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Lexicon of Albanian Mythology: Areal Studies in the Polylingual Region of Azov Sea

The main goal of this research is to study the language and traditional culture of the Albanians who live on the territory of the former Soviet Union (the Ukraine, Moldova, Russia) and to establish the degree of ethnocultural and language interference which has taken place during their long co-existence with other ethnic groups.

Historical Facts. Four villages with Albanian population are located in the Ukraine: Karakurt (Zhovtnevoe) set up in 1811 (Odessa region), Tyushki (Georgievka), Dzhandran (Gammovka) and Taz (Devninskoe) set up in 1862 (Zaporizh'a region). Before migrating to the territory of the Russian empire, Albanians had moved from the south-east of the present day Albania into Bulgaria (Varna region) because of the Osmanli invasion (Державин, 1914, 1926, 1933, 1948, pp. 156–169). Three hundred years later they had moved from Bulgaria to the Russian empire on account of Turkish-Russian opposi-

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tion in the Balkan Peninsula. Ethnic Albanians also live in Moldova, Odessa and St. Petersburg.

Present Day Situation. Nowadays, in the Ukraine and Russia there are an estimated 5000 ethnic Albanians. They live mainly in villages situated in the Odessa and Zaporizh'a regions. The language and many elements of traditional culture are still preserved and maintained in four Albanian villages (Будина, 2000, pp. 239–255; Иванова, 2000, pp. 40–53). From the ethnolinguistic and linguistic point of view these Albanian villages are of particular interest and value since they are excellent examples of a “melting pot” (Иванова, 1995, 1999). Bulgarians and Gagauzes live side by side with Albanians in Karakurt; Russians and Ukrainians share the same space with Albanians in the Azov Sea region. It is worth mentioning that in these multi-lingual environments, the Albanian patois retains original Balkan features.

Lexica of Mythology: Areal Studies. During the expeditions between 1998 and 2013 in the Azov Sea region (Pryazovs'ke district) and Budzhak (Bolgrad district) ethnolinguistic material was gathered by means of questionnaires by Julia V. Ivanova, Anna A. Plotnikova and the author himself. A deep study of mythology was carried out in the Pryazovs'ke district in 2009–2013. Since 2011 the author and his colleagues (Andrey N. Sobolev, Denis S. Ermolin, Maria S. Morozova, Alexandra S. Dugushina) have been gathering lexica and narratives concerning demonology in south-eastern Albania.

In the present day the Albanians of the Ukraine continue to believe in mythological creatures, parallels of which are found in the Balkans (Nopça, 1913a, 1913b; Tirta 2003, 2004, 2007). The analysis of lexica of the Albanian subdialect of the Ukraine shows the continuation of mythological terminology between the districts of south-eastern Albania (Korça, Devoll, Kolonja) and the Albanian-speaking villages of the Azov Sea region.

Collective Name for Evil Spirits

The Albanian subdialect of the Ukraine has no collective lexeme which could refer to all the representatives of the demonic world. The most common forms of denotation are these: *nok janë të prastúrë* (lit. ‘they are unclean’), *shpírti nok i prastúrë* (lit. ‘unclean spirit’). Here is a possible combination: *të gjithë nok janë të prastúrë* (lit. ‘all of them are unclean’). These denotations are set against the concept a *prastúrë* (lit. ‘clean’), *shpírti i prastúrë* (lit. ‘clean spirit’).

Vampirë

This character is known among the Albanians of the Ukraine under the name *vampirë* ('vampire'). It can be not only masculine, but also feminine – *vampirë/ë, -a*. Here our informants distinguish very strictly between the stories of their grandmothers and great-grandmothers about vampires and how vampires are portrayed in the modern world (via the mass media): “In my opinion, vampires are animals that drink blood. But who are they? They are not like people. I don’t know what to call them in Russian” (AOE: Новик, 2009: Мельничук_мифология).

Very often the stories about vampires are accompanied by narratives about witches, sorcerers and quacks. The layer of knowledge about mythological vampires, which is sustained quite well in the Balkans (Tirta, 2004, 2007), appears to be greatly reduced among the Albanians of Budzhak and the Azov Sea region. Quite often respondents remember their childhood, when their parents and grandparents used the word *vampirë* as a curse. However, the stories about vampires and the harm, they can do to people turn out to be much the same.

There is every reason to suppose that the mythological character is traditionally associated with humiliation, pranks and intrigues against people.

“We had a neighbor. She had a naughty boy. She always told him: «Pandîlo, mos bë! Pandîlo, mos! Ìsh vampirë! Sas vampirë! Qentë të të hanë!» [Pandil’o, don’t do that. No, Pandil’o! Oh, vampire! What a vampire! Let the dogs eat you! – A. N.]” (AOE: Новик, 2009: Мельничук_мифология).

The word *l’ugat / люгат* ('bogeyman') is not recorded in the Azov Sea region, whereas the Albanians of the Balkan Peninsula use the word *vampirë* ('vampire') but it is perceived as a neologism of the last decades. Albanian interlocutors in the Balkans would rather use the lexeme *lugat* ('bogeyman') (Tirta, 2004; Qazimi, 2008). If you ask about *vampirë* ('vampire'), they usually start speaking about various films and soap-operas.

During the 2012 expedition to Gammovka we managed to record material where *vampirë* is associated with a snake: “*G’arp* means not only a snake, but also some kind of a bogeyman, an evil spirit which lies in wait for you and moreover may bite you and then lead you into trouble. This may be the meaning of the word *vampirë*” (AOE: Новик, 2012: Торбина (Миц)_АК_мифология).

Harm Caused to Domestic Animals

An evil spirit may cause harm to livestock, principally to cows (Новик, 2011: Шопова_СМ_Мифология; Новик 2012: Сендели_АН_Мифология). Weasels cause the most serious harm to livestock. *Nuse a lalos* (variant: *nuse lalos*; ‘bride of l’al’o’) is the subdialect word for ‘weasel’. Furthermore, the native consultants cannot explain the meaning of the word *l’al’o*, so they cannot say whether it is a title or a proper name (according to the subdialect system *l’al’o* may be the name of the bride herself or even of her bridegroom). *Nuse a lalos* appears to be a totemic name. Most probably a mysterious animal couldn’t be referred to directly, which is why it was given an allegorical name. *Nuse a lalos* is registered in the Dialectological Atlas of Albanian Language (ADGJSH, 2007, 2008) as a word used in south-eastern Albania, precisely in the district which is considered to be the ancestral motherland of present day Albanians of the Ukraine.

Transformation of People into Animals and Things

We do not find the stories about transformation of people into wolves in the Albanian settlements of the Ukraine. Here images of werewolves have not been preserved in the stories of the old people (however there are many stories about wolves in this steppe zone). There are only a few memorates about the ability of some witches (subdial. alb. *xhadî*, -u, masc. sing., pl. *xhadînj*; *xhadîjk/ë*, -a, fem. sing., pl. *xhadîjkra* – ‘witch’) to transform themselves into wolves (moreover, some informants insist on the fact that only women had such abilities) (Новик, 2012: Сендели_АН_Мифология).

There are a large number of stories about transformation of people into other animals – dogs, cats, goats, foxes, chickens etc. and even into things (the most common variant is about the transformation of a man into a wheel).

Concept of *Maksull* (subdial. alb. *maksull*, – i)

The set of beliefs in *maksull* is very stable. The interlocutors can hardly find any Russian or Ukrainian equivalent for this word. Usually it takes them a lot of time to explain the word *maksull*. The word *maksull* means ‘a good side which exists in every living being’. This concept is often mentioned when speaking about domestic animals.

Marr maksullnë ('to steal *maksull*') means 'to bewitch a house'. These concepts go hand-in-hand with one another. This very fact argues for the Albanians of the Ukraine being kin to the inhabitants of the Balkan Peninsula. It is next to impossible to fight against witches who steal *maksull*. Several decades ago every housewife scattered poppy seeds, millet or grains of rape about the yard in order to protect the cattle from angry witches. Moreover, during this ceremony she kept repeating these words: "Gjer më se sosesh koqet të mbellesh nok ad hinesh as brenda as ta loptë" ('You won't go into the house or into the cowshed until you finish picking up all the grains') (Новик, 2012: Сендели_АН_Мифология).

The concept *maksull* among the Albanians of the Ukraine is closely related to the mythological worldview of the Balkan peoples (the Albanians, Serbians, Macedonians etc.) and is also associated with belief in witches (particularly in milk witches) among the Eastern Slavs as they have lived in the same territories (Budzhak and the Azov Sea region) for more than 200 years (Скуратівський, 1996).

***Xhadî, -u* ('Dzhadi') and *Xhadîjk/ë, -a* ('Dzhadiyka')**

Dzhadi (*xhadî, -u*, masc. sing.; pl. *xhadînj* < Turkish) and Dzhadiyka (*xhadîjk/ë, -a*, fem. sing.; pl. *xhadîjkra*) are characters from an Albanian set of beliefs. More often the informants of the Azov Sea region translate the words *xhadî, -u* and *xhadîjk/ë, -a* in Russian as *колдун* ('sorcerer') and *ведьма* ('witch') respectively. However many language speakers are inclined to see a difference between Russian and Albanian characters.

It seems interesting that the albanized variant of Russian word *ведьма* ('witch') – *ved'm/ë, -a* – was registered in the village Devninskoje (Новик, 2012: Сендели_АН_Мифология).

These persons cause serious harm to cattle and all living beings. Principally, they kill the cattle.

Mythological Creatures Coming at Night and Strangling People

The images of mythological creatures "coming at night and strangling people while sleeping" are very widespread among the Balkan peoples. The Albanians of the Balkan Peninsula associate these creatures with female characters, whose names differ from one district of Albania to another. The same stories

are also recorded among the Albanians of the Ukraine but these mythological characters have another appearance. According to the informants' stories it is a "dark man who comes at night" (alb. *burri i zi*, rus. *черный мужик* – 'black man') (АОЕ: Новик, 2009: Бурлачко_Мифология).

***Rusale* ('Mermaids')**

The beliefs of the Albanians of the Ukraine in mermaids are very strong. *Rusale* is the subdialect variant for the word 'mermaid'. The habitat of mermaids is the sea. "*The mermaids are the Sea*" (Новик, 2012: Сендели_АН_Мифология).

The interlocuters do not remember any stories about mermaids who live in lakes, rivers or other water reservoirs.

According to the beliefs of the Albanians of the Ukraine, mermaids are creatures where the upper body is that of a female human and the lower body is the tail of a fish. In these parts there is no mention of any legends about romantic relationships between the mermaids and the youths of the earth. In the opinion of the Albanians, mermaids are dangerous and cunning creatures that will only cause trouble to people.

***Varalluzhgë, -a* ('Varaluzhga')**

We also observe the personification of the steppe wind¹ among the Albanians of the Ukraine. Thus there is a special word for this kind of wind in this subdialect – *varalluzhgë, -a* ('varaluzhga').

In the past (before 1970s) older people claimed that this wind was alive, having flesh and blood. Moreover, according to their tales, this blood could be seen. It was believed that if anybody threw a knife into the centre of the whirlwind, causing clouds of dust and steppe litter, to rise up, its edge would be tinted with blood. This blood of the *varalluzhgë* was supposed to be the soul of the steppe wind.

But *varalluzhgë* is not just a whirlwind; it brings diseases and evil spirits. If the *varalluzhgë* wraps round you, you will catch some disease.

If you see *varalluzhgë* in front of you while walking, you should stop immediately and say the following: "*Varalluzhgë-varalluzhgë! Te priftit dera të*

¹ Compare Скуратівський, 1996.

hinesh!”, which means ‘Varalluzhgë-varalluzhgë! Enter the doors of the priest!’ Then the wind will go away.

Older people also remember the following saying: “*Po shih varalluzhgë ad të sëmuresh*” (‘If you see varaluzhga, you will catch a disease’) (Новик, 2011: Шопова_СМ_Мифология).

***D'all ma lesh* (‘Leshy, Shaggy Chort, Hairy Demon’)**

There are quite a lot of stories about *d'all ma lesh* among the Albanians of the Ukraine. *D'all ma lesh* (lit. ‘shaggy chort’) is a subdialect word for “leshy”. According to folk beliefs this mythological character is closely related to *leshy* in the beliefs of the Russians. However *d'all ma lesh* is not a creature that lives in a forest, bog or some special plot of land. This character of Albanian mythology lives in a house, to be more precise in a garret, or in a *pl'avitsa* – a special building for storage of straw and other agricultural products.

***Tri burre qysh japin fatnë* (‘Three Men Determining the Fate of a Child’)**

The Balkan peoples believe that the fate of every person is determined by three mythological characters (Седакова, 2007; Плотникова, 2009). Most of them, including the Albanians, consider that these three characters are female. They appear several hours after the child’s birth and determine its fate.

Such tales are recorded in different countries of the Balkan Peninsula. They include regional particularities, but in general these beliefs represent a strong layer of the Balkan world view. The Albanians of the Ukraine keep these beliefs, but according to their system of mythological imaginings there are three men determining the child’s fate instead of three women. As the native consultants claim, these are three huge, tall and strong black men (АОЕ: Новик, 2009: Бурлачко: mythology_3).

But at the same time legends about three women assigning the child’s fate also exist among the Albanians of the Ukraine (АОЕ: Новик, 2011: Шопова_СМ_Мифология). The following variant of such a legend was recorded in the village Devninskoje: “*Tri gra shkrujtin kismetnë kësij d'al*” (‘Three women have written the fate of this boy’).

Another variation on this theme comprises the stories about Christ’s disciples, the apostles and their followers, who can also determine the child’s fate.

Paranditë të gjithë bënë rasredelit' **(‘Everything is Assigned by the Gods’)**

There is another belief among the Albanians of the Ukraine according to which the fate of a child is determined by the *parandí*, -të (pl. ‘gods’) – from *Parandí* (‘God, deity’). It was recorded in the village of Georgiyevka that all the Christian saints gather three days after the child’s birth and determine its fate. But according to the recorded narratives we may distinguish only two godlike beings: Jesus Christ and the Holy Virgin.

Bad Route

The stories about a bad route are very popular among the Albanians of the Ukraine. Furthermore, there are many legends about bad places for building a house, dead points of the regional landscape and dangerous routes.

The Albanians of the Ukraine believe that God can make a sign for the traveler. This sign can contain good news as well as bad news. “*Parandíja të jep jís lle për të mirë. Parandíja mund të të japë jís lle për prost. Parandíja të jep jís lle të mirë. Parandíja të jep jís lle prost*” (‘God makes you a sign for your own good. The God can also make you a sign for coming disaster. God makes you a good sign. God also makes you a bad sign’) (AOE: Новик, 2009: Мельничук_Мифология).

Demon of Fire

The Balkan peoples, including the Albanians, have very strong beliefs in the demon of fire. The informants from Budzhak and the Azov Sea region confirm that the demon of fire really exists. In the past if anything broke into flames older people used to say: “*Díl ndezkan*” (‘The devils set it on fire’) or “*D’alli a ndezi lle ndezet*” (‘The devil set it on fire and now he is burning himself’).

The mythology of the Albanians of the Ukraine needs further research. Special attention should be paid to phenomena at the interface of language and culture. The analysis of the material gathered and comparison with the material from south-eastern Albania should give good results.

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Leksyka mitologii albańskiej. Badania arealne w wielojęzycznym regionie Morza Azowskiego

Na Ukrainie znajdują się cztery albańskie wsie: Karakurt (Zhovtnevoe) założona w 1811 roku (rejon Odessy), Tyushki (Georgievka), Dzhandran (Gammovka) oraz Taz (Devninskoe) założone w 1862 roku (rejon Zaporozża). Analiza leksyki gwar albańskich na Ukrainie wykazuje kontynuację terminologii mitologicznej z terenu południowo-wschodniej Albanii (Korça, Devoll, Kolonja).

W gwarze albańskiej Ukrainy brak wspólnej nazwy na istoty ze świata demonów. Najczęściej używa się określeń: *nok janë të prastúrë* (dosłownie ‘są nieczyste’), *shpírti nok i prastúrë* (‘duch nieczysty’).

Istnieje bardzo dużo opowieści o przemienianiu się ludzi w zwierzęta – psy, koty, kozy, lisy, kurczaki i in., a nawet w przedmioty (najczęstszy wątek mówi o przemianie człowieka w koło). Istnieje także motyw personifikacji stepowego wiatru – w omawianym dialekcie nosi on nazwę – *varalluzhg/ë, -a*.

Na Bałkanach popularne było wierzenie, że los każdego człowieka związany jest z trzema mitycznymi istotami. Większość narodów bałkańskich, w tym Albańczycy, uważają, że istoty te są rodzaju żeńskiego, zjawiają się w kilka godzin po narodzinach dziecka i określają jego przyszłość. Albańczycy z Ukrainy zachowali samo wierzenie, lecz w ich mitologicznym uniwersum istoty te są rodzaju męskiego. Są to, według miejscowych informatorów, trzej potężni, wysocy i silni czarni mężczyźni (*tri burre qysh japin fatnë*). Inny wariant tego wątku mówi, że mogą to być uczniowie Chrystusa, apostołowie i ich następcy.

Słowa kluczowe: leksyka; mitologia; dialekty albańskie

Lexicon of Albanian Mythology: Areal Studies in the Polylingual Region of Azov Sea

Four villages with Albanian population are located in the Ukraine: Karakurt (Zhovtnevoe) set up in 1811 (Odessa region), Tyushki (Georgievka), Dzhandran (Gammovka) and Taz (Devninskoe) set up in 1862 (Zaporizh'a region). The analysis of lexica of the Albanian subdialect of the Ukraine shows the continuation of the use of mythological terminology between the districts of the South-Eastern Albania (Korça, Devoll, Kolonja) and the Albanian-speaking villages of the Azov Sea region.

The Albanian subdialect of the Ukraine has no collective lexeme to designate all the representatives of the demonic world. The most common forms of denotation are these: *nok janë të prastúrë* (lit. ‘they are unclean’), *shpírti nok i prastúrë* (lit. ‘unclean spirit’).

There are a large number of stories about the transformation of people into the animals – dogs, cats, goats, foxes, chickens etc. and even into things (the most common plot variant is about transformation of a man into a wheel).

Also we observe the personification of the steppe wind among the Albanians of the Ukraine. Thus there is a special word for such a kind of wind in this subdialect – *varalluzhg/ë, -a* ('varaluzhga').

The Balkan peoples believe that the fate of every individual is assigned by three mythological characters. Most of them, including the Albanians, consider that these three characters are female. They appear several hours after the child's birth and assign its fate. The Albanians of the Ukraine keep these beliefs, but according to their system of mythological images, there are three men determining the child's fate instead of three women. As the native consultants claim, these are three huge, tall and strong black men (*tri burre qysh japin fatnë*). Another variation on this theme comprises the stories about Christ's disciples, the apostles and their followers, who can also determine the child's fate.

Keywords: lexis; mythology; Albanian dialects

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