

# ІСТОРІЯ КУЛЬТУРИ. ЕТНОЛОГІЯ. ЕТНОГРАФІЯ

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## THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE BODY IN THE HEALING MAGIC OF THE UKRAINIANS

*The author studies Ukrainian healing texts, the human of that body is associated with the Cosmos. The identification of the Universe with Jesus Christ indicates that the Cosmos is alive, which corresponds to mythological doctrines of other nations, as well as portrait tradition, including a cabbalistic one. The motive of enclosing is in association: the Sun and the Moon is an example of the stability of celestial motion, which is projected to terrestrial processes. Semantic matching of man and the Cosmos explains that the causes of the disease can be identical. The body is a mediator between the world of humans and the natural world in healing practices. This explains why the main objects of manipulation are the blood, bone, flesh. Mythological symbols of blood, bone, and flesh with natural objects stimulate the regeneration and purification of water, stone, and the earth and explain the logic of sacrificing the young and healthy, but not the old and sick.*

*Key words: mythology, healing magic, body, Cosmos, healing practices.*

Problem statement is motivated by the actuality of the role and place of man in the Universe. In this aspect it is interesting to explore the experience of previous generations that represented the man and the Universe is an indivisible whole.

The problem of anthropocentrism continue to attract the attention of ethnographers. Encyclopedia of cosmological ideas Slavs includes a dictionary «Slavic antiquities» [1], where the studies of O. Belova, S. Tolstoy, T. Agape, L. Vinogradova and other well-known scientists of Slavists are published. The publications of the Maksym Rylski institute of art studies, folklore and Ethnology of Academy of Sciences of Ukraine that concern the symbolism of the body in the mythology of Ukrainians play the fundamental role [2].

The purpose of the article is to try to reconstruct the unknown facts on ancient cosmological views of Ukrainians on the the material of medical texts.

The main feature of various cosmological doctrines is that a human body constitutes a whole system of signs which have their projections in all spheres of the society. Metaphorical correlations of body and space are fixed in the mythological systems of the world. Thus, in the Rigveda it is a divine couple which is considered to be the creator of the visible: «The Earth emerged from the Foremother, the world space emerged from the Earth, Daksha emerged from Aditi <...>, and then there emerged the gods» (Rigveda X, 72), and the World is born like a child: «Who knows the navel of the universe? Who knows heaven, earth, and midair? «Scandinavian sagas have it that the world is derived from the body of the Emir, from whose muscles the earth was created, from whose bones the mountains were sculptured, from whose skull the sky was produced, and from whose blood the sea originated; the trees used to be his hair, the rocks used to be his teeth, and from his brain the clouds were made» [3, p. 29, 46]. Mythological representations of ancient peoples are reflected in the literary tradition, particularly Kabalistic and apocryphal. Adam Kadmon's descriptions of the first man resemble the myths of the peoples, who are not the Semites. In the apocryphal book «Conversation of three saints» the origin of the Universe is explained as follows: «The World began from the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit began from Christ, from Christ himself who is King of Heaven, the Sun belles is from the face of God, the new Moon is from the breast of God, the stars are from the vestments of God, from Christ himself, the King of Heaven» [3, p. 44]. We meet similar stories in the ancient Ukrainian healing texts: «The Earth is the Lock, and the Sky is the key, lock this body lest it should hurt, lest red blood should be shed» (earth / body – water / blood – author's note) [4, № 307].

Now we shall detail on how a human body is semantically tied with elements of the landscape in the Ukrainian healing magic. In this connection we shall dwell on the elements of enclosing and girdling with/by the Moon and the stars: «The Virgin was going in the serene mountain, stepping on the silk grass, being enclosed by the Moon, being girdled by the Sun / Jesus Christ reinstated (name), was born, descended, lighted by the Moon, enclosed by the stars» [4, № 445, 435]. Most often the motive of enclosing occurs in the texts aimed at ridding of fright. Apart from practical considerations based on it that the Sun and the Moon are the embodiments of the heavenly light that withstands the darkness of the night and different ailments, the motive of girdling by the Sun or by the stars is a preventive magic instrument as it foresees the creation of a protective circuit formed from the Sun, the Moon, and the stars. The employment of such powerful (in terms of mythology) measures is predetermined by the «specificity» of the fright as the fright is caused by devastating natural disaster that violate the integrity of the cosmos –

the wind, the whirlwind. In the representations of the Ukrainians the whirlwind is of evil nature as it causes breaking / distortion, that is – turns a stem that used to be straight into a broken one, healthy hair becomes matted, still waters become a whirlpool, etc. Hence, the explanation why the origin of the whirlwind was connected with negative mythical personages which cause a natural mess (evil spirit/devil), or the otherworldly creatures that ruin the social order (souls of suicides / unbaptized children, and witches) [5, p. 380].

Textual associations of an ill person with a planetary Jesus Christ are symbolic, as Jesus Christ like the Indian Purusha, the Scandinavian Emir, and the Judaic Adam Kadmon impersonates the Cosmos, the heavenly light (the Sun, the Moon, and the stars) and thus it is a model of stability, balance, and purity. Such comparisons should project the integrity and inviolability of the Cosmos onto the sick man, destroy the evil spirits that settled in a man with a whirlpool and caused the ailment 1. It is confirmed in the other texts in which the fright is ousted on two parallel levels – the human (carnal) and outer (spiritual): «I am charming you off the fright, from the blood which is red, from the bone which is white (human), from the body of Christ, from the face of Lord (cosmic, spiritual – author's note)» [4, № 156]. Mentioning the incorruptible «body of Christ» and «the face of the Lord» along with frail bones and blood is a kind of guarantee that the disease will be destroyed as spiritual substance (the «body of Christ») is beyond all bodily ailments.

By the logics of the myth a human body is a model of the Universe as it is created «in the image and likeness of God», thus in the course of the healing process it can act as an intermediary, i.e. be a means of magical influence on natural phenomena. In healing the fright, the healer also governs the strength of the wind and its direction, as the wind is the cause of the disease and a destructive atmospheric phenomenon. Examples of such relationships are the texts meant to help in healing epilepsy: «Jesus did go out from Jerusalem and came to a halt. The Mother of God did go out of Jerusalem and came to a halt. So do you – storms, hurricanes, and fiends – come to a halt! Jesus Christ and Holy Virgin, calm down these storms, these winds, and all the saints move into (name) to protect from this blowy disease» [4, № 436]. Texts like this have a bilateral focus: a) taming the wind is connected with quenching mental stress; b) termination of epileptic seizure is connected with the cessation of excessive wind gusts (body is a model of the Universe / the Cosmos is a prototype of a body).

Specification of mythological meanings can be traced to the example of textual analogies between «red blood / yellow bone / white body» and rivers / mountains / the Earth itself: «There is a bloody creek running, a reed is flowing on it, the reed is broken, the blood comes to a halt» [4, № 303]. Comparison of waterways with blood vessels is registered in the texts helping to heal dislocation, in which the sacred Jordan is compared with the blood, so its waters heal and bring life. Hence, the understanding of the semantics of baptism as a new birth, where the font is associated with blood or labour waters: «Blood, you shall come to a halt in the wound like the water in the Jordan» [4, № 290]. Compare this with a tradition of coloring the Epiphany Cross with a beet juice, which made the cross look as if it had been colored with blood. «The Epiphany water» does not spoil (is alive) for a long time and can be used for healing purposes.

Textual links of river and blood with mountains indicate their ritual parallels where muscles and bones resemble the earth (the soil) and rocks, «Jesus ascends the stony mountain; steps on the stone, charms the blood <...>. From your veins, from your yellow bones, from your white joints the body of (name), the Servant of God, consists, the blood is charmed and comes to a halt» [6, p. 35]. In the texts meant to help in labour we come across the comparison of the skeleton with mountains / cliffs: «Stone mountains, fall apart; dark clouds, disperse yourselves; white body, open; baby, appear into the light of day!» [4, № 22].

Identification of the human skeleton with elements of the landscape is a sign of mythological synonyms that can be traced to the example of matching such concepts as skeleton / rock that in the Ukrainian language (skelet – skelya) have a common root \*скѣль (ukr.), and denote objects related to hardness / dryness [7, p. 638]. In healing texts «bones» and «sand» have the same colour code – they are «yellow» [4, № 684, 691], which correlates healing texts with etiological myths, where man is made of «yellow / red» clay [8, 88].

The rudiments of meaningful comparisons of the natural and the human are manifested in the idioms «face of the earth», «mountain range», «time zone» and so on. In magical healing practice the «face of the earth» can be understood as sacred territory, natural dais on which temples and shrines were placed, the place likely to be struck by the lightning: «Saint George will come down to earth, with a golden sword and with thunder will strike, burn, from the face of the earth will sweep you, and throw in the black sea» [4, № 659]. A positive meaning of the «face of the earth» is confirmed by the presence of the Ukrainian oppositional concept: *poty-lytsya* (ukr.) where *poty-* is «something that is on the other side of the face», (russ. – *za-tylok* – literally: «in the rear»). Analogical to it are the mythological opposition associated with a landscape that is unfavourable for life, with the seat of evil spirits – «rotten swamps / blue woods / high mountains / yellow sands». In addition, it is worth noting that there are ritual parallels between the human face and the «face of the earth». For example, it was considered unacceptable to intentionally beat the

ground or spit at it, which was regarded as contempt. Similar prohibitions concern a human face. The taboo was raised only if the action was performed for healing reasons or used as an amulet – a child's forehead was smeared with saliva or somebody spit over their left shoulder. There are data of taking an oath using the notions of soil / mother / head as guarantees of vows, and confirming the oaths by eating a handful of earth that can be a rudiment of the ritual eating a part of the ancestors' body.

Additional facts testifying the symbolization of the above concept are that the face is a sign of personification (cf. – «to save face»), the face is possessed by both – man and the land that specifies their mythological parallels. In contrast, animals and evil spirits have no face: «Where there is no face, there is no shame» [9, p. 172], that's why a verbal destruction of face was associated with the return of the disease to the other world: «I shall cover your face with water, I shall cover your eyes with bake, I shall charm you with prayers, I shall send you out of the Christian faith» [10, p. 127] (in all probability, turning objects "face down" during the funeral rites is somehow connected with this semantics).

Semantic associations between the body and the earth can be traced in other Slavic nations. In particular, the Bulgarians believed that the bodies of the giants are growing like mushrooms in the soil [11, p. 301]. The Eastern Slavs had ritual prohibitions on earthworks before Annunciation «for the earth is sleeping», the Earth was treated with deep respect and respectfully called «mother». According to Ukrainian beliefs earthen mounds are the remnants of some mythological ancestors [12, p. 31]. Similar views are projected on humans. The Serbs considered the backbone of the deceased to be a basis for a new body after the resurrection (take the proverb as an example: «Should the bones be intact, the flesh would grow»). In healing texts body injuries were healed with the application of soil: «Ant, do run, do bring some sand, to cover the wound of (name), the servant of God» [4, № 374]. Not buried (not covered with the ground) bones can cause the existence of a «living corpse» without a body or with a malformed body [13, p. 628]. The correct location of the skeleton during the second reburial of the deceased (which was carried out when an old grave was accidentally dug out) was of particular importance. In this context the organization of the parts of the body and the veins as a foundation for the next body is of importance. This is due to the fact that the presence of bone is a sign of human nature, as in the representatives of the other world the bones are absent [13, p. 628]. In healing texts an illogical description of human appearance is a sign of the netherworld or the inanimate: «Kryklyvytsi, plaklyvytsi (childhood diseases associated with an insatiable crying and weeping), go to the partying, there are bearded guys there, pot-bellied girls, they drink and hell there and will welcome you» [4, № 78], they are semantically opposed to the consistent (correct) transfer, aimed at modeling a healthy / live body: «I will whisper out, charm, call out from <...> the head, → the legs, → the fingers, → the joints, → the hair, → the voice, → the blond braid, → the beauty, → the white face, → the cheerful heart, → the hazel eyes, → from the shoulders → from the breast. You shall not be here, you shall not bedevil, you shall not separate the soul and the body» [6, p. 63–64]. The defectiveness of the body is the result of improper assembly / «new drafting», hence, the procedure of naming the organs, which had to be freed from the ailment, in a certain order. Hence, the identification of a disability as the violation of a set order, something that can bring harm: «There goes Saint George, Saint Nicholas ... The Holy Virgin meets them: «Where are you going, Saint George, Saint Nicholas?» «Dear Mother of God, we are going to whisper the fright out of (name), the servant of God, to rid him/her of the blind, of the lame, of the crippled, and of the bad tongues» [4, № 247]. The Ukrainians believed that «nasty old females» <...> easily become witches. And the ugly men turn into witchers. In general, all sorts of monsters are the witch or the witchers» [14, 182].

Conclusion. In the Ukrainian healing texts, as well as in the mythology of other peoples, the human body is associated with the Cosmos. Significant in this regard is the motive of enclosing a sick man with heavenly bodies, which assimilates a corruptible human body with immortal Jesus Christ (absolute light, space), deprives the human of earthly darkness associated with otherworldly beings and disease. The identification of the Universe with Jesus Christ indicates that the Cosmos is alive, which corresponds to mythological doctrines of other nations, as well as portrait tradition, including a cabalistic one.

The logics of the motive of enclosing is in association: the Sun and the Moon are an example of the stability of celestial motion, which is projected to terrestrial processes. The vortex and the wind, on the contrary, implement random movement, thus they are the cause of physical and mental chaos – fear / epilepsy. The main characteristic feature of these conditions is the violation of social orientation, so the images of the sky (absolute static) and astral bodies (perfect order) are used in the texts.

Semantic matching of man and the Cosmos explains that the causes of the disease can be identical. Thus, the vortex is the cause of fear, epilepsy and natural disorder; the flood is associated with bleeding; breaking a tree triggers fractures, etc. (cf.. with totemic beliefs about the transmigration of souls into trees). Thereby, in healing practices the body is a mediator between the world of humans and the natural world, thus becoming the subject of magical manipulation. In particular, healing the patient's body, the healers could also affect the natural phenomena. This explains why the main objects of manipulation are the blood, bone, flesh. «Red blood» nourishes the body (red is the color of life), it is a sacred substance, a

repository of the soul, it is compared with the sacred river, «the soul of humanity», which is the Jordan river, and therefore is associated with the rivers that feed the earth: «Three rivers started from the body of Jesus Christ: water, stone, and blood» [4, № 281]. «A yellow bone» is the foundation of the body, and its color indicates the presence of life (these are the colors of the same palette), «a yellow bone» is opposed to «a white bone» (which is washed by rain and fanned by wind), and is associated with a rock (the foundation of a landscape). «A white body» indicates the purity of the body, its cleanness and health, and is associated with «holy» land. Mythological parallels of blood, bone, and flesh with natural objects stimulate the regeneration and purification of water, stone, and the earth, that explains the logic of sacrificing the young and healthy, but not the old and sick.

1. The charms mentioned above duplicate the Evangelical motives of the expulsion of demons: «When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick» (Matthew 8, 16, 28–32).

2. Adam – Hebrew, אָדָם – «land» and אֶדְם – «red», i.e. a person molded from clay.

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### МІФОЛОГІЯ ТІЛА В ЛІКУВАЛЬНІЙ МАГІЇ УКРАЇНЦІВ

*У лікувальних текстах українців тіло людини асоціюється з Космосом. Показом в цьому плані є мотив огородження недужого небесними світилами, що уподібнює тлінне тіло людини безсмертному Ісусу Христу, позбавляє його від земного мороку, пов'язаного з потойбічними істотами і хворобами. Логіка мотиву огородження криється в асоціаціях – Сонце і Місяць є зразком стабільності небесного руху, який проектується на земні процеси. Натомість вихор і вітер втілюють довільний рух, тому є причиною тілесного і психічного хаосу – переляку/епілепсії.*

*Ключові слова:* міфологія, лікувальна магія, тіло, Космос, лікувальні практики.

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### МИФОЛОГИЯ ТЕЛА В ЛЕЧЕБНОЙ МАГИИ УКРАИНЦЕВ

*В лечебных практиках украинцев тело человека ассоциируется с Космосом. Показательным в этом плане выступает мотив ограждения нездорового небесными светилами, что отождествляет тленное тело человека бессмертному Иисусу Христу, освобождает его от земного мрака, который ассоциируется с потусторонними существами и болезнями. В текстах заговоров Солнце и Луна исполняют роль образцов стабильности небесного движения, который проецируется на земные процессы. Вместе с тем, образы вихря и ветра воплощают неупорядоченное движение, поэтому способствуют возникновению телесного и психического хаоса – перепуга/эпилепсии.*

*Ключевые слова:* мифология, лечебная магия, тело, Космос, лечебные практики.