

CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE SPIRITUAL LEGACY OF PODHALE HIGHLANDERS

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The article is synthetic flashbacks the contents, demonological motifs and beliefs in a supernatural power of the Tatra highlanders. It is based on archive materials, relevant literature and field research conducted by the author in 1991–1994. The work describes the notional world of highlanders from the turn of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. This conceptual framework was shaped by many different factors (such as the location of the region, its economy, peripheral occupations, multicultural ethnic structure) and the determinants of Christian and magical syncretism, as well as the naturalist and religious system. The parallel notional reality that emerged reflected the adequate semiotic space of the past, still remains a part of the spiritual cultural legacy and a characteristic feature of the region of Podhale.

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Artykuł jest syntetyczną retrospekcją treści, wątków demonologicznych oraz wierzeń w moc nadprzyrodzoną górali podhalańskich. Oparty jest na materiałach archiwalnych, literaturze przedmiotu oraz własnych badaniach terenowych autorki, przeprowadzonych w latach 1991–1994. Przybliża wyobraźniowy świat górali z przełomu XIX i połowy XX wieku. Na jego ukształtowanie złożyło się wiele czynników (m.in. lokalizacja regionu i jej konsekwencje, charakter gospodarki, zajęcia uboczne, napływowa wielokulturowa struktura etniczna) oraz sygnujące światopogląd determinanty synkretyzmu chrześcijańsko-magicznego i systemu naturalistyczno-religijnego. Wykreowana na ich podstawie równoległa rzeczywistość ideyjna, odzwierciedlająca adekwatną z nią przestrzeń semiotyczną minionego czasu, pozostaje nadal częścią duchowego dziedzictwa kultury i desygнатem regionu podhalańskiego.

Key words: religious system, beliefs, supernatural creatures, human beings, magic, Podhale

INTRODUCTION

The region of Podhale located at the feet of the Tatra Mountains was ‘discovered’ only in the 19th century, owing to the publication of Stanisław Staszic’s *O ziemi-rodztwie Karpatów i innych gór i równin Polski* (1955 [1815]). This work provided not only the first academic account of the geological structure of the Tatra range and the adjacent regions, but also many interesting observations about the life of the highlanders from the northern side of the Tatras. The author included a description of the

regional attire and the physical countenance of the locals, as well as remarks on their personality traits. The source of regional superstitions, emphasized by Staszic as a force stronger than religion, lies in the belief in “some spirits, beings hidden in the clouds, in the mountains, in grottoes” and stories of “their many transformations into beasts, birds or sometimes into old men with long beards” (1955, 119, 165). The otherness of the inhabitants of Podhale was also noticed by Ignacy Baranowski, who claimed that this feature might allow the highlanders to “make a more substantial contribution to national culture than the people of many other regions of Poland” (1912, 401). The present article shall present a contextual basis for the spiritual and cultural ‘otherness’ of Podhale highlanders.

The world-view that had direct and indirect influences on the cultural characteristics of the region was shaped by a number of external and internal factors, such as territorial isolation,¹ the local climate, economic circumstances,² hunting and brigandage. The culture of the region was also influenced by the waves of migration of Wallachian shepherds (13th, 14th, 16th and first half of 17th century) (Dobrowolski 1930). Immigrants from the Carpathians and the Balkans, who came from many different ethnic groups (Ruthenians, Slovaks, Hungarians, Romanians), introduced various elements of their native culture, e.g. several methods of shepherding and elaborate systems of beliefs and magical practices. An interesting example comes from Staszic, who mentions having read Slovakian “booklets and writings” passed down in secret form one generation of the family to the next. These publications contained formulas and descriptions of magical rituals, and were used by shepherds initiated in the arts. The author draws particular attention to the content of the spells addressed to Persian spirits – angels (*Amschaspands* and *Bachman*) (1955).

The combination of the mentioned factors (material, social and spiritual) pervading the native cultural substratum resulted in the creation of specific designates unique to the mountain region. These were preserved by folk architecture and artistic handicraft (decoration, plant and geometrical ornaments, magical symbols,³ solar emblems) (Lehr and Tylkowa 2000). They are also evident in numerous loanwords (from Romanian, Hungarian, Ukrainian and Slovakian) (Bubak 1991), as well as

¹ The isolation was due to the topography of the region. It ended in the 19th century, when the economic situation resulted in the development of supralocal contacts – at first these included trading wine and cloth made in Podhale and travelling to find seasonal employment in “Uhry – Hungary” (in Slovakia) and in Poland (in “the Kingdom”). Highlanders also began to leave the homeland to work in the United States (Lehr 2003).

² In the 17th century shepherding and silviculture took the place of the ineffective agriculture.

³ These include e.g. unexpected crosses – ancient Slavonic runes for protection against evil spirits carved with an axe on the quoins of the house, or a six-pointed star in a circle carved into the *sosręb* (a thick, richly decorated beam running through the ceiling parallel to the façade of the building), which was to protect the members of the household from spells and hexes (Kurek 1978; Lehr ed. 2000).

in the musical folklore referred to as “highlander impressionism” and the sensual dances,⁴ Both these aspects of culture are characterized by stark, expressive realism – a factor that in the axiology of Podhale has become synonymous with highlander nature, which originated from the ancient shepherding tradition (Wawrzeniecki 1916; Długolecka and Pinkwart 1992; Brzozowska-Krajka 1989). A culture without a verbal aspect, or, strictly speaking, without its expression manifested in a linguistic image of reality, would not be able to articulate the unique atmosphere of the highlanders’ transcendent perception. It contains the beliefs regarding non-empirical knowledge about the world (including cosmogony) and the existence of supernatural beings (eschatology, demonology) affecting human life. This element of culture belonging to verbal folklore (tales, fables, legends, stories and parables) binds together all aspects of the cultural existence of highlanders. What is more, it also reveals – literally, metaphorically and metonymically – the essence of being an inhabitant of Podhale, with all characteristic problems and coping mechanisms. Highlanders portrayed in folk tales could always find their way out of seemingly hopeless situations. The protagonists won bets against the Devil and were able to cheat Death. They knew what to do to rob a *dziwożona* (malignant female sprite) of her power, deal with a *planetnik* (water demon), a *strzyga* (life-sucking demon), *siodełek* or with souls trapped in this world. The senior shepherds were believed to be versed in magic, while many highlander ladies knew certain magical practices and could neutralise the effects of evil eye (Arch. I, II, III). Contacts with the supernatural were considered obvious and understandable, as according to highlander legends what used to be Hell was now a cold, rocky place whipped by strong winds. It was believed that God once wandered there and decided to cover Hell with stone and mountain, moved by pity for the God-fearing folk who lived in the barren lands in close vicinity to devils sending hot, hell-fire winds⁵ (Bazińska 1967b).

The image of everyday struggles with the problems of the real and the spiritual world was immortalised in tales, passes from generation to generation by superb 19th-century storytellers, including the famous Jan Krzeptowski Sabała – an illiterate highlander, a folk philosopher, a mentor, a moralist, a less-than-exemplary Christian and a unique folk musician (Hoesick 2001). The oral folklore described by 19th- and 20th-century by collectors⁶ of folk curiosities fascinated with the culture of Podhale,

⁴ In reference to this form of non-verbal expression of the semiotic “body language” and the “dance of the bull”, which reveals “the archaeology of ritual and tradition” and was ‘discovered’ in Podhale by a British anthropologist F. Pine (2000, 87–88), it must be explained that the traditional dances of Podhale mentioned by the inhabitants of the region themselves were *drobne*, *krzesane* and *zbójnickie*. The first two types are collectively referred to as *góralskie* and danced in pairs, whereas the third is performed only by male dancers (Długolecka and Pinkwart 1992).

⁵ A foehn wind commonly referred to as *halny*.

⁶ Works of this kind include the oldest monograph on Podhale by L. Kamiński (vel. Kamiński; 1992), the writings of S. Goszczyński (1958 [1853]; 1901), articles describing various aspects of spiritual culture, including the belief in demons, authored e.g. by S. Eljasz-Radzikowski (1897), A. Suleja (1903),

studied by 20th-century scholars⁷ and treated as a source of inspiration by many poets and writers,⁸ reveals some aspects of the local spiritual culture of Podhale. This image is far from complete, yet the well-known beliefs provide sufficient material for a reconstruction of the supposed imaginary world of Podhale highlanders. The reconstruction shall also be complemented with an analysis of folk tales conducted by the author in the final decade of the 20th century.⁹

THE RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL DOMAINS OF EXISTENCE OF PODHALE HIGHLANDERS

The traditional highlander world-view has evolved over many generations. It contains a unique blend of religious practices and ancient, if slightly modified, beliefs in demons and supernatural beings. It also reveals the subjects of belief, the highlander perception of the natural environment and its phenomena and the simultaneous participation in two types of reality: factual and irrational. Elements of Christian or – strictly speaking – Catholic religious practices are combined with magic and the belief in beings of demonic provenance. Such a syncretic image of the world may be considered a type of philosophy supported not by empirical, but by notional knowledge related to the natural environment. In the words of William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (1976), beliefs from Podhale form a system of both religious and naturalistic nature. One example of such references is the cult of the holy spruce (*Picea excelsa*). Most probably it was brought to Podhale from the Balkans and was very strong until the second half of the 19th century.¹⁰ Another much venerated tree was the yew (*Taxus baccata*). As late as in the 1950s yew and spruce twigs were considered apotropaic symbols and used by highlanders in their magical practices. Yew trees were offered ‘sacrifice’ of the

W. Kosiński (1904) and K. Potkański (1905), as well as the collection of tales told by most famous Podhale storytellers compiled by W. Wnuk (1975). Further information on the current state of research may be found in Lehr (2003).

⁷ The most interesting publications include the monograph by B. Bazińska focusing on the beliefs and magical practices of shepherds in Podhale and the social function of witches and warlocks (1967a, 1967b), the collection of folk tales from the region of Nowy Targ compiled by J. Śliziński (1987), and the article by A. Kowalska-Lewicka (1957).

⁸ The culture of Podhale inspired the works of K. Przerwa-Tetmajer (1960), S. Witkiewicz (1963), J. Kurek (1978), and many others.

⁹ More detailed information regarding the materials used in the present article may be found in the section entitled “Archival material”.

¹⁰ Its existence was discovered in missionary accounts dated 1759 by K. Dobrowolski. For generations, the locals believed in the divine properties of a spruce growing in a forest near Zakopane. Children and cattle were brought to the site and offerings were made. People circled the tree on their knees and prayed to it for a cure for sickness (Dobrowolski 1961, 57–58; Bazińska 1967b, 160).

so-called *pierwociny* (firstlings).¹¹ This custom exemplifies the reciprocal nature of the relations between human beings and the nature. The strong bonds highlanders felt with the surrounding environment and the resulting interdependence became a part of their everyday existence, the basis for customs and rites, the subject of superstitions and the implement of many practices of magical and magical-cum-religious nature.

The naturalistic and religious system was rooted in the interrelation between man and nature, making no distinction between magic, religion and beliefs. The harmonious coexistence of these seemingly contradictory doctrines resulted from the specific common-sense attitude the highlanders displayed towards religion. It was apparent already to Kamiński, whose 19th-century manuscript states that highlanders “consider what the priests tell them and only accept that which is in accordance with the teachings they received at home” (1992, 14), assuming that “there is no need to pester the Lord so much” (Hoesick 2001, 67).

The world perceived through the prism of animalistic elements and integral causality is also characterised by dualism coupled with the idea of two opposing world orders: the divine and the diabolic. As Ryszard Tomicki (1981) points out, the dual structure of the world was the basis of all life and its continuity. The characteristic features included not only the anthropomorphisation of beings, but also the often emphasised familiarity and ‘intimacy’ with the agents of the divine order. Folk fables and Sabata’s tales, very popular with the highlanders, presented God as an “Aged Father”, an experienced *gazda* (master of the household), the owner of many fields and forests He is willingly giving to righteous people. In His tasks to rule the world of men and beasts He is assisted by angels. He lives in a *chata cyfrowana* (a house all covered in ornaments)¹² with benches by the windows and a beautifully carved *sosręb*. He dons traditional highlander attire and – just like shepherds – carries a bag with a folding knife in it. Jesus is perceived as a helper of the “Aged Father” who deals with the affairs of men, cares for their salvation and fights with the Devil over every soul. Holy Mary is a merciful, righteous and just *gądzina* (lady of the household), always willing to arbitrate the most complicated disputes (Hoesick 2001). Thus, highlanders had protectors whom they viewed as ‘local’ – made in their own image – and needed not fear the Devil nor his associates and any other beings from the pagan pantheon of demons, spirits and penitent souls.

The eclectic substance of religious and pagan beliefs based on an emotional spiritual bond with various ideational orders led to the development of a heterogeneous faith

¹¹ Yew twigs were needed for magical rituals. Before they could be cut, the tree had to be appeased by the following practice: every nine years the head of a firstborn ram was buried by the roots. The propitiatory nature of this custom was described and emphasised by T. Karwicka (1983, 43).

¹² The term *chata cyfrowana* is derived from the dialectal term *cyfra* signifying a stamp for printing decorative motives on metalwork and other items. It may also be used with reference to embroidery (e.g. *cyfrowane portki*) (Lehr ed. 2000).

that included the imaginary world of demonic beings which constitutes the subject of the present analysis. The mosaic extra-sensual universe combining religious and magical elements included in folk understanding of the world originated from the specific environmental conditions and highlander mentality. The local topography included steep forbidding mountains, impassable crags, precipices, ravines, vast forests full of game, creeks and waterfalls, mountain lakes, deep and hidden caves. Due to the lay of the land, its inaccessibility and the mystery surrounding it, some places gained the status of *sacrum* or *profanum*, becoming the context for creating mythical and demonic beings. This view is corroborated by the fact that in highlander imagination supernatural creatures were to be found in glens, trees, flowers, seeds and on every boundary (Bazińska 1967b). The belief in the ubiquity of spectral beings and their involvement with the world finds its justification in a logical fallacy of the fact preceding the cause. This error was repeated for generations and resulted from the lack of rational premises that would explain the existence of certain phenomena or anomalies. The creatures from the realm of the supernatural that is a part of the spiritual legacy are, on the one hand, a representation of the sensual projections of actual occurrences and feelings, such as sickness, handicap and death, losing the way, experiencing a natural disaster or an epidemic. On the other hand, they are the creation of suggestive beliefs passed down for generations and corroborating the alleged influence of supernatural beings over human life. Such ideas helped shape the image of a world full of inimical beings, but also provided the inhabitants of the inhospitable land with means of handling various problems.

The stipulation of the heterogeneity of beliefs resulted in an alleged (in highlanders' perception – real) coexistence of humans and the personified beings and the development of a kind of communication along the vertical axis (humans – God) and horizontal axis (humans – supernatural creatures). Such a situation necessitated the creation of certain activities of ritual and magical nature, which had to be performed to repel the malignant spirits that were supposed to plague highlanders. These beings were portrayed as malignant, tricky, either visible or invisible, often personified or capable of taking certain guises within some specified time-space. The range of prophylactic and defensive measures reveals that highlanders had a vast knowledge of herb lore and magical practices, complemented by verbal formulas and various apotropaic items including religious paraphernalia.

THE SUPERNATURAL REALM

The domain of the supernatural as imagined by the inhabitants of Podhale was populated by personifications of natural phenomena and included many interrelations between spiritual and social life. It may also be considered an example of the subjec-

tion of naturalistic phenomena, interpersonal relations and religious doctrine to a folk system of values. The imagined forms of more or less defined demons, half-demons, bogeymen and ghosts belong to different spatial arrangements which represent three natural elements: air, earth and water. The origins attributed to these beliefs are very diverse and at this stage it would be very difficult to analyse their roots. It is, however, probable that the belief in beings associated with each of the elements may be derived from the archetypal belief in animism and the evolution of the concept of the soul (in folk understanding of the term) which could transform into a demon before or after a person's death. The traces of pagan beliefs noticeable in some accounts are a continuation of the imagination process and determine the unique character of the highlanders' translation of natural phenomena observable in their environment.

AIR

DEMONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE WEATHER AND THE PLANETS

The frequency and intensity of violent weather (rain, hail, snow) determined the quality and quantity of harvest, thus becoming a condition for survival of highlander families. People felt powerless in the face of nature, which inspired their imagination to attribute crop failure and famine to supernatural causes. Highlanders, who often experienced hunger, started to believe in beings that could govern clouds and bring rain or snow. The beliefs regarding this category of demonic creatures include two kinds of beings: the dragon and *cloud demons*.

The dragon (*smok*). Tales including the motif of a dragon in Podhale indicate that this belief is very ancient, as corroborated by the old etymology of the pan-Slavonic term *smok* (dragon – *zmij*) emphasised by Kazimierz Moszyński (1967). The motif from Podhale is very similar to Balkan beliefs in mythical serpent-meteorites, serpent-*planetnicy*, serpent-humans who were not *planetnicy* and serpents proper, i.e. dragons. The highlander *smok*, sometimes identified with the personification of the *halny*, was in fact a lizard which grew to reach a massive size. In time the scales on the skin of the lizard hardened and became impenetrable. Dragons lived in the Tatras, high up on the crags and unreachable peaks¹³ or hid in deep caves. They fed on sheep and cattle, sometimes abducting people. Highlanders believed dragons to be the cause of bad weather with constant rain (Kamiński 1992).

Cloud demons (*planetnik*, pl. *planetnicy*). The weather had a decisive influence on the harvest in the lowlands and the period of intensive sheep grazing in the meadows and mountain glens in the Tatras. Highlander folklore mentions another type of

¹³ According to local beliefs people who knew a special spell from a sorcerer's book could draw a dragon out, saddle it and use it as a steed; a feat allegedly achieved by one *baca* (Goszczyński 1958).

being capable of controlling the clouds, namely the *planetnicy*. These mythical beings were said to come to life as a result of a stone-throwing contest between God and the Devil. God threw a stone against a rock three times – each time He did this, the rock produced a beautiful angel. The first time the Devil threw a stone the rock shattered, with the second throw a witch emerged from the rock, whereas the third throw produced the first *planetnik*. The Devil wept, furious at his inability to create a beautiful or benevolent creature – thus the *planetnik* inherited an evil, vengeful nature and the ability to bring rain (the Devil's tears) and hail (Bazińska 1967b). According to another version of the legend, when God was creating the mountain peaks, Podhale and men, the envious Devil decided to make creatures of his own by mixing clay with his spit. Labouring hard, he formed ten humanoid shapes and tried to breathe life into them, as God had done, yet to no avail. Finally God pitied the hapless Devil and gave life to his creatures, whereupon the Devil ran away in shame. God decided to place the newly awakened beings in the clouds, as they did not deserve to live in Hell and had no reason to stay on Earth, as they had no women. He assigned them the function of governing the weather – thus the *planetnicy* were born (Bazińska 1967b).

In newer tales *planetnicy* appear as humans with supernatural powers or dependent on sorcery which had enthralled them. These properties were often ascribed to Slovaks and Hungarians. Irrespective of the fact that specific people could be regarded as *planetnicy*, these beings still had some features pointing to their demonic nature. These manifested themselves in visual signs of 'alien-ness' – *planetnik* could be described as a huge man wearing *ceperskie* (i.e. non-highlander) trousers and straw boots, girdled with a cord (Szczepaniak 1915). He could also appear dressed as a highlander, but he could still be distinguished by the fact that his clothes were always wet, with water lapping in the shoes and dripping from the brim of the hat (Poronin) (Grzebinoga 1975). *Planetnik* was also depicted as an old man with a grey beard resembling a priest or a scholar (Pach and Jarzębowski 1957). His distinguishing features could also include facial hair, black attire, dripping-wet clothes or the appearance of a beggar (Bukowina) (Śliziński 1987). *Planetnicy* could sometimes be identified due to deformity: a huge head, large ears covering a naked and wet body (Bazińska 1967b).

Planetnicy could bring "an evil rain" by gathering the waters from brooks and pouring it down on fields (Brzegi, Czarny Dunajec) (Śliziński 1987; Kantor 1912). In fair weather *planetnik* might fall down to Earth and help people with their chores in exchange for some food and a word of praise (Biały Dunajec) (Skupień-Florek 1991). He returned to his skies by means of ascending natural phenomena: he could climb a rainbow, thick mist or a cloud which he could summon by starting up a fire with a flintstone (Kosiński 1904; Bazińska 1967b).

In highlanders' perception *planetnicy* had a tendency to use the power God gave them over the weather to serve their own petty purposes, such as vengeance upon people who wronged any *planetnik*. The spiteful nature of *planetnicy*, which suited

their devilish origins, manifests itself in the often-repeated motif of an itinerant elder who gets sucked up by the clouds and causes landslides or sends down hail which covers the fields, forests and houses with a thick layer (Suleja 1903). *Planetnik* who has been treated well shows his gratitude – any person who shares their meal with such a creature will receive a timely warning before a storm (Pach and Jarzębowski 1957). Due to these beliefs, each stranger with an unusual countenance was treated to the best meals, eaten only on special occasions.¹⁴

Planetnicy were also considered to punish people for the crime of infanticide. If an unmarried woman decided to kill the child she bore, her village would be visited by an unknown old man, who then walked into a forest and disappeared. After he was gone the sky darkened and a heavy rain began to fall, causing the land to slide and expose the hidden body of the infant. The motif of punishment exacted by *planetnik* is connected with tales of *porońce*, unchristened children, shows that such creatures could act as judges contributing to the disclosure of a crime (Arch. III). This gives *planetnicy* the role of protectors of the moral code consistent with the Christian Decalogue.

Village dwellers had certain ways of preventing the *planetnicy* from ruining their crops, yet only a very limited number of householders mastered the skill of dispersing or diverting clouds from arable land, steering the rain towards meadows and wastelands (Kantor 1912).¹⁵ Some householders were said to have dealings with *planetnicy* and be able to persuade their supernatural friends to send hail to a given spot (Śliziński 1987). However, since not all highlanders had power over such beings, ordinary village dwellers used their own methods of dispersing clouds. These included special consecrated counter-storm bells: “if one rang them, one could see the clouds moving away” (Arch. I, II). Kamiński (1992) noted that such bells, called ‘Loreto chimes’, were consecrated nine times so that they would acquire the power to repel hail clouds. Highlanders additionally amplified the magical qualities of the bell by burning herbs consecrated during the eight days following Corpus Christi placing them on a shovel used for putting bread in the oven, or by lighting a large candle. Such practices modelled after the magical lore of previous generations were still followed in the 1950s and, on rare occasions, even in the 1990s (Arch. I, II; Udziela 1905). The magical properties of burning herbs or the flour for bread were associated not with the plants themselves, although consecrated herbs were believed to work best, but with the smoke. The inhabitants of Podhale viewed smoke as food for *planetnicy*, which is an indication of the surviving archetype of a gift, an offering (Lehr 2003). The motif of making

¹⁴ It was a dish called *moskol* (a type of an oat cake) with *bryndza* (soft goat’s cheese) or noodles with cracklings. According to some legends *planetnicy* demanded to be given scrambled eggs and meat (Szczepaniak 1915).

¹⁵ In other regions of the Carpathians influencing weather was a profession. Individuals who entered this trade were called “weather sorcerers”. This subject has been described in a separate article (Lehr 2009a).

offerings to personified natural phenomena (or to elements;¹⁶ a custom observable in other regions of Poland) as a form of communication between people and deities or demons, appears also in beliefs associated with the wind.

The wind. The wind is an interesting example of combining phenomenological aspects with metempsychological depictions of the soul. The Podhale highlanders do not perceive the wind as a specific demonic being, but ascribe a demonogenic nature to this natural phenomenon. This view might be corroborated by the existence of beliefs associating the wind with the breath of a dead soul that has escaped from Hell. If the soul belonged to a wicked man, a suicide or a sorcerer, the wind gets very strong (Lehr 2012b). It only stops blowing if some flour and consecrated salt is placed at a corner of the house and taken away by the soul in the wind (Bazińska 1967b). The fact that flour was meant as an offering for a demon or perhaps an ancient pagan deity may be corroborated by a very expressive comment by an elderly highlander from Brzegi: “as the wind blew, they took the flour out and fed him: wheat flour, oat flour, rye flour. They took handfuls of it and tossed it in the wind, so that he could munch on it” (Arch. I).

A soul of unbaptized child (*latawiec*, pl. *latawce*). The creature called *diabeł-latawiec* had a connection with thunder. The materials are scarce and ambiguous, yet they point to the fact that in folk understanding lightning was associated with demonic beings. In old Slavonic beliefs *latawiec* was the soul of an infant that was miscarried or died before it could be christened. Such souls were always chased and hit by lightning (Moszyński 1967). The name *latawiec*, initially signifying thunder strike, began to be associated or even identified with the Devil. This demonstrates how many beliefs were, from the very beginning, influenced by Christian doctrine. Pagan demonic beings started to be counted among the servants of the Devil. This may be corroborated by the following statement: lightning strikes the spot where the Devil, that is *latawiec*, wants to sit (Kamiński 1992:154).

The sun ray demon (*stonecznica*, pl. *stonecznice*). The sun cannot be counted among natural phenomena, but as a celestial body, it does have an influence on nature and people – one which is not always positive. Highlanders used to believe that the rays of the sun are inhabited by demons called *stonecznice*. “By God’s decree” they assaulted the impious who slept in on Sundays. *Stonecznica* was believed to be a particularly wicked spirit that should be avoided (Bazińska 1967b).¹⁷ The abovementioned beliefs may, to

¹⁶ This most likely pertains to the traces of a pagan cult of water apparent in Polish beliefs, according to which water reservoirs were the hiding place of demons. To appease the creatures one had to make animal offerings at the site (Moszyński 1967; Lehr 2012a). Traces of that rite are still observable today in the widespread custom of throwing coins into basins and fountains. It has an equally magical significance, yet a different purpose – to allow the person making the offering to return to the same place.

¹⁷ In folk etiology such creatures were the cause of heat-illness and deadly sunstrokes. These symptoms could also be induced by similar demons, e.g. *południce*, *żytnie baby*, “field devils” or “noon witches” that dwelled in corn and lupine (Lehr 2009b).

some extent, be related to the ancient and lost elements that contributed to or originated from the pagan cult of the Sun. Such an assumption finds confirmation in the typical ornamentation of houses, unique to Podhale. To this day, gable walls of traditional houses are decorated with the motif of the rising sun with long, well-defined rays.

THE EARTH CHTHONIC DEMONS

Highlanders perceived the world as full of supernatural creatures such as *boginki*, will-o'-the-wisp, ghouls, *siedliska*, *mamuny*, *leśne* and various types of ghosts, phantoms and bogeymen. The surviving tales are fragmented, varying in content and contaminated, yet the materials from the 19th century make it possible to reconstruct the conceptual framework of earthly demons. The lack of factual continuity, however, makes it difficult to ascertain the origins of the beliefs, their evolution, let alone their roots in Poland. These issues may only be hypothesised upon by experts on demonology and religion. Polish Slavonic culture has no written sources dating back to pagan times, such as the Icelandic *Edda*, the East Slavic *Byliny* or Scandinavian sagas, which could serve as a reliable empirical source of reconstruction. The work of the Polish chronicler Jan Długosz (15th century) contains an ambitious attempt at creating a pantheon of deities modelled after the Greek Olympus, yet it cannot be regarded as conclusive evidence. The motifs are vague and ambiguous due to the overlapping foreign elements and the strong influence of the Church that fought pagan beliefs but at the same time sought to adapt some of them into the doctrine. It is nonetheless possible to identify the common origins of all demonic beings. With the exception of the mysterious *leśna*, all earthly demons are associated with metamorphic images of the soul. Its metempsychological properties and the symptoms of (sometimes only temporary) transmigration focus around the fate of the dead (*boginki* and similar beings, *graniczniki*, *strzygonie*, various types of penitent souls) or the living (vampires).

Nymphs (*boginka*, pl. *boginki*). The beliefs regarding the supernatural vary not only between Podhale and ethnically different regions of Poland, but even from one village to another. One example of these differences with regard to both the origins and the typology of a supernatural being is the female creature referred to as *boginka* or sometimes as *dziwożona*.¹⁸ Aleksander Brückner (1985) associates such creatures with *brzenigie* and *wity* – deities worshipped by the Slavs and included into the diverse pantheon of nymphs and *rusalki* related to the cult of water, rivers, springs, mountains and

¹⁸ The name *boginka* is more common and is known in the entire Podhale. The name *dziwożona* appears in the north-east parts of the region, especially near the border with Spiš, and is a direct translation of the Slovak term *diva zena* (wild woman) (Skupień-Florek 1991). The latter term has nonetheless been noted in Skalne Podhale and in the villages of Ludźmierz, Krauszów and Rogoźnik (Lehr 2003).

forests. Such an interpretation may be disputed because, as noted by Witold Klinger (1949) and Stanisław Urbańczyk (1991), the name *rusalka* was not known in Poland. The latter author, however, is of the opinion that all Slavonic peoples believed in some forms of demons originating from the souls of maidens. If we adhere to one version of the tale about the provenance of these beings (they are personified souls) and take into consideration those elements that emphasise – if not consistently – the demonic features of *boginka* (wearing a red cap, feeding on ferns) and the ambivalence in her appearance and character (beauty vs. ugliness; maidenhood vs. married state; seducing boys vs. abducting children), we may hypothetically assume that the belief in *boginki* (or *dziwożony*) is partially related to other female demons in Slavonic mythology. The fact that such beings were said to dwell on steep river banks, forest precipices and on the waterfront of Czarny Dunajec, Rybi, Morskie Oko and other mountain lakes may also be considered a clue, even if it does not constitute a clear typological premise. Additional information on these beings, such as their love of dancing and the tendency to steal children or abduct women who had just given birth, point to the fact that the tales were contaminated with many different motifs. Thus *boginki* cannot be included into the group of nymphs (*rusalki*) or aquatic spirits. Counting them among the so-called ‘waterfront’ demons, suggested by Leonard Pełka (1987), is equally problematic, as it does evoke the associations with nymphs, which in the case of *boginki* from Podhale beliefs seems to be an over-interpretation. For the purpose of the present article, based on the information found in the literature of the subject and resulting from the analysis of the author’s own material, it will be sufficient to note that this belief is present in the region of Podhale and to include this female being and its varieties into the group of chthonic demons.

Nymphs (*boginka*). In Podhale legends the motif of *boginki* appears in two versions. The first one kept many elements of foreign origin and refers to an older stratum of beliefs (*boginka*). The second version is native and includes some relic elements emphasising the demonic nature of these supernatural beings (*dziwożona*).

If we assume their archetypal animistic origins to be true, *boginki* were beautiful and graceful, lived alone, had no children and – although they liked to play innocent tricks on mankind – it was possible to befriend them (Skupień-Florek 1991). Regarded as anthropomorphised penitent souls, these female spirits seem very similar to Slovak *rusalki*, i.e. the souls of girls who died prematurely, most often before their wedding – unable to fulfil their roles on earth, they took the form of a demon (Melicherčík 1968, 555–560; Horvátová 1975, 1022–1030; Kosiński 1904). The ‘in-between’ state of the soul, a consequence of dying before a rite of passage was completed (i.e. during a period of transformation of one’s cultural status) manifests itself in the belief that *boginki* liked to abduct young farm-hands they had a weakness for (Skupień-Florek 1991).

Wild woman (*dziwożona*, pl. *dziwożony*). The native Podhale equivalent of *boginki* were the *dziwożony*, beings both human and demonic considered to be particularly

repulsive in appearance: with a hairy, dirty body, very dark complexion similar to that of a Gypsy and “eyes glowing like oil-lamps”¹⁹ (Kamiński 1992, 157). Their long, tangled hair reached down to their heels. Some of the *dziwożony* were deformed, most were very short. They wore rags and were sometimes seen naked. *Dziwożony* were also said to have saggy breasts reaching down to their knees. While walking, they threw their breasts on their backs; they also used their own breasts instead of beaters while washing underwear (Skupień-Florek 1991; Arch. II, III). *Dziwożony* were usually seen on Saturday afternoons. Sometimes they wore highlander clothing and red caps with a fern twig attached to it or wreaths of alpine lady-fern²⁰ or meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*) (Goszczyński 1901; Suleja 1903). Their diet consisted in mushrooms and berries, yet their favourite food was the common polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*) (Goszczyński 1958). *Dziwożony* also liked to make night raids, stealing beans and potatoes from the fields, cheeses from the larder and milk from the udders of kine and sheep (Suleja 1903). If *dziwożona* was trapped or caught red-handed and her red cap was taken from her, she would promise to do no more harm for the return of the item (Śliziński 1987).

Dziwożony had offspring, the fruit of their relations with the Devil (Kamiński 1992). The children were as ugly as their mothers – they were portrayed as little monsters with thin arms, bandy legs, huge bellies, even larger heads and teeth like cows. Incessantly hungry and wailing, they could walk and find food even as small infants (Bazińska 1954; Suleja 1903; Śliziński 1987). It was believed that *dziwożony* disliked their misshapen offspring and often switched them for human babies that had not been christened yet (Potkański 1905; Brzega 1969). Highlander women used a variety of prophylactic measures to protect their children from being kidnapped by *dziwożony* and from being hexed. First of all, a woman who had just given birth and the infant were isolated from the rest of the household with a linen cloth hung at both sides of the bed on a vertically positioned two-pronged rake (Kowalska-Lewicka 1957). The power of warding off *boginki* was ascribed to many apotropaic items, e.g. *kosak* (a knife for cutting cabbage) or a consecrated broom left in front of the threshold – the boundary between the *orbis interior* and *orbis exterior*. Additional protection was acquired if the doorway and the windows of the house were sprinkled with holy water (Kamiński

¹⁹ This is a typically demonic feature, as is dark complexion, abundant bodily hair, shortness, deformity etc. (Moszyński 1967). Nevertheless, it might be assumed that the appearance of itinerant Gypsies, unknown and ‘alien’ to the highlanders, may have influenced the creation of this demonic creature, one that combines ancient motifs with new determinants of otherness (real and imagined) characteristic for the Gypsy ethnic group.

²⁰ A plant of the genus *Athyrium* found in Skalne Podhale. Local names include *flore cyna*, *fere cyna* (*Athyrium distentifolium*); shepherds from the Liptovska Valley call it *ferečina*, a term derived from the Romanian *ferece*. The plant was believed to bloom once a year with an invisible flower (Radwańska-Paryska 1992).

1992; Bazińska 1954). Despite these prophylactic measures and the fact that infants were closely watched at all times, abduction could still take place. In such cases the most certain way to retrieve the kidnapped infant was to take the *odmieniec* (changeling) out to the refuse heap and beat it with a stick. The cries of the baby would attract the *boginka*, who then returned the human baby she had taken (Arch. I; Suleja 1903). Another method included starving the changeling by feeding it from egg shells or with beans from a narrow jar that trapped its hand inside (Śliziński 1987).

The *dziwożony* were also said to kidnap women who had just given birth and had not been through the ceremony of *wywód* (leading out of the house)²¹ (Gąsienica 1975). For this reason, women were forbidden to exit the house before this rite was performed. A kidnapped mother could only be saved by a St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*),²² sometimes called "the weed of the *dziwożony*" (Witkiewicz 1963), growing at a baulk. The magical properties of this plant were supposedly revealed to one kidnapped woman by a limp *dziwożona* who could not keep up with the rest. Out of spite, she called to the woman: "Goodwife of the human folk, grab the goatweed by the baulk" (Arch. I). The moment the lady touched the herb, the *dziwożony* lost all power they had over her and left her alone on the meadow (Potkański 1905). Such creatures could also abduct unmarried girls. This motif was used by the poet Seweryn Goszczyński. A young *dziwożona* in one of his poems complains that she had once been taken against her will and changed into what she is (1901, 383).

The soul of dead woman (*mamuna*, pl. *mamuny*). A more malignant type of *boginka* was called *mamuna* or *jędza*. These were nocturnal creatures, especially active during a new moon, who liked to lure evil people into forests, pits, quagmires, glades and cemeteries. They were believed to be transformed penitent souls of old women who died in sin or unmarried girls who gave birth to illegitimate children or dabbed in sorcery and did not receive the viaticum before dying. Young *mamuny* lived in forests or between rocks, whereas old ones could be found in brooks or large tufts of grass. They could be freed of their penance if they brought a living soul to Sunday Mass on the day of the holy patron of the parish (Bazińska 1967b).

The earth spirit (*bogincorz*, pl. *bogincorze*). The creature called *bogincorz* was considered to be the male equivalent of *dziwożona*. These beings were said to be earth spirits assaulting men who went out without covering their heads. If *bogincorze* met

²¹ It was a type of a religious purification rite performed independently of the christening of the infant, six weeks after the birth. After the Second World War the magical and religious perception of this rite changed – it is currently viewed as a type of blessing, performed together with the christening.

²² Z. Radwańska-Paryska (1992) claims that the common Polish name of this herb, *dziurawiec*, was not used in Podhale until very recently. In this region the plant was called *dzwonek*. Radwańska-Paryska emphasises the magical properties of the herb, manifested in another of its names common in the Middle Ages – namely *fuga daemonum*. Goat weed was known for its medicinal properties and widely used in magical practices performed to ward off devils and malignant spirits (1991).

a highlander without a hat on, they grabbed him and danced with him until all his strength was spent, leaving him half-dead on the ground (Kowalska-Lewicka 1957).

It was believed that *boginki* and similar creatures stopped appearing near Czarny Dunajec as early as in the 18th century due to the numerous floods that troubled the region. The supernatural beings from the vicinity of Morskie Oko were said to have been chased away by highlanders themselves (Kamiński 1992). According to other tales, such creatures ceased to harass people after the introduction of the religious ceremony of the Confirmation (Kowalska-Lewicka 1957).

Will-o'-the-wisp (*graniecnik*, pl. *graniecniki*). Demonic beings of the chthonic type included *graniecniki* also known as *mierniki* (geometricians). These creatures were said to originate from souls of men who made unfair measures of fields or villages and had to atone for this after death. They appeared at the site where they broke the law as anthropomorphic figures without heads sitting at a table. It was believed that the presence of *miernik* at the place of his crime is an attempt to make amends for the damage done: "they measured wrong in life, so after death they wished these boundaries undone" (Śliziński 1987, 66). The penitent souls of geometricians were sometimes depicted as lights drawn towards people, as men with glowing faces or as little children dressed in short linen shirts and carrying a lamp (Kowalska-Lewicka 1957).

Nightmare (*siedlisko*, *siodło*, *siodelko*, pl. *siedliska*). This demonic creature may be considered a type of a nightmare – i.e. a personification of disease (Lehr 2009b) or a penitent human soul (Bazińska 1967b). *Siedlisko*, also referred to as *gnieciuch*, was invisible, yet sometimes took the guise of a cat or a creature with the head of a cat or a bird (Śliziński 1987). Such demons could harass both men and women, but only those who slept lying supine. They appeared at night and sat on a person's legs, later moving up to the chest until the sleeping man or woman could no longer breathe (Arch. I). *Siedlisko* could also bite, leaving its victims with marks. To get rid of the demon one had to move one's big toe; cursing the creature was equally effective (Kowalska-Lewicka 1957). An animal equivalent of *siedlisko* was called *siodło*. Shepherds believed these to be the spirits of unfairly killed beasts (Bazińska 1967b).

Vampire (*strzyga*, pl. *strzygi*).²³ Other malignant demons included creatures that sucked on the blood of people and livestock or stole the milk from the udders of kine and sheep (Goszczyński 1958). *Strzyga* was sometimes identified with *czarownica* (a witch), i.e. a woman from the village who crept into the barns of her neighbours under the cover of darkness. Witches were also accused of sucking the blood out of small children; they were sometimes seen in the mountain pastures where sheep were grazing. One could drive *strzyga* away using a consecrated whip or by fumigating the

²³ This term functioned in Polish folklore synonymously with *upiór* and *strzyż*. Slavs took this word from the superstitions of ancient Romans, who believed that witches or other demons could assault children and adults in the guise of night fowl (*strix*, *strigis*: owl, tawny owl) sucking their blood as they slept (Moszyński 1967).

sheep with a smoking twig of a mountain ash (*Sorbus aucuparia* L.) or grey alder (*Alnus incana* [L.]) (Bazińska 1967b).

Ghoul (*strzygoń*, pl. *strzygonie*). The highlanders believed that any person born with their pupils upturned could – due to their demonic properties related to their ‘otherness’ – become a *strzygoń* after death. The dead body of such a person was thought not to become rigid; the eyes remained open and the mouth kept smiling. *Strzygonie* rose from their graves on moonless nights to creep into houses, suck on women’s breasts and bite people. To prevent someone from turning into *strzygoń*, one had to bury them face down and place a piece of paper with the sign of the cross (drawn by the sacristan with the key to the pyx) under the dead person’s tongue (Bazińska 1967b).

The forest demon (*leśna*, pl. *leśne*). The beliefs from the Podhale region recounted by Bazińska (1967b) include a female forest demon called *leśna*. In appearance and behaviour this creature is rather similar to *boginka* (of the nymph type). As the name suggests (*leśna* means ‘of the forest’), these beings dwelled in the woods and only rarely ventured out to be seen by the roads. They were depicted as exceptionally beautiful creatures prone to lure bachelors with their charms and seductive voices. They led their victims to remote rocky precipices, deep woods, bogs or swamps and then disappeared, whereupon the men lost their bearings and often fell to their deaths or drowned.

Mountain demons. A special place in the notional world of the highlanders ought to be given to beings that dwell in inaccessible mountain regions. These include mountain *diabły* (devils) and other evil creatures which guard treasures hidden by brigands, penitent spirits wandering along mountain trails or by specific rock formations (e.g. the rock called Mnich near the Morskie Oko lake), as well as demonic reptiles such as the King of the Serpents (Łapczyński 1867; Pełka 1987). Legend has it that the treasures in the vicinity of Morskie Oko are protected by *niedusznik* – a devil, an anthropomorphised being which appears in the guise of a slender man with a handsome face, dressed in a glistening uniform (Kolberg 1968). The surviving relics of beliefs include a variety of demonic creatures populating the mountains. In highlanders’ perception “there are empty mountains and then there are those that have their own spirit [...] there are knights sleeping under the Giewont, whereas under the Wysoka there dwells the ghost of an old shepherd who had human blood on his conscience” (Bazińska 1967b, 94; Krzeptowski 1975, 49–52). Such beliefs caused the locals to avoid passing between high rocks which stand near to one another, climbing certain mountains and entering deep caves with many forking corridors. Superstitions of this type could still be observed in the 1960s. The numerous secret symbols and signs carved into the rocks in the High Tatras most probably had a magical significance. Bazińska (1967b) suggests they may constitute a trace of a cult of rocks. Some of these symbols were said to be very powerful, as evidenced by accounts suggesting that such sites were covered in offerings of bread and linen or with pictures of the saints or “special” crosses. Highlanders also recall church services being organised by a special stone followed by communal feasts

during which the locals ate a “*rosolny* or smoked mutton”²⁴ (Bazińska 1967b, 95). In the absence of reliable source material it is impossible to ascertain whether these practices were indeed relics of a cult of stones or perhaps of spirits or some undefined mountain demons dwelling in the rocks that had to be appeased with an offering.²⁵

DEMONIC PERSONIFICATIONS OF EVIL AND DEATH

These two beings played a very significant role in the folk epistemology of the mystery of life and death. The personification of evil, i.e. the Devil (*diabeł*) functioned in the realm of Christian doctrine, the primary concept of which is to adhere to the Decalogue. The personification of Death (*śmierć*), present in the existential domain, translated the phenomenon of death through portraying it as a sentient being, which helped highlanders get accustomed to the inescapable.

The Devil. The etymology of the word *grzech* (sin) used by the highlanders to denote the Devil clearly identifies this being as a personified concentration of all types of evil. It may be added that the use of a kenning indicated a strong belief in the magical power of a word. It reflects the rules of pre-logical thinking (speech is tantamount to a deed and a symbolical act), according to which a verbalised denotation of a subject gives it creative power: the “signifying” becomes the “signified”; word becomes flesh (Lehr 2012c).

In Podhale beliefs the Devil appears as an anthropomorphised and zoomorphised figure (a black dog or cat). The most common personification in Polish folklore (mountain regions included) is the image of a “stranger”, i.e. someone from a different ethnic group (e.g. a German) or social stratum (e.g. a nobleman). The description included in Kamiński’s monograph (1992) specifies that the face of the Devil resembles the hairy muzzle of a monkey, with a hawk nose with no holes. The elements of his dress, i.e. a tricorne hat, wide trousers and boots, hide the features that would betray him as a demonic being (the horns, the tail, the bandy legs and the hooves). He appears at night, spending the day hidden in the bushes, in caves or under bridges. The Devil known from folk tales was most of all a prankster: under the cover of darkness he caused the grazing horses to scatter; sometimes he pulled people into rivers or lakes. In some regions (Czarny Dunajec) it was believed that the Devil could take the souls of living men, leaving only the empty shells of their bodies, provided the victims were drunk (Kantor 1912). He could not touch a person who has stepped into a circle drawn

²⁴ *Rosolne* was a dish of meat (usually mutton) preserved by soaking it in salted water with garlic for a given amount of time (Lehr ed. 2000).

²⁵ In Staszic’s interpretation based on his conversations with initiated highlanders, the symbols on the stones (shaped in peculiar forms or crosses) were marks allegedly leading to hidden treasure coves. One could reach these places by calling on certain spirits in places that bore the mark (1955).

with consecrated chalk (Arch. III). A Devil could also be tricked into getting inside a jar with consecrated *kokocyna* (the material for producing rosaries), which he was not able to get out from (Bazińska 1967b).

The image of the Devil in highlander folklore is strangely ambivalent. On the one hand he appears as an evil power that cannot be resisted. This view may be exemplified by the belief that the Devil's incitement is impossible to silence or overcome – e.g. people wishing to hang themselves will do so even on a thread. On the other hand, the surviving tales, fables and parables portray the Devil as a stupid creature which is repeatedly being tricked by courageous and resourceful (Krzeptowski 1975, 58–60). Such stories usually include the motif of the Devil striking a deal with the protagonist in order to take his or her soul. Highlanders are tempted with the prospect of a major change in their fate or the possibility of saving their souls. In one tale, the Devil approaches a man who plans to commit suicide because of his wife's insufferable temper. He offers to take the place of the highlander for some time in exchange for the man's soul. After three days the Devil runs away saying that if he were the highlander, he would have hung himself thrice already (Przerwa-Tetmajer 1960). Another folk tale speaks of a speed-sewing contest between the Devil and a shoemaker. The Devil chooses to work with a long thread, which forces him to jump out of the window every time he pulls the string through; the shoemaker sews with a short thread, wins the competition and saves his soul (Arch. III).

Despite the fact that the Devil was portrayed as intellectually limited and physically weak, highlanders also attributed to him certain positive features and had him follow specific etiquette. Such a Devil inspired neither fear nor respect. For shoeing a horse late at night the Devil presents the blacksmith with a magical shotgun capable of killing invisible birds and all kinds of beasts; for stealing the last *moskol*²⁶ from a highlander the Devil agrees to become his servant, increasing his wealth and punishing his unfair lord (Harkłowa) (Skupień-Florek 1991; Bazińska 1967b).

The motif of the Devil is directly or indirectly related to the concept of a magical coin referred to as *dobiedz* or *inkluz*, which always returned to its owner and multiplied their riches. To obtain the coin, one had to sell one's soul to the Devil (Bazińska 1967b), thus an *inkluz* was sometimes called *diabetek* (little devil). Some individuals were said to know the method of producing such a coin. To do that, one had to find an egg laid by a black hen and fathered by a black cockerel and carry it under one's armpit. After nine days and nine nights the egg would hatch, revealing a little *diabetek* inside (Kowalska-Lewicka 1957). Getting rid of the coin was a much more complicated task: left behind or given away it always returned to the owner. The only way to save one's soul was to hang the *inkluz* on a withered branch of a willow (*Salix aurita*) hanging over the water of a swift river (Kamiński 1992).

²⁶ Also known as *moskal* – a traditional oatcake, nowadays made of cooked potatoes (Lehr ed. 2000).

Death. The subject of death rarely appears in monographs and articles pertaining to folk culture. Its renown is due to a unique and very popular fable by Jan Krzeptowski Sabala (Hoesick 2001).²⁷ The tale speaks of the relations between people and an anthropomorphised female demon named Death, and between God and Death. It is a perfect example of highlander philosophy regarding the inevitability of death. In the first part of the fable, a village carpenter meets a tall and thin old woman whom he recognises as Death. He tricks her and shuts her in a willow trunk. With Death no longer doing her job, the Earth becomes overpopulated; the carpenter grows old. Left by his children and grandchildren, alienated from the world he no longer belongs to, he waits for an end that never comes. Finally, he remembers what he had done to Death and sets her free. Death then restores order to the world, but refuses to come for the carpenter. The second part of the tale starts with Death entering a hut inhabited by *gądzina* (lady of the household) and her seven children. Moved by pity, she spares the woman's life. Having met God who scolds her for her behaviour and explains the significance of her work to her, Death returns for the woman to do God's bidding (Krzeptowski 1975). According to a different tale recounted by Augustyn Suski (1975), people used to know a method of prolonging their life – they cast away their old skins while bathing in spring water. There was a woman of one hundred years who lived with her grandson. Feeling that her end draws near, she decided to become young again. She changed her skin and returned to her grandson but he did not recognise her. Having understood the nature of fleeting time, the woman begged the Sun to return her to her original looks. The act of renouncing miraculously regained youth out of love caused the world to change. The ability to prolong life was lost to humankind forever.²⁸

The lesson these tales intend to convey is that upsetting the natural order of the world will always cause chaos and unhappiness. Their message and significance also alludes to the search for eternal life or, as Mircea Eliade (2004) emphatically put it, the more or less conscious belief in human immortality ruined by an unfortunate coincidence of a demonic plot.

Other tales from Podhale portray Death in a triad. The “three Deaths” were believed to dance on infrequently used roads or in the wilderness, singing songs about their

²⁷ The first writer to recount the tale was H. Sienkiewicz in 1891. It was later published in B. Dembowski's adaptation in 1892; in 1987 A. Stopka-Nazimek recounted a different version. As suggested by F. Hoesick (2001), all these narratives originate from the tale authored by Krzeptowski Sabala; the small modifications only emphasize the non-standard composition of variations with no definite ending.

²⁸ The scholar heard the fable told by his grandfather. Despite many elements related to the cultural environment of Podhale, the story contains many analogies to the Melanesian myth that associates the arrival of death with an imprudent deed of the mythical ancestors. Melanesians believed that the first people grew younger with time, casting their skins off like snakes. It was so until one woman who regained her youth was not recognised by her child and decided to cover herself with her old skin. She then lost her immortality, and the whole humankind with her. From then on human life was to be limited (Eliade 2004, 51–52).

origins and their roles: “We motherless born death-sisters three; throttling the man-folk God made us to be” (Biały Dunajec) (Skupień-Florek 1991, 214). After singing these lyrics the Deaths dispersed – wherever they went, someone died. There was no way to escape death, because “each Death has its privileges, she herself will find a reason for sickness and dying” (Kantor 1912, 386). Yet another tale mentions that as the plague came to Podhale three hundred years ago, in the forests surrounding the villages of Ząb and Suche Deaths could sometimes be seen dancing with Devils and singing a tune the lyrics of which told people how to save themselves from contracting the disease:²⁹ “do not wash one foot with the other / do not crush salt with salt / use *pieprzyniec*, burnet saxifrage and juniper / and you will come to no harm” (Bazińska 1967b, 104). This dance of the unholy was said to cause a six-coloured wheel (white, red, green, blue, yellow and black) to appear at this spot. The wheel spun down to the villages: wherever it passed, death followed.

Death was not merely performing the role assigned to her by God; she was also unfriendly towards people whose time had not yet come. If she met such a person, she danced with them till the morning light, leaving them exhausted (Biały Dunajec) (Skupień-Florek 1991). In other cases, however, she proved truly magnanimous. She rewarded the highlander who carried her across the river by granting him the power to heal, which he then lost as a result of his own greed (Gaśienica 1975).

In contemporary folk accounts Death may be portrayed according to Church doctrine, i.e. as a skeleton, or as a “bony old woman in white, wearing a headscarf and carrying a scythe” (Arch. I). Seeing such a person near somebody’s household was a sure sign that one of the inhabitants was about to die. “As she was trundling around the house, he would breathe his last” (Arch. I, IV). Although it was known that Death cannot be defied, there were tales of people trying to fight it and losing: “mother told me that someone older than her fought Death and even broke a chair, he was defending himself against Death with a chair” (Arch. I).

Death understood as a biological occurrence, an antithesis of life, is presented in highlander legends and tales from other regions of Poland as a cultural phenomenon, a necessary completion of existence signifying a change in the ontological situation of a human being. Folk beliefs, permeated with eschatology, do not portray death as the end of life, but as a cultural boundary. Crossing it leads to the separation of the soul from the body, which initiates a new stage of existence in the spiritual domain. This conceptual framework is exemplified by the numerous folk interpretations of the fate of a soul after death (Lehr 2012b).

²⁹ The medicinal (antiseptic) properties of the mentioned herbs: *pieprzyniec* (most probably peppergrass; *Lepidium ruderale*), burnet saxifrage (*Pimpinella Saxifraga*) and juniper (*Juniperus communis*) were widely known in folk pharmacotherapy. In the centuries past, saxifrage was commonly used as a remedy and a magical prophylactic measure against bubonic plague and other epidemic diseases (e.g. cholera) (Kawalko 1986).

DEMONS – SOULS, GHOSTS, BOGEYMEN

The majority of tales and beliefs focuses on demons emerging from souls of people who died a sudden death. Folk beliefs associate premature or unusual death with the likelihood of transforming a human into a demon. This was equally probable for the body as for the soul itself, a notion referring to the Christian belief in afterlife. Moszyński (1967) emphasises that the ghosts or specters of the dead played a significant role in the development of folk demonology. His view finds its confirmation in the origins of the supernatural creatures described above – the majority of them were said to emerge from ghosts. In Podhale the concept of a transformation of a soul into an amorphous or sometimes anthropomorphic or zoomorphic demon evolved in several directions. Such beings may be divided into penitent souls of children (*porońce*), suicides or victims of murder, souls of the dead returning to the world for a certain reason or non-specific ghosts.

A soul of miscarried child (*poroniec*, pl. *porońce*, *niechrzczeniec*, pl. *niechrzczeniec*). This category only includes penitent souls of children that died before they were christened, thus turning into demons. This was the fate of illegitimate children killed by their mothers; the crime always provoked an intervention of divine or demonic forces (see: *planetnik*), most often manifested as a sudden and heavy rain which revealed the buried corpse or as the sound of a wailing babe. In the latter case one had to ask: “Wandering soul, what do you want?” and articulate the words spoken during a christening. Naming the child soul freed it from penance (Arch. II; Potkański 1905).

The souls of the murdered. Religious doctrine dictated that the soul of a person who died without receiving the viaticum (and the Anointing of the Sick) was at risk of being obliged to do penance or even to be eternally doomed. Such a soul was believed to stay in between the afterlife and the world of the living, wandering freely and haunting people. The souls of the killed could appear in the place of their sudden death, where one could also see dancing specters or hear wailing. Horses tended to be uneasy around such spots (Arch. I). There was a custom of saying Mass for the intention of people who died a tragic death and erecting small shrines in the places “visited” by their souls.

The souls of suicides and sorcerers. Suicidal death was believed to cause unusual weather. When someone hung themselves, the wind started to blow with extraordinary force until the day the suicide was buried (Kamiński 1992) (see: the wind). Such superstitions are still alive in contemporary Podhale. In the 20th century, at least until the 1950s, the prohibition of interring suicides in consecrated ground was strictly adhered to by the highlanders. These restrictions also pertained to burials of a *czarownik* (sorcerer) (Arch. I). Breaking the rules allegedly resulted in heavy and prolonged rainfall. In times of natural disaster highlanders could even resort to desecrating graves. The exhumed corpse of a suicide was placed beyond cemetery walls “on somebody

else's land over the tenth baulk" (Kamiński 1992, 72), the bodies of sorcerers were burnt (Arch. I).³⁰

Suffering and malignant ghosts. According to highlander beliefs, a human soul might be obliged to do penance for various reasons. The soul of a person who had been harmed or had wronged others (e.g. by not performing a task they had been paid to do) appeared in the form of an amorphic or anthropomorphic shape (Śliziński 1987). There were also malignant ghosts that lead people astray and souls that had been irresponsibly summoned (Kosiński 1904; Śliziński 1987).

The ghosts/souls of the dead. Souls and ghosts of all people who had passed on could appear on the night after All Hallows Day (the 1st of November). According to many highlander tales, this was the time when one could see white-clad figures coming out of the cemetery and heading to the church. These were the souls that had reached salvation, coming to hear holiday Mass said by a phantom priest. The souls of the damned were said to scatter around the world to haunt people in various ways. The souls of the delivered took anthropomorphic shapes, whereas the damned appeared as animalistic symbols of evil (a black cat) or metaphorical portrayals of injustice (e.g. a skinned animal) (Skupień 1979).

WATER AQUATIC DEMONS

Water spirit (*topielec*, pl. *topielcy*). This demon represents the category of beings associated with the element of water – the proto-matter, which in many myths and religious systems of the world is a symbol of chaos, change and transformation. *Topielec* originated from a soul of a dead person – it could be a child born of an unmarried woman, unchristened and deliberately drowned or that of an unborn child of a lady who drowned by accident or on purpose. The soul of the baby was obliged to do penance for seven years, during which time it lived in the water pulling people under the surface. If *topielec* fulfilled its task sooner, its soul was taken to purgatory. The creature was believed to lose its power if anybody threw at it a string pulled out of a piece of underwear. After that the demon's attempt to drown a person would always be unsuccessful (Kamiński 1992; Bazińska 1967b).

One characteristic feature of this type of demons was their attraction to moonlight. These creatures were said to be particularly active on clear nights when the moon was

³⁰ Józef Stolarczyk, a 19th-century parson priest from Zakopane, tried to battle the superstitions of the locals. In 1864 he allowed the body of a man who committed suicide to be buried in the local cemetery, causing an outrage in the community. The exceptionally bad harvest that year was blamed on his deeds and the locals demanded that the suicide be removed from the cemetery. The parson refused to comply but noted in his diary that it "took much effort to protect that poor corpse from being dug up" (Hoesick 2001, 111).

up. The association between *topielcy* and the moon is emphasised not only in Podhale folklore – it appears in beliefs from other regions of Poland and is common as a motif in other Slavonic countries. Ancient Slavs associated the moon with the night, the earth, water and death, making it an object of cult (in early Christianity). According to folk beliefs the Moon was a god of water demons (Bartmiński and Niebrzegowska 1996; Biegeleisen 1929). This view is corroborated by the text of an invocation to the Moon that *topielec* was believed to say every time it stole beans from highlanders: “dear God, please light your light, the peas I pick I’ll see aright”. These demons also liked to “pluck” themselves or do chores in the pale light of the moon (Lehr 2012a). If hit by a highlander with a stick or a bridle they also addressed the Moon, this time with reproach: “you gave me such a hit, my legs are weak for it” or “shine, shine, you better shine, not brawl” (Bazińska 1967b, 91; Śliziński 1987, 65). Moszyński postulates that this fragmented data may be a trace of “deeper mythological relations picturing some demons as fully dependent on the Moon as the realm of the dead”; relations that can no longer be ascertained on the basis of Slavonic materials or those of related cultures (1967, 643).

In newer versions of tales *topielec* was considered a kind of a water devil. Such an interpretation is directly indicated by the characteristics of *topielcy* in folk understanding noted by Bazińska (1967b). Many details of the descriptions of these creatures were very similar to the image of a devil (see: the Devil) presented by Kamiński (1992).

HUMAN BEINGS AND SUPERNATURAL POWER

In the notional world of highlanders from Podhale special significance was attached to individuals who possessed magical powers or knowledge of medicine and healing various diseases (of beasts and men) brought about by magic. This category included both women (witches) and men (sorcerer-shepherds and others) whose competences were defined by their social roles related to gender. Sorcerers and witches engaged in magical practices of translocatory (relocating, crossing) and transmissive nature (sending), mostly sympathetic in character. Prophylactic substitutes for magic were used also by ordinary villagers, mostly women. All practices were accompanied by adequate magical measures and verbal formulas called *modlitwy* (prayers), *zaklinanie* (hexing) or *zamawianie* (spellbinding). The Church clearly disapproved of such actions, deeming them a cardinal sin, because they aimed at disturbing the Christian order of the world. In the existential reality of Podhale inhabitants who experienced poverty, illness and other obstacles on a daily basis, magical practices were perceived as means for bringing imaginary balance to “their own” world.

Sorceress. In folk tales a witch (called *czarownica*, *babrosia*, *guślarka* or *znachorka*) is a character that belongs both to the human world and to the realm of the

supernatural. She was seen as a part of the human world, since she was never considered a demonic creature. Her connections with the supernatural were based on her alleged contacts with the Devil, practices characteristic for negative folk magic and her ability to shapeshift (Arch. 1). Women were branded as witches mostly as a result of human jealousy – hard-working, industrious individuals were often accused of witchcraft. Alienation from the community was also considered a reason for taking up magical practices forbidden by the Church, especially in the case of women who were old and alone, lived in poverty and had a bad temper. Descriptions of alleged sabbaths of witches found in tales and books (from treatises written by Church Fathers and scientific dissertations to trashy literature) that were circulated in many European countries since time immemorial, also had their equivalent in Polish folklore. Older versions of highlander tales include accounts of witches meeting in Hałeczkowa Polana (Babia Góra) on the eve of the day of their patron saint, Lucy. They gathered there at midnight, having flown from afar on broomsticks, shovels or sometimes on farm-hands turned into horses (Kamiński 1992).

The role of the type of witch called *guślarka* was mostly associated with counter-acting spells cast on cattle, milk or dairy, healing “hexed” kine, bewitching people and pastures (Bazińska 1967b). Such witches also used herbs, most commonly devil’s turnip³¹ (*Bryonia alba*) and various props of magical significance (e.g. nails taken out of a coffin, the remains of a burnt frog) (Kamiński 1992). Highlander women who knew much about the pharmacological properties of plants (such information was passed down from older generations) used them to protect themselves against the hostile actions of a *babrosia*. Preventive measures included fumigating cattle with herbs³² consecrated in the eight-day period following the Corpus Christi (June) or on the day of the Assumption of Mary (15th of August) and sprinkling it with holy water (Arch. I, II). The most effective of all herbs was *glowatnik* (most probably brown knapweed; *Centaurea jacea*),³³ used with the others it had the power to release kine from any spell (Kamiński 1992).

Sorcerer-shepherds (*czarownicy-owczarze*). This was the largest group of individuals involved in magic and witchcraft connected with shepherding and animal husbandry. Highlanders considered sorcerer-shepherds to be on the very top of social hierarchy, in

³¹ This herb is the Polish equivalent of the biblical mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*) – both male and female (*Mandragora mas*, *Mandragora foemina*) – the root of which resembles a human figure. This poisonous plant has been used since antiquity in medicine and magical practices (Kawałko 1986).

³² These included e.g. lad’s love (*Artemisia abrotanum*), green ginger (*Artemisia absinthium*) and mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*).

³³ Kamiński does not mention the Latin name of the plant; Radwańska-Paryska (1992, 29) identifies it as brown knapweed (Rostafiński 1962), yet the name *glowatnik* might also signify centaury (*Centaureum umbellatum*), a plant included in the group of the so-called ritual herbs mentioned by the Polish Encyclopedia (*Encyklopedia Powszechna*) in mid-17th century (Kawałko 1986).

stark contrast with their female equivalents – the witches. The secrets of arcane knowledge were believed to be kept by Slovak sorcerers; highlanders from the Polish Podhale were not always able to match their southern neighbours in power. In dire cases they sought the advice of famous non-local sorcerers such as Bulanda (a senior shepherd, sorcerer, diviner and healer) or asked the Slovaks for direct help (Bazińska 1967b; Arch. I).

Sorcerers belonging to this category used a broader spectrum of props in their magical practices: pieces of metal (e.g. a type of shepherds' bells called *zbyrcoki*, shepherds' knives, needles, horseshoes), items and products made of animals such as birds, fish and reptiles, parts of the human body (e.g. fingers, bones, hair, teeth) and human secretions (e.g. blood, excrement, sweat), plants (e.g. consecrated herbs, weeds with magical properties, branches of coniferous and deciduous trees), products originating from plants (e.g. linen shirts, hempen belts, tow ropes, straw, flour, salt) and objects of religious cult (e.g. holy water, consecrated chalk, stoles, large ceremonial candles, communion bread, images of the saints) (Bazińska 1967b).

Sorcerer senior shepherd (*baca-czarownik*). Grasping the basics of sorcery was a necessary condition for becoming a senior shepherd (*baca*). It was claimed that “who could not cast spells was not fit to be a *baca*” (Arch. I). It was believed that cases of harming the herds of a rival shepherding team using magic were very common, and therefore the ability to heal sheep and protect them against the effects of sorcery was an essential skill. Appropriate magical practices warranted the well-being of animals, prevented them from contracting diseases and protected them from danger. Almost each action taken by shepherds from the moment of leaving the village and crossing successive boundaries on the way to the mountain meadows (e.g. taking sheep to pastures, milking them and processing the milk) was connected with certain magical practices which formed a plethora of beliefs and rituals of religious and magical significance (Dobrowolski 1958; Sutor 1992; Bazińska 1967b). The shepherds' interest in sorcery, their magical education and the practical knowledge of every experienced and specialised *baca* took the form of institutionalised sorcery. This aspect of highlander culture was described in detail by Bazińska (1967a; 1967b), therefore the present publication will only briefly mention other types of sorcerers of varying provenance and scope of competence. These types are: *ślepolnicy*, *czarnoksiężnicy* and *znachorzy*.

Invisible sorcerer (*ślepolnik*, pl. *ślepolnicy*). The name pertains to a sorcerer who wielded the Devil-granted power of invisibility. They were believed to seek out rich householders and steal their money. The only way to see and defeat a *ślepolnik* was to find a pregnant old lady, take some clay from under her feet and say the following words: “godless mage obscured from view, I can now discover you” (Kamiński 1992, 146; Bazińska 1967b). The power of such clay neutralised the invisibility spell, bereaving the *ślepolnik* of the protection of the Devil.

Magician (*czarnoksiężnik*, pl. *czarnoksiężnicy*). This type of a sorcerer was also called *wróż* (diviner) or *prorok* (prophet). Their arcane knowledge came from reading sorcery

books. Apart from fortune-telling, such individuals also dealt with healing or magical practices for their own benefit (Bazińska 1967b).

Quack doctor (*znachor*, pl. *znachorzy*). *Znachorzy* were people whose healing power allegedly came from a contact with a magical serpent whom they made their servant. They occupied themselves primarily with preparing healing potions or repellents, setting broken bones, stopping hemorrhages or even pulling out teeth (Bazińska 1967b).

CONCLUSION

The notional reality of Podhale highlanders from the turn of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century is a remarkable aspect of the culture of this mountain region. The records of this culture pertaining to the above period, conditioned by the contemporary civilisation, cannot be valorised. The following view is also true in relation to Staszic's 19th-century opinion quoted in the introduction that among highlanders superstition is stronger than religion; and the authoritative judgment expressed by Mieczysław J. Adamczyk in the second half of the 20th century that "for centuries Podhale has been a place where magic, sorcery and superstition belongs to old and deeply rooted tradition present in the life of many generations of highlanders" (1966, 168). The evaluation of spiritual aspects of culture, be it contemporary or historical, seen from the perspective of an educated person and the current reality, especially through the prism of frequently quoted, inelegantly phrased opinions does not justify making such critical remarks. Culture is the given group's semiotic space of knowledge, socially accepted and respected. It includes existential aspects, social relations and transcendent communication. One example are the beliefs described above – the network of meanings and symbols included in them creates a specific notional structure. Depending on the configuration of the main elements (beings), the meaning of this construct may be interpreted as a translation of inexplicable natural phenomena and human disease or as a metaphorical, symbolical understanding of human actions. The analysis results presented below are an attempt at a non-stereotypical interpretation consistent with the intellectual level of its authors.

In the first conceptual framework supernatural beings are slogans – personifications of the unknown causes of phenomena, which form a kind of a guidebook of the world of beliefs. It explains weather anomalies (a dragon, *planetnik*, *poroniec*, a soul = rainfall, hail, wind), physical sensations (*siedlisko*, *strzyga*, *stonecznica* = breathing difficulties, body damage, sunburn), mental states (*mamuna*, *graniecnik*, a ghost, *leśna* = fear or hallucinations), illness (*strzyga*, *odmieniec* = anaemia or genetic defects) and metaphysical phenomena (Death = the end of human life; the Devil, *latawiec* = the essence of evil).

The latter perspective creates a kind of an unusual moral code. It includes personified sanctions – the anthropomorphised equivalent of negation and breaking estab-

lished norms and values compliant with the rules of coexistence and with Christian doctrine. Examples of socially and culturally unacceptable disruptions of the homeostasis of existence include crime (*topielec* = infanticide; ghosts = murder; penitent souls = suicide), failure to keep one's obligations (*graniecnik*, ghosts = wrongdoing), forbidden magical practices (a witch = negative interpersonal relations; the Devil = collusions with unholy forces), neglecting religious rites (*dziwożona* = christening, *wywód*), unexpected death (*boginka* = death during the period of cultural transformation; witch, sorcerer, suicide, *poroniec* = lack of absolution or sacraments: the anointing of the sick, baptism).

Culture constitutes a world of meanings and symbols. As Wojciech Burszta put it, the world-view aspect of culture reflects "the ultimate axiology of any group with a distinct and complex cultural knowledge" (1998, 52). The heterogeneity of features and the cognitive complexity of the world evolve with civilisational changes and with varying intensity modify the attitudes related to its perception. Each successive record of culture contains new indicators, but also exposes relic elements in the form of cultural sediment. Magical and religious practices of magical nature employed by highlanders and shepherds used to be an important element of everyday life; they complemented the image of spiritual existence. Yearly and family rites performed in connection with basic activities (shepherding, agriculture, making dairy products, building a house) were in fact irrational, but gave highlanders a feeling of ontological security. After the Second World War the circumstances of life forced highlanders to adapt a different dialectics, which, however, never managed to fully eliminate the relics of the traditional way of thinking. Surviving superstitions include the custom of consecrating garlands and bunches of herbs which are later dried and hung at the corner of the house below the roof or, if need be, use them for traditional purposes (Arch. III).

Elements of old beliefs or practices can still be observed today. They survive as a "mental tradition" associated with the elderly – the post-figurative generation. They are symbols of the past preserved for the sake of cultural continuity achieved by skillfully combining the old with the new. These changeless values determine the specificity of the 'highland-ness' which belongs to the cultural inheritance of Podhale highlanders – a complementary cultural phenomenon.

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ARCHIVE MATERIAL

Materials gathered by the author during her field research in Podhale villages in 1991–1994, stored at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Kraków:

Arch. I – Brzegi, inv. no. 1760/1992.

Arch. II – Małe Ciche, inv. no. 1748/1990; 1752/1991.

Arch. III – Ząb, inv. no. 1762/1992; 1787/1993; 1797/1994.

Arch. IV – Bustryk, inv. no. 1763/1992.

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