

The Way of the Táltos: A Critical Reassessment of a Religious-Magical Specialist

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For a long time, Hungarian scholars debated the origin and structure of Hungarian folk religion and folk beliefs. This article considers the relevance of shamanism to Hungarian folk belief, especially the complex surrounding the táltos. This Hungarian magical practitioner reveals connections both with historical magical specialists and with recent ethnographical materials. There are, however, important questions that must be answered: for example, how does the táltos figure in Hungarian religion, magic, and folkloric practices appear? What are the specific connections with neighbouring South Slavic, Romanian and western magical practices? And, finally, how does the táltos belief relate to linguistic, symbolic and bodily expression in Hungarian traditional culture? This article attempts to answer some of these questions by focusing on body symbolism, the mythical horse symbolism, and possible altered states of consciousness phenomena.

Introduction

Since 1996, the Hungarians have celebrated the 1,100 years of the conquest of their homeland and the foundation of the Hungarian kingdom. Naturally, enormous intellectual energies have been expended on researching and reinterpreting Hungarian prehistoric culture. In this, religion has played a central role. Despite the large number of published materials, however, there is still no agreement as to what constituted Hungarian tribal religion of that period. Scholars still debate whether Hungarian tribes possessed a single shamanistic religion or, alternately, a syncretic religious complex that included Christianity, Islam, Tengrism and Judaism. How these debates have developed, what went on and what was left out, should be re-evaluated with the hope of providing additional food for thought for future comparative research.

In 1921, heated debates ensued between the “Europeanizers” and the “Asian gravity” (referred to also as the “Turanian hypothesis”) schools in Hungarian ethnography. The former asserted a predominantly European cultural heritage, the latter argued that the Hungarian language and peasant culture has preserved remnants of an ancient Asian heritage. At that time, György Király, a historian of literature, expressed his doubts concerning the origin of the Hungarian shaman (*táltos*) and whether such specialists should even be considered direct descendants of Asiatic shamans (1921: 46-53). Géza Róheim, a prominent Hungarian ethnographer and (later) a psychoanalyst, summarized his beliefs about folk religion in his classic “Hungarian Folk Beliefs and Folk Traditions”, with a fact-of-the-matter statement: “All in all, we can state without exaggeration that Hungarian folk belief is Slavic folk belief” (1925:335).

This statement provided food for thought to Hungarian ethnographers and folklorists, who have been intent on proving Róheim either wholly wrong or wholly right. For example, many folklorists have agreed with the aforementioned statement by Róheim critically dismissing the Asiatic and Finno-Ugric shamanistic heritage ((Voigt 1976, Jung 1981, Korompay 1989). At the same time, Diószegi (1958, 1962, 1983), Hoppál (1984, 1989, 1992), and Goodman (1980) have argued for the Asiatic (Finno-Ugric and ancient Turkic) heritage, while arguing against the specific statement of Róheim and his followers. In retrospect, it now seems ironic that both groups have missed Róheim's previous statement in the same book. Róheim wrote: "If we were to analyze Hungarian folk religion we will recognize that, while the Finno-Ugric stratum is not present in it, the Turkish-Tatar is present only in shamanism and, much more removed, in animism" (1925:334). While analyzing the interrelationships between Hungarian medieval history and mythology and its Siberian parallels, Róheim also detailed this specific connection (1984:171-228). Thus, based on passages taken out of their context, the rivalry between two Hungarian schools of thought was cemented.

Definitions notwithstanding, shamans, witches, prophets, and sorcerers are religious specialists whose powers enable them to cross standard boundaries while challenging established values.¹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to rekindle arguments for or against the shamanistic theory of Hungarian religious pre-history (Kürti 1994). Rather, I wish to emphasize those elements in Hungarian folklore that could be related to a historically produced belief system fusing with (perhaps predating) Balkan, Slavic, Germanic and Christian elements.² Just as in the nineteenth century occultism and spiritualism owe their existence to the "momentous legacy of mesmerism, physiognomy and the other fringe sciences" (Porter 1999: 254), so, too, can we realize important connections between early medieval witchcraft and shamanistic practices (Pócs 1996, 1998).

In order to discuss this connection, I espouse the view introduced by Max Weber that religious or magical behavior should not be set apart from the range of everyday purposive conduct.³ With this in mind, I aim to explain those activities that are fundamentally interconnected with present and historic mentalities. Aside from traditional accounts on shamanism, recent cross-cultural analyses call attention to the fact that many heretofore unnoticed aspects of dances, games, songs, movements, gestures, and body postures may be related to the craft of shamanizing (Goodman 1988; Mastromattei 1989; Zhornitskaya 1978). These, then, need to be placed in the context of religious practices with regard to the Hungarian material presented here.

¹ For an earlier collection of classic anthropological and cross-cultural treatment on shamanistic research, see the articles in Lessa and Vogt (1965).

² It was the Hungarian folklorists János Jankó (1900) and Gyula Sebestyén (1900) who proposed first the direct link between the *táltos* belief and Asiatic shamanism. Detailed knowledge of shamanism was introduced into Hungarian scholarly pursuit by Aladár Bán (1908), based largely on the 1892 materials of the Russian scholar V. M. Mihailovsky. For the development of interest in shamanism by the pioneers of Hungarian ethnography, see Kósa (1989).

³ Max Weber continues that this is particularly so "(because)... even the ends of religious and magical acts are predominantly economic" (1965:1). As far as the economic argument is concerned it may be well the case for the early history of shamanism since the profession itself was overwhelmingly connected to large-scale, transhumant herding and a militarization of tribal confederations.

Hungarian Shamanism: History vs. Ethnography

Whatever similarities or differences there may be between Hungarian archaic beliefs and Asiatic shamanism, in Hungarian culture, I argue, there have only been religious beliefs concerning many specialists of supernatural powers. Their names are quite telling: *néző* or *látó* (seer), *javas* (medicine man or woman), *boszorkány* (witch), *tudós* (wise-man), *garabonciás* (wandering magician), and *táltoses* (or *tátus* or *tátos*).⁴ For better or worse, the last figure has been identified as one of the most archaic religious specialist. He or she is born with distinguishing marks, such as superfluous bones and hair. While most witches are females, *táltoses* are generally males, and are able to turn into a stallion or bull in order to fight with others for health, fortune, and good weather (Kálmány 1917; Szücs 1951, 1975; Róheim 1984). Thus, he or she must be born as a shaman, a profession only given by calling, as is evidenced in legends, tales and even in some following folksongs.⁵

An additional specialty of this hero with supernatural powers is the ability to find hidden treasures, an aspect common in European magical practices. Today, however, the traits of such belief are rare and mostly found in linguistic and etymological analyses, folkloric tales, legends and practices of magical kind (Bihari 1980; Büky 1989; Klaniczay 1983; Kriza 1989, Szücs 1975).⁶ In particular, the *táltos* in Hungarian popular fairy-tales is also a horse – first a ragged, sick-looking one, later transforming into a miraculous steed by eating burning embers (Banó 1988:66-67; Erdész 1988:98-100; and Kriza 1989:97-103). In popular legends, however, the *táltos* is a man who can become transformed into stallions or bulls. The connection between the *táltoses* and “miraculous coachmen” (*tudós kocsis*) and their horses – many with extraterrestrial qualities – needs to be further researched in order to reach to those hidden elements which may give us more clues as to the relationship between the magic horse and the earlier magical belief system.⁷ However, it may be true that shamanistic elements survived in the profession of working with horses such as herding and especially among coachmen who preserved a secret knowledge of talking to and commanding their steed (Ferenczi 1984).⁸

Most difficult to decipher from ethnohistory, however, is the art of shamanizing. As we know from the pioneering ethnographic works on shamanism (M. Eliade, M. Czaplicka, V. Diószegi, U. Harva), the classic Eurasian and some American Indian shamanistic performances were accompanied by singing, dancing, drumming and an

⁴ According to the TESZ (1976:832), the word *tátos* is Finno-Ugric connected to Khanty and Mansy concepts of “magic” and “powerfulness.” Different (Turco-Tatar) interpretations for this origin, however, have recently been offered by others.

⁵ This song is a curious one, in light of what has been said about the special calling of the *táltos*:

Eb-nyától lettél,	Of a bitch-mother,
Kökényfán termettél,	Born on a blue-berry tree,
Tátos Luca-napján,	On the day of shaman's Lucia,
Éjfélben termettél!	You were born at midnight!

(Dömötör 1974:157).

⁶ The first English language treatments on Hungarian “shamanism” and *táltos* beliefs are Róheim (1951); Diószegi (1958); Balázs (1963) and Fazekas (1967).

⁷ Matolcsy's analysis (1976:191-223) of an archeological burial site reveals the possible connection between the Hungarian *táltos* and his horse; see also Gunda (1963) and László (1945).

⁸ There are other names, such as *tudós* (“prophet,” “the knowledgeable one”), *javas* (“diviner”), and *néző* (“seer”) which have also been collected in Hungary.

amalgam of complex underlying political and religious symbolism.⁹ In Hungarian prehistory, *táltoses* most probably performed with small hand-held drums. By the time we are provided with the first descriptions about the activities of shamans and witches in the written witch-trials of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries the drumming aspects were already obsolete.¹⁰ One possible explanation for this is the church's ideology in forcing the *táltoses* and other religious mediators out of their jobs. We can only guess their fate as many wandered aimlessly (this is in fact a consistent topos in Hungarian fairy tales!); others were simply abandoned by their community or were killed. Many faced overt hostility and had simply given up their profession.¹¹

It needs to be mentioned here that Hungarian shamanism during the period between the Conquest of the Carpathian Basin and the late Middle Ages (800-1000 AD), cannot be viewed simply as the only and in fact a major religious ideology of the time. On the contrary, it had to be an alternative form of religion and popular belief system that existed side-by-side with other religions such as Islamic, Zoroastrian, Christian, and Hebrew religions. However, rather than claiming the vanishing of this culture, we should pay attention to the many elements of their religious worldview and practices which were elevated and fused into the more profane folkloric and linguistic aspects of everyday popular culture (Büky 1989; Paizs 1977; Vargyas 1977). Such cases abound in other parts of the world where traditional practitioners met a similar fate, as major world religions won over local customs and beliefs subsuming or eliminating them completely while, at the same time, resulting in new religious belief systems.¹²

However, there seems to be a major problem in connecting Asian shamanism, Hungarian prehistoric religion, the *táltos* folk belief and the description of the miraculous *táltos* in folktales (cf. for example, Kriza 1964). Elements associated with the practice of the *táltos* are randomly selected; others are simply not fully explained. For instance, in Hungarian scholarship it has been long established that the magical use of the drum (*dob*) was lost quite early.¹³ Drums, especially the military kind, had continued to exist in a semi-magical fashion. While we do know some uses of drums by witches from witch trials, other uses of the drum are scant. In one early source, "The Hungarian Mars, or the Memory of

⁹ Studies on drums are numerous; see for example Strömback (1956) and the studies in Diószegi (1968) and Diószegi and Hoppál (1978).

¹⁰ Dümmerth attempts to connect shamanism to the period of Conquest – with shamanistic theory and ritual totemism of the dynasty of Arpad – to prove the sacredness of kingship for the first kings of the Árpád dynasty; see Dümmerth (1977:86-88).

¹¹ For the complexity of tribal prehistory and religious cultural intermingling see Kristó (1985) and Szegfű (1985). Recent discussions concerning Hungarian folklore scholarship and ancient history are found in Kelemen (1978) and Voigt (1977).

¹² Perhaps the best illustration for this comes from Evans-Pritchard's classic study on Azande witchcraft (1976). Before colonial rule, witchcraft accusation was at a final stage, decided by a princely, or provincial, court by using the poison oracle. This judicial practice was followed by compensations and fees. Once the colonial judicial system was established, based on the British Common Law, recognition of the reality of witchcraft and acceptance of poison oracles by the princes' court became meaningless, since those involved could simply go to the colonial administration for filing charges. See also Balzer's analyses of Siberian shamanism and its connection with Christianity, as well as the influence of communism on native religious practices (1983, 1987, 1994); Davidson's discussion of the incorporation of ancient beliefs and folklore into Christianity in Northern Europe (1993); and Samuel's study on the amalgam of strands of Indian Buddhism and the indigenous spirit cults of Tibet (1993).

the Dangerous Event that Occurred on the Field of Mohács” (*Magyar Márs avagy Mohács Mezején. Történi Veszedelmek Emlékezete*, Bécs 1663), the author László Listi mentions the captain of the Hungarian forces, Pál Kinizsi with a reference to his magic drum:

Kinisi Pál dobja,	The drum of Pál Kinisi,
nevezteték bika	is referred to as bull
Midőn török hallotta;	As the Turks heard it;
Hunyadi zászlóját,	Similar to the flag,
s bárcsak karnétáját,	and the trumpet of Hunyadi,
Ellenség sajdította,	When the enemy saw and heard,
Csak futásra indult,	Could only run,
s többé meg se fordult,	Never turning back,
Mindenét hátra hagyta.	But leaving everything behind.

(Quoted in Komáromy 1891:356).

The battle drum, named bull, is not only a curious example, but also an extremely important source for the continuation of magical drumming and the belief in superstition connected to animal transformation. The term “bulls” still exists for musical instruments: they are the so-called “jug-drums” (jugs with horsehair) and used in children's magical games. From classic works on shamanism we are informed that drums often take over the qualities of the shaman's spirit helpers and animals. This source also suggests that special drums may have had ritualistic functions and, thus, were held in high esteem.

It deserves mention in this context that the only musical instrument in today's Hungarian peasant culture resembling that of the drum – both in its function and in sound – is the *ütőgardon* (hit-bass). This instrument is used by Hungarians, the *csángós* of the Gyimes region of Transylvania in Romania (Dincser 1943; Pávai 1993). Whether the violin and the hit-bass orchestra is any indication for the survival of the Hungarian magical practice or not must be further researched.

Throughout the centuries, as the drum was slowly eliminated, its magical role was extended to the sieve (*szita* or the *rosta*), a switch, no doubt, facilitated by the utility of the same utensil for witchcraft, fortune telling, fertility and ritualistic practices widespread in Europe. Both names of these kitchen utensils are of Slavic origin (TESZ 1967:448, 766), an indication of the large-scale agriculture and flour production adopted by the Hungarians after their settlements in the Carpathian Basin. Since such utensils were increasingly common in agricultural households, and since they were utilized in relation to bread, their function was elevated beyond the ordinary. In their forms, as well as in material and manufacture, however, the *szita* and the *rosta* are similar to the drum.¹⁴ This morphological

¹³ The Hungarian noun *dob* (drum) is phonetically identical with the verb *dob* (to throw), though the Hungarian Etymological Lexicon argues that there is no connection between the two (TESZ 1967:650). However, in more archaic usage the verb also meant to give, to place, or even to give birth (literally “to drum up” something). In a collection of a western Hungarian speech dialect, the following expression has been recorded: “Ne add e lovadat, dob am még ecs csikot neked” – which may be easily rendered as follows: “Don't sell your horse, she will throw/give/(drum up?) you another foal” (Ábrahám 1991:54). It would make sense to argue that there is a meaning-extension connection between the noun and the verb. For the magical usage of the drum is to invoke, to cast a spell, tell fortune, asking for plenty and luck. The act of drumming, and thus the instrument used, then, is to try to influence the powers to receive something back in exchange hence the possibility of connected sound, wishing and meaning. For a semantic and content analysis of the verb *dob*, see Kelemen (1985).

analogy, as well as the connection with flour (the symbol of fertility and plenty, as well as the basic source of carbohydrate for Europeans), could have facilitated its elevation into magical and ritual practices. Fortune telling and sorcery are connected to specific moves known as the “turning-of-the-sieve” in European witchcraft (Sebald 1984). This magical maneuver had been quite standard in European culture, an aspect that should caution anyone from arriving at an easy conclusion concerning the utensil's archaic history. The Hungarian ethnographer, Béla Gunda, for example, argues that the “origin of the knowledge of sieve-turning and sieve-throwing is in Western Europe” (1989:27).

However, while it may be evident that “sieve-turning” is more “European” than Asiatic (See Diószegi and Tárkány Szücs 1984:373), there is an etymological connection here with dancing which may direct this analysis beyond the simple culture-contact or cultural borrowing hypothesis. For in Hungarian “turning of the sieve” is expressed as *rostaforogtatás*, *rostavetés*, or *szítálás*. The native concepts of *forogtatás* and *vetés* relate to “turning” and “throwing” respectively. The former is a constant in native Hungarian dance terminology – for example, *forogtós*, *forogós*, and *fordulós* all expressing “turning” and “whirling” motions. The latter verb, *vetés* – more familiar to contemporary Hungarian readers with reference to *vetni* i.e. “to sow” (seeds) – connotes “casting” as in the side-to-side movement of the women in front of their partner in couples' dances such as those of *vetéllős* and *átvetős*.¹⁵ It must be stressed here that all of these terms are of Finno-Ugric origin, a language family to which Hungarian, and other Siberian tribal languages (most closely the Khanty and Mansy) are all related. This is also the case with most of the words used in dance terminology describing movements, styles, rhythm, and body parts used.¹⁶

The Horse

Since it is reasonably well established and accepted by Hungarian scholars that the sieve-*szita* is a symbolic representation of the drum, we need to establish the connection between the *szita* and the horse, as well as with dancing. The horse was an important riding and draught animal of the Hungarians, from their prehistory well into the post-Conquest period (since 896 AD).¹⁷ In folklore and ethnography, however, the horse has been

¹⁴In an ethnohistorical document of the mid-nineteenth century, the *rosta* appears to be a special type of hand-held drum with metal cymbals attached to it. This was used by a Gypsy band and may be an extremely rare instance (Pávai 1993:76-77).

¹⁵Etymological and symbolic analyses of dance terminology are yet to be made. Similar scholarly pursuits have been central to other areas such as material culture, symbolism and clothing (Nagy 1983).

¹⁶Few scholars have ventured into investigating the archaic nature of dance language. In fact, there were only two pioneers: Márian Prikkel Réthei (1924) and György Martin (1984). Their analyses, while useful and wide ranging, do not do justice to the richness and historical debt of the material in question since their arguments center around the origin of certain dance names and dance music since the sixteenth century. Studies of Hungarian dance language, especially its relation to Uralic- Altaic and (possibly) paleo-Siberian languages – for example, in similar veins to the analyses of Pusztay (1990) and Hajdu (1977) – are yet to be made.

¹⁷See the argument by István Zichy (1923:25) concerning the Finno-Ugric origin of the horse and horse-keeping vocabulary of ancient Hungarians; and for a recent summary, Bartha (1988:98-107), Matolcsy (1982), Tókei (1983), and U.Kóhalmi (1972). There are the myths of the *fehér ló* (the white steed) which was a symbolic gift of exchange between the Hungarian chiefs and the hosts at the time of the Conquest. The “mare's milk bath” of heroes in fairy tales (see, Banó 1988:67; Kristó 1980:203; Nagy 1988:159) are still largely unexplored themes in Hungarian folk beliefs.

polarized somewhat between the idealistic and the more mundane forms of representations. Drumming has been used among the Hungarians in Moldavia, especially with regard to the magical practice of tying and untying (Diószegi 1957: 128-154). However, the tying-untying practice was common in medieval witchcraft as well and cannot be solely connected to shamanism alone. Géza Róheim, who tried to explain the phenomenon of shamanism based on psychoanalytic principles, argued that the shaman/*táltos* had a spirit helper in the form of the horse (1925:10-11). Solymossy connected the *táltos* to the horse on the one hand, and the shaman's drum to the *szita* on the other (Solymossy 1943:355-356). According to a collection of superstitions, among the csángós of Moldavia, the practice of fortunetelling with a sieve and acorns is called “*bobolás*” and the sieve is called simply “*dob*” (drum);

“Te dob, mond meg az igazat, ke vaj eszverontalak, vaj ezek elszertülnek!”

“I ask you drum for the truth; if not, I will either break you into pieces, or these grains must be scattered everywhere” (Fazekas and Székely 1990:41; cf also Róheim 1984:179).

Nevertheless, it was Géza Róheim and, following him, Vilmos Diószegi who, to my knowledge, first made the connection between the drum-sieve-horse complex (Róheim 1984:178-180, 196-197; Diószegi 1983:69-73). More recent analyses of fairy-tales offer ample evidence for the existence of the Hungarian *táltos* and his spirit helper, one of which could have been the horse, hence its name in popular consciousness as *táltosló* (see Kovács 1984:24).¹⁸

The connection between the sieve-drum and the horse is provided by additional information overlooked by these illustrious figures. Without exception this kitchen utensil for sifting flour is made out of wire. However, finer and more special sieves had been made earlier with strong horse-hair.¹⁹ This material connection and, with it the movement of circling or circularity, is further reinforced in the following folksong as well:

Azért, hogy a szita, rosta kerek, -	The sieve and sifter are both round,
Én vagyok a hires magyar gyerek.	I am the real famous Hungarian lad,
Ha kantáros lovon járok,	When I ride on my bridled horse,
Akkor szeretnek a lányok.	Girls fall in love with me.

(Quoted in Viski 1935:43).

Love magic and horseback riding form an essential part of the “drumming-sifting” magic as is evidenced in this song. In Szatmár county, a folk riddle proposes the same connection: “I have a horse which neighs at every window;” what is it?, the drum (Viski 1934:368).²⁰

Interesting as well is the way in which Hungarians describe the movements of both sifting with the sieve and body-slapping during dance. For when using the *szita*, the corresponding verb is not only “shaking” (or, in Hungarian, *rázzák*) but “hitting”,

¹⁸ Analyses about animals, especially the horse, their role and symbolism, are yet to be made. For earlier attempts see Gunda (1963), Hajdú (1992), Kálmán (1938) and Lükő (1965); more recently see Bendek and Csonka (1999).

¹⁹ That this is a culturally specific and significant example may be seen in the fact that in other cultures different materials are used to make sieves. For example, among the nomadic, transhumant pastoralist Basseri of South Persia, large sieves are made of “perforated sheets of guts” (Barth 1961:92).

“beating”, and “slapping” (in Hungarian these terms are: *pofozzák, verik*). In a proverb from Kibéd (Transylvania, Romania), it is the women who literally “dance” with the sieve – an obvious connection between gender and the act of fortune telling as well as dancing:

Erdőn vágják, falun szárasszák,	Made/cut in the woods/forest,
s az asszonyok táncot járnak mellette	Dried in the village,
	And women dance with it.
	What is it? The <i>sieve</i>

(My translation, quoted in Ráduly 1990:183).²¹

But the verb *verni* is not only descriptive of dance and sieve-beating but also included in the economic and productive activity. This idiom is also to be found with relation to the first driving out the animals to the pasture at springtime described as “*kihajtás*” (a term analyzed in depth later) or “*kiverés*” (Luby 1938:11).²²

In popular parlance it is also evidenced that the *táltos* cannot stay put; he or she must be constantly on the move, an element constant in folktales as well. They are in an eternal quest to regenerate their power. The *táltoses* do not get along with people and, especially, their colleagues; in other words they are “incompatible” or “quarrelsome”, *összeférhetetlenek* (Kálmány 1917). They are born fighters; they defend their territory; they punish those mistreating them; and, which is essential to their quest, they must prove their worth to their community as well as to their fellow professionals at regular intervals. *Táltoses* sometimes fight in defending their own herds, sometimes to ward off strange colleagues; at other times, to preserve their reputation or save their settlement from foreign intruders.²³ In historical documents they are also described as fighting vehemently against witches. This is a curious point which may shed some light on the fact that *táltoses* and witches had to negotiate their place in society, a fact that could help the accelerated of fusion of elements between the two religious beliefs (Klanciczay 1983:128-129; Pócs 1989).

²⁰The various movements of the *szítálás* may be understood better if we mention that in Hungarian it is explained also with the specific “*jobbra-balra*” (right-left) and more general “*ide-oda*” (here-there) expressions. Today, these two verbal utterances are much more commonly utilized in everyday parlance. In one dance - call, the *szítálás* appears as an analogy to *riszál*, “swaying of the hips:”

Ha úgy tudnál szítálni,	Only if you could sift,
Mint a farod riszálni,	As you sway your hips,
Többet érnél anyádnál,	You could be worth more,
Annál a vén kofánál.	Than your elderly mother.

(See Olosz 1982:202).

²¹The *szita* also appears in the following dance call:

Keresztúri szitakéreg,	The rim of the sieve from Keresztúr,
Ne futkározz, mint a féreg.	Don't run around like an insect.

(See Olosz 1982:213).

Although it seems quite unrelated at first, the opening line is followed by a description of the “running around” aimlessly, or without meaning, an obvious reference to the circularity of the rim of the sieve. At the same time, insects may also damage wood – like termites or carpenter ants – which may be related to the first line's hint at the danger to the wooden rim of the sieve. Thus, it is evident that even in seemingly unconnected stanza rhymes there could be deeper associations, allusions, and meaning extensions of various kinds.

²²Aside from these, *verni* – to beat, to hit, to strike – also has other connotations with dancing and music. In Moldavian Hungarian communities, dances held inside were rationalized as the “house's floor will be stamped/beat down” – “*megverni a földjét*” (Hankóczi 1988:317). Also the playing-style of the musical instrument the *koboz* (folk lute) is described as *verni* (Hankóczi 1988:321)..

²³For a comparative study on fighting in folk literature see Lengyel (1986-87),

Both the *táltoses*, and their equine alterego, are described in folktales and beliefs as fighting viciously, wrestling, biting and hitting one another – in Hungarian they are *vivnak*, *viaskodnak*, *marakodnak*, *megküzdenek*, *birkóznak*, *vagdalkóznak* (Diószegi 1983:108-122). The most vivid descriptions are bloody-fights of *táltoses* transformed into bulls and studs, but never into mares or cows (Róheim 1984:192). It needs to be stressed that etymologically these terms belong to the most archaic (i.e. Finno-Ugric) vocabulary of the Hungarian language. The fighting motif has been suggested as being as the single-most important element in the Hungarian *táltos* belief originating in the Siberian-Altai or proto-Turkic shamanic culture, an area separating the Hungarian tradition from the neighboring Slavic and Romanian parallels (Róheim 1984:203-210).²⁴

The fighting may point to the altered states of consciousness so well-known in magical practices all over Eurasia. There are, however, no ethnographic data to prove that Hungarian shamans achieved their extasy-like state. This fact is easily discernable in North America, Siberia and the Far East. In Hungary, there are, nevertheless, certain beliefs that may serve as a clue to connect present-day terminology with the ritualistic movements of the *táltoses*. In classic historical and ethnographic documents the *táltos* survives only by drinking “milk” or milk products, a habit clearly of symbolic significance identifying the religious specialists and, at the same time, separating them from the behavior of ordinary persons.²⁵

Similarly, in contemporary oral accounts, the *táltos* is described as someone who “talks a lot,” “who yells or even speaks loudly,” as well as a person who is always “hungry,” “eats fast and large amounts of food.” These descriptions oppose accepted human conduct and norms (Ferenczi 1980-81:316-317). There are even data that may indicate a closer interrelationship between ritualistic movements and dance-like behavior.

As we have seen before, *táltoses* are “quarrelsome” and must be on the “move” at all times. But it is not only wandering from village to village, from settlement to settlement, which sets them apart from commoners, but also their eccentric bodily movements which have been interpreted as “strange,” or out of the ordinary. In one description, for instance, the *táltos* Ferenc Csaba “rolls his eyes in a strange (amazing?) manner” (Szücs 1942:117-124).²⁶ Diószegi reports an oral account from Zselye (historic Moson county) that connects horses and *táltoses* in motion-related etymology:

A good running horse was called *táltos*. A horse which was fast was referred to by the people of Szeremle as “we have a horse, like a *táltos*, he doesn't look to the sky or earth, just goes everywhere (or against anything)” (my translation). (A Moson megyei Zselyén a jól futó lóra mondták: olyan mint a *táltos*. A nagyon “sörény” lóra azt mondják Szeremlén:

²⁴ In fact, Róheim suggests that the fighting motif may be one of the few elements appropriated from the Hungarian belief system by neighboring Slavic populations (1984:192).

²⁵ A curious aspect of the *táltos* and witch-beliefs is the consumption of milk and milk products. This connection is explored in one children's rhyme about animals, in which the “bull” is asking for milk:

Bölon bika, nagyapó.	Crying bull, grandpa,
Adsz-e tejet nagyanyó?	Will you give me milk, grandma?
Nem adhatok, mert nem jó	I cannot for it's no good anymore,
Belehullott a pondró.	For worms have gotten in it.
(Kiss 1891:17).	

²⁶ Eyes are, of course, also connected to witches and belief in the evil eye. For a classic psychoanalytic treatment on the evil eye see Róheim (1952).

“olyan a mi lovunk mint a táltos, nem néz se eget, se földet, az mén mindennek” (Díószegi 1983:73).

Similarly, such eccentric movement also appears in a study of folk beliefs in a single village, Karancskeszzi, northern Hungary, in which the *táltos* is described by one local as follows:

...Van a faluban egy asszony... az annyira megy és annak jár a keze, jár a lába, jár neki az, feje, jár neki mindenye, az úgy megyen az úton. És ő is megkapja sokat, hogy mondják neki: Ollan vagy mint a táltos... Mert nem úgy mégy mint egy szelid öregasszony, hanem úgy mégy mint egy táltos. (Fejős 1985:57).

...There is a woman in our village...she moves so much; her hands and legs move constantly; even her head moves; every part of her body moves, that's how she walks on the street. Many times they tell her: “You are like a táltos.” For she does not walk like a quiet old woman, but she moves/walks like a táltos. (My translation, Fejős 1985:57).²⁷

Powerful and charismatic, *táltoses* do not possess the same kinesthetic qualities as ordinary people do; their gaze, gait and bodily movements distinguish them from the everyday and the usual. Such is indeed the case with *táltoses* who are empowered to search for treasures hidden underground. Although looking for hidden treasure is a general theme in Europe (among others Sorb, Polish, German, Finn, Sami, Estonian and Welsh treasure stories are known), Hungarian beliefs are connected to the special power of the *táltoses*. No matter how powerful, however, the *táltos* cannot simply take the treasure out of the ground: he/she could only “stomp it out/up” (*dobbanthatja fel*). As Lajos Kálmány noted earlier in this century, in one oral account from the Great Plains: “the táltos made one-hundred steps west from the well and, stopping for a moment, he made a single “stomp” (*égygyet dobbantott*) and said: this is where the money is” (1917:267). Kálmány also recorded another case from Szentes where, according to locals, the “tátos” slept for three days, then waking up he drank milk and then: *a lábával dobbantott, aztán eltűnt. A szomszédunk mindjárt tudta, hogy ott pénz van, ki is ásta; azóta gazda ember* (He stomped with his foot, then he disappeared. Our neighbor knew immediately that the money was there; he dug it up and became a rich man. (My translation, Kálmány 1917:266). In another case, the *táltos*, known by his stage-name as Pista Pénzásó (Steve the Treasure-Digger), always said that people should dig where “he will stomp” and then the treasure will be revealed to the uninitiated (Füvessy 1992:312-313).

This special “stomping” (*dobbantás*) has connections only in Hungarian folkdances, where variations of special “stomping” movements (*tombol, dobog, dübög*) and others referred to above) have been preserved into the twentieth century. Aside from regional dance variants which are named “stomping,” there are similar movements: for instance, in Kék village in Szabolcs county, where dancers “stomped” (*dobbantottak*) at key moments in the song (Nyárády 1941:283). Ritual stomping may also be found in the Transylvanian shepherds dance as an organic part of the mid-winter nativity play, the *betlehemezés* (Olsvainé 1991:470-471). But we may continue this line of reasoning further by arguing

²⁷It should be noted that the verb *jár* has multiple meanings in Hungarian. Among other things, it may mean “to walk,” “to go,” “to pass,” “to work,” or “to move;” moreover, one special meaning it has is “to dance” (MNYTESZ 1976:260-262). Needless to say, it is one of the archaic words in the Hungarian language. In fact, Hungarians do not “dance” when they dance, they are described by the infinitive *járni*. One special Hungarian dance is also called “*jártató*.”

that the connection between these words and concepts and the behavior of the horse is even more striking when it is realized that horses are also known to *dobog* and *tombol*.²⁸ Both of these words, translated either as “stamping” or “stomping,” or thus “dancing,” could thus be related to “drumming.”²⁹ Good riders have the skill to make their horse dance as it is evidenced in a “hussar farewell”, a folklorized poetry in which the discharged cavalryman thanks his horse while saying goodbye:

Shine your spurs and boots,
With which you taught your horse how to dance.³⁰

Hungarian folk beliefs and folk tales also suggest the same ritualistic movement. Heroes of folktales and their magic steed also dance with distinctive actions described as “*dobbant*” or “*toppant*.” In a wonderful fairy-tale from Transylvania, the heroic Miklós Kűs fights an old hag in order to find his sweetheart. He rides on his talking magic (*táltos*) horse, a pattern common in fairy-tales in many cultures. However, in the Hungarian version, before each magic flight, the horse “skips” and “stomps” a number of times and, only by so doing, are the horse and rider able to be airborne (Olosz 1972).³¹ At one point they perform a “*hajdútánc*,” a soldier-dance known between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries:

Once landed under the window of the king, (the hero) performed such a haiduk-dance that he broke the windows with the pieces of stones kicked up from the courtyard; even the king had a hard time surviving (Olosz 1972:58-59).³²

Horses are also described as *tombolnak* in Margit Luby's wonderful little study about superstitions in Szatmár county, north-east of Hungary:

Csatlós Jóska felbízta Szántó Bertit, az meg el vette a fekete pálcát, megzörgette az ajtófélfákat. Tomboltak rá a lovak, ölték vóna megfele egymást.

²⁸That this connection is not so far fetched may be seen in cross-cultural examples, where dancing and horse-back riding are inextricably linked activities. Frederik Barth reports that among the Basseri tribe of Southern Persia, during the wedding day, women dance to their own singing and men entertain themselves with horse-racing and stick-duel dancing. When the groom's family takes the bride to the specially erected nuptial tent "Dancing women and galloping men accompany and circle the procession" (Barth 1961:140-141).

²⁹Witches also use drums, a point of contention concerning the drumming aspect in Hungarian folk religion. For example, Éva Pócs (1989:165) argues for a possible Balkanic origin.

³⁰The poem, written in the style of a self-educated villager, reads:

Sarkantyús csizmáját szépen kipuczoja
Ugy tündöklök rajta aczél sarkantyúja
Melyel ő a lovát táncolni tanítja (Asztalos 1992:63).

³¹Actually, the stomping and the jumping occur three times but differently on every occasion: first as “*egyét szököm, kettőt dobbantok*” (“one jump two stomps” p. 53), then “*kettőt toppantott, egyet szököt*” (“two stomps, one jump” p. 54), and finally “*Egyet dobbintott, egy felet ugrott*” (“one stomp, one half-jump” p. 55).

While I do not intend to go into a detailed content and semiotic analysis of this fairy-tale, I find it revealing that as the power of the hero is increases, (his transformation from copper and silver to gold), the number of stomps and the jumps decreases.

³²In Hungarian:

Az ablak alatt olyan hajdútáncot járatott a lóval, hogy a flaszterdarabokkal a király szobájának az ablakait mind berugatta, s a királyt is szintés de szinte agyonverte (Olosz 1972:58-59).

(József Csatlós egged Berti Szántó on, so the latter picked up his black stick and started to hit the door-posts. The horses went wild and began to stomp, almost killing one another (Luby 1983:70).

A further support for the connection between the stomping movements and the realm of the magical relates to the thunder and wind, both of them described with a language-specific term as *tombol*. With this we arrive at an important correlation between the magical specialist and the wind, an area which has been mentioned by others earlier in this century. In a folk riddle we are asked to identify the wind-as-shaman as follows:

Egy gyors röptü táltos,	One fast flying shaman,
Gyorsan repül, szálldos.	Flying with speed, airborne,
Senki fel nem tartja,	Nobody is able to stop it,
Eljut mindenhova.	It could be everywhere.

(Quoted in Enyedi 1988:80, my translation).

Thunder and whirlwind are, of course, related to all forms of the supernatural.³³ In the *táltos* belief, however, the whirlwind is said to be caused by angry *táltoses* and their lesser counterparts (i.e. the *garabonciás*, who ride the whirl-wind on their own steed, the dragon). The native term for whirlwind is “*forgószél*,” a descriptive term relating to “turning” and “whirling” – and thus dancing, as we saw earlier with reference to the sieve. This special turning motion may also reveal a connection that further proves the interrelationship of specific movement qualities and shamanism. The whirl-wind in Hungary is known either as *szépasszony szele* (Beautiful woman's or Fairies' wind) or *táltos-szél* (shaman's wind) (Kertész 1985:73). People with strokes are told to be caught (actually “slapped”) by the “beautiful woman's whirl-wind,” which is also known as the “dance of the Beautiful Women”.

Body Symbolism and Meaning

One aspect related to the magical powers of witches, sorcerers and shamans has to do with bodily symbolism. As explained earlier, the *táltos* is born with distinguishing marks: such as six fingers, double-rows of teeth, and abundant bodily hair or *sörte* (“bristle”). It should be mentioned that the horse's mane is called *sörény* (a variant of *sörte*), which is another etymological/symbolic connection between the human and the supernatural worlds.³⁴ Naturally, witches, too, are born with extra body parts such as a small tail, huge breasts, long hair, ugly nose or rows of teeth. Both religious specialists are described in ethnohistorical documents as having bushy eyebrow, a mark of power enabling the specialist to cast an evil eye (Róheim 1952).

That hands, fingers, eyes and other ‘extra’ body parts, are also endowed with special meanings is easily verified from cross-cultural examples (Polhemus 1978). As cross-

³³It is worth mentioning that, in the European witch-beliefs, female witches perform a “circle” dance during Sabbath. In 1741, during a trial the accused witch admitted to be at the Szent Gellért mountain where dancing took place where, she says, “We danced like a whirl-wind” (Szendrey 1986:160).

³⁴While there is an unusual similarity between the words “*sörény*” (meaning “mane”) and that of “*serény*” (*sörény* in different dialect), meaning “fast,” the former is from “hair” (*szőr*), and the latter is from “speedy rotation” (MNYTESZ (1976:520-525).

cultural investigations inform us, bodily noise - such as whistling - is an important element of shamanistic rites and magical performances.³⁵ Among the Huichol, Pomo and the Pima Indians we are told that curing shamanistic practices are referred to as “sucking” or “blowing” hence the name “sucking doctor” applied to them at times (Kippler 1988).³⁶ Spirit possession is one related aspect of such shamanistic performance (Lewis 1988). Many of the North West Coast Indian tribes also rely on whistles to enter trance or receive ghosts and spirits who arrive by whistling (Suttles 1990:309, 330); and performed “sucking” and “spitting” during shamanic cures (Suttles 1990:309, 330, 372, 565). Even among the Khantys, blowing has been a part of curing ceremonies, as the shaman after catching the soul of the sick person would “blow the soul into the right ear of the patient” (Balzer 1987:1087). Krohn also reports (1908: 153) that the Cheremis shaman cures by blowing and spitting into a glass of vodka which he later throws behind his back.³⁷

A host of Slavic witches and supernatural beings are also known to be powerful “blowers” with capabilities of creating a storm (Pócs 1989:124-126). In Hungarian folk medicine, blowing has existed: as for example “blowing away” various sicknesses such as evil eye, pulled tendon or growths (Kandra 1897:349; Pócs 1986:39, 49-50, 56). I cannot at this point offer more than just a hypothesis that whistling (and blowing) in both Eurasian shamanic and European magical performances had an important meaning both as a communicative device and, perhaps, as a folk medicinal practice.³⁸

Dance and Altered States of Consciousness

The notions of soul (*lélek*) and wind (*szél*) are present in both dancing as well as *táltos* beliefs. As I have argued in an earlier publication, there are dancing rituals in which elements of fertility symbols may be found, in an article based on my fieldwork among Hungarians in Transylvania, Romania (Kürti 1987).³⁹ Yet, there are even more, isolated instances where distant traditions were preserved in twentieth-century peasant customs. In traditional peasant society, young, unmarried girls danced a particular dance form known

³⁵ In many American Indian cultures, whistling indicates the arrival and reception of spirits (Du Bois 1935).

³⁶ Among the Patwin and the Miwok tribes of California the expression *koja-pe* is a “sucking-shaman,” and *koj-pa* is “to suck for a diseased object” (Gifford 1955; Kroeber 1932). The opposite of blowing is, of course, spitting – or in tribal medical practices even vomiting – which is also present in many folk medicine and superstitions. For example, it is reported for many California Indian tribes such as the Tolowa and Shasta:

In working a cure the shaman went into a trance and danced violently until she vomited up an object (often a lizard, produced by sleight of hand) that was said to be the “pain.” Sometimes the “pain” was sucked out of the patient (Gould 1978:134).

Recent analyses suggest that meditative breathing techniques – which are of course structured exercises of inhaling and exhaling air – known in vernacular as “blowing” and “sucking”, such as in tantrism, yoga and Zen (Mastromattei 1989:228), also change one’s mental state (Doore 1988:218-219).

³⁷ Among the Cheremis (Mari), one special medicine man – or shaman – is known as *süvedese* and blessing is “*süvedeme*,” both words are from the same root, *süvalam*, to spit; see Sebeok (1975:312). One Hungarian term for the long shepherd’s flute is *szültü* or *süvölt*, which may have its distant relative in the Cheremiss *sijáltös* (Sárosi 1979:234). This connection, which reaches back hundreds of years into Finno-Ugric prehistory, should be further analyzed.

³⁸ Outside Eurasia, among the Azande for example, the following aphorism exists: “The blower of water does not die,” an obvious reference to the extreme power of witches (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 44). Spittle and “blowing breath” are also part of the Lugbara religious system, especially with regard to sacrifice and purification of the cult of the dead (Middleton 1987:102-104).

as *karikázó* or *karéj* (literally “circling,” “encircling,” “round”), a dance of two or three different tempi accompanied acapella (Martin 1979). In formal analyses, men’s circle dances have been connected to the eighteenth century military recruiting institution, and the “maiden’s round,” to Lent when orchestral music was forbidden by the church (Pesovár 1978:30). While these rigid historical explanations are somewhat simplistic and lack adequate verification, there are more persuasive “hidden” elements that might reveal further information about the past and the underlying connotation of this kind of dancing. For instance, according to the people of Szőreg, witches gather during night at Whitsuntide and: “*karikába táncolnak, aki abba a karikába belehág, az ojan bajt kap, amelikbül nem lehet kigyógyítani*” (they dance in a circle which will cause incurable sickness to those who happen to step inside of it) (Szendrey 1986:162; also Pócs 1983:146-148).⁴⁰

This – as well as the turning the sieve and the whirl-wind – indicates that the women’s round dance may be endowed with magical meanings beyond the ordinary. Therefore such kinetic shapes may be endowed with non-human characteristics. Circularity and turning (whirling) are, of course, shapes and forms of a spatial enclosure with specific symbolic meanings existing in many tribal as well as organized state religions (i.e., the mandala in the Far East and the labyrinth in the Mediterranean and the Middle East). In fact, the drums of shamans, with their iconic paintings, are miniature representations of the worlds envisioned and visualized by their owners (Diószegi 1962a, 1963).

As with the magical stomping before, I wish to argue that the horse-connection here, too, is also present. As we saw earlier, in Hungarian parlance horses not only “dance” and “fight” – activities fused into one another – but are described with specific turning and circular movements when it is said that they “*kereken megy*” (translates as “it goes nicely on a circle,” or “it turns according to command”).⁴¹ In one beautiful fairy-tale the heroine (!) uses a special shamanic-horse with seven legs to travel the worlds in a fragments of a second. Interestingly the horse and the rider must makes seven pirouettes, in water in order to be successful:

She noticed the silver lake with the whirling water. After jumping in it with her horse, they turned seven times. Pulling on the bridle they jumped out and in less than a second they were back home in front of their hut. (My translation Voigt 1989:32).

According to Szűcs, the *táltos* Ferenc Csuba said that the hidden treasure may be found where: *hét nagy csődör táncol és kerengel, biztosan a kincset azon helyen megtalálják* (You will find the treasure where seven stallion dance and whirl; 1944:155).

This special underlying connotation is further revealed when analyzing one particular females’ circle dance, which might be even more telling of an archaic religious

³⁹In this article I have argued, against the assertion of Tekla Dömötör, that the ritual “*henderikázás*” (couples embracing while rolling down the hill, an obvious fertility movement) may be much more archaic than was previously believed (1987:391).

⁴⁰Witches were also described by the Lutheran minister, Péter Bornemissza, as dancing wildly or as *tombolók*, a word used for the *táltoses* as seen above. This is an excellent example to show how shamanistic characteristics may be transferred to witchcraft practices (see Trócsányi 1958:240). This is further supported by the fact that witches are also *dübögnek* (stomping) to scare people (Fehér 1937:223).

⁴¹The phrase *kereken megy* (goes on a circle) refers to an even galloping-gait. My understanding of this is that there is full control of the horse by the rider, keeping the horse on an even tempo, with the front and the hind legs rounded, almost forming a circle.

world-view and possible shamanistic practice. In the northern Hungarian village of Nagyréde, there is a basic women's round: the dancers hold their hands behind each other's backs, singing acapella while the circle rotates in a slower and a faster part, both clockwise and counter-clockwise.⁴² This dance, however, is not only referred to as "round" or "circling" but called by the curious term *szédülés* (Lugossy 1952:59; Martin 1979:165). This can be rendered into English best as "dizzying" or "fainting." The speedy rotation of the circle – no doubt – makes many of the women dancers quite dizzy, an aspect of dancing present in regular couple dances as well, where turning and rotating is an essential element of the dance.⁴³ This dancing-form of "dizziness," however, may be related to other aspects of Hungarian beliefs, though the text of the song does not reveal its underlying connotation. In fact, the words *szédül* and *szél* (wind) are etymologically from the same root, relating the act of fainting to turning (MNYTESZ 1967:692).⁴⁴

As we saw above, the practice of finger-snapping already connected Hungarian dancing to the notions of "whistling" and maybe "blowing," themselves related to the concepts of "air" and "breath." Thus, with the "dizzying dance" we are provided with additional information that one could faint when one simply "loses one's soul." There are similar beliefs in Khanty society mentioned earlier, for fainting and death are said to be the result of losing one's "breath soul", or *lil*, a term of common Finno-Ugric origin (Balzer 1987:1087; Büky 1989:130; Schmidt 1990:182; Vértes 1990:115-116; cf. also Stora 1971:186-188).⁴⁵ Of course, such a trance-like state is also present in witchcraft (Pócs 1996, 1998), and in saintly cults (Kürti 1998). While the practice itself may be connected to both European trancing and Eurasian shamanistic heritage, through the Hungarian language the connection to the latter is readily evident. The ritualistic round dance with trancing connotation, however, is a very rare example that may be connected to diverse magico-religious practices of the past.

The rotation of the circle, the speed, and the folk etymology suggests that in this case we may be dealing with a historical remnant of a trance-inducing practice of ritualistic and magical (shamanistic) origin.⁴⁶ The fact that this dance is connected to women – in fact

⁴²Sometimes the slower and the faster parts possess different names: more specifically, the latter may be described as "whirling," "running," and "jumping" etc (*sergés, sürgés, futó, ugró*).

⁴³For an earlier description see Lugossy's account (1952:59); for a more thorough treatment, see Martin (1979). Although both Lugossy and Martin list a single song, one may wonder whether there were any others earlier which could have provided more information concerning the dance, its meaning and relationship to ritualistic behavior.

⁴⁴According to the MNYTESZ (1967:692): "A 'forog' - 'szédül' jelentésfejlés és természetes" (the connection between the verbs 'turns' and 'faints' is obvious). If this is so, then we might equally argue that the connection between the circle dance (the "dizzying") and shamanism is equally self-explanatory.

⁴⁵It may be of historical interest to note that Géza Róheim did not find these in Hungarian texts, for he notes that there is no evidence for trancing (1984:192). He did not live to see, of course, the ideas developed by Vilmos Diószegi about the *révülés* and "sleeping" which proves the existence of mediatory trance-like state.

⁴⁶One could cite the tradition of the Mehlevi order of dervishes, also known as the "whirling dervishes," who by constantly rotating counter-clockwise achieve the desired state of communion with God (Allah).

maidens – may not be simply just a coincidence. On the contrary, it even could provide a clue that female shamans (or *táltoses* in our case) utilized, or preserved, a “dizzying” form of dancing to achieve a state of ecstasy.⁴⁷

While the “dizzying” dance is certainly a rare example in Hungarian culture, this is by no means the only element to prove the connection between turning and fainting in specific, or between shamanic heritage and contemporary culture in general. There is also a children's game, “Who stole the ax,” which helps to understand the connection more fully.⁴⁸ In this form of childhood fantasy, there is an appointed “judge” trying to ascertain from suspects who stole the “ax”.⁴⁹ The children form a circle and, upon questioning, all try to do their best to deny the act of stealing. At the “judge's” command all begin to whirl feverishly, turning and turning until someone becomes dizzy and falls to the ground; obviously, this proves the case: he/she is the thief (Képes, 1976:43).⁵⁰

One of the reasons why the “dizzying dance” and the “ax game” are important is that they provide an alternative explanation to a dominant theory supporting the use of hallucinogens. In shamanic scholarship it is accepted that Hungarian *táltoses* achieved trance states by utilizing hallucinogenic substances: in specific, fly agaric, or *bolongomba* (*Amanita muscaria* L.) in Hungarian, a powerful and toxic mushroom used intermittently in various regions of Siberia as well (Hoppál 1984:432; 1992:171; Róheim 1984: Serov 1988:248; Solymosy 1991:110).⁵¹ In fact, the earlier mentioned practice of drinking milk by Hungarian *táltoses* is interpreted as the search for a detoxicant to counteract the impact of mushroom poisoning (Czigány 1980:216). However, in her in-depth analysis Anna-Leena Siikala, the Finnish ethnographer, firmly states that: “The use of hallucinogens and

⁴⁷We are informed by Piers Vitebsky that among the Sora of North India, the shamans (*kuran*) visit the world of the dead linked by a huge tree on which the female shaman must clamber. It is not an easy feat; on the contrary, it is a “impossible-balancing path” for there are “dizzying precipices” on the way down which leads to the “murky-sun country, cock-crow-light country” (Vitebsky 1993:18-19). This could be the type of ‘dizzying’ experience - the ecstatic travel in the netherworld - which achieves the desired altered state of the shaman (see also, Balázs 1963:57-83 and Schmidt 1990:189). In tribal India, fainting was achieved through the use of swings (Jones 1968:335-336). Swings and swinging rhymes were also important in childrens' game in Hungary. In one such song, the last line ends: *Hajts ki diófa tetejibe* – Drive/fly up to the top of the walnut tree. This is a closing formula which could again be analyzed in relation to trancing (Kriza, Orbán, Benedek, Sebesi 1882:256; see also the swinging rhymes, many with multiple meanings, in Kiss 1891). Let us recall that the original Greek word for this is *ekstatis*, which literally refers to leaving one's self, or stepping out of one's regular, normal senses or consciousness.

⁴⁸Thorough analysis of children's games are yet to be made by Hungarian scholars using available cross-cultural data and sound analytic techniques; for earlier standard treatments see Lajos (1968) and Gyula Hajdú (1971). Géza Róheim was, of course, a scholar who was willing to look at children's games as possible repositories of archaic and historic meanings and symbols (1984).

⁴⁹In European folklore, including witchcraft, the magical uses of the ax are well known. In the ethnographies of Siberian and Finno-Ugric peoples, evidence is plenty for the use of the ax. For instance, in religious and burial rituals (Stora 1971:177-183), curing, and taking an oath; even an ax-dance dance is described; see Vértes (1990:162, 256) and Felföldi (1987:299) both of whom rely on the ethnohistorical study of Munkácsi Bernát. This is not to suggest an immediate link between the Hungarian material and its distant relatives. Yet the parallels are striking, especially in light of the fact that the “ax game” is not for the *balta* or *szekeerce*, other words for ax in Hungarian, borrowed from Slavic, but for the *fejsze* which is the archaic Finno-Ugric word for it! In Hungarian culture there are some “unusual” presences of the ax: its use in witchcraft, for example, is well-known (i.e. in relation to whirl-winds); and in the Rábaköz region of western Hungary where the dough for the *perec* (cake) is kneaded together by two men with axes! There are evidences for the use of the ax in dance among Hungarians and Gypsies in northern Hungary, dances of skill that I have seen on films.

other such intoxicants is not, however, a vital element of trance technique in any part of Siberia” (1992:340). Agreeing with Siikala, I argue that the claim for a hallucinogenic practice of Hungarian *táltos* is not supported. Moreover, the role of the milk, as a dexotiant, is wholly unsubstantiated. For one, there is no ethnographic evidence that *Amanita muscaria* L. was *ever* used in Hungary. Drinking of milk, is a general practice in European witchcraft.

While the use of hallucinogens in native folk religions has received profuse attention, the non-drug induced trance states have been neglected.⁵² It is reported by Balzer that the use of hallucinogenic drugs (mushroom, herbs) among the Khantys may be only reserved for a few special occasions, and at other times music, singing and dancing serve to achieve an altered state of consciousness (1983:61, 71). As the doctor-turned-anthropologist, Wolfgang Jilek argues:

The capacity of attaining altered states of consciousness is a universal property of the human central nervous system as evidenced by the ubiquitous occurrence of trance phenomena through time and space. However, the prevalence of these phenomena appears to be a function of socio-cultural variables (1988:24).

Similarly, cross-cultural examples also warn us that in many cultures shamans are not necessarily trained to use hallucinogens to alter their state of mind.⁵³ For, as Nanda describes:

Through dance, an individual and a group can *feel* the qualitative shift in the normal pattern of mental functioning through a disturbed sense of time, a loss of control, perceptual distortion, a feeling of rejuvenation, a change in body image, or hypersuggestibility (1987:354).

⁵⁰The original game was collected and described in Kriza, Orbán, Benedek and Sebesi (1882:254). In this collection there is another game which has the “dizzying” aspect as well (“Egy kis kertet keríték...”). In the classic collection of children’s games and dances of Áron Kiss, there are two more versions of the “ax game”, both of which end with someone falling to the ground - the moment of losing one’s innocence (1891:486).

⁵¹Interestingly, Vilmos Diószegi does not argue for the “mushroom-theory” of shamanistic trance induction with reference to the Hungarian material. On the contrary, he argues for the “sleep-dream” (*révülés*) connection, resulting from a special breathing technique (Diószegi 1983:107-108).

⁵²The classic works on shamanism all promoted this image: cf. Eliade (1964). Following this, many prominent scholars – M. Harner, P. Furst, W. La Barre, J. Fernandez, and R.G. Wasson – also addressed the issue by further supporting this theory. In introductory anthropology textbooks it is still a practice to introduce shamanism though drug use as a specific feature of achieving altered states of consciousness: see, for example, the recent comparative reader by Lehmann and Myers (1993).

⁵³Backman and Hultkrantz report that, while among the Lapps drinking lye and aquavit (bitterish alcohol substance), as well as the use of mushroom, were recorded, most of the shamanistic trance journeys were self-transference, i.e. singing, dancing and psychic stress (1978:93, 107). In southwest China, among the Jingpo people, “the *midui* (shaman) usually falls into trance several times during the annual sacrificial rite with the help of intoxicating wormwood and ginger” (Kun 1988:126). Kun also reports that more than two thousand years ago, the historic shamanic seance was accompanied with much wine-drinking (Kun 1988:128).

Thus, it is evident that by turning around one's axis until losing balance or control dizziness and fainting may be induced.⁵⁴ This technique had been part of the art of Hungarian *táltoses* as well as other magical specialists. The “dizzying” dance – the manifold uses of the *ker* root certainly gives credence to this – may just have preserved for us one of the most archaic and natural forms to achieve altered states of consciousness.⁵⁵

Conclusions

In this paper I have discussed certain selected “archaic elements” in order to connect some seemingly disparate threads of Hungarian folk culture and religious beliefs in relation to a magical and shamanistic world-view. Many of the terms, such as “archaic”, “past”, “magical”, *shamanism*, and “folk culture”, are, by their very nature, problematic for the scholar working in the 1990s, and have been rightfully scrutinized recently (Fabian 1991; Ginzburgh 1989; Roseberry 1989). The notion of what constitute, or what has constituted shamanistic religion in the past, has been arguably both redefined and refined, since cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary investigations facilitate a more flexible understanding of such practices (Balzer 1994; Humphrey 1994). This, too, has been my aim with music, verbal and non-verbal expressions as well as dancing as meaning-producing activities (Kürti 1989; Ness 1992; Novack 1990; Williams 1979).

In line with these concerns, a magico-religious world-view has here been used rather broadly to denote a culture that *may have been* rather than *was* a part of Eurasian culture. It should not, however, be implied that this analysis subscribes to the idea that, during the course of *la longue durée* of Hungarian prehistory, an overarching shamanistic belief system engendered all these elements described. No known society has been strictly shamanistic at any given time, and not all groups in society adhered to shamanism. In fact, sociologists, anthropologists and historians of religions have described a world in which cultures of religions, whether Islamic, Buddhist and Christian, or small-scale Lamaist, Zoroastrian or animistic, were in a state of flux constantly borrowing from and fusing with one another (Samuel 1993). As it has been presented above, such has been the case with this European material, in which elements of an earlier belief system was impregnated with ideas, symbols and visions of later, dominant Christian and various ethnic magical beliefs. In fact, we must search for those elements following the suggestions of scholars such as

⁵⁴By turning, the physiological changes in the human body remain constants: increasing body temperature and heart beat, sweating, production of adrenalin, blood pressure fluctuation, and the various pressures on the cardiovascular system. It is not clear, however, how long one can stand the rotation before fainting – it is, nevertheless, my hypothesis that this too can vary. It may be enhanced by cultural training, or may be different for men and women; and, finally, age may be a decisive factor as well. For example, Jilek while analyzing the North West Coast Indian “Spirit Dance,” describes twelve conditions observed during trance dancing which are present, and which influence one's somato-psychological state of being (1988:46-48).

⁵⁵In an interesting ethnohistorical document Dezső Malonyay described the circle dance of Hungarian women at the turn of the century with a great deal of romanticism as well as insight:

The circle is closed, the fast rhythmic Hungarian song is heard, eyes are glittering, faces are red, waists are swinging rapidly, skirts are flying, and the circle is progressing faster and faster, the fairy-wheel is rotating speedily...

A kör összezáródik, hangzik a gyorsütemű magyar nóta, kigyúladnak a szemek, kipirul az arc, a derék hevesen rezdülnek, repülnek a rokolyák, s forog a kör, gyorsan, gyorsabban, mind sebesebben forog a tündérkaréj...(Quoted in Martin 1979:85).

András Róna-Tas and Gyula László. They argue that shamanism was too simple and narrow itself to be the (only?) religion for the Hungarian tribal federation of the 9-10th centuries. For such complex ideational and material experience - in which the twentieth century data were superimposed on historical experiences while everyday practices were placed side-by-side with other coeval events - an inter-disciplinary analytical approach is needed. Only such a framework may account for the complexity of the historical, etymological, and ethnographic material (cf. for example, Klaniczay 1990, Klaniczay and Pócs 1991, Pócs 1996, 1998).

In conclusion, I have argued that the seemingly unconnected and marginal elements in Hungarian peasant culture – the *táltos* belief, the sieve, the horse, and dance behavior – may be understood differently if seen from an interdisciplinary analysis guided by interpretive concerns. I have maintained that scholarly analyses must be a critical re-evaluation of earlier texts in order to reveal those specific elements that may provide a better understanding of the interrelated aspects of religion, magic, witchcraft and shamanism with movement, rituals, speech, myth, and magic. Since many of the described activities and folkloric texts speak of a culture which had already become considerably transformed, one possible way to ascertain their message is by a thorough cross-disciplinary investigation of language, thought, and action, which could be meaningful and explainable from within the culture's own perspective.

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Pota taltosov: Kritično ovrednotenje posvečenca v religijo in magijo

László Kürti

Čeprav so že veliko pisali o tem, kaj sestavlja prazgodovinsko kulturo na Madžarskem in še posebej plemensko verovanje, se mnenja znanstvenikov razlikujejo. Še vedno potekajo razprave o tem, ali so madžarska plemena poznala samo šamanizem ali pa so imela kompleksno sinkretično religijo, ki je združevala elemente krščanstva, islama, tengrizma in judovstva. Da bi prispevali dodatne misli za bodoče primerjalne raziskave, bi bilo potrebno ponovno ovrednotiti, kako so se razprave o tem problemu razvijale, kaj se je dogajalo in kaj se je opustilo. V začetku 20. stoletja so potekale burne razprave med dvema madžarskima etnografskima šolama; prva je zagovarjala "evropsko" teorijo, ki poudarja predvsem evropsko kulturno poreklo, druga, ki jo imenujemo tudi "turanska hipoteza," pa je bila mnenja, da madžarski jezik in kmečka kultura vsebujeta ostaline starega azijskega izročila.

Kakršnekoli že te definicije so, ostaja dejstvo, da so šamani, čaravnice, preroki in čarodeji verski izvedenci, ki jim moči omogočajo, da med izzivanjem obstoječih vrednot prekoračijo standardne meje. Obseg tega prispevka nam ne omogoča, da bi preučili razloge za ali proti šamanistični teoriji religije v prazgodovinski dobi na Madžarskem. Namesto tega želi avtor osvetliti tiste elemente madžarske folklore, ki jih lahko povežemo z zgodovinsko pogojenimi sistemi verovanj, ki so se stopila z balkanskimi, slovanskimi, germanskimi in krščanskimi elementi (ali pa so bila morda še starejša od njih). Prav tako kot sta okultizem in spiritualizem 19. stoletja izhajala na primer iz, mesmerizma,

fiziognomike in drugih mejnih znanosti, je očitna pomembna povezava med čarovništvom zgodnjega srednjega veka in med šamanskimi praksami.

Ne glede na podobnosti ali razlike med madžarskimi arhaičnimi verovanji in azijskim šamanizmom je avtor mnenja, da v madžarski kulturi obstajajo le tista verovanja, ki se nanašajo na mnoge posvečence z nadnaravnimi močmi. Njihova imena, ki so tudi zelo povedna, so *néző* ali *látó* (videc), *javas* (zdravilec ali zdravilka), *boszorkány* (čarovnica, čarovnik), *tudós* (modrec), *garaboncias* (črnošolec), in *táltos*, tudi *tátus* ali *tátos* (taltos). *Táltosa* so spoznali za enega najbolj arhaičnih izvedencev za religijo. Lahko je moški ali ženska, rojen s posebnimi znamenji, kot so odvečne kosti ali dlake. Medtem ko je večina čarodejnih bitij ženskega spola, so *táltosi* v glavnem moški, in se lahko spremenijo v žrebca ali v bika in se z drugimi bojujejo za zdravje, bogastvo ali lepo vreme. *Táltos* mora tako biti rojen kot šaman, biti mora poklican za to, kar je razvidno iz legend, povedk in celo nekaterih ljudskih pesmi.

Dodatna sposobnost tega junaka z nadnaravnimi močmi je, da lahko najde skrite zaklade, kar je v evropskih magičnih praksah pogosto. Danes pa so značilnosti takega verovanja redke in jih največkrat lahko najdemo v lingvističnih in etimoloških analizah, folklornih pripovedih, legendah in magičnih dejanjih.

Na tem mestu je potrebno povedati, da v obdobju med zavzetjem Karpatske nižine in poznim srednjim vekom (800-1000 n. š.) madžarski šamanizem ni bila edina in najpomembnejša religija. Nasprotno, to je bila alternativna oblika religije in ljudskih verovanj, ki je obstajala ob ostalih religijah, kot so islam, zoroastrstvo, krščanstvo, judovstvo. Namesto da trdimo, da je ta oblika verovanja izginila, bi morali pozornost obrniti k številnim sestavinam šamanističnega svetovnega nazora, kakor tudi k praksam, ki so se stopile z bolj profanimi folklornimi in lingvističnimi oblikami vsakdanje ljudske kulture. Taki primeri so pogosti tudi v drugih delih sveta, kjer so tradicionalne verske prakse doživele podobno usodo, ko so se lokalni običaji in verovanja popolnoma utopili v velikih svetovnih religijah, obenem pa so se iz tega procesa rodili novi verski sistemi. Vendar pa je povezovanje azijskega šamanizma, madžarske religije v pradavnini, ljudskega verovanja v *táltose* in opisov *táltosov*-čarovnikov v ljudskih povedkah izredno problematično. Elementi, ki jih povezujejo z dejanji *táltosov*, so bili izbrani na slepo; drugi spet niso bili dovolj pojasnjeni. Pričujoči članek poizkuša to popraviti tako, da skuša izslediti madžarske *táltose* v madžarskem ljudskem verovanju in v magiji s pomočjo odkrivanja tistih prvin, ki bi jih bilo mogoče povezati s šamanizmom: pesem, ples in padanje v trans.