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It may be stated with some certainty that for the last two centuries scholars of the history of Hungarian culture have tried eagerly to ascertain what the old religion of the ancient Hungarians must have been like. Now, at the time of the 1100th anniversary of the Hungarian Conquest, this interest is still active, and questions and problems, if possible, are only increasing in number as we learn more and more about details, possible parallels and analogues.

Addressing the members of the scholarly community of Gottingen in the late 1700's, Daniel Cornides naturally spoke of a 'religion' but the first problem that actually emerges in this connection is whether we can talk about a religion at all or whether instead we ought to refer to our subject as a mythology or a popular belief or system of beliefs. A correct and readable summary of these problems was provided in one of Voigt's last lectures (1996).

While earlier research usually speaks of 'ancient religion' (e. g. Solymossy in 1929 pointed out elements of an ancient religion in Hungarian folk tales, mentioning oriental parallels to the motif of the duck-legged spinning castle), Vilmos Diószegi's attempt (1967) was directed at reconstructing the "belief system" of pagan Hungarians. Unfortunately, he failed to finish the grand project that he had laid out so carefully, but he did complete its most important part, the comparison of Hungarian *táltos* beliefs and Siberian shamanism. In other words he invested a great deal of difficult and meticulous labour to assemble a mosaic from its fragments. What are the elements that belong to the system of '(ancient) Hungarian shaman belief'? Instead of using the term shamanism I prefer to speak of shaman belief, not only because it sounds less modern but also because it expresses a degree of abstraction. Shamanism I believe is not a religion but a world view of a kind, a relation to things, to the world and to one's environment. It is not much a collection of sacred dogma as a practice of everyday life.

In 1967 Vilmos Diószegi published a short monograph on '*The Belief System of Ancient Hungarians*' (Budapest, Akadémiai, Kőrösi Csoma Books, No. 4.). In this book he summarises the results of his earlier research regarding the world view of pre-Christian Hungarians and the figure of the Hungarian *táltos*. Naturally, Diószegi based his statements mainly on his research into shamanism, or more precisely on the results of the comparison he car-

ried out between Hungarian popular beliefs and the shamanism of Siberian peoples.

His starting point was the methodological principle according to which he only included those elements of Hungarian popular belief in his comparative study which are not to be found among the neighbouring peoples and of these elements only those which have parallels in the Far East. It is evident that his main interest was in these oriental elements. This is no wonder as his original orientation during his university study was Manchu Tunguz linguistics and only later did he become an ethnographer. As such he left behind him a most coherent body of work, not to mention what is called his Shamanism Archive, which is unparalleled throughout the world.

In the following paper we are going to provide a brief summary of Diószegi's views and describe the oriental elements that he detected in Hungarian popular belief. A summary of his ideas could be that 'the backbone of the world view of pagan Hungarians was a shamanistic cosmology'. He emphasised however that this was not a homogenous world view just as Hungarians were not a homogenous people. He warned about the difficulty inherent in the fact that after the assumption of Christianity the belief system of the pagan era gradually became less potent since remnants of the old faith were subject to persecution. It is a characteristic of oral tradition and ethnic folklore that even in such conditions it retains elements, constellations of elements, motifs and texts for centuries.

One such series of elements is the 'world tree with the sun and the moon' and another is the bird-peaked tree which clearly retains reminiscences of the world model of Siberian shamanism. Diószegi supported his ideas with a multitude of data and the conclusions he draws are thoroughly well-founded (a detailed treatment of the topic in question can be found in Diószegi 1969). Another surviving series of ideas is the set of views regarding the underworld. Talking of these, Diószegi points out that "on the basis of the image of a land of snakes, lizards and frogs which is presented by Ob Ugrian, Samoyed and other shaman-faithed peoples, it is possible that the faith of Hungarians in a similar underworld also goes back to pre-Christian times and was thus once a part of the cosmology of pagan Hungarians" (Diószegi 1967:21).

The most coherent part of Diószegi's explanations, in fact of his life's work, is the comparison between the tradition of beliefs surrounding the 'pagan Hungarian *táltos*' and the phenomena of Siberian shamanism. In Hungarian popular belief the shaman is selected for his or her mission after an illness, just as in the case of the shamans of most Siberian peoples. Apart from selec-

tion through illness, other features are the experience of some sort of a 'calling', a long sleep and the dismemberment of the candidate's body which is followed by reassembly - both the latter are experienced in a state of dreamlike vision (for more details on this question see Hoppál 1989, 1995).

The correspondence between the Hungarian features and the distant, Oriental tradition goes well beyond the rough outline - it extends to details like the candidate's reluctance in consequence of which he or she becomes seriously ill or the rite of passage which usually means climbing the shaman ladder or the tree that reaches the sky. It is worth noting here that of all the Far Eastern data cited by Diószegi the ones that come closest to Hungarian *táltos* folklore are the parallels from the Altaie Turks, Tuva and Mongolia.

Diószegi lists the objects which belong to the *táltos* shaman's equipment - the drum which served as vehicle for the trance journeys to the other world, the head-dress which was ornamented with birds' feathers or was shaped like a crown and adorned with antlers and the *táltos's* tree - as each shaman had his or her own tree (cf. Hoppál 1994:22-228, pictures, Yakut data and Diószegi 1967:91). I myself had the occasion during my Siberian journey to see a shaman tree in a Yakut village and to photograph the Nanays perform their animal sacrifice in front of the three *turu*, which is the name of the sacrificial tree.

Speaking of the *táltos* shaman's activity, it is the etymological analysis of the Hungarian words *révül-rejtekezik* (to go into a trance, to hide) which leads us into the area of Ob Ugrian parallels (as Balázs pointed out in his 1954 article, cf. Diószegi 1967: 95-103), including details like yawning which is a sign of the commencement of trance or an altered state of mind. Diószegi's most detailed analyses regard the struggling of the *táltos* (1967:108-122) and it is noteworthy that these narratives are perhaps the most complete surviving presentations regarding the shaman's struggle. These usually take the form of a bullfight, or more precisely the shaman's animal-shaped helping spirit fights the helping spirits (*tin-bura*) of the other shaman. The best parallels and motif correlations are to be found in the material collected among the Yakut and the Buryat Mongolian people and it is from here that Diószegi himself cited them. Diószegi's work is not a mere comparison of individual elements but of coherent motifs and, ultimately, of the entire image system. He pointed out that he found a system of images which form an organic whole and 'among which there is no part or detail that is not paralleled among the images and notions of the shamanic faith of the shaman ladder or the tree that reaches the sky. It is worth noting here that of all the Far Eastern data

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Diószegi could not be very well acquainted with the material of Manchu shamanism and thus did not rely on it to any particular extent. It must be said in his favour that until a few years ago Manchu scholars who lived in a minority in China were prevented from publishing their own works and even now their work mainly appears in Chinese.

During my study trip to Uyguria in 1995, I met a young scholar belonging to the local Manchu minority, the *Shibo*. Kicheshen had only recently sent off an English translation of his richly documented paper on the shamanism of his own people. In this the first similarity with Hungarian features is that the shamanic candidate, usually when still a child, falls ill which indicates to the people around him or her that the person in question has been selected by the spirits for the shamanic mission. He or she must undertake the task, no matter what suffering it entails (Kicheshen 1996:5, or as the second line of a related Hungarian folk song says, 'he must go through hell'). Thus, for example, the Shibo candidate must climb the ladder that reaches the sky and is built of sharp knives (*chakur*) so as to meet the main deity of shamans (*Isanju Mama*). (Representations of the shamanic pantheon and of the ladder had been published in Stary 1993:23 1, 235).

In the Manchurian city of Yilin the local Manchu colleagues have assembled in the last few years a collection of several objects from the attributes of Manchurian shamanism. They collected shaman costumes, drums and other ritual objects of the most varied kind from the different peoples living in the area (e.g. Dahur, Shibe, Oroch, Evenki, Hezhe). Among the objects is a clay statuette which represents a breast-feeding woman with an eagle's head. In answer to my question they told me that this woman is the mother of the first shaman who was inseminated by an eagle (her name is *Ise n-mama*).

This myth, the origin myth of shamanism seems to exist not only in Buryat shaman mythology but all over Siberia (and Eurasia) with the eagle and the shaman both figuring, to an equal degree, as mediators between the worlds of people and of the gods (Eliade 1972:69-7 1, further examples in Halifax 1982:23). The Tunguz Gilyak people, for example, use the same word to signify eagle and shaman. At any rate the mother of the tribe of shamans was begotten by an eagle of heavenly origin which is a motif that bears noteworthy similarity to the basic motif of the origin myth of the tribe of Arpád, leader of the Hungarians of the conquest. This is the myth of Emese's dream, in other words the myth of the Turul bird (Regarding this see Róheim 1917, regarding the ani-

mal-shaped mothers of Siberian shamans see Lommel 1967:62. A very interesting analysis of Almos has recently been published in Dümmerth 1986).

It is interesting that neither Diószegi nor Jenő Fazekas gives any attention to this motif and even Dezső Pais (1972:302-307) only mentions it as a tribal totemistic legend in his linguistic work entitled 'A magyar ősvallás nyelvi emlékeiből' ('Some linguistic remnants of the ancient Hungarian religion'). The Turul legend was recorded by the chronicler Anonymus in his *Gesta* thus we have all reason to consider it not only old but also authentic since Latin chronicles borrowed and retained a great deal of folklore motifs. It is not entirely unfounded to assume that at the time when the Nameless Chronicler was working there were still bards living and working from whose 'chatters and silly stories' the chronicler may have heard or borrowed this motif. The institution of the king-shaman is well known from Korea where it functioned during the time of the Silla dynasty in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD (which dynasty is assumed by Korean scholars to have originated in Inner Asia (Covell 1986:139-137), see the example of crowns adorned with a world tree and of the horses that fly to the sky).

Still talking about Manchuria and the Orient we must add that one of the basic motifs of Hungarian *táltos* stories, the 'bull-fight' (meaning a fight between shamans) is to be found among many Turkic peoples (e.g. in Kazak folk stories) and it also survives in the form of a popular game (sport) among the Hui tribe which lives in the Xhingjiang area. The director of the Ethnic Minorities institute of Yilin still remembers having seen such games in his childhood. Fu Yuguang, an expert in Manchu folklore and oral tradition, has told me that this game, i. e. the sport of stopping the bull with one's bare hands, is also known among the Manchus. Three or four decades ago young men would not elect a man leader unless he fought the bull bear-handed. Such men were then called *batur*. As is well known, this motif survives not only in Hungarian *táltos* stories but also in the 19th century poet János Arany's epic poem, *Toldi*, as a sort of vague reflection of long bygone Oriental connections. It can be no accident that the Hungarian words 'Álmos/álmom', *Emese*, *Turul* and *táltos* belong to one etymological group and also outline a myth cycle.

Another interesting element of the set of beliefs surrounding the Hungarian figure of the shaman is the everyday meaning of the word *táltos* which is none other than the image of a horse of great strength or extraordinary abilities. Since it mainly occurs in folk stories, the *táltos* horse has been to some extent ignored by Diószegi's analyses. In folk stories it appears as a winged, flying horse. This correspondence is probably not accidental, since in Yakut

shamanism the shaman appears in the form of a stallion while the helping spirits invoked are of the female sex (from the early part of the century, based on G. V. Xenofontov 's collection, see Balzer 1995: 178).

Here as well as in the traditions of other peoples the shaman enters sexual intercourse with the helping spirits and/or the entire session can be transcribed in sexual symbols (as in the case of the rein-deer sacrifice among the Ostyaks). This aspect of shamanism has been little researched thus far (it is mainly drumming that is usually interpreted in this light -Harnayon 1990), even though the French scholar Roberte Hamayon 's explanation is based on a very convincing logical argument when she points out that the essence of the session is that 'the shaman must obtain a woman from the world of spirits' (Hamayon 1995:418).

The image of helping spirits as sexual partners is quite wide-spread in the shamanism of Siberian peoples (cf. Basilov 19484:53) and it might be worthwhile to examine the character of the spirit helper-lover which appears in the Hungarian cycle of belief surrounding the figure of the *lidérc* (will-o-the-wisp) (a reference to it was made in Pócs 1992:48), as it is possible that this would reveal a further shamanistic element in Hungarian popular belief.

The *Emese Turul* motif is not mentioned either by Hungarian scholars (Gunda 1957) nor by those working in other countries (Róheim 1954) even though they were examining the remnants of totemism in old Hungarian shamanism. They did, however, mention an ancient element, probably of oriental origin, and this is the use of 'magic mushroom' (*Amanita muscaria*) in order to achieve the altered state of mind (Czigány 1980). This article is little known in Hungary as it was published in the *Slavonic and East European Review*. Similarly little known are F. Goodman's (1978) and Jenő Fazekas's (1967) studies. They both examined, one by one, the categories of Hungarian 'shamans' on the basis of the available linguistic material. They distinguished the clearly circumscribed social roles of *~i~os garabonciás, néző, boszorkány* and *regös*. (Cf. Pócs 1994).

Without going into details we must mention that the word which forms the root of *regös*, which is also present in our words, *révül* (*reitezik*) originates in the oldest, probably Ob Ugrian (perhaps Uralic) stratum of our language (Cf. Balázs 1954). Together with the word *kiált* it retains the memories of the shaman belief of the Ugrian era (*kalált, kaj, hal, hwi*.) but *hejgetés* can also be included (Mészöly 1952, Demény 1994), in other words the memory of shaman songs has very probably been retained by our language and there are also traces of it in folk customs. (e.g. *regölés, hejgetés*).

The *regös* question can be seen in an even more interesting and more clearly historical perspective if we recall the explanation of the archaeologist István Dienes who assumed that in the horse-riding nomadic society of the age of the conquest, which was similar in a typological sense, there existed institutionalised shamanism. The shaman partly played the role of the organiser of the ceremony and partly that of a bard, occupying quite a high position in the social hierarchy.

“The institution of the sacred monarchy was meant to support the structure of the state organisation through the means of religion, by institutionally controlling social consciousness. The order of the shamans, who were in the service of the court, was organised around the sacred king.” These enjoyed a privileged position under the leadership of the much respected shaman and “...their main task was to keep alive the circle of legend surrounding the founder of the dynasty and his progeny as well as to laud and glorify the current monarch and his leaders at any one time and to enhance their prestige.” (Dienes 1989: 376, 383).

Besides these there existed also the healing shamans who attended to everyday tasks of healing, as we can observe to this day all over Siberia. In fact the number of these is even increasing at the present time. With the help of *regös* bards (Dienes 1985:387) fragments of the ancient heroic epic survived through centuries, as is witnessed by numerous references. We find it likely that certain motifs of the Toldi legend which hint at an oriental origin also survived in this fashion. The same is probably true of certain images in folk stories (e.g. the winged *táltos* horse, about which we are planning a major study in the future, cf. Kiss 1995).

Quite naturally, critical remarks are also repeatedly voiced regarding the oriental elements in Hungarian popular beliefs (e.g. Géza Róheim, Tekla Dömötör). Gyula László questioned Didszegi's entire theory in 1976 in an article which he wrote in memory of Dezső Pais entitled 'Különvélemény ősvallásunkról' ('A dissenting opinion regarding our ancient religion'). In this he voices his disbelief regarding the possibility of correlation between our word *táltos* and the word meaning shaman. Referring to Dezső Pais, he questioned the etymological evidence of the Turkic origins in spite of the fact that words that correlate to the stem *tal* are not to be found anywhere else. But even he did not deny the identity between folklore texts and certain motifs. He quite logically pointed out that obvious differences which separate *táltos* and shaman must be taken into account as well as correspondences (László 1990:169). Indeed the *contrastive* research which is to collect differences is

still a task which has to be completed but that will be the topic of another lecture or paper.

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