

The Alcmene Myth¹

A number of complicated intrigues and contests involving the Olympian deities preceded – as Hesiod, Homer, Apollodoros, Theocritus, Pindar, Diodorus and John Tzetzes harmoniously wrote – the birth of Hercules, the out of wedlock son of Zeus and Alcmene (the wife of Amphitryon), a representative of the human race. The whole issue was sensitive if only due to the ambiguous, at the very least, situation of Hera, the rightful wife of Zeus, and thus called for considerable tact. Zeus, on the other hand, has never been known for excessive subtlety. When the time of birth was nearing he started to loudly boast of his fatherhood and promised that the prince to be born in the family of Perseus before twilight would become a great king. This was exactly what Hera had been waiting for.

*Hera went at once to Mycenae, where she hastened the pangs of Nicippe, wife of Sthenelus. She then hurried to Thebes and squatted cross-legged at Alcmene's door with her clothing tied into knots and her fingers locked together; by which means she delayed the birth of Heracles until Eurystheus, son of Sthenelus, a seven-months child, already lay in his cradle.*²

*According to others,³ it was Eileithyia, who hindered the travails on Hera's behalf, and a faithful handmaiden of Alcmene's, a yellow-haired Galanthis, or Galen, who left the birth chamber to announce untruly that Alcmene had been delivered. When Eileithyia sprang up in surprise, unclasping her fingers and uncrossing her knees, Heracles was born and Galanthis laughed at the successful deception.*⁴

One way or another, the birth of Hercules was sufficiently delayed for him to lose primacy for the sake of Eurystheus, born before nightfall, for whom he was also later compelled to perform his famous labours. Magic spells cast by jealous Hera proved effective. Let us, therefore, subject them to a more through analysis.

The cited myth contains two types of operations: 1) the tying of knots and crossing of fingers and legs

in order to prevent (halt) birth; 2) the uncrossing of fingers and legs to cause (start) birth.

These operations are evidently identical with the magic tricks applied during childbirth in Polish lands. By way of example, provoking or accelerating labour involved stretching hands,⁵ unfurling fingers,⁶ opening doors,⁷ windows,⁸ chests,⁹ and drawers,¹⁰ and even dispatching messengers to a priest so that he may open the pyx with the consecrated host¹¹ or – in Russian Orthodox Church terrains – the imperial gates,¹² and praying to God to open the heavens and hell, even if for a short while.¹³ All possible knots are untied,¹⁴ holes are made in walls and the roof,¹⁵ rings and wedding bands are removed from the fingers of the woman in labour¹⁶ whose hair is unbraided,¹⁷ and local fences are toppled and destroyed.¹⁸ The entire duration of childbirth is also the time of a ban on sewing and spinning.¹⁹ If someone were to maliciously wish to halt labour he would have to perform the reverse of the above-mentioned operations, and the most frequently encountered procedures are those applied by Hera: the crossing of fingers and legs,²⁰ the knotting of clothes²¹ or (as in the case of Polish Jews) the closing of drawers.²²

Activity from the range of Alcmene's magic	Operations (+)	Operations (–)
To cause labour (opening)	106	–
To halt labour	–	12
Prior to baptism and purification	3	–
Prior to a wedding ²⁶	59	–
After a wedding ²⁷	1 ²⁸	109
To render a wedding impossible ²⁹	1 ³⁰	18
To accelerate death (shorten agony)	37	–
To render death impossible	–	47
After death	20	24
Total	227 ³¹	212 ³²

The purpose of undertaking particular operations, which (together with their derivative forms) we shall call in further parts of this article Alcmene's magic,²³ is sufficiently distinctive to permit an easy, individual interpretation consisting of associating magical activities with the physiological process of labour.²⁴ The situation grows complicated, however, when we notice that Alcmene's magic universally accompanies²⁵ also other rites of the family cycle; the conventional designation of opening and tying, the prohibition of sewing and spinning, the making of holes, the taking off of rings and wedding bands, etc. – operations (+), and the reverse marked as (-) and presented in the table below as follows:

If we were to eliminate for a while from our reflections assorted malicious practices (*bewitching* – as W. Abraham described them in contrast to ordinary magic operations) and those intended to counter the natural order of things concurrent with the ritual cycle (such as rendering death impossible), we would gain a consistent chain of sequences:

Alcmene's magic operations (+) birth.

Alcmene's magic operations (-) ... (+), purification and baptism . (-) ... (+) nuptials (-) ... (+) death (+) i (-).

Each family ritual³³ is thus preceded by a positive aspect of Alcmene's magic, and the completed ritual –

by negative magic. In an analogy to easily legible birth practices one would be tempted to say that at the beginning family rituals are caused (opened) and at the end – rendered impossible (closed). We may capture the meaning of such activities only after accepting the Van Gennep theory of *rites de passage*.³⁴ Human life is composed, according to this interpretation, of a comprehension of time in folk cultures, a chain of assorted states (*l'état*). In order to alter state x (e.g. that of a single person) – which takes place through the intermediary of the ritual – into state y (e.g. marital) it is first necessary to leave initial state x (connected with a whole magic-ritual procedure) and then subject oneself to the complete complex of the ritual period of transition³⁵ so as to be finally magically enclosed within new state y. In this situation, Alcmene's magic, by referring not to rituals as a separate object but to people subjected to its operations, would have to aim at (+) opening, causing an exit from the initial state, and (-) – in the new state of retention. Such an interpretation, concurrent with the third condition of the Lévi-Straus construction of a model, presents all the observed facts (see: table above).

The Van Gennep theory encompasses not only the ritual nature of the family, but also the whole cycle. While accepting the explanation of using Alcmene's magic based on the framework of this theory we should consistently draw attention to the rites of passage of

Holiday (rite de passage) ⁴¹	Actions (+)	Actions (-)
St. Dmitriy 11 November ⁴²	6	6
St. Lucia 12 December	27	10
Christmas Eve 24 December	28	59
New Year's Eve (31 December) 1 January	3	9
Our Lady of Candles 2 February	11	-
Shrovetide	14	4
Annunciation to the Holy Virgin Mary 25 March	4	2
Easter	30	39
St. George 23 April ⁴³	8	7
Whitsuntide	4	1
St. Vit 15 June	2	1
Eve of St. Jonh the Baptist 23 June	7	14
Sts. Peter and Paul (Petro Pavel) 29 June	5	5
Transfiguration of the Lord 5 August	8	15
St. Michael (?) ca. 24-29 September ⁴⁴	3	2
Total	160	174

the annual cycle³⁶ and the accompanying magic practices (or rather those that comprise the basic core of folk culture). Here, the magic of Alcmene occurs in the same forms as in the family cycle³⁷ but in their different statistical intensification. In this manner, while in the family cycle the most frequent were the opening and shutting of windows, doors, and drawers, the crossing of fingers, the making of knots, or the combing of hair or placing a headband, here pride of place is given to the prohibition or, alternatively, injunction concerning sewing and spinning,³⁸ the use of chains to bind tables and other objects, the tying up of scissors,³⁹ and the tying up, and walking around⁴⁰, of people, animals, plants, household items or sacral items, the making or filling of holes, etc. The most distinctive symptoms of Alcmene's magic are to be discovered on the following holidays:

This is by no means the end. The Van Gennep conception of the "state" (despite the fact that the author had not steered his reasoning in this direction) cannot be limited only to the sphere of rituals. All definition-oriented conditions for the "state"⁴⁵ are met also by such life situations as illness and, alternatively, the state of being healthy, the state of good fortune and natural calamity, etc. They too are accompanied by typical symptoms of Alcmene's magic. Thus we come across the latter (operations +) among activities intent on ending an illness - 42 cases, increasing the growth of grain - 21 cases, and making it possible to build a house, a bridge, or a road - 17 cases. In turn, Alcmene's magic (-) takes place in preventive anti-sickness practices (the retention of the state of being healthy) - 44, malicious magic intent on making it impossible for the ill to get well (the retention of an illness) - 26. It (-) is also applied for preserving the security and prosperity of a home, a family or property - 82, protection against contacts with demons and spirits - 54 cases,⁴⁶ etc. The latter example, proposed by Alcmene's magic (+) and employed to evoke demons - 20 cases⁴⁷ or establishing contact with God

- 26 cases,⁴⁸ is of special interest to us. What sort of a change occurs in those instances?

In the case of the God-man relations the issue at stake, while referring to the foundations of Slavonic folk cosmogony, seems to be fairly uncomplicated. God and man remain upon different cosmic levels, distinctly separated. Regardless of the copious number of conceptions and attempts at formulating this distinctness⁴⁹ we may hazard declaring that it is sufficiently outlined in folk culture for us to be able to recognise the distinctness of the state of God (the state in which God finds Himself) and the earthly state (in which man finds himself). Since - as has been mentioned - the prime condition for any sort of change of the existing state is leaving the initial *x* it is not surprising that man's attempts at coming closer to the divine must be accompanied by Alcmene's magic (*T*). A reference to this comprehension and to the relation between people and demonic creatures encounters, however, considerable difficulties. All researchers dealing with Polish folk demonology⁵⁰ agree that Slavonic demons do not comprise (as Lelewel wanted) autonomous creatures, being mere posthumous embodiments of people of certain, specific categories; naturally, this could suggest an obliteration of differences between their state *z* and state *v* corresponding to particular phases of the family cycle.⁵¹ This situation would, in turn, exert a negative impact on the possibility and purposefulness of applying Alcmene's magic. In order to explain this lack of clarity it appears to be necessary to establish these "demon-creating" human categories. Who becomes a demon after death? Solutions to thus formulated questions are offered in the table⁵² presented below:

The enumerated detailed categories can be restricted with the least risk of logical invalidity to three more extensive ones: those that broke the principle of the succession of states (item 1 and 2 in the table),

those that carried out a change of the state without fulfilling the *rite de passage* obligatory (Alcmene's magic!) in this situation (item 3, 6-9). those that died in the state of passage (item 1, 2, 4, 5).

No.	"Demon-creating" category	no. of cases
1	Dead foetuses	30
2	Miscarried	47
3	Not baptised	79
4	Betrothed, died prior to wedding	12
5	Betrothed, died during wedding	35
6	Suicide victims	33
7	Hanged	29
8	Drowned	82
9	Victims of unnatural and violent death	35
	Total	392

Once again, those three categories can be summed up in a single, most general one: – those who (in a biological sense) departed and those who did not (in a magic-ritual sense) from state *x*, and those who entered (in a biological sense) and did not enter (in a magical-ritual sense) state.⁵³ In other words, after death only those become demons who (regardless whether unconsciously or not) broke out of the chain of the succession of states, thus situating themselves outside its constant links (or, from another point of view, several links simultaneously), i.e. in a permanent state of transition. This partly explains the fact to which attention should be drawn already at this stage, namely, that the formulas⁵⁴ describing the period of *temps de passage* and characterising the “demon-creative” state of people who are supposed to turn into demonic creatures are totally identical.

Now, leave this issue for a while and return to the question of the forms of Alcmene’s magic (comprehended in a totally descriptive-mechanical manner). They can be divided into two typical varieties:

A. Connected with opening and closing, and thus the opening and shutting of doors, windows, drawers, pyxes with the consecrated host, and imperial gates, the destruction of roofs, walls, and fences, the making and plugging up of holes, etc.

B. Connected with tying up and untying, and thus: assorted practices involving knots, fragments of fishing nets, the belting, wrapping or tying of people, animals, plants and objects, the encircling of a table with chains and ropes, a forehead - with a wreath, fingers - with rings, the placing of a cap, injunctions and prohibitions concerning sewing, spinning, etc.

This division, totally illegitimate and based on subjective and imprecise premises, does not possess any sort of essential significance and was performed in order to make it easier to demonstrate that it is possible to add to each of the distinguished categories A and B a number of similar forms of activity pursued at the same time and place, and thus semantically identical with the enumerated ones. One of them is the creation of the theme of a relatively copious ethnographic bibliography,⁵⁵ i.e. the so-called magic circle.⁵⁶

According to K. Moszyński: *The function of magic enclosure is fulfilled by a belt, a chain, a magic circle, a ring, a wreath, etc. [...] When, for instance, an inhabitant of the Polesie region travelling during the Pentecostal week across the local forests hears strange sounds announcing the proximity of water sprites* ⁵⁷ *he marks with an axe a circle around the cart wide enough so that the demon could not touch him. The women of Polesie walking in a forest or working on land located in distant woodlands act in the same way; instead of an axe they mark a circle on the ground with a knife [...]. I selected particularly vivid and typical examples; one could cite many less appealing ones.*⁵⁸

Let us add immediately that Moszyński listed as analogous to the creation of the magic circle also the custom of ploughing around villages and fields or their inclusion within a “metaphorical tangle”.⁵⁹ The magical circle in the form used by the peasants of Polesie appears to be, however, the simplest example, and thus the most useful for initial analysis.

What does the essence of the activity of Alcmene’s magic in this form consist of? By enclosing (symbolically girding) a certain space, the peasant from the Polesie region stops it at the initial (current) state *x*. At the time of drawing the circle this state of things prevails on both its sides. At the stage when the situation on the outside is subject to change (e.g. an attack launched by demonic creatures), the new, emergent state could not encompass the magically enclosed space⁶⁰ and thus harm the objects within it. Naturally, an obliteration of the circle or its part would immediately produce a diametrically different effect - such as the above-mentioned damaged fence or a hole made in a wall or a roof. In all those cases we are dealing with identical phenomena not only upon a semantic level (Alcmene’s magic) but also on an instrumental one. Just as the magic circle restricts arbitrary space dependent on the requirements of the person applying magic, so the walls, the threshold, and the roof or the windows are elements limiting the inner space of the home (wider: every building). Representatives of the same category will also consistently include fences or unploughed strips of land enclosing farmstead, village borders, cemetery walls, riverbanks, and roads⁶¹ as well as crossroads. All divide space and thus in suitable conditions⁶² also states, and all may comprise the subject of Alcmene’s magic. Are they, however, identical? To what category should we ascribe the space of a yet unploughed strip of land, the village border, or the threshold? Books by theoreticians of magic,⁶³ folk beliefs,⁶⁴ and even numerous legal formulae⁶⁵ concerning borders provide an unambiguous solution. Borders are extra-territorial, i.e. objects from this particular category belong to both divisible sequences of transformation (here: states *x* and *y*) and, at the same time, they do not belong to any of them. They can be described, therefore, only by the following the Hegelian sentence, incorrect from the viewpoint of formal logic:

$$A = (x \text{ -} i \text{ -} y) \text{ and } (-x + -y).$$

This sentence had already appeared to be indispensable upon two other occasions – for defining the essence (specificity in relation to the “normal” state) of periods of passage in annual and family cycles, and for characterising demonic (“demon-creating”) creatures. This is a concurrence of essential significance. If heretofore reasoning is correct and the essence of the three discussed phenomena situated at levels ostensibly remaining at a great distance, is identical,

then they must demonstrate a distinct connection, including exchangeability and mutual exponentiation. Take a closer look at the level of binary relations. Theoretically, there exists the possibility of a relation of the categories described in: $A = (x + y) \text{ i } (-*x + -y)$ and arranged in three pairs: a - demonological ("demon-creating") creatures: spatial borders (thresholds, unploughed strips of land, fences, roads, etc.); b - demonic ("demon-creating") creatures: periods of passage (as in the family, annual, and 24 hour cycle⁶⁶); c - spatial borders: periods of passage.

Each of those versions (a, b and c) corresponds to particular relations in the tables presented below:

As can be seen, in all three cases the existence of correlation gains a distinctive numerical confirmation. In this fashion, relation a⁶⁹ achieves in the case of burials of "demon-creating" creatures as much as 98,9% of co-dependence; those data are slightly lower in the case of relation b (correspondingly: 96,4% and 92,5%) and relation c. This would confirm distinctly the legitimacy of heretofore reasoning without, however, comprising its ultimate proof, i.e. an ascertainment of the at least relative identity of the analysed categories.

Let us start with the fact that each of the latter possesses the ability to attain exponentiation *via* an "intensification of features". In other words, a drowned non-baptised person will be a more malicious (or rather, more powerful) demon Y than an ordinary victim of drowning or a non-baptised person who died of natural causes; the same holds true for a groom who hanged himself in the course of the wedding ceremonies, compared to an ordinary victim of suicide by hanging, etc. Similarly, in the case of spatial borders (Z) there are more demons at the crossroads than along an ordinary straight road, while plants growing next a fence have greater medicinal powers if this spot is the meeting place of two or more fences, etc. Such qualities become even more vivid during times (periods) of passage (V). Ferns bloom only at midnight before the feast day of St. John the Baptist, while wolfsbane assumes aphrodisiac properties at noon each day but its effectiveness is certain only at noon on Whitsuntide and (in the case of dried plants) on the day of St. Lucia. Such examples can be multiplied, although it must be accentuated right away that this sort of individual (single-category) exponentiation is relatively rare in Slavonic folk culture.

Relation a	village borders	unploughed land	fences	thresholds	roads	banks	others without features A ⁶⁷
Place of burial of demon-creating creatures	80	19	18	66	62	30	3
Place of appearance of demonic creatures	65	55	11	21	26	30	7
Place of establishing contacts with the devil	6	2	7	5	26	7	19
Place of witch sabbaths ⁶⁸	5	4	–	1	10	3	47
Total	156	80	36	93	124	70	76

Relation b	periods of passage in annual cycle	another not A ⁶⁹ in annual cycle	creatures in the state of passage	creatures in not the state A	periods of passages the daily cycle					total in the daily cycle in the periods of passage
					12	24	east	west		
Periods of appearance of demons	146	7	–	–	59	79	38	33		209
Periods of possible establishment of contacts with demons	20	1	26	4	3	13	5	7		28
Total	166	26	62	92	43	40	237			

Relation c (1)		transition peri- ods in annual cycle	other times of annual cycle	transition periods of day cycle	other times of day, night
Ritual activities on village borders, unploughed land, roads, etc.	No	126	4	180	14
	%	96,9	3,1	92,7	7,4
Relation c (2)		pregnant women	young mar- ried people	cortege with the dead	others uncon- nected with transition period
Ban on staying on borders or crossing them		80	43	33	7

Magic folk prescriptions as a rule combine elements of all "Alcmene" categories (without, however, limiting themselves to them).⁷⁰ The "statistical"⁷¹ folk, paramedical "prescription" advising: "Take a thread from the noose of a hanged man, add a_1 , a_2 , a_3 , and herb a_4 z picked at the crossing of unploughed strips of land at noon on St. George's day..." is thus based on, i.e. an interchangeable exponentiation of "Alcmeniana" and *ergo* can be written down as:

$$f = Y^n \times Z^n \times V^n \times a_1 \times a_2 \dots \times a_n$$

This formula ultimately confirms the legitimacy of our heretofore reflections (only identical categories can mutually exponentiate), and hence provokes their temporary completion.

I would like to emphasise temporary completion particularly strongly. The presented sketch is not only an open entity but without a continuation it outright loses its *raison d'être*. (I bypass the explanation of particular problems). The process of introducing order into findings neglected or rendered vulgar by the theoreticians of magic and Slavonic rites, and the demonstration of their close, integral union can become a point of departure for more correct studies on a whole range of aspects of Polish folk culture. In this respect, I would be inclined to consider the important message of this article to be as follows:

The recognition of the impossibility of a separable examination of questions linked with the comprehension of space and time in folk culture. Its structures, after all, develop in three parallel dimensions: temporal, spatial and theognostic-cosmic,⁷² if one can thus describe the Earth (man)–heaven (God) axis together with all its cosmosophic aspects. Sidestepping any of those levels not only impoverishes but, even more, remarkably falsifies the image of the products of folk spiritual culture, turning it into a flat and barren caricature.

Endnotes

¹ The bibliography used in this text has been verified rather extensively in the course of research conducted in the following voivodeships: Białystok, Chełmno,

Nowy Sącz, Przemyśl, Siedlce, Suwałki and Zamość. The collected material also made it possible to ascertain the existence of the majority of the forms of Alcmene's magic kept alive in Poland up to this day.

² R. Graves, *Mity greckie*, Warszawa 1974, p. 411.

³ Pausanias, Ovid, Aelian and Antoninus Liberalis.

⁴ Graves, op. cit., p. 412.

⁵ W. Łęgowski, *Zwyczaje i obyczaje. Styty pogrzebowe, obrzędy ślubne, chrzciny i inne zabawy ludowe, głównie pod względem na hygienę*, "Wędrowiec", 1899, fasc. 2, p. 487; J. Talko-Hryniewicz, *Zarysy lecznictwa ludowego na Rusi Południowej*, Kraków 1893, p. 77.

⁶ W. Łęgowski, *Zwyczaje i obyczaje. Styty pogrzebowe, obrzędy ślubne, chrzciny i inne zabawy ludowe, głównie pod względem na hygienę*, "Wędrowiec", 1899, fasc. 2, p. 487; J. Talko-Hryniewicz, *Zarysy lecznictwa ludowego na Rusi Południowej*, Kraków 1893, p. 77.

⁷ K. Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa Słowian*, Warszawa 1967, vol. II, part 1, p. 292.

⁸ J. S. Bystron, *Słowiańskie obrzędy rodzinne*, Kraków 1916, p. 20.

⁹ Moszyński, op. cit., vol. II, part 1, pp. 292-293; Bystron, op. cit., p. 20, 27.

¹⁰ Bystron, op. cit., p. 20, 28.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 20.

¹² S. Poniatowski, *Obrzędy rodzinne*, "Wiedza o Polsce", vol. 3, part: *Etnografia Polski*, Warszawa 1932, p. 328; Bystron, op. cit., p. 20; Talko-Hryniewicz, op. cit., p. 73.

¹³ Talko-Hryniewicz, op. cit., p. 76.

¹⁴ J. Świętek, *Lud nadrański od Gdowa po Bochnię*, Kraków 1893, p. 599; Bystron, op. cit., p. 20; Frazer, op. cit., p. 216; Moszyński, op. cit., vol. II, part 1, 292.

¹⁵ D. Lepkiy, *De yaki verovania pro detinu*, "Zorya", VII: 1886, p. 269.

¹⁶ Bystron, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁷ Moszyński, op. cit., vol. II, part 1, p. 291.

¹⁸ N. Z., *Z Opatowa*, "Gazeta Radomska", 1888, no. 57, p. 3.

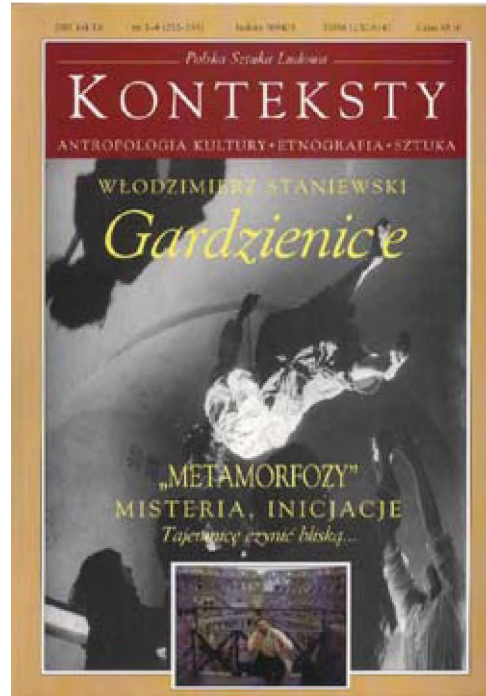
¹⁹ Bystron, op. cit., p. 15, 35.

²⁰ L. Marcewicz, *O zabobonach i gusłach przy narodzeniu dziecka*, Kraków 1876, p. 29; Frazer, op. cit., p. 217.

²¹ K. Wójcicki, *Klechy, starożytne podania i powieści ludu Polski i Rusi*, Warszawa 1972, pp. 220-221; Marcewicz, op. cit., p. 30; A. Fischer, *Zwyczaje pogrzebowe ludu polskiego*, Lwów 1921, p. 112; S. Ciszewski, *Żeńska twarz*, Kraków 1927, pp. 20-24.

- ²² Marcewicz, op. cit., p. 28.
- ²³ The symbolic name of the phenomenon (and not "the magic of knots", e.g. as Witort described certain activities of this sort) is necessary to underline: 1) the fact that the same range of phenomena will include operations differentiated as regards their form), 2) such forms can have totally dissimilar meanings in various ritual contexts, i.e. not every knot is an element of Alcmene's magic and not always will it be connected with the tying and untying of knots.
- ²⁴ An association universal in nineteenth-century ethnographic literature. See also: Talko-Hryniewicz, op. cit., p. 75.
- ²⁵ All numerical data pertain to a representative sample of fifty selected publications. Importance is, therefore, attached not to the absolute value of the data but to the proportions between them.
- ²⁶ A typical example of the prenuptial magic performed by Alcmene (+) is the ceremony of *rozpleciny* (unbraiding). See: L. Stomma, *Analiza strukturalna słowiańskich obrzędów weselnych* (typescript at the disposal of the Chair of Ethnography at Warsaw University), Warszawa 1973, pp. 7-12.
- ²⁷ Typical activity – the *oczepiny* ceremony (covering the bride's hair with a cap). Stomma, op. cit., pp. 23-29.
- ²⁸ In accordance with the recommendations made by Lévi-Strauss I regard individual cases unconfirmed by comparisons as deviations and exclude them from my reflections.
- ²⁹ Here, a classical example is "tying up the potency" of the groom, encountered all across Poland, in order to render him unable to consummate the marriage. B. Baranowska, *Życie codzienne wsi między Wartą a Pilicą w XIX wieku*, Warszawa 1969, p. 100; F r a z e r, op. cit., pp. 217-218; Talko-Hryniewicz, op. cit., p. 203.
- ³⁰ See: note 27.
- ³¹ Apart from the above-mentioned, other relatively common forms include: untying horses, damaging the threshold, taking covers off pots, etc.
- ³² Additional mention is due to: tying a chain or a rope around a tree, shutting doors, a metaphorical closing of the world (?) with a key moved about in the air, etc.
- ³³ I intentionally bypassed the role of the dual nature of posthumous operations since it is difficult to determine which comprise an element of the burial ceremonial and which, focused on the future, are supposed to facilitate the return (rebirth) of the deceased; they are thus rather connected with birth.
- ³⁴ A. Van Gennep, *Rites de passage*, Paris 1909, pp. 14-18, 271-279.
- ³⁵ The period of transition is situated between two separate states, thus linking simultaneously the elements of both. This process can be described as: $A = (x + y)$ and $(-x - y)$. Note: this formula is not a logical sentence.
- ³⁶ It must be stressed that we regard as *rites de passage* only those that separate differentiated time categories. Not every annual festivity, therefore, is a *rite de passage*.
- ³⁷ I have in mind a general tendency, since there exists a certain small collection of forms of Alcmene's magic specific for particular ritual cycles.
- ³⁸ Operations + occur in the case of all the saints in the table. See, i.a. R. Tomicki, *Wierzenia i obrzędy związane ze śmiercią w tradycji społeczności wiejskich* (typescript at the disposal of the Chair of Ethnography at Warsaw University), Warszawa 1972, pp. 84-85, 129-130; W. Kosiński, *Materyały etnograficzne zebrane w różnych okolicach Galicji Zachodniej*, Kraków 1903, p. 62, 63, 66, 78, 84; W. Klinger, *Doroczne święta ludowe a tradycje greckorzymskie*, Kraków 1931, p. 77; Baranowski, op. cit., p. 80; Świętek, op. cit., p. 558; Bystron, op. cit., p. 15.
- ³⁹ This is a splendid example of enhancing magic by closing an object that by the very nature of things possesses opposite properties. W. Szuchiewicz, *Huculszczyzna*, Lwów 1904, vol. III, p. 248 and p. 12, 14, 18, 221, 224, 226, 243, 246, 248-250, 268, 294.
- ⁴⁰ Moszyński, op. cit., vol. II, part 1, pp. 318-324.
- ⁴¹ It should be stressed that all *rites de passage* enumerated in the table possess a distinctive solar nature. They do not, however, include *rites de passage* of the economic cycle.
- ⁴² This holiday is celebrated predominantly in regions inhabited by a Russian Orthodox population.
- ⁴³ See above.
- ⁴⁴ The application of Alcmene's magic is rather clearly associated with the autumn equinox, while its connection with the feast day of St. Michael is presumably rather late (nineteenth century?).
- ⁴⁵ V a n Gennep, op. cit., pp. 271-279.
- ⁴⁶ Świętek, op. cit., pp. 539-540; Tomicki, op. cit., pp. 82-84.
- ⁴⁷ K. Koranyi, *Czary i gusła przed sądami kościelnymi*, "Lud", vol. XXVI, fasc. 2, p. 11, 17.
- ⁴⁸ I. a. M. El i a d e, *Sacrum – mit – historia*, Warszawa 1970, p. 89.
- ⁴⁹ F. Gajczyk, *Teodulja*, Kraków 1900, pp. 112-132.
- ⁵⁰ Ł. Gołębiowski, *Lud polski, jego zwyczaje i zabobony*, Warszawa 1830, p. 150, 170-171; R. Lilienthalowa, *Święta żydowskie w przeszłości i teraźniejszości*, Kraków 1919, p. 26; Baranowski, op. cit., p. 106; Klinger, op. cit., p. 58; Kosiński, op. cit., p. 11; Moszyński, op. cit., vol. II, part 1, passim; Tomicki, op. cit., pp. 77-81, 83, 88-90, 100-102.
- ⁵¹ For example, a phase in the family cycle between death and rebirth.
- ⁵² The table takes into account only 91,22% of the general set (see: note 24) of cases owing to the fact that the remaining 8,78% are scattered across as many as 17 categories and possess the features of disturbances.
- ⁵³ In accordance with the previously accepted terminology we thus write down the phenomenon as: $(x + y)$ and $(-x - y)$.
- ⁵⁴ $A = (x + y)$ i $(-x - y)$.
- ⁵⁵ I. a. T. Seweryn, *Ikonaografia etnograficzna*, "Lud", vol. XXXIX, p. 340; S. Gansiniec, *Pas magiczny*, Kraków 1934.
- ⁵⁶ It occurs not only in folk culture but also in the "professional" magic of yore (F. Ribadeau-Dumas, *Histoire de la magie*, Paris 1965, pp. 80-156).
- ⁵⁷ For an explanation of the demonic nature of water nymphs see: Tomicki, op. cit., p. 81.
- ⁵⁸ Moszyński, op. cit., vol. II, part 1, p. 319, 322.
- ⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 323.
- ⁶⁰ K. Baschwitz, *Czarownice, dzieje procesów o czary*, Warszawa 1971, p. 15, 17, 21.
- ⁶¹ Owing to insufficient space I shall not cite proof legitimating the addition of the category of paths – this will be the topic of a separate article.
- ⁶² Certain ethnographers, such as Moszyński, accepted implicitly that due to the differentiated evaluation in folk culture of particular fragments of space, village borders, fences, the threshold, etc. always divide the states.

- ⁶³ Mentioned by Theophrastus Bombastus aka Paracelsus, and Johannes Trithemius.
- ⁶⁴ Moszyński, op. cit., vol. II, part 1, p. 202, 322; Świętek, op. cit., p. 459.
- ⁶⁵ T. Łętocha, *Granice i spory terytorialne w Afryce*, Warszawa 1973, pp. 19-26.
- ⁶⁶ The passage periods in the 24hr cycle are: midnight (24. 00), noon (12. 00) and the setting and rising of the Sun.
- ⁶⁷ Here, naturally, meaning: under the fence, under the threshold.
- ⁶⁸ Obviously, witches as living creatures do not belong to the category of demons. <» $A = (x + y)$ and $(-x + -y)$.
- ⁶⁹ I have in mind burials and sites of revelations since the remaining are mentioned in the table only for the sake of comparison.
- ⁷⁰ "All" means "all enumerated in the article" since there exist other ranges of the presence of Alcmene's magic.
- ⁷¹ The number of such formulae subjected to analysis totals 200, with the exception of four cases, i.e. 98% confirmed the observations presented here.
- ⁷² N. Mastret described this dimension simply as cosmic, which appears to excessively restrict its meaning.



Piotr Borowski, Expedition to the East Poland, see: *Koniec pieśni* (The End of Song), "Konteksty" No. 2-3/2010