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## The Problem of Mysteriousness of Baba Yaga Character in Religious Mythology

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*This article reveals the ambiguity of interpretation of Baba Yaga character by the representatives of different schools of mythology. Each of the researchers has his own version of the semantic peculiarities of this culture hero. Who is she? A pagan goddess, a priestess of pagan goddesses, a witch, a snake or a nature-deity? The aim of this research is to reveal the ambiguity of the archetypal features of this character and prove that the character of Baba Yaga as a culture hero of the archaic religious mythology has an influence on the contemporary religious mythology of mass media.*

*Keywords: religious mythology, myth, culture hero, paganism, symbol, fairytale, religion, ritual, pagan priestess.*

**Introduction.** “Religious mythology” is a new term, which is relevant to contemporary religious and cultural studies, philosophy of religion and other sciences focusing on correlation between myth and religion. This concept as well as its structural elements is being specified and elaborated in contemporary native religious studies (Ivanova, 2012, p.56). For example, I.N. Yablokov thinks that within the contemporary philosophy of the myth one can distinguish “syncretic archaic, religious, “scientific”, political, artistic-literary, ordinary and social mythologies” (Yablokov, 2012, p.91). However, stating that the archaic religious myth and the developed religious myth differ from each other, we do not find any meaningful units of this concept. It appears that the central figure in a religious myth is the culture hero, whose different variations have been already

examined by the author of the article (Ivanova, 2012, p.56). The subject of the research presented in this article is topography or conceptual space of notional understanding of the fairytale pagan culture hero – the character of Baba Yaga.

**Materials and Methods.** The earliest notional perspective on the given character is natural mythological interpretation. A.N. Afanasyev calls attention to the fact that Yaga flies through the sky in a fiery mortar, which she urges on with a burning broom and that during the time of her flight the trees groan, writhe and crack, and the winds howl. He writes that this mortar as well as the turning hut (hearth) is the metaphor of the storm cloud. Yaga possesses magical fire-breathing horses, seven-league boots, a self-flying carpet and self-playing gusli, thus being also the owner of the fast-moving clouds, heavy thunderstorms and bolts of lightning. When

chasing fugitive heroes, she flies after them as a black cloud. In parallel with Slavic fairytales with Baba Yaga as a central figure, Neo-Greek and Albanian fairytales display Lamia (witch, sorceress) or Draconida (snake). Slavic people themselves render Baba Yaga and the mythical snake as identical characters: what is attributed to the snake in one variant is performed by Yaga in another; in the Ukraine a witch is also often called a snake. Similar to a snake, she hides the springs of living water, copper, silver and gold, that is the treasures of the sun. Therefore she is able to cast foul or fine weather at her own will. Russian witches as well as Baba Yaga hover in the air in an iron mortar (kettle-cloud) propelling with a pestle or a staff (thunder-club) and sweeping away the traces of their passage with a broom. When they gather on the Bald Mountain, there are the fiery flames burning and the roaring kettles boiling. Thus the witches boil rainwater on a thunder-flame. According to A.N. Afanasyev, iron mortar is the metaphor of the storm cloud (Afanasyev, 1982, p.49). The well-known fairytale of Ivan the Fool's victory over Baba Yaga (she told him to sit still on a baking shovel in order to cook and eat him, but he asked her to show how exactly it is done and popped her into the stove himself) is interpreted by A.N. Afanasyev as the victory of the sunbeam over the black storm cloud.

Thus, A.N. Afanasyev underlines that the triune character "Snake-Witch-Baba Yaga" is the depiction of nature-deities or administrators of natural phenomena. That is why the romantic natural mythological school interprets the phenomenon of Baba Yaga by the reason that the most ancient notions of the world and its structure are the reflection of the earthly life in heaven.

The second view on the origin of this character is thoroughly developed by a Christian researcher A. Men, who emphasized the fact that numerous vulgar superstitions of sorcerers, hexes and witches echo "from the ancient times,

when sacrifices, spells and magic were in the hands of women" (Men, 1996, p.26). He thought the consequence of this to be the character of Baba Yaga as the mistress of the woods, birds and animals. Not only creatures, but also nature elements follow her will. She "hisses like a snake", "roars like a beast", is able to take the shape of different animals in which case reaching fantastic sizes. All this being said, it is possible to conclude that Baba Yaga was one of the pagan goddesses of fertility giving life to all the nature and setting cosmic paces, whose role has been diabolized since the adoption of Christianity in Russia. There was the character inversion from a beautiful woman into a hag and a malicious one at that, the one feared even by the children. The character became trivial and superficial, reflecting integral magical and ritual notion no more, but only negative moral qualities: likes stealing and eating children – so if you, kids, misbehave, you will end up on Yaga's baking shovel.

The third view on the origin of the character is Baba Yaga being a priestess of the pagan goddess Lada. The ritualistic school, the members of which see the actions of fairytale characters as the reflection of forgotten archaic rituals (V.Y. Propp, B.A. Rybakov, A. Andreev), indicates which forces Yaga served and what exactly she was "in charge of". V.Y. Propp analyzes several types. The first type is Yaga the Benefactor visited by a hero. She riddles him and then gives him a horse, magical items or rich gifts. These are the magic clew, the winged horse, self-flying carpet, seven-league boots, self-playing gusli, the golden spindle, etc. The second type is Yaga the Kidnapper. She steals a child and attempts to cook it, followed by the child's escape and rescue. The third type is Yaga the Warrior. She returns to her hut and cuts a strip out of the hero's back. She is endowed with unmatched strength, being able to fight two heroes at the same time without feeling their strikes as if they were mosquito

bites. V.Y. Propp also reviews the fourth type – Yaga the Warden of the Underworld. These types are represented in all Russian folk tales. But a more in-depth study of this character shows that all of these types are inherent namely to Yaga the Priestess, the performer of the ancient rituals.

The fourth perspective on the given character is mythological. She is the guide between the worlds, sort of a border guard. V.Y. Propp clings to the same notion providing the following argumentation. First of all, Yaga resides in the deep forest – the entrance to the underworld (Propp, 1986, p.53). *Koshnoe tsarstvo* (the underworld in Slavic mythology) was comprised of two layers: the one in the ground, where the ancestors remain, and the other below the ground, where the demon spirits live. In this case, Yaga helped a fairytale hero to sneak specifically into the lower layer to save the princess stolen by malicious forces, while ritually, as ritualists emphasize, she was guarding the entrance to the realm of the ancestors. She was the symbolic figure of an administrator of “the rites of passage”, when a person being tested sort of died under one guise in “ignorance” and resurrected under another as an initiate “possessing secret knowledge” after the ritual was performed. So a hero walks without purpose and stumbles upon the chicken-legged hut. He is anything but daunted by this sight and knows how to handle it – it needs to be turned in a specific direction. The act of turning itself is the symbolic opening of the doors to the underworld in the mythological universe.

The very hut can be viewed as a symbol. First of all, it reminds of the ancient totemic rituals or the rituals associated with the burial of the dead. B.A. Rybakov points out that “wooden coffin huts covering the urns with burnt bones in the cities of the dead stand in rows as if huts in a village” (Rybakov, 1988, p.12). Chicken legs are rather wooden piles saturated with bdellium. Another interesting version of the hut was brought out as

early as in the XIX century by ethnographers, who hypothesized that the hut is possibly a symbol of “labaz” (a barn), which is well-known in Northern countries. This is a kind of a household building on tall smooth piles intended for storing gear and supplies from mice and predators. These tree stands are always positioned “with the back turned to the forest and the front turned to the traveler” so that the entrance can be approached from a river or a wood trail. Little ceremonial barns with neither windows nor doors resemble the look of the fairytale hut even more. They usually contained dolls dressed in national fur clothing. The doll occupied almost the whole barn and served as a container for the soul of the departed until it is reborn in a child.

In order to get into the underworld Ivan has to become “sort of dead” since the living are not welcome in the realm of the dead. So Ivan must complete a special ritual – he must be served and fed by no ordinary food, but the food of the dead. In this case he can remind the mistress of the feeding or even request it. This ceremonial “decedent” feeding is declared taboo for the living so that one would not incidentally join in the underworld. Supposedly, these are the mushrooms (toadstools). Mushrooms are the food of both the living and the dead. Mushrooms often act as a classifier of binary oppositions in mythology: plant kingdom – animal kingdom, profane – sacral, “food for the Gods” – “food for the dead”, food – antifood. Exuberance of mushrooms is coupled with the fact that toadstools serve as the main ingredient of hallucinogenic drinks commonly used by shamans in their journeys into the underworld. Mushrooms are also included in the “life – death – fertility” triad, thus resembling the functions of the world tree (journeying to upper and lower realms from the center of the world).

Taking a steam bath is another substantial element of the hero’s behavior on a visit to Baba

Yaga. Therefore the hero's initiation to the underworld is twofold: through a steam bath and through a meal. In order to sneak into the underworld unnoticed the hero must get rid of the smell of the living. But only Yaga, who is in possession of the magical steam bath, knows how it can be done. Could well be the case that Slavic mythology presumed the existence of a certain magical bath besom used by Yaga for steaming the hero and forcing his soul out of his body.

The sequence of actions is as follows: the hero is steamed and clean – deprived of the smell of the living – his soul removed from his body – ritually dead – served and fed – joined in the underworld – served in the “opening of the mouth” ritual to be able to speak and see in the underworld – put to sleep – buried in the sepulcher – turned into a winged creature – continues his search.

The character of Baba Yaga herself is the reflection of Death. The words by V.Y. Propp may be in order here: “When Ivan enters the hut, Yaga is lying either on a stove or on a bench. She occupies the whole hut: her head in the front, one leg in one corner, the other leg in another. Or else: Baba Yaga lying on a stove, her bony legs stretched from corner to corner, her nose sticking into the ceiling. But nowhere is she mentioned as a giant. Therefore it is not her, who is too big, but the hut, which is too small. Yaga looks like a corpse in a narrow coffin or in a special cage, where people are left to rot. She is a corpse. Russian Yaga does not possess any other attributes of a corpse. But Yaga as an international phenomenon does have a wide range of such attributes of decay, which help us understand the bony legs of hers” (Propp, 1986, p.70).

Another native ritualist, K.D. Laushkin points out Baba Yaga being one-legged. He emphasizes this attribute being not yet adequately investigated, though meanwhile “this very attribute provides an opportunity to interpenetrate the ancient zoomorphic identity of Baba Yaga”

(Laushkin, 1970, p.181). In fact, some fairytales do call our heroine the one-legged. A character of the fairytale “Tsarevitch Ivan and warrior maid Blue-eye” addresses her, “Ah, you the one-legged Babushka Yaga”. In “Ivan the Fool” Baba Yaga appears in front of three brothers in the forest and “hops around them on one leg”. The other attributes of Yaga's leg are: bony, wooden and gilded.

Let's take a closer look at the symbolism of one-leggedness. In chthonic symbolism one-leggedness (lameness) is associated with the symbol of a snake. Remember Greek mythological figures: Hephaestus, Oedipus, even Zeus. K.D. Laushkin derives the following rule: “if there's something wrong with the mythical creature's legs, there's a snake at the bottom of it” or “if the mythical creature bears relation to snakes, there's something amiss with his legs” (Laushkin, 1970, p.181). The theory of transformation is as follows: 1) a snake (primitive stage); 2) a humanoid creature with the tail of a snake (Erichthonius stage); 3) one-legged deity; 4) lame deity (Hephaestus stage); 5) deity handicapped in one leg (Oedipus stage); 6) fully “humanized” deity with either a myth or a ritual suggesting former lameness (Zeus stage). Turning back to the character of Baba Yaga, we find that before death she turns into a snake. Therefore, according to K.D. Laushkin, the origin of the given character is as follows: in primeval times – a snake, the embodiment of death; in pagan times – Baba Yaga (the one-legged), Slavic goddess of death; in modern times – Baba Yaga (the bone-legged), fairytale character. So initially she was crawling like a snake. Then she started hopping on one leg (one-legged deity stage). Then she started riding her mortar on the ground and later on got off the ground to catch the air. The last Baba Yaga's locomotion, which is most common in fairytales, kind of represents her ultimate takeoff and full liberation from supernatural functions related to

earth and the underworld. She turns into a purely fairytale character and once again represents the “Snake – Witch – Baba Yaga” triad.

Now let's review another attribute – Yaga's blindness. Moreover, let's emphasize that the hero, who comes to Yaga, also complains about his eyes. He says, “First give me some water to wash my eyes, feed me and then ask whatever you wish to ask”, “My eyes are swollen”. In other words he is getting blind. V.Y. Propp considers such blindness to be a special mark of the chosen, matching blindness of males serving in initiation rituals against fairytale ephemeral blindness.

A mighty old man with huge eyebrows and heavy eyelashes is a well-known character of our native folk tales. These eyebrows and eyelashes have grown so thick they have caused completely blurred vision: it takes several strong men, who can lift his eyelashes with pitchforks, in order for him to see clearly (the tale of Ivan Bykovich). This character resembles Viy from the homonymous short story by Gogol. However many Viy's attributes were not included in the Gogol's story. For instance in Podolia Viy is viewed as a horrible annihilator, who kills people with his gaze and turns cities and villages into dust. People's imagination portrays Perun, the god of thunder and lightning, in the same sublime fashion: he hurls thunderbolts from under his cloud eyebrows as well as brings death and fires.

As Afanasyev points out, human eyes had to obtain mystic supernatural meaning under the influence of metaphorical language. What had been previously said about the heavenly eyes was eventually understood literally and transferred by human on himself. If the flaring gazes of Perun bring death and fires, then the same terrible power is inherent to human vision as well. Hence the belief in “the evil eye” and “the basilisk glance”. The natural mythological school does not contradict the ritualistic one here at all: quite the opposite, the fusion of these two viewpoints provides

further understanding of one of the attributes of Yaga the Witch: artificial blindness – the absence of visual light – the possibility of seeing invisible light – initiation ritual – new knowledge, new light leading to enlightenment – the recovery of physical vision. Such is the pattern of appearance of new knowledge and “witting”, wherefrom the “witch – Baba Yaga” dyad emerges.

So the possibility of seeing the physical world in a new perspective is not granted to anyone. There is an inversion – a reversal in mundane consciousness. Things, which are considered significant among the profane, are seen differently by “the witches”. But seeing differently is dangerous in mundane consciousness, hence the epithets of “evil”. Meeting a blind man is bad luck. Collective consciousness disapproving of such “knowledge” has endowed people with poor “abnormal” vision with the qualities of moral imperfection, envy, hatred and deceit. Therefore Baba Yaga has poor vision as of later fairytales.

Another characteristic feature of Baba Yaga is her strongly emphasized physiology. She is always portrayed as an old woman besides an unmarried one. Her relationship with Koschei the Deathless is complicated, though he is neither her husband nor her lover in fairytales. Baba Yaga is the mother to monsters. However, as of later fairytales one can encounter the following characters: her son – Oleshka the short-legged, the imps – Vezi, Sini and Puzi or just some abstract nameless sons. She does also have relatives: either the Yagishna sisters or the snake brothers.

But let us turn back to her maternal duties. “Yaga represents a stage, whereon fertility was thought through women independently from men. Yaga is the mother to forest beasts. Being a personification of her sex, she does not have any sexual life. She is just a mother already, being a wife neither in the present nor in the past. And even though she is never mentioned as the mother of beasts in fairytales, she has absolute

power over them, since mother is in the first place the master. She undergoes changes in a myth as follows: she retains the maternity attributes only keeping her power over beasts, and as the very life of a hunter depends on his game, she also keeps the power over human life and death” (Propp, 1986, p.70).

The ritualists conclude that ritual perishes but fairytale remains. Just as remains life in its concrete rather than symbolic aspects, just as remains death. What was attached to the ritual, what happened to the initiate now happens either in a fairytale or to the dead. This is the explanation of the hero venturing into the forest as martyrdom (or initiation); this also explains why from the earliest times the dead were boiled and burned just as the initiates, why the initiate had to lose his sight, why he was tested for his smell just as the stranger to the underworld would be tested in the future. With the advent of agriculture and agricultural religion the whole “forest” religion turns into sheer evil: a mighty wizard turns into an evil sorcerer, the mother and the master of beasts – into a witch, who lures children into the forest to “cook them and eat them”. “The practices, which abolished the ritual also abolished its creators and carriers: the witch, who burns children alive is similarly burnt first by a storyteller, the carrier of the epic fairytale heritage, and eventually by the carriers of the other paradigm. This storyline shows that it was created not during the ritual practices, but during the practices, which would replace it turning sacred into evil, into half-heroic and half-humorous grotesque” (Propp, 1986, p.111).

B.A. Rybakov has a somewhat different vision of Baba Yaga. He considers her to be the manifestation of a female goddess. This goddess was ambivalent representing Mokosh when threatening the harvest, and being the embodiment of Mara or Marzanna in case of a plague or a threat to human life. Fairytales adopted

the second aspect of this ambivalence – hostility to the world. “Yaga is lying in her hut stretched from corner to corner, her legs in one and her head in another; her lips on the lintel, her nose sticking into the ceiling, her face of clay and her breasts stuffing up the stove. This description suggests the given character’s connection with One-eyed Likho (a ravenous woman giant devouring people). Likho resides in the forest hardly fitting inside her hut and cooks the slaughtered victims in the stove” (Rybakov, 1988, p.219). In the other of his studies B.A. Rybakov points out Baba Yaga the Horsewoman riding in the lead of her host. In the “Of three kingdoms” set of fairytales Baba Yaga is in charge of the innumerable host issuing commands from the horseback. The heroes vanquish Yaga’s armies and she retreats to the dungeons followed by the protagonist.

B.A. Rybakov emphasizes that a variety of belligerent female characters indicates a different, other than forest type of Baba Yaga. This one lives beyond the steppe river, by the silken grass at the seaside. Pastures, livestock and herds of excellent horses are constantly mentioned in fairytales. All of this is located somewhere near the mountains with cliffs and ravines either at the seaside or overseas. Apparently, as the author implicates, this is the pre-Turkic steppe realm of the Amazons of Cimmerian-Sarmatian origin.

Could well be the case that the armed conflicts between Russian bogatyrs and snake women in the “snake lands” reflect the setting of VIII BC, when male Cimmerians went on campaigns to the Middle East (722-611 BC).

The very means of fighting the bogatyrs, who reached the core of the snake lands, were different from the ones in the Cimmerian period, when there was evident aggression from the Yaga’s forces infiltrating Russia; snake women here are no Amazons, no self-sufficient warriors. This is just the women left in the rear with no part in warfare. The means of fighting the bogatyrs

here are purely female: snake women turn into ruddy apples, spring water and duvets in order to lure the conquerors and kill them subtly.

When in the snake lands Russian bogatyr is often chased by Yaga flying in a mortar. B.A. Rybakov interprets this by the Russian wooden mortar being similar to the Scythian or Sarmatian kettle on a tray and rallies V.Y. Propp's opinion of Yaga representing a "corpse", which cannot move on its own and for that reason requires some sort of an object, as well as Afanasyev's metaphors of storm clouds.

Now let us review another perspective on the character of Baba Yaga. A ritualist, one of the contemporary researchers of Slavic paganism A. Andreev argues that Yaga is the goddess of the Earth, the Moon and the Sun (Andreev, 1996, p.79). He uses an extensive amount of evidence making references to numerous folkloric and Indo-Aryan sources. Taking this viewpoint into consideration let us remind ourselves of a fairytale, which many folklore researchers often refer to. This is the fairytale of Yaga being the mistress of three horsemen. Vasilisa the Beautiful is sent to get some fire from Baba Yaga, and the description of her journey represents a tale of the Day in a truly mythological form – three horsemen go before her: the white horseman on a white horse (the Day), the red horseman on a red horse (the Fair Sun) and the black horseman on a black horse (the Dark Night).

The second aspect of studying Baba Yaga by A. Andreev is her being the goddess of Death (mentioned above already). This author considers her not just the goddess of Death, but also the master of the Souls. It is her, who sends them on Earth and takes them back.

The third aspect analyzed by A. Andreev is that supposedly Yaga is not a goddess, but rather a priestess of the mentioned goddesses (a witch). That is why she is endowed with secret knowledge. Supposedly, as a result, she was

diabolized and adopted a rather unattractive physical appearance. A. Andreev along with the other ritualists analyzes some specific features of Yaga's appearance searching for a key to the given character's puzzle. The first among others is the unfastened hair. A particular hairdo of Yaga is never mentioned, though fairytales hint at the unfastened hair and the magic deeds of hers. The national cult always associates hair with magic. According to the ancient beliefs the unfastened hair was the symbol of magic powers, thus being the strongest charm. The unfastened hair is associated with marriage, death and burial, saving the lives of livestock, people and the world. Having been forgotten, this cultural element turns into a threat during different times with the different mentality. Thus emerges one of the attributes of a witch-sorceress – the long unfastened hair.

Another ritual forsaken by people is the overbaking of babies. Much was written about it by many researchers. According to A. Andreev, Yaga is the priestess saving babies. The inversion leads to Yaga having the urge to "eat the baked child" as well as the witches urging to steal children in order to eat them. V.Y. Propp views this ritual as the overbaking of the dead as related to the underworld, but A. Andreev analyzes precisely the ritual of "the overbaking of babies". This was usually performed by an elderly woman with the children of her own; preference was usually given to the ones living a flawless moral life. Moreover, a special ritual emphasis in terms of childbearing was attributed to the Hearth (supposedly, according to the Law of Similarity in sympathetic magic – like produces like). By the way A. Andreev thinks that "not only the Hearth possesses the qualities of the womb, but also the Womb possesses the qualities of the hearth, its fieriness in particular. Isn't this the origin of colloquial terms such as the fervor of love or the fiery passion, which are directly relevant to

childbearing?” (Andreev, 1996, p.80). Therefore the description of the overbaking ritual or any of Yaga’s actions is the description of the rituals related to obstetrics and protecting the child either prematurely born or the one born with rickets. For this purpose a child was wrapped in a big johnnycake (“the mother’s womb”), put inside the heated hearth on a baking shovel for a short period of time and then taken out and covered by a rotten pan. The ritual’s meaning was sort of the second birth of a child after the first unsuccessful one. In this case the great importance was attached to the magic actions; therefore the “ignorant” ones were not allowed to participate. The ritual actions have been forgotten but fairytales, which take everything literally and aim at teaching the younger generation of good and evil, remained. In this case good turned into evil and anchored as edification: common people are not allowed to do this.

Let’s turn back to the priestess, who aided new mothers. A. Andreev tries to analyze the Yaga’s name. He writes that “*to yagat*” means “to shout loudly, to cry during birth. People enrage themselves in a similar fashion before fighting or during the fight in order not to feel pain. This gives ground for thinking that “*to yagat*” means not just to cry and shout, but to let out a torrent of raging power with one’s voice”. The researcher also concludes that most probably Yaga is one of the birthing mothers, the Mother of the Harvest and the Mother of the Gods and the witches following her lead are the priestesses. Alternatively she is the teacher, mentor or sort of an examiner in the female initiation rituals (Andreev, 1996, p.85).

As a cultural hero of religious mythology Yaga possesses the magic items – the fetishes. In many texts she is the keeper of life force and the essence of life taking shape of magic water contained in two barrels or wells with the living and dead water. Supposedly, the “living” and

“dead” water are the symbols of death and rebirth during the initiation ritual.

**Results.** Having mentioned a fair number of perspectives on the character of Baba Yaga, what kind of results do we arrive at? It would be certainly fascinating to identify her with one of the goddesses of the Slavic pantheon – Mokosh, Lada, Rozhanitsa (a pagan goddess with a favorable role) or Mara (an unfavorable role). Nonetheless the abundance of the analyzed data leads us to the conclusion that she is rather a half-goddess (a cultural hero). Why so? All of the researchers place her in one of the mythical worlds: either in the upper one, where she possesses the water of nature – the “living” water, or in the lower one, where she is the guide to the underworld for heroes searching for their stolen brides. Therefore she is the mediator between two worlds living in between. Moreover it stands to mention that the upper worlds had certain hierarchies with Yaga belonging to the “visible” upper world – in the sky or in the proximate lower world or on its border. She is the intermediate agent of the gods – neither a god, nor a human, but both. Hence she is the mother, but not a wife, the mother of beasts, but not humans, etc. As any mediator she does not have her own free will, she just passes it to humans, though not to everyone, but only to the chosen.

It is no coincidence her character being the one of a priestess, a teacher, mentor and the oracle of sacral pagan knowledge of Life and Death. The unfastened hair, the Hearth, the magical and the heavenly Fire and the apprenticeship – these are the symbols of the one bearing knowledge, passing and controlling it. She is in charge of people in this middle world – from the very birth (the Hearth) till marriage or death. These are the three major sacred milestones in life of every man in this world and all of them are accompanied by a priestess, because these milestones are full of magic and thus important,

with the whole social life ultimately depending on how they pass. This was mentioned by both V. Propp and A. Andreev. The latter associated the priestess with transitional rituals and thought that “concerning children and their education the grown-ups had to be utterly strict and precise. Otherwise the world would go the wrong way. A tiny mistake in education will eventually lead to accumulation of alien qualities and instead of a man you will bring something terrible into this world – an alien” (Andreev, 1996, p.89). Yaga did actually play a stabilizing role – the violation of the sacred rituals could possibly shatter the World of men. Hence there appeared a great importance of educating and examining the neophytes. Yaga was this educator (again as a mediator between the worlds), who brought harmony into this world and taught people of their social role by showing the initiates the Path of the social Force and the Path of the individual Force. She knew and saw something different from what common people could see and she passed this knowledge to her apprentices. Unfortunately, the concept of apprenticeship did not preserve in the Russian culture, but it does find evidence in the vast ethnographic matter of other nations, especially in an ancient Indian tradition of apprenticeship.

**Conclusion.** How come did Yaga turn from a protagonist into an antagonist? We mentioned this above already: the forsaken rituals turn into

fairytale characters due to the shifting paradigm and fairytales generate an inversion. Noteworthy is how V.Y. Propp comments upon it, “With the enhancement of the tools of labor, the adoption of agriculture and new social structure the ancient barbarous rituals are handled as redundant or even cursed and their edge is turned against their performers. If a man is ritually blinded by a forest creature, which tortures him and threatens to eat him, then the myth, which is already detached from the ritual, becomes the means of “outcry”. A similar situation happens with the burning: it is the children, who are burned in the ritual, but in a fairytale children burn the witch” (Propp, 1986, p.75).

In the following ages Yaga is getting even more diabolized and coalescent with the Western European characters of witches and sorceresses as a result of cross-cultural interaction. This is how we find her in Russian fairytales. Is this cultural hero relevant to the contemporary religious mythology? In a huge thesaurus of dualistic myths of life and death, good and evil, witches, vampires and werewolves – the characters of the contemporary mass media formation of myths, Baba Yaga remains a cultural hero – a mediator between the “diurnal” and “nocturnal” worlds and a profound archetypical character generating all of the basic mythologems of dramatic, romantic, heroic, pagan and neopagan scenarios in the contemporary religious mythology.

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## **Проблема загадочности образа Бабы-яги в религиозной мифологии**

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*В данной статье раскрывается многозначность прочтения образа Бабы-яги представителями различных мифологических школ. Каждый из исследователей данного образа по-своему трактует семантические особенности данного культурного героя. Кто она? Языческая богиня, жрица языческих богинь, ведьма, змея, повелительница небесных стихий? Цель исследования автора статьи – раскрыть многозначность архетипических характеристик этого образа и доказать влияние образа Бабы-яги как культурного героя архаической религиозной мифологии на современную религиозную мифологию средств массовой информации.*

*Ключевые слова: религиозная мифология, миф, культурный герой, язычество, символ, волшебная сказка, религия, ритуал, языческая жрица.*

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