

## **How the Third Son Kills Oedipus in Bulgaria?**

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### **Abstract**

The main purpose of our presentation is related to the idea that “different type of culture needs different type of family therapy”.

Firstly we had to find what is the main difference in family models between our culture and west European culture and then we will think about specific Bulgarian family therapy model.

After 6 years of researches of Bulgarian fairytales, myths and beliefs, historical texts and work with families and family models we found that:

The main difference of our culture from the west European is “the cult of the third son”. This cult seems to be basic for communication on our society. In the west European culture the first son inherited everything – money, power, land etc. In this culture the Oedipus complex solves the incest problem.

In our culture the same problem is solved by the cult to the youngest son. The third son is very important and special for the mother. There are a lot of expectations from him. When he reaches the majority his mother already is out of the generative age. Our society encourages extremely close relationships between mother and the youngest son.

No matter that this beliefs are related to the traditional culture they are still available now, when our society is in transition to the postmodern world.

We hope that various models family therapy in different cultures will be discussed.

## **How the Third Son Kills Oedipus in Bulgaria?**

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We are from Bulgaria. Our country is a small, Eastern European country which has existed for more than 1300 years. Our nation is synthetic and consists of three separate communities: Thracians, Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century the Proto-Bulgarians came to our lands from the Provolzhie region (see map). They brought with them their myths, beliefs and traditions. They were a very bellicose people and managed to impose themselves upon the local population. Thus, little or no trace of Thracian or Slav traditions remains in our beliefs. The cultural features of the Bulgarian families are mainly based on beliefs typical of Central Asia.

Bulgarian families are different from Western European families. This fact is explained in the first year of family therapy training. The question which has always concerned us is, “**What is the fundamental difference?**” Why are we more communicative and the Western Europeans richer? Why do we share our food and why are we “warm” and hospitable. While they are more individualistic? Our basic assumption in our entire process of training was connected with the belief that our culture tends more to validate the value system connected with motherhood.

This presentation will examine the question of the difference – something which has always been exceptionally important.

Taking into account the characteristic features of the Bulgarian family we were convinced that the difference is at a fundamental, basic level. This belief was probably brought here with the arrival of the Asparuh Proto-Bulgarians from the valley of the Volga river. Our initial ideas were connected with the existence of a female divinity (the Great Mother God), a belief in which leads to a more systematic structure of society. This is a basic difference with the individualistic nature of the Western European society in which the individual is most important. In searching for evidence of this theory, five years ago we undertook a study of the museums and cultural monuments of Eastern Bulgaria. We spent many hours in the National Historical Museum in Sofia. We spoke to historians, cultural specialists and academics, including an academic born in Podvolzhie and later came to Bulgaria. It became clear that the Proto-Bulgarians only brought their god, Tangra, to Bulgaria. They had no female divinity. They only female divinities which existed in our lands dated from the Thracian period, i.e. 3-4000 BC. Beliefs in Bendida, Kibela and Leda have disappeared.

Despite our great disappointment that there was no female divinity, we decided that there must be a belief which would explain our family models. We read all the major historical sources which described the beliefs and the domestic life of the Proto-Bulgarians. In the "History of the Bulgarians – from Antiquity to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century", historians refer to ideas concerning the existence of a female divinity amongst the Proto-Bulgarians. In their opinion "the Bulgarians probably had a cult of the female divinity connected with the idea of birth (fecund nature bearing land and all that lives on it), but for the moment nothing positive can be confirmed. Attempts to postulate the existence of the Turkic goddess Umai amongst the Bulgarian pantheon after conversion to Christianity are entirely hypothetical and for the period from the 7<sup>th</sup> century at least can not be supported by specific source evidence". This process was very emotional, since modern culture looks for cults and secret beliefs as explanation. However, it is clear that a belief can indeed be sustained for many centuries by being simply shared by the entire community and people.

According to Herodotus the Scythians and their descendant Iranian and Turkic-Mongol ethnoses bore the practice of the youngest son, Prince Guardian of the domestic hearth. (Amongst the Turkic-Mongols this practice is known as ot-chigin or ot-tigin). The name ot-tigin was given to the youngest son of the ruler and for this reason he was given the honour and obligation to remain and learn the details of ruling within the paternal home. It could also be considered that this is related to the cult of fire amongst the Bulgarians. Herodotus also mentions that the Scythians worshipped the fire in the royal hearth, while Polienus indicates that the Sac revered eternal fire and holy water. An echo of this practice is probably the above-mentioned ot-tigin, or "prince of the fire" and protector of the heart, "the concentration" of the state. He was responsible for maintaining the fire in the paternal hearth.

This is typical for the steppe nations, such as the Bulgarian nation. Studying Bulgarian folk tales, beliefs, myths and legends, we inevitably come to the conclusion that within the Proto-Bulgarian beliefs it is the third son who is encumbered with the greatest expectations. What we know is that the third son of a mother is considered the most healthy. There is still a practice in Central Asia – Turkmenistan, in which the first child is given to the parents of the father, the second is given to the parents of the mother, while the family only raise the third child.

The taboo against incest in Western European models is based on the Oedipus complex. In our family models the danger of incest is resolved through the cult towards the smallest (in particular the third) son. At the moment when the youngest son reaches sexual maturity, the mother has already outgrown her fertile age which reduced the threat of incest.

On the other hand our personal experience confirms the serious expectation which is imposed on the smallest child in the family, especially when the family has no son. These expectations personally brought me into the programme of family therapy.

Since we were convinced that a different culture needs a different type of family therapy, our main aim was to discover and describe the ways in which we adapted family therapy to Bulgarian family models.

The differences between Eastern and Western cultures have been a very common subject of discussion and research in recent years. Although borders have been falling in Europe over recent years, we still consider that the symbolic border from St. Petersburg to Trieste still exists. It separates Europe into an eastern and western part.

From a historical perspective, the differences between the so-called Eastern and Western European family models can be described predominantly as: different ages and priorities for marriage, percentage of non-married, inheritance, and duration of widow-hood.

A comparison of the age for first marriage in Bulgaria with countries in Western Europe (England, France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway – described by Gaskin, 1978) during the 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries reveals the different marriage models in the two regions. Hainal who first introduced the concept of “European marriage model”, characterized by late marriage and a high percentage of non-marriage, also noted the boundaries between the “European” and “traditional” or “non-European” family model (Hainal 1965). In the first model women entered into marriage older than 24 years of age, and in the second model – less than 21. Another method for the comparison of marriage models is by means of calculating the percentage of the population which does not enter into marriage at all. The differences between the “European” and the “traditional” model are quite distinct, with the higher marriage age and the larger portion of the population which does not get married is typical of the European model. More interesting is the comparison of the date for Bulgaria alone during the 19-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The analysis reveals early marriages for both rural and urban populations and non-marriage is not encountered.

The important role of inheritance systems in the formulation of the structure of the household has long been acknowledged. Anthropologists and historians unanimously accept that “indivisible inheritance leads to a low percentage of marriages, predominantly composite households, while the possibility of division leads to early marriages, a moderate percentage of constant non-marriage and a high percentage of nuclear families” (Viazzo, 1989). Bulgaria on the whole fits into this model. Analysis shows that there is a predominance of small but family households.

Over the past 10 years, Eastern European countries have been in transition which has affected family models. There has been a trend towards the standardization of family models (globalization). The basic characteristics of the Eastern and the Western European family models are no longer so distinct. Despite this there are still significant differences. The family therapy in which we have been trained is in our opinion difficult to apply to the Eastern European family model. Our feeling is that there is a need to describe a different type of theory and practice of family therapy which would correspond to the different family model and culture.

At this point we will describe a typical Bulgarian family with which worked over a number of years. It consisted of four members, father, mother, daughter and son. At the moment when we began the therapy, the daughter was married and was living separately with her own family. She had one daughter. The family had been referred with a clear request for family therapy. The applicant was the wife and her application was connected with a last attempt to improve relations before divorce. The mother – S. was 52 years old, a transport engineer, and looked much younger than her husband, L, who was the same age, had only high-school education, and was a construction worker. Their son S. was 17. During the therapy period their son was conscripted into national military service. The main problem was they chronic alcoholism of L., which had led to major problems in their family and his work. Later it became clearer that there was violence in the family. L. when drunk had on a number of occasions thrown his wife and son out of the house into the street in bad weather. L. was the youngest child in his family. He had an older sister who was not married and lived with her mother close by. S. was an only child, did not know her father, even though she believed she could easily trace him. Mother, father and son lived together as a single household. In answer to the question “Who do you feel closest to?” during the entire period of the therapy the mother answered, “My youngest son”.

We would like to propose this case for discussion:

- What is your method of working?
- What techniques do you use?
- Approximately how much time would the therapy take?
- What would the result be within your culture?

Take a minute to think about it. ....

Your solutions illustrate the cultural differences. What we did was to use all these techniques over a number of years. Sessions with the family took place over 6 month cycles. Each time there was an improvement, after which things went back to the way they were. So we decided to change something in the therapy, in order to achieve a more durable and stable change. The technique which best corresponded to the specific features of Bulgarian culture in our opinion was a narrative technique – the writing of a personal fairy-tale. With regard to S. and L.’s family the construction of a personal fairy-tale began at the moment when we realized that we had to elevate the therapy to a symbolic level, in order to achieve a lasting change for the family and avoid their dependence on the therapist and therapy. This is the story which we wrote for the family. It is called “The Fairy-tale of the Fire”. The title came from the L’s ability to light fire and the way in which his wife connected him with it. The other theme was the above-mentioned cult of the Proto-Bulgarians for holy fire and the little prince, guardian of the fire in the paternal hearth.

### ***The fairy- tale of the fire***

*Once upon a time there was a Queen and a King. The day after their wedding some soothsayers came to the castle to foretell the young family about their long and happy life, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. When the soothsayers left the Royal servant ran into the great hall where the King and the Queen were and summoned them to the bedroom, where a miracle had taken place. In a corner of the Royal bedroom there was a wonderful fire burning.*

*Years passed and the Royal family lived happily and joyfully. There was peace, calm and harmony throughout the kingdom. The strange fire in the bedroom continued to burn of its own volition. A daughter and a son were born to the King and the Queen.*

*Time passed, the children grew up and turned into a beautiful Prince and Princess. Watching them grow up the Queen felt more and more lonely and the day on which they were to leave home was approaching.*

*One day the young Princess married the Prince from the neighbouring village and left home to live with him. The Prince had grown up as well and the Queen felt more and more lonely, since she had nothing to fill her time with. Since their kingdom was so big and it was difficult for the King to rule alone, even though he was so strong, the Queen decided to take part in the government and help the King in affairs of the country. To begin with the King was very happy, seeing what a clever and capable woman his wife was and how well she managed the Royal duties. However, the more royal duties she took upon herself, the more unnecessary he began to feel.*

*Gradually the members of the Royal court began to see the sadness on the face of their King and gave more power to the Queen in a desire to protect the King. However, since that did not help, the members of the Royal court worked together and built a tall tower in which the King could be alone and rule without the interference of his Queen.*

*Day after day the King began to spend more and more time in the tower. Over the years the people began to call the tower "The Tower of Pride". In their desire to help their King the members of the Royal court showed him the cult of the new God. He accepted the new God and began to feel like a King again.*

*The Queen spent more and more time with the young Prince, who still had not married.*

*During all these years the strange fire in the Royal bedroom continued to burn, but its power had begun to wane.*

*Years passed and the beauty of the Queen began to fade and her strengths began to fail. There was a rumour in the Kingdom that the Queen was slowly beginning to turn into an angel and she hid her angel's wings during the day.*

*One morning the Queen woke up and with horror realized that the strange fire that burned in the bedroom had turned into a barely noticeably flame which might go out at any moment. The Queen ran towards the tower, wanting to bring the King back into the palace, but the tower was already so overgrown with thick bushes and thorns that she couldn't get anywhere near it.*

*The people of the Kingdom rarely saw their King outside the tower, until one day the members of the Royal court found him staring with already unseeing eyes at his God, to whom he had dedicated the last days of his life.*

*But this story might have a different ending.*

*When the Queen saw the flickering flame, she ordered for the soothsayers to be brought to court. As soon as they saw the Queen, the soothsayers realized she had been taken over by*

*the Angel of Loneliness. They took the Queen into her rooms, asked all the members of the Royal court to leave and explained to her that this was the most terrible and strongest of all angels and that everyone was afraid of it. People preferred to go to Hell rather than fall victim to the Angel of Loneliness. The terrified Queen asked the soothsayers to release her from its power and cast it out of her soul. The soothsayers responded:*

*“Whatever Angel rules your soul, Queen, is a matter for you alone, only you have the power to cast it out. The only person who can help you face the Angel of Loneliness is the King. He is the only person in the Kingdom with sufficient power to defeat him and release you. The Prince is too young and the other Kings are too weak and cannot help you face this Angel.*

*At the moment they said the soothsayers disappeared at this moment the last flickering flame died.*

*There were only a few small embers glowing in the ashes.*

*The Queen was sad and wandered alone through the empty halls of the palace, until she suddenly decided to ask the King for help. She went to the “Tower of Pride” but it took her days to cut her way through the bushes and thorns. Finally she saw the door of the tower, ran to the King with tears in her eyes and told him what the soothsayers had foretold. The King held out his hand to the Queen and said that they would conquer the Angel of Loneliness together.*

*And the King and the Queen went back together into the palace.*

*The next morning they woke up, looked through the window and in amazement they saw that the Tower of Pride had disappeared and in its place there was a beautiful garden, and in the middle of the garden the Miraculous Fire was burning brightly.*

*The next day the Prince brought a beautiful princess into the palace. They held a huge wedding feast, to which the soothsayers came. They foretold that they young people would live long and happily.*

*“The Miraculous Fire”, they said, “will burn as long as the King and Queen are alive”.*

*Once again there was peace and prosperity in the Kingdom. The King and the Queen happily raised many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. In the memory of generations after them they were known as the Grandmother and Grandfather who lit the “Miraculous Fire”.*

The effect of the story was that the family stopped coming to therapy after 6 years. We monitored them over two years and the last telephone conversation took place in November, 2007. We learnt that L. had stopped drinking, and was working hard to cope with his alcohol dependency. Their son had started work in Azerbaijan, where he is at present. S. is happy and pleased to be able to help their daughter raise their two grandchildren. They have stopped discussing divorce.

## Conclusion

Every people has their own myths, beliefs and family models. If they have been sustained for 2000 years or more then they must be important for the survival of that people. Our belief is

that family therapy must know them, follow them and use them in everyday work. This speaks of the need to adapt them to techniques and not simply transfer them from Western family therapy. We have been trying to work in the way in which we were trained and use techniques directly without changing them. We found it difficult. Families didn't stay with us long and we had no sensation of enduring change. When we realized the need to study and use the fundamental difference of the Bulgarian family, the only path left to us led to the need to writing personal stories for our clients. When we understood the meaning of the cult of the youngest son, this process became easier. We still have much to learn and to perfect our techniques, but at least we know the direction and the way in which we must work.

At the moment we have ceased to work with families in which the husband is the first son and we are trying to write a story, but this has turned out to be the most difficult thing. There is no Bulgarian folk tale about the first son.

Thank you for your attention.

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