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POSSIBLY ORIENTAL ELEMENTS IN SLAVONIC FOLKLORE. *MAMUNA* [PART 2]

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Abstract

A specialist in Middle Eastern languages will likely be quick to associate Pol. *mamuna* ‘an ape-like mythological creature’ with Ar./Pers./Tkc. *majmun* ‘ape’. It is possible and indeed probable that this name is an Oriental borrowing applied to an ancient native belief, but a closer inspection reveals at least several other possibilities tangled in an ethnolinguistic web of potential confluences and contaminations. This paper presents the ethnographic background and some etymological ideas, though without as yet a definite answer.

3. Etymology

The belief in *mamunas*, and together with it the word itself, is most widely spread in Poland among the Slavonic countries. To the best of our knowledge, also all the existing etymological proposals focus only on Polish. Except for one, all reach out and search for the source among not necessarily very similar creatures outside Poland and Polish folklore, but at the same time overlook obviously related beliefs in the neighbouring cultures. We are not yet certain that the new bits of evidence presented in this paper bring us any closer to uncovering the origin of *mamunas*, but they have undoubtedly proved helpful in rebutting some of the previous ideas.

3.1. Carpathian *mamuna*

Let us briefly inspect all those languages and countries which we suspect might be of any relevance for us here. When doing this, we will generally omit the Biblical *Mammon* ‘wealth’, ‘personification of greed’; it is rather widespread but, as will be shown in 3.2.2, quite unlikely to have a deeper connection to our creature than maybe an occasional, local, secondary contamination. The countries and nations are in the clockwise geographical order with Poland as the centre.

For Lithuania, which would have been anyway slightly too distant geographically, we have not been able to find reports of sufficiently similar creatures or similar names. Perhaps the closest is *maūmas* ~ *baūbas*, a demon used to scare children (Balsys 2014: 73, 85; LKŽ). We suppose that it may be connected in some way to Eastern Slav. *русалки* and/or G *Kornmuhme* (see 2 and 3.2.3), perhaps even eventually stem from the same ethnographic complex, but it seems unlikely that it should be the direct source of our *mamuna*.

For Polish-Lithuanian Tatars, we have not been able to find even this much. They, too, would have been somewhat too distant geographically (Kryczyński 1938: after 52, unnumbered map; Tyszkiewicz 1989: 236), but unlike Lithuanians they could be hoped to have brought to Europe and preserved the belief in *bičīn*, an ape-like feminine demon known to abduct and kill lone travellers, especially children (more on this in 3.2.7). Unluckily, this seems to not be the case (Musa Czachorowski – p.c.; see also Kryczyński 1938; Borawski, Dubiński 1986; Tyszkiewicz 1989).

For Belarus, specifically for the Polesia region, Vinogradova and Levkievskaja (2012: 470, 775) report the figure of a terrible hag, hirsute, with a huge bust, and generally looking like an ape. Surely, it is not unconnected to eastern Pol. *małpa* ‘mamuna’ mentioned by Budziszewska (1985: 119). A similar image, Vinogradova and Levkievskaja continue, appears under the name of *русалка* in stories meant to scare children away from going into the fields. It shares this and some other characteristics with G *Kornmuhme* (see 3.2.3), but seems to not go by any name that could be considered reminiscent of *mamuna*. We were also unable to find any such word in Сацько et al. (2004); Paškoŭ et al. (2005–2006) or any other source.

For Russia, we could find no accounts of our creature. In fact, several works cite the word *mamuna*, but always adding that it is not an eastern Slavonic beast; see e.g. Anisov (1994 s. vv. *богінки* and *подмѣныи*), Zelenin (1995: 21, 226, 312, 426), Gura (1997: 241), Levkievskaja (2000: 505), Tolstoj (2003: 563), Vinogradova (2004: 176). All five describe it as specifically Polish; Anisov (s.v. *богінки*) also mentions the Carpathian area. Other sources either do not include our word at all, or only cite the Biblical *Mammon* (see 3.2.2) or ORuss. *мамонъ* (3.2.4) (e.g. Fasmer 1967; Vinogradova 2000; Belova 2001; Černyh 2001; see also Preobraženskij 1910, s.v. *мамо́на* where unusual meanings are attested: ‘belly, intestines’, ‘glutton’, ‘layabout’).

For the Ukraine, the only relevant attestations we were able to find are the following three words included by Hrinčenko in his 1907–1909 dictionary (after UkrLit):

мамун ‘an evil spirit that abducts women and confuses people’ (after Šuchevyč 1899: 43 [perhaps a misprint for 69]; see also Hnatjuk 1912: xxvi; Janów 2001 s.v. *mat’un*) | *мамўна* ‘a closed, veiled figure’ (after Verchatskyj 1902: 433f), according to Budziszewska (1985: 119) also ‘mask’, ‘masked figure’, and ‘witch’ | *мамўнка* ‘doll, puppet’ (after Verchatskyj 1902: 434). It appears that the geographical reach is limited to the south-western tip of the country, the lands of Hutsuls and Lemkos, close to the Polish and Slovak border. For the semantics, cf. Pol. ‘dolls made from colourful pieces of cloth, hung on the door or in a window to scare away forces that could harm the baby’ in the Rzeszów area (Budziszewska 1985: 118).

For Romania, we found an attestation of *mamona* ‘a demonic figure who changes children’, but it is in a Polish dialect in Bukovina (Greń, Krasowska 2008). In actual Romanian, the closest shape is *matón*, but its meaning ‘devil’, and particularly ‘the devil of greed’, reveals that it is a borrowing from the Bible (see 3.2.2; dex-online s.v. *maton*; DEX; Hulubaş 2009: 608). The second closest modern shape is *maimúţă*, archaically *maimun*, but the meaning is simply ‘monkey, ape’, and dialectally ‘scarecrow’ – clearly an independent borrowing from Tksh. *majmun* ‘monkey, ape’ (Leschber 2011: 49).

For Bulgaria, there is the Tksh. *маймўна* ‘monkey, ape’ (BER; Геронъ 1899; ËSSJa), but apparently not anything closer to our *matuna* (see e.g. Геронъ 1899; Georgieva 1993; Plotnikova 2004, 2009) – except perhaps *мәмники* ‘wizards’, *мәмница* ‘a species of butterfly’, but dialectally also ‘witch, sorceress’, and *житомамница* ‘a witch who uses magic to take away fertility’ or ‘a witch who uses magic to move prosperity from one place to another’ (BER s.v. *мәмня*; ËSSJa s.v. **татъница*). Both these sources are most probably right to derive those words from **tamiti* ‘to delude, to beguile, to deceive’, meaning that their connection to *matuna* is entirely superficial.

For Slovakia, we have attestations of *matuna* ~ *mamona* with meanings related to those of Pol. *mamuna*: ‘night terrors’, ‘superstition’, ‘scare’, ‘magic’ (Smatana 2004: 160), ‘a repentant soul wandering the world in the form of a white dog, white horse, a dead person, or shapeless white mass, often not seen but only felt, who leads people in forests until exhaustion, leaving them in terrible fear afterwards’ (Valencova 2013: 198). The word is used in north-eastern Slovakia, in the Prešov area (not very far from the lands of Hutsuls and Lemkos). Semantically, this is not a perfect match, but definitely closer than the Bulgarian ones. We have not been able to find any more similar words, apart from the Biblical *maton(a)* (HSSJ; SSJ).

For Czechia, again apart from the Biblical *maton* ~ *mamona* ~ *matmon* (Jungmann 1836; Gebauer 1970; PSJČ), we have *maton* ~ *mamona* in the meanings ‘any supernatural appearance’, ‘bogeyman’, and ‘an evil, dangerous man’ (Bartoš 1885: 38, 40f; Kott 1890 s.vv. *maton*, and *mamona*; and Zibrť 1888, who derives it from the Biblical word). Geographically, it appears to be limited to western and southern Moravia. Semantically, these are perhaps even closer to Pol. *mamuna* than the Slovak attestations.

For Germany, we could find no more than *Kornmuhme* for the ethnographic side (see 3.2.3), and little more than the Biblical *Mammon* for the linguistic side (see e.g.

EM; Wörterbuchnetz¹). Both show a certain degree of similarity to our beast and its name but neither is likely to actually have been its source (see 3.2.2 and 3.2.3). The last possible creature is *Bäumann* ~ *Bomann* ~ *Bumann*.² It is a fairly prospective candidate from the phonetic point of view, but sadly appears to be too distant ethnographically to be regarded as a possible source (HdA s.v. *Bumann*).

It seems, then, that *mamuna* inhabits central-southern Poland (see Fig. 1) and northern Carpathians: Cz. *tamon*, *tamona* | Pol., Slk. *mamuna*, *tamona* | Ukr. *мамун*, *мамúна*, *мамúnка*. It is not very clear what the original meaning of our word was; the most specific definitions come from Poland and Slovakia (see above and 3.2) but they are hardly compatible. The one component that is common to almost all is ‘evil spirit’, usually one dangerous to children because it abducts them, or is merely used as a scare. The eastern meanings ‘doll ...’, ‘mask’, and ‘masked figure’ seem to be secondary (see 2 above). We should also take into account the gradual erosion of folk beliefs. What were originally various creatures become sometimes conflated, their names confused, and their defining properties distorted or forgotten. Perhaps the Czech and Slovak *mamuna* only seem so different from their Polish and Ukrainian namesakes because they took over the characteristics of some other beast?

Transmission over the Carpathians is perfectly possible (see above Pol.dial. *tamona* in Romania, and Stachowski 2005, 2007, 2012, and others). It is perhaps less likely that a word from the dialect of Polish Gorals (highlanders) would spread nearly as far northwards as Warsaw; the opposite direction seems to be more probable. However, central Poland is not a region that is particularly prone to borrowing (see 3.2), and *mamuna* is not only widely spread there, it is also almost limited to this area. The situation appears to have become a bit of a stalemate; we may be forced to accept that the history of *mamuna* does actually contain a less than probable leap.

3.2. Polish *mamuna*

Having established its background, let us now focus on Pol. *mamuna* because this is the word that appears to be the most attested and researched of all. The main shapes are *mamuna* and *tamona*; the pronunciations *mamqna* and *mam^hona* are probably just phonetic quirks, while *tamonia* and *mania* are local innovations in the area of Rzeszów, both irrelevant for us here. Northern Polish forms *mamon*, *tamón*, and *māmún* (not indicated in Fig. 1) are probably a separate word; see 3.2.2. The common, primary meaning in Polish is ‘evil spirit’. Beyond that, definitions vary in specificity, the most often recurring motifs being abducting and swapping children, anthropomorphism, femininity, ugliness, hirsuteness, harming

¹ The only out of the ordinary variant is *Mammona* ‘papaya (*Carica papaya*)’ in *Meyers Großes Konversationslexikon* (www.woerterbuchnetz.de/Meyers?lemma=mammona). However it came about, we suspect it is not in any way related or indeed relevant for our *mamuna*.

² We would like to express our gratitude to Dr Corinna Leschber (Institute for Linguistic and Cross-Cultural Studies, Berlin) for this piece of information, and for the discussion.

women in childbed, boginki (see 2 above), in the south also deception, and in the east strangling of people bathing or sailing the Vistula river. Exceptionally, the meaning may have somewhat shifted away from the supernatural (e.g. ‘an unlikeable, unpleasant, intrusive woman suspected of witchcraft’ near Gorlice), or from the spirit itself (‘dolls made from colourful pieces of cloth, hung on the door or in a window to scare away forces that could harm the baby’ in the Rzeszów area). (Budziszewska 1985: 118f; Dźwigoł 2004: 111f, 164f, 180, and others; Karłowicz 1903; Pełka 1987: 92f, 146f, and others; SGP).

The geographic reach in Polish dialects is shown in Fig. 1. It is specific and important, being almost sufficient in itself to rebut some of the previously proposed etymologies. Over the period of more than a thousand years, the borders of Poland changed both very frequently and very significantly. No single region remained fully under Polish control throughout this whole time; the lands that came closest to it are those that lie in the triangle between Kraków, Sandomierz, and Warsaw. At times, they belonged to two or three relatively independent provinces during the period of fragmentation between the 12th and 14th centuries; they were divided between Austria and Prussia during the Third Partition in 1795, until reunification as part of the Duchy of Warsaw in 1809, they were occupied during World War I and II, but overall those are the lands that form the very core of Polish geography. As such, they are the least susceptible to foreign influence and set the bar higher for etymologies that rely on borrowing than e.g. Masuria and Warmia or Silesia would, being borderland regions and having changed hands as many times as they did.

The reach of *mamuna* is nearly the same as the extent of those lands, yet almost all of the several etymologies that have been offered for it agree that it was borrowed; and that there occurred a secondary contamination with the verb *mamić* ‘to delude, to beguile’. Let us discuss the various proposed etymons.

3.2.1. Slav. *mami-*

The simplest version is that proposed by Miklosich (1886 s.v. *mami-*). He does not explain any details, merely mentions Slk. *mamona* ‘supernatural appearance’ while discussing *mamić*, and asks the reader to compare [Pol.] *mamona* ‘dziwożona [sic] who changes children’.

This suggestion is so vague that not much can be said about it. A contamination with *mamić* ‘to delude, to beguile, to lure’ is possible, indeed very likely in southern Poland (see e.g. *mamuny* ‘evil spirits; apparitions, illusions, delusions’ in Zakopane; Budziszewska 1985: 118), but the meaning of *mamić* does not quite suffice in itself to explain the whole of *mamuna*. It is *mamuna*’s contemporary image that may contain elements of what were originally separate creatures but clearly, its primary *raison d’être* is to abduct and swap children; see 2 above. Our word does not have so obvious a morphological structure as to justify an etymology with such a gap in semantics.

3.2.2. Biblical Mammon

According to Sumców (1891: 581), an author we were not able to establish suggested in the *Wisła* journal between 1887 and 1891 that our word stems from Biblical *Mammon*

‘riches’ and ‘personification of greed’ (Pol. *Mamona*), later contaminated with *mamić*. Also Brückner (1902: 94f; 1989 [1927]), Bańkowski (2000), and Bracha (2007: 312) subscribe to this idea.

The ultimate source of Biblical *Mammon* is not absolutely clear; it involves Lat. *mamona*, Gr. *μαμωνᾶς*, Aram. *māmōnā* and perhaps other Semitic forms, all with the meanings ‘riches, wealth’, ‘profit’, and similar (OED). Importantly for us here, the word spread across Europe from the Bible, and owing probably to such appearances as in Mt 6:24 (Stuttgart Vulgate): “non potestis Deo servire et mamonae”, it was very early cast in the role of personification of greed, became associated with the devil, and portrayed accordingly. This gives it two significant points of contact with our *mamuna*: the essence of its nature (evil spirit), and the physical appearance (anthropomorphic, hirsute, ugly).

We judge this to be sufficient similarity for a later contamination but it seems unlikely to us that Lat. *mamona* could be the actual source of Pol. *mamuna*. Firstly, it would be difficult to explain the semantic development. *Mammon*’s greed is for the earthly riches; *mamuna*’s is for children, but only so that she can place her own in their stead. Secondly, we can see little reason for the *o* > *u* change in the second syllable. In the early Polish translations of the Bible, the word is either substituted with ‘devil’, ‘riches’ or similar (e.g. RP: 280; Lk 16:9 in: BLeo), or rendered consistently with *o* as *Mammon[a]*, *mámmon[a]*, or *mámon* (e.g. Mt 6:24 and Lk 16:9 in: BBrz, BLeo, BNie, BWuj). Thirdly, assuming the Bible as the source of Pol. *mamuna* would rather complicate its relation with Cz. *tamon(a)*, Slk. *tamuna* ~ *tamona*, and Ukr. *мамун(а)* ~ *мамунка* (see 3.1). Quite understandably, Bible translators often viewed *Mammon* as a personal name, left it in its original form, and thus introduced to their native language. But our *mamuna* is only known in central-southern Poland, and marginally in Czech, Slovak, and the southwestern tip of the Ukraine, in fairly diverse meanings, none of which is particularly similar to the Biblical *Mammon*, and all of which appear to be remnants of a much older stratum of beliefs (see 2 above). It is rather unlikely that all should be independent contaminations, but it is not much more probable that they should all stem from a single one – or in fact, any intermediate position between these two extremes.

On the other hand, forms that do probably stem from Lat. *mamona*, via G *Mammon*, are Cashubian and northern Polish shapes *tamon*, *tamón*, and *māmún* ‘evil spirit’, ‘satan’, ‘evil spirit guarding a buried treasure’, perhaps also ‘juggler, entertainer’³² (Kolberg 1966: 421, 609; Budziszewska 1985: 118; Dźwigoł 2004: 111;

³ This last meaning is surprising. One way it could have come about is through a series of contaminations: *Mammon* ∅ ‘devil’ ∅ ‘monkey’ ∅ ‘juggler, entertainer’. (cf. 1. Mt 6:24; 2. HdA s.v. *Affe*; Janson 1952: 13–27, and others; 3. Janson 1952: 61, 171, 192f, and others.) Each of these steps is likely in itself, but how probable is it that all of them happened together and culminated in Warmia and Masuria? Another way would be a contamination with the verb *mamić* ‘to delude, to beguile, to lure’ – very often precisely the trade of jugglers, players, and other street entertainers. We are not certain how likely this possibility is; the two words appear to fit semantically, but in our experience *mamić* is rarely used in connection with entertainment, though cf. Kolberg (1962: 45f). Perhaps other explanations are also possible.

SGOWM). They seem to have no connection with children (and to have a connection with riches), their phonetics matches the German rendering (*Mammon* already in M. Luther's translation), they are geographically detached from the forms in -a, and moreover, they are used in lands which had for many centuries remained under strong German influence.

3.2.3. G *Kornmuhme*

Sumców's (1891: 582) own solution is that our word is a borrowing of G *Muhme* 'aunt', as used in *Kornmuhme* 'a corn demon', later contaminated with *mamić*.

Ethnographically, it is fairly easy to see why Sumców viewed G *Kornmuhme* as a suitable source for Pol. *mamuna* but the idea is actually quite problematic, and not only from the point of view of phonetics and geography but also semantically.

In German folklore, *Kornmuhme* is one of the many names for one of the many spirits that dwell in grain fields and crops in general. Their appearance and behaviour vary considerably, but what would be important for us here is that in the Prussian provinces of Posen and East and West Prussia they tended to take on the form of a woman (not at all necessarily old, hairy or ugly, however), and that this feminine spirit could be used as a scare for children to keep them from running off into the fields, as it was believed to abduct and do horrible things to them such as blowing their eyes out, selling them away, eating them, etc. (typically not, however, substituting their own offspring in their place). This may be a sufficient similarity for an occasional contamination but it does not quite validate G *Kornmuhme* as the source of Pol. *mamuna*. In addition, *Gersten-*, *Korn-*, *Roggen-*, and *Weizenmuhme*, *-mutter* and *-weib* (also known under other names) have some of their own unique characteristics – perhaps most notably connected with iron, such as iron breasts or a glowing, pointed piece of iron – which *mamunas* have not (Mannhardt 1868: 19f; Beitzl 2007 [1933]: 15f, 21f, 48f; HdA s.v. *Korndämonen*). Cf., however, *русалка* of the Polesia region in Belarus in 3.1.

Geography does not favour a German origin of our word, either; see 3.1. Phonetically, a transition from *Muhme* to *mamuna* is not entirely inconceivable but also not likely. It could perhaps be assumed if the idea had a strong ethnographic and historical backing which it does not.

3.2.4. ORuss. *мамонъ*

Budziszewska (1985: 119f) presents two possibilities. According to one, our word was borrowed from ORuss. *тамона* 'simian' < Ткс. < Ar. *maimūn* lit. 'auspicious', used as a euphemism for 'devil' because Arabs considered monkeys to be devils > It. *tammone* 'güenon', etc., and later contaminated with *mamić*.

ORuss. *мамонъ* ~ *момонъ* ~ *мамонь* 'a kind of monkey', attested since 1472, stems eventually from Ar./Pers. *maimūn* 'monkey' (Sreznevskij 1902 s.v. *тамона*; Fasmer 1967; Filin 1975-). Most probably, the word entered Russian through Turkic mediation; Ottoman and most other Turkic languages are possible (*majmun*) but the usually more readily suspected Tatar may need to be excluded as it appears to only have the shape *majmyl* since at least the 19th century; see, however, 12th–14th c.

Kipch. *majmun* in *Codex Cumanicus* (Men 1680; Budagovъ 1869; Kuun 1880: 128, 304; R: 1992; Drimba 2000: 107; TatRS). More on this possibility in 3.2.7.

Ethnographically, the Old Russian source is not impossible. Budziszewska (1985: 119) mentions that *mamuna* (the creature) also appears in Polish folklore under the name *małpa*, literary Polish for ‘monkey, ape’. The attestations are from south-eastern Mazovia, the Lublin Voivodeship, south-east of Lviv, and also from Ukrainian. But in itself, this piece of information does not in fact build a bridge between Old Russian and Polish; the chain ORuss. *мамонъ* ‘a kind of monkey’ > eastern Pol. *małpa* ‘1. monkey, ape; 2. an evil spirit’ > central Pol. *mamuna* ‘an evil spirit’ has but two links, and both are missing something: the semantics between Old Russian and eastern Polish, and the very word between eastern and central Polish. Nonetheless, see 3.2.6 regarding apes and their behaviour towards children, and for a possible parallel example.

Perhaps the only realistic way in which this idea can be rescued is to assume that *мамонъ* also meant ‘an evil spirit’, and that the word *mamuna* had also been used in eastern Poland at some point in time, between which and today it was replaced by its Polish counterpart *małpa*. Both are believable, but we are not aware of any piece of evidence to support either. We should also consider how ORuss. *мамонъ* could have possibly spread to northern Carpathians and central-southern Poland, leaving apparently no trace in Belarusian or Ukrainian. It was mentioned in 3.1 that we may have to prepare to accept an etymology containing a slightly improbable leap, but this one effectively hinges on three such assumptions.

3.2.5. Lat. *mammones*

Budziszewska’s (1985: 119f) other idea is to explain our word from mediaeval Latin *mammones* ‘simians’, later contaminated with *mamić*. She reports after Rostafiński (1900: 432f) that monkeys were widely known in mediaeval Europe, and Polish attestations are as old as the 15th and 16th centuries, among others for ‘guenon’ under the name *morska kotka* lit. ‘sea cat’, a calque of G *Meerkatze* id. We mentioned several times above that *mamunas* were often pictured as particularly hirsute, and Budziszewska (1985: 120) adds that in one of the accounts they were said to mew rather than to speak.

Indeed, monkeys were fairly well known in the Middle Ages and sometimes they were even kept as house pets (LMA s.v. *Affe*; Walker-Meikle 2012: 55f, and others). However, they were also very expensive animals, and probably more familiar to the wealthy than to those for whom folklore was part of everyday life. In fact, Rostafiński (1900: 433) mentions from his own memory that the first monkey was brought to Zakopane only around 1882.

As for the word *mammones*, it is included in Du Cange et al. (1883–1887) based on a single source (Guillelmus de Baldenzel, *Hodæporico*, p. 112) but further attestations proved very difficult to find, be it in databases (DLD; LLT-A; LLT-B) or through a Google search. More readily found is the derivative *mamonetus*, established in European zoology since the 13th century in the meaning ‘cercopithecinae’ (Gesner 1551: 968; Baptista Bernardus 1582: 52; Rohn 1764: 165; Thomas 1909: 558f;

see also Ambrosinus, Aldrovandi 1645: 244; GTB; had s.v. *Affe*; Stadler 1920: 1413f; Hünemörder 2001: 35, etc.).

The semantic aspect is here effectively the same as with ORuss. *мамонъ* in 3.2.4, which is to say quite acceptable (see also 3.2.6), but the overall situation is nonetheless different. Unlike ORuss. *мамонъ*, Lat. *tamonetus* clearly belongs to the learned vocabulary; the best chance it might have had to penetrate into the beliefs of the common folk would be through the clergy. It may have been that some priest or monk knew the word, identified it with an image of evil spirit that had already existed in the folklore (see 2 above), simultaneously with the devil, and then used it in his sermon, but we do not feel that this can in itself account for the spread of *tamuna* in Polish dialects, and beyond, in Czech, Slovak, and Ukrainian (see 3.1).

3.2.6. It. *gatto mammone*

The following is not a rigorous etymological hypothesis; our understanding of It. *gatto mammone* is not sufficiently clear for this, and there is also the question of geography. We merely mention the creature because it bears some ethnographic and phonetic similarity to *tamuna*, which appears to have been overlooked so far.

Janson (1952: 173, 194) mentions that apes are sometimes shown in mediaeval and Renaissance art and told in literature to abduct children and place their own offspring in their stead. This information certainly reinforces the semantic side of proposals 3.2.4 (ORuss. *мамонъ*) and 3.2.5 (Lat. *tamonetus*), but at the same time it introduces another creature, the Italian ‘monkey-cat’ known most commonly as *gatto mammone*, but also *gatto maimone* ~ *gatto maimono* ~ *gaito maimono* ~ *gatto mammono* ~ *gatto mammine* (de Ritis 1845: 111; Janson 1952: 194; Sciacca 2004: 103; Domínguez 2006: 15; Treccani 2016).

The word is attested since the 14th century with two meanings: ‘a species of monkey’ (probably one of Cercopithecinae), and ‘evil spirit’ (Borghi Cedrini 1996: 41; Passavanti c. 1355: 331.15 [after OVI]; Perfetti 2000: 173; Poggibonsi c. 1345: 75.8 [after OVI]; Sapere.it). Its etymology is not established. At least two sources have been proposed: Gr. *tamùni* ‘scarab’ (perhaps less likely semantically), and Tksh. *majmun* ‘monkey, ape’ (Battisti, Alessio 1975; Cortelazzo, Marcato 1998); possibly Lat. *tamonetus* (3.2.5) should also be taken into consideration. But the eventual origin is of lesser importance for us here.

More relevant is the mythical creature. Unhelpfully, its image is not very consistent. It is often said to be used to scare children (e.g. Janson 1952: 194; Contu 2004; Sapere.it), but e.g. in I. Calvino’s rendition (“Il gatto mammone”) it is a definitely positive, fair and benevolent character. Perhaps this is just a case of Calvino exercising his artistic license and mellowing a story he felt would be too harsh for the modern reader; but in the end, it is only the good sister who is rewarded while the lazy sister is cruelly punished, so the dark element has not been entirely removed. As for *gatto mammone*’s appearance, it seems that very little can be said about it. A feline image is sometimes mentioned, owing no doubt to *gatto* in the name, but we have not been able to establish more for certain.

Certainly, a more thorough investigation of *gatto mammine* would be necessary to turn this loose idea into an etymology. Whatever its results, however, it will be still very difficult to connect it with Cz., Pol., Slk. and Ukr. *mamuna* because there appear to be absolutely no traces of it remaining along whichever path it might have travelled from Italy (see 3.1). It may be that the only way in which *gatto mammine* will be of help in establishing the origin of *mamuna* in the future will be by providing a parallel example of conflation of ‘monkey’ and ‘evil spirit’ – and, perhaps, remembering Janson’s account above, with the abduction of children.

3.2.7. Kipch. *majmun*

The following idea we present with just a little more conviction than It. *gatto mammine*. It is certainly not perfect but it is perhaps more promising.

Turkic mythology knows several ape-like creatures, but one of them is more interesting for us here. It goes by the name *bičēn* ~ *mičēn* ~ *pečan* ~ *pičan* ~ *picēn* ~ *picin*, and it is a feminine evil spirit in the form of a hirsute ape who lives in abandoned hunting huts, abducts those who wander alone in the forest, especially children, and does harm to them; it is also known to take on a more appealing form in order to lure men. It is attested in Tatar folklore, in the area of Omsk, Tobol, and Tymen. Sometimes, it is equated with other creatures from Turkic mythology, *aršuri* and *šürele*, though to our eyes the similarity is less than striking (Beydili 2004 s.v. *šürele*; MNM and MS s.vv. *арсүрү*, *ницѐн*, and *шуралѐ* (the latter two are identical in both); Valeev 1976: 325; Zarišova Četin 2007: 8f.).⁴³

The name originally sounded *bičēn* and meant quite simply ‘monkey; ape’ (Clouston 1972: 295f; DTS; MK: 271, 311). It was later ousted by Ar./Pers. *maimūn* id., but it is not clear when exactly the change took place. Most likely after the Islamization, but this was a relatively long process. On the one hand, we know that at least some of the soldiers under Mongol command in the 13th century adhered to the ancient system of beliefs, while on the other, we find the word *majmun* attested in 12th–14th c. *Codex Cumanicus* (the modern Tatar shape is *majmyl*; see 3.2.4). We also know that a considerable proportion of the Mongol army in Europe was made up of Turkic peoples, and that their route through Poland led through the southern part of the country, with an excursion to the north in the centre – largely where the word *mamuna* is attested today.

It is tempting to speculate that, in the mix of tribes, languages, religions, and beliefs that constituted the Mongol army in the 13th century, the demon *bičēn* ‘monkey; ape’ would also have been sometimes called *majmun* id., and that this complex of beast and its name would have been identified by the Polish populace with their own pre-existing creature, so similar in appearance and behaviour (see 2 above). However, we must also admit that there is very little evidence of close contact between Mongol soldiers and European, or at least Polish folk. In fact, it appears that it is only in

⁴ Also in the Mongolic mythology we find a demon by the name of *mičēn*. It is, however, a personification of the Pleiades and clearly connected with Tat. *bičēn* only etymologically but not ethnographically (MNM s.v. *ми́чин*).

the 14th century and later, when Tatars arrived in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth on more peaceful terms (see e.g. Tyszkiewicz 2008) that such a contamination would have been possible (incidentally, cf. ORuss. *мамонъ* in 3.2.4.). But would the theoretical *bič'in* ~ *majmun* alternation still exist then, and should we not expect some traces of the belief to be found in Lithuanian folklore and, most importantly, in the mythology of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars (see 3.1)? These are rather serious arguments but, unlike the majority of the doubts that we raised against other proposals above, these may be hoped to be removed simply by a (considerably) more thorough investigation.

*

To sum up, none of the seven etymologies of Pol. *mamuna* is entirely satisfactory. All the proposed etymons show some degree of similarity to our word and its meaning but lack one or more crucial property and, in the majority of cases, are also unlikely for other reasons. Most, however, are sufficiently similar to allow the possibility of contamination – including even between themselves and not necessarily with our *mamuna*.⁵⁴ The semantics in Polish dialects varies somewhat and it seems quite likely to us that a considerable part of this diversity can be explained through the influence of one or more of the admittedly easily confused words above and the ethnographic complexes they represent. The details, however, require further investigation.

4. Summary and conclusions

The word *mamuna* is present in Poland in two independent clusters; the northern one in Warmia and Masuria; and the central-southern one which is geographically connected with (much rarer) attestations from Czechia, Slovakia, and the Ukraine. Ethnographically, they appear to refer to at least three separate complexes. The northern *mamuna* is most probably a borrowing of the Biblical *Mammon* 'wealth', 'personification of greed', likely via German (3.2.2). The southern one is more complex. It combines the ancient belief in child-swapping creatures with an equally old image of riverbank nymphs who lure and kill people. The former is more pronounced in central, the latter in southern Poland. This conflation results surely from the progressive dwindling of folk mythology. Czech and Slovak attestations represent the next step on the same path, where once dangerous demons are essentially reduced to bogeymen; the Ukrainian (Lemko, Hutsul) *мамун* etc., together with eastern Polish forms, constitute a separate branch, one probably closer to the central Polish group.

The origin of the word itself remains unclear. We are aware of five previous attempts at an etymology, four of which assume a borrowing. We add two new

⁵ See e.g. Janson (1952: 37) on the possible link between the Biblical *Mammon* and names for 'monkey' deriving from Ar./Pers. *maimūn* such as Sp. *maimon*, OFr. *mainmonet*, E. *monkey*, etc. Likewise, cf. ORuss. *мамонъ* and Kipch. *majmun* in 3.2.4 and 3.2.7, respectively.

ideas here, both involving a foreign ancestry. Contamination is also often raised as a distinct possibility.

Indeed, there is no shortage of easily confused beliefs and words. Demons abducting children, demons abducting children and placing their own in their stead, hairy and ape-like demons, demons inhabiting the woods, riverbank demons are anything but rare in European, and other mythologies: Tkc. *almas*, Tat. *bičin*, Slav. *boginki*, Russ. *chuchunya*, E and Celtic *elves* and *fairies*, Brus., Pol. *małpa*, G *Roggenmuhme* (also known under multiple other names, see 3.2.3), Scandinavian *trolls*, Sp. *xana*, and numerous others. Words sounding similar to *tamuna*, and possessing an element of semantic similarity, are also not in short supply: apart from the ones listed in 3.2.1–3.2.7 we can name e.g. Slav. *татънь* ‘foolish, stupid’ (ESJS); Bulg. *мѣмница* ‘witch, sorceress’ (3.1); various diminutives of *mama* ‘mother, mum’, such as Bulg. *мѣминка* (Герговъ 1899), Pol. *tamunia*, etc.; Lith. *tamántas*, Russ. *мѣмонѣт* ‘mammoth’ (LKŽ; Stachowski 2000); the many European and Asian offshoots of Ar./Pers. *majmun* ‘monkey; ape’, such as OFr. *mainmonet* and *monin*, OSp. *mona*, OOcc. *monina*, maybe also E *monkey* (OED) and perhaps even *mannequin*; Tkc. *majmun*, Kzk., Tat. *majmyl* (3.2.7; SKzkP), etc., perhaps also Oir. *momon* ‘mole cricket’, *nomon* ‘mole’ (OirRS; Stachowski 2000: 306f).

But contaminations, because it seems likely that some may have occurred, do not quite suffice to explain the *tamuna* complex. Ethnographically, the core of the belief appears to belong to an ancient stratum, but it has not been preserved unchanged. Etymologically, the name *tamuna* is more likely than not to be a borrowing, but whether it is Oriental or not cannot as yet be said for certain.

Abbreviations

Ar. = Arabic; **Aram.** = Aramaic; **Brus.** = Belarusian; **Bulg.** = Bulgarian; **Cz.** = Czech; **dial.** = dialectal; **E** = English; **Fr.** = French; **Gr.** = Greek; **G** = German; **It.** = Italian; **Kipch.** = Kipchak; **Kzk.** = Kazakh; **Lat.** = Latin; **Lith.** = Lithuanian; **O-** = Old; **Occ.** = Occitan; **Oir.** = Oiroit; **Pers.** = Persian; **Pol.** = Polish; **Russ.** = Russian; **Slav.** = Slavonic; **Slk.** = Slovak; **Sp.** = Spanish; **Tat.** = Tatar; **Tkc.** = Turkic; **Tksh.** = Turkish; **Ukr.** = Ukrainian

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