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SHVOT AND ISHVUT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ARMENIAN LOWER MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS

Abstract. This article examines Shvot or Ishvut, an evil spirit well-known in Armenian lower mythology and folk beliefs. Drawing on ethnographic materials collected from various regions of Armenia and among Armenian communities in the Kessab region of Syria, the study employs primarily historical methods, including historical-comparative and chronological approaches, alongside specialized ethnographic methods such as in-depth qualitative analysis. The research delineates the defining characteristics, functions, manifestations, and associated attributes of Shvot. The primary objective is to analyze this lower mythological figure through a synchronic approach, utilizing folklore and ethnographic sources documented from the mid-19th century to the present. Etymological considerations, name verification, and related issues are addressed peripherally using an asynchronous approach with historical sources, though these remain secondary to the study's main focus. Shvot is identified as a calendar spirit, predominantly associated with the Terendez holiday and the New Year. According to folk beliefs, the Shvot spirits reside in human dwellings during winter and are expelled through specialized exorcism rituals at the onset of spring, rituals that symbolically reflect the transition from winter to spring. The name Shvot exhibits phonetic variations across Armenian dialects, yet its functions remain consistent. The spirit is believed to inhabit homes, barns, and storerooms during winter, consuming food stored in barns, harming livestock, and deceiving women as an untrustworthy entity. Shvot is situated within a broader spectrum of spirits in Armenian lower mythology, and its parallels within the Armenian belief system are explored in detail in this study.

Keywords: lower mythology of Armenians; folk beliefs; calendar rituals; winter-spring period of the calendar; Shvot; Ishvut

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Исследовательская статья

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ШВОТ И ИШВУТ. СРАВНИТЕЛЬНОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ (ПО АРМЯНСКИМ НИЗШИМ МИФОЛОГИЧЕСКИМ ПЕРСОНАЖАМ)

Аннотация. Данная статья посвящена Швоту или Ишвуту – злему духу, широко известному в армянских низших мифологических сказаниях и народных верованиях. Статья основана на материалах, собранных в различных этнографических регионах Армении и у армян региона Кесаб в Сирии, с использованием в первую очередь исторических методов (историко-сравнительного и хронологического), а также специализированных методов (углубленного исследования), соответствующих теме исследования. В результате рассматриваются определяющие черты персонажа, его функции, проявления трансформации и другие аспекты. Наша главная цель – проанализировать низшего мифологического персонажа Швот, используя синхронный подход, опираясь на фольклорные и этнографические материалы, задокументированные со второй половины XIX века по настоящее время. Что касается этимологии персонажа, проверки его имени и связанных с этим вопросов, мы иногда обращались к историческим источникам, используя асинхронный подход. Однако этот анализ поверхностен и не входит в основную сферу нашего исследования. Швот является календарным духом, который в основном обсуждается в контексте праздника Трндез и, в частности, в контексте Нового года. По народным представлениям, духи швоты зимуют в домах людей, а в начале весны люди выгоняют их из домов благодаря особому ритуалу изгнания швота. Ряд обрядов изгнания швотов фактически выражает реальность изгнания зимы и встречи весны. Имя имеет множество фонетических изменений в армянских диалектах, но функции его те же. Он появляется человеку зимой, обитает в большом количестве в домах, сараях и кладовых, поедает оставшуюся в сараях пищу, причиняет вред домашним животным. Он также является лживым и неверным духом, который является женщинами. Этот злой дух принадлежит ряду духов армянской низшей мифологии. Злой дух Швот имеет свои параллели в армянской системе верований и это подробно рассмотрено в этой статье.

Ключевые слова: низшая мифология армян; народные верования; календарная обрядность; зимне-весенний период календаря; Швот; Ишвут

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Introduction

This study analyzes Shvot or Ishvut, a malevolent spirit in Armenian lower mythology. The term “lower mythology” was first introduced into academic discourse by the German ethnographer Wilhelm Mannhardt, a proponent of the Grimm brothers’ school of mythology [1, pp. 215–217]. In Armenian folklore studies, Manuk Abeghyan was the first to use this concept. In his 1899 work, *Der armenische Volksglaube* (Armenian Folk Beliefs), he classified the pagan aspects of Armenian folk beliefs as a form of lower mythology, noting its similarity to the folk traditions of many other cultures of the world [2, p. 13].

From the mid-19th century through the 1980s, during the Soviet period, the Armenian folkloristic school regarded lower mythology as superstition, and narratives about the figures of the Armenian pantheon were labeled as superstitious tales. However, since the late 20th century, prominent Russian scholars, including L. Vinogradova [3, p. 100; 4, p. 2] and R. Seferbekov [5], have concluded that beliefs and ideas about both benevolent and malevolent spirits are not merely superstition but rather an ancient tradition rooted in myths and mythological stories. This perspective is supported by numerous scientific and ethnographic studies conducted by Russian researchers on the oral traditions of various ethnic groups, including almost all Slavic peoples (e.g., Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Bulgarians, Serbians). Consequently, these scholars have minimized their use of the term “superstition” and now consistently publish their work under the headings of “folk demonology” or “lower mythology.”

This research aims to examine the mythical creature known as Shvot and the beliefs associated with it using a synchronous approach. The study draws on folklore, ethnographic, and dialectal materials collected from the latter half of the 19th century to the present day. The primary focus of this study is the field research and folklore-dialect notes gathered over the past two decades. Extensive fieldwork was conducted in Armenia and among the Armenian community in the Kessab region of Syria. The data were recorded through in-depth individual interviews with a wide range of age and gender groups. To achieve our research objectives, we collected lower mythological narratives about Shvot/Ishvut from both written and oral traditions, classified popular and dialectal versions of the spirit, and analyzed its role within the context of rituals, beliefs, and daily life.

The study’s methodology is grounded in empirical research, incorporating observation, material recording, and a synthesis of folkloristic, ethnographic, and linguistic data. The work also utilizes typological and phenomenological methods. An examination of the functions and behavior of Shvot is carried out in the entirety of its origin and development, demonstrating a historical approach using historical-cognitive and historical-comparative principles.

To ensure and support the reliability of the research findings, we have compared the results and experiments in the fields of ethnography and folklore, based, primarily, on two types of materials: folkloristic and ethnographic, which were collected from bibliographic sources, fieldwork and others.

Etymology and dialectal versions of the word Shvot

The word “Shvot” is of Assyrian origin, and is the eleventh month of the Assyro-Babel book, which corresponds to the Roman February and the Armenian Margats. According to that, in modern dialects, “Shvot” means a kind of demon that operates in February [6, p. 537–538]. There are a number of dialectal forms of the word “Shvot” from different dialect-speaking regions of Eastern and Western Armenia, Cilicia, other Armenian-inhabited places, such as Ararat, Shirak, Khoy, Polis, Sebastia, Karin, Kharberd, Dersim, Hachn, Mush, Van, Bagrevand (*Shvot*), Malatia (*Shivot*, *Shuved*), Nor Bayazet (*Shhod*), Balu (*Shuet*), Shirak (*Swedi*), Sebastia (*Shifot*, *Fshot*), Nor Nakhichevan (*Zhvet*, *Zhvot*, *Zhivot*), Kessab (*Ishvut*) and etc.

The word “Shvot” holds two main meanings: the month of February and a type of monstrous being.

The Month of February: Shvot is the name for February, a month traditionally believed to be a time when demons were unleashed to cause harm. A common saying reflects this belief: “Shvot out, March in.”

An Evil Spirit: Shvot also refers to a malevolent spirit that appears at the end of February. This spirit is said to inhabit people’s homes during the winter but retreats to the fields in the spring. While it causes some harm,

it is not considered to be as malevolent as the devil. To drive it away, people perform a ritual on the night of March 1st: a bowl of water is placed on the doorstep, and old clothes, furs, and blankets are beaten against the walls of the house. During this ritual, they chant, “Shvot out, March in” (originally, “February went, March came, winter passed, spring came,” with the metaphorical meaning that evil departs and good remains) [7, p. 540].

The forms *Shved* and *Shvet* are also associated with the holiday of *Tyarnandaraj*,¹ which takes place on February 14th. This connection is further supported by related terms such as *shvotahan*, meaning “taking Shvot out of the house,” and *shvotamis*, meaning “the month of Shvot, February” [7, p. 540]. Later dictionaries provide similar definitions. For instance, one source defines Shvot as “an evil spirit that, according to popular beliefs, appears in February” [8, p. 1119]. A Western Armenian dictionary provides two meanings: “1. Monster, afrit. 2. The last night of February” [9, p. 486].

The various expressions of the word “Shvut/Shvot” existing in the Armenian dialects, are considered by Armenian linguists and ethnographers to be etymologically accepted as the month of February, but almost everywhere among Armenians, it was not just a month name but it acquired a new meaning. In some ethnographic regions, the people call those spirits Shvot, which, in their opinion, play a negative role in their economy before the arrival of spring [10, p. 34, 9, 263–278].

The word “Shvot” means the devil. “As if that devil and his children want to own all the food and herbs in the house. That’s why, they are beaten and thrown out of the house [11, p. 191].” Based on the nature and functions of the examined spirit, ethnographers do not rule out that the Armenian word *Shvait* (*Zekh*, *Tsop*) is also connected with the word “Shvot” [12, p. 47].

Another phonetic variation of the name Shvot is the word *Ishvut*, which exists in the dialects of Kessab and Swetiye. The Armenians of Swetiye and Kessab were familiar with Arabic and Turkish languages, in which the name *Shubat* is associated with the month of February. However, they exclusively use the synonym *Piturvar* (February) and never associate their word *Ishvut* with *Shubat* or *Shvot* as a month name. Instead, *Ishvut* refers to an evil spirit and has no direct connection to the month of February (*Shubat*) [13, p. 120]. This marks a fundamental difference in the concepts of Shvot/*Ishvut* among people from the two Armenian environments.

Shvot’s functions

According to popular beliefs, the Shvots are invisible spirits who are said to descend from Noah’s son, Ham. Armenian folklorists have documented numerous stories and traditions about the origins of the Shvots from various ethnographic regions of Armenia. One such tradition recounts that Ham, being unfaithful to God’s command and disrespecting the sanctity of the ark, had a son with his wife during the flood. A year later, when God’s angel opened the ark’s door and counted the eight people to take them out, the angel asked Ham if there was anyone else inside. Ham, ashamed, answered, “There is none.” The angel then stated, “If there is one, let it not be,” which caused the newborn child to be transformed into an invisible spirit. This spirit grew stronger, married into the human race, and had children who are also invisible spirits. The Shvots are said to have multiplied greatly, and they do not die, as they are believed to be present in every part of the world. Because they are considered the “fruit of sin” and were not born of a holy marriage, they are believed to be the source of all kinds of evil [14, p. 210].

In Armenian lower mythology, it is etymologically understood that the Shvots appear in homes during winter, often on or around New Year’s Eve. In Maghnisa (Smyrna), Shvot was specifically regarded as the spirit of New Year’s Eve. According to local beliefs, “instead of distributing gifts to boys, they go around all the houses that have a person named Mariam, and collect gifts” [15, p. 293]. Like many other malevolent beings, the Shvots were primarily perceived as trickster spirits.

One common tale describes a Shvot appearing to bedridden boys who sleep without praying. The spirit takes the form of an acquaintance or relative, tricking the child into wetting the bed. In another account, a wealthy housewife recounted a story about her “washer” who was called to work by a Shvot appearing in its true form. After a long night of wandering, the woman realized she was lost and her guide was a complete

1. Tyarnandaraj is one of the holidays of the Armenian Church, celebrated on February 14th, forty days after the Epiphany of Christ (January 6th). The name Tyarnandaraj means “coming up to meet the Lord.” It is also commonly known as Terendez, Tyrendez, and Tyrntes, all of which are derived from the phrase “The Lord is with you.”

stranger. Suddenly, the companion began to shrink, eventually merging with the darkness and disappearing. By muttering the name of Jesus Christ, the woman was finally able to find her way home [16, p. 618–619].

Shvot is primarily a calendar spirit tied to the transition from winter to spring.² The term “Shvot” is closely linked to the Terindez³ festival, as not only is the month of February called Shvot, but the festival of Tyarnandaraj itself is also referred to by this name [17, p. 66]. This association is also found in Hachn, where the festival is called *shvet* and symbolizes Terindez’s arrival in February, a month that shares its name with the Persian word for February, *šubāt*.⁴

In some dialects, Terindez is known as “Shvot night,” and February is called *Shvotamis*. Beliefs hold that the Shvots spend the winter in human dwellings. There’s also a folk belief connecting the Shvots to sexuality. For example, when cats’ mating season begins in March, it is sometimes called the “month of Shvot” [18, p. 10, 54], and a young couple in love may be metaphorically referred to as a “cat of Shvot” [19, p. 88].

In Kars, when a wedding coincided with Tyarnandaraj, a disguised performance featuring a Shvot-cat and a banished woman would take place. Two men wearing turbans would participate, one disguised as a man and the other as a woman. The “wife” would beat and kick out the man with a broom, while the “husband,” impersonating a cat, would lie on the ground, clawing and grabbing the feet of passers-by while demanding gifts. The woman, meanwhile, would make distorted facial expressions and demand gifts with slapping gestures [20, p. 150].

In Nor-Bayazet, it was believed that the Shvots multiply by deceiving and luring people. They are said to live in people’s homes during the winter and move to the fields in the spring. February is called their month because their blood heats up during this time, and they are said to seduce people with erotic dreams. The belief also suggests that the presence of the Shvots causes cats to meow in that month because the animals are able to see them [21, pp. 107–108]. It is also believed that on the evening of Terindez, the Shvots enter the belly of cats and fight one another.

According to these ideas, Shvot is associated with fertility, rebirth, and the continuation of life. Thus, one of its functions is to inspire people with erotic dreams, which is connected to its association with cats during the winter-spring transition, particularly around New Year’s Eve. The month of February was considered the middle of winter by the people, a time of great concern. With the first vegetables not yet ready, people worried if their food and fodder would last until spring, and they attributed any scarcity to the work of the Shvots and other devils.

The following example of folklore songs are dedicated to Terindez, testify to this reality:

Տէրընդէզ, դարմանը՝ կէս, / Terindez, the feed (hay) is half over, /
Առ հաց ու կէս՝ էլիր գեղէս, / take half a loaf – leave the village, /
Տէրընդէզ, միսի դին տես, / Terindez, look in the direction of the smoke, /
Մէ փութ ցանես՝ հարյուր քաղես [22, p. 233]: / Sow 1 put (16 kg), collect 100/

By nature, Shvot is a voracious spirit that consumes a person’s winter provisions, as it is believed to live in abundance within homes throughout the season. In February, as the ground begins to warm, the Shvots are said to come and go, causing cats to growl and mate. This links Shvot to fertility and procreation, as it is also believed to inspire people with sexual dreams [23, pp. 263–278].

In the Sweida region, Shvot is known as Ishvut and is perceived as an insatiable evil spirit. This is captured in the comparative saying: “*Dz Ishvut i, na udilu g gshdanu, na khumilu g gsdanu*,” which translates to “He is Ishvut; neither eating nor drinking fills him up,” and is likened to a dragon that is never satisfied [24, p. 70]. In the Kessab dialect, Ishvut is defined as a “lunatic, sickly person” or a “monster, a beast-like being” [25, p. 250]. For many in Kessab, the term “Ishvut” is used to describe a person who is a glutton, whimsical, a drunkard, an adulterer, or even a blasphemer, often summarized by the phrase “*yntez Ishvut mi*,” meaning “he is like an Ishvut.”

The term is also used to describe devilish or sick people, as it is generally imagined as a monster or beast-like being. According to an elderly informant named Rahel Zahterian, Ishvut is a dark and white spirit in the

2. Shvot shares some characteristics with the “March old woman” figure, which is common in the Carpathian-Balkan region, a detail that highlights its role in the winter-spring transition. // Goland N.G. The Legend of the March Old Woman and its Reworking in Romanian Literature. *All-Russian Congress of Folklorists*, pp. 357–368.

3. Terindez (Tyarnandaraj) is an Armenian Church holiday commemorating the offering of baby Jesus to the temple. The Armenian Church celebrates it on February 14, forty days after the Epiphany of Christ (January 6).

4. <http://www.houshamadyan.org/arm/mapottomanempire/adanavilayet/hadjin/religion/festivals.html>

ugly form of a man that appears to women as they leave the pantry. The informant claims that a woman saw it in front of her house, drunk and with wine, and with a repulsive appearance. As soon as the woman said “Jesus Christ,” it disappeared.

Interestingly, in Sweida, Ishvut is equated with a real woman. One narrative recalls Ishvut as a once brave, strong, and tireless old woman who could single-handedly load a mule – a task that typically required two people. However, mischievous children mocked her, provoking her to curse their families [26, p. 208]. This account illustrates how the concept of Ishvut transcends a purely mythical evil spirit to become a figure with human traits, blurring the line between folklore and real-life associations.

In both Kessab and Sweida, the figure of Ishvut is linked to February and its rituals. Among Armenians, Shvot is a lower mythological figure with a complex gender profile, appearing in amorphous, zoomorphic, or anthropomorphic forms. Its functions include inspiring sexual dreams and maintaining a close association with cats, especially during the winter-to-spring transition, which coincides with the New Year holiday.

Elements of Shvot’s characteristics are reflected in Kessab’s Terindez rites. These traditional rituals, held in February, center on fire as a symbol of renewal and purification. Newlywed grooms would compete to be the first to light the pyre, pushing each other to reach the pile of maple tree branches. Once the pyre was lit and the flames had subsided, the grooms and young men would leap over them, an act symbolically known as “burning the winter” (*dzmery varil*). As the fire died down, participants would carry burning sticks or candles back to their homes to light their lamps and their home fires. If a candle extinguished on the way, it was considered a bad omen, and it had to be relit from another source.

The charred remains of the fire were also believed to possess protective and fertile properties. People would scatter the extinguished wood in granaries, gardens, and fields, under trees, or among their wheat and barley stores to ensure abundant harvests and protect against the evil eye. Similarly, in other parts of Armenia, fire was used to repel evil. The following day, women would visit churchyards to collect ash from the Terindez fire, which they would scatter in garden pits or beds where pumpkins were to be planted. A belief persisted those pumpkins grown in such ashes would never diminish, symbolizing endless prosperity.

In summary, Shvot in popular belief appears in various forms: a real woman, an ugly person, or a very thin and tall being. Shvot is also said to transform into a hardworking old woman or a wheel that rolls after people, catching them and subjecting them to nightmares. Like many spirits, Shvot can change its appearance; to enter a home, it often takes the form of a cat, slipping in unnoticed and bringing frost with it. Most often, however, the Shvots are considered invisible evil spirits that operate secretly without being seen by humans.

Banishing the Shvots

By nature, these consumer spirits prefer to live in groups within warm houses, barns, and pantries, where they destroy the winter provisions that people have stored with the help of *Dovlat* (a spirit of abundance). From February 14th to the 20th, a fierce battle begins between the Shvots, who have grown strong from enjoying the home’s provisions all winter, and the tired *Dovlat*, who has worked to fill the empty pantries and barns. *Shvotahans*, who are mostly women, come to aid *Dovlat*. The Shvots are removed from the house through a special ritual also called *shvotahan*.

On the last day of February, and in some places on the first of March, the women of the house strike the walls and corners with sticks, various pieces of cloth, and calf, goat, and sheep furs, chanting, “Shvot out, March in,” which means “evil out, good in.” In Bulanekh, one woman reportedly came out of her house at night and saw a Shvot standing at her neighbor’s door, cursing because it had been driven out of the house for the winter [18, p. 10].

A prevailing opinion about the ritual of banishing the Shvots is that the phrase “Shvot out, March in,” which was recorded in several regions of Armenia, was used by peasants at the end of February to bid farewell to winter and welcome spring. This proverb is linked to a myth and belief among the people about the evil spirits called the Shvots, which are thought to secretly enter a peasant’s home, harming their stored provisions and milking animals. The origin of the saying is clearly connected to the animism of the agricultural-livestock period, during which primitive people believed they could influence and use nature’s phenomena and forces through various magical means, such as formulas, rituals, and ceremonies [27, pp. 21–22].

In Kessab, women say “Issus Qristus” or “Jesus Christ” when they enter the pantry and open it, as they believe this expression helps to banish spirits.

Interestingly, the belief in and the practice of banishing the Shvots also exist in the Alevi villages near Kessab. At the end of the month, elderly Alevi women sweep their homes back and forth, chanting in Arabic, “*Kushsh kushsh ya far, rah Shubat ua ichha Azar*,” which translates to “Kish-kish, you mouse, Shubat’s gone, February has gone, Azar: March came in.” They often repeat this phrase while hitting a tin [28, p. 346].

Parallels in the Armenian and Kessabian beliefs

In Armenian and Kessabian beliefs, Shvot corresponds to the spirit known as *Purtik*⁵ or *Pupushic*. In Archak, these beings were imagined as “brown-skinned, very curly-haired, and plump, with bright eyes like a lamp, children in ruffled clothes.” Once a year, on the evening of the Annunciation, housewives would give little girls a lit lamp and use a giant wooden stick from the tandoor to draw a cross with its charred end in the four corners of the tandoor, pantries, grocers, stables, and other places. As they did so, they would constantly repeat the saying, “Pupushik, go out, Pupushik, go out.” This ritual would make the Pupushiks “to run away” and “go in and out” in groups to Gyazna, near “the great devils” [29, pp. 89–90].

Similarly, in Vaspurakan, a householder would wrap his head in a goatskin, take another skin in one hand and a sickle in the other. He would then walk around all the rooms, hitting the walls with the sickle and saying, “Purdik, out, Purdik, out.” When he reached the street door, he would add, “Purdik, go out to the green fields, cold springs, Kurdish houses,” before immediately closing the door. To ensure the Purdik did not re-enter, he would first place two wooden sticks on the ground in a cross shape, believing the power of the cross would chase the spirit away [30, p. 58].

In Kessabian belief, February is a transitional month associated with death, renewal, and mythological beings. One such being is Blder Ajuz, a spirit that is believed to appear in February to “collect” the sick and elderly. People would warn, “Pay attention to the sick elderly – lest Blder Ajuz come and take them away.” Those who survived the month were celebrated, and their resilience was acknowledged with statements like, “See, your tough guy, Blder Ajuz is not for you.”

Similarly, in Musaler (Mount Musa), February was also considered a dangerous month for the elderly. Those who lived through it would say, “*Prtu khisilen is dara*,” which translates to “I was freed from death this year.”

The Alawites in Kessab shared similar beliefs about February, calling it *Bard Al-Achuz* (“the old woman’s cold”), a term derived from Arabic. Over time, dialectal distortions transformed this into *Blder Ajuz*. Hail that falls at the end of February was believed to represent the old woman’s tears, and in Arabic, it is called *Ders Al Ajuz* (“the teeth of the old woman”). These icy “teeth” were thought to damage crops and symbolize the lingering cold of winter.

The last four days of February and the first three days of March are referred to as the week of Blder Ajuz and are considered a particularly ominous time. According to tradition, the old woman, busy with household chores, especially laundry, gathers her pot, bucket, washing basin, and a basket of rags and heads to the valley to wash in the ashtray. She places a pot on the stove, lights a fire, and boils water to begin her work. This narrative also reflects the joy and relief of the old woman as February comes to an end. An Alawite tradition includes a similar story, where the old woman triumphantly says, “Shubat has passed; we have put a needle in his buttock,” expressing her satisfaction at having survived the hardships of the month. However, February overhears her mockery and, though it is powerless to harm her directly, conspires with March. February says to March, “Four from me, three from you, cousin, to drag the old woman into the water.” The combined forces of the two months bring thunderstorms, torrential rain, and floods that sweep away the old woman, along with her washing tub, pot, and clean rags. This marks the conclusion of winter’s wrath, allowing nature to rest. Among the Alawites, the end of this turbulent period is marked by the saying, “*Rah Shubat el-ghaddar, ua ija Azar el-haddar*” (“Sneaky February is gone, March the spendthrift has come”), a phrase that highlights the continuing unpredictability of March. To protect themselves, they caution, “Keep the big stick for your uncle, Azar,” acknowledging the challenges that remain.

5. *Purtik* or *purnit* is a term used in regions such as Basen, Ararat, Mush, Van, Shirak, and Bulanykh. In Vagharshapat, Oshakan, Ashtarak, and Parpi, it is also known as *Purnuj*. It refers to a specific type of bread: half-baked bread left in the oven (in Shirak, it’s the baked bread), which was considered the “angels’ piece,” or the thick-edged bread baked in a tonir oven. In Van, it is known in its *Purnik* form.

The beliefs surrounding Blder Ajuz and Ishvut are deeply interwoven, reflecting shared themes of hardship, survival, and renewal. These themes are also evident in ritualistic sayings used by the people of Kessab, which blend Armenian and Turkish words:

Unvar, unun var mi? (Turkish) – “January, is there wheat?”

Pidrvan, piden var mi? (Turkish) – “February, is there firewood?”

Mart, chkmaynja dered chkmaz (Turkish) – “March, let your soul heal.”

April, br ebras al (Armenian) – “April, you will live.”

The seemingly unnecessary inclusion of Turkish words in these sayings is rooted in a cultural belief in using foreign elements to protect good from evil. In Kessab, it was believed that giving children Turkish or Tajik names could shield them from the evil eye, a practice particularly common in families where children frequently died young. Similarly, domestic animals like dogs and cows were given Turkish names for the same purpose – to render them unappealing or hidden from malevolent forces. This practice reflects a deep-seated conviction that blending elements from different cultures and languages could serve as a shield against harm.

Thus, through these shared stories and traditions, February emerges as a month that bridges death and new life. It is a time of reflection on mortality, the challenges of nature, and the promise of renewal that comes with the changing seasons. The figure of Blder Ajuz encapsulates the struggles and hopes of this transformative period, linking communities through their shared cultural and mythological heritage.

Conclusion

Shvot is a calendar spirit, primarily examined in the context of the Terindez and New Year holidays. As a New Year's spirit, its presence is found only in the folklore of Trabzon and Maghnis. By its nature, Shvot is a consumptive spirit that inhabits houses, pantries, and barns, and it is known for causing disease, inflicting harm, and weakening animals.

In lower mythology, Shvot is identified with the devil and, like the latter, can be neutralized with a needle [31, p. 58]. It is also believed to harm the fetus and newborn and, in its ability to change newborns, is identified with the evil spirit *Al* [32, pp. 1074–1081]. Given its association with sexuality, Shvot can also be considered a desirable spirit. Based on these shared functions, the name Shvot can be used to group a number of other evil spirits known from folk stories, including Shahabed, Shvaz, Zhivut, Ishvut, Sveti, Azar, Purdik, and Pupushik, all of which are closely identified with the spirit under examination.

Shvot is primarily characterized by the ability to deceive, mislead, and transform, and it is described in folklore with a diverse range of appearances and perceptions. The ritual of *shvotahan*, or the expulsion of the Shvots, is a symbolic expression of driving away winter and welcoming spring. The term “Ishvut” is also used to describe gluttonous, sloppy, and disorganized people, with the saying “*Endzs Ishvut mi*,” meaning “He is like Ishvut,” sometimes used to directly equate a person with the spirit. Shvot also shares similarities with the “March old woman” figure common in the Carpathian-Balkan region, further highlighting its role in the winter-to-spring transition.

The following primary motifs emerge from the folk beliefs about Shvot spirit:

Shvot was considered an evil spirit associated with the cold.

Shvot inspired erotic dreams in people.

The image of Shvot was closely associated with a cat.

The analysis of this folklore material leads to the conclusion that Shvot is a syncretic and ambivalent mythological character, combining the features of a calendar spirit with those of a demon of pregnant women and newborns.

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