

BIRD IMAGERY IN ESCHATOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE
OF MODERN GREEK FUNERAL LAMENTS

by

MICHAŁ BZINKOWSKI

The belief that the outside world is not only what it seems to be and what is visible and touchable but refers to another reality through the language of symbols has been characteristic of human thinking from the beginning of mankind. Man constantly and cautiously looked around him trying to guess the meaning of sudden, mostly unexpected, signs the physical world sent to him. This way of conceiving the world has slowly disappeared in West European civilization dominated by the rationalistic mind neglectful of premonitions based on feelings. Only folk culture, hardly susceptible to invasive influence of philosophical and religious systems being currently in force, preserved the most archaic ideas regarding the perception of the world. Especially worth researching is the vitality of precognitive abilities of foreseeing death based on the observation of nature.

According to folk beliefs, there is a variety of portents of approaching death, namely the signs seen by a man and read as potential prognosis of imminent danger threatening himself or someone else. The folk imagination abounds in images of such signs that could be visible all around and have predictable and determinable effect on human efforts. Mostly, these omens have physical properties coming indirectly from the world of animals, plants and natural phenomena. The other ones could appear in dreams or on important days of the liturgical year, especially on Easter and Christmas, regarded unequivocally in popular beliefs as a time of a sudden change and opening for the powers that stay hidden during the rest part of the year.

Apart from the ethnographic research that obviously tells us through the stories of the respondents about the vitality of such a divination in rural Greece, the other valuable source of studying of evil omens in folk tradition are Greek demotic songs (τα δημοτικά τραγούδια) preserved and transmitted in oral tradition from antiquity. Especially, the folksongs belonging to the group of so