Христофорова, Ольга. *Колдуны и жертвы: Антропология колдовства в современной России* [Khristoforova, Ol'ga. *Sorcerers and Victims: The Anthropology of Sorcery in Contemporary Russia*] (in Russian). Moscow: Обьединенное гуманитарное издательство; Российский государственный гуманитарный университет, 2010. 432 pp. Bibliography. Black/white photographs. Hard cover. ISBN 978-5-94282-617-8.

Because she is writing on the sensitive topic of contemporary mythological thinking, the author starts with the disclaimer that she does not believe in sorcery, omens, the evil eye, or curses. While she herself may not believe, the author tries to stay unbiased towards her informants and to accept at face value the beliefs of the people whose lives revolve around magical phenomena. Khristoforova's monograph is based on her extensive fieldwork conducted between 1998 and 2009 and her informants are mainly rural Russians from the Upper Kama, Kaluga, Kirov, and Moscow regions, as well as from the city of Moscow. She researches beliefs in sorcery/witchcraft as a socio-cultural phenomenon and, in her book, she presents the reader with an enormous number of narratives about *sglaz* [the evil eye, or unintentional harming] and *porcha* [intentional harming through magic].

In the first chapter, *Антропология и колдовство* [Anthropology and Witchcraft], the author discusses approaches to studying witchcraft/ sorcery in Russian and world scholarship. She pays special attention to the six main models for interpreting sorcery: as a way to explain misfortune; as a social institution; as a political instrument; as a way to release negative emotions; as a phenomenon immanent to peasant societies; and as a way of thinking that is prevalent in developing countries. We learn that, while Soviet era folklore scholarship ignored the topic, witchcraft and sorcery were extensively researched both before and after the Soviet period. Furthermore, the phenomenon was examined from a variety of perspectives.

The second chapter, *Колдовство, несчастья и репутация* [Sorcery, Misfortunes, and Reputation] provides explanatory models used by tradition bearers in Russian villages. The explanations include fate, God's punishment, or the revenge of a sorcerer. These are all used interchangeably, yet the last of these dominates the narratives of religious people and is their preferred way of explaining mundane misfortunes. They consider themselves victims of sorcerers and it is they who shape the sorcery discourse through rumors and the dissemination of

suspicions and fears. Yet people who acquire a reputation as sorcerers not only deny being such, they actually position themselves as victims of other people's magical powers. One can get a reputation as a sorcerer as the result of interpersonal conflicts and also on the basis of some character traits, certain physical qualities (either disability or perfect health), certain professions like being a stovemaker, or anything else that makes a person different from others.

The third chapter, *Власть, гендер и агрессия* [Power, Gender, and Aggression] analyzes the power ascribed to sorcerers. It also examines pairs of oppositions such as socially marginal vs. socially powerful figures and males vs. females. All of these can become a sufficient reason for demonizing a person and demonstrating oppressed aggression against her/him. Khristoforova presents behavior strategies which villagers use to "weaken" or even "neutralize" the power of a suspected sorcerer. While physical aggression against such a person is prohibited, other types of aggression are accepted and even encouraged.

The fourth chapter, *"Знать" и "делать"* [To "Know" and to "Do"] is a discussion of how knowledge, according to informants, is material in nature. Khristoforova analyzes two Russian verbs that acquire special, negative meanings within the sorcery discourse and also looks at their synonyms. The one who *knows* is the one who *does* evil, while *ladit'* (to fix) is used for actions that counteract the harm that was *done*.

The fifth chapter, *"Свои" и "чужие"* ["One's Own People" and "Strangers"] reveals categories of people that are most likely to be accused of being sorcerers. People whose ethnicity, place of birth or place of residence, and religion differ from those of their fellows are excluded from *svoi* and are suspected of harmful magic. The same attitude applied to wanderers, beggars, and members of certain professions. The line between *svoi* and *chuzhie* is extremely flexible, however.

The sixth chapter, *Колдовство и воровство* [Witchcraft and Thievery] describes how sorcerers – and they are always thieves in people's eyes – are said to use witchcraft to steal. It also discusses how victims of sorcery themselves use magical aids to identify and punish the perpetrators of thievery. The author presents numerous examples of the latter in everyday situations.

In chapter seven, *Бред колдовства: фольклор или психопатология?* [The Sorcery Delirium: Folklore or Psychopathology?] Khristoforova tries to differentiate the healthy from the pathological in terms of people's perception of reality and their belief in sorcery/

witchcraft. The chapter presents two case studies of elderly villagers who state that their psychosomatic symptoms are proof of the sorcery used against them, yet both seem to mix up the real and the imagined in their accounts.

Chapter eight, *Традиционные модели в городской культуре* [Traditional Models within Urban Culture] examines how the village way of thinking about sorcery adapts well to urban settings. Khristoforova states that, although urban sorcery beliefs have acquired new elements such as new characters and motifs, modern terminology, the reduction of traditional ideas about sorcerers, and the dispersion of the sorcery discourse in multiple social contexts, city dwellers still use traditional behavior strategies in situations of danger and uncertainty.

Khristoforova's monograph is an in-depth examination of the sorcery/witchcraft phenomenon in contemporary Russia as seen through the eyes of the culture bearers themselves. The author does a good job of comparing rural and urban settings. She presents the psychological mechanisms behind sorcery beliefs and behind the folkloric image of a sorcerer. She also pays close attention to linguistic nuances. The author uses "anthropology" in her title, although her research is heavily folkloric and psychological. In the seventh chapter it even veers toward psychiatry. Yet this chapter seems to be the most debatable: it is unclear if the mental health of the informants was generally impaired or otherwise normal elders became disturbed only when speaking on the topic of sorcery. The monograph will be exciting and useful reading for folklorists, ethnologists, linguists, as well as for the wider audience interested in cultural studies and contemporary Russia.

Svitlana Kukharenko
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
Canada