

# MAGICAL ACTS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE AT THE BIRTH OF A CHILD

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## Анотация

**Емануел Орбан. Магическите действия и тяхното значение при раждането на дете.** Раждането на дете е събитие, което също е обект на етнологички изследвания. Човекът, появявайки се на бял свят, вече е в центъра на вниманието на семейството и общността, тъй като и за двете групи това е значителна промяна в досегашния им начин на живот. Етнологичките проучвания потвърждават, че от незапомнени времена с раждането на дете са били свързани редица обреди, магически действия и суеверия. Целта на тази статия е преглед на магическите действия, които са били свързани с появата на нов член в семейството. В нашето изследване ще работим с метода на интерпретативния анализ, който има за цел да обхване магическите практики, присъстващи на различни етапи от раждането на дете, като бременност, раждане, шест месеца, неонатален период и кръщение.

**Ключови думи:** Раждане, магически принципи, инициация, религиозна, богословие

## Резюме

**Емануел Орбан. Магични дѣи та ѝх значения при народженнѣ дитини.** Народженнѣ дитини – це подѣя, яка також є предметом етнологічних досліджень. Людина, з'являючись на світ, вже перебуває в центрі уваги сім'ї та громади, оскільки для обох груп це є значною зміною в їхньому попередньому способі життя. Етнологічні дослідження підтверджують, що з народженням дитини з незапам'ятних часів пов'язана ціла низка обрядів, магичних дѣи та забобонів. Метою цієї статті є огляд магичних дѣи, які були пов'язані з появою нового члена в родині. У нашому дослідженні ми будемо працювати з методом інтерпретативного аналізу, метою якого є зафіксувати магичні практики, присутні на різних етапах народження дитини, таких як вагітність, пологи, шість місяців, неонатальний період і хрещення.

**Ключові слова:** Пологи, магичні принципи, ініціація, релігієзнавство, богослов'я

## Abstract

**Emanuel Orban. Magical acts and their significance at the birth of a child.** The birth of a child is an event that is also the subject of ethnological research. The human being, when he is born is already the focus of attention of the family and the community, because for both groups it represents a significant change in their previous way of life. Ethnological studies confirm that, with the birth of a child, the a number of ritual ceremonies, magical acts and superstitions have been associated with childbirth since time immemorial. The aim of this contribution is to provide an overview of the magical acts that were associated with the arrival of a new member to the family. In our study, we will use the method of interpretive analysis, the purpose of which is to capture the

magical practices present at the various stages in the birth of a child such as pregnancy, childbirth, six months, the neonatal period and baptism.

**Key words:** Childbirth, magical principles, initiation rituals, religious studies, theology

**Introduction.** The birth of a child represents a significant rite of passage, a custom of the life cycle that is subject to the study of the social disciplines of the humanities, specifically by scholars in ethnology, religious studies, museology, psychology of religion. The arrival of a new member to the family was perceived by almost every community as a joyful ceremonial event associated with certain ideas, customs and magical rituals. It is said that a new life is a new hope, and the hope of man as well as of every society needs. A child comes into the world as an innocent and defenceless being, on whom so many spiritual pitfalls. For this reason, the defence of the child was to be ensured by various magical acts. The aforementioned ceremonial rituals, by the way, form an important part of the spiritual culture of our nation. Magical acts from a religious point of view were intended to provide protection for the child from negative forces that acted from the environment, but on the other hand, from a Christian point of view, the Bible clearly forbids the practice of superstition and various incantations. The effect of magic on the human individual can also have a counterproductive dimension, it can make a person many proponents of folk superstition are not even aware of this risk. And therefore not it is impossible to overlook this inescapable fact, which can do enormous damage, because magic also works through higher spiritual forces in the form of magic spells.

**Objectives and methods.** Our main effort is to point out the importance of the meaning of individual magical acts, ideas and rituals that were associated with the birth of a child. The subject matter will be treated using the method of content analysis, through which we will relate the patterns of the spread of magical and superstitious ideas or acts at the birth of a child. As a rule, we will rely on the analysis of scientific documents (ethnological studies).

The contribution is conceived into theoretical and practical parts. The aim of the theoretical part is to present a scientific view of magic in historical, ethnological and psychological context. As part of this question, we are also looking at how magic is applied in everyday activities associated with the various stages of man's coming into the world. In the theoretical part of this contribution we also work with phenomenological method, which examines how the various magical principles relate to the stages associated with childbirth. „The benefit of phenomenology lies in the elucidation of individual phenomena and phenomena. emphasizes the modern object-oriented mode of inquiry, which allows us to see things only as objects of our consciousness" (Delfová-Hackeneschová-Lauerová-Lemckeová, 1993, p. 93). A classic example of use of this method may be the magical principle of similitude, which the pregnant woman practically performs when influencing the sex of the child.

In the practical part of this contribution we point out the representation of individual superstitions and magical acts in the repertoire of testimonies of the older generation of women from the environment of the Bratislava district of Petržalka.

The comparative method allows us to put into a broader mutual context individual thematic groups of statements with the corresponding literary sources.

**Magic as a religious phenomenon.** Magic is a universal phenomenon spread all over the world. Similarly, with magical practices, they are encountered at every historical stage of human evolution. Communal societies have magic was a potent force that was harnessed by man through practices that brought him diverse benefits in a positive or negative sense.

Magic involves certain rites and acts which are directly related to the belief in the ability of man to influence the lives of others through supernatural forces people and animals, or to influence

natural phenomena or the world of spirits or gods (Horváthová, 1995).

The term magic originally originated in Persia, where magicians were members of a religious sect based on the teachings of Zoroaster (Ibid). In the past, magical practices were widespread in all spheres of human activity, mostly they served to ensure health, beauty, cleverness of a person. Several ethnologists believe that the power of the human psyche can be considered as the source of magic. This power can guide unusual or unknown phenomena. Magic, by its very nature, works with the human potential, the practices of which are also used by the new religious movements of the so-called New Age (Marrs, 1990). In connection with the treatment of the subject we note the magical rites which are immediately associated with the arrival of a child into the world.

The eminent Scottish anthropologist James George Frazer in his work *The Golden Bough* characterizes magic as the idea of the supposed interdependence of phenomena on the basis of the principle of analogy (the same produces the same, lat. *similia similibus curantur*) or touch, virtually (Frazer, 1994). Frazer conceived of magic as sympathetic and accordingly divided it into homeopathic (imitative, similar), the result of which consists in achieving the desired result by imitating it, and contact (tactile, contagious). The aim of homeopathic magic is to imitate a certain gesture, movement, object, which by its property, ability or form, represents the desired goal and is thus intended to bring it about (Ibid.). Homeopathic magic in many cases serves a good purpose. In today's terminology, therefore, we also speak of white magic. The second type is black magic serving negative ends such as harm, injury, and even through them the death of a person could be summoned. The third case is red magic, which also has its representation in a person's life. It serves him mainly in the area of relationships, love. It is often used in child birth as well. Magical practices were also used to facilitate childbirth or to provide offspring for infertile women. In this context, we mention a case from Sumatra, which specifically concerning the Batak tribe, which is also mentioned by the aforementioned James George Frazer in *The Golden Bough* "An infertile woman becomes a mother by making a figure of a child out of wood and bringing it up in the belief that her wish will one day come true" (Ibid., p. 20). In connection with the second principle, i.e., "contact magic can be transfer the property of one object to another by touch, either directly or through a third object, which thus performs the function of a mediant" (Horváthová, 1995, p. 323). The individual laws of magic were not only used in the performance of acts intended to accomplish a certain end, but were also respected in the form of prohibitions, also called taboos. These prohibitions applied in particular to women during pregnancy, during during which certain foods were to be avoided. A typical example was rabbit meat, so that the child would not have rabbit's mouth. The prohibition also applied to onions, so that the newborn would not get sores or other skin disease. Also in the past, it was recommended that a woman avoid negative feelings and emotions. The ancients believed that this condition also had an effect on the actual course of childbirth. Similarly with homeopathic magic, based on the general idea that the beginning of a certain process, or event affects the course and especially the outcome of the principle. This kind of magical rule was manifested also in the performance of certain works. A woman could have a positive mental attitude and distract herself by by doing all the usual garden chores. During pregnancy, women planted, dug potatoes and tended flowers. They were convinced that this would also make childbirth easier for them. On the other hand, the pregnant woman was not allowed to come into contact with manual labour, which involved lifting, carrying heavy objects such as furniture. Such work is naturally not recommended for women, because nature "could count" and would cause spontaneous abortion.

The examples mentioned above are at the same time a manifestation of contact magic, which also works in a negative context. Practically speaking, a woman is not allowed to get in contact with certain activities that could somehow harm her as well as her offspring. Fertility magic was meant to prevent infertility of women: "In the event of unwanted childlessness, a woman made a pilgrimage in which she laid at the altar a wax" (Horváthová, 1995, p. 44).

Magical practices were also associated with the childbirth. Childbirth was also used to be concealed so that the mother would not be harmed by evil forces and magic. It was also practised in the countryside the custom of having a man present during childbirth. The principle of deceiving evil forces, known as kuvada. The principle of kuvada is as follows. The expectant father of the child, by means of magical practices, symbolically to take on some of the woman's pain. He would lift the parent, namely his wife, in his arms, cross her and "In the traditional culture of Slovakia, therefore, one can only speak of a quasi kuvada" (Beňušková, 1995, p. 72).

In the right kuvado the man, besides taking the pain, imitated childbirth. The phenomenon of kuvada derives from an outdated interpretation from the matriarchal period, when the men were literally forced to participate in childbirth. Later, male presence at childbirth did not occur, because women did not want men to be present at this intimate moment. At the end of the twentieth century there is a return to this custom of male presence, but the reasons are different, not magical, but mainly psychological and emotional.

**Magical acts related to the birth of a child.** Magical acts are immediately associated with the various stages of the birth of a child. Customs at birth of a child play an important function in the wider social context. Within them, it is not possible overlook their connection to the family ritual cycle. Family customs have evolved over the course of historical development of society, they have been transformed and modified mainly under the influence of Christianity, which introduced the obligatory religious acts of baptism for a believer. An important fact cannot be omitted here, which related to Christianity's rejection of various supernatural secret forces. According to the ancient teachings of the Church Fathers, magic has always been regarded as the work of the devil. In the Middle Ages magicians were even excommunicated from the Church for being guilty of idolatry (Dam, 1991).

Nevertheless family customs have an important place in the traditional folk culture of Slovakia. They belong to the general ethnological heritage of every nation. On the basis of the structured sequence of the ceremonial cycle, they can be the main stages of childbirth can be distinguished, namely the gestation period, the magical rituals associated with childbirth, magical restrictions during the six weeks, the newborn ritual and magical practices at baptism. We will subject each stage to a deeper analysis.

**Magic during pregnancy.** The relevant ethnological sources show that in some Slovak regions, self-married (pregnant) women used to keep their blessed state a secret<sup>1</sup>. Their closest surroundings also participated in the secrecy. "The roots of this behaviour may lie in ancient times, when concealment was a way of protection from the influence of evil forces" (Botíková-Jakubíková-Švecová, 1997, p. 163). We also had the opportunity to personally talk about the above mentioned fact with older women living (age category 70 and above) in Petržalka. Because of their age, they were able to comment on the situation that prevailed in the 1970s, when they themselves were young mothers. At that time, pregnancy was no longer a secret, as it was considered an expected and natural phenomenon for married women. In the last century, unmarried women were viewed differently. This experience is rooted in ancient Rome, where children of unwed mothers were considered inferior, i.e. practically unable to act independently in key decision-making situations (Sokol, 2008).

Unwed mothers (pre-sleepwives) were the target of shame and ridicule, hostile looks from people. Similarly, in the time under study in Petržalka, the unwed mother had an uneasy position in society, namely, she feared slander and subsequent alienation. The status of unmarried

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<sup>1</sup> The principle of concealment of childbirth was practiced in Komjatice (district of Nové Zámky) in the Ponitri region until the second half of the 20th century (Cifra- Vrabcová, 2006).

mothers was hierarchically lower than that of married women. She naturally wanted to keep her status a secret for as long as possible. The only way out was to conceal her pregnancy for as long as possible or to marry. Consequently, the truth came out publicly after a while anyway. A pregnant woman (self-second, heavy, fat) did not used to have any relief by virtue of her condition, especially in the matter of carrying out normal work duties (Botíková-Jakubíková-Švecová, 1997). She practically did all the normal chores around the house, whether cleaning, cooking, and was also in charge of small jobs in the garden such as digging potatoes, planting and tending to the flowers. This fact is confirmed by the following principle: "Where the child is supposed to be, the woman can do anything." In the mapped area (Bratislava-Petržalka, author's note) we also encountered the version that the woman avoided strenuous work during the advanced stage of pregnancy. Here we also want to draw attention to another important fact. Pregnant women also believed in the magical power of protective devices (magical objects): "Pregnant women wore amulets to ensure a smooth pregnancy, to protect against spontaneous abortion and to ensure a good and quick birth (okytokia). Gems and semi-precious stones were worn to protect the uterus from evil entities" (Zaviš, 2016, p. 34-35). Much more important for the pregnant woman was the adherence to the principles of a healthy lifestyle, which mainly related to healthy eating (increased consumption of fruit and vegetables). It had its own significance, which is also described by ethnologist Rastislava Stoličná in her publication: "The food that she liked during pregnancy was also liked by the child" (1991, p. 133). The objective reasons for the inheritance of such eating habits are probably difficult to confirm; rather, one could think of a kind of imitation of homeopathic magic here.

**Magic during childbirth.** Women's approaching childbirth was accompanied by several feelings of fear, as well as concerns about the health and appearance of the baby. It is not for nothing that childbirth is said to be a matter of life and death. The parent was also worried about when and where the birth pains themselves would reach her. In the recent past (1950s), many magical ideas, acts, as well as fortune-telling predictions were also associated with childbirth in Slovakia (Beňušková, 1995). The immigrants from Petržalka (especially from the northern regions of Slovakia) brought certain magical ideas with them to their new environment. A typical example is the following statement. A child born in a coat used to be said to have curly hair.

The difficult and complicated delivery was also a result of the woman's disregard for orders during the gestation period. Several informants confirmed to us that even at that time (1970s), parturients were instructed in advance about breathing during labour. In order to speed up childbirth in Petržalka, women (parturients) used to be massaged with medicinal ointments, or given medicinal decoctions to drink, or even charred with burning coals. During the period under study, there were no more home births in Petržalka. This change was mainly influenced by the spreading urban culture.

The anonymity of relationships in the city gradually displaced the mission and importance of grandmothers. The professional and medical aspect of childbirth became more and more important.

Isolated midwives were still to be found in the countryside at that time, where the availability of a doctor was much more difficult. In the 1970s in Petržalka there were known cases of midwives helping women to give birth at home.(Kormaňáková, Gardoňová) Moreover, midwives fulfilled the status of state employees in the health care system<sup>2</sup>. The ethnologist Zuzana Beňušková writes in the Encyclopaedia of Folk Culture of Slovakia: "The profession of midwives existed already in the Middle Ages. Until the 18th century, it was practiced in Slovakia only on the basis of knowledge gained from ancestors and their own experience. Thanks to the Enlightenment policy of Maria

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<sup>2</sup> Grandmothers in Petržalka in the 1970s did not practice their profession for finances, because it was not taken for granted then that people had to pay for everything. Mostly they were fed or rewarded in kind, with peasant household surpluses such as eggs, meat, etc. In certain cases it was given to the so-called babe in the bucket.

Theresa, courses for midwives began to be organised at the University of Trnava in 1770. From 1777 they were trained in Buda, and from 1873 again in Slovakia, in Bratislava, and later also in Košice and Uzhhorod" (Beňušková, 1995, p. 72).

However, in the second half of the 19th century in many villages of Hungary there was no mention of trained midwives, and this state of affairs lasted in the villages until the middle of the 20th century (Beňušková, 1990). The main reason for the retreat was logical, because the professional awareness of midwives began to decline significantly.

**Newborn rituals.** The arrival of a new member was accompanied by feelings of joy, hope for the family, and for the wider community. The protection of the newborn's life and health was thus the subject of various magical acts. In recounting the birth, some informants living in Old Petržalka literally used the expression that the baby was born "fat." They did not specify the expression, but it was also used in other Slovak regions (Horváthová, 1988). For the following reason, the child had to be washed under running water. According to some informants, apart from hygienic effects, the water itself was attributed with magical effects that were supposed to ensure beauty, wealth, cleverness and fertility. Therefore, when bathing in the tub for the first time, it was customary to throw money into the water so that the child would be rich and generous for life. This is the principle of contagious magic. The magical effect was also attributed to lucky days.

Happy is the child who is born on Saturday, Sunday and possibly after the New Year, or even if the family is visited by a chimney sweep. Then the mother gives birth to a healthy and strong child. The child was also negatively influenced by human insults, from which the defenceless child had to be defended. The following magical means and acts were used for potential protection from unwanted forces. For example, red ribbons were attached to the hands of young children or to a pram. Spitting was also important for the child's happiness. People have believed in the magical power of excrement since ancient times. Urine and saliva were used as protection against spitting (e.g. triple spitting) and to cure it (Feglová-Chorváthová-Zajonc, 1995).

If a child is cut he has a strange look, he is sick, cries, falls asleep and never wakes up again. The aforementioned curse passes not only to the child, but in addition to the animals. It was believed that the cow would milk the blood. If a woman finds that her child is cut, she must immediately take some soiled diaper and wipe the child's eyes with it. In certain cases, they used to wrap the child with coals in which they put peacock feathers. However, in rural areas, a magical custom was practised which involved the preparation of a decoction of charcoal. The charcoal was put in water, which was used to wash the child.

After this tincture, it was expected that there would be no need for a cesarean section in the child's family in the future. Healing magic is still working in many Petržalka households today. The attitude of Christianity towards individual magical practices and superstitions is negative because it is contrary to the first commandment of God. "All practices of magic or sorcery, by which man wishes to subdue hidden powers in order to place them at his service and to attain supernatural power over his fellow-man-even to gain his health-are gravely opposed to the virtue of piety. These practices are still more reprehensible when they are combined with the intention of harming another, or when they resort to the intervention of evil spirits" (Katechizmus katolíckej cirkvi, 1998, p. 521). Astrology also falls into the category of transgressions against God's law. Also unacceptable to Christians is the 260-day Mayan astrological calendar in connection with the interpretation of a person's destiny, which was sealed at birth (Matthews, 1992). It was clearly the duty of a devout Christian Catholic to avoid these things.

**Magical limitations of hexadecimial cribs.** Magical practices and acts accompanied the child and the mother even during the forty-day purification of the woman. The pollution comes from the birth itself. The six-week period is a period in which the woman had to observe restrictions for

a certain time, which had a hygienic as well as a superstitious basis. The time of validity of the said restrictions varied (Jakubíková, 1989).

This period could have lasted even shorter in a rural environment, as ethnologist Zuzana Beňušková mentions: "In the traditional environment in the first half of the 20th century, the six-week period could last even shorter (2-3 weeks) in order to get the mother into labour as soon as possible" (1995, p. 232). The shortening of the cleansing period was thus socially conditioned. In Petržalka in the 1970s, there were no special restrictions and prohibitions on the six-week period in terms of isolation or prohibition from performing certain work, as the transformed urban society gradually began to separate itself from the established economic work associated with the countryside.

The testimony of the informant, the writer Daniela Palkova-Homolyova, says it all: "During the six weeks, the mother could not bathe in cold water and eat everything because of the baby, because she was breastfeeding. She avoided coffee because it contains caffeine, pears, these foods had a negative effect on the baby's development. For the production of breast milk, she consumed apples, black beer, fried soups, pineapple to keep not only herself but also the baby healthy. There was no isolation for her in the apartment; the various methods of protection that involved separating and covering a corner of the room with a so-called smokesheet disappeared."

Gradually, the vision that related to the woman in the period of the sextuplets being in the power of evil forces was overcome. Such cases occurred in Petržalka in the first half of the 20th century, and in Rača especially before the First World War: "Before the First World War, a sixth-grader lived in a house isolated by a sheet covering her bed in a corner. At that time, no strangers had access to the house, which was strictly observed, especially in the evening after sunset, when it was no longer open to anyone. The prohibition against staying outside the house was motivated by the protection of the woman, because, according to superstition, everything bad had access to her. A woman was not allowed to go out into the fields, especially on the cross roads, nor was she allowed to go into the courtyard or even between the doors" (Jakubíková, 1989, p. 172).

Close relatives – husband, godmother, aunts – helped her with household chores (washing, cooking, ironing). The godmother used to visit her mother most often, bringing her in-kind items such as a basket full of eggs (symbolizing more offspring), a roast goose (a symbol of happiness) and bread (a symbol of hospitality). Certain magical ideas (based on the principle of similarity) did work in the area under study (Bratislava-Petržalka). The quantity and quality of the food brought depended on the wealth of the family. In the richer families of Račany in the 1970s, the godmother came six times (6 days) with a complete lunch, and even after the baptism she brought the so-called "ostatek" – a large cake, plums and a kilo of meat (Jakubíková, 1989). These visits by the women were an important form of needed social assistance and an expression of the women's kinship.

**Baptism.** Baptism is a significant event after the birth of a child, part of which included celebrations specifically baptisms. From the 18th century onwards, banquets began to be held with the gifting of newborns (Beňušková-Krekovičová, 1995). The ceremonial act of baptism officially recognised the child as a rightful member of the wider community, namely by giving him or her a name. The child was thus subsequently accepted into the family and wider kinship (Jakubíková, 1989). When a child's name was given, a family council consisting of parents and grandparents met, at which they all had to collectively agree on a name. The present testimonies of Petržalka residents show that in the 1970s the most popular names in the Bratislava district were Alžbeta and Ondrej.

During the socialist period, secret baptisms in church for children of Communist Party members or collaborators were also known. The State, through the representative bodies of the State administration, introduced congregations for civil ceremonies. Established in 1953 as the Corps for Civil Affairs, their essence was to register newborn children in the civil registry (Beňušková, 2017). Before baptism in the church, the child was registered in the birth book. Some informants,

did not have the child baptised in the church for personal reasons, so they preferred to attend the ceremony in the ceremony hall to welcome the child, where the persons in charge wished them well in life. We were told that on this occasion the children were given gifts of cuddly toys. They viewed the act positively as the beginning of the child's acceptance and socialisation into the wider society.

By baptism, the child acquired godparents and received gifts from them. During socialism in Petržalka, godparents used to give the child shoes, a cushion, a nappy, a cot, a cradle or even a kit for a newborn. The custom of giving a cap or a shirt was also widespread in that area. It involved bringing gifts of money, gold chains and earrings. In some families it was customary to put money in the feather quilt, which magically symbolized abundance, so that the child would be rich and generous. The abundance of individual gifts depended on the wealth of the families involved.

At the baptismal ceremony, the child wore a white-coloured shirt, symbolizing innocence. Girls used to wear earrings, gold chains, a cross or a ring. The parents of the child, the godparents, used to attend the christening ceremony in the church; the grandmother's attendance was not obligatory. The ritual act of baptism consists in immersing the child in water three times, while the priest (deacon) who baptizes the newborn pronounces the familiar formula, "M (Name), I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." (*Katechizmus katolíckej cirkvi*, 1998, p. 323). Baptism, by the way, is also a form of exorcism. Baptismal parents respond with an oath by which they also commit themselves to educating their baptismal children in the faith, to help and guide them in their lives. In the event of the loss of the blood parents, they are to assume full responsibility for the child's upbringing.

According to one informant's account, some women interpreted the rule of taking over parenting in their own way. They told us that during the period under study in Petržalka, the idea that parents, especially single mothers, get rid of their children through baptism was widespread<sup>3</sup>. The informant in question experienced firsthand how her friend got rid of her own child after baptism and gave it to godparents to be raised by godparents. The child was indifferent to her as it was the product of rape. The baptism served to shift responsibility to the godparents, but also to save the child's life.

In the case of an exceptional situation, the church allowed anyone to baptize a child. It is worth mentioning the historical fact that already from the 17th century midwives were obliged by superiority regulations to baptize a weak child beforehand (Apáthyová-Rusnáková, 1995). In Petržalka, this phenomenon of midwives baptizing children did not occur in the second half of the 20th century. For Christians, the sacrament of baptism has the important meaning of cleansing a person from the original sin of the biblical forefathers. Baptism sanctifies a person by grace. There was a widespread notion among the people of Petržalka, which applied to the unbaptized, "A man, if he is not baptized, cannot be properly buried". From life experience it was clear that baptism should not be left for adulthood, because even small children were dying. The execution of baptisms in Petržalka was arranged by the child's grandparents, who were in charge of preparing the festive feast. Traditional dishes such as goose meat, cockerel soup, cutlets, meatballs and potato salad were eaten during the festive feast. Drinks were raspberry and mineral water, and alcoholic beverages were mainly beer, vodka, borovovka and slivovitz. In a figurative sense, the richly laid table was to ensure that the child would be healthy in the future. Several informants declared that when the parents returned from church with the child, they were greeted among the assembled relatives with a sentence that was well known in Petržalka during the period under study: 'We have brought you a pagan, we have brought you a Christian...' An important initiative was taken here by the grandparents, who put a cross on the child's forehead and kissed it so that it would be protected from all harm and live for many years.

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<sup>3</sup> As evidenced by the following sentence of the (female) informant: "Local mothers don't like their children".

Based on the magical rule of similarity, it was believed that as the baptism was, so would be the future life of the child. Therefore, the feast itself was to be abundant and joyful, so that the child's whole life would be like that (Botíková-Jakubíková-Švecová, 1997). The richness of the feast depended on the wealth of the family. Within the Petržalka district of Bratislava, there is a mention that in poorer families only a modest feast was arranged for the godparents or grandparents. Poor families prepared bread and coffee, tea and moonshine for the celebration. In certain cases, a secret acquaintance would provide them with a treat so that they would not be disgraced in front of their family afterwards. Any expression of togetherness continued to prevail in Petržalka, despite the transformation of the original rural village into an urban district of Bratislava.

**Conclusion.** The contribution deals with an important period of human life, which is the arrival of a human being into the world. The importance is also reflected in the association of this stage with individual magical acts, imaginations and ceremonies at the birth of a child, which have been significant in all cultures. Through them, people invoked a supernatural magical power that they could not explain to themselves. In fact, for a long time there were only unwritten magical rules that people came into contact with in their daily lives. Knowledge of them was the property of the entire society, and so the magical message and magical worldview was successfully passed down orally from generation to generation.

One of the aims of the paper was to find out the presence of elements of magical worldview as well as magical practices in the consciousness of the older generation of women (age category 70 and above) in the Petržalka district of Bratislava. Based on the testimonies of the target group of women informants, we concluded that many times people did not know and thus did not understand the original context of magical practices (protection against infertility, caesarean section, etc.). In particular, they did not know what exactly superstitions meant or why certain acts were performed. The focus group stated that they respected the magical acts in question because they simply worked and brought good or evil to the newborn and the mother.

In the course of our research, we found the presence of particular magical elements that were many times purposefully associated with the Christian faith. That is, the magical effect was automatically attributed to baptism itself. This misconception persists in the public to this day.

The phenomenon of magic was not only known in a religious context, but also in a psychological context. Magic has always been closely connected with the human psyche, since with the help of this supernatural power man was able to secure his dream goal. Our observation shows that magic as it was known to previous generations is on the wane, but man is one who does not stop dreaming. In order to achieve his dream goal, namely to give birth, have a healthy and successful child, he will look for more and more magical aids.

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