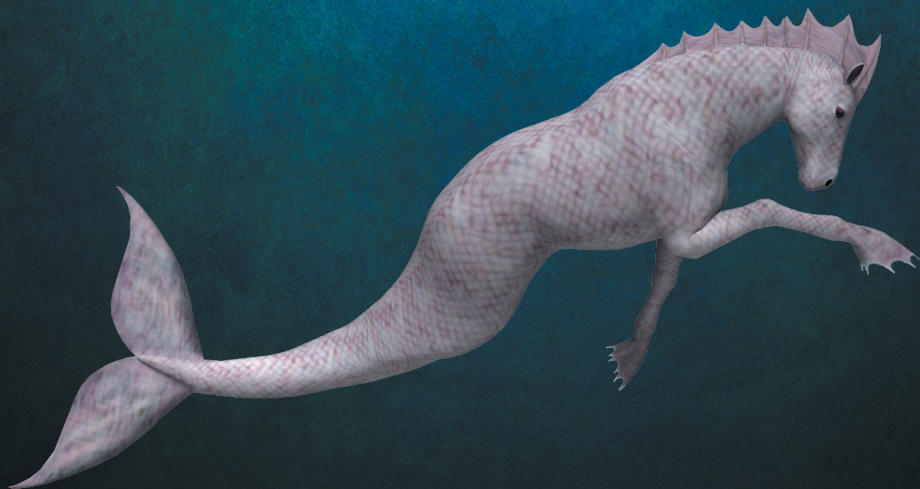


– 292 DESCRIPTIONS –
Ireland, England, Wales, Cornwall,
Scotland, Isle of Man, Orkney's,
Hebrides, Faeroe, Iceland,
Norway, Sweden and Denmark

SPIRIT BEINGS

IN EUROPEAN FOLKLORE 1



COMPILED & EDITED BY
BENJAMIN ADAMAH

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A

Afturgöngur

In Icelandic folklore *Afturgöngur* (those who have returned to walking in life) is used as a generic term for ghostly figures or returning dead of different categories. Among them we can distinguish in the first place those who already had an evil nature during their life (the so-called *Illhryssingar*), then the *Titburdir* (foundlings), the *Fépukar* (misers) and furthermore the *Heimselskendur* and *Hefnivargar*, who for some reason always haunt one particular location, or a living person they want to take revenge on.

17
A

Alfemoe

In Icelandic folklore the *Alfemoe* is a type of parasitic *Alp*; a creature that visits people or animals at night to harass them by pressing their chest, or in the case of animals, drive them mad with fear. The *Alfemoe* is mentioned by Elard Hugo Meyer in his chapter on *Alps* in *Mythologie der Germaner*.

Alp-luachra

In Celtic mythology the *Alp-luachra*, also known as *Joint-eater*, *Just-halver* or *Alp-loochra* (Ireland) is a type of parasitical spirit who invisibly sits at the table and consumes half of their victim's food. When a person falls asleep by the side of a spring or stream, the *Alp-luachra* appears in the form of a newt and crawls down the person's mouth, feeding off the food that they had eaten. In Robert Kirk's *Secret Commonwealth of Fairies*, this creature feeds not on the food itself, but on the "pith or quintessence" of the food. A person haunted by an *Alp-luachra* will never grow fat, because he/she only digests food robbed of its nutritional value. People who consume newts are thought to be plagued in this way. In Douglas Hyde's collection of folk tales, *Beside the Fire*, a farmer, who was starving from an *Alp-luachra*, was eventually rid of the spirit. He was instructed to eat large amounts of salted meat and, when he could eat no more, lie still with his mouth open just above the surface of a stream. After having been driven to thirst by the salt, the offspring of the *Alp-luachra*, and eventually the *Alp-luachra* mother herself, jumped into the water.

Apple-Tree Man

In Somerset the oldest apple-tree in the orchard is called the *Apple-Tree Man* and it seems that the fertility of the orchard is supposed to reside there as a spirit being. Tales about the Apple Tree Man were collected by the folklorist Ruth Tongue in the cider-producing county of Somerset. In one story a man offers his last mug of mulled cider to the trees in his orchard on Christmas Eve (a reflection of the custom of apple wassailing – a ritual offering of bread and toast to the trees, performed by young men). He is rewarded by the Apple Tree Man who reveals to him the location of buried gold, more than enough to pay his rent.

18
A

Arkan Sonney

Arkan Sonney (lucky urchin or plentiful little pig) is the Manx term for both a hedgehog and a Fairy creature. It is also called *Erkin sonna* or *Lucky Piggy* which is the name given to the *Fairy Pig of Man*. In Manx folklore it is a type of Fairy animal that takes the form of a white pig that brings good fortune to those who manage to catch it. If you caught one you would always find a silver coin in your pocket and it was even considered a favorable omen just to have seen the “lucky piggy”.

Walter Gill in *A Manx Scrapbook* mentions a Fairy pig seen near Niarbyl by a girl, who told him about it some fifty years later as an old woman. It was a beautiful little white pig, and as the Fairy pigs are supposed to bring luck, she called to her uncle to come and help her catch it. But he called back to her to leave it alone, and then it soon disappeared. Dora Broome has a tale of a little Fairy pig in her *Fairy Tales from the Isle of Man* (1951). Her little pig is white, with red ears and eyes like most Celtic Fairy animals. Arkan Sonney can alter its size, but apparently not its shape.

Askafroan

Askafroan or *Askfrun* is an ash tree-spirit in southern Swedish folklore, a reminiscent of the *Dryads* and *Hamadryads*. Like the elder tree, the ash tree was in ancient times a common tree of care, to which the luck of the farm was believed to be linked. To this tree both food and drinks were sacrificed, according to several records. It is mainly in Skåne that the spirit of the ash tree was called Askafroan (Ash tree-woman). She was believed to live in the ash tree or under its roots.

Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius, in his book *Wärend och wirdarne*, 1863, writes about this spirit:

“Thus in the district of Ljunit the people still know of a wondrous creature, which dwells in the ash-tree, and is therefore called the Askafroan. It was the custom of the ancients to sacrifice to the Askafroan, on Ash-Wednesday-morning before the sun rose, by striking water over the roots of the tree. They used the words, “Now I sacrifice, and you do us no harm”. If anyone broke the leaves or branches of the ash-tree, he was thought to get pain or sickness. Likewise, in Skåne (Gärds härad and others), there is talk of a twisted natural being in the pine or elder tree. This being is called the Hyllefroan. If anyone does damage to the pine tree or messes around with it, he gets a disease called Hylleskåll, which is cured by pouring milk over the roots of the tree.”

19
A

Asrai

In English folklore the *Asrai* is a type of Water-Fairy, that lives in seas and lakes and is similar to the *Mermaid* and *Nixie*. They are sometimes described as timid and shy, standing 2-4 ft (0.61-1.22 m) tall, or may be depicted as tall and lithe. Ruth Tongue recollected *Asrai*-folklore in *Forgotten Folk-Tales of the English Counties*. There are two tales almost identical from Cheshire and Shropshire. In both tales a fisherman dredges up an *Asrai* and puts it in the bottom of his boat. The creature pleads to be set free, but its language is incomprehensible. In the Cheshire tale the fisherman bound it, and the touch of its cold, wet hands burned him so that he was marked for life. In both stories the *Asrai* is covered with wet weeds and it lays moaning in the bottom of the boat, but its moans grow fainter, and by the time the fisherman reaches the shore it has melted away leaving only a little water on the bottom of the boat. Ruth Tongue heard other references to *Asrai* from the Welsh Border, always in the same strain. The inability of *Asrai* to survive daylight is similar to that of *Trolls* from Scandinavian folklore.

Some folktales describe the creatures as having green hair and a fishtail instead of legs, or with webbed feet. *Asrai* are said to live for hundreds of years and will come up to the surface of the water once each century, to bathe in the moonlight which they use to help them grow.

If the Asrai (usually depicted as female) sees a man, she will attempt to lure him with promises of gold and jewels into the deepest part of the lake to drown or simply trick him. However, she cannot tolerate human coarseness and vulgarity, and this will be enough to frighten her away. The oldest known appearance of Asrai in print was with the poem *The Asrai* by Robert Williams Buchanan, first published in April 1872. Buchanan described them in this fragment as nature-loving spirits who could not tolerate sunlight:

...

*Yet far away in the darkened places,
Deep in the mountains and under the meres,
A few fair Spirits with sunless faces
Lingered on with the rolling years,
And listened, listened, luminous-eyed,
While the generations arose and died,
And watch'd, watch'd, with sad surprise,
The gleaming glory of earth and skies,
Beyond their darkness. But ever, by night,
When the moon arose with her gentle light,
The Asrai, hidden from human seeing,
Drank the moonlight that was their being,*

...

Awd Goggie

Awd Goggie is a Bogey-figure from English folklore who has to keep children from wandering alone into orchards. The Awd Goggie is said to inhabit fruit orchards, where it will attack children.

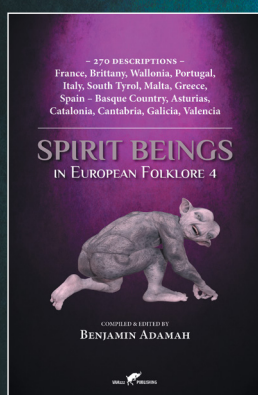
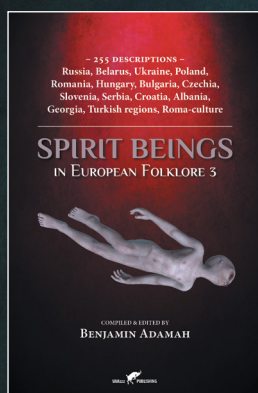
B

Bäckahäst or Bækhest

In the Scandinavian languages the *Bäckahäst* or *Bækhest* is a Brook-horse. A creature of Scandinavian mythology, the Bäckahäst was a beautiful white horse that would emerge from bodies of water such as lakes or ponds, particularly during foggy weather. Anyone who climbed onto its back would not be able to get off again. The horse would then jump into a river, drowning the rider, whether adult or child. The brook horse could also be harnessed and made to plough, either because it was trying to trick a person or because the person had tricked the horse into it. It has a close parallel in the *Nykur* of the Faeroe Islands, the Scottish *Kelpie*, and the Welsh *Ceffyl Dŵr*. The following tale is classic for the Bäckahäst, or any brook horse. Again – as in many tales about water-spirits – iron is used as protection against the evil inclinations of the spirit:

“A long time ago, there was a girl who was not only pretty but also big and strong. She worked as a maid on a farm by Lake Hjertasjön in southern Nerike. She was ploughing with the farm’s horse on one of the fields by the lake. It was springtime and beautiful weather. The birds chirped and wagtails flitted in the tracks of the girl and the horse in order to find worms. All of a sudden a horse appeared out of the lake. It was big and beautiful, bright in colour and with large spots on the sides. The horse had a beautiful mane which fluttered in the wind and a tail that trailed on the ground. The horse pranced for the girl to show her how beautiful he was. The girl, however, knew that it was the brook horse and ignored it. Then the brook horse came closer and closer and finally he was so close that he could bite the farm horse in the mane. The girl hit the brook horse with the bridle and cried: “Disappear you scoundrel, or you’ll have to plough so you’ll never forget it.” As soon as she had said this, the brook horse had changed places with the farm horse, and the brook horse started ploughing the field with such speed that soil and stones whirled in its wake, and the girl hung like a mitten from the plough. Faster than the cock crows seven times, the ploughing was finished and the brook horse headed for the lake, dragging both the plough and the girl. But the girl had a piece of steel in her pocket, and she made the sign of the cross. Immediately she fell down on the ground,

FROM THE SAME SERIES:



Compendium 1 of the *Spirit Beings in European Folklore*-series covers the northwestern part of the continent where Celtic and Anglo-Saxon cultures meet the Nordic. This book catalogs the mysterious creatures of Ireland, the Isle of Man, England, Wales, Cornwall, Scotland, Hebrides, Orkneys, Faroe Islands, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark. For centuries, the peoples of these regions have influenced each other in many ways, including their mythologies and folklore. The latter is perhaps most evident in the various species of *Brook-horses* or *Water-horses*. These semi-aquatic ghostly creatures come in all kinds of varieties and are typical of the English or Gaelic speaking parts of Europe and Scandinavia. Many other ghostly entities occur only in specific areas or countries. Some even became cultural icons, such as the Irish *Leprechaun*, the *Knockers* from Wales, the Scandinavian *Trolls* and *Huldras* or the Icelandic *Huldufólk*. England has its *Brownies*, several kinds of *Fairies* and locally famous *ghost dogs*. Iceland and Scandinavia seem to “specialize” in spirit beings who appear fully materialized, such as the different species of *Illveli* (Evil Whales) and *Draugr*, the returning dead.

Compendium 1 discusses 292 spirit beings in detail, including their alternative names, with additional references to related or subordinate beings and a unique selection of illustrations.