

– 270 DESCRIPTIONS –
France, Brittany, Wallonia, Portugal,
Italy, South Tyrol, Malta, Greece,
Spain – Basque Country, Asturias,
Catalonia, Cantabria, Galicia, Valencia

SPIRIT BEINGS

IN EUROPEAN FOLKLORE 4



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A

Aatxe

Aatxe (calf) is an *Irelu* (nature genius) in the folklore of the Basques. His name can be translated literally as “young calf”. *Aatxe* lives in caves and usually takes the appearance of a young red calf, but because he is a shapeshifter, he can also present himself in the form of a man. At night, especially during stormy weather, he is believed to come out of his lair to attack criminals and other evil-doers. He also protects people by making them intuitively decide to stay home when danger threatens. *Aatxe*, like many Basque *Ireluak* (pl. of *Irelu*) or *genii*, is both a unique entity and a representative or manifestation of the goddess *Mari*. These *Ireluak* often act as the executors of her will, and punish people who somehow violate the rules of the goddess. In some regions, the name *Aatxegorri* (red calf) is used instead of *Aatxe*, a contraction of the words *aatxe* (calf) and *gorri* (red) or *Beigorri* (red cow). It was believed that *Aatxe* lived in caves and dens; in many caves (Isturits, Sare, Errenteria, etc.) engravings and paintings have been found depicting aurochs (extinct cattle species), bulls and oxen; this suggests that this Basque myth may have its origins in the Paleolithic period.

Addar

Addar or *Aiar*, the latter being a diminutive, is a horned and evil underground *Irelu* of Zuberoa in Basque folk belief. Its name means “branch”.

Aidegaxto

Aidegaxto, *Aide-gaizto*, *Aire-gaizto*, *Aide* or *Lainogaixto* is an *Irelu* of Basque and Asturian folklore who, according to Labourdine beliefs, creates and directs storms. This spirit is also called *Ortzi*, *Ostri*, *Urtzi* or *Ortizilanoa*. *Aidegaxto*, literally means “bad sky” or “wrong sky” (*Aidegaixtoa* in Basque). The name is a contraction of the words *aide* (heaven) and *gaixo* (unhappy, sick). *Ortzi* means “firmament”, “sky”, “storm”. Closely related to *Ortzi*, *Aidegaxto* (evil air, or lightning) is the *Irelu Odei*, who creates and directs thunderstorms, hurling them against men in order to harm them.

Protection against Aidegaxto

To exorcise Aidegaxto or to placate him, several procedures were used, ranging from lighting blessed candles, burning laurel branches in the home, wearing a wreath of laurel or hawthorn leaves on the head during storms, and placing an axe on the front door threshold of the house, with the edge up. Attaching a laurel cross or branches of trees such as hazel, ash or pine on the front door was also applied. One procedure used the magical influences of the herb *Rumex crispus*, or *cow's tongue*. The herb was rolled on the wrist of the left hand of the sorcerer or conjurer in question, while with the right hand he indicated to Aidegaxto the course he had to follow and where he had to unleash the wind and to unload the rain. In Brañaseca people lighted a blessed candle and placed the oven shovel on the roof, next to an axe with the edge up. In other Asturian villages *candles tenebrarias* are lit and rosemary and laurel are burned on Palm Sunday.

12
A

Aideko

Aideko is an *Irelu* in Basque folklore. It is invisible in itself, but it can take on a variety of shapes, such as fog. The spirit can act as a criminal, but also be benevolent or neutral. This is common among the *Ireluak* of Basque folklore. *Aideko* is derived from *airekoa* meaning “moving with the air” or “coming from the air”. Other names: *Aide*, *Aidetikako*, and *Lauso* and *Lainaide* when it appears as a fog. *Lainaide* is composed of *Laino* (mist) and *Aideko*; “the mist of Aideko”.

Aideko seems to be an autonomous entity as well as a feature of *Aidegaxto*. While the latter is feared for the material damage caused by bad weather, *Aideko* seems to represent the interaction of the supernatural or “airy” world in a more occult way, and the spirit is especially associated with causing diseases or epidemics. Within the scope of the Basques the world has two sides; one is “natural”, all in itself, natural. The other is *aide*, “aerial” – supernatural, magical, mystical. The aerial world, home of many *Ireluak*, can invade the natural world in a good way or a bad one. Within this context the responsibility for all illnesses that are not revealed is the faculty of *Aide*. In addition to the Basque Country, the geographical area that preserved *Aide's* faith covers the whole of the Pyrenees and the Cantabrian side of the Iberian Peninsula. In Goierri it was believed that fog was bringing *Aide*, which is

why they considered fog to be something harmful. The belief that low fog is harmful is widespread in the Basque Country. The long days of “rotten fog” can ruin crops and orchards, and can be harmful to both livestock and humans. In such cases, Aideko looks like *Lainaide*. It is the sea that sends Aide in the form of a low fog to spoil crops and grass.

The cholera-fog

According to the folk belief of Zerain and Zegama, the cholera plague was caused by Aide, who looked like a small fog bank. In the middle of the year, it is said that a low fog passed through the streets of Segura, and the next day the plague of black fever began to massacre the population. To put an end to the plague, groups of sheep were taken to Segura and passed through its streets. They believed the sheep would absorb the disease and save the people who lived there.

Akelarre

Akelarre is a controversial Basque term denoting “Witches’ Sabbath” or more precise: *the place* where witches hold their meetings. The most common etymology proposes Akelarre as “*meadow of the billy goat*” – meadow is *larre* and billy goat translates as *aker*. Witches’ sabbaths were envisioned as presided over by a billy goat (which in the Basque religion was not an animal but *Aker* or *Akerbeltz*, which was in turn one of the manifestations of the goddess *Mari*). Spelled as *aquejarre* the term has been used in Castilian Spanish since the witch trials of the 17th century. It is also the title of a witchcraft painting by Francisco Goya, to be seen in the *Museo del Prado*, which depicts a gathering of witches in the company of a huge black billy goat, that made the word more famous. “Aquelarre” was first attested in 1609 at an inquisitorial briefing, as a synonym to *junta diabólica*, meaning: *diabolic assembly*. Basque terms, often transcribed into Spanish texts by monolingual Spanish language copyists, were fraught with mistakes. According to J. Dueso, in *Brujería en el País Vasco* (1996), during the 1609-1612 persecution period and later, the Basques actually didn’t even know what the term “akelarre”, referred to by the inquisitors, meant.

The Spanish Inquisition politicized the ancient Basque religious practices as part of their conversion strategy and condemned people who worshipped a black goat by relating this to the worship of Satan. As the

only true goal of the Inquisition was to bring any non-Christian people under the influence and domination of Rome, it is clear they demonized Basque goat worship into something that “justified” the horrors so many Basques would suffer in “the Name of God” when the persecutions started. In 1610, the Spanish Inquisition tribunal of Logroño initiated a large witch-hunt in Zugarramurdi and villages around Navarre, that resulted in 300 people being accused of practicing witchcraft. They took 40 of them to Logroño and burnt 12 supposed witches in Zugarramurdi at the stake (5 of them symbolically, as they had been killed by torture earlier). As a result of these major trials the term *akelarre* became synonymous with the word witches’ sabbath, and spread into common parlance in both the Basque and Spanish language.

Places where according to folk-belief and other sources the Akelarre was organized

- *Akelarre*, a field of Mañaria, Biscay.
- *Akelarrenlezea*, a large cave of Zugarramurdi, Navarre.
- *Abadelaueta*, in Etxaguen, Zigoitia, Alava.
- *Ajunt de Bruixes*, in Canigou mountain, Catalonia, believed to be the place where the *Sorginak* created storms to send to the plains.
- *Akerlanda*, “Goat’s meadow”, in Gautegiz Arteaga, Biscay.
- *Amboto*, Álava and Biscay.
- *Atsegin Soro*, “Pleasure orchard”. This was the name by which *Sorginak* themselves called the field of Matxarena in Errenteria (Gipuzkoa), according to inquisitorial records.
- *Balmaseda*, Biscay.
- *Bekatu-larre*, “Sinful meadow”, in Ziordia, Navarre.
- *Campo de las Varillas*, Castro-Urdiales, Cantabria, Spain
- *Cernégula*, Burgos.
- *Cueva de Salamanca*, Salamanca.
- *Dantzaleku*, between Ataun and Idiazabal, Gipuzkoa.
- *Edar Iturri*, a spring in Tolosa, Gipuzkoa.
- *El Bailadero*, area in the Anaga Massif, Tenerife.
- *Eperlanda*, “Partridges’ field”, in Muxika, Biscay.
- *Garaigorta* in Orozko, Biscay.
- *Irantzi, Puilegi, Mairubaratza*, in Oiartzun, Gipuzkoa.
- *Jaizkibel*, mountain in Hondarribia, Gipuzkoa. The inquisition heard they celebrated *Akelarre* near the church of Santa Barbara. Local sayings believe that there were *Akelarres* in the bridges of Mendelu, Santa

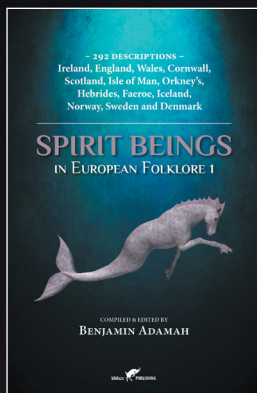
Engrazi and Puntalea.

- *La Veiga'l Palu, Caboalles de Arriba*, in Laciana, León, Castilla y León
- *Larrun mountain*, here the Sorginak from Bera (Navarre), Sara and Azkaine (Lapurdi) gathered.
- *Llano de Brujas y Alcantarilla* in the Region of Murcia.
- *Macizo de Anaga* in Tenerife, Canary Islands.
- *Mandabiita* in Ataun, Gipuzkoa.
- *Matxarena* in Errenteria, Gipuzkoa, according to inquisitorial records.
- *Monasterio de Hermo* in Cangas del Narcea, Asturias.
- *Pals*, the mountains on top of the village Pals, in Andorra.
- *Petralanda* in Dima, Biscay.
- *Playa de Coiro*, Cangas de Morrazo, Pontevedra.
- *Sorginerreka*, “Sorginaks’ creek”, in Tolosa, Gipuzkoa.
- *Sorginetxe*, “Sorginaks’ house”, in Aia, Gipuzkoa.
- *Sorgintxulo*, “Sorginaks’ hole”, a cave in Hernani, Gipuzkoa.
- *Sorginzulo* “Sorginaks’ hole”, in Zegama and another one in Ataun, both in Gipuzkoa.
- *Trasmoz y Gallocanta*: in Aragón.
- *Turbon*, a mountain in Huesca.
- *Urkitza* in Urizaharra, Alava.
- *Viladrau y Cervera* in Catalonia.

Akerbeltz or Aker

Akerbeltz or *Aker* (from *aker*; billy goat, and *beltz*; black) is a deity and nature demon in the folk mythology of the Basque people, representing one of the aspects of the goddess *Mari*, but he is also known as a sovereign deity. A stone slab dating back to the Roman age already mentions *Aherbelts Deo* (the god *Aherbelts*). *Akerbeltz* had many *Ireluak* as his servants. In Christianity, *Akerbeltz* – the name is sometimes shortened to *Aker* – is the live image of “the demon” and the Inquisition identified him as *Satan*, or the *Devil* himself. The black he-goat was associated with all kinds of sexual activity, expression and exaltation, and was the central force and entity of the sabbath. Folklorists have linked *Akerbeltz* to some ancient deities as *Dionysus*, in terms of excesses, and *Pan*, in terms of sexual activity. However, originally *Akerbeltz* was an ancient European deity, worshiped also outside the Basque Country as the protector of animals. There were some other beliefs that say he was the animals’ and houses’ protector, having power over all the animals.

FROM THE SAME SERIES:



Compendium 4 of the *Spirit Beings in European Folklore*-series covers an area that starts with Wallonia and continues via France and the Pyrenees, through the Iberian Peninsula, to Italy and Greece. This results in a very diverse and colourful collection of spirit beings, due to the many included Basque nature-spirits or *Ireluak*, the Spanish *Duendes*, the Celtic spirits of Brittany, the prankster Italian *Folletti* and the creatures from Greece. Some creatures from Breton folklore are particularly gruesome, such as the hollow-eyed *Ankou*, the Werewolf-like *Bugul-nôz*, or the ghostly and *Will-o'-the-wisp*-like *Yan-gant-y-tan*, who roams the night roads with his five lit candles. Most Italian ghosts are less gloomy, while the Iberian Peninsula is home to everything ranging from the 'Beauty' to the 'Beast'. *Compendium 4* contains – amongst other things – many kinds of dwarf-spirits or *Goblins* (*Lutins*, *Nutons*, *Folletti*, *Farfadettes*, *Korrigans*, *Minairons*) various seductive and feminine spring creatures, *Wild Man*-varieties (*Basajaunak*, *Jentilak*) and an extensive section on the *Incubus-Succubus*. It is fascinating to discover how many types of European spirit beings (from *Kobold* to many female spring-spirits), described in the other *Compendiums*, can be traced back to creatures from Ancient Greece.

Compendium 4 discusses 270 spirit beings in detail, includes their alternative names, additional references to subordinate beings and a unique selection of illustrations.

