

## History of Eastern Demons

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Disclaimer: This work has been completed as an educational tool for students of history, religious and paranormal studies. The author wishes to discourage any use of this work in conjunction with paranormal field investigations of demons.



## Introduction

"Long lips reaching out from where one hundred males gather send envious talk (mi-kha) like an arrow; where one hundred females gather, it is like spun wool... where one hundred demonesses gather, it flows like water ... In Tibet the dharma is dying out, like beings who are near death. Oceans are drying up, the Life Tree is falling. The big lips of the nine mi-kha brothers are coming ..."

These words are taken from the Tibetan exorcism ritual. It expresses the belief that the world is moving from an age of prosperity into one of decline. The entropic decline is being led by the 9 demonic Gong-po brothers that can take many forms like the mi-kha, or lords of envious talk.

For someone here in the United States, names, pictures and stories of demons from places like India or Tibet may seem strange and exotic. Yet at the very core, there are a striking number of similarities to those found in the West.

Let us roll back time for a moment and look briefly at the current scientific Mythology on the history of man:

- Homo sapiens evolved 200,000 years ago in central Africa.
- Humans began speaking around 100,000 years ago<sup>1</sup>
- The earliest known writing so far discovered is from a Harappan settlement in Pakistan and dates to 4,100 BC
- The earliest decipherable surviving writing system was developed around 3,600 BC (5,000 years ago) in Mesopotamia as a system of symbols to represent numbers

This is not to say that there was not symbolic representations prior to this point.

Before the Mesopotamian era, there is only art. Several prominent examples are:

- the face in stone in Angouleme, France that was created 27,000 years ago
- the cave paintings in Malaga, Spain created 43,500 years ago

While the symbols give us an impression, they do not tell a story. And more importantly, they give only interpretive information. Even if these dates are off by thousands of years, the point remains the same, we as humans only have record of a tiny fraction of our interactions with the universe around us.

So for better or worse ... our history ... Our stories are mostly lost

Yet from our earliest stories, there have been tales of spirits ... of Gods ... and of demons. Before there was Christianity ... Before there was Buddhism ... There was a world with tribal gods and demons that were tangible representatives of the forces of nature. In this world, demons were just as real and just as fearsome as the yearly outbreaks of influenza. While the names of these creatures varied from village to village and through languages groups, most shared similar origins and characteristics. For tens of thousands of years this was the case around the world.

Suddenly 2500 everything changed with a young Macedonia warrior king called Alexander. As the armies of Alexander swept through the Middle East not only did they bring the Greek culture, they brought with

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<sup>1</sup> Some claim as recently as 30,000 years ago



them Greek religious philosophy. This conquest and cultural exchange laid the ground work for the eventual spread of Christian religious ideas throughout the West. So for the Europeans, the old tribal gods and demons were suppressed and merged with the more philosophical and less physical Christian religion. Yet to the east of Alexander's conquest, the "global" spiritual religion would take a different form. In India, Tibet, to some extent Japan and Indonesia, Buddhism would provide the spiritual template that would become the predominant religion. As Buddhism spread, like Christianity it was forced to merge with the many tribal religions that were already in place. Unlike Christianity's spread, the passive tenants of Buddhism tended to embrace alternative religions rather than violent suppress them. So while in the western world, demons have been made to represent the most evil aspects of the universe. They are feared, talked about in whispers and when necessary asked to leave. In Asia, demons are treated as either a part of nature to be embraced or when the demons are evil, they are destroyed. If we travel even further to the east, beyond the early reach of Christianity and Buddhism, it is even possible to see Demons and religions in place with only a 500 year influence of the two early global religions.

In starting to explore the world of Demonology, we need a firm definition of "what is a demon".

### Definition of a demon

In the Western world, we tend to define demons based on the outward symptoms of a possession. There are 5 generally accepted characteristics<sup>2</sup> that must be met for a demonic possession:

- Will
  - The demon must express a distinct will outside of its host and exercise that will.
  - Promise of a demon to return or harm the host.
- Emotion
  - A demon will react to emotional stimuli or threats to itself that would not ordinarily harm the host. For example reaction to the threat of exorcism or banishment
- Intellect
- Display of knowledge beyond a natural source of the host
- Self-Awareness
  - The claim that the personality is unique and distinct from the host's personality
- Speech

Literature is filled with cases of the supposed demon speaking through its host and having a distinctly different personality or vocal pattern. This includes speaking languages unknown to the host.<sup>3</sup>In studying Eastern demons, possession is only one possibility.

As we will discuss, Eastern demons are often given more physical characteristics based of the residual influence of the tribal cultures before the arrival of Buddhism. For example:

- Most non-western demons are cannibals. Many are outcast.
- Tibetan demons are mostly invisible, extra-planar beings.
- Hindu demons are often described as physical monsters, illnesses or possessing spirits.
- Japanese demons are traditionally fearsome Ogres but can also illness or nature spirits.
- Mesoamerican demons are the forces of nature given physical form.

So for our purposes today, we are going to stick to the rather vague assertions that:

- A demon has not previously been a human.
- A subject under demonic influence is not exhibiting normal symptoms of a scientifically definable physical or mental disease.
- Demonic influence must have outward manifestations beyond the explainable abilities of an associated host.
- A demon is assumed to be of limited power and therefore at a lower level than a primary deity.

Now that we have a definition, we may begin.

## Gilgamesh

Let us start our worldwide journey with the beginning of recorded history and one of the most complete of the early stories, the epic of Gilgamesh. Luckily for us, not only has this story been preserved but it also contains the first concrete references to demons.

In the ancient Sumerian texts, there are three basic classes of demons:

- Disembodied human spirits
- Half-monster, half-human entities
- Non-human forces

## Utukku

The most prevalent in the Gilgamesh saga is the Utukku which is the spirit ghost of Gilgamesh's companion Eabani. Gilgamesh asks the god Nergal to return Eabani to him and the god complies. The term Utukku eventual changes in Sumerian and Babylonian text to be a kind of demon that haunts barren places and harms man.

Often associated with the breaking of a taboo, the Utukku is described as prowling like a dog and faster than a falling star. The female, called a Lamashtu, has a hairy body, a lion's head, donkey teeth and donkey ears. She also has long fingernails and the feet of a bird. One reference in a spell describes the creatures:

*"A door cannot exclude them ,A bolt cannot turn them back; They slither through the door like a snake, They blow in by the hinge like the wind, They bear off the wife from a man's embrace; They snatch the son from a man's knee."*

-Extract from a Mesopotamian

## Alu (Gallu)

The second demon from Gilgamesh is Alu. When Anu wants to avenge his daughter Ishtar on Gilgamesh and Eabani, he creates a celestial bull named Alu to attack them. Like the Utukku, this term evolved. Alu seems to be derived from the Sumerian term Gallu which means "tempest." Ironically as these terms blend Gallu also refers to a bull spirit that hunts at night.



## Lilu

The lilu are the Babylonian prototypes types for the incubus/succubus legends. The Lilu, like their modern counter parts, are represented as having sex with humans to steal life-force or to become impregnated. Like the alien abduction phenomena, the real origin of these demons may be related to sleep paralysis rather than supernatural.

Thanks to bad translations and bad history, the Lilu have been retroactively branded as the origin of the Jewish Lilith mythology. Contemporary translations firmly assert that that the Lilith linkage is incorrect.

## Shedim

With the name derived from the Babylonian name meaning "to be violent", the Shedim are the winged bulls used to guard temples in Babylon and Assyria. They are referenced to in both curses as well as spells of protection.

If in a broad sense the religion of a Gilgamesh could be assumed as typical in the pre-universal religion period, then it is easier to see how the spread of religions has resulting in the merging and transfer of ideas.

## Transfer of Religions

To best understand the migrations of demons across the eastern world, it is important that we pause for a necessary digression ... The concept for the transfer of religions.

There are 3 primary methods of Transfer:

1. Neighbor to neighbor
2. Trade
3. Conquest

In following the story of demons as they move east from Babylon to Hindu India, into Tibet, and into the Pacific islands, ideas, concepts and names become blended. For a religions to survive in its purist form there is an inevitable conflict between change and preservation. For a culture, bombarded by divergent religions to survive, they must try to preserve their cultural identity by the enforcement of cultural traditions to isolate themselves from their neighbors. This is accomplished in several ways:

- Conversion of completing religions gods to lesser gods/demons
- Branding any completing religions gods as Evil.
- Prohibiting breeding outside the tribe as well as self-imposed tribal isolation.
- Unique diets
- Maintaining tribal languages
- Maintaining secret rites for the initiated

## India

The country we now call India is really a patch work of hundreds of religions and micro-cultures. Preserving their local gods and demons under the banner of the Hindu religion, in India individual gods and demons are often treated as generic religion and therefore viewed as non-competitive. When faced with the rise of Buddhism in the area two responses emerged:



- Combine and strengthen
- resist and fight.

Generally speaking over the thousands of years of cohabitation, the religions have formed a symbiosis in the region. Even in an environment where prior to Islam there were no overt threats, there are a number of ways that the Hindu religions have resisted the subversion from other religions. The Hindu culture provides a concrete example of these prohibitions to maintain isolationism. The Makarat (ma-KAY-rat) are the 5 forbidden things to the Hindu:

- Wine
- Meat
- Fish
- Hand gestures with the left hand or touching things with the feet.
- Sexual union

Ironically, the same basic list of forbidden items has also migrated into the Mahayana (mah-Ayana) Buddhist tradition.

Because of the vast scope and depth of the Hindi religion, any attempt to comprehensively review the demons that are named would prove impossible. To that extent, a few of the more notable demonic concepts and most prominent dement will be briefly mentioned. One fundament concept in the Hindi religions in the idea of Nirakara (nir-A-KAY-ra) which is the sanskrit word for "formless, incorporeal". Fundamentally this is the idea that the "godhead" is beyond the realm of physical existence. As it applies to demons, it is the assertion that some kinds of demons are without bodies or physical form. They can influence that which has form (sakara) and can be forced away from the sakara and, like the western view of demons, they cannot be destroyed.

In contrast to the demons with Nirakara, most demons in the Hindi religions have physical form. And can be killed...

This precedent is established in the story of Mahishasura.

### [Mahishasura](#)

According to the Hindu religions, the buffalo Demon Mahishasura was granted the gift from the god Brahma that no male could kill him. Using his new power, Mahisha led an army against the gods and defeated them. Upset at their defeat, the gods' anger created the goddess Durga. Using all the different gods weapons Durga was sent to kill Mahisha. After a long battle, Durga eventually cut off the head of Mahisha and as a result Durga became the gods' protector.

### [Rakshasa](#)

Rakshasa demons are blood-drinking cannibals with the power to fly, vanish, and change shape as well as size. These fierce giants are described as black with two fangs protruding from their mouths and s p claws. According to legend, the Rakhasas demons were created from the breath of Brahma when he was asleep. These demons were so filled with blood lust that they started eating Brahma himself. Brahma shouted "Rakshama" (which was Sanskrit for "Protect Me!") and to save Brahma, Vishnu expelled all Rakshasas to Earth.



In the Ramayana, one of the major enemies of Rama is the king of the Rakshasa with 10 heads, Ravana. In the text Ravana steals Rama wife Sita and the hero is forced to fight Ravana to the death to free his wife.

In the Mahabharata, it is the hero Bhima that fights the Rakshasa. Living in the jungle and dining on travelers, these demons made the mistake of letting one of their females scout the traveling party of Bhima. The demoness falls in love with Bhima and warns him of the Rakshasa. The demons attack and are ultimately defeated. As an illustration of how demonic concepts have been transferred across religions, Rakshasa eventually are found in the Theravada Buddhist literature where they harass and threaten Buddha. Eventually they debate Buddha and decide to follow him. Even in Japan, the Rakshasa demons turn up in the form of the Rasetsu.

### Pishachas

Like the Rakshasa, the Pishachas, are flesh eating with dark skin and glowing red eyes. The demons can shift form at will, turn invisible and even possess victims. Believed to feed off of life energy, the Pishachas are credited with causing illness and even insanity. Like western demons, it is believed that these demons can be cast out using certain mantras and religious tools. Just like the Rakshasa, the Pishachas can also be found in other religious traditions as transplants. The most prominent of the transplanted Pishachas is in the form of the Tibetan Pisat.

### Tibet

To understand the Tibetan demons and the rituals surrounding them, it is important to acknowledge the religious aspects of Tibet. Contrary to the popular image of Tibet as an entirely Buddhist country, it is important to understand that it is also a country with an entrenched shamanistic tradition. Just like Christianity locally was modified as it encountered alternate religions in the Americas, as Buddhism entered into Tibet, it became infused with the local religions. The resulting Tibetan Buddhism is now filled with rituals that are both Buddhist and shamanistic in nature. Old gods are now the demons and devils that haunt the population.

There are two Tibetan terms that need to be mentioned:

- Bdud which is the Tibetan word for demons
- Gto means to "expel."

Like some sects of Indian Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism has a strong belief in ghosts and demons. According to most traditional legends, there is a ghost world that parallels the human world. After death, the ghost is freed from the body. After a period of uncertainty, it may choose to enter the ghost world or remain in the intermediate Bardo state.

The Bardo realm is the doorway between worlds. From Bardo, you may enter into reincarnation, the ghost world or achieve Nirvana. If the ghost does not enter one of these 3 states, they will eventually simply end. While in the state of Bardo, mean or selfish ghosts are left in a perpetual state of "pain or hunger." These "ser na" (which means yellow nose) are in a constant state of wanting to consume but they can no longer eat and therefore cannot satisfy their hunger. This perpetual hunger drives the Ser Na to try to possess the living to feed.





In addition to ghost threatening people, according to the writings of Lama Chog Lingpa, there are 3 other key supernatural forces plaguing mankind:

- The Klu are serpent deities that that whisper false accusation into people's minds to destroy the harmony of the world.
- The btsan are the warrior spirits that seek to revenge their heroic deaths.
- The bdud are the demons that that cause personal and historic decay.

### Grul-dzul

The Gyasumdo Tibetans believe that a demon arrives in their villages on the back of a traveler. This classa demon called a Grul-dzul, the hunts within the village for the weakest member and attacks. Villagers try to prevent this from happening by placing a sign of a leaf rake sticking out of basket with girl's pants on their doors prohibiting travelers from entering and, therefore, keeping the Grul-dzul out.

### Fighting a demons

The Tibetans believe that there are 4 ways to stop a ghost or end a possession:

- Use of a phurba
- Spirit traps to protect the home
- Gouduojie festival rituals
- Direct exorcism

The phurba is the ancient ritual dagger that is used to destroy spirits. It can be used to stab the spirit directly which then either absorbs the spirits energy and destroys it or forces the spirit to be reincarnated.

A spirit trap is a kind of yarn spindle mounted to the outside of a house or to a tree. The spindled is wound with a variety of colored interwoven yarns designed to catch the attention of spirits nearby. The spirit becomes fascinated with the colors and then trapped within the spindle. The spindle is then burned to destroy the spirits inside.

Gouduojie is the Tibetan Ghost Exorcism festival held on 29 December. Tibetans traditionally clear their houses on this day and then carry torches and recite the words of exorcism.

For Tibetans, the direct exorcism begins with the suspicion of demonic affliction called the rnam-rtog. The spells and chants are traditionally composed of two parts:

- The enticement... "Come swim in the lake ... "
- And the destructive part ... "May you be carried away in the landslide ... "

The exorcists, usually a Paju shaman, leads the two part invocations to help reinforce social rules. Obey and prosper. Defy and be destroyed.

Once divination confirms the target to be possessed, the removal of the demon is started with the construction of an effigy on the victim. Blood or red wine is poured over the effigy as a red offering and substitute. There is a chant from the exorcist... "Take the meat and go ... "





After the demon is believed to be within the effigy, the surrogate is carried outside the village where it is then shot with arrows. The arrowed effigy is then thrown over a cliff where the chant promises a landslide to take the demon away.

### Sri Demons

As a second phase of the Tibetan exorcism rite, the Paju performs a ritual to banish the Sri demons that may be waiting to attack. The Sri demons are the escaped inhabitants of the Gurung underworld of Khro-nasa. For this ritual, small dough animal effigies are placed in a tray. A thin layer of white ash is placed on the tray and the covered by black ash. At the head of the tray a dog's skull is placed to hold the trapped demons. All fires are put out as the chants are recited. With the room is re-lit, the ashes are examined to see if there are demon footprints in the ash. The processed is repeated over and over in hopes of capturing the demon. If the demon tracks are found, then the skull of the dog is taken to be ritualistically destroyed. As part of the destruction ritual. A phurba is used to cut a small hole in the ground. The paju then says: "Through the crack you see nine levels. Below that is an ocean in which there is a nine-headed serpent demon (klu gi bdud) who is a prisoner of his evil deeds ... He has a crocodile's body and a dark ugly face with his mouth emitting poisonous vapors." The priest then lowers the trapped demon in to the hole. The chant then says that the demon will be pressed down by the mouth of the servant demon and trapped.

The philosophy of not actually hurting the demon directly is key to the Tibetan idea on non-violence and their cultural detachment from the actual act of killing for food. Yet this is not always actually the case.

### Death demons

There is a class of Tibetan demon called the "death demon". A popular exorcism ritual used to stop the death demons is called the "za-dre kha sgyur". In these rituals, the Paju directly threatens the demon with harm from the wrathful form of Buddha from the Vajradhara called the Phyag-na rDo-rje. The Paju says "If you disobey Phyag-na rDo-rje, he will split your head! He will chop up your body and send down a rain of weapons and turn you to dust! Instead it is better that you leave!" If the demon fails to leave the victim is ritualistically purged with the use of a special phurba to force the demon out of the spirit world. While some of the Paju assert this is a "higher rebirth" other Lama assert that the demon is destroyed.

### 3 headed black demons

Another key exorcism rite used by the Tibetans in the Gyasumdo is the expelling of the 3-headed black demon, Nag-po mgo gsum. This ritual is performed annually because the Paju believe that once a demon has arrived, unless it ascends it will periodically return.

The exorcism begins with "Among the eight trigrams some have become friendly, others enemies, and the planets and the nine numerical squares are fighting. By doing so, they send harm to us. Fight then develops among us and property deteriorates."

For this ritual an effigy of the demon's host is made to trap the demon. The dough of the effigy has the nine numerical squares of the Tibetan astrological chart and 8 religious trigrams added to it. Signs for the 7 planets are also added. These symbols are believed to attach the demon and then temporarily trap it in the effigy. The effigy is then threatened. Chants are used to draw any other demons in the area into



the effigy. The effigy is encased in a small structure to represent the house it attacked. The structure has bamboo crosses on the top with five colored threads in concentric designs. The demon is trapped inside the construct with the placement of a fence of wooden knives to seal it in. The entire trap is then placed at across road to ward off any traveling demons from passing the intersection as a Zor ward against demons. The story of the Nag-po mgo gsum is actually a story of what happens if you fail your dharma and how karma exacts revenge on the wicked.

### Gcod- inviting the demon in

One final Tibetan exorcism rite of note is the Gcod or severance rite. Unlike all other exorcism rites, the Gcod instead of binding the demon and repelling it, encourages the demon to enter freely and feast on the body of the ritual performer. The rite calls on the goddess Ma-gcig slab-sgron (ma-cig lab-dron) to cut up the body and distribute it among the swarms of demons the ritual attracts. Once the demons are satiated, they leave and take the anger, passion, ignorance and ego with them. The self-sacrifice of the Gcod pays the Karmic debts of those at the ritual by paying the demons with self-sacrifice.

### Burma and Thailand

While many of the traditions of the various sects of Buddhism have made their way throughout southeastern Asian, there is one class of spirit in particular that meets our criteria for demons.

The people of Burma and Thailand believe that there is a type of nature spirit that instead of possessing people generally prefers to live in trees, along the rivers or serving as cemetery guardians. The Nat (in Burmese) or the Phi (in Thai) generally are represented as positive nature spirits unless provoked.

### Japan

In Japan, demons have manifest in their own uniquely Japanese form, the Oni. Alive in both history, religions and modern pop culture, the Japanese Oni is both a feared Ogre and a harbinger of luck.

### Oni

While today's Oni are more the monsters of anime than western demons, historically the Oni have evolved. In early works, the Oni are the strangers lurking in the mountains that plague the villagers. They are also the causes of many illness in the Chinese influenced medical treatises.<sup>2</sup> In Heian court literature, the Oni are also the Kokoro No Oni, "the oni in one's heart" or the evil controlling one's soul.

Beyond the general idea of the Oni as a demon, like in the western traditions, Oni have come to represent the very nature of evil. In the Onmyodo, the way of yin and yang, the Oni are the evil spirits dedicated to harming humans.

In studying the personified Oni demons, there are 5 general characteristics that describe them:

- Cannibalism
- Transformation
- The Other- Oppressed, outsiders, alienated, isolated
- Lightning
- Prosperity

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<sup>2</sup> Though the Oni are replaced as the causes of illnesses in later works by the Mushi, a kind of invisible insect.



### *Shuten Doji*

While there are hundreds of stories of the Oni, one of the most famous old stories is that of the Shuten Doji, the drunken Demon. In the Heian legend, the Shuten Doji would come into the capital, kidnap a beautiful maiden and then eat her. Because this demon is fought by a less than loved ruling warrior class of Heian, to the general population the demon became a symbol of resistance to the central authority ... a kind of demonic Robin Hood. In many ways, the demon also represents the resistance of the old religions to the encroachment of the government on the freedoms of the people. One early writing on Shuten Doji even claims that "there is nothing false in the words of Demons."

In part, one of the reasons for the persistence of the Shuten Doji is that the demon finally faces his defeat at the hands of the warrior hero Minamoto No Raiko (Yorimitsu) and his four lieutenants. Because the rise of warrior class was at the expense of farmers, the outcast demon's struggle became that of the villagers outside the capital.

### *Yamauba*

Unlike the Shuten Doji, the female Oni rarely are portrayed positively themselves. The Yamauba is most often portrayed in the old stories as an ugly woman forced to live in exile in the mountains. Capturing and murdering people, the Yamauba serves as a warning of the dangers found in being less than vigilant when leaving the villages. Yet even this personification of evil periodically is treated with some positive aspects. In later stories the demones may briefly take the form of a beautiful woman to seduce her would be victim. In a story related to the Raiko, one of the four lieutenants that kills Shuten Doji is actually the son of a Yamauba.

For a researcher today, one of the most fascinating aspects on the Oni is how they have transformed over time and still remained relevant in the Japanese society. As early as 1824, Tsuruya Nanboku began commercializing and sensationalizing the Oni in his book Tokaido Yotsuya kaidan (Yotsuya Ghost Stories). Edogawa Ranpo continued to do so with his 1930s book Koto no oni (Oni of a Solitary Island). Today it is not uncommon to find the Onis as manga, anime, books and movies.

Perhaps most striking is the continuation of the Oni as part of today's religious institutions.

### *Namahage*

One of the most prevalent types of Oni is the fearsome Namahage. Primarily originating along coastal village, the Namahage are most frequent represented as red, blue or black faced demons dress in straw garments. In the annual Setsubun ceremony, a small group of men costumed as the Namahage storm down from hilltop shrines and raise havoc in the villages. Searching for lazy or disobedient children, the Namahage enter the homes where the villagers shout:

"Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!"

"Oni, Go out! Blessings come in"

To prevent the children from being taken, soy beans are tossed at thee Oni and food is offered. Eventually a large meal is consumed to appease the Namahage. As they depart, the straw that is dropped from the costumes is first tied around the children's heads for luck and then gathered as a luck token for the coming year.



The origins of this demonic ritual have two distinctive origins:

One legend has the Namahage demons descending from the mountain to take a little girl from the village. The elders agree to give up the girl if the Oni will build a 100 steps to the top of a hillside shrine before the crowing of the morning rooster. Just before sunrise the villagers cheat and fake the crow. The demons flee but the villagers feel remorse and every year honor the Oni.

A second more pragmatic analysis is that the Oni represent foreigners that at some point invaded the villages and are now personified as demons.

## America

While the other demonic traditions that we have looked at were influenced by Buddhism, North and South America were not influenced by either Buddhism or Christianity until 500 years ago. As a result of these cultural absences, it is possible to see demonic variations without the contaminations of overarching religions.

Today most of the understanding of original Mesoamerican religions is gained from glyphs or by conquerors rather than practitioners. Many of the great codices of religious rites written when the Spanish arrived were eventually burned in the name of Christianizing the natives. Yet some of these works have survived. The Popol Vuh is a general mythology of the K'iche' kingdom in Guatemala's western highlands. Thanks to the work of a Dominican friar, the Popul Vuh has survived and now provides one of the only glimpses into the religion of the ancient Mayans. Contrary to the ambitions of the Christian churches, many of the old Gods and spirits have continued to be a real part of indigenous American culture. Even today, it is possible to sit and watch the Maya celebrate the struggle between good and evil as they dance around their sacred altars of flowers and fruit.

A key factor in understanding the Mesoamerican religions is the concept of religious transfer that was mentioned earlier. Given today's perception of relative isolation between cultural groups from South America to the North it is important to understand that for thousands of years trade routes connected the people of both continents. Gods and ideas passed from neighbor to neighbor as well as from coast to coast. For instance, in North America 500 years before Columbus, there was already a trade system that stretched from Tampa to the Great Lakes to the Rocky Mountains. With village and cultural warfare constantly occurring, the Americas supported a tapestry of gods that often were the same characters with differing names.

## Maya

To the ancient Maya, demons and spirits were very different than how "modern" Americans perceive them today. Generally speaking all demons and gods had an absolutely physical presence. These gods and demons may be hidden in the shadows or take other forms but they had bodies. Yet at the same time, the Maya believed that they could channel or be possessed by the spirits of the gods through the use of ceremonial masks and spells. Because they gods had bodies, they required feeding. The primary gods required blood sacrifices while the lesser gods like the Xibalba were reduced to minor symbolic sacrifices as their prominence waned.



### *Camazotz*

One of the most common of the demons found throughout Mesoamerica with various names is the Camazotz or "death Bat". Associated with the Quiche god of fire, Zotzilaha Chama leen, at least two different forms of the Bat are found in the Po pol Vuh. In one chapter the Camazotz decapitates the hero Hun Hunahpu with his claws but was ultimately defeated and cast out from the world. The bat mythos is ingrained in many America religions. For the Bakairi tribe in Brazil, the bat is Evaki, a night goddess. The Muskogee Creek, the Cherokee and the Apache all include some form of bat spirit as part of their mythologies. Interestingly this demon still is considered real by the Zotzil and the Zinacatan people of Mexico as well as in Trinidad and Ecuador.

In a case that may be more Cryptozoology than Demonology, since 1947 there have been reports of giant bats with an unusually bald or misshaped head.

### *Xibalba*

In the Mayan religion, the underworld, Xibalba, the "place of fear" is ruled by two death gods named Hun-Came (One Death) and Vucub-Came (Seven Death). Beneath them 10 demons serve in paired groups:

- Xiquiripat (Flying Scab) and Cuchumaquic (Gathered Blood) cause sickness by poisoning peoples' blood.
- Ahalpuh (Pus Demon) and Ahalgana (Jaundice Demon) cause swelling in dead bodies to swell as from infection.
- Chamiabac (Bone Staff) and Chamiaholom (Skull Staff) represent the natural decomposition of bodies into skeletons.
- Ahalmes (Sweepings Demon) and Ahaltocob (Stabbing Demon) are demons that lie in wait in the unswept areas of people houses and stabbed them to death.
- Xic (Wing) and Patan (Packstrap) cause people to die coughing up blood especially when while out walking on a road.

I am going to quickly mention a few more Mayan demons to give you a feel for how the Maya incorporated these monstrous demons into their religion.

- Caprakan Demon spirit of earthquakes, Child of Gucup Cakix and brother of Zipacna. He was defeated by Hunahpu and Ixbalanque.
- Cotzbalam Demon servitor of Alom, His name means "Crunching Jaguar"
- He aided in the destruction of the Second Creation, by devouring the bodies of the Tsaboi-People who inhabited that world.
- Xecotcovach Demon-bird servitor of Alom, His name means "Face-Gouger" He aided in the destruction of the Second Creation, by tearing out the eyes of the Tsaboi-People who inhabited that world.
- The Muan is a sort of messenger demon that most often takes the form of a screech owl and provides ill omens to any whom encounter it.

While the Mayans provide a great example of the ancient impacts of demons on a society, the current practitioners give a modern demonologists even greater understanding their religious beliefs.



## Zuni

### *Atahsaia*

The Zuni of the Southwestern US has a class of giant demons called the Atahsaia. Like the Oni of Japan, this demon hunts to other demons as well as humans for food. This proto-bigfoot monster is said to have a torso as big as an elk, hands so thick that his knuckles appear horned, and a wild mane of grey bison hair. In some versions of the Atahsaia stories, his chest hair is like; a porcupine's quills and his arms are protected with scales. All the stories agree that he has unblinking eyes and yellow tusks.

Most of the stories featuring Atahsaia, center on the demons attempting to capture and eat various women that have strayed from their villages. As the demons struggle to "get the girl," usually the twin Zuni gods, Ahayuta and Matsailema, intervene to slay the monster and reward the intended victim. In the modern Zuni religious "wa'templa" ceremonial dance, Atahsaia is used as a figure to frighten children into obedience. Donning spotted masks with protruding teeth, the monster dances about with a flint knife helping to wipe the earth by allowing dead things to decay.

## Shoshonee

### *Dzoavits*

In the Shoshonean religion, an earthquake demon named Dzoavits is believed to feed on children as well as the eggs from the sacred dove. One story tells of how the demon in tricked into chasing the dove into a cave where he becomes trapped. The shaking earth is the demon trying to force his way from the cave.

## Mapuche

### *Wekufe*

The Wekufe, from the Mapudungun word "wekufu" meaning "demon, outside being", is an important type of harmful spirit or demon for the South American tribe of the Mapuche in Patagonia. Originally the term was used to describe any person that tells lies or is deceptive. After the arrival of Catholicism, the word was used as their term for demons of any creature that means to harm Mapuche people. The Wekufe can take physical form or move about in spirit form. According to legend, the soulless wekufes entered the world during a battle between the Pillan spirits which shattered the world's harmony. Working in conjunction with powerful sorcerers called kalkus, the wekufe work to destroy the world.

In order for the Wekufe to possess a host for a kalkus, the sorcerer most often hides the demon within piece of wood, straw or part of a lizard's body that must touch the victim. A wekufu may also directly enter a victim of its own volition when it is in its ghost form. Generally speaking, the victim of the Wekufes must have violated a taboo by:

- behaving badly
- not performing guillatun ritual of thanks
- mocking or disbelieving a machi (Mapuche shaman)
- Eating food that was killed or harvested without the spirits or thanking the gods.
- By not respecting the laws of the harmony.

Once possessed the Wekufe can only be cast out through a form of exorcism called the machitun ceremony.



## Amazon

### *Chullachaqui*

Deep in the forests of the Amazon, there are stories of the shape-shifting demon Chullachaqui. As a form of guardian spirit, the Chullachaqui protects the forest and punish those that violate taboos. Disguising its self as prey, hunters are lured deep in the forests into traps the Chullachaqui has prepared. In some cases the trap is a direct challenge to victims: either a physical contest or a puzzle of some kind. Failure to accept the challenge leaves the victim cursed. Failure leaves the victim dead. In modern times, the Chullachaqui has become associated with particularly violent attacks of the chupacabra.

## Conclusion

Today we have walked through some of the demonic traditions of the non-western world. While there are many similarities to western understanding, there are several subtle differences that add to our understanding demons.

The various demons we have looked at today, share a few general characteristics.

They are usually estranged in some way from society.

Many of the demons hold the ultimate taboo of cannibalism.

Most of the demons can be killed or exorcised.

Just like in life, knowledge can conquer fear. It is the perception not based in reality that leads to our destruction.

I am going to leave you with an old Southern joke to illustrate this point.

>Insert Lewis Grizzard Stone mountain joke<