

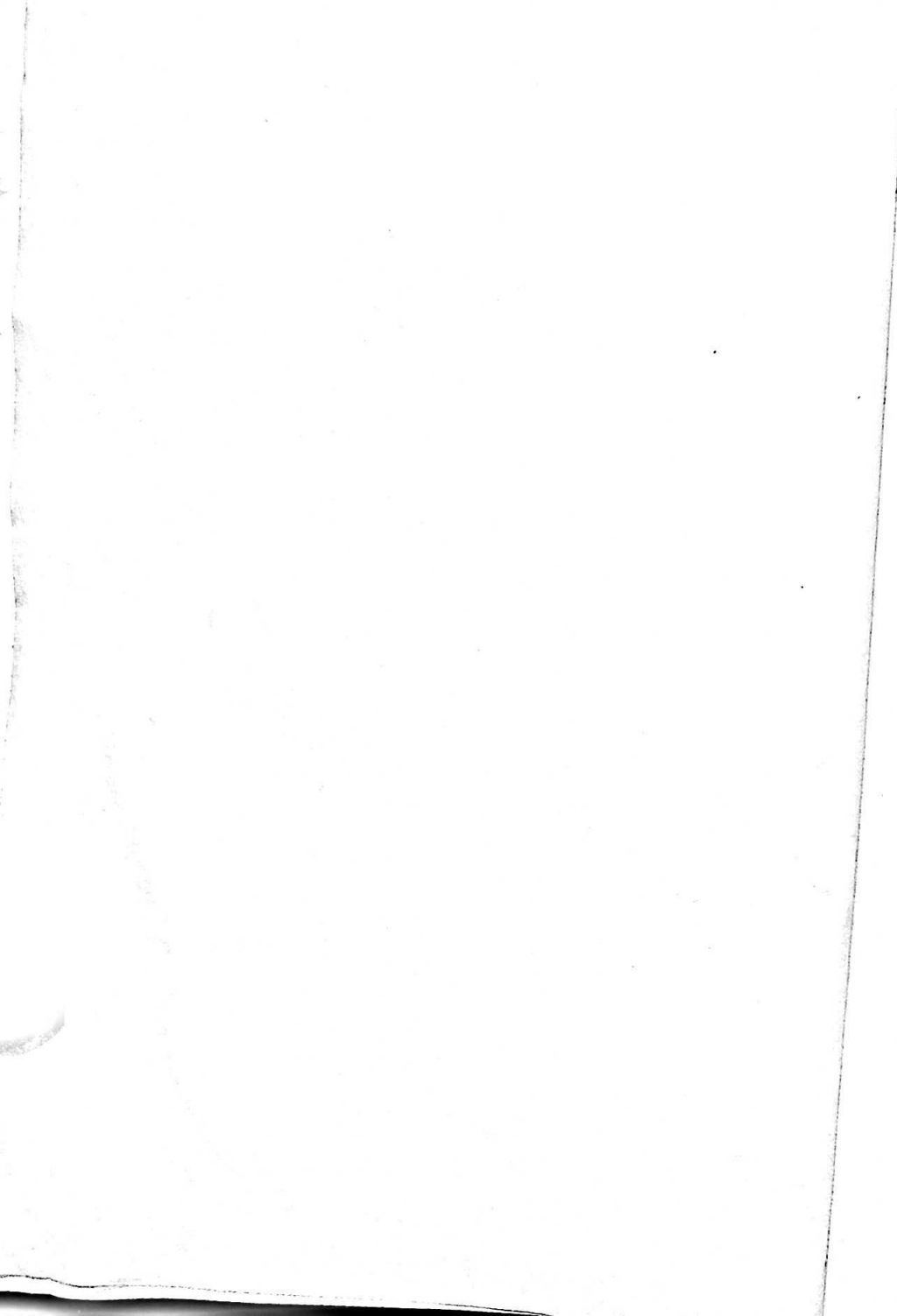
OF **GODS** &
HOLIDAYS



THE BALTIC HERITAGE



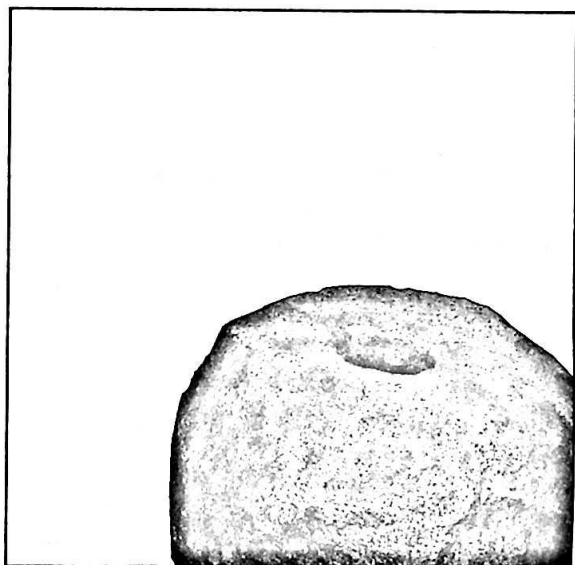
**OF GODS &
HOLIDAYS**
THE BALTIC HERITAGE



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OF GODS & HOLIDAYS

THE BALTIC HERITAGE



Edited by Jonas Trinkūnas



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**OF GODS &
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PREFACE

Until fairly recently reliable information about ancient Baltic culture, its mythology and religion has been scarce. The occupation of Lithuania and Latvia by the Russian-Soviet Empire in 1940 cut off these two countries from the Western world and made them a part of communist Russia. Even now, uninformed observers from the West regard the Baltic people as "Russians". Nothing could be further from the truth. They differ from the Russians, in language (which is not Slavic), in culture, religion, customs, and historical experience. It is worth noting that during the past two centuries, one of their defining characteristics has been their efforts to free themselves from the Russian (first czarist, then communist) empire.

The differences become even more prominent if one looks deeper into the history of these countries. Analysis of place-names shows that in early times the Balts lived in an area which extends far to the east of their present territory. Today these lands are inhabited by Belorussians and Russians. When one thousand years ago their Slavic neighbours accepted Christianity, the Balts retained their pagan religion for another four centuries. During that period

they established a powerful state which incorporated extensive Slavic lands. When the first Renaissance thinkers appeared in the West seeking to re-establish the frayed links to the wisdom of ancient Greece, the archaic Indo-European religion and mythology on which the Greek civilisation was founded was still surviving on the South-eastern coast of the Baltic sea. The eternal fire was still burning in the pagan temple in Vilnius, and people still worshipped the mighty Perkūnas and the even more archaic goddesses of Earth and Nature. It was only in 1387 that the sacred fire was extinguished in eastern Lithuania, and it took another full generation, up to 1413, for this to happen in Samogitia. At first these changes affected principally the nobility; the conservative Lithuanian population maintained the traditions of their ancestors and secretly worshipped their gods for several centuries more.

One of the firsts books to present the ethnology of this region to the general reader is *The Balts* by Maria Gimbutas, which was published in London in 1963. It provides considerable information about pre-Christian Baltic history, their culture, and religion. However, a single book cannot begin to exhaust this broad subject. The extensive collections of Lithuanian and Latvian folklore remain for the most part inaccessible not only to the reader who has interest in ancient cultures, but also to researchers in the areas of folklore and mythology. Most of the source material, as well as the studies which are based on it, have until now been available primarily in the two surviving Baltic languages – Lithuanian and Latvian. This is one of the main obstacles preventing this segment of European cultural heritage from being more widely known.

Unfortunately, at the present time even anthologies and reference works dealing with European mythology contain almost no information about Baltic culture and ancient religion.

Though the effort of collecting, preserving, and interpreting the heritage of the Baltic peoples was never completely interrupted, during the years of occupation this work could continue only with the utmost difficulty. The recent years of independence have therefore seen a virtual renaissance in publishing material. For example, in 1996 the first volume of *Sources of Baltic Religion and Mythology* was published in Vilnius. This is the first of a multi-volume work and encompasses source material from the earliest times to the end of the 15th century. A very extensive compilation of mythological texts is being issued in the multi-volume publication under the title *Lietuvių mitologija (Lithuanian Mythology)*. Volume I was published in 1995, volume II appeared in 1997. This important study suffered a grievous loss when its initiator and main compiler, Prof. Norbertas Vėlius, died unexpectedly in 1996. However, the groundwork has been laid and publication in this series will continue.

Of great importance are the studies, which systematize and analyze the extensive source material. In past decades researchers have taken the next step and have tried to reconstruct the ancient Baltic religious belief systems and to trace their evolution. Important contributions in this area have been made by Prof. Julius Greimas, a Lithuanian who lived and taught in France. He is one of the principal developers of semiotic techniques and has applied them in the interpretation of Baltic mythological source material.

A key study in this area is *Of Gods and Men* which is available in the English language, another influential work *Tautos atminties beiėškant (In Search of National Memory)* was published in 1990 both in Vilnius and Chicago and has inspired researchers of the next generation. It is available only in Lithuanian. In the introduction of this seminal work Greimas emphasizes the importance of the Baltic past to the entire field of Indo-European studies. He writes: "Religious beliefs must be considered as part of the ideological framework of those times. In this context one can conjecture that the establishment and expansion of the Lithuanian (pagan) state was accompanied by a corresponding development of its religious structures. Keeping this in mind, the interpretation and restoration of the Lithuanian mythological systems is important for the entire field of Indo-European studies. Researchers in this area are waiting impatiently for the results of these inquiries."

One of the younger generation of scholars who have taken up Dr. Greimas' challenge is Gintaras Beresnevičius. In 1995 he published a book entitled *Baltų religinės reformos (The Religious Reforms of Balts)* in which he convincingly demonstrated the dynamic nature of the Baltic religious system. He showed that under the influence of internal and external factors the system evolved and changed, that this change was ongoing and was terminated only with the introduction of Christianity.

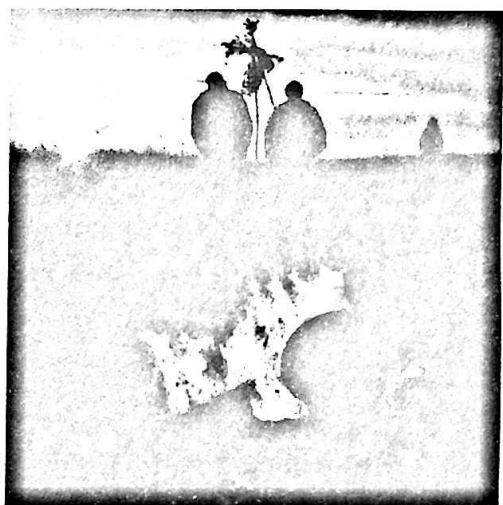
It is to be hoped that with time the studies mentioned above, as well as additional material, will become available to the English speaking reader. With this text we hope to make a modest contribution toward this goal. The book is divided into three general sec-

tions. The first (*Of Gods & Goddesses*) provides an overview of the traditional Baltic religion and includes brief descriptions of the major pagan deities. The second part (*Of Holidays*) describes the traditional holidays, their meaning, and the customs and rituals which have survived to the present day. Representative articles are chosen from works of the above noted authors and additional material is supplied by A. Dundzila (USA), V. Vytė (Canada), and J. Trinkūnas (Lithuania). The later authors treat the traditional Baltic religion not simply as part of the past, but also as a living presence which can offer a viable framework for present day spiritual life. This is dealt with in more detail in the third and last section, which is appropriately titled: *The Living Heritage*.

Though the title suggests that both Baltic nations are covered equally, in fact most texts are by Lithuanian authors and they reflect the Lithuanian tradition. By no means do we mean to slight our Latvian colleagues, it is just that during preparation of the book more texts by Lithuanian authors were available. Our special thanks go out to Dr. Tupešu Janis who gave permission to include his description of the Latvian *Dievturība* movement and to Dr. V. Vike-Freiberga who allowed her article about the Latvian *dainas* to be reprinted. Both articles appear in the last section of this compendium. The editor and publishers expresses the hope that in future revisions of this book, or in texts of a similar nature, the Latvian contribution can be featured more prominently.

The book is illustrated with photographs taken during various traditional calendar holidays.

OF GODS &
GODDESSES





The heading for this section is chosen in honour of Prof. Marija Gimbutas, a leading authority on ancient European cultures and the author of numerous books in this area. Her seminal work *Of Gods and Goddesses* (1982) highlighted the central position that was accorded to female deities in pre-Indo-European religious systems. One of her works, *The Balts* (1963), besides including the first scholarly treatment of the early Baltic traditions, provides a broader depiction of pre-Christian Baltic culture and history. The book includes a chapter titled "Religion", in which Prof. Gimbutas uses archaeological evidence to amplify the available knowledge of early Baltic religious systems. In 1985 M. Gimbutas published an updated and expanded version of *The Balts* where, utilising her latest research results on ancient European culture, she presented a more systematic view of Baltic mythology and religion. In it she has shown that the pantheon of Baltic deities has two distinct origins. The more ancient one traces its roots to the matricentric goddesses of ancient Europe, the second one came from the more martial and patriarchal gods and goddesses brought in by the Indo-

Europeans. The updated version of *The Balts* is available only in Lithuanian, and in this collection we have included the chapter from the first version, which is supplemented by fragments of major significance from the updated book.

The section includes two additional overview articles by noted authorities. One of these is the late Norbertas Vėlius, who before his untimely death in 1996 worked intensively in the field of Lithuanian folklore and mythology. Dr Vėlius had an in depth knowledge of folklore. He was not only a scholar in the field of Baltic mythology, but also a very active collector and systematizer of ethnographic material. What is probably just as important, he inspired many others to follow his example. Through the years (including the difficult years of Russian occupation), he organised numerous expeditions which collected and analysed thousands of folklore and mythological facts. In 1983 he published the study *The Life-Philosophy of Ancient Balts* (in Lithuanian) in which he made use of the numerous facts of folklore and mythology at his disposition. In his synthesis he attempted to explain the territorial peculiarities of Baltic mythology by applying the principle of opposites, such as: East – West, low – high, water – fire, old – young. From Vėlius' extensive work we include the key article "The Ancient Lithuanian Religion and Mythology" (in *Christianity and its Social Role in Lithuania*, Vilnius, 1986). The original article incorporates numerous references and many specific examples taken from the folklore treasury which tend to make reading for the layman rather difficult. To make the ideas expressed in the study more readily accessible, we have ventured to shorten

the text significantly, and it is to be hoped that more complete versions of Dr. Vėlius work will become available in English in the future.

The third review article in this section is by Gintaras Beresnevičius. The younger generation of researchers in the area of Baltic mythology and religion, accumulation and classification of facts is not enough; it must be followed by analysis and synthesis. Beresnevičius is a good example of this trend. In 1995 he published the study *The Reforms in Baltic Religion* (in Lithuanian) in which he showed convincingly that even in historical times traditional Baltic religion was not static, but changed under the influence of cultural, political and social conflicts; conflicts which finally brought the country to Christianity.

A discerning reader could well miss an article in this section by Prof. J. Greimas. We greatly value the contributions of Dr. Greimas, but after reviewing it, reluctantly decided that it is probably too specific to be included in an overview type collection such as this one. To be appreciated, Dr. Greimas' work requires a broader framework. This is but one more example illustrating that additional English language texts in this area are sorely needed.

The three review articles are followed by a selection of brief articles which describe the more prominent Baltic gods and goddesses. A number of these have appeared originally in the "Ramuva" periodical. The authors are Jonas Trinkūnas, Audrius Dundzila (Dainius Sirutis, United States) and Vilija Vytė (Canada).

RELIGION AND MYTHOLOGY OF THE BALTS

Marija Gimbutas

"(...) And inasmuch as they [the Prussians] did not know of [the Christian] God, it so happened that they worshipped the entire creature-world instead of God, namely: the sun, moon and stars, the thunder, birds, even the quadruped animals including toads. They also had holy groves, sacred fields and waters."

(Chronicon Prussiae, by Peter Dusburg, 1326)

It is with great amazement that the first missionaries in the Baltic lands, the chroniclers of the Teutonic Order and many later chroniclers describe all the "incredibilia" of the pagan religion: cremation rites; the belief in reincarnation; the veneration of holy groves, trees, fields, waters and fire; the belief in the existence of many gods and spirits; sacrificial offerings and soothsayings. The Teutonic Order carried the Christian cross to Prussia and to Liv-

nia, and though they did succeed in conquering these people politically, they could not subdue them spiritually. The Prussian villagers remained pagan until their extermination in the seventeenth century, even though officially they accepted baptism in the thirteenth century and all pagan rites and customs were strictly forbidden. This was also the case in western Livonia (present day Latvia). Lithuania accepted Christianity only in 1387 when the Lithuanian ruler Jogaila (Jagello), son of Algirdas, married the heiress to the Polish throne, the Hungarian princess Jadwiga and became king of Poland. Even then, while the Christian faith penetrated the palaces of the nobility and cities, the villagers retained the old religion for many more centuries. The customs, beliefs, mythological songs and folk art symbolism of the Lithuanians and Latvians are amazingly replete with antiquity. The Christian stratum is recent and can be easily detached. For studies of comparative religion, the value of the Lithuanian and Latvian folklore and folk art is of the same importance as that of the Baltic languages for the reconstruction of the "mother tongue" of the Indo-Europeans. The pre-Christian stratum is so ancient that it undoubtedly reaches back to prehistoric times – at least to the Iron Age or in the case of some elements, even several millennia further.

What lies hidden in this storehouse of antiquity? Some of the elements of Baltic mythology hark back not just to prehistoric times, and not just to the pre-history of the Indo-Europeans, they reach back to even more ancient epochs.

The culture of the earliest inhabitants of the European subcontinent is distinctly different from the one brought by the Indo-

Europeans. The study of pre-historic symbols and the comparative analysis of pre-Indo-European artifacts reveals that the mythology of almost all nations points to a matriarchal, chthonic (that is earth centered) world-view. This belief structure, characteristic of agricultural societies, is lunar oriented and is based on the renewal cycles of nature and of the moon. Matriarchal ideology is dominated by the creative power of all-knowing Goddesses. It is remarkable that almost up to the 20th century the Baltic goddesses such as *Laima*, *Ragana*, *Giltinē*, *Laumē* and others have preserved traits that can be found in the characteristics of Greek goddesses as Athena, Hera, Hekate which were recorded about 2500 years earlier. For aeons these traits were tightly woven with the universal issues of birth, death and renewal and were therefore more meaningful, more essential than the world-view represented by armed male gods. The image of these goddesses penetrated so deeply into consciousness that they could not be eradicated neither by the Indo-European nor by the Christian religion.

There is no doubt that these goddesses reach us from pre-historic times. Some of their characteristics, for example, their ability to transform themselves into birds, snakes, deer or bears probably hail from the late Paleolithic era. Others, like their association with the fertility of the earth, probably were added as agriculture become dominant. All of them are associated with the mysterious forces of water, earth, and stone. It is from these sources that life is formed, and they represent this power. On the other hand, they also have a destructive potential, for their power is not always maintained in a controlled balance. The secondary goddesses can either

be helpmates to the principal deities, or serve to highlight some of their powers. Another feature of archaic European mythology is that the same or similar goddesses can appear under several names. Examples are Laima and Giltinē, the three Laimos, the three swans; also they can appear in groups. Thus there can be a large number of *Raganos* or *Laumēs*, when this is the case, one of them is the senior. This feature reflects a matriarchal structure.

The goddesses of archaic Europe are inseparable from earth and water, while the Indo-European gods and goddesses are more strongly associated with the sky, its cosmic bodies (sun, moon, stars) and such phenomena as light and thunder. This is characteristic of animal herding cultures. In most of the Indo-European languages the names of the chief deities are similar. Thus the *Dievas* of the Balts, (Prussian *Deyws*) the god of sky and light is related to the *Dyaus* of Sanskrit, the Greek *Zeus* (a transformation of *Djeus*) the Latin *Deus* the Germanic *Tivaz*. In the Finno-Ugric language the word for sky is *taivas*. This implies that it is a loanword from the Indo-European, which illustrates the association with sky and the light emanating from the sky. In some languages the word has not survived, but the functions have been preserved. Thus there are clear parallels between the *Perkūnas* of the Balts and the Scandinavian Thor or German Donner, all are gods of thunder. Comparative mythology proves that the Indo-European gods and goddesses have a common origin.

In Baltic mythology the most prominent Indo-European gods and goddesses are: *Dievas* (in Latvian *Dievs*), his twin sons, the *Dievo sūneliai* (in Latvian *dieva dali*), the sun *Saulē* and her daugh-

ters *Aušrinē*, (in Latvian *Auseklis*), the moon *Mēnulis* (in Latvian *Meness*), the smith of the heavens *Kalvis* (also *Kalvelis*, *Kalvaitis*), the thunder god *Perkūnas*, *Velinas* (in Latvian *Vels*, in Prussian *Patolas*), and the gods of fire *Gabija*, *Gabjaujis* or *Jagaubis*.

When the Indo-Europeans reached the shores of the Baltic, *Laima*, the chief goddess of archaic Europe, was not displaced, but some of her functions were shared by the Indo-European god *Dievas* who became the god of light, promoter of plant growth and shared the ability to predict the future. In this manner Baltic mythology acquired a dominant pair of gods, *Laima* and *Dievas*, who are analogous to *Hera* and *Zeus* of Greek mythology.

Since they were foreigners and did not understand native languages, what the Christian observers saw and described is usually superficial. Therefore the basic source in reconstructing the ancient Baltic religion is folklore; it supplements the written sources of recorded history and archaeological evidence. Baltic architecture was entirely of wood, as it was in all northern Europe. *Domos sacres* and *sacres villas*, known from the documents of the fourteenth century, have not survived; and Christian churches arose on the sites of pagan sanctuaries during the succeeding centuries. It was only in 1955–7 that, in the lands of the eastern Balts, remains of a number of wooden temples and large sanctuaries were uncovered. Excavations by Tret'jakov south of Smolensk clearly showed that some of the fortified hilltop villages were not regular habitation sites, but sanctuaries. The uncovered hill-top sanctuaries date from the 1st century B. C. to about the 6th or 7th centuries A. D. and some of them revealed several successive layers with residues of

round wooden temples. These certainly are the predecessors of the *sacred villas* known to early history. Some of the *sacred towns* in central and eastern Lithuania, it is said, were important religious centers to which people from several provinces collected for religious practices. What was the purpose of the wooden post inside the temple found in some of the sites? It may have been either an image of a god or just a post capped by animal skulls. Until the twentieth century the skull of a horse or bull (or the horns alone) was believed in Lithuania to afford protection against the *evil eye*, illness in human beings or animals, hailstorms or other natural perils, and was raised on a high pole wherever danger threatened. Until very recently horses' heads, horns, male goats, rams, cocks, and other birds were used as gable decorations.

The presence of priests who performed rites and recited prayers cannot be doubted. In the early historic records they are continually mentioned as *sancti viri*, *auguri*, *nigromantici*, *sacerdotes*. In 1075 Adam of Bremen, writing about the Curonians, said: "All their houses are full of pagan sooth-sayers, diviners, and necromancers, who are even arrayed in a monastic habit. Oracular responses are sought there from all parts of the world, especially by Spaniards and Greeks." The priests were wise old men chosen by the people and held in greatest respect. Sixteenth-century sources say they were regarded as divine personages, similar to the Christian bishops. Peter von Dusburg wrote in 1326 that in the Prussian province of Nadruva, in the place called Romuva, there was a powerful priest named Krive, whom the people regarded as pope, and whose dominion extended not only over Nadruva, but also over

Lithuania, Curonia and Semigallia. The only such "pope" known to recorded history, Krive was highly respected by the kings, nobility and common people, and his rule covered almost all the Baltic lands during the wars with the Teutonic Order. It is doubtful whether such powerful priests existed in the earlier periods; the emergence of priestly power in the fourteenth century may have resulted from the old religion being endangered at this particular period by the invasion of Christian enemies. Theocracy is not attested among the Baltic peoples; political power was in the hands of kings. The pagan religion, however, was universal and profoundly influenced all spheres of life.

The custom of cremation persisted long after the introduction of Christianity and was abolished only as the result of a fierce struggle against the practice by the Christian missionaries. Lithuanian kings and dukes were cremated with great pomp until the end of the fourteenth century. Algirdas was cremated with 18 horses in 1377 in a forest north of Vilnius. "He was cremated with the best horses, clothes resplendent in gold and girdled with a gilded silver belt and was covered with a gown woven of beads and gems". Algirdas' brother Kęstutis was interred in a similar manner in 1382, "and splendidly could be seen a deep pit in man's length full of ashes – and nothing there escaped death: horses, clothes, weapons, etc., all were consumed by fire; hunting birds and dogs were cremated with him". The historian Dlugosz, writing at the beginning of the 15th century, mentions that Lithuanians had hearths in holy groves, each family and house its own, where they cremated their relatives and closest friends, along with horses, saddles and costly

clothes. A French envoy, Ghillebert de Lanoy, who traveled in Curonia in 1413, noted that there was a sect among the Curonians who still cremated their dead in full dress and with the costliest ornaments on a pyre of pure oak wood in a nearby forest. The sacred groves where the cremation rites were performed were usually on a hill or elevation called *Alka*.

The Anglo-Saxon traveler Wulfstan, during his stay in the lands of the Prussians (Aistians) about 880-90, happened to make extremely valuable observations about the preservation of the dead before cremation, and about the funeral races.

“And there is among the Aistians a tribe that can produce cold, and therefore the dead whom they freeze can lie so long and do not putrefy. If anyone sets two vessels full of ale or water, they contrive that both be frozen, be it summer or be it winter.”

To preserve the dead and keep them unburied for a long period was a custom deriving from the earliest antiquity, probably universal in all Indo-European groups.

For the protracted funeral meals, the Baltic *šermenys* (the word being connected with “feeding”; *šerti*, to feed), oxen were slaughtered. Lamentation songs, the *raudos* surviving still in the villages of Lithuania and Latvia and mentioned in written records since the thirteenth century, must certainly have been a part of the funeral wakes at prehistoric burials. Even when at war the Balts needed many days to lament the deceased and cremate them. Thus, in 1210, during the war with the Order of the Sword, the Curonians at Riga, had to stop the battle for three days for cremation and lamentation. The dead were lamented, praised and bidden farewell

so as to ensure that they would safely arrive in the kingdom of the dead and stay among parents, brothers, sisters, and other relatives. The Christian missionaries regularly forbade the lamentation songs, and the lamenters were fined; but even so the *raudos* have survived up till modern times, thus preserving beautiful pieces of lyrical and extremely touching folk poetry.

The death of a farmer had to be immediately announced to his horses and cattle, and when a beekeeper died, the bees had to be told; otherwise; the animals and bees would die out. The horse was not allowed to carry its master to the cemetery; if it did, it would sicken or die. These beliefs, still held in Lithuanian villages at the beginning of the twentieth century, are the last traces of the great empathy that existed between man and animal. In prehistoric times, it was believed that the animals went to the other world to live there with their master. During the first centuries AD, in Prussia and Lithuania, horses were buried in the standing position and in full attire, ready to be mounted. Dusburg, in speaking of the Prussian religion in 1326, clearly stated that the Notangians, one of the central Prussian tribes, used to be cremated on horseback.

Deceased warriors and farmers, it was said, rode their horses through the sky to the realm of the souls, and on horses they usually returned to earth to visit their families and to attend the feast of the dead in October and on many other anniversaries. Written records of the seventeenth century mention that during the feast of the dead, the intestines and skin of a horse were brought to the grave in order to help the dead ride to the host's house.

During the protracted wars between the Teutons and

Lithuanians, the chroniclers who described the protracted struggle, often expressed shock at seeing how readily the Lithuanians took their own lives. The most horrifying incident occurred in 1336 in the castle of Pilėnai on the River Nemunas. When the Lithuanians perceived they could no longer hold out against the Teuton's onslaught, they lit a huge fire, threw all their possessions and treasures into it, killed their wives and children, and then offered up their necks to their chief, the duke Margiris for decapitation. During this same siege, an old woman decapitated with an axe 100 men who voluntarily accepted death at her hands; then when the enemy broke in, she split her own head in two with the same axe. The chronicler, Wigand of Marburg, who described this scene in his rhymed chronicle of 1393-4, described the spectacle as defying belief and ended with the words: "However, it is not altogether amazing, since they did that according to their religion in which death is accepted much easier." After an unsuccessful attack by the Lithuanians in Estonia in 1205, 50 wives of the fallen warriors hanged themselves. "It is no wonder," writes Henry of Latvia in his *Chronicon Livoniae*, "since they believed that very soon they would live together with their husbands."

In the light of these sources, the many "collective" graves that occur in the Baltic area from the Chalcolithic period can be attributed to the obligatory death and burial of the surviving wife, husband, child or children upon the death of a member of the family. When the feudal chief or the king died not only the members of his family but also his servants and favorite slaves had to follow suit. The practice of burying "with people" was forbidden by the

Christian faith, but echoes of it are still to be found in some customs and folk songs of the Latvians and Lithuanians. Thus, at the funeral of a betrothed girl or boy, the burial ceremony is more like a wedding: wedding songs are sung, dances are danced, and both the living and the deceased partner are dressed in wedding costume. It was believed that dead relatives and friends also joined in celebrating the wedding. Even in this century the Lithuanian girl has been known to bring a wreath of rue, the symbol of chastity to the grave of her beloved. The wedding of the dead is not simply connected with belief in the continuity of the earthly life after death, but also with the belief that people who die unmarried and all those who die an unnatural death are a danger to the living since they have not lived through the whole span of life. In the Baltic languages, the word for the devil or the evil spirit, the *velnias*, derives from the dangerous dead who return and threaten the living.

The Baltic *velēs* – etherizations of the deceased – go to live their family and communal lives, to a sandy hill, a hill of *velh*, where they have their houses and household artifacts, where they are covered with linen clothes. The “hill of *velēs*” has gates through which the *velēs* enter and benches on which they sit. These features recur in descriptions of the afterlife in Latvian and Lithuanian folk poetry. The verses seem to have preserved the image of the ancient burial mounds, the wooden chambers or stone vaults. Many passages in Latvian folk songs speak of a cemetery on a small sandy hill, often so full of graves that there is no more room for new arrivals. They may reflect the communal Bronze Age barrows with hundreds of graves, or the Iron Age barrows with a number of graves of one family.

If the realm of the *vëlès* on “a high sandy hill” in the neighborhood of the village reflects the more realistic side of this people’s beliefs about life after death, there also exists an imaginary hill, or a steep stone mountain, which the dead have to climb. Therefore they need to have strong fingernails or the aid of animal claws. On this steep hill *Dievas* (God) resides and summons the *vëlès*. Here we begin to see the connection between the god’s (Lithuanian *Dievas*, Lettish *Dievs*) abode and that of the dead. Further, we learn from the mythological songs that the goal is not the hill, which is the image of the sky, but a place beyond the hill.

The path to this mystical place is a long one. The *vëlès* may ride on horses through the sky, they may rise with the smoke of the cremation pyre, or fly like birds through the Milky Way, which in Lithuanian means “the Birds’ Way”; they may also go by boat as does the Sun at night through the waters of the sea, the *Daugava* or *Nemunas* rivers – to the west. There the Sun sleeps, there she washes her horses and there other gods appear. *Dievas*, the Thunder god, the Moon, and the deity of the Sea. And somewhere in this remote place are the grey stone and the sun-tree, or the iron post and at the post two horses. These represent the cosmic tree of the Balts, the axis of the sky, having close analogies in Hindu, Roman, Slavic and Germanic mythologies. In folklore it is usually an oak-tree or a birch tree with silver leaves, copper branches and iron roots; sometimes it is an enormous linden or an apple-tree. It stands on the stone at the end of “the way of the Sun”. The Sun hangs her belt on the branches, sleeps in the crown of this tree and when she rises in the morning the tree becomes red.

“Beyond the hill is my mother, there where the sun is”, runs the Latvian song. The dead travel to the realm of the gods, to the realm of light, to the end of the visible world. It is still said: “He is in the realm of *dausos*”. The Lithuanian word *dausos* preserves the meaning of a mysterious realm and cannot be translated either as “paradise” or as “heaven”.

The departure of the *vèlè* does not signify the end of physical ties between the dead and the living. Besides the *vèlè*, which is comparable to the Greek *psyche*, there was the *siela* related to the Roman *anima* or the Greek *pneuma*, meaning a living power, which did not depart from the earth. It was reincarnated in trees, flowers, animals, and birds. It would leave the body as a breath, a vapour, and immediately find lodging in plants, animals or birds. Sometimes it would issue directly from the mouth in the shape of a butterfly, a bee, a mouse, a toad, a snake, or grow out of the mouth of a young girl in the shape of a lily. Most frequently, however, it would be reincarnated in trees: men’s spirits, in oaks, birches and ash trees; women’s, in linden and spruce. The Baltic peoples have extremely intimate relations with these trees. The oak and the linden are key trees in folklore. At the time of one’s birth, a specific tree is assigned to one, and it grows imbued with the same life forces as its human counterpart. If the tree is cut down, the person dies. Trees growing in old cemeteries of Lithuania are never touched by a pruner’s hand, for there is an adage saying that to cut a cemetery tree is to do evil to the deceased. Neither is it permissible to mow the grass: “From cemetery grass our blood flows”, runs the old proverb. Next after the plants spirits were most likely to pass

into birds – women into cuckoo or a duck, men into a falcon, a pigeon, a raven, or a cock. Some would also be reincarnated in wolves, bears, dogs, horses and cats. In the Protestant cemeteries of the mid – nineteenth century in Prussian Lithuania (the area of Klaipėda), wooden tomb stones were found resembling the shapes of toads or other reptiles, combined with motifs of flowers and birds, and other tomb monuments were capped with horses' heads.

The conception of death and the afterlife thus has a dualistic character. The *vėlė* and the *siela* are very different entities. The *vėlė* is a bloodless, bodiless spirit, whereas *siela* is the essence of life, power and energy. This dualism can be explained by recognizing that these entities are inherited from different religious systems: the *vėlė* from the Indo-European, the *siela* from archaic pre-Indo-European Europe.

Earth is the Great Mother. All life comes from her: humans, plants, and animals. In Latvian she is called *Zemes mate*, “mother earth”, in Lithuanian *Žemyna*, from *žemė*, “earth”. Her anthropomorphic image is vague; she is the Earth holding the mystery of eternal life. She is called by such picturesque names as “the blossomer”, “the bud raiser”. Her functions are distributed among several minor deities of forest, field, stones, water and animals, who in Latvian folklore acquired the names “mother of forests”, “mother of fields”, “mother of springs”, “mother of domestic animals”, etc. Cardinal Oliver Scholasticus, Bishop of Paderborn, in his description of the Holy Land written about 1220, refers to Baltic pagans as follows: “They honor forest nymphs, forest goddesses, mountain spirits, lowlands, waters, field spirits and forest spirits.

They expected divine assistance from virgin forests, wherein they worshipped springs and trees, mounds and hills, steep stones and mountains slopes – all of which presumably endowed mankind with strength and power.”

Man is born of the earth; babies emerge from springs, pools, swamps, trees or hillocks. As recently as the eighteenth century, Lithuanians offered gifts to Žemyna upon the birth of a child. Earth was to be kissed in the morning and in the evening. Offerings to the power of the earth – ale, bread, grains, herbs, or a sheaf of rye – were interred, laid in front of stones, attached to trees or thrown into the sea, rivers, lakes and springs. According to seventeenth-century records, there were no festivals in villages during which the earth deity, Žemyna, was not venerated.

During the festival in the month of October, next to Žemyna the Lithuanians venerated the homestead deity Žemėpatis or Žemininkas, who was considered to be a brother of Žemyna. The deity of the homestead also appears in Lithuanian as *Dimstipatis* (from *dimsti*, “homestead”). Latvians have *Majas Kungs*; “the master of homestead”. A separate deity was the lord of the fields, the Lithuanian *Laukpatis* (from *laukas*, “field” and *patis*, “lord”) or *Lauksargis*, the “guardian of the fields” (from *sargas*, “the guardian”), and there were deities or spirits of flowers, foliage, grass and fields of meadows, rye, flax or hemp. The corn spirit hid in the rye or other grain fields and was believed to be incarnated in the final sheaf, which was reaped. The Lithuanians used to make this sheaf of rye into the shape of a woman; it is still called *rugių boba*, “the old crone of the rye”. She was brought home, celebrated at the

harvest festival, and then kept in the house until the next year's harvest. The corn spirit of the Prussians assumed the shape of a rooster, called *Kurke* (known as *Curche* in the Latin text of the treaty between the Teutonic Order and the Prussians of 1249). A rooster was offered during the harvest festival, and in the fields some ears of corn were left for the corn spirit. Trees and flowers, groves and forests, stones and hillocks, and waters were endowed with miraculous life giving forces. They were thought to bring blessings upon human beings by healing diseases, safeguarding them against misfortunes and assuring health and fertility. All manifestations of the earth's fecundity were lovingly cared for and protected; the written records from the eleventh-fifteenth centuries repeatedly mention a deep respect for groves, trees and springs. And the "ignorant ones" (i.e. the Christians) were forbidden access to the sacred forests or groves (*sacrosanct sylvan*). No one was permitted to cut trees in sacred forests, to fish in sacred springs, or to plough in sacred fields, which were referred to variously as *Alka*, *Alkas* or *Elkas*, and were guarded by a taboo. The name itself shows that these reservations of virgin nature were untouchable and protected places: the root *alk-*, *elk-*, is related to Gothic *alhs*, old English *ealh*, old Saxon *alah*, the "protected", "invulnerable". In the holy *Alkas* votive offerings to the gods were made and human cremations took place. The usual animal offerings were boars and pigs, he-goats, sheep, calves, cocks and hens, as testified by the excavations and the historical records.

Since the holy places were imbued with silence, a number of sacred hills and forests in East Prussia and Lithuania carry names

having the root *rom-*, *ram-*, which means “quiet”; one of these is the sacred hill of *Rambynas* on the north bank of the lower Nemunas near Tilžė (Tilsit), mentioned in records ever since the fourteenth century. A stone with a flat surface formerly crowned this hill and votive offerings were placed on it by newly married couples seeking fertility at home and good crops in the field. The water found up on *Rambynas* was eagerly sought after for drinking and washing. Forests and towns called *Romuva*, *Romainiai* and the like have historic traditions going back to the ancient sacred places. The fourteenth century records mention a sacred town (“villa”) *Romene* in central Lithuania.

Oak, linden, birch, maple, pine and spruce were prominent among sacred trees. Particularly the old, mighty, twinboled trees were believed to possess strong healing powers. They were un-touchable; none dared cut them down. Historic records since the thirteenth century mention “sacred oaks”, consecrated to the god *Perkūnas*, or “sacred linden trees”, consecrated to *Laima*, the goddess of fate to which offerings were brought. A ditch or a stone circle surrounded such trees. A stick from an ash tree, a twig of juniper, elder, willow or southernwood (*Artemisia abrotanum*) or any green bough was regarded as effective weapons against the evil spirits.

Forests had their own goddesses and gods. *Medeinė* (the name comes from *medis*, “tree”) was the Lithuanian forest goddess, attested in thirteenth century records. Seventeenth and eighteenth-century sources mention a male god of forests, *Giraitis*. In Latvian folklore we encounter a “forest mother” and a “forest father”, and

there was also a "mother of shrubs". A peculiar earth deity living under elderberry bushes was *Puškaitis* who ruled over good little subterranean manikins called *Barstukai* (or *Parstukai*) and *Kaukai*. If offerings were made to *Puškaitis*, the little men brought plenty of corn and did the household work. During special feasts for *Barstukai*, tables laden with bread, meat, cheese and butter were left in barns, where the little men used to come at midnight and eat. In return for this generous treatment the farmers were rewarded with bountiful crops.

In songs trees and flowers are not realistically described, but their essential parts are emphasized the bud and the crown, their vitality and fecundity. "A green linden has grown, with nine branchlets and a gorgeous top". A tree is usually three, seven, or nine "storeys" high. It is a living symbol, guarded in folk art by twin figures or heads of male animals – horses, bulls, stags, he-goats, swans – or it is encircled by suns, moons and stars; or else a bird perches on it. Plants in the folk songs have golden or silver buds, and the bird atop the tree is a cuckoo, the prophet of human fate.

A peculiar cosmic tree of the Baltic peoples was the wooden, roofed pole topped with symbols of sky deities – suns, moons, stars – and guarded by stallions and snakes. Right up to the present century, roofed poles as well as crosses with a sun symbol around the cross-arms could be encountered in Lithuania in front of homesteads, in fields, beside sacred springs, or in the forests. They were erected on the occasion of someone's marriage or illness, during epidemics, or for the purpose of ensur-

ing good crops. Though none of these perishable monuments are more than two hundred years old, their presence in pre-Christian times is attested by historic documents describing them as relics of the old religion. Christian bishops instructed the clergy to destroy the poles and crosses in front of which the peasants made offerings and observed other pagan rites. The Lithuanian roofed poles and crosses managed to escape destruction because the people fixed some of the Christian symbols to them and gradually they came under protection of the Catholic Church. They are, nevertheless, monuments stemming from the pre-Christian faith, as well as examples of Lithuanian folk art. Their symbolic and decorative elements manifesting direct ties with the art of the Iron Age.

Old legends abound regarding huge stones containing holes or "footprints". To drill a round hole into a stone was to fecundate the earth force, which resides in the stone. Rainwater falling into these holes acquired magic properties. Until quite recently, Baltic peasant women coming home from work would stop by such stones to cure their aches and pains by washing themselves with the water. Stones are found in the Baltic lands into which symbols of suns and snakes were chiseled, much as they were elsewhere in northern and western Europe from the Bronze Age onward. A large stone in the shape of a woman's torso, located in Lithuania during the nineteenth century, was believed to possess magical qualities that would bestow fecundity on allegedly barren women. From a description given in 1836 we learn that in Lithuania there were stone monuments – usually about 6 feet high,

smoothly cut, and surrounded by a ditch – which were dedicated to goddesses who were believed to spend their time at the stone spinning the fate of men. In 1605, a Jesuit reported a stone cult in western Lithuania: “Huge stones, with natural surfaces were called goddesses. Such stones were covered with straw and venerated as protectors of crops and animals”. A large number of rivers and lakes are called *Šventa*, *Šventoji*, *Šventupe*, *Šventežeris* in Lithuania, and *Sveta upe*, *Svetupe*, *Svetais ezers* in Latvia. The names coming from the words *šventas*, *švent-a* (Lithuanian) and *svet-a* (Latvian), that which is “sacred”, “holy”. Also, there are many rivers called *Alkupe*, *Alkupis*, all of which were sacred and venerated in antiquity, and some of which are still held in esteem. No one dared defile their life-giving water, which had purifying, healing and fertilizing properties. If one gave them holy water, flowers, and trees would blossom bountifully. The fields were sprayed with holy water to ensure good crops; the animals were sprinkled with it to keep them healthy. Washing with clear spring water would heal eye and skin diseases. At the beginning of summer, during the sun festival (the present St. John’s night), people would go swimming in the holy waters so that they would be healthy and beautiful and so that young people would soon marry. Holy were those springs and streams, which flow toward the east, toward the sun.

Water spirits were beautiful women with elongated breasts, very long blond hair and a fishtail. They were mute. When people happened to see them, they would stare back silently, spread their wet hair and hide their tails. Historic records mention, and folk-

lore has preserved, the names of separate deities of rivers (Lithuanian *Upinis*), of lakes (Lithuanian *Ežerinis*), and of the sea-storm (Lithuanian *Bangpūtys*, the "god of waves", who sails over the wild sea in a boat which has a golden anchor). The Latvians had *juras mate*, "mother of the sea". In the sixteenth-century descriptions of Prussian gods we find *Autrimpas*, god of the sea and large lakes; *Patrimpas*, god of rivers and springs; and *Bardoyats*, god of ships. There was also a separate deity of the rain: the Lithuanian *Lytuvonis*, known from sixteenth-century sources. The deities of the waters demanded offerings. To the river god *Upinis*, for example, white sucking pigs were offered lest the water be not clear and transparent.

Fairies called *Laumės*, peculiar naked women with long hair dwelt in forests, near expanses of water and stones. On occasion they mingled with humans and were yearning for motherhood, frequently they used to kidnap infants or small children and dress them in most attractive clothing. They could be extremely good-natured as well as extremely short-tempered. They represented the irrational woman. They could work fast and spin and launder rapidly, but once angered, they would destroy their handiwork in an instant.

A superior goddess, common to all Balts, was *Laima*, the goddess of fate. She dispensed human happiness and unhappiness, as well as determining the duration of a person's life. She controlled not only human life but also that of plants and other living things. Her name is inseparable from *laimė*, "happiness". Fate usually appears in the shape of this one deity, but is referred to in

stories as three or even seven goddesses of fate, analogous to the Greek *moirae* and German *Nornen*. In Lithuanian songs she is sometimes called by a double name *Laima-Dalia*, "happiness" and "fate". The Latvians also had *Dekla* who was very sympathetic to humans, took care of small children, and grieved over the birth of a baby who was destined to have an unhappy life. *Laima*, though standing close to the earthly life, is related in her functions to *Dievas*, the sky god, and to the Sun.

The earth's great impulse for giving birth was matched by the dynamism of the sky and the male element in nature, endowed with the life-stimulating and evil-combating powers. The animate and dynamic forces of the heavenly bodies – the sun, moon and stars – and phenomena such as thunder, lightning fire and the rainbow; male animals like the stag, bull, stallion, he-goat, ram, rooster, swan and other birds; and such reptiles as snakes and toads were all believed to exercise a great influence on the development of plants and of animal and human life. The divine significance of the life- and light-bringing powers inspired the personification of the sun, moon, morning and evening stars, thunder and bright sky, giving rise to the images of sky deities. Male animals and birds and reptiles, because of their sexual nature or their ability to prophesy a change in the weather and the regular awakening of nature, became inseparable associates of the sky deities. The Baltic pantheon of sky gods is very closely related to that of all other Indo-European groups. To it belong *Dievas* (proto-Baltic *Deivas*), the god of the shining sky, related to Old Indian *Dyaus*, Greek *Zeus*, Roman *Deus*; the Thunder god, Lithuanian *Perkūnas*, Latvian *Perkons*,

Prussian *Perkonis*, in name and function are closely associated with the Slavic *Perun*, Hittite *Peruna*. Old Indian *Parjanya*, Celtic *Hercynia*, as well as to Scandinavian *Thor*, German *Donnar* and Roman *Jupiter* (the oak, the tree of *Perkūnas*, in Latin is *quercus* which comes from *percus*); *Saulė*, the Sun, is very closely related to Vedic *Surya* and *Savitar*, the early Greek *Helios*, and the other Indo-European sun-gods, though the Baltic *Saulė* is of a feminine gender; Lithuanian *Mėnuo*, Latvian *Meness*, the Moon god; Latvian *Auseklis*, Lithuanian *Aušrinė*, the morning star and goddess of the Dawn, related to the Vedic *Ushas*, and its counterpart, the Lithuanian *Vakarinė*, the evening star, both being personifications of the planet Venus. Among the sky gods there was also the divine smith, called simply *Kalvis*, "smith", or in diminutive form, *Kalvelis* and *Kalvaitis*. Most prominent among the divine animals was the horse, the escort of *Dievas* and *Saulė*. In mythological songs, the horse (Lithuanian *žirgas*, Latvian *zirgs*) is so intimately related to *Saulė*, the Sun, that sometimes it seems to stand as a symbol for the sun. Next in importance was the he-goat (Lithuanian *ožys*) escort of the Thunder god, a symbol of virile power and a weather-propheying animal.

Common Indo-European roots of these gods and their associates are incontestable, especially in that the Baltic gods preserved very ancient traits and have not lost their ties with natural phenomena: the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, the thunder. Except for *Dievas* and *Perkūnas*, the anthropomorphic images of the gods were not very strongly developed. The name of the god *Dievas* is directly connected with "the sky". The Lithuanian *dievas*

and Lettish *dievs* still have preserved the meaning "the sky" as in Sanskrit. The etymology of the god's name is clarified by the Sanskrit verb *dyut*, "to shine", "to beam", and the adjective *deivus*, "of the sky". Dievas is represented as an extremely handsome man, dressed in a silver gown, a cap, his clothes adorned with pendants and with a belt and a sword attached. This image undoubtedly goes back to the Late Iron Age, being very much akin to the appearance of a Baltic king. He is inseparable from his horses, one, two, three, five, nine or more, all in silver bridles, with a golden saddle and golden stirrups. His large fenced home-stead recalls a castle, having three silver gates and comprising a manor, farmhouses and steam bath, with garden and forest trees around. It is located beyond the sky; beyond the stone, silver, gold or amber hill. From this hill Dievas rides on horseback, or in a chariot or sleigh of gold or copper, holding golden reins ending in golden tassels. He approaches the earth very slowly, extremely carefully, lest he shake off the dewdrops and blossoms of the snow-ball tree, lest he stop the growth of shoots, lest he hinder the work of sower and ploughman. He raises up the rye, he steps on weeds. In Latvian mythological songs he appears sowing rye or barley from a silver basket and among other things, hunts and brews ale. Dievas is the guardian and stimulator of crops. In these functions he is closely related to the Sun, Moon and Venus. He is endowed, also with the power to control human destiny and the whole order of the world. On his account the sun and moon and the day are bright. With Laima, the goddess of human fate, he determines the life span and the fortune of man. Although Dievas possessed

higher powers than other gods, he was not considered to be the supreme god and to rule others. In the pantheon of the sky, Dievas was friendly and democratic. His homestead and his sons, Latvian *Dieva deli*, Lithuanian *Dievo sūneliai* were particularly closely associated with Saulė, the Sun, and her daughters, who also had a castle with silver gates beyond the hill in the valley or at the end of the water.

Saulė's anthropomorphic image is vague but more important is her journey over the stone or silver hill in a chariot with copper wheels drawn by fiery steeds who are never tired, never sweat and never rest. Toward evening she washes her horses in the sea, after which she sits on top of the hill holding the golden reins, or goes down to the apple orchard, in nine chariots drawn by a hundred steeds. She also sails in a golden boat, or is herself a boat, which sinks into the sea. The ball of the setting Sun is pictured as a sinking crown, or a ring, or a red apple falling from the tree into the water. The falling apple makes the Sun cry and the red berries on the hill are her tears. The sun's sphere is also a jug or a ladle, since the light of the sun is conceived as a fluid substance. In the evening, *Saulė's* daughters wash the jug in the sea and disappear into the water. The daughters may have signified the light that the sun sheds at dusk and at dawn, and may have been connected with the evening stars. During the midsummer festival on June 24, the sun was thought to be adorned with a wreath of braided red-fern blossoms and she danced on the silver hill wearing silver shoes. In songs, *Saulė* is "rolling", "hopping". The Latvian songs about the sun contain the refrain *ligo (ligot*

means "to sway") or *rota* (from *rotat*, "to roll", "to hop"). In folk-art the sun is depicted as a wheel, a circle, a circle with rays, a rosette or a daisy (in Lithuanian called *saulutė*, "little sun", or *ratilas*, "wheel"), the flower of the Sun. The dynamic vigor of the sun, the regularity of its daily journey, its influence on verdant life and on human happiness was a great source of inspiration for countless verses of ancient Baltic poetry and Baltic folk art. Spring and midsummer festivals (present Easter and St John's Day) were festivals of joy, of the resurrection of nature, during which sun symbolism played a central role. The farmer's life was regularly guided by prayers to Saulė at sunrise and at sunset, for all fieldwork was entirely dependent on the sun's beneficence. Prayers to Saulė had to be said with one's head uncovered.

Mėnuo or *Meness*, the Moon god, was a very close associate of Saulė's. Like the periodical appearance of the sun, the moon's disappearance and renewal in the form of a young moon brought well-being, light and health. It is still believed that flowers must be planted either during a new or a full moon. Prayers were especially useful to the young moon. The Moon god (of masculine gender) wore a gown of starry night and was drawn by grey horses. Frequently he was at the silver gates of Saulė's castle, courting her daughters (in Latvian mythology); he even married Saulė herself, but being unstable, fell in love with *Aušrinė* (Lithuanian, "Morning star"); this angered Saulė, and the Thunder god Perkūnas broke him in two (Lithuanian mythology). He finally married the weaver of the star-canopy, and while counting the stars found that all were there except *Auseklis* (Latvian,

“Morning star”). The Prussian mythology knows another god of light, who in the records of the sixteenth century appears as *Swayxtix* or *Suaixtis*, which in present Lithuanian will be *žvaigždys*, from *žvaigždė*, “the star”.

Kalvaitis, the heavenly smith, hammers at the end of the waters or in the sky a ring or a crown for the Dawn and a silver belt and golden stirrups for Dievas’ sons. Every morning he hammers a new sun (“a ring”, “a crown”). When he hammers in the clouds, silver pieces fall down upon the waters. In Baltic mythology, *Kalvaitis* or *Kalvelis* is a figure similar to Hephaistos in the Greek, *Volundr*, *Welant* in the Scandinavian, and *Ilmarinen* in the Finnish mythologies. His hammer was gigantic; Jerome of Prague, a missionary in Lithuania, noted in 1431 that Lithuanians honored not only the sun, but also an iron hammer of exceptional size, with its aid the sun was said to have been freed from imprisonment.

Perkūnas – the Thunder god, ruler of the air, is a vigorous man with a copper beard, holding an axe in one hand. He traverses the sky with great noise in a fiery two-wheeled chariot, drawn by a he-goat. When thunder is heard, a proverb says, “God is coming – the wheels are striking fire”. His castle is on the high hill (in the sky). *Perkūnas* is very just, but restless and impatient; he is the great enemy of evil spirits, devils, and unjust or evil men. He seeks out the devil and smites him with lightning. He throws his axe at evil people or tosses bolts at their dwellings. He does not tolerate liars, thieves, or selfish and vain sons. The tree or stone that has been struck by lightning provides protection from evil spirits and cures maladies, especially toothache, fever and fright. The stone

axes dropped by Perkūnas possess the power of fecundity. They are still called "the bullets of Perkūnas". (Stone or bronze axes, "battle-axes" were frequently ornamented in prehistory by zigzags, the symbol of lightning and by circles, the sun symbols. Miniature axes of bronze were worn as amulets up to the last epoch of the prehistoric era). Perkūnas also purifies the Earth exercising evil winter spirits. The first thunder in the spring moves the earth to action; the grass begins to grow rapidly, grain take root, trees turn green.

In addition to horse and he-goat, the bull, the stag and the swan were symbols of virile, life-bringing power, but the harmless grass snake, the Lithuanian *žaltys*, played a prominent part in the sexual sphere. It was a blessing to have a *žaltys* in one's home, under the bed or in some corner, or even in a place of honor at the table. He was thought to bring happiness and prosperity, to ensure fertility of the soil and an increase in the family. Encountering a snake meant either marriage or birth. This mystically endowed creature is known to Lithuanian folklore as "the sentinel of the gods". *Žaltys* is loved by the Sun, and to kill it is a crime. "The sight of a dead *žaltys* causes the Sun to cry", says the proverb. The very name for "snake" in Lithuanian, *gyvatė*, shows association with *gyvybė*, *gyvata*, "life", "viability". Another mysterious, wealth-bringing creature, known from the early records as well as folklore, is *Aitvaras*. He sometimes has the head of a *žaltys* and a long tail which emits light as he flies through the air. Sometimes he is a golden rooster.

The Balts were great venerators of fire. "*Litواني sacrum colebat cumque perpetuum appellabat*". Fire was sacred and eter-

nal. Tribes had official sanctuaries on high hills and on riverbanks where a fire was maintained, guarded by priests, and in each house was the sacred hearth in which fire was never extinguished. Only once a year, on the eve of the midsummer festival, was it symbolically extinguished, and then kindled again. Fire was a goddess, who required offerings. She was fed and carefully guarded and covered over at night by the matriarch of the family. The Latvians call this flame "mother of the fire", *ugnes mate*, in Lithuanian it is *Gabija* (from the verb *gaubti*, "to cover"), in Prussian *Panike*, "the little fire". Fire was the purifying element and the symbol of happiness. Legends relate that fire was transferred to earth by Perkūnas in a storm, or that it was brought by a bird, usually a swallow, which burned itself while bringing it.

This is not the place to present in more detail all the *incredibilia* seen by Christian missionaries in the Baltic lands, or to portray the folk religion which still lives in folklore in surprisingly pure elements going back to earliest antiquity. However, I hope that from this short survey the reader will have gained a general impression of their nature. The Baltic religion has faithfully preserved the basic elements of ancient times. They are closely related to the early-recorded religions of the Indo-European peoples, particularly to the Indo-Iranians. This is seen in the cult of the dead, the burial rituals, the healing powers of the sky and air deity, as well as the sun, snake, horse, water and fire cults; at the same time, it has remained true to the peasant's perception of the real world and to his rich natural environment,

sustaining his profound veneration for the living land – forests, trees and flowers – and his intimate relationship with animals and birds. In speaking of the legacy of Baltic prehistory, we mean above all the ancient religion, which is incarnate in the cosmic and lyrical conception of the world of present-day Lithuanians and Latvians, and is an unceasing inspiration to their poets, painters and musicians.

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MYTHOLOGY AND RELIGION OF THE EARLY LITHUANIANS

Norbertas Vėlius

The formation of the Lithuanian state occurred during a time of conflict with Christian Europe. This circumstance could not help but influence the evolution of the prevailing pagan religious system, which became an important factor in the unification of the state and one of its main sources of strength. During this period the fight for independence became also a fight to defend native gods, and the native religion was increasingly perceived in opposition to "foreign" (primarily Christian) religions. Christian Europe did not help matters since their main goal of conquering the lands of the Balts was only thinly disguised by their proclaimed mission to baptize the pagan population and to force them to abandon the old beliefs. In order to deflect this threat, the rulers of Lithuania entered into various compromises with the Christians. For example, they permitted the construction of a few churches and establishment of monasteries, some agreed to be baptized (like Mindaugas) others entered into negotiations regarding baptism (like Gediminas).

These political compromises contributed to the promotion of religious tolerance. Especially the nobility adopted a flexible approach and paid more attention to those traits, which are common to religious beliefs rather than dwelling upon the differences.

This politically promoted tolerance led to a paradoxical situation in which those strata, which should have been the main defenders of the old religion (the rulers and nobility), were the first to abandon it. It remained for the common people to become the principal defenders of the old faith.

The ancient traditional religion and mythology had permeated all spheres of human existence and for a long time it constituted the foundation of their worldview. This belief system had an Indo-European core which was augmented with locally developed features. For this reason several superimposed layers can be distinguished in its structure: 1) the very oldest layer – this includes atavistic features from the most archaic culture strata, 2) the Indo-European stratum, 3) the Baltic stratum, and finally, 4) the Lithuanian stratum.

The later can be further subdivided into the 1) Aukštaičiai (literally “Highlanders”) and 2) Samogitian (or *Žemaičiai* that is “Lowlanders”) strata.

In three contemporary sources the principal god of the Aukštaičiai is called *Nunadiēvis*, *Andajās*. Linguists and mythologists propose several interpretations of these names though all agree that the key root of these names is the word *dievas*. It has been established that for the Lithuanians the first among the gods (and also the most important) was the god of heavenly light. Analo-

gously some of the Prussians considered *Ukapirmus* (*Occopirmus*) the god of the sky and stars to be the first among gods whereas the Samogitians called the principal god *Aukstheias Vissagistis*.

Evidence about the Lithuanian deity of heaven and light can be found also in the manner in which the Christian God is depicted in folklore. When He appears in songs and fairy tales, the Christian God has many traits which are characteristic of the Indo-European god of light. Thus he is depicted as concerned about order and harmony, he rules over nature and the fate of men.

The early Lithuanians worshiped not only abstract deities, they paid great respect also to some natural phenomena and objects. Especially important were sacred groves, the sun and fire. The special honor accorded to fire is illustrated by the practice of cremation of the deceased. The *Malala Chronicle* (13th century) includes a story (the myth of *Sovius*) which relates how cremation of the dead was established in Lithuania and in other Baltic lands. A. J. Greimas is of the opinion that *Sovius* is a representative of a "new" direction in the religious development in which all chief deities had to have some association with fire.

In the mythology of the Prussians two brothers play a similar role: *Vaidevutis* and *Brutenis* (S. Grunau, 15th–16th centuries). As depicted in the mythological story, one of the brothers was king, the other, the chief priest. The story relates how they brought order to the material and spiritual life of the Prussians, how they established laws and finally how they immolated themselves and were subsequently worshiped as gods.

The chronicler Dlugosz (15th century) also accords first place

to the reverence of fire. The veneration of fire is characteristic of all Indo-European religions. For example, in the *Rigveda* of the Hindus the first hymns are offered to fire and only subsequently are hymns offered to other gods. Fire was considered to be both an independent god and as the means by which one could communicate with the other gods (almost all offerings were burned).

Dlugosz in describing rituals mentions temples, priests and idols. Especially relevant is his description of Samogitian funerary rites. He relates that in the sacred groves each Samogitian family had a special location where "they cremated the bodies of their relatives dressed in white, festive clothes and seated upon a steed." Near the pyres sacrifices were offered for the benefit of the deceased: "they put vessels there made out of oak bark and placed into them some food which was similar to cheese and poured mead into the fire. They believed that during the night the *vėlė* of the departed would come and partake of the food and drink the mead which they had poured." They would gather in these same sacred places to celebrate a feast, which took place around the first of October. At this time they would bring food and drink and feast for several days during which "each of them placed offerings to the gods at his own fire place".

Dlugosz also states that on the shores of the Nevėžis River a sacred fire was kept burning on top of a tall tower. It was tended by priests who took care that it should never go out.

Later sources (from the 17th-18th centuries, chiefly recorded by Christian clergy) mention that the old religious customs are still being observed in some locations. For example, in 1718 the Jesuit

Ostrowski relates that he met people who “worshiped the sun and the moon, and who appealed to the sun and the moon to cure them from illnesses.” He notes that in the north of Lithuania “the peasants still utter the name of five gods with worshipful reverence and these are the Sun, Moon, Lightning, Fire and Bread”.

The Earth cult was stronger in western Lithuania (Samogitia). There more reverence was accorded to the gods who were responsible for the yield of the fields and for domestic animals, the cult of the *žaltys* was more prevalent. According to a traveler to Samogitia in the 15th century: “The patriarch of each homestead keeps a *žaltys* who lives by the hay stacks, is provided with food and receives offerings.”

In the later mythology of the Samogitians and in some cases of the Aukštaičiai folklore personalities are some times confused with deities. For example, J. Lasicki lists *Ragana* (a witch), *Aitvaras* and *Kaukai* (a sprite similar to trolls). *Ragana* has traits similar to the traditional witch of folk tales who lives in a lonesome hut in the forest; *Aitvaras* is the guardian of wealth and finds his abode “beyond the fence” of a homestead, whereas *Kaukai* are small creatures related to the souls of the departed. It is for them that food offerings are laid out.

The ancient Lithuanian gods, the mythology associated with them, did not vanish without a trace, rather aspects of them were preserved in the rich and varied folklore, in the folk-customs, the beliefs in magic and incantations. However, the relationship between the folklore and the early religion and its mythology is very complex and is still not adequately explored. Without going into

detail, it should be noted that many traces of the ancient Lithuanian deities can be found in folk tales, in the traits of folk characters which inhabit them, also in family rituals, in folk customs. Of all the available sources it is Pretorius (17th century) who has provided the most information about the various Lithuanian folklore personalities (the *Laimės*, *Laumės*, *Aitvaras*, *Kaukai*, unusual persons, animals etc.). He provides a sort of bridge, which helps to understand both the folklore and to decipher the influence that the traditional religion has had on it. For example, among popular personalities appearing in Lithuanian etiological tales are the creator of the world *Dievas* (the God) and *Velnias* (the devil), in legends giants appear and their opponent often is *Velnias*. Numerous mythological tales concern farmsteads inhabited by *Kaukai* and *Aitvarai*. *Laumės*, *undinės* live in the vicinity, natural phenomena like the wind, the cold, and also *Laimė* (luck, fortune) are personified in the tales along with *Giltinė* (death).

Some of these folk tale personalities have maintained the names of the ancient deities (e.g. *Dievas*, *Perkūnas*, *Velnias*), others, though they do not appear in the lists of deities found in the early sources, have names which are of archaic Baltic and Indo-European origin (e.g. *Laimė*, *Vėjas*, *Laumė*, *Kaukas*).

Some of the personalities, examples again are *Dievas*, *Perkūnas* and to a certain extent *Velnias*, exhibit clear traits of the former pagan deities though these are modified to various degrees by Christian analogues.

For others the relationship to the ancient gods can be established only by careful research. Such research has shown that the

origin of *Laumės*, which appear in many folk tales, can be traced to goddesses who were responsible for fertility and the yield of crops; the *Aitvarai* are derived from twin-gods, the sorcerers, magicians and witches (*raganos*) of folklore represent in part pagan priests and so on. Many of the remaining folklore personalities also incorporate traits that they have inherited from the ancient gods and goddesses, it is to be hoped that these will be deciphered by future researchers. It should be noted that each religious system has its own hierarchy of deities. Beside the principal gods, there are deities of secondary and tertiary importance, and there are semi-gods and ancestors who have been endowed with divine features. There are demons, good and evil spirits and so on, all of which can be found in almost all Indo-European religions (Hindu, Greek, Celtic, etc.) No doubt these demons were also a part of the old Lithuanian religious structure and traces of their characteristics can be found in folklore up to the present.

Researches have uncovered a close connection between some Lithuanian folk tales and ancient myths. Thus V. Ivanov and V. Toporov have shown that the mythological tales about Perkūnas and Velnias are especially archaic and are related to fundamental Indo-European myths.

The Lithuanian folk tale "Eglė, Queen of the Žaltys" reflects the myth about death and resurrection of deities. The tie between some tales and old rituals is readily recognizable. For example, some of the folk tales include a remarkably complete description of ancient wedding rituals.

Many of the customs practiced during the Christmas Eve

celebration, during New Year, and in the time before lent incorporate elements of the ancient feasts celebrated during the spring and fall equinox. Folk games and rituals still practiced in the 19th and early 20th centuries reflect ancient summer solstice rituals. Many archaic elements are to be found in traditional wedding, christening and funeral rituals. However, folk practices during the celebrations associated with various agricultural activities have up to the present not been explored adequately.

It is now becoming feasible to define the general world view framework of the early Lithuanians on the basis of the extensive collections of folk art, symbols, folk tales, customs, incantations, superstitions and other sources. The early Lithuanians, like other Indo-Europeans, pictured the world around them as divided into three vertical levels: the sky, the earth and the under-world. This archaic depiction of the world often employed the "world tree", a symbolic tree that is popular as a decorative element in many folk artifacts including, dowry chests, flax containers and others. In various guises it appears in songs, riddles orations, fairy tales and incantations. Lithuanians, similar to other Indo-Europeans, also used the imagery of a mountain, a house, a ship or a bridge to symbolically depict the world.

It is not easy to establish how the early Lithuanians depicted the horizontal order of the world, however, it appears that it roughly paralleled the vertical structure. Thus east and north was equated to the sphere of the sky, and west was analogous to the under-world. This analogy between the vertical and horizontal world order was fostered by the direction of flow of the principal rivers in their

territory (east to west). In the early beliefs of many cultures it is assumed that rivers arise in the sky and eventually flow into the "under-world". In this respect rivers have the same "joining" function as the world tree. It is evident from old sources that on the basis of the direction of flow for the main rivers, the early Lithuanians were aware that as one traveled from east to west the elevation of their territory was decreasing.

This relative elevation of the regions is reflected in the make-up of regional mythologies. Thus the mythology of the Aukštaičiai is more oriented toward the "sky" gods, whereas the Samogitians deal preferentially with the earth. That is true also of the folklore, which has been gathered in the 19th and 20th centuries. Among the Aukštaičiai folk tales commonly deal with themes, which are associated to the mythology of the sky, in Samogitia the more earth bound themes are popular. The Samogitian and Aukštaičiai mythologies are thus complementary and together they form a single mythological worldview. This interesting complementarity probably originated a very long time ago and reaches back to the archaic dualistic order of society. More problematic is the origin of the tri-level structure. In the folk tradition this can be narrowed down to attempts to explain the origin of the earth. Observing birth and growth in nature forms the basic concepts that enter into this explanation. In the Lithuanian worldview the "world tree" symbolically represented the growth of the universe. For this reason this tree was usually represented by a rapidly growing species. The under-world sphere, which is symbolized by the root structure of the tree, is considered to be of older origin, it represented the past, whereas the branch structure symbol-

ized the future. In the mythology of the Lithuanians as well as their neighbors, the under-world sphere is also associated with water. It is thus logical that the Lithuanians held that the primary matter of the world is water. This is evident from those etiological tales, which, though influenced by Christianity, have preserved archaic world-view elements. For example, we find the following descriptions: "In the beginning there was no earth, no sun. There was nothing except water everywhere (...)"

In Lithuanian etiological tales regarding the creation of the world two mythological personalities, Dievas and Velnias act in concert. For example, Dievas sends Velnias into the depth of the sea in order to bring back some earth. From the grains of sand "the seeds of the earth" brought back by Velnias, the entire earth is formed. In the opinion of J. Meletinski this theme is very archaic and is equivalent to the creation myth in which the origin of the earth is associated with a primary, universal egg.

In Lithuanian etiological tales Dievas and Velnias create not just the earth, but also all the plants, animals birds and even man. Considering that the origin of these two deities reaches back to archaic Baltic mythology it is evident that Dievas represents the god of light and day, whereas Velnias is the god of the under-world and water. Such a worldview is not naive; rather, it was developed by our forebears through an extended observation of their environment and is expressed in terms of mythological images of those times. The tri-level world view also encompassed their concept of life and death. They conceived of life and death as a continuous, evolving chain. The under-world was associated with death, the

heavens with the future and life. On the earth itself both death and life were present. For this reason the after life was considered to be below, beyond the waters. Thus Sovius, a personality in the oldest recorded myth, descends below the earth and becomes a guide to the underworld. After the introduction of Christianity, the underworld, the adobe of the dead, was associated with hell. For this reason in the old texts hell is called *paskanda* (literally – “that which has drowned”). Probably it was imagined that in order to reach it one had to descend into the waters, that is, to drown.

The dead themselves were usually depicted as antropomorphic, though in folk tales traces of an older Indo-European concept can also be found. In this myth structure the world of the dead is depicted as a pasture and the dead themselves as grazing animals. This article deals with only a part of the issues that are raised in the restructuring of the Lithuanian mythological concepts. Until this most important area is not studied extensively it will be difficult to decipher the ties that the archaic Lithuanian culture has with Christianity and with the present culture.

N. Vėlius, *Senovės lietuvių religija ir mitologija, in Krikščionybė ir jos socialinis vaidmuo Lietuvoje*, Vilnius, 1986.

RELIGIOUS REFORMS OF THE BALTS

Gintaras Beresnevičius

The religious beliefs of the Baltic peoples were not a static edifice frozen in time, but a living, evolving system. The evidence of this is recorded in a number of sources. Notable among these are: the relation of the Sovius myth in the *Malala chronicle*, descriptions in the *Chronicle of Grunau*, the myths and legends recorded in the *Lithuanian chronicle*. I have tried to identify the traces that religious reforms have left in the sources and identify the influence, which can be discerned in myths and legends.

In the earliest times reaching back to the late Paleolithic era, the central deity was the revered Mother-Goddess, which in the oldest mythology is usually equated with Mother Earth. She was endowed with powerful creative and life restoring powers. In this religious system burial in the earth was dominant because it implied the assignment of the deceased to the care of the most important deity.

The myth of Sovius belittles burial in the earth as well as

another archaic burial custom, the placement of the deceased in trees. It elevates cremation as the proper funerary rite. Cremation is a radical method, because it annihilates the body and thus frees the spirit. Sovius chooses the path to the nether world through fire. This is a fundamentally Indo-European solution for this problem. The Indo-Europeans believed that *Agni*, the guide of spirits to the other world, chooses the path through fire. The spirit of the deceased ascends along with the rising smoke of the funerary pyre.

In the religious tradition of the Balts, traces of three reform periods can be discerned. Evidence of religious reforms is found in the myth of Sovius, in the legend of Videvutis and Brutenis, and in the legend of Šventaragis. Confirmatory evidence of these reforms can also be inferred from Baltic folklore, historical sources, and archeological material. Further confirmation is provided by comparative linguistics.

The myth of Sovius was first recorded in 1261 as an insert added to a translation of the *Malala Chronicle*. The Sovius of the myth repeatedly travels to the world of the dead; in this journey he tries various burial modes and makes an unqualified decision about which one is to be preferred.

Sovius sacrifices a boar; the nine spleens of the boar are eaten by his sons. He gets angry with his sons and attempts to reach Hell. With the help of one of his sons he finally manages to penetrate into Hell through the ninth gate. There he repeatedly falls asleep (dies) and spends a night interred according to the modes practiced at that time by the Balts. This includes burial in the earth, placement of the body in trees, and finally – cremation. Of the

three modes, only cremation satisfies him. He then becomes a guide for the deceased to the nether world.

Studies have shown that the myth of Sovius is related to the change of funerary practices of the Balts, which occurred in the twelfth, and thirteenth centuries when cremation supplanted other forms of internment. However, the myth itself appears to have older origins. Parallels to the myth, which can be found among Indo-European peoples, e.g. Anglo-Saxon tales and in Balkan and Slavic folklore, indicate this. The myth of Sovius is reflected in some rituals of Siberian shamans, elements of it are also present in Korean and Mongolian myths dealing with the origin of death. In those myths, however, the teacher or magician himself is sacrificed and eaten, instead of the boar, as happens in the myth of Sovius. These elements are related to the ritual in which a god dies and comes back to life again. Humans can participate in this process by eating the body of the god. From this it can be inferred that the boar appearing in the Baltic version of the myth is a later development.

The sacrifice of a boar or a man, whose bodies are subsequently consumed in a ritual feast is characteristic of the Dionysian and Sabasius rituals in Greece. The myth of Sovius, though related to Dionysian and Sabasius rituals, includes elements which set it apart from the rituals of Eurasian religions. In the Baltic version the central theme of death and reincarnation was used to strengthen an ideological position – it became the precedent for cremation of the dead. The ritual of cremation, which was introduced by Sovius together with the cult of deities who maintain their principal abode in the heavens, is a development in opposition to the archaic proto-

Indo-European religion of the Mother-Goddess. It can thus be conjectured that the myth of Sovius alludes to the conflict that arose between the archaic religion of the early inhabitants of Europe and the Indo-Europeans. Taking conjecture a step further, the myth arose during the period when a synthesis of the two religious systems – that of the earlier inhabitants and of the migrant Indo-Europeans was taking place.

The result of that conflict was the triumph of the Indo-European pantheon of heaven-dwelling deities. In this the most important representative, the Thunder God (Perkūnas), replaced the earlier native religion of the Mother-Goddess. However, this victory was not absolute. As agricultural practices developed in Rome gradually spread, increasing yields and a certain renaissance of the Mother-Goddess religion took place. The religious reforms of Videvutis and Brutenis in Prussia and the reforms of Šventaragis in Lithuania were directed against this rebirth.

Videvutis and Brutenis were two chiefs of the Kimbrai tribe originally resident on Gotland, the largest island in the Baltic Sea. When the tribe was displaced from the island by the Goths (hence the present name Gotland) they migrated to Prussia and there came in conflict with the native Baltic people. The result of this conflict was a change in the religious customs and communal structure of both peoples. The Mother-Goddess religion practiced by the native population was displaced by a masculine pantheon of three male gods, the main figure of which was Perkūnas. This religious reform also resulted in the establishment of a main religious center.

The Šventaragis reforms, which took place in the 5th to 6th

century AD, re-established the practice of cremation. Echoes of this reform are to be found in the legendary part of the *Lithuanian Chronicle*. Šventaragis both reconfirmed cremation as the dominant funerary method and established a necropolis for the ruling dynasty, which later became the religious center of Lithuania. The cremation custom spread from this center along with political influence until it encompassed the entire region up to the Baltic Sea. The funerary practice was a central part of a religious system, which emphasized Indo-European features; this included the cult of a sky god, who lived on top of a hill.

The Baltic religious reforms can be described as a process in which Indo-European religious ideas became established and spread. They were opposed by the archaic religious forms of the cult of the Mother-Goddess, which prevailed among the earlier indigenous European people. Progress in agricultural practices and yields brought a temporary re-birth of the Mother-Goddess cult. This process was strengthened by influence from Roman provinces and the Celts. It was also probably driven by internal factors, for example, a resistance movement, which can develop when a religious system is displaced and suppressed. The chances for its success could have been increased when, during the migration period, the warriors and some of the priests who were the main supporters of Indo-European religious systems, moved south or southwest.

The reforms carried out by Videvutis, Brutenis and Šventaragis can thus be regarded as an effort to reestablish the dominance of the religious system and class structure which had been imposed by the Indo-Europeans and which was weakened when

large segments of the dominant populations joined the "barbarian" onslaught on the Roman Empire. On the other hand, the movements which favored a re-birth of the Mother-Goddess cults were part of an internal development in which a repressed religious system attempts to regain lost positions.

The custom of cremation was associated with the establishment of religious centers, or even with the establishment of a single center for the entire region. This religious system was based on a pantheon of sky gods, with a special role assigned to the Thunder God Perkūnas. In the Baltic religious reforms the sky god pantheon was opposed to the re-establishment of the Mother-Goddess cult and also other archaic local religious practices.

G. Beresnevičius, *Baltų religinės reformos*, Vilnius, 1995.

DIEVAS

The ancient Lithuanian god *Dievas* (Latvian – *Dievs*, and Prussian – *Deices*), receives his name directly from the proto-Indo-European word *dieu*, which apparently meant both God and heaven. The name originally did not indicate the Judeo-Christian God Yahweh, as it presently does, but rather a Baltic God, whose proper name is *Dievas*. Christians usurped the name of *Dievas* to identify their God in Lithuanian.

Folklore reveals little of *Dievas*' physical characteristics, focussing instead on his apparel. *Dievas*, a young man, dresses in lavish silver, felt, and silken clothing and bears a shining (sometimes green) sword, reflecting the wardrobe of the Baltic dukes. As a result of *Dievas*' association with light and silver, light and silver serve as his symbols. *Dievas* sometimes appropriates veiled appearances for himself. Specifically, he wears a white shirt and a gray coat, which do not distinguish him as a ruler. As an old man, he travels among the people, visiting people from house to house and from village to village. In this embodiment, he acts in human fashion and gives opulent gifts to good people.

Dievas' cosmological functions depict him as the creator of the world, as the establisher of order, and as God of light. Specifically, *dainos* focus not so much on Dievas as creator but on his creations. Dievas creates earthly objects with great precision, granting humans cultural values. He also legislates law and establishes order in the world, thus ensuring cosmological-religious stability.

As a determiner of fate, Dievas comes into direct contact with the human world at births, weddings, and deaths. This parallels the influence of Laima, (triple-aspect Goddess of Fate) whose powers and functions were expropriated by Dievas. Both, described by an identical vocabulary, determine fate. In certain contexts, Dievas even appears as the father of Laima. The confrontation of Dievas and Laima results in limited, recurring folkloric strife between the two. Laima wins the argument in an overwhelming number of such clashes.

Dievas lives and works on his own farmstead or estate in heaven, located at the top of a high, steep, stony mountain. Dievas' farm contains all the elements of a rich, typical earthly farm, including surrounding fields, gardens, buildings, and a sauna (*pirtis*).

Dievas drives a golden or silver wagon or sleigh drawn by magnificent dappled steeds, called the *Dievo žirgai*. These steeds sometimes appear as black dogs or black ravens, vaguely symbolizing the prophetic associations of Dievas. Dievas also rides his steeds. He drives down from the heavenly mountain in order to increase the fecundity of the fields. The slow drive down the mountainside parallels the approach of spring and summer and prevents the disruption of dew (sacred water). His ride and appear-

ance also accompanies the cycles of the sun. The agrarian cycle of celebrations reflects Dievas' agrarian activities, and indicates his existence as a calendar God. Dievas participates, in one form or another, in nearly every community festival, which usually centers around a solemn meal. Numerous rituals mark Dievas' approach, entrance, and greetings.

In particular, the summer solstice celebrates the presence and blessing of Dievas and of Saulė, the Sun Goddess. Dievas may even be St. John, christianized in name only. In addition to ensuring the fertility of the fields, the rituals emphasize human sexuality, animal insemination, and beekeeping.

Dievas also actively participates in stock breeding, especially of horses. In terms of horses, Dievas' involvement goes deeper. Dievas presents horses as gifts, helps with their upkeep, and gives advice on the raising of horses.

Dainius Sirutis (Audrius Dundzila), *Dievas*, in
Romuva/USA, No 9, 1992.

The image of *Dievas* presented in the above article draws heavily on Latvian folklore and mythology. Ethnological scholars have expressed various opinions about this Baltic deity. For example A. J. Greimas is of the opinion that: "The search by mythological and folklore scholars for a Chief God in the Baltic pantheon appears to be motivated by the desire to find an analogue to the Christian God". However, he is also of the opinion that reasons exist why the name Dievas was transformed into the Christian God.

“The Dievas of the Balts is one of the most positive deities in the entire pantheon, this is proven by the circumstance that his name was chosen to represent the Christian God.” In the opinion of V. V. Ivanov and V. N. Toporov, Dievas was the first among the principal gods of the Balts. In the Prussian pantheon he is called *Okopirmas* (the one who is first).

Jonas Trinkūnas

J. Greimas, “*Tautos atminties beieškant*”, Vaga, 1990.
V. V. Ivanov, V. N. Toporov, “Mitologia Baltica”, in *Studi Slavi*,
No. 3, Pisa, 1995.

PERKŪNAS

Perkūnas, the God of Fire, revives life and protects righteousness and order. In Lithuania, farmers prayed to him and warriors called on him. During the last pagan centuries, a time for which we have historical records, Perkūnas had become the best known, most widely recognized Lithuanian god. Lithuania's enemies knew of his might, and his flag flew over Lithuanian lands. The *Vytis* of our flag is derived from a flag honoring Perkūnas. The Prussian chronicles record a flag with the images of three gods: Perkūnas is the central god. In the religion of the rulers and nobility, Perkūnas was the chief god.

The Lithuanian ruler Gediminas writes about Perkūnas in his famous letters to the Pope of Rome. During the reign of Gediminas and other pagan rulers, the Perkūnas' *Romove* (temple

or abode of peace in Lithuanian) in Vilnius was the most important temple of the realm. The *Lithuanian and Samogitian Chronicle* reports the following: "In Vilnius, in the Valley of Šventaragis, named after the legendary Lithuanian High Priest, Skirmantas, the ruler of Lithuania, ordered vestals and priests to make offerings to honor the gods and to the Great God Perkūnas, who rules fire, thunder and lightning. They were to feed the eternal flame day and night with oak wood. If the fire ever died, it was lit again with sparks from a great boulder."

This is how Perkūnas became the chief Lithuanian god and protector of the state. Even the introduction of Christianity did little to minimize the power of Perkūnas. Lithuanians maintain to this day that if it were not for the Christian God, their foremost god would be Perkūnas. In 1583, Jesuits visiting the Lithuanian diocese discovered to their great dismay that the Lithuanians were worshipping the storm god Perkūnas, ancient oaks, the old communal gods and "imaginary phantoms", which they claimed were protecting homes, towns and gardens. Sacred fires were kept burning to Perkūnas in the forests. They called the women protecting these fires vestals.

All over Lithuania Perkūnas had his sacred lands, called *Alkos*, in which eternal flames burned. Hills and oak groves touched by Perkūnas were considered to be holy. A tree or a rock stuck by Perkūnas protected from evil and disease. Sacred oaks and hills covered with oak groves were fenced and protected by moats. All these places were the sacred lands of Perkūnas. For farmers, Perkūnas remained a God of nature, controlling lightning and

weather. He sends rain and revives the fertility of the Earth. The first thunder of spring shakes the Earth, and purifies the Earth and water. People wait for it as if for a great blessing. It was forbidden to begin tilling the soil before the first thunder rumbled. That awoke the Earth, and everything began to grow. The time of the first thunder was auspicious: if it came before Easter, it was bad, but if it came after Easter, it was considered very good.

Thursday is Perkūnas' day. On that day, a fire should be lit to Perkūnas. The tradition to burn a *graudulinė* or memorial candle has survived to the present day. Although the word *graudulinė* now means "mournful", etymologically the *Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language* explains the word as an alternative name of Perkūnas signifying a single thunderclap. This candle is used as the fire of Perkūnas in other rituals as well, especially blessings. When Perkūnas takes on human form, he appears as an angry man with a copper beard, carrying a bolt of lightning or an ax in his hand. The fire of Perkūnas is moving, flashing, and his tools indicate movement. His tools arranged together become a swastika.

Perkūnas protects the order of the world. He pursues forces and evil and instigators of chaos, who shatter harmony. Folklore tells of many tales where Perkūnas pursues the god of the dead, Velnias. Another symbol of Perkūnas is his two-headed ax, which depicts his creative and destructive power. Perkūnas protects and punishes. The symbols of Perkūnas protect people, houses and buildings from fire and other disasters. A very important symbol of his is the slanted cross, "x", called the Pagan or the Celtic cross. This symbol can be made with movement and with words. For example,

there is a folk saying: "Before Perkūnas thunders, turn your face to the clouds, and say: 'the cross on the litter, the cross on the tree'. Perkūnas, don't touch me, don't send your lightning to me. Go aside, go aside." The ancient Lithuanian sign of the cross was the Pagan Perkūnas cross. That it was a crooked cross-can be seen from the many ancient ritual items: ladles, window ornaments. The Perkūnas sign of the cross was utilized in many rituals: while entering into contracts, drinking a ritual drink. The Perkūnas symbol was made with a cross: on the Earth to protect the seed, or on a door or gate to protect from harm.

Perkūnas as the god of the annual wheel of life awoke the Earth and the life force. With the help of water and fire, he himself would walk this wheel. He would appear at many holidays in different guises. That is why, according to legends, there are many Perkūnases: one for spring and for fall, one for the East, South, West and North. Some say there are nine Perkūnases.

Perkūnas has many holidays throughout the year: February 2 – Perkūnas' Day: *Graudulinė* or the Western Candlemas in mid-winter; Spring Perkūnas at *Pelenija* or the Western Mardi Grass; Easter; *Jorė* (the first bloom); The Cross Days of May; the Sixth Sunday or the Gathering Festival of Perkūnas; June 24 as the Fire of Perkūnas; June 29 as Perkūnas' Day, and October 1 are also Perkūnas' holidays.

Perkūnas and his symbols are widely used in Lithuanian creative arts. G.Beresnevičius has demonstrated how Perkūnas' fire-lightning symbolism continues to appear in Lithuanian art and poetry. Simonas Daukantas in *The Way of the Ancient Lithuanians*

and Samogitians wrote that Perkūnas, the greatest of Lithuanian gods, had many names: *Dundulis*, *Aukštėjas*, etc. He was also directly called Dievas, the supreme name of God – the God of the Lithuanian Nation.

Jonas Trinkūnas

VELNIAS

In the early Lithuanian and Latvian religion Velnias is the god of the underworld and the protector of the dead. In historical sources he is also associated with agriculture, hunting, trade and crafts. Sometimes he acts as the protector of righteousness. He participates with Dievas either as an assistant or as an antagonist in the creation of the earth, its fauna and flora. Velnias is related to the old prussian god Patulas, he shares some characteristics with the Hindu gods Varuna and Vritra, with the Scandinavian Odin and the Slavic Veles. The root of the name *Velnias*, that is *vel-* is the same as for *velė*, the spirit of the departed. Velnias is the most popular god in Lithuanian folklore.

Lithuanian folklore contains a far greater number of chthonic characters than that of celestial gods. It is important to investigate the Velnias' image in folklore as it is here that the main mythological personalities belonging to the chthonic world can be found. Being one of the most popular Lithuanian mythological characters, Velnias is frequently depicted in folk art and folklore, he is mentioned often in superstitions, beliefs, everyday speech, he also figures prominently in

literature, fine arts, films, etc. by professional artists and writers. The partial transformation of Velnias to the antipode of God, that is, to the Devil or Satan, took place, after the introduction of Christianity.

The book by N.Vėlius dealing with chthonic mythology makes use of more than 10,000 narrative pieces of Lithuanian folklore in which Velnias is mentioned. In Lithuanian folklore Velnias has more than 200 names and appears in the shape of various animals, birds, reptiles or people of different ages and professions. He associates with gods and goddesses and with mythological beings of lower rank. His relationship with people is especially complicated and contradictory. Sometimes Velnias seeks friendship with people, their love or help. For example, he asks them to play something for him on a musical instrument, or to hide him from Perkūnas. Sometimes different considerations lead him to help people and he tills their land, builds houses, bridges, churches for them, protects them against wrong-doers, renders assistance to smiths, hunters, musicians or priests. But not infrequent are cases when Velnias harms people in various ways – he mocks them, misleads and pesters them, makes an attempt on their lives, tempts them to commit a sin, enters into their souls and tries to seduce them.

In ancient Lithuanian religion and mythology Velnias was not a simple demon but a god and guardian of the dead. The functions of Velnias as the patron of the dead, reincarnated as some animal can be established on the basis of Lithuanian fairy tales. Velnias was not only a patron of animals but also a patron of their herdsmen and shepherds.

In Lithuania folklore Velnias is very often depicted as a

mythological being who is attractive to women, who seeks their love and even marries them. The current depiction in Lithuanian folklore of the relationship of Velnias and woman has experienced a good deal of Christian influence.

Certain place names and hints in folklore and old mythological records make it possible to assume that in the earliest times Velnias was conceived as the celestial god's double on the earth incarnating all his opposite features. In the model of the world's structure Velnias' place was in the underground and in the presentation of this model in the shape of the cosmogonic tree Velnias place was at the base. As a chthonic mythological being, Velnias is opposed to the celestial mythological beings – God and Perkūnas.

Velnias and God appear together frequently in Lithuanian etiological legends where they cooperate in creating the world. Few are the legends where they are presented as equals, most often Velnias is considered to be lower in rank. He is God's assistant and servant who helps him to materialize his ideas, but very often, wittingly or unwittingly, he upsets God's plans by his own silly initiatives. The image of Velnias as a creator and master of the material world (implements, fire, etc.) was formed under the influence of an ancestors cult who were often perceived as giants.

The antagonistic relation of Velnias and Perkūnas is, most probably, a later development than their friendly relation. It reaches back as far as the proto-Indo-European period.

Norbertas Vėlius, *Chtoniškasis lietuvių mitologijos pasaulis*.

Vilnius, 1987.

SAULĖ

The Great Sun Goddess *Saulė* (pronounced SOW-lay) whose name means the sun itself, is Queen of Heaven and Earth and Matriarch of the Cosmos. As many old hymns and prayers attest, she is a beloved and popular deity of the Lithuanians and Latvians. Her main feasts occur at the summer solstice or *Rasa*, around the time of the winter solstice and the equinoxes.

As the days grow shorter in the fall season, Saulė weakens in Her battle against the Powers of Darkness. Many rituals and spells are undertaken to aid and strengthen Her at that time. Lithuanians begin awaiting “The Return of the Sun” around November 30th. Closer to the end of December, festivities in Her honor begin and last until the 6th of January.

This period of awaiting Saulė’s return, became the Christian Advent in later times, and *Kūčios/Kalėdos* (December 24th and 25th, respectively) – Christmas Eve and Christmas.

Saulė is often portrayed as a golden-haired woman, richly dressed in golden silk raiment with a golden shawl and crown. She drives her chariot across the heavens, pulled by two white, golden manned steeds, called the *Ašviniai* or the Divine Twin Sons of Dievas (God of Shining Sky). Saulė has close associations with the sea, into which She sinks at the end of Her daily journey to bathe and wash her steeds and then crosses by boat. By night, she travels through the underworld, shining in Her dark aspect.

As the female head of the heavenly family, Saulė is the mother of the planets (note the similarity to the “Big Bang Theory”). Among Her daughters are: *Vaivora* (Mercury), *Žiezdrė* (Mars), *Selija* (Saturn), *Indraja* (Jupiter), *Aušrinė* (Morning Star or Venus), and *Žemyna* (Earth). Thus, according to some scholars, Lithuanians named the planets during a matriarchal age i. e. earlier than the Romans.

On December 13th, (Feast of St. Lucia), Saulė pauses on Her return to dance with Her daughters. She also dances at *Velykos* (Easter) and *Joninės* or *Rasa*. Saulė was married to *Mėnulis* (the Moon), but divorced Him due to His infidelity with their daughter, *Aušrinė*. She scared His face for this deed. In other versions, Dievas smote the handsome Mėnulis and disfigured Him.

The Sun Goddess is associated with the magical Smith God *Kalvis* (comparatives in Latvian – *Dangaus Calves* and Finnish *Ilmarinen*). It is said that He created the Sun and placed Her in the Heavens. Other mythologies include tales of Her imprisonment and rescue by a hero or the signs of the zodiac.

Saulė is wealthy, but works hard to care for Her lands, fields, cattle and family. Unlike the fickle Mėnulis, who occasionally disappears for a few days, Saulė always rises and attends to Her duties in a sense “Her work is never done”.

She loves all people and shines on all equally and unconditionally. Her love for humanity is likened to that of a mother. Good women are often compared to Her. In Saulė’s presence, demons and wicked spirits flee and people feel safe to go about their businesses and tasks. But, once She leaves the skies, certain work must

end. To continue, without Her guardianship, would be inviting trouble from dangerous spirits.

Within Saulė's garden, situated in the west, are apple trees, bearing their fruit of gold, silver, and diamond. In traditional riddles and keenings, Saulė is often referred to as the "golden apple". Other associations include: Fire, Horses, *žalčiai* (Lithuanian *žaltys*, sacred serpents); birds and trees; in particular, the Linden; roses and daisies; a white cow or white she-goat at dawn and a black one as She sets; bees; Her sled and later, Her multi-wheeled chariot or wagon; Her golden boat; burning Solar Wheels; *Saulės Medis* (the Sun's Tree) and, of course, the Solar Crosses, which dot the Lithuanian landscape.

Saulė is connected to the wheel. In Lithuanian, She is sometimes referred to as *ridolele* – the rolling Sun. In Latvian, there are solar songs with the refrain *ligo*; *ligot* means to sway, and *rota* from *rotat*, to roll or hop.

On Summer Solstice morning, Balts anxiously awaited the sunrise, in order not to miss even Her first blessed rays. Everyone wanted to see how the sun danced, how it ascended and then descended for a moment, and how it finally shone in various colors. In Latvian songs about such feasts we find the refrain: "The sun, dancing on the silver hill, has silver shoes on her feet".

Shepherds in Lithuania consider Saulė to be their only guardian and have many devotional prayers dedicated to Her. Lithuanians address Her in the morning, as she sets and at the end of harvest with other songs and rites.

All spheres of traditional women's work are under Her guard-

ianship, as are earthly fecundity and healing; and it is She who plays the *kanklės* (a traditional ritual instrument).

Saulė has been described as the wife of Dievas, of Perkūnas (the Mighty Thunderer) and Mėnulis, the Moon. Yet, in the end, She remains the independent and powerful matriarch of the Heavens and divine inspiration to all single mothers.

Beside the Balts, we find many other peoples with female solar deities; as in the Norse, Germanic, Japanese, Hindu, ancient Arab and numerous Native North American cultures. Where one does find a contemporary masculine sun (Celts, Greeks and Romans), one also finds vestiges of Sun Goddesses in myth and place names. While it is difficult to determine a single, simple cause for these differences between cultures; the influence of gender on the most powerful heavenly body on earthly life cannot be underestimated.

Audrius Dundzila

- P. Dundulienė, *Lietuvių liaudies kosmologija*, Vilnius, 1988;
D. Sirutis, The Lithuanian Sun Goddess Saule,
in *Romuva/USA*, 1991, No. 4;
M. Gimbutas, *Ancient symbolism in Lithuanian folk art*.
Philadelphia, 1958.

OLD LITHUANIAN SONGS:

SAULĖ

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>– <i>Miela saulyte,
dievo dukryte
Kur taip ilgai užtrukai,
Kur taip ilgai gyvenai,
Nuo mūs atstojusi?</i></p> | <p><i>Beloved Sun,
God's daughter,
Where so long tarriest thou,
Where so long dwellest thou,
When from us removst thyself?</i></p> |
| <p>– <i>Po jūrių, po kalnelių
Kavojau siratėles,
Sušildžiau piemenačius.</i></p> | <p><i>Behind seas, behind mountains
I shelter homeless waifs,
I keep warm the shepherds</i></p> |
| <p>– <i>Miela saulyte, dievo
dukryte,
Kas rytais vakarėliais
Prakūrė tau ugnelę?
Tau klojo patalėlį?</i></p> | <p><i>Beloved Sun, God's
daughter,
who of a morning kindleth
Thy fire?
Who at evening
Prepareth thy bedding ?</i></p> |
| <p>– <i>Aušrinė, vakarinė:
Aušrinė ugnį prakūrė,
Vakarinė patalą klojo.
Daug mano giminėlės,
Daug mano dovanėlių</i></p> | <p><i>The morning Star,
the Evening Star,
Morn's Star kindles my fire,
Eve's Star prepares my bedding.
Many are my kith and kin,
Many are my gifts and boons.</i></p> |

MĖNESIO SVODBA

*Mėnuo saulužę vedė
Pirmą pavasarėlį.*

*Moon took to be his bridge
Sun in the first spring tide.*

*Saulužė anksti kėlės,
Mėnužis atsiskyrė.*

*When sun woke up at dawn,
Moon from her side was gone.*

*Mėnuo viens vaikštinėjo,
Aušrinę pamylėjo.*

*Moon, as alone he roved,
Morn's Star beheld and loved.*

*Perkūns, didžiai supykęs,
Jį kardu perdalijo.*

*Then Thunder, wrath,
With His blade cleft him in two
and said:*

*– Ko saulužės atsiskyrei?
Aušrinę pamylėjai?
Viens naktį vaikštinėjai?*

*– Why didst abandon Sun?
Why, Morn's Star's minion,
By night didst rove alone?*

(Ludwig Rhesa, *Dainos*, Königsberg, 1825;
Translation by Adrian Paterson in *Old Lithuanian Songs*,
Kaunas, 1939)

ŽEMYNA

The Lithuanian Earth Goddess *Žemyna*, commonly called by her endearing diminutive name *Žemynėlė*, ceaselessly creates and nourishes human, animal, and plant life: all life arises from

her, and returns to her. As the mother of all, Žemyna not only gives birth to humans and feeds them, but also bolsters their ability to create new life. Žemyna also imparts health and prosperity. Žemyna has a brother *Žemėpatis*, who specifically protects the farmstead and household.

Historical chronicles written by Protestants abundantly note the worship of Žemyna, but rarely provide specific information. Christian missionaries in general loathed the widespread devotion of the Lithuanians to their beloved Goddess Žemyna. M. Praetorius, a resident of Klaipėda, wrote an extensive chronicle c. 1690 which includes specific, but not exhaustive, information on Lithuanian religion (excerpts available in *Deliciae Prussicae oder preussische Schaubuhne*. Editor W. Pierson, Berlin: a. Duncker, 1871). Modern scholars have used his record in addition to other available sources to describe Lithuanian religion in greater detail. J. Balys describes a standard invocation to Žemyna in his article “Motinos žemės gerbimas”. Every major celebration began with an invocation to Žemyna. The head of the household filled a ladle with beer, and poured some out onto the ground, saying a prayer. The head then drank some beer, thanked the gods, and the members of the household, and expressed well wishes for everybody present. He then passed the ladle to the next person, who repeated the offering and blessing. Marija Gimbutas in *Language of the Goddess: Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilisation* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1989) recounts Praetorius’ account of sacrifices that Lithuanians used to perform to Žemyna.

A ceremony during which a black suckling pig was offered to

the Lithuanian Earth Mother Žemyna used to be performed as late as the 17th century AD. At a harvest feast presided over by a priestess, the sacrificed pig was ritually consumed. The priestess then took a portion of the pig, together with three times nine pieces of bread, to the storage house. There, she prayed alone to the Goddess. In olden times, many nations used to offer pigs to their Earth Goddesses. Lithuanians enhanced this tradition with a sacred offering of multiple slices of bread. The multiplication factor betokened enhancement.

In spring, Lithuanians respected Žemyna as a pregnant mother, and celebrated her fruitfulness in a variety of ways. *Užgavėnės* traditionally celebrated in early March drove winter away (Christianity transformed *Užgavėnės* into Mardi Gras) The Spring Equinox assisted the birth of new life. Numerous rituals to Žemyna accompanied the first planting. Most often farmers baked loaves of bread from the last sheaves of grain harvested in the fall. Then they plowed the fresh baked bread into the earth. Besides granting and sustaining life, Žemyna receives the dead. The life force of dead humans and people returned to the Earth to be renewed in a new cycle of creativity. Žemyna does not bring death herself, but transforms death into new life. Lithuanians made special offerings to Žemyna at funerals.

Since the Earth is the holiest of all things, Lithuanians dared not joke with her, hit her, spit on her, or disrespect her in any way. Instead, they often and regularly kissed the earth, especially starting work or going to bed. They also kissed her at important transitional moments of life. Periodic offerings to Žemyna, which con-

centrated on bread and ale, formed the basis for the agrarian cycle of Lithuanian celebrations. Lithuanians also invoked Žemyna in seeking justice and swearing oaths.

A clear anthropomorphic image of Žemyna never evolved. A number of descriptions recount Žemyna with metaphors of nature, while others emphasise her birth-giving abilities. Pre-historic amber statues of birth-giving mothers, reminiscent of Old European statuary, may represent the unnamed predecessor of Žemyna. As late as the nineteenth century, Lithuanians worshiped Žemyna at large flat stones dug into the Earth. These stones embodied žemyna and contained her power.

According to Gimbutas, a number of Goddesses, such as *Medeinė* (Forest Goddess), *Lazdona* (Hazel Nut Goddess), and Gods, such as *Giraitis* (Grove God), *Puškaitis* (Earth God who breathes loudly), *Miškinis* (Forest God) repeat Žemyna's functions, but limited to a particular manifestation of nature. Several chroniclers had listed *Medeinė* (Forest Goddess), *Žvėrūnė* (Beast Goddess), as one of the principle canonical Baltic divinities.

Under the influence of Indo-European religion, Žemyna became the wife of either the principal heavenly God Dievas in his incarnation as *Praamžius*, or of the weather, thunder, and justice God Perkūnas. Žemyna in the guise of a wife completed the Father Sky – Mother Earth duality indigenous to Indo-European religions. As wife of Perkūnas, she required her husband's seed, which came in the form of rain, for spring growth to start. Therefore, no plowing or planting occurred before the first spring thunderstorm.

J. Balys has compiled prayers to Žemyna, some of which are

given bellow. Lithuanians often said such and similar prayers while kissing the earth:

*Iš Žemeles parėjau,
į Žemelę nueisiu.
Žeme, motina mano,
iš taves atėjau ir į tave pavirsiu.
Žeme mano, motina mano,
aš iš taveš atėjau ir vėl noriu
sugrįžti.
Žeme, motina mano, aš iš
taves esu, tu mane šeri,
tu mane nešioji, tu mane
ir po mirties pasiimsi.
Sudie, juodoji Žemele,
mano nešiotojė!
Bėginėjau maža būdama.
bučiavau tave rytais
vakarėliais.
Žemynėle, Žiedkelėle,
žydėk rugiais, kviečiais, miežiais
ir visais javais;
būki linksma, dievėle, ant
mūsų.*

*I came home from Žemelė,
I will return to Žemelė.
Žemė, my mother, I came from
you and I will turn into you.
My Žemė, my mother.
I came from you and I
want to return to you again.
Žemė, my mother, I am from
you, you feed me, you carry
me, you will also take me
after death.
Good bye, black Žemelė,
my carrier! I ran around on
you when I was small. I kissed
you every morning and
evening. (While leaving home)
Žemyna, raiser of blossoms,
bloom with rye, wheat,
barley, and all grains, be
happy, Goddess, on us.
(While offering food)*

GABIJA

The worship of fire is of ancient origin. Since fire protected our ancestors from all manners of beasts and terrors of the night, it was held in great esteem, as something supernatural and otherworldly. When fire was brought into dwellings, it did not lose its sacredness, in fact it gained new meaning as the hearth-fire that united families, clans, tribes and later – cities. Fire was not just looked upon as a burning process, but as an invisible being. In the traditional religion of Lithuanians fire was considered to be a sacred, divine power and a symbol of all life on Earth. The ancient Balts were often referred to as fire worshippers. One Greek source mentions Lithuanians and calls them *pyrolatrians*.

Lithuanian folktales relate that fire was not of this Earth but was brought from the underworld by the swallow who burned her tail into its distinctive “V” shape, for her troubles. Other sources say that fire was brought down from the heavens by the great thunderer, Perkūnas during a storm. But, once on Earth, it would appear that the care and tending of this sacred and powerful flame was left to women.

The sacred cult of *Gabija* with its prehistoric roots has survived to our present day. She has evolved through ornithomorphic, zoomorphic (the cat) and anthropomorphic portrayals (a woman clothed in red, sometimes winged). She is tended solely by women, traditionally the head woman of the household or clan. From the Stone age woman caring for the cave fire, to the pagan “convents” of the ancient Baltic lands to the modern woman cooking the family meal in her kitchen,

the Fire Goddess cult is historically a rich and varied one, in different early societies she has been known Gabija, Hestia, Vesta, or Brigid (P. Dundulienė, *Senovės lietuvių mitologija ir religija*, Vilnius, 1990).

In Lithuania Gabija has also been called *Ramutė*, *Ungula*, *Ugminė* (fiery), *Pelenų Deivė* (Goddess of Ashes), and *Ponikė* (Lady). With the coming of Christianity, She was known also known as Saint Agate. But, aside from a Christian name, Her rites and prayers remained relatively unchanged.

The name *Gabija* is derived from the verb *apgauti*, to cover up. This refers to the process of putting Gabija to bed by carefully banking the coals and ashes for the night and uttering prayers that entreat Her to “stay put” and not to wander. This was an important duty of the mistress of the home, each evening. Repeating the prayers taught to her by her mother, she would carefully and lovingly cover the coals. To be neglectful or careless in this task would mean disaster for her home and loved ones, for under no circumstances was Gabija to be treated with disrespect or neglected. If angered She would “go for a walk” leaving destruction in Her path.

Gabija is “fed” traditionally with salt and numerous food offerings. If a bit of salt or food falls into the fire while a woman is cooking, she will say: *Gabija, būk pasotinta* (Gabija, be satisfied).

Evening prayers to Gabija:

Šventa Ponyke, aš tave gražiai palaidosiu. kad nepapyktumei.

Šventa Gabija, būk rami ant vietos.

Gyvenk su mumis ramybėje, šventa Gabija.

These prayers ask Gabija to live with us in peace and to stay put. It is customary to leave a bowl of clean water by the hearth, in case Gabija feels inclined to wash, saying: *Ugnele, pasimaudyk, atilsek!* (Bathe and rest, Fiery One).

Should it be necessary to extinguish the flames, it can only be done using clean water. Fire has eyes; thus no impurities can be thrown into the flames. Much folklore attests to the dire consequences for those who urinate, spit or stomp on Her. Stray coals must be carefully retrieved and placed again in the hearth or stove.

The hearth fire was the focus of all family rituals and rites of passage with the head woman or male elder presiding. Lithuanians begin each ritual invoking her presence without which the rites would not be possible. She accepts the sacrifices and acts as a mediator and messenger to other deities Her healing, protective and purifying powers are well documented in many other Indo-European societies. Here is not the reserved, passive, maiden aunt archetype of Vesta or Heslia. Gabija is the vital center of each temple, grove and home. She is the flaming symbol of all that which is truly alive on this planet and a deity and power to be treated with the utmost respect.

As population grew, a class of priestesses, the *vaidilutės*, attended to the sacred eternal flame that burned for the *tauta*. Relieved familial duties and working in pairs they tended the fire, as well as fed and cared for the Sacred Serpents (*žalčiai*).

To this day in Lithuania, ritual fires are lit by women.

RAGANA

The image of the Goddess as a Destroyer and Regeneratrix is colorfully preserved to this day in the Baltic and Slavic folk tradition. She is *Ragana* in Lithuanian and Latvian folklore and *Baba Yaga* in Russian tales. The name of the Baltic *Ragana* is related to the verb *regėti* – “to know, see, foresee”, and to the noun *ragas* – “horn, crescent”. The name itself reveals her essential characteristics: she is a seer, she “knows”, and she is associated with the moon’s crescent.

In appearance she can be a beautiful woman or a nightmarish creature. She can transform herself into myriad shapes, primarily of a toad, hedgehog, and fish. She is also a bird since she flies rarely walks; or else she rides on a stick or a stump (a symbol of dead nature).

At the winter solstice assemblies of Raganas fly at night to a special meeting place on a hill. One of the groups is called “Lady”. In the winter Raganas bathe in holes cut into the ice of the frozen lakes or sits in birch trees and comb their long hair. The killer instinct of *Ragana* manifests itself not in the winter but in the summer, especially when nights are shortest and plants thrive... She reminds us that nature is mortal and that there is no life without death. Thus, she is essentially concerned with regeneration.

In the Baltic pantheon, no Goddess inspires fear quite like *Ragana* (RA-ga-na) or *Rage* (RA-gay), as she is also called. Her name appears to be rooted in the word "horn" Lithuanian *ragas*) and linked with the horned (waxing and waning) moon. Marija Gimbutas also associated her name with the verb *regėti*, "to foresee". In Lithuanian and Latvian, *Ragana* is synonymous with "witch".

Whatever the origins of her name, she appears to be a pre-Indo-European deity, whose worship apparently dates back to Neolithic times. Pranė Dundulienė remarked that hunters, deep in wooded groves first worshipped her, where she was given the first offerings of the hunt. *Ragana* is a lunar deity, Goddess of the night, of winter, or birth, death and regeneration. She is all knowing and all-powerful; she has the ability to heal and destroy. She affects the fertility of animals and humankind; controls the weather, causes storms and great winds to rise and abate with her magical red wand. She can wreak pain and great misery on humans: for example, she can leave women barren, cause men to become impotent, and dry up the milk of cattle.

Her time of triumph occurs at the summer solstice, when all vegetation is at its peak. It is at the time of Saulė's (sun Goddess) greatest power that she steps forth to bring cessation to growth, and begin the waning of the year.

She is the Goddess of balance; bringing balance between light and dark, increase and decrease growth and destruction. For the unbridled forces of fertility could in themselves, also bring disaster. What would happen, if the forces of nature should continu-

ously flourish and increase, unchecked? If a woman should bear children without end? If vegetation and populations would grow and grow? As she cuts the moon, she cuts the womb and brings cessation to menstruation. Ragana causes plants to wither and die, so that they may come to seed and grow again in time. Ragana keeps the cycles and seasons of the wheels, turning.

But, while she is the Goddess of regeneration and birth, her powers of destruction and death appear again and again in Baltic folklore. There are not a few references to cannibalism in her lore. According to writing from the Panevėžys region of Lithuania, Ragana eats three-time-nine "green" berries and three-times-nine ripe berries, and in so doing she destroys that number of men, women and children.

Ragana is a shape-shifter with an ability to appear both in the form of a frightening hag and a beautiful seductress. Her bird is the owl. She also takes the form of a serpent, but her favorite is the toad. Such "Ragana toads" were believed to have fatally poisonous saliva. To bother them in any way was considered to be a dangerous practice. These toads were immortal and it was prohibited to attempt to harm them. Such a toad, if injured or killed, would regain life once in contact with the earth. Toad-shaped amulets made of wax, wood and later, metal were carried in order to avert danger or the evil eye.

Ragana shape-shifts into other animal forms, birds, she-goats, female dogs, fillies and sows. All these creatures were symbols of death and rebirth. Many place names of lakes, bogs and hamlets, bear witness to the extent and popularity of this deity's cult. Yet, it

would appear that she was demonized quite early in time and long before the coming of the first Christians, according to the old folktales and pagan customs.

She does not belong to the Indo-European pantheon. Nor was she “married” into the celestial family of deities upon the arrival of the Aryans. One might guess that she was too powerful a figure, as was her cult. Ragana is perhaps a “patriarchy’s nightmare” – a strong matriarchal deity, whose power extends even to the sexual performance of men. Her lore is full of tales of the destruction and cannibalization of young males who have come upon her and her handmaids (raganos). She literally exhausts (sexually), then devours them. It seems that her cult involved actions similar to those of the Greek Maenads – the pursuit of a male, his rending to pieces and eating of his flesh.

Later folktales involve the quest to outwit the raganos and their powers of destruction. Much magic is worked in order to avert their wrath. Although it was understood in the Baltic worldview that destruction is but a part of the cycle of re-creation, it would seem foolhardy to invite such a deity to visit one’s farmlands and family. Her realm of influence could be described as a “necessary evil” in the cycle of death and re-birth. Ragana’s strength cannot be stopped for she is an inherent part of nature. Thus, many spells and incantations involve the deflecting of her powers, in the hopes of re-directing Ragana’s destructive forces elsewhere; i.e. towards one’s enemies or disfavored neighbors.

Ragana is portrayed in many ways. One Source indicates that her earliest statues were made of stone. She is a frightening deity to behold, with teeth like a boar’s and long claw-like nails.

Offerings to her include the first eggs of spring, animal flesh, sheep's wool, women's hair, cheeses and butter. But, she is best appeased with human blood. In one hand she holds a broadsword, in the other, a chalice or goblet (a womb-like symbol of regeneration). Thus, she offers death and the promise of re-birth, destruction and healing. But, it is her negative aspect, which has sparked the imaginations of generations and created a much-feared demoness and the vast lore of witchcraft.

So, perhaps there is due cause for the spark of dread that the term, "witch", inspires. For even in pagan times the ragana was feared. Thus, at least in Baltic tradition, there is no such thing as a "white" witch.

Vilija Vytė

S. Baltrunas, Ragana, in *Romuva*, 1993; No 11;
P. Dundulienė, *Senovės lietuvių mitologija ir religija*, Vilnius, 1990;
M. Gimbutas, *Baltai priešistoriniais laikais*, Vilnius, 1985.

VELIONA

Veliona (comp. Latvian, *Velu Mate*) was the Goddess of the Dead, or the *vēlēs*. Little is known about her. In the town of Veliuona (on the Nemunas River, east of Kaunas), the church was built on top of the famous temple dedicated to the Goddess Veliona.

Veliona is a chthonic Goddess who watches over the waters, the earth, the underworld and the riches in these locations. According to Indo-European cosmology, the shades of the dead reside in

the underworld. Veliona primarily protected the dead, while her male counterpart Velnias or Pikuolis (Patulas) (one member of the Baltic trinity) also protected the fertility and bounty of the Earth and of animals. Several legends about Lithuanian warriors indicate that Veliona receives those who die in battle, usually protecting Lithuania from the invading Christian crusaders. P. Dundulienė wrote that her name and the word, *vėlės*, share the same root with the English, *Wael*, (corpse left on a battlefield) and German *Walkurie* (*Valkyries*) and *Walhala* (Hall of fallen warriors).

Chronicles record the wide spread sacrifice of pigs to Veliona, and pork as a staple of the Vėlinės meal. A family invited its neighbors to the slaughter, conducted by the eldest family member. Immediately after the slaughter, the men boiled certain parts of the animal in a grain stew, which was then sacrificed by libation to Veliona. The brain was also immediately cooked and eaten by everybody present. Other sources indicate that hens and roosters as well as male and female calves, ewes, goats, pigs, and geese were sacrificed. One prayer reads: "Veliona, come, eat sausage with us and with our dead".

Dainius Sirutis

LAIMA

Laima, the goddess of destiny, manifested or subserviently replaced her great Mother, who held the reins over everything that she let into the world (gave birth to). She arranged the life of every living thing, and finally, assigned its departure from the world (its

death). The importance of the goddess Laima continuously increased in the development of the Baltic world with man's increased involvement in the rhythms of nature, the world of Mother Žemyna, who held all things within the Baltic world in the magnificent balance of destinies. The magnificent balance of destinies, comprising all – inanimate things, plants, and animals – remained undisturbed by man – Žemyna's disturbed, homeless and restless child – in the endless eternal forests of Baltic lands.

Laima was already known during Žemyna's era as Žemyna's sister, the daughter of the pre-Baltic Mother Žemyna of the Marshes. Most likely, she was known to the pre-Balts as one of many divine manifestations of the Mother Goddess. In these early eras Laima was a divine power, governing the metamorphosis of things in motherly Nature, especially of plants and animals – by arranging their births, ways of life, and death. With the far-reaching intrusion into Nature by man through his destructive-creative agricultural undertakings, and his organized tribal and national entities with large settlements – the goddess Laima, acquired the status of goddess of destiny, swaying individual, communal, and social lives of men and nations. Laima eventually rose even above the gods, obtaining thus the aura of divinity as such. In this sense, Laima can be considered as a Baltic counterpart of the Greek Moira; she already played a significant and ever-increasing role during Perkūnas' era. Perkūnas likewise was unable to turn away the destinies placed by Laima upon the warriors and leader-kings of the Balts.

Emerging as the goddess “above the gods”, the deity of des-

tiny, Laima attained the status of divinity, founding a distinct phase of the Baltic world.

According to Latvian myths, Laima, supervised mothers giving birth to their babies. Ultimately, it was Laima's arrangement of destinations that determined whether a baby would be born at all, what his or her physical and mental qualities or abilities would be, whether he/she would be wealthy or a pauper, and, finally, when and how he/she would die. After a successful birth, sacrifices were offered to Laima, a crested hen or a piglet. On the occasion of a baby's birth, women of the neighborhood gathered in the bath house (a separate building which was a necessary part of a homestead), where these rituals of offering were performed and hymns to the goddess were sung, or ritual texts, dedicated to her, were recited. Rituals of this kind were called *pirtizas* (*pirtis* means "bath house").

Laima, destined not only individual happiness: upon her depended the well being of the whole homestead or estate. According to Baltic myths, Laima resided near a family's hearth, carefully observing the activities of every member of the family and guiding them on their pre-ordained ways. In the spring Laima walked around the fields, blessing the sown grain; and in the fall, after the harvest, she kept herself in the mill-room, determining the abundance of the family's flour. She also was thought to stay in the cattle sheds or stalls, ordaining the well being of the domestic animals.

Finally, Laima embraced not only individual and family lives: she destined the well-being, survival, flourishing and sometimes the dwindling, decay and tragic perishing of a tribe or even a na-

tion; Laima's divine power prevailed over, or predestined the way of every individual, every community, every tribe and every Baltic state – be it the most warlike and bellicose, led by mighty Perkūnas.

Destructive-constructive Laima was the goddess of creativity, as creativity essentially is the process of constructiveness-destructiveness – they go hand in hand. The Latvian *laist*, as well as Lithuanian *leist*, means “to let be”, and hence “to destine”. Furthermore, the Latvian *laidums* means “creation” and *laideja* – “creatoress”. Outside of Dievs, only Laima has functions of creativity. No other deity possesses them.

This intimate togetherness opens up two other insights: Laima as goddess of destiny is sovereign in her resolutions. She not only discusses various problems with Dievs, but also often disputes with him and maintains her opposing resolution.

V.Vycinas, *The Great Goddess and the Austin Mythical World*,
New York, 1990.

For the Balts, birth and a long successful life depended on the goddess Laima. Dictionaries as well as sources dating from the 17th and 18th centuries document that Laima was considered to be the goddess of “birth and fate”, in folk beliefs her influence is still evident. Rituals in honour of this most important goddess were being performed up to the second half of the 19th century. Thus records show that in Latvia a ritual bath ceremony before giving birth and a ritual feast immediately after were still being performed

at that time. The rituals were directed by the matriarch of the family and the ceremony included the sacrifice of a sheep or a chicken. Similar customs have been recorded in 17th century Lithuania. The traditional sacrifice was a chicken, which had to be killed by a ladle. Only women took part in the ceremony. The birth mother made an offering of a towel, a sash or vest, these items were handed to the keeper of the sauna (*pirtis*). Interestingly the birth mother was called a bear; this practice could have come from Palaeolithic times when a woman who was about to give birth was imagined to take on some aspects of a goddess.

Laima is an all-knowing goddess. In old Lithuanian the word *lemti* had many meanings associated with knowledge. It meant not only luck (*laimė*), fate (*lemtis*), the verb derived from it could mean to “know”, to “decide”, to “determine”. Laima can appear as a single goddess, or as a trinity. The three *Laimos* represent different aspects of fate. Thus at the time of birth one determines that the child will live, the other determines that it will in time die, the third the years of life that have been accorded. This plurality seems to symbolise the relativity of fate. The life of a person is spun out like a thread. The body is likened to a spinner's spool over which the thread is wound, once the spool is full, life is terminated. The *Laimos* are weavers as well as spinners; they can also disrupt or sever the thread of life.

As the goddess of fate Laima can assume the form of a cuckoo. In this incarnation she can call out a prophecy about luck or misfortune. At times she can appear as three birds, thus in songs we find: “Oh, and three cuckoo birds flew up in the middle of a

dark night..." Songs also mention a golden stool: "As she sat on the green birch tree, as she reclined on the golden stool, she was embroidering a silken scarf, she was playing with golden balls".

Laima can determine not only the duration of life, but material bounty as well. Thus in the old Prussian language, the word *laims* designates "bounty", "richness", in Latvian the word *laimē* means "rich". In this guise she can take the form of a swan, a duck or a lamb. If she is caught while in the form of a swan, she can turn into a woman. The one who marries her becomes very rich. If one acquires a lamb, which is the incarnation of Laima, it will also bring untold richness and a happy life. The early Lithuanians used to sacrifice lambs in front of sacred stones; this practice is probably of great antiquity. Researches of pre-historic times have established that the ram was the sacred beast of the Bird Goddess.

Traces of the Laima image can be found in other secondary gods. Thus the *Aitvaras* of Lithuanian folklore can also change its form and appear as a bird or as a fiery snake. He also brings richness and happiness to some people, and does so usually without their knowledge. The *Aitvaras* is usually hatched from an egg, which is found in most cases near a wild pear tree. Because of his demonic heritage, the *aitvaras* can also bring misfortunes, for example, it can cause fires.

In the chronicles written by Jesuits in the 17th century mention is made of pillar shaped stones (menhirs) to which offers of flax, sashes, woven cloth and flowers were made. Some of them were called *Laima's* or *Goddess' stones* and were revered as sacred. It was believed that near them Laima spun the thread of fate

and that underneath such stones the “water of life” could be found. In 1836, L. A. Jucevičius described many such stones in Samogitia and in the Vilnius region. They were about 1.5 m high, with a smoothly hewn exterior and were placed by rivers or brooks surrounded by ditches. According to Jucevičius these places were dedicated to the “ruling goddesses”.

Marija Gimbutienė

“*Baltai priešistoriniais laikais*”, Vilnius, 1985.

AUSTĖJA

Austėja is a goddess of bees, and it was believed that she, like Žemyna, promotes growth, plentifulness and reproduction. J.Lasicki mentioned her in the 16th century. Austėja is simultaneously the protectress of families and the only true mother of all other bees. Austėja is thus a woman and a bee in one person. A.J.Greimas links her name to the Lithuanian verbs *austi* – to weave (linen), and *austyti* – to fly swiftly here and there, to shut and open doors repeatedly. This is metaphorically linked to the gathering of honey and building of honeycombs.

The Greek goddess Artemid, protectress of mothers of large families and pregnant women, was also called a bee, *mel-issa*.

When sacrificing to Austėja, drinks are tossed up into the

air, up toward the ceiling. Mead must be offered before the wedding dance. During christening parties mead is also poured and matchmakers offer toasts so that the "bees would better gather honey plentifully". Austėja is the goddess who protects brides and pregnant women. The form of the goddess-bee shows her to be a deity of great antiquity.

The celebration of Austėja occurs in the middle of August – a holiday called *Žolinė*, when bees are especially active in bringing honey from meadows. Offerings of honey are made to Austėja.

On the day when the honey is gathered from the hives, people used to get together early in the morning. Before the beehives were opened, they would pray and sacrifice to the goddess. In the Baltic languages there is a special term which describes such a gathering. That is *bičiuliai* in Lithuanian (literally: fellow beekeepers). This term has acquired a broader meaning and now is also used to designate especially close friends.

It was believed that bees are not just ordinary beings – they are sacred, goddess like workers. In Lithuanian special terms are used to differentiate death of men from the death of all other beings. In this respect a bee is placed on the same plane as men and it is only in case of bees that the word reserved for people is employed. The dead bee had to be buried in the earth. Trees in which bees build their hives were regarded as sacred. Bees were endowed with a strong moral authority. It was not allowed to quarrel, curse, abuse one another or behave disgraceful in the presence of bees. It was believed that bees could talk and sing. They sang during main holidays, especially during the celebra-

tions of the Sun. Bees could understand the human language and thoughts and prophesise the future.

An example of a riddle: "In a dark sitting-room a maid is weaving without a loom and without yarn." (A bee builds a honeycomb).

Jonas Trinkūnas

KAUKAI, AITVARAI AND OTHERS

In the mythology and religion of Lithuanians there are many secondary deities and mythological beings whose memory was kept alive in the folklore and customs of the nation up to the beginning of the twentieth century. In older times, the times of the mighty Baltic gods, these secondary gods were thoroughly familiar to the plain country people. Furthermore, the peasants of those days and up to recently have also honoured the most ancient feminine deities. For example, in the pantheon of the pagan Lithuania rulers it would be difficult to find the most important goddesses of the farmers – Žemyna and Laima. Martynas Mažvydas wrote on the pages of the very first book printed in Lithuanian *Catechismus* (1547): "In our days many still practice blasphemous idolatry: some honour trees, some rivers, some grass snakes or something else, they worship them and give them honour. And here are such, who are solemnly swearing to Perkūnas; there are those who while worrying about their crops worship Laukosargas,

and those who care for cattle – Žemėpatis. Those who are bent to evil activities worship Aitvarai and Kaukai as their gods”. And then Mažvydas appealed to his Lithuanian readers: ”Cast away the kaukai, žemėpačiai and lauksargai”. A. J. Greimas calls the worshipping of such lower deities a “religious degradation”, however, this part of the religious practice of the folk proved to be the most persistent one. The book of Norbertas Vėlius *Mythic beings of Lithuanian legends* (Vilnius, 1997) is an exhaustive study on laimės; laumės (spirits of Nature); aitvarai; kaukai (house-spirits); witches, sorcerers, werewolves (extraordinary people) and others.

We will mention and characterise only some of Lithuanian mythic beings.

The Lithuanians respected the gods and goddess of the farmstead and home. The cult of these deities originated from the deified remote primordial mother image; later on the father image influenced it too. These deities protected the house, the people living there, farm-buildings, domestic animals and fowls.

Some archaic elements of the primordial mother cult survived as long as the 19th century. During the wedding, as the bride bade farewell to her paternal home and its gods, she would pray and make sacrifices to a female idol made of a sheaf of straw, begging to forgive her for leaving home and moving to a new one, where she would have to adore other gods. *Nonadieva*, a goddess mentioned in the *Volyn' Chronicle* (middle of the 13th century), must probably have been the domestic goddess. She corresponds

to J.Lasicki's *Numeja*. The sentence "Numeias vocant do Domesticos" should by translate as "Numejas are called domestic goddesses".

The goddess *Dimstipati* mentioned in the written sources was later transformed into a male deity *Dimstipatis*, but woman, which may indicate his feminine origin, performed the offering rites addressed to him. Women used to take care of the most important place in the house, the corner behind the table, where goddesses were supposed to live. *Žemėpati*, the goddess of the farmstead mentioned in the written sources, was also later transformed into a male god *Žemėpatis*.

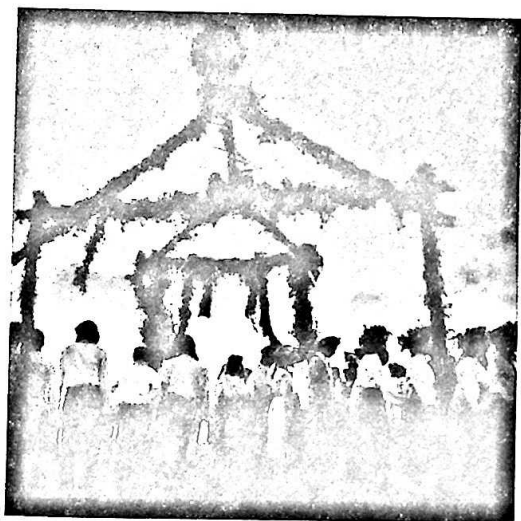
Among the underworld spirits *kaukai* were best known to the Lithuanians. The image of this creature originated from still-born babies or those that died without the birth rites. *Kaukai* were represented as little manikins, both men and women. Beside *kaukai*, the underworld also had spirits that guarded treasures hidden in the ground. J.Lasicki wrote, "Kaukai are the palm size spirits of the dead ('lemurs'). People fed them, as they believed that if they won't, they would loose their luck".

Aitvaras should be grouped with the atmosphere gods. *Aitvaras* seems to have the shape of dragon or huge snake with flaming head. He should be fed on baked and cooked meals, which were not tasted by someone yet. The image of this creature originated while watching flashing meteors, most probably after agriculture had already spread. At first *aitvarai* were supposed to live in the sky or in the woods. People that keep *aitvarai* were consid-

ered as wicked persons, because aitvarai stole from others' granaries and barns. Aitvarai are persecuted by Perkūnas. Under the influence of Christianity they were settled in garners and denounced as thieves. On the whole, aitvarai were considered to be divine creatures, to regulate human relations and to influence the state of wealth.

Jonas Trinkūnas

OF HOLIDAYS





Holidays are an integral part of all religious systems. In the traditional Baltic religion holidays reflect the cycles of Nature, some are tied to dominant farming activities, others use changes of seasons to honour ancestors. Even the traditional non-seasonal family holidays, that is, christening celebrations, wedding feasts and funeral wakes – have also preserved some ancient rituals and customs and are characterised by a conservative world outlook. In the roster of traditional holidays there are none, which celebrate some historical event, holidays of this type are originated by state structures. After the belated acceptance of Christianity in Lithuania, the Catholic Church strove to prohibit many of the folk celebrations and customs, and these efforts continued well into the 18th century. In cases where this proved difficult, there was an effort to change the character of the holidays, or at least to give them new Christian names.

In the Baltic countries all four seasons of the year have a similar duration and this has influenced the distribution of season based holidays. It is interesting that the stages of a human life were

also perceived as reflecting the recurring seasons of the year. Most of the major calendar holidays were devoted to remembering and honouring departed ancestors. Presently aspects of this tradition have been retained only in the customs associated with *Vėlinės* and more vividly during *Kūčios*. The celebration of the dead was related not only to honouring their memory but dealt with more practical matters as well. It was believed that the dead could contribute to an improved yield, therefore autumnal holidays honoring the dead occurred after the crops had been gathered.

Almost all calendar holidays are distinguished by some characteristic accent, such as fire, water, a tree, feasting, celebration of the dead, veneration of celestial bodies (the Sun, the Moon, etc.). For example, during the spring attention is paid to the reappearance of seasonal birds, and many spring holidays include some customs which commemorate their arrival. For example during *Velykos* the symbol of vitality – a coloured egg is presented as an offering. Fire is perceived as a universal power that cleans, renews and provides light, and there are rituals during which fire itself is renewed. Water is a source of vital strength, it is a source of vitality and a universal purifier. The type of food which is served during holiday feasting is a very important component of the ritual as well. Food and drink are associated with offerings that are made to celebrate the harvest or in honoring the departed. The veneration of trees is related to man's participation in the seasonal cycles of Nature. For example, *Verbos* mark the first growth that appears in the spring. The vitality which characterises summer is celebrated when people adorn their homes with birch branches during *Sekminės*, when girls

weave garlands during *Rasa* (Summer Solstice) and so on.

In Latvian mythology celestial bodies and other natural phenomena were personified as mythical beings sharing a common name, *Dievadeli* (sons of God), and some of them became an integral part of the Annual Order of Festivals. The Spring Equinox, *Lieldienas*, is also personified. It is believed that during these festivals the personified celestial beings arrive bearing gifts for everyone. In return people offer them food and gifts.

Folk songs and ritual round dances are an important part of calendar holidays. Each region of Lithuania has preserved its specific heritage of those songs. *Dzūkai* (Southeast Lithuanians) preserved Yule songs the best, *Aukštaičiai* (the Uplanders) retained songs celebrating the spring season, *Žemaičiai* (Samogitians) – chants to the dead. Calendar songs preserve a legacy, which reaches far back in time. They have retained the symbolism characteristic of Indo-Europeans and in some cases even of that of the ancient inhabitants of Europe.

The revival of Baltic traditional culture including ancient rituals associated with holidays was begun in earnest a few decades ago. This section begins with a table, which provides an overview of the principal holidays and gives a brief explanation of their purpose. Articles dealing with the customs associated with major holidays follow this. The articles were originally published in internal publications directed at members who are interested in the ancient pagan traditions.

THE MAIN TRADITIONAL HOLIDAYS

A chronological list of the principal traditional holidays.

Month	Lithuanian name	Explanation
I.	Pusiaužiemis	New moon. Feast to celebrate mid-winter
	Kirmių diena	End of month: Remembrance of hibernating žaltys
II.	Užgavėnės	End of month. Rite to usher out winter. Presently – beginning of Lent
III.	Pavasario lygė	Spring equinox. Welcomes spring, blesses renewal of life
IV.	Jorė	End of month. Celebrates new growth of spring

V.	Samboriai	End of month. Celebrates the growth of crops
VI.	Rasos	Summer solstice. Homage to the sun. Feast also celebrates medicinal herbs
VII.	Rugių šventė	End of month. Blessing of rye and other grain crops before the harvest.
IX.	Dagotuvės	Fall equinox. Harvest celebration
X.	Vėlinės	End of month. Feast for remembrance of the dead
XII.	Kūčios	Eve of the winter solstice. Time of union between the living and the dead.
	Kalėdos	Winter solstice. Homage to the sun, a feast to cast

UŽGAVĖNĖS

Escort of winter

The holiday of *Užgavėnės* ushers out winter and greets spring. For Christians, it is the eve of Lent, the pre-Easter period of fasting and repentance. *Meteni* is the name of the same festival in Latvia.

A. J. Greimas wrote, "Under the influence of Christianity, Užgavėnės became a movable day. Earlier, it was celebrated at the time of the Spring equinox. The new sickle of the moon that appeared at that time proclaimed the beginning of a new year." In many countries, Užgavėnės is celebrated as Carnival. The Lithuanian Užgavėnės has a tradition of ancient rituals, during which the shades of dead and deities of nature are encountered.

In the Lithuanian lowlands of Samogitia, processions of masked and costumed people are very popular. In the highlands of Aukštaitija, people like to ride sleighs, race, and sing *dainos* (ancient Lithuanian hymns akin to the Indian *Vedas*).

A long list of traditions, games, *dainos*, etc. come together in Užgavėnės. The following more important holiday events can be listed:

Abundant meals.

Riding and races.

Dragging *More* (a straw woman symbolising winter) from farmstead to farmstead and destroying her by immolation or drowning at the conclusion of the holiday.

Players, dressed as animals, strange people, and demons



(goats, storks, horses, the Death Goddess *Giltinē*, doctors, beggars or wandering mendicants, soldiers, Gypsies, wedding parties, etc.).

Depictions of the battles between Winter and Spring – the duel between the *Lašininis* (a figure symbolising gluttony) and *Kanapinis* (a emaciated figure symbolising the fast), in which the skinny, frail *Kanapinis* wins over its fat, robust opponent.

Scenarios of weddings or funerals.

Pouring and splashing with water.

Fortune-telling.

A. Rekašius wrote, “Užgavēnēs are related to spring, to fertility, and to flax. The period of this spring holiday was connected to the *vēlēs* or shades of the ancestors. The holiday is directly re-

lated to the protection of the harvest. (...) Because the vėlės actively work in this period (as also in Advent), this may be the time when they can cross from the sacred into the earthly world of people. That is why efforts were made not to get in their way, not to be noticed by them.”

Dainos. The Samogitians have seemingly preserved Užgavėnės’ traditions best. They sing more songs about beggars or wandering mendicants. The Aukštaitians have preserved very old Užgavėnės dainas, but fewer traditions.

The symbols of dainas are the following:

Horse, steed. “Oh, that is a horse, that is a good horse...” “The horse ran, the grass grew...” That is a symbol of awakening life energy. Nature is awakening.

Water, running water. This is mentioned in almost all dainas of this period. “The deep river, leluma”, “Beyond seas, the seas, the lakes froze.” Water and seas are primeval nature, in which everything is born and to which everything returns. Moving, flowing water symbolises the awakening of nature.

Girl. “In that river, in the lake, in a chair sits a girl.” Sitting in a golden chair, she is combing her hair. This is a very common image of the ancient Nature Goddess.

Hair. Combing the hair is also related to swimming and flowing: the movement of nature.

Flax. That is also a symbol of hair and of spreading life.

SPRING CELEBRATIONS

The first *šventė* (celebration) in the spring is *Lygė*, even though the first signs of spring emerge much earlier. Spring starts with *Perkūnas* day. It ends with *Vieversys* (lark) day. *Užgavėnės*, in the past, according to A.J. Greimas, was celebrated during *Lygė*.

Lygė signals the true beginning of spring. Soon to follow are *Verba*, *Velykos* and *Jorė* – a series of festivals with similar worship, traditions and songs.

***Perkūnas* day.** Celebration of the first thunder of the year.

B. Buračas wrote: "The day, on which, the first thunderclaps of spring are heard, is remembered by people for the rest of the year. They interpret its signs through their experience in life. Inhabitants of Šiauliai deem the year to be a good one, if thunderstorms start on *Velykos*. If *Perkūnas* is not heard at all during spring – a bad year is predicted, possibly even famine. *Perkūnas* on *Pelenų* day (before *Velykos*), foretells plague. If heard on *Jurginės* (St. George day) – or *Jorė* – there should be a good harvest.

On the first day that *Perkūnas* thunders, the entire earth is shaken, awakening nature. The grass begins growing, as do crops, trees, and all life. It is said, that if you bathe, after the first thunder, in a river, or lake, you shall be healthy and strong. Drinking water, unblessed by *Perkūnas*, may sicken you.

Girls, desiring that their rue plants would grow luxuriant and beautiful, would plant them right after the first thunderstorm.

Before *Perkūnas* blesses the land, it is not allowed to walk

on it barefoot, to lay down on the Earth, or sit upon rocks.

It is also forbidden to start a fire to burn old growth before the first thunder is heard. Else Perkūnas will burn down your home.”

These are just a part of the old superstitions and beliefs that have been recorded. They show how important Perkūnas is in the spring – he is youthful, powerful, and always a bringer of rebirth.

Old sources mention a number of spring gods, goddesses, and saints – Pergrubris, Sacred Jurgis, Jorė, Patrimpas. In reality, the bringers of spring are Perkūnas and Žemyna, known by different names.

Lygė. The day keeps getting longer, and around the 20th of March, the length of day and night become equal. This is called *Lygiadienis* (equinox). Nature flowers and thrives even more profusely. In old traditions celebrating spring, vestiges of a ritual struggle between two elemental forces can be observed. These are the *Dvyniai*, seen as a pair of twins– bird versus *žaltys*, fire versus water, etc. A competition of two groups of mounted young men in Samogitia was described by M. Valančius. Competitive games practiced by the Old Prussians had a similar origin. The symbol of *Lygė* is that of twins, in Latvia – that of *Jumis* (fertility).

The first thunder had a beneficial effect on many aspects of the environment. For example:

Water, after the first thunder, is now refreshed. Water is sacred; streams are visited, and the more important ones are decorated with *verbos*. At this time, water is magical. It should be washed with and bathed in. It is also good to dive in a lake or a

river, or even bathe in the snow. Guests should be greeted with water: "We came to bless you with a good word, and to sprinkle pure water on white hands". While greeting, they pour a little water into the palms, and quickly clean it with a towel. It is joyful to splash and play with water – for it is spring. A dish with water is placed in the home, next to the new fire.

Fire (*Ugnis*) in *Velykos*. The old fire of the winter is put out, and a new spring fire is lit up. The fire is brought home from the fire of a sacred altar (spring Perkūnas' fire). Fire is also burned during *Velykos* of the *Vēlēs*.

Verba – from the woods, *verbos* are brought home. Branches of osier and willows are tied with a red thread or an ornamented tape. *Verba* is the magical branch, which gives one the power of life and growth, protects one from diseases. Homes are decorated with *verbos*.

During *Velykos*, when visiting gravesites, *verbos* are placed on the graves. *Verba* is used as a means of protection, rejuvenation and cleansing. Even a river's water can be improved – by sticking a *verba* on both sides of the river. *Verba* is the people's deep belief in the sacredness of the green branch. When the *verba*, at home, dries up, they remove it, leaving only the branch. The thorns are then stored in a bag, and are later burned as incense for Perkūnas, or upon someone's death.

During the *šventės* (celebrations), everyone tries to get up early and whip the sleepy ones with a *verba*, for which they must repay with a *margutis*. That, which is touched by a *verba*, receives the force of life.

Margutis – a symbol of nature's rebirth, has a sacred force of life. Eggs are painted during ceremonies and celebrations up until Jorė. The first margučiai are red – during Lygė. Later – margučiai are decorated with meaningful ornaments – for rites, gifts, games, rolling. Velykos fir trees are decorated with margučiai. The old woman, *Velykė* brings an egg for the child, early in the morning, and puts it on the window sill.

Ancient Rituals. The old authors (M. Strykowski, J. Lasicki, S. Daukantas and others) describe how Lithuanians worshiped the spring gods, the most important of which are Perkūnas and Goddess Žemyna. Even now, not only are the traditions alive, but so are the songs and dances, meant for the Goddess *Deivė* – the maiden, and the God *Viešpatis* – dear father. The aforementioned authors identify a prayer such as this:

O Viešpatie...

*Tu išvarai žiemą, parneši malonų pavasarį,
Su Tavimi ima žaliuoti laukai, sodai, miškai.
Prašome padauginti pasėtus javus,
O visas rauges teikis sutrypti.*

Oh Viešpatie...

*You chase away the winter, bringing a kindly spring,
With you the fields turn green, and gardens, and the woods,
We ask you to multiply the crops we've sowed
And trample the weeds under foot.*

Afterwards – the sky is greeted, and the earth is honored – with beer and cake made of a several types of grain. Fire, water, and the earth are worshipped.

The margutis is divided between everyone. The shells – part of them are burned, a part burried.

Velykos is a movable holiday, celebrated on the first full moon Sunday after the spring equinox. The Christian church associates *Velykos* with the celebration of Christ's resurrection. The time of *Velykos* lasts, starting with *Verbos Sunday* (Palm Sunday) until *Atvelykis*. Every day is full of old traditions and beliefs – *verbos*, *margučiai*, the renewal of fire and water.

The name of *Velykos*, in our tradition, corresponds with the name of *Vèlès*. At that time of the year, since prehistoric times, a spring *Vèlinès* was celebrated, called *Vèliu Velykos*. They began on the Great (or the Green) Thursday, and lasted until Saturday.

“During *Velykos*, they use to go to the cemeteries to visit their dead ones, and put eggs on their graves”. After supper, the table is not cleaned up, or at least some food is left for the dead. The time of *Velykos* is a meeting and parting with the *vèlès* of the close ones. They visit holy places, temples, and leave, for the entire summer. J. Basanavičius wrote, “After death, the close one visits his relatives up until Green Thursday, but after that day, he bids them fare well”.

Important days continue even after *Velykos*. According to P. Dundulienė, the first day of *Velykos* uses to be called *Ugnies* (of fire) – when *lalauninkai* (singers) traveled through the towns. The second day – *Perkūno*, the third – *Gegužės* (May or cuckoo), and

the fourth – ice day, when no one should disturb the earth.

Swinging on the swings starts as early as Užgavėnės, later on Velykos, Sekminės, Jorė, and Rasa.

Lalavimas, music – Songs of *lalavimas* are sung. Horns, pipes made of osier/willow, and drums are played to signal the beginning of spring. They help Perkūnas chase away, and lead away all ghosts and spirits.

RASA

Lithuanian Summer Solstice

Towards the end of June, at the time of the Summer Solstice, when night is the shortest and Nature bursts with blossom and growth, we celebrate the holiday *Šventė of Rasa*. This day is also known as *Kupolių Šventė* and by its Christianized name, as *Joninės*, St. John's Day.

Rasa is different from other *šventės*, in that we do not end the rites with a remembrance of the Dead. Rasa, means dew, which has divining qualities on solstice morning. The greater the amount of dew there is on that morning; the greater will be the harvest next year.

Before dawn, the dew possesses great healing power. If you cleanse your face with this dew, especially dew that comes off rye shoots, your skin will be clear. Around the region of Švenčionys young women would rise early and wash with the dew and then sleep again to dream of their future husbands. During the night, dew would be gathered on cloth, which would later be used in heal-

ing rites. Bathing or rolling in the dew made one youthful. If one followed the rites carefully, as they had been practiced for ages, one would become wise and clairvoyant, able to "see" evil folk, charmers and witches.

There is no happier *šventė* than Rasa. On that morning, the Sun, Herself, dances.

Herbs and Grasses (*žolynai*). At this time, most healing herbs are possessed of great strength and potency. On the eve of Rasa, young women engage in the holy gathering of herbs (*kupoliauti*). To this we attribute the other name for this *šventė* – *Kupolinės*. The specific herbs for this day, or *Kupolės*, as they are called are: daisies, St. Johns Wort, bilberries and any yellow blossoming herb (*Melampyrum nemorosum*).

***Kupolė*.** This name is given to a branched pole, which is placed in the center of the ritual area. The top of the pole has a triple branch (which is reflected in the rune ascribed to this feast day). In eastern Lithuania it is explained that this is a miraculous growth with three branches, one which blooms like the Sun, the other, like the Moon and the third like a Star. Young women, who wish to wed, play a divination game: standing with their backs to the *kupolė*, they throw a wreath over their heads and hope that it will land on the *kupolė*. As many tries as it takes, indicates the number of years until marriage. (Shades of the bride throwing of the bouquet, which is still practiced today.)

Prussian Balts would decorate a long pole with flowers, greenery and flowing ribbons. This *kupolė* would stand in the corner of the fields, not far from the rye. If the *kupolė* is decorated

with nettles and fern, it acts as a witch repellent.

An address to the Kupolė:

<i>Oi, Kupolė, Kupolėli,</i>	<i>Oi, Kupolė, dear little Kupolė,</i>
<i>Kur tu žiemą žiemavojai,</i>	<i>Where did you winter,</i>
<i>Kur tu vasarą būni?</i>	<i>Where are you to be found</i>
	<i>in summer?</i>
<i>Žolėse kvepiančiose, ar</i>	<i>Are you among the fragrant</i>
<i>po gėle?</i>	<i>greenery, or underneath a flower?</i>
<i>Žiemavojau pūkynuose,</i>	<i>In winter, I am covered in down,</i>
<i>Vasarą žaidžiu žolynuos.</i>	<i>In summer, I play amongst the</i>
	<i>grasses.</i>

Wreaths (*Vainikai*). Rasa is a feast of wreath-making. Maidens who place them on their heads make ritual wreaths from the holy herbs. Wreaths decorate homes, doors and gates. The men adorn themselves with wreaths of oak leaves. During the night, all go to holy rivers and lakes and cast these wreaths on the waters. Candles are attached to the wreaths. If the wreaths of a woman and man float together, it is a sign that they will wed.

Gates (*Vartai*). Gates are constructed from poles in which the upper crossbeam is decked in greenery. Each person that enters through the gates becomes a participant in the Rasa rites. Around one pole of the gate, the maidens circle, and around the other, the

young men. They bow and greet each other as they pass, circling through the gate while a daina is sung. One strives to “greet” the summer solstice partner of choice. “*Tu žilvītēli*” is sung during this greeting rite.

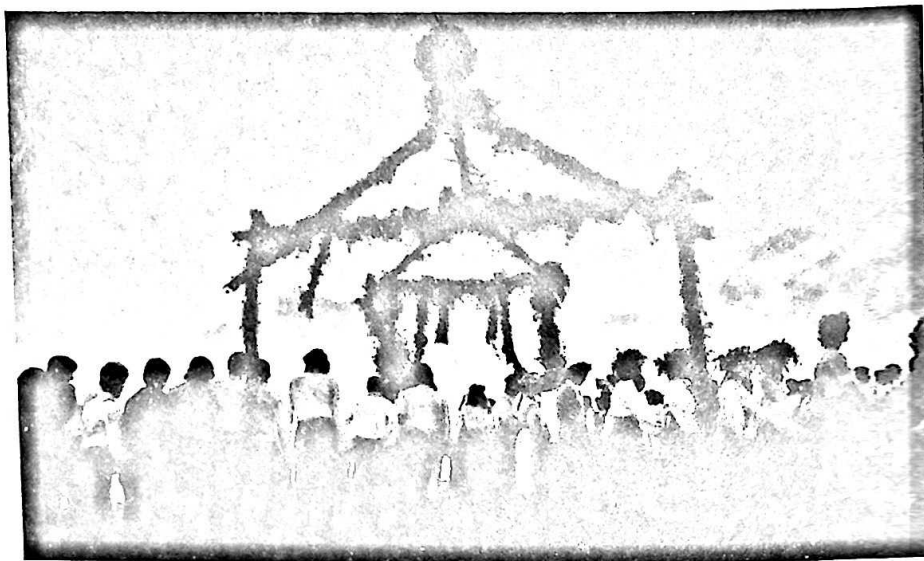
Fire (*Ugnis*) in *Rasos*. According to our custom, the “old fire” is extinguished with pure water and a new, holy fire is kindled. The holy *aukuras* (ritual fire) is addressed. We bid “adieu” to the settling Sun and honor Nature by the placing of the wreaths (*kupolēs*). Newlyweds carry the new kindled fire to their homes. This fire is sacred and blesses their home. The “sun wheels” (flaming wheels) are let loose to roll down hills.

The Fern (*Papartis*). A wide spread custom prescribes an impossible task – the search for a blossoming, magical fern. It must be found at midnight, in total silence and with appropriate rites. The blossoming fern is the fire of the mighty Thunderer – Perkūnas.

Rye fields are visited with song and blessings, so that the harvest would be abundant. Rye is the staple grain of the Balts. Dolls are made from rye stalks and ears which are subsequently burned or drowned with the appropriate *dainos*. That, which is old, is thus reborn.

Feast (*Vaišēs*). Everyone gathers for the feast, where the popular foods are: Beer, cheese and egg dishes. The table is decorated with greenery.

Swinging. Swings are constructed and swinging ensues with appropriate “swinging” songs. We celebrate “between heaven and Earth”. We leap over the ritual fire and dance the circle dances.



The Greeting of the Sun. All night we have feasted and rejoiced. Now we address the dawning Sun and delight in Her dancing.

Rasa today. The old sources state that the ancient rites were prohibited by the Catholic Church. But, it was celebrated all the same. Originally, the šventė was celebrated for fourteen days. It was the custom to celebrate Rasa from mid-June to the end of June.

Rasa was not just celebrated in-groups. Solitary persons would also go forth to worship Nature. J. Petruolis wrote that a certain farm hand would disappear for two weeks. On his return he would say "I must take the time to honor the Sun, it can't be helped".

A Sampling of the Rasa rites performed at Kernavė, Lithuania.

17:00 hours – Circling the Gates.

Singing “*Tu žilvitėli*” and “*Kupolė, rožė, ratilio*”.

18:00 hours – Kupoliavimas (Herb gathering).

Singing “*Kupolėle, kas tavo skynė*”, “*Lioj, žalija rūta*”, “*Sėjau kupolę*”.

19:00 hours – Address to the Kupolė.

Game and dainos: “*Bitela Ryto*”, “*Šokinėjo Žvirblelis*” and “*Saduto tuto*”.

Divinations and the game of the throwing of the wreaths.

Circle dances and dainos “*Aš pasėjau kanapėlę*” and “*Graži mūsų šeimynėlė*”.

20:00 hours – Feasting.

Dainos: “*Apynelis augo*” and “*Išvedžiau ožį*”. (I lead out the goat). Games follow.

21:00 hours – Address to the setting Sun.

Dainos “*Saulala sadina lylią*” and “*Eina Saulelė aplinkui dangų*”.

22:00 hours – Kindling of the Sacred Fire and Sacrificial Offerings.

Daina “*Stovė oželis*” (The goat song). Traditional instruments are played: horns, panpipes and *kanklės*.

23:00 hours – Blessing of the Fields and Trees.

Dainos “*Oi, ta ta, kupolė graži*”, “*Žibinkštėlė tekejo*”, “*Kupol, rožė, ratilio*” and “*Eisim, broliai, tūto*”.

24:00 hours – Bonfire.

The Burning of the *Morė* (Straw Dolly) and bumming of the poles. Dainos: “*To to, prieš kupolinės*” and “*Ant tėvulio dvaro*”. Circle dances around the bonfire – “*Impolė, rūta, čiūto*”, “*Žalias žalias žolynėlis čia po mūsų kojom*”.

1:00 hours – Bathing – the burning boat – the Sun.

“*Eina Saulelė aplinkui dangų*”.

2:00 hours – The casting of the wreaths – address to the Moon, the greeting of the stars.

Dainos: “*Lėk, sakale, mariose*”, “*Bėg, upele, vingurdama*”.

4:00 hours – Greeting the Dawn.

Dainos: “*Užteka, saulužė, dauleliu, leliu*”, “*Kas ten teka per dvarelį*”, “*Užteka, teka šviesi Saulelė*”. Bathing in the Dew. “*Kupol rože, ratilio, Rasito rasito*”.

This is a mere sampling of the feast rituals and cannot lay claim to being the only way of celebrating it. There are many variations and regional differences in the rites.

Rasa is also known as a night of raganos (witches); a night when they are particularly active. Many of the charms and spells worked at the time of Rasa are done to repel them and undo their works. Please note that the term ragana (witch) has different meaning in this case, and should not be confused with the neo-pagan term.

First verse of the Address to the Setting Saulė (Sun):

*Miela Saulyte, Dievo
dukryte,*

*O, beloved Saule, Daughter
of God,*

<i>Kur visą dieną buvai ?</i>	<i>Where were you, all the day long?</i>
<i>Po jūros kalnelius</i>	<i>Among the hills and seas</i>
<i>šildžiau savo vaikelius,</i>	<i>I warmed my children,</i>
<i>Daug mano dovanėlių,</i>	<i>Many are my gifts,</i>
<i>Oi, kupoliau, kupolėli</i>	<i>Oi, kupoliau, kupolėli”</i>

J. Trinkūnas. Rasa. In *Sacred Serpent*, 1994, No.2

VĒLINĒS

Remembrance and communion with the *vēlēs* of ancestors

After the fall equinox, the time of the *vēlēs*, begins. It lasts until the end of October or beginning of November. *Vēlinēs* or *Ilgēs* are the most important holidays for remembering and paying homage to departed ancestors. During this time not only the immediate family is remembered, but also the more distant ancestors. It is to those great ancestors, that we give thanks for all that we possess today.

“According to Christian doctrine, the dead and the living are separated and do not commune. Lithuanian folk beliefs saw things differently. During the times of *Kūčios* (Christmas Eve) and *Vēlinēs*, the dead would gather and feast alongside the living, partaking of the offered dishes” (E.Šimkūnaitė).

The ancestral dead are the links between living human beings and nature’s cycle of rebirth through death. The dead leave for another world – it is not far away, but relatively close by. The dead

caloftern return and meld with the forces and forms of nature. All calendar feasts except Rasos include the honoring of the departed, through offerings, prayer and communal feasting.

Fire (*Ugnis*) in *Vėlinės*. The hearth joins the family, the community and symbolizes the permanancy of life. It links the ancestors and gods with their descendants. It was believed that many *vėlės* live near the hearth, thus a home's hearth joined all family's members, both living and dead.

It was at this time, that the graves were visited, decorated and honored – especially the ancient mound graves or *piliakalniai*.

J.Dlugosz wrote that in the fifteenth century, this fall feast took place in the wooded groves. After the harvest had been gathered, people would bring food, drink and feast for days. Each would have their own fire for the making of offerings to the gods and the ancestors.

Home celebrations were recorded by M.Strykowski in the fifteenth century: "Towards the end of October, adults and children would gather in one home. They would arrange straw on a table and cover this with a tablecloth (white) and then place several loaves of bread and a pitcher of ale on the corner. Other food would then be placed on the table and prayers and offerings would be made."

Some grain and dollops of beer would be offered to the hearth-fire, sprinkled on the ground and in the corners of the house (the most important dwelling place for ancestors souls). Ritual prayers would be said during this ceremony.

Celebrating *Vėlinės* at Home. After the graves have been visited, a family dinner is held. Before eating, the head of the family would hold up a *kaušas* (offering cup reserved for this occasion

– more anciently a *kaukolē* – skull-cup) and place within it, various grains, flour and salt. The contents would be poured into the hearth-fire with the words: “For all our dear friends”. A drinking horn would then be passed around the table with appropriate toasts and the dinner would begin.

After the feast, dainos for Vēlinēs would be sung, along with war and harvest songs. If there was someone who was particularly honored, an empty place was left for them at the table, complete with cup, plate and towel. Morsels from each dish were symbolically offered and placed in the plate. During the Vēlinēs meal, candles or small torches are burned.

By candlelight, all family members would gather in silence, while the eldest person would pray, thus: “Shades of the dead, who still remember this house, honored ancestors, grandfather, grandmother, father and mother (the dead are named) who are worthy of eternal remembrance, and all our relatives and children whom death has taken from us, we invite you to this annual feast. May it be pleasant for you, honored ancestors, as are sweet, our memories of you”

Little Table for the Dead (*Vēliu stalelis*). These are prepared on graves or elsewhere in groves. Candles and food offerings are arranged there.

Many are the variations in the way in which Vēlinēs is celebrated. One needn't worry about a “correct” method.

There is a human need to remember those who have gone before us, to honor the ancestors who are so bound with our identity, both personally and as an ethnic group.

KŪČIOS AND KALĒDOS

The Winter Solstice

Kūčios and *Kalėdos* mark the end of the year, when the world returns to darkness and non-existence. However, as death begets birth, the two holidays also herald the rebirth of nature and the return of the Sun. The Lithuanians distinguish the two subsequent days now celebrated on 24 and 25 December with a variety of ritual customs.

Adults begin their preparation for *Kūčios* and *Kalėdos* by placing a cherry twig in water on the day when bears start to hibernate, which is the first day of winter according to folklore. The twigs sprout roots in time for the holiday. Children play games symbolising the planting of crops such as the one wherein girls imitate sowing, by strewing hemp seeds, which prompts dreams about future husbands.

Indo-European cultures traditionally greet the New Year with rituals and tales that re-enact and relate the creation of the world. In Lithuania, an elderly mendicant called *Senelis Elgeta* retells everything that has happened since the creation of the world.

Kūčios. The solemn feast of *Kūčios*, continuing the celebration of *Vėlinės*, unites the living with the dead as well as all forms of life: people and animals.

The house requires special preparation. The family hangs up an iconic "grove": birds made of wood, straw or egg shells

surrounding a straw sun. This grove as well as a multitude of burning candles invokes the souls of the dead (*vēlē*) who sit at a small table with bread, salt, and *Kūčia* on it. The *Kūčia* contains many traditional grains, which symbolise regeneration: cooked wheat, barley, peas, beans, rye, poppy seeds, and hemp seeds etc., mixed with nuts and honey water. The *Kūčia* feeds the souls of the ancestors as well as the living. The living sit at another table, covered with hay and a table cloth. In earlier days, hay also used to cover the floor. Symbols of the life forces, which sustain the human world, decorate the main table. This includes a bundle of untrashed rye, which the family used the next day to bind around its apple trees.

Kūčios, an exclusively nocturnal celebration, begins when the evening star appears in the sky. Before gathering at the ritual table, everybody bathes in saunas, makes up with their neighbours, and forgives their enemies. In olden days, the head of the household – wearing high black boots, a large black *juosta* (sash used as a belt), and a prominent black hat – used to circle the farmstead three times. He would approach the house door after everybody else had entered. To the question: “Who is there?” he answered: “Dearest God (*Dievulis*) with the *Kūčia* begs admittance”.

Once the family gathers, the eldest member (man or woman) says a traditional invocation and breaks the *Kūčia* bread, which everybody gives to each other. According to the sixteenth century historian Pretorius, every member of the family, placing a loaf of bread on the floor prayed: “*Žemėpatis* (God of the homestead), we thank you for the good bread you give us. Help us work the fields



while blessing you, that *Žemynėlė* (Mother Earth Goddess, sister of *Žemėpatis*) would continue to give us your good gifts.” Then everyone raising the bread to the sky concluded with: “Nourish us.”

After the exchange of the *Kūčia* bread, each person sips some beer, spilling few drops onto the floor for the *vėlės*, the souls of the dead. Dinner follows.

Kūčios traditionally required 13 different foods, which echoed the 13 lunar months of the year. Under the influence of the solar calendar, the number changed to 12. The foods may not contain any meat or milk. The meal consists of *kūčia* (mixed grain dish described above), *kisielius* (a type of cranberry jelly), hot beet soup, mushroom dumplings, cabbage, fish and seafood. Desert includes *slizikai* (sweet poppy seed cookies), poppy seed milk, apples, nuts and other sweets that evoke wishes for a sweet New Year.

Animals partake of the solemnities by eating the same food that people eat. When people and animals used to live under one roof everybody fed their household and farm animals from the table. On farms families still feed their animals with the leftovers from Kūčios. The families also share the food with bees and fruit trees.

After dinner while everyone remains at the table-the children and young person pull straws of hay out from underneath the tablecloth. A long straw represents a long and prosperous life. The adults too would tell their own fortunes in a variety of ways.

After dinner participants exchange wishes for each other by pouring grains into the hearth fire. The hearth becomes the sacred fire of the home – each single grain sown in the fire grows and prospers. The family also ritually burns a birch wreath, stump, or log in the hearth, representing the old year. The participants can also destroy evil by burning splinters they invest with meaning.

Kalėdos. The merry rituals of Kalėdos celebrate the rebirth of the sun called *Saulė Motulė* (Mother Sun). In folklore, *Kalėda* symbolically represents the sun, returning home with a crown of pearls:

Look, holy Kalėda returns,

The great Kalėda.

For it is the day of Kalėda.

*Iron wheels, silk lashes –
The great Kalėda.
For it is the day of Kalėda.*

Nine horned reindeer also symbolise the sun, in addition to embodying the unity of the three worlds.

People carry images of the sun through the fields and the towns, wishing everybody prosperity. Greetings and wishes, expressed during Kalėdos, possess a potency, which guarantees their fulfilment. Metamorphosed beings such as the old man of Kalėda (Santa Claus) or humans dressed as animals – especially goats, cranes, bulls, steeds and bears also wander about. A *Juodas Kudlotas*, representing the power of harvest prosperity and richness, accompanied these wanderers. People going around during Kalėdos, called *Kalėdotojai*, sing Kalėda songs to every person they meet and every house they visit: “We go to sing Kalėda – Kalėda”.

The traditional meal includes pork and other meats, cakes, and rowanberry juices. During the day a special group of wandering *Kalėdotojai* known as the *Blukininkai* – men and women, young and old – drag a log called a *Blukis* from house to house around the entire town. The *Blukis* symbolises the old year. They sing, dance, play music, and play tricks under way. In the evening the *Blukininkai* gather together to burn the log. In Latvia, this tradition took place Kūčios evening, which the Latvians call *Bluka vakars*.

According to the renowned Lithuanian scholar of mythol-

ogy A. J Greimas, Lithuanian Kūčios and Kalėdos do not have anything in common with Christianity, which usurped or destroyed all aspects of the traditional Lithuanian celebrations. Both feasts, in all of their aspects, celebrate solidarity, encompassing not only the nuclear and extended families – but also the entire community of the living and the dead, and all of life itself.

Jonas Trinkūnas



THE LIVING HERITAGE



Everywhere the old traditions and archaic cultural forms that enriched the lives of people for hundreds and thousands of years are passing away. For some time now it has become increasingly evident that with this passing important values, which distinguished nations are being lost and humankind is being deprived of a rich heritage. Social scientist was among the first who became aware of this and began to collect and preserve the vanishing national heritages. It was at that time that national consciousness re-awoke in many European nations. The articles collected in this section relate how the traditional Baltic religious beliefs were preserved and re-lived in Lithuania and Latvia.

The strengthening of national consciousness in the Baltic lands began in the 19th century. It was initiated by a revitalization of the native languages. An important aspect of the national revival was the collection of folklore, popularization of traditional songs and renewed interest in other forms of folk art. For Latvians and Lithuanians songs are an integral part of their culture, thus, for example the recent restoration of Independence, was often was

called "The Singing Revolution", because the political meetings and public gatherings were usually accompanied by the collective singing of the traditional songs.

Such an emphasis on folklore and traditional customs was characteristic of other nations as well, though for Balts it was of special significance. For Lithuanians the most memorable period of history were the 13th and 14th centuries when Lithuania was the last pagan state in Europe. Most of the favorite rulers hail from that time as well, and they were pagans. After the belated christening a time of gradual decline set in. As a consequence of this decline in the conscious of some Lithuanians the traditional pagan religion often became identified as an integral part of Lithuanian national consciousness. Considering the fact that over the centuries the Catholic Church has established a strong presence, such an attitude of some Lithuanians is quite remarkable.

The idealization of the ancient religion is already noticeable in the very first works of the initiators of the national awakening. An example of this is the history written by Simonas Daukantas (1793–1864) *Būdas senovės lietuvių, kalnėnų ir žemaičių* (1845). The Lithuanian poet Andrius Vištelis (1837–1912) believed in the ability of the old pagan Gods to return and protect the rights of Lithuanians. He wrote pagan poems and prayers and built a "Romuva" shrine. The traditional Lithuanian religion was propagated by a number of activists during Lithuania's inter-war period of independence. Thus duke Jonas Beržanskis (1862–1936) ardently propagated the Lithuanian Religion; Vydūnas–Vilius Storosta (1868–1953) organized public celebrations of the traditional pa-

gan holidays. Vydūnas also wrote a number of very important and influential philosophical and literary works about the old Lithuanian Religion. Visuomis-Domas Šidlauskas (1878–1944) propagated a reformed version of the traditional religion, calling it “Visuomybė” (Universalism). He established congregations in Lithuania and abroad, and in 1929 founded a sanctuary called “Romuva” in north-west Lithuania. In 1930, a fraternity called “Romuva” and, a sorority called the “Vestals of Romuva”, was established to foster Baltic unity, based on principles of Baltic Religion.

The “Romuva” movement was disbanded and severely persecuted in Lithuania during the period of Soviet Occupation, during this time many of the active members were executed or deported to Siberia. A clandestine Romuva congregation was resurrected in the Inta labor camp (Russia). Upon their return to Lithuania around 1960, several of the members were arrested and put on trial for their activities. In Lithuania itself, Jonas Trinkūnas (1939–) organized the “Vilnius Ethnological Ramuva” and initiated public celebrations of Lithuanian Religious holidays in 1967. The name “Ramuva” – a variant of Romuva – was an attempt to veil the true identity of the group. This succeeded only for a short time and three years later; Soviet authorities expelled its members from the Vilnius University study and exiled its leaders. “Ramuva” was finally reestablished in 1988 during the “perestroika” period and has been active since that time.

In 1991–1992, Romuva congregations were established and incorporated in Vilnius, Kaunas, Chicago, Boston and Toronto. Outside of Lithuania, Vincas Vycinas (1918–1996) promoted

Lithuanian Religion through his philosophical works and organized a Romuva commune for a brief period. Marija Gimbutas (Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė) (1921–1994) documented the mythological history of Lithuanian Religion through a series of very popular books and articles.

In 1995, Lithuania passed the “Law on Religious Communities and Associations”, according to which Romuva is a “non-traditional” religion. The law requires a minimum 25 years of existence before a “non-traditional” religion receives the state support reserved for “traditional” religions (E.g. Catholics, orthodox etc.).

In Latvia the pagan traditions are being maintained and propagated by the pagan religious association called “Dievturi”. *Dievturi* means in Latvian “those who hold by God”. The movement of dievturi arose in the twenties; the founder was Ernest Brastinš (1892–1941). Brastinš based his attempt to revive paganism on Latvian dainas, the folk songs of Latvia which are of great antiquity and are imbued with pagan religiosity and symbols describing in detail pagan beliefs and customs.

After the occupation of the Baltic countries by the Soviet Union the “Dievturi” association was disbanded and persecuted. Ernest Brastinš was executed in Astrakhan in the forties; some of the “Dievturi” members went into exile. Those who settled in the USA have registered their denomination and continued their activity. One of them is Janis Tupesis, professor at Wisconsin University, who came back to Latvia and was elected to the Parliament as

a representative of the Peasant Party and later he became the Latvian ombudsman. His contribution in this book provides a panoramic view of the "Dievturi" movement. Of special interest is a complementary article from the pen of Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, another émigré academician from Canada who has become active in Latvian politics. In this simultaneously scholarly and poetic study Dr. Vike-Freiberga shows that the astonishingly extensive collection of Latvian dainas represents a unique and almost inexhaustible source which opens a window into the very soul of the ancient Balts. She shows that the dainas provide information regarding mythology and social order and allows a reconstruction of a metaphysics in which the highest aim of a human life is harmony with the will of Gods and the rhythms of Nature. The dainas are a source extensively used in the reconstruction of the belief framework, which characterizes the "Dievturi" movement.

From its inception, the "Dievturi" movement was closely associated with the striving for Latvian independence. This became especially pronounced during the years of Soviet occupation. One of the activists in this movement was Olgerd Auns, who coordinates the activities of "Dievturi" for many years. He was a lecturer at a clandestine school of Latvian history and was one of the initiators of Latvian folklore festivals, which during the "perestroika" period evolved into huge manifestations of national feelings.

An international observer (Piotr Wiench) has characterized the Baltic pagan organizations as follows:

"Among the various pagan groups in Central-Eastern Europe the pagans in the Baltic countries – Lithuania and Latvia –

seems to be most active and best organized. The majority of pagans in the region are not politically active. As for their political views, they are either moderate rights, centrist, or particularly those ecologically oriented – moderate left. None of the above organizations can characterize as extremist. They try to exploit tradition in order to create a new response to the contemporary challenges”.

The texts, which follow, provide a glimpse of the varied activities of Baltic pagans. Some are descriptions of the movements directed to a general audience; others are texts that were prepared for members and published in internal publications. Included among these are attempts to describe the ideology and goals of the movements. One of these, the declaration issued after the “First World Congress of Ethnic Religions” in Vilnius (1998), which ties the Baltic Pagan movement to the world community of traditional religions.

ROMUVA - LITHUANIAN BALTIC RELIGION

Audrius Dundzila, Jonas Trinkūnas

*A poplar stood alongside a road
Sounding kanklės from below the roots,
Buzzing bees in the middle
Falcon's children at the top,
And a group of brothers comes ridding on horseback,
Please stop, young brothers,
Listen to the sounding kanklės,
Listen to the buzzing bees,
Look at the falcon's children.*

(Lithuanian folk song)

This *daina* or ancient hymn portrays the world tree. It unites the past, the present, and the future; the living and the dead; and the human and natural worlds. It then tells us to reflect on our situation in the world.

THE BASIS OF LITHUANIAN BALTIC RELIGION

1. Lithuanian Baltic Religion is the native ethnic religion of the Lithuanians.

2. Lithuanian Baltic Religion is based on the personal experience of the Lithuanian spiritual and religious heritage. This heritage is inherent in Lithuanian ethnic culture: *pasaulėjauta* (world concept), *pasaulėžiūra* (worldview), *dainos* (songs and hymns), *pasakos* (tales), *užkalbėjimai* (incantations), music and art. Since time immemorial, our ancestors have passed down this heritage from generation to generation.

3. There is something greater in life. Everybody experiences it in her or his own way. It happens any time and any place, even in our mundane life. All who seek it find it. We cannot fully comprehend or describe it. There is no word for it. Lithuanian Baltic Religion teaches Lithuanian methods of seeking it.

4. It is approached through life, nature, deities, holidays, holy places, and countless other means. Life and nature are holy. The most important and widely worshiped Lithuanian divinities are the Gods Dievas, Perkūnas and Velinas and the Goddesses Laima, Žemyna and Saulė. The most important and widely celebrated holidays are *Krikštynos* (name giving), *Vestuvės* (wedding), and *Laidotuvės* (funerals) as well as *Kūčios-Kalėdos* (Winter Solstice), *Velykos* (Spring Celebration), *Rasa-Kupolinė* (Summer Solstice), and *Vėlinės* (Fall Commemoration of Dead). Lithuanian holy places are scattered throughout Lithuania: temple sites, ritual places, and

sacred forests. There are numerous Lithuanian deities, holidays, and holy places.

5. All religions are equal: they have the same goal, and lead to it in their own way. Lithuanian Baltic Religion is the Lithuanian way.

THE NAME

The ancient Lithuanians did not conceptualise their religion until modern times. Instead, they simply lived their *pasaulejauta* (world concept) and *pasauležiūra* (worldview). Their way of life formed their religion. Consequently, they did not have a name for their religion.

“Baltic Religion” or “Romuva Religion” now identifies the ancient religion that is common to all Baltic nations (Lithuanians, Latvians, Prussians, etc). “Lithuanian Baltic Religion” or “Lithuanian Religion” is the Lithuanian version of Baltic Religion, while “Latvian Baltic Religion” or “Latvian Religion” is the Latvian version of it.

Followers of Lithuanian Religion chose the name “Romuva” earlier this century. “Romuva” means “temple” or “sanctuary” as well as “abode of inner peace”. The main Prussian temple was called “Romuva”. Members of Romuva are called *romuviai* or *sentikiai*, “old believers”. Latvian Religion took the name *Dievturība*, and followers are called *dievturi*, meaning “Bearers of God Dievas”.

HISTORY

Lithuanian Religion does not have a founder or any single beginning or source, and it predates recorded history. It is one of the oldest religions of the world, and the oldest one in Lithuania. It evolved from the natural and native beliefs of its indigenous people.

Lithuanian Religion has many sources. After the last Ice Age, the first nomads in the region of present-day Lithuania practised Shamanism. Once the region became agrarian, the settlers practised their version of Old European religion. After a wave of cultural changes spread across Europe, the inhabitants practised their form of Indo-European religion. Each religious transformation incorporated elements from its predecessors. Baltic Religion evolved primarily from these three antecedents. Lithuanians and Latvians as well as the Prussians and several other now-extinct Baltic peoples developed their own ethnic variants of Baltic Religion.

During the first millennium AD, Baltic Religion underwent several reforms. *Sovius* (dates unknown) reintroduced cremated burials which gained wide spread acceptance. In Lithuania Šventaragis (ca. 5th–6th Centuries) relocated cremations to certain sacred places. Prutenis (441–573) and his younger brother Vaidevutis (457–573) unified the Prussians into a theocratic state, reformed the pantheon, and built the Romuva temple at Nadruva with the gods Patrimpas (Dievas), Perkūnas and Patolas (Velnias) as the presiding trinity. They also preached adherence to the Gods, for without them there is no good, no fortune, and no happiness.

(Simon Grunau, 16th Century)

Baltic religion freely thrived in the Baltic lands until the end of Dark Ages when catholic Christianity declared a crusade against the Balts for their non-Christian beliefs. The Balts spent the Middle Ages defending their lands from Christian invaders. Prussia and Latvia were defeated. This led to the eventual genocide and assimilation of the Baltic Prussians (ca. 1710). The Latvians fared better, except that foreign domination of Latvia continued until 1918.

The Grand duchy of Lithuania accepted Roman Catholicism as a state religion in 1387, while the Samogitian (Lowland) Duchies acquiesced in 1410.

Christianity advanced only slowly as the Lithuanians continued to practice their own religion. Throughout the following centuries, Christians frequently documented Lithuanian obstinacy to Christianity.

ROMUVA—THE BALTIC TRADITION

The Baltic traditions took shape in a vast territory, encompassing the south-eastern shores of the Baltic sea and huge forest, lake and river areas, which today are divided into Baltic and Slavic lands. This division which was mainly initiated by the world's new religions and its plundering politics, even now is creating confusion and hampers this areas stability. Many residents of this land, notwithstanding the many different nationalities, have a similar world outlook, moral and aesthetic values, a rich folklore and have preserved in various forms aspects of their ancient, native religion.

Our ancestors lived long centuries in this land, struggled for their existence, sought to understand and give meaning to the world around them. Until historical and written times they had already created their most significant cultural objects – language, world outlook, art and other values. Not everything survived, many cultural and utilitarian objects have perished. Aggressive religious and political forces tried to conquer these nations and to thrust upon them their own life styles, and even their own outlook on life. Language and religion were most sensitive to these constraints and forces. Having lost these spiritual, cultural moorings, the nation or ethnic community would lose its identity and become a different community of impoverished people. In the fourteenth century, the ruler of pagan Lithuania, Gediminas, proclaimed that every nation has rights to its own distinctive perception of the world and respect. Vilnius was a city of diverse religions, and Lithuania was a multinational nation, everyone lived in harmony and agreement. Unfortunately, this sensible way of life was not able to hold out against fierce and aggressive conditions of that time.

Baltic tradition – world outlook, ancient beliefs, traditions, folklore and the like, and Romuva symbolises the solidarity of traditions. Sources from the fourteenth century state that in the centre of Baltic lands (today Kaliningrad region), there existed a special Romuva sanctuary, which was revered by all Baltic nations, the eternal fire burning there spread her light and peace (that is the meaning of the word Romuva), throughout the entire Baltic coast and even further. Until now, Belorussians have folk songs about Romuva, and call themselves Krivicians, Romuva's high priest Krivis followers.

Unfortunately, the propagators of the new religion extinguished this fire, and hard times fell upon the ancient traditions. Worship and reverence of ancestors, nature, land and ancient gods were strictly forbidden and even persecuted. Today the awakening has arrived and a resurrection of ancient beliefs is occurring. Similar events are taking place in Europe and in other nations; who have become weary and exhausted by the effects of civilisation. People yearn for simplicity, intercourse with nature, communication with trees, stones, rivers, all those things that were habitual to our ancestors, who knew how to find and create harmony. We also understand that today every person has the right to choose or not to choose his faith.

The ancient religious systems were diverse and their structure was developed within historical periods, which could be tranquil, but at times could be full of hardship and brutal. In this system farmers had their own particular gods, the military and the priestly caste had different ones. These days historical development of ideas proceeds at different rates than in earlier times when continuity was the basis of the present. These days everything moves much more quickly and in through this perpetual change the sense of continuity is lost.

Romuva is the contemporary inheritor of the heritage of the traditional Baltic religion. It differs from similar movements in this and the last century because it bases its world-view and rituals on the regional Baltic mythology, on folklore and folk customs and avoids invented religious components. The evident and half-concealed sources, which have become part of folklore, customs, and traditions and are inherent even in the language, are almost inex-

haustible. A patient and persistent study of these sources, an emphatic approach can reveal and will explain the true meaning of a nation's heritage.

THE RELIGION OF BALTIC ROMUVA

The religion of Baltic Romuva consists of knowledge derived from the ethnic heritage, faith and a way of life. It is not something that can be attained simply by membership or some initiation rite. Only a patient and persistent cultivation of inherent religious feelings, the purification of ones inner life from contemporary stains can bring a person to Romuva – the mansion of faith created by our ancestors. Faith and religion are understood to consist of mans harmony with his surroundings. It was perceived that the world and our existence in it are manifestations of our relationship to the spiritual world and to the sphere of the gods. The ancient religion's most characteristic aspect is diversity; it is a diversity, which leaves room for mystery, personal insights and a wide range of emotional states.

Holiness – is that unnamed vital power and spiritual strength, which is inherent in people and nature. Baltic traditions preserve the ancient concepts of holiness, which differs considerably from Christian concepts. In this worldview rivers, springs, trees, stones and other aspects of nature are endowed with an inherent holiness. These aspects of holiness are often personified in order to make them more accessible to people's feelings and understanding, in order to draw them more readily to godliness. Daukantas wrote that for the Balts God the creator had many names. This many fold manifestation of



holiness grows, expands and does not lose its link to the source, to the Godhead. In this respect it metaphorically resembles a tree. Therefore a tree is a significant image of the ancient religion which is used to explain the world's structure. In Lithuanian and Ukrainian harvest time songs the following verses are sung:

*A sycamore stood by the side of the road,
the brave grass plot, rye.*

From below the roots, sounds of kanklės.

In the center buzzing bees.

Falcon's children at the summit.

Roots – signify the underground, death and past, water – the spring of life and the new beginning. In the middle buzzing bees – representing the toiling world of the people. At the treetop – light of heaven and the future of life. Death and life are links of an uninterrupted evolution. A tree drops its leaves in the autumn, goes into a semi-sleep in winter, but deep within it its soul remains alive and life goes on. Such is also mans path – through birth, death and rebirth.

In the traditional religion both male and female had equal claim to holiness. The contemporary Romuva worldview maintains this tradition; godliness is perceived equally in both genders and is represented by Goddesses and God in equal measure. The ancient mythology speaks of many gods and their families. This brought the gods closer to man and made it possible to imbue the environment with personified holiness. Each river, mountain or even tree was considered to possess a soul and an ennobling deity. Our ancestors knew how to identify and name such deities. The people of Romuva should learn, as Vydūnas taught, to be their own persons, truly self determined and having their own personal relationships to the world of the gods.

The knowledge and creativity of our forefathers are the most important sources for the development of the Romuva world-view. Respect for nature, gods, the homeland and our ancestors are the core beliefs of Romuva. In the rituals practiced by Romuva cantos and folk songs play an important role and like other traditional customs and symbols become imbued by special power and meaning. The *dainos* have always been an important means of spiritual expression for the Balts. In a sense the *dainos* can be considered as the principal Holy Text of the Balts. Our kinsmen, the Aryans, use

the term *daena* in their spiritual text *Avesta*. Its meaning there is faith, inner essence and the vitality of man. In the Baltic lands old and young, women as well as men sang while working, merry making and grieving. Songs have been handed down from one generation to the next as a most precious treasure.

Nature, gods and man are all part of one interwoven existence. Daukantas wrote: "Nations living in one place for time immemorial become as one with their surroundings. The mountains, rivers, swamps and all of the land where the people live and their gods dwell become enmeshed not only with their emotions but also with their very existence to the extent that they can not be separated".

People are joining the Romuva community because they recognize the natural essence of its religious world-view. These days many have an inner need to individually express their religious feelings and the dogmas of the dominant religious denominations are at times perceived as restricting barriers. The Romuva communities can help people rediscover forgotten or suppressed traditions. Within these communities it is possible to combine the worship of nature with the rituals of christenings, weddings, burials and calendar feasts.

RESPECT OF ANCESTORS AND MAN'S DESTINY

Respect of ancestors is an essential part of Baltic religion. It is expressed in a multitude of ways. There are ritual remembrances during special days, but aside of that many visible and invisible connections is maintained permanently with departed family mem-

bers. Songs, customs, even the language itself imbues thoughts and feelings to maintain a link with our ancestors. After death the deceased maintains a tie to his relatives and during religious and/or traditional rites the living and the dead meet directly. Another important link between the living and the dead is the feeling of oneness with the earth and the native land.

In Lithuania it is said: "The souls of the dead are the trustees of their living relatives, or their intimates, especially dead parents are trustees of their orphaned children." The dead also becomes caretakers of the native fields and farmsteads. The living and the dead unite through nature and the earth. Originally funeral rites were always celebrated outside in direct contact with nature, only later were they moved indoors. G. Beresnevičius writes: "The day for commemorating the dead is the time when our departed ancestors and parents join us, the living. The gates of eternity then open and once again we see and feel their love. We honor their presence by lighting candles and are assured that they still love us for what we are. During every hardship in our lives we feel their help and support." Emigrants, who have left their native land, must return in order to re-establish and maintain this important connection. The life and death cycle of every family progresses in such a manner that it creates a single, undivided road.

Žmogus. In Lithuanian the word for man is *Žmogus* (genderless, it applies to male and female) a word which has a direct connection to the earth – *žemė*. This is also true for the name of wife – *žmona*. It is for that reason that the most important symbol of man is a tree, whose beginning is the earth. Like the tree



reaching for the heavens, man also has heavenly aspects. In folk songs man's connectedness to the world is emphasized by calling recurring verses, which state that the sun is the mother, the moon, the father. This links man first to his family, after that to his home and native land and through the land to the trees, rivers, and animate and inanimate surroundings. Man differs from his surroundings not because he is wiser, more worthy or better, but because of his obligation to others. If a tree or an animal is thought to grow only to satisfy man's needs for lumber and meat, as is the case in the currently prevailing world-view, then the family of man has no long-term future. In each action and even intention or thought, there reside many unforeseeable consequences, both for good and bad. It is for this reason that in the ethnic tradition not every man or

THE CALENDAR, PRIESTS AND ROMUVA

Calendar feast days are important because they help man to live harmoniously through the periods of time allotted to him: birth – maturity – death. Such holidays act as reminders of the complex circle of life and to prepare for the inevitable journey to the other side. Folk calendar songs and rites incorporate much symbolism representing the circle of life. The sun's rebirth, beginning a Christmas (Kalėdos) is also the beginning of the rebirth of the world. The creation of the world is celebrated in an ancient Lithuanian Christmas canto:

Oh! A spark fell, Kalėda

Oh! And the blue sea spilled over, Kalėda

On that sea a ship is sailing, Kalėda

A chair stands in that ship, Kalėda

A girl sits in that chair, Kalėda

Historical sources tell that in ancient times the Baltic religion was served by prophets, seers, wizards and priests, including a high priest (*žynys, krivis, burtininkas, krivių krivaitis*). These positions could be filled either by men or women. It was they who accumulated and preserved the ancient wisdom and for this very reason they were the first to be attacked and victimized, first by the conquering Christians and eventually, after the nobles accepted Christianity, by their own state. The priestly tradition was thus the first to suffer, and it was continued at an unofficial level by healers specializing in herb medicine and mendicants and traveling bards.



It is not surprising that under those conditions some negative aspects also emerged. There were occasions where the *žyniai* tried to usurp power in communities and use people for their own selfish needs. Such an abuse of the privileges of the priestly caste perverted the most important aspect of the ancient religion, the personal relationship to nature and the gods. Such an evolution is contrary to the goals of Romuva. The purpose of Romuva is to draw people together who while preserving their own individuality share the knowledge and practice of ancient traditions. It is thus most desirable that each member be acquainted with various aspects of the Baltic religion, its rites, songs and traditions. Of course, not everyone is endowed with equal abilities in these areas, for this reason members who have a deeper understanding are encouraged to act as organizers and to share what their knowledge. However,

this does not mean that persons who take a lead in performing rituals could have special privileges and power in the Romuva community. Every member of Romuva has some favorite activity and can contribute by developing his abilities in this area. The Romuva community makes special efforts to ensure that favorable conditions for the development of each individual are present.

Romuva does not seek to develop collectivism or foster communal excitement. It is much more important to experience religious feelings individually, while communicating with nature or some aspects of it which have individual significance. This could be a favored oak or linden tree, even a stone or a fire. It is for the individual to discover the time and place which favor his religious experience. In this respect also there are some persons who are especially endowed. This has led to the establishment of special sacred groves, the *Alkos*. In a similar manner folk songs can arise from a deep spiritual experience. A group of like minded, kindred spirits can create an atmosphere, which can be both emotionally, fulfilling and creative.

The Romuva of today continues the spirit of Prussian universality and draws its strength from several Baltic traditions. The movement is an integral part of the revival and recovery of Europe's ancient religions. This renaissance is proceeding naturally because its time has arrived. We can rejoice that the Baltic nations and other European peoples have preserved aspects of their ancient tradition and that now times have come where these traditions can be recovered and further developed.

THE LYRICAL AND EPICAL IN LATVIAN AND FINNISH FOLK POETRY

Vaira Vīke-Freiberga

The year 1985 marks the sesquicentennial of two events eminently worthy of commemoration by all scholars of the Baltic region:¹ the publication of the first edition of the Finnish national epic *Kalevala* by Elias Lönnrot, and the birth of Krišjānis Barons, the classifier and editor of *Latvju dainas*, still the definitive collection of Latvian folksongs.

While Barons' period of activity came half a century after Lönnrot's, both played an analogous role in the cultural history of their respective peoples. Ever since their publication, the *Kalevala* in Finland and the dainas in Latvia have been an endless source of inspiration to artists in every domain of artistic endeavour. More important still, both publications contributed significantly to laying the foundations of a modern national culture in their respective countries. Thus it is surely no accident that song number one, which opens Barons' enormous collection of folksongs, read as follows:

¹ Krišjānis Barons was born in Strutle, Northwestern Latvia, on October 30th, 1835. The first edition of the *Kalevala*, containing 32 poems and runes, is dated 1835-36.

*One girl sings in Riga,
Another sings in Valmiera.
Both sing the same song,
Could they be daughters of a same mother?*

At a time when both Finns and Latvians were being reminded at every turn by Germans, Swedes, Russians and anyone else who condescended to take notice of their existence that they were backward, uncultured peoples lacking a historical past, both Lönnrot's *Kalevala* and Barons' *Latvju dainas* had an immense influence in raising the level of national self-respect and collective self-confidence of their respective peoples. They revealed a rich cultural heritage which had left no trace in historical record, yet had endured through centuries of oral transmission, engraved in the hearts and minds of the common people. Through their collections of songs, these peoples recovered their lost past, restored their dignity and strengthened their sense of collective identity.

Through countless centuries, folk singing had been an inherent part of traditional societies, be they farmers, fishermen, hunters, or a mixture of all three. In such societies, the oral arts – speech, oratory and song – were held in high regard and were nurtured in children from a tender age. And so the songs survived, immune to those kinds of changes that make the stuff of written history. For whatever the dates of battles fought and whatever the names of the kings who won or lost them, the land remained fundamentally the same, worked by the force of horse and man. Customs changed but slowly and gradually, and the songs changed slowly along with

them, adding new layers as the time went on, but always preserving deeper layers which went back to the most remote antiquity.

Not until the nineteenth century did changes arise that posed a threat to the continuance of the old traditions, greater by far than even that occasioned by wars and pestilence in centuries past. Schooling made its way into the peasantry, many a farmer now read not just his Bible on Sunday but also a newspaper and an Agricultural calendar full of modern ideas and scientific advice. The printed word started to replace the spoken word as the source of wisdom, information and entertainment. Teachers took over much of the authority and responsibility once reserved to the extended family in the education of children. New, store-bought metal tools and farm equipment took over from handcrafted wooden ones. Poorer farmhands flocked to work in the new factories in town, and a new world was more and more rapidly making inroads on the old. And along with the old way of life, gone too would be the old customs, beliefs, rituals, the whole psychological substratum which had kept the songs alive for centuries before.

Awareness of these changes and a growing appreciation of the cultural and historical value of ethnic antiquities led toward a search and preservation of both oral and material folklore. The precise dates and the exact manner of doing this differ, of course, for the different countries on the Eastern shores of the Baltic, but the general trends and principles remain much the same.

Where the differences between the different countries become more pronounced is in the genre of material collected, its quantity and accessibility as well as in the impact made in the intervening years beyond its national borders. In comparing the *Kalevala* and

the Latvian dainas, particularly, it is plain to see that the epic songs of the *Kalevala* have become far wider known all across the world.

True, if you stopped a random sample of Canadians or Americans on the street nowadays, and asked them what the word *Kalevala* means to them, likely as not they would guess that you must be talking about some new rock group by that name. Even so, the likelihood of finding anyone – outside of those of Latvian origin – who had ever heard anything of the Latvian dainas.

Ever since the historically very important translation of the *New Kalevala* into German, that work, or excerpts from it, has been translated into all major languages and more than a few minor ones, a total of 32 languages in all.² The dainas, in contrast, have seen only small selections of them translated into half a dozen other languages, and none of these translations has been memorable nor even particularly satisfactory.

This difference in availability in other languages is all the more surprising in view of the striking differences in the sheer size of the materials involved. Since both the dainas and the *Kalevala* consist largely of 8-syllable lines, it is convenient to use lines of verse for quantitative comparison.

The first edition in 1835 of the *Old Kalevala* contains just short of 13,000 lines. The *New Kalevala*, published in 1849, contains a total of 22,795 lines that is, just short of 23,000.

In contrast, Baron's *Latvju dainas*³ contain close to 36,000

² See the Helsinki University Library commemorative publication: *Kalevala, 1835-1985. The National epic of Finland*, p. 82.

³ The six volumes of *Latvju dainas* appeared between 1894 and 1915 under the

(35,789) numbered type songs, accompanied by clusters of related variants representing about 182,000 additional texts, for a grand total of 217,996 different recorded text versions, most of them quatrains, but about 10% made up of longer songs. While Barons managed to condense all this information into 8 tomes of his 6 official volumes, the total size of his corpus comes to the staggering number of approximately 1 million lines.

There are several reasons why the *Kalevala* has found a far wider audience than the Latvian dainas. When the *Kalevala* was published in the first half of 19th century, it fitted perfectly with the spirit of the times. The literary values then prevalent combined ideas drawn from German Romanticism with notions going back to Aristotle Poetics, according to which epic poetry was seen as the ultimate achievement of human genius, as far above lyrical poetry in value Tragedy is above Comedy. The highest embodiment of this genre was the heroic epic, in which the manly virtues are extolled: brute strength, courage, prowess in battle and the ability to lead men. In contrast, lyricism was seen to be woman's poetic domain and thus, within the prevalent sexist frames of mind, necessarily inferior to the epic. In psychological terms, the heroic epic could be said to represent an exultation of the faculty of conscious

double authorship of K.r. Barons and H. Visendorfs (Wissendorff). The first volume was published in Jelgava (Mitau) by Dravin-Dravnieks, the remaining ones appeared in St. Petersburg, published by the Imperial Academy of Sciences. Barons gave Visendorfs as his co-author mainly because the latter's efforts to secure funds and find publishers were crucial in the success of this enormous project. Visendorfs also contributed by collecting a substantial number of folksongs and suggesting the title for the collection. The scholarly work of classification, editing and writing commentaries, however, was entirely Barons' own.

will, setting it above all others functions of the human psyche.

The prejudice favorable to the epic was so strong that it managed to overlook the fact that the *Kalevala*, as noted by a number of scholars,⁴ is not truly an heroic epic but a magical one. A great many of the plot episodes found in the *Kalevala* can be found in the folk tales of Latvia as well as those of other neighbouring countries. In many ways, the *Kalevala* may be said to be a concatenation of fairy tales and legendary motifs, differing from related traditions only in the fact that these motifs were set to music and cast in the form of verse.

In spite of the approval, in principle, of the heroic epic as the ultimate in literary achievement, the fact is that in practical terms, the epic had lost popular favor since the late Middle Ages. Centuries before, Chaucer had lampooned the monotonous epic in his *Canterbury Tales*, Cervantes had burlesqued it in his tale of *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. The reason that the *Kalevala*, like the legends about Arthur and his knights of the Round Table, has maintained its popular appeal, is precisely because it contains a heavy dose of magical elements overlaid over the truly epic. In psychological terms, the *Kalevala* contains much material which Freud would label as indicating primary process: stark, vivid images straight from the deepest layers of the unconscious, expressing primal drives and pulsions in barely veiled terms. There is also a goodly element of wish-fulfilment, much like that found in folk tales. These elements are what is most stirring to the imagination, they possess a fascination that remains

⁴ Cf. Felix J. Oinas, "The Balto-Finnic Epics" in his own edited book, *Heroic epic and Saga: An Introduction to the World's Great Folk Epics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978, pp. 286-309.

despite the ebb and flow of change in literary fashions.

In contrast to the different forms of epic, the dainas represent a poetic attitude that may be qualified as the verbal equivalent to magical realism. On the surface, the dainas speak of apparently mundane, concrete things. Yet the concrete, vividly sensory detail focussed on in the daina is but a vehicle for a deeper, more abstract idea. The dainas do not depict concrete reality, they transfigure it. It is a verbal alchemy which takes the common metal of all that the singer encounters and transmutes in into poetic gold.

If the dainas have not received the international recognition which they so richly deserve as the largest single repository of published oral folklore, it is for the double reason of their belonging largely to a lyrical genre of poetry and of the difficulties inherent in translating such material in other languages. What Claude Lévi-Strauss has said of myth⁵ certainly also applies to epic: the epic narrative can be translated into other languages without losing its essential hold on the imagination. In lyrical poetry, in contrast, form and content are so inextricably bound together that the medium is indeed the message and to tamper with the medium in translation is necessarily to impoverish the message.

The highly stylized and condensed poetic diction of the dainas represents such consummate skill in using every nuance of the Latvian language that to reflect all its facets in any other language becomes an almost hopeless task. This is particularly true with selections of isolated quatrains taken out of any sort of context, since what the

⁵ C. Lévi Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth", in *Myth: A Symposium*, ed. T. A. Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), pp 81-106.

dainas talk about is frequently unknown to the modern reader. Seventy years after the last volumes of Barons' collection were published, the dainas still present a daunting challenge to scholar and poet alike—the challenge of making them cross the sound barrier that is their special language and of bringing them to their rightful place of appreciation within the literary heritage of the world.⁶

Contrary to Lönnrot, Barons was never able to go out collecting folksongs in person. Between the years 1877 and 1886, Frīcis Brīvzemnieks had published a long series of articles in the Latvian language press, urging everyone to take time to record and send in any folk materials that they could find in their regions. All available folksong materials, both new manuscripts and older collections were now entrusted and transferred to Krišjānis Barons, who was elected the official classifier and compiler of the songs. His would be task of publishing them and preserving them, “from the tooth of time”, as Brīvzemnieks put it in a popular phrase.

⁶ Relatively small selections of dainas have appeared in a number of languages, including German, Russian, Polish, French and Yiddish. Such selections typically lack adequate ethnological notes and explanations to make the texts comprehensible, let alone enjoyable. The Rev. Gustav Bergmann privately published two small collections from his district in 1807 and 1809, with Latvian originals and German translations, which include glaring mistranslations of certain key words, particularly in mythological songs. Michel Jonval's *Les chansons mythologiques lettones* (Paris, 1929) is marred by a superficial introduction and countless mistranslations, both major and minor. The largest English-language selection until very recently was Uriah Katzenelenbogen's *The Daina: An Anthology of Lithuanian and Latvian Folk Songs* (Chicago, 1935). This includes a sympathetic but inadvertently condescending introduction. The same author also has published a Yiddish translation of the same materials as *Daines* (Toronto, 1930). A special Barons sesquicentennial publication is *Krišjānis Barons, Latvju dainas. Parīdenu izlase*, Riga, 1984, published by Soviet Latvian Writers' Union. This is a 497 page selection from Barons' collection with line-by-line translation in Russian, German and English. There is two-page Postword and a brief glossary of formulaic terms in each language. It suffers the usual fate of selections without explanatory background, in that quite correctly translated texts are quite incomprehensible without extensive background information on their ethnographic context (the fifth text on page 417 is a prime example).

Over the years, the songs kept coming in, transcribed by many hands, some similar to ones already in the corpus, other quite new and different, all needing to find their place in a coherent system of classification. With the mathematically inclined and rigorous mind of a man whose University studies had been in the field of astronomy, Barons set about to impose order and pattern on a continuously growing mass of manuscripts, much like an astronomer orders the glimmering dots on the night sky into galaxies and constellations. The system that Barons developed was a marvel of logic, lucidity and coherence. The ingenious solution he devised for presenting masses of related and partly similar texts has never been equalled, before or since, for sheer efficiency in presenting staggering amounts of information in a clear, concise and incredibly economical way on the printed page.

It is important to remember that the recorded song texts, such as they reached Barons' hands, reflect but partly what a song would have been in live performance. A "live" song is normally carried by melody, or at the very least by the support of rhythm in monotonous chanting (as with magic incantations) or in cadenced recital (as in the case of children's songs and riddles). Most important of all, a "live" song always occurs in a social context, it has a certain intent, it is aimed at a certain audience, be it the singer herself while grinding grain on a hand-mill, a baby in its cradle or a whole festive crowd, such a wedding or the Midsummer night celebration. The isolated song text alone, transcribed on paper, is but a pale wraith, a mere shadow of the live song sung in performance and in its natural context. It is thus like a faded flower pressed

between a page of grandmother hymnal, a dessicated relic of the fresh blossom that it once was, in all its three-dimensional substance, shape, form, texture, color, scent. The live song as sung by the folk singer is as insubstantial as the wind that carries it, as ephemeral as the breath that forms it. The song in performance, as it issues forth from the singer's mouth, is like a live butterfly on the wing, vibrant with life, iridescent with color, but short-lived and destined to an early death. The song text transferred to the printed page is like the captured specimen, speared on a pin, lifeless and dry, yet preserved for posterity and rescued from oblivion.

What Barons managed to achieve in his classification of the Latvian folksongs was far more than the mere lining up of row upon row, case upon case of dead butterflies, as in some museums of Natural History. Through his hierarchically ordered scheme of thematic classification,⁷ Barons made use of the songs themselves and their sequence to reconstruct, at least partly, some sense of the wider context in which originally they would have been sung. In this way, the texts not only become more accessible and understandable to the patient reader, they also build up to form an encyclopedic compendium of information about the ancient Latvian way of life, about the daily tasks, cares, joys, sorrows, beliefs, customs and values of the people who composed them and transmitted them.

⁷ Barons' contribution lies not so much in the invention of a thematic scheme of classification as in its refinement and application on an unprecedented scale. The major themes were subdivided into a hierarchical set of subdivisions and a functional relationship to the ethnographic setting or event was the primary guiding principle in organizing these subsections. Each text was accompanied by a geographic code of origin, so that it becomes possible to construct distribution maps of variants of any given song. Within each subsection, songs are arranged in alphabetical order of the first word or line.

The songs, recorded across the land, kept flowing to Barons in a tangled, shapeless, confused mass. Barons transcribed them on tiny slips of paper in his precise, spidery hand, cut up the sheets sent in by others so as to reduce them all to the same format, read, pondered, sorted, filed them, arranged them in little boxes, transferred them to his custom-built cabinet with 70 special drawers. Thus, slowly, working painstakingly and meticulously over the years, over four full decades of dedicated life, from tens of thousands of little strips of paper, Barons came to reconstruct the world of the dainas as a conceptually coherent, an esthetically sophisticated and an emotionally moving accomplishment on the human spirit.

From the inchoate mass of longer or shorter strings of verse, Barons elected the quatrain as the fundamental building-block of the huge edifice that is the Latvian folksong corpus. The four-line strophe is the atom of the dainas tradition, its smallest semantically and poetically integrated unit. Cast in a metrical mold of mathematically rigorous double symmetry, constructed according to an intricate geometry of parallels and contrasts, each quatrain, taken separately, is a self-contained epigram or a poem in miniature, like the Japanese haiku. But arranged thematically into cycles and sequences, the shorter texts combine to form the echoes of an ancient cosmogony, a mythology, a social order, and take on a breadth and scope which acquires an epical flavour.

Take, as an example, the huge number of different songs forming the Latvian wedding-song cycle. Seen in isolation, each song is like a snap-shot, a still frozen from a film, a single frame from a longer, continued, ritual sequence. But thousands of wedding songs, arranged

in the order of ritual events, meld together into what is indubitably a dramatically structured and temporally ordered larger whole.

Such a narrative, concatenated out of a selection of different variants, is precisely what Lönnrot incorporated as the wedding sequence of his *Kalevala*. This produces a more artistically satisfying effect and is easier on the reader. Barons was more scientific, and included enough variants to form scores of different versions of the same event. The material is all there, but its very wealth of abundance makes it more difficult to assimilate and to appreciate. Nevertheless, with some degree of careful reading, the thematic larger cycles of songs about family feasts and festivities offer the verbal analogue to an animated motion picture. Arranged in sequence, the series of frames that are the *daina* quatrains create movement, recreate life, and amount to what is the script of a cinematographic reconstruction of ancient rites and rituals, along with an echo of what they meant to those who participated in them. Or, to put it another way, the song cycles about ritual celebrations are like the librettos to an archaic folk opera. It is an opera, however, to which there are no passive spectators, only active participants, be it in minor roles or as members of the choir.

The lyrical quality of the *dainas* comes mostly from the fact that they are never "objective" descriptions presented by a detached narrator. On the contrary, they are live testimonials from active participants, cast in the first person singular of the "lyrical I". This lyrical I is not to be confused with the person of the singer, since it starts talking before leaving its mother's womb and goes on to make comments at its own funeral. While the two most fre-

quent words in the dainas are *es* and *man*, two declensions of the first person, singular pronoun, the dainas do not express unique, individualized experience so much as collective wisdom. Similarly, the timeframe of the dainas is an eternal present, with no attempt at historical documentation in any Hegelian sense, no apparent desire to record any one, unique event, precisely located on a measurable, linearly conceived timeframe. What the dainas depict is a composite picture of many different lives, all following the same archetypal pattern. What they offer is the essential distillate of all that the experience of many generations holds in common, the essence and the common core of what is universal to human beings, but expressed in a manner and in a style that is uniquely Latvian.

The dainas never refer to historically identifiable, unique individuals. Only in the heat of satirical song wars are proper names inserted into interchangeable slots to fit any particular target of satire or radicule. The dainas are not about any specific Lize or Made, Mikus, or Peteris. They are about Eternal Bride and the Eternal Bridegroom, about the archetypal Mother and the archetypal Brothers, they are about the eternal cleavage between members of a clan and outsiders, between relatives by blood and relatives by marriage. Penetrating the universe of the dainas produces the same effect as entering a time-machine - they project us into a different world and cause us to wonder that we would have made of it, had we been born at such a time and in such a place as left their echo in these songs. The dainas allow us to recreate in imagination both the physical world their creators inhabited and the aesthetic and spiritual world through which they transfigured it.

The main psychological axis around which the world of the dainas revolves is the mystical correspondence between the Microcosm and the Macrocosm. It appears in the daina quatrain as the metaphorical parallel between Nature and Culture, the first two lines of the classical quatrain presenting a poetical image from nature, the last two echoing with an analogue from human life.

The periphery of this poetical world of the dainas is traced by the Cycles of Eternal Return,⁸ a never-ending spiral of existence in which each individual and each event only re-embodies and re-enacts a pattern set down at the beginning of Time. The visible embodiment of this immutable law of existence is the Sun, with the lesser heavenly bodies in a secondary role. The Sun, with its daily ride up the Hill of Heaven and its yearly circuit of sunrises and sunsets around the horizon, is the Celestial time-piece; it is the Cosmic clock which sets the rhythms and the patterns which everything on earth, including Man, must follow.

The summer and winter solstices and the spring and fall equinoxes form the main spokes of the yearly wheel of time, marked off by the four major calendar festivities and communal celebrations. These form the metaphor for all ever-recurring cycles of manifestation: birth, growth and death, followed by a new cycle of cre-

⁸ While modern Latvian poetry shows certain characteristics of tone and style which have marked affinities with the poetics of the folk tradition, the attitude toward time in modern poetry shows a radical departure from these archaic modes of thinking. I have attempted to delineate these differences in an article entitled "Linear and cyclic time in traditional and modern Latvian poetry", *World Literature Today*, 51 (1977), pp538-543. For the influence of the dainas on modern Latvian poetry see the article, "Echoes of the dainas and the search for identity in contemporary Latvian poetry", *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 6 (1975), pp17-29.

ation, increase and destruction and so on and on without cease, for ever and ever, "so long as the Sun remains in the sky." The major periods of single human life are marked off by family feasts celebrating the successive rites of passage: name-giving, marriage and the funeral rites, following the major stations of the Sun: morning, noon and night, Spring, Summer, Winter and Fall. Separate individuals enter this world, only to leave it. Humanity goes on forever, each generation repeating in essence, the path followed by its predecessors.

The order set by Cosmic and biological rhythms creates a framework for religious beliefs, ethical values and social order. The dainas offer a wealth of information about these systems of beliefs, even if there is little in terms of explicit articles of faith or of mythology organized in terms of narrative structures. The dainas allow us to reconstruct a metaphysics in which the highest aim of a human life is to live in harmony with the will of the gods, with the rhythms of Nature and with other members of society. Personal worth and integrity are expressed in terms of possessing Virtue, not in terms of avoiding sin, which is a concept alien to the dainas. The basis of personal virtue rests on reverence for the gods, respect for one's elders and the indefatigable ability to work hard all one's life long. The more archaic layers of the dainas also reveal a strong belief in sympathetic magic as well as in the creative power of the logos, the power of the Word, acting through magic incantation on the physical world and imposing Man's will on the forces of matter.

On the social plane, the Cosmic order, especially as em-

bodied in the Sun, serves as a model of an ideal social order.⁹ In many dainas, the gods are shown to intervene in person in certain cases where the ideal equilibrium has been most grievously disturbed. In other thematic cycles we find expressions of social protest and moving testimonials to the injustice done by man to man. Always the vision of the world as it should be, as it might be, appears to have been a great source of consolation, allowing many people to survive without being crushed in spirit even under the most extreme conditions of physical oppression.

While Barons' accomplishment has not received the full extent of international recognition that his work deserves, it is easy to see why the Latvian people hold him in the same sort of veneration that others reserve for their patron saints or their most illustrious kings.

For Barons accomplished far more than an astounding scholarly feat in publishing a truly enormous corpus of folksongs. From tens and hundreds of thousands of lyrical miniatures, he built a verbal monument unparalleled in the whole cultural heritage of humanity. If in his classification system he gave each text its identity card, its personal reference and identification, then it might be truly said that he did the same for the whole Latvian nation. He gave the Latvians of his time what amounts to a certificate of spiritual maturity, an international passport of cultural citizenship, with which they could confidently issue forth into the modern world and assert their equal rights and equal worth as an ethnic group and as human beings.

⁹ For a specific analysis revealing this type of matrix, see my article, "The orphan in Latvian Sun songs: An analysis of the semantic links between two concepts", *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 11 (1980), pp 49-61.

DIEVTURIBA – THE ANCIENT LATVIAN RELIGION

Tupešu Janis

INTRODUCTION

At the outset, some explanatory remarks are in order.

(i) If the ancient Latvians had been asked what their religion is, they would have been baffled by the meaning of the question. Their religion was their way-of-life (*dzīves zīna*) and ultimate concerns were not couched in abstract dogmas or analytic cannons. The highest aim of human life was to live in harmony with Nature and other members of society – to follow the will of gods. Personal worth and integrity was expressed in terms of possessing the many Virtues, and there was no need for conceptualizing such religious metaphors as sin, atonement or redemption.¹

¹ See, for example, Vaira Vikis-Freibergs' article in *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vo. 17 (1986), pp. 104-105. Professor Freibergs is the author of many publications dealing with Latvian religion, folklore and mythology, and is a good, scholarly source of information on the ancient Latvian religion.

(ii) This article is meant to be neither apologetic nor condescending. The author assumes the plurality of all religious convictions and considers any system of thoughts, actions and experiences that allow individuals and societies to make sense out of their world, as equally valid and worthy. I do not think it is important how religion is defined, or even if it is defined at all. As we approach the twenty-first century, it is important what system of values individuals and society possess, not what dogmas they profess. Of course, these considerations did not concern the ancient Latvians. But then again, they were not part of a rich culture on the verge of forced genocide and self-chosen extinction.²

(iii) Dievturība – both the name and the *systematized* Latvian way of looking at the world are twentieth century phenomena. Using the Latvian *Dainas*³ as their main source of orally transmitted wisdom and traditional values, a group of intellectuals, writers and artists after many meetings and debates decided that instead of syncretizing the ancient Latvian wisdom within the Christian dogma, the uniquely Latvian encounter with the sacred is worthy

² There are approximately 1,500,000 Latvians in the world today. In occupied Soviet Latvia the ruling nomenclature is forcibly proceeding with the incorporation of all Latvians into one culturally homogenous people (the soviet people!). But the lack of self-determination is not alone responsible for the less than zero population growth. This has been true ever since World War II and few years' back; Soviet Latvia had the world record for the smallest rate of natural population growth.

³ The six volumes of *Latvju dainas* appeared between 1894 and 1915, all but the first published by the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. All classification, editing and commentaries were accomplished by Krišjānis Barons – a grand total of 217,996 different text versions. Presently the Soviet Latvian Academy of Sciences has approximately 1,250,000 in its Folklore Archives, the largest orally transmitted folksong collection in the world!

enough to carve its own destiny.⁴ Starting with a small group of convinced enthusiasts, the movement gained momentum in the mid-thirties and is very much alive today.

The Latvian language does not have a word for "to have". The Latvians say, "to me is". Utilizing the old Baltic form *turēti*", Brastinš called a person who holds or possesses Dievs (God) according to the ancient Latvian tradition, a *Dievturis*. The name has become part of the Latvian language and a Dievturis, following perennial wisdom, is literally a God-keeper or possessor.

(iv) Both the psychical and social sciences are undergoing a paradigm shift.⁵ A paradigm is defined as follows: A constellation of concepts, values, perceptions and practices shared by a community, which forms a particular vision of reality that is the basis of the way the community organizes itself. The Latvian religion, Dievturība, encompasses such a vision of reality. The community consists of all the God-keepers, past and present.

The Latvian way of viewing the world is not only a historical reality, but also a living force consistent with all the criteria of the new paradigm thinking in science. These criteria are:

A. Shift from the parts to the whole. Basically, there are no parts at all. What we call a part is merely a pattern in an

⁴ The main ideologue of the Dievturi movement as a unique Latvian religion was Brastinu Ernests. He initially tabulated some 5000 dainas that in some form mentioned one of the Latvian divinities, but this was only the beginning. Many books and short articles (all in Latvian) followed. *Cerokstis* (Riga, 11932), the initial compendium of Dievturība in question-and-answer form, has gone through many editions.

⁵ "The Concept of Paradigm and Paradigm Shift" by Fritjof Capra in *Revision Summer/Fall* (1986), pp. 11-12. The criteria for the new paradigm thinking listed in this paper are taken from prof. Capra's article.

inseparable web of relationships.

B. Shift from objective knowledge to one dependent on the human observer. The understanding of the process of knowledge has to be included explicitly in the description of natural phenomena.

C. Shift from fundamental laws to a network of relationships. The metaphor of basic building blocks is being replaced by that of an inseparable network.

D. Shift from truth to approximate descriptions. This means that all concepts and theories in science are limited and approximate.

E. Shift from structure to process. The entire web of relationships is intrinsically dynamic.

F. Shift from domination and control of nature to cooperation and non-violence. The patriarchal idea of “man dominating nature” is transforming into the matriarchal concept of man and woman living/participating in nature.

Implicit in the new paradigm are transformed values and practices – religious attitudes and convictions that the late twentieth century Latvia can accept and, at the same time, incorporate the values and symbols of the earlier agricultural societies into the contemporary world paradigm.

(v) Although officially christianized in the thirteenth century, the ancient Latvians did not accept Christianity until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – and then only superficially. The main reason for this was the non-acceptance of the indigenous population as equals by the ruling German nobility. The language used

in the churches was either Latin or German and the Latvians simply could not understand what was being preached from the pulpit. These factors, along with the many punitive acts inflicted by the ruling German landowners, forced the indigenous population to keep their old traditions deities and basic social structure. The cement for this continuity was the *Dainas*.⁶ With their strict metric and tonic structure, the Latvian folk songs helped memorization and prevented unchecked substitution of new words and phrases. Also, for almost 600 years, the Latvian culture was that of the peasant class, subject to forced isolation from the so-called "higher and more advanced" culture of the German barons.

(vi) The New Encyclopaedia Britannica defines religion as man's relation to that which he regards as holy.⁷ The "holy" need not be thought of as supernatural, much less personal. This defini-

⁶ The individual authors of these songs are unknown. Most of them seem to have originated between the 13th and 16th centuries, although there are scholars who have claimed the dainas to be as old as Latvian language itself (Arveds Švabe, the main editor of the Latvian Encyclopedial *Latvju Enciklopedija* (Stockholm, 1950), was one of them). The first collection of religious folk songs, *Dieva dziesmas* (Songs of God), systematized and annotated by Brastinu Ernests was published in 1928. This book was followed by *Tikumu dziesmas* (Songs of Virtue) and *Gadskartu dziesmas* (Songs of Festive Seasons). Others were compiled, but their publication was stopped by the Soviet occupation of Latvia in 1940.

⁷ The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* definition of religion is found in the fifteenth edition (1986), Vol. IX, p. 1016. A good description of the Latvian religion is found in Vol. XIII, pp. 905-909. Although Professor Haralds Biezais discusses Baltic religion, most of the references are to ancient Latvian deities, rituals and customs. There is a definite scarcity of English language publications dealing with the Latvian religion. Four other sources are: *Contextualizing the Gospel to Followers of the Latvian Religion Dievturiba* by Daina Elberts (part of a dissertation at a theological seminary; pro-Christian and critical of Dievturiba), *Latvian Religion* (New York, 1968) by Janis Dardedzis, *Standard Dictionary of Folklore* (1972, pp. 606-608) by Jonas Balys and *The Balts* (London, 1963) by Marija Gimbutas. There are, however, many publications in German and Latvian that deal with the ancient Baltic/Latvian religion. One good German source is *Germanische und Baltische Religion* (Stuttgart, 1975) by Ake V. Strom and Haralds Biezais.

tion includes religions with or without God-god(s), monotheistic or polytheistic – it dissolves the theism/atheism boundary, permitting religions to be operative within the context of scientific reason.

Its critics have labeled Dievturība as pagan, folkloristic and polytheistic. The EB interpretation of religion obviates these criticisms as meaningless. Religions are not inherently and absolutely good or bad – they are all functions of some culturally dependent definitional codex.

The rest of this paper will describe “man’s relation to that which he regards as holy”, as it applies to the Latvian religion Dievturība. The scope of the description will consist of the traditional categories and functional analyses of any religion: (i) God/god(s), if any (ii) Values and codes of conduct (iii) ritual and (iv) ultimate metaphysics (life, death and meaning itself).

GOD/DIEVS⁸

The original research of Brastinu Ernests revealed some 4,000 dainas dealing with the subject of *Dievs*. The conceptualisation of Dievs has changed and evolved as it has in most religions. From a once impersonal, ubiquitous force, already centuries before our era, the bright sky became sky-God. Long before the thirteenth century, continued anthropomorphisation created the complete image

⁸ The most comprehensive analysis of Dievs is the doctoral dissertation by Dr. Phil. Karlis Polis, *Dievs un dvesele ka religioz priekšstats aizkristietisko latviešu tradīcijas* (published in book form in 1962, Lincoln, Neb.).

of the Latvian Dievs (frequently used is the diminutive form, *Dieviņš*): full of goodness, ever present, ultimate dispenser of all the virtues and representing everything that is (Vedantic Brahman). Such was the conceptualization of Dievs/God that the first missionaries encountered when they set foot on Latvian soil. Due to the factors already cited, Dievs underwent little syncretisation during Latvia's Christian centuries.

Dievs can be interpreted as (i) a unity: all that exists, transforms and remains, (ii) duality: the matter/spirit interface, (iii) trinity: matter, energy and the evolving, unifying and maximizing laws of the Cosmos/*Višums* and (iv) plurality: all the multifaceted and multifunctional deities of the Latvian Pantheon. According to EB's definition of religion, they are all valid ways of encountering the holy.

Dievs is invisible and inaudible, imparting his wisdom *padoms* to all of creation. The highest gift that Dievs can bestow on man is *laime* – luck, benevolent fate and happiness. For example, one *daina* relates that:

*The skylark sings higher than all other birds;
Dievs' wisdom is higher and beyond this entire world.⁹*

⁹ I will attempt only a few translations of the *dainas* in this paper, mainly because without extensive ethnological and idiomatic annotations, (the translated texts are quite incomprehensible. The largest English-language translation) until a few years ago was Uriah Katzenelenbogen's *The Daina: An Anthology of Lithuanian and Latvian Folk Songs* (Chicago, 1935). In 1984 a 497 page selection from Barons' collection with line-by-line translations in Russian, German and English was published by the Soviet Latvian Writers' Union, titled *Krišjānis Barons, Latvju dainas. Parindenu izlase*. This is the best collection of translations so far but, without proper ethnographic enculturation, is again at times incomprehensible. Some scholars and folklorists have claimed that, like some of the Vedas, many of the *dainas* are not translatable.

But this bestowal and all other relationships between Dievs and man are personal. There were no institutions or other intermediaries interceding for, or acting on behalf of, the individual seeking the help or counsel of Dievs.¹⁰

Since the Latvian religion is not dogmatic, prophetic or revelatory, every individual can choose his own interface with Dievs. Those Latvians needing a creator and ruler have their Dievs. Those who cannot accept something as being created out of nothing also have their Dievs: the eternal, ever changing universe with its inherent laws and punctuated, localized creations. But those not concerned with the big, analytical and "ultimate truths" also have their Dievs: the personification and highest ideal of all that is good, virtuous, noble and just. Another *daina* informs us:

Oh, Dievs, what will you do when we all pass away?

Thou hast no father, mother, nor a bride to call your own.

In the dualistic interpretation of Dievs, Mara is the symbol of the world of matter - she encompasses all of the material existence. There is considerable controversy among scholars about the syncretic matrix of the Mara/Mary controversy, i. e., who was

¹⁰ In modern times the religious matrix has changed for the Latvians still professing the ancient religion. Living in the technological and information age, the once agricultural and mainly rural Latvians have been forced to meet the challenges of the modern world. Along with their Christian brethren outside Soviet Latvia, most Dievturi have organized themselves into *draudzes* (congregations), thus facilitating the celebration of season feasts, sacred rituals and rites of passage - all integral parts in the life of a Dievturis.

here first?¹¹ Without doubt, living within the confines of centuries long, but unaccepted Christianity, some syncretism had to transpire. However, Mara already appears in the Vedas, Upanishads and many other remnants of the ancient Aryan peoples of north-western Europe and the Mediterranean region. She is the Mother of all mothers (the Latvians have more than sixty of them mentioned in the dainas and folk tales) - The Great Mother/Goddess.

We know that matter is in a constant flux and change. Certainly, the ancient Latvians also knew this and personified the many aspects of Nature as the changing manifestations of Mara- Earth Mother, Wind Mother, Mother of the Sea, and so forth.

From the approximately 1,700 dainas that mention Mara, we can discern her three main functions: the giver, preserver and finally the taker of life (Velu Mate). These three aspects of the Great Mother permeate all Indo-European religions and folklor but, in the Latvian, it is noticeably voluminous and present in all the main phases of one's life cycle.¹²

¹¹ The core concept of a female Supreme Being/Goddess has been with us for tens of thousand of years. To the pre-Aryan and pre-Semitic ancients, the Goddess was a full-fledged cosmic parent figure who created the universe and its laws, ruler of nature, time, fate, truth, wisdom, justice, birth and death. One of her names was Mara. Many of the fathers of the Christianity church strongly opposed the worship of Mary because she was only a composite of the many pre-Mary pagan goddesses. In fact, the Christian figure of Mary was gradually created during the first four centuries of the Christian era from Mara and her many nicknames (Mariamne, Maya, Mari, Kel-Mari, Yamamari and numerous others). For good sources, see Barbara G. Walker's *The Woman's Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco, 1983) and Geoffrey Ashe's *The Virgin* (London, 1976).

¹² When the Aryan peoples invaded and settled in the territory that is present Latvia some 4,000 years ago, they already encountered a culture that was almost totally matriarchal. We might say that Father Dievs/sky formed a union with Mother Mara/earth and, to this day, the Latvian religion and culture is embedded in this sacred duality. Marija Gimbutas in her *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe* (London, 1974) well describes this process.

In the triune interpretation of Dievs, the mediator between Dievs and Mara is the Goddess of Fate, Laime/Laima. Like Dievs, Laime cannot be seen. Being just another aspect of Dievs, she is everywhere. Even though Laime determines a person's unchangeable destiny at the moment of birth, the individual still has to choose between good and bad within the broad limits prescribed by her decree.

Nearly all mythologies bear traces of the triple goddess of fate, rulers of the past, present and future - virgin, mother and crone/destroyer. This female trinity assumes many guises, especially in western religions. There are many traces of her in the Latvian religion.

And finally, in the pluralistic interpretation of Dievs, besides the Latvian trinity of Dievs, Mara and Laime, there is a multitude of mythological and folk-tale figures. These parallel the lesser deities of many other cultures and religions. There is a plethora of sky divinities (Saule, Meness, Perkons, Auseklis, Usinš), agriculture deities (Jumis, Ziedu Mate), chthonic goddesses (Velu Mate, Kapu Mate) and syncretized Christian saints (Martinš, Peteris, Mikelis, and possibly Janis¹³). All of these are personalized natural phenomena and processes, reflecting the tendency of the ancient Latvians to personalize and encompass all of nature within the recurring cycles of life. Most of them have families, homesteads, human qualities and serve as the metaphoric mediaries between man and the multiform Dievs.

¹³ Although Jani, the Latvian Midsummer night festival, is definitely of pre-Christian origin, many scholars believe that the name itself is derived from St. John. To counter the popular pagan appeal for the festival, the Christian church proclaimed June 24th as the birth-date of John the Baptist. However, there is some evidence that the name is of pre-Biblical, Indo-European origin.

VALUES AND CODES OF CONDUCT

For the ancient Latvians and the modern-day Dievturi, the meaning and purpose of life is to live in harmony with the repeating rhythms of Nature (this includes all the gods – even Dievs himself!) and other members of society. This means that a harmonious life is self-justifying - there is no meaning beyond life itself.

The attitude toward life is positive and optimistic (until fairly recently!). One strives for the possession of virtue(s), not avoidance of sin(s). In fact, the concept of sin is foreign to the dainas.

Life's most basic purpose is to be good. This unwritten imperative implies that if everyone were good, there would be no room for evil or bad luck. All of the virtues guiding one's conduct can be broken down into three categories: (i) the virtues of life and Dievs, (ii) the basic self-ethics or virtues for oneself and (iii) the communal ethics, or the basic virtues as they relate to others.

The two virtues in the first category admonish: Be good! and be reverential and full of awe for Dievs! The entire code of ethics for the ancient Latvians was positive in tone. One was basically taught what to do and what to be, not what not to do and be.

The four fundamental virtues for self-enhancement and behavior are: Be wise! Be diligent/active! Be beautiful, clean and orderly! and be cheerful! Wisdom includes the awareness of good things and values, an understanding of goals and purposes. And only wisdom can determine proper behavior toward self, others and Dievs. The virtue of work leads to success both in the mental

and material world. Many a daina states that Dievs will not enter a homestead that is not orderly, clean and cheerful.

The last category of virtues is virtues of compatibility: Be full of love! Be easy to live with! Be generous! and Be just! These four virtues provided directives for the Latvians in their interactions with relatives, neighbors, strangers and other clans/nations.

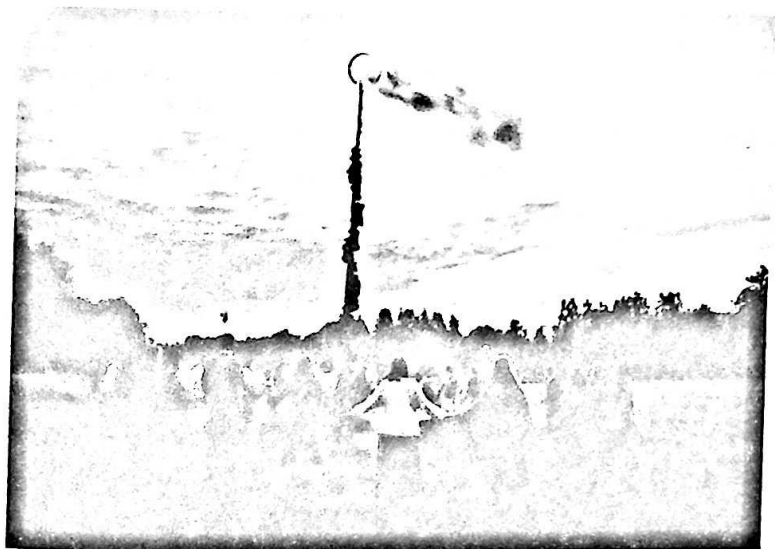
Evil in the Christian sense does not exist as a functional concept. One simply speaks of bad fortune and not living with the dictates of the above virtues. The source of bad things happening is caused by man himself. Nature and the world, including all the calamities, is basically neutral – it simply is. Man determines what to do with it, for better or worse.

SACRED RITUAL

Typologically, the ancient Latvian religion is an agricultural religion. The movements of the heavenly bodies and the agricultural cycles which they engender determined a set, never-ending, but highly structured spiral of existence. The solstices and equinoxes determined the basic framework for this structure. To these correspond *Jani* (summer solstice), Winter festival (winter solstice) and many autumnal harvest festivals (fall equinox).¹⁴

Interspersed among these are the many planting, harvest and other communal celebrations. All these cyclical festivities deter-

¹⁴ The Latvian cycle of eternal return is based on (i) the position of the Sun in the sky, (ii) life, agricultural and fertility cycles and (iii) the concomitant work in the fields and homesteads. Janis Dardedzis' *Latvian Religion* (pp. 40-43) gives a description of the feast days corresponding to these recurring cycles.



mine sacred times and rituals with appropriate songs, dances, foods and other activities. Dievs and other deities are welcome participants in all of these rituals. It is also characteristic of these festivals that some form of fire and honey mead is always present.

The cosmic clock, which determines the rhythms and patterns of the festivities, is, of course, the Sun. There are literally thousands of Sun-dainas consoling, advising and providing a role model for the individual to follow. The mythological astral family provides the proper metaphor for the ever-recurring manifestations on earth: birth, growth, fruition and death. Through this metaphor the agricultural religion of the ancient Latvians is at the same time an astral religion – as above, so below.

Corresponding to the birth, growth and death in Nature, the Latvians also ordered their lives by the life cycles of the people themselves. The beginning, middle and end of life – the rites of

passage – were also marked by scared and festive celebrations: the first related to the birth (name-giving ceremony), the second to courtship and wedding ritual, and the last to death.

The modern Dievturis has not abandoned these sacred festivals and rites of passage. Many of the age-old, traditional rituals have taken the form of sacred games.¹⁵ The nature of the game does not determine its importance of meaningfulness – the participants do. And to the Dievturis, the sacred games are important benchmarks for ethnic and cultural renewal – a self-chosen commitment to a nation, people, Dievs and life itself. Our last daina:

*My countryman! Say the right words, follow the right path!
Then Dievs himself will help you never to go astray.*

ULTIMATE METAPHYSICS/ METAPHYSICS OF THE ULTIMATE

As already inferred earlier, the ancient Latvians did not find justification for the actions of this life in some transcendent, abstract reality beyond this world.¹⁶ Life was, and for many of us still is, its own justification. Hence, the ultimate goal is to live in har-

¹⁵ By a game here is meant any structured, social interactive set of rules to which a society (a portion of) agrees to abide. Among all the games man plays, the religious game is one of the noblest and most awe-inspiring.

¹⁶ In Latvian the word for "world" is "pasaule", meaning "under the Sun". Thus, the Latvian speaks of "this Sun" and "that Sun" to differentiate the empirical everyday reality from the one that might exist after the last rite of passage. Where once "that Sun" was conceptualized as an inevitable reality, for the modern Dievturis it has become more of a change in energy forms within the matter/spirit interface - still an unknown state and having only metaphoric reality.

mony with the micro and macro-environment and other members of society, full of virtue and goodness. And this all occurs within the constraints imposed by Mother Destiny/Laime herself. It is a life of activity and duty – to oneself, to others and to Dievs.

The Latvians did not, and still don't, like to express their deepest convictions in complex abstractions and analytical language. Communication with, and interpretation of, reality is metaphorical, couched in the short-verse form of the Dainas.

The ancient Latvians and the Dievturi metaphorically express themselves as being constituted of three parts: the body, soul and *velis*.¹⁷ In this tri-partition of the Self, the physical body returns to Mother Earth/Mara and the soul reunites with the Cosmic Mind/Dievs. Velis, the in-between of body and soul is what we would now call the high-energy body – the ultimate matter and energy interface. Traditionally it lingers on after physical death and as condensed high-frequency vibrations may return (in fact, the vibratory force field has never left) to the physical plane. If the language sounds like that taken from modern spiritualism or channeling, then one has only to read some popularized interpretations of the latest theorizing in hard core modern physics.¹⁸

As alluded to earlier, the meaning of life for the Dievturi and the ancient Latvians is/was found in living a virtuous, active and

¹⁷ This tri-partition is not unique to the Latvians. The Egyptians, Greeks and other ancient cultures had similar nomenclature. In modern consciousness studies these would correspond to the physical, astral and mental energy levels.

¹⁸ *Perceiving Ordinary Magic* (Boulder, 1984) by Jeremy W. Hayward; *Quantum Questions* (Boulder, 1984), ed. by Ken Wilber; *Physics for Poets* (Chicago, 1978) by Robert H. March; and the now classic. *The Tao of Physics* (Berkeley, 1975) by Fritjof Capra.

dutiful life. There is nothing to be saved from, nothing about which to repent and no sin to expiate. Everyone starts out life being good and determines his own destiny within the constraints of the probabilistic laws of Nature/Laime.

CONCLUSION

As in any article describing a specific religion, this short discourse has more omissions than specific descriptions of details. Also, since the Latvian religion does not have an unchanging dogma or infallible prophets, the previous description of the religion is only the author's interpretation.

Each culture and the individuals within that culture interpret reality somewhat differently. The Latvians have traditionally been an agricultural society and only recently, alas forcibly, has Latvia been transformed into an industrialized state. With respect to religion, the big question remains: "Can the old values and gods still give guidance and meaning to life as we approach the twenty-first century?"

My affirmative answer to the previous question is to be couched in the new paradigm shift in the physical and social sciences stated in the Introduction, namely:

A. Shift from the parts to the whole... The ancient Latvians have always maintained that all phenomena in Nature are intricately dependent on each other and that social interactions cannot be isolated from their physical counterparts in an inseparable web of dynamic relationships.

B. Shift from objective knowledge to one dependent on the human observer... This is consistent with value system and epistemology of the individual. The world and the universe are value neutral. Ethics and knowledge is situational and all responsibility is thrust upon the individual. Be wise, just, diligent, loving and compassionate!

C. Shift from fundamental laws to a network of relationships... The *dainas* continually stress the awe, enchantment and inexplicable mystery of Existence. Our well being is not determined by its inherent and immutable absoluteness, but our culturally determined response to it.

D. Shift from truth to approximate description... There are no immutable truths and/or absolutes in the Latvian tradition. The physical/spiritual interface is always changing, a function of new discoveries, developments and interpretations of reality. This, for example, prevents the names of the old deities and personified abstractions becoming meaningless words in this changing world. No matter what interpretation is given to all of reality and its laws, the *Dievturis* calls it *Dievs*. No matter how "physical matter" is partitioned in its basic building block nomenclature, we can call it *Mara*. No matter what the probabilistic force-field laws determining our existence are, we can call it *Laime/Destiny*, and so forth.

E. Shift from structure to process... The old Latvian religion considered the entire world as one living organism, from a blade of grass to the extended astral family. This reflects a modified continuity of animistic beliefs. But this is exactly what the

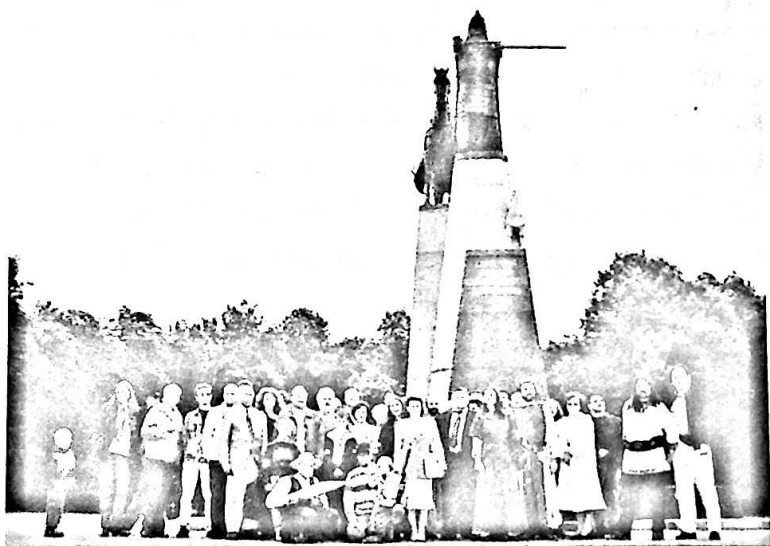
global brain, *Gaia*, self-organizing universe and universal consciousness theorists are saying.¹⁹

F. Shift from domination and control of nature to cooperation and non-violence... The entire ethos of the dainas and the ancient Latvian culture emphasizes this dictum. At no other time in the history of the world have we needed more non-violent, matriarchal and caring attitudes toward the world and each other.

The hard-line and fundamentalist Christian will consider the Latvian religion as pagan, pantheistic and polytheistic, and in many respects it is. But to assign a value-judgement in this pluralistic, data based and information age is extremely problematic. Who is to say that the modern scientific age with all its answers has a better paradigm for survival and well-being than perennial Wisdom and value system in the Sacred Dainas!

¹⁹ Two excellent scientific discourses on this topic are Ilya Prigozine's *Order Out of Chaos* (New York, 1984) and Erich Jantsch's *The Self-Organizing Universe* (Oxford, 1980).

WORLD CONGRESS OF ETHNIC TRADITION IN VILNIUS



During the Rasa festival (summer solstice) of 1998, representatives of pre-Christian or pagan faiths from Europe, United States and India gathered in Vilnius. Such groups exist in almost all countries of Europe, as well as in other continents. This event illustrates that for believers in the traditional faiths the time of cul-

tural isolation is coming to an end, and conditions are favourable for removing the obstacles, which stand in the way of more effective communication between them.

What was the background for this international meeting in Vilnius? The good will of the participants and the initiative of the organisers were certainly important, but not sufficient. The history of the city of Vilnius and Lithuania contributed to the choice of location. Already before the Second World War the idea was gaining acceptance that Lithuania was well placed to become a mediator between East and West, between the traditional religions and Christianity. The cultural heritage of the Balts can be classified as a cultural bridge – a culture that has unique features but incorporates elements from Eastern and Western cultures. The synthesis of cultures is an integral aspect of its history. The tradition of Vilnius as a universal city, in which all religions have equal rights, goes back to the time of Gediminas. Gediminas was a 14th century Pagan ruler of Lithuania who provided an example of tolerance and enlightenment. At that early time he declared that Pagans, Catholics and Orthodox Christians worship essentially the same divinity, albeit in different forms. He guaranteed religious freedom to all his subjects and tenaciously defended Lithuania against Christian crusaders seeking to convert his nation by force. He issued invitations to various groups of people to visit Vilnius and put down roots here. His example showed that paganism could be a tolerant religious system. The establishment of Christianity tempered this tradition of humanism but never displaced it completely. Some centuries had to pass before the traditions of Gediminas could again gain ascendancy. In 1996 an imposing statue of this pagan ruler was erected in the Cathedral Square of Vilnius. The Romuva com-

munity actively supported this project and participated in its dedication. The memory of Gediminas was honoured during the opening ceremonies of the June 1998 International Conference of Ethnic Religions by placing flowers at the monument and proclaiming words of gratitude to this tolerant pagan ruler.

The Baltic faith community Romuva, had experience at making contact and communicating with like-minded persons and organisations and took the initiative in calling this international gathering. The most active communication was maintained between neighbouring countries: Lithuanians, Latvians and Belorussians. In 1997 in Užpaliai Lithuania a meeting took place in which representatives from the Baltic countries and believers in the native faith from East Europe, Russia, Ukraine and Poland participated. The direct established contacts made it clear that the "pagan" movements share a common set of goals. On the other hand, the meetings also showed that interesting differences between the various groups exist. It became evident that we can learn from one another and exchange experiences. At the same time information came from western countries about increased interaction between communities of western pagans. Thus communication between the Pagan Federation of England and the Icelandic native faith Asatru became more active. It became apparent that the time had arrived for initiating a gathering of representatives of traditional faiths from East and Middle Europe. Romuva then took the initiative in calling the "World Congress of Native Religions". The word "world" was employed to stress the commonality of traditions and cultural areas and to emphasise that the movement is open to all who are interested in traditional religious systems.

The conference had several goals: 1. To become acquaintant with each other, to exchange problems and ideas; 2. To come to an agreement concerning further co-operation and to found an organisation.

The Congress was opened in Kernavė - the first capital of the pagan Lithuanian State. On the 20th of June the festival of Rasa was celebrated there. The location and the festival are of great importance to Romuva; it was here that the founding of the Romuva community took place 30 years ago. For many guests this was the first acquaintance with Lithuania and Romuva.

The Conference continued at 22nd of June in Vilnius. It was held in the main hall of the Teachers Association building, one of the larger meetings places available in Vilnius. The participants of Conference were welcomed by vice chairman of Lithuanian Parliament Romualdas Ozolas. The hall was full, and the participants had a unique chance to become acquainted and to communicate with native faith believers from several countries. Their reports were presented in the two following days.

At the close of the conference the representatives of diverse ethnic organisations resolved to establish a common umbrella association. By majority decision the name chosen was the "World Congress of Ethnic Religions" – WCER. It was also decided that the centre of this Congress will be Vilnius and the Romuva community was requested to co-ordinate its activities. The conference closed by drafting the included Declaration that was subsequently further edited and refined by electronic mail.



THE DECLARATION OF WCER

We, the delegates of the World Congress of Ethnic Religions, held in Vilnius, Lithuania, from 20 to 24 June 1998, have gathered to express our solidarity for the ethnic, indigenous, native and/or traditional religions of Europe and the other regions of the world.

All cultures as well as native religions and faiths should be equally valued and respected. Each region and each people have their distinctive local traditions (native faith, world outlook, mythology, folklore etc.) which articulate their love of their land and history, and cultivate a regard for the sacredness of all life and the divinity of Nature. Just as Nature survives through a wide variety of species, so can humanity be allowed to develop freely and without interference along a wide variety of cultural expressions.

According to our ancient traditional ethics, the Earth and all creation must be valued and protected. We as human beings must find our place within the web of all life, not outside or separate from the whole of creation.

We share a common understanding of our position in the world, based upon our common historical experience of oppression and intolerance. Ethnic and/or "Pagan" religions have suffered great injury and destruction in the past from religions claiming they possess the only truth. It is our sincere wish to live in peace and harmony, and to strive for co-operation with the followers of all other religions, faiths and beliefs.

We believe that the dawn of a new era of individual and intellectual freedom and global exchange of views and information gives us an opportunity to start again to return to our own native spiritual roots in order to re-claim our religious heritage. We are worshippers of Nature just as most of mankind has been for the greater part of human history.

True indigenous religions should give us love and respect for all that we see and feel around, to accept all forms of worship which emphasise sincere hearts, pure thoughts and noble conduct at every moment of our life, towards all that exists.

Let us be proud of our reborn ethnic religions. Our

new Universalism induces people not to remain closed within walls of hatred and jealousy against those who are not inside our walls. Let us break these walls and expand the horizon and vision of the whole humanity.

We established the "World Congress of Ethnic Religions" (WCER) to help all ethnic religions groups survive and co-operate with each other. Our motto is "Unity in Diversity".

Oyvind SILJEHOLM ARNESEN (Norway), Hans BERGHMANS (Belgium), Janis BRIKMANIS (Latvia), Denis DORNOY (France), Audrius DUNDZILA (USA), Arwind GHOSH (India), Morten GROLSTED (Denmark), Surinder Paul ATTRI (India), Vadim KAZAKOV (Russia), Stefan KLUGE (Germany), Todor KASHKUREVICH (Belorussia), Koenraad LOGGHE (Belgium), Giuseppe MAIELLO (Czech), Halina LOZKO (Ukraine), Geza von NEMENYI (Germany), Stashko POTRSHEBOVSKI (Poland), Vlasis RASSIAS (Greece), Rajinder SINGH (India), Nikolaj SPERANSKIJ (Russia), Michael Strmiska (USA), Jonas TRINKUNAS (Lithuania), Lila WIBERG (Sweden), Catrin WILDGRUBE (Germany)

Vilnius, Lithuania,

23rd June 1998

2ND DECLARATION
(25TH OCTOBER 1998)

The WCER is primarily concerned with the protection and development of ethnic Cultures and Identities. We understand the term "Ethnic" as referring to religions and cultures that are related to a particular people's cosmology as it is expressed in cultural and social terms as well as ancestral. We recognise that many factors make up people's identity.

Historically those of other ethnic backgrounds have been adopted into new ones if they took on the beliefs and mores that are a larger part of the identity of that people. Although we are convinced that every human being has the best possibilities within his/her own culture to re-establish the harmony with the divine aspect, it does not, however, exclude anyone from participation in their activities.

The WCER is therefore categorically opposed to discrimination; suppression or persecution based on race, colour, social class, religion or national origin.

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GLOSSARY

Aitvaras – Lithuanian mythological being. Protects and works to increase wealth and property. Takes shape of a fiery snake or bird. Resides in rural outbuildings and brings money, grain, milk, and other wealth to the owners of the farm.

Alkas – place of sacrifice of ancient Lithuanians (a hill, woodland grove, meadow, or brook) where sacrificial and funerary rites took place.

Auseklis – Latvian goddess of the dawn. Morning Star.

Austēja – protectress of brides and pregnant women. The Bee Goddess.

Aušautas – ancient Prussian god of medicine (health and healing). Counterpart of the Greek deity *Aesculapius*.

Aušrinė – the Morning Star. Lithuanian goddess of the dawn, of love and beauty (Hindu – *Usha*, Roman – *Aurora*, Latvian – *Auseklis*).

Animals: cow and mare.

Autrimpas – Prussian god of the sea (Roman – *Neptune*).

Bangpūtys – Lithuanian and Prussian god of winds (kin to *Vėjopatis*).

Bardaitis – Prussian god of sailors.

Barzdukai – aides to the Prussian god *Puškaitis*, guardians of wealth and property. Tiny, bearded creatures that live in the ground.

Burtai – spells, magic incantations used to influence events and to alter the future.

Burtininkas – a person practising magic – also known as a witch or warlock, medicine man, caster of spells, magician, sorcerer, wizard, mage.

Dalia (Latvian *Dekla*) – giver and taker of material goods. *Incar-nations*: duck, goose, swan, lamb, rock, *aitvaras*, snake, bird.

Dausos – in Lithuanian mythology – the residence of souls after death. The souls travel to the Dausos via the Milky Way.

Dievas (Latvian *Dievs*) – literally means “God”. He is the god of light and sky, the god of day, of agreements, peace, and justice. The power responsible for the growth of plants. *Animals*: deer, steed, small birds. *Plants*: birch and other deciduous trees. *Weap-ons*: dagger, sword.

Dimstipatis – Lithuanian god of the hearth, protector of homes from fire.

Ežerinis – Lithuanian god of lakes.

Gabija – goddess of home and hearth-fire.

Gabjaujis – god of covered fire.

Giltinė – goddess of death, sister of *Laima* (Hindu - *Kali*).

Gyrates (Latvian *Mežutevs*) – protector of the forests.

Gyvatė – Snake Goddess.

Ilgės – ancient Lithuanian feast-day honouring the dead. Later called *Vėlinės*.

Jumis – Latvian god of fruitfulness (in Latvian *jumis* means a

double ear of corn). Comparable to the heavenly twins of Indo-European mythology.

Jorė – feast celebrating the advent of spring. Later known as *Jurginės*.

Juratė – a legendary queen of the Baltic Sea. In the form of a beautiful mermaid.

Kalvelis – the heavenly smith who forges a new sun and the crown for *Aušrinė*, and stirrups for the sons of *Dievas*.

Kaukai, Barstukai (plural) – mystical powers, worker of magic.

Kravis, Krivių Krivaitis – the chief holy man or seer, who lived in Romuva (Prussia). His influence extended beyond Prussia to Lithuanians, and other ancient Baltic tribes.

Kurka, Curche – Prussian god of fruitfulness.

Lada – Lithuanian goddess of fruitfulness, marital relations and marital concord.

Laima (Latvian – *Laima*) – goddess of destiny, the All-knowing. *Incarnations*: cuckoo (messenger of destiny and spring), owl, titmouse (messenger of death), she-elk, bear.

Laukpatis (Latvian *Mežu tevs*) – protector of domestic animals and farmland.

Lauksargis – Lithuanian god and protector of arable land.

Laumė (Latvian *Zemes sieva*) – functionary of Laima and Ra-gana; goddess and woman. Protectress of orphans and lost children. Bestower and taker of wealth and fertility. Harbinger of death.

Lazdona – protectress of nuts, nut-trees, and nut groves.

Lizdeika – the seer who interpreted Prince Gediminas' dream of the iron wolf. According to 16th century Lithuanian chronicles, the baby

Lizdeika was found in an eagle's nest – hence the name *Lizdeika* (*lizdas* means “nest” in Lithuanian). He grew up to become the chief seer of Lithuania (Krivių Krivaitis).

Marša – goddess of birthing calves, protectress of cows. *Incar-nations*: black snake, hen, and black insect.

Medeina (Latvian *Mezu mate*) – goddess and protectress of the forests and the hunt.

Mėnuo, Mėnulis – Moon: Lithuanian deity of the Earth and the dead. It is thought that the home of the waning moon was beneath the ground, and that of the young moon – the heavens. In many of the prayers directed to it, the young moon is addressed as god and prince, is petitioned to bring health and good fortune.

Miškinis, Girinis – (from the Lithuanian words *miškas, giria*, meaning “forest”) Lithuanian god of the forests, the spirit of the woodlands. Comparable to the Roman *Sylvanus*.

Morė – effigy in the form of a woman, a symbol of winter. It is traditionally burned on Shrove Tuesday, as a symbolic expulsion of winter.

Nunadievis – Lithuanian god, found in 13th century writings. The meaning is not quite clear – it is either the chief of gods (*No-an-deiv*) or a misspelling of *Numdievas* – god of the house.

Pagirinis – grass snake that was kept in ancient Lithuanian homes; considered being a god. Its purpose was to protect the hearth-fire from strangers.

Patrimpas – Prussian god of cornfields, who was supposed to bring victory in war. Imagined to be a young man crowned with a wreath made of ripe ears of grain. His symbol was the grass snake. Some held him to the

god of the waters as well. One of the three principal Prussian deities.

Patulas – Prussian god of death and the underworld. The opposite of *Patrimpas*. Imagined as a horrible old man with a long white beard, head swathed in lengths of white linen. He appeared at night. His symbol – the head of a dead man, or horse, or cow. One of the three principal Prussian gods. Later referred to as *Pikulas*, *Poklius*. The counterpart of the Lithuanian *Velnias*.

Pergubris – Prussian god of spring and vegetation. He casts out winter and helps the plants to grow. The first spring holiday, Jorė, is dedicated to him. Comparable to the Slavic *Jarila*.

Perkūnas (Latvian *Perkons*) – god of thunder and justice. Impregnates the Earth. *Animals*: bull, goat. *Birds*: pigeon, cuckoo. *Trees*: oak, ash. *Weapons*: axe, bow, and arrow.

Praamžis, Praamžius – the first, all-embracing god of the Baltic Pantheon. Could be very closely related to *Prakorimas* or even the same deity by another name.

Prakorimas – supposed to be one of the Titanic members of the very first generation of ancient Baltic gods. Ruler of gods and men and their fates. He is thought to have had many names, one of which is probably *Praamžius* (literally – the beginning of eternity).

Prutenis – legendary chief seer (*Krivių Krivaitis*), brother of the 6th century Prussian ruler *Videvutis*. Supposed to have founded Romuva and the cult of the three main gods – *Patulas*, *Patrimpas*, *Perkūnas*.

Puškaitis – incarnation of the Earth who engenders the *Kaukai*.

Ragana – goddess of death and resurrection. Protectress of the cycles of nature, keeper of power of life within limits. All knowing, all foretelling. Simultaneously a beautiful and a horrible woman (the modern Lithuanian

word *ragana* means “witch”). *Incarnations*: primarily as a toad, but also as a goat, mare, crow, magpie, hedgehog, pike, carp, and other fish.

Ramuva – Lithuanian ethno-cultural organisation, founded in 1967, banned by the Soviets in 1971. Functioned only in the University of Vilnius until 1988, when it resumed open activity.

Rasa – ancient Lithuanian feast of summer solstice, resurrected in 1967 in Kernavė by the Ramuva movement.

Romuva – the central sanctuary of the ancient Balts, located in Prussia, founded during the 6th century, when the old pagan religion was reformed and the cult of the three principal gods, *Patulas*, *Patrimpas*, and *Perkūnas*, established. The re-established ancient Lithuanian pagan religion of today was officially registered in Vilnius in 1992 under the name “Romuva”.

Rugiu boba – The Old Crone of the Rye. She ruled the birth, life, and death of cultivated plants.

Rupūžė – Toad. Symbol for the energy and regeneration of life.

Samboriai – Lithuanian feast occurring in May, celebrating the end of the spring labours and the re-birth of nature.

Saulė – Sun. Wife or daughter of heaven.

Siela – (literally, “soul”) the life force of the body. It leaves the body temporarily during sleep, and forever at the point of death.

Skalsa – Lithuanian deity, the embodiment of plenty, prosperity, and good fortune. According to some chroniclers – the Horn of Plenty. A feast in honour of Skalsa used to be celebrated at harvest time. Akin to the Latvian *Jumis*.

Sovius – Baltic mythical cultural hero – the founder of the custom of immolation of the dead, guide of the souls of the departed into the afterlife.

Stabas – idol – the image of a god.

Šventaragis – legendary Lithuanian prince, cultural hero. The spot where his corpse was burned was known as the Šventaragis Valley and became the cultural and religious centre of ancient Lithuania. It is located in Vilnius, between the Vilija (Neris) and Vilnelė Rivers – the site of present-day Vilnius Cathedral.

Tulisonys and Ligašonys – Prussian seers who officiated at funerary rites.

Ukapiřmas, Okopiřmas – chief god of the Prussians, corresponding to the Lithuanian Dievas, Latvian Dievs.

Undinė – mermaid; mythical being of the sea; a woman with the tail of a fish instead of legs.

Užgavėnės – Shrove Tuesday, celebrated in Lithuania as the symbolic departure of winter.

Vaidila (male), Vaidilutė (female) – Prussian religious officials. Aides to the chief seer, Krivių Krivaitis. They tended the sacred flame and read oracles.

Vaižgantas, Rūpintojėlis – protector of flax and hemp. God of birth, life, torture, death, rebirth. Lithuanian *Dionysus*.

Vakarinė – Evening Star. The opposite of *Aušrinė*. Probably, the planet Venus.

Vėjopatis – Lithuanian god of wind.

Vėlė – the soul of a dead person, as opposed to *siela* – the soul of a living person. When someone dies, the *vėlė* leaves the body, remaining among the living for a while before it departs for the world of the dead – *Dausos*, the Hill of Vėlės.

Vėlinės – Lithuanian feast commemorating the dead (from the word *vėlė*). Earlier known as *Ilgės*.

Velnias, Velas, Velns – god of the kingdom of the dead and the netherworld. God of cattle, of magic, and metamorphosis. Creator of black animals and birds. *Plants*: alder, coniferous trees. *Weapons*: lance, noose. (In modern Lithuanian, the word *velnias* means “devil”).

Videvutis, Vaidevutis – mythologized Prussian cultural hero, brother of *Prutenis*. Prussians elected him king during the 6th century.

Vilktakis, Vilkolakis (Latvian *Vilkacis*) – werewolf – a man who has the ability to change into a wolf.

Žaltys – sacred serpent; a revered grass snake, indigenous to the Baltic lands. The sentinel or messenger of the ancient Baltic gods plays a significant role in the mythology and lore of the region. It is forbidden to harm or kill one of these creatures.

Žemėpatis, žemininkas (Latvian *Majas Kungs*) – brother of *Žemyna*, god of inhabited farmsteads, including orchards and gardens, and farms.

Žemyna, Žemė (Latvian *Zeme, Zemes mate*) – Mother Earth, goddess of fertility and fruitfulness of the Earth. Mother of the dead as well as of the living, who gives birth to all. Purity. Goddess of justice.

Žvaigždikis, žvaikžtikis – Prussian god of light. One who produces the necessary light for the growth of grain, grass, and animals. Equivalent to the Greek-Roman sun gods (*žvaigždė* is modern Lithuanian for “star”).

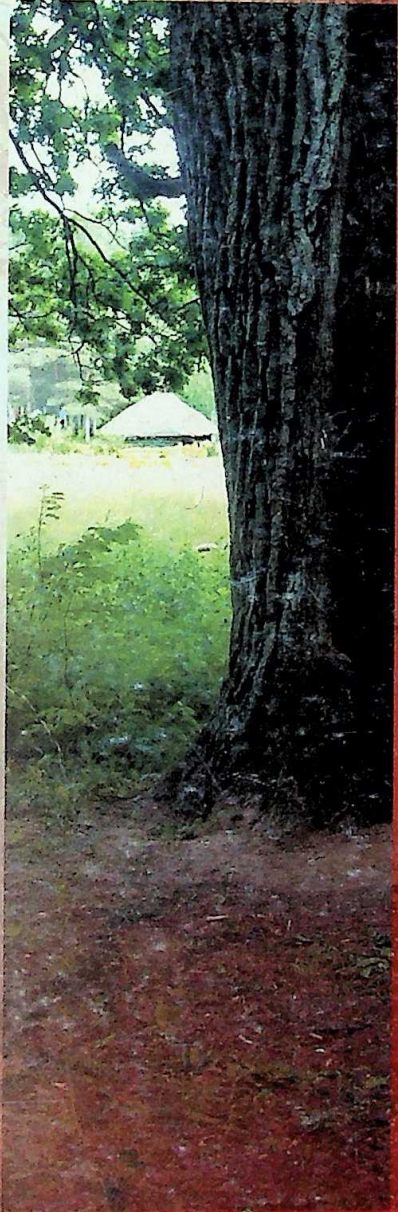
Žvorūnė, Žvėrynė – Lithuanian goddess associated with the Evening Star; holds power over wild animals, the hunt, and the Earth.

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Christian cathedrals were built in places hallowed by millennia of pagan worship, feasts and holidays where altered by suffusing them with Christian content. This happened overall in Europe, the Baltic experience is unique in that the changes occurred later. Many centuries later. As a result, in Baltic cultures the evidence of the pagan foundation can be discerned more clearly.

This book presents a collection of articles, which outline the structure of the Baltic religious systems, and describes the holidays that grew out of it. In a final section it is shown that in the Baltic lands the ancient religions have not vanished entirely. They have re-appeared in interesting forms and again assert their influence.



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