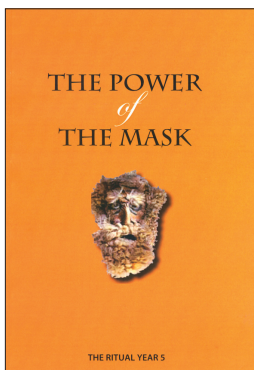


BOOK REVIEWS

THE POWER OF THE MASK



Arūnas Vaicekauskas (ed.). *The Power of the Mask. The Ritual Year 5*. Kaunas: Vytautas Magnus University, 2013. 150 pp.

The collections published by the Ritual Year Working Group of the International Society of Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF) provide a unique overview of the key points of the ritual year, not only by means of theory but also through detailed case analysis. The treatments proceed from various methodological bases and specialities (history, anthropology, folkloristics, ethnology, religious studies, ethnomusicology). The collections of the series cover a wide time range: festivals and celebrations from long-gone times, medieval traditions side by side with the festivals from the recent past and modern society, such as granting citizenship, the celebration of national days, etc. The articles also dwell upon institutional new rituals, festivals constructed or re-established by alternative religious movements, as well as customs related to the key events in human life. The articles in the series constitute a peculiar thematically coherent set.

The collection recently published in Kaunas is not an exception either. The majority of the contributions add to the former knowledge of masking and history of masks as well as local interpretations of masks in European traditions. Researches in this collection are related to the former treatments published by the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group, expanding the observations made on masking rituals in several European countries during the past decade (e.g., Fikfak, Gunnell, Raicane), adding also descriptions of new religions.

The researches included in *The Power of the Mask* indicate the unification of rituals and spread of similar tendencies over a vast territory. The whole ritual is undergoing changes: masks and masking also keep changing throughout eras; new masks and costumes are merged into it, ways of celebration are modified and unified, whereas old traditions are also preserved. A good example of it is Arūnas Vaicekauskas's treatment of modern Baltic masking traditions. He refers to masking as a tradition of great variability, which is not connected with former calendar holidays any more, but is currently replaced by public carnivals, private masked parties, or personal masking. Unified characters follow the examples of movies, fiction, fairytales, etc. Also, village masks typical of Lithuanian tradition have been preserved.

John Helsloot's article written in 2008 within the wave of a wide-ranging public discussion dwells upon Black Peter, who accompanies St. Nicholas in the Netherlands. Black Peter is a well-known and beloved character in folk tradition. The mask lacks any negative meanings although it is easily identifiable as a racial stereotype, as has been

emphasised by some Dutch and especially by foreign researchers. J. Helsloot inquires about the position of the ethnologist willing to protect cultural heritage, especially in the case of a missing negative stereotype.

The masking rituals of different regions are discussed from a wider philosophical perspective. Aida Rancane treats masking as a form of symbolic behaviour, enabling transition to the key values. Transformation into mythic heroes and repetition of archetypal activities offer a possibility for the renewal of primeval time. Tatiana Minniyakhmetova introduces traditional masking and zoomorphic and anthropomorphic masks. The author also touches upon rare masking traditions (old women disguise as men and imitate them), as well as their mythological and social background. Božena Gierek presents the Polish *pucheroki* masking tradition on Palm Sunday. This custom involves boys at the age of four to fifteen and is based on 16th-century university students' customs. Modern masking traditions are discussed by Marlene Hugoson in her article about Star Trek fandom, and by Ekaterina Anastasova in her treatment of a Latvian private birthday party with participants disguised as pioneers, as well as its background. Žilvytis Šaknys introduces changes in calendar customs in the south of Lithuania and north-east of Poland during the Soviet period and after that.

However, masks and masking is not the sole topic in the collection. In each volume of the series, Emily Lyle, president of the working group, presents a treatment of the general theoretical problems of the Ritual Year. This time it is dedicated to the summer/winter and decrease/increase transitions in the year and their life-cycle equivalents.

In addition, the collection comprises articles on some celebrations that have recently been introduced into European cultural space, such as baby showers originating in the United States (Carola Ekrem), and same-sex weddings as rites of passage (Emilia Karjula). Irina Sedakova discusses changes in Russian rituals related to love and weddings, and Rasa Račiūnaitė touches upon the westernisation of Lithuanian wedding traditions.

Throughout times, high school graduation has been a festive event at the end of the long educational road. For young people this is a considerable rise in status, an official transition to the adult world, a rite of passage. Lina Gergova writes about Bulgarian high school graduation ball as a phenomenon that has gained much popularity during the past fifty years.

The collections of the Ritual Year have always featured treatments of (Neo)-Paganism. Kamila Velkoborska's contribution introduces the Czech branch of Slavic Paganism.

The scientific approaches of *The Power of the Mask* make the dimensions of our social life comparable and understandable.

Mare Kõiva