

NEWS IN BRIEF

MEDICA III: FOREIGN BECOMES OWN

Renata Sõukand

On May 10-11, 2006 the third conference in the MEDICA series was held in the main hall of the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu. The main theme of the presentations held at the interdisciplinary conference of medical anthropology was the transforming of 'foreign' into 'own'.

On the opening day of the conference, social anthropologist Argo Moor introduced different worldviews and treatment practices, historian Kurmo Konsa discussed the perfection of human from homunculus to cyborg, and thus introduced the theme of the conference – the rough road of possible realities and interpretation of their populations.

Folklorists Mare Kõiva and Marju Torp focused on the relations of environment and health: the former observed the peculiarities of online medicine, which emerged together with advances in information technology, and analysed the online interview with Vormsi Enn, a famous Estonian folk healer, and the latter recalled the influence of the physical environment on health relying on the peculiarities of Estonian landscape. The presentation of Lauri Niilisk, a tai chi instructor and MA student of health care economy, discussed two aspects that are closely interrelated and at superficial glance even conflicting in tai chi – namely, the healthy side and the belligerent side and their manifestation in the western context. The first conference day concluded with the presentations by physical anthropologists Jaan and Tiiu Kasmel, discussing the studies of the physical development of Estonian schoolchildren in 1956–1958 in Tartu, and the districts of Tartu and Elva (presently Tartu County), and the folk medicine on conferences of science history in the Baltic States during 1958–1959.

Presentations on the first half of the second day of the conference focused on Estonian folk medicine. The topic of an overview by Raivo Kalle, MA student of botany and mycology at the Estonian University of Life Sciences, was early foreign species in Estonian folk medicine. Pharmacist Stella Kuhi analysed the introduction of medicines in the eighteenth-nineteenth-century Estonian language calendar literature; Renata Sõukand, a PhD student at the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu, showed on the example of two plants the transformation of foreign into own. The following presentation was also directly connected with folk medicine: Ave Tupits, a PhD student at the Chair of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu, observed various tendencies of research into folk medicine. PhD student of classical philology Kaarina Rein introduced an approach to medicine written down by a seventeenth-century student of Academia Gustaviana. The conference concluded with three presentations on alcohol policy in Estonia. The presentation by psychologist Anti Liiv on the characteristic features of alcohol policy in Estonian in the 20th century provided a thorough overview of the problem; MA student at the Demographic Insti-



Figure 1. The presentation by Anti Liiv provided an overview of the problem of alcoholism in Estonia. Photo by Alar Madisson, May 2006.

tute of the Tallinn University Kelli Arusaar discussed the tight ban on alcohol in the final years of the Soviet period in Estonia as a result of Gorbachev's alcohol policy, and the presentation of Ken Kalling, PhD student at the Department of History at the University of Tartu, about the relations of the temperance movement and eugenics emphasised the influence of the former on the national movement.

The presentations were followed by a round table discussion about the pre-

sentation of a foreign cultural phenomenon or object, how it is either adopted as own or tried to get rid of, how it is reflected in health behaviour, and how the process can be studied. Foreign is not only something that is labelled as such. For example, calendula or camomile that are well known to all are foreign species, which have been introduced in Estonia only a century or two ago. By now they have become 'own'. 'Foreign' has arrived in our culture in physical form and by the culture area, it has adapted here and transformed into 'own'.

FOLKLORE AND RELIGION BETWEEN TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION

**International Conference Ljubljana – Celje (Slovenia), 7–12
September 2006**

Ingrid Slavec Gradišnik

The Institute of Slovenian Ethnology SRC SASA had provided the initiative for and was the chief organizer (with the Slovenian Academy Sciences and Arts and the SIEF) of the international conference taking place in Ljubljana and Celje, commemorating the centenary of the birth of academy member Niko Kuret. Kuret provided the initiative to establish this institute and was its leading researcher for many years.

At our two-day conference in Ljubljana on 7 and 8 September 2006, we first of all wished to draw attention to Kuret's exceptional contribution as a scholar. He not only

laid the foundation for the ethnological institute and steadily developed it as an institution, but also contributed valuable research in the fields of ethnology and folklore studies in which his successors continue to discover scholarly and professional challenges. Without attempting to delineate or limit his scholarly and professional profile in advance, it appears that one of the main elements of his research was tradition – its recognition, its evaluation, and finally its endurance – and with this, its significance today.

In Section One (*Tribute to Niko Kuret*), the participants presented papers relating most directly to the person and work of Niko Kuret. A personality of Niko Kuret was outlined by France Bernik. Kuret's son, Primož Kuret described his father's life step by step; decades long fellowship with Kuret in the Institute was depicted by his companion Milko Matičetov. His scholarly ethnological horizons were delineated by Ingrid Slavec Gradišnik, and Kuret's research in Carinthia by Helena Ložar-Podlogar. Peter Jan Margry, vice president of the SIEF, honored him as one of the founding members of the Société d'Ethnologie et de Folklore. Two presentations focused on his early interest in children's games (Igor Cvetko) and puppet theatre (Jelena Sitar). His pioneering engagement in ethnographic film juxtaposed with contemporary trends in visual research was discussed by Naško Križnar, and Roberto Dapit linked together Kuret's research of the festive year of the Slovenians with dilemmas of contemporary research issues.

Section Two (*Tradition, Innovations, and Reconstructions*) included papers on research from contemporary perspective by those continuing Kuret's work. The focus was on elucidating the phenomenon of tradition from the perspective of current research, its transformation and research efforts within it, and especially research topics that were at the center of Kuret's work (e.g., rituals). The following papers were presented: "(Re)construction of the festivals in the yearly cycle" (Mateja Habinc), "New elements of social relation in village communities in Slovakia" (Zita Škovierová), "Tradition and innovation in contemporary Slovakia" (Kornélia Jakubiková), "The role of work customs in an agricultural community in the light of economic and social changes" (Saša Poljak Istenič), "Birth customs in the context of social changes, or: customs and their changeability" (Irena Rožman), "Images of women in folk religion and customs – From ancient beliefs to contemporary worship" (Monika Kropelj), "Between ethnology and archaeology – Oral tradition concerning *Baba* monoliths and underground caves" (Katja Hrobat), "Understanding ritual through Slovenian folk song" (Marija Klobčar) "The *Štehvance* in the Sava River Valley" (Nena Židov), "Carnival customs in Benecia/Benečija and their Social Significance" (Mojca Ravnik), "Repetitive symbols and the procedures of open meanings – Carnival 1984–2004" (Ivan Lozica and Joško Ćaleta). Also the concluding presentation "On the reconstruction of ritual practices of Jurij Fikfak and his two guests (his informers)" was dedicated to carnival rituals.

All of the mentioned presentations showed that tradition should not be understood only as a cultural process that is some kind of nexus of past and present research in ethnology and folklore studies, but also as a phenomenon that (in a manner of creative reconstruction) is created and recreated not only by the people themselves, but also by researchers and their scholarly and professional activity in a more or less conscious and reflected manner.

Niko Kuret was exceptionally active on the international scene and enjoyed an honourable reputation in scholarly circles abroad. Among other things, as mentioned, he was a founding member of the Société d'Ethnologie et de Folklore (SIEF). It was partially with Kuret in mind that the society's working group on the ethnology of religion, chaired by Gábor Barna, selected Celje for its fifth meeting titled *Senses and Religion* because folk religiosity was also one of Kuret's significant areas of research. In this part of the conference, experts on religious questions and folk belief seek to shed light on certain issues in the relationship between faith and the senses, or the manner and extent to which the senses form part of folk religiosity and its practices.

The conferences in Ljubljana and Celje were connected by two events:

- The concert "Zajuckaj in zapoj" (Shout and Sing), which has been prepared every first weekend in September for a number of years by the Institute of Ethnomusicology SRC SASA. This year's concert, which started at 8 p.m. on Friday, 7 September, was titled *Bingale, bongale...* and presented various styles of *pritrkavanje* (traditional Slovenian rhythmic bell chiming) at the Church of St John the Baptist in Trnovo, Ljubljana;

- An excursion on Saturday, 9 September 2006, took participants on a roundabout route from Ljubljana to Celje.

At the conference venue in Ljubljana, the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, there was an exhibition featuring a selection of Kuret's works on ethnology and folklore (compiled by institute's librarians Vanja Huzjan and Sinja Zemljič-Golob), which intended to highlight Kuret's many years of extensive and diverse professional and scholarly achievements.

Presentations from the conference in Ljubljana are to be published next year, some of them in a book on Niko Kuret and others in *Traditiones* (Journal of the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology and of the Ethnomusicological Institute SRC SASA), Vol. 36, No. 1, and the proceedings from *Senses and Religion* conference in *Traditiones* in No. 2.

IN ST PETERSBURG ON VEPSIAN MATTERS

Kristi Salve

On October 4-6 an international seminar was carried out at the Russian Museum of Ethnography in St Petersburg. The main organiser and financier of the event was the Russian and East-European Institute in Finland under the head of Seppo Lallukka. The seminar, which was referred to as 'the Vepsian seminar' from the very beginning, was officially called *The Vepsians and Ethnocultural Changes in the 20th Century*.

I have no patience to wait until the last paragraph of the following overview to express my satisfaction with the event. On the one hand the event met with success because all the participants were in one way or another, some even in different ways at the same time deeply involved in Vepsian matters, regardless of the different disciplines and approaches represented at the event. Seminar participants came from Fin-

land, St Petersburg, Petrozavodsk and Estonia. Author of this overview was the only Estonian speaker at the seminar; however, T.-K. Raudalainen and M. Arukask were given the opportunity to present their documentary.

The opening speech by Seppo Lallukka and Olga Fishman having been made, the floor was given to Riho Grünthal, professor of Balto-Finnic languages at the Helsinki University, who has conducted student fieldwork expeditions in Vepsian villages. His topic dealt with subjects from the 19th century and explored the beginning of Vepsian language studies with the first recorded materials and identification of the language. At the time this was carried out by scholars of Finnish origin. In a later period, the language materials were systematically collected and systematised, and since the 1930s Russian scholars have been involved in these activities. According to Grünthal the interest towards the Vepsian language results from the national awakening of the Finns on the one hand and advances in the methods of linguistic research on the other.

Maria Mullonen, a leading collector, publisher and scholar of Vepsian language material, gave an overview of such materials held in the institute of Karelian Research Centre, and the history of these collections. Her presentation also informed of publications and research topics. The speaker worried about transcribing of more than 300 hours of audio recordings, even more so because magnetic tape recordings have already become outdated and the quality worsens from year to year.

Irma Mullonen, an expert in Vepsian toponymics, spoke about the ethnocultural potential of Vepsian toponyms. The author discussed the possibility of using (micro-) toponymics to determine the onetime settlement areas of Vepsians, and also to receive information about the history of Vepsian language. Irma Mullonen provided a thorough overview of fieldwork in the Kema River basin and the upper course of the Suda River, Vologda Oblast, which was started in the 1990s and has been continued since. The Vepsians who lived in these areas and were Russianised by the end of the 19th century formed the link between eastern and southern Vepsians.

An interesting presentation, or to be more precise, the sources that the presentation was based on, was delivered by L. Korolkova, who works at the Russian Ethnography Museum and has studied, for example, the peculiarities of Vepsian clothing. The speaker explored the representations of life in Vepsian villages in the local written press in the 1920s–1930s. The titles of the newspapers published were quite familiar for someone coming from a former Socialist Republic: *The New Way*, *The Red Sheltozero*, *Lenin's Way*, *Vepsian Truth*, *The Red Flag*, *The Oyat's Truth*, etc. The presentation focused on the issue of eliminating illiteracy. The newspapers were ideologically extremely biased: a fine example is atheist propaganda, which was given much space, and emphasis on class struggle. The contrivances of class enemies were even believed to be behind the problem of children's failure at school and the slow acquisition of literacy by adult learners.

B. Musaiev from the St Petersburg Institute of History analysed the Balto-Finns of the Leningrad Oblast as the object of the Soviet nationalist politics. While in the 1920s, ethnic village councils and schools were being founded and representatives of ethnic minorities were tolerated, since the establishment of collective farms it was the Balto-Finnic minorities (especially the Finns and Estonians who were wealthier in the oblast) that were more often than not victims of repressions. During 1937–1939, all

Balto-Finnic groups, both indigenous and settlers, were being persecuted. Ethnic schools, village councils, cultural institutions, journalism were banned. The ethnic population fell victim to repressions.

V. Lapin, a well-known scholar of music and culture from the Institute of World Culture, dedicated his presentation to 'the Shimozero Tragedy', a name the scholar used to refer to the fall of this onetime large East-Vepsian village group. The speaker mostly relied on recollections recorded from his former teacher, a Vepsian, S. Gavrilov in 2001.

Ethnologist Z. Strogalshchikova, who fiercely fought for the Vepsian independence in the period towards the end of the Soviet regime, shed light on the Vepsian population at the time. Since then it has proved to be considerably larger than what was presented in the official statistics. The scholar has later carried out surveys in 1994 and 2002, which quite expectedly show that within a dozen or so years the number of Vepsians has decreased considerably, since birth rate has declined, the older generation has died and the few young people have moved elsewhere. Certainly, this is also involves adopting a new identity: while the younger generation might be able to understand and speak (some) Vepsian, they still consider themselves as Russians. In this rather unfortunate situation, the growth in the level of education among the Vepsians is nevertheless positive.

S. Egorov, delegate representing the University of St. Petersburg, provided a comparative overview of the Vepsian population in two settlements – Shugozero and Pashozero. The former was inhabited from the 1960s onward by younger people from southern and mid-Vepsian villages. These people preserved their accustomed lifestyle, but under the influence of the much larger Russian majority in the village they too adopted the Russian language and became the passive speakers of their mother tongue, and their children no longer understand their ancestral language. Pashozero was settled in the 1980s mostly by old age pensioners from dying villages. These people were not involved in household chores, but they have kept their mother tongue in everyday communication.

Nina Zaitseva discussed very proficiently language planning on the example of Vepsian language. She pointed out resources and stages of literary language development (Vepsian language with its dialects, closely related languages, etc). Most of the points argued by Zaitseva had already been put to practice, so that the speaker had fine examples to illustrate the presentation. Here I would like to share my personal experience in broadening the functions of the Vepsian language – namely, our correspondence with Alevtina Andreeva on the matter of the international film project was held in Vepsian language. This experience also confirmed that the new terminology is quite successful.

Igor Brodski, author of the first Vepsian novel *Fish Shore*, was already standing out in Vepsian fiction before taking up Finno-Ugric studies. In his seminar presentation he spoke about Vepsian phytonyms, comparing plant names with their equivalents in related languages and the principles of compound noun derivation on the example of phytonyms. Personally, the most intriguing examples were the equivalent Komi plant names, since the (folkloric) Vepsian-Komi relations have recently caught my scholarly attention.

Kaija Heikkinen, professor at the University of Joensuu, has been involved in the Vepsian studies since 1991, from which time the Vepsian settlements became acces-

sible to the foreigners. This presentation discussed the problems faced by a Finnish (or otherwise ‘foreign’) scholar that hinder the full understanding of the studied society. Heikkinen also pointed out that an ethnologist is tempted to focus on ethnic characteristics, but a culture is never homogeneous. Thus, more attention should be paid to the polyphony (in the Bakhtinian sense of the word).

Irina Vinokurova has studied the Vepsian issues since the beginning of her scholarly career, and has contributed most by researching calendar traditions. Her presentation discussed the changes in the celebration of a village feast in two (South and East) Vepsian villages within 20 years. The material on the years 2001–2002 was video-recorded. Celebrating holidays or festivities is a reflection of the period. The speaker recognised the major role that village feasts tend to have even nowadays, even though villages are slowly dying out.

Olga Zhukova, the youngest speaker at the conference, who came from Kurba and has studied in Petrozavodsk, introduced the past and the present of teaching the Vepsian language at the University of Petrozavodsk, which was a useful information indeed. Zhukova has worked as a teacher after graduating from the university, is currently a PhD student and her thesis explores the vocabulary of laments.

The seminar was concluded with the presentation by the author of this overview about Vepsian folklore and literature, focusing on which narrative plots and stylistic devices have been used in newer Vepsian literature, and to what degree they have been used, what has the Vepsian folklore to offer to the young Vepsian fiction, and finally also arguing that relying on folklore is by no means a *sine qua non*.

In addition to listening to the presentations, the participants were offered an opportunity to watch three documentaries. One of these was a traditional ethnographic documentary with interviews, nature scenes, recording of an event, etc; the second was a project documentary by a Vepsian voluntary youth organisation *Vepsän vezad* entitled *Vepsän sai*, which was a rather elegant documentary about staged wedding traditions; and the third documentary presented was by Estonians Madis Arukask and Taisto-Kalevi Raudalainen entitled *Buried Alive*, and was a portrait film about a North-Vepsian woman who leads a secluded life.

The modestly organised seminar offered excellent opportunities for informal exchange of thoughts. Printed materials brought along from the seminar are also very valuable. Apart from minor personal inconveniences on the way back, the overall impressions of the seminar were entirely positive.