

BALTIC WORLDVIEW: FROM MYTHOLOGY TO FOLKLORE

The international conference 'Baltic Worldview: From Mythology to Folklore' took place in Vilnius in July 8–10, 2009. The initial idea behind this conference was to look at the Baltic worldview as manifestation of the spiritual culture of the Baltic Sea region, which transgresses the linguistic boundaries. Since the end of the 19th century, when grouping of cultures according to their linguistic characteristics was introduced, a distinction between Lithuanians, Latvians and Prussians, belonging to the Indo-Europeans, on the one hand, and Estonians, Karelians, Finns and other nations regarded as Finno-Ugrians, on the other hand, occurred. Because of this linguistic distinction, a gap in the research of eastern Baltic folklore, mythology and cultural heritage in general appeared. The purpose of the conference was to communicate the Baltic worldview as common cultural contents in spite of the linguistic boundaries, which manifests in forms of language, folklore, mythology, religion and other kinds of culture.

The conference was organized by the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore in cooperation with the Center of Research in Imagination at Grenoble's Stendhal University (*Centre de recherches sur l'imaginaire Université Stendhal, Grenoble 3*). Lithuania and France have for over a century been connected by mythology and folklore studies, starting with collections of folktales edited in France by the famous poet of Lithuanian origin Oscar Milosz, such as *Contes et Fables de la vieille Lithuanie* (1933), *Contes lithuaniens de ma Mère l'Oye* (1933), continuing through the studies of Lithuanian mythology by the Parisian semiotician Algirdas Julius Greimas and to the works by other French contemporary researchers, interpreting Lithuanian mythology today. France was represented at the conference by Professor Philippe Walter, head of the *Centre de recherches sur l'imaginaire*, and by Christian Abry from the *Centre Alpin et Rhodanien d'Ethnologie, Musée Dauphinois*.

The presentations at the conference comprised various contexts of the Baltic worldview and manifested different methodological approaches. The conference opened with research on myths and rituals. Emily Lyle (Edinburgh) introduced the group of Prussian deities described in the 16th century in the chronicle by Simon Grunau in the light of the Indo-European pantheon. Philippe Walter (Grenoble) talked about the most ancient Lithuanian myth from 1261 describing Sovijus, who established the ritual practice of cremation. The act by Sovijus, who hunted down the wild boar with nine spleens before stepping into the underworld, was compared in the presentation to the Celtic myth of Finn and the Norse myth of Fáfñir; bearing in mind that boar (swine), salmon and dragon are mythic equivalents of primordial beings. Daiva Vaitkevičienė (Vilnius) introduced the libation ritual of the Balts referring to the genetic and typological parallels in other Indo-European religions. Vykintas Vaitkevičius (Klaipėda) discussed issues of religious terminology of the Baltic region in his paper entitled "Tracing the Baltic Religious Terms: the Lithuanian *stabas* 'Pagan Idol'".

Attempts at reconstruction of the ancient worldview were undertaken by Aušra Žičkienė (Vilnius) in her paper on the musical code in pre-Christian culture, by Teuvo Laitila (Joensuu) discussing the notion of the "limited good" in a self-contained community of the Border Karelia. Eila Stepanova (Helsinki) examined the world view registered in folk laments and the common motifs of Karelian and Lithuanian la-

ments. Possibilities of using linguistic data in reconstruction of functions ascribed to the Prussian gods were introduced by Rolandas Kregždys (Vilnius).

Four papers comprised the section of the conference dedicated to the features of prehistoric religion and to the contemporary situation of the indigenous religion. Ergo-Hart Västriik (Tartu) investigated the Peko cult in the vernacular Setu religion. Valdis Rūsiņš (Rīga) questioned the result of the Baltic and Slavic cultural contacts, namely, the cult of the thunder god Perkūnas/Perkons, supplemented by the cult of female deities, that is, the daughters and daughters-in-law of the thunder god. Jonas Trinkūnas (Vilnius) discussed the ethic principles of the ancient Lithuanian religion, while Eglė Trinkauskė (Syracuse, USA) described the concept of indigenous religion and revealed the traits of Lithuanian indigenous religion in contemporary Lithuanian culture.

A substantial group of presenters discussed the functioning of myths and folk narratives in the Baltic region. On the basis of folk narrative about the theft of the thunder instrument (AT 1148B), Frog (London/Helsinki) proposed an idea of the existence of a circum-Baltic mythology. Dwelling on the Lithuanian data and its analogues in other countries, Jūratė Šlekonytė (Vilnius) analyzed the phenomenon of the 'Wild Hunt'. Leszek Słupecki (Rzeszow) compared the images of werewolves in Baltic and Slavic cultures. Christian Abry (Grenoble) searched for parallels between the Lithuanian *nėrovės* ('mermaids') and *Naroves* from Savoy, Vallée d'Aoste and Piemont regions. Lina Būgienė (Vilnius) analyzed the image of Lithuanian *aitvaras* and the supernatural milk-stealer from other national folk narrative traditions of the Baltic region. Ülo Valk (Tartu) discussed the ghost stories in relation to social change.

Very colorful and interesting papers addressed issues related to cultural landscape. Andra Simniškytė (Vilnius) presented an analysis of the funeral monuments called 'giant graves' and discussed the cultural background of this name. Andrej Pleterški (Ljubljana) posed a hypothesis of Baltic and Slavic cultural contacts, reflected by coinciding Lithuanian theonyms and certain sacred place names in Slovenian mountains.

A separate section of the conference was dedicated to issues related to methods and sources. Aldis Pūtelis (Rīga) discussed historical documents as sources for the research of Latvian mythology and the lost tradition. Toms Ķencis (Rīga/Tartu) analyzed methodological problems of Latvian mythological research. David Šimeček (Prague) introduced the hitherto practically unknown manuscript article by J. H. Máchal (1855–1939) on Baltic mythology.

Five poster presentations were also included in the conference programme. Among them, particular attention was focused on the poster presentation by Mare Kõiva and Andres Kuperjanov (Tartu), entitled 'The Moon in Baltic-Finnic Mythology', in which a hypothesis of the particularly close proximity between the Baltic and Finnic cosmonyms was proposed; and the interpretation of the images on Prussian saddles from Alejka (Kaliningrad region) dating from the 11th–12th century, presented by Roman Shiroukhov (Klaipėda) and Konstantin Skvortsov (Kaliningrad).

Among the events related to the conference, a discussion under the title 'Studies of the Myths Today' which took place at the French Cultural Center on July 8 should be mentioned. At this event, Philippe Walter and Christian Abry made presentations of the meaning of myths and their functions in contemporary culture. Also, as part of the



Conference participants near the Open Air Museum of the Centre of Europe, where the conference was held. Photo by Vykintas Vaitkevičius, 2009.

cultural programme, a performance of ancient Lithuanian polyphonic songs *sutartinės* and of the ancient folk musical instruments was organized at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore.

The conference concluded with a special excursion to the ancient Baltic holy places in southern Lithuania, during which Lithuanian historical and mythological heritage was introduced by Vykintas Vaitkevičius.

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