

NEWS IN BRIEF

ON THE JUBILEE OF EMILY LYLE

On 19 December 2022, **Dr Emily Lyle**, the founder and the Honorary Chair of the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group (RY WG), Honorary Fellow of the University of Edinburgh, will be celebrating her jubilee.

Since the inaugural meeting of the RY WG on 11 July 2003, at the Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh, and its official establishment at the 8th SIEF Congress in Marseille, which followed on 29 April 2004, Emily has been the key source of ideas, the engine, and the heart of the group. Due to her academic knowledge and talent, her communicative skills, humour, and humanism, the group has become a prominent international scientific network, resulting in dozens of collaborative projects, conferences, seminars, and publications. *The Yearbook of the RY WG* was also Emily's idea and brainchild, and she has gone on to become the general editor and a contributor to all the volumes.

In 1984, Emily also founded the Traditional Cosmology Society with its innovative journal *Cosmos*.

Emily has been and always is ready for investigation. Her research comprises an incredible variety of data and examples from all the eras and spaces, reorganized in an innovative and unique way that leads to unexpected and ground-breaking conclusions. An internationally acclaimed scholar of ballad studies, she has also worked with the topics related to gods, colours, gender, celebrations, rituals, mythology, and calendar festivals, bringing all these data and all of her thoughts about them together in her wide range of books, research articles and papers. Among her own and co-authored books are: *The Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection* (co-edited, 8 volumes; Aberdeen University Press, 1981–2002); *Scottish Ballads* (editor, Canongate, 1994; Barnes & Noble, 1995); *Fairies and Folk: Approaches to the Scottish Ballad Tradition* (Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007); *Ten Gods: A New Approach to Defining the Mythological Structures of the Indo-Europeans* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012); and *Robert Burns and the Discovery and Re-Creation of Scottish Song* (with Katherine Campbell as a co-author; Musica Scotica Trust, 2020). Emily has also published numerous articles over the course of her career, one of her most recent being “Structures for the Transfer of Power in Ibn Fadlān's Account of the Rus” (*Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift*, 2022, No. 74).

This year, Emily participated in the 14th RY WG Conference “Commerce and Traditions” in Riga, with her paper “The Festival Year in Relation to the Spatiotemporal Perception of the Cosmos”, and in the 15th Conference of the International Association

for Comparative Mythology, “Sacred Ground: Place and Space in Mythology and Religion”, in Belgrade, with her paper “The Indo-European Deities of the Directions as Represented in Ritual”.

A persistent scholar, as Emily was characterized in the title of the festschrift dedicated to her (2007), keywords such as *cosmos*, *power*, and *myth* have been central notions that run throughout her work; arguably they are also central to her nature and her soul.

We all wish you many more years of good health, dear Emily.

The SIEF Ritual Year Working Group



Emily Lyle giving her paper at the 10th Conference of the SIEF RY WG “Magic in Rituals and Rituals in Magic”, September 2014, Innsbruck, Austria. Photograph by Nina Vlaskina. Personal archive.

THE 14TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE IN ESTONIAN STUDIES, AND THE 5TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE “BALKAN AND BALTIC STATES IN UNITED EUROPE: HISTORY, RELIGION AND CULTURE V”

Tartu, Estonia & online, 18–22 September 2022

From September 18 to 22, 2022, the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu, Estonia, hosted two parallel and joint conferences – the 14th Annual Conference of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies, and the 5th International Conference “The Balkan and Baltic States in United Europe: History, Religion and Culture V”. The conference was held with the support of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies, the Department of Folkloristics of the Estonian Literary Museum, the Estonian Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and the International Society for Balkan and Baltic Studies. The organizing committee of the double international scientific forum included the following researchers from Estonia and Bulgaria: Mare Kõiva, Ekaterina Anastasova, Svetoslava Toncheva, and Anastasiya Fiadotava (heads), Sergey Troitskiy and Maris Kuperjanov (secretaries), Evgenia Troeva-Grigorova, Piret Voolaid, Milena Lubenova, Tõnno Jonuks, and Reet Hiimäe. The committee chose the topic “Nature and Culture in Ritual, Narrative and Belief” as the main unifying theme of the 14th Annual Conference of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies. The selection of the main research topic by the above-mentioned researchers is based on the assumption that the binary opposition nature/culture (formulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss) is often seen in traditional and modern societies, and that this opposition finds multiple applications in many folk genres, in beliefs and customs of the calendar and family life cycle, in folk religious practices, in language, etc. On the other hand, the organizing committee of the event assumed that nature and culture are not always opposed; they are mutually connected and complementary. Based on this, the main unifying theme absolutely fits into the context of the relatively newly emerging fields of research aimed at a different, non-anthropocentric study of the world-more-than-human geography, multispecies ethnography, archaeology of fullness, etc., based on the posthuman vision of the world (J. Igoe, W. Dressler, E. Kohn, E. Maris, B. Büscher and R. Fletcher, S. Toncheva, etc.). The interest, according to the above-mentioned researchers, in such a study of the world in postmodern society is due to the increasingly acute challenges of climate change and, accordingly, the cultural attitude towards nature, actions and debates related to development and sustainability, standing at the centre of European and global rhetoric.

Finally, the choice of the theme stems from the fact that the study of the nature/culture dichotomy has become a broad interdisciplinary field where the humanities and social sciences collaborate with the earth and environmental sciences, economics, health, and food security. With such a focus on local and traditional environmental knowledge, and European mechanisms for nature protection, the lecture topics had as exemplary focal points: economy / political economy and coexistence of human and nature, arts and nature, nature/culture relationship in religion, traditional beliefs and practices, in festive ritual and life, in Paganism and Neo-Paganism. Meanwhile, as this 5th consecutive international conference marked fourteen years of meetings and discussions on the Balkans and the Baltic region in United Europe, the questions it asked were related to it, and were as follows: What has changed in the Balkan-Baltic region in the last fourteen years, and in this sense, how is its new history interpreted and rewritten? What is the situation with ethnic and religious communities there, and what new topics of debate are emerging in the Balkan-Baltic research space?

The conference was extremely eventful throughout the five days it was held. The first day, Sunday, 18 September, began with a seven-hour pre-conference workshop on the topic “Ecology of Nature and Ecology of Culture”. The next day of the conference, 19 September, coincided with the first day of the working week, Monday, kicking off the conference programme that was preceded by an official opening ceremony of the event with **Piret Voolaid** (Estonian Literary Museum) as the moderator. As VIP guests, **Tõnis Lukas**, Minister of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia, and **Merike Kiipus**, the Acting Director of the Estonian Literary Museum, delivered congratulatory speeches to the organizers, lecturers, and guests of the international scientific forum in the main hall of the Estonian Literary Museum. Congratulatory words were also presented by **Mare Kõiva**, Head of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies (Estonian Literary Museum), and online via Zoom connection by scientists from Bulgaria and Russia – **Ekaterina Anastasova** (Association of Balkan and Baltic Studies; Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), and **Irina Sedakova** (Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences).

The conference programme included four plenary lectures, given to the scientific audience by four researchers: Krzysztof Duda, Tõnno Jonuks, Marju Kõivupuu, and Yuri Berezkin. The first plenary lecture that opened the double international conference was the lecture by **Tõnno Jonuks** (Estonian Literary Museum), host of the event, on the topic “Nature, Nation, and Religion – The Appearance of Nature-Religion in Estonia”, with moderator **Eda Kalmre** (Estonian Literary Museum). Tõnno Jonuks is an archaeologist by profession, and his research interests are related to the materiality of religion between the early Mesolithic and the modern era, and the history of Estonian religions. His study of the prehistoric materiality of religion led him to a modern perception of

the past beliefs, and thus the religions of nature and modern paganism were a genuine continuity of ancient beliefs.

The second plenary lecture of the conference, also given on the same day, was by the Polish cultural anthropologist **Krzysztof Duda**, Head of the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Tourism at the Institute of Cultural Studies at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, and Director of the Institute of Zootechnics in Krakow. The author of national and international publications in the fields of cultural anthropology, history of science and culture, Dr Duda is a member of the American Anthropological Association, the Carpathian Society, and *Res Carpathica*. In addition to this, Krzysztof Duda is a member of the History of Science Section of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Scientific Policy Committee affiliated with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland. His lecture was on the topic “Highlanders of the Eastern and Western Carpathians: Nature-People-Culture”. The moderator of the lecture was **Mare Kalda** (Estonian Literary Museum).

The third plenary lecture was also given by a representative of the hosts – **Marju Kõivupuu** (Centre for Landscape and Culture, School of Humanities, Tallinn University). She is Chairman of the Expert Council of Historical Natural Sanctuaries at the National Heritage Board of Estonia, folklorist and culturo-logist whose monographs reflecting her research interests related to the relationship between people, landscape and cultural heritage have been recognized not only at Tallinn University but also nationally throughout Estonia. Marju Kõivupuu supervises PhD candidates and gives lectures to graduate students on topics related to Estonian and comparative folklore, worldviews and religions, landscape heritage and everyday culture. She gave her plenary lecture on the fourth day of the conference, 21 September, on “Neo/Paganism and Nature Protection in the 21st Century”, moderated by **Piret Voolaid** (Estonian Literary Museum).

The fourth plenary speaker of the conference was Russian researcher **Yuri E. Berezkin**. He is Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor of the Department of Anthropology of the European University at Saint Petersburg, Head of the American Department of Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (*Kunstkamera*) of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and member of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. His research topics include cultural and political anthropology, comparative and non-classical mythology, folklore databases, distribution of folklore and mythological motifs as a source of data on ancient migration processes, prehistoric migrations and spheres of interaction and archaeology, and iconography of Native American art. Related to Professor Berezkin’s research interests listed above, he lectured on the closing day of the conference, 22 September, on “Prehistory in the Looking Glass of Oral Traditions (Following Traces of Ancient Mythologies in the Post A.D. 1500 Folklore)”. The plenary lecture was moderated by **Mare Kõiva** (Estonian Literary Museum).

The conference continued with the scientific papers presented in thematic sections. In section Gender – 1, with moderator **Anastasiya Fiadotava** (Estonian Literary Museum), three lectures were given: “Women’s External Pieties and Art: A Case of Old Believer Journal *Rodnaia Starina* (1927–1933)” by **Danila Rygovskiy** (University of Tartu), “Men’s Stories: Military Legends in Estonian Folklore” by **Eda Kalmre** (Estonian Literary Museum), and “Straight Edge, Veganism and Masculinity: Extreme American Subculture” by **Aimar Ventsel** (University of Tartu). In the Special Report section led by the same moderator, the floor was given to **Aado Lintrop** (Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum) for the lecture “The Beast with Many Faces: Bears in Mansi Folklore and Mythology”.

Arūnas Vaicekauskas, moderator from the Vytautas Magnus University, led the Space and Water section, in which lectures were given by **Evy Johanne Håland** (Lifetime Government Grant Holder, Norwegian *statsstipendiat*, Arts Council, Norway) on “Water Sources and the Sacred in Modern and Ancient Greece”, and by **Victoria Legkikh** (Technical University of Munich) on “Holy Patrons of the City and Their Relics: From the Medieval Time to Modernity”. Meanwhile, in the Minorities section, led by moderator **Nikolai Kuznetsov** (Estonian Literary Museum), two lectures could be listened to: “Mordva (Ersa) Material in Estonian Collections and Ersa-Moksha Communities in Estonia” by **Natalia Ermakov**, and “Bilingual Ditties in the Modern Life of Udmurts of the Village Dyrdashur (Sharkhanskiy Rayon of Udmurt Republic)” by **Pavel Kutergin** (University of Tartu). The final event on this day of the conference was the workshop on the topic “Sacred Sites as Sites of Problems” with the participants **Kristel Kivari** (University of Tartu), **Elo-Hanna Seljamaa** (University of Tartu), **Tõnno Jonuks** (Estonian Literary Museum), and **Lona Päll** (Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum).

On 20 September, ten sections worked in parallel at the conference, including the Gender-2 section, which was a continuation of the connecting scientific topic in the Gender-1 section, presented on the previous day of the conference. Its moderator **Lina Gergova** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) gave the floor to **Alexander A. Novik** (Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Saint Petersburg State University) for the lecture “From Headscarf to Hijab: Headdresses of Muslim Albanian Women in the Changing Balkans in the 20th – Early 21st Century”, and to **Monika Balikienė** (Vilnius Institute for Advanced Studies) for the lecture “Love Magic: Spells on Menstrual Blood in Lithuania”.

In the section Forms of the Relationship Between Human and Nature – 1, with moderator **Irina Stahl** (Institute of Sociology, Romanian Academy of Sciences), the following scientific reports were presented: “Old Shrines, New Worshipers: Cultural Practices for Connection with Nature” by **Evgenia Troeva** (Institute of Ethnology and

Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), “Ecological Funeral: New Ideas in Contemporary Lithuania” by **Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužolienė** (Vytautas Magnus University), “Developmentalism vs. Environmentalism or How Biodiversity and Grazing Livestock Husbandry Coexist?” by **Atanaska Stancheva** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), and “Convivial Conservation in Theory and Practice: Human-Bear Coexistence in the Mountains of Bulgaria” by **Svetoslava Toncheva** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) and **Robert Fletcher** (Wageningen University, Netherlands).

After the presented reports, the topic of the relationship between human and nature smoothly moved to the section Human and Animal, with moderator **Svetoslava Toncheva** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), where the following lectures were given: “Natural and Cultural Dimensions of a Snake in Bulgarian Folklore and Rituals: Semiotic and Ethnolinguistic Approach” by **Irina Sedakova** (Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences), “Diseases in Traditional Culture and Contemporary Society (Smallpox Variola Vera and Monkeypox)” by **Ekaterina Anastasova** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), and “Mythologems and Motifs of the ATU 570* (Pied Piper) Plot Type in the Texts and Beliefs of the Belarusians and Estonians. Zoofolkloristics” by **Elena Boganeva** (Centre for Research of Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature, NASB) and **Mare Kõiva** (Estonian Literary Museum). This section, like the section Forms of the Relationship Between Human and Nature – 1, contributed thematically to the scientific work on 21 September, the penultimate day of the conference, of the section Human-Nature Relationships – 2, moderated by **Katre Kikas** (Estonian Literary Museum). Three very interesting lectures were presented there: “Zoofolkloristics: Water Horses in Belief Narratives – 3” by **Mare Kõiva** (Estonian Literary Museum), “Colours in Belief Narratives” by **Andres Kuperjanov** (Estonian Literary Museum), and “Nature in the Service of Satire: Zoomorphic Caricatures in the Russian Empire 1890–1905. The Balkan and Baltic Case” by **Sergey Troitskiy** (Estonian Literary Museum). The Human and Nature – 2 section was preceded by two more scientific reports on the same topic, united in the Human and Nature – 1 section with moderator **Ieva Pigozne** (Institute of Latvian History, University of Latvia). These were “The Tribal Narrative of Reverence and Resilience: A Study of the Entangled Natureculture Relation in the Folklore of Gujjars and Bakerwals Tribe of Jammu and Kashmir” by **Tanu Gupta** and **Quleen Kaur Bijral** (Indian Institute of Technology Jammu), and “Walking as Artistic Research: More-than-Human Agency in a Performative Ritual” by **Mari Keski-Korsu** (Aalto University). Finally, the topics human/animal and human/nature were supported by another very important topic – “Protection of Nature/Culture”, which gave the title to

a section moderated by **Liisi Laineste** (Estonian Literary Museum). The lectures given there were: “Study of Divination Technologies to Enhance a Deep Listening of Nature” by **Juan Duarte** (Aalto University), and “Nature for Protection, Nature for Sale: Conservation, Livelihoods and Social Conflicts in the Case of Bolata Bay in Bulgaria” by **Ivaylo Markov** and **Desislava Pileva** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences).

Nine of the research papers at the conference were united by the space sections. In the section Space – 1, moderated by **Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužoliienė** (Vytautas Magnus University), the floor was first given to **Irina Stahl** (Institute of Sociology, Romanian Academy of Sciences) for the lecture “Crosses and Flowers of the Fields. A New Form of Romanian Religious Folk-Art”. This was followed by **Milena Lyubenova** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) with the paper “The Hidirellez Feast in Northeastern Bulgaria”, and **Solveiga Krumina-Konkova** (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, University of Latvia) and **Karlis Aleksandrs Konkovs** (Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences, University of Latvia) with the presentation “Life by the Lake: Lubana Region and Its People in Nature, History and Culture”. In the section Space-2, the moderator was **Gavrail Gavrailov** (Plovdiv University, Bulgaria), and the lectures given there were “Life in a Coronavirus: Leisure Inside and Outside the Home Space in Lithuania” by **Rasa Paukštytė-Šakniene** (Lithuanian Institute of History), ““There is (not) such a bird out there’: Conflicts of Knowledge in the Process of Designation and Management of Natura 2000 Sites” by **Petar Petrov** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgaria Academy of Sciences), and “New Sites and Rituals to Recall Vanished Cultural Landscapes (Villages under Reservoirs Waters in Bulgaria)” by **Lina Gergova** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences). The third consecutive section of Space – 3 was moderated by **Alexander A. Novik** (Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) of the RAS; SPSU) and united three papers. These were “Protected Area of Rupite, Bulgaria: Sacred Legitimization of Secular Interests” by **Violeta Periklieva** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), “Danurbanity – Valorisation of Local Heritage in Ulpia Escus-Novae Bulgarian Region (Belene, Nikopol, Gulyantsi, Svishtov)” by **Gavrail Gavrailov** (Plovdiv University, Bulgaria), and “The Pragmatic Basis of Figurative Nomination (On the Example of Belarusian Microtoponymy)” by **Tatiana Oliferchuk** (Centre for Research of Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature, NASB).

Another conference section, which united nine research reports, was dedicated to customs, beliefs, and rituals. The moderator of the Customs, Beliefs and Rituals – 1 section, **Žilvytis Šaknys** (Lithuanian Institute of History), gave the floor to **Bidisha Chakraborty** (Banaras Hindu University) for the lecture “Carving a Sacred Canopy:

Confluence of Nature and Culture in the Marwa Ritual and Songs of the Bhojpuri Community in India”, **Archita Banerjee** (Banaras Hindu University) for “The Ritual of Itu: Making Space for Nature-Culture Synthes”, and **Aurora Del Rio** (Aalto University, Department of Art and Media) for “Contaminating Mythologies”. The moderator of the Customs, Beliefs, and Rituals – 2 section was **Solveiga Krumina-Konkova** (University of Latvia). The lectures in this sections were “The Submerged Church at Zhrebchevo Dam: Sacral Site, Center, Scene” by **Yana Gergova** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), “Popular Beliefs and Sorcery Inducing Fertility at the Beginning of the 20th–21st Century: The Case of Lithuania” by **Nijolė Vailionytė** (Vytautas Magnus University), and “Folk Customs and Beliefs in Kosovo and Metohija Between the Two World Wars” by **Božica Slavković Mirić** (The Institute for Recent History of Serbia, Belgrade, Republic of Serbia). The third section, united by the theme of traditions and rituals, Customs, Beliefs and Rituals – 3, with moderator **Mare Kalda** (Estonian Literature Museum) worked on the next day of the conference, 21 September, during the entire forenoon, and five research papers were presented: “Ritual Dimensions in Calendrical Holidays” by **Kristina Blockytė-Naujokė** (Klaipeda University, Lithuania), “The Festival of the Finding of the Holy Icon (ΕΟΡΤΗ ΑΓΙΑΣ ΕΥΡΕΣΕΩΣ) or the Lanterns (Phanarakia), Tinos, Greece” by **Evy Johanne Håland** (Lifetime Government Grant Holder, Norwegian *statsstipendiat*, Arts Council, Norway), “Sacred Footwear: Latvian Perceptions in the 19th Century and Today” by **Ieva Pigozne** (Institute of Latvian History, University of Latvia), “Estonian Contemporary Beliefs and Narratives about Perpetual Motion Machines and Generators” by **Reet Hiemäe** and **Andrus Tins** (Estonian Literary Museum), and “Folk Performance Narratives in Kurubarpet Beershwara Jatre Ritualises the Kuruba Identity” by **Yashasvi M Maadesh** (Christ University).

Božica Slavković Mirić, in addition to being a lecturer, was the moderator of the Ethnobotany and Historiography section. There **Nadezhda Suntsova** (Izhevsk, Udmurtia) gave the lecture “Ethnobotanical Analysis of G.E. Vereschagin’s Works Devoted to the Traditional Economic Occupations of the Udmurts”, and **Pavlo Yermieiev** (V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University) presented his paper “Relationship Between Religion and Science in the Works of Mykhailo Maksymovych”.

In the section Migration, Identity – 1, with moderator **Aurora Del Rio** (Aalto University), the lectures given were: “Plants and Migration” by **Mariyanka Borisova** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), “Ruler Visibility, Public Space/Sphere, and Collective Identities in the Late Russian and Ottoman Empires” by **Darin Stephanov** (Kone Foundation), “Coloratives with a Dendrological Component as a Projection of the Worldview of Belarusians and Poles” by **Timur Buiko** (Centre for Research of Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature, NASB), “Celebration in Private and Public Spaces: Lithuanian Ritual Year in Three

Specific Periods” by **Žilvytis Šaknys** (Lithuanian Institute of History), and “Nature and Culture: Interaction Rites Between the Ukrainian War Refugees and the Society in Latvia (2022)” by **Māra Kiope** (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Latvian University).

Estonian researcher **Tõnno Jonuks**, who was the first plenary speaker of the conference, also presented himself as a moderator in the Migration, Identity – 2 section. This section combined the following lectures: “Giulio Clovio. The ‘Foreigner’'s Creativity” by **Anna Troitskaya** (Estonian Literary Museum); “Sergey Smirnov About Relics in Serbia” by **Kornelija Ićin** (University of Belgrade); “Bulgarian Tolstoy Colony (1906–1908): Followers of the Religious and Ethnical Doctrine of Leo Tolstoy in the Village of Yasna Polyana, Primorsko Municipality, Bulgaria” by **Ralitsa Savova** (University of Pécs, Hungary), and “Baltic-Balkan Encounters in the Book-Migration: The Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a Provider by Liturgical Books: The Ethnicities of Byzantine Rite in the Hungarian Kingdom” by **Sándor Földvári** (Debrecen University, Hungary; Hungarian Academy of Sciences).

The five-day conference was also packed with seminars, five in total. In addition to the pre-conference workshop “Ecology of Nature and Ecology of Culture”, and the “Sacred Sites as Sites of Problems” workshop held on the first and second day of the conference respectively, the organizers of the Tartu Science Forum also offered the “Finnic-Ugric Animism”, “Art in COVID-19 Humour”, and “Estonian Singing” workshops. The “Finnic-Ugric Animism” workshop was led by **Laur Vallikivi** (Tartu University), and the speakers were **Eva Toulouze** (Tartu University, INALCO); **Stephan Dudeck** (Tartu University, IASS, Germany; University of Lapland, Finland); **Eszter Ruttkai-Miklian**, **Art Leete** (Tartu University), and **Nikolai Kuznetsov** (Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu University). The moderator of the first workshop, “Art in COVID-19 Humour”, was **Władysław Chłopicki** (Jagiellonian University). The discussant of the seminar was **Anna Pięcińska** (Marie Curie-Skłodowska University of Lublin), and the discussion was related to the following lectures: “Turning ‘Unknown’ Paintings into COVID-19 Memes as a Means of Humorous Criticism” by **Villy Tsakona** (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) and **Dorota Brzozowska** (Opole University), “Mona Lockdown. The Use of Internet Memes in Humorous Corona Discourse” by **Ralph Müller** (Universität Freiburg, Institut für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft) and **Agata Hołobut** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków), “Cartoons and Memes: Images from Childhood used as Expressions in Adulthood” by **Saša Babič** (ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, Slovenia) and **Jan Chovanec** (Masaryk University, Brno, Czechia), and “‘If God Asks...’: Hidden Emotions and Folk Beliefs in the ‘Mythical Meme’ of the Pandemic” by **Tsafi Sebba-Elran** (University of Haifa) and **Rita Repšienė** (Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, Vilnius). In one of the five scientific papers presented for discussion at this workshop, **Władysław Chłopicki** appeared not only as moderator, but also as co-lecturer, together with **Delia Dumitrica** (University of Rotterdam, Netherlands) and

Anastasiya Fiadotava (Estonian Literary Museum). The above-mentioned researchers gave a lecture titled “From Venus De Milo to Nike Ads: The Glocalization of Art References in COVID-19 Humour in Central and Eastern Europe”.

The theme of humour was continued after the workshop “Art in Covid-19 Humour”, with a presentation of the humour collection of Ivar Kallion. The venue of the event was the main hall of the Literary Museum. The event was followed by a visit of the conference participants to the Tartu Art Museum. After a five-day intensive scientific programme, the conference organizers announced its closing on the evening of 22 September with a cultural programme, an Indie group TARAI performance, preceded by a workshop on Estonian singing with **Taive Särg** (Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum), who spoke about Forest Song Festivals, and **Janika Oras** (Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum) on the topic “An Appetite for Singing. Singing Experiences of Elderly Singers in Estonia in the Context of Historical Singing Practices”. The content of the lectures given at the 14th Annual Conference of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies, and the 5th International Conference “Balkan and Baltic States in United Europe: History, Religion and Culture V”, is to be published in a book in 2023.

Ralitsa Savova
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WORKSHOP “ART IN COVID-19 HUMOUR”

The workshop “Art in COVID-19 humour” took place on 21 September 2022 within the framework of the 5th international conference “Balkan and Baltic States in United Europe: History, Religion, and Culture V”, which was held in Tartu, Estonia, on 18–22 September 2022. The project participants presented the research results of the year-long project “Study of Art in COVID-19 Humour”, which was sponsored by Jagiellonian University (Krakow, Poland).

The panel consisted of 13 researchers representing 10 countries and an array of different academic disciplines: folkloristics, linguistics, literature studies, art history, and communication studies. Using the material from the International Coronavirus Humour Corpus, which that was collected during the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic and consists of more than 12,000 humorous items, this workshop aimed to analyse COVID-19 humour, using references to art (e.g., painting or music) and popular culture (e.g., film, TV series, literature, etc.) as the area where the global and local collide and interweave, including some hybrid forms. In particular, the workshop focused on the Central and Eastern European and Baltic cultural spaces, looking into how local and regional traditions

are mixed with transnational references in order to produce humorous effects. Each of the presentations of the workshop was co-authored by researchers belonging to different countries and often also to different academic disciplines. This ensured a versatile approach to the data and enabled making cross-cultural comparisons on different levels.

The workshop consisted of 5 presentations and a discussant's comment. The first presentation titled "Turning 'Unknown' Paintings into COVID-19 Memes as a Means of Humorous Criticism" was delivered by Villy Tsakona (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) and Dorota Brzozowska (Opole University). It revealed that the recontextualization of lesser-known paintings helped to use them to criticize COVID-19 measures and peoples' reactions to the "new normal" of the pandemic, as well as the fact that by using the "unknown" paintings meme creators were more flexible as they were not bound by the cultural connotations of these artworks. In the next presentation titled "Mona Lockdown: The Use of Internet Memes in Humorous Corona Discourse" the focus was on the well-known artworks, such as "The Last Supper" and "Mona Lisa" by Leonardo da Vinci and "Scream" by Edvard Munch. The authors, Ralph Müller (Universität Freiburg, Institut für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft) and Agata Hołobut (Jagiellonian University, Kraków) adopted the General Theory of Verbal Humour to the multimodal meme genre and outlined the dominant themes of these humorous works. The issue of art was approached more broadly in the presentation "From Venus de Milo to Nike Ads: The Glocalization of Art References in COVID-19 Humor in Central and Eastern Europe" by Władysław Chłopicki (Jagiellonian University, Kraków), Delia Dumitrica (University of Rotterdam), and Anastasiya Fiadotava (Estonian Literary Museum). By drawing upon art and popular cultural references in Polish, Romanian, and Belarusian humorous COVID-19 memes, the authors categorized the data according to the degree of adaptation to the particular culture of origin, thus dividing the corpus into local, regional, global, and glocal memes. Saša Babič (ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana) and Jan Chovanec (Masaryk University, Brno) further broadened the focus on popular culture in their presentation "Cartoons and Memes: Images from Childhood Used as Expressions in Adulthood". The researchers came to the conclusion that the intertextual popular cultural references in these memes are connected to the "hypermemonic logic" that guides the replication of images as well as the performative self which in this case indicated a contrast between pre-pandemic and new realities. The final presentation by Tsafi Sebba-Elran (University of Haifa) and Rita Repšienė (Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, Vilnius) was titled "'If God Asks...': Hidden Emotions and Folk Beliefs in the 'Mythical Meme' of the Pandemic", which explored the clash between the world of archaic mythical and religious references, on the one hand, and the realm of digital internet memes, on the other. The authors illustrated how these references contributed to the expressions of feelings and helped to regulate emotions during the initial stages of COVID-19 pandemic.



*Ralph Müller (Universität Freiburg, Institut für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft) and Agata Holobut (Jagiellonian University in Kraków).
Photograph by Anastasiya Fiadotava.*

The panel presentations were followed by a discussant's commentary. Discussant Anna Pięcińska (University of Warsaw) summed up the key aspects of the presentations and pointed out that most of the humorous memes that employ art references are not based on the art per se but rather on its visual elements that have some inherent incongruities and inspire the creativity of the meme-makers.

The presentations of the workshop and the discussant's commentary provided different perspectives on the use of art and popular culture in the COVID-19 humour. The workshop also opened up several directions for future studies of multimodal humorous forms and the role of intertextuality in memes – hopefully, these directions will be explored in-depth during future conferences and academic projects.

Anastasiya Fiadotava

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ABOUT LIFE IN THE LHOPO COMMUNITY

The doctoral dissertation of Kikee Doma Bhutia, “Mythic history, belief narratives and vernacular Buddhism among the Lhopos of Sikkim”, broadly speaking, deals with the multiple interactions and entanglements between diverse dimensions: among these intertwined dimensions the author explores relations and dynamics between the Lhopo community and the non-human entities with whom they share the landscape they live in, but also, in a broader framework, the dynamics occurring between vernacular Buddhism and orthodox Buddhism. Moreover, her attention is also devoted to exploring the social and historical landscape in which people are embedded, i.e., the Lhopos as an indigenous community among other communities claiming indigeneity, and as a minority vis-a-vis the State and its apparatuses, at least since the inception of the kingdom of Sikkim (1642) and then after its incorporation into India (1975). Equally relevant, if not more, is the attention paid to the epistemological question of discussing belief and indigenous knowledge in a complex setting, where multiple perspectives, cosmologies and ideologies coexist side by side, even when apparently contradicting each other. At the same time, of the utmost importance is the gaze that the researcher turns towards herself, as a liminal figure, betwixt and between, at the same time insider and outsider, intimate participant and yet somehow critically detached.

The dissertation is elegantly written, well-structured and finely balanced in addressing all of the abovementioned topics, and it includes the following: a general introduction; an examination of the topic of the Beyul (“Hidden Land”) according to academic, Buddhist and vernacular interpretations; a historical overview; an appreciation of the entanglement between mythic and contemporary narratives; an enquiry into Lhopo cosmology, with details on ritual specialists as mediators between human and non-human communities; a theoretical and methodological framework; a section on four academic articles engaging with some of the aforementioned topics; and final considerations followed by a useful glossary of recurring terms. The only possible remark about the dissertation structure is the question of why the author has positioned the chapter on theoretical and methodological framework so late (chapter 6) in her work as the theoretical and methodological framework is surely something that a reader would like to find earlier in an academic publication.

The author was able to bring in and collate inputs from a range of diverse subjects, all equally useful to put forward a detailed account of the context of reference, and a deep analysis of specific beliefs and related narratives. In doing this, the author mastered with competence the relevant scientific literature from the disciplines of folklore studies, Buddhist studies, ethnography, and cultural anthropology. I was nonetheless

surprised to see that the bibliography does not include sources in Tibetan (which could have been useful to substantiate Buddhist stories on cosmology, Padmasambhava and local deities, etc.), except for Rigdzin Gödem (1337–1408). The same applies to sources in Nepali or Hindi, which the author knows and to which she has access.

On the Taming/Incorporation of Local Deities

I find extremely pertinent the reference to the figure of Padmasambhava (Guru Rimpoche) as the historical-mythical figure enabling the dissemination of Buddhism in the Himalayan regions. The more so since the narratives about the taming of local (or should we say indigenous?) deities are the critical node of conjunction between Tibetan Buddhist arch-narratives and cosmology on the one hand, and its vernacular receptions and adaptations on the ground. Padmasambhava is more a tamer than an exorcist: local deities are not simply banished or annihilated, but, in most cases, incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon. Yet, this incorporation is arranged through a process we may define as domestication: local deities and spirits are given a position and a role in the pantheon modelled on the image of a mandala. On these dynamics of incorporation, I suggested that the author take into account David S. Ruegg's *The symbiosis of Buddhism with Brahmanism / Hinduism in South Asia and of Buddhism with "local cults" in Tibet and the Himalayan region* (2008). Incorporation entails hierarchisation: the distance from the centre of the mandala equates with a specific position in the general hierarchy of Buddhism, which the author summarises as *yeshey ki lha* and *jigten ghi lha* (p. 13). These two expressions situate entities onto an over-arching Buddhist pantheon, and yet some of the vernacular entities are not easily included: *Aju Zom Tsering*, *pue sdé*, *bandar deuta*, and probably others escape strict classification and, as the author acknowledges, pass "through ethnic boundaries" (p. 15). It would be good if the author had elaborated on these deities/entities bypassing or crossing ethnic boundaries. In particular, at narrative level, there is an issue of the crossing of boundaries engendering specific dynamics of othering/demonisation (p. 54). The dissertation inspires the questions of whether external entities are more dangerous, more difficult to appease, and whether Lhopo deities attack intruders, foreigners, and other members of indigenous communities.

Visible and Invisible

On page 14 the author states: "I choose to write non-human entities as they are invisible, not human and have supernatural attributes". This might contradict some of the materials she collected through interviews, since some informants relate about real

encounters with some of these entities. Moreover, since several local sacred mountains are deities themselves, it is difficult to define them as invisible. I would have liked the author to elaborate more on these visible and tangible expressions/manifestations of the so-called visible side of the supernatural, as sacred mountains, lakes, and rivers. In addition, in her dissertation, the author quotes Kinnard, who says, “There is nothing inherently sacred about any place or space” (Kinnard: 2014: 2), and yet she is well aware that the places usually associated with the supernatural, at least in the Himalayas, stand out in the landscape for some striking features: mighty mountains, ominous rocks and crags, eerie forested slopes, caverns and waterfalls. They might have nothing inherently sacred in them, but surely, they are regarded as potent places inherently different from surrounding ones (see Allerton 2013).

As to the above, we could argue that non-human entities are not exclusively invisible, and that the landscape could be potent without being supernatural. These issues have been dealt with by recent ethnographies, for example Allerton 2013, and especially De la Cadena’s *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice Across Andean Worlds* (2015). These and other recent ethnographies take into account indigenous cosmologies, reframed as distinct ontologies (see Descola 2005), giving voice not only to humans but also to non-human collectivities. Bridging the gap between humans and non-humans opens up for us the topic of cosmopolitics, which the author explores in her second article. Elaborating more on the agency of Sikkimese vernacular non-human entities (deities, mountains, territorial gods, etc.) in cosmopolitics would add significant layers of analysis, enriching the understanding of dynamics unfolding in and around the notion of sacred landscape.

More on Cosmology

There are several hints towards a deep understanding of the interactions between pre-Buddhist and Buddhist cosmology. But can a discourse on current, contemporary times avoid discussing the emergence of a post-Buddhist worldview, i.e., a worldview combining belief, religion, science, secularism, and even scepticism? This is what is seemingly emerging from some of the interviews, and it could be a fruitful venue on which to tread further to explore individual ideas, perceptions, expressions, and feelings.

Shared Cosmos or Parallel and Conflicting Ones?

Cosmological narratives of diverse groups, moreover, provide elements for collective identities but also create alternative and sometimes conflicting worldviews. I especially like that the author avoids simplistic generalisation, by giving voice to informants who

express doubts about cosmological narratives, yet it emerges that sometimes doubt is used to deny the essentialist views embedded in mythic narratives. For example, on page 31, the author mentions the myth of creation of the Lepcha indigenous people, as opposing the ideas of the Beyul established by Guru Rimpoche. Such narratives propose mutually exclusive narratives. Are these narratives not only cosmopolitical, but also intrinsically political and communalist? The author seems to elaborate on this idea in her final (re)consideration (p. 56). Does the author see these narratives as related to political assertiveness of the diverse communities inhabiting Sikkim? Is there a Sikkimese identity at all, or is there a fragmented one? In other words, is Sikkim a “world where many worlds fit” (p. 53), or is it an arena of competing interests? Such questions seem to be only hinted at in the final (re)considerations (p. 56), and yet it would be interesting to delve deeper into these aspects.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the author demonstrates her academic skills in developing a coherent, original, and well-structured discourse, going beyond the literature of reference and integrating it with novel perspectives, data, and analysis. She shows a remarkable level of engagement, investigation, and insight in relation to the object of her research, substantiated by the main body of her dissertation and completed by the four articles included. Her work is enriched beyond measure by the awareness and self-reflection on the scholar as a liminal figure in the field, even when her field is one with which the researcher has cultural intimacy and to which she has privileged access. Equally relevant and interesting is the idea of proposing a “partially native theory” to finally decolonise the objectifying gaze of the observer, acquired through distancing and learning to unlearn and relearn while based at the University of Tartu, as she herself states (p. 57). As a final remark, I would like to point to the concluding words of her dissertation: “My study at the University of Tartu as well as geographical distance provided me with a space to be true to the evidence, helping me develop the position of the partially native that I aspired to embody from the beginning” (p. 57). I would like to suggest a change, if I may: instead of “partially native”, I would say “a critical human being”. That is what academia needs the most.

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Kikee Doma Bhutia defending her doctoral dissertation at the University of Tartu on 7 March 2022. Photograph by Anastasiya Fiadotava.

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