THE YEARBOOK OF BALKAN AND BALTIC STUDIES

VOLUME 8.1

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF BALKAN AND BALTIC STUDIES

THE YEARBOOK OF BALKAN AND BALTIC STUDIES

VOLUME 8.1
LITHUANIAN ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORISTICS

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
EKATERINA ANASTASOVA †, MILA MAEVA

EDITORS FOR THIS ISSUE
ŽILVYTIS ŠAKNYS
SKAIDRĖ URBONIENĖ

ELM SCHOLARLY PRESS
VILNIUS-TARTU-SOFIA-RIGA 2025

Supported by Bulgarian, Lithuanian, Estonian and Latvian Academies of Sciences, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Estonian Literary Museum, Lithuanian Institute of History, Lithuanian Culture Research Institute; Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, University of Latvia

Supported by ELM project EKM 8-2/20/3

ISSN 2613-7844 (printed)
ISSN 2613-7852 (pdf)
DOI 10.7592/YBBS8.1
www.folklore.ee/balkan_baltic_yearbook

Contents

Introduction
Skaidrė Urbonienė, Žilvytis Šaknys 7
https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.00

An Ethnologist in Two Historical Epochs: Irena Regina Merkienė
Žilvytis Šaknys 10
https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.01

Bronislava Kerbelytė: Innovator of Folktale Research
Jūratė Šlekonytė 32
https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.02

An Ethnologist in the Face of Migration Challenges: Evidence from Antanas Mažiulis's Letters
Irma Šidiškienė 48
https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.03

Ludwig J. Rhesa *Dainos, oder Litthauische Volkslieder* (Königsberg, 1825): Text as an Event of Cultural Memory
Lina Petrošienė 77
https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.04

The Lithuanian Cross-crafting Tradition during the Period of National Revival (1988–1991): Reclaiming Memory
Skaidrė Urbonienė 109
https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.05

Challenges in the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Lithuania
Vytautas Tumėnas 137
https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.06

Family and Crisis: The Christmas Eve Dinner in Lithuania and Bulgaria
Rasa Paukštytė-Šaknienė 169
https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.07

The Religious Landscape in Bulgaria and Lithuania: Spiritual Resilience and Religious Practice among Academic Youth during COVID-19 and the War in Ukraine
Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė 194
https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.08

Between Ethnic and Cultural Identity: The Effect of Turkish Religious Literature on the Lifestyle of the Lithuanian Muslim Community
Gintarė Lukoševičiūtė 212
https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.09

Modern Pagan Traditions in Lithuania: Navigating Romantic Nostalgia and Creativity in Ritual Year Celebrations
Dalia Senvaitytė 243
https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.10

Belief Narratives in Lithuanian Mushroom Picking Practices
Vita Džekčioriūtė 264
https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.11

In memoriam: Ekaterina Anastasova (1962–2025)
Lina Gergova 278
https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.12

https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.00

Introduction

Unlike the previous volume, the eighth volume of the Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies is organised by geographical region rather than theme. This year it consists of articles from Lithuania.

The year 2024 was marked in Lithuanian ethnology by losses. Almost on the same day, we lost our esteemed colleagues ethnologist Irena Regina Merkienė (October 31, 2024) and folklorist Bronislava Kerbelytė (November 5, 2024). In this volume their scientific activities are presented by their students Žilvytis Šaknys and Jūratė Šlekonytė. In his article "An Ethnologist in Two Historical Epochs: Irena Regina Merkienė", Šaknys concludes that the period of Lithuanian independence created career opportunities for ethnologist Merkienė, as well as the chance to establish and manage ethnological institutions. It also gave her the freedom to expand the boundaries of ethnological research and examine the nation's culture (not just folk culture) from various ethnological perspectives. Jūratė Šlekonytė's article "Bronislava Kerbelytė: Innovator of Folktale Research" describes the unique methodology, structural-semantic text analysis, developed by Kerbelytė and how it redefined the classification of Lithuanian folktales, beliefs, local legends and anecdotes.

In addition to the articles about prominent Lithuanian ethnologists Merkienė and Kerbelytė, Irma Šidiškienė's article is dedicated to émigré ethnologist Antanas Mažiulis (1914–2007), focusing on the experience of the Lithuanian diaspora in the mid-twentieth century. The article, which is based on an analysis of Mažiulis's letters, explores the challenges of forced migration and how it affects community formation and the preservation of personal identity. The theme of text as a source of ethnology is continued by Lina Petrošienė's article which examines the cultural significance of Ludwig J. Rhesa's *Dainos,*

oder Litthauische Volkslieder (1825), the earliest systematic collection of Lithuanian folk songs. Two articles analyse the theme of intangible cultural heritage. The article by Skaidrė Urbonienė is dedicated to the peculiarities of the cross-crafting tradition during the period of Lithuanian National Revival (1988–1991). It shows that the cross-crafting tradition reflected the most significant issue of that period, reclaiming historical memory and the nation's aspirations for freedom and independence. In his article, Vytautas Tumėnas explores the challenges of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in Lithuania. He focuses particularly on the role of heritage communities and how enthusiasm, the economy and socio-cultural policy affect decisions when these communities interact with the state.

The interaction of tradition and innovation is analysed in Vita Džekčioriūtė's article, which compares belief narratives related to mushrooms and mushroom picking practices in Lithuania at the end of the 19th century, with these narratives as practiced in recent decades. Two articles are dedicated to the COVID-19 pandemic, using comparisons of the specificities of Lithuanian and Bulgarian culture. Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė's article examines the spiritual resilience and religious practices of Bulgarian and Lithuanian youth during the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. In her article "Family and Crisis: The Christmas Eve Dinner in Lithuania and Bulgaria", Rasa Paukštytė-Šaknienė analyses the specific features of Christmas Eve dinners in Vilnius and Sofia during the period of the pandemic, concluding that the deviation from culinary traditions on this day in both countries was slight.

Several other articles are devoted to traditional Lithuanian religions. Gintarė Lukoševičiūtė's article "Between Ethnic and Cultural Identity: The Effect of Turkish Religious Literature on the Lifestyle of the Lithuanian Muslim Community" is dedicated to the spread of Muslim religious literature. Dalia Senvaitytė's article "Modern Pagan Traditions in Lithuania: Navigating Romantic Nostalgia and Creativity in Ritual Year Celebrations" examines annual celebrations among Native Faith communities in Lithuania today.

Unfortunately, this issue is marked by loss. As soon as we had agreed on the contents of this volume, we received the sad news of the unexpected death of this publication's editor Ekaterina Anastasova. In Memoriam dedicated to her is written by Lina Gergova.

Skaidrė Urbonienė and Žilvytis Šaknys

Skaidrė Urbonienė, PhD, is a senior researcher at the Department of Sacral Art Heritage, Lithuanian Culture Research Institute. Her main research interests are the cross-crafting tradition; the heritage, socio-cultural, artistic and identity issues of folk art; and folk art in migration.

Žilvytis Šaknys, PhD, is a senior researcher at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Lithuanian Institute of History. He has conducted fieldwork in Lithuania, Belorussia, Poland, Latvia and Bulgaria. His research interests are in the field of traditional and modern culture; ethnology of youth; ethnology of the city; ethnology of friendship; ethnology of tourism; the history of ethnology; ethnicity; ethnic and confessional tolerance; the ritual year.

https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.01

An Ethnologist in Two Historical Epochs: Irena Regina Merkienė

Dedicated to the memory of Irena Regina Merkienė (1937–2024)

Žilvytis Šaknys

Senior Researcher at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Lithuanian Institute of History, Vilnius, Lithuania

E-mail: shaknys@gmail.com

Abstract: In the article, which aims to reveal the scientific life path of ethnologist Irena Regina Merkienė, I set the following tasks: 1. reveal the features of the institutionalisation of ethnology in Lithuania as compared to neighbouring countries; 2. describe ethnologist Merkienė's research during the Soviet period; and 3. analyse Merkienė's ethnological research after Lithuania regained independence. The conclusions obtained are that the period of Lithuanian independence created not only career opportunities and the opportunity to create and administer ethnological institutions for ethnologist Merkienė, but also the freedom to expand the boundaries of ethnological research, looking at the nation's (not only folk) culture from different perspectives of ethnological research.

Keywords: Ethnology, Irena Regina Merkienė, period of Soviet occupation, period of Independent Lithuania (from 1990).

Introduction

> *The life-history of the individual is first and foremost an accommodation to the patterns and standards traditionally handed down in his community. From the moment of his birth the custom into which he is born shape his experience and behaviour. By the time he can talk, he is the little creature of his culture, and by the time he is grown and able to take part in its activities, its habits are his habits, its beliefs his beliefs, its impossibilities his impossibilities (Benedict 1959: 2–3).*

In these few sentences, anthropologist Ruth Benedict described the path of a human life. At first glance, these words could also be used to describe the path of a scientist. The humanities, like a baby, are inseparable from the culture that surrounds them. However, if a scientist's life spanned several historical eras, the transition from one to another changed not only the names of that science (ethnography to ethnology), its possibilities and the need to break taboos that had been in place for decades, but also its relations with other scientific disciplines, ideologies, changing opportunities, contacts, and geographic space. As Máiréad Nic Craith has noted, some disciplines, such as history or literature, are easily defined, maintain their conceptual integrity over time and are institutionally privileged. The situation of interdisciplinary sciences (such as ethnology) is much more difficult (Nic Craith 2008: 1). Lithuanian ethnology is no exception, it is a small field of study with major institutionalisation problems (Šaknys 2011: 23). How did an ethnologist who worked during the years of Soviet occupation and in the independent Republic of Lithuania solve these problems?

Irena Regina Merkienė was born on February 14, 1937, in Kaunas. She spent her summers in Klangiai, a small town whose cultural environment fostered a love and respect for folk culture. In 1960, while still studying history at Vilnius University, she began working at the Institute of History (now the Lithuanian Institute of History, hereinafter LIH) in the Department of Archaeology and Ethnography. From 1961 to 1983, she was a junior researcher, from 1983 to 1993 a research fellow, from 1993 to 1995 a senior researcher, and from 1995 to 2002 a chief researcher. From 1992 to 1997, she was the head of the Department of Ethnology. Merkienė contributed significantly to the establishment

of the Department of Ethnology and Folklore at the Faculty of Humanities of Vytautas Magnus University (hereinafter VMU). This laid the foundations for the study of ethnology in Kaunas. From 1991 to 1992, she worked as a lecturer at VMU, from 1992 to 1993 as an associate professor, from 1993 to 1994 as a professor, and in 1995 she was awarded the title of professor. She established a separate school of ethnology. Under her leadership, the doctoral dissertations of Žilvytis Šaknys, Vida Savoniakaitė, Arūnas Vaicekauskas, Irma Šidiškienė, Asta Venskienė, Inga Nėnienė and Dovilė Kulakauskienė were successfully defended. She was also a member of doctoral dissertation committees, an opponent, and a member of the habilitation committees of professor Vacys Milius, professor Romualdas Apanavičius, and professor Alfonsas Motuzas. While teaching at VMU and Vilnius University, she supervised the defence of bachelor's and master's theses. From 1993 to 1996, she was a member of the Doctoral Studies and Habilitation Committee of the LIH and VMU (chair from 1996 to 1997), a member of the LIH and VMU Doctoral Studies and Habilitation Committee, and from 1998 to 2003 chair of the LIH and VMU Habilitation Committee in Ethnology in the Humanities and deputy chair of the Doctoral Studies Committee in Ethnology. She was the editor of numerous monographs and a member of the editorial board of scientific journals. It is worth noting that she was responsible for creating the first series of ethnological monographs in Lithuania, Lietuvos etnologija (Lithuanian Ethnology) (nine volumes were published between 1996 and 2002). In 1998, she was awarded the Jonas Basanavičius Prize for promoting ethnic culture. In 2006, she was elected an academician at the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Sciences, and in 2007 she was awarded the Lithuanian Science Prize for her series of works Typological Areas of Lithuanian Ethnic Culture and the Expression of Regional Identity (Second Half of the 16th Century to the 20th Century). After retiring in 2002, she continued her important scientific and science popularisation work (for more on Merkienė's scientific activities, see: Šaknys 2007: 7–17; Irena Regina Merkienė 2009).

Figure 1. Irena Regina Merkienė, winner of the Lithuanian Science Prize. May 3, 2007. Photo by Žilvytis Šaknys.

A few simple calculations suffice to show that Merkienė began her intensive scientific activity at the age of over fifty, an opportunity made possible by the declaration of Lithuania's independence in 1990. Ethnology gained new opportunities at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st. However, the research had to be carried out by the same people who had received their education during the Soviet occupation. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the methodological assumptions of ethnology were based on history and the humanities (Jasiewicz 1998: 39), which were among the most ideologised fields during the Soviet era. However, according to Zbigniew Jasiewicz, ethnology was sensitive to local conditions: the pressure of national goals, the dependence of national institutions, publishing in national languages (Jasiewicz1998: 39). As Vytis Čiubrinskas noted, the discipline of Ethnology (Ethnography) in Lithuania during the Soviet period threatened to become a tool for the dominant ideology and a source of scientific argumentation for the assimilation of Lithuanians into the melting pot of the Soviet Russian empire.

At a minimum, it had to follow the methodology of historical materialism while also serving much more as a formative force for anti-Soviet nationalist attitudes and setting out to record typical, specific, authentically Lithuanian traditions in the Sovietised Lithuanian society of the time (Čiubrinskas 2001: 99–117).

The progress of a scientist's work in countries with different ideological attitudes is a problem that has not yet been examined in Lithuanian ethnology. In the article, with its goal of revealing the scientific life path of ethnologist Merkienė, I set the following tasks: 1. reveal the features of the institutionalisation of ethnology in Lithuania as compared to neighbouring countries; 2. describe ethnologist Merkienė's research during the Soviet period; and 3. analyse Merkienė's ethnological research after Lithuania regained independence. The article focuses on analysis of Merkienė's scientific works.

The Institutionalisation of Ethnology

The history of science is often associated with the institutionalisation of that science at the university level (Kuligowski 2011: 109). The first Department of Ethnology in the territory of contemporary Lithuania was established in 1927 at the University of Stephen Báthory in Vilnius, a city that was then occupied by Poland (Dundulienė 1978: 52). A student, Pranė Dundulienė (Stukėnaitė), played a major role in shaping the science of ethnology during the Soviet occupation and was Merkienė's teacher. The institutionalisation of ethnology in the Republic of Lithuania was delayed. It was not until 1934 that the Department of Ethnicity (Lith. Etnika) was established at VMU in Kaunas (after Vilnius was regained, the former Department of Ethnicity, renamed the Department of Volkskunde (Lith. Tautotyra), was moved to Vilnius University). It covered both folklore and ethnology, although greater attention was paid to folklore studies (Maciūnas 1939: 261–298).

According to Romualdas Apanavičius, the object of study in ethnology at the SBU was ethnic material culture and the recording and collection of data relating to it, and therefore these studies were also linked to history and archaeology. The object of study at VMU was the oral heritage of ethnic culture, its meaning and imagery. Studies of material culture did not outweigh this object, so there were connections with philology and mythology (Apanavičius 2009: 149). In 1941, after the first Soviet occupation the first ethnology insti-

tution, the Institute of Ethnology, was established. According to Irena Regina Merkienė, the Institute of Ethnology was used in the Soviet Union in the 1950s to conduct research for applied political and ideological purposes in museums that were easily subjugated. In Lithuania, the Šiauliai Aušra Museum became the basis for the institute (Merkienė 2011: 138).

In addition to the Ethnography Department with its museum, a Folklore Department with a Folklore Archive was also established (Merkienė 2011: 130–131). Unfortunately, in 1944 (according to other sources, in 1945: Mardosa 2016: 13) the Institute of Ethnology was closed, and ethnologists and folklorists found refuge at the Institute of History, Lithuanian SSR Academy of Sciences. An ethnography section was established. Unfortunately, the separate ethnography department was soon abolished. In 1952, the archaeology and ethnography section was established, and folklorists moved to the Institute of Lithuanian Language and Literature at the Academy of Sciences (Šaknys 2011: 15). In 1962, the ethnography and archaeology sections separated. In 1996, the Ethnography Department was renamed the Ethnology Department (in 2016, the Ethnology and Anthropology Department). Until 2010, it was the only ethnology institution with more than 10 employees.

Figure 2. The Institute of History, Ethnography Department in 1984. In the first row, from the left: Janina Morkūnienė, Irena Regina Merkienė, Angelė Vyšniauskaitė, Vitalis Morkūnas, Vida Kulikauskienė, Vacys Milius. In the second row, from the left: Stasys Gutautas, Rasa Paukštytė, Laura Kazlauskienė, Petras Kalnius, Marija Miliuvienė, Rita Butviliene, Jonas Mardosa. Photo by Stasys Žumbys.

When discussing the institutionalisation of ethnology in Lithuania, it is also necessary to mention education institutions. In the early post-war years (1944–1947), Vilnius University still had a Department of Ethnography. After 1947, it was reorganised into the Department of Museology, in 1949 into the Department of Archaeology and Ethnography, and later, in 1966, when ideological repression led to a review of the Lithuanian studies departments at Vilnius University, it was reorganised into the Lithuanian SSR's Department of History, where ethnology was represented for most of the time by one person, Pranė Dundulienė (Apanavičius 2009: 153). In 1991, the Department of Baltic Linguistics and Ethnology was established at Klaipėda University. In 1993, replacing the Department of Anthropology established in 1989, the Department of Ethnology and Folklore was established at VMU (Senvaitytė, Anglickienė 2019: 23–36). Merkienė was one of the active founders of this institution.

Starting Points in the Soviet Era: Lithuanian Ethnology in the Context of Neighbouring Countries

How did the situation for Lithuanian scientists differ from that of other former Soviet republics or socialist countries? First of all, because of different institutionalisation. The Soviet republics that had ethnology institutes and departments were in a better position. Even comparing Lithuania with Latvia and Estonia, ethnology during the Soviet period differed in terms of the amount of scientific resources, research and even the tradition of institutionalisation.

The progress of ethnological science in Lithuania was hindered in several ways. The closure of Vilnius University by the Russian administration in 1832 (restored in 1918), which, according to Pranė Dundulienė, played a significant role in the formation and development of ethnographic science (Dundulienė 1978: 51), the ban on printing the Latin script in the years 1864 to 1904, and the occupation of Vilnius by Poland in the 1920–1939 period were not favourable to the development of Lithuanian ethnological science. The situation in neighbouring countries was different. For example, the first record of an ethnography course in Estonia, at Tartu University, admittedly by way of exception, dates from 1807. A department of geography, ethnography and statistics was established in 1865, but an independent department of ethnography began operating only in late 1919 (Luts 1993: 77). According to

Ferdinant Leinbock-Linnus, in 1930 "Ethnology thus became recognised at the University as an independent discipline, a status it has not enjoyed in many countries, including our immediate neighbours Latvia and Lithuania" (cited from Luts 1993: 77). This led to different scientific efforts and starting positions after the USSR occupied the Baltic States in 1940. For example, Lyudmila Terent'yeva, who analysed the possibilities of ethnic cartography, pointed out that in interwar Estonia there was a planned development of areal research on material culture and the publication of solid monographs, and that a considerable amount of ethnographic material had been collected and published in monographs in Latvia, while in Lithuania in the period from 1930 to 1940, "almost no ethnographic research had been conducted" (Terent'yeva 1975: 5–6). Even the academic ethnological publications summarising Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian ethnology (then ethnography), published between 1964 and 1967, differed considerably (Vyšniauskaitė 1964; Moora, Viires 1964; Strods 1967). There were significant differences in these countries when comparing pre-Soviet ethnological fields related to religiosity, especially studies of calendar customs (Šaknys 2010: 94–95). After regaining independence in 1990, it was only possible to rely on the much more modest ethnographic sources and ethnological research accumulated before the Soviet occupation. Thus, the development of ethnology in Lithuania lagged behind both Europe and the Baltic countries, posing additional challenges both during the Soviet era and after Lithuania regained independence (Šaknys 2011: 23). This makes research on these periods particularly relevant.

Merkienė's ethnological research during the Soviet era

Having defended her diploma thesis titled "Samogitian Folk Textiles in the Second Half of the 19th Century and First Half of the 20th Century" at Vilnius University in 1960, Merkienė began systematic scientific research in the Archaeology and Ethnography Department at the Institute of History, Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, and joined the Development of Material Culture long-term research program (1961–1985). She began preparing her dissertation by choosing an ambitious topic. In 1962, she undertook a study of the daily life and culture of workers in the multinational Grigiškės urban-type settlement. This was a new field of research in the USSR and throughout Eastern Europe.

The study testified to the geographical origin, family structure and ethnic characteristics of workers from rural areas and the changes in the forms of material culture (food, residential buildings, interior, clothing) that occurred between 1925 and 1965 in the new cultural environment. In 1966 she defended her dissertation, titled "The Life and Culture of Grigiškės Pilot Paper Mill Workers between 1925 and 1965", for the degree of Candidate of Historical Sciences (from 1993 nostrified as a dissertation for a Doctor of Humanities) at the Institute of History. In Lithuanian ethnological historiography, this is the first work devoted to working-class culture, the first to cover suburban culture, and the first to cover the culture of residents of different nationalities. The groundwork laid in research into different cultural areas led to further research by Merkienė on many topics. Articles on flax harvesting, beekeeping, and ethnographic questionnaires designed to collect data on draft animals, livestock buildings, animal husbandry, and summer kitchens were published shortly thereafter (Šaknys 2017: 241–242).

However, the main theme selected was livestock studies. The research was published in a series of articles, in the study "Livestock Inventory in Lithuania in the 19th and 20th Centuries" (including chapters on feed transportation, feed preparation and feeding inventory) (Merkienė 1979: 6–105) and the monograph *Livestock Farming between the 16th century and First Half of the 20th Century: The Origins of Ethnic Experience* (covering livestock herds, livestock products, and livestock buildings) (Merkienė 1989a). The research was also related to the Historical-Ethnographic Atlas of Agriculture in the Baltic States project. A map dedicated to draft animals was compiled together with Estonian ethnologist Ants Viyres, with a commentary (Merkene, Viyres 1985: 53–55, map 7). Based on these studies, in 1993 Merkienė defended the first habilitation dissertation in ethnology in the humanities in independent Lithuania, titled "Livestock Farming between the 16th and 20th Centuries: The Origins of Ethnic Experience" (Merkienė 1993). The work required a great deal of field research. The situation in ethnology at the time is illustrated by the telling fact that between 1967 and 1984 as many as 18 questionnaires and ethnographic questionnaires were used to create the ethnographic material for the habilitation thesis (Merkienė 1993: 23–24). On the other hand, the very broad chronological framework of the work also necessitated extensive archival research, which was a novelty among ethnologists.

However, let us return to the research conducted during the Soviet era. Although ethnography at that time was divided into the fields of material and spiritual culture, Merkienė's research was not confined to these boundaries. For example, a comparative study was conducted titled "Analogies and Areas of Animal Pasture Rituals in Lithuania and Western Belarus (from the Second Half of the 19th Century to the First Half of the 20th Century)" (Merkienė 1981: 100–112). Another bold step was taken in 1982, when a questionnaire on ethnographic issues entitled Calendar Customs of the Winter Period was compiled with the help of postgraduate student Vytis Čiubrinskas (Merkienė, Čiubrinskas 1982). At that time, research into traditional calendar customs was, to put it mildly, not tolerated in the Lithuanian SSR (Šaknys 2014: 92–105). However, artistic expression became important to Merkienė during this period. She researched western Lithuanian bedspreads (Merkinė 1983: 69–73) and zoomorphic ornamentation in textiles (Merkienė 1985: 121–126). In the final years of Soviet occupation, with the beginning of the *Sąjūdis* movement, Merkienė's scientific interests shifted even more towards customs. In 1986, she began researching the customs of Lithuanian rural communities in the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries (as part of the History of Capitalist and Pre-capitalist Socio-economic Formations: The Customs of Lithuanian Rural Communities (1986–1988) and The Development of Rural Community Customs in the 19th Century and First Half of the 20th Century (1989–1992) programs). The term 'rural community customs' covered a broad sphere of traditional culture providing an opportunity to examine calendar customs that were still prohibited at the time. The easing of Soviet censorship after 1986 was also a good opportunity to 'clean out the drawers' by publishing works that had been put aside during the Soviet era, making it possible to refer to the works of Lithuanian researchers who had emigrated to the West, works that had previously been unavailable or uncitable due to ideological restrictions.

The younger generation was also taken into consideration. Albinas Rekašius, Žilvytis Šaknys, and Arūnas Vaicekauskas were accepted for research on rural communities. The youngest generation of ethnologists was also being trained. In 1988, the School for Young Ethnographers was established at the LIH, and the Young Tourists' Station for senior students in Lithuanian schools. A collection of ethnographic questions was prepared for them. In 1989, a published collection covered community work, neighbourly relations, maintaining good manners, ethics, and etiquette (Merkienė 1989), while a second covered cal-

endar customs, food, hygiene, laundry care, etc. (Merkienė 1991). The goals of this School of Young Ethnographers were not only to spark interest in the field of ethnology, but also to train qualified collectors of ethnographic material. Special attention was paid to ethnographic field research, which Merkienė herself conducted together with students.

In summary, we can say that during the Soviet era Merkienė researched several topics, but after defending her dissertation she focused most of her attention on the study of animal husbandry, a topic that was less restricted by Soviet ideological control. However, we can see that the last years of Soviet occupation were marked by intense scientific activity in preparation for research during the years of independence.

Merkienė's ethnological research during the period of Lithuanian independence

An article by Merkienė, written in the last months of the Soviet occupation and published in the independent Lithuanian publication *Ethnographic Research* in 1988 and 1989, titled "The Structure of the Nation's Culture", which aimed to reveal the general patterns of cultural development in society, started a new stage in the science of ethnology (Merkienė 1990: 3–13). In independent Lithuania, opportunities arose to conduct not only thematic, but also problem-based research. Independent Lithuania provided new opportunities for the science of ethnology. From 1992 to 1995, Merkienė was the head of the Department of Ethnography (renamed the Department of Ethnology in 1993), and the fate of ethnology as a science depended largely on her. And so it is thanks to Merkienė that ethnology (unlike archaeology) became a science that was separate from history in legal terms. Despite her work in establishing the Department of Ethnology and Folklore at VMU and working with doctoral students, Merkienė developed and led a number of programs at the LIH, for example Ethnic Culture and National Revival (1992–1994), the Atlas of Lithuanian Customs: From the Late 19th Century to the First Half of the 20th Century (1994–1997), Ethnic Cultural Areas and Their Dynamics (1995–1997), the Atlas of Lithuanian Customs: The Second Half of the 20th Century (1998–2002).

She also led projects for the Lithuanian State Science and Studies Foundation, which enabled her to conduct more extensive research. One of these

projects resulted in a monograph on gloves from Lithuania Minor. The studies revealed that Lietuvininkai (Lithuanians of Lithuania Minor) glove patterns replicate the most ancient ornament of ceramics and metal wear decorations found by archaeologists in Lithuania and its coastal area. Prehistoric, Gothic and Renaissance patterns of Western, Eastern and Central Europe had undergone a revival period in Lithuania Minor (Merkienė, Pautieniūtė-Banionienė 1998). Another monograph also marked the end of a project she led for Lithuanians in south-eastern Latvia (Merkienė, Paukštytė-Šaknienė, Savoniakaitė, Šaknys 2005). In separate chapters of the monograph, the professor discusses the circumstances surrounding the formation of the Lithuanian community in Latvia, cultural traditions in the family and community (religious life, holidays, relics and national symbols, glove making, patterns and related customs). Another chapter is devoted to beliefs about the afterlife and funeral customs. Funeral customs, which have been little researched by Lithuanian ethnologists, became one of the most important topics studied by Merkienė. However, customs cannot be studied in isolation from human social life. A major work on this topic was the first volume of the Cultural Heritage of Northern Lithuania monograph series. Her study, "Taking Care of People in Old Age and at Their Funerals" combines two themes: internal relations within rural communities and funeral customs. It seeks to determine how family and community relations with dying members who have lost their ability to work and their health changed in the second half of the 20th century. The conclusion is that death still unites the community. In the worldview of the inhabitants of northern Lithuania, the human body and soul are still traditionally considered valuable. The death of a person obliges the living to take care of them, to provide any necessary service as dictated by tradition, ideology and the fashions of the period (Merkienė 2007d: 137–159). Merkienė found the greatest diversity of topics in a large-scale study of her native region (Veliuona, western Lithuania) (Merkienė 2001a: 589–702). The study examined forms of social, spiritual, and material culture that are revealed in an environment defined by nature and historical events. Unlike most of her works, this one was based on field research conducted many years ago (in 1958, 1963–1965, and 1975–1976). The conclusions reached were that the social tensions between age groups, individuals, and rural communities that arose at the intersection of agrarian and industrial globalised cultures did not prevent the formation of a cultural identity group that eventually took on the new meaning of majority identity.

Ethnic territorial local identity consisted of many components that were not part of the whole local community's conscious or unconscious expression of cultural identity. Cultural identity in terms of the use of traditional and innovative cultural forms remained only a partial and constantly changing feature of society in any particular case (Merkienė 2001a: 696).

Merkienė also wrote shorter publications. Among them, I would highlight the more theoretical articles devoted to local culture (Merkienė 2007c: 39–56), and migration and its influence on ethnic culture (Merkienė 2007b: 75–100). These works placed particular emphasis on the ethnic culture of Lithuanians living in neighbouring countries. In addition to the aforementioned studies on south-eastern Latvia, Merkienė published articles on south-western Latvia (Merkienė 2001b: 117–143), eastern Belarus (Merkienė 2002b: 333–353), and north-eastern Poland (Merkienė 1997: 26–35; Merkienė 2006: 169–190). An important publication is also devoted to the history of ethnology (Merkienė 2011: 125–142). Much has been done in analysing calendar and community customs and knowledge, for example articles on Easter in the Baltic region (Merkienė 1999a: 187–207), St Andrew's customs (Merkienė 2001c: 99–121), community customs (Merkienė 2002c: 104–109), death ethics (Merkienė 2005: 15–37), and atmosphere control (Merkienė 1999b: 208–222). Merkienė was also interested in the ethics of ethnographic research. Her article "Between Copyright and Privacy: The Experience of Ethnographical Research Ethics in 20th Century Lithuania" was the first publication by a Lithuanian ethnologist on this issue (Merkienė 2002a: 103–114). Her concern for the methodology of collecting ethnographic material culminated in the publication of another book for experienced collectors of ethnographic material (Merkienė 2007a).

I also belonged to Merkienė's ethnographic school. When I began analysing the customs of rural communities, I chose to study the traditions of young people. At that time, this was not common in Lithuania. Merkienė supported me. In her words, it was necessary to break stereotypes, expand the boundaries of science, and look for what no one else had yet looked for. This led me to view customs as a social phenomenon, seeking to understand not only their mythological and magical, but also their social, aspects.

In summary, we can say that the period of Lithuanian independence provided ethnologist Merkienė not only with career opportunities and the chance to establish and administer ethnological institutions, but also with the freedom to expand the boundaries of ethnological research by looking at the culture of the

nation (not just the people) from different ethnological research perspectives, drawing on the experience of other humanities and social sciences.

Continuing Benedict's words quoted at the beginning of this article about human dependence on the surrounding cultural environment, I will repeat Merkienė's favourite observation by George Peter Murdock, that, despite its conservative nature, culture changes over time and space (Murdock 1965: 61). During the years of Soviet occupation, Merkienė did a great deal to understand the dynamics of cultural change; when Lithuania regained its independence, she had the opportunity not only to observe and study, but also to change that cultural environment by shaping the science of Lithuanian ethnology and educating the people who create it.

Figure 3. In commemoration of her 80th birthday, Irena Regina Merkienė gives a special lecture entitled "The Everyday Life of the Ethnographic Fieldworker: The Case of the Lithuanian Institute of History in the Second Half of the 20th Century". Vilnius. 22 February 2017. Photo by Žilvytis Šaknys.

Conclusions

The slower development and institutionalisation of Lithuanian ethnology in the second half of the 19th century and first half of the 20th, in the context of Eastern and Central European countries, resulted in a number of challenges for Lithuanian ethnologists during the Soviet period. In previous periods, relatively less ethnographic data was accumulated in Lithuania and relatively less ethnological research was published, which led to ethnographic field research being quite an intense field during the Soviet period. Ethnologist Irena Regina Merkienė paid special attention to both ethnographic data and fieldwork during the Soviet period as well as after Lithuania regained independence.

After defending her doctoral dissertation, in which she analysed the daily life of workers in the multinational city of Grigiškės (now part of Vilnius city), Merkienė focused most of her attention on peasant culture, for example animal husbandry, a topic that suffered less from Soviet ideological control. Her in-depth study of animal husbandry, which corresponded to the interests of Lithuanian ethnology at that time, led to intense ethnographic field research and the abundance of ethnographic questionnaires that she prepared.

When analysing Merkienė's scientific activity, one can distinguish not only the Soviet and independent Lithuania periods, but also the transitional period of 1987–1989 in her scientific career, which was characterised by intense scientific activity in preparation for research during the years of independence.

The period of Lithuanian independence created for Merkienė not only better opportunities for a scientific career and the opportunity to create and administer ethnological institutions, but also the freedom to expand the boundaries of ethnological research, looking at the nation's (not only folk) culture from different ethnological perspectives. Merkienė focused on the people's economic and social lives, as well as their local, ethnic and confessional lives, combining the opportunities provided by ethnology and folklore, archaeology, history, geography, art history.

When examining the scientific life of Irena Regina Merkienė, we can state that the institutionalisation of science, the abundance of previously conducted research, and ideological control largely shaped her abilities and scientific activities, while at the same time Merkienė also had an influence by expand-

ing the boundaries of science and creating new opportunities for herself and other scientists.

Notes

[1] In the 1990s, the Institute of the Lithuanian Language and Literature at the Academy of Sciences became the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, where three of the seven departments are dedicated to folklore (Folk Narrative, Folk Song, the Folklore Archive).

[2] Later, the number of people in the Ethnology Department declined, and it has only begun to increase again in recent years, reaching 10 people in 2025.

[3] On September 1, 2012, the name of the Department of Ethnology and Folklore Studies was changed to the Department of Cultural Studies and Ethnology, and in 2016 to the Department of Cultural Studies (Senvaitytė, Anglickienė 2019: 23–36).

[4] On the other hand, as mentioned by Marleen Nõmmela in her description of the Estonian situation: "It may be said that looking into the grass-roots level of 'science in the making' reveals that the general understanding of what constituted ethnology at that time was not as clear for contemporary researchers in the 1920s" (Nõmmela 2011: 105).

[5] In Lithuania, interest in calendar customs developed later than in Latvia and Estonia (Seljamaa 2023: 275–294). There was also a big difference between Lithuania and other small countries. For example, in Hungary the first cartographic map of summer festivals was published in 1902 (Paládi-Kovács 1996: 202). Maps for festivals in Lithuania appeared almost a century later.

[6] Data on scientific programs from Irena Regina Merkienė 2009.

[7] Gloves of Lithuania Minor. Individual project. Lithuanian State Science and Studies Foundation, 1994.

[8] Ethnic and Cultural Orientation of Lithuanians in South-eastern Latvia after 1991. Lithuanian State Science and Studies Foundation, 1998. Pilot fieldwork took place in 1996 and 1997. The monograph was prepared earlier but was not published for financial reasons.

[9] The work was prepared several years before its publication.

References

Apanavičius, Romualdas 2009. Etnologijos studijos Lietuvoje 1927–2005 metais (Studies in Ethnology in Lithuania 1927–2005). *Lietuvos etnologija: socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*, Vol. 9 (18), pp. 139–164.

Benedict, Ruth 1959. *Patterns of Culture*. New York: Mentor.

Čiubrinskas, Vytis 2001. Sovietmečio iššūkiai Lietuvos etnologijai: disciplina, ideologija ir patriotizmas (Chalenges to Lithuanian Ethnology During the Soviet Period: Discipline, Ideology and Patriotism). *Lietuvos etnologija. Socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*, Vol. 1 (10), pp. 99–117.

Dundulienė, Pranė 1978. *Etnografijos mokslas Vilniaus universitete* (The Science of Ethnography at Vilnius University). Vilnius: LTSR aukštojo ir specialiojo vidurinio mokslo ministerija, Vilniaus Darbo Raudonosios Vėliavos ordino V. Kapsuko universitetas.

Irena Regina Merkienė 2009. In: LKMA akademikai. Available at: https://www.lkma.lt/index.php?id=213 (accessed 28/07/2025).

Jasiewicz, Zbigniew 1998. History of European Ethnology/Anthropology and Identity of Ethnologists/Anthropologists in Europe. In: A. Posern-Zieliński (ed.) *The Task of Ethnology Cultural Anthropology in Unifying Europe*. Poznań: Prace komitetu etnologicznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, No. 8, pp. 37–42.

Kuligowski, Waldemar 2011. Etnologija Lenkijoje: institucinė ir mokslo raida nuo 1910 metų iki šiandienos (Ethnology in Poland: Institutional and Scientific Development since 1910). *Lietuvos etnologija: socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*, Vol. 11 (20), pp. 109–124.

Luts, Arved 1993. The Teaching of Ethnography at the University in Tartu. *Pioneers. The History of Finnish Ethnology. Studia Fennica Ethnologica,* Vol. 1, pp. 77–84.

Maciūnas, Vincas 1939. Lituanistinis sąjūdis XIX a. pradžioje. Susidomėjimas lietuvių kalba, istorija ir tautotyra. Disertacija Vytauto Didžiojo Universiteto Humanitarinių mokslų fakulteto daktaro laipsniui įgyti (The Lithuanianist Movement at the Beginning of the 19th Century: Interest in the Lithuanian Language, History and Volkskunde. Dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Humanities, Faculty of Humanities, Vytautas Magnus University). Kaunas.

Mardosa, Jonas 2016. *Etnografija ir etnografo darbas. Etnografinių tyrimų istorijos ir praktikos klausimai* (Ethnography and the Work of the Ethnographer: Issues in the History and Practice of Ethnographic Research). Vilnius: Lietuvos edukologijos universiteto leidykla.

Merkene, Regina; Viyres Ants 1985. Rabochiy skot (Draught Animals). In: *Istoriko-etnograficheskiy atlas Pribaltiki: Zemledeliye* (Historical-Ethnographic Atlas of the Baltic States: Agriculture). Vil'nyus: Mokslas, pp. 53–55, Map 7.

Merkienė, Regina; Čiubrinskas, Vytis 1982. Žiemos periodo kalendoriniai papročiai. Etnografinių klausimų lapas Nr. 93 (Calendar Customs of the Winter Period: Ethnographic Questionnaire No. 93). Vilnius: LTSR MA Istorijos institutas; LTSR istorijos ir etnografijos muziejus.

Merkienė, Regina 1979. Gyvulininkystės inventorius Lietuvoje XIX–XX amžiuje (Livestock Inventory in Lithuania in the 19th and 20th Centuries). In: R. Merkienė, V. Milius (eds.) Žemės ūkio inventorius (Agricultural Inventory). Vilnius: Mokslas, pp. 6–105.

Merkienė Irena 1981. Išginimo ritualų analogijos bei arealai Lietuvoje ir Vakarų Baltarusijoje (XIX a. antroji – XX a. pirmoji pusė) (Analogies and Areas of Animal Pasture Rituals in Lithuania and Western Belarus (Second Half of the 19th Century to First Half of the 20th Century)). In: *Iš lietuvių etnogenezės* (From Lithuanian Ethnogenesis). Vilnius: Mokslas, pp. 100–112.

Merkienė, Regina 1983. Žemaičių lovatiesės XIX a. pab. – XX a. (Samogitian Bedspreads from the Late 19th century to the 20th century). In: V. Morkūnas et al. (eds.) *Etnografiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 1981 ir 1982 m.* (Ethnographic Research in Lithuania in 1981 and 1982). Vilnius: Lietuvos TSR Mokslų akademijos Istorijos institutas, pp. 69–73.

Merkienė, Regina 1985. Zoomorfinis ornamentas dzūkų liaudies tekstilėje (Zoomorphic Ornament in Dzūkia Folk Textiles). In: V. Morkūnas et al. (eds.) *Etnografiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 1983 ir 1984 m.* (Ethnographic Research in Lithuania in 1983 and 1984). Vilnius: Lietuvos TSR Mokslų akademijos Istorijos institutas, pp. 121–126.

Merkienė, Regina 1989a. *Gyvulių ūkis XVI a. – XX a. pirmojoje pusėje. Etninės patirties ištakos* (Livestock Farming between the 16th Century and the First Half of the 20th Century: The Origins of Ethnic Experience). Vilnius: Mokslas.

Merkienė, Regina (ed.) 1989b. *Lietuvos kaimo papročiai: etnografinių klausimų rinkinys* (Lithuanian Rural Customs: A Collection of Ethnographic Questions). Vilnius: Respublikinė jaunųjų turistų stotis.

Merkienė, Regina 1990. Tautos kultūros sandara (The Structure of the Nation's Culture). In: V. Milius et al. (ed.) *Etnografiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 1988 ir 1989 metais (konferencijos, skirtos etnografinių ekspedicijų rezultatams aptarti, medžiaga, Vilnius, 1989 m. gruodžio 14 d.)* (Ethnographic Research in Lithuania in 1988 and 1989 (Material from Conferences Dedicated to Discussing the Results of Ethnographic Expeditions, Vilnius, December 14, 1989)). Vilnius: Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Istorijos institutas, pp. 3–13.

Merkienė, Regina (ed.) 1991. *Kaimo papročiai ir žinija: etnografinių klausimų rinkinys* (Rural Customs and Knowledge: A Collection of Ethnographic Questions). Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 1993. *Gyvulių ūkis XVI–XX a.: etninės patirties ištakos. Habilituoto daktaro disertacijos tezės. Humanitarinių mokslų sritis. Etnologijos mokslo kryptis* (Animal Husbandry in the 16th to 20th Centuries: Origins of Ethnic Experience. Theses of the Habilitated Doctoral Dissertation. Field of Humanities. Field of Study Ethnology). Vilnius: Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, Lietuvos istorijos institutas.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 1997. Lietuvių etninės kultūros poslinkiai Seinų ir Punsko krašte (Changes in Lithuanian Ethnic Culture in the Sejny and Punsk Regions). In: *Etninė kultūra atkurtoje Lietuvos Respublikoje* (Ethnic Culture in the Restored Republic of Lithuania). Vilnius: Lygė, pp. 26–35.

Merkienė, Irena Regina (ed.); Pautieniūtė-Banionienė, Marija 1998. *Lietuvininkų pirštinės: kultūrų kryžkelėje* (Gloves of Lithuania Minor: At the Crossroads of Cultures). Vilnius: Žara.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 1999a. Velykiniai pavasario ženklai. Baltijos regiono kultūra XX amžiuje (Easter Signs of Spring: Culture of the Baltic Region in the 20th Century). In: I. R. Merkienė, V. Savoniakaitė (eds.) *Etninė kultūra ir tapatumo išraiška. Etnologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 1992, 1993 ir 1995 metais* (Ethnic Culture and the Expression of Identity: Ethnological Research in Lithuania in 1992, 1993, and 1995). Vilnius: Mokslo aidai, pp. 187–207.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 1999b. Atmosferos „valdymo" būdai Lietuvoje XX a. pirmojoje pusėje: etnokultūrinio tapatumo savybės (Ways of Managing Natural Phenomena in Lithuania in the First Half of the 20th Century: Features of Ethnocultural Identity). In: I. R. Merkienė, V. Savoniakaitė (eds.) *Etnologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 1992, 1993 ir 1995 metais* (Ethnic Culture and the Expression of Identity: Ethnological Research in Lithuania in 1992, 1993, and 1995). Vilnius: Mokslo aidai, pp. 208–222.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 2001a. Kultūrinio teritorinio tapatumo išraiška ir tradicijų pavidalai kaimo gyvenime (XIX a. antroji – XX a. pirmoji pusė) (Expressions of Cultural Territorial Identity and Forms of Tradition in Rural Life (Second Half of the 19th Century to the First Half of the 20th Century)). In: *Veliuona* (Veliuona County). Vilnius: Versmė, pp. 589–702.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 2001b. Latvijos lietuviai etninėje ir kultūrinėje konvergencijoje [Lithuanians of Latvia in the Ethnic and Cultural Convergence]. *Lituanistica*, Vol. 1 (45), pp. 117–143.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 2001c. Apaštalo Andriejaus šventės papročių savitumai. Baltų ir slavų merginų iniciacijų XIX a. – XX a. pirmojoje pusėje pėdsakais (The Peculiarities of the Customs of the Feast of St Andrew the Apostle: Evidence of the Initiation of Baltic and Slavic Girls in the 19th and First Half of the 20th Centuries). *Lituanistica*, Vol. 4 (48), pp. 99–121.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 2002a. Between Copyright and Privacy: The Experience of Ethnographical Research Ethics in the 20th Century Lithuania. *Pro Ethnologia*, Vol. 13, pp. 103–114.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 2002b. Paribio žmogaus kalendoriniai papročiai (Calendar Customs of the Borderland People). In: N. Vėlius et al. (eds) *Lydos krašto lietuviai* (Lithuanians of the Lida Region). Kaunas: Poligrafija ir informatika, Vol. 1, pp. 333–353.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 2002b. Tarpusavio pagalba ir įsipareigojimai XX a. Lietuvos kaimo bendruomenėje (Mutual Assistance and Obligations in 20th–Century Lithuanian Rural Community). Žemės ūkio mokslai, Vol. 4 (appendix), pp. 104–109.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 2005. Mirties etika Lietuvos kaimo kultūroje (The Ethics of Death in Lithuanian Rural Culture). *Lituanistica*, Vol. 3 (63), pp. 15–37.

Merkienė, Irena Regina (ed.); Paukštytė-Šaknienė, Rasa; Savoniakaitė, Vida; Šaknys, Žilvytis 2005. *Pietryčių Latvijos lietuviai. Tapatumo išraiška. Etninės ir kultūrinės orientacijos* (Lithuanians of South-east Latvia: Expression of Identity. Ethnic and Cultural Orientations). Vilnius: Versus Aureus.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 2006. Punsko ir Seinų krašto lietuvių Kūčios etnokultūriniame kontekste (Christmas Eve in the Ethnocultural Context of Lithuanians in the Punsk and Sejny Regions). In: P. Kalnius (ed.) *Punsko ir Seinų krašto lietuviai. Etninio ir kultūrinio tapatumo bruožai* (Lithuanians in the Punsk and Sejny Regions: Features of Ethnic and Cultural Identity). Punskas: Aušra, pp. 169–190.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 2007a. Šiokiadienių ir šventadienių etnografija. Etnografinių duomenų rinkimo pagrindai (Ethnography of Everyday Life and Holidays: The Basics of Collecting Ethnographic Data). Vilnius: Versmė.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 2007b. Gyventojų migracijos įtaka etninei kultūrai: reiškinių paralelizmas (Lietuva XX amžiuje) (The Influence of Population Migration on Ethnic Culture: The Parallelism of Phenomena (Lithuania in the 20th Century)). In: I. R. Merkienė (ed.) *Rytų Europos kultūra migracijos kontekste. Tarpdalykiniai tyrimai* (East European Culture in the Context of Migration: Interdisciplinary Studies). Vilnius: Versus Aureus, pp. 75–100.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 2007c. Lokalinė kultūra istorijos ir geografijos kontekste (Local Culture in Historical and Geographical Context). *Lietuvos etnologija. Socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*, Vol. 7 (16), pp. 39–56.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 2007d. Karšatis ir laidotuvės (Taking Care of People in their Old Age and Funeral). V. Didžpetris (ed.) Šiaurės Lietuvos kultūros paveldas. Papročiai (Cultural Heritage of Northern Lithuania: Traditions). Kaunas: Žiemgalos leidykla, Vol. 1, pp. 137–159.

Merkienė, Irena Regina 2011. Etnologijos institutas sovietmečio Lietuvoje mokslo politikos ir ideologijos kontekste (The Institute of Ethnology in Soviet Lithuania

in the Context of Science Policy and Ideology). *Lietuvos etnologija: socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*, Vol. 11 (20), pp. 125–142.

Moora, Harry; Viires, Ants (eds.) 1964. *Abriss der Estnischen Volkskunde*. Tallin: Estnischer Staatsverlag.

Murdock, George Peter 1965. *Culture and society*. Pitsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Nic Craith, *Máiréad 2008. From National to Transnational:* A Discipline en Route to Europe. In: M. Nic Craith, U. Kockel, R. Johler (eds.) *Everyday Culture in Europe. Progress in European Ethnology*. Burlington: Ashgate, pp. 1–17.

Nõmmela, Marleen 2011. Becoming an Ethnographer. Becoming a Science. Ferdinand Linnus and Estonian Ethnology in the 1920s. *Lietuvos etnologija: socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*, Vol. 11 (20), pp. 93–108.

Paládi-Kovács, Attila 1996. *Ethnic traditions, classes, and communities in Hungary*. Budapest: Institute of Ethnology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Strods, Heinrich (ed.) 1967. *Latviešu etnogrāfija* (Latvian Ethnography). Rīga: Zinātne.

Seljamaa, Elo-Hanna 2023. Baltic Calendrical Folklore. In: H. Beissinger (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Slavic and East European Folklore*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 275–294.

Senvaitytė, Dalia; Anglickienė, Laimutė 2019. Etnologijos studijos ir etninės kultūros specialistų rengimas Lietuvoje Europos Sąjungos šalių kontekste (Ethnology Studies and Training of Ethnic Culture Specialists in Lithuania in the Context of European Union Countries). *Tautodailės metraštis*, Vol. 37, pp. 23–36.

Šaknys, Žilvytis 2014.Tradicinių kalendorinių papročių tyrimai sovietų Lietuvoje (Research on Traditional Calendar Customs in Soviet Lithuania). *Etnografija*, Vol. 20, pp. 92–105.

Šaknys, Žilvytis 2007. Profesorė Irena Regina Merkienė: mokslininkė ir mokytoja (Professor Irena Regina Merkienė: Scientist and Teacher). *Lietuvos etnologija. Socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*, Vol. 7 (16), pp. 7–17.

Šaknys, Žilvytis 2011. Ieškant idėjų praeityje: etnologijos istorija ir dabartis (In Search of Ideas in the Past: The History and the Present State of Ethnology). *Lietuvos etnologija. Socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos,* Vol. 11 (20), pp. 9–32.

Šaknys, Žilvytis 2017. Irenai Reginai Merkienei – 80 (Irena Regina Merkienė – 80). *Lietuvos etnologija. Socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*, Vol. 17 (26), pp. 241–243.

Terent'yeva, Lyudmila Nikolayevna 1975. Iz opyta raboty po etnograficheskomu kartografirovaniyu (Experience of Ethnographic Cartography). In: V. A. Aleksandrov, N. V. Shlygina (eds.) *Etnograficheskoye kartografirovaniye material'noy kul'tury narodov Pribaltiki* (Ethnographic Cartography of the Material Culture of the Baltic Peoples). Moskva: Nauka, pp. 3–10.

Vyšniauskaitė, Angelė (ed.) 1964. *Lietuvių etnografijos bruožai* (Features of Lithuanian Ethnography). Vilnius: Valstybinė politinės ir mokslinės literatūros leidykla.

Žilvytis Šaknys, PhD, is a Senior Researcher at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Lithuanian Institute of History. He has conducted fieldwork in Lithuania, Belorussia, Poland, Latvia and Bulgaria. His research interests are in the field of traditional and modern culture; ethnology of youth; ethnology of the city; ethnology of friendship; ethnology of tourism; the history of ethnology; ethnicity; ethnic and confessional tolerance; the ritual year.

E-mail: shaknys@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-2594-2155

https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.02

Bronislava Kerbelytė: Innovator of Folktale Research

Dedicated to the memory of Bronislava Kerbelytė (1935–2024)

Jūratė Šlekonytė

Senior researcher, Department of Folk Narrative, Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Vilnius, Lithuania

E-mail: jurates@llti.lt

Abstract: This article presents the scholarly legacy of Bronislava Kerbelytė (1935–2024), a pioneering Lithuanian folklorist whose lifelong work significantly advanced the study of narrative folklore. Kerbelytė developed a unique methodology of structural-semantic text analysis, which redefined the classification of Lithuanian folktales, belief legends, local legends and anecdotes. Her approach challenged the limitations of the Aarne-Thompson (AT/ATU) and Proppian systems by introducing the concept of elementary plots, fundamental narrative units based on causality and semantic coherence. This method was applied to the extensive Catalogue of Lithuanian Narrative Folklore, covering over 85,000 texts. Although complex, her system offers deep insights into the thematic structure and cultural significance of folktales, revealing patterns in plot variation and human behaviour across narratives. Despite some international criticism regarding clarity and practicality, Kerbelytė's work is praised for its originality and empirical rigor. Her contributions have influenced both national and international folkloristics, offering new perspectives on narrative analysis and folklore comparison. This article not only evaluates her methodology

but also commemorates her role as a teacher, scholar, and leading figure in the field of folklore research.

Keywords: narrative folklore, methodology of structural-semantic text analysis, Lithuanian folktales, Catalogue of Lithuanian Narrative Folklore, elementary plot.

Introduction

Last autumn, the world of science suffered a great loss when the famous scientist, folklorist and expert on Lithuanian narrative folklore, Bronislava Kerbelytė (1935–2024), passed away just short of celebrating her 90th birthday. Although Kerbelytė has completed her earthly journey, her meaningful life is evident through the impressive number of scientific works, popular science articles and folklore collections she leaves behind.

Kerbelytė took a long, consistent, path in her journey to scientific heights. She didn't have to search for or select that path. Born in a village in central Lithuania, she lived in an environment steeped in folklore from childhood: her grandmother was a great storyteller of traditional tales and even a charmer. It was a happy coincidence that led her to the Department of Folkloristics at the Philological Faculty of Moscow's M. Lomonosov University, where many excellent professors taught courses in linguistics and literature. Here the future scientist gained knowledge of Slavic and Asian folklore.

After graduating from university, she returned to Lithuania and started working at the Institute of Lithuanian Language and Literature. She then went on to prepare and defend her dissertation, titled "Lithuanian Local Legends", at Vilnius University in 1965 (for more on the biography see Korzonaitė, Šlekonytė 2005a). From that moment Kerbelytė was completely dedicated to collecting and researching Lithuanian narrative folklore. During her time at the Institute (1963–1999), Kerbelytė produced her most significant scientific work and developed a distinctive methodology for the study of narrative folklore. In addition to her scientific work, the professor gave lectures to students at the Department of Ethnology and Folklore Studies at Vytautas Magnus University (1996–2010). Kerbelytė educated a large group of folklorists. Some students who were interested in folklore topics chose to pursue further educa-

tion under the professor's guidance. They wrote and defended their dissertations and continue to work in the field of folkloristics.

Thus, the professor devoted her entire life to the study of folklore. Even after retiring, she continued to compile one collection of Lithuanian folklore after another and translated the folklore of other nations into Lithuanian. She is the author of more than two dozen scientific books and several hundred articles in Lithuanian, Russian, Polish, German and English (for more scientific works see Korzonaitė, Šlekonytė 2005b, Balsys 2010). Kerbelytė also prepared a number of folklore sources that enrich the understanding of the Lithuanian narrative tradition and open up broader perspectives for its research.

It is also important to acknowledge Kerbelytė active participation in scientific conferences and seminars for teachers, as well as her interesting public lectures. Her contribution to Lithuanian folklore studies, and to culture in general, is immeasurable. Her scientific work will be an inexhaustible source for current and future Lithuanian scholars.

Kerbelytė established contacts with foreign scientists, taking an interest in their research. Cooperation with foreign folklorists developed into closer relations. Kerbelytė was accepted into international folklorist organisations[1], was a member of the editorial board of periodicals[2], and wrote commissioned articles for the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (the Encyclopedia of the Folktale)[3]. It should be noted that Kerbelytė's active participation in the international scientific community was also motivated by personal incentives. She developed a unique methodology for studying narrative folklore and wanted to present it to foreign folklorists for an assessment of its effectiveness and value to narrative research.

This article aims to present Kerbelytė's contribution to narrative folklore research and evaluate her structural-semantic text analysis methodology, which she considered to be the core of her research and the most important work of her life.

Figure 1. Bronislava Kerbelytė delivering a scientific report in Klaipėda University. 15 November 2012. Photo by Žilvytis Šaknys.

The prerequisites for the emergence of a new method of narrative research

At the beginning of the 20th century the historical-geographical method flourished. This method of analysis was particularly actively applied to the study of folktales. Using this method, motifs of a certain type are distinguished and analysed from a spatial and temporal perspective: the locations of motifs are marked on a map and the time of their recording is specified, thus attempting to determine the place of origin of the motifs, the direction of their spread, and the most archaic form. The historical-geographical method has encouraged comparative historical studies of the similarities, interactions, and influences of folktales of various nations.

However, despite significant achievements, the shortcomings of this method eventually became apparent. There was unevenness of the material under study – folktales are assigned to a particular type due to one or another feature or recurring motif – producing vague research results.

Gradually, the need to create abstract models and structures to help us better understand and explore folktales arose. Vladimir Propp, a Russian scholar, is one of the most important representatives of structuralism. After analysing the plots of Russian tales of magic collected by Alexander Afanasyev, Propp

created a typical narrative scheme, which he described in the monograph *Morphology of the Folktale* (Propp 1928). Propp divided folktales into their smallest structural parts, which he called functions, and concluded that folktales consist of thirty-one functions arranged in a consistent sequence. This method of folktale analysis proved attractive and even gained a number of followers. For example, the American folklore professor Alan Dundes developed Propp's ideas, distinguishing a new unit of narrative structure, the motifeme. This allows for a freer interpretation of the structure of a folktale (Dundes 1962). In his analysis of folktales, Dundes combined structuralism and psychoanalysis.

These were the prevailing trends in narrative research at the time that Kerbelytė started working at the Institute of Lithuanian Language and Literature. The director of the institute asked her to prepare a prospectus for a new catalogue of narrative folklore. At that time, a large array of narrative folklore had accumulated in the folklore archive of this institution. The oldest manuscripts date back to the end of the 19th century. Folklore was actively collected during the interwar period and this work continued during Soviet-era expeditions. Kerbelytė faced a great deal of work to identify works of narrative folklore and thus create favourable conditions for their systematic study.

Kerbelytė began to systematise folktales according to the internationally recognised Aarne-Thompson (AT)[4] classification system. Unfortunately, the system used in this catalogue to identify and assign folktales to certain types proved inconvenient for her. According to this system, a folktale is treated as a set of components (motifs). The concept of motif, its defining characteristics, and its boundaries have been, and continue to be, subjects of debate among scholars. For example, the American scientist Stith Thompson claimed that "A motif is the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition. In order to have this power it must have something unusual and striking about it" (Thompson 1946: 415). Based on such a definition, it is difficult to accurately assess what the boundaries of a motif are and what it is. In this case, a motif can be both an action and an object.

While working with this classification system, Kerbelytė found that many works either did not correspond to the reference type descriptions, or only corresponded partially. The system also seemed confusing because it was difficult to find the right folktale. This was because they were assigned to specific types based on a specific storyline, rather than by evaluating their abstract semantic meanings. Nevertheless, it became increasingly clear that this work required

the use of abstract structures to allow related folktales to be discovered and grouped together.

It became clear that a more precise tool was needed to classify folktales. Kerbelytė turned to the ideas proposed by Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale*, which were extremely popular in the scientific world at that time. According to Propp, a fairy tale (tale of magic) can be divided into composite units, or 'functions'. At the theoretical level, this system divided folktales into abstracted units and therefore satisfied the condition raised by Kerbelytė. However, unfortunately this research method did not meet expectations and proved ineffective. This is a more theoretical model that is practically inapplicable (perhaps this is why Propp, the creator of the method, did not develop a system for classifying folktales). The obstacle to using Propp's classification system turned out to be simple: he used a general linear scheme to study folktales despite the fact that this does not accurately reflect their structure. According to this theoretical model, the functions must be arranged in a specific, unchangeable order. Unfortunately, folktale plots do not always correspond to this model in reality, leaving the researcher faced with the question of how to analyse non-standard works. Due to this limitation, Kerbelytė later strongly criticised Propp's research after developing her own research methodology (Kerbelytė 1991, 2015).

Kerbelytė based her criticism on rich empirical experience. By conducting field research, taking notes on new folklore works from storytellers, and systematising manuscript versions of narratives, Kerbelytė became very familiar with the range of Lithuanian narrative folklore[5]. She delved particularly deeply into folktale plots and their variations, identifying trends in how plots could change. She gradually refined her vision of how the text of folktales (and other narratives) should be broken down and how these texts should be analysed to reveal their essence. Kerbelytė began to look for a new way to analyse and classify works of narrative folklore by reading and comparing them. She viewed folktales as profound, multi-dimensional works. Texts are composed of structural units that are connected by causal relationships. These relationships are not only linear, but also interpenetrate each other. The composite parts of folktales can form a mosaic. All that was needed was to give this vision a material form, to describe the structural units of the tale and the principles of their identification. Kerbelytė also faced the most difficult task of all in the creation of a new system of text classification.

Figure 2. Bronislava Kerbelytė records folklore from Ona Gedminienė in the village of Paskynai (Jurbarkas district) in 1967. (LTRFt 3974)

Structural-semantic text analysis methodology and its application to the creation of catalogues

Analysis of folktales and the creation of folktale catalogues was based on the idea that folktales have a relatively stable narrative core consisting of interconnected motifs (GEFF 3: 938), with motif understood as the smallest element of a folktale that exist in the traditional narrative. These motifs are then combined into larger units of the folktale plot known as 'episodes'.

When developing a methodology of structural-semantic text analysis, Kerbelytė observed that the concept of motif, which is widely used as a structural narrative unit, is characterised by heterogeneity. The concept of motif can refer to a character's activities and the full range of his or her actions, as well as the description of the situation (Kerbelytė 1991: 18). Thus, having critically evaluated the classification principles of previous folktale researchers and the laws of tradition revealed by many folklorists, Kerbelytė formulated one of the most important insights: "Each folktale type changes over time". Therefore, it is pointless to compare the variants with each established 'ideal' plot model (Kerbelytė 2011: 29). The conclusion has consistently been reached that, in

narrative plots, the most stable elements should be sought out, as their role in organising the elements of the work into a harmonious whole is the most important. Such elements can be identified by analysing a wide range of folktales and legends. Kerbelytė first turned her attention to tales of magic as the genre with the most interesting and diverse motifs. After analysing more than 12,000 variants, she divided tales with magic plots into smaller parts (see more: Kerbelytė 1991). This is how the concept of the elementary plot as a smaller unit of a folktale was formulated. An elementary plot (EP) is either an independent work or a fragment of a larger work which depicts a single encounter between the hero and antagonist as the hero achieves his or her goal (ibid.: 30–31). We would describe this as a kind of cell within a folktale. Using this method, the folktale is divided into EPs, with the most important one being identified. This forms the semantic core of the folktale, according to which folktales are classified. The semantics of an EP is explained using three-level abstraction.

Thus, after many years of researching folktales, the structural-semantic methodology of text analysis was developed. The next step was to apply this methodology to other works of Lithuanian narrative folklore, such as different types of folktale, belief legend and local legend.

It is important to note that the methodology of structural-semantic text analysis is not only applied to text analysis, but also underlies the classification of narratives. This approach is based on the creation of a significant publication, the four-volume Catalogue of Lithuanian Narrative Folklore (KbLPTK 1–4), which summarises information on over 85,000 folklore texts. This catalogue includes folktales, belief legends, local legends, orations and life stories. An intermediate variant was applied to the classification of folktales, combining the old AT system with the identification of elementary plot types (KbLPTK 1–2). The indexes of elementary plots provided at the end of the books reveal a broader picture of the variations in the structure and semantics of folklore works.

Meanwhile, belief and local legends have been classified using the system created by Kerbelytė. They are also published using the same principle in the English–Russian Catalogue of Lithuanian Legends (KbTNS). The catalogue of Lithuanian folktales, which was later published in Russian and English, was organised according to the new system of elementary plot types (KbTS, KbSSTLT).

Thus, the classification of Lithuanian narrative folklore has gradually shifted towards identifying elementary plot types. This represents a significant development in the field of international folkloristics, which traditionally relied on the AT (or updated ATU) system for classifying folktale texts.

Advantages and disadvantages of the new method in the context of international folkloristics

In folklore studies, each research method is a tool that should help effectively analyse texts. Structural-semantic text analysis provides an opportunity to take a fresh look at folktales, examining their structure and semantics. These two aspects enable researchers to evaluate the purpose of the folklore works, considering what they meant to the storytellers and the reasons why they were told. Having discovered a way to analyse, summarise, abstract and semantically interpret a wide range of folklore material, new opportunities have emerged for exploring the deeper meanings of narratives and, more precisely, for comparing folklore works of different genres and nations.

Although Kerbelytė used complex semantic language to describe the abstract levels of texts when applying this methodology, the research results were nevertheless presented in simple, easy-to-understand categories. For example, after studying 12,000 Lithuanian tales of magic and evaluating their semantic meanings, Kerbelytė identified five main human aspirations reflected in tale plots:

1) the desire to be free and unconstrained by the environment, or to control it;
2) the desire to have the necessities of life, or to seek comfort;
3) the desire to be an equal member of a tribe or society, or to seek high status;
4) the desire to find an ideal marriage partner;
5) the desire to have harmonious relationships within a tribe, family, or society (Kerbelytė 1991: 94–95).

The analysis revealed the pragmatic purpose of folktales and their clear connection with legends, as both genres document the rules of human behaviour. After the entire systematised Lithuanian narrative folklore (including folktales, legends and anecdotes) was abstracted, the exact number of elementary plot types became clear at 152 (Kerbelytė 2011: 34).

The summarised material shows that people took folktales seriously and treated them as a source of knowledge about the environment and about behavioural patterns. Kerbelytė emphasised the didactic value of these works in particular. An in-depth analysis of folktales revealed how these works were affected by new social problems and how new plot elements emerged as a re-

sult. Structural-semantic analysis provides better opportunities for comparing similar plots in folktales and legends from different nations, and for answering the question of why such similarities are found in the folklore of neighbouring countries and distant nations that have never had contact. Additionally, research based on a new method of text analysis has shown that it is possible to distinguish between falsified and reworked literary folktale plots. This is particularly important when evaluating unique folklore works to assess the competence and honesty of the collector of a folklore text. Additionally, the new method of studying folktales enables researchers to identify variations and trends in plot development, and even predict how plots might evolve.

Kerbelytė's first monograph, which revealed the essence of structural-semantic analysis, was published in Russian, significantly expanding the circle of readers. Meanwhile, the Catalogue of Lithuanian Narrative Folklore was published in Lithuanian, with no concise annotations of the types of folktale provided in any international language. Therefore, for a long time, the layers of Lithuanian narrative folklore were *terra incognita* for foreign folklorists. This changed radically with the publication of the aforementioned bilingual catalogue of Lithuanian legend types, as well as the catalogue of Lithuanian folktale types in Russian.

A little later, in a prestigious series, a collection of Lithuanian folktales was published in English, presenting them in two volumes. The published system of folktale and legend classification attracted the attention of folklorists both for its valuable new material and for its original method of presentation (Janeček 2017). However, these publications have not escaped criticism. The catalogues of belief legends (Jason 2002) and folktale types (Jason 2017) have been criticised for inaccurately translating some formulations into English. Another reviewer found the new folktale typology limited, stating that "the categories often seem somewhat arbitrary". He noted that elementary plots are not distinctive enough to justify a general typology of folktales. Kerbelytė's system really does not seem to be an independent classification system, but rather a system to be used together with AT/ATU. At the same time, he noted that the AT/ATU classification actually provides a more accurate representation of the narrative's nature, both structurally and semantically. However, the reviewer acknowledged that Kerbelytė's work contains a great deal of useful information about the extensive collection of Lithuanian folktales, although this

information could only be obtained by studying the new folktale classification patiently (Gay 2016).

One remark can be added to these observations. By dividing narratives into smaller units, i.e. elementary plots, Kerbelytė ignored the fact that Thompson's six-volume *Motif Index of Folk Literature* (MIFL) had been published. This work collects information about the constituent parts of texts, i.e. motifs, as identified in various folklore texts (especially folktales). Thompson distinguished and classified motifs conceptually into twenty-three groups, encompassing both supernatural and real-life phenomena. This classification made it possible to identify similar motifs in works of folklore from different genres. This has had a significant impact on comparative narrative studies. Of course, one could debate whether motif or elementary plot is a more effective unit of comparison. As an analysis has not yet been conducted, we will leave this question for the future.

One of the shortcomings of the methodology developed by Kerbelytė is its complexity, and this should be emphasised. Both the identification of narrative structures and their abstract language are quite difficult to understand for folklorists. A researcher of folktales who is not familiar with the new system will face the major puzzle of how to navigate an array of tales arranged in an unfamiliar way. This is different from the internationally used system that has been in place for many years. In order to start using this catalogue, it is necessary to become thoroughly familiar with its theoretical basis, i.e., to read the introduction to the book, and even better the book, as it justifies the effectiveness of this system (Kerbelytė 1991). Fortunately, the links between the new system and the AT classification are presented at the end of the book, which makes the work somewhat easier.

Will this system find its way into the research of other scholars? On the one hand, the information summarised in the new classification of Lithuanian folktales and legends will be analysed and incorporated into comparative narrative research. The Structural-Semantic Types of Lithuanian Folk Tale could become something similar to Thompson's catalogue of motifs, which contains valuable information that can be used to identify similarities. However, it is difficult to say whether structural-semantic text analysis methodology itself will become a tool for scientific research. Let's leave that for the future.

Figure 3. Professor Bronislava Kerbelytė and Dr Jūratė Šlekonytė with scientists from the S. S. Surazakov (Gorno Altajsk) Altaic Studies Research Institute in 2008.

Conclusions

Bronislava Kerbelytė undertook the enormous task of recording, identifying, classifying and studying Lithuanian narrative folklore. Through her research, she significantly expanded our understanding of the plots of folktales, belief legends, local legends and anecdotes, as well as their variations and development. Perhaps her greatest contribution to folkloristics research was her study of Lithuanian tales of magic. She knew these tales not only theoretically, but also through first-hand experience during field research, where she observed how they were performed and how they functioned in people's everyday lives.

The professor formulated universal laws governing the structure of folktales and other folk prose works. She created rules for the semantic interpretation of their elements and compiled a descriptive dictionary. She also identified basic plots – the fundamental components of folk narrative structure –, enabling her to conduct in-depth research into folktales and legends, making significant discoveries in the process. While this system, which was used to create a catalogue of Lithuanian narrative folklore, will probably not replace the AT/ATU system of folktale classification, it will nevertheless be useful as an auxiliary typology for researchers of Lithuanian and comparative folklore.

It is important to note that Kerbelytė not only became a prominent figure among Lithuanian folklore researchers, but also inscribed her name in global folklore research. She actively promoted her research at international conferences, giving lectures to foreign students and publishing her monumental research in Russian and English.

Only time will tell if the international scientific community will evaluate structural-semantic text analysis positively and recognise it as an effective instrument for text research. However, one thing is certain: the methodology of structural-semantic analysis has already been recorded in the history of folkloristics as a way of studying folklore narratives.

Notes

[1] Member of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR), full member of the Folklore Fellows (Finland).

[2] *Humanitaro zinatnu vestnesis* (Latvia) and *Estudos de Literatura Oral* (Portugal).

[3] This German research project (1980–2015) on international folkloristics comprises fifteen volumes and is widely regarded as the most comprehensive work in its field. It was published by the Göttingen Academy of Sciences. It is a reference book that presents the results of almost two centuries of international research into past and present folktale traditions in detail. It covers all forms of popular storytelling, including folktales, legends, religious tales and humorous stories (EF).

[4] By the way, this systematisation work was started in interwar Lithuania, by Jonas Balys, who systematised 16,000 works of narrative folklore and published a catalogue based on his work (BLPTMK), so Kerbelytė continued the work he had begun.

[5] Kerbelytė systematically organised more than 85 thousand variants of folktales, legends and anecdotes published and preserved in the Lithuanian Folklore Archive in the index of the Lithuanian Narrative Folklore Catalogue.

Abrevations

AT – The Types of Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography, Antti Aarne's Verzeichnis der Märchentypen, translated and enlarged by Stith Thompson. FF Communications, 1964, No. 184.

ATU – Uther, Hans-Jörg 2004. The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, part I: Animal Tales, Tales of Magic, Religious Tales and Realistic Tales, with an Introduction; part II: Tales of the Stupid Ogre, Anecdotes and Jokes, and Formula Tales; part III: Appendices. FF Communications, No. 284–286.

BLPTMK – Balys, Jonas 1936. Lietuvių pasakojamosios tautosakos motyvų katalogas (Motif-Index of Lithuanian Narrative Folklore). Tautosakos darbai, Vol. 2.

EF – Encyclopedia of the Folktale https://adw-goe.de/en/enzmaer/

GEFF – Haase D. (ed.) 2008. The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales, 3 vols. Westport (Connecticut), London: Greenwood Press.

KbLPTK – Kerbelytė Bronislava. Lietuvių pasakojamosios tautosakos katalogas (The Catalogue of Lithuanian Narrative Folklore), Vol. 1: Pasakos apie gyvūnus. Pasakėčios. Stebuklinės pasakos (Animal Tales. Fables. Tales of Magic), Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 1999; Vol. 2: Pasakos-legendos. Parabolės. Novelinės pasakos. Pasakos apie kvailą velnią. Buitinės pasakos. Melų pasakos. Formulinės pasakos. Pasakos be galo (Religious Tales. Exempla. Realistic Tales. Tales of the Stupid Ogre. Anecdotes and Jokes. Tall Tales. Formula Tales. Catch Tale), Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas; Vol. 3: Etiologinės sakmės. Mitologinės sakmės. Padavimai. Legendos (Origin Legends. Belief legends. Local Legends. Legends), Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2002; Vol. 4: Pasakojimai. Anekdotai. Oracijos (Life Stories. Anecdotes. Orations). Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 2009.

KbSSTLT –Kerbelytė, Bronislava 2015. The Structural-Semantic Types of Lithuanian Folk Tales: Vol. 1 (FF Communications 308), Vol. 2 (FF Communications 309). Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

KbTNS – Kerbelytė, Bronislava 2001. Tipy narodnykh skazaniy: strukturno-semanticheskaya klassifikatsiya litovskikh etiologicheskikh i mifologicheskikh skazaniy i predaniy =The Types of Folk Legends: the Structural-Semantic Classification of Lithuanian Legends. Sankt-Peterburg: Yevropeyskiy dom.

KbTS – Kerbelytė, Bronislava 2005. Tipy narodnykh skazok. Strukturno-semanticheskaya klassifikatsiya litovskikh narodnykh skazok (Types of Folk Tale: Structural-Semantic Classification of Lithuanian Folk Tales), Vol. 1–2. Moskva: RGGU.

LTRFt – Lithuanian Folklore Archives at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore (photograph collections)

ThMIFL – Thompson, Stith (ed.) 1955–1958. Motif-Index of Folk Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Medieval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books and Local Legends, Vol. 1–6. Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger.

References

Dundes, Alan 1962. From Etic to Emic Units in the Structural Study of Folktales. *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 75, No. 296, pp. 95–104.

Kerbelytė, Bronislava 1991. *Istoricheskoye razvitiye struktur i semantiki skazok: na materiale litovskikh volshebnykh skazok* (Historical Development of the Structure and Semantics of Folktales: Based on Lithuanian Tales of Magic). Vilnius: Vaga.

Kerbelytė, Bronislava 2011. *Tautosakos kūrinių prasmės* (The Meaning of Lithuanian Folklore Works). Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas.

Kerbelytė, Bronislava 2015. Neosushchestvlennaya ideya klassifikatsii skazok (Zametki o «Morfologii skazki» V. YA. Proppa) (The Unrealised Idea of Classifying Folktales (Notes on the "Morphology of the Folktale" by V. Propp)). In: A. Toporkov (ed.) *Neizvestnyye stranitsy russkoy fol'kloristiki* (Unknown Pages of Russian Folklore Studies). Moskva: Indrik, pp. 230–244.

Korzonaitė, Edita; Šlekonytė, Jūratė 2005a. Pasakų išminties skleidėja (The Spreader of Folktale Wisdom). *Tautosakos darbai*, Vol. 22 (29), pp. 294–297.

Korzonaitė, Edita; Šlekonytė, Jūratė 2005b. Bronislavos Kerbelytės darbų bibliografija [Bibliography of Scientific Publications by Bronislava Kerbelytė]. *Tautosakos darbai*, Vol. 22 (29), pp. 298–313.

Balsys, Rimantas 2010. Pagrindinių mokslinių publikacijų sąrašas 2005–2009 m. (List of Main Scientific Publications 2005–2009). *Res Humanitariae*, Vol. 7, pp. 287–289.

Gay, David Elton 2016. Review of Bronislava Kerbelytė "The Structural-Semantic Types of Lithuanian Folk Tales, Vol. I & II (Folklore Fellows Communications 308)". *Journal of Folklore Research Reviews*. https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/jfrr/article/view/38470

Janeček, Petr 2017. Bronislava Kerbelytė, The Structural Semantic Types of Lithuanian Folk Tales. Volume I. Genres and Tale Types. Volume II. The Classification and Index of Elementary Plots and Their Types. Folklore Fellows' Communications 308. Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia – Academia Scientiarum Fennica 2015, 477 s., 331 s. *Český lid* 104 (3), pp. 527–528.

Jason, Heda 2002. KERBELITE BRONISLAVA. Tipi Narodnyh Skazanij. The Types of Folk Legends. The Structural-Semantic Classification of Lithuanian Aetiological, Mythological and Historical Legends. St. Petersburg: Evropejskij Dom, 2001. Russian text by B. Kerbelite; English text by I. Antanaitis and A. Chistova. *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 1, pp. 177–179.

Jason, Heda 2017. Kerbelyte, Bronislava. Structural-Semantic Types of Lithuanian Folk Tales. Vol. I, *Genres and Tale Types* 2015. *Fabula*, Vol. 58, No. 3–4, 2015, pp. 403– 405. https://doi.org/10.1515/fabula-2017-0037

Propp, Vladimir 1928. *Morfologiya skazki* [Morphology of the Folktale]. Leningrad: Academia.

Thompson, Stith 1946. *The Folktale*. New York: The Dryden Press.

Jūratė Šlekonytė, PhD, is a senior researcher at Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Department of Folk Narrative. Her main research interests are Lithuanian folk narratives; archiving, classification of folktales; Lithuanian tales of magic; folktales and their storytelling contexts.

E-mail: jurates@llti.lt

ORCID: 0000-0002-8023-6114

https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.03

An Ethnologist in the Face of Migration Challenges: Evidence from Antanas Mažiulis's Letters

Irma Šidiškienė

Researcher at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Lithuanian Institute of History, Vilnius, Lithuania

E-mail: irma.sidiskiene@istorija.lt

Abstract. Focusing on the experience of the Lithuanian diaspora in the mid-twentieth century, the article explores the challenges that forced migration poses to the formation of community and the preservation of personal identity. As evidence of individual experience, letters become the foundation for studies that seek to understand how an individual adapts emotionally and culturally to a new environment without losing connection with his or her origins. The study is relevant within the fields of cultural, migration, and identity studies, in which increasing attention is directed towards subjective narratives and autobiographical sources.

Keywords: Antanas Mažiulis, letters, culture shock in the USA, cultural identity, forced migration

Introduction

Antanas Mažiulis (1914–2007) was a renowned researcher of Lithuanian folklore, an ethnologist, a Lithuanian language and literature scholar by education, as well as a dedicated social activist and bibliophile. He studied at Vytautas

Magnus University and Vilnius University between 1938 and 1943 and graduated with a degree in Lithuanian philology from the University of Tübingen in Germany in 1949. Escaping Soviet repression, in 1944 he fled to the West together with Česlovas Grincevičius.[1] Although initially he did not plan to go to the USA, he did not feel safe in Europe and, following the example of his friends, he moved to America, hoping not to stay there permanently and return to a free Lithuania or to collect research material in European archives. However, he was unable to return to Europe and spent the first two years living in Brooklyn, New York City.[2]

Reflected in his letters, Mažiulis's first experiences in the USA are unique in that they were recounted not to his relatives in Lithuania, but to his comrades, friends, and colleagues living in free countries, and therefore the letters openly and bluntly describe the environment, his personal emotions, and experiences. The uniqueness of these letters was emphasised by a number of his correspondents. From 1933, Mažiulis had distinguished himself with his journalistic talent[3] writing for various Lithuanian and émigré publications and encyclopaedias. His contribution to the methodology of collecting folklore and material of regional studies, numerous reviews, and scholarly articles demonstrate his broad academic field.

In examining the multi-layered and complex problem of the impact of crises on the expression of community spirit, this study pays particular attention to the experience of forced migration. As a social and cultural phenomenon, migration fundamentally transforms an individual's relationship with their community, identity, and social environment. One of the main ways of investigating this problem is analysing the ways forced migration affects human integration into a new community, the challenges posed by culture shock and social adaptation, and the manner in which the migrants reflect on their opportunities to pursue personal goals in a new environment. The most effective method is a case study based on research on the personal experiences of a migrant, which makes it possible to reveal the impact of the culture shock, individual experiences, and adaptation strategies. By recording emotional states, worldviews, and sociocultural reflections, migrants' letters become an important source of cultural and social documentation.

The article draws on theoretical approaches to migration, social memory, and cultural identity. Robin Cohen (2019) describes migration as a comprehensive, multi-layered process that affects both individuals and global structures.

He emphasises that migrants often face identity crises as they try to reconcile their own culture with that of their new country, which can lead to conflict or become a source of cultural diversity. Kalervo Oberg (1960) described the culture shock experienced by migrants by distinguishing several stages of adaptation, from euphoria to frustration and final integration. These stages find their reflection in migrants' letters, which display ambivalent emotions, doubts, longing, and efforts to maintain a connection with their past identity. In developing his theory of collective memory, Pierre Nora (1989) points out that collective memory evolves through symbolic signs and personal testimonies, such as letters, diaries, or memoirs. Maurice Halbwachs (1992) argues that collective memory is constantly reconstructed in social interaction and that migration experiences become an important part of this memory. In his research on identity formation, Stuart Hall (1990) emphasises that migrant identity is a constantly changing process of negotiation and reflection, especially when faced with culture shock and the norms of a new society.

As one of the components of egodocuments[4] letters often exhibit subjectivity, autobiographical and emotional expression, and the ability to reveal authentic experiences and individual perceptions of the world. According to Waldemar Chorążyczewski and Agnieszka Rosa, when applying anthropological approaches to egodocuments, it is not facts or their veracity that are addressed but rather how writers experiences reality, how they perceive and reflect on it (Chorążyczewski, Rosa 2013: 31). Letters are regarded as documents that reflect a particular era, culture, and social practices, but at the same time, they are partly literary texts with rhetorical and stylistic features. Egodocuments play an important role in migration studies. An article by Edith Saurer and Annamarie Steidl analyses the ways egodocuments (i.e., personal testimonies such as letters, diaries, autobiographies, etc.) provide valuable insight into individual migration processes that are often overlooked in official historical sources. Egodocuments allow readers to delve into migrants' feelings, moods, memories, and personal insights of into migration processes. The authors note, as does David Gerber (2006), that they may contain distorted or biased experiences that depend on personal perspective (Saurer, Steidl 2013).

The object of this study is Antanas Mažiulis's letters written in 1951–1952, immediately upon his arrival in the United States, when he lived in Brooklyn. The letters reveal the unique experience of Lithuanian émigrés in the mid-twentieth century; some of them can be considered texts of a reflective or

imaginative nature. As Fatemeh Pourjafari and Abdolali Vahidpour (2014) note, such texts "reflect a complex and ambiguous reality, and therefore convey people's feelings and understanding much more reliably than most academic artifacts." Letters are analysed in terms of their ambivalence: as a long-term emotional condition, a situational attitude, or even an existential position.

A set of 42 letters selected for analysis[5] is interpreted using a contextual and thematic content analysis method. The letters are analysed not only as a means of communication but also as emotional and cultural texts capturing the subjective experiences of migration: reflections on identity, emotional states, and forms of expression. These egodocuments reveal both individual and collective experiences of the émigrés, for example identity crises, ambivalent relationships with American society and the Lithuanian community, efforts to preserve cultural identity and continue scholarly vocation under new conditions.

The aim of this study is to show how the ethnologist's reflection and humanitarian stance in exile become a form of resistance to superficiality and the fading of cultural identity. The main themes raised in Mažiulis's letters, which reveal his conception of reality, are analysed. The study raises the following questions: how are experiences of culture shock and integration expressed in these letters? What emotional states dominate the letters in the early period of migration?

Based on relevant theoretical approaches and contemporary migration studies, such a study contributes to a deeper understanding of the experiences of the Lithuanian diaspora and the effect of migration on identity and cultural memory.

The addressees, the style, and the themes of the letters

During the period under review, letters were written to various addressees: friends, comrades, colleagues, clergymen, and professors residing in free countries. Letters are considered egodocuments: they are subjective texts that record not only personal experiences but also the broader cultural, political, and social field of the diaspora. Aistė Kučinskienė notes that letters are a "medium of self-expression and self-creation" in which writers do not so much reveal their existing identities as shape them through their relationship with specific addressees (Kučinskienė 2019: 35). Therefore, the object of the

study encompasses not only the content of a letter, but also the building of the relationship with the reader (addressee) through language, tone, style, and communication structure.

The letters analysed clearly reveal such themes as the search for identity, migration insecurity, political disappointment, and cultural resistance. This is reflected in the following quotes: "We are Europeans, so everything seems strange, especially when you start thinking with your stomach." ((To Ivinskis)[6], 20 May 1951);[7] "I'll paint a new tail for some devil of mine" (to Juozas (Lingis), 28 May 1951); "I serve no emperor but suck a bear's paw" (to Česlovas (Grincevičius), 21 September 1951). It is through such vivid expressions that Mažiulis conveys not only his emotional state but also an immigrant's inner struggle against the values of a new culture.

The language used in the letters is informal, demotic, brimming with metaphors, irony, and humour, revealing the writer's literary sensitivity and his cultural reflexivity. A specific manner of speaking is chosen for each addressee: familiar, witty, full of slang and nicknames for friends; respectful, intellectual, often argumentative, as well as emotional and critical for priests and professors; gentle, sensitive, thoughtful for women.

The influence of the addressee on the form of communication. A summary table

Type of the addressee	**Language style/tone**	**Features of the forms of address/place names[8]/signatures[9]**
Professors	Formal respect, intellectual analysis	"Dear Professor"/"Brooklyn"/ signature – "Yours"
Clergymen	Merged respect (sometimes warm, other times formal)	"Dear Priest", "Revered"/"Brooklyn"/"Yours"
Juozas Lingis[10] (a colleague)	Direct, professional	"Dear Juozas", "Juozas"/"Brooklyn", "Velnynė" (devils' lair)/"Yours"

Friends (in Germany)	Familiar, ironic, emotional charge	"To my remaining friends", "Hello those who haven't sold their souls"/"The trash heap"/ no signature or "Yours"
Associates (from the Šatrija association)	Caricatured, with pseudonyms, patriotically ironic	"Apuokėlis" (owlet), "Murza", "Untė"/"Biesynė" (devils' place), "Pasaulio šiukšlynė" (world's garbage dump), "Velnių Šiukšlynė" (devils' garbage dump)/sometimes signed "Your Brisius"
Women[11]	Intimate, gentle, nostalgic	Diminutive names/"Golden city"/"Your Tulis", "Karšinčius" (old man in need of care)
Česlovas Grincevičius (a friend)	Mixed – critical and witty	By name or "Dear Česlovas", sometimes "Hello Martyr of Martyrs", "Noble creature"/"Doghouse"/"Antanas", "Karšinčius"

Letters to Grincevičius and some of his female correspondents most clearly reveal his emotional and value conflict and his inner non-reconciliation with the realities of migration. Alongside academic discussions, political deliberations and social critique dominate his letters to professors (in particular to Juozas Brazaitis,[12] Antanas Maceina[13]). For example, in a letter to Brazaitis, Mažiulis writes that he is delighted at the achievements of the Lithuanians[14], seeing this as an important step that could influence international politics; however, that same letter reveals internal criticism and competition between various political figures and groups, which points to certain political struggles and disagreements (9 November 1951).

Letters become a communicative space where Mažiulis conveys his knowledge or emotions and simultaneously constructs his place between different worlds: Lithuanian and American, academic and mundane, personal and collective. They are a multifaceted form of narrative that combines autobiography, cultural criticism, ideological commentary, and emotional self-reflection.

In Antanas Mažiulis's letters that I analysed, themes recur (for instance, he described his first visit to a museum to Ivinskis, Grincevičius, and two women – A. and R.), although it is possible to distinguish the dominant topics by the groups of addressees. This helps reveal the thematic distribution of the narrative and changes in emphasis depending on the communication partner. The table below is based on data from the analysis of 42 letters.

Distribution of dominant topics in letters by group of addressees

Group of addressees	Most frequently discussed themes	Nature of themes
Professors	Reflections on migration, culture shock, social issues in the USA, politics, requests for recommendations, academic deliberations	Intellectual, analytical, critical
Clergymen	Spiritual quests, the moral situation of the Lithuanian diaspora, the relationship between religion and nationalism, political commentary	Ethical, reflective, partially apologetic
Colleagues	Academic news, ethnological deliberations, preservation of Lithuanian culture, job search in the USA	Theme-based, professional, matter-of-fact
Friends (in Germany)	Nostalgia, wartime and post-war experiences, daily challenges, the theme of resistance, irony, memories	Emotional, witty, nostalgic
Associates (from the Šatrija association)	Social criticism in the USA, living conditions, work experiences, national self-awareness, literary metaphors, satire	Ironic, culturally engaged
Women	Personal experiences, emotional loneliness, adapting to a new environment, nostalgia for relationships	Intimate, gentle, autobiographical
Česlovas Grincevičius (a friend)	Deep political analysis, details of daily life, psychological tensions, personal identity conflict, criticism of the diaspora	Combined – emotional and analytical

The table shows that letters are multi-layered acts of communication in which the subject matter and style of expression are closely related to the identity of a specific addressee and their relationship with the author.

This multi-layered analysis of texts allows the study to pinpoint key issues, such as how identity, worldview, ideological stance, and cultural affiliation are reflected in letters; how the figure of the addressee functions in the dynamics of the narrative; and how both personal and collective experiences of exile are revealed through epistolary practice.

I Analysis of American society from an ethnological point of view

First impressions, the environment, and contrasting values. "For me, as for many, the beginning was more than bitter, especially after settling in this city" ((to Brazaitis), 9 May 1951). Mažiulis describes his experience of arriving in the United States as a particularly strong culture shock. Upon arrival, he is constantly asked, "Do you like America?", and at first he responds with an uninformed 'like', but he soon realises that he should say 'very like'. This becomes a metaphor for Americanisation, polite but superficial adaptation. He was also bothered by the climate, which was unusual for him:

> I am bothered by hardships, as before. It is hard to imagine a bathhouse like the one here now. You sit there and sweat pours off you. It doesn't seem that hot, only about 36 European degrees, but there's that water that saturates the air. The worst thing is that you can't sleep because it's fiercer than in a bathhouse (to Tadas (Alinskas),[15] 17 July 1951).

Another strong impression is that of a world resembling a "dump", both literally and metaphorically. According to him, the trash here symbolises not only physical pollution of the environment, but also a deep spiritual decline arising from a consumerist and materialistic model of society. Mažiulis notes that European and especially Lithuanian values[16] remain strong, but the encounter with the new environment causes existential turmoil and drives him to despair. He is critical of the American notion of freedom[17], which he considers simplistic and often reduced to an individualistic, self-serving pursuit of 'freedom' detached from deeper values. In his view, the American way of life is too heavily based

on material goals, and money becomes the central social unit of measurement. According to him, migrants often 'sell their Lithuanian soul' by adapting to a new system in which consumption and financial success become the most important aspects.

As Mažiulis describes, the urban environment appears to be repulsive: it is depicted as overflowing with trash, aesthetically unappealing, and chaotic. Here, the architecture of skyscrapers is not a result of aesthetic expression but rather an expression of functional planning. The author notes that due to natural conditions, in particular strong winds, piles of rubbish often accumulate in the city, interfere with daily life, and point to a lack of urban planning. This view of the city seems to him to be significantly different from the more orderly, aesthetic, and human-friendlier urban environment in Lithuania. Mažiulis interprets this situation as an indication of the chaos of industrial civilisation and alienation of humans from their environment.

When reflecting on the American notion of freedom, the author contemplates the paradoxes of work and freedom. In his opinion, many migrants arrive with illusions of greater opportunities and personal freedom, but in reality they encounter a situation where 'freedom' manifests itself as coercion to work non-stop in pursuit of material well-being. According to Mažiulis, this situation creates dependence on work and money but brings neither spiritual fulfilment nor meaning to life. He expresses his disappointment with a social system in which human existence becomes enslaved to constant demands for productivity and lacks deeper existential motivation.

Yet Mažiulis notes another, more positive aspect of freedom in American life: work, which is perceived not only as a necessity, but also as a source of joy. He points out that in US culture, work is often seen as the main purpose of life, and hard physical labour does not inflict misery but brings satisfaction. In his words, "the hardest work here brings joy to people", and this means that work becomes a means not only of securing a livelihood but also of spiritual self-expression. He finds this approach fundamentally different from that of Eastern Europe, especially societies influenced by the Soviet legacy, where work was perceived as an imposed duty inseparable from coercion and constant dissatisfaction.

Social reality and working conditions in the US context. In the letters dated 1951/1952, Mažiulis consistently reveals the difficulties he encountered in trying to establish himself in the US labour market. He is critical of a system

in which social status, personal connections, and recommendations become essential factors even when seeking even the lowest-skilled job. He says that without the so-called 'American papers' and relevant recommendations, even the simplest duties remain unattainable. He draws attention to the requirements of some jobs, which he considers unreasonable or even absurd, for example, one's appearance or age become decisive selection criteria regardless of competence or work experience.

These aspects reveal Mažiulis's deeper disappointment with American work culture, in which, as he points out, human value is often reduced to financial expression. He sums it up succinctly: "A person's value is based on the amount of dollars they have." Hard physical labour, low pay, and constant fatigue become the main aspects of his migration experience. Reflecting autobiographically, Mažiulis mentions summer jobs for one dollar an hour, comparing them to his previous, better-paid, and socially more stable jobs in Europe. Speaking about the Lithuanian diaspora, the historian Daiva Dapkutė noted that "many countries were looking for a manual labour force after the war, and Lithuanians had to reorient themselves while experiencing social degradation as few were able to find work within their professions." (2017: 66). Furthermore, as Mažiulis's letters show, his pride and his desire to preserve his personal dignity stop him from taking advantage of social benefits, even though this could alleviate his situation. He is unable to "tell lies in the American way" ((to Ivinskis), ? December 1952) in order to receive unemployment benefit, which demonstrates both his ethical idealism and his inability to adapt to the new system. He conveys this inner conflict with an ironic statement: "Your *žilvinas*[18] doesn't know how to deal with pigs, he still behaves like a noble …" (to Juozas (Lingis), 23 October 1952).

Criticism is also directed at the US bureaucratic system, which, according to Mažiulis, is based on an employer–employee dependency model. He is of the view that although individuals in the United States are formally considered free, in reality they are constantly monitored and registered according to their employer rather than their independent identity. This, he believes, creates control structures that limit personal autonomy, contrary to what is declared in public discourse.

Racism and social inequality: ethnic minorities in US society. Along with analysing working conditions, Mažiulis devotes considerable attention in his letters to the topics of racism and social exclusion. He says that discrimination

is deeply rooted in American society, affecting not only black people but other ethnic and cultural minorities as well. He notes that various groups, including immigrants, often face preconceived stereotypes that limit their opportunities in the labour market and social life. This problem is particularly acute in the southern states, where, in his view, racial differences still carry significant social weight.

Although he acknowledges that the values declared in the United States – tolerance, racial equality, recognition of cultural diversity – exist in theory, in practice they often remain unfulfilled in everyday life. He notes critically that American culture tends to overemphasise its own values but lacks an open and sincere attitude towards traditions of other nations. Such value-based closed-mindedness contributes to social exclusion and intolerance.

Mažiulis pays particular attention to the situation of Lithuanian migrants (displaced persons, or DPs). He says that this community often faces various obstacles arising from ethnic origin, religious beliefs, or even historical associations, such as the stereotype of 'fascists'. For these reasons, the integration of Lithuanians into American society is slow and often painful. He describes how this group experiences exclusion on both social and cultural levels and how combating stereotypes and establishing themselves in a new environment becomes a complex and emotionally draining task.

Cultural and social differences through the eyes of an immigrant. Mažiulis's letters reveal a deep cultural and value conflict between the Lithuanian worldview and American society, where, he believed at the time, he resided temporarily. He describes American society as highly consumerist and materialistic, where money becomes the main measure of an individual's worth. In his opinion, this economic logic destroys spiritual values, and issues of morality and ethics are often marginalised. Mažiulis notes with some sadness that secularisation and the weakening of the significance of faith indicate a broader crisis of values, which is reflected at both the individual and societal levels.

In his letters, he goes on to reflect on the cultural differences between Americans and Lithuanians, particularly with regard to the concepts of family, religion, and community. Lithuanian immigrants are often forced to change their traditional values[19] or abandon them in order to adapt to their new environment. He notes that this adaptation is not uniform: the older generation often feels disconnected, while younger people of Lithuanian origin tend to integrate quickly, even forgetting their origins. At the same time, he criticises certain

tensions and disagreements between the Lithuanian and American clergy, especially regarding the interpretation of religious practices and traditions.

Mažiulis criticism extends to Americans' relationship with money and its sacralisation. Here, the dollar acquires not only economic but also symbolic significance by becoming a moral compass. Mažiulis observes that many Americans live isolated in their routines, and money becomes not a means to an end, but an end in itself. In his opinion, "Maceina should have lived here for at least a year, then he would have been able to write more vividly and accurately about the three temptations of devil, which are so evident in the life of this free country" (to Antanas Styra,[20] 17 November 1951).

The letters convey details of everyday life that expose cultural paradoxes. For example, Mažiulis describes the freedom enjoyed by children when out on the streets, which sometimes evolves into disregard for behavioural norms. The phenomenon of waste management is also discussed. When playing with discarded objects, children creatively reconstruct their environment, for example, by turning old sofas into playgrounds. In addition to providing an illustration of cultural differences, these observations ironically reflect on the attitude of American society toward consumption and the transience of objects.

Mažiulis notes that despite industrial growth, the social and economic situation in New York remains difficult. A significant proportion of the population is unemployed, and the labour market is unstable and difficult for immigrants to access. He plans to work only until Christmas, aiming to accumulate enough money to return to Europe. This temporary residence strategy reflects a lack of adaptation to the US way of life and social system.

Mažiulis provides an observation on the cultural and academic environment in the USA. In his opinion, museum exhibitions lack the systematic approach to science that is characteristic of Germans: they are often fragmented, unfounded and, in some cases, vulgar. For example, he considers the depiction of the menstrual cycle to be excessive and inappropriately conveyed. The dominance of Darwinist ideas, the treatment of human culture as a natural phenomenon, and the merger of anthropology with palaeontology or mineralogy seem to him to be a distorted understanding of human history and culture. He is particularly critical of the reduction of folklore to commercial forms and considers the cowboy-style storytelling tradition not to be folklore but a commercial imitation.

The letters go on to criticise the internal cultural state of the Lithuanian diaspora. He views the Lithuanian press with sarcasm, calling it worthless, and national consciousness superficial. Parochial thinking, indifference to cultural activities, and unwillingness to invest in meaningful projects are considered signs of community weakness. However, he acknowledges Lithuanians' ability to endure and suffer, at the same time urging them to speak out, because suppressed experiences of pain, especially those related to deportation and spiritual humiliation, can turn into inner alienation.

Mažiulis's criticism does not spare **religious practices and the Catholic tradition** either. He notes that American Catholic practice focuses primarily on money, donations, and church statistics, and that religion often becomes a mechanism associated with social status and traditions that do not always correspond to the depth of faith. Priests are hypocrites, seekers of power and money, and parish houses are run not by priests but by the "little ladies" (housekeepers) who manage everything from parish organisations to monitoring people's "loyalty": "God rules only heaven, and he gave the earth to the parish priest, who in turn … handed it over to the little lady" (to a woman I., 14 August 1951). Mažiulis criticises priests and newspapers, which only report on picnics, name days, and "toilet matters". He writes: "Let those grunters read that there is another science besides engineering and the priesthood" (to Juozas (Lingis) 13 June 1951). This satire is directed at the "American horns", i.e., priests who have turned religion into a convenient, commercial, empty form.

Mažiulis's criticism also covers social inequality as he notes that even after death, people remain divided by their monetary value. He observes ironically, writing to a woman, I., that on a monument in the cemetery, "the initial of the name cannot be carved because he is a beggar." This is a cruel caricature of reality: even a name is not allowed for a beggar because he or she does not deserve an identity. Mažiulis notes that even the symbols of justice become slaves to money when "the angel wants a little bribe…" and "the beggar is unnecessary" (to a woman I., 1951. VIII. 14.). This phrase is bursting with irony: even the messengers of heaven are corrupt – they would only collect sweat and tears from the rich, because they would give 'tips'.

Thus, the letters convey the cultural distance between the migrant and the host society. Mažiulis is sceptical about the values declared by the USA – tolerance, equality, cultural diversity –, which, in his opinion, often remain unfulfilled in reality. He gives examples of how religious or faith-based public

figures often attract negative reactions, which points to the contradictions between public rhetoric and everyday practice. Finally, in criticising American anthropology and its approach to culture, Mažiulis emphasises the need to view the evolution of culture and science not only rationally, but also sensitively: as a living and meaningful part of human existence.

II Academic activities, personal struggles, and maintaining identity in exile

Mažiulis's letters as documents of cultural resistance. In exile, Mažiulis experiences academic and social exclusion. He feels unwelcome, unfit ("*trefnas*") in the scholarly community, which instead of fostering creative cultural revival becomes a source of disappointment. For him, the publication of the encyclopaedia, which was supposed to be the pinnacle of cultural activity, becomes a sad reminder of internal issues among the editorial board. He describes the editorial team as unproductive and superficial, and some of the editors as individuals who adapted to the Soviet regime of 1940 and were appointed as 'professors' not for their merits but for their loyalty to the occupying power. In his letters, he encourages his colleagues to speak out about inappropriate editorial decisions.

Despite these challenges, Mažiulis does not abandon his main mission to consistently collect, systematise, and interpret Lithuanian folklore and elements of material culture. His correspondence discusses specific topics related to wooden architecture, folklore, and religion. He comments on the term *Kupolis* to his colleague, and his letters contain linguistic, etymological, and semantic analyses.

In his letters to colleagues, Mažiulis critically assesses the lack of competence in ethnography among some experts. According to him, important aspects of ethnic architecture are often ignored, and scholars tend to interpret Lithuania's ethnic heritage superficially or incorrectly. Even living in unfavourable conditions, Mažiulis remains faithful to scholarly idealism, nurturing the idea of compiling an ethnographic lexicon, striving to maintain academic integrity and leave behind a valuable scholarly legacy.

He is interested in comparative studies and analyses Slavic and Germanic cultural influence on Lithuanian religious tradition, emphasising the influence

of Eastern Christianity, which is often confused with paganism. He is critical of Western scholarly developments, which are still dominated by the outdated ideas of Taylor, Frazer and Darwin, and welcomes new trends in ethnology, especially the work of the Swedish researcher Albert Eskeröd. Mažiulis encourages Juozas Lingis to participate in international congresses and seek visibility for Lithuanian culture in the international context, without limiting himself to the circle of 'our own'. He writes articles for the magazine *Aidai* and is considering publishing in the American academic space. He also writes to a youth magazine: "I wouldn't write, as others do, but I can't help myself. Secondly, when you write, you free yourself from America and return home. When you write, you devote Saturdays and Sundays to your book and the library, spend a dollar or two you have saved on books (to Vincas (Natkevičius),[21] 15 November 1951). He is delighted to find here the press and literature that was lacking in Germany (Tübingen), but is now constrained by his health.

Notwithstanding financial uncertainty (for example, unpaid academic work – "[they] will pay with a shovel after death"), he encourages others to work guided by idealism. Mažiulis is actively involved in the creation of the Institute of Lithuanian Studies, which, despite doubts about its success ("building castles in the sand"), he considers to be a potentially important centre of Lithuanian culture and science in the diaspora.

Despite his health issues, Mažiulis's letters reveal distinctly his fervent dedication to research: he continues his search for folkloric material, takes an interest in religious texts, and quotes historical sources. However, scholarly work in the American environment appears to be hardly possible as people are too much occupied, they have neither time nor desire to share:

> Taking a break from work, I read or go round Brooklyn in search of folklore. However, people in Brooklyn are too proud, and I have no success. They are educated and wise, of course, because they've spent many years in America, while you are just a newcomer [grinorius]. Only one or another is sincere, but very difficult to catch, because even after the age of 65 they are still doing all kinds of extra work, even overtime ((to Jonas Balys),[22] 17 April 1952).

He notes that, compared to Lithuania, cultural activities in America are often considered less significant and everyday life is permeated by commercial motives.

He is critical of advertising and the influence of television; he is of the view that the latter is often a substitute for religion, and even doctors are judged not on their professional competences but on their ability to represent themselves through advertising channels.

These scholarly endeavours are inseparable from Mažiulis's personal experience of life in exile, on which he reflects in detail in his letters. His attempts to adapt to the American environment unfold against a backdrop of constant tension: low-paid jobs, health problems, and rigorous social and cultural standards. He is open about his inability to establish himself in the labour market due to his accent, lack of citizenship, or even his 'incorrect' appearance, which, according to him, prevented him from obtaining an academic position. He feels tired and exhausted, calls himself lazy, although this is clearly not laziness but fatigue brought on by physical and emotional stress.

> Emigration was so urgent that it was no longer possible to postpone. And so I left. Upon arrival, I started a philosophical life in the humanities, doing a little bit of everything. I've even given my share to society. Now I've been lazing about for two months already. The doctors are feeding me with digitalis, while I am railing at American haste and the steps of New York, which unravelled my heart like an old bast shoe (to Jonas (Znotinas),[23] 17 April 1952).

Economic hardship, debt, and constant physical fatigue highlight social instability and vulnerability. He directs his critique at the mechanisms of American work culture: employers appear ruthless, wages are low, immigrants often become a marginalised workforce. While working as a sweeper, he also experienced culture shock: he is amazed by social behaviour, which he finds liberated and even vulgarly open. He mentions the moral discomfort arising from the sexualised communication that prevails in workplaces, which he describes as "pan-sexualism", a phenomenon pointing to the fundamental difference between Lithuanian and American values.

Practical concerns are coupled with an increasingly apparent personal identity crisis. "I am still alive and single, only fishing with my tail like a wolf in an ice hole. I pull it out or it freezes, then all the consequences", he wrote to a newspaper editor (to Juozas (Prunskus?),[24] ? 1952). Mažiulis acknowledges the emotional loneliness, the inability to maintain close relationships, and describes life without a family as an "old bachelor's" existence, accompanied

by existential emptiness. Frustration is compounded by missed opportunities. He regrets unfulfilled relationships, unmet expectations, while adjustment to the new social order poses both practical and identity difficulties.

Yet even in this contextual exclusion, the author remains faithful to his ethnic and academic identity. In his letters he calls for Lithuanian values to be preserved, the pressures of American materialism to be resisted, and moral backbone to be maintained despite the circumstances. In his view, the orientation of American society towards economic success contradicts the deeper spiritual values cherished in Lithuania. Emigration therefore becomes not only an existential challenge, but also a moral test: it is an opportunity to remain himself, even if it means constant resistance to the prevailing system.

Political frustration: the fragmentation of the émigré community. Mažiulis's letters reveal deep political reflection that combines a critique of both American domestic policies and political activities of the Lithuanian diaspora. He writes about his frustration at the corruption and moral decay of the US political system, stressing the prevalence of bribery and the links to communist groups. These observations reveal his pessimism about America's ability to solve its domestic issues. He is equally disapproving of both Smetona's authoritarian regime in Lithuania and the Soviet occupation and voices his disappointment with the political situation both in Lithuania and the diaspora.

In his letters, Mažiulis discusses the internal conflicts and political disagreements within the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (*Vyriausiasis Lietuvos išlaisvinimo komitetas*, VLIK). He describes how, while striving for the freedom of the nation, the VLIK was influenced by personal interests and political intrigues. He criticises the partisan divisions between the Christian Democrats, the populists, and the Social Democrats, which, in his view, hamper the united purpose of the nation. The moral upheaval, when political goals were achieved by destroying idealists and ridiculing freedom fighters, caused him particular anguish. This experience raises the existential question of the importance of conscience in politics, stressing that without conscience politics becomes destructive. The letters reveal fragmentation, selfishness, the pursuit of power, even at the expense of the national interest. "Now we are lying down in the trough and grunting that we are liberating the nation" (to Brazaitis, 9 November 1951). Here, irony and sarcasm turn into a weapon against hypocrisy and political opportunism.

Mažiulis's letters reveal the political disintegration of the diaspora. He resents ideological intrigues, party reckoning, and group interests, which, in his view, destroy the unity needed to liberate the nation. He calls for conscience to be brought back into politics, stressing that without it the nation can expect neither freedom nor an honourable return to Lithuania.

III The immigrant's spiritual crisis: existential testimony through the eyes of an ethnologist

Mažiulis's correspondence with his closest friends is remarkable for the candid revelation of his spiritual struggles.

Letters addressed to women (close friends) reveal the deep crisis experienced by Mažiulis, a migrant, which encompasses not only physical aspects (the nature of the work, the hardship, the alien cultural environment), but also intense spiritual discomfort. He finds himself caught between two disparate cultural spaces: his native culture, which becomes inaccessible due to physical distance and social exclusion, and the new American culture, which he finds superficial, consumerist, and spiritually empty.

The letters show that this experience becomes exhausting for the author and provokes a reaction of rejection. He writes in one of the letters: "Life is getting hard in the golden city…", where the metaphor "golden city" (a reference to New York) is used sarcastically, conveying frustration and a critical attitude towards materialistic reality. Here, gold becomes a symbol of consumerist culture, which the author deliberately rejects: "I have never liked gold, it did not tempt me…" (to a woman R., 16 March 1951).

He shares negative attitudes, which are evident in his assessment of the urban environment, with his women friends: "Here, people enjoy garbage around them and in their hearts" (to a woman I., 20 May 1951). The physical and symbolic motif of garbage becomes part of a broader critique of civilisation as a reference to spiritual degradation that, according to the ethnologist, pervades American everyday life. The letters divulge a profound value conflict between a rationally-based Western worldview and the author's own more metaphysical, existential way of thinking. This tension is particularly evident in the description of the museum-visiting experience when, instead of the expected beauty and order of the natural world, he encounters explanations of human origins based on

the theory of Darwinian evolution, which seems to be ideologically imposed: "…also obsessed with Darwinian evolution. And this is called science…" (to a woman R., 16 March 1951).

Mažiulis does not confine himself to a critique of his surroundings. He observes himself from the outside, as an individual who has deliberately opted out of the "game". The letters voice the position of an observer and a lone thinker: "I want to be free, free within myself, and to understand the meaning or meaninglessness of silence and suffering…" (to a woman I., 20 May 1951). This withdrawal from society shows the characteristics of existentialist thinking in that Mažiulis chooses moments of silence, suffering, and self-reflection as tools for self-analysis and the search for meaning. It is not about physical but about spiritual, inner, freedom from social pressures, external expectations, and cultural norms. This is particularly relevant for individuals who experience cultural or existential alienation.

One of the recurring themes in Mažiulis's letters is the pain of the migrant, the reality of physical labour: "Work makes me tired and takes away my loneliness…" (to a woman I., 20 May 1951). He has an exhausting physical job (working 11 to 12 hours a day), yet even in this context he is looking for spiritual meaning or an opportunity to spend time in solitude, in silence. Garbage – physical and spiritual – becomes a symbol of cultural critique, signifying the decline of civilisation.

Extreme sensitivity to the environment and to the phenomena of the world leads to a permanent feeling of pain. This emotional intensity leads to a desire to withdraw, not as an escape but as a defensive reaction. The letters clearly articulate the issues of meaning, faith, and God: "If I believe in God, then I can still allow for some meaning, but when I don't believe, when God is dead to me…" (to a woman I., 20 May 1951). It is the expression of an existential crisis, an experience of spiritual emptiness and a collapse of values. Such a condition correlates with Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the 'death of God', in which the human has to create a new meaning in the existential void.

When it comes to relations with women, Mažiulis maintains a distance, justifying his detachment by his total commitment to research: "I married ethnology and now I am raising my children" (to a woman I., 20 May 1951). This metaphor reveals that for him, ethnology is not just a profession, it is a way of life, and even if painful, it was a conscious choice. Even at moments of

weariness, he refers to the library as his "inn". It is a form of maintaining his cultural identity, while his academic work is the basis of his existence.

Declaring loneliness in letters sounds like a cry for help. The statement "I've moved out of the way" becomes a symbolic gesture, a conscious withdrawal from the structures of 'normal' life. Mažiulis chooses to live on the margins, refusing to participate in the race of the modern world. The sentence "I rejoice in my loneliness, in those short last moments before death…" (to a woman I., 20 May 1951) is ambiguous. On the one hand, loneliness becomes not a void, but a space for self-observation, existential reflection, and on the other, it conveys a sense of the nearness of the end of life.

The letters to women highlight Mažiulis as an existentialist, a thinker who explores not only a different society but also the meaning of human existence. His rhetoric reveals irony and pamphlet criticism against social and religious duplicity, especially among the Lithuanian diaspora. The letters paint a portrait of a man whose cultural ideals, spiritual quest, and loyalty to scholarship and God clash with the rationality, superficiality, and existential emptiness of American life.

Letters to a friend, i.e., Mažiulis's correspondence with Česlovas Grincevičius, reveal his evident emotional and intellectual development in 1951–1952. The letters of 1951 abound in optimism, even though they are permeated by the mood of deep fatigue and despair. The author is still struggling, trying to retain his ideas and values despite physical and psychological challenges. In 1952, his emotional state changes dramatically as he becomes increasingly worn out and defeated, although, despite the growing loneliness and weariness of life, he remains critical and analytical.

The letters of 1951 clearly show that the author's life in America was difficult and full of daily stress. He describes his working conditions, often in unskilled, manual jobs such as sweeper, dishwasher, and the like, which reflect the problem of professional devaluation. Humanitarians like him were forced to do any job to survive. In his letters he regularly mentions his material difficulties: constant changes of housing, struggles with debt, constant financial shortages and the need to borrow.

In the letters to Grincevičius, he unreservedly condemns American materialism and its culture, which he sees as a place of greed, superficiality, and worship of the 'golden calf'. He opposes turning culture into a commodity, where even art museums seem to him to be "material without a system" only

"showcasing wealth". He is very critical of the community of the Lithuanian diaspora, especially priests and the 'patriots'. Mažiulis believes that priests, although they speak of love of the neighbour, overshadow these values with their wealth, and that the church acts as an institution rather than a genuine community.

Despite these difficulties, in 1951 Mažiulis still shares with his friend his intentions to continue his mission of collecting folklore and preserving Lithuanian culture, and how he plans to give lectures and seminars on Lithuanian studies, although without funding.

However, life in America is causing him ever increasing frustration and pain due to his exclusion from the Lithuanian community. His letters of 1952 to Grincevičius reveal an even more aggravated state of mind. Loneliness becomes a permanent leitmotif of his life: "I live in terrible, terrible loneliness", "I don't want to meet a human", "I'm too sensitive to write letters". He feels estranged from the Lithuanian family next door not just by a wall, but also by a symbolic cultural abyss. He feels that national and cultural identity is disappearing in America; it is no longer an ideal but a painful memory and burden.

The letters provide an overview of the social and political landscape in the diaspora. With sharp irony, he criticises the activities of the Christian Democrats and the members of the Lithuanian Front, highlighting their hypocrisy and ideological emptiness: "politics is a mess and a pig-baiting business". He also regrets the reluctance of the Catholics to support Lithuanian cultural projects, seeing their activities as political rather than spiritual.

Mažiulis reveals his health problems to Grincevičius. He is suffering from heart conditions and often regrets his frail body, but he is never prepared to accept state benefits as he finds it humiliating. His only remaining principle of honour is to remain debt-free: "I want to die without debts". At the same time, he experiences an inner contradiction in the form of the desire to remain human, even if it means becoming a "living ghost", a spiritual refugee, a wandering soul.

Comparative analysis of the themes of the 1951–1952 letters to Česlovas Grincevičius:

Topic	Letters of 1951	Letters of 1952
Everyday life and becoming established	Physical, exhausting work; efforts to persist, support others, organise lectures	Physical weakness, fatigue, loneliness; little activity, more resignation
Critique of life in the USA	Criticises materialism, superficiality, the cult of the 'golden calf'; retains the desire for change	Deep frustration: "the world is ruled by dogs"; irony turns to despair, rejection
Relationship with the Lithuanian community	Criticism of priests, *pilviniai* (i.e., those who prioritise eating much and living comfortably), yet a desire to act in the community	Isolation, exclusion, disappointment: "the nation is already dead", the community is alien
Preserving Lithuanian identity and culture	Attempts at collecting folklore and preparing lectures; the ideals remain	The desire to preserve culture, yet without hope; Lithuanian-ness is a painful burden
Emotional condition	Tense yet still combative; irony, sarcasm, spirit of resistance	Profound loneliness, existential pain, depression, hopeless moods
Philosophical reflection	Social criticism, reflections on the crisis of values, yet faith in the mission of culture	The meaninglessness of life, devaluation of the human, the desire to die with dignity
Style and language	Picturesque, metaphorical, humorous; the language is archaic, folkloric	Even richer metaphors, but much gloomier; dark images predominate

These letters reveal not only the personal vicissitudes of Mažiulis's life, but also a deep philosophical and social reflection on the Western world, the Lithuanian diaspora, and cultural identity. He remains faithful to his ideas, which, unfortunately, are becoming more and more difficult to realise both because of the external conditions of life and internal struggles with himself. This theme of Mažiulis's letters resonates with Vytautas Kavolis's observation that "the main reality of the exiles is a state of profound hopelessness. At the same time, it is also the source of their strength. The exiles are all those who no longer deceive themselves" (Kavolis 1968).

Conclusions

In his letters, Antanas Mažiulis clearly articulates a response to the value and social hostility arising from the encounter with paradigms of a different culture. He is critical of the values espoused by the USA, such as tolerance, equality, and cultural diversity, describing them as a rhetorical construct that often does not correspond to social practice.

The devaluation of notions of religious faith and spirituality in the American context is particularly striking in the letters. The author regrets that religion, which he hoped would be a source of spiritual solace, turns out to be an institution driven by commercial logic that has lost the features of a community of faith. Similar criticism is addressed to work ethics: Mažiulis speaks ironically about the so-called American freedom defined as the involvement of the individual in an economic system in which work becomes an end in itself, while the search for existential meaning is marginalised. In this context, he formulates the relationship between work and freedom as a phenomenon of spiritual captivity in which the individual becomes part of a system of productivity and loses the ability to reflect on the deeper aspects of human existence.

In response to the cult of rationality, the superficial nature of interpersonal relationships, and the commercialisation of religion in American society, Mažiulis consistently defends European humanist values, national identity, and academic integrity. He is particularly critical of the community of the Lithuanian diaspora, which, in his opinion, only declaratively upholds national values while effectively subordinating them to personal well-being. In the context of such a position, Mažiulis chooses the image of a *veluoka*, i.e., a ghost, a spirit, a marginal yet intellectually independent subject who thinks critically and is loyal to his values.

The letters under scrutiny turn into a statement of resistance, not of adaptation. They are a document of intellectual protest, evidence of active spiritual and cultural resistance to de-nationalisation, spiritual emptiness, and cultural alienation. Antanas Mažiulis's position is not conformist, it expresses a consistent stance of cultural, moral, and intellectual resistance against ideological pressures of a foreign environment. Notwithstanding his physical decline, he continued to uphold the principles of scientific idealism, strove to preserve

Lithuanian cultural identity, and reflected on the issues of the meaning of human existence under conditions of migration.

Mažiulis's experiences correlate with the 'idealist' personality type identified by Cirtautas, who is motivated by the pursuit of spiritual values, as opposed to the 'utilitarian' personality type who is oriented towards material well-being. Cirtautas points out that eventually, both the idealist and the utilitarian are assimilated into the structure of the new society and adopt its values and way of life (Cirtautas 1958). In his early years as an immigrant, Mažiulis remained consistently critical, rejected conformism, and maintained his moral compass. The experience and stance of Antanas Mažiulis gain significance in the broader context of existential reflection on immigration.

Notes

[1] Česlovas Grincevičius (1913–1994) was a Lithuanian writer, bibliographer, and an active cultural figure of the Lithuanian diaspora. Having fled to the West, he headed the Lithuanian People's University in Salzburg, studied pedagogy at the University of Salzburg and edited the newspaper *Mūsų žinios*. After moving to the USA, he lived in Cicero, Chicago, taught at Lithuanian schools, worked for the newspaper *Draugas*, was the director of the World Lithuanian Archive and the chair of the Lithuanian Writers' Association.

[2] In addition to Brooklyn (New York City, USA), he lived in Philadelphia for several years, where he worked at the University of Pennsylvania Library. In 1956, he settled in South Boston, Massachusetts, where he continued his work on the editorial board of *Lietuvių enciklopedija* (Lithuanian Encyclopaedia, hereinafter LE). From 1953 to 1966, he was the editor of the ethnography section and proofreader of the first volume, and was one of the editors of the 37th volume. He wrote over 680 articles for the Encyclopaedia, and also wrote for *Encyclopedia Lituanica* and contributed to *Mūsų Lietuva* (Our Lithuania) prepared by Bronius Kviklys. From 1967, he worked in the library of the Carroll School of Management, a division of Boston College. From 1958 to 1969, he taught at the Boston Lithuanian Saturday School, which he headed from 1963 to 1964.

Antanas Mažiulis was a committed social activist: he collected folklore, antiquities, and words for the Lithuanian dictionary; he headed a cell of Pavasaris (Spring), the Lithuanian Catholic Youth Federation, was a member of Ateitis (Future), a Lithuanian Catholic organisation for personality development. He was also a member of Šatrija, the Ateitis organisation's art society founded in Kaunas in 1926 and approved by the

statute of the Lithuanian University in early 1927. Thanks to the efforts of Vincas Kazokas, Antanas Mažiulis, and Stasys Sėlenas, Šatrija's activities were revived in Germany.

From 1941 to 1944, Mažiulis participated in underground activities, represented the Lithuanian Unity Movement in VLIK, gave lectures at the events of various organisations, and supported Catholic activities in the USA.

[3] For one year, Mažiulis was a member of the editorial board of the magazine *Ateitis* (from No. 6 in 1951 to No. 6 in 1952); after the revival of the magazine *Į laisvę* (To Freedom) in 1953, he was a member of the editorial board for three issues of this magazine (1964, No. 34–36).

[4] In this work, egodocuments are defined as personal sources that provide a direct insight into an individual's experiences and feelings. The main feature of egodocuments is that they provide a subjective, personal view of the world and historical processes that have taken place.

[5] Copies of the letters are kept in Antanas Mažiulis's archive at the American Lithuanian Cultural Archives (ALKA, b. 342, 344–346, 348, 367) in Putnam, CT, USA.

[6] Zenonas Ivinskis (1908–1971) was a Lithuanian historian. A member of the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Sciences (1933), he taught at universities in Lithuania and Germany, was active in the Lithuanian liberation movement, worked in the Vatican archives, edited the section on the history of Lithuania up to 1600 in the LE. He lived in Rome.

[7] Citation references indicate the addressee, salutation, or surname of the person identified in secondary brackets, and the date of the letter.

[8] As mentioned above, Mažiulis lived in Brooklyn, NYC, in 1951 and 1952, although he referred to it by various names.

[9] The surviving copies of Mažiulis's letters under scrutiny often lack the author's signature.

[10] Juozas Lingis (1910–1998) was an ethnologist and professor. He studied at the universities in Kaunas (German studies and linguistics) and Stockholm (ethnology, ethnography, archaeology). He taught at Stockholm and Uppsala universities and worked at the Nordic Museum (Nordiska Museet) and elsewhere.

[11] We don't write women's names for ethical reasons. The study uses Mažiulis's correspondence with three women, I., R., and A.

[12] Juozas Brazaitis (Ambrazevičius until 1955) (1903–1974) was a Lithuanian politician, public figure, and literary scholar. He taught at Vytautas Magnus University, was prime minister of the provisional government of Lithuania, wrote textbooks and literary studies, and participated in anti-Soviet and anti-Nazi resistance. He lived in Brooklyn, USA.

[13] Antanas Maceina (1908–1987) was a Lithuanian philosopher. He taught at Vytautas Magnus University, the University of Freiburg, and the University of Münster (Germany),

led the *ateitininkai* (members of Ateitis) Lithuanian émigré association and edited the magazine *Ateitis*.

[14] It is about the September 1951 protest by the Lithuanian American Council and the Lithuanian American Information Centre (LAIC), headed since 1951 by Marija Kižytė, against the draft law proposed by the so-called International LAW Commissions under the name of the United Nations Code to Protect the Safety and Security of Humanity.

[15] Tadas Alinskas (1924–?), a Lithuanian American, chemist, and actor. After moving to the United States, where he lived between 1952 and 1988, he worked in laboratories and companies in the chemical industry. An actor at the New York Drama Studio and later at the Brooklyn, NY, theatre company.

[16] Lithuanian values encompass all aspects associated with Lithuanian identity and the preservation of Lithuanian cultural heritage.

[17] The American notion of freedom: an analysis of how freedom is conceptualised and understood within the United States.

[18] The name of the male protagonist in the Lithuanian folk tale "Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes".

[19] Traditional values refer to elements of Lithuanian culture that have been transmitted across generations.

[20] Antanas Styra (1918–2003)? joined Ateitis's Šatrija society in 1938. He emigrated to Cleveland, OH, USA. He was a Christian Democrat and a long-standing member of the board of the Cleveland branch of the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Union.

[21] Vincas Natkevičius Natkus (1918–1999) was a scholar of Lithuanian studies, educator, literary researcher, philosophy enthusiast, active member of the Ateitis organisation and social activist. In 1944, he fled to Germany, where from 1945 to 1957 he taught at the Lithuanian February 16th Gymnasium in Hüttenfeld, Germany, serving as principal of this school from 1967 to 1980. In 1973, he was invited to teach Lithuanian language and conduct a seminar of Lithuanian studies at the University of Frankfurt am Main.

[22] Jonas Balys (1909–2011) was a researcher of Lithuanian folklore. He worked at universities and libraries in Lithuania and the USA. He founded and edited the scholarly journal *Tautosakos darbai* (Folklore Studies).

[23] Jonas Znotinas (1913–?) was ordained a priest in 1940 in Tübingen, where he served as spiritual leader of the *ateitininkai* (members of Ateitis) and chaplain of the college. In around 1952, he left for the United States, where he worked in St Peter's parish in Washington, and from 1966 was the parish priest of St George's parish in Valley Lee, Maryland.

[24] Juozas Prunskis (1907–2003) was a priest, a prominent figure in the Lithuanian community in the USA, and a journalist. In 1945, he graduated from the Catholic University

of America in Washington, D.C. He edited newspapers and magazines, taught journalism, and was a member of the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Sciences.

Sources

ALKA, b. 342, Antano Mažiulio susirašinėjimai (laiškai, jų kopijos, vokai, telegramos, atvirukai). *Vokietijos dienos. 1946 – 1966 m*. Rankraštis (Correspondence of Antanas Mažiulis: Letters, copies, envelopes, telegrams, postcards). German Days. 1946–1966. Manuscript.

ALKA, b. 344, Antano Mažiulio susirašinėjimas (laiškai, vokai, telegramos, atvirukai): *Dr. Irenos Kuraitės įvairūs laiškai tremties metui suprasti ir pan. 1949 – 1950 Vokietija, 1950 – 1953 Amerika.* Rankraštis (Antanas Mažiulis' correspondence (letters, envelopes, telegrams, postcards): Dr. Irena Kuraitė's various letters to understand the time of exile, etc., 1949–1950 Germany, 1950–1953 America.) Manuscript.

ALKA, b. 345, Antano Mažiulio susirašinėjimas (laiškai, atvirukai) su Juozu Lingiu. Švedija, 1949 – 1965. 12 l.; Antano Mažiulio rašytų laiškų Juozui (Lingiui?) kopijos. Tubingenas, Brooklynas, Phila[delphija], 1948 – 1954 m., 16 l. (Correspondence (letters, copies, envelopes, postcards) between Antanas Mažiulis and Juozas Lingis (?). 1949–1965 and 1948–1954).

ALKA, b. 346, Antano Mažiulio susirašinėjimas (laiškai, jų kopijos, vokai, atvirukai) su Česlovu Grincevičiu. 1951 – 1989 m. Rankraštis. 32 l. (Correspondence (letters, copies, envelopes, postcards) between Antanas Mažiulis and Česlovas Grincevičius. 1951–1989.) Manuscript.

ALKA, b. 348, Antano Mažiulio susirašinėjimas (laiškai, jų kopijos, vokai, atvirukai). 1951 – 1959 m. Rankraštis (The correspondence (letters, copies, envelopes, postcards) of Antanas Mažiulis. 1951–1959.) Manuscript.

ALKA, b. 367, Antano Mažiulio susirašinėjimas (laiškai, kopijos, atvirukai) su Jonu Rimeikiu, 1950 – 1956 m. Rankraštis, 18 l. (Correspondence (letters, copies, envelopes, postcards) between Antanas Mažiulis and Jonas Rimeikis. 1950–1956.) Manuscript.

References

Bražienė, Marija 2017. Trauminė atmintis ir jos įveika memuaruose: lietuvių pasitraukimas į Vokietiją Antrojo pasaulinio karo metais (Traumatic Memories and How They are Dealt with in Recollections of the Lithuanian Exodus to Germany

during the Second World War), *Oikos. Lietuvių migracijos ir diasporos studijos*, No. 1–2 (23–24), pp. 175–192.

Chorążyczewski, Waldemar; Rosa, Agnieszka 2013. Metodologiniai lietuviškųjų egodokumentų paieškos aspektai lenkišku požiūriu (Methodological Aspects of Searching Lithuanian Egodocuments from the Polish Viewpoint). In: *Egodokumentai ir privati Lietuvos erdvė XVI–XX amžiuje,* pp. 27–45. Vilnius: Vilniaus universitetas.

Cirtautas, K. C. 1958. Refugees: Idealistic and Utilitarian, *Lituanus*, Vol. 4, No. 2. http://www.old.lituanus.org/1958/58_2_07Cirtautas.html (excerpt from Cirtautas, K. C. 1957. *The Refugee. A Psychological Study*. Foreward by Prof. Pitirim A. Sorokin. Boston: Meador Publishing Co.)

Cohen, Robin 2019. *Migration: The Movement of Humankind from Prehistory to the Present*. London: André Deutsch.

Dapkutė, Daiva 2017. Be teisės sugrįžti: Lietuvos gyventojų priverstinės migracijos keliai ir likimai po Antrojo pasaulinio karo (Without the Right to Return: Lithuanian Forced Migration Paths and Fates after the Second World War). In: J. Niewulis -Grablunas, J. Prusinowska, J. B. Walkowiak (eds.) *Apokalipsy bałtyckich światów* (Apocalypses of the Baltic Worlds). Poznań: Wydawnictwo Rys, pp. 59–68.

Gerber, David A. 2006. Epistolary Masquerades: Acts of Deceiving and Withholding in Immigrant Letters**.** In: B. S. Elliott, D. A. Gerber; S. M. Sinke (eds.) *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 141–1857.

Halbwachs, Maurice 1992. *On Collective Memory,* Lewis A. Coser (ed., trans., Introduction). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hall, Stuart 1990. Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In: J. Rutherford (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 222–237.

Kavolis, Vytautas 1968. *Nužemintųjų generacija, Egzilio pasaulėjautos eskizai* (The Generation of the Humiliated: Sketches of the Exile's Worldview). Cleveland, Ohio: Santara-Šviesa A. Mockaus vardo Knygų leidimo fondo lėšomis. http://www.šaltiniai.info/files/literatura/LH00/Vytautas_Kavolis._Nužemintųjų_generacija.LHC600A.pdf

Kučinskienė, Aistė 2019. *Kultūrišku keliu. Juozo Tumo-Vaižganto laiškai* (In a Cultural Way: The Letters of Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas). Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas.

Oberg, Kalervo 1960. Cultural Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments. *Practical Anthropology,* No. 7, pp. 177–182. doi.org/10.1177/009182966000700405

Nora, Pierre 1989. Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, pp. 7–24. doi.org/10.2307/2928520

Pourjafari, Fatemeh and Vahidpour, Abdolali 2014. Migration Literature: A Theoretical Perspective. *The Dawn Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 679–691.

Saurer, E(dith); Steidl, A(nnemarie) 2012. Ego Documents Entered Migration History. In: M. Messer, R. Schroeder, R. Wodak (eds.) *Migrations: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Vienna: Springer, pp. 155–161.

Irma Šidiškienė is a research fellow at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Lithuanian Institute of History. Her main research interests include expressions of ethnicity, cultural heritage; urban ethnology and anthropology; social interaction among co-workers and their cultural expression; history of ethnology and anthropology.

ORCID: 0000-0001-5806-3002

E-mail: irma.sidiskiene@istorija.lt

https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.04

Ludwig J. Rhesa *Dainos, oder Litthauische Volkslieder* (Königsberg, 1825): Text as an Event of Cultural Memory

Lina Petrošienė

Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Philology, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of Klaipeda University, Lithuania

E-mail: lina.petrosiene@ku.lt

Abstract. This article examines the cultural significance of Ludwig J. Rhesa's *Dainos, oder Litthauische Volkslieder* (1825), the earliest systematic collection of Lithuanian folk songs. The study investigates the editorial history, translations, and performative revivals of Rhesa's collection as it relates to cultural memory. Using Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory and Richard Schechner's concept of performance, the article demonstrates how the text functioned both as a philological object and a dynamic cultural tool across different historical eras.

Utilising qualitative content analysis, comparative textual study, and empirical data from interviews, recordings, and concert documentation, the research demonstrates how Rhesa's songs became part of folklore ensemble repertoires in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Two interpretative approaches are identified: an authenticity-driven, historical-ethnographic model and a more experimental, genre-blending ethnomusicological practice. The findings reveal how Rhesa's textual legacy continues to be reinterpreted within diverse cultural frameworks, illustrating the dynamic interaction between written heritage and contemporary performance.

Keywords: Cultural memory, folklore ensembles, Ludwig Jedemin Rhesa, Rėza, Lithuanian folk songs, songbook edition, performance, revitalisation of folklore, textual reception, translation.

Introduction

2025 marks the 200th anniversary of the first collection of Lithuanian folk songs, Ludwig J. Rhesa's[1] *Dainos, oder Litthauische Volkslieder* (Rhesa 1825). Born in the Curonian Spit, part of the former Prussian Kingdom, Rhesa was a priest and theologian who later became professor and vice rector of the University of Königsberg (1820, 1824, 1830), as well as head of its Lithuanian language seminar (1810–1840). His culturally self-determined initiative to collect and publish Lithuanian folk songs, and to translate them into German, laid the foundation for their preservation, dissemination across Europe and North America, and continuing relevance in contemporary performance contexts.

In the second half of the 20th century, the songs from Rhesa's collection became the standard repertoire of Lithuania Minor[2] folk music for folklore ensembles in the Klaipėda region and throughout and beyond Lithuania. During the Soviet era, these songs were the only officially sanctioned means of accessing and practising this unique musical dialect, as permitted by the communist cultural authorities. This illustrates the symbolic significance of Rhesa's song collection within various historical, ideological, and aesthetic contexts.

This article explores the representational forms of the sung folklore compiled by Rhesa at the beginning of the 19th century. Rhesa's folklore legacy includes 64 melodies, more than 230 poetic texts, and one of the earliest analytical articles on Lithuanian folk songs, "Betrachtung über die litthauischen Volkslieder". Across five editions published over two centuries, Rhesa's work has exerted considerable influence on Lithuanian folkloristics, particularly in the field of song research and in the folklore revival movement of the Klaipėda region, part of the historical territory of Lithuania Minor. Translations into German, Czech, Polish, Russian, Italian, Yiddish, English, and Prussian produced by a range of authors reflect philological interest and a desire to incorporate Lithuanian songs into broader international cultural contexts. The article is structured around three interrelated parts: the editorial history of Rhesa's *Dainos*, its translations into European languages, and the collection's role in reviving and representing the musical folklore of the region.

This study employs an interdisciplinary methodology that combines cultural memory theory (Assmann 2006) and performance theory (Schechner 1985). It aims to examine the long-term reception, reinterpretation, and performative renewal processes of the Lithuanian folk song collection compiled by Rhesa in the early nineteenth century. As Jan Assmann states,

> The theory of cultural memory, which amounts to a kind of 'ontological turn in tradition,' could be summarised with the words 'Being that can be remembered is text.' … Text, on the other hand, is constituted based on prior communication. It always involves the past. Memory bridges the gap between then and now (Assmann 2006: IX).

Songs become canonical cultural texts, gaining normative authority in processes of meaning and identity creation. Richard Schechner's concept of performance and 'restored behavior' and 'twice-behaved behaviour' offers to both individuals and groups the chance to rebecome what they once were, or even, and most often, to rebecome what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become (Schechner 1985: 36–38). These approaches reveal how folklore texts have become an academic object over two centuries. They also acquire new meaning through ritualised performances and become living cultural texts, operating in the structures of memory and the practices of self-expression of contemporary communities.

The research employs qualitative content analysis, as well as interpretative and historical-comparative methods. The study draws on both primary textual sources – published editions with their paratextual elements and translation cases with contextual framing – and contemporary data related to the collection's use in the practices of folk ensembles. The empirical basis of the study includes: 1) an analysis of the original editions and translations of the Rhesa songbook; 2) an analysis of publications, video, and audio recordings of ten folklore ensembles from the Klaipėda region, two folklore ensembles from Vilnius, and the folklore group Rasa from Riga; 3) analysis of YouTube channels that publish folklore ensembles' videos; 4) observation and semi-structured interviews with respondents.[3] During the period of folklore revival, folklore ensembles from 1975 reconstructed the musical folklore of Lithuania Minor, preparing about 40 thematic programs and performances and releasing more than 20 audio and video recordings. The vast majority of these programs drew from the Rhesa folk song collection.

Rhesa's personality and his entire folklore legacy have attracted particularly close attention from various social circles, including the academic world, over the past two centuries. First of all, Rhesa himself evaluated the songs in his comments and in a special study of Lithuanian folk songs (Rhesa 1825). Soon after the songbook was published, it received favourable reviews in Europe (Citavičiūtė 2017). Each new edition or translation of Rhesa's songbook received attention, and there were also negative reviews. Professor Georg Heinrich Ferdinand Nesselmann of the University of Königsberg critically assessed Rhesa's work, claiming that the songs were published indiscriminately and edited unprofessionally (Nesselmann 1853; Citavičiūtė 2018: 10). But over time it has become clear that Rhesa's method of maintaining as much of the song's authenticity as possible is more acceptable.

The treatment of Rhesa's folkloric legacy in Lithuania as an object of folkloristics and its detailed study began at the beginning of the 20th century (Biržiška 1935; Eretas 1938; Brazaitis 1938). After World War II, the assessment of Rhesa's personality and work took place within the framework of the Soviet cultural paradigm, without avoiding an ideologised interpretation and conscious Lithuanianisation of the culture of Lithuania Minor (R I 1958; R II 1964; Jovaišas 1969; Čiurlionytė 1969; Lebedys 1972; Jonynas 1989; etc.). Modern research into Rhesa's legacy aims to reconstruct a comprehensive picture of his work, and to correct previously formed distortions of information and supplement it with new data obtained from foreign archives (Gineitis 1995; Citavičiūtė 2015, 2017, 2018, 2018a, 2019; RR 5 2018; Aleknavičienė 2019; Petrošienė 2007; Stundžienė 2018, etc.). Issues relating to the musical interpretation of Rhesa's songs have been explored by Audronė Kaukienė (2000), Rimantas Sliužinskas (2007), and in the broader context of the singing tradition and intangible cultural heritage of Lithuania Minor, by the author of this article (Petrošienė 2021, 2025). A different perspective on reviving Rhesa songs as part of the heritage of the Baltic Prussians and all Balts was offered by Latvian ethnomusicologist Valdis Muktupāvels. His work is notable because he not only shared his vision of reviving the extinct Prussian culture that inspired him and his like-minded group, but also outlined the principles behind their new musical folklore compositions (Muktupāvels 2023).

However, how the textual heritage of the early 19th century changes its existential forms and, from the second half of the 20th century, is transformed

into a new expression of living tradition and cultural identity, these are new questions of scientific research which are explored in this article.

Five Editions of Rhesa's Songbook and Folkloric Legacy[4]

Rhesa's collection of Prussian Lithuanian songs and its manuscript folklore heritage go beyond ethnographic or philological documentation. This publication marks the turning point when song heritage is transferred from a living tradition to a written cultural memory that acquires the functions of public symbolic capital. Writing is a form of knowledge storage, a precondition for its reproduction and a mechanism that allows memory to expand beyond the boundaries of specific generations and communities:

> The stock of memories stored up in the medium of writing quickly transcends the horizons of a knowledge of the past that can be put to immediate use, and transforms the bonding memory through a cultural memory that operates on a much larger scale (Assmann 2006: 29, 105).

Written knowledge becomes a cultural memory, allowing for the creation of collective narratives of identity and the consolidation of the symbolic order in which Lithuanian folk art became represented. Each edition and translation of the songs in the Rhesa collection speaks of the dynamics of cultural memory: it is edited, rewritten and reconstructed in historical, political, social and artistic contexts. According to Assmann, with cultural memory, millennium memory spaces open up, with writing playing a decisive role in this process (Assmann 2006: 28).

The five editions of the Rhesa folk songs material disseminated almost the same textual material and created memory regimes that reflected the value and cultural trajectories of each era. Applying Assmann's theoretical model, these editions are analysed as layers of written cultural memory in which the folklore text is not only transmitted, but also reinterpreted as a living, but writting-based, instrument of identity formation.

Rhesa's motivation to collect folk songs emerged from both personal and intellectual contexts. He grew up in a multilingual environment where Lithuanian was spoken and valued. The intense development of Lithuanian grammar in the Lithuanian part of East Prussia, dating back to the beginning of the 18th

century, and the Enlightenment's approach to national languages and cultures in Europe were strong external factors that encouraged Rhesa to undertake song collecting as a scholarly and identity-building project.

The pioneer in standardising the Lithuanian language, priest Michael Mörlin, acknowledged the lexical richness of folk songs but recommended that practitioners avoid performing them and instead concentrate on religious singing (Drotvinas 2008: 123). Priest Philip Ruhig supported Mörlin's views on the Lithuanian language and, eager to showcase its beauty and richness, published Lithuanian folk songs with their German translations in his linguistic works. Nonetheless, he advised that one should "devote one's heart and time to beautiful religious hymns" (Ruigys 1986: 157).

This ambivalent attitude towards folklore, fluctuating between linguistic appreciation and moral restraint, developed over time. Around the turn of the 19th century, the first Lithuanian song texts emerged, published in German poetry almanacks along with collections of folk songs from various European nations (SVL1813: 129–142). These collections reflect a new approach to folklore, with Johan G. Herder as the principal architect in Europe. Folk songs began to be treated as a vehicle of collective poetic imagination and cultural memory.

It was within this ideological background that the theoretical principles of collecting and researching Rhesa's sung folklore, as well as the songbook itself, developed. Rhesa's pedagogical and scientific Lithuanian pursuits, along with his high regard for Lithuanian folk poetic creation, motivated and engaged the enlightened people of East Prussian parishes – priests, teachers, landowners, and servants – in the work of collecting folklore. Subsequently, other writers and researchers from Königsberg, and from other European and Lithuanian universities, followed his example.

Rhesa stated that he had been working on his publication *Dainos* for 15 years. Nine individuals – priests and civil servants from Lithuania Minor – submitted song texts and melodies (Lebedys 1972: 251; Citavičiūtė 2019: 184–185). The correspondence between Rhesa and Johan W. Ghete shows that the manuscript of the songbook, which was not ready for publication, was already prepared in 1815, although it 'matured' for another ten years: edited in both Lithuanian and German, the structure was improved, etc. (Citavičiūtė 2018b: 74). From the submitted songs, Rhesa compiled and published the first collection of Lithuanian folk songs, in 1825, which included 85 texts, seven melodies and the first study of Lithuanian folk poetry.

After the publication of the songbook, folklore collecting in Lithuania Minor noticeably revived. Parish priests and other educated people continued to send Rhesa their recorded folklore, and his archive was filled with new material. Rhesa's personal archive contained many unpublished texts and melodies. He did not lose interest in folk songs even in his old age, perhaps intending to publish them (Citavičiūtė 2019: 183–205).

Collections of Lithuanian songs compiled by later authors show that some of the folklore recordings belonging to the Rhesa archive were also available to other folklore collectors. Almost everything that is now commonly considered to be Rhesa's legacy was published in periodicals or songbooks in the 19th century. Nesselmann, who critically assessed Rhesa's publication, used his archive and was the first to publish 90 drastically re-edited, previously unpublished song texts from Rhesa's legacy, in Berlin in 1853 (Aleknavičienė 2019: 118–119). However, he did not publish the previously unpublished melodies contained in it, reprinting only four melodies from Rhesa's publication. Nesselmann's large-scale collection of Lithuanian songs was in great demand for a while, although due to the free editing method of the texts to "restore the original, uncorrupted form of the song", it eventually lost its scholarly value (Balys 1948: 224; Petrošienė 2007: 15–16; Citavičiūtė 2018: 10).

The publication of the musical part of Rhesa's folklore heritage is related to the interests of Peter von Bohlen, a professor at the University of Königsberg and a Sanskritologist. The manuscript of Lithuanian songs compiled by him ended up in the archive of the Lithuanian Literary Society in Tilsit after his death. When compiling *Dainu Balsai* (BDB 1886, 1889) Christian Bartsch used this archive and published 82 songs with melodies that are attributed to Bohlen's literary heritage. However, 47 of them are considered to be copies of Rhesa's manuscripts (R II 1964: 6–7; Petrošienė 2001: 139). The entire material of Rhesa's heritage was later spread through various collections and translations of Lithuanian songs with the folklore collected by Rhesa published four more times in separate publications between the 19th and 21st centuries.

Rhesa's songbook was immediately and widely distributed in Europe in the 19th century, attracting international interest from writers and linguists. Reviews appeared in leading journals across Königsberg, Weimar, Stuttgart, Berlin, Vienna, Leipzig, Lviv, and Göttingen (Citavičiūtė 2017: 147–159). These responses positioned the collection not just as a local ethnographic effort, but as part of a European scholarly discourse.

The second edition of Rhesa's *Dainos*, which was initially published in a small limited edition and was very popular, was prepared and published in Berlin in 1843 by Rhesa's student, professor of linguistics Friedrich Kurschat (Kurschat 1843). The title page states that the songs have been "reviewed, revised, and improved". This indicates that the language of the lyrics and translations has been carefully modernised, considering the specifics of the songs. The book's structure has been reorganised: the table of contents and Rhesa's article about the songs have been moved to the beginning, and the songs have been numbered. This edition was studied and learned by students of the Lithuanian Language Seminar at the University of Königsberg, which was led by Kurschat (Citavičiūtė 2018a: 48). The second edition was frequently used by translators of Lithuanian songs across Europe.

In the first half of the 20th century, Rhesa's works and influence on Lithuanian folklore studies in Lithuania were highly esteemed. Contemporaries took pride in the fact that the centenary of his death in Lithuania would be appropriately commemorated – with comprehensive research into his biography and works (Brazaitis 1982: 542). One notable academic publication is the third edition of Rhesa's folkloric legacy, which was prepared and published in Kaunas between 1935 and 1937 by professor and literary historian Mykolas Biržiška (Biržiška 1935, 1937). It is a two-volume, particularly thorough, scientifically grounded, critical edition of Rhesa's sung folklore collection in Lithuania. Biržiška visited the Königsberg State Archives and compared the manuscript material with both Rhesa's published and unpublished songs and his numerous collaborators and followers. This publication establishes a foundation for comparative study of the variants and origins of the sung folklore of Lithuania Minor and Lithuania Major.

Biržiška, like Kurschat, edited and modernised the orthography of the songs in the first edition and published the songs from the manuscripts, leaving the original orthography intact. For the first time, he refused to publish translations into German. This is now regarded as a significant shortcoming, as it deprives us of the chance to explore this creative aspect of Rhesa (Citavičiūtė 2018a: 10). Biržiška did not attempt to publish all the melodies in the manuscript, reprinting only seven from Rhesa's first edition. For the first time, Rhesa's songbook was published in Latin script, whereas both editions had previously been printed in Gothic script. It was believed that the greatest value of the publications prepared by Biržiška lay in the fact that, even without access to the original Rhesa

manuscripts, we can, if necessary, "be content with second-hand sources – the data from this [Biržiška] edition" (Brazaitis 1982: 541–542). However, there were limitations to exploiting this opportunity in Soviet-era Lithuania: Biržiška's books, like those of many other writers who fled to the West after World War II, acquired an artificially created status as 'bibliographic rarity'.

After World War II, the fourth two-volume edition of the Rhesa folklore heritage, published in 1958 and 1964, had a different cultural mission (R I 1958; R II 1964). It was designed for both academic purposes and the general public, including schools. This edition became one of the most essential sources of musical folklore from Lithuania Minor during the emerging post-war folklore movement in Soviet Lithuania. Among many benefits of the publication – such as a facsimile of the first edition and detailed scientific commentaries – one of the most significant is that 64 song melodies from the Rhesa archive have been published. These melodies were edited by music professionals, allowing the songs to be sung. In the transposed text, the spelling and dialectal phonetics are replaced with the spelling and phonetics of the modern literary language (R I 1958: VIII–IX). The songs in Rhesa's collection are classified into genres on a functional-thematic basis according to the Lithuanian folk song classification system that was already officially established at that time (Stundžienė 2018: 64).

Published without German translations, the fourth edition reflected the cultural-political stance of the time in order to distance Rhesa from the German context and establish him as a collector and preserver of Lithuanian origin and Lithuanian folklore. The songbook became part of institutionalised memory, blending into the officially supported Soviet narrative of Lithuanian national culture, but at the same time masking Rhesa's German aesthetic and intellectual aspirations.

The changed historical and political conditions after the restoration of Lithuanian independence in 1990 – primarily the restoration of academic autonomy, access to foreign archives and digitised sources – created the conditions for a new look at Rhesa's personality and work. The complete collection of Rhesa's Collected Writings, edited by Liucija Citavičiūtė, began to be published in 2011. The fifth volume, which is also the fifth edition of Rhesa *Dainos,* was published in 2018 and dedicated to the centenary of the restoration of the Lithuanian state (RR 5 2018).

The fifth edition reprints Rhesa's songbook, his songological research, and articles analysing this material, with various commentaries and facsimiles. It

is regrettable that the song material in the manuscripts, which was published in the third and fourth editions, has not been included in the latest edition. This is a significant shortcoming as it omits a part of Rhesa's legacy that is very important for ethnomusicology and awaits a new approach to Rhesa's musical and manuscript material.

An analysis of the Rhesa songbook and its manuscript editions reveal how historical, linguistic, and ideological shifts shape the significance of folklore texts within culture. Each edition alters the original material in some way, reflecting a specific view of sung folklore as a document, symbol, or representation. Editorial choices, such as including or omitting translations and melodies, reflect different cultural memory regimes, showing how Rhesa's legacy is interpreted, adapted, or sometimes rewritten. Both the Rhesa *Dainos* itself and its publication history demonstrate a changing relationship with folklore, cultural heritage, and personality, spanning different eras.

Rhesa's *Dainos* Translations: Between Languages and Cultures

Rhesa's *Dainos*, published simultaneously in Lithuanian and German, marked the start of Lithuanian folk poetry spreading across Europe. The bilingual format gave the songs legitimacy among educated audiences and turned them into a form of cultural representation. The Lithuanian version signified national authenticity, while the German language acted as a medium for international communication and interpretation.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, between a few and several dozen translations of Rhesa's *Dainos* were published in various types of publication at different levels across Königsberg, Berlin, Heidelberg, Vilnius, Prague, Warsaw, Poznań, Lviv, Moscow, Rome, Amherst, and Chicago. This section seeks to discuss and evaluate the translations that are most well known in scientific and artistic circles.

The bilingual edition of the publication, along with reviews in European academic circles and translations into various European languages, enhanced the authority of Rhesa's work. This recognition allows it to be regarded as a canonical text of Lithuanian culture. As Assmann states, "Canonization is a special form of writing. Texts are not merely written down: their authority is

increased" (Assmann 2006: 64). The translations served as a means to spread Rhesa's ideas globally and affected the national traditions and cultural, particularly philological, debates of other nations.

The books of Professor Rhesa from the University of Königsberg were relatively well known among scholars from other countries. His bilingual edition of Kristijonas Donelaitis's poem *Metai* (Four Seasons) and the songbook of Lithuanian folk songs published in 1825 quickly reached the Czech Republic (Šeferis 2009: 41). Philologists were also the first to become interested in folklore in the Czech Republic. They, like Rhesa, were within the sphere of influence of historical-comparative linguistics, which had emerged in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century (Piročkinas 1981: 43).

Čelakovský was a Czech writer and folklorist of the first half of the 19th century. He was interested in Lithuanian songs influenced by the ideas of Herder and Lessing, which were popular across Europe, as well as Polish literature (Piročkinas 1981: 44). However, his primary focus was on the relationship and interaction between Slavic and Baltic languages. In the second volume of his collection *Slowanské národnj pjsně* (Slavic Folk Songs), he published three Lithuanian songs from Ruhig's 1745 treatise on the Lithuanian language, including both the original and Czech versions (Čelakovský 1825: 200–206; Lemeškin 2008: 69).

Čelakovský's correspondence indicates that he already possessed Rheza's songbook at the start of 1826 and had begun translating it as well as publishing individual Lithuanian songs in the Czech press. In 1827, Čelakovský's translation of Rheza's songbook was published, with 73 original Lithuanian songs and their Czech translations (Čelakovský 1827). Čelakovský rearranged the order of the songs according to his classification logic, and for unclear reasons he did not translate or include twelve songs in the Czech edition. Čelakovský's publication gained popularity and was reprinted twice (Piročkinas 1981: 46–57).

We mentioned earlier that Čelakovsky became partially acquainted with Lithuanian folklore through Polish literature, although no publication in Poland included a complete translation of the Rhesa songbook. However, by 1829, the first response to Čelakovsky's translations appeared in the Lviv press. The Polish priest and writer Franciszek Siarczyński published a review of Čelakovsky's translation (Siarczyński 1929: 51–67) that included eight songs from the Rhesa collection translated into Polish by Adam Rościszewski, a member of the Krakow Scientific Society (Jovaišas 1969: 311; Piročkinas 1981: 48).

The Polish public first encountered Rhesa's folklore activities and Lithuanian songs around 1830 through the work of Polish poet and translator Kazimierz Brodziński (Brodziński 1872). He translated Rhesa's article "Betrachtung über die litthauischen Volkslieder" and 16 texts from the *Dainos* into Polish (Jovaišas 1969: 311). At the same time, several translations of Rhesa's songs by Antoni E. Odyniec and Stanisław Jachowicz (VLE 3) appeared in the Polish cultural press. Later, individual Rhesa's songs were also included in various song collections, such as *Pieśni ludu nadniemeńskiego z okolic Aleksoty* (Brzozowski 1844), among others.

Rhesa's songs have attracted significant attention from Polish poets and writers, who have incorporated historical events into their works. Poet Franciszek Zatorski published Rhesa's songs alongside his historical poem in verse *Witold nad Worksłą*, which depicts one of the bloodiest battles of Medieval Europe between the Tatar hordes and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Zatorski 1844). Although Lithuanian songs typically depict military-historical events through a female lyrical perspective, the author deemed it appropriate to publish 66 Rhesa songs translated into Polish, including not only the historical context of the Battle of Worksła but also a poetic commentary on the songs (Zatorski 1844). Subsequently, Zatorski admitted that Rhesa's songbook "aroused a general interest in Lithuanian songs" (Zatorski 1846: 683).

Zatorski's thoughts were supported by one of the most productive Polish writers, poets, and historians, Józef I. Kraszewski. In 1844, while discussing Lithuanian songs, he paraphrased Rhesa's ideas about Lithuanian folk poetry and translated more than 50 of Rhesa's songs into Polish (Kraszewski 1844).

In the context of the multi-ethnic narrative of Tsarist Russia, the first translations of Lithuanian songs into Russian appeared in Vilnius and Moscow in 1854. They typically included extensive commentaries, particularly relating to history, folklore, and mythology. The writer, historian, professor at Vilnius University, and censor of the Vilnius Censorship Committee, Pavel Kukolnik, translated 56 songs from Rhesa's collection into Russian. These were published in the collection *Cherty iz istorii i zhizni litovskogo naroda* (Features from the History and Life of the Lithuanian People) (Kukolnik 1854), edited by Adam Kirkor. Kukolnik also prepared a substantial introductory article with comments on the nature of Lithuanian songs and their context. He notes that the first song collections were published by Ruhig and Rhesa using Kraszewski's Polish translations, discussed above, for the translation.

At the same time, poet, publicist, and translator Nikolai Berg published his collection *Pesni raznykh narodov* (Songs of Nations) (Berg 1854), in Moscow, which included 26 folk songs from various European nations, presented in both their original languages and Russian. Among these, 12 songs were from the 1843 Rhesa collection. In 1921, these songs were issued as *Litovskiye pesni* (Lithuanian Songs) in Vilnius (Berg 1921).

In the first half of the 20th century, there was significant interest in the legacy of Indo-European languages and in the knowledge of Slavic and Eastern European languages and cultures in Italy (Nuncio 2014: 110–122). A prominent figure in promoting Lithuanian literature in Italy at that time was Giuseppe Morici, who was familiar with Donelaitis' work. He was the first to translate Lithuanian songs, including those from the Rhesa collection, into Italian and to compile a collection, titled *Canti popolari lituani* (Lithuanian Folk Songs) (Morici 1925, 1930). While Morici's publication is not an academic study, both editions (1925 and 1930) feature songs published only in Italian, without the original texts. Nonetheless, it is a comprehensive and well-structured essay (Morici 1930: 7–47), providing an in-depth overview of Lithuanian folk poetry and analysing the thematic, linguistic, and rhythmic aspects of the songs, which is considered accurate and reliable (Nuncio 2014: 112–120).

In the context of research on Rhesa's work, little is known about the translations of his published and collected Lithuanian songs into Yiddish and English. Uriah Katzenelenbogen, a Jewish writer, journalist and translator born in Vilnius, who emigrated to North America in 1927, translated 590 Baltic songs into Yiddish and published the songbook *Daynes: Litvishe and Letiše Folkslider* (Songs: Lithuanian and Latvian Folksongs) (Katzenelenbogen 1930; JLV). The songbook contains translations of 140 Lithuanian song lyrics, including Rhesa's legacy songs, and 450 Latvian songs. It features a detailed introduction to the cultures and songs of each nation. Five handwritten Lithuanian and Latvian song melodies have also been included.

In his introduction to Lithuanian songs, Katzenelenbogen addresses a broad range of issues. He discusses Rhesa's Lithuanian songbooks, the fundamental songbooks of Antanas and Jonas Juška, and others already published at that time, including the content and genres of the songs as well as the interaction between melody and language. He explains the specific challenges of translating into Yiddish, given the differences between Lithuanian and Yiddish language systems. He also pays significant attention to actual historic events in Lithu-

ania and Europe, without avoiding discussing the increasingly apparent threat of anti-Semitism. Additionally, he highlights the relations between Jews and Lithuanians and advocates improved mutual communication and understanding (Katzenelenbogen 1930: 5–20). In 1935, Katzenelenbogen's translation of Lithuanian and Latvian songs into English was published in Chicago, featuring 19 Rhesa songs (Katzenelenbogen 1935).

Katzenelenbogen's translations were rooted in cultural self-reflection and dialogue. They serve as evidence of the Jewish intelligentsia's effort to establish its position within the Lithuanian cultural landscape and to showcase Baltic culture in a global context.

In the second half of the 20th century, a great interest in the extinct Prussian language arose in Lithuania and beyond its borders in Germany, Poland, and Russia. The research of Baltists Vytautas Mažiulis, Audronė Jakulienė Kaukienė, Letas Palmaitis and Vladimir Toporov inspired the restoration and creative development of Prussian language and culture. In 1984–1985, and later, Letas Palmaitis, Glabis Niktorius and Vytautas Rinkevičius translated several songs from the Rhesa collection into Prussian (MLE 1 n.d.; Muktupāvels 2023: 19–24). The idea, which was developed and is still supported by upholders of the old Baltic religion, is that the code of the extinct Baltic-Prussian nation might have survived in the songs of Prussian Lithuanians.

Rhesa songs in Europe and North America have mainly been the focus of linguistic, cultural, and partly historical imagination. Translators from various linguistic backgrounds, guided by their distinct approaches to folk art, have reinterpreted Rhesa songs so that they become not only a direct reception but also a cultural construction that aligns with their cultural expectations, value orientations, aesthetic norms, and historical experiences. Translations of Rhesa songs have served as an important resource for demonstrating national identity, the search for cultural kinship, and even political representation.

In this context, the musical expression of Rhesa's songs hardly functioned and for many reasons was discovered much later. Firstly, this was caused by Rhesa's inadequate preparation for working with musical material, as well as the general practical difficulties in transcribing the melodies of folk songs. The Tetzners aptly discussed the challenges of rhyming translations, their arrangement with the melody, and the fact that Germans, according to Tetzner, read songs rather than singing them (Tetzner 1897: 52).

Revitalised Tradition: Rhesa's Folkloric Collection between Text and Stage

Rhesa's collection of songs, which became a source of textual memory, was transferred to a new form of existence in the second half of the 20th century – the stage. The staged performance of folklore reflects what Schechner defines as restored behaviour. It is a conscious, repetitive action, removed from its authentic historical context, but actualised and gaining a new meaning in the present. Schechner notes that restored behaviour is symbolic and reflexive: "This special way of handling experience and jumping the gaps between past and present, individual and group, inner and outer" (Schechner 1985: 36, 115).

The theoretical approach of performativity allows us to understand the 'revival' of Rhesa's songs through singing not as a return to their original, ethnographic form, but as a creative, selective and sometimes ideologically motivated process in which the entirety of the song is embodied in new artistic, educational or representational means.

In the second half of the 20th century, Rhesa songs gained renewed significance within Lithuania. Historical and geopolitical shifts symbolically and physically relocated Rhesa's songs to the Klaipėda region, where local performers began to sing them. Who were these performers? Most of them were newcomers to the Klaipėda region who had never sung or even heard these songs before.[5] The tradition of demonstration and imitation had already been broken, and when the connection with living examples is lost, people turn to texts in search of anchors. In such cases, as Assmann states, not only do new texts emerge, but existing texts are also granted greater normative importance (Assmann 2006: 69).

From the 1970s onwards, folk ensembles in Klaipėda and the surrounding areas started learning and singing songs from the fourth edition of Rhesa's *Dainos* (R I 1958; R II 1964). In establishing cultural coherence in written culture, learning songs from sheet music and performing them are considered "functionally equivalent procedures for creating cultural coherence" (Assmann 2006: 39). This also marks the moment when leaders of folklore ensembles gain the status of new agents of cultural memory (Assmann 2006: 43).

An analysis of how eleven folklore ensembles have expressed themselves – through programmes, audio recordings, and concert activities – from 1971

to 2024 reveals that many of them possess their understanding of how to perform Rhesa's songs. Alternatively, they are all endeavouring to find an individual approach to this relatively little-known musical dialect. These approaches can generally be categorised as:

– Historical-ethnographic, aiming to revive cultural memory, including the musical folklore of Lithuania Minor;

– Ethnomusicological, focusing on stage adaptation, musical innovation, and audience engagement.

Data on the songs of Lithuania Minor and especially their performance contexts is incomplete, but some information exists in historical and ethnographic sources from various periods. When reproducing the songs of the Rhesa collection, available historical data is used to develop a model of how these songs might have sounded, and then they are performed. This kind of aesthetic performance is the main way to physically recreate an extinct behaviour (Schechner 1985: 48). Folklore ensembles, as mentioned, chose different paths to recreate the sound and contexts of Rhesa songs. In the following, we will discuss one aspect of song performance related to a key feature of Prussian Lithuanian songs, monophony.

Folklore ensembles that followed the historical-ethnographic direction of song revival paid much attention to the analysis of sources. They are dominated by information about the monophonic nature of Lithuania Minor songs, both in terms of melody and performance. Thus, ensembles from this group typically perform songs solo or in unison. Prussian Lithuanian songs generally depict life centred around a person or family surrounded by nature, containing few historical facts. Rhesa's songs were incorporated into folklore performances, utilising historical circumstances, ethnographic stories, fiction, customs, and other means to better connect the present with the past from which the songs originate.

The first institutionalised folklore ensemble in Klaipėda, Vorusnė, which started operating in 1971, followed a historical-ethnographic direction. Throughout its existence, Vorusnė produced programmes and performances related to Lithuania Minor, for example, "Jūrų-marių dainos" (Songs of the Sea and Lagoon) (1979), "Lietuvininkų vestuvės" (*Lietuvininkai*[6] Wedding) (1979), "Mažvydas ir lietuvininkų dainos" (Martynas Mažvydas and the Songs of the *Lietuvininkai*) (1979), "Lietuvininkai" (1985), "Žodis ir giesmė" (Word and

Hymn), "Lietuvininkump ir žemaičiump" (Among the *Lietuvinkai* and the Samogitians), etc.

Vorusnė performed Rhesa's collection and other songs of Lithuania Minor in unison, whether the song had a monophonic or homophonic structure. In the early stages of ensemble activity, they did not use musical instruments to accompany the songs, as there is little information in the sources regarding this type of performance. This is corroborated by listening to the ensemble's audio recordings (FKK 2022 1; FKK 2022 2).

For example, the song "Strazde strazdeli" (Thrush, Little Thrush) from Rhesa's collection is performed by Vorusnė in unison (FKK 2022 3). However, its melody could be sung in a traditional polyphonic manner, this song being close to the polyphonic songs of neighbouring Samogitia. Vorusnė's choice reflects the desire to maintain the authenticity of the musical dialect of Lithuania Minor, but not to exploit the opportunity to expand the sound of the song, to achieve a better artistic effect.

However, not all ensembles resisted the influence of polyphony. Post-war migration brought many Samogitians to the Klaipėda region, influencing local interpretations of folklore and performance culture. For example, in a 1995 video, we can see that the same song, "Strazde strazdeli", is sung in a polyphonic manner by the Nida school folklore ensemble (BF 1995). The Vilnius folklore ensemble Visi, led by music professionals, also performed this song in a distinctly Samogitian style (EV 1995).

The Vorusnėlė children's folklore ensemble from Klaipėda performs Rhesa's minor-mode melodies in a polyphonic style, giving them a distinctly Eastern Lithuanian (with a hint of Slavic) sound, as in the song "Miegužio noriu" (I Want to Sleep) from Rhesa's collection (KEC 1998). Vorusnėlė is interesting because, based on its activities and ideological goals of reviving regional culture and informal representation, as well as educating children and youth, it can be regarded as an ensemble of a historical-ethnographic nature. However, the musical expression of the ensemble tended to align more with the second group of ensembles supporting the ethnomusicological approach to folklore revival.

The second – ethnomusicological – approach focuses on the musical expression of revived folklore. Ensembles seek ways to perform songs, often accompanied by musical instruments, creating a vocal and instrumental polyphonic texture. These performances are most commonly presented as standalone concert pieces. The historical-ethnographic context may be entirely unimport-

ant or, conversely, incredibly inspiring, leading to the creation of ethnographic stories combined with artistic invention.

One of the most prominent early examples of this approach is the interpretation of the Prussian theme "Prūšos manas kājas autas" (I Put on My Shoes in Prussian Land) by the Latvian ethnomusicologist and composer Valdis Muktupāvels and his group of like-minded musicians, Rasa (Muktupāvels 2023: 53).

The future composer and folklore performer's early contact with the spirit and reality of East Prussia in the Soviet-occupied and militarised Kaliningrad region, military service in Gusev (formerly Gumbinė), and subsequent interest in the works of Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, and Russian historians and linguists, particularly Baltists specialising in Prussian studies and Baltic-Slavic ethnolinguistic contacts, resulted in a notably distinctive stylistic interpretation of the songs from the Rhesa collection. This interpretation was almost not practised by other Lithuanian folklorists of that period.

The acquaintance that occurred in 1985 marked the beginning of collaboration between the Baltic and Slavic philologist and Prussian language reconstructor Letas Palmaitis and Muktupāvel, which resulted in a notable achievement. In 1988, the Rasa ensemble produced a "Prussian" programme that includes two songs with melodies from Rhesa's collection, arranged and translated into Prussian: "Ei skijā, skijā" (Ei, kilo, kilo / Hey, it rose (R II 1964, No 73) and "Swettei iz Dānskan" (Pirš man iš Danskos / Proposal from Gdansk (R II 1964, No 6) (Rasa 2023). The first song is performed solo, accompanied by the ancient Latvian string instrument the *gīga* and a whistle. The second dance-like melody is sung in unison by the group at a fast tempo, accompanied by percussion and a *gīga*. Performers create an impression of connection with early music.

The initial aim of the "Prūšos manas kājas autas" program, as Muktupāvels defines it, was to create a multi-layered depiction of the Prussians, their language, traditions, and religion based on historical, folkloric, and ethnographic sources. It sought to portray their contact with Christian Europe, their continuity in other nations, and their revival today, all illustrated through Latvian and Prussian (or rather Prussian Lithuanians) music material. Ilze Šarkovska, a member of the Rasa group, recalls that this program resembled a fascinating lecture, during which Muktupāvels discussed the Prussians and their history, and commented on each song (Muktupāvels 2023: 23–30). From this perspective, Rasa's work and contextualised interpretation of Rhesa's songs appear to lean

more in the historical-ethnographic direction, which emphasises the symbolic significance of musical folklore. However, audio recordings and group members' reflections on the musical part of the program point in an ethnomusicological direction, in which musical expression is in the foreground. All members of the ensemble are professional and creative musicians who already had musical skills at that time and were able to improvise and use various traditional and classical musical instruments. Their democratic cooperation enabled the interaction of musical styles and genres; so-called issues of folkloric traditionalism and authenticity were secondary. The ensemble members themselves admit that it is impossible to talk about some absolute authenticity related to the Prussians as it is post-folklore. Gita Lancere described it more drastically: Rasa treated the material "rather shamelessly", but people liked it (Muktupāvels 2023: 67–68).

The ritual folklore group Kūlgrinda, which started its activities between 1988 and 1990 and is part of the Baltic religious community Romuva, was the first to perform Lithuanian songs translated into Prussian, including those from the Rhesa collection. The ensemble declares that it revives and represents "the oldest layer of Baltic folklore known to us, reaching back to the early Middle Ages and even to the times of ancient Europe" (Romuva n.d.). The musical activities of the group are closely associated with the so-called indigenous religion and ritual practices rooted in folklore. The material of musical folklore is used and interpreted very freely and serves the dissemination of neopagan ideas and ideology.

In 2005, the group released the album *Prūsų giesmės* (Prussian Chants), which contains 17 songs from various regions of Lithuania translated into Prussian, accompanied by *kanklės*, bagpipes, drums, and wooden horns (TV n.d.). Among them are three lyric texts from the Rhesa collection and one melody. "Mīniks Saulīkan weddi" (Mėnuo saulužę vedė / The Moon Married the Sun (R I 1958, No 27)) is a song that Rhesa himself discussed in his research as having mythological motifs. Kūlgrinda adapted the melody of another Rhesa song "Pareinu rytą anksti" (I Come Early in the Morning (R II 1964, No 59)) for it, which is sung solo, accompanied by bagpipes. For other Rhesa lyrics (R I 1958, No 78, 83), which lack their original melodies, Kūlgrinda adapted tunes from songbooks by Bartsch (BDB 1889, No 336) and Antanas Juška and Jonas Juška (JSD I 1955, No 582).

Summarising Kūlgrinda's work, one must agree with Austė Nakienė's view that discussing the continuation of the old Prussian tradition is not worthwhile:

the idea that some of its remnants have persisted in Lithuanian culture is very uncertain. The reconstruction is valuable not as a link to the old culture but as a symbol of a modern, entirely new Prussian community, an expression of the creative imagination of its members (Nakienė 2008: 169).

Returning to ethnomusicological-direction interpretations of Rhesa's songs in Lithuanian, we must first discuss the folklore ensemble Visi, led by Evaldas Vyčinas. He began accompanying Rhesa's songs with the nine-string *kanklės* and violin as early as 1988 (KEC 2021). We hear this in the previously discussed song "Strazde strazdeli", as well as on the CD *Liudviko Rėzos dainos* (Songs by Ludwig Rhesa), which contains 18 songs from Rhesa's collection. The nine-string *kanklės* and violin accompany them (LRD 2000).

The work of ethnomusicologists Daiva Vyčinienė and Evaldas Vyčinas at the outset of Lithuania's re-independence had a highly influential and inspiring effect on other folklore groups. After 1990, an increasing number of ensembles performing songs from Lithuania Minor began to incorporate instrumental accompaniment, especially for dance-style melodies.

For example, folk ensembles like Alka integrated regional instruments into their song arrangements, diversifying their performance styles and reaching broader audiences. In a soundtrack recorded in 1997, the Rhesa collection song "Parbėg laivelis" (A Small Boat Sails to the Shore) is performed in unison, with an adapted accompaniment on a reconstructed instrument from this region, now widely known as the Lithuania Minor *kanklės* harp (KEC 1997).

However, another dance-style festive song, "Kas tas miežio grūdas" (What is that Barley Grain), is performed at a quick tempo, accompanied by violins, cymbals, drums, pipe, and double bass. This practice was first noted in audio recordings of folklore ensembles performing songs from Lithuania Minor (KEC 1997 1).

It is important to emphasise that this musical solution does not conflict with tradition. It is documented in the memoirs of folk music performers from the turn of the 20th century. It appears in the iconography of the 17th century, depicting musical instrument bands in Lithuania Minor. This kind of interpretation of Rhesa's songs persists today, including both live concert performances and audio recordings by folklore ensembles as well as the numerous thematic folklore performances produced in recent decades. For example, "Jau saulelė" (The Sun is Already Rising) (Alka, Vorusnėlė, 2012); "Žemė prašo nepamiršti jos vardų" (The Native Land Asks Us Not to Forget Its Names) (Verdainė, 2013); "Kur

medaus upės tek" (Where Rivers of Honey Flow), "Vėjų marės, medaus upės" (Windy Lagoon, Rivers of Honey), "Lietuvininkai" (Kuršių ainiai, 2013, 2015, 2017); "Už stalelio sėdau" (I Sat Down at a Table), "Ernstas Vilhelmas Berbomas" (Ernst Wilhelm Beerbohm), "Eisim žvejoti, duos Dievs laimėti" (Let's Go Fishing, God Willing, We Will Win) (Alka, 2015, 2018, 2018); "Rylužė Jevikei" (Kuršiukai, 2018), "Dirbdysiu laivą" [I will Build a Ship] (Verdainė, 2018), "Esu kilęs iš lietuvių giminės (Liudvikas Rėza)" [I Come from Lithuanian Ancestry (Ludwig Rhesa)] (Aušrinė, 2018), "Moterystė pagal Ievą Simonaitytę" [Womanhood According to Ieva Simonaitytė] (Ramytė, 2022), "Senosios žvejų dainos ir šių dienų žvejų pasakojimai" [Old Fishermen's Songs and Modern Fishermen's Stories] (Giedružė, 2022), etc. This list suggest that the ensembles of the Klaipėda region continued along the path established by Vorusnė to create performances that integrated folklore, literary, and historical themes. Research into regional musical traditions provided a basis for incorporating instrumental music and staged storytelling in public performances.

New creative practices emerged alongside a shift in perspective from authenticity to artistic agency. After 2000, collaborations with jazz and pop musicians became more common, allowing folk material to interact with new genres. Such projects reflect the flexibility and resilience of living heritage.

The earliest jazz and folklore collaborations captured on video is the Sodalė project (2006). Folklore ensemble Alka, together with pop artist Gytis Paškevičius, performs a composition by Romuladas Malinauskas that features the song "Per kalnelį per aukštąį" (Over the High Hill) from the Rhesa collection (KEC 2006). One of the most successful artistic outcomes of the interaction between jazz and folklore is compositions by folklore group Audenis and jazz pianist Saulius Šiaučiulis. Among these is the song "Eisva mudu abudu" (We Will Come Together) from the Rhesa collection, a minor-key melody performed in polyphony, with added piano accompaniment and improvisation (KEC 2009).

The proficient folklore interpreters Kuršių ainiai and electronic music creator multi-instrumentalist Donatas Bielkauskas joined forces to create the soundtrack *Rasi rasoj rasi* (Perhaps You Will Find It in the Dew). This extended recording features, alongside other songs from Lithuania Minor, a modern interpretation of material from Rhesa's collection in the form of the songs "Mergyte miela" (Sweet Girl), "Kad aš turėjau" (That I Had), and "Jau aušt aušružė" (It is Already Dawn) (KAD 2017).

Analysing the activity of folklore ensembles and their repertoires, it is evident that since the last decade of the 20th century, the number of songs from Lithuania Minor from other written sources has increased. Between 1995 and 2017, almost all the sung folklore of Lithuania Minor stored in Lithuanian archives was published. Ensembles from the Klaipėda region paid particular attention to songs recorded locally. A significant event was the publication of a new edition of Bartsch's *Dainu Balsai* (Voices of Songs) in 2000. In this edition, the lyrics of the songs, translated by Bartsch into German, were restored to Lithuanian based on the variants of Lithuanian songs. Nevertheless, the songs from Rhesa's collection continued to be relevant.

The use and reinterpretation of Rhesa-legacy songs by contemporary folklore ensembles reflects more than artistic variation. It becomes a communal act where performers assert control over inherited cultural material and re-enact it through public performance. This autonomy is evident in the way the groups choose arrangements, styles, and performance contexts, sometimes affirming, sometimes challenging institutional narratives of authenticity and representation.

The interpretation of Rhesa's material exists as an open cultural possibility, constantly embodied and reinterpreted in new contexts. It attempts to imitate authentic tradition, but with its help, it articulates the needs, aesthetics, and even political intentions of the present. The 'transfer' of songs to the stage presupposes their sonic fulfilment and symbolic action, which revives collective memory, directed towards the future.

Conclusions

Rhesa's *Dainos* (1825) marks the first systematic collection of Prussian Lithuanian and all Lithuanian sung folklore, serving as a crucial cultural memory resource and foundational for dynamic stage performances. This publication enabled songs to endure, be disseminated widely, and be reinterpreted within new cultural frameworks for over two centuries.

The collection's reception is international and enduring, as confirmed by numerous translations and reviews that demonstrate academic and artistic interest in Lithuania as a cultural space.

The interpretation of Rhea's songs by folklore ensembles in the 20th and 21st centuries reveals two distinct approaches. The first is a historical-ethnographic focus, centred on reconstructive and documentary performance practices, aiming to revive and preserve the perceived authenticity of the original material. The second is an ethnomusicological approach, marked by experimentation, a variety of musical expressions, and creative fusion with other genres, reflecting broader aesthetic and cultural shifts in contemporary folk performance.

Initially focused on authenticity, folklore ensembles have gradually shifted towards more inventive and expressive formats, especially after 2000, increasingly incorporating theatrical elements, inter-genre dialogue, and culturally reflective modes of expression.

Rhesa's legacy testifies to the continuity and ability of tradition to renew itself, and to how songs function as a dynamic tool for expressing cultural identity in local and international contexts.

Notes

[1] Lit. Martynas Liudvikas Gediminas Rėza; Ger. Martin Ludwig Jedemin Rhesa.

[2] Lithuania Minor is a historical and ethnographic region that emerged in the first half of the 16th century. It was located between the Prieglius (Ger. Pregel) River and the lower reaches of the Nemunas (Ger. Memel) River and was inhabited by Western Baltic ethnic groups. In the early 16th century, the names Klein Litau and Klein Litauen appeared in Prussian chronicles (for example those of Simon Grunau and Lucas David). Later, the term *Preussisch Litauen* (Prussian Lithuania) became widespread in German historiography and is still in use today. In Prussian government documents from the 16th to 19th centuries, as well as on Prussian maps from the 17th century onwards, the region was also referred to as the Province of Lithuania or the Lithuanian Domain (Ger. *Litauischer Kreis*). The area was part of the Prussian/German state from the time of the Teutonic conquest in the 13th century until the early 20th century.

Following the Great Northern War, the Great Plague and the livestock plague in the early 18th century, Prussian authorities resettled large numbers of Austrians (Salzburgers) and Germans in the depopulated homesteads. As a result, the region gradually became multicultural, though it remained dominated by the official Germanic order and culture. After World War I, the Treaty of Versailles assigned the northern part of Lithuania Minor – the Klaipėda Region – to the Republic of Lithuania. After the World War II, the Klaipėda Region was incorporated into to the Lithuanian SSR, while the

remaining territory was divided between the Russian Federation and Poland (VLE 1 n.d.; VLE 2 n.d.).

[3] The Susitikimai+ (Meetings+) project, partly funded by the Lithuanian Council for Culture and Klaipėda City Municipality, was carried out in 2021–2022. During this period, the author of the article conducted in-depth interviews with individuals who participated in the movement to revitalise the culture of Lithuania Minor during the Soviet era and beyond. Based on the collected material, eight podcasts were produced, and audio recordings of Vorusnė from 1979 and 1993 were restored. The material has been made publicly available on the *Folkloras. Klaipėdos kraštas* (Folklore: Klaipėda Region) YouTube channel (FKK 2022).

[4] In September 2025, a new edition of L. Rėza's folk song collection was published, after the article had already been prepared (Rėza 2025)

[5] More details are available in the author's articles written in Lithuanian (Petrošienė 2021, 2023) and English (Petrošienė 2025).

[6] *Lietuvininkai* are Lithuanians of Lithuania Minor, also referred to as Lithuanians of Prussia (Ger. *Kleinlitauer*, *Preussische Litauer*), an ethnic and ethnocultural subgroup of western Lithuanians. The autochthonous population of the region referred to themselves as *Lietuvininkai* of Lithuania Minor, a designation that has appeared in Lithuanian writings as well as in official Prussian and German state documents since the 16th century (MLE n.d.).

Abbreviations

BDB 1886, 1889 – Bartsch, Christian (ed) 1886, 1889. *Dainu balsai* (Voices of Songs), Melodieen lithauischer Volkslieder, gesammelt und mit Textübersetzung, Anmerkungen und Einleitung herausgegeben von Christian Bartsch, Bd. I, II, Heidelberg.

BF 1995 – Traditional East Prussian folk song *Strazde strazdeli.* Nida, 1995. *Baltų folkloras* (Baltic Folklore). Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clDXGlIFc6k&list=RDclDXGlIFc6k&start_radio=1 (accessed 29/07/2025).

EV 1995 – Strazde strazdeli. Visi, 1995. *Evaldas Vyčinas*. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_W57GRgrFH4&list=RD_W57GRgrFH4&start_radio=1 (accessed 29/07/2025).

FKK 2022 – Folkloras. Klaipėdos kraštas (Folklore: Klaipėda Region). YouTube. Available at https://www.youtube.com/@folkloras.klaipedoskrastas (accessed 29/07/2025).

FKK 2022 1 – Folkloro ansamblis *Vorusnė*. Vestuvinės dainos (Folklore Ensemble *Vorusnė*: Wedding Songs), 1979. Klaipėdos universitetas, 2022. *Folkloras. Klaipėdos*

kraštas (Folklore: Klaipėda Region). Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSMJT__bH98&t=43s (accessed 29/07/2025).

FKK 2022 2 – Klaipėdos universiteto folkloro ansamblis *Vorusnė* (Klaipeda University Folklore Ensemble Vorusnė), 1993. *Folkloras. Klaipėdos kraštas* (Folklore: Klaipėda Region). Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXDNZpx7mpA&t=954s (accessed 29/07/2025).

FKK 2022 3 – Strazde strazdeli (11:23). Klaipėdos universiteto folkloro ansamblis *Vorusnė* (Klaipeda University Folklore Ensemble Vorusnė), 1993. *Folkloras. Klaipėdos kraštas* (Folklore: Klaipėda Region). Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXDNZpx7mpA&t=954s (accessed 31/07/2025).

JSD I 1955 – *Lietuviškos svotbinės dainos* (Lithuanian Wedding Songs), A. Juška and J. Juška (eds), Vol. 1. Vilnius: Valstybinė grožinės literatūros leidykla.

JVL n.d. – Katzenelenbogen, Uriah. *Jewish Virtual Library*. Available at https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/katzenelenbogen-uriah (accessed 29/07/2025).

KAD 2017 – Rasi rasoj rasi. Kuršių ainiai ir Donis, Klaipėdos miesto savivaldybės etnokultūros centras (Klaipėda City Municipality Ethnocultural Centre), CD, 2017. Available at https://www.discogs.com/release/24709049-Kur%C5%A1i%C5%B3-Ainiai-ir-Donis-rasi-rasoj-rasi?srsltid=AfmBOorm2xATYR4lGHd4BYxDTnIWJ5qhJRVfgwi_B21C4ooP82zuK2sg (accessed 28/07/2025).

KEC 1997 – Parbėg laivelis (1:34). Ant jūružių krašto (On the Edge of the Sea), Alka, 1997. *Klaipėdos etnokultūros centro garso įrašų archyvas* (Klaipėda Ethnocultural Centre Audio Recording Archive). Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zOT_HrItz0&list=PLmcPKCPJCeC-t5JMil7EhL0IfTrJP9ny-&index=4 (accessed 28/07/2025).

KEC 1997 1 – Kas tas miežio grūdas (21:25). Ant jūružių krašto (On the Edge of the Sea), Alka, 1997. *Klaipėdos etnokultūros centro garso įrašų archyvas* (Klaipėda Ethnocultural Centre Audio Recording Archive). Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zOT_HrItz0&list=PLmcPKCPJCeC-t5JMil7EhL0IfTrJP9ny-&index=4 (accessed 28/07/2025).

KEC 1998 – Miegužio noriu (20:30). Vorusnėlė, 1998. *Klaipėdos etnokultūros centras* (Klaipėda Ethnocultural Centre). Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABmIWsISBgE&list=RDABmIWsISBgE&start_radio=1&t=83s (accessed 29/07/2025).

KEC 2006 – Per kalnelį per aukštąjį (43:45). Romualdas Malinauskas, Sodalė, 2006. *Klaipėdos etnokultūros centro garso įrašų archyvas* (Klaipėda Ethnocultural Centre Audio Recording Archive). Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfdn524FOHw&list=PLmcPKCPJCeC-t5JMil7EhL0IfTrJP9ny-&index=22 (accessed 28/07/2025).

KEC 2009 – Eisva mudu abudu (59:23). Audenis ir Saulius Šiaučiulis, Klaipėdos krašto dainos [Songs of Klaipėda Region], CD, 2009. *Klaipėdos etnokultūros centro garso įrašų archyvas* (Klaipėda Ethnocultural Centre Audio Recording Archive). Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZoFd0UZ_ps&list=PLmcPKCPJCeC-t5JMil7EhL0IfT-rJP9ny-&index=8&t=3s (accessed 28/07/2025).

KEC 2021 – Liudviko Rėzos dainos ir legendos apie mus (Songs by Ludwig Rhesa and Legends about Us) 30/07/2021. *Klaipėdos etnokultūros centras* (Klaipėda Ethnocultural Centre). Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyzNIjwOVS0 (accessed 29/07/2025).

LRD 1935 – *Liudo Rėzos Dainos* (Songs by Ludwig Rhesa). M. Biržiška (ed), Vol. 1. Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto Humanitarinių mokslų fakulteto leidinys.

LRD 1937 – *Liudo Rėzos Dainos* (Songs by Ludwig Rhesa). M. Biržiška (ed), Vol. 2. Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto Humanitarinių mokslų fakulteto leidinys.

LRD 2000 – Liudviko Rėzos dainos (Songs by Ludwig Rhesa). *Visi*, CD, 2000. Available at https://www.pakartot.lt/album/liudviko-rezos-dainos (accessed 27/07/2025).

MLE n. d. – Matulevičius, Algirdas. Lietuvininkai (Prussian Lithuanians). *Mažosios Lietuvos enciklopedija* (Encyclopaedia of Lithuania Minor). Available at https://www.mle.lt/straipsniai/lietuvininkai (accessed 29/07/2025).

MLE 1 n.d. – Prūsų giesmės (Prussian Chants). *Mažosios Lietuvos enciklopedija* (Encyclopaedia of Lithuania Minor). Available at https://www.mle.lt/straipsniai/prusu-giesmes (accessed 19/08/2025).

Rasa 2023 – Prūšos manas kājas autas (I Put on My Shoes in Prussian Land). *Rasa.* Available at https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_l_c4O1r_dK_P6p7qkS-7VmsjR_uaZJfD9E (accessed 08/08/2025).

R I 1958 – Rėza, Liudvikas 1958. *Lietuvių liaudies dainos* I (Lithuanian Folk Songs). J. Jurginis and B. Kmitas (eds), Vol. 1. Vilnius: Valstybinė grožinės literatūros leidykla.

R II 1964 – Rėza, Liudvikas 1964. *Lietuvių liaudies dainos* II (Lithuanian Folk Songs). A. Jovaišas (ed), Vol. 2. Vilnius: Vaga.

RR 5 2018 – Martynas Liudvikas Rėza. Prūsijos lietuvių dainos (Martin Ludwig Rhesa: Songs of the Prussian Lithuanians). *Raštai* (Collected Works), L. Citavičiūtė (ed), Vol. 5. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas.

Romuva n.d. – *Romuva. Senovės baltų religinė bendrija* (The Ancient Baltic Religious Community). Available at https://romuva.lt/pasauleziura/giesmes/ (accessed 18/08/2025).

SVL 1813 – *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*. Gesammelt, geordnet, zum Theile übersetzt durch Johann Gottfried von Herder. Neu herausgegeben durch Johan von Müller. Vien, 1813, pp. 129–142. Available at http://books.google.lt/books?printsec=frontcover&id=mYs0AQAAIAAJ#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed 29/07/2025).

TV n.d. – Prūsų giesmės (Prussian Chants). Kūlgrinda. *Audio ir video Tautosakos vartai* (Audio and Video Folklore Gate). Available at http://tautosakosvartai.lt/?mark=237 (accessed 19/08/2025).

VLE 1 n.d. – Matulevičius, Algirdas; Kaunas, Domas. Mažoji Lietuva (Lithuania Minor). *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija* (Universal Lithuanian Encyclopaedia). Available at https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/mazoji-lietuva/ (accessed 29/07/2025).

VLE 2 n.d. – Gruodytė, Stefanija; Matulevičius, Algirdas. Maras Lietuvoje (Plague in Lithuania). *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija* (Universal Lithuanian Encyclopaedia). Available at *https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/maras-lietuvoje/* (accessed 29/07/2025).

VLE 3 n.d. – Šostakovski, Juzef. Antoni Edward Odyniec. *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija* (Universal Lithuanian Encyclopaedia). Available at https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/antoni-edward-odyniec/ (accessed 29/07/2025).

References

Aleknavičienė, Ona 2019. Asmeninis Martyno Liudviko Rėzos archyvas: rekonstrukcija (The Personal Archive of Martin Ludwig Rhesa: A Reconstruction). *Knygotyra*, Vol. 73, pp. 113–202.

Assmann, Jan 2006. Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies. Stanford University Press. (Original work published in 2000).

Balys, Jonas 1948. *Lietuvių tautosakos skaitymai* (Readings of Lithuanian Folklore), Vol. 2. Tübingen: Patria.

Berg, Nikolaj 1854. *Pesni raznykh narodov* (Songs of Nations). Moskva.

Berg, Nikolaj 1921. *Litovskiye pesni* (Lithuanian Songs). Vilnius: Br. Jalovcer spaustuvė.

Biržiška, Mykolas 1935. III Dainų leidimo redakcijos žodžiai (Editorial Preface for Third Edition of Songs). In: M. Biržiška (ed) *Liudo Rėzos Dainos* (Songs by Ludwig Rhesa), Vol. 1. Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto Humanitarinių mokslų fakulteto leidinys, pp. III–XVII.

Brazaitis, Jonas 1982. Liudo Rėzos dainos (1938) (Songs by Ludwig Rhesa). In: *Raštai* (Collected Writings), Vol. 3. Chicago: Į laisvę fondas lietuviškai kultūrai ugdyti, pp. 541–543.

Brodziński, Kazimierz 1872. *Pisma* (Collected Writings), Vol. 1. Poznań: Drukiem J. I. Kraszewskiego, pp. 339–355.

Brzozowski, Karol 1844. *Pieśni ludu nadniemeńskiego z okolic Aleksoty* (Songs of the Neman People from around Aleksotas). Poznań: Księgarnia J. K. Żupańskiego.

Citavičiūtė, Liucija 2017. Vokiečių ir lenkų recenzentų žvilgsnis į M. L. Rėzos parengtą lietuvių dainų rinkinį Dainos (1825) (German and Polish Reviews of the *Dainos* Collection of Lithuanian Folksongs (1825) Edited by Rėza). *Tautosakos darbai*, Vol. 54, pp. 147–159. https://doi.org/10.51554/TD.2017.28530

Citavičiūtė, Liucija 2018. Parengėjo žodis (A Word from the Author). In: L. Citavičiūtė (ed.) Martynas Liudvikas Rėza. *Raštai*: *Prūsijos lietuvių dainos* (Martin Ludwig Rhesa. Collected Works: Songs of the Prussian Lithuanians), Vol. 5. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, pp. 9–14.

Citavičiūtė, Liucija 2018a. Prūsijos lietuvių dainų rinkimo, tyrimo ir publikavimo pradžia (The Beginning of the Collection, Research and Publication of Prussian Lithuanian Songs). In: L. Citavičiūtė (ed) Martynas Liudvikas Rėza. *Raštai: Prūsijos lietuvių dainos* (Martin Ludwig Rhesa. Collected Works: Songs of the Prussian Lithuanians), Vol. 5. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, pp. 17–49.

Citavičiūtė, Liucija 2018b. Martyno Liudviko Rėzos Veimaro rankraštis (The Weimar Manuscript by Martynas Liudvikas Rėza). *Tautosakos darbai*, Vol. 55, pp. 60–81. https://doi.org/10.51554/TD.2018.28499

Citavičiūtė, Liucija 2019. Martyno Liudviko Rėzos susirašinėjimas su lietuvių dainų rinkėjais provincijoje (Martin Ludwig Rhesa's Contacts with Lithuanian Song Collectors in the Provinces). *Knygotyra*, Vol. 72, pp. 183–205. https://doi.org/10.15388/Knygotyra.2019.72.25

Čelakovský, František Ladislav 1827. *Litevské národní písně* (Lithuanian Folk Songs). Praha: Jan Host. Pospíšil.

Čelakowský, František Ladislav 1822, 1825, 1827. *Slowanské národnj pjsně* (Slavic Folk Songs), Vol. 1–3. Praz: Pjsmem J. owd. Vetterlowé z Wildenbrunu.

Čiurlionytė, Jadvyga 1969. *Lietuvių liaudies dainų melodikos bruožai* (The Melodic Characteristics of Lithuanian Folk Songs). Vilnius: Vaga.

Drotvinas, Vincentas 2008. Michaelio Mörlino traktatas *Principium primarium in lingva Lithvanica* (Michael Mörlin's Treatise *Principium primarium in lingua Lithvanica*). In: V. Drotvinas (ed) *Trys 1706 metų filologinės polemikos šaltiniai* (*Three Sources of Philological Polemics of 1706*). Vilnius: LLTI.

Eretas, Juozas 1938. Rėzos santykiai su Goethe (Rhea's Relationship with Goethe). *Athenaeum*, Vol. 9, pp. 2–55. Available at: https://archive.org/details/athenaeum-t.-9.2-1938_202212/page/54/mode/1up (accessed 04/08/2025).

Gineitis, Leonas 1995. *Prūsiškasis patriotizmas ir lietuvių literatūra* (Prussian Patriotism and Lithuanian Literature). Vilnius: Pradai.

Jonynas, Ambraziejus 1989. *Liudvikas Rėza tautosakininkas* (Folklorist Ludwig Rhesa). Vilnius: Mokslas.

Jovaišas, Albinas 1969. *Liudvikas Rėza* (Ludwig Rhesa). Vilnius: Vaga.

Katzenelenbogen, Uriah 1930. *Daynes: Litvishe and Letishe Folkslider* (Songs: Lithuanian and Latvian Folk Songs). Amherst.

Katzenelenbogen, Uriah 1935. *The Daina: An anthology of Lithuanian and Latvian Folksongs*. Chicago: Lithuanian News Publishing Company Incorporated.

Kaukienė, Audronė 2000. *Po Mažosios Lietuvos dangumi*: mintys apie Mažosios Lietuvos praeitį ir dabartį (Under the Sky of Lithuania Minor: Thoughts on the Past and Present of Lithuania Minor). Klaipėda: Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla.

Kraszewski, Józef Ignacy 1847. *Litwa* (Lithuania), Vol. 1. Warszawa.

Kraszewski, Józef Ignacy 1844. Dainos – pieśni litewskie (Dainos: Lithuanian Songs). *Athenaeum*, Vol. 2, Wilno.

Kukolnik, Pavel 1854. Cherty iz istorii i zhizni litovskogo Naroda (Features from the History and Life of the Lithuanian People). In: *Obychai, pover'ya, predrassudki, plyaski obryady, pesni i poslovitsy litovtsev*. 2-aya ch. pamyatnoy knizhki vilenskoy gubernii na 1854 god (Lithuanian Customs, Beliefs, Prejudices, Dances, Rituals, Songs and Proverbs: Part Two of the Memorial Book of Vilnius Province for 1854].

Kurschat, Friedrich 1843. *Dainos oder Litthauische Volkslieder*. Gesammelt, übersetzt und mit gegenüberstehendem Urtext herausgegeben von L. J. Rheza, <…> Neue Auflage. Durchgesehen, berichtigt und verbessert von Friedrich Kurschat, <…> Berlin: Verlag von Theod. Chr. Fr. Enslin. Available at: http://archive.org/details/dainos00reza (accessed 29/07/2025).

Lebedys, Jurgis 1972. *Lituanistikos baruose* (Lithuanian Studies), Vol. 2. Vilnius: Vaga.

Lemeškin, Ilja 2008. Augustas Schleicheris ir Praha / August Schleicher und Prag. In: I. Lemeškin, J. Zabarskaitė (eds) *Lituanistinis Augusto Schleicherio palikimas* (The Lithuanian Legacy of August Schleicher), Vol. 1. Vilnius: Lietuvių kalbos institutas, pp. 63–149.

Morici, Giuseppe 1925, 1930. *Canti popolari lituani*: con uno studio sulla poesia popolare lituana (Lithuanian Folk Songs: A Study of Lithuanian Folk Poetry). Roma: Anonima Romana Editoriale.

Muktupāvels, Valdis 2023. *Prūšos manas kājas autas* (I Put on My Shoes in Prussian Land). Grupas Rasa mantojums [The Legacy of the Group Rasa]. Rīga.

Nakienė, Austė 2008. Baltiška muzika – naujas vardas muzikos scenoje (Baltic Music as a New Name on the Musical Stage). *Tautosakos darbai*, Vol. 35, pp. 164–174.

Nesselmann, Georg Heinrich Ferdinand (ed) 1853. *Littauische Volkslieder*, gesammelt, kritisch bearbeitet und metrisch übersetzt von G. H. F. Nesselmann. Mit einer Musikbeilage. Berlin: Ferd. Dümmlers Verlagsbuchhandlung. Available at:

https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_hU0AAAAAcAAJ/page/n24/mode/1up (accessed 29/07/2025).

Novella di Nuncio 2014. Canti Popolari Lituani: The First Collection of Lithuanian Folk Poetry in Italian. V*ertimo studijos*, Vol. 7, pp. 110–122.

Petrošienė, Lina 2001. Christiano Bartscho Dainų balsai: rinkinio sandara [Christian Bartsch' Collection *Dainų Balsai*: The Structure of the Collection]. *Darbai ir dienos*, Vol. 25, pp. 137–145.

Petrošienė, Lina 2007. *Lietuvininkų etninė muzika: tapatumo problemos* (Ethnic Music of the *Lietuvininkai*: Issues of Identity). Klaipėda: Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla.

Petrošienė, Lina 2021. Lietuvininkų dainavimo tradicija XX a. antrojoje pusėje – XXI a. pradžioje (The Singing Tradition of the Inhabitants of Lithuania Minor from the Second Half of the 20th Century to the Beginning of the 21st Century). *Tautosakos darbai*, Vol. 61, pp. 97–121. https://doi.org/10.51554/TD.21.61.04

Petrošienė, Lina 2023. Mažosios Lietuvos instrumentinio muzikavimo tradicija: du likimai (The Tradition of Instrumental Music-Making in Lithuania Minor: Two Destinies). *Res Humanitariae,* Vol. 31, pp. 88–112. https://doi.org/10.15181/rh.v31i0.2584

Petrošienė, Lina 2025. Musical Folklore of Lithuania Minor During the Soviet Era (1946–1989): The Voices Lost and the Forms of Revitalization. *Letonica,* Vol. 57. Rīga. (Forthcoming).

Piročkinas, Arnoldas 1981. Lietuvių liaudies dainos Čekijoje (Lithuanian Folk Songs in Czech). *Literatūra*, Vol. 23, pp. 43–57.

Pocytė, Silva 2007. Martynas Liudvikas Rėza nepriklausomos Lietuvos lietuviškoje spaudoje 1918–1940 metais (Martin Ludwig Rhesa in the Lithuanian Press of Independent Lithuania 1918–1940). In: S. Pocytė, N. Strakauskaitė (eds) *Martynas Liudvikas Rėza: Epochų atspindžiai* (Martin Ludwig Rhesa: Reflections of the Epochs). Klaipėda: Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla, pp. 54–65.

Rėza, Liudvikas 2025. Lietuvių liaudies dainos (Lithuanian Folk Songs). Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas

Rhesa, Ludovicus 1810. Supplementorum ad Buxtorfii et Wolfii diatribas de abbreuiaturis hebraicis Sylloge I. Qua lectiones cursorias a viro plurimum reuerendo, M. Ludouico Rhesa, Theol. Prof. extra ord. designato et V. D. M. in arce Fridericiana, publice habendas indicit D. Sam. Theoph. Wald, Collegii Fac. Theol. h. s. Decan., Regiomonti.

Rhesa, Ludwig J. (ed) 1825. *Dainos oder Litthauische Volkslieder* gesammelt, übersetzt und mit gegenüberstehendem Urtext herausgegeben. Nebst einer Abhandlung über die litthauischen Volksgedichte, Hartung, Königsberg. Available at: https://archive.org/details/RhesaDainas1825/page/n117/mode/2up (accessed 29/07/2025).

Ruigys, Pilypas 1986. *Lietuvių kalbos kilmės, būdo ir savybių tyrinėjimas* (Research into the Origin, Nature and Characteristics of the Lithuanian Language). Vilnius: Vaga.

Schechner, Richard 1985. *Between Theater and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.

Šeferis, Vaidas 2009. Kristijono Donelaičio kūryba čekų filologijos akiratyje (Kristijonas Donelaitis' Works in Light of Czech Philology). *Senoji Lietuvos literatūra*, Vol. 28, pp. 41–62.

Sliužinskas, Rimantas 2007. Martyno Liudviko Rėzos *Dainos oder Litthauische Volkslieder*: intepretacijos stereotipai ir naujovės (*Dainos, oder Litthauische Volkslieder* by Martynas Liudvikas Rėza: Interpretation Stereotypes and Innovations). In: S. Pocytė, N. Strakauskaitė (eds). *Martynas Liudvikas Rėza: epochų atspindžiai* (Martin Ludwig Rhesa: Reflections of the Epochs). Klaipėda: Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla, pp. 85–97.

Siarczyński, Franciszek 1829. O śpiewach narodowych litewskich przez L. J. Rhesę zebranych, a przez Fr. Lad. Celakowskiego na język czeski przełożonych, i w Pradze r. 1827 wydanych (On Lithuanian National Songs Collected by L. J. Rhesa, Translated into Czech by Fr. Lad. Celakowsky and Published in Prague in 1827). In: *Czasopism Naukowy Księgozbioru Publicznego, Imienia Ossolińskich* (Scientific Journals of the Ossolińskis Public Book Collection), Vol. 2. Lwów, pp. 51–67.

Strakauskaitė, Nijolė 2007. Martynas Liudvikas Rėza tautinio ir lokalinio identiteto fone (Martin Ludwig Rhesa Against the Background of National and Local Identity). In: S. Pocytė, N. Strakauskaitė (eds) *Martynas Liudvikas Rėza: epochų atspindžiai* (Martin Ludwig Rhesa: Reflections of the Epochs). Klaipėda: Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla, pp. 66–84.

Stundžienė, Bronė 2018. Martyno Liudviko Rėzos dainynas ir jo šiuolaikinė recepcija (Ludwig Rhesa's Songbook and Its Contemporary Reception). In: L. Citavičiūtė (ed) Martynas Liudvikas Rėza. *Raštai*: *Prūsijos lietuvių dainos* (Martin Ludwig Rhesa. Collected Works: Songs of the Prussian Lithuanians), Vol. 5, Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, pp. 53–76.

Tetzner, Franz und Helene 1897. *Dainos, litauische Volksgesänge*. Leipzig: P. Reclam.

Zatorski, Franciszek 1844. *Witold nad Worksla*. Piešni ludu z nad dalnego Niemna (Vytautas on the Vorskla: Songs of the People from the Far Neman River). Warszawa.

Zatorski, Franciszek 1846. *Pieśni litewskie*. Przegląd Naukowy (Lithuanian Songs. A Scientific Review). Warszawa.

Dr Lina Petrošienė (Laurinavičiūtė) is a scholar of ethnology at Klaipeda University (Lithuania), where she holds the positions of professor and senior

research fellow in the Department of Philology at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. Her research focuses on ethnic music, folklore, and cultural processes, with a particular emphasis on the ethnic music and customs of Lithuania Minor (Prussian Lithuania) and carnival traditions across Lithuania and Europe.

E-mail: lina.petrosiene@ku.lt

ORCID: 0000-0003-0490-1327

https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.05

The Lithuanian Cross-crafting Tradition during the Period of National Revival (1988–1991): Reclaiming Memory

Skaidrė Urbonienė

Senior researcher at the Department of Sacral Art Heritage, Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, Vilnius, Lithuania

E-mail: skaidreu@gmail.com

Abstract: The article examines the Lithuanian cross-crafting tradition during the period of National Revival (1988–1991). The primary objective is to reveal how cross-crafting served as an expression of the prevailing societal sentiments, values, and topical issues of the time. The main focus is on an analysis of the intentions and occasions for erecting crosses during the period of National Revival. The article determines the dominant intentions for building crosses: commemoration of the victims of Soviet repression, specifically fallen partisans and deportees; the rebuilding of crosses that had been destroyed by the Soviet regime; to thank God for regained freedom and to seek divine protection for the nation and the state, which had had independence restored. The study concludes that the cross-crafting tradition during the National Revival reflected the most significant issues of that period, i.e. reclaiming historical memory and the aspiration for freedom and independence.

Keywords: commemoration, cross-crafting, national aspirations, religiosity, traumatic experience

Introduction

The Lithuanian tradition of cross-crafting, originating with the introduction of Christianity, reached its zenith in the 19th century and had become a prominent symbol of national identity by the early 20th century. Crosses and other forms of religious monument were erected as expressions of piety in all Christian, especially Catholic, countries, with Lithuania standing out for its abundance and variety of forms[1], something that was noticed in the 19th century not only by Lithuanians but also by foreign travellers and researchers[2]. Due to the abundance of cross-crafting, which give the Lithuanian landscape a distinctive character, Lithuania was already being called the 'land of crosses' by the end of the 19th century (Jaksztas 1891: 153).

Crosses and shrines were built by individuals, families or communities, as well as by community groups (youth, women's, men's) and organisations. As in other Catholic countries, crosses built by individuals or families were intended to satisfy individual spiritual needs and commemorate family life events (weddings, child baptisms, housewarmings), while those built by communities or organisations had more general intentions or reasons, addressing collective needs or commemorating special events in the history of the village, parish, state, or Church.

The development of cross-crafting was uneven. This tradition went through very difficult periods when people were forbidden from erecting religious monuments. The first restriction on the cross-crafting tradition was during the years of Tsarist Russian occupation in the mid-19th century and especially after the suppression of the 1863–1864 uprising. However, the Tsarist government's prohibitions and restrictions on erecting crosses were inconsistent and were often ignored or circumvented, so they did not fundamentally disrupt the cross-crafting tradition. The most difficult period for cross-crafting began after the Second World War when the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania. In the first post-war years, as the repressive apparatus of the occupying power began to operate, restrictions on religious activities and the introduction of atheist ideology took hold. At this time the Soviet authorities began destroying visual signs of religious faith and many churches were closed and turned into warehouses or secular institutions. Cross-crafting, especially crosses in public spaces, also attracted the attention of the Soviet authorities, and they began to be removed

with the erection of new crosses no longer tolerated. Persecution of those who made and erected crosses was carried out in various ways through penalties (warning letters, fines), hospitalisation in psychiatric hospitals, prohibition of obtaining a higher education diploma, etc.

However, despite prohibitions, deliberate destruction, and repression, crosses appeared here and there throughout the Soviet period. The existence of the cross-crafting tradition during the Soviet era can be illustrated by material from museum curator Vytas Valatka's expedition to Samogitia in 1964 (ŽAM MA, f. 652). During the expedition through the Telšiai, Plungė, and Šilalė districts, Valatka recorded all the crosses, shrines, and column shrines seen by the roadside, in homesteads, and in town and village squares. He registered a total of about 564 crosses. Of these, 122 objects were built during the Soviet era. Thus, this material recorded by Valatka testifies to an unbroken, albeit greatly suppressed, cross-crafting tradition.

On what occasions and with what intentions did people, albeit rarely, still erect a cross during the Soviet era? As my research has shown, during the Soviet period, the tradition of marking the place of a sudden or tragic death with a cross or erecting a cross near a home in memory of a loved one was continuous. A cross would also be erected to fulfil a vow (especially when asking for good health) or as an offering to God, when asking for some grace or when giving thanks for it. However, there were not many such cases. Those who decided to erect a cross or shrine tried to place it near their home so that it would be less noticeable to passing Soviet officials, or they would choose a secluded spot nearby or in a forest. It was almost impossible for communities to erect a cross in a public place, so sometimes parishioners would build a monument in a churchyard or cemetery, as the authorities interfered less in these spaces. During the Soviet era, the cross-crafting tradition was also maintained by restoring old monuments or moving them from public places to safer ones (cemeteries, churchyards, near homes) (Urbonienė 2014: 36–39).

More favourable conditions for the cross-crafting tradition emerged in 1985 when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev initiated a programme of economic, social, and political reforms (Rus. *perestroika*)[3]. The implementation of *perestroika*, and especially the policy of publicity (Rus. *glasnost*)[4], contributed to local authorities having a more liberal attitude towards the erection of crosses and encouraged more masters to engage in this activity. The revival of cross building was already felt on the eve of *perestroika* when, in 1984, to commemorate

the 500th anniversary of the death of the patron saint of Lithuania, prince of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, St Casimir, multiple monuments were erected in churchyards (Urbonienė 2015b: 75). And just three years later the spiritual liberation of society inspired by *perestroika* was significantly reflected in the cross-crafting tradition. Nineteen-eighty-seven became exceptional in the development of Soviet-era cross-crafting as in that year, to commemorate the 600th anniversary of the baptism of Lithuania, a wave of cross-building swept across the country. Almost every churchyard was then adorned with a cross dedicated to this jubilee (Urbonienė 2015b: 84).

Nineteen-eighty-eight was especially important for Lithuania and the development of the cross-crafting tradition as the social and public political Lithuanian Reform Movement (*Sąjūdis*) was founded and the National Revival period began, leading to the restoration of independence on March 11, 1990 and widespread international recognition of Republic of Lithuania in 1991. During the Revival period, with the prevailing mood of freedom and re-independence felt in society, religious life and religious practice[5] also intensified. The population took the initiative to make crosses and to rebuild or restore those destroyed during the Soviet era. This four-year period significantly revitalised the cross-crafting tradition. During this revival, hundreds of crosses were erected. This short but significant period of cross-crafting development from 1988 to 1991 is the chronological framework of this article. The object of the article is the crosses erected during this period. These are taken as a visual expression of religious feeling and as 'memory aids', following the concept of social anthropologist Elisabetha Viggiani (Vigiani 2016: 55–56). Drawing on the insights of Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, Hastings Donnan, and others, Viggiani describes memorials to violent events as having the function of *aide-mémoires*, which these monuments acquire by "recalling the sights, sounds, and smells of former time and providing frameworks through which people perceive and engage with the present and the future" (Vigiani 2016: 55).

The primary objective is to reveal how cross-crafting served as an expression of the prevailing societal sentiments, values and topical issues of the time. To this end, the study aims to analyse the intentions for and occasions of erecting crosses during the National Revival period and to determine the dominant reasons for making crosses at that time. To highlight the specificity of the cross-crafting tradition during the period in question, the reasons for making crosses

will be compared with those of the Soviet era. The study employs quantitative and qualitative analysis, interpretative and historical comparative methods.

The cross-crafting of the National Revival period has not yet received detailed study. The attention of ethnologists and art historians has mainly focused on the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, as well as earlier periods. The situation of the cross-crafting tradition during the Soviet era has been discussed by only a few researchers (Skaidrė Urbonienė, Vacys Milius, Gražina Marija Martinaitienė). There are only a few publications relevant to the article's problem, and they are intended to review the crosses built in a particular district at the time of Revival (Milius 1997; Lazdauskas 2000; Varkalienė 2003). In addition, some publications on the 20th-century cross-crafting tradition in local areas mention one or other cross from the 1988–1991 period. These articles provide empirical data about the motives, intentions, locations, and artistic features of the crosses of the research period.

The research source is photographic material stored in the manuscript section of the Library of the Lithuanian Institute of History (LII BR), and published material such as albums of crosses, as well as local history articles and publications in the periodical press and on the internet. The research also drew on material collected by the author during field research since 2003 (people's memories, testimonies of craftsmen), which was collected through semi-structured and unstructured interviews (the informant survey material is stored in the author's personal archive). During the field research, photo documentation and descriptions of crosses were also made (photo material with descriptions is stored in the author's personal archive). The field research material collected between 2013 and 2015 during a research project[6] on the cross-crafting tradition of the Soviet era is particularly important for the article's problem. When talking about their experiences during the Soviet era, informants remembered the National Revival period better, which they already associated with a free, independent Lithuania and unsuppressed religious life. Therefore, the facts related specifically to the rise of cross-crafting during that period remained more vivid in their memory.

For the study, 398 crosses built in various parts of Lithuania during the 1988–1991 period were selected; the descriptions of these monuments record the intentions, motives, and occasions of erection. A significant number of crosses built during the research period have been recorded, although they were not included in the study if their descriptions did not indicate the inten-

tions or motives for erection, which is important information for analysing the research problem.

Of the 398 monuments built during the studied period, 14 were built in 1988, 122 in 1989, 164 in 1990, and 98 in 1991.

We can assume from the figures presented that fewer crosses were built in 1988 because *Sąjūdis* began to operate publicly in June, and crosses are usually built from late spring (when the ground is no longer frozen) to late autumn. In addition, the monument must be ordered from the craftsman in advance, and the necessary materials must be acquired. These circumstances probably contributed to the seemingly small number of crosses built in 1988.

In 1989, a significant increase in the erection of crosses was observed, which intensified further in 1990 when the independent state of Lithuania was restored. We can assume that some of the monuments erected in 1989 (or even 1990) were commissioned as early as 1988. According to one wood carver from Kupiškis, he received so many orders for crosses at that time that he was unable to fulfil them all on time (personal communication, 2012). In 1991, as the young state was establishing its regained freedom, the number of recorded crosses was similar to that of 1989.

An analysis of the collected field research material and the published iconographic and ethnographic material revealed the main intentions and occasions for erecting crosses during the Revival period.

Crosses commemorating individuals

The majority of the crosses I have studied consists of crosses dedicated to the memory of individuals (131 items). Among them, crosses dedicated to the memory of fallen partisans, victims of the Soviet era, and deportees prevail. These are signs commemorating painful, traumatic experiences related to the post-war resistance against the Soviet occupiers, the partisan struggle, and the mass deportation of Lithuanians to Siberia.

Armed resistance to Soviet occupation began in 1944 and continued until 1953. During this period, about 50,000 people participated in active combat, and another 100,000 provided support and were members of underground organisations (Vervečkienė 2024: 1313). During this period, the Soviet authorities suppressed the resistance movement using various means and methods: they

repressed or even killed the families of those who helped partisans, infiltrated partisan groups and underground organisations, imprisoned and tortured captured resistance participants, and fought battles with partisans. Many resistance participants, if they were not killed, were sentenced and deported to Siberia. During the armed resistance, 20,000 partisans died, whose remains, taken from their places of death or burial, were secretly reburied by relatives or comrades in the nearest cemeteries or near homesteads, in forests (Trimonienė 2009: 182). So that the place of death or burial would not be forgotten, relatives would mark them with a small cross or a miniature shrine in a tree, on which there were no inscriptions (Čepulytė 2011: 117). Usually, only the person who left that sign would know about such a place. When the National Revival began, the act of marking the sites of partisan's deaths became publicly possible. Older people, witnesses to the tragic events of that time, retained in their memory the places where partisans were killed or died, so from the founding of *Sąjūdis*, those who knew these places hastened to erect memorial crosses there. In addition, during the Revival, many forgotten and unknown burial places of killed partisans were discovered and marked with crosses.

Figure 1. A column shrine built in 1991 marking the place where four partisans died. Kepaliai village (Kelmė district). Photo by Vacys Milius, 1992. LII BR F73, neg. 85332

For example, a cross erected in 1988 at a homestead in Kurkliečiai village (Rokiškis district) commemorates the events of July 14, 1945, when five partisans were killed in a battle with a Soviet military punitive unit, and eight villagers were murdered (Kurkliečių kaimas, https://www.genocid.lt). In 1991, a column shrine was erected near the Kražantė river at the place where four partisans died in 1949 (Fig. 1).

In 1991, Apolonija, the sister of fallen partisan Petras Gasčiūnas, erected a cross in Dimšiškiai forest (Pakruojis district), where her brother and three other partisans died in June 1945 (PRSVB KE 2019: 428). Crosses erected in commemoration of partisans always have inscriptions with the names and dates of the fallen, and often the circumstances of their deaths.

Crosses also commemorate the memory of innocent civilians, whose lives were taken by the violent actions of Soviet military punitive units. Wood carver Petras Pranckevičius dedicated one of his crosses to the "Memory of Murdered Innocents", which he erected in 1989 in Klepočiai village (Alytus district) (Pranckevičius 2016: 5). With this cross, he commemorated the memory of the villagers of Klepočiai who were killed in 1944, and also the memory of the violent event itself, which happened when, during a punitive operation by the Soviet military that aimed to destroy partisan supporters and intimidate the local population, 12 villagers were killed, 21 homesteads were burned and property was looted (Jankauskienė & Trimonienė 2014).

In Christian countries, places of violent, as well as unexpected or premature, death, are often marked with crosses with the aim of cleansing and sacralising that place. By erecting a cross at the place of someone's death (which marks the boundary where good and evil symbolically collide) relatives not only commemorate the deceased but also sacralise the site of violent death, transforming it into a 'sacred' place towards which people show respect as they do for all that is regarded sacred in the Durkheimian sense (Durkheim 1948: 317). For a believer, a sacralised place is equivalent to the holy ground of a cemetery where the deceased rest.

When a cross is put into ground that is itself part of the event being referenced, it not only commemorates the deaths of the individuals but also draws attention to the reasons for their deaths, as with spontaneous shrines (Santino 2011: 99–100). Thus, in these cases, when the memory of those who died for freedom is commemorated with a cross at their places of death, the

place itself becomes important for memory. As Hastings Donnan has noted, "by evoking past events, landscapes serve as aide-memoirs" (Donnan 2005: 75).

Moreover, by marking that place with a sacred sign, by honouring the memory of the deceased with flowers and lit candles, that place of tragic death, as Hege Westgaard pointed out, is aestheticised, it is redefined and reclaimed. It changes from being a place of horror to a place of recall (Westgaard 2006: 170).

Such crosses, erected through the efforts of communities and individuals at the places where partisans died or were buried, not only give meaning to the memory of a specific family or community's post-war tragedy but also to the tragedy of the entire nation.

Crosses commemorating the fallen members of the resistance are erected not only at their places of death but also in public places, to remind passers-by or a specific social group (for example students) of the Lithuanian people's struggle for freedom. For example, to establish historical memory for the younger generation, a cross in memory of the victims of the resistance was erected in the garden at Pakruojis 1st Secondary School on June 14, 1991 (Vanagienė & Žvikas 1994: 15). It should be noted that this date was chosen for its symbolism. June 14 is widely commemorated in Lithuania as Mourning and Hope Day, marking the beginning of the mass deportations during the first Soviet occupation in 1941. Cross builders often chose this day for the ceremonial consecration of crosses as well. In one such case in 1989 a cross was built in Plaučiškiai village (Pakruojis district) and dedicated to the victims and sufferings of the Soviet era. It was consecrated on June 14, 1991 (PRSVB KE 2019: 420). By choosing this memorable day for cross-building or consecration ceremonies, the message conveyed by the cross is strengthened.

During the National Revival period, a number of crosses were also erected in memory of deportees. The Soviet government began carrying out the mass deportations of Lithuanians to Siberia in 1940, as well as during the post-war period (1948–1951) (Anušauskas, https://www.vle.lt). Even during the Soviet era there were isolated cases in which deportees who returned from exile would gather and erect a cross in a cemetery or churchyard in memory of loved ones who died in exile. Although the intention behind their erection was not publicly declared, such crosses were called Deportees' Crosses by local residents. One example is the cross erected in 1970 in Obelynas village (Šilalė district) by those who had returned from exile (personal communication, 2003).

During the National Revival period, crosses dedicated to the memory of deportees became a common phenomenon. They were built by individuals, communities, or community groups, often deportees' clubs. The location for a cross which commemorates the memory of all the deported people of that locality (village, town, parish) would be in a public space (squares, churchyards, near public buildings), where people could gather during national holidays and other commemorations. Crosses erected in memory of deportees usually bear particular inscriptions. For example, a column shrine in the centre of Darbėnai town (Kretinga district) has a dedicatory inscription that reads, "Their suffering – the nation's pain / 1941–1953 / To the deportees / 1989" (Paulikienė 2007: 28). The inscription on the cross ("To the martyrs of the nation / 1989 /06 / 14") in the old cemetery of Joniškis (Vičas 2010: 17) and the date of its erection (June 14) indicate that it is dedicated to the memory of victims of mass deportations. These and similar inscriptions send a message not only to remember the deportations of people from a local area but also the tragedy of mass deportation as experienced by the entire nation. They, like the inscriptions on the crosses at the sites of resistance fighters' deaths, are an important element in maintaining memory and giving crosses the *aide-mémoires* function.

Figure 2. A column shrine in memory of the Deportations at Biržai railway station. Photo by Skaidrė Urbonienė, 2011.

In some cases, crosses in memory of deportees are erected in a place associated with the deportation. For instance, a cross was erected at Kulūpėnai (Kretinga district) railway station in 1990 to commemorate the deportation of local people from this railway station to Siberia in 1949. Every year on June 14, the commemoration of Mourning and Hope Day takes place at the cross (Galuškinienė 2010: 5). In 1990, the deportees and political prisoners of the Biržai region also erected a column shrine in memory of the Nation's Deportation at the Biržai railway station, from which people were taken to Siberian exile (Fig. 2). In these cases, the memorial cross as well as its surroundings (the railway station) become an important element for establishing historical truth and maintaining memory. According to Donnan, the concreteness of place and the materiality of the signs within it projects people's memories onto the landscape in a way that can then be read back as 'history': as neutral, self-evident, and true (Donnan 2005: 98).

Crosses in memory of a family member who did not return from Siberian exile were also erected by individuals at that person's homestead. For example, in 1991, a daughter erected a cross to her father, a deportee who never returned from Siberia, at his homestead in Laimučiai village (Pakruojis district). The inscription on the cross specifies not only the father's memory but also the location of his death in a specific Gulag camp ("Aleksas / Petraitis / 1901–1953 / Inta Gulag camp / Komi ASSR") (PRSVB KE2019: 55). In 1990, children erected a shrine at their parents' former homestead in Kulūpėnai village in memory of their parents, who were deported to Siberia in 1948 and died there (Galuškinienė 2010: 14). In 1990, a woman in Darbėnai erected a column shrine near her home in memory of her husband, who died under tragic circumstances in Siberia in 1945 (Paulikienė 2007: 35).

Crosses were also erected to commemorate other victims of the Soviet genocide or those who suffered the regime's repressions. In 1989, crosses dedicated to the victims of the Stalinist era were erected in the Jonava cemetery (Kasperavičiūtė-Karaliūnienė 2006: 10), and also near the Lukšiai (Šakiai district) church (Dėdynas 2009: 53). A cross dedicated to the victims of Soviet repression, carved by craftsman Vytautas Ulevičius, was unveiled on June 14, 1989, in the central part of Kaunas Street Cemetery in Kėdainiai (Banys 2014: 7).

In the summer and autumn of 1991, following the events of January 13[7], crosses were erected to commemorate those who died on that day. One such

cross, made by cross crafter P. Pranckevičius and other masters, was erected in Alytus city park in 1991. The same Pranckevičius also erected a cross in memory of the victims of that day near the Vidzgiris' church in Alytus. The master recalled that on the night of January 13 he did not sleep, followed the events on the radio, and "when I found out that people had died, the thought stirred in me that I would like to commemorate them. And that night, I created a cross in my mind" (Pranckevičius 2016: 14). But he took time to solve the technical and organisational issues of the construction, and erected the cross only in 1992 (ibid.: 14). Crosses in memory of the events and victims of January 13 were most often erected in public spaces so that there would be enough room for people to gather for the commemorations of that day. However, crosses in honour of the victims of January 13 were also erected by individuals in their private spaces, as the Puidokai family did on their homestead in Pročiūnai village, Joniškis district (Vičas 2010: 91).

During the Revival period, crosses also began to be used to mark the memory of prominent Lithuanian state figures, clergy, scientists, and individuals who had contributed to culture, for example writers or artists. Such crosses were most commonly erected at the person's birthplace. For example, in 1991, a roofed pillar-type cross with an inscription was unveiled at the site of the birthplace of Lithuanian statesman Antanas Merkys (1887–1955) in Bajorai village (Kupiškis district) (Jonušytė 2015: 39). In Joniškis, a memorial cross was erected in 1989 near the house where the famous interwar émigré artist Adomas Varnas (1879–1979) was born (PA Photo). A tall wooden roofed pillar-type cross was erected in 1990 at the site of the former family homestead of the famous interwar émigré writer Marius Katiliškis (1914–1980) in Katiliškės village (Joniškis district) (PA Photo).

As before, crosses were erected on homesteads to commemorate family members on the anniversaries of their birth or death, or on the occasion of a child's birth or wedding. The tradition of erecting a small memorial cross at the places of a sudden death (traffic accidents) was also continued. However, there were few crosses built with such intentions; they were greatly outnumbered by the already discussed crosses dedicated to the memory of partisans, victims of Soviet genocide, and deportees.

One of the intentions that emerged during the National Revival period was to erect memorial crosses or shrines at the sites of vanished homesteads or villages (27 items). Crosses erected with this intention are partly related to

crosses in memory of individuals, as they are connected to the memory of the residents of a vanished homestead or village.

During the Soviet era, many homesteads disappeared after their owners were deported to Siberia, or were forcibly abandoned due to the ongoing programmes of land reclamation and collectivisation. Therefore, with the beginning of the National Revival, people took the initiative to mark the sites of vanished homesteads with monuments, thus honouring the memory of their family homesteads, parents, and grandparents. For example, Kazimieras Griškėnas erected a cross with the inscription "God, bless the fields of my homeland" in 1991 in Pasodninkai village (Rokiškis district) in memory of his vanished family homestead (personal communication, 2004). Dalia Liorentaitė-Viltrakienė erected a cross in memory of her family homestead in 1990 in Kumečiai village (Vilkaviškis district) (Valuntaitė-Mickevičienė 2007: 118). The family of Jonas Vrašinskas erected a cross in 1991 in Gudupiai village in memory of their family homestead, which was destroyed in 1948 (Katkuvienė & Linionis 2007: 98).

During the Soviet era, entire villages were moved to newly created settlements. In the National Revival period, residents of former villages began to gather for village commemorations, and during these events would often erect a cross in memory of a vanished village. For instance, the residents of the former Sidaugai village (Pakruojis district) erected a cross in 1991 in memory of the village and its residents (PRSVB KE 2019: 282). The residents of Gikoniai village (Pakruojis district) erected a cross on the occasion of a community meeting in 1991, dedicating it to the memory of the village and also to Lithuania with a plea for God's protection (PRSVB KE 2019: 396).

Rebuilding crosses

The second largest group (96 items) of crosses I have researched consist of rebuilt crosses that were destroyed or fell into disrepair during the Soviet era. The rebuilding of these crosses had already begun even before the establishment of *Sąjūdis*, but with the start of *Sąjūdis*' activities, the rebuilding of crosses intensified. People began openly and fearlessly to express their religious feelings and views, spurring them to rebuild crosses or shrines that had once stood in private or public spaces. As one respondent who repaired crosses in the 1980s said, he always felt fear at that time, but "during the *Sąjūdis* period, although it

was still the Soviet era, it was already different as no one was hiding anymore, they weren't afraid" (personal communication, 2013). Another family from Taujėnai (Ukmergė district) also stated that when *Sąjūdis* began, "we were no longer afraid, we built crosses in 1989" (personal communication, 2004).

People would rebuild crosses that had stood near their or their parents' homes, trying to keep the location the same as the old cross. Additionally, people often had several intentions when rebuilding a cross near their homestead. For example, one woman in Paberžinė village (Utena district) pointed out that in 1989 she and her husband rebuilt a cross in the same spot where her husband's grandfather's cross, built in 1889, had stood (it had fallen from old age in 1983, but they had not dared to rebuild it then). The family rebuilt the cross not only as a testimony to the memory of their grandparents and parents but also in the hope that God would protect them from misfortune (personal communication, 2013).

Crosses built by communities during the interwar period were also rebuilt. For example, in Auksūdis village (Kretinga district), a cross built with youth funds in 1921 was demolished during the Soviet era. In 1989, the local community commissioned a new one from craftsman Albinas Gricius and erected it at the same crossroads where the old cross had stood (Paulikienė 2007: 59). The residents of the neighbouring Nausėdai village did the same, collecting funds and rebuilding a cross and a shrine at the village crossroads that had been demolished in 1959 (ibid.: 67).

Sometimes, rebuilt crosses were given an intention that was relevant at the time. For example, the community of Tetirvinai village (Pasvalys district) rebuilt a cross and dedicated it to departed villagers (those who died in Siberia or in Lithuania during the Soviet era, and those who left their native village). As the wood carver who made the cross recounted, the location at the edge of the village was chosen according to an old tradition to protect it from evil spirits (personal communication, 2011).

One after another, crosses that were built in 1928 and 1938 to commemorate the ten-year anniversaries of the First Republic of Lithuania were rebuilt. These symbols of statehood were especially undesirable during the Soviet era, so most of these crosses were demolished. In the 1989–1991 period, wooden crosses commemorating the anniversaries of Lithuanian independence were rebuilt in Pravieniškės (Kaišiadorys district), Naujasodis (Jonava district), Kalvarija, Kalnaberžė and Šėta (Kėdainiai district), Betygala (Raseiniai district),

Slavikai (Šakiai district), Upyna and Vytogala (Šilalė district), Bartninkai and Virbalis (Vilkaviškis district); roofed pillar-type crosses were rebuilt in Žeimiai (Jonava district), Jonava, Svėdasai (Anykščiai district), Širvintos, and elsewhere (Krikštopaitytė-Urbonienė & Smilingytė-Žeimienė 2018; Vaidotas 2018).

Figure 3. People celebrating the rebuilding of a cross on Pakalniai hill on July 26, 1989. Unknown photographer. Private archive

At the beginning of the National Revival, not everything went smoothly. In some places, the local authorities were not yet sure that a separation from the Soviet Union was coming, so they were displeased when crosses were rebuilt, especially those that marked the anniversaries of the First Republic of Lithuania. Such crosses were a clear sign of the memory of the independent Lithuanian state, so they particularly annoyed Soviet officials. For example, a tall cross commemorating the first decade of independence was built on Pakalniai hill (Utena district) in 1928 but was demolished during the Soviet era. With the start of *Sąjūdis*' activities, the local community rushed to rebuild this cross. The master who made the cross in 1989 said that he received threats from the local authorities that he "would go to Siberia" for making the cross (personal communication, 2013). However, the initiators of the reconstruction were supported by some members from the local Soviet body, and so the cross was successfully erected on the same site as its predecessor (Fig. 3).

Crosses commemorating Lithuania's freedom

The third largest group (66 items) consists of crosses dedicated to the Lithuanian National Revival, freedom, and independence. They were erected in gratitude to God for regained freedom and restored state independence, and as a plea for God's protection for the country during this politically tense period. Such crosses also marked important events of that period, symbolising the history of those days, thus leaving signs of memory for the younger generation.

At the beginning of the National Revival period, in 1988–1989, crosses that were erected to ask for God's help in regaining freedom and restoring state independence were dominant. For example, a cross in the churchyard of Gelgaudiškis has the inscription: "Protect, Most High, our beloved country. 1989" (PA Photo). The same appeal is inscribed on a cross erected in 1989 in the churchyard of Griškabūdis (PA Photo). In Butėnai village (Kupiškis district), a roofed pillar-type cross was erected in 1989 with the inscription "Lithuania pleads, God, have mercy on her children" (Jonušytė 2015: 51). In 1989 in Vaišvydava (Kaunas district), a cross was erected on the initiative of the residents with an appeal to God: "Do not forsake us, Most High, nor our dear Homeland" (Poškaitienė & Vaičius 1992: 3). Individuals also built crosses with this intention on their private land. For example, a resident of Maželiai village (Joniškis district) erected a cross at his homestead with the inscription "Please, Lord, grant us peace and unity. 1989" (Vičas 2010: 100). In 1989, a resident of Kapčiamiestis erected a cross on his homestead with the dedication "Lord, be with us. For the glory of Lithuania" (LII BR F73, neg. 85467, 85468).

The Baltic Way[8] also inspired people to erect memorial crosses along the road where people stood holding hands during the event. As a woman from Vadai village (Ukmergė district) recalled, there were a lot of crosses along the Baltic Way: "The Baltic Way was here – oh my God, so many of those crosses were built!" (personal communication, 2004). These were often quickly built, unstable crosses that did not last long, and are classified as temporary monuments. But there were also more durable, quite tall oak crosses commemorating this event, such as the cross erected by residents of Jonava city who participated in the Baltic Way, at the 91.1 kilometre mark on the Vilnius Panevėžys highway (Karaliūnienė 1998: 20). Residents of Jonava still commemorate the Baltic Way every year at this cross.

Figure 4. A cross to the glory of Lithuanian independence built in 1990 in Sartininkai. Photo by Skaidrė Urbonienė, 2012.

On March 11, 1990, the Act on the Re-Establishment of the State of Lithuania was adopted, and that summer crosses began to emerge in gratitude to God for the restoration of independence. For example, the residents of Duokiškis parish erected a cross in 1990 in the town to thank God for their regained freedom (personal communication, 2005). The residents of Sartininkai erected a cross in 1990 dedicating it to the glory of Lithuanian independence (Fig. 4). The community of Morkakalnis village (Pakruojis district) erected a cross at the village crossroads in 1991, dedicated to "Reborn Lithuania" (PRSVB KE 2019: 292).

However, the tense political situation, with a strained relationship with the Soviet Union and the continued presence of its military units in Lithuania, caused anxiety and uncertainty among the residents, and overshadowed the joy of regaining freedom. Therefore, it is not surprising that the crosses erected during this period were predominantly inscribed with pleas to God to protect Lithuania and its people: "Protect us, O Most High, and our beloved country", "Lord, protect our Homeland Lithuania", "O God, protect reborn Lithuania", "God, protect us and Lithuania".

Figure 5. A cross dedicated to the nations that recognised Lithuanian independence, built in 1991. Kaunas. Photo by Skaidrė Urbonienė, 2020.

In 1991, as other countries began to recognise Lithuania as an independent state, crosses appeared to commemorate these events. The first such cross, a temporary memorial dedicated to Iceland, was erected in Vilnius near the parliament building shortly after the events of January 13, when, on February 4, Iceland was the first country to officially recognise the Republic of Lithuania as a sovereign state (Urbonienė 2024: 187–188). In the summer of that year, a tall wooden cross with the inscription "To the nations that recognised Lithuanian independence" was erected on a hill of crosses in Kaunas near the Sixth Fort (Fig. 5).

Another specificity of the period in question is that there were many cases where a cross was erected with multiple intentions, combining family or community events with state events. For instance, children erected a cross at the former Simonaitis homestead in Gačioniai village (Pakruojis district) in memory of their parents, who were deported to Siberia, and at the same time dedicated it to reborn Lithuania. This double intention is testified by the inscriptions on the cross: "Lithuania, having endured the years of Golgotha, be blessed. 1991" and "In memory of our dear parents" (PRSVB KE 2019: 52). Another family

erected a cross in 1990 near their home in Juodupė town, dedicating it to the memory of their parents, and to commemorate the Revival, because, according to the daughter's testimony, her parents, who were deportees, did not live to see the restoration of independence (personal communication, 2004). In Smėlynė village (Anykščiai district), Steponas Šerelis erected a cross at his homestead in memory of his parents with an appeal to God: "O God, protect us and Lithuania. 1990" (Zabulytė 2018: 243). A cross erected in 1990 to commemorate the vanished Juškaičiai village (Joniškis district) was also a plea for God to protect the Homeland (Vičas 2010: 99).

Other intentions

During the period in question, a more significant community activity in erecting crosses is noticeable. In addition to the aforementioned initiatives, local communities or community groups also built crosses to ask for God's protection for their communities during that politically unstable period. Such community crosses often have dedicatory inscriptions. For example, the 1990 cross in Ūdekai village (Pakruojis district), built on the initiative of the villagers, serves as an offering to God for the community's protection, with the inscription "God, protect the people of Ūdekai" (PRSVB KE2019: 231). The cross in Virbališkiai village (Kupiškis district) was also erected to seek God's blessing for the villagers. This is apparent from the inscription: "Lord, bless Virbališkiai and their people. 1991" (Jonušytė 2015: 22). The residents of Tumasoniai village (Kupiškis district) inscribed on the cross: "Bless us, Lord, and may your blessing remain with us always. Residents of Tumasoniai village. 1991" (ibid.: 57).

Sometimes the communities of two villages would build a cross, seeking God's intercession for the residents of both villages. This is illustrated by some examples, such as a cross erected in 1990 with funds from the communities of Dailučiai and Staugaičiai villages (Vilkaviškis district), with a plea for God to protect them from various misfortunes (Valuntaitė-Mickevičienė 2007: 110). Similarly, the residents of Pyragiai and Plundakai villages (Kupiškis district) jointly erected a cross in 1990 asking for God to protect them from misfortune (Jonušytė 2015: 24).

Continuing the earlier tradition, a community or a group within it would gather for the construction of a cross to commemorate a date or a memora-

ble event important to that group. To illustrate this, the staff of the school in Reškutėnai village (Švenčionys district) erected a cross in 1990 to commemorate the school's anniversary (Lapėnienė 2005: 92). Parishioners would also collect funds and commission a cross to commemorate an important date or event for the parish. In one such case, the people of Girkalnis parish (Raseiniai district) erected a cross in 1991 to mark the beginning of the construction of the new St. George's Church in Girkalnis (Tarvydienė & Kantautienė 2016: 75). The residents of Marijampolė city erected a cross in 1989 when the city returned to using the name Marijampolė[9] (Katkuvienė & Linionis 2007: 25).

During the Revival period, people continued to erect crosses for personal reasons or occasions, a tradition that had persisted even through the Soviet era.

A number of cases show that a cross was erected due to a person's religious convictions (49 items). Respondents explained their motivation for this by saying that they could not, or were afraid to, build a cross during the Soviet era, but always wanted to have one or a shrine near their home because they were religious. As soon as a politically and ideologically freer time arrived, they erected a cross near their home. The owner of a homestead in Pakruojis, who erected a cross in 1990, stated that "Lithuanians are Christians, so they must have a cross" (PRSVB KE 2019: 267). A woman from Klausgalvai-Medsėdžiai village (Kretinga district) said similarly: "we are Christians, so let's build crosses and pray for health and happiness." She had always wanted to have a shrine near her home, so made her dream come true in 1990 (Galuškinienė 2010: 28). A woman from Kulbiai village (Panevėžys district) said that she erected a cross near her home in 1991 because her husband had always wanted a cross near the house. They built the cross to seek God's protection for their home (personal communication, 2014). Another woman, living in Peluodžiai village (Pakruojis district), erected a cross near her home in 1991, believing that God would give her a happy life in a liberated Lithuania (personal communication, 2006). A family living in Butniūnai village (Pakruojis district) erected a cross near their home in 1991 because they "wanted to have their own cross, so they would have a place to pray" (PRSVB KE 2019: 12). At the request of an old, sick mother, in 1990, children erected a column shrine near her house in Kulūpėnai village so that she could see it from the window of her room. This was a great comfort to the elderly woman, who was unable to go to church due to her health and would pray at home by the window with a clear view of the column shrine (Galuškinienė 2010: 11).

A few traditional cases were recorded where a cross was built to seek God's help for health. For example, in the non-operating cemetery in Nevočiai village (Šilalė district), a father mourning his deceased baby erected a shrine in 1989 so that the Mother of God would protect babies from death (personal communication, 2003); in 1990, a cross was erected at a homestead in Nasrėnai village as an offering to God so that a sick son would recover (Galuškinienė 2010: 19).

Some cases testify that people continued the tradition of erecting a cross to fulfil vows made to God. In 1990, a family in Kaltanėnai village (Švenčionys district) erected a cross near their home, fulfilling a vow they had made when their son went to serve in the Soviet army. The son returned unharmed, and so the parents erected the cross (Lapėnienė 2005: 27). Another family, living in Sartininkai (Tauragė district), erected a cross near their home in 1990 when their son was serving in the Soviet army. After the Act on the Re-Establishment of the State of Lithuania was announced on March 11, 1990, young men began to flee the army and try to return home. That time was especially tense for the parents, so they erected a cross and prayed to it for their son to return safely and also dedicated the cross to commemorate the restoration of state independence (personal communication, 2012).

There were also cases where a long-held vow to build a cross to thank God for a grace received could only be fulfilled with the start of a freer period. Thus, one man erected a vow cross in 1990, thanking God for keeping him alive during the Second World War (Valuntaitė-Mickevičienė 2007: 134). Or a former Siberian deportee living in Skaborai village (Rietavas municipality) promised to build a cross to thank God for surviving the deportation. She was afraid to do so during the Soviet era, but in 1990, her daughter helped her fulfil her vow (PA IV 2013: 6). These cases, and other similar examples, show that the second and third generations are also affected by the traumatic experiences of their parents and grandparents. By erecting a memorial cross, they not only help solidify family memory but also actively maintain it themselves.

Conclusions

This study of Lithuanian cross-crafting during the period of National Revival (1988–1991) showed a significant resurgence of this tradition compared to the Soviet era. The cross-crafting tradition of the National Revival period reflected the prevailing public sentiment and values.

Although some individuals erected crosses for personal reasons or to celebrate personal occasions, priority during the Revival period was given to intentions that expressed the interests and aspirations of society and the state. A notable specificity of this period was the erection of crosses with a dual intention combining personal and public motives.

One of the main intentions for erecting crosses was to honour those who died fighting for Lithuania's freedom (partisans), as well as those who perished in exile in Siberia or suffered from Soviet repression and public commemoration of these people was impossible during the Soviet era. These crosses were not only a means of showing respect for those who died for freedom but also a way for individuals, communities, and society as a whole to reclaim historical memory, one of the most significant issues of that period. The aspiration to reclaim memory is also evidenced by a large number of rebuilt crosses that had been destroyed during the Soviet period, especially those dedicated to commemorate important dates in Lithuanian state history.

Meanwhile, crosses erected to commemorate fallen resistance fighters or victims of Soviet repression, even when they mark individual, personalised suffering and loss, simultaneously reflect the suffering or traumatic experience of the community or society as a whole.

Crosses erected to commemorate the Lithuanian Revival period, the *Sąjūdis* movement, the March 11 Act of Independence, and the January 13 events, as well as those built to thank God for regained statehood or to seek divine protection in the pursuit of an independent state, expressed the most important value of Lithuanian society at that time, i.e. the aspiration for freedom and independence. These crosses also bore witness to the patriotism and religiosity of Lithuanian society.

It is notable that the vast majority of crosses erected during the Revival period have inscriptions indicating the intentions or the reasons for their construction. These inscriptions specify the commemorated date or event, thereby helping to solidify historical memory. Without such inscriptions these crosses are indistinguishable from other crosses erected for various non-commemorative purposes, remaining merely a visual expression of religiosity. When there are no longer individuals who can remember or recount the events commemorated by the cross, the inscription preserves that memory and strengthens the power of the message being conveyed. As *aide-mémoires*, the inscriptions on

these crosses link the present with the past and help to reconstruct traumatic memories and historical events.

In some cases the location of crosses is also important for preserving and maintaining memory, as it is associated with the commemorated events and serves as an *aide-mémoire*. It is precisely the site of the event that, as Donnan put out, "gives them their power" (Donnan 2005: 91).

Crosses in which the expression of religiosity was intertwined with the manifestation of traumatic memory and the commemoration of the most significant events of the Revival period, transformed the landscape into a living testimony of the nation's struggle for freedom and aspirations for the future.

Notes

[1] The forms of cross-crafting monument are: crosses, roofed pillar-type crosses, column shrines, and shrines (standing on the ground or hung in trees). The term cross is most often used in the article because this form was dominant during the period in question. In cases where the form of the monument is important, it will be specified, i.e. either roofed pillar-type cross, column shrine, or shrine.

[2] Priests Liudwik Adam Jucewicz (1813–1846), Bonawentura Butkiewicz (1795–1871), judge Michael Gadon (1807–1855), traveller and physician Teodor Tripplin (1812– 1881), and forester Aleksander Połujański (1814–1866) are worthy of mention (Urbonienė 2015a: 29).

[3] The *Perestroika* programme aimed to revitalise the slowly and inefficiently developing economy and attempted to introduce elements of a market economy (encouraging self-financing, increasing the autonomy and profit of enterprises). Residents were allowed to set up small businesses (Pertvarka, https://www.vle.lt).

[4] With the slogan of publicity (Rus. *glasnost*), more political freedoms and opportunities for criticism emerged, and later even a certain political pluralism; political prisoners were released, censorship was limited, and state structures began to be democratised. The democratisation of the totalitarian regime highlighted previously suppressed aspirations for independence in the occupied Baltic states. The policy of *glasnost* was one of the most important achievements of *perestroika* greatly accelerating the collapse of the communist regime and the Soviet Union itself as more and more people became involved in the reform process and a legal opposition formed, seeking to create a Western-style liberal society. Taking advantage of *glasnost*, public political movements and organisations were created in the Baltic states (the Estonian Popular Front, the Latvian Popular Front, and Lithuanian Reform Movement *Sąjūdis*), which spread ideas

of national revival and thanks to which the Baltic states finally became independent (Pertvarka, https://www.vle.lt).

[5] Sociological studies of religiosity conducted between 1990 and 1997 showed that the changes that began after the collapse of the communist regime led to an increase in the religious activity of the Lithuanian population, which continued throughout the last decade of the 20th century (Juknevičius 1998: 297–299). This led to a religious revival: people started attending church more, and religious rituals began to be considered more important (Žiliukaitė 2000: 249).

[6] The Lithuanian Cross-crafting during the Soviet Era: Ideological, Socio-cultural, and Artistic Aspects project carried out by Dr Skaidrė Urbonienė, funded by the Research Council of Lithuania (2013–2015).

[7] At the beginning of January 1991, the Soviet Union sent in special military units in order to restore Soviet rule in Lithuania. On 11 January, Soviet troops occupied the buildings of the Department of National Defence and the Press House in Vilnius. Tanks appeared on the streets of Vilnius on the evening of 12 January. The intention was to seize strategic objects such as the Television Tower, the Radio and Television Committee building, and the Supreme Council of Lithuania (the parliament). People all over the country gathered at these buildings to defend them. Soviet military forces began a crucial crackdown on the night of 13 January. Fourteen civilian protesters died, and hundreds were injured. Although some objects were seized, the ultimate aims of the operation were not achieved. Military raids continued for several months following the attacks, but no large open military encounters took place after the January events. January 13 became an official commemorative day, the Day of the Defenders of Freedom.

[8] The Baltic Way was a peaceful mass demonstration organised by the national movements of the three Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) on August 23, 1989. It was intended to condemn the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact (August 23, 1939) and to express a unified aspiration for liberation from the Soviet occupation regime. On that day, the residents of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia formed a human chain, holding hands on the Vilnius–Riga–Tallinn highway, stretching for about 650 kilometres. About 1 million people from Lithuania participated in the manifestation, with a total of about 2 million residents of the Baltic states (Baltijos kelias, https://www.vle.lt).

[9] During the Soviet era, the city of Marijampolė was renamed Kapsukas, the pseudonym of interwar communist party activist Vincas Mickevičius (1880–1935).

Sources

LII BR – Manuscripts of the Library of the Lithuanian Institute of History

PA IV 2013 – material collected by local ethnographer Irena Vaizgirdienė in 2013, kept in the author's personal archive

PA Photo – author's personal photography archive

PRSVB KE 2019 – Public Library of Pakruojis District Municipality, collected material titled "Where the Crosses Mourn at the Roadside" from a regional history expedition of the same name, pp. 1–565

ŽAM MA – Scientific archive of the *Alka* Samogitian Museum

References

Anušauskas, Arvydas. Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai (Deportations of Lithuanian Residents). *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija* (Universal Lithuanian Encyclopaedia). https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/lietuvos-gyventoju-tremimai/ (accessed 06/08/2025).

Baltijos kelias (The Baltic Way). *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija* (Universal Lithuanian Encyclopaedia). https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/baltijos-kelias/ (accessed 06/08/2025).

Banys, Vaidas (ed.) 2014. *Žemėlapio "Laisvės kovų paminklai ir atmintinos vietos Kėdainių krašte" aprašas* (Description of the "Monuments and Memorable Places of the Struggles for Freedom in the Kėdainiai Region" Map). Kėdainiai: Spaudvita.

Čepulytė, Aistė 2013. Partizaninio karo vietų įpaveldinimas: besikeičianti vertybės samprata (Heritagisation of the Sites of the Partisan War: The Changing Conception of Value). *Acta humanitarica universitatis Saulensis*, Vol. 16, pp. 206–220.

Dėdynas, Vidmantas (ed.) 2009. *Zanavykų krašto mažoji architektūra* (Small Architecture of the Zanavykai Region). Kaunas: V3 studija.

Donnan, Hastings 2005. Material Identities: Fixing Ethnicity in the Irish Borderlands. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, Vol. 12 (1), pp. 69–105. DOI: 10.1080/10702890590914320

Durkheim, Émile 1948. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. London: George Allen & Unwin LTD.

Galuškinienė, Rima 2010. *Kulūpėnų ir aplinkinių kaimų mažoji architektūra* (Small Architecture in Kulūpėnai and Surrounding Villages), pp.1–33. Available at https://www.kretvb.lt/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/etnografija_kulupenu_kaimu_mazoji_architektura2.pdf (accessed 21/07/2025).

Jaksztas, Adomas 1891. Keletas žodžių apie musų Kryžius (A Few Words about our Crosses). Žemaiczių ir Lietuvos Apžvalga, No. 20, pp. 153–155.

Jonušytė, Aušra (ed.) 2015. *Mediniai kupiškėnų paminklai. Mažoji architektūra* (Wooden Folk Monuments of the Kupiškis Region: Small Scale Architecture). Kupiškis: Kupiškio etnografijos muziejus.

Jankauskienė, Edita & Trimonienė, Rūta 2014. Klepočių žudynės (The Klepočiai Massacre). https://www.partizanai.org/index.php/kalendorius/6452-klepociu-zudynes (accessed 06/08/2025).

Juknevičius, Stanislovas 1998. Religingumo raida posovietinėje Lietuvoje (1990–1997) (The Development of Religiousness in Post-Soviet Lithuania (1990–1997)). *Kultūros istorijos tyrinėjimai*, Vol. 4, pp. 289–299.

Karaliūnienė, Regina 1998. *Jonavos krašto kapai ir paminklai* (Graves and Monuments in the Jonava Region). Ukmergė: Ukmergės spaustuvė.

Kasperavičiūtė-Karaliūnienė, Regina 2006. *Jonavos krašto kryždirbystė ir kryždirbiai. Atgimimo paminklai* (Cross-Crafting and Cross-Crafters in the Jonava Region: Monuments of the Revival Period). Jonava: Linotipas.

Katkuvienė, Danutė & Linionis, Romas (eds.) 2007. *Mažoji medinė Marijampolės krašto architektūra* (Small Scale Wooden Architecture in Marijampolė District). Marijampolė: Piko valanda.

Krikštopaitytė-Urbonienė, Skaidrė & Smilingytė-Žeimienė, Skirmantė 2018. *Paminklai Lietuvos valstybingumui įamžinti: tarpukario kryždirbystė* (Monuments Commemorating Lithuania's Statehood: Cross Crafting in the Interwar Period). Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas.

Kurkliečių kaimas (The Village of Kurkliečiai). https://www.genocid.lt/Statiniai_Vietos/Paminklai/Rokiskis_paminklai.htm (accessed 07/23/2025).

Lapėnienė, Viktorija 2005. *Kryžių sakmė: Švenčionių rajono kryžių katalogas* (The Legend of the Crosses: A Catalogue of Crosses in Švenčionys District). Vilnius: Firidas.

Lazdauskas, Vaidas 2000. Atgimimo ir atkurtos nepriklausomybės laikotarpio paminklai Raseinių rajone (Monuments of the Revival and Restored Independence Period in the Raseiniai District). *Kultūros paminklai*, No. 6, pp. 160–202.

Milius, Vacys 1997. Atgimimo ir atkurtos nepriklausomybės laikotarpio paminklai Tauragės rajone (Monuments of the Revival and Re-independence periods in Tauragė District). *Kultūros paminklai*, Vol. 4, pp. 200–204.

Paulikienė, Danutė 2007. *Darbėnų apylinkės architektūriniai, archeologiniai ir gamtos paminklai* (Architectural, Archaeological and Nature Monuments in the Darbėnai Area), pp. 1–78. Available at https://www.kretvb.lt/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/krastotyra_darbenu_apylinkes_architekturiniai_archeologiniai_gamtos_paminklai.pdf (accessed 21/07/2025).

Pertvarka (Reform Programme), *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija* (Universal Lithuanian Encyclopaedia). https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/pertvarka/ (accessed 10/07/2025).

Poškaitienė, Vidimanta &Vaičius, Antanas 1992. *Iš užmaršties sugrįžę* (Returned from Oblivion). Kaunas: Šviesa.

Pranckevičius, Petras 2016. *Ranka rankon su medžiu* (Hand in Hand with the Wood). Kaunas: AB KOPA.

Santino, Jack 2011. Between Commemoration and Social Activism: Spontaneous Shrines, Grassroots Memorialization, and the Public Ritualesque in Derry. In: P. J. Margry & C. Sánchez-Carretero (eds.) *Grassroots Memorials. The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 97–107.

Tarvydienė, Vita & Kantautienė, Lina 2016. *Pietryčių Žemaitijos kryždirbystės savitumo bruožai* (Distinctive Features of Cross-crafting in South-eastern Samogitia). Vilnius: Žuvėdra

Trimonienė, R*ūta* 2009. Paminklai sovietinio genocido aukoms ir rezistencijos dalyviams atminti Lietuvoje (1941–1953, 1988–2009) (Monuments Commemorating the Victims of Soviet Genocide and Resistance Participants in Lithuania). *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, No. 2, pp. 180–202.

Urbonienė, Skaidrė 2014. Kryždirbystė XX a.: sovietmečio patirtys (Cross-Crafting in the 20th Century: Experiences from the Soviet Era). *Liaudies kultūra*, No. 3, pp. 35–43.

Urbonienė, Skaidrė 2015a. *Religinė liaudies skulptūra Lietuvoje XIX a. – XX a. I pusėje* (Folk Religious Sculpture in Lithuania from the 19th to the First Half of the 20th Century). Vilnius: Vilniaus dailės akademijos leidykla.

Urbonienė, Skaidrė 2015b. Sovietmečio kryždirbystės meninės raiškos bruožai (Some Features of the Artistic Expression of Cross Crafting in the Soviet Period). *Menotyra*, Vol. 22 (1), pp. 73–90.

Urbonienė, Skaidrė 2024. Memorialising Historical Events in the Urban Space: Temporary Memorials, Monuments and Rituals. In: I. Stahl (ed.) *The Ritual Year 13*: *City Rituals 1*. Tartu: ELM Scholarly Press, pp. 178–188. DOI: 10.7592/RY13.13

Vaidotas, Edvinas 2018. *Žuvusiems už Lietuvos laisvę* (To Those Who Died for Lithuania's Freedom). Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo karo muziejus.

Valuntaitė-Mickevičienė, Aušra 2007. *Vilkaviškio krašto kryžiai ir kryždirbiai* (Crosses and Cross-Makers of the Vilkaviškis Region). Paežeriai: Vilkaviškio krašto muziejus.

Vanagienė, Birutė & Žvikas, Klemensas (eds.) 1994. *Pakruojo krašto paminklai* (Monuments of the Pakruojis Region). Šiauliai: Saulės Delta.

Varkalienė, Laimutė 2003. Atgimimo ir atminimo paminklai (Monuments of Revival and Remembrance). In: I. Seliukaitė & L. Varkalienė (eds.) *Kuršėnai*. Klaipėda: S. Jokužio leidykla-spaustuvė, pp. 478–484.

Vervečkienė, Liucija 2024. Remembering the Anti-Soviet Partisan War in Lithuania, 1944–1953: The Effects of Heroization at Different Levels of Remembrance. *Memory Studies*, Vol. 17 (6), pp. 1311–1326. DOI: 10.1177/17506980231184577

Westgaard, Hege 2006. 'Like a Trace': The Spontaneous Shrine as a Cultural Expression of Grief. In: J. Santino (ed.) *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 147–175.

Vičas, Darius (ed.) 2010. *Medinis Joniškio krašto mažosios architektūros paveldas* (Wooden Heritage of Small Architecture in the Joniškis Region). Šiauliai: Liucilijus.

Viggiani, Elisabetta 2016. *Talking Stones. The Politics of Memorialization in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781782384076

Zabulytė, Jolanta 2018. *Anykščių krašto kryždirbystė: Mediniai paminklai* (Cross-Crafting in the Anykščiai Region: Wooden Monuments). Vilnius: Savastis.

Žiliukaitė, Rūta 2000. Religinių vertybių kaita Lietuvoje 1990–1999 metais (The Dynamics of Religious Values in Lithuania: 1990–1999). *Kultūrologija*, Vol. 6, pp. 213–251.

Skaidrė Urbonienė, PhD, is a senior researcher at the Department of Sacral Art Heritage, Lithuanian Culture Research Institute. Her main research interests are the cross-crafting tradition; the heritage, socio-cultural, artistic and identity issues of folk art; and folk art in migration.

E-mail: skaidreu@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-5827-2218

https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.06

Challenges in the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Lithuania

Vytautas Tumėnas

Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Lithuanian Institute of History, Vilnius, Lithuania

E-mail: vytaut.tumenas@gmail.com

Abstract: This research analyses the challenges of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Lithuania, with a particular focus on the role of heritage communities in cooperation with the state, considering the role of volunteer enthusiasts, as well as economic and socio-cultural policy. The case study is based on statistical data analysis, participation and observation, and a survey of the leaders of ICH safeguarding. The study reveals that constructive interaction between heritage communities and authorities represents the optimal strategy for success. Questionable funding models that prioritise innovation should be revised to align with the needs of local traditions in order to ensure even regional distribution and diversity of cultural expression. Enthusiasts seek to increase ICH awareness within society and to strengthen collaboration with the state in order to reinforce the cooperation and dialogue network that promotes experience exchange, research, and education.

Keywords: ICH safeguarding and promotion, cultural policy and economics, critical heritage studies, Lithuanian intangible heritage

Introduction

The situation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in contemporary Baltic Europe can be described as a constant challenge provoked by dynamic changes in the economic and socio-cultural life of society caused by technological and economic progress and changing cultural policies. The surprising contradiction between ideal concepts and expectations in the safeguarding of ICH and the reality of their implementation is the main issue addressed in this paper.

With the entry into force of the 2003 *UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2006, research on ICH has increasingly adopted a critical ethnographic perspective. Empirical studies now focus on local discourses, examining both the instrumentalisation of heritage as cultural property and the involvement of a range of actors including individuals, communities, private and state institutions (Lähdesmäki et al. 2020: 120).

David Lowenthal, providing the theoretical basis for critical heritage studies, challenged essentialist or objectivist notions of heritage and aligned with the constructivist stance that sees heritage as a contemporary social practice. Lowenthal treated authenticity as a negotiated rather than intrinsic concept. Heritage studies, in his view, explores how the past is marketed, packaged, and consumed (for example, in media, museums, tourism). According to his view, we don't retrieve the past as it was, but rather construct it based on present needs, values, and ideologies. Heritage is an emotional, selective, and identity-driven subject. Heritage is not a neutral transmission of the past, it is often instrumentalised. He discussed the revival of the past through outdated practices, and "presentism", where contemporary concerns distort perceptions of the past. He also analysed the exclusion of certain groups from heritage narratives (Lowenthal 2015).

ICH can become a form of embedded cultural capital from which self-determination can emerge amidst the multiple crises of the rural world. Even identifying a common task and forming a task force can be enough to trigger reassessment and a change in social consciousness (Meissner 2024: 437–449). Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital helps us understand how individuals or groups gain social and economic advantages through culture. He distinguished three forms of cultural capital: a) embodied cultural capital (the knowledge, skills and competences that an individual acquires); b) objecti-

fied cultural capital (material objects – for example books, artworks, instruments – that convey cultural value; c) institutionalised cultural capital (the recognition or validation of cultural knowledge or achievement, often through formal education or qualifications such as degrees or awards). Embodied cultural capital refers to knowledge and experiences which are made by people in contact with their social and natural surroundings. This type of implicit and explicit knowledge determines our lifestyles. In turn, objectified cultural capital describes a material state of cultural capital, namely cultural goods or objects. The application of cultural objects, their understanding and appreciation, depends on embodied cultural capital. Institutionalised cultural capital can be regarded as a further form of objectification of incorporated cultural capital (Bourdieu 2007: 46–58). Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital explains how ICH is transmitted, preserved, and valued, linking cultural practices to social, political, and economic power. ICH, as embodied cultural capital, shapes societal identity and prestige, while sometimes reinforcing social stratification; its preservation often depends on resources and networks, with some traditions restricted to specific groups.

The 2003 UNESCO Convention promotes cultural participation as essential for socially sustainable development and underscores the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration between cultural organisations, fostering relationships between diverse communities, groups, individuals, and other stakeholders. It advises against top-down, expert-driven approaches, urging active participation from all directly involved. ICH safeguarding should ensure the widest possible participation of the communities, groups, and individuals who create, maintain, and transmit it, actively involving them in its management. The Convention draws attention to indigenous communities, groups and individuals in their production, safeguarding, maintenance and recreation of ICH, thus helping to enrich cultural diversity and human creativity. Critical heritage studies have moved beyond the traditional focus on technical management issues to view cultural heritage as a political, cultural, and social phenomenon, with increasing attention paid to the economic and social dimensions of ICH and its role in sustainable development (Bortolotto & Skounti 2024).

The concept of ICH can generate new cultural management policies that drive social and cultural change through interaction, knowledge transfer, and shifts in agency (Kuutma 2024: 73–89). Laurajane Smith has raised issues related to the implementation of the Convention on ICH that are still relevant today,

for example popularisation, involvement of heritage communities, economic value, education, dissemination (especially through the internet), recognition and diversity in cultural policies, and the fusion of material and intangible heritage in the latest concepts (Smith 2014: 12–22).

According to Kynan Gentry and Smith, the discourses that frame our understanding of heritage are a performance in which the meaning of the past is continuously negotiated in the context of the needs of the present (Gentry & Smith 2019: 1148–1168). Heritage is a 'discursive construction' with material consequences (Smith 2006: 11–13).

Research has critically pointed out many cases where public involvement in heritage processes is shaped by power imbalances and hierarchies, which go against UNESCO's ideal of a community-driven, bottom-up approach. Heritage revitalisation is often controlled by experts, political interest groups, and professional elites from various institutions, while broader local society remains uninvolved (Tauschek 2010; Bendix 2013; Schneider & Uhlig 2023).

Cultural heritage safeguarding 'from below' can reveal the value of previously overlooked local capacities and resources (Robertson 2012). Broad community involvement can become a significant endogenous development factor, especially in shrinking peripheral rural areas. This can be achieved through identification and valorisation of one's own heritage, based on local bottom-up structures such as voluntary work or private initiatives. Networking through joint projects fosters a renewed understanding of shared heritage and strengthens the recognition of common roots and regional identity (Trummer & Uhlig 2025: 542).

Case studies examine how the 2003 UNESCO Convention has shifted heritage governance from top-down regulation to approaches that enhance local actors' autonomy and foster horizontal, multi-level, cross-sectoral networks involving civil society and the private sector in rural heritage policy-making. In such an approach, communities articulate their needs, influence development processes, and collectively assume responsibility for the safeguarding of ICH. Incorporating local stakeholders' knowledge and capacities enhances the mobilisation of community potential, while coordinated cooperation across governance levels ensures integration of local, regional, and national structures. In rural areas with limited development capacity and policy expertise, these collaborative approaches can yield substantial benefits and serve as models for

other regions (Swyngedouw 2005; Böcher 2008; Horlings & Marsden 2014; Akagawa & Smith 2019; Trummer & Uhlig 2025: 556–557).

The economic development of peripheral regions through UNESCO cultural heritage – particularly ICH – has become a key focus in cultural policy and management, playing a strategic role in valorisation processes that support both cultural and economic development. Studies show that locally embedded heritage, such as ICH awards, can catalyse cross-sectoral, endogenous networking and stimulate collaboration across culture, business, and politics, transforming cultural capital into social and economic capital. Such revitalisation can benefit supportive networks while also serving hidden commercial or political interests. Examining the actors, networks and discourses of participation in ICH safeguarding reveals underlying cultural values and local powers, highlighting the social and developmental significance of ICH for communities and regions (Tauschek 2010, 2013; Meissner 2021: 163–171; Cerquetti & Ferrara et al. 202; Trummer 2023).

In Lithuania, critical heritage studies are relatively scarce, with Audronė Pociūtė's research offering valuable insights into the relationship between cultural heritage, regional development, and heritage safeguarding policies. She criticises the situation at the time when EU funds remained difficult to allocate for regional heritage protection and promotion projects. She emphasised that decentralising the management and administration of these processes fosters a better understanding and preservation of heritage, while strengthening cultural, economic, and social ties within communities and supporting regional development. Her study highlights how, in France, local communities play a significant role in shaping cultural heritage policy because heritage is understood as a foundation for community identity. Pociūtė predicts that the future of cultural heritage protection will largely depend on residents' awareness, values, and commitment to maintaining their heritage, with priority given to grassroots initiatives. Moreover, she argues that bringing society and heritage closer together, enhancing interregional and interinstitutional cooperation between heritage and art sectors, and developing reliable systems for disseminating information about cultural heritage should be central objectives of heritage safeguarding (Pociūtė 2005).

Heritage researcher Rasa Čepaitienė has examined from an ideological perspective the instrumentalised attitude toward Lithuanian cultural heritage in the construction of national identity. She theoretically analysed the perspec-

tives of nationalist and multicultural (multiethnic and European) interpretations of heritage, along with the related challenges and the opportunities they offer. The current context of today's Lithuanian heritage protection is also touched upon, i.e. the strengthening local and regional self-understanding and ambiguously assessed manifestations of heritage commercialisation (Čepaitienė 2006: 47–54).

Vitalija Rudzkienė and Reda Skrodenytė identify Lithuanian artistic folk crafts, certified by the National Heritage agency, as key economic, social, and cultural assets that can drive prosperity while safeguarding identity in a globalised world. The authors attributed low domestic demand for this production to weak information dissemination and propose complementary marketing with targeted strategies such as ethnological research, digital promotion, and strategic positioning in order to strengthen authenticity recognition and stimulate consumption (Rudzkienė & Skrodenytė 2012: 68–79).

Martynas Purvinas highlights how Western scholarship extensively studies traditional rural culture and heritage using vast historical archive sources covering economic, technological, social, folk-cultural, and settlement development aspects, as well as narratives of peasants' lives. In contrast, Lithuania lacks a holistic analysis of traditional rural culture as an integrated complex. Since the loss of its leading researchers, studies remain narrowly focused on isolated phenomena, leaving fundamental questions and the broader scope of rural heritage insufficiently explored compared with international research (Purvinas 2020: 3–14).

The connections between economic aspects of rural culture and ICH transmission are currently being studied intensely by Lithuanian and international ethnochoreologists (Wharton & Urbanavičienė 2022).

According to Khun Engh Kuah and Zhaohui Liu, academics have an obligation to bring attention to disappearing culture and to help raise the visibility of local voices to protect the diversity of ICH (Kuah & Liu 2017).

Based on critical heritage discourse and the search for hidden local and state power relations, as well as the various networks and governances arising from local negotiations of ICH, in this paper I explore the 'anthropology of success' (Trummer & Uhlig 2025), examining the ways in which the implementation of the status of ICH in real cultural life can transform communities and revitalise heritage traditions.

At the same time the main aim of this study is to identify the challenges arising in the promotion, actualisation, and safeguarding of ICH in Lithuania and to provide recommendations for addressing them. The phenomenon of ICH is analysed and classified through economic-financial, art studies, folkloristic, and cultural management perspectives.

The research is based on my experience as an expert in the Lithuanian ICH Inventory Commission, as well as on a survey of respondents collected by means of a questionnaire developed in the course of the study commissioned and sponsored by the Lithuanian Council for Culture (LCC). The study was carried out within a 2022 project organised by the non-profit NGO Kultur that aimed to determine the state of preservation and actualisation of ICH and the possibilities of its improvement.

For this research statistical data on the interaction between ICH communities and state support is used. Apart from statistical analysis, several other methods will be used: a) participant observation and direct participation in several events and processes (2014–2023), especially as an expert for the applications submitted to the Lithuanian UNESCO National Heritage List Commission; b) case studies based on structured interviews (2021) with five ICH community leaders (of the different branches of folk culture: visual folk art, economic folk art, customary folk art, ethnochoreography, folklore) or their natural or revived tradition promoters in different types of location (national park, regional park, resorts, the capital, villages, and the countrywide).

A synthesis of *emic* and *etic* perspectives is applied. The more and less successful practices of interaction between the leaders, managers, ethnologists and municipal and state institutions involved in safeguarding ICH traditions are discussed. Analysing the situation in this way helps to define more objectively the challenges in this field of culture.

The inclusion of folk cultural phenomena in the UNESCO ICH National Inventory (Savadas.lnkc.lt 2019) means that they are considered an important element of cultural policy. However, in the second half of the 20th century folklore in Lithuania often served as a form of opposition to official culture, as a means of national and cultural resistance to the official political and cultural soviet ideology and aesthetics.

Consequently, this leads to logical questions: What are the benefits of the National ICH Inventory for the communities involved in practicing their herit-

age, and for society today? What system of safeguarding should be developed, and how?

ICH's relationship with cultural policy

Analysis of the phenomenon of ICH, which is spread nationwide or localised in protected natural areas and resorts, or in the provinces and cities of Lithuania, shows that there are a few important external factors influencing the vitality, transmission, and promotion of tradition of intangible heritage and folk culture in Lithuania: a) the economic-financial factor, b) the socio-cultural factor, c) the context of the cultural climate in the state and the main trends and values implemented and promoted by the state's cultural, scientific, and education policies (government, parliament, municipalities).

The ratio of activities in the field of ICH safeguarding carried out by the various state-level, municipal non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and heritage communities becomes clear when comparing the numbers of successful applications submitted by four different types of institution (including joint interinstitutional bodies) that led to the inscription of 48 elements into the Lithuanian ICH Inventory (according to the situation as of 2023): 1) municipalities provided 44.444% of the inscribed elements, 2) state authorities provided 28.572%, 3) local communities provided 17.46%, 4) social organisations provided 9.524% of all inscribed elements. It is evident, that municipalities and state institutions are the most active when it comes to the submission of heritage elements for inscription in the national ICH Inventory.

A total of 48 elements in the Lithuanian inventory have planned methods for their preservation and safeguarding. The principal forms are propagation and dissemination (at events and in the media), which are prescribed for all 48 elements. The documentation, accumulation and management of data pertaining to processes, activities, individuals, groups and communities are prescribed for 38 elements. A total of 37 elements are linked to workshops, while 35 elements are associated with other specific measures such as education programmes (formal and informal).

However, this assessment does not take into account the calculation or planning of the numbers of newcomers and their limits on a particular tradition,

nor are there any measures for planning and calculating the effectiveness and intensity of the transmission and popularisation of tradition.

The economic and commercial factors that shape the viability of crafts and visual folk arts are of paramount importance. It is imperative that the Lithuanian Council for Culture (LCC), a state cultural foundation, provides support for educational, performing and exhibition activities, as the alternatives from private foundations are underdeveloped in Lithuania.

The principal source of financial support for the promotion of intangible heritage is the state, particularly in the form of programmes and projects organised by the Ministries of Culture, Agriculture, and Education, Science and Sport (in collaboration with UNESCO). The Parliament of the Republic is responsible for the declaration of special plans for activities dedicated to anniversary dates or other notable events that occur on an annual basis. Furthermore, municipalities implement specific financial programmes designed to bolster local cultural initiatives. In addition, at their fairs municipalities apply certain specific tax discounts to traditional craft products certified by the National Heritage Agency under the Ministry of Agriculture. But when it comes to ICH as a whole, the cultural and scientific research projects partly supported by the LCC is of the utmost importance for the safeguarding of ICH. However, it must be noted that the Year of Folk Art (2020), declared by the Lithuanian Parliament, was one of the most challenging for the Lithuanian Folk Art Association from a financial perspective, as the lowest number of projects were supported by the LCC that year. This indicates a lack of coordination between the primary state institutions in the field of intangible heritage safeguarding policy.

The main Lithuanian folk traditions can be divided into several branches: 1) folklore and customs, 2) handicrafts and enterprises, 3) fine crafts and visual folk art, 4) other cultural practices. The monitoring and analysis of ICH safeguarding processes shows that folklore and customs can survive better than the other branches, independently of economic benefits or state support because they are based on community values, socio-cultural interaction and communication, as well as on local social community creativity and family traditions based on sharing and participation.

According to the geographic specificity of practices associated with values already included in the national ICH list, these practices can be divided into: a) traditions practiced in national or regional parks, resorts or other areas heavily visited by tourists, b) local but prominent traditions in other areas of

the province, c) traditions practised in both regions and centres, d) national, geographically broad traditions (for example, Lithuanian Christmas Eve *Kūčios*) that suffer from poor support from the state, municipalities, and even local communities due to problematic coordination, as it is unclear who should take the lead and how. It is obvious that these activities require different human and financial resources in centres and at the periphery. However, criteria for evaluating the funding of such different areas have not yet been developed.

In contrast to the governance of material cultural heritage, Lithuania lacks a clear concept and qualification for ICH professionals and experts. However, this role is partly addressed by the qualification process for folklore specialists organised by the Lithuanian National Culture Centre (LNCC) which runs seminars for specialists who are evaluated in competitions and are involved in projects activities.

The LCC funding scheme gives priority to the ideology of innovation in its support for projects. However, this cannot be an important criterion for the safeguarding of authentic traditions and can be treated as manifestation of 'presentism'. The Folk Culture Safeguarding Council, expressing the consolidated opinion of ICH specialists, has repeatedly appealed to the LCC, criticising this provision and inviting discussion[1], but has received no response. The lack of dialogue is one of the most sensitive challenges of ICH safeguarding in Lithuania. Therefore, the role of the leader of the ICH or folk-cultural tradition and its community, his initiative and professionalism, scientific and methodical competence and ability to manage relations with local and state institutions and society at large effectively are crucial. In some cases, the dilemma of a rational division of responsibilities between ICH carriers, their communities and their leaders, municipalities and the state arise.

For example, traditions such as Christmas Eve *Kūčios* or the tradition of place names in the countryside require a specific community to take responsibility. However, organising such a community for Christmas Eve is a challenge because it is a private, family-based celebration. And the preservation of the country's traditional place names is directly dependent on government policy on real estate registers. The best environment for ICH vitality, development and economic benefit is where local managers, scholars, folk culture specialists, the state and community institutions work actively and positively with the bearers of local heritage. The data collected from heritage practitioners and promoters highlight these challenges of safeguarding ICH.

ICH Safeguarding Challenges and Strengths from Leaders' Perspectives

1) The straw gardens tradition

Soviet ideology was indifferent or hostile towards customary, ritual folk art. Straw gardens – handcrafted hanging octahedral straw ornaments made from grain stalks, used in traditional weddings and at Christmas and Easter as interior decorations (Fig. 1) – was therefore a tradition in decline. However, towards the end of the Soviet era, attention was drawn to straw gardens at exhibitions organised by the Lithuanian Folk Artists' Union, and young people became interested in them. In recent decades the leader of the straw gardeners craftsmen's association *Dangaus sodai* (Heaven Gardens), Marija Liugienė, prominent creator, handicraft educator and exhibition organiser, has played a key role in their promotion. While working as a manager at the municipal Vilnius Ethnic Culture Centre (VECC), she developed skills in writing project proposals for submission to the LCC and has shown a strong commitment to promoting straw gardens. She has received funding for international seminars, conferences and exhibition projects, and gathered a community of straw garden makers. Following the successful submission of her application, the straw gardens tradition was included in the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Lithuania. Subsequently, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and the LNCC, this community actively prepared the documentation for the nomination of the straw gardens tradition to the UNESCO World Heritage List, which was successfully accomplished, securing its inclusion. An inaugural standalone exhibition of straw gardens was held in 2013; the tradition was included in the UNESCO National Inventory in 2017, and on World Heritage List in 2023.

Figure 1. Lithuanian straw gardens made by Danutė Palaimienė. Photo by Vytautas Tumėnas, 2025.

Convinced that straw gardens deserve more attention, renowned Lithuanian designer Saulius Valius used blue-painted aluminum tubes to create a modern interpretation of their octahedral form for the EU Council's interior in Brussels, serving as a symbol of Lithuanian's Presidency in 2013. In the same year, he was also the architect of the first-ever exhibition dedicated exclusively to straw gardens, curated by Liugienė at the Lithuanian National Museum. Over the next two years, she held eight additional exhibitions in various locations. In 2020, she also established an association of handicraftsmen, called *Dangaus sodai*, to promote the crafting of straw gardens and to foster the advancement of this cultural practice.

Liugienė, identified the following problems concerning the safeguarding of this tradition:

1. There are no firms in Lithuania that engage in the cleaning, cutting and sale of straw. Consequently, there is a lack of competition in this field and the majority of the raw material purchased by craftsmen is sourced from online suppliers in Germany and Estonia.

2. The absence of inter-institutional collaboration. There is a notable deficiency in communication between the various state institutions, coupled with a discernible lack of robust collaboration with the local community.

The Dotnuva Institute of Agriculture could assist us in procuring the requisite raw materials. However, it is imperative that the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Culture reach a consensus regarding the provision of support. The association is insufficiently resourced to exert influence. Despite the signing of cooperation documents that stipulate the provision of consultation by the aforementioned ministries, the responsibility for the success of the venture ultimately rests with the leader of *Dangaus sodai* only, due to the lack of a formalised support structure. Upon submission of the application to UNESCO, this association was assured that assistance would be forthcoming. But despite their efforts and contributions, the government's support remains inadequate.

3. To date, no museum in Lithuania has a permanent folk-art exhibition of straw gardens. The primary source of funding for this initiative is the LCC, which has provided funding for over ten projects. During the course of the song festivals, the LNCC provided partial funding for straw garden exhibitions. Vilnius City Municipality provided financial support for the production of a film. Following an exhibition in Croatia, the straw gardens were sold at auction. A further auction is planned, with the proceeds to be sent to Ukraine. The activities are designed to highlight the significance, relevance and accessibility of the subject matter. These include exhibitions in Lithuania and abroad, as well as educational workshops, seminars and video lessons accessible online. In addition, the VECC publishes books and organises conferences, while also selling educational practical sets for this handicraft which become popular before Christmas.

The following activities are intended to incorporate the straw gardens tradition into daily cultural, social and economic life:

- The craft was demonstrated and products sold at heritage markets and fairs (producing an income);

- This handicraft session, which had social and therapeutic aims, was organised in prisons and for the disabled. The craft was studied in relation to teaching spatial thinking and geometry at a seminar entitled Teaching Spatial Thinking by Making Straw Gardens, held at the Lithuanian Centre of Informal Youth Education.

- Making straw gardens is incorporated into informal education through the state-funded Culture Pass.

The following channels of communication have been identified as means of communication between society and community: Exhibitions and training sessions, word-of-mouth, websites, Facebook, national and particularly regional media, documentary film, books, conferences.

Dissemination results. As a consequence of the exhibitions, a number of individuals have initiated the construction of their own straw gardens. Approximately 1,000 people have received instruction in workshops, with ten percent of them expressing interest in this fine craft. Following the tradition's inclusion in the National ICH Inventory, there has been a notable increase in public interest in both the craft and its practitioners, leading to an increase in self-respect for those who create straw gardens. Furthermore, there is a community-boosting effect as a community has been born; it is encouraging to be part of this, with the knowledge that support and extra help are available.

The implementation of exemplary aspects of safeguarding management is contingent upon the collaboration of community leaders and other individuals who are invested in the perpetuation of a specific tradition. A model of dissemination is achieved through the implementation of various measures, including the organisation of exhibitions, symposiums and teaching sessions.

An analysis of the straw gardens tradition revealed that the exceptionally robust cooperation between ICH tradition leaders, NGOs, local authorities, and state institutions – originating primarily from the private initiative of folk artists – produced impressive and exemplary results, demonstrating how an active and influential community of fine craft practitioners can be nurtured, one that has achieved global recognition for this tradition. In this way, through cross-sector networking and bottom-up activity, the country's cultural capital was mobilised to cultivate abundant social capital, the activities of which have revived this tradition. However, it is believed that the future successful development of the tradition will depend precisely on the improvement of state policy in this field.

2) The Old method of winter fishing for smelt and vendace by rotating a bobbins in Balteji Lakajai lake in Mindūnai village

Some local fishing traditions in Lithuania survived Soviet modernisation only thanks to their flexible adaptation to the economy of state socialism, i.e. by being incorporated into fishing enterprises and persisting as modest amateur fishing, or by poaching, which also had motives of economic resistance to the Soviet regime. Today the old method of fishing for smelt and vendace in winter by pulling a net into the lake through a hole in the ice and using a rotating wooden bobbin pole called a *boba* (comprising a horizontal seine and a vertical pole used to winch up a fish net from beneath the ice) is little known in Lithuania. However, it has been applied uninterruptedly since the end of the 19th century in the area of Baltieji Lakajai lake in Mindūnai village in the Labanoras Regional Park, Molėtai District. The fishing traditions that survived in one way or another now face new challenges. On the one hand, sustainable development and environmental protection have been restricted with the aim of preserving natural resources, and on the other hand the workforce has moved away from rural areas in search of more attractive opportunities in other activities. Therefore, the promotion of local fishing aligns with the community's interest in strengthening its cultural, economic, and social identity, increasing its visibility, and enhancing the attractiveness of life in the area.

The Winter Ice Fishing Festival in Mindūnai, managed by Aldona Petrauskienė and held annually since 1995, is a relatively successful example of the aforementioned ancient practice. This led to the documentation of this fishing tradition in the National UNESCO Inventory in 2017. The fishing heritage is integrated into the famous village Festival, which includes a culinary heritage fair, sports activities, fishing demonstrations, and folklore performances. The event attracts a considerable number of tourists and visitors on an annual basis, and provides an appropriate platform for anglers to sell their catch. In this instance, the authentic tradition has become an integral component of contemporary festival management, which has a beneficial effect on the advancement of the regional museum, as well as on the cultural and economic life of local communities.

Figure 2. Winter fishing with *bobas* in Mindūnai. Photo by Juozas Petrauskas, 2014 (Savadas.lnkc.lt 2019).

The initiators of the Festival are the local museum (the Lake Fishing Museum in the village of Mindūnai, a branch of the Molėtai Regional Museum) and specifically staff member Alfreda Petrauskienė while the main organisers are the museum collective and active members of the village community. The Festival's partners are commercial fishermen, amateur fishermen, certified craftspeople, folklore ensembles from Molėtai and neighbouring regions, the administration of Molėtai Region Municipality and the Directorate of the Labanoras Regional Park. The circle of festival participants and partners grew along with the festival's popularity. At present, participants enquire of the festival's initiators whether the festival will go ahead. There has been a symbiosis of sustainable cooperation between museum staff belonging to the local community, and the heritage community and its value leaders.

The sources of funding can be classified into the following categories: museum funds (ensembles are remunerated for their appearances); project funding from the Ministry of Culture, the LCC, and municipal and (NGO) support programmes (a local club called KOPS (Travel, Explore, Discover, and Enjoy Sport) was established to administer the project's funding for this Festival); and private sponsors. Other sources of funding include the establishment

and awarding of prizes by private individuals and organisations, such as the municipality, which provides financial support for the Festival, which is one of the four most significant festivals in the region. Nemunas, the Lithuanian Rural Sports and Culture Association, (of which KOPS is a member) also offers assistance in the form of prizes, medals, and championship cups. Some supporters organise activities and establish prizes independently. The majority of expenditure is allocated to the rental of stages, mobile toilets and rubbish containers, and the utilisation of waste.

The Festival originated as a modest winter ice fishing competition. Subsequently, commercial fishermen, who employed traditional techniques such as the use of the *boba*, became involved. As the event expanded, particularly from 2012 onwards, certified craftspeople (predominantly those specialising in wood, pottery and knitted goods) and folklore ensembles from Molėtai and neighbouring regions also became involved. The festival has expanded to encompass a variety of activities, including sporting events, musical performances, a craft market, commercial activities, and a fish soup-making competition. From its inception, the overarching objective has been the provision of entertainment. The format of the festival enables the presentation of indigenous cultural values in the context of alternative fishing techniques and related phenomena. The commercial aspect, with fish and other craft goods available for purchase, and the ecological aspect, with a quiz organised by the Directorate of the Labanoras Regional Park on the subject of the park, fishing and birdlife, are also of significance.

The following channels are utilised for the dissemination of information regarding activities: the Molėtai Regional Museum website; the Lake Fishing Museum Facebook page; announcements made at education institutions and tourism agencies; word-of-mouth, which is considered the most effective method of communication; and media outlets.

The results of this dissemination revealed that up to 100 amateur fishermen participated in the competition, with approximately 1,500 spectators in attendance. The objectives of the Festival are to provide an opportunity for people to learn how to relax in a natural setting, to fish, to exercise patience, and to interact with one another, with the *raison d'être* being to foster a sense of community cohesion. This is accomplished through the Festival's collective organisation, active participation in the event itself, and subsequent relaxation and enjoyment.

The transmission of this ICH value is not the sole objective of the Festival, as it is too narrow a concept to be commercially viable and certain restrictions apply. The objective is to familiarise the general public with this ICH. To this end, filmed material illustrating ethnographic fishing practices is exhibited at the museum, while the fishing process is demonstrated on the lakeshore via a large screen. The public was impressed and began to contribute new exhibits to the museum, including archaeological fishing equipment that they had discovered.

As the festival expanded, the municipality became increasingly invested in its preservation and popularisation while the general public's awareness of the museum's existence rose, as did the number of visitors (outside of the Festival). This combined effect ensures the continued popularity and survival of the value. Eventually the inclusion of this item in the National ICH Inventory prompted the municipality to accord greater attention to this value and the village itself.

The following aspects are worthy of particular commendation: 1) the rationale behind the combination of an element of ICH, mass event organisation and the aims and methods of museologists (it can be argued that without the museum exhibition, dissemination and knowledge of this value would not be as great), 2) the importance of goal-oriented local ethnographic research in the safeguarding of ICH.

This case analysis shows how attention to ICH can become a catalyst for creating new jobs, and how cross-sectoral cooperation (culture, business, politics, media, etc.) and grassroots mobilisation can foster the growth of the region's cultural industries and economy as a whole. In this case, the enthusiasm of local cultural managers and tradition leaders for nurturing and promoting tradition are far more effective than the external influence of ICH experts and the state.

However, despite excellent management, the consequences of climate change have threatened the Festival's survival, as insufficient ice during warmer winters has made it impossible to practice or demonstrate ice fishing for the past three years.

3) *Jurginės* Festival in Palanga

The *Jurginės* (St. George's Day) Festival in Palanga was a significant day in the traditional local calendar, although by the end of the 20th century its importance had greatly diminished. Therefore, a group of local enthusiasts decided to revive, reconstruct, and develop this tradition into a widely known festival.

The contemporary St. George's Day Festival in Palanga, initiated by ethnologist and folklorist Zita Baniulaitytė, has been held since 1990 as a springtime event featuring a folklore ensemble and their acquaintances. Since its inception, the festival has grown from a small gathering of enthusiasts on St. George's Day to a significant regional event. In 2021, the tradition was included in the National ICH Inventory.

Subsequently, the involvement of the municipality increased, along with that of other organisations, city and professional communities, and private sponsors (for example horse riders, the Botanical Garden, the Catholic Church). Ultimately, the project was successful in securing various tenders, thereby transforming the event from a local tradition into a regional folklore festival that enjoys nationwide support.

Figure 3. The *Jurginės*, or St. George's Day, Festival in Palanga. Photo by Eglė Mekuškienė, 2018.

What are the activity initiators, executors, partners and model of collaboration in the Festival? The activity is initiated and executed by the Mėguva Palanga resort city folklore ensemble, which is led by its founder Baniulaitytė. The tradition was revived on the basis of the calendrical importance of archaeological discoveries on Birutė Hill made by professor Vladas Žulkus, and the astronomical temple research and reconstructions of Saulius Manomatis and professor Libertas Klimka. The festival's principal regular partners are the Di-

rectorate of the Palanga City Botanical Gardens, which views the event as the 'season opening celebration' of the park, and other Lithuanian (and occasionally Latvian) folk ensembles.

The initiators collaborate with the Municipal Palanga Culture Centre, the Public Library, a regional history society, education institutions, equestrian clubs, mounted scout groups, sports enthusiasts, and the University of the Third Age. Over the past decade, the parish has also become involved, performing mass in the chapel on Birutė Hill.

At the outset, there were challenges in persuading stakeholders that this was not merely a narrow folklorists' festival, but rather had the potential to evolve into a city-wide celebration. Historians Žulkus and Mikelis Balčius played a pivotal role in facilitating communication with the municipality's Department of Culture and staff at the Culture Centre. At conferences, they consistently emphasised that St. George's Day had already been revived. The primary challenge lies in the reluctance of personnel from the education sector to engage in collaborative efforts, with a prevailing sentiment that the two domains are not aligned.

Financially the festival is dependent on the collaboration of various municipal institutions, including the Park Directorate and the Culture Centre. In addition, the involvement of volunteers, including folklore ensembles and other enthusiasts of the festival, is crucial to its success. In its inaugural years, the festival was entirely self-funded, relying on the dedication and enthusiasm of its organisers. As the festival gained greater publicity, the Palanga Cultural Centre became involved, and the municipality began to provide some funding. Despite the fact that folklore is not a particularly favoured genre in Palanga the municipality has demonstrated a growing interest in stylised dance forms. It has even been proposed that the St. George's Day Festival be held only every second year. Despite the inclusion of the project in the ICH Inventory, the initiators have not yet received any funding from the LCC. It is possible that the request was excessive, given the scale of the project. Should the current trajectory persist, it is likely that the festival will become entirely commercialised, with all participants required to pay for their own participation. However, this is not merely a festival, it is the city's celebration. Therefore, it would be wholly inappropriate to restrict access to the park and make it a paid event.

The activities that were undertaken with the intention of revealing the importance, relevance and accessibility of the value can be categorised as follows:

- Lectures and conferences, which were initially organised but later discontinued as they were not appropriate to the Festival's timing.

- A parade through the city, which included different social groups such as folklore ensembles, the city's residents and tourists, horse riders, sportspeople, school students, a religious contingent and families with children. This activity was considered to be crucial, the most important and enjoyable part of the Festival. Historical sources describe a procession that commenced at the church and concluded at Birutė Hill. Similarly, the contemporary iteration of this tradition involves dancing and singing along the route, fostering a sense of collective joy and attracting a considerable number of onlookers.

- In addtion, non-stage concerts by folklore ensembles are held, wherein these collectives traverse the city, singing and dancing at various locations at any given moment. The absence of a dedicated concert stage underscores the festival's emphasis on collective participation and authenticity. The Park administration's assistance, particularly that of director Aušra Latonienė, was invaluable in explaining the importance of St. George's Day to the staff.

- National TV made a short film about the Festival in 1999.

In order to incorporate the values into daily cultural, social or economic life, a variety of activities have been implemented. These include various accompanying cultural and sports events, such as exhibitions, a mystical sound and light display, a show jumping event, an open day at the horse riding club, orienteering competitions and a gardening fair. This latter event was once held during the Festival as an experiment, but was later discontinued due to the abundance of other fairs. Furthermore, a connection with the environment and the spring awakening of nature is realised through land art and sustainable art (patchwork art exhibitions).

In terms of activity communication, the most effective channels were found to be personal interaction, local and regional press articles and announcements, national and regional news portals (for example www.alkas.lt), and specialised websites (for example ICH List, blogs, forums, Facebook (including the homepages of folklore ensembles, the horse sports community, the Folk Culture Association), the LNCC), YouTube (to a lesser extent), and Wikipedia. In addition, regional television and film were significant contributors to the

dissemination of information. Three videos about the festival were produced and uploaded to YouTube and Facebook.

Following its inclusion in the ICH Inventory, the festival has attracted greater interest from the municipality and its Culture Centre. Conversely, the residents of Palanga themselves do not always evince a great deal of interest. The Festival plays an instrumental role in prolonging the tourist season, establishing a strong association with its opening in mid-spring. The successful activity, as an organised initiative, is grounded in ethnologic and historic research conducted by local experts, which is essential for any city seeking to identify and develop its unique cultural assets. It comprises numerous interrelated components, requiring collaboration across various fields and social groups. The Festival integrates cultural, natural, and religious elements, aiming to foster harmonious coexistence.

4) The *Polka* dance in Lithuania

Traditional dances in Lithuania (alongside professionally stylised so-called 'national' stage dances performed by amateur artists), persisted within Lithuanian folklore communities and their events throughout the 20th century. They were documented by folklore scholars, members of ensembles and amateur enthusiasts of regional studies during ethnographic expeditions. However, more detailed publications on authentic traditional dances only appeared at the end of the 20th century. The practice of traditional dances continues today through folklore ensembles and clubs.

The Traditional Dance Club (TDC), which has been in existence for over 30 years, plays the most active role in popularising traditional Lithuanian dances, including the *Polka*. The folklorist Eugenija Venckauskaitė (a staff member at the LNCC and a member of the Vilnius University Regional History Club) initiated the promotion of the *Polka* prior to the restoration of Lithuanian independence. This initiative was subsequently disseminated within the Vilnius TDC (from 2002 onwards). Since 2004, traditional dance summer camps have been conducted annually. In 2017, the Lithuanian *Polka* was incorporated into the Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. The *Polka* being danced at the Traditional Dance Club summer campus at Salos manor, Rokiškis reg. Photo by Vytautas Tumėnas, 2025.

The TDC was established by the Lithuanian Folk Culture Association, which is led by Dalia Urbanavičienė. Clubs were established in Vilnius, Kaunas and Klaipėda. The primary activity partners are the VECC, LNCC and the Lithuanian Music and Theatre Academy. However, a significant challenge remains in accessing suitable venues for rehearsals and evening dances, particularly in capital city Vilnius. This is compounded by evidence suggesting that the Municipality of Vilnius does not sufficiently value the *Polka* and other traditional dance heritage.

The TDC organisation is primarily funded through participant fees, with the input of volunteer assistance also being significant. The availability of funding is a determining factor in the scope and scale of the activity. According to the leaders, in 2022, due to a lack of project funding, participant fees were increased and there was minimal advertising, resulting in the lowest ever turnout of 150 participants at the summer camp.

The dance club has not received any funding from the LCC for the past five years, and the camp has not received any funding for the past two years. The rationale behind the decisions made by the LCC is often unclear and lacks coherent argumentation. It is anticipated that the TDC will receive low scores in the areas of inclusion, continuity, skill improvement, and target group involvement. Furthermore, the LCC has thus far declined to provide funding for ancillary costs such as fuel, equipment, and technical rentals.

The most significant TDC events are traditional dance evenings held on a regular basis throughout the year in Vilnius and Klaipėda (once per week), and Kaunas (once per month). During the warmer months, these evenings are held in public spaces around Vilnius, thereby encouraging social dancing. During the colder months, dance evenings move indoors and are accompanied by traditional dance lessons. Only live traditional music is performed. In addition, TDC events include New Year's Eve night dances and traditional dance summer camps that are organised in different locations around the country each year.

In terms of activity communication, Facebook is of the utmost importance. The Vilnius TDC public group forum has 1,249 members, the Kaunas TDC forum has 821 members, and the Klaipėda TDC forum has 512 members. In order to facilitate broader communication, additional financial resources are required.

Dissemination of the results has led to an increase in the number of Facebook group members, demonstrating that the popularity of the initiative is growing and that the community is active, as evidenced by the number of comments and images and videos that are shared. The weekly event held by the Vilnius TDC has also gained popularity, attracting between 50 and 70 participants. Another improvement can be seen in the largest number of attendees for the summer dance camp, at 420. While the quantity of participants is significant, the quality of the lectures, lessons, and fiddlers is also of importance as it enhances the cultural, artistic, and social appeal of both the *Polka* and the dance events. The social function of these dance evenings in Vilnius is important, as they provide a space for people of all generations to meet and interact, facilitated by the implementation of a fee for local participants. The incorporation of the *Polka* into the inventory did not result in heightened interest or concern from the state, leading to a sense of ambivalence among our communities regarding this outcome. A substantial increase in support would be provided by the presentation of a more compelling rationale for why the LCC does not endorse our initiatives; we await the input of more qualified experts.

The following aspects are worthy of commendation: activity is predicated on the foundation of robust leadership, the fervour of cultural workers, the assistance of volunteers, and collaboration with scholars and practicing specialists in this field. The value is safeguarded and popularised through the implementation of inclusive social activities, such as dance evenings and summer camps.

Here we have a case in which intangible cultural heritage serves to unite a modern, specialised community of practitioners, forming a nationwide heritage community. A successful promotion strategy is employed, addressing the artistic, aesthetic, socialisation, and leisure needs of contemporary society.

5) The singing tradition of the southern (Šiliniai) Dzūkai in the village of Žiūrai

It is also important to highlight the contribution of other disciplines, such as ethnology, folkloristics, art studies, ethnomusicology, ethnochoreology, and so forth, to the popularisation of research, and to participation in management processes of ICH events and activities. It is of great importance that their work should be directed towards the discovery, cultivation and guidance of talent in the direction of authentic traditions, particularly in the case of leading folklore ensembles. Ethnologists and those who practice ICH work acting together brings great benefit to the field, as without such collaboration there is a risk of the work being of poor quality and lacking content.

A principal criterion for the continued viability of ICH is the transfer of tradition-specific knowledge through the involvement of specialists. This emphasises the significance of the policies of research and education institutions (the Ministries of Education, Culture; universities and high schools) in the training and education of these professionals.

Nevertheless, there are instances where ICH bearers, municipal and state institutions, and scientists are unable to reach consensus with the community's leading figures, resulting in less successful outcomes. The lack of constructive dialogue between communities and external specialists, as well as authorities, can result in the undermining of the quality and authenticity of tradition practices. This can lead to the transformation of a tradition from high-level artistic expression into a predominantly social phenomenon.

The 19th-century singing tradition in the Dzūkian spoken and musical dialects of Žiūrai village (Fig. 5) is one of the best-preserved in Lithuania and still unites the community today. The Žiūrai folk ensemble was formed in 1970 on the initiative of folklorist Jonas Trinkūnas, and even had the support of the Soviet authorities; its songs were released on a Melodiya record and broadcast on Lithuanian television. After the restoration of independence (in 1991), as the oldest singers aged and passed away, the ensemble's activity declined. In

recent decades, however, encouraged by folklore experts to collaborate and inspired by the ensemble's 50th anniversary, there has been a revitalisation of the group that unites several generations, including newcomers to the village.

Figure 5. The elder generation of the Žiūrai village folk ensemble at its 45th anniversary celebration, 2016 (Varėna Cultural Centre Archive and LNCC Archive).

In my research the southern Dzūkai singing tradition in Žiūrai village was observed in the context of collaboration with experts in folklore practice. As indicated by my informants, some younger members of the community displayed a lack of enthusiasm for acquiring a comprehensive understanding of tradition and properly inheriting the singing style from their elders. The prevailing opinion within the community was that rehearsals were merely for the purpose of socialisation and celebration. Ultimately, a dispute arose between the managers of the musical record project and community leaders. The production and publication of the ensemble's songs on record were only made possible through considerable effort on the part of the external organiser. In this context, it is pertinent to recall the observations of Smith, who emphasised the significance of dialogue and the capacity to negotiate as pivotal elements in any heritage consultation process (Smith 2014). However, such competencies are not yet included in the curriculum for heritage professionals.

Following the acquisition of funding from the LCC, the community organised a notable celebration to mark the 50th anniversary of the ensemble's

debut performance. A compelling documentary film was produced that offers an insight into their tradition. Nevertheless, while the future of this tradition remains uncertain among scholars of folklore, its problematic aspects are not publicly discussed so as to avoid any potential harm to the reputation of the ensemble and the tradition itself.

It is clear that subjective internal factors play a crucial role in ensuring the endurance of tradition, its creative adaptation to new circumstances, its transmission, education, explanation and promotion. These factors include the extraordinary artistic talents and specific aesthetic values of tradition bearers and their family members, as well as a strong communal support. This implies that individuals who embody tradition are indispensable in the preservation of ICH.

This case demonstrates that top-down approaches to reviving tradition can be difficult to implement and insufficiently effective, as ICH folklore heritage experts require not only knowledge of art management and heritage, but also specialised competencies in psychology (particularly of village communities) and mediation. Moreover, participants' narrow 'project-based' approach to cultural and rural economic development, coupled with insufficient attention to cross-sector collaboration and networking, and the necessity to engage deeply with heritage, may reinforce local tradition bearers' illusion that learning traditions is unnecessary, as they are supposedly innate. Consequently, there is a risk that artistic traditions could lose their aesthetic quality and becoming merely social phenomena.

Conclusions

The investigation critically examines the perspectives of selected practitioners representing diverse Lithuanian ICH elements as cultural capital, highlighting their power relations, achievements, and the societal, education, organisational, cultural-ideological, and economic challenges in maintaining traditional practices, as well as endogenous and exogenous factors limiting society's access to ICH knowledge transmission and acquisition. This regional experience also offers insights that are universally applicable to enhancing ICH safeguarding.

The key challenges identified in ICH safeguarding, whether in the continuation or revival of a tradition, are promoting public awareness and understand-

ing, enhancing societal prestige (which is further undermined by the absence of permanent exhibitions for living traditional crafts in national museums), limited consensus among communities and between local and central government institutions over the distribution of responsibilities and authority, weak cross-sectoral collaborative networks and insufficient inter-institutional communication, and the need to develop effective communication between heritage specialists and communities, some of which show fatigue when preserving the artistic quality of a tradition.

There is a dearth of broad-based long-term strategic training opportunities for tradition culture managers. The most successful cases of safeguarding ICH elements owe much to practitioners' enthusiasm and leaders' practical management skills, developed largely through life experience rather than formal training.

Existing economic incentives, such as tax relief, are suboptimal, particularly when the high cost or limited availability of materials diminishes the benefit for crafts people's compared to the greater financial and marketing capacities of large business. Representatives of the performing arts highlighted the considerable difficulties encountered in renting appropriate and affordable spaces for rehearsals and events, particularly in the capital city. Some respondents indicated that the economic support provided by the state is insufficient, despite the involvement of their tradition in the ICH Inventory. On the other hand, no measures exist to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change, which in recent years have brought the practice of under-ice net fishing to a halt.

The LCC's emphasis on progress and innovation in ICH projects reflects 'presentism', privileging contemporary relevance in ways that could inadvertently reshape traditions, creating significant challenges in balancing the preservation of traditional forms with the encouragement of novel approaches in ICH governance.

The LCC's funding principles are seen as insufficiently effective for the specifics of ICH. The neoliberal funding framework tends to eliminate weaker project initiators who are unable to compete effectively, a situation at odds with the objective of preserving the diversity of cultural expressions and ensuring equality in regional dissemination. Moreover, the exclusive reliance on a single competitive foundation in Lithuania renders the system inherently unstable and offers no viable alternatives.

Based on heritage practitioners' perspectives, the investigation of state support measures has resulted in the following recommendations for ICH policy:

1) in the economy:

The competitive model for LCC funding and state economic support systems should be combined with the strategic aim of preserving the diversity of cultural expressions, with greater attention given to the specific, and sometimes unique, economic needs of ICH activities;

2) in education, science and informatics:

a) support should include passing on specialised knowledge to communities that lack it, with priority given to continuous training and capacity-building within state and municipal programmes and projects aimed at preserving and actualising ICH. Such activities could also take the form of annual camps, long-term workshops, and festivals;

b) support for communities should extend beyond promoting participation to cover areas outside their competence, such as increasing media visibility, raising cultural and scientific awareness of ICH's value, and providing assistance with legal and administrative issues;

c) a comprehensive, long-term national strategy for study and scientific research in the field of ICH safeguarding is needed;

d) permanent exhibitions in national museums should provide stronger representation of ICH traditions;

3) in society:

a) it is essential to enhance the understanding and awareness of ICH among state and societal entities, including governmental and non-governmental organisations in order to create an environment that fosters collaboration, dialogue, and negotiation through exchange networks;

b) effective collaboration in safeguarding and actualising ICH values is essential, requiring mobilisation and support for communities. Every national ICH value should be represented by the relevant organised communities or institutions, with access to digital platforms for communication. Regular experience sharing and active networking should become integral to the process of actualising ICH.

c) the state should begin paying greater attention to community leaders and outstanding individuals, i.e. those with influencers, while continuing to support ICH community activities.

This signifies the necessity for a complex approach to enhanced inter-communal and inter-institutional collaboration, as well as the improvement of knowledge-sharing, education and research opportunities, and economic incentives.

Notes

[1] The Council for the Safeguarding of Ethnic Culture appeal to the Ministry of Culture and LCC, regarding Lithuanian Council of Culture-funded projects that focus on preserving and promoting Lithuania's folk culture and intangible cultural heritage, 03/02/2023, No S–39.

References

Akagawa, Natsuko & Smith, Laurajane (eds.) 2018. *The Practices and Politics of Safeguarding*. London: Routledge.

Bendix, Regina 2013. Dynamiken der In-Wertsetzung von Kultur(erbe). Akteure und Kontexte im Lauf eines Jahrhunderts. In: B. Schnepel, F. Girke, E.-M. Knoll (eds.) *Kultur all inclusive. Identität, Tradition und Kulturerbe im Zeitalter des Massentourismus*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, pp. 45–73.

Böcher, Michael et al. (eds.) 2008. *Regionale Governance und integrierte ländliche Entwicklung: Ergebnisse der Begleitforschung zum Modell-und Demonstrationsvorhaben „Regionen Aktiv"*. Springer.

Bourdieu, Pierre 2007 (1983). The Forms of Capital. In: A. H. Halsey et al. (eds.) *Education. Culture, Economy, and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 46–58.

Bortolotto, Chiara & Skounti, Ahmed (eds.) 2024. *Intangible Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development: Inside a UNESCO Convention.* London; New York: Routledge.

Cerquetti, Mara et al. 2022. Enhancing Intangible Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Tourism Development in Rural Areas: The Case of The "Marche Food and Wine Memories" Project (Italy). *Sustainability*, Vol. 14 (24).

Čepaitienė, Rasa 2006. Kultūros paveldas ir lietuviškasis tapatumas (Cultural Heritage and Lithuanian Identity). In: J. Glemža (ed.). Kultūros paveldas ir visuomenė XXI a., nacionaliniai ir tarptautiniai aspektai (Cultural Heritage and Society in

the 21st Century, National and International Aspects). Vilnius: Vilniaus dailės akademijos leidykla, pp. 47–54.

Gentry, Kynan & Smith, Laurajane 2019. Critical Heritage Studies and the Legacies of the Late-Twentieth Century Heritage Canon. *International Journal of Heritage Studies,* Vol. 25 (11), pp. 1148–1168.

Horlings, Lummina G. & Marsden, Terry K. 2014. Exploring the 'New Rural Paradigm' in Europe. Eco-Economic Strategies as a Counterforce to the Global Competitiveness Agenda. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, Vol. 2, pp. 4–20.

Kuah, Khun Engh & Liu, Zhaohui (eds.) 2017. *Intangible Cultural Heritage in Contemporary China*. Milton Park; Abingdon; Oxon; New York: Routledge.

Kuutma, Kristin 2024. Ownership and Rights: Sustainable Development Ideals with Inequalities of Recognition and Resource Management. In: Ch. Bortolotto & A. Skounti (eds.) *Intangible Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development: Inside a UNESCO Convention.* London; New York: Routledge, pp. 73–89.

Lähdesmäki, Tuuli et al. 2020. *Creating and Governing Cultural Heritage in the European Union: The European Heritage Label*. London: Routledge.

Lowenthal, David 2015. *The Past Is a Foreign Country–Revisited*. Cambridge University Press.

Meissner, Marlen 2021. *Intangible Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development. The Valorisation of Heritage Practices*. Springer.

Meissner, Marlen 2024. The Participatory Process of Documenting and Implementing Intangible Cultural Heritage in Rural Areas. In: B. C. Müller, M. L. Schmidt, & A. L. Moreno (eds.) Proceedings of the International Conference on Intangible Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development. Springer, pp. 437–449.

Pociūtė, Audronė 2005. Kultūros paveldas ir regionų plėtra (Cultural Heritage and Regional Development). *Kultūros barai,* No. 5, pp. 19–22; No. 6, pp. 22–24.

Purvinas, Martynas 2020. Lietuvos tradicinė kaimiškoji kultūra ir jos paveldas Europos kontekste (Lithuanian Traditional Rural Culture and its Heritage in the European Context). *Kultūros paminklai*, Vol. 24, pp. 3–14.

Robertson, Iain J. M. (ed.) 2012. *Heritage from Below*. London and New York: Routledge.

Rudzkienė, Vitalija & Skrodenytė, Reda 2012. Tautinio paveldo produktų vertė, rinkodara ir plėtros kryptys (The Value, Marketing, and Development Directions of National Heritage Products). *Žemės ūkio mokslai*, Vol. 19 (1), pp. 68–79.

Savadas.lnkc.lt 2019. Nematerialaus kultūros paveldo vertybių sąvadas. Lietuvos nacionalinis kultūros centras (Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements: Lithuanian National Cultural Centre). Available at https://savadas.lnkc.lt/en/elements/element-list/, last accessed 13/8/25.

Smith, Laurajane (ed) 2014. Patrimoni immaterial: un repte per al discurs de patrimoni autoritzat? (Intangible Heritage: A Challenge for Authorised Heritage Discourse?) *Revista d'Etnologia de Catalunya*, Vol. 39, pp. 12–22.

Schneider, Thomas, & Uhlig, Mirko 2023. *Das Hanselfingerhut-Spiel in Forst. Ethnografisches Portrait und kulturhistorische Rekonstruktion eines Brauchs*. Waxmann.

Swyngedouw, Erik 2005. Governance Innovation and the Citizen. The Janus Face of Governance beyond the State. *Urban Studies*, Vol. 42, pp. 1991–2006.

Tauschek, Markus 2010. *Wertschöpfung aus Tradition. Der Karneval von Binche und die Konstituierung kulturellen Erbes*. Münster: Lit Verlag.

Tauschek, Markus 2013. *Kulturerbe: Eine Einführung. Reimer Kulturwissenschaften*. Reimer.

Trummer, Mirko 2023. Wissen, Mobilität, Idylle. Junge Hochqualifizierte zwischen "Stadtflucht" und "Landlust". In: Th. Schindler et al. (eds.) *Alltagskultur ist Alltagskultur ist Alltagskultur. Kulturkontakte – Kultur(de/re)konstrukte – Kulturverluste. Essays zu Perspektiven empirischer Kulturwissenschaft*. Jonas Verlag, pp. 70–75.

Trummer, Mirko; Uhlig, Manuel 2025. Intangible Heritage as a Factor of Cultural Resilience in Rural Areas of Germany. In: W. Christopf (ed.) *Handbook on Intangible Cultural Practices as Global Strategies for the Future. Twenty Years of the UNESCO Convention on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage. Heritage Studies*. Springer, pp. 539–559.

Wharton, Anne von Bibra & Urbanavičienė, Dalia (eds.) 2022. Dance and Economy, Dance Transmission. Proceedings of the 31st Symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology 12–18 July, 2021 Klaipėda, Lithuania. Vilnius: ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology, Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre.

Vytautas Tumėnas, PhD, is a scientific researcher at the department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Lithuanian Institute of History. His research interests include folk art studies, ethnosemiotics, the mentality and identity of communities, and regionalism.

E-mail: vytaut.tumenas@gmail.com

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0035-5253

https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.07

Family and Crisis: The Christmas Eve Dinner in Lithuania and Bulgaria

Rasa Paukštytė-Šaknienė

Senior Researcher at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Lithuanian Institute of History, Vilnius, Lithuania

E-mail: rasa.sakniene@gmail.com

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to compare the specific features of the Christmas Eve dinner celebrated in Vilnius and Sofia during the COVID-19 period. In order to reveal and compare the changes in the culinary traditions in the two capitals, my objectives are the following: (1) to explore the cultural specificities of Christmas Eve in Lithuania and Bulgaria, (2) to reveal the social aspects of pandemic 2020 Christmas Eve dinners in Sofia and Vilnius, (3) to analyse the specificities of cooking and the dishes of the 2020 Christmas Eve dinner, and (4) to compare the dishes of the 2020 Christmas Eve dinner and their correspondence with the cultural tradition of Lithuania and Bulgaria.

In this paper I conclude that the deviation from the Christmas Eve culinary tradition in both countries is slight. The tradition developed in Lithuania and Bulgaria during the socialist period and was not a consequence of COVID-19. It can therefore be concluded that the culinary tradition of Christmas Eve remains stable in times of crises, both in Bulgaria and Lithuania.

Keywords: Christmas Eve dinner, culinary traditions, Bulgarians, Lithuanians, COVID-19

Rasa Paukštytė-Šaknienė

Introduction. Regional and denominational Christmas Eve traditions

"COVID-19 challenged the entire population of the world, affected everyone, and all spheres of life, changing the content and ways of communication, cultural habits" (Kõiva 2024: 350). The pandemic has not only affected everyday life, but also important holidays, limiting people's sense of community. In both Bulgaria and Lithuania, holidays play an important role in maintaining relationships with friends (Šaknys 2018: 119–130), neighbours (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2021: 175–198) and colleagues (Šidiškienė 2018: 131–144), as well as with family and relatives (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2019: 57–70). "Ritual connects past, present, and future, abrogating history and time. Ritual always links participants to one another and often to wider collectivities that may be absent, even to the ancestors and those yet unborn." This is how John R. Gillis described the social essence of a holiday (Gillis 2004: 99). Perhaps the most striking features of harmony with the ancestors can be seen in the customs of Christmas Eve. Since ancient times, the people of Lithuania and Bulgaria would never leave the table after Christmas Eve dinner without hope that the souls of the dead would gather at the table (Dundulienė 1979: 18–19; Kudirka 1993: 119–122; Bŭlgarski tsŭrkoven i etnokalendar 2018: 378; Dimitrova, Antonova, Paprikova-Krutilin 2019: 15). In Racho Slaveĭkov's book *Bulgarian Folk Customs and Beliefs* first published in 1924, Christmas Eve, also called Small Christmas (Малка Коледа), is described in greater detail than Christmas itself (Slaveĭkov 2012: 9–20, 158–160). In the first monograph devoted exclusively to Christmas (Kudirka 1993), the same can be seen in Lithuania.

When people talk about Christmas in Lithuania, they usually focus on the day before, i.e., Christmas Eve dinner. It is not even a separate holiday and was not called a holiday in the past. Ethnographic material shows that in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, Christmas Eve was seen only as the eve of Christmas and was traditionally perceived as a ritual fasting dinner without meat, milk, or eggs (Kudirka 1993: 64–85). The 1925 and 1930 laws on holidays and rest for the Republic of Lithuania did not designate Christmas Eve as a holiday, although it did distinguish it as a non-working day for public and local municipal institutions (Švenčių ir poilsio... 1925; Švenčių ir

poilsio... 1930). In Soviet Lithuania, Christmas, just like other religious festivals, was not tolerated. Ethnological research shows that a considerable number of people were forced to have their Christmas Eve dinner secretly at that time (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2016: 10–11). When Lithuania regained its independence in 1990, Christmas was restored to the status of public holiday: the two days of Christmas were declared public holidays, and in 2012 Christmas Eve was also declared a non-working day, i.e., a public holiday included in the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania. Since all non-working days in Lithuania have been called public holidays since 1990, Christmas Eve also became a standalone holiday.

The majority of the population of Lithuania are Catholic, but other denominations have also lived here since ancient times.[1] The Christmas Eve of the Lithuanian Evangelical Lutherans and Reformed Evangelicals, neither of whom observe fasting, differs from that of the Catholics (for example Kudirka 1994: 20–22; Kavaliauskienė 2024: 368–369); meanwhile, according to ethnologist Juozas Kudirka, Orthodox Christmas Eve is similar to that of the Catholics although celebrated according to the Julian calendar (Kudirka 1994: 22). As for Bulgarians, the majority of the population are Orthodox, although they celebrate Christmas according to the Gregorian calendar as Catholics do. Christmas Eve is defined as "the evening before Christmas when the whole family gathers for a festive dinner" (Benina-Marinkova Dimitrova 2019: 15). In Bulgaria, as in Lithuania, Christmas Eve is recognised as a standalone holiday separate from Christmas (*Bŭlgarski ofitsialni praznitsi*).

Some Orthodox countries in Europe celebrate Christmas at the same time as Catholics. Christmas Eve is celebrated on 24th December, but is a public holiday in only a limited number of countries. In addition to Lithuania and Bulgaria, Christmas Eve is a public holiday in Czechia, Iceland, Portugal, Slovakia, Hungary, Finland, and Estonia. On the one hand, the fact that Christmas Eve was given the status of public holiday shows its significance in the calendar year. On the other hand, an official day off provides one with an opportunity to prepare for Christmas Eve dinner and for the family and relatives to gather in preparation for Christmas. This is especially true for families whose members live in another city or abroad.

As I have already mentioned, Christmas Eve is celebrated not only in the countries dominated by Catholic and Orthodox religions, but also by Evangelical Lutheran religions. Yet as a celebration that consolidates the family as

a whole, Christmas Eve dinner can vary from country to country in terms of the dishes eaten. According to Helene Henderson, meat dishes are eaten at Christmas Eve dinner in Denmark, Finland, France, Latvia, Estonia, and even Italy (Henderson 2005: 110–111). On the other hand, Henderson argues that despite its Christian significance, Christmas Eve is associated with quite a few pagan and supernatural beliefs (Henderson 2009: 138). In this perspective, Lithuania was one of the last countries in Europe to adopt Christianity, while Bulgaria is one of the oldest Christian nations. Despite these differences, Lithuania and Bulgaria are among the few nations that celebrate Christmas Eve at a national level and uphold the tradition of the Christmas Eve dinner, which includes fasting.

The common aspects of Christmas Eve celebrations led to the extension of comparative studies in Lithuania (Vilnius) and Bulgaria (Sofia) in 2023. The starting point was the period of the COVID-19 crisis, during which the issue of how the tradition of the Christmas Eve dinner was upheld in Lithuanian and Bulgarian urban families during the pandemic period became relevant, with a focus on 2020.

In 2023, an ethnographic field study in Lithuania sought to find how Christmas Eve was celebrated 2020 during the 2020 lockdown period, a time when there was a nationwide ban on gatherings of groups larger than a single household. The study therefore aimed to find out whether Christmas Eve was celebrated at all that year and who attended the Christmas Eve dinner. Much attention was paid to the preparation of festive dishes and the specification of their range. Respondents were asked about other features of the lockdown Christmas Eve dinner and were asked to compare it with the pre-lockdown period. Forty-one respondents born between 1940 and 2001 were interviewed in Lithuania by means of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. By nationality, two were Poles (Catholics), one was Russian (Old Believer), and the rest were Lithuanians (all Catholics except for one Lutheran).

A similar study was carried out in Sofia in 2023, also after the pandemic had ended. Semi-structured interviews (with similar questions to those used for the residents of Vilnius) was conducted in Sofia with 20 respondents, all Bulgarians by nationality, born between 1945 and 1996. All were baptised in an Orthodox church, but only 16 were believers.To make my research as comprehensive as possible, I will draw on the work of earlier ethnologists and reference publications. I must note that the level of exploration of holidays

in Lithuania and Bulgaria is not equal: while in Bulgaria detailed studies of calendar holidays were carried out in the first half of the twentieth century, in Lithuania this happened as late as the 1980s. Among the Bulgarian studies, I would single out Racho Slaveĭkov's 1924 book *Bulgarian Folk Traditions and Beliefs* (cited from Slaveĭkov 2012), Christo Vakarelski's *Bulgarian Holiday Customs* (Vakarelski 1943), and Mikhail Arnaudov's *Bulgarian folk holidays: Customs, Beliefs, Songs and Entertainment throughout the Year* (Arnaudov 1943).

In Lithuania, the first ethnological book on calendar customs, *Lietuvių kalendoriniai ir agrariniai papročiai* (Lithuanian Calendar and Agrarian Customs), appeared as late as 1979 (Dundulienė 1979). More extensive research into Christmas Eve began after the restoration of Lithuania's independence in 1990 (Kudirka 1993; Kudirka 1994). The author of this paper conducted a study on Christmas Eve in Vilnius in 2012 and 2013 (Lithuanians, Poles and Russians were interviewed). The study identified the dominant Christmas Eve dishes in all three ethnic groups. Other aspects of Christmas Eve celebrations were also analysed. A survey of the residents of Vilnius revealed the continuity of the Christmas Eve tradition (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2016: 29–74). The article by ethnologist Dalia Senvaitytė is also relevant for a comparison of the situation in Lithuania and Bulgaria, in which, based on an empirical study conducted in 2010, she discusses the features of the collective (national, cultural and religious) identity of Bulgarian and Lithuanian students and the expression of those features. Senvaitytė's comparative study showed that in the early twentieth century, Christmas was the most widely observed holiday both in Lithuania and Bulgaria (Senvaitytė 2011: 476–487). I devoted two more articles to the analysis of the festivals celebrated by families in Vilnius and Sofia (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2018: 58–72, Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2019: 57–70). In my research, I examined Christmas Eve alongside other calendar holidays. Based on field research conducted in Vilnius from 2012 to 2016 and Sofia in 2015, I found many common features in the celebration of Christmas Eve (Lith. *Kūčios*, Bul. *Бъдни вечер*) and Christmas (Lith. *Kalėdos*, Bul. *Коледа*). For example, similar attitudes towards festive traditions were revealed among the residents of both Vilnius and Sofia. My fieldwork showed that among the respondents in both countries there were those who said that today's urban residents had hardly any traditions, and those who stated the opposite, that their families celebrated the way their parents and grandparents did (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2018: 58). It should be stressed that both countries were affected by the policy of atheisation during

the period of socialism, when some families had to celebrate Christmas Eve and Christmas Day in secret. Yet in both countries, the Christmas Eve dinner made up of fasting dishes (in line with different Catholic and Orthodox traditions) has survived, the only difference being the traditionally dominant number of the dishes: an even number among Lithuanians (most often twelve), and an odd number among Bulgarians (seven, nine, eleven).[2] It is also significant that my fieldwork shows that denominational affiliation is not important for the Christmas Eve dinner because Orthodox Christians in Sofia attach as much importance to Christmas Eve dinner as the Catholics in Vilnius. At the same time Orthodox and Old Believers in Vilnius do not attach significance to this holiday and give priority only to Christmas, which is celebrated according to the Julian calendar (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2018: 58–72). In another article devoted exclusively to the Christmas holiday, I also present research conclusions to the effect that both Lithuanians and Bulgarians place too much importance on the Christmas Eve dinner and have preserved strong traditional features of the celebration, while analysis of ancient Lithuanian and Bulgarian festivals possibly reveals certain similarities that were preserved irrespective of geographic environment, history, ethnic (Baltic or Slavic) and religious (Catholic or Orthodox) background (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2019: 57–70).

The aim of this paper is to compare the specific features of the Christmas Eve dinner celebrated in Vilnius and Sofia during the COVID-19 period. In order to reveal and compare the changes in the culinary traditions of the Christmas Eve table in the two capitals during the COVID-19 pandemic, my objectives are the following: (1) to explore the cultural specificities of Christmas Eve in Lithuania and Bulgaria, (2) to reveal the social aspects of pandemic 2020 Christmas Eve dinners in Sofia and Vilnius, (3) to analyse the specificities of cooking and the dishes of the 2020 Christmas Eve dinner, and (4) to compare the dishes of the 2020 Christmas Eve dinner and their correspondence with the cultural tradition of Lithuania and Bulgaria.

The 2020 Pandemic Christmas Eve in Bulgaria and Lithuania: Mobility and participation in the celebration

In 2020, the Lithuanian public, just like people all over the world, encountered an unprecedented situation for the first time. During the pandemic and especially during the lockdown, the 'relocation' of workplaces, schools, and kindergartens to home settings became a challenge for many. We can only imagine how difficult family life must have become in trying to define the boundaries between parents' work, children's schooling, holidays, and leisure time. I agree with the ethnologist Mila Maeva's argument that the impact of the pandemic was important not only for different types of local community and group, but above all for the family. Although the pandemic had created a crisis, families and family structures were able to adopt different coping mechanisms to deal with it. On the one hand, one can see the mobilisation of social support in this process; on the other hand, the creation of a sense of security and harmony through various rituals is observed (Maeva 2022: 128). One of the strongest factors consolidating families were the celebrations that took place in the family. The introduction of various restrictions, bans and lockdowns in everyday life to deal with the crisis situation caused by COVID-19 naturally raised the question of how holidays would be celebrated.In Bulgaria and Lithuania, as in many other countries at the time, the lockdowns and restrictions that were imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the spatial mobility of family members and relatives. This brought certain adjustments to family and calendar celebrations at home by changing the number of participants, the food prepared, and socialising traditions during the holidays. For example, as shown in the study by Bulgarian ethnologists Ivaïlo Markov and Desislava Pileva, at the Easter celebrations of 2020 (during the first lockdown), there was a decrease in family members being able to celebrate together and also meet up with freinds (Markov, Pileva 2021: 68).

On 28 November 2020, a second lockdown was declared in Bulgaria, which was described as partial because it was not as strict as the first (13 March–13 May 2020). The lockdown was to last until almost Christmas, i.e., 18 December 2020, but was extended until 31 January 2021 (COVID-19 pandemic in Bulgaria). However, the field research data shows that Christmas Eve in Bulgaria was less socially restricted than Easter.

How was Christmas Eve 2020 celebrated in Sofia? While many things retained the traditional aspects of the Christmas Eve dinner, this time it was different. According to a Bulgarian woman born in 1972,

> ... although the food did not differ, Christmas Eve became more memorable. The pandemic made it holier. Many turned to prayer that night wishing for the pandemic to end and people not to die. There was more serenity, concentration, prayers. It was a difficult time, and it is not pleasant to remember it now.

A woman born in 1979 said that the dinner was

> the same as every year, but the pandemic added an extra layer of stress, and it was harder to shop for food and gifts. If one got sick, one was quarantined for two weeks and couldn't leave the house. In the shops, there were time slots for older people to shop, and the rest for everyone. It was a difficult time.

According to the study, Christmas Eve 2020 was celebrated by all respondents in Sofia, both believers and non-believers. According to a man born in 1953 (baptised Orthodox but currently a non-believer), "Christmas Eve is a family celebration. Believer or not, everyone celebrates. Such is the tradition. The religious go to Orthodox church to pray on Christmas Eve, others keep it as a family tradition. And no matter, pandemic or not."

The study showed that in Sofia, the majority of respondents celebrated pandemic Christmas Eve as before, without any inconvenience. According to the respondents, 'it was just as always'. A male respondent (b. 1988) said that Christmas Eve was celebrated as it was every year, and, in his opinion, there was no lockdown at the time. After all, people could visit each other. A female respondent (b. 1984) said that she had celebrated Christmas Eve with her parents and relatives, nine people came together to celebrate, as always.

Thus, in the absence of the ban on contact in the home environment with those who did not share that household, some respondents said they were not even aware of the lockdown at the time. The lockdown became obvious when demands were voiced to restrict socialising in larger groups, something that happened at Easter. According to a female respondent (b. 1945), "there was no lockdown on Christmas Eve. The lockdown was enforced for two months in spring [2020]. The authorities allowed Easter to be celebrated in only one

house, in only one family. Hadn't seen her children for two months, even though they live next door."

One male respondent (b. 1987) made a similar claim, saying that there was no lockdown on Christmas Eve and anyone who was not sick could celebrate. This shows that despite the official lockdown, the celebration of Christmas Eve in 2020 was not strictly regulated inside the country. However, some respondents claimed that because of the pandemic, Christmas Eve celebration was restricted to only immediate family or to only five or six people. Visiting public spaces such as restaurants was forbidden during this lockdown. This restriction hardly affected the lockdown Christmas Eve of 2020, as Christmas Eve is seen as a family celebration; thus, according to the respondents, there was no need to invite friends or celebrate in a restaurant.However, the respondents whose family members lived in different countries or other cities in Bulgaria experienced more lockdown restrictions and mobility inconveniences. A Bulgarian female respondent born in 1981 and living in Switzerland (she was visiting Sofia at the time of the survey) said that she usually celebrated Christmas Eve in Sofia with her parents, or her parents visited her in Switzerland. On Christmas Eve 2020, she had to celebrate Christmas Eve separately, where she and her family lived at the time. Another Bulgarian woman (b. 1972) had a similar experience: her children were studying abroad at the time, they could not come home for Christmas Eve, and she was very sad about this. Those living in other parts of Bulgaria also encountered some restrictions. Another female respondent (b. 1977) said that her family and her parents celebrated Christmas Eve separately:

> Yes, I was scared for my parents, they live in Burgas. I celebrated Christmas Eve with my sister's family, they live in Sofia. They were not afraid of getting infected. The lockdown was in effect on Christmas Eve, but it didn't restrict social life too much. We lived as usual.

Even in the absence of restrictions, even people living in the same city were not always able to celebrate Christmas Eve as usual because of the spread of COVID-19. A female respondent (b. 1950) said that she had contracted coronavirus at that time, so she stayed with her husband, their children could not visit them as they usually did. Another female respondent (b. 1979) said that her family was also in a difficult situation. Both of her children contracted

coronavirus over the Christmas period. Her mother was also sick at the time, and her brother had to come over to look after her.

To sum up, accounts from those interviewed in Sofia indicate that although Christmas Eve in 2020 was celebrated "as usual", some families did so in a smaller social circle than before the pandemic. Of all the respondents, 40% claimed to have celebrated Christmas Eve not only with their own family but also with their parents' families (in two cases, with the families of their and their spouse's parents), while 15% mentioned that their immediate family and the family of a sibling had been present. Only in a couple of cases did close relatives and friends celebrate together. The biggest problem was travelling to or from another city (or country). We can therefore assert that in almost a third of families, Christmas Eve during the pandemic brought fewer close people together than in previous years.

Meanwhile, in Lithuania, compared to Bulgaria, lockdowns were longer and people experienced more social restrictions, which also affected holidays. On 14 March 2020, the Lithuanian government issued Decree No. 207 on the declaration of a lockdown in the territory of the Republic of Lithuania, which entered into force on 16 March 2020 for two weeks and was subsequently extended until 17 June. On 4 November 2020, a general quarantine was re-imposed until 1 July 2021. The application of restrictions and bans was not uniform throughout the period, with the cultural and entertainment sphere suffering most. Travel bans were further intensified during the festive periods, at Easter 2000, in late 2020 and early 2021 (restricting Christmas and New Year celebrations), and at Easter 2021, when inter-municipality travel was banned. The authorities ordered that Christmas Eve and Christmas 2020 should only be celebrated in the company of one household, i.e., one's own family, and that contact with other households was forbidden. Such households included both large families and single people (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2023: 122). As the 2023 study in Vilnius showed, this also determined the composition of the participants in the Christmas Eve celebration. For most residents of Vilnius, Christmas Eve 2020 was different from pre-quarantine in several respects. First of all, because of the lockdown restrictions, they celebrated Christmas Eve in a smaller circle of relatives than before the lockdown. In the vast majority of cases, the Christmas Eve dinner was eaten only by people living in one family, i.e., in one household. As many as five out of 41 Vilniusites spent Christmas Eve alone, i.e., in a single-person household. Another ten respondents reported

celebrating with two people (because that was how many people were in one household). For many, the loss of face-to-face interaction on Christmas Eve was painful. To protect their elderly parents from possible infection, people left them to celebrate Christmas Eve by themselves. A female respondent (b. 1968) said she had to celebrate alone because her daughter could not come over because of lockdown travel bans. Another aspect that emerged came from the respondents who had lost physical contact with their next of kin (even if they did not practice such interaction before the pandemic) and compensated by choosing virtual methods of communication. A woman born in 1973 said that she had been in virtual contact with relatives that evening who were not only in Vilnius but also in Vilnius district and London. For many, the lack of communication was replaced by a phone call, Skype, Messenger, or a short meeting with children or relatives in the garden or at the door of a flat. Yet there were also some families, just a few, admittedly, who came together, as they had been doing every year, disregarding the bans and the fear of being infected (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2023: 122–123).

Summing up the experience of the residents of Sofia and Vilnius, the 2020 lockdown in Lithuania was much stricter and brought more noticeable changes to the Christmas Eve tradition than in Bulgaria. Restricting the celebrations to one household forced almost all Vilniusites to celebrate in a much smaller circle than under normal circumstances. In contrast, in Sofia similar restrictions were more common among those whose relatives lived abroad or in another city in Bulgaria. In Sofia, a third of the families surveyed had fewer people for the Christmas Eve dinner than before the pandemic. In Lithuania, the strict lockdown created a demand for virtual communication, which was used by many a family. Respondents in Sofia did not accentuate this mode of interaction.

Christmas Eve 2020 in Bulgaria and Lithuania: The food and the place of celebration

All twenty respondents interviewed in Sofia claimed that their families followed the tradition of entrusting the cooking to the women and, in some families, keeping the tradition of the oldest woman in the family cooking Christmas Eve dishes. The role of men also remains significant, mainly in various supporting activities. For example, according to a female respondent born in 1950, a woman

had always cooked Christmas Eve meals in her family. Previously, when her parents were still alive, she used to celebrate Christmas Eve at her parents' house, and her mother would cook. In their family, bringing food when you come to another home to celebrate was not accepted. On Christmas Eve, all the food is provided exclusively by the hosts. She was already a widow at the time of the survey, so she took care of everything, including cooking. When her husband was still alive, he always helped her shop for food. A male respondent (b. 1963) also pointed out that although women always cooked the festive dishes, men also helped. For example, he helped with buying food and bringing it home. In his family, his mother cooked Christmas Eve dinner for as long as she was physically capable, now his wife had taken this over. The study showed that the Bulgarian tradition was also upheld when living abroad. According to the female respondent (b. 1981) living in Switzerland, when her mother came to visit, the Christmas Eve dinner would be cooked by all the women present, although sometimes men helped too. It is obvious that although women play a dominant role in the preparation of food in some families, men are also involved, and not only in the menial tasks but also in the preparation of the festive meal. A female respondent born in 1996 said that her father would also help make one dish or another. A male respondent (b. 1957) believes that while both women and men can cook, in Bulgaria it is traditionally women who do. According to a female respondent born in 1980, Christmas Eve dinner is cooked by all women: her mother, herself, her godmother, and her sister-in-law. A male respondent born in 1952 said that when Christmas Eve was celebrated at home, his wife cooked and their daughter helped. If the celebration took place at his parents-in-law, his mother-in-law did all the cooking, and his wife brought a dish to her parents' home. If, conversely, Christmas Eve was celebrated in their place, then his mother-in-law contributed a dish. Thus, in some families contributing to festive dishes is traditionally accepted. A female respondent (b. 1990) said that although all cooking was done by the woman in whose house the holiday was celebrated, other women could also contribute a dish each. No matter in whose house they celebrated, the tradition of her family was that the women of all the families who come for dinner brought food. Despite some variation the predominant answer was that the dishes were prepared by the oldest woman in the house where Christmas Eve was celebrated.

However, some respondents were forced to disrupt their routines and experience the inconvenience of the pandemic due to COVID-19. A female respond-

ent (b. 1979) said that during the pandemic on Christmas Eve, she had taken over the cooking of the festive dishes as her mother was ill and could neither attend the Christmas Eve dinner nor cook. According to a female respondent born in 1986, she had always celebrated Christmas Eve at her parents' place, but during the pandemic (although not because of COVID) she was forced to celebrate at home. In this case, as happened every year, her mother made all the traditional Christmas Eve dishes and brought them to the respondent's house. The respondent only baked bread, although this is the main dish of Christmas Eve.

This means that in Sofia the pandemic did not change the tradition of festive cooking: Christmas Eve meals were prepared by the oldest woman in the family or by the hostess of the house in which the celebration took place, although in some families the established routine was disrupted by the pandemic.

Although in Lithuania most of the dishes are made at home, 'God's bread', or *kalėdaitis* (Christmas wafer), is brought from church, unlike in Bulgaria. Theoretically, the restriction on the participation of members of other households during the lockdown period in Lithuania should have brought more changes than in Bulgaria. The distribution of food preparation between genders showed no significant variation. Both in Bulgaria and in Lithuania, the preparation of festive dishes is the responsibility of women. The study showed that despite the lockdown, cooking traditionally remained the domain of female competence, because only 29% of the respondents indicated that their husbands, children or family members contributed to the preparation of Christmas Eve dishes (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2023: 123). In fact, some families even have a tradition of distributing the cooking of dishes among family members. For example, in the family of a woman born in 1974, her husband usually makes cranberry pudding and poppy seed milk, not because of lockdown but because of family tradition: she cooks some dishes, her husband prepares others, and the children also cook something (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2023: 124). The Bulgarian tradition of entrusting the cooking of the festive dishes to the oldest woman in the family is also present in Lithuania. There has always been a tradition for children and grandchildren to gather at the parents' home for Christmas Eve dinner, which means that the oldest woman in the family would prepare the food. Recently, there has been a growing urban trend when families gathering for a shared dinner decide in advance which dishes they will cook, thus forming a potluck Christmas Eve table.

Adjustments were made to some celebrations during the lockdown period as sometimes just a single person celebrated Christmas Eve. According to a respondent born in 1996, "although I had Christmas Eve dinner alone, I still made twelve dishes, but in very small portions. I didn't cook all the dishes; I bought some already made." Unlike in Bulgaria, Lithuanian respondents tended to emphasise a stable number of Christmas Eve dishes: twelve. For example, a female respondent from Vilnius (b. 1966) said: "there were fewer people at the Christmas Eve table then, but there were still twelve dished, as appropriate."A woman born in 1963 said that she did not see any differences between the dishes, but "I had to cook them all myself, when in the past we used to decide between families celebrating together who would cook what". Another female respondent said that "the only difference that year was that during the lockdown we couldn't all gather at my mother's and had to cook all the dishes separately". A respondent born in 1994 was nostalgic:

> During the lockdown, some of the foodstuffs for the Christmas Eve table were bought from a shop, because when we cooked dinner at my parents' we used some products that we had grown on our farm. Most importantly, I didn't have a *kalėdaitis* [Christmas wafer], which my parents used to take care of [i.e. bring from church].

On the other hand, to compensate for the change, they shared foodstuffs or ready-made dishes whenever possible. Most often the exchanges took place outside the house or even at the door of a flat. A female respondent from Vilnius (b. 1963) said that she had been handed *kūčiukai* (Christmas Eve biscuits) baked by her mother. A female respondent born in 1968 said that that year she also ate mushrooms and *kūčiukai* gifted to her by a friend. For some female respondents, the pandemic allowed them to recall the traditions of their parents' family rather than those of their in-laws. A female respondent born in 1974 said that for her, the Christmas Eve of 2020 was some sort of a shift, a change: "it was great to celebrate with just my family, the way we wanted and imagined it". After all, before the lockdown her family used to celebrate Christmas Eve with her husband's family. Now she remembered her childhood and tried to prepare the dishes her mother used to make (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2023: 129).

In both countries, the pandemic and the lockdown led to some adjustments in food preparation and the place of celebration. Yet as the cases of Sofia and Vilnius show, the preparation of Christmas Eve dishes remains women's respon-

sibility, although men also contributed to the festive dinner. And the difficulties of the pandemic, according to some Bulgarian men, made their help even more significant. In Lithuania, a strict lockdown forced people to celebrate in smaller groups than usual, but it did not change the number of Christmas Eve dishes; it only reduced the quantity of food prepared. Meanwhile, Bulgarians had fewer restrictions on Christmas Eve 2020.

Christmas Eve 2020 dishes in Bulgaria and Lithuania

Speaking of shopping difficulties during the pandemic, such as the need to wear masks and the limited time available for shopping, which led to more stress, all the respondents interviewed in Sofia said that Christmas Eve food remained unchanged. Some respondents confirmed that they were fasting as usual, with Christmas Eve dishes cooked without meat, fish, milk, or eggs. A female respondent (b. 1996) pointed out that both believers and non-believers follow this order as it is simply tradition. It is true that in some cases there had been slight departures from this tradition, but it is likely they were not pandemic-related. A male respondent born in 1980 said he sometimes used dairy produce. A female respondent born in 1986 also pointed to certain changes in the tradition of choosing the time of Christmas Eve dinner:

> The Christmas Eve dinner should not be eaten until 8 pm – that's what religion says one should do. But our family doesn't follow this. But in line with religion, our family eats only fasting dishes that evening. Nothing with meat, only with oil.

Other respondents also reported not eating meat, fish, dairy or egg dishes.

As in Bulgaria, in Lithuania the fasting requirement for Catholics was observed in most cases (unlike the Orthodox, Catholics are allowed to eat fish). For example, according to a female respondent from Vilnius (b. 1954), "all Christmas Eve dishes are made with oil, there is no animal fat and no meat". She said that dishes cooked in this way are served together only on Christmas Eve. A female respondent from Vilnius (b. 1968) said that the dishes of the Christmas Eve dinner are never seasoned with mayonnaise, nor are eggs added. Although some families use dairy products in cooking dishes, this is an exception rather

than the rule. No respondents in either Lithuania or Bulgaria mentioned meat among their Christmas Eve dishes.

Let us take a look at the dishes of Christmas Eve 2020 in families in Sofia and Vilnius. According to a male respondent (b. 1963), different traditions exist in different places in Bulgaria, meaning that the dishes can also differ. His family customs came with him from the place of his birth. Where he comes from, they would prepare spiced beans for Christmas Eve dinner, which they would spread on bread and eat. To identify the most popular Christmas Eve dishes, the respondents were asked to tick the dishes eaten in their families. They were also asked to name three most important dishes without which the Christmas Eve table is unthinkable. *Sarmi* (***Сарми***, cabbage or vine leaves stuffed with rice or groats) dominated among the answers with 80% of respondents choosing this, ritual bread (***питка за Бъдни вечер***) and pepper stuffed with rice or beans (***пълнени пиперки*** (***чушки***)) were selected by 75% of the respondents, walnuts (*орехи*) by 70%, boiled sweetened dried fruit compote (*ошав*) by 65%, boiled beans (***варен фасул***) and pumpkin pie (***тиквеник за Бъдни вечер***) by 60% each, garlic (***чесън***) by 55%, honey (***мед***) by 50%, fortune bread (***питка с късмети***) by 45%, winter salad (***зимна салата***) by 35%, boiled wheat (***варено жито***) by 30%, sauerkraut with beans (***кисело зеле с боб***) by 25%, wine (***вино***) and rakia (***ракия***) 35% each, *banitsa* (***баница***) 25%, and in isolated cases baklava (***баклава***) 15% , fresh fruit (***пресни плодове***), and a potato dish (***ястие с картофи***) 5% each.

As we can see, Christmas Eve is dominated by cereals, fruit, and vegetables, as well as uncultured natural products such as nuts and honey. Orthodox fasting forbids consumption of fish, and this has shaped Bulgarian ritual Christmas Eve cuisine. Although *sarmi* was the most frequently mentioned dish, and stuffed pepper was mentioned as one of the three most important dishes, the responses that distinguished between ritual bread and fortune bread suggest that in the majority of cases respondents referred to the same product eaten at the start of the Christmas Eve dinner.

In Lithuania, the Christmas Eve dinner starts in a similar way with the breaking of the Christmas wafer (*kalėdaitis*, *plotkelė*), a dish made of fine flour. However, this ritual dish is apparently not listed as a separate dish by most respondents. *Kūčiukas* (Christmas Eve biscuit), another very important Christmas Eve dish, is also made of cereals (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2023: 128).

Fish dishes dominated the Christmas Eve dinner among Vilnius residents in 2020. One or several herring dishes were mentioned by 97% of respondents, and 70% indicated they prepared fish in different ways. As many as 59% of Vilniusites had mushrooms dishes on their Christmas Eve table. Mushrooms were served as a separate dish, but even more often they were eaten with other dishes. Sixty-five per cent of the respondents reported they could not imagine the Christmas Eve table without *kūčiukai*. A third of them mentioned that at the Christmas Eve dinner, they only ate *kūčiukai* with poppy seed milk. Similarly, 68% of the respondents reported making *kisielius* (kissel), mainly from cranberries, and only once from oats, as a must-have at Christmas Eve dinner. Dried fruit compote, a cranberry drink, a bread drink (*gira*), sweetened water (without poppy seeds) to soak the *kūčiukai*, as well as coffee, tea, hot chocolate, juice, and red wine were also mentioned among the beverages served at the Christmas Eve dinner. Beverages are mentioned quite rarely and may not have been considered equivalent to dishes.

Traditionally, the Vilniusites place nuts on the Christmas Eve table (30% of respondents). Dried fruit is mentioned several times, with occasional mentions of prunes and dried fruit compote, or as a topping on other dishes. Honey was served as a separate dish in 8% of the families surveyed, and a wheat mixture called *kūčia* was also common. Some respondents mentioned pearl barley soaked in honey (*grucė*). Slightly more often they reported that hemp seeds were placed on the Christmas Eve table. A common dish was small buns with such fillings as poppy seeds, bananas, raisins, apples, and cabbage.

Forty six percent of Vilniusites mentioned mixed salads as one of the most frequent Christmas Eve dishes, something that was common during the Soviet period. In some instances a crossing of the boundaries of fasting is observed. For example, bread, cheese and apple salad, or white salad with mayonnaise were prepared. In most cases, however, mixed salads can be classified as fasting as they are often made from fresh or pickled (often home grown) vegetables, and vegetable oil is used to flavour them, for example, green cabbage, or sauerkraut, or a mixture of both. It turns out that Vilniusites also like salads with other vegetables, with as many as 35% of respondents citing beetroot salad as a traditional Christmas Eve dinner dish in their families. Eleven percent of respondents made salads with beans (beans cooked separately were mentioned only once), 8% with cooked peas (with mashed peas in some cases), and 24% with potatoes. Carrots as an ingredient of a dish with herring or in a salad were

mentioned by three people, and cucumbers by only one person; apples were mentioned by 19% of the respondents, but only in less than half of the cases were they mentioned as a separate dish. Salads made of various fresh vegetables were mentioned sporadically, and as many as 27% put fruit on the Christmas Eve table. Traditionally, bread as a stand-alone product or used in the preparation of salads (22%) was given a prominent place on the Christmas Eve table. As with the residents of Sophia, the Vilniusites also occasionally put non-fasting foods on the table, including such items as chicken and cooked ham. On Christmas Eve, such dishes as *šakotis* (tree cake), vegan *žagarėliai* (angel wings), or fruit jelly, which are typical of other holidays, are rarely put on the table. Alcoholic beverages such as wine were mentioned only in few cases.

Among the three most important dishes, Vilniusites prioritised fish (74% of respondents mentioned fish dishes). Herring (71%) and other fish (28%) are the most frequently chosen dishes. In addition to mushroom dishes made with herring (15%), there were also mushroom buns (8%), occasionally dumplings with dried boletus filling, mushroom brine (*rasalas*), fried mushrooms with cabbage or scones with mushroom sauce, and, presumably, mushroom dishes, such as beetroot broth with mushroom-filled dumplings (*ausytės*). Dishes with mushrooms were mentioned by 31% of respondents. The importance of *kūčiukai* (Christmas Eve biscuits) is significant for Vilniusites, with 56% of respondents mentioning them as a separate dish. For 31% of the respondents, poppy seed milk remains significant; more than half (58%) indicated that it was eaten together with *kūčiukai*. A traditional dish that has retained its position on the Vilniusite table is *kisielius* (kissel), which was served in 28% of the respondents' families (half of these said that they cooked specifically cranberry kissel). Only one respondent mentioned nuts, which are often put on the Christmas Eve table in rural Lithuania. According to a Vilniusite, "they simply have to be on the table". Vegetable dishes such as cabbage buns or simply fried cabbage could be called traditional dishes, as could cereal dishes such as fried 'mild-tasting pancakes' and buns without filling, and hemp and pearl barley (*grucė*, which was also eaten on Christmas Eve in the past). Only 8% of respondents chose *kūčia* (grain mixed with honey) as an important cereal dish. Ten per cent of respondents identified *kalėdaitis*, the Christmas wafer, the breaking of which starts the celebration of Christmas Eve, as an important attribute of the Christmas Eve dinner. Salads were mentioned as a non-traditional dish, yet 18% of Vilniusites ranked them among one of the three most important dishes served

on a modern Christmas Eve table. However, the respondents who prioritised salads emphasised that in their families Christmas Eve dishes were never seasoned with mayonnaise, nor were eggs added to other dishes. They could therefore be called fasting dishes. A look at the three most important dishes for Christmas Eve dinner in 2020 confirms the assumption that traditional fasting Christmas Eve dishes still dominate among the residents of Vilnius.

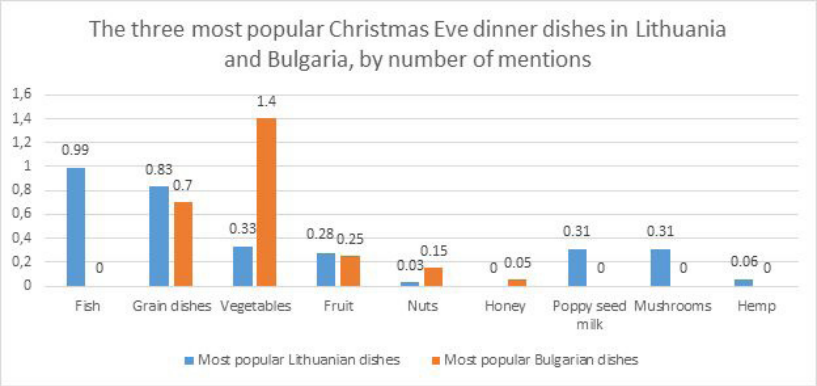
The study shows that despite the change in the number of participants in the celebration, traditional Christmas Eve dishes were still eaten during the COVID-19 pandemic both in Bulgaria and in Lithuania.

The uniqueness of Bulgarian and Lithuanian Christmas Eve dishes and their conformity with tradition

The main differences between the structure of Bulgarian and Lithuanian Christmas Eve dishes are due to religion and natural conditions. The Catholic faith, unlike Orthodoxy, accepts fish as a fasting food. Nevertheless, Christmas Eve customs in both countries are united by bread. The main Bulgarian Christmas Eve dish is bread, which is eaten at the start of the Christmas Eve dinner. In Bulgaria, the beginning of the celebration is associated with the ritual breaking of bread that has an object or product baked or hidden in it, which is used to predict the success of the year ahead. For example, someone who finds a coin believs she or he will be rich. A man born in 1953, a non-believer, said that his wife baked the ritual bread, and all those who baked bread at home marked it with the sign of the cross. At the start of the Christmas Eve dinner, the oldest member of the family shares bread with others. Bread functions as a central food in many Bulgarian calendar and family celebrations (Mikov 2022).

Bread has had important ritual functions in Lithuania (Dundulienė 1989; Marcinkevičienė 2014). In Lithuania, we know of cases where the Christmas Eve dinner was started with bread and salt, although the popularity of *kalėdaičiai* (Christmas wafers) made from the finest flour and imprinted with biblical imagery spread under the influence of religion. These wafers used to be called Christ's bread (Dundulienė 1989: 60). Most families start Christmas Eve by eating *kalėdaičiai*, although the majority of respondents did not treat *kalėdaičiai* as food. The popular Lithuanian *kūčiukai*, made from yeast dough and poppy seeds, also symbolise small loaves of bread.

We also see certain Christian symbols in Bulgarian bread. The main loaf of Christmas Eve bread is decorated with various figures made of dough, such as two birds, a bunch of grapes, a sheaf of wheat, a lamb, a plough, a ploughman, or anything else related to the family or the family's economic activity in the hope for a rich and fertile year (Prodanova 2013: 202).



Vegetable dishes were less common in Lithuania, with the difference due to the climatic conditions as no peppers or grapes were grown in Lithuania. A dish typical of Lithuania is poppy seed milk[3] (a non-alcoholic drink made from poppy seeds, boiled chilled water, and sugar or honey), while the ritual cuisine of both countries is linked by the grain dish *kūčia* (Lith.) and ***варено жито*** (Bul.). In both countries, ingredients for Christmas Eve dishes found in the wild, such as nuts and honey, are rare (cf. Marcinkevičienė, Šemetaitė, Vakarinienė 2019: 223–224, 238–240). Meanwhile, mushrooms used as a dish, a filling, a sauce, and even mushroom brine, are an ingredient that is only important only to Vilniusites. Small changes to Christmas Eve dinner dishes are found in both Lithuania and Bulgaria, although these changes are never to the three most important dishes. Alcoholic beverages such as wine and beer are not mentioned among the main dishes. It can therefore be argued that deviation from the Christmas Eve culinary tradition is slight and happened during the socialist period rather than as a consequence of COVID-19. Therefore, the stability of the culinary tradition in times of crisis points to the preservation of both Bulgarian and Lithuanian ethnic cultural traditions, even when the composition of the participants changes and the upholders of and successors to the tradition are not present.

Conclusion

On a national level, Christmas Eve is celebrated in a small number of European countries, Lithuania and Bulgaria, where Christmas Eve is a public holiday, among them. Despite the atheist policies and restrictions of the socialist period, most people in Vilnius and Sofia still uphold the tradition of celebrating Christmas Eve with their family or the family of their next of kin (parents, grandparents, children), and of observing the fasts prescribed by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. With the change in the possibility to celebrate Christmas Eve in 2020 with relatives in another city or country (in Lithuania, with those not living in the same household) and the decrease in the number of people celebrating, the culinary tradition of Christmas Eve remained stable in both countries. Although the importance of the dishes is different (fish dominates in Lithuania and vegetables in Bulgaria), a comparison of the culinary traditions of Lithuania and Bulgaria shows many archaic grain dishes manifesting themselves in different forms (ritual bread in Bulgaria and *kalėdaitis* and *kūčiukai* in Lithuania), along with foraged products such as nuts and honey in Bulgaria and mushrooms and poppy seeds in Lithuania. In both countries, some dishes made with ingredients of animal origin are occasionally mentioned, although in neither case are they listed among the top three. It can therefore be argued that deviation from the Christmas Eve culinary tradition is slight; it developed in Lithuania and Bulgaria during the socialist period and was not a consequence of COVID-19. It can therefore be concluded that the culinary tradition of Christmas Eve remains stable in times of crisis, both in Bulgaria and Lithuania.

Notes

[1] According to the 2021 census, Roman Catholics accounted for 74.2% of the country's total population, which was 2,810,761 (Results of the 2021 Population and Housing Census of the Republic of Lithuania). The second largest religious community was Orthodox, comprising 3.8% (105,600) of the population. Less than 1% of the Lithuanian population identified as belonging to other religions: Evangelical Lutheran 0.6%, Reformed Evangelicals 0.2% of the population (Results of the 2021 Population and Housing Census of the Republic of Lithuania).

[2] Although the Bulgarian ethnologist T. A. Koleva mentions nine or twelve dishes (Koleva 1977: 272), the number twelve, as is the case in Lithuania, can be interpreted by analogies with the number of apostles or the number of months in the year (Baeva, Toncheva 2019: 231). The numbers seven and nine are also known among Bulgarian Catholics (Yankov 2003: 85). According to Juozas Kudirka, five, six, nine, and thirteen dishes could also be eaten by Lithuanian Catholics (Kudirka 1993: 62–63).

[3] I do not classify poppies as fruit.

References

Arnaudov, Mikhail 1943. *Bŭlgarski narodni prazdnitsi. Obichai, vyarvaniya, pesni i zabavi prez tsyalata godina* (Bulgarian Folk Holidays: Customs, Beliefs, Songs and Entertainment throughout the Year). Sofiya: Bŭlgarska kniga.

Baeva, Vikhra; Toncheva, Veselka 2019. *Golyama kniga Bŭlgarskite praznitsi i obichai* (The Big Book of Bulgarian Holidays and Customs). Sofiya: Pan.

Benina-Marinkova Dimitrova, Vera et. al. (eds.) 2019. *Bulgarian Calendar Holidays and Observances*. Sofia: Prof. Marinin Drinov Publishing House of Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Bŭlgarski ofitsialni praznitsi, Narodno Sŭbranie na Republika Bŭlgariya (Bulgarian public holidays, National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria). Available at: https://www.parliament.bg/bg/24 (accessed 11/06/2025).

Bŭlgarski tsŭrkoven i etnokalendar (Bulgarian Church and Ethnic Calendar). 2018. Magdalena Stoyanova (ed.). Sofiya: Millenium.

COVID-19 pandemic in Bulgaria. In: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_Bulgaria (accessed 11/06/2025).

Dundulienė, Pranė 1979. *Lietuvių kalendoriniai ir agrariniai papročiai* (Lithuanian Calendar and Agrarian Customs). Vilnius: LTSR aukštojo ir specialiojo vidurinio mokslo ministerija, Vilniaus Darbo Raudonosios Vėliavos ir Draugystės ordinų V. Kapsuko universitetas.

Dundulienė, Pranė 1989. *Duona lietuvių buityje ir papročiuose* (Bread in Lithuanian Household and Custom). Kaunas: Šviesa.

Gillis, John R. 2004. Gathering Together: Remembering Memory through Ritual. In: A. Etzioni and J. Bloom (eds.) *We Are What We Celebrate Understanding Holidays and Rituals*. New York and London: New York University Press, pp. 89–103.

Henderson, Helena. 2005. *Holidays, Festivals, and Celebrations of the World Dictionary*. Griswold, Detroit: Omnigraphics, Inc.

Henderson, Helene 2009. *Holiday Symbols and Customs*. Detroit: Omnigraphics.

Yankov, Angel 2003. *Kalendarni praznitsi i obichai na Bŭlgarite katolitsi (kraya na XIX – sredata na XX vek)* (Calendar Holidays and Customs of Bulgarian Catholics (End of the 19th – Mid-20th century)). Sofiya: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Marin Drinov".

Kavaliauskienė, Aušra Žemyna (ed.) 2024. *Prikelta atmintis:* šimtmečio *eksponatai. Reviving the Memory: Centenary Exhibits*. Klaipėda: Mažosios Lietuvos muziejus.

Kõiva, Mare 2024. COVID-19 in Saaremaa. Limited Resources and the Mechanisms for Healing and Prevention. *Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies*, Vol. 7, pp. 350–372.

Koleva, T. A. 1977. Bolgary (Bulgarians). In: S. A. Tokarev (ed.) *Kalendarnyye obychai i obryady v stranakh zarubezhnoy Yevropy XIX – nachalo XX v. Zimniye prazdniki* (Calendar Customs and Rituals in Foreign Countries in Europe in the 19th – Beginning of the 20th Centruy: Winter Festivals). Moskva: Nauka, pp. 266–283.

Kudirka, Juozas 1993. *Lietuviškos Kūčios ir Kalėdos* (Lithuanian Christmas Eve and Christmas). Vilnius: Vaga.

Kudirka, Juozas 1994. *Lietuviškos* Kūčios. *Istorinė lyginamoji medžiaga* (Lithuanian Christmas Eve: Historical Comparative Material). Vilnius: Lietuvių liaudies kultūros centras.

Maeva, Mila 2022. Family Well-being during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Bulgaria. *Psychological Research (in the Balkans)*, Vol. 25 (2), pp. 128–137. doi.org/10.7546/PsyRB.2022.25.02.03.

Marcinkevičienė, Nijolė 2014. *Nuo grūdo iki kepalo* (From Grain to Loaf). Vilnius: Žuvėdra.

Marcinkevičienė, Nijolė et. al. 2019. *Atvažiuoja Kalėdos. Advento-Kalėdų papročiai ir tautosaka* (Christmas is Coming: Advent Christmas Customs and Folklore). Vilnius: Lietuvos liaudies kultūros centras.

Markov, Ivaĭlo; Pileva, Desislava 2021. Prostranstvena mobilnost i semeĭno-rodstveni otnosheniya v usloviyata na pandemiyata ot COVID-19 (Spatial Mobility and Family Relations in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic). In: V. Baeva and A. Ilieva (eds.). *Etnologiya i epidemii. Sotsiokulturni izmereniya na pandemiyata ot COVID-19* (Ethnology and Epidemics. Sociocultural Dimensions of COVID-19). Sofiya: Izdatelstvo na BAN "Prof. Marin Drinov", pp. 61–72.

Mikov, Lyubomir 2022. *Obredni khlyabove ot Severozapadna Bŭlgariya (lokalni varianti)* (Ritual Breads of North-Western Bulgaria (Local Variants)). Sofiya: Akademično izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov".

Paukštytė-Šaknienė, Rasa 2016. Kūčios ir Kalėdos (Christmas Eve and Christmas). In: R. Paukštytė-Šaknienė (ed.) Šventės šiuolaikinėje *vilniečių* šeimoje (Holidays in the Contemporary Family of Vilnius Inhabitants). Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, pp. 30–73.

Paukštytė-Šaknienė, Rasa 2018. Vilniaus ir Sofijos gyventojų šeimos šventės (Festivals in Families in Vilnius and Sofia). *Lituanistica*, Vol. 64 (1), pp. 58–72.

Paukštytė-Šaknienė, Rasa 2019. Family Celebrations in Lithuania and Bulgaria: Ethnic, Confessional and Cultural Traits. *Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies*, Vol. 2, pp. 57–70.

Paukštytė-Šaknienė, Rasa 2021. Festive and Daily Interaction between Neighbours in Contemporary Lithuania and Bulgaria. *Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies*, Vol. 4, pp. 175–198.

Paukštytė-Šaknienė, Rasa 2023. *Vilniečių Kūčių valgiai: ar išliko tradicija XXI a. mieste?* (Vilnius Kūčių Dishes: Has the Tradition Survived in the 21st Century City?). *Lietuvos etnologija. Socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*, Vol. 23 (32), pp. 108–137.

Prodanova, Mariya 2013. *Bolgarskiye prazdniki i traditsii* (Bulgarian Holidays and Traditions). Sofia: Bard.

Results of the 2021 Population and Housing Census of the Republic of Lithuania. In: Official statistics portal. https://osp.stat.gov.lt/2021-gyventoju-ir-bustu-surasymo-rezultatai/tautybe-gimtoji-kalba-ir-tikyba) (accessed 11/06/2025). Senvaitytė, Dalia 2011. Kolektyvinio bulgarų ir lietuvių tapatumo bruožai: lyginamoji studentų požiūrio analizė (Traits of Collective Bulgarian and Lithuanian Identity: A Comparative Analysis of Students' Attitudes). *Lituanistica*, Vol. 57 (4), pp. 476–487.

Slaveĭkov, Racho 2012. *Bŭlgarski narodni obichai i vyarovaniya* (Bulgarian Folk Customs and Beliefs). Sofiya: Knigoizdatelstvo Asenevtsi.

Šaknys, Žilvytis 2018. Friendship and Spending Time with Friends in the City in Lithuania and Bulgaria. *Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies*, Vol. 1, pp. 119–130.

Šidiškienė, Irma 2018. Comparison of Co-Workers' Leisure in Sofia and Vilnius: Personal Occasions. *Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies*, Vol. 1, pp. 131–144.

Švenčių ir poilsio *įstatymas* (Law on Holidays and Rest) 1925. *Vyriausybės* žinios 02 02, pp. 1–2.

Švenčių ir poilsio *įstatymas* (Law on Holidays and Rest) 1930. *Vyriausybės* žinios 05 14, pp. 2–3.

Vakarelski, Khristo 1943. *Bŭlgarskite praznichni obichai* (Bulgarian Holiday Traditions). Sofiya: Izdatelstvo Voenno Knigoizdatelski fond.

Rasa Paukštytė-Šaknienė, PhD, is a senior researcher at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Lithuanian Institute of History. Her research interests are in the field of traditional and modern culture, the family, the

neighbourhood, ethnic minorities, ethnology of the city, the history of ethnology and festivity. She conducts fieldwork in Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Latvia and Bulgaria.

rasa.sakniene@gmail.com

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3987-8887

https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.08

The Religious Landscape in Bulgaria and Lithuania: Spiritual Resilience and Religious Practice among Academic Youth during COVID-19 and the War in Ukraine

Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė
Vytautas Magnus University, Department of Cultural Studies
E-mail: rasa.raciunaite-pauzuoliene@vdu.lt

Abstract: This article examines the spiritual resilience and religious practices of Bulgarian and Lithuanian youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis includes two periods of ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the author in Lithuania and Bulgaria between 2022 and 2024. The study aims to: analyse the manifestations of religiosity during the COVID-19 pandemic, using content analysis of scientific literature; and present the manifestations of religious and spiritual practices that emerged from an analysis of empirical ethnographic data. The results of empirical data reveal that social distancing and adaptation to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic have increased the need for religious practices and changed the expression of these practices. In conclusion, faced with the threat posed by the pandemic, academic youth have resorted to various survival strategies in the form of both traditional religious practices and alternative spiritual practices that allow them to maintain hope, meaning, emotional stability and spiritual resilience.

Keywords: spiritual resilience, religious practices, academic youth, COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, Bulgaria, Lithuania.

Habitus, or the resonant disposition, as theoretical paradigm

In the first part of this article, I would like to focus on the theoretical paradigm of *habitus*, i.e. the disposition of the collective resonant, a mode of listening and responding (Rosa 2024). The beginning of 21st century can be defined as a period marked by constant crises. Some of the main events that stuck in people's minds were September 11, 2001, when terrorists attacked the World Trade Centre in the USA, the global financial crisis of 2008, the 2015 European migrant crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, which tumbled over humanity in 2019, and the war which Russia started in Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic provoked a number of global changes: first of all a health crisis, followed by financial, political, cultural, moral and global crises (Fuchs 2021: 5).

The slowdown of real life in the physical world during the pandemic made individuals feel isolated and silenced, however, it served as the breakthrough for resonant relationships, i.e., "new forms of solidarity and friendship" with others and the world, where domination and control are surpassed by dialogue (Rosa 2020; Fuchs 2021: 27–28). On the one hand, people felt insecure having left the comfortable zone of interaction, on the other hand, they found a positive aspect to the situation: by spending time in their home environment they were able to reflect, observe the details of everyday life and fully experience every moment of their daily routine. The German sociologist Hartmut Rosa pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic made us feel as if we were in "an experimental laboratory" with the situation serving as an incentive to rethink our lives.

The present social situation is sometimes referred to as 'deadlock'. Rosa points out that our social system is permeated by the aspiration for perfection, growth and optimisation, which leads to estrangement and a lack of resonance. Such a social system lacks the ability to innovatively adapt to the challenges of the future, and is not predisposed to display 'a listening heart', which could find its response in religion, fostering the culture of dialogue, listening and reflection, enabling people to enter into relations with others and perceive the world as a place full of meaning. The potential for resonance in rituals, conscious actions and meetings is high as they enable citizens to nourish democratic sensitiveness, which might become a way out during times of instability. Rosa remarks that

if society loses this way out, "if it forgets this form of relationships, it would be lost forever" (Rosa 2022: 74).

Rosa goes on to ponder the problem of losing the experience of resonance in the context of the world gaining speed. He points out that "something new can evolve only in resonant relationships", in the moment of collective resonance when all of us are able to listen to each other, "to open up to each other and the world and thus find the answers" (Rosa 2020). Thus, something new can evolve, defined by Rosa as society's ability to invent itself anew, to experience new forms of existing in the world and interacting with each other (Rosa 2020). Rosa defines resonance as consisting of four factors: meeting; contact, or activity, which makes us active; the result of the action, i.e. transformation (when the world is perceived in a different perspective); and inaccessibility. Resonance cannot be planned: what mattered yesterday does not necessarily matter today (Rosa 2022). Rosa encourages us to look for alternative ways and forms of dwelling in the world. The most valuable relevant resources can be found in religious ideas and practices, even in the sacred spaces of cathedrals or the religious perception of time. He considers the fact that such spaces and practices are about to vanish in the Western world to be bad news (Rosa 2024). Rosa points out that the Church provides us with spaces, time, practices and ideas that enable us to form attitudes of consideration and receptivity, or *habitus* (Rosa 2024).

Research Design and Methodology

The article aims to investigate the spiritual resilience that young people developed during the COVID-19 pandemic and in light of the war Russia started in Ukraine, referring to the works of other investigators and the ethnographic data collected by the author in Kaunas and Sofia. The study aims to: analyse manifestations of religiosity and trends therein during the COVID-19 pandemic using content analysis of scientific literature; and present the manifestations of religious and spiritual practices that emerged from an analysis of empirical ethnographic data.

This article focuses on the problem of what factors have encouraged the manifestations and practices of religiosity and spirituality of young people as

they face the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

The analysis includes two periods of ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the author as part of the bilateral international Ethnicity, Religiosity and National Identity in Bulgaria and Lithuania (Traditional Elements and New Transformations) project jointly organised by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences (2022–2024). The research is new and relevant from a comparative perspective as it focuses on comparing the impact of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine on the spiritual resilience and religious practices of academic youth in two European Union countries, Lithuania and Bulgaria.

The ethnographic research was conducted in November to December 2022 in Kaunas and between April 14th and 22nd, 2024 in Sofia. The study involved 81 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students in humanities and social sciences who were studying during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bulgaria or Lithuania. Fifty students (from graduate and postgraduate study programs) of humanities at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas participated in the study. These were divided by gender as follows: 38 females, 11 males and 1 other gender. The age of the students ranged from 18 to 29. The majority of students were Lithuanians, the minority had Ukrainian or Russian background. There were 31 respondents from graduate, postgraduate, and PhD study programs in Bulgaria, all from St Kliment Ohridsky University in Sofia. The majority were Bulgarians, with a minority of Ukrainians and Russians. The genders of respondents from Bulgaria were: 22 females, 8 males and 1 other gender; their ages ranged from 17 to 35.

Adopting ethnographic research methodology, I used a questionnaire survey; conversation; semi-structured in-depth interview; observation; comparative, interpretative methods; and content analysis of scientific articles.

The issue raised is the impact of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine on the spiritual resilience of young people. The questions to be answered are: what were the challenges young people faced during the pandemic and under the conditions of the war caused by Russia in Ukraine? What are the experiences of spiritual resilience developed in the two contexts and how does religion, as a source of resilience, affect the lives of young people today?

Religion as a Source of Resilience during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on people's everyday activities and lasting habits. Bulgarian ethnologist Stamen Kanev, who studied the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic on peoples lives, observed that "everyday habits and behaviour are oriented not only towards individual life strategies – they also reflect the development of society" (Kanev 2021: 15). Another Bulgarian scholar, Georgi Kapriev, mentions several negative consequences of the pandemic on academic life: the compromise of university education during the pandemic, radical changes in social life, the devaluation of the education process, and others (Kapriev 2023: 28). The pandemic had a negative effect on economics, social and political life, and on people's religious life. Scientific research has shown that social isolation and the requirement to adjust to restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for religious traditions and determined a change in forms of expression.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Sociocultural Dimensions (Baeva & Ilieva 2021), a collection of articles by Bulgarian ethnologists, deals with the challenges of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences for social and cultural life. The authors argue that the COVID-19 pandemic changed not only established habits and daily life, but also fundamental communication models, a fundamental idea that forms part of community (Ilieva & Baeva 2021: 12). The collection deals with the issue of "distant socialisation" using digital technologies, new forms of support for collective solidarity, and the preservation of social proximity and its common responsibilities (Ilieva & Baeva 2021: 12). Bulgarian ethnologist Nevena Dimitrova reveals the challenges faced by the Orthodox Church and its ritual practices during the COVID-19 period (Dimitrova 2021).

On the one hand, during the pandemic in 2020 the Bulgarian Orthodox Church faced challenges when celebrating Palm Sunday and Easter due to social restrictions. On the other hand the COVID-19 pandemic "has created an opportunity to return to traditional religious practices, rethink them, and for new traditions to emerge" (Dimitrova 2021: 83).

Unlike in Lithuania and other European countries, when the COVID-19 pandemic started in Bulgaria, the government decided to leave places of wor-

ship – churches and mosques – open. On March 13, 2020 it introduced special measures with the aim of impeding the spread of COVID-19 in the country, including the requirement to maintain physical distance between people. Religious communities, including the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the most numerous Christian confessions in the country, were also obliged to fulfil the requirements: people had to maintain a distance of two metres during services and places of worship had to undergo regular disinfection. In addition, mourning family members had "to arrange funeral rituals strictly following the established order – the ceremony took place in the open, and could be attended by a minimal number of relatives" (Kalkandjieva 2020). Protestant pastors stopped holding services in churches and asked people to maintain physical distance when visiting them. Meanwhile "Catholic and Armenian Churches in Bulgaria started rendering services behind the closed door and broadcasting the service over the Internet" (Kalkandjieva 2020).

The restrictions introduced during the pandemic determined certain changes in Christian religious rituals, especially as concerns physical contact, singing in the choir and consuming the Eucharist (Baker et al. 2020), restrictions that persisted after the pandemic. Data shows the following consequences of these changes: 1) privatisation of religiosity; 2) asynchronic performance of religious rituals and participation in these rituals; 3) changes in the conditions of the religious environment, with the aim of using technological innovations for the dissemination of religious ideas; 4) the collaboration of religious organisations with local communities; and 5) conflicts arising between religious groups and the government including representatives of local administrations because of restrictions on social gatherings (Baker et al. 2020).

Lots of articles were written during COVID-19 analysing the significance of religion during the pandemic. They provided lots of information proving that religious and cultural beliefs have a major effect on people's attitudes and behaviour and exert positive or negative influence on individuals', and likewise society's, health (Sisti et al. 2022). The results of the investigation showed that religious institutions became both vectors for COVID-19 outbursts as well as information mediators overcoming resistance to the introduction of COVID-19 preventive measures. These studies recommended that politicians working in the field of healthcare be more sensitive and recognise the significance of religion and culture when solving complicated global health challenges (Sisti et al. 2022).

Researchers examined connections between religion, spirituality and resilience, making the conclusion that spirituality serves as a key factor in resilience, and that it is "an important resource for managing hardship" (Manning et al. 2019: 168). Several scholars have argued that resilience could be a valuable resource to help individuals "overcome adversity" and cope with complex situations (Clemons 2024: 567). Resilience could be defined as "a person's ability to overcome, manage, experience and rebound when facing adversities" (Reivich and Shatté 2002), "the capacity for recovery and maintained adaptive behaviour" upon encountering a stressful event (Garmezy, 1991: 459; Shean 2015: 8) or as "a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation" despite major assaults on the developmental process. (Luthar et al. 2000: 543)

Religion could be said to be one of the sources of resilience that adds to a person's emotional stability and value-based resilience. A religious or philosophical world outlook is an important part of human life that influences a person's behaviour, emotional stability, the maturity of their personality, self-respect and satisfaction (Rahman et al. 2020: 1139). "Religion is the essential element nourishing and testifying to the person's spiritual health" (Papazoglou et al. 2021: 3224). Investigations conducted in recent years have shown that religious beliefs and practices are closely related to aspects of health, for example, the ability to cope with illness, recover after an operation and view a complicated state of health in a positive light (Kowalczyk et al. 2020).

The majority of scientists agree that spiritual health is more than a system based on personal values and principles of faith: it brings the person closer to the essence of their faith. Spiritual health manifests itself as service to the community, sharing one's beliefs and values, and the manner of worship (Papazoglou et al. 2021: 3224). It plays an important role while nourishing emotional and psychic well-being and even contributes to physical convalescence. Former investigations showed that participation in religious rituals and pilgrimages can reinforce social relations and foster a sense of belonging, which is an indispensable condition for ensuring one's physical, mental and spiritual health and well-being (ibid.).

The group of Orthodox investigators who analysed the impact of COVID-19 on the ways in which religiosity manifests itself revealed that faithful believers strongly attached to Church tradition prohibited from attending services during the pandemic, or from going on pilgrimage, experienced negative effects on their spiritual health (Papazoglou et al. 2021: 3224). Research conducted

by Polish scientists showed that in spite of a sense of human fragility, social isolation, fear and helplessness, the experience of the pandemic served as an incentive to spiritual renewal for young people. Thus, we may presuppose that a new "Coronavirus generation" is being formed – nurturing their spirituality, they will have a mature view of faith (Kowalczyk et al. 2020: 2676).

The Results of Ethnographic Data

In the last part of this article, I would like to focus on the empirical results gained from the ethnographic data gained through my fieldwork in Bulgaria and Lithuania.

The results of my recent study in Bulgaria show that the pandemic had a negative effect on the well-being and spiritual health of young people. In response to stressful situations, young people used various defensive coping mechanisms: psychological resistance strategies, support from family and friends, as well as education, religious and health system institutions (Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė 2025: 154). In this study, I am particularly interested in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the religiosity of young people in Bulgaria and Lithuania.

The religious and ethnic identity of Bulgarian respondents. The data from the investigation conducted in Bulgaria in 2024 shows that the group of 31 respondents consisted of 17 Orthodox Bulgarians, six Romans Catholics (five Bulgarians and one Russian), 2 Ukrainian Orthodoxies, six non-believers, atheists or agnostics. Ninety-seven percent of respondents were Bulgarian, two percent Ukrainian and one percent Russian.

This ethnographic shows that some Roman Catholics came from Bulgarian Orthodox families that did not practice the same faith. They decided to attend Roman Catholic church on their own, familiarising themselves with the faith by reading Christian literature or when invited by friends. One young Bulgarian Catholic man maintained:

> "My parents are non-practicing Bulgarian Orthodox Christians. My faith is my personal choice – I decided on the Catholic Church after reading books. I read Thomas Aquinas and *Russia and the Universal Church* by Vladimir Solovyev" (VMU ER, f.1, 2024/ 27).

The ethnographic investigation conducted in Bulgaria shows that young Orthodox Bulgarians and Roman Catholics treated the pandemic in somewhat different ways. During the critical period the resilience of Roman Catholics was nurtured by prayer, faith in God, family support, and Church community. They performed religious practices, which brought them peace and spiritual strength. Religious practices performed during the pandemic included going to church, and supporting the Church community with prayer and Bible reading (VMU ER, f. 1, 2024/23–28).

Some students, especially those with a clearly defined Christian religious identity, which is to be said about Roman Catholics in Bulgaria, singled out how "thinking rationally and acting in a moral way" were one positive aspect of the challenges of the quarantine period (VMU ER, f. 1, 2024/26). The answers of the Catholics confirmed the conclusion of previous research which stated that women were more persistent when declaring their faith or spiritual standpoint in the precarious situation of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kowalczyk et al. 2020: 2676).

Unlike Bulgarian Catholics, who used to observe traditional Catholic practices, when striving to overcome COVID-19 challenges young Orthodox Bulgarians prioritised alternative practices. Some of these respondents observed that their decision to join the Bulgarian Orthodox community was a conscious choice. One respondent openly shared his personal experience. He was baptised at the age of 21:

> When I was a baby, my parents decided not to baptise me until I grew up. During the time of socialism my parents were not baptised because it was forbidden. I made my own decision concerning baptism. I decided to relate to the group. My parents were not traditional Christians; they had no faith in God. My parents taught me morals based on the teaching of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church…. My family upbringing was Orthodox. I am not a traditional Orthodox. I am neither a believer, nor an unbeliever. I think that the moral teaching of the Orthodox religion is a way of life. I don't go to church every Sunday. The church is a special place for community gatherings. I go to church on the days of great feasts: September 22, Christmas or Easter, but I am not a traditional believer who goes to church every day or on Sunday (VDU ER, f. 2024/1).

A woman shared a similar experience: her parents, Orthodox Bulgarians, did not practice their religion during the Soviet period and did not baptise their children. The woman was baptised an adult at the age of 22 or 23. At the time she was studying in a foreign country and was in search of religion and spirituality. She practiced yoga, did breathing exercises and unexpectedly converted to the Bulgarian Orthodox religion after spending some time in a Bulgarian monastery, where she was baptised.

During the period of the Covid pandemic both Bulgarian and Lithuanian Orthodox youth overcame stress by means of alternative spiritual practices, such as meditation, Reiki, fitness, sport, walking or engaging in long discussions which had a psycho-therapeutic effect. Research participants from both countries underlined the significance of support from their family and friends, saying that it helped them to overcome the challenges of the pandemic. Traditional religious practices such as attending services or reading religious philosophy books were observed by a very small group of Bulgarian Orthodox respondents (less than 1%).

The investigation showed that during the period of COVID-19 Lithuanian and Bulgarian Master's students, most of whom were Roman Catholic, were involved in traditional Catholic religious practices to a greater degree than those of the Bachelor's programme.

After Russia started the war in Ukraine, young Orthodox Bulgarians experienced strong polarisation and had conflicts with their friends and family members, who viewed the situation in a different light. Bulgarian youth took to heart the deaths of innocent people, some provided financial support for Ukrainians and volunteered with other aid, and some were worried because of political and financial instability.

Young Lithuanians were less polarised when evaluating Russia's war against Ukraine. Students in Lithuania were shocked to learn about the military activities in Ukraine and experienced lots of stress, fear and anxiety because of what was happening and might happen in Ukraine, and Lithuania. They felt anger towards the aggressors and were ashamed because of people in their environment who supported them. They were willing to overcome the challenges raised by the war, donated to support Ukraine, helped suffering Ukrainians, and engaged in voluntary philanthropic activities.

Based on ethnographic research data, after Russia started the war in Ukraine, young people gained new life experiences that enabled them to

maintain spiritual resilience. Ukrainians studying in Bulgaria who had left their country and had lost family members said that when living in Bulgaria they had completely changed their lifestyles and were preparing for anything that could happen to them by learning to relate and communicate with everyone (VMU ER, f. 1, 2024/22). One Ukrainian war refugee stated: "The war started in my country, thus I had to face all the problems of this period." Roman Catholics maintained that the best practice was to pray and trust in God's mercy even in the most difficult circumstances, disregard those who speak in support of the war and other such subjects that we cannot change, trust the power of prayer and the wisdom of the Bible, and perform small actions of charity and be grateful for peace in the country in which one lives (VMU ER, f. 1, 2024).

The pandemic taught the students to adjust to the new conditions of life, to advance in different fields, to be grateful for everything they have, to find meaning in their work, to keep real relationships with people around them, to seek help from others, to collaborate with different people, to look for alternative ways and forms of dwelling in the world, to contemplate the meaning of life and to reflect on the situation of the world, which, if nothing changes, will become an even worse place to live in.

One informant stated: "I feel that people intuit the approaching crisis (starting with mass migration finishing with climate change); however, people have not summoned up their strength in order to overcome old habits and acquire new ones" (VMU ER, f. I, 2024/19).

Some Catholics said, for example:

> I go to church every Sunday and, if it is possible, every day and try not to evade problems when they arise, but face them with courage and God's grace (VMU ER, f. 1, 2024/23).

> I try to be surrounded by people who share my beliefs and help me keep my faith. I am open-minded as much as concerns who I am, my religion and world outlook. Besides, I also try not to pay heed to new ideologies that strive to conquer the world (VMU ER, f. 1, 2024/24).

> I often think about God and my friends and try to ponder less on problems hoping that God will take care of them (VMU ER, f. 1, 2024/25).

> Every earthly thing dies out and is lost… The only thing that enables us to retain hope is faith, or to be more concrete God, through his only holy universal Church (VMU ER, f. 1, 2024/26).

> Most often I apply philosophical means – self-reflection, ethical consideration of one's life, the practices of the Catholic faith (VMU ER, f. 1, 2024/27).

The ethnographic investigation conducted in Bulgaria and Lithuania showed that Orthodox youth were less engaged in traditional religious practices during the pandemic. The majority were inclined to swap Orthodox religious practices for alternative spiritual practices. Confronting the threat of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, academic youth used different strategies of survival, for example traditional religious practices or alternative spiritual practices.

Figure 1. Sofia's St. Kliment Ohridski University, April 2024. Photo by Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė.

Young Lithuanian respondents' expressions of religiosity. The ethnographic data revealed that academic Lithuanian youth were assisted in overcoming anxiety during the pandemic by both traditional religious and alternative spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, "establishing a connection with the universe", a philosophical worldview, psycho-therapeutic measures, communication with relatives and friends, positive thoughts, knowledge and understanding of matters related to the war.

One young woman stated: "Being an army volunteer, I referred to my knowledge, disposition and understanding of military actions" (VMU ER, f. 1, 2022/4).

The investigation conducted in Lithuania showed that students were enabled to overcome the problems by certain protective factors: a person's psychological qualities and the support of family members and social support structures such as the Church and institutions of education.

The results of the empirical data reveal that social distancing and adaptation to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for religious practices and changed the expression of these practices. The survey finds considerable diversity within religious groups. For instance, an ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Bulgaria showed that there were differences in the religiosity of Roman Catholic and Bulgarian Orthodox youth during the pandemic. Roman Catholics maintained stability during this period relying on such elements of spirituality as faith in and love for God, prayer, family support, and church community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Catholics observed traditional religious practices (attending church, reading the Bible, praying with the community), which helped them maintain spiritual peace. Lower interest in religious practices prevailed among Orthodox Bulgarian youth during the pandemic. Most representatives of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church used alternative spiritual practices such as meditation, yoga and breathing exercises.

One more way to overcome the challenges related to the war in Ukraine was to contribute to funds supporting Ukraine, strive towards a concrete goal, for example to help Ukrainian people who were suffering the consequences of the war, or to volunteer to do something constructive. One respondent said: "I help those who ask and those who ask silently or are waiting for help" (VMU ER f. 1, 2022/21).

The research conducted in Lithuania showed that some students acquired new values: they became more empathic with those who suffer, undertook philanthropic activities that they continue to date, and donated money to support Ukraine every month. Thus, the philanthropic disposition of young people became stronger. However, students were enabled to overcome the problems because of certain protective factors: the person's psychological qualities, the assistance of family members and external support structures such as the institutions of education and religion.

Faced with the threat posed by the pandemic, academic youth have resorted to various survival strategies, for example traditional religious practices or alternative spiritual practices that allow them to maintain hope and meaning. Religion helped develop young people's emotional stability and spiritual

resilience during the pandemic, which enabled them to form an attitude of consideration and receptivity, or *habitus* (Rosa 2024).

Former investigations showed that in times of disturbance and crisis humanity tends to seek comfort in prayer and look for answers to existential questions in religion. This is confirmed by the investigation conducted by Jeanet Sinding Bentzen in 2020 using Google search data from 95 countries (Bentzen 2021). The word "prayer" served as a keyword for observing the intensity of prayer during the COVID-19 pandemic across the world. The data from Google showed that the pandemic increased searches for prayer and related topics reaching a peak in March, 2020. More than half of the world population prayed with the intention of ending the pandemic. The increased interest in prayer was noted on the internet on all continents and included all religious denominations (Christian (especially Catholic), Hindu and other traditional religions, except Buddhism) (Bentzen 2021: 559). Previous investigations, which were used to supplement the data of this research, concluded that natural disasters have a long-lasting effect on religiosity, which is transmitted from generation to generation despite the education of the people (Bentzen 2019).

Thus, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the religiosity of future populations and their spiritual resilience will only become apparent in some time, after investigators have analysed various levels and sources of resilience including demographic and personal development, and including sources from the fields of culture, social life, religion and economy.

Figure 2. Kaunas, Graduation ceremony at Vytautas Magnus University 2021. Photo by Jonas Petronis.

Conclusions

This investigation dealt with the spiritual resilience and religious practice of young people during the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, based on analysis of the data presented in scientific articles and gathered during ethnographic investigation in Bulgaria and Lithuania. The results revealed some similarities between the two countries.

Firstly, the ethnographic data showed that Bulgarian and Lithuanian Orthodox youth were less engaged in traditional religious practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Asked about religious practices and developing their philosophical world outlooks they indicated such means as reading the philosophical works of the stoics and performing the religious practices of the Orthodox Church. The majority of Orthodox youth were inclined to swap Orthodox religious practices for alternative spiritual practices such as meditation, relaxation, yoga, fitness, and breathing exercises.

Secondly, during the period of COVID-19 Lithuanian and Bulgarian Master's students programme, most of whom were Roman Catholics, were involved in traditional Catholics religious practices to a greater degree than those of the Bachelor's programme.

Thirdly, confronting the threat of the pandemic, Lithuanian and Bulgarian academic youth used some strategies of survival, for example traditional religious practices, alternative spiritual practices, and psycho-therapeutic measures, allowing them to sustain hope and helping to give meaning to life. They also kept in close contact with their parents and friends through social media or by phone, nurturing positive thoughts and engagement; they used external support structures such as the Church and psychological support services.

Fourthly, with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Bulgarian academic youth experienced significant social polarisation and had conflicts with their relatives and friends who had different opinions. Bulgarian youth were concerned about the deaths of innocent people. Some provided financial support to Ukrainians or volunteered, others were concerned about political and financial instability. Lithuanian young people were less polarised in their evaluation the war Russia started against Ukraine. They experienced lots of stress, fear and anxiety, and felt anger towards the aggressors. Lithuanian academic youth tried to overcome the challenges caused by the war through concrete action such as donating to

the Ukraine Support Fund, helping suffering Ukrainians, volunteering, and engaging in philanthropic activities.

Acknowledgment

This research was supported by the Bulgarian academy of Sciences and the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences under the bilateral international Ethnicity, Religiosity and National Identity in Bulgaria and Lithuania (Traditional Elements and New Transformations) project (2022–2024).

I would like to thank all respondents who gave me interviews and shared their knowledge. Personal thanks go to associate professor Ekaterina Anastasova, associate professor Gergana Nenova, assistant professor Antoaneta Getova and assistant professor Mariyanka Borisova for their assistance and cooperation in conducting the research.

References

Baker, Joseph; Martí, Gerardo; Braunstein, Ruth; Whitehead, Andrew; Yukich, Grace 2020. Religion in the Age of Social Distancing: How COVID-19 Presents New Directions for Research. *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 81 (4), pp. 357–370. doi. org/10.1093/socrel/sraa039

Bentzen, Jeanet Sinding 2019. Acts of God? Religiosity and Natural Disasters across Subnational World Districts. *The Economic Journal*, No. 129 (622), pp. 2295–2321.

Bentzen, Jeanet Sinding 2021. In Crisis, We Pray: Religiosity and the Covid-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*. Vol. 192, pp. 541–583. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2021.10.014

Clemons, Andrea 2024. Exploring Academic Resilience: a Phenomenological Study of Lived Experiences during COVID-19 and Hurricane Ian. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, Vol. 46 (5), pp. 563–578, DOI: 10.1080/1360080X.2024.2334986l.

Dimitrova, Nevena 2021. Pravoslavie i pandemija: fizika i metafizika v liturgijnoto deistvie (Orthodox Christianity and the Pandemic: Physics and Metaphysics in the Liturgical Action). In: V. Baeva & A. Ilieva (eds.) *Etnologija i epidemii: Sociokulturni izmerenie na pandemiata ot COVID-19* (Ethnology and Epidemics: Sociocultural Dimensions of the COVID-19 Pandemic). Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov Publishing Houseof the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, pp. 73–84.

Fuchs, Christian 2021. *Communicating COVID-19. Everyday Life, Digital Capitalism, and Conspiracy Theories in Pandemic Times*. Bingley (UK): Emerald Publishing.

Garmezy Norman 1991. Resilience in Children's Adaptation to Negative Life Events and Stressed Environments. *Pediatric Annals*, Vol. 20 (9), pp. 459– 466. DOI: 10.3928/0090-4481-19910901-05

Ilieva, Angelina & Baeva, Vihra 2021. Pandemijata ot COVID-19 i neinite sociokulturni izmerenija (The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Sociocultural Dimensions). In: V. Baeva & A. Ilieva (eds.). *Etnologija i epidemii: Sociokulturni izmerenie na pandemiata ot COVID-19* (Ethnology and Epidemics: Sociocultural Dimensions of the COVID-19 Pandemic). Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov Publishing House of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, pp. 9–14.

Kalkandjieva, Daniela 2020. *Religion and COVID-19 in Bulgaria*. Available at https://www.academia.edu/42745542/Religion_and_COVID_19_in_Bulgaria_Read_more_En_savoir_plus_http_eurel_info_spip_php_article3577?email_work_card=title

Kanev, Stamen 2021. Aspects of Everyday Life during the Covid-19 Pandemic. In: S. Kanev, M. Janislavova (eds.) *Sofia – Skopie: vsekidnevie i prazničnost no vreme na pandemija* (Sofia and Skopje: Everyday Life and Celebration during a Pandemic). Sofia: Izdatelstvo Erove, pp. 15–45.

Kapriev, Georgi 2023. COVID-19: Crisis, Social Panic, Religious and Academic Life in Bulgaria. *Analogia,* Vol. 17, pp. 123–128.

Kowalczyk, Oliwia; Roszkowski, Krzysztof; Montane, Xavier; Pawliszak, Wojciech; Tylkowski, Bartosz & Bajek, Anna 2020. Religion and Faith Perception in a Pandemic of COVID-19. *Journal of Religion and Health,* Vol. 59 (6), pp. 2671–2677. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01088-3

Luthar, Suniya; Cicchetti, Dante & Becker, Bronwyn 2000. The Construct of Resilience: A Critical Evaluation and Guidelines for Future Work. *Child Development*, Vol. 71 (3), pp. 543–562.

Manning, Lydia; Ferris, Morgan; Narvaez Rosario, Carla; Prues, Molly; Bouchard, Lauren 2019. Spiritual Resilience: Understanding the Protection and Promotion of Well-being in the Later Life. *Journal of Religion Spiritual Aging,* Vol. 31 (2), pp. 168–186. doi: 10.1080/15528030.2018.1532859

Papazoglou, Andreas; Moysidis, Dimitrios; Tsagkaris, Christos; Dorosh, Marko; Karagiannidis, Efstratios; Mazin, Rafael 2021. Spiritual Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Impacts on Orthodox Christianity Devotion Practices, Rituals, and Religious Pilgrimages. *Journal of Religion and Health,* Vol. 60, pp. 3217–3229. doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01347-x

Park, Yonghee; Kim, In Hong; Jeong, Yeo Won 2024. Resilience Experienced by University Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Exploration

Based on Focus-group Interviews. *Heliyon*, Vol. 10 (18). DOI: 10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e37678

Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė, Rasa 2025. Jaunimo iššūkiai ir psichologinis atsparumas COVID -19 pandemijos kasdienybėje (The Challenges and Psychological Resilience of Young People in Their Daily Lives during the COVID-19 Pandemic). *Logo*s, Vol. 16, pp. 154-162. doi.org/10.24101/logos.2025.16

Rahman, Bin Ab Zaizul; Noor, Ahmad Yunus Mohd; Kashim, Mohd Izhar Ariff; Saari, Che Zarrina; Hasan, Ahmad Zaki; Pa'ad, Nur Shahidah; Ridzuan, Abdul Rauf; Sham, Fariza; Mohammed, Ahmad Fakhrurrazi 2020. Critical Review of the Relationship between Resilience, Self-esteem and Religiosity among the Tabligh during the Fight of COVID-19. *Journal of Critical Reviews,* Vol. 7 (5), pp.1136–1144.

Reivich, Karen & Shatté, Andrew 2002. *The Resilience Factor: 7 Essential Skills for Overcoming Life's Inevitable Obstacles*. New York: Broadway Books.

Rosa, Hartmut 2022. *Demokratie braucht Religion: Mit einem Vorwort von Gregor Gysi*. Kösel-Verlag.

Rosa, Hartmut 2024. Interview: Hartmut Rosa, Sociology Professor. By Terence Handley MacMath. *Church Times*. 21 June. Available at https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2024/21-june/features/interviews/interview-hartmut-rosa-sociology-professor

Rosa, Hartmut 2020. „Wir sind in einem Versuchslabor". Interview. *TAZ,* 25 March. Available at https://taz.de/Soziologe-Hartmut-Rosa-ueber-Corona/!5673868/

Shean, Mandie 2015. *Current Theories Relating to Resilience and Young People: a Literature Review.* Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. Available at https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Current-theories-relating-to-resilience-and-young-people.pdf

Sisti, Leuconoe Grazia; Buonsenso, Danilo; Moscato, Umberto; Malorni, Walter 2022. COVID-19 and Religion: Evidence and Implications for Future Public Health Challenges. *European Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 32, Issue Supplement_3 October. doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckac130.025

Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė is Professor of Ethnology at Vytautas Magnus University, in the Department of Cultural Studies. Her research interests focus on the family, youth and gender studies, urban anthropology, religious and visual anthropology, identity and migration studies. Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė conducts field research in Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Belarus, Bulgaria, and England.

E-mail: rasa.raciunaite-pauzuoliene@vdu.lt

ORCID: 0000-0001-8744-6301

https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.09

Between Ethnic and Cultural Identity: The Effect of Turkish Religious Literature on the Lifestyle of the Lithuanian Muslim Community

Gintarė Lukoševičiūtė
Lithuanian Institute of History, Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: gintare.lukoseviciute@istorija.lt

Abstract: This paper examines the increasing presence of Turkish religious literature in Kaunas, Lithuania, home to the only brick mosque in the Baltic States and an active Muslim community with a Turkish imam conducting services. In the globalised context, spiritual texts play a key role in shaping identity and communal lifestyle, and Turkish authors' literature, due to accessibility in local languages, may be relevant for Lithuanian Muslims. By focusing on two Muslim groups, Lithuanian Tatars and converts, the research investigates how religious translations are transmitted, adapted and integrated into the local community. The analysis focuses on the Islamic religion and communal expressions and explores whether translations influence the identity of Lithuanian Muslims, their spiritual practices, linguistic preferences, historical consciousness or socio-political approaches. Additionally, it provides insights into how Turkish literature serves as both a cultural artefact and an element for identity formation for these two Muslim minority groups.

Keywords: converts, identity, lifestyle, Lithuanian Tatars, Muslim community, translations, Turkish religious literature.

Introduction

The dissemination of Turkish[1] culture abroad began to attract interest in the Republic of Turkey in the first half of the 20th century, alongside other reforms that were taking place at the time. The translation of Turkish literature into other languages, including European languages, was supported by Turkey's cultural diplomacy efforts, and expanded from the mid-20th century (Gürçağlar 2008: 101; Dickinson 2015: 7). The increase in the distribution of religious publications, such as books, newspapers, advertising materials, reflected shifting political situations and was observed from the late 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries (Şahin 2023: 385-386).

Compared to other European languages, translations of Turkish literature into Lithuanian started relatively late. The process became more systematic only after Lithuania's independence was restored in 1990, although there is still no history of Islamic terminology in the country (Račius 2023: 452). Meanwhile, at the beginning of the 20th century, such translations were not scientifically accurate, and texts were mainly translated from other languages, such as French and German. Nevertheless, there is now a growing interest in Turkish literature and its translations among academics and scholars. Vilnius University (VU) in Lithuania has provided a Bachelor's degree programme in Lithuanian Philology and Foreign (Turkish) Language since 2000 (Miškinienė 2020: 285). Additionally, at the VU Centre of Oriental Studies, the Middle Eastern Studies programme offers a specialisation in Turkology, indicating an academic interest in Turkish language and literature. Studies include courses on Turkish history, literature, syntax, translations from Turkish into Lithuanian and vice versa (ibid.). On top of this the Baltic Academy of Turkish Culture, or Balturka, based in Vilnius, offers Turkish courses and introduces the culture. This has created and continues to create favourable conditions for the translation of Turkish literary works.

Regarding the translation and promotion of religious literature in Lithuania, which is the subject of this study, the Turkish authorities and the Turkish Embassy in Vilnius play a significant role in this process. At the beginning of the 21st century, one of Turkey's policy intentions was to focus on translating Turkish literature, with funding from the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Hürriyet Daily News 2016). The Turkish state's institution, the Presidency

of Religious Affairs (Tur. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı or Diyanet), supports the Muslim community in Lithuania in acquiring religious textbooks and contributes to their smooth translation into Lithuanian, Russian and English. The Yunus Emre Institute (Tur. Yunus Emre Enstitüsü) also contributes to the dissemination of Turkish culture and literature in Lithuania through its cooperation with VU (Litvanya'da Türk Tarihi ve Kültürü Sempozyumu 2012).

In 1997, the Turkish Embassy assisted in opening the Turkish Language Office at VU, later renamed the Turkish Language Centre (Miškinienė 2014), which collects material transmitted by Turkey about the country and the Turkish language. The head of the Centre, the orientalist and turkologist Galina Miškinienė (Tautinių bendrijų namai 2023), has established close personal and institutional ties with Turkish academic institutions and scholars. In 2011, she contributed to the organisation of the Turkish Culture Days in Vilnius, in collaboration with TURKSOY, the International Organisation of Turkic Culture (Tur. Uluslararası Türk Kültürü Teşkilatı or TÜRKSOY) (TÜRKSOY 2011). The Turkish Embassy also provided funds for the opening of the Islamic Culture and Education Centre in Vilnius (Islamo kultūros ir švietimo centras 2016). Academic, literary, and cultural initiatives, as well as links with Lithuania through the dissemination of cultural events and the promotion of the Turkish language and literature, demonstrate the activity of cultural exchanges.

The current translations of Turkish literary texts that reach Muslims in Lithuania primarily relate to the Islamic religion. Nevertheless, their audience, the readers, have been socialised in a Catholic Christian or agnostic and atheist environment (Račius 2023: 453). This will be discussed further in this study.

This article is based on participant observation in a mosque in Kaunas and interviews collected in Kaunas and Vilnius from March to July 2024 and from February to March 2025. It analyses two primary groups within the country's Muslims, both permanent residents of Lithuania, Tatars and converts. The literature selected for the study consists of Turkish authors' religious texts translated into Lithuanian, which are available at the Kaunas Mosque and on the Lithuanian Muslim community's internet platform.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the effect of translations of Turkish religious literature on the ethnic and cultural identity of the Lithuanian Muslim community. To achieve this goal, the following objectives were set: 1) to present the theoretical framework, research overview and methodology;

2) to introduce the historicity, structure, ethnicity and cultural features of the Lithuanian Muslim community; 3) to find out whether Turkish literary texts influence the ethnic identity of Lithuanian Muslims; 4) to determine whether Turkish literature shapes the cultural identity of the community members, for example, their worldview, values or traditions.

Theoretical framework and research overview

The concept of identity is not static but constantly changing and can be influenced by different social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. It is essential to underline that a significant contribution to the study of ethnic and cultural identity on a global scale has been made by scholars such as Benedict Anderson (1983), who examined the formation of ethnic and national identity and memory; Anthony David Stephen Smith, who researched ethnic origins and national identity; Clifford Geertz, who revealed insights into cultural identity with the thick description method (relevant in this paper) and also researched Islam (1971, 1973). The anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen's research on ethnicity, identity and the globalisation of culture is key to understanding contemporary identity formation. The majority of these scholars' works are published in English, with a limited number available in Lithuanian.

In Lithuanian historiography, Vida Savoniakaitė, an ethnologist and cultural historian, has explored issues of nationalism, ethnicity and culture. Her article "Jono Basanavičiaus požiūris į lietuvių tautos tyrimus, 1879–1927" (2019) (Jonas Basanavičius' View on the Research into the Lithuanian Nation, 1879– 1927) examines Basanavičius' ideas about leading the nation through language and encouraging historical research as well as the collection of manuscripts and books. According to Savoniakaitė, such studies influenced the Lithuanian national revival and development of ethnicity and culture. In her research, the ethnologist also emphasises the definition of identity: "By defining one's own identity, one distinguishes oneself from others and, at the same time, defines those of one's own traits that bind one to a group, community, nation or institution" (Savoniakaitė 2011: 389).

The anthropologist Vytis Čiubrinskas has also conducted studies on identity (2008, 2011), using the Lithuanian term *identitetas*[2], focusing more on migration. Ethnologist Auksuolė Čepaitienė (2001) employed the Lithuanian

term *tapatumas* to describe identity in her research. Recent historiography includes Savoniakaitė's monograph *Imperija ir tauta: Eduardo Volterio etnografija 1882–1941* (2023) (Empire and Nation: The Ethnography of Eduard Voltaire, 1882–1941), which analyses ethnicity as constructed and Voltaire's (the person in the book) interest in human identity, religion, belief, superstition, and linguistic features. Thus, these studies reveal how identities are constructed in changing social, cultural and political environments.

Moreover, to define 'ethnic' and 'cultural identity', one can refer to the anthropologist Eriksen, who initially stressed that ethnic identity is based on socially accepted ideas of cultural differences and notions of shared ancestry, while cultural identity involves shared norms and practices (Eriksen 2001: 43). In later years, he added that there is no simple or unambiguous link between cultural and ethnic identity, as ethnic groups can have significant internal cultural differences or unclear cultural boundaries (Eriksen 2017: 154–155). Eriksen defines ethnicity as not due to cultural differences but to the ideology of cultural difference: "Ethnicity consists in making cultural differences comparable …" (Eriksen 2021: 6). According to him, the term ethnic identity started to be used in anthropology in the middle of the 20th century, and new identities – ethnic, religious, post-ethnic – are constantly emerging (ibid.; Eriksen 2017: 154).

The historical memory and expression of identity of Lithuanian Tatars have been studied by a number of Lithuanian scholars, including Jonas Mardosa (2024), Lina Leparskienė (2022), Inga Zemblienė (2018), Gintarė Lukoševičiūtė (2015), Mindaugas Peleckis (2010), and others. Research on identity is also conducted by Tatars such as Tamara Bairašauskaitė, Galina Miškinienė, Adas Jakubauskas, Galim Sitdykov, Stanislav Dumin and others. Moreover, an English article by Mehmet Aça (2023), a Turkish researcher, examines the identity challenges faced by Lithuanian Tatars and the significance of collective memory. The only Lithuanian Tatar newspaper, *Lietuvos totoriai,* also devotes several articles to ethnic identity and relations with Turkey. Meanwhile, very few academic texts are available on the identity of Lithuanian converts, except for studies by a Lithuanian researcher on Muslim communities Egdūnas Račius (2013, 2018) and Vytautas Magnus University's student Dalia Markevičiūtė (2009).

There are no specific studies analysing the effect of translations of Turkish religious literature on foreign or Lithuanian Muslims. One of the most

significant papers is an English article by Račius. In a study (2023), the author examines religious terminology in Islamic literature translated into Lithuanian. Although the investigation focuses on analogies of the use of Lithuanian concepts in translated texts, there appears to be minimal mention of Turkish literature. It is noteworthy that, at the time the researcher was conducting the investigation, an increase in such literature had recently emerged. However, although these publications were not abundant a few years ago, Račius drew attention to the fact that the existing texts represented official Turkish Islam and were supported by Turkish institutions such as Diyanet.

Articles in Lithuanian (2010, 2014) and insights in Turkish (2020) by Miškinienė, are also relevant to this research as they provide knowledge about the written heritage of the Lithuanian Tatars, and cultural ties between Lithuania and Turkey.

This paper does not aim to provide a comprehensive definition of 'lifestyle', therefore, the term is defined through the concept of 'life', using Čepaitienė's framework (2013: 5–6, 15) and will focus mainly on the aspects of community, social structure and organisation, environment, economy, politics, religion, rituals and lifestyle shifts in examining the effect of Turkish literature on the Lithuanian Muslim community.

Methods and Methodology

In the context of globalisation, religious literature is becoming a significant element in shaping the identity and lifestyle of communities, and translations of Turkish religious texts, due to their accessibility in local languages, may also be relevant for Muslims in Lithuania. Although Muslims are a minority in Lithuania, there is a rising fear of extremism or radicalism in society today, which is often linked to religious identity. The scarcity of research of this kind makes this study academically valuable.

The selection of topic was influenced by several factors. After the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, Turkish interest in Lithuania's Muslim community increased. Additionally, the author's earlier historical research on the development, interrelations and migration of Vilnius' and Kaunas' Muslim communities provided a useful background for this study.

This research employs a qualitative approach, using content analysis of published and unpublished sources to explore the Muslim lifestyle and history. Unpublished sources related to Turkey, and translations of Turkish religious literature were examined in the Lithuanian Central State Archives, unfortunately without success. The Kaunas Muslim religious community granted access to the mosque archive, although it contained no information relevant to this study. The mosque holds birth and marriage records from 2000 to 2014, but no correspondence with Turkish officials regarding religious literature. Such information was best revealed by the material collected through interviews.

The paper provides a descriptive-interpretative analysis as well as a historical-comparative approach to reveal the development of Islam and ethnic dynamics in Lithuania. The study is based on ethnographic field research methods in the form of an ethnographic questionnaire, semi-structured and in-depth interviews, participant observation, and visual material collection.

The location is Kaunas city, the location of the only brick mosque in Lithuania and the Baltic states, and the imam of the Muslim community is from Turkey. The mosque is rich in Turkish religious literature with translations into Lithuanian, English and Russian. Several interviews were also conducted in Vilnius, as some Lithuanian Tatars currently reside there.

Semi-structured and in-depth interviews were collected from experts (Muftis, imams, community leaders) and female ordinary members. All have a university education and were selected randomly. Separate questionnaires were prepared for experts and other respondents, comprising approximately 30 questions, along with additional questions in specific cases. Interviews lasted one to four hours and participants ranged in age from 32 to 85. Respondents consisted of six men and four women. A female expert preferred to be identified only as Tatar, rather than Lithuanian Tatar, stating that there was no point identifying her with a specific location. To define the historical context and some events, three interviews were collected in 2011 and 2012, and the remaining seven in 2024 and 2025.

In line with research ethics, the names of the interviewees were coded (Expert Lithuanian Tatar 1, Convert 1, etc.). All participants requested confidentiality and anonymity, and some asked that their positions not be disclosed to maintain community peace, especially regarding sensitive political topics. Respondents were also assured of the study's purpose, voluntary participation and data usage being only for scientific reasons.

Five participatory observations were conducted at Kaunas Muslim community events: three consecutive Fridays during Ramadan (March-April 2024), one Friday in March 2025, and one Sunday during the Open Day event in July 2024. Each lasted two to six hours. During observations, notes were taken on a mobile phone, and were directly expanded afterwards into detailed descriptions. Visual material (photographs, videos) was also collected and archived.

The study has limitations, as its geographical focus is on one city and only includes interviews from Vilnius and Kaunas, which may not accurately reflect the entire country's Muslim community. It was also carried out over a short period of time (March–July 2024 and February–March 2025), limiting its ability to show long-term trends.

Between Ethnic and Cultural Identity: The History, Ethnicity and Cultural Traits of the Lithuanian Muslim Community

The first Muslims in Lithuania were Tatars, and the origins of the community date back to the late Middle Ages, specifically the 14th and 15th centuries, when they settled in the then Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) (Kričinskis 1993: 15, 17–18). The first arrivals were mainly political emigrants from the Golden Horde and later from the Crimean Khanate. They were soon joined by mercenary soldiers of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania, refugees and prisoners of war who afterwards decided to remain and settle in the region (ibid.: 19–25).

The Tatars, descendants of the Turkic and Mongol tribes, differed from Lithuanians not only in their ethnic identity but also in their religious affiliation, as they practiced Sunni Islam. They identified themselves as belonging to the Hanafi school of the Muslim scholar and theologian Abu Ḥanifah, like Muslims in Turkey. The predecessor of the Turkish Republic, the Ottoman Empire, was one of the migration destinations for Muslim Tatars living in Lithuania during various historical periods (Kričinskis 1993: 39, 43, 50, 197; Bairašauskaitė 2021: 58–62, 111–113). It was a multicultural state, and the cultural features of the Turks were remarkably like those of the Tatars: religion, and similar traditions, observances and customs. Moreover, the Lithuanian Tatars lost their mother tongue as early as the 16th century, while Turkish, a

Turkic language, was closely related to Tatar (Makaveckas 2003: 7). Thus, the common religious identity and linguistic closeness facilitated the conditions of adaptation in a foreign immigration state.

In 1922, the Constitution of the State of Lithuania confirmed the religious and cultural existence of national minorities (*Lietuvos valstybės konstitucija* 1922: Articles 73, 74). Islam and other confessions were officially recognised, then the first brick mosque in Lithuania was built and opened in Kaunas city in 1933 (Expert Lithuanian Tatar 2 2011; Kaunomecete.lt), thus the Tatars had the favourable conditions necessary to preserve ethnic identity and cultivate religion. However, during the Soviet occupation, religious freedom was restricted, leading to the repression, emigration or assimilation of some Tatars into the Lithuanian population and, therefore, loss of religious identity (Expert Lithuanian Tatar 1 & 3 2012; Expert Lithuanian Tatar 2 2011).

In the late 20th century, the Lithuanian national revival was accompanied by a Tatar ethnic revival, although some Lithuanian Tatars began to focus only on ethnicity rather than religion (Expert Lithuanian Tatar 1 & 3 2012). During this period, transformations in the composition of the Muslim community were also observed as the Muslim community in Lithuania became multinational. Currently, this community consists not only of Tatars but also of migrants who arrived during the Soviet era and after the restoration of Lithuania's independence in 1990, as well as Lithuanians who converted to Islam and people who arrived during the 21st century (Tamelytė 2019a). However, this paper focuses only on the two groups of permanent residents: Lithuanian Tatars, and converts.

At the end of 2023, Lithuania's Migration Department published the latest immigration data, which shows that more than 1,500 Turkish citizens were living in Lithuania in that year, while in 2024 there were 2,403 Turkish citizens who had valid residence permits (Migracijos departamentas 2023, 2024). However, these data include not only permanent residents but also temporary migrants and could, therefore, be inaccurate. The primary source of demographic information on Muslims in Lithuania is the decennial official population census, which includes a religious dimension. The 2021 census shows that in Lithuania 2,165 Sunni Muslims participated in the latest register, of whom the most numerous ethnic groups were Tatars (1,128), ethnic Lithuanians (451), and other converts. Fifty-two-point-seven percent of Lithuanian Tatars identified as Sunni Muslims (Lietuvos statistikos departamentas 2021). Most Muslims

live in Kaunas, Vilnius and the surroundings of the capital, while the rest are scattered in other parts of Lithuania.

In 1998, the Lithuanian Sunni Muslim Spiritual Centre-Muftiate (hereafter LMSDC-Muftiate) was opened, uniting Muslims in the country. However, in 2019, another Muslim administrative entity, the Council of Muslim Religious Communities of Lithuania-Muftiate (CMRCL-Muftiate), was also established. Its founding saw the beginning of ongoing disagreements within the Muslim community and the division of the community into at least two factions. Several articles suggest that the split within the community could be linked to Turkey's policies and the coup trial of July 2016 (Račius 2019; Tamelytė 2019a).

Furthermore, the newly established Muftiate, which comprised the Muslim religious communities of Vilnius, Švenčionys and Kaunas, also took over the Kaunas Mosque and welcomed imams from Turkey into mosques and *musallas*[3] in these cities. Meanwhile, the LMSDC-Muftiate includes the Hikma Vilnius Muslim religious community and religious communities in Raižiai and Keturiasdešimt Totorių kaimas ('Forty Tatars village'). Both spiritual centres are made up of Tatars, converts and migrants, although the CMRCL-Muftiate involves a significant number of Muslims from Central Asia (Expert Lithuanian Tatar 5 2025; Tamelytė 2019b).

Despite their religious identity being linked to Islam, the majority of Lithuanian Tatars and converts do not speak Arabic, considered theologically the most important language in the religion: the Qur'an, the sacred scripture of Muslims, is the only original publication that is written and read in Arabic. All other language editions of the holy book have the status of translations of the Qur'an's meanings. The two Lithuanian Muslim groups have only been exposed to the religion through local teachings in *musallas* and mosques, weekend schools, and gatherings, and the Islam they practice does not always follow the standard canonical forms. The Tatars have a unique form of religion that is a mixture of both multicultural and multi-confessional faith traditions (Bairašauskaitė 2021: 224, 269). Interview data and literature indicate that Lithuanian converts and some (possibly non-Muslim) Tatars also celebrate Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter (Converts 1 & 2 2024; Miśkiewicz 1990: 150). However, Muslim Tatars have explicitly denied this, claiming that they only observe Islamic feast days. The fundamental principles of Islam include profession of the Islamic faith, the five daily prayers, almsgiving, fasting during Ramadan and religious pilgrimage. The major Islamic holidays are Eid

al-Fitr (in Arabic) or Ramadan Bayram (in Turkish), which marks the end of fasting. Eid al-Adha or Kurban Bayram involves the sacrifice of an animal (usually a sheep or a goat) to mark the end of the pilgrimage, the hajj ceremony. The community commemorates Mawlid, the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad and gathers on the Night of Power (Laylat al-Qadr) when the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet.

While most Tatars are traditionally born into a Muslim family or a family that follows Tatar-Turkic traditions, Lithuanian converts are born and raised in families with Catholic Christian backgrounds and values. This suggests that converts need to make more effort to understand and accept their new identity. A separate study could be carried out on this issue, but in the meantime we can conclude that Tatars and converts living in Lithuania are influenced by both ethnic and cultural traditions deriving from both external, such as Turkish, and internal local Lithuanian cultures.

Thus, the ethnic identity of Lithuanian Muslims is revealed by membership in an ethnic group. However, self-perception, self-identification as belonging to a particular ethnic group, and a sense of commonality among individuals of the same ethnic set are also important aspects of ethnic identity. Cultural identity, on the other hand, involves people from different ethnic groups sharing similar values, moral norms, traditions, practices, etc. The Muslim community in Lithuania is made up of people from various ethnicities who are united by the religion of Islam and, at the same time, have a cultural influence related to the country they live in and its society. Nevertheless, there are also noticed external attempts by another country to introduce cultural elements into the life of the Lithuanian Muslim community.

Turkish Religious Literature and its Effect on the Lifestyle of the Lithuanian Muslim Community

On the first visits to the Kaunas Mosque in March and April 2024, during Ramadan, it was clear that on the first and second floors of the mosque[4] there are bookshelves with neatly arranged religious literature in various languages. Meanwhile, several brown cardboard boxes contained translations of Turkish religious literature, mainly in Lithuanian but also in English and Russian. Some books were funded by the Turkish Diyanet (Presidency of Religious Affairs),

and all were free for visitors. In the cartons was literature related to Islam, the basics of religious knowledge, and the status of women and their rights.

The first page of one of the records, entitled *Religinių žinių pagrindai* (The Basics of Religious Knowledge), mentions that the Diyanet has 1,390 publications and 152 professional books. It is not apparent whether this is the number of translations and printed units in Lithuanian or whether the figures refer to foreign language translations or to originals. Contact information in Turkey is also provided for foreigners, although the author of this paper has not received a reply from the e-mail address given.

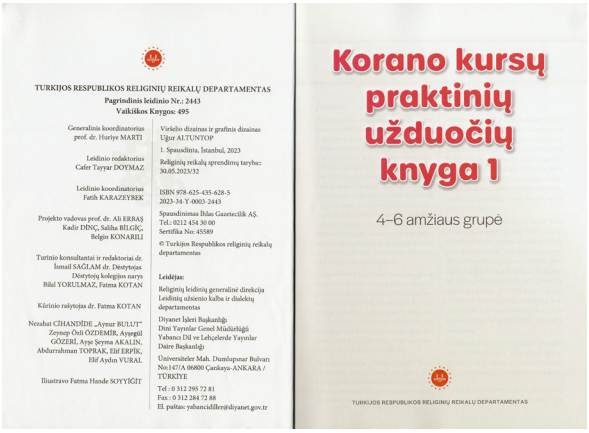
Other texts are *The Final Divine Religion Islam* by the Turkish author Murat Kaya and a Lithuanian version translated as *Paskutinė dieviškoji religija islamas*. Both are dated 2022. Other publications include Osman Nuri Topbaş' *Contemplation in Islam*, translated as *Pamąstymas apie Kūrėją, visatą ir žmogų* in Lithuanian. The English translation was published in 2022, with the Islamic year, 1443, also given (Islamic Hijri calendar). The Lithuanian edition was published a year later in 2023 (1444).

The Diyanet helped to purchase the Lithuanian translation of the Turkish religious textbook series Benim Güzel Dinim (Lith. Mano puikioji religija, Eng. My Beautiful Religion), published first by the LMSDC-Muftiate in 2013 and edited by Mufti Romas Jakubauskas. Meanwhile, Mufti Aleksandras Beganskas, of the CMRCL-Muftiate, translated the Turkish cleric and scholar Osman Ersan's book *Moteris islame. Jos teisės ir orumas* (Woman in Islam: Her Rights and Dignity), which is available on the Muftiate's website (CMRCL-Muftiate 2023). In fact, this book is translated from Russian, not Turkish.

During subsequent participant observation in 2024, three more translations of Diyanet religious publications from Turkish into Lithuanian were recorded: *Korano skaitymo pagrindinės taisyklės* (Basic Rules for Reading the Qur'an), 1st edition, Ankara, 2022; *Mokinamės skaityti Koraną* (Learning to Read the Qur'an), Istanbul, 2023; *Korano kursų praktinių užduočių knyga 1* (Qur'an Course Practice Book 1), Istanbul, 2023 (see Fig. 1). Printed in Lithuanian on the last page is *Religinių reikalų ministerijos dovana. Neskirta parduoti* (Gift of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Not for sale).

Figure 1. Translations of Turkish religious literature in cardboard boxes in Kaunas Mosque. Photo by Gintarė Lukoševičiūtė, 14 July 2024, Kaunas.

Račius mentioned that earlier translations of Islamic literature lacked *real* people behind them and, therefore, authority (2023: 464). However, most of the current translations refer to Mufti Beganskas of the CMRCL-Muftiate as the author and/or editor, though the last two publications mentioned above list Turkish citizens in these positions (see Fig. 2).


TURKIJOS RESPUBLIKOS RELIGINIŲ REIKALŲ DEPARTAMENTAS
Pagrindinis leidinio Nr.: 2443
Vaikiškos Knygos: 495

Generalinis koordinatorius
prof. dr. Hurije MARTI

Leidinio redaktorius
Cafer Tayyar DOYMAZ

Leidinio koordinatorius
Fatih KARAZEYBEK

Projekto vadovas prof. dr. Ali ERBAŞ
Kadir DİNÇ, Saliha BİLGİÇ,
Belgin KONARİLİ

Turinio konsultantai ir redaktoriai dr.
İsmail SAĞLAM dr. Destytojas
Dėstytojų kolegijos narys
Bilal YORULMAZ, Fatma KOTAN

Kūrinio rašytojas dr. Fatma KOTAN

Nezahat ÇİHANDİDE ,Aynur BULUT
Zeynep Özlü ÖZDEMİR, Ayşegül
GÖZERİ, Ayşe Şeyma AKALIN,
Abdurrahman TOPRAK, Elif ERPİK,
Elif Aydın VURAL

Iliustravo Fatma Hande SOYYİĞİT

Virželio dizainas ir grafinis dizainas
Uğur AUTUNTOP

1. Spausdinta, Istambul, 2023

Religinių reikalų sprendimų tarybos:
30.05.2023/32

ISBN 978-625-435-628-5
2023-34-Y-0003-2443

Spausdinimas İhlas Gazetecilik AŞ.
Tel.: 0212 454 30 00
Sertifika No: 45589

© Turkijos Respublikos religinių reikalų departamentas

Leidėjas:
Religinių leidinių generalinė direkcija
Leidinių užsienio kalba ir dialektų departamentas

Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı
Dini Yayınlar Genel Müdürlüğü
Yabancı Dil ve Lehçelerde Yayınlar
Daire Başkanlığı

Üniversiteler Mah. Dumlupınar Bulvarı
No:147/A 06800 Çankaya-ANKARA /
TÜRKİYE

Tel : 0 312 295 72 81
Fax : 0 312 284 72 88
El. paštas: yabancidiller@diyanet.gov.tr

Korano kursų praktinių užduočių knyga 1

4–6 amžiaus grupė

TURKIJOS RESPUBLIKOS RELIGINIŲ REIKALŲ DEPARTAMENTAS

Figure 2. Translation of the Qur'an Course Practice Book 1 into Lithuanian. Photo by Gintarė Lukoševičiūtė, 14 July 2024, Kaunas.

Turkish religious literature is also applied at the Minaretas weekend school at Kaunas Mosque. However, textbooks are more often used because of their colourful design, which stimulates children's interest. Nevertheless, these books are sometimes employed for specific tasks, such as learning the Arabic alphabet.

Although the LMSDC-Muftiate's approved translation of the Qur'an into Lithuanian was published in 2010 (and in 2023), the CMRCL-Muftiate's version was in preparation until 2024. Firstly, the Turkish Diyanet announced its intention to produce its own translation of the Qur'an as early as 2016 (Expert Tatar 1 2024; Expert Lithuanian Tatar 4 2024; *Yeni Asya* 2016). Then, after quite an extended period, the CMRCL-Muftiate's translation of the Qur'an appeared in 2024, first in an online version at Koranas.lt and then in print at the end of the year (see Fig. 3). The first printed edition in Lithuanian reached Lithuanian Muslims in early 2025.

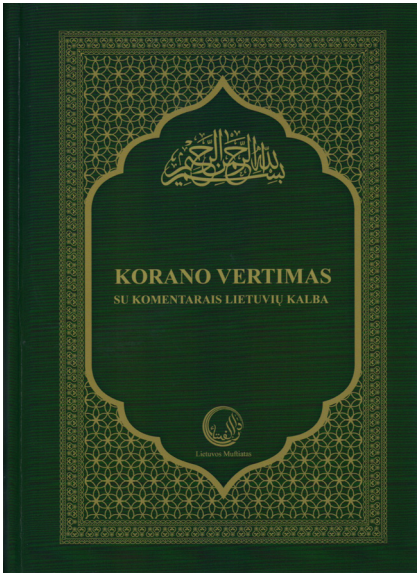


Figure 3. CMRCL-Muftiate's translation of the Qur'an with commentaries in Lithuanian. Photo by Gintarė Lukoševičiūtė, 19 March 2025, Kaunas.

In addition, more books by Turkish authors were published in Lithuanian in 2024. For instance, Osman Ersan's previously mentioned text on women's rights and dignity, which until 2024 had only been available online, was published in 2024 by Erkam Printhouse in Istanbul, Turkey. The publisher is, in

fact, the CMRCL-Muftiate, as stated on the first page of the book, the translation still coming from Russian, as well as the edition by Mufti Beganskas. The first printed version (light cover) of *Korano skaitymo pagrindinės* taisyklės (mentioned above) appeared in 2022 and the updated version (dark cover) in 2023. The first edition features Diyanet logotype, while the new one has the CMRCL-Muftiate logo (see Fig. 4).

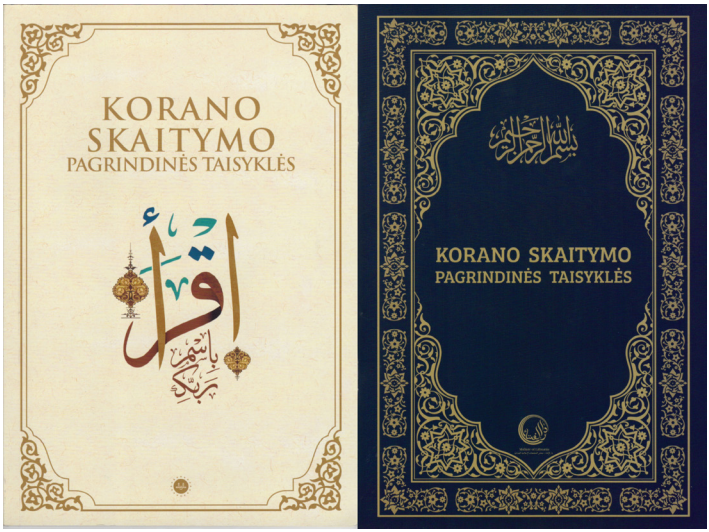


Figure 4. Translations of *Basic Rules for Reading the Qur'an* into Lithuanian. On the left is the 1st edition of 2022 with the Diyanet logo at the bottom, and on the right is the new edition of 2023, already with the CMRCL-Muftiate logo. Photo by Gintarė Lukoševičiūtė, 14 July 2024 and 19 March 2025, Kaunas.

At least 10 different religious books by Turkish authors translated into Lithuanian, as well as other languages of interest to the community, are currently available at the mosque and the number of translations is increasing every year. Some are also available on the internet (Muftiate.lt). Therefore, it is no coincidence that the question of whether Turkish writing shapes the worldview, values, and traditions of the Lithuanian Muslim community arises. The next question is how does this writing affect the daily lives of Lithuanian Muslims and influence the ethnic and cultural identity of the community? The dimensions of potential impact selected for further analysis here are: a) religious or spiritual; b) linguistic; c) historical; d) cultural or identity related; e) economic and political.

a) The religious or spiritual dimension

We can assume that Turkish religious literature help to strengthen the spiritual life of the community. Lithuanian Muslims often read religious texts not only in Lithuanian, Russian and English but also in other languages, including Turkish. Services in mosques and *musallas* are usually held in several languages, including Turkish (Islamasvisiems.lt). The Friday talk, or sermon, by the imam, known as the *khutbah*, is provided by the Diyanet and adapted to the Lithuanian community by the imam. Later, translations into Lithuanian are publicly posted on the mosque's social media platforms. In addition, Turkish literature serves as a valuable resource in religious education, as the above-mentioned texts, translated by Turks, are mainly related to the teaching of Islam and are commonly utilised in weekend (Sunday) schools and read by both children and converts.

The Lithuanian Tatar community has preserved its cultural heritage, including ancient manuscripts and prayer books, which, although aesthetically modest, reflect Islamic and Ottoman elements in their visual layout and calligraphy. The *chamails*, prayer books, consist of religious texts written in Arabic and Turkish and their explanations in Polish and Belarusian (ELTA 2005). These manuscripts not only convey spiritual information but also encourage Tatars to delve deeper into their history and into Islamic theology.

However, during participant observation at the Kaunas Mosque, when interacting with Lithuanian female converts, they pointed out that they are not interested in the information in the translated publications they read, whether it is Arabic literature translated into Lithuanian, or Turkish. New converts are attracted to any kind of knowledge about Islam, be it literature, material available digitally or spoken information heard in a mosque. New members of the community who have recently converted to Islam ask other converts all sorts of questions about the religion, even their opinion on Islam's prohibition of celebrating Christian festivals or attending friends' weddings in a Catholic church, and regard their answers as absolute, unquestionable and authoritative. However, the same cannot be applied to Turkish imams, the clerics who have been sent from Turkey to Lithuania since the beginning of the 21st century to lead prayers in various languages. During one participant observation, converts were asked who the imam currently was at the Kaunas Mosque. One member of the community gave an abrupt verbal answer: "The imam, and that's it."

They were then asked about his nationality. One of them replied that "there were always only Turks"[5], but nobody knew their names. This shows that it is irrelevant for Lithuanian converts who lead the prayers because it is likely that they do not have any other way of communicating with the imam other than the standard prayers in the community. They do not ask what information or message was delivered today, what knowledge was conveyed by the Muslim cleric, what lesson they took away or whether they understood it.

Moreover, the converts pointed out that during the observations at the mosque in Kaunas during Friday prayers, no Tatars had been spotted, although during the open day event around five Tatars were present. They also noted that the interest of Tatars in the free donation of translated literature was lower than that of converts and other guests. A Tatar expert (2024) also revealed that she is not very fond of reading Turkish religious literature: "Personally, I don't like to read Turkish literature, especially if it's more Sufi-related. It's a complete empty-headedness for me. I like that kind of classical, standard stuff, especially in a religious sense." As to whether the translations of Turkish religious literature have an effect on the lifestyle of Lithuanian Muslims or other ethnic groups, the same respondent replied that it depends on the knowledge and viewpoint of each individual: "… how a person becomes aware and understands, and the perception – it's individual whether they accept it or not, I don't know. It is purely their experience" (Expert Tatar 1 2024). Furthermore, on Friday, after the *iftar*[6], one of the converts went separately to read the English translation of the Qur'an, taking it from the cardboard box on the second floor of the Kaunas Mosque that also contained other translated literature by Turkish authors.

In 2025, at least 15 boxes each containing 20 Lithuanian translations of the Holy Qur'an reached the mosque, totalling over 300 copies. The leader of CMRCL-Muftiate revealed that the translation of the Qur'an took 2.5 years. The sacred text with commentaries was interpreted from various languages – the original Arabic, and translations from English, Russian and Turkish. According to the leader, Turkish representatives of the Diyanet did not contribute to the translation, although the CMRCL-Muftiate had paid them for the layout and printing in Turkey. Unfortunately, it was not specified who had done this. In the boxes that are currently at Kaunas Mosque, books with inscriptions in Turkish such as *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. Kur'an-i Kerim Orta Boy. Hediyem Kuran Olsun* (Turkish Diyanet Foundation. Qur'an Middle Size. Let My Gift Be the Qur'an) are visible. The boxes also include contact details for Erkam

Yayınları, a publishing house in Turkey, known for printing Islamic literature in various languages.

Meanwhile, another convert was reviewing the new literature in the boxes and selected several books to take home. This convert noted that some were in English, others in Lithuanian. Therefore, new converts are interested in the variety of religious literature available. They are still in the process of gathering knowledge in all accessible forms and are trying to shape their identity through knowledge acquisition.

Thus, Lithuanian female converts do not currently record or reflect on the nationality of the authors of the religious literature they read. The views and opinions of other Muslim converts have so far had a more significant impact on their identity formation and religious life. Nevertheless, it is likely that regular reading, and the increasing availability of Turkish literature in the mosque, will have a more substantial influence on them, their spiritual development, worldview, and value systems in the future, albeit unconsciously.

b) The linguistic aspect

Observation has demonstrated that religious literature in the mother tongue can be used to attract people to convert to the faith described in the texts. A Lithuanian convert, a woman approximately 30–35 years old, travelled from Vilnius because, as she explained, in the capital, only men gather in the *musalla* on Fridays, and women attend on Saturdays when there are fewer men. Her husband is a Christian who does not seek to change his religion to Islam, although she tries to persuade him by offering some translated literature that she brings from the mosque to read. Another woman shared a similar story regarding attempts to convert her sister to Islam. This shows that such efforts are common among converts' their inner circles and that translating texts into Lithuanian and publishing them can facilitate or encourage conversion, although this is not necessarily the case, as demonstrated in the situations presented.

Although a translation of the Qur'an into Lithuanian was first published in 2008, it has been criticised for misinterpretation (Vireliūnaitė 2016). For this reason, a second revised version of the literary translation appeared a few years later, translated from Arabic by the head of the LMSDC-Muftiate, Mufti Jakubauskas, and re-released in 2023 (Expert Lithuanian Tatar 4 2024; Converts 1 & 2 2024). Also, at the beginning of 2024, a new Lithuanian edition

of the meanings of the *Qur'an* was published by the Islamic Centre[7]. However, based on collected verbal material, it has not been approved by a spiritual centre, the Muftiate in Lithuania. Thus, this translation is not officially recognised by Muslims who belong to the CMRCL-Muftiate (Expert Tatar 1). However, one convert mentioned that she had received a translation of the meanings of the *Qur'an* as a gift at the Vilnius Book Fair in 2024, while two stated that they gained it by mail from the publisher himself (Converts 1 & 2 & 3 2024). Thus, Lithuanian female converts do not avoid this religious translation, they appreciate and tend to read it. Meanwhile, one interview indicates that such a publication cannot be preserved or distributed at Kaunas Mosque:

> We do not keep the translation made by [personal name omitted, Islamic centre] in Kaunas because it has not been coordinated with the Muftiate…. to bring this book to the Kaunas Mosque, it must be patented, it must be recommended, because all the literature that comes here must be verified. It is not possible for anyone to bring literature and distribute it here. So, if this is the way the community speaks, then we do not accept this translation (Expert Tatar 1 2024).

In contrast, the Muslim community in Kaunas was exceptionally proud to receive a new translation of the Qur'an in Lithuanian from the CMRCL-Muftiate in March 2025.

Of course, Turkish literature can contribute to language learning, primarily through religious terms. Part of the Muslim community in Lithuania is composed of Tatars, whose historical linguistic identity is rooted in the Kipchak-based Turkic tradition, which is distinct from modern Turkish (Kulwicka-Kamińska, 2018: 99). Nevertheless, some of the religious terms used in the Lithuanian Muslim community have their origins in Arabic and Turkic languages, including Ottoman Turkish, and therefore became the part of the community through Islamic practices and written traditions. Terminology associated with spiritual observances and ceremonies, such as *Bayram* (feast), *Ramazan* (month of fasting), *kurban* (sacrifice), *namaz* (prayer), *cami* (mosque), *hoca* (religious teacher) and others, clearly reveal the cultural influence. These words are prevalent in the Islamic world, particularly in Turkish contexts, and were adopted over time and included in the religious and everyday language of

Lithuanian Tatars, who historically spoke several languages, including Polish, Lithuanian and Russian (Łapicz 1986: 88; Račius 2023: 455).

It is worth mentioning that during the open day observation at Kaunas Mosque, the current imam, the Diyanet's religious official, also read Turkish poetry. He recited poems in Turkish, but the participants were provided with printed translations in Lithuanian. On the same day, a Lithuanian Tatar woman read her poetry in Tatar and revealed both her yearning for her long-forgotten homeland, and her devotion to her new homeland, Lithuania. The organisers of the event were keen to interest and involve people from different ethnic groups and to present diverse poetic traditions and cultures.

c) The historical aspect

The influence of Turkish literature and culture on the Lithuanian Muslim community is relevant not only through the dissemination of Islamic scriptures but also through the historical prism of the settlement of the first Muslims in Lithuania, the Tatars, and the historical development of their community. The literature often mentions how, throughout the ages, the Tatars have eagerly preferred Turkey as a destination for emigration. Meanwhile, the texts translated into various languages by Turkish authors, discussed earlier, although mainly related to religious topics can remind the Tatars of their cultural identity and historical roots, and can contribute to the preservation of their ethnic identity. Turkish researcher Aça stresses that collective memory is one of the fundamental processes of identity formation at the group level (2023: 95). Through language, history, ritual and ceremony, groups maintain a shared past and a living collective memory.

It is important to emphasise that the manuscripts of Lithuanian Tatar heritage, written in Slavic, Arabic and old Ottoman languages, to the graphic, textual and thematic analysis of which the turkologist Miškinienė has made a significant contribution, reveal the cultural links between Tatars and Turks (Miškinienė 2010: 199). She has also touched upon the historical context and the similarity between the Tatar and Turkish languages, giving examples of the use and translation of terms. According to Miškinienė, a valuable Lithuanian Tatar manuscript, a semi-kitab of Poltožickis, dates to the beginning of the 19th century and contains a four-part text, *The Journey of a Turk to the East* (Miškinienė 2002: 165-172, 2010: 207). A local Lithuanian Tatar transcribed

the text in Arabic and included it in one of the *Kitabs*. Therefore, it is better perceived as a locally situated historical narrative influenced by the Ottoman Empire rather than a straightforward translation of a Turkish literary work.

Meanwhile, alumnus of VU the orientalist and philologist Anton Muchlinski was one of the first to publish transliterated *Kitab* passages in his study, *Issledovaniye o proiskhozhdenii i sostoyanii litovskikh tatar* (An Investigation of the Origin and Situation of the Lithuanian Tatars) (Muchlinski 1857; Jonušas 2022: 7). In the mid–19th century Muchlinski published a translation (albeit in Polish) of a 16th century Turkish manuscript that he claimed to have purchased from sellers in Istanbul (Miškinienė 2010: 200). However, it turned out to be a work of local tradition, containing elements of Ottoman Turkish religious terminology but not an original text by a Turkish author (Miškinienė 2010: 200; Bairašauskaitė 2021: 368–369). However, if the work is a forgery from the 19th century, this indicates that Muchlinski sought to highlight historical kinship and similarity between the Lithuanian Tatars and the Ottoman Empire of the time.

Thus, historicity is manifested through the narration of the Lithuanian Tatars, their settlement, written heritage and its research. In this case, Lithuanian converts, born and raised in a Lithuanian cultural environment, cannot be automatically included in the historical influence of Turkish literature because, unlike Lithuanian Tatars, they do not have a centuries-old history of Turkic origins and writing.

d) The cultural – or identity – related aspect

Over the past decade, Turkey has been actively involved in the life of the Muslim community in Lithuania, supporting cultural and religious projects, financing the renovation of Lithuanian mosques and opening an Islamic culture and education centre (Tamelytė 2019a). We can assume that this has strengthened ties and brought Turkish culture closer to Lithuanian Muslims, allowing for the introduction of more Turkish elements in the internal life of the Lithuanian community.

VU organises Turkish Culture Days, presenting Turkish culture and study opportunities in various forms, from cuisine to traditional arts. The event was supported by TİKA (in 2011), and this year by the Yunus Emre Institute and the Turkish Embassy in Lithuania (Filosofijos fakultetas 2025).

Balturka, an NGO in Vilnius, also contributes to the formation of the cultural identity of Lithuania's Muslim community through traditional Turkish cultural forms such as cooking and knitting lessons and runs various education projects. Its members organise Turkish language courses, with culture and the religion of Islam serving as integral components.

The Turkish language can serve as a social link and have a cultural dimension. Texts written in Turkish can refer to Turkish traditions and customs that could affect the daily life, celebrations and rituals of members of the Muslim community in Lithuania. However, this requires additional exploration.

Turkish students also study at various Lithuanian universities, both in degree programmes and on short-term exchanges, such as the Erasmus mobility program for studies and internships. Although they are usually temporary immigrants and leave Lithuania after finishing their education, some students participate in festivals and prayers and have the opportunity to meet other country's Muslims, bring Turkish culture to the community and influence their identity through communication. However, observations revealed that Turkish religious literature does not encourage community members to interact with Turkish Muslims to strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation. For example, during one of the observations, two Turkish women visited the mosque. All the women entering the mosque greeted each other with the Arabic phrase *As-salamu alaykum* (peace be upon you), regardless of their country of origin, thus the Turkish females, as usual, greeted them with this phrase when they entered. Nevertheless, during and after the *iftar*, the Turkish women were talking to each other and not paying any attention to the Lithuanians. One Turkish female was sitting with her head completely uncovered (the scarf was pulled down around her neck), wearing a mottled blouse with a rather open neck, and the other was dressed in totally the opposite manner, modestly in a dark shirt and wearing a *hijab* covering her hair and neck. They both went out together after dinner, but they were also the subject of gossip among the converts. As Lithuanian female converts dress very modestly in the mosque, with dominant dark clothing and head (hair), neck, arms, legs and chest covered, one of the Turkish women reminded them of a frivolously dressed young girl. However, the topic of the converts' conversations changes quickly, and after a minute, the Turkish women are forgotten and talk turns to other matters.

Thus, the effect of Turkish literature can also take external forms, such as support for Turkish cultural activities. The formation of cultural identity is also

influenced by Turkish organisations in Lithuania and their events, manifested in one way or another in the lives of Muslims in the country through language and various workshops, the promotion of religion, and other cultural elements.

e) The economic and political dimension

Since its establishment in 2019, the CMRCL-Muftiate has been open about is connections with Turkey. Its religious activities have led to inter-ethnic cooperation with the Diyanet and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (Tur. *Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı* or *TİKA*). The Mufti of the CMRCL-Muftiate was educated in Turkey and trained under a Turkish imam (Expert Lithuanian Tatar 5; Muftiate.lt). Moreover, at the entrance to the Kaunas Mosque, there is a *TİKA* sign, a Turkish symbol on the wall, to express gratitude for the renovation of the mosque (Expert Tatar 1 2024). Thus, the aforementioned aspects facilitate the establishment of contacts and create conditions for closer cooperation with Turkey.

According to Expert Tatar 1 (2024), a Mufti is also responsible for providing translations of religious publications from Turkish to Lithuanian. "The Mufti maintains contact with the Diyanet, and we [the most active members of the Muslim community in Kaunas and Vilnius] even had an excursion to Diyanet", says the expert. The Tatar revealed that during the tour they ordered several Turkish religious publications to be translated into Lithuanian, such as *Mokinamės skaityti Koraną* and *Korano kursų praktinių užduočių knyga* (both mentioned above), which were published in 2023 and reached Kaunas Mosque in 2024.

The CMRCL-Muftiate communication with Turkey was probably strengthened by the renovation of Lithuanian mosques and *musallas*, as the country's Muslims needed financial support. This led to cooperation and support through various projects (Expert Tatar 1 2024; Expert Lithuanian Tatar 5 2025). But do they have any effect on the customs and religious life of Lithuanian Muslims? The Tatar expert (2024) argues that projects promote cultural dialogue and union. As this person stated, Turks had previously mentioned the importance of unity and communication (ibid.). Does this strengthen religious life? According to the collected interview material, it promotes knowledge, tolerance and appreciation of Turkey as a country and the combination of the Muslim

community not on the basis of nationality or race but on the basis of religious background (Expert Tartar 1 2024; Converts 2 & 3 2024).

Another part of the Lithuanian Muslim community and those of its members who belong to the LMSDC-Muftiate hold controversial views on such activities, indicating that the Lithuanian Muslim network is divided (Lithuanian Tatar Expert 4, 2024; Lithuanian Tatar Expert 6, 2025). At the same time, the CMRCL-Muftiate is not supported by some indigenous Tatars and converts due to its close relations with Turkey and certain expressions of support for its current policy.

Although the translation and distribution of Turkish religious literature in various foreign languages is one of the political tendencies in Turkey, the content of those texts does not contain any information about Turkey itself, its history, or its political developments. This article is not intended to address the content and internal structure of the translated books; however, it is important to mention that the texts focus on religious matters such as the correct performance of prayers, rituals before prayer, etc. Thus, although the translation of Turkish religious literature is one of Turkey's foreign policy strategies, it does not publicly declare its political ambitions in the content of religious publications. Although, of course, usually on the front and back pages of each book, the name Diyanet can be mentioned several times.

Most of the interviewed Lithuanian Muslims emphasised that they are not interested in politics and, therefore, expressed indifference toward any political views or ideologies the Turkish side might disseminate through the translation of religious publications (Converts 1 & 2 2024; Expert Lithuanian Tatar 4 2024; Expert Tatar 1 2024).

Conclusions

The ethnic and cultural identity of the Lithuanian Muslim community is multifaceted and complex, with overlapping elements. The country's permanent Muslims, the Tatars and converts, are partially influenced by, or may be influenced by, translations of Turkish religious literature in various aspects. For Lithuanian Tatars, the most relevant forms of effect are through the historical as well as linguistic dimensions. Meanwhile, the religious or spiritual factor

is more applicable to converts. However, Turkish cultural elements can affect both Muslim groups, some members consciously and others not.

It turned out that most ordinary members of the Muslim community are not interested in political trends and, therefore, do not find it significant that translations of religious literature can be one of the strategies of Turkish politics. Although the two highest religious institutions, Muftiates, operating in Lithuania have disagreements, do not communicate and assess each other's activities in a controversial manner, the CMRCL-Muftiate publicly announces its cooperation with Turkey, and is often supported either financially or through works and items such as religious publications and their translations. Thus, despite ignoring the political aspect, the economic basis of the community (if not the whole, then certainly at least part of it) is obviously dependent on Turkey.

To summarise, Turkish literature has thus far made only a marginal contribution to the religious life and formation of the cultural identity of the Lithuanian Muslim community. Converts, especially those who are newly converted, are drawn to various available religious texts, as they are still in the process of shaping their worldview and identity. Therefore, their values and approaches can be affected by such literature as is distributed in the mosque.

Nevertheless, the increasing presence of Turkish elements in the country is gradually shaping positive attitudes towards Turks and Turkey, assigning them a role as supporters, particularly in financial matters. This affects both the Muslim groups investigated in this study, with some individuals being aware and recognising the effect and others not or experiencing it unconsciously. Moreover, this investigation revealed that translations of Islam-related Turkish texts into Lithuanian contribute to strengthening the religious lives of individual Muslim community members, but does not currently play a significant role in those religious lives.

Notes

[1] In this article, the term Turkish is deliberately used when referring specifically to the Republic of Turkey, its citizens or cultural elements directly related to it. In cases where broader ethno-linguistic or historical connections are implied, the word Turkic is considered a more accurate term. Both concepts used in the text also reflect the terminology found in academic research, interviews and community discourse.

[2] In his studies, conducted in Lithuanian, Vytis Čiubrinskas has mainly used the concept of *identitetas*. There is a difference in expressing the same concept in another word in Lithuanian, as Savoniakaitė uses the term *tapatybė*. *Identitetas* is classified as an international word, while *tapatybė* and *tapatumas* are Lithuanian equivalents.

[3] Spaces that are mainly used for prayer in Islam.

[4] In Kaunas Mosque, men pray on the ground floor and women on the upper floor.

[5] Although this is not true. Initially, the functions of the imam were performed only by Lithuanian Tatars, but after the restoration of Lithuania's independence and the establishment of the Turkish Embassy, these functions were sometimes performed by immigrants, including Turks.

[6] Iftar is a dinner eaten during the month of Ramadan, a common custom in Islamic culture.

[7] Please note that the Islamic Centre and the Islamic Culture and Education Centre are separate public institutions in Lithuania. The head of the Islamic Culture and Education Centre is Aleksandras Beganskas, the new Islamic Centre is led by Paulius Bergaudas.

Sources:

1. Author's personal archive:

1. Correspondence with the administration of Kaunas Mosque, 2024.
2. Participant observation at Kaunas Mosque. March-April, July 2024, March 2025.

2. Interviews:

1. Convert 1 (2024). Kaunas
2. Convert 2 (2024). Kaunas
3. Convert 3 (2024). Kaunas
4. Expert Lithuanian Tatar 1 (2012). Vilnius
5. Expert Lithuanian Tatar 2 (2011). Kaunas
6. Expert Lithuanian Tatar 3 (2012). Kaunas
7. Expert Lithuanian Tatar 4 (2024). Vilnius
8. Expert Lithuanian Tatar 5 (2025). Vilnius
9. Expert Lithuanian Tatar 6 (2025). Kaunas
10. Expert Tatar 1 (2024). Kaunas

References

Aça, Mehmet 2023. The Role of Rituals and Ceremonies in the Identity Struggle of a Society that Has Lost Its Language: the Example of Lithuanian Tatars. *Lietuvos istorijos studijos*, Special ed., pp. 93–108.

Anderson, Benedict 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* London, New York.

Bairašauskaitė, Tamara 2009. Vietinis komponentas Lietuvos totorių sociokultūrinės tapatybės konstrukcijose (istoriografinis aspektas) (The Local Component in the Construction of the Socio-cultural Identity of Lithuanian Tatars (Historiographical Aspect)). *Lietuvos istorijos studijos,* Special ed., pp. 255–273.

Bairašauskaitė, Tamara 2021. *Lietuvos totorių istorija* (The History of the Lithuanian Tatars). Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas.

Charrière, Etienne E. 2020. Translation, Transcription, and the Making of World Literature: On Late Ottoman and Modern Turkish Scriptworlds. In: B. Alkan, Ç. Günay-Erkol (eds) *Turkish Literature as World Literature*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, pp. 36–54.

Čepaitienė, Auksuolė 2001. Atgaivinant etninį tapatumą: individas, simbolis, vieta (Reviving Ethnic Identity: The Individual, the Symbol, the Place). *Lietuvos etnologija. Socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos,* Vol. 1 (10), pp. 167–198.

Čepaitienė, Auksuolė 2013. *Gyvenimo etnografija: vietos, struktūros ir laikas. Besikeičianti Lietuva XX amžiuje* (Ethnography of Life: Places, Structures, and Time: Lithuania in Transition in the 20th Century). Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas.

Čiubrinskas, Vytis 2008. Tautinio identiteto antropologinio tyrinėjimo klausimai (Aspects of Anthropological Research on National Identity). *Lietuviškojo identiteto trajektorijos* (Trajectories of Lithuanian Identity), Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, pp. 13–25.

Čiubrinskas, Vytis 2011. *Lietuviškasis identitetas šiuolaikinės emigracijos kontekstuose* (The Lithuanian Identity in the Context of Contemporary Emigration). Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas.

Dickinson, Kristin Ann 2015. *Translation and the Experience of Modernity: A History of German Turkish Connectivity.* Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4g22n4qv.

ELTA 2005. Senieji Lietuvos totorių rankraščiai – unikalioje parodoje (Old Lithuanian Tatar Manuscripts: A Unique Exhibition). Delfi.lt. https://www.delfi.lt/kultura/naujienos/senieji-lietuvos-totoriu-rankrasciai-unikalioje-parodoje-6658039 (accessed 15/05/2024).

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland 2001. Ethnic Identity, National Identity, and Intergroup Conflict. *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, No. 3, pp. 42–68.

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland 2017. *What Is Anthropology?* London: Pluto Press.

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland 2021. The Loss of Diversity in the Anthropocene Biological and Cultural Dimensions. *Frontiers in Political Science*, No. 3, pp. 1–10. https://doi.org/10.3389/FPOS.2021.743610.

Ersan, Osman 2024. *Moteris islame. Jos teisės ir orumas* (Woman in Islam: Her Rights and Dignity)]. Vilnius: Lietuvos musulmonų sunitų religinių bendruomenių taryba-Muftiatas, Istanbul: Erkam Printhouse.

Filosofijos fakultetas 2025. https://naujienos.vu.lt/turkijos-kulturos-dienos-vilniuje-savaite-kupina-skoniu-ir-patirciu (accessed 21/06/2025).

Geertz, Clifford 1971. *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press.

Geertz, Clifford 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Puhlishers.

Gürçağlar, Şehnaz Tahir 2008. *The Politics and Poetics of Translation in Turkey, 1923– 1960*. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi.

Hürriyet Daily News 2016. Turkish Books Available in Dozens of Languages. https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-books-available-in-dozens-of-languages-95649 (accessed 21/05/2024).

Islamo centras 2024. https://www.islamocentras.lt/korana-beverciant-naujas-vertimas-i-lietuviu-kalba-jau-pakeliui (accessed 21/05/2024).

Islamo kultūros ir švietimo centras 2016. https://www.islamo-centras.lt/en/apie-mus/ (accessed 22/03/2025).

Islamo žinios 2019. Lietuvos musulmonų religinių bendruomenių taryba – Muftiatas ir LMRBT – Muftiato muftijus (The Council of Lithuanian Muslim Religious Communities – Muftiate and Mufti), https://islamasvisiems.lt/lietuvos-musulmonu-religiniu-bendruomeniu-taryba-muftiatas/ (accessed 21/05/2024).

Jakubauskas, Adas; Sitdykov, Galim; Dumin, Stanislav 2009. *Lietuvos totoriai istorijoje ir kultūroje* (Lithuanian Tatars in History and Culture). Kaunas: Lietuvos totorių bendruomenių sąjunga.

Jonušas, Jonas 2022. Lietuvos totorių raštija (Lithuanian Tatar Writings). *Lietuvos totoriai,* No. 1 (169), pp. 7–9.

Kričinskis, Stanislovas 1993. *Lietuvos totoriai*. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla.

Kulwicka-Kamińska, Joanna 2018. Piśmiennictwo religijne Tatarów Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego jako źródło badań historycznojęzykowych (The Religious Writing of the Tatars of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania As a Source for Historical and Linguistic Research). *Bulletin de la Société Polonaise de Linguistique*, pp. 93–106.

Leparskienė, Lina 2022. Totorių Vokė. Istorinės atminties ir asmeninių patirčių erdvė (Tatars' Vokė: A Space for Historical Memory and Personal Experience). *Tautosakos darbai,* Vol. 63, pp. 62–80.

Lietuvos statistikos departamentas 2021. Lietuvos Respublikos 2021 m. gyventojų ir būstų surašymo rezultatai. Tautybė, gimtoji kalba ir tikyba (2021 Lithuanian Population and Housing Census Results. Ethnicity, Native Language and Religion). https://osp.stat.gov.lt/2021-gyventoju-ir-bustu-surasymo-rezultatai/tautybe-gimtoji-kalba-ir-tikyba (accessed 21/05/2024).

Lietuvos valstybės konstitucija (The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania) 1922. Kaunas: „Varpo" b-vės sp.

Litvanya'da Türk Tarihi ve Kültürü Sempozyumu (Symposium on Turkish History and Culture in Lithuania) 2012. Yunus Emre Enstitüsü. https://www.yee.org.tr/en/node/824 (accessed 21/05/2024).

Lukoševičiūtė, Gintarė 2015. *Lietuvos ir Lenkijos musulmonų migracijos raida 1944–1990 metais* (The Process of Migration of Muslims from Lithuania and Poland between 1944 and 1990). Master thesis, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania.

Łapicz, Czesław 1986. *Kitab Tatarów litewsko-polskich (Paleografia. Grafia. Język*) (Kitabs of the Lithuanian-Polish Tatars (Paleography. Graphology. Language)). Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu im. Mikołaja Kopernika.

Makaveckas, Romualdas 2003. Kas mes – kultūros požiūriu (Who We Are from a Cultural Perspective). *Lietuvos totoriai,* No. 9 (71), pp. 6–8.

Mardosa, Jonas 2024. *Raižių totoriai XX amžiaus istorijos ir kultūrų sankirtose* (The Tatars of Raižiai: At the Crossroads of 20th Century History and Cultures). Vilnius: Mardosų spaustuvė.

Markevičiūtė, Dalia 2009. *Internal Linkages and External Adjustment of Muslim People in Lithuania.* Master Thesis, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania.

Migracijos departamentas 2023. The Number of Foreigners Living in Lithuania Exceeded 200 000. https://www.migracija.lt/-/the-number-of-foreigners-living-in-lithuania-has-exceeded-200-thousand (accessed 03/12/2024).

Migracijos departamentas 2024. Imigrantai Lietuvoje. Apžvalga (Immigrants in Lithuania: Overview), November 1. https://migracija.lrv.lt/public/canonical/1730710415/1067/imig-2024-11.pdf (accessed 03/12/2024).

Miśkiewicz, Ali 1990. *Tatarzy Polscy 1918–1939* (Tatars in Poland 1918–1939). Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawn. Naukowe.

Miškinienė, Galina 2002. Iz arkheograficheskikh nakhodok leta 2002 goda (Archaeological Findings from the Summer of 2002). *Kalbotyra,* Vol. 51 (2), pp. 165–172.

Miškinienė, Galina 2010. Lietuvos totorių rankraštinė knyga: istorija ir tyrimų perspektyva (Manuscript Book of Lithuanian Tatars: History and Research Prospects). *Knygotyra*, No. 54, pp. 199–210.

Miškinienė, Galina 2014. *Orhano Veli poezija, arba Kultūriniai Lietuvos ir Turkijos tiltai* (The Poetry of Orhan Veli, or Cultural Bridges between Lithuania and Turkey). Vilnius: Vilniaus universitetas.

Miškinienė, Galina 2020. *Vilnius Üniversitesinde Okutulan Yabancılara Türkçe Öğretimi Ders Kitapları Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme* (An Overview of Textbooks for Teaching Turkish to Foreign Students at Vilnius University). https://www.academia.edu/45437891/Vilnius_%C3%9Cniversitesinde_Okutulan_Yabanc%C4%B1lara_T%C3%BCrk%C3%A7e_%C3%96%C4%9Fretimi_Ders_Kitaplar%C4%B1_%C3%9Czerine_Bir_De%C4%9Ferlendirme (accessed 12/03/2024).

Muchliński, Anton Osipovich 1857. *Issledovaniye o proiskhozhdenii i sostoyanii litovskikh tatar* (An Investigation of the Origin and Situation of the Lithuanian Tatars). Saint Petersburg.

Peleckis, Mindaugas 2010. Lietuvos totorių tapatumo paieškos: analizės štrichai (The Search for Lithuanian Tatar Identity: An Analysis). *Kultūrologija,* Vol. 18, pp. 140–154.

Račius, Egdūnas 2013. A "virtual club" of Lithuanian converts to Islam. In: Thomas Hoffmann, Göran Larsson (eds) *Muslims and the New Information and Communication Technologies.* Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, pp. 31–47.

Račius, Egdūnas 2018. Faith No More: The Views of Lithuanian Converts to Islam on Deconversion. In: Karin van Nieuwkerk (ed.) *Moving In and Out of Islam*. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 363–384.

Račius, Egdūnas 2019. How Turkish is Islam in Lithuania? *Berkley Forum,* September 19. https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/how-turkish-is-islam-in-lithuania (accessed 28/05/2024).

Račius, Egdūnas 2023. Religious terminology in Islamic Literature in the Lithuanian Language. *Contemporary Islam*, No. 17 (3), pp. 451–466.

Savoniakaitė, Vida 2011. Tapatybė (Identity). *Lietuvos etnologijos ir antropologijos enciklopedija* (Encyclopaedia of Lithuanian Ethnology and Anthropology). Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, pp. 389–392.

Savoniakaitė, Vida 2019. Jono Basanavičiaus požiūris į lietuvių tautos tyrimus, 1879– 1927 (Jonas Basanavičius' View on the Research of the Lithuanian Nation, 1879–1927). *Lietuvos etnologija: socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*, Vol. 19, pp. 51–79.

Savoniakaitė, Vida 2023. *Imperija ir tauta: Eduardo Volterio etnografija 1882–1941* (Empire and Nation: Eduards Volters' Ethnography, 1882–1941). Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas.

Şahin, Ertuğrul 2023. Progress, Function and Structure of Mosque Archives of Turkish Immigrants in Germany: An Overview. *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, No. 12, pp. 376–394.

Smith, Anthony 2009. *Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*. London and New York: Routledge.

Tamelytė, Kristina 2019a. E. Račius: pleištas Lietuvos musulmonų bendruomenėje susijęs su politine situacija Turkijoje (E. Račius, The Split in the Lithuanian Muslim Community is Related to the Political Situation in Turkey). *Bernardinai.lt.* https://www.bernardinai.lt/2019-10-28-e-racius-pleistas-lietuvos-musulmonu-bendruomeneje-susijes-su-politine-situacija-turkijoje (accessed 28/05/2024).

Tamelytė, Kristina 2019b. A. Beganskas: mečetė yra visų musulmonų reikalas (A. Beganskas, The Mosque is a Matter for all Muslims). Bernardinai.lt. https://www.bernardinai.lt/2019-10-30-a-beganskas-mecete-yra-visu-musulmonu-reikalas (accessed 28/05/2024).

Tautinių bendrijų namai 2023. *Lietuvos totorių nevyriausybinės organizacijos* (Lithuanian Tatar Non-governmental Organisations). https://tbn.lt/ova_sev/lietuvos-totoriai.

TÜRKSOY 2011. Vilniüs'te Litvanya Türk Günleri (Turkish Days in Vilnius, Lithuania). https://www.turksoy.org/haberler/2011-04-30-vilniuste_litvanya_turk_gunleri (accessed 14/04/2024).

Vireliūnaitė, Lauryna 2016. Turkija vers Koraną į lietuvių kalbą, poeto Sigito Gedos vertimu Lietuvos musulmonai nebuvo patenkinti (Turkey will Translate the Qur'an into Lithuanian. Lithuanian Muslims are Dissatisfied with Poet Sigitas Geda's Translation). 15min.lt. https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/turkija-vers-korana-i-lietuviu-kalba-poeto-sigito-gedos-vertimu-lietuvos-musulmonai-nebuvo-patenkinti-56-584663 (accessed 27/05/2024).

Yeni Asya 2016. Diyanet'ten yeni atılım (The Diyanet's New Initiative), https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/gundem/diyanet-ten-yeni-atilim_385990 (accessed 15/05/2024).

Zemblienė, Inga 2018. „Tautų susiliejimas": Lietuvos totorių vaikų tapatybių daugialypiškumas mišriose šeimose, 1940–1990 ("The Merging of Nations": The Multifaceted Identities of Lithuanian Tatar Children in Mixed Families, 1940–1990). *Logos,* No. 97, pp. 201–216.

Gintarė Lukoševičiūtė is a PhD candidate at the Lithuanian Institute of History. Her research interests are Muslim communities in Lithuania and Poland, their migration processes, and their lifestyle in the diaspora.

E-mail: gintare.lukoseviciute@istorija.lt

ORCID: 0009-0008-6994-8381

https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.10

Modern Pagan Traditions in Lithuania: Navigating Romantic Nostalgia and Creativity in Ritual Year Celebrations

Dalia Senvaitytė
Kaunas Faculty, Vilnius University
E-mail: dalia.senvaityte@knf.vu.lt

Abstract: This paper examines annual celebrations among Native Faith communities in Lithuania in contemporary society. The analysis is based on ethnographic research conducted by the author between 2015 and 2025. The study investigates both newly introduced holidays and adaptations of traditional Lithuanian festivities within a modern sociocultural context, focusing on exploring the creativity of Lithuanian modern pagan traditions, particularly the observance of the spring and autumn equinoxes. The paper highlights how individual initiatives and socio-cultural factors shape the evolution of these traditions. It also looks at the creative reinterpretation of rituals to illustrate how communities preserve and transform their heritage. Additionally, the dissemination of these traditions to the broader society is presented, revealing a dynamic interplay between nostalgia for ancient pre-Christian practices and contemporary expressions of identity within modern Lithuanian paganism.

Keywords: annual celebrations, calendar holidays, Lithuanian paganism, modern paganism, Native Faith, ritual year

Introduction

Promoting ideas about pagan roots in traditional Lithuanian annual festivities began with the early works of annual ritual year researchers in the first part of the 20th century. This trend gained popularity during the Soviet era, when intense anti-religious – and especially anti-Christian – propaganda was prevalent. It continued after Lithuania regained independence, when interest in Lithuanian ethnic traditions became a popular research subject. Scholars such as Angelė Vyšniauskaitė (1964), Pranė Dundulienė (1979, 1982, 1991) and Juozas Kudirka (1991), among others, contributed significantly to this discourse. Enthusiasts of ethnic culture used this framework to promote Lithuanian ethnographic traditions while downplaying their Christian elements.

These ideas were further expressed in practice, particularly through the Ramuva folklore movement, which emerged in Lithuania in the late 1970s and 1980s. Ainė Ramonaitė and Rytė Kukulskytė examined this ethnocultural movement in Soviet Lithuania, emphasising its connections with paganism and the Native Faith (Ramonaitė 2014).

The Romuva community, which split from Ramuva and was formally registered as a religious organisation in 1992, further emphasised pagan elements in Lithuanian annual celebrations. The established community developed through the formation of subdivisions between followers of the Lithuanian Native faith. Unaffiliated groups and individual followers of the Lithuanian Native Faith also remain active in interpreting the tradition. Scholars like Dalia Senvaitytė (2018) and Eglė Aleknaitė (2018), among others, have investigated this community.

Adherents to the Native Faith adapted older ethnographic traditions to the contemporary context, interpreting them in ways that emphasised presumed archaic ritualism. While elements from diverse ethnographic sources were integrated into these celebrations, they were often creatively reimagined, interpreted, and adapted. As a result, Lithuanian annual holidays celebrated in the 19th and 20th centuries were modified and entirely new ones created.

Organisers' perspectives on the role of tradition and ritual in these festivities vary: some point to the importance of gathering information from multiple sources, while others rely heavily on intuition. Regardless of the approach, celebrating the annual feasts remains the most significant religious activity for adherents of the Lithuanian Native Faith, fostering unity among its followers.

The socio-cultural context that contributed to the establishment and spread of modern holiday models in Lithuania has been analysed by Senvaitytė (2013, 2014), Arūnas Vaicekauskas (2009), Žilvytis Šaknys (2014), and others. Researchers have also examined the influence of folk movements and Native Faith ideologies on creating specific customs for the annual celebrations. For example, Saulė Matulevičienė (2007) traced the development and organisation of the first pagan festival, Rasos, in Kernavė; Gintarė Dusevičiūtė (2015) analysed the peculiarities of the Jorė calendar festival among Lithuanian Native Faith practitioners; and Gita Vilčiauskienė (2022) studied the formation and evolution of the Day of Baltic Unity at the beginning of the 21st century, noting its connection to pagan equinox celebrations.

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the annual holidays introduced or modified by adherents of the Native Faith in Lithuania. Although Native Faith followers celebrate holidays such as Easter, Christmas, Shrovetide, St. John's Day, St. George's Day, and All Souls' Day – festivals deeply rooted in Lithuanian ethnographic tradition – they reject Christian church practices and rituals. The primary focus of this study, however, is on celebrations absent in previous Lithuanian ethnographic tradition, with particular attention to the rituals of the autumn and spring equinoxes. The paper also evaluates the dissemination of these newly created holiday or holidays reinterpreted into mainstream society beyond contemporary pagan communities.

It is important to note that in this article, the terms paganism, modern paganism, and contemporary paganism are used synonymously, without evaluating the meaning or in what sense they are 'correct/incorrect', 'true/untrue'. Contemporary paganism serves as an umbrella term for modern religious movements, particularly those claiming continuity with pre-modern European pagan practices. The term modern paganism follows Michael Strmiska's usage in *Modern Paganism in World Culture* (2005). The emic terms Native Faith and followers of and believers in Native Faith are employed when discussing Lithuanian contemporary paganism.

The study is based on an analysis of online materials provided by the organisers of annual celebrations and supported by ethnographic research conducted by the author between 2015 and 2025. This fieldwork involved the observation of discussed celebrations, participant observation, and formal and informal conversations with organisers. The theoretical foundation of this paper draws

on Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's concept of the 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm 1992).

Rasos

The Rasos (literally 'dew') festival is one of Lithuania's most significant celebrations for followers of the Lithuanian Native Faith. The festival aligns with St. John's Day, which has deep roots in Lithuanian ethnographic tradition.

Romuva members often associate their community's beginnings with the first celebration of this holiday, organised in 1967 in Kernavė, the historical capital of Lithuania, and based on interpretations of ancient Lithuanian traditions.

Researchers have repeatedly examined the distinctive features and transformations of this festival, including works by Matulevičienė, Vaicekauskas, Aleknaitė, Rasa Paukštytė-Šaknienė, and others. Matulevičienė analysed the development and organisation of the first Rasos festival in Kernavė, describing the rituals performed and their meanings for both organisers and participants (Matulevičienė 2007). When discussing St. John's Day traditions across different historical periods, Vaicekauskas used four categories to analyse the feast: 1) peasant traditions, 2) the early twentieth-century public folklore tradition, 3) modern pagan traditions, and 4) modern traditions that incorporate earlier customs with the needs of contemporary consumer society (Vaicekauskas 2009). Aleknaitė differentiated folkloric, local, religious, commercial, and family-oriented practices of the St. John's/Rasos holiday, emphasising differences in their structure, celebratory character, interpretation, and symbolic meaning (Aleknaitė 2014). Paukštytė-Šaknienė examined the festival in relation to Lithuania's political position during various periods: the National Revival (late nineteenth century), the interwar period (1918–1940), Soviet Lithuania (1940–1941; 1944–1989), and contemporary independent Lithuania. Her study highlights the festival's political implications and its instrumental role in diverse undertakings, ranging from national rejuvenation and independence movements to resistance against Christianity, the institutionalisation of a new pagan faith, and the creation of an ethnic cultural sphere for emigrants (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2016).

Some traditional ethnographic elements of St. John's Day were incorporated into Rasos. The search for an alternative name for the feast that would not

be associated with the Christian name for the holiday drew attention to two twentieth-century sources, Teodoras Narbutas (1992) and Liudvikas Adomas Jucevičius (1959), both of which used the term Rasos in connection with midsummer celebrations.

As several researchers have previously analysed the transformation of the feast, its peculiarities will not be discussed here. However, it is worth mentioning that the festival's pagan elements are rooted in agrarian ethnographic tradition. Key elements of the festival include building bonfires on hills, gathering herbs, weaving wreaths from the gathered herbs, and searching for a fern flower. Recently added elements include access of participants to the festival site through a specially made symbolic gate, symbolic sacrifices to the gods at the beginning of the festival, and the ritual importance given to dancing around the fire and singing specific songs, among others.

As noted on the Romuva community's official website (romuva.lt), the authentic customs of Rasos embody reverence for nature as the source of human physical and spiritual vitality and respect for ancestral traditions. The main customs of the Rasos festival are:

gathering magical herbs,

weaving and floating wreaths on a river,

building bonfires,

greeting the sun,

washing with the morning dew,

celebrating communality by honouring the powers of nature.

Today, the Rasos festival is celebrated across all Romuva communities, and by other Native Faith groups, and it has also gained popularity more broadly in Lithuania. One of the most significant celebrations is held in Verkiai Park, Vilnius, where participation is open to the public. The 2025 program (20 June) included:

19:00 – Kupoliovimas, wreath weaving, herb market,

19:30 – Ritual circles at the entrance gates,

19:45 – Ritual circles, fortune telling,

20:30 – Fire rites, singing sutartinės,

21:00 – Greeting the setting sun

21:40 – Lighting the bonfire, dancing, singing,

23:30 – Torchlight procession, wreath floating on the river.

Until dawn – searching for a fern blossom, bathing in the morning dew, greeting the morning sun.

Another major Rasos celebration is held annually in Kernavė, where pagan elements play a prominent role in a broader, publicly oriented event. The 2025 program (23 June) was scheduled as follows:

12:00 – Craft fair featuring artisans and culinary heritage,

17:00 – Kupoliavimas with a herbalist in Pajauta Valley (herb gathering, wreath weaving, tea),

20:00 – Ceremonial gate at the foot of Castle Hill,

20:20 – Ceremonial circles, games, folklore performances on Castle Hill,

21:40 – Sunset ritual,

22:20 – Lighting the altar at the foot of Aukuras Hill,

23:00 – Lighting the Great Bonfire and hilltop beacons,

23:20 – Night dancing on Castle Hill,

24:00 – Wreath floating on the Neris River,

03:00 – Bonfire jumping,

04:30 – Greeting the sunrise and washing *with dew on Mindaugas' Throne Hill and in Pajauta Valley.*

It should be emphasised, however, that these public festivals are primarily organised for broader society rather than being confined to closed circles of Native Faith followers. Celebrations conducted within the Native Faith community are not widely publicly advertised and are instead often observed privately in smaller, like-minded groups.

Figure 1. Rasos celebration on Altoniškiai hill (Kaunas district) in 2018. Photo by Virgilijus Avižonis.

In contrast to the more intimate celebrations held within Native Faith communities, modern pagan customs have also been widely adopted in the St. John's Day/Rasos celebrations with cultural institutions throughout Lithuania organising John's Day events (for example, in Jonava, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Šventoji, Kretinga, and other locations). These public festivals are oriented toward a broader audience with participants less directly engaged in the rituals, often acting as observers rather than active practitioners. In addition, such events frequently incorporate elements of popular culture, creating an atmosphere more strongly associated with entertainment than religious practice.

Jorė

The celebration of *Jorė* originated in the 1970s and 1980s, when Native Faith enthusiasts in the Vilnius district began to ritualise it (Dusevičiūtė 2015). The festival acquired new significance in 1997, when it was organised in the village of Kulionys in Molėtai district, since when it has steadily gained in popularity across the country.

Like Rasos, Jorė coincides with a Christian feast as it is observed around April 23, the date of St. George's Day. Both festivals share ethnographic associations with the beginning of the agricultural year. The conceptual foundations of Jorė are linked to a pre-Christian spring festival. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-

century sources (for example, Matthaeus Praetorius) mention an annual festival known as Pergubrinės, celebrated in the Baltic region at the start of the farming season, which modern pagans regard as a historical antecedent of Jorė.

In its contemporary form, the festival was reframed as Jorė, symbolising the joy of awakening spring and the first sprouts of the season. The central rituals include reverence for ancestral spirits, the initiation of new community members, offerings to the deities Žemyna and Perkūnas, and sharing ceremonial meals. Music and song accompany these rites, reinforcing the spiritual connection between participants, ancestral spirits, and divine forces. The *vaidilos* (chief priests) recite prayers, which are repeated collectively by the community.

Over time, new elements have been integrated into the program alongside rituals that have become traditional. For example, the 2025 celebration in Kulionys featured the presentation of Algimantas Bučys' two-part work *Kings and Queens of Lithuania*, and a performance by the actor and bard Gediminas Storpirštis.

As with Rasos, the celebration of Jorė has spread beyond its original location and is now marked throughout Lithuania. Today, it is observed not only by modern pagan communities but also by cultural and education institutions, reaching broader audiences and contributing to the visibility of Native Faith traditions in contemporary society.

Figure 2. Jorė celebration on Pypliai hill (Kaunas district) in 2017. Photo by Dalia Senvaitytė.

Dusevičiūtė (2015) has commented on the festival's ongoing adaptations, questioning whether these modifications signify the true continuation of an ancient tradition or are instead constructions shaped by modern needs. Exam-

ining these dynamics provides insight into the broader discourse surrounding modern paganism in Lithuania, where the balance between historical fidelity and adaptive creativity remains a contentious aspect of community practice.

Spring and Autumn Equinoxes (Pavasario lygė and Rudens lygė)

Unlike Rasos and Jorė, the spring and autumn equinoxes are not attested in Lithuanian ethnographic tradition or historical sources. Therefore, their contemporary observance within modern Lithuanian paganism must be explained through influences from abroad or individual initiatives.

As Ronald Hutton (2008) points out, the popularity of solar festivals is linked to the ideas of Edward Williams (nicknamed Iolo Morganwg) and their dissemination in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The context was the 'discovery' of the ancient Druids in the mid-18th century and the association of ancient megalithic monuments in Britain with them, which heated the romantic imagination of the time; the intense interest in the ancient teachings of the Druids; and the popularisation of the notion that somehow their knowledge might have survived the spread of Christianity. Nineteenth-century scholars such as Jacob Grimm (Deutsche Mythologie, 1835) and James George Frazer (The Golden Bough, 1890) further speculated on the calendar year of the ancient Europeans. Margaret Murray (1921) popularised the idea that equinoxes were once central pagan festivals whose traces survived in witchcraft traditions. Although M. Murray acknowledged that British witches did not celebrate the equinoxes, her writings shaped the symbolic calendar adopted by mid-twentieth-century British Neopaganism.

The Wicca movement, initiated by Gerald Gardner in the 1950s, systematised observation of solstices and equinoxes. With the collaboration of Doreen Valiente, Gardner emphasised the solar cycle as part of the Wiccan liturgy, as articulated in *Witchcraft Today* (1954) and the *Book of Shadows* (1957). Initially considered minor, the equinoxes became part of the 'Wheel of the Year' after 1958, when the eight major Wiccan festivals were canonised (Hutton 2008). Through oral transmission, ritual manuals, and publications, this model spread across Europe and the United States, merging with countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

In Lithuania, access to these Western Neopagan ideas was limited by the Soviet occupation. Nevertheless, the Soviet Society of Knowledge (est. 1947, Moscow) and its Lithuanian counterpart, Žinija (est. 1948), indirectly popularised astronomical knowledge and non-religious worldviews. Publications such as *Mokslas ir gyvenimas* (Science and Life) and lectures at the Vilnius Planetarium offered alternative cosmological frameworks that later dovetailed with pagan revivalism. Informal channels, including samizdat and contacts with Russian neopagan groups, also contributed to the circulation of related concepts.

The first efforts to commemorate the equinoxes as pagan festivals in Lithuania date to the early 1990s. These inaugural celebrations occurred within Vilnius Kalnai Park, organised by a small collective of like-minded pagans. The central ritual of these gatherings involved the ceremonial ignition of bonfires during the night. These early initiatives were notably influenced by the ideological leadership of Jonas Trinkūnas, a prominent figure within the Romuva community.

Trinkūnas later articulated his vision in *Baltic Faith* (2000), designating the spring and autumn equinoxes as *Pavasario lygė* and *Rudens lygė* (or *Daga*) and prescribing ritual practices such as extinguishing and relighting fire, honouring water, and employing symbols like *verba* branches and decorated Easter eggs (*margučiai*) as survivals of pre-Christian spring customs (Trinkūnas 2009).

Afterward, due to the active participants of those first celebrations, this tradition extended beyond the Vilnius area to other regions of Lithuania. The organisation of equinox celebrations quickly gained power in the Samogitian region. The observances took place at Vainagiai hill (initiated by Rimantas Braziulis and Valdas Rutkūnas), while in Šiauliai, Darius Ramančionis and the Aukuras public club organised gatherings at Salduvė and Bubiai hills from 1994.

While historical and ethnographic material do not provide explicit information about the observance of the equinoxes in Lithuania, organisers frequently drew inspiration from eclectic sources: Pretorius' seventeenth-century description of *Pergubrinės*, Aryan New Year rites, the international Earth Day movement, and others (Ramančionis, interview 2023). Despite limited historical evidence, autumn celebrations were also connected to ethnographic remnants of Sambariai, Ožinės, and Alutinis.

Later, a significant stimulus for establishing innovative equinox celebrations was provided by the Vilnius Ethnic Culture Centre (https://www.etno.lt/), formed under the guidance of the Vilnius City Council in 1992. Eglė Plioplienė,

the head of the centre at the time, designed cultural events in Vilnius rooted in Lithuanian ethnic traditions. She intended to reinvent 'traditional' celebrations and adapt them to the modern context of the city. According to Plioplienė (interview, 2023), a primary focus was the creation of new festivals aligned with the astronomical calendar, tailored to an urban environment, while simultaneously integrating mythological significance into these newly introduced observances. In developing these festivals, she consulted various sources, all emphasising the fundamental role of sacrifice to ancient gods in ancient celebrations. While the tradition was developing, the nature of these sacrifices evolved: symbolic offerings to ancient pagan gods replaced animal sacrifice. For example, straw figures were made during the autumn equinox, such as a symbolic straw goat that used instead of the animal offering. During the spring equinox of 1993, trees were venerated by 'offering' them candles and crafting fire patterns that symbolised the grass snake as a revered emblem of life. A ceremonial fire strip was ignited along the Neris River embankment in Vilnius.

The first autumn equinox celebration, also known as *Rudens Lygė*, was coordinated by the Vilnius Ethnic Culture Centre in 1992 on Tauras Hill in Vilnius. Subsequently, the spring equinox, also known as *Pavasario Lygė*, was commemorated in 1993 at Sereikiškės Park (Bernardinai Garden) in Vilnius.

The spring equinox celebrations held from 1993 to 2000, organised by the Vilnius Centre of Ethnic Culture, were also formally linked to Earth Day. Initiated by the United Nations in 1971 and officially recognised in Lithuania in 1992, Earth Day was promoted nationally through the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania. On this occasion, numerous organisations arranged festive performances, creative campaigns, park visits, forest management activities, and bird-nesting initiatives nationwide.

Following a break, spring equinox celebrations in Vilnius were revived in 2008 and have been held annually since then.

The celebration of the autumn equinox also gradually gained popularity. The transition from the period of light to darkness in autumn is marked by ceremonial fires and musical rites conducted along the banks of the Neris River in Vilnius.

During the 2000s, the festival evolved through the introduction of sculptures, each representing a distinct theme annually, for example, commemorating the anniversary of the Battle of Žalgiris (Battle of Grunwald) or honouring prominent figures in ethnic culture who passed away that year (for example,

A. Vyšniauskaitė, V. Toporov). A collaborative team of professional sculptors was commissioned to create straw and wood sculptures that embodied the essence of the autumnal equinox. Symbolic straw figures, depicting goats or other mythological beings, were set ablaze to mark this seasonal transition. Fireworks and musical performances accompanied the burning of these sculptures, forming the visual and auditory centrepiece of the ceremonial fire spectacle. Musical performances included folklore, folk rock, folk jazz, and jazz, often anchored by traditional Lithuanian *sutartinės* (interpreted as ancient ritual songs), providing a rich cultural foundation to the event. The celebration has consistently included symbolic offerings to the pagan gods and commemoration of the year's cyclical significance.

Subsequently, the autumn equinox celebrations in Vilnius began to coincide with the Capital Days festivities, further increasing their popularity. Since 2007, Ugnis ir kaukė (Fire and Mask) has organised the Fire Sculpture Mysteries.

Autumn equinox events have taken place at multiple locations in Vilnius, including Kalnai Park, Sereikiškės Park, and Lukiškės Square, while spring equinox celebrations have focused on the area between the National Museum and Cathedral Square.

In 2000, another significant alteration marked the celebration of the autumn equinox as it became interlinked with the observance of Baltic Unity Day, commemorating the 'Battle of the Sun' (an initiative introduced by the above-mentioned Aukuras club). On this day in 1236, the united Baltic tribes fought against the Livonian Order.

These celebrations are typically held at hillforts, hills, or *alkakalniai* (supposed ancient sacred hills), where bonfires are lit at 8 pm. Participants often follow the recommendations of the event's initiators: prior to lighting the bonfire, collective efforts are made to clean and prepare the surroundings, arrange the fire pit, and ready the site for the festivities. Discussions during these gatherings touch on the significance of Baltic unity, recount Baltic history, commemorate the autumn equinox, revive ancient customs, and perform pagan equinox rituals.

A digital map has been in development since 2014 to indicate the scheduled locations of these events. This initiative was spearheaded by Aukuras as they are dedicated to preserving natural and cultural heritage (https://www.aukuras.lt). The map is a valuable resource for planning, coordinating, and documenting these events, as illustrated in Figure 3.

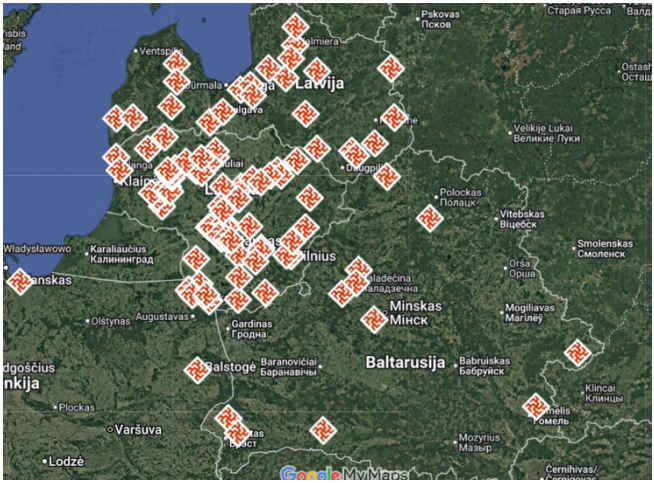


Figure 3. Sites of autumn equinox celebrations in 2025.
Photo from https://www.aukuras.lt/sasauka-2025/

Following the launch of the spring and autumn equinox festivities, articles promoting them highlighted their connection to ancient traditions (e.g., Klimka 2002).

Today, the festival is organised on various scales:

1. Public Celebrations. These are held in Vilnius and Kernavė (here they are organised by the Kernavė Branch of the Širvintos Culture Centre; the event takes place in the Kernavė State Cultural Reserve), and occasionally in other Lithuanian cities and locations organised by diverse cultural organisations. Such events are designed for large audiences and, sometimes, for urban settings, emphasising visually engaging elements.

Figure 4. Autumn equinox in Kernavė in 2023. Photo by Dalia Senvaitytė.

2. Gatherings organised by followers of Native Faith communities. These festivals, arranged by followers of Native Faith communities, often attract individuals interested in ancient pagan traditions. Rituals, in accordance with pagan traditions (for instance, an appeal to the ancient gods), are consistently performed. Participants actively organise these celebrations themselves, rather than serving solely as observers.

3. Community-specific events (organised by schools, cultural centres, and similar institutions). The customs observed in these community-oriented celebrations are strongly shaped by the unique characteristics of each community. Nevertheless, organisers frequently seek to incorporate or emulate the traditions practiced within Native Faith communities or larger public celebrations.

The evolution of equinox celebrations in Western Europe and Lithuania reveals a dynamic interplay between romanticised reconstructions of the past, scholarly interpretations, and contemporary cultural creativity. In Lithuania, the spread of equinox celebrations appeared through indirect cultural transmission from abroad. By the 1990s, inspired by Trinkūnas and the Romuva community, local activists began shaping distinctly Lithuanian expressions of

these festivals. Drawing on inspiration from historical sources, ethnographic customs, neighbouring traditions, and global influences such as Earth Day, these events developed into significant public urban rituals. While the historical record offers no direct evidence of pre-Christian Lithuanian equinox rites, these modern practices illustrate how communities – motivated by a desire for cultural continuity, identity, and a connection to nature – have created a living and evolving tradition.

Other festivities

In addition to the festivals already discussed, modern pagans in Lithuania often celebrate other newly introduced festivals, which, in one way or another, they try to associate with the ancient pre-Christian Lithuanian or Baltic tradition. These include the Day of the Perkūnas, the Day of Gabija, the Day of Milda, the celebration of Eternal Fire, the Feast of the Sun, and the Day of the Krivis, among others.

The Day of Perkūnas (The Day of the Thunder God). Observed on 2 February, this day in ethnographic Lithuanian tradition coincides with Catholic customs known as *Grabnyčios* (Candlemas). For followers of the native faith, it is associated with Perkūnas, the most significant deity of pre-Christian Lithuanians and is linked to thunder and atmospheric phenomena. Certain priestesses within the Romuva community or other modern pagan groups perform fire rituals dedicated to Perkūnas. Participants prepare candles to invoke Perkūnas' blessings for protection against storms and misfortune, enhancing the spiritual connection between practitioners and their deity. Today, rituals and emphasis on festivals' pre-Christian roots occur across Lithuania. These festivals are organised not only by Native Faith followers but also by cultural and education institutions. For example, on Sunday, 2 February 2025, at 4 pm, a ceremony was held at the Lithuanian National Centre of Culture in Vilnius.

The Day of Gabija. Celebrated on 5 February, this day corresponds in the ethnographic tradition to the Catholic St. Agatha's Day. In modern pagan practice, it honours Gabija, an ancient Lithuanian deity and protector of the fireplace and home. Rituals on this day focus primarily on fire, highlighting its purifying qualities and vital role in Native Faith worship.

The Celebration of the Eternal Fire: Since 2017, the Šatrijos Romuva community has organised the Feast of the Eternal Fire on the first Saturday of July atop Šatrija Hill in Telšiai district. This festival references the kindling of the eternal fire, an important pre-Christian ritual practice in Lithuania. The tradition was reinstituted in 1994 under the initiative of the community's early leader, Adolfas Gedvilas (1935–2017). Fires from various locations are brought together on Šatrija Hill, symbolising the unity of Native Faith practitioners. Participants engage in a circular procession after paying homage to the ancient gods and ancestors.

The Day of Milda: First organised by Romuva adherents around 2006 in Dvarčiškiai village, Švenčionys district, this festival honours Milda, a legendary Lithuanian goddess of love, known primarily from a single 19th-century reference by the romantic historian T. Narbutas (1992). Celebrated on 13 May (or a nearby date), the festival incorporates elements of the traditional Lithuanian May Days (*gegužinės*), when young people historically organised amusements and festivities in May. Over time, Milda Day has spread to other regions, including Kelmė, Varėna, Panevėžys, Kaunas, and other localities. The festival has gradually gained popularity beyond pagan communities, reflecting its broader cultural recognition and participation.

Figure 5. Milda day on Veršvai hill in Kaunas, 2019. Photo by Dalia Senvaitytė.

The Feast of the Sun: This festival centres on the veneration of the sun and is celebrated in July. The exact date of its inception is uncertain, but it is estimated to have emerged around 2020. The festival was first organised by the *Saulės vartų Romuva* (Sun Gates Romuva) community in Dovainonys, Kaišiadorys district. Subsequently, similar events have been held by modern pagan communities in other districts of Lithuania, including Trakai, Šakiai, and Prienai. Notably, the festival reflects influences from other contemporary alternative spiritual practices, incorporating activities such as yoga, rebreathing techniques, and ecological teachings. These elements add a multifaceted dimension to the celebration. However, the Feast of the Sun remains less widely recognised and attended than other modern pagan festivals in Lithuania.

The Day of the Krivis: In 2010, adherents of the Romuva community inaugurated a commemorative event known as the Day of the Krivis to honour the consecration of their paramount leader, Krivis Jonas Trinkūnas. This gathering takes place in Vilnius, specifically at Gediminas Tomb Hill, the site where Trinkūnas assumed the role of the community's principal priest, or Krivis. The ceremony begins with the symbolic ignition of a ceremonial fire.

Although these festivals lack direct evidence of continuous practice from the pre-Christian period, they exemplify how modern Lithuanian paganism negotiates the interplay between nostalgic historical imagination, cultural heritage, and contemporary community identity.

Generalisation

Despite the enduring observance of traditional Lithuanian customs related to Christmas Eve, Easter celebrations, *Užgavėnės* (the day before Ash Wednesday), and the visitation of graves on All Saints' and All Souls' Days, contemporary annual holidays in Lithuania display profound influences from modern pagan practices. While certain traditions began to gain prominence during the 1990s, others have emerged since the turn of the millennium and continue to thrive.

The resurgence of pagan festivals and traditions in Lithuania reflects the contemporary pagan community's aspiration to reclaim and safeguard pre-Christian cultural heritage, which they consider authentic Lithuanian 'ethnocultural heritage'. Modern Lithuanian pagans reconstruct traditional folk motifs – such as fire, bonfires, wreaths, folk songs – into newly devised ritual

calendars. The rites performed by Romuva and the connected communities' rites fit Hobsbawm's concept of 'invented traditions': scripted practices loosely anchored in fragmentary lore, designed to serve contemporary identity needs. This blending of folk imagery with creative innovation reflects ritual adaptation: existing songs and customs are repurposed, and calendars retooled, to produce a seemingly continuous tradition. Participants evoke a nostalgically romanticised pre-Christian pagan past, despite the centuries-long disruption caused by Christianisation.

The Lithuanian case of annual celebrations illustrates how cultural revival and creative invention go hand in hand. Native Faith festivals are deliberately designed rituals – part myth, part scholarship, part activism – that connect communities to an idealised ancient pagan past. They demonstrate how contemporary pagans reinterpret history, selectively preserving pagan survivals, retelling legends, and even inventing deities and rituals to address present cultural and spiritual needs.

Due to the efforts of modern pagans across Lithuania and their engagement with diverse cultural, educational, and institutional settings, newly constructed traditions have spread nationwide. The active involvement of cultural and education institutions, such as the Vilnius Ethnic Culture Centre and others, has been instrumental in promoting pagan cultural values and facilitating the integration of pagan religious beliefs into the broader society.

Various celebratory events related to modern paganism now occur at multiple scales, ranging from large urban festivals to smaller gatherings hosted by cultural and education institutions and contemporary pagan communities or individuals.

The development and spread of these holiday traditions can be summarised schematically (Figure 6):

Figure 6. Scheme of the spread of modern pagan holidays.

The most popular festivities, shaped or invented by followers of the Lithuanian Native Faith, today are Rasos, Jorė, and the spring and autumn equinoxes. These

festivals adapt to changing societal needs and are shaped by the creativity of the organisers, the location, the audience, and the size of the event.

References

Aleknaitė, Eglė 2014. Rasos Kultūros centrų Joninėse/Rasose kuriamos tapatybės: Lietuvos nacionalinė švenčių sistema ir interpretacijos švenčiančiose bendruomenėse (Identities Created in Cultural Centres during Midsummer/Rasos: Lithuania's National Holiday System and Interpretations in Celebrating Communities). *Lithuanian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 1, pp. 61–76.

Aleknaitė, Eglė 2018. Participation of Contemporary Pagans in the Heritage Politics of Lithuania. *Pomegranate.* Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 92–114. DOI: 10.1558/pome.33715

Aukuras: public organization for preserving natural and cultural heritage. https://www. aukuras.lt

Dundulienė, Pranė 1991. *Lietuvių šventės: tradicijos, papročiai, apeigos* (Lithuanian Holidays: Traditions, Customs, Rites). Vilnius: Mintis.

Dundulienė, Pranė 1979. *Lietuvių kalendoriniai ir agrariniai papročiai* (Lithuanian Calendar and Agrarian Customs). Vilnius: Lietuvos TSR Aukštojo ir specialiojo mokslo ministerija, Vilniaus darbo raudonosios vėliavos ir tautų draugystės ordinų valstybinis V. Kapsuko universitetas.

Dundulienė, Pranė 1982. *Lietuvių etnografija* (Lithuanian Ethnography). Vilnius: Mokslas.

Dusevičiūtė, Gintarė 2015. 'Jorė': (re-)konstrukcija ar tradicijų tąsa? ('Jorė': (Re-) construction or Continuation of Tradition?). *Lietuvos etnologija: Socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos,* Vol. 15 (24), pp. 177–203.

Gardner, Gerald 1954. *Witchcraft Today*. https://archive.org/details/witchcraft-today-gardner-gerald-z-lib.org

Gardner, Gerald 1957. *Book of Shadows*. Theophania Publishing.

Hobsbawm, Eric; Ranger, Terence 1992. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press.

Hutton, Ronald 2008. Modern Pagan Festivals: A Study in the Nature of Tradition. *Folklore,* Vol. 119, pp. 251–273. DOI: 10.1080/00155870802352178

Jucevičius, Liudvikas Adomas 1959. *Raštai* (Writings). Vilnius: Valstybinė grožinės literatūros leidykla.

Klimka, Libertas 2002. Apie astronominį lygiadienį ir tradicinius papročius (On the Astronomical Equinox and Traditional Customs). In: V. Milius (ed.) *Liaudies kūryba* (Folk Culture). Vilnius: Mintis, Vol. 5, pp. 407–412.

Kudirka, Juozas (ed.) 1991. *Lietuvių liaudies papročiai* (Lithuanian Folk Customs). Vilnius: Lietuvos liaudies kultūros centras.

Matulevičienė, Saulė 2007. Iš Rasos šventės istorijos (On the History of the Rasos Festival). *Liaudies kultūra,* No. 3, pp. 64–69.

Murray, Margaret 1921. *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology*. Oxford: UK Oxford University Press/Clarendon Press.

Narbutas, Teodoras 1992. *Lietuvių tautos istorija* (The History of the Lithuanian Nation), Vol. 1. Vilnius: Mintis.

Paukštytė-Šaknienė, Rasa 2016. Joninės (St. John's Day). In: R. Paukštytė-Šaknienė (ed.), J. Mardosa, Ž. Šaknys, I. Šidiškienė. *Šventės šiuolaikinėje vilniečių šeimoje* (Holidays in the Contemporary Lithuanian Family). Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, pp. 263–289.

Ramonaitė, Ainė; Kukulskytė, Rytė 2014. Etnokultūrinis judėjimas sovietmečiu: nematoma alternatyva sistemai? (Ethno-Cultural Movement in Soviet Lithuania: An Invisible Alternative to the Regime?). *Lietuvos etnologija*: *Socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*, Vol. 14 (23), pp. 161–181.

Romuva: The Community of the Ancient Baltic Religion. https://romuva.lt/

Senvaitytė, Dalia 2014. Lietuviškų tradicinių metinių švenčių kūrimo klausimu (On the Question of the Creation of Lithuanian Traditional Annual Festivals). *Lithuanian Journal of Anthropology,* Vol. 1, pp. 77–88.

Senvaitytė, Dalia 2018. The Hunt for Lost Identity: Native Faith Paganism in Contemporary Lithuania. *The Pomegranate*, Vol. 20, pp. 234-260. DOI: 10.1558/pom.34718

Senvaitytė, Dalia 2013. Kalendorinių švenčių diskursas tarpukario Lietuvos periodikoje (The Discourse of Calendar Holidays in Lithuania Periodicals during the Interwar Period). *Soter*, Vol. 73, No. 45, pp. 115–138.

Strmiska, Michael (ed.) 2005. *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

Šaknys, Žilvytis 2014. Politics and Festivals: Lithuania's Shrove and Midsummer. In: G. Barna and I. Povedák (eds) *Politics, Feasts, and Festivals.* Szeged: Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, pp. 136–150.

Trinkūnas, Jonas 2000. *Baltų tikėjimas: Lietuvių pasaulėjauta, papročiai, apeigos, ženklai* (Baltic Faith: Lithuanian Worldview, Customs, Rituals, and Symbols). Vilnius: Diemedžio leidykla.

Trinkūnas, Jonas 2009. *Lietuvių senosios religijos kelias* (The Path of the Ancient Lithuanian Religion). Vilnius: Asveja.

Vaicekauskas, Arūnas 2009. Lietuviškos Joninės: nuo kaimo bendruomenės iki šiuolaikinės miesto šventės (St. John's Day: From Village Community Traditions to Contemporary Urban Celebration). *Liaudies kultūra,* No. 4, pp. 33–38.

Vilčiauskienė, Gita 2022. *Baltų vienybės dienos tradicijų formavimasis Lietuvoje XXI a. pr.* (The Formation of Baltic Unity Day Traditions in Lithuania at the Beginning of the 21st Century). Master Thesis. Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas.

Vilniaus etninės kultūros centras (Vilnius Ethnic Culture Centre). https://www.etno.lt/

Vyšniauskaitė, Angelė 1964. Liaudies kalendorius. Šventės (The Lithuanian Calendar: Holidays). In: *Lietuvių etnografijos bruožai* (Lithuanian Ethnographic Traits). Vilnius: Valstybinė politinės ir mokslinės literatūros leidykla, pp. 536–550.

Dalia Senvaitytė, PhD, is a researcher at the Kaunas Faculty of Vilnius University. Her research interests include the study of the Lithuanian ritual year, ancient and contemporary Lithuanian paganism, and modern festival culture.

E-mail: dalia.senvaityte@knf.vu.lt

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5881-9244

https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.11

Belief Narratives in Lithuanian Mushroom Picking Practices

Vita Džekčioriūtė

Research Fellow at the Department of Folk Narrative, Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Vilnius, Lithuania

E-mail: dzekcioriute@llti.lt

Abstract: This article focuses on certain belief narratives related to mushrooms and mushroom picking practices in Lithuania. It compares material from two time periods: the first from the end of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, which is commonly referred to as traditional culture in Lithuania; the second reflects materials gathered during 21st century expeditions. Three groups of Lithuanian belief narratives related to mushroom picking practices are discussed in the article. The first group focuses on the principle of the 'mushroom fortune', which includes successful mushroom picking and the notion of the mushroom as the embodiment of success. The second group is related to ritual and the magical practices of mushroom picking. The third group reveals the perception of mushrooms as mythical beings. Comparison of the study material showed that belief narratives about mushroom picking practices were much more common in the older folklore research material. Nevertheless, some beliefs still exist in the 21st century, albeit to a lesser extent. Moreover, new beliefs and mushroom picking practices that are not characteristic of traditional Lithuanian culture are also recorded in the 21st century.

Keywords: beliefs, ethnomycology, mythical beings, mushroom fortune, mushroom picking, mythological mindset, narratives, success.

Introduction

This research belongs to the field of ethnomycology, which studies the cultural significance of mushrooms, how they're used and how this affects society. According to Valentina and Gordon Wasson, the pioneers in the field of ethnomycology, all cultures can be divided into mycophilic and mycophobic cultures. Mycophobic attitudes towards mushrooms lead to their avoidance. In such cultures, their perception is that they are dangerous agents of the wild. Mycophobic attitudes towards mushrooms are common in Anglo-Saxon countries. To the east of these countries, the opposite mycophilic approach to mushrooms prevails. Here, mushrooms become economically, socially and culturally important (Wasson & Wasson 1957: 4).[1] According to the Wassons' classification of attitudes towards mushrooms, Lithuanians can definitely be classified as extreme mycophiliacs (Motiejūnaitė et al. 2024).

Much of the contemporary research by ethnomycologists focuses on the economic and ecological importance and taxonomy of fungi in specific regions of the world (Zent et al. 2004; Guissou et al. 2008; Łuczaj & Nieroda 2011; Turtiainen et al. 2012; Kasper-Pakosz et al. 2016; Kang et al. 2016; Kotowski et al. 2019; Kotowski et al. 2021; Belichenko 2022; Torres-Gomez et al. 2023). There are a number of works that explore how the human environment, landscape, social and economic relationships, cultural phenomena and identity are revealed through mushrooms and mushroom picking. The most striking example of this is the research carried out by Sveta Yamin-Pasternak (Yamin-Pasternak 2007, 2008a, 2008b). There are also ongoing studies focusing on the medical use of fungus in different cultures (Gründemann et al. 2020; Prakofjewa et al. 2024). However, with regard to the subject of this article, there are very few ethnomycological works that focus on the mythological mindset. Mention should be made of Egleé Zest's article on the relevance of mushrooms in mythology among the Jotï indigenous people of the Venezuelan Guayana (Zent 2008). Another researcher with an interest in the relationship between mushrooms and mythological thinking is Frank M. Dugan. His work covers the history of humanity using fungus, ritual practices, folklore and the various beliefs associated with fungus (Dugan 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2011). Two publications by Lithuanian researchers on this topic are worth mentioning. Mushroom picking as a manifestation of ancient Lithuanian religion has been the subject

of research by religious scholar Eglutė Trinkauskaitė-Johnson (Trinkauskaitė-Johnson 2006). I discussed the mythical notion of mushrooms in the traditional Lithuanian culture in my previous article (Džekčioriūtė-Medeišienė 2016). Accordingly, this article is the continuation of my previous research. It aims to compare the old traditional Lithuanian belief narratives about mushrooms and mushroom picking with the latest materials gathered during 21st century expeditions.

Data sources and research material

This research is based on narratives which confirm certain beliefs related to mushroom picking practices. Two periods are compared in this article: the first covers a time from the end on the 19th century until the first half of 20th century. The data for this period are taken from archival material from the Lithuanian Institute of History (LII BR F73, LTA) and some printed sources (Vėlius 1987; Buračas 1996; Marcinkevičienė 2009; Marcinkevičienė 2014). Although some of these sources were written or printed in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, they represent the old traditional Lithuanian worldview of the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. The second period is reflected by material from the 21st century. Some data are taken from the previous records from the Archives in the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and folklore (LTRF cd 587, 595), although the majority was recorded on six expeditions in 2022 and 2023 (LTRF cd 1784–1884). These expeditions were part of an interdisciplinary project with mycologists funded by the Research Council of Lithuania (Grant No S–LIP–22–58). The expeditions took place in different ethnocultural regions of Lithuania (Žemaitija (Samogitia), Suvalkija, Dzūkija, Aukštaitija), except for Lithuania Minor, where local traditions were largely lost due to major population changes and immigration from other parts of Lithuania after the Second World War (Kraniauskienė et al. 2019). The interviews were conducted in 40 locations, belonging to eleven administrative units: Anykščiai district, Biržai district, Ignalina district, Kazlų Rūda municipality, Kretinga district, Marijampolė municipality, Panevėžys district, Plungė district, Švenčionys district, Utena district and Varėna district. The aim of the project was to find out what species of mushrooms people know, what they collect, for what purposes, and what vernacular names of mushrooms are used in different

regions. In addition, efforts were made as much as possible to collect different folkloristic data about mushroom picking. The research material was gathered through unstructured interviews with 119 informants, mainly middle-aged and older people (age range 32–97, the average being 70). The material on beliefs and mushroom picking practices on which I will focus is only a small part of the data collected during these expeditions.

This article discusses three groups of Lithuanian belief narratives related to mushroom picking practices. First, I focus on beliefs related to the principle of the mushroom fortune: this is successful mushrooming and the notion of mushrooms as the embodiment of success. Second, ritual and magical practices of mushroom picking are presented. Third, some beliefs that stem from the perception of mushrooms as mythical beings are discussed.

The mushroom fortune and successful mushrooming

Mushroom picking has connections with the mythical notion of mushrooms. This activity depends on the mythical principle of the mushroom fortune, which manifests in successful picking, or takes mushrooms to be the embodiment of success. This principle defines the number of mushrooms one is able to pick in the forest and the number and kinds of mushroom gathered by each picker.

In ancient times the belief was that each person's mushroom fortune was destined in advance, for example:

> Everybody wanted to be the first in the forest, although one used to say that everybody gets his or her own mushrooms. One hundred people can walk in the same place, but only you will find your mushrooms (Marcinkevičienė 2009).

> One says that every forest has a specific number of mushrooms for each person. If a person went around all the forests, he or she would find mushrooms in all of them, but he or she would find only so many as are meant for that person. He or she wouldn't see the mushrooms of other people. And if that person doesn't take his or her mushrooms, they will rot because nobody will see them (Vėlius 1987: 79).

However, it was believed that there are people who don't have a mushroom fortune and can't find mushrooms. There are even proverbial sayings in Lithu-

anian that state: "Without luck, one cannot pick mushrooms" or "Fate helps pick mushrooms" (eLPP).

Compared to today's material, the attitude of mushroom pickers has changed significantly. The vast majority of informants today state that successful mushroom picking is a learned skill and depends on familiarity with the environment and personal qualities of observation (LTRF cd 1800, 1803, 1811, 1825, etc.). One of the most common things mentioned by informants in order to be successful at mushrooming is the need to know the places where mushrooms grow. Lithuanians usually refer to these places as "my places" or "my own places" (LTRF cd 1805, 1812, 1818, 1822, etc.). This indicates a certain special relationship with their environment, which is expressed through the practice of mushroom picking. It is very rare to hear someone say today that success in picking mushrooms is predetermined. However, several such cases have been recorded during expeditions in recent years. For example: "Some succeed, others fail" (LTRF cd 1880); "Some people are good at mushroom picking, while others are not, because they don't have the fortune" (LTRF cd 1815); "Mushrooms … You don't know what's in here. You have a certain flair. Everyone goes to the same forest, but not everyone brings mushrooms. … There is something like a feeling" (LTRF cd 1823); "My mother used to tell me when I came home with a full bag: 'with your fortune, it's good for mushrooming'. Others go out, bring little, and there are no mushrooms, but I still find them" (LTRF cd 1824); "There is every man's fortune in the forest: if I were to go and another man were to follow me, he would find his own mushrooms" (LTRF cd 1875).

It is worth noting that three of the five examples are recorded in the Dzūkija region of south-eastern Lithuania, where, according to folklorists, the old world view and the associated folklore are best preserved in Lithuania.

Mushroom as the embodiment of success

In ancient times, mushrooms could be seen as an expression of luck and good fortune. When picking mushrooms, it was important to recognise your own luck, and then you would have good luck picking mushrooms all the time. For example: "If one finds a mushroom in the forest, even a very small one, and does not pick it, people believe that one will find no more mushrooms in the forest" (LTA 1288(173)); "When one finds a mushroom, one has to

pick it, then there will be more mushrooms to find" (LTA 140(400)); "When one finds the first mushroom, one has to pick it with roots, because the first mushroom is the person's luck" (LTA 1352(23)); "If one does not pick a mushroom when one finds it, another person who will do it will destroy your luck, money, etc." (LTA 1476(6331)); "When one finds a mushroom, one has to pick it because it will no longer grow, and the person will be unlucky" (LTA 1593(11)).

This material shows that the mushroom hides a person's happiness, and if people do not recognise this, they lose it; or, in other words, it becomes inoperative in their lives. Quite many similar beliefs have been written down in Lithuania dating back to the 19th century.

Today, people no longer believe in this at all. In all of our six expeditions in 2022 and 2023, we have recorded only one reference to such a belief from all of our 119 informants: "It's better to take a small mushroom as well, otherwise your fortune will be left in the forest" (LTRF cd 1874).

Ritual and magical mushroom picking practices

Despite the fact that the mushroom fortune can be predetermined, ritual and magical practices have long been known to increase the success of mushroom picking. The oldest such practice, which is known from just one printed source, is that if you are going to pick mushrooms, someone should throw a shoe at you, then you will have good luck picking (Buračas 1996: 78, 80–81). Probably related to this custom are the beliefs that a barefoot mushroom hunter does not find any mushrooms (Buračas 1996: 84) or finds only old ones (LTA 291(321)). It would be difficult to have an explanation for the origins of these beliefs. However, today we no longer find equivalents of such practices. One more magical practice that increases the success of mushroom picking is spitting on the first mushroom found. This practice was very common in old times (LTA 447(62)); Buračas 1996: 80), and even today is quite well known in southern and eastern Lithuania (LTRF cd 1803, 1825, 1853, 1854, 1856). Spitting on the first mushroom to ensure the success of mushroom picking can be explained by the fact that mushrooms have always been regarded as nature's goods and wealth. This idea is supported by the long-held belief that when you trade something and make your first money, you have to spit on it to ensure the success of the trade (LTA 1284(627), 1289(649), 1333(67)). A variation on the practice of spitting

on the first mushroom is the belief that it should be kissed, which has been documented as a way of increasing the success of mushroom gathering today. Several such beliefs are recorded in northern Lithuania (LTRF cd 1844, 1847) and in the south-eastern (LTRF cd 1814, 1815, 1819, 1821, 1823, 1824) and eastern (LTRF cd 1864, 1865) parts of the country. These beliefs are more typically held by older informants.

When picking mushrooms, a prayer can be a magical tool for success. The prayers ask not only for mushrooms, but also for protection from being lost or bitten by a snake. They can be completely individual:

> I would get lost when mushroom picking but then I created a short prayer. I would say it while entering the forest and I would not get lost and I never came back empty-handed. (Marcinkevičienė 2014: 87)

> Mushrooms mushrooms, boletes,
> Colonel of all mushrooms,
> Look at me,
> Run to me. (LII BR F73 1096(12): 34)

> We are waiting for mushrooms and they do not come, so when we see the young moon, we make a cross sign and say this prayer: "Young moon, the prince of the sky, sow mushrooms for us." (Marcinkevičienė 2014: 87)

It is interesting to note that even today, prayers are sometimes written down. However, the informants are reluctant to share them. Here are just three examples of prayers recorded during the expeditions: "When you enter the forest, you say 'God, help me find mushrooms'" (LTRF cd 1814); She looks at the moon and says: "Moon, heavenly father, give me mushrooms this year" (LTRF cd 1816); On the way to mushroom picking, she crosses her fingers and says: "May I have a bright road, a happy road so that I have seen nothing, heard nothing, and so that the Devil will bring me home happily" (LTRF cd 1820).

These examples were recorded in Dzūkija, a region in south-eastern Lithuanian. On the other hand, in Aukštaitija, in the eastern part of Lithuania, we managed to record the single case of a 51 year old woman hoping to find more mushrooms and starting to sing. This is a practice she learned from her mother:

> If they couldn't find porcini boletes, for example, … my mother … she would say, … "You have to sing", but I have the feeling that it was a 'belly

> song' – whatever you sang. … This is what I remember, and if I don't find any boletes, I start humming too. (LTRF cd 1853)

This example clearly shows how some of the ritual practices involved in picking mushrooms can be adopted in a quite intuitive way within a tradition. In this eastern region of Lithuania, close to the border with Belarus, folklorists often record archaic material.

Mushrooms as mythical beings

Another group of belief narratives is related to the perception of mushrooms as mythical beings. The first belief is that just like humans or animals, mushrooms allegedly suffer from the evil eye. According to a popular belief, well known across Lithuania from the ancient times, when it has been seen, a mushroom stops growing. For example:

> If the person saw a mushroom with his eyes, the mushroom will no longer grow. (LTA 1315(207))

> If one finds a mushroom, even if it is small, one [has to] pick it because it will no longer grow and will dry up and stay the same size. When a person sees a mushroom, the mushroom dries up. One can remember the place where one found a small mushroom and leave it there. If one comes to the same place after a few days, one will find a dry mushroom and it will not have grown. (LTA 1306(21))

In south-eastern Lithuania, known as the land of mushrooms, people believe that only the 'real' mushroom, boletes, does not grow when seen by human eyes:

> – How can you see that a bolete doesn't grow?
> – Boletes don't grow. And chanterelles, look at them, how they grow. And when no-one is looking, a bolete grows.
> – Why doesn't it grow?
> – How should I know, it gets surprised, it is afraid of being seen. A bolete only gets surprised. This is what people say: "Got surprised as this bolete…" (LTRF cd 587-18(29)).

It is very interesting that this belief persists to this day. The vast majority of the informants from the expeditions of 2022 and 2023, from all the ethnocultural regions of Lithuania, still believe this.

Despite the fact that mushrooms, like humans, can suffer from the evil eye, mushrooms are perceived as some kind of alien representatives of the natural world, spirits of the forest, or living beings. People used to believe that mushrooms can hear. In addition, they hide from mushroom pickers: "It was not usual to be loud – you will scare the mushrooms away. We used to go to the forest as early as possible while mushrooms were still asleep, not yet hidden away" (Marcinkevičienė 2009). This is a very ancient view of the mushroom as a mythical being.

Nevertheless, although it is rare, this animistic relationship with mushrooms is still witnessed today. One 65 year old woman from our expedition to the south-eastern part of Lithuania remembered that as a child she was constantly told that if you shouted in the forest the mushrooms would hide. Another 56 year old woman from the Western part of Lithuania says: "My head must be empty because I need to hear where the mushrooms grow. If I put something on my head, I can't hear anything" (LTRF cd 1790).

There is also an interesting practice related to mushrooms as mythical creatures, unknown in the past and recorded only in the 21st century. There are three examples:

> When mushroom picking, if you take out a bag or knife too early, mushrooms will not appear, they will not come out. (LTRF cd 595-01/1/)

> I have a superstition: never take your knife out of your pocket until you find the first mushroom. … It is … Don't frighten the mushrooms. … Here's one I made up. (LTRF cd 1836)

> Once you've told yourself that there won't be any mushrooms, that there won't be any mushrooms, and you've folded the knife and you've already put it down, then, well, you've usually found boletes then. … And you find yourself discovering those mushrooms. … Then you fold the knife, you put it down, but in your head it's a different story. I fold the knife, not because I don't want to pick any more, but because I want to pick mushrooms. Because that's what happens. (PA)

These mushroom picking practices, which have only been recorded in the 21st century and have no equivalents in the ancient tradition, seem to be an intuitive expression of the mushroom pickers' relationship with the environment and mushrooms as mythical beings. Moreover, the second informant quoted emphasises that he invented this 'superstition'. It is also clear from the third story quoted that the submitter reacted naturally to the situation, as he felt he should when picking mushrooms having not acquired this knowledge from someone else. It seems that in the 21st century some beliefs related to mushrooms and mushroom picking practices function as intuitively derived individual knowledge that exists without any of the transmission that is inherent in the traditional culture.

Conclusions

Belief narratives in Lithuanian mushroom picking practices reveal themselves in three ways: through the conception of the mushroom fortune, through the rituals and magical practices of mushroom picking, and through the notion of mushrooms as mythical beings.

The older mindset is characterised by a much more intense mythological perception of the world, which is why belief narratives about mushroom picking practices are much more common in the older folkloristic research material.

In the 21st century, while some beliefs still exist, albeit on a smaller scale, and we can observe them as relicts of the old mythological mindset, new beliefs and mushroom picking practices that are not characteristic of traditional Lithuanian culture can also be recorded. These reveal themselves to be intuitive, individual knowledge that exists without any form of traditional transmission.

Today the number and extent of belief narratives in mushroom picking practices differ between different ethnocultural regions of Lithuania. Most of the relicts of the old mythological way of thinking can be found in eastern (Aukštaitija) and south-eastern (Dzūkija) Lithuania, which are considered by folklorists to be the most conservative ethnocultural regions.

Acknowledgements

The article was written within the framework of the Forgotten Diversity in Lithuania: Fungi and Lichens – from Cultural Concepts to Data Systems (ETNOMIKO) Project and was funded by the Lithuanian Research Council (Grant No S–LIP-22–58).

Notes

[1] It is worth noting that such a strict distinction between mycophilic and mycophobic cultures does not fully reflect the reality of the situation. Ethnomycological research in recent decades has shown that mycophilic communities still exist in different parts of the world (Zent et al. 2004; Guissou et al. 2008; Garibay-Oriel et al. 2012; Braday et al. 2015; Kang et al. 2016) and that the tendency to collect mushrooms is often linked to the preservation and transmission of old lifestyles and traditions. On the other hand, there are ethnic groups that have always been mycophobic. These include some of the inhabitants of the Chukchi Peninsula in remote Siberia, who did not start collecting mushrooms for food until the middle of the 20th century, when mushroom-loving Russians moved into their land (Yamin-Pasternak 2007). The indigenous people of western Alaska have also long been mycophobic (Yamin-Pasternak 2008b).

Sources

eLPP – Electronic Compilation of Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases: https://elpp.archyvas.llti.lt/en.

LII BR F73 – The Manuscript Collections of the Library of the Lithuanian Institute of History.

LTA – Catalogue of Lithuanian Beliefs at the Lithuanian Institute of History.

LTRF – Audio records of Lithuanian Folklore Archives at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore.

PA – Recordings of interviews with informants from the author's personal archive.

References

Belichenko, Olga 2022. "Setos pick russula and purovik, and not the red ones, they are slimy": Cultural Preferences in Edible Mushroom Use of the Setos and Russians

of Pechory District of Pskov Oblast, NW Russia. *Études finno-ougriennes*, Vol. 54, pp. 137–66. DOI: 10.4000/efo.21868.

Braday, Lyès; Neffar, Souad; Amrani, Khaled; Bissati, Samia & Chenchouni, Haroun 2015. Ethnomycological Survey of Traditional Usage and Indigenous Knowledge on Desert Truffles Among the Native Sahara Desert People of Algeria. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*, Vol. 162, pp. 31–38. DOI: 10.1016/j.jep.2014.12.031.

Buračas, Balys 1996. *Pasakojimai ir padavmai* (Stories and Legends). Vilnius: Mintis.

Džekčioriūtė-Medeišienė, Vita 2016. Mitinė grybų samprata lietuvių kultūroje (Mythical Notion of Mushrooms in Lithuanian Culture). *Tautosakos darbai*, Vol. 52, pp. 119–144.

Dugan, Frank M. 2008a. *Fungi in the Ancient World: how Mushrooms, Mildews, Molds and Yeast Shaped the Early Civilizations of Europe, the Mediterranean and the Near East*. St. Paul: APS Press.

Dugan, Frank M. 2008b. Fungi, Folkways and Fairy Tales: Mushrooms & Mildews in Stories, Remedies & Rituals, from Oberon to the Internet. *North American Fungi*, Vol. 3, No. 7, pp. 23–72.

Dugan, Frank M. 2009. Dregs of Our Forgotten Ancestors: Fermentative Microorganisms in the Prehistory of Europe, the Steppes, and Indo-Iranian Asia and Their Contemporary Use in Probiotic Beverages. *Fungi*, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 16–39.

Dugan, Frank M. 2011. *Conspectus of World Ethnomycology: Fungi in Ceremonies, Crafts, Diets, Medicines and Myths*. St. Paul, MN: The American Phytopathologycal Society.

Garibay-Oriel, Roberto; Ramírez-Terrazo, Amaranta & Ordas-Velázques, Marisa 2012. Women Care about Local Knowledge, Experiences from Ethnomycology. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, Vol. 8 (25). https://ethnobiomed.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1746-4269-8-25.

Gründemann, Carsten; Reinhardt, Jakob K.; Lindequist, Ulrike 2020. European Medicinal Mushrooms: Do They Have Potential For Modern Medicine? – An update. *Phytomedicine*, Vol. 66. DOI: 10. 1016/j. phymed. 2019.153131.

Guissou, K. Marie Laure; Lykke, Anne Mette; Sankara, Philippe & Guinko, Sita 2008. Declining Wild Mushroom Recognition and Usage in Burkina Faso. *Economic Botany*, Vol. 62 (3), pp. 530–539. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12231-008-9028-5.

Kang, Jin; Kang, Youngxiang; Ji, Xiaolian et al. 2016. Wild Food Plants and Fungi Used in the Mycophilous Tibetan Community of Zhagana (Tewo County, Gansu, China). *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, Vol. 12 (21). DOI: 10.1186/s13002-016-0094-y.

Kasper-Pakosz, Renata; Pietras, Marcin; Łuczaj, Łukasz 2016. Wild and Native Plants and Mushrooms Sold in the Open-Air Markets of South-Eastern Poland. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, Vol. 12 (45). DOI 10.1186/s13002-016-0117-8.

Kotowski, Marcin A.; Pietras, Marcin & Łuczaj, Łukasz 2019. Extreme Levels of Mycophilia Documented in Mazovia, a Region of Poland. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, Vol. 15, pp. 12. DOI: 10.1186/s13002-019-0291-6.

Kotowski, Marcin A.; Molnár, Zsolt; Łuczaj, Łukasz 2021. Fungal Ethnoecology: Observed Habitat Preferences and the Perception of Changes in Fungal Abundance by Mushroom Collectors in Poland. *Journal of Ethnobiolology and Ethnomedicine*, Vol. 17, pp. 1–23. DOI: 10.1186/s13002-021-00456-x.

Kraniauskienė, Sigita; Pocytė, Silva; Leiserowitz, Ruth & Šutinienė, Irena 2019. *Klaipėdos kraštas 1945–1960 m.: naujos visuomenės kūrimasis ir jo atspindžiai šeimų istorijose* [Klaipėda Region 1945–1960: the Creation of a New Society and its Reflection in Family Histories]. Klaipėda: Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla.

Łuczaj, Łukasz & Nieroda, Zofia 2011. Collecting and Learning to Identify Edible Fungi in Southeastern Poland: Age and Gender differences. *Ecology of Food and Nutrition*, Vol. 50, pp. 319–36. https:// doi. org/ 10. 1080/ 03670 244. 2011. 586314.

Marcinkevičienė, Nijolė 2009. Grybai, miško uogos – Dzievo rasa [Mushrooms and Forest Berries are God's Dew]. *Šiaurės Atėnai*, No. 953. http://eia.libis.lt:8080/archyvas/viesas/20120129190712/http://www.culture.lt/satenai/?leid_id=982&kas=leidpasirink.

Marcinkevičienė, Nijolė 2014. Šilinių dzūkų grybai [Mushrooms of the Šiliniai Dzūkai]. *Liaudies kultūra*, No. 5, pp. 86–89.

Motiejūnaitė, Jurga; Džekčioriūtė, Vita; Kutorga, Ernestas; Kasparavičius, Jonas & Iršėnaitė, Reda 2024. Diversity of Ethnomycological Knowledge and Mushroom Foraging Culture in a Small Nation: Case of Lithuania. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, Vol. 20 (88). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1186/s13002-024-00730-8.

Prakofjewa, Julia; Sartori, Matteo; Kalle, Raivo et al. 2024. "But how true that is, I do not know": the Influence of Written Sources on the Medicinal Use of Fungi Across the Western Borderlands of the Former Soviet Union. *IMA Fungus*, Vol. 15 (22). DOI: 10. 1186/ s43008-024-00156-7.

Torres-Gomez, Mariano; Garibay-Orijel, Roberto; Pérez-Salicrup, Diego & Casas, Alejandro 2023. Wild Edible Mushroom Knowledge and Use in Five Forest Communities in Central México. *Canadian Journal of Forest Research*, Vol. 53, pp. 1–13. DOI: 10.1139/cjfr-2022-0043.

Trinkauskaitė-Johnson, Eglutė 2006. Apie grybus, arba velniškas nuklydimas [A Diabolic Digression: Death Caps, Boletuses, Russulas]. *Liaudies kultūra*, No. 2, pp. 10–18.

Turtiainen, Marjut; Saastamoinen; Olli; Kangas, Kari & Vaara, Mati 2012. Picking of Wild Edible Mushrooms in Finland in 1997–1999 and 2011. *Silva Fennica*, Vol. 46(4), pp. 569–581. DOI: 10.14214/sf.911.

Vėlius, Norbertas (ed.) 1987. *Sužeistas vėjas: lietuvių liaudies mitologinės sakmės* [Wounded Wind: Lithuanian Folk Belief Legends]. Vilnius: Vyturys.

Wasson, Valentina P. & Wasson, Gordon R. 1957. *Mushrooms, Russia and History*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Yamin-Pasternak, Sveta 2007. An Ethnomycological Approach to Land use Values in Chukotka. *Études / Inuit / Studies*, Vol. 31(1–2), pp. 121–141.

Yamin-Pasternak, Sveta 2008a. A Means of Survival, a Marker of Feasts: Mushrooms in the Russian Far East. *Ethnology*, Vol. 47(2), pp. 95–107.

Yamin-Pasternak, Sveta 2008b. From Disgust to Desire: Changing Attitudes Toward Berringian Mushrooms. *Economic Botany*, Vol. 62 (3), pp. 214–222.

Zent, Egleé L.; Zent, Stenford & Iturriaga, Teresa 2004. Knowledge and Use of Fungi by a Mycophilic Society of the Venezuelan Amazon. *Economic Botany*, Vol. 58 (2), pp. 214–226.

Zent, Egleé L. 2008. Mushrooms for Life among the Jotï in the Venezuelan Guayana. *Economic Botany*, Vol. 62 (3), pp. 471–481. DOI: 10.1007/s12231-008-9039-2.

Vita Džekčioriūtė, PhD, is Research Fellow at the Department of Folk Narrative at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore. With other scientists at the Institute she is working on the serial fundamental paremiological publication "Lithuanian Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases". Her main research interests are children's mythical fears, the functions and manifestations of mythical images in culture, the relationship between paremias and other folklore genres, ethnomedicine, ethnomycology, and biocultural diversity and its manifestations.

E-mail: dzekcioriute@llti.lt

ORCID: 0000-0002-8803-4859

https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.1.12

In memoriam: Ekaterina Anastasova (1962–2025)

Katya was part of the Bulgarian and international academic field from the very moment I entered it more than 20 years ago. Today, a few months after she passed away, I truly realise all that we lost with her, but also all that she left behind.

***

Ekaterina Evgenieva Anastasova was born on April 19, 1962, in Yalta, into a Bulgarian-Russian family. Her mother was Russian, while her father's lineage came from Macedonian lands. This is why Katya always felt at home in several countries and on two continents. She was surrounded by prominent relatives who were artists, scholars, and doctors. For her, existing beyond national boundaries was as natural as breathing regardless of political circumstances or

administrative frameworks. Her passport was Russian, her address Bulgarian, but her heart belonged to the world.

Katya was a musician, having graduated from the National Music School in Sofia. She toured numerous countries as an orchestral cellist. Later, however, she turned to her other great love, philology. In 1988, she graduated as an ethnolinguist from the Faculty of Philology at Moscow State University. Her thesis was supervised by Academician Nikita Tolstoy, whose follower she remained in the decades that followed. She turned to ethnology after her return to Bulgaria, where between 1989 and 1993 she worked as a researcher in the Department of Historical Ethnology at the Centre for Thracology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS). After a short period in the Department of Contemporary Ethnology at the Ethnographic Institute with Museum, she established her career in 1994 in the then Department of Balkan and Slavic Folklore at the Institute of Folklore, BAS.

In 1996, under the supervision of Professor Ivanichka Georgieva, Katya defended her dissertation, which was devoted to the Nekrasovtsy in Bulgaria. Her doctoral thesis was published under the title *Old Believers in Bulgaria: Myth, History, Identity* (Anastasova, Ekaterina 1998. *Staroobredtsite v Balgariya: mit, istoriya, identichnost*. Sofia: AI "Prof. Marin Drinov"), which became a starting point for many further articles and studies on Russian-speaking ethnoconfessional communities in the Balkans and Baltics. Her next monograph, *Ethnicity, Tradition, Power (Essays on the Transition)* (Anastasova, Ekaterina 2006. *Etnishnost, traditsiya, vlast. Etyudi za prehoda.* Sofia: AI "Prof. Marin Drinov"), continued her work on the models of 'otherness' and summarised the achievements of modern research on ethnicity in Bulgaria in the first fifteen years after the democratic changes. From today's perspective, it seems to me that this book marked a transition in Katya's understanding of ethnology from a discipline of ethnic and religious difference to a field of knowledge about the cultural and political meanings of affinity. This was also the result of her close collaboration around the turn of the millennium with French colleagues, especially with Professor Jean Cuisenier.

A few years later, in 2008 at the Institute of Folklore, BAS, Katya initiated the Balkan–Baltic research network with the organisation of the first conference connecting the two regions. The following year saw the publication of the first collective volume, which since 2018 has developed into *The Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies*. Katya's belief in the importance of close scholarly contacts

between these regions, so similar in historical destiny, political complexity and cultural diversity, continued to foster academic friendships and mutual research between leading anthropologists, ethnologists, folklorists, and ethnolinguists from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Greece, and beyond. This community was also closely connected with another research group very dear to Katya's heart, the SIEF working group on The Ritual Year. She was deeply interested in rituals, interpreting them through the lenses of nationalism and political culture, as well as through the tension between religiosity and secularism. This was the central discourse of one of her most significant and productive scholarly friendships, with Professor Irina Sedakova of the Institute of Slavic Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences and Dr Mare Kõiva of the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu.

The dynamics between nationalism, religiosity, and tradition were a major theme in Katya's research. Many issues of the journals *Bulgarian Folklore* and *Bulgarian Ethnology* edited by her, as well as several collective volumes, were dedicated to this topic (*Bulgarian Folklore*, 2008, No. 1 (*The Danube Banks: Traditions, Communities, Identities*); 2009, Nos. 3–4 (*The Balkans and the Baltic in a United Europe: Histories, Religions, Cultures*); 2016, No. 1 (*Identities, Religions, Migrations*); *Bulgarian Ethnology*, 2017, Nos. 1–2 (*The Way 1, The Way 2*) and others. See also: Anastasova, Ekaterina and Koiva, Mare (eds.) 2009. *Balkan and Baltic States in United Europe: Histories, Religions and Cultures*. Sofia – Tartu: Paradigma Publishing House). Her attentiveness to emerging issues and paradigm shifts guided one of the major collective projects Katya initiated and led – research on the cultural and political meanings of the Cyrillo-Methodian legacy in Bulgaria and Europe. Innovative, interdisciplinary, and involving dozens of scholars, it remains today a point of reference in the scholarly deconstruction of Bulgarian state cults, calendars, and mythologies (Anastasova, Ekaterina; Lozanova, Galina; Stanoev, Stanoy (eds.) 2015. *Prazdnikat na Kiril i Methodiy. Prostranstva na duha*. Vols. 1–2. Sofia: Paradigma Publishing House). "In fact", Katya wrote, "ethnology is not an intellectual game entertaining itself with archaic facts and complex methodologies. Nor is it a science of 'everything,' as we are sometimes tempted to claim. Ethnology has been and continues to be at the foundation and in the future of our knowledge of humankind, society, and the state." (Anastasova, Ekaterina 2017. Preface by the Editor. *Bulgarian Ethnology*, Nos. 1, 3–5, p. 3).

For Katya, teaching and mentoring the next generations of scholars was a crucial mission. From the mid–1990s, she gave lectures and courses for undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students at Sofia's St Kliment Ohridski University (Traditions and Identity; Folklore; Slavic Ethnology; Russian Folklore and Ethnology; Ethnicity, Nation, and Nationalism), at Plovdiv's Paisii Hilendarski University (Dynamics of Ethnicity), at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Balkan and Slavic Folklore), as well as at universities in Kaunas, Tallinn, Jena, Nitra, and Trnava. She supervised numerous master's theses and several doctoral dissertations. She managed to form a circle of academic collaborators in Sofia, affectionately calling us "her school", among whom I would note Svetoslava Toncheva, Grigor Har. Grigorov, Yana Gergova and myself.

Like many colleagues with significant research and teaching achievements, Katya also held a number of academic administrative positions such as head of the Departments of Balkan Ethnology and Comparative Folklore Studies; member of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, BAS; representative of the Institute at the BAS General Assembly; and scientific secretary of the Institute. In these roles, she gave meaning and direction, managing to sustain democratic principles in the governance of academia.

***

Working with Katya was at once easy and difficult. She always looked ahead, toward the next ideas, those that no one else had thought of yet, which came to her while reading a crime novel, visiting an exhibition or listening to a concert, ideas that were always just beyond the horizon. She thought, expressed, criticised, and encouraged with the same determination and swiftness, with generativity and pluralism. Lately she spoke of studies on the Caucasus and Asia, and I am sure that this scholarly dream would have been realised, had there been time. Ekaterina Anastasova's time with us came to an end on June 15, 2025, but her dreams remain.

Farewell, Katya!

Lina Gergova
Email: lina.gergova@iefem.bas.bg