

PREFACE

From 2 to 4 May 2008, the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore and the public institution Vita Antiqua held an international conference in Kernavė under the title 'Natural Holy Places of the Baltic Region According to Archaeological and Folklore Data'.

The conference was part of the series of events devoted to the issue of natural holy places which had started in 2007 at the initiative of Estonian archaeologists and researchers into folklore. More participants attended the Lithuanian conference than had attended any of the events up till then. The conference covered a wide range of academic disciplines and issues. Among the 18 researchers from eight countries attending, there were highly experienced and well-known professionals, as well as young researchers still pursuing their

doctoral studies. There were archaeologists and folklore experts, and researchers in the fields of religion and the history of culture.

The 15 reports presented at the conference and two further reports made available on stands covered the northern, eastern and southern parts of the Baltic Sea region: Finland, Estonia, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Poland and Germany. Participants accepted the term 'natural holy places' as a working term for the conference, covering all and any holy or cult places in the natural world (such as rocks, stones, trees, water bodies), which are normally of natural origin. Rock carvings and cup-marked stones found in Finland represented perhaps the oldest period, the Stone Age and the Bronze Age, whereas stones with sharp-bottomed



A moment during the conference in Kernavė (photograph by Ramunė Steponavičiūtė).

bowls that are common in the nucleus of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 14th to the 16th centuries represented the youngest holy places.

The reports presented to the conference, some of which are published in this issue of *Archaeologia Baltica* (the rest have not yet been prepared for publication), included an initial survey of types of natural holy places, discussed statistical data, assessed the current situation of studies of natural holy places, and introduced both current and completed research projects. As Dr Tõnno Jonuks from the Museum of Estonian Literature noted, it was amazing that both the traditions of ancient natural holy places covering several countries and questions and knowledge related to the modern study of them were essentially the same. These evident points in common united participants in discussions on terms and notions, methods, and the interpretation of results.

The range of issues in archaeological studies related to natural holy places was touched upon in most of the reports, by Tiina Äikäs (Oulu), Tõnno Jonuks (Tartu), Irena Kaminskaitė (Vilnius), Juha Ruuhonen (Turku), Rudi Simek (Bonn), Leszek Słupecki (Rzeszow), Vyktas Vaitkevičius (Klaipėda), and Heiki Valk (Tartu). As could be expected, one characteristic of natural holy places across the entire region is the individual finds dating from different periods which are usually found accidentally. A key issue that poses numerous questions is their interpretation and the possibility to build up a picture of rituals of the past, at least in part. On the other hand, it was very important to see natural holy places as an indivisible element of the cultural landscape of the Baltic region, an element closely related to places where people lived, buried their dead, and engaged in economic activity. It is clear that interaction between the ancient religion and Christianity in every cultural region is characterised by certain local features. However, the main element in the process of the study of the origin and use of natural holy places from this point of view is the viability and continuity of the traditions.

The use of folklore data in archaeological studies was another key aspect of the reports presented to the conference. Marge Konsa (Tartu) announced the results of a search for new archaeological monuments carried out in the Estonian area of lakes known for the numerous legends about them. Professor Juris Urtāns (Riga) reviewed the results of aerial surveys of lakes in southeast Latvia known for legends about them. It became evident that cooperation between archaeology and folklore was very important and promising.

In some cases, an analysis of natural holy places was based on historical sources and folklore material. Alak-



Professor Juris Urtans' report was especially expressive (photograph by Irena Kaminskaitė).

siej Dziermant (Minsk), Sandis Laime (Riga), Nijolė Laurinkienė (Vilnius), Elena Tianina (Moscow) and Anna Wickholm (Helsinki) have shown that specific place legends about natural holy places are known in all countries, although in different amounts and different ways. The most common questions related to this phenomenon are the origins of motifs, their dating, and sources.

During the conference, much attention was paid to giving participants opportunities to learn about Lithuanian natural holy places. They had a chance to see the archaeological monuments of Kernavė and the neighbouring village of Grabijolai, the Old Town of Vilnius and the Park of Hills (Kalnų parkas) and the crypt of the cathedral, and the Vilnius and Širvintos districts (including a visit to the oak tree and burial mounds of Ardiškis, the stones of Liukonys, the stone with a footprint at Gelvonai, the Kupolis hill at Pypilai, the Alkupis at Stavarygala and Šventėžeris, and the site of the Kukaveitis sacred grove near the village of Gudulinė).

Part of the conference was an educational project presented by Sedula, a creative folklore group directed by Dr Daiva Steponavičienė. Participants could also see an installation on the subject of sacred water entitled 'Springs in Baltic Culture' by Beatričė Laurinkutė.



The excursion to the site of the Kukaveitis sacred grove (photograph by Irena Kaminskaitė).



The excursion to the sacred oak tree of Ardiškis (in the Širvintos district) (photograph by Irena Kaminskaitė).

From 8 to 10 July 2009, an international conference with the title 'The Baltic World-View: From Mythology to Folklore' was held in Vilnius. It was organised by the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, in cooperation with the Centre de recherches sur l'imaginaire, Université Stendhal, Grenoble.

The cultural ties connecting Lithuania with France have historically been associated with the poet Oscar Milosz or Algirdas Julien Greimas, a professor of semiotics who promoted Lithuanian culture in France. This time, however, these ties took a different turn, and brought from Grenoble Philippe Walter and Christian Abry, whose studies focus on Lithuanian mythology and folklore. It should also be pointed out that the conference was held at the time that the country was commemorating the 1,000th anniversary of the first mention of its name in written sources, and it emphasised the aspiration to show the ancient culture of Lithuania in the context of other cultures.

The main object of the conference was to look at the Baltic world-view as part of the intangible heritage in the Baltic Sea region, which extends across the borders of individual linguistic areas. The conference aimed to overcome the problems caused by the tendency to analyse the Baltic world-view from a philological point of

view (by focusing on linguistically related cultures), a tendency that formed in the 19th century and still exists today. The problem is not relevant in archaeology, which studies archaeological monuments, landscape and artefacts, but is of high relevance in philological and ethnological disciplines. In the course of dividing cultures into groups from a linguistic point of view, some differentiation occurred in scientific works between Balts belonging to the Indo-European group of languages (Lithuanians, Latvians and Prussians), and the culture of the Estonians, Karelians, Finns and other nations belonging to the Finno-Ugric linguistic group. Methodological obstacles resulting from linguistic differentiation interfere with study of the folklore, mythology and world-view of cultures of the Baltic region as the intangible heritage of an integral cultural region. Therefore, one of the most important objects of the conference was to transcend linguistic boundaries and bring together researchers of Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, Finnish and other cultures.

Another important task is to study the Baltic world-view as a cultural phenomenon manifested in different forms (such as folklore, language, religion and mythology), and to bring together researchers from different fields. This is also very relevant, especially in view of



At the Centre of Europe Open Air Museum conference hall (photograph by Vytautas Tumėnas).

the fact that interdisciplinary and complex studies of Baltic cultures are far from being numerous.

Another important aspect of the conference was the fact that it brought together researchers in Lithuanian culture, mythology and folklore from various foreign countries (France, Great Britain, the United States, Finland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia). Lithuanian material was selected as the main subject, or as an object for comparison, in a number of reports presented. A total of 26 reports were made, and five poster sessions were presented at plenary sessions. Two more reports made at the event were held within the framework of the conference at the French Cultural Centre.

The work of the conference included the formulation of several important study concepts (as seen from the methodological positions of France, Great Britain, the United States and the Baltic region), and an analysis of different aspects of spiritual culture (the sources, methods and results of the reconstruction of a world-view, how myths functioned in the Baltic region, Baltic mythology as seen from an Indo-European point of view, indigenous cultural values, the sacral landscape).

The reports delivered covered different contexts of the Baltic world-view and represented different methodological points of view. Considerable attention was paid to research into mythology and religion. Emily Lyle (Edinburgh) analysed the Prussian triad of gods described in Simon Grunau's *Chronicle* in the 16th century, and interpreted it on the basis of categories of Indo-European mythical thinking. Philippe Walter (Grenoble) analysed a Lithuanian myth that was written down in 1261 about Sovijus, who established the custom in the Lithuanian state of burning the dead. He compared this myth with the Celtic myth about Finn and the Germanic myth about the giant Fafnir, and the wild boar killed by Sovijus with the salmon and the dragon, primordial creatures of Indo-European myths. Rolandas Kregždys (Vilnius) presented reconstructions of several Prussian gods, and explained the importance of linguistic data reconstructing the world-view of the ancient Balts. Valdis Rūsiņš (Riga) analysed the impact of cultural contacts between Balts and Finns on Baltic religion, especially the cult of the Baltic god of Thunder (in Latvian *Perkons*, in Lithuanian *Perkūnas*) and its female line, the cult of the god's daughters and daughters-in-law. Ergo-Hart Västriik (Tartu) analysed the cult of Peko, the god of fertility, in traditional Seto religion. In the late 19th and early 20th century, wooden dolls were made and special rites were performed in the worship of this deity. Teuvo Laitila (Joensuu) analysed the healing practices of the Orthodox community of Border Karelia, and attempted to determine whether G. Foster's theory, according to which a mythological



The French mythologists Philippe Walter (right) and Christian Abry at the Centre of Europe Open Air Museum (photograph by Vykintas Vaitkevičius).

notion of 'limited good' prevails in a closed community, was valid there.

Daiva Vaitkevičienė (Vilnius) analysed the Baltic libation, which has a large number of typological parallels in both the Indo-European religion and the religions of other cultures. A study of ritual objects was presented by Vykintas Vaitkevičius (Klaipėda) in his report on the terminology of the Baltic religion. He delivered a report on a Baltic term used for the image of a deity: Lithuanian *stabas*, Latvian *stabs*, Prussian *stabis*, and Swedish *stav*.

The notion of a natural Lithuanian religion was discussed in two reports. Eglutė Trinkauskaitė (Syracuse, USA) characterised the methodological concept of a natural religion, and revealed, through mushroom-gathering, berry-picking and beekeeping practices, features of the indigenous religion in modern Lithuanian culture. Jonas Trinkūnas (Vilnius) discussed the ethical principles of the ancient Lithuanian religion and their cultural continuity.

A large number of speakers analysed folklore narratives from the Baltic region. Frog (London/Helsinki) analysed the general mythology of the Baltic region on the basis of the myth about the theft of the thunder-instrument (AT 1148B). Jūratė Šlekonytė (Vilnius) reviewed the narrative of the wild hunt in Lithuanian folklore. Leszek Słupecki (Rzeszow) compared Baltic and Slavic images of werewolves. Christian Abry (Grenoble) searched for parallels between Lithuanian mermaids (*nėrovės*) and *naroves*, the aquatic creatures known in the Savoy, Vallée d'Aoste and Piedmont regions. Lina Būgienė (Vilnius) analysed *aitvaras*, the mythical being of Lithuanian legends, and compared it with the supernatural milk thief found in other folklore traditions of the Baltic region. Ülo Valk (Tartu)

analysed Estonian ghost stories, and drew attention to the fact that these stories reflect social changes.

Reports by three folklore researchers were studies of music and poetics. Eila Stepanova (Helsinki) analysed the world-view of lamentation songs, and common poetic principles of Karelian and Lithuanian lamentation songs. Aušra Žičkienė (Vilnius) presented the main principles of Lithuanian ritual music in her analysis of the layers of ethnic music arranged like geological layers of different historical periods. Jurga Sadauskienė (Vilnius) analysed changes in the portrayal of the flower garden in Lithuanian folk songs: the transformation of poetics from symbolism to aesthetics. Using differences in the portrayal of a flower garden in songs from the 19th and 20th centuries, she revealed changes in the Lithuanian world-view. Another report related to plants was given by Daiva Šeškauskaitė (Kaunas), who emphasised the importance of trees in Lithuanian mythology.

Reports on the cultural landscape were especially interesting and colourful. Andra Simniškytė (Vilnius) analysed the burial mounds from the Roman Period (the first to the fourth century) called ‘giants’ burial mounds’ in northern Lithuania, and discussed their relation to the cult of the ancestors. Andrej Pleterški (Ljubljana) suggested a hypothesis concerning Baltic and Slavic cultural ties, which are reflected in

the coincidence of certain Slovenian sacral sites and Lithuanian theonyms. Janis Cepītis (Riga) and Lilija Jakubenoka (Aizkraukle) presented a group of Latvia’s sacred stones, capable of spinning yarn or making a dress.

A separate section of the conference was dedicated to methods and sources. Aldis Pūtelis (Riga) discussed problems of criticism of written sources pertaining to the Baltic religion and mythology, and suggested that no clear dividing line between folklore and mythology should be drawn, because today folklore, with all its strengths and weaknesses, is the only source that allows for the objective study of Baltic religion. Toms Ķencis (Riga/Tartu) analysed 20th-century methodological problems encountered in research into Latvian mythology. David Šimeček (Prague) presented a previously unknown manuscript on Baltic mythology by the Czech philologist J.H. Máchal (1855–1939).

Five poster sessions were also presented at the conference. The report by Mare Kõiva and Andres Kuperjanov (Tartu) entitled ‘The Moon in Baltic-Finnic Mythology’ attracted special attention. It suggested the hypothesis that Baltic and Finnic cosmonyms were much more closely related than those of the Balts and the Slavs. The report by Dovilė Kulakauskienė (Kaunas) discussed modern children’s mythology and ‘table tapping’. Stormy discussions were provoked by the re-



Visiting the Witch’s Armchair in Noreikiškės (in the Prienai district). Sitting: Frog. Standing: Eila Stepanova (third from left), Ūlo Valk (fourth from left), Eglutė Trinkauskaitė (fifth from left) and Emily Lyle (sixth from left) (photograph by Daiva Vaitkevičienė).



On the Beižionys hill-fort (Elektrėnai municipality) (photograph by Rasa Kašėtienė).

port by Roman Shirouhov (Kaliningrad/Klaipėda) and Konstantin Skvortsov (Kaliningrad) which presented polychromatic drawings from the 11th and 12th centuries of Prussian saddles found during archaeological research in Alejka (in the Kaliningrad region). Other poster sessions were also related to the applied arts, to a greater or lesser degree: Vytautas Tumėnas (Vilnius) presented interpretations of fabric patterns in contemporary art, and the report by Nijolė Kazlauskienė (Kauņas) focused on bead wreaths, strings of beads, and the image of pearls in Lithuanian folklore.

It should also be mentioned that the conference was held in the Centre of Europe Open Air Museum conference centre, in a pleasant harmony of nature and culture. A separate event within the framework of the conference entitled 'Studies of Myths Today' was held on 8 July at the French Cultural Centre, at which Philippe Walter and Christian Abry spoke about the meanings of myths and their role in the modern world. On 9 July, a concert of ancient Lithuanian polyphonic songs (*sutartinės*) took place at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore. It was given by Trys Keturiose, a group of polyphonic singers under the leadership of Daiva Vyčinienė. Skirmantas Sasnauskas played improvisations on Lithuanian folk music instru-

ments. On 10 July, there was an excursion to sacred Baltic sites near Prienai, Kaišiadorys and Elektrėnai. During the excursion, Vykintas Vaitkevičius presented the Baltic historical and sacral heritage. The following sites were visited: the hill-fort at Beižionys and the Beižionys group of burial mounds (giants' graves), the King's Mount at Ringailiai and the ritual stone called The Gypsy Lady's Stone, Lake Švenčius (a sacred lake, *Swente Azere*, the first one to be mentioned in Lithuania, in 1384), the ancient settlement area of Nemaitonys (populated since the Late Neolithic), the sacred stone of Nemaitonys, the sacred oak at Užkalnis, and the third to sixth-century archaeological site at Noreikiškės and the Witch's Armchair there.

Volume 15 of *Archaeologia Baltica* contains eight articles based on reports given at the conference 'The Baltic World-view: From Mythology to Folklore'. These articles reflect the main tendencies highlighted at the conference, and represent the present-day situation in studies of the Baltic world-view.

Vykintas Vaitkevičius,
Daiva Vaitkevičienė

Translated by Vidmantas Štilius