

ANCIENT SACRED PLACES IN LITHUANIA: CROSSROADS OF GEOGRAPHY, ARCHAEOLOGY AND FOLKLORE

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Abstract

This article addresses the current stage of research on Lithuania's ancient sacred places. Numerous examples and discussions prove that these are cases for cross-disciplinary investigation. Although they are different, all the geographical, archaeological, linguistic and folklore aspects are important, and urgently require careful consideration, both by analysis and synthesis.

The article discusses the Lithuanian term *senoji šventvietė* ('ancient sacred place') and difficulties concerning the understanding of it. The division of sacred places into areas is presented from a geographical point of view; historical factors are mentioned, as well. Attention is drawn to the local geographical features of sacred places, such as, for instance, their association with the points of the compass. The amount of archaeological stray finds with respect to sacred places is discussed. Finally, some important details are pointed out, while presenting research into place names and folklore associated with sacred places.

Key words: Balts, *alka*, ancient sacred place, archaeology of religion.

Research into ancient sacred places was a rather slow and hard process during the 20th century. A lot of ideological and methodological controversies surrounded the subject. In fact, the religious role, which is still topical in some cases, the multidisciplinary character of sacred places, and the ambivalent ideological attitudes towards them were factors that affected the issue very much.

The initial professional approaches to the sacred places of the Balts that were proposed by Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė (1943, pp.65-71) and Eduard Šturms (1946) were mainly ignored in Lithuania and Latvia, their homelands, in Soviet times, or, as in Šturms' case, they were left unknown, due to the extremely limited number of published copies.

Since the 1970s, which was a turning point in politics and culture, research into Lithuanian sacred places has changed significantly. Archaeological excavations of several sites have taken place for the first time, and interpretations based on their results have been proposed (Urbanavičius 1972; 1977). Also, the reliability of written sources on the religion and mythology of the Balts was newly verified. But real recognition of ancient sacred places in Lithuania should be counted from the 1990s. Substantial progress in recording and summarising material is also a characteristic feature of this period (Urbanavičius 1994; Vaitkevičius 1998a).

Nowadays, nearly 2,500 ancient sacred places have already been recorded across Lithuania. This consists of hills, arable fields and meadows, groves and trees, rivers and springs, lakes and wetlands, stones, and hollows. There are also some caves known in exposures

on river banks. But statistics are not the main point. The data already allows analytical work. However, there is still an evident lack of academic discussion. Many aspects of the history of ancient sacred places remain undiscovered.

Perception and denotation of the subject

There are several Lithuanian terms denoting ancient sacred places. Because of numerous parallels in other Indo-European languages, the Lithuanian *alka* (feminine) and *alkas* (masculine) are regarded as the most archaic and appropriate terms. But since they have survived only in a few regions of Lithuania and are mainly used as proper names, this usually leads to considerable misunderstandings. In this regard, it was proposed to use the more neutral term *senoji šventvietė* meaning an 'ancient (pre-Christian) sacred place', which also presupposes that such a sacred place is either an object of a natural character or situated in nature (or both specifications together).

But not only is there the question of the term and its equivalents in foreign languages; the concept of a sacred place in Lithuania is not well established yet. An 'ancient sacred place' quite commonly covers a wide range of matters, including stones with carvings from historical periods, sites where evil used to appear, hidden treasure sites, and so on. This means that an ancient sacred place is still closely associated with the broad term 'mythological place', as well as with the particular archaeological term 'prehistoric cult place'.

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A puzzle of evidence for ‘ancient sacred place’ illustrates the complicated pattern of details and phenomena that should be considered in the course of the investigation. The frequency of appearance of associations between archaeological, linguistic, folklore and ethnological evidence and ancient sacred sites is rather different (Table 1).

In fact, an ancient sacred place seems to be a kind of combination of evidence characteristic of mythological sites presenting mainly place names, folklore and traditions, and prehistoric cult places yielding different material evidence.

The Lithuanian *senoji šventvietė*, translated into English as an ‘ancient sacred place’, demands at least one type of association with particular evidence, but the whole complex of them remains always the primary objective of researchers. Experience shows that ancient sacred places, usually possessing specific names, accompanied by folklore and sometimes considered in religious treatment, are rarely associated with archaeological finds.

Later in the article, I intend to give a short overview of ancient sacred places, presenting some cross-disciplinary points of view.

The division of ancient sacred places into areas

The cognition of sacred places gradually arises with every research project. So far, the most comprehensive data originates from the west and east of Lithuania. Corresponding catalogues of ancient sacred places have already been published (Vaitkevičius 1998b; 2006). The catalogues include maps, photographs, drawings and descriptions: key resources for research. This collection of data clearly demonstrates that some geographical features, like highlands, lowlands, wetlands, and so on, influence the division of sacred places into regions. In certain cases, it also correlates with the cultural areas drawn by archaeologists and ethnographers.

The first region in the west is evidently oriented towards the Baltic Sea. It is distinguished first of all by the huge amount of sacred hills usually called Alka hill (Alkos kalnas) and sacred stones, usually boulders without artificial features. The second region has a continental character, and can be described as a part of the East European forest zone (Fig. 1A). The huge amount of fields and meadows called Alka, and water bodies of different sizes and character, are remarkable here. But the striking fact is that the boundaries of the areas of sacred places have been substantially affected by the historical development of the country. Since much evidence for ancient sacred places dates from the 14th to the 20th centuries, the ravages of political history might be as important in the course of research as the complex of geographical features.

There are no serious differences in nature in comparing the Užnemunė region (No. 1 in Fig. 1B) with others, but there are no *alka / alkas* place names recorded. This type of name is characteristic of the ‘classical period’, when holy places were established, used and accepted as legal appearance. The Užnemunė region was to a large extent deserted in the late 13th century (after 1283), was newly colonised from the early 16th century, became a part of the Prussian Empire in 1795, and was included in the autonomous Polish state in 1815.

The second area, which is called Klaipėda (Memel) land (No. 2 in Fig. 1B), was under Prussian/German rule for more than 500 years from the early 14th century. In the 16th century, the inhabitants of the region became mainly Lutherans. An important point to us is that there is a distinct lack of ancient sacred places. A slightly different situation is observed only in areas bordering on the Samogitia region (to the east and southeast).

The third example looks contrary to the ones mentioned above. The Vilnius area (No. 3 in Fig. 1B) was under Poland for 20 years in the period 1919 to 1939. Nothing essential happened there from the point of view of ancient sacred places. Perhaps this historical period was too short for essential changes? Or else it might

Table 1. The frequency of appearance of associations between particular evidence and different concepts of ancient sacred places, based on Lithuanian data (compiled by the author).

	Archaeological finds in particular context	Place names of a sacral character	Folklore texts: place legends, tales, etc	Religious treatment and particular ethnographic traditions
1) An ancient sacred place as a mythological site	- (Very rare)	+ (Often)	+ (Often)	+ (Often)
2) An ancient sacred place as a prehistoric cult site	+ (Always)	- (Rare)	- (Rare)	- (Rare)

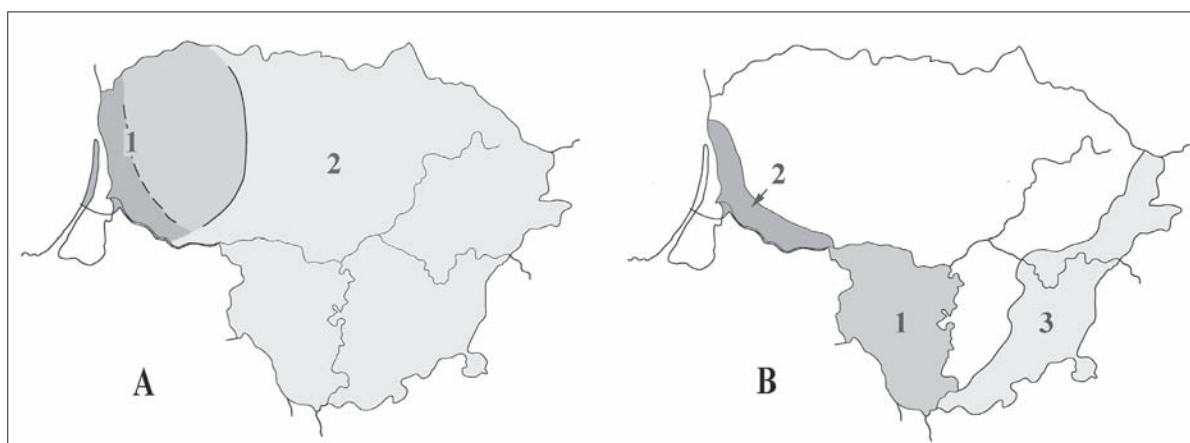


Fig. 1. (A) The geographical regions of ancient sacred places in Lithuania (1 the western area; 2 the eastern area); (B) historical regions dating from the 15th to the 20th centuries which affect the presence and character of ancient sacred places (1 the Užnemunė region; 2 the Klaipėda land; and 3 the western boundary of the Vilnius area) (drawn by the author).

be that the nature of the Polish state's policy, which was characterised by the dominance of the Catholic Church, the Polish language and slow economic progress, was similar to the previous situation in the area.

Examining the geography of ancient sacred places

In research into sacred places, their geographical features deserve special consideration along other features. The data we already possess is rich in variations, but it also clearly indicates the possible significance of global and local geographical factors. Although it has not been carefully investigated so far, we may sometimes observe the evident importance of the site's geomorphology, or the particular site's associations with the points of the compass. Examples worth mentioning are as follows: the northern bay of Lake Lūkštas, where most amber pieces used to emerge, is regarded as being sacred; natural mineral water springs often deserve more attention in comparison to other sources; mounds, stones, water bodies and trees with unusual shapes are usually pointed out as being of particular religious interest, and many others.

Concerning the points of the compass, in connection with ancient sacred places, we must underline the key axes: east–west, and north–south. For centuries, the east–west axis has been a special focus for the Balts. This statement can be supported by a number of burial sites in graves oriented in an east–west direction. The significance of facing east also appears in an examination of flowing water. In contrast to water flowing west, sacred springs approaching the east deserve special attention in terms of religious treatment; they used to possess vital powers of life, health, youth and beauty. This is still explained as a result of the posi-

tive influence of the rising sun (Vaitkevičienė 2001, pp.151-154). Moreover, in corresponding activities, the use of such spring water should be performed in the course of the sunrise.

An example taken from the Samogitia region, the area of the lower reaches of the River Dubysa (in the Nemunas basin), is of an even more global scale. Symptomatically, tributaries of the Dubysa flowing east, and some other water bodies (Fig. 2), have something special in their names, or traditions connected with them. This could rarely be stated in the case of rivers in the area flowing to the west or the south.

Particular water bodies (rivers or lakes) and roads (sometimes a network of them) used to act in a role of local factors affecting the geographical situation and topography of ancient sacred places. So far, this question has not been thoroughly investigated. Evidently, sacred places, water bodies on the one hand, and roads on the other, are so intimately connected that it is impossible to find out which element of them is more significant than the others.

Archaeology in action

Let us turn to archaeology, where we might find good prospects for research into ancient sacred places, along with considerable difficulties posed by the definition of their religious functions and the establishment of a chronology.

There are only a few examples of sacred places of which the archaeological context and chronology might be defined to a greater or lesser degree. These are first of all cup-marked stones.

Enormously numerous in northern Estonia, such stones are rather rare in Lithuania (Vaitkevičius 2004, pp.27-

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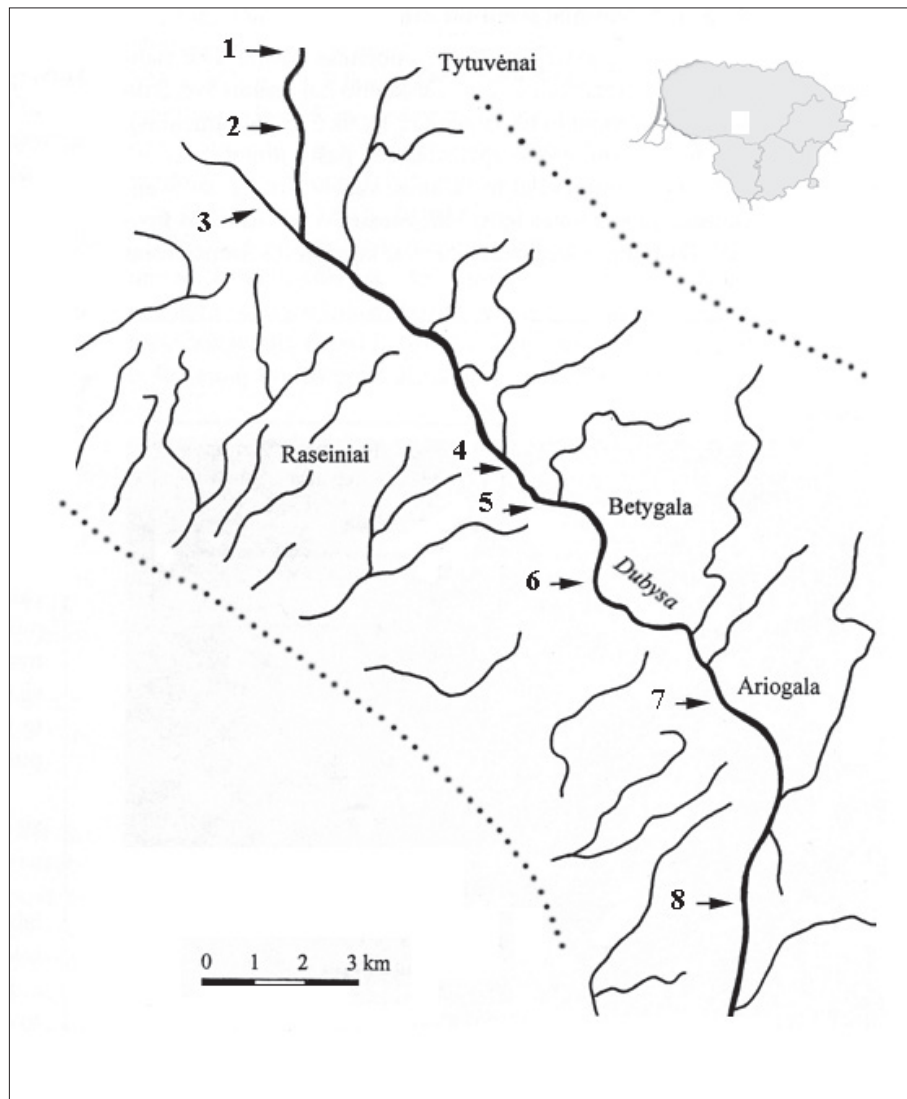


Fig. 2. The lower reaches of the River Dubysa. The Dubysa's tributaries and other water bodies with sacred names: 1 Maironiai holy spring; 2 Padubysis holy river (Šventravis); 3 Janapolis souls' river (Veliuonėlė); 4 Kengiai Alka river (Alkupis); 5 Žemygala holy river (Šventravis); 6 Kejėnai holy river (Šventupis); 7 Kalniškiai goddesses' well (Deivių šulinėlis); 8 Pašiliai Alka rivulet (Alkus) (drawn by the author).

28, Map XIV), Belarus (Vinakurav *et al.*, 2003) and Latvia (Urtans 1987; in fact, the data needs to be updated). The principal conclusions made by Andris Tvauri (1997) and referring to the Estonian data are also relevant to the above-mentioned region in the south. Originating in the Bronze Age, prevalent in the Early Iron Age, that appearance, linked to agricultural activities also covering appropriate rituals, lasted into the early first millennium AD in Lithuania.

Cylinder-shaped stones with a flat-bottomed bowl on their upper surface present a much more restricted distribution area, focused mainly on northwest Lithuania and southwest Latvia (Vaitkevičius 2004, p.28ff, Map XV). The shape of these Curonian stones still shrouded in the mists of the Iron Age is surprising and unique. The most recent archaeological evidence of the use of this kind of sacred place (potsherds in fireplaces right

by the stones) is dated to as late as the 18th or early 19th centuries.

Altogether, archaeological finds appear comparatively rarely in ancient sacred places. Besides, we are forced to acknowledge that they usually represent completely different periods of prehistory, covering a long chronological period from the Late Neolithic to the Middle Ages, and even later. In spite of the difficulties with interpretations, the dozens of stray finds stored in museums and private collections constitute a great reserve for further research. The huge amount of artefacts found by changes (usually) or during investigations (exceptionally rare), like polished flint and stone axes, flanged bronze axes, bronze and silver neck-rings, crossbow fibulae, swords, and other artefacts without a certain archaeological context discovered in wet areas or just in water bodies, during the ploughing of

peat bogs or newly prepared fields, are worth mentioning (Plate V, Fig. 3) (Puzinas 1938, pp.198-204; Rimantienė 1977, pp.131-133; Vaitkunskienė 1981, pp.27-31; Kazakevičius 1996, pp.101-124; Bliujienė 2010). A careful examination of these stray finds might be of considerable benefit to the search for archaeological evidence directly in the area or just in the surroundings of ancient sacred places of those that lack prehistoric or early historical consideration. The discussion of the concept of a sacred place at the beginning of this article already presupposes that task.

For the present purpose, we might focus either on a particular type of find to study the possible regularity in their deposition or to reveal the possible connections between artefacts and lakes, stones, trees or other sites in nature.

In this case, a brief glance at a description of the circumstances in which stray finds like polished flint axes and shaft-hole axes were found shows that in this case we are also dealing with ritual depositions (Brazaitis, Piličiauskas, 2005, pp.94-96; Johanson 2005). Besides other rivers, rivulets, lakes, peat bogs and boulders, natural locations but not habitation sites are mentioned as find places. It is also easy to recognise a couple of well-known sacred places among them, like, for instance, Vilkų Kampas Alka site (in the Šilutė district), the River Aitra passing the Lembas Alka site (in the Šilalė district), Bajorai (Jagelonys) Cock's Stone (in the Elektrėnai district), Rokiškis Devil's Hill (Rokiškis) (Rimantienė 1974, pp.109, 146, 175, 196), and others.

The finds reviewed above are outstanding examples of mythology embedded in prehistoric religious treatment. Flint and stone axes, still known as thunderbolts, clearly refer to the myth of faith between the Thunder and the Devil still prevalent in the oral traditions of Indo-European lands (Balys 1939). But the question when flint and stone axes were deposited in ancient sacred places surely remains open. It might have happened following the same approach to thunderbolts as having supernatural powers in the Late Neolithic as well as in the Middle Ages (Piličiauskas 2007; Johanson 2009).

Another attitude towards finds as potential archaeological evidence for ancient sacred places might focus on 'simply' natural places, like lakes, trees or stones, where artefacts have been discovered. For instance, lakes have provided researchers with prehistoric artefacts of different types and chronologies. Worth mentioning are two polished flint axes found in Lake Dubingiai (in the Molėtai district) (Rimantienė 1974, pp.120-121), four shaft-hole axes found in Lake Dugai (in the Alytus district) (Rimantienė 1974, p.117), two unique stone head-shaped figurines found in

Lake Galvė (Trakai) (Plate VI, Fig. 4), and stirrups, a horse's bell, a buckle and other items found in Lake Puikinas (now absorbed by the reservoir at Elektrėnai). At the same time, a collection of amber figurines, the Juodkrantė (Schwarzort) Hoard, should be mentioned, although certain circumstances surrounding that discovery have never been defined (Bliujienė 2007, pp.80-92).

Another location in nature from where stray finds sometimes originate is boulders. For instance, polished shaft-hole axes are known to be deposited near sacred stones in Antakmenė (in the Ignalina district), Bajorai (Jagelonys) (in the Elektrėnai district), Kadarai (Biržai district), Pakriaunys and Sidariškės (both in the Rokiškis district) (Vaitkevičius 2006, pp.321, 575, 587). Right by a stone in fields at Kusai village (in the Skuodas district), three silver neck-rings were found (Jablonskis 1993, p.185). In addition, people used to discover artefacts under stones, for example, in the Kūtymai site (in the Šilalė district) some bronze rings and arm-bands were found right under a stone (Rimantienė 1977, p.132), and in Gudė field at Černaučizna (in the Anykščiai district) at least 43 fire-damaged finds characteristic of the middle to late 13th century were found. Among them was a sword with an inscription on its blade, and also some spearheads, axes, knives, razors, awls, fire steels, stirrups, spurs, potsherds, and so on (Ribokas, Zabiela 1994). While talking about later periods of history, belongings of great value and coins hidden under stones appear rather well known in present-day Lithuania (Ivanauskas 1995). It is very likely that this phenomenon recalls in some ways the old custom of deposition, but now they are just looking for divine protection for a particular human's wealth.

To sum up, even though we handle a large amount of archaeological evidence linked to religious treatment, the question of putting together artefacts and ancient sacred places in many ways remains without a clear answer. It can only be assumed that single deposits might refer to what we call, or intend to call, ancient sacred places today.

Tracing sacred places in place names and folklore

An outstanding place name (the name of a mythological character or just one including a theonym) is often the only feature of an ancient sacred place that might be considered. The use of them in research is remarkably similar to that applied in linguistics, historical geography and folklore. However, many unsolved, sometimes even substantial, problems are related to terms

shared by both pre-Christian and Christian religions, and presented also in place names. Of course, the first in this range is the Lithuanian *šventas*, meaning ‘holy’.

Šventas and its numerous cognates (Latvian *svēts*, Prussian *swints*, Old Slavonic *svęťŭ*, Russian *святой*, etc), which have their origins in pre-Christian religions (Benvenist 1995, pp.344-346; Mallory, Adams 1997, pp.493-494), were used with the same meaning ‘holy’ as in Christianity. Problems caused by place names are not of such a global scale. But in any case, they need careful analysis and appropriate response, as, for instance, in the case of Sacred Fields or Meadows (*Šventas laukas*, *Šventoji lanka*), someone should find out whether such a name is inherited from pre-Christian times or whether it just expresses a link between the place and Christianity (if the ground was once donated to a church, or the altar of a particular saint in it).

The issue of place names that we are discussing is rather complicated, but sometimes, as successful investigation trials show, the only way to learn about the regional peculiarities of ancient sacred places is to find out how old they might be.

For instance, mapping place names considering the celebration of the feast of midsummer (St John’s Eve) provides us with three different areas where specific place names denote this particular type of ancient sacred place (Fig. 5). Hills of the Sun (Saulėkalniai) in the west appear in a very archaeological context, on a spot together with Samogitian hill-forts and burial grounds of the mid-to-first millennium AD to the early second millennium AD (Fig. 5:A); whereas Kupolė Hills (Kupoliakalniai) in the east are evidently connected with villages established in historical times, in the 16th and 17th centuries (Fig. 5:B). Despite the extremely late chronology, latter sacred places have accumulated spectacular traditions from pre-Christian times, namely to provide food and drink for communal feasts on the upper flat surface of the unaltered table-shaped stone (Plate VI, Fig. 6). Šatrija Hills are common in the middle, between the two areas already mentioned (Fig. 5:C). The fact that *šatrija* is also a well-known witch’s epithet directs us perhaps to the transition period from pagan to Christian culture. People familiar with old customs and still practising them were placed outside society and its Christian norms.

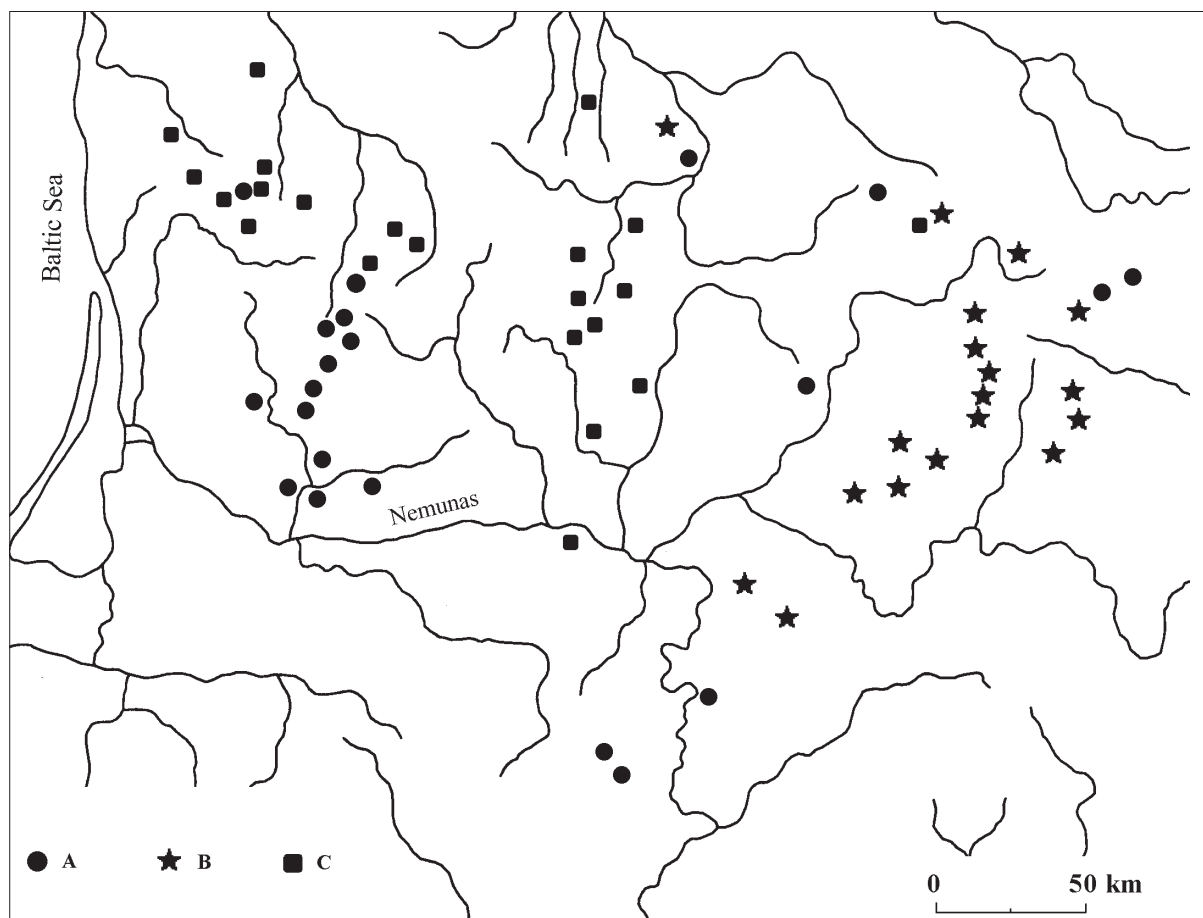


Fig. 5. The distribution of selected sites for the feast of midsummer (St John’s Eve): A Hills of the Sun; B Kupolė Hills; C Šatrija Hills (according to Vaitkevičius 2004, Map V).



Fig. 7. Šatrija Hill (on the left) in the Telšiai district: an administrative, defensive and religious centre in northern Samogitia up to its conversion to Christianity in 1421. It later became closely associated with witches (compare also Šatrijos Ragana 'the Witch of Šatrija Hill', a widely known saw with a negative meaning) (photographed by V. Daugudis in 1964).

Places (the same ancient sacred places) for such performances became associated with evil (Fig. 7).

Folklore, like place legends, tales or just beliefs referring to ancient sacred places, plays a special role in our research. Usually folklore is the first, and often also the only, source that informs us about past and modern human experience related to sacred places. It is hard to say how big the entire body of folk narratives in Lithuania is. It consists of around 80,000 pieces in total, but these are rather different from the point of view of their content and length. Perhaps only a tenth of that amount of pieces accompanies ancient sacred places, as usual and first of all, hills, lakes, trees and stones.

Folklore contains at least four thematic sections that deserve our attention today. The first displays different relationships between ancient sacred places and living people, such as, for instance, their extraordinary visions, healing, miracles, and so on. It is quite easy to recognise pieces of this kind. The words 'it really happened to me ...' or 'believe me ...' appear at the beginning or the end.

The second folklore section represents mythological content: there are also, to a greater or lesser degree, descriptions of characters acting in the field of ancient sacred places. Some gods and goddesses, their manners, activities, figurative expressions, and so on,

are remarkable. Of course, the devil (in Lithuanian *velnias*) is first in this particular range, but surely deserves special investigation in every case (Vėlius 1987; cf. Valk 2001).

The third section is of a mythological nature too, but it deals with symbols and metaphors, and also with a kind of encoded information from the point of view of modern society and its culture. An image of a church that once drowned in earth or water is the most prevalent one. It absolutely ignores the boundaries of all the regions, is presented in a huge amount of different variations, and at the same time preserves its keynote: the ancient sacredness (of a pre-Christian character) is now hidden in the underworld (Vaitkevičienė, Vaitkevičius 1996, pp.172-175; cf. Klintberg 2010, pp.359-374). In fact, it has died for people living in the present-day world. Sometimes there is only a 'passive' memory of the subject left, sometimes also particular attempts to save the church ('sanctuary') are known.

Remembrance of ancient times, or the 'pagan past' in other words, is the last piece I want to mention. It is not always possible to distinguish authentic remembrances from a kind of reconstructed history. Anyway, there are some typical motifs that are of special interest: 1) the making of sacrifices; 2) a holy fire burning constantly; 3) the presence of virgins, called *vaidilutės* (or just *mėrgos*, *panos* 'girls [not married yet]', or *vienuolės*

‘nuns’) who served the needs of the priest; 4) the high priest (or his servants) committing suicide soon after Christianity was introduced.

Sporadically, motifs one to three appear all over Lithuania, and are usually associated with sacred hills, hill-forts, stones, groves and trees. However, the most complete picture is observed within the boundaries of Samogitia, and is clearly connected with the distribution area of Alka hills. In this respect, the above-mentioned motifs might be considered as both reliable and valuable data from the point of view of the religion of the Balts.

Besides, one more area in eastern Lithuania (around Utena) should be mentioned. Here, already-reviewed motifs are often associated with hill-forts (fortified settlements) of Striated Ware Culture and dating from the first millennium BC to the Roman Iron Age. The origins of this appearance are not clear enough. The assumption might only be made that there were some later grounds for regarding hill-forts to be sacred places.

The fourth motif is rarer than the others. Usually it is associated with water bodies, and sometimes also with stones. The priest, priestess (sometimes there is also the status of a queen mentioned) and servants-virgins meet almost the same fate everywhere: they drown themselves in a river or spring in the area near the ancient sacred place, inspired by the land’s conversion to Christianity. The occurrence of the last motif in different parts of Lithuania enhances in some way its reliability (Vaitkevičius 2011).

The possible correlation between the motif ‘the priestess drowns herself’ and historical events on the eve of Lithuania’s conversion to Christianity in the late 14th century is a most intriguing issue. It concerns Birutė (died in 1382 or 1383), who was, before she married Kęstutis in 1349, a Samogitian virgin, or *vaidilutė*. This legend was recorded in the early 16th century, and it has been accepted to a greater or lesser degree by modern historians (Gudavičius 2004, pp.74-75; Bumblauskas 2005, pp.118-119). According to the chronicle written by Wigand von Marburg in 1394, Birutė was lured by Grand Duke Jogaila or his followers soon after her husband’s murder in 1382 (Scriptores 1863, p.614; in 1386 Jogaila became a Christian himself, and was the initiator of the state’s conversion to Christianity in 1387).

The story of Birutė’s murder has very likely influenced the folklore considering ancient sacred places. Birutė appears sometimes in places names or place legends in the role of virgin *vaidilutė* or duchess. In addition, this fact draws our attention to water as a space and substance being perhaps in a particular way appointed to priests and priestesses.

Conclusions

These examples and the brief discussion prove that ancient sacred places are a case for cross-disciplinary research. Although they are different, all the reviewed geographical, archaeological, linguistic, folklore and also some other aspects of sacred places are important for their cognition and precise definition. The latter is not yet well established, and urgently needs a wide international discussion like this. Based on Lithuanian data and research experience, the assumption might be made that the concept of an ancient sacred place is a kind of combination of evidence characteristic of mythological sites presenting place names, folklore and traditions on one hand, and prehistoric cult places yielding different material evidences (artefacts, bones, etc) on the other.

The distinct interface between geographical regions and particular areas of ancient sacred places should be verified, while taking into account all possible historical factors: administrative boundaries, distribution areas of Christian faiths (Catholic, Orthodox and Lutheran), and so on. The definition of regular patterns of location and the appearance of ancient sacred places is another topical task of a geographical character.

Stray finds without a ‘standard’ archaeological context, otherwise known as single deposits, provide researchers with unique information about the nature of pre-Christian religious treatment, its time and space. But the theoretical question on putting together artefacts and ancient sacred places still remains in many ways without a clear answer.

The mapping of place names in detail and the determination of prevalent folklore motifs considering ancient sacred places is a huge project, but it will substantially benefit our cognition and enlarge the set of data for further analysis. In order to reveal particular national and international features, appropriate folklore studies should be fulfilled at a wide international level.

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SENOSIOS LIETUVOS ŠVENTVIETĖS: GEOGRAFIJOS, ARCHEOLOGIJOS IR TAUTOSAKOS KRYŽKELĖS

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Santrauka

Straipsnis skirtas dabartinei senųjų Lietuvos šventviečių tyrinėjimų padėčiai aptarti. Jame akcentuojamas daugiaplanis šių tyrinėjimų pobūdis, o pateikiami pavyzdžiai iliustruoja geografinių, archeologinių, kalbinių bei tautosakos tyrimų ir jų metu gautų rezultatų analizės ir sintezės svarbą.

Pirmieji profesionalūs baltų šventviečių tyrinėjimai, atlikti Marijos Alseikaitės-Gimbutienės (1943) ir Eduardo Šturmo (1946) po Antrojo pasaulinio karo jų gimtinėse buvo ignoruojami, arba, kaip antruoju atveju, dėl nepaprastai mažo leidinio tiražo, nežinomi. Padėtis Lietuvoje ėmė keistis 1970-aisiais, Vytauto Urbanavičiaus tyrimų dėka. Lūžis, susijęs su oficialiu šventviečių pripažinimu ir sistemingo duomenų apie jas kaupimo pradžia įvyko 1990-aisiais (plg. Urbanavičius

1994; Vaitkevičius 1998b). Dabartiniu metu Lietuvoje daugiau ar mažiau išsamiai aprašyta apie 2500 šventviečių: kalnų, dirbamųjų laukų ir pievų, miškelių ir medžių, upių ir šaltinių, ežerų ir pelkių, akmenų, daubų, olų.

Senosioms šventvietėms pavadinti lietuvių kalba turi archajišką, kitoms indoeuropiečių kalboms giminingą terminą *alka* arba *alkas*. Tačiau bendrinėje kalboje ir tikriniuose pavadinimuose jis išliko ne visuose Lietuvos regionuose, o tai neretai kelia nesusipratimų. Atsižvelgiant į tai siūloma priimti ir vartoti neutralesnį pavadinimą *senoji šventvietė*. Tačiau tai tik iš dalies išsprendžia termino reikšmės ir sąvokos skaidrumo klausimus. Faktiškai senosios šventvietės sąvoka tebėra neįskristalizuota, ir tai esanti tam tikra mitologinės vietos (kurią paprastai apibūdina vietos pavadinimas, susijusi tautosaka ir tradicijos) bei priešistorinės kulto vietos (kurioje rasta materialinių šventvietės faktų patvirtinančių įrodymų) derinys.

Sukaupti šventviečių duomenys leidžia kalbėti apie du pagrindinius geografinius jų regionus: vakarinį, kuris visų pirma išsiskiria Alkos kalnų gausa, ir rytinį, kuris yra Rytų Europos miškų zonos dalis (1a pav.). Pastarajam ypač būdingi Alkos laukai ir įvairūs šventieji vandenys. Nepaisant gamtinių ypatumų svarbos ir įtakos, šventviečių regionus ženkliai paveikė istoriniai veiksniai. Apie tai byloja Užnemunės regionas, kuriame nėra užfiksuota nė vieno vietos pavadinimo su žodžiu *alka* arba *alkas*. Klaipėdos kraštas – tai pavyzdys, kaip veikiant specifinei regiono raidai (viešojo vokiečių kultūra, evangelikų liuteronų dominavimas ir kt.) tam tikroje teritorijoje senųjų šventviečių išliko labai mažai. Priešingai, Vilniaus kraštas, dvidešimt metų buvęs Lenkijos okupuotas, iliustruoja, kad šios aplinkybės neturėjo įtakos nei senųjų šventviečių likimui, nei jų sudėties pokyčiams.

Lokaliniai senųjų šventviečių geografijos ypatumai tebėra menkai pažinta tyrimų sritis. Nėra abejonės, kad svarbų vaidmenį vaidino vietos geomorfologija, topografija, padėtis pasaulio šalių atžvilgiu ir pan.

Visuotinė žinoma, kad archeologinių radinių šventvietėse yra reta. Tačiau tokį įspūdį sudaro tik iki šiol mažos apimties ir efektyvumo archeologinių tyrimų rezultatai senosiose šventvietėse. Muziejuose saugomas didelis skaičius priešistorinių radinių be aiškaus („tikro“) archeologinio konteksto, kuris sprendžiant iš radimo aplinkybių apibūdinimo (pvz., artefaktai buvo rasti šlapiose vietose, vandens telkiniuose, ariant durpynus ar kultivuojant numelioruotus laukus) (3, 4 pav.), yra labai artimas šventviečių sričiai. Gali būti, kad nuodugnus tokių archeologinių radinių, datuojamų laikotarpiu nuo neolito iki viduramžių ir net vėliau, nagrinėjimas ateityje pateiks senųjų šventviečių tyri-

mams reikšmingų išvadų – kai kurie iš minėtų radinių yra nuoroda į vietas, kurioms šiandien galėtų būti taikomas senųjų šventviečių pavadinimas.

Išskirtiniai (mitologinio turinio arba sudaryti su teonimais) vietovardžiai yra svarbi, neretai net vienintelė senųjų šventviečių nuoroda. Nepaisant visų sunkumų, su kuriais mokslininkai susiduria, nagrinėdami vietovardžius, žinoma ir labai sėkmingų senųjų šventviečių pavadinimų tyrimų. Jie nurodo svarbius lokalius šventviečių ypatumus; kartais net suteikia duomenų apie šių šventviečių chronologiją.

Tautosakai: padavimams, sakmėms, tikėjimams, susijusiems su senosiomis šventvietėmis, tenka išskirtinis vaidmuo. Dažnai tai vienintelis šaltinis apie žmonių patirtį, susijusią su šventvietėmis praeities ir šiuolaikinėje kultūroje. Mūsų dėmesio nusipelnė mažiausiai keturios tematinės tautosakos grupės. Pirmoji rodo žmonių ir senųjų šventviečių ryšius (plg. sakmes apie nepaprastus regėjimus, stebuklingus išgijimus). Antroji grupė byloja mitologinį turinį. Neretai šiuose tekstuose iškyta dievų ir deivių paveikslai, kuriuose matyti jų manieros, veiklos pobūdis, figūratyviniai raiškos būdai ir pan. Trečiosios grupės turinys taip pat yra mitologinio pobūdžio, tačiau perteiktas simbolių ir metaforų kalba. Populiariausias vaizdinys, susijęs su šventvietėmis, be abejonės, yra praeityje stovėjusios ir prasmegusios arba nuskenusios bažnyčios. Jis nepaiso geografinių ribų, turi daugybę variantų, bet išsaugo pastovų branduolį – senovinis (t. y. ikirikščioniško pobūdžio) šventumas glūdi požemio pasaulyje. Taigi šiandienos žmonėms jis yra miręs.

Paskutinė svarbi tautosakos duomenų dalis kalba apie senovės laikus arba, kitaip tariant, apie pagonišką praeitį. Žinoma, ne visada galima tiksliai atskirti originalius ir autentiškus prisiminimus nuo tam tikros rekonstruotos arba naujai išmoktos istorijos. Bet kuriuo atveju, tiriant senąsias šventvietes, svarbūs keturi pagrindiniai motyvai: 1) aukų deginimas senovėje; 2) nuolat besikūrenančios šventosios ugnies motyvas; 3) vaidilučių (kitaip mergų, panų, vienuolių) buvimas; 4) žynys ir (arba) jo tarnai nusizudo po to, kai įvedama krikščionybė.

Pirmasis–trečiasis motyvai žinomi visoje Lietuvoje, jie paprastai siejami su šventaisiais kalnais, piliakalniais, akmenimis, miškeliais ir medžiais. Tačiau pats išsamiausias šių motyvų vaizdas matomas Žemaitijoje, kur jis faktiškai sutampa su Alkos kalnų paplitimo arealu. Tai netiesiogiai patvirtina minėto tautosakos motyvo autentiškumą.

Straipsnyje keliama prielaida, jog ketvirtasis motyvas „Žynė nusiskandina“ yra susijęs su istoriniais įvykiais Lietuvoje jos krikšto išvakarėse. Pagal Vygando

Marburgiečio kroniką (1394), žemaičių vaidilutė ir kunigaikščio Kęstučio žmona Birutė buvo nuskandinta Jogailos ar jo šalininkų neilgai trukus po Kęstučio nužudymo 1382 metais. 1386 m. apsikrikštijęs pats, 1387 m. Jogaila tapo Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės krikšto iniciatoriumi ir vykdytoju. Tikėtina, kad Birutės nužudymo istorija paveikė žodinę tradiciją, susijusią su senosiomis šventvietėmis. Kunigaikštienės arba vaidilutės vaidmenyje Birutė kartais išnyra vietovardžiuose arba padavimuose.

Apibendrinant tai, kas išdėstyta straipsnyje, dar kartą pabrėžiama tarpdalykinių tyrinėjimų svarba, akademinės diskusijos šventviečių klausimais nacionaliniu bei tarptautiniu lygmeniu svarba ir tolesnių plačių senųjų šventviečių tyrinėjimų, nukreiptų į jų geografinius ir istorinius aspektus, teorinius religijos archeologijos klausimus, vietovardžių paplitimo ir tautosakos motyvų analizę, būtinybę.

I

NATURAL HOLY
PLACES IN
ARCHAEOLOGY
AND
FOLKLORE
IN THE BALTIC
SEA REGION