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MIDSUMMER CELEBRATIONS IN LITHUANIA MINOR: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN TRADITIONS

Abstract

A number of different Midsummer celebration models can be distinguished in Lithuania Minor: the most archaic (14th to 19th century), 20th century, and the modern St John's Day celebration models. The most archaic celebrations were rich in vestiges of the Baltic world-view and mythology: nature, fire and water were worshipped, and people cast spells to protect themselves from evil forces and ensure a good harvest and a happy life. The 20th-century ritualistic St John's Day tradition of Prussian Lithuanians lost its existential importance as rituals became customs with new forms and symbolic meanings. The most important features of the celebration are the burning of witches in St John's fire, and general merriment for youth. In the modern celebration model, there is an attempt to combine ethnic traditions with the needs of the consumer society. Fireworks replace ritual Midsummer fires, as bonfires lose their mythological significance. Although the institutionally organised Midsummer celebrations follow a more or less Lithuania-wide scenario; the centralised organisation of cultural events may be beneficial in fostering local forms of the Lithuanian celebratory tradition by highlighting typical elements of St John's Day in the region of Lithuania Minor.

KEY WORDS: Midsummer celebration, St John's Day, Lithuania Minor, Prussian Lithuanians, customs and traditions.

Anotacija

Skirtini keli vidurvasario šventės modeliai: archajiškasis (XIV–XIX a.), XX amžiaus ir šiuolaikinis Joninių šventės modelis Mažojoje Lietuvoje. Archajiškosios šventės apeigose gausu baltiškiosios pasaulėjautos, mitologijos liekanų: pagerbiama augmenija, ugnis, vanduo, burtais siekiama apsisau-

goti nuo blogųjų jėgų poveikio ir užsitikrinti gerą derlių bei laimingą gyvenimą. XX a. lietuvininkų Joninėse ritualinė tradicija nebeteko turėtos egzistencinės svarbos, ritualai pavoje papročiais, įgijusiais naujų formų ir simbolinių reikšmių. Svarbiausiu šventės akcentu tapo laužuose deginamos „raganos“ ir bendras jaunimo pasilinksminimas. Šiuolaikiniame šventės modelyje bandoma derinti vartotojiškai nusiteikusios visuomenės poreikius su etninėmis tradicijomis. Joninių ritualinę ugnį keičia fejerverkai, nes šventiniai laužai netenka mitologinės prasmės. Instituciškai organizuojamos vidurvasario šventės vyksta pagal daugiau ar mažiau visai Lietuvai būdingą scenarijų, išskyrus tipiškus Mažosios Lietuvos regionui Joninių elementus. Centralizuotas kultūros institucijų veiklos organizavimas gali būti palankus puoselėjant vietines lietuvininkų šventės tradicijos formas.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: vidurvasario šventė, Joninės, Mažoji Lietuva, lietuvininkai, papročiai ir tradicijos.

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Due to historical circumstances, Lithuania Minor¹ was separated from Lithuania Major and developed its own distinct features of life, religion and material culture. The historical and cultural fate of Prussian Lithuanians in Lithuanian Minor includes many centuries of Germanisation, assimilation, the loss of the ethnic identity, and the constant struggle to preserve their rights, language, customs, traditions, art and national consciousness (Kaunas 2004, 7; Zinkevičius 2008, 7–15; Brakas 1995, 33). Since ancient times, the spiritual and material culture of the Lietuvininkai² of Lithuania Minor has attracted the attention of

¹ In 2022, a map of the ethnographic regions of Lithuania was prepared on behalf of the Council for the Protection of Ethnographic Culture by Dr Žilvytis Šaknys and Dr Danielius Pivoriūnas. According to the recommendations approved by the Council for the Protection of Ethnic Culture, which defined the boundaries of the spread of ethnic traditions, Lithuania Minor includes the areas of Klaipėda, Neringa and Pagėgiai, and Šilutė and Rusnė in the Šilutė district, Kintai, Saugai, Juknaičiai, Usėnai, Lauksargiai in the Tauragė district, Smalininkai and Viešvilė in the Jurbarkas district, and the Doviliai, Kretingalė, Priekulė, Sendvaris, Dauparai-Kvietiniai and Agluonėnai municipalities of the Klaipėda district. The other part of Lithuania Minor (the Königsberg region) is currently governed by Russia (<https://bbf.lt/eFLgQ> [accessed 07.10.2023]).

² Lietuvininkai are a distinct ethnic and ethnocultural group which formed in the 16th century and lived in the northeast part of East Prussia in and around Įsrutis/Insterburg, Labguva/Labigow, Ragainė/Ragnit, Tilžė/Tilsit, Tepliava/Tapiau and Klaipėda/Memel. The area they inhabited was called Lietuvos provincija (Lithuanian Province), Lietuva (Lithuania), Prūsų Lietuva (Prussian Lithuania), and at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries the name Mažoji Lietuva, or Lithuania Minor, gained currency. The people are also called Prussian Lithuanians and Mažlietuviai (MLE II, p. 577; Kaunas 2004, p. 7; Zinkevičius 2008, p. 7–15; Brakas 1995, p. 33). The ethnonym Lietuvininkai dates back to the early 16th century, and Mažlietuviai to the late 19th century. The question of the actual ethnogenesis of the Lietuvininkai caused much controversy after the First World War: German researchers argued that the Lithuanians living in Prussia in the 15th century were colonists from Lithuania proper; and it was unclear whether the Skalviai and Nadruviai were Old Prussians or west Lithuanians, or transitional tribes between the Prussians and Lithuanians. More recently, Lithuanian scholars have come to think that the Skalviai and Nadruviai were transitional tribes closely related to the Lithuanians, thus occupying a place between the Prussians and the Lithuanians. In the middle of the first millen-

travellers and chroniclers from other countries, and has been described in historical sources. Oral folklore was recorded and studied there earlier than in other regions of Lithuania.

The tradition of calendar holidays in Lithuania Minor is a very distinct phenomenon of Lithuanian culture. It is closely related to the historical, political, social and religious development of the region. An analysis of separate calendar feasts shows that the structure and local meaning of the same celebration, both of the same ethnos, can differ, and the reason for this could possibly be the increased cultural influence of cities and the transformation of ceremonial rituals into entertainment at the beginning of the 20th century. The Midsummer celebration is one of the most prominent and important feasts in the agrarian cycle. However, there is not much reliable knowledge about the former ritual structure of the feast in Lithuania Minor.

The subject of the article: celebratory traditions and rites of Midsummer (also known as Joninės [St John's Day], Rasos [Dew Holiday] and Kupolė³) in Lithuania Minor.

The research objective: to examine chronologically the specific nature of the Midsummer celebration in Lithuania Minor, to determine structural and functional changes to calendar traditions and rites, and to examine the basis used in attempts to revive the St John's Day holiday in Lithuania Minor.

Tasks of the article: 1) to distinguish and describe the known elements of the Lietuvininkai Midsummer holiday models; 2) to examine the meaning of their contents and contemporary transformations.

Research data and methodology. The main source of research data is material from ethnographic expeditions and field studies conducted between 2007 and 2017. In order to get a more comprehensive picture of the research subject,

nium they started turning into East Balts. On the eve of German colonisation (13th century), they were already very Lithuanianised. After the war between the German crusaders and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the lithuanianisation of the country increased (due to factors such as returning refugees, prisoners of war from Lithuania being settled there by the crusaders, etc), so a compact group of Lithuanians who called themselves Lietuvininkai formed and lived in part of Prussia (Narbutas 1998, p. 3). During the period of Germanisation, nationally conscious and patriotic Lithuanians in Lithuania Minor who fought for the preservation of their Lithuanian language and culture began to be called Lietuvininkai, emphasising their pro-Lithuanian proclivities, as opposed to their pro-German countrymen, whom they called Vokietininkai (in terms of thought and actions). From the late 20th century, the term Lietuvininkai was applied to all Lithuanians who lived in Lithuania Minor (MLE 2003, p. 589).

³ *Kupolės* are bouquets of herbs gathered on Midsummer's Day, herbs with healing powers, or even individual species of herbs (St John's wort, blue or yellow flowering herbs, J. Basanavičius also called chamomile *kupolė*). The ceremonies in the feast would begin with *kupoliavimas* (collecting herbs). This ritual was performed both in groups and individually. A large bunch of herbs was put together and placed on a high pole. This was Kupolė, the symbol of the feast.

an entire range of materials and sources were used, including written sources, material from the Phonological Library of the Folklore and Ethnographic Manuscript Collection at Klaipėda University, the folklore manuscript collection and audio recordings library at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, and ethnographic field studies material from the Ethnology Department of the Lithuanian Institute of History. In total, information from 128 informants was collected on the topic of St John's Day in Lithuania Minor in the late 19th and 20th century. The author's research programme was carried out between 2007 and 2013, and between 2015 and 2017. Fifty Lietuvininkai were interviewed at length, using a set of questions drawn up by the author. Ethnographic field studies were conducted at 15 locations in Lithuania Minor (Vėlaičiai, Rusnė, Kintai, Katyčiai, Klaipėda, Šilutė, Jakai, Priekulė, Ketvergiai, Dovilai, Stankišķiai, Kukorai, Lumpėnai, Viešvilė and Smalininkai). The active participant observation method was used during the research, where respondents were chosen using directed, intentional selection to get the most accurate information with the most relevance to the subject of the research. Criteria included, for example, whether the potential informant was born and grew up in the location. For a variety of empirical reasons (such as migration, the deaths of old Lietuvininkai) it was often impossible to find the right kind of informants. The search for Lietuvininkai born and raised in Lithuania Minor was carried out by travelling to the administrative buildings and ethnocultural centres of the locations listed. Most of those questioned were elderly. It is notable that the older generation mainly referred to themselves as 'residents of the land of Klaipėda'. They were also most able to remember and describe old customs and rituals, and by comparing them to those of the present time, they greatly expanded the dimensions of the researcher's field of inquiry.

Based on the research subject and tasks, ten employees responsible for organising holiday celebrations in the most active cultural centres in the towns and rural locations of Lithuania Minor were questioned. Since Lithuania Minor is divided into sections, corresponding to the city of Neringa, the city and region of Klaipėda, the city and region of Šilutė, and the city and region of Pagėgiai, material was collected at Klaipėda Ethnocultural Centre and Dovilai Ethnocultural Centre, Šilutė Culture and Recreation Centre and the Vydūnas Cultural Centre in Kintai, Pagėgiai Municipal Cultural Centre and the Martynas Jankus Museum of Bitėnai municipality, and Jurbarkas Regional Cultural Centre of Lithuania Minor. Data were collected based on unstructured interviews and collections of photographic and video images.

The analysis of the archaic model of the Midsummer celebration is based on material from the 'Sources of Baltic Religion and Mythology' (compiled by

Norbertas Vėlius), the sources collected and published by Jonas Balys, and ethnographic and historical texts by Balys Buračas, Teodoras Narbutas, and others.

Methods. The subject and problem of academic research defined the methodology, based on a combination of several different methods. The corpus of Midsummer rituals, customs and traditions of Lithuania Minor was studied using analytical, interpretive and comparative methods. As empirical data were collected, methods for the analysis and synthesis of the contents of archival sources, academic literature, news media and periodicals were also applied.

The archaic model of the Midsummer feast in Lithuania Minor (14th to 19th century)

Although Midsummer is first mentioned in historical sources in 1372 in a letter written by Bishop Henry II of Warmia, where he forbids the inhabitants of German-occupied lands to celebrate Midsummer in the 'old-fashioned' way, there is not much reliable information about the ritual structure of the feast in Lithuania Minor before the 16th century. On the basis of historical and ethnographic sources, it is possible to identify the most important elements of the summer solstice ritual between the 16th and the 19th centuries: *kupoliavimas*, various beliefs and spells, ceremonial fires, and swinging on swings. Midsummer temporal dimensions encompassed the eve of the feast, especially during the dark part of the day, a time favourable for magical practices: girls can predict their marriage, it is a favourable time for witches to cast spells over cows, and herbs are at their most powerful in their healing properties. Hills and bodies of water should be considered as the main ceremonial sites of the archaic sacred space (BRMŠ 2003, 289; Jucevičius 1959, 234).

Four sources provide information on the customs of the summer solstice feast in the late 16th century: the Wolfenbüttel Postil (1573), the chronicles of Martin Kromer (1512–1589) and Matthias Strijkowski (1575–1578), and the explanatory notes to the maps of Greater Prussia by Kaspar Henenberger (1595).

The Lithuanian Wolfenbüttel Postil mentions the gathering of herbs known as *kupolės*. The author wonders about the custom of blessing field herbs and how they help mothers in labour or sick people (Gaigalat 1901, 148). In his book 'Lithuania', Ludvikas Adomas Jucevičius quotes a 16th-century manuscript of Kromer's chronicle, which states that 'on Midsummer's Day, Lithuanians, like the Latvians and Curonians, worship Leda, or Liada, in whose honour they cover all springs with flowers and branches of trees, and hand out all kinds of herbs that are supposed to cure various diseases' (Jucevičius 1959, 234). Kromer's knowledge of old Prussian and Lithuanian customs and beliefs comes from J. Dlugosz:

the author first repeats Długosz's information about Lada and Ladona, and then uses his own observations to speculate about the customs (BRMŠ 2001, 419).

Strykowski states in his work 'The Chronicle of Poland, Lithuania, Samogitia and the Whole of Russia' that he himself participated in pagan Lithuanian sacrificial feasts in Lithuania Minor around Įsrutis, Ragainė, Livonia, Curonian Kurland and Samogitia, and in Lithuania around Obeliai, Subačiai and Pasvalys. He writes that during the Midsummer celebration in June, Lithuanians worshipped a god called Didzis Lado. From 25 May to 25 June, men would go to inns, and women and girls, holding hands, would dance in circles in the meadows and streets, singing mournfully: 'Lado, Lado, Lado Dzidais mūsų dzievie!' (Strykowski 1846, 147–157). This information seems to be drawn mainly from living tradition, based on Strykowski's own observations and reflections, while other facts may have been retold from older sources.

Kupoliavimas was also described in the late 17th century by Matthias Pretorius (1690). In his 'Curiosities of Prussia' he points out that: 'On the eve of St John's Day, the master of the house sends hired workers, especially girls, into the fields to gather St John's herbs. When they have gathered them, the master or mistress takes as many herbs as there are people, and tucks them into a wall or behind a beam, and they watch the herbs; a person whose herb does not bloom is said to be ill, and perhaps is even going to die. They tie the rest into a bunch, fix it to a long pole, shouting merrily, and place the pole on the road by the gate or wherever the grain is to be carried through. They call this bunch Kupole, and the feast Kupole. Then the master of the house prays again in his Prussian language, with a ladle in his hand' (Pretorijus 2006, 503). Although Pretorius collected material for his work from a wide variety of sources of varied value (ancient writers and historians, German and Prussian chronicles between the 14th and 16th centuries, the chronicles by Strykowski, Henenberger and others, and travellers' accounts of their journeys), he draws on his own recorded material and that of informants to describe the Midsummer customs. It can be said that in Lithuania Minor one of the most important ancient rites, *kupoliavimas*, was still in use until the end of the 19th century: 'On Midsummer's Eve they went out into the fields and meadows to look for *kupolės* (field herbs). Each woman brought a bundle of herbs to the yard. But she did not bring it to the house outright; she took a string and picked a bunch of nettles, which she tied with the healing herbs (*kupolės*), and put it all on a long pole in the yard. On the second day, it would fall down. When the lady of the house came out, she said, "The witch was riding the pole with *kupolės*, but her backside got grazed." So she put the *kupolės* back on the pole and they stayed there until St Peter's Day' (*Lietuvininkai* 1970, 386).

Wreaths were woven from gathered herbs and used to wish good luck in a marriage. One description from Lithuania Minor, dated 1848, gives the following reason for throwing wreaths at trees: 'On St John's Day, trees were crowned with new foliage so that they would yield more' (*Preussischer Volkskalender* 1848, 229). When people returned home, they would throw the wreaths into the house through the window or over their heads: 'Then you can throw the wreath on to the bed, not through the door, but through the window, and tuck it under your pillow at night: you will see your future husband in your dreams. Well, we girls all did that, and I really had a dream about him, and I remember him having such big eyes.' (KUTRF 786 [b. 1929, Sakūčiai, Kintai district]). These wreaths were kept at home for a long time as a symbol of health and happiness.

When describing Lithuanian customs and traditions, Kaspar Henenberger mentions in his 'Explanation of the Maps of Greater Prussia' that 'On the night of St John there is terrible idolatry, which is approved of by the authorities and unpunished by the Church' (BRMŠ 2001, 342). According to him, on the eve of the feast, doors, gates and fences are covered with bunches of nettles and other herbs as protection against witches, and bonfires are lit where the cows will be taken to graze that year. On the morning of St John's Day, the cows are driven over the remains of the bonfires to make them produce more milk; then the young men who built the bonfires go from house to house collecting milk as a reward (BRMŠ 2001, 342). It can be said that this is authentic material, recorded by the author during his travels in Prussia, through his contacts with informants and his work in various parishes.

In the early 17th century, Juozapatas Mykolas Karpis wrote a pastoral letter to the diocesan clergy in which he talked about the burning of fires, walking in a circle around the fire, and jumping over the fire on the eve of St John's Day: 'On St John's Day, a fire is lit in towns and villages, and people, especially the younger ones, jump over the flames and play *rateliai*' (BRMŠ 2005, 129). Although some of the customs listed by Karpis (e.g. bonfires) had already been mentioned in previous sources, the information contained in the letter is not a compilation, but ethnographic material based on the author's experience.

The symbolic meaning of fire associated with its destructive (purifying) power in the 19th-century Lithuanian tradition was described by James George Frazer (1890), who pointed out that 'in many parts of Prussia, on the eve of the summer solstice, the inhabitants build huge bonfires. All the hills as far as the eye can see are alight with fire. These fires are believed to protect against witches' spells, lightning, hail, and sickness in livestock, especially if you drive your animals over the bonfire the next morning. These fires are considered to be the most effective

tool against witches, which use spells and incantations to deprive cows of their milk' (Фрэзер 1986, 585–586).

The fact that rituals are performed on Midsummer's Day to protect against witchcraft has already been mentioned by Henenberger: 'Bonfires are built and entertainment is organised around them, and in the morning cattle are driven over the remains of the bonfire to protect them from falling ill or being cursed, to ensure that the cows produce a lot of milk and do not lose it, and to protect them from all sorts of ghosts, as well as lightning and hail; gates, doors and cattle pens are covered with weeds, which protect against devils, witches and warlocks (Mannhardt 1936, 315). These means often originated in the old mythical world-view. According to Ignas Narbutas, all measures of protection against witchcraft and spells can be divided into three types:

- a) to 'fend off' a sorcerer who is a 'stranger' (symbolic 'locking' of the barn);⁴
- b) to channel the magic to its source (boiling milk, etc);⁵
- c) to symbolically destroy an opponent⁶ ('witch' burning on Midsummer's Eve) (Narbutas 1998, 15).

It was believed that fairies, like witches, could cast a spell on animals at Midsummer. A rowan⁷ tree or a wreath⁸ protected them. According to Narbutas, the latter belief arose by confusing the Midsummer and Pentecost traditions (Narbutas 1998, 41).

As H. Frischbier points out, in Prussian Lithuania, in order for the sorcerer to have no power over the animals on Midsummer Eve, a cross must be painted on each door of the barn, and a bunch of nine kinds of flowers must be tied together and a bunch of thorns must be placed on the top. This double bunch is fixed with two sticks on to a branch in the village. When the witch arrives, she sits on the thorns and cannot get down (Frischbier 1870, 11). The belief that witches are active on Midsummer's night persisted in Lithuania Minor until the 20th century.

⁴ In an attempt to protect their livestock, on the eve of St John's Day, villagers would cover barn doors and windows with sharp or pointed objects (thorny plants, nettles or rowan branches), prop up the barn doors with a harrow, and place a mourning candle (blessed in church) and a cross made of beeswax or other material near barn doors and windows (Balys 1993, 227–230).

⁵ 'They would get their milk back only by casting spells: splitting a birch tree, setting light to it, and dipping the charcoal into water, and washing the cow's eyes and udder. And then they said the milk would come back, it would return' (LTRF 2829 (102), LTR 25 No 5375).

⁶ 'Bonfires are still lit in the highlands today, but the most common is the burning of witches. Young men put a tarred barrel filled with sawdust and other things [...] on a high pole' (Vilmantienė 1941, 118).

⁷ MLT 1937, 25/ No 221 (LTR 604).

⁸ LŽ 1995, 360/ No 799 (LTR 6060).

Water also had a special significance in the symbolism of the Midsummer feast's beliefs and fortune-telling, as Midsummer water was perceived as a magic substance. In general, bodies of water were important places for performing festive rituals. In describing Lithuanian customs and traditions, Henenberger states that 'in the region there are streams that are considered sacred, whose water heals the eyes, and women climbing the sacred Rambynas Hill must be clean and dressed up, because it is believed that if they climb it barefoot and dirty they will fall ill' (BRMŠ 2001, 342).

On Midsummer's night, people bathed in rivers, stripped naked, and rolled in the dew before sunrise. This was believed to bring health, strength, no rashes, and a clear face. It should be noted that in Lithuania Minor on St John's Day, and for a few days after the feast, coastal fishermen did not go fishing, as the sea was a lurking threat.

In Lithuania Minor, swinging during the Midsummer feast was known since the 17th century. Swinging on Midsummer's Day was also common in other parts of Lithuania, but disappeared much earlier. According to T. Lepner, 'they [Prussian Lithuanians] have a game and a pastime, swings, which they set up in many of their yards at Easter, Pentecost and on St John's Day. They are made of sturdy wooden poles: these are dug deep into the ground, three at each end, and their tops are tied tightly with twisted wicks. A sturdy crossbar is tied at the top. The swings are about 15 feet high and 13 feet wide. A person who wants to swing sits on the board [...] two men stand on the sides, and, holding a rope by its ends, use it to toss the person sitting on the swing high in the air' (Lepner 2011, 196). 'Throwing' high in the air could also be semantically linked to the sacred movement of pouring a drink for the gods. The repetitive imitation of the top, the air, the celestial sphere, can be understood as a symbolic acknowledgement of the spiritual, otherworldly nature of 'all the gods' (Beresnevičius 2003, 4). The custom of swinging continued until the late 19th and early 20th century: 'As late as the end of the 19th century, young people in Lithuania Minor would meet at swings. Although Midsummer is a mythologically dangerous time, they would swing in the woods' (Šaknys 2001, 78).

To sum up, the folk rites of the Midsummer celebration are full of vestiges of the Baltic world-view and mythology: they worship vegetation, fire and water, and use various ritual actions as protection from the influence of evil forces, especially witches, to protect livestock, and to ensure health, happiness and a bigger harvest. In the 1880s and 1890s, the old rites of the St John's feast began to disappear in Lithuania Minor, and its customs began to take on new forms.

Thus, festive rituals had a unique role for the inhabitants of Lithuania Minor, which is why the change in the Lithuanian tradition was slow. In 1894, the founders of the Birutė Society organised the first staged Midsummer celebration on Rambynas Hill: an altar was built, choirs sang, and actors performed. This celebration was initiated by Vydūnas, Martynas Jankus, and other cultural figures from Lithuania Minor. It began to change the stereotypes of social behaviour and the way of thinking of the Lithuanians.

The 20th-century Midsummer celebration model

In the 20th century, the process of inculturation in Lithuania Minor was influenced not only by natural modernisation, but also by Germanisation and the Soviet occupation. Political, economic, religious and demographic changes inevitably influenced the perception of the Lithuanian identity and the closely related spiritual culture.

Based on an analysis of ethnographic material from the early 20th century, it can be said that during this period, rituals turned into customs that acquired new symbolic meanings and forms, and the ideology of the national revival strengthened. The Midsummer celebration became increasingly visual: floating wreaths with burning candles, burning wheels symbolising the sun flung down from the hills, and mythological figures burnt in bodies of water. The perception of the space of mounds also changed, and a patriotic aspect emerged, linking the place of the celebration to the nation's glorious past: 'Almost all nations have their own sacred places, which are like monuments to living generations, testifying to the honourable life of their ancestors, their ways and their struggles. One of the most sacred places for our Lithuanian nation is old Rambynas Hill' (*Lietuvos pajūris* No 2, 1961, 12). During this period, the folkloric Midsummer holiday, whose main spatial dimension was Rambynas Hill, started to be actively celebrated in Lithuania Minor: 'It was not until the early 20th century that Lithuanian national holidays began to be organised and celebrated, and it was mainly Vydūnas and his Lithuanian Singers' Society that contributed to this.'⁹

⁹ Rambynas Hill has been a venue for youth congresses since 1894: 'Midsummer's Day on Rambynas Hill was of particular importance in the decades before the war. Since the time of Birutė, as the Lithuanians of Lithuania Minor, especially the youth, began to wake up to their nationality, young people's associations were established everywhere in the region. And so, from east and west, young people's congresses on Rambynas Hill began. The Sunday before St John's Day was chosen. These ceremonies were held every year. Only the war interrupted this beautiful custom for several years. After the storms of the war had passed, it was revived again' (*Mažosios Lietuvos jaunimas* 1932, 2). 'A very beautiful commemoration was organised in 1912: a congress of young people was convened on the occasion of the Rambynas Hill celebration. After the war, in 1923, the first celebration of the rapprochement of the Lithuanian nation took place at the Rambynas shrine' (*Vakarai* 1936, 5).



Fig. 1. The programme for the St John's holiday, 1938. From the newspaper *Lietuvos pajūris*, 1982, No 5, p. 33

Of course, celebrations were also held in other places in the region, for example, in Juodkrantė on Ieva Hill, but the biggest Midsummer celebration, which attracted more than 5,000 people, took place on Rambynas Hill in the early 20th century: 'Under the rule of the bourgeoisie, Midsummer celebrations almost everywhere were transformed into demonstrations, mainly of the Riflemen and the Scouts. It was celebrated to a greater extent on Rambynas Hill. Five or six thousand people used to gather there. In 1929, a small altar was built on Rambynas Hill, but in 1939 the occupiers demolished it and banned traditional Midsummer celebrations' (Černeckis 1961, 24). According to Nijolė Marcinkevičienė, 'the most famous Midsummer celebration in prewar Lithuania took place near Pagėgiai, by the rivers Nemunas and Jura, where Rambynas Hill is. Geographers called this place the Vilkyškių Ridge, but in people's minds it was a place of fairy tales, a place of magical Midsummer appeal. Everything happened here: first of all, the speeches of Martynas Jankus and other famous figures, the burning of witches, and the participation of choirs. Then a procession with burning torches, lit in the middle of the forest, marched to Theatre Square, where the Pagėgiai Rifle Squad, together with the choir of the Klaipėda Singers' Society,



Fig. 2. Vydūnas speaks at the St John's Day celebration. Rambynas Hill, 1925.
 From the collection of Vaclovas Bagdonavičius (*Encyclopedia of Lithuania Minor*)

performed the three-act play *Nuvainikuota vaidilutė*. The following day, Sunday, the celebration started at 11am with a parade by the Riflemen and other organisations in the region. A swearing-in ceremony took place. Many top choirs came together. The celebration ended with a large sports competition. Festivals were organised in a similar way for several years' (Marcinkevičienė 1991, 5). The press reports suggest that elements of earlier traditions (the combination of hill and water, bonfires, witch burning, *kupolės*) were artificially incorporated into the mass model of the folklore festival. At the same time, completely new elements (not described in ethnographic sources) were introduced, such as performances by choirs, ensembles and actors, excursions, sports competitions (*Vakarai* 1936, No 141, 8). It is noteworthy that the festival took place over two days (*Mažosios Lietuvos jaunimas* 1932, No 21, p. 21).

In the early 20th century, Midsummer celebration in Lithuania Minor finally became focused mainly on Midsummer bonfires, the burning of the 'witch' as high as possible on the hill, and general merriment for young people (Pušaitis 1925, p. 83). Some of the former rituals remained because of their entertainment appeal: 'On St John's Eve, we would burn a witch. We would put a bucket on a wooden pole, add firewood so it would burn well, and then we would light it high up to be seen from afar across the village. Near Karaliaučius they also



Fig. 3. Burning straw witches. From the personal papers of K. Blockytė-Naujokė

had a witch, but they burned the witch not on a pole, but on the ground. It was believed that the fire brings happiness and success in all work' (VDU ER 2482 [b. 1912, Vėlaičiai, Piktupėnai parish]).

It is noteworthy that in 1941, in her article 'St John's Customs among Prussian Lithuanians', Ona Vilmantienė also mentions the custom of 'rolling burning hoops down a hill, especially on the southern side of the River Nemunas', which took hold in the last centuries after the Germans left. She believes that the rolling wheel symbolises the sun, which on St John's Day will begin to recede (*Gimtasai kraštas*, No 1–2 [29], 1941, 116). It can be said that in the German St John's Day tradition, in addition to bonfires, flaming wheels, barrels of salt and flaming discs were rolled down from high hills. It was believed that all this should protect crops from stormy weather. There was also a tradition of scattering the ashes of Midsummer bonfires in the fields, thus ensuring a more abundant harvest (Andree 1901, 358).

During the interwar period, many young people and adults in Lithuania Major came together on St John's Day. Colourful artistic and patriotic programmes were prepared. 'After regaining independence, especially post-1926, Lithuania also sought to emphasise its honourable past through the image of St John's Day, to put it before the confessional differences between the residents of

these regions, to establish a foothold in the regained Klaipėda region' (Šaknys 2001, 77). Bonfires and merriment continued until dawn even in the Soviet era, and although an attempt was made to organise sports events (in 1976) and 'Soviet youth' holidays (in 1980) on Rambynas Hill instead of the St John's feast (Kudirka 1991, 5), it never became a lasting phenomenon. According to 20th-century ethnographic sources, elements of consumer culture can be found in the structure of the Midsummer feast on Rambynas Hill in the Soviet era: a fair of artisans' goods, and popular music concerts. There were also new symbolic moments, such as candles placed in crowns of flowers, bathing in the river or searching for fern blossom (Vaicekauskas 2009, 35; Balys 1993, 235–239). 'My father tells me that his father went to search for ferns at twelve o'clock at night, since it has to bloom on St John's Day. A blooming fern unfolds, and when it falls, catch it, you will be lucky for the rest of your life. And my Granpa was so fearless, he was not afraid of anything. A few went to look for it, but others ran away. It was almost twelve o'clock, and Granpa was waiting for the fern to flower. He heard a ghost that started howling in all kinds of voices, and squealing, and showing all kinds of muzzles, and he ran away, and so he missed it. He said: "No, it's impossible. It means no happiness for you. If I had found that fern, I would have ruled the whole world"' (LTRF k. 883 [3], No 6060 [b. 1919, Kintai]).

The tradition to collect field herbs, *kupoliauti*, was observed in Lithuania Minor until the late 20th century. The entire village went out to the fields in a group, singing songs devoted to the holiday. After collecting the herbs, they crowned a tall pole and placed it next to a rye field on the outskirts of the village. In Prussian Lithuania, this pole was called *kupole*.¹⁰ Vydūnas said that 'women and girls go through the forest and fields to collect all kinds of herbs a few days before the solstice festival. They know from their wise great-grandfathers what mysterious forces descend on green nature from other worlds in spring. Now it is important to collect herbs, save them and use them as needed' (Pėteraitis et al. 2003, 370). Lithuanian women wove wreaths (without thread) from the collected herbs and threw them over their heads on to a birch tree or a willow tree, watching to see how many times it took for the wreath to get caught on the branches of the tree: the girl would get married in that number of years. On the eve of the holiday, women fed some of the herbs to the cows to make them produce more milk, and dried the rest as medicine for various diseases. A similar tradition was common in other parts of Lithuania. J. Kudirka claims that in the 1930s and 1940s, in the districts of Ignalina (the Paringis district), Molėtai (Balninkai,

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that in the northern part of Germany, in Schleswig-Holstein, midsummer bouquets (*Mittsommerqueste*, *Mismosquost*) were also made on St John's Day. This custom was known since ancient times, later forgotten, and then revived in 1921 (Aiblinger 1975, p. 358).

Dubingiai, Luokesa districts), Marijampolė (Liudvinava district) and Anykščiai (Svėdasai district), a pole made from oak was put up in the town square or near it. It was decorated with braids, garden flowers and herbs tied to its top, and in the Paringis district with a bouquet of St John's wort. In the Luokesa district it was called Kupole, in the Ludvinavas district a St John's bouquet (Kudirka 1991, 30).

In addition, during the Second World War, instead of the St John's Kupole and a bonfire, a custom from Germany spread in Lithuania Minor of making a 'May tree'.¹¹ German songs were sung and games were played around it (Petrošienė 2007, 226–229). In Germany, the May tree stood until St John's Day, when it was burned. According to Edwin Fehrlé, this did not necessarily mean the destruction of the old symbol, but it was another element of the ritual, symbolising the sun, its warmth shared with animals and plants (Fehrlé 1955, 160). The burning of wood (usually in the form of a scarecrow) in a bonfire symbolised the power of fire, which was transmitted to people by jumping over the bonfire (Пронин 1963, 85).

Due to the increased cultural influence of the city and the transformation of old ceremonial ritual functions into entertainment, the celebration took on new forms. In this period, the public St John's model can be distinguished in the city of Klaipėda. Although there is not much information about the former structure of the public holiday in the city, in the 19th century the press wrote that the people of Klaipėda were very happy to start celebrating St John's Day 'à la Dancing', i.e. according to the customs of the city of Gdańsk. The largest celebrations took place in the garden of Šauliai's house and other cafés and restaurants that had summer gardens. The most important thing was to invite orchestras and make sure there were a lot of fireworks and sparklers (on Midsummer's Eve, trees were

¹¹ Wilhelm Mannhardt considers the Germanic St John's wort (*der Johannisbaum*), like the May tree (*der Maibaum*), to be the embodiment of a vegetation spirit or a demon. The May tree (*vasara* according to Mannhardt), decorated with wreaths, flowers, ribbons, eggs, baked goods, and all sorts of other goodies, was ceremoniously brought into the village; dances and merriment happened around it, and then it was burned or thrown into water. Mannhardt comments on the burning of the ceremonial 'tree' in St John's or May fire (*im Mai – oder Johannisfeuer*): 'I cannot see anything else here but the symbolic representation of the event that the vegetation, under the influence of sunlight and heat, flourished and reached maturity [...]' (Mannhardt 1904). The author explains the meaning of this category of ceremonial 'trees' by relating them to certain chthonic deities and the rituals dedicated to them. Prominent examples of this type of deity are the famous Phrygian *Magna Mater – Kybele* (the Romans also started worshipping her in 204 BC), the goddess of the earth and nature, and its fertility in general, as well as Mother Earth of the Germanic tribes, the goddess Nertus (*Nertum, id est Terram matrem, Tacitus*). The obviously ritualistic St John's tree, which, like the aforementioned goddesses of fertility, could be immersed in water or burned during the feast, may also be connected with the Lithuanian witch burned on St John's Day.

decorated with sparklers). St John's Eve traditionally concluded with a procession with lanterns around the garden. In the early 20th century, when Smiltynė was joined with Klaipėda, St John's Day moved there. The main orchestral concert was held there, where the townspeople danced, played various games (vertical wrestling, climbing a pole, rooster fighting), and lit fireworks. Having fun on this special night was enjoyed by every person: no one stayed at home on St John's Night. The honouring of John and Janina was not emphasised that day. There is a surviving description of what the city looked like after St John's Day in 1870: 'Yesterday was St John's Day, today is "Blue Monday", don't try to find anything or accomplish anything in Klaipėda today' (Nikžentaitis et al. 2002, 87–88). This meant that St John's Day was on a Sunday that year. According to Zita Genienė, the head of the History Department in the Lithuania Minor History Museum, the name 'Blue Monday' has survived since the days of the guilds, when people who worked six days a week relaxed on Sunday, and Monday was a very hard day (Nikžentaitis et al. 2002, 87–88).

In the early 20th century, a new tradition arose in Smiltynė near Klaipėda: boats decorated with lanterns would sail to the Curonian Lagoon on Midsummer night. In order to have as much light as possible, tar barrels were lit in the lagoon (Petronytė 2002, <https://bbf.lt/fLLqO> [accessed 10.08.2023]). Honouring those born on the day of the holiday also became popular throughout Lithuania, but this phenomenon did not become widespread in Lithuania Minor.

In the mid 20th century, informants' stories mentioned marriage spells, which were cast on the basis of a 'lottery' (semantically significant places in the house are not emphasised): fortune-telling by pouring tin into water. 'We poured lead into water, and looked at what would be there, all kinds of forms were formed: a coffin, a wreath or a ring. Well, they were later interpreted: the coffin meant death, and the ring meant a wedding' (KUTRF 404/ KUTR 65) (b. 1920, Kintai). Seeing your beloved in a dream: 'On St John's night, a girl has to put a washing basin, some soap, a comb and a towel under the bed. A cross must be placed on the washstand. When she has done this, she must go to sleep without saying a word. She will marry the person who appears in her dream that night' (LTR 2321 (96) (b. 1916, Klošiai, Klaipėda district). Or in the ground: 'In the evening, you will cut a piece of turf where earth is, and you will turn over the turf, and in the morning you will go and look. If ants have come out, then you will marry a worker. And if you find some shiny beetle, then you will marry an official' (KUTRF 399/ KUTR 64 [b. 1922, Užvilčių, Smalininkai district]).

It should be noted that the temporal dimension is also important in traditional fortune-telling: 'On St John's Night, you should take a mirror and place it so that the moon shines on the mirror. Then a girl must draw a circle with chalk

(a devil's circle), stand in it and look in the mirror. At twelve o'clock sharp she will see her future husband. When the man starts to move, the girl must turn round quickly, otherwise the devil may snap her neck' (LII BR b. 2321, p. 124). 'On St John's Night, at twelve o'clock sharp, a girl must go completely naked to the oven where bread is baked, take the peel, and put one end of it into the oven. Then she must straddle the peel and look at the oven through her legs: there she will see her future husband' (LII BR b. 2321, p. 125). However, there are not many such stories; it may be assumed that St John's spells related to paganism were avoided, due to the strong influence of the Evangelical and other Christian churches.

The 21st century Midsummer celebration model

In modern society, a tradition is no longer understood as being a custom passed down from generation to generation. The modern Midsummer celebration of the Lietuvininkai has shown that a tradition can be invented, modified and even adopted by declaring the priority of the ethnic cultural level over the local one. A tradition can be (re)created even when there are no local people left. An analysis of ethnographic field research material from Lithuania Minor reflects the contemporary need of the region's residents to construct their identity on the basis of old Lithuanian culture.

Another stage in the transformation of the social status of customs starts as the ceremonial meaning of St John's customs disappears (when they begin to be dominated by entertainment functions), and the elements of the holiday turn into entertainment. 'In 2003, when St John's Day was declared a national holiday, the staff of cultural centres and public organisations faced a dilemma: how to reconcile the ethnic tradition publicly declared by the state with the needs of the modern urban consumer society' (Vaičekauskas 2009, 33).

Even though in the early 21st century the organisers and scriptwriters of public Midsummer holidays are forced to combine ethnic traditions with the needs of the modern consumer-oriented urban society, it can be said that the tradition of public events partly supports the contact of the festive space with nature: large Midsummer celebrations in Lithuania Minor take place in town squares surrounded by hills, on summer stages on the banks of rivers, etc. Modern celebration spaces that depend on the individual understanding of the scriptwriter are less common. For example, in 2011, the Midsummer feast 'St John's Day on the Roof' took place on the Karčema outdoor terrace on the third floor of the Gilija restaurant in Šilutė. Although traditional Midsummer bonfires were not lit on the roof, the organisers wove an oak wreath and 'planted' ferns, in which

fern blossom was hidden. In the evening, instead of the traditional Midsummer bonfires, torches were lit, songs were played, and there was dancing' (Lukošius 2011, <https://bbf.lt/fLLqQ> [accessed 08.06. 2017]).

In the city of Klaipėda, there was an attempt to organise St John's Day on the beach,¹² but it did not become a lasting phenomenon, because the traditional festive space for the people of Klaipėda is St John's Hill (Radzevičiūtė 2012, <https://bbf.lt/PVwZl> [accessed 02.09.2023]). Every year, on the evening of 23 June, Klaipėda Ethnocultural Centre traditionally organises Midsummer Day, where the main elements of the holiday are combined: water, herbs and fire (VDU ER 2482) (Klaipėda Municipal Ethnocultural Centre). Wreaths woven from grass with candles are floated on the water, a bonfire is lit, with dancing and singing around it, and witches are burned. John and Janina are also crowned. Folk groups from Klaipėda and other regions of Lithuania, as well as non-folk bands, participate in the feast. So the tradition of honouring 'St John's namesakes' (people called John), which was widespread in eastern, central and northern Lithuania in the early 20th century, only took hold in Lithuania Minor in the 21st century. For example, since 2008, St John's namesakes have been honoured at the Dovilai Ethnocultural Centre: the staff go round the Dovilai district and greet villagers named John (VDU ER 2482) (Dovilai Ethnocultural Centre).

In 2006, it was decided to bring back the traditions of St John's Day on Rambynas Hill, nurtured by Vydūnas. Today's Midsummer feast on Rambynas Hill is called 'The Braid of Traditions according to Vydūnas'. Choirs and folk ensembles from all over Lithuania take part in it: 'This year, for the 114th time, residents and guests of the Pagėgiai region gathered to celebrate St John's Day on Rambynas Hill. Traditional grass wreaths were woven, folk ensembles sang, and sacred altars were lit. It was also possible to admire Lithuanian *vaidilutės* (soothsayers and keepers of the flame) and their dance' (Bastakytė, *Šilokarčema.lt*). In terms of structure, the celebration consists of several parts: the official part (acting) and the popular music programme. Traders' tents are another noticeable element of popular culture, which was also characteristic of the 20th century. During the 2011 feast, a new altar designed by the sculptor R. Midvikis was unveiled on Rambynas Hill, symbolising the trinity of ancient Baltic gods.

¹² In 2009 and 2010, 'the Entertainment Mill' organised St John's Day on Melnragė beach. On 23 June, St John's wort workshops were held, folk and non-folk ensembles performed, line dances were danced (which have nothing to do with the old tradition), and kites were flown. Sunset was accompanied by the sound of drums, and those who wanted to know the future could try fortune telling. Another interpretation of the holiday was a 'dating auction', where a couple could be chosen based on a pre-prepared picnic basket. On 24 June, at noon, St John's Day was traditionally announced by the bells and trumpets in the courtyard of the Klaipėda Clock Museum (Lukošiuė 2010, <https://byt.lt/XAfbz> [accessed 02.10.2023]).



Fig. 4. Wreaths are woven. From the archive of Klaipėda Ethnocultural Centre

The Lithuania Minor Midsummer festival uses many elements of the traditional celebration: lighting bonfires, gathering herbs and using them in magic practices, floating wreaths with candles on the river, searching for fern blossoms, and holding a procession with torches. All these customs are accompanied by appropriate songs and movement elements that are more aesthetic than ritual actions (Pamarys 2021, <https://byt.lt/nCCWa> [accessed 01.07.2021]). For example, the Agila Nida Culture and Tourism Information Centre has a tradition of organising St John's Day in the Tila Valley at the foot of Parnidis Dune, where herbs are gathered (*kupoliavimas*), wreaths are woven, and songs are sung. Later, a procession with torches goes from Parnidis Dune to the Nida pier, where a festive concert takes place. At midnight, participants search for fern blossoms in the woods, and walk to the Baltic coast, where they count the stars, joke and wait for sunrise (VDU ER 2482) (Klaipėda Municipal Ethnocultural Centre).

It is noteworthy that before the Second World War, excursions to Rambynas Hill were traditionally organised on St John's Day; now travel agencies do it. The tradition to honour its founders was introduced at the Rambynas Hill feast: 'Every year, at Bitėnai cemetery, the luminaries of our region, Martynas Jankus, Vydūnas, Jonas Vanagaitis and Eva Milda Jankutė, were honoured with a moment of silence, flowers and memorial candles, to commemorate their legacy,



Fig. 5. Marriage spells: wreath casting.
 From the archive of Klaipėda Ethnocultural Centre

their role in Lithuanian literature, and their public activities. The celebration opened with a dance performance by Šilalė Cultural Centre (director Aušra Danisevičienė). The sacred fire was lit on Rambynas Hill, and the Eternal Book of Rambynas Hill was signed by the mayor Vaidas Bendaravičius and the heads of Pagėgiai municipal councils' (Pamarys 2021, <https://byt.lt/nCCWa> [accessed 01.07.2021]).

There are also other interpretations of the tradition. For example, 'Švyturys Midsummer Night Regatta'¹³, organised for the first time in Klaipėda in 2009, has since become a traditional element of the Midsummer celebration. According to the regatta's organisers, 'Combining old Lithuanian traditions and sailing, the regatta is organised at night, thus moving the celebration of St John's Day from the meadows to the Curonian Lagoon. Sailors from Klaipėda know that, according to old Curonian legends, magic fern blossoms should be searched for specifically in the Curonian Lagoon' (webpage 'Midsummer Night Regatta':

¹³ It should be mentioned that international regattas were organised in Klaipėda even before the Second World War (the first was organised in 1937): 'Since in the past few days there were big storms in the Baltic Sea, which prevented the smaller Latvian and Estonian yachts from coming to Klaipėda, the racers' union decided to postpone the international regatta for a. Thus, the regatta will start in Klaipėda tomorrow, 20 June, at 9 o'clock, and in Nida on Monday, 21 June' (*Vakarai* 1938, 10).

<https://byt.lt/M3XYE> [accessed 18.06.2023]). The transformation of the existing 19th-century custom can be clearly seen here: to sail out into the Curonian Lagoon on Midsummer's Eve in boats with flaming barrels of tar at both ends. However, it can be said that the modern St John's Day model has no contact with tradition, because it is a newly constructed celebration, which includes a sequence of certain festive actions.

Thus, in summary, it can be said that with the strengthening of the cultural influence of the towns, customs have turned into a form of entertainment for the consumer society. Burning candles and floating wreaths on a body of water only happened in the 20th century as a transformation of the tradition, and some of the former rites only survived because of their entertainment appeal: ritual fires were replaced by fireworks, and Midsummer bonfires lost their mythological meaning. In the modern model of the summer solstice festival, the former burning of weeds or gathering of herbs, *kupoliavimas*, has lost its ritual significance and has been transformed into a beautiful activity incorporated into the structure of the feast: herbs collected in the fields are 'sacrificed' in the fire, or simply used as a means of divination. On the other hand, this can be interpreted as the preservation of the ethnic heritage, since the nature of the rites allows many archaic customs to survive in the new social and cultural conditions.

Conclusions

1. Having analysed models of the St John's Day celebration in Lithuania Minor, it can be stated that:

- the archaic model (14th to late 19th century) reflects the cultural distinctiveness of Lithuanians: the material and spiritual heritage, identity, rituals, rites, customs and traditions;
- between the late 19th and the late 20th century, two different trends merged: an attempt to restore and/or continue old customs based on the ideology of the national revival, and cultural elements that have emerged as a result of globalisation (when regional specificity is abandoned and traditions are unified);
- in the modern era (late 20th and early 21st century), traditions are 'invented' (old elements acquire new meanings, attempts are made to organise shows with popular performers, trade fairs, etc). However, the example of the St John's Day celebrations on Rambynas Hill according to Vydūnas' vision shows that a tradition can be (re)created even when there are no local people left. The analysis of ethnographic field research material from

Lithuania Minor reflects the contemporary need of the region's residents to construct their identity on the basis of old Lithuanian culture.

2. Archaic St John's Day rites of the Lietuvininkai have many vestiges of the Baltic world-view and mythology: vegetation (*kupoliavimas*), fire and water are honoured, various ritual actions are aimed at protection from evil forces, especially witches, protecting animals, and ensuring good health, a happy life and an abundant harvest. In the 1880s and 1890s, the old rites of the summer solstice festival began to disappear in Lithuania Minor, and customs began to take on new forms.

3. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the following processes can be distinguished in Lithuania Minor: the disappearance of the ceremonial functions of calendar customs, the formation of new functions, and the unification of traditions. The most important highlight of the St John's Day celebration is the burning of witches on bonfires and the general merriment for young people.

4. In the modern holiday models of the Lietuvininkai, an attempt is made to combine ethnic traditions with the needs of the modern consumer society. The ritual bonfires of St John's Day are replaced by fireworks, as festive bonfires lose their mythological meaning.

5. At the turn of the century (20th to 21st century), cultural and educational institutions became perhaps the most important factor supporting the vitality of symbolic forms of ethnic culture. Institutionally organised calendar holidays follow a more or less typical scenario throughout Lithuania. However, by singling out typical holiday elements in the region of Lithuania Minor, cultural institutions can organise centralised activities to promote the fostering of local forms of Lietuvininkai traditions.

Abbreviations

KUTRF – Phonological Library of the Folklore and Ethnographic Manuscript Collection at Klaipėda University

LLTI – Folklore Manuscript Collection and Audio Recordings Library of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore

LII – ethnographic field studies material from the Ethnology Department of the Lithuanian History Institute

VDU ER – Ethnology Manuscript Library, Department of Cultural Studies, Vytautas Magnus University

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VIDURVASARIO ŠVENTĖ MAŽOJOJE LIETUVOJE: TRADICIJŲ TĘSTINUMAS IR KAITA

Santrauka

Nors Joninės pirmą kartą istoriniuose šaltiniuose paminėtos 1372 m. Varmės vyskupo Henriko II rašte, kuriame draudžiama vokiečių okupuotų kraštų gyventojams Joninės švęsti „senoviškai“, vis dėlto apie buvusią ritualinę šventės struktūrą Mažojoje Lietuvoje iki XVI a. patikimų žinių nėra daug. Remiantis istoriniais ir etnografiniais šaltiniais, būtų galima išskirti svarbiausius vasaros saulėgrįžos šventės XVI–XIX a. ritualo apeigų elementus: kupoliavimas, įvairūs tikėjimai ir burtai, apeiginės ugnys, supimasis sūpuoklėmis.

Remiantis XX a. pirmosios pusės etnografinės medžiagos analize galima teigti, jog tuo laikotarpiu ritualai pavirto papročiais, įgijusiais naujų simbolinių reikšmių ir formų, sustiprėjo tautinio atgimimo ideologija. Joninių šventėje daugėjo vizualizacijos: pradėti plukdyti vainikėliai su degančiomis žvakutėmis, nuo kalnų leidžiami saulę simbolizuojantys degantys ratai, vandens telkiniuose deginamos mitologinę reikšmę turinčios figūros. Pakito ir piliakalnių erdvės suvokimas, atsirado patriotinis aspektas, siejantis šventės vietą su garbinga tautos praeitimi. Šiuo laikotarpiu Mažojoje Lietuvoje aktyviai pradedama švęsti folklorinė vasaros saulėgrįžos šventė – pagrindinė erdvės dimensija – Rambyno kalnas. Į masinį folklorinės šventės modelį buvo dirbtinai įtraukti ankstesnių tradicijų elementai: kalvos – vandens derinys, laužų kūrenimas, „raganų“ deginimas, kupoliavimas. Tuo pat metu atsirado ir visiškai naujų (neaprašytų etnografiniuose šaltiniuose) akcentų – chorų, ansamblių ir aktorių pasirodymai, ekskursijų sutikimai, sporto varžybos. Šventė vykdavo dvi dienas.

Pažymėtina, kad XX a. pirmojoje pusėje svarbiausiu Joninių šventės akcentu Mažojoje Lietuvoje galutinai tapo Joninių laužai, „raganos“ deginimas kuo aukščiau ant kalno ir bendras jaunimo pasilinksminimas. Dalis buvusių ritualinių apeigų išliko dėl pramoginio patrauklumo.

Tarpukariu per Joninių šventę susiburdavo daug jaunimo, suaugusiųjų ir iš Didžiosios Lietuvos. Rengtos spalvingos meninės ir patriotinės programos. Laužų

deginimas ir linksmybės iki paryčių išliko ir sovietmečiu, nors 1976 m. bandyta Rambyne vietoje Joninių surengti sporto, o nuo 1980 m. – „tarybinio jaunimo“ šventės, tačiau tai niekad netapo tęstiniu reiškiniu.

Sovietmečiu vidurvasario šventės ant Rambyno kalno struktūroje aptinkama vartotojiškos kultūros elementų – amatininkų prekių mugių, populiariosios muzikos koncertų. Taip pat atsirado ir naujų simbolinių momentų, pavyzdžiui, žvakelių, įstatytų gėlių vainikėliuose, plukdymas upe arba paparčio žiedo, Mažojoje ir Vakarų Lietuvoje vadinto diemedžio žiedu, ieškojimas.

Nors XXI a. pradžioje viešųjų vidurvasario švenčių organizatoriai ir scenarijų autoriai buvo priversti derinti etnines tradicijas ir vartotojiškai nusiteikusios šiuolaikinės miesto visuomenės poreikius, tačiau galima teigti, kad viešųjų renginių tradicija iš dalies palaiko šventinės erdvės sąlytį su gamta – masinės Joninių šventės Mažosios Lietuvos regione vyksta miestelių aikštėse, apsuptose kalvų, vasaros estradose, upių pakrantėse ir pan.

Apibendrinant būtų galima teigti, jog sustiprėjus kultūrinei miesto įtakai, papročiai virto vartotojiškai visuomenei priimta pasilinksminimo forma. Žvakučių deginimas ir plukdymas su vainikais vandens telkinyje atsirado tik XX a. kaip tradicijos transformacija, o dalis buvusių ritualinių apeigų išliko tik dėl pramoginio patrauklumo – ritualines ugnis pakeitė fejerverkai, Joninių laužai neteko mitologinės prasmės. Šiuolaikiniame vasaros saulėgrįžos šventės modelyje buvęs piktžolių deginimas ar žolynų rinkimas, kupoliavimas, neteko ritualinės reikšmės ir transformavosi į gražų veiksma, įkomponuotą į šventės struktūrą, – laukuose surinktų žolynų aukojimą ant ugniakuro ar tiesiog būrimo priemonę. Kita vertus, tai galima traktuoti kaip etninio paveldo išsaugojimą, nes toks apeigų pobūdis leidžia daugeliui archajiškų papročių išlikti naujomis socialinėmis bei kultūrinėmis sąlygomis.