

NEWS IN BRIEF

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON HOLY GROVES AT THE ESTONIAN LITERARY MUSEUM

Kaisa Sammelselg

On May 4, 2007, the international seminar *Holy Groves around the Baltic Sea* was organised by the Department of Folkloristics at the Estonian Literary Museum, the Centre of Cultural History and Folkloristics in Estonia, and the Chair of Archaeology, University of Tartu. The seminar welcomed scholars from Finland, Estonia and other Baltic states. Research into holy groves is gaining momentum among scholars of these countries, necessitating the grouping of scholars studying this topic into a network for organising joint seminars. The sacred places of Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and the Scandinavian countries differ from each other both in terms of geography and semantics, which determined the general tonality of this year's seminar. According to the plan, the seminars of the following years will deal with the systematisation of the types of holy groves and places.

Papers held at this seminar could be divided in two – those discussing the holy groves from the archaeological viewpoint and those discussing it from the angle of folkloristics. The opening speech of the seminar was delivered by researcher Tõnno Jonuks (Estonian Literary Museum), who was also the main organiser of the event. Anna Wickholm (University of Helsinki) focused on the similarities of cremation cemeteries under the ground level and grove or *hiisi*-sites in Finland, and suggested that the ritual objects found in Finnish Iron Age cemeteries seem to indicate that the cemeteries were used for different purposes round-the-year. According to Wickholm, the underground cremation cemeteries may have served as smaller communal ritual centres. The cemeteries functioned as meeting places where the whole community could practice their cult also between the funerals.

Juha Ruohonen (University of Turku) discussed the relations of holy groves and cemeteries and the funeral traditions of inner areas of Finland, which were historically considered as periphery. In these areas, the old funeral traditions and rituals were preserved longer than anywhere else in Finland, where funeral tradition often merged with Lutheran or Catholic traditions.

Vykintas Vaitkevičius, who studies holy places in Lithuania, provided an overview of research trends in the study of the sacred groves of the Balts in the past and present, discussing linguistic, archaeological and ethnological sources. Latvian scholar Sandis Laime introduced the holy groves of Central Courland from a diachronic viewpoint. Laime compared the historical and modern research data on the sacred grove sites in Latvia. It is historically known that there were Curonian kings, descendants of Curonian nobility, in seven Latvian villages. Various sources reveal that next to other pagan traditions, the kings upheld traditions related to sacred groves. Fieldwork conducted in the area resulted in a large body of material on taboos observed in the sacred groves



*Sandis Laime from Latvia introduces the sacred places of the Balts.
Photo by Andres Kuperjanov, 2007.*

even today. Laime emphasised that there are obvious parallels between contemporary taboos and those of previous centuries.

Archaeologist Heiki Valk (University of Tartu) discussed the regional differences of Estonian natural sacred places, observing these on the example of three regions: western and northern Estonia, southern and southwestern Estonia, and southeastern Estonia (the Setu region). Valk pointed out that the regional differences of Estonian sacred places result from specific historical contacts, interactions and circumstances.

Tõnno Jonuks explored different possibilities for dating the sacred groves in Viru County, focusing in his paper on grove sites, the toponym of which includes the word *hiis* (grove) and analysed their geographical location and orientation and connection with archaeological sites.

Anne Hyvarinen (University of Helsinki) focused in her paper *Hiisi-Places on the Landscape of Eastern Finland in the Light of Archive Materials* on sites associated with supernatural beings and explored the relations between the sacred groves and death culture from the viewpoint of comparative religion.

The paper by Auli Kütt (MA student, University of Tartu) discussed the contradiction and symbiosis of historical sacred groves in Estonia at different times, and differed from other presentations in the speaker's religious affiliation with nature religion and her emotional response on which practices are allowed to be performed at sacred grove sites and which are not.

Heiki Valk concluded with an overview of the future of Estonian sacred places and the planned national program of sacred groves in Estonia.

The seminar program included poster presentations by Mari-Ann Rimmel and Elo Liiv. *The Sacred Tree as a Visual Symbol and a Measure of Moral Values* by Rimmel discussed parameters that may make a tree more popular (such as the favourable

location, diameter, height and age of the tree), and how the destroying of old sacred trees may affect the local community.

Elo Liiv, as a practising follower of Estonian nature religion, posed the question of superficiality of contemporary ethnographic collections: the collected material is sufficient for studying and analysing but not for transmitting and practising the traditions. Liiv concluded with a view that researchers and active users of tradition today are no longer conflicting parties, like they once were, but require and make use of each others' information.

On May 5–6, the seminar participants toured the Tartu and Viru County and visited the sacred places in the region.

TRAVELS OF AN ETHNOLOGIST. ANU KORB AND HER PHD THESIS ON ESTONIANS IN SIBERIA.

Aivar Jürgenson

For defining an ethnologist, various parallels have been used. Justin Stagl, professor of anthropology, for example, compares an anthropologist with a Muslim pilgrim. Pilgrimage is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and is obligatory for all Muslims. The pilgrimage to Mecca belongs to the semantic field of the word 'Muslim', which is why the name only applies to those who have visited the holy city, and they may call themselves 'hajj'.

Here the parallel with an ethnologist is certainly 'fieldwork', which for the ethnologist represents both a method for collecting information and a personality-defining experience. A more colourfully put, and perhaps slightly exaggerative, statement that a scholar will be born anew at fieldwork expeditions leads us to the next association that characterises an ethnologist as a scholar through a cultural term from his own research discipline – namely, 'initiation'. French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has drawn parallels with travelling to discover the inner self, although the association remains more or less the same. Even psychoanalysis may be juxtaposed with initiation.



Anu Korb, researcher at the Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum, has arrived at an important landmark on the travel of an ethnologist. On August 28, 2007, she defended her PhD thesis on Estonian communities in Siberia as a source for folkloristic research (*Siberi eesti kogukonnad folkloristliku uurimisallikana*. Dissertationes folkloristicae universitatis Tartuensis, 8. Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus. Opponents Kristin Kuutma, PhD, and Aivar Jürgenson, PhD) in the Senate Hall of the University of Tartu.

Parallels with pilgrimage or initiatory travelling are particularly applicable to Anu Korb's scholarly work, since there are only a few other ethnologists in Estonia whose scholarly career has been so closely connected with fieldwork. Moreover, in her thesis Anu Korb herself confesses that it is the field expeditions that have turned her from an archivist and preserver of folklore into a scholar. The material collected by her is held in the Estonian Folklore Archives, and quite a significant amount has been published in the text anthologies on Estonian settlements, started by her (*Eesti asundused*, four edited anthologies, published in 1995–1999).

Thus it is a logical conclusion that Anu Korb's doctoral thesis is based mostly on material collected by herself, amounting to quite a significant source in the past sixteen years, during which she has been involved in studying Estonian settlements in Siberia. The voluminous publication in the series of dissertations of the University of Tartu consists of two recently published monographs: (1) *Venemaal rahvusaaslasi küsitlemas. Folkloristliku välitöö metoodilisi aspekte*. (On factors affecting folkloristic fieldwork: on the example of Estonians in Siberia. *Studia Ethnologica et Folkloristica Tartuensia*, 9. Ene Kõresaar, Tiiu Jaago (eds.). Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus 2005, 158 pp.); and (2) *Rõžkovo virulased pärimuskultuuri kandjaina* (The carriers of folk culture in Ryzhkovo. *Commentationes Archivi Traditionum Popularium Estoniae*, 24. Mall Hiiemäe, Kadri Tamm (eds.) Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum 2007, 216 pp.). The first focuses on the collection of lore material, collection event and methods, the second analyses the folklore of a diaspora community and the process of change on the example of the village of Ryzhkovo in western Siberia.

The first book that the thesis is based on may be used as a guidebook for someone planning folkloristic fieldwork, or simply a longer trip to Russia. The immense hospitality and openness of Estonians in Russia is repeatedly emphasised, and so is the fact that in Russia the scholar manages to establish a closer contact with informants in Russia than in villages in homeland. The latter claim is probably supported by all ethnologists who have conducted fieldwork in Russian settlements. With her excellent knowledge of lore, experience in joint expeditions of the archive, and overview of collection methods, Anu Korb has definitely benefitted from her long experience in working at the folklore archives.

The study discusses at length the contact established between the scholar and the informant and the process of establishing communication. The issue of trust is inevitably introduced: how to make an informant open up to the scholar? Anu Korb writes about the advantages of private conversations, especially in case of sensitive topics, but also presents opposite examples of cases of informants becoming particularly talkative in the presence of someone well acquainted with the story. The author also mentions "the value of an outsider": a person outside the community is trusted and

allowed to ask things that may be considered a taboo by a community member. Probably all researchers who have a longer fieldwork experience can attest to that. Fine examples are given in subchapter “Self-command of a lore transmitter”, demonstrating how the informants may find performing of texts of obscene content problematic. The same applies to confidential or private information.

The second book of the thesis (*Rõžkovo virulased pärimuskultuuri kandjaina*) discusses the earliest Lutheran settlement in Siberia, founded around 1803. The village is unique among the Siberian settlements in many respects. Mixed settlement and cultural contacts have shaped the tradition and the language of the inhabitants. The chapter on language identity as a decisive factor in determining ethnic identity (*Keeleline identiteet rahvuskooluvuse määrajana*) is particularly interesting. Owing to its historical background, Ryzhkovo village offers an excellent opportunity for studying the merging of religious and ethnic identity, the blurring of ethnic identity. The author has pointed out that while in Ryzhkovo the ethnic term *virulane* refers to both Estonians and Finns, and all three are used as near synonyms, in other villages *virulane* is used self-referentially by the Estonians. In addition to language relations in Ryzhkovo, the book explores the song repertoire, folk calendar, folk medicine and funeral traditions of the community, constituting only a selection of areas in the ethnological canon; however, since Anu Korb has taken greater interest in these areas of study in the Estonian villages in Siberia and is clearly best acquainted with these, the selection criteria seems justified.

While Ryzhkovo may seem unique among other Siberian villages, the village is in many ways characteristic of Estonians in Siberia, and thus the book offers a fairly good overview of the folk tradition of Estonians in Siberia. Numerous parallels, which Anu Korb has been able to provide, owing to her fine knowledge of the folk tradition of Estonians in Siberia, contribute to the depth of the overview.

The thesis entails several innovative elements: for example, the classification of Estonian settlements in Estonia, based on the ethnic origin of the founders of the settlement and the percentage of Estonians in the settlements today. In the view of the situation when the number and percentage of Estonians in the settlements is steadily decreasing, the classification proposed by August Nigol (in his book on Estonian settlements in Russia *Eesti asundused ja asupaigad Venemaal*, published in Tartu in 1918) has become outdated, and the one proposed by Anu Korb is definitely a success. Since the lion's share of Estonians in Siberia still live in rural areas, the author has focused in her collection and research work as well as in the current classification on Estonians in the rural regions of Siberia. Also, there is another fact to consider – during the 20th century, many Estonians in Siberia have settled in cities (about a thousand of the 4,100 Estonians in Krasnoyarsk Krai live in the city of Krasnoyarsk), which is why a separate category of *urban population* should be added and, perhaps, further researched in the future.

In her thesis, Anu Korb focuses mainly on the analysis of fieldwork, especially folkloristic fieldwork, as collection of data. Reading between the lines, however, reveals the same issue of fieldwork as the transformation of personality, the rite of passage.

Anu Korb has kindly shared her initiatory experience in fieldwork with a number of younger ethnologists, and mostly on purely practical considerations. Even I ended up interviewing Estonians in Siberia owing to Anu Korb, as in 1996 she invited me along as a cameraman to Omsk Oblast and instilled in me interest in this diaspora group. Several other ethnologists have come to study Estonians in Siberia thanks to Anu, who has been largely responsible for the fact that Estonians in Siberia is very likely the most studied Estonian diaspora group. Not all scholars have bothered to educate the young generation of scholars. The attitude of scaring “rivals” away from studying a particular group, which is characteristic of some scholars, – this immunizing strategy arrogantly appealing to authenticity, which some reputed scholars use to monopolise the study of a certain ethnic group, considering it exclusively their “private territory” – would be unthinkable in the case of Anu Korb. Her openness and the willingness to help that she has always bestowed on her younger colleagues, and also her respect towards their opinions and interpretations has facilitated the forming of a school of researchers of Siberian Estonians, who will probably excite interest in the following years. May Anu be full of vim and vigour for years to come!

A FOLKLORISTIC STUDY OF RUMOURS IN TARTU

Mare Kõiva



This news piece was inspired by the fact that Eda Kalmre defended her PhD thesis on August 28, 2007 at the University of Tartu, and also by the fact that, having read the book three times, I was ravished by the presented narratives and documents. In the following I will share some impressions about the book, embedded with thoughts and ideas inspired by it. I have always regarded legends about sausage factory as tales of international spread, based on stereotypical beliefs, which are intensified by the socio-economical situation. But the presented tales also speak about evil, thus posing a number of questions. What is indicated with these tales? What are they telling us about the contemporary reality? How is a ru-

mour or newer migratory legend localised? What is the output of evil horror tales in modern times?

Hypothetically speaking, the beliefs and narratives circulating during and after WWI are genetically related to the themes discussed by Eda Kalmre, which will be demonstrated after a reference to the prevailing discourse of evil throughout history.

According to experimental psychologist Richard Beck, it is too simple, though rather pointless, to claim that Hitler was a representation of pure evil and the atrocities of Holocaust were his fault. This does not correspond to reality, but is shifted like commonplace media production and fiction which creates an illusion of daily criminal atrocities, presenting the actions of serial killers, child molesters and sadists as something rather ordinary, and making us forget that the number of such people is not large and the cases are rare. Statistics show that one is much more likely to get killed by one's angry spouse than a serial killer. Beck relies on the model of eight characteristics comprising the myth of pure evil, which is based on a schema with three parts: Evil is intentional harm; the perpetrators of the harm are sadistic, they enjoy harming others; and the victims of evil are innocent and essentially good. The operation of evil is possible because of the perpetrators of evil and those who let it happen. The famous psychologist claims that evil is actually perpetrated by victims of the system. Not the pure evil in the form of Hitler, but the explicit and implicit support to him by German citizens made the evil possible. Hitler was only able to capitalise in average Germans on the general feeling, created by their treatment before, during, and especially after WWI, that they had been victimised.

Let us return to WWI, a source of inspiration for much folklore, and touch upon Phillis Campbell, a person of modest education, who wrote reports which excited considerable media popularity on, for example, how Germans crucified civilians and cut off hands of innocent children – reports later proven false. She wrote, "It seemed to me that all the wickedness, all the fear and filthiness imaginable that exists can be summed up in one word: GERMAN." With her deep hatred she sought to transfer the hatred to others. A spectacular belief story that she claimed having witnessed was that of angels fighting against Germans at Mons. A large German army was shot down by arrows but no wounds were found later on the dead bodies. But the story became so popular that it instantly entered oral lore, and several soldiers, alleged witnesses to the event, sold the story to newspapers. The incident (slightly different versions of it) was repeatedly published in the press. Though once a piece of fiction invented by one woman, the story was later popularised by many fame-seekers. James Hayward, who has collected and studied legends of the WWI, claims in his book *Myths and Legends of the First World War* (2004) that the legends are still very much a part of oral lore.

In terms of the Estonian tradition, the years before and after WWII clearly witnessed the emergence of a large number of legends and stereotypes in folklore. At least two legends, which still have an effect on modern culture space, were known and told in virtually all Estonian families. Both are evaluative and expose the socio-cultural changes of major tumults during the period. One of such stories tells how the wives of officers, stationed by the 1939 agreement of establishing military bases in Estonia, were humiliated and ridiculed at a festive banquet for having worn slips and night-gowns instead of evening dresses out of ignorance. According to folk narrative rules, comments, alleged eyewitness reports and other facts confirming the incident were

added to the legend. The same story was known in my own family through a pre-war narrative by a grand-uncle, who had migrated to the US.

The second popular tale of the period, the sausage factory legend, was localised in Tartu or Tallinn, but spread fear all over the country in the form of exempla, cautionary or admonition tale. In Tallinn, the legend was associated, among other things, with the residential area of the poor opters of citizenship, who had replaced the Russian factory workers, and on the premises of which there was also a soap factory.

Both legends constitute a particularly insidious type of folklore, having devoted believers and eyewitnesses, because the elements, under certain conditions, make the legend an almost wishful reality. Aili Aarelaid, for example, has presented the former legend as a true story – that is, has accepted the folkloric elements embedded in life stories and oral history reports as a fact.

The legend studied by Eda Kalmre has been a widely known set of traditions in Europe and the territory of former Soviet Union. Having read the passionate interviews and argumentations presented in the thesis, it becomes clear that for many it is a symbolic tale which is not subject to reason and for which one is willing to reconstruct oneself in any situation. Also, many are willing to hyperbolise and alter the facts of everyday life in order to demonstrate the depravity and injustice of the system, the social rule. Thus it is a story that enables readers to use it for adjusting a certain social regime and situation, provides an emotionally colourful evaluation of the political and economic situation, and has hidden purposes. The presented examples often emerge very intensely; the story they tell is a fragment of painful history. While reading, I often caught myself wondering how many topics were the informants able to discuss through the author's mediation and how much information on postwar life in Estonia is revealed in the study of a single motif.

It has to be noted that the majority of informants were not adult in 1947, and thus mediate their childhood memories. The sausage factory tales were definitely better remembered because of the intense feeling of fear, further encouraged by the heard cautionary tales. Children created their own belief system, stereotypes, experiences of fear and communication for interpreting the suspicious situation around the memorised tales.

In the book, the description of history as a process alternates with the observation of the migration of folkloristic motifs, which is an intriguing method of presentation. By applying folkloristic methods, the author introduces the beliefs of different periods. The oral lore that circulated at the beginning of the 20th century (the author has grouped sausage factory legends among older folktales, including fairy tales) is traced back to the past, revealing different layers of narrative history, beliefs and folktales which share common narrative motifs. In my personal opinion, if the book has any shortcomings at all, it would be the association of the tales with old motifs but a disregard of similar lore of the modern period, and perhaps the insufficient source criticism of (party) documents.

The treatment of recent interviews provided the informants an opportunity to reconstruct and, indeed, reinterpret the postwar events. The informants share a wish to clarify historical truth and/or protect the stereotypes and perception of the past of their generation. The informants form a relatively homogenous narrative group. Among other examples, the narratives of some informants with a particularly negative atti-

tude and not exactly successful life course appeared to stand out. Two out of the selected four narrator types which are described in more detail seem to represent embittered and unfortunate people. One of such informants does not seem to realise that she was fortunate to have been grown up among relatives, not as a deportee or at an orphanage, and that she actually had a nice and active support group in her church congregation. Somewhat exaggerated and twisted are also other example texts of the discontented informants, which leaves an impression that some of them used the interview for expressing social criticism and as a compensation for what they believed was an unappreciated life.

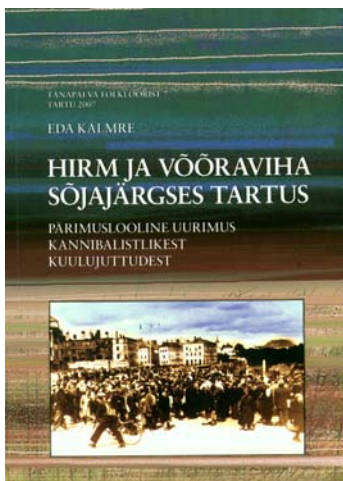
As to the setting of the legend, Eda Kalmre has reconstructed, on the basis of documents held in the history archives, media articles, folkloristic research articles and interviews, the Tartu of 1947 in order to set the folkloric legend in an appropriate time and space and consider the social situation conditioning it. Tartu is a solid place for this setting, the symbol of intellectuality in Estonia. The temporal setting encompasses the period during which the Soviet regime had already begun breaking the will of the population and their subjugation to their system with a wave of intimidation and delation, collecting reports and stigmatisation in public meetings. Nevertheless, some figures in Tartu who had the courage to make their voice heard, who pointed to the shortcomings in the society and criticised these, stand out in the presented documents.

Eda Kalmre's observation of narrative events and analogous phenomena from different angles (opposition of foreign and own, food strategies, narrative-specific incidents) is noteworthy: the chapters include numerous interesting comments on the history of Tartu (e.g., the bombing of Kivisild, or Stone Bridge, which is definitely a characteristic legend of postwar Tartu), of the social situation at the time, and of contemporary folklore. The author has interestingly presented the reasons behind the narrowing and changing of the spread of older lore, and considered also the narrators' interpretations.

The intriguingly structured material can be extended in various directions and brought closer to the present day. For example, next to the narratives of unsuitable food, there is a motif of exemplum: owing to the inadequate and slow communication of official information, simply warning against suspicious, insanitarily prepared or kept, and stale or rotten food (e.g., warnings about the cheese- and sausage-processing technology and the insanitariness of it in the tales, etc.). This was partly due to the actual situation in food stalls. But the atmosphere and factiousness is perhaps best characterised by the fact that the robbers-murderers of the stories of the time formed an anonymous and unspecified group (or, if at all, defined only by nationality) – this means that they are not heroised, they cannot be specified, and they remain an anonymous threat (if we disregard the characteristic adopted appearance of a Russian commissar, deporter, or Dzerzhinsky, clearly influenced by Russian films, in some tales). The group also includes women who have adopted the role of an enticer or a cruel gang member. The list indicates to highly modernised bandit lore, influenced by the 20th-century realia (e.g., cruel partisan Ilp and his even crueller bride, etc.). The fictionality of the tales is suggested by several details that could be described in more detail: such as the fact that the language use and appearance of an enticer are “authentic” and do not cause suspicion in the tale's protagonist. This stands in conflict with referring to representatives of foreign ethnicity as people who lured others into ruins:

the reason which enabled rational readers to doubt its veracity. Of course, there were other incidents that enabled the younger generation to categorise such tales, told by adults, under the category of 'heard through the grapevine'.

This is the first full study based significantly on rumour as a source. It is a fine contribution to the research of contemporary legends and also an important academic counterargument to the tales disseminating fear and hatred by Campbell and other rumour-mongers.



Eda Kalmre *Hirm ja võõraviha sõjajärgses Tartus. Pärimuslooline uurimus kannibalistlikest kuulujuttudest* (Fear and hatred of the 'other' in post-war Tartu. A folkloristic study of cannibalistic rumours). Tänapäevafolkloorist/Contemporary Folklore. Tartu: EKM Teaduskirjastus 2007, 239 pp.