Easter in Estonia

Folk calendar is a long and evolving process, which has been changed mainly by the changes in the economic situation and environment, political and religious systems, fashion and media, taste, charismatic persons and other factors. Similarly, elements of folk calendar, such as the chronological system and calendar holidays, as well as traditions, beliefs, taboos and entertainment associated with it, have changed over the centuries.

Very little is known about the prehistoric Estonian folk calendar, as regular recording of calendar reports began only in the 19th and 20th century. Earlier traditions are mentioned in visitation and witch trial documents, travel letters, chronicles and books. Arguments based on the prehistoric Estonian folk calendar are largely hypothetical and presumptuous. Apparently, its most important function was counting weeks, each consisting of seven days. Prehistoric Estonians mostly observed the lunar calendar but also celebrated major solar calendar holidays. Celebrating the beginning and end of major works and the change of seasons has also been central in the tradition.

The establishment of Catholicism in the area in the 13th century brought a critical change in the Estonian folk calendar along: people began celebrating saints' feast days, construct churches, chapels and crosses dedicated to Catholic saints. Former sacred places were abandoned in favour of others recognised by the Catholic Church, and the reform of the economic calendar began; new holidays were adopted, several mythological beings were attributed new names and celebrating the rituals connected with these probably changed in manner and time. It is believed that around the same time the system of sacrificing at specific calendar days changed. Large stones and other natural monu-

ments were associated with specific saints. While gaining ground, Catholicism integrated earlier beliefs and conceptions and introduced new traditions.

The influence of Catholicism is evident in Estonian folk calendar even today, among other things it has somewhat retained the symmetry where certain saints' feast days celebrated in summer correspond to those celebrated in winter. Although the older part of the Estonian folk calendar includes strictly regional festivities, most of the tradition and customs are still analogous to the traditions and festivities of other European countries.

The next major change in the calendar was caused by the Lutheran reformation in the 1520s, which necessitated the reconstruction and destruction of the sacred places of the Catholic religion and resulted in the abandoning of saints' worship. References to saints, however, were retained in the names of calendar holidays and churches. Until the end of the 19th century the ministers of Lutheran congregations in towns and rural areas were mostly Germans, nevertheless, sermons were held in the Estonian language. Conversion to the Orthodox religion began in the 1840s under the influence of the then political and economic situation. Some people joined Protestant free churches, but Lutheranism remained the dominant religion. According to the 1934 census, nearly 874,000 people considered themselves as members of the Lutheran church, constituting nearly four fifths of the Estonian population (Sild 1938; Plaat 2001).

The Lutheran reform could not change the entire system of calendar traditions, though it introduced changes, and many holidays were becoming irreversibly forgotten without official support. However, it is worth noting that regardless of the introduction of the Russian Orthodox religion (which became more firmly established in the peripheral regions of Estonia and in towns, see e.g. Sõtšov 2004); it did not bring along major changes in folk traditions, folk calendar and religious practices, other than in the Setu County and in Northeast Estonia next to the Russian border, where the population had contacts with the Russian Orthodox neighbours already before.

The support of the clerical circles, the symbiotic relationship of official calendar holidays and folk traditions, or the disapproving of celebrating certain holidays by the church, has had a much greater impact on calendar tradition than would appear at first.

It is also worth noting that since the 17th and 18th century, the Estonian folk calendar has been influenced by calendar and school literature, since the 19th century by special albums, publications compiled for calendar holidays and fiction. During the past centuries, calendar holidays have been introduced mainly by the media, which has also brought along changes in celebration, and promoted the celebration of e.g. St Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and other holidays.

Next to the church and media, folk calendar has also been influenced by the political regime. The Soviet regime managed to restructure the system of national holidays, and the celebration of many former customs was carried on behind closed doors. Likewise, the tides in national identity have caused the reinvention or abandoning of former customs. This article aims to present an overview of changes in the Easter tradition in Estonia throughout centuries and to characterise its celebration in modern times. A brief introduction of the local peculiarities of the tradition in a nation state, the role of an individual in continuing the tradition, as well as the impact of politics and the idea of ethnicity on calendar tradition will be also presented.

Material

With the help of local correspondents, calendar tradition has been collected in Estonia for over a century, and together with various omens, work restrictions, chores, special customs, ritual foods consumed on specific holidays, forms of entertainment, etc. it will constitute a corpus of nearly 180,000 text entries. Its major flaw is perhaps a certain retrospective emphasis: informants or collectors of the material have been encouraged to concentrate on as early tradition as possible, thus overshadowing the imminent empirical experience and information about the contemporary period. This, of course, does not apply to all the folklore correspondents, as the material also includes authentic recorded texts, filled with facts and often emotionally inspiring. The entries of the past decades, however, are critically different as the voice of the collector is far more explicit.

For the present article, I have made extensive use of one of our most recent web-based databases/portals, which is intended

to inform users about the ritual Estonian folk calendar. BERTA (2004, http://www.folklore.ee/Berta) was commissioned by the Estonian Tiger Leap Foundation, which is actively involved in establishing an Estonian-language learning environment, interactive web-based education, instruction in information technology and in a project of supplying Estonian schools with computers.

BERTA or the Database of Estonian Folk Calendar currently introduces about 80 folk calendar holidays of varied importance and is as such the largest and most comprehensive corpus of Estonian folk holidays, beliefs and music. The database also presents a selection of (major) Russian Orthodox holidays as well as holidays of Estonian school calendar (especially those exhibiting features characteristic of a popular calendar holiday).

Each holiday links to an introductory web page, which provides a brief overview of customs connected with a particular holiday and a short history of the day (specifying its origin, spread and adoption in Estonia, and the changes it has undergone). The introduction also provides information about the saint (if the holiday is a saint's feast day), comparative material from other cultures, and some most recent interviews. Additional key words to facilitate the understanding of the archaic tradition are added to the introductions of most holidays and feast days. Separate links refer to specific web pages and printed sources for further information on single topics.

Web gallery consists of photographs associated with various holidays from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 21st century. Photographic material was found not only in the photo archives of the Estonian Folklore Archives, and the Estonian National Museum, but also in private collections and, particularly in terms of the newer material, also from the web galleries of schools. Video and sound samples are provided on a separate page and originate in the Estonian Folklore Archives and private collections. Submitting comments and stories are made simple for the user, the stories written and added by users explains the actual meaning of the holiday to our contemporaries. Archive texts have been grouped in a separate database, containing texts about thirty of the most important holidays, which are searchable by means of a formalized key word of a separate search engine. This symbiosis of personal recollections and mod-

Photo 1. Eastern in South-East Estonia (Setu Country, Võmorska village), 1913. Photo by Johannes Pääsuke, courtesy of Estonian National Museum, 213:167.

ern media interviews with folkloric archive texts helps scholars to study the changes in the tradition on a diachronic and synchronic level.

Easter Traditions

As mentioned above, the sources to study the earlier calendar tradition are relatively scanty. Moreover, the material has been primarily collected from the town population, especially members of the upper and middle class, which explains why the collectors recorded mostly the tradition of non-Estonians and integrated immigrants. Proceeding from the assumption that the social differentiation in Estonia was never very rigid and information and traditions were transmitted through various informal networks between members of different social classes, and that the calendar tradition included many collective activities

and symbols that were adopted and observed by individuals, it is possible, to a certain extent, to extend the generalisation on what took place in other social groups.

The internal organization of the ritual system is usually a complex orchestration of standard oppositions that generate flexible sets of relationships both differentiating and integrating activities, sacred places and communities. Domestic rituals contrast with communal rituals, male rituals with female rituals, preliminary rituals with culminating ones.

Strategic differences in ritual traditions can differentiate specific communities, ritualisation can also operate to integrate communities (Bell 1992). In the 14th century, the four most important holidays celebrated with drinking and festivities were Martinmas, Christmas, Shrovetide and Eastertide. Beer and wine also belonged to the celebrations of Michaelmas, Lent, in Livonia also Midsummer Day and the feast days of some saints. In the 15th century, the major folk calendar holidays were Christmas and Shrovetide, whereas the expenses paid for entertainment and guild festivities of the Shrovetide often exceeded those of Christmas. Since the 15th century, new festive holidays emerged, such as the Twelfth Night, New Year's Day and the holiday, which in the Estonian language was called *hingepewe*, or All Soul's Day.

In the medieval period, Easter was celebrated only for one day, when aldermen of Tallinn and Riga gathered to the Town Hall to drink beer or wine. Anu Mänd, who has studied medieval festivities in Estonia, has indicated that two kegs of dark beer were consumed at the Easter celebration in 1372, and a keg of beer was drunk by the Great Guild of Tallinn in 1363 (Mänd 2004: 66). People also sang songs at these festivities. In addition, on this day the town musicians were paid. Even in the 15th and 16th century people were known to gather to the Town Hall of Tallinn to drink wine and beer, though the celebrations were then held in the period following Easter. Therefore, unlike other folk calendar holidays, little is known about the secular celebration of this period. Some reports mention the procuring of beer and wine for the time of Lent. Moreover, at Easter not only town musicians were paid but also it was an important economic time for paying taxes and settling debts. There is no information about medieval traditions of private spheres, as the rituals centred on

church and reportedly colourful celebrations of the holiday in public places.

If we attempt to divide tentatively a year into certain critical periods, which according to folk beliefs were the times when numerous mythological creatures and preternatural forces were actively around, we will have four tentative dates around equinoxes. A year could be divided in eight critical periods, whereas the number of important dates in the medieval autumn-winter period (four periods since Michaelmas to Whitsuntide) is considerably larger than in the summer season. For example, the best times for reciting spells were spring and winter folk calendar holidays such as St. Matthias' Day, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, St. George's Day, Whitsuntide, Midsummer Day, and autumn calendar holidays such as Michaelmas, Martinmas, and Christmas holidays (Kõiva 1990). Maundy Thursday and Good Friday were particularly good for performing smaller rituals of magic and for influencing the forthcoming year. The intense practising of magic was connected with the vernal equinox as well as with Christian teachings about the heightened activeness of evil forces and the Devil around the particular time. For example, a child who was nursed on three consecutive Maundy Thursdays was believed to become a witch.

In the 17th–19th century, the reports are mainly complaints about practising witchcraft and fertility rituals at church holidays. As to the 19th century, the material is mostly from written press and concerns popular customs in public and private sphere. According to these data, Easter at the time was the symbiosis of the seasonal, commemorative and religious celebrations (Bell 1997: 103 ff.). As in other European countries in the period following the Lutheran reformation, the carnival tradition began to die out and was replaced with mumming and masking in villages and other public activities. The most popular Easter custom in the European countries and in Estonia was decorating and eating Easter eggs and giving these as gifts: this is the main private symbol of the date in popular culture. In the Orthodox regions of South Estonia, it was also customary to roll the eggs. Easter eggs were a significant form of social interaction, as they were given and received as gifts. While the nineteenth-century reports discuss widely the collecting of the eggs long before the Easter so that there would be enough to paint and give away to

the family, relatives and egg-finders, in the 20th century things are quite different, as the growth of chicken farms and the trade system makes procuring the eggs much easier. The image and relevance of eggs as the symbol of Easter holidays and domestic culture undergoes significant changes, as they become symbolic statements of social order.

Even today, eggs are given to friends, teachers, midwives and godparents. Formerly, the latter used to give Easter eggs as gifts to their godchildren. The most common custom of the 19th century and the early 20th century was that young men went around in the village gathering eggs, and godparents gave Easter eggs to their godchildren. After reaching adulthood, however, godchildren were expected to give Easter eggs as presents to their godparents.

> *During spring holidays, we often rushed to the church to meet the younger ones. At other times, we were not allowed to visit. The eggs were boiled, painted and given to godchildren. Godmother gave these to the godchild until he or she had finished confirmation classes. After confirmation, the godchild gives candy or something else to the godmother. Boys visited girls to look for the Easter eggs. The boys always came in a crowd. Were shared with acquaintances and also strangers.*
>
> *In the Vaikla village, boys and men went mumming as roosters. Had disguised themselves as roosters before sunrise, and cried like roosters, then you knew you had to give them an egg.*
>
> *Easter eggs were red and coloured, but Pentecost eggs were yellow, dyed with birch leaves. Painted eggs were taken to an anthill, so that the ants would leave a pattern on them. Such an egg would have a nice smell and also taste. Such eggs were given only to the best friends* (RKM II 362, 456 (16) < Otepää parish, Mõrtsuka village, Järva farm – Mare Kõiva < Rudolf Andrei, b. 1908 (1982))

Eggs were painted at Easter all over Estonia, whereas in the northern and central Estonia eggs were also decorated on Whitsuntide or Pentecost.

Easter eggs were decorated in a variety of ways. Even nowadays it is common to dye eggs with natural dyes like onionskins (for a brown or dark yellow colour), birch leaves (for light yel-

Photo 2. Egg rolling in Sout-East Estonia (Setu Country, Lepa village), 1975. Photo by Vello Kutsar, courtesy of Estonian National Museum, 1754:20.

Photo 3. Egg rolling in Sout-East Estonia (Setu Country, Lepa village), 1975. Photo by Vello Kutsar, courtesy of Estonian National Museum.

low), madder (for red colour), and coffee (for brown eggs). In the 20th century, silk or crepe paper and cloth were used for decoration. For patterns, grain or rice was added, dye was scraped off, or names were written or images drawn on the shell. Wax or different plants were also pressed against an egg wrapped in a piece of cloth – the latter resulted in a faint impression of a plant's contour. Different colours were obtained by using watercolours or egg paints, which were particularly common methods of decoration in the 20th century. In the period of deficit following the Second World War, other colouring substances were used instead of egg paints, including even potassium permanganate, Brilliant Green (*Viride Nitens*), and other substances available.

Making use of different techniques, such as water stickers and adhesive labels, cut-outs and pasted pictures, and dyed feathers glued to the egg, became more widespread. At the beginning and in the final decades of the past century the name of the beloved or that of whom the egg was addressed to was written on the egg, also hearts and simpler images were drawn. In the second half of the 20th century eggs were crafted into chickens, comic figures of humans, animals, etc. – literally anything the maker could think of.

The 19th century witnessed the custom of hiding Easter eggs so that children could search for them, and the custom of preserving some Easter eggs. It was believed that if an Easter egg is carefully kept for seven years the egg yolk will start glowing and the shell becomes transparent. The tradition of painting eggs with children belongs to the 20th century. In the 1960s and 1970s and later, egg paints were often not available in stores, but eggs were inexpensive and easy to buy, thus painting the eggs was no longer the responsibility of young adults, but children's and teenagers'. Families observe this tradition with children even nowadays. After the Second World War, painting eggs, hiding them in a house or apartment, and placing the painted eggs in a wicker bird nest lined with soft lichen or on green grass early in the morning while the children were asleep, became a symbol of Estonian domestic culture. Painting eggs with children and sharing these with family and friends was a deeply private family custom, especially in the Soviet period, when the authorities disapproved the celebration of Easter, as other church holidays.

Photo 4. Egg rolling in Sout-East Estonia (Setu Country, Lepa village), 1975. Photo by Vello Kutsar, courtesy of Estonian National Museum, 1754:16.

The oral narrative history of many families included the legend and beliefs addressed to or fostered by children that the eggs were painted, brought and hidden by an Easter bunny, which sneaked in at nights. The first documented report about eggs delivered by the Easter bunny originates from Germany in 1572. In Estonia, the custom is still actively practised, although from the 1960s onward, chocolate eggs and figures are hidden instead of dyed eggs in some families. In all the countries where Easter bunnies are known it is told that the eggs are their droppings, in the 20th century small round candy, such as raisins dipped in chocolate, were added among the Easter dishes. Here I would like to emphasise two aspects of this tradition: firstly, the searching for and promoting of ethnic Estonian customs in Soviet Estonian folklore studies and in media. Consequently, customs that were estimated to be only a hundred years old or even younger were automatically considered as non-authentic and non-ethnic (further on this see Kõiva 1996; 2006). The same applied to customs that were known to be of, for example, German origin, or to

have an international spread or variant, or that belong (also) to urban culture, as folklore and ethnic Estonian tradition were primarily connected with agrarian culture (see e.g. Hiiemäe 2003). The first extensive set of topics – the symbiosis of different ethnic identities and continuity of culture versus strategies of resistance under the circumstances of an authoritarian political regime – deserves a separate study (e.g. on the structure of the celebration of Christmas as a family holiday in Soviet Estonia see Hiiemäe 2003). Secondly, the Easter tradition is particularly interesting because of its spontaneous playfulness, the creation of fiction tales and reinvention of the different forms of masking tradition. In the late 20th century, townspeople were known to

Photo 5. Self-made Easter postcard, designed by Estonian emigrants and sent to Estonia from Brisbane, Australia in 1979. Private collection.

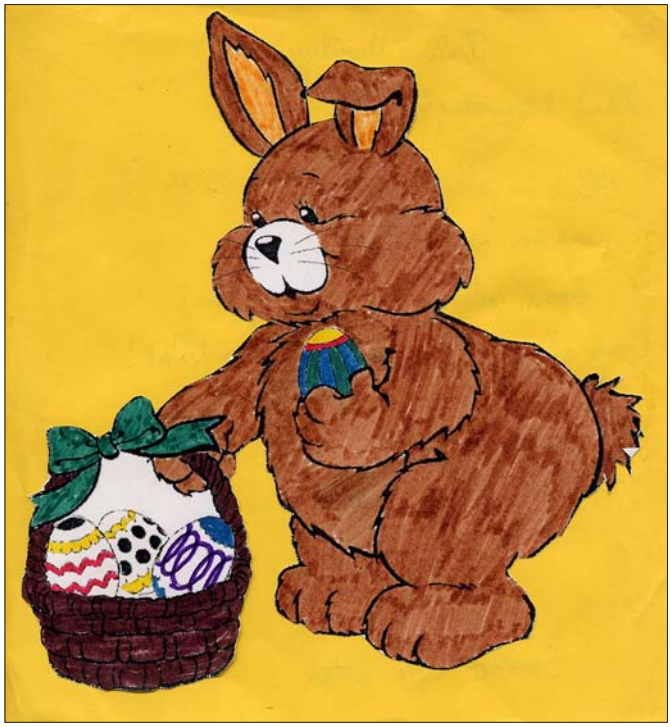

Photo 6. Self-made Easter postcard. Private collection.

have walked around in bunny costumes, sometimes selling Easter eggs.

An important part of the 20th century Easter tradition was self-made or printed Easter postcards sent to friends and family. In Estonia, the postcards usually depicted chickens with painted eggs, Easter bunnies with eggs, pussy willows, etc. The first postcards that circulated in Estonia were printed in Germany and are therefore quite similar in appearance. Self-made postcards are far more interesting; many of these were created in the period following Second Wold War when Easter could not be officially celebrated or Easter postcards printed. Owing to the unavailability of printed postcards, photographers photographed the old cards and copies thus obtained were spread as black-and-white or coloured photos. Sending out postcards was such an

important part of the family tradition that the Estonians deported in Siberia in 1941 and 1949 drew and sent self-made Easter and also Christmas cards home and to fellow deportees. Easter cards have also been drawn and designed by Estonian emigrants, who were unable to purchase Estonian-language Easter cards abroad.

It is important to emphasise that the self-made cards were particularly valuable because of their social significance and coherence, as they were the symbol of emotional bond, personal attention, human warmth and care. Nowadays the postcards are beginning to be replaced bye-cards and SMS messages.

There were two other significant customs of family tradition at Easter – bringing home pussy willows and looking at the dancing of the Sun early on Easter Sunday morning. Taking home pussy willows was an inseparable part of Easter tradition. Who had not brought them inside before did so by the Easter Sunday. If hepaticas were already in bloom, some moss and first spring flowers were brought inside. The budded branches with small leaves were used to decorate rooms. At the end of 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, pussy willows were taken to be blessed in the Russian Orthodox Church on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday and were later used to whisk family members at home, which the latter rewarded with eggs or small gifts. In the 20th century, people began growing grass on a plate or in a bowl to place the painted eggs on.

According to a widespread belief Easter Sunday is the day when the Sun dances while rising in the early morning sky (cf. Simpson & Roud 2000; Šmits 1940–1941). People gathered outside, sometimes even climbed on a hilltop or attic to observe it. According to another well-known belief, water turns sweet, as if someone had put sugar in it, for one minute during Easter. In some places children reportedly threw sugar in the well or spring.

> *On the morning of the first day of Pentecost the so-called 'playing of the Sun' was on everybody's mind. If you wanted to see it, you had to try to get out of bed by sunrise. It was said that the most beautiful golden rays were then cross crossing, irregularly, in the Sun, this was said to be particularly important. Unfortunately, this fascinating play could be seen only in clear weather and often not even then* (E 73060 (5) < Karja parish, Pärsamaa commune, Ratla village – P. Tamm < Tiiu Lodi (1931)).

Easter Masking and Mumming

Most of the 19th century holidays associated with the tradition of masking and mumming occurred in the period between November and Easter. Throughout the whole of Estonia (except for the Orthodox Southeast Estonia) the most important masking and mumming holidays with rich customs and regional idiosyncrasies were the eves of Martinmas (November 10) and St. Catherine's Day (November 23). Already in the 19th century, the masking and mumming tradition was particularly rich in West Estonia and on the islands, and shared similarities with the corresponding customs in Scandinavia (Christmas and New Year's goats, whips, etc.; see Eike 2002) or customs of wider spread (Three Kings; Simpson & Roud 2000). Easter masking and mumming were formerly more widely known; they were later observed in the same area, probably because of analogous celebration of other holidays. A characteristic feature of the tradition in western Estonia and on the islands was 'mummers' in animal or bird costumes who visited people to wish them good luck or health. For example, a 'goose' visited families to birch them for good health on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. According to recent accounts, the 'goose' no longer wore a costume, but the name was retained.

Another masked creature characteristic of the region was the Meat Woman, sometimes called Meat Kai, who appears in texts recorded in the 19th century. Meat Woman is a personification of Lent and is believed to keep guard of how people observe fasting and work prohibitions, and is therefore similar to the personification of hunger around New Year. A female creature who peeps through windows during Lent before Easter makes sure that nobody does forbidden needlework or breaks the fast. According to a popular saying, she breaks the neck and pulls out the guts of whoever is caught at a forbidden activity.

The fast abandoning of masking at Easter may be partly attributed to the belief system, which did not allow the transmitting of the tradition to women and children. In the 19th century, it was considered bad luck if the first visitor after the Christmas Eve was a woman. For this reason, young men were sent ahead to ask for beer or just to greet. There was also another prohibition – namely, children were not allowed to go to visit, and if

they did so, old leather shoes were thrown around their neck. Only in the final decades of the 19th century, women accompanied New Year's goats, but even then, the women hid behind the mummers or stayed outside. Masking at Christmas, however, strictly remained the privilege of adult men.

Communication and Constructing Locality

The description above indicates that in the Estonian Easter tradition, decorated Easter eggs played an important role in the communication between relatives, godparents and godchildren, and villagers. Things have no meaning apart from those that human transactions, attributions and motivations endow them with (Appadurai 1986: 5). Until the Second World War, searching for Easter eggs alone or together with a group of village boys was considered a fun and widely spread form of entertainment. At the beginning of the 20th century, eggs were gathered in the village in such great numbers that some boys even had trouble with eating all the found eggs. It was also customary for girls to give the most beautiful eggs to one's sweetheart or the favourite boy, and, in return, boys gave eggs to the girls they liked. In many regions young people gathered to dance and eat eggs in the evening.

> *Eggs were painted and then they walked around in the village. Full-grown men were coming along, and eggs were searched for at the girls' homes. Afterwards they cracked the eggs, to see whose eggshell will break; he had to give the egg to the other contestant. One guy even had a wooden egg, painted and all. Got everyone else's eggs. Guys were pestering him to let them see the egg, but he wouldn't show them.*
>
> S*omeone had buried all the eggs he had won under lichen, to come fetch them afterwards. However, later could not find the eggs anymore. Perhaps someone else found his eggs and took these away. It was fun.*
>
> *In olden times, people went to the inn and cracked the eggs there* (RKM II 362, 456 (16) < Otepää parish, Mõrtsuka village, Järva farm – Mare Kõiva < Rudolf Andrei, b. 1908 (1982)).

Next to expressing liking, respect and family ties, Easter eggs were also used to demonstrate dislike and ridicule. Raw eggs were secretly given to or placed in the baskets of the egg gatherers who were disliked or for picking a quarrel. When young men gathered to crack and eat eggs together, discovering a raw egg was quite a shame. Another popular trick was taking a wooden egg to overcome contestants at egg cracking. A masterfully coloured egg was almost identical with the normal egg. Crushing Easter eggs was a part of the interaction between boys and girls. At schools and in towns boys used to crush girls' eggs for teasing. As a result, the girl could not fulfil her role in important social interaction on the holiday.

While cracking eggs was a very popular and widespread custom, egg rolling was mostly known in South-East Estonia, which the whole village gathered to look on. As the time coincided with the beginning of the swinging period, people used to swing, sing, and eat home-baked pastry and chat. In the Russian Orthodox Setu County in Southeast Estonia, eggs were rolled downhill or along a special wooden channel. The person whose egg touched someone else's egg won his egg. Eggs were rolled as long as they could be won, after which all the eggs were gathered and the next person could take his turn. The won eggs were eaten at once, though the winner was also allowed to take them along. The custom of egg rolling and gathering was primarily limited to men. In the recent decades, however, this custom has also become more liberal, and women may roll eggs. The transformation of the tradition and the mitigation of gender roles had many reasons, among these contacts with Lutheran neighbours as such gender polarisation was not common in Lutheranism, general secularisation, and also changes in the social position of women in the community over the past half a century, etc. Southeast Estonians who had settled in other Estonian regions tried to preserve the special features of their tradition. The Setu who settled in towns modified the egg-rolling custom by carrying it out in one's home yard, house or apartment. The custom was carried on mostly in families with children and mainly for the sake of children, and mothers played the vital role as painters, hiders and initiators of egg-rolling contest. Over the centuries, there have been many outdoor activities and celebrations during Eastertide. In southern Estonia Eastertide also marked the

Photo 7. Easter swinging in Sout-East Estonia (Setu Country, Lepa village), 1975. Photo by Vello Kutsar, courtesy of Estonian National Museum, 1754:3.

beginning of swinging. Formerly, swinging was attributed a magical significance and therefore it had definite beginning and end (Vissel 2003: 35). Easter swinging (which served a magical purpose) was known among all Balto-Finnic peoples, but also among the Balts and the Russians (Talve 1961: 33–36). Since the beginning of the swinging period fell on an important holiday, it symbolised the creation of health, vitality and happiness for people and cattle. Setting up the village swing was the responsibility of young men. In the 19th century, this work was rewarded with mittens and belts, and most certainly with eggs. Swinging was a highly important form of entertainment for youths, and was accompanied by singing, games, contests of strength and dancing.

Another Easter custom practised in northern and central Estonia was board jumping, which was skilfully mastered by youngsters and children. A person was standing on either end of a board supported on a stone, tree-stump or log. If either of them jumped up, the person standing on the other end fell against the ground. The jump had to be performed masterfully to land on one's end of the board. The game of board jumping has been practised until now, though presently it is mostly practised in summer instead of swinging, rather than as a part of Easter tradition. This custom was also believed to secure health and happiness.

Symbolic Rituals and Securing Good Luck

Similarly to other folk holidays of the same degree, such as the New Year's Day, Whitsunday, and Midsummer Day, it was also forbidden to clean rooms and sweep floors – preparations for the major calendar holiday were indeed thorough. During the Holy Week and the Easter Sunday smaller rituals of magic were performed to secure good luck and health for the performer: for example, washing eyes before sunrise guaranteed good health and diligence. In the early 20th century, some silver was scraped into the water or the water of pussy willows was used for washing eyes.

> *On an Easter Sunday morning, a silver coin or some other silver object was slipped in the washbasin and the water was used to wash one's eyes. It was believed that the eyes would remain clear and healthy, if washed with this water* (E XIII 17 (90) < Nõo parish – Matthias Johann Eisen < Aliide Rass).

Early on Maundy Thursday morning people brought in shingles or tried to grab as many chunks of firewood from the stack – the more firewood was grabbed, the more bird nests were found this summer. The ritual was also believed to bring strength and diligence. The same custom was used for predicting marriage – if firewood or shingles happened to be in pairs, a wedding was expected in the year to come. The ritual has been performed on Annunciation Day, Palm Sunday, and during Eastertide, though it was followed most widely on Maundy Thursday.

Magic of the period focussed on cattle, aiming to procure them health and growth, and to protect them against evil external magic. Since formerly it was believed that there is only limited amount of happiness and luck in the world, people wished to secure oneself as sufficient or as large part of it as possible. This was done primarily by bewitching other farms and neighbours. This is why people feared bewitching of milk and cattle. For protective purposes salt was added to the animals' food and spread in the shed; iron objects were also hidden under the shed threshold on Maundy Thursday. Other people's milking luck was turned by gathering cattle's footprints or debris from these on cattle-trails; people called out from the top of the tree or some other higher place to secure milking luck for one's own family, or imi-

tated the milking on juniper bushes or fence pickets, and so on. Among such measures was fleecing other people's sheep by cutting a small tuft of wool, which was believed to bring luck in court and while dealing with legal matters. Maundy Thursday marked the symbolic beginning of outdoor work (for example, three shovelfuls of manure were thrown on the field, a few furrows were made, egg shells were placed in the corners of the field to protect against evil, fishnets were spread out in the water or mended, and rifles were cleaned). These preparations guaranteed fertility luck and protection and the works could be started at the best possible time. For better luck, tools, such as fishing nets, farm tools, etc., had to be at least moved or their mending and cleaning imitated.

In the 19th century, fruit trees, especially apple trees, were covered with white or red cloth to make the trees blossom and yield more fruit, thus improving harvest. Apple trees were also smoked with various herbs for protection against evil. In some regions, it was customary to surround the house or sometimes even fields with edge tools to keep evil away. Good Friday was also good for love magic, to make someone love you or break up someone else's relationship.

On Maundy Thursday and Good Friday it was important to beware of not going outside without breakfast in the morning, lest the birds might lead one astray.

Modern Easter Traditions

In the 20th century many folk feast days turned into important family holidays, which united and strengthened family ties, village communities, relationships between godparents and godchildren, teachers and pupils, friends and relatives (cf. Vesik 2000: 189). The bulk of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday rituals have disappeared. Easter traditions, on the other hand, have changed over the past few centuries but have retained their manifold relevance. Even today, decorating and exchanging eggs, as well as bringing inside pussy willows or budding birch rods, is an important custom for families with children.

During the past decades, kindergartens, schools and museums have become increasingly important in celebrating Easter

and other national and calendar holidays. For example, the list of holidays celebrated in Estonian schools includes a remarkable number of former folk calendar holidays (cf. BERTA). Of course, the list of holidays somewhat varies depending on the region: in western Estonia many holidays coincide with Scandinavian holidays, whereas in eastern Estonia many Russian Orthodox feast days are celebrated. The list contains holidays that have been popular for centuries, like Martinmas and St. Catherine's Day, revived holidays like All Soul's Day, St Lucy's Day, as well as newcomers like Halloween, St. Valentine's Day, Walpurgis Night, and revived medieval festivities and rituals like the so-called electing of the Count of May (or *Maikrahv* in Estonian), etc. During Easter, children are given instruction in egg-dying, introducing also old holiday customs, special holiday foods, handicraft skills at kindergartens and more progressive museums opened within the past ten years. Children bring home the eggs they painted at kindergarten, and some more nicely decorated eggs are sometimes displayed on an exhibition at the kindergarten, or used to decorate trees in the yard. Children are instructed to wicker imitations of bird nests to place Easter eggs in, and taught songs, etc. At museums, children are sometimes taught to make an Easter crown decorated with blown eggs: making such, a crown used to be a popular Easter custom in the mid-19th century and earlier (Õunapuu 2001) though this has been revived in single families. Whether and how the tradition is preserved and transmitted in such institutions providing instruction, education and involved in preserving and passing on cultural heritage often depends on a specific instructor's knowledge, skills and active work. Official institutions have helped to support and promote the celebration of Easter, which is primarily a holiday of domestic culture; such institutional celebration has helped to preserve many folk calendar holidays (Feast of the Annunciation, St. George's Day) and has revived the celebration of others (Walpurgis Night).

Many calendar holidays are promoted and financed by departments of culture of municipal and county governments and local communities. Several traditions have been introduced or revived by young university graduates and people who share their views, who have moved to work in smaller places and have used the holidays to revive local cultural life (cf. Lukka-Jegikjan

Photo 8. Easter's egg-tree in Tartu, in the garden of the kindergarten Rukkilill, 2002.

2006). In Estonia young people who have studied cultural management at Tallinn University, have been trained at courses at the Estonian Folk Culture Development and Training Centre; students of Mikk Sarv and Ene Lukka have a particularly important role in this. These people have been taught to adapt and customise old customs and rituals for modern life. Among the promoters of the older traditions are also the followers of the prehistoric Estonian religion *maausk* ('Earth Faith'). Their homepage presents an overview of the holidays of their faith (Pühad 2005), basically a calendar version of adapted holidays, though avoiding saint names. Even though the number of the members of this religious group is rather modest, the group has devised its own traditions and mythology, grouping together intellectuals, artists, cultural workers, and people from various fields of life.

The role of the press is also undergoing changes. Longer introductory articles and studies are published less frequently. The focus of the written media appears to be on newer holidays - namely, those that have entered our cultural scene only recently. For this purpose, people are interviewed and folklorists and historians are asked for their expert opinion. Since journalistic discourse also includes mediating the news, academic research and traditions may receive wide publicity in the context of some sensation. Such was the case of discovering the body of St Nicholas and publishing his reconstructed portrait, for example.

Egg-rolling in South-East Estonia has been an important expression of regional identity – people continue to observe the custom even after moving to larger cities, either by constructing an egg channel in the apartment or going outdoors to roll eggs. Youth societies of the Setu have organised public egg rolling in several towns outside Southeast Estonia. This custom, as well as village parties still held in the Setu County which have disappeared elsewhere in Estonia, distinguishes the Setu from other Estonians. This Easter tradition has thus developed into an element of regional identity, which enables to distinguish one cultural group from others.

Final Comments

The secularisation of the Estonian population began in the late 19th century, and the process continued well into the 20th century. The characteristic features of the post Second World War period is urbanisation and major economic changes, which has also affected the calendar customs as quite a number of holidays lost their relevance and disappeared. An important turn in calendar traditions had taken place after First World War, but the Soviet period with its upward-downward regulations, which thus far has unfortunately been largely overlooked, influenced the natural course of tradition with the same intensity. Political pressure speeded up the secularisation process, causing abrupt changes in the tradition not only by political decisions but also by deportation and fast internal and external migration, thus making the construction of locality and continuity of tradition more complicated. The influence of single persons has therefore been much

more valuable: next to charismatic church ministers and schoolmasters, the traditions have survived largely owing to cultural activists, energetic families, and local youth. In the Soviet period, the celebration of folk calendar holidays (as only few calendar holidays were celebrated collectively, among these were Shrove Tuesday, Women's Day, Mayday festivities, Midsummer Day, Martinmas, and St. Catherine's Day) shifted from public celebration to completely private family circle – and the same happened with Easter celebrations. However, the relationship of folk calendar holidays and the Soviet period are not that unambiguously black-and-white, as the then ideology required the assimilation of the national with supranational, resulting in state financing of some officially accepted holidays.

The power relationships and influences deserve a separate study, especially since at that time Easter as an important religious holiday was among the unacceptable and objectionable holidays. Another characteristic feature divides generations: for some Easter stands for gathering eggs and common celebrations, whereas for the post Second World War generation Easter is first and foremost a family holiday. Today, Easter is largely still a family holiday of sharing holiday greetings, sending postcards, decorating and exchanging eggs. Even nowadays eggs are given to friends, schoolmates and colleagues, although the tradition is less widespread. Among the actively practised Easter customs is growing grass, budding birch twigs, bringing home pussy willows, decorating homes with flowers, and hens and chickens made of wool by children or bought from stores. It is a time of small gifts, candles and eggs.

During the last ten years, the holiday has become strongly institutional. The role of the church has changed the least, but has become more explicit since the previous century. In the period of Estonia's regained independence Easter was reinstated as a public holiday accompanied with thematic media programmes and official acknowledgement. While the written press appears to have abandoned the role of promoting and informing their readers about calendar tradition, this role is increasingly taken over by the Internet and regional websites.

Different groups, including schools and 'institutions of memory' like museums and archives, which promote and remind the public of older customs, have actively worked in the name of pre-

Photo 9. Easter Day at home. Cracking eggs.

serving the tradition. Egg fairs and displays, thematic performances, and other events organised by commercial enterprises and departments of culture diversify the celebration; cultural activists of varying background, leaders of local societies, who attempt to innovate tradition and modify and revive older phenomena of family culture, achieve the same. In the situation of commercialisation, Easter paraphernalia can be bought at stores, which has made the observing of customs more convenient and stifles initiative, but preserves its fundamental significance and continues to unite close relatives and acquaintances. Alternatively, as a schoolchild has put it:

> *When we were little, the exciting quest began after dinner. The Easter bunny had visited and hidden eggs somewhere in the house. But the eggs weren't ordinary eggs, but of chocolate (there was also candy and chocolate bunnies). Whoever found some was allowed to eat it right away. It was such fun! We haven't played it anymore, because we are all grown up.*
>
> *We also visit grandma and grandpa to wish them happy holidays and exchange Easter eggs. They also have a holi-*

day dinner with holiday food on the table. This why on holidays we traditionally have dinner at their place. Either on Easter Sunday or some other holiday.

Holidays are very nice and enjoyable. Then you can spend time with your family, sometimes meet an old friend who has moved elsewhere and visits the place only once in a while (Kena 2006).

Manuscripts

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RKM – Manuscript folklore collection of the Folklore Department of Estonian Literary Museum in the Estonian Folklore Archives (1945 to 1995).

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