

INTRODUCTION

This issue is aimed at introducing several studies dwelling on the major theme *Track Changes: Reflecting on a Transforming World* of the 14th SIEF Congress which took place in Santiago di Compostela (April 14–17, 2019).

We found it logical to open the volume with a review article by **Alexander Novik** (Sankt-Peterburg) and **Irina Sedakova** (Moscow) of the 14th SIEF Congress which sheds light on the major trends in the development of ethnology and folklore, as well as in the humanities and social sciences all over the world, including Balkan and Baltic states.

Most of the articles published in this issue were delivered at the panel of the SIEF Working Group The Ritual Year “Tracking the ritual year on the move in different cultural settings and systems of values”.¹ This panel aimed to question the ritual year logic through its archaic long-term structures and through its short-term dynamics and adaptations. Indeed, studying the ritual year often draws the attention to long-lasting patterns which had already been documented by the folklorists in the 20th century, but it also opens a more contemporary approach focusing on recent social changes.

There is a vast bibliography on various aspects of the calendric rites and customs, including the Yearbook of the SIEF WG *The Ritual Year* (11 volumes have already been published, two more are in progress), publications of the members of the groups in journals, and collections of essays. Balkan, Baltic and Slavic countries’ ritual years are thoroughly studied which gives an opportunity for comparative research, in search of similar and yet different cultural settings and systems of values.²

In the field of ritual year studies, changes connected with new technologies and new political regimes have brought dramatic evolutions in the systems of

values and in the ways the rituals are celebrated. In the new post-Soviet context for instance, a lot of religious re-inventions have taken place. In the Balkan and the Baltic countries, these changes have also to deal with the new political alliances connected with the European Commission. Furthermore, moves in the ritual year cycle can occur even more suddenly, due to different sorts of hazards. At the time when we were in Santiago di Compostela, on April 15, 2019, a huge fire destroyed the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris, bringing a lot of emotion and sudden changes in the ways of locally organizing the Christian cult.

Looking at changes in the ritual year proved to be extremely topical from the beginning of 2020 after the Corona virus took over the world. During the process of preparation of this issue, extreme changes have flown over the whole planet and the manhood found itself in a sort of a fantastic novel. The pandemic brought in its own vocabulary, changed the old customary practices and founded new ones. It modified our everyday life, communications, mass media, politics and the ethics, economies and businesses. Our major scholarly field – the Ritual Year in all of its hypostases and fields – has been influenced a lot, too. The studies of the changes in the religious festive life and calendars, ways of celebrations all the holidays (personal, family, religious, state) are still in progress. Data is being collected and reflected upon, but it is evident that contextual hazards have a huge impact on the changes of the rituals. The articles we present in this issue can serve as a foundation for this research.

There are five papers in this issues which were all delivered at the Ritual Year panel in Santiago de Compostela and then elaborated into a study, they constitute the first part of this issue “**The Ritual Year on the Move: Cultural Settings and Systems of Values**”.

Concentrating on a precise example of a religious holiday – the Day of Assumption – enables **Žilvytis Šaknys** (Vilnius, Lithuania) to track the ways one specific ritual date embodies different values in different sociocultural, confessional and ethnic contexts. A Christian holiday (in the late 19th– first half of the 20th century in Lithuanian villages) was later transformed into a Lithuanian national holiday (in 1929 in Kaunas) then into a Lithuanian holiday (in Pusk, Poland, from 1967 onwards), and eventually into a non-working day (in Vilnius and its surrounds from 2000 onwards).

Another way of working out the changes in the cultural settings and systems of values of the ritual year is to focus on a given community (or several ones), as does **Rasa Paukštytė-Šaknienė** (Vilnius, Lithuania). Her article questions

the links with the neighborhood in Lithuanian rituals; distinguishing two types of neighbourhoods: distant (official) and close (informal) ones. The first is determined by territorial proximity, while the second concerns a group formed around common interests, who are free to choose to spend their leisure time or celebrate special occasions together. The different types of neighbourly relations determine the ways the different rituals are performed around the year.

The issue also contains an article by **Tanya Matanova** (Sofia, Bulgaria) on pilgrimage, which is now closely connected with cultural tourism. This essay is partly a tribute to Santiago de Compostela, the center for St. Jacob pilgrims, but it also deals with the calendric ritual year place in the Balkans, especially seasonal male pilgrimages of Bulgarians to Mount Athos. Often the objection of the visit is philanthropical, medical aid, assistance in construction, etc. This type of activity the men combine with celebrating greater Christian church calendric festivals.

The majority of the articles are based on Balkan and Baltic data, but there are many typological similarities with other ritual years beyond this area. This is the reason why we also publish the article by **Tatyana Mikhailova** (Moscow, Russia) on the Celtic ritual year and its connection with St. Brigitta. Celtic traces are still being discovered in the Balkans, that's why we decided to include this paper in the volume. Another reason is a typological process observed in many countries – the outburst of modified cults of Catholic or Christian Orthodox Saints, new vernacular religious activities, described by the author who studied the development of the image of St Brigitte and observed the new ceremonies in Ireland.

Another significant field of research which is reflected in the title of this volume and was present in the title of the SIEF Congress panel, that is axiology. The system and hierarchy of values connected with the ritual year is really ambivalent: being stable and conservative, it can be modified rather quickly. That is what we are witnessing now in the situation of self-isolation and social distances. Basic values such as health, life, family, togetherness, etc. are on the top of evaluation, while other values connected to business and modern urban life like success, leadership, self-realization, etc. are not topical anymore. These points are discussed in the article by **Irina Sedakova** (Moscow Russia), **Maria Kitanova** (Sofia, Bulgaria), **Peter Žeňuch** (Bratislava, Slovakia) and **Nikita Gusev** (Moscow, Russia), which is scrutinizing the shift(s) of the old and new values in various cultural, ethnic and religious settings.

The second part of this issue, “**Academic Studies and Practical Issues**” includes a detailed review of the development of the Baltic studies in Moscow by **Maria Zavyalova** (Moscow, Russia), in particular the semiotic and structural investigations of folklore and rituals, Baltic-Slavic language contacts, and the research of the history of Lithuanian and Latvian languages. The author provides information of the most valuable publications by the prominent scholars working in the area of Baltic studies.

Alexander Novik in his paper describes the history of the Albanian folk festival through different ideological systems. Through this history one can see the attitudes to authentic Albanian folklore, rites and national clothes which are rich and are geographically different. The author gives additional information on the history of the city of Gjirokastra and its meaning for Albanians, which adds value to the status of this cultural national event.

Mare Kõiva and Kristina Muhu (Tartu, Estonia) in their article explore the changes in Estonian school calendar holidays in 1992–2018. The investigators basing on statistical data and interviews shed light on the role of teachers, families and pupils in the evaluation of the most important points in the run of the ritual year.

The issue contains reviews of books and conferences, highlighting the topical academic problems in Balkan and Baltic studies.

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Notes

1 There is a certain tradition to publish some of the papers presented at the SIEF Congresses in academic journals, see Fournier & Sedakova 2015, Sedakova & Vlaskina 2016.

2 The 15-years activity of the group, founded in 2004 by Dr Emily Lyle, now the honorary Chair, was presented as a poster *Tracking the Ritual Year (2004–2019): fifteen years of working group activity* by Irina Stahl (Romania) and Tatiana Minniyakhmetova (Austria) and it draw attention of the audience. During the Congress there was also a short documentary on the Ritual Year WG activity shot which will appear on the SIEF site (<https://www.siefhome.org/wg/ry/index.shtml>).

References

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