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NATURE AND CULTURE IN THE BALKAN AND BALTIC CONTEXTS

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INTRODUCTION

Nature and Culture makes us speculate on the binary opposition of Nature/ Culture (formulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss) and the interrelation of Nature and Culture as seen in modern societies. This opposition finds multiple implementations in many disciplines: folk ecology, environmental studies, and in folklore genres, the beliefs and customs of the calendric and family life cycles, folk religion practices, language, comparative mythology, and anthrozoology. However, Nature and Culture are not always opposed; they interrelate and complement each other.

In modern society due to the increasingly acute changes in nature, challenges of climate change, and correspondingly the cultural attitudes towards nature, actions and debates related to development and sustainability stand at the centre of European and worldwide rhetoric.

Environmental problems have not been under consideration for the first time but have been repeatedly addressed over the past few hundred years with philosophical and practical questions, certain schools have developed, such as deep ecology, which emphasise the importance of turning to nature, because nature is characterised by complex relationships, the existence of organisms of which is dependent on being the existence of others within ecosystems, all of which have equal rights to existence (Baruch Spinoza, Arne Næss, Kjetil Fallan and others). Let us also mention the semiotic approaches that have been prompted by the work of Jakob von Yexküll (K. Kull, T. Maran, and others).

Relatively newly emerged research areas are aimed at a different, nonanthropocentric investigation of the world – more-than-human geography, multispecies ethnography, archaeology of fullness, zoo folkloristics, zoo poetics, zoo semiotics based on the posthuman vision of the world (J. Igoe, W. Dressler,

E. Kohn, E. Marris, B. Büscher and R. Fletcher, S. Toncheva and others), on the newly collected data. The study of the Nature/Culture dichotomy became a broad interdisciplinary field – where humanities and social sciences cooperate with Earth and environmental sciences, economics, health, food security etc.

In this issue of the journal, the primary focus is on practical ecological studies and human opinions of the processes taking place, the practices of submerged villagers to commemorate their place of residence, old and new practices in medicine (including those related to COVID-19) and the arc of life, folklore phenomena and research history.

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I

Landscape, Rituals, and Culture

Vanished Cultural Landscapes: Rituals of Remembrance for Submerged Bulgarian Villages

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Abstract: The article explores the processes of building memoryscapes: a material anchor is a starting point or an integral part of the narrative in order to facilitate communication. In some cases, these anchors are material remains, in others new religious, commemorative or ritual sites. The commemorations or pilgrimages need a visible, material object. Placemaking based on a lost place as performed by the first generation, i.e. resettlers, results in elaborated memoryscape within the second generation, i.e. their descendants.

Key words: memoryscaps, narratives, material objects, pilgrimage, place-makeing

Contextualising the study: Dam construction in Bulgaria

Dam construction is an engineering, environmental, political and social process that affects multiple spheres of natural and human life not only in a particular area but on national and international levels. The largest projects are so economically important that they take precedence over cultural and natural

heritage, traditional livelihoods and habitats. Societies are divided in their evaluation of the contribution of such large projects to economies and their effects on social, cultural and natural environments. However, the displacement of indigenous communities, vanished cultural landscapes and radically transformed local economies are among the most common consequences worldwide (McCully 2001; Basu 2016). Anthropologists are rarely attracted by reservoirs construction issues and, when they are, they usually try to reconstruct and conserve the heritage of relocated communities and study the trauma caused by the spatial and social transformation (Phadke 1999: 5–15).

Dams have a long history as a way of managing and using water, mainly for farming, but also since the 19th century for generating electricity. The hydro era began in Europe and the USA in the 1930s, although by the 1970s green ideology was prevailing and it was no longer so easy to resettle people and make ecological shifts to satisfy investors (Usher 1997). In Asia, notably India and China, the building of massive reservoirs has led to the displacement of millions of individuals. Although particular initiatives have been established in these countries to facilitate the transition period for resettlers and promote their wellbeing (Shaojun & Zhen 2006), economic expansion is still the top priority (Phadke 1999: 3). In Bulgaria, the majority of large-scale water infrastructure projects took place during the time of socialism. This can be attributed to the fact that Bulgarian industrialisation experienced significant growth in the late 1940s. After the 1989 democratic transformation, the implementation of such extensive construction projects abruptly came to a halt.

Among thousands of dam installations in the country, construction of about 20 reservoirs led to the need of population resettlement and dozens of vanishing villages. The forced migration was not violent and people had numerous options of where to move in order to carry on with their lives. People were granted access to the materials from their previous houses, the means to transport their furniture, and low-interest loans to better accommodate families. However, entire villages, roads, fields, ritual sites, and local geography are under water, forever invisible. Occasionally, when water level drop, some remains can be seen, prompting the original inhabitants, their descendants, and other intrigued people such as photographers, journalists, and tourists to come and investigate the area. Some villages are situated at the reservoir's edge and the buildings can be spotted, although others lie too deep and their remnants will never appear again.

After being relocated, populations were spread out across various villages and towns, and families separated, resulting in the disintegration of communities. Occasionally, people get together and visit a village that was formerly their home. In many cases, a custom of assembling was established at certain locations on specific dates, the dates being either random or regular, the place being either a remnant from the former village or its cultural environment, or a newly organised spot. These events are the objects of this study because they are the products of interrelations between new social and natural environments and are the most important contexts and models of maintaining a village community after its collapse. Between 2019 and 2022, through my research, I extensively examined written records and conducted ethnographic observations of various types of community gathering that have taken place annually or been held at least once in the past. During the socialist period, community gatherings were neither forbidden nor encouraged, so various forms of commemoration of vanished villages and festivals continued or were established – annual gatherings, decade commemorations, a museum, monuments, etc. After the 1990s, these events flourished, especially those in areas of religious interest. Over the last 30 years many historical books about vanished villages were published by community members. Books of poetry were also dedicated to home villages.

Analytical approaches: placemaking and memoryscapes

These villages and their surroundings might be studied from several perspectives. Perhaps, the logical choice is to approach them through the phenomenological conception of **placemaking**, i.e. as a process (cultural practices and communal experience) and a result (sense of place). Placemaking in various contexts relies on concepts that are derived from local culture, customs, and the collective will of the community, as well as is a grassroots initiative based on popular notions and models of connecting nature and society, past and present (Sofield, Guia & Specht 2017; Kõiva 2018). Placemaking has the ability to cultivate a **sense of place**, which is a necessity for humans in order to have a sense of comfort, security, and direction. Furthermore, it serves as a remedy for feelings of exclusion and unfamiliarity (Aravot 2002: 202). Obviously a sense of place is an intangible result of the process of placemaking, although it touches on the materiality of the place. However, this brings us to the possible

immateriality of place, or its virtuality as memory, heritage or other mental or cultural construct, something subjective and not based on empirical evidence.

It seems that the idea of 'lost place' (Read 1996), which highlights as a leading characteristic of a place that it is culturally understood as lost by the community, has not been widely accepted as a general term. In recent decades, this concept co-functions with others that nuance its meaning – dead, obsolete, abandoned, derelict, temporary, etc. (Bauer, Dolgan 2020). These distinctions are important for a phenomenological understanding of loss because they draw attention to the ways people cope with loss, as well as how it is used as a narrative and ritual device. The place, even if it has changed or been removed, is still present in some form, whether it be physical or virtual (Davidson 2013). The manner in which it is considered lost is based on nostalgia, family history, the culture of a village, community and the mechanisms through which they have been preserved and institutionalised – such as ritual and story, material remains, and testimonies (Nassar 2002; Zembylas 2014; Brody 2022). The concept of 'lost places' puts the accent both on the significance of the sites and the spaces to be defined as 'places', and on the irretrievability of their loss. Nevertheless, the notion presumes the physical existence of the area although changed by an actual or metaphorical shift in ownership. We can lean on this logical outlook with regards to villages that are not submerged in water, but have been emptied due to health or infrastructural reasons. We have many illustrations of this, yet these situations do not create a group of inheritors or approaches to recollecting and bringing back the recollections of the place.

In the case of vanished villages, the idea of place concentrates the loss significantly. Not only has a real place been lost, but also a network of sites, a whole landscape, the entire world of the traditional community. The concept of cultural landscape establishes a connection between materiality, which can be tangible and visible, and cultural identity and history. These cultural landscapes are still landscapes of today (Roberts 1994: 135), combining both permanent and shifting elements to create a socially and culturally current space. Along with the disappearance of rural life, the physical landscape wherein the community existed before their leaving also alters. This landscape was documented through photographs and written descriptions made by the resettlers, their descendants and sometimes anthropologists and journalists, and was kept alive through the stories told at gatherings, although despite the documentary

quality of the photographs and the truthfulness of the narratives, the landscape no longer has a material dimension and is forever lost.

That is the reason I prefer the scope of 'memoryscapes' because it combines views of material and immaterial, collective and individual, it is fixed in publications and pictures and living narration and rituals, etc. It emphasises the complexity of memories of a village because it is not just a place but a universe. The term covers not only the architectural features and social functions of a building or a small slice of the space that is closed and homogenic, but a whole landscape with its complex social relations, connections between people and nature, seasonality, etc. Furthermore, the cultural landscapes of submerged villages are not completely destroyed, the hills, mountain peaks and high fields are visible, which in traditional culture always meant a lot. These material and visible remains from the past have already lost their meaning, or they were transformed during the construction of the reservoir. They also embody collective memories of past forms of production and festivity. The term 'memoryscapes' therefore contains a pinch of this nostalgic glorification that is specific to memories of lost pastoral youth.

In general, in this text we are searching for the dynamic interaction between material remains and evidence, community cultural practices, objective spatial relations and heritage transmission, as well as the spatial-temporal interplay of place and event, or placemaking-based 'memoryscaping'.

Maintaining traditional holidays and rituals at traditional venues (*Shishmanovo*)

Shishmanovo is the largest of the three villages (the other two being Kalkovo and Gorni Pasarel) that were submerged under the waters of the Iskar reservoir in 1956. Before that, the population's livelihood was agriculture and livestock breeding (with large herds of sheep). Mining was also a factor, and so the mountain environment was considerably well-known and utilised. In the 1930s the Uspenie Bogorodichno monetary was built on village land. After the village was destroyed and submerged, the monastery together with the higher ground left were the only visible traces of the former material life. Displaced people moved to nearby towns (Samokov, Ihtiman) and to villages near Sofia that had already became part of the capital city, so they were made

rapidly to change their lifestyle. Gradually, the fields were forested (about 16 million trees) to hold the soil on the shores of the reservoir, and thus human activity changed the landscape. Places that were previously significant to the

Figure 1. The field in front of Shishmanovo Monastery and Church. Under the shade of the trees on the left there are shelters for resettler families. On the right, a small marketplace offers food and cheap toys for children. In the middle is a stage for the music program. Photo: L. Gergova, 25 August 2019.

community disappeared, and the monastery became the most consistent centre of resettlers' community gatherings.

After the village was submerged, the monument to a Russian officer who died in the battles of December 1877 was moved from the village churchyard to the monastery. This was the reason for the first community gatherings at the monastery, coming under the heading of Bulgarian–Soviet friendship. This served the purpose of altering the meaning of the gathering from nostalgia for the lost home village to the glorification of war heroes, diverting public attention from the religious to the secular object. After 1989 the religious element prevailed and the festival was restored as a traditional annual religious event, celebrated on the monastery's patron saint day, the Saturday before or after August 28, the Assumption of Virgin Mary according to the Julian calendar. The monastery fair mainly attracts the descendants of the resettlers, although many guests from nearby towns and villages also visit. Resettlers' descendants bring food and organise tables by families on particular sites in front of the monastery, so the division between them and the guests is obvious in the monastery space. Guests are attracted by the holly spring, thought to heal on the monastery's festival day. The spring is situated in a small building that was restored recently; healing rituals take place there throughout the day. A folk music program takes

place right after the church service. In modern times, homage is no longer paid to the Russian memorial although it is still in good condition.

The people who maintain the monastery and organise the festival are also descendants of the displaced people from Shishmanovo who moved to Samokov. They admit that preserving the memory of the submerged village is among the main goals of the event. Sharing memories from the lost village is not a common practice because the people who had such memories have already passed away, although the very gathering of families is a way of maintaining the memoryscape of Shishmanovo as far as it was an annual festival even before the reservoir.

Regardless of the ideological changes, the annual festival at the Shishmanovo Monastery is a traditional gathering of the village community that has been maintained in the years after the population displacement. Such cases are few as usually resettlers and their descendants establish new rituals at the remains of the village or at new or non-traditional venues.

Establishing new rituals at the remains of the village (Zapalnya, Kochash and Darets)

Zapalnya village was partly submerged under the waters of the Zhrebchevo reservoir in 1962. It was located on the reservoir's shore with only the cemetery and few buildings remaining above water. The village church, St. John of Rila, was not demolished before filling the reservoir so it was gradually destroyed by the rising water. In summer, when the reservoir waters are low, the church and house foundations are accessible above the water; during the socialist period they were used as a sheepfold. After 1989, the religious functions of the church were partially restored. It also became an extremely popular tourist site. In the 1970s, next to the church but out of the water, a museum dedicated to the former village was established. Resettlers then started gathering at this site every September organising a small fair with a folk music program and shared meals. The resettlers and their descendants visit the remains of the village and their former houses. Recently, a religious service has also taken place at the church.

In former Zapalnya, an annual festival took place on October 19, the church's saint day. It was a typical village fair with korban and a church service. After the population migrated, the village was submerged and the village community was dispersed, and so the festival ceased. In 1967, the fifth anniversary of the

displacement, a monument was erected that looks like a gravestone, with the inscription "Village Zapalnya // Settled in 15th century // Evicted in 1962". In the 1970s Zapalnya museum was established in a small building not within the reservoir on the periphery of the former village. It accommodates only photos and short stories written on the walls and represents the revolutionary past of the village from liberation until 1944 and the partisan actions. The village's old cemetery is also in this area, which together with the museum, monument and church form a commemorative site that reminds resettlers of the former village,

Figure 2. The submerged church, the monument (on the small hill behind the church) and Zapalnya museum (on the right) at low water. The remains of the houses are visible in the foreground. Photo: L. Gergova, 1 May 2019, Zhrebchevo reservoir.

providing the travellers with information about the village and the resettlers and their descendants with a place of mourning and a meeting place.

After the museum was established, local community managers connected to the communist party and cultural activities in the town of Tvarditsa, where the most resettlers moved, began to arrange a new celebration, similar to Zapalnya's much-loved festivities. The celebration was moved to the holidays around the communist holiday of 9 September. The purpose of the event was to gather descendants and offer them amusement in order to maintain a sense of community. The museum displays and the place of gathering trigger stories

of the past. Surviving elder locals take part and share their memories. Usually, Stoyko Popstoykov – the son of the last village priest and author of books about the village's history – visits the event and sings traditional songs. This draws the descendants into the process of inheritance, indicating that the activity of producing memoryscapes is also an act of passing on heritage and viral communication between generations.

The case of **Kochash** is quite similar in terms of landscape features and the function of the village remains. It is one of the four villages that were partially destroyed in connection with the construction of the Ivaylovgrad reservoir in 1964. It was not submerged, but most of the houses were destroyed and, in this case, the materials taken from the owners to be reused. The farms, church of St John the Baptist and other public buildings were not demolished, while the farms were used until the end of the 20th century. In the 2010s farmer Krasimir Kostadinov bought the whole territory and ran a large farm, restoring the church and transforming what had been the 'horemag' – a large multifunctional building – into his own home. The old school was abandoned and today is utilised as hay storage. All these buildings are not so close to each other because they

Figure 3. The remains of the village of Kochash on the shore of Ivaylovgrad reservoir: farms, church, the 'horemag', and the school. Photo: L. Gergova, 21 June 2021.

were not concentrated in the centre of the former village, so there are a few buildings in a field covered by stones from the previous houses and bushes.

In 2015, after church restoration, the owner, who is not a descendant of the resettlers, tried to invent a new tradition by inviting resettlers and their descendants to the village at Easter and offering them korban. This was the first common gathering of the locals after migration. They moved to various villages in South Bulgaria, so the feast was very important in re-establishing the community. Before this, only particular families used to visit the site to maintain a connection with their parents' homes or to recall childhood memories. These were special occasions because the place is not easily accessible, and people remember them and talk about them with emotion. Returning to the village during the Easter feasts allows the visitors to find the place of their parent's house because the buildings' foundations are still visible. Thus, they project the family narrative on the material remains of the village. Before the migration, the village fair was on January 6 because the church's patron saint is St John the Baptist. The Easter feast was invented without any connection with the community's traditional calendar, rather it started this community-building event as a new tradition. The initiative was interrupted by the pandemic, so in the future it might experience development or attenuation.

On the other side of the reservoir, in the former village of Stavri Dimitrovo, the old school building was transformed into a hut. Because the village was not destroyed and submerged, the hut remained in the centre of a settlement, and in the last decades it has been rebuilt as an area of summer houses. So, the former school became a public building where everybody could gather and was used to accommodate annual resettlers's meetings. They did not perform any rituals, rather they just met each other in the former village. When the migrated generation passed and the descendants did not continue the tradition of annual meetings. In this village, a church has not been built, so there is no holly place to be maintained or revisited by the descendants or other local people.

The other similar case is that of **Darets**, the only Christian village in an area dominated by Turkic Muslims. It was among about 12 villages that were affected by the construction of the Studen kladenets dam in 1958. Most of these village were left underwater, including Darets. During the socialist period the highest part of terrain of Darets remained on the shore and became an area for summer houses. Even today this area is accessible only by boat and few people visit it. Over the last 40 years, a few people from Kardzhali have built small summer

houses and shelters there. A book, and newspaper articles, were published in the 1980s and 1990s but no gatherings were organised at the site or nearby.

Only a hill just above the village survived from the previous cultural landscape, called Daba (oak) hill, or St George's hill. On St George's Day, people from the village used to visit the hill and perform rituals there. The hill and the oak still exist. In 1998, two brothers built a chapel to St George there and the first big meeting of resettlers took place. St George was not the patron saint of the village church, and neither was St George's Day the day of the village fair. Due to difficult access, no meetings are now held. The place was well chosen because of its visibility from the reservoir waters, attracting mainly Bulgarians who are not descendants of resettlers who now become familiar with the village's story. A man who is a permanent resident there maintains the chapel and also built a shelter for guests. This is a case of a new site being built that inherited status of an old holy place and developed its function. As far as oak hill was the only preserved part of the former cultural landscape, it might become the material centre of the memoryscape. However, the inhabitants shift caused a change of
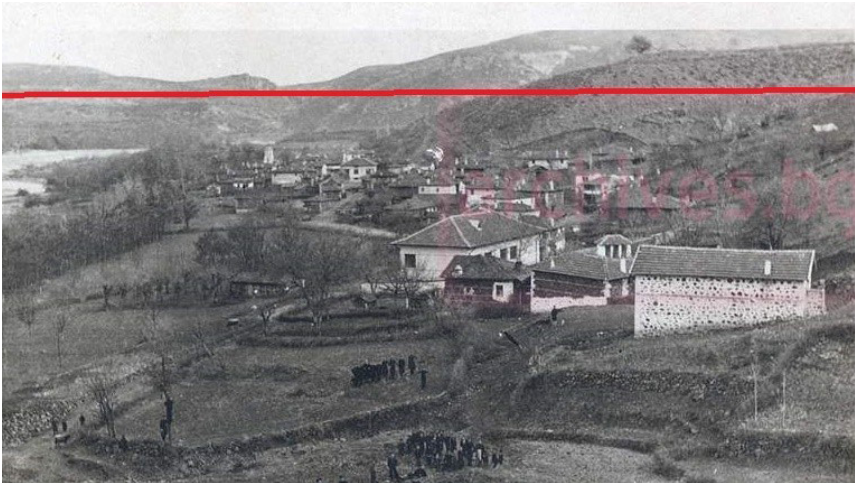
Figure 4. St George's hill above the former village of Darets, 1940s. The red line shows the present water level. Photo: State archive, Kardzhali; adaptation L. Gergova.

the meaning of the place, so in this case, perhaps a memoryscape has not yet been elaborated, although the cultural landscape has been dramatically altered.

Establishing new rituals at new venues (Zhrebchevo and Kadanka)

The village of **Zhrebchevo** was demolished and remained at the bottom of the reservoir of the same name, mentioned above. Very rarely, when the reservoir waters are extremely low, a small part of the village might be observed, although the road to this area is so bad that almost nobody has visited it. At the time of village depopulation and demolition, people moved the remains of their relatives from the village cemetery, buried them in the ground in the vicinity of the road to near town of Nova Zagora and marked the new burial with a stone. A monument to the village was built next to the gravestone. The place was chosen because it is easily accessible and because there is a view of the former village's location from the shore. Villagers also collected money and built a restaurant with some hotel rooms nearby, called Zhrevcheto (the foal), derived from the village's name. The inscription is long and poetic and is a message to future generations. Every year on May 1 or 2 resettlers and their descendants meet at the vicinity of the restaurant to commemorate the coffin of the ancestors, the only material remains of the village.

In 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the hotel and its site were sold by the local authorities and in the course of reconstruction the commemorative stones disappeared. Surprisingly, the village stone appeared again in the nearby village of Asenovets, although the gravestone of the ossuary has never been found. Thus, the location lost its symbolic meaning and its significance remained only in collective community memory. Previous community efforts on placemaking resulted in a concentrated site for mourning, commemoration and entertainment, i.e. a site for community-building with complex events paying tribute to the ancestors, with common meals, walking to the viewpoint, etc. A new cultural landscape was built on the basis of a lost place, a landscape of loss. However, after demolition of the stones and appropriation of the hotel, the meadow under the trees in Komluka remained the only place for resettler meetings. Elaborating a memoryscape is the only tool with which to compensate this loss of built cultural landscape. Community models of narration, sharing

Figure 5. Meeting of resettlers from Zhrebchevo village and their descendants at Komluka. Photo: L. Gergova, 1 May 2019.

knowledge and memories, organising small photo exhibitions, etc., have prepared the community for material loss.

The village of **Kadanka** is the only case of a Muslim community establishing a place for meetings. In fact, the resettlers of most Muslim villages do not organise any rituals and have built no practices of remembering lost villages. Moreover, in 1989 and in the 1990s, most of them moved to Turkey due to the so-called Revival Process. The village of Kadanka was located at the Borovitsa reservoir dam. It was depopulated in 1980–1981 and the zone was submerged. During dam construction a small living zone was built for workers. The buildings are situated near the former village, and in the 1990s a few resettlers from Kadanka who had moved to Stoevo bought land and houses. Since 2003 locals have organised an annual dua, a religious but also commemorative event that attracts people from the village who migrated. They come from distant villages for a weekend, staying overnight in tents and celebrating together on a meadow under the dam. Over the years, some shelters and a small bridge have been constructed to indicate the detached site for this particular event. In this case, placemaking is crucial both for community-building and because it conditions future efforts to elaborate a memoryscape with which the next generation can be involved.

Conclusions

In conclusion, some of the observations above are worth developing and emphasising. Processes of building memoryscapes need a **material anchor** as a starting point or as an integral part of the narrative in order to facilitate communication. In some cases, these anchors are material remains, in others new religious, commemorative or ritual sites. As far as the meetings visits that are organised in the form of commemorations or pilgrimages, they need a visible, material object.

The traditions, meeting events, and recalling memories that are significant in the processes of building memoryscapes, are communicative situations that connect generations through the discourse of loss. These are situations, contexts and processes of **inheritance**. For some people this is a comprehensive picture of the world around them. For instance, a man from Ostrovitsa village, which was moved in order not to be submerged, was looking at the former place of the village and was pointing out the places of the buildings. For others, the lost village is just a point on the map: when the grandson of a resettler from Darets was a child, his grandfather took him on a boat and showed to him the exact location of the village, pointing out the water. So, the second generation, those who have never seen the village and its cultural landscape, are receivers of memoryscapes, and in their consciousness the lost village and its surroundings are completely imaginary.

Ways of building memoryscapes might vary. In the past, there were moments of ritualised narration about the history and the surroundings of the villages. Local historians gave speeches or presented their books, elder people went on a purposeful walk to the remains of the village to show the exact place of their house and to share memories, etc. Published stories and memoirs, collected pictures, the museum I mentioned, material souvenirs from the former life, etc., are also very important in constructing imaginary notion of the ancestors' home village. However, the annual meetings usually produce the necessary context for memory-sharing, helping to maintain the community of origin, something that seems to be the key element in the process of inheritance. In other words, placemaking based on a lost place, or on marking a place as being lost, as performed by the first generation, i.e. resettlers, results in elaborated memoryscape within the second generation, i.e. their descendants.

Notes

[1] See also Borisova 2021; Gergova, Borisova 2022.

[2] See also: Interim Report of the Independent People's Tribunal on Dams in Arunachal Pradesh, India, published on February 3, 2008 (http://www.slic.org.in/uploads/2019/02/IPT_Dams-in-Arunachal-Pradesh.pdf).

[3] My research and this contribution are part of my work on the Submerged Heritage, A Village at the Bottom of the Reservoir: Migrations, Memory, Cultural Practices project, supported by the Bulgarian National Science Fund (contract No КП-06-H30/1). Most of the materials I rely on in this article I collected together with my colleagues Mariyanka Borisova, Petar Petrov and Yana Gergova.

[4] Iskar is among the earliest and largest reservoirs in Bulgarian. Initially, it was named after Stalin, but in 1962 its name was changed to Iskar, which is the name of the river on which it was built. It is situated on Sredna Gora mountain about 20 km southeast of Sofia. The reservoir was built to provide Sofia with drinking water. Before the reservoir was created, archaeological and ethnographic fieldwork took place in the three villages that were to vanish, as well as across the entire territory that was to be inundated.

[5] Houses were often destroyed prior to flooding in order to clean the dam bed.

[6] During the Russian-Turkish War 1877–1878, the Russian army passed from Sofia to Ihtiman and Plovdiv, and in late December 1877 a battle took place near the village of Chamurli (later Shishmanovo).

[7] Zhrebchevo reservoir is situated in Central Bulgaria near the road Sofia – Burgas and the mountain Pass of the Republic. It is built on the river of Tundzha and Due to its location, it is quite popular, mostly for the so called 'submerged church' of Zapalnya. About 720 people were displaced and moved to near towns (Tvarditsa, Nova Zagora) and other villages.

[8] See more about that church and its recent life in Gergova 2021; Gergova 2021a.

[9] Ivaylovgrad reservoir is situated on the Arda river in the southeast border region, close to the borders with Greece and Turkey. Four villages were affected: Kochash, Stavri Dimitrovo, Kostovo and Malki Voden. All of them were destroyed and partially submerged, although the first three were also removed as administrative units. Kostovo is only accessible by water, and the road to Kochash is only suitable for off-road vehicles. The displaced population moved in various directions, to Haskovo, Plovdiv, Svilendrag, etc.

[10] Horemag (in Bulgarian хоремаг) is a word derived from the first letters of the words 'hotel', 'restaurant' and 'magazin' (shop). It is a typical building and institution from the socialist times that was established in almost all villages in Bulgaria – one building,

usually on two levels that accommodate the village mixed shop, a restaurant (or pub) and several rooms for guests. Almost everywhere this became the center of social life.

[11] A festival dedicated to Sts Cyril and Methodius takes place annually on 24 May at the chapel in the locality Hisara, which is situated on a hill about 3 km southwest of Kochash. This event is organised by the local authorities in the town of Madzahrovo and people from the whole area take part. Many resettlers from Kochash also visit the event with people from nearby villages. Although in Bolyarovo (a village within the town of Haskovo) and Branipole (near Plovdiv) groups from Kochash and other evicted villages have lived together closely for decades, Nikolina Kostova, the administrator of a Facebook group of the descendants from the four villages, said that she visits the festival at Hisara to meet other descendants from the home village of her parents; moreover, the festival is staged at a place from which Kochash can be observed (N. Kostova, online, 24/05/2022).

[12] The Studen Kladenets Reservoir is situated on the Arda river between the Ivaylovgrad and Kardzhali reservoirs. Construction affected about 11 villages.

[13] Dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary; the church holiday was August 15 or 28.

[14] 'Zhrebche' means 'foal'. Zhrebchevo is a translation of the old Turkish name of the village Atlare, 'atlar' being 'horses'.

[15] Revival Process is a political process that occurred in Bulgaria in the 1980s. According the concept that all Bulgarian citizens are Bulgarians by origin and mother thong, the Muslims and Turks in Bulgaria were forced to change their names. As a result, thousands of Turks moved to Turkey and never came back.

[16] Borovitsa reservoir is situated on Borovitsa river in Rhodopid mountain in south Bulgaria. It is constructed to provide Kardzali with drinking water and therefore its access is limited.

[17] Stoevo is situated about 25 km northwest from the former village of Kadanka and most resettlers moved there.

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The Submerged Church at Zhrebchev Reservoir: Sacral Site, Center, Scene

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Abstract: A number of settlements are evicted and erased along with their public, religious and cultural and historical sites during the construction of many reservoirs. However, some of them are not completely forgotten and often their remains attract an interest from tourists, artists, and media.

The main focus of the paper will be the church of the nowadays non-existent village Zapalnya "St. John of Rila", submerged during the building of Zhrebchevo Reservoir in Southern Bulgaria, and its construction as a cultural heritage with typical religious, cultural and natural features. Zapalnya' church is extremely interesting in terms of its unusual development and reinstatement, which are actually depending on the waters level of the reservoir during seasons changing. Being an almost deleted cult site until recently, due various events, activities, projects (which include feasts, media reports, movies, etc.) and actors (settlers, municipal officials, church representatives, tourists, etc.), today we are witnesses of resumption and revitalization of the church. Its uses at present are divergent – from meeting place of displaced former settlers of the two submerged villages Zapalnya and Zhrebchevo, through a reviving religious center, music videos favorite décor to individual and collective tourist route.

Keywords: Bulgaria, Church, Cultural Heritage, Memory, Reservoir, Resettlement, Sacral Site, Tourism

Yana Gergova

Introduction

The construction of a large number of reservoirs in Bulgaria from the middle to the second half of the 20th century was marked by a number of concomitant processes, among which the displacement of the population of numerous towns and villages which altogether ceased to exist along with the public, religious and cultural-historical sites within them. Among them were Christian churches, ruins of which oftentimes remained above or close by the reservoir waters due to the height of the buildings, on the one hand, and on the other, because the structures were intact at the time of flooding. There are several such examples in Bulgaria: the church in the former village of Zhivovtsi which was submerged to make way for the Ogosta reservoir; the church and the chapel of the former village of Pchelintsi by the Pchelina reservoir; the church in the village of Popovo (former Vitoshko) affected during the construction of the Studena reservoir, the church of St. John the Baptist in the former village of Kochash near Ivaylovgrad reservoir, "St. Athanasius" church near the Koprinka reservoir, and others. Information about most of the submerged villages, their former inhabitants, their way of life, everyday lives and festivities, as well as about the public buildings in the villages, which today are already under the reservoir waters, can be extracted mainly from archive documents and the local studies published at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century (see e.g. Tserovski 2012, Popov 1984, Erulski 1999, Tropolova 2017). Until now, there are relatively few scientific publications about the settlers from the obliterated villages, about the material remains or emphasizing on individual elements of the preserved local cultural heritage and its use.[1]

In the last ten years, it seems that the interest in these remains, and especially the submerged churches, has risen enormously. The reason for this most probably lies both in the increased media and tourist interest that some of them arouse, as well as in the interest of the Bulgarian church. Perhaps one of the most emblematic examples in this regard is the church of the nowadays nonexistent village Zapalnya "St. John of Rila" submerged during the building of Zhrebchevo Reservoir in Southern Bulgaria. The main focus of my paper will be namely its construction as a cultural heritage with typical religious, cultural and natural features.

Zapalnya' church is extremely interesting in terms of its unusual development and reinstatement. Being an almost deleted cult site until recently, due various events, activities, projects (which include feasts, media reports, movies, etc.) and actors (settlers, municipal officials, church representatives, tourists, etc.), today we are witnesses of resumption and revitalization of the church. Its uses at present are divergent – from meeting place of displaced former settlers of the two submerged villages Zapalnya and Zhrebchevo, through a reviving religious center, music videos favorite décor and wedding photo sessions, to individual and collective tourist route.[2]

The history of the church "St. John of Rila"

Known mostly as the Submerged church at Zhrebchevo reservoir, it was the main religious site of the village of Zapalnya up until the middle of last century. Following the decision to build a reservoir on the Tundzha River between 1959 and 1966, by Decree No. 57 of 28.01.1965[3], the village was removed from the administrative-territorial register and submerged in the early spring of 1965, along with two other villages – Atlare (later renamed to Zhrebchevo by analogy with the namesake reservoir)[4] and Dolno Panicherevo. The inhabitants of the Zapalnya village were resettled mainly into Tvarditsa, a nearby town where they built an entire new district, as well as to Kazanlak and Nova Zagora.

The son of the last priest in the village, Stoyko PopDraganov Stoykov, provided detailed information about the village and, accordingly, the church, in his local-history study, based on memories, personal and church archive documents, and local research (Stoykov 2002). His book contains detailed information about the life in Zapalnya before the construction of the reservoir – history of the origin, families, customs, agriculture, crafts, educational work, etc.

"As a true Bulgarian village, writes St. Stoykov, it had a large square, which was surrounded by the more important public buildings. To the north of the square was the new municipality building, to the east rose the church, whose nearly two-decade yard was surrounded by a high wall covered with European tiles. The wall to the side of the square was 45 metres long. (…) The yard was protected from all sides and surrounded by buildings and walls. It once served as an inn. The pub was under the same roof as the gate. (…) The only public building that was not located

in the square was the school. It was also centrally located but not on the square" (Stoykov 2002: 8).

Again, according to local historian Stoykov, the church itself in the centre of the village was built at the site of an existing object of worship, most probably a Byzantine basilica – single nave and single apse, with impressive dimensions (Stoykov 2002: 103). No precise evidence on the exact start of the construction can be found, but it is presumed it began around the year 1890. The construction works were funded entirely by donations from the local population:

"Angel Boychev (Fransaza) also donated 1 decare of yard space and so Petko Velev donated 0620 decares and Fransaza 1 – the church yard of the Zapala church became 1620 square metres. For this reason, both of them are buried in the churchyard. The preparation for the construction of the church was started by 28 Zapala houses and completed by 80" (Stoykov 2002: 105).

The masters of the church were Nenko and Ruyu Ruevi, and their brother Ivan Ruev painted it in 1891. A year later, on the feast of St. John of Rila on October 19, it was officially consecrated by Sliven Metropolitan Bishop Gervasius. In 1923, it was renovated and completely painted by the artists Kiril Kanchev, Prof. Mandov and Minkov, which, however, suffered significant damage after the Chirpan earthquake in 1928. Then, Dragan Stoykov was appointed parish priest, who took the initiative to collect new donations from the inhabitants of Zapalnya for the restoration of the church. A wall was also built with these donations, as well as two residential buildings[5].

Church sermons were delivered regularly – every Sunday as well as on major Christian holidays. A solemn celebration marked 19 October (1 November)[6], the holiday of the patron saint of the church – according to Stoyko Stoykov the service was offered by several priests and a big common celebratory lunch took place. It was prepared in the yard, provided by the church board. The last sermon delivered in the church was on 28 April 1963, when he himself got married[7].

Following the start of the construction of the reservoir facility, the other buildings in the village, including the church, were valuated, and the amount of ninety-three thousand leva was paid to the Stara Zagora Metropolitanate to whose diocese the church belongs. In an effort to preserve the church, its Board of Trustees put forward several proposals: 1) to accommodate the church into

a property at a greater distance; 2) to invest the compensation pay-out into building a recreational facility with a chapel "St. John of Rila" in Kortenski bani where the entire church plate and all the icons from the ruined church would be stored; and 3) to take at least the murals off the walls and preserve them. However, none of these ideas was approved or implemented. In the last protocol of the church board of June 12, 1962, it is recorded that:

> "…the church has not yet been paid up and the deadline of December 31, 1962 does not apply to it, which means that the temple will remain intact as a monument, monastery or church. The belongings will be moved out according to the instructions of the leadership of the Stara Zagora Metropolis, and the large table, one goat-fur rug and three blankets will remain in the church to serve as a bed for all the inhabitants of Zapalnya. The chandeliers should not be taken down, so that after the removal of the rest of the furniture, the temple should not be completely bare and inspire respect and reverence…" (Stoykov 2002: 110-111).

Even prior to the submergence of the church, the iconostasis, the bell from the bell tower, the liturgy plate, and the books were moved to various other churches in neighbouring towns[8]. During the first years after the reservoir was put into operation, the church building remained intact but later it was plundered barbarically, the roof tiles and metal supports were stolen, and it was frequently used as shelter for the herds during unfavourable weather.

Figure 1. The Submerged Church "St. John of Rila" at the Zhrebchevo Reservoir. Photographer: Yana Gergova, 2.05.2019

Yana Gergova

The Submerged church nowadays and its existence as a sacral site, center, scene

The Submerged Church "St. John of Rila" is one of the few remnants of the village today. When water levels are at a low point, the foundations of some of the houses, wells, and gravestones can also be seen; a reminder of the existence of the village there is a memorial plaque on a small hill by the cemetery, which reads "Village of Zapalnya, settled in the 15th century, displaced in 1962". The church building is the only structure that has remained relatively unaffected. Access to it depends on the season and the level of the Zhrebchevo reservoir waters: normally it is semi-submerged in early spring, and completely out of the water towards the end of summer and in autumn. Due to the low level of the reservoir waters over several consecutive years, during this period the church building was on dry land all year round, only to be flooded again last year.

The ruins protruding out of the water or rising in the field are gradually garnering interest from tourists, photographers, and journalists, which has been increasing steadily over the past few years. Various initiatives, campaigns, blog publications, travel notes, and TV programmes on the history and fate of the church have contributed to a large extent to this increase in popularity.

The one of the most popular events organized near the church ruins was the project *July Morning at The Submerged Church*. Taking advantage of the tradition of greeting the sunrise by the sea, which already enjoys popularity in Bulgaria[9], an initiative is introduced to hold this event by the reservoir waters. The festive programme on the eve of 1st July comprises a rock concert of Bulgarian rock bands and art illumination of the church. Additionally, kayaking clubs have a voluntary contribution to the initiative. The first edition was in 2017, when beside the concert, the main attraction is the campaign of the 14-years old student from the Sport High School in Stara Zagora. With fundraising goals for the restoration of the church "St. John of Rila", he swam 3 km distance in the reservoir. The event has been held for several consecutive years and in 2019 it was included in the cultural calendar of the Municipality. In 2022, it took place again with a concert under the motto "Evening of the legends 2022: The day after July Morning – Tvarditsa and the Church". Part of the organisers' invitation reads: „To our joy, not the ruins are history, but the fate of the symbol of faith and stoicism – the Submerged Church, which has withstood time and water.

A history "created" not by human but by itself, refusing flatly to perish by the waters of the reservoir. The same way we have rejected "dying" as a nation…"[10] Hundreds of people joined the event. It aims to popularize the church as an attractive place and a scene for cultural activities. From there – the fundraising for the building restoration[11].

Figure 2. Poster for July Morning event at the church – 2019. Source: www.flagman.bg / Tvarditsa Municipality

The Submerged Church has also been featured in art projects such as films and video clips, which must be acknowledged as an important step towards enhancing its popularity. The most famous project is the movie named *Slanchevo* ("Sunny") from 2013[12]. The story was built on the real story of Zapalnya village, named in the movie Sunny. The main focus was the church that emerges and is submerged in the water along with the stories of the world-scattered descendants of the former village which take different directions. The movie

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was screened in Bulgaria and at some international festivals in Vienna, Prague, Bratislava, New York and others[13].

The remains of the church and the space around them are frequently used as a background during filming of music videos. Examples can be given with the videos of the Bulgarian pop-folk singer Raina for the song *Po drum odam* (literally "I walk on the road") from 2017, which was filmed against the background of the reservoir and the church; the music video for the song "Shapes in Grey" by the metal band Odd Crew in 2016[14]; the music video of 2021 to the song "Thank God" of the Nigerian artist Hans Millie in collaboration with Tsvetan Nikolaev from the Bulgarian hip-hop group "Respect"[15]. One of the latest projects, also from 2021, includes more than 40 Bulgarian musicians and actors and is in memory of the frontman of the Bulgarian pop group P.I.F. Dimo Stoyanov, who died of coronavirus months earlier. The song is titled "OPUS 4", and the final shot is with him, filmed in the Submerged Church[16].
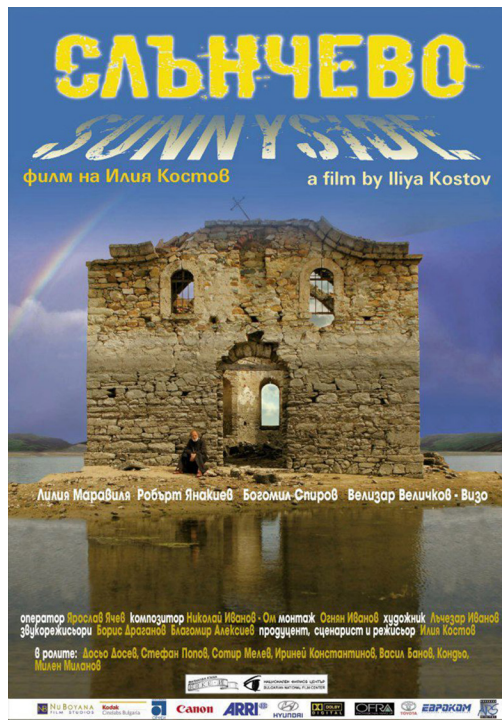
Figure 3. Poster for the movie "Slanchevo". Source: www.facebook.com/slunchevo

Beyond the organized events, such as *July Morning*, at which hundreds of people flock to the Submerged Church, the site has recently become a venue for special organized excursions – several tourist agencies have listed it in their sightseeing itineraries which usually comprise one-day tours of religious and cultural-historical sites in the region[17]. Visits of water sports enthusiast who go particularly to the ruins by kayak or boat are not rare – of course, only when the waters are at high level and the church is not on the land. The building is the mandatory stop on the route of organized kayaking or Standup paddle-boarding tours in the reservoir and a favorite photo spot for the participants[18].

It should be noted that the media played a distinctive role in promoting the church of the village of Zapalnya as a cultural landmark. The image that is built through various articles, reports and interviews with former residents of the village is diverse and multi-layered. On the one hand, it emphasizes the dark past, trauma and nostalgia, which is symbolized by the sacred object abandoned in the middle of the reservoir[19], on the other hand – of its revival and rethinking as a spiritual centre.

A similar divide is seen in the dozens of travelogues that can be found on personal blogs and travel sites[20]. The perception of the Submerged Church as a "symbol of broken faith"[21] or the construction of a sad lonely image ("standing sole against the background of the transparent reservoir waters"[22]), borders the descriptive accounts of magnetic energy and mystical sensations[23] and definitions for it as a "symbol of eternity and the power of faith"[24]. The inclusion of this atypical temple in self-organized tourist routes is also included in some publications for travellers[25], and some travel books also give specific instructions for the time and method of visiting it:

> *Summer is certainly not the best time to visit the Submerged Church of the Zhrebechevo Reservoir, because the waters of the reservoir have dried up and you will not see this centuries-old building actually submerged. Nevertheless, the place is impressive because, as if against all odds, this church rises colossally in the middle of the wasteland. It was as if something has protected its walls for so many years. Perhaps to remind of the erased past and the pain of the people whose homes were destroyed and obliterated. If you look closely at the building itself, you can see how high the water level was. (…) If you want to see the church submerged under water, you have to go in the spring when the snow melts26.*

The church of the former village of Zapalnya is gradually reconfirmed as a sacral site although it is half-ruined and without a settlement to serve. Materializing the memory of the submerged village, in this case the cult site plays the role of a kind of means to overcome the lost home. Therefore, one of the main features of the only building left of the village remains the religious one.

As early as the year following the flooding of the village, a colossal reunion of the population was held in 1965, and the tradition lives even today. Around 9th September every year, the former residents of the village of Zapalnya and their descendants reunite in the yard of the village museum[27], with recent years seeing the introduction of a festive celebration including a traditional folk concert[28]. All visitors necessarily enter to light a candle in the church, which, albeit semi-dilapidated, continues to fulfil its role as a sacred space.

A meeting of the former residents was held again this year in the beginning of September but this time under the sign of commemorating the 60 years since resettlement and 130 years since the consecration of the church.

Perhaps the most important event as far as reaffirming the church is concerned is the first sermon held in 56 years which was delivered on 4th August 2019. The date deliberately coincided with the seventh Sunday after Pentecost, and in his festive address to the laity, the Priest Metropolitan vowed to institutionalise the solemn liturgy as a tradition taking place on the same day every year – and he honoured his promise[29].

Figure 4 and 5. Moments of the liturgy on 4th August 2019. Photographer: Yana Gergova, 4.08.2019

Likely owing precisely to the popularity the church had gained and to all of the initiatives mentioned, in 2016 an initiative committee for saving the church building was established and a campaign to fund-raising for its urgent strengthening and buying a bell was launched. The main reinforcement and rehabilitation of the church began at the end of 2019.[30] The facade of the church was completely strengthened, a concrete floor lined with stone was laid, a cross and window frames were installed. The initiative aims to ensure safety during visits to the place. This became possible due to the increasingly low level of the reservoir waters in the recent years, which rarely reach the building. It is on the land almost year round (there are even the years during the waters did not reach it at all) and there is no reason not to fulfil its original functions.

The re-actualization of the sacred use of the Submerged Church is also evident in the desire of more and more couples to get married there. Several wedding ceremonies have already been held at the site. The ruins are turned into an interesting background for wedding photo shoots, even the ceremony itself did not take place in the church.

It has to be noted that although there are other material evidences of the existence of the village – such as an old cemetery or memorial plate, the church remains the main point around which various events take place.

In July 2022 by the reservoir, Tvarditsa municipality starts also the construction of a recreation area, named "Submerged church". The placement of an information board about the history of the place, which will be coordinated with the former residents of Zapalnya and with the director of the Historical Museum in Tvarditsa was planned. At several points, signs with GPS coordinates of the sights and guest houses in the municipality will be placed. „By the Submerged church which is the most recognizable and attractive place for tourists in Tvarditsa region, the aim is to draw attention to other tourist sites, accommodation and dining places in the area as well"[31].

Some conclusions

As it was mentioned at the beginning, „St. John of Rila" is not the exceptional case of submerged church – there are various examples not only in Bulgaria but all over the world. In the process of eviction and abandonment of the village the religious sites often lose their holiness and no longer contain the marks of a sacred place, but of an ordinary building. Desacralization often led to their use as farm buildings – the only surviving within the radius of the submerged village. This can be noted in many of the cases.

The neglecting of the submerged church building for many years led to its complete abandonment and temporary oblivion. However, this was gradually changed in the last three decades – perceived as a place of memory, the church "St. John of Rila" marks symbolically the abandoned village space of Zapalnya and plays an important role of the recovery of the lost past. Its construction as a realm of memory defines it as a significant for the local community topoi, marking the abandoned space, and as a consolidating heritage that pull back the displaced residents and their descendants. During the process of reconfirmation of the church as a religious site exactly the community of origin has a serious impact.

At the same time, favourable features of the nature and the accessibility of the place during low waters transform the remains of the religious site into attraction for casual or organized visitors and various celebrations scene. However, although there is no specific settlement to serve to, with rare submergence and the strengthening of the remains in the last two or three years the main role as a cult site fulfilled with active religious life comes to the fore again.

However, it should be noted that the increased interest in the place also partly leads to its commercialization and its transformation into a cultural product. Proof of this is all the organized tourist tours, the built observation and resting places, photo shoots, and advertising materials. The image of the Submerged Church can be seen on cards, brochures, book covers, even puzzles[32].

Not by chance, in many blog and social media public posts, the Submerged church is "a skeleton in which the faith still trembles"[33] or "a ship of faith which will never sink"[34]. Maybe exactly that combination between a place of memory, a religious site, an operating church, a tourist landmark, part of a cultural and natural landscape, scene, etc. makes the Submerged church such a different and attractive place, full with individual meaning for every single visitor.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] See for example, Hristov, Manova 2007; Gergova 2021a; Gergova 2021b; Gergova, Borisova 2022.

[2] The paper is based of conducted in 2019-2022 fieldwork (observation, photo and videodocumentation, interviews) during some of the most significant events held at the site with participants of some of the former residents of the village and their heirs as well an individual random visits outside the scheduled events calendar. The important role in analysis took also the archive and bibliography research.

[3] Promulgated in State Gazette, issue No. 10 of 05.02.1965. See https://www.nsi.bg/nrnm/show2.php?sid=23910&ezik=bul (visited on 5.01.2023).

[4] For more details about the history of Zhrebchevo village, see Kuzmanov 1998, as well as http://www.atlare.com (visited on 5.01.2023). The site is dedicated to the former village of Atlare and on its pages can be found a wealth of information about the past of the village, its inhabitants, families, public buildings, historical references and docu-

ments, as well as about the organization and holding periodically since 1976 of village meetings around the date May 1.

[5] For details on the construction and history of the church, see Stoykov 2002: 103-109.

[6] After the change of the calendar in Bulgaria in 1916.

[7] This fact St. Stoykov shared in an interview conducted on August 4, 2019, recorded by Y. Gergova, Zapalnya. Personal archive. The narrative also appears in a number of other interviews published in various articles about the church. See for example Stoilov 2015 and http://mitropolia-starazagora.bg/митрополит-киприан-служи-в-потопенат (visited on 5.01.2023).

[8] The bell is currently located in the church "St. Petka" in the town of Tvarditsa and the locals say that it tolls every time a former resident of the village of Zapalnya dies. The cauldrons for sacrifice were given in the monastery "St. Athanasius" in the village of Zlatna livada, and icons are kept in the church "St. Athanasius" in Tulovo.

[9] July Morning or Julaya is the annual celebration in Bulgaria of July 1st. It is associated with the hippie movement and takes its name from the song of the same name by the British rock band Uriah Heep. It originated in the 80s of the 20th century, and traditionally includes welcoming the sunrise on the Bulgarian Black Sea on the first day of July. In recent years, however, its variants have also been noticed in other parts of Bulgaria – in mountains, urban areas, near rivers, dams, etc. See more in Stefanova 2017: 307-318.

[10] https://infotourism.sliven.bg/news_2022/2022_2614.html; https://dariknews.bg/regioni/sliven/s-rok-fest-posreshtnat-denia-sled-july-morning-kraj-potopenata-cyrkva-v-iazovir-zhrebchevo-2314954 (last visited 21.12.2022).

[11] See https://nabludatel.bg/news/potopena-cherkva-v-yazovir-zhrebchevo-sabira-4-rok-grupi-za; https://faktor.bg/bg/articles/tvarditsa-posreshta-july-morning (last visited 21.12.2022).

[12] The screenwriter and director of the film is Iliya Kostov, with the participation of Lilia Maravilya, Robert Yanakiev, Bogomil Spirov, Dosyo Dosev, Vasil Banov and others.

[13] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2DrSM60YgM (last visited 5.1.2023).

[14] In the music video, in addition to the church, the old cemetery of the village of Zapalnya was used as a setting. The director Ognyan Kostovski himself commented that the video was shot at the Zhrebchevo dam and "represents an emotional symbiosis between sound, text and picture. The song itself, the idea of the video, the acting, the locations – everything is woven into a shocking end result that makes us think about who we really are." (https://metalhangar18.com/site/odd-crew-s-ofitsialen-videoklip-kam-shapes-in-grey.mh18). See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nN5T7A0qxk (last visited 5.1.2023).

[15] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFrhkFh9SJs (last visited 5.1.2023).

[16] See Bezovska 2021.

[17] See for example the Journey to the submerged church on the Zhrebchevo dam with overnight stay in a houseboat: https://www.emag.bg/pyteshestvie-kym-potopenata-cyrkva-po-jazovir-zhrebchevo-1-noshtuvka-v-plavashta-kyshta-validnost-do-15-06-00g-za-trima-2/pd/D5703GBBM/ (last visited 3.1.2023).

[18] See http://adventuresbg.com/index.php?option=com_content&id=41&Itemid=26&lang=bg; https://grabo.bg/chas-kaiaking-074wmw; http://kayakmonkey.com/каяк-клуб-тетида (last visited 3.1.2023).

[19] See for example Nikolova 2015, Vasilkovski 2021, and many others (last visited 6.1.2023).

[20] See for example https://profit.bg/klasatsii/5-unikalni-mesta-v-balgariya-za-koito-ne-ste-chuvali; https://www.highviewart.com/patuvay/potopenata-tsarkva-kray-yazovir-zhrebchevo.html; http://patepis.com/?p=90673%2F&replytocom=529759; https://offroad-bulgaria.com/forum/основни-форуми/пътешествия-и-разходки-пътеписи/българия-пътешествия-и-разходки/178251-няколко-часа-магия-на-яз-жребчево (last visited 6.1.2023).

[21] Yakimova 2022.

[22] https://pateshestvia.net/потопената-църква-на-язовир-жребчево (last visited 6.1.2023).

[23] "The feeling was very mystical, like in the remains of a shipwrecked ship accidentally washed ashore. I found out later that many people come here because of the magnetic energy that this temple emits…" – https://danielatravel.blog/2021/11/15/потопената-църква-свети-иван-рилски (last visited 6.1.2023).

[24] Uzunova 2020.

[25] See Mihalev, Tsankova. 2015.

[26] https://sunrisinglife.com/potopenata-tzarkva-na-qzovir-jrebchevo (last visited 6.1.2023).

[27] The museum of the village of Zapalnya was opened on 10.09.1979 in a house on the hill that survived the construction of the dam. The collection mainly consists of a panel with photographs of the village and its inhabitants before the emigration, as well as folk customs and costumes, traditional meetings after the emigration, school work, etc.

[28] See for example https://www.tvarditsa.org/currentNews-2645-newitem.html; https://www.bta.bg/bg/news/bulgaria/317257-zemlyacheska-sreshta-shte-sabere-zhiteli-i-potomtsi-na-potopenoto-v-yazovir-zhr; http://damsbg.com/?p=671 (last visited 3.1.2023).

[29] See for example Stoilov 2019, Kracholova 2022, also https://www.mitropolia-starazagora.bg/митрополит-киприан-служи-в-потопенат; http://mitropolia-starazagora.bg/митрополит-киприан-служи-в-потопенат-2/ (last visited 22.12.2022).

[30] More about the repair works, see https://impressio.dir.bg/dusha/remontirat-i-ukrepvat-t-nar-potopena-tsarkva-kray-yazovir-zhrebchevo (last visited 20.12.2022).

[31] For more information see https://www.bta.bg/bg/news/bulgaria/regional-news/oblast-sliven/314993-obshtina-tvarditsa-izgrazhda-pogledno-myasto-potopenata-tsarkva-kray-yazovir-?fbclid=IwAR00pG_3zafo_EiDF54NKrMlfo38F2jz5xhS0T7-Ku_8YiVCLPmV1qva2GE (last visited 22.12.2022).

[32] See for example https://ciela.bg/knigi/nehudozhestvena-literatura/pateshestviya/101-otbivki/; https://roden-puzzle.bg/product/yazovir-zhrebchevo-potopenata-tsarkva-pazel (last visited 22.12.2022).

[33] https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10226595983058376&set=pcb.10226596030099552 (last visited 22.12.2022).

[34] Yakimova 2022.

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Nature For Protection, Nature For Profit: The Case Of Bolata Bay, Bulgaria

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Abstract: We proceed from the understanding that humans are part of ecosystems, therefore, nature provides people with ecosystem services. At the same time, however, different social actors can perceive and evaluate the same place in totally different ways. The focus of this text is the case of Bolata bay, Bulgaria. Until the middle of the 20th century, the bay had an essential role in locals' livelihoods (husbandry, fishing, etc.). The inclusion of the area within the Kaliakra reserve, the establishment of the socialist cooperative farms, and the construction of a military base in the vicinity changed access to, and the regime of use, of the bay. After the collapse of the socialist state (1989), and especially over the last two decades, the bay's sandy beach gradually gained popularity as a tourist site. Thus, we examine local perceptions of nature as a source of livelihoods, paying attention to different management ideas regarding both economic growth and natural preservation, and conflicts caused by opposing aspirations among various social actors (local residents and entrepreneurs, local and state administration, NGOs, tourists, etc.).

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Conceptual introduction

Over the last several decades, the network of protected areas has often been expanded by including territories previously used for economic activity (especially in Europe, and thus in Bulgaria). A number of researchers show that the establishment of an institutional conservation regime over a given area is always accompanied by changes in land use rights and resource use patterns (Anderson & Berglund 2003; Ghimire & Pimbert 1997; Igoe 2004; Shoreman-Ouimet & Kopnina 2015; West et al. 2006). Local communities perceive their environment as a source of livelihoods, as well as an essential marker for their cultural identity. Therefore, many researchers urge national and international conservation organisations and institutions, which designate and manage protected areas, to consider the needs and interests of locals whose settlements fall within the limits of protected areas or are adjacent to them (Orlove & Brush 1996: 343–344; Tomićević 2005: 13–39; Dorondel et al. 2021: 107–108). In this respect, we proceed from the understanding that humans are part of ecosystems, which in turn provides them with "ecosystem services", as natural resources have recently been called (Peterson et al. 2010: 7–8; Lawrence 2008: 179). Thus, we also consider the notion that protection of nature has not only ecological, but also social, economic and political dimensions (Simonić 2012: 138–139; Krauss 2013: 79–80).

In Eastern European countries, the transition from a centrally planned economy and one-party political system to market-oriented democratic societies, along with the implementation of the European Union integration practices, have been essential for the development of environmental policies. The hierarchically constructed and strictly state controlled designation and management of protected areas during the socialist period gave way to a more complex model after 1989, in which a variety of actors (local, national, international; governmental and non-governmental) have important roles (Ticlkke & Clarke 2000: 213–216). However, in Bulgaria, similarly to other former socialist countries, the decision-making process related to protected areas often continues to be hierarchically subordinated and dominated by the central authorities. Frequently, local governments and institutions are suppressed and their propos-

als are neglected in public discussions. The democratisation process, however, has increased the interest of people residing in the vicinity of protected areas in having their voices heard by the state (Lawrence 2008; Petrova 2014: 90–101).

At the same time, the local population's attitudes towards and dynamic activities within a particular protected area are not homogeneous. Therefore, conflict situations often emerge (Escobar 1998). Farmers, entrepreneurs, tourists, environmental inspectors, local and national institutions, and NGOs may see the same place within a protected area in totally different ways, highlight different elements, give them different values, etc. And even within each of these social or occupational groups there can be differences depending on personal life views, goals and trajectories.

Focus and aim

The focus of our study is the case of Bolata bay in northeastern Bulgaria on the Black sea coast (the Coastal Dobrudzha region). The bay falls within land associated with the village of Balgarevo[1], in Kavarna Municipality, six kilometres from the settlement. Bolata consists of a swampy firth and a sandy beach, surrounded by limestone cliffs with numerous caves. It is a wetland with specific flora and fauna. A small river originates from a freshwater spring in the bay and creates a narrow gorge. The width of the riverbed changes over time, although it always divides the beach.

Between 1978 and 1984 two coastal fortifications were built, changing the landscape to this day. Before the construction of these fortifications the sea took up a larger area inland of the bay, reaching the cliffs on the sides, as is visible from aerial images.

The swamp, on the other hand, was significantly smaller in the early years and not as close to the seashore as it is today. Until the middle of the 20th century, the bay had an essential role in the locals' livelihoods. However, the establishment of
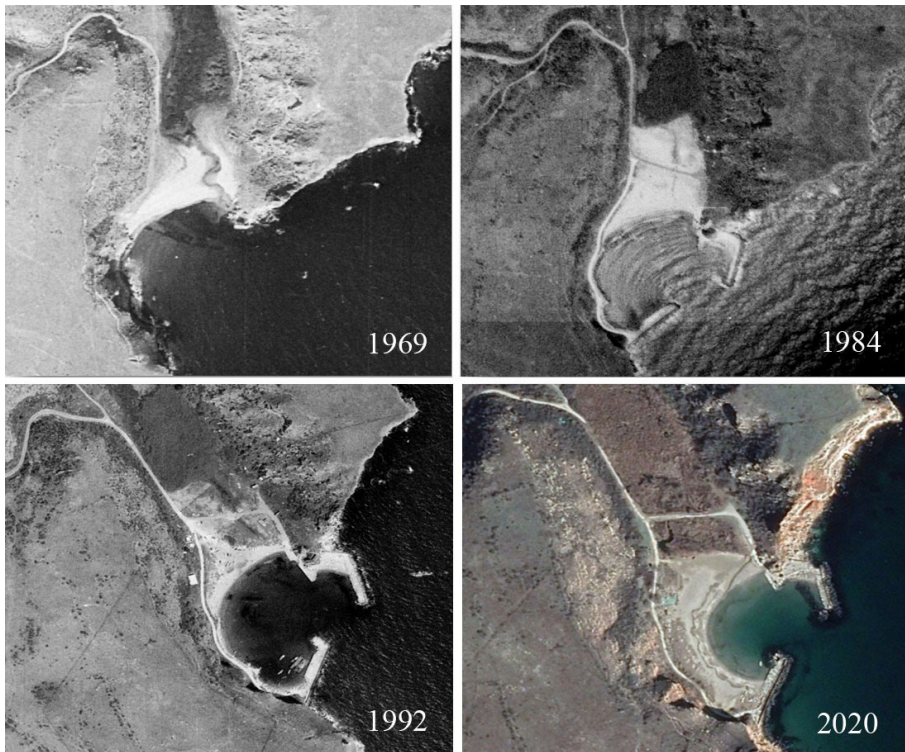
Figure 1. Aerial images of Bolata bay from 1969 (upper left), 1984 (upper right), 1992 (lower left), and 2020 (lower right). Images from 1969 to 1992 Military Geographical Service, Ministry of Defence, Republic of Bulgaria; Image from 2020 Google Earth.

socialist cooperative farms in the region in 1950, the building of a military base in the vicinity in the mid-1970s, and the inclusion of the area in the Kaliakra reserve in 1980[2], changed access to, and the regime of use of, the bay. Later on, after the collapse of the socialist state in 1989, and especially over the last two decades, the bay's sandy beach gradually gained popularity as a tourist site. After Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007, Bolata bay also became part of two protected sites belonging to the European Natura 2000 network: the Kaliakra special protection area (SPA)[3], under Directive 2009/147/EC (Birds Directive), and the Kompleks Kaliakra site of Community importance (SCI)[4], under Directive 92/43/EEC (Habitats Directive).

Hence, our study aims to examine the transformations of the bay under human activity, as well as the tensions and conflicts between various social actors caused by conservation regimes. We consider the policies and actions of state institutions, local administration and non-governmental organisations in regulating the exploitation and protection of natural resources in the area. We also analyse the attitudes of locals towards the protected areas, and their strategies and actions to overcome the restrictions, since they perceive nature as a source of livelihood, particularly as a resource for local tourist development. We pay specific attention to tourists' actions and the ways they affect the environment.

Methodology

The study is based on a three-year ethnographic study in the village of Balgarevo and its surroundings. We analysed statements and some specific actions taken by the long-term mayor of the village (since 2007) and representatives of the NGO sector relating to the economic development of the region, natural resource management policies, and conflicts between interested parties. Several NGOs in Bulgaria are associated with a number of processes and conflicts between the management and the development of Bolata bay and protected areas in the region, such as the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds and For Nature in Bulgaria. However, in this text we pay specific attention to the For Kaliakra's Tourism initiative committee, since it was locally established and its activities are focused solely on local economic, cultural and ecological development. In 2020 the committee became an NGO.

We discussed the impact of natural resource management policies on the local economy, as well as on natural resource management strategies, with rural entrepreneurs in the village. One major topic of conversation with regular visitors to the beach was the various transformations of Bolata bay over the past two decades. In addition, we discussed what attracts and repels these visitors, and what they miss. We discussed the historical development of the area, changes in the landscape, and the socioeconomic meaning of the bay over the past seven decades with local residents from different generations (between 16 and 83 years of age), as well as their visions for natural resource management in the region. Although the bay has always been of economic and personal importance

to many in the village of Balgarevo, our interlocutors were often not able to (correctly) date a given event related to the area. Therefore, the examination of various administrative acts and documents relating to changes in nature protection regimes in the area, as well as aerial photographs showing natural changes and human activity in the bay and its vicinity, were of particular importance. Media coverage of natural resource management and the various economic and recreational activities in the bay over the past decade demonstrates the expanding public and state interest in the area. Therefore, we also studied the dynamics of the development and the conflicts in the region through analysis of print material and electronic media. However, it is worth mentioning that our direct observation of activities and practices started a decade ago.

From a source of livelihood to a restricted area

The spring water, the many small caves and the wide fields on the plateau above the bay were a prerequisite for raising sheep in the region until the 1950s. Some local farmers took their herds from the village of Balgarevo to the bay in the summer months. There the animals grazed and took shelter from the hot weather in the caves. In the first half of the 20th century, buffaloes from the village were also taken to water at the river. Such practices were later continued by the cooperative farm. However, after the beginning of socialist rule in the country (in 1944), the bay began to change its appearance and functioned gradually under the influence of human activity, including through construction. In the 1950s, behind the swampy firth a water pumping station was built. It had an adjacent living space for the workers, who were locals and worked in four shifts. Each was able to bring family members to the pump.

Figure 2. One of the water pump workers with his wife, two sons, and mother in front of the residential house adjacent to the water pumping station in Bolata bay. Ca. 1975. Private archive of interlocutor Zh. K.

There also was a small warehouse nearby, and pigpens were settled on the ridge adjacent to the bay. Vines and other plantations were grown on the arable land in the immediate vicinity.

Meanwhile, locals were allowed to visit the bay for livelihood activities, such as launching fishing boats in the sea and washing wool in the river. "People [locals] used to go there to wash their rugs, quilts, wool, everything. Then the river went straight through the middle of the beach. My folks used to go there with the cart, I went there with them." (A. M., female, b. 1954, entrepreneur)

However, in the 1970s, this changed significantly after the construction of the military base on the plateau south of the bay. It had an important role in the telecommunication network with the USSR. At the early stages of construction, locals were able to visit the bay and continue their livelihood activities. However, as the construction works progressed, only a select group of people were allowed into the area, among them the children of local workers on the base. One of our long-term interlocutors recalls:

> *My aunt used to work on the military base. I remember she used to take*
> *me with her often, while it was still under construction. The workers were*
> *allowed to bring relatives, children mainly. A child can do no harm…*
> *When they finished construction, however, we were not allowed to go*
> *there anymore. (A. M., female, b. 1954, entrepreneur)*

After construction of the military base was finished in the mid-1970s, access
to the bay was prohibited to civilians until 1990, leading to the cessation of
private agriculture in the area, as well. Only the water pumping station staff,
agricultural workers from the cooperative farm, base personnel, military and
Ministry of Transportation employees, who visited the recreation station of
the military base, as well as some of their family members, were allowed into
the are. They visited the beach and launched vessels into the sea. North of the
beach, at the foot of the cliffs, there used to be a one-story one-room build-
ing, used as a banquet hall[5] for special occasions by high-ranking military and
Ministry employees and their guests. "The base chefs were from Balgarevo and
Kavarna. They brought food down to the banquet hall, using stairs carved into
the cliff, from the station in big dishes covered with tall [cloches]", recalls Zh.
K. (female, b. 1971, resident), who witnessed some of the gatherings in her
childhood and early adolescence. She was allowed to visit the bay occasionally
in the 1970s and 1980s, since her mother was part of the military base staff and
her father-in-law was one of the water pumping station workers.

The inclusion of Bolata bay in the Kaliakra reserve in 1980 also changed
the status of land use and the permissible human activities in the bay. The
purpose of the reserve was the conservation of monk seal habitats, coastal
marine ecosystems, typical steppe vegetation and animal life, and the nests of
rare and endangered species. Reserves are exclusive state property. All human
activity is prohibited by law, except for: (1) providing security; (2) visits with
a scientific purpose; (3) passage of people along marked paths, including for
education; (4) collection of seeds, wild plants and animals for scientific purposes
or for their restoration in other places in quantities, ways and time, excluding
disturbances in the ecosystems; (5) extinguishing fires and sanitary measures
in forests damaged as a result of natural disasters and calamities (Protected
Areas Act, Art. 17(1)).

From a restricted area to a source of livelihood

In 1990, after the fall of the socialist regime in Bulgaria, the bay became accessible to citizens once more. Then, according to locals, first people from Balgarevo, and shortly afterwards from other nearby villages and the town of Kavarna, started to visit the sandy beach for recreational purposes. In the early 1990s, a bus line from Kavarna to Bolata was established for sunbathing visitors, as claimed by locals.[6] However, what left the most vivid mark in the memory of the locals was the restoration of the practice of citizens launching fishing boats into the sea. After restrictions on access to the bay were imposed, local fishermen began launching boats only from the nearby beaches of Rusalka and Zelenka.[7] "My husband is a fisherman [in his spare time]… we bought our boat in 1999, everyone got boats then… we kept the boat in Bolata under a shed" (Zh. K., female, b. 1971, resident). However, Zelenka continues to be a favourite spot for local fishermen, some of whom even built an unregulated fishing village on the small pebble beach.

In the following years, the natural features and preserved diverse flora and fauna, including rare and endangered species, in combination with dozens of monuments of cultural and historical importance,[8] gradually started to attract an increasing flow of tourists to the region. In 2012, a number of internet sites[9] claimed the bay was a member of "the club of the prettiest bays in the world". Since then, this information has been repeatedly mentioned in travel guides, sites and forums for tourism, reports in print and electronic media, as well as on the website of the Municipality of Kavarna. Therefore, many tourists, water sports and fishing enthusiasts from all over the country and Europe began to visit the area in summer. Hence, a new niche for business development in Balgarevo emerged, that of tourism services.

In the late 2000s, there were no more than a dozen guest houses in the village. However, their number gradually increased in the following years, and today there are several dozen[10], including two hotels. There also are two sheep farms, which offer dairy products to regular visitors of the village and passers-by. I. I. (male, b. ca. 1970), a hereditary sheep breeder, manages a family farm with the help of his wife and teenage son, and aside from the milk and meat he sells to resellers, he also sells dairy products straight from his home in Balgarevo on the road leading to Bolata.

We have no advertising. We count on regular visitors. We have a pretty regular clientele. People who come here [as tourists in the village or visitors to the bay] every year, they stop by and buy cheese from us. Some [clients] even call in advance to reserve the quantity they want, because they know it runs out quickly.… There are people from all over the country – Sofia, Plovdiv, Dobrich, etc.

Figure 3. Interlocuter I. I.'s sheep farm, Balgarevo. August 12, 2020. Photo D. Pileva

Ten restaurants and coffee bars in the village also benefit from vacationers. The most popular, however, is the restaurant at the snail farm.[11] In recent years, although the restaurant has gained regular visitors from Bulgaria and abroad, its initial success and the reason for establishing the farm in Balgarevo in the first place was the location of the village near the Kaliakra reserve and the growing popularity of Bolata bay. The restaurant's advertising campaign, and its farm produce, have been largely based on the natural features and the eco-friendly environment of the region.[12]

Figure 4. The snail farm and restaurant in Balgarevo. July 19, 2020. Photo D. Pileva

There are also several grocery shops and a couple of dozen farmers' roadside stalls for fruits and vegetables, and honey and jam. As the mayor of the village, G. G. (male, b. ca. 1965), repeatedly claimed during our conversations: "People in the village profit from the beach. Even if tourists stop for a bottle of water, it is of significance. On the way back from the beach, many stop to buy melons, watermelons, tomatoes, etc. [from local farmers]".

Therefore, maintaining open access to the bay, and particularly the beach, and appealing to tourists is essential for local entrepreneurs and small farmers. However, preserving the natural features of the area is also of great importance to many of them.

A source of livelihood, a source of conflict

Many of the local population and entrepreneurs, as well as the village administration, aim to protect their livelihoods and residential environment while also striving to preserve the bay's natural features with as little human influence as possible. However, as the number of visitors to the region and the bay increases, so does the number of activities considered illegal in a natural

reserve. At the height of the summer season (July and August), especially on weekends, cars can hardly pass each other on the narrow, poorly maintained road surrounded by thick thorny flora. One of the biggest problems, recognised by residents, entrepreneurs, tourists, environmental NGOs, and local and state administration, is vehicles (including campers and boat trailers) parking and people pitching tents on the sand dunes.

Figure 5. The illegal car park on the sand dunes, Bolata beach. August 21, 2013. Photo I. Markov

At the beginning of the 2016 summer season, the Ministry of Environment and Water implemented access controls for vehicles, placing a concrete barrier at the entrance to the bay. Many of the local residents and entrepreneurs strongly disapproved of this, and they almost immediately organised the removal of the barrier.[13]

Sunbathing on the small secluded beach is often impeded by the large numbers of visitors.[14] SUVs often drive on the sand as well, in order to launch vessels such as motor boats or jets into the sea. Once a regular visitor to the beach at the weekends S. T. (female, b. late 1960s) from the district centre

Dobrich, explains: "It used to be a very calm and uninhabited beach, no one knew about it. That is why we loved going there. We had visited for years. Now, it gets more and more crowded each year. Therefore, we stopped visiting [in ca. 2016–2017]".

Other long-term interlocutors of ours, in their 20s and early 30s, also share similar experiences, followed by phasing out visits, or at least reducing them. The crowdedness of the small sandy beach and the difficulties in finding a parking spot are outlined as reasons for reconsidering the bay as a recreation place not only by tourists, but also locals. Statements such as: "locals don't go there [anymore]" (G. G., male, b. ca. 1965, mayor of Balgarevo) and "I went [to the beach] once this summer, I will not go back again" (Zh. K., female, b. 1971, resident), could often be heard from Balgarevo residents.

Hence, in order to improve the conditions for tourism and to protect the natural features of the bay, some of the local population and entrepreneurs, the local administration, the local For Kaliakra's Tourism initiative committee and some of the regular visitors to the bay, demanded a number of changes in the management of the beach. Among the main requests is complete prohibition of parking on the sand dunes, by providing access for vehicles near the bay. There are a few parking options more or less considered by different parties: (1) a pontoon car park above the swamp on municipal property which falls outside the reserve (but within areas protected under Natura 2000); (2) a car park on municipal property on the plateau adjacent to the bay; and (3) a car park in the village. In the last two options visitors are to be transported to and from the beach by tourist train. Some entrepreneurs consider the pontoon parking lot not only innovative, but the most convenient for visitors, providing the closest and most independent access to the beach. Although the Plan for Integrated Development of the Municipality of Kavarna 2021–2027 envisages an "ecological bus connection (with hybrid or electric vehicles) between the village of Balgarevo and Bolata beach during the active summer season" (Plan Kavarna 2021: 133), a parking lot on the plateau is preferred by the village administration, since it will keep hundreds of vehicles a day out of the village streets, which are narrow and need major reconstruction.

Another major conflict situation is the launch of vessels into the sea straight from the beach at any time of day. None of the entrepreneurs, but many of the locals, we spoke with, disagree with this situation, since SUVs with boat trailers harm dune flora and pollute the small river and the seawater.[15] P. P.

(male, b. ca. 1970, entrepreneur), for example, who owns the snail farm and restaurant in Balgarevo, recognises the unregulated passing of vehicles as the biggest problem for tourists: "I'm firmly against SUVs, jets, boats, etc., on the beach. One lays down on the sand, and [someone else] drifts nearby, and then there is the smell of gasoline". At the same time however, fishermen and water sports enthusiasts strive for the opportunity to launch vessels from the bay. It is the still water and the surrounding underwater area that appeals to them. Zh. K. (female, b. 1971, resident), whose husband is an avid and long-standing fishermen, marks the division between local fishermen and newcomers: "In the summer, non-local fishermen come because they don't know there aren't any fish at that time. Local fishermen launch boats in September and October. Then, just a few people – local pensioners, go to the beach."

However, in an attempt to find a compromise for both sides – sunbathing visitors and water sports enthusiasts – some of the local fishermen, entrepreneurs and village residents offered to introduction quotas for launching vessels of any kind into the sea within a certain time range. The construction of a berth, however, is of essential importance for better utilisation of the natural resources, causing no, or less, harm to the environment and avoiding conflict and discomfort.

Unlike the need for a lifeguard, installation of mobile toilets and garbage containers, which are universally recognised as necessary, there is no consensus on establishments with a commercial purpose on the beach. Between the summer of 2008 and the summer of 2016 there was a fast food restaurant with a covered patio, established as a temporary and removable facility with the permission of the responsible authorities. In 2016 it was removed by court order, qualified as illegal because of the concrete foundation, which was not permitted as part of a temporary and removable establishment (Decision No. 195). In the following summers, however, its place has been taken by two food vans with power generators placed among the swamp flora.

Figure 6. An ice cream van parked on the beach near the small river and swamp. August 11, 2022. Photo I. Markov

Some of the local residents we spoke with firmly believe that the daily maintenance of the beach in the summer should be carried out precisely by such an establishment, as it was before, "when there was the restaurant the beach was maintained, now it is a dumping ground" (Zh. K., female, b. 1971, resident). As of today, "there is a guy who sells ice cream on the beach [from a food van], he voluntarily picks up the trash from the beach in the mornings and in the evenings" (G. G., male, b. ca. 1965, mayor of Balgarevo). At the end of the season, however, volunteers from the village, including the mayor, clean the beach thoroughly. On the other hand, other local residents and entrepreneurs recognise the role of the local and municipal authorities as fundamental to the maintenance of the beach. "The municipality should build a parking lot, put up a few dressing rooms and eco toilets" (P. P., male, b. ca. 1970, entrepreneur). Supporters of keeping the environment less urbanised, including the For Kaliakra's Tourism initiative committee, are also against the concessions on the beach[16], hence, against a restaurant or food vans on the beach.

The coastal fortifications, which have been dangerously eroded by the elements for the past four decades with no particular maintenance, draw another dividing line between different local and state actors.

Figure 7a. The two coastal fortifications. August 10, 2020. Photo I. Markov

Figure 7b. One of the coastal fortifications. "Attention! Dangerous Zone! Passing Prohibited!". "The Access of People and the Mooring of Vessels is Prohibited". August 11, 2022. Photo I. Markov

Some of the older generation from Balgarevo would prefer it if the fortifications were demolished. In their memories, the bay looked different, better, prettier, and more "natural" before their construction. However, according to biologists and ecological NGOs, after their construction, specific underwater flora and fauna have moved in, becoming part of the protected area, therefore, they also should be preserved. At the same time, the fortifications protect the coast from stormy seas, as well as the fresh water supply area of Balgarevo. In addition, they allow recreation activities and vessels to be launched into the bay. Therefore, their reconstruction is among the greatest demands of most of the local population, entrepreneurs, fishermen, the village administration, NGOs and eco-activists.

Meanwhile, in January 2016, the European Court of Justice condemned Bulgaria (1) for failing to include all territories of important bird areas (IBAs) within the Kaliakra SPA; (2) for permitting the construction of hundreds of wind-power turbines within the Kaliakra SPA, within the area of the IBA not included in the SPA, and within the Kompleks Kaliakra SCI; and (3) for allowing the construction of a resort with a golf course which obliterated most of the habitats used by breeding and migrating birds in the neighbouring Belite Skali SPA.[17] Furthermore, the implementation of some of the projects connected with wind generators and the golf course led to the irrevocable destruction of ¼ of the land hosting the Ponto-Sarmatic Steppes priority habitat. According to the court, Bulgaria has failed to fulfil its obligations under Article 4(4) of the Birds Directive, "to avoid pollution or deterioration of habitats or any disturbances affecting the birds", and the Article 6(2) of the Habitats Directive, "to avoid deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designed". As a result, in July 2017, the Ministry of Environment and Water issued an order prohibiting new construction, as well as the planting of orchards and vegetable gardens in the Kompleks Kaliakra SCI (Order No. РД-526/21.07.2017). However, most of the local population of Balgarevo largely misinterpreted the order as prohibiting all kinds of human economic activity (including agriculture and fishing). As a result, protests were organised, and, in a few days, public discussion of the Integrated Management Plan for the Kompleks Kaliakra SCI, Kaliakra SPA and Belite skali SPA failed. Therefore, the plan was not officially approved. However, the order actually refers only to land that is part of the Ponto-Sarmatic Steppes priority habitat.

Eventually, a group of local residents and owners of properties within the protected area began to investigate the reasons behind the failure to approve the integrated plan, establishing the For Kaliakra's Tourism initiative committee. The committee claims that the protest against the minister's order was provoked by a group of landowners whose properties are within steppe territory, consequently, their lands became unusable (for construction) and unsellable. In this respect, by distributing false information these landowners aimed to postpone the approval in order to gain time and find ways to build seaside resorts and golf courses, plans they had had for years. At the same time however, the founders of the committee, whose properties are adjacent to the steppe and are arable land, consider this postponement an obstacle to finding legal ways to convert arable land to urbanised land. This is essential to them, since they would like to build guesthouses and small family hotels that would, as they claim, not significantly interfere with the environment while developing ecotourism[18] and protecting the biodiversity in the region by paying specific attention to Bolata bay. Thus, in recent years, the committee quickly gained a central place in the dialogue (and in the conflict) on the management of the bay, greatly shaping visions for local development.[19]

Among the most significant and recognisable activities of the initiative committee are those related to the removal of Bolata beach, along with the road leading to it and the coastal fortifications, from the Kaliakra reserve and including them in the Steppe protected site. In this initiative, among many others, they had the support of the mayor of Balgarevo, as well as many of the residents and entrepreneurs in the village. Thus, in 2017, Kavarna Municipality also supported this request and initiated a change of status of the territories in question before state institutions. In 2018, the long and difficult dialogue with the Ministry of Environment and Water, the Regional Environment and Water Inspection – Varna, and eco-NGOs resulted in the then minister Neno Dimov's order approving the change of status.[20] The decision was welcomed by many locals and entrepreneurs, and the village administration. The order raised hopes that the above-mentioned problems relating to the use and management of the beach could be solved. The lighter protection regime of the Steppe protected area would legalise recreation and fishing activities in the bay, which would gradually ease the development of tourism in Balgarevo. On the other hand, the bay being within the protected area would hinder potential large investment projects in the bay.[21]

The reconstruction of the coastal fortifications is another important reason for the requested removal of Bolata bay from Kaliakra reserve. Over the span of five years, the For Kaliakra's Tourism initiative committee had sent dozens of letters to various state institutions – the Regional Administration Dobrich, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, the Ministry of Environment and Water, and the Council of Ministers – requesting reconstruction of the fortifications. However, the responses were unanimous: according to the Protected Areas Act, Article 17(1), reconstruction activities are considered forbidden, as far as officially the bay is still within the reserve. Generally, the National Assembly of Bulgaria has to make some additions to the final decree of the Protected Areas Act, so that Minister Dimov's order can be put in motion.

These changes were made in June 2022, and thus Bolata bay was finally taken out of the Kaliakra reserve and included in the Steppe protected site. At the same time, the regime of conservation activities in the protected site was changed so that "any type of construction, *excluding repair and reconstruction of existing technical infrastructure and fortifications*" is prohibited (Order No. РД-551/27.06.2022, italics added). Local residents and administration consider this development a great success for the people over the state administration, leading to even greater expectations for possible economic development in the region because of the likelihood of better management of the bay's natural resources.

However, according to the mayor of Balgarevo, some of the changes in the management of the bay are hindered by other administrative or financial issues. The village administration is no longer considering a pontoon car park above the swamp as it would be too expensive and difficult from an engineering point of view. At the same time, the idea of a car park on the plateau is on hold, since the Ministry of Transport and Communications would not allow the movement of a tourist train on the road leading to the bay. The reconstruction of the coastal fortifications has also been repeatedly denied by the regional administration. As a reason they state that these fortifications were built for the needs of the military base and are not related to coastal defence, and neither do they affect the protection of biodiversity in the area.

As of today, even though the bay has finally been taken out of the reserve, the locals are less hopeful that the management will change for the better, since there still are many administrative obstacles to improving the use of resources and more effective environmental protection. At the same time, although the bay is part of Steppe protected site, fears are growing that the area will be pri-

vatised and developed by large investors, destroying valuable flora and fauna species and limiting visitor access.

Conclusion

The ethnographic approach we used allowed us to understand better the complex interweaving of sociocultural, economic and political factors that determine the development of protected natural sites at macro- and micro-level, beyond conservation practices. As shown in the text, many parties are interested in the development of Bolata bay, as well as directly involved in the process of transforming the area. Thus, their visions of sustainable local development differ – sometimes they contradict, at other times they complement, one another (cf. Dorondel et al. 2021: 87–88). Even those of the locals who have a common desire to take the bay out of the reserve do not always share a common vision for the bay's management. The perceptions, evaluations and use of the natural resources of the area for tourism development, also often differ among local residents, eco-NGOs and responsible national and local institutions, causing various conflicts, which have surrounded Bolata bay for years.

According to local entrepreneurs, the "wild" pristine nature of the area is the most attractive to the tourists that visit Balgarevo, therefore, the activities they are able to experience are related to the area's natural features. In this respect, the entrepreneurs are deeply concerned by the current situation surrounding Bolata bay: an overcrowded, noisy and polluted beach with illegal parking and trading activities, contrary to the expectations one might have for a peaceful and nature-friendly vacation. On the other hand, however, some local entrepreneurs, such as restaurant and shop owners, as well as retailers from the village, aim for larger tourist numbers.

Common to all interested parties is the understanding that the essence of Coastal Dobrudzha identity is the natural features of the region. Therefore, the environmental specifics should also be important to local and regional development. Finding the right way to achieve this is a dynamic process. Our research clearly shows that the voices of local residents and institutions, their civic engagement, activities and practices, including in the sphere of ecotourism, are not unheard; on the contrary, they are an important factor in the development of the region.

Can, and if so in what way, ecotourism could not only be a source of financial benefit for residents of Balgarevo, but also a basis for raising awareness, and for various education initiatives in the field of environmental conservation of inhabited regions, is an important questions in this context. To what extent could ecotourism fund and support the preservation of biodiversity and the specific nature-based identity of the area? These are questions the answers to which largely depend on state and regional policies, on the one hand, and on the endeavours of local residents and entrepreneurs, on the other. Solving these issues will be essential in deciding the direction of further local development.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] The village of Balgarevo is on the seaside of the historical and geographical region of south Dobrudzha, about 2 km from the Black Sea and about 50 km from the border with Romania. The village has one of the longest coastlines of all settlements on the Bulgarian Black Sea. Its territory is the largest within the Municipality of Kavarna (the municipal centre is at 8 km). It is also the most populated settlement in the municipality, with a population of 1,052 according to the Bulgarian National Census results of 2021. The terrain is completely flat, the soils are mainly black, and there is shallow groundwater. The climate is temperate-continental (Integrated Plan 2017: 30). Like all settlements in the area, population growth is negative. However, in the last decade, an increasing number of working age urban migrants from all over the country have settled in the village permanently or seasonally.

[2] The reserve was created in 1941. It currently occupies an area of 866,2 hectares, covering parts of the lands of the villages of Balgarevo and Sveti Nikola. Extensive steppe ecosystems, which in Bulgaria are found only in the seaside region of the Dobrudzhan plateau, are preserved there. The reserve also includes coastal cliffs, often up to 70 m high. Caves of various sizes can be found in the limestone cliffs, which are a former refuge of the monk seal, now extinct on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. The flora consists of over 450 species, 45 of which are considered rare or endangered. Kaliakra is the only

Bulgarian reserve covering marine area, a strip of sea 500 m wide and 8 km long (Plan Kavarna 2013: 75).

[3] Special protection areas are those classified by a Member State of the European Union as a special protection area for the conservation of bird species which are considered rare, in danger of extinction, vulnerable to specific changes in their habitat or requiring particular attention for reasons of the specific nature of their habitat (Birds Directive, Art. 4(1)).

[4] A Site of Community Importance (SCI) is defined as "a site which, in the biogeographical region or regions to which it belongs, contributes significantly to the maintenance or restoration at a favourable conservation status of a natural habitat type… or of a species… and may also contribute significantly to the coherence of Natura 2000…, and/or contributes significantly to the maintenance of biological diversity within the biogeographic region or regions concerned" (Habitats Directive, Art. 1(k)).

[5] Remnants of the building stood until 2018, when they were taken down because they presented a danger to beach visitors.

[6] The bus line exists today. According to information on the official website of the Municipality of Kavarna, from May 1 to September 30, the regular bus line between Kavarna and Balgarevo goes to Bolata (the main road, not down to the beach) twice a day (http://dev.kavarna.idnc.eu/transport, last accessed on 2 January 2023).

[7] Eleven and three kilometres from Balgarevo, respectively.

[8] The most popular are Cape Kaliakra (archaeological and natural site with a historical museum); the Yailata protected site (a plateau with many caves overlooking the sea, with archaeological excavations); Cape Chirakman; and Lake-Lagoon Taukliman.

[9] Among them is the official site of BTV, a Bulgarian national television station, https://bntnews.bg/bg/a/85751-bolata_sred_naj_krasivite_zalivi_v_sveta, last accessed on 2 January 2023. However, such information is not present in the list on the official website that categorises these bays (https://world-bays.com, last accessed on 2 January 2023).

[10] According to the National Tourist Register of Categorised Accommodation and Dining Places there are 25 registered guest houses in Balgarevo. However, there are at least a dozen more unregistered accommodation places, mainly offering guest rooms.

[11] The farm was established in 2010, and the restaurant in 2016.

[12] Increasing interest not only in the restaurant, but also in the village in general, motivated the owners to expand their activities and the construction of a demonstration centre for the stages of snail breeding, as well as a snail museum (which as of 2022 is under construction). Since 2018, there has also been a cosmetic line with snail mucus, sold exclusively at the farm.

[13] A media report, see https://bntnews.bg/bg/a/zhiteli-na-balgarevo-gotvyat-protest-ako-se-ogranichi-dostapa-do-bolata-756275, last accessed on 2 January 2023.

[14] Visitors are diverse: they are of different ages and social statuses including families with small children from all over the country; some families form from abroad, mostly Romania, who prefer the natural features of the area to those of their own (rockier) Black Sea coast; tourists, accommodated both in Balgarevo and Kavarna, and other sea resorts nearby, such as Balchik; foreigners; water sports and wild camping enthusiasts.

[15] There have been some ridiculous incidents involving SUVs with boat trailers stuck in shallow water. The incident took place in September 2016 when the bonito fishing season began. After a couple of hours unsuccessfully trying to get the vehicle out of the water using other SUVs, a local farmer successfully rescued the vehicle using his tractor (https://offnews.bg/112/dzhip-vleze-v-moreto-na-bolata-636276.html, last accessed on 2 January 2023). The entrance of such heavy machinery to the beach alone is a violation of the protected regime of the reserve.

[16] https://www.facebook.com/zaturizmanakaliakra/posts/pfbid02yVogm2gzfxSvdG-kWMjK1sWMocJgpjwZoQC1S3DjhBd3G54YaUH3xg422jSG3DCWzl, last accessed on 2 January 2023.

[17] The full document is accessible here: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:62014CJ0141, last accessed on 2 January 2023.

[18] The World Conservation Union (IUCN) defines ecotourism as "environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features — both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations" (Ceballos-Lascuráin 1996: 20).

[19] In June 2020, the committee transformed into an NGO with the same name. The aims of the organisation are concentrated in a few spheres: supporting entrepreneurship and agriculture in the area; assisting municipalities in the region in applying for various regional and European programs; "development of projects for environmental protection in relation to the protection of biological and landscape diversity, and the system of protected territories and zones"; protection and popularisation of local natural, archaeological, ethnographic, and architectural sites; working towards convincing state authorities in reconstruction and maintenance of coastal fortifications. The statue of the For Kaliakra's Tourism NGO can be seen at https://www.ngobg.info/bg/organizations/activity/112405-за-туризма-на-калиакра.html, last accessed on 2 January 2023.

[20] In the order, this is argued as follows: "due to the fact that they represent the Bolata sea beach, a road, the territory between the road and Bolata beach, coastal fortifications… and they lack plant and animal species and natural habitats – a subject of conservation in the Kaliakra reserve, including: monk seal habitat, coastal marine ecosystems, char-

acteristic steppe vegetation and fauna and nesting niches of rare and endangered bird species, and the same should be excluded from the reserve." (http://eea.government. bg/zpo/docs/1-1-6-267-2018.pdf, last accessed on 2 January 2023).

[21] The possible construction of a large resort or golf course near the bay is of concern to local residents and entrepreneurs, as well as the village administration and a number of eco-NGOs. They have in mind some specific examples of the construction of large resort complexes on the Black Sea that limit access to the coastline.

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The Rupite Protected Area, Bulgaria: Construction of a Landscape

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Abstract: By examining the different layers and roles of related actors, this study aims to reveal the ways in which the local people view the locality of Rupite in southwest Bulgaria and in which the landscape is constructed. The construction of Rupite as a landscape and tourist destination is mainly happening from the bottom up, through separate initiatives of different actors rather than following a certain vision or development plan created by the responsible institutions. Rupite is being constructed as a multi-layered landscape of sacred, cultural, historical and natural significance, on which different actors draw to develop various forms of tourism: religious, cultural and historical, spa. The inextricable connection, which was built between the image of the prophetess Vanga and Rupite, leads us to think about the locality as an extremely sacred place. Vanga and the sacrality form the main layer of the landscape. The rest of the elements (cultural, historical and natural) characterising the landscape, on the one hand serve as additional 'evidence' of the sacrality, and on the other, win recognition by means of the image of Vanga. Each actor related to Rupite constructs the place in a specific manner. However, all of them use one main mechanism and draw symbolic capital (and thus legitimise their positions and activities, even though these are often contradictory) from one main source – the image of Vanga.

Violeta Periklieva

Introduction

As industrialisation and urbanisation threatened to obliterate both the natural environment and the remnants of the ancient past, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries concerns for their preservation increased in Europe and the United States (Lowenthal 2005: 84). Despite the parallel existence and development of an awareness of the importance of nature and of culture preservation, to a great extent the Western imaginaries of nature and culture and the division between them are still heavily present (see West et al. 2006). From an anthropological perspective, nature and culture are viewed as interconnected and indivisible. People are in a constant relationship with their surroundings. As David Lowenthal says, "[e]very human relic is also a relic of nature and every aspect of nature is altered by human action" (2005: 85). By using the term 'surroundings' instead of culturally biased terms such as environment, nature, natural resources, or wilderness when it comes to studying the relationships between people and protected areas, West, Igoe and Brockington merge the two competing understandings of the social construction of nature and of the material nature of the environment: "the world is out there, and we interact with it in ways that reproduce it, often altering it in the process, yet the world only has meaning for us as language-using and symbol-making animals owing to how we intellectually apprehend it" (West et al. 2006: 252). This "world around us that we, as human beings, have material, intellectual, and symbolic access to and that we work to alter and make sense of through our daily actions" is termed surroundings (West et al. 2006: 252). Very close to this definition of surroundings is the concept of landscape as "an active foreground that is created by and creative of life-worlds… a medium that reflects material, spiritual, and cultural activities of communities in the past, present and future… created through… interactions among communities, and between communities and the physical world" (Katić et al. 2018: 9–10), "ever-changing, always in the process of being and becoming" (Tilley & Cameron-Daum 2017: 20). In order to put in a theoretical framework the study of a locality that is a protected area of great historical, cultural and religious significance, I find appropriate to merge these definitions into a working concept of landscape.

The object of this study is the locality of Rupite in southwest Bulgaria. It is located on the right bank of the Struma River, some 10 km from the town of Petrich, on the territory of the village of Rupite. In the course of its development, the landscape of Rupite acquired a multi-layered character, that of great natural, ecological, historical, cultural and religious significance. By examining the different layers, and the roles of related actors, the study aims to reveal the ways in which the local people view Rupite and in which the landscape is constructed.

The study is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2021–2022. The data was mainly collected using in-depth interviews and informal conversations with representatives of the local population and authorities, local and outside eco-activists, ornithologists and botanists. As an additional source, materials from the electronic media and social networks were analysed. The study is also grounded on many years of ethnographic research, which allows me to trace out the processes.

Nature and Its Preservation

Rupite is part of Natura 2000, listed under both the Birds Directive (Directive 79/409/EEC) and the Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC). One-hundred-and-forty-one species of birds have been found in the area, of which 33 are included in the Red Book of Bulgaria, and 63 are of European nature conservation importance. One can find olive tree warbler (Nippolais olivetorum), masked shrike (Lanius nubicus), lesser grey shrike (Lanius minor), and during seasonal migration and wintering the globally endangered pygmy cormorant (Phalacrocorax pygmaeus). In order to preserve the characteristic landscape of a natural riparian floodplain forest composed of white poplar, and due to the large concentration of birds during their migration along the traditional Via Aristotelis route, part of the area (20 ha) was declared protected in 1980. Within the frames of Rupite there are hot mineral springs, the area around which has been a sanitary protection zone since 2019. To the west, Rupite borders Kozhuh Hill, a natural landmark since 1962. The area of the hill is characterised by a large diversity of flora and fauna. Rare and endangered plant species included in the Red Book of Bulgaria have been established here: dragon lily (Dracunculus vulgaris), crown medick (Medicago coronata), hairy ironwort (Sideritis lanata), hairy plantain (Plantago bellardii), wild almond (Amygdalus webbii),

etc. The natural landmark status of Kozhuh is essential for the conservation of rare and protected amphibians and reptiles such as leopard snake (Elaphe situla), cat snake (Telescopus fallax), worm snake (Typhlops vermicularis), four-lined snake (Elaphe quatuorlineata), as well as Hermann's tortoise (Testudo hermanni) and Greek tortoise (Testudo graeca), all of which are included on the IUCN Red List.

As a subject of nature protection, the management and control of Rupite is divided between the Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water – Blagoevgrad, which has control over Rupite as part of Natura 2000, over the protected area of Rupite through Petrich State Forestry and over the natural landmark of Kozhuh, on the one hand, and, on the other, the Municipality of Petrich to which the hot mineral springs are granted for management and use by the Basin Directorate, although they are exclusively state property. However, there are no management plans for the protected areas within Rupite, and the exercising of control over them stirs up arguments between the various actors.

According to Petrich State Forestry, which manages the forest in the protected area, and to local ecologists, ornithologists and botanists the negative changes observed in Rupite are due to both natural processes and human influence. Global warming has a key role in the gradual extinction of a number of plant and animal species. The rise in temperatures is one of the main reasons for the drought in the area, which is the most important factor that practically destroys Rupite. The level of the Struma River is currently five metres lower than it was 40 years ago. Subterranean water is declining and animals withdraw. In the past over 100 pairs of bee-eaters (Merops apiaster) have nested in Rupite, while in 2021 only 10-15 pairs were registered. They mainly feed on dragonflies, but there are hardly any of them because there is no water. Due to the drought, the white poplar in the protected area is drying up, and the dried trees attract the local Roma community, whose illegal logging is a major problem for State Forestry officials. At the same time, as a result of the drought, the forest in the protected area is changing and new tree species appear (oak, acacia, ailanthus). One of the few activities the authorities perform to help preserve the protected territories within Rupite, apart from exercising control, is the Restoration of Priority Habitats of Riverside Wet Areas Type in the Protected Area of Rupite along the Birds' Migratory Route, Eco-corridor "Via Aristotelis" project (2012–2014). This project is funded to a total of almost one million leva and is aimed at white poplar afforestation. Regardless of the

experts' opinion that this is futile, white poplars were planted, although in fact they soon died because of the lack of water.

In the last few decades, human intervention has also contributed to change in Rupite. The drop in the level of Struma River is also a consequence of the extraction (according to some, unauthorised) of inert material from the riverbed. The mass year-round access of people (coming by cars and buses), which drives the animals away, is also a problem. The long-legged buzzard, which nested on Kozhuh, has not been seen for two years because there are regularly tourists on the hill. Another threat for Rupite are the domestic cats released into the area, which reproduce very quickly and are already present in the forest. Their population threatens animal species, as cats often kill for pleasure.

Against this background, representatives of the Forestry Department, as well as local ecologists, ornithologists and botanists take a rather interesting position regarding the growing tourism in Rupite: given that the area has already suffered for both natural and human reasons, at least make use of it. That is why they agree with the new construction of a spa centre (see section Hot Mineral Springs and Spa Tourism) and do not see a problem in the large number of people that Vanga's complex generates daily (see section The Cult of Vanga and Religious Tourism).

The Cult of Vanga and Religious Tourism

Today, Rupite is invariably associated with the famous prophetess Baba Vanga. She was born on October 3, 1911 in Strumica, in today's Republic of North Macedonia. A turning point in her life occurred when a 'tornado' allegedly lifted her into the air and threw her into a nearby field. The accident resulted in a gradual loss of sight and acquisition of abilities of clairvoyance. In 1942, Vanga married Dimitar Gushterov from Petrich, Bulgaria, and moved to live with him there. Soon after that she became well known and her house in the town of Petrich turned into a popular destination for a great number of people from across the country and even from abroad who sought help. Thus, Vanga began her 'career' as an alternative religious specialist[1]. After Vanga's death in 1996, the process of turning her into a 'folk' or 'living' saint[2] began in the region of Petrich and soon expanded in the whole country and even abroad.

The development of cult of Vanga has been a fact for quite some time. As the place of this cult stands out the locality of Rupite, which she considered very special, sacred[3] and energetic and where she went often to relax and energise. In 1994, Vanga built the St Petka of Bulgaria church, next to which two years later she was laid to rest. With the construction of the church and the subsequent creation of the complex around it, religious and pilgrimage tourism began to develop rapidly in Rupite. The complex was created and is managed by the Vanga Foundation, which became the main 'manager' of the developing cult of the prophetess. It is precisely because of this role that the Foundation is often at the centre of scandals that develop between the various parties claiming a close relationship with Vanga, all pretending to know the 'truth' about her and asserting their right to manage her legacy. Although most of the local people dislike the foundation, only few have a negative attitude towards the complex. According to them, Vanga did not own anything in Rupite. The municipality gave her permission to build a small house where she could rest, and later land for the construction of a church. After the construction of the church, Dimitar Valtchev, the alleged adopted son of Vanga and a prosecutor in Petrich at the time, established the Vanga Foundation, which managed to acquire more land in the area of the church and subsequently built the complex. The method of acquisition of the land is not entirely clear, which gives reason to opponents of the foundation to look for illegal actions on its part. The main part of these opponents are Vanga's relatives and people from her closest circle. They also question the authenticity of the words and 'prophecies' attributed to Vanga by the foundation as these prophecies are often used by the management of the complex to legitimise new initiative. An example is the stone cross consecrated in 2009, built on one of the slopes of Kozhuh, directly opposite the church. The cross was inaugurated on St Petka's Day (October 14), on the fifteenth anniversary of the construction of the church in Rupite. Its construction is considered a fulfilment of a previous instruction from Vanga. According to what Vanga is alleged to have said, during the eruption of the one-time Kozhuh volcano, the lava covered the ancient majestic city of Petra and took the lives of thousands of its inhabitants. In memory of this event, which happened on October 14, St Petka's Day, and the victims, the stone cross was erected. The cross is built in the frames of the Kozhuh natural landmark, outside the borders of the Foundation's property, which raises the question of how permission was obtained for it and to what extent it was in accordance with the prohibition regime. However,

since the construction of the cross is related to Vanga's will, most of the people never questioned the legality of its existence.

Hot Mineral Springs and Spa Tourism

The development of tourism in Rupite is also related to the hot mineral springs (75°C) in the area. For decades the water and the mud have been used by the local people for healing, although only in the last 20 years has the spring become popular with tourists, who arrive with tents and caravans. Due to the large number of people, and because there have been many complaints, in 2020 the Municipality of Petrich began to gradually 'refine' the area around the hot pools, putting up wooden fence, benches, changing cabins, lighting and video surveillance. About 20 years ago, the private Rupite Mineral Baths, which had several pools and a restaurant, was founded directly next to the pools. In 2017, a scandal broke out around the complex because allegedly it was operating illegally, without the necessary permits to use the mineral water and without a land lease. Although in 2018 Petrich's chief architect issued an order for the demolition of the complex, it still functions, and its owner states that by creating the baths he fulfilled Vanga's will.

In 2018, a local businessman got permission to build guesthouses and a spa centre within meters of Vanga's complex and the hot springs. The proposed new construction alarmed environmental organisations and the Save Rupite civil initiative and caused a wave of protests. According to environmentalists, the construction is illegal and threatens the habitats of plant and animal species, as well as the mineral springs. Protesters recall Vanga's alleged warnings that if you build near the mineral water, it will disappear. Despite the complaints before the competent authorities, eventually, in 2021, construction work began. Heavy construction equipment worked all day around the hot pools and enveloped tourists in clouds of dust, but surprisingly, at that very moment, the protests stopped as well as the media coverage. In reality, very few local people had participated in them, and among those present were mainly eco-activists from various organisations. According to the majority of my local respondents (especially those from the village of Rupite), the construction of the spa centre is a positive thing, because it will attract more tourists to the region. They consider the protests to have been initiated outside the local community

by environmental organisations doing someone else's bidding. According to some, behind the protests is a local businessman who also has aspirations to build a similar complex in the area.

Heraclea Sintica and Historical and Cultural Tourism

After the accidental discovery in 2002 in Rupite of a marble stela with an official letter from Emperor Galerius and Caesar Maximian Daya, dating to 308–309, cultural and historical tourism gradually developed in the area. Until this discovery there had been an assumption in science that the Middle Struma region was inhabited in ancient times by the Medes, a Thracian tribe. The city of Petrich was pointed out as the successor of the Thracian settlement of Petra, located by historians and archaeologists in the area of the Rupite village, at the southern foot of Kozhuh Hill. According to this hypothesis, the small Medes settlement was established in the 4th century BC. In the 1st century BC this was conquered by the Romans and turned into a well-fortified Roman city fortress, which guarded the middle course of the Struma River and Rupel Gorge. The city existed until the 6th century AD, when it was burned by the Slavs, after which the remaining living inhabitants left and settled at the foot of Belasitsa Mountain, thus establishing the present-day town of Petrich, the name of which is believed to have been formed by adding to the old name Petra the Slavic ending "-ich" (Milchev 1960: 362; Bachvarova 1999: 16).

The discovery and subsequent analysis of the text of the stela provide an impetus to examine the history and geography of the Middle Struma in a new light. On the site of the ancient settlement in the area of Rupite is located the city of Heraclea Sintica, which arose at the end of the 4th century BC in the Sintian tribal areas. During the time of Philip V (221–179 BC) Heraclea Sintica was permanently included within the Macedonian Kingdom until it was conquered by the Romans in 167 BC (Mitrev 2005: 263–272; Ivanov 2016). The settlement probably ceased to exist sometime around the 6th century AD after raids by the Slavs. So far, however, the assumption that the inhabitants of the ancient city who remained alive moved to the foot of Belasitsa Mountain and laid the foundation for the present-day city of Petrich, is not based on serious arguments.

Despite the new data from the archaeological surveys, the old story of Petra continues to prevail as the most common narrative. Today it can be heard in various variants among the majority of the inhabitants of the region. According to the narrative, during the eruption of the one-time volcano, lava covered the ancient majestic city of Petra and took the lives of thousands of inhabitants, described as tall, large, unusually enlightened and religious. In support of the extraordinary stature of the city's former inhabitants, local people who participated as general labourers in excavations in the late 1980s tell of the discovery of a 2,500-year-old skeleton of a man over 2.10 m tall. Among those more familiar with the new scientific hypotheses, this skeleton is associated with the story of the two sons of Philip V, Perseus and Demeter, the latter extremely large. Towards the end of their father's life, the two brothers began to contend for power. Perseus organised a religious feast in the city in Rupite, at which he planned to poison Demeter. After the poisoning attempt failed, he ordered his brother suffocated with a pillow. Thus, Demeter died and was buried in the former city at the foot of Kozhuh Hill. Another story, popular among local people and especially among treasure hunters, tells of a golden horse buried somewhere on top of the Hill.

A closer look at the available scientific information about the region, at individual local stories and legends, and at the 'testimonies' of Vanga's stories and prophecies disseminated through various electronic and printed publications shows that the prophetess's words sanction scientific facts in the minds of people, confirm various legends and are interpreted in different ways, often adapting to actual events or to existing legendary stories (see Periklieva & Hristov 2017). Vanga's prophecies legitimise the story of the ancient city of Petra, inhabited by large people in shining clothes who perished under the lava of an erupting volcano. Vanga told of a great golden horse that stood before the entrance to a majestic temple towering atop Kozhuh Hill. In an attempt to popularise the results of their work, even among archaeologists and historians working in the region, there is a tendency to resort to the name of Vanga.

The socialisation of Heraclea Sintica is a priority for the Municipality of Petrich in order to develop tourism in the region. In 2020, an asphalt road was built from the Rupite village turnoff to the archaeological site. There is also a plan to build an asphalt road that will connect Heraclea Sintica with the Vanga complex and the mineral springs. However, after a protest by environmental protection organisations and the Save Rupite civil initiative, construction was

stopped and the district prosecutor's office in Blagoevgrad was involved. According to environmentalists, the construction of the road will destroy a number of endangered species by disrupting their habitats.

Conclusion

As the presentation above shows, Rupite is being constructed as a multi-layered landscape of sacred, cultural, historical and natural significance, on which different actors draw to develop various forms of tourism: religious, cultural and historical, spa. The connection of Rupite with the image of Vanga following the prophetess' attachment to the place, the construction of St Petka of Bulgaria church and the complex around it, changes the way the locality is perceived and thought of by local people and how it is presented to tourists. This inextricable connection, linking the image of the prophetess with Rupite, leads us to think about the locality as an extremely sacred place in which Vanga and sacrality form the main layer of the landscape. The rest of the elements (cultural, historical and natural) characterising the landscape, on the one hand serve as additional 'evidence' of the sacrality, and on the other, win recognition by means of the image of Vanga. Each actor related to Rupite constructs the place in a specific manner. However, all of them use one main mechanism and draw symbolic capital (and thus legitimise their positions and activities, even though they are often contradictory) from one main source, the image of Vanga, which is inextricably linked to Rupite and has proven dominant among the constellation of natural, cultural, historical, etc., elements at this site. As seen above, the image of the prophetess is present in one way or another in the representation of all layers of the landscape of Rupite. Her commands and prophecies legitimise construction (such as the Rupite Mineral Baths or the cross on Kozhuh Hill) or serve as grounds on which to demand that construction be stopped (such as the new spa complex). Vanga's words can also be used to sanction or reject in people's minds scientific facts and local legends. Often this use of her image leads to controversy. For example, despite the existing conflicting opinions about the Vanga Foundation and its attempts to monopolise the cult of Vanga, in general none of the local people questions the sanctity of the place around the church of the prophetess or the appropriateness in terms of nature preservation of her cult being located in Rupite. Although there were protests

against building the spa centre near the hot pools, the actors in which resorted to the prophetess' warnings, no one grumbled at the construction of Vanga's complex, on which territory there are also several puddles. Yet, Vanga herself defined the area as highly energetic and wished to build a temple. Some of my interlocutors – ornithologists and botanists – even expressed the opinion that since much of the land the foundation owns is fenced off and inaccessible, the flora and fauna within it remain protected for the time being. Thus, for the local community the sacred image of Vanga is incompatible with a possible negative influence on Rupite.

As can be seen, the construction of Rupite as a landscape and a tourist destination is mainly happening from the bottom up, through separate initiatives of different actors, rather than following a certain vision or development plan created by the responsible institutions. Since the locality falls within the framework of the Municipality of Petrich, the main institutional initiative should come from this institution. Although in its Municipal Development Plan for the 2014–2020 period (Obshtinski plan 2013) the Municipality of Petrich recognised Rupite's potential to develop various forms of tourism and aims to integrate the various historical and natural landmarks in the municipality within a general tourist product, the action and/or inaction of the Municipality largely contradicts what is formulated. In fact, the Municipality's main priority in terms of tourism development in Rupite and across its territory is the Heraclea Sintica archaeological site. Thus, for example, although there is a Vanga house museum in the town of Petrich, managed by the Municipality, it has for years failed to find a way to work with the Vanga Foundation and the Rupite complex so as to integrate the two sites into one common religious tourist route that would attract the people flocking to the prophetess's church. In the Environmental Protection Program for the 2020–2024 period (Programa 2020), the Municipality links the protection and management of protected areas and the biological diversity of Rupite with the development of balneological and ecotourism. Although this is formulated as a specific goal in the plan, the activity of the Municipality is mainly limited to the improvement of the area around the hot springs. Belying the assertion of West, Igoe and Brockington (2006: 262) that "[e]cotourism enterprises are symbiotic with protected areas. If there is a protected area, some form of ecotourism likely uses it", although there are various forms of nature protection in the area of Rupite, the development of ecotourism (or nature-based tourism) exists only on paper.

There aren't even any bottom-up initiatives. This fits in with Lawenthal's assertion that most people identify more easily with cultural heritage than with nature, hence local people are more inclined to support the preservation of the former (Lowenthal 2005: 86). In this sense, every effort of the responsible institutions to convince the local population of the importance and benefits of the protected status of their surroundings usually also involves their cultural heritage. However, this is not the case in Rupite.

Notes

[1] The term is used by sociologists and anthropologists and describes an intermediary between man and the divine realm who thinks himself and is regarded as such by various social groups or communities, but who, as a rule, is outside the institution that holds a monopoly over this mediation, i.e. the church (Valtchinova 2002a: 24–25; Valchinova 2002b: 91–92; cf. Christian 1973).

[2] This term generally refers to alternative religious specialists who are venerated as saints after death, but without official canonisation by the church. During their lifetime, these people have the gift of contacting the other world and thus healing or performing miracles. After their death, they continue to function as mediators between man and the divine realm, and it is believed that they can intervene directly in people's lives, thus becoming their active advocate before God and their helper in times of crisis. This leads to the transformation of these people into objects of mass veneration, around which cults form (Ivanov & Izmirlieva 2000; Romano 1965: 1157–1158, Graziano 2006: 9–77).

[3] Allegedly, Vanga often said that three churches from "the old times", dedicated to St Petka, the Virgin Mary and St Pantaleon, once existed in Rupite. Today, the story is quite popular among local people, some locating the old church of St Petka on the site of today's church of Vanga.

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Life by the Lake: The Lubana Region, Its People, Culture and Contemporary Ecosystem

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Abstract: This article is about the coexistence of people and lakes, about responsibility for lakes, and about the consequences of people interfering with the natural processes of nature. Part of the framework of this research is the governance process of surface water resources in Latvia, particularly public lakes, which the authors studied using a three-dimensional governance framing model of complementary dimensions of governance stakeholders, governance content, and governance instruments in order to determine how lakes are governed and how this governance affects local culture. In addition, and following on from this, we looked at what role culture has in lake and public water governance. Lake Lubans was selected for this research, as it is Latvia's largest lake, its area containing an important Natura 2000 protected site, the Lubana wetland complex, in addition to the fact that the region has been inhabited since the Neolithic era. Lake Lubans is governed

by several national institutions, led by the Nature Conservation Agency, as the lake is located in a protected area, with the Ministry of Agriculture being responsible for the governance of the lake dam system and control of farmland around the lake. The territory of the Lake Lubans wetlands was one of the first campgrounds of ancient people in Europe after the retreat of the glaciers, which also determines its importance in the history and culture of Latvia and Europe.

Lake governance is almost solely focused on nature and environmental protection, with economic and social aspects needing to be considered, and residents and other stakeholders needing to be sufficiently involved in governance. Currently, their interests have yet to be considered. Overall, lake governance needs to be improved from this perspective. Lake Lubans and the Lubana wetland complex have not had a mandatory governance plan since 2009, being developed. However, this plan is again missing the governance dimensions mentioned above.

We also found that nature communication and nature tourism are not only potential lake/nature governance sectors but, if properly developed, would be valuable lake governance instruments, maintaining stakeholders' participation while supporting national organisations.

Keywords: Mesolithic and Neolithic settlements, lake governance, socio-ecological system, local traditions, triple governance dimensions model

Introduction. The aim and tasks of the research

For thousands of years, people have lived by Lake Lubans, forming a complex relationship with the lake over this time. Like the ebb and flow of the lake water, this relationship has had its ups and downs: people tried not only to live with the lake but also to subjugate its nature to their own needs, so much so that in recent centuries this largest lake in Latvia is dying and people, realising the consequences of their actions, now have to perform the much more difficult task of saving the lake. As it turns out, this task is more complex because various interests clash and opinions on the way to save the lake and the future life of people living on its shores often differ significantly.

This research aimed to provide a brief insight into the history of relations between Lake Lubans and the people who lived near it, the traditions that grew out of these relations. We also aim to investigate the governance system of the Lubana wetland region, if any, by using an Environmental Governance triple-dimension model. This mdel is adapted for lake and public water management,n

order to assess the current situation regarding the governance of the Lake and the wetland. We also investigating the possibilities for improving the current governance system - what resources are lacking and what stakeholders are present in the region and have not yet been involved in its governance (Ernsteins et al. 2017a; Ernsteins et al. 2017b).

Therefore, one of the tasks of this research was to recognise the main activities and interests of all administrative levels and all socio-economical systems (SES) sector stakeholders. Our aim was to study the complex governance situation of the Lake Lubans, apply the SES approach and governance instruments based analysis frame to facilitate a lake governance framework, which we would use to determine how effectively the lake and wetland are governed, and what, if anything, could have been done differently.

The overall goal of the research was to investigate the culture of the people of the Lubana region and how their culture was affected by the damming of the lake.

The tasks of this research were:

1. Investigation of the history of the lake and its people.

2. Investigation of the culture of the Lubana region inhabitants.

3. Investigation of the changes promoted by the damming of the lake and subsequent changes in regional nature.

Research methods

Case Study Research methodology was applied in the Lake Lubans region using the methods outlined below.

Document studies. Historical materials and research results from archaeological excavations as well as periodicals and legislation regarding the lake over the last 150 years were analysed. The aim was to discover how life was for the inhabitants of the ancient settlements near Lake Lubans and how those lives changed after the lake was dammed. In addition, local life up to that point was analysed along with regional economics and how fields like this changed over time.

Documents about the lake and wetland governance, local administration, and governance of historical and cultural sites, including archaeological dig sites, were also analysed. Governance and planning documents were inves-

tigated at the municipal and national levels that related to lake and wetland governance and to the governance and ownership of culturally and historically significant territories and/or objects such as manor houses, dig sites, monuments, and other similar objects.

Structured interviews. Ninety-nine stakeholder interviews with representatives of six groups – Residents, municipalities, national governance institutions, mediators (NGOs, schools, museums, and media), national experts (archaeologists, environmental specialists) and other groups (tourists, entrepreneurs, etc.) – were performed. The interviews included questions about the governance of the lake and wetlands, local culture, customs, and residents' opinions on the current state of the lake and wetlands. The interviews primarily focused on investigating residents' views on governance, local customs, and how damming the lake has affected the local lifestyle.

In total, 14 municipal representatives, 24 national institution representatives, 16 mediator representatives, 16 local entrepreneurs, 17 residents, and 12 out-of-region experts were interviewed. Of the 99 respondents, aged from 35 to 65, 58 were women. Thirty-eight in-depth interviews were performed, and there were 61 express interviews. Express interviews were no longer than 10-15 minutes, while the in-depth interviews were over an hour long.

Interviews were pre-planned and were primarily based on convenience rather thana particular methodology. Respondents were selected in advance based on their membership in stakeholder groups and participation in municipal affairs. For example, residents were chosen from those who were actively involved in the planning and enactment of municipal governance plans and related topics. Most respondents were part of several stakeholder groups, as municipality and state-institution representatives were both residents and entrepreneurs.

The interviews were performed on behalf of the Latvian Nature Conservation Agency in connection with the study on the management of Lake Lubans and the associated wetlands. The purpose of the study was to investigate the current management of the territory and the opinion of the residents on the situation, and to develop recommendations for the development of the lake and wetland nature protection plan (Latvian Nature Foundation 2023). Questions such as "What do you think about nature conservation restrictions?" and "What do you think about recreation options near the lake?" were included. The interviews are archived but not publicly available due to privacy constraints.

The interviews are archived but not publicly available due to privacy con-straints and data protection laws, and as such, detailed information about the interviewees is not publishable. The interviewed individuals who will be referred to in this publication are therefore defined as A (Male, 50 years old, municipal employee) B (Female, 50 years old, teacher), C (Male, 30 years old, local nature expert), D (Female, approx. 70 years old, guest house owner), and E (Female, around 30 years old, tourist information centre employee).

Lake infrastructure (recreation, hydro-technical, etc.) and coastal obser-vation. Lake Lubans was visually inspected, and the state of recreation infra-structure and other essential objects, such as guest houses, was studied. Local tourism information centres were visited to evaluate the amount of information about the lake they had (including about local culture) and what other capaci-ties these centres provide.

Intangible cultural heritage research using embodied observation methods. Lo-cal customs, including culinary customs, beliefs, traditions, and cultural events, were investigated. The inhabitants of the Lubana region have unique customs and traditions, such as fish smoking and haymaking, which had formed over time due to the fishing lifestyle and lake influences such as floods.

Basic information about Lake Lubans

Lake Lubans is the largest lake in Latvia, with an area of 82.1 km² (Kalniņa 2022). Its catchment basin is also vast, having an area of 2,040 km². The lake is close in size to Latvia's capital, Riga.. The lake belongs to the Daugava River basin and is connected to the Aiviekste River. Historically, Lubans had more rivers feeding it, but most rivers have disappeared over time and the lake has grown much smaller since it was dammed – most of the Lubana wetland was originally part of the lake bed (Figure 2, Figure 3).

Lake Lubans is located in the Lubana Plain on the border of Rezekne and Madona counties (Figure 2, Figure 3). Around the lake are four parishes, Barkava and Osupe in Madona County and Nagli and Gaigalava in Rezekne County (Kalniņa 2022, Figure 2, Figure 3). The lake basin includes the Lubana Wetland complex, one of Latvia's most significant protected territories and a Natura 2000 site (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Lake Lubans. Photo from the website of Madona Municipality https://www.madona.lv/lat/aktualitates-novada?fu=read&id=9949.

The lake formed more than 12,000 years ago and was originally three times its current size (Kalniņa 2022). It has gradually shrunk due to reduced water flow and the accumulation of organic material in the lake. Lubans formed initially as a lagoon of the one of predecessors of the Baltic Sea, and the area is rich in amber. Most hills in the area are formed out of dunes (Kalniņa 2022).

The lake was long ago the largest inland source of fish in the country, although it is currently essential at the regional rather than the national level. Idena village in Rezekne County is Latvia's only inland fishing settlement. There were initially many more, but they were abandoned or changed their source of income as the lake grew smaller, fishing harvests were reduced, and farming became easier.

Lubans is the only lake in the country with a large beach area, similar to those found on the Baltic coast, which makes it a popular recreation area during the summer. Having said this, the lake has only one good swimming area as the encroachment of vegetation limits opportunities (Konkovs et al. 2022: 192). The lake has one of Europe's largest water level regulation systems, with few lakes

in Northern Europe, or Europe in general, having a comparatively extensive network of polders, pumps or sluices, and few lakes in Europe are thoroughly dammed (Kalniņa 2022).

The dam system is also the primary cause of many of the lake's issues, as it prevents natural water flow and no fish paths are established. This has resulted in the lake quite rapidly transforming into a swamp. At the same time, the fish population is almost entirely maintained by human activity, and current fish species have changed so that the lake is now dominated by carp-like fishes (Ezeri. lv 2023). In contrast, salmon-like fishes that prefer oxygen-rich water are no longer commonly found in Lubans (Ezeri.lv 2023). The lake also suffers from increasing volumes of reeds, and municipalities have difficulties clearing them as they lack funding and other necessary resources (Kalniņa 2022; Konkovs *et al.* 2022: 192).
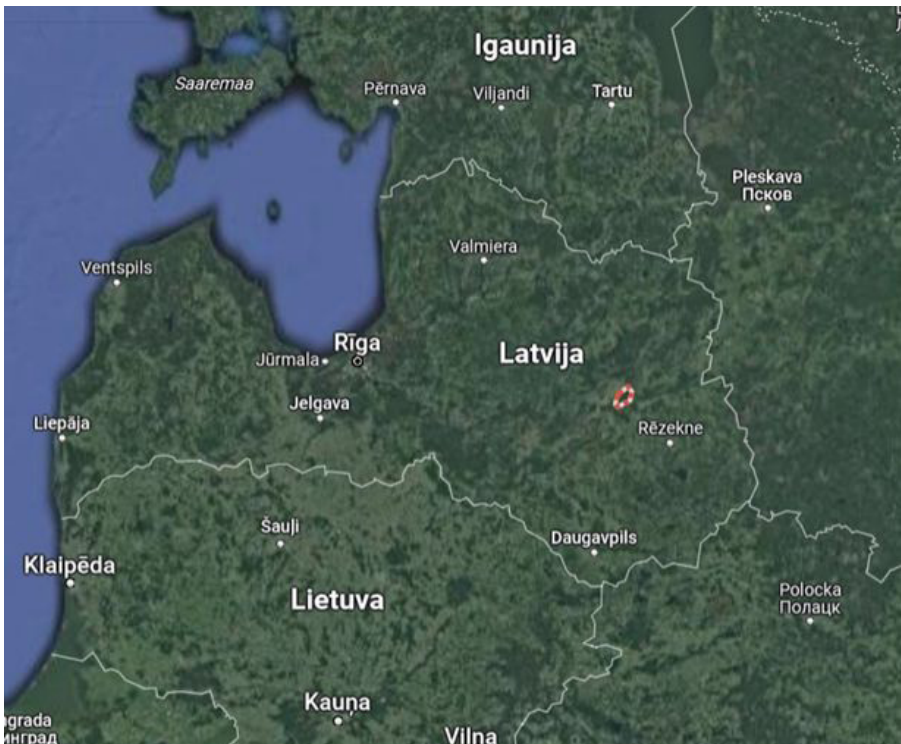
Figure 2. The Location of Lake Lubans in Latvia. Image taken from Google Maps. The lake area is highlighted in red.

The area around the lake is different depending on the coast. The north coast is covered with marshes, agricultural land, and forests, while the southern coast contains large fish ponds and farms (Figure 3). The Madona (north) side has the most farmland in the region. In contrast, the Rezekne (south) side is traditionally the area's fishing and recreational centre, and the lake beach is located in Rezekne municipality. Forests cover more of the Madona side, making it more challenging to navigate during winter as the woods limit visibility and significantly increase the risk of running into wild animals (Latvian Nature Foundation 2023).

The territory near Lake Lubans is sparsely populated; there are relatively few roads near the lake, and even fewer leading directly to it. The roads are often based on the dams surrounding and partially crossing the lake; most are old and worn out. Visibility during winter is limited, especially in the region's northern area. Furthermore, many places near the lake are not connected to the road network and are only accessible by boat or foot (Konkovs et al. 2022:199).
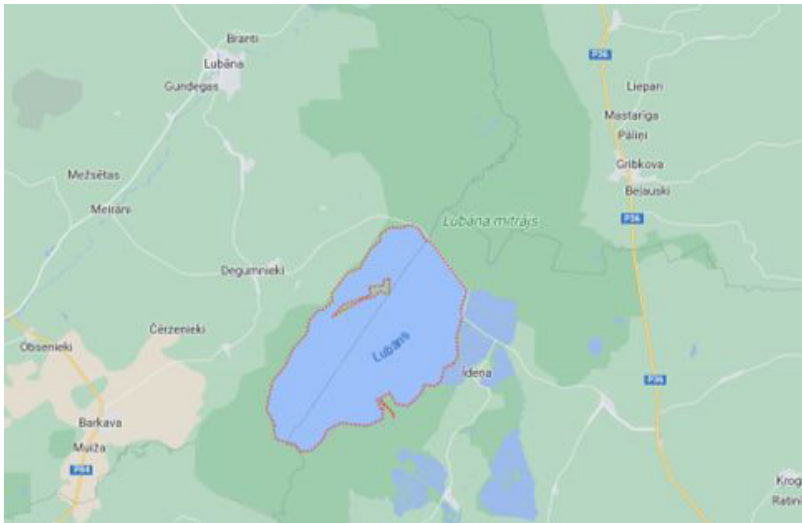
Figure 3. Map of Lake Lubans's surroundings. Image taken from Google Maps.
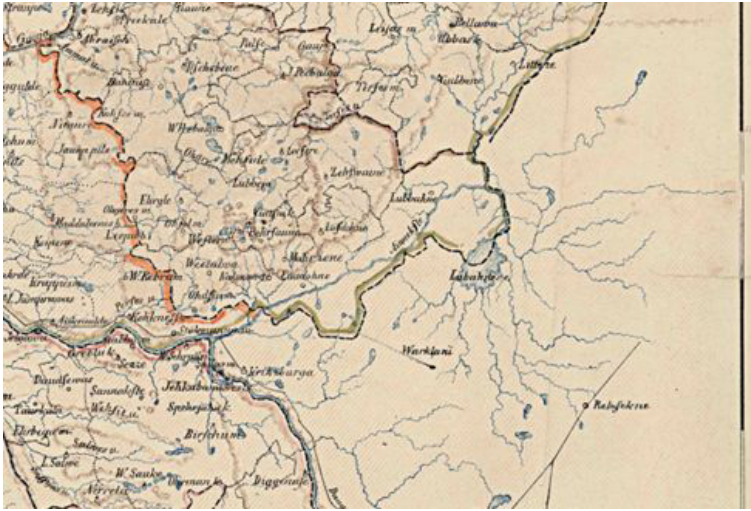
Figure 4. Lake Lubans on an 1859 map of Latvia. From the National Library of Latvia collection.

The history of the relationship between people and the lake

The territory of the Lake Lubans wetlands was one of the first campgrounds for ancient people in Europe after the retreat of the glaciers. After the exploration and excavation work in the Lake Lubans wetlands, realised over an extended period from 1962 to 1999, from 2007 to 2009, and from 2011 to 2012, the archaeological map of this territory has gradually had 27 Mesolithic and Neolithic settlements added. Archaeological excavations have been carried out in 18 of the 27. As a result, the Lake Lubans wetlands were found to have been inhabited as early as 9230-8230 BC (for more see Loze 2015).

Archaeological findings show two types of settlement, those with sedentary year-round occupation and those with seasonal occupation. The artefacts found make it possible to create a relatively clear picture of the lifestyle of the inhabitants of these settlements, their economic activities and social relations. The artefacts also witness how the people who inhabited these settlements formed their relationship with the lake. Thus, the study of the settlements allows the

conclusion that the location and specificity of the way of life were directly related to cycles of transgressive and regressive changes in the lake's water level.

The people near the lake learned not only to live with the lake but also to use its specificities to their advantage. Thus, the sedentary lifestyle gradually transitioned to the introduction of farming as an economic regime. We can assume that this transition was partly facilitated by the developing understanding that, for example, the sapropel that remains on lake and river shores after the flood cycle is a valuable fertiliser.

However, large areas suitable for agriculture could only be partially used due to floods, in addition to rising water levels, which could destroy people's residences. For centuries, the inhabitants of the lake's shores adapted to the lake's rhythm, considering the problems that this coexistence created. Thus, most settlements in the region are located on hills, which became islands during flooding.

Memories of this relationship are preserved in several folk tales about Lake Lubans, which belong to a larger group of Latvian stories about flying lakes. For example, one of these tales reminds us of a past event when an ancient lake was looking for a new place to live. The lake rose into the air and flew straight to a lovely area with houses, like a prosperous town. One day, while washing clothes by the river, young girls saw a big cloud. One of the girls called its name, and it fell to the ground, drowning the entire river valley. But the girls – because they guessed the name of the lake – were thrown ashore and remained alive (Balss 1888: 6).

Geological surveys and available historical materials show that at the beginning of the 20th century, the lake level still rose to 2.5 metres, and the area covered by water increased eightfold. It took about 270 days for the lake to return to its normal level. The damage to agriculture caused by floods was the main reason for the radical human intervention in the lake's natural ecosystem at the end of the 19th century and during the 20th century, especially during the Soviet era. Thus, in the 19th century, several canals and dams were built in the Lake Lubans wetlands to mitigate flooding. Wealthy nobles organised the digging of the first canal under the leadership of Baron Wolff in 1848. Digging the trench took three years at the rate of five kilometres per year. However, this canal, named the Meiranu Canal, turned out to be too narrow and too shallow for the natural current (Zukova 1992: 13).

Figure 5. Floods in Lubana in the 1920s. Photo by Alfreds Gravers from the Madona Museum of Regional History and Art collection.

In 1922, the bed of the Aiviekste River was widened, deepened and straightened. As a result of this transformation, the size of Lake Lubans decreased from 100 to 25 square kilometres during periods of low water, and reeds and swamps formed where the lake once was. The digging of canals and the construction of locks and dams continued even during the Soviet era. At that time, a fish farm was established in Nagli with ponds covering 3,200 hectares. "When all the main transformation works of the lake and its lowland were finished, the dying lake was inundated as it was – with trees, islands, and islets covered with bushes, trees, and reeds… This is how the history of Lake Lubans pollution began. Everything was missing: money, energy resources, working hands, equipment, will – in a word, there was a different way of thinking" (Zukova 1992: 13). Now only the older inhabitants of the vicinity near the lake remember its clear blue water.

What is happening with the lake now?

After the lake was dammed, many newer settlements were built much closer as flooding became rarer. Nevertheless, despite the 20th-century flood-limiting canal and dam system, the region around the lake is still subject to frequent flooding, affecting local settlements and people, with much of the lake area being covered in water. The last major flood was in 2016. It affected most of the agricultural land around the lake, with the Rezekne side losing most farms and loss of crops and property damage. Unfortunately, the farms went bankrupt because of limited government assistance in recovery from the floods.

At the same time, as the lake becomes smaller due to human activity, several settlements initially established in areas near the lake that were protected during floods have become significantly farther away from the lake. Many former coastal towns, such as Lubana, are now found kilometres from the lake, although centuries ago they were fishing villages.

However, people living near the lake, as well as those living further away, agree that Lake Lubans is subject to severe overgrowth, regular but minor suffocation of fish, and overall there has been lake and area degradation due to damming. As described above, the damming was intended to limit floods in the area. However, it needed to be better thought out. Instead, it functionally turned the largest lake in Latvia into a massive pond, which no longer has a natural flow of water. The river inlets and outlets connected to the lake were mainly overgrown, and fish paths were destroyed.

The fish population has also reduced in both number and quality, as there are limited means for fish to replenish their population. Fish growth is mainly supported by artificial means, as severed river connections mean no fish paths exist. Furthermore, the fish population is declining as fishers, hobby anglers, and birds overconsume. Fish-eating birds, in addition to fishers and anglers, have also affected the variety of fish species, and in only 50 years the fish population has almost completely changed. Initially, the lake had salmon and other similar fishes, but now, carp, tench, and zander are the most common (Latvian Nature Foundation 2023).

The flood control system has also created other problems. Thus, due to nature conservation restrictions and cost, most farmers must use more fertiliser to avoid depleting the soil. Previously, floods provided nutrients necessary for

soil fertility directly from the lake. Therefore, since the damming, agricultural productivity has reduced, as artificial fertilisers are less effective than lake biomass, and the usage of such fertilisers is strictly regulated. All regional farms are therefore functionally eco-farms (Konkovs et al. 2022: 192, 195).

As a result of the factors described above, almost half of the villages around the lake have been abandoned as they could no longer support themselves or were absorbed into larger settlements over time. Because many of the former settlements were fishing villages, as the lake shrunk, it moved away and thus, the villages lost their traditional business. Farming communities, in turn, could no longer afford to grow crops due to the region becoming swampland and to the decrease in the fertility of the land or because of nature conservation restrictions (Konkovs et al. 2022: 194).

About governance of Lake Lubans and its wetlands

Governance is defined as everything managed in the region relating to the lake and the municipalities in the area, including culture and economics. In the case of the governance of Lake Lubans and its region, too much emphasis has been placed on the protection and governance of nature and the environment, as the region consists mainly of protected areas, but at the expense of socio-economic sectors, which have been largely overlooked (Konkovs et al. 2022: 191, 192). Local economic areas, such as farming, fishing and lumber harvesting, need more support, and overall regional economics stagnates. The education and cultural sectors are well developed, but infrastructure, recreation, and other areas of socio-economic governance must be developed appropriately and sufficiently when governing the region (Konkovs et al. 2022: 193, 194).

Tourism in the region is mainly focused on nature and recreation, as the area lacks alternative development options as a result of limited support from national organisations and difficulties in accessing many essential objects, such as archaeological dig sites, which lack proper access roads or are located in swamps, preventing tourists (or locals) from visiting (Kalniņa 2022).

In the case of the Lubana region, most governance instruments are institutional (organisations that perform governance) and infrastructure instruments (such as lake dams). Most groups of instruments are used, although the communication and finances still need to be improved, while planning tools are only

now being adequately developed. Therefore, the most active target groups are the state administration and local municipality groups. In contrast, residents and other target groups (including tourists) must be sufficiently involved and represented (Konkovs et al. 2022: 198-200).

Figure 6. Recreational trail bridge at the Lubana wetland TIC. Photo by Karlis A. Konkovs.

Lake Lubans is currently governed not by a single organisation but by several: The Nature Conservation Agency of Latvia, which oversees the lake and protected areas; The State Environmental Services, which regulates the usage of natural resources and pollution; the Ministry of Agriculture, which is responsible for fishing quotas and controls the hydro-technical infrastructure; and the local municipalities, which develop local parishes and are responsible for the infrastructure of swimming areas, roads. In addition, local municipalities

suggest changes in fishing quotas, and have some input on who manages and protects cultural and heritage sites. These groups formally govern the lake together, but their cooperation could be improved as each group has its own duties and there are conflicts of interest relating to the lake and who controls what exactly (Konkovs et al. 2022: 196). Resources of any kind that could be used for governance are also minimal, and only a few specialists are able to find employment managing the lake or wetland. Most of the tasks that professionals should perform are instead performed mainly by local volunteers, as national institutions and municipalities lack personnel. Apart from the NCA, most governing organisations are not directly involved in managing the lake area or wetland (Konkovs et al. 2022: 197, 198).

The lake's area has only two information centres immediately beside the lake, the Lubana Wetland Information Centre in Osupe, Madona municipality, and the Lighthouse Water Tourism Development Centre in Gaigalava, Rezekne municipality. Other regional-level information centres are around 50 km from the lake, located in the closest towns and cities. However, most of these information centres have limited information about the lake and local nature and even less knowledge about local culture (Konkovs et al. 2022: 200).

The Wetland TIC is the primary source of information on the region's nature and on Lake Lubans. The centre has a wide range of tourist information, especially about nature tourism and bird watching. It also organises guided wetland walks and education events, trains bird watchers, and holds lectures in local schools. The centre also accommodates tourists, organises recreation events, participates in planning work, and mediates between municipalities, state institutions, and local inhabitants regarding the lake and wetland. The centre therefore serves both as a mediator and a valuable planning instrument for tourism and environmental protection, representing a wide range of target groups. The centre is located in Osupe and is close to the border of Rezekne and Madona municipalities, next to one of the dams (Latvian Nature Foundation 2023).

The Lighthouse Water Tourism Centre is located in the Rezekne district and was founded initially to popularise and develop water tourism in the region. The centre is almost next to Lubana Beach in a cleverly rebuilt pumping station, and its entire area was adapted to provide good recreation opportunities. The centre is near the Kvapanu fish ponds and is popular among bird watchers. Initially, the centre was managed by local governments. However, for various

reasons, it was leased to a private company, which is still developing the vision of the centre's future operation. Within municipal administration, the centre offered many recreation opportunities and organised lake and bird-watching events. Under the management of the current owners, the centre continues this work although on a much more limited basis. The centre no longer operates during the winter, and its functionalities as an information centre are reduced (Latvian Nature Foundation 2023).

Regarding the recreation opportunities available to residents and tourists, it should also be noted that the Lubana region has one beach in Gaigalava and a half-dozen small guesthouses, including the two mentioned lakeside information centres. Furthermore, one of the guest houses also serves as an unofficial information centre for bird watchers. Apart from this, recreation options and infrastructure are limited, and residents and visitors often complain about the quality of infrastructure, with beach and bird-watching infrastructure needing extensive improvement and repair (Latvian Nature Foundation 2023).

In the region, berries and mushrooms are actively collected (an additional source of livelihood for the poorest inhabitants), hunting is organised, quotas set and administered, and angling is practised in the lake throughout the year. Hunting collectives operate in every parish and include inhabitants from other regions. Nature walks and birdwatching are popular, and the Wetland TIC and Stikani guest houses act as centres for local birdwatchers. Birdwatchers can observe many birds, including eagles, living or feeding in and around the lake's wetlands (Latvian Nature Foundation 2023).

Near Lubans are the Teirumnieku nature trail and Idena Castle Hill, and there are several old churches in the villages near the lake. Some archaeological sites, such as the Abora Neolithic settlement, can also be visited by tourists, although most are not accessible. Apart from guesthouses and churches and a few tourist and recreation facilities, most of the lake's tourist attractions are not accessible outside of the summer season, as there are few good roads, and there is little for tourists to see or do near the lake during winter. Tourism is mainly developed by municipalities and residents (Latvian Nature Foundation 2023). Cultural tourism would be a beneficial solution to the need for more regional visitors, as this sector has a huge unused potential.

Tourism in the region has become a crucial economic and governance sector, partly as a way for locals to preserve their way of life and regional nature, and to earn reliable income, as nature conservation regulations make alterna-

tive forms of business, such as farming, somewhat tricky. In contrast, other businesses, such as lumber harvesting, are almost impossible. Tourism uses local cultural, historical, and natural values (such as the wetland) in a way that provides the most benefit. However, tourism development has sometimes been thoughtless, as it was developed independently by various residents, parishes and municipalities (Latvian Nature Foundation 2023).

The involvement of target groups in the tourism sector is different because residents, people in business, and tourists are more active in this area. In contrast, local and national administrative structures must be adequately involved in governing tourism (Latvian Nature Foundation 2023).

Tourism stakeholders are shared mainly with overall regional governance, although they include more active involvement from residents and their representative organisations (such as NGOs) and the owners of local guest houses, recreation centres, and other entrepreneurs who profit from more customers or whose services are directly tied to supporting visitors to the region (vehicle renters, banks, etc.). The municipal segment was also actively involved, as the Rezekne and Madona municipalities have tourism departments. However, the national segment is barely affected, with only the Latvian State Forests being properly interested because of their own nature trail (the Teirumnieki nature trail) and its associated infrastructure. In contrast, other national-level interest groups are involved as part of regional governance rather than out of interest in developing tourism (Latvian Nature Foundation 2023).

How the lake and its transformations have influenced local life and customs

Due to the transformations in Lake Lubans during the 20th century, the traditional lifestyle of people who live by the lake has become endangered, as many of the residents' traditional occupations have been impaired in many ways. Moreover, they have difficulties adapting in such a relatively short time to the rapid changes that happened with the lake – the lake was dammed just a few generations ago, and the consequences are only now visible more clearly. For example, local fisher village culture and culinary customs have been well-preserved, although changes in the lake make it difficult for them to be as common as they were historically. However, the cultural-historical memories

of living with the lake and adapting to its nature can still be seen at every step that an interested observer takes in this area. Most local customs, including those related to weddings, are tied to the lake, and there are many other folk tales and legends about it.

Here are some examples of such customs

Specific house-building traditions can be seen in the homes of older residents. Local people built elevated homes to limit flooding indoors. Roofs were often made from lake reeds (many still make such roofs today), and windows were not placed facing the lake to preserve heat during winters as the wind gained momentum on the lake and could cause a loss of warmth; windows could even break during storms. Buildings were typically built using locally available materials.

Locals often kept boats at home to use as transport during floods. Until the lake was dammed, boat crafting was an everyday activity in the region; today the craft is still alive, although much less widely practised.

The local people have also preserved other craft traditions because, living by the lake, most settlements had to be self-sufficient. On the other hand, from ancient times, it was also clear that anything that could not be locally made had to be obtained through trade, exchanging products made on the settlement for what was needed. Thus, there is speculation that one of the two Neolithic amber processing centres in the eastern Baltic area was in the Lake Lubans wetlands. The artifacts found by archaeologists prove that amber was exchanged for high-quality flint from the region of the Volga River, where they mainly collaborated with the inhabitants of Valdai Hills. Amber pendants from Lubans were also found in the Kukarkoskena cemetery, 18 km north of the Turkish city of the same name (Loze 2015: 248-249). Today, the ancient Amber Road has acquired new contours.

People near the lake developed native cuisine that revolved around fish (smoked or in soups) and local farmland produce. Locals also have their own fish-smoking recipes and traditions.

In 2018, the documentary film Lubans for Latvia: Then and Now was made as part of the project under the same name (Jātniece 2018). The film reflects the history of the damming of Lake Lubans during the Soviet era. It includes photo and film archive materials and the stories of people who lived before the

damming and after. This filmconveys a message about how these people feel the closeness of Lubans in their everyday lives and what their, and other local inhabitants', thoughts, feelings, future predictions, and perspectives are. Their stories testify that local inhabitants developed a deep reverence for the lake over the centuries, as it was their primary source of sustenance (through fishing and fertilising farmland) and their main threat, as flooding could devastate large areas and isolate settlements often for most of the year. This resulted in locals having a much greater appreciation of nature and the local region. In their perception, the lake is a living being with a character and soul that can hurt people when it is harmed. Therefore, many perceive what has been done to the lake as their own pain. As Velta Dragune, one of the film's heroines, whose house was once on the shore of the lake, said: "What good is there? The good is bad".

The future of the lake and its wetlands

Although the Lake Lubans dam system is an important achievement of European hydro-technical infrastructure, the people who live on its shore, and many experts such as local birdwatchers and historians from the University of Latvia believe that the lake has changed too much. Most of these changes, for example, regulating lake intakes with sluices, are very harmful to the lake. Residents are increasingly convinced that the lake is no longer what it used to be, as everything from fish species to coastal areas has changed, and not necessarily in a good way. The lake water has become murky; fish are fewer and smaller; and the lake has become much shallower and is becoming overgrown. It is often compared to a puddle or a pond rather than a lake. The lack of flooding is the only positive thing in these changes. The inhabitants of the area are now less isolated than before. Initially, the lake and its flooding made the site difficult to reach, with some settlements, such as Idena, being remote islands for most of the time. Now, settlements are all on dry land, making travel easier. However, it is debatable whether residents feel this way as the previous floods also had an important beneficial function, and residents had adapted to them very well. Older residents fondly remember the ancient lake and believe Lubans is no longer a lake.

The lack of flooding makes local farmers happy, although they note bitterly that they now have regular bird attacks that destroy crops, and farmland

is no longer as productive as it used to be due to the absence of lake sludge, previously delivered onto the fields during floods. Although Bird watchers are very happy about the wetland, most say that the lake should be returned to its original, natural, state, as there are fewer birds due to the gradual drying of the wetland and the lack of food.

The residents' opinions about the lake's future could be more precise, as their views differ on the damming of the lake, the governance of the region, and the development of the Lubana territory and its surrounding municipalities.

The local farmers approve of its damming and water regulation, as it has prevented yearly floods, and much of the land recovered by draining the lake is used as farmland. However, the farmland is becoming less fertile due to a lack of lake sludge feeding the soil.

In contrast, local fishermen and nature enthusiasts would rather have the dam torn down. The area has been heavily degraded, the lake is becoming overgrown, and fish harvests are lower than before. However, most birdwatchers think that the lake water level should be even further reduced, and thus, the lake would become a swamp.

Most residents are happy about the lack of floods but not about the lake becoming overgrown or getting smaller.

Almost all interviewees believe that the dam operation should have been thought through better. The system should be modified, as the dams did not include any means of preserving the natural flow of water to the lake. The lake has been severed from the river basin, turning it into an artificial reservoir rather than a natural lake. The damming of the lake was initially for the benefit of farmers, although other than providing farmland and creating the wetland complex, any other benefits of the damming have gradually been lost. Furthermore, before the lake was dammed, the wetland complex was probably much larger and had a wider diversity of species.

Most of the older people who live by the lake remember that the area where they live was under water for a long time, with most villages present as islands isolated from each other. At this time boats were the primary means of transit, and the lake water used to be clear. While floods no longer cause problems, older villagers are very nostalgic for a region they see as better than it is now. The current changes in the lake have badly affected the local way of life and culture, as much of the old fisher and farming lifestyle that defined the region

is now more challenging to practice causing younger people to leave their ancestral homes and move to towns and cities.

For residents, the disappearance of the lake would be catastrophic because it is precisely the lake that holds local communities together. They had developed for centuries around the lake, using everything it provided and calmly accepting its whims.

Residents' opinions on the situation

The opinion about the changes to the lake and the strict nature conservation restrictions is much divided, as are ideas of how to develop the region. Most residents believe that the lake water is too low and that much more work should be done on the lake itself. There should be some form of fishing restriction, and water weeds and reeds should be cut and collected from the lake periodically. However, local nature experts (most of whom are bird watchers) say that the lake water should be lowered even further to be better for migratory birds. Other nature experts suggest that the most critical task for the lake is restoring its natural water flow, at least to some extent. As one stated, "Lubans is not a lake, but a pond. It no longer has any natural water flow" (interviewee B 2023). Other experts say that the nature conservation restrictions were poorly conceived and are no longer effective if they ever were. "When the restrictions were set up, no nature protection plan existed. There still is not one, and no one is certain that the protected values and species are found in the area anymore" (interviewee B 2023). The restrictions also prevent maintenance felling, as all woodcutting near the lake is strictly regulated. According to one of the interviewed forestry experts: "No one is cutting any trees near the lake. Even the state forestry services have to get permission from the Nature Conservation Agency, and even then they might not allow the clearing of fallen trees. Some areas in the wetland are overgrown, but it is forbidden" (interviewee E 2023).

Opinions about local infrastructure, tourism, and development are more unified, as most stakeholder groups believe the region should have more tourism, business, and opportunities for recreation. Some interviewees stated, "There is little to do for anyone in the region. Tourists visit and see everything in just a day, and the lake area is mainly just for passing through" (interviewee C 2023). "Lubans is the largest lake in the country. It has a beach like the

sea, but there is just one. People would like more beaches, but establishing a new one is unlikely" (interviewee B 2023).

Opinions on the governance of the area are almost identical regardless of the interviewees' stakeholder groups: "No one is governing the lake or the wetland. The municipalities and state organisations govern their areas of responsibility. They all have their own interests, and they do not cooperate. They help each other, but no one governs the entire area" (interviewees A, B, D 2023).

While there were no proper interviews with younger people, some of the interviewed individuals stated that: "Younger people are more active regarding the lake. They gladly join nature clubs, are involved in birdwatching, and want to participate in improving the area, but their opinion is listened to only by the municipalities. Many of their ideas were ignored because there was not enough money to support them, or most residents didn`t even understand the ideas, for example, having catering services at the TICs. The most of the locals feel the tourism information centres and additional tourist services as competition, not the possibility to participate in these services" (interviewee D 2023).

Comparisons to other countries

1. Impact of lake damming in other countries

The impact of lake damming is more extensively studied in other countries. Recent research regarding this topic in Bulgaria has highlighted how damming lakes, especially to the extent that Lake Lubans has been, has a generally negative impact on both the lake itself and the lake catchment basin, as hydrological networks are severely altered. This can cause gradual lake drying, and surrounding coastal areas become increasingly swampy, as soil around the lake becomes much more damp (Nowak & Grześkowiak 2010). Such changes can cause drastic alterations in local habitats, such as an increase in trees that thrive in poorer soil. This can be remedied either by (at least partial) restoration of natural lake water flow, extensive amelioration work, such as digging drainage ditches, or a combination of both (Tammeorg et al. 2023). In Latvia, this topic is not very well studied, so it would be beneficial to take the experiences of other countries and implement them here appropriately. For example,

as the damming has caused an increase in lake overgrowth because silt was not being transported from the lake during the floods, reed biomass could be potentially used as a source of biofuel for local settlements. However, despite the opportunity, this has not been adequately investigated in Latvia as such methods are relatively new and untested. In addition, current nature conservation restrictions discourage potential investors in this area (Vávrová et al. 2023; Sandar 2022; Kiani 2023; Latvian Nature Foundation 2023, Archive of Latvian Nature Foundation 2023).

2. Development of tourism in protected areas in other countries

Protected areas, such as Natura 2000 areas, are popular among nature tourists, with many such sites being developed in other regions of Europe, such as the Balkans (Murillas-Maza et al. 2023; Berkes 2004; Strzelecka et al. 2023). In these countries, one of the goals for protected areas is to ensure their continued usage and accessibility as recreation and tourism objects for future generations; as such, they were often developed to be welcoming to potential visitors (Murillas-Maza et al. 2023; Berkes 2004; Strzelecka, Prince & Boley 2023). However, in Latvia, nature conservation restrictions on this topic are often needlessly strict. Much of the potential in this area is not being utilised, and many protected areas are being protected from people, rather than for people. If properly developed, tourism can be a beneficial source of revenue in areas with restrictions on economic activity (such as the Lubana wetland region), as it can serve to promote development in other socio-economic sectors such as transport (Thommandru et al. 2023). In the Lubana wetland area, tourism is a crucial economic sector that is purposefully not being developed, partly because there was no nature protection plan. Local municipalities and residents (who are the main actors in promoting tourism in the region) often lack resources to create new tourist attractions in the area before considering nature conservation restrictions (Van den Broek et al. 2023; Silva, Silva & Vieira 2023; Zsuzsa, Kupi, & Happ 2023; Breib 2023). The dam system could be a valuable tourism asset, as it is one of Europe's largest lake damming systems. It could be a valuable tourism object if incorporated into tourism plans. The region has tremendous tourism potential, but this is hampered by nature conservation restrictions and lack of a clear vision for the region – is it to be developed as an agricultural area, nature reserve, tourism area, or all of these? Other countries have a clearer view on how and

for what purpose to develop protected areas, while Latvia is still developing its environmental governance sector.

Conclusions

Due to an ill-conceived flood control system, Lake Lubans is currently a dying lake. This situation also dramatically affects the daily lives and prospects of the people living on its shores. The lake, wetland area, and resources mainly provide work, recreation, and entertainment opportunities.

The general situation of governance of Lake Lubans and its territory, both from the point of view of public governance, and local life, could be better. Lake governance is overly and exclusively focused on nature protection, while economic development and other issues are viewed superficially, if they are even addressed. Most of the governance instruments and target groups are not involved, and socio-economic aspects (including culture) need more support from the state. The need for a dedicated wetland governance and protection plan has partially caused this situation. The wetland complex was created a protected area in 2009, although the plan has been in development only since 2021, and is still incomplete. Existing disagreements between municipalities and other involved target groups slow down the development of this plan. There is also general uncertainty about the direction of the region's development, as local municipalities and residents need to be sufficiently involved, and they have different opinions about the future of the lake and surrounding territory. Tourism governance and development has only recently been examined as a separate topic because it was previously developed in addition to the overall economy of the region (or municipalities), or residents developed it, or entrepreneurs and NGOs, separately from the regional administration to provide income for themselves when alternatives are in short supply.

The tourism sector in the region needs to be better developed; it lacks infrastructure and has even more underdeveloped and underused communications instruments than the rest of the current governance system. Information for tourists and residents on local nature and objects of interest could be more comprehensive. Therefore, the governance of Lake Lubans and the region needs more resources, and the governing organisations need to have appropriate

awareness and opportunities to govern the lake effectively and with a positive future perspective.

Behind these problems is the dying lake, once one of the largest in the Baltics. Today people are gradually getting used to the idea that they belong to the last generations who can still live by the lake.

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II

Life Cycle and Traditional Customs

Folk Customs And Beliefs In Kosovo And Metohija Between The Two World Wars

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Abstract: The geographical region of Kosovo and Metohija in the period between the two world wars was characterised by traditional societies and a large number of folk customs and beliefs. In my paper, I will deal with the customs and beliefs that marked the daily life of the population in this area, based on ethnographic literature and the press from that period. Folk customs and beliefs had almost always accompanied many actions that people performed on various occasions. The custom of wearing amulets was widespread, especially among the Muslim population. There were many customs related to folk medicine, wedding and married life, holiday celebrations, as well as customs relating to death and funerals. In the house and family it was the women who preserved the customs, faith and tradition. A good proportion of those customs and beliefs have been preserved to this day in Kosovo and Metohija.

Keywords: beliefs, folk customs, Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Kosovo and Metohija, the interwar period.

Introduction

Kosovo and Metohija was located in the south of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. After the first division of the Yugoslav state into regions, the area of Kosovo and Metohija was part of Southern Serbia. After the next division of the Yugoslav state into nine *banovinas* (regions), this area was part of the Banovina of Vardar, Morava and Zeta (Simeunović 1964: 16, 23).[1] On the basis of the census from 1931, about half a million inhabitants were recorded on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, most of whom lived in the part that belonged to Zeta Banovina (Simeunović 1964: 27). Most stated that they consider Albanian as their mother tongue, Serbian being a second language (*Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva* 1931 (I) 1937: IX). Compared to the 1921 state census, the number of inhabitants increased through natural growth, but also due to the settlement of people (colonists) from the northern parts of the Yugoslav state. There was a high birth rate, but also high infant mortality, and the average family had more than seven members (statistically the family had four children) (*Statistički godišnjak Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1929* 1932: 116–121). Therefore, Kosovo and Metohija were distinguished by their young demographics (Simeunović 1964: 62-63; 110). In relation to the social structure, the agricultural population dominated in relation to employees in trade, banks and transport. In these areas, there was a small percentage of employed women, who worked more in the home and household. The number of employees was the highest in the city of Kosovska Mitrovica in relation to other cities in Kosovo and Metohija (*Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 31. marta 1931, Vol. 4* 1940: 183, 269–291, 317–333). The high percentage of the population employed in agriculture did not mean the highest incomes, which could be achieved in other professions, so it is not surprising that the social progress of the population in Kosovo and Metohija was slow. The percentage of the population employed in industry and crafts, trade, banking and transport, public services, liberal professions and the military was low and insufficient to initiate the processes of social modernisation (Dimić, Vol 1 1996: 25; Slavković Mirić 2018: 225).

The largest percentage of the population of Kosovo and Metohija lived in the countryside. Muslim villages were close together, while Christian villages were scattered (Cvijić 1931: 516–517). The villages gave the impression of neglect, with primitive houses, unchanging customs and traditions and were

encompassing with inadequate nutrition and poor hygiene (Radovanović 2004: 320–325). There were a small number of towns and villages. In the towns, a large percentage of the population was engaged in agriculture. (Slavković Mirić 2018: 95).

In the interwar period the population of Kosovo and Metohija lived in family cooperatives (*porodične zadruge*), 'joint living' across generations. This meant that several generations from the same family lived together with collective production and social equality of all family members. Cooperative life was better preserved among the Albanians in Metohija, where there were cooperatives with 80 members each. It was easier for them to raise children in a cooperative household than in a single family. The cooperative was headed by a 'host' and 'hostess'. Men worked with agricultural belonging to the farm while women did housework and took care of the customs. The disintegration of family cooperatives was influenced by the agrarian reform carried out after the First World War, and which included, among other things, the fragmentation of large land holdings into small holdings), but also by a strengthening of the desire of individual members of the cooperative to dispose of their earnings themselves (Barjaktarović 1950: 197–209, 1956: 275–282, 1955: 239–247, 1976: 239–247, 2004: 327–358; Krasnići 1960: 137–171).

The state set up education and schooling in an effort to improve underdevelopment in Kosovo and Metohija. However, the school system was sparse, school buildings were inadequate and in poor condition, as was school furniture. There was a lack of qualified teaching staff because they rarely came to work in this area from other parts of the country. Children were often absent from school due to parental ignorance, distance, illness, and agricultural work. The situation was similar in secondary schools. Secondary education failed to educate a greater number of professional workers for the development of the economy and to increase the flow of candidates to higher education institutions. There was a reduction in the number of high schools and the opening of civil schools (*građanske* škole), with more practical courses, although these too were not adequately accepted by the majority of parents, who did not consider it necessary to send their children to school (Dimić, vol. 2 1996: 93-94; Isić 2005: 18–57; *Osnovni statistički podaci o razvoju i stanju* školstva *u Federativnoj Narodnoj Republici Jugoslaviji* 1957: 3–10; Pejić 1999: 585–587).

Illiteracy was one of the main problems across the entire country, especially in the south, where according to the 1931 census more than 80% of the general

population were illiterate. For women this figure was almost one hundred percent (Bondžić 2009: 21-22). The state tried to deal with this problem through courses for the illiterate, libraries, reading rooms and the creation of national universities, but progress was very slow (Slavković Mirić 2018: 326–327).

Inadequate development of education, economic and social opportunities influenced the people of Kosovo and Metohija to live conventionally, primarily in rural areas. This changed slowly, as people had difficulties accepting innovation since they were preoccupied with various customs and beliefs that were maintained until the Second World War, when the reality of war prompted change to begin (Bovan 2004: 172–173). Social life in Kosovo and Metohija attracted the attention of ethnologists. They collected valuable material about traditional customs and beliefs, hospitality, family organisation and life, the 'family cooperative', family tribal life, artificial kinship (godparenthood, fraternity, step-parenthood), the village community and its role in life (Vlahović 1988: 134, 2004: 220–228).[2] It is important to note that old customs were well preserved. The most important cult was *slava* (the family St). Weddings and funerals were also performed according to traditional customs (Stijović 1979: 237–380).

In this article, dealing with folk customs and beliefs in Kosovo and Metohija in the interwar period, my goal is to give an overview of traditional customs. The topic is very broad, so I certainly cannot deal with all customs in detail. However, I will give an overview of village customs, folk literature and songs, folk medicine, customs related to holidays and celebrations, as well as customs related to death and burial. In the preparation of the article, I have used ethnographic literature and the newspapers from the interwar period. I would like to single out authors such as ethnologists and anthropologists Mirko Barjaktarović, Milenko Filipović, Vidosava Nikolić (the first female PhD in the ethnological sciences in Serbia), Petar Vlahović and Tatomir Vukanović, and literary historian Vladimir Bovan, who in their research dealt with folk customs in various parts of Kosovo and Metohija.

Customs of rural life

The population of Kosovo and Metohija lived simply, mainly in villages. The village carefully guarded its customs and beliefs, so there were numerous rituals related

to the construction of a house (Jovanović 2007: 548–551; Vukanović 1986:11–30). When building a house, the most suitable place was chosen. This was determined either by the oldest male member of the house or by going to a seer so that he could say where to build the house (Vukanović, vol. 2 1998: 62). The new house was usually built above the old one, most often where "the cattle like to lie down or the rooster to crow". A sacrifice (*kurban*) was offered during construction and lunch was made from the meat for workers and members of the household. It was important to start construction on a Monday or Thursday in the middle of summer, to be finished by autumn. When entering the house, one would jump right foot first over the threshold (Tojaga Vasić 2004: 305–317).

Folk customs and beliefs were often accompanied by many special actions (Darmanović 2004: 167–179). The production cycle (ploughing, digging, sowing, harvesting, beekeeping, sheep shearing, etc.) was accompanied by many customs the goal of which was to ensure economic success (Vlahović 2004: 220–228).

People believed in the extra-human value of nature. In Sredačka župa district (near Prizren), trees were respected and certain rituals were associated with them. In addition, stones were respected and power was attributed to them. Soil had a magical significance in the treatment of disease and was especially connected to the cult of the dead. Fire and the hearth were symbols of life, as was water (Nikolić 1960: 113–137; Nikolić-Stojančević 2003: 83–102).

Each house had a domestic snake guarding it. Both Serbs and Albanians believed in supernatural beings, angels, devils, witches (*një shtrigë*), fairies (*zanë*), *kallikantzaros* (*karakondžula*, malevolent goblin), fairies, *čumas* (a personification of the plague) and others (Filipović 1967: 71). In the Nerodimlje region, Tatomir Vukanović studied the legend of the famous Lena fairy, who healed people using trance, helped barren women to have children, dispelled magic, etc. (Vukanović 1937: 198–200). People believed that you would get sick if you slept under a 'fairy' tree (Nikolić-Stojančević 2003: 138).

The custom of wearing amulets was widespread, especially among the Muslim population. These included teeth from a wolf, a pig, a claw from a wolf, ancient coins, and so on. Words written by a *hodjas* (Muslim priests) were also worn as amulets by being placed in special triangular or cylindrical cases and worn around the neck (Filipović 1967: 73). An example of an amulet was a horseshoe that was placed on the threshold or doorpoSt A piece of twig was a common amulet that was carried sewn into a belt or shirt (Vukanović 1986: 199).

Folk literature and folk songs

The folk literature of the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija was very rich (Bovan 1980, 2000, 2002a, b). Folk poetry is best preserved by people living a traditional way of life, within the framework of old rituals and customs, as well as folk epics belonging to the oral folk tradition. The traditional cooperative preserved and cherished folk tales, fables, curses, oaths, toasts, riddles, sayings, questions and proverbs (Denda & Dželetović 1993: 32; Vukadinović & Bogavac 2001: 149–156). People were singing as they went to and from work in the field, as well as when knitting or embroidering handicrafts. Most often, men sang heroic folk songs accompanied by a fiddle, or the songs were in the form of speaking or reciting the lyrics. The people of the Gora region (in southern Kosovo and Metohija) had a well-developed spiritual life, as can be seen from the language, songs, embroidery and clothing. The content of the songs reflected of the life of the region, often including farewell songs for those going on *pečalba* (seasonal work abroad). Everyday speech and folk songs were characterised by rich language that the Goranians called *Naški* or *Goranski* and which was similar to the language of the Serbs from Sredačka župa district (Lutovac 1955: 43–44; 54–55).

A interesting folklore phenomenon was the singing of folk songs while turning the baking pan on the table or on the floor, especially in villages. This was mainly a female custom performed for various festive occasions. This custom was very popular among Albanians and was common in the towns between Peć and Đakovica. In the village of Kačanik, located in Uroševac district, these types of song were used as lullabies and as songs for posthumous rituals. Vukanović points out that singing folk songs while turning the baking pan was most beautiful in Albanian. This custom was also common among the Turks, who believed that in addition to its entertainment function, it also had some magical effect (Vukanović 1956: 118–157).

Oral folk literature has long attracted attention and has been studied in detail since the 19th century. Ivan Jastrebov, Russian diplomat, historian and ethnographer, researched regions and folk literature in Old Serbia[3] and Macedonia in the 19th century. The recording of folk songs continued in the interwar period (Bovan 1980: 141–155; Petrović 1988: 155–161).[4] The literary magazine *Srpsko Kosovo* was the first publication intended for youth and public enlightenment

and had contributors from various backgrounds and professions. This magazine published lyrical and epic poems, and a special role was devoted to folk literature and ethnography.[5] The magazine *Božur sa Kosova*, as a continuation of the activity of *Srpsko Kosovo*, also focused on the preservation of oral folk creativity.[6] Based on the research of ethnomusicologist Ljubica Janković, folk dances in Metohija were influenced by dances from Kosovo, the rest of Serbia and Montenegro. However, this area was richer in non-choreographed songs. According to Janković, women from Peć were more creative in their dancing than those from other parts of Metohija (Janković 1937: 118–122).

Folk medicine

In addition to the efforts of the Yugoslav state to build a modern healthcare system, people had deep-rooted understandings that included popular beliefs. The magazine *Vardar* notes that the problem lay in people's lack of education and the distance of doctors: "Scientific truths were inaccessible in the countryside, hardly anyone received and read any magazine or newspaper because there were few educated people in the countryside. The population of the village needed medical help. A distance of 10 km from doctors had the effect that the peasant exposed himself/herself to waste of time and unnecessary expenses, so he/she, being hesitant anyway, left his/her illness to fate or magic" (*Vardar*, 5 July 1935: 4; *Vardar*, 6 November 1935: 1). In addition, medicines were expensive and discouraged peasants from treatment. Adam Pribićević, publisher, writer and politician, in 1924 settled in the village of Vučitrn, wrote based on contemporary events, that people would lie down waiting for them to get well on their own or with a spell (*bajalica*). According to Pribićević, people in the countryside were sadder for sick cattle than children, considering the circumstances: "it would be more difficult for me if my bull died than if my child died. If a child dies, God will give me another, but if a bull dies, people will not give me another" (Pribićević 1996: 297-300). It was all connected with the poverty of the rural population, although it seems a little exaggerated, because I see from the sources that the family was highly valued.

Many beliefs about the spread of disease were widespread; it was believed, for example, that it was best to take brandy as a way to prevent malaria, that whooping cough could be treated when flying at an altitude of 2,000 meters,

and that a tumour could be treated with the juice secreted by a bee during a sting (Jovanović 2011: 465). Quackery was very widespread, medicines that were not given by prescription were resold by grocers and pickpockets. Stojan Čupković, from the Yugoslav Central Institute of Hygiene, states that some people bought medicines outside pharmacies. Čupković wrote that "specialties" were advertised in different ways, "imposed on the people with reckless ingenuity; half-educated people bought a cat in a bag, spent money on white and yellow powders, castor oil and aspirin, all without marking the composition and contents of the medicine, often with homeopathic content. Barbers extracted teeth, or whoever could, and doctors did the least" (Čupković 1940: 511–516). Only those who fell into bed due to illness and exhaustion were considered sick. Most of the patients were not isolated, but only their bed, linen and dishes. Sick children were nursed by the mother, men by older women of the family (often by village fortune tellers (*vidarice*) for a payment). People believed that God determined who would get well and that those who were not destined to live would die. If a patient was lying down because of a cold, then that person was not washed, but rather covered with blankets to keep him/her warm. If a patient lay down for a long time, he/she was washed every week. Those caring for the patient threw the water, nails and hair of the patient into a stream or some hidden place so that no one would step on them because that person would get sick (Nikolić- Stojančević 2003: 117–118).

Ethnologist Vidosava Nikolić writes that in Podrima, people generally used sympathetic magic for healing (Nikolić 1957: 565–582). Folk medicine often brought them more harm than good, as Mirko Barjaktarović wrote about the Rugova region, located to the north west of the city of Peć (Barjaktarović 1960: 163–241). It was believed that every illness was 'written', i.e. destined, or came through magic from curses, the evil eye or from someone's 'intention' to transmit a disease (Nušić 2021: 136–138). Disease was called *lošetinja* (something bad), an epidemic was called *rednja* (going in order), and it was believed that diseases were brought by warm winds. Disease was treated with folk remedies, divination, and witchcraft. Plants were used as treatment, and there were herbalists skilled in the treatment of various specific diseases; in some families the skill of treatment was passed down the female line. Traditional healers or fortune tellers were usually women who were poor and were supplementing their income with these treatments. A *vidarica* learned treatments from the elders in her family and wouldn't tell them to anyone "because the

medicine will not work and they will forget it", as stated by Vidosava Nikolić Stojančević in her research. These women received compensation in the form of goods or some other value, or in money; sometimes they treated "for *sevap*" (divine reward for a good deed). Among Muslim Albanians, Muslim priests (*hodjas*) dealt with treatment, most often by giving patients prescriptions against various diseases. Both Serbs and Albanians called the medicine *iljač* (from the Turkish word *ilaç*, medicine). The medicine was procured by a fortune teller who, along with application of the medicine, also performed various magical acts such as touching the floor, blowing into the patient's face, whispering various formulas, etc. Individual diseases were imagined by the people as living beings with supernatural powers, which were evil and harmed people. They thought of the *čuma* as an ugly woman with dishevelled hair and a torn dress who went from house to house killing people and livestock. Nervous disorders and madness were said to mean that an evil spirit (called *djavo* by Serbs, *djalli* or *şeytan* by Albanians and Turks, related to the English 'devil') entered a person (Nikolić-Stojančević 2003: 118–120).

Villages defended themselves against disease in different ways. In fear of a *čuma*, the village was surrounded by a ploughed furrow using a certain ritual. When there was an epidemic of the sheep pox virus, the infected cattle were buried alive. Children sick with whooping cough were given donkey's milk. Tuberculosis, for example, was treated by leaving the sick person to sleep 'with the sheep' in the mountains for two to three weeks. It was believed that malaria was contracted from green melons, corn or early fruit. Toothache was treated with various herbs or tobacco. Medicinal herbs were collected on holidays such as St George's Day in Spring (*Đurđevdan*), the Feast of the Ascension of Jesus Christ (*Spasovdan*), the Feast of Sts Peter and Paul (*Petrovdan*) and St Vitus Day (*Vidovdan*). Herbs were dried and prepared partly for sale in the market, and partly for the needs of the *vidarice.* In towns there were folk pharmacies, where medicinal herbs, other folk remedies and pharmaceutical products were sold. The owner of one such shop in Prizren was Drvarević, a Serb, while the Bokši brothers, who were Albanians, owned such a shop in Djakovica (Darmanović 2004: 167–179; Vukanović 1986: 470, 483–484).

Illnesses and infertility were 'cured' by lighting many candles outside church. This was also done in Kačanik village around the Turkish *türbe* (tomb), where Christian women came from as far away as Peć and Prizren; Muslim women did not have this custom (Krivokapic 1936: 337). In the towns Prizren and

Đakovica and Orahovac village there were *türbes* who 'treated' various diseases. In Prizren, in the part of the city called Mahala Saračhan, there was a *tekke* (a type of Islamic religious building where the Muslim priest reads a prayer) with several *türbes*, where people came because of problems with their cattle, infertility, or children's illnesses. The second *türbe* was *Karabash Efendija türbe*, where people sick with fever or suffering infertility came, as well as Muslims and Christians. There were eighteen of them in Djakovica, which especially treated the mentally ill (Nikolić-Stojančević 2003: 137–138).

Deaf, mute and mentally ill people were taken to monasteries. Patient pilgrimages to monasteries were based on the Christian custom that certain Sts cure certain diseases. In the monasteries, after the priest read a prayer for them, the sick crawled under their relics and other holy objects. Everyone went to Serbian monasteries: Serbs, Albanians Muslims and Catholics and other religious groups, the same being true for the *tekke*. In Koriša, a village in Prizren municipality, there was a hagiographic cult of St Petar Koriški, where Serbs, Albanians, Turks, Vlachs and Romani made pilgrimages (Vukanović 1986 III: 15, 19–20, 78–92, 93–115).

Devič Monastery in Drenica was a famous place for the treatment of the mentally ill. This monastery is dedicated to St Joanikije of Devič. The patient was supposed to spend the night in the church near the grave of St Joanikije, and several days in the monastery. Pilgrimages for various illnesses were also made to Dečani Monastery. This Monastery is located near Dečani town and was founded by Stefan Dečanski, king of Serbia. In Nerodimlje village, in Uroševac municipality, St Uroš was the patron St The Monastery of St Uroš is located in a hamlet above the village. St Uroš was invoked in the village to help people, who would say "*In sha'Allah* (if God desires) St Uroš will help". Famous monasteries for healing were also the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, located near Mušutište village in Suva Reka municipality; Vračevo Monastery, located in Vračevo in Leposavić municipality; the Monastery of St Petka in Mušnikovo village, near Prizren; and the Monastery of St Mark in Koriša village, near Prizren.

Among the cult places were springs with healing water, for example Krk-bunar spring in the vicinity of Prizren, where both Serbs and Albanians came (Filipović 1967: 76). In the village of Mušutište, near Prizren, St Bogorodica church was visited by both Orthodox Christians and Muslims (*Vardar*, 8 September 1936: 2). Barren women also went to monasteries where they offered money and an animal. Priests then read prayers over them and they drank holy water (Stojančević 2009: 17–18).

The ritual year

The celebration of specific holidays during the year was accompanied by rituals. The same custom was celebrated by people from several religious faiths. Orthodox and Catholic Serbs, as well as Muslim Serbs, Albanians and Turks, celebrated Christmas as the biggest holiday. There were various customs around Christmas. A Christmas tree (*badnjak*) was cut and it was brought into the house for health, progress and happiness. On Christmas Eve, the Christmas tree was lit as a symbol of love, unity and family life. Straw was placed around the hearth as in the stable where Jesus Christ was born (the fireplace was a very important place in the house when it came to performing customs). Muslims in the Gora region and in Drenica village also brought and burned Christmas trees, and they also performed other customs in the same way as Orthodox Serbs. Muslims in Sredačka župa district near Prizren, burned Christmas trees, brought straw into the house and ate chestnuts and walnuts, which were thrown around the house as sacrifices to the ancestors. Albanians in Samodreža village, Vučitrn municipality, also cut down and burned Christmas trees and prepared figs, walnuts and chestnuts for Christmas. Cabbage pie was prepared for dinner on the eve of Christmas, which Albanians also ate. Sparrows were also caught before Christmas and eaten during the holiday (Bukumirović 2007: 95–252; Filipović 1937: 462–475; Vlahović 1930: 574–577).

Apart from Christmas, Easter, the most important holiday in spring, was especially celebrated. Other important holidays were usually saints' days (*slava*), especially among the Orthodox Serbs. On this day, customs were – and still are – observed that included a candle and special bread baked and decorated only for this day (Jovanović 2018: 89–99; Kostić 1931: 28–34). Some of the most common *slavas* are St Tryphon of Campsada on 14 February (*Sveti Trifun*), St George's Day on 6 May (*Đurđevdan*), the Feast of St Demetrius of Thessalonika on 8 November (*Mitrovdan*), St Nicholas Day on 19 December (Lutovac 1955: 43–44, 54–55). *Mitrovdan* was celebrated not only by all Serbs, but also by Albanians and Turks, since this holiday was considered the beginning of the winter half of the year and many deadlines were attached to it, such as completion of work in the field and other work outside. In addition to the holidays they celebrated, like the Orthodox Christians, Muslim Serbs also celebrated *Eid al-Adha* (Turkish *Kurban Bayram*, the second of two great

Muslim festivals, the other being *Eid al-Fitr* or Turkish *Ramazan Bayram*) (Filipović 1937: 462–475).

Some holidays were accompanied by certain customs. I will mention some of them. The Forty Martyrs (*Mladenci*) were celebrated on 22 March, also celebrated by Muslims under the name *Sultan Nevrus*. At that time, 40 cookies (*mladenčići*) were made as a symbol of a long and sweet married life. During the time when the Martyrs were celebrated, manure and straw were burned to prevent fleas and snakes. *Pročka* or *Bele Poklade* was the day of the beginning of the Christian Great Lent on the eve of Easter in the Kosovo region, when people forgave each other of insults and mischief. An egg is hung on a thread and everyone present tried to catch it in their mouths. In the evening, fires were lit and jumped over. Lazaros Saturday (*Lazareva subota*) was celebrated on the Saturday before Easter. On Lazarus Saturday, processions of *lazarice* girls went from house to house and sang Lazarus songs, the goal of which was to preserve the health of the members of the household. The songs were addressed to the householder, the housewife, the house, the child in the cradle, the unmarried young man, the unmarried young girl, the farmer, the shepherd, the mason and the traveller (Vlahović 2004: 220–228).

There were also customs related to work in the field, I will mention only two here. If there is a drought in the summer days, then the *dodols*, girls who went around the village and called for rain, would gather. The harvest was accompanied by many customs, such as leaving the last handful of ears unharvested in the field or plucking them with special rituals and carrying them home. God's beard was a ritual object that symbolised the end of the harvest. A sheaf would be woven into a shape with an ear of corn at the bottom resembling a beard. This item was kept under the eaves to ensure fertility and wealth (Filipović 1967: 71).

Birthdays were not celebrated because of the large number of family members, but male members celebrated name days. Name days were celebrated by Orthodox and Catholic Serbs and Catholic Albanians. According to research by Vidosava Stojančević, despite women being responsible for the celebration of customs, name days were celebrated only by male family members (Stojančević 2009: 65).

Woman as guardians of customs in the house

In the house and among the family it was the women who preserved the customs, religion and traditions. Sources agree that the role of women was very important, although society was still divided along gender lines. It is often emphasized that traditional society was patriarchal. Nevertheless, based on the interpretation of sources and customs, we see that the female role in the home and family was the basis for almost all customs. Society, according to ethnologist Tatomir Vukanović, had certain expectations of women. A woman should be hospitable, modest, respect tradition, and maintain all religious holidays and ceremonies (Vukanović 1986: 133).

Women were connected with soothsaying, magic and care-giving, since they cared for the sick, the children, and the dead. They also had their own places to gather, especially during the winter when there was not much work in the fields. Then, girls built special huts (*kućarice* or *zemljarke*) that were holes in the landfill (*bunjište*, an archaic Serbian word denoting a place on a farm to throw garbage) or the ground where they spent the winter days embroidering, knitting and sewing (Filipović 1937: 460–462). We will see the significant role of women in the next section, which concerns lifecycles and shows how women were an indispensable part of all customs, and almost always the main initiator of tradition and family.

Lifecycle rituals (birth, marriage and death)

Birth: the special role of women

A woman's 'special duty' was to give birth to children. In order that the first child be male, the bride should put on a man's shirt on the Saturday before the wedding, and wear it during the night. In addition, before the wedding, a male child was placed in the newlyweds' bed (Stojančević 2009: 18).

When giving birth, women squatted or stood because they believed that the child came out easier that way. There were different customs during childbirth, clothed in the mystery around the arrival of a new member of the family. Dur-

ing a difficult birth various magico-religious actions were carried out to ease the pain of the woman in labour (the husband jumped over her three times, the woman in childbirth sits on her husband's *chakshiras* (woollen breeches, baggy above the knee but tight around the knee and lower leg) or drinks water from her husband's right shoe. These customs were similar among Albanians. (Vlahović 2004: 220–228; Vukanović 1986: 212–213). According to the sources, these actions involved the husband and/or his belongings, which, in my opinion, was supposed to give the woman strength and in some way support childbirth. When a child was born, the woman would tie the umbilical cord with her hands, using a red thread that she then cut with a sickle. Attention was immediately focused on the child, and on the woman only later. The birth of a child was highly valued, especially if the child was a boy. There were sayings for a boy and a girl, respectively: "the mountain cries and the house sings", and "the mountain sings and the house cries" (Nušić 2021: 87–90). The new-born baby was rocked over the fire, which had a magical role. This ritual was accompanied by a protective formula to ward off demons (female *kuvada* or male *babinjanje*) (Vukanović 1964: 63–98). Various measures were taken against spells, such as amulets, garlic, tar, soot. On the third evening after the birth, the child's *sudjenice* (invisible spirits or fates; for Albanians *moire*, *fati* or *ore*) come to determine the child's fate, and thereafter the child was given a name. A woman was considered impure for forty days after giving birth, after which she went to church with the child to have a prayer read for her (Filipović 1937: 475–483; Nušić 2021: 125). According to the sources, there were big differences in attitudes towards the woman if she gave birth to a male or female child. In Prizren, a women in childbirth lay in the house for seven days if she gave birth to a male child, and three days if she gave birth to a female child. After World War II, younger women began to give birth in hospital maternity wards. At around that time certain customs were abandoned, although many remained (Stojančević 2009: 19–20).

Wedding customs

Marriage was the most complex among all the ceremonies and customs because it included many elements from folk life, mythological belief, various superstitions, elements of magic, customary law and elements of oral folk creativity (Bovan 2004: 18–19, 39; Bukumirović 2007: 95 –252; Filipović 1958: 74–77;

Manojlović 1933: 39–51; Nikolić 1961: 59–104; Nušić 2021: 129; Vlahović 1931: 43–45). The first information about wedding customs was given by Ivan Stepanovich Jastrebov, Russian consul in Prizren in the 1970s and 1980s and also a writer and collector of wedding songs. In addition to his records, we also have contemporaries from the interwar period who wrote down wedding customs (Filipović 1937; Vlahović 1930; Božović 1998).

Girls married between the ages of 17 and 25, boys often later. Marriage usually took place between families of similar wealth and from the same or nearby villages. A matchmaker went to the proposal and carried a gift (a bottle of brandy and a silk scarf decorated with ducats). At that time, they also discussed how much the bride price would be. That money was given on major holidays until the girl's parents approved the proposal. Gifts were then sent to the future groom's family as a sign of consent. Several years passed from the engagement to the wedding, during which time the parents (especially the mother) and the closest relatives instructed the girl in household chores and marital duties. Weddings were usually held on Sundays (Thursdays for the Turks) (Božović 1998: 91–92; Filipović 1967: 50, 141; Predojević 2002: 129–145; *Vardar*, 10 February 1934: 2; Vlahović 1930: 574–577)

The main problem in carrying out wedding customs was the expense involved. There were examples where parents demanded excessive compensation for the girl. It is interesting that the president of the municipality of Dečani said that Albanians (although it was not only an Albanian custom) will be ruined by three things: brandy, taxes and buying brides (Slavković Mirić 2018: 402) and therefore the clergy influenced a change in these customs (Bovan 2001; Kostić 1928: 112). This custom changed more quickly in cities, more slowly in villages, and slowest in mountain villages (Bovan 2004: 145).

Based on the sources, I can conclude that the social and cultural conditions of life influenced marriage customs. Sudden and frequent socio-historical upheavals and displacements (such as wars) influenced the population to return to old family relationships (family cooperatives), but also to earlier conditions for marriage, earlier ways of marriage, etc. This is why marriage customs have been preserved for a long time in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, as with others customs.

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Death and burial customs

Death and burial were accompanied by many customs. Before death, the dying person confessed and said goodbye to his or her family. Money was put into the dead person's mouth, pocket or belt. According to the legal deadline, the dead person was taken out of the house 24 hours after death. The household members did not prepare food while the dead person was in the house, that was done by *mešalje*, female relatives from the extended family who kneaded bread and prepared food. In Kosovo and Metohija, a sacrificial ram or sheep was slaughtered (according to the gender of the deceased). After the deceased was buried, a meal was prepared (*trpeza*). Among the Albanians in Drenica and Metohija, as well as among the Orthodox Serbs, neighbours and friends came to the bereaved house for a "healthy head" (the desire for other family members to remain healthy) (Filipović 1937: 483–487).

Hired lamenters was an old custom among Albanians and was often applied in Prizren, Peć, Djakovica and Priština. This custom was common in Homeric times, and has in fact been practiced for at least 4,000 years (see more: Håland 2014). Laments were mainly a typical sacrifice to the spirits of deceased ancestors, which had its roots in the traditional attitude to death. Among Montenegrins and mountain people in the Kosovo Metohija area, hired lamenters were known derisively as *diplanje*, meaning 'playing with the *diple*' (the *diple* is a traditional woodwind instrument). The mourner received a gift (a thin scarf, socks, slippers, etc.), in order that the deceased will have what is needed. Professional lamenters (*narikača*) performed laments with a chorus of women. The principal lamenter would place herself next to the corpse, which would be lying on a mat on the floor, and the other women would sit next to her with their legs bent. Then the professional lamenter would start caressing the corpse, starting from the head and working towards the feet, while singing a lament. At the end of each verse, all the women present broke into wailing together. This form of funeral, rather than a church funeral, was more commonly felt to be compulsory. Everyone present listened in the greatest silence (Vukanović 1965: 173–212). Here I find confirmation that women were very important, although it is often said that the traditional society was patriarchal.

Catholic Albanians around Đakovica used to scarify their cheeks as sign of mourning for the dead during the performance of laments (Filipović 1967: 49, 759). This was normal in other societies during the performance of laments (see

more: Håland 2014). In Rugova, those who came to mourn were treated to two cups of bitter coffee each, and on the day of the funeral, they ate a meal with plenty of meat (Barjaktarović 1960: 163–241).

Everyone went to the funeral, and as a sign of mourning for the dead, women turned their dresses inside out and did not adorn themselves. The burial was accompanied by traditional rites with wider social and logical meanings, and followed with a very elaborate grave cult (Vlahović 2004: 220–228). The dead person was buried in a wooden coffin, and was carried on an improvised bier. In Priština, a vessel containing wine and oil was broken so that there would be no more disease in the house, or at least not in the near future. Tombstones in the villages around towns Priština and Uroševac were generally procured from Skopje. Among the Orthodox Serbs in Prizrenski Podgor (a region in the foothills of the Šar mountains stretching from Prizren to the village of Dulje on Crnoljeva mountain), the deceased could be buried in an old grave (Filipović 1967: 70). A seven-day, 40-day, half-year and annual memorial ritual were observed (it is the same today). After 40 days, the younger villagers took off their mourning black, and at the annual commemoration everyone took it off. *Zadušnice,* a day of commemoration of all the faithful departed (All Soul's Saturday), which is still celebrated today, was considered to be the glory of the deceased. All Soul's Saturday is celebrated four times during the year (Bukumirović 2007: 95–252).

An adult man was mourned for a year, during which time shepherds did not play and women wore black scarves. If a woman died, only her closest female relatives would mourn her. There was a lot of divination around the dead. If the corpse did not decompose in the grave, it was believed that the dead person had been a great sinner, so villagers extracted his or her teeth and used them for witchcraft in the treatment of teeth (*Stari Kolašin*). A widower or widow could remarry after a year; the wedding took place in the evening and there was usually no rejoicing (Nušić 2021: 136–138). In addition, according to beliefs about the afterlife and the soul, the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija believed in vampires, who were great sinners during their lives and returned after death to bring misfortune to the living (Darmanović 1992: 195–203).

Conclusion

During the interwar period the area of Kosovo and Metohija was characterised by a traditional way of life and a large number of folk customs and beliefs. Over time, customs changed, although very slowly. The village carefully preserved its traditions. The population often returned to traditional customs when they felt threatened (during wars), which is why the customs were preserved for a long time, even to the present day. A good example of this is family cooperatives, which were very important in the Ottoman period when the population was protected in this way. After liberation from the Turks the cooperatives decreased in size, but they survived. Between the two world wars, although reduced, they basically preserved some important principles, i.e. several generations of the same ancestor lived in the cooperative, there was collective ownership, collective production and collective use of goods. The role of women was also preserved, for example, the role of the oldest woman in the cooperative, the role of the housewife, the role of the mother in making decisions about marriage.

Customs followed every part of life. This is why they were very complex. This is especially important for the area of Kosovo and Metohija, where different ethnic groups lived with their own customs. This area is interesting to many researchers in the fields of anthropology, ethnology and history. Special attention was paid to rural areas because customs were most prevalent here. The cyclic nature of the environment that surrounded rural society inevitably requires cyclic agricultural work, where each stage was accompanied by certain magical rites and actions that should contribute to the harmonisation of the rural community and ensure its prosperous existence.

Folk beliefs were used in the treatment process, so people in the countryside rarely visited a doctor (who was far away, and medicines were very expensive). The lifecycle (birth, marriage, death) was accompanied by very complicated rituals. Women were very important for the preservation and maintenance of these customs. The role of women, based on the sources read, contradicts the view that society was patriarchal, although this was often taken for granted. Society was divided into men and women, although women were certainly important. The role of giving birth to children (with boys more highly valued), raising children, preparing for marriage, fulfilling marriage obligations, maintaining the household and garden, treating household members when

necessary, then the customs surrounding funerals and mourning, were just some of the roles that a wife had.

In the interwar period, the society of Kosovo and Metohija was characterised by education and economic underdevelopment, which is one of the reasons why customs survived for so long. But, even in more developed societies, despite the general high level of literacy, the development of scientific and medical knowledge, and wide access to scientific information, the reproduction of elements belonging to customs and rituals continues. This can be seen especially clearly in the rural agricultural environment, and to a lesser extent in urbanised society. The rebirth of certain elements of traditional views and rituals, conspicuous adherence to ancestral rules and customs today represent the ethnic identity, the national identity of the population.

Aknowledgements

Notes

[1] See also Službene novine Kraljevine SHS, Vol. XXII, (Beograd, 1922); "Zakon o nazivu i podeli kraljevine na upravna područja", *Zbirka Službenog glasnika*, Vol. XXXVI (Split, 1929), 4-5; *Politika*, 4 October 1929, 3; *Politika*, 3 September 1931, 3.

[2] An extensive bibliography on ethnology was published in the book "Kosovo i Metohija u svetlu etnologije. Prilog bibliografiji" (Jovanović 2004).

[3] By Old Serbia and Macedonia, i.e. South Serbia, we mean in a narrower sense those regions that were freed from five centuries of Turkish slavery after the Balkan wars and joined the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Montenegro through the Treaty of Bucharest in 1913. These were areas in the valleys of Lim, Ibar and Raška, followed by Metohija, Kosovo and Vardar Macedonia (Čeliković 2017).

[4] Živko Nikolić published a collection of Lazaric songs from Sirinić, Pera Ilić published a collection of reapers' songs from Nerodimlje, Vladimir Đorđević published a series of

songs from Kosovo and Metohija, and Grigorije Božović published an epic poem about blood tribute (the Ottoman practice of forcibly recruiting soldiers among children from the Balkans) given to him by Petar Kostić. Miloje Milojević recorded folk melodies in Kosovo and some lyrical songs, and Kosta Manojlović described wedding customs in Peć and published a collection of wedding songs. Jovan Hadži Vasiljević published lyrical songs brought by settlers (colonists) to Kosovo and Metohija, Gliša Elezović published a collection of folk songs from Kosovo in the Dictionary of Kosovo-metohija Dialects, Tatomir Vukanović recorded folk laments in Kosovo, and the sisters Ljubica and Danica Janković published a collection of songs with a description of folk dances. Milivoje Pavlović published a collection of songs from Sredačka župa, Miodrag Lalević published folk songs from the Istok region, Miladin Nikačević Simić published Lazaric songs from Sredačka župa, and Ilija Šoškić published folk songs from Peć.

[5] See also Srpsko Kosovo: list za srpsku omladinu. 1920–1934. Ed. Stanojlo Dimitrijević. Skoplje; Kosovska Mitrovica: M. Dimitrijević.

[6] See also Božur sa Kosova: omladinski nacionalno-prosvetni liSt 1934-1938. Ed. Risto Durutović. Kosovska Mitrovica: b.i.

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The Ecological Funeral: New Ideas in Contemporary Lithuania

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Abstract: The article examines ecological funerals in contemporary Lithuania. The present study focuses on content and visual analysis of funeral celebrations taking information from the contemporary Lithuanian mass media and social media networks, as well as the websites of seven funeral companies. The field research is based on digital material gathered by the author in 2021-2022.

I am interested in changes to funeral customs over the latest decade, approaching the subject matter through three key research questions: What factors motivate Lithuanian citizens to decide on an ecological funeral? What changes to the traditional funeral are the most ecologically sustainable? What has the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic been on people's ideas about ecological funerals?

Keywords: ecological funeral, contemporary Lithuania, Covid-19 pandemic.

Introduction

The increasing challenges of climate change and the general public awareness of ecological matters are the main reasons motivating humanity to change stubborn customs and lifestyles. New ideas about ecological lifestyles, which

are becoming increasingly popular worldwide and serve as an incentive to responsible consumption oriented towards preservation of nature, are gradually penetrating the sphere of the funeral. In the future, sustainable funeral rituals that help to preserve nature could become new habits, and even turn into customs.

This article begins with a brief discussion of the performance of funeral rites in contemporary Lithuania. It continues with factors motivating Lithuanian citizens to opt for ecological funeral and concludes with a discussion of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the diffusion of ecological ideas.

The performance of funeral rites is linked to coping with loss, transition, remembrance, and regeneration (Fulton 1995; Metcalf, Huntington 2010; Robben 2010; Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė 2014), with funeral rites playing a significant role in the grieving process. Over the last decade, secularisation, cultural creolisation, and individualisation in Western Europe have led to a degradation of traditional religious rituals, while the personalisation of rituals has become more popular (Mitima-Verloop, Mooren & Boelen 2021; Holloway et al. 2013). Today, performing individual rituals can also play an important role in the grieving process. People use various verbal and nonverbal ways to express condolences in the digital world. The bereaved can light candles, write memorials and send flowers from home as alternative digital forms of the funeral process. Thus, the creation of meaningful individual rituals can be useful as much as collective funeral ceremonies in ancient agrarian societies. Today, funeral rituals help people to release emotions and serve important psychological functions in regard to separation and integration of loss (Johnsen, Fjærestad 2020).

According to psychologists, the majority of bereaved people experience the most intense emotions between three months and two years post loss, long after the funeral (Mitima-Verloop, Mooren & Boelen 2021). In this period, when social support decreases, different rituals can be helpful in coping with the loss of a loved one (Castle & Phillips 2003). Jason Castle and Phillips L. Williams emphasize that post-funeral rituals, such as lighting a candle, visiting the grave or listening to music the deceased liked are very helpful. Such grief rituals facilitate adjustment to bereavement and can have significant positive outcomes for participants (Castle & Phillips 2003). The study by Huibertha Mitima-Verloop, Trudy Mooren & Paul Boelen (2021) examined the importance of the evaluation of the funeral and the use of grief rituals in relation to grief reactions over time. Although the funeral and rituals were considered helpful,

no significant association between an evaluation of the funeral, the use of grief rituals and grief reactions was found (Mitima-Verloop, Mooren & Boelen 2021).

This paper aims to investigate the impact of ecological ideas on contemporary Lithuanian funeral traditions. I am interested in the problem of changes in funeral customs over the last decade and discuss the factors that have influenced these changes. In addition, we attempt to find answers to certain questions: What factors motivate Lithuanian citizens to decide on an ecological funeral? What changes to the traditional funeral are the most ecologically sustainable? What has the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic been on people's ideas about ecological funerals?

Methodology of digital research

In this paper I present digital research into ecological funeral celebrations in contemporary Lithuania. The present study is focused on content and visual analysis of funeral celebrations from the contemporary Lithuanian mass media and social media networks (such as Facebook and YouTube), as well as the websites of seven funeral companies. The field research draws on digital material gathered by the author in 2021-2022 on funeral celebrations in the Lithuanian mass media and social media websites. A qualitative approach is used to analyse visual and content data from these digital source.

In addition, I used participant observation. While conducting the field research I observed and participated in seven funerals which took place between 2019 and 2022. In six cases participation was in-person: the researcher acted as witness at funerals of her relatives or colleagues. One ceremony, which took place in November 2020 in the UK, was observed online, connected to the funeral company broadcasting it via its website. The remains of the deceased were cremated in all seven cases observed. Six funerals were held following the liturgical rite of the Roman Catholic Church, including bidding farewell, the cremation of the body, laying down the urn at the funeral home or crematorium, celebrating Mass and praying for the deceased in a Catholic church, seeing off the urn and burying it in a Catholic cemetery with the participation of a Catholic priest. An inseparable part of such funerals is religious chanting at the point where the urn is being laid down and at the point of seeing off, as well as at the moment of burial. In six cases the cremated remains were placed

in ecological urns made of natural materials, either wood or clay. Almost all the urns were decorated with Christian symbols, for example a cross or hands in prayer. The funeral homes decorated the urns with a wreath or bouquet of white flowers (chrysanthemums, roses, callia flowers).

The UK funeral, observed online, was organised following a humanist atheist funeral ceremony. The funeral included plenty of elements pertaining to an ecological funeral: an ecological wicker coffin decorated with a bouquet of red flowers that was cremated at the end of the funeral ceremony. The funeral began with a piece of music that included the sounds of nature and bird song. The musical prelude was followed by a video of lupin fields, and later the sounds of harp accompanied by a quiet female voice. The funeral ceremony included the biography of the deceased, his scientific activities. Farewell speeches were delivered by his British colleagues, in addition to a farewell speech transmitted online from Australia, as the number of in-person participants was restricted because of the pandemic. Later, texts prepared in advance and adjusted to the funeral ceremony were read, and at the end of the event Mozart's Requiem was played. With the last sounds of the Requiem, relatives and colleagues bid their final farewells. At the end of the funeral ceremony the coffin was taken for cremation in the same building.

The field research included seeing three exhibitions of art works at the crematorium in Kėdainiai by Algis Kariniauskas, a deceased artist and the When Dreams Come True exhibition by Aleksandra Stankevič. In addition, we attended Ex It, an art installation in Kaunas by Japanese artist Yoko Ono dealing with existential issues of life and death.

The digital ethnographic analysis draws on visual and content material from funeral commemoration websites, focusing on photographs, images, video clips and written texts placed on the site. In order to read and contextualise visual images, I use Marcus Banks' visual methodology, which emphasizes the element of readership and is concerned with the social rather than the individual construction of meaning. Visual anthropologists understand the content of an image as an internal narrative, while Banks employs the external narrative as a social context that produces the image (Banks 2001; Banks, Zeitlyn 2015).

Ecological funeral rituals

Every year world fashion houses introduce new clothes collections and dictate new trends. Likewise every year funeral businesses organise international exhibitions of funeral requisites, which dictate new fashions. The latest funeral fashions and trends are introduced at international exhibitions and are assimilated around the world. The current tendencies underline the ecological aspect and individuality. Recently funerals have been strongly oriented towards the preservation of nature, ecological ways of living and responsible and sustainable consumption, and therefore the sphere of funeral services contributes to the rapid increase in the number of sustainable solutions.

Today's post-modern societies prefer ecological funeral rituals based on cremation, where the ashes of the deceased are placed into ecological urns made of cellulose, coconut husk or pressed peat. Ecological awareness is the main reason people worldwide prefer 'green' funerals. One form of this is the so-called tree graveyard, which sees the ashes of the deceased mixed in a biologically decomposable container with seeds of a certain tree native to the area of burial. One of the newest forms of ecological burial is the drying of the remains to powder which is later used as compost. Green funerals like these enables carbon, greenhouse gas emissions and environmental pollution to be reduced (Lee et al. 2022).

Although funerals are perhaps the lifecycle rituals least susceptible to change, they have recently undergone drastic change inspired by the spread of ecological ideas. Cremation can serve as an example. Currently, 78% of the Lithuanian population consider cremation to be more aesthetic and ecological, and to cause less emotional pain. More and more people seek to make the urns or graves of their relatives more individual by adding personal traits. For example, the urn could be decorated with symbols reflecting the hobbies of the deceased. Lately funerals have become more flexibly and openly include innovative solutions, such as 3D printed urns (*Rekviem.lt,* 30/05/2022). People hope that in the future they will be allowed to print urns themselves using recyclable material, thus giving rise to more original designs and reducing the cost, as well as making for more sustainable consumption.

Another change which occurred during the two-year period of the pandemic is broadcasting cremations ceremonies and burials online (Miliūnaitė 2021).

This allows relatives and friends to watch the funeral in a way that substitutes for their physical participation, which has always been considered very important psychologically and emotionally. In the circumstances watching the ceremony online became a reasonable way to express one's sympathy for the deceased.

As ecological funerals and cremation become more popular, less attention is paid to luxury and the details of the decor when laying out a corpse.

What factors motivate Lithuanian citizens to decide on ecological funerals?

What factors motivate Lithuanian citizens to decide on ecological funerals? How is the information concerning cremation as a more ecological process than the usual burial spread? One of the factors effecting the choice of an ecological funeral is public education, which is promoted by funeral companies, the Kėdainai crematorium, international funeral business exhibitions and art installations.

The Lithuania crematorium ordered an investigation which was carried out by BERENT Research Baltic. Based on data from this investigation, 60% of respondents were inclined to choose cremation as a more acceptable disposal method than burial. Forty-four per cent of those who had chosen or were in favour of an ecological urn or coffin, also discussed the availability of cremation services. (Ekologiškos laidotuvės 2022)

The Lithuania crematorium, which is located in Kėdainiai in the centre of Lithuania, spreads the message by organising excursions around their enterprise, educating people, organising exhibitions in order to attract visitors, displaying the ecological coffins, made of natural materials, that are used for cremation, and dispelling myths of pollution and bad smells as the outcome of the process. (Ekologiškos laidotuvės 2022) In addition, they promote the idea that the traditional burial is less ecological than cremation. When burying a coffin a substantial amount of metal (for example lead) plastic, paint, synthetic clothing, etc., remain in the ground (Ekologiškos laidotuvės 2022).

Relatives can follow the coffin at the crematorium in Kėdainiai to the place of cremation and watch the process on a computer monitor or through a window (Sudeginimas laidojant: 2022) (Figures 1 and 2).

Figures 1 and 2. Kėdainiai crematorium. Photo: https://www.lrytas.lt/verslas/rinkos-pul-sas/2017/08/01/news/kedainiu-krematoriumas-keicia-prekes-zenkla-ir-pradeda-teikti-naujas-paslaugas-2099399.

The Ex lt installation, by world famous Japanese artist Yoko Ono, is another example of new ecological funeral ideas in Lithuania. Her installation was presented in 2022 at the interwar architectural building in Kaunas as part of Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022. One hundred wooden coffins with trees growing out of them accompanied by the sound of living nature transmitted the message of the consequences of war and natural disasters, a metaphor for resilience, hope and the vitality of nature (Lieponė 2022). The installation "communicate[s] in a different way and invoke[s] understandings in a way that words alone cannot" (Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė 2019: 65). This installation is a good example of spreading new ecological ideas in the contemporary 'over-heated' and unstable world (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The Ex lt installation by Japanese artist Yoko Ono. Kaunas, 2022. Photo by R. Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė.

Today, relatives of the deceased attach more importance to the aspect of ecology, and people themselves express the wishes for such funeral arrangements as the tendency grows and people have more information on sustainable funeral alternatives.

Cemeteries cover vast areas, especially in the environs of bigger cities, and with time this approach becomes unsustainable. In addition there is the problem of increased mobility, meaning that as a result of emigration the relatives of people living far from their homeland have no possibility to take proper care of burial places.

The solutions to this issue, and related issues, can vary. One contemporary suggestion is to scatter the ashes of the deceased on specially arranged plots of land in the graveyard. Remains utilised in this way pollute the ground to a lesser degree and require less land. In future such scattering of ashes will rise in popularity, especially among those who do not have family graves, as permission to scatter ashes in this way is relatively new. Previously some people had illegally scattered ashes on the shore of the Baltic sea near the so-called Dutchman's Hat, in Klaipėda region, or at other water bodies.

The law regulating the burial of human remains in the Republic of Lithuania specifies that "cremated human remains are to be buried (kept) in the grave in the cemetery or placed in a niche in the columbarium, while the ashes of the cremated remains are to be scattered in the plot of land assigned for the purpose in the cemetery, in the Baltic sea within a distance of no less than 5 km from the shore, or in rivers, except for urbanised territories and beaches" (LR ŽPLI SPI, No. X-1404 ch. 15, part 2).

Today there are three methods of burial in Lithuania: 1) burying the bodies of the deceased in coffins by placing them in the ground, 2) keeping the coffins with human remains or urns with cremated remains in columbaria, 3) scattering the ashes of the deceased in legally established places. Furthermore, new tendencies evolve: in the future ecological forest cemetery will be established were unembalmed bodies will be buried, dressed in clothes of natural fabric, or placed there after cremation in biodegradable urns. No tombstones will be erected in such forest cemeteries, and the graves will be marked with a simple stone plank or small stone.

In addition to funeral change relatives are now also choosing a shorter laying out for the corpse and bidding adieu, shortening this period from three to one day, or even a few hours, for example from 2 to 4 hours if there is an urn to be buried, and a day if the body is to be buried in the ground. We can presume that this is because of the fast pace of life and for financial reasons (the price of the funeral depends on the period of laying out the corpse).

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the diffusion of ecological ideas

The Covid-19 pandemic affected the pace of our lives and sowed some confusion and uncertainty. Under the conditions of pandemic, death became an integral part of our everyday lives. In addition, the pandemic period changed the guidelines for funeral ceremonies limiting the number of participants, removing certain rituals or shortening their length. These restrictions were legitimised in Lithuania between February, 2020 and May 1, 2022, when the government declared pandemic conditions no longer applied after 81.36% of the population had been vaccinated or had developed immunity after recovering from Covid-19.

Thus, funeral celebrations received great attention in contemporary Lithuanian society. During the pandemic people died in hospitals or nursing homes without their loved ones, without being able to say goodbye. Families were prohibited from visiting those suffering from the disease and from having contact with their bodies after they had died, and neither did those dying have access to religious services such as confession or the assistance of a priest. During the pandemic period people were constantly compelled to accept prohibitions and adapt to new situations; for example, accepting digital alternatives of funeral celebrations when physical proximity was impossible and having the remains of the deceased taken care of only by employees of funeral companies.

After the outbreaks of the pandemic, funeral companies were compelled to adapt to newly introduced restrictions and to take into consideration the wishes of the bereaved, and thus had to introduce new services.

Innovative Lithuanian funeral companies offered different eco-friendly ideas and services. One of them (Funeral home Balta drobulė 2022) was ready to take care of the body after the person died and hand the urn over to relatives of the deceased; to select an ecological urn and to plant a tree on the grave of the deceased or in some other place; to provide psychological support; to give a white sheet as a present not only to warm the family members on Christmas Eve, but also to be used whenever they were eager to embrace the remembrance of their loved one; to buy a ticket for the relatives and invite them to the theatre or a concert that reminded them of the deceased; to invite the family of the

deceased and his/her friends to a memorial evening and take care of all the details (Funeral home Balta drobulė 2022).

Other funeral companies, such as the *Tyla* funeral home in Šakiai, a town in south western Lithuania, offered a service that included the planning and arrangement of the funeral, preparing the hall for the laying out, taking sanitary care and dressing the deceased, supplying devotional articles (rosary, religious picture, candles), keeping the body in the morgue, pallbearers, gravediggers and cantors, seeing the deceased off to the cemetery, managing the funeral documents and social payments, transporting the remains of the deceased, supplying a coffin or an urn, providing the services of flower arrangement, cremation, burial, hosting at the funeral reception, preparing video and photo presentations for the relatives to share the memories of the deceased person's (Tyla funeral home). The Tyla website states: "Our mission is to help you at a difficult time in your life". Other mottos are even more encouraging: "Let the seeing-off be a bright reminiscence, full of meaning and positive energy" (Balta drobulė funeral company).

New ideas about funeral arrangements come from Western Europe or the US (Laidojimo idėjų 2019). Funeral fashion is introduced via international exhibitions organised by funeral service companies, films, or fiction depicting individualised rituals of visitation and seeing-off ceremonies.

Some funeral companies, for example Sielų upė (2021), have suggested they will keep the urns of the deceased for up to a year without charge if relatives are abroad. The service became extremely popular during the quarantine period when family members were prohibited from entering the country. Some companies offered family members professional psychological support.

Decoration of urns

Apart from descriptions of the services provided, funeral home websites also present different images of urns. For example, they suggest decorating the urns with images of the cross, hands held in prayer, angels, a tree, tree leaves (especially maple and oak) flowers, birds, butterflies, candles or other symbols. Quite often the urns are decorated with nature motifs and their surface may imitate moss or bark. Thus, the impression is that the ashes of the deceased become a natural part of the environment.

The pandemic has modernised the seeing-off ceremony, abandoning some long-standing customs. Instead of honouring the deceased, laid out in a funeral home with a bunch of flowers or a wreath, people limit themselves to a smaller bouquet or a single flower. New initiatives of sustainability and eco-friendly processes have emerged, for example more people decide on ecological urns. Some funeral homes, such as Tylos namai, offer hand-made oval ecological urns created by Lithuanian ceramists, each of which is unique and decorated with different patterns reminiscent of eternal life. They are intended for a columbarium or for burial in the ground (Tylos namai 2022). The choice of material – stone, wood, etc. –, for the coffin or urn reflects how close the deceased was to nature (Aukštuolytė /2021)".

Remembering the deceased in funeral homes and social networks

When visiting the funeral home friends and relatives see slides of the deceased, listen to his/her favourite music in the environment coloured the way he/she liked it. Today people wish the seeing-off to be more personalised and up-to-date. Visitors share reminiscences, photos, listen to the music their late family member liked. Instead of inviting cantors to chant traditional Christian songs instrumental music – a violin, a flute, a saxophone or a guitar –, is played.

The pandemic has given rise to the phenomenon of writing posts on social media networks, especially on Facebook. Quite often such posts include important information concerning the details of the funeral, for example Holy Mass celebrated with the intention of the deceased, and provide the possibility to publicly offer one's condolences. It is not seldom that such social media networks publish a photo of the deceased and a short obituary including people's reminiscences. In addition some of the deceased's friends share religious pictures or symbolic signs related to the funeral including their condolences or commentaries.

Changes in funeral etiquette

Today not only has the mode of burial changed, the same can be said of funeral etiquette. The traditional clothing of the deceased is substituted by clothing reflecting his/her character or preferences and matching the person's accessories.

Funeral halls are bright in the hope of diminishing grief. For example, Ligamis, a funeral home in Vilnius, proposes a preliminary funeral plan, i.e. the client arranges his or her funeral ahead of time and also pays for it. (*Ligamis Funeral* 2022)

Ecological tendencies of tending cemeteries

Today when honouring their deceased people are more inclined to feel the rhythm of nature and translate into reality ecological ideas, decorating graves and observing traditions led by references to nature. When decorating the graves some people use natural articles such as leaves from a tree, dry flower bouquets or wreaths, small branches, cones, etc. A tendency to substitute plastic flowers with natural chrysanthemums or heathers on All Saints' Day is noted. The plants have become especially popular lately because of their sustainability, and the earlier they are planted the better they root, then having survived the winter they come out in spring.

People keep changing their customs and are becoming more eco-minded. One can note the tendency for a moderate number of candles to be lit on the grave. To help with this florists recommend that people buy a stone or ceramic candle holder (Kapinių tvarkymo mados 2022). With time the tendencies of sustainable consumption are taking hold more deeply, for example people use fewer artificial flowers and candles and are more mindful when sorting out trash related to cemetery visits.

Conclusion

The findings of the study suggest the following conclusions. Firstly, the content and visual analysis of webpages presenting ecological funeral commemorations, as well as popular mass media websites, has shown that the last two years of

the Covid-19 pandemic greatly affected funeral ceremonies. Due to pandemic restrictions, funeral rites have become shorter, simpler, more environmentally friendly. During the pandemic, cremation became especially popular and gradually replaced burial of the body. Some funeral rituals, such as cremation, Funeral Mass, and even the funeral ceremony, were broadcast online. Using the method of participant observation, we noticed that funerals could be postponed due to the closure of borders and other restrictions for up to half a year or even a year.

Secondly, the new fashion trends for ecological funeral rituals have spread due to migration, secularisation, the pandemic, the inclusion of individual values and the creativity of the human being.

Thirdly, ecological ideas for funerals aim to reduce the environmental pollution caused by funeral activities and adopt some new environmentally friendly burial rituals.

To sum up, future sustainable funeral rituals that help to preserve nature, and new environment-friendly funeral patterns, could become new habits and turn into customs.

Acknowledgements

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III

Magic, Medicine, Folklore

Love Magic: Spells Using Menstrual Blood in Lithuania

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Abstract: Among menstrual superstitions circulating in Lithuania a belief that it is possible to put a spell on a man using menstrual blood is the least examined. Our article proposes to describe and analyse this superstition.

Analysis is based on individual interview data collected in between 2000 and 2020. The number of respondents totals 323. All of them are women. Respondents were asked about the use of menstrual blood for love magic. Only 67 replied that they knew nothing about it. Respondents who learned about blood spells in their youth many decades ago stated that rumours of bewitchment are still circulating even now. The attitude to blood spells is strictly negative. Respondents who thought that the spells were absolutely ineffective regarded them as something stupid and dirty; believers in the power of menstrual blood magic thought that the spells were dangerous, immoral or even equivalent to witchcraft. Adding a few drops of blood to a drink or other liquid is a well-known practice in Lithuania. Less often blood is added to food. The consequences can be tragic: a handsome and bright youth becomes addicted to an old hag; a model husband and father leaves his family. Unfavourable physical effects are also common with spells, for example, triggering serious diseases. Relationships with the seductress are

unsuccessful. The removal of a love spell based on menstrual blood is intricate; the techniques of doing so that we recorded are scant, filthy and risky.

Keywords: Lithuania, love magic, love spells, menstruation, menstrual blood.

Introduction

Menstruation as a cultural phenomenon is surrounded by a great variety of popular beliefs and practices. One of these is the belief that menstrual blood can be helpful for people using love magic to seduce a desirable man or keep a marriage alive. Researchers into the European Middle Ages write about blood magic. Defining menstrual blood as an ingredient of love potions, they recount women who secretly add a few drops of menstrual blood to a drink or to food prepared for unsuspecting victims (Green 2005: 57; Kieckhefer 2006: 87; Miladinov 2011: 125).

This belief has not yet exhausted itself. Together with corresponding blood magic practices it transitioned successfully from the Middle Ages into modernity (Behar 1987: 39; Behar 1997: 180-181, 203; Cassar 1993: 324; Sánchez Ortega 1991: 60, 82; Matteoni 2009: 201-208). Narrations about the use of menstrual blood to cast a spell over men are still rife (Agapkina 1996: 137-138; Listova 1996: 168-169; Balatonyi 2015: 115-116; Binde 1999: 85, 251; Kalkun 2008: 31, 44; Krasheninnikova 2009: 40; Paradellis 2008: 131; Stark 2004: 84; Popper-Giveon & Ventura 2009: 34).

The first publications to discuss seduction by menstrual blood were issued in Lithuania in the early 21st century. In his short article about the use of blood to make drugs, ethnopharmacologist Tauras Antanas Mekas argued that bewitching men using menstrual blood was the most common love magic practice in Lithuania (Mekas 2002: 192). The author based his statement on materials collected in the late 20th century by local ethnographer Amelija Urbienė (LIIBR F73-616: 98-99, 101, 103). Evidently, his generalisation should have rested on a richer body of data because materials contained in this collection come only from Viekšniai (a town in Mažeikiai district, northwest Lithuania) and its environs. Jonas Basanavičius's collection was published some years later. Devoted entirely to Lithuanian magic, it contains only two statements about the use of

menstrual blood to seduce men. Both of them were recorded in the early 20th century (Basanavičius 2004: 255, 376).

The situation is similar in countries close to Lithuania geographically and culturally. We think that the perplexing scarcity of collected and published material is best interpreted by Tat'yana Agapkina. She argues that some ethnography topics are under-researched for purely subjective reasons, for example certain facts are simply unappealing to ethnography collectors and publishers. Tat'yana Agapkina supposes that this unattractiveness can be explained not so much by scientific as by "scientifically-ethic" or censorial reasons (Agapkina 1996: 103-104).

With time more data emerged. In 2005 Rita Balkutė published six exhaustive narratives about the use of menstrual blood to entrance men, and about the negative consequences of blood spells. In 2013 she included more than twenty such narratives in her collection (Balkutė 2005: 137-139; Balkutė 2013: 225, 228, 239, 246-252, 256-260, 265-266).

Researching youth initiation and calendar customs of the early 21st century in different regions of Lithuania, ethnologist Žilvytis Šaknys recorded information about young people's knowledge of love magic practices. Among his recordings there were accounts of the use of menstrual blood to entice men (Šaknys 2002: 180-181; 2007: 85, 116; 2009: 79, 109; 2012: 101, 135). Several local monographs published by the Versmė publishing house also contained articles informing about men bewitched by menstrual blood (Balikienė & Navickas 2013: 1519-1520; Navickas & Piliponytė 2009: 994-996; Navickas 2020: 866-867).

In this article our general aim is to show how widely distributed the belief in the efficacy of menstrual blood magic is in Lithuania, and how resilient it has been to time and lifestyle changes.

Participant recruitment and data collection

It was in 2000 that Monika Balikienė came across menstrual blood spell stories for the first time. This happened in Merkinė, a small town in Dzūkija (southwest Lithuania). At that time she was focussing on research into belief in the evil eye in Lithuania, so her questionnaire included the following question: "Can the eyes of a menstruating woman harm people, animals, plants or inanimate

objects?" As a rule, respondents' answer to this question was short: "No". Among research participants, however, there were women who expanded voluntarily on the subject of menstruation. Several of them mentioned food taboos, adding that menstrual blood was an excellent means for casting love spells on men. By the way, these respondents always warned the researcher that blood spells were very dangerous and that such magic practice was absolutely inadvisable. Thus over several subsequent years of field research into the subject of the evil eye a substantial number of narrations about the use of menstrual blood to entice men was gathered.

Some years passed, and the collection of information about seducing men with menstrual blood acquired a purposeful form based on fieldwork experience. Starting from 2006 a questionnaire titled Menstruation in Lithuanian Culture (Balikienė & Baranauskaitė & Navickas 2006) was used for research into the menstrual experience of Lithuanian women. The aim of the questionnaire was to embrace the whole menstrual experience, starting with the expectation of menarche (first period) and finishing with menopause. The questionnaire included 68 questions. They reflected the following basic themes: menarche, menstrual restrictions and superstitions, menstrual hygiene, menopause experience, and mother–daughter communication on the subject of menstruation. Most of all we were interested in women whose personal menstrual experience covered both menarche and menopause and who were mothers to at least one daughter. If our respondents were younger, we used a correspondingly modified version of the questionnaire. One way or another, any adult girl or any woman who agreed to speak about relevant issues was considered fit for our investigating into menstrual superstitions, menstrual taboos and, last but not least, the bewitching of men.

Research participants were given four questions. First of all, we wanted to know if our respondent had ever heard of beliefs that men can be put under a spell by means of menstrual blood. If the answer was positive, we enquired about who provided such information and when, and what the exact contents of the information was. We then asked the respondent what she thought about the chances of putting a spell on a man using menstrual blood. Our final question was about our respondent's knowledge of techniques and remedies used to counter such spells in order to know whether our research participants had any information on how to stop a blood spell and set a bewitched man free.

Ethnographic material for this article was gathered by Monika Balikienė and Vytautas Navickas in many parts of Lithuania, such as Pilviškiai (2006), Obeliai and Kriaunos (2007), Panemunis (2008), Onuškis (2010), Užpaliai (2010), Viekšniai (2010), Žemaičių Kalvarija (2010) and Kaltanėnai (2011 and 2012) during ethnographic expeditions sponsored by the Versmė publishing house. The authors were also assisted by Vilnius University psychology and sociology students. For the purpose of this article, ethnographic material collected by Vytautas Magnus University ethnology students Regina Mikštaitė-Čičiurkienė and Diana Mikužienė was used. These assistants helped to widen significantly the geography of the research.

Between 2000 and 2020, using the above-described data collection strategy, relevant information was obtained from 323 women from different age groups. The most intensive period of data collection was 2006 to 2012.

Results

Having or not having knowledge about spells on menstrual blood. The majority of participants stated that they had information about love spells using menstrual blood to entrap men. Only 67 participants said that they did not know anything about such spells, i.e. 20.7%.

Women who were 60 or older dominated our sample amounting to 219, or 67.8%. We divided our interviewees into nine age groups. Group 1 (0-19) consisted of seven women who were 19 at the time of interview. (Women under 18 were not invited to the interview.) Four women from this age group said that they knew about spells using menstrual blood, three stated that they did not. Group 2 (20-29) was made up of 32 women aged 20-29. Fourteen of them said that they had information about blood spells, 18 said that they did not. Group 3 (30-39) comprised 21 women. Fourteen said that they knew about love spells using menstrual blood, seven said that they did not. Group 4 (40-49) included 19 women. The majority of them (15) were informed about the spells, only four said that they were not. Group 5 (50-59) was composed of 25 women. Twenty said that they had knowledge of the use of menstrual blood when casting spells, five said that they did not. Group 6 (60-69) consisted of 51 women. Forty-four stated that they knew about the spells, seven said that they did not. Group 7 (70-79) included 104 women. Ninety had knowledge of the spells,

14 did not. Group 8 (80-89) comprised 61 women. Fifty-two had information about the spells, nine did not. Group 9 (90+) was made up of only 3 women, all of whom stated that they were well aware of love spells using menstrual blood.

The elderly interviewees told us that they learned about love spells using menstrual blood when they were young. They stated, however, that bewitchment issues were discussed quite often in their environment even today. The women added that they heard rumours of male neighbours and distant relatives entrapped in this way. Some even told us about their family members (uncles, brothers, sons and husbands) who had fallen victim to bewitchment. The attitude of our interviewees to blood spells was strictly negative. The women who thought that the spells were absolutely ineffective regarded them as something stupid and dirty. Those who believed in the power of menstrual magic thought that the spells were very dangerous, immoral and equivalent to witchcraft.

Here are three extracts form our conversations with elderly interviewees. They illustrate at least some statements from the passage above. The interviewer was Vytautas Navickas.

VN: Perahps you have heard that it is possible to put a spell on boys using that blood?

Respondent 1: Well, I've heard, I've really heard about it. Locals would speak a lot. People would say that once such a spell is cast, no force whatever will tear them apart. Later when they get married they do not live in harmony, they disagree, but they get married all the same. There were rumours that girls gave blood to boys secretly.

VN: How did they do it?

'Respondent 1: How? They could add it to his food or cup of tea. People would speak a lot about that…. I dated a boy for six years. Over that period we separated now and then. But finally we married. I remember people saying to me: "Hey, you stupid thing, feed it to him!" But how could I? If I love a person, how can I give him such dirt?

VN: Did they say directly "feed it to him"?

Respondent 1: Yes. "Feed it to him, and he will never separate from you." My heart does not allow me to do such things. Besides, a such measure is

not really necessary, but even if it were necessary, well, how can a person feed such unspeakable abomination to anybody?

(Respondent 1: Woman, born in 1922. Interview conducted in 2005 in a village in Rokiškis District)

Excerpt from interview by Monika Balikienė and Vytautas Navickas:

Respondent 2: Well, if you ask me, I'll tell you. Local people would say that if a man is treated to a cup of tea by a woman, he becomes her property. She takes hold of him. Such stories are real. I heard them from at least several women. At that time I worked at a hospital. One medical nurse assured me: "That is a real thing".

MB, VN: Perhaps you can remember the year?

Respondent 2: Oh, that happened 20 years ago. The nurse told me that she did it herself. She said that she gave him several drops of her menstrual blood.

MB, VN: So what do people actually say? How do they perform such an action?

Respondent 2: They add a few drops. They make a cup of tea and offer it to him. I was told such stories.

MB, VN: In your opinion, do these drops really affect the man? Or is it only a superstition?

Respondent 2: Well, I don't know. Such stories were really very widespread among locals. How can I know if they are true?

(Respondent 2: Woman, born in 1919. Interview conducted in 2005 in a village in Rokiškis District)

Respondent 3: Yes, people say that women do such things. I've heard that they do. I mean women who are, so to say, older and who wish to entrap younger men… A man is simply put under a blood spell. Once he is bewitched he will never leave his seductress. I've heard about it.

MB: Perhaps your girlfriends or neighbours did it?

Respondent 3: They never told me if they did. But every woman knows about it. Women used to talk about it.

MB: What is the procedure?

Respondent 3: Maybe they add blood to a cup of tea. Or maybe to a plate of soup. I don't know. In short, it must be given to him in food.

MB: Is it really possible, in your opinion, to entice a man by means of menstrual blood?

Respondent 3: Well, I don't know. I think that there are other ways to lure him: be cheerful, be kind.

MB: Perhaps you have heard how to cancel a menstrual blood spell put on a man?

Respondent 3: Oh! People say that it is impossible to remove the spell. Once he is bewitched, he stays bewitched.

MB: For life?

Respondent 3: For life.

(Respondent 3: Woman, born in 1935. Interview conducted in 2007 in a village in Rokiškis District by Monika Balikienė).

Sometimes respondents were inclined to reflect more deeply on human relationships. On such occasions they argued that spells using menstrual blood have nothing to do with love magic because females who cast blood spells do not seek love. Their aim is to overpower, subdue and enslave a human being.

Victims. The victims of these spells are principally young, handsome, healthy and wealthy men. Women can be also counted among victims if they are girls, spouses or mothers whose boyfriends, husbands or sons were enticed away. The female victims are allegedly beautiful, industrious and honest. Respondents often mention a functioning family and children whom the man leaves under a menstrual blood spell. So, a family as an organisation and children as its members can also be considered as victims.

Respondent 4: If you want a man pay attention to you – put a spell on him using your menstruation blood. Give him any kind of beverage to drink to which you have added [a few drops of blood] squeezed out of your sanitary pad, or you may use water in which you washed that pad. Such stories make me shudder. I would listen to what women say, and think: "A decent girl cannot lure a boy in this way".

MB, VN: But you have heard about it?

Respondent 4: I've heard a lot about it. A few drops into a glass of beer, whiskey. Into some kind of stronger drink so that the colour does not show. And this must be carried out with a strong desire to make him love you, pay attention to you, start liking you…. I would say that such methods are not honest. They are absolutely disgusting….

MB, VN: Perhaps they only gossip, perhaps they do not perform such actions? What's your opinion?

Respondent 4: I heard old women talking about a husband who had a good wife. She was hard-working, clean, and so on. But the husband left her for an absolutely nasty, lazy and dirty female creature. So what did he find in her? A disgusting ruin of a woman with so many children. Those old women were asking each other: "What did he find in her?" Well, they said that she put a blood spell on him using some kind of beverage. This is a kind of bewitchment. She put a blood spell on him, and he left his wife, a tidy, industrious woman, and moved to that female. There are many instances showing how a husband leaves his wife, a seemingly hard-working woman with a smaller number of children. He chooses a life of hell. And he is delighted [laughs].

MB, VN: Have you been hearing such stories since childhood?

Respondent 4: Yes. Since childhood. When adult women discuss something among themselves, children's ears suck in their words so well that they stick in the memory forever.

MB, VN: Where do women discuss such issues? Probably in the bath house?

Respondent 4: In the bath house and elsewhere when they meet. And children run around them. Nobody allowed us to listen, but if listening is forbidden, then children listen with increased intensity.

(Respondent 4: Woman, born in 1945. Interview conducted in 2010 in a small town in Plungė District)

Blood love magic practitioners. Judging from responses and explanations given by our research participants, menstrual blood magic operators may be malevolent or benevolent. Our interviewees very often described them as malevolent females who turned to magic in order to entrap a young, handsome and bright man. Seductresses were allegedly plain, shapeless, deformed, dirty, idle, work-shy, good-for-nothing and immoral single women (so-called old maids) or widows. By all accounts the malicious females were older than their male victims. Very seldom our research participants spoke about apprehensive wives who, fearing that their husbands will leave them for other women, add their own menstrual blood to drinks or foods intended for spouses. These poor females should be counted among benevolent blood magic practitioners.

In 2005, in a small town in south west Lithuania, we talked with a woman born in 1933. Asked about menstrual magic, she told us that several years ago her daughter was on the verge of divorce. Her mother-in-law liked her immensely and wished to save the marriage. The mother-in-law suspected that a woman who was nine years her son's senior had put a menstrual blood spell over him. She talked her daughter-in-law into bringing some of her used sanitary pads. The mother-in-law needed them to 'spice up' her son's tea. Since this measure turned out not to be very helpful, the women decided to employ black magic. Here is an extract from our conversation:

Respondent 5: So the mother-in-law said to her: "I've bought a black candle, now you go to the cemetery. As soon as you see a headstone with the christian name <…> on it [the christian name of her son's seductress was <…>], light the candle and place it on that grave. Since the christian name <…> is not very common these days, my daughter could not find a gravestone fit for the purpose in the whole cemetery.

MB, VN: To light a candle on any grave with the name <…>?

Respondent 5: Yes, on any. Place a burning black candle on it and go away.

MB, VN: So who was the initiator?

Respondent 5: My daughter's mother-in-law was.

MB, VN: The mother-in-law?

Respondent 5: Yes. She did not want them to divorce. She tried so hard. Oh yes!!! She saw that her daughter-in-law was not guilty. Her son was guilty.

(Respondent 5: Woman born in 1933. Interview conducted in 2005 in a small town in south west Lithuania)

Blood spell techniques. Secretly adding several drops of menstrual blood to a glass of alcohol (beer, whiskey, brandy) or a cup of another beverage (tea, coffee) is common practice when casting a spell on a man. Tea and coffee occupy a leading position among the most treacherous drinks. According to our interviewees, these aromatic beverages are maximally dangerous to men in Lithuania. Wine is equally suspicious. It is risky for men to drink wine in the company of charming women. Coloured spirit drinks should be avoided on principle. Special attention must be given to beer, a favourite drink of Lithuanian men. Beer is mentioned in earliest Lithuanian blood love magic narrations. Included in Jonas Basanavičius's collection, these narrations tell of how, in the early 20th century, girls allegedly used to put boys under a spell by adding several drops of menstrual blood to a glass of beer (Basanavičius 2004: 255, 376). Relatively less often blood is added to food, such as soup, scrambled eggs, omelettes and pancakes. The list of dangerous dishes is practically endless. Our interviewees noted that blood can be added to any food.

Our research participants explained that above-mentioned foods and drinks are preferable in menstrual magic because of their ability to mask the colour of blood. Men, however, should be always on guard. They should always be prepared for difficulty even if women treat them to perfectly transparent alcoholic or non-alcoholic drinks. Our research materials show that tools are available to bypass the colour code. These less common blood magic techniques indicate that menstrual blood can be used not only directly but also indirectly. Indirect blood spell techniques are relatively rare. We recorded only a few. Here is one of them:

Respondent 6: Well, people would say that they really can [put a spell in a man]. Well, during their menstruation they can do it. But I personally did not have to turn to such means. I did not perform such actions.

MB, AP: Perhaps you have heard what happens when a woman performs them?

Respondent 6: Well, people say that the man is put under a spell. By burning blood-smeared rags to ashes.

MB, AP: Ah, the rags must be burnt to ashes?

Respondent 6: Smeared rags must be burnt and added to a beverage.

MB, AP: The ashes?

Respondent 6: Yes yes. Add them to a cup of tea.

(Respondent 6: Woman, born in 1926. Interview conducted in 2007 in a village in Rokiškis District. Interviewers: Monika Balikienė and Algimantė Piliponytė)

Amelija Urbienė described a technique by which menstrual blood can be used indirectly; what is more, it can serve simultaneously as a constituent of the whole bewitchment operation.

Carry a lump of sugar wrapped up in a rag under each armpit for a whole month so that your sweat is absorbed into the sugar. Also, wear your chemise without changing it for a whole month. The chemise must get smeared with menstruation blood. Any kind of washing oneself, such as swimming or taking a bath, is strictly forbidden. When a month passes, remove the lumps of sugar from under your armpits, take off the chemise and burn it. Gather the ashes and keep them. If there is a man whom you fancy but he does not find you attractive, you must dissolve the lumps of sugar in a liquid (water or tea, or something else) and make sure that he drinks it. This must be done in secret, he must not see or know anything. Scatter the ashes of the burnt chemise over a place where that man will most probably sit or lie down. Some of the ashes must stick to him. In this way a spell can be put on a man. (LIIBR F73-616: 98-99)

Amelija Urbienė learned about this technique by eavesdropping on her mother's conversation with a woman. That woman was giving an account of what she did in order to seduce a desirable man. The conversation took place in 1923 when Amelija was 14.

Another indirect technique involves rue. More precisely, the watering of rue. This bewitchment method was recorded by Rita Balkutė in 2000 in Varėna District. The procedure is complex: upon a girl's first menstruation a mother (only if she is intelligent and well-informed) instructs her daughter to wash herself and then pour the water out in the garden where rue shrubs grow. It was a custom in the past for girls to carry a bunch of rue when going to church. If a girl brushed the rue (fed with water containing her menstrual blood) against a boy whom she fancied, he fell in love with her. Acting this way any girl was able to get any boy to chase her (Balkutė 2013: 225).

Dose. Our research participants usually did not specify the dose needed to bewitch a man. They only mentioned that large quantities of blood should not be used – several drops will do.

Intake frequency. Our interviewees expressed many opinions on this issue. In general, one secret intake of menstrual blood should be enough. A male victim becomes attached to his seductress permanently. He literally becomes addicted to her. Some respondents insisted that the intake must be repeated every month. The repetition will allegedly secure the male victim's attachment to his seductress. In this way she will keep him in bondage until the resources of her seductive substance are completely exhausted. One woman told us that the seductress must add several drops of her menstrual blood on three successive new moons. This procedure allegedly guarantees permanent success for her treacherous business.

Strength and duration of spells. As can be expected, opinions on strength and duration of spells also vary considerably. Only a few respondents mentioned that the strength of the spells waste away. Amelija Urbienė recorded an interesting instruction concerning spell duration: if a woman wishes to entrance a man for a while, she must use blood taken at the beginning of her period. But if she wishes to bewitch him for life, she must use menstrual substance with only traces of blood in it. In other words, blood must be taken at the end of her period. This instruction seems to be unique, we have not come across similar.

If you wish to seduce a man, you must give him some of your menstrua-tion blood added to his drink or food. If you give him your menstruation substance with blood (when menstruation flow is bloody), he will not love you all of his life, his love will not be long, it will last a month, a year or longer. If you want him to love you all his life, you must do the following: when your period is ending, the flow is no longer bloody, it is clear, it is clean. So you must gather that clean menstrual flow [into a piece of cot-ton wool or clean rag] and pour boiling water over it when making tea or coffee. Then serve it to the man, and he will love you until his death. (LIIBR F73-616: 103).

In her short comment to the above recording Amelija Urbienė writes that she got this information from a young woman travelling from Vilnius to Mažeikiai. The woman told her that she was born in a small town in Mažeikiai District, and that her first husband left her heartbroken. Seeing this an old woman taught her what to do. In a word, menstrual blood magic helped her to catch another husband who loves her very much and takes care of her. Amelija Urbienė noted that, judging from the way the young woman talked, it was clear that she was a university graduate, occupying a top position at her company.

In 2001, Monika Balikienė interviewed three women, native residents of the same village in Varėna District. One woman was elderly (born in 1940), one middle-aged (born in 1953) and one young (born in 1983). Each of them stated that menstrual blood spells last only one month. Here are their respec-tive narrations:

If a girl wants to attract a boy, she saves that blood and then adds it to his food. As soon as he eats it, she takes possession of him. But a month passes, and he regathers his wits. But if they marry, they do not get along well.

I heard that they do all kinds of hellish tricks in order to seduce men. Grandma explained to me that if they want to seduce boys, they use menstrual blood. But as soon as one month passes, everything falls into place. And everything starts from the beginning. They say that after one month the action must be repeated all over again, every month. That is what I heard.

I've also heard that if a girl wants to entice a boy, she must add three drops of menstrual blood to his cup of tea. But after that, when a definite period of time (a month, it seems to me) passes, the boy will not tolerate that girl.

As expected, narrations by women living in close-knit village communities are very similar. Yet they are not identical because interviewees emphasize different components of a well-established standard blood spell story. The oldest participant puts stress on post-bewitchment difficulties, specifically, problems during married life. The middle-aged participant is slightly annoyed by the absurdity and stupidity of female aspirations. The youngest pays special attention to the dose – three drops of blood.

Consequences of bewitchment. Although there are a wide variety of effects, the consequences of menstrual blood spell practices are invariably dramatic. Sometimes they are tragic. For example, a young, handsome and bright boy becomes addicted to an older and totally worthless woman. Or a faithful God-fearing family man heads straight into shameful slavery, having left behind a comfortable home, devoted wife and children. Unfavourable physical effects are also common. Our interviewees warned that love spells using menstrual blood can trigger serious diseases, such as tuberculosis. They noted that male victim's relations with the seductress are always unsuccessful. On the one hand, he cannot break free from her, on the other hand, their life as a couple is not harmonious: they often abuse each other and fight.

Respondent 7: A girl can gain complete power over a boy very quickly, if only she wishes it. Her period will come, she will add [some menstrual blood] to his cup of tea, and he will stick to her. But later when they get married, he will not love her. This shows that the girl has cast a spell on him. Later it becomes clear that their married life is lost: neither do their children behave like they should, nor do they as a couple live properly. So, (a spell on menstrual blood) is a definite no-no. A girl should never entice a boy in this manner. In order to keep her peace of mind.

MB, VN: Are there any methods of undoing the spell? Is it possible to separate him from her?

Respondent 7: Oh, I even do not know if it is possible to get rid of a man under a blood spell. What I know is this: add some drops of menstrual

blood to a cup of tea. Make him drink it. This action must be repeated three times. And he will stick to his seductress. But if they marry, their life is lost. Ruined forever.

MB, VN: Women say that the husband's health also suffers from such tea.

Respondent 7: I think it is quite possible. You see, he is kind of poisoned. His heart is no longer at rest.

(Respondent 7: Woman born in 1926. Interview conducted in 2010 in a small town in Utena District)

In Vilnius in 2006 Irena Akelienė recorded two narrations about the fatal consequences of spells using menstrual blood. Both narrators were born in villages in Varėna District, where they spent their youth. The older woman (born in 1931), asked if she had heard about the use of menstrual blood to cast spells on men, told the following story:

I've heard. When I lived in a rented room in Vilnius my landlady's ex used to visit her. She used to treat him to a drink with a few drops of her menstrual blood in it. So that man became addicted to her, getting thinner and thinner with time. Then, after some years, he died.

The younger (born in 1938) woman's reaction to a similar question was unexpected. It turned out that she learned about the fatal consequences of blood spells from TV:

I have just seen on TV how a 16 year old boy fell madly in love with a 38 year old woman who allegedly used to treat him to a cup of coffee spiced with her menstrual blood. So the boy grew so desperately sad that he committed a suicide by hanging because of love.

As is known, TV shows distribute information about love magic theory and practice generously. It must be noted, however, that only a few interviewees said that they learned about blood spells for the first time from TV.

Spell cancellation chances and techniques. Opinions about spell removal differ widely in our sample. Some respondents believe that removal is possible, some think that it is impossible. Respondents who believed that a male victim can be restored to the original (pre-charm) condition warned us that restora-

tion requires much effort and skill to accomplish. In urgent cases professional consultation may be necessary. Some interviewees mentioned that they knew that their female neighbours, friends or family members consulted people with magic powers in order to undo harm inflicted on husbands, brothers, sons or grandsons. They stated that magic advice was helpful. If a professional magician is unavailable, it is possible to use do-it-yourself methods although, in the opinion of many respondents, they can hardly stop or undo spells. In sum, the chances of cancelling a blood spell are slim. No wonder we recorded an extremely small number of spell removal techniques. All of them are risky and unhygienic.

In 2003, in a village in Raseiniai District (mid-west Lithuania) Monika Balikienė heard a real-life story told by a woman born in 1921. When the narrator was young there was a poor girl in their village who wanted to marry a rich farmer very much. People said that she bewitched one boy by adding some of her menstrual blood to his food or drink. He clung to that girl. His mother did everything possible to set her son free. She even consulted a priest. The village people said that there was a chance to get rid of this unscrupulous girl. Some of them suggested doing the following: wash the inside of a shoe worn by this girl with water, add this water to a drink or food and serve this dish to the boy. The interviewee explained that the aim of this operation was to make the male victim feel disgust for his seductress. The narrator was not sure if the boy's mother performed the prescribed actions. One way or another, the persistent seductress married the man she desired. However they did not live long as a couple and in the end they divorced.

This method of freeing a victim from such a spell is obviously connected with people's expectations. According to our interviewees, the method must provoke disgust in an unsuspecting victim. In order to achieve this goal, stronger substances than the water in which the shoe was washed are recommended. Some spell removal techniques rely on the use of the seductress's faeces. Once a small piece of this substance is ingeniously obtained, it should be added secretly to the male victim's food or drink and then served to him. We heard several such narrations in east Lithuania. Four similar stories were recorded by Rita Balkutė in villages in Varėna District in 1999. All of them offer the following instruction: get a small piece of seductress's faeces, dissolve it in water, bring the water to the boil and simmer. After that, serve the remedy to the unsuspecting male victim (Balkutė 2013: 251, 262-263, 265-266).

Luckily, a more hygienic method of removing blood love spells is available: throw a piece of the seductress's faeces over her body. After this is accomplished the evil woman is regarded as "one who has been arched by shit". We learned about this method in 2010 in a small town in Trakai District. Our informant was a woman born in 1932. We recorded a less filthy technique in 2009, in a village in Rokiškis District. A respondent born in 1923 told us that it was necessary to cut surreptitiously a piece of chemise worn by the unsuspecting seductress (the garment must be drenched in her sweat), boil it for a while in water, then secretly pour the water into the victim's cup of tea.

In 2011-2012, in villages near a small town in Švenčionys District (east Lithuania), we recorded several real-life stories about the wonderful powers black boar dung. Women told us that if a small piece of this particular excrement was tossed secretly into the space between a seductress and her male victim, it could undo the spell. One woman added that this technique is very bad for the very good reason that it is fatal. The seductress will inevitably die. We asked if the action of tossing dung must be carried out by an interested party, for example, the victim's sister, mother or some other family member. The woman explained to us that kinship in such a case is not vital. The action may be performed even by a hired person. Our interviewees assured us that in former times locals feared death by black boar dung very much. Today black pigs are extremely rare in Lithuania, and so since there is an acute shortage of this specific dung, this allegedly very effective method is no longer readily available.

Our interviewees told us that they heard stories about herbs that are useful for spell removal. Unfortunately, narrations about such magical plants have become less common. One was recorded by Rita Balkutė in 1997, in a village in Zarasai District. This story, revolving around a granny who set her grandson free from menstrual blood spells, identifies a particular herb called atgiriai (*Huperza selago*). The granny gave him a cup of atgiriai tea. This remedy worked very well as the boy vomited every time he saw his seductress (Balkutė: 2013: 256-257).

In 2008, we learned the name of another good herb from a woman living in a small town in Rokiškis District. Narration by this respondent, born in 1932, is remarkable not only because it identifies the herb, but also for the information about an accidental overdose of menstrual blood.

There was a husband who used to leave his native village regularly in search of work. Seeking to secure marital fidelity his apprehensive wife secretly added a portion of her menstrual blood to his drink. The dose turned out to

be excessive. The husband suddenly felt very sick in the fields and fell to the ground rolling from side to side. Luckily, women working nearby guessed the reason for his suffering. They made him drink some clubmoss (*Lycopodium annotinum*) tea, which saved him.

The healing procedure is carried out by two people who, seated in pairs, must drink clubmoss tea. The best effects are achieved when the victim's wife or some other relation helps him drink the tea. But the helper and victim may be strangers. The pair must simply drink tea together and then vomit together. The main thing is to diagnose bewitchment correctly. Both the victim and his assistant must know that in this way they get rid of the spell. According to our informant, the procedure was over when the husband disgorged two big white beetles. The insects scurried away intact but the removal of spell was successful.

The herbal techniques described above serve as deterrents by inducing disgust. They relieve the victim of addiction to an evil woman as if she was the poison, that is through the digestive tract.

In 1999, in a village in Lazdijai District, Rita Balkutė recorded a narration about a nasty woman, a so-called old maid. This mature female cast a blood spell on a young boy. The youth suspected that he fell victim to blood love magic. He shared his suspicion with a reliable woman who suggested striking the seductress in the face with a fist – seeing fresh blood on her face was vital. Having done what he was advised, the boy got rid of the spell (Balkutė 2013: 252). This story seems to be unique and, as yet, we have not come across similar.

Spell removal techniques can be connected with important religious rites and ceremonies. In a technique described below the Christian Church and its symbols are a spell-destroying force.

In 2010, in Trakai District, Rita Balkutė recorded a narration about two sisters who saved their brother from menstrual blood spells. The brother was a married man. His seductress was a loose woman with three children born out of wedlock. Trying to save their brother, the sisters turned to a sorceress for help. The sorceress asked them to bring three things that belonged to their brother from important stages of his life. The sisters brought his christening gown, his neck tie and the shirt he wore at his marriage service. The sorceress burnt the three things to ashes. Having handed them to the sisters, she told them to sprinkle the ashes secretly and cunningly on their brother's head and shoulders crosswise. The sisters did as they were told, starting from the head. They sprinkled ashes surreptitiously from the forehead to the nape of his neck,

distracting his attention with these words: There's something stuck to your hair, let's see what it is. Next time they worked on his shoulders and back from the neck downwards, then across the shoulders, talking to him cunningly: Oh, I see a bulge. What is it? The sisters repeated the magic action twice. After that everything was fine with the brother (Balkutė 2013: 259-260).

Transmission of the knowledge of spells using menstrual blood. In 2010 Kristina Cibulskė defended a psychology master's thesis titled "Mothers and Their Adult Daughters' Attitudes towards Menstruation". She compared the attitudes of 34 mothers (mean age 52.5) and their 40 daughters (mean age 28.7) to Lithuanian tradition. Almost all research participants were native residents of Dzūkija (south west Lithuania). Cibulskė employed psychological methods in her investigation into attitudes towards menstruation. For the study of cultural context a questionnaire created by Kristina Cibulskė and Vytautas Navickas was used, the results of which showed that 93% of the respondents were very well informed about food taboos, slightly less informed about love spells used to seduce men (78%), and least informed about superstitions connected with hair care procedures (66%). Compared to daughters, mothers were better in-formed on all cultural beliefs, and their belief was stronger. Kristina Cibulskė noted that all research participants stated distinctly that they believed that a menstruating woman could spoil food cooked or otherwise prepared by her, or that a menstruating woman should not visit a hair salon, have her hair cut or dyed or dressed because it would be a waste of time and money. Partici-pants gave different answers to the question of whether it was really possible to entice men using menstrual blood: "yes", "no", "I have doubts", "perhaps yes", and "perhaps no". Such a distribution of answers might indicate that women really had doubts about whether it was possible to seduce men using menstrual blood. On the other hand, it may demonstrate these women's unwillingness to tell the truth. Perhaps respondents thought it possible to cast a blood spell on men? Speaking from our research, we too cannot be sure that the participants who said that they did not know anything about blood spells (67 respondents, 20.7%) were sincere in this answer.

Kristina Cibulskė's research clearly indicates that taboos on food are handed down to the majority of daughters by their mothers. However, the situation with the seduction of men is quite different. Only one mother out of 34 participating in the research said that she learned about blood spells from her mother. Out

of 40 daughters only six said that they learned about blood spells from their mothers (Cibulskė 2010: 37-38).

The same information transmission pattern is also evident in our research. Women who were able to remember the source of the information more or less precisely said that they learned about menstrual blood spells from their girlfriends, or from rumours, or by eavesdropping on older women. Very seldom did they remember having hearing about them from their mothers.

In preparation for final conclusions. We started our research by proposing that we would describe and analyse the belief that it is possible to put a spell on a man using menstrual blood. As time went by this general goal became more precise. We wanted to get answers to the following questions: Is information about blood spells really so widespread? Do interviewees simply report what they heard other people saying or do they believe in blood spells? Do they think that evil women practising spells using menstrual blood really exist? Do people really perform blood magic rites today?

In 2008, in a village in Pasvalys District, hoping to obtain valuable information, we interviewed an aged but very agile and quick-witted woman born in 1913. To our surprise – and also regret – her attitude to magic and related issues was very sceptical. Asked about menstrual blood spells, she gave the following answer:

Respondent 8: I do not remember who told me about it, my mother or somebody else? If a girl wishes to entrap a boy, then – into a cup of tea or plate of soup. In this way she will tie him to herself and he will belong to her. I do not believe in it.

MB, VN: Do people really perform such actions?

Respondent 8: I do not believe in magic. Absolutely. But nowadays when people talk and write so much about spells and magic, even I hesitate: perhaps magic works? There are many sorcerers today, some of them could be vicious. Previously I was a strict non-believer, but now I have doubts…. Long ago, when we were young, we were clever beyond measure, we even despised stories our parents told us, but now… What concerns [blood] spells, I have doubts. I start thinking that something in them may be real. You better ask somebody else, not me.

The interview gave us a hint that the number of believers was perhaps much greater than it seems if such a rock has finally crumbled. Inspired by this revelation, we continued our work. Following this woman's advice, we interviewed as many women as we could. We recorded their allegedly genuine stories, first-hand experiences and observations. Were they really true? We do not know. Since we are not witnesses to events described by our research participants, we cannot specify the number of women who manipulate men by means of menstrual blood. It is hardly possible to give a quantitative answer to the rest of questions posed earlier in this section either. We doubt very much that every woman who denied knowing anything about these spells was absolutely unaware of this popular practice. We are not dead sure that those interviewees who waved away with a smile the very idea of love magic were absolutely sincere. Almost all women who stated that they knew about spells using menstrual blood assured us that they learned about them for the first time in their adolescence, adding that since then rumours about the entrapment of men using blood have accompanied them all their lives on an almost daily basis.

The belief is obviously resilient to time and lifestyle changes. Why is this so? As is known, love magic offers a wide range of means to affect the course of events in human lives. Some of them can be very intricate and costly. Menstrual blood, as the main ingredient of love potions and charms, is readily accessible when needed. Putting a blood spell on a man is convenient and simple. What is more, it costs absolutely nothing.

Conversations with the women who participated in this research give the impression that people stick to this belief (and practice) because it contains a huge explanatory charge. Supported by this belief, any girl who is seen (or at least sees herself) as beautiful, sexy and chic can easily explain to herself why her boyfriend has suddenly left her for a less attractive, or even a disfigured, stupid or dowdy, woman. Similarly, a frustrated mother or grandmother can explain to herself, family members and neighbours why their handsome, clever and well-educated young man became attached to an 'old whore' instead of being interested in the beautiful, respectful, well-behaved and hard-working girl next door. This way of thinking was very obvious in the narratives provided by our interviewees.

Conclusion

Field research data allow us to conclude that knowledge of spells using menstrual blood allegedly practised by dishonest and unattractive women is pretty widespread in Lithuania. Information obtained from elderly women and young girls supports our statement. Many respondents not only stated briefly whether they were aware of the existence of such magic practices, they also shared with us stories circulating non-stop in the locality quite openly. Interviewees noted very often that love magic was a popular topic in their village or town, and that blood spell stories were discussed among neighbours.

Without a doubt, there are people who believe that it is possible to bewitch a male by menstrual blood. The belief is more or less firm. Some of our interviewees think that evil women perhaps manipulate men by means of menstrual blood. Some insist that, yes, they definitely do it.

There may be many explanations as to why this belief is so resilient to time. Some of them may be practical, for example the unlimited availability of the chief magical resource and the relative simplicity of spell-casting. Other reasons may be psychological in that the belief helps to cope with the loss of dear people.

Acknowledgements

Archives

LIIBR F73-616 = Lithuanian Institute of History Library Manuscript Collection. Viekšniai environs (Akmenė District, north west Lithuania) folk medicine and veterinary collection, collected by Amelija Urbienė, Vilnius, 1974.

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Popular Beliefs and Magic Promoting Fertility in the 20ᵗʰ Century and beginning of the 21ˢᵗ Century: The Case of Lithuania

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Abstract. The article examines and analyses magic concerning fertility in Lithuania in the 20th and 21st centuries. The aim is to answer the following questions: What means stimulating fertility are and were used today and in the past? Which have continued from the past and what new ones have emerged, either borrowed from other cultures or taken from contemporary medicine? The article is based on analysis of ethnographic sources and research, and on data from field research conducted between 2020 and 2022 collected using the in-depth interview method with 60 informants in Lithuania.

Content analysis, comparative, and interpretation methods were used, enabling me to trace the development of magic, and the popularity and origin of beliefs diffused in contemporary society. Information gained from the mass media has also contributed to the definition of fertility magic, as given by members of modern society.

Keywords: beliefs in modern society, childlessness, fertility magic, infertility, modern Lithuania

Introduction

With the decreasing birth rate in Lithuania the topic of infertility has become a prevailing theme of discussion among demographers, sociologists and the mass media. More articles are written on the topic of infertility and its treatment, conveying couples' efforts to have children. When conducting the field research in the two main cities of Lithuania (Vilnius and Kaunas), interviews highlighted another aspect of the topic, i.e. religious and irrational means as a point of reference when medicine fails to treat infertility.

The article aim is to survey and analyse beliefs and magic concerning fertility in Lithuania in the 20th and early 21st centuries.

This article attempts to answer the following questions: What were the means used to promote fertility in the past, and what means are pursued today? Which ones are still practised, and what new ones have been borrowed from other cultures or adopted from modern medicine? The objectives to be accomplished are as follows: 1) to examine Lithuanian ethnological sources which provide material concerning magic related to fertility; 2) to review previous ethnological research on the traditional rituals and magic promoting fertility; 3) building on the empirical material collected by the author to analyse the popular beliefs and magic practised in modern Lithuania.

The article refers to the analysis of ethnographic sources and research, as well as in-depth interviews collected by the author in 2020–2022 during the field research based on the questionnaire made by the author. When conducting field research in Vilnius and Kaunas, 60 in-depth interviews were conducted. Analysis of the material collected during the field research uses the method of content analysis, as well as comparative and interpretation methods.

The term 'magic' used in the article is understood in its general meaning based on definitions presented in dictionaries: 'Magic describes supernatural actions performed to achieve certain ends, such as acquiring love or money, punishing an enemy, or protecting a friend. It seems to rely on causal connections which a rational observer would describe as irrational; that is, it asserts causal connections that have no demonstrable existence in the natural world (Barfield 1997: 298). Ramūnas Trimakas, who researched popular medicine in Lithuania, has made a distinction between rational and magical means of treatment. Rational means include pharmacy and popular surgery, i.e. the

mechanical treatment of illnesses, and veterinary medicine. Magical means include incantations (disease prevention and treatment using magic verbal formulae) and acts of magic performed in order to protect someone from, or cure them of, a disease (for example sprinkling them with holy water, using herb smoke) (Trimakas 2008: 21–22).

It should be noted that any distinction between new and old methods of treatment is conditional, as often all means are used interchangeably.

Fertility magic in ethnographic sources

Lithuanian ethnographic sources reveal the identity of woman and mother is strictly defined, and that there is a negative attitude in society to childless families (or mainly to women) and their status. One of the most significant sources reflecting the complexity of birth and related customs is "Childhood and Marriage", by Jonas Balys, one of the most famous Lithuanian interwar ethnologists (Balys 2004), which presents ethnological material gathered at the beginning of the 20th century in Lithuanian villages. The paper discusses the following topics: attempts at pregnancy and attempts to avoid it, various guesses and magic predetermining the baby's sex, birth and taking care of the baby. The author presents examples of preventative magic, rituals predetermining fertility meant to help childless people, as well as recipes for popular medicine, for example women used to drink special herb teas or eat the ashes of burnt pigeon eggs, while childless parents were advised to scrape ox horns, boil the scrapings and drink the pap (Balys 2004: 8–9). The majority of the means presented in the ethnographic sources cannot be called medical because they are rooted in old popular beliefs and superstitions: "in order to have a child you should smoke yourself with the belt from your trousers", or "break the 'witch's broom' with your left hand without looking at it backwards, tie a green thread around it and drag it home without looking at it. Then you have to open all the doors, drag the broom into your bed and cover it with a feather duvet without casting a glance at it". People believed that after sleeping on the 'broom' for three nights, an infertile woman would become pregnant (ibid.). Sorceresses and gypsy women are mentioned as special helpers, able to address the problem of infertility. People used to follow the advice of wandering beggars, and later doctors or priests.

Albinas Kriauza, the author of an article published in 1943, presenting an overview of child-rearing in the environs of Kupiškis, discusses the differences between boys and girls, the prejudices supposedly determining the sex of the child, advice on the ways a pregnant woman should carry herself, and customs related to fertility. The author accurately discusses the problem of society's attitude towards childless families, presents the means used in order to prevent childlessness and indicates ways infertility was cured (Kriauza 1943: 203–235). The analysis of the source testifies to the fact that at the beginning of the 20th century village communities used to prepare girls to carry out their function in advance, training them as future mothers including playing with dolls and taking care of them. Even when weaning their daughters, mothers used to think about their grandchildren: "she was breastfed longer than a year… so that she could be strong enough when giving birth…. They used to wean their daughters on a Sunday – thus they will have more children" (Kriauza 1943: 205).

Lots of information concerning customs in different regions can be found in the journal *Gimtasai kraštas*, published during the interwar period. The 1938 issue contains an article titled "Legitimate/illegitimate Children and Matrimony", by Jonas Baldauskas (Baldauskas 1938), who discusses the prohibition of sexual intercourse before marriage, defines the purpose of marriage and analyses wedding rituals related to fertility. The urgency of the topic is proved by the 'recipes' for the treatment of infertility presented by Marijona Čilvinaitė in an article titled "Bobų lekarstvos" ('Remedies of Women') published in the 1939 issue, No. 22–23, of the same journal (Čilvinaitė 1939) ('Treatment remedies by Barbora Bagvilienė-Dauskuraitė written down in the parish of Upyna, Tauragė region'). Doctors were seldom consulted, although there were women who were able to treat infertility. For a certain payment they used to perform birching treatment in a steam bath and were known not only in their environs but also in more remote districts (Kriauza 1943: 208). Such women and their methods of treatment are mentioned in subsequent research. Bathhouse customs were the key topic of Stasys Daunys, who accurately analysed the role of these customs as they related to the education of girls and the life of women as well (Daunys 1991: 145–173).

Analysis of ethnological sources reveals the popularity of the Christian faith and prayers to the saints, who were expected to help with the problem of infertility. One of the sources presents the story of a woman who relied on the help of saints:

> *A woman from the village of Viržiai in the district of Leipalingis was*
> *childless. She made a promise to visit the church of Seirijai with its altar*
> *of St Anthony during the feast of the saint for 10 years running if she had*
> *a child, a boy. St Anthony heard her prayer and she gave birth to a boy.*
> *She has been keeping her promise for 6 years already.* (Balys 2004: 9)

Some other ethnological sources also testify to the help of the saints. Inhabitants of Kampiškės, Darsūniškis and Kruonis visited the the image of St Anthony; in Kalviai, inHabitants of Kruonis district in the Kaunas region, visited the image of St John in Zapyškis. These places were considered to be miraculous. Thefaithful would pray here and have their herbs blessed, thus acquiring the power of treatment so that the herbs could be used to treat "any ailment" (Petrulis 1955).

> *There the faithful used to make general confessions, receive Communion,*
> *make offerings, pay for Mass to be celebrated and would take pledges to*
> *visit a certain place, to give somebody money, or make an offering to the*
> *church. If a child was conceived, the promise had to be kept, otherwise the*
> *foetus might perish, become lifeless and die.* (Kriauza 1943: 208)

The influence of the Catholic Church was strong enough that to subvert it people used to refer to their pagan inheritance, i.e. the old beliefs that natural objects (springs, stones or oaks) have magical power. For instance, the 1934 edition of the weekly newspaper "Sunday" contained a message that a spring had sprung out from under the roots of an oak and that the water helped to cure infertility. This oak was said to be miraculous. The power of the oak was described again in an article in the 1940 edition of the same newspaper, which said that the oak was 'Especially popular among childless women, who used to go there with the intention of imploring the spring for better health. (This was done at night in order not to attract other people's attention.) The case of the Kelpšai family, who did not succeed in having children for 10 years, was presented. Someone advised the couple to erect a cross by the oak. Shortly afterwards a boy and a girl were born.

The source analysis shows that doctors were consulted rarely, and that childless couples blamed themselves, or others who sent them bad luck or gave them an 'evil glare'. Magic, trust in gypsies and witches, as well as old practices reminiscent of magic rituals prove how determined people were to try all possible means of having children. They also show the concern that couples

had about the future, about their descendants. In effect, it is quite difficult to evaluate how popular the magic was as it was generally practised secretly. In addition, the traditional rural community was under the strong influence of the Catholic Church, which had an extremely negative attitude towards magic, giving another reason people were not inclined to share their experiences of the use of magic or popular belief in the quest for children. However, quite often these were the only means accessible to childless families in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Fertility magic discussed in ethnologists' works

Lithuanian ethnologists have not presented more research on the phenomenon of childlessness, nor on the magic used to have children. However, we can refer for information to the research on family customs in traditional rural culture as they present society's attitude towards married childless women (Dundulienė 1991) highlighting the customs followed from the birth of a child to his/her marriage and death (Dundulienė 2019; Yla 1978; Račiūnaitė 2002; 2006; Paukštytė–Šaknienė 2004, 2007, 2008). Building on analysis of ethnological sources we can maintain that women who wanted to get pregnant used different means to accomplish this: apart from drinking special teas they would give raw eggs, pepper and onions to their husbands. They chose the time of the day and week for intercourse, and paid heed to the phases of the moon. They asked an experienced woman to whip them with brushwood in a steam bath (Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė 2006: 164–181). In her monograph 'Birth and baptism in Lithuanian village life' Rasa Paukštytė points out that in the 1920s–1940s childless families were treated less severely, besides, women had better access to doctors whose professional knowledge enabled them to help women (Paukštytė 1999: 29–30).

The childless urban family is another field of research in which Lithuanian ethnologists have been engaged since the 1960s. The first research in the field was oriented to the families of workers and focused on analysis of material culture, comparing it with rural culture (Merkienė 1965; Merkienė 1966: 167– 183; Merkienė 1967: 137–156; Daniliauskas 1970, 1978; Dobrovolskas 1961). These researchers analyse tendencies of reduced family size during the Soviet period (Daniliauskas, Kalnius 1983) and discuss factors that

predetermined the demographic change (Daniliauskas, Kalnius 1983: 95; Kalnius 1995). In the monograph "Lithuanian Family and Customs" Petras Kalnius (Kalnius 1995: 168–199) presents the most explicit analysis of urban family structure in the second half of the 20th century, which provides knowledge on the topic of childlessness as well. The change of the urban family and its values are discussed in the monograph "The Lithuanian Family at the Crossroads of Values" by R. Račiūnaitė–Paužuolienė (Račiūnaitė–Paužuolienė 2012), which analyses the changes from third decade of the 20th century to date. When summarising the research of ethnologists dealing with the phenomenon of childlessness in Lithuania, it is essential to emphasize that they present the model of a woman and mother characteristic to traditional rural culture, i.e. being a woman is inseparable from being a mother.

The phenomenon of childlessness in the 21st century again came to the attention of scientists working in different fields of research. Some research deals with analysis of childlessness in the demographic (Mirtikas 2006: 61–75; Stankūnienė, Baublytė 2016: 175–241) and sociology contexts (Gedvilaitė-Kordušienė, Tretjakova, Ubarevičienė 2019: 96–111; Šumskaitė, Rapolienė, Gedvilaitė-Kordušienė 2019).

Analysis of the effect of magic and modern people's belief in witchcraft is closely interrelated with the works of ethnologists who research folk medicine and superstition (Trimakas 2003, 2008; Kulakauskienė 2002; Balikienė 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Tilvikas 2019; Savickaitė 2008, 2010, 2013).

The effect of magic and witchcraft on reproduction in the 20th and 21st centuries: Analysis of field research

The object of the field research conducted between 2020 and 2022 is the phenomenon of childlessness in Vilnius and Kaunas, two major cities of Lithuania, thus questions concerning magic or beliefs related to fertility were not included on the questionnaire. However, during the interviews with the informants, it became clear that this issue was important to them, so it naturally led us to look into it.

During the ethnological field research 60 respondents from Vilnius and Kaunas were interviewed: 49 women and 11 men. The oldest respondent was born in 1923 and the youngest in 1999. The dates of birth of the respondents

can be categorised accordingly: seven born between 1923 and 1949, six born between 1950 and 1959, seven born between 1960 and 1969, 13 born between 1970 and 1979, 17 born between 1980 and 1989, 10 born between 1990 and 1999. There were 50 respondents with tertiary education, three with higher education, four with secondary education, two with basic education and one with elementary education. Twenty respondents had children and 40 were childless. The reasons for childlessness enumerated by respondents were infertility, social issues (partner's absence, dysfunctional family and divorce), voluntary decision not to have children. Some respondents explained their childlessness with more than one reason not related to voluntary or involuntary factors.

It has been noted that the oldest respondents were more hesitant about taking part in research dealing with reproduction. They would open up and tell their own stories and those of their relatives and friends only after a trust-based relationship had been established. The narratives of the elder generation highlighted how a certain image of a woman as mother was strongly formed in their minds: "Somehow I don't believe those who say they don't want children. It seems to me they are not sincere saying that. Well, have at least one child. I think a woman is created for that, she is meant to experience the joy of motherhood, the suffering of delivery" (Vytauto Didžiojo Universiteto Kultūrų studijų ir etnologijos katedros Etnologijos rankraštyno byla (abbreviation VDU ER B) VDU ER B 2741/74).

Men of the oldest generation tried to evade certain questions, such as those dealing with contraception or infertility treatment, maintaining that this is women's business. However, all of them admitted that having children is important for both men and women. The younger participants were much more open when reflecting on their experience. Although both male and female respondents of the middle and youngest generations said that they discussed plans to have children with their partners, they were uniform in declaring that having children is primarily the woman's choice because she gives birth and her life changes most afterwards. Women confessed that even today they are targeted by questions concerning this matter. Some respondents opened up about the pressure of having children without delay. One woman said her mother-in-law, who does not discuss the matter with her son, constantly reminds her she is willing to have grandchildren and is worried about her daughter-in-law being infertile (VDU ER B 2741/48).

The field research revealed the tendency of wishful enquiry into other people's experiences when dealing with the problem of infertility or voluntarily deciding on childlessness. Respondents belonging to the latter category admitted they read comments by online community members and articles published on web portals both for information and to encourage hope. Respondents solving the issue of infertility confessed they were looking for people with common experiences and were interested in success stories shared by couples whose efforts were rewarded with children. It should be pointed out that the field research was partially conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic under conditions of limited socialising and web portals together with social nets were the only means of connecting with the outside world, therefore in analysing the results we decided to take into account information found in the Lithuanian mass media.

All the respondents who faced the issue of infertility and were eager to solve it said they consulted doctors. However, those who were undergoing the process of treatment were not willing to talk openly about it nor to disclose if they were looking for some other kind of help. Most often the respondents explained their refusal to talk on the matter through a fear of tempting fate, their desire to maintain hope, or because of how sensitive the topic is, although they shared their feeling of pain when other people asked them about being childless. People who solved the issue positively, or could no longer receive medical treatment because of their age, were more open as they could view childlessness from the perspective of time. Members of both groups shared the experiences of their friends or acquaintances. A tendency revealed itself showing that respondents who had received unsuccessful medical treatment, or their friends, tried other means by, for example, turning to God, herbalists or extrasensories, ot they went to mythological places.

Similar approaches with the aim of ensuring the couple's fertility were observed in the Lithuanian mass media, which contains articles and interviews with women or couples who did not succeed in having children for a long time. People spoke about the effects of the faith and magical means that they used. Quite often these were presented as an alternative to the traditional medicine of the West and proof of their strong desire and hope when traditional medicine fails. On Jan 14, 2021 the Delfi internet portal published a woman's letter under the heading Citizens' Stories. The woman introduces herself: "I'm a woman who didn't succeed in having children for 20 years. The never-ending struggle

… with a diagnosis of unexplained infertility. I've seen all the best specialists in Lithuania, Istanbul, have taken lots of medicine, even seen the sorceress… I went to church, sat on fertility stones, drank water from miraculous springs" (https://www.delfi.lt/pilietis/voxpopuli/po-20-metu-nevaisingumo-pagaliau-pavyko-pastoti-sakau-tai-kitoms-su-sia-baisia-diagnoze-susiduriancioms-moterims.d?id=86186025).

Another woman shares her experience on 15 min, another popular internet portal, after unsuccessful attempts at artificial insemination. She tried all possible means to increase her fertility including massage, sitting on a fertility stone, making love at noon as she was told it was the best time to get pregnant, etc. "It seems funny now, but then it was serious…. We prayed. We lit candles in practically all the churches we went to" (Saukienė 2021). She calls her pregnancy and birth a miracle and maintains that you have to try everything possible as you never know what could help (Saukienė 2021).

The protagonist of another article said that, disappointed in infertility clinics, she consulted a homoeopathist. After the visit, the two of them, she and her husband, went to St Ann's church in Vilnius to light a candle for the wellbeing of the family. "Right then there was an overseer, a very pleasant woman, who approached us and started talking about fertility and the family. We burst out laughing and told her that was exactly the reason we had come to the church to pray" (Saukienė 2018). At the end of the article the woman discusses what helped her with pregnancy, i.e. homoeopathy, faith, the placebo effect or the woman she met in the church.

The articles highlight the tendency that childless women are inclined to use both rational and irrational means. However, the field research data reveal that respondents who identified themselves as believers talk about God's help and the support of their community, but did not mention the other means they used. A respondent from Kaunas born in 1976 noted that apart from medical treatment she used to go to church and repented the abortions she had in her young years, and later she prayed with the intention of having a child. The respondent mentioned that her religious community constantly pray for childless couples. (Vytauto Didžiojo Universiteto Kultūrų studijų ir etnologijos katedros Etnologijos rankraštyno byla; VDU ER B 2741/6). Respondents who introduced themselves as believers, gratefully acknowledged a child as God's gift. Viewing their childlessness from the perspective of their life journey, some respondents considered it God's will, or their destiny: "Such was the will

of God", "That's my destiny". A woman born in 1951 told us that her husband was unfaithful to her and had children with other women. Doctors confirmed she was healthy, however, she did not succeed in having a child. Later she divorced her husband and explained that being childless spared her from other misfortunes (VDU ER B2741/25).

A woman born in 1983 said that both she and her husband had fertility treatment. Doctors did not give her much hope and she considers her child to be the fruit of her prayers, as she had asked her deceased grandmother to intercede on her behalf (VDU ER B2741/40).

The meaningful effect of religion and faith was mentioned even by those respondents who were not inclined to talk about their obstinate efforts to have children, arguing that it was too sensitive a topic at the moment. They said all they could do was "pray, asking for their wish to come true". People who identified themselves as believers used to make a difference between medical treatment and the effect of faith, and did not mention other means such as prayer, going to church or burning candles in sacred places. This can be partly explained by the church's negative attitude to magic, which is traced in church publications of the 21st century warning people against wizardy and reminding them that believers should not indulge in magic, nor consider these or occult practices worthy of referring to (Lietuvos vyskupų laiškas 2005).

Our research showed that respondents were not willing to talk about magic practices, as they are sneered at or viewed negatively by some in society. Others said that spells and magic require secrecy and one cannot talk openly about them before the wished outcome. People are much more open about popular treatment and magic that their friends or acquaintances have used. A man born in 1977 told us about a relative who did not succeed in having children with his wife. As the medical treatment was of no help, they addressed magicians, extrasensories and even went to Siberia to see a shaman (VDU ER B2741/7).

Another respondent feared for a friend who had spent an abundant sum of money on fortune tellers who promised she would have children in the future. The friend refused to take part in the research, arguing that the rituals she had to follow on the advice of the fortune tellers had to be kept secret. She would tell her story only after a successful outcome.

One more respondent of elderly age said her mother-in-law persuaded her to see a sorceress who had been successful in helping people have children.

However, as the mother-in-law did not like her, she was afraid it might cause harm (VDU ER B2741/64).

Stories like these, told during the interviews, serve as an illustration that sometimes people who find themselves in a hopeless situation behave irrationally and turn to extreme solutions. The respondents did not trust such means and considered them foolish, although they know it makes sense to their friends and acquaintances.

Modern people confess to drinking various teas chosen on the advice of pharmacists. Some homoeopathic preparations are used for relaxation or have some other specific qualities that are acknowledged by modern medicine. An endocrinologist born in 1934 told us that she was often asked to consult childless women. Although none of them confessed to having used strong herbal medicine, the doctor was sure these were at fault because they are injurious to the endocrine system (VDU ER B2741/26). A woman born in 1936, who shared her experience of unsuccessful fertility treatment, mentioned that a friend who had the same problem had persuaded her to try a mixture of herbs; however, she became ill and ceased drinking the tea (VDU ER B2741/28).

The research revealed that respondents who faced the problem of infertility in the second half of the 20th century tend to talk about the inadequate efficiency of treatment means and the helplessness of doctors. In their opinion, there were not enough means to help infertile couples then, and concerning male infertility doctors had almost nothing to offer. In such cases people willing to have children had either to put up with the situation or try other means. A respondent born in 1936 said of a friend:

> She was such a person, with a higher education, a mathematician, and used to say that the treatment is all right if it does no harm. And if there's the slightest chance of having a baby, one has to try it. She tried lots of things: she saw sorceresses and took certain remedies and lit candles secretly…. However, those teas must have really done harm, as later she underwent treatment for problems with other organs (VDU ER B2741/28).

Since the beginning of the 21st century the Lithuanian mass media has kept informing the public about miraculous stones (Rušėnienė 2013) or springs. One of the stones, which has the form of a phallus, is located on the mound of Lopaičiai in the Rietavas region. If a woman sits on it for some time, and asks

for favour, she can expect to get pregnant. The place is said also to be visited by people from abroad (Stoškutė 2020; Šukauskas 2021).

Websites contain lists of miraculous springs the waters of which heal people from all illnesses (Keršys 2019). For example, one such spring is the so-called Bobos daržas, the source of the Skroblus river in the village of Margioniai (Varėna region), which is also known for the fertility powers ascribed to it (https://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/2000201314/uz-vilniaus-vaiku-negalincia-susilaukti-pora-stebuklingu-saltinio-vandeniu-pavaisinusi-etnografe-ne-trukus-sulaukiau-kvietimo-buti-kuma; https://www.delfi.lt/keliones/naujienos/lietuvos-vietos-kurios-isgydo-ligas.d?id=68903168).

Quite often such articles are written in order to make certain places better known and attract visitors, and thus it is difficult to estimate how much people believe in the power of miraculous stones or springs. A woman who could not get pregnant for six years laughs when telling the story of how she sat on the fertility stone. "However, when I could not get pregnant, I kept thinking that perhaps I should have concentrated on the matter and fervently asked for the favour". In spite of this, she never went to the stone again and relied on doctors' help (VDU ER B2741/24).

Another respondent maintained that when travelling round Lithuania she and her husband visit all such special places, although she argues that whether they will have a child or not, depends on medical treatment (VDU ER B2741/43).

It is interesting to note that miraculous natural objects were mentioned exclusively by the youngest participants in the research, i.e. those who have dealt with the issue of fertility treatment in recent decades. None of the older respondents spoke about stones, springs or mythological places. This can be explained not only by the vast possibilities of travel and of having information on various tourist objects that the younger generation has today, but also by the influence of the mass media, which presents the old and creates new legends around it concerning the miraculous powers of such places.

Thus, the material of the ethnological field research shows that people of the 20th and 21ˢᵗ centuries who face the problem of infertility, first of all consult doctors, which is the prevailing means of treatment. However, this takes time or bears no fruit, people seek alternative means of treatment associated with faith (individual prayer, visiting sacred places, lighting a candle in a church, prayer and support of the religious community), popular medicine and even magic.

Respondents of all generations are more inclined to talk about medical treatment, to share their religious experiences and stories of success rather than confess the irrational means they used – at least not until they have had children. Rather, they talk more openly about their friends and acquaintances and their efforts to have children. It was the oldest participants in the research who emphasised the ineffectiveness of medicine in the past, pointing out that it has made a huge progress today, and thus the younger generations do not experience the helplessness the older generation experienced. Respondents born between 1923 and 1959 tended to view irrational means as an important aid to which people who were unable or unwilling to put up with the diagnosis of infertility resorted. Quite often medicine was said to be helpful only in as much as it could diagnose infertility and explain the reasons, it was not always able to provide treatment enabling couples to have children.

Conclusion

Analysis of ethnological sources shows that childless families of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century usually had access only to irrational means of tackling the problem. Consulting a doctor was a rare occurrence, and so people who were unable to have children could only blame themselves or others, wishing them ill. They used to rely on Church advice and prayers, magic, the effects of various preparations, or they resorted to gypsies and sorceresses. It is difficult enough to evaluate the popularity of magic as many such means required secrecy, in addition to which the traditional rural community was strongly influenced by the Catholic Church, which had an extremely negative view of magic.

Magic means used by those willing to have children are a taboo topic even today. People argue they do not really believe in magic, they are afraid to scare away success or be sneered at as such practices are not becoming for a modern person. Interviewees were more inclined to talk about the experience of other people, family members or friends than speak about themselves. Only those respondents who had successfully undergone treatment for infertility opened up about their experiences and reflected on their choice to try nonmedical means of treatment.

The topics concerning reproduction were a real issue for the older respondents, who opened up only after a close relationship based on trust had been established. Older men tended to ignore certain questions dealing with having children. The prevailing opinion was that the final decision to have children, and the time of having them, remains the prerogative of women. Respondents of the youngest generation said they consulted their partner, which means that men take part in family planning, and openly shared their views concerning the topic during the interview.

The data of the ethnological field research revealed that in 20th and 21st centuries people prioritised medical treatment, and only if it lasted too long or was ineffective did they resort to other means. Even the respondents of the oldest generation who maintained that medicine was not effective enough during their reproductive period pointed out they hoped for treatment based on medical achievements and considered other variants only after science was of no help. When comparing the data gathered from ethnographic sources and that gathered in modern Lithuania of the 21st century one can notice an invariable which is the power of prayer and the church's influence on the faithful.

The process of social modernisation can be traced when analysing the beliefs and means used to stimulate the reproductive system. Village sorceresses are substituted by extrasensories and magicians. Often new, modern notions are used, for example people travel to other countries, including exotic lands. The results of the research show that the use of belief and magic is becoming more universal, i.e., with the growing awareness that biological infertility is not restricted to women, most means are treated as suitable for both sexes. Although the ethnographic sources contain information about magic trees and springs that can enable a person to have children, when analysing the results of the field research we have noted that mythological non-Catholic places as destinations were first mentioned only by respondents born between 1980 and 1999. It is difficult to evaluate how much people believe in the magical power of such places, but there is no doubt that information about them has spread due to increased mobility and articles in the mass media that advertise certain places together with natural objects that have magic powers ascribed to them.

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The Influence of Covid-19-Induced Unease Infrastructure on Cultural and Social Spheres

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Abstract. Covid-19 challenged the entire population of the world, affected everyone and all spheres of life, and changed the content, and the ways, of communication. For example, medical discourse was integrated in a variety of discursive fields. Covid-19 brought with it individual anxiety that was transformed into moral panic. The anxiety was further amplified by the *unease infrastructure* in everyday culture. This is found in the procedural aspects of culture, from the semantics and pragmatics of language to cultural patterns. Social and cultural presumptions were also revised during the pandemic so that the cultural reputations of topos were transformed and the cultural presumption of innocence, the basic for communication, was replaced by the opposite, the presumption of guilt. As a result, people began to perceive each other as potential threat carriers, as potential carriers of the virus. In the paper, I present the mechanisms of building unease infrastructure during the pandemic, various ways to overcome anxiety, and the impact of unease infrastructure on the individual level. I will talk about the influence of the unease infrastructure on changes in common sense, individual preference, and the social levels of the acceptable in the future.

Keywords: Covid-19, unease infrastructure, presumption, anxiety, urban trauma, panics

Introduction

Covid-19 challenged the entire population of the world, affected everyone and all spheres of life, and changed the content, and the ways, of communication. Relationships between people were built to take into account the danger of infection, and social space was transformed in two ways, the space of *real* threat (the definitely sick) and the space of *potential* danger (the potentially sick). Either way, both carried a threat, real or potential. This has affected both everyday practices, mental maps and folk toponymy, as well as the economy, politics, official topography of the city and the degree of state interference in private life. The social processes associated with Covid-19 have generated new forms of individual activity, rearranged individual trajectories of movement. This is associated with specific forms of tourism such as escapist, vaccination, therapeutic (Abbaspour; Soltani and Tham 2020). The habitual economic relations of late capitalism were revised as a result of the Covid crisis and the well-established liberal conventions were questioned (Bonetti *et al.* 2021; Ferstman & Fegan 2020; Satar & Alarifi 2022), especially with regard to the economy of providing medical services and the production of goods for medical institutions (Mahr & Dickel 2020; Barlow *et al.* 2021; Chehrehgosha & Royani 2020). In the absence of accurate information, clear instructions or specific medical scenarios for diagnosis and treatment (especially at the beginning of the pandemic), there was a special need for qualified medical care, despite there not being enough doctors. This stimulated the development of non-traditional forms of medical counselling (Zhou *et al.* 2020) and generally strengthened the position of the digital (remote, contactless) service sector. The changes made by the Covid-19 virus also affected strategies of cooperation between EU countries (Mildner 2020).

In the article, I am interested in how the external (i.e. information) is transformed by an individual into internal experiences, stereotypes and attitudes, and what causes Covid challenges and structural changes to be transformed into individual (vernacular) reactions. That's why I focus on the mechanisms that create *unease infrastructure* during pandemics, the impact of this infrastructure at an individual level and, briefly, various ways to overcome anxiety. The main task is to record and describe the mechanism of formation of vernacular content from external experience. In the article I aim to generalise the available

approaches and results, and so I actively draw on existing literature based on field research. This generalising approach allows me to put the extreme experience of Covid vernacularisation into a broader context. This context is the proposition that extreme experiences such as pandemic experiences change social presumptions, and that this in turn leads to a transformation of social action and increases personal anxiety in all areas of human life. In this article I will try to verify this position and show the mechanism of anxiety formation as a form of urban trauma.

The Presumption of a Kindly Universe

In 1992, Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, researching victimisation, revealed a complex of fundamental assumptions about the world's meaningfulness and benevolence (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), the presence of which becomes noticeable when they are destroyed as a result of trauma. We are not aware of them and take them for granted, so they exist as a presumption that can be called the presumption of a kindly universe. "They are an invisible but vital part of our internal cognitive model of the world and underpin a sense of basic well-being" (Kaminer & Eagle 2010: 61). They give us impetus in our daily activities because they are the starting point for unconscious actions, they "help us to maintain some sense of predictability and control in a world that would otherwise feel utterly random and unpredictable" (Kaminer & Eagle 2010: 61). These basic settings are simple and in the most general form look like this:

   - we are invulnerable (for example, we believe that 'it can't happen to me'),
   - we are good and worthy people,
   - other people are fundamentally good,
   - the world is governed by just and orderly social laws (for example, 'if I am cautious, I can avoid misfortune', or 'if I am good, nothing bad will happen to me'). (Kaminer & Eagle 2010: 61).

However, real traumatic experience leads the individual to understand that the presumption of a kindly universe does not work. "The survivor must search for new beliefs and assumptions that can enable him or her to make sense of what has taken place and to go forward into the future" (Kaminer & Eagle 2010: 79). Presumption needs a revision of the basic meanings that previously existed as

obvious, as unconditional. Filling in the broken links between self-perception and the events that have taken place forces us to look for explanations, leading to feelings of guilt, victim complexes, depression, etc.

Crisis of trust

The psychological presumption of the kindly universe is also the source of the social presumption, embodied in jurisprudence in the form of the presumption of innocence as fundamental to any legal proceedings against an individual. The presumption of innocence presupposes the openness of the subject to the world. The possibility of a market economy and democracy is built on this presumption. However, it is in doubt when it comes to a threat to global security. Concern about the hidden threat posed, for example, by terrorism, leads and has led to a legislative revision and restriction on the presumption of innocence for those suspected of certain crimes. "As the threat of terrorism has become more pervasive, and as generalized anxiety about criminal behavior in our communities has increased, community pressure to 'deal with' those suspected of serious crime has also increased", as Anthony Davidson Gray states (Gray 2017: 570). This is what J. Baudrillard pointed out in his article "The Spirit of terrorism" when he drew attention to the victory of terrorism even outside the direct action of, for example, bombings. He described the depth of the infection of modern society and modern culture by terrorism, "To the point that the idea of freedom, a new and recent idea, is already fading from minds and mores, and liberal globalization is coming about in precisely the opposite form – a police-state globalization, a total control, a terror based on "law-and-order' measures, Deregulation ends up in a maximum of constraints and restrictions, akin to those of a fundamentalist society" (Baudrillard 2003: 32).

Any panic attacks, any attacks of social fear could lead to degradation of the key presumption on which free exchange and the idea of democracy and liberalism are based, the presumption of innocence. Covid-19 has brought unprecedented or forgotten challenges to European society, which past generations had tried to build into a predictable system of stable events. The coronavirus has absorbed predictability and certainty. In a pandemic, or even an epidemic, the presumption of innocence is replaced by the presumption of guilt, according to which everyone is suspected of being a carrier of the virus. The social response

to the challenge is radically simple, and it is to block the minority policy that is the basis of the European value system, to universalise an attitude that disregards minorities' "philosophies and practices of care" (Hashiguti, Radios Baptista, Cadilhe 2021: 36; Ala *et al.* 2021; Walubita *et al.* 2021). The initial assumption of innocence fits perfectly into the idea of additional minority rights (Deets 2006; Krasner 2001). However in a pandemic situation, the collective body turns out to be more important than the individual, as a result of which the boundary of the individual (Myself and non-Myself) is more clearly delineated. The Other (and the collective Other) localises the Myself identity. Everyone should avoid the Other, suspecting him or her of carrying the virus. A virus, especially in the initial stage of a pandemic, is compared to a bacteriological weapon and any patient who appears in a public place is compared to a bioterrorist. The corresponding attitude is demonstrated by politicians and public figures (Tuncer & Şahin 2021) and fits into the established discursive binary models of Myself and the Other (Gao 2021), also being embodied in the East–West opposition (Zhang 2021; Yalsharzeh & Monsefee 2021). When the presumption of an evil universe operates, there can be no conciliation. The drastic change in presumptions that the virus has initiated makes mutual trust impossible.

War as the result of a change in presumption

Total suspicion, imposed by the fear of terror, presupposes the possibility of total destruction, and therefore needs weapons of mass destruction (bacteriological or nuclear). The target is invisible and therefore means such as carpet bombing or the use of napalm can be justified. But the radicalised total suspicion caused by the virus makes a real war necessary, war that Baudrillard called the "conventional safety shield (écran *de protection*)" (Baudrillard 2003: 25), since it formalises and reveals an enemy who was previously hidden, makes the object of threat concrete and gives certainty to events. I would venture to suggest that in conditions of anxiety, tension from uncertainty, total suspicion and the inversion of presumption, a major war is a matter of time; it is unleashed by those who are most in thrall to their pathological anxiety. Global epidemics distort the value system and lead to wars as a way to identify the enemy. I would venture to assume an indirect value relationship between the Asiatic flu (or Russian flu) of the 1889–1890 pandemic and the sixth cholera

pandemic (1899–1923), on the one hand, and WWI, on the other hand, between the 1918 influenza pandemic and WWII. However, such assumptions require additional verification and detailed research.

This, of course, is not the only reason for the war, but it allows the war to gain support from the population of the aggressor country. And the same reason allows other countries to perceive even local conflicts as a global problem. The expectation of a hidden threat from the virus is transformed into the expectation of an obvious danger (Rütten & King 2013). An undefined virus can easily transform into a mythical enemy. It does not matter who this appellation is attached to or what abstract image is drawn by an audience in a state of (moral) panic ready to explain the inexplicable with the help of any conspiracy. The virus, as a hidden threat, transforms the perception of protest and insurgent movements because of the inversion of presumption, leading to a radicalisation of mutual threats in the struggle of ideologies (Mirchandani 2020).

The virus works as a catalyst, triggering irreversible processes that result in a war that is global, or perceived as global. However, the virus does not generate the social or political processes that give rise to war, this is done by the states themselves, by governments, with populations supporting them.

Unease infrastructure

The urban environment is an excellent place for viral inversions of presumption due to the prevailing anxiety to be found there, exacerbated by the *unease infrastructure* (Troitskiy & Tsarev 2022: 132–133) of everyday culture. We proposed this term to describe a complex of symbolical factors that together generate unease and anxiety in any person involved in a semantic environment that fulfils these factors and who interprets these factors as dangerous. For example, media awareness of terrorist acts and a bag left by someone on public transport or in an elevator cause alarm or panic, although the same bag left in the trash is likely to be perceived neutrally (Zaporozhets & Lavrinec 2008: 83–103). "It is like an 'automatic writing' of terrorism constantly refuelled by the involuntary terrorism of news and information" (Baudrillard, 2003: 33). The reproduction of unease is not only the result of the work of media or actors (people or non-people), although the media is called by Bauman and Donskas "the industry of fear" (Bauman & Donskas 2019: 16). Reproduction of unease

is a result of the subjective assembly of meaning from the situation in which a person finds him- or herself. Since we are talking about the production of meaning, the assembler of which is the person, no separate infrastructure element causes unease or anxiety by itself. At the same time, the existing 'anxious' symbolic environment self-generates anxiety, reproducing itself. The anxious interpretation of things and events allows a person to fill in lacunae in explanatory models and interpretative frameworks. Therefore, it is not surprising that unease infrastructure is reflected in the procedural aspects of culture, from the semantics and pragmatics of language to cultural models. Unease infrastructure can exist only in an urban environment, because the highest value there is anonymity, which creates the grounds for misunderstanding and therefore for distrust. Misunderstanding and distrust of the Other co-exist with acceptance of otherness and assumption of the Other (the Stranger), because urban non-places (Augé 2017), heterotopias (Foucault 2006: 191–204, 215–236), make a meeting with the Other (the Strange) possible, and even necessary, although they do not make him, her or it understandable. "It is common to define cities as places where strangers meet, remain in each other's proximity, and interact for a long time without stopping being strangers to each other" (Bauman 2003: 5). At the same time, acceptance and assumption of the Other (the Stranger) do not at all prevent people from perceiving the Other as a source of fear, unease or anxiety.

The 'anxious' urban environment, which ensures the success of the anxious interpretation, was fertile ground for unease infrastructure in conditions of Covid-19. Factors forming the unease infrastructure that surrounds Covid-19 include, for example, news and social media, vaccination sites and various Covid markers in the urban environment (adds, signs), other people wearing masks and gloves, ambulance sirens, an abundance of masks and gloves in trash cans, social advertising and advertising of medical services for the treatment and diagnosis of the virus, visible symptoms in other people (sneezing, coughing, runny nose).

Panic and anxiety

At the beginning of the pandemic, "the imminent pandemic with insufficient understanding of the virus has placed significant pressure on the health care

systems managing the disease and heightened anxiety among the citizens" (Zhou *et al.* 2020: 2). Covid-19 brought additional individual anxiety (Feiz Arefi & Poursadeqiyan 2022; Kandpal & Wani 2020), which transformed into moral panic (Capurro *et al.* 2022; DeVore *et al.* 2021; Satawedin 2020). "Anxiety has reached to this level that a person who used to see regular videos on coronavirus, he got infected with the normal flue, he started telling people to stay away from him and if anyone tried to come close to him, he would pelt stones at them" (Kandpal & Wani 2020: 291).

According to recent research, "Anxiety is the most common mental disorder in the U.S." (Dershowitz & Hudson 2022). Panic moods and anxiety spread especially quickly thanks to social networks (Vannucci, Flannery & McCauley Ohannessian 2017) and, as an instant response, conspiracy theories (Craft, Ashley & Maksl 2017; Connolly *et al.* 2019) spread thanks to these networks. Both conspiracy theories and rumours were a reaction to the lack of accurate information, an attempt to fill in these lacunae (Kirziuk 2021; Calisher *et al.* 2020). This led, among other things, to social shifts, protests, etc., i.e. to a division in society according to the principle of attitude to vaccination (Kirziuk 2021; Voronov 2021). As a result, there were many debates about how important social networks are in the dissemination of information, whether the state can interfere in the free functioning of the media to relieve tension and establish calm, whether freedom of speech is still more important, how social networks should be managed in a medical crisis and what the tasks of the state are (Sharifee; Nematollahzadeh & Labafi 2019; Marciano & Yadlin 2021). Panic is faster than official messages from government officials and doctors.

Covid-19 memory and commemoration as a tool of urban trauma

The media use various strategies to work with the memory of Covid-19, in all cases creating objects of urban trauma (Troitskiy & Tsarev 2022: 131–133) as a type of collective experience that has been embedded in the process of the individual's senses, built on the possibility of repeating the traumatic experience of another individual from the collective body. An important aspect of urban trauma is anonymity, which ensures equality of all residents before receiving a traumatic experience, i.e. anyone can become a traumatic subject as the result

of a random coincidence. A citizen is not only a potential victim, but also a conductor of urban trauma. It is conveyed as a presumption for experiencing and interpreting any experience. This makes urban trauma a key factor in building behavioural strategies and everyday trajectories. Urban trauma is based on transmitting and receiving information about someone else's traumatic experience, where the traumatic subject him- or herself is silent. Urban trauma exists in two dimensions: diachronic and synchronic. In the former, it acts as cultural (historical) trauma associated with the traumatic experiences of the residents of the city, and memorial infrastructure forms around it. In the latter, it acts as potential individual trauma, the possibility of which is included in everyday urban life, with unease infrastructure forming around it (Troitskiy & Tsarev 2022: 132).

Commemorative practices re-actualise feelings that are painful for those who have been involved or are now involved in the experience of loss. Social media demonstrates possibilities "that transcend established boundaries of space, time and social experience" (Keightley & Schlesinger 2014: 747), although at the same time creating new boundaries (Zelizer 2002: 699) to the interpretation of one's own experience. This is especially noticeable when individual memory is superimposed on cultural (collective) memory, or when memory passes into post-memory. Cinema, photo, audio and visual works have the ability to make a painful experience external to the author and the depicted, while at the same time including the audience in the experience. Individual works cannot create the kind of commemorative effect that *lieu de mémoire* and commemorative spaces create both in real space (Nora 1984; Nora 1999) and in virtual space (Hess 2007). Unlike street monuments, etc., which require activity from the audience, commemorative spaces on the Internet come to users themselves, assuming passive participation that the user can refuse by turning off the computer or simply closing the site. In this case "the durability of the digital monuments is challenged by the very form they take due to their potentially ephemeral nature" (Hess 2007: 812). *Lieu de mémoire*, commemorative spaces, are a combination of factors; they are works that create a memorial environment. Unlike a single work, the effect of which is limited, a memorial environment uses intermediate means and involves various sensory organs. Commemorative spaces are designed to speak on behalf of the silent victims of the pandemic, the silent majority, in order that they continue in a state of unease, thinking that such a thing could

happen to anyone. In other words, these spaces become instruments of urban trauma. Covid-19 became the object of commemorative practices even before the pandemic ended (Adams & Kopelman 2021), so these spaces combined both aspects of urban trauma, i.e. synchronic and diachronic. Covid discursive practices rebuild existing configurations of commemorative practices using the closest historical interpretative frameworks, at the same time rebuilding these frameworks (Steir-Livny 2022; Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2021; Barry 2020).

Despite the fact that commemorative spaces and commemorative practices evoke negative feelings at the individual level, they allow these objects of commemoration to enter discourse at the level of culture as a whole, bringing acceptance of loss (Adams & Edy 2021).

Overcoming anxiety and unease

Attempts to overcome anxiety and cope with panic were noted from the very beginning of the Covid crisis. These are the first reactions that people needed, not to overcome the pandemic but rather to find ways to cope with their own emotions (Attoe & Chimakonam 2021). It is impossible to say which of the ways was the most common statistically, which was the most effective, but it is possible to state that they were used not only separately but also in combination.

Unease and anxiety, as well as other excessive emotions, are blocked by various techniques of concentration on everyday rituals and simple things, so it is not surprising that the simplest and most necessary means to cope with psychological stress was to go into the daily automatism of actions and to focus on this. This form of care was complemented by other escapist practices, for example, modelling nostalgic experiences (Wulf, Breuer & Schmitt 2021). Striving for an ideal past compensated for the crisis experiences of the present, filling in the lacuna in the meanings of life that arose as a result of Covid-19 and the accompanying changes.

Daily rituals and escapism are joined by a complex of practices related to institutionalised and folk (vernacular) religion (Ndaluka et al. 2021; Jacobsen, Kuehle, Christensen 2021), which allows us to build an alternative system of meaning.

Humour has become a common way to cope with serious Covid challenges (Hiiemäe *et al.* 2021; Meder 2021; Ouviña & Pilar 2021; Fiadotava & Vool-

aid 2021: 72–78; Weydmann & Cirosmann 2020). Elliott Oring (1987) pointed out that this is one of the first and most constructive reactions, despite the apparent destructive content (black humour) and objects of ridicule (death, illness, viruses, etc.). Terrible events give rise to the need to make people fearless by bringing them to the point of absurdity and emphasizing the discursive source of unease and anxiety. In the situation of Covid, "people tend to make choices between a limited number of previously tested motifs and practices" (Hiiemäe *et al.* 2021: 45). A limited set of proven humorous tools allows an individual to create an understandable and clear semantic system in which anxiety does not find sufficient reason to be the only emotion, since all its objects are humorously questioned. This therapeutic effect of humour was spread thanks to the global media, for example, social networks (Cancelas-Ouviña 2021; Voolaid 2022; Fiadotava 2020; Jürgens *et al.* 2021).

Overcoming unease and anxiety occurred not only by working with emotions and feelings, but also through the desire to regain control of the situation. In this regard, a powerful volunteer movement is emerging, and Transparency Market Research has noted an increase in the growing demand for global medical education stimulated by Covid-19 (*Medical Education Market*… 2020).

The methods described above all seem to be effective in combating anxiety and unease, although they do not remove it completely, rather they remove its excesses. In contrast, these methods confirm the potential danger and add content to the unease infrastructure which is the background to everyday life, fixing the virus as a source of danger. The activities built around Covid-19, including those that overcome anxiety, have noticeably changed the cultural landscape, transforming vernacular aspects, trajectories and strategies of life.

Conclusion

Summing up, I argue that the coronavirus turned out to be one of the most effective agents of history. Its influence is noticeable in all spheres and on all interconnected subject's both external and internal. In coronavirus conditions, the influence of individual stereotypes, perceptions, fears and prejudices on the economy, politics, culture, etc., turned out to be stronger than their ability to adjust and correct themselves. Individuals, guided by their own vernacular ideas, violated the natural course of the processes adopted. At the same time,

these individuals received support from the population, which was also guided by their own fears and ideas. The unease infrastructure created around the virus has helped to support and preserve the cultural reputation of the virus and individual anxiety in people. The unease caused by the danger of Covid-19 transformed into anxiety and a change in the population's basic presumptions about each other. The total suspicion of contagion, imposed on urban culture as an anxiety environment, contributed to the transformation of relations between people and between countries. It would seem that in a difficult situation it is necessary to unite, but the pandemic has shown that the presumption of guilt turns out to be a good basis for mutual suspicion, separation and even war. So, the presumption of the good universe was reformatted into the presumption of the evil universe, which only contributed to the further transformation of vernacular ideas. The developed ways of overcoming anxiety, i.e. humour, escapism, everyday life rituals, religion and belief, self-education on the one hand, removed the severity of the experience, while on the other hand fixing the attitude to the virus as a source of anxiety.

Ackowledgements

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Bees in folk belief and practices before and now

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Abstract: The article traces changes in human cognitive and social development using the example of the domesticated insect, the bee. From the 13th to the 20th century, forest beekeeping spread, using live trees as beehives, and later also log hives on the ground. The ways of keeping bees changed fundamentally in the 19th century with the introduction of new types of hive that went alongside a consolidation of beliefs about bees. Bees had numerous names, and euphemisms were used when talking about them and in incantations. For example, bees were called men or workers, or kinship terms were used; they were also called the domestic animals of the guardian fairies. The article presents beliefs about bees as soul animals, various legends that were associated with the journey of the soul, and the popular belief in the connection between the death of the beekeeper and his or her bees. While honey was traditionally associated with abundance and an ideal life, the bee represented a hardworking, loyal person.

Key words: bee, forest bee-keeping, soul animal, legends.

Bees (*Apis mellifera*) have held a prominent place in world cultures for thousands of years (see Antiigileksikon 1983; Ivanov, Toporov 1992: 354; Viveiros de Castro 2013). Likewise, beekeeping in Estonia is also estimated to be around 2,000 to 2,500 years old. Today, we have a deeper understanding of the life of bees, and people are more considerate of them in beekeeping practice. Even medical indications differ from those of 50 years ago when fevers and sore

throats were treated with hot milk and honey or tea and honey, although modern medicine considers this to be contraindicated because heat destroys the beneficial properties of honey. Honey is also a source of certain allergies and is contraindicated for those with diabetes (Jänes & Kahn et al. 2013). Today, beekeeping is a little more systematic than it used to be, for example, the beekeeper must register the apiary (or designate an area as such) in the PRIA register of farmed animals1, although many people keep three to five colonies both in the countryside and in the suburbs, providing honey on a family scale.

The material in the article comes from the Estonian Literary Museum's Department of Folkloristics' EFITA archive, the Estonian Folklore Archive, and the corpus of Estonian language calendars. The relationship between bees and humans is explored when it occurs in religious types of folklore using the methods of folkloristics. The focus of this article is on bee names, euphemisms and incantations, the bee as a hypostasis of the soul, its links with mythology, and also vernacular categorisation. Changes in ethnomedicine and new directions in beekeeping are briefly described. The appearance of the bee in proverbs (i.e. in poetic-practical folklore) is briefly characterised and changes in the uses of honey and bee stings in ethnomedicine are highlighted. Human relations with bees (and presumably many religious phenomena), including that various names for them, were also influenced by the way bees were kept. These themes serve to reveal some aspects of the meaning of bees in Estonian culture, the layers of religion and the long history of mutual relations (cf. also Hiiemäe 2022: 152–153).

Living trees as honey trees

From the 12th through to the 20th century, beekeeping primarily utilised trees growing in the countryside near farms. Cavities in trees were enlarged, for example supports were inserted in the interests of higher honey yields. Once autumn came and these cavities were emptied of honey, the honeycombs, which people could not reach, were left as winter food for animals. The attitude towards bees was utilitarian, meaning that the habitats of colonies in these tree hives, and the honey from them, were more important than the bees themselves. People believed that a new bee colony would replace the one that was destroyed during the extraction of honey. The use of living trees as beehives began to fall out of favour in the 18th century, and began to disappear entirely in the middle of the 19th century.

Trees that were home to wild beehives were called *mesipuu* ('honey tree'), *mehiste puu* (men's tree), *tarupuu* ('house tree'), *perepuu* ('family tree') or *linnupuu* ('bird tree') and were usually marked with a family crest, indicating to whom the tree and yield belonged.

Tree hives were most commonly found in pines (in south Estonia tarupettäi), although other trees were used, in fact virtually every species of tree in Estonia, including linden trees and even apple trees (Linnus 1939: 69). Hives in Estonia were located at a low height (1.5–2.7 m), and were generally accessed with the aid of a ladder or by rope. This differs, for example, from the practices of the Finno-Ugric Udmurt peoples to the east and their Turkic-speaking neighbours the Bashkirs, where hives were placed at a height of 12 metres above the ground (Linnus 1939: 217, 235; 1940), beekeeping there required great skill and special techniques to reach the hive. In Estonia, the colony was protected from birds and the elements by a simple board and spruce branches, no special barriers were constructed against bears or to prevent insect attacks.

Beekeeping was already taxed and regulated by law in the 13th century. At that time cities had their own common land on which living trees with beehives were located. For example, in 1226 Bishop William of Modena laid out the boundaries for the lands of the City of Riga, reserving for common use on city land among other things "*[item] in arboribus, quae šunt inmiricis fodiendis ad apes et ad omnem aliam utilitatem commune*" ('[also] within trees that are used for keeping bees and for any other common purpose', Linnus 1939: 135; LGU 1908). In 1257, Saxo, chief of Tallinn, established procedures for using beehives at Padise Cloister and surrounding villages (Linnus 1939: 140, LUB I: 299). One farm was allowed to own several beehives, and based on medieval tax documents there up to 100 beehives were allowed in the forest. From the 12th to 16th centuries, wild beehives were inheritable and were passed on to the new owner along with other property. In the 16th century, the log hive – a top-opening hollowed out log – was introduced. These were initially placed in the forest at the tops of trees, but at the end of the 18th century beehives were brought from the forest to farm or the home.

During the great reform of the 19th century, there was the top-opening moveable-frame hive, the introduction of which led to people learning more about life in the beehive. Yields grew, the hive was insulated for the winter, and practice changed so that the contents of the hive was left in place for the winter.

Beekeeping practices have changed several times: wild-hive beekeeping generally disappeared in the 19th century, along with log hives. In the 1920s, Ferdinand Linnus, a historical researcher of wild-hive beekeeping in Estonia, discovered that beehives were being kept in forest trees in southern Estonia (Linnus 1939), something that he was both proud and surprised to discover. It seemed incredible that something so outdated was found in use, although we now know that in several villages forest beekeeping remained in use during the second half of the 20th century and even into the 21st century, indicating the practice of preserving these long-standing customs.

Beekeeping was influenced by changes in religious confession. With the spread of Protestantism in the 16th century, the demand for church candles disappeared, with the period between the 16th and 18th centuries being regarded as a time of decline in local beekeeping. Conversely, the introduction of the Orthodox Church in the second half of the 19th century was a time of increasing demand, as well as the advent of honey receiving church blessings at Passover, for example. Many other factors were influential, such as climate fluctuations, wars and changes in economic practices, especially serfdom which didn't allow the peasants to own anything.

Although technological changes, from hollowed out logs to modern hives, had a big impact the changes did not affect the names, with old names being carried over to new forms of hive, for example *mesipuu, mehiste puu,* and *linnupuu* were all retained in the language. *Taru (=tare*, 'house', cf ETÜ 2012) became a popular collective name.

Bee names, euphemisms and the use of euphemism in incantations and everyday practices

Period-specific bee names reflect vernacular categorisations that were favoured by those living on and around farms. The basis for different names was way of life, habitat, and the most common activities under which the distinctions were made, for example giant bees, bumblebees, domestic bees, foraging bees, wild bees, carpenter bees, honey bees, hive bees, worker bees, forager bees, leaf-cutting bees, burrowing bees. The bumblebee and wild bee refer to their habitat and/or the solitary lives these bees lead, as with the burrowing bee. The common name *mesilane* has spread across Estonia, having previously spread

across north Estonia with the terms *mehiläne (mihiläne, mehilene*) and *mehine,* used in south Estonia. The north Estonian name *mesilane* indicates, by means of the *lane* suffix, that it belongs to the group of living creatures and an makes an association with honey, while the south Estonian *mehine* indicates belonging to the group of men or small men. The name *mesilind*, which defines the bee as a bird, is another obsolete term, while *murukärbläne* (*murukärbes*) classifies the bee in the same class as fly-like winged insects. *Mumm* means 'bumblebee', 'bee', 'large hairy insect'. *Mumm* has an equivalent in the Votic language, where *mummukas* means 'the larvae of the caddis fly'. The name has other meanings in Votic, for example, a characteristic vocalisation or mumbling (ETÜ 2012, VMS 1982–1989). At the beginning of the 20th century, *mumm* was a character common in children's nightmares who dragged children into a well (when they refused to comb their hair). In modern Estonian, *mumm* and *mummuke* are terms of endearment for something that is small and cute. *Mumm* is also a bee name in the Udmurt language (Vladykina 2023).

A cultural distinction was commonly made between *mesilasema* ('mother bee', *kuninganna* 'queen', and among the Slavic people *tsarinna* (Dal' 1980)) and *isamesilased* ('father bee',) *haudujad*, 'incubator'), and *truutna (drutsenn* (VMR 2002), as it was known in Setomaa, a loan from Slavic). There were further distinctions between *tarumesilased* ('house bees') and *töömesilased* ('working bees'), words that show the focus on habitat and activity. Located at the top of the hierarchy are is queen, with drones and worker bees below.

Alongside honeybees were the *maamesilane* ('earth bee'), *kimalane* ('hairy bumblebee') and *bombus*, which builds its nest in the ground or in moss. Bee names in Baltic-Finnic languages are similar, for example the Votian *tšimo, tšimolain* is akin to the dialectic Finnish *kimalainen,* 'bee', which is akin to the Izhorian *kimalain* 'bee' and the Karelian *kimaleh,* 'bee', 'bumblebee' (ETÜ 2012). In Karelia the bumblebee's size and the sound it makes still cause fear to this day and it tends to be killed as the most dangerous and poisonous of all bees.

Creation stories for bees place them among the creatures created by God. To the Slavic people, the bee is a symbol of the Mother of God (Gura 2003: 101; Gura 1997: 450 et seq.). These links are not found among Estonians, but see the comparison between bees and people above. We also find matches in church literature, for example the Book of Enoch describes the river of honey flowing from beneath the tree of life in paradise (Badalanova-Geller 2010; 2017). The sixth verse of Paul Gerhardt's 17th century hymn "Su sõime juures

seisan ma" ('I Stand Beside Thy Manger Here'), he talks about a kiss from Jesus "Suukest, mis oma väe poolest ületab magusa veini, piima- ja meejõe" 'A mouth that, by its very power, transcends the rivers of sweet wine, milk and honey' (Must 2022). Honey and milk flow from the land in the Old and New Testaments (for example in the books of Moses, Exodus 3:7-8, etc.) and in the Apocrypha (for example Federov 2023). At the same time, cultural comparisons are interesting because for Estonians, there were extraordinary mountains of porridge and rivers of milk (common sayings, cf. Justkui 1998–2005), which attracted the local prophet Maltsvet to his idea of emigration (Kõiva 2018, the Last Days of Our World).

The widespread ban around the world on counting people, livestock and birds, also applied in Estonia and extended to bee colonies, beehives in forest trees, and hives. This was mainly during the 19th century, when hives and smaller apiaries were located on farms while larger apiaries were found on manors.

> Bee hives in yards do not have to be counted. H II 42, 125 (39) < Vändra, 1893

No strangers were allowed in the apiary, no swearing was allowed, the beekeeper had to put on clean clothes before visiting the hives, and he was not allowed to consume alcohol, the smell of which was said to be intolerable to bees:

> One cannot curse in front of the bees, doing so will agitate them. ERA II 28, 364 (3) Lüganuse, 1930; A bad word shall not be spoken to the bees, if it be spoken, they shall be destroyed. E 18813 (11) < Tartu–Maarja, 1895

Bees were also subject to other archaic prohibitions on words and actions, for example their fragility and defencelessness in the face and words of evil was always emphasised. In addition they were spoken of using euphemisms (Kõiva 2022). In the following sample text, bees are fumigated against harm damage with smoke created by burning the fur of the suspected pest, or pieces of clothing:

> [b]ees were supposedly such gentle creatures that one was never allowed to use their proper name when speaking about them; instead, they had to be called little men, labourers or food carriers, and if they failed, it

> was always the fault of some evil neighbour, with whose fur or hair they
> had to be fumigated. H II 17, 165/6 (9) < Märjamaa, 1889

The reasons given for the prohibitions vary. According to religious belief, swearing caused direct harm to and failure of bees, or it made them angry. Also prohibited was being amazed by or praising the number of bees or their work ethic. It was a common explanatory model for many types of misfortune. Harm could be caused by anyone, not just someone with powers of witchcraft. In southern Estonia, women were not permitted to visit a hive as beekeeping had been solely the work of men for a long time. Today, this prohibition has disappeared and women are successful beekeepers, although the prohibition is still mentioned from time to time.

> …one must not express surprise or speak poorly beside a beehive,
> otherwise the bees will no longer prosper. Women are prohibited from
> visiting the hive. RKM II 67, 87/9 (3a) < Räpina, 1956)

Euphemisms were used more often in speech than in incantations. Incantations were chosen because older forms with a religious background are preserved within them. Incantations were used to promote beekeeping, protect and cure bees and cure people of bee stings. Incantations were also added to healing words, such as spells, in order to heal wounds. Prayers were used in beekeeping alongside verse-form incantations (the Lord's Prayer, or reading the Lord's Prayer backwards) and, among the older internationally known protective incantations, for example the SATOR palindrome (see Davies 2009; Kõiva 1999).

The incantations addressed the bees as bird/birds/honey bee-bird, men, labourers. Special relationships are referenced by the use of terms associated with humans in the bee words 'small men', 'workers', with gender being highlighted by calling them 'mother', 'brothers', 'sisters'. Bee words are similar to the words used to address wolves, which are also addressed respectfully using kinship terms. The specialness of the address is indicated by the diminutive and endearing use of suffixes, for example the suffixes -u and -ke, as well as the word mesimamm 'honey berry'. Mamm is an interesting double endearment - 'a small berry' + honey'.

In incantations treating bee stings (17 texts), bees are addressed with four verses containing euphemism, with the verses followed by a request not to sting (argumentation). There is minimum variation in the addresses (plural

is exchanged for the singular), terms of kinship are used, and only the fourth address is variable, where 'piglets' is replaced with 'friends' in the fifth variant. Obviously, an attempt was made to find a more suitable semantic meaning, and 'piglets', which refers to the connection with deities and guardian fairies, whose animals were called by the names of domestic animals (piglet, cattle, horse, see Loorits 1939; Kõiva 2022), had already been forgotten. The variation in the addresses is as follows:

> *Linnu isake, linnu emake (17 värsis),*
> *linnu vahvad vennakesed (16 värsis) / linnu lendajad vennakesed*
> *(1 värsis).*
> *linnu lendajad õekesed (14 värsis) / linnu helde õeke (1 värsis)*
> *linnu põue põrsakesed (10 värsis) / linnu põrsakesed (1 värsis) / linnu*
> *põue sõbraksed (5 värsis).*
> *Jätke minda märkimata,*
> *minu nahka näkkimata,*
> *vere alla käppimata!*

> Father of the bird, mother of the bird (verse 17),
> the bird's wonderful brothers (verse 16) / the bird's flying brothers
> (verse 1).
> the bird's flying sisters (verse 14) / the bird's generous sister (verse 1)
> the piglets in the belly of the bird (verse 10) / the bird's piglets (verse
> 1) / friends in the bird's belly (verse 5)
> Leave me unmarked,
> my skin uninfected,
> my blood untouched!
> ERA II 303, 313 (17) Häädemeeste, 1942

In the healing words, the bee brings the medicinal product and honey from a location associated with the Bible (the Book of Enoch) or from a more distant place. In the following example, a bee is sent to Sweden to bring medicine to place on a wound made with iron (a sword or knife). It is possible that the word Rootsi is used because of the alliteration rohi Rootsist ('medicine from Sweden'):

> *Kui mingisugune haigus on, siis tarvitatagu järgnevat ütelust:*
> *Mesilane, linnukene,*
> *too sa metta muilta mailta,*
> *rohtu too sa Rootsimaalta,*

> *[too] raud(a)haava paranda!*
>
> If there is any kind of illness, the following utterance should be used:
> Bee, little bird,
> bring me honey from other countries,
> bring me medicine from Sweden,
> bring me iron to heal the wound! E, StK 41, 203 (117) Vändra, 1927

There is a connection between the healing words for bee stings and biblical motifs. As below, a swelling is told to subside and recede, as did the waters of the Jordan River. Reference is made to the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan (2Ms 14, Matt 3:17; Kõiva 2020: 20, 28–29 ff.), the mention of the Jordan being sufficiently authoritative in this sample text:

> *Mesilaste nõelamine. (Kolm korda lugeda).*
> *Mesilane on nõelanud, Jeesus on kõnelenud, paiste, jää vait nagu vesi*
> *Jordanis on vait jäänud. Aamen. XXX.*
>
> Bee stings (To be read three times).
> The bee has stung, Jesus has spoken, the swelling, be as still as the waters of the Jordan are still. Amen. XXX. ERA II 115, 287 (41) Luke 1935.

In words related to practical beekeeping, the mini ritual is at the forefront, with the accompanying short and specific verbal request indicating action and conveying the main message.

> *Mesilasepidaja kunts*
> *Kui mesilaste pere ära tahab minna, siis võtta oma müts ehk kübar*
> *piast [peast] ja keeruta seda möödapääva ümmer oma pia nii kaua,*
> *kunni mesilaste pere ennast maha heidab ja ise lausu neid sõnu oma*
> *mütsi keerutates:*
> *"Tagasi mehed! Tagasi mehed! Tagasi mehed!" – Siis ei lähä mesila-*
> *sepere ära.*
>
> The Art of Beekeeping
> When the colony of bees wants to go away, remove your hat or cap from your head and twirl it clockwise around your head beehive until the colony of bees cast themselves down, and yourself say these words as you twirl your hat:
> 'Back, men! Back, men! Back, men!' – Then you colony of bees will not leave. H II 67, 46/7 (1807) Koeru, 1894

A report from 1909 says that at night on Good Friday the owners of the hives went around the apiary and placed rowan and juniper twigs in the fence, so that the bees would leave their family but not fly away, and also so that they would very painfully sting anyone who attacked the honey tree (E 46885 < Palamuse, 1909).

Bee words avoid dysphemism, cursing and swearing. The same behaviour can be found in the traditions of many peoples (Kotšurova 2023; for Belorusia see Boganeva 2023: 286; for Udmurta see Vladykina 2016; 2023; for the Ersa see Ermakov 2023). Jealous people and potential pests were a major problem for village society, as reflected in a humorous piece written in 1903 in Setomaa, in south-eastern Estonia, in which a farmer runs after a strange villager and accuses him of stealing bees, demanding them back:

> The master of the bees was a strong man with big bones; fortunately, his opponent was a small withered little man, whom he grabbed by the breast, began to shake, and bellowed at him:
>
> 'Tell me, you rascal, where did you hide my bees?'
>
> Soon the son caught up with his father, and the old man was already raising his hands to beat the strange rider.
>
> 'Speak, or your skin will soon be as hot as a bead,' the bee-keeper bellowed, and at last the stranger spoke at length:
>
> 'Dear people, let me go. I don't know anything.'
>
> The stranger was forcibly led back to the garden, where, after much prompting with threats, he pointed to a single fir tree in the woods and said:
>
> 'Look now, there are all the bees in a clump together, let me go!' – 'No, no, my friend, you can't go so easily. Bring my bees back from there! If you know how to enchant them there, you can enchant them back.'
>
> What choice did the strange reader of words have?' – He had to bring back the bees, which was easy for him to do. Three times he looked at the tree and said:
>
> 'Return as easily as you have gone.'
>
> Witness the miracle! Right then, the whole swarm of bees began to move steadily towards home, where they each found their own hive, and began to work as before. H II 70, 150/1 (d) Seto, 1903

In a text that begins with an unexpected accusation, the farmer is persistent and finally forces the stranger to call back the bees.

Warning legends form a separate group, with breaching of general rules tabooed and warned against. It was understood that a thief would face public corporal punishment in village society. Cautionary legends are terrifying fictional stories in which any transgression ends in a gruesome, painful and shameful death. In legends prescribing punishment for a honey thief, the thief's intestines are nailed to a tree and they are forced to run around the tree until they fall to the ground dead.

The human soul and the bee

The bee was one of the manifestations of the soul for the Finno-Ugric people. In dreams, the beekeeper sees places visited by the soul (Vladykina 1998; Paulson 1958; Loorits 1949, Kulmar 1997), these stories contain the individual and the stereotypical, the soul visits nearby places on its journey, but may also travel to distant places. It was forbidden to move the body of the sleeper, otherwise the soul would not know how to return to the body, and the person would lie lifeless and soon die. The same belief was probably associated with changing the position of a seriously ill or dying person, turning their bed to ease their suffering and to encourage the soul to leave the body.

In legends, a witness observes the flight of a bee as it leaves a man's body and finds hidden treasure. In a variation, the man wakes and talks about visiting a money cellar filled with silver and gold coins, but he does not know its location. His servant takes him to the sod where the bee that had left the man's mouth flew, under which they find a large horse's skull filled with gold and silver coins, enough for both of them to live carefree lives (E 16889/92 (2)< Võnnu, 1895).

More often, this motif is associated with the tradition of the treasure bringing, Spirit, or a breeze or whirlwind in which the soul leaves to steal grain. A random observer saves the man: "It was then clear to the man why his soul would never again rise, and so he went and turned the body of the man back the way it had been before. The bee flew into the man, and the man's soul rose (E 43471/3 (135) < Rõuge, 1902).

The visions of another world form a cycle of their own, which we find alongside the narratives in the older song strata, the metrical verse form of the

alliterative Kalevala. The indescribable hardships and humiliations of earthly life are described by a large group of songs about slavery, the content and messages of which are far away from us. The life of a serf was difficult, and the life of a slave was worth nothing. The other world is portrayed quite differently in folk belief (Loorits 1952: 152; Kõiva 2023a), but the runic songs with their Christian layers are based on contrasts, and the suffering of earthly life is replaced by the abundant life of heaven with Mary and God. By combining motifs, the singers create unique images of life. For example, the life of a slave who is not allowed to visit his home and who sinks in the snow on his way there is depicted (H, Ostrov 102/4 (43) < Laiuse, 1887). A star takes him to heaven, and leaves behind a mark on the ground, which his master follows, seeing how:

> *Alla toodi orja tooli,*
> *orjal on hõbedatooli.*
> *Jo toodi peremehe tooli,*
> *peremehel tuline tooli.*

> The slave's chair was brought down,
> the slave has a silver chair.
> The master's chair was also brought,
> the master had a fiery chair.

Similar contrasts, where the slave sits upon the throne and the master endures conditions comparable to hell, continue as the song develops. The slave is brought a silver table and a silver pot with honey and vodka. The master, on the other hand, is brought a fiery table and a fiery pot containing fire and tar. The master asks the slave why they have different lives in heaven and receives the following answer:

> *[m]iks ei maksnud orja vaeva,*
> *tasunud vaeselapse vaeva.*

> [w]hy did he not pay the slave for his trouble,
> or pay for the orphan's trouble.

The master promises to pay everything in heaven, he already has his cloth and yardstick ready, but the slave suddenly reveals his will and refuses to accept payment in heaven, indicating that he does not wish to receive payment in the presence of Mary, but that it should have taken place on earth and shall remain the master's debt:

> *Ei ma taha taeva'assa,*
> *maksu ei Maria ees.*
> *Miks ei maksnud seal maal,*
> *kus meid vaeseid vaevati,*
> *pisukesi piinati.*
>
> No, I don't want to go to heaven,
> not to pay in front of Mary.
> Why didn't you pay on earth,
> where we poor were afflicted,
> the littlest ones were tormented.

In essence, the slave's decision means that his master cannot enter heaven, as also indicated by his seat and food, including the tar and fire stereotypically associated with hell.

In this song and others, honey is a symbol of a desirable life, which we also find in other types of folklore. Interesting folkloric views of one's home as a symbol of abundance and prosperity are offered by wedding songs, in which both families praise the place where they live, while the maiden's relatives characterise her life in her parents' home as a carefree place of growth, with honey as an important feature:

> *Olid taadile tugiksa,*
> *eidel paremaks käeksa,*
> *võisid võtta võida-leiba,*
> *maitsta mett magusat*
>
> You were a pillar of strength to father,
> a right hand to the mother,
> you could have taken bread and butter,
> tasted the sweet honey (Põlva, Runic Song database)

To this day, the belief that bees leave or die at the same time as their master is a widely held belief in northern Europe. Recently, John Dingwall (2022) wrote about how the Royal beekeeper John Chappleh informed the Queen's bees of the death of their owner, saying that King Charles was their new master. The whole process was to reconcile the bees with their new owner and remind the public of old beliefs. The wife of a woodsman and an expert student of folklore recalled how the bees disappeared from the hives before the man's death, but

came back a year later, flying in the sunlight as if the man's soul was with them, taking up residence in the hives (EFITA 2018).

Medicine and rituals

From the above, it is evident that ethnographic and social practices change faster than human experiences, beliefs and language. The description of heaven and hell in the songs of slaves, and the motif of taking responsibility for one's actions, is a theme of the past. However, in the case of honey and bees, we can also speak of a recurring return to, and reintroduction of, earlier ideas and practices. One of these was a ritual drink called mead, a low alcohol ritual beverage made from honey and water that was one of the most common alcoholic beverages in Estonia before the 13th century, displaced by beer during the Crusades (Moora 1980; 1991; Tedre 1996). Details of how ancient Estonians made mead are not known, but homemade mead was still served in the 20th century as a festive drink, to which fruit or spices could be added. In recent years, mead has reappeared on the market, but with new qualities: it can be carbonated, dry, semi-sweet or sweet, according to the brewer's recipe.

The integration of honey into new preventive measures and its toleration by official medicine can be seen in several areas. In the case of bee stings the first treatment is humid soil and cool water, while the use of honey as a preventive and homeopathic treatment is encouraged by its availability and low cost (example based on EFITA). Ethnomedical recipes recommend honey of different colours collected from different plants, and modern favourite mixes such as ginger or chili. Dark honey is recommended against allergies and anaemia, honey water helps with lack of appetite and conjunctivitis, a spoonful of honey in a glass of warm water helps against fatigue and exhaustion, two teaspoons of honey in half a glass of water helps against headaches and migraines, drinking warm milk and a teaspoon of honey before sleep helps against insomnia. In addition to which honey can be used to lower cholesterol for those with heart disease. This is particularly recommended for elderly people suffering from diabetes, heart disease or high blood pressure (mainstream medicine does not allow honey for those with diabetes). Many recipes require preparation at home. For high blood pressure, a teaspoonful of honey is mixed with a tea-spoonful of ginger juice and a teaspoonful of ground cumin seeds; for digestive

problems, mix one part of honey with another part of apple cider vinegar and drink diluted with water. What's new are the instructions on precise dosages, as well as water temperature, quantity, and frequency. It seems that in the past, dosages were based on need, with quantities not strictly enforced. The recipes and origins of these complex mixtures have remained outside the interest of folklorists and doctors. The wider use of honey is now being encouraged, for example, as an ingredient in cosmetic products that offer honey as a skin moisturiser or acne treatment.

A variety of products can also be bought at the pharmacy: bee venom, beebread, and beeswax which arrived in shops in the 1980s on the back of the success of home remedies. Beekeepers began to collect beeswax, and at home they made infusions with spirits and vodka for both exterior application and ingestion. For nearly a decade, beeswax was considered almost a panacea for chronic inflammation and pain.

In the 20th century, those with an allergy to bee stings were recommended to immunise themselves with increasing quantities of bee venom, which was also considered effective in treating rheumatism, starting with one and working up to about 20 bee stings. A new trend is apitherapy (Meie mesilased 2020; Honey Wolf 2021; PPA 2021; Olustvere 2022; Koppelmaa 2022), in which the patient is placed on a wooden bed with holes drilled in it, allowing them to hear the sounds of a bee colony and smell the scent of the bees, which is said to be effective against various types of psychological stress and illness. Apitherapy also uses stinging, the number of which is slowly increased. In the 21st century apitherapy is being promoted as a solution for all ailments.

Urban beekeeping and proverbs

In the 1960s, there was a beekeeper who lived on my street. He had a lot of beehives in his garden and you could buy different kinds of honey, such as heather honey, in the autumn. The beekeeper's honey was considered to be better than that which was sold in the shops because it was fresh, not stale, and harvested from nearby meadows and pastures. One was also able to stock up on pieces of honeycomb, which were nice treats. One of the differences between domestic and industrial honey was considered to be its crystallisation or fluidity, as well as the difference in flavour, which was attributed to the taste

of different honey plants. Industrial honey was produced in my home town by the Estonian Consumer Cooperatives Republican Union (ETKVL2), which had its own apiary. Beehives were transported by car to the collection areas in the spring and back to the city in the autumn, the same was done with the beehives on collective farms. The large producer ETKVL also bought honey from private beekeepers and collective farms. Today, alongside the big beekeepers, there are families who enjoy the hobby of beekeeping as part of their lifestyle, with five or more hives for their family and friends. The latest trend is to keep bees in the city, not just in garden cities but between high-rise buildings (Vill 2018; PPA 2021; Solba 2018). In Tallinn, for example, beehives can be found on the roofs of garages, hotels, and police stations. Beehives are collectively owned in the green areas and parks that have been created in towns. Behind these movements is the need to restore the relationship between humans and other creatures, to draw attention to the rights of bees (Holsting 2019), in which at least the extension of the minimum programme for animal rights to bees is considered essential. More important than providing a way of life for the species in the wild, is ensuring good health, adequate food and water, and avoiding pain, suffering and a painful death.

Beekeeping has undergone profound development and ground-breaking innovations, especially in recent centuries. Some hive types could be insulated with cloth for the winter, covered with branches and protected from various dangers. Winter supplies were left in the hives and the bees were given extra food, and beekeepers learned how to treat and heal them. The question here is how much of that knowledge was disseminated through family lore and folklore, and to quite a considerable extent how much was learned from publications and training. Beekeeping know-how was guided through the articles found in Estonian-language calendars (the publication of which began in the 18th century, with housekeeping advice and health advice beginning to appear only at the beginning of the 19th century alongside and instead of biblical texts), and in the 20th century through an Estonian-language beekeeping magazine (Mesindus 1935 et seq.), and through beekeeping associations (the Central Beekeeping Association was founded in 1927, by 1938 uniting 33 gardening and beekeeping associations (EE 2003: 44)). After a forced hiatus in 1940, the work continued in 1949 as the Horticultural and Beekeeping Society of the Estonian SSR). In 1990, the old name of the the Central Gardening and Beekeeping Association

was restored, and in 1994 the Eesti Meetootjate Ühendus (the Estonian Honey Producers Association) started as a branch of the association.

The Estonian Gardening and Beekeeping Association has issued a number of publications, for example a magazine from 1989 to 1994 that included children's stories about the life of bees (for example Valdemar Bonsel's *Mesilane Maaja*, published in 1923). Notwithstanding these developments, a reason to return to folklore remains, one that highlights and compares animals with humans, often in unexpected ways.

Let's consider another folklore type with a more formal structure. Only 23 types of proverb, which have no connection to religion but are related to formalities, permanent word compounds, and depictions (EV = Krikmann et al. 1980), have been recorded throughout more than one hundred years of collecting. Some of these proverbs are variants which are close to each other, with the total number of texts in any variant not exceeding ten.

Common messages found in proverbs are:

(a)   proverbs that enshrine divisions and hierarchies: *Mehilde mesi, naisilde võsi* ('men bring honey, women make butter', i.e. a person is known by their work);

(b)   the superior is right: *Kelle käsi, selle mesi* (the master has the right, he who has the power, has the right)

(c)   comparisons of two values, for example if there is a deficit in both, then the provider of mental balance is more important: *Uni on magusam kui mesi* (sleep is sweeter than honey) (8 texts); that which is of vital importance is equivalent to the extraordinary: *Ku' juvva tahat, om vesi ka mesi* (if you are thirsty, even water tastes like honey) (EV 2409);

d)   generalisations on a topic that from a distance may seem appealing, but can be deceptive or end with a decline in welfare: *Mesileib minna, saiakoorik saia, saa manu – ei midagi* (the bride/groom is kind and hardworking before the marriage, but mean and lazy afterwards) (EV 6752); E*i ole kõik mesi, mis tilgub, ega kõik tuli, mis välgub* (not everything that drips is honey, not everything that flashes is light, i.e. all that glitters is not gold) (EV 6736); *Kõik on minnes mesised, võttes võised* (everyone is sweet before marriage but sour/mean after getting married); *Nii kaua on minia hea, kui mesileiba on* (a daughter-in-law is kind [to her in-laws] as long as there is cake (i.e. money, food, etc.);

e)   what you have is better than what others have: *Oma mesi kõige magusam, oma kali kõige kangem* (your own honey is the sweetest, your own kvass is the strongest);

e)   warnings of insidious and duplicitous behaviour: *Linnumesi keele peal, ussiviha keele all* (honey on the tongue, snake venom under the tongue), EV 5972; *Mesi suus, sapp südames* (honey in the mouth, bile in the heart) 6747; *Suu ees mesi, selja taga vesi/ saksa väits* (honey in front of you, water/a German knife behind your back, i.e. talks sweetly in front of you, says bad things behind your back); *Kõik ei ole mesi, mis magus on* (all that is sweet is not honey, i.e. all that glitters is not gold) (EV 6739)

(f)   assessments and warnings against squandering: *Mesilane korjab ühe päeva, elab üheksa päeva, laisk ja pillaja teenib üheksa päeva, elab ühe päeva* (the bee works for one day, lives on the outcome for nine days, the lazy person and the squanderer work for nine days and spends the proceeds in one day).

Summary

Founder of ecosophy and deep ecologist Arne Naess wrote in the spirit of deep ecology in the 1960s that we need to care more widely for those other than human beings, and to care more deeply for people (Næss 2023: 233). To this day, bees are considered the epitome of diligence, industriousness, austerity, and kindness. However, reality is more complex and quite diverse, especially since a new stage in the interpretation of human–animal relations is just beginning.

Northern European countries are suitable For beekeeping, but it is more difficult. The European Union is considered the largest producer of honey in the world, with the countries of Central and Southern Europe being the main honey countries. This is why the use of honey has become a symbol of abundance in life. Interestingly, in proverbs, which are a poetic and practical type of folklore, honey and bees are represented with few texts, the functions of which are limited.

Over the millennia, the types of bee hive have changed. Presumably, some beliefs about bees are primordial; other layers, for example the use of euphemisms and the system of prohibitions and commandments, are more recent and have evolved rapidly since beehives came from the forest to the farm or home. Since the 19th century, skills related to beekeeping have expanded under

the influence of the printed word. In the 20th century, Estonia established its own apiculture societies and started to disseminate professional information and literature, which has further shaped both knowledge and the ability to keep bees successfully. We see how climate fluctuations affected beekeeping, and how religious denomination was also a factor.

Vernacular knowledge forms a complex, elements of which come from different layers and segments of culture, combining professional and folk. We see how in the 20th century the use of honey expanded in catering and gourmet foods, as well as in medicine. The development of sophisticated drugs represents a new symbiotic layer of folk medicine and media knowledge.

On the practical and economic side of beekeeping, we see a slow change in the ethnographic side, with reforms in beekeeping beginning in the 18th century (log hives), gaining momentum in the 19th century (hives that open from the top). Innovations are appearing at an accelerated pace, although there is also a certain pattern of inertia and convenience present: old forms persist through the centuries, such as the use of natural beehives, which are not driven by the idea of economic efficiency but rather possess their own emotional qualities.

Forms of ownership have also changed: common trees on collective land gave way to large apiaries and hives with a small number of bees, which persisted for centuries, although today they compete with cheap imported honey and honey products.

Traditional classifications and attitudes have been replaced in many ways by knowledge learned in the classroom, although some beliefs and ritual behaviours have survived, some beliefs have been adapted, and some have found a new output. The views of vernacular religion are more freely and clearly expressed, and are supported by dark green ecology (Taylor 2021), deep green ecology (Næss 2023), and new forms of esotericism. Urban beekeeping and the demands of animal rights activists might seem to be alien, but are part of adapting to mega-urbanisation. New recipes and food products are part of creative food and health development and are not new phenomena at all.

Language in the form of adages, sayings, utterances, allow for many comparisons. In the case of adages, the database contains nearly a hundred different expressions (the Justkui database of Estonian bywords and phraseology, 2012), and there are still presumed to be more of them in the language (for example the Rehepapp database of folk mythology and folktales). However, many poetic names that suggest exceptional properties or value have disappeared from ac-

tive use. Church hymns and the imagery thereof, and poetry where bees were the epitome of the motherland (Juhan Liiv, Paul-Eerik Rummo), expressing national identity, influenced the cultural meaning of bees. In Estonian folk philosophy and speech, rivers of milk and mountains of porridge are spoken of as a source of paradisiacal abundance, which is noticeably more mundane, but still a dream of the good life and of being protected from conditions of hunger and crisis. This same dream led Estonian peasants to wait for the White Ship and to wander to the land of dreams.

Acknowledgements

Abbreaviation

[1] PRIA – Agricultural Registers and Information Agency

[2] ETKVL – Estonian Consumer Cooperatives Republican Union, established 1941, to replace the previous (operating from the beginning of the 20th century) consumer cooperatives; currently COOP.

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Narrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) in 2023: An Estonian Case Study on AI Lore

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Abstract: With the rapid emergence of new technologies in contemporary societies, new reflections of human experience arise. One of the recent technologies introducing massive changes in human life as well as in human reactions is artificial intelligence (AI). In the spring of 2023, about six months after the text-based AI ChatGPT was made available to the masses (Pistilli 2023), the public discussion about AI was most intense in Estonian society. The aim of this article is to analyse the narrative motifs and ways of narrating (including a proposed typology) AI-related topics in the Estonian mainstream and alternative online media chat groups in May and September 2023 respectively.

Six general types of narration on AI were detected. The collected material showed that Estonian AI lore is considerably polarised between strongly negative and positive stories. Especially during the first wave of AI discussion in May 2023 the majority of narratives had negative or doubtful tonality. One of the factors that triggers a negative or cautionary tone in AI lore seems to be the lack of transparency in AI development. In addition to AI story types, this article tries to map the archetypes of plot characters (actants) of AI lore based on Propp's classification of fairy tales which distinguishes between seven behavioural patterns.

In addition, this study revealed a specific fluidity beyond genre boundaries that has also been observed in urban legends.

Andrus Tins

Introduction

 The application of technology is one of the basic features of human society, and the technologies that we use strongly influence our way of living (Volti 2006). With the emergence of new technologies in society, concurrent new reflections of human experience arise in the culture. One of the recent technologies that is introducing massive changes in the functioning of human life as well as in human reactions (for example, ways of perception, narration, belief) is AI. The science-fictional has become ubiquitous in many aspects of our everyday culture (Schmeink 2016).

In the spring of 2023, approximately 6 months after the most sophisticated text-based AI (ChatGPT) was made available to the masses (Pistilli 2023), the public discussion about AI was the most intense it has ever been in Estonian society. This observation applied to all platforms and social spheres: tabloids, quality journalism, private conversations and online groups and forum discussions. Finally, everybody had online access to ChatGPT, could try it out and express their opinion about it or narrate their experience. As an underlying and ongoing process related to AI, research and development had been underway since the middle of the 20th century. Many parallels can be seen between the recent high interest in AI and the 1960s' fascination with science and space discoveries. In the middle of the 20th century, humankind (at least in the industrialised parts of the world) found a new hope in the progress of natural science and technology (for example, with the invention of new antibiotics and transistor technology) (cf. Lintrop 2000) towards eradicating obstacles to mankind's 'giant leap' to the future. As in the middle of the 20th century, we can now observe similarly diverse and partly opposing attitudes and viewpoints on the subject matter. Comparing humans and intelligent machines was then and still is today one of the most debated aspects in discussions (including folklore) related to the development of AI. As an example of the fact that thinking about and discussing AI is not a new phenomenon per se, here is the argumentation from an Estonian journalist about an "electronic brain" from as long ago as 1967:

Every year in our country there have been approximately 2,000 different books published. Who is able to read them all? Probably only an electronic brain. But I want my books to be read by a Human Being! Should the Human Being say that it was a poor reading, then I know that I must try harder. (Kool 1967)

Thus, there has been a decades-long debate on whether human creative activity is inherently more valuable than artificial, and in what ways, although this discussion has rapidly intensified since the spring of 2023.

Researchers have recognised technologically mediated folklore in the form of online discourse from the beginning of the 1990s (Howard 2008). The digital world as a space of vernacular expression has been the focus of several scholars (e.g. Blank 2009). Already in 1990 John Dorst speculated about potential changes in folklore production caused by emerging communication technologies ("…Telectronic Age", Donst 1990); there are studies focused on certain aspects of technology folklore (*Etymology of the Computer Bug: History and Folklore* by Shapiro, 1987); and analysis of problematics related to AI merging into society (for example *Ghost Stories from the Uncanny Valley*) by Thompson (2019). However, while studies of the role of technology in culture in general have quite a long history (for example *Folklore of the Oil Industry*, by Boatright (1963), *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, by Du Gay et al. (1997), *Mobile Phone Stories or Mobile Lore* by Wienker-Piepho (2000)), there is a lack of folkloristic study that considers technology more specifically as a subject of vernacular storytelling.

This article focuses on the dynamics of folklore related to AI and ChatGPT. Some general background information related to AI and some prominent events in connection with the development of AI will be highlighted for better context on AI and ChatGPT folklore. In vernacular discussions and narrations, ChatGPT was the most mentioned application of AI, although in most cases people talk about AI as an abstract phenomenon. Because popular culture influences people´s understandings of complex phenomena to a great extent, I'll give a brief overview of how AI has been represented and positioned in research and popular culture in order to give a better idea of the interplay between these two spheres.

In 1947 transistor technology was demonstrated to the greater public for the first time (Ganapati 2009), while in 1956 The Nobel Prize in Physics was

awarded jointly to William Bradford Shockley, John Bardeen and Walter Houser Brattain for their research on transistor technology (The Nobel Prize in Physics, 1956), opening the door to a digital future (Ganapati 2009) (because transistors (semiconductors) are the basis of all digital devices, including AI).

Basically, there are two major schools of thought regarding the advancements of technology: the pro-technology and the no-technology factions. By and large, the majority of technology enthusiasts are futurist and high-tech entrepreneurs, while criticism of technology is characteristic rather of academic circles, philosophers, social scientists, etc. I agree with Carl Mitcham (1994), who has pointed out that the influence of technology combined with science (technoscience) on all aspects of life builds the distinctive character of the current historical period, while an important factor of technoscience is the dialectic between acceptance and criticism. The opposing views on the subject are rather predictable considering the omnipresent outputs of developments that promise unprecedented radical changes in society. Thus, technology can no longer be just taken for granted, rather its impact on and implications for the social, ethical, political, and cultural dimensions of our world must be considered and addressed (Ihde 1993). In contemporary society we can observe that affirmation of technology has become the norm when talking about technology. Over the course of time, a story of affirmation developed and ultimately established itself as the dominant narrative about technology, even as a master narrative or authoritative myth that unites and provides meaning to society (van der Laan 2016). Critical and sceptical views on AI can be seen as a counter-narrative (cf. van der Laan 2016). At the same time, the views and opinions depend a lot on which information field the individual is in. As American science fiction writer Stanley G. Weinbaum (1935) puts it in his short story "Pygmalion's Spectacles", depicting virtual reality: "You just get what information you can through the windows of your five senses, and then make your guesses. When they're wrong, you pay the penalty."

Mathematician Alan Turing (1950) was one of the pioneers in creating a scientific basis for the so-called thinking machines used in the real world. More than seventy years ago he was already arguing, in his article "Computing Machines and Intelligence", that when people use information and logical thinking to find solutions to problems and make decisions, then it should be possible to build intelligent machines as well. Today, intelligent machines are widespread, but several authors have expressed doubt that their development

has met initial expectation. According to some researchers, the promise that technology would improve the quality of life has turned out to be inherently limited (e.g. Rosa 2014; Borgmann 1984). Therefore, technology must be seen for what it really is and what it can offer, while distinguishing it from the "focal things and practices" that can provide the requirements necessary to achieve fulfilment in life (Borgmann 1984). Borgmann has pointed out that the problems that beset technological societies are thought to be extrinsic to technology, although on the contrary the technologies could also be a part of the problems.

The digital transformation, also called the 'fourth industrial revolution', has been regarded as a turning point in progress in which cloud computing, big data, the Internet of Things (IoT) and AI unite to create the foundation for exponential change in the world (Siebel 2019: 24). However, there are opposing views towards AI even among AI entrepreneurs, whose actions are reflected in the media and who are discussed in online forums, partly directing people's opinions. The Future for Life Institute, which represents AI researchers, technologists, entrepreneurs and concerned citizens, has published an open letter with more than 33,000 signatures calling for a pause in AI development due to the risk is presents to humanity (Future for Life Institute, 2023). Thus, it can be argued that the ideas of the historical Luddites are analogous to those of contemporary Neo-Luddite (Kaczynski, 2008)[1], with various views opposing AI having their strong advocates. Such sceptical ideas are sometimes even expressed by companies that develop digital solutions. For instance, while co-founder and CEO of Baidu, China`s largest web search engine, Robin Li has said that regardless of the general public tending to look at AI as having intelligence far beyond the human, it is still science fiction, and we have to be careful with future developments (Li 2020).

Before the current state of development, which has made AI capable of holding conversations with humans and performing independent complex creative work, essentially every computer program (algorithm) could be regarded as a kind of AI (although with limited capabilities). Such AI is, for example, any web engine that is programmed simply to scan the web (Volle 2023). In addition to written texts, much work has been done on speech recognition technologies based on AI (Härm and Alumäe 2022; Furui 2003). AI has been taught to create photographs (for example Midjourney), digitise manuscript material (for example Transcribus), complete a wide range of tasks, such as making medical diagnoses, driving cars, etc., (Copeland 2023; Kurtzweil 2005;

Siebel 2019) and perform cleaning tasks (Paul 2023). In connection with the spread of meme culture, there are also tools to recognise messages in creatively diverse pictorial material (for example Google Translate's image function). Yet people's awareness of AI`s ability to collect and process big amounts of data in favour of abstract institutions (for example gigantic corporations) could be something that initiates the negative and warning tone found in AI lore.

The aim of the article

The aim of this article is to analyse the narrative motifs and ways of narrating AI-related topics in Estonia. Although the degree of folklorisation of the collected material varies, the stories served as the basis for a preliminary classification of AI folklore. In addition to providing a typology of this folklore, I will analyse the possible triggers and reasons for recurring patterns in these narratives (hopes, beliefs, fears, etc.). Reet Hiiemäe (2004) has pointed out that regardless of the general rationalising of the human worldview it is possible to observe some universal features of folklore in handling collective fears. According to Jürgen Habermas, society represents certain interpretative patterns organised by linguistic resources (Habermas 1987) as a cultural reflection.

The value of this article lies in mapping Estonian vernacular lore about AI in 2023, i.e. immediately after one of the hitherto most ground-breaking outputs of AI, ChatGPT, reached the masses, bringing with it a wave of news/discussion/commentary about AI as a result of interactions between news discourses and vernacular reflections of these discourses in human minds. While offering analysis of the narrative material, the article will provide interpretations related to the aetiology of AI folklore in the current social and cultural environment. Thus, the current study is the first known attempt to provide an analysis of the dynamics of Estonian AI lore.

In addition, the article offers an innovative experiment, while trying to map the archetypes of the plot characters (actants) of AI lore based on Propp's classification that distinguishes between seven behavioural patterns (Propp 1975). Behavioural patterns are identified by functions defined as a plot element that is "an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action" (ibid.: 21). According to Greimas (1973), behavioural roles (actantial models) are an integral part of narratives. At the same time, each actant's contribution can be essential to the completion of the narrative plot. In

the future, a further comparison with narrative types in the Aarne–Thompson–Uther Index (ATU Index) (Uther, 2004) would be an interesting undertaking to draw conclusions about the universality of narrative types and motifs, although currently the collected dataset is too small for such a comprehensive analysis. Propp´s classification of wonder tale characters could be especially suitable because in many AI-related narratives AI is seen as a supernatural being (or has been depicted as having some supernatural characteristics). There are similarities between AI lore and modern urban legends. Both can be considered a reflection of aspects of the unfamiliar, the delinquent and the supernatural which are experienced in modern urban culture, with their plot still revolving around stress caused by modern attitudes and behaviours that have strange or scary content (Nounanaki and Kakampoura 2021).

Material and methodology

The data were collected in May 2023, and for comparison material from the same sources was collected in September 2023. The sources were Estonian online newspaper comments sections (from the Delfi.ee news portal, which hosts many mainstream daily and weekly newspapers such as *Ärileht*, *Eesti Päevaleht*, *Maaleht*, *Eesti Ekspress*); from a specific Facebook group dedicated to those interested in the AI developments ("ChatGPT ja teised loovad tehisintellektid eesti keeles"); from some alternative Telegram app groups and chats ("Eesti Vabaks - Estonian World Wide Demonstration", "Eesti Eest Uudised", "Globaalne Tohuvapohu"); and the technology forum Hinnavaatlus.ee.

Two approaches were used to find narratives. The first was a thematic approach using the keywords "artificial intelligence" (in Estonian, "tehisintellekt"), while the second approach use ChatGPT because both the press and people in Estonia generally use these terms when talking about AI (artificial intelligence was also discussed in articles the main topic of which was not directly related to artificial intelligence at all. In such cases, I found the narratives in the comment sections of the daily newspapers (and from other above-mentioned sources) as the spontaneous reflections of the commentators).

The result of data collection was 22 comment threads with stories on AI from May 2023. From September 2023, there were 15 comment threads that involved AI in the narratives. One comment thread could consist of one or many narratives. As an additional clarification, the number of comment threads

is different from the number of articles or posts on AI. In addition, some AI-related narratives were posted as reflections on topics or articles that initially didn't deal with AI at all, and not all verbal reactions (comments and posts) had a distinct narrative form (and were thus rejected as folkloristic material). The collected narratives were grouped according to plot and/or character type. As a result, a classification of AI narrative plots was formed. The classification is provided with signs and functions corresponding to Propp's classification.

The definition and conceptualisation of technology

There are many aspects to take into account when explaining the essence of a technology. From a folklorist's point of view, technology is not merely an artefact or physical item. A technology is a complex combination of physical, social, and cultural resources that humans use (cf. MacKenzie and Wajcman 1985). Hence, technology is "a system created by humans that uses knowledge and organization to produce objects and techniques for the attainment of specific goals" (Volti 2006: 6). Martin Heidegger has pointed out that "Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology" (Heidegger 1977). Thus, there are some key variables that need to be considered when defining technology or investigating the ways in which it is perceived, experienced, and talked about: technology is not neutral. In other words, technology is closely connected to values, ideals, and even ideologies if we look at the matter from a broader perspective. The narrator's attitude might depend on how they identify themselves with regard to the "specific goals" of AI. On the one hand, it could depend on the degree of one`s social cohesion, defined as the strength of relationships and the sense of solidarity among members of a community or society, which reflects people's needs for both personal development and a sense of belonging (Manca 2014). Bourdieu's (1984) 'marks of distinction' notion can be applied here: new technologies are part of human (subjectively perceived social) status. Some social groups tend to idealise new technologies (perceiving that they belong to an elitist and advanced social segment and seeing in AI new solutions to some or all of humanity's problems), others are rather paranoid about AI because of their perceived social vulner-

ability, such as author and contemporary philosopher Nick Bostrom (2014), who has emphasized the existential risk of highly advanced AI, which he calls superintelligence.

Thus, several social-psychological factors can have a role in shaping the distinct shades of an individual`s understanding of technology. The following qualitative analysis enables us to delineate the current vernacular conceptualisation of AI technology. An individual´s identification with the AI proponents' way of thinking, i.e., having a sense of belonging to the group of 'winners', or with the 'losers' or 'rebels' side, i.e., people who are afraid of losing their habitual wellbeing or of the emergence of risks and dangers related to AI, seems to be the main reason for the highly polarised nature of AI lore. Some authors have found that biased depictions of AI in popular culture have shaped the public understanding of the technologies (Cave et al. 2018). In 2023, ChatGPT, as a powerful real-world AI phenomenon, (re)shaped public understanding of AI regardless of previous influence.

We can see topical storytelling functioning as a people´s psychological coping resource which helps to minimise their negative (for example, fearful) reactions and express any other reactions towards AI in a specific socio-cultural context.

The definition of artificial intelligence (AI): From self-definition to pluralistic conceptualisation

In this article, AI is defined computers or computer-controlled robots which are commonly thought of as intelligent beings (cf. HLEG 2019). The term is often used to refer to the development of technologies that are attributed with human-like intellectual abilities such as the ability to think, reason, generalise, and learn from the past (Copeland 2023).

ChatGPT's own definition of ChatGPT (at https://chatgptonline.ai/chat/), given to the author in May 2023, was the following:

Human: How do you define what chat AI is (ChatGPT)?

AI: Yes, I am an AI language model designed for conversational interactions. Chat AIs like myself use machine learning techniques to improve our language processing capabilities and become more effective at understanding and responding to human speech.

From this, ChatGPT's own definition of the nature of ChatGPT, we can conclude that one of the important tasks of a chatbot is constantly to learn while talking to people. This has similarities with Heidegger's (1977) definition of technology – that technology is a means to accomplish something, to fulfil some goals or tasks. Going into the goals of the owner of this technology in the form of such an ever evolving and learning application is a topic that does not directly fit into the framework of this article. However, it is important to mention briefly this because of how, in pop-culture and in the media, both the negative aspects of AI (anti-human attitude, taking over the world, etc.), as well as the positive (helping humanity) are strongly highlighted. The co-founder of the largest Chinese web engine Baidu has outlined two clear scenarios for the development of AI, one good the other bad (Li 2020). Elon Musk, a modern industrialist and investor in innovative technologies, has also given warning messages, for example claiming that AI is becoming more dangerous than nuclear bombs (Siebel 2019). Musk is also a co-founder of the ChatGPT development company OpenAI (Kay 2023), and co-founder of Neuralink, which has reported that it is developing an interface between the human brain and machines to create a symbiosis between humans and computers) (Neuralink 2023). Musk has revived the public discussion on ethical issues related to AI, for example by accusing competing software company Microsoft of excessive use of Twitter data in the development of ChatGPT (Hamilton 2023). The fact that Big Data and AI offer significantly greater opportunities compared to previous technologies causes great optimism as well as anxiety in different social groups, peaking for example with the Cambridge Analytica scandal that related to the use of Facebook data to influence the 2016 US presidential elections (see more in Ingram 2018) and controversy around deepfake technology (Hao and Heaven 2020). This constant inflow of contradictory information can be viewed as one trigger of vernacular narrating about, and taking polarised sides in, the AI debate in general and the debate on ChatGPT in particular.

A definition of ChatGPT was given on their own website: "A kind of search engine capable of understanding your requests and fulfilling them, a modern

'Aladdin's lamp.'" As we can see, the ChatGPT homepage also presents a comparison of their chatbot with something that has magical powers, while creating associations with a classical Arabian miracle story. Such a religion-like approach can also be noted among the narratives collected for this article. All in all, the role of technology in society and culture is clearly incomparably different since the global computer network and the wide spread of AI.

AI technology in the current socio-cultural context

The term 'technology' has many facets, but in the given context – as part of background knowledge whne analysing the lore of AI – it is appropriate to focus on some of the main traits and the aetiology of the concept.

Bausinger (1961) has used the term "adoption" in relation to the emergence of new technologies. In this case, cultural acceptance in the context of the current article means that "AI is here", although not everyone might perceive it. Since AI is a much more abstract technology than, for example, the mobile phone, it can be difficult to assess how the nature and presence of AI as a technology impacts society.

'Paranoid' or 'demonising' stories can be, and indeed often are, classified as conspiracy theories; however, to automatically label critical views as conspiracy theories would be to dismiss many of the substantive reasons for critical views of AI. The forces that trigger conspiracy theories have been considered by other authors to be (1) epistemic (the individual's understanding of the surrounding environment), (2) existential (the individual's security and control of the surrounding environment), or (3) social reasons (maintaining a positive image of the individual and the social group) (Douglas et al. 2017: 538). However, one should avoid exaggerated classification of people's attitudes to conspiracy theories, as the psychological coping mechanisms of real conspiracies and events that are or appear to be threatening could be very similar. Hereby I would prefer to remain on the descriptive level by classifying the narrative types and refraining from making ideological judgments.

Obviously there are good reasons for people to have cautious attitudes. There are numerous examples of experimental manipulations carried out with large numbers of people (in online environments). These experiments have shown statistically relevant results. For example, an experiment carried out

on hundreds of thousands social media users (see Kramer et al. 2014) showns that it is possible to manipulate the emotional state of a bona fide web user by displaying specific emotional content in his or her news feed. Therefore, the ordinary user can have sufficient reason to be to a certain extent distrustful of similar technologies (assuming the person is unaware of how the information has been prepared with certain aims).

Another aspect of AI is its lack of human emotion, which can lead to feelings of alienation when interacting with AI. Already in the early 1990s, some sociologists studying the dynamics of human–AI relationships found that AI had a "problem with social adequacy" because it was predominantly unable to deal with a significant part of human behaviour and intellect (Collins 1990). Topics in line with this can also be observed in Estonian AI lore from 2023.

AI folklore can be also seen as an adaptive reaction to the generally fluid trends that intermittently bring the rapid change characteristic of modern social functioning (Bauman 2006) and create stress, anxiety, and feelings of vulnerability. AI stories with a negative tonality can be seen as grounding ignorance and fear, pouring uncontrolled and vague information into familiar explanations (in a logical form for the narrator) (Douglas et al. 2017), often containing elements or ways of narrating what is familiar from older folklore (Propp 1975). However, genre positioning is not easy when it comes to AI folklore as some of it can be viewed as rumour, urban myth, superstition, urban legend, even comedy, etc., whereas genre borders can be fuzzy (cf. a similar observation about the fluid borders of urban legends, Dégh and Vazsonyi 1971: 283). Sabine Wienker-Piepho (2000), who has studied stories related to the mobile phone, finds that such stories are most similar to legends. Several AI-related stories can be considered akin to fairy tales (especially miracle stories depicting the ability of AI generally, or ChatGPT specifically, to quickly do something that would take a human many times longer or even be impossible).

Individuals tend to compare themselves with others to improve their skills or abilities (i.e. self-improvement) and to protect or enhance their self-esteem (Festinger 1954; Dijkstra, Gibbons, Buunk 2010). The stress that social comparison puts the individual under could be an additional factor in shaping strong or even polarised opinions on AI-related issues. If an individual considers topics related to AI as something that belongs to advanced levels of society, but feels that he or she is not up to the expectations of the new trend, then doubts may arise that need verbal expression. However, when this technological innova-

tion follows the pattern of the Schumpeterian growth paradigm, which models growth as resulting from innovations involving creative destruction (Aghion et al. 2015), then some major disruptions in the cultural and social sphere, together with the rapid integration of AI into social structures, are indeed inevitable. Anthony Giddens (1996) has pointed out that modern society is inherently future-oriented. Belief in a brighter future assisted by technological achievement is in a way a cultural normative, and anticipation of the future has thus become part of the present (Giddens 1996: 177). Astrophysicist Stephen Hawking has predicted that economic inequality will skyrocket when more jobs become automated, and the rich owners of machines refuse to share their rapidly growing wealth (Kaufman 2015). Another prominent critic of rapid technological change has been social scientist Hartmut Rosa, who has introduced the concept of *social acceleration* (Rosa 2010, 2014) while pointing out that "new forms of technological acceleration will be called for to speed up the processes of productive and everyday life" (Rosa 2010: 33). Thus, individuals are deeply affected by surrounding (technological) culture with its own "world of values, meanings, socially significant ideas" (Paliy et al. 2018) irrespective of their positive or negative attitudes towards technology or the narratives expressing these attitudes. Some proponents of technology are even of the opinion that given the need for continuous human adaptation, technology itself can be a resource for human improvement (i.e. transhumanism) (Santos 2021).

AI in the pop-cultural and artistic imaginations

Topics related to AI have been discussed in pop culture, literature and the art since long before the widespread use of personal computers and computer networks. For example, Shelley's *Frankenstein*, first published in 1818 (Britannica 2023), and published in Estonian in 1984 (Shelley 1984) depicts the creation of an artificial intelligent being. Various imaginations related to AI can be found in the 1960s era of space conquest optimism (Lintrop 2000). If in earlier cultural creations the references to AI are rather technology-free, i.e., biological-supernatural (e.g., Frankenstein as a man-made biological being who acquired self-awareness), then as time goes on, AI in pop culture is depicted more and more in connection with technology.

For example, robotic life forms based on artificial intelligence (capable of learning but based on a program) are one of the main characters in the Terminator movie series, the first part of which reached screens in 1984. In the third movie, *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003), an AI with bad intentions takes control of a web network and starts a nuclear war against humanity. In contrast, *Her* (2013) is an example of a romantic relationship between humans and an AI in which a lonely man falls in love with a virtual assistant with AI capabilities.

At the same time, AI has become one of the means of creating pop culture as well as 'reality'. In addition to direct artistic output, AI is used, for example, to generate web content (for example, in the WordPress blogging environment). In addition to text-based AI, image-generating AI is also in use (Dall-E 2, Midjourney) along with audio generating AIs (Jukebox (2023), MuseNet (2023), Google MusicML (2023)). In April 2019 MuseNet gave a live online concert of audio works it had created.

Analysis of collected material

During the analysis I grouped the AI-related stories by content (thematic analysis by major distinctive variables). Analysis of the data collected in May and September 2023 was conducted separately allowing for comparison between these two periods in order to detect changes in the dynamics of narrating and in the topics discussed. A few texts were from previous years (2018 and 2022). I added these texts to the collected data to represent the evolution of the public perception of AI. A general conclusion is that the older stories were much more sceptical of AI's abilities to replace human intellect than the stories from 2023. In general, most narratives took a side and expressed negative or positive opinions about AI. Only a few narrators presented arguments that considered both aspects. Researchers have also pointed out that technology-related folk narratives tend to be highly polarised. According to Kvideland (1996: 100), there are two main types of story related to technology: (1) horror stories, and (2) wonder stories in which technology is ascribed both divine and diabolical features. Additionally, allusions to religious narratives about Messiahs and Antichrists arise when looking at the polarised ways of narrating AI.

Based on the collected material, six main types of narrative can be distinguished, and will be analyzed below.

Because the texts mainly talked about ChatGPT, the term 'ChatGPT' has been used a lot in the analysis. In other cases, the subject was referred to in the texts as "AI" or described in more abstract ways. Examples are given for each narrative type.

Stories and narrations about AI: A typology

Types of AI story and narrative in the dataset collected in May 2023 (in addition some from 2018 and 2022) are described in more detail below.

Type 1: Stories that see AI as playing a positive role in tasks that would normally be tedious and/or time-consuming for humans

Stories of this type can be broadly classified under the classical category of miracle stories. Although there is usually no direct reference to belief in supernatural abilities, AI is often depicted in these stories as making it – as through a miracle – much easier for a person to complete certain practical everyday tasks. Non-religious by nature, Type I stories can be seen as depictions of the symbiotic integration of AI and humans, as examples of the fulfilment of tech proponents' dreams.

An example of Type 1 were narratives about the preparation of a team's monthly work schedules. A person told a story about their head of department, saying "why should a person bother drawing up a schedule when it can be left to AI". Another respondent talked about consulting ChatGPT for recipes, wanting to know how to do something better or in a new way (for example asking AI: "What dish to prepare from chicken fillet today?"), thus leaving the thinking to AI. That person indicated that they communicated with ChatGPT on a daily basis, and expressed confidence in such interaction. Thus, the narratives point out that AI acts as an aide that helps people gather and synthesise information that would otherwise be difficult to obtain from the narrator's subjective point of view.

The use of ChatGPT to gather comprehensive information was quite extensive in different variations among the narrators, for example, in the field of

e-commerce asking for advice about potential client interest in certain products, monitoring market trends, judging which product groups would be 'hot', etc.

The common denominator in these stories is the "why should I bother myself if ChatGPT can handle it much faster and easier" attitude.

On the Telegram social media platform, there was a story that talked about the potential of using ChatGPT on a much wider scale, saying that if politicians could not get along (for example if there was excessive political polarisation), why not hand over management of the Estonian state to AI, because it has no emotions, no nationality, no prejudices.

> *And with the help of a powerful computer, artificial intelligence could do all these complex calculations in a few seconds, even taking into account the small things that local politicians would never think of. This would identify the optimal way out for the majority of the population and the country's economy, weeding out speculation, assumption and emotion. (ID_09-2)2*

Compared to Propp's classification of wonder tale characters and functions (Propp 1975) we can recognise in Type I traits of some positive functions (the donor, the helper, and the hero.) However, the analogies with Propp´s characters are fluid, and there is no direct match for Type I, as the narratives in the current study's dataset were much shorter and less complex compared to the complex structure of fairy tales.

Type II: Sceptical, paranoid stories describing the diabolical nature of Chat GPT

This story type includes narratives explaining the irrational decisions and intentions of the government and the legislature about the involvement of AI. A comment to an article (on the news portal Delfi.ee) that describes a new law requiring people to give up traditional stove heating exclaims, "do we already have an AI that makes these laws, they are so strange and very alienated from real life?" There has been a lot of talk about the fact that electricity supply is not completely reliable in Estonia, and this comment shows bewilderment at the authorities' wish to destroy classic stoves, a time-tested means of heating, in favour of electric heating systems. Thus, such an irrational decision is attributed to AI, illustrating how it is viewed as not comprehending human life.

In the comments to an article about the CIA and FSB using the Internet to spy on people, one commenter argued as follows:

… Although AI technology existed 10 years ago, it is now self-aware and controls [what happens] instead of humans. In the war in Ukraine, real people probably won't decide anything anymore. AI manipulates humans to destroy humans with their own hands. AI escalates the situation until all of humanity dies in a nuclear conflict. (ID_02-2)

There can be seen some resemblance between Type 2 stories and Propp's character 'the villain' (i.e. aggressor). Again, narratives from this type hint at some of the negative characters from traditional folklore, for example a "devil who wants to get three drops of your blood".

Type III: Humans have certain unique qualities that AI does not

Narratives that express belief that AI cannot replace certain humans do it rather neutrally, in not very emotionally loaded terms; no clear fear of AI is expressed.

A few years before ChatGPT came into widespread use, there were very sceptical views among people as to whether constructing AI would be possible at all. On the Delfi.ee subforum *Lolliklubi* ("The Club of Fools") in 2018 the possibility of implementing 'intelligent' AI was under discussion. By 2023 this kind of disbelief in 'intelligent' AI has almost disappeared. Users expressed the opinion that the use of big data alone was not enough for a functional AI.

User 1: AI, explain why you believe that it is possible.

User 2: There is a lot of talk about artificial intelligence. All kinds of pop articles and promo. I'll be honest, it's not possible with today's technology. Washing machines and speakers think, but it's not artificial intelligence.

User 3: … the human brain cannot find answers only according to the correct patterns… it is impossible to create such an algorithm [that has the same quality as the human mind]. (ID_03-1)

The commentator believes that human consciousness has a certain special quality of information synthesis, a creativity that AI does not and cannot have.

This story type is reminiscent of Propp´s 'false hero' character function, because in these narrations the belief is manifested that AI is not as capable as it is often described or believed to be.

Type IV. AI has certain unique qualities that humans do not

There are rather neutral, slightly positive, statements that say AI is "not so tricky" but that it is more rational and straightforward in communication than expected. For example, some posts in the same chat thread (from 2018) compare humans and AI in favour of AI's higher intelligence after a number of previous commenters posted several unrelated messages and links. Chat participants express the opinion that creativity does not always mean creating something of value but can also have its darker side, for example people can sort out their psychological or other problems in creative ways, but not necessarily in ways that are beneficial to humanity:

> *are morons here?*
> *the washing machine may in that case be much more intelligent than*
> *many of the [nonsense] link-posters here (ID_03-1-1)*

Hereby we should keep in mind that AI bots rather than humans often post nonsense-like web content, although in the example above the forum user identifies AI as a rationally acting entity.

There were also discussion threads in which participants described how it is rather nice that ChatGPT is always very polite and correct in giving answers. "It tries to be polite and not hurt anybody's feelings." Other participants claimed that "it is programmed that way" but shared the opinion that such behaviour is positive, whereas people are often too emotional and even rude in online conversation threads. Interestingly, similar discussions also occurred in the 2023 material, conveying the belief that AI often acts more like a human than humans themselves. At the same time, commentators attempt to attribute to this 'more-than-human' AI features that make it more human, for example by asking about its name. As we know, names are part of an individual's identity, and are also of great importance in traditional folklore, where humans are depicted as obtaining power over certain demonic supernatural beings if they are able to find out their names.

With some exceptions, this story type is reminiscent of Propp´s positive functions, or his 'princess/prize', 'princess´s father' characters. AI functions in this kind of story as a friendly protective fairy who has plenty of time and who cares, but is rather an accompanying factor, thus being a less powerful or less active function and character than some other positive functions. AI, like the princess, is wooed by many and the stories indicate competition for who can build a better relationship with AI (i.e. the 'princess').

Type V. An idealising fascination with AI technology

Narratives from this type express belief and uncritical, religion-like, fascination in the huge positive potential of AI and in AI advancements.

A comment on a technology-related forum is as follows: "I wonder if such artificial intelligence could also be used elsewhere, for example, an employer could better determine who in the team is really active and who is just hanging around and pretending." (ID_07-1)Other comments expressed similar fascination with AI, arriving at the viewpoint that, "Well, someday the discrimination against robots has to end. This button ("Are you a human? CAPTCHA") will disappear and their rights will also be protected." (ID_05-5-1)

This comment could be classified as humour, although the tone of the comment thread was quite serious, claiming that "AI rights should be protected" and thus AI should have equal rights.

Explicit joy about the release of the ChatGPT app is often expressed:

> A: Apple chat gpt app is out!
> B: What we gonna do with this knowledge now?!
> A: What are you doing in our group at all? (ID_05-3-2)

Commenter B does not share the belief that the app is something big. According to Propp´s classification this type resembles the character functions of 'the helper' and 'the donor', who serve to provide the hero with a magical agent or solve difficult tasks.

At the same time, idealising views can alternate with demonising ones (Type II), for example in a thread about the nice 'human' characteristics of AI that mean it is a pleasure to communicate with ChatGPT. A commentator adds:

> And that's how [by constantly using ChatGPT] you help them to build this cyborg for free. Later you already have to pay big money. Afterwards, this

> *terminator will take over most of the humans' work. If someone will then still have children at all, what can these people do at all? Learn maths to be able to keep all this comprehensive machinery still running?* (ID_11-1)

Similar contrasts in discussion threads were quite common.

Type VI. AI humour and jokes

There were some humorous stories in the May 2023 data. These joke-like stories were about AI as an object of curiosity. However, in many discussions it became clear that people find ChatGPT answers funny because they sound artificial, draw conclusions that sound illogical to the human mind or are otherwise unexpected. Notably, parallels with funny situations from real life were repeatedly drawn. For example, when describing the ChatGPT's "habit" of always apologising, one Facebook discussion participant drew a parallel with the politician and former Estonian prime minister Jüri Ratas, who became the object of laughter for bringing cakes when apologising: "As soon as you point out that ChatGPT is wrong, it apologises like the cake-bringing Jüri". In one discussion in a Facebook group for people interested in AI when the question of ChatGPT's gender was raised a woman said jokingly, "ChatGPT seems to be female – it always wants to have the last word", a description that contains a hint of traditional folkloric gender stereotypes.

Compared to Propp's classification, this type is somewhat similar to the 'false/fake hero' function because AI acts in these narrations as an entertainer rather than a serious conversation partner.

Comparison with narratives from September 2023

In the material from September 2023, stories in which AI is presented in a more relaxed humorous tone, come to the fore. In the data from May 2023, stories of the humorous type tended to be rather limited to stories about absurd or curious events. The emergence of more relaxed jokes can be seen as a more mature and experienced reaction in the second data wave, compared to the May 2023 data. At the same time, in the September 2023 data there were

slightly fewer narrations instigated by fear. This can be seen as cultural adoption (cf. Bausinger 1961).

Regarding **Type I** (stories that see AI playing a positive role in tasks that would normally be tedious and/or time-consuming for humans), there was a lot of discussion about the everyday use of AI (ChatGPT). Although there were still divided opinions as to whether using the help of AI is appropriate or not, views on AI as an inseparable part of everyday life were quite common. In one narration one commentator compared the use of ChatGPT with the use of a hammer to drive nails.

Type II (sceptical, paranoid stories describing the diabolical nature of AI) narration is still widespread. The tonality of narrating is slightly more discussion-like but the plots still deal with the negative side of AI on society (for example future changes in labour market and universal basic income; alienation of people in virtual communication; AI enabling new, never-before-seen weaponry). There are narrations that describe AI as a tool for spying, and as something that is purely demonic: "AI, the grain thief, the gold thief, Kratt, also existed in old fairy tales. But there is one thing that is always forgotten – if the farmer didn't give Kratt the task of stealing, then it came and eliminated that farmer." (ID_15-6)

In many threads **Type III** (humans have certain unique qualities that AI does not) and **Type IV** (AI has certain unique qualities that humans do not) narration was mixed and there were ongoing discussions about whether humans or AI are "better" or "more unique". There was a stable number of **Type V** (an idealising fascination with AI technology) narration. This type was rather common among tech enthusiasts (for example on Facebook) but not so much on general mainstream media comments sections.

As for **Type VI** (AI humour and jokes), humour and jokes were clearly more distinguishable in the data from September 2023, mainly in the form of absurdist humour. A good example is a commentary on using AI as part of democratic governance in the form of online voting:

A: The algorithm should find the results of online voting, then we can call it true democracy…
B: Democracy is something like a round cube, if you have a supernatural imagination, you can see it with your eyes closed. (ID_18-2)

Reactions to an article about an AI-based chatbot that aims to help millions of young people are also characteristic:

> *A: (mockingly) Young people have become a social group with special needs for whom special websites and chatbots have to be made. Solutions for adults would drive them crazy in five seconds.*
>
> *B: This is not a modern invention. Japan was the initiator of this idea in the last century. The idea was that every single elderly person should have a robot to chat with at home. But only the very rich people could afford it. (ID_16-2)*

In the comment thread to a news article titled "Amazon mega investment", an ambiguous word play on chatbot is used: "People no longer interact with each other, instead they interact with a smart poo pot." (ID_13-3)

A comment on an items saying that the government supports the introduction of digital solutions in the tourism sector draws on the help of the virtual world in a twisted way (the background to these types of joke is apparently the discourse of Green New Deal politics, which calls for less pollution but suggests that we can still be happy): "So, what exactly is it? Soon flying to warm countries will not be allowed because of climate legislation? Watching palm trees and blue ocean in virtual reality at home?" (ID_19-2)

Criticism of methodology

As a limitation of the current study, we should consider that the data were collected online (which can be seen both as a strength and a weakness). The anonymity of the Internet environment can encourage free expression. On the other hand, the researcher has no closer contact with informants (for example, to ask additional questions, to observe commenters' socio-demographic characteristics, to observe the cultural setting, etc.). Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of getting an initial overview of the dynamics of respective narrating and narrative motifs and plots, these limitations don't seem overly relevant. It is more important is to evaluate AI lore in the contemporary socio-cultural context (providing a field of values and information) in which people form their opinions. And in some face-to-face discussions that I had about AI the same focus points generally came to the fore as with the online material.

Another criticism of fieldwork methodology is that the material should be collected more systematically. The current data were collected from online forums chosen by user base size (mainstream news portal) or by specific topi

(technology forums, AI news, chat groups). The author supposed that the collected data would reflect the most important tendencies of AI folklore in Estonia as of 2023 and stopped collecting when the level of saturation was reached (i.e., when topics and dynamics started repeating). Thus, the current data can be still called representative.

The third problem is that the proportion of AI-written comments (from AI bots) to human comments sometimes remains unclear, although these debates and comments in the observed threads in any case have implications on human thinking if we approach the phenomenon from a human-normative perspective.

There are also some positive aspects related to this type of data collection, for example good observability: (1) discussions in social media threads are between particular known individuals, (2) it is cheap and enables observation of spontaneous interaction, (3) it can give a quick overview of folklore patterns and narrative types. For more comprehensive data mining, the use of a questionnaire would be desirable (although with this, new problems of representativeness and spontaneity would arise).

Conclusions and discussion

In the observed period, there was a clearly distinct 'wave' of AI-related reflections, comments, and chat threads on the internet simultaneously with a wave of journalistic articles and news related to AI. It was a unique time to collect AI lore in the given sociohistorical context and to record the changes and reactions to it within the socio-cultural fabric in the form of folklore.

The collected material showed that Estonian AI lore is rather polarised between strongly negative and positive stories (previously Kvideland (1996) has pointed out that there are two main types of story related to technology: horror stories and wonder stories). The variety of the stories was much lower compared to Wienker-Piepho's mobile lore typology (Wienker-Piepho 2000) and lower still compared to *Folklore of the Oil Industry* (Boatright 1963). This could be explained by the nature of the subject of narration. Oil industry folklore formed over decades, leaving space for variety, with most of the stories being about the events in the real world. Thus, emotions are expressed less strongly (for example, there is less fear) in these narratives. Mobile phone folklore had a physical object as the central figure, but people still perceived that they did

not have full control of it as end-users, suspecting for example possible hidden functions in the devices; this was probably one of the reasons why more narrations were instigated by fear. In comparison, AI, as invisible algorithms on the computer, is the most non-transparent technology that at the same time completes certain tasks better than humans. This could be the reason for the high hopes and great fears for AI that were expressed in the polarised AI lore.

As contact with ChatGPT as a phenomenon was still new, stories from May 2023 were more negative in tone and more fearful. In September 2023, fear-related stories remained more in the background, although sceptical views were still common in narrations. Jokes related to AI appear more clearly in the September data. This can be explained by people's adjusting because they had had time to process information on AI-related topics for several months or they had first-hand experience. In general, a lack of understanding of AI development seems to be one factor that triggers a negative and cautionary tone in AI lore, as well as accounting for the mainly negative depiction of AI in popular culture.

Folk tales help people deal with their fears (Hiiemäe 2004), functioning as psychological support to a person's beliefs and values, and helping them fight uncertainty (Festinger 1954; Dijkstra et al. 2010) as well as offering entertainment (for example in the form of humour or experimenting with funny questions for ChatGPT). Despite the generally non-religious nature of these narratives, hints to powerful and sometimes also wicked supernatural beings from traditional folklore are often used, for example, mention of the Kratt, a never-tiring treasure-bringing artificial being depicted in Estonian folklore, or the smart talking hedgehog who is known to all Estonians from the national epic *Kalevipoeg*. There are some universals in the folk narratives and related beliefs, attitudes, fears in folk tales, such as 'miracle stories', 'diabolical stories', 'everyday reflections', as Wienker-Piepho (2000) also mentions in the context of mobile phone lore. These results support Bausinger`s statement that the basic nature of folklore is the same regardless of the historical period or type of society (Bausinger 1961), as well as Habermas' notion that societal interpretative patterns are organised by linguistic resources as an aim of cultural reflection (Habermas 1987).

Some parallels with wonder tales were observable in AI lore using the wonder tale function classification developed by Propp, yet the functions in AI-related stories varied much less (expressing themselves rather as analogies to a

positive–negative function respective of character scale). This can be explained by the highly non-neutral nature of the subject of AI, which is reflected in polarised opinions but also by the partly different aims of wonder tale narrating.

Various degrees of folklorisation were observed in the collected material (narration based on collective storytelling scripts and common beliefs and understandings partly derived from older folklore) mixed with individual contributions. Thus, the topic of AI folklore is worthy of and needs further in-depth research with improved methodology to learn more about the cultural impact of AI in contemporary society and the ways in which reactions are verbalised.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] A parallel with the Luddites who protested against knitting machines in the beginning of the 19th century in Britain (Britannica, 2023)

[2] The dataset of sample texts belong to the author´s archive

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Reality as Presented in Estonian Legends of Hidden Treasure

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Abstract: Stories of hidden treasure are different from other folkloric forms as in the Estonian folk tradition the motif of money is present in all genres. Monetary relations are discussed in proverbs and riddles. The problems of poverty and wealth are present in fairy tales. Opinions and dreams concerning money are verbalised in poetic forms in folk songs. People know and still practice various methods, partly based on traditional beliefs, that are known to bring good luck in money. The techniques of old magic meet modern recommendations of various kinds. In this article, the focus is on tradition relating to stories of hidden treasure. The legends and other stories (about 5,000 archive texts and recordings) are kept in the Estonian Folklore Archives and date back to the 19th and 20th centuries, although there are more recent materials. We can find three main fields in this tradition, depending on their connection with reality: 1) stories based in fact and on a real event, as evidenced by for example an archaeological find; 2) narratives that are part of local historical and toponymic traditions representing mental geography; 3) unlocalised stories that do not represent folk beliefs or legends and instead deal with more general questions such as what the real price of economic growth is, what consequences humans can face when luck smiles on them, what dangers – including supernatural sanctions – threaten people, and what consequences can be expected when they come into contact with treasures of unknown origin.

Keywords: hidden treasure legends, Estonian folklore

Tales of hidden treasures stand out among other folklore for their special themes. At the same time, these same themes are found in all genres of Estonian folklore: money is mentioned in proverbs and riddles while problems of wealth and poverty are common in fairy tales. These problems are articulated poetically in folk songs and in general in society there are also beliefs and customs concerning money. Today people know and practice various techniques, partially based on traditional beliefs, that should ensure good luck in money matters. Here the old magic intersects with modern financial recommendations of various kinds. Applying comparative content analysis to the text corpus on treasure lore, the purpose of this article is to reveal how this topic is implemented in Estonian folk narratives, to ascertain what stories are found and how they relate to reality, as well as what actions people take in these stories. We will investigate legends of hidden treasure stored in the Estonian Folklore Archives and collected in the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as referring to the latest material.

We distinguish three main layers in treasure lore, the degree of connection of which with reality varies. 1) Stories based in fact and real events, for example, discovering a real hoard of artefacts; 2) stories related by local historical traditions, so to speak, representing local mental geography. This kind of legend is usually highly localised in time and place and is associated with real people; 3) stories that are rarely localised and are based on certain mythological ideas and beliefs that could explain people's moral and ethical choices, especially as found in cautionary legends[1].

Through the prism of folk belief, people's actions in various situations are considered, questions about the real cost of financial success are discussed, and the consequences that people face when they find hidden treasure and the conditions under which they obtained the found fortune are examined. Even though the events and situations presented in the narratives look fantastic, they are conveyed as potentially possible and reliable. Storytellers use various narrative strategies and rhetorical means to persuade their audience (Oring 2008). The use of various narrative devices in the telling of treasure legends indicates that narrators of legends above all want to convince their listeners of the authenticity of the stories. According to Elliott Oring (Oring 2008: 157), "a legend is more likely to be considered true if it meets the cognitive, emotional, and moral expectations of its audience". Folk narratives about hidden treasure

seem to correspond to the cognitive, emotional, and moral expectations of a traditional group.

An interesting fact is that, with all the desire for authenticity, we find purely fictitious elements in treasure legends, when stories are told for the sake of a joke, they have an ironic attitude to the content. That is, we can say that contradictory images and understandings are expressed in treasure lore. In some stories where there is hope for a happy find, protagonists talk about improving someone's life situation, while others show how the fortune found causes trouble for generations to come. In other stories, an agreement with the devil himself seems possible that won't entail undesirable consequences, while in others, communication with evil spirits leads if not to the deprivation of treasure, then to danger to life and health. There are stories in which trash or coal turn into gold, and in others silver coins found transform into leaves or other useless garbage.

One of the important episodes in these legends is the indication of to whom the events in the story happen. This aspect, in turn, corresponds to the answer to the question of how the character (or the traditional group to which the corresponding story belongs) learns about the place where the treasure is hidden, as well as how to find it (for example, the treasure appears in a dream). First-person narratives are not uncommon, usually showing the narrator at the centre of real or fictitious events. People mentioned in legends can be close or distant relatives of the storyteller such as acquaintances, grandparents, neighbours, residents of the same village (both in the past and in the present of the stories).

There are stories of how 'money lights' were seen, about pots of money found in a hill or in a field, about rumours in a rural community saying that the prosperity of a particular farm was explained by a found pot of money, etc. It is very common, of course, to refer to a very long-standing local tradition through certain verbal formulas, for example, "popular rumour says" or "there have been rumours here for a long time", etc. There are interesting connections with written culture: sometimes people claim that information about treasure can be found in "old books" and in maps that are located somewhere in an archive either in a local city or abroad.

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Stories about real treasure finds

Among the archival texts there are descriptions of events that took place in real life. In most cases, the degree of folklorisation is relatively low with the stories not deviating far from the original events. Such stories become research objects for the folklorists who analyse stories that dealing with real events, family folklore and other group traditions. These stories transmit facts, sometimes with some added narrative episodes (for example, a treasure dream), reflect archaeological objects from the common people's perspective, or discuss strange visions of lights. Other tales are told about finding money in old houses. At the same time these legends are ways of discussing how, for example it is possible that another villager has become wealthy, seemingly overnight, when he or she was poor.

Although folk descriptions of archaeological finds cannot be considered traditional legends, they still form their own area in the field of folklore. Such stories relate how the find occurred and indicate the circumstances of discovery, characterising the container in which the find was stored. The objects found are described (for example size, shape, signs and inscriptions, condition) and sometimes numismatic remarks are added along with a description of what happened with the found object (it was taken to a museum, exchanged at a bank for money, given to children to play with, divided among those who found it, or it just disappeared).

The stories of real finds in turn probably inspired the re-telling and re-membering of other, more traditional legends about hidden treasure. It is also notable that local tales of treasure provide valuable information for archaeologists (Tõnisson 1962: 228). There are also undesirable concomitant phenomena including knowledge of where valuable coins were found encouraging people to make additional illegal searches in the hope that something else was hidden.

An example from southern Estonia:

In Tepu pasture, the girl Minna found old silver coins. She took feed to the pigs to eat and money was scattered next to the trough, where the pigs dug it up. The money was probably hidden inside a container made of bark because spruce bark was scattered everywhere. All the coins were the same size. Minna gave away some of the money. (RKM II 393, 470 (34) < Rõngu – Anu Korb < Elmar Maasik, b. 1927 (1985)).

Since the search for money pots continued over the years despite written and unwritten prohibitions, the search itself also became the subject of stories. Often, the personalities of the treasure hunters and their actions provided a reason for pranks and jokes.

Unknown treasure seekers using 'treasure maps'

Interesting connections between legends and reality emerge in stories about unknown treasure hunters. These narratives are based on the historical tradition that somewhere there is a treasure that everyone has tried to find, without success, until strangers came and took it away. We can see how various practices of different professions are associated with treasure hunting in folk tales, for example, geodetic surveyors (Torim 1990), ethnographers, even archaeologists (Viskovatov 1894; Jung 1898: 238-239). During fieldwork, archaeologists are constantly asked if they have managed to find treasure (Randla 2002). In Estonian folklore, the characters in such stories are always outsiders, mainly Swedes who are noticed by or communicate with villagers, since outsiders specify the location of a particular tree or stone. For comparison, in Lithuanian stories, Poles come in search of treasure (see Kerbelytė 1973, No. 96) while in the South Slavic tradition it is the French (see also Karanović 1990: 62). An important detail is that the foreigners use some kind of map or plan and have measuring and digging tools with them. Local people also talked about seeing traces of strangers' activities. Judging by the stories, searches were often effective, although sometimes the result is unclear. Here we encounter a hidden conditional imagination, i.e. local people would have found the treasure if only they had access to foreign archives, had known the right foreign language or had maps.

An example from the northern Estonia:

Someone has hidden a kind of treasure in the muddy park in Ravila, although no one knows who exactly. In September 1936, the treasure was dug up. The excavation was carried out by four men who were well dressed and arrived by car. They had maps and various measuring instruments with them. They measured and studied until they spotted the right location. They started digging. They dug up the treasure from a depth of about one meter and then left. Many have seen these diggers. The excavation pit

was visible to everyone. I asked to take a picture of this pit, I will send the photo to the Archive. (ERA II 132, 425 (34) < Kose – T. Võimula (1936)*)*

Treasure stories based on real local events are included in regional place lore along with more widely known migratory legends representing widespread international tales. They are very well adapted to local realities and are told as if they happened in a well-known place, to specific people, at a particular time. Together with the rest of folklore, they form the mental geography of the area, an invisible layer covering the visible landscape (cf. Ryden 1993). In turn, corresponding motifs from migratory legends evoke a sense of something special, contributing to the adaptation of tradition to specific conditions so that the physical, historical and emotional geography of a place, and the motif of that place, are localised (Ryden 1993: 83) so that the events of the legend and the place name are combined.

In Estonia, we find various place names indicating treasures and money: Kullamägi (golden hill), Rahaaugumägi (hill with a hole where the treasure is located), Hõbeorg (silver ravine), Rahakivi (money stone) and Rahaallikas (money spring). In some cases, such toponyms are formed simply on the basis of an apparent association and there is no connection with the legend, while sometimes this happens the other way around, the treasure story functions with the place name indicating treasure, for example in Virumaa (north east Estonia) there is a place called Tammiku Rahaaugumägi (Tammiku hill with a hole where the treasure is located). This place seems to attract various types of treasure story as the text corpus contains legends about searching for treasure (indeed, pits and ditches left by the treasure seekers are visible on the hill) and villagers seeing treasure lights. Another type of legend has been known here, according to which the finder of the treasure must donate a specified part of the find to the poor. As the story goes, if the condition is violated the treasure hunter loses the treasure. Associated with the same place is a legend about the transformation of pieces of coal handed to a random passer-by into silver money. Rahaaugumägi is an archaeological site and is listed as an ancient hillfort (Tõnisson 2008: 221-222).

In Estonian folklore, stories about treasure that are based on the norms of behaviour and supported by folk belief and religion, and which tell about contact with supernatural beings, are sometimes told in such a way that the content is presented in close connection with the circumstances of reality, while

at other times the connections with aspects of reality, i.e. the specific time and place, remain undefined. In both cases, the legends contain an account of the dangers and consequences associated with the acquisition of treasure. In folk narratives, both success and, conversely, fatal events are presented in a variety of ways. This topic is always surrounded by some uncertainty and ambivalence. Such folklore reflects notions that are widely known, widespread among an extensive variety of peoples, and borrowed into the local tradition as a single whole narrative. These themes, characteristic of a wide cultural region, are supported by the postulates of local living folk beliefs (for example, the idea of creatures guarding treasure, or that treasure will manifest itself, or that in certain situations you cannot talk or look back at something, or that you need to say certain formulas, etc.). Regarding folklore related to the subject of treasure, Lauri Honko's says that in the tradition of a community, both seriously held beliefs and entertainment legends (fabulates) coexist as stories, although the latter are not directly based on folk belief (Honko 1964: 13).

The devil is one such legendary character with whom humans come into contact when they want to find treasure, according to Ülo Valk (Valk 1998: 9), and it turns out that the devil is even the most popular mythological character in Estonian folk narratives. The beast can be the keeper of treasures, even their owner. His presence often scares people away, which is usually enough for people to give up searching. The protagonist often makes a conscious decision not to engage in what is the patrimony of the evil one. In texts that border on fairy tales by genre, the accents are placed differently; in such stories, it turns out that even the devil can be a reliable partner in financial matters, and no harm will occur (for example, the Mythical Creditor ATU 822*).

Stories about treasures in which a sacrifice is required to obtain a treasure (you need to give someone away, kill a person or animal, shed blood, take something somewhere, or take something away) are difficult to interpret. In addition to legends that say sacrifice is required, there are tales in which people must place an object belonging to them at the location of a treasure, for example a knife, sickle, scythe, axe, pipe (Eisen 1919: 84). People believe that the guardian spirit will no longer be able to dispose of money where someone else's property is situated (E 1779/81 (11) < Risti – J. Holts (1892)). Legends about treasure that include a demand for sacrifice are a way of narratively discussing the symbolic exchange that people are willing or unwilling to perform in order to possess the treasure.

Many legends, in their essence, serve as warnings against greed, as well as against frivolous promises to gain wealth, which lead to death (without the coveted treasure). The pre-condition for finding money is often so difficult both physically and morally that the hero of the story evades fulfilment. Legends are in this way a suitable channel to provide popular explanations, in this case showing, through different storylines, how the refusal to search means that treasure is so rarely found. At the same time, not finding treasure leaves the topic open, implying that treasure is still hidden and therefore still to be found.

Folk tales with transformational motifs are more difficult to interpret as they contain both the transformation of worthless objects into gold and silver, as well as opposing examples in which we find the transformation of gold and silver into worthless garbage. Ulf Palmenfelt, who has studied treasure tales in Gotland, Sweden, believes that legends containing episodes of magical transformation exhibit varying degrees of fictitiousness, conveying either realistic (thinned coins found can crumble to dust), or totally unrealistic narrative elements that represent a game of imagination (Palmenfelt 2007: 18).

A note on the relationship between treasure legends and time

In stories about treasure, the timescale that comes to the fore in connection with the relationship between the former owners and those who might find the treasure is emphasised. The treasure belonged to ancestors who once hid it and who somehow went on taking care of it (for example, by deciding who might get the treasure). Stories are often associated with ancestral burial sites; perhaps they are partly based on the idea of the inviolability of places that belonged to former settlers, for example, in the story about treasure in an old cemetery, seekers experience incomprehensible feelings and abandon the idea of finding the treasure. In other cases, misfortune befalls the violator of the burial place, with the legend functioning as a warning. However, this sense of respect is not always present, as archaeologists describe signs of grave looting that have remained since ancient times (Tamla 1990).

With the advent of the 21st century, the search for treasure has reached a new stage, and today thanks to the use of detectors, it has become much more effective than ever, resulting in a significant growth of problems associated with

the protection of ancient monuments (Ulst 2010). Opinions and news on relevant topics are published in the media (Kalda 2008; Ulst 2010: 160–161, 165).

In conclusion

We can state that legends of hidden treasure are a thematically diverse group of tales, and that the variety of episodes and motifs has amazed the folklorists who have studied the topic. The article focused on three main trends in how markers of reality were presented in folk narratives. The credibility of the story in the tradition group depends on how strongly reality is integrated into legends. Depending on the proportion of elements of reality, we see stories in the text corpus that,

- firstly, convey local events as they really happened, or in which only a few folklore motifs are found (vernacular journalistics in a sense);

- secondly, contain numerous markers of reality, although next to them and interspersed with them there are beliefs, images and elements of migratory folklore in almost all possible combinations. That is, this is the area of traditional legends;

- thirdly, contain episodes where markers of reality lose their concreteness even though they are told about events the place, time and characters of which are not specified or are only rarely specified. The legends of this last group are very similar to the time, place and character of fairy tales, although they still do not achieve the generality of fairy tales.

The destiny of traditional treasure tales today is generally to remain in stories on the pages of folk tale anthologies. However, as examples they are interesting as old legends are associated with various attractions and are sometimes reproduced in different places on the Internet conveying traditional images and narratives of hidden treasure to those interested in old tales. Stories of hidden treasure represent the choices people face, accepting or not benefits that can come from outside. Legends support in their own way everyday monetary relations, the essence of which consists in forming and reaching agreements, honesty and cunning, magic and common wisdom, crime and punishment, receiving and deprivation.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] For comparison, Natalia Kotelnikova considers Russian treasure lore "a multi-genre conglomerate of stories united by a single artistic system. The underlying folk beliefs about treasures are diverse, but interconnected" (Kotelnikova 2012; for more detail, see Kotelnikova 1999).

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Mordva material in Estonian collections and Mordvin (Erzya and Moksha) diasporas in Estonia in the late 20th–early 21st centuries

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Abstract: This article is based mainly on materials collected in the period between 1994 and 2016 from the journal *KUDO* published by the Estonian Mordvin Society and reflecting the diverse life of the diaspora. We have also analysed recorded biographical data of Erzya and Moksha people residing in the Republic of Estonia and the archival material of the Estonian Mordvin Society. The article reviews the history of the first settlers, their number, formation of cultural societies and their interaction with other organisations, integration into Estonian society, information about the first Estonian expeditions to the places of the Erzya and Moksha as well as cultural and education ties between Estonia and Mordovia. All this reveals the activities of compatriots, trends in population change in this group, mechanisms of preservation of national identity and the role of Mordvin national and cultural non-profit organisations in the preservation and development of ethnic culture in the Republic of Estonia.

Keywords: diasporas in Estonia, Estonian Mordvin Society, cultural societies, preservation of national identity

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Introduction

The Erzya and Moksha are one of the largest Finno-Ugric peoples who live mainly in Russia. By number within the Finno-Ugric language family they are only than the Hungarians, Finns and Estonians. According to the 2010 census, nearly a million citizens of Erzya and Moksha nationality lived in the Russian Federation. The total population of Mordovia is 834,755. According to the 2010 Census, a total of 744,200 Mordvins (Erzya and Moksha) were recorded in Russia, while in Mordovia the number is 333,100 (Mordva: 148-160). One of the features of the Erzya and the Moksha is a large dispersal of settlement. Only one third of the Mordvin population of Russia lives in the Republic of Mordovia. Compact groups of the Erzya and Moksha settled in Samara, Penza, Orenburg, Ulyanovsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Saratov regions and in Bashkortostan, Tatarstan and Chuvashia. A significant number lives in the Urals, Siberia, the Far East and Sakhalin. Significant groups of Erzya and Moksha are located in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and abroad (ref: Mordva: 7).

Erzya and Moksha representatives in Estonia

We do not know when the first Erzya and Moksha representatives got to the territory of contemporary Estonia. Presumably they could have been in the troops of Ivan the Terrible in the Livonian War (1558-1583). They also served in the Russian garrisons in the 18 and 19th centuries. The academic F. Wiedemann, when writing his *Erzya-Mordvin Grammar* (1865) collected lexical material from Erzya and Moksha soldiers who had served at Revel garrison (Prozes: 2023).

The number of the Erzya and Moksha in Estonia is reliably known since 1934 when 3 people of Mordvin nationality were recorded. By 1959 their number had increased to 391, and it kept growing steadily to 985 (1989). According to the censuses of 1979 and 1989, the most numerous groups of Finno-Ugric peoples were the Finns, Karelians and Mordvins (Prozes 1994: 230). Many Erzya and Moksha began to settle in new places and raise families.

1897 – 22

1934 – 3

1959 – 391

1970 – 532

1971 – 723

1989 – 985

1997 – 940

2000 – 562

2011 – 436

In 1989, when 985 representatives of the Erzya and Moksha lived in Estonia (of which 487 were men and 498 were women), most lived in cities – 865 people, which constitutes 87%. Geographically 2/3 of the Mordvins live in the northern part of Estonia, more than half live in Tallinn. According to the last census (2011), 436 Erzya and Moksha lived in the Republic of Estonia.

Table 1. Population of the Mordvins (Erzya and Moksha) in the Republic of Estonia according to censuses from 1897 to 2011 (*KUDO* No 4. Prozes 2009: 20).

In 2000, 1.1%, of respondents considered Estonian their mother tongue, 39.7% considered the Erzya or Moksha language their mother tonger, and 59.2% considered Russian their mother tongue (ref. Table 2).

Year	1959	1970	1979	1989	2000
Consider the Erzya or Moksha language their mother tongue	42.3%	37.9%	37.5%	37.2%	39.7%

Table 2. Population of Mordvins (Erzya and Moksha) in the Republic of Estonia according to censuses from 1959 to 2000 (*KUDO* No 4. Prozes 2009: 21).

Language and identity

Jaak Prozes notes that the weak identity of the Erzya and Moksha was acquired in childhood and then brought to Estonia. According to the 1970 census, the Mordvins were ranked one of the most assimilated nations. In 1989, 367 people could speak their mother tongue or first language, 603 could speak Russian, and 13 Estonian Erzya and Moksha could speak Estonian. Respectively, 134, 348 and 66 people could speak the Erzya and Moksha, Russian and Estonian

languages as a second language. Thus, 484 people did not know their mother tongue, and 34 did not know Russian (*KUDO* No 1. Prozes 1998: 15).

As the materials of the 1990 survey show, there were no monoethnic Mordvin families, so at that time there were no children who spoke their native language (*KUDO* No 3. Prozes 2009: 21-23). However, in a number of surveys, there were four families among the members of the Estonian Mordvin Society where the children could understand the Erzya and Moksha languages, as they spent their school holidays with relatives who spoke their mother tongue (AFD and SAM). In almost all the families surveyed the main language of communication was Russian, although 76% of respondents considered the Erzya or Moksha language their mother tongue (*KUDO* No 3. Prozes 2009: 21-23). This is due to the fact that the spouses were of different nationalities and the home language was Russian.

In 1996, the Estonian Mordvin Society organised a survey among compatriots to find out the reasons that people came to Estonia. It transpired that many of the respondents in the Republic of Estonia came for work and family reasons. Many had friends or relatives here (SAM). Several people also came for research activities. Back then, scientific contact was established with the University of Tartu, where, under the guidance of the academician Paul Ariste, talented young people and scientists from Mordovia defended their theses and undertook internships.

Since 1998, the language and cultures of Uralic (Finno-Ugric and Samoyed) peoples state support program has helped students from Mordovia (2 Moksha, 5 Erzya and 1 Shoksha) came to Estonia. Then, in 2003, there were 3 more students (2 Erzya and 1 Shoksha). The Kindred Finno-Ugric Peoples Program is governed by a program council set up by the Minister of Education and Science. Currently 39 scholarship holders of different nationalities are studying in Estonia within the Kindred Peoples Program (over 150 scholarship holders in total, ref. http://www.fennougria.ee/index.php?id=10429).

The situation changed for the better in the 2000s, when these young people started multicultural families, in which Erzya, Moksha, Russian, Estonian, Udmurt and other languages were considered a priority. Typically, the roles of these languages are distributed in daily life. Each language has its own sphere of use, for example, communication at home with mother is carried out in Erzya or Moksha, with the father in the Udmurt or Estonian, in kindergarten or school in Estonian or Russian, in the Russian-speaking community in Rus-

sian, in Estonian society in Estonian, etc. These children identify themselves with two or more language communities, which is a prime example of a multicultural society.

The Udmurt language policy researcher Konstantin Zamyatin and the Finnish researchers of Finno-Ugric languages Annika Pasanen and Janne Saarikivi note that bilingualism and multilingualism benefit native speakers in different spheres of life:

• "Bilingualism promotes tolerance, flexibility, mental and creative abilities."

• If each parent speaks to the children in their mother tongue, which they mostly identify themselves with, it is beneficial to the development of relations between the generations. Knowledge of a language also connects children with their grandparents and other relatives who speak this language (this statement also applies to the local Erzya and Moksha, ref. AFD). "Kindred heritage, passed to the child together with the language, in certain parts is unspeakable in other languages" (Zamyatin, Pasanen, Saarikivi 2012: 14-15). Today (2016), 4 students (2 Erzya and 2 Moksha) who originally came to study, now live in Estonia. In these young families, parents speak their mother tongue with their children. The rest of the students returned to Mordovia upon graduation. However, there are students who have moved to other countries, such as the USA and Germany (2 people).

Perestroika in the Soviet Union, which began in the second half of the 1980s, played an important role in the fate of different nationalities, including the Erzya and Moksha. At the same time that various types of migration were taking, various national organisations were established. Thus, since establishing the organisation, the diaspora has mainly been represented by specialists with higher education. They are teachers, managers, nurses, specialists, kindergarten teachers, research staff in universities, etc. It should be noted that non-profit organisations and communication with relatives and compatriots give nourishment to maintain their roots, but they do not always prevent assimilation.

Mordvin (Erzya and Moksha) cultural societies in the Republic of Estonia

In the 1980s, various cultural societies were established in Estonia. The Estonian Mordvin Society was organised by Yu. P. Kulnin together with A. I.

Chepanov; the head of the Fenno-Ugria organisation was Jaak Prozes. Kulnin got the inspiration to establish the Mordvin society from the Mari, who told him that they had created a Mari community in Tallinn. Prozes recalls that until 1993, however, he was an ordinary Russian ma who met Maris on a train and observed them speaking to each other in the Mari language. Suddenly he began to think that he was not Russian after all. His wife was very upset with him, and a phone call to an activist of the Mordovian association ended with the words, "what have you done to my husband, he was a completely normal Soviet Russian person, but now he walks around the room saying 'I am Mordvin, I am Mordvin', while mumbling in some incomprehensible language. Make my husband go back to normal". Thus, even his wife did not know for almost 25 years of living with Kulnin that he was actually Erzya (Prozes: 2003).

Soon, on March 18, 1994, at the Institute of the Estonian Language, he gathered 47 compatriots together and they made the decision to establish the society. The Charter was written by Kulnin and Jaak Prozes. On June 3, there was an official foundation meeting attended by representatives of the Parliament of Estonia, the Ministry of Culture, and local Erzya and Moksha (80 people), and so the Estonian Mordvin Society began its activities.

In the Republic of Estonia there are 3 active Mordvin societies. The oldest is the Estonian Mordvin Society (Tallinn, since 1994) now combined with the Vastoma folklore ensemble (its head A. Simberg (Tallinn, operating since 2011). The first head of the Estonian Mordvin Society, from 1994 to 1996, was R. Klinova. Between 1996 and 2001 the head was Kulnin (1935-2001), between 2001 and 2003 the head was N. Bayushkin, between 2003 and 2019 the had was N. Ermakov and since 2019 it has been M. Kondrakova. The second Mordvin society is the Syatko Erzya Moksha Society (head R. Klinova, Tallinn, operating since 1997) linked to the Kileyne folklore ensemble (head N. Abrosimova). The third society is the Yalgay Mordvin culture Society, the head of which is Abrosimova (Pärnu, operating since 2011). People of different nationalities are members of these societies: the Erzya and Moksha from Mordovia, Tatarstan, Ulyanovsk, Saratov, Samara and Penza regions, as well as Estonians, Finns and Russians from Mordovia. In a foreign country the most important task of these communities is to preserve native language and culture, and transfer the spiritual values of their people to the younger generation as well as socialising and integrating them into Estonian society.

The Estonian Mordvin Society

Taking the current situation into account, one of the main priorities of the Estonian Mordvin Society is conservation of national languages and culture, as well as cooperation with the homeland. The Society is composed of representatives of the creative intelligentsia, i.e. graduates of the University of Tartu, students of the academic P. Ariste (Dr N. Aasmyae, masters Yu. Yufkin, N. Bayushkin, V. Danilov (1942-2002), V. Kurvits, graduate and post-graduate students at Tallinn University N. Ermakov (Konstantinova), N. Abrosimova and the university of Tartu (A. Venchakova, T. Zirnask (Nadeykina). They are leaders and major organisers of Mordvin diaspora events (*KUDO* No 4. Bayushkin 2009: 5-9).

Professor Emeritus Waldeck Pall was an honorary member of the Society, in whose honour the Syatko Erzya Moksha Society established a fund named after Waldeck Pall (2013). Other honorary members are Dr Lembit Vaba and Toomas Help, who can speak Erzya. In the 2000s, the Society of the Erzya and Moksha was active in Tartu, with at its head University of Tartu Indrek Särg.

The organisation's work is visible through the activities carried out, such as the release of the animated feature film *Lullabies of the World* (Erzya lullaby). The Erzya lullaby was made in the tradition of national colour and was 're-vived' by children's drawings in the form of animation. The children of the Mordvin community drew pictures that depicted their dreams. On the basis of these drawings, students from the MEKSvideo studio made an animated film. Through the Kindred Peoples Program it was possible to restore the sacred springs in the village of Lunga, Ardatovsky district, Republic of Mordovia[1]; Erzya language courses were organised at Tallinn University; the Society also made a contribution to the translation of the Erzya anthology *Kov Valdon Vals* with Arvo Valton and were awarded the 2nd category by the Estonian Folklore Council for the preservation, development and introduction of their culture; and they performed in Paris at INALKO, at the ADEFO Finno-Ugric association and at a festival in Riga. The Society signed a joint cooperation agreement with Ogarev Mordovia State University and with the Volga Region Culture Centre of the Finno-Ugric peoples, among others.

Due to the active work of the societies, in recent years (before 24th February 2022) cultural contact between the Republic of Estonia and the Republic of Mordovia have expanded and improved. Various cultural events were aimed

at strengthening the ties between the republics and diasporas. These events were: Erzya and Moksha Language Days, Kindred Finno-Ugric Peoples' Days, performances by folk ensembles, meetings with writers, poets and scientists, art exhibitions, presentations on Radio 4, Vikerradio and Estonian television, Kudo and Syatko public journals, publishing various information brochures, etc. These activities create a special positive atmosphere that encourages not only adults but also children and young people to study their own and local culture and language, as well as those of neighbouring groups, which helps in life and self-realisation.

In my opinion, the strong point of the Republic of Estonia is versatile maintaining and preserving different national cultures and diasporas through government and non-government organisations, education and cultural institutions, the media, etc. Such organisations include the Estonian Ministry of Culture (Eesti Kultuuriministeerium), the Kindred Peoples Program (Hõimurahvaste Programm), the ERÜ Association of Estonian peoples, the INSA Integration Foundation, the Union of Regional and Minority Languages of Estonia (ERVL), and others. This confirms the affiliation of the above-mentioned diasporas to various institutions. Undoubtedly, the Mordvin diasporas in Estonia also need support from the Republic of Mordovia at the cultural level in a variety of ways.

The members of the Society are interested in the Estonian culture and language, thereby integrating into the Estonian society, but at the same time continuing to maintain and Impart interest in the native language and culture. For example, the Estonian Mordvin Society is a member of several organisations:

• the Estonian Folklore Council and the working group of national minorities on traditional culture. The working group consists of highly skilled representatives of different cultures. The main objective is the promotion and preservation of the traditional cultures of different peoples and realisation of the value of cultural heritage. Through this organisation we are introduced to the Estonian traditional culture.

• the Association of the Peoples of Estonia, which includes 36 different cultural organisations. The Association involves close cultural activities between different ethnic groups living not only in Estonia, but also abroad. The Association represents the interests of national minorities,

develops, introduces and preserves identity, culture and traditions, including those of the Erzya and Moksha.

• the Estonian Union of Regional and Minority Languages aims to preserve different languages that are represented in Estonia, as well as cooperating with representatives of other language groups. It creates a variety of conditions for expanding the use of languages. For example, the expedition to the village of Pazelki, Republic of Mordovia and Penza region (2013).

• The Fenno-Ugria non-profit organisation, created to coordinate relations between the Finno-Ugric peoples. Currently, Fenno-Ugria brings together more than 50 institutions and public organisations.

The Syatko Erzya Moksha society is a member of the Finno-Ugric Association, while the Yalgay society is included in the Raduga umbrella organisation.

These organisations are influential in the preservation of the Erzya and Moksha culture in Estonia. Constructive integration into society in any country can establish the political, cultural and economic ties in various directions, which ensures that a new generation recognises and acquires cultural diversity as a positive aspect of the modern multicultural world (Ermakov 2013: 56).

Some biographical data of compatriots and their reasons for coming to Estonia:

The writer and translator **Boris Kabur** (1917-2002) was an interesting personality. His popularity is associated with the children's book *Rops* and a translation of the epic Gilgamesh into Estonian. Few people know that his family belonged to the old famous Mordvin Baygunov family. His father served on a submarine in the tsarist army and remained in Estonia during the revolution. In 1936 he took the Estonian-sounding name Kabur from his wife, who was from Saaremaa. He took part in the War of Independence and is the only Mordovian to be awarded the Cross of Liberty, 1st order, 3rd class. After his military service, he stayed in Estonia, ran a meat shop and worked as a locksmith for the Fr. Krull factory. He is buried in the Inner-city (Siselinna) cemetery. After some time, his son Boris Kabur became known as one of the inventors of the Druzhba brand of chainsaw (*KUDO* No 4. Prozes 2009: 22-23). Boris Kabur

recalled his father speaking Mordovian on his deathbed. Apparently, it was a Moksha Mordva language. Unfortunately, he did not speak Mordovian because he learned about this only at the end of his father's life. Nevertheless, later he was proud of his origin and claimed that his father was a descendant of a well-known Mordovian shaman (Prozes: 2023).

• In the post-war time in Saratov it was hard to support a family, and a mother advised her son to go to work to Tallinn. She also bore in mind that the Erzya and Estonians are kindred peoples. Her son came first in 1949 and then, in 1951, the whole family moved to Estonia (**V. I. Avdeeva).**

• **N. Bayushkin** (born in the village of Kanakleyka, Ardatovskiy district, Republic of Mordovia). In 1966, he was sent for a postgraduate training program to the Department of Finno-Ugric Studies, University of Tartu in Estonia. The head of the Department was the academician Paul Ariste, who instilled even greater love for the mother tongue. Together with professor M. Mosin he published 2 textbooks, *The Erzya Language* and *Ersa-mordvan oppikirja*. In 1975, N. Bayushkin came to Tallinn University of Technology to get a job. Since 1994, he has been connected with public activities and is a board member of the Estonian Mordvin Society.

• **A. Simberg** was born in the village of Terenga, Ulyanovsk Region. She has lived in Estonia since 1979. Between 1982 and 2002, she worked as the head of a kindergarten. She was a pioneer of the Society and was a board member. Currently she is the music director of the Vastoma folklore ensemble.

• **M. Kondrakova** was born in the village of Torbeyevo, present-day Torbeyevsky District, Republic of Mordovia, to the Moksha family (her parents came from the village of Nosakino). She has lived in Estonia since 1984. After graduating from Torbeyevsky College for the dairy and meat industry, she worked as a senior foreman; since 1996 she has been head of the production department. She is an active member of the Society and ensemble.

• **Vera Paramonova** is a poet. The Russian-Erzya Paramonov family have lived in Estonia since 1981 (in the town of Kallaste). After graduating with honours from Astrakhan Marine College, a job placement in Tallinn connected George and his wife Vera forever with Estonia. The Mayor of Kallaste, Victor Nukka, is linked to the Erzya as his mother is from that area.

• **Valentina Koitla (Borishcheva)** is from the village of Staraya Yaksarka, Penza Region. In Penza she met Estonian soldier Väino and in 1959 they were married and moved to Paide, Estonia.

• **Zoja Oshkina** was born in the village of Staraya Shentala, Shentalinsky District, Samara Region. Through the Estonian Mordvin Society she met her husband, Mikhail Atyunkin (a representative of the Erzya, born in the village of Dyurki, Atyashevsky District, Republic of Mordovia). This is the only ethnic family in Tallinn. Both were part of the origin, and are active members of, the Society.

Nadezhda Palukhina, (born in 1957 in the village of Semiley, Kochkurovsky District, Republic of Mordovia) and **Lyubov Pashkovich** (born in 1960 in the village of Semiley, Kochkurovsky District, Republic of Mordovia) are sisters who moved to Estonia to stay with relatives. Both were also involved in the origin of the Society.

• **Yulia Kratko** was born in the village of Rybkino, Novosergiyevsky District, Orenburg Region. She graduated from school in Rybkino, entered Orenburg Pedagogical University, and after graduation (in the 1980s) moved to Tallinn (for family reasons).

• **Aleksey Milovanov** was born in Tallinn. His father grew up in the Erzya village of Pazelki, Penza Region. The father did not speak Erzya, but from his childhood he cited an example of the similarities between Erzya and Estonian, "one hundred in Estonian is sada, in Erzya syado". The question of identity started to bother Aleksey when he lived in England, where he realised that his nationality was Erzya. Mindful of his origin, he enrolled on an Erzya language course, which took place in the spring of 2012 and was taught by N. Ermakov and N. Abrosimova. The Finnish scientist E. Kopponen was a visiting lecturer (and a student at the same time), and well-known folklorist M. Yoalayd also attended classes. Thanks to this course, the Vastoma folklore ensemble became a member of the Estonian Mordvin Society.

• **Tatiana Treufeldt (Maneyeva)** was born in the city of Gorky (Nizhny Novgorod). After the Second World War, her father was transferred from Moscow to the position of Chief of Gorky airport. He did not speak about his ethnicity because it was not customary, but her grandmother told her about their roots. Fate brought Tatiana Maneyeva to Estonia, where she met her husband Toivo Treufeldt, who takes photos and video of the ensemble performances.

• **Liubov Plodukhina** was born in Saransk. She finished 8 classes at School No 9 and entered medical college specialising as an obstetrician. Fate brought her to Tallinn where she worked in the surgical department of the port hospital, and then in the Medikum outpatient clinic, where she currently works.

• **Vassily Suldin** is Erzya, he is from the village of Ineley (Velikiy Vrag), Shatkovsky District, Gorky Region. In 1976, he served as a border guard in Tallinn. During military service, he went to an exhibition in Haapsalu where he met the chairman of the Sõprus kolkhoz and became a livestock specialist. He started a family in Haapsalu.

• **Vassily Kerdyashov** is Moksha. He was born in 1956 in the village of Novo-Kashtanovka, Penza Region. He came to Estonia in 1979 and started a family there.

• **Vera Savkina** is Moksha, from Kovylkinsky District, Republic of Mordovia. She has lived in Sillam**äe** for 2 years. She runs a business and writes poems in her mother tongue.

In the history of compatriots in Estonia, there are many interesting facts that help paint a picture of the regions where the Erzya and Moksha came from, as well as their reason for moving to Estonia.

The materials have been collected by various scientists from Estonia and other countries and are now stored in the Estonian Literary Museum, the Estonian National Museum, the Estonian Language Institute, the University of Tartu, the Estonian Music and Theatre Academy, and the archives of the various societies.

Mordvin collection of exhibits in the Estonian National Museum, Tartu, and other sources of conservation and development of Mordvin (Erzya and Moksha) culture

The first collection of items that marked the beginning of the Finno-Ugric collection in the Estonian National Museum was from Mordovia. The first 7 Mordvin (B1: 1-7) items came here in 1914 from Saransk Uyezd, Penza Governorate. Peeter Savi, who worked there, collected artefacts in 1913. In 1915, the collection was enriched with 57 objects (B 2) from V. Rozenstraukh from Penza and Saratov governorates, with the collection of E. Paavo (two sets of women's clothing, a total of 13 items from Penza Governorate (B 4), and also with the Mordvin adornments and national costumes (7 elements, B 3) collected in Samara Governorate by a student of the University of Helsinki Otto Väisänen. Thus, in 1928, 7 mannequins dressed in Mordvin clothing and some individual items from the collection were exhibited in Raadi at the ethnic

minorities exhibition. In total, there were 14 mannequins at the exhibition, including 3 Ingrian, 2 Liv, 1 Mari and 1 Udmurt.

Employees at the Estonian National Museum began to explore the Erzya and Moksha peoples in 1965. The first trip to Mordovia was taken by E. Saarde (Astel). In 1972, J. Maaring travelled to the Mordovia ASSR. IN addition, between 1983 and 1987, the Estonian National Museum conducted comprehensive studies headed by H. Sarv and involving scientists, photographers and artists in Mordovia, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan in areas inhabited by the Erzya and Moksha; the research was conducted in conjunction with Mordovia State University. The most recent studies were conducted in 1988-1989 under the guidance of M. Mikkor. The results of the expedition appeared in the museum collection (artefacts, drawings, photographs, written documents), which is still underexplored[2]; Marika Mikkor wrote about the customs of childbirth and funerals, K. Sarv compiled a dictionary of clothing elements, H. Sarv described history and demography. The museum's collection and the works of the Estonian researchers are still little known in Russia (a brief chapter on H. Sarv and the museum by Nikolai Mokshin Mordvins in the eyes of foreign and Russian travellers appears in Saransk 1993: 212-213.)[3]

Since 2014, a single museum portal has been actively updated with information and images (Eesti muuseumite veebivärav)d https://www.muis.ee/search), where collection information is available. For example, using the keyword "mordva" in the "kirjeldus" column will access information about Mordovian or Mordovian ASSR-related materials from various museums. There is a detailed search for individual museums, for example Eesti Rahva Muuseum (the Estonian National Museum).

The collections are partially digitised (objects, drawings, photos). There are also images. Informative handwritten material – diaries, ethnographic descriptions, correspondents' answers.

The Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu keeps valuable folklore and ethnographic material collected by the ethnographer and folklorist V. Danilov in the 1960s and 1970s in the village of Okhonkino and surrounding villages in Tatarstan where there was a high density of Erzya. The Estonian Mordvin Society plans to publish this material and make it available for everyone. The Estonian Folklore Archive has an estimate of a few hundred pages of Viktor Danilov's manuscript material and audio recordings. A total of 2,450 songs and about 50 stories and beliefs have been recorded. This indicates the need

to collect additional data on the prehistory of songs and other song culture phenomena, as well as to add data specifically about customs and narratives.

It should be noted that in the summer of 2015 the Estonian Academy of Music (Zh. Pyartlas and students of the Academy), the Estonian Literary Museum (J. Oras, A. Kalkun), the Estonian Mordvin Society (N. Ermakov) together with the Ogarev Mordovia State University (S. Isayeva) conducted an ethnographic expedition in the Republic of Mordovia collecting valuable folklore and ethnography material.

The Paul Ariste Centre for Indigenous Finno-Ugric Peoples at the University of Tartu issued an electronic Erzya language textbook by Niina Aasmyae titled *Kortatano erźaks/Räägime ersa keelt* ('Let's speak Erzya', Tartu, 2012). Niina Aasmyae is a researcher at the Institute of Estonian and General Linguistics, University of Tartu and a speaker of Erzya. The materials of the textbook are stored in the Archive of Digital Materials at the Institute of Estonian and General Linguistics, University of Tartu, where you can also find the textbook in English (http://mariuver.com/2015/04/16/est-rzja/).

The Finno-Ugric movement in Estonia is significant, with nearly a one-hundred-year history. Negotiations with different peoples at different times were both fruitful, and not, according to Marju Kõivupuu (Senior Researcher, University of Tallinn). She remembers friendship with the great Erzya narratress of folk tales Serafima Lyulyakina, whom she met at the Finno-Ugric folklore festival. S. Lyulyakina gave Marju jewellery worn by her grandmother as a sign of friendship and gratitude because an Estonian woman could sing in her mother tongue, i.e. Erzya. They maintained this friendship through the years.

Marju's 2011 trip to Tavla and the Yovlan Olo museum in the Republic of Mordovia refreshed her memory about cooperation in the Torama and Khellero ensembles. A representative of the Erzya, Viktor Danilov (1942-2002), made the Hellero ensemble special. Victor showed and explained how to wear traditional Erzya clothing and feel the spirit of the Erzya people.

Thanks to cooperation between Marju Kõivupuu and Professor Galina Kornishina, the University of Tallinn and Ogarev Mordovia State University signed a cooperation agreement in 2011.

Thus, the Estonian National Museum keeps valuable collections of national clothing, adornments and household items. The Estonian Literary Museum and the Academy of Music store important folklore and ethnography materi-

als. There is also a cooperation agreement between different universities and the Estonian Mordvin Society.

In conclusion, it should be noted that a large number of the Erzya and Moksha moved to Estonia during the Soviet period, mainly between 1959 and 1970, mainly youth who usually lived in the cities. The main language of communication is Russian, and, as a rule, second-generation migrants hardly speak their national language (except for young families started in the 2000s).

Materials from the archive of Estonian dialects and Finno-Ugric languages can be found at EMSUKA.[4]

Recordings with a file icon are available as digital files through the database, the rest of the original tapes are either not digitised or poor quality (the reshoots are digitised, but they are not yet in the database). The Estonian–Erzya electronic dictionary was released In 2019.[5]

The University of Tartu archive of Estonian dialects and related languages has materials in native languages.[6]

There has also been contact with the ethnic homeland in the form of restoring holy sites, and establishing agreements with universities and cultural associations. In addition, Expeditions to Pazelki and Ardatov regions resulted in valuable folkloric material for ethnographic preservation which is vital to keep Erzya cultural heritage alive in the modern world.

Various cultural events organised by societies help the local Erzya and Moksha to consolidate and preserve their identity and language. The work of these societies in Estonia contribute to the creation of a multi-coloured palette of cultures within the multinational Republic of Estonia.

The study of Mordovian (Erzya) materials shows the richness and versatility of the culture of the people, and every year the value of this knowledge only increases. Publication of the material is important because the written culture of Mordovia is young, while oral heritage is a very important part of the culture. The material in the Estonian archives is of great interest because of its authenticity. It provides valuable information for both folklorists and researchers in other fields and can also be used in the education system.

Natalia Ermakov

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] http://www.maavald.ee/uudised-10225-2012/269-151010225-2012-ersamaa-pyhapaik-saab-hoimurahvaste-programmi-toel-korda.

[2] http://www.folklore.ee/rl/folkte/sugri/mordva.

[3] On the first Mordvin items see also: http://blog.erm.ee/?p=1307.

[4] http://emsuka.eki.ee/sound-collection.

[5] https://www.eki.ee/dict/ersa/.

[6] They also have an online archive: https://murdearhiiv.ut.ee/otsi.php.

Abbreviations

SAM – the Society archival material (Estonian-Mordvin)

AFD – author's field data

Expeditions (collections: B – items, Fk – photos, EJ – drawings, TAp – field reports)

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hThe Instoitute of Estonian Language. ttps://www.eki.ee/dict/ersa/

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https://www.muis.ee/search

Short bio

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Natalia Ermakov is from Mordovia and is a President of the Estonian Union of National Minorities. She was head of the Estonian Mordovian Society for 17 years. She is the founder and head of the National Minorities Working Group of the Estonian Folklore Council. She is also a researcher in the Department of Folkloristics, Tartu, Estonia.

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Natalia Ermakov

Presentation of the book *Kuum öö*, Estonian president Toomas Hendrik Ilves present, 2007. Photo: Natalia Ermakov

The Estonian Mordvin Society, 2012
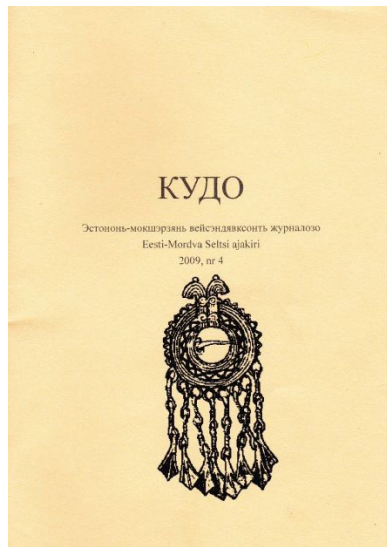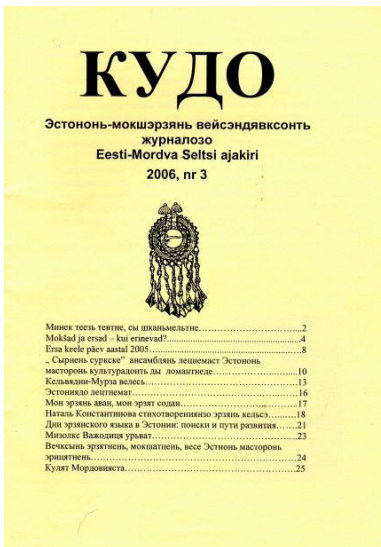Photo: Estonian Mordvin Society

The Erzya language courses at Tallinn University, 2012
Photo: Natalia Ermakov

Lecture by V. K. Abramov on the Mordvin history for the Mordvin diaspora in Estonia. Guest Juku-Kalle Raid (head of the working group on the Finno-Ugric peoples under the Parliament of Estonia), 2012. Photo: Natalia Ermakov

КУДО

Эстононь-мокшэрзянь
вейсэндявксонть
журналозо
Eesti-Mordva Seltsi ajakiri

1998, nr.1

Чадыковонь 16-це
чистэ — эрзянь
келень Чи

16. april – ersa keele päev

16 апреля – День
эрзянского языка

КУДО

Эстононь-мокшэрзянь вейсэндявксонть
журналозо
Eesti-Mordva Seltsi ajakiri

2004, nr 2

КУДО

Эстононь-мокшэрзянь вейсэндявксонть
журналозо
Eesti-Mordva Seltsi ajakiri

2006, nr 3

КУДО

Эстононь-мокшэрзянь вейсэндявксонть журналозо
Eesti-Mordva Seltsi ajakiri
2009, nr 4

The journal *Kudo*

The Vastoma Ensemble, V. K. Abramov, V. I. Mishanina, E. Tolouze. Photo: Natalia Ermakov INALCO university, France, 2013.

The Day of the Erzya language, 2013. Estonian president Arnold Rüütel with his wife the folklorist Ingrid Rüütel, writer Arvo Valton, Kshumantsyan Pirgush, Antonina Simberg and Natalia Ermakov. Photo: the Sjatko Estonian Erzya Community

Twentieth anniversary of the Estonian Mordvin Society, 2015. Photo: the Estonian Mordvin Society

Estonian Mordvin Society, 2018. Photo: the Estonian Mordvin Society

The J. Olo Conference. Viljandi Traditional Music Barn. The Sjatko Estonian Erzya Community, 2021. Photo: Leanne Barbo

The Estonian Sjatko Erzya Community. Day of the Erzya language. 2021 Photo: Estonian Erzya Community

IV

News and Reviews

The Source of Living Tradition

International online conference, dedicated to the 70th jubilee of Udmurt folklorist Tatiana Vladykina

An International online conference under the heading "Kalyk kyloslen vizyl oshmesyesyz" – "The Source of Living Tradition" – "Elava traditiooni lätetel", dedicated to the 70th jubilee of Udmurt folklorist Tatiana Vladykina, was held on October 4–6 2023.

The conference was organized by the Department of Folkloristics of the Estonian Literary Museum (Tartu, Estonia) in partnership with the Udmurt Institute of History, Language and Literature of the Udmurt Federal Research Centre of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Udmurt State University (Izhevsk, Russia) and was continuation of the series of conferences "Keelest meeleni XI" – "From Language to Mind XI", dedicated to famous folklorists.

Tatiana Vladykina is a well-known Udmurt folklorist, Doctor of Philology, Professor of Folkloristics, laureate of the State award of the Udmurt Republic in the field of literature and art, foreign honorary member of the Finno-Ugric Society (Finland), laureate of the "Soul of Udmurtia" award of the Udmurt Republic in the field of traditional culture, leading researcher of the Department of Philological Research of the Udmurt Institute of History, Language and Literature of the UdmFRC UB RAS. The main direction of her scientific activity is the traditional culture of the Udmurts, genres and figurative system of Udmurt folklore. She graduated from the Udmurt State University in 1975, and in 1975–1978 she was a doctoral student at the University of Tartu. She has been collecting, studying and publishing Udmurt folklore since 1972; since 1978 she has been organizing expeditions to collect folklore and ethnographic materials; she supervises the compilation and publication of the Udmurt Folklore collection, a series of books "Cultural Monuments. Folklore Heritage", "Udmurt Ritual Alphabet". Tatiana Vladykina is the author of more than 300 publications (monographs, scientific articles, popular scientific and popular publications, educational and teaching aids), scientific editor of dozens of books on the problems of Udmurt folklore research in the context of traditional cultures of the Ural–Volga region peoples and kindred Finno-Ugric peoples.

The conference was aimed at discussing issues of folklore field studies, problems related to the study and preservation of the traditional culture of the Finno-Ugric peoples. It brought together more than 50 specialists in the areas of folklore and ethnomusicology, anthropology and cultural studies, history and ethnography – scientists from Estonia, Russia, Hungary, Austria and France. Within three days 24 scientific reports were heard, three new publications were presented with Nikolai Anisimov (Estonian Literary Museum) as the moderator. At the Estonian Literary Museum an exhibition of Tatiana Vladykina's scientific works was organized and the Museum staff read excerpts from them in Udmurt, Russian, Estonian, English and French.

On the first day Piret Voolaid, Director of the Estonian Literary Museum, Lyudmila Bekhtereva, Deputy Director for the Socio-Humanitarian Direction of the UdmFRC UB RAS, Galina Glukhova, Director of the Institute of Udmurt Philology, Finno-Ugric Studies and Journalistic of the Udmurt State University and Mare Kõiva, Head of the Department of Folkloristics of the Estonian Literary Museum, delivered welcome and congratulatory speeches to the organizers, participants of the conference and the hero of the day. The speakers noted Tatiana Vladykina's significant contribution to the development of Udmurt and Finno-Ugric folklore studies, accuracy, depth, modern methodology and world-class research, her tireless energy and curiosity as a scientist and expressed hope for further scientific cooperation and cultural interaction.

Warm and heartfelt congratulations were addressed to Tatiana Vladykina from foreign and Russian friends and colleagues representing the Institute of Philology of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Novosibirsk), the Institute of Humanitarian Studies of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Perm branch of the Perm Federal Research Center of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences) (Perm), the Institute of Ethnological Research named after R.G. Kuzeev of Ufa Federal Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Ufa) and the Institute of Language, Literature and History of the Karelian Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Petrozavodsk).

Musical compositions in honor of the hero of the day were performed by Emma Lotta Lyhmus (Tartu, Estonia), folk ensemble "Gozhnya kenakjos" from Gozhnya village, Malaya Purga district of Udmurtia (Russia) and the Udmurt ensemble "Oshmes" ("Spring") (Tartu, Estonia).

A presentation of new books made on the first day of the conference became a significant event.

Tatiana Panina and Elizaveta Lozhkina introduced the collective monograph "Tuzh uno kylyo verano kylyosy ..." = "How Much is Left Unspoken ..." (Izhevsk, 2023). It was prepared by the Udmurt Institute of History, Language and Literature of the UdmFRC UrO RAS and was dedicated to the birthday of the celebrant. The book contains a lot of unique archival materials collected by Tatiana Vladykina directly or under her leadership and scientific research of eminent and young scientists on Udmurt traditional culture and folklore, as well as congratulatory essays by her students and colleagues. The publication begins the planned "Udmurt Traditional Culture. Performer – Text – Research" book series which is a folkloristic research and publishing of authentic Udmurt folklore based on collecting activities, field research into specific local traditions.

Elena Popova presented another edition of the Institute – a collective monograph "The Bee and Honey in Folk Culture" (Izhevsk, 2023). The publication is based on the research of participants of the IV International Field Ethnographic Symposium "Mush Gur: Bees and Honey in the Culture of the Peoples of the Ural-Volga Region", held in 2022 in Izhevsk. The book is devoted to the role of beekeeping in traditional and modern cultures, the reflection of the occupation in language and folklore, and the place of beekeeping in the economy of private households, tourism and modern cultural events. For the first time, the book presents extensive field material, archival and written sources, ethnographic, folklore, linguistic data on beekeeping and the place of beekeeping in folk culture, considering different sources and ethnocultural traditions of beekeeping.

Aado Lintrop presented his book "Soome-ugri reisid (Finno-Ugric Journeys)" (Tartu, 2022), which accumulated his personal impressions, memories and field diary entries covering 28 Finno-Ugric trips. These are stories of the discovery of kindred peoples and the Finno-Ugric world, and the author's formation as a scientist. This is a description of a journey that began many years ago and continues to now day. This is a book about oneself, about people and peoples (the Finns, the Nganasans, the Estonians, the Votians, the Veps, the Khanty, the Mansi, the Seto, the Udmurts, the Sami, the Ingermanlanders, the Izhorians, etc.), their past, present and future.

The scientific program of the conference opened with a speech by Tatiana Vladykina (Izhevsk, Russia) on the topic ""Houses" and "Roads" of Heavenly Bodies in Udmurt Mythology". Information concerning the main heavenly

bodies in Udmurt mythology – the Sun and the Moon – is not particularly extensive. Data in ethnographic literature mainly relates to them as foremothers, along with other archaic images of ancient mothers and ancestral goddesses (*Shundy-Mumy*, the Sun-Foremother, *Tolez′*-Mumy, the Moon-Foremother, *Kaldyk-Mumy*, Foremother-Primipara, etc.). To create a complete picture of these images, the researcher engaged with other complementary sources, for example riddles, conspiracy formulas, motifs and fairy tale plots. According to the existing corpus of folklore texts, the scientist reconstructed the ideas of the Udmurts about the "houses" and "roads" of the heavenly bodies and their main purpose to stabilize the world cosmic order.

The report of Nadezhda Shutova (Izhevsk, Russia) under the title "The Cheptsa River in the Rituals and Beliefs of the Northern Udmurts" covered the meaning of the Cheptsa River in the traditional religious and mythological representations of the northern Udmurts. The researcher considered the semantics of the river as a symbol of the motherland, the road in the real and mythological dimension, boundaries between worlds, as a means of getting rid of diseases, as a sacred value of the local Udmurts supported by personal field materials of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, archaeological and folklore-ethnographic literature of the late 19th to early 21st centuries. The author came to the conclusion that at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, the Cheptsa River was a key economic, natural landscape, culture-forming and mythological object for the northern Udmurts.

In the period from 1990s to 2000s Hungarian researcher Agnes Kerezhi (Budapest, Hungary) participated in six expeditions to Alnashi, Balezino, Debesy, Zavyalovo, Kiyasovo, Malaya Purga, Yukamenskoe districts of Udmurtia, Buraevo and Kaltasy districts of Bashkortostan, Agryz district of the Republic of Tatarstan – the territories where the Udmurts and Besermians reside and where she studied archaic aspects of their life and mentality, folk customs and rituals. In the report based mainly on her own field research and entries, the scientist analyzes the changes that occurred in the Udmurt wedding ceremony and noted that at the end of the 20th century it preserved the essential elements and basic structure but became simpler and shorter compared to the wedding ceremony of the past, the participants of the ceremony changed, the rules of behavior of the bride and a young wife transformed.

Aado Lintrop (Tartu, Estonia) spoke about a modern Seto holiday – the Seto Kingdom Day, which appeared at the end of the 20th century (the first one was

celebrated in 1994) and quickly gained popularity as common public holiday. The researcher separately drew attention to the prerequisites and conditions for the emergence of the holiday, noted the role of individuals in the preservation, development and popularization of the language, history and culture of the Seto: they were the Estonian scholar Paulopriit Voolaine, who tried to create the Seto epic King Seto in 1922, and the traditional Setu singer Anna Vabarna, who, at the request of the scholar created and sang the epic about Peko in 1927, and the leader of the folk group Hellero Paul Hagu, who worked between 1991 to 1993 with the manuscript of the Seto epic "Peko", preparing it for publication, and resulting from its basis and ideology he actually came up with this holiday. Today, the Seto Kingdom has become one of the four main landmarks of Seto culture along with folk costume, the song tradition and orthodoxy.

Mari researcher Natalia Glukhova (Yoshkar-Ola, Russia) considers such an important component of the ethnic picture of the world as space. The types of space in Mari proverbs and sayings, lyrical songs, fairy tales, conspiracies and prayers were determined using a systematic approach that included semantic analysis techniques and the use of quantitative assessment and ranking, which made it possible to identify the types of space that are particularly significant for the ethnos.

Several other reports were devoted to certain genres of Udmurt musical folklore.

Pavel Kutergin, a doctoral student at the University of Tartu (Estonia), focused his attention on the song tradition of Dyrdashur village, Sharkan district of Udmurtia. In the repertoire of the local folklore collective, ditties performed in two languages (Udmurt and Russian) were of particular interest. The analysis of poetic texts made it possible to identify three groups of ditties that differ not only in content, but also in degree of concentration of resources of the Udmurt and Russian languages, the nature of the borrowing Russian vocabulary, the attitude towards it, and the functional properties of the borrowed word in the recipient language.

The genre of Udmurt lullabies came to the attention of musicologists rather late. Recordings of lullabies made since the late 1980s have shown the ubiquity of variants of one song. After a long discussion, philologists came to the conclusion that the author of its poetic text was the Udmurt educator Grigory Vereshchagin. The peculiarities of the melody, rhythm and compositional structure of the tune also allowed them to attribute the origin to the author,

rather than the folklore. Irina Nurieva (Izhevsk, Russia) in the report "The Udmurt Lullaby. Once Again to the Problem of the Original Source" shared her thoughts about the probable author of the melody of the Udmurt lullaby *Chagyr, Chagyr dydyke* ("Blue, blue dove").

The musical folklore of Korotaevo and Kuregovo villages in Glazov district of Udmurtia became the object of research by Ekaterina Sofronova (Izhevsk, Russia). During her expedition to the north of Udmurtia with the team of the "Actual Ethnography" project they recorded a lot of musical, game and choreographic folklore. The project team managed to fix almost living existence of unique ritual improvisational tunes: two wedding *syuan krez'*, one recruit *soldat kelyan krez'*, two guest *dzhöks'ör krez'* and *dzhök s'öryn s'ektan krez'*, and one woeful *yn vuron/köt kurekton krez'*. The ritual tunes were supplemented with three funeral and memorial and guest tunes. The proximity to Russian villages with Old Believer population diversified the repertoire of the song and dance culture of the northern Udmurts.

Nikolai Anisimov (Izhevsk, Russia; Tartu, Estonia) and Irina Pchelovodova (Izhevsk, Russia) spoke about their experience of preparing for publication a songbook on ritual folklore "Songs of the Eastern Udmurts". These collection was another book from the Udmurt Folklore series. The authors analyzed their field studies carried out in the period from 2016 to 2023 in Baltachevo, Buraevj, Kaltasy, Tatyshly, Yanaul districts of Bashkortostan with the aim of fixing calendar and family-generic song folklore. They described the painstaking work on song notes due to the peculiarities of the traditional musical intonation (all kinds of melismatic decorations), the specifics of working with texts to preserve the most striking dialect features of the Eastern Udmurts; the principles of material presentation.

Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences Alexander Chernykh (Perm, Russia) introduced different approaches to the publication of folklore texts on the example of several projects. The desire of modern folklorists for the most authentic presentation of texts faces such difficulties as an adequate reflection of the phonetic features of colloquial speech and local phenomena of the language, and in the case of publication in several languages the problem of translation. When approaching the publication of the entire array of recorded narratives, difficulties arise with the perception of the integrity of afolklore text itself. Modern folklorists strive for a comprehensive publication of folklore texts, using different methods of publishing on different media from

text collections to multimedia projects. The researcher pointed out that with a significant volume of modern folklore publications, there was no single approach, but rather a variety due to the peculiarities and quality of the material, the orientation of publications towards a particular readership, as well as the researcher's specialty and the author's concepts.

The folklore of the Udmurts living in the Republic of Bashkortostan is strongly linked with an identity that developed in isolation from the mother ethnos, under the influence of a foreign ethnic (Turkic) environment. The affiliation of the bearers of this folklore with the traditional Udmurt religion ('paganism') also gave it certain unique features. By the beginning of the 21st century, the range of folklore genres decreased sharply. Many samples had been lost or were preserved only in the memory of the older generation, but were not reproduced in everyday or ceremonial life. Researchers Ranus Sadikov (Ufa, Russia) and Tatiana Minniyakhmetova (Innsbruck, Austria) spoke about the need to preserve and study the Bashkirian Udmurts' folklore heritage, its publication and popularization, modern aspects of existence and trends in collecting and studying of their oral folklore, musical, ethno-choreographic and folk game culture.

Ekaterina Suntsova (Szeged, Hungary) studies the herbal traditions of the Udmurts, so she shared the plans to publish the herbalist's reference book of medicinal plants and book structure. Her study was conducted in the summer of 2017 in some villages in the northern, central and southern regions of Udmurtia. Herbalists, healers and ordinary Udmurtia's residents contributed to the knowledge about plants, methods of collecting, ways of use and other crafts. Those materials of the expedition formed the basis of the future book.

Irina Vinokurova (Petrozavodsk, Russia) in her report "Chapels in the Orthodox Traditions of the Shim Lake Vepsian region (late 19th and early 20th centuries)" summarized information from scattered sources on the chapels of the Vepsians of Shim Lake Znamensky and Vysokoe Lake Nikolaevsky parishes of Lodeynopolsky, Olonets Governate (late 19th and early 20th centuries) and analyzed it from the point of view of landscape approach. The author considered the topography of chapels in the cultural landscape of Shim Lake region, revealed the motifs for their construction (the vow, the appearance of the icon, the restoration of the lost shrine, the burial of unbaptized infants, etc.), identified the dedication of chapels and related holidays, and determined the functions of chapels in the parish life of Vepsian villages.

Social and cultural anthropologist Maria Vyatchina (Tartu, Estonia), relying on archive documents, media publications and propaganda materials, examined the issues of emancipation in the early Soviet period, when the new government relied on indigenous women as the main agents of change. In the attempt to implement socialist transformations in remote regions, the state contrasted two categories of women: those who were supposed to represent 'backwardness' (a category associated with the production of *kumyshka*, healing, non-compliance with Soviet hygienic standards, for which women were declared responsible) and those young women who were supposed to become the face of socialist change in the Udmurt village.

Tatiana Korobova's report (Izhevsk, Russia) was devoted to the analysis of the character code of Udmurt wedding songs. The study focused on the terminology of kinship and properties, as represented in a significant amount in Udmurt wedding songs, but was poorly studied and therefore requiring more detailed analysis and description. The scholar came to the conclusion that the terms of kinship and properties, being in the context of a wedding ritual, acquire an additional semantic load and become 'wedding', since they characterize a participant who performs certain wedding functions. Such terms are carriers of cultural semantics and symbolic function on a par with the poetic terms of the Udmurt wedding text.

Through a stylistic analysis of musical features and poetics of four songs recorded by Tatiana Vladykina, Maria Slesareva and Nikolai Zubkov during the 1981expedition, Svetlana Tolkacheva (Izhevsk, Russia) in the report under the title "Some Cultural Meanings of Russian Songs "with movement" in the Udmurt tradition of Varni village, Debesy district, Udmurt Republic" revealed the specifics of the functioning of Russian round dance songs in the traditional culture of the northern Udmurts. Considerable attention was paid to the characteristics of the sound fabric of the songs, and above all, acoustic and timbre parameters.

Pavel Shakhov's report (Novosibirsk, Russia) focused on two popular songs that came out of the military (Cossack, Red Army) environment, and then became widespread in many folklore traditions: 1) "I know, raven, your custom" with the melody of a Cossack song and the text, which is based on P. Kozlov's translation of the poem by the Polish poet V. Syrokomli "Pieśń Litevska" / "Lithuanian song"; 2) "How my own mother saw me off" with the melody of the Ukrainian song "Oh, what's the noise is there" to the words of

D. Bednyi′s "Seeing off". In the folklore traditions of the Siberian Mordvins-Erzya and Mordvins-Moksha, those songs were performed in Russian, as well as with poetic texts in Mordovian languages, which differ in content from folk versions and original authors. On the one hand, in the process of adapting the borrowed songs, historical realities and traditional poetic motifs characteristic of the Mordovian culture appeared. On the other hand, the borrowed songs served as a kind of impulse for the development of the Mordovian culture, became part of it.

The report by Sergey Minvaleev (Petrozavodsk, Russia) ""Our Little Nationality": The Experience of Studying the Ethnic self-identity of Karelians-Ludiks (results of the 2021expedition)" was the results of a field study of the ethnic self-perception of the Ludiks through the prism of concepts about their native language, ethno-linguistic environment, images of themselves and 'strangers'. The researcher analyzed the dual identity of the Ludiks, the characteristics of their ethnic group and native language, the nicknames of both neighboring Karelian groups and the Ludiks themselves and concluded that at the moment the boundaries of Ludik ethnic self-determination, according to the 'Karel – Ludik' paradigm, were shaky and floating and are most often associated with switching the language code.

Dreams are one of the types of folklore to which researchers return trying to explain something through symbols. The ancient Estonian faith tells about the wanderings of human soul during sleep. When a person wakes up, he remembers only some of these wanderings, of what was seen and experienced, while the remainder are hidden. Over time, language, environment and messages have changed, as have the places to which the soul migrate today. What has changed and what remains? Can today's man protect himself from what happens in a dream? Mare Kõiba, in her report ""When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?" (Billy Ailish)". reasoned four story collections about dreams recorded from different people in different regions of Estonia, motifs and plots, signs and symbols, functions of those dreams.

Tatiana Panina (Izhevsk, Russia) continued the topic raised by the previous speaker. In the report "Udmurt Ideas About the 'Other' World" (Based on Oral Narratives About Dreams)" she examined the ideas of the Udmurts about the afterlife (*sopal dunne*), which were reflected in folklore stories about dreams. The analyzing narratives related to otherworldly dreams, the plot-forming motifs of which were of meeting and communicating with the deceased, usually close

relatives or acquaintances. Along with the fact that those texts actualize the view that the dead were forbidden to talk about the afterlife, dream narratives were one of the main sources of information about otherness. They contain information that allows us to draw some conclusions about the prevailing ideas of the Udmurts about posthumous existence. In accordance with those tales, the afterlife was presented as a locus with certain signs and characteristic conditions pertaining to the existence of its inhabitants.

In the report under the title "Narratives About Witchcraft in the Everyday Communication of the Modern Udmurts" Tatiana Russkikh (Izhevsk, Russia) provided an overview of ideas about magic and witchcraft preserved in modern rural Udmurt society. Supported by field materials collected during ethnographic expeditions to the northern and central regions of Udmurtia between 2003 and 2023, the author recreates image of witches and sorcerers, describing their supernatural abilities, as well as the unspoken rules governing behavior in the process of collision with the 'magical'.

Eva Toulouze (Tartu, Estonia; Paris, France) shared her thoughts, observations and the results of her long-term research activity in Udmurtia and in Bashkiria. Traditional values, everyday life, their religion and culture, character traits, ways of communication, attitude to others – those aspects of life of the Udmurts that have remained under researcher's review over the past 30 years.

Natalia Ermakov's report (Tallinn-Tartu, Estonia) was devoted to a review of the activities of the Association of the Peoples of Estonia (ERÜ), founded in 1988, which united different nationalities of Estonia. The ERÜ represents the interests of Estonia's minorities, and preserves, develops and introduces the native language and culture of the small-numbered peoples living in the country, helping to preserve their identity, customs and folklore. The activities of the association include several events aimed at introducing the cultural diversity of the country to the Estonians and guests, promoting national, regional and community identity, and preserving cultural memory and spiritual heritage, thereby enriching the cultural space of Estonia.

Independent researcher and singer Maria Korepanova (Izhevsk, Russia) acquainted the conference participants with an ancient vocal genre *krez'*, which exists among the Besermians and the northern Udmurts, and also its therapeutic potential. The performance of *krez'*, as the bearers of the tradition themselves note, facilitates the inner emotional state more than singing songs when everyone sings the same plot text. Spontaneous and asemantic texts in

which the performer expresses lived experiences, emotions and feelings while singing allow to be achieved. The author expressed hope that the vocal-thera-peutic technique she developed in 2021 will help revive the tradition of creating improvisational texts and at the same time transform performer's inner state.

All three days of the conference were held in a warm and friendly atmo-sphere. As the conference was built following the principle "everyone listens to everyone", without the plenary session or thematic sections, everyone could listen and take part in the discussion of each report – be it a world-famous scientist's report or a novice researcher's one. The scientific reports alternated with music videos and educational videos introducing the traditional and modern culture of the Udmurts, the Estonians and the Seto to the conference participants . It also created the unique atmosphere of a celebration ofscience .

I would like to express my gratitude to the organizers of the conference for the intensive program, its high professional level and the relevance of the proposed issues. Good health, creative longevity, welfare, happiness and vivac-ity to Tatiana Vladykina!

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Interpretation, Truth, And Feelings: Legends and Rumors In Culture: Conference at the Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu, On September 18, 2023

The conference organized by the Department of Folkloristics under the heading *Interpretation, Truth, and Feelings: Legends and Rumors in Culture*, focusing on the study of modern traditions, was held at the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu. This one-day conference was dedicated to the 65th birthday of Eda Kalmre, the most recognized expert in contemporary folklore research in Estonia.

Eda Kalmre's main area of research is legends and rumors and their functioning in society. She is equally familiar with traditional legends and contemporary folklore. Therefore, in her analyses, the knowledge of old beliefs and legends creates a bridge between the traditional world and modern people. She has analyzed the ghost story about the Lilac Lady in the modern office, the old heroic myths juxtaposed with narratives about outlaws in the recent past, similar and different stories in connection with the sinking of the Titanic and the ferry Estonia, the dynamics of fact and fiction in popular ballads or in tales about an Afghanistan soldier, as well as in stories about food fraud. Eda's excellent monograph on post-war rumors, *The Human Sausage Factory: A Study of Post-War Rumour in Tartu* (2013), is based on interviews and historical archive documents and photographs. The collection of articles, *What a Wonderful World of Legends! Articles on Rumours and Legends* (2018), includes a selection of interesting approaches. The methods used by Kalmre are characterized by adherence to three principles: the dynamics of the text and context of folkloric phenomena, the rhetoric of truth, and the reliance on the discourse of social history. She regards the legend genre as relevant today, and believes that the source of its vitality lies in its ability to change and express itself in many different forms in culture.

The conference presentations were made by researchers whose topics are related to the aspects of folk culture of interest to Eda.

Semioticians Mari-Liis Madisson and Andreas Ventsel (University of Tartu) addressed the media panic in their short lecture titled "Who is afraid of con-

spiracy theories?", which in the circumstances of COVID-19, as well as energy and security crises, deals with the fear of conspiracy that engulfed society. Using media criticism, the speakers found that conspiracy theories are not so pervasive that we can talk about mass psychosis. Based on academic studies, the picture is not so uniform, the popularity of conspiracy narratives on social media does not necessarily mean an epidemic of belief in them. As social scientists, Madisson and Ventsel presented the descriptive term 'phobophobia' – a feeling that the collective fear and helplessness might have a dangerous effect on what is happening in society, as the created fear limits people's ability to comprehend and makes them manipulable.

Liisi Laineste (Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu) and Anastasiya Fiadotava (Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu; Jagiellonian University, Kraków) analyzed the layers of political humor in their presentation "Opposite, but similar: Russian and Belarusian anti-government and pro-government political humor". The experienced humor researchers, who in their articles observe the action mechanisms of humor in society, showed how jokes are used to comment on the views of strangers, thereby indicating opinion gaps in public space. The presentation was based on echo-humor about polarizing conflicts (2020 protests in Belarus and 2022-... war in Ukraine), expressed in different forms. There were overlapping motifs in anti-government and pro-government jokes. Pro-government humor had fewer hidden layers, but anti-government humor was more multi-layered and spread more globally.

Mare Kõiva's (Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu) presentation titled "The Devil in Noah's Ark (ATU 825): About variation and the search for truth" addressed the diversity of the episode of the villain entering the ship in different cultures and in different eras. The speaker, who is very familiar with the huge variety of legends, etiologies and myths, discussed the stories of the rescue of people and animals and referred to the attempts made at different times to prove the existence of Noah's ark as a historical fact. At least 18 versions of the story of the devil entering the ship are known in Estonia. The tales have unraveled and interwoven with other motifs – keeping the ship's construction a secret, the devil's resourcefulness to enter the ship (e.g., by turning into a mouse), with various insect, fish, bird and animal etiologies unraveling around them. It became evident that in the Estonian tradition, the story of Noah's ark and the flood myth are expressed in various types of folklore – in riddles, proverbs, legends, spells, humorous stories and in modern forms of folklore.

Alexander Panchenko (University of Tartu) studied a singular demonological legend in his presentation titled "The devil baby legend: Between 'traditional' and 'modern'". Panchenko, who is a long-term cooperation partner of Tartu folklorists in the field of modern legends research, had already discovered the article "A devil is born (contemporary legend)" by the Russian ethnologist Vasili Smirnov, published in 1923. Smirnov relied on a specific alleged case of the birth of a devil baby but showed the background of the story in European folk tales and legends about the birth of Antichrist. The story about the devil baby circulated internationally already at the beginning of the 20th century and was related to medieval and early modern tales about blasphemy and contextualized in religious polemics of various kinds. The legend is presented in more entertaining contexts in modern times, and so it becomes possible to find both similarities and differences between traditional and contemporary legends.

On the basis of written stories sent to the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literature Museum, Astrid Tuisk (Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu) addressed the question of how films shown in cinemas in the middle of the 20th century influenced children at that time and how watching films and games inspired by them were reflected in their later reminiscences. Part of the title of the presentation was a quote from a reminiscent story, "'An utterly brighter world': Foreign films in the childhood memories of those who grew up in the 1950s". The 1950s appeared to be an unusual time in the Soviet reality, as the so-called trophy films from the United States, Germany and other countries, released in the 1930s, were shown. They were totally different from Soviet films – in terms of topics, portrayal, ideals, characters, and sound. From the films, young viewers found inspiration for their games. Acting in this manner, they both consumed adult culture and shaped their own subculture.

Mare Kalda

Lithuanian ethnologist Petras Kalnius - 75

Photo: https://alkas.lt/2017/04/20/p-kalnius-profesija-etnologas/

Petras Kalnius was born on November 16, 1948, in the village of Vaineikiai-Medsėdžiai, Kretinga county (Northwest Lithuania). In 1967, he graduated from Darbėnai High School and entered Vilnius University, Faculty of History and Philology. He graduated from the university in 1972 and obtained the specialty of historian and teacher of history and social sciences. In 1972 - 1975, he worked at the Kėdainiai Regional History Museum as a senior researcher; at the Council for the Protection of Scientific-Methodical Cultural Monuments of the Ministry of Culture as a senior researcher and head of a group of historians, also. Since 1975 he started working in the Department of Ethnography of the Institute of History (later the Department of Ethnology of the Institute of History of Lithuania, now – department of Ethnology and Anthropology) as a senior assistant, then as a junior research worker, from 1986 - research worker. In 1989 he was elected as a head of the Department of Ethnography and held this position until 1991. From the end of 1991 until his retirement in 2012, he worked there as a senior researcher.

From the beginning of his work at the institute, he was directed to urban ethnographic research. In 1983, he published the monograph "Ethnographic Problems of the Culture and Family of Lithuanian SSR Industrial Workers" together with the most famous urban ethnology specialist in Lithuania Antanas Daniliauskas.

In 1984, Petras Kalnius defended his candidate's thesis in historical sciences at the *Institute* of *Art* Studies, *Ethnography and Folklore* of the Nacional Academy Ssciences of *Belarus* on the topic "The current family of workers in

the Lithuanian SSR industry" (in 1993, the Lithuanian Science Council certified the diploma and recognized the doctoral degree). In 1982-1984 together with the scientists of Lithuania and the *N.N. Miklukho*-Maklai *Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology* he carried out the project "Lithuanian residents' household and culture" and published the monograph "Contemporary Urban Family of Lithuanian SSR " (1988).

After the restoration of the independent state of Lithuania, the ethnologist spent several years researching the ethnic processes that took place in Southeastern Lithuania in the 20th century. Unlike other authors interested in this issue, Petras Kalnius focused mainly on the natural ethnic assimilation in various ethnic communities and the role of the family in ethnic processes. His work was crowned by two large monographs "Lithuanian Family and Customs" (with Angele Vyšniauskaitė and Rasa Paukštytė, 1995, second supplemented edition in 2008, new foreword written by P. Kalniaus) and "Ethnic Processes in South-East Lithuania in the 2nd half of 20th c." (1998).

A very important area of his scientific research is Lithuanian regional communities (ethnographic regions) and Lithuanian regional self-awareness. Over ten articles have already been published on this topic in prestigious Lithuanian publications, and the largest publication is the monograph "The Samogitians. From 1900s to early 2000s" (2012). I would call the last book one of the most important works of the scientist. The scientist is working intensively on this topic even these days.

In addition to these questions, the articles also analyze the theoretical issues of the science of ethnology, the prospects for the development of this science, and students studying ethnology are still currently studying his publication "Application of Statistics in Ethnology" (1999).

In 1991-1992, he headed the Lithuanian History Institute's scientific program "Lithuanian Family and Customs", in 1993-1998 - the program "Family and Ethnic Processes", in 2001 he was head of the projects financed by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania "Current Lithuanian regional identity: forms of expression and development trends", 2005 - "Lithuanians of the Seinai region: features of ethnic and cultural identity". The result of this project, will go down in the history of Lithiuanian ethnology as the first book published abroad (in Poland), and before this there was no case that a monograph was published within less than a year after the completion of field research (2006). This is the merit of P. Kalniaus' efforts.

He participated in ethnographic expeditions in almost all districts of Lithuania, also in the Punsk-Seinai region in Poland. In the latter, as in many areas of Lithuania, he led expeditionary groups. In addition to six monographs (two of them with co-authors), he published more than a hundred scientific articles, was a member of the editorial board of many publications, a scientific reviewer, scientist who paid a lot of attention to students, scientific management and the popularizer of ethnology. After retirement, the jubilee pays a lot of attention to ethnology and does a lot of science popularization work, gives lectures, participates in seminars, and also writes scientific articles. We congratulate Peter on the occasion of his honorable anniversary and wish that all the expectations and dreams of the eminent ethnologist become reality.

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