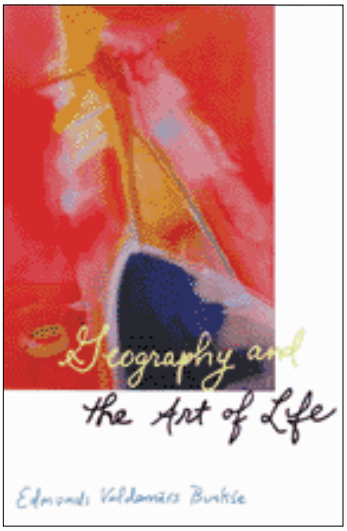
BOOK REVIEW

A BOOK ABOUT MEMORY AND PLACES, GEOGRAPHY AND PHILOSOPHY



Edmunds Valdemārs Bunkše. ***Geography and the Art of Life. Baltimore and London:*** **The Johns Hopkins University Press. 2004, 122 pp.**

Edmunds Valdemārs Bunkše was born on July 29, 1935 in Liepāja, Latvia. Like many of his contemporaries in Europe, his life, and the life of his family, was tragically and irrevocably changed by the onset of the Second World War. In his nine-year-old mind, he painfully realised what the Soviet occupation meant to his family, home and homeland. Ceaselessly moving crowds on the street, the seal of hopelessness stamped on the faces of those who were leaving, even the smallest of children carrying bundles and suitcases – "I knew that these people were fleeing from war and deportation to Siberia," Bunkše himself recalls (p. xiii). The little boy's inquisitive look in his father's eyes found a positive confirmation with the family being able to escape the 1941 deportation. Tens of years later, the author verbalised his emotions in the front matter of the book:

> Thus in the late summer of 1944 we were homeless, on the road. [---] Our road only led away from the warmth and security of home toward danger, foreignness, exile. But I knew nothing of the future in the summer an autumn of 1944. [---] I only had the sense that I had lost my childhood (p. xiv; xvi).

In October the same year, the Bunkšes ended up in the displaced persons' camp in Lübeck, where Edmunds made friends with a boy of his age from Estonia, whose family was seeking refuge from the Soviet occupation in the free world. The boy was Ivo Iliste (Dec 14, 1935–Dec. 1, 2002), who was from a doctor's family in Tartu, and became later known as a cosmopolite, translator and culture politician, poet and essayist, literary editor and a reputed ethnologist and ethnographer; but also as the founder of journal *Mana*, the head of the Baltic Institute in 1986–1996 and editor of the journal of politics and culture *Baltisk Revy*, which was published in 1990.

In the 1950s, the Bunkšes moved to the United States. Having studied architecture at the BA level at the University of Illinois, and geography at Syracuse University, E.V. Bunkše defended his master's and doctor's degree in geography at the University of California, Berkeley and became one of the representatives of humanist geography in the world. His contact with homeland was re-established in the tumultuous 1990s. A year later, Edmunds Bunkše was elected the honorary doctor of the University of Latvia, Riga, and was also the foreign member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences.

Being currently employed as the associate professor of geography at the University of Delaware, he calls himself a cultural geographer specialised in geosophy.

The study of history, based on dispassionately documented facts, while analysing the events of a distant or a more recent past, cannot always answer the question as to how an event **actually** took place. Also, it is impossible to document everything without taking sides at the very same time that the events are actually taking place. Often it is not even considered necessary, and, quite frequently, making any comments by either side is perceived as objectionable. It is worth noting that in the past decades, research into narrative history has gained so much popularity that it has become to be considered an independent discipline, involving different schools of thought.

The same tendency – distancing from the positivist science which aims to draw conclusions directly on the basis of the study material and minimises the creativity of a scholar – is characteristic of other areas of the modern humanities: such as folkloristics and ethnology, which have moved from the descriptive level, shy of translation, to the new qualitative level – the conceptualisation of the material from the aspect of both the transmitter of lore and the scholar of folkloristics, whereas the distance between them is reduced to a minimum.

Even though Bunkše writes in the front matter to *Geography and the Art of Life* that "this is a book about the human condition in places and landscapes, about how we make sense of geographic experiences in an artistic way" (p. 3), I would not quite agree with him, as texts tend to have much more layering and planes. *Geography and the Art of Life* is a **tale of home**, in the profoundest philosophical sense of the expression. Geographers have employed an array of sayings based on the relatively trivial argument that the Earth is the home of people. "The home is a substratum of culture. [---] Historically – and logically – the house as a material and tangible entity is a central component of [---] identity. 'Worries about the home' are worries about one's identity." (Bormane 2002: 159).

It is slightly more complicated if we talk about homeland. In a wistful dilemma, which is characteristic of many who have gone or been driven to exile, E. Bunkše repeatedly confesses: "my soul was in Latvia, but my heart was firmly rooted in America, [---] a land I like very much." (pp. 7, 56).

Geography and the Art of Life is also a study of **landscapes**. Simply put, we can talk about two perspectives in landscape discourse: (1) ecological and (2) semiotic (Gosgrove 2003: 15). The author approaches landscape as a point of convergence for thoughts about the relationship of nature and culture. Surrounding landscapes are reflected in the tangible and intangible culture of people: buildings, natural costumes, beliefs and customs, poetic folklore, (folk) music, literature, landscape paintings, history and politics – even national anthems (see also Claval 2004). The landscapes reveal what humans have created: both cleverness and senselessness. To paraphrase Wright, each place and location has its own story, which exceeds the core of the science of geography or the systematised knowledge of it. Landscapes are one of the most intriguing ways to conceptualise the surrounding culture and reflect the identity values of the society. Landscapes effectively bridge the gaps between different disciplines: folklore, ethnology and anthropology, linguistics and psychology, archaeology and history, geography and environmental studies, not to mention fine arts and individual mindscapes. A landscape communicates with a person inhabiting it in another language than it does

with an outsider, be it a tourist, scholar, or a random visitor. Landscape is also a good teacher, provided the newcomer has enough sensitivity to it and a keen sense of observation. And, last but not least – the semantic space of a landscape is in constant change, similar to the constant journey of humankind from childhood to evanescence.

These are the main themes that E. Bunkše, with his brilliant erudition, endeavours to contemplate on. On these travels of thought, he has retained the imminent emotional relationship with the discussed topic – be it his childhood Latvia, life in the displaced persons' camp, or his travels in Europe and America – despite his academic background.

Geography and the Art of Life is undoubtedly also **the tale of time, his-story** in the years during and after the Second World War. This is the story about the generation who got caught in the Soviet occupational regime and whose sufferings, fears and worldview often remain incomprehensible for the future generations and for people who have been born and grown up in the free democratic world. E. Bunkše narrates the story of himself and his time, which, however, is not limited to sharing personal emotions and recollections and the descriptions of the ever-changing worlds and landscapes that have surrounded or are still surrounding him; instead, the story is taken to a new level, encompassing humanist geography in its broadest sense, embedding into it oral history by means of telling an autobiographical story. Sometimes his lines unveil a despondent finiteness, characteristic of a mature scholar: "That then is my story. In writing it I have learned, as did Carlo Gebler, that 'you cannot change the past, but you can sometimes draw the poison out of it'" (p. 115).

Further about the author and his publications see http://www.udel.edu/Geography/faculty/bunkse.html

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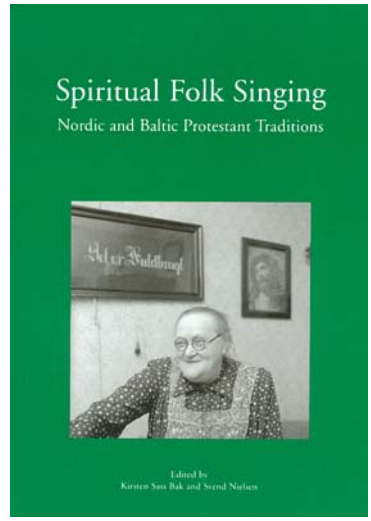
A BOOK ON FOLK HYMN TRADITION

Spiritual Folk Singing. Nordic and Baltic Protestant Traditions. **Kristen Sass Bak, Svend Nielsen (eds.). Denmark, Forlaget Kragen 2006, 284 pp.**



A collection of articles this extensive and of this quality on the Nordic and Baltic spiritual folk song has been long expected. The nearly 300-page volume features articles by ten authors on spiritual folk singing in Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, the Faeroe Islands, Island and Lithuania. Two attached CDs of audio samples of the spiritual folk song repertoire of all the countries discussed in the collection contribute to the high value of the publication.

In the final decades of the twentieth century, the topic of traditional hymn singing has attracted wider attention among ethnomusicologists and musicians in the Baltic and Nordic countries. By embedding features of popular and authored music, and different social, spiritual and historical musicological layers, this song genre is a valuable source of research in musical analysis, sociology, history, comparative theology, local and national histories and their interrelations. The topics, approaches and research methods presented in the collection vary due to the historical, social and cultural situation in different countries and also due to the different experiences of individual researchers. For example, in Norway, Finland, and the Faeroes, it was possible, even in the latter half of the twentieth century, to take part in the living singing tradition and build research on fieldwork; in other countries researchers have had to rely on the archive materials collected by former generations.

In the collection, two layers of the spiritual folk singing tradition are discussed. Firstly, scholars have taken interest in the popular variations of Lutheran hymn tunes, disseminated in Protestant European countries, such as the melismatic style, tonality, rhythms, etc. of folk hymns. Secondly, the articles focus on the newer spiritual folk singing tradition, mostly created in the course of the pietistic revival in Northern Europe, particularly in the 17th–18th century in Denmark and Norway. Regardless of historical and social idiosyncrasies, the tradition of all the Baltic and Nordic countries share similarities in the folklorisation of hymns.

Swedish ethnomusicologist Margareta Jersild provides a thorough historical and stylistic overview of Swedish traditional singing, focusing also on the singing tradition on the western coast of Finland and in the Swedish-speaking parts of Northwest Estonia. The author discusses the collection and study of song repertoire of congregational singing, disseminated by the State Church of Sweden, and developed local versions: the function and dispersion of traditional hymn singing, the variation of hymn melodies, the relation of text and tunes, and regional and individual features of the singing tradition.

Estonian musicologist Urve Lippus presents in her article a survey of Estonian and Estonian-Swedish folk hymn variants included in archive collections and a brief introductory comparison of the repertoires. The analysis of melodies is used to demonstrate several mechanisms of variation – for example, changes in the formal structure of melodies, ornamentation and elaboration of melody line, changes in the tonal/modal structure. The study points out that regardless of the melismatic ornamentation of hymn tunes, the structural simplification is characteristic of the song genre.

Lithuanian ethnomusicologist Rimantas Sliužinskas gives an overview of the tradition of folk hymn singing among the Lutheran Lithuanians in the Catholic Klaipėda region in Lithuania. Regardless of the difficult cultural and historical situation, this singing tradition influenced by Lithuanian and German folk music is still alive. With the changing of Lutheran hymn tunes local melody variants as well as individual author tunes have emerged. In the article the scholar has focused on the analysis of hymns folklorised according to regional peculiarities.

Finnish musicologist Jukka Louhivuori explores the traditional folk hymn singing in Finland on the example of Beseecherism, a pietistic revivalist movement (Finnish: *rukoilevaiset*). A reader is provided an overview of the collection, study and publication of folk hymns in Finland, the formation of Beseecherism, Christian principles, and the spiritual singing tradition. The author also touches upon the influence of spiritual folk hymns on the Finnish Lutheran hymn book and the popularity of singing spiritual folk hymns in Finland today.

Ingrid Gjertsen, Norwegian ethnomusicologist, takes an in-depth look at the musical tradition of a specific pietistic religious movement, the Hauge movement, which emerged within the framework of the Lutheran State Church. The revelatory movement, founded in the early 19th century and still active, has considerably influenced the traditions and repertoire of Norwegian spiritual singing. The main research focus of the article is singing as an expressive medium within a particular religious practice, and an inseparable part of the lives of the given pietistic sect. The main emphasis of the approach is on the function of singing in different religious, historical and social contexts.

Irene Bergheim, Norwegian musicologist, has taken interest in the influence of published hymn tunes on the folk singing tradition in a rural region in Norway. The author explores a 19th-century collection of hymn tune transcriptions by an amateur Norwegian musician Knut D. Stafset. This is an interesting collection of more popular hymn and folk songs of the period. By analysing the compiler's choice of repertoire, the principles of notation and the style of variation, the author seeks to answer questions about the hymn singing tradition, popular among the rural population in the late 19th century.

Danish musicologist Kirsten Sass Bak presents a complex treatment of the traditional Kingo singing in Denmark. The study focuses on the traditional hymn singing which emerged in a Lutheran congregation under the influence of Thomas Kingo's hymnal, published in 1699. The author sheds light on the religious, social, cultural and musical context of the singing tradition, which has played a major role in the cultural history of Denmark, demonstrating the effect of this singing tradition on the basis of research on two religious movements that emerged in the Lutheran church.

Marianne Clausen, musicologist from Denmark, continues with discussing the Kingo singing style on the Faeroe Islands. With 'a Kingo', 'a Kingo tone' or 'a Kingo song', the Faeroese refer to the old-fashioned singing of hymns and spiritual songs; for example, performing a hymnal text to a Faeroese folk song tune. 'Kingo songs' may also include songs from other collections of hymns, now used only outside the church. In addition to focusing on the local peculiarities of the Kingo singing tradition, the article provides a versatile analysis of example songs.

Icelandic ethnomusicologist Smári Ólason provides a thorough historical and cultural overview of the formation and development of Icelandic folk music culture, including the spiritual singing tradition, in more than 400 years. Regardless of the venerable age of written Icelandic and Icelandic poetry, the formation of clearly outlined local musical traditions has been uneven. The author explicates the reasons why Icelandic music tradition has been susceptible to foreign influences and demonstrates the difficulties in collecting folk hymn variants.

Danish folklorist Svend Nielsen investigates traditional hymn singing in Iceland. From the Reformation to the 19th century, hymn singing, next to other manifestations of musical culture, has played an important role in the lives of the islanders. The tradition of church singing was under constant change, which explains why no uniform criteria for folk variation developed. The analysis of hymn tunes, provided by the author, confirm that the degree of embellishment of folk hymns, for example, may vary considerably from one hymn tune to another, from one singer to another, and also within the same singer's repertoire.

The editors' work on this versatile and extensive collection may be best described as done slowly but surely. In the introduction the editor emphasises that the majority of contributed articles were ready for publication already in 2000. The value of the collection, however, has not diminished during this period: the thorough articles are still topical, posing important research questions and offering comprehensive solutions to the presented issues.

Helen Kõmmus