

KREUTZWALD DAYS 2009: FOLKLORISTIC ISSUES

As of 1957, the Literary Museum holds an annual two-day conference for researchers of Estonian literature and folklore in December of each year, referred to as the Kreutzwald Days in honour of the founder of Estonian national literature.

The 53rd Days of Kreutzwald were dedicated to the International Year of Astronomy. Traditionally, the first day of the conference concerns issues of wider cultural and social interest, followed by a session on literature, and the second day, on 18 December, 2009 was organised by the Department of Folkloristics. The content of the interdisciplinary event was diverse – at first, the floor was given to professional astronomers: Ene Ergma provided an overview of the current situation in Estonian astronomy, from individual attitudes towards the multi-faceted nature of the of the world, to the Estonian space policy in general. Jaan Einasto, the most recognised astronomer in Estonia, spoke on the birth and development of the world, giving an insight in the advancement of cosmology during the last century wherein Ernst Öpik had a great role at the onset of studying the physics of galaxies. According to the recent data, the universe is estimated to be 13.7 billion years old. The presentation touched upon the pulsating universe theory, the measuring of the redshift of millions of galaxies, and the utilisation of these data to compile maps of the networks of superclusters. Thereafter, the speaker elaborated on cosmic microwave background radiation and the dark matter, the material of which is so far unknown to people. One of the most significant scientific out-



*At the conference. From the left: Janika Kronberg, Jaan Einasto and Ene Ergma.
Photo by Alar Madisson 2009.*

comes in the cosmology of the last decade reveals that since the epoch which corresponds to redshift of 0.7, the density of the dark matter is higher than the density of the visible matter and thus, the universe is currently expanding at an ever accelerating speed.

Jaak Jaaniste, professor of physics, focused on one of the versions of a cosmic catastrophe in 2012 – the invisible-unobservable planet/star Nibiru which is supposed to end our Earth in 2012, to be survived only by 10 % of living matter in a good outcome. The overview by the presenter showed that there are more than many of those who believe in this nonsense.

Astronomic issues were complemented by the session on folk astronomy during which Mall Hiiemäe gave an overview of the package, *Palmse Sky*, obtained from Johann Sõster, the head teacher of the local ministerial school and correspondent of Jakob Hurt in 1902. This material mainly comprises memories heard from Ann Meikar, and also a description of the village life and community lifestyle in Tammisspea at the time. Enn and Tiiu Ernits introduced Votian folk astronomy, providing a significant supplementation to their first overview on the subject matter published 25 years ago, in the nature magazine *Eesti Loodus*. The well-structured presentation first dwelt on the genesis and composition of the world, and thereafter focused on the day, i.e. the Sun and Moon. The Votians believe that there were more stars in the sky in quondam times, and the cause for this, according to one of the informants, is the fact that airplanes and sputniks have mixed up the sky (*taivaz porattu*). Likewise, according to one of the linguistic informants, the Votians had not given names to the stars in the sky, as people were working hard and had been too tired to look up into the sky. Despite all this, the Votians did have names for their stars, yet unfortunately, there is little information about these astronoms. Towards the end of their presentation, the speakers gave an overview of comets and falling stars in Votian folk astronomy.

The ethno-astronomic theme was continued by Urmas Sutrop who thoroughly discussed the designations for the North Pole and the Milky Way among different peoples. Yuri Berezkin elaborated on the earlier stratifications of European astronoms – following the geographical disposition of different chains of motifs, the presenter managed to highlight a relatively probable and dynamic development model of astronoms. With regard to the history of earlier astronomy, Peeter Espak discussed the myths associated with the creation or genesis of the cosmos as one of the main bases for the perception of life among the peoples of the Near East. Amar Annus spoke about the historical background for the making of horoscopes as a relevant brand.

Aado Lintrop's presentation on the self-mythology of the Roerich family observed how the authentic tradition of different peoples has been synthesised into a legend of a miraculous stone, first mentioned in 1911, accumulating the mystic energy flow derived from the Orion constellation. The speaker presented the further development of relevant events, myth creation and the belief that such myths would later become a reality. Andres Kuperjanov focused on some widespread astronomic everyday beliefs regarding constellations, and supported the previous speaker on horoscopes, stating that in the present-day meaning, astrology was used as the PR and fundraising source at the time when astronomy began to develop as science.

For economising reasons, one of the panels of the interdisciplinary medical anthropology conference *Medica VI, Influence of Astral Phenomena on Medicine*, took place in the framework of the same event. Mare Kõiva's presentation on lunar phases and the Sun in the treatment strategies of the 20th century introduced several healing methods and described the relevant understanding and incantations associated with celestial bodies. Raivo Kalle's and Renata Sõukand's paper on plants and stars was displayed as a poster presentation, specifying that several forest flowers with white petals have been associated with stars; whereas star flowers can also be the ones with yellow or red blossoms. There are a number of folk names given to plants and herbs which can be associated with the sky, the Moon and the Sun. The presentation also dwelled upon the influence of celestial bodies on different jobs of work, and on the utilisation of lunar phases in the treatment with medicinal plants. The signs of the zodiac, however, obtained significance in the practical life of people since the thirties of the previous century.

The rest of the session continued in a poster format, whereby I would like to mention Piret Paal's presentation on the treatment of cancer in Finnish folk medicine, with a special focus on the beliefs related to the Moon and Sun.

The intensive day ended with the promotional presentation of a CD of Kihnu dance tunes *Kihnu tantsulood* (compiled by Ingrid Rüütel, Angela Arraste and Krista Sildoja), and Dan Ben-Amos's book *Kommunikatsioon ja folkloor* 'Communication and Folklore' (published by Estonian Literary Museum, Department of Folkloristics).

Andres Kuperjanov
Estonian Literary Museum