

## DOCTORAL DISSERTATION EMITTING POSITIVE ENERGY

### **Kristel Kivari's dissertation *Dowsing as a link between natural and supernatural: Folkloristic reflections on water veins, Earth radiation and dowsing practice***

On June 10, 2016, Kristel Kivari defended her doctoral dissertation titled *Dowsing as a link between natural and supernatural: Folkloristic reflections on water veins, Earth radiation and dowsing practice* at the University of Tartu.

The dissertation includes five studies from the period 2012–2016. The first two introductory chapters explain the structure and objectives of the dissertation, give an overview of the practice of dowsing, and refer to research done so far. The structure of the dissertation is well organised and logical and the introductory part unites the following five research articles into a consistent whole.

The author gives an overview of dowsing for mining purposes and for discovering water veins. A relevant question is asked about to what extent this topic could be placed in the context of religious tradition. In this respect a special role is given to legends as carriers of this tradition. It is positive that the author has noticed the role of legends in spreading knowledge. This offers a possibility to continue studies, as stories related to dowsing keep emerging, and besides, such stories themselves also deserve examining, either within scientific or folk religious discourse.

This subject is highly topical at the moment. Kivari has discussed today's practices reverberating in people's activities, as well as attention from the media. Besides, detecting energies and using the dowsing rod and the pendulum are popular also in the sphere of business: tourism, training courses (identifying positive and negative energies, quests for improving personal welfare, etc.). Today the observation of water veins and earth radiation – as many other spheres – is a hybrid phenomenon, attracting the knowledge and performance of several levels of different fields. The author has noted and highlighted in the dissertation how peculiar approach complexes emerge simultaneously: folkloric, vernacular, and deliberately science-based. This is intervened by people's knowledge of folklore, their self-perceptions, and subjective interpretations, which people try to market through their authority or charm or promote otherwise. Their activity always finds response and followers, but also opponents and sceptics. These discussions, performances, and stories deserve an analytical approach and examination. It is explicable that the author emphasises that her research focuses mainly on verbal expressions – most probably due to her respect for folkloristic research tradition. And yet the dissertation clearly reveals a competent approach to the research object as a specific practice.

Kivari has also questioned the analytic distinction between the outsider's and insider's point of view. The author defines the etic and emic perspectives, drawing on the book *Text, Context and Performance: Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice* by religion researcher James Kapalo, published in 2011. However, these approaches can boast a long history. After these terms had been coined by Kenneth Pike, a behavioural psychologist and linguist (Chapman & Routledge 2005: 206–207), distinguishing between the emic and etic perspectives has been part of cultural studies to a smaller or larger extent. In folkloristics these types of research models took root in the 1970s–



*Kristel Kivari.  
Photograph from private collection.*

1980s, above all, through the works of Lauri Honko and Dan Ben-Amos.

Highlighting this aspect means, among other things, also self-positioning of the researcher. The reader can easily find an answer to the question about how Kivari in the role of a researcher is related to the scholars interested in the topic as well as practitioners. Both the opponents of the dissertation had also prepared relevant questions, which were answered by Kivari in an honest yet academic vein.

I am of the opinion that the researcher's personal engagement in the material under study enlivens and even animates the writing. The advantage of the dissertation for the reader is that the author has been able to express in academic language the perception and body-related feelings experienced by people while dowsing or coming into contact with Earth energies, etc.

Kivari's approach is likable, emphatic towards her informants and respectful, yet objective towards the studied material. In places, however, she seems to turn into an advocate of described events: the third article in the dissertation, titled "Esoteric lore in Kirna Manor and magical epistemologies" seems to be nearing the borderline.

The dissertation presents an observation significant in terms of folkloristics (and also of vital importance), concerned with the developments and changes in legend content. Kivari maintains that "the need to interpret and re-interpret one's environment" (in the second article of the dissertation, titled "Water veins, energy columns and health issues: Expressions of vernacular religion") creates new stories associated with the places charged with special energies. While speaking about water veins and bringing examples of their impact on human beings, discussing the possible effect of Earth radiation and the use of the dowsing rod and pendulum both by specialists and laymen, the environment is made meaningful in various ways. When creating local stories people want to include significant places and events in the narratives they tell. Finding and experiencing water veins and energies provides new material for it. The fact that the explored processes have been placed in vernacular religion instead of coherent religious ideology yields conceptual sustainability to folk belief studies.

Opponents are always tempted to speak about things missing in the dissertation, not those dealt with. Maybe the materials in the Estonian Folklore Archives would have deserved more detailed discussion? And although the significant works in the European tradition, for instance, in the context of the 17th century, are presented in detail, the older tradition of dowsing with its own peculiarities has been left rather invisible. Some of the treatments of Estonian material from the past would have deserved a synopsis of at least a few sentences but Kivari has only mentioned them passingly. Although special literature has been thoroughly and probably sufficiently elaborated, diligent browsing of bibliographies (not only those of folklore) would have yielded salient addition namely in terms of local tradition.

The dissertation published as the 24th issue of *Dissertationes Folkloristicae* is a salient research enriching folkloristic analysis. Due to the approach considering different aspects, the use of suitable analytical tools, and the unique interaction of the researcher and the research object, the dissertation *Dowsing as a link between natural and supernatural: Folkloristic reflections on water veins, Earth radiation and dowsing practice* has added essential and necessary new knowledge to cultural studies.

Mare Kalda

## References

Chapman, Siobhan & Routledge, Christopher (eds.) 2005. *Key Thinkers in Linguistics and the Philosophy of Language*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

## CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH, Tallinn, June 28 – July 2, 2016

Amsterdam in 2010, Harrisburg in 2011, Gottingen in 2012, Lexington in 2013, Prague in 2014, San Antonio in 2015, and Tallinn in 2016 – these are the cities that have recently hosted researchers of contemporary legends, who persistently continue the tradition of annual meetings. This year researchers in this field from the Estonian Literary Museum were given the honour of organising the 34th conference of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research (ISCLR). Eda Kalmre and Mare Kalda along with an efficient conference team had chosen as the venue to discuss contemporary legends a place in Pühavaimu Street, in the Old Town of Tallinn.

Year in, year out, the first call for papers has been similar in form: Proposals for papers on all aspects of legend research are sought, as are those on any legend-like tradition that circulates actively at present or has circulated in an earlier historical period. Extensive understanding of the sphere and its resulting interpretation have