

DISCUSSION

THE LIFE OF RITUALS DURING THE PANDEMIC: THE RITUAL YEAR SIEF WG ROUNDTABLE AT THE SIEF 2021 CONGRESS

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Abstract: This paper is an unconventional review of the online roundtable meeting under the heading “Perf 03c: Old Rituals, Changing Environments, New Rules III”, which took place on 23 June 2021, during the 15th Congress of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF), titled “Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression”. It includes an analytic introduction and the edited transcript of the roundtable discussion. This roundtable concluded the work of two previous panels organised by the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group, narrowing the discussions to the impact the recent COVID-19 pandemic had on the ritual year. Scholars from nine countries discussed issues related to the changes in the lifecycle and calendric rituals brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through various case studies and auto-ethnographic observations, participants considered the changes in social and individual experiences; the increased interest of the society in the essence of rituals; rethinking of the emotional component of daily routine and festive events; the way ritual participants and researchers adapted to the restrictions imposed by local authorities; changes and negotiations of the ritual space; new business proposals related to the ritual sphere, as a response to the restrictions; and the use of new technologies in the ritual contexts.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, religion, research strategies, ritual year, rituals, SIEF 2021 congress

INTRODUCTION

The 15th SIEF Congress, titled “Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression”, was hosted by the University of Helsinki on 19–24 June 2021.¹ Due to the extraordinary circumstances imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the very format of the congress served as an illustration of the chosen theme. For the first time in the history of SIEF, the congress was held exclusively in the online realm, in complete transgression with the traditional, live meetings organised in the past. But this was not the only challenge the organising committee faced, as it broke loose from the traditional formats of scientific gatherings. Virtual sessions and panel presentations required a completely new approach and new formats, which involved numerous, innovative technical solutions. New workshop sessions, film demonstrations, roundtables, as well as combined meetings were introduced in order to stimulate interactions and enhance the feeling of togetherness. Despite the inherent difficulties of adapting to the new format, the congress experience highlighted several advantages, the most remarkable being that of accessibility, which allowed more academics from outside of Europe, or with lower income, to attend the reunion. Another advantage was the combination of audio and written speech, which allowed the questions, notes, and bibliographical references to be written down in the chat-box section.

The SIEF Ritual Year Working Group was represented during the congress by two panels: “Perf 01: Calendric Rituals: A Time to Break the Rules”, convened by **Irina Sedakova** (Russia) and **Laurent S. Fournier** (France), and “Perf03c: Old Rituals, Changing Environments, New Rules”, convened by **Irina Stahl** (Romania) and **Nina Vlaskina** (Russia). The convenors of both panels sought for an opportunity to organise a joint discussion and, in the new proposed circumstances, a roundtable appeared to be the most suitable choice, allowing a large number of attendees to take part in the discussions. The roundtable was organised as the third session to the panel Perf03, and addressed the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic and the disturbances it engendered to the ritual year, more exactly, the changes imposed to the calendric year and life cycle rituals.

The roundtable took place on 23 June 2021² and lasted for one hour and 45 minutes. It brought together 20 scientists from nine countries: Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Russia. The meeting was structured around three main topics, for each of which a keynote speaker was invited: **Mare Kõiva** talked about COVID-19 and emotions, **Joanna Lipińska** about (re)negotiations of space, and **Daria Radchenko** about the adaptation of research strategies. They set the tone for the discussions which were continued freely by the rest of the participants.

The discussions engendered during the roundtable covered a large variety of topics: new rules and violation of preexisting rules in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (interdictions, exceptions, compromises, dialogue, and negotiation or imposition); general emotional assessment of the new situation and the ‘new normal’ by the respondents (participants, organisers, and observers); transformation of festive symbols (new perception of space, time, and ritual, its actors and objects); metamorphosis of the involvement; and new pandemic-related research methods and strategies. The case studies presented complemented each other and offered a multifaceted view of the issues under discussion. The dialogue between scholars turned out to be stimulating and instructive.

As a traditional review would not have been able to cover all the topics and relevant problems disclosed during the discussions, the authors decided, following this brief introduction, to present the readers with an edited transcript³ of the roundtable instead. By providing the full content of the meeting, it is hoped that the readers will gain a better understanding of the issues discussed and that they will find the dialogues as inspiring and motivating as the participants did at the time they took place. References to studies mentioned during discussions were added to the transcript.

ROUNDTABLE PERF 03C: OLD RITUALS, CHANGING ENVIRONMENTS, NEW RULES (TRANSCRIPT)

Nina Vlaskina:

We are glad to see you here, and we thank you all [for joining us]. We hope that our discussion today will be productive, fruitful, and insightful. We are at the [last session of the] panel “Perf03c: Old Rituals, Changing Environments, New Rules III”, which will be held in the form of a roundtable. We have organised the discussion in such a way that everybody can speak whenever he or she finds it appropriate: you may either speak out or write your message in the chat box. If you like, you can also raise your hand, like several participants did yesterday, and one of the moderators of this roundtable (Nina Vlaskina or Irina Stahl) will give you the floor. If you have any technical questions, you can address them to our volunteer Ana Daniela da Silva Guerreiro.

So let us begin. I will say a few introductory remarks, and then we will continue our discussion.

The COVID-19 pandemic was officially announced in March 2020, and it drastically changed the lives of people across the entire planet. In many countries, governments introduced restrictions. They imposed new rules, and these

rules initially dealt with physical and social distancing and hygiene compliance. In fact, new norms of social contact were established, and these changes directly affected the ritual sphere because all kinds of rituals (lifecycle and calendric cycle rituals) have always presupposed communication and contact. In any period [of time], people have gathered during rituals and festivals. They did so and continue to do so in order to establish new norms and reaffirm the old ones. Our colleague **Laurent Sébastien Fournier** recently mentioned that only when we lose the opportunity to hold our rituals as we are accustomed to doing, we perceive and understand how meaningful the ritual is and how we need it in different kinds of situations (Fournier 2021).

Under these circumstances, each of us, be it a professional ethnographer or not, may ask the following questions: What is a ritual? What is the essence of a ritual? What are the substantial parts of a ritual that make up its core? What are we longing for the most? Yesterday⁴ we had some beautiful examples of these elements from different spheres, which people think are of the greatest importance during a ritual. For example, in her presentation about weddings, **Judit Balatonyi** said that all of one's friends should be present at the wedding, and if they were not, it would not be a real wedding. In the presentation of **Žilvytis Šaknys**, [the most meaningful part of the ritual] was the presence of one's relatives. If you spend Easter without relatives, it would not be a good feast, and so on. I think that we will continue to analyse this today. In this situation [during the pandemic], people try to find new ways to cope with the new reality. They establish new rules, they break the[preexisting] rules, or they introduce new elements that help them cope with the situation. In these circumstances, we as researchers have [to develop] new ways of analysing and recording the situation, because the very situation has changed. Hopefully, today we will continue to talk about it.

Irina Stahl:

I would like to stress Laurent's idea: the fact that we could not perform our rituals as usual [during the COVID-19 pandemic] made us realise how important they are and how they are actually rhythm-making. They impose a rhythm on our lives, and we just cannot do without them. The entire situation of preventing us from performing our rituals made us reflect on the core and essence of rituals. What is the core of rituals? What do we miss the most [when we cannot perform the usual rituals]?

Yesterday, we had some sort of idea of what we missed the most. It stemmed from our discussion that it was actually the togetherness [that was missed]. Separation is a problem, the fact that togetherness is no longer there. It is not just the separation from people, but also the separation from objects and every-

thing that makes us feel like *being in* the ritual, *being part* of it. And here come all those elements from the environment, like the smell, the touch, the feeling of the others, all those things that come and trigger our senses and make us get involved with all our senses, with everything that we are, *in* the ritual. This [the total experience of a ritual] is what people miss the most. Then, moving forward from that, there is the idea that people started inventing new ways of staying together and being involved in their rituals; new ways of performing the rituals and also new ways of being in the rituals, or being part of them. And this is the interesting part because [it brings up the question about] these new solutions: What do we do with them once the pandemic is over? Are we going to keep them? Are we just going to go back to our old ways? Usually, from history, we know that we can never go back in time, so it is to be assumed that we will keep some of this experience from during the pandemic. These are the directions in which we want our discussion to continue today, because we find this very interesting and challenging.

Daria Radchenko:

What I would suggest doing is discriminating between the two types of alienation that you have spoken about, without uniting them. Alienation type one is the problem of lack of communication with other people, of togetherness, exactly what you said. The alienation from the senses, from feelings, from being involved in the ritual as a person and as a physical body is something different to me, it is something more individualistic. In my research, I have noticed that people speak about those things differently. The Russian Orthodox Church now (in Russia at least) is, I would not say, really suffering, but experiencing more and more an individualistic approach. The parishes are very much clergy-centred, and there are not so many parishes with real communities in them. Therefore, many of my research participants (Radchenko 2022) spoke more about their individual experiences and lack thereof rather than about communication with other people. For them, it was a real surprise that they missed other people who could be irritating in the church, during the church service, who made noise, the crowd, etc. Still, it was not about other people as such. It was rather about the lack of “my own” experience; a feeling that “I’m not involved” [emphasis on I] rather than “I miss communication with other people”. Therefore, I would rather distinguish between these two deficits. Of course, they are in some way connected, but they are about different things: group dynamics, group belonging, group participation versus physical participation, and the quality of individual experience in the ritual.

Žilvytis Šaknys:

My research⁵ showed that in the contemporary Lithuanian community, it was more important to communicate with close people [family and friends]. For many, live communication with them was more important than a religious ritual. A large part of respondents perceive the holiday as a continuation of tradition. When they are unable to observe the traditional ritual, they compensate it not only by online meetings with beloved ones or with God, but also by maintaining the culinary tradition. One respondent even compared the situation in 2020 to the Soviet era situation when, for example, teachers in Lithuania could not attend church; they celebrated [religious feasts] alone, secretly, and the continuity of tradition was supported by festive dishes. A few years ago, I experienced a similar situation when analysing the customs of Lithuanian Karaites (a very small ethnic group [of Turkic-speaking adherents to Karaite Judaism]). Many of them do not speak the Karaite language. During the Soviet period, they were unable to perform religious practices. They maintained their ethnic identity during the holiday meetings [by the means of] culinary tradition. For example, currently in Lithuania, young people are less and less religious. During my fieldwork, 20 years ago, when I spoke with Russians, they would say, “I’m Orthodox” or “I’m an Old Believer (Starover)”, while now, in our time, some of the young people are not able to distinguish between religions. They would say, “I’m a Christian, but I don’t know if I’m a Catholic or an Orthodox”. There are extensive changes in relation to religion in Lithuania, and the festive traditions are stronger than [commitment to the] church. In my case, when I did my fieldwork, it was two weeks after Easter, and Orthodox Easter was one week after Catholic Easter. I found that not only the religious ritual was important, but also communication and the preservation of tradition.

Irina Stahl:

I think that these are the two main things that Daria highlighted. One is the group dynamics that was disturbed during the new regulations – the social aspect of the ritual – and secondly there is the individual experience within the rituals – the religious experience. This is what you meant, Daria, isn’t it? So, the difference lies between social and religious – is it a religious ritual, a religious individual experience, I mean.

Daria Radchenko:

Exactly, and the question is what people are trying to actually recreate or cannot adapt to, which side of it.

Irina Stahl:

Exactly. Do they attend church more for the social interaction or for religious personal experiences? That is what they miss the most. Yes, that makes sense. OK, things are starting to become clearer now, they are getting more organised.

Emese Ilyefalvi:

Thank you, Daria; it was a good distinction, but I have an example that relates to both. Because in one of the Calvinist congregations where I did my fieldwork,⁶ the day started very early in the morning with a prayer online, a Zoom-meeting, which is not very traditional in the Calvinist communities. They got together online (via Zoom) every Tuesday at 6 o'clock in the morning, and it was a twenty-minute prayer together with a Calvinist minister. I mean, it was within this circle of five or six congregation members, not a lot of people. But that was new to them, and they wanted to continue this on Zoom, online, after the pandemic, because, they said, it is only possible in the online universe, because nobody wants to go to the church at 6 o'clock in the morning every Tuesday or every Wednesday. And for them, it was also [a matter of] social connections and social dynamics, but they said [at the same time] it was a very intimate religious experience for them – those five or six people – a very new and intimate one.

Irina Stahl:

This is exactly what we were talking about. Which elements of the ritual that worked during the pandemic would be kept after the pandemic, because they enhanced the core of the ritual? And in your case, it is both the social and the religious aspect.

Emese Ilyefalvi:

Yes, but there is just one more tradition that I think is really interesting in this Calvinist congregation. [The manifestation of] this individualistic aspect was that many believers started to make small holy corners in their homes. That is really not Calvinist and against the Puritan Calvinist tradition, but somehow they tried to accommodate [and to make their own] little church in the house, [to be] in a room with a songbook, with the Bible, and just tidy up everything and make it a clean and nice space.

Anamaria Iuga:

I would like to turn the discussion to another example that I have because two days ago I was at fieldwork and followed a custom that was not held during the pandemic. It is a custom that we have on Pentecost, the custom of *Căluș* (Iuga

& Vlahbei 2022), which implies dancing. A group of men dance ritual dances around some plants which are considered to be healing plants, like garlic or [wormwood] *pelin* in Romanian, and they also cure people who have the mythical disease of being touched by fairies, and they have these symptoms that *Căluș* recognises. During the pandemic in the villages where I was, it was no longer possible to follow the custom. Last year there was no *Căluș* ritual in the villages. And in some villages, I met other *Călușari* [dancers] from other villages. They had to pay a fee because the police stopped them and forbade the ritual. But this year they could perform the ritual because we have a very good situation with the pandemic in Romania at the moment. It was really interesting to see how people reacted. The custom is that they go from house to house, they enter, perform the dances, and some comic play; it has a character that has a mask... Before the pandemic, not all the houses received them; only people who could afford it (because at the end they had to pay the *Călușari*) or people who were really fond of traditions.

But this year it was interesting to see that more houses opened, and villagers were also talking about this. People were longing to see the ritual that they had not been able to see at all the previous year. More people were participating in the ritual. It was really interesting to see how the pandemic caused [people's] reactions [and their decision] to return to the ritual and not to forget it. Because we were thinking: OK, one year the custom was not observed, maybe the next year it would be followed even less, and in two or five years it would disappear in some villages, but this was not the case. I have talked to the groups of *Călușari* that I have been following for the past few years. Two years ago (prior to the pandemic) in one of the villages in Bârla, the group did not meet, because they were not the right number [they did not have the right number of men necessary for the ritual]. Last year [they did not perform because] there was the pandemic, and this year they called me to ask me if I was going to come to the village to see them, because there were already nine *Călușari* who had met, and they were going to perform the ritual. So, it is also interesting how the pandemic helps not with the revival, because the custom is alive, but with giving more force, more authenticity, and more importance to the ritual.

Joanna Lipińska:

I am focusing my research on Neo-Paganism in Poland and the UK.⁷ Previously, it was said that alienation of people and alienation of the senses are separate. In the case of Neo-Pagans, [the question is] where they meet to conduct rituals. These are rituals of handfasting, pagan marriage, and so on and so forth. When I talked to Neo-Pagans, they said that because of restrictions and because they did not want to pass COVID around, they had to cancel the rituals in person.

But they lacked both of those things [meeting with others and the experience of the senses]. They could not meet anymore, as during their rituals they do not only take part in it, they are passing around food, for example, and touching, and dancing, and hugging each other. They said that they missed all of those things; the way in which they were all connected. It all depends on the kind of rituals people attend.

Mare Kõiva:

I will speak a bit about emotions. Actually, online cemeteries and online commemoration places came into existence at the very beginning of the Internet. I think the first message [I received with photos attached] was like, “Please look at our newborn baby”, and I received it from my friend in the United States, at the very beginning of the 1990s. The Internet provided the first possibilities to demonstrate photos and so on [to family and friends at a great distance]. The distance between families is nothing new, especially in Eastern Europe. You know, we have a kind of pendulum or chain migration. It is very typical in India and in Nepal. But just now, during this pandemic situation, it is very obvious that people need the emotional side more and more to feel that they are connected.

For example, I would like to speak about a paper by a Swedish researcher of belief narratives and ethnology of religion (Svensson 2013). He wrote some ten years ago that in everyday life Swedish people must somehow follow the basic rules: you cannot demonstrate a very close relationship in the street or in public spaces. He said that actually people are more emotional via Internet: they speak about emotional things, they demonstrate how dear their relatives are and so on. I think this was also typical of our pandemic case. On the one hand, when I arrived on [Saaremaa] Island a year ago, I understood that nobody wanted to meet me because I came from the city [of Tartu] and maybe I was bringing a disease. But another thing was that somehow the pandemic connected my family. We started with very old jobs, with very old traditions, and so on, to keep all the children and all the family together, although a part of our family had never come to the island with us before.

I also noticed (and I think that I am not the only one who made remarks during the fieldwork) that in huge, big cities, during the pandemic, the city people, the people who belong to the same block of flats, were demonstrating feelings that were very important. People can exchange material things but can also exchange feelings. In doing so, they demonstrate that “we are the same gang, we are the same crew of people”. I think during these times [of the pandemic], we all experienced loneliness more often. You have many opportunities to write, but you cannot communicate as much or as frequently [with your loved ones].

I think there were very different sides of the pandemic, and especially the side of emotions, which are actually important for people.

[The next aspect is] the soundscapes. It is very strange to go through Tartu, which is actually a small city, and realise that there are only birds singing. I soon discovered that hedgehogs and other animals lived in the vicinity of my block of flats. However, you cannot hear a human voice. When you are walking down the street, there is someone at every window, standing and watching you. So, you are thinking that they might be so lonely. Of course, all these family events and distances were very widely discussed. But also I saw how people reacted to the discussion on church matters. Congregants expected their ministers, their church teachers, their popes, and others to act like ordinary people. Some old discussions [were revived], for example, [the issue] of asking for money and so on, and were somehow overreacted to, I think, by the public.

Finally, I would like to recall something which I never thought I would actually feel. On 20 May me and Andres Kuperjanov reached Sofia [capital of Bulgaria], and we realised that all the shops were open, including the bookshops. And I cannot forget the deep happiness and shock that I felt when I arrived in Sofia and [entered] the first bookstore. You were able to touch the books! You were able to open them! There were academic books, science fiction, children's books, and photo albums. I was brought to tears and experienced a very touching feeling [when I realised] that bookstores [still] existed, that they were [still] open and a variety of [physical] books were still available. I think I have never experienced this before and I will probably never experience it in the future. I really hope I will not experience it in the future. The feeling that the world exists, and there is a very colourful variety, and it is not a fabrication. And that the world is not only full of non-humans, birds [and animals], but also of humans and everything that we have: festivals, connections, and all other things. [This was my personal experience during the pandemic.]

Nina Vlaskina:

Thank you very much! And I see a comment in the chat box from Žilvytis Šaknys, about St. John's festival.

Žilvytis Šaknys:

In Lithuania, the situation was not similar to Russia, for example. On Easter [Sunday] in 2020 and even in 2021, all the churches were closed. We could not go to another city, or join the community, or visit other people, or even see our relatives. The situation was different in other countries, and there were people who tried to go to the closed church, to leave a coloured egg for the bishop, but the situation was very difficult in Lithuania. By Saint John's Day – celebrated this

evening – the quarantine in our country has not finished yet. However, I believe that something about the holidays will change after the quarantine. Maybe the first thing to change will be communication with close people. But I do not know if the situation will change with video, online masses, and online communications, because part of my respondents, from older generations, had no opportunities to connect online. They could only speak on the phone and without video.

Irina Sedakova:

I would like to add several points. First of all, we speak of death and life, while there is not just one unified opinion on the situation the entire planet is facing. People's attitudes are different. As we know, some people are [COVID-] dissidents, and some people are afraid [of being infected]. And we know that people do die of COVID. In almost every family, there are victims of this illness, which does not stop other people from thinking that it does not exist, and there are many conspiracy theories about vaccination, etc. Even the attitude towards rituals is very different. Several monasteries and churches were not closed down at all, and the believers went there and took Communion without any fear [and any hygiene preventive measures]. The picture is diverse. It was Žilvytis's very pertinent point that the situation [around the world] was different, and it was not simultaneous, so to speak. For example, in Lithuania and Estonia, some activities were forbidden, but in Russia they were not, and vice versa. At the moment, we are witnessing the same: some big [and relevant calendric, family, and religious] holidays in some countries follow very severe restrictions while in other countries the bans are not that strict. It changes the very idea of globalisation, and the idea of the global rituals [acquires its local objectivation].

Another thing, it is Mare's good point that we are reopening our emotions now. When being in a hurry and following all our tasks and deadlines, we did not pay attention to many emotions. It is very providential, I would say, that the COVID pandemic began at a time when it became very fashionable and transcendent to express the ideas of mindfulness, or thoughtfulness [of 'slow activities'] not only about ecology but about everything. You have to stop and think, and it is one interesting coincidence [which COVID brought around].

Another coincidence is that technological development is so rapid at the moment; it is developing in front of our eyes. Who could have imagined that we could have such a huge congress without any technical problems? I was wondering how SIEF would function with so many parallel sessions. In parallel, there is a big ethnolinguistic congress [in Lublin, Poland] now; I am participating in two congresses simultaneously. Again, this is the case of COVID timing in the era of technical progress. The ethnolinguistic congress was also postponed,

like the SIEF one, and then the dates coincided. [Before, I had to choose where to go – to Poland or to Finland, but] now I can combine the two congresses. Both congresses have perfect organisation; there are no problems with visiting multiple sessions. [Even more, they are all videotaped, which will allow the use of the recordings for teaching and research purposes.]

In conclusion, I would remind you of the words of Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh about crisis (Anthony 1994), and we are definitely in a situation of crisis: when a crisis comes, it means that new doors and new possibilities will open. After each crisis a bunch of new ideas start flourishing. This is my thought, a bit optimistic, about the development of the rituals. Of course, we can talk lots and lots about the new rituals, new etiquette, 'new normal'. This is a huge theme that we can discuss. But we have to be more structural, and my idea is, I repeat, that the situation is very different [from one country to another]; people's attitudes are very different; and countries' attitudes are very different. We are reopening our senses and emotions, I think everybody would agree, and then, the technical possibilities are fabulous, and we have to be grateful for them.

Nina Vlaskina:

We are moving forward to the next part in which we would like to speak about the transformation of festive symbols. We would like to give the floor to Joanna Lipińska.

Joanna Lipińska:

My part is about space, which is actually a central element of social life. And before the pandemic, most rituals had fixed spaces of some kind, like churches, homes, meeting places in the woods (in the case of Neo-Pagans), or standing stones like Stonehenge, for example. We had Midsummer two days ago, and usually in Stonehenge there are loads of people: druids, wiccans, witches, and so on. And it is one of the few days when English Heritage⁸ allows people to stand between the stones because of the sacred value of the place. But because of the pandemic and of the situation in England, the event was cancelled, and the only way you could attend it was by watching Stonehenge on the Internet, through Facebook, during the sunrise and sunset. And they were closed,⁹ so we could not even see the sunrise properly.

I would say that in the time of the pandemic, access to the ritual space has changed a lot. It is completely impossible to visit some places. To the others, access is limited because of the restrictions. For example, in Poland churches were open all the time. Some people attended [the service], even in greater numbers than what was allowed. Either COVID is not a problem, or their faith

is bigger than the problem of COVID. But in most cases, those restrictions made people find new places. And I would say that it was a time of negotiating ritual spaces. So, instead of the fixed traditional spaces, people looked for new places to conduct their rituals. And these were mostly [private] homes, open spaces like parks and gardens, the Internet or TV, and (which was quite a surprise for me), in Neo-Pagan cases, there were also astro-meetings, during which they discussed over the Internet the time and the place, for instance a place they all knew. They can imagine it. And the whole meeting takes place there, I am not sure if I should say [in their] imagination or where their astral being is in this imagined place. So, it changed a lot. But mostly, I would say, many rituals have simply moved to the Internet, to virtual space (Zoom, Skype, Facebook live). A conference is also a kind of ritual, and we all just moved to Zoom, so we followed this way of thinking as well.

And of course, such a way of attending rituals lacks some of the important aspects, such as personal meetings, the possibilities of small talk, and so on, but on the other hand, they can still be performed, which means a lot. And when it comes to some examples, in my field, the Neo-Pagans had a few ways of solving this problem. For example, the high priests or priestesses organised virtual rituals, where one person created the sacred space, prepared everything, like an altar, and so on, either at [their] home or when it was possible to leave the home, they went to the woods and prepared everything and used the Internet to send [the video] to all the contacts, so that everybody else could connect and take part in it. So, people were alienated, everybody was on their own, but at the same time, they were together through the means of the Internet. I would say it is quite similar to traditional holidays like Christmas or Easter which we either put on hold or also negotiated. [In 2020 and 2021] people sent food and presents and so on to their families, although they did not spend the ritual time together. But they also used Skype phone calls or video calls to be together.

Nina Vlaskina:

Thank you very much, Joanna, for sharing your experience. It is a little bit different paradigm from the cases we discussed before, and that's why it is meaningful to see things from another side. In the chat box, I see that Mare talked about St. John's Day, and I think that it is also the case of new negotiations about space because the common space, the shared space for celebrating St. John's Feast is one thing, and another case when people meet in a family circle.

Mare Kõiva:

I think that St. John's Day is of the same importance as Christmas, so of course, the city officials say that you cannot celebrate it, because the vaccination has

reached nearly 40 percent of the population. People are actually worried about the decisions the city mayors take and so on. But it is [only] one case. Another case is that I do not know how [the situation is] in your countries, but in Estonia it is very obvious that since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, there were plenty of suggestions: please look around [you]; please support your local tourism and travelling to places closer to home [in Estonia]. Things like this never happened in previous years, but people travelled the way they knew. There was a kind of folk concert or some concerts as part of an opera event on the island [of Saaremaa¹⁰], and everybody went to the island to listen to the opera or to participate in a small village event (village folklore days), and so on. People travelled around [the country] a lot, and there were many young families who travelled from one place to another. And I think for the first time people actually realised what nature is like or what kind of events take place in Estonia. They also realised how long it takes to travel through Estonia. So maybe it is also about focusing on your own surroundings. Maybe it is one of the 'new styles' or 'new rules'.

Nina Vlaskina:

I should say that in Russia the situation was the same. We experienced an explosion of inward tourism. It was very interesting to observe how information on the windows of tourist agencies changed just in a couple of days. Yesterday Turkey, Bali, and Europe [were offered as tourist destinations], and the next day it would be the Northern Caucasus, the Black Sea, Adygea, and so on.

At this point in our discussion, we would like to highlight cases concerning different kinds of symbols, and I have an example of an object symbol. At different points of our discussion, we said that several parts of our daily lives would be with us after the pandemic ended. I think that there are some object symbols that will continue to be in our tradition. For example, in my city, in Rostov-on-Don, we have the case of Easter bread, or holy bread (*kulich*, *paska*). Last year, we were not able to consecrate this holy bread in churches because churches were closed. And people and church authorities thought about how to normalise this situation, in which people did not have their bread consecrated. It was decided that the clergy or priests would go to the bakeries and consecrate the bread there. Some of us baked it on our own, while others chose to buy it in stores. And so, some people had already pre-consecrated bread. And it was a surprise for me, in 2021, to go to the store and to find consecrated bread there. There was an inscription mentioning that the bread was already consecrated. Today people do have the permission to go to the church and get their bread consecrated, but nevertheless, they also have the option to buy this already consecrated bread and not go to the church.

Irina Stahl:

That is amazing, and is related to our next year's Riga conference on commerce and traditions.¹¹ Because I have been taking pictures of all kinds of traditional foods that I have been able to find in the supermarket lately, like painted eggs, which were unimaginable a few years ago. Everybody used to paint their own eggs for Easter. Why should you buy already painted eggs [when the idea was to paint them yourself]? But these products were recently introduced [to the market], and now, this year, we had them till Pentecost, so they were available for several weeks after Easter, which is again a new thing; we did not have them before. We do not have any blessed [food] articles. I do not believe I have seen any. But we do have pre-blessed icons. That is the case of the small paper icons that people carry with them in their wallets or in their bags. They have an inscription saying they were [previously] blessed. So, it is similar.

Daria Radchenko:

Actually, [in Russia] there were consecrated holy breads available in stores even before COVID. What is also interesting to me is that it is not only this kind of industrial consecration, which was done, of course, on a larger scale during and after COVID, but also the increase in the agency of laypeople, because when the lockdown started, the clergy distributed instructions on how to bless ritual food, the Easter ritual food, on one's own. And people used this opportunity. It was said that basically any adult Christian, preferably a male, could consecrate or bless the family's Easter food without going to the church. There was a huge discussion on social media and among my research participants: is this an actual blessing or just a substitution? But many people were very happy about this, happy that they did not have to go to the church to do this, that they could do this by themselves. I also had one interesting case where a priest distributed information among his parish that he would bless the food online via Zoom. He said one should place his or her food in front of the screen, holy water and some supplies to sprinkle the food while the priest reads the prayers online. This is a question for me of how agency is distributed between the circles of the process: laypeople, the clergy, and the industries around rituals.

Emese Ilyefalvi:

Was this water holy, in this case?

Daria Radchenko:

Normally, a lot of people who go to church frequently have some supply of holy water at home from January, when we celebrate the Baptism of Christ, so a lot of people go to the church with huge bottles to have some holy water at home,

because some people use it on a daily basis, and some people cook with it, as a beneficial spiritual practice, or at the least sprinkle their foods. So, many people who are frequent churchgoers have some holy water at home. I think that the priest relied on this supply.

Dzheni Madzharov:

I want to make a summary of what has been said up to this moment, because everybody has shared his or her personal experience or the experience of research that they conducted. For me, the idea of the future is interesting. Yesterday, I started to ask the question: what will the situation be like when the pandemic is over? Will it change our everyday lives? Will anything remain of it in the pattern of our culture, or in the model of our culture? At the moment, I see some changes happening in the spheres like [the nature of] workplaces, [mass emergence of] home offices, etc., and [a new mass trend that] more people prefer to work in home offices. Or, maybe [the practice applied] in education [will change completely]. You see, in education changes started very rapidly, and the result is very interesting. Maybe there will be some changes in the future. So, we have to think about the consequences of this COVID-19 disease. How will it evolve in the future? How will it influence our future? Will it change or will it be the same? Because in some spheres, I suppose it will be just the same situation because we will forget the disease and our personal connections will be restored. We will go to festivals just the same way because everything will be open for us. There will be no regrets, and nothing will prevent us from doing the same things again in the future. So, we will have to think a little bit differently. What will the [permanent, not temporary] result be after everything that we have seen up to this moment?

Nina Vlaskina:

I think there are also differences, as Irina Sedakova said. We have different opinions and cases, and the situation may be different. I think this is the time when our previous experience does not always lead us to the scenarios that we expected. As in Anamaria Iuga's example, who thought that the [*Căluș*] ritual would be abandoned, but, on the contrary, [observed that] the ritual was still performed. I would like to ask Ana: What about other holidays? Were the venues of other holidays during the pandemic in your country the same [as previously]? A couple of days ago, your colleague told us that in Romania some official celebrations were forbidden, but at local places they remained to be held.

Anamaria Iuga:

Yes, it is true. For example, at the beginning of Lent, we have a custom that entails masks, a carnival. I had been to the villages near Bucharest, and I knew that, officially, the carnival was forbidden, and the festival that is connected to the ritual was not held, but at the same time people celebrated it. They masked themselves, went out, and had little fires the night before. So, on an official level, let us say, it could be that it is forbidden, but in private it is held. Just as you described. Another example is Christmas. We have this Christmas carolling tradition that is very vivid, and I know that it was forbidden officially, but people [participated in it] up to some hours. They went and visited some families, but you had to be at home by ten o'clock, so people visited each other and sang these Christmas carols. Not in such a manner as it used to be before, but they still followed the tradition. So, yes, there are many examples. For Pentecost, for this custom that we have now for the *Căluș*, there were no restrictions, because we have a very good situation with COVID at the moment, but I do not know if it will happen with the new Delta variant of COVID; the public restrictions will probably be activated again by the officials. So, there are always these two levels. Also, officials mainly think about organising festivals, so what is not allowed is organising festivals, the kinds of festivals that we have here in Romania, which are somehow a legacy of the communist times, where they involve a lot of folkloric groups that are invited, and the public. So, a festival involves a lot of people, but if we think only of the custom, how it is held outside the context of the festival, people kind of avoided these restrictions or were allowed to avoid them.

Irina Sedakova:

Just a very small comment: one strategy to avoid restrictions. I gave a paper in Tartu, and I showed the Epiphany bathing in icy waters (Sedakova & Stahl 2022: 206). This winter, such baths were strictly prohibited in Moscow, but people went to the Moscow region, where they were not prohibited. Can you find anybody in the Moscow region in Russia? It is so big. So people did not follow the restrictions.

Irina Stahl:

So, they are just switching the spaces, changing the space, finding a new one.

Irina Sedakova:

Exactly, yes. It is a strategy to go to another place, another church, et cetera.

Nina Vlaskina:

I think that even the church has to change many things. If I may say something on behalf of my colleague Irina Kuznetsova, who has not had an opportunity to be here; she told me that there was a huge discussion among the [Russian Orthodox] clergy about objects and the symbolic meaning of objects. For example, there is a tradition to share the spoon and to use the same spoon and the same part of the tissue during Holy Communion. For most people, it was not a matter of which spoon to use, but for the clergy it was really a question of faith. Because if you do not believe that you cannot get ill from [having the communion from the same] spoon, then you do not believe in God, because God could not allow people to become ill from sharing one spoon. So, it was not a matter of objects, but a greater matter of one's faith. And in different parishes, the problem was solved in various ways. For example, in Irina's parish [of St. Elijah's Church in Krasnodar, Russia], there were disposable spoons; in other parishes, they used sanitisers or somehow cleaned the spoons.

Irina Stahl:

We had a huge discussion in Romania about the Eucharist. And the decision of the church was that they did not absolutely want to change it for fear that it might remain changed later on. The general idea is that the Orthodox clergy never change [the established] rituals, so they did not even want to discuss it. They said discussions with the other sister churches were ongoing, but the decision was never made public. Priests continued to give people the Eucharist in private, though they were avoiding doing it in a group, after the liturgy; however, in private, after parishioners had confessed, they were giving it to them. And I think they tried as much as possible to keep the spoons clean. But there was also the idea that a healing gesture by definition could not make you ill. They did not want to change this paradigm. It was supposed to heal you. God cannot allow a holy object or a holy ritual to make you sick. So yes, it was a question of belief, and I addressed that on several occasions, and I have not gotten any answers, so the answer was kind of avoided. It was just a taboo subject. Nobody wanted to discuss it because it is a matter of faith. But then we cannot just pretend that we do not know any scientific results, and there are quite a few studies on this topic. I read some studies about Hindu [and other religious] customs that were meant to be holy (Pellerin & Edmond 2013), but instead infected people with various diseases, so the disease was transmitted through the rituals. We cannot pretend we, as scientists, do not know about them. So, yes, there was a huge discussion on this matter.

Irina Sedakova:

I think it is a huge *theological* question because it is discussed not only by parishioners, but also by scholars and by the priests on a very high level. I wonder what God thinks about it, but you know, priests act differently. In the Russian Christian Orthodox churches, there are many priests who do give communion with disposable plastic spoons. And every receiver [of the Sacrament] has his or her own tissue to wipe the mouth.

Irina Stahl:

I found out that the Finnish Orthodox church is using disposable wooden spoons too, and they recycle them afterwards, so I thought that was interesting. It is really up to each parish or each church to make the decision. And this is not a singular case in history. We experienced a similar situation in Romania, in Bucharest, in the nineteenth century, during the plague, when communion was banned. The priests were kept from giving communion to people. So, this is not the first interdiction of its kind. It is strange that we have had so many tragedies and so many pandemics up to this point and we have still not found a solution. Or more precisely, the church should [think of] find[ing] a solution for this kind of situation in the future.

Nina Vlaskina:

We have some comments in the chat. One comment is from Joanna Lipińska. She says that in some churches in Poland, the priests insisted that there was no COVID or that the holy water would heal it, and they were against not allowing the use of holy water when entering the church. Yes, it is also a matter of sharing things. Tania Matanova says that [in Bulgaria] there were also discussions about the Eucharist. So, it is a kind of international issue.

Anamaria Iuga:

I know that one Orthodox priest [in Romania] said that it is allowed to give the Eucharist with the same spoon because it is a silver spoon and cannot contain any viruses.

Irina Stahl:

Silver destroys most bacteria, [that is true] but not viruses. It is science versus religion at this point. We are moving on and will discuss the methodological question. I believe everybody here has something to say. We all had our problems in our fieldwork during this period, and we wanted to discuss with you the way in which you adapted your methodology.

Maybe I can start by sharing a few of my problems with the counting of people attending pilgrimages (Stahl 2022). I had to change my methodology several times and tried to cope with the unexpected news of no access [to people who did not stay in the line of pilgrims who were waiting to touch the relics and pray at them]. First of all, the thing that I had problems with was the mask and my glasses getting fogged. It was a huge thing because I could not take the mask off, and I could not see through my glasses, so counting people from a distance was quite difficult. And also, the fact that I could not keep my usual spot because for several years already I had had my own rituals of studying rituals. I used to go to the same place and do the same things. And this year it was impossible: not [being allowed to] approach or getting close to the relics was a major issue for me. So, I had to adapt and invent. For instance, in the case of Saint Demetrius [celebrations last year], the police initially announced that the flow of pilgrims will only run one way: you entered one way [the access alley to the Patriarchal Palace at the bottom of the hill] and you exited the other way [the other side of the hill, through the back gate]. I thought, “Oh, that’s going to be easy. I’ll just go to the back gate and count”. But it was not that easy because I soon realised that many people [were breaking the rule because they] wanted to go back the same way they came. So, I had to do it in two sequences: I counted people exiting the back gate, and then I went and counted people exiting through the front alley. These are the kinds of examples in which you have to be inventive and find new ways on the spot because you cannot do what you would have done normally.

Joanna Lipińska:

One of my main problems was that the UK was closed for quite a long time, and I conducted my research both in Poland and in the UK. I got a scholarship that I could not use. The other thing is that the open rituals were usually held in London, and all those rituals were cancelled, so they had to move online. On the one hand, it is easier because I can stay at home and watch it. But on the other hand, I cannot approach people to just ask them to talk to me about something, so I cannot make new contacts easily. So, yes, that is a huge problem.

Daria Radchenko:

I would like to talk about the specifics of conducting interviews via various technical devices, such as Zoom or Skype, and being distant. What I noticed during this work was, of course, not only that the process was so much quicker and [more] convenient, because I could talk to people living in different cities and conduct the interviews in a very short time, but [I could] also [notice] the effect of this type of work on the results of the interviews. In my experience, the

majority of my research participants were unknown to me beforehand. I just recruited them on Facebook. I made a post on Facebook and asked everyone who wanted to talk about this experience of online Easter to write me a note, and then we could arrange an interview. So, [there indeed] was the problem of establishing mutual confidence in a very short time, online, without any kind of physical contact, without being there in the same space and having to deal with the technical ruptures. The latter problem was particularly important because the connection might be different, the quality of connection, and if the connection is lost and we have to re-establish it somehow, to repair the connection, the kind of psychological connection also fails, and we have to repair that as well. We return to what we have been talking about, the emotional state we have been in, because again, this topic is really sensitive. And it is no secret that people are very emotionally involved. I had situations of great emotional involvement from both sides: from my side as the researcher and a believer, and from my research participants.

But on the other hand, what was interesting was the addition [degree] of confidence [established between me and the participant] due to the fact that we both, unplanned, chose to interact from our private spaces. One thing is that private space ensures a feeling of safety for the research participant. He or she is at home and can stop the interview at any time, which is not possible during physical contact. One does not have to go somewhere in some public space and can talk openly because no one would hear him except the researcher. And another thing is that we have the opportunity to observe the inside of each other's private space. So, for me, it was important because my research participants could show me the space where they celebrated Easter: where the icons were, where they put the gadget, and what the specifics of the space were. But for them, it was equally important to look inside my private space. I conducted the interviews from the very same room I am in now. And I had the bookshelves in the background. And they looked at my bookshelves, and actually commented on them. They somehow enhanced my status as a researcher because they saw professional books [in the background]. They asserted that my experience and my knowledge were confirmed: "Yes, this is a researcher!" I could not confirm it myself in any other way; no one recommended me; it was just Facebook; you can deal with anybody on Facebook. Or some people would comment on items on my shelves: statues or pictures, asking me to show them closer to the screen, et cetera. So, we could establish a kind of unofficial, informal relationship between us. And I even had a very nice experience when, again, not being physically present in the private space of the research participant, I was still there in some sense, because her cat came up to look at the digital screen and my research participant commented that the cat would not normally do that.

“Probably,” she said, “she likes you.” The cat confirmed my good intentions as well. This sounds a bit anecdotal, but I really think that it is methodologically important how this brief change from the formal to informal situation, a mutual intervention from the private space, enhances this confidence between the researcher and the research participant.

Emese Ilyefalvi:

I really experienced the same [thing] during my interviews. However, I met everybody once, in real life, before I did the Zoom interviews. But it was my experience that they were much more intimate than my other interviews in real life. So, that was a great experience for me. What I would like to add, [an issue] which was problematic for me during this research, is how to avoid being continuously involved in participant observation on Facebook. Because sometimes it was really hard to draw a line [and say to myself] that I am not a researcher, I am just hanging on Facebook, but I [still] followed all the Christian congregations and ministers and priests from Hungary and all the other people. And it was sometimes hard because I said [to myself] that I was always sitting at the computer, hanging on Facebook, and I did not know if there was any qualitative difference [between] when I was a participant observing online, or now [when] I am just using the Internet.

Daria Radchenko:

There are quite a few papers and books on digital ethnography and multisite ethnography which focus on this. As for me, I am accustomed to this because, generally, the sphere I am working in is digital anthropology. So, spending time online and on Facebook while being paid for it is a familiar situation for me. But still, there are huge discussions on how this difference in involvement works in this situation. Here, I think that it is important that we are all in the same situation. It is not that we artificially stick to Facebook or whatever while all the rest of people’s activities are actually undertaken offline. This is different. The activity is online.

The problem for me is how to find the fields in which to conduct participant observation. Because, for example, in my experience, what I started with this research was the celebration of Easter online. Because I am a Russian Orthodox, a believer, I was naturally involved in the process. My first motivation was to participate in the service as much as I could via live stream. But of course, the “anthropologist mode” switched on immediately, and I started to keep my field diary, making screenshots, thinking of what was going on not only as a service but also as a field I am in. The problem is that we cannot be everywhere at the same time. For example, I have investigated lots of videos which were actually

live streams on Easter night. But I did this (the live streams, the accompanying chats, all sorts of materials) later on, a few weeks after Easter. And this makes us think about the difference between experience in the moment, which is actually participant observation, and working with the digital archive, which is exactly what I did later. I am trying to investigate what was going on in other churches, in other cities, and probably in some other countries. The digital archive allows us this illusion that we are still there, in this moment. But, of course, I think it is methodologically important to reflect on the differences in our experience (the key instrument of anthropologists), to think about the emotions, and the differences in involvement that we have during this kind of work with archived material online.

Irina Stahl:

I have to say that during the lockdown, the main feeling that I had was that of frustration that I could not go and take pictures. I was really frustrated because you could see a few pictures in the media [so obviously some people were granted access]. I thought: How did they do it? Of course, journalists usually have a tag with “Media” on them [which provides them unlimited access during pilgrimages]. But we, researchers, we do not carry any tag, and we are not granted unlimited access. So, it was very frustrating, because I really wanted to take pictures during the pandemic [in order to document my studies]. At that point, I did not really think of the virus as much as I thought of the fact that I needed to be there [and document], but I could not. Later on, when access was granted, my main concern during fieldwork was how not to be arrested, how not to be noticed by the police agents, because it was forbidden to remain stationary. And if they saw you, they started asking questions. What could I have told them? That I am a researcher, that I work at the [Romanian] Academy? They would certainly not have made any exceptions for me. So, yes, you have to find ways for being there or not being there and dealing with your emotions.

Judit Balatonyi:

At the beginning of my research (Balatonyi 2022), I planned a big classic ethnographic fieldwork in open areas, but then COVID reached Hungary as well as other European countries. So, I was happy because, from the very beginning of my research, I began my digital ethnographic fieldwork in a lot of Facebook groups, so I changed my focus and I tried to be more focused on this digital sphere. I wrote a lot of letters to admins and wedding planning groups, telling them I was an anthropologist and I wanted to be there as a researcher [online]. That was my situation in this field, so I began to do ethnographic research, of course, mainly on Facebook, and I tried to attend a lot of webinars and seminars.

There was a boom in these seminars in the sphere of wedding planning. A lot of wedding service providers tried to make money, spend money, and so on. They tried to do a lot of webinars, so I participated on these occasions. And of course, I tried to conduct a lot of in-depth interviews with wedding service providers and with brides. It was very interesting. Emese Ilyefalvi and I also conducted online surveys. It was a very new situation for me, and also I think that all ethnographies and anthropologies are very interesting. [While I was working with questionnaires], it was a question for me how the results could be ethnographically relevant and deep. What were they for? So, for the methodological aspect, I think a lot about the possible ways of using these kinds of results in ethnography. I have a question: who among us has dealt with the online questionnaire before, in this COVID situation, or is using it now?

Mare Kõiva:

I am.

Emese Ilyefalvi:

It was the first time for me to do the online questionnaire.

Nina Vlaskina:

Was it as effective as the questionnaire for the interview offline? Was it as effective as you thought it could be?

Judit Balatonyi:

Yes.

Irina Stahl:

Did they have to fill it in by themselves or was it an online interview?

Emese Ilyefalvi:

They could fill in my questionnaire themselves.

Irina Stahl:

Did they fill in all of it? Because that is the problem with the [online] questionnaires. Many questions are left unanswered.

Emese Ilyefalvi:

Almost all questions were converse, and I was shocked that research participants filled it all in, but they did. I do not know why, because it was very long. But they did, and we got a lot of mini-essays about their feelings and opinions.

The questionnaire had 70 questions. I know that it was a really unorthodox questionnaire. I mean, this is a very good example of what happens when a folklorist or anthropologist starts to use online questionnaires. I do not want just one word, answers, or just clicking options. So now, this is why we are still analysing the material.

Daria Radchenko:

I also have a question, Emese. How did you recruit the research participants for this questionnaire? Did you know them prior to that or did you just spread the word?

Emese Ilyefalvi:

The online questionnaire was spread out everywhere in Hungary, so it had a very good media impact, which is why we had a lot of data. But for the interviews, yes, I did my fieldwork in my own congregation and another one in the same county. Actually, for the interviews, I chose people close to my age, plus or minus ten years. So, it was easy because I knew, or a friend of a friend knew, her or him. But I tried to choose ministers and leaders of the congregation as well as just average members of the congregation.

Judit Balatonyi:

I published Google forms online with a self-completion questionnaire as a paid aid on Facebook. As Laura Iannelli and her colleagues wrote, “survey-based studies are increasingly experimenting with strategies that employ digital footprints left by users on social media as entry points for recruiting participants and complementary data sources” (Iannelli et al. 2020: 462). In my case, the target group was defined as being between the ages of 20 and 60, residents of Hungary, engaged or newly married, and interested in marriage and weddings. So, I tried to use this strategy to catch people on Facebook as a paid aid. And it was successful.

Nina Vlaskina:

Dear colleagues, thank you very much for your contributions. In fact, our time is almost up, and we need to draw some conclusions and say our final words. Firstly, I would like to thank all the participants in all the parts of our panel. Because it was a really fruitful discussion, many new thoughts were generated.

Irina Stahl:

I found the discussions very motivating and interesting yesterday and today as well. It was an unusual situation, and we were fortunate, as researchers,

to experience this pandemic. We need to draw some conclusions. This was a great opportunity for us to face our fieldwork and our studies and to see them in a different way. It is an awakening moment for the entire society and also for us as researchers. And it should force us to go to the core of our research and our activities and question everything. Usually, a crisis situation leads to a lot of reflection. And this is what we tried to do here today with this roundtable, which was an unusual format that we have never had before, but I find it very stimulating, this kind of brainstorming. And I think we all have to think about what was said today, quietly in our own private spaces, reflect and try to summarise the whole thing.

Irina Sedakova:

I am trying to be a realist, not a pessimist; even more, I am trying to put forward some optimistic things. When we are speaking about the future, as Dzheni Madzharov asked us, I think that this time is giving us some opportunities which will last as an option. They will last as a new methodology, not brand new but improved. Like Daria Radchenko put it, having a mass at home and looking at the details of her ‘religious’ interior, meanwhile discussing the anthropology of things besides other issues [she receives a wider scientific picture of the topic studied].

[The pandemic changed the activity of scholars to a certain extent.] This lockdown time of the pandemic was additionally given to us, the scholars who have already had some time to think over the material that we have already gained. This extra time allowed many people to finalise and publish books, which is wonderful. There are many scholars who stopped doing field research and finally had the time to sum up the studies [and to develop new ideas, following the new circumstances].

With the very best wishes and many thanks to the organisers, I say bye-bye and good luck with the new methodology and the old one [in researching traditional and innovative topics].

NOTES

¹ A detailed review of the congress by Alexander Novik, Irina Sedakova and Anastasia Kharlamova (2022) as well as several papers of the SIEF participants are published in this issue.

² The video recording of the roundtable is available online at https://youtu.be/_hOmDR1_3Po, last accessed on 20 September 2022.

³ The subsequent text is, for the most part, a literal transcript of the roundtable meeting. Minor changes were made to correct errors natural to the flow of oral speech and to

exclude transitional words when the conveners turn the floor over to the next person. Words that were omitted from the direct speech but important for understanding the general meaning of the statement are put in square brackets.

- ⁴ The first two sessions of the panel “Old Rituals, Changing Environments, New Rules” of the 15th SIEF Congress “Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression” were held on 22 June 2021. Video recordings are available online at <https://youtu.be/4isH8EWira4> and <https://youtu.be/Fmei6WPcuOc>, last accessed on 20 September 2022.
- ⁵ Žilvytis Šaknys delivered a paper on this topic, titled “Real Holiday? Pandemic Easter – Lithuanian Case” to the Panel “Perf03b Old Rituals, Changing Environments, New Rules II” of the 15th SIEF Congress titled “Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression”.
- ⁶ Emese Ilyefalvi delivered a paper on this topic under the heading “Online Rituals of Practicing Religion: The Effects of COVID-19 on Hungarian Religious Communities” at the panel “Perf03b Old Rituals, Changing Environments, New Rules II” of the 15th SIEF Congress titled “Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression”.
- ⁷ Joanna Lipińska delivered a paper “Wiccan Rituals in the Time of Pandemics: How Witches Decided to Move on the Web” at the panel “Rel03 New Agents, New Agency: How to Study ‘Post-Secular’ Religious Ontologies” of the 15th SIEF Congress “Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression”. The video recording of this panel is available online at <https://youtu.be/P58xFcPzIWM>, last accessed on 20 September 2022.
- ⁸ English Heritage is a company that cares for over 400 historic buildings, monuments and sites in England, including Stonehenge.
- ⁹ Stonehenge visiting hours are 9:30–19:00.
- ¹⁰ Saaremaa Opera Festival is organised by Eesti Konsert annually since 2008 in July in Castle Yard (Lossihoov), Kuressaare city, Saaremaa parish, Saare County, Estonia.
- ¹¹ The 14th Conference of the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group, “Commerce and Traditions” was held in Riga, Latvia, on 1–4 June 2022, and was hosted by the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia, the Archives of Latvian Folklore, and the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group. The information on the event is available at <http://en.lfk.lv/RY2022-commerce-and-traditions>, last accessed on 20 September 2022.

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