

## Constructing Contemporary Periodical and Occasional Rituals

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This paper investigates and compares two kinds of contemporary rituals: 1) the native (pagan, new spiritual movements) periodical rituals performed around equinoxes and solstices, and 2) occasional rituals performed by masters of new rituals. The aim of the paper is to re-evaluate and deconstruct these rituals using Hobsbawm and Ranger's concept of invented tradition (1983) and studies of new religiosity/spirituality. The structure of ritual, text and presentation settings of four ritual masters of different world views are highlighted, aimed at mapping the similarities and the differences between these religious and spiritual phenomena. Part of the rituals under investigation were dedicated primarily to solstices and astronomical bodies, or their text reflected interconnections of celestial bodies and human culture.

**Key words:** incantation, new spiritual movement, prayer, ritual

### Introduction

The article continues observation on microscripts of new rituals celebrating equinoxes and occasional rituals. One of the common denominators selected for this article is the making of verbal connection between the ritual and astronomic phenomena. Today, appeals addressing the Sun, the Moon and other astronomical bodies and phenomena form an indelible part of new religious and cultural rituals. At the beginning of 20th century, verbal charming was used for medical purposes, magical enhancement of household efficacy (intended to bring about economic success, especially with cattle keeping and agriculture) or to increase wealth. The core of a typical ritual consisted of a prayer/appeal, incantation or short formula of verbal magic addressing the sun or the moon. Astral bodies other than the sun and the moon were addressed less frequently and usually by the common denominator *täht* 'star'. The invariant messages in rituals addressing the astronomical bodies pertained to their status and attributed powers. The belief system based on analogy magic related lunar phases with respectively growing (waxing) and

diminishing (waning) powers, while the so-called inter-moon period (new moon) had additional significance. Also, vernacular belief considered solar light to carry different healing and repelling energies at dawn, sunset and midday. For example, certain activities were forbidden at dawn and sunset (e.g., hanging clothes to dry outside) while others (e.g., healing tumours and illnesses on the surface of the body) were encouraged. In addition to the time of conducting a ritual, its duration and temporal sequence of elements, i.e. the timing and temporal structure of rituals was significant (e.g., about incantations see Kõiva 2009).

Texts and customs dwindling from active use were adapted for modern society already in the early 20th century. At the same time, new spiritual movements inscribed the society with newly created practices. This was not a single event but rather a repetitive enhancement and reinterpretation of earlier texts, concepts and rituals in order to inscribe them into modern society. Eric Hobsbawm has noted that the most interesting feature of the phenomenon of invention is the use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes (Hobsbawm 1983: 6). In the cases under examination (selected rituals from the 1980s to date), rituals are tailored to resemble traditions of the past but they have many innovative integrated parts and elements.

While terms connected with new spirituality and native (indigenous, Pagan, Neo-Pagan) religiosity vary greatly, I have here taken the view that they are coherent sets of beliefs and practices (e.g. Hanegraaff 1996, Heelas 1996, Harvey 1997, Greenwood 2000, York 2001, Blain 2002, Wallis 2003, Heelas and Woodhead 2005, Wallis 2010, etc.) through which a movement comprises/converges a variety of traditions. Academically, they are sets of discourses and practices providing their followers or disciples standpoints from which to engage with the social worlds, ritual practices, and concepts with which to develop these engagements (c.f. Wallis 2010).

Emphasis on and special celebration of equinoxes as a critical time is supported by different cultural phenomena<sup>1</sup>, new religious practices in particular. Many of the theorists listed above have considered celebration of equinoxes to be one of the distinguishing markers of New Age or spiritual movements (Hanegraaff 1997, Heelas and Woodhead 2005, Wallis 2010). Based on Estonian material, I can

affirm that equinox celebration in recent decades has been promoted by various official, state institutions and the media, and seems to be one of the cultural markers of our times. It is also among the traditions which folk healers and mediums have introduced as a part of vernacular new rituals.

Renowned religion researcher Roy Rappaport has defined ritual as a unique structure despite the fact that none of its elements – performance, invariance, formality – belong to it alone. Rituals consist of self-referential messages; invariant additional messages, although transmitted by the participants, are not encoded by them (Rappaport 1997).

This paper investigates and compares two kinds of contemporary rituals: 1) the rituals performed around equinoxes and solstices, and 2) occasional rituals; often performed by masters of new rituals for different purposes and in different settings, different private and public rituals from the 1990s until 21st century. The structure of ritual, text and presentation settings of four ritual masters of different world views are highlighted: Vigala Sass (1941–2016), Thule Lee (b. 1972), Urmas Sisask (b. 1960), Igor Mang (b. 1949); additionally, ritual practices of other significant practitioners are referred to (Ene Lukka-Jegikjan, Helve Laksberg, Heie Tuli, Mikk Sarv, Errol Vares) with the aim of mapping the similarities and the differences between these religious and cultural phenomena. Part of the rituals under investigation were dedicated primarily to solstices and astronomical bodies, or their text reflected interconnections of celestial bodies and human culture.

### **1) The rituals performed around equinoxes and solstices**

In many European countries sets of beliefs and practices that could be called native religiosity emerged and bloomed in the early 20th century. In the Estonian case, the religious movement called *Taara-usk* (Taara-belief), complete with rituals, ritual objects and sacred groves emerged in the 1920s (Vakker 2013). During and after WW2, many of the leaders of these religious movements emigrated from Estonia. The tradition was carried on in exile: in Canada, USA, Australia and elsewhere. These traditions were also part of the so-called forest universities<sup>2</sup> that were regarded as ethnically

important continuation of ancient traditions and honouring of forefathers. Meanwhile in Estonia, after the Republic of Estonia was annexed to the Soviet Union in 1940, the pagan believers were one of the groups deemed dangerous for the new regime and therefore forcibly deported to Siberia. Those that survived the Siberian prison camps returned in the 1950s. It is very difficult to give an accurate overview of the activities of small alternate religious groups in the 1940s and 50s. However, after Estonia regained independence in 1992, paganism underwent an explosive revival.

In late 20th century, a new native religious movement emerged beside the *taara-usk*, spearheaded by young people with different educational background and attitudes – *maausk*. The new movement shared several touching points with analogous Baltic movements. The dynamic nature and variety of branches of paganism has been overviewed by many scholars, but it nevertheless seems important to point out that even close geographical neighbours sprouted unique strains of paganism (cf Strimbska 2005, Krumina-Konkova & Gills 2010, etc.). Still, recent times have seen some coordination and homogenization (in, for example, rituals of welcoming the Sun at solstice in Latvia and Estonia) due to reciprocal visits and discussion among leaders (Kõiva 2014).<sup>3</sup>

The end of the Soviet era and late 20th century is characterised by a boom of spiritual and religious self-seeking, trainings, autodidactic acquisition of religious knowledge and different techniques. Equally important were the charismatic leaders and the individual contributions of participants. Some researchers (e.g., van Gulik 2010, Hubbes & Bakó 2011) have emphasised the creativity of the participants of new religious movements. In the Estonian case this meant creativity in establishing new locations, new topographies and establishing models appropriate for rituals, complete with all the related elements and choosing structural templates. Sites embedded with new sacrality were established under the leadership of institutions and leaders. New spiritual movements also attributed value to old cult sites as well as a number of historical, archaeological and cultural memorials, initiating their reinterpretation and introduction to modern sacral practice.

One of the pioneers in celebratory equinox rituals in late 1980s and early 1990s was the healer Vigala Sass or Sass of Vigala (legal name



*Vigala Sass performing a chant in 1990.  
Photo from private archive.*

Aleksander Heintalu) (1941–2016), who conducted the rituals in a cult site he established near his home in Triigi village, Saaremaa Island. His rituals reflect combinations of different religious and secular approaches. It is significant to note that the new rituals were a reinvention of older tradition with the help and on the bases of printed scholarly books and folklore archives. Some of his early rituals were solo performances where neither audience nor participants were welcomed (interviews 1990). During these sessions, Sass communicated with so-called tribal spirits (*hõimuvaimud*). One of his very first rituals he addressed the fire, and addressed the ritual the fire spirit and the elements connected with fire. Experientially, this was a significant step: to actually experiment with one's body and mind in order to comprehend what takes place during a ritual. In the case of the fire ritual, he was later fascinated by the fact that the hot coals he grabbed from the fire did not leave burn marks on his body or hands, as well as the accompanying mental process. He was deeply impressed and exalted by what happened. Other (equinox) rituals also offered him personal experiences with supernatural beings (e.g., the experience of meeting with spirits of the tribe (*hõimu vaimud*), in the course of which he received prophetic messages, experienced the fulfilment (or failure) of the ritual's purpose. Physically and mentally, descriptions of his experiences are reminiscent of those of North and East Siberian shamans' classic initiation and healing rites (cf., Bulgakova 1995, Gratševa 1993, et al). Later, Vigala Sass started to conduct equinox rituals with a definite group of people or with visitors. During his 1990s group rituals Vigala Sass insisted that equal numbers of women and men participate in a ritual as this would have a balancing effect.

At the same time the rituals were conducted, for example, in the Roiu holy site near Tartu. The establishing and introduction of this holy site with sacrificial stones surrounded by trees was the work of Heie Tuli, a conceptual thinker and practical applier of new spiritual practices. The incantation text and instructions for its performing were an original adaptation of the text Vigala Sass used for his rituals. The instruction taught how to give honour to the place, express piety and leave offerings to the stone.

To the same period dates the ritual site established by the healer Thule Lee (b. 1972) whose holy grove (*hiis*) lies in the farmstead of



*Thule Lee and her ritual space in Leesoja.  
Photo from private archive.*



Leesoja, situated in Varbla parish in western Estonia, well away from the larger cities and settlements. The Leesoja holy grove is among the oldest of the newly recreated sites. Thule Lee has been an important alternative healer since the 1990s and is an important figure in contemporary new spirituality. The ritual site blended elements from different cultures: straw dolls from older Estonian tradition, a miniature copy of the Stonehenge circle, a wagon wheel (symbolising the Sun) on top of a high pole, etc. Her ritual place comprises and invents details from local folk traditions, details from the models of other ritual masters. Her rituals, also, creatively combine her own mental and cognitive discoveries with models proposed by others. Rituals are conducted at solstice and equinoxes, the most important being rituals performed during the Midsummer Day (summer solstice). During that ritual all the World Mothers are called upon to take part in the ritual through special prayer; different small offerings (eggs, home-cooked bread, water, ribbons) are sacrificed. Strict rules concern both objects used during the ritual as well as the dress code – folk costume or long ritual skirts, scarves on heads and knife on the belt, talismans and jewellery (in more detail, Kõiva 2011).

In the 1990s, rituals dedicated to the Sun emerged simultaneously from several performers, and by no means were all of them healers, spiritual guides or people practicing new religions. In addition to new spiritual rituals, also rituals based on folk tradition appeared. I have discussed the rituals that cultural professional, teacher of folk traditions Ene Lukka-Jegikjan (b. 1954) restored and introduced (see Kõiva 2011 chapter on women's rituals). She started the process together with her students in 1996. The ritual dedicated to the Sun is a women-only celebration, which starts before 6 AM on Annunciation: before the sunrise in order to welcome the sun with the singing of old epic songs and performing a small charm dedicated to the Sun. A small sacrifice (tying a ribbon to a tree) follows the greeting. Later follows an indoor gathering with food and drink traditionally served on Annunciation. Requirements for ritual clothing are minimal but emphasise the importance of the event – the dress code calls for full or partial national costume. The structure and texture of Ene Lukka-Jegikjan's rituals does not differ much from those of new spiritual teachers. The largest difference lies in how the ritual site is used. Although she does regularly return to certain locations



to perform a certain ritual, she is a travelling ritual master – she does not participate in the creation of landscape-altering holy sites but rather brings the rituals to locally treasured cultural, natural or historical locations. Her role is, as is that of many other ritual masters, attribution of new functions and applications to ethnically and locally important places.

2014, the Estonian Annunciation sun-greeting ceremony was participated by organisers of a similar Latvian event. The Latvian women who joined the ritual performed songs in Latvian in parallel with the Estonian participants. The next day, students and interested parties were treated to an overview of how the sun is greeted in Riga, displaying videos and photos. Personally, I consider the conversations and discussions the ritual masters had the night before the event to be most significant. Folklore contains no ready-made models and creators of new rituals need to fill up a lot of so-called white space. During the discussion, both sides introduced their folkloric backgrounds, ritual texture and structure together with different choices and solutions (vt Kõiva 2014).

## **2) Occasional rituals**

In addition to cyclic and periodically repetitive rituals there are also occasion-based rituals with their distinctive florid array of details and network of solutions. Dedicated rituals are usually markedly ethnical, for example relating to ethnically significant objects and locations.

Since the late 1980s, rituals (with charming) have been an integral part of Estonian public events: group observation of natural phenomena, gatherings, cultural events dedicated to local history, concerts and cultural events, local markets, dedications of monuments, some political events but also public crises rituals. All technical aspects of this kind of rituals are commonly left to the care of the ritual master who conducts the ritual and compiles the verbal side of the ritual.

Well-known people are asked to conduct rituals accompanying public secular and spiritual events. Often, one of the earth believers, or a neo-shaman, leader of an alternative spiritual movement or other experienced ritual conductor is invited to perform the role of

the ritual master. Many counties and towns have their own ritual masters of wider renown who are commonly contracted. For example, Urmas Sisask (b. 1960) has directed various rituals.<sup>4</sup>

Urmas Sisask is a well-known composer, but also amateur astronomer. Urmas Sisask started to observe the night sky as an early teenager. He has reminisced that walking home from school by himself he used to admire the grandiose beauty of the starry sky. The starry sky remained a constant source of inspiration throughout his life. A significant portion of his music is dedicated to constellations and phenomena of the starry sky. While performing his pieces and on stage, Urmas Sisask adds a narrative part to his music. This combines myths of different nations and a personal blend of religious and spiritual explanation models. However, he has the skills of a storyteller and his performed myths are individually ordered, blended and retold variants.

From the 1990s till early 21st century, he owned an amateur observatory in the Jäneda manor house. In the tower he had the equipment for star watching. He used to perform a piano concert at the Jäneda tower, followed by an observation night, introducing various astral myths, sometimes also performing a ritual.

Urmas Sisask has also conducted dozens of public rituals in places other than his observatory. He has been invited to opening ceremonies of new monuments, study camps, events of science school, musical events, etc.

Urmas Sisask does have a teacher whose rituals were the example he followed in order to perfect his own, and who has been his partner in discussion of spiritual issues. His teacher is one of the leaders of the reinvention of authentic folklore, and folk song culture, but also the importer and teacher of core-shamanism, Mikk Sarv (b. 1950). Mikk Sarv, in turn, has good knowledge of the religion and beliefs of Estonian, native Siberian peoples, and Sami peoples, both from literature and first-hand fieldwork. He belonged to the network of friends working on the reinstitution of ancient Scandinavian culture, music and religion, teacher of new age spiritualism like Jonathan Horwitz. Mikk Sarv and Urmas Sisask both joined the Roman Catholic Church in the 1990s. The ritual texts of Sisask reflected the blending of old folklore texts and catholic motifs in

his improvised texts, but both men use drums to accompany their rituals, a characteristic feature of both Siberian and northern native cultures as well as neo-shamanistic and neo-spiritual movements (c.f., drumming, neo-shamanism and new spiritual movements in contemporary Siberia and close areas – Kharitonova 1999; 2002).

Rituals and verbal art performed by Urmas Sisask became a traditional part of the annual Estonian hobby astronomers' summertime Perseid-watching nights (since 1996). Participants include people of all ages, mostly male, most with a (hard) science degree and academic career. The locations of the annual meeting vary: every other year is in Tõravere, at the prominent Estonian Observatory, otherwise in different parts of the country featuring a significant natural monument. For observation purposes, distance from light pollution sources is important. Incantations are usually performed around 9 PM, before starry sky observation. Sometimes, if possible and permitted, a fire is lighted. So-called opening and introductory rituals are usually performed in a circle, moving in a manner reminiscent of that accompanying the singing of old traditional epic songs. Urmas Sisask acts as the master of the ritual, he is drumming and decanting the incantation or prayer. The incantation text uses elements of sun words, but also addresses nature spirits and the goddess mother, St Mary, uses some elements of canonical prayers, to mention some sources – verbal art is piecemeal converged from different cultural segments.

Sisask's drummed incantations to lure out the Sun or repel rain and clouds are also traditionally performed before the society trips abroad (1998 Hungary, 2007 Turkey, 2009 China) to observe a solar eclipse. Clear skies are a must for successful astronomical observations. The rituals prior to solar eclipse observation are performed by Urmas Sisask in solo. The soundscape of the ritual consists of drumming, using Buryatian throat singing, loudly performed adaptations of Estonian sun incantations, and other elements. In Turkey, in 2006, after the successful observation of the solar eclipse, the musical instruments used were a water bottle and screwdriver. His performance is syncretic using improvised dancing and archaic circular movement. Still, sometimes the participants join in the music-making: his drumming has been accompanied by someone playing a Jewish harp, for example. In fact, the whole group can be

involved in coaxing the sun by engaging in ancient circular movement (as happened in Turkey in 2007).

There are no requirements for ritual clothing. Urmas Sisask sometimes wears white linen clothing, which is close to traditional Estonian peasant men's wear. At other occasions he has worn urban casual costume. Vocals, drum and drumming is the main attributes typical to the rituals. At the opening of the monument to the Witch of Äksi he used a drum and Australian didgeridoo. One of his most publicised performances was the ritual performed to protect the Tuhala karst well from mining initiatives (see video clips on YouTube, Sisask 2012).

No offerings or other objects are used at the rituals, and the rituals were participated by local people and visitors.

Occasional rituals are converged, multi-layered and based on mixed ideas. In 2006, near the forestbound Elva Tervisekeskus (Elva Health Centre) an alley of wooden sculptures was opened for public use by the mayor of Elva.<sup>5</sup> The idea of the alley was inspired by the polytheistic Ancient Greece where statues of Gods stood near the stadium. The concept of a park of Earth Gods was proposed by local Elva artists Anni Irs and Mariina Tiidor who also designed the 18 statues of old Estonian deities. The statues, carved by various sculptors, were erected on two sides of the stadium where the longest Estonian ski marathon finishes. Estonian mythological beings have been turned into statues by way of different texts, signs, symbols as well as free-flying fantasy. Symbols have been cut into the gigantic statues and the foot of each statue feature its name.

Since only single fragments have survived of the pre-Christian Estonians theistic network, nature spirits (so-called mothers and fathers) have been elevated into members of the pantheon. The erected statues include the World Egg, the main god Taara as well as figures of wind and water mothers-fathers, etc. The statues feature visual cues typical of the sculpture of various Nordic and linguistically related nations' (Mordvinian, Mari) mythological wooden sculptures.

The usual inaugural speeches were followed by a public ritual directed by the Earth believer and poetess Kauksi Ülle. Poetess emphasised at the beginning of the syncretic ritual uniting vari-



*A sun-ritual lead by Urmas Sisask in Turkey, 2007. The whole group is involved in coaxing the sun by engaging in ancient circular movement. Photo from private archive.*



ous official and unofficial institutions and textual discourses that this religious undertaking of the Earth Believers must be taken in full seriousness. The public observed the sacred performance sedately. For many, this was the first contact with native religion. The verbal part comprised an adaptation of and expansion on an epic runic song: a long prayer text that addressed the statues. The ritual master was assisted by women wearing national costume and holding a bucket of thickened juice and a basket of pies: every statue was treated to a ladleful of thickened juice and a pie was laid at its feet. At the end of the ritual, Kauksi Ülle addressed the public, calling on them to tie ribbons on the sculptures, explaining the significance of the ribbon colours and the action itself. Most of the public participated.

The other ritual example comes from 2014, May, Tallinn in honour of 20 years of Maaema Mess (Earth Mother Fair)<sup>6</sup>. A ritual with open fire was conducted by the organizer of event – Helve Laksberg, but the parts of ritual being conducted by different ritual masters. The multipart ritual took place on top of the Skåne Bastion, the mightiest Baroque fortification building in Tallinn Old City. The public included people differing in world views and age, former performers and organisers of the fair. Maaema Mess is a mixed event where teachers and representatives of various alternative spiritual schools, folk healers as well as sellers of eco- and health products meet – the whole event is a big market place and forum. The Mess is traditionally accompanied by a number of events: conference, cultural program with films and physical trainings, exhibitions and workshops.

The public ritual was opened by the Earth Believer, Errol Varres, using a shaman drum and communicating with fire. He circled the fire addressing sprites, forefathers and various old powers. Next, Helve Laksberg picked six worthy male participants to break up and distribute a loaf of bread she had baked, and six women for another loaf. Some bread was placed on the grass for the Earth Mother. The next section was conducted by Igor Mang (b. 1949), Scion of Christ, astrologer and lector at the Estonian Astrological School. For the past 22 years, Igor Mang has conducted magical rituals in the medieval fort Varbola at the four solstices every year. At Maaema Mess, he has given lectures on lifestyle and astrology.

He conducted his portion of the ritual at the Skane Bastion, sharing wine from a self-made clay cup, chanting one of his best known ritual texts with participants repeating the verses in chorus. His ritual addressing the planets and the Sun has been broadcast by commercial TV programs. At the start of the Bastion ritual, he asked the participants to form groups according to their zodiacal signs, and then chant:

*I am prepared for cooperation with the cosmos . . .*

*Exalted Sun*

*Motherly and caring Moon*

*Smart Mercury*

*Lovable Venus*

*Courageous and dapper Mars*

*Rich Jupiter*

*Dutiful Saturn*

*Genius Uranus*

*Mystical and musical Neptune*

*And magical Pluto*

*Fill this cup with your best forces  
and features*

*Everyone that takes a sip from this cup*

*Partakes of this shared power*

This was followed by a short informal blessing by Helve Laksberg and the ritual was declared finished. Participants dispersed, some went on to gathering while people from peripheral Estonian regions started on their way home.

## Conclusions

The article discussed seasonal rituals and occasional rituals, also the rituals addressing astronomical objects. Rituals related to pivotal periods of the calendar year and astral phenomena are merely one small segment of all contemporary rituals. Wouter Hanegraaff (1996) emphasises the distinctive feature that new spiritual movements rely on past traditions. Appreciation of past mentality is a feature also highlighted by Paul Heelas and Woodhead (2005): one whole branch of British Paganism is stamped by re-use of archaeological monuments (c.f., Wallis 2010). Eric Hobsbawm declared,



based on much broader data that the most interesting feature of the invention of tradition phenomena is “the use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes” (1983: 6). Although he did not investigate new spirituality the definition also fits here. He declared that invented tradition is a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historical past (Hobsbawm 1983: 1–2).

During the last decade, more attention has been paid to construction and invention of new religions in East European countries as they emerged from the Socialist period (Aitamurto & Scott 2013, Shnirelman 2002, Hubbes & Bakó 2011, etc.). In Eastern Europe essence of regional religiosity is reconstruction of local or native pantheons that are strongly related to (national) identity. The newer trends, e.g. Slavic native religions, have received more attention while their relations with early 20th or late 19th century movements have been largely obscure. It is only recently that the activities of various teachings and schools have been analysed and described (e.g., studies published by the ISORECEA in 2014).

In the case of Estonia, the movements are extremely heterogeneous their leaders differ in world view. They blend different discourses and their teaching forms complicated networks. In the Estonian case the process is tinged by the fact that elements of native rituals, folkloric texts or adaptation thereof are used in local secular events and rituals. The same characterises new spiritual movements.

Both native or pagan and occasional rituals have similarities in details. Representatives of different schools can attend one and the same ritual (e.g., the Skane Bastion ritual discussed above). In the cases of Ene Lukka-Jegikjan, Vigala Sass and Thule Lee, rituals are tailored to resemble traditions of the past, use traditional local elements, including prayers to stellar objects. The kinetics, ritual food and re-interpreted mythology or folklore play an important role.

Hobbyists, students and patients have been visiting Vigala Sass for three decades. He is a peculiar teacher who has built up his own

school of thought. The solstice rituals of Thule Lee are advertised in newspapers as alternative events for local people and any interested parties. Both teachers are certain one must learn to develop personality. Both have admitted that they continue to learn about the secrets of human psychology and they create new psychological techniques and practical exercises (for more, see Kõiva 2011).

Besides the human search for the self, finding the core, philosophy and life perception in ethnic knowledge are central values. They are sought from not just ethnic sources but archaic wisdom and knowledge is sought from different sources, time periods and cultures.

However, the literary sources, are different as these individuals belong to different generations or have different preferences. Vigala Sass was influenced by and he integrated Russian cultural and esoteric space (e.g. Blavatsky, books of Russian ethnographers and religion researchers). Yet, he as well as Thule Lee are interested in, Carlos Castaneda's teachings. Thule Lee is attracted to Chinese and Japanese folk medicine. Both admit that Estonian original rituals and aromas are important, and they use and create their own rituals by assimilating knowledge from archives, different cultural sources and their personal experiences into a special personal mixture. For example, for Urmas Sisask his personal knowledge of world myths and their interpretations, love of astronomy and musical self-seeking, all play a role. The rituals of Igor Mang were changed and shaped by his meeting the descendant of the esoteric Eduard von Keyserling – Arnold von Keyserling – and participation in his courses.

Correspondingly, the ritual masters act as authors, they create created new poetic forms of ritual texts, that reflect personal skills, means of expression and messages they wish to convey. The individual texts can be formed for that specific rite. The texts are full of intertextual links, author used dialectic forms of language and the form of runic songs (e.g. Kauksi Ülle's ritual in Elva), or intertextuality with prayers (Urmas Sisask). At the same time the individual ritual text (invocation, charm) can also be used in several rituals if they have become sacral text stems (I. Mang, E. Varres).

Notably, recent decades have seen a marked change in ritual dress code: female ritual masters emphasise national costume or elements

thereof; occasional rituals are conducted in casual clothing. In time, ritual masters have experimented with special costumes (Thule Lee with white and black robes with different symbols; Vigala Sass with a black robe; Igor Mang with an attractive staff, hat and black robe). Similar changes and evolution has occurred in sacral space design.

Generally, what makes new spirituality and its rituals significant is experience with the supernatural and the revival of cultural practices and old powers that are aimed to attain harmony with. One of the most common attitudes is that of respect towards nature, the attempt to communicate with it and ecological attitudes (c.f., Aitamurto & Scott 2013: 56 ff.).

The constellations of textual, ritual and time-space parameters change and depend on social needs. Nevertheless, due to their longstanding repetitive use, the rituals of Igor Mang or Thule Lee or Ene Lukka-Jegikjan can be considered successful reinventions and reconstructions of rituals. The old forms are combined with the present time and ancient texts performed side by side their own invocations, incantations, charms. We can see many individual solutions and nearly universal, similar outcomes. Remarkable is that the level of institutionalization is similar (no matter they belong to the congregation of official church or not), –as teachers of new spirituality, masters of rituals they are not part of certain pagan community, they perform rituals during crucial points of ritual year for different interested persons. They can build up occasional ritual, or participate at the public ritual as invited master.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Two Estonians calendar feasts fall almost on the equinox – Christmas on the winter equinox and St. John's Day on the summer equinox – and are bundled with many rituals and cultural entertainments as well as rituals with mundane or religious significance. Lighting candles in public space, decorating urban landscape and trees with electric lights, and conducting various light rituals in December are customs borrowed in the 1990s from the Scandinavia. This has transformed the darkest period of the year into a time of light festivals where the illuminated party period contrasts the cold and dark weather. Well-known folk healers conduct rituals dedicated to the time. Candlelight is also part of the cemetery culture – candles are lit on the graves of the dearly departed on both equinoxes. On the other hand, spring and autumn equinoxes are emphasised by the media and formal education, and had become celebrations for folk healers and masters of rituals by the end of the 20th century.

<sup>2</sup>*Metsaülikool* 'Forest university' – an umbrella term including all informal summer schools organised by the Estonian diaspora where lectures, workshops and cultural events of various nature took place.

<sup>3</sup>Estonian and Latvian masters of rituals have reciprocated in participating major celebrations. One of the most emotional and detailed descriptions of pagan St. John's Day celebrations came from my Bulgarian friend Nikolai Sivkov. He, together with the Bulgarian Rodopi folk music and folk dance ensemble accidentally joined a pagan St. John's Day celebratory ceremony. In 2014, the Estonian Annunciation sun-greeting ceremony was participated by organisers of a similar Latvian event. The Latvian women who joined the ritual performed songs in Latvian in parallel with the Estonian participants. The next day, students and interested parties were treated to an overview of how the sun is greeted in Riga, displaying videos and photos. Personally, I consider the conversations and discussions the ritual masters had the night before the event to be most significant. Folklore contains no ready-made models and creators of new rituals need to fill up a lot of so-called white space. During the discussion, both sides introduced their folkloric backgrounds, ritual texture and structure together with different choices and solutions.

<sup>4</sup>Mare Kõiva has recorded Urmas Sisask's rituals performed at hobby astronomers' gatherings, and a lengthy interview dates to 1998.

<sup>5</sup>The ritual was video recorded by Rahel Laura Vesik. The ethnofuturistic movement was central to the introduction of wooden sculptures. Ethnofuturistic camps brought to Estonia young Finnic-Ugric artists who introduced the wooden sculpture tradition that was part of their folk art (about

ethnofuturism Mihkelev 2002, Etnofutu 1996–2004). Today, producing wooden sculptures for private gardens is the livelihood of several sculptors (see Kõiva, Kuperjanov, forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> The ritual was video recorded by Rahel Laura Vesik in 2014.

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