

Programme & Abstracts

***GENIUS LOCI* IN THE PREHISTORY OF THE BALTIC SEA REGION**

The 9th Austmarr symposium

29-30 May, 2019 Klaipėda

29th May (Wednesday)

9:00-10:00

Alexandra SANMARK (The University of the Highlands and Islands)

Keynote lecture: **Norse assembly sites: a case of *genius loci*?**

This paper will examine Norse assembly sites from a long term perspective. A particularly striking trait of these sites is that they were very long-lived; in many cases they seem to have been in use for a thousand years or more. It is not clear from the evidence if they were in constant use, or whether they were revisited with seemingly rather long intervals. If not in continuous use, did some sites simply possessed certain qualities, a *genius loci*, that made them suitable for meetings? Or were these sites remembered in oral traditions, or perhaps marked in some way which strengthened a *genius loci* and therefore visited by gatherings of people on a regular basis over very long periods of time?

10:00-10:30

Jukka KORPELA (University of Eastern Finland)

***Genius loci* of cult places – place names and cult places in East Finnic forests**

Some medieval Russian and Swedish texts refer to Finnic shamans. The folklore reflects the shamanistic culture from other perspective. Early modern administrative Russian and Swedish documents criticize the continuation of the Paganism of Finnic forest dwellers, and we know that the burials became Christian only after the 18th century.

There is archaeological evidence about cult places, too, but their dating is obscure, and unfortunately the archaeologists have focused only on the start of the cult objects. Surely rock paintings are mostly from Neolithic period, but the cult may have continued until the end of the forest dwelling paganism, what means the 19th and 20th centuries. The identification of the cult persons is left now aside, although there is material about them in administrative documents and folklore.

One possibility to reach the shamanistic culture is to look at the landscape around the cult places. A considerable part of the Finnic place names are old and pre-Christian and therefore they open a window to the old world.

In this paper I shall look at some areas of cup-market stones, rock paintings, Lapp cairns, stone formations identified by scholars as *seita/seid* and analyze the name material in their surroundings.

Later I shall connect these results with other source information and finally to explain the transformation of the culture and society in the Finnic forests.

I do not yet count the hill forts, which are many and which may have cultic extensions, too. Historians and cultural people have been interested in these long and therefore connected various stories to them. This makes the material complicated. The holy trees exist but they are too young in the Finnish landscape.

10:30-10:45

Coffe break

10:45-11:15

Sabine Heidi WALTHER (University of Bonn)

Greek and Latin Authors on Religious Practices Performed in Natural Spaces in the Southern Baltic Region

Several Greek and Latin authors state that Germanic peoples did not worship in temples, e.g., Tacitus (Germania 9,2; transl. Rives) says: “In other matters, they judge it not in accord with the greatness of the gods to confine them with walls or to liken them in the appearance to any human countenance. They consecrate woods and groves, and the mystery that they see only in their awe they call by the names of gods.” This passage combines two ideas: 1) the worship of gods in natural spaces instead of temples; 2) the worship of a divine presence in natural spaces instead of anthropomorphic idols.

This paper analyzes such passages on religious customs performed in natural spaces in a philological-historical perspective taking into consideration the historical circumstances, their place within the larger narrative and the Graeco-Roman – and possibly Christian – concepts that the authors might have had in mind while describing religious customs of those foreign peoples. The focus will be mostly on peoples who lived or ‘originated’ from south of the Baltic sea, i.e., mostly on the Elbe Germanic and East Germanic tribes.

The paper will not evaluate and interpret these passages for their religious content; it will rather introduce a choice of passages and provide historical-philological information on which such an evaluation and interpretation by historians of religion could be based on.

11:15-11:45

Kendra WILSON (University of Turku)

Creating the Vörå runestone sites

The discovery of three runic inscriptions in Vörå, Ostrobothnia, western Finland, between 1978 and 1982, set off a fierce debate. Some were convinced they stemmed from the Viking Age, while others were equally certain that they were modern forgeries. Archeologists and runologists from Finland and Sweden made confident but contradicting pronouncements on their age and authenticity.

Media attention was intense. Granö (2017a) reports that asking about the subject at the archive of the Vasa newspaper Brage yielded “Tre tunga mappar av tidningsurklipp. Fyra dagar av intensiv läsning. Minst fyra till hade krävts ifall jag faktiskt läst all text.” (Three heavy folders of newspaper clippings. Four days of intense reading. At least four more would have been required if I had actually read all the

text.) The conflict has many dimensions: town vs. gown, rural vs. urban, Sweden vs. Finland, Swedish vs. Finnish-speaking Finns.

A prominent characteristic of contributions to the Vörå discussion across different genres and viewpoints is the emphasis on narrative strategies. Norrman (1983) states expressly that his goal is to establish an authoritative account of the discovery. His book invokes techniques from oral tradition to establish credibility; the narrators emphasize their local knowledge and membership in the community.

Narrative strategies are also invoked by writers in normally less narrative genres such as archaeological articles, to contextualize the findings, the debate, and the writer's own involvement in the investigation (e.g. Taavitsainen 1980: 37, Salberger 1986). Oja (2015: 159-162), while maintaining distance from the controversy, describes his own "pilgrimage" to the site. The debate itself has become a subject of tradition (Granö 2017 a, b, c).

These layers of competing narrative imbue the Vörå sites with meaning as a touchstone for Ostrobothnian Swedish identity. A comparison can be drawn to the Kensington runestone in Minnesota, which Krueger (2015) discusses as a focal point for Scandinavian-American foundation myths.

References

- Granö, Viktor. 2017a. De gåtfulla runorna i Vörå I: Österbottens första viking. Yle svenska 5 mars 2017. <https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2017/03/05/de-gatfulla-runorna-i-vora-i-osterbottens-forsta-viking>
- Granö, Viktor. 2017b. De gåtfulla runorna i Vörå II: Mannen med metalldetektorn. Yle svenska 5 mars 2017. <https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2017/03/05/de-gatfulla-runorna-i-vora-ii-mannen-med-metalldetektorn>
- Granö, Viktor. 2017c. De gåtfulla runorna i Vörå III: I jakt på bevis. Yle svenska 5 mars 2017. <https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2017/03/05/de-gatfulla-runorna-i-vora-iii-i-jakt-pa-bevis>
- Krueger, David M. 2015. Myths of the rune stone. Viking martyrs and the birthplace of America. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Norrman, Ralf. 1983. Vörårunorna. Del 1. En bok om runinskrifterna i Höjsal och Härrtull. [Jakobstad]: Jakobstads tryckeri.
- Oja, Heikki. 2015. Riimut: viestejä viikingeltä. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Salberger, Evert. 1986. De tre runinskrifterna i Vörå. *Studia archaeologica Ostrobothniensia* 1986: 18-28.
- Taavitsainen, J.P. 1980. Runinskriften vid Höjsal trask i Vörå. *Horisont* 27(3): 37-40.

12:00-13:00

Lunch

13:00-14:00

Leszek SŁUPECKI (University of Rzeszow)

Keynote lecture: **Three capitals where *genius loci* works: Vilnius, Cracow, and Kiev**

Vilnius with its mythic Iron Wolf, Cracow with the Dragon (which was not precisely a dragon), and Kiev with its forgotten Swan (and valkyry Lybed) had myths and landscapes creating the symbolic centres of the community in pagan and – later on – in the Christian time.

Central Europe in its northern (so to say Jeguellonian) part has in Kiev, Cracov and Vilnius three important symbolic centres and at the same time for long time state capitals, where since the beginning of the existence of the three important national communities (Russian - Belorussian and Ukraininan includes -, Polish and Lithuanian) *genius loci* evidently was at work.

To all those three cities myths of origins of national communities were attached. Those myths include some original local elements in the narratives, as well as borrowings from and links to learned

European post ancient heritage (in case of Kiev also Scandinavian), resulting in creation of well rounded and beautiful stories of obviously mythographic content having great importance for national and cultural identity of Lithuanians, Poles and Russians (including Belorussians and Ukrainians).

All those packages of myths (Kievan, Cracovian and Vilnean) include genuine mythic or half-mythic characters more or less reshaped for those stories, some supernatural animals, and prophecies about future importance of the place and nation and shows connections to ruling dynasties giving them mythic foundations for their rule anchored in capital cities.

What is very important and make such stories persistent, influential through centuries and still alive today is the link of key elements of those narratives to the landscape what make possible an identification of the arena of events from the narratives in the geography of the place visible today, including some natural elements (like e.g. Dragons cave in Cracow), and some created and human made constructions, especially burial mounds present in the landscape and linking geography to the stories thanks to (half) mythic characters supposedly buried there.

Similar places having own genius loci are to be find in Central Europe in other locations as well, and especially the Czech capital Prague is here to be mention, because there appear some elements lacking (or rather poorly documented) in the three over mentioned examples, like for instance the Royal throne and its myth.

What is also important is the fact that not only mythography of the pagan past shaped the landscape of those towns – the importance of those capitals was stressed in the Christian time with elements linking them to the global centres of power, like Golden Gate in Kiev echoing the Golden Gate in Imperial Constantinople, or church geography of Cracow repeating (according to R. Michalowski) the church geography of the Carolingian Aachen. Here on the level of geography on may see similar efforts as those visible in the mythography which tries to attach the legendary history of Russia, Poland and Lithuania to the Ancient world, what on may see in Master Vincent Chronicle which gives to Cracovian heroes Ancient Roman dress and partners (in similar way as Saxo Grammaticus did Romanised Scandinavian heroes), in efforts to bring ancestors of Lithuanians from Rome, and ascribe first Christian mission to Russia to St Apostle Andrew who according to the so called Nestor letopis had erected a cross on the hill dominating over the place where later on the town of Kiev was established.

14:00-14:15

Coffe break

14:15-15:15

Joonas AHOLA (University of Helsinki)

Keynote lecture: ***Genius Loci* and Ontologies of a Place**

This paper discusses the themes of the symposium freely and creatively. Genius loci is discussed as a culturally defined relationship between a person and a place that may acquire the shape of a supernatural agent in its verbal expressions. The essence of this agency is discussed in terms of ontologies rather than in terms of senses of verbal expression, such as a metaphor. The concept of 'ontologies' refers to the ways or forms of existence of which the physical reality is only one. For example, certain things exist in our psychological reality (such as emotions, evaluations etc.) and others in a social reality (such as enmities, companionships, etc.). Individual subjects may have significance in several ontologies simultaneously. The significance of genius loci is discussed especially in relation to language and narration that, together with cognitive factors such as cultural knowledge and situation-based orientation, have an essential role in culturally oriented experiencing of a given place. This paper

is not throughout theoretical and speculative but instead, refers to Finnish traditions concerning the guardian spirits of a place and of home (*haltia*) as well as to potential comparable cultural phenomena in other cultures as well.

15:15-15:45

Léon van GULIK (University of Leiden)

Evoking the spirits of time and place: towards a theory of atmospheres as the felt properties of human experience

Atmospheres can be linked to both time and space. With regard to time, we talk about the spirit of the age – i.e., a gestalt made up from the felt specifics of a certain time, such as ideas expressed in art, socio-political structures or ultimate concerns, the implications of technology of the day, and major events. The feelings and moods thus invoked, however, rely on collective episodic memory, and are prone to be constructed only after the era to which they point has ended.

When related to space, atmospheres may be envisioned as *genii loci*. The notion may refer to either the spirits of the place, in terms of supernatural agents that have been designated to rule over a place, as is traditionally done, or, naturalistically, as the emergent property of placeness, i.e., a personification of what sets apart a specific locality from other places, just like a particular scent can be discerned.

Regardless of the two understandings of *genius loci*, is that mankind has come a long way of making sense of the qualities that come with the perception of places. In my presentation, I want to discuss the notion of atmospheres as related to placeness, and offer a set of conceptual tools may help us to analyse and understand the interaction between human experience and memory as the basis for both the emergence of culture and the sense of being alive.

15:45-16:15

Rasa ČEPAITIENĖ (Lithuanian Institute of History)

***Genius loci* and the cultural heritage conservation discipline**

The presentation will discuss the multi-faceted and polysemous links of the phenomenon of the ‘spirit of the place’ with the classical and (post)modern concepts of cultural heritage.

Rapid processes in the change of the living environment, which had begun under the impact of modernization and were inspired by industrialization, urbanization and the secularization of society in the end of XVIIIth – till XXIth c., had a strong effect on the revival of the antique term of ‘spirit of the place’. The romantic approach to this phenomena differed from both the archaic and from the contemporary postmodern approach which, taking into account the accelerating processes of dehumanization, standardization and commoditization of living environment, emphasizes the need to take care of the preservation of its distinctive nature and special atmosphere. This premise has been established in international documents on heritage protection, especially on the *Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place* (2008).

Preserved by traditional societies, the holistic approach to the living environment that connects people and animals, land and culture, could be the essential source of revival of ‘the sense of place’ and ‘the identity of place’ in the conditions of the ‘displacement’ brought about by globalization. The new, dialogic, notion of the heritage makes it possible to transcend the dichotomies of *nature/culture*, *material/immaterial* values, and *experts/society* that have been

established in postmodern heritage protection, thus qualitatively updating the category of *genius loci* and turning it into one of the essential components of heritage protection, ecology, architecture, and landscape management.

16:15-16:30

Coffe break

16:30-17:00

FROG (University of Helsinki)

Otherworlding: A Theoretical Approach to the Mythologization of Place

The concept of otherworld is linked to concepts of otherness and the other, but the concept of otherworld itself tends to be taken for granted as a fantastic location where the possibilities of imagination are realities. What makes a space or place an otherworld? How is an otherworld distinguished from this world? We consider it self-evident that places beyond empirical experience, places known only through imagination are otherworlds, but does that mean that empirical places cannot be otherworlds? Pre-modern Finno-Karelian traditions maintained the local forest as a realm with a supernatural community comparable to that of Pohjola and the cemetery as a village inhabited by deceased kin – a village of the dead right next door. Are these not also otherworlds? The classic adventure of epic heroes is a journey to the otherworld and return, a narrative pattern commonly played out without ever leaving the empirical world.

Rather than taking otherworlds for granted as a general type of place, this paper focuses on what makes a place an otherworld. Othering is viewed as a process of discourse that builds models of us versus other through emblems of difference. Here, the creation of otherworlds is seen as a process of othering of places and spaces that I describe as otherworlding. As a process, otherworlding occurs through discourse, and places or spaces become otherworlds though the combination of imagination and what I call mythologization, when the way of talking about the place becomes seen as how it really is.

Otherworlding is explored as a phenomenon that constructs the *genius loci* of particular places in experienced landscapes, explored through Finno-Karelian traditions. Discussion begins with the otherworlding of wholly imaginal places like Pohjola and Tuonela. It then advances to the otherworlding of remote locations that people might visit but most people only know through other people talking about them, such as Lapland. Discussion then moves to otherworlding of experienced places, such as the forests and cemeteries, and finally considers sites of ritual activity that connect things like a stone fixed in the earth or a tree felled by a storm as supernaturally empowered places. Approaching otherworlds through processes of otherworlding breaks down the intuition to think about otherworlds in black-and-white terms of places that empirically exist as opposed to those that exist only in imagination, bringing us a step closer to understanding how otherworlds are grouped and perceived.

17:00-17:30

Andrius KANIAVA (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore)

Story-places: phenomenological approach to Lithuanian sacred sites

In Lithuania, there are no cult buildings and very few artefacts of pre-Christian religion. Our sacred places are natural objects – hills, rocks, streams, forests, etc., rich with folklore tradition from 19th–20th century. It's part of a sacred landscape, full of meanings and ideas instead of material culture. However, ancient sacred places as a rule belongs to the field of archaeology and history. And lack of

artefacts makes it difficult to apprehend sacred places in conventional archeological ways. This situation forms a methodological issue which could be solved by interdisciplinary discussion.

The term *genius loci* refers to some kind of special significance of a place that persists from prehistoric rituals to 20th century – same places uniting people for hundreds of years. I believe that the reason why *genius loci* endures through time is stories. Because a place is, before anything else, a story.

In this paper I'm going to share my thoughts about a new theoretical perspective for studying Lithuanian sacred places. Instead of focusing on historical and archeological data, I try to adapt ways of phenomenology. At the centre of my approach is human experience, which comes out as stories and meanings behind them. Nevertheless, it's only one of many steps which, combined with archeological and historical interpretation, should form a full picture of a place that was sacred in the past and still important in the present.

17:30-18:00

Eero PELTONEN (Finnish Folklore Society)

Sacred encounters – ancient echoes of painted cliffs in Finland

This presentation focuses on archaeoacoustics, a research field which unites archaeology and ethnomusicology. The presenter will introduce a recent research project by the University of Helsinki in which the acoustics and echo features of prehistoric paintings on lakeside cliffs in Northern Finland were measured with scientific tools and data. The exceptional echo effects at the cliffs and the images of drummers and possible witches/shamans painted on them suggest that these places have been the subject of rituals in which the voice, the song and possibly drumming, played a central role.

This summer the Helsinki University research team will measure the echoes of the painted cliffs in Eastern Finland. The presenter will be joining them, bringing his experience of human voice, traditional music and prehistoric art. At the conference he unfolds the origin, meaning and possible uses of these sacred archaeological sites. He will also tell about the inspiration to compose tradition-based runosongs suitable for the soundscapes and images at the cliffs. This process is carried out by singing and playing with the echo of the painted cliffs and by letting this interplay create melodies, rhythms and poetry.

About the presenter: Eero Peltonen is a researcher of Finno-Ugric and Finno-Baltic traditions. He works as a heritage educator with focus on archaeology, folk healing, voice work and traditional singing in Kalevala metre. He is an active member of the Finnish Society for Prehistoric Art and the Finnish Folklore Society.

19:30

Reception at the Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology

30th May (Thursday)

09:30-19:00

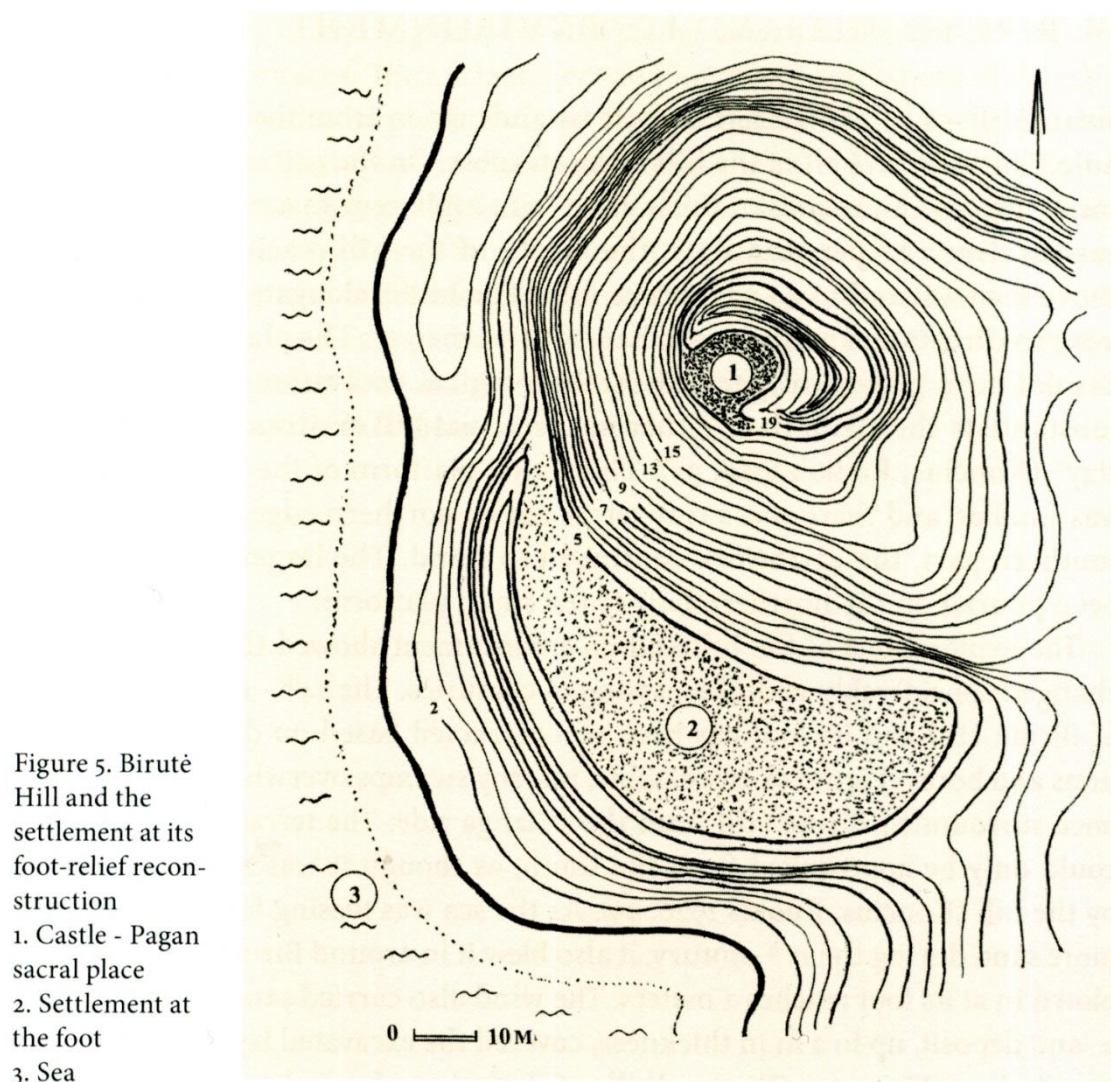
Excursion

Birutė Hill in Palanga (WGS: 55.905629, 21.053028)

Vykintas VAITKEVIČIUS (University of Klaipėda)

Talk on the spot: *Genius loci* from the historical perspective. Case of the Birutė Hill in Palanga (NW Lithuania)

The Birutė Hill is a nearly 20 m high relic sand dune whose western foot used to be washed by the waves of the Baltic Sea until the late 19th century. The Palanga Bridge caused changes in the littoral currents resulting in the emergence of new dunes within a several-kilometre stretch south of it. In the early 20th century, the local people, encouraged by the Dean, evened out the remains of ramparts on the Birutė Hill and increased the area of the site on which a brick chapel dedicated to St. George was built in as early as 1869 (Žulkus 1997, 16).



Drawing: Žulkus 1997

In 1976 and 1983, archaeologists excavated the greater part of the Birutė Hill site (the total area of 263 sq. m., led by Vladas Žulkus); simultaneously, bores were drilled and the vicinities of the hill were surveyed. As established, as early as in the first centuries AD, the 16x17 m site on the Birutė Hill was surrounded by a 6 m wide and 1,5 to 2 m high sand horseshoe-shaped rampart on the east side, while remaining open to the west. The fortifications on the Birutė Hill and its foothill emerged, and settlements

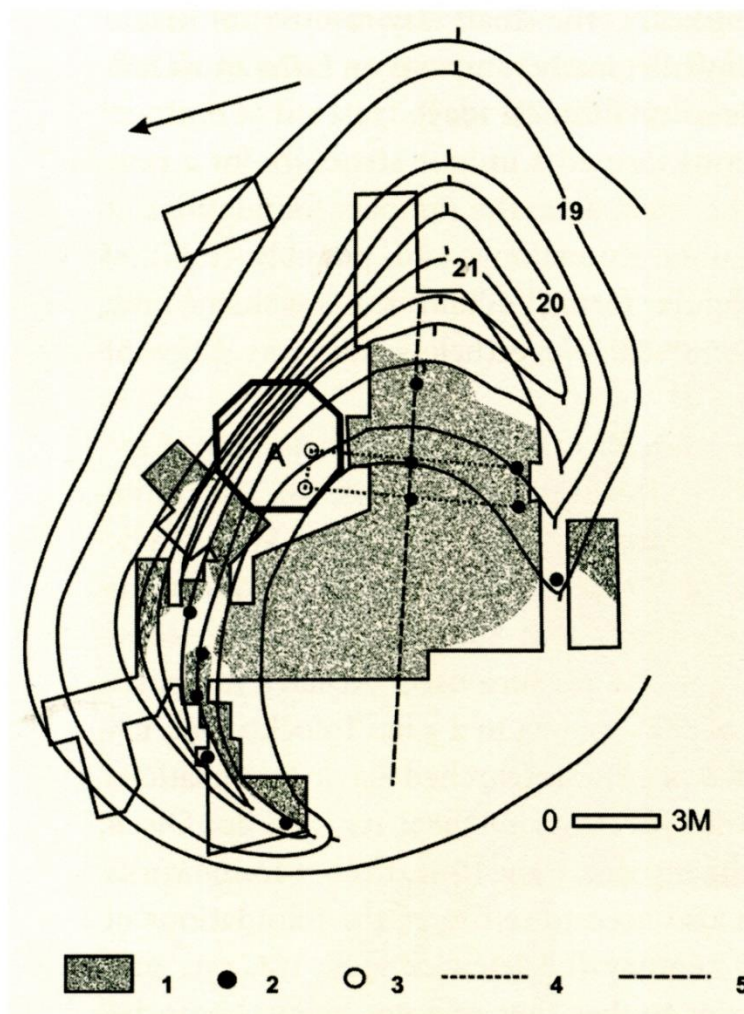


Figure 25. The 14th - start of the 15th century Pagan sacral place layer within the examined research area of Birutė Hill

1. Sand with soot and charcoal bits
2. Discovered postholes
3. Surmised postholes
4. Surmised contour of the erection
5. Main axis of the Pagan sacral place A. Chapel

Drawing: Žulkus 1997

in other parts of Old Palanga grew and flourished, around the 10th to the 12th century; life came to a standstill in the mid-13th century (Žulkus 1997, 284-287; cf. Kraniuska 2011; Žulkus 2014).

Approximately in the 14th century, during the battles against the Teutonic Order, defensive wood and clay structures on the Birutė Hill were rebuilt and, before long, burnt once again. In the late 14th or the 15th century, the sand rampart was widened and heightened, and the location of the former structures was occupied by wooden poles embedded in the inner side of the rampart. The finds included two burnt 15–28 cm diameter pole ends (two out of eleven were rough-hewn), sticking up above the former ground. The latter appeared as a 3 to 15 cm thick layer of black earth containing charcoal, needles, fine twigs, and burnt boards; it also contained numerous 0,3 x 0,5 to 0,4 x 0,6 m-size campfires on the ground. At that

time, a sanctuary is believed to have been on the Birutė Hill, where the Sun and the Moon's movement in the sky vault was observed and the ritual fire was burned (Žulkus 1997: 45–54).

More than a hundred years later, a wooden chapel was built on the Birutė Hill. It is reasonably believed to have emerged at the same time when the first church of Palanga was constructed, funded in 1540; after the Reformation had subsided, it could have been again renovated in c. 1590 (Miltakis 2007, 26; Ališauskas 2012, 19). In accordance with the data of archaeological excavations, at St. George's Chapel on the Birutė Hill site, occasional burials occurred in the second half of the 17th through the 18th century (four tombs were found, three of them with coffins; in the second half of the 15th through the 16th century, burials took place east of the Birutė Hill, on a lower relict dune – the Žemaičiai Hill).

The first rituals on the Birutė Hill were attested by historian Motiejus Strijkovskis (Maciej Strykowski) who visited Palanga and wrote in 1579 or 1580. According to him, Samogitians and Curonians called the place the Hill of St. Birutė and "celebrated her Holy Day in the same place where the Roman priest would come, too, receiving abundant benefits from candles and offerings" (*obchadzią jeszcze po dziś dzień jej Ś. Uroczyste, tam na tym miejscu, gdzie i kapłan Rzymski zajeżdża, a świec i z ofiar niemały pożytek biera* – BRMS II 528, 561).

In his manuscript history *On the Beginnings of the Famed Nation of Lithuania, Samogitia, and Russia...* and in the famous Chronicle, Strykovskis repeats and develops the legend of the Lithuanian Chronicle (the Bychovec Chronicle): ruler of Samogitia (Lith. Žemaitija), and later of the whole Lithuania, Kęstutis once heard about Birutė, a girl from Palanga who had given a vow of chastity to the old pagan gods and was worshiped by people as a goddess (*sama była chwalena od ludey za bobiniu*), and visited her. He fell in love, asked her to marry him, and was rejected ("I promised to my gods to remain a virgin all my life" – *ja poszłubiła bobom swoim czystost' chowat' do żywota swojeho*). Then he took Birutė from Palanga by force, brought her to Trakai, his capital, with great respect, and threw a wedding (BRMS II 375; the wedding is believed to have taken place in 1349 or a bit earlier - Gudavičius 2004, 74). Thus, in the 16th century, the Hill of Holy Birutė in Palanga was already associated with Grand Duchess Birutė.

In the 17th century, Prussian historian and Lutheran pastor Matas Pretorijus (Lat. Matthäus Prätorius) described a hill near Palanga, "considered of old to be holy." The Catholics had a chapel there where Prussians and Samogitians worshipped St. George, while the Old Scalovians, "stuck in paganism", worshipped their old idols there (*alte und noch im Heydenthumb steckende Zalavonier ihre alte Abgötter verehren* – Pretorijus 2006, 124–125). Pretorijus did not mention the name of Birutė or all the more did not talk about the relationship of the holy hill with the Lithuanian Duchess of the 14th century. However, the author emphasized the old origins of the Palanga holy place and spoke about its significance felt by people until the 17th century and the experienced sacred emotions.

In the second half of the 19th century, the first Lithuanian newspaper widely wrote about Catholics and Lutherans coming to pray on the Birutė Hill, often from distant lands. Every March 4th (the Day of St. Casimir) and April 23rd (the Day of St. George) Samogitians, Curonians (Latvians), and Germans (Prussians) used to bring a lot of horses that were solemnly walked around the hill while praying to God that, with the assistance of St. George, he would protect horses from diseases and thieves. Moreover, on that day, horse figurines modelled from wax were given as offerings to God; "farmers were placing harrows, wooden ploughs, and other farm tools and implements, and women farmers were bringing calves, piglets, and other wax creatures" (Šliūpas 1884, 264). Those customs survived later, however, were associated with St. George and St. Rokas (commemorated on August 16th). As remembered by people, money used to be donated on the Birutė Hill, donors prayed for success in fishing and health for themselves and domestic animals, and beggars were also given food: cheeses, butter, milk, eggs as well as fish (LTR; cf. Užpelkis 1995).

In the late 19th century, the Birutė Hill became part of the residence of Count Tiškevičius (Tyszkiewicz). At the foot of the hill, the first in Lithuania replica of the Lourdes Grotto with the statue of St Mary the

Virgin was built in accordance with the design of French architect Édouard François André. Incidentally, at that time, Palanga dwellers and all Samogitians believed that the installation of Lourdes could offend the former sanctuary and the old customs (Končius 2001, 31). It was the custom of vows that survived for the longest period of time: in the first half of the 20th century, priest Juozapas Šniukšta still resented the offerings of bands or necklaces on the Birutė Hill trees.

Discovering the patroness of the place

The history of the Birutė Hill in Palanga is old and multilayered. Its beginning and the original silhouette of Birutė – *genius loci* – are still hazed in mist. To date, the image of Birutė as a virtuous pagan priestess who had dedicated her life to the gods and became the Grand Duchess of Lithuania, established in the late 19th and the early 20th century, prevails. In search of its origins, we shall refer to the thesis of cultural historian Vytautas Ališauskas (2012, 20) to the effect that the author of the 16th century Lithuanian Chronicle (or his source of information) "mixed up the figures of the goddess Birutė, worshipped in Palanga, and the wife of Grand Duke Kęstutis". Of course, the most natural explanation and justification would come from an assumption that Birutė, chosen by the Duke for his wife, was somehow related to the cult of the goddess Birutė.

Up to the present time, not much is known about the goddess Birutė in the field of Baltic religion and mythology. In the first quarter of the 18th century, the Jesuits of Daugavpils discovered the remains of the old rites in Livonia and wrote that, in some places, the deities taking care of animals were still worshiped: the patron of horses Ūsinis, the patroness of cattle Birutė, and the patron of pigs Tenis (*Auditus est illic praeses equorum Usins, dea pecudum Biruta, genius suum quidam Tenis, orcinianis commentis celebrari* – Latvijas 1940, 391). Further, the source quoted the prayer said by women making their offerings at the linden trees, which confirmed that the Daugavpils Jesuits had worked both in Latgale and Aukštaitija, or in mixed Lithuanian and Latvian settlements. Naturally, that accounts for the occurrence of a goddess with a Lithuanian name among the gods of the exceptionally old Latvian religion.

Personal names Birutė (female) and Birutis (male) are diminutives of the forms Bira or Byra, related to the words *bira* 'harvest, yield', *birėti* 'to yield a crop', and originate from the ancient Indo-European *bher- 'bear'. The Lithuanian verb *birti* also preserved the meaning of 'giving birth': *subirti* 'to bring forth the young (in the case of animals)' (cf. Gothic *bairan* 'to bear, to give birth'). That made it possible to put together the message of the 18th century Jesuits with the data about the rituals devoted to horses, calves, or pigs, reliably testified to, on the Birutė Hill in Palanga. This is obviously demonstrated by the name of St. George, patron of animals, once given to the chapel. Thus, to cite Ališauskas (2012, 19), Birutė was a goddess of animal fertility whose special competence was taking care of herds: sheep, goats, and possibly female calves and pigs, their fertility, and their bringing forth the young.

Several hundred kilometres between Daugavpils and Palanga feature several dozens of Birutė Hills, Birutkalnis, Birkalnis, and Birutinis Hills spread throughout Lithuania. We do not have so much accurate information about them, since so far, no attention has been paid to the possible links of these places and the Baltic religion. Attention was also distracted by the well-known claim of folk etymology that the said names allegedly originated due to the similarity of the place to the Birutė Hill in Palanga or due to the seeming connection with Duchess Birutė (in the late 19th century and especially later, her name used to be given to public movements, initiatives, or cultural organizations; simultaneously, of course, the name of Birutė was also given to children). The fact that there are no Birutė Hills in Užnemunė (beyond the Nemunas River, otherwise – Suvalkija), the region which was the most literate and the most active participant of the nation awakening movement in the second half of the 19th through the early 20th century, makes us, with certain historical exceptions, reject folk interpretations and further thoroughly check the assumption that the Birutė Hills were old sanctuaries. Meanwhile, the image of the goddess Birutė, as reconstructed by Ališauskas, is specified by the folkloric data about the Birutė Hill in Palanga.

As early as in 1822, Simonas Daukantas cited a proverb "To Birutė to pile up stones" which served as an answer to the question "Where are you going?" (Daukantas 1976, 96). Subsequent recordings are very similar, e.g., "Go to Birutė to pile up stones (2 variants; PP). The proverb survived, however, its meaning and / or the situation of its use changed.

This ancient proverb precisely corresponds to the custom of vows known in Samogitia: childless women would bring stones (*kėliai*) to the holy place in their aprons (*sterblė*). In the village of Pakapė (Telšiai district), the custom survived for a particularly long period of time and was associated with the Hill of Honour (meaning woman's honour, or chastity) or the Hill of Sterblė (for Samogitians, *sterblė* means the lower part of the apron raised and held by a woman to put something into it and carry on the legs above the knees, in the region of hips): *Women wishing to have children would carry stones in their aprons and pile them up on the hill* (Andriusevičius 1994). The proverb from Skuodas which sounds as follows: "The stomach rumbles (*burga*) as if somebody rolls stones on the Birutė Hill" (LKŽ; incidentally, the verb *burgėti* 'gurgėti' has a meaning 'to spurt out, to flow') confirms that the story turns upon some special stones. The mythical hypothesis that allegedly the Birutė Hill in Palanga was made by women who once brought earth for it in their aprons also relates to that: "here every pinch of soil is sprinkled with sweat and accompanied by prayer" (Končius 2001, 30).

This suggests that the competence of the goddess Birutė used to relate not only to the animal fertility and bringing forth their young, as evidenced by the sources of the new centuries from the area of Jesuit missions in Palanga and Daugavpils, but also be of a more general character, covering the origins of fertility of humans and animals and their birth. It could have been the foundation of the cult of Birutė, universally understood, which was so much important and of such great vitality in Palanga that it survived until the 19th through the 20th century.

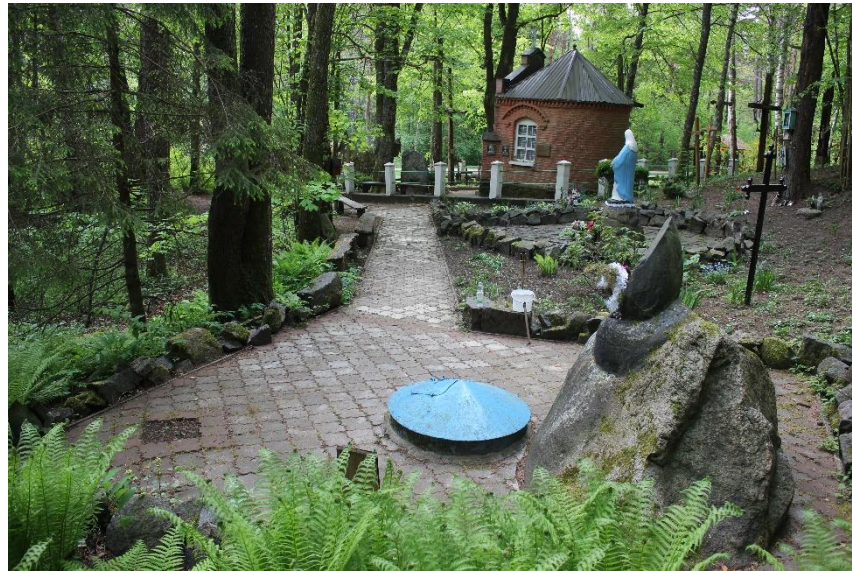
Conclusions

Birutė, who is likely to have been a historical person, the future Duchess, was associated with the cult of the goddess Birutė, shared the same name, and, as the legend recorded in the Lithuanian chronicles suggests, she embodied the goddess, was worshipped by people, and was universally called a saint. Birutė's vow of chastity, which was mentioned in the legend, was the basis for worshipers to identify her with the Blessed Virgin Mary for several hundred years. However, the writings and the fiction of the period of Romanticism and partly the liberal environment of the Palanga resort (founded in 1888), where the seaside visitors overshadowed the local inhabitants, as well as the national character of the culture of independent Republic of Lithuania in the 1930s of the 20th century and ultimately the Soviet atheistic ideology led to the separation of Palanga Birutė from Christianity, her transfer from the field of this religion to a fundamentally intercultural environment, and her restoration to the world of myths and legends.

The story of the Birutė Hill in Palanga, covering at least 700 years, is a testimony to a unique interaction: woman embodied the *genius loci* and the goddess Birutė (who could be perceived as a *woman giving birth*), and she was worshipped in a place dedicated to the goddess. The case also shows the specific ways in which this happened and the forms of their manifestation; moreover, today we are made to talk about various kinds of internal and external impulses that are being constantly experienced by a particular community that inherits or (re)creates the image of *genius loci* as well as about certain attitudes and customs of the society.

Eršketynė holy place (WGS: 55.983603, 21.226901)

Eršketynė holy place is located in an oak wood, and contains a well, a rock and a chapel, built in 1930. A place is a perfect example of how holy places in Lithuania evolved through ages. Old oak wood and a spring with a rock tells us stories from pre-Christian times.



Eršketynė holy place. 2019.

However, after Christianization significant places like Eršketynė wasn't forgotten – they were reused by building chapels and applying Christian ideas.

Šilalė complex of sacred stones (WGS: 56.154102, 21.562419)

Šilalė complex of sacred stones composed of three individual stones. The biggest of them is about 7 meters long and 5 meters wide, one of the top5 biggest stones in Lithuania. According to the legend a son of the Wind sleeps under the stone. Other two stones are stones with flat-bottomed bowls on top of them, common in North-Western Lithuania. This kind of stones are related with two elements of nature – water and fire. Bowls were made to collect rain water, associated with ancient god of thunder Perkūnas. Also, surroundings of Šilalė sacred stones were excavated in 1970 and traces of fireplaces were found.

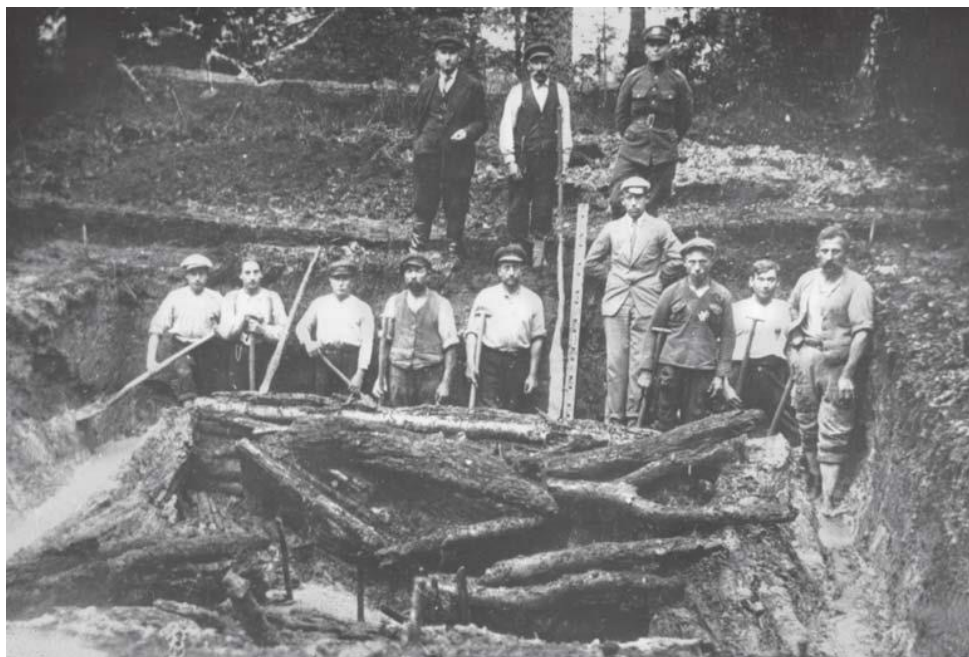


Šilalė complex of sacred stones. 2010.

Apuolė hill-fort (WGS: 56.246382, 21.677783)

Apuolė is the oldest Lithuanian place name known from written sources. It was mentioned in 853 AD by Rimbert in *Vita Sancti Anscharii* in a context of Viking campaigns to Baltic lands.

Apuolė was a strongly fortified hill-fort with wooden castle on top of it, used until late 13th century. Series of major archaeological excavations were held here during 1928–1932, revealing fortification history and numerous artefacts from middle-ages.



Remains of logs in former place of a well discovered on the top of Apuolė hill-fort. 1930s

Gargždelė open-air museum of sacred and modern arts (WGS: 56.051835, 21.613208)

Entrance – 4 euros

Orvidai homestead is an outdoors museum, founded by Lithuanian folk artist and stone cutter Vilius Orvidas (1952–1992). His aim was to rescue natural objects like stones that was meant to be broken by soviet industrialization and create an open space for people and himself to be in nature and meditate.

The museum is full of Vilius stone and wood sculptures, as well as works of other Lithuanian folk artists, inspired by different religions and worldviews – from ancient paganism to Christianity and Buddhism.

Contact person

Vykintas Vaitkevičius

+370 698 27589

Organiser of the symposium

University of Klaipėda

The Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology

Supported by

Prigimtinių kultūros institutas