

LIBATION IN BALTIC RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

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Abstract

It is mentioned in 15th to 18th-century written sources that in Lithuania, Prussia and Latvia pagan rituals, during which a certain amount of drink would be poured out for the gods and the dead, were practised. Lithuanian and Latvian ethnographic material from the 19th and 20th centuries supports the continuity of this tradition at community and family feasts.

In sources on Baltic religion it is usually emphasised that the drink would be poured out on to the ground. This can be interpreted as a triple offering: to the goddess of the Earth, to the domestic deities, and to the souls of the dead.

However, the Balts not only practised pouring drink on the ground, but other libation practices too. In terms of the place on to which the drink would be poured, the following practices can be singled out: pouring on the ground, into fire, into water, and into the air (sprinkling the drink upwards). Pouring on to stones and trees, which is related to elements of sacred places, also deserves special attention.

Key words: libation, Baltic religion, earth, fire, air, water, dead, sacred place.

Introduction

Libation, or the act of pouring out liquid as an offering, is a fundamental ritual that was and still is practised in most religions. It is known in nearly all cultural and geographical regions of the world (Betz 2005; Davis 2008; Poo 1995; Shelton 2008). The ritual was practised as early as Prehistoric times, and flourished in the civilisations of the Bronze Age (Burkert 2000, p.70). Although the purpose of this article is not related to Indo-European studies and its intention is to highlight the Baltic religion from a typological rather than an ethno-genetic point of view, it should be pointed out that in cultures speaking Indo-European languages, the forms of libation were highly developed. The Baltic word *lieti* 'to pour', which describes the act of libation, is related to the Latin word *libō* (-āre) 'to pour, provide an offering, to make a libation', and the Greek word *λείβω* 'I am pouring, dripping'. Cf.: Lithuanian *lieti* 'to pour', Prussian *pralieiton* 'poured', Latvian *līt*, *listu* 'to spill over, overflow', Ukrainian *liti*, Bulgarian *lits*, Slovenian *liti*, *lījem*, Czech *liti*, *leji* and others (Fasmer 1986). Since ancient times, libation was an important religious practice in Greece (Davis 2008; Elderkin 1945). It was practised intensively during the Roman Period of Greek culture, too. Greek and Roman libation is described in numerous written sources, scenes of offering drink are portrayed in pictures, whereas the ritual inventory (altars, vessels, and so on) that has survived to this day makes it possible to study libation. In ancient India, the pouring out of soma as described in the Indian Vedas was widely practised. Even today, libation in India remains a vital form of religious offering.

The historical sources that mention libation in Baltic cultures date from rather later times, and the earliest of these sources give an account of the situation that existed at least a century after the introduction of Christianity. Attention was paid to libation in writing about heathen ritual feasts, offerings and rituals devoted to the dead that survived. In most instances, the accounts refer to the libation of an alcoholic drink, beer or mead, because the very ritual of drinking was a highly important Baltic religious practice that usually accompanied other religious practices. Matthaeus Praetorius, who described the rites of Prussian Lithuanians in the 17th century in minute detail, wrote that: 'Every ceremony or feast starts with drinking [...] Before they start drinking, they pour out some drink on to the ground for Zemylene, the goddess of the Earth' (Pretorius 2006, pp.480, 482). The rite of drinking was seen as an essential element of the ritual practice, a sacral connection between humans and deities. Also in the 17th century, Joannes Stribingius, a Jesuit, emphasised that the Latvians, who used beer in their rites and offerings, believed that their gods would not listen to them without beer: '*nunquam deos exaudituros illos sine Cereuisia*' (BRMŠ 2003, p.551). The Prussians, even when baptised as Christians, would continue relating sacrality to beer. Having confessed their sins in church, they would, as a mandatory part of the rite, complement the church rite with washing away their sins with beer in an inn.

In the 15th century, Bishop Michael Junge had to issue a special decree forbidding Prussians to go to an inn after a church service:

II

BALTIC
WORLDVIEW:
FROM
MYTHOLOGY
TO FOLKLORE

... *et post confessionem non visitet tabernam, nec aliis quouis modo per se uel alias personas cereuisiam procurent de tabernis sibi apportari ad peccata eorum propotandum sub pena trium marcarum melioris monete* (BRMŠ 1996, p.481).

‘... after confession, you must not go to an inn or wash down your sins with beer brought from an inn by yourself or someone else [...] Likewise, inn-keepers must not sell beer to anyone or drink it.’

Although the Baltic rite of drinking was a very important religious practice, it has not yet been studied thoroughly. A brief article on the subject has been published by the Lithuanian ethnologist Angelė Vyšniauskaitė (1989). Some research into the ritual aspects of beer in Latvia has been conducted by Linda Dumpe (2001, p.113ff). Elvyra Usačovaitė has made a comparison between the Baltic and the Slavonic libation of drink (1999, 2009). The authoress of the present article has studied the way the pouring out of a drink fits into the general structure of the rite of drinking (Vaitkevičienė 2003), and in which instances the subject of libation is the goddess of the Earth (Vaitkevičienė 2004).

The purpose of this article is to highlight types of libation in the Baltic religion, in terms of the place of the performance of the ritual and the contact zone of libation. The place of the offering, just like the nature of the liquid, is a most important criterion that makes it possible to find out its meaning and purpose. In this article, libation is understood more widely compared to earlier studies of the Baltic rite of drinking: we intend to research the libation not only of a ritual alcoholic drink (beer, mead, and whisky, in the case of ethnographic sources dating from later times), but also other ritual liquids (milk, thin soup, water), as well as blood, if and when a live creature was sacrificed. Due to the limited space, the article will not discuss issues related to the nature of liquids and the diversity of libation gestures, or semantic differences arising from the forms of the performance of the rite: libation while the person making the offering is standing, jumping up, pouring out over his head or his shoulder, and so on.

Earth

Both historical sources and Lithuanian and Latvian ethnographic material contain numerous references to libation on to the ground as a Baltic religious practice. Liquids would be poured out on a variety of occasions: during agricultural and domestic rites, at weddings, christening parties, funerals, days of remembrance of the deceased, and so on. Pouring a liquid downwards

was a very significant cultural gesture that drew the attention of casual observers. For instance, Balthasar Russow, a 16th-century Livonian historian, in his description of a wedding celebrated in the house of the guild in Riga, showed that drinking beer went hand in hand with pouring it on to the floor. The floor became so wet during the feast that they even had to cover it with hay, so that people could walk and dance on it (Rusovs 1926, p.55).

Pouring downwards reflects the tendency to offer a drink to deities of a chthonic nature. On numerous occasions, sources point to the fact that such an offering was intended for the goddess of the Earth, the gods of the Earth, and the dead (Vaitkevičienė 2004). In Baltic languages, even the words *žemyn* ‘downwards’ and *žemė* ‘earth’ have the same root: in Lithuanian *žemė*, in Latvian *zeme*, ‘earth, ground’; in Lithuanian *žemyn* ‘downwards’, in Latvian *zemē*, ‘on the ground, downwards’.

Pouring on to the ground for chthonic deities and the dead covers a very wide comparative context. This libation technique was practised quite widely. It was recorded both in ancient civilisations and in ethnographic cultures: in the Mediterranean region, Mesopotamia, ancient India, Iran, China, in the cultures of the American Indians, and other locations (Davis 2008, pp.48, 52; Schröder 1952, pp.76-77). In Mexico, pouring on to the ground maintained its continuity from the civilisation of the Aztecs to the rites of the Zapoteca Pueblo Indians (Parsons 1970, p.537, footnote 114). In the middle of the 20th century in Peru, pouring on to the ground was still practised by Aymara Indians (Hickman 1964, pp.110, 275a). As religions changed, in some cultures the offering of a drink on to the ground was supplanted and replaced with another libation technique. For example, in Greece in the most ancient times, libations were poured directly on the ground (drink was offered to the dead, demons, subterranean powers, or chthonic deities on the Earth). Later, as concepts changed, it became more common to pour libations on the altar of the god, where the fires indicated that the god had consumed the offerings, or to place them in bowls on or beside the altar (Burkert 2000, pp.71-72). A similar change is observed in the religion of the Israelites, where libation on to the ground due to chthonic connotation came into conflict with the concept of a purely heavenly god. For this reason, libation on to the ground was prohibited (Rubenstein 1994, pp.435-438; Davis 2008, pp.48-50).

In Baltic religion, pouring on to the ground was the most common and best-documented libation technique. Three aspects of chthonicity can be distinguished,

which correspond to the three groups of the subject of libation: (1) the goddess of the Earth (in Lithuanian Žemynėlė, in Latvian Zemes māte ‘The Mother of the Earth’); (2) chthonic domestic deities; and (3) the souls of the dead. We will discuss each one of them in turn.

According to East Prussian sources, pouring for the goddess of the Earth was performed during every single rite, irrespective of the religious intention of the rite. Matthaeus Praetorius, the 17th-century Prussian historian, wrote in *Deliciae Prussicae oder Preussische Schaubühne* the following:

Jeder Feyer oder Fest Tag wird angefangen mit em Saufen. <...> Nehmlich sie gießen || zu allererst, ehe sie noch trinken, etwas auf die Erde der Zemynelen, || i. e. der Göttin der Erden, denn Zeme heißet auf Preußisch u Littauisch || die Erde, Zemyne, Zemynele, die Erd Göttin, so der Erden zu gebieten || hat. Zemyne-lauti heißet, dieselbe Göttin bedienen, oder derselben ihr || devoir thun. Diese Göttin wird bey allen Sollen-taeten zuerst u am || allermeisten bedienet, auch so gar, daß ohne Sie nichts verrichtet, ja || nichts angefangen wird <...> die Zemynele || giebt u erhält, ihrer Meinung nach so Menschen Denn Vieh, u allen Dingen || das Leben, drum sie auch bey allen ihren Sollennitaeten sie alle Zeit zu || allererst verehren, Wird jemand gebohren, komt jemand zu einem || Stande, wird einem Hauß Wirth ein Pferd oder ander Vieh gebohren, für || allen Dingen muß die Zemynele verehret werden, daß sie allen das || Leben giebt und erhält. Stirbt jemand, wird die Zemynele bedienet, || ja ihr vertrauet, das, was sie der verstorbenen Seelen wünschen u gönnen (BRMŠ 2003, pp.177-178, 197).

‘Every ceremony and feast starts with drinking [...] Before drinking, they pour some drink on to the ground for Zemynele first, that is, for the goddess of the Earth, because both in Prussian and in Lithuanian the goddess of the Earth is called Zeme, Zemyne, Zemynele, she is the goddess of the Earth, who rules the Earth. *Zemyne-lauti* means serving this goddess, doing one’s duty to her. During all and any ceremonies, she is the goddess to whom offerings are made first; without her, they dare not do anything or start anything [...] This is because, as they believe, Zemynele gives and maintains the life of man and animal, and all living creatures; this is why they pay their respects to her first during all their rites. When a baby is born or someone enters a new class in society, or a farmer’s mare gives birth to a colt, everywhere and always, Zemynele must be worshipped first, because it is she that gives and maintains everyone’s life. Again, if someone dies, they pay their respects to Zemynele, too, because everything they wish for the soul of the deceased is entrusted to her.’

Friedrich Blaufuss, a Latvian Lutheran priest in the 18th century, reveals a similar notion of making offerings to the goddess of the Earth. He claims that ‘since those people survive on the fruits of the Earth, some of the people of Vidzeme worship the earth as the provider of their bread and living, and call it the Mother of the Earth (Zemes māte); they make offerings to her’ (Blaufuss 1938, p.691). According to Blaufuss, the Mother of the Earth would be made offerings of the first drop of freshly brewed beer, the first bite of a meal and the first gulp of a drink (*ibid.*).¹ In his *Livonian History* (1595), Christian Kelch draws attention to offerings to the Earth made in certain parts of a farmstead. He writes: ‘I still know some people who had a certain place in their homes where *they would pour some beer or milk* and throw a piece of any other food being cooked; that is, they would say, an offering to the Earth’ (BRMŠ 2003, p.714). The practice of offering a drink to the Mother of the Earth is confirmed by ethnographic sources, too. For example, in Latvia, when they had finished pulling flax, the flax pullers would pour some vodka on to the ground at the place of the last bunch of flax and drink a glass of vodka ‘They saw it as an offering to the Mother of the Earth who had helped the flax grow’ (LFK 929/1936).

We can see libations intended for the goddess of the Earth in Greece during Ancient times. In the Historical Period, this libation is reduced to an offering for the dead: the Earth becomes solely a mediator between the people making the offerings and the ancestors (Davis 2008, p.47). However, a Pindaric scholiast points out that during ritual feasts a libation would be performed for Ge, the goddess of the Earth, and for the souls of heroes (Elderkin 1945, p.429). An offering of a drink used to be made to other deities of the Earth too. For example, Oedipus appeases chthonic deities in a sacred forest by pouring out some honeyed water for them (Davis 2008, p.47, footnote 14). An offering poured for chthonic deities was called *chthonioi*, to distinguish it from the common Greek term describing libation *spondai* (Burkert 2000, p.70).

In the Baltic lands, pouring a drink on to the ground was intended for more than one chthonic deity. At first glance, the cases recorded in written sources look complicated. The drink poured out on to the ground could be intended for different gods: for Cerroklis, the god of the corn and the fields (BRMŠ 2003, p.550); for Waiz-

¹ F.B. Blaufuss is talking about pouring beer intended for the Mother of the Earth into fire; nevertheless, it should be treated as a result of the disappearance of differences in libation.

ganthos, the god promoting the growth of flax (BRMŠ 2001, p.596)²; for an unidentified deity that the Jesuits called a demon (*daemonem*) and related to the grass-snakes worshipped in the past. According to the Jesuits of Vilnius, pagan Lithuanians saw demons in grass-snakes (BRMŠ 2005, p.115). These deities are undoubtedly chthonic; they are related to definite aspects of farming, or the earth, as their domicile. Furthermore, domestic demons, or grass-snakes, clearly express the territorial sacrality of the home: a land property in which a sacred grass-snake lived was called in Lithuanian *žemė meldžiama* (literally ‘the ground to which prayers are devoted’, that is, consecrated land). A miniature shrine intended for grass-snakes would be set up in a corner of the house under millstones. Grass-snakes were seen as the guardians of the home (Greimas 1990, p.427ff). The presumption can be made that libation on to the ground, depending on the situation, was intended for the entire group of chthonic gods, or for some of them.

Offering some drink to chthonic domestic deities is not an exceptional feature of Baltic religion. For instance, the Lapps made offerings to domestic deities called *akkas* by pouring out a little brandy for each of them at particular places where they were supposed to dwell (Karsten 1955, p.103).

The souls of the dead make up the third group of recipients of chthonic libation. Libation for the souls is a very distinct practice recorded on numerous occasions. Four moments are very important for this practice. In terms of the number of testifications, their order seems to be as follows: memorial ceremonies for the dead, funeral repasts, rites on graves (during funerals or memorial ceremonies) and the preparation of the grave and the shroud.

Libation on to the ground during memorial ceremonies for the dead, mentioned from the 16th century, was so common that it nearly became a distinctive feature of offerings to the dead. The fact that during annual memorial ceremonies for the dead a community would start the ceremonial feast by throwing some food and pouring some beer on to the ground is described in an anonymous treatise *Sudauer Büchlein* (The Booklet of Sudovians) written between 1520 and 1530. In 1585, offering food and the libation of drinks were described

² It is possible that the Samogitian Waizganthos and the Latvian Cerroklis are the same deity, from the functional point of view. The word *Vaišgantas* can be etymologically related to the Lithuanian *vaišės* ‘festive food, a feast, a banquet’, *vaišinti* ‘to treat somebody to something’, whereas Cerroklis is described by the Jesuit Stanisław Rostowski as ‘the god of hospitality’ (BRMŠ 2005, p.142). It is highly likely that it was a deity of agriculture, to which *primitiae* (the first sips of drink and pieces of food) were given at every feast.

by the historian Maciej Strykowski (BRMŠ 2001, p.518). Similar Lithuanian practices were recorded on numerous occasions by Jesuits (BRMŠ 2001, pp.606, 621; Ališauskas 2003, pp.11-12). Historical descriptions emphasise the complexity of the ceremonies: the rite includes the invitation of the souls, the preparation of the table with special dishes, the address to the souls with a special prayer, the offering of drinks and food, and finally seeing the souls off. Some authors stress the offering of animals to the dead. The libation of a drink as a characteristic element of such festive ceremonies was practised in Lithuania until the 20th century. For example, as late as 1996 in eastern Lithuania, feasts devoted to the dead still existed in living memory:

Per Visšventį jau an pietų kap sėdasi visi, tai jau dūšios atajj, tai, kap paima pirmucinį šaukštų, po stalu išlėj – itai dūšiom, ot! Ir tie visi, kiek yra, tai po stalu išlėj – tai dūšiom jau anų. Ir tadu jau visi poterius sukalbėj ir valgo, žodžiu, dūšiom atidavė, kas reikia (Vaitkevičienė, Vaitkevičius 1996, p.255).

‘On All Saints’ Day, when everybody is sitting at the dinner table, the souls of the dead come. When the people take the first spoonful, they pour it under the table, for the souls, really! And everybody present pours out under the table, for the souls of their dead. Then everybody says a prayer and starts eating, that is to say, they have paid their dues to the souls.’

At wakes, just as at memorial ceremonies, a custom of pouring the first drop of a drink on to the ground for the dead was also observed. In Latvia, no one dared to drink beer or vodka at a wake without first pouring some of it on to the ground (LTT I, pp.121, 146). The first glass of beer would be poured on the ground for the deceased person (LTT I, p.145). It was believed that anybody who drank the first glass at a wake without pouring some out first would be the next member of the community to die (LTT I, p.122). Matthaeus Praetorius, who described a wake in East Prussia in the 17th century, emphasises the difference between the wake and other ceremonies. According to him, during all and any celebrations and ceremonies, drink was poured on the ground only when taking the first sip of the celebration (Pretorijus 2006, pp.488-489). However, wakes and memorial ceremonies are an exception: in these cases, some drink must be poured out every single time before drinking, no matter how many times the drink is passed around the table. ‘They believe that the soul of the deceased person experiences a special sense of relief, when everyone offers something to Zemynele first and entrusts the soul of the dead person to her. Furthermore, people utter words of good fortune to the deceased’ (Pretorijus 2006, p.688ff).

In Baltic religion, as in the Greek religion, the Earth acts a mediator between the living and the dead. This is attested to not only by libation, but by burying food in the ground for the dead too. The Jesuits of Vilnius noted in 1600 and 1634 that people who observed pagan rites 'bury food in the ground so that the appeased earth should shelter the souls more safely' (BRMŠ 2001, p.620). 'They bury food deep in the ground to please the goddess, or, as they call her, the goddess of the Earth [Tellurem], so that she does not let out the souls entrusted to her' (Ališauskas 2003, p.613ff). A similar libation of beer or another alcoholic beverage on the ground for the dead in the belief that it has an influence on the fate of the deceased person also extends across the eastern border of Lithuania into Belarus. There, the spring feast devoted to the dead finishes with a wish that the earth should not weigh down on the chest of the deceased (Shein 1890, p.622), whereas the wake is interpreted as a rite intended for opening the door for the deceased person into the next world (Shein 1890, p.531).

Offering a drink in a cemetery into an open grave and on to a grave should be discussed separately. When writing about Prussian and Livonian customs in around 1546, Joannes Maletius, an evangelist in the Duchy of East Prussia, claimed that during funerals they 'put some bread and a jar full of beer into the grave at the head of the deceased person, so that the soul does not experience thirst or hunger' (BRMŠ 2001, p.206). In 1599, the custom of placing beer and bread in the grave of a deceased person was recorded in Latvia in the area of Rēzekne (Dumpe 2001, p.142). Catholic priests claimed that in 1664 in Alūksne, and in 1671 in Rujiena, a jar full of beer was poured into the grave during funerals (*ibid.*). There is some data attesting to the fact that libation was intended for the body of the deceased person too. Johann David Wunderer, who travelled around Latvia and Samogitia in the 16th century, wrote that during funerals beer used to be poured over the body of the deceased (BRMŠ 2001, p.639). Another source from the 16th century interprets it as the share of the deceased that is poured over the body (Spekke 1995, p.196). It is also worth mentioning that it was a custom in Lithuania to pour some beer, vodka or water on the place in the house where the coffin had been (Schleicher, p.217; cf. a similar Belarusian custom, Sy-sou 2001, p.340).

Libation on to a grave was a typical religious reality recorded in historical sources. When writing about Samogitians in his 15th-century *Historia Polonica*, Jan Długosz claimed that they had fireplaces intended for burning the bodies of the deceased, next to which they would put some food and pour some mead into the fireplace, in the belief that the souls of the dead

come at night, and eat the food and quench their thirst with the mead absorbed by the ash of the fireplace (BRMŠ 1996, p.560). Alexander Guagnini wrote in the 16th century that people in Lithuania would place some beer, mead and milk on the grave of a dead person (BRMŠ II, p.469). Jan Łasicki claimed at the same time that people would put a jar of beer and some bread at the head of the dead person (BRMŠ 2001, pp.602-603). Accounts of church visitations in the 17th century mention that the Latvians would offer bread and beer to the souls of the dead on graves, asking the dead to help the barley and rye spout, and their horses and cattle to be healthy (LTT IV, p.1955).

Libation into or on a grave is not a uniquely Baltic custom. In Ancient Greece, libations were poured into a grave where a body or ashes had been buried, and such libations were repeated periodically, usually for at least a year (Sarah 2005, p.164). In some cultures, even today, some drink is poured on a grave. Examples can be found among both close neighbours (Belarusians, Estonians, Russians) and remote lands, such as cultures of the African subcontinent (Cox 1998, p.199ff).

An exceptional offering for the dead was the libation of blood. This is a characteristic funeral offering that has survived in Lithuania in an ethnographic form as the custom of slaughtering an animal when a person has died. It was believed that 'during a funeral one must slaughter at least a chicken. It is necessary to shed some blood. They pour the blood on the ground.'³ There is a well-known and widespread belief that 'a dead person needs fresh blood, and if he is not given some, he takes an animal with his own hand' (LTT IV, p.126; Balys 1981, p.65).

The libation of blood on to the ground is a typical offering to the dead and to chthonic deities. According to B. Davis, examples from different cultures (the Mediterranean region, India, China, Bolivia, West Africa) show a tendency that the blood being offered must flow downwards and must be absorbed by the ground. Even if the blood is being offered on a stone or an altar, they take care that it flows down from the stone or the altar on to the ground (Davis 2008, p.53). This tendency is also reflected by the Greek *bothros*, holes in the ground through which the blood of offerings was poured directly into the ground to satiate the dead with blood (Burkert 2000, pp.60, 200).

Aspects of libation on to the ground discussed earlier (offering to the goddess of the Earth, chthonic domestic deities and the dead) when applied during the same rite

³ According to Helena Mockienė-Remytė, who was born in 1938 in the village of Mockos, near Gervėčiai in the Astrav district. Recorded by D. Vaitkevičienė and S. Matulevičienė in 2010.

II

BALTIC
WORLDVIEW:
FROM
MYTHOLOGY
TO FOLKLORE

look like a complicated procedure. However, it is exactly the composite procedures of the drinking rite that are emphasised in written sources, which mention all three components, albeit not going into great detail. In 1718–1719 the Jesuits of Vilnius wrote in an account: ‘Pagan offerings are still used to worship the *earth* and, similarly, *domestic gods*. The *souls of the dead* are usually invited to feasts and treated abundantly’ (BRMŠ 2005, p.116). The same three aspects were emphasised in an earlier account dating from 1593, in which the Jesuits expressed their indignation at the widespread custom of feeding the souls of the dead by holding feasts for them. During such feasts, ‘whatever food the living humans take and taste, they throw a piece of it under the table, that is, they send food from the table to the *dead*. Villagers are closely watched so that they do not (as they are used to) make offerings to the *earth* or worship *domestic deities*’ (BRMŠ 2001, p.619).

According to detailed sources dating from slightly later times, such as *Deliciae Prussicae* by Matthaeus Praetorius, it is clear that the drinking rite lasted for a long period of time, and that the drink would be sent around the table several times. Ceremonial feasts devoted to a number of gods are described in earlier sources. For example, *Sudauer Büchlein* describes the spring rites dedicated to the start of the ploughing work (going out to work in the fields) during which four gods were addressed in turn, each prayer finishing with drinking and throwing the vessel over the head (BRMŠ 2001, pp.129-131). During the ceremony of offering a goat, in which four or six villages took part, as many as 12 gods in turn were addressed (BRMŠ 2001, pp.129, 132). By their complexity, the drinking rites of the Balts are similar to the Greek drinking rites of the fifth and sixth centuries, during which three banquet-libations and four sacred drinks were performed: ‘The first banquet-libation was for Zeus and the Olympians, the second for the heroes, the third for Zeus Soter. Sacred drinks supplementary to the libations were dedicated to four deities, Hygieia, Hermes as the guardian of the house, Zeus Soter as its protector, and Agathos Daimon as a divine agent of good fortune’ (Elderkin 1945, p.425).

Fire

Libation on to the ground, albeit well documented, is only one of the libation techniques practised by the Balts. We will begin an analysis of other forms of libation with libation into fire, because fire is considered to be a basic element of the Baltic religion (burning offerings in fire is one of the most distinct stereotypes for portraying the Baltic religion in historical sources and folkloric tradition).

Libation into fire is one aspect of the cult of sacred fire. Most information concerning this libation practice can be found in Latvian sources, as well as in the writings of Matthaeus Praetorius, where he wrote about the Prussian Scalvians. According to Praetorius, the Scalvians would offer food and drink to fire by putting them on a carved-out board and pouring mead, milk or beer on to them (Pretorijus 2006, p.258). Honey would be offered to fire too. The honey would first be melted by heating it in a pot (*ibid.*). Joannes Stribingius, a Jesuit from Riga, writes in his visitation account of 1606 that the Latvians ‘pour beer into fire as if for a god. They do not eat the first bit of bread baked from the corn they have ground, but throw it into a fire. They also pour beer on to the walls of the stove, asking the fire not to bring them harm, or they pour it outside or into the stove’ (BRMŠ 2003, p.551).

Stribingius also mentions offerings of beer and bread into fire during feasts devoted to the souls of the dead: ‘They put a loaf of bread on the table and then throw the bread into the fire. At the same time, they put beer on the table and then also pour it on to the ground or into the fire. Finally, they clean the stove and drive the souls out of it’ (BRMŠ 2003, p.552).

The religious facts given by Stribingius recall the offering of the first loaf of bread to Gabija, the goddess of the home fire, in Samogitia, as described by Jan Łasicki in 1585 (BRMŠ 2001, p.582). However, in historical sources, libation into fire is related not only to the domestic goddess of fire but also to Perkūnas, the god of Thunder. It is exactly for this god, who is very important in Baltic religion, that beer is poured during the offering ceremony. It is described in Dionysius Fabricius’ *Livonicae Historicae* (written between 1611 and 1620):

Observant quoque hanc consuetudinem in hodiernum vsque diem, quando magna est siccitas terrae, in defectu pluviae, solent in collibus inter densissimas sylvas tonitrua adorare, eique immolare juvencam nigram, hircum nigrum et gallum nigrum; quibus mactatis ritu suo conveniunt plurimi ex vicinia, ibidem convivantes et potitantes, invocando Percunum, i.e. deum tonitru, omnium primo infundentes craterem cerevisiae, quem ter circumferentes circa ignem ibidem excitatum, postremo effundunt in ignem orantes Percunum, vt pluvias fundat et imbres (BRMŠ 2003, p.570).

‘Even today [the people of Livonia] keep to this custom. When the ground is very dry due to a lack of rain, they worship thunder on hills in the thick of the forest and offer a black heifer, a black goat and a black cock to it. According to the custom, when the animals have been slaughtered, all the neighbours get together, eat and drink, and address Percunum, that is, the god

of Thunder. They first take a helping of beer, which they pass three times around the fire, and then put some more firewood on to the fire, and finally pour out the beer into the fire, begging Percunum to send them rain and water.'

The Baltic god of Thunder (in Latvian Perkons, in Lithuanian and Prussian Perkūnas) is closely related to fire. It is highly likely that libation into fire is intended for the deities of fire (the god of Thunder and the deity of the Hearth). The Latvian folkloric tradition has preserved stories of libations intended for the domestic deity (Mājas kungs) performed in the hearth. They would pour some soup, break up some meat and bread, and pour beer for the gods (Šmits 1936, p.254). Although Latvian domestic deities in the 19th-century folkloric tradition are often referred to under the general name of gods of the Earth, it seems that this is a result of the disappearance of differences. Cristian priests and chroniclers did not differentiate clearly between domestic deities of different origins (the master of the home Mājas kungs, the Latvian goddess of the Hearth Uguns Māte 'the Mother of Fire', the goddess of Fortune Laima, the deity of Horses Ūsiņš). This is shown by the fact that the names are often mixed up. The term *zemes dievi* (gods of the Earth) might have been formed in opposition to the Christian heavenly god with the aim of emphasising pagan fallacy. F.B. Blaufuss' statement, too, that Latvians not only poured on to the ground for the Mother of the Earth, but also poured beer into fire, should be seen as a result of the observers' inaccuracy, or maybe even the degradation of the very rite: 'When they brewed beer and poured it into casks, they would pour a large portion into the fire for the Mother of the Earth, and if someone drank beer, he would pour out a few drops for the Mother of the Earth' (Blaufuss 1938, p.491).

Libation of animal blood into fire deserves special attention. We have information about it solely from ethnographic sources. Having slaughtered a pig, the Latvians would not eat the meat until they had poured three drops of pig's blood into a fire (LTT I, p.310). At the end of the 19th century, Eduard Wolter described the ritual of the offering of a cock on St George's Day, during which Latvians would pour the cock's blood into the fire (Volter 1890, p.24). The libation of animal blood into fire corresponds typologically to the classic process of an animal offering in Greece, when an animal's blood was poured on to an altar on which the sacred fire was burning (Burkert 2000, p.56).

There is plenty of ethnographic information concerning the fact that the Latvians would pour on to a furnace or behind a furnace and over the pole that held a copper over the open fireplace (LTT IV, p.1857; Šmits

1936, p.254-257; LFK 55/431, 72/7128). Libation next to fire or the fireplace was not necessarily directly related to the deity of Fire. In some cases, a place next to a fire might be selected for the purpose of the evaporation of the liquid (cf. libation on to heated altars positioned next to fireplaces as practised in cultures of the Mediterranean region, see Davis 2008, p.54). The Latvian rite called *pertiškis*, which is performed when a baby is no longer fed its mother's milk, might serve as an example of libation for the purpose of evaporation. Some beer would be poured into a small pit on the top of the stove, so that hot vapour rises directly into the baby's face (Volter 1890, p.136ff).

Air

Spreading a liquid in the air is recorded not only in the form of evaporation, but by sprinkling a liquid upwards too. It is perhaps the libation practice that survived the longest, as it is still remembered by people in Lithuania. Libation upward was especially typical of Lithuanian wedding and baptism customs, although it is known from other instances, such as during supper on Christmas Eve (Kudirka 1993, pp.116, 167). Libation upward was also performed when selling or buying something, when '*magaryčios*' was drunk for the occasion (Mačiekus 1997, p.17), or, to put it in other words, 'to wet the bargain' (even today in Lithuania the word *aplaistyti*, 'to water', is used to mean drinking alcohol after making a deal). The gesture of sprinkling upwards is also well-known in Belarus (Shein 1890).

Contrary to libation on to the ground or into fire, the remains of the drink, and not the first drops, were sprinkled upwards. This is how Antanas Juška, a collector of Lithuanian songs in the mid-19th century, describes upward libation during a wedding:

Po marčpiečio jaunoji išeina iš užstalės ant vidurio aslos. Į ratą išėjusi, geria midų arba vyną ir lieja į aukštą, į lubas, o paskui eina šokti su jaunuoju. Pašokę triskart aplinkinį, pasibučiuoja su jaunuoju ir sėdasi apent į stalą (Juška 1955, p.343).

'After the dinner served by the bride, she leaves the table and comes out to the middle of the floor. Standing in the middle of a circle, she drinks mead or wine and sprinkles it upwards, on to the ceiling, and then starts dancing with the groom. After three rounds, she and the groom kiss each other, and then sit down again at the table.'

Quite often, the person sprinkling the ritual drink would jump up slightly. In 1888 the collector of folklore Mečislovas Davainis-Silvestraitis wrote that during a feast to celebrate a baby's baptism in Samogitia, every

II

BALTIC
WORLDVIEW:
FROM
MYTHOLOGY
TO FOLKLORE

guest, when drinking his portion, must leave a drop of vodka, jump up and throw it at the ceiling (Davainis-Silvestraitis 1973, p.210). The jumping movement is also mentioned in characteristic forms of congratulation that accompany libation upward. They contain the wish that God should allow the most important people at the ceremony (the newborn baby and the mother) to be merry and jump (in Lithuanian *šokinėti*) (LTR 2123, pp.41ff, 34ff).

We find the same word *šokinėti* in other libation formulas, too. When throwing drink at the ceiling, they say, 'So that the bees jump' (Buračas 1935, p.206). A rudimentary form of this intention is the belief that when you drink, you should not drink everything down to the last drop, but 'leave a few drops for the bees' (Aleksynas, Sauka 2004, p.379). According to A.J. Greimas, who tried to reconstruct the mythical functions of Austėja, the Lithuanian goddess of Bees, libation upward is devoted to Austėja as an aerial deity. He argues that the upward direction differentiates this manner of libation from libation downward, which is addressed to the goddess of the Earth Žemyna (Greimas 1990, p.279).

Austėja, who according to Greimas' description is charged with a very wide spectrum of women's matrimonial and sexual matters (Greimas 1990, pp.274-286), nevertheless does not exhaust all the possibilities of interpretation of libation upward. Of no less significance is the fact that wishes for happiness are uttered during libation. The wish can be very universal: 'Let him be happy' (LTR 6447, no. 1207/27), 'To good fortune, to happiness' (Mačiekus 1997, p.17), and so on. It is a standard wish during family parties and 'wetting of bargains'.

In ancient thinking, man's good fortune is not an abstraction, but a special mythical principle, the successful act of which is ensured by Laima, the Baltic goddess of Destiny (Vaitkevičienė 2002, p.9). Laima is a manifold deity related to both man's personal happiness and the happiness of the home and the homestead (Biezājs 1955; Kursīte 1996, pp.190-257; Greimas 1990, pp.185-253; Vēlius 1977, pp.56-82). We cannot relate Laima to a single space or substance, because she is localised in various places and manifests herself in complex ways: through water, earth or fire (Vaitkevičienė 2002, pp.124-127, Kursīte 1996). The aerial dimension is expressed by the shape of Laima as a bird (a cuckoo, or a swan) (Greimas pp.190ff, 211). In view of the fact that in Lithuanian and Latvian ethnographic sources gestures directed upwards (such as ritual lifting up) are generally related to good fortune (Vaitkevičienė 2009), it can be seen that libation upward is a gesture-based form of offering that is suitable for Laima. It should be

mentioned that libation upward, as an offering to the deities of good fortune, can be found in other cultures too. For example, in Tibet, when the bride travels to the groom's house during the wedding, the cavalcade is stopped by women, who offer her bowls of *chang*. She dips her fingers into the liquid, and flicks some drops into the air as a libation to the gods who will bring her good fortune (Peter 1963, p.424).

Water

There is not much information about libation into water, although, in general, offering to water is a characteristic form of religious practice that reflects the attitude of the Balts towards water as a divine or demonic being, or as a place where mythical beings dwell (aquatic maids, souls, and so on). As late as the first half of the 20th century, it was believed that water must receive its *donis* (offering). That is to say, before going swimming or when crossing a bridge, a person must throw something into the water, such as bread, cheese or money, and if he has nothing, he must throw at least a crumb or a piece of straw from his pocket. Otherwise, the water will drown the person (Balys 1966, p.33). In Lithuania, legends about lakes which demand offerings ('a live head') every year are quite common. An animal (a cock, a cat or something similar) is drowned, so that no human drowns there (Vaitkevičienė 1996, p.58).

The material that is available, although it is quite fragmentary, allows me to speak of the libation of beer, milk and blood into water. In the early 20th century, in the Anykščiai area (eastern Lithuania), people would go to Karalienės liūnas ('Queen's quag', a springy old riverbed of the River Šventoji) and offer grain, and butter, cheese, pork fat or heifer's milk in the spring. 'The first milk of every heifer must be poured into "Karalienė"', so that the housewives' dairy farming goes well' (Žukauskas 1907, p.141ff; Vaitkevičius 2006, p.474ff). Latvian folklore stories mention retting ponds, in which the masters of homesteads would make offerings so that all went well on their farms (Šmits 1936, p.280). In 1926, the Lithuanian writer Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius published a few stories about Lake Pilvingiai in southern Lithuania, in which, as the stories go, there is a church sunken together with 'pagan priests'. Therefore, people 'would take and throw into the lake food and drinks for these pagan priests'. The stories say that when Catholic priests prohibited making these offerings, one or two people would drown in the lake every year (Krėvė-Mickevičius 1926, p.449).

From older sources, a visitation report from southeast Latvia written by the Jesuit Joannes Stribingius in

1606 should be mentioned. He tells about fishermen who sought a pagan priest's advice when they could not catch any fish, and were instructed to offer three casks of beer to the god of water. When they completed the ceremony and drank some beer, the fishermen went back to the lake to fish, and they caught lots (BRMŠ 2003, p.551). The report does not describe in detail the way the beer was sacrificed. Nevertheless, it is highly probable that some of the beer was poured into the water.

A couple of sources contain information about the libation of the blood of a sacrificed animal into water. In 1605, the Jesuits of Vilnius wrote about 'ignorant and superstitious people' who worshipped various gods and made offerings to them, and whom the Jesuits visited during their visitation. 'They offer a goat to a god named Nosolum, and pour its blood into the river, so that the god procures abundant harvests' (BRMŠ 2001, p.624). In 1797, the Latvian *Gada gramata* wrote about the libation of the blood of a sacrificed animal into water for a different purpose, so that no one would drown in the water:

Veci ļaudis teic, kad bērns akā jeb citur ūdeni iekritis, tad tā aka jeb upe kādu dvēseli griboti, un ka tad gailis jeb cits kāds lopiņš tanī pašā vietā jākauj un tās asinis tur jālej iekšā, tad tur vairs cilvēks nekritis nedz slīkts (LTT III, p.1700).

'Old people say that if a child falls into a well, or into any kind of water, it means that the well or the river wants a soul, and a cock or some other animal must be slaughtered in that place, and then the blood poured into the water, and after that no one will fall or drown in the water.'

There is no doubt that the libation of blood, milk or beer into water, although not recorded in great detail, was nevertheless practised in the Baltic lands.

Ritual stones

Up till now, we have not related the libation practices discussed to definite places, although it is evident that offerings to fire, water or earth were made mostly in sacred places, that is, sacred groves, or in the domestic environment. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss, at least briefly, two elements of sacred places related to libation: sacred stones and trees. Although this is a wide subject which requires an analysis of historical, folkloric and especially archaeological data, I will attempt to explain at least the fact of libation related to sacred stones and trees.

The information available allows me to speak of pouring beer, milk, thin soup and blood over stones. The

stones on to which the liquids were poured can be divided into two different categories: parts of complexes of ancient sacred places, and stones intended for the cult of domestic deities.

Stones related to communal religious practices were normally visited on religious holidays. Sometimes communal feasts were held next to such stones. For example, in the 1840s in Latvia, people used to offer grain from the first threshing, and beer, butter and ears of corn on the Muļķīstāru stone, which has a trough-shaped hollow. The stone would often have milk poured over it (Urtans 1990, p.57). In eastern Lithuania, as late as the early 20th century, women who respected old traditions would still put flax, corn, milk and other offerings on the Antakmenė stone (near Kazitiškis in the Ignalina district, see Plate VIII, Fig. 1), which also has a trough-shaped hollow on the top (Vaitkevičius 2006, p.341). On Whit Sunday, people would hold a feast next to the Paindrė stone (near Dusetos in the Zarasai district), which is called Laumių stalas (Fairies' Table), and put offerings (loaves of bread, and meat) and pour beer or mead on to the stone, 'so that the fairies protect the fields'. They say that someone once upset a cask of beer on the stone, and the older participants in the ceremony would not allow anybody put the cask straight, saying that the spilling beer was 'the fairies' share' (Vaitkevičius 2006, p.637).

Sacred stones situated in a domestic environment should be related to the deities of the family and the homestead. There is much information about domestic offerings practised in Latvia. Beer, milk, soup and the blood of a sacrificed animal (normally a cock) were offered to the domestic gods. The sources available show that sometimes, although not always, this was done on a stone, a pile of stones or a small area of ground covered with stones. The place for the offering can be in different parts of the homestead: on the threshold, by the gate, in the bath-house, in the cattle-shed, next to a fence, or under the sacred tree of the homestead (LTT I, pp.1178-1182; Šmits 1936, pp.248-282). A church visitation report from 1739 from Latvia mentions Bērtulis Pīlats, who every year on St Michael's Day would pour some beer and three spoonfuls of soup, put three pieces of bread and slaughter a cock as an offering on a stone next to the gate of his house (LTT IV, p.1180). A report dating from 1740 reveals that 'There was a tree in Drustenhof, with thirteen idols under it. Some of them were made of stones arranged one on top of another, and one of them had a nickname, Spitzkopff (Sharp-Headed). Vihlum Jahnis, the master of the house, would first make offerings of every dish and drink there, and only then would he partake of them' (BRMŠ 2005, p.154). The Jesuits of Vilnius also described offerings on a stone: 'They roll a stone over a

II

BALTIC
WORLDVIEW:
FROM
MYTHOLOGY
TO FOLKLORE

pit-hole and offer it some of the food and drink they are having' (BRMŠ 2001, p.624). Latvian narratives that tell about the remains of the ancient religious tradition also contain information on ceremonial libation on a stone. For example, on St Michael's Day the master of the house poured the first helping of cabbage soup on to the stones of the bath-house stove, saying: 'Here is your share, God, for you; give me a full cattle-shed and a garner, so that I can cook a full copper [of food]' (Šmits 1936, p.282). There is another story that tells how if you pour some beer on to a sacred stone once, you have to keep doing it later; otherwise you may fall ill (Šmits 1936, p.261ff).

Sacred stones with bowl-shaped hollows that are found in large numbers and in various shapes in Lithuania and Latvia are also related to libation. The very act of pouring a liquid into the bowl of a stone can be interpreted as a way of offering a liquid to the gods. This interpretation is supported by common Lithuanian folklore stories about grass-snakes which were given milk from stones with bowls (Vaitkevičius 2006, p.223). Researchers of Baltic religion generally agree that grass-snakes represented domestic deities (Grei-mas 1990, pp.425-433).

A stone can also serve as a ritual instrument when pouring on the ground or into fire. Special attention should be drawn to two instances of chutes carved in ritual stones and leading to fireplaces. The stone of Katinai (in the Anykščiai district), with a flat-bottomed bowl carved on its top, has a chute directed to a former fireplace (Vaitkevičius 1999, p.237). The stone at Laukagalis (in the Kaišiadorys district, Plate VIII, Figs. 2-3) is even more interesting. There is a trough carved on the top of the stone, from which two chutes run in the direction of two separate fireplaces (*ibid.*).

The issue of offering blood on sacred stones should be treated separately. This is what the Jesuits of Venden wrote about the Latvian domestic cult in 1618: 'They worship certain stones as if they were sacred; they keep them in the kitchen, granaries or storehouses, and call them "the place of throwing down" (*Atmeschene Wēte*) in their language [...] On these stones they pour the blood of slaughtered animals and put pieces of food' (BRMŠ 2003, p.565). It is likely that some folkloric data recalls offerings too. For example, in the case of the Darželiai stone with a footprint (near Linkmenys in the Ignalina district), people used to call the water accumulated in the footprint-shaped hollow 'blood'. The water was used for healing (Vaitkevičius 2006, p.329).

The libation of the blood of a sacrificed animal on to a ritual stone or an altar belongs to a very wide paradigm of religious behaviour that covers not only Baltic and Indo-European contexts, but also the religious prac-

tices of very different cultures. Of closer examples, the Scandinavians should be mentioned. The poem *Edda Hyndluljóð* tells how Ottar Innsteinnsson worshipped the goddess Freya by pouring the blood of a sacrificed animal on a stone (Kaliff 2007, p.112). The libation of blood on an altar is known from Ancient Greece. It should be pointed out that a rough version of the Greek offering table was simply a natural stone or a small pile of stones (Burkert 2000, pp.56, 87). Of examples that are culturally more remote, the offering rite practised in Igbo culture in Nigeria can serve as an example of a similar rite. It is performed in a sacred grove, where the blood of a sacrificed goat is poured on a sacred stone. The Igbos make offerings to the domestic deity in the same way, the only difference being that the rite is performed in the home shrine, consisting of an obo tree surrounded by a pile of stones, with one flat stone in the centre. The master of the house kills a goat and pours the blood over the central stone, and then on the other stones. He also smears some on the obo branch, and sticks feathers in the congealed blood (Meek 1970, pp.59-60).

Sacred trees

Although there is not much information about Baltic offerings to sacred trees, it is important to take note of this fact, for the reason that stones and trees made up an indivisible complex of sacred places when talking of both public and private (family) cults. Information related to libation represents mostly domestic deities and the rites devoted to them.

Latvian folklore stories provide information about offerings made next to trees. For example, there was a large alder next to the Boksts homestead, under which elderly people would feed the gods. They would bring some of all the dishes cooked for the first time to the alder, and on holidays they would bring beer and pies for the god (*Dieviņam*) (Šmits 1936, p.278). In another homestead, the lady of the house would put a helping of all the dishes cooked for the first time under the two birches that grew in the yard (Šmits 1936, p.276). In the Katriņas Danderi homestead, they would take food and drink for the gods to an old oak-tree on the eve of every holiday (Šmits 1936, p.264). Sometimes, food and drink were put in a hollow in a tree. For instance, a farmer would put a bottle of vodka and some food in a hollow in a tree (Šmits 1936, p.279). Stories about people living in old Latvian homesteads making offerings to old trees, especially oaks, by putting offerings in hollows or next to them, have been recorded on numerous occasions (Šmits 1936, pp.264-282). Some trees growing on homesteads had sacred names. For example, a pine tree growing in the Antuža home-

stead was called Dieva priede (God's pine). Offerings of food, drink, clothes and flax were made next to it (Šmits 1936, p.275).

Information about offerings to trees is supported by historical sources. This is what Joannes Stribingius wrote in 1606:

Quercum vocant Masculum, cui duo oua certis temporibus supponunt. Tiliam vocant Femellam, cui offerunt Butyrum, Lac, caseos et pinguedinem pro salute et incolumitate suorum liberorumque. Et si qui infirmantur, statim mittunt ad Arbores Popum, qui expostulat cum arboribus, quare illos permittant infirmare, quandoquidem illis debitum suum obtulerint. Quod si non statim conualescunt, adducit arboribus duplum praedictarum rerum, et ita liberantur. BRMŠ 2003, p.554

'They call the oak tree a man, and bring him two eggs at a set time. They call the lime tree a woman, and make offerings of butter, milk, cheese and fat to her, for the sake of their own and their children's health and welfare. When someone falls ill, they immediately send a pagan priest to the trees, who asks the trees why they allow them [the people] to fall ill if they have paid their dues. If they do not get well quickly, they bring double the amount of things mentioned earlier, and this way they expel the sickness.'

Stribingius mentions offerings to trees on another occasion too, when writing about Moschel, the god of cows (the Latvian goddess Marša), to whom they make offerings of butter, milk, cheese, and so on, 'and if a cow falls ill, they immediately go to the trees and make offerings to them, and then the cow gets better' (BRMŠ 2003, p.550).

In ethnographic data, the fact about offering blood deserves some attention. The Latvians would 'pour blood on a rowan when they have slaughtered a pig, so that the pigs get strong' (LTT I, p.309). We should note the belief that domestic trees and other plants (especially flowers) need animal blood. For example, if you want 'a planted seedling to take root and grow, you have to pour warm poultry or animal blood on to it right after the planting' (Balys 1986, p.117). 'If an apple tree does not bear fruit, then they bury an animal under the tree' (Slaviūnas 1947, p.182). As some beliefs show, an animal offering guarantees religious protection of the farm. For instance: 'When you plant a peony, you have to bury an animal's head under its roots; then the animals will not die' (Balys 1986, p.117).

It is very likely that the libation of blood can be interpreted as a method of consecrating a tree. The unique description by Mattheus Praetorius highlights the way in which trees were consecrated. If the *weidullis* (pagan priest) wanted a deity to settle in a tree, he had to

fast for three days and three nights, and invite his god to occupy the selected tree and help people through it. If the god did not settle in the tree within three days, the priest had to scratch his chest until he drew blood. If this did not help either, he had to get some of his child's blood and smear it on the tree so that the god settled in the tree. 'Then, they believe, the god comes to the tree for sure, and then offerings must be made' (Pretorijus 2006, pp.140-143).

Offerings to trees have not yet been studied thoroughly. The libation of a drink or blood is one aspect of this wide and important subject. Nevertheless, it should be noted that libation to trees is not a unique Baltic offering. Typological parallel to offerings to domestic trees can be found in Africa in Uganda domestic deities residing in trees are moved to a new homestead by planting trees from the shoots of the trees of the old homestead. During the consecration ceremony, beer is poured on the roots of the planted trees for the gods Mukasa and Kaumpuli (Roscoe 1911, p.427).

Conclusion

A closer look at Baltic libation practices reveals the diversity of libation techniques, which indicates that there existed a differentiated ritual system. The libation techniques that have been discussed differ from each other in various ways: in terms of the offering site or substance (earth, fire, water, air, stone, tree), the direction (upwards, downwards), the object (gods worshipped generally, domestic gods, the dead), and the level of publicity (communal or private rites). In terms of the material offered, libation involves various liquids: traditional fermented drinks (beer, mead) and other alcoholic drinks (wine, vodka) that later replaced the former, in addition to milk, runny honey, thin soup (it is probable that the soup was broth, made from the meat of a sacrificed animal), and water (in very rare cases). There is no information as yet attesting to the libation of fats (oil, butter, animal fat, tallow).

The libation of blood, which is part of the rite of animal offering, should be put in a separate category. Information concerning blood offerings can be related to all the substances and offering sites (earth, fire, water, stone, tree) with the exception of air. This leads us to the assumption that a blood offering is not a characteristic of aerial deities (this supports A.J. Greimas' idea that aerial deities do not have offering sites intended for them; therefore, he relates the theonym *Beaukuris*, literally 'the one who has no credence, altar', to the god of Wind (Greimas 1990, pp.434, 489).

When comparing Baltic libation with rites practised in Greek and other cultures, we can see clearly that the

II

BALTIC
WORLDVIEW:
FROM
MYTHOLOGY
TO FOLKLORE

libation techniques used by the Balts have typological parallels in the religious practices of both Indo-European cultures and other cultures that are not related to the former from an ethno-genetic point of view. The comparative context reveals the archaism of the ritual practice of the Balts (for example, the libation technique of libation on the ground as practised until the early 20th century emphasises the religious respect for Earth deities and the dead; no such thing exists in religions in which celestial deities become dominant as compared to earthly deities). The wide spectrum of libation techniques, sites and substances emphasises the balance of the polytheistic system of the religion of the Balts and the systematic character of religious practices.

Abbreviations

- BRMŠ – N. VĒLIUS, ed. *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai. Sources of Baltic Religion and Mythology. Quellen der baltischen Religion und Mythologie*, vols. I–IV. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 1996–2005.
- LFK – Archives of Latvian Folklore (Latviešu folkloras krātuve) of the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia
- LTR – Lithuanian Folklore Archives (Lietuvių tautosakos rankraštynas) of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore
- LTT – P. ŠMITS, ed. *Latviešu tautas ticējumi*. Vols. I–IV. Rīgā: Latviešu folkloras krātuve, 1940–1941.
- SCHLEICHER = P. profesoriaus Schleicher'io laišakai sekretoriui apie mokslinės kelionės į Lietuvą rezultatus [Professor Schleicher's letters to his secretary about the results of his scientific journey to Lithuania]. *Tautosakos darbai*, 1997, 6-7, 212-236.

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APEIGINIS NULIEJIMAS BALTŲ RELIGIJOJE

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Santrauka

Libacija – skysčio nuliejimas aukojant – yra vienas iš fundamentalių ritualų, praktikuotas ir tebepraktikuojamas daugelyje religijų. Libacija žinoma beveik visuose pasaulio kultūriniuose ir geografiniuose regionuose, šis ritualas buvo atliekamas jau priešistoriniais laikais, o ypač suklestėjo bronzos amžiaus civilizacijose. Nuo pat archajiškojo periodo libacija buvo svarbi religinė praktika Graikijoje, taip pat intensyviai praktikuota romėniškuoju graikų kultūros laikotarpiu. Graikų ir romėnų libacija apibūdinta gausiuose rašytiniuose paminkluose, gėrimo aukojimo scenos vaizduojamos ikonografijoje, ją tyrinėti leidžia išlikęs ritualinis inventorius (altoriai, aukojimo indai ir kt.). Senovės Indijoje plačiai praktikuotas somos nuliejimas, aprašytas indų Vedose; ir šiandien Indijoje nuliejimas tebėra gyvastinga religinio aukojimo forma.

Straipsnyje stengiamasi išryškinti libacijos tipus baltų religijoje, atsižvelgiant į ritualo atlikimo vietą ir nulie-

II

BALTIC
WORLDVIEW:
FROM
MYTHOLOGY
TO FOLKLORE

jimo kontaktinę zoną. Aukojimo vieta, kaip ir skysčio pobūdis, yra vienas iš svarbiausių kriterijų, leidžiantis išsiaiškinti nuliejimo prasmę ir paskirtį. Straipsnyje nagrinėjami baltų apeiginio nuliejimo tipai pagal aukojimo vietą: libacija žemei, ugniai, vandeniui, nuliejimas į orą ir gėrimo bei kraujo aukojimas ant akmenų ir medžių.

Nuliejimas ant žemės buvo pats įprasčiausias ir geriausiai dokumentuotas baltų libacijos būdas. Išsiskira trys chtoniškumo aspektai, kurie atitinka tris nuliejimo adresatų grupes: (a) žemės deivė, (b) chtoniškos namų dievybės ir (3) mirusiųjų vėlės. Šie trys aspektai, jeigu jie taikomi vienoje ir toje pačioje apeigoje, atrodo kaip kompleksinė procedūra. Tačiau būtent sudėtinės gėrimo ritualo procedūros akcentuojamos rašytiniuose šaltiniuose, kurie, nors ir nedetalizuodami, pažymi visus tris dėmenis.

Gėrimo ar kito skysčio liejimas į ugnį irgi ne mažiau svarbus baltų religijoje. Tai vienas šventosios ugnies kulto aspektas. Daugiausia žinių apie šį nuliejimo būdą pateikia latvių šaltiniai, taip pat šiek tiek M. Pretorius, kalbėdamas apie Prūsijos skalvius. Nuliejimas į ugnį istoriniuose šaltiniuose siejamas ir su Perkūnu; ši apeiga aprašoma Dionisijaus Fabricijaus *Livonijos kronikoje* (1611–1620). Atskira tema yra gyvulio kraujo pylimas į ugnį. Pvz., Latvijoje žinomas tikėjimas, kad paskerdus kiaulę mėsos negalima valgyti tol, kol į ugnį nebus įpilta trijų lašų kiaulės kraujo. E. Volteris XIX a. pabaigoje fiksuoja gaidžio aukojimo ritualą per Jurgines, kurio metu latviai liejo gaidžio kraują į ugnį. Gyvulio kraujo nuliejimas į ugnį tipologiškai atitinka klasikinę gyvulio aukojimo procedūrą Graikijoje, kai gyvulio kraujas buvo nuliejamas ant altoriaus, ant kurio liepsnojo šventoji ugnis.

Skysčio paskleidimas ore fiksuojamas ir kaip garinimas, ir – kur kas dažniau – kaip liejimas viršun. Tai bene ilgiausiai išlikusi nuliejimo praktika, būdinga lietuvių vestuvių ir krikštynų papročiams, nors žinomas ir kitais atvejais, pvz., valgant Kūčių vakarienę. Nuliejama į viršų ir ką nors parduodant ar perkant, kai ta proga geriamos „magaryčios“.

Nėra daug duomenų apie nuliejimą į vandenį, nors apskritai aukojimas vandeniui yra būdinga religinio elgesio forma, atspindinti baltų požiūrį į vandenį kaip į dievišką ar demonišką būtybę arba kaip į vietą, kurioje gyvena mitinės būtybės (nėrovės, vandens mergos, vėlės etc.). Turima medžiaga, nors ir ganėtinai fragmentiška, leidžia kalbėti apie alaus, pieno ir kraujo nuliejimą į vandenį. XX a. pr. Anykščių apylinkėse žmonės lankydavo *Karalienės liūną* (šaltiniuotą Šventosios upės senvagę) ir į vandenį rudenį aukodavo (skandindavo) javų, o pavasarį – sviesto, sūrio, lašinių ir pirmaveršių karvių pieno. 1605 m. Vilniaus jėzuitai

rašė apie vizitacijos metu aplankytus „tamsius ir prietaringus žmones“, kurie dievui, vardu *Nosolum*, aukoja ožį ir jo kraują išpila į upę, kad tas dievas duotų gerą javų derlių“.

Libacija taip pat aptartina tiriant šventviečių elementus – šventuosius akmenis ir medžius. Turimi duomenys leidžia kalbėti apie alaus, pieno, skysto viralo (sriubos) ir kraujo nuliejimą ant akmenų. Pavyzdžiui, Latvijoje ant Muļķīstāru akmens su lovio formos išduoba XIX a. 5-ajame dešimtmetyje žmonės aukojė pirmojo kūlimo grūdų, alaus, sviesto, javų varpų. Akmuo daug kartų buvo aplietas pienu.

Namų aplinkoje esantys šventieji akmenys sietini su šeimos, sodybos dievybėmis. Ypač daug duomenų yra apie Latvijoje praktikuotus namų aukojimus; namų dievams buvo nuliejama alaus, pieno, sriubos ir aukojamo gyvūno kraujo (dažniausiai – gaidžio). Su libacija susiję ir šventieji akmenys su dubenimis, kurių Lietuvoje ir Latvijoje žinoma daug ir įvairių formų. Patį skysčio pylimo į akmeninį dubenį veiksmą galima traktuoti kaip skysčio aukojimo dievybėms formą.

Akmuo taip pat gali tarnauti kaip ritualinis instrumentas, kuriuo naudojantis nuliejama ant žemės ar į ugnį. Įsidėmėtini du atvejai, kai ant apeiginių akmenų yra iškalti latakai, vedantys link ugniaviečių.

Nėra daug žinių apie baltų aukojimus, skirtus šventiesiems medžiams, nors į šį faktą svarbu atkreipti dėmesį dėl to, kad akmenys ir medžiai sudarė bendrą šventviečių kompleksą kalbant tiek apie viešus, tiek apie privačius (šeimos) kultus. Apie aukojimus, atliekamus prie medžių, žinių suteikia latvių folkloro pasakojimai ir istoriniai šaltiniai. Pvz., jėzuitas Jonas Stribinis 1606 m. rašė, kad latviai „ąžuolą vadina vyru ir nustatytu laiku jam atneša du kiaušinius; liepą vadina moterimi ir jai aukoja sviesto, pieno, sūrių, riebalų savo pačių ir savo vaikų sveikatos ir gerovės labui“.

Atidesnis įsižiūrėjimas į baltų religines praktikas, susijusias su skysčio nuliejimu, atskleidžia libacijos būdų įvairovę, kuri rodo buvus diferencijuotą ritualinę sistemą. Nagrinėti nuliejimo būdai skiriasi įvairiais parametrais – pagal aukojimo vietą arba substanciją (žemė, ugnis, vanduo, oras, akmuo, medis), kryptį (aukštyn – žemyn), adresatą (visuotinai garbinti dievai, namų dievai, mirusieji), viešumo lygį (bendruomeniniai ir privatūs ritualai). Aukojamos medžiagos požiūriu libacija aprėpia įvairius skysčius: tradicinius raugintus gėrimus (alus, midus) ir vėlyvesniu laikotarpiu juos pakeitusius kitus alkoholinius gėrimus (vynas, degtinė), taip pat pieną, skystą medų, skystą viralą (sriubą; galbūt tai kadaise buvo būtent paaukoto gyvulio mėsos nuoviras, – deja, šaltiniai nėra šiuo požiūriu informatyvūs) ir vandenį (labai retais atvejais). Neatsirado

duomenų (bent kol kas), liudijančių riebalų (aliejaus, sviesto, taukų, lajaus) nuliejimą.

Atskirai kategorijai priskirtinas kraujo nuliejimas, kuris yra gyvulio aukojimo ritualo dalis; duomenys apie kraujo aukojimą sietini su visomis substancijomis ir aukojimo vietomis (žemė, ugnis, vanduo, akmuo, medis), išskyrus orą. Galbūt tai leistų spėti, kad orinėms dievybėms kraujo auka nėra būdinga (tai paremia A. J. Greimo mintį, kad oro dievybės neturi joms skirtų aukojimo vietų, todėl teonimą *Beaukuris*, pažodžiui „tas, kuris neturi aukuro, altoriaus“, jis sieja su vėjo dievu).

Lyginant baltų nuliejimus su graikų ir kitose kultūrose praktikuotais ritualais, galima įsitikinti, kad baltų naudoti libacijos būdai turi tipologinių paralelių ir indoeuropiečių, ir etniniu bei arealiniu požiūriu negiminingų kultūrų religinėse praktikose. Lyginamasis kontekstas atskleidžia baltų ritualinės praktikos archajiškumą (pvz., iki XX a. pradžios praktikuotas nuliejimo ant žemės būdas pabrėžia rodomą religinę pagarbą žemės dievybėms ir mirusiesiems; tokio dėmesio nėra religijose, kuriose dangaus dievybės ima dominuoti žemės dievybių atžvilgiu). Platus nuliejimo būdų ir vietų bei substancijų spektras pabrėžia baltų religijos politeistinės sistemos pusiausvyrą ir religinių praktikų sistemiskumą.

II

BALTIC
WORLDVIEW:
FROM
MYTHOLOGY
TO FOLKLORE