

STONES-GODDESSES IN GRANARIES

NIJOLĖ LAURINKIENĖ

Abstract

The subject of this article is stones which were venerated in household surroundings. These stones that were kept in granaries were called goddesses (*Deyues*). Information about stones-goddesses is found in written sources on Baltic religion and mythology, mostly from reports by the Vilnius Jesuit College from the 17th and 18th centuries. The question arises: what deity is incarnate in these stones, bearing in mind that the functions of the object are defined in relation to well-being in the home, full storage bins, the protection of grain and livestock?

Key words: stone, granary, Žemyna, earth goddess, Grain Goddess, Grain Mother, Baltic mythology.

In Lithuania, many stones situated in natural surroundings are known from written sources or folklore dealing with old beliefs, as incarnations of deities or demons, often tools or objects of their actions, where these mythical creatures have left a mark of their activity. Stones, objects of pagan adoration or cult places, may have been venerated not only in nature, but also in domestic surroundings as well. We have information about stones kept in homes with religious intentions from 17th and 18th-century written sources on Baltic religion and mythology. These sources supply rather fragmented information, sometimes indicating the placement of the stones in granaries, that is, in buildings set aside for the storage of grain, and that sacrifices to some goddesses were carried out on these stones. The first points to be clarified are: what cult is associated with these stones, what was the aim of the sacrifices made upon them, and who were they dedicated to? The Vilnius Jesuit College, having initiated its missions in Lithuania at the end of the 16th century, in one yearly report (the year 1600), mentions sacrificial stones called goddesses (*Deyues*). It could be in the region of Samogitia, but the precise place is not indicated. These stones are quite big, with a flat surface, dug into the ground and covered with straw.

Alibi lapines non parui in horreis, in terra defossi, superficie plana sursum versus, non terra, sed atramine contacti asseruantur; quos Deyues appellant, atque vt custodes frumentorum et pecorum religiose colunt. Focus ipse ita omnibus obseruatur religiose, vt nemo accedere propius audeat; quod si quis eum attingat, eum confractum iri credunt (BRMŠ 2001, p.620).

‘In some granaries there are dug into the ground large stones, flat side up, not buried but covered in straw; they are called goddesses (*Deyues*), and are humbly revered as protectors of grain and livestock. This place of sacrifice is so protected by all, that none dare to come close to it. There is a belief that if someone touches it [the stone], that person will be struck.’

The meaning of the stones (*Deyues*) mentioned here was explained by Algirdas Julius Greimas. He claimed that the stones, written about by the Jesuits, are one of the forms of occurrence of the deity Laima (Laima-Dalia) (Greimas 1990, pp.214-217). Laima is the Lithuanian goddess of birth, destiny and happiness. However, it is difficult to think of her as a protector of grain and livestock, which is considered to be the area of *Deyues*. This field of operation is not typical of her. The available data enables us to presume that stones-goddesses and the rites performed around them were possibly related to Žemyna and her cult.

In Lithuania, it is known that there were many stones that were considered to be sacred and played a role in a cult. By themselves or together with other objects creating sacred spaces, they served as sacrificial stones where sacrifices were laid, poured or burned. Straw or hay are an attribute that was used to cover an object or a place where offerings were made and sacrificial ceremonies took place. Herodotus wrote that the hyperboreans (people of the north), when sending objects destined for sacrifice to the Sciths, would wrap them in wheat straw. Also, according to him, Thracian or Peon women (probably an Illyrian tribe), when sacrificing to the queen Artemisia, deposited sacrifices bound in wheat straw Herodotus (1988, 221-222; BRMŠ 1996, pp.116-117, 122-123). The Balts also used wheat straw or hay when making ritual offerings to the ancient gods. In a fragment of a lost text dated to the 16th century and published for the first time by Wilhelm Mannhardt (*Zedel zu einem verlorenem Briefe*, ‘A Leaf from a Lost Letter’) that has been conserved in the Secret State Archive of Königsberg, there is a description of a pagan Baltic sacrifice of a goat (the place is not defined), and the use of hay is also mentioned. Hay was spread under the body of the sacrificial animal, and its head was sprinkled with water from a handful of hay dipped in water. Later, the cooked flesh was laid in a bowl on a table strewn with hay (Mannhardt 1936, p.310; BRMŠ

2001, p.166). Hay was used in an offering to an ‘earthly’ god (*erdische goth*), which is what the goat is called here (there are quite a lot of such references among sources of Baltic religion and mythology about a connection between the goat and agriculture and its gods). Hay is also present in other rituals connected to the Baltic chthonic gods. Maciej Strykowski notes that in sacrifices carried out at the end of October in Lithuania, Samogitia, Livonia, Curonia and Russia in some regions to the god Ziemeinnik, the table was laid with bread and beer on hay or a towel (*stól sianem a indzie abrussem nakryją*, BRMŠ 2001, pp.515, 548). Pretorius writes that the descendants of the ancient Prussians, when blessing a calf that has been weaned, prepared a ritual meal on a basket, covered with a handful of hay instead of a tablecloth (*leget an statt des/Tisch-tuchs ein Fließchen Heu hinauff*, Pretorius 2006, pp.558, 559, 562, 563).

So, according to different historiographers, hay was used to cover a place where ritual meals were set, those offered to chthonic gods, or those associated with them due to their nature. Hay (in Lithuanian *šienas*) ‘grass cut and dried for fodder’ and straw (in Lithuanian *šiaudai*) ‘a mass of grain stems after threshing’ (LKŽe: *šienas, šiaudai*), were obviously connected with agriculture and animal husbandry, and not only with the practical side, closer to modern man, but with the religious side as well. Stones in granaries, stuck in the ground flat side up, were covered in straw, as was usual in the practice of pagan cults, in order to distinguish the place where symbolic communication with a deity was carried out. It might be considered as well that straw was used to cover and protect a sacred spot.

About stones that supposedly harbour deities, we can also find a mention in a later report by the Vilnius Jesuit College about the ‘superstitions’ of the inhabitants of Lithuania:

Nec praetermittendum in hac utraque missione quosdam tam crassa Dei et rerum coelestium ignoratione repertos, ut lapidibus ipsis nescio quid numinis inesse arbitantes, cultu superstizioso eos venerantur et decimas omnium rerum eis offerent (1603; BRMŠ 2001, p.622).

‘It must be mentioned that in each of our missions we have encountered people that know nothing at all about God or heavenly matters, but consider that some deity resides in stones, and superstitiously revere them, sacrificing one tenth of everything.’

In a report by the Vilnius Jesuit College dated 1605, there is confirmation stating that a stone can be considered a god (*Deus*), on whom the fullness of storage bins and domestic well-being depends:

Quidam rudissimi villani, opera nostrorum, prauam exuere consuetudinem colendi lapidem quandam, quem horrei ac foecunditatis, domesticaeque felicitatis Deum esse putarunt (BRMŠ 2001, p.623).

‘Thanks to our efforts, more than one unlearned villager has given up the habit of offering to a stone that he used to consider the god of domestic well-being and full storage bins in the granary.’

In the 1605 report by the Vilnius Jesuit College, there is another mention of a stone kept in a home in the name of good harvests, which was rolled over a depression in the threshold:

Una superstitio pro felici fruge apud plures communis erat: servabant lapidem super orificium foveae, cui quicquid in esculentis aut poculentis habebant, promiscue ingerebant. Fecit Pater, ut domo lapines exturbarent et foveas humarent (BRMŠ 2001, p.624).

‘In the hope of good harvests, many believe in the superstition of rolling a stone over a depression dug in the threshold, and taking there [a sacrifice] of what they ate and drank. The Father [Jesuit] made us roll the stone out of the house and fill the hole.’

That the threshold is a place of domestic sacrifice can be read in a service letter (1571) written in Labguva (in East Prussia) where there is a description of the Prussian sacrifice of a black goat in this place: the animal’s head was chopped off ‘on the threshold’, after which there was prayer and other rituals (*Neben dem hat er sie dazu gebracht, dass sie ihm halfen einen schwarzen Bock heiligen, welchem sie auf der Schwelle des Hauses den Kopf abgehauen, und indem sie sämtlich herumgekniet, wie er ihnen befohlen, gebetet und andere Zeremonien mehr gebraucht*, BRMŠ 2001, p.227).

The threshold was considered holy since ancient times. Being the barrier between the safe space of the home and the outside world, it is related to various taboos and recommendations: *Su žmonėm nesisveikink par slenkstį, jei nenori su jais greitu laiku susipykt* (‘Do not greet people over the threshold, if you do not want to have a falling-out soon,’ LKŽe, *slenkstis*).

The inhabitants of Lithuania Minor had a tradition of leaving money on the threshold during a housewarming. According to Pretorius, during a house-blessing ceremony, the head of the family would secretly put a coin on the threshold *einen Dreypelcher* (Pretorius 2006, p.556, 557; BRMŠ 2001, p.303). In folklore, there are references to being buried under the threshold, which would confirm beliefs found in many nations about the connection of the threshold to ancestors and the souls of the departed (Chevalier, Gheerbrant 1996, pp.997-998). *Kad gaspadinė badu miršta, reik ją*

po slenksčio pakasti ('If the housewife dies of hunger, bury her under the threshold,' LKŽe, *slenkstis*).

So the situation of a stone over a hole dug in front of a threshold, as was mentioned in the 1606 Jesuit report, would allow us to believe in a connection between this stone and what lies under the threshold with a mythical being, controlling the souls of the departed and the fertility of the earth. As we know, this part of the mythical world, ghosts and the fertile powers of the earth, traditionally belong to chthonic deities; although we will temporarily set aside the question of exactly for whom these sacrifices on the threshold stone were intended.

The Latvian belief about extraordinary stones kept in the kitchen, barn or storage buildings is referred to by a Venden Jesuit in a 1618 report (about the state of the Dunaburg, Ludsen and Rezekne parishes):

Lapides quosdam certos colunt tanquam sacros, quos servant in culina, in horreis aut in granariis, quos lingua sua vocant Atmeschenes Wête, quasi loca projectiva; nephas est apud illos magnum, talia loca prophanare, vel ab aliquo alio illa tangi, praeterquam ab eo, qui a Superiore habet facultatem; fundunt super lapides tales quorumvis animalium, quae mactant, sanguinem et a quolibet cibo portiunculum ibidem reponunt (BRMŠ 2003, p.565).

'They revere as holy certain stones kept in the kitchen, barn or storage building, calling them in their own language the place to cast things. It is a great crime to desecrate these places or to touch them, except for those that have permission from the elder. On these stones they pour the blood of animals that have been slaughtered, and bits of all kinds of food.'

The question arises, what god is incarnate in these stones, located in the barn, the kitchen or on (or maybe by) the threshold, if the deity was probably feminine (*Deyues*), and its functions defined as augmenting the fertility of the earth, the connection with well-being in the home, full storage bins, and the protection of grain and livestock? Let us remember that these stones received sacrifices of what was eaten or drunk, as well as the blood of slaughtered animals.

We know from written sources that the descendants of the ancient Prussians, as well as the Lithuanians, consigned their homes to the protection of the goddess Žemyna, who was also patroness of the earth and fertility, by simply libating the earth with food and drink: 'Before drinking, they [nowadays the Nardruvians and Skalvians, according to Pretorius] pour some on the ground for Zemynėle (Žemynėlė), which is the goddess of the earth' (Pretorius 2006, pp.482, 483). 'And guests during a wake would take great care to throw three bites of bread, the same amount of meat and as

many spoonfuls, each wishing that Zemynėlė be kind to the departed in the other world, some say in heaven' (Pretorius 2006, pp.688, 689).

Libations to Žemyna were made during religious ceremonies, when starting the seasonal cultivation or harvesting work or blessing animals, and during crucial moments of a person's life, such as birth, marriage and death.

It is worth noting the existence of stones in natural surroundings called *boba*, sometimes with an epithet. *Bobas* are associated not only with the stones-goddesses discussed above, but also with Žemyna, since some of her manifestations are called *boba*, as in *rugių boba* (Rye Woman, idols made from the last sheaf of rye) (for the relationship between Žemyna and *rugių boba*, see Laurinkienė 2008, pp.78-80).

It should be noted that in Germany, children used to be frightened by a mythical creature, the Grain Mother (like the Lithuanian Rye Woman, *rugių boba*). Her names were Kornmutter, Roggenmutter or Roggenmuhme, or the Grain Mother, Rye Mother or Rye Aunt (Mannhardt 1865, p.17). '*Kinder sollen nicht ins Kornfeld gehen, da sitzt die Kornmutter, Roggenmutter, Roggenmuhme drin.*' ('Children are not allowed into the fields of grain, because that is where the Grain Mother, Rye Mother and Rye Aunt sit.') Such warnings for children are well known throughout Germany (Mannhardt 1865, p.31). It is said that this Grain Mother or Aunt has many iron breasts. She makes children lie down and suckle until they die ('*Sie hat viele und grosze eisene Brüste. An diese legt sie die Kleinen, und zwingt sie, daran zu saugen, so dass sie sterben müssen*' Mannhardt 1865, p.31). So this German Grain Mother is a frightening and dangerous being, whose bodily parts reflecting her motherhood are big iron breasts (and in great number, too).

A stone in Levaniškiai (in the Molėtai district, near Čiulėnai) in Aukštaitija is also worth mentioning. It is called Geležinė boba (Iron woman) and used to be on the edge of a swamp. The stories told about it are of some woman who later went into the earth and turned into a stone:

Senų senovėje buvo tokia boba su geležine kačerga, ir ji vaikščiojusi ir žmones mušusi su kačerga. Paskiau, sako, ji palindus žemėna (Vaitkevičius 2006, p.238).

'In ancient times there was this woman who had an iron poker; she used to go around beating people with the poker. Later, they say, she went into the ground.'

Pasakojama, kad toj dirvoj [Gelažinėj] yra didžiulis akmuo ir po juo sėdinti boba, kuri geležimi pavirtus. Ja kaimo žmonės baugina vaikūs. Sakoma, kad vėlai

vakare gaudanti mažus vaikus ir nešanti po akmeniui (Vaitkevičius 2006, p.238).

‘It is told that in that field there is a huge stone and a *boba* [woman] sitting under it that has turned into iron. Local villagers scare their children with her. They say that late in the evening she comes out to catch small children and take them under her stone.’

The stone at the edge of a swamp, the Iron Woman from Levaniškiai, can probably be compared with this Grain Mother. The Iron Woman from Levaniškiai is probably connected with the Lithuanian grain goddess (Grain Mother) Žemyna.

As has been mentioned, stones-goddesses in granaries are keepers of grain and livestock. The goddess Žemyna is known as the goddess of grain, its cultivation and harvest, as well as of domestic animals. This can be read in a generalised form in a Vilnius Jesuit College report: ‘*Telluri, deae suae, utpote frugum et pecorum custodi offerunt*’ (‘They sacrifice to Tellus [Žemyna], their goddess, because she guards the harvest and livestock’) (a letter dated 1634, from Ališauskas 2003, p.214). Žemyna, as the goddess of livestock and connected with all the goodness that comes from the earth, especially grain harvests, and not only the harvesting, but also the threshing, blessing and storing, is confirmed by Pretorius (Pretorius 2006, pp.504-529, 559-569). In a hidden form, these areas of Žemyna’s influence are mentioned in much later ethnographic sources, in Lithuanian agricultural and animal husbandry practices as late as the 20th century.

We can also associate the stones-goddesses with the earth goddess through the content of a sacrifice, a black suckling pig, whose sacrifice is described in the 1600 Jesuit report:

Mactant parcellum lactantem omni parte nigrum, quem coctum pater et mater familias, cum anu sacrificia comedunt; particulas autem tam ex porcello, quam ex aliis cibis, si qui forte parari fuerint, cum ter nouem buccellis panis, anus in horreum defert, vbi dictum Deyues sola, remotis omnibus, placat (BRMŠ 2001, p.620).

‘They slaughter a suckling pig, completely black, that the father and the mother eat cooked in the company of an elderly woman sacrificer; small parts of the pig, as well as other food if they are having it, and twenty-seven pieces of bread, are then taken by the sacrificer to the granary, where she, and she alone, prays to the aforementioned goddesses [the stone].’

So in the sacrificial suckling pig feast, both the father and the mother take part, together with the sacrificer.

Pigs or piglets are typical sacrifices to earth and agricultural deities, and livestock associated with them. Pigs are the correct sacrifice to the Greek agricultural goddess Demeter. Pigs were also sacrificed to the Roman earth goddess Tellus, and the goddess of vegetation Ceres (Wissowa 1902, p.161; Guillen 1985, p.239).

That the Lithuanians made porcine offerings to the earth goddess (*tellurae dea*) is confirmed by Jacobus Lavinius (1583, BRMŠ 2001, pp.605, 608) and a 1588 Vilnius Jesuit College report: ‘*In oppido quodam tam crassa erat ignorantia rerum, ut porcā immolarent Deae Telluri*’ (‘In one small town the obscurantism was such that they sacrificed pigs to the goddess Earth’) (BRMŠ 2003, pp.618, 626). The descendants of the Prussians symbolically sacrificed a pig during the sowing festivities, obviously connected with Žemyna: the pig’s head, feet, and especially the snout, were the main dish in the ritual sowing meal (Pretorius 2006, pp.500-501; BRMŠ 2003, pp.180-182, 287-288). The Jesuit Stanislaw Rostowsky mentions that the people of Samogitia offered a pig to the Earth: *Telluri porca faciebant* (BRMŠ 2003, pp.140, 143; probably based on information from Lavinius).

A black piglet was also sacrificed to the Latvian Ceruoklis, the god of fields and grain, and lord of an area close to Žemyna. He was sacrificed to in forests, and not just a black piglet, but a black chicken and a black bull as well, with a couple of barrels of beer (a 1606 report by the Jesuits of Riga, BRMŠ 2003, p.555; BRMŠ 2003, pp.557, 562). Black animals were frequently offered to the gods of the earth and the underworld. According to Rostowsky, the Latvian Ceruoklis was ‘the god of hospitality originating from hell’ (*ex orco ille hospitalitatis deus*), to whom people libated the first bites of a meal, and the first sip of every drink (BRMŠ 2003, pp.142, 146; BRMŠ 2003, p.567).

Returning to the offering to the stones-goddesses, it is important that it was completed by the sacrificer, visiting the stone in the granary and praying alone, while everyone else stayed away, and offered the remains of the piglet and bread, divided into twenty-seven pieces. So the piglet is not the only offering, but bread is as well, as is usual when sacrificing to home or chthonic deities: Žemyna, Žemėpatis (Zemopatis, Zempattys), Pagirniai (BRMŠ 2003, pp.227, 323; pp.199, 302; 2001, pp.622, 630).

To resume, we can state that goddesses as stones in the granary that protect the grain can be interpreted as an incarnation in stone of the god of ploughed fields and the home. The sacrifice of a black piglet and bread to the stones-goddesses gives us reason to see these stones as chthonic deities, probably as an incarnation

of Žemyna. If we accept this supposition, we might conclude that the goddess Žemyna manifested herself not only in the earth and grain, but also in stones. In other words, these stones were considered a material representation of this goddess, venerated at home, and sometimes in natural surroundings.

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.

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Nijolė Laurinkienė
Department of Folk Narrative
Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore
Antakalnio Street 6 Vilnius, LT-1038
Lithuania
nlaurinkiene@yahoo.com

AKMENYS-DEIVĖS SVIRNUOSE

Nijolė Laurinkienė

Santrauka

Akmenys, kaip pagoniškojo kulto objektai ir kulto vietos, galėjo būti garbinami ne tik gamtinėje, bet ir namų aplinkoje. Apie religine intencija namuose laikomus akmenis pateikia žinių XVII–XVIII a. rašytiniai baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai, daugiausia Vilniaus kolegijos jėzuitų pranešimai. Viename jų (1600 m.) kalbama apie akmenis, saugomus svirnuose ir vadinamus Deivėmis (*Deyues*), kuriems būdavo aukojamas juodas dar žindomas paršiukas ir 27 gabalėliai duonos (tai galėję būti Žemaitijoje). Šie akmenys – nemaži, plokščiu paviršiumi, buvo įkasti į žemę ir apkloti šiaudais. Jie pamaldžiai garbinti kaip grūdų ir galvijų saugotojai (*custodes frumentorum et pecorum religiose colunt*).

Keliamas klausimas, kokios dievybės inkarnacija buvo laikomi akmenys svirnuose, turint omenyje, kad su jais siejamos dievybės funkcijos apibrėžtos kaip ryšys su namų gerove, pilnais aruodais, grūdų ir galvijų sergėjimu.

Iš rašytinių šaltinių žinoma, kad senovės prūsų palikuonys namų aplinkoje atnašaudavę Žemynai, žemės ir jos derlingumo deivei, numesdami maisto ar nuliedami gėrimo ant žemės. Esama faktų apie aukojimus šiai deivei ir gamtoje ant akmens. Deivė Žemyna kaip tik globojusi javus, prižiūrėjusi nuimamą ir specialiuose trobesiuose saugomą javų derlių, pasižymėjusi ir naminių gyvulių patronavimu. Akmenis-deives su žemės deive leidžia sieti ir tiems adoruojamiems akmenims skirtos minėtosios aukos – juodas dar žindomas paršiukas ir 27 gabalėliai duonos. Tai – tipiškos aukos chtoninėms dievybėms. Duona ir kiauliena neretai aukota Žemynai. Jei priimtume prielaidą, kad akmenys-deivės svirnuose galėjo būti laikomi Žemynos inkarnacija, prieitume išvadą, kad ši deivė manifestuodavusi ne tik žemėje, javuose, bet ir akmenyse. Kitais žodžiais, akmenys, matyt, laikyti šios deivės materializuotu reprezentantu, garbinamu namų, o kartais ir gamtinėje aplinkoje.