The Rose and Blood: Images of Fire in Baltic Mythology

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The mythical expression of fire goes far beyond the boundaries of direct depiction: research into fire deities, rituals, and especially myths inevitably brings us not only to direct manifestations of fire, like fire in a fireplace, fire of heaven or fire of hell, but also to its metaphorical forms. As one of the elements which make up the world, fire exists in plants, animals, constellations, parts of the human body, food, etc. In other words, it can be expressed via any cultural code: botanical, medical, culinary, cosmological and others. In this paper, two typical images of fire in Baltic mythology will be analysed – the rose (botanical fire), and blood (the fire of the human body).

Research is somewhat impeded – yet made more interesting at the same time – by the fact that images of fire are very closely related to the deities of fire, and for this reason research must be comprehensive in scope. An interesting tendency emerges when trying to analyse the images of fire bearing in mind their links to the Baltic fire deities: in most cases, these images express not specific, local deities of a lower hierarchical level (like, for instance, the Lithuanian goddess of the home fireplace Gabija, or an analogous Latvian goddess Uguns Māte), but the gods of the highest level who are related to fire in general. One can assume that the deep level of the metaphoric images of fire is related to more common, well-known and more permanent gods. Such deities are the Lithuanian god Perkūnas and his Latvian counterpart Pērkons and the Lithuanian goddess Saulė, and her Latvian counterpart Saule. It is interesting that not only do these gods have analogous functions in Lithuanian and Latvian mythologies, but they also have the same names. We find the same names also in the Prussian language and religion (Perkono, variant Perkunis; Saule). It is a pity that too little is known about Prussian mythology to allow proper research on the images of fire in Prussian mythology to be carried out.

Perkūnas, the god of thunder, is one of the four highest gods of the Lithuanian pantheon of the thirteenth century, along with Andojas (the god of water), Kalevelis (a god-smith, the guardian of dead

souls) and Medeina-Žvėrūna (the goddess of hunting and warriors) (Vėlius 1996: 256-61, 263-8). At the centre of the Prussian pantheon of gods, there is also Perkūnas, related to power, maturity and fulfilment, and different from Patrimpas, a young god of vegetation, and from Patulas, the god of the dead (Vėlius 2001: 66-7). Considerable offerings were still being made to Perkūnas as late as the seventeenth century (Vėlius 2003: 570). In Latvian mythological songs, Pērkons is one of the most important mythical personages along with the syncretic personage Dievs, his sons Dieva dēli, and the female deities Saulite (little Sun), Saules meita (the daughter of Saule) and Laima.

The issue of the Baltic goddess Saulė has not yet been resolved. Although she is not in the pantheon of either Lithuanian or Prussian deities, the sources between the thirteenth and the seventeenth centuries reiterate, as a formula, that the Balts worshipped the Sun and the Moon. Many agricultural rituals relating to the Sun have survived; and a multitude of sun myths is preserved in Latvian songs. Since the nineteenth century, this theme has been explored by scholars of comparative Indo-European mythology, and, depending on the trends, the meaning of the sun in Baltic mythology has been either overestimated or underestimated. Previous research by the author of this paper (Vaitkevičienė: 2001) shows that the topic of the mutual relations between Saulė and Perkūnas deserves closer attention, because they emerge not only in the themes of Latvian songs but also in Lithuanian folklore (proverbs and riddles) and in linguistic data (in particular, names of plants and place names).

One should not reject the view that the images of fire analysed here extend far beyond the borders of Baltic culture as they are quite universal. Their universality can be compared to the international popularity of folk beliefs. As in beliefs, one can find many similar motifs and images, yet the meanings differ considerably depending on the region.

This analysis of the images of fire in Baltic mythology is mainly based on folklore and linguistic data, since today the Baltic mythical universe can only be imagined from the fragmentary shivers of a religious system that once existed. Of special value are Latvian folk songs that have preserved mythical themes, and the common array of Lithuanian-Latvian beliefs. The beliefs are the binding material that allow us to join the broken links of associations and determine the network of mythical correlations.

THE RED FLOWER (ROSE)

Blazing fire is often associated with blossom, especially with plants that have red flowers. In traditional interpretations of dreams, red flowers forebode a fire. The fire of heaven, the Sun, is also shown as a flower: "A flower blossomed, upraised the whole world. The Sun is rising." (LMD III 114/9-13). The Sun's characteristic flower is the rose; it is in this form that the Sun is represented in Lithuanian Christmas songs: this is how the myth of the goddess of sun reborn at Christmas is manifested (Greimas 1990: 472).

In Latvian songs, the rising and setting sun is depicted as a rose wreath, a rose bush, a rose garden and the like, and Mannhardt has already written about this (Mannhardt 1875: 97). In some cases, we see both the sun and the rose, and one of the most characteristic motifs in Baltic mythology is a rose garden (Klaustiņš and Endzelīns 1928-1932: 10, No 1608 etc).

The rose is often the shape of the morning or the evening sun; it is the rising or the setting (fiery, red) sun, as in the riddle: *Skaista puķe ezerā: dienu zied balta, rītā un vakarā sarkana. Saule*. (A beautiful flower in a lake; it blossoms white in the day, and red in the morning and in the evening. The Sun. Ancelāne 1954: No 2680a).

The colour red is the main semantic feature on which the association of the sun (rising and setting) and the rose is based. One should also bear in mind the similarity of the shape but, first of all, let us see what plant is called the rose.

For Lithuanians, *rožė* "the rose" was not just one flower but all of the following:

Common mallow, *Malva sylvestris*: roželė (Kaunienė 1991: 99), roželės (Vailionis 1938: 212);
Vervain mallow, *Malva alcea*: roželės (Vailionis 1938: 212);
Dog rose, *Rosa canina*: rožė (Vailionis 1938: 299), šunrožė (Vailionis 1938: 299);
Hollyhock, *Althea*: rožė, kiaurarožė, aukštrožė (Vailionis 1938: 17);
Field bindweed, *Convulvulus arvensis*: roželės, rožačkėlės, vargo roželė (Vailionis 1938: 102);
Rosebay willow-herb, *Chamerion angustifolium*: ožrožė (Vailionis 1938: 131).

The study of Lithuanian botany shows that plants that are named *rožė* have some common features: a pink or rosy shade and a blossom of four or five petals. In the ornaments of Lithuanian and Latvian sashes and cloth, the rose (*roželė, rožiukė, erškėtėlis*) is a diamond with extensions (Tumėnas 1989: 16):

Fig. 1

This shape is achieved by crossing parallel lines. The meanings of "crossing", "intersection", "ramification" enter the Lithuanian name of *rožė*, since, in Lithuanian, *rožė* also means a crosspiece or ramification, for instance: *rožė*, "weaving at the intersection of the crossing of basket hoops", "ramification of the horns of an elk or a deer" (Ulvydas 1978: 847). The rose is understood as the centre of an intersection or ramification of several lines and, in some cases, the filling of the centre of the intersection with a circle or a diamond. This is what "weaving at the intersection of the crossing of basket hoops" looks like:

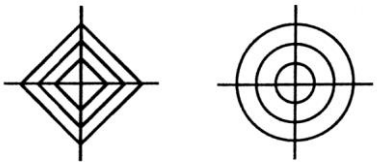

Fig. 2

Latvian signs of the Sun – *Saules zīmes* – have an analogous basis, and their immense variety is drawn to two main types (Ancītis 1990: 77): diamond signs (Fig. 3) and rosettes (Fig. 4):

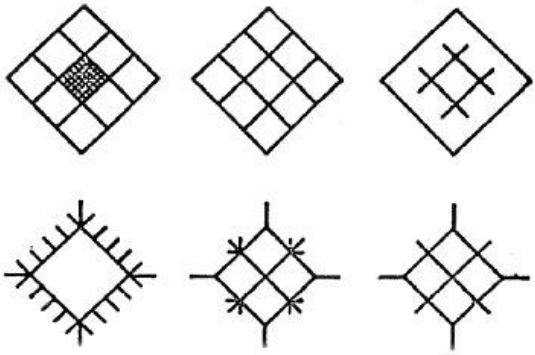

Fig. 3

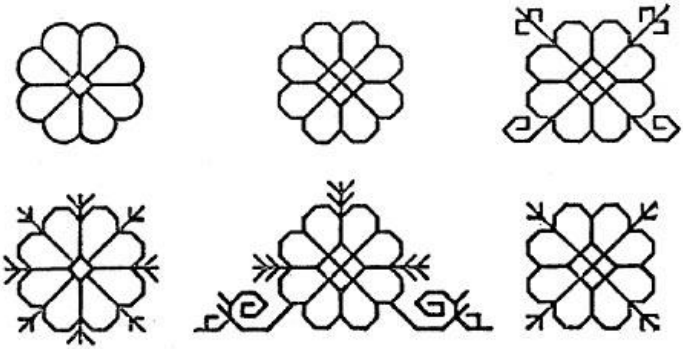

Fig. 4

Diamond-shaped Latvian signs of the Sun (Fig. 3) are made of a combination of intersecting lines: these are geometrical ornaments in which the sun is depicted in an abstract manner. As we can see, some variants are very close to the Lithuanian *rožėlė* (see Figs 5 and 6, and cf. Fig. 1):

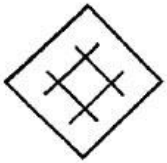

Fig. 5. *Saules zīme*

Fig. 6. *roželė*

The rosette signs of the Sun (Fig. 4) are transitional between floral and geometrical ornament; here, the sun is depicted in the form of a plant (rose). Such ornaments are close to decorations of distaffs and other popular everyday objects in Lithuania (Fig. 7), which are traditionally linked to the symbols of the sun (Vaiškūnas 1992: 133-7):

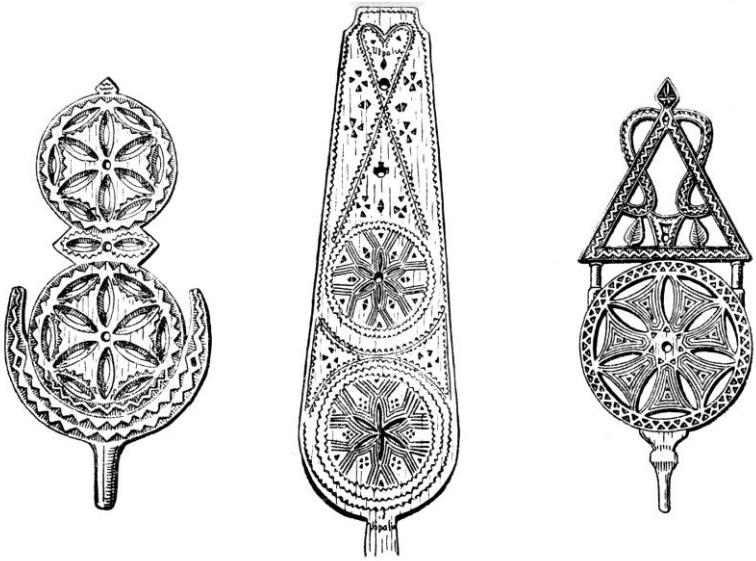

Fig. 7. Galaunė 1988: 211.

Here we see a segmented star which, in its turn, is related to the ornaments on the graveyard crosses: crosses of different types depicting "beaming" Sun (Fig. 8). The researchers of Lithuanian ornaments call them "little suns".

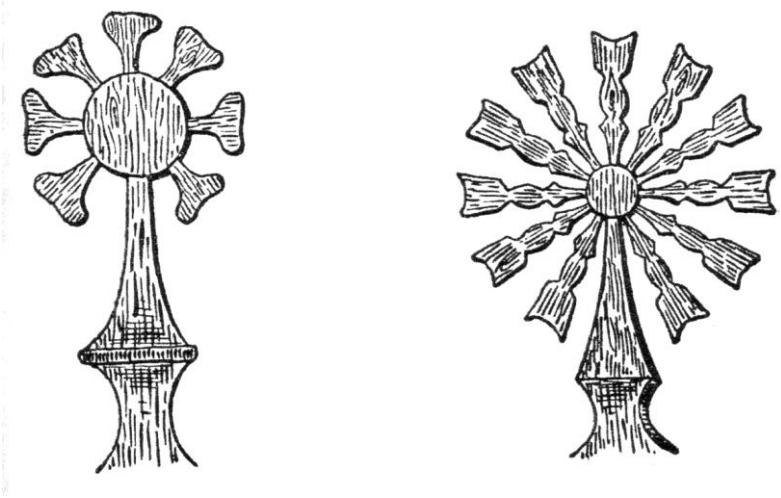

Fig. 8 Galaunė 1988: 229.

In revealing some common traits between the shapes of *saulė* and *rožė*, we would like to emphasise the role of the correlating traits in creating the Sun's botanical expression. Several dominating features – red, round, intersected, centrifugal – determine the associations between *saulė* and *rožė*. As in the case of a metaphor, the sameness is partial: several dominating aspects are chosen from a great number of possible features, which allow *rožė* to be treated as a botanical manifestation of Saulė.

On the other hand, some of these features mean fire in a different context: for instance, the fire of lightning is also symbolised in different forms of the cross – a straight cross, a turning cross, i.e. a swastika, etc. (Beresnevičius 1992: 42-56). Thus we can make an assumption that geometrical combinations of the circle and the cross in general correspond to the mythical paradigm of fire.

THE ROSE OF THE BODY

The figure of *rožė* appears in another, medical, context as well: *rožė* "rose" is a disease characterised by a sharply demarcated red, painful skin and fever (erysipelas) (Ulvydas 1978: 846). Popular knowledge lists twelve types of *rožė* – that of the brain, teeth, heart, veins, bones, flying *rožė*, dry *rožė*, water *rožė*, etc. In verbal charms, *rožė* is often described by its colour (white, red, blue). The colour depends on the origin of *rožė*: if, for example, one gets it after catching cold in water, it will be a white, water *rožė* (LTR 4813/9). The meanings of the colours of roses are easier discernable in the mythical context of the meanings of colours. For instance, *baltoji rožė* (white rose) is related to water and cold and is semantically close to *balta saulė* (white sun). Popular meteorology says that if the sun is setting "white", one can expect rain the following day (Šmits 1940: No 26442); when the sun is white and is shining through the clouds, it is said that it is "wading in water", and thus rain is expected shortly (Petrauskas 1985: 39; LTR 1515/9-1).

Contrary to the white, a red sun means clear, dry weather: when the sun sets red, the coming day will be cloudless (Šmits 1940: No 26443). The red rose is dry, hot and fiery, as opposed to the watery and cold rose. It is caused by heat: if a person is very much ashamed or scared, he or she feels *rožė* appearing (Petkevich' 1911: No 181). In order to treat the fiery *rožė*, red is transformed into white, which can be seen from the verbal charm below:

> *Lygioj pievoj užaugo dvi rožės – viena balta, kita raudona. Raudona nunyks, o baltoji uždygs!*
>
> Two roses grew in a flat field – one red, and one white. The red will wither, the white will take root! (LMD I 940/31)

Since the white rose is of watery origin, the change of red into white indicates the transfer from fire to water, that is, the treatment of *rožė*. *Rožė* is seen as a mythical excess of fire in a person, in other words, *uždegimas* meaning "inflammation" (from Lith. *degti* "to burn"). The verbal charms show several ways of suppressing that fire. Apart from quenching with water (red → white), there is also quenching with earth, and, as variants, black wool and blue paper are applied to the wound (LTR 4424/79; LMD I 1063/48; LTR 1031/267). This can be

understood as suppression with the colour black. Fire is also extinguished by making movements in the direction opposite to the sun, for example, circling *rožė* with the ring finger in the direction opposite to that of the sun (LTR 4035/11).

The treatment of *rožė* is somewhat different when entering sacral relations with the Sun that, as mentioned above, is seen as a rose. In order to cure *rožė*, verbal charms are said at sunrise, at sunset, and then again at sunrise, facing the Sun (LTR 4118/193; LTR 4765/454). The charms mention "Mary's flower garden" (LTR 4850/46), resembling "Saulė's garden", known from Lithuanian and Latvian songs (Slaviūnas 1959: No 1198; Rėza 1958: No 62; Ambainis 1955: No 343L). When, in a Lithuanian charm against erysipelas, the Virgin Mary is addressed, she is also compared to a rose (LTR 3585/209). This shows that *rožė*, or erysipelas, can be treated by two mythical methods: (1) by appealing to the sphere of sacral fire (for instance, a goddess in the shape of a rose), and (2) by choosing opposing figures of the mythical code, e.g., red rose vs white rose (fire vs water), red rose vs black wool (fire vs earth). In both instances, the treatment of *rožė* is based on the knowledge of its mythical (fiery) nature.

BLOOD

The rose – the botanical fire – is closely related to another red-coloured figure, blood. In Lithuanian folklore, we often come across the motif of blood, especially the blood of the dead, turning into a rose (that is, the rose is a transformation of blood). This is especially typical in poetical glorification of the death of soldiers in war (Jokimaitienė 1985: 442):

Devynias kulkas pro šalį lieke,
O su dešimta broleliui kirta.

Kur kuns gulieja, meitos kvepieja,
Kur kraujas biega, rože žydieja.

Nine bullets flew past,
The tenth hit the brother.

Mint smelled sweet where his body lay,
Roses bloomed where his blood was shed.

Like the rose, blood is of the colour of fire and that is how it is directly named in verbal charms (LMD I 946/9). Besides, it is hot like fire; for example, people say, *kraujas verda* "my blood is boiling" (meaning, I am angry or hurt), *karšto kraujo* "of hot blood" (temperamental), and *kraujas kaista* "blood is heating up" (exciting) (Kruopas 1962: 461).

According to Lithuanian etiological tales, blood is older than fire, which itself had been formed from the blood of mythical or biblical personages. It is thought, for example, that hell came to existence from Lucifer's boiling and burning blood (Sauka 1967: 165). Another version of the tale says that it was Jesus who shed his blood and made the burning hell (Balys 1940: 10). It is primeval fire, since there was at that time no fire either on the earth or in heaven. God sent a swallow (Lith., *kregždė*) to bring fire from hell and, because it brought that fire, swallows have red marks under their necks and on their tails (LTR 3470/111).

The relation between blood, fire and the swallow that had brought fire from hell is found in popular botany. For example, the synonyms for the plant *ugniažolė*, "the herb of fire" (*Celidonium majus*, greater celandine), the roots of which are of the colour of fire, are *kregždažolė*, *kregždinė*, *kregždynė* "the herb of the swallow", as well as *kraujuotė*, "the herb of blood" (Vailionis 1938: 84). This plant is used to treat bleeding (LTR 6447/185). In addition, greater celandine cures skin conditions (warts, herpes) (LTR 6447/185), while herpes and eczema are understood in popular medicine as fire and are called *ugnis*, "fire" (Vitkauskas 1996: 386). One can think that treatment with greater celandine represents the mythical procedure of extracting fire from herpes. This is manifested in the use of other plants the names of which have *ugnis* in their root. For instance, *ugnialapis* (*Tussilago*, coltsfoot) extracts fire from a boil (Vitkauskas 1996: 378); *ugniagėlė* (Lith.) / *ugunspuke* (Latv.) (*Ranunculus acris*, meadow buttercup) stops the spreading of a boil (Šmits 1940: No 31108; Vailionis 1938: 291).

Such fiery plants demand caution, because they can cause a fire. That is why it is not recommended to take a buttercup home (Šmits 1940: No 31109). In the seventeenth century, Matthew Praetorius described a fiery oak, a special type of the oak that belongs to Perkūnas and which contains the sacred fire. To safeguard from a fire, this oak cannot be used for construction, because when cut down it is usually struck by Perkūnas (Mannhardt 1936: 534).

When fiery plants are used in treatment, they extract the surplus of fire from the wound, as Saule, the goddess of the Sun, suppresses the "burning" of erysipelas. The diseases of "fire" are cured by restoring relations with the entire sacral sphere of fire, since erysipelas, boils, warts and similar conditions are caused by violated relations with fire. For instance, *rožė* (erysipelas) attacks the one who extinguishes fire with dirty water (clean water should be used for extinguishing fire because fire is considered sacred; Balys 1951: Nos 229, 38). And if anybody spits into fire, then a boil is bound to rise on that person's lips (Šmits 1940: No 30927).

Some of these fiery plants stop bleeding and are used to cure wounds. These plants are usually related to sacred beings; for example, common St John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), which in Latvian is called *asinszāle* ("the herb of blood"), has several "biblical" names: *Jėzaus žaizdų žolė* "the herb of Jesus' wounds", *Marijos žoliukės* "Mary's herbs" (Vailionis 1938: 175), *marijakraujė* (Mary's blood) (LTR 6447/298, LTR 6447/1413, 1424). These names are motivated by broader mythical narratives that appear in verbal charms against bleeding and in etiological tales, e.g.:

> *Ėjo ponas Jezus per Cedros upį ir puolė ponas Jezus ir nusimušė pirštelį ir kraujas bėgo Viešpaties. Tai taip ir mano bėga. Viešpati Jezau, sulaikyk mano kraują.*
>
> Jesus was crossing the Cedra river and tripped over and hurt his toe, and God's blood was running. My blood is running like this, too. Jesus Almighty, stop my blood. (Mansikka 1929: No 25)
>
> *Ajo Panelė Švenciausia per loukelius, pataikė kojali in akmenėlį, numušė mažų pirštelį, aptaškė akmenėlį kroujaliu. Per tų kraujų Švenciausios Panelės sustok kraujas iš NN kūno tekėjis.*
>
> The Blessed Virgin was walking in the fields; she hit her foot on a stone and hurt her little toe, and splashed the stone with her blood. Because of the Blessed Virgin's blood, stop, O blood, running from NN's body. (Krėvė Mickevičius 1926: No 1)

> *Senovėje akmenys augo. Vieną kartą ėjo Pana Marija ir nusimušė į akmenį kojos pirštą. Ji tada labai supyko ir pasakė: "Kad tu didesnis neaugtum!" Nuo to laiko akmenys daugiau nebeauga.*
>
> In olden times, stones could grow. Once, while walking, the Virgin Mary hit her toe on a stone. She was very cross and said, "May you not grow larger!" After that, stones stopped growing. (Balys 1940: 10)

These popular beliefs about Mary's or Jesus' shed blood even today are related to certain stones that have red stains, are covered in red lichen or are red as if covered in blood (see Vaitkevičius 1997: 34-5). One of these red stones was on the sacred hill of Rambynas on the River Nemunas. The sacred forest of Rambynas is mentioned in the 1394 description of the Crusaders' roads. Following the introduction of Christianity in Lithuania, public rites on Rambynas were forbidden yet, right up to the nineteenth century, the sick would visit it with offerings for their health; and newlyweds came here asking for marital happiness etc. The sacred stone and a sacred lime-tree were the highlights of the hill (see further Vaitkevičius 1998: 641-6). The stone was hard, reddish-black granite with mica (Glagau 1970: 232). When this stone was broken up by a miller in 1811, some people managed to get hold of the fragments, and guarded them because they protected against natural disasters and cured wounds, in the same way as the thunderbolts called *Perkūno pirštai*, (Perkūnas' fingers) or *Perkūno kulkos* (Perkūnas' bullets). The thunderbolts were used to treat boils, bruises, warts (Balys 1937: No 571, 598), herpes (Balys 1937: No 575), and *rožė* (erysipelas) (Balys 1937: No 584). Also, bleeding could be stopped with Perkūnas' bullets (Balys 1937: No 574). Thus Perkūnas' bullets, by the manner of their application, are identical to the red stones splashed with the blood of Jesus or Mary, which can stop the flow of blood through the verbal charms against bleeding and through appeal to special events in etiological myths.

According to the etiological tale versions and verbal chants mentioned above, the blood-splashed stones were cursed by biblical personages and stopped growing. Some versions of the tale, however, claim that these stones stopped growing for other reasons – when God sent fire from heaven (Ancelāne 1991: 68) or when the thunder rolled

(LTR 2560/293; LTR 2376/1; cf. Vaitkevičius 1997: 33, and Laurinkienė 1996: 126). It is obvious that Perkūnas' touch upon the stones is borne in mind (cf. Mary or Jesus tripping over a stone), since during a thunderstorm Perkūnas strikes, not just anything, but stones in particular – this is widely explicated in popular beliefs (see Balys 1937: Nos 148-64). Additionally, a tendency is observed for Perkūnas to strike not just any stones, but to prefer red stones, leaving black stones untouched (Balys 1937: No 159a). This allows us to make the assumption that, in etiological tales about the hit stone and blood, Perkūnas appeared much earlier, and only later was replaced by Jesus.[1]

Since blood is the liquid form of fire (see above), Perkūnas' relation to blood (cf. the relation of Perkūnas' bullets to stopping bleeding) once again, in the context of a different cultural code, points to the fiery nature of this god. On the other hand, the links between Perkūnas and blood demonstrate the importance of the element of cosmic fire in the evaluation and understanding of the mythical qualities of blood.

FIRE OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

Rožė and *kraujas* represent the same mythical content of fire, thus one figure can easily transform into another. This is correlated with transformations of a different nature, for instance, passing from life to death. When a person dies, only a certain figurative transformation takes place: where blood is running, a rose grows (Jokimaitienė 1985: No 467, and LTR 701/55):

Kur kraujas tiško,	Where blood splashed,
Ten rožė dygo,	A rose grew,
Kur galva krito,	Where a head fell,
Žemčiūgai blizga.	Diamonds sparkle.
Kur galva krito,	Where a head fell,
Bažnyčią statė,	A church was built,
Kur kraujas bėgo,	Where blood ran,
Rožė žydėjo.	A rose blossomed.

A rose that grew in the place of death (or on a grave) is identified with the soul of the dead. For instance, in one song from a region of Lithuania Minor, the soul of a young man is shown as a rose blossom floating in a river (Kalvaitis 1905: 113). Another version of this imagining is the belief that the soul of a dead lives in flowers:

> *Kadu žmogus miršta, o pamirus kiek laiko būna gėlėsna, kol jį kur paskiria, paskui iš tų gėlių vėl skirsto po žmones, ir vėl gema ir auga žmonės.*
>
> When a person dies, for some time after death he stays in flowers until he is elsewhere assigned, then from those flowers [they] are sent among people, and again people are born and grow. (Stanikaitė 1994: 77)

A division between two images of fire, the rose and blood, is quite evident here: the dead manifest themselves through flowers, while a human's vital powers are represented by blood which gives red colour to a human's face. Lithuanians believed that a healthy person has red cheeks (Ulvydas 1981: 665; Astramskaitė 1993: 139); cf. this charm about a patient's fate:

> *Raudonų raudonų pivonijų virini. Nu, ir tada žiūri: kad ružava, tai atgis ar didelis, ar mažas, o kad baltas, tai jau mirs, neatgis.*
>
> You boil a bright red peony. Then watch: if it's pink, then the patient will recover, whether old or young; if it's white, then he will die, will not recover. (LTR 6447/1291)

When a person dies, however, the fire of the body – blood – is transformed into the botanical fire – the rose. This conception determines funeral traditions; for example, the rose is a traditional flower of a graveyard.[2] This tradition is evident in Lithuanian and Latvian songs, where it is repeated thousands of times that red roses must be planted on graves (Jokimaitienė 1985: No 671; Barons 1894: No 4070 and others).

Manifesting the transformation of death, the rose, both in the mythical and the ritual dimension, helps the dead in passing to a new state (getting to a different world), and so it is sometimes depicted as

a mythical plant by which one can climb to heaven. This motif is especially characteristic of Latvian songs, of which the following is one example (Barons 1915: No 34041):

Iestādīju baltu rozi	I planted a white rose
Baltā smilšu kalniņā;	On a white sandy hill;
Tā izauga liela, gara	It grew big and tall,
Līdz pašām debesīm.	Up to heaven.
Es uzkāpu debesīs	I climbed to heaven,
Pa tiem rožu zariniem.	On those branches of the rose.

Due to its mediation function, the rose may be used in burials. According to A. L. Jucevičius, roses were part of the coffin-lining in nineteenth-century Samogitia: "The Samogitians would line the coffin with a thin linen cloth, embroidered with various designs and strewn with dog roses" (Stanevičius 1954: 19). Archaeological data also confirms "roses" as an element of the burial; for instance, in a seventeenth-century grave of a woman the archaeologists found the seeds of the hollyhock (*Althea*) (Varnas 1987: 38).

Other symbols of the colour red can have the same mediation function; for instance, the deceased would be girdled with a red band (Šmits 1940: No 20769). A red band means fire[3] and such a red band was offered to fire during wedding rituals (LTR 6447/232); by doing this, the bride wanted to ensure that her hearth would always burn well (LTR 6447/1490).

Not only metaphorical images of fire, but also fire in its pure form allow the spirit of the dead to go to heaven; such, for instance, is the fire of lightning. It is a universally known belief that a person struck by lightning goes straight to heaven; already touched by fire, he or she will not have to suffer the heat of fire in hell or purgatory (Balys 1937: Nos 875-81). This and other similar beliefs can be easily related to the ritual of the burning of the dead, which was known in Lithuania before the introduction of Christianity. (Jogaila and Vytautas, the grand dukes who brought Christianity to Lithuania, were the first rulers of the country who were not cremated during their funeral).[4] In this context the image of the rose (botanical fire) is only one of the figurative means of expressing the sacral meaning of fire as well as the powers and functions of the gods in charge of fire.

THE ROSE GARDEN

The concept of the sacrality of the rose and blood has been preserved in modern times through planting and attending to a flower garden. In Latvian songs, a flower garden is called *rožu dārzs*, a rose garden, since the central flowers there were *rozes*, the hollyhocks (Klaustiņš and Endzelīns, 1928-1932: 3.425). In Lithuanian songs it is different, because these cannot be imagined without a rue garden, where rue plants, roses and lilies grow. Lithuanian rue plants have one common feature with Latvian roses: like roses, they grow from drops of blood:

> *Rūtos yra šventos ir nešventintos, nes jos yra išdygusios iš Jėzaus kraujo lašų: kai Jėzus meldėsi alyvų daržely, nulašėjo kruvinas prakaitas ir išdygo rūtos.*
>
> Rue plants are sacred without consecrating because they sprout from the drops of Jesus' blood: when Jesus was praying in the olive garden, ensanguined sweat fell on the ground and rue sprouted. (Balys 1986: No 1838)
>
> *Kada Jėzusą nukryžiavo, šv. Magdalena surinko nukritusius kraujo lašelius ir pasėjo. Išaugo rūtos, už tai rūtų negalima mėtyti.*
>
> When Jesus was crucified, St Mary Magdalene collected the drops of his blood and sowed them. Rue plants grew from them, and that is why you cannot throw rue about. (Balys 1940: 101)

The connection between rue and blood can be explained only with prior knowledge of the fact that, in Lithuanian, rue was not only *Ruta graveolens*, but also bearberry, *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* (Šimkūnaitė 1990:28). The red berries of this plant resemble drops of blood. Due to the red berries, this plant is also called *kristakraujė* (Christ's blood) in Lithuanian (Kaunienė 1991: 204). The relation of blood with a rue garden is recorded on the ritual plane, too; for instance, it used to be held that it was necessary to slaughter an animal or bird (a rooster, a chicken, or at least a mouse or a frog) while planting a rue garden, and to bury its head in that garden. If that was not done, the flowers would not grow (Balys 1986: Nos 1847, 1849). Similar rituals were

carried out in the garden: if an apple tree did not give fruit, then some animal was buried under that tree (Slaviūnas 1947: 182); for a newly planted tree to take root and grow, after planting it had to be watered with the warm blood of a bird or an animal (Balys 1986: No 1884).

On the other hand, an offering of an animal's head in a rue garden secures success to the farm animals. For instance, there was a belief that if, when planting a peony, one buries the head of an animal under its roots, then animals will not die (Balys 1986: No 1849).

Burying a head or spilling blood introduces the broader theme of the offering to the dead. An analogous, but much larger-scale, offering of an animal is necessary during the funeral ritual:

> *Jeigu šeimyna mato, kad ruošiasi mirti tėvas arba diedukas, tai sako, kad reikia papjauti veršelis arba paršelis, nes gali gyvuliai gaišti.*
>
> If a family sees that father or grandfather is nearing the end of his days, they say that a calf or a piglet should be slaughtered, because animals might start dying. (Balys 1981: No 593)

The funeral offering is understood as providing the share of the dead. If an animal is not slaughtered for the wake, the whole herd might die, since the deceased "will get his share anyway" (Balys 1981: No 594). Similar logic can be discerned in the offerings in the orchard or the flower garden. Fruit trees and flowers are the abode of the spirits of the deceased and, for this reason alone, one cannot cut down apple trees and other fruit trees in a garden (Balys 1986: No 1928). As has been mentioned above, the spirits of the recently deceased live in flowers, and so it is plausible that the flower garden of the ancestral home could be the abode of the spirits of a farmstead. This can be confirmed both by Lithuanian and Latvian material; for instance, one Latvian song says that after death, a spirit found abode on the top of an oak in the rose garden, but nobody in the family could see it (Šmits 1938: No 55205).

Why do the dead "call for fresh blood" (Šmits 1940: No 2082), as popular beliefs insist? The same beliefs answer this question: blood allows the spirit of the dead to get to heaven. It is figuratively imagined that the deceased travels to heaven with the animal which had been slaughtered for his or her wake (Šmits 1940: No 2082). We can see that blood correlates with the rose, by climbing which one can

get "onto the clouds", and, continuing the chain of associations, with the fire of lightning (since a person struck by lightning goes to heaven). This yet again shows that identical mythical content is represented through different but mutually related mythical images.

CONCLUSIONS

In Lithuanian and Latvian mythology, fire is encoded through the use of cultural images, of which two – the rose (botanical code) and blood (physiological code) – are especially productive. The choice of these, from among a huge mass of images, is based on metaphorical thinking: metaphorical images of fire, and fire itself, are related by one or several common semantic features (colour, warmth, shape, etc.). This allows treating such images as mythical metaphors of fire. They prevail in traditional culture even when their primary meaning is forgotten and associative relations are hard to recognise.

The two images of fire under analysis – the rose and blood – are closely inter-related. In certain situations, one image can replace the other as a variant of the same mythical content. In addition, they not only express the element of fire, but also the fire-related mythical content in general. In this particular case, both the rose and blood express upper space: ritual actualisation of these images in beliefs and rituals related to funerals is understood as a way to help the deceased to go to heaven (the top cosmological space). Thus it is possible to speak not only of the similarity or even identity of the meanings, but also of the functions. It is also possible to grasp the correlation of the functions of the two gods in the Baltic pantheon that have been highlighted here: Saulė (Sun), who is perceived as the rose of heaven, and Perkūnas (Thunder), who is represented by the image of blood.

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Notes

1 In numerous Latvian songs and one unique Lithuanian song, Perkūnas sheds the oak's blood (Rėza 1958: No 62). In this case, Perkūnas is an active agent – his blood is not shed, but he causes the blood of another

to be shed. Incidentally, rainwater that has collected in the hollows of stones is also called blood, and is used for treatment. The water in stone hollows after the first thunderstorm has similar curative powers (Vaitkevičius 1997: 34).

2 In Lithuanian folk songs, this traditional graveyard plant is rue. According to V. Tumėnas (1989: 18), "rue plants (which for Lithuanians *served as roses* [emphasis by V.T.] and were the symbol of love and innocence, a symbol of wedding) often decorated the graves of Lithuanians".

3 An identical red band is used to stop bleeding or cure warts and other sores, cf.: *Es aizsēju asins upi Ar sarkanu dzīpariņu* (I tied the river of blood with a red band); see Kursīte 1996: 60.

4 On the burning of the dead and the sacral context of this ritual, see Kursīte 1996: 60; Vaitkevičienė and Vaitkevičius 2001; Vaitkevičius 2004.

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