

# A Hundred Years of Archaeological Discoveries in Lithuania



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# Sacred Sites

■ Vykintas Vaitkevičius

A conception of the Baltic religion's sacred sites has developed since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, the conception was affected by Romanticism and Positivism, with sacred sites being celebrated by some and belittled by others. It was closely connected with the development of Lithuanian culture, scientific research, and the protection of sites. But the conception of the Baltic religion's sacred sites was mainly affected by ideological attitudes active to this day. In 1387 Grand Duke Jogaila baptised Aukštaitija, and in 1413 Grand Duke Vytautas Samogitia. During the efforts to convert the land into a Christian country, the parish network in Lithuania long remained very thin. In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Catholic Church went to war against non-Catholicism, not only the Reformation, but also the ancient pagan religion. During that century, the situation in Lithuania changed substantially. The mid-17<sup>th</sup>-century wars, the famine and plague that followed them, and the related changes in the population contributed to this. In the second

half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a new wave of criticism of pre-Christian Lithuanian culture arose from the Catholic Church. The tension between Christianity and the Baltic religion in Lithuania even today manifests itself in society in certain ways including a different attitude towards sacred sites, their investigation, and their protection. It should be stressed that some Baltic sacred sites: hills, trees, stones, and springs, which were considered sacred, long ago became Catholic shrines or parts of them (Fig. 1), including two of the most famous pilgrimage sites in Lithuania: the Chapel of the Annunciation in Šiluva and the Hill of Crosses in Jurgaičiai village.

The abundant written sources for Baltic religion and mythology<sup>1</sup> contain a great deal of knowledge about the gods, goddesses, mythological beings, and cult of the dead, but little about specific sacred sites. In this respect, geographical descriptions of the region, land inventories, court cases, and old maps are important, but their investigation is accompanied by other difficulties, namely that sacred sites are difficult and frequently impossible to recognise if they are not called a sacred site and if, with like many other localities, there is no other information about them.

An abundant, important source for Baltic sacred sites is narratives and stories. They began to be collected in Lithuania in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and now number about 80 000 texts. Narratives yield information not only about the geographic position, appearance, and special features of sacred sites, but also about the deities and mythological images of the Baltic religion which are connected with that specific location. The narratives, although often very short and altered, are told by the local inhabitants to this day. Local names: oikonyms, toponyms, hydronyms, etc. are closely connected with these narratives.

Each sacred site has a name, but they are very diverse and still changing, which sometimes makes them

FIG. 1. ■

Worshippers and beggars at the entrance to the chapel of St George on Birutė Hill in Palanga. Postcard by P. Mongirdaitė, 1904. *Senoji Palanga. Henriko Grinevičiaus fotografijų ir atvirukų kolekcija. Vilnius, 2009, p. 174*



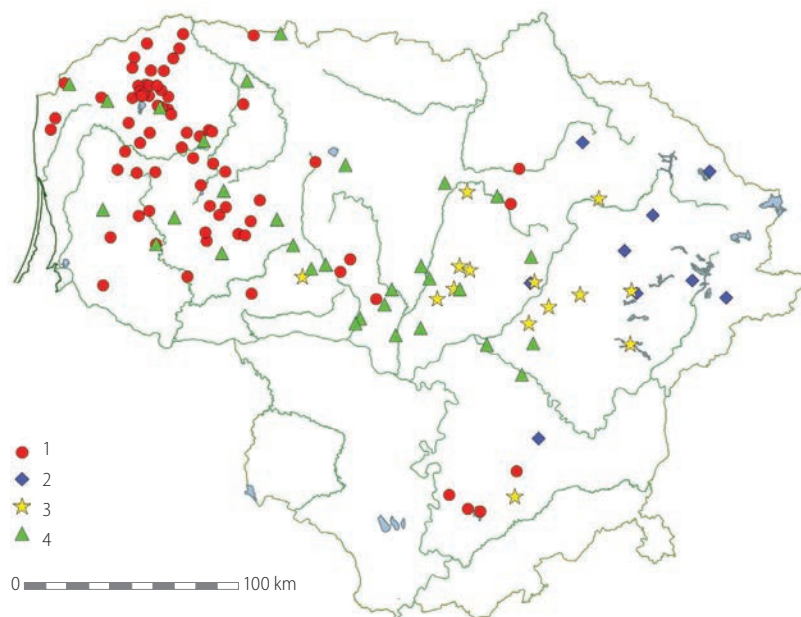
1. For more, see *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai*. Vilnius, 1996–2005, vols. 1–4.

unrecognisable. Up until the Soviet collectivisation and land melioration in Lithuania (aside from the Polish-occupied part of the Vilnius Region), about 150 000 place names had been collected. Although the sacred site names comprise a small percentage of this collection, they are universally significant.

The Lithuanian word *alka* (*alkas*) and the related Latvian *elks* and Prussian *\*alka* are a religious term, which means a sacred grove, sacrificial site, or even the sacrifice itself. The more than two hundred place names such as *Alkos kalnas*, *Alkupis*, *Alko bala*, etc. show that several different sacred site traditions existed in Lithuania<sup>2</sup>. Judging from the fact that no *alka* (*alkas*) place names are known in Užnemunė (southwest Lithuania region), which became uninhabited in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, the aforementioned sacred site traditions formed prior to creation of the Lithuanian state. Sacred sites were in forests and groves, on hills, in fields and meadows, on the edges of rivers, lakes, and bogs, and beside isolated trees, stones, springs, hollows, sinkholes, and caves.

Hills called *Alka* predominate in West Lithuania, fields beside rivers and lakes as well as islands in bogs and lakes in East Lithuania (Fig. 2). Central Lithuania is sort of at the intersection of these two traditions, i.e. a transition zone; in this area, a hill called *Alka* is recorded

here and there but mostly streams, riverside fields, and bogs are called *Alka*. To a certain degree the incidence of Šventoji, Šventėžeris, Šventupis and other place names reflect these tendencies. But the majority of the sacred sites are called by proper names deriving from



■ FIG. 2.  
Hills (1), islands (2), lakes, bogs (3), and streams (4) called *Alka*.  
Map by V. Vaitkevičius, 2014.

2. For more, see Vaitkevičius V. *Alkai. Baltų šventviečių studija*. Vilnius, 2003; Vaitkevičius V. *Studies into the Balts' sacred places*, *BAR International series*. Oxford, 2004, vol. 1228.



■ FIG. 3.  
One of the first archaeological field investigations of sacred sites. The beginning of the excavation near the Šilalė stone which has flat-bottomed cup-marks. Photo by E. Jurgaitis, 1970.

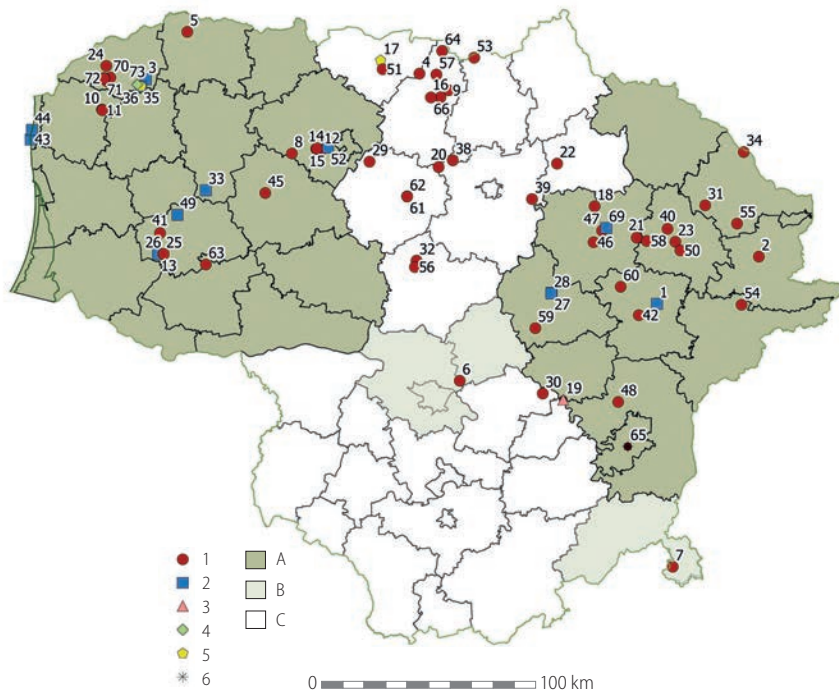


FIG. 5. ■ One of the last sacred oaks near Šventragiai village, as seen from the west. Photo by V. Vaitkevičius, 2008.

the names of gods, goddesses, and mythological beings rather than from a common word. These sites have been identified on the basis of written sources and folklore texts, but many (perhaps even the majority) of the divine names and epithets in place names are unique and frequently remain unrecognised by investigators.

The origin of the West and East Lithuanian sacred site traditions is closely connected with the natural environment: geomorphology, physical geography, and the climatic conditions. The sacred site traditions reflect the division of the Baltic range into eastern and western parts: the West Lithuanian sacred sites are justifiably connected with the Samogitian, Curonian and to a certain extent, Scalvian tribes and in the east to the archaeological heritage of the Aukštaitians, Lithuanians, and Selonians. The Jatvingians in the south, who are the least well known, and the Semigallians in the north occupy a transitional location: the sacred sites in the western part of Semigallia are closest to the western tradition and those in the eastern part to the

3. Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė M. Pagoniškosios laidojimo apeigos Lietuvoje, *Gimtasai kraštas*, 1943, no. 31, p. 53–80; Šturms Ed. Die Alkstätten in Litauen, *Contributions of Baltic University*. Hamburg, 1946, no. 3.

4. Vaitkevičius V. *Senosios Lietuvos šventvietės. Žemaitija*. Vilnius, 1998; Vaitkevičius V. *Senosios Lietuvos šventvietės. Aukštaitija*. Vilnius, 2006.

■ FIG. 4.

Baltic sacred site records in Lithuania's districts (catalogue: A – prepared and published; B – prepared but not published; C – in preparation) and sacred sites, where excavations have been conducted (1 – a stone; 2 – a hill; 3 – a field; 4 – a wetland; 5 – a spring; 6 – a structure): 1. Aigėlai, 2. Antakmenė, 3. Barstyčiai, 4. Buletiškis forest, 5. Dapšiai, 6. Daukliūnai forest, 7. Dieveniškės forest, 8. Gerbėniškė forest, 9. Guostagalys, 10, 11. Imbarė, 12. Jakštaičiukai, 13. Jomantai, 14, 15. Jonelaičiai, 16. Jurgaičiai, 17. Kalnelis, 18. Katinai, 19. Kernavė, 20. Kiaušeriai, 21. Kilėva, 22. Kirdiškis, 23. Kloviniai, 24. Krakės, 25, 26. Kunigiškiai, 27, 28. Kurėnai, 29. Kutiškiai, 30. Laukagalys, 31. Lūžai forest, 32. Mantviliškis, 33. Mažasis Palūkštis, 34. Medoliškės, 35–37. Mikytai, 38. Nauraišiliai, 39. Nibragalys, 40. Nolėnai, 41. Padievaitis, 42. Paduobužė, 43, 44. Palanga, 45. Pavaiguvis, 46. Pašventupys, 47. Paelmis, 48. Pikeliškės, 49. Prapymas, 50. Puodžiai, 51. Radikiai, 52. Raizgiai, 53. Ratkūnai, 54. Reškutėnai, 55. Salakas, 56. Siponiai, 57. Skaruliai, 58. Stabulankiai, 59. Sukiniai, 60. Trumponys, 61, 62. Vaiduloniai, 63. Vaitimėnai forest, 64. Vileišiai, 65. Vilnius, 66. Voronėliai.

Map by V. Vaitkevičius, 2014.

eastern traditions. The Jatvingians influenced the East Lithuanian sacred site tradition, and their ties with Old Prussians are an objective for future investigations.

Of course, the sacred site traditions were also later affected by the historical, cultural, and economic development of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and to a certain degree, by the consciousness and religiosity of the region's inhabitants.

The beginning of the investigation of Baltic sacred sites and the aspiration to preserve them is connected with the activities of the Lithuanian Army officer, archaeologist, and writer, P. Tarasenko. M. Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė and E. Šturms also made significant contributions to the scientific investigation of the problem<sup>3</sup>. During the Soviet occupation, there was a long lack of interest in sacred sites; V. Urbanavičius (Fig. 3) began the archaeological investigation of sacred sites only in 1970 and part of his habilitation dissertation was later devoted to the results. The present author has conducted the complex investigation of sacred sites since 1990 and at his initiative, data is being collected for a sacred site catalogue (Fig. 4)<sup>4</sup>.

At present about 40 forests and groves considered to be sacred are known throughout Lithuania. Their numbers were very definitely greater. More than 500 forests and former forest sites with the common word, *gojus*, in their name have been recorded. This could be



a reference to sites sacred to the Baltic religion since it is known that beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the number of locations called *Gojas* grew rapidly, the word *gojus* replacing *alka*.

It is characteristic that sacred forests and groves existed together with the other types of sacred sites, i.e. hills, bogs, and hollows and occupied a certain part of these sacred sites or coincided with their grounds. It should be mentioned that a sacred forest known as *Gojus* was recorded on the eastern edge of the Kernavė archaeological site, the Lake Galvė peninsula to the north of the Trakai castle complex was called the Šventų liepų gojus ['*Gojus* of the Sacred Lindens'], and a sacred forest stood in the Šventaragis valley of Vilnius.

In the Medieval and New ages, the forested area rapidly declined throughout Lithuania; a prohibition to cut down a grove that was considered sacred was heeded in exceptionally rare instances. Isolated sacred trees usually survived: oaks (Fig. 5), lindens, and pines, which were protected by Baltic mythological images or a cross mounted in the tree. To this day, a living custom for vows among the Samogitians is for the vow to be made near pines marked by a shrine. Mention should also be made of various-aged trees throughout Lithuania, which have branches or cavities that have grown together, are distinguished by extraordinary healing powers, and are considered sacred.

The number of hills considered sacred is not known precisely. These sacred sites are distinguished by great diversity, the result of their geographic and cultural position, place names, stories, and some other factors. These sacred sites are known throughout Lithuania, irrespective of the general hilliness. Of course, the hills considered sacred in Samogitia, Aukštaitija, Dzūkija, and other highland areas are tens of metres high, while those on the plains and lowlands are only several metres high. It is characteristic that the hills considered sacred are in watershed zones between river basins, at the confluence of rivers and streams, and on lake islands. They are known in forests thickets, miry bogs, prehistoric complexes (Fig. 6), and modern inhabited locations.

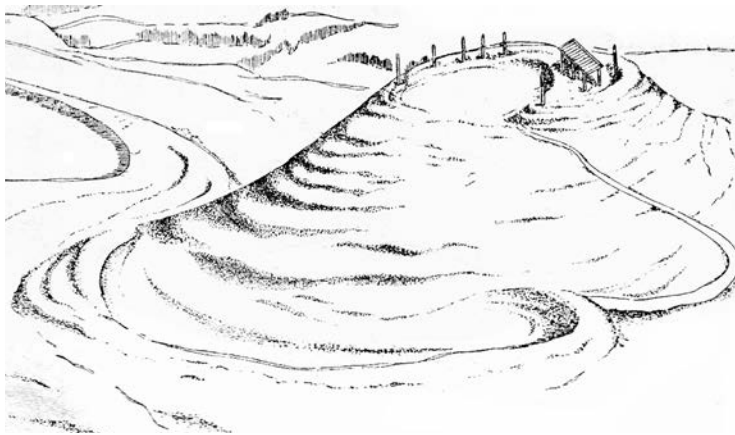
The place names reveal certain special features of hills considered sacred: God's Hills occur in a small area of East Lithuania around Molėtai and Ukmergė, Perkūnas Hills in South Lithuania around Alytus and various locations in Aukštaitija and Samogitia, Aušrinė Hills in Samogitia around Plungė, Telšiai, and Šilalė, Saulė Hills in Samogitia around Telšiai, Šilalė, and Tauragė, etc.

The map of sacred sites called Alka Hill is dense and significant: eighty Alka Hills have been recorded in West Lithuania, the range extending north past the Latvian border. Isolated Alka Hills occur in Central Lithuania around Raseiniai and Raguva and in East Lithuania ten lake islands are called *Alka*. Many stories about Alka



■ FIG. 6.

The Karūžiškė archaeological complex, as seen from the southeast. A footpath joins the hillfort (foreground, on the right) with the hill called *Alka* (midground, on the left). Photo by Z. Baubonis, 2007.



■ FIG. 7.

A reconstruction of the sacred site on Birutė hill in Palanga. Drawing by S. Stripinis and V. Žulkus. Žulkus V., Klimka L. *Lietuvos pajūrio žemės viduramžiais*. Vilnius, 1989, p. 75.

Hills consider them to be cult sites of the Baltic religion and tell about a sacred fire maintained there, burnt offerings, and sometimes even about the cremation of remains. In some places, Alka Hills were converted into Christian shrines, where prayer houses were erected and cemeteries created.

It should be noted that hillforts are frequently called sacred hills: fortified Brushed Pottery culture settlements in East Lithuania (dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC – first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD) and old Lithuanian wooden castle sites throughout Lithuania (11<sup>th</sup> – early 15<sup>th</sup> cen-

turies). The archaeological investigations of the hillforts of the Eastern Baltic tribes in Russian territory attest that in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium there were Baltic sacred sites in the enclosures of fortified hills, which do not differ in appearance from hillforts. But the abundant stories about Lithuanian hillforts force one to think that the majority of them became a sacred site after the fortifications had disappeared. A broader investigation was conducted in 1984 of one of the most famous of this type of sacred site, i.e. Palanga Hillfort, also known as Birutė Hill. It was determined that in around the 13<sup>th</sup> century the hill's defensive fortifications had been destroyed. It is thought that in the mid – second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century roughly 6 m wide, 2.5 m high sand embankments were created atop them and eleven 16–28 cm diameter poles set on their inner side (Fig. 7); fires were periodically lit around them, creating a 3–15 cm thick layer of charcoal and ash. It is thought that this sacred site had an astronomical purpose, the poles helping to establish the dates of



seasonal festivals. In the late 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century the Chapel of St George was erected on Birutė Hill and later became famous among pilgrims. Burials also began to be made beside it<sup>5</sup>.

About 100 fields and meadows considered sacred have been recorded throughout Lithuania. Around half of them bear the name of *Alka* and very definitely represent a distinctive Baltic sacred site tradition. Fields and meadows considered sacred frequently belong to broader sacred sites (Fig. 8) and 1<sup>st</sup> – first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-millennium archaeological complexes. 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup>-century written sources describe sites called *Alka* as farmed fields and hayfields; some of them could be the cleared sites of sacred forests while others attest to the rites of communities of farmers and animal breeders.

The precise number of depressions considered sacred is not known. They are recorded throughout the country. In north Lithuania around Biržai and Pasvalys roughly 8–12 m deep karst sinkholes, which appear after the gypsum layer has dissolved, are common. Around Aukštadvaris, ten kettle holes, which appeared as the glacier retreated and are called Devil's Pits, have been recorded. The most famous of them, the Devil's Pit of Škilietai Forest (Trakai District), has a surface diameter of more than 200 m, a depth of 37 m, and a 9.5 m thick layer of peat on its bottom. This and other similar pits are in the neighbourhood of barrow ceme-

teries from the first half – mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium and are the subject of stories characteristic of many other sacred sites: a church sank into the ground at that spot, the tolling of the bells can be heard from underground, an angry spirit appears there, etc.

Ten bogs called *Alka* and another ten called a *Šventa* [sacred] have been recorded in East and West Lithuania. Many of them belong to broader sacred sites and are situated near hills and forests considered sacred. The number of bogs, about which stories characteristic of sacred sites are told, is definitely several fold larger. It should be noted that they are near many groups of East Lithuanian barrows (dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries).

The bogs, which when drained and used for peat extraction or drained under other circumstances, yield various archaeological artefacts, are of the greatest interest to archaeologists. The number of finds in these assemblages ranges from several to several hundred. The investigation of one of the most famous find spots of this type, the Šliktinė village refuge near Mikytai Hillfort (Skuodas District), has recently been renewed.

In 1938 part of a hoard compressed by an oak log was found while digging the new Šata stream bed and in 1971 another part of the hoard was turned over by

5. For more, see Žulkus V. *Palanga in the Middle Ages. Ancient Settlements*. Vilnius, 2007, p. 23–71.



■ FIG. 8.  
Alkas hill near Alkas village,  
as seen from the south.  
Photo by V. Vaitkevičius, 2009.



FIG. 9. ■ Penannular brooches found on the ground's surface in Šliktinė in 2012. Simanavičiūtė E., Montvydas Ž. Šliktinės aukojimo vieta, *ATL 2012 metais*, 2013, p. 593

an excavator during melioration work. In 2012 artefacts from the destroyed hoard site were again discovered on the surface of ploughed ground<sup>6</sup>. Museums today hold a total of 447 artefacts characteristic of males from the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries: ornaments (mostly penannular brooches with poppy head terminals), weapons (mostly various types of spearheads), some tools, pieces of equestrian gear, a weight from a



FIG. 10. ■ The stone heads found in lake Galvė and preserved at TMH. Photo by V. Vaitkevičius.



0 5 cm

FIG. 11. ■ Bubbling Truikinai spring, also known as Šmita spring, as seen from the south. Photo by V. Vaitkevičius, 2010.



set of scales, and part of an Arab dirham; some of the artefacts show signs of being in a fire (Fig. 9).

The majority of the fifteen pools, lakes, and parts of them called *Alka* are situated in East Lithuania around Ukmergė and Molėtai. These sites frequently belong to a wider sacred site space, but there is a lack of other data about their significance. And then there are nineteen lakes called *Šventas*. Their average size is 30–40 ha, but Lake *Šventas* in Girutiškė Forest (Zarasai District) is 440 ha. This lake is fed by precipitation without any streams flowing into or out of it.

An abundance of prehistoric sites: unenclosed settlements from the 1<sup>st</sup>–early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, groups of East Lithuanian barrows, and other kinds of sacred sites: streams, hills, and stones lie on the shores of lakes called *Šventas*. Stories are told about a sunken church or boat (chest) with gold coins, sometimes confirmed by the fact that the lake's water will not freeze until a sacrifice has been made, usually the head of a living being. This belief is widely known on the shores of lakes in East, South, and part of West Lithuania (a total of 30 locations) with various names. In one such lake, Galvė, the rector of Trakai, K. Kulakas, was fishing in 1923 in the shallows between Pilis and Pirtis islands when he found two unique stone heads lying side by side (Fig. 10). It is possible to cautiously conjecture that they had been sacrificed there long ago.

Thirty rivers with a length rarely more than 5–10 km are called *Alka* throughout Lithuania. In West Lithuania,

<sup>6</sup> Montvydas Ž. Seniai pamesta, iš naujo atrasta: Šliktinės lobiai, *LA*, 2013, vol. 39, p. 285–308.

such streams often flow by hills called by the same name but in Central Lithuania, other sacred sites are rarely known on the banks of such streams.

More than fifty rivers with a length ranging roughly from 15 to 25 km are called Šventa throughout Lithuania. The Šventoji (the definite form of the word Šventa, a 249 km long right tributary of the Neris) in East Lithuania and the Šventoji (a 74 km river flowing into the Baltic Sea) in West Lithuania are distinguished by their size. It is characteristic that rivers called Šventa exist in the areas that have been defined by archaeologists as having been inhabited by the Baltic tribes as well as on the edges of some historic lands and districts. Many rivers called Šventa belong to broader sacred sites and flow past hills, trees, and stones considered sacred.

It is generally told that at a certain location on a river called Šventa a priest fell into the water while carrying the Holy Sacrament to a severely ill patient and drowned, but the body of Christ (host) rose to the surface of the water. It is thought that the drowned priest in these stories has taken the place of some water deity in the Baltic religion.

Many Lithuanian rivers have areas connected with the Baltic religion. It is believed that annual sacrifices had to be made at these locations and that those swimming at these places during the summer solstice festival would acquire youth, beauty, health, and even extraordinary knowledge. Although such locations are usually connected with witches, there is reason to think that in Christian times these took the place of the Baltic goddess of fate, Laima (or the three Laimas).

The water of many springs also had extraordinary powers. The precise number of springs throughout Lithuania is not known but springs considered sacred have also been recorded at the most famous sacred sites and in archaeological complexes from the 1<sup>st</sup> – early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium.

It is characteristic that the water from sacred springs is distinguished by a certain mineralisation, bubbles up without ever freezing (Fig. 11), and the water flows to the east. The last quality, i.e. flowing towards the sun, especially strengthens the water's extraordinary powers. It not only heals and strengthens the human body, especially the eyes, but also makes a person younger and gives him or her beauty and spryness.

Since ancient times, various sacrifices have been made in the water of springs considered sacred, on the

ground beside them, or under nearby trees. In Modern times these generally took the form of coins as well as other items and food. Patients used to leave linen shirts, handtowels, handkerchiefs, and vow bands or strings.

One spring gushes from one of two caves considered sacred that are in a conglomerate bluff called Šventoji on the bank of the Neris near Liucionys (Vilnius District) (Fig. 12). To this day religious honour has been shown this site by members of both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. A second cave, also known as the Devil's Castle, is in a gypsum bluff near Padvariečiai (Biržai District). The precise chronology of these sacred sites has not been determined.

The precise number of stones once considered sacred has not been established and many of the stones have not survived, having been destroyed in the destruction of the sacred sites, in the later melioration of the fields, and during various construction work. No stone has ever been called *alka*, but they sometimes bear the old meaningful name of *stabas* [‘an honoured statue or different image of a deity’], which corresponds to the Latvian *stabs*, Prussian *stabis*, Old Norse *stafr*, Swedish *stav*, etc.

Stones that are considered sacred are frequently elements of other sacred sites and are distinguished throughout Lithuania by great diversity. This has been caused by the geological structure, qualities, shape, certain symbols created by nature or man on the surface of the stones, and the stories and narratives about them. It is characteristic that depressions or ‘cups’ on the surface of stones collect water and people impart a

■ FIG. 12.

Liucionys cave, also known as Šventoji, as seen from the east. Photo by D. Vaitkevičienė, 2008.



healing meaning to it. The large flat stones in East Lithuanian community festivals were used in the spring as ritual tables for placing food and drink (Fig. 13) and sometimes people danced on such stones. Stones called Devil's, Witch's, Hag's, and sometimes Mary's chair have hollows or depressions, where it is comfortable to sit and put one's hands. The area around one such a stone, called the Devil's Armchair, was investigated at the foot of Padievaitis Hillfort (Šilalė District) in 1971. The hillfort was inhabited in the early 1<sup>st</sup> millennium, the wooden castle having been destroyed, it is thought, during a 1329 assault by the Teutonic Knights. It was determined that the aforementioned, carefully manufactured armchair (Fig. 14) had been set upon a stone pedestal; opposite the seated person was a 1.3 m diameter, 1.5 m deep pit, in which a fire was lit and which was surrounded by a semi-circle of stones. The cultural layer contained sherds of hand built and partly thrown pottery and animal bones. It was noticed that the voice of a person sitting in the

chair was several times louder than normal for those listening in the hillfort's enclosure.

To this day, several sacred stones are called *Mokas*, i.e. all knowing and learned. It is known that people prayed there for advice, barren women for children, and various sacrifices were made there. It is characteristic that stories consider the *Mokas* stones to be a cursed family. The father and son were usually on dry ground while the mother was at the bottom of a lake or river. The area around a 1.58 m high stone called *Generolas Mokas*, was investigated in Dieveniškės Forest (Šalčininkai District) in 1951. Unfortunately, it had already been destroyed by treasure hunters, but it was determined that an 8 m diameter stone kerb from an East Lithuanian barrow (characteristic of the first half – mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium) was to the north of the stone (Fig. 15)<sup>7</sup>.

Some stones considered sacred have Christian names: John, Peter, Joseph, and Raphael. Stones called *Martin* are common throughout Lithuania. Judging from the stories, they could be connected with the end of shepherding and pasturing on the feast of St Martin (11 November). Sometimes Baltic sacred site stones were not only christened but also marked with a small chiselled or inset cross. In this way, they used to become boundary markers or were consecrated, protecting people from the pagan gods who had been converted into evil spirits, thereby making the old sacred sites

FIG. 13. ■

The Paindrė stone, also known as Hags' Table. Photo by P. Tarasenko, 1933. Centre of Cultural Heritage archive, negative no. 4941.



FIG. 14. ■

The Padievaitis stone, also known as the Devil's Armchair, as seen from the west. Photo by V. Vaitkevičius, 2008.



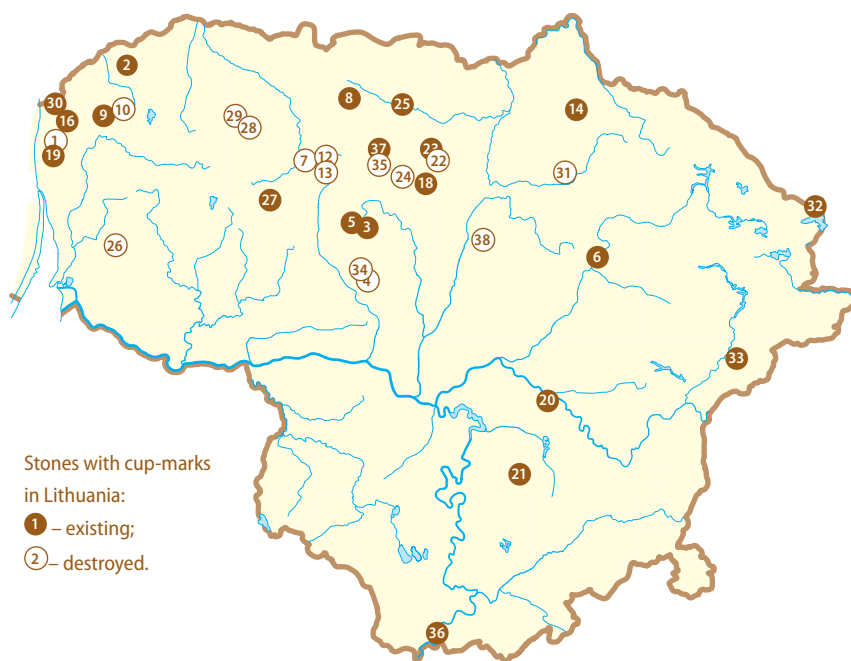
7. Tautavičius A. Šalčininkų rajono pilkapynų tyrinėjimai, *ILKI*, 1958, vol 1, p. 71.

new ones. In this context, stories about brides, wedding participants, and their carriages, which have been cursed by the parents or wrathful wizards and become stones, should be mentioned. There are grounds to think that long after the introduction of Christianity a bride riding to or from a wedding left sacrifices at these locations and prayed for a happy family life, children, and wealth. The motif of stones that sewed shoes or clothing is significant. This image also arises from the rites of the Baltic religion, which were performed beside sacred stones and banned by the Catholic Church.

The majority of the Baltic sacred site stones today bear the name Devil's (Satan's), although it is impossible to dismiss the possibility that prior to the introduction of Christianity these were cult sites of *Velinas*, the old Lithuanian god of underground wealth and the dead. In fact, the stones sometimes have not one but several depressions reminiscent of footprints, which are considered to be the footprints of the Devil and God or the Devil, God, and an angel, the boundary between respect and hatred for such sacred sites being slight.

Although archaeological investigations at the site of stones with footprints have not yielded very significant results, it should be stressed that throughout Lithuania they have survived at prehistoric burial sites. The mythological meaning of these stones connected with this fact is that the footprints provide an opportunity for the gods and souls of the dead to travel from one world to another, both vertically and horizontally.

The stories about stones with footprints are very similar to those about stones with cup-marks. They definitely belong to a larger range, North Estonia being the region with the densest concentration on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. The majority of the forty stones in Lithuania are situated in fertile flatlands and river valleys. Old settlements and burial sites from the Stone – Bronze Age (on the banks of major rivers: the Nemunas, Neris, and Šventoji), the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC (West Lithuania), and the first centuries of our era (Central and North Lithuania) have also been recorded in these localities (Fig. 16). It should be mentioned that alongside stones with cup-marks, some other Lithuanian stones are also considered sacred, i.e. *bullets of Perkūnas*, which are polished stone axes with a shaft hole were found. The archaeological excavations beside stones with cup-marks have not yielded very significant results. Only in 1977 were two bonfire sites of indeterminate age,  $0.5 \times 1.2 \times$



■ FIG. 15.

The excavation in the vicinity of the Dieveniškės forest stone, also called *Generolas Mokas*, on the left, in the midground. Photo by A. Tautavičius, 1951. MRLIH, negative no. 1990.

■ FIG. 16.

1. Ankštakiai, 2. Apuolė, 3. Baranaučižna, 4. Dapkaičiai, 5. Daukšiai, 6. Dvaronys, 7. Gošteliškiai, 8. Gurbai, 9–11. Imbarė, 12, 13. Jakštaičiukai, 14. Kadarai, 15–17. Kašučiai, 18. Kleboniškiai, 19. Kveciai, 20. Laukagalys, 21. Mergiškės, 22. Moniūnai, 23. Paežeriai, 24. Paežeriai, 25. Pamūšis, 26. Papjaunys, 27. Pavaiguvis, 28, 29. Pavirvytis, 30. Pelėkiai, 31. Siauriai, 32. Tilžė, 33. Šakaliai, 34. Šnipaičiai, 35. Šniūraičiai, 36. Šven-dubrė, 37. Žadžiūnai, 38. Žvirbliai. Map by V. Vaitkevičius, 2014.

$0.35 \text{ m}$  and  $0.6 \times 1.8 \times 0.1 \text{ m}$ , discovered beside the south edge of the Laukagalys Stone (Kaišiadorys District) (Fig. 17). These contained flakes from rocks that had crumbled from the heat. It is possible that the bonfire sites are



FIG. 17. ■ The excavation near the Laukagalis stone, as seen from the southwest. Photo by V. Urbanavičius, 1977. MRLIH, negative no. 41028.

FIG. 18. ■ During the excavation of the Trumponys stone, which has a flat-bottom cup-mark. Photo by V. Urbanavičius, 1972. MRLIH, negative no. 32946.

connected with a small shaped flat area and chiselled channels in the south part of the stone rather than with the 7 cup-marks in the north part.

The cup-marks on the stones are on average 3–6 cm in diameter, 1 cm deep, gently sloped, and sometimes joined by short channels. The number of cup-marks on a stone varies from several (many stones having only up to ten cup-marks) to 169 cup-marks on the third Kašučiai Stone (Kretinga District).

The archaeologists have mainly been interested in the cylindrical stones with flat-bottomed cup-marks. All of the stones are very similar: a diameter of usually 1 m, upper sides worked with an iron chisel, a usually unworked bottom in the ground, and cup-marks about 50 cm in diameter. Forty such sacred site stones have been recorded in West and East Lithuania and several more are known in Latvia. There are usually no stories about them and the stones are found by chance.

During 1970–1972 and 1975, V. Urbanavičius investigated the area around 11 cylindrical stones (and later

M. Černiauskas and I. Škimelienė did one each) (Fig. 18). The results of the all of the excavations are similar: small pedestals for keeping the stone with the cup-mark level and firm were found and isolated charcoal, small pieces of charcoal, or a bonfire site were found near the stones. A fire had been lit in an irregular 2 × 2 m oval pit with a flat bottom near the first Šaukliai stone (Skuodas District) and in a 1.5 m diameter, 50 cm deep pit near the Šilalė Stone (Skuodas District). Three New Age rustic vessels were found in the latter pit: sherds of a small bowl, a jar, and a pot. A semi-circle of six postholes of indeterminate purpose and chronology, two sherds of hand thrown pottery, and a 14<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup>-century bronze crotal were found at the site of the Paduobužė Stone (Molėtai District).

The map of the incidence of stones with flat-bottomed cup-marks allows one to think that this was a sacred site tradition of the Curonian tribe, the refugees of which carried it to East Lithuania, the nucleus of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, circa the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Stones with pointed-bottom cup-marks are another sacred site tradition from the period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. These stones are not found in any neighbouring country except for several instances near Latvia's southern border. It is thought that this type of stone with cup-marks were widely manufactured during the 15<sup>th</sup> – mid-16<sup>th</sup> century; during the Vokla land reforms (beginning in 1547/1557), they were moved along with buildings and the rest of people's possessions to houses in villages with a street (block) plan, where they were used not only for rituals, but also eventually for various economic purposes.

A total of about 650 stones with pointed-bottom cup-marks were recorded in Central, North, and East Lithuania around Utena and Anykščiai but unfortunately, many of them were destroyed during the Soviet era in demolishing old farmsteads or were often added illegally to personal collections. These stones were universally considered to be old quern stones (or more precisely, mythical). These flat stones have various geometric shapes, range in size from 0.6 × 0.7 m to 1 × 1.2 m, and are about 25–35 cm high. The conical, triangular, semicircular, and similar cross-section cup-marks are frequently at a distance from the stone's centre (Fig. 19), range in diameter from 15 to 24 cm, and are from 7 to 17 cm deep.

During 1971–1977, V. Urbanavičius, M. Černiauskas, R. Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė and J. Šliavas conducted

archaeological investigations beside 11 stones with pointed-bottom cup-marks. Various finds from New Age village houses were found: sherds of hand thrown pottery, animal bones, and some iron and glass finds. The possibility cannot be rejected that these are traces of Baltic religious rites. While excavating the second Vaiduloniai Stone with a cup-mark (Radviliškis District) in 1974–1975, it was determined that it was in the north corner of the foundation of a wooden building, on the interior side of which was a 0.9 m thick cultural layer with a hard-packed clay floor, hearths of various construction, stones, abundant sherds of hand built and hand thrown New Age rustic pottery, domestic and wild animal bones, etc. (Fig. 20).

Judging from the archaeological and written sources, i.e. Jesuit reports from Central Lithuanian villages, stones with pointed-bottom cup-marks were part of family sacred sites set up in a home's suspected quern stone corner, where the goddess, Žemyna, and the god, *Pagirnis*, an epithetic name, were honoured. In the stories, their traits were eventually absorbed by the mythological being, *Aitvaras*, who was able to both bring and steal the home's wealth. There are grounds to think that sacred soil was kept in the cup-marks<sup>8</sup>.

Unfortunately, mistakes were unavoidable in the excavation of Baltic sacred sites, and the responsibility for the loss of many unique sacred sites falls to Lithuanian heritage protection. Only in 1990 did the possibility arise of declaring sites, which are sacred to the Baltic religion and have not only archaeological, but also mythological value, to be state-protected cultural sites and extending legal protection to them. The inventory that has been started, a catalogue of Baltic sacred sites in Lithuania, has greatly peaked the public's interest and prompted the active search for, protection, and cherishing of sacred sites. Their significance for the national culture and identity as well as the importance of the search for, accounting, and investigation of them, has begun to be perceived.

The investigation of sites sacred to the Baltic religion centuries after Lithuania's baptism is a difficult and thankless task, which cannot be resolved by the science of archaeology without the assistance of mythology, history, ethnology, linguistics, and folklore. The conception of

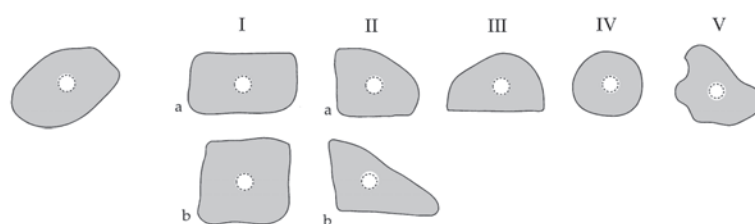


FIG. 19. Characteristic shape of an unworked stone with a pointed-bottom cup-mark (on the left) and the five main types of worked stones (I – rectangular, II – triangular, III – semicircular, IV – round, V – irregular). Drawing by V. Vaitkevičius, 2004.



FIG. 20. Excerpt of the excavation plan of the second Vaiduloniai stone, which has a pointed-bottom cup-mark. MRLIH, f. 1, no. 529, p. 34.

sacred sites, which is not always accepted, can answer all of the questions and determine the value of the various sites and is therefore changing and being changed.

Baltic sacred sites are today perceived as not just ancient cult but also mythological sites. They can be ritual and sacred at the same time, creations of nature and the hand of man or this division can be rejected in light of the fact that the feeling of SANCTITY experienced there is indivisible. It should be stressed that it is not controlled by time and does not heed it. Sanctity can be affected and transformed, but it never disappears. Abandoned, at any moment it can be given meaning again, attract religious attention, prayers, and sacrifices. To this day Baltic sacred sites affect the scientific, cultural, and art world, supplement it with not just knowledge, but also values, which are shaping the worldview of the contemporary Lithuanian nation.

<sup>8</sup> Vaitkevičius V. Akmenys su smailiadugniais dubenimis, *LA*, 2005, vol. 28, p. 191–207.

## Abbreviations

**GDR** Grand Duchy of Lithuania

## Institutions

**GRRCL** Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania  
**HMLM** History Museum of Lithuania Minor  
**LIH** Lithuanian Institute of History  
**MRLIH** Manuscript Room of Lithuanian Institute of History  
**NML** National Museum of Lithuania  
**ŠAM** Šiauliai 'Aušra' Museum  
**VGWM** Vytautas Great War Museum  
**VMMC** Vytautas Magnus Museum of Culture  
**TMH** Trakai Museum of History  
**VU** Vilnius University

## Literature

**AB** Archaeologia Baltica. Vilnius (vol. 1-5), Klaipėda  
**AHUK** Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis. Klaipėda  
**AILL** Archaeological investigations in independent Lithuania. Vilnius  
**AL** Archaeologia Lituana. Vilnius  
**AP** Architektūros paminklai. Vilnius  
**ATL** Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje. Vilnius  
**ILKI** Iš lietuvių kultūros istorijos. Vilnius  
**Istorija** Lietuvos aukštųjų mokyklų mokslo darbai. Istorija. Vilnius  
**KP** Kultūros paminklai. Vilnius  
**LA** Lietuvos archeologija. Vilnius  
**LAŠSP** Lietuvos archeologijos šaltiniai Sankt Peterburge. Vilnius  
**LIM** Lietuvos istorijos metraštis. Vilnius  
**LPA** Lietuvos piliakalniai: Atlasas. Vilnius, 2005.  
**MADA** Lietuvos TSR Mokslų Akademijos darbai. A serija. Vilnius  
**MLA** Metodai Lietuvos archeologijoje. Mokslas ir technologijos praeičiai pažinti. Vilnius  
**MP** Muziejai ir paminklai. Vilnius  
**PF** Pamiełnik fizyograficzny. Warszawa  
**WA** Wiadomości archeologiczne. Warszawa

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