

# Sacrificial Offering Sites of Lithuanian and Prussian: Sweat-lodge

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One of the previous articles describes the ritual purpose of one of the peasant's buildings – the drying barn. It was concluded that in the 16th and 17th centuries the drying barn was the place in which the Lithuanian peasants widely practiced sacrifices to the old gods. This is shown not only by the 16th – 17th century written sources, but also by the stories and beliefs of the beginning of the 19th and 20th centuries keeping the traces of sacrificing in the drying barn tradition. However, the drying barn was not the only building of the peasant homestead at that time, in which rituals related to the old religion were performed. The sweat-lodge is also regarded as not only a building of economic and hygienic use, but also as a small peasant's „church“ of the 15th – 17th centuries, i. e. the place where various rituals to the gods, dead ancestors, etc. were performed.

**Keywords:** drying barn, sweat-lodge, church, gods, rituals.

Bath and their usefulness for human health were well known to the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and Slavs.<sup>1</sup> We find reference

1 Of the written sources ascribed to the Slavs, mentionable is a description of the travels of the apostle Andrew, which says: “I saw a wooden sweat-lodge, heated to a high degree, so that all disrobe, heat themselves to the point of redness, beat themselves with the branches of saplings; emerging from the sweat-lodge barely alive, they pour cold water over themselves and thus revive. And they do this continually, compelled by no one...” „Диво видел я в Славянской земле на пути своем сюда. Видел бани деревянные, и намоют их сильно, и разденутся и будут наги, и обольются квасом кожевленным, и поднимут на себя прутья молодые и бьют себя сами, и до того себя добьют, что едва вылезут, чуть живые, и обольются водою студеною, и только так оживут. И творят это постоянно, никем же не мучимые, но сами себя мучат, и то творят омовенье себе, а не мученье“. Internet webpage: <http://www.old-russian.chat.ru/01povest.htm> (accessed June 10, 2013).

to the sweat-lodge of the nomadic herder Scythian tribes as early as Herodotus.<sup>2</sup>

The ancient Greek scientist and doctor Hippocrates treated his patients in the bath-house and considered its effects on the human organism to be of divine origin (incidentally, the word hygiene comes from the Greek goddess of cleanliness and health Hygeia,<sup>3</sup> who is also associated closely with the bath), while the sweat-lodge in the myths of the Eastern Slavs was considered the birthplace of gods and men.<sup>4</sup>

It is noteworthy that neither the sweat-lodge nor the tradition of flagellation with branches have changed at all since that time.

2 Internet webpage: <http://www.vehi.net/istoriya/grecia/gerodot/01.html>. Accessed June 10, 2013.

3 Internet webpage: <http://banya.konotop.biz/?tag=%D0%B3%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BE%D1%82>. Accessed June 10, 2013.

4 Internet webpage: <http://www.ostashovo.narod.ru/>

## 1. The Name and Function of the Building

In historical times the Balts considered a sweat-lodge a smoke-house with an oven, a place where our forefathers not only took bath, but lived. This is demonstrated, according to Augusts Bilenšteins (August Johann Gottfried Bielenstein), Kazimieras Būga and Pranas Skardžius echoing Būga, by Baltic loanwords in the language of the Finns and related languages (Karelian, Saami, Liv and Estonian). The Finnish word *pirtti* preserves the older meaning of the Baltic word *pirtis*, as a smoke-house.<sup>5</sup> As the entire ensemble of farm buildings developed (with distinct cottage and threshing-barn), the function of the *pirtis* slightly changed.

It is known from different written sources from the 16th and 17th centuries that the farmstead of the well-to-do Lithuanian in that period typically had from several to more than a dozen different buildings, each with its own function. A survey of the ethnographic materials collected by Theodor Lepner and others from the second half of the 17th century to the first half of the 20th century leads to the conclusion that they did not have distinct features at different times in different regions of Lithuania, and that J. Mickevičius was correct when

he wrote in the 1930s that while everyone knows what a sweat-lodge is, they don't understand it in the same way.<sup>6</sup>

From about the 16th century on, Samogitians (modern Žemaitijans) and Lietuvininkai (Lithuanians from East Prussia) called both the grain-drying room (the *jauja* in Lithuanian, a building or room for drying grain and flax) within the barn, and a separate building for bathing, *pirtis*, or sweat-lodge (although some Samogitians also used the terms *perenė* and *pakrosnė* for the bath<sup>7</sup>). For the two groups of Lithuanians known as Zanavykai and Kapsai living beyond the Nemūnas (Nieman) River, *pirtis* meant a special building for drying and crushing flax for linen. The sweat-lodge from the Lithuanian ethnographic region of Dzūkija were for bathing, but were also used for threshing flax when the need arose.<sup>8</sup> It was only among the Eastern Aukštaičiai that *pirtis* meant a building which functioned exclusively as a sweat-lodge, including bathing and flagellating oneself with green tree shoots.<sup>9</sup>

Descriptions by Lepner and S. Daukantas of the concept of the sweat-lodge held by the Lietuvininkai and Samogitians are quite detailed. Theodor Lepner writing in the

banya/history/rus.htm. Accessed June 10, 2013.

5 August Johann Gottfried Bielenstein. *Die Grenzen des lettischen Volksstammes und der lettischen Sprache in der Gegenwart und im 13. Jahrhundert*, Eggers, Peterburg, 1892, 494; K. Būga. Rinkiniai raštai. Volume III. Vilnius: Valstybinė politinės ir mokslinės literatūros leidykla, 1961, 494; Pranas Skardžius. *Pirties žodžio sąvoka ir kilmė. Gimtasai kraštas*. No. 2, 1934, 74.

6 J. Mickevičius. *Senovės žemaičių pirtis. Gimtasai kraštas*. Nos. 9-10, 1936, 470.

7 J. Mickevičius. *Senovės žemaičių pirtis. Gimtasai kraštas*. Nos. 9-10, 1936, 470; Izidorius Butkevičius. *Lietuvos valstiečių gyvenvietės ir sodybos. Iš Lietuvos kultūros istorijos*. Vilnius: Mintis, 1971, 248; *Lietuvių kalbos žodynas. Volume X*. Senior editor J. Kruopas. Vilnius: Mokslas, 1976, 34; *Lietuvių kalbos žodynas. Volume IX*. Senior editor J. Kruopas. Vilnius: Mintis, 1973.

8 *Ibid*, 33-34.

9 Pranas Skardžius. *Pirties žodžio sąvoka ir kilmė. Gimtasai kraštas*. No. 2, 1934, 74.

second half of the 17th century portrayed the life and customs of the Lithuanians of East Prussia, and stated: “they thresh the grain in the *jauja* (Jaugen), which contains the sweat-lodge <...>. Here all around there is a rod set up, upon which the crops are hung to dry, and it is heated and sometimes used as a *jauja*, but sometimes as a sweat-lodge (Pirt).”<sup>10</sup> „This space is about the same height as a person and is used as a sweat-lodge. There is a fireplace made of rough stones and clay, called a *krosnis* [Lithuanian for oven, fireplace], and there are benches on either side, made of four rods, upon which they customarily dry crops.”<sup>11</sup>

Daukantas says much the same thing in the mid-19th century about the sweat-lodge inside Samogitian *jaujas* (or *rejas*): “...the dry crops are taken from the pit, the sheaves are stacked in the barn. In the threshing barn there was a square well higher than the eaves of the barn called a pit in which they dried crops, almost half the size of the threshing barn, lower than the stove?, and there was a door to the pit, a place for drying hops, in which there was a window which was called a *garvilkas*, and on the side of that pit there was a place called a *pelude* where the chaff and husks were placed. The poor used that little space for a bath, because there was a full stove there.”<sup>12</sup>]

10 Theodor Lepner. *Prūsų lietuvis*. Compiled by Vilija Gerulaitienė. Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2011, 183.

11 *Ibid*, 224-225.

12 *Budą senowęs – Lėtuwiū Kalnienū ir Zámajtiū iszrazę Pagal senowes Rasztū Jokyb's Laukys. Petrolie Spausdinie pas C. Hintze 1845*, 25-26. Internet webpage: <http://www.epaveldas.lt/vbspi/biRecord.do?submit=Per%C5%A1okti+%C4%AF&biExemplarId=933&psl=34>; accessed May 30, 2012.

In reality there are differences between the sweat-lodge of the Lietuvininkai and that of the Samogitians. According to Otto Glugau, writing at the end of the 9th century, “In the past the Lietuvininkai in every courtyard had a separate building for bathing, called a *pirtis*. This was a dark room barely the height of a man with a pile of rough stones inside and wooden benches around the walls. The stones were heated by an underground fire and were later watered. The entire space filled with hot steam. Then people entered naked inside, stretched out upon the benches and beat one another’s body with short switches of birch ... and ran outside and, to cool off, jumped right there into the pond or rolled around in the snow.” Glugau concludes his graphic description of the sweat-lodge and bathing of the Lietuvininkai with the observation that this same sweat-lodge facility was used for drying grain and hops, and notes with regret that this type of steam sweat-lodge, which at that time (the end of the 19th century) was universal in Russian villages, had disappeared from among the Lietuvininkai.<sup>13</sup> As an aside, its disappearance wasn’t the result of that generation’s caprice, as Glugau believes, but due to the fires they frequently caused. Orders by the East Prussian government aimed at safeguarding the welfare of the peasantry and protecting them from house fires was the main reason for the disappearance of these sweat-lodges among the Lietuvininkai. This

13 *Lietuvininkai. Apie Vakarų Lietuvą ir jos gyventojus devynioliktajame amžiuje*. Compiled by Vacys Miilius. Vilnius: Vaga, 1970, 244-245.

was the reason why there were barely one hundred sweat-lodges left in the region beyond the Nemūnas according to data for 1931, while there were around 26,000 still operating in Aukštaitija at that time, another 7,000 in Central Lithuania and around 4,000 in Samogitia (Žemaitija).<sup>14</sup>

Summarizing the information about sweat-lodges in the different regions of Lithuania, it bears repeating that there were two types of sweat-lodge in Samogitia and Lithuanian Minor (Lithuanian areas of East Prussia)—separate buildings, and the sauna located within the *jauja*. In ethnographic descriptions these two sorts of sauna usually are differentiated, but deciding which sort of sweat-lodge is meant in folklore and religious contexts is not always possible. Neither is it always possible to make the distinction in the written sources from the 14th-17th centuries.

## 2. The Sweat-lodge Heated for the Gods

Peter von Dusburg was the first to mention bath being kindled to honor the gods. In his Chronicle of the Lands of Prussia in 1326 he says: “Some or another of them bathe in the sweat-lodge daily out of respect for their gods, others among them simply despise and loathe the sweat-lodge.”<sup>15</sup> Nikolaus von Jeroschin repeated this information setting Dusburg’s chronicle to rhyme (in Middle High German) in the 1330s: “Some Prussians make sure / to honor their gods / by bathing daily. / Among them were, / as

it was said, also those / who never / entered a sweat-lodge,”<sup>16</sup> as did Jan Długosz, writing in the mid-15th century: “Both men and women bathe daily in the sweat-lodges; there they can treat a hangover from the previous evening’s drinking and revive themselves.”<sup>17</sup> Neither author, it seems, could resist the temptation to add a little of their own to the text, nor did they manage to resist the temptation to completely distort the significance of the initial information, i.e., they failed to associate the sweat-lodge ritual with the honoring of the old Prussian gods. Marcin Kromer (Martin Cromer) writing in the mid-16th century fails in the same manner. Reprising Długosz, he writes: “Almost daily, exhausted after laboring, incontinence or drinking, they bathed in steam or the sweat-lodges, desiring to revive themselves, and being accustomed to the climate, they were not afraid of bathing or washing with cold water, even in winter.”<sup>18</sup>

With reservations bathing as a way to wash away an alien baptism and washing during Christmas in the hopes of a larger sheep herd are also examples of the sweat-lodge in the service of honoring the gods. Henry of Latvia (aka Heinrich von Lettland, Heinrich von Livland, Henricus de Lettis) writes in his Chronicle of Livonia (Cronicon Lyvoniae, writing ca. 1225-1227): “Apostate Livs leave their sweat-lodges (*de balneis*) and splash themselves with the water of the Dauguva [Dvina] River, saying:

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 567.

<sup>18</sup> *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai. vol. II.* compiled by Norbertas Vėlius. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 2001, 421.

<sup>14</sup> *Lietuvių enciklopedija. Volume XXIII.* Boston, 1961, 56.

<sup>15</sup> *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai. vol. I.* Compiled by Norbertas Vėlius. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 1996, 345.

‘Here we wash away the water of baptism and Christianity itself with the water of the river...’<sup>19</sup> Penned by an unknown author, “Information about the Manners, Character and Life of the Lithuanians” published in the second half of the 17th century relates: “On the morning of the first day of Christmas they bathe in their sweat-lodges. They do this in the expectation of receiving white and mixed black-and-white lambs.”<sup>20</sup> In both cases, there is an expectation of mediation by the god (or gods).

The primary sources worth consulting at this point in time are only those (if we exclude retellings) in which the act of taking a sweat-lodge is at least partially associated with rituals dedicated to the pre-Christian elder gods. Unfortunately, the sources and later retellings do not tell us to which gods the ritual bathing is dedicated, or how this bathing “for honoring the gods” differs from a regular, everyday bathing, undedicated to the gods. Peter von Dusburg, of course, was writing about Prussian customs, so it is entirely possible, as noted earlier, that this source is about a sweat-lodge which is not a separate facility but part of the grain-drying barn, or *jauja*. In that case, it could be said that all of the rituals performed for the Prussian gods (all the supreme Prussian gods, with a goat sacrificed in the spring and fall, and also the deities Gabija, Gabjaujas and Jagaubis<sup>21</sup>) in

the *jauja* are simultaneously performed in the sweat-lodge, because during the course of these rituals the fire in the *jauja* would be kindled, that is, the stove in the sweat-lodge of the *jauja* would be lit. Seventeenth-century sources (including the 17th century document of unknown authorship cited above) often provide information about the peasantry’s religious rites for supplicating gods concerned with a specific (and usually narrow) range of activities. Whether or not bathing in the sweat-lodge (in the expectation of a larger sheep herd) is connected with the gods of sheep described by Jan Łasicki,<sup>22</sup> we can only speculate.

Although there is only a little information about rituals performed in the sweat-lodge for the elder gods in the written sources from the 14th to 17th centuries, their lack is compensated partially by folklore and beliefs recorded in the 19th and 20th centuries. Knowing that the propagators and custodians of Christianity vehemently sought to extinguish all customs and traditions connected with the old religion (and the annual reports by the Vilnius Jesuits Collegium from the latter half of the 16th and first half of the 17th centuries are especially informative in this regard), one might conclude that beliefs concerning prohibitions on entering

19 *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai. vol. I.* compiled by Norbertas Vėlius. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 1996, 278, 285.

20 *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai. vol. III.* compiled by Norbertas Vėlius. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 2003, 325-328.

21 For more, see: Rimantas Balsys. *Jauja – XVI–XVII a. valstiečių „bažnyčia“.* *Sakralieji baltų kultūros aspek-*

*tai. Senovės baltų kultūra. vol. 9.* Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2012, 191-205.

22 *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai. Volume II.* compiled by Norbertas Vėlius. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 2001, 594. For further information about the gods of the sheep described by Łasicki, see Rimantas Balsys. *Lietuvių ir prūsų dievai, deivės, dvasios: nuo apeigos iki prietaro.* Klaipėda: Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla, 2010, 195-199.

the sweat-lodge during holy days, during the great feasts as well as Holy Thursday and Easter Friday, arose out of the desire to destroy the older rituals performed in the sweat-lodge. This is supported by oral traditions in which an elderly woman who ignores the injunction not to enter the bathing on Holy Thursday is skinned alive by the devil, and stories about sweat-lodges with all their occupants descending into and disappearing below the earth because took a bath on Easter morning<sup>23</sup>.

For the same reasons, it seems, the *pirtis* in fables is one of the favorite and most-frequented places of devils and *laumės* (female deities and elementals in Baltic mythology taking a variety of forms)<sup>24</sup>. The fable “The Devil and the Girl in the Sauna” and variations upon it was likely the most widespread of all fables among Lithuanians. The daughter (or step-daughter, or maid-servant) stays alone in the sweat-lodge to wash herself and the devil introduces himself and invites her to dance. The girl attempts to save herself demanding of him a series of diverse things (soap, a washcloth, a shirt, a dress, shoes, a comb, a mirror, etc.), in order to postpone his advances and await the break of dawn. When the cock crows, the devil curses her, “that the devils might take you and your accessories, because of which there was no chance to dance,” and then disappears, while all the objects the girl demanded remain with her.<sup>25</sup>

In the less common fables, girls wash the devil and slap him with branches in the sweat-lodge; *laumės*/the devil/devils remove dead skin from a woman/women in the sweat-lodge; a step-daughter washing clothes in the sweat-lodge at night is visited by St. Mary, while the daughter is visited by the devil;<sup>26</sup> *laumės* wash, dress and lead home an old man brought to the sweat-lodge by his daughter-in-law;<sup>27</sup> men (a hunter, a young man, a boy) annoy the *laumės* while the latter flagellate one another with branches in the sweat-lodge, and the *laumės* chase the onlookers out and rip up their clothing, destroy the fence, poke an eye out or exact some other kind of revenge.<sup>28</sup>

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Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2002, 343-350, no. 353-364; Bronislava Kerbelytė. *Lietuvių pasakojamosios tautosakos katalogas. vol. III. Etiologinės sakmės. Mitologinės sakmės. Padavimai. Legendos*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2002, 168.

26 Jonas Balys. Raštai. T. III. compiled by Rita Repšienė. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2002, 354-356, 380, 381, 382, 386.

27 Bronislava Kerbelytė. *Lietuvių pasakojamosios tautosakos katalogas. Volume III. Etiologinės sakmės. Mitologinės sakmės. Padavimai. Legendos*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2002, 170.

28 *Lietuviškos pasakos įvairios. Surinko Jonas Basanavičius. Pirmą knygą*. Compiled by Kostas Aleksynas. Vilnius: Vaga, 1993, 108; *Lietuviškos pasakos įvairios. Surinko Jonas Basanavičius. Antra knyga*. compiled by Kostas Aleksynas. Vilnius: Vaga, 1995, 100, no. 44; Norbertas Vėlius. *Mitinės lietuvių sakmių būtybės. Laimės. Laumės. Aitvarai. Kaukai. Raganos. Burtininkai. Vilkčiai*. Vilnius: Vaga, 1977, 104-105. Jonas Balys. Raštai. Volume III. Compiled by Rita Repšienė. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2002, 216, no. 3693. Bronislava Kerbelytė. *Lietuvių pasakojamosios tautosakos katalogas. Volume III. Etiologinės sakmės. Mitologinės sakmės. Padavimai. Legendos*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros

23 J. Mickevičius. *Senovės žemaičių pirtis. Gimtasai kraštas*. Nos. 9-10, 1936, 478-479.

24 Norbertas Vėlius. *Chtoniškas lietuvių mitologijos pasaulis. Folklorinio velnio analizė*. Vilnius: Vaga 1987, 53.

25 Jonas Balys. Raštai. T. III. compiled by Rita Repšienė.

Identical beliefs among the Latvians, i.e., those affected by Christian ideology, portray the sweat-lodge as a place of evil spirits. They visit the sweat-lodge unbeckoned, or are called in by inappropriate behavior in the sweat-lodge. For that reason, according to Latvian beliefs, one must not whistle in the sweat-lodge because it might conjure up the devil, and one must not go in the sweat-lodge after midnight because that's the time when the devil enters the sweat-lodge. There are also prescriptions provided for protecting oneself from and ridding oneself of these evil spirits. According to one belief, this could be accomplished only by determining who did not belong to the Christian community. One was supposed to go outside and say: "Let [only] those take a bath who have been baptized."<sup>29</sup>

Traces of ritualistic behavior in the sweat-lodge can be found as well in more common, everyday folklore. One set of sayings is comparable with sayings about the church and testifies to the sacredness of the sweat-lodge: "In the sweat-lodge as in church," "Let the devil into the sweat-lodge, and he will soon climb up onto the upper benches," "If you let the Gypsy into the sweat-lodge, he will soon climb up onto

the upper benches,"<sup>30</sup> compare with "Let the devil in the church and he'll climb onto the altar as well." Other sayings have been influenced by Christianity and illustrate the demonization of the sweat-lodge: "Washing like a devil in the sweat-lodge," "a devil slaps you and throws the stick at you,"<sup>31</sup> „Like thunder after lighting the sweat-lodge / running like a devil bizas who set the barn [jauja] on fire," "Warmed up like a laumė in the sweat-lodge," „In the sweat-lodge and the jauja the devil has [you] in [his] clutches"<sup>32</sup>.

The connection between mythical entities and the sweat-lodge is obvious as well in common Lithuanian phrases such as "the laumė kindles the sweat-lodge," "the rabbit kindles the sweat-lodge," "the fox kindles the sweat-lodge" (said when fog rises over meadows and fields), and "the devils are going to the sweat-lodge" (said when a strong wind gusts).<sup>33</sup>

Accepting as correct the insight that "the tramp is the heir to the old religion,"<sup>34</sup> or "the reflection of the image of the God

ir tautosakos institutas, 2002, 171-172. The legends discussed thematically closely resemble stories recorded in Eastern Lithuania concerning girls going to the sweat-lodge on Christmas Eve in order to foretell the future (see Bronislava Kerbelytė. *Lietuvių pasakojamosios tautosakos katalogas. Volume IV. Pasakojimai. Anekdota. Oracijos*. Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 2009, 108).

<sup>29</sup> *Latviešu tautas ticējumi* (24094, 24107, 24113). Internet webpage: <http://valoda.ailab.lv/folkloraticejumi/> accessed May 29, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> *Lietuvių kalbos žodynas. Volume XVIII*. Senior editor Vytautas Vitkauskas. Vilnius: Lietuvių kalbos instituto leidykla, 1997, 648.

<sup>31</sup> Samogitian „Biesas tave nuper[a] ir [v]antą antmet[a]“. The saying, according to B. Jasiūnaitė, was applied to failures and losers (see Birutė Jasiūnaitė. „Raganos šluota“ (mitologinių personažų įrankiai frazeologijoje). *Baltistica XLIII(2)*. Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2008, 254.

<sup>32</sup> Internet webpage: <http://patarles.dainutekstai.lt/pirtis-6.htm> accessed June 11, 2013.

<sup>33</sup> *Frazeologijos žodynas*. Editor Jonas Paulauskas. Vilnius: Lietuvių kalbos institutas, 2001, 535.

<sup>34</sup> Algirdas Julijus Greimas. *Lietuvių mitologijos studijos*. Compiled by Kęstutis Nastopka. Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2005, 406-407; Dainius Razauskas-Daukintas. *Krosnis mitologijoje. Baltų mitologijos ir ritualo tyrimai. vol. 3*. Vilnius: Aidai, 2011, 27.

who once walked the earth,”<sup>35</sup> then the belief recorded by J. Basanavičius that “there is no greater offering than Holy Mass, a sweat-lodge lit for a tramp and a feast held for a tramp”<sup>36</sup> is of significance here.

### 3. The Sweat-lodge Heated for the Ancestors

The author of the Book of the Suduvians, written in the 1610s or 1620s, was the first to describe how the Suduvians of the Semba Peninsula treated the corpse of a fellow member of the tribe: “[They] wash [him] in a warm sweat-lodge or shed, wash him clean and dress him in white clothes.”<sup>37</sup> Maciej Strykowski (Matys Strycovius) repeats this information at the end of the 16th century, but applying it not just to the Prussians but the Lithuanians, Samogitians and Latvians as well: “They gently wash the dead in the sweat-lodge and dress him in a long white shirt.”<sup>38</sup> At the end of the 17th century, Matthäus Prätorius, probably based on the

Book of the Suduvians, applies this custom (washing the corpse in the sweat-lodge or tub) to all Prussians.<sup>39</sup>

From these rather fragmentary descriptions in sources from the 16th and 17th centuries, it’s difficult to determine whether this washing in the sweat-lodge should be considered ritualistic or merely a practical consideration (availability of hot water, benches for treating the corpse, remoteness of the sweat-lodge from living quarters ensuring separation of the corpse from the living, etc.). In any event, information from sources from the same period (Jan Łasicki, Dionysius Fabricius) allows stating at least hypothetically that the of the sweat-lodge was not just a place for treating corpses, but was also the venue for performing a general series of rituals concerned with the cult of the ancestors.

At the end of the 16th century Jan Łasicki seems to support this in his description of the celebration of Ilgès—the pagan precursor to All Saints’ Day—by the Samogitians, who called their dead ancestors to the of the sweat-lodge: “During these holidays they invite the dead from the grave to the sweat-lodge for a feast. As many as they invite, so many chairs do they place for that purpose in the shack, and so many napkins and shirts are laid out, the table laden with food and drink,” and three days later “they wave good-bye to their ghosts.”<sup>40</sup>

35 Nijolė Marcinkevičienė. Kuo įsimintinas konkursas „Etninės kultūros šaltiniai. Žmogus ir jo gyvenamoji aplinka“? *Žmogus ir jo gyvenamoji aplinka. Konfencijos medžiaga*. Vilnius: Lietuvos liaudies kultūros centas, 2007, 20.

36 *Jono Basanavičiaus tautosakos biblioteka. Surinko Jonas Basanavičius. vol. 7. Iš gyvenimo vėlių bei velnių*. Compiled by Kostas Aleksynas. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 1993, 121, no. 24. In this regard also relevant is the fairytale „Dievas pirtį“ [„The God in the Sweat-lodge“], in which the heroine (a girl) climbs to heaven on a beanstalk and meets God, who asks the girl to light the sweat-lodge and make it hot (*Paparčių ir Žaslių apylinkės*. Compiled by Judita Mačiokienė. Kaišiadorys: Kaišiadorių etninės kultūros centras, 1997, 134).

37 *Ibid.*, 152.

38 *Ibid.*, 550.

39 Matas Pretorius. *Prūsijos įdomybės, arba Prūsijos regykla. Volume. III*. Compiled by I. Lukšaitė in cooperation with M. Girdzijauskaitė, S. Drevello, J. Kilius and M. Čiurinskas. Vilnius: LII leidykla, 2006, 673.

40 *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai. Volume III*. compiled by Norbertas Vėlius. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 2003, 596. It appears that in the first half of the 19th century Ludwik Adam Jucewicz retold this same information, based on Łasicki, and



Dionysius Fabricius describing the customs and rituals of the people of Livonia at the beginning of the 17th century partially repeats Łasicki's information, but complements it with an original text, an address to the spirits of the ancestors as they are being escorted out: "Dear spirits, here we have feted you as best as we are able, and you help and guard us until the same day next year. We will again reward you generously."<sup>41</sup>

It is noteworthy that in the 13th century sources dead ancestors were honored in the autumn at sacred sites located in the forest. This transformation, i.e., the removal of rituals to the peasant's farm, should be considered a consequence of the establishment of Christianity. After the destruction of the former sacred sites, by the 16th century many of the rituals were being performed in secret in farm buildings.<sup>42</sup> This same tendency held sway,

according to the written sources, until the end of the 17th century.<sup>43</sup>

The belief that "the spirits of the dead who once lived on the farm visit" the sweat-lodge, "especially on All Saints' Eve,"<sup>44</sup> survived throughout Lithuania right up and into the first half of the 20th century. According to a similar belief (perhaps somewhat more influenced by Christianity), the souls of the dead didn't confine themselves to visiting just the sweat-lodge on that night, but also returned from purgatory or limbo to other non-residential buildings (the barn, the *jauja*) in order to pray.<sup>45</sup>

The examples above correlate with a holiday in Aukštaitija (Eastern Lithuania) celebrated in November called *Ažinkai* (and also called *Stalai* [Tables], *Stalų kėlimas* [Raising of the Tables], *Diedai*, *Diedaduonė* [from a Polish dialect for "tramp, old man"]). This holiday is made up of two elements: the bathing, which is lit Saturday evening and in which everyone must bathe; and ritual foods prepared the next day, a portion of which is placed in baskets and brought to the *Diedai*, i.e., to tramps, so that the latter pray for one's dead relatives.<sup>46</sup> D. Vaitkevičienė reports the

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that Jonas Basanavičius, and later Jonas Balsys, used Jucewicz's information (see: Adam Ludwik Jucewicz. *Litwa pod względem starożytnych zabytków, obyczajów i zwyczajów*. Wilno, 1846, 292; *Jono Basanavičiaus tautosakos biblioteka*. Compiled by Jonas Basanavičius. Volume 7. Iš gyvenimo vėlių bei velnių. Compiled by Kostas Aleksynas. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 1993, 53; Jonas Balys. *Lietuvių kalendorinės šventės. Tautosakinė medžiaga ir aiškinimai*. Vilnius: Mintis, 1993, 283-284, no. 49.)

41 *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai. Volume III*. Compiled by Norbertas Vėlius. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 2003, 573. It might be for this same reason that J. Pabrėža in his sermons said it wasn't necessary to wash the corpse, and that this was a relict from pagan times (Viktoras Gidžiūnas. *Jurgis Ambraszėjus Pabrėža: (1771-1849)*. Roma, Lietuvių katalikų Mokslo Akademija, 1993, 202).

42 Rimantas Balsys. *Jauja – XVI-XVII a. valstiečių „bažnyčia“. Sakralieji baltų kultūros aspektai. Senovės baltų kultūra. T. 9*. Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2012, 191-205.

43 Rimantas Balsys. *Maldos į senuosius lietuvių ir prūsų dievus XIV-XVII a. rašytiniuose šaltiniuose. Tautosakos darbai. Volume XXXV*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2008, 263-265.

44 P. Bugailiškis. *Senovės pirtis. Gimtasai kraštas*. No. 2, 1934, 97.

45 J. Mickevičius. *Senovės žemaičių pirtis. Gimtasai kraštas*. Nos. 9-10, 1936, 478. In isolated cases the spirit of the departed may settle in the sweat-lodge stove for an extended period, until it has suffered sufficiently to atone for its sins (Balys Buračas. *Pasakojimai ir padavimai*. Compiled by Albinas Degutis ir Vidmantas Jankauskas. Vilnius: Mintis, 1996, 42).

46 Jonas Balys. *Lietuvių kalendorinės šventės*. Vilnius: Mintis, 1993, 284, no. 54.

Diedai tradition and bathing tradition exist in parts of Belarus to this day. In celebrating this holiday, everyone enters the sweat-lodge while simultaneously invoking the spirits of the dead: “Diedai! Great-grand-diedai! Come to bathe yourselves, bring yourselves in holding one another’s hands.”<sup>47</sup>

Another example of the connection between the sweat-lodge and honoring the ancestors can be found in a belief recorded by J. Basanavičius: „Leaving the sweat-lodge, one must say three, five or seven *Pater noster*s, and as many *Requiem Aeternams*, for those souls which have been burned up in the fire or drowned in the water.”<sup>48</sup>

#### 4. The Sweat-lodge and Family Holidays

Johann Lange’s (Jānis Langijs, Jānis Lange, Johannes Langius) Latvian-German dictionary from the end of the 17th century contains the lexeme *pirtynas* (Pirtihf chi), „an offering left in the sweat-lodge after the birth of a child, a feast or meal after the birth of a child.”<sup>49</sup> Gotthard Friedrich Stender also cites the word *pirtize*, meaning the bathing of a newborn in the sweat-lodge.<sup>50</sup>

Although Lange fails to say for whom the offering was made following a success-

ful birth, this is not beyond all speculation if we use the information from 17th century authors Matthäus Prätorius and Paul Einhorn. Prätorius was the first to write about “Laimelè, the goddess of child-birth, upon whom they call when the woman must give birth or has given birth already; they also have special rites for this.”<sup>51</sup> After a successful birth the midwife, according to Prätorius, prays “to the Virgin Mary (Mother Mary) (some further call upon Laimè (Layme), for whom they pour a libation on the ground).”<sup>52</sup> Near the end of the 17th century Einhorn says Latvians “and primarily pregnant women and those giving birth, honor to an extraordinary degree Laima, who is fortune, or the goddess of happiness, upon whom they call and who aids during birth...” Laima laid out blankets for the women giving birth, often woven by these same women, upon which they were supposed to give birth; if they did so, the birth was considered blessed.<sup>53</sup>

There’s little reason to doubt the veracity of the information provided by these authors given the abundance of associations between the goddess Laima and women giving birth contained in the folklore and folk beliefs. For instance, in Latvian ethnic songs and beliefs birth itself is called “Laima’s bath,” and often “Mara’s bath.” This is probably why the attributes of Laima are the branch (for slapping the skin in the sweat-lodge), keys and a knife. After a successful birth (beating with branches from saplings, unlocking, cutting), according to

47 Daiva Vaitkevičienė. Stalų kėlimai, Diedai ir Kūčios. *Šiaurės Atėnai*. No. 874. 2007 12 22. Internet webpage: <http://eia.libis.lt:8080/archyvas/viesas/20100823114233/> [http://www.culture.lt/satenai/?leid\\_id=874&kas=spaudai&st\\_id=15650](http://www.culture.lt/satenai/?leid_id=874&kas=spaudai&st_id=15650) accessed November 14, 2013.

48 *Ibid.*, 122, no. 34.

49 *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai*. Volume III. Compiled by Norbertas Vėlius. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 2003, 702.

50 *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai*. Volume IV. Compiled by Norbertas Vėlius. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 2005, 227.

51 *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai*. Volume III. Compiled by Norbertas Vėlius. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 2003, 260.

52 *Ibid.*, 320.

53 *Ibid.*, 630, 632.

Pēteris Šmits-Smiters (aka Šmidts), a ring, coins, dyed woolen threads, woven sashes, a chicken or even a sheep were sacrificed to Laima or Mara in the sweat-lodge.<sup>54</sup> Probably because of these crucial functions, over time Laima became the guardian not just of women giving birth and birth in the sweat-lodge, but of the sweat-lodge and bathing more generally. This is demonstrated by beliefs recorded which say that following a bath, one should leave the water ladle and wooden switch on the higher benches “for Laima to take a bath;” one should place the switch and warm water in that same place for Mara to take a bath; and to wash off the benches to make a place clean for Laima.<sup>55</sup>

Ethnographic and folklore material indicate women often (especially in winter) gave birth in sweat-lodges in Eastern Aukštaitija and Samogitia right through the 19th and into the first half of the 20th century.<sup>56</sup> Heating the women giving birth up, the steam, massages and even slapping her with branches were considered very effective means of easing the birthing process.<sup>57</sup> Incidentally, a fragment of a Lithuanian folk song recorded by A. Juška illustrates giving birth in the sweat-lodge: „Vaikščio martelė / Po

pirtelę, / Kalėdo / Ne viena martelė, / Drauge bobelė<sup>58</sup>, / Kalėdo. / Kai dievas davė / Marčiai džiaugsmelį, / Kalėdo / Gi gi gi, / Kliu kliu kliu, Ir iš bankelės<sup>59</sup> [The young bride walks/ into the sweat-lodge / Ho-ho-ho / Not alone / Together with the old woman / Ho-ho-ho / When God gives / Joy to the young bride / Ho-ho-ho / Hee hee hee / And glurg glurg glurg / From the little bottle...]. Of course the sweat-lodge was chosen for giving birth for practical reasons as well as ritualistic ones, as already noted (warmth, cleanliness, a distant and isolated safe space, means to heat water, a place to slap and warm up the woman giving birth), but the custom of taking the woman to the sweat-lodge during the birth process, widely practiced in Eastern Lithuania, was nonetheless mainly a ritualistic act. One sees here all the indications of the post-liminal phase of the rite of passage: the clearing away of debris from the other side (cleansing), return (being returned) to the community, and the feast or meal.<sup>60</sup> Until this ritual is performed, the birth-giver is still separated from the community and therefore vulnerable to evil spirits. For this reason other (female) participants in the ritual greet the woman giving birth, shouting “a wolf is coming,”<sup>61</sup> i.e., concealing the woman’s true name.<sup>62</sup>

54 Pēteris Šmits. *Latvių mitoloģija*. Translated from Latvian to Lithuanian by Dainius Razauskas. Vilnius: Aidai, 2004, 46-47.

55 *Latviešu tautas ticējumi* (24093, 24086 24099-24101). Internet webpage: <http://valoda.ailab.lv/folkloraticejumi/> accessed May 29, 2013.

56 P. Bugailiškis. *Senovės pirtis. Gimtasis kraštas*. No. 2, 1934, 97; Mažiulis Antanas. *Senoji pasartiškių pirtis. Mūsų kraštas*, no. 1, 1992, 90-103; Bronislava Kerbelytė. *Lietuvių pasakojamosios tautosakos katalogas*. vol. IV. *Pasakojimai. Anekdotai. Oracijos*. Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 2009, 63.

57 Angelė Vyšniauskaitė, Petras Kalnius, Rasa Paukštytė. *Lietuvių šeima ir papročiai*. Vilnius: Mintis, 1995, 420

58 „Bobelė“ („boba“) here likely signifies a village midwife, compare the verb *bobauti*, „to be the old woman at a birth.“ See: *Lietuvių kalbos žodynas vol. I*. Senior editor J. Kruopas. Vilnius: Mintis, 1968, 961.

59 Lietuviškos svotbinės dainos užrašytos Antano Juškos, išleistos Jono Juškos. Vol. II. Vilnius: Valstybinė. grožinės literatūros leidykla, 1955, no. 829.

60 For more on birthing rituals, see: Arnold van Gennep. *Les Rites de Passage. Liaudies kultūra*. No. 2 (125), 2009, 51-54.

61 Rasa Paukštytė. *Pirties apeigos* [Rites of the Sauna] (unpublished article).

62 The reason for concealing the name is revealed by the

One could well suspect that bringing the woman into the sweat-lodge in this region of Lithuania has merged with popular religious tradition, because, according to Stasys Daunys, priests used to refuse to bring into the church women who hadn't been taken to the sweat-lodge to give birth.<sup>63</sup> Rasa Paukštytė reports these practices are still remembered clearly by informants in the region surveyed in 2011 and 2012.

The newlywed bride's first trip to the sweat-lodge is celebrated in almost exactly the same way in this region. In the area around Gervėčiai (Гервяты) this custom is called *Atžydėtuvės* [Blossoming ceremony] and consists of several significant elements: greeting the young bride (shouting "the wolf is coming"), placing a veil over the bride's head, washing and dressing the bride, tasting something sour or bitter, and singing.<sup>64</sup> In other words, just as the birth-giver is brought into the sweat-lodge, so within the community does the rite of passage into womanhood end in the sweat-lodge.

## 5. The Sweat-lodge and Health

Theodor Lepner's work at the end of the 17th century called *The Lithuanian of Prus-*

sia has a chapter titled "On the Medicines the Lithuanians Use to Maintain Their Health, and Which, Being Lost, They Seek to Regain" which contains a more detailed description of the sweat-lodge and the bathing conducted there. It begins with a quatrain which shows that the sweat-lodge at that time wasn't considered merely a place for maintaining cleanliness, health and strength, but was also a place for the restoration of health:

*Vos sveikatai sušlubavus  
Tuoju nuleisti kraują stengias,  
Kuria pirtį, verda žoles  
Ir taboką uosto uoliai.*

[As soon as health starts to waver,  
Try to let the blood right away,  
Kindle the sweat-lodge, boil herbs  
And snort tobacco deeply and heartily.]

According to Lepner's information, the usual bath procedures, unchanging over the centuries, provided for health, strength and resistance to all sorts of disease: "... the oven is heated greatly and water is poured over its rocks ... they can withstand the humidity well. They drive away the sweat using these short birch brooms and branches, which still have their leaves ... having sweated and bathed until they are satiate, they jump into a pond, which is usually dug next to the sweat-lodge, without regard to cold, as there is in spring and fall, and wash away the sweat. And if the pond is frozen over, as during winter, then in the entranceway to the sweat-lodge they pour on the very tops of their heads a pail full of cold water. This violent alternation between hot and cold in their sweat-lodge would drive

Latvian belief: „Pirtī nedrīkst viens otru saukt vārdā, bet par vilciņu, jo tad nepiemetīsies ļaunums,“ „In the sweat-lodge do not say one another's name, but use the name wolf, so that evil would not come“ (žr.: *Latviešu tautas ticējumi* (24126). Internet webpage: <http://valoda.ailab.lv/folkloraticejumi/> accessed September 20, 2013.

63 Stasys Daunys. *Pirties papročiai. Gervėčiai*. Vilnius, 1989, pp. 139–141; Rasa Paukštytė. *Pirties apeigos* [Rites of the Sauna] (unpublished article).

64 Rasa Paukštytė. *Pirties apeigos* [Rites of the Sweat-lodge] (unpublished article).

others to their death, but to them it is healthy, for it has not been heard that they might have grown ill from this..."<sup>65</sup> A Latvian belief demonstrating the importance of the sweat-lodge rituals for human health confirms what Lepner says. It is said the sweat-lodge is the true doctor of the peasant, because if not for the sweat-lodge and the radish, the doctor would ride in a golden carriage...<sup>66</sup>

Besides these health procedures performed in the sweat-lodge, according to Lepner, blood-letting was also performed there (this was done when "Lithuanians, men and women, feel ill," as were herbal treatments applied for all sorts of diseases, including "digestive disease," side-aches, and bone and joint pain.<sup>67</sup>

This same function of the sweat-lodge (i.e., as the only "health institution" of the time) remained in place until the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Here rural elderly women used massage to heal and cleanse newlyweds, women following birth and those suffering from natal diseases ("gumbas") in general;<sup>68</sup> they also treated men, those suffering from heavy lifting, as well as scabies, rheumatism, fevers, measles, consumption (tuberculosis), feeble-mindedness and many other diseases.<sup>69</sup> From ethno-

graphic descriptions from the latter half of the 19th and first half of the 20th century it is clear that almost all diseases were treated in the sweat-lodge through the letting of blood, and those who performed this procedure, the blood-letters, were highly respected in the rural community.<sup>70</sup>

Objects or parts of objects used during the bath sessions, both general health procedures and the slapping of people with green branches, were widely used in folk medicine, especially in love and fertility magic. Most especially the wooden switch.<sup>71</sup> Patients were hit with the switch, the environment was ritually cleansed with it, it was placed under the pillow and its leaves were used as tea for patients. Latvian beliefs prescribed preparing the switch during the waning of the full moon, to keep scabies from appearing,<sup>72</sup> and to get rid of fleas.<sup>73</sup>

The bath switch was also used widely in healing magic among the Slavic tribes. It was usually used to treat the evil eye,

65 *Ibid.*, 224-225.

66 „Pirts ir zemnieka dakteris. Ja nebūtu pirts un rutku, tad dakteri brauktu zelta ratiem.“ See: *Latviešu tautas ticējumi* (24166). Internet webpage: <http://valoda.ailab.lv/folkloraticejumi/> accessed September 20, 2013.

67 *Ibid.*, 225.

68 Bronislava Kerbelytė. *Lietuvių pasakojamosios tautosakos katalogas. Volume IV. Pasakojimai. Anekdotai. Oracijos*. Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 2009, 53.

69 P. Bugailiškis. *Senovės pirts. Gimtasai kraštas*. No. 2, 1934, 97; Mažiulis Antanas. *Senoji pasartiškių pirts. Mūsų kraštas*, no. 1, 1992, 90-103; Bronislava Kerbe-

lytė. *Lietuvių pasakojamosios tautosakos katalogas. Volume IV. Pasakojimai. Anekdotai. Oracijos*. Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 2009, 58.

70 J. Mickevičius. *Senovės žemaičių pirtis. Gimtasai kraštas*. Nos. 9-10, 1936, 477-478.

71 See: Rimantas Balsys. *Lietuvių ir prūsų dievai, deivės, dvasios: nuo apeigos iki prietaro*. Klaipėda: Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla, 2010, 440-441.

72 „Peramās slotas jāgriež vecā mēnesī, tad niestis nemetas.“ See: *Latviešu tautas ticējumi* (28288). Internet webpage: <http://valoda.ailab.lv/folkloraticejumi/> accessed September 20, 2013.

73 „Peramās un mēžamās slotas vajagot griezt vecā mēnesī, tad ar viņām varot izslaucīt visas blusas“ (28289). See: *Latviešu tautas ticējumi* (28288). Internet webpage: <http://valoda.ailab.lv/folkloraticejumi/> accessed September 20, 2013.

skin diseases, headaches and fever.<sup>74</sup> The Russians used to thank the guardian spirit (*банник*) of the sweat-lodge for restored or improved health, placing a pail of water and a switch on the upper benches, and reciting: “For you, sweat-lodge, to stand. For me, to stay well.”<sup>75</sup> The Lithuanian belief that the bath switch should not be burned because “if you burn the switch, the body will break out in sores” also testifies to the sauna switch’s exceptionality, distinction and intimate connection with human health.<sup>76</sup>

Switches made from different deciduous and evergreen trees as well as other plants are used even now in sweat-lodge

to preserve health and banish even chronic illnesses.<sup>77</sup>

In summary, it should be noted that information in sources from the 14th to 17th centuries on rituals performed in the sweat-lodge is not abundant, and the sources that do exist are fragmentary and not especially informative. On the other hand, these episodic descriptions, analyzed and compared with customs, folklore and folk beliefs from the end of the 19th and first half of the 20th century, do demonstrate that the sweat-lodge was a miniature offering site for the peasant of those times, i.e., a place not just for taking a bath, but also a place for performing rituals connected with the old (pre-Christian) religion (honoring the gods and ancestors, making an offering after successfully giving birth). It was most likely for this reason that from the Christian ideological perspective the sweat-lodge (and also the *jauja*) were at that time called and truly considered “the devil’s nest,” i.e., the venue for visitations and activities by all sorts of evil spirits.

- 74 Ludmila N. Vinogradova, Svetlana M. Tolstaya. *Simbolicheskiy Yazik Veshchey: Venik (Metla) v Slavyanskikh Obryadakh i Verovaniyakh. Simbolicheskiy Yazik Traditsionnoy Kultur*. Moscow: Nauka, 1993, 3–36 [Людмила Н. Виноградова, Светлана М. Толстая. Символический язык вещей: веник (метла) в славянских обрядах и верованиях. Символический язык традиционной культуры. Москва: Наука, 1993, 3–36].
- 75 „Тебе, баня, на стоянье, а нам на здоровье“ (See: Erna V. Pomerantseva, *Mifologicheskiye Personazhi v Russkom Folklore*. Moscow: Nauka, 1975, 115 [Эрна В. Померанцева, *Мифологические персонажи в русском фольклоре*. Москва: Наука, 1975, 115]).
- 76 *Lietuvių kalbos žodynas, vol XVIII*. Senior editor Vytautas Vitkauskas. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas, 1997, 120.

- 77 Internet webpage: <http://www.medicina.2maneknai.eu/medicina/liaudies-medicina/535-kaip-van-tomis-isvaryti-liga> accessed September 21, 2013; [http://www.baltai.lt/kulturos\\_forumas/viewtopic.php?f=56&t=621](http://www.baltai.lt/kulturos_forumas/viewtopic.php?f=56&t=621) accessed September 21, 2013.

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## Lietuvių ir prūsų aukojimo vietos: pirtis

### *Santrauka*

Šio straipsnio tikslas – remiantis rašytiniais XIV–XVIII a. šaltiniais, kuriuose randame duomenų apie senąją lietuvių ir prūsų religiją, aptarti pirtyje atliekamus ritualus ir pasekti, kokie tų ritualų pėdsakai išliko XIX–XX a. papročiuose, tautosakoje, tikėjimuose.

XIV–XVII a. rašytiniuose šaltiniuose duomenys apie pirtyje atliekamus ritualus nėra gausūs, o ir tie patys gana fragmentiški, menkai informatyvūs. Tačiau ir tokie epizodiniai aprašymai, jų analizė ir ypač greitinimas su XIX a. pabaigos – XX a. pradžios

papročiais, tautosaka, tikėjimais leidžia teigti, kad pirtis laikytina mažąja to laikotarpio valstiečio aukvieta, t. y. vieta, kurioje ne tik periamasi, švarinamasi, grūdinamasi, bet ir atliekamos su senąja (ikikrikščioniškąja) religija susijusios apeigos (pagerbiami dievai ir mirusieji protėviai, aukojama po sėkmingo gimdymo). Greičiausiai dėl šios priežasties krikščioniškosios ideologijos požiūriu pirtis tuo metu laikyta ir vadinta „velnio lizdu“ – t. y. visokių nelabųjų susirinkimo bei veiklos vieta.

**Esminiai žodžiai:** tvartas, pirtis, bažnyčia, dievai, ritualai.