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# SIGNS OF MORNING STAR *AUŠRINĖ* IN THE BALTIC TRADITION: REGIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL FEATURES

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## ABSTRACT

The present research aims to clarify a certain visual and mythical-poetic elements of Lithuanian folk culture as codified images and symbols associated with the mythology of Baltic *Aušra*, *Aušrinė* (Morning star, Sun Maiden and Sunrise) and to highlight previously unnoticed systemic relations between investigated cultural phenomena, based on the tradition of the mythical world-view. Forms of particular rake type patterns in folk textiles, their ancient archaeological analogues, and their folk names are analysed. Comb/rake pattern forms and folk names are investigated as elements of mythical-poetic images, related to a combing action, in folklore and customs associated with textile techniques. Ethnographic, folkloric and archaeological data, and other local cultural and transcultural material is examined from an interdisciplinary perspective, using historical and typological comparative and semiotic approaches, and from ethnological and mythological points of view. The investigation of the *Aušrinė* image mythical-poetic context of wedding folklore, customs, textile technologies and patterns reveals that its semantic field embraces folkloric extraordinary maidens, divine virgins, characterised by the attributes of comb and rake, and the actions of hair combing and hair braiding, and hay raking. Magic-symbolic hair combing and braiding actions were very important in Baltic wedding rites of passage. This kind of textile technique, as well as the comb pattern on sashes in this context, are interpreted as a codification of the wedding transformation related to Morning Star mythology.

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**KEYWORDS:** Comb symbolism, Lithuanian ornament, Ornament symbolism, Morning Star mythology, Baltic Mythology, *Aušrinė* folkloric image

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the traditional world-view, natural and cultural elements of the human environment (farm tools, housing, clothing, etc) had a prescribed metalanguage signification. It has been characterised by surplus variance, which provided resistance to the loss of cultural memory: although some elements of the culture disappeared, they were duplicated by others (Baiburin 1993). This enables the reconstruction of mythical concepts by analysing fragments and parts of them.

Attributes of the deity *Aušra*, *Aušrinė*, *Austra* (Morning Star), *Saulės dukrytė*, *Saules meita* (Sun daughter) of Baltic mythological folklore, and elements of her semantic field, have received considerable attention (Афанасьев, 1865; Vėlius, 1994; Gimbutienė, 1985; Gimbutienė, 2002; Greimas, 1979; Dundulienė, 1988; Tumėnas, 2002; Razauskas, 2011). Intercultural archetypal features of the image of Morning Star have also been profoundly analysed (Афанасьев, 1865; Ward, 1968; West, 2007). But fea-

tures of the image of this specific Baltic deity, such as hair combing, hair care in a boat floating on the sea, and metaphorical associations of her image with weaving technologies and matchmaking symbolism are still poorly studied from a regional and intercultural point of view.

## 2. "RAKE" PATTERN IN LITHUANIAN FOLK TEXTILES

There are popular rake or E-form signs in the ornamentation of traditional Lithuanian pick-up woven sashes. Weavers called them "rakes" (*grėbliukai*) (The Ethnology Manuscript Archive of the Lithuanian Institute of History, LII ES b. 1954, l. 9, recorded by V. Tumėnas, 1992) or "combs" (*šukos*) (LII, ES b. 1958, l. 45 (rec. V. Tumėnas, 1989-91) (Figure 1-1). This name is also known in neighbouring Belarusian textiles: *грабелькі* (Нячаева, 2004). In some Lithuanian dialects, the words referring to *comb* and *rake* are synonyms.

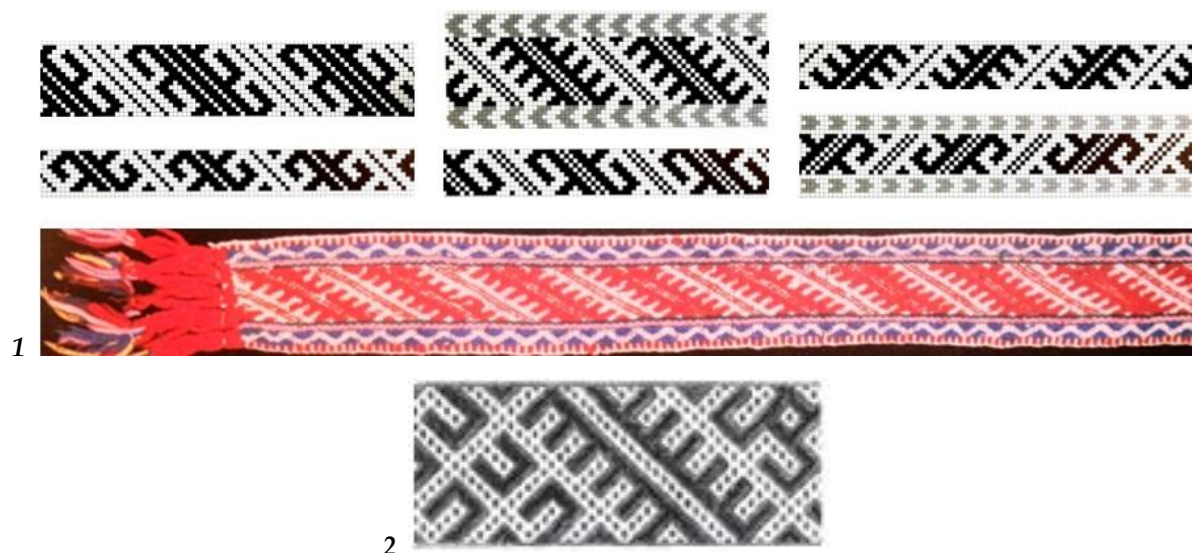


Figure 1. The comb or rake type patterns in ethnographic and archaeological textiles: 1) Lithuanian pick-up woven sashes (19<sup>th</sup> century - early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); 2) Lyvian tablet woven sash pattern fragment from Latvia (10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c.).

## 3. THE ORIGINS OF THE "RAKE" PATTERN

These ornaments and signs in the Baltic countries are traced from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD in textiles of the Lyvians in Latvia (Zariņa, 1988, X tab./2)

(Figure 1-2). Much older examples of the "comb" pattern are known in Hungarian Bronze Age ceramics decorations (Kalicz-Schreiber 1990, Figure 3) (Figure 2-1).

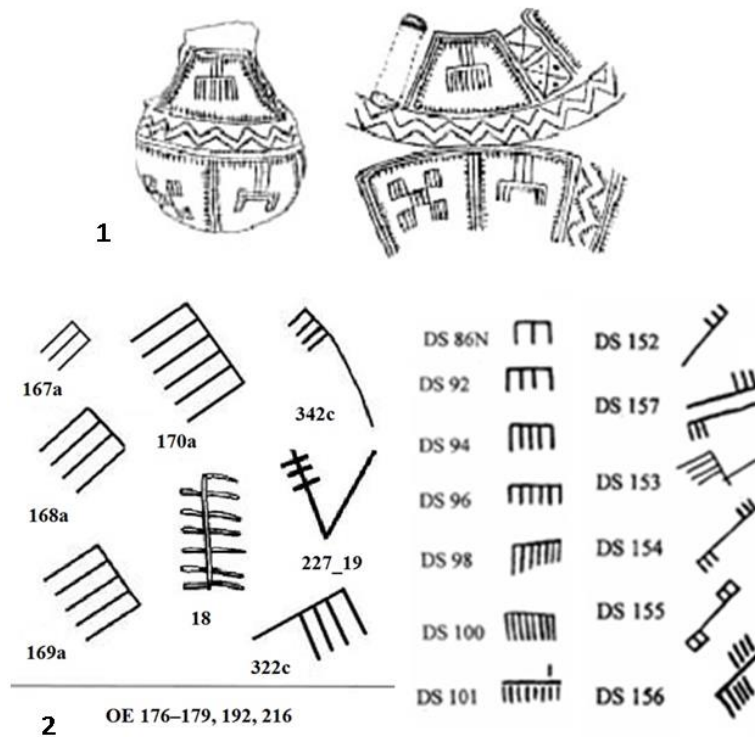


Figure 2. The Comb pattern on ancient ceramics: 1) The Bronze Age pot from Hungary; 2) The Neolithic script-signs of Old European civilisation: Nr. 167-170a, 18, 227\_19, 322c, 342c - classifications according to Lazaroviči (2005); Nr. OE 176-179, 192, 216 - Haarman (1996); Nr. DS 86 - 156; Winn (1982).

A rich variety of the oldest examples of the “comb” pattern is known in Old European Neolithic civilisation (Figure 2-2).

Another very important ancient comb pattern example is known from Neolithic Spain. There the

comb pattern represents the sun rays and it is used as the element of the image of the Sun (Sandars, 1985) (Figure 33-1).

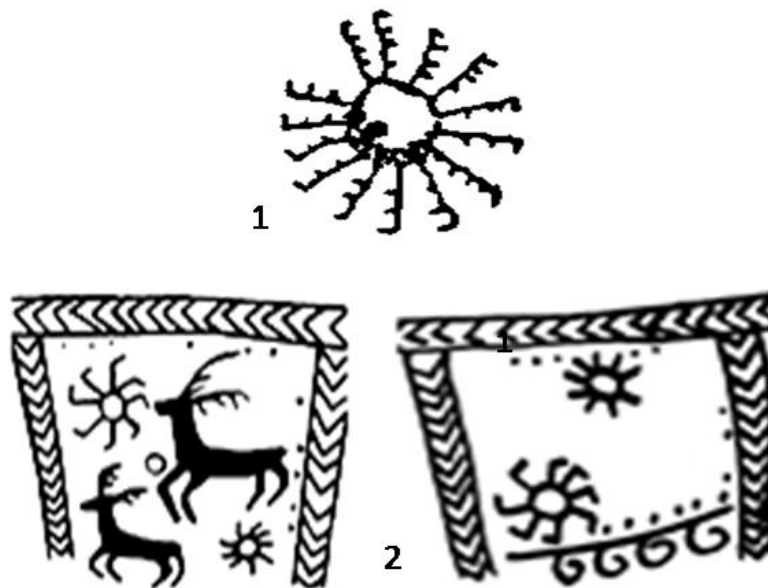


Figure 3. The similarity in geometrical representations of the Sun with comb-like rays in distinct cultures: 1) Ceramic pattern from the Neolithic Spain, Tajo de las Figuras. 2) The two fragments of decorations on the wooden ritual ladle from the 16th c., Gardinas (Hrodna), Grand Duchy of Lithuania (The Museum of the Belarusian Folk Art in Raubichi).

This pattern of a circle with bent, hook-like rays is similar to the symbol known in Baltic tradition. A similar sun is depicted by the horned deer images on the ritual ladle from the 16<sup>th</sup> century found in church of Gardinas. According to J. Vaiškūnas (2012), the signs of Zodiac referring to the different houses of the Sun are depicted on this ladle, and the Sun is represented in each section (Figure 3-2).

The image of the comb is not only popular in the ornamentation of traditional Lithuanian woven sashes. Comb artefacts are known in Lithuania from the late Iron Age (9<sup>th</sup> century). Combs found in contemporary Lithuania and Latvia have been investigated by several archaeologists (Vitauskas, 1938; Puzinas, 1964; Kulikauskienė-Volkaitė, 1958, Vol. 1, Figure 14:9; Graudonis, 1994) (Figure 4). Based on folklore motives, archaeologist I. Vaškevičiūtė interprets the wooden and metal combs and their miniature amulets, found in the graves of women and men, as apotropaic shoads, associated with hair magic of fertility and beauty (Vaškevičiūtė and Cholodinskienė, 2008).

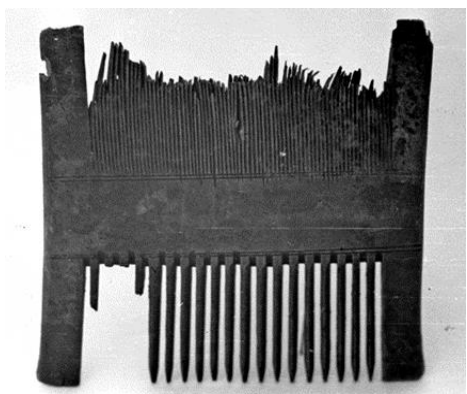


Figure 4. A comb from the Lower Castle of Vilnius, found in 1960 (The Manuscript Archive of the Lithuanian Institute of History; Photo archive (Archaeology), LIIR, Nr.: ng. 9905a.

Bone combs are popular among artefacts excavated from 34 cremation graves of Baltic Semba, Prussia (now Aleika-3, Russia) (9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> c.) (Скворцов, 2007). Combs are not common in inventories of the East Slavic graves from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The archaeologist Zaikovskij assumes that the custom to put combs in cremation inventory of the Slavic graves was influenced by Scandinavian and Baltic cultures (Zaikovskij, 2012). Eleven combs are found in the 10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> century graves in burial mounds in Belarus (5 one-sided, 6 two-sided). One-sided combs were popular in the 10<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> century in Kievan Rus, and also in the Baltic countries, Poland and Germany (Мядзведзева, 2002). Combs from the beginning of the first millennium were found in the grave inventories of the West Baltic grave mound culture, in Velbar culture and Liuboshic culture

(Zaikovskij 2012). The sophisticated bone comb is found in Finno-Ugric graves (9<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> c.) in northern Russia. It is made from horn and decorated with the image of a horse pair by the World Tree (Куликов, Иванова, 2001).

The cremations of combs are found in various European pre-Christian sanctuaries: in Skedemosse, Öland island, Sweden (1<sup>st</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> c.), in Niudam swamp, Denmark (2<sup>nd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> c.) (Русанова, 2002), and in Przeworsk culture Otalażka temple near Warsaw, Poland (4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> c.) (Bender and Stupnicka, 1974).

Comb artefacts in burial inventories show that this item had a ritual function - "to accompany" the dead after death. Combs became an everyday item for an afterlife journey, the individual property of the deceased, or a gift from family and relatives, irreplaceable on the long trip (Кондратьева, 1988). According to T. Volodina, the comb was assigned the role of the mediator in a nature/culture binary opposition, within a special intermediate place between what is mastered and what is not, in other words, between your own and the stranger (Валодзіна, 1999).

The motif of the comb possessing miraculous vital protective powers is common in Lithuanian and Russian fairy tales (Байбурин, 1993; Афанасьев, 1957). The hero of Lithuanian tales, fleeing from hostile forces, afterwards defends himself by the throwing a magic comb, from which a forest suddenly appears.

#### 4. THE COMB IN TRADITIONAL CUSTOMS. THE SEMANTIC LINKS BETWEEN THE COMB, HAIR COMBING AND PLAITING, AND TEXTILE TECHNOLOGIES

In the traditions of the Lithuanians and Latvians, and neighbouring Slavic cultures, a great importance was given to the plaited two or one hair braids as a sign of a young unmarried girl. The purpose of the bridesmaid combing the bride's hair at a pre-wedding hen party (Lith. *mergvakaris*) was to adorn the bride's head with braids, ribbons or crown for the last time before the wedding. The aim of the wedding ceremony of veiling the bride (Lith. *gobtuvės, nuometavimas*) was to destroy her youthful hairstyle, which symbolised her youthful beauty, unmarried status, and free will. Brushing and hiding the bride's hair under a head covering in the wedding rites of the Balts and Slavs symbolised the attainment of marital status (Vyšniauskaitė, 1995). So the comb in Lithuanian wedding rituals is a necessary attribute in ceremonies transforming the bride's hair (Figure 5).





*Figure 5. The Lithuanian custom of plaiting a bride's hair at the hen party.*

When the bridesmaids finish making plaits for the bride at the hen party, the comb is thrown up in the air and the bridesmaids compete to catch it. They believe that the one who catches the comb will be the

next to marry (Vyšniauskaitė, 1995). This means that the comb was associated with weddings and the magic of love (Figure 6).



*Figure 6. After the hair combing is finished, the comb will be thrown up in the air, to be caught by one of the bridesmaids.*

The creation of the bride's hairstyle, the combing and brushing, plaiting and braiding, and also unplaiting or unbraiding her braided hair, essentially

repeats the basic textile-making processes of spinning, weaving and plaiting (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Traditional east Lithuanian plaited sashes, an element of the national costume.

As A. Baiburin has stated, these codes and metaphors of textile technology play an important role in the system of the *ritual* world-view of traditional cultures (Байбурин, 1993).

The hair comb is semantically similar to the flax comb, which has the same name of comb in Lithuanian, *šukos*. In Lithuanian folklore, the attention to processing raw flax as the preparation of yarn for textiles is very significant. A popular song metaphorically links blooming flax with a girl's wedding: *Oh flax, the time has come for your blossoming / Oh girl, the time has come for your wedding*. Consequently, the bridal combing can be treated as a similar process to flax combing, and thus relates to the mythical-poetic codification of textile technologies (Figure 8).



Figure 8. A traditional Lithuanian flax comb and combing work (early 20th century).

Another agricultural tool similar to a comb is a rake. Its Lithuanian name *grėblys* is very similar to

the dialect term for a comb – *grėbenys* (Figure 9 and Figure 2).



Figure 9. Raking hay in Lithuania (early 20th century).

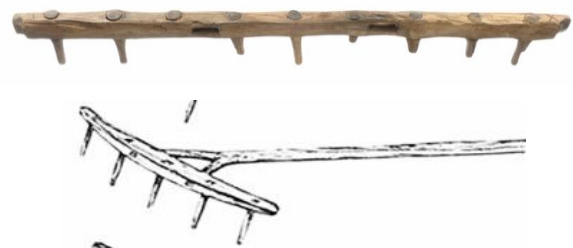


Figure 2. An ancient rake found in the Vilnius Castle, 15th century (National Museum Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania).

In the language of ancient poetry, grass and flowers were called or associated with Earth's hair (Афанасьев, 1865). In Lithuanian folk songs, the theme of raking hay with a rake is often associated with the semantic field of love, flirting, matchmaking and weddings: *Our brother has married / He will bring home a very beautiful bride / The bride's braids extend to the waist sash (belt) / The Sun is rising from her braids...[...]* / *The bride's rake is painted/ It was presented by the brother-in-law/ Oh bride, why are you standing? / Why you do not rake [hay]?/ Are you mourning a maple rake?/ Do you mourn a meadow clover?/ May be you are*

*mourning the days of youth / And a green wreath of rue?  
/ – I don't sorry neither for a maple rake, / Either the  
meadow clover / I mourn the days of youth / And a green  
wreath of rue<sup>1</sup>.*

## 5. CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE FOLKLORIC HAIR COMBING MAIDEN MOTIF AND THE MYTHICAL-POETIC IMAGE OF THE MORNING STAR GODDESS AUŠRINĖ

The combing activity is characteristic of goddesses. The white goddesses of German sagas (*weis-sejungfrauen*) like to comb their braids and present their hair overhanging on combs to wayfarers. Later their hairs turn into golden cereal ears (Афанасьев, 1865). In Russian incantations against bleeding and for healing wounds, one talks about the goddess of Dawn (or Morning Star) or Mother of God sitting in the sea (the lagoon symbolises the sky) engaged in weaving: she is a skilled seamstress who threads a golden needle with brown-yellow silk thread and stitches up wounds (Афанасьев, 1865). Therefore, it is possible to suspect that the maiden of Lithuanian Shrovetide songs who is sitting and weeping in a boat in the middle of a sea-lagoon, whirlpool, river or a lake, and combing her hair with a comb (or fish bone comb) and letting some strands of hair drift in pure water, is not a real but a mythical character. She is brushing and combing her hair with the aim of extracting a strand of hair and sending it to a beloved lad, to ask him if he loves her. But the young boy replies that he does not love her and will make rakes from her fingers and rope bonds from her braids (Misevičienė 1972, 286–288; Kriščiūnienė 1992, 62, 64–65). Consequently, combing and letting some strands of hair drift in pure water stands for a symbol of flirting, lovemaking, affection and marriage intentions. Meanwhile, the answer of the boy, perceived in the mythological context, implicates the idea of offering a mythical living being, and using his body parts for textile and agricultural activity, which again is a metaphor for matchmaking.

The folk song “A maiden walked by the sea” (*Pararėmis mergelė vaikščiojo*) again presents the motif of hair combing and sailing in a boat as a clear symbol of love, flirting and matchmaking (Kazlauskienė, 1983, No. 55): *A maiden was walking by the sea / And combing her hair. / She was walking and combing her hair / With a golden yellow rake. / And a black boat came /*

*Swimming across the sea / – Sit down girl on my boat. / We will swim across the sea, the lagoon/ We will find there father and mother / We will find there brothers and sisters. / – For you she is a mother, / For me she is the mother-in-law. / For you he is the father, / For me he is the father-in-law. / For you she is the sister, / For me she is the sister-in-law. / For you he is the brother, / For me he is the brother-in-law.*

The songs with such content were sung during the pre-wedding hen party, while combing the bride's hair (Burkšaitienė, Krištopaitė, 1990). In this way, the bride is identified with the hair-combing maiden of folk songs, who is often referred to as the orphan associated with the luminaries of the sky, as in the song “A boat sails” (*Plaukia laivelis*): *A boat sails in the water / In that boat sits a girl / She is combing her hair and sends one to drift in the water./ She sends a hair and laments with great sorrow: / I have no father to give me a lot. / I have no mother to bring me a dowry. / I have no brother to sit near me./ – The Moon father wants to give a part to you / The Sun mother wants to bring a dowry./ The brother Pleiades wants to sit near you.* (Burkšaitienė and Krištopaitė, 1990, No. 198).

Who is this person, walking by the sea or sitting in a boat floating in the middle of a lake or a sea, and combing her hair, and whose parents and brothers and sisters can be replaced by the main celestial luminaries? The miraculous golden colour of the maiden's comb shows her relationship with the sun and also its rays. Her links with gold and a boat floating in the lagoon, and also with the luminaries of the sky, refer to the image of the Sea Maiden, Morning / Evening Star of Baltic mythology. This presumption may be based on other examples.

The wedding symbolism of the motif of the Evening Star *Vakarinė* rising in the evening sky, and its parallel with the image of the bride, is evident in the song “The evening star is rising and running” (*Oi teka bėga vakarinė žvaigždėlė*) (Čiurlionytė, 1955): *Oh, the Evening Star is rising and running / She invites all other stars. / Oh, but she did not invite the dark Moon only. / – Oh, please wait, the Evening Star. / What is there for me to tell you? / Much will I reveal and plain to you [...] / Oh, the bride goes and runs across the palace. / – Oh, please wait, newlywed daughter-in-law, / What is there for me to tell you? / Much will I reveal and plain to you...<sup>2</sup>*

The motifs of the rising sun and the glowing dawn, as the parallel with human matchmaking, are very popular, for example in the song “The Dawn is rising and glowing” (*Aušta aušrelė žaruodama*)

<sup>1</sup> „Žanijosi mūsų broliai / Parvos marčių labia gražių. / Marčios kasos sulig juostai / Iš kaselių saulė teka. / Iš vainiko rasa krinta. / Vesim marčių sieną grėbti. / Marčios grėblis maliavotas / Dieverėlia dovanotas. / Oi tu marčia, ko tu stovi? / Ko tu stovi, ko negrėbi? / Ar tau gaila kleva grėblia, / Ar pievelės dovilėlia? / Nei man gaila kleva grėbliu, / Nei pievelės dovilėlia. / Man tik gaila jaunų dienų, / Žalių rūtų vainikėlia“.  
Sunged by J. Čiulada, Laukagalys vil., Kaišiadorys distr.

<sup>2</sup> „Oi teka, bėga vakarinė žvaigždėlė, / Visų žvaigždelių pasikviesdama. / Oi tik ji nekvieta tamsiojo mėnulio. / Oi sustok, palauk, vakarine žvaigždele, / Ką aš tau sakysiu, daugel sugodosiu [...] / Oi eina, bėga martelė per dvarą, / Oi sustok, palauk, jaunoji martele, / Ką aš tau pasakysiu, daugelį sugodosiu...“

(Kazlauskienė, 1983, No. 72): *The Dawn is rising and glowing / The Sun (maiden) is rising and shining. / – Come to me, marry me, oh darling girl, / White lily, marry me.*

According to the ethnologist P. Dundulienė, the maiden of magnificent beauty in Lithuanian fairy tales, who has the sun in the forehead, the moon in the occiput, and the stars under the ears, may be associated with *Aušrinė*. One legend tells of the Sun, who is making excuses for why she had not risen for three days, explaining that she has been looking at a very beautiful maiden who was born in the middle of the sea and who is even more beautiful and more virgin than she is. Another legend tells of a maiden with golden hair, more beautiful than the Sun, who rises into the heavenly vault from the sea in the evening, after the Sun has gone down (Dundulienė, 1988).

The semiotic complex involving the bride image and the Sun and dew is evident in the song “Our brothers have married” (*Žanijosi mūsų broliai*). Here the newly married daydreaming bride’s head is directly associated with the luminary of the sky: *Our brothers have married / They will bring home a very beautiful bride / Bride’s braids extends to the sash (belt) on the waist. / The Sun is rising from her braids. / The dew is dropping from her wreath. / We will take her to rake hay. / The bride’s rake is painted. / It was presented by the brother-in-law. / Oh bride, why are you standing? / Why you do not rake? / Are you sorry for a maple rake? / Do you feel sorry for the meadow clover? / I don’t feel sorry for either the maple rake, / Or for the meadow clover. / I’m mourning the days of youth / And the wreath of a green rue.*

The motif of the rising sun in the braids of the bride may be an allusion to the Morning Star. The connection between some strands of golden hair fallen from the maiden’s head and the idea of match-making is seen clearly in the story “Sun, the Mother of Winds”, in which the hero falls in love with the beautiful golden-haired Morning Star, having just found her golden hair in the water of the lagoon (Greimas, 1979). As the Morning Star’s hair was equated with the rays of the sun (according to J. Lasickis, the Lithuanian Morning Star is the goddess of the sunrays of sunrise and sunset (Lasickis, 1969)). Consequently the image of the bride/newlywed with the sun rising/flushing in her braids is similar to the Morning Star image. So, the image of bride on a boat combing her hair may be a mythical symbol of the Morning Star (also called the Bride of the Lagoon – *Marių Pana*).

In the Lithuanian folk beliefs, the thread of each human life ends up in the star, and this thread is threaded by the goddess Spinner (*Verpėja*) who is most likely associated with the Morning Star as well as *Laima*, the goddess of fate. Similarly, the Latvian mythical-being *Saulīte*, in the same way as the Lith-

uanian Morning Star *Aušrinė*, interlaces threads, weaves the cloths, mends scarves and washes woven blankets. The Morning Star shares many common features with the goddess *Laima* (or *Laumė*). They are both associated with love, weddings and baptism ceremonies, as well as with weaving technologies. The similarity between the Morning Star and *Laima* has been revealed by V. Toporov. Based on folklore sources, he reconstructed the mythical story of the Morning Star *Aušrinė/Austra* in Baltic mythology. The Morning Star *Aušrinė* was the wife of *Perkūnas*, the god of thunder, but she was kidnapped by her husband’s rival. *Perkūnas* punished her for her infidelity, and expelled her from heaven to Earth, where she converted into *Laumė*, the goddess of waters, weaving and fate (Иванов, Топоров, 1991; Toporov, 2000). A fairy tale published by J. Basanavičius also suggests that *Perkūnas* had children and a spouse, who, while returning home to heaven from a visit to the Earth, lost her way. Thus, heavenly bodies such as the Sun, the Moon, the stars, the wind and the storm helped her find her way home (Basanavičius, 1926). It is quite logical that *Perkūnas*’ wife could have been one of the heavenly bodies not mentioned, the Morning Star *Aušrinė* herself.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The Lithuanian folk textile “comb/rake” pattern originated in the pre-Christian world: this type of pattern can be traced from the 10th to 11th century local textiles. Symbolically significant comb artefact amulet cerements are known from the 9th century. The earliest “comb/rake” type pattern examples in Europe are known from Neolithic artefacts.

The “comb” pattern has semantic links with the mythical-poetic bridal comb artefact in folklore, which is described as being full of vital protective and fertility power, and associated with celestial luminaries and water, and also with a significant magical role in wedding customs relating to the bride.

The investigation into the mythical-poetic context of comb and combing (folklore, customs, and crafts) helps to detect and link some extraordinary folkloric maidens, who are characterised by symbols of the wedding transformation, with the Morning Star *Aušrinė* image semantic field. They are the motifs of the hay raking and the bride’s hair combing, braiding and unbraiding, and letting strands of divine maiden hair float in waters. They are all very closely semantically related to textile technology. The narrative image of the production of the mythical Life Yarn, which ends in the Star, also belongs to this mythologem.

These new revelations may prompt further investigations and contextual explanations of the local features of Baltic Morning Star mythology, as a part of the wider Indo-European mythology.



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