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The Lithuanian *Apidėmė*: A Goddess, a Toponym, and Remembrance

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Abstract: This paper is devoted to the Lithuanian apidėmė, attested since the 16th century as the name of a goddess in the Baltic religion, as a term for the site of a former farmstead relocated to a new settlement during the land reform launched in 1547–1557, and later as a widespread toponym. Apidėmė has been researched by linguists, historians, and mythologists. An archaeological perspective is applied here for the first time.

Polysemantic words in standard language that coincide with theonyms, people’s surnames, or toponyms conceal secrets encoded into their rich history of meanings. On the other hand, they provide researchers with ample opportunities for studying and understanding not just discrete parts of culture, but phenomena as certain links that connect worlds distant in terms of time or, at first glance, unrelated aspects of life. This paper deals with the Lithuanian word *apidėmė*, known from 16th century sources as the name of a goddess in the Baltic religion and later as a widespread toponym. *Apidėmė* was also used as a term for the site of a former farmstead relocated to a new settlement during the Volog Reform, a land reform launched between 1547 and 1557. With the Volog Reform came significant economic and social change but also spiritual religious reverberations: the location of the original farmstead was considered the abode of family hearth deities as well as the souls of ancestors. They could not be left behind without the care of the gods. Data on land ownership and land use reforms in Lithuania collected throughout the 20th century allows one to perceive the phenomenon and to follow

its development, even if with certain reservations. During the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, the Soviets demolished or moved Lithuanian settlements. A custom developed in which the locations where these farms once stood were marked with memorial stones, trees, crosses, or small chapels. Today this custom is a notable aspect of Lithuanian culture. *Apidėmė* has been discussed by linguists, historians, and mythologists (Jurginis 1970; Zinkevičius 1981; Greimas 1990: 91–92; Mulevičius 1990). This paper adds, for the first time, an archaeological perspective, which significantly deepens and expands the research on this topic; Viewed in relation to the ethnological data, *apidėmė* emerges as an integral part of contemporary Lithuanian culture, here viewed retrospectively.

Lithuania first attracted the attention of Western European nobility and missionaries in 1009. Two centuries later, Lithuania’s Duke Mindaugas rose to the status of Grand Duke and, by the grace of the Pope, wished to advance to the throne of the king. In 1251, in order to be crowned king, Mindaugas was baptised. Two years later, he achieved his goal of kingship. Yet his monarchy rule was short-lived. Later,

it was the Teutonic Order that sought to Christianise Lithuania. The Teutonic Order organised the Baltic Crusades together with the European nobility, yet the Christianisation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was also a lynchpin of the political aspirations and activity of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania, the cousins Jagiello (1377–1392) and Vytautas (1392–1430). In 1387, the Vilnius Diocese was founded, followed by the Samogitian Diocese in 1417. The resulting religious changes had an impact on the political, administrative, economic, and cultural life – and lifestyle – of the country. However, ties with the pre-Christian world were most notably severed by the Voklo Reform. The Voklo Reform period coincided with the spread of the Reformation and a Counter-Reformation wave. The wave's main representatives in Lithuania – Jesuits – also went to great lengths to remove manifestations of the old religion.

In the implementation of the Voklo Reform, all the lands of the Grand Duke (at the time the country's largest landowner) were newly measured and divided. This was achieved by moving peasant houses from individual farmsteads and free-plan villages to new linear settlements in the form of precise rectangular plots along a single road. Deprived of the last of their freedom, peasants received strips of land (a *voklo* or its part) in three or more land plots in which they were to strictly administer a newly-introduced three-field crop rotation system. The ruler's example was soon followed by the Catholic Church and the nobility. The establishment and development of *folwarks* (smaller units of economic administration) in areas remote from the main estates took longer (for more details about the reform, see: Balčiūnas 1938: 30–45; Jurginis 1962: 288–297; Bučas 1988: 57–64; cf. Šešelgis 1996).

The Historical Context of apidēmė

It is important to emphasise that *apidēmė* emerged in religious writings mainly during the Voklo Reform. *Apidēmė* is first attested among a group of deity names and sacred places of the old religion found in the first collection of Protestant sermons of 1573. This collection was drafted for Lithuanian Evangelical churches in Prussia and is best

known as *The Postilla of Wolfenbüttel*. The attestation appears as follows:

Tikedami ing szemepaczius, Eitwarius, kaukus, appidemes, kelnus, akmenis, medzius gaius (kaip ghe wadinna alkus) Vpes perkunu. (Gelumbeckaitė 2008: *Litauische*, fol. 85v; here and below, underlining indicates the spelling of *apidēmė* in the source text.)

(Pagans) believing in gods of the Earth, spirits of wealth, goblins, *appidemes*, hills, boulders, trees, groves (so-called *alkai*), rivers, and Thunder.

Along with the domestic wealth-multiplying *Aitvaras* and the god of farmlands *Žemėpatis*, *Apidēmė* is emphatically referred to as an evil spirit: *Welnas ira etwaras, teip besas ira szemepatis, teipag czertas ira Apideme* (Gelumbeckaitė 2008: *Litauische*, fol. 85v) [‘*Aitvaras* is a devil, as well as *Žemėpatis*, and *Apideme* is also a devil’]. In Jan Lasicki's treatise on idolatry *De Diis samagitarum caeterorumque sarmatarum et falsorum Christianorum* (written around 1580 and published in 1615), *Apidēmė* is defined as the deity of a ‘changed’, i.e. abandoned, settlement:

Apidome mutati domicilii deum. nato cuiusuis generis, vel coeco vel debili pullo, actutum sedes mutantur.

Apidēmė is a god of a settlement that has been changed. As soon as some animal gave birth to a blind or lame baby animal, people immediately moved to live elsewhere. (Translation following Greimas 1990: 91; see also Lasickis 1969: 20; Ališauskas 2012: 113.)

It is necessary to note that a major source of Lasickis' knowledge was surveyor Jacob Laskowski, implementer of the Voklo Reform in the Grand Dukes' land holdings in Samogitia.

As a place name, *Apidēmė* (*onedomu*) is first found in a land ownership document dated to 1552, during the Voklo Reform. The number of such records increased continuously through the rest of the 16th century and into the first half of the 17th century (see Mulevičius 1990: 93; cf. Спрогис 1888: 13). Beginning from the Voklo Reform period the name *apidēmė* or *apydēmė* is recorded with numerous variant forms in inventories and documents concerning land purchases and litigation. In this period, it emerges as a term for the sites of



Figure 1. In a cultivated field, a black cultural layer of the Daugėlaičiai ancient settlement, dating back to the 5th to the 13th centuries, stands out. (Photo by V. Vaitkevičius 2014).

the relocated or vanished farmsteads, as can be illustrated through a few examples: *Ниву мою, называемую Апидеме, то ест старое селище* [‘My field, called *Apidēmė*, i.e. the former living place’] (Pavandenė, 1599 or 1600); *Третью ниву... называемую Апидемали, где седел Миколаи Кгдеикисъ* [‘The third field, called *Apidemalė*, where Mikalojus Gedeikis used to live’] (Pašilė, 1616); *Прыкуплю [...] называную ниву Апидемю старое седлиско [...]* [‘I shall buy a field, called *Apidēmė*, a former place of residence’] (Veliuona, 1627 or 1629; Jablonskis 1941: 2). This evidence indicates a change in use of the word in the mid-16th century and that the land reform is of fundamental significance for the study of the history of *apidēmė*.

Apidēmė is only attested as a theonym beginning in the second half of the 16th century, a use that seems to have spread simultaneously as a generic name for the site of a former farmstead and a toponym with a corresponding meaning. In the Lithuanian language, the prefix *api-* (*apy-*) frequently means ‘an object possessing just a part of some relevant properties’, e.g. *apymaišis* [‘a not totally full

sack’], *apymolis* [‘rather clayey soil’], etc. The historian Leonas Mulevičius (1990: 92) argued that *apidēmė* could thus be a compound of *apy-* and *dēmė* [‘a spot’] that referred to an indistinct spot which stands out in its environment due to its colour. The linguist Wojciech Smoczyński (2007: 19–20) related *apidēmė* to a later recorded version *apynamė* [‘the place around a house’] through the first edition of Konstantinas Sirvydas’ dictionary, published around 1620, where *apidēmė* appeared as *apidamė*. Smoczyński did not reject the possibility that the root *dam-* was eventually assimilated by Lithuanians from Sirvydas’ dictionary and converted into *nam-* (see also Zinkevičius 1981).¹ Examples from the *Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language* reveal that *dēmė* [‘spot’] was a term used for the mark in the landscape that remained on the site of an abandoned farmstead from its structures, and especially from the house, even in negative statements such as *Trobos nė dēmės nebliko* (Salantai; LKŽe, s.v. ‘dēmė’) [‘Not a single spot remained from the house’]. Therefore, *apidēmė* is most naturally interpreted as that which is above/on² or around/by³ the place where the house or

farmstead used to be. The name of the goddess *Apidèmė* appears to be an epithet that describes the abode of the deity, a location that coincides with a spot of black ground on the site of the former home or a farmstead.

The definition of *apidèmė* as referring to observable traces of earlier settlement in the landscape coincides with the archaeological data: sites of prehistoric settlements established approximately in the first millennium BC (in some places somewhat earlier, in others somewhat later) can be observed as a black cultural layer stretching through the landscape (Figure 1). Whether the buildings decayed or burned in a fire, regular black spots on the ground frequently indicate their former sites. Based on the data of archaeological excavations, archaeologist Rokas Vengalis (2009: 88–89, 103, 151) demonstrated that the thickest and most intensive cultural layers, rich in finds, formed not on the sites of buildings themselves, but close by, around, or possibly in, the spaces between them. However, the hearth was easy to notice, as the earth was full of coal and soot, while stones in that location were shattered and crumbled from the heat. The black sites of a former farmstead and hearth testify that fire was kindled there – people found warmth and made food. Until the 20th century, the fire in a home was protected from extinction every night. In the morning, it was awakened with gentle words: the home hearth fire was considered sacred and called by the name of the Baltic goddess *Gabija* or the Catholic *St. Agota*, or by the joint name of *Gabija-Agota* (Lovčikas 1994).

It is evident from historical sources that the name *Apidèmė* used to be given to farmstead sites: compare Russian *Старое седлиско* [‘Old Settlement’], *Старое селищю* [‘Old Settlement’], and *Старое Апидеме* [‘Old (former) *Apidèmė*’] (Jablonskis 1941: 2). In the second half of the 16th century, i.e. in the years of the Volog Reform and in those following it, Samogitia abounded in *apidèmė*. In toponyms, almost exclusively in the names of fields, *apidèmė* was frequently employed in word combinations (noting that many of these sources were written in Russian) specifying where, what kind of, or whose farmstead used to be there, such as *Апидеме паклоснисъ* [Ru. ‘*Apidèmė* under/by the Willows’] (Viduklė

rural district, 1595–1653), *Апидемисъ старе* [Ru. ‘the Old *Apidėmis*’] (Raseiniai rural district, 1599), *Апидемя авкитоя* [Ru. ‘the High *Apidėmė*’] (Josvainiai rural district, 1596), *Апидеме салю* [‘*Apidėmė* of the Saliai’] (Raseiniai rural district, 1599) (Спрогис 1888: 13). It is possible that the last of these, *Salių apidėmė*, as well as *Rimdeikiškis apidėmė* (*Апидеме римдейкишкя*, Raseiniai rural district, 1596), *Valatkiškiai apidėmė* (*Апидеме волаткишкя*, Vilkija rural district, 1598), and some others had originally been inhabited by people whose proper names were perpetuated in the toponyms.

To date, *Apidėmė*, *Apidėmės*, *Apydėmė*, *Apydėmai* and a number of similar names have spread all over Lithuania (LVŽ 2008: 144–146). According to 20th-century data, the names were given to fields, meadows, scrublands, waters (bogs or streams), and occasionally even to individual farmsteads (the *apidėmės* were also re-populated after a break). The toponymic data indicates several ways that places called *apidėmė* were used: they were most frequently used as farmlands, pastures, or hayfields. In Dieveniškės, a town in southern Lithuania, a village cemetery was called *apidėmė*: *Prabaščius ažuprašė mus aptvert apidėmes* [‘the parson asked us to fence in *apidėmes*’] (Mikulėnienė et al. 2005: 16). However, the origin of that local phenomenon remains unexplored.

Recent field surveys conducted by the author in Joniškis, Pakruojis, Radviliškis and Šiauliai (districts in northern and central Lithuania) prove that no distinct cultural layers remain in the locations called *Apidėmė* and that any future search for them must be grounded in geophysical or geochemical research methods. However, a high probability of individual archaeological finds (objects or structures) from the 15th to the first half of the 16th century remain, as proven through information on find locations and circumstances surrounding the discovery of stones with narrow-bottomed bowls (cf. Vaitkevičius 2016: 29–31). Before the mid-16th century, these stones were kept in home shrines, most likely in the corners of the house, and were related to an earth deity cult. During the Volog Reform, most of these stones with narrow-bottomed bowls, along with the buildings

themselves and other personal property, were moved to new settlements. Remaining stones from time to time reappeared in arable fields (for details, see Vaitkevičius 2004: 30–31).

The use of *apidėmė* was, and still is, predetermined by a number of circumstances: the relation of the farmer and the community as a whole to their ancestors, customs, and with the past in general. In the years of the Vok Reform, peasants, resisting the transfer of their farmlands from one place to another, appealed not only to their economic experience, but also to customs related to the respect of parents and to the home; “the ancestors or parents’ farmstead was regarded as a sacred place to be respected and cherished,” wrote historian Juozas Jurginis (1970: 59). Valuable data on the exclusive view of the rural population on *apidėmė*, i.e. on the sites of former farmsteads and villages, can be gained from sources covering the first half of the 20th century’s large-scale land ownership reform in Lithuania, the first such reform since the Vok Reform. For example, the former Voveriškiiai village site could not be given to a particular villager moving to an individual farmstead; each villager wanted to have at least a part of it (LŽV 1935: Voveriškiiai, Šiauliai rural district and county). By way of common agreement, the former Janušava village site was not turned into strips of farmland. Instead, the former village site was measured in small plots used by each owner in compliance with their individual needs:

In olden times, there used to be the Janušava village there. The plague killed all its villagers; only two old men survived. They took the deceased away from the village and buried them on the largest Trakai Forest hill of Janušava. The hill became a plague cemetery. The village was empty. As nobody wanted to come and live in it, the houses were burnt down, and the land was given to newcomers. The new settlers set up a new Janušava village half a kilometer away north of, and in parallel to, the old location of the village, leaving the old street as a path of remembrance. The land between the New Janušava and the Biliūnai Village was divided into strips. Even though the same strips could have passed the homesteads of the Old Janušava as their extensions, the people would not include the homesteads into the strips, but divided the land in small plots. (LŽV 1935: Janušava, Kėdainiai city and county.)

Apidėmė in Contemporary Lithuanian Culture

In the 19th and the early 20th century, attempts were made in Lithuania to change the division of land from the strips that had prevailed since the 16th century. However, a large-scale land reform was only launched and implemented by the Republic of Lithuania after the restoration of its independence in 1918. Volunteers of the Wars of Independence, as well as villagers with no plots of land (or only small ones) were given estate lands. The reform, of course, also focused on villages: villagers were invited and encouraged to move from the old settlements to individual farmsteads. From farmsteads, farmlands, and meadows for haymaking or grazing, to roads, school locations, forest guard sectors, and commonly used gravel deposits, things were changing. Changes in post-Vok Reform villages in the Polish-occupied Vilnius Region, as well as in other places of Lithuania, took place until the first Soviet occupation of 1940–1941. A second occupation started in the summer of 1944.



Figure 2. *The Ramašauskas family bidding farewell to their native home in the Ročkiai Village (Joniškis District). (Photo of an unknown photographer 1968.)*

By the end of World War II, the owners of numerous farmsteads emigrated to the West, perished in battle against the invaders, or were imprisoned or deported to Siberia. According to different data, however, in the 1950s–1960s there were still some 280,000 to 380,000 farmsteads in Lithuania, or approximately six to seven farmsteads per 100 hectares of farmland that impeded the implementation of the Soviet land reclamation (Murauskas 1970: 53–54; Kavoliūtė 2015: 50; cf. Rupas, Vaitekūnas 1980: 60). Deprived of land ownership, people cherished their remaining property – their houses and surrounding plots

of land (that amounted to 60 ares – i.e. 6,000 square meters).

In 1966, a drama started that was only publicly (and honestly) discussed several decades later: numerous farmstead hosts failed to accept the process of land reclamation. This resulted in the relocation or demolition of houses and farmsteads were converted into farmlands or pastures – the people resisted, insisting on their attitudes and beliefs over policy. While authorities offered compensation for downed fruit trees and demolished buildings, the conflict was not extinguished. A 1978 to 1979 survey of the rural population of seven Lithuanian districts showed that 70% to 80% of survey respondents⁴ were unwilling to leave their homes in the reclaimed lands (Grabauskas 1983: 1) (Figures 2 & 3).



Figure 3. “The woman got a room somewhere at a neighbours’ place, yet she would come back to her own kitchen stove and make pancakes... and later her stove was completely destroyed.” (Photo by Stasys Padalevičius, 1970s. After Matulevičienė 2015: 62.)

Thus, the last resident of Baranaučižna in Radviliškis District repeated: “You will only carry me out in a coffin.” He died at home at the age of 97 and was carried out of his home in a coffin by relatives (field research data, January 2013). The owner of the demolished Mėdginai farmstead in the Joniškis District, Pranas Povilaitis, hanged himself in grief (field research data, January 2015), while a farmstead in Buivydziai (Joniškis District) was defended by its owner, Ms. Mačiulytė with enviable persistence. Mačiulytė was commonly referred to as a witch and her neighbours still believe that she was helped by her spells (for details, see Vaitkevičius 2016: 48–49).

Under occupation, farmstead destruction became a tool with which occupiers could disrupt human connection to the land and the

past. Occupiers could change the identity of the occupied and eventually overcome the local population’s resistance, whether they were armed or unarmed. During Soviet occupation, owners of surviving farmsteads demonstrated will and patience, referred to influential patrons, or simply bought themselves off.

The similarity between the historical processes of the second half of the 16th century and the second half of the 20th century is obvious: farmers were made to leave their residences, whether farmsteads, houses or orchards. In the 20th century, most of those places turned into arable or fallow lands or pastures of *kolkhoses* and *sovkhoses* (collective farms).⁵ All this happened in the presence of our parents and grandparents, and frequently with their direct participation. In turn, their lively and eloquent testimonies are still available. The former owners once maintained, and in some cases continue to maintain, a sensitive, strong and, most importantly, spiritual relationship with those places.

In 1990, property – primarily land – expropriated during Soviet occupation was returned to the citizens of newly independent Lithuania. Quite a few took advantage of this opportunity; having regained the land, some Lithuanians revived the sites of their former farmsteads and homes. One can still hear stories of how firmly people took this step, and how they received support and encouragement from their deceased parents, grandparents, and other relatives in their dreams. For example:

Monica, that’s my sister, saw Dad in her dream, who said: “Children, take the land.” Had I failed to take the land, I would have felt like I had committed a crime. (Vaitkevičienė 2013: 62.)

When it became possible to regain the land after the Restoration of Independence, I saw in my dream through my bedroom window: Mother’s face could not be seen, just a skirt of coarse homemade woolen cloth and bare feet soiled with earth (...), soiled with rich fertile earth. And then Vladukas, my brother, arrived and said (...): “We are getting back the land”. Thus, through that window, my Mum with her earth-soiled feet brought me the message that I shall regain the land. (LTR cd 1380.)

It is important to emphasise that family relations with ancestors were formed not

merely through farmland but also through surviving farmstead trees, foundation stones, and sometimes wells or ponds. Where none of those left any trace on the land, memories and ancestral connections were stored in the earth: they can be found in fragments of pots or plates, broken window glass, or broken bricks, for example. (Vaitkevičienė 2013: 64).



Figure 4. The site of the Radzevičius Homestead in the Antaniškiai Village, Šiluva Eldership, Raseiniai District. The inscription on the cross reads: 'This is our Native Place. The Radzevičius Family.' (Photo by V. Vaitkevičius 2015.)

Due to changes in lifestyle and other cultural, social, and economic circumstances, most former farmsteads were not revived in the late 20th century. Farmlands or growing forests stretched over these former sites, and a sense of the sacred became associated with these sites. This picture is close to the phenomenon of *apidėmė* found in historical documents: those were fields turned into farmlands and pastures, and occasional untouched small plots of land in their surroundings (which in the 16th century were under the protection of goddess *Apidėmė*, and in the 20th century, the Virgin Mary).

Holding family or neighbour reunions, building memorial stones with names of the former residents and rhymed inscriptions, planting trees or groves, or consecrating

crosses or small chapels (Figure 4), were means with which the people of contemporary Lithuania entrusted themselves to the protection of the farmstead sites and of those who had lived and died there (or had moved from there), and also specifically to the protection of the Most Holy Virgin Mary. Thus, for example, 87-year-old Salomėja Eitavičiūtė-Lubienė from Kūlupėnai (Kretinga District) believed that Mary lived in a small chapel mounted in a tree on the site of her native farmstead and protected the place:

- How did it come into your mind to mount a chapel in a tree?
- Because it was necessary. How else? No parents and no home place will be left. Nobody and nothing. Nobody will protect the native home. And somebody has to take care of it, somebody has to be there. Mary [has] to protect us. When nobody is [living] there any longer, just the fields are left. But the place that was left has to stay there.

(Field research data of March 2013.)

In comparison, in 1984, the Blažys family put up an inscription on a small chapel in their grandparents' farmstead in Pušinava (Radviliškis District): *Saturated with blood and tears, land of our parents, be generous* (field research data, June 2013). In Palmajė (Ignalina District), on the outskirts of the Paukštė family farmstead, a stone cross stands with an inscription: *In Memory of Parents' Land* (field research data, August 2013). The Poškiai family, on the site of their family home, in the fields of the Gulbinai Village (Radviliškis District), planted two birch trees with a memorial stone between them. An inscription on the stone reads:

In the years 1926–1959, Pranciškus and Ona Poškiai lived there, worshipped God, raised children, and got through thick and thin. Lord, reward them in eternity. (Field research data, August 2014.)

Summary and Conclusions

The reference point of the present research is a toponym complex represented in forms such as *Apidėmė*, *Apydėmė*, and *Apydėmai*, all well-known in Lithuania. As evidenced by the historical data, these toponyms began spreading around 1547–1557, when the Voklo Reform was launched, and referred to the sites of former farmsteads, relocated to settlements

measured in Voloks. The application of the name of the goddess *Apidèmė*, attested in the first collection of Protestant sermons from the second half of the 16th century and in the treatise on Samogitian gods by Jan Lasicki, meant that the Volk Reform's changes in land administration and division were not merely of an economic and social character. Rather, one can assume that, as part of their spiritual and – most likely – religious life, human affection for their place of residence intensified and increased. Based on Greimas, the affection for one's historical *apidèmė*, usually a one-and-a-half to two hectare residential area, rested on people's connection with fire and a fireplace. The site of the relocated, collapsed, or possibly even incinerated farmstead was the abode of the family hearth deities. Importantly, it was also the abode of ancestral souls, souls which could not be left without the protection of the gods.

The name of the goddess *Apidèmė* is ultimately an epithet: it in fact describes the abode of the deity which coincides with the spot of black ground on the site of a former home or farmstead. It is difficult to judge either the nature of the goddess or her field of activity. To some extent, *Apidèmė* belongs to the spirits acting in a specific home or place. However, we cannot identify her with the deities who determine the destiny of family wealth, happiness, and health: *Apidèmė* is a kind of reflection of positive material and immaterial good in the place where life (hence rituals and sacrifices) once took place but was interrupted. *Apidèmė* is like a trace of sanctity, still lingering in the earth, water, stones and trees, even though these are no longer tended or augmented by inhabitants.

For the first time, this paper has discussed similarities between the historical *apidèmė*, which once received veneration, and memorial sites that emerged during periods of land ownership and use reforms in the 20th century. Sites of farmsteads, demolished, relocated, or else transformed into arable fields, fallow lands, or pastures for collective farms under Soviet occupation, deserve particular attention. Those places and the protection of the souls that lived and died there – or who had moved away – are mainly entrusted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and they are marked with memorial stones, trees, crosses, and small

chapels. These folk beliefs and customs are a living and significant part of contemporary Lithuanian culture and of the identity of the Lithuanian people.

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Notes

1. For comparison, Sirvydas translated the Polish *śiedlisko* into the Latin *sedes* [‘an abode, a place of residence’] and *area* [‘a square, a yard’] (Pakalka 1997: 353).
2. Cf. *apy-danga* [‘a cover, a top’] (LKŽe, s.v. ‘apydanga’).
3. Cf. *apy-gardė* [‘the place around an enclosure/a cattle shed’], *api-daržė* [‘the place around the vegetable garden’], *api-kaimė* [‘the environ, parish’] (LKŽe, s.vv. ‘apygardė’, ‘apidaržė’).
4. Given the fact that the statistical indicators hail from the Soviet era, actual figures ought to be higher.
5. For a village resident of the 20th century, *apidèmė* would mean a plot of land between two farmsteads, jointly managed by two neighbours or community members (LKŽe). That, of course, does not deny the possibility that in the past those were dwelling places.

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LTR cd – Lithuanian folklore manuscript collection of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore (the number of the CD in the phonotheque is indicated).

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Freyja's Bedstraw, Mary's Bedstraw or a Folkloristic Black Hole?

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Abstract: This article reviews the sources behind the alleged tradition that the plant galium verum, commonly known as 'bedstraw', was associated with Freyja in pre-Christian times. All references to this link ultimately go back to the same Latin document from ca. 800. Unfortunately, the relevant section of this document is unintelligible without textual emendation and, of the three commonly suggested emendations, 'bedstraw' is the least likely.

Having recently looked into some late-recorded folk traditions relating to the Old Norse goddesses Frigg and Freyja, I was attracted by one particular detail, which I have come across several times over the years, namely the idea that especially the plant *galium verum*, commonly known as *bedstraw*, *Our Lady's bedstraw* and similar – with Scandinavian variants such as *Jomfru Marias sengehalm* and *Jungfru Mariæ sänghalm* [‘Virgin Mary's bedstraw’]¹ – was in pre-Christian times associated with Freyja.

References to a link between Freyja, the Virgin Mary and this particular plant are fairly common.² Frustratingly, however, such mentions often circle around a void, with scholars referring to each other rather than to primary sources. The link specifically to Freyja appears not to be all that old, the earliest mention I have been able to locate being a 19th

century remark by Hermann Heinrich Ploss (1885: 349–350).³ However, Ploss points to an 8th century Church Council presided over by St. Boniface, who supposedly ensured that it was forbidden to use *galium verum* for medicinal purposes in connection with childbirth.⁴ Ploss also mentions that the prohibition was due to the plant being associated with Freyja (cf. Näsström 1996: 344). This looked to me like an extremely enticing folkloristic carrot at the end of a very long mythical stick. So I pursued it.

The primary source in question is a document known as *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*, which is essentially a list of thirty heathen practices that were condemned by the Church at the synod of Listines, held in Estinnes in Hennegau, modern-day Belgium, in perhaps 743 and with St. Boniface as one of the major players (Kalhous 2017: 369). The