

# MODERN HOLY PLACES OF EUROPEAN AUTOCHTHONOUS RELIGIONS: THE SACRED SPACE OF LATVIANS AND DIEVTURĪBA

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## Abstract

The breakthrough of the newly built sacred structures of European autochthonous religions activated in recent decades indicates the topicality of the sacred space studies in these emerging places of worship as well as the historical background. While focusing particularly on Latvians and *Dievturība*, the paper encompasses the sanctification of trees and house thresholds, the case of Rāmava, analysis and classification of sacred structures, and an insight into *Dievturi* shrines.

**Keywords:** *architecture, ethnic religion, Dievturi, Latvian, place of worship, sacred space.*

## Introduction

Autochthonous, indigenous, nativistic, ethnic, folk etc. – these are the relevant terms applied to describe the type of non-Abrahamic religions studied in this paper. Gausset et al. distinguish that autochthonous people are anchored in their territory, from which they are said to originate; the term *indigenous* tends to be used for people who are already marginalized, whereas *autochthonous* is generally reserved for people who are dominant in a given area but fear future marginalization [Gausset, Kenrick & Gibb 2011: 138–39]. According to ECER<sup>1</sup>, ethnic religion is a “religion, spirituality, and cosmology that is firmly grounded in a particular people’s traditions ... this does not include modern occult or ariosophic theories/ideologies, nor syncretic neo-religions.” From a monotheistic point of view a non-Abrahamic religion has been referred to as ‘Paganism’ and its adherents

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<sup>1</sup> The *European Congress of Ethnic Religions* (ECER) was established in 1998 to “express our solidarity for the ethnic, indigenous, native and/or traditional religions of Europe (...) serve as an international body that assists ethnic religious groups in various countries and oppose discrimination against such groups” [ECER 2014].

have been referred to as ‘pagans’. However, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Declaration by 34 delegates from 12 countries of ECER issued on 9 July 2014, states: “We urge all European governments to ... refrain from granting preferential treatment to some religions over others. We also ask that this equality of religious preference be reflected in the European educational systems ... We object to the use of the term ‘pagan’ ... as it reflects negatively on our reputation” [ECER 2014]. Yet, Morgana Sythove, co-editor of the magazine *Wiccan Rede*, argues that: “The emergence [of ECER] revealed that the ‘ethnic’ view may be very non-tolerant to what they perceive as ‘imported’ religions – and Wicca most certainly falls into that category in their eyes. I think we must be wary of Pagan fundamentalism, which is focused on creating rigid identities which may under certain circumstances beget nationalism, racism and bias” [Galtsin 2015]. In case of *Dievturība*, the revival fostering Latvianness systematized and canonized during the 1920s of (primarily) ethnic religion of the Latvians before Christianization, the recent expansion of seekers and adherents among people from other descent groups implies a viable paradigm shift in terminology from exclusive (*latviešu* “Latvian”) *ethnicity* to inclusive (*latviskā* “Latvian-like”) *autochthony*, and from *primeval* “ethnic religion” to its *revival* “national religion” (*nacionālā reliģija*). Adherents, however, advocate the use of the endonym *dievestība* (Latvian for “theism”, like *shintō* 神道) over allochthonous term *reliģija* (“religion”) [Nastevičs 2018]. The **purpose** of this paper is to provide an insight into modern holy places of *Dievturība*. The **tasks** are: to consider the historical background of the sacred space and places of worship of the Baltic people, and to analyze the contemporary *Dievturi* places of worship in the context of other modern holy places of European autochthonous religions.

### Legacy of the sacred space of ancient Balts

Latvians and Lithuanians are the two contemporary ethnolinguistic groups retaining the heritage of several ancient Baltic peoples including Old Prussians, Galindians and Yatvingians which are extinct by now. The Baltic religious worldview as recorded in chronicles, folklore and archaeological finds provides source for studying the sacred space.

Lithuanian folklorist Norbertas Vėlius pinpoints the regional differentiation of Balts between the Eastern sky-oriented (*Perkūnas, Saule*), the Central earth-oriented (*žemėpačiai, aitvarai*), and the Western water/underworld-oriented (*Patulas, kaukai*) mythology and symbolism of flora and fauna; the Eastern area (dominant ideology of warriors) favours summer solstice, and the Western area (priests) – winter solstice rites, while the Central area (farmers) prefer equinoxes which are linked with the fertility [Vėlius 1983: 275–77]. Archaeologist Vykintas Vaitkevičius attests: the stringent attempts to destroy ancient sacred places or to give a Christian sense to

their existence perpetrated after Conversion (Christianization of Lithuania) in 1387; the association of sacred places with the territorial complexes of dwelling, defensive and burial sites; he distinguishes 8 types – *hills* (e.g. frequent hillforts-temples of the Dnieper-Daugava Culture with round or oval cult buildings from 1000 BC – 500 AD), *fields, groves, trees, stones, waters, hollows, caves* – and 6 ranks of Baltic sacred places – *home, village, regional, interregional, state* [Vaitkevičius 2003: 257–71]. Suffice it to mention that Latvians and Lithuanians did not worship forests, fire, grass-snakes (*Natrix natrix*) and stones as such; instead, they viewed them as holy and revered them as abodes of gods, likewise Prussians regarded the oak as sacred because chief gods lived in it [Vēlius 1996: 71].

In the Cabinet of Folksongs (*Dainu skapis*), which has been inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, more than a hundred betrothal folksongs (including #13250-n, #13373-0 and #33625-n) reveal a peculiar narrative of metempsychosis – a linden tree (or a rose) with dense canopy grows out of the resting place of human remains, yet the *kokle* (Latvian psaltery) which has been carved out of a single piece of that tree, whenever played, keeps reminding the bereaved people of the deceased one. The tree continues to grow both above and below the ground, and acts as a medium interconnecting the two realms.

*“... Jūra viņu nepanesa, Izskaloja maliņā. Tur uzauga kupla liepa Deviņām galotnēm. No devītās galotnītes Bāleliņš kokles taisa. Sak' bāliņš koklēdams: Tās koklītes koši skan; Sak' māmiņa raudādama: Tā dziedāja pastarīte, Tā dziedāja pastarīte, Kas noslika upītē”* #33625-9 [LFK 2002].

According to the folk beliefs [Šmits 1941], a piece of a lightning-struck tree is sacred and kept as a hereditary charm for household prosperity; yet, if a tree breaks, withers, falls or is felled in a dream, someone of relatives will die. In Latvian folklore trees (grammatically) imply gender of a person (masculine trees: oak, birch, ash, willow, osier; feminine trees: linden, pine, spruce, bird-cherry, apple tree [Rūķe-Draviņa 1985]); when a child is born, a respective tree customarily gets planted in backyard, becoming his or her peer (of the same age), and gradually undergoes further sanctification by supplying a personalized bond with the very ancestor resting under it.<sup>1</sup> The distinctive Latvian attitude towards trees manifests when somewhere tree cutting is expected – the peculiarity of mindset rooted in the ancestor worship

<sup>1</sup> Note that in recent years several initiatives, such as *Urna Bios* (1997) in Spain, *jumokusō* (1999) in Japan, *Capsula Mundi* (2002) in Italy, *Promession* (2001) in Sweden, *Resomation* (2007) in Scotland and *Émergence* (2012) in France [Anstett 2015], have encouraged environmentally friendly biodegradable burial practices where a seed or sapling (planted with the remains) uses the nutrients that emerge from the corpse to develop into a tree.

prompts many to stand up for the preservation of trees – as an ancient Baltic relic it dates back more than a thousand years:

“April 23, 997. Adalbert of Prague ... after he converted Hungary, he was sent by the Pope to convert the heathen Prussians ... It was standard procedure to chop down sacred oak trees, which they had done in many other places, including Saxony. Because the trees were worshipped and the spirits who were believed to inhabit the trees were feared for their powers, this was done to demonstrate to the non-Christians that no supernatural powers protected the trees from the Christians. When they did not heed warnings to stay away from the sacred oak groves, Adalbert was martyred for his sacrilege on the Baltic coast. It is recorded that his body was bought back for its weight in gold” [Della-Piana 2010: 118].

The papally sanctioned destruction of sacred groves in the territory of present Latvia since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, despite the aggravation after the Reformation, could not be accomplished even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the First Latvian National Awakening and nationwide collecting of folklore began in full swing laying the foundation for *Dievturība* [Nastevičs 2017: 46]. Ernests Brastiņš suggests that Latvian theism has been maintained in a detached manner: “everyone could be a celebrant of family rites and celebrations – it fits the Latvian character likewise detached homesteads, curt Dainas (folksongs) and gruff adornment ... Each Latvian on his own can have a talk with Dievs, Laima or Māra and each spot in Latvia can be the exact sacred place for holding rituals” [Brastiņš 1937]. The rural landscape of Latvia commonly features separately growing oaks and tree clusters in an open field. Removal of them would practically resolve the encumbered tillage process, yet more determinant than a mere biodiversity-boosting eco thinking may, in fact, be the motives of deeply aesthetic magical thinking. Wilhelm Mannhardt affirms that among Latvians “it was usual even up to the present century to find beside the homestead a small grove which was regarded as the dwelling-place of the *Mājas kungs* (“lord of the home”) and honored it with small offerings” [Chadwick 1900: 32].

### **Rāmava – constructing the sacred space**

Visual depictions of the sacred structures of ancient Balts are rather scarcely found. German historian Caspar Hennenberger provides the first colour illustration of a place of worship *Romove*<sup>1</sup> (*Rāmava*, a derivation from *rāms* “calm” – a calm,

<sup>1</sup> *Romove* – first mentioned by Peter von Dusburg in the *Chronicon terrae Prussiae* (1326, i.e. 90 years after the Battle of Saule where the Livonian Brothers of the Sword (*Fratres militiae Christi Livoniae*) were defeated by the united forces of Baltic tribes) as *Romow* with a leader called *Criwe* [Dusburg 1861: 53].

peaceful place for worshipping the ancestral deities, with a sacred (oak) grove around, where cutting of trees and intrusion by strangers was prohibited [Visendorfs 1893a: 489]) – in the Sambia Peninsula inhabited by Old Prussians and *Kursenieki*<sup>1</sup> – consisting of a fire offering and a jug in front of an oak, with dense canopy and cult images (busts) of three deities<sup>2</sup> in its trunk, enveloped by an angular curtain with a frontal opening and firewood stacks around the site [Hennenberger 1584: 7]. A century later Prussian historian Christoph Hartknoch reproduced the illustration in a higher detail in black and white [Hartknoch 1684: 116]. Baltic German writer Garlieb Helwig Merkel in the section on the Latvian religious views and the chief deities before the 13<sup>th</sup> century featured a similar setting, supplemented with three spears stuck in the ground with a skull on top of each, where the chief priest *Criwe* was prostrating in front of the fire with *Waidelotte*, the distinguished priests and priestesses, present aside. According to Merkel, the curtain was octagonal, covered with carpets, forming the sacred space inside – hidden from unfaithful eyes – to be unveiled and entered just by priests and for the ritual occasions only [Merkel



Figure 1. Romove [Hartknoch 1684].

<sup>1</sup> *Kursenieki* (also *Kuršininkai*) – a Curonian ethnic community referred to as “Prussian Latvians”, spoke a language related to the Latvian language of Courland (*Kurzeme*) from where their ancestors had migrated mainly during the 15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> cent. [Kapenieks 2012].

<sup>2</sup> Triad of deities resemble Patrimps, Pērkons and Patuls in the flag of Widewuto (Waidewuti) first published [Hennenberger 1584: 22], based on description in the *Preußische Chronik* by Simon Grunau.



Figure 2. Romuva [Balkūnas 2016].

1798: 154]. Yet another century later Latvian folklorist Henrijs Visendorfs argued that the equivalence of customs and religious basics of the kindred nations – Old Prussians, Lithuanians and Latvians – implied their respective pantheon and cult practices, such as holding rites in dedicated places of worship, i.e. *Rāmavas*, should hardly differ either. In his case the elements of previous depictions had been merged together with the exception that the curtain had become a conical tent around the trunk of the oak and the fire offering was brought outside the frontal opening of the curtain [Visendorfs 1893a: 489, 1893b: 2]. Hartknoch’s *Romove* (fig. 1) seems comparable to the setting of the place of worship of *Romuva* during the festival *Mėnuo Juodaragis 2016* [Balkūnas 2016] in Lithuania (fig. 2) – in both cases there was a sacred tree with a fire offering in the centre, and a fabric curtain that indicated the boundary between the sacred and the profane realm.

### Threshold as the boundary of the sacred space

The awareness of the boundary is likewise present in the dwelling architecture, marked by the threshold at the main entrance as well as between the rooms. Among Latvians there is a still-intact custom to “avoid stepping on the threshold”, which has been once present in several other cultures (Russian, Karelian [Keinänen 2010], Anatolian, Chinese, Kyrgyz, Mongolian, Turkish [Yaşa 2017], Buddhist,

Thai [Cavanagh 2013], Japanese [斗鬼 2009] etc.), yet rebuked by Judaism and Christianity (cf. *Zephaniah 1:9* and *1 Samuel 5:4–5*). The frequent stepping on physically wears the threshold out, causing exposure to *caurvējš* (a cold draft, air leakage under the door), which not only lowers the energy efficiency of the building, but is also believed to make people more susceptible to health issues. Another reason is the low *paloda* (door head)<sup>1</sup>, which requires to step over the slightly raised *slieksnis* (threshold)<sup>2</sup> while bowing each time in order to pass through the door smoothly, otherwise it poses a head-hitting hazard for the unwary. Yet, the next reason might be the crucial one. Social anthropologist James George Frazer thinks of the threshold as an abode of spirits – a Russian custom suggests that peasants bury stillborn children under the threshold, hence the souls of the dead babies haunt the spot; in northern India when a child dies it is usually buried under the house threshold in the belief that as the parents tread daily over its grave, its soul will be reborn into the family; a custom in Central Africa also regards the afterbirth buried under the threshold of the hut as the twin of the infant whom it follows – mother hopes that as she steps out of and into the house the spirit of the child or of its supposed twin will pass into her womb and be born again – on this hypothesis the widespread belief in the reincarnation of the dead would explain the sanctity of the threshold [Westermack 1914: 369]. Andrzej Szyjewski pinpoints a Slavic belief that due to the cumulative potential of unrealized life the stillborn fetus turned into a protective house spirit *kłobuk* instead of a malicious demon *poroniec*, if it was buried properly under the threshold of the house [Szyjewski 2003: 195]. Rūta Muktupāvela affirms that “burying the dead under the hearth or threshold for [ancestral] protection and help in daily lives is a practice likewise observed by ancient Balts” [Upīte 2014]. The boundary of the chthonic realm as well as the entrance of the sacred space can be marked by a stone. Peculiar stones have been chosen for sacrifices, offerings and other rites, especially for ancestral household deities [Nastevičs 2017: 38,49]. Multifold thresholds mark the diversified sanctity zones in both dwelling architecture and places of worship – awareness of those largely determines the attitude towards the dead, the ancestors and their tutelary significance, as well as those who breach the boundaries.

<sup>1</sup> *Paloda* – a door head in the traditional Latvian architecture, usually significantly lower than the ceiling (cf. the *kamoi* (鴨居) and the *nijiriguchi* (躡り口) of a Japanese tea house), improves the energy efficiency, considering the principle of convection, i.e. warm air rises, cold air sinks.

<sup>2</sup> *Slieksnis* – a slightly raised threshold (cf. the *agarikamachi* (上り框) at the entryway of a Japanese dwelling) in the traditional Latvian architecture keeps mud, dirt and dust out of one's room.

### Newly built sacred structures of the European autochthonous religions

The data was gathered by collating the public information of the ECER members, their peers and personal communication with representatives<sup>1</sup> in April, 2018. For the Lithuanian and Latvian sacred structures, a field study was conducted, including observations and interviews with Valdis Celms in Klintaine (6 May 2017), Inija Trinkūnienė in Dvarčiškiai (15 August 2017), Liena Eidone in Talsi (20 November 2017) and Ilze Kļaviņa in Grant (4 August 2018). The European religious nativistic (or, in a broader sense, revitalization) movements [Wallace 1956], such as *Трепкеѝа* BG, *Radzimas* and *Родовичу* BY, *Slovanský kruh* CZ, *Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft* DE, *Forn Siðr* DK, *Maavalla Koda* EE, *Groupe Druidique des Gaules* FR, *Societas Hesperiana* and *Movimento Tradizionale Romano* IT, *Društvo Veles* and *Slovenski staroverci* SI, etc., have activated in the last three decades for holding rituals at open-air ancient cult sites, sacred groves and other places of worship in nature<sup>2</sup> (fig. 3); yet the actual extent of ritual activities is still veiled as several groups refuse to disclose the exact coordinates of their sites: “we don’t want to have guests there.” Nonetheless, since the 2000s, there has been an unprecedented breakthrough of the

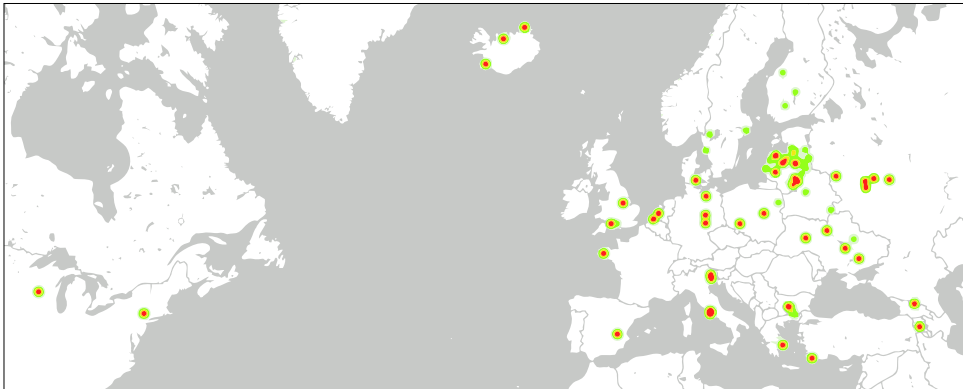


Figure 3. Newly built sacred structures (red spots) and other active places of worship (green spots).

<sup>1</sup> Informants: Evangelos Bougadakis GR, Inija Trinkūnienė LT, Johan De Vriendt BE/DE, Leonid Vladimirovič PL/RU, Federazione Pagana IT, Noemi Marinelli Barbera IT, Rafał Merski PL, Svetozara Pronina and Александр Севастьян RU, Владимир Куровский UA (personal communication, April, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Informants: Аляксандр Мікус BY, Ene Lukka EE, Georgi Mishev BG, *Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft* DE, Irena Petrič and Matija Kenda SI, Ivars Logins LV, Per Varg Brandt Rasmussen DK, Zdeněk Ordelt CZ, *Societas Hesperiana* and *Movimento Tradizionale Romano* IT (personal communication, April, November, 2018).



newly built structures and places of worship of the modern revivals of European autochthonous religions in Europe and diaspora [Nastevičs 2017: 7]. Each structure (table 1; fig. 3) falls into either of these categories: *sacred grove* – a small wooden area or plantation; *kapishche* (*kanuuce, kapiše*) – a site encircled by stones or wooden poles with a cult image and offering stone in the centre; *pirca* – a stone wall enclosure; *henge* – a circular structure of upright stones; *shelter* – a small roofed building to protect underneath from bad weather; *hall* – a one-room building; *house* – a multi-room building; *naos* – a building in shape of Greco-Roman temple; or *room* – a part inside a building that is separated from other parts by walls, floor and ceiling.

Table 1. Newly built sacred structures of the European autochthonous religions

<i>newbuilt sacred structure</i> <sup>1</sup>	<i>location</i>	<i>year</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>organization, key person</i> <sup>3</sup>	<i>type</i>
<b>Dzintari</b>	Libagu pagasts, Talsu novads	<b>1930</b>	Latvijas Dievturu sadraudze	lv1 room
Գարնու տաճար (Garni tachar)	Garni, Kotayk	1975	Հեթանոսություն (Hetanosutiwn)	am naos
Skandava, <b>Dievsēta</b>	Grant, Monroe County, Wisconsin	<b>1979</b>	Latvju Dievturu sadraudze	us1 house
Святыня Оріяна (Temple of Oriyana)	Spring Glen	1983	Рідна українська національна віра (RUNVira)	us2 house
Slawische Tempel	Groß Raden, Sternberg	1987	Archäologisches Freilichtmuseum Groß Raden	de1 hall
<b>Dievturu draudzes sēta</b>	Salaspils	<b>1990</b>	<b>p</b> Latvijas Dievturu sadraudze	lv2 house
Tempel van Nehalennia	Alphen aan den Rijn	1994	m Archeon	nl0 naos
Senovinė dangaus šviesulių stebykla	Kulionys, Molėtų rajonas	1996	u Romuva	lt1 kapishche
Святыліце Реком <sup>4</sup> (Rekom shrine)	Цей, Северная Осетия–Алания (Cej)	1997	Уацдин (Uacdin)	ru1 house
Капище (Карише), Славянский мифологический лес	Томская писаница, Писаная, Кемеровская область (Pisanaa)	1997	u Томская писаница (Tomskaa pisanica)	ru2 kapishche
Larario della Gens Julia Primigenia	Roma	1998	Movimento Tradizionale Romano	it1 room

<sup>1</sup> The transliteration of Cyrillic conducted according to the ISO 9 standard by using www.translit.cc interface.

<sup>2</sup> p – projected sacred structure, yet to be constructed; u – unsheltered, roofless, open-air sacred structure.

<sup>3</sup> ID is abbreviation of country as in country code top-level domain (with a numeral in case of several instances).

<sup>4</sup> Rekom shrine for men, first built in 1936, renovated in 1997 after being destroyed by lightning strike in 1995. The nearby Women's shrine (Святыліце Мады Майрэм) and Maidens' shrine (Девичье святыліще) were built in the 1990s.

<i>newbuilt sacred structure</i> <sup>1</sup>	<i>location</i>	<i>year</i>	<sup>2</sup>	<i>organization, key person</i>	<sup>3</sup>	<i>type</i>
Bosco Sacro di Jesolo	Jesolo, Veneto	2000	u	Federazione Pagana	it2	grove
Heimskautsgerðið	Raufarhöfn	2003	u	Ásatrú, Jónas Friðrik	is1	henge
Святиня Різдва Лева Силенка (Temple of the Nativity of Lev Sylenko)	Олександрівка	2004		Рідна українська національна віра (RUNVira)	ua1	house
Ringheiligtum Pömmelte / Sonnenobservatorium Goseck	Pömmelte / Goseck	2005	u	Himmelswege	de2	kapishche
Славянский храм (Slavic temple)	Славянский Кремль, Валищево (Vališevo)	2005		Rodnovery, Виталий Сундаков (Vitalij Sundakov)	ru3	hall
Nehalennia Tempel	Colijnsplaat	2005		Corbvlo	nl	naos
Chram Mazowiecki	Nowa Wieś	2007		Rodzimy Kościół Polski	pl1	shelter
<b>Tautisks Dievnams</b>	Zaķusala, Rīga	<b>2008</b>	<b>p</b>	Latvijas Dievturu sadraudze	lv0	house
Templo de Gaut	Albacete	2009	u	Ásatrú	es	pirca
Ναός (Naos)	Oraiokastro	2009		Ομάδα E (Omada E)	gr1	naos
Le Rick	Saint-Goazec, Bretagne	2010	u	Kredenn Geltiek Hollvedel	fr	kapiše
Капище (Kapiše)	Григорьевка, Запорожский район, Запорожская область (Grigor'evka)	2011	u	Rodnovery	ua2	kapishche
The White Spring Water Temple <sup>4</sup>	Glastonbury	2012		The White Spring Glastonbury Foundation	uk1	house
Šventykla	Dvarčiškiai, Švenčionių rajonas	2012		Romuva	lt2	hall
Соборный Храм (Sobornyj hram)	Київ (Kyiv)	2012	p	Родовое Огнище Родной Православной Веры (Rodnovery)	ua3	house
Многофункциональный комплекс "Капище" (Kapiše)	Хабаровск (Habarovsk)	2012	p	Rodnovery, architect Александр Севастьян (Aleksandr Sevast'ān)	ru4	house / kapishche
Капище (Kapiše)	Смоленское Поозерье, Пржевальское (Smolensk Lakes)	2013	u	Утро Сварога (Utro Svaroga)	ru5	kapishche
Ásheimur hof	Efri-Ás	2014		Ásatrú, Árni Sverrisson	is2	hall
Newark Odinist Temple	Newark	2014		Odinist Fellowship	uk2	hall
Святинна хата (Svátinna hata)	Старокостянтинів (Starokostiantyniv)	2014		Рідна українська національна віра (RUNVira)	ua3	house
Храм огня Сварожича (Hram ognā Svarožiča)	Красотынка (Krasotyinka)	2015		Союз Славянских Общин Славянской Родной Веры (Union of Slavic Native Belief Communities, Rodnovery)	ru6	hall

<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Originally a Victorian-built well house erected in 1872; water temple of the *Companions of the White Spring*.

<i>newbuilt sacred structure</i> <sup>1</sup>	<i>location</i>	<i>year</i>	<sup>2</sup>	<i>organization, key person</i>	<sup>3</sup>	<i>type</i>
Hof Ásatrúarfélagsins	Reykjavík	2015	p	Ásatrú	IS3	hall
Óðinshof (Odinshof)	Brownsville, California	2015		Asatru Folk Assembly	US3	house
Οίκος (Oikos)	Koskinou	2015		Ύπατο Συμβούλιο των Ελλήνων Εθνικών (ΥΣΕΕ / YSEE)	GR2	shelter
<b>Baltu senrelīģijas centrs</b>	Esplanāde, Rīga	<b>2016</b>	<b>p</b>	Latvijas Dievturu sadraudze	LV3	house
Świątynia słowiańska, Centrum kultury słowiańskiej	Wrocław	2016	p	Watra	PL2	hall
Valheim hof	Faaborg	2016		Ásatrú, Jim Lyngvild	DK	hall
Aukuras	Šatrijos kalnas	2017		Šatrijos Romuva	LT3	shelter
<b>Lokstenes svētnīca</b>	Klintaines pagasts, Pļaviņu novads	<b>2017</b>		Latvijas Dievturu sadraudze	LV4	hall
<b>Svētnīca</b> <sup>4</sup>	Svētes pagasts, Jelgavas novads	<b>2017</b>	<b>p</b>	Svētes dievturu draudze	LV5	hall
Templum Iovis / Tempio di Giove	Roma	2017		Associazione Tradizionale Pietas	IT3	naos
Ναός (Naos)	Athens	2017		Ύπατο Συμβούλιο των Ελλήνων Εθνικών (ΥΣΕΕ / YSEE)	GR3	room
Святылище Велеса (Veles shrine)	Зубово, Рязанская область (Zubovo)	2018		Велесов Круг (Velesov Krug)	RU7	hall
Templum Apollinis	Ardea, Lazio	2018		Associazione Forza Vitale	IT4	naos
Templum Minervae Medicae	Fontanafredda, Friuli-Venezia Giulia	2018		Associazione Tradizionale Pietas	IT5	shelter
Място за почит (Place of worship) <sup>5</sup>	Старосел (Starosel)	2019		Трескея (Threskeia), Георги Мишев (Georgi Mishev)	BG	hall

Presence of a sacred tree or *grove* as the primeval type of places of worship [Chadwick 1900] is a common feature in most of the cases listed here. For instance, the grove of IT1 was newly planted in 1995 and has been active as place of worship since 2000, yet a new wood area was planted in 2017 to enlarge the first one; the site also features several sculptural cult images, comparable to those in GR1–3. The *kāpishche*, *pirca* and *henge* as the wooden or stone enclosures distinctly mark the boundary of the sacred space; a number of these serve as solar observatories. A common feature in Lithuanian (LT1–LT2) and Slavic (PL1–2 RU2–6 UA2) sacred structures are the wooden sculptural cult images: the former include Perkūnas, Žemyna, Milda, Sotvaras, Pramotė, Protėvis, etc., whereas the latter include Rod, Dažbog, Mokoš, Perun, Svetovid, Veles etc. The *shelter* as the subsequent type

<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The framework of the conical hall has been completed; further construction work is underway as of December 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Thracian temenos encircled by a wall with a red tile roofed stone-built hall dedicated to Hekate and Dionysus.

protects the cult images and worshippers under the roof, which can be further developed into a walled *hall*, *naos* or *house*. For instance, Greek, Italian, Armenian (AM anastyled in 1975, actively used for rites as the central shrine since the 1990s) and Dutch temples are *naos*. In case of limited needs or resources, especially in an urban area, a *room* can be furnished or rented as a solution for ritual occasions (LV1 GR3). Regarding the architecture of *halls* and *houses*, they tend to be based on either the local traditional architecture (US1 LV2 RU1 RU3 LT2 UA3 IS2 LV4 LV5 RU7), the archaeological evidence (DE1 RU6 PL2), or both (DK BG); nonetheless, some of the new projects (RU4 IS3 LV3), which are yet to be constructed, rather contribute to the modern trends in architecture with little influence from the aforementioned. Last but not least, US1 and US2 deserve a special mention – both shrines have been built by, serving as sanctuaries and community centres for, and are still maintained by the adherents' societies, who sought refuge in exile due to the persecutions by the Soviet occupation at home.

### Characteristics of the sacred structures of *Dievturi*

Examples of the traditional architecture, such as *rija* (threshing barn), *klēts* (granary) and *istaba* (dwelling house, room) have been well preserved, yet the extirpated Latvian shrines have been scarcely featured only in chronicles as wooden buildings with ancient Latvian cult images and stones on the site. Viktors Eglītis once theorized on a future *Dievturi* shrine, suggesting the implementation of: the Latvian column (so-called “Curonian Kings’ column”) as the peculiar architectural element inherited in colonnaded porches of *klēts* and *rija*; the forked roof finials on the ridge ends in shape of horse (or rooster) heads; a light, beautiful and noble atmosphere with enough room for open space in the interior; ceiling supported by a row or two of Latvian columns; a sacred tree marking the altar; mythical folktales illustrated on the walls and sculptural cult images [Eglītis 1934]. The reinvention of tradition, which had once been interrupted for a long time, is inevitably innovative yet firmly limited to the Latvianness (i.e., the Latvian character), as *Dievturība* is based on sources in the extensive Latvian folklore.

A private house *Dzintari* (Ambers) built in 1930 with a multi-partitioned sacred room (*svēttelpa*) on the first floor is the first sacred space furnished and dedicated exclusively for the *Dievturi* rites. Landlord Tīcs Dzintarkalns involved painter Kārlis Sūniņš to adorn the antechamber, the Room of Worship, and the Room of Offerings with the altarpiece [Audzis 1936] on the west side behind the woollen curtain (fig. 4). The interior features a cross crosslet-shaped central light fixture, frescoes of the Tree of the Sun, Pērkons and other deities – everything designed in the National Romanticism style; behind the wall of the Room of Worship there is the Room of Folktales with 10 colourful frescoes featuring scenes and heroes well known



Figure 4. Room of Offerings at *Dzintari* [Audzis 1936].

to Latvian children. In the backyard there was also a wooden cult image of Pērkons (now nonextant). At the *Dievturi* property abroad – *Dievsēta* (God’s Homestead) in the USA, there is the *Skandava*, collectively designed and built in 1979 as the *house* for rites, featuring a prominent cross crosslet  $\text{✠}$  (the religious symbol of *Dievturība* since its inception) on gable, forked roof finials and the Latvian colonnaded porch (fig. 6). On the easternmost<sup>1</sup> wall of the *hall* hangs a cross crosslet tapestry as an altarpiece, two prominent light fixtures shaped as the sign of the Sun, and the whole wood-furnished interior is adorned with traditional decorations (fig. 4). In a sacred

<sup>1</sup> In case of the USA, the easternmost side constitutes the direction Latviawards – the direction of the swearing of an oath (“*Vai Tu, \_\_\_\_, uzņēmoties vadoņa pienākumus, apņemies iet dievāju ceļu, censties izvairīties no svešu mežu maldugunīm un meklēt pareizās atslēgas, ar kurām atvērt latvisko zinību vārtus, un centīsies daudzīnāt un stiprināt latviešu dievestību, latviešu tautas nākotni un latviskās Latvijas labā? Ja tā, tad vērsi seju mūsu svētās Latvijas zemes virzienā, uz cietā un nemainīgā akmens pamata zintēdams, apliecinā to savu apņemšanos – klātesošo liecinieku, dievturu vecāko, saviešu un draugu priekšā!*”) at the *Dievturi* overseas leader inauguration rite [Pone 2007]. It resembles the concept of Qibla, in this case, symbolizing the unity of Latvians worldwide.



Figure 5. *Skandava* [Dievsēta 2014].



Figure 6. Interior of *Skandava* at *Dievsēta* [Nastevičs 2018].



Figure 7. *Rāmava* at *Dievsēta* [Nastevičs 2018].

grove within the grounds of the property, there is also an outdoors place of worship *Rāmava* with the Oath stone for inauguration and other rites (fig. 7).

There have been 4 projects which have not materialized yet. *Dievturu draudzes sēta* (Homestead of *Dievturi* congregation) – an architecture graduation project by Ineta Butāne in 1990, proposed to be built in Salaspils. The shape of the thatched roof of the *house* (16 × 16 m) resembles a pyramid reflecting in nearby water-reservoir to create a rhombus (fig. 8); a northeastward glass wall with a view of an oak outside serves as an altarpiece of the central *hall* (*Skandava*, fig. 9), during the summer solstice the Sun appears rising from behind the oak. In a cyclic order there are rooms dedicated for rites of Namesgiving, Wedding and *Veļi*<sup>1</sup> arranged in corners of *Skandava* which has a skylight ceiling. A basement for storage purposes is included. Through the roof overhang above the entrance emerges a *torii*-like gate with the cross crosslet on it [Butāne 1990]. *Tautisks Dievnams* (Folkish shrine) – a multipurpose venue proposal by Jānis Siliņš in 2008 for *Dievturi* congregations, the National Studies, *kokle* ensembles, folklore and dance groups to be built on Zaķusala Island in Rīga. The *house* – a log building of Latvian traditional architecture. Square, hexagonal or round *hall* features a transformable amphitheatre with a capacity of 400 persons and a cross crosslet-shaped central light fixture as an elevatable altarpiece. Other facilities such as rehearsal, conference and class rooms, basement etc. are also to be included [Siliņš 2008]. *Baltu senreliģijas centrs*<sup>2</sup> – an architecture graduation project by Andis Alksniņš in 2016 – a multipurpose venue to be built

<sup>1</sup> *Velis* (pl. *Veļi*) – a shade, ancestral tutelary, spirit of a dead person (viable yet-to-be reincarnated into a lineal descendant); a part in the *Dievturi* concept of triune being of man, i.e. *augums – velis – dvēsele* (body – *velis* – soul).

<sup>2</sup> The English title of the project is “The Cultural, Educational and Science Center of Baltic Nations”.



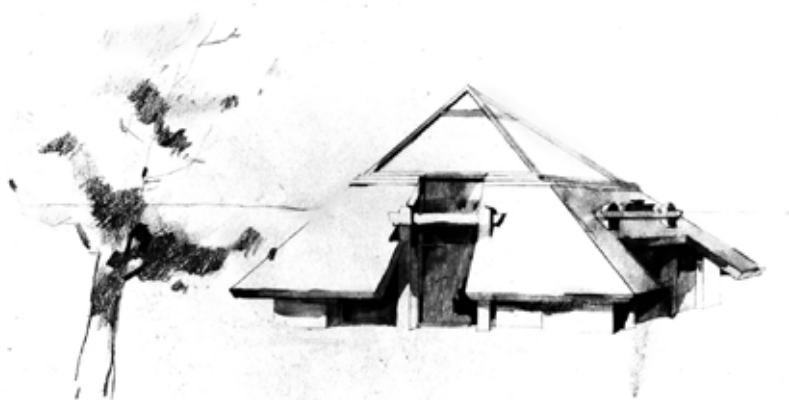


Figure 8. *Dievturu draudzes sēta* (project) [Butāne 1990].

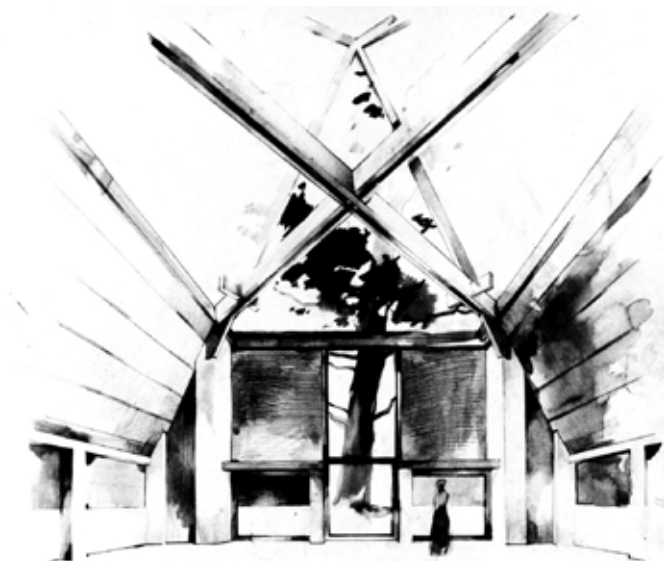


Figure 9. Interior of *Skandava* at *Dievturu draudzes sēta* (project) [Butāne 1990].

in Esplanāde<sup>1</sup>. The C-shaped *house* resembles a hillfort with a continuous circular mobility symbolizing the idea of infinity (fig. 10). A part of the inclined one level building volume is raised up, it has a publicly accessible roof, and several facilities including basement [Alksniņš 2016; Mārtuža 2016]. *Svētnīca* (Shrine) – a conical

<sup>1</sup> The formerly uneven ground of nowadays Esplanāde was filled with the earth from the Mons Antiquus (*Kubes kalns*) hill – a historic landmark of Rīga until it was levelled in 1785 [Alksniņš 2016].



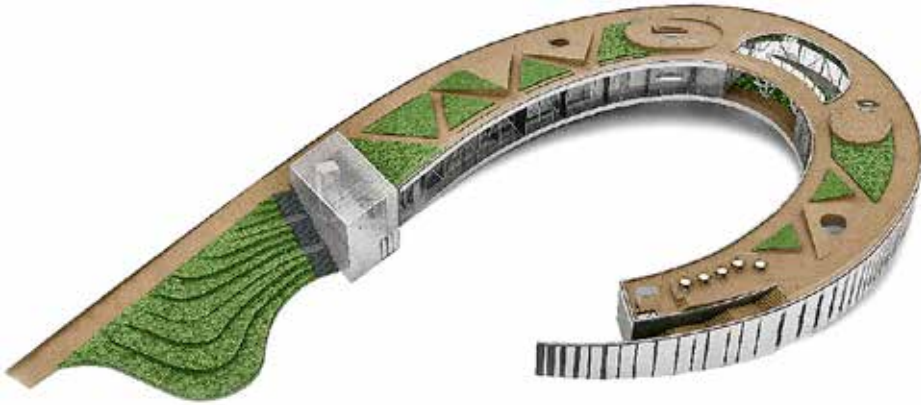


Figure 10. *Baltu senreliģijas centrs* (project) [Alksniņš 2016].



Figure 11. Framework of *Svētnīca* (under construction) [Žukovskis 2017].

*hall* project for *Svētes dievturu draudze* by Andris Žukovskis in 2017, currently under construction in Svēte (fig. 11), with a capacity of 30 persons, aspen shingle roof with forked roof finials, a fire offering in the centre and an altarpiece placed at the west wall, exactly opposite to the entrance [Žukovskis 2017].

The first *hall* for Dievturi rites in Latvia completed since the restoration of independence is *Lokstenes svētnīca* (Lokstene shrine), designed by Andrejs Broks, Valdis Celms, Ainars Markvarts, supported by Dagnis Čākurs and consecrated in



Figure 12. *Lokstenes svētņīca* [Nastevičs 2017].

2017, in a scenic location on an island on the Daugava River in Klintaine parish (fig. 12). The wood-frame *hall* (15 × 8 m) with thatched roof and forked roof finials, features full height windows and doors on all sides ensure good daylighting, the main entrance faces the sun at midday and the longitudinal axis runs east-west. A fire offering altar marks the centre. In the *hall* there is a cross crosslet stand, a trunk drum, a pair of large *puzuri* (traditional Latvian straw mobiles) hanging from the ceiling supported by Latvian columns, a bookshelf of Dainas (Latvian folksongs), a historic *Dievturi* wooden candelabrum, tapestries adorned with Latvian ornaments symbolizing deities and verses of Dainas. Pilgrims cross the river by boat to reach the island; a path from the dock towards the shrine goes through the Square of Flags, the Stone of Ancestors and the Gate of the Sun – each serving as a landmark boundary to stop by.

### Conclusions

Latvians have inherited several sociocultural traits from the ancient Baltic tribes. The plausible tree burials (*jumokusō* 樹木葬) and belief in the metempsychosis, i.e. transmigration of human souls into the trees and *kokles*, causes both latter to become sanctified and cherished as media interconnecting the living with the dead. Hence the forest bathing (*shinrin-yoku* 森林浴) and environmentalism are not a mere trend but rather an indispensability for Latvians derived from an immanent spiritual ecology. The *Rāmava* constitutes a transitional type of place of worship between the sacred groves and the shrine buildings. The sanctity of the threshold, causing

a custom to “avoid stepping on” in many cultures, dates back to the infant burial practices underneath it, hoping for the ancestral protection and rebirth of the soul into the family. The awareness of multifold thresholds of the boundaries between the inner sacred space and the outer profane space determines the behaviour.

Several (nativistic) European autochthonous religions have been activated recently, still the wish to keep the places of worship secret implies the prevalent sense of danger, especially enduring in countries with an overwhelming majority of the members of Abrahamic religions. There has been a breakthrough of the newly built sacred structures which can be classified as: *grove*, *kapishche*, *pirca*, *henge*, *shelter*, *hall*, *house*, *naos* or *room*. Most cases feature a sacred tree or grove, while *halls* and *houses* tend to be based on the local traditional architecture; Lithuanian, Slavic, Greek and Italian sites are prone to cult images; in urban areas a *room* often serves as a solution for ritual occasions. There are also significant shrines built by adherents in exile due to Soviet occupation at home.

*Dievturi* have 3 extant sacred structures (*room*, *house* and *hall*) and 4 projects yet to be materialized. Certain common features can be distinguished – the use of the cross crosslet and other Latvian ornaments symbolizing deities, principles of Latvian traditional (wooden) architecture including forked roof finials and Latvian columns, a sacred tree or grove nearby, the east-west orientation (cf. *ad orientem* and *versus populum*), and, above all, the ageless pursuit of Latvianness. These may be regarded as the key elements of the emerging tradition of *Dievturi* sacred architecture.

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