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LITHUANIAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND FOLKLORE: TOWARDS COOPERATION

Both archaeology and folklore aim to explore the human past: its aspects that used to appear as physical objects and those features that are non-material. Nowadays, there is no doubt that archaeology and folklore are closely related. Unfortunately, the development of science during the 20th century led to the division of methodology between the disciplines, and only new approaches brought archaeologists back to folklore as a valuable source for the exploration of the past.

The researchers have renewed discussions about many theoretical aspects of the dialogue and the possible interaction between archaeology and folklore [3]. To this end, we need some comprehensive studies of particular regions to be undertaken now – and Lithuania is one of such regions.

Lithuanian resources

There are very few written sources and historical documents of the 13th–18th centuries related to the folklore of prehistoric sites [cf. 6, 370–384, 503–569]. On the other hand, plenty of documents, including the descriptions of the land and inventories, have not been published yet. One fine example of this kind is the description of 1784 concerning Varguliai hill fort dated back to the Late Iron Age: "*Co do Starożytnosci: Jest Szaniec... usypany na wielkiey Górze nad Jeziorem... zkąd w onczas Szwedzi obrone mieli przeciw Moskalom*" ("Talking about ancient monuments, there is a fortification erected on the high hill on the lakeside; the Swedish soldiers made their defence against Russians") [8, 17].

About 80,000 of the folk tales and narrations stored at the Lithuanian Folklore Archive [for its subjects see: 9; 16; 20, 593–664; 29; 30, 523–600] were mainly collected during the late 19th–20th century.

Archaeological excavations performed by amateurs started in the early 19th century. In 1855, Vilnius Archaeological Commission and the Museum of Antiquity were founded. In 1995, up to 3,000 archaeological sites were record-

ed, and about 300,000 archaeological findings were stored in museums around Lithuania [21, 28–31].

Naturally, the content of folklore could be revised and disproved by archaeologists [cf. 19, 29], but place-legends would always be the first indicators when looking for prehistoric sites. Experience does attest that a large number of hill forts, burial and pagan cult sites were explored by archaeologists as places denoted by significant names and tales. Archaeologists often discover sites which folk memory has known for centuries.

There is a fine example of Rėkučiai defence wall dated back to the early 13th century, shrouded in tales, which was first discovered by the archaeologist Vladimir Kashirski in 1906, and for the second time by a research group in 1989) [see 13].

Archaeology and folklore: defining positions

Archaeology and folklore in Lithuania have been closely related since their beginnings. For long, both archaeological findings and folk tales were treated as equal sources for understanding the original purpose of hill forts, barrows, and other sites. The instruction for the nation-wide inventory of ancient monuments in 1890s as well as the instruction for recording place-names and all antiquity in 1935 included questions on folklore.

Jonas Puzinas, who finally qualified Lithuanian archaeology as a science in 1930s, noted the chronology and definition of prehistoric cultures [cf. 23]. Jonas Balys also led Lithuanian folklore to the international classification and corresponding standards [cf. 5]. Nevertheless, archaeology and folklore were still close to each other. Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, a student of Prof. J. Puzinas, wrote her excellent study on prehistoric burial rites based on both archaeological and folklore materials [1]. J. Balys prepared a valuable volume of historical legends [14].

However, there was no active dialogue between archaeology and folklore in the Soviet period. Occasionally, folkloric data were applied when interpreting burial rites [cf. 26], and the inventory of archaeological sites – when identifying the subjects discussed in place-legends [17, 18]. In 1970s, Vytautas Urbanavičius proved that some accounts concerning the Baltic religion had been recorded in historical documents [27]. Valdemaras Šimėnas started with a kind of archaeological verification of legends about Lithuanians and Prussians in 1980s. In his opinion, the legends appearing in the chronicles of

the 16th century [see 6, 13–23, 48–122] could be linked to the processes of the Migration period in Europe in the 1st millennium AD [24, 25]. On the other hand, the formal proposition that folklore sources are only creative works for a historical investigation was still prevalent [15, 101–113].

Archaeology and folklore: towards cooperation

Political, economic, and cultural changes in 1990 led Lithuanian archaeologists to some new knowledge as well. The spread of democracy, contacts with colleagues in Western Europe and especially in Scandinavia, easy access to foreign publications, and some other factors influenced the science very much. The studies of Marija Gimbutienė exploring Old Europe civilization as exhibiting a particularly religious character demonstrated what kind of perspectives are offered by an interdisciplinary approach [cf. 11, 12]. However, the works known worldwide did not stimulate researchers in Lithuania; archeomythological approach was neither introduced nor adapted.

Nevertheless, there are some symptoms showing that humanities are moving towards cooperation. A significant complex research was dedicated to Raigardas valley, shrouded in legends concerning the underworld [2]. Currently, a team of archaeologists, historians, folklorists, ethnologists, and linguists is developing a project directed towards the common database for all kinds of sources related, in fact, to the same subject – the history of Lithuania [14]. The present situation clearly indicates that the representatives of different sciences are in need of an active interaction. The use of different sources and methods in exploration will enable researchers to discover essential aspects of the past culture.

Using folkloric data for investigations

I will briefly discuss some potential of Lithuanian folklore relevant to archaeology. The prehistoric spiritual culture is obviously the field where folkloric data and the results of research into it are particularly expected. Many aspects of the world outlook, burial praxis, the religious purpose of items, and the symbolic meaning of signs could be mentioned in this case. However, I would like to emphasise the importance of folkloric data exploring landscapes: cultural (generally) and sacral (in detail).

Place-names, place-legends, and beliefs covering a particular area or connecting distant regions in various ways are often not only alternative but also

the main evidence about the meaningful landscape. The synthesis of both archaeological and folkloric data would be of utmost importance in its exploration.

The folklore of prehistoric sites usually reminds of a particular structure in a cipher. To illustrate, I will give just one well-known example concerning hill forts.

The proposition that people (soldiers, bondmen) used to mound hill forts using their caps is particularly prevalent. (These actions are connected with war in various ways.) [17, 108–109] Moreover, the shape of a hill fort often reminds of a cap and a request of the hill for passers-by sometimes sounds like: "Please, uncap going past me!" [28, 648, 649].

A poor shepherd would always recover his cap full of money from inside of a hill, and a ploughman of the hill would often hear the words "Do not lacerate my crown", while dreaming [20, 638–640].

If you are interested in the meaning such a hill fort possessed, you have to realize what part a cap played in mythology and rites.

Obviously, two more aspects of this case are possible. Firstly, what kind of needs according to folk memory did a hill fort originally fulfil? Secondly, how would local people accept it later? [cf. 7, 45; 10, 14, 15]. In this context, you could ask whether a hill fort could be a kind of a property-sign in the landscape, whether the folk memory could remotely reflect funeral rites, and also whether those sites could be closely linked to the ancestors' concept in the past. Moreover, we should ask what kind and scale of "immunity" prehistoric sites possessed. All these questions need an elaborate study of the related folklore.

The last example I will discuss here would clearly indicate what part the folkloric data play in examining the actual landscape.

Both banks of the Neris River in the environs of Vilnius are full of prehistoric sites of different character (Fig. 1). However, the number of excavated monuments and the coverage of the excavations are quite inconsiderable. Therefore, recording of the folklore has contributed to the examination of this area very much. After a few hundred folk-legends had been recorded in recent years, our knowledge essentially increased [22].

There are a number of place legends discussing the significance of the Neris River, its tributaries, shoals, and separate rocks as well as hills, springs, and stones on the riverbanks. It is worth noticing the newly discovered mythical ties between the Neris River, its shoals and rocks, and the burial mound
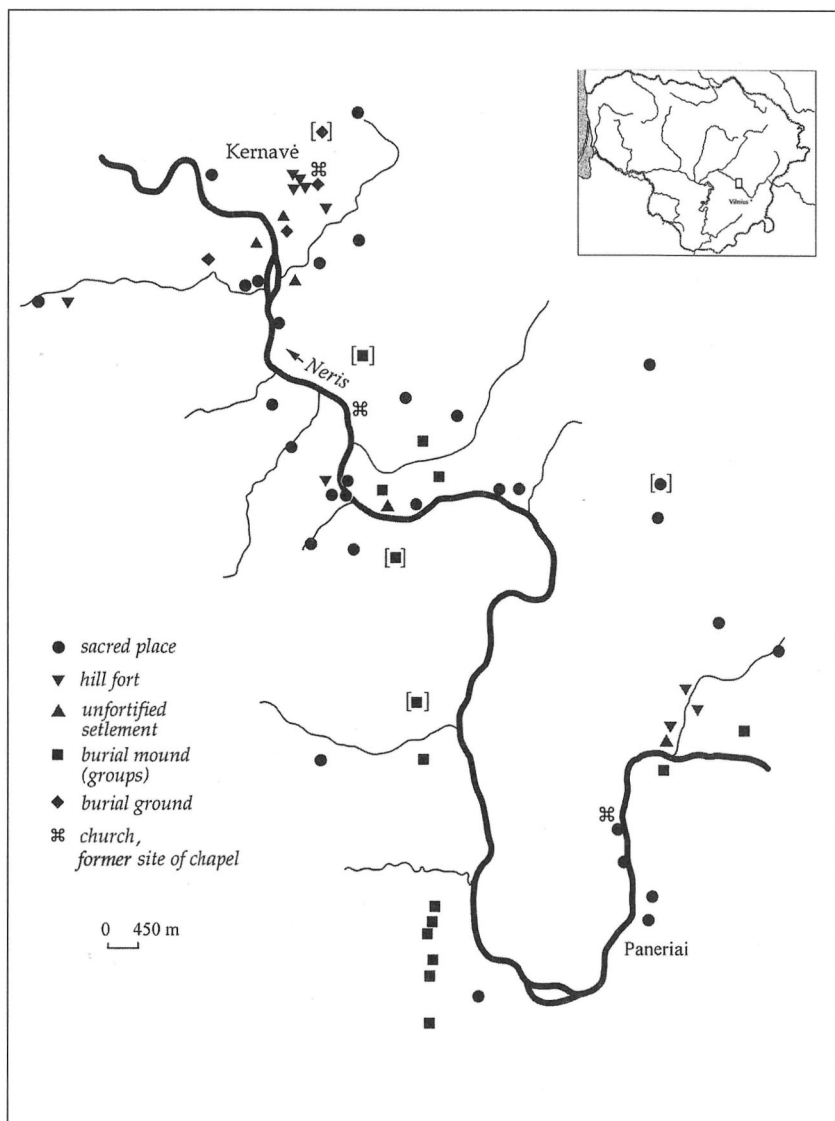
Fig. 1. The Distribution of archaeological sites at the Neris River in environs of Vilnius

groups (dated back to the 1st millennium AD). Dozens of burials were mounded along the course of the river flowing north and west here. Moreover, the location of burial mound groups actually correlates with the geographical position of the shoals: the latter are usually situated within a short distance down the river. The folklore clearly reveals the code for understanding the mythical meaning of the shoals – their rocks are considered participants of the bridal processions under a charm. (The meaning of the wedding-like rite of passage is known worldwide). Hereby, the Neris River appears like a path leading to the beyond; its water and rocks – like a medium for souls wishing to become clean, in other words – sinless.

Conclusions

Only persistent sceptics could doubt that a dialogue between archaeology and folklore would be senseless. While expanding in recent years, archaeology has already borrowed many scientific experiences how to recognize objective details as the result of investigation.

Competence in understanding folklore would be one of the key tasks for the Lithuanian archaeology in the near future. Moreover, archaeologists should develop a kind of folk archaeology based on the cross-disciplinary investigation of the folklore of prehistoric sites and the exploration of such sites.

Abbreviations

LVIA SA – Lithuanian State History Archive, Old Acts Collection.

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Vikints Vaitkevičs
Lietuvas arheoloģija un folklora: ceļš uz sadarbību

Kopsavilkums

Raksts veltīts akadēmiskai sadarbībai arheoloģijas un folkloras pētījumu jomā Lietuvā laikposmā no 19. gadsimta līdz mūsdienām. Sniegts arī īss pārskats par Lietuvas arheoloģijas un folkloras resursiem; proti, 80 000 tautas leģendu, kas savāktas Lietuvas folkloras arhīvā, un vairāk nekā 300 000 arheoloģisko atradumu, kas glabājas Lietuvas muzejos.

Pētījumu vēsture ļauj mums saskatīt saikni starp leģendām un arheoloģiskās izpētes vietām. Arheologi ir izpētījuši daudz pilskalnu, apbedījumu vietu, pagānisko kulta vietu, kas saistītas ar zīmīgiem nosaukumiem un leģendām. Arheologi bieži atklāj vietas, kas tautas atmiņā ir glabājušās gadsimtiem ilgi.

Padomju laikā aktīva dialoga starp arheoloģiju un folkloru nebija. Tikai 1990. gadā notikušās politiskās un sociālās pārmaiņas iezīmēja lūzumu arī Lietuvas arheologu uzskatos. Pēdējā gadu desmitā ir vērojams dažas pazīmes, kas liecina, ka humanitāro zinātņu pārstāvji virzās pretim sadarbībai.

Raksta sadaļā "Folkloras datu izmantošana pētniecībā" tiek iztirzāta tēze, ka noteiktu reģionu aptverošie vietvārdi, leģendas un ticējumi ir galvenie zīmīgie kultūrainavas liecinieki. Pēdējos gados Viļņas apkaimē veiktie pētījumi nepārprotami apstiprina šādu projektu nozīmi.