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# of Lexicon Baltic Mythology

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Lexicon of
Baltic Mythology

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Preface

The book you are holding represents an updated translation of the book that was first published under the title *Encyklopedie baltské mytologie* by the Czech publishing house LIBRI[1] (Praha 2012), as part of an edition of encyclopaedias dedicated to individual mythological traditions and religious systems. Our book was the first of its kind in this series, thanks to its systematic etymological analyses and the number of primary sources that had to be consulted. The topic of Baltic mythology is a half-forgotten field of study that, in Czech works at least, enjoyed a far greater attention 150 years ago. Nowadays it is mostly studied by Lithuanian and Latvian scholars, but it remains at the fringes of interest elsewhere in Europe. Only several articles on Baltic mythology have been written by Czech authors and it has been touched upon in translations of Baltic fiction. And yet, the tradition of Czech Baltic studies had already been founded by the writer and translator František Ladislav Čelakovský (1799–1852). This book hopes to remedy this blatant omission and to open up to its readers the so far nearly concealed area of Lithuanian and Latvian folklore, which in many ways has wondrously preserved ancient Indo-European archetypes.

Because it is the first monographic treatment of Baltic mythology in not only a descriptive, but also a historical, linguistic and comparative perspective, we thought it expedient to accompany the text with illustrative examples from our primary sources. We therefore frequently quote both selected passages from chronicles and official documents on the one

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[1] In his letter addressed to Václav Blažek, dated the 20th Feb 2013, the director of the publishing house, Dr. Karel Žaloudek, wrote: Nakladatelství Libri nemá námitek proti vydání překladu *Encyklopedie baltské mytologie* v angličtině. Předpokládám, že případné anglické vydání nebude kopírovat vydání české (grafická úprava a obálka), protože na to jsou také autorské smlouvy. ('The publishing house Libri has no objections to publication of the English translation of the *Encyclopedia of Baltic Mythology*. I suppose that the English translation will not copy the Czech edition concerning its graphic layout and jacket').

hand, and parts of folk songs – *dainas* – on the other hand. The transla-
tions in the text itself are usually ours (unless stated otherwise) and we
place the original text (Latin, German, Old English, Old Russian, Polish,
Lithuanian, Latvian, Finnish etc.) in footnotes or, in the case of *dainas*,
in the text itself. By this practice, we want to make possible further study
of authentic, but usually hard to come by sources, to scholars of Baltic,
Indo-European, Fenno-Ugric, mythological, ethnological or historical
studies, as well as any curious person from the general public. Our ety-
mological conclusions represent the latest level of knowledge; in many
entries we even present brand new solutions. We were ourselves surprised
how often there exists a unique parallel between mythological names in
the Baltic region and in ancient Italy. We believe these are independently
preserved archaisms that open new possibilities for the reconstruction of
the Indo-European pantheon.

The book we offer you aims to be an encyclopaedia of the mythology of
Baltic nations; we must, therefore, clearly define which nations are con-
cerned. The contemporary political term "Baltic nations" encompasses
Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians, i.e. the main ethnicities of the three
small states at the Eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. However, the con-
cept used in this book is based on the viewpoint of linguistics, compara-
tive-historical linguistics in particular, where the Lithuanian and Latvian
languages represent the Baltic branch of Indo-European languages; while
Estonian belongs to the Balto-Finnic branch of the Finno-Ugric group of
Uralic languages.
    Originally, there were more than two languages in the Baltic branch
of Indo-European languages. At the time of English Revolution, there still
existed the language of old Prussians, originally spoken approx. from the
mouth of the Vistula River to the river Neman (Lith. Nemunas), i.e. in the
area of today's Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship in Poland and the Rus-
sian Kaliningrad Oblast.
    Chronicles recording events from the 12th and 13th centuries inform
us about other Baltic tribes. Curonians, who lived in the west of Latvia,
participated in the ethnogenesis of Western Lithuanians, who are called
Žemaitians, but partly also of Latvians themselves. To the south of the
Gulf of Riga and the river Daugava there lived Semigallians; further to
the east there were Selonians. To the north of Daugava there was the terri-
tory of Latgalians. (In the Latvian language, there exists to this day a Lat-
galian dialect, actually deserving of the status of an autonomous language

with its specific phonetics.) These three tribes and a part of Curonians formed the modern Latvian nation.

The Lithuanian ethnic group has since the Middle Ages been divided into the Western, Žemaitian (Samogitian) group, i.e. "Lowlanders", and the Eastern, Aukštaitian group, i.e. "Highlanders". The same distinction survives to this day in Lithuanian dialects. At the mouth of the Neman River resided the Skalvian tribe, presumably part of the larger Prussian ethnic group. To the south of the middle reaches of the Neman and to the north of the Narew River, there was the territory of Sudovians, while to the east of Prussians and to the west of Lithuanians lived Yotvingians. Some peculiarities of the southernmost Dzūkian dialect of the Aukštaitian Lithuanian are usually ascribed to the influence of the tribal dialect of Yotvingians. They probably also played a similar role in the formation of the Belarussian language. Galindians, who lived to the South of Prussians, were in part assimilated by the ancestors of Poles and in part completely dissolved in the Migration Period of the 5th century.

Many regional names in the Baltic area preserve the names of the tribes listed above: Aukštaitija (Eastern Lithuania), Žemaitija or Samogitia (western Lithuania), the Curonian Spit (a sand-dune spit in the Baltic Sea, divided between the territories of Kaliningrad Oblast and Lithuania), Kurzeme or the historical Courland (western Latvia), the historical Livonia (northern Latvia and southern Estonia; Livonians were a Finno-Ugric tribe), Zemgale (southern Latvia), Latgale (eastern Latvia). Even Latvia itself got its name from the Latgalian tribe: *Latvija*. The meaning of this word is not clear, unlike the meaning of the name for Lithuania (*Lietuva*), which is formed from the name of a rivulet, *Lietava*, which in turn is derived from the Lithuanian word *líeti* "to pour". Similar names appear in Central Europe as well, most notably in the name of the river *Leitha* (Hungarian *Lajta*, Czech *Litava*) on the Austrian-Hungarian border, which historically divided the Austrian-Hungarian Empire into Cisleithania and Transleithania.

Around the year 1200, the Baltic tribes inhabited an area about three times as large as they do in the present. During the centuries, the largest territory was lost in the east, south and south-west; in the north and partly also north-west, on the other hand, the borders at that time lay further to the south and south-west than they are now. Older borders of the Baltic dialectic continuum can only be determined on the basis of toponymy. Vanagas (1980, 119) defined a conservative version: north – the northern border of Latvia and the towns of Pskov, Toropec, Zubcov, Kalinin; east – the towns
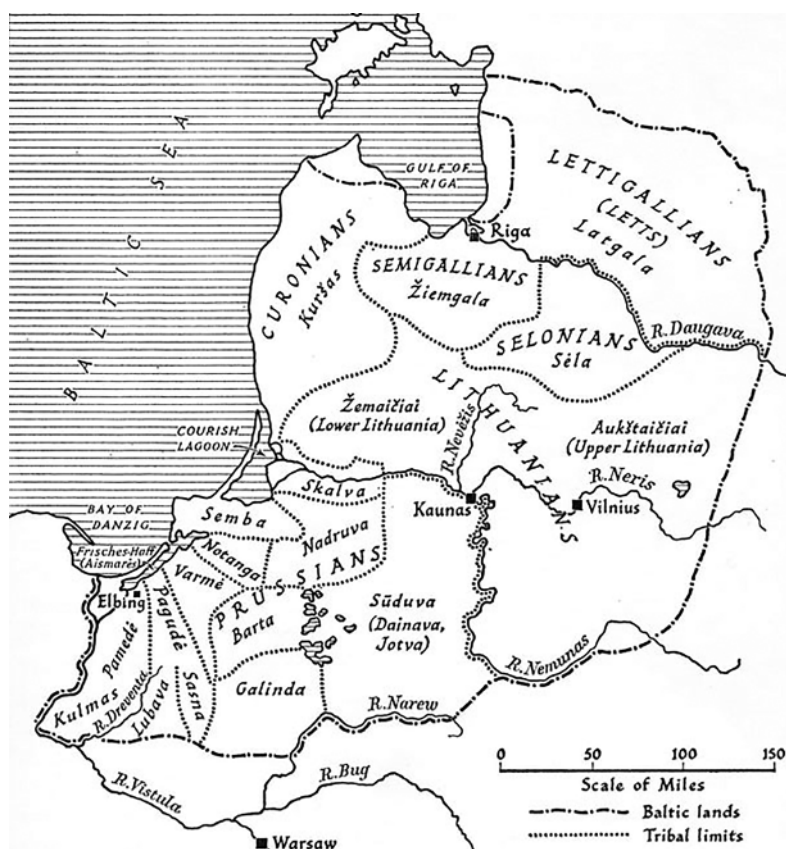
Baltic tribes and provinces around 1200 according to M. Gimbutas 1963, 23
See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltic_languages#/media/File:Baltic_Tribes_
c_1200.svg> – visited on June 2, 2021

Moscow, Kaluga, Orel, Kursk; south – the rivers Seym, Pripyat, Western
Bug; west – the Vistula River. Other Baltic scholars argue that the area in
which Baltic-type toponyms occur is much larger. The western border is
moved much farther, into the basin of the upper reaches of the Havel River
in south-eastern Mecklenburg (see Schall 1964, 1966; Toporov 1966a,
b). The eastern border, mapped in great detail in a series of studies by the
Russian scholar Toporov (1972, 1982, 1988, 1989, 1997a, b), reached to
the eastern banks of the upper reaches of the Volga River. The northern

border is defined by the shores of the Baltic Sea and the southern border of the Finno-Permic languages. If we accept the occurrence of Balt. place names, especially names of rivers, to the west of the Vistula River, only the southern border is left to define. There is an unspoken agreement as to its being identical with the mountain ranges on the southern border of Poland, although no explicit definition has ever appeared, not even in the latest studies (Orel 1997; Popławski 2001). However, Baltic place names, especially names of rivers (most notably Úpa, concordant with Lith. *upė* "river", Latvian *upe* id.; further *Brlenka* vs. Lithuanian *burlýnas* "thick mud", Latvian place-name *Burliņi*; *Cidlina* vs. Latvian *Ciduļ-upe*, Lithuanian *Kìdul-upis*; *Metuje* vs. Lithuanian *Medujà*; *Trutina*, today *Trotina* vs. Lithuanian *trúotas* "granite; whetstone, grindstone", Latvian *truõts* "whetstone, grindstone"), cross the Polish-Czech border and stand witness to the presence of a Baltic population in Eastern Bohemia before the arrival of the Slavs (Blažek 2003a, 2004b, 2006).

It is very difficult to date ethnic processes that took place in a time for which there are no written sources. Archaeological dating can be called upon to some extent – it is, nowadays, quite trustworthy thanks to dendrochronology – but no artefact can tell us anything about its maker's ethnicity or language unless they had left behind their signature as well. But not even a signature or a name present an unambiguous proof of the ethnicity. Gauls liked to use prestigious Roman names from the 1st century AD onward; the name of Maroboduus, the Marcomannic king, was apparently Celtic; and the name Attila, ascribed to the leader of the Huns, is possibly Germanic (there are other theories). The names used nowadays come from a variety of sources as well – in the English-speaking world, there are not only Germanic names used, but also names Celtic or Norman in origin, as well as Biblical, Greek, Roman and others. Archaeology, therefore, can date its finds of material culture but cannot discern who had used or made them.

This is an area where historical comparative linguistics can help. If it is presented with a representative sample of vocabulary, it can not only categorise a given language genetically into a higher taxonomy, but also determine a whole chronology of certain phenomena, namely e.g. to date the separation of hypothetical proto-languages. As archaeology uses the radiocarbon method to date fragments of originally organic material and genetics can pinpoint when two species began to differentiate, so linguistics can discern when two or more related languages began to arise from what had originally been one proto-language. This method was already invented in

mid-20th century by Morris Swadesh who named it glottochronology. Since then, his method has met with harsh critique rather than warm reception. However, several linguists have tried to revise it into a reliable method. Out of these attempts, the most successful results are yielded by the recalibrated glottochronology of Russian scholar Sergei Starostin. Its application and results are based on a detailed etymological analysis of test samples from the basic vocabulary of the languages that are studied.

Application of Starostin's modified glottochronology confirms the old but often disputed hypothesis that the closest relation to the Baltic languages are Slavic languages. The method dates their separation into the first half of the 14th century BC. Around 800 BC, a group of tribal dialects split from the Baltic continuum, eventually to become the Prussian language. Slavic languages, in contrast, divided as late as the 6th century AD. Around the year 600, the central Baltic dialects separated as well; eventually, they constituted predecessors of Lithuanian and Latvian languages. A cause and effect can be discerned in these events. An expansion of Slavic-speaking tribes to the northeast caused not only the assimilation of older Baltic population in the East as far as the upper reaches of the Volga River, but also most probably a different development in the north of the Baltic area that led to the formation of Latvian language.

The same method suggests that the northern neighbours of the Baltic languages, Balto-Finnic and Saami languages, separated around the year 1300 BC, i.e. about 2–3 generations later than Baltic and Slavic languages. It is, therefore, both attractive and logical to assume that this later separation resulted from an expansion of Baltic tribes to the north and northeast after the Balto-Slavic unity had fallen apart. The long-time proximity of Balts and Balto-Finns led to more than 200 Baltic loanwords in the vocabulary of Balto-Finnic languages, including the names of some gods and demons, mentioned in this encyclopaedia (Thomsen 1890; Blažek 2004a). Baltic loanwords in Saami and Mordvinic languages, originally spoken to the east of the Balts, count in tens (cf. Hofírková & Blažek 2011; Vaba 1983). Word borrowing in the opposite direction is much rarer. Most of it is limited to relatively recent Estonian or Livonian influence on Latvian, but some older archaic loans can be found as well: Lith. *laĩvas* "ship", Latv. *laĩva* "boat", cf. Finn. *laiva*, Est. *laev* "ship, large boat", Liv. *lääja* "boat".[2]

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[2]   Fraenkel I, 335.

Let us now leave aside the scholarly insights that historical linguistics and archaeology can give us about the ancient inhabitants of the eastern Baltic area, their neighbours and their mutual influences. Except for their immediate neighbours, the area remained until the High Middle Ages almost perfectly hidden from the rest of Europe. It is only briefly mentioned by historians and chroniclers, in the reports of merchants and Christian missionaries, but always only second-hand, on the say-so of other nations. For example, Roman historian Tacitus writes in his *Germania* at the end of the 1st century AD[3]:

"Upon the right of the Suevian Sea the Aestian nations reside, who use the same customs and attire with the Suevians; their language more resembles that of Britain. They worship the Mother of the Gods. As the characteristic of their national superstition, they wear the images of wild boars. This alone serves them for arms, this is the safeguard of all, and by this every worshipper of the goddess is secured even amidst his foes. Rare amongst them is the use of weapons of iron, but frequent that of clubs. In producing of grain and the other fruits of the earth, they labour with more assiduity and patience than is suitable to the usual laziness of Germans. Nay, they even search the deep, and of all the rest are the only people who gather *amber*. They call it *glasing*, and find it amongst the shallows and upon the very shore."[4] The name of the Aestyan people was in the Middle Ages used to designate the area of today's Estonia, but Tacitus was most probably describing the territory further to the South where Balts lived.

Another report about the eastern Baltic area comes from the 9th century. Its author was the Anglo-Saxon sailor Wulfstan. His information can be safely localised to the territory of Baltic Prussians[5]: "The Weissel

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[3] §45. *Ergo iam dextro Suebici maris litore **Aestiorum** gentes adluuntur, quibus ritus habitusque, lingua Britannicae propior. Matrem deum venerantur. insigne superstitionis formas aprorum gestant: id pro armis hominumque tutela securumdeae cultorem etiam inter hostes praestat. rarus ferri, frequens fustium usus. frumenta ceterosque fructus patientius quam pro solita Germanorum inertia laborant. sed etmare scrutantur, ac soli omnium sucinum, quod ipsi glesum vocant, inter vada atque in ipso litore legunt.*

[4] Transl. Thomas Gordon (1910) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2995/2995–h/2995–h.htm>.

[5] *þæt Witland belimpeð to **Estum**; seo Wisle lið út of Weonodlande, lið in Estmere; se Estmere is huru fiftene mila brád. Þonne cymeð Ilfing eastan in Estmere of ðæm mere ðe Truso standeð in staðe, cumað út samod in Estmere,*

is a very large river, and near it lie Witland and Weonodland. Witland belongs to the people of Eastland; and out of Weonodland flows the river Weissel, which empties itself afterwards into Estmere [i.e. today's Pol. *Zalew Wiślany*, Germ. *Frische Haff*, Lith. *Aismarės*]. This lake, called Estmere, is about fifteen miles broad. Then runs the Ilfing east (of the Weissel) into Estmere, from that lake on the banks of which stands Truso. These two rivers come out together into Estmere, the Ilfing east from Eastland, and the Weissel south from Weonodland. Then the Weissel deprives the Ilfing of its name, and, flowing from the west part of the lake, at length empties itself northward into the sea, whence this point is called the Weissel-mouth. This country called Eastland is very extensive, and there are in it many towns, and in every town is a king. There is a great quantity of honey and fish; and even the king and the richest men drink mare's milk, whilst the poor and the slaves drink mead. There is a vast deal of war and contention amongst the different tribes of this nation. There is no ale brewed amongst the Estonians, but they have mead in profusion."

Because the Baltic tribes were not christianised, they had attracted the attention and captured the imagination of the Christian part of Europe since the 9th century AD. Gradually, Christian missionaries started to head there. One of the first to do so was a Czech man, St. Adalbert (Vojtěch in Czech), the former bishop of Prague († 997), known for his martyrdom

Ilfing eastan of Estlande, Wisle suðan of Winodlande. Þonne benimð Wisle Ilfing hire naman, ligeð of þæm mere west norð on sǽ; for ðy hit man hæt Wislemuða. Þæt **Estland** *is swyðe mycel, þær bið swyðe manig burh, on ælcere byrig bið cyningc. þær bið swyðe mycel hunig fiscnað; se cyning þa ricostan men drincað myran meolc, þa únspedigan þa þéowan drincað medo. Þær bið swyðe mycel gewinn betweonan him. Ne bið ðær nænig ealo gebrowen mid* **Estum**, *ac þær bið médo genóh.* The description of Wulfstan's sea journey from Heddeby in Jutland to the Pruss. Truso was added to the Anglo-Saxon translation of **Boc þe man Orosius nemned** 'A Book Called Orosius', the work *Historia adversum paganos* by the Hispanic author Paulus Orosius, written around the year 417 AD. The translation was made in the years 888–893/897 by the famous Anglo-Saxon king Alfred the Great. The English translation here used comes from the book *The New Navigation and Discovery of the Kingdom of Muscovy* etc., by Richard Hakluyt, available online through Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4076/pg4076.txt> Visited on June 2, 2021. (See also Blažek, Hofírková, Kovář 2011, 197–198).

as, according to legend, he violated Prussian tribal laws. The missionaries were, however, only successful with individuals; and so, since the end of the 12ᵗʰ century, crusades were waged against the territory, benedicted by the pope, to baptise the locals by force. At that time, there already existed well-organised tribal princedoms in the area; Lithuania managed to resist the crusaders for 200 years. Later on, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania emerged, which was still expanding southeast at the time of the Hundred Years' War. It was not only the largest state in Europe at the time, but also the last European pagan country. Its christianisation only happened "from within" in the second half of the 14ᵗʰ century, forwarded by the Grand Duke Jogaila (the founder of the Jagiellonian dynasty, which also ruled in Poland and for a time in the Czech lands and Hungary as well). This era, when the journey of Hieronymus of Prague to Lithuania also took place, could have provided excellent resources on Lithuanian pagan religion and its mythology, but unfortunately only scarce written sources have been preserved. The later fate of Lithuania was as follows: It existed as an independent Grand Duchy, known by its tolerant policy towards its conquered provinces in today's Poland, Belarus and Ukraine. The Grand Duchy lasted till the 16ᵗʰ century when it entered a closer union with the Kingdom of Poland in the Union of Lublin. This large state, known by the saying "every other Pole is a *bojar* [6]", suffered from its own freedoms in the 18ᵗʰ century: there were too many noblemen with too many liberties (*liber vetum)* in state management, including the election of the ruler. In May 1791, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth even adopted the first democratic constitution in Europe, but its existence was ephemeral – several months later the internally weak state fell prey to the Second Partition of Poland. At the end of the 18ᵗʰ century, the remaining territory was divided between Prussia and Russia in the Third Partition; Lithuania fell to the tsar.

Let us now return to the Prussians and the ancestors of today's Latvians. Unlike Lithuania, their territory was conquered by the crusaders and christianised by force during the 13ᵗʰ century. The Czech king Přemysl Otakar II. took part in two crusades in the years 1254–1255 and 1267–1268; he co-founded the town of Regiomontanum (Cz. Královec, Germ. Königsberg, since 1945 it is the Russian Kaliningrad). The territory was then held by religious orders, namely Livonian Brothers of the Sword and Teu-

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[6]   Polish nobleman.

tonic Knights. Their language was Latin, although the mother tongues of most crusaders were various German dialects. This reflected on many areas. For example, chroniclers wrote all Old Prussian and Latvian words (including names of deities) using the German orthography of the time. Many German words worked their way into Old Prussian and Latvian. Notably, the only preserved Prussian dictionary is Prussian-German. Active contacts with the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and the fact that many Prussian and Latvian towns belonged to the confederation of trade towns known as *Hansa* (Hanseatic League) probably helped in transforming these two originally church states into Lutheran princedoms. The city of Riga was the first territory outside today's Germany to adopt Lutheranism. But from this time on, the fates of Prussia (this name, however, involved many territories), ruled by the increasingly powerful dynasty of Hohenzollern, originally Margraves of Brandenburg, and the territory of what is today Latvia began to differ. In short: Prussia was a Protestant princedom until World War I.; in 1701 it became a kingdom with German as its official language. The descendants of Prussian tribes lived there as serfs and their language gradually died out. In the 18th century, those who had the chance to study turned German and the rest adopted the language of Lithuanian immigrants. That is why the north-eastern part of Prussia came to be known as Lithuania Minor. That is also why the first work of Lithuanian fiction was created on Prussian territory – it was the poem *The Seasons* by Prussian-born pastor Kristijonas Donelaitis whose mother tongue was Lithuanian. The rulers of Prussia endorsed education and regarded the publishing of books in their subjects' mother tongue quite benevolently; Königsberg (Lith. Karaliaučius) therefore became an important centre of culture for the Baltic nations as well. For example, the book *Deliciae Prussicae oder Preussische Schaubühne* by Matthaeus Praetorius, the most comprehensive source of information on Baltic mythology, as well as many works of Lithuanian revivalists who could not publish in Lithuania, then part of the tsarist Russia, were published in the city. Thus, the occupation of *knygnešys* arose – "a books carrier", actually a smuggler who ran an even greater risk than usual by adding prohibited books to his cargo. This is also the reason why so many books in our list of sources were published in Königsberg.

In contrast, the territory of today's Latvia divided and re-united several times. At the end of the 16th century, it divided into Livonia (North), Latgale (East) and Courland (South and West) as a result of the Livonian War with the Tsardom of Muscovy. All three lands fell to the Polish-Lith-

uanian Commonwealth, but only Latgale was directly connected to it. (That is one of the reasons why Latgale is, unlike the rest of Latvia, even nowadays profoundly Catholic.) Livonia and Courland remained Protestant princedoms as fiefdoms of the Polish-Lithuanian state. Courland enjoyed an era of prosperity in the 17th century – manufactories were founded, the spiritual education of the subjects was attended to, villages were granted the status of towns and the princedom even bought overseas colonies – the St. Andrews Island on the West African coast and Tobago in the Caribbean. In the 18th century, Courland maintained an intense relation with Russia – the Duke Ernst Johann von Bühren (Biron) was very influential at the imperial court and had two grand palaces in the style of the Winter Palace in Petersburg built. His son, Peter von Biron, was an enlightened ruler who founded the first grammar school for his subjects of Latvian origin in the capital of Jelgava (Mitau). However, after the Third Partition of Poland (1795), Courland was seized by Russia which made it into one of its governorates.

Livonia, on the other hand, fell to Sweden right at the beginning of the 17th century, and it also experienced its "golden years" in some ways – the Swedish government was fervently Lutheran: it supported translations of the Bible, catechism and church hymns into Latvian, founded parish schools, while being on a watchout for manifestations of pagan behaviour. However, as stated in the entry → werewolf, hunts for → witches and werewolves were far less widespread and cruel in the Baltic countries than they were in Western and Central Europe. We owe many things to the Swedish rule; from the mythological point of view, it particularly concerns interesting reports of manifestations of paganism, where they were observed and what was their character. But in the year 1721, Sweden once and for all lost the Great Northern War (1700–1721) and Livonia fell to Russia. The same fate then followed for Courland and Latgale in the last Partition of Poland 70 years later.

Thus, in the 19th century, both Lithuanians and Latvians found themselves under Russian rule, gradually becoming aware of their national identity. The tsarist government did not pay much attention to Lithuania and in Latvia it gave free rein to the local German-speaking nobility. National revival in both countries is associated with a foreign city: for Lithuania, it was Königsberg, where the first Lithuanian-written magazines and Lithuanian folk songs etc. were printed and whence they were smuggled into Lithuania. The first work of Lithuanian fiction was also

created near Königsberg. For Latvia, the foreign cities were the Esto-
nian city of Tartu (Dorpat) and Petersburg in Russia, where the revival-
ists often studied, held their meetings and supported one another in their
persuasion. Naturally, Lithuanian and Latvian mythology, especially folk
songs and tales, became one of the cornerstones of national identity.

This had two kinds of effect. The first one is very useful for con-
temporary mythologists: The revivalists diligently collected oral litera-
ture and their collections still serve as some of the fundamental and most
trustworthy sources of information on Baltic mythology. The other kind
of effect is confusing. In their attempts to prove that the Baltic coun-
tries had had a great past, the revivalists created elaborate pantheons of
"Pan-Baltic" deities, based on the Ancient Greek model. They mixed
together indiscriminately conceptions of Prussian, Lithuanian and Lat-
vian deities, and they distorted their names and created false etymology
for them. Moreover, these works did not distinguish between reliable and
unreliable resources; for example, the lists of objects of Latvian pagan
faith were contaminated with Prussian figures, taken from the Prussian
chronicler Simon Grunau. Many mythologists nowadays doubt the exist-
ence of these conceptions (e.g. the Pan-Baltic Prussian high priest *Kriwe*,
Krīvs in a lettonised version). Surprisingly, even the Polish historian Teo-
dor Narbutt created a similar pantheon, unquestioningly influenced by the
Lithuanian collector A. L. Jucevičius whom most mythologists nowadays
suspect of colouring up and adding to the oral literature he had collected.
Narbutt himself completed the pantheon with deities of his own inven-
tion. Nonetheless, the works of both "researchers" gained such popular-
ity that Lithuanians still consider some of the deities they created to be
"old Lithuanian deities" and give their names to their children. The best
known of these we therefore dedicate separate entries to, marking them
as a creation of T. Narbutt. Nowadays, mythologists are convinced that a)
deities common to all Baltic tribes were very few; b) their gods had no
particularly organised hierarchy.

Beside Lithuanian and Latvian revivalists, Baltic mythology also
attracted the interest of many scholars and writers from other countries
in the 19th century. Foremost, these were German writers and scholars.
German interest in the Baltic countries went back hundreds of years.
Prussia, the hegemon of the German unification that culminated in 1871,
was directly neighbouring with Lithuanian-speaking territories, and in the
area of East Prussia, the Prussian language had been a living language
only seven generations before the unification (till the end of the 17th cen-

tury). Even Goethe or Herder took interest in Lithuanian songs, but here it is necessary to emphasise the work of Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831–1880), the librarian of the town library in Gdańsk (then the German Danzig), who collected and analysed the most important historical resources on Baltic mythology – relevant passages from chronicles, secular documents and church protocols – in his book *Letto-Preussische Götterlehre*. He worked on the book till the end of his – unfortunately short – life. The book was finally published in 1934 in Rīga and immediately became the cornerstone for the study of Baltic mythology; this book is no exception (mark the frequency of quoted source abbreviation LPG).

However, the study of Baltic mythology is made drastically difficult by the absence of sufficiently long texts of mythological content. Moreover, so far it has only been possible to work with limited secondary sources or with folklore material. An apt way to describe the situation is the Latvian mythologist Aldis Pūtelis's sigh: "If only we had a time machine…" The study of Baltic mythology would be best likened to archaeological investigations, or to a detective story without a detective to tell you who the culprit is at the end. The information is so grievously fragmented that describing most of the deities is similar to finding a single word and having to deduce the whole sentence. And not a single one of these pieces of information comes directly from a person who had grown up in this faith and still believed in it. Everything was written down either by people who did not believe in this mythology and wanted to exterminate it, and therefore described it as darker than it truly was; or by collectors who recorded oral tradition and received material by mail from other people. Very often, such texts were adapted so that it would be "fit for an educated gentleman," as the peasants often perceived the folklore collectors. It is no wonder, then, that a Baltic mythologist wishes to have a time machine to travel into 2nd century AD or whereabouts and to hear the myths people told and see the ways they sacrificed to their gods. So do not be surprised, dear readers, by the abundance of words such as "probably", "possibly", "apparently" in our encyclopaedia…

In spite of these problems, it is possible to put the individual pieces of information together into an interesting mosaic that shows at least a partial picture of Baltic mythology. It is a picture in which both Indo-European and Fenno-Ugric elements blend. No long sagas have been preserved, although it is possible that they existed earlier but nobody recorded them. Particularly in comparison to Nordic or Vedic mythology, elements of violence and fight play a much less significant part in Baltic

mythology. With the Balts, we usually find little stories about individual characters. These stories are usually brief but the way they are told betrays a personal relation to all concerned characters. They are not great epics, and yet they will capture your imagination with unusual themes. Among the typical motifs are e.g. the activities of the supreme god → Dievas or the sky wedding (→ sky inhabitants, wedding) of the Sun and the Moon. Elsewhere, the god of thunder → Perkūnas (Latv. Pērkons) pursues → Velnias (→ velinas). We can find a cult of agricultural deities, the goddess of destiny and women in childbed → Laima, the goblin → *áit(i)varas* (Latv. pūķis or → vilce), the souls → vėlės (Latv. veļi) and → werewolves.

<div align="center">* * *</div>

If the songs with mythological motifs in this book capture your interest, you can search online for musical groups that sing these songs. These include the Lithuanian groups VISI, Žalvarinis, Atalyja, Kūlgrinda, Sedula, Spanxti, Donis + Rasa Serra and the Latvian groups Iļģi, Rasa, Auļi, Skandinieki, Laimas muzykanti, Trejasmens, Auri, Grodi, Teiksma, Skyforger and Suitu sievas.

Acknowledgement

Lexicon of baltic mythology

áit(i)varas, also **áičvaras, éit(i)varas**, in some dialects merely **áitas**; **óitas** in the East of Lithuania – Lith. "elf, flying spectre, goblin, paper kite, mare, pony-tail" (Latv. → *pūķis)*. Á.'s various forms and activities bear some level of resemblance to all of these words. The first mention of his name can be found in the first printed Lithuanian catechism, published by Martin Mosvidius (Lithuanian Martynas Mažvydas) in 1547. He mentions not only the name Aithwars[1] but also its Latin variant Eithuarus.[2] Á. was a household spirit. According to Lithuanian and Prussian tales, he usually lived at a farm and served the landlord. Sometimes, there were two á.s in one household. Á. is roughly an analogy to the English *hob* and the Czech *plivník*. He can fly, he can spit fire and his duty is to provide the landlord with money, grain, flour, smoked meat and dairy products, stolen from other farmers. However, the landlord's life was tied to á. forever: he had to feed him regularly and show him respect. If he did not, á. set his house on fire. In some Lithuanian tales, á. cooperates with the devil and so his landlord's soul goes to hell after death. Matthaeus Praetorius, a 17th century Prussian priest, says in his chronicle *Deliciae Prussicae* that owners of á.s are disliked by other villagers. We can see that á. is a being that ensures riches at the cost of losing one's friends or even one's soul. But he is also a being with many interesting traits; so, let us explore him more closely. To obtain á. was one's voluntary decision. There were many ways to do so: a) one could buy him in Rīga, Königsberg or Klaipėda from a "little German chap" (that was one of the forms the devil liked to take on; see →Velinas), from a "roaming Hungarian" or from a sorcerer; b) hatch him from an egg laid by a 3–, 7–, 9–, 12– or even 100–year-old rooster. The hatching is not easy: in most of the tales it must be done by carrying the egg in one's armpit around the clock, but it can also be hatched by a rooster, a cat or an old woman, with the egg

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[1] *Aithwars ir deiwes to negal padariti* (i.e. Aitvaras and Deives cannot do that).

[2] *Qui ad malas artes adjiciunt animum, Eithuaros et Caucos Deos profitentur suos.* (They make it known to their gods Eithuaros and Caucos, who to evil deeds his soul commits.)

lying in a mug filled with fine down. It is also possible to c) find á. d) catch á. – on seeing a flying á. one must tie a knot on one's handkerchief or a rosary, alternately to thrust one's knife into the ground; e) to allure á., usually with the help of a meal put on a roof ridge together with a written note asking á. to bring a specific thing to a specific place. In some cases, á. f) offers his services by bringing a heap of coal, peas or something similar, of low value, to the house at night. If the landlord accepts it, á. starts bringing more valuable things. The tales pay great attention to á.'s appearance. It is characteristic of á. to change his form completely according to the circumstances: he takes on certain forms when being bought, a different form when letting himself get found, and yet another form when at home. Some sources even claim that a flying á.'s appearance changes in accordance with the cargo he is carrying. Let us now describe his appearance in individual situations. Á. is usually bought in the form of a piece of coal or resin. It is found as a curry-comb or a rope for tying horses' legs. At home, he usually takes on the form of a black animal: a tomcat, rooster, crow or a magpie. Sometimes also the appearance of the "little German chap" – then he is called Velnias, "the devil", in the story. A flying á. is most interesting and his appearance varies the most. Frequently, he is of longish shape, of black or red colour, glowing, sparkling, sometimes even burning, with the front part broader than the rear part. The tales often mention that he moves like a crawling snake: he contracts and stretches himself, or he wriggles. "… and an áitvaras flew out of the barn over the roof ridge, looking like a black poker, only his head was red, he was contracting and again stretching himself, and so he flew away and disappeared".[3] The flying á. is most often compared to a poker; in many cases also to a stake around which hay stacks were piled on meadows, to a snake, a sleeve, a ribbon or a log. In some tales, he is also compared to a flying worm or to a bird with fire sparkling from under his wings. In one tale, he is described as a "light horrible to look at", and in another, quite mysteriously, as a "sort of a creature, neither a tomcat, nor a bird, more similar to a fish actually, longish and wriggling like an adder".[4] When á. is not carrying anything, he is light with a dark tail, white or light red; while bringing food to his master, he is blue, dark red

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[3]   *… iš tokios klėties išlėkęs aitvaras per šelmenį, toks kaip pagaikštis juodas, tik galva raudona, ir driūkai driūkai taip driūkuodamas nulėkęs ir prapuolęs.*

[4]   *kažin koks padaras, nei katinas nei paukštis, labiau panašus į žuvį, pailgas ir vingiuojasi kaip gyvatė.*

or black. Some tales mention his colour varying according to the cargo: an á. carrying money is red, while an á. bringing grain is blue, black or yellow. Having brought the cargo to the denoted spot, he "throws it up". To keep á. satisfied and to make him serve well, one must feed him regularly with fried eggs (in Aukšaitija, i.e. eastern Lithuania) or with gruel (in Žemaitija, i.e. western Lithuania). In some tales, á. demands very specific meals, e.g. herring heads or nearly hatched eggs. Á. is easy to offend, if he is not fed regularly, or when he gets to eat a meal that has already been tasted by someone, or when someone utters the name of God in front of him, when someone sprinkles him with holy water, or when someone eats his meal and then uses his plate as a toilet. The last mentioned offence is often committed by the farm's grooms who especially dislike á. This is caused by á. bringing so much grain that they have much more work to do than before. Grooms sometimes even beat á. These are also ways of getting rid of á., but definitely not very safe ones, as the offended á. simply leaves the house in some cases, but in most, he sets it on fire before leaving.

Á. is a popular being amongst Lithuanian mythologists. His association with several animals (rooster, snake, horse) and elements (fire, air) has inspired many theories of his connection with various mythological phenomena, both Lithuanian and Indo-European. Let us look at M. Gimbutienė (who also used the name M. Gimbutas) first: she considers á. to be a servant of the goddess of destiny → Laima, and given his association with eggs and birds, she connects him with her reconstructed Bird Goddess (Deivė-Paukštė). N. Vėlius is of the opinion that his popularity among peasants was caused by the absence of any other household spirit in Lithuania (unlike Latvia, where → Mājas kungs was known), making á. a being fulfilling all household spirits' functions. Vėlius agrees with the Latv. mythologist L. Adamovičs who claims that á. used to be a household spirit who protected the house and whose mere residence in it made it prosperous. Later, partly because of the influence of Christianity, his image changed to more negative, for his presence was beneficial to a very limited number of people. Vėlius focuses on his form of a rope for tying horses' legs and of a curry-comb. He discovered some Lithuanian tales from the area of today's Belarus mentioning an á. found in the form of two grains grown together. Vėlius deduces from this association with horses and double objects that the cult of á. developed from the Indo-European twin cult (cf. Vedic Aśvins, Greek Dioskuros and Latv. → Dieva dēli). Vėlius supports this hypothesis with a number of reasons: e.g. Indo-Eu-

ropean twins are associated with horses too, they were asked by people
to provide abundance of food, one of them hatched from an egg, and they
made themselves visible to people and sacrifices were brought to them
just before dawn and during sunset – that is, exactly at the times when
also á. is fed and makes himself visible. Hence, Vėlius' etymology of the
word á.: the first component can be associated with Lith. *aitrà* "heat",
while the second one with Lith. *vãras* "cross-bar" – and it was a cross-
bar that symbolized the mythical twins with the Indo-European nations.
It connected the top parts of two wooden poles that the twins used to lit
a fire. A. J. Greimas, however, puts á. in opposition to the horse. Also, he
notes that an etiological myth exists parallel to the tales about á. In this
myth, á. is pursued by the thunder god → Perkūnas and as a result of this
chase, a wind rises to form the landscape. For Greimas then, á. is one of
the oldest Baltic gods and an adversary of Perkūnas. Similarly to Velnias,
he loses to Perkūnas in the end and thus helps create the present world
order. Other etymologists connect the first component with the word *aeteis*
"parts" from the language of Oscans, the inhabitants of ancient southern
Italy, and with Greek αἶσα "part; destiny" < **aiti̯a*. The second compo-
nent could then be associated with Lith. *vãras* "force; violence", derived
from *varýti* "to propel, to drive", Latv. *vert* "to run". Cf. Russ. *vor* "thief".
That would make á. a being that enforces the destiny. The Polish Bal-
tic scholar Smoczyński considered the possibility that the original form
was **ati-varas* – a prefixed verb derivate of *ati-varýti* "to chase away".
However, his solution relies on the irregular change of **ati-* to *⁺aiti-* that
has no analogy in any of the forms using this prefix. The etymologies pro-
posed so far, strangely enough, do not take the initial *e-* into account, even
though it is contained in the Latin form *Eithuarus* in the oldest mention
of the being and also in some dialectal variants of the name. The com-
posite **eiti-varas* or **eiti-tvaras* presents a promising explanation. It is
composed of Lith. *eitìs*, more frequently prefixed: *ateitìs* "future; the side
someone comes from", with a different prefix *išeitìs* "way out, solution";
plus *vãras* "force; violence". Then, the compound word **eiti-varas* could
have denoted a being that uses violence slyly, attacking not face to face,
but from the side. Alternatively, we could consider the composite **eiti-
tvaras*, where the second component – *tvaras* – is known from e.g. the
word *sùtvaras* "creator; creation" (cf. the cattle deity *Sotwaros* by Stryj-
kowski), which is derived from the prefixed verb *sutvérti* "to create". The
second component, then, would have a meaning similar to the Czech *tvor*
"creature", *stvůra* "monster" or *stvoření* "creation"– all of these words

have numerous parallels in other Slavic languages, and those parallels are related to the Lith. words. On the Lithuanian shores of the Baltic sea and in northern Lithuania, á. was called *pūkys*; in Latvia, *pūķis* (from German *Puck* "hob") or → vilce. Unlike Lithuanian mythologists, the Latvian ones consider the pūķis to be a relatively new fairy-tale character rather than an ancient part of the Baltic mythology. It is possible that Latvians borrowed this household spirit from the Germans. The Latvian pūķis is quite similar to the Lith. á., though there are some differences between them. For example, the Latvian pūķis can be bought in Rīga of course, and apart from taking on the forms mentioned with á., he also lets himself be bought in the form of a mole. Some Latvian tales claim that a flying pūķis has all the colours of the rainbow. It is said in Latvia that one can obtain pūķis from the devil. One must give him several coins and the devil throws them into a fire. Then, one must endure the sight of the coins melting in the fire and the image in one's head of one's soul burning in hell like the coins. Having brought pūķis home, the landlord must say to his wife: "Devil in your heart, devil in mine, too!" One tale tells a story of a farmer who did not take the incantation seriously and having come home with pūķis, he said to his wife: "Devil in your buttocks, devil in mine, too!" And when he woke up the next morning, pūķis was gone and the whole entrance room was full of horse droppings.

Bibl.: BRMŠ II, 184, 186 > Mosv; BRMŠ III, 256, 258–260 > Prae; DLKŽ 6, 915; Fraenkel I, 4; II, 1152; 1149–1150; Gimbutienė 2002, 52–55; Greimas 2005, 86–122; Kregždys 2018a; LPG 280, LPG 536, 543, 330, 339; ME III, 446, IV, 542; Smoczyński 2007, 5, 144, 698 & 2018, 9; Vėlius 1977, 130–181.

Alabatis – Lith. deity, mentioned by Jan Łasicki in his book *De Diis Samagitarum Caeteromque Sarmatarum et falsorum Christianorum. Item de Religione Armeniorum* (abbreviated as "*De Diis* 1580" from now on in this book) which was probably finished by 1580 but was not published until 1615: "Alabatis, called to help by flax hacklers."[5] At the end of the 19th century, Mierzyński proposed the emendation *a la batis* "oh father", supported by these two verses from a folk song:

Ey batti, batti, batuže mano,   Hey father, father, my daddy,
Perlejsk man ta mergyta.   let me have the girl.

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[5]   *Alabathis, quem linum pexuri in auxilium vocant.*

However, it is a more promising theory to identify the first part of the name with Lith. *ãlas* "bald; exhausted"; that, combined with Lith. *bàtis* "friend, fellow; father", could have denoted one of the phases of flax harvesting ("the bald fellow"?). When we realize that flax harvesting consisted of several phases and one of them was flax retting we can speculate that the name of this deity is actually the corrupt sentence *alė(k)*[6] *bàti* "stand under water, friend", consisting of the words *aléti,-éju* "to stand under water" and *bàtis* "friend, fellow; father".

Bibl.: Kurschat I, 27, 279; LKŽ I, 91; LPG 357, 393; Smoczyński 2018, 17.

Algis – Lith. 'messenger of gods'(?). Information about this Žemaitian (Samogitian; Western Lithuanian) deity can be found in J. Łasicki, *De Diis* 1580: *Algis angelus est summorum deorum* "Algis is the messenger of the highest gods". S. Stanevičius interpreted this theonym as the Lith. word *algis* "groom; help hired at an agreed price". We cannot be sure that this word actually existed, though, because it is not listed in any Lithuanian dictionary. German mythologist W. Mannhardt proposes a different interpretation: Knowing that the word denotes a spokesman of gods, we can assume that the name is a *nomen agentis* derived from Lith. *algti* "to call up", *algóti* "to say, call, call by name". A. would then be a middleman called by people when they needed help of the major gods. This theory is supported by a number of scholars, e.g. V. Jackevičius, J. Jurginis and R. Balsys. The latter adds that in Algis' name "there might be some connection to the Lithuanian custom of shouting and making noise during both family and calendar festivals. So far, this custom has been explained as a reliable way of chasing away evil spirits. We can speculate, though, that dangerous spirits were neutralized by calling up [Lith. *algóti*] protective gods".

Bibl.: Fraenkel I, 7; LPG 356, 375; RB 384–385; RB 384 > Stanevičius 1967, 297; Smoczyński 2018, 18.

analogical magic – a type of magic that achieves the desired result by imitation. Usually, that means an activity that is visually or symbolically similar to the activity that needs to be done but cannot be carried out by a human. For example, many Indo-European nations would sow their grain when the moon was waxing. During this period, the moon gradually grows

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6   Imperative forms without -*k* ending do exist in some Lithuanian dialects. See
     Zinkevičius, Z.: *Lietuvių dialektologija*, Vilnius: Mintis 1966, 370–373.

into a full moon, and there was a belief that this would ensure good growth of the grain. A. m. also denotes the belief that certain two objects are related by similarity of appearance or name, and therefore one of them must be treated in a certain way because this treatment automatically influences the other object. As documented by collected folk beliefs (or, as the collections'authors sometimes call them, "superstitions") and historical sources, the Baltic nations were no exception when it came to usage of a.m. They not only believed that it was used by witches and wizards to harm people, but they used it in everyday life, too. For example, Latvians believed that on the day of the Holy Cross it is not advisable to plough your field if you do not want it destroyed by hail. This sounds illogical to non-Latvian ears but it makes sense once you realize that the Latvian word for the "cross" is *krusts* and the one for "hail" *krusa*. Let us look at some more beliefs: Both Lithuanians and Latvians believed that cows will give more milk if they graze on a meadow where dandelions grow. This belief is inspired by the fact that Lith. *piẽnė* and Lat. *pienene* "dandelion" are similar to Lith. *píenas* and Lat. *piens* "milk". Latvian parents who wanted their little daughter to grow up to be as slender as a willow would hang her crib on a willow tree[7] whenever they went out to work in the field in summer. The oak and the birch were symbols of healthy men, and therefore when a Latvian woman cut birch branches, she was careful to leave the upper part of the tree untouched:

Smuidru griezu bērza rīksti,	Thin wand I cut from a birch
Kupl'atstāju virsunīti,	But the top I left dense;
Lai aug mans arājiņš	May my plougher grow up
Sprogainiem matiņiem.	To have curly hair. (LD 10711)

Water symbolised tears in a.m., and so witches would pour or sprinkle water around to cause sorrow. But a.m. was also used to cure. There is a Prussian record of the trial against Kotryna Gailiuvienė who was accused of witchcraft in 1560: "She voluntarily admitted to having helped and cured blind people. And that she always did in this manner – she took a piece of hazel or birch bark torn by wind from a fence, she laid it on the blind man's eyes and spoke so: 'Thou, eternal Lord, like the wind blows or tears bark from a fence, please tear the web from the eyes of this man.'" Bibl.: NarkGail; PŠ 14, 142, 214, 216, 223.

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[7]   Willow trees in Latvia often grew near houses or in gardens.