

BALTIC MYTHOLOGICAL PARKS OF LITHUANIA

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to discuss the (re)presentation of gods and mythological creatures of the Baltic mythological parks in Lithuania. The term “Baltic mythological park” denotes a relatively new phenomenon of the 20th-21st century: the period of their creation can be approximately dated to the years 1977-2015, and the process is still ongoing. An interesting and much-needed area for further research could be the analysis and comparison of the intentions and circumstances of the establishment of the parks, while in the present paper the main focus is on the (re)presentation of the parks and sculptures inside them. Based on the fieldwork data collected in 2021-2022, it can be claimed that the forms of representation are mostly chosen by interpreting freely. Wood is the most commonly used material, while stone and metal are used less often. Not only the recreational but also the educational purpose of the places is often emphasized.

Keywords: ethnology, mythological parks, Baltic, sculpture.

INTRODUCTION

The newly introduced term “Baltic mythological parks” refers exclusively to objects complying with the definition of the word “park” that are in line with the topic of Baltic mythology in the research, i.e., they are characterized by a specific layout and thematic artistic design (usually, a sculpture or natural objects given meaning). The study also encompasses mythological educational theme trails and hills that meet the characteristics discussed above. The Baltic mythological parks under investigation are usually installed not only for recreation or entertainment, but also educational purposes.

It should be noted that, when it comes to the theme, the term “Baltic mythology” is used to refer to a category (and belonging to it) rather than in a general sense, i.e. the theme of specific parks may represent the mythology of only one particular nation such as Lithuania rather than the mythology of all Baltic nations. However, a note shall be made that there are some examples among the parks included in the study, where the concepts of Baltic mythology and ethnic belonging to the Balts are generalised. The most obvious example is the Park of Baltic Mythology in Sausdravai, Kretinga region. The founder Voldemaras Reinikis came up with an idea to establish a place where one could get acquainted with the mythological worldview of all Baltic tribes.

This term defines a relatively new phenomenon of the 20th–21st century: the period of creation of these parks can be approximately dated to the years 1977–2015, and the process is still ongoing. As the number of Baltic mythological theme parks is growing in Lithuania, there is a need to not only define this type of a park but also analyse the newly emerged phenomenon. As it has not yet received the attention of researchers, except for a small review study of Rimantas Balsys, in which the author briefly presents the six largest objects of the mythological theme parks in Lithuania (Balsys 2017). Also, some of the mythological parks are mentioned in the large study dedicated to the classification of Lithuanian woodcarving by Vytautas Tumėnas, where the representation and dissemination of sculpture parks/ensembles and their objects in the online space are discussed (Tumėnas 2019a, b).

The aim of the research is to analyse and discuss the (re)presentation of gods and mythological creatures of the Baltic mythological parks in Lithuania, assessing the form and material of the sculptures, as well as the representational solutions of the parks.

The main question raised in the paper is what determines the choices of (re)presentation of gods and mythological creatures in the Baltic mythological parks in Lithuania.

The following tasks are set to achieve the aim:

- To discuss the issues of tradition and novelty of representing gods;
- To define the period of creation of the Baltic mythological parks in Lithuania;
- To assess the material and form choices of the authors of sculptures representing gods and mythological creatures in the studied parks;
- To discuss the presentation methods of these Baltic mythological parks.

Although all the parks of the research are presented in the paper, only two of them are used to examine the proposed questions: the Park of Baltic Mythology and the Mythological Trail of Šventa. These parks are chosen for

their unique characteristics that allow different regularities to be identified in the research.

The main source material of this work was gathered during the field studies that were conducted in the Baltic mythological parks in Lithuania in 2021–2022. The records of interviews and their transcriptions that are used in this paper are archived in the Folklore Archives' database of Klaipėda University with the assigned archival number KUTR 300–303. In the research, observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews necessary for surveying well-informed respondents were employed for gathering empirical material. Other important methods include mapping and photography, aimed at gathering visual empirical material, as well as the methods of visual material analysis. When analysing the collected material, the analytical descriptive method, interpretation, the typological method, and the comparative method were used. The interdisciplinary study encompasses the subjects of ethnology, history, mythology, and local lore studies.

ARE THE SCULPTURES OF GODS IN THE MODERN BALTIC MYTHOLOGICAL PARKS IN LITHUANIA A CONTINUATION OF AN EXISTING TRADITION OF REPRESENTING GODS, OR IS A NEW PHENOMENON BEING CREATED?

As regards the representation of gods in the current times, one should first of all pay attention to the past and the question whether we can claim that the tradition of god representation and idol building existed in the times of the ancient Baltic religion. The problem raised is not new, as it goes back to the time of Matas Pretorius who talked about the Prussian Romuva shrine and has been noticed by scientists from various fields more than once (Pretorijus 2006; Narbutas 1998; Kraszewski 1860; Krzywicki 1906; Kšivickis 1928; Brensztejn 1906; Brückner 1904; Klimas 1919; Basanavičius 1913; Basanavičius 1970; Galaunė 1930; Mierzyński 1892; Mierzyński 1896; Mierzyński 1900; Būga 1958; Balys 1929; Jurginis 1976; Rimantienė 2005; Dundulienė 1966; Kralikauskas 1973; Gimbutas 1958; Urbanavičius 1994; Beresnevičius 2004; Vaitkevičienė 1999; Širmulis 1999; Zabulytė 2006; Balsys 2012; Balsys 2017). Mythologist and ethnologist Rimantas Balsys is tackling this question on the basis of historical sources by summarising the studies dedicated to this topic in his scientific article titled “Images of Lithuanian and Prussian Gods in accordance with the Data of Written Sources” (Balsys 2012). On the basis of written sources from the 5th century B. C. to the 17th century A. C., which are mostly supplemented by archaeological data, the author claims that gods and mythical images of ancestors (idols) worshipped by Lithuanians and Prussians had anthropomorphic visual characteristics (Balsys 2012, 84).

Are the newly emerging landscapes dedicated to this theme of Baltic mythology a new phenomenon, or perhaps a certain continuation of a tradition dating back to ancient times? Extensive research still needs to be done to answer this question, starting with the discussion of the representation of gods and mythological creatures in the parks included in the study.

The term “Baltic mythological parks in Lithuania” (hereinafter in the article referred to as “mythological parks”) defines a relatively new phenomenon of the 20th–21st century: the period of creation of the parks can be approximately dated to the years 1977–2015, and the process is still ongoing. There are twelve objects under investigation at the moment.

Table 1. Baltic mythological parks in Lithuania: The list, arranged according to year of creation (by author)

1. tabula. Baltu mitoloģiskie parki Lietuvā, saraksts sakārtots pēc izveides gadiem (pēc autora)

The year of creation/opening	The name and location of the mythological park
20th century	
1977	The Trail of Sculptures on the coast of Lūšiai Lake (between the villages of Meironys and Palūšė, Ignalina region)
1979	The Hill of Witches (Juodkrantė, Neringa, the Curonian Spit)
1984 (The park opened in 1984, but its creation started in 1978)	The Beekeeping Museum (Stripeikiai, Ignalina region)
1997	The Valley of Žaltė (Alytus region, Punia forest)
21st century	
2003	The Mythological Trail of the Oak Wood of Dūkštai (Dūkštai, Vilnius region)
2005	The Valley of Gods and Goddesses (Kulautuva, Kaunas region)
2007–2013	The Park of Gods (Kamorūnai, Varėna region)
2008	The Mythological Park of Balsiai (Balsiai district, Vilnius)
2009	The Park of Baltic Mythology (Sausdravai, Kretinga region)
2011	The Baltic Mythological Park (Naisiai, Šiauliai region)
2013	The Educational Mythological Trail of Šventa (Šventa village, Sirvėta Regional Park, Švenčionys region)
2015	The Recreational Sculpture Park of Oak Wood (Molėtai region)

The table above shows the list of the Baltic mythological parks in Lithuania, arranged by the year of creation. Currently, the old parks listed above are being (or have been) reconstructed (the Beekeeping Museum, the Trail of Sculptures on the coast of Lūšiai Lake (Alkas 2022), the Mythological Trail of the Oak Wood of Dūkštai) or at least the sculptures there are being repaired (the Hill of Witches). There are also already open, working but unfinished parks, which are yet to be supplemented with additional sculptures: the Park of Baltic Mythology and the Mythological Park of Balsiai. Moreover, there are privately developed parks, some of which have not been completed yet, hence, they are not included in the study.

An interesting and much-needed area for further research could be the analysis and comparison of the intentions and circumstances of the establishment of the parks, while in the present paper the main focus is on the (re)presentation of the parks and sculptures inside them.

THE CHOICE OF FORM AND MATERIAL FOR SCULPTURES REPRESENTING GODS AND MYTHOLOGICAL CREATURES

The process of creating the Baltic mythology parks is varied. Sculptors are usually given freedom of artistic expression. The park sculptures, however, are more often the result of joint creative work, as in the Educational Mythological Trail of Šventa, and reflect the creative decisions of their authors. In the case of this park, during the whole project, sculptors were given the freedom of artistic expression, i.e. visual solutions relied on the authors' personal interpretation. The authors interviewed sought to predict the interplay between nature and their artworks from a temporal perspective and to leave space for the visitors' unique interpretation. When referring to the creative process of making the sculptures, one of the sculptors said the following: "I assume that sculptures



Figure 1. The sculpture "Javinė" in the Mythological Trail of Šventa (sculptor Arvydas Ališanka, 2014), (photo by author)

1. attēls. Skulptūra "Javinė" Šventas mitoloģiskajā takā (tēlnieks Arvīds Ališanka, 2014), (autores fotogrāfija)

will be improved by nature itself. Sculptures under the trees should eventually become mossy and blend into with nature even more” (KUTR 302). The sculpture “Javinė” that stands in the Mythological Trail of Šventa (sculptor Arvydas Ališanka, 2014) in the picture above is expected to be improved by nature.

However, there are other examples when the integrity of the park founder’s idea is realized, and the sculptures are created according to the sketches specified by him. Such a process was observed in the Park of Baltic Mythology. “We were talking all the time. “The Creation of the Baltic World” is completely created [by the two brothers who founded the park], Krasauskas [the sculptor] only put it together, so it would exist. [...] It is a living thing” (KUTR 303).

Another decision that needs to be made in the creation process is the choice of material for the sculptures. It has been found in the current study that wood is the most commonly used material when creating sculptures in the parks discussed, while stone and metal are used less often. As regards technical solutions, the material selected for the sculptures of the Mythological Trail of Šventa (or the Mythological Park of Balsiai) is relatively unusual as compared to most other parks in Lithuania under investigation. Stone and metal elements were used less frequently than the typical warm Lithuanian wood. “Perhaps this park, this forest and even we, Lithuanians, will no longer exist, yet the sculptures will remain telling the story about Lithuanian gods” (KUTR 300), one of the respondents admits when referring to the importance of longevity of sculpture material.

The picture above shows an example of a sculpture (“The Creation of the Baltic World” in the Park of Baltic Mythology (sculptor K. Krasauskas, blacksmith S. Kronis, 2018)) where wood and metal come together, and it has been created by the artists according to the sketches specified by Valdemaras Reinikis, the founder of the park.



Figure 2. The sculpture “The Creation of the Baltic World” in the Park of Baltic Mythology (sculptor Kęstutis Krasauskas, blacksmith Saulius Kronis, 2018) (photo by author)

2. attēls. Skulptūra “Baltu pasaules radišana” Baltu mitoloģijas parkā (tēlnieks Kęstutis Krasausks, kalējs Saulius Kronis, 2018) (autore fotoģrāfija)

VIABILITY OF THE BALTIC MYTHOLOGICAL PARKS IN LITHUANIA AND THEIR PRESENTATION

While discussing the problem of representation of gods and mythological creatures, the question of the ways chosen to introduce these places is also important. Returning to the listed parks and their names, they usually emphasize the educational and recreational purpose of these places. For example, it is interesting to note the difference in the names of the Baltic Mythological Park and the Park of Baltic Mythology. The point is that the founders of the latter park strongly emphasize the educational purpose of the place. Many parks offer guided tours, even interactive, theatrical educational events. In the Park of Baltic Mythology and the Educational Mythological Trail of Šventa, visitors are greeted by employees, the topic of mythology is introduced, and those willing to proceed are accompanied by a guide. Day tours as well as night tours, which offer a different range of sensations, are offered. In the latter, more emphasis is laid on senses, a different atmosphere is created, and narrative plots are employed. Ethno-archaeologist Vykintas Vaitkevičius also discusses the effects of a place at different times of the day and during different seasons as well as the diversity of landscape educational trails from varying perspectives by adding different symbolic meanings (Vaitkevičius 2012, 57–58).



Figure 3. Gods represented are brought to life in the Mythological Trail of Šventa (photo: Sirvėta Regional Park administration)

3. attēls. Šventas mitoloģiskajā takā attēlotie dievi tiek atdzīvināti (foto: Sirvetas Reģionālā parka administrācija)

In order to make the theme relevant to a modern person, during important events in the Mythological Trail of Šventa, the gods represented are brought to life by means of animation as they are awakened from the static state and played: “When we have an important event [...], employees of Sirvėta Regional Park wear [special] clothing, thus embodying specific Deities. [...] Maybe this comes close to interpretations; yet, the aim is to attract people visually and to awaken their interest,” says one of the employees of the Regional Park (KUTR 300). The picture below is taken during one of the events described.

Employees who communicate with visitors claim that they adapt this broad and rich theme to the age, fields of interest, and even occupations of the visitors: while some are interested in historical or mythological knowledge and interpretations, which can be perceived differently, others are into materiality and the subtleties of the construction of the park (Vanagiene 2021).

In conclusion, it must be observed that when presenting the topic of Baltic mythology and its profundity to the visitors, the developers of mythological parks adapt their creative process to the natural surroundings. They pay tribute to the past while looking forward to the future. Thus, in the creation process of the parks, the ancient connection that Lithuanians had with nature is preserved. Also, traditional materials are preferred. However, the authors are not afraid to experiment when choosing materials and to apply contemporary, modern creative solutions to these places that tell visitors about the ancient Baltic culture and mythology.

CONCLUSIONS

The important and relevant problem of representing the gods is discussed in this small-scale study based on the research implemented by the author, which suggests that the tradition of representing the gods dates back to pre-Christian times. However, nowadays, the forms of representation are mostly chosen by free interpretation, even though the scientific material available to the authors and developers of the parks is used and consultations with ethnologists and mythologists come in handy. Warm Lithuanian wood is the most frequently used material. Still, to ensure longevity, the sculptures in the discussed parks are also created of stone and metal.

The period of the development of the parks encompasses the 20th–21st century. The first three parks were established at a similar time during the Soviet era. In the 21st century, the number of the parks of this type is constantly increasing. The most recently established park, which can be

found on the list of the parks in the research, dates back to 2015. However, it is still difficult to determine whether this process has ceased.

While addressing the question of their representation, it is important to state that not only the recreational but also the educational purpose of the Baltic mythological parks is often emphasized. In many cases, this is reflected in the names given to these places. The employees of the parks seek to attract people visually and to awaken their interest by offering day tours, as well as night tours, which awaken a different range of sensations. Even interactive theatrical educational events are taking place.

The aim of presenting to the visitors the themes of Lithuanian history and mythology, or even Baltic mythology in general, in an attractive, traditional but also modern form determines the choices regarding the sculptures, their form and material, and the live narration of the park employees. Selected sculptures of gods and mythological creatures are usually created by adapting them to the environment, with the aim of presenting the most important or the most well-known of them. In other cases, the intent is to introduce the theme of mythology more extensively by depicting all (or most) of the deities and mythological creatures in the sources. “Because it is a part of our culture, where the worldview of that time comes to light, values that are still vivid today are revealed,” says one of the interviewees (KUTR 301).

ABBREVIATIONS

KUTR – Klaipėdos universiteto tautosakos rankraštynas (Folklore Archives’ Database of Klaipėda University)

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KUTR 300–303.

BALTU MITOLOĢISKIE PARKI LIETUVĀ

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ANOTĀCIJA

Šī raksta mērķis ir aplūkot dievu un mitoloģisko būtņu attēlojumu Baltijas mitoloģiskajos parkos Lietuvā. Termins "Baltijas mitoloģiskais parks" definē salīdzinoši jaunu 20.–21. gadsimta fenomenu: to tapšanas periods ir aptuveni datējams ar 1977.–2015. gadu, un process joprojām turpinās. Interesanta un ļoti nepieciešama joma turpmākai izpētei varētu būt parku izveides ieceru un apstākļu analīze un salīdzināšana, savukārt šajā darbā galvenā uzmanība tiek pievērsta parku un tajos esošo skulptūru (re)prezentācijai. Balstoties 2021.–2022. gadā veiktajos lauka pētījumos, var apgalvot, ka reprezentācijas formas lielākoties ir brīvas interpretācijas. Visbiežāk izmantotais materiāls ir koks, retāk tiek izmantots akmens un metāls. Bieži tiek uzsvērts ne tikai vietu atpūtas, bet arī izglītojošais mērķis.

Atslēgvārdi: etnoloģija, mitoloģiskie parki, Baltija, tēlniecība.

Kopsavilkums

Rakstā analizēti baltu mitoloģiskie parki Lietuvā kā salīdzinoši jauns 20.–21. gadsimta fenomens. Šī raksta mērķis ir aplūkot Baltijas mitoloģisko parku dievu un mitoloģisko būtņu attēlojumu Lietuvā. Uzdevumi ir šādi: apskatīt tradicionālos un novatoriskos dievu attēlošanas aspektus; definēt pētāmo parku tapšanas periodu; novērtēt autoru izvēlētos materiālus un formas dievu un mitoloģisko būtņu skulptūru izveidē; aplūkot šo cilvēka veidoto ainavu reprezentācijas metodes un apskatīt parku izveidei izvēlēto vietu likumsakarības un atšķirības, kā arī vietas izvēles nozīmi ideju īstenošanas kontekstā.

Darbā izmantoti materiāli, kas tika apkopoti, veicot lauka pētījumus Baltijas mitoloģiskajos parkos 2021.–2022. gadā. Pētījumā tika izmantotas novērošanas un padziļinātas daļēji strukturētas intervijas, kas nepieciešamas labi informētu respondentu aptaujāšanai. Citas svarīgas izmantotās metodes ir kartēšana un fotografēšana, kuru mērķis ir vākt vizuālu empīrisku materiālu, kā arī vizuālā materiāla analīzes metodes. Analizējot savākto materiālu, tika izmantota analītiskā aprakstošā metode, interpretācija, tipoloģiskā metode un salīdzinošā metode. Starpdisciplinārais pētījums ietver etnoloģijas, vēstures, mitoloģijas un novadpētniecības tēmas.

Balstoties uz lauka pētījumiem, var apgalvot, ka mērķis atraktīvā, tradicionālā, bet arī mūsdienīgā veidā iepazīstināt apmeklētājus ar Lietuvas vēstures un mitoloģijas vai pat baltu mitoloģijas tēmām kopumā nosaka skulptūru, to formu un materiālu izvēli, kā arī parku darbinieku vēstījumu apmeklētājiem. Siltais lietuviešu koks ir visbiežāk izmantotais materiāls. Lai nodrošinātu skulptūru izturību aplūkotajos parkos, tiek izmantots arī akmens un metāls. Dievu un mitoloģisko būtņu skulptūras parasti tiek veidotas, pielāgojot tās videi. Šādu parku attīstītāji godina pagātņi, lūkojoties uz nākotni. Tādējādi tiek saglabāta senā saikne, kas lietuviešiem bija ar dabu. Tā kā tā ir daļa no mūsu kultūras, kurā nāk gaismā tā laika pasaules uzskats, atklājas arī mūsdienās spilgtas vērtības, stāsta viens no intervētajiem (KUTR 301).