



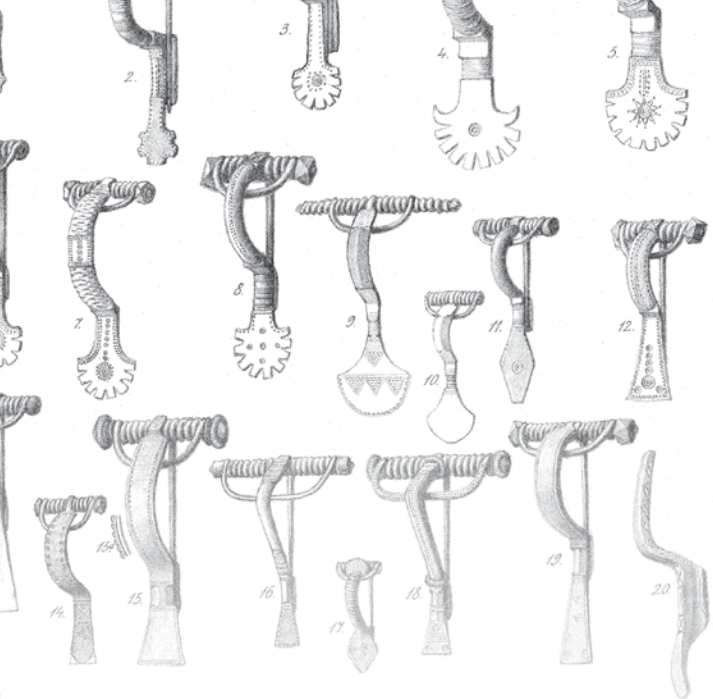
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dedicated to
Baltic culture





BALTIC CULTURE

It is no easy task to define Baltic culture, to dissociate it from the culture of its closest neighbours, to state what the Balts have given to the culture of Europe and the world, in particular — the spiritual culture. All the more so because it had been forming for thousands of years and had been heterogeneous. Baltic culture fused the indigenous ancient Narva and Nemunas cultures with the imported Indo-European ones, the so-called Corded Ware and Globular Amphora cultures. It also fell under the influence of the cultures of the Baltic Finno-Ugric peoples as well as other neighbours and



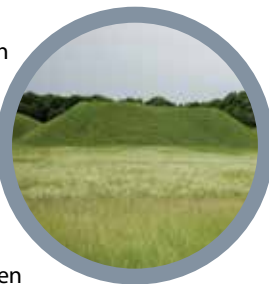
distant nations. Since Baltic languages belong to the family of Indo-European languages, comprising a separate group within it, its main cultural element is Indo-European. This element, which, from the beginning of the third millennium BCE, began to gradually prevail in the territory of the Eastern Balts, Belarus and Central Russia, was brought from Central Europe by representatives of a three-stratum patrilineal society — the ruling stratum, the warriors, and the cattle breeders and farmers, who had assimilated into the local ancient cultures of hunters, fishermen and early farmers. More elements of local cultures, the so-called Old European substrate, survived in places that were more densely inhabited by local people and further away from arterial areas, such as the closed basins of large lakes.



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The most data for tangible culture, which at the same time enables the reconstruction of some features of spiritual culture, is derived from archaeological investigations. They are the basis for stating that the Neolithic Period saw the start of quadrangle buildings of a pillar-type construction with a gable or hip-roof (as seen from borrowed words, the Finno-Ugric peoples learnt to construct such buildings from the Balts). Later, establishment of fortified settlements — hill-forts, where similar and long quadrangular constructions were built — began. Barrows for the deceased were first erected, encircled by stone wreaths and ditches. In the 4th c., when hill-forts, becoming increasingly defensive in nature, were surrounded with bulwarks, ditches and towers, people began to move down to settlements at the foot of the hills and put up log buildings. From the 11th c., defensive fortifications were so perfected that part of the hill-forts were turned into wooden castles. In the Baltic territories, there once were buildings for cult purposes (as in the Prussian Nadruva; in Vilnius, where the Cathedral is now located; on the Hill of Birutė in Palanga) as well as ritual stones, witnesses to formerly sacred sites. Old roads, called *kūlgrindos* (hidden underwater stony roads across swamps and swampy areas) and *medgrindos* (hidden roads paved with timber across swampy areas) are also attributed to Baltic culture. Thousands of hill-forts, barrow mounds and barrow complexes, defensive ramparts, and ritual stones comprise a tangible heritage of exceptional value, forming the unique cultural scenery of the Baltic world in Lithuania, Latvia, Kaliningrad, Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine — all the places where the Baltic tribes once lived.

An overview of ancient Baltic art should begin with amber arte-



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facts — their tradition, which was formed by local peoples and impacted by the intruders, survived for more than six millennia. Even modern people are fascinated by the simple human- and animal-shaped amber figurines, buttons, chain links, pendants, and, in particular, ornate discs, decorated with tiny holes in a cross shape. Amber connected the Baltic world with Southern Europe and, in the process of the formation of the national identity of Lithuanians and Latvians, became an integral part of their cultural identity. Ornamentation was of particular importance in works of art. It is believed that the geometrical ornament of the indigenous tradition prevailed, the diversity of its compositions distinguishing the Balts from other tribes. This diversity has survived to the present day — it is well-reflected, for example, in the national sashes of the modern-day Baltic peoples. In the local traditions one can also come across zoomorphic ritual staffs, dishes and other artefacts, anthropomorphic pillar-shaped figures, small figurines. The Balts were very fond of metal jewellery. Some, such as headbands, bell-shaped pendants, spoon-ended torcs, cruciform pins, etc., are only typical of the Baltic tribes. With the Middle Ages nearing, zoomorphic ornaments began to prevail, especially in a reptilian motif. Overall, the influence of the indigenous people of the Narva and Nemunas culture (hunters, fishermen and the first farmers) is still felt in the art of the ancient Balts. Indications of this influence can still be observed in the artefacts of modern artists, especially jewellers and wood carvers.

Knowledge of the mythological images and faiths of the Baltic tribes, fragmentary and not always reliable, is mostly found in

chronicles from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period that were written by foreigners and, most often, Christians. These chronicles contain mentions of nature worship, respect for fire, reptiles, and the deceased — all characteristic of the ancient Balts. However, the key source for reconstructing the mythology and religion of the Balts is folklore, especially Latvian songs, Baltic languages and pre-historic art. They hint at an interlaced two-layer system of imagery. As in the case of tangible culture, the Indo-European layer should be considered as the primary one, with male gods dominating, of which **Deiwas*, the deity of the bright sky, was the main one (compare Lith. *Dievas*, Latv. *Dievs*, and Old Prus. *Deywis* 'God', all having the same root meaning 'to shine', as in the Lith., Latv. word *diena*, Old Prus. *deina* — 'day'; cf. the Greek Zeus and the Roman Jupiter of the same origin). Other important gods of this layer that are known to us are *Perkūnas* (compare Lith. *perkūnas*, Latv. dial. *pērkūns*, Old Prus. *percunis*, 'thunder'; the origin is unclear, perhaps the root is related to *perti* 'to beat, flog' or the Baltic **perkus* — 'oak') and his opponent *Velinas* (compare Old and dial. Lith. *velinas*, standard Lith. *velnias*, Latv. *velns*, 'devil'). *Perkūnas* was the deity responsible for thunder, lightning

and rain, while *Velinas* was the guardian of the realm of the dead souls (Lith. *vėlės*). The second level of Baltic mythology, which reflects the chthonic culture of ancient Europe, worships the earth, she who gives birth and creates, personified as the Lithuanian *Žemyna* and Latvian *Zemes māte*. The mythological world of the ancient Balts had many, primarily female, deities, who were the guardians of different areas, e.g. the Latv. *Lauka māte*, *Linu māte*, *Jūras māte*, *Meža māte* (Lith. *Medeinė*), Latv., Lith. *Laima*, *Ragana*. The well-being of the home was the responsibility of male deities, such as the Lith. *Kaukas*, *Aitvaras*, Latv. *Mājas gars*. There is an abundance of place-names with the root *alk-*, *elk-* (cf. Lith. *Alka(s)*,



9,10,11,12,13,14

Alkakalnis, Latv. *Elkalauks*, Old Prus. *Alke*) in once inhabited by the Balts, and the legends to them testify to former places of sacrifice (the origin of the word *alka*, *alkas*, Latv. *elks*, having kinship with the Germanic languages, is unclear; may be derived from the Proto-Indo-European substrate).

There are no surviving developed plots of Baltic myths, similar to, for example, the Germanic myths. There is a tendency to distinguish the Baltic myth from the Sovius, which describes three ways of burial, favours cremation of the deceased. Fragments of the cosmogonic myth are believed to be preserved by the plots of legends about the creation of the world, images of the World Tree or a stag with antlers, etc. Overall, reconstruction of the mythology and religion of the ancient Balts poses a number of questions that will perhaps be answered by further research. Undoubtedly, the ancient world-view of the Balts has, in modern times, merged with the world-view, festivals and traditions brought by Christianity, and degraded into many superstitious beliefs.

Dr. Habil. Bonifacas Stundžia



**2 EURO
COMMEMORATIVE
COIN DEDICATED
TO BALTIC
CULTURE**

*CuNi/CuZnNi alloy
Diameter 25.75 mm
Weight 8.50 g*

*On the edge of the
coin: LAISVĖ * VIENYBĖ *
GEROVĖ *
(FREEDOM * UNITY *
WELL-BEING *)*

*National side of the coin
designed by Jolanta
Mikulskytė and Giedrius
Paulauskis.*

*Common side of the
coin designed by Luc
Luycx.*

*10,000 BU quality from
1,000,000 pcs mintage.*

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Information at the Bank of Lithuania

Tel. (85) 268 0316

E-mail: gpt@lb.lt

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LIETUVOS MONETŲ KALYKLA

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Lithuanian Collectors Coins

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The publication uses photographs of exhibits from the National Museum of Lithuania (disc-amulet. Amber. 3rd millennium BCE. Dakariškės 5 settlement (cover), round plate brooch (11, 14)), National Ethnographic Open Air Museum of Latvia (Alsunga woven belt (8)), History Museum of Lithuania Minor (filigree and plate brooches (10, 15)), Mažeikiai Museum (horseshoe brooch from Pavirvytės-Gudų (7)), Museum of Prehistory and Early History in Berlin (round flat brooch (13)), Vytautas the Great War Museum (round openwork and round openwork with swastika brooches (9, 12)); a photo from the photo-archive of the Directorate of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė (brass pin with a spiral head (3)); illustrations from the publication *Baltų menas (Baltic Art)*; compiled by A. Butrimas, 2009 (1, 2, 5, 6); reconstruction of Voruta castle, according to G. Zabiela, drawing by architect V. Kalinauskas (4). Photographers: A. Baltėnas, J. Butrimaitė, S. Butrimienė, C. Plamp, D. Vaičiūnienė.

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