

Baltic Paganism in Lithuanian Neoshamanic Communities

Neoshamanic Interpretations of a Local Indo-European Religious Tradition

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I aim to provide an analysis of various Lithuanian Neoshamanic groups' relationships to a local Pagan tradition and to show the impact of socio-political context on the popularity of shamanic interpretations of Indo-European religious traditions and various possibilities of expressions of interest in local Indo-European customs. Building on 2009–2015 fieldwork data and analysis of published scholarly and Neoshamanic texts, I present the Lithuanian Neoshamanic milieu, discuss scholarly interpretations of shamanic elements in the Baltic religious tradition, examine interpretations of the local Pagan tradition relevant to Lithuanian Neoshamanic communities, consider Lithuanian Neopagan attitudes to shamanic interpretations of the Baltic tradition, and analyze the impact of Lithuanian socio-political context.

KEYWORDS: Neoshamanism, Baltic Paganism, (Neo)paganism, Indo-European religious traditions, Lithuania, Balts, Neotoltecs, Sacred Fire of Itzachilatlan, Siberian Neoshamanism

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Scholarly attempts to find elements of shamanism in Indo-European traditions began in the early twentieth century and intensified in the 1960s and 1990s.¹ In the twenty-first century, Neoshamanic practices based on interpretations of these traditions are increasingly widespread and have already gained the attention of quite a few scholars.² Such practices are particularly interesting as contemporary spiritualities representing conceptual shifts in shamanism, merging various religious traditions, local adaptations of transnational spirituality, and general trends of Western society. Two reasons often are given in explanations of such interpretations: the movement of coming back to the roots that encourage the search of the exotic *Other* in one's own tradition,³ and the reaction of indigenous shamanic communities to Neoshamanic appropriation of their culture.⁴ Social anthropologist Galina Lindquist has conceptualized the foundation of these reasons as the fundamental search for authenticity, or a meaningful authentication strategy, pointing out three such strategies used in Neoshamanic communities: references to the Self, to the pure *Other* (spatial distanciation), and to roots (temporal distanciation).⁵ The growing popularity of such interpretations means that, in some circumstances, the reference to roots has become more important than the reference to the pure *Other*.

Lithuania belongs to the Indo-European region and has several Neoshamanic groups interested in various Shamanic traditions, as well as Neopagan groups that have been reconstructing pre-Christian Baltic religion for several decades. These conditions can be considered prerequisites for reconstructions of Baltic Shamanism corresponding to reconstructions of Indo-European shamanism in other European countries. However, the socio-political context in which Neoshamans live can encourage or impede such interpretations. Most of these studies focus on communities based in Western Europe (or, partly, in the United States). Lithuania provides a slightly different context due to its specific twentieth-century history, and the historical experience common to Central and Eastern Europe. As well, most studies on shamanic interpretations of Indo-European traditions are based on developments of Neoshamanisms offering a "matured" synthesis of shamanism and local religious traditions and are focused on key figures and rituals. Bearing in mind the ambiguity of these communities, new insights can be gained by focusing on "minor expressions" in Neoshamanic events and other activities, as well as on ideas relevant for "ordinary" members.

In order to explore the relationships of various Lithuanian Neoshamanic groups to local Pagan tradition, I will use fieldwork data, analysis of scholarly Neoshamanic and other relevant texts, and online discussion. The fieldwork was carried out in 2009–2015 using formal and informal interviews with main figures and ordinary members, observation of Neoshamanic and Neopagan events and group rituals, and behaviors and discussions occurring between and after the events. My aim is to show

that the popularity of shamanic interpretations of Indo-European traditions, or some kind of merging of shamanic and local pagan traditions, depends upon socio-political context and that such merging can be observed both in participants' well-developed interpretations and minor expressions incorporated in rituals.

I will present the Neoshamanic milieu in Lithuania; discuss scholarly interpretations that contextualize shamanic interpretations of Baltic tradition; and analyze interpretations of local Pagan tradition in Neoshamanic communities as well as attitudes towards shamanism in Neopagan groups and possible socio-political influences.

There are many definitions of shamanism in academic circles, and scholars disagree about, among other things, the main constituents of this phenomenon, its relationship to religion, and its geographical distribution. Shamanism is “a contested concept that constantly evolves because individuals have defined, created and challenged shamanism in various continuously changing fields.”⁶ In this paper, I use a working definition of shamanism as being a system of religious beliefs and practices whose main actor—a shaman—has extraordinary knowledge about, and the ability to travel to and communicate with, the spiritual world to fulfill a community's needs. Neoshamanism includes practices of contemporary Western alternative religiosity, whose performers profess to practice, continue, or revive shamanic traditions.⁷ I do not aim to evaluate the validity of such definitional concepts or the interpretations of scholars and spiritual seekers analyzed here. Instead, I focus on meaning: are shamanic interpretations of local Indo-European religious traditions meaningful for Lithuanian scholars and spiritual seekers as in Western European Neoshamanic communities? How can relevance of such interpretations be observed? How does a particular socio-political context contribute to or hamper the meaningfulness of such interpretations?

THE NEOSHAMANIC MILIEU IN LITHUANIA

The earliest Lithuanian Neoshamanic practices emerged in the late 1980s and were based on the teachings of Carlos Castaneda, an American author whose books—beginning with *The Teachings of Don Juan* in 1968—had promoted Neoshamanism in the West.⁸ After Lithuania re-established its statehood in 1990 during the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a growing interest in shamanism led to the organization of public lectures by foreign Neoshamans who visited Lithuania's main cities, Vilnius and Kaunas, as well as the publication of Lithuanian translations of Castaneda's books. This growing interest undoubtedly was related to the New Age movement and the development of alternative religiosity, as well as to post-Soviet freedom, emerging Internet-based media, and late-twentieth-century economic well-being in

Lithuania that enabled travel to Western Europe and South and North America.

Most contemporary Neoshamanic groups emerged in Lithuania in the 2000s, when the already present New Age movement became more active there.⁹ Since 2003, translations of authors in addition to Castaneda have appeared,¹⁰ and Neoshamanic teachings and practices are presented in lectures, seminars, countercultural art and spirituality festivals. At present, quite a broad range of Neoshamanism is practiced in Lithuania: Castaneda-influenced Neotoltecs;¹¹ followers of the Sacred Fire of Itzachilatlan who build their practices on Native American traditions; followers of Siberian shamanic traditions; lucid dreamers of Robert Mauss' school; transpersonalists working with shamanic images; and healers using what they claim to be shamanic techniques, combined with other non-Shamanic material (for example, a Vedic worldview). There are, however, no developed forms of Baltic Neoshamanism (i.e. Neoshamanism based on shamanic interpretation of the old Baltic religious tradition), nor are there adherents of shamanthropologist Michael Harner (b. 1929),¹² whose school of core shamanism¹³ popularized safe and simple techniques attractive to post-psychedelic Neoshamanic seekers in the 1980s.¹⁴ Lithuanian Neoshamans associate their practices with various original traditions and geographical regions (Siberia, North and South Americas) and use them in different worldview contexts (Neopagan, New Age, self-development, holistic medicine, and so on). The authenticity of the practiced tradition, its relation to sources, and the nature and purpose of shamanic activities can be perceived differently in these Neoshamanic manifestations.¹⁵ With a few exceptions, most expressions of Lithuanian Neoshamanism fall within the New Age sphere, as most are based on a self-sacralization ideology and aimed at adherents' self-development. Early Lithuanian Neoshamans picked up Castanedian ideas through Russian publications in Moscow and other Soviet cultural centers.¹⁶ Contemporary Neoshamans communicate primarily with Western practitioners and visiting native South Americans or Siberian practitioners, read their published materials, and gain knowledge during their travels to the Americas, Siberia or Europe.

Noticeable features of the Lithuanian Neoshamanic milieu—connection to a geographical flow of ideas, international relationships, and ages of participants in Neoshamanic activities—can be traced to post-Soviet Lithuania. While people of various age groups (mostly 18–60) participate in Neoshamanic events, there is a sharp, language-based division of younger (18–40) and older (40–60) participants. Older persons mastered Russian during the Soviet era and often lack the ability to communicate in English or other foreign languages. Hence, they depend on Lithuanian translations of works written in English but can communicate directly with Russian-speaking (Neo)Shamans from Siberia.

Younger persons are more interested in practices based on the use of entheogens¹⁷ (usually coming from South America directly or through the mediation of West European practitioners). They have mastered English and other foreign languages and consequently can maintain more active contacts with (Neo)Shamans in Europe and South America.

An important feature of Lithuanian Neoshamanic communities, common to many Western counterparts, is their diversity and involvement in other spiritual practices, communities, and networks connecting practitioners of alternative religiosity.¹⁸ Most people attending Neoshamanic events often are engaged in groups practicing yoga, reiki, theta healing, theosophy, self-development, and Neopaganism, and do not necessarily identify with a specific shamanic tradition or a particular community. Neoshamanic communities are united mainly by an interest in practices considered shamanic, while interpretations and understandings of features can be very different. The looseness of the communities and their members' participation in other communities and networks are especially important to the topic analyzed here, the variety of interpretations in attitudes toward the relationships of shamanism and the Baltic Pagan religious tradition.

SHAMANIC ELEMENTS IN BALTIC PAGANISM? SCHOLARLY RECONSTRUCTIONS OF BALTIC PAGANISM¹⁹

The history of Western attraction to shamanism²⁰ clearly demonstrates how the content of the term, initially associated with a specific tribe and limited region, was broadened to include ever-larger regions. Shamanism can be imagined as a universal phenomenon, opening the search for shamanic features in every religious tradition. Both scholars and Neoshamans have paid the most attention to Celtic and Germanic (Nordic) shamanism, but elements in other Indo-European traditions also have fascinated Westerners.²¹ A successful search for and reconstruction of Indo-European shamanisms partly depend upon a particular conceptualization of shamanism, but available sources and recorded historical fragments of a tradition can either help or preclude such reconstructions.

In their interpretations and reconstructions of the old Paganism of the Balts, Lithuanian scholars²² have tended not to compare it systematically with other, particularly "exotic," archaic traditions. Historian of religions Gintaras Beresnevičius (1961–2006) and mythologist Dainius Razauskas (b. 1960) are the exceptions among Lithuanian scholars who have tried to associate and systematically compare Baltic religious practices to shamanism. Beresnevičius imagined the Baltic Pagan tradition as a dynamic interaction of many influences and trends. While he did not acknowledge a "Baltic shamanism," he found some shamanic elements

in the Baltic religious tradition. According to him, some of the shamanic elements originated in autochthonous traditions of the Mother Goddess, and others came through the influence of neighbors of the Balts (first of all, the Finno-Ugric people). Some functioned in opposition to the dominant Indo-European ideology, while others were used in its consolidation.²³ In his studies on Baltic mythology, Razauskas has drawn on his broad knowledge of sources on Baltic Paganism and many other religious traditions, as well as philosophical ideas and philological data. He extensively compares Lithuanian images with those images of other traditions, with the most shamanic material found in his analysis of a Lithuanian folkloric image of a witch and an image of a blacksmith.²⁴ For Razauskas, however, shamanism is just one of many religious traditions available for comparison that reveal the deep nature of the Baltic tradition.

In Baltic religious tradition, shamanic elements can be found in origin myths of the mythical figure Sovijus, who introduced the burning of the dead, and Lizdeika, a pagan priest, known from thirteenth- and sixteenth-century chronicles; in divination practices of eighteenth-century peasants; and in the folkloric image of a witch. The universality of many mythical images and lack of knowledge of their broader contexts, however, shed doubt on their shamanic interpretations.²⁵ Beresnevičius and Razauskas, who have shown the most interest in shamanic traditions, have not considered the possibility of some type of “Baltic shamanism.”

There are other reasons why Lithuanian researchers have not been willing to compare Baltic Paganism to diverse religious traditions. For example, the relationship of Baltic Paganism researchers and the dominant Lithuanian Neopagan group Romuva²⁶ with the national awakening movement that emerged during the end of the Soviet period encouraged attempts—conscious or unconscious—to claim the uniqueness of the Baltic religious tradition. For these reasons, scholars did not show much interest in “foreign” worldviews or religious analogies, let alone the identification of Baltic religious images with religious traditions of other nations.²⁷

The influence of scholarly discourse on those interested in shamanism varies among different groups. Many Neopagans are avid readers of Lithuanian mythology and the history of Baltic Paganism, although their reliance on scholarly authority is diverse. Members of Neoshamanic communities are interested mostly in texts presenting various Neoshamanic teachings or other practices of alternative religiosity. There are, however, exceptions: texts written by early Lithuanian followers of Castaneda show a deep knowledge of Lithuanian mythology. Contemporary Neoshamanic practitioners sometimes use their knowledge of Lithuanian mythology and the old religions, as well as the authority of scholars to deny the possibility of a Baltic shamanism and argue their use of a foreign tradition. For example, lucid dreamer Rita

Banienė denies a possibility of Baltic shamanism, building on her personal experience and information provided by her daughter, who studied ethnology at Vytautas Magnus University.²⁸ If scholarly discourse does not support associations of shamanism and Baltic paganism or even denies them, how do some Lithuanian Neoshamans incorporate Baltic Pagan heritage into their Neoshamanic practices and explain this merging?

BALTIC PAGAN HERITAGE IN LITHUANIAN NEOSHAMANIC COMMUNITIES

Lithuanians became acquainted with the ideas of Carlos Castaneda in the late 1980s, mainly through Russian translations, with Lithuanian translations being published later. Some Lithuanians attracted to these books started practices based on consumption on various entheogens (ayahuasca, LSD, and others). They performed their rituals at old Pagan sites and associated their practices with the activities of countryside herbalists, folk healers and witches, as well as with folk beliefs and visions of the old religion and mythology. In their books, they combined visionary experiences of dreams and various mystical traditions with Baltic mythology.²⁹ For example, in *A Valley of White Pajauta*,³⁰ author Oneta Lunskaja presented her visionary experiences that united her life experiences and those of her friends, ideas of comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell, Hermeticism, Kabbalah, Christian mysticism, and mythological images of various traditions, including Baltic Paganism. In her visions, Lunskaja met various Baltic deities and mythical creatures, who easily transformed into characters of other traditions or the author's relatives and friends. The geography of the visions encompassed the whole universe, supernatural spheres, and the author's own inner world. At the same time, she emphasized several Lithuanian localities for their importance in her life (for example, Šiauliai as her hometown) and their ties with Lithuanian history and Paganism (for example, the old Lithuanian capital Kernavė, which now attracts visitors with its impressive mounds surrounded by a fascinating landscape). Despite referring to diverse traditions, Lunskaja identified herself with Baltic tradition, and her main sources were popular books on Baltic religion and mythology by famous Lithuanian ethnologists and folklorists Pranė Dundulienė and Norbertas Vėlius.

Contemporary Lithuanian Neotoltecs are mostly indifferent to the Baltic tradition, but some do find it important. One of the largest Lithuanian Neotoltec communities,³¹ opposing the use of psychotropic substances, gathers around American teacher Susan Gregg, who offers a feminine, love-based interpretation of the Neotoltec tradition.³²

Susan Gregg

According to Gregg, our universe, made up of energies, is a safe place and people should live happily, but our mental filters prevent our happiness. By achieving three “masteries”—awareness, transformation, and intention—people can achieve absolute love, freedom, and the possibility of being happy under any circumstances. Lithuanians became acquainted with Gregg’s teaching through Lithuanian translations of her books. The main event of this Lithuanian community is an annual seminar organized at the seaside town of Nida since 2003. The most active members (known as “Teachers”) meet once a month, participate in rituals four times a year, visit Gregg in Hawaii and go to places of power in Central America where “shamanic flying” is performed.

In her Neotoltec teaching, Gregg uses symbols, deities, spirits, and religious characters freely, reinterpreting and lifting them out of their original contexts. In *The Encyclopedia of Angels, Spirit Guides & Ascended Masters*,³³ she mentions three Baltic deities—Perkūnas and Vakarinė (Lithuanian), and Laima (Latvian)—among many deities, spirits, and religious characters of Pagan, Christian, Jewish and other traditions. Thus, Baltic Pagan tradition can be useful for Gregg’s followers, but it is not regarded as somehow exclusive. During their conversations and sharing of experiences and insights, however, members sometimes mention their Lithuanian spiritual heritage. Some of them are excited by ideas of unique Lithuanian energetics or Lithuanians as the last Pagans of Europe fighting against Christianity. For example, during a group conversation in the 2013 Nida seminar, one woman noted that Lithuanians had no magnificent castles or architecture, or many impressive old towns; but, when they had to defend themselves from Crusaders and Christianity, they banded together and united their forces on their castle hills. Gregg replied that their unity was based on fear instead of love. The same woman then asked if Lithuania differed energetically from other nations. Gregg replied that the energies of all nations are different, even those of allied nations such as Lithuania and Latvia. All nations are different, but none is better than others. In a 2015 seminar, several members expressed the opinion that “ancient Lithuanians” were exceptional for their intimate connection with nature. In that seminar, Gregg was absent for an opening ritual, which was led by an experienced member who proposed to invoke “Sea, Our Mother Earth, Nation and Ancestors.” The last two are common in Lithuanian Neopagan ritual invocations and atypical of rituals led by Gregg.

Arnoldas

Another, much smaller Neotoltec group relies mostly on Castaneda’s teachings and aims at personal spiritual development while avoiding the

use of psychotropic substances. It gathers in Šilutė district,³⁴ in a grange belonging to its leader Arnoldas, who introduced the Siberian drum into group rituals because, he said, such drumming distinguished shamans from other spiritual seekers. During a 2014 group gathering, I asked the leader about Baltic deities. He explained that there was one God or energy that was called by various names. While he felt no connection with Lithuanian Neopagans, some Neotoltecs of this group are fascinated by the spiritual power of the ancient Baltic Pagan priests and, together with their Neopagan friends, look after ancient Lithuanian sacred sites and stones located there. Between rituals, one member caressed stones located by the main fireplace as the “gates” for spirits; as she explained, in this gesture she drew upon practices her Neopagan friends performed in Pagan sacred sites.

Sacred Fire of Itzachilatlan

Some attempts to relate shamanic practices to local religious tradition were observed in the behavior of the Lithuanian Neoshamanic community, which is part of the international network of Sacred Fire of Itzachilatlan.³⁵ Also known as Red Path, this movement was founded in the early 1990s by Mexican artist Aurélio Díaz Tekpankalli in the United States and later spread to Latin America and Europe. It draws inspiration from the Native American Church and indigenous traditions of the Americas.³⁶ This Lithuanian community keeps close ties with European and Latin American communities: the most active members often travel to vision quests organized in Europe or spiritual practices in Ecuador and other Latin American countries. Connections with Latin America account for the ritual use of Ayahuasca and San Pedro,³⁷ specific ceremonies, a half-moon altar, abundant singing of Hispanic chants, and other features of their practices.³⁸

The leader³⁹ of the Lithuanian Sacred Fire group (being an ethnic Russian, like some other members) perceives this spiritual path as originating in Native American traditions and their revival movement. She builds her knowledge on books and on experiences gained during her travels to Ecuador and other Latin American countries. She and the majority of this group find specific native Latin American traditions, but one important element is considered universal to all cultures—the use of psychoactive substances made of plants and fungi containing DMT. (The leader claimed that “everything and every human being contains some DMT.”⁴⁰) Thus, when talking to an interested newcomer, the leader discussed species of fungi and plants used, she said, by Lithuanians and mentioned a young Lithuanian ethnologist who had done some research on this issue.

Rituals of the Lithuanian community are similar to ceremonies performed by other communities of Sacred Fire: they have elaborated

aesthetic and symbolic details that reference an indigenous origin. Although the symbolism is related mostly to traditions of Latin America, some aspects of the rituals allow rather free interpretations and expressions by practitioners. One is singing, regarded as a powerful practice enabling singers to join vibrations of the Earth or the Universe. Members of this group sing, usually with the accompaniment of a drum and a rattle, and make music in general during ceremonies and in non-ceremonial time in their meetings. Most often, Hispanic songs are sung in Spanish, especially by more experienced members. These songs are usually recorded in Latin America or transmitted by members who have been there. Sometimes, songs are sung in Lithuanian or Russian. Leaders encourage any singing. Thus, in a Temescal ceremony⁴¹ in June 2015, participants sang five Lithuanian songs, one Russian song, and many Hispanic chants. Three of the Lithuanian songs were folk songs and two were *sutartinės*—polyphonic folk chants. The latter are strongly associated with the sacred, both in popular opinion and among folk music revivalists and Neopagans who often use them in their rituals. Similarly, a ceremony of Two Tobaccos in September 2015 included five Lithuanian folk songs (including one *sutartinė*). The majority were sung by one woman, who sang only Lithuanian folk songs. After the Temescal ceremony, group leaders explained that songs included in rituals should be important and meaningful to the singer, with a clear rhythm accompanied by a drum and/or rattle. In addition to welcoming any singing and some formal requirements of a suitable rhythm, participants chose songs according to their nature and with content suitable to participants' spiritual needs. *Sutartinės* usually are performed by a group and have a clear rhythm. In the 2015 ceremony, performance of songs in the rituals actually was atypical: the participant transformed them into solo singing, and the rhythm sometimes hardly fitted with the rhythmical accompaniment. When performed in this way, *Sutartinės* do not sound as impressive as they do in their typical performance, but this hardly matters for the performers because of the meaning it holds.

Petras Dabrišius and Siberian shamanism

Petras Dabrišius (b. 1955), a forestry officer of Telšiai district, practices Neoshamanism based on Siberian traditions.⁴² During his youth, he spent seven years in Central Asia. Later, after Lithuania regained its independence, Dabrišius visited Central Asia again and met shaman Nadya, in Tuva, who taught him he had already experienced shamanic visions and left his body. He was trained to perform shamanic rituals, to make a drum, and to make ritual clothes by Tuvan and Khakassian (Neo)Shamans who visited Lithuania at his invitation several times.⁴³ They gave public lectures, performed rituals, and became teachers of

several Lithuanian Neoshamans. The story of his acquaintance with the Siberian shamans and his life in Central Asia is essential because Dabrišius uses it as a validation of his practices and authority. In a Lithuanian Neoshamanic context, he is a rather exceptional case due to his attitude towards the purpose of shamanic activities, which he says is primarily to help other people; the activities are not just means of self-expression or spiritual self-development.

The community that gathers around Dabrišius is equally important for understanding the development of his practices. He generally likes holding center stage, often showing up at cultural events as an “exotic” shaman who happily welcomes visitors to his farmstead. His visitors include not only those who are simply curious, but also people seeking healing as well as spiritual seekers interested in various kinds of shamanism, Neopaganism, and other traditions. For several years, a group of Neopagans and folk music revivalists from Klaipėda visited Dabrišius to celebrate various seasonal festivals, in all likelihood telling him about the old Baltic religion and influencing his rituals. Lithuanian Neotoltecs from these groups often participate in his rituals, which also attract solitary New Agers who include shamanism and Baltic tradition into a much broader system uniting many religious and magical traditions.

Among those I studied, Dabrišius probably most actively attempts to coalesce shamanism and the old Baltic religion. He sometimes performs rituals on sacred Pagan hills because of their strong energetic power, aiming to make a circuit of all the sacred hills in the Žemaitija region to revive their powers by loading them energetically through his rituals.⁴⁴ Eventually, instead of wearing his habitual “shamanic” robe, he began to wear a white linen robe because, according to him, such clothes were typical of Baltic priests. He has noticed that “a shamanic way of stacking firewood” (in a quadrangle tower for a ceremonial fire) introduced by visiting Siberian (Neo)Shamans survived among Lithuanian herds until recent times. While thinking about songs performed during shamanic rituals, Dabrišius decided to adapt a Lithuanian folk song, “A crane flies” (Lith. *Lek gervėla*), for ritual use. He thinks Lithuanian Pagan priests were a kind of shaman whose rituals included drums, the oldest instruments that help cause vibrations, similar to those of nature and spirits. This Neoshaman claims that the old chronicles describe how the drums of Lithuanian priests were broken and their heritage destroyed after the advent of Christianity.⁴⁵ He nurtures a strong relationship with the local environment and Lithuanian religious heritage because of his sense that everyone needs to relate to oneself and one’s native land. He noted that visiting Siberian (Neo)Shamans have noted that sacred sites and multi-trunk trees emanating exceptional power (and therefore especially valued by shamans) are more abundant in Lithuania than anywhere else.

Transpersonal psychology

Finally, the application of ideas associated with shamanism is known to some Lithuanian representatives of transpersonal psychology. Rimvydas Budrys is one such transpersonalist and probably the most actively engaged in applying shamanic imagery in his psychotherapy. For Budrys, shamanism is a specific relationship to the world, a tradition of healing, a way of coexisting with the world that has been distorted by civilization. A shaman is someone who has obtained knowledge and experience, has been trained and initiated, is able to help and heal others, and conduct them during the most important moments of life—birth, marriage, and death. According to Budrys, there was no Baltic shamanism, but in 2007 he led a seminar on shamanism called “The Baltic tradition,” during which he analyzed the openness of residential space and used drum-induced trance. Shamanism was associated with a myth in the seminar: a myth is a worldview, and shamanism is its corroboration allowing one to get in touch with things they cannot feel or see directly.⁴⁶

Thus, looking at various aspects of rituals, individual behavior, and conversations, it is possible to notice many expressions of merging of Baltic religious heritage and shamanic tradition in Lithuanian Neoshamanic communities. Before examining the possible influence of their socio-cultural context, however, one more religious group should be discussed: Lithuanian Neopagans.

INTEREST IN SHAMANISM IN LITHUANIAN NEOPAGAN COMMUNITIES

If Neoshamans can reference local religious traditions to strengthen the authenticity of their practices, Neopagans can use shamanic activities and images to create intensive spiritual experiences and as a way to communicate with other realities. The Lithuanian movement of Neopagan religiosity is heterogeneous; its members emphasize different values and pursue various spiritual goals. Lithuanian Neopagans, however, are most closely comparable to their counterparts in Eastern Europe and Scandinavia. In contrast to Wiccans and similar groups that base their practices on the general idea of a pre-Christian religion, Lithuanian Neopagans usually attempt to reconstruct their own ethnic, pre-Christian religious traditions.⁴⁷

The dominant and most visible Lithuanian Neopagan group is Romuva.⁴⁸ Judging by the texts and speeches of its leaders,⁴⁹ Romuva is not interested in the idea of shamanism as an element of universal human religiosity recognizable in almost any religious tradition, or in the qualities of religious behavior associated with shamanism. Romuva

builds its image as a national religion and strives for the status of a traditional religious community. The group offers a religious path based on moral behavior, respect for ancestors, and the authority of scholarly interpretations of historical and ethnographical sources used to reconstruct the old religion. Great stress is put on a supposedly unbroken continuity of the old religion surviving now in the countryside folk culture. Virtually the only non-Baltic religious tradition used for comparative purposes and development of self-identity is Hinduism. For this Neopagan group, the image of this religion helps suggest a long history and high development of Baltic Paganism and to position Romuva as essentially similar to this large religious community with its elaborate practices and theology.⁵⁰ Esoteric knowledge, intense experience, and things exotic, archaic, primitive, or magical that can be associated with shamanism have no place in such a vision of the old (and contemporary) Baltic religion.

More or less similar attitudes are characteristic of older members of this movement. These members emphasize experiences of the 1970s and later Soviet times, obviously perceiving their activities as practices belonging to the sphere of religion and as attempts to strengthen Lithuanian national identity. Rather than satiating their hunger for spirituality with practices originating in remote or alien localities, or having no direct associations with Lithuanian or Baltic ethnicity, this approach has encouraged interest in Lithuanian sources of religiosity. In this milieu, shamanism that has a clear undertone of Otherness naturally would be avoided; Romuvians usually have searched for ethnic uniqueness in their own sources.

Younger members of Romuva, however, grew up in a different socio-political context, when postmodern values gradually replaced modern nationalist ones and the possibility of “friendly” relationships with the outside world emerged. At the turn of the twenty-first century, mild conflicts between older and younger members occurred over attempts to include “foreign” elements into their rituals. Such conflict is visible in Egidija Ramanauskaitė’s ethnography of the 2001 Autumn Equinox celebration, when younger members worked to include the singing of sound attributed to Scandinavian runes. Older members evaluated this inclusion skeptically because “scholars did not prove that runes were used by ancient Lithuanians.” The younger initiators of this ritual did not care so much about scholarly authority. Attempts to keep in touch with the past primarily through Lithuanian folk songs is not sufficient for younger members, who want to feel the reality of the past and the spirituality of the present by testing different ways of cognition.⁵¹ The younger members search for alternative experiences in their rituals and tend to call them by “foreign” names more boldly.

In 2005–2006, the question of the existence of shamans in the Baltic tradition was raised in an Internet forum of a Dangus community⁵²

consisting mostly of young people interested in Lithuanian folk culture and history, participating in folk music revival, and feeling an affinity for Romuva. The main idea in the forum was that Balts have had “analogues” of shamans, but with “shaman” in their Lithuanian names.⁵³ Shamanism is a specific phenomenon that is not characteristic of the Balts, and the term “shaman” describes only practices of several Siberian peoples.⁵⁴ The questions about shamans arose within the context of a discussion of Lithuanian magical practices opposed to an “official” religion controlled by priests. Together with other magic specialists, shamans were presented as individualist and independent, as opposed to practitioners in an “official” (dominating) religion.⁵⁵ Thus, participants in the Dangus forum do not distance themselves from the content of shamanism, but they think Lithuanians (Balts) are a unique culture with its own terms for magical-religious specialists.

Several trends can be noticed in the Romuva community that emphasize different spheres of “Baltic spirituality.” These trends, however, are united by their focus on an exclusively “Baltic” tradition, an emphasis on folk songs, a recognition of scholarly discourse, the devaluation of attempts to systematize Pagan theology, and the exaltation of a supposedly uninterrupted tradition found in quite recent Lithuanian folk culture. Similar attitudes towards shamanic and other “foreign” elements can be observed in other, smaller Neopagan groups such as the Vilkatškai (formerly known as Baltuva), with its warrior type of the Baltic, pre-Christian religion.⁵⁶

The dichotomy of adherence to the tradition recorded in ethnographic sources as against more elaborate religious teachings based on various sources distinguishes another group of Lithuanian Pagan spiritual group—Kuronas, formed in 2003 after a split from the dominant and more visible Romuva. In his spiritual journey, Kuronas leader Liutauras Baltasis tried out various practices of alternative religiosity (for example, different kinds of parapsychology and Eastern astrology, the Neopagan practices of Romuva). Finally, he united a group of followers who would come to pay much more attention to individual religious experience, avoid rituals as re-enactments based on scholarly reconstructions, and search for possibilities of particularly strong religious feelings. The group completely ignores the reliability of scholarly ritual reconstruction and freely combines a wide range of religious traditions. The most important feature of traditions included in this combination is their relevance to, and impact felt by, practitioners.⁵⁷

The Kuronian approach creates a situation where shamanism can easily become an element of the Baltic worldview, and shamanic trance can be used as a technique for religious experience. Indeed, the leader of Kuronas was consecrated a “spiritual guard” of the Verkiiai Regional Park by Tuvan shaman Tatjana Kobezhykova, one of the Siberian shamans invited by Dabrišius. For Baltasis, however, this title or experience

is one of many in his spiritual journey encompassing different religious traditions; he does not claim to be a shaman or some Baltic equivalent of a Siberian or American shaman.

In 2004, several members of Kuronas discussed shamanism in their Internet forum,⁵⁸ but in a different way than in the Dangus forum. Members were asked why they were interested in shamanism. Discussion participants did not analyze parallels of shamanism and the Baltic tradition or any aspects of shamanism; rather, they presented and discussed their personal experiences. What matters for this community is experience; designations are only of secondary importance.

INTERPRETATIONS OF BALTIC RELIGIOUS TRADITION AND THEIR SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

As has already been stated, there is no practice of Baltic Neoshamanism. Lithuanian Neoshamans mostly regard shamanism as a universal spiritual practice that was best preserved in some distant cultures. However, the foregoing analysis reveals some behaviors, practices, and discussions evidencing some Lithuanian Neoshamans' preoccupations with their local religious heritage and their linking of universal or alien practices or teachings to Lithuanian heritage. The communities testify to a large variety of such behaviors, practices, and interpretations: images of Baltic mythology woven into participants' visions, songs chosen for performance during rituals, clothes, or other ritual elements adapted to local religious heritage, or simply interpretations reflecting the motivation of participants.

In some cases, observation of the main practices and rituals provides little knowledge on the analyzed issue. The most revealing data was gained from participants' actions, discussions, and even incidental remarks. Actually, it is sometimes unclear whether some expressions deal with interpretations of Lithuanian pre-Christian heritage or Lithuanian issues in general. As people attempt to unite their knowledge and experiences into one more-or-less coherent worldview, any aspect of local history or contemporary issues can be used for these adaptations. For example, Arnoldas, the leader of one of the Neotoltec groups, who is absolutely uninterested in the Lithuanian Paganism, thinks that old churches are strong places of power because of the spiritual strength of earlier Catholic priests. Many local issues or religious traditions can be included in the worldview of Neoshamans in this way, resulting in a variety of interpretations. These conflicts show that some communities consider the Baltic tradition important and try to include it in their syncretic Neoshamanic worldview. But, it is not so important as to cause a split in the community, or to be a reason to form new communities based on reconstructions of Baltic shamanism.

The discussions reflect the creation of a coherent, all-embracing worldview that unites a person's interests in both Lithuanian Paganism

and shamanism. However, it does not always encourage innovations in a “foreign” shamanic tradition. The idea of shamanism as a universal practice best retained in some “distant” cultures is anchored in major rituals of these Lithuanian Neoshamanic communities. Still, in some cases, the practices and rituals are not regulated very strictly—participants can rather freely insert content that corresponds to their personal interpretations. As we have seen, such insertions have been observable in the Sacred Fire of Itzachilatlan community, and (most evident) in the activities of Dabrišius, who completely adapts some of his rituals to particular circumstances or for his Neopagan audience.

Interpretation of local religious heritage strongly depends on the nature of Neoshamanic communities and their interaction with broader networks of alternative religiosity. The communities presented here actually are quite loose, united by an interest in shamanism and by a leader who runs the gatherings. Members of these communities belong to other communities, and their worldviews and practices are diverse. Researchers have noticed such fuzzy boundaries of Neoshamanic communities (and other New Age groups).⁵⁹ What is important here is the members’ multiple ties with other communities, especially groups for whom the main authentication reference is to Baltic religious heritage. Neoshamans who care about this heritage usually participate in groups focusing on Baltic Paganism; there are some Neoshamans participating in some Neopagan groups in every discussed Neoshamanic community. Neopagans desiring intense, dramatic religious experiences within their own group can find these experiences and opportunities to express their Baltic preoccupations in a rather free flow of Neoshamanic rituals or in specific structural parts of rituals intended for the expression of personal concerns. During breaks between a Neoshamanic group’s rituals, participants can perform specific behaviors—for example, communicating with and caring about stones located in a ritual space—learned in a Baltic heritage group.

In addition, it is worth considering specific conditions that can influence local Neoshamanic interpretations. For example, recent reconstructions of Baltic shamanism in Lithuanian Neoshamanic communities are possibly unpopular for several reasons.

First, the Lithuanian milieu lacks some Neoshamanic schools that are very influential in other countries, where followers have contributed to the development of Neoshamanism based on shamanic interpretation of Indo-European religious traditions. Followers of Michael Harner are virtually absent in Lithuania, yet it seems that Harner’s school had a distinct impact on the main actors of Nordic Neoshamanism (although later they often have criticized their teacher and his ideas).⁶⁰ It appears that Castaneda’s followers focus more on the traditions of Central America, while the school of Harner, offering its abstracted core shamanism, prepares its followers to recognize shamanic elements in any religious tradition.

As well, followers sensitive to the critique of cultural imperialism can more easily change the reference from the *Other* to their own roots. Some Lithuanian Neoshamanic groups reflect concerns of the global Neoshamanic community—for example, use of psychotropic substances or reflections on femininity—but Lithuanians typically do not care about these accusations concerning cultural imperialism. No such concerns were expressed in any discussion analyzed here, and direct responses included such assertions as “Actually, there is not any theft. [Indigenous shamans] give some things to people who can perform a function of a soul healer. You can’t steal those things. How can I steal something from your inside?”⁶¹ The Lithuanian Sacred Fire community leader has heard that some Native Americans oppose the participation of Westerners in the revival of shamanic practices, but she stresses that some Natives of Ecuador support the Western movement and even come to Lithuania to lead ceremonies. Similarly, Dabrišius and his fellow practitioners follow the Siberian shamanic tradition because they rely mostly on the leadership of Native Siberians.

Finally, general trends of religiosity influenced by the Soviet and post-Soviet socio-political context can be of importance. Because of restrictions on religious life, Neoshamanic ideas (and ideas of the Western New Age movement in general⁶²), especially those coming directly from the West, became popular in Lithuania later than in the United States or Western Europe, and some are still unknown in Lithuania. As in other post-Communist countries, the Lithuanian religious sphere that began to emerge in the late-Soviet period and exploded in post-Soviet culture became entangled with nationalist motivations. Many religious groups developed a worldview based on nationalistic ideology and a philosophy of uniqueness, among similar concerns.⁶³ Such religiosity is prone to include particular religious ideas of a supposedly foreign origin that can strengthen a national myth. Thus, the reference to roots has a slightly different meaning in Lithuanian alternative religiosity than in countries where forms of Neoshamanisms based on shamanic interpretations of Indo-European religious traditions have been developed. In the context of authentication, the introduction of Lithuanian expressions into a foreign or global shamanic practice acts more as a reference to Self-strategy aimed at the efficacy of a practice, rather as the reference to the roots strategy.

Similarly, the influence of nationalism on scholarly work in Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuania could have discouraged serious precedents of shamanic interpretations in scholarly research on Baltic Paganism. While Neoshamans in countries that have welcomed shamanistic reconstructions of Pagan traditions can refer to scholarly research, Lithuanian Neoshamans as yet have no such possibility.

Even though the socio-political context of recent decades has been unfavorable for the emergence of a developed Baltic Neoshamanism,

the future can see at least growth of tendencies to associate “foreign” shamanic practices with local religious heritage. As obstacles to the direct flow of ideas are broken down, more and more Neoshamanic ideas and teachers are reaching Lithuania, and Lithuanian Neoshamanic and Neopagan practitioners are developing stronger links with their Western counterparts. Together with a new political situation, the growing emphasis on self-authority, and on personal and intense experiences, is changing the Lithuanian Neopaganism movement, redirecting its focus from purely nationalistic claims to issues of a broader character. All these trends can foster a situation advantageous for the synthesis of local pagan heritage and “foreign” ideas.

CONCLUSION

The Lithuanian Neoshamanic milieu and the merging of Shamanic and local Indo-European traditions both depend upon the specific sociopolitical context and history of Lithuania. This context encouraged scholarly and popular interpretations of local Pagan religious heritage based on nationalistic motivations that stressed the tradition’s uniqueness, discouraging comparisons with “foreign” traditions. Therefore, there is no developed scholarly Neoshamanic or Neopagan discourse associating the old Baltic religion with shamanic traditions. However, deeper analysis of the rituals, events, and expressions in the Lithuanian Neoshamanic communities shows that in addition to interpretations of written sources of Indo-European religious traditions, the fusion of these and shamanic traditions can be based on more subjective sources—feelings, impressions, experiences, and associations. Furthermore, this analysis shows the necessity of paying more attention to the nature of Neoshamanic communities, their networks and their links with Neopagan and other religious groups, as well as innovations and insertions made by “ordinary” members. A particular Neoshamanic group can unite people using different authentication strategies that Lindquist pointed at. Signs referring to the local Indo-European—Baltic—tradition can be observed in nearly any Neoshamanic group or event in Lithuania, despite a particular (Siberian, South American or other) shamanic tradition they are supposedly based on. Such a focus allows researchers to discern important changes and interactions of various groups and local adaptations of transnational spirituality.

ENDNOTES

¹ See Robert J. Wallis, *Shamans / Neo-Shamans: Ecstasy, alternative archaeologies and contemporary Pagans* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 79–141.

² See Wallis, *Shamans / Neo-Shamans*; Galina Lindquist, *Shamanic Performances on the Urban Scene: Neo-Shamanism in Contemporary Sweden* (Stockholm University: Stockholm, 1997); Jenny Blain, *Nine Worlds of Seid-Magic: Ecstasy and Neo-Shamanism in North European Paganism* (New York: Routledge, 2002); and Siv E. Kraft, Trude Fonneland and James R. Lewis, *Nordic Neoshamanisms* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

³ Lindquist, *Shamanic Performances on the Urban Scene*, 28–52.

⁴ Andrei Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive: Shamanism and the Western Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 305–09.

⁵ Lindquist, *Shamanic Performances on the Urban Scene*, 291.

⁶ Jeroen W. Boekhoven, *Genealogies of Shamanism: Struggles for Power, Charisma and Authority* (Eelde, Netherlands: Barkhuis, 2011), 27.

⁷ Neoshamanic practices are diverse, and the dichotomy of shamanism and Neoshamanism is complicated and obscure. Recognizing that many practitioners would reject the term “Neoshamanism” (or would tend to agree with it applied to groups unacceptable to them), but taking into account the term’s established use, I refer to practices and practitioners here as Neoshamanism and Neoshamans.

⁸ Gintautas Mažeikis, “Neošamanizmo kelionės [Journeys of Neoshamanism],” in *Kelionių antropologija* [Anthropology of Travels], ed. Gintautas Mažeikis (Šiauliai: Šiaulių universiteto leidykla, 2004), 149. On Castaneda, his teachings and impact on Neoshamanism, see Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive*, 189–203; Boekhoven, *Genealogies of Shamanism*, 206–11; and Wallis, *Shamans / Neo-Shamans*, 39–44.

⁹ Milda Ališauskienė, *Naujųjų religijų raiška ir ypatumai Lietuvoje: “Gyvenimo meno” fondo atvejo studija* [The Manifestations and Peculiarities of New Religions in Lithuania: Case Study of the Art of Living Foundation] (Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, 2009), 60.

¹⁰ Susan Gregg, *Toltekų kelias: asmeninės transformacijos vadovas* [The Toltec Way: a Guide to Personal Transformation] (Kaunas: Mijalba, 2003); Susan Gregg, *Galios šokis: šamaniška kelionė* [Dance of Power: a Shamanic Journey] (Kaunas: Mijalba, 2004); Susan Gregg, *Angeli, dievy, pranašų, dvasios vedlių ir pakylėtųjų mokytojų enciklopedija* [The Encyclopedia of Angels, Gods, Prophets, Spirit Guides, and Ascended Masters] (Kaunas: Mijalba, 2011); Alberto Villoldo, *Nušvitimas: šamano kelias į nušvitimą* [The Enlightenment: The Shaman’s Way to Enlightenment] (Kaunas: Mijalba, 2011); Heather Hughes-Calero, *Jegos ratas: energijos gijų surišimas* [Circle of Power: Tying Down Strings of Energy] (Kaunas: Mijalba, 2004); Heather Hughes-Calero, *Sparnuotosios vilkės skrydis: šamanės ir jos mokinės energijų žaismas* [The Flight of Winged Wolf: Aligning Shape-Shifting Energies Between Shaman and Apprentice] (Kaunas: Mijalba, 2004); Simon Buxton, *Šamaniškas bitės kelias: senoji bitininkų išmintis ir gydymas* [Shamanic Way of the Bee: Ancient Wisdom and Healing Practices of the Bee Masters] (Vilnius: Algarvė, 2007); Lynn V. Andrews, *Šamanė* [The Shaman] (Vilnius: Alkionė, 2008); and Lynn V. Andrews, *Dvasios moteris: skydo mokymas* [Spirit Woman: Teaching of the Shields] (Vilnius: Alkionė, 2008).

¹¹ Neotoltecs are Neoshamans who claim to follow a Toltec tradition. The term was introduced into the Neoshamanic context by Castaneda, who initially

described Don Juan as Yaqui but later, in his fourth book, referred to his teacher's knowledge as Toltec in origin. This development began in his third book, where "Don Juan loses his specificity as a Yaqui, someone of a particular cultural and ethnic background, and becomes a more homogenous and less easily traceable indigenous sorcerer whose knowledge does not appear to have a precise point of reference and whose particular ethnic identity can no longer be placed" (Ageeth Sluis, "Journeys to Others and Lessons of Self: Carlos Castaneda in *Camposcape*," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4, no. 2 (2012): 3, available at <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/2k72p3w7>, accessed 12 July 2016. Followers of Castaneda's teaching are now often referred to as Toltec warriors or followers of the Toltec path (e.g. Wallis, *Shamans / Neoshamans*, 39, 44).

¹² On Harner's "core shamanism" and his impact on Neoshamanism, see Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive*, 234–47; Boekhoven, *Genealogies of Shamanism*, 217–19; and Wallis, *Shamans / Neo-Shamans*, 45–48.

¹³ "Core shamanism" names Michael Harner's belief that certain tribal shamanic techniques and practices transcend culture and context, yielding a global "core" practice. See Michael J. Harner, *The Way of the Shaman: A Guide to Power and Healing* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

¹⁴ Among those I studied, only Rita Baniénė told me of knowing Harner, although she has never been in workshops of his school. Personal interview in Kaunas (3 April 2009). There were plans to arrange a workshop led by Fabienne De Vestel, a representative of this school, in the autumn of 2015, but the event was cancelled.

¹⁵ Eglė Aleknaitė, "Formy neoshamanizma v Litve: ich kontekst i sviazi [Forms of Neoshamanism in Lithuania, their Context and Connections]," *Colloquium heptaplomeris* 2 (2015): 95–100.

¹⁶ Mažeikis, "Neošamanizmo kelionės," 149.

¹⁷ The term "entheogen" (Greek, "become divinely inspired within") is a neologism created by a group of scholars as a substitute for "hallucinogen." An entheogen is any substance that produces a feeling of hyper-inspiration or spirituality.

¹⁸ Lindquist similarly emphasizes the fuzziness of Swedish Neoshamanic communities. See *Shamanic Performances on the Urban Scene*, 292–94.

¹⁹ The ancient Pagan tradition practiced in what is now Lithuania and analyzed by Lithuanian historians of religion is usually referred to as "Baltic Paganism" because several Baltic tribes lived in this territory, and scholars tend to use sources describing practices and images of various Baltic tribes interchangeably in their reconstructions of this Pagan tradition. The majority of Lithuanian Neopagans (groups claiming to revive or continue the ancient local Pagan tradition) also use the term "Baltic;" thus, I use "Baltic Paganism" in this paper to refer to the local Pagan tradition of Lithuania.

²⁰ See for example Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive*, and Boekhoven, *Genealogies of Shamanism*.

²¹ See for example Apostolos N. Athanassakis, "Shamanism and Amber in Greece: The Northern Connection," in *Shamanhood Symbolism and Epic*, ed. Juha Pentikäinen (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2001), 207–20.

²² In this article, I analyze only those ideas and processes relevant to Lithuania and interpretations of Lithuanian scholars. This does not mean that Baltic

Paganism has not been analyzed in other countries, or that Lithuanians have no knowledge of this research. It is likely, however, that works of Lithuanian scholars have the biggest influence on the public image of ancient Baltic Paganism in Lithuania.

²³ Gintaras Beresnevičius, *Dausos* [Land of the Dead] (Vilnius: Taura, 1990), 154–57; *Baltų religinės reformos* [Baltic Religious Reforms] (Vilnius: Taura, 1995), 50–51, 176–79; and “Ekstremalios būklės baltų tradicijoje [Extreme States in the Baltic Tradition],” *Šiaurės Atėnai* 6 (2005): 4.

²⁴ See for example Dainius Razauskas-Daukintas, *Krosnis mitologijoje* [Furnace Mythology] (Vilnius: Aidai, 2011); 154–58, 278–79.

²⁵ Eglė Aleknaitė, “Šamaniški elementai baltų religinėje tradicijoje [Shamanic Elements in Baltic Religious Tradition],” *Liaudies kultūra* 3 (2008): 12–19.

²⁶ The Neopagan group reviving the old Baltic tradition officially registered as a religious community in 1992. Some of its members, together with leaders Jonas (1939–2014) and Inija (b. 1951) Trinkūnai, claim to have had a Pagan worldview since the 1960s.

²⁷ Aleknaitė, “Formy neoshamanizma v Litve: ich kontekst sviazi,” 98–99.

²⁸ Personal interview with Rita Baniėnė, Kaunas, 3 April 2009.

²⁹ Mažeikis, “Neošamanizmo kelionės,” 149.

³⁰ Oneta Lunskaĳa, *Baltosios Pajautos slėnis* [A Valley of White Pajauta] (Vilnius: Roza Mira, 1999). The Pajauta Valley is associated with Pajauta [Lith. *feeling*], a mythical daughter of Lithuanian duke Kernius. The valley is located in the old Lithuanian capital Kernavė, where this Neoshamanic group performed some of their practices.

³¹ Despite different types of membership and involvement levels (Aleknaitė, “Formy neoshamanizma v Litve: ich kontekst sviazi,” 98), the main seminar attracts 50–100 participants annually. Similar numbers attend lectures in various Lithuanian cities, while translations of Gregg’s books are published in runs of 2000 copies, a large number in a small Lithuanian book market, particularly a specialized one, with some titles having second printings. No other Lithuanian Neoshamanic community attracts such a big audience. Descriptions of the group and its attitudes and practices presented here are based on 2013–2015 field data in Vilnius, Kaunas, Nida.

³² In her teaching, Gregg samples many religious traditions; in her books, however, she identifies it with “Toltec wisdom.” She claims she mastered it during her training with her teacher don Miguel Ruiz (b. 1952), a Mexican-born author of “Toltec tradition” spiritual literature.

³³ Gregg, *Angeli, dievy, pranašy, dvasios vedliu ir pakylėtuju mokytoju enciklopedija*, 404–09.

³⁴ My description of the group is based on data gathered during fieldwork in Šilutė district in 2014–2015.

³⁵ Itzachilatlan is a Nahuatl word, in this context meaning the Americas. See Dylan Miner, *Creating Aztlán: Chicano Art, Indigenous Sovereignty, and Lowriding across Turtle Island* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 178. My description of the group is based on data gathered during fieldwork in Vilnius and Varėna district in 2014–2015.

³⁶ Esther J. Langdon and Isabel Santana de Rose, “Medicine Alliance: Contemporary Shamanic Networks in Brazil,” in *Ayahuasca Shamanism in the Amazon and Beyond*, ed. Beatriz C. Labate and Clancy Cavnar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 85; Esther J. Langdon and Isabel S. de Rose, “(Neo)Shamanic Dialogues: Encounters between the Guarani and Ayahuasca,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 15, no. 4 (2012): 36–59; 41.

³⁷ A mescaline-bearing cactus, *Echinopsis pachanoi*.

³⁸ Langdon and de Rose, “(Neo)Shamanic Dialogues,” 42.

³⁹ Usage of psychoactive substances as occurs in rituals of the community is considered illegal in Lithuania, and at least one practitioner has been jailed as a result. Therefore, to protect the community and its members I do not provide their names.

⁴⁰ Fieldwork in Varėna district, 20 September 2015.

⁴¹ A ceremony of death and rebirth carried out in a sweat lodge (steam bath) and intended for purification through rebirth from the womb of Mother Earth.

⁴² My descriptions of this Neoshaman and the community surrounding him are based on data gathered during fieldwork in Telšiai district, Šilutė district and Nida in 2009–2015.

⁴³ Petras Dabrišius, *Vilko kailyje* (Kaunas: Sveikas žmogus, 2011), 130–35.

⁴⁴ Fieldwork in Telšiai district, 19 September 2009.

⁴⁵ There are no historical chronicles mentioning such drums, and I have not succeeded in finding his sources. It is worth noting that stories about the destructive advent of Christianity, especially the elimination of drumming from folk culture, are important for the identity and practices of the dominant Lithuanian Neopagan group Romuva.

⁴⁶ Interview with Rimvydas Budrys, Vilnius, 29 January 2008.

⁴⁷ See Michael F. Strimiska and Vilius R. Dundzila, “Romuva: Lithuanian Paganism in Lithuania and America,” in *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Michael F. Strimiska (Santa Barbara, California: ABC CLIO, 2005), 241–98.

⁴⁸ The group has been presented and analyzed in a number of studies, including Strimiska and Dundzila, “Romuva: Lithuanian Paganism in Lithuania and America;” Michael Strimiska, “Romuva Looks East: Indian Inspiration in Lithuanian Paganism,” in *Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society*, ed. Milda Ališauskienė and Ingo W. Schröder (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 129–47; and Egidija Ramanauskaitė, *Subkultūra: fenomenas ir modernumas* [Subculture: Phenomenon and Modernity] (Kaunas: VDU leidykla, 2004), 116–50.

⁴⁹ See Jonas Trinkūnas, *Baltų tikėjimas: lietuvių pasaulejauta, papročiai, apeigos, ženklai* [Baltic Faith: Lithuanian Worldview, Customs, Ceremonies, and Signs] (Vilnius: Diemedis, 2000); and Jonas Trinkūnas, *Lietuvių senosios religijos kelias* [Path of the Old Lithuanian Religion] (Vilnius: Asveja, 2009).

⁵⁰ This identification and contact of Romuva with India started only in 1998, although a tradition of associating Hinduism and India with the old Baltic religion and Lithuania in various Lithuanian discourses can be traced to the late nineteenth century. See Strimiska, “Romuva Looks East,” 129–47.

⁵¹ Ramanauskaitė, *Subkultūra: fenomenas ir modernumas*, 146–47.

⁵² “Dangus” (Lithuanian, “heaven”) is a record company and organizer of festivals focusing on alternative music, Baltic culture and Neopagan spirituality. Fans of the music and regular visitors of the festivals are active participants of discussions taking place in an online forum established by the company.

⁵³ Anonymous post, Dangus Forums, <http://www.dangus.net/forumas/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=188&start=48>, accessed 12 July 2016.

⁵⁴ Post by Paulešas, Dangus Forums, <http://www.dangus.net/forumas/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=188>; accessed 12 July 2016.

⁵⁵ Post by Ugn, Dangus Forums, <http://www.dangus.net/forumas/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=188>; accessed 12 July 2016.

⁵⁶ Rasa Pranskevičiūtė and Eglė Aleknaitė, “Šiuolaikinė pagonybė Lietuvoje: matomos ir nematomos grupės [Contemporary Paganism in Lithuania: Visible and Invisible Groups],” in *Religinė įvairovė Lietuvoje: portretai, kasdienybė ir šventės* [Religious Diversity in Lithuania: Portraits, Everyday Life and Celebrations], ed. Milda Ališauskienė (Vilnius: Versus Aureus, 2015), 172.

⁵⁷ Pranskevičiūtė and Aleknaitė, “Šiuolaikinė pagonybė Lietuvoje,” 172.

⁵⁸ “Support Forum;” at http://baltai.lt/kurono_forumas/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=19; accessed 12 July 2016.

⁵⁹ See for example Lindquist, *Shamanic Performances on the Urban Scene*, 292–94.

⁶⁰ Kraft, Fonneland and Lewis, *Nordic Neoshamanisms*, 3.

⁶¹ Interview with Rita Baniienė, Kaunas, 3 April 2009.

⁶² See Milda Ališauskienė, “The New Age Milieu in Lithuania: Popular Catholicism or Religious Alternative?” in *Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society*, ed. Milda Ališauskienė and Ingo W. Schröder (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 152, 154.

⁶³ See for example Ališauskienė, *Naujųjų religijų raiška ir ypatumai Lietuvoje* [Manifestations and Peculiarities of New Religions in Lithuania], PhD diss., Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas (2009), 38. Romuva, the most visible Lithuanian Neopagan community, and especially its representation in discourses of its leaders, is a pure example of a Post-Soviet Neopagan community. Its interpretations of pre-Christian religious heritage and other important concepts have been shaped by specific Soviet and post-Soviet socio-political contexts.