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3rd International Scientific Conference of the Lithuanian Society for the Study of Religions

LIFE

HERE AND HEREAFTER:
BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Vilnius, Lithuania, 23-24 October, 2015
Vilnius University

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ABSTRACTS

Lithuanian Society for the Study of Religions, Vilnius University and
Vytautas Magnus University

**The 3rd International Scientific Conference of the Lithuanian Society for
the Study of Religions**

LIFE HERE AND HEREAFTER: BELIEFS AND PRACTICES
Vilnius, Lithuania
23-24 October 2015

Abstracts

Conference committee:

dr. Eglė Aleknaitė (Vytautas Magnus University),
assoc. prof. Milda Ališauskienė (Vytautas Magnus University),
prof. Audrius Beinorius (Vilnius University),
assoc. prof. Aušra Pažėraitė (Vilnius University),
dr. Rasa Pranskevičiūtė (Vytautas Magnus University),
prof. Edgūnas Račius (Vytautas Magnus University),
assoc. prof. Annika Hvithamar (Copenhagen University).

Opening plenary session

Moderator: Milda Ališauskienė, Head of Lithuanian Society for the Study of Religions

Welcoming speech by representative of Vilnius University Rectorate

Tony Walter: *Why Today's Dead Become Angels*

Why Today's Dead Become Angels

Tony Walter

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Abstract

How might the content of afterlife beliefs relate to experiences of loss? Very little research has been conducted into this question that bridges the study of bereavement and the study of religion. This paper analyses the recent shift, in a number of western countries, away from the belief that the deceased's soul goes to heaven to be reunited with other deceased family members, to the idea that the dead become angels. This shift is found especially online and among younger mourners who might expect to live many decades till they themselves get to heaven. Unlike souls residing in heaven, angels can move to and fro, continuing to relate to the living on earth, not least as protectors. The angelic dead articulate younger mourners' experiences of living with the dead on earth, unlike older mourners who may look forward to joining them in heaven. That the dead become angels is taught by neither churches nor popular books on angels; it is not a creedal belief, but an idea, a meme, spread largely through the internet, that some mourners use – and creatively develop - in particular contexts for particular beloved deceaseds, and may be understood as vernacular religion.

Parallel session 1

Life Here and Hereafter: Biblical and Early Christianity Approaches

Moderator: Eglė Aleknaite

Sami Yli-Karjanmaa *Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions": Reincarnation in Philo of Alexandria*

Gintaras Sungaila *The influence of Gnosticism on the Images of Afterlife in Eastern Christianity"*

Aušra Pažėraitė *Who Has a Power to Destroy the Hell*

Mark John Nixon *Glimpses of the Hereafter in the Speeches of Peter in Acts*

Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions: Reincarnation in Philo of Alexandria

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Abstract

Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE to c. 50 CE) is the most important representative of Hellenistic Judaism. Philo's literary output is of the same order as the Septuagint, and he had a profound impact on early Christian theology. His allegorical interpretations of the Pentateuch are greatly influenced by Greek philosophy, Plato's in particular.

Philo's views about the soul represent an area of his thought where there are few departures from Plato. This has been acknowledged for a long time, and he has been seen as a proponent of the Pythagorean–Platonic tenet of reincarnation at least since the 16th century. However, since the early 20th century scholars have adopted diagonally opposite positions on the issue. These positions have not, however, been based on actually examining the issue. My doctoral thesis (Åbo Akademi University 2013) filled this gap.

Taking into account all the available evidence that can be garnered from Philo's works, it can be seen that the idea of reincarnation is in harmony with Philo's anthropology, ethics and soteriology. Philo also freely uses Plato's reincarnational imagery and terminology. He nowhere rejects the doctrine but instead speaks of it with relative openness in a few passages (*Somn.* 1.138–139, *Cher.* 114, *QE* 2.40, frg. 7.3 Harris; cf. *Agr.* 89). Mostly, however, Philo's elusive language requires that the researcher do some dot-connecting; the tenet seems to have been an esoteric one.

The result that Philo endorsed reincarnation helps us understand a large number of Philonic passages more accurately. His basic scheme of the journey of the soul includes its divine origin, sojourning on earth and in the body, and the return to God. But this does not explain what happens to imperfect or wicked souls after death. They reincarnate until they change their orientation from earthly to heavenly things.

The influence of Gnosticism on the images of afterlife in Eastern Christianity

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Abstract

In 1980 the Synod of Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) organized a special theological committee in order to resolve a newly arisen theological issue. Then-deacon (now archbishop) Lazarus Puhalo has accused famous hieromonk Seraphim Rose (now sometimes regarded as a saint in practice of the Church) of heresy.

The source of controversy was teaching on Aerial Toll-Houses explained in the Seraphim's book. In spite of not being dogmatically defined by any Ecumenical Council this teaching is so common among Orthodox Christians, that even some bishops view it as a dogma. Nonetheless even after Synod of ROCOR adopted the position of Seraphim Rose and warned deacon Lazarus, the debate still prevailed and many remarkable theologians took part in it. This teaching remains an issue at the episcopal level too. In 2011 the head of Antiochian Orthodox Church in America metropolitan Philip Saliba used his episcopal authority to recommend reading the book by theologian Adnan Trabulsi „Beyond Death“, which calls the belief in Aerial Toll-Houses a heresy.

This paper examines the influence of Gnosticism on the teaching on Aerial Toll-Houses. According to this teaching, after death the soul passes Toll-Houses, in which demons attempt to find a reason for taking the soul to Hades, while the angels and the prayers of the living defend the soul. Analogies are found in gnostic texts, such as the Apocalypse of Paul, the First Apocalypse of James etc. The paper considers latest research in the fields of patristic studies and studies of gnosticism in this context.

Who has a power to destroy the Hell? Exegesis of Dan 12:1-3

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Abstract

A word that we find in the passage of Daniel (12:1-3) *deira'on*, is very rare in the Bible, appearing only one time in the last line of the book of the prophet Isaiah (66:24): And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.” (KJV) This line strengthens the suspicion that Daniel envisions the Hell as a condition of someone staying in the face of others. The state in which one is suffering contempt, condemnation and revulsion. And not just in Daniel. Translation to Aramaic of the quoted passage in Isaiah (in which it is not very clear how the

same corpses can be burning for centuries and at the same time be eaten by worms, and even more, might be worried that someone comes to look at them every Sabbath), translates as follows: "And they will come to see the skeletons of people, sinners who rebelled against my Word, and their souls will not die, and their fire will never be extinguished, and the wicked will be judged in Hell, until the righteous will say on their behalf, we have seen enough." So the righteous in this life has the power to make the lives of others a hell, and the righteous ones in eternal life - to destroy the eternal Hell?

In my paper I will present exegetical analysis of Dan 12:1-3 with recourse to rabbinical exegesis.

Glimpses of the Hereafter in the Speeches of Peter in Acts

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Abstract

This paper introduces us to a Christian view of the afterlife that existed in the first days of the Church. The speeches of Peter recorded in the Acts of the Apostles are analysed to see what glimpses they provide to us for establishing this early belief. The early speeches in Acts are considered to be based on an authentic early tradition rather than being a wholly Lukan creation of the late first century C.E.. In order to set the context in which Peter speaks we will briefly consider contemporary Jewish thoughts regarding resurrection and the afterlife. These are essential not just for the background but also for providing the framework of Petrine thought. Peter's focus on the resurrection causes him to have distinctive features in his message and so we then focus on these characteristic factors that Peter introduces to distinguish his position on the afterlife by paying close attention to two passages – one in Acts 2 and another in Acts 4. In the former passage Peter considers the hope of King David regarding his own future in the presence of God and in the latter Peter's indication that the resurrection of Jesus is distinctive as a resurrection "out from among the dead ones." A close reading here of the text shows how he combines popular beliefs about the afterlife with his new teaching on the resurrection of Jesus to offer a rebuttal of the teaching of the Sadducees that there is no resurrection and also provides hope of a general resurrection for those who hope in God. Our analysis allows us to draw some conclusions regarding the initial proclamation or kerygma concerning Jesus Christ.

Parallel session 2

Life Here and Hereafter: Contemporary (Post)Christianity

Moderator: Annika Hvithamar

Paul Heelas *The Flow of Life-itself: Here/After*

Svetlana Karassyova *Understanding of Postmortal Existence by the Religious People in Belarus (Based on the Results of the Republican Cross-Confessional Survey, 2012–2014)*

Ibrahim Abraham *Serious Leisure and Spiritual Anxiety in Evangelical Youth Culture*

Panagiotis Pentaris *Before, During and After the Cemetery: An Ethnographic Study of Greek Burials & Beliefs*

Jones Irwin *Confessional Religious Education, Pluralism and Their In-Betweens - Developing a Multi-Belief Curriculum for Primary School Children in Ireland*

The Flow of Life-itself: Here/After

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Abstract

Inspired by Charles Taylor's approach to the study of religion, spirituality and the secular condition, I'm a great believer in the comparative study of sources of significance.

There are three main ways of envisaging the death of the physical body as a source of significance. One is advanced by *secular life* (with atheists, in particular, treating death as the ultimate end); another by *theistic life* (with dedicated Christians and Muslims (for example) believing that death is the ultimate movement into the true life of transcendent heaven); and the third is the *monistic life* (with participants working to experience the flow of inherent life, thereby entering the eternal dynamic that lies within existence).

Having introduced, and compared, the three modes - with a particular eye on what is entailed for life 'here', if not for 'after', I'll dwell on monistic life:

- Reflecting on some of the ways that fear of death is addressed: for example, by the monistic path going beyond the fears than can be aroused by the 'teleological self' of the secular;
- Reflecting on survey data to see if the numerical significance of the monistic approach can be ascertained: for example, could it be the case that Lithuanian data – 79% believing in life after death, 47% believing in God – indicates monistic 'flow'; a transformation of the immanence of the ultimate life of the transcendent Godhead of Catholicism into the inherent of life-itself?;
- Offering tentative observations on explaining the (arguable) expansion of the monistic life in certain countries: for example, has the collapse of Christianity, and increasing awareness that secular life founders in face death, prompted movement to the 'third way' of inherent flow?)

Understanding of postmortal existence by the religious people in Belarus (based on the results of the republican cross-confessional survey, 2012–2014)

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Abstract

In frames of the all-republican survey aimed at revealing the main types of religiosity in the modern Belarus, among other questions, there were five doctrinal ones. Those questions corresponded main worldview blocks: about the creation of the world, its structure, its ultimate fate and in particular about human final fate (or postmortal existence). The results of the survey showed that the question about postmortal existence appeared to be the most difficult. This paper gives a hypothetical explanation of this fact and some figures are demonstrated.

Serious Leisure and Spiritual Anxiety in Evangelical Youth Culture

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Abstract

In recent decades, Evangelical youth culture and ministry has utilized multiple forms of “serious leisure” to present and perform Evangelical belief. As the name suggests, “serious leisure” activities are those which demand the investment of significant amounts of time, and which typically have their own subcultural values and hierarchies. Serious leisure activities that have been utilized by Evangelicals include various forms of popular music as well as various individual and team sports. Based on interviews and participant observations in South Africa, Australia, Britain, and the United States with Evangelical heavy metal, punk, and rap musicians, as well as with Evangelical surfers

and skateboarders, this paper will analyze the tensions inherent within Evangelical engagements with serious leisure. Whereas existing studies of serious leisure, treating the phenomenon as a secular phenomenon, stress the beneficial aspects of these pursuits for both individuals and communities, and for young and old alike, examining specifically Evangelical expressions of serious leisure reveal constitutive tensions. Evangelical desires to appropriate or articulate specific forms of serious leisure typically lead to conflict between the normatively this-worldly nature of the leisure activity, focused on life *here*, and the other-worldly nature of Evangelicalism, focused on life *hereafter*. As such, young people whose conversion to Evangelical Christianity comes through serious leisure ministry often experience intense anxiety over their continued participation in serious leisure pursuits, with many feeling that the life-changing experiences that ought to accompany Evangelical conversion necessitates the cessation of their involvement in the serious leisure. Continued involvement in serious leisure after Evangelical conversion can depend on successfully sanctifying serious leisure, and thus overcoming the tension between focusing on life here and life hereafter.

Before, during and after the cemetery: An ethnographic study of Greek burials & beliefs

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Abstract

Death is a contested notion across the globe. In its objective form, the mere cessation of bodily functions, it is the same event for all and to every place. Nonetheless, death is a socially constructed notion. Objective may the event be but it is our culture, religion, history and inherited values that teach us how to perceive, interpret, and understand death. They also remind us how to respond to the event of the loss of a loved one, both privately and publicly. Oftentimes responses include beliefs to an afterlife, and always there is a set of practices that accompany the death of a loved one. This paper is focusing on traditional Greek practices that surround burials and their contested notions. This is an ethnographic study with a family that lost a loved one in Crete. Information are gathered before, during and after the cemetery, in order to depict traditional practices in Crete. Particular focus has been given on religion; how has the Greek Orthodox Church belief informed these practices and beliefs. There is overall proof that mourning in traditional Greece is a public affair. The community comes together to carry out practices that convey their belief system, as well as the communal character of dying.

Confessional Religious Education, Pluralism and Their In-Betweens - Developing a Multi-Belief Curriculum for Primary School Children in Ireland

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Abstract

I am currently developing, as part of a team in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) the first Irish state curriculum in the pluralism of religion and ethics, a multi-denominational curriculum Goodness Me! Goodness You! (NCCA 2014-), for Senior classes, that is children aged eight years to thirteen years. The state curriculum is being developed in response to a growing argument in Ireland that the dominant confessional approach (mostly Catholic) to religious and ethical education in schools is too limiting for a pluralist society and in certain instances, discriminatory against children or parents who come from minority religions and nonreligions.

In this paper, I will explore some of the theoretical and practical tensions involved in seeking to develop a pluralist pedagogy and epistemology in the approach to different beliefs and

practices. Is there a 'common ground' on which alternative and often conflicting beliefs about the 'here and the hereafter' can sit together or is there something fundamentally irreconcilable about such diversity? Our approach to Goodness Me! Goodness You! is strongly influenced by radical educators such as Paulo Freire, who argue for a 'generative'/'contextual' and 'participative' methodology in developing such a curriculum. But there are also significant educational critics of this approach, who should be taken account of. For example, a more realist religious epistemology would argue that the Freirean approach is too relativistic. At issue here is also the complex understanding of childhood, children's own understanding and positioning within the educational sphere (vis a vis parents and /or teachers) and also children's contextualisation within religious and nonreligious belief and practice.

As well as intra-pedagogical issues, the development of this ethical-religious curriculum foregrounds problems concerning the relation between philosophy and religion (including mysticism), problems in inter-religious dialogue, problems in dialogue between religion and nonreligion, and broader political questions concerning the relation between the secular public domain and religious belief and practice.

In this paper, I will focus on some of the more pressing particular concerns and questions in each of these domains.

Parallel session 3

Life Here and Hereafter in Contemporary Asia

Moderator: Egdūnas Račius

Itzchak Weismann *The Saved Party: This Life and the Hereafter in Modern Salafi and Muslim Brotherhood Thought*

David Thurfjell *The Bitter-Sweet Taste of Despair: Death and Youth Culture in Charismatic Shi'ism*

Marie-Dominique Even *Change and Continuity in The Representations of the Hereafter among the Mongols*

Justina Razumaitė *Freedom of Religion in China: The Case of Christianity*

Brenda Beck *A Sacrament of Ritual Suicide: Why The Death and Resurrection of Two Medieval Hindu Folk Heroes Is Re-enacted Today*

The Saved Party: This Life and the Hereafter in Modern Salafi and Muslim Brotherhood Thought

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Abstract

Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood represent, in themselves and in the interrelationships between them, two of the major responses to the Muslim encounter with Western modern civilization. Both are rooted in the reformist endeavor to revive the spirit of the pious forefathers (*salaf*) as a means to regain Islam's supremacy in the contemporary world. Yet, while the Salafis dwell on the purity of faith and follow a literalist understanding of the Quran and Sunna (the Prophet's example), the Muslim Brothers pursue a political activist approach aimed at (re-)establishing the Islamic state.

Though essentially this-worldly, the hereafter is a central motivation in the conduct of both Islamist trends. For the Salafis it is mostly associated with their self-view as the Saved Party, which according to a famous hadith (a saying attributed to the Prophet), is the only one among 73 Muslim groups that will enter paradise while all others are destined to hell. For the Muslim Brothers gaining paradise is associated with service and self-sacrifice for the community.

In my presentation I will trace the evolution of the Salafi and Muslim Brotherhood ideas of this life and the hereafter against the background of the upheavals of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Focusing on the writings of major thinkers of each trend, I will show how the initially reformist notion of the Saved Party designed to adapt Islam to modernity has been transformed into disavowal of everything considered un-Islamic in the Salafi camp and into rebellion against secular Muslim governments on the Brotherhood side. I will finally demonstrate how the rejoining of the otherworldly notions of the purist Salafi and the radicalized Muslim Brotherhood informs the rise of global jihad and suicide bombing.

The bitter-sweet taste of despair: death and youth culture in charismatic Shi'ism

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Abstract

Based on fieldwork in Qom, this paper explores the ritual and theological meanings of death among members of a Shi'ite revivalist movement in contemporary Iran. The *heyhati* movement represents a charismatic development in the religious landscape of the Islamic Republic. The movement expanded on massively during the last decade and played a pivotal role in the mobilisation of popular support for former president Ahmadinejad. The movement circles around an independent type of preachers known as *zaker* or *madha*. Although the *heyhati* movement represents a form of Iranian folk religiosity that in connection to certain holidays entertains broad popular support, it has also developed into a particular subculture with its own lifestyle, ritual repertoire and ideological profile. Lately this development has created controversy as some preachers, more or less openly, have challenged the clerical establishment in the country. Stories about the martyrdom of historical Islamic heroes, ritual manifestations of one's own readiness to die and meditations about death, constitute important features in the religious life of *heyhati* men. Despite these mournful expressions in their ritual life, however, present and former members of the movement predominantly speak of their engagement in terms of joy and friendship. In this paper the amalgamation of politics, joyful youth culture and death awareness is presented and analysed.

Change and continuity in the representations of the hereafter among the Mongols

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Abstract

The object of this paper is to address the impact that social and religious change can have –or not have– on the cultural representation of the after-life. A major change occurred in Mongolian society with the official adoption of Tibetan Buddhism at the end of the 16th century in lieu of shamanist sacrifices made to ancestors providing prosperity for the family or the community here on earth, and of human sacrifices at royal funerals. The Buddhist notion of endless rebirths that await all worldly beings according to their actions in their previous lives created new fears among the Mongols and entailed various rites and practices aimed at securing individually a good rebirth. Yet, pre-Buddhist imaginary of the hereafter was partly preserved in people's representations and mingled with the lamas' teachings, as shown in popular narratives and ethnographic data. In the 20th century, two major changes occurred: the establishment of a government on the Soviet model in 1921 which soon worked to eradicate the ancient beliefs and impose its own dogma, and the rapid transition to a pluralist regime after 1990, a period marked by globalisation and the spreading of new, mainly Christian, religions. Based on historical data, oral literature and regular field visits in Mongolian areas, this paper will discuss the relation between culture and religion on the one hand, and the question of "secularisation" in contemporary Mongolia on the other.

Freedom of Religion in China: The Case of Christianity

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Abstract

China – a multi-ethnic state and an old civilizational structure with unique moral and ethical systems, where religions such as Confucianism, Taoism, Islam, Christianity, and others are confessed by various groups and individuals since ancient times. From the institutional point of view, freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Constitution of the People's Republic of China and is protected by state. On the other hand, religious activities are strictly controlled by the Government, specifically the State Administration for Religious Affairs. Of course, there is no wonder that in countries with hierarchical political structures the mechanisms of control over the religious activities are intensely implemented. However, contemporary China is inevitably affected by the processes of globalization and internationalization, as well as inner reforms and urbanization. This causes the individualization of the society in China, and, thus, it is more difficult for state to monitor the processes related to religious practices. According to statistical data, Christianity is becoming the most popular religion in China. The number of believers is increasing every year, in 2014 it was about 200 million (Communist Party of China has about 88 million members) and it is predicted that China will become the biggest christian country in the world by 2030. Bearing all this in mind, the case of Christianity in China is very timely to reveal the balance of freedom of religion and state/party control of it as an institutional process in hierachical society. The insights of this presentation are based on theory of institutionalism.

A Sacrament of Ritual Suicide: Why The Death and Resurrection of Two Medieval Hindu Folk Heroes Is Re-enacted Today

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Abstract

A medieval oral epic from South India describes the life and death of two heroic brothers who valiantly try to advance their family's good name. Then, feeling guilty that they have lost so many loyal fighters in the process, the men turn to a river to wash their swords. There they receive a sign from Lord Vishnu saying they must quickly end their lives. Now the two decide to fall forward on their own weapons. That is the story. Nowadays the area is dotted with folk temples honouring these heroes. Furthermore, at several shrines their deaths are re-enacted annually. Late in the evening, on a day when there is almost no moon, male devotees grab swords, dance about widely and then each falls to earth in a swoon-like death. These bodies are laid out on the ground as corpses and covered with white cloths. Then, at the climax of this sacrament a young virgin girl arrives with a pot and sprinkles water from it onto each prone body. Meanwhile a bard recites magical verses to rhythmic drum beats. The dead celebrants all come back to life. This paper will describe both the medieval story and its modern rites. The author will then attempt to explain why using the term "ritual sacrament" is appropriate. Drawing on her depth of knowledge of South Indian religious practices and beliefs, she will also explain how the outcome of these rites becomes a kind of "grace." The paper's main themes will be visually illustrated.

Parallel session 4
Life Here and Hereafter in Contemporary Paganism
Moderator: Rasa Pranskevičiūtė

Michael Strmiska *The Ambiguity of Ancestors: Questions of Inclusion, Exclusion and Ethnicity in Modern Pagan Conceptions of the Afterlife*

Eglė Aleknaitė *Does Death Matter to Toltecs? Idea of Death in the Teachings of Carlos Castaneda and Later Developments of Neoshamanic Toltec Teachings and Practices*

Giuseppe Maiello *Attempts to Implement "Pagan Funerals" in the Czech Republic*

Agnė Kalėdienė *Construction and Reconstruction of Baltic Paganism: Comparison of Pagans, Historical Reconstructors and Pagan Metal Subculture*

Olga Pawlik *Category of Justice in the Image of Afterlife in Rodzimy Kościół Polski*

The Ambiguity of Ancestors: Questions of Inclusion, Exclusion and Ethnicity in Modern Pagan Conceptions of the Afterlife

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Abstract

Modern-day religious groups attempting to revive and/or reconstruct pre-Christian European religious beliefs in Europe, the USA and elsewhere face considerable difficulties in working out their belief systems about continued existence in the afterlife. European Pagan mythology, as preserved in literary, historical and folkloric sources, typically refers to the dead living in communities of their kin and countrymen grounded in a seemingly strong and unambiguous sense of shared ethnic or tribal identity. Today, many centuries after the time of the original, pre-Christian Pagans with their supposedly clear and straightforward sense of identity, we are in a day and age in which ethnicity, religious affiliation, national belonging and other markers of individual and communal identity have become complicated and contested issues. With many elements of identity, from language to location to worldview, having been altered, mixed and rearranged in our world of blurred boundaries, shared traditions and mobile populations, it is not a simple thing for modern-day Pagans to speak of "joining the ancestors" in the afterlife. While some modern Pagans may hunger for membership in a romanticized tribal community of Pagan ancestors, the problem arises that many generations of ancestors are likely to have spoken different languages, lived in other places with other cultural traditions, and followed other religions. Another complexity enters the picture when we consider the influence of New Age and Eastern religions that speak of reincarnation or total spiritual transcendence after death rather than membership in a tribal or ethnic community. This paper will examine how different varieties of modern Paganism or Neo-Paganism from Baltic to Nordic to Slavic to Celtic navigate these issues in arriving at their views of the afterlife.

Does death matter to Toltecs? Idea of death in teachings of Carlos Castaneda and later developments of neoshamanic Toltec teachings and practices

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Abstract

Death has been a significant element in the teaching of Carlos Castaneda, who introduced the neoshamanic Toltec tradition. However, his teaching underwent various transformations and later followers of the Toltec path developed their versions that differed from the Castanedian one in many

significant ways. The changing perception of death and significance it has for the worldview and practices of Toltecs is one of such changes and can reveal many aspects of development of neoshamanic Toltec tradition, neoshamanisms in general, as well as the whole contemporary spirituality.

Although most Toltec groups belong to the New Age movement, engage in self-development, care about life here and now and avoid questions concerning afterlife, death is a powerful symbol and multi-meaningful element of some Toltecs' teachings and practices. Toltec groups can be subsumed into two broad categories with different attitudes towards death. The first group sees the universe as a quite hostile place and considers their journeys to other realities as rather dangerous activities. Death can mean literal end of functioning of a physical body, spiritual transformation and a personification of a powerful spiritual teacher. It is a sign of otherness and exoticism of their practices and experiences in the context of modern Western life.

The second group prefers a vision of a universe as a friendly and safe place of love. For this group, death is an inevitable fact of physical reality, but of little significance and interest in the context of their spiritual development. Avoidance of questions about death can be seen as a common trend of contemporary mainstream Western culture and growing attraction of spiritual seekers to "safe" spiritual practices.

The research presented in the presentation is based on the analysis of published texts and fieldwork done in two Lithuanian Toltec groups in 2013-2015.

Attempts to implement "pagan funerals" in the Czech Republic

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Abstract

In the beginning of the year 2012, after the dramatic death of two relative young Czech pagans belonging to the first generation of Czech new pagans, some other pagans decided to organize a series of meetings targeted to find a concrete way to realize "pagan funerals". The experiment failed despite the fact that the energies invested were considerable. The paper will present a short history of that experiment, mainly through the narration of the actors. The interviews are conceived as unstructured in order to build better rapport with the interviewees, usually reluctant to open up to scientists. Using the emic approach, the aim of the paper is to understand the insider view of the ways how the Czech pagans imagine a pagan funeral. Another matter of concern will be the vision of the future and a representation of afterlife of selected respondents. Free narration enables the interviewee to use his or her own spontaneous language to tell the stories of his or her life with minimal influence of the interviewer. It is also generally believed that telling stories makes the interviewee express his/her particular perspective in a more genuine form than when he/she is manipulated into answering specific questions in the question-response-schema method. By using the episodic interview method, which combines the advantages of the narrative and guided interview, we aim to make the informants reveal not only the stories of the particular experiences as they were preserved in their memory (times, places, situations and other participants) but also the semantic knowledge attached to these particular experiences.

Construction and reconstruction of Baltic paganism: comparison of pagans, historical reconstructors and pagan metal subculture

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Abstract

Recently, due to accelerating migration and spreading of cosmopolitanism, members of youth subcultural groups became more interested in ethno cultural ideas. Cultural field, which emerged during fieldwork, is one example of this phenomenon. This field is composed from groups that associate their cultural identity with their ethnic roots, but express it in various modern forms. Pagan religion is one of uniting elements of this field. Religion of ancestors, as an alternative to Christian church, is chosen by pagans. While the main focus of historical re-construction clubs is Baltic warfare, paganism is also important part of their worldview. Members of pagan metal groups also sing about glorious battles and gods of their ancestors. It can be said, that paganism in Lithuania exist in three forms: as religion, as reconstruction and as inspiration to art. Furthermore, these forms are always overlapping.

In this paper, using data from on-going fieldwork, Baltic paganism in three groups will be compared. These groups are: Lithuanian youth Ramuva, brotherhood of Baltic warfare "Vilkatlakai" and pagan metal band "Obtest".

In this paper place of pagan religion, in every group will be analysed and compared. Attitude towards religion and its authenticity, veneration of ancestors and patriotism, paganism in art and activities of the groups, sources of re-construction of religion, pantheon of gods and religious rites, celebrated holidays and paganism in everyday life of group members will be discussed.

While comparing groups we can notice what the common elements of paganism are and also what the differences between these groups are. This leads to discussing the communication between these different groups, their attitudes towards each other and discussions and arguments that arise from the differences.

It can be stated that groups are united by veneration of ancestors, interest in history and ethnic culture and patriotism. Group members celebrate calendar and family holidays following pagan tradition: performing religious rites and offering to the gods. Despite the fact, that all these groups base their beliefs in religion of their ancestors, the form and the role of pagan religion is different in their activities. While paganism can be the most important unifying factor in one group, it can be more of the artistic inspiration in another.

Category of justice in the image of afterlife in Rodzimy Kościół Polski

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Abstract

One can observe peculiar tension between Contemporary Pagan convictions in the matter of afterlife. In Polish group Rodzimy Kościół Polski (RKP) strong pull towards equality of lifestyles and belief in utter transcendence of gods (which makes them uninterested in judging people) stand in balance with the need to acknowledge morality in religious eschatology. Justice is both inherent and irrelevant to RKP religiosity. Category of sin, as well as Christian beliefs and rituals connected with it, is severely resented. Good and evil are believed to be relative, only considered in regard to personal convictions and needs of the society. At the same time, RKP soteriology and ideas of afterlife seem deeply moral.

The paper discusses Contemporary Pagan ideas of justice and afterlife in Polish group Rodzimy Kościół Polski. It touches the problems of morality in a relative worldview, nature of Pagan gods and influence of Christian context on shaping a member's of RKP worldview.

Parallel session 5
Reincarnation in the Here and Hereafter
Moderator: Audrius Beinorius

Antonia Mills *Studies of Reincarnation Cases From The 1960s To The Present With Some Examples*
Erlendur Haraldsson *Reincarnation – Is There Any Evidence for it?*
Ohkado Masayuki *Children’s Past-Life and Intermission Memories*
James Matlock *Evidence of Past-Life Memory in a Mildly Autistic Boy*
Vilius Dranseika *Afterlife Beliefs and Folk Reasoning about Personal Identity*

Studies of Reincarnation Cases From The 1960s To The Present With Some Examples

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Abstract

At the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 AD the Catholic Church decided to make belief in reincarnation anathema with the result that reincarnation concepts have not played a major role in concepts of the Here and Hereafter and related Practices and Beliefs in Christian countries. Nonetheless Gallup Poles have indicated that some 25 percent of the US population accepts the concept. Beginning in the 1960s the late psychiatrist Ian Stevenson at the University of Virginia began carefully recording cases of reincarnation reported among Inuit and Indigenous Northwest Coast North American societies and subsequently in India, Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand, i.e. Hindu and Buddhist societies where the concept is accepted, and subsequently in Europe and North America where cases are less frequent, noting that the features of cases vary somewhat according to expectations; some cases include Intermission Memories; and some cases include compelling birthmarks and birth defects related to the cause of death in the previous life. Stevenson asked Erlendur Haraldsson, myself and Jürgen Keil to conduct replication studies and hired child psychiatrist Jim Tucker to join him and continue the research at UVA. Today I will share a case I have studied among the Indigenous people of Northwest BC, a case I have studied in India and an American case that Dr. Tucker has described in a joint article with me, to convey what these cases and beliefs indicate about being here and the hereafter, and how this relates to practices and child rearing, including a summary of the similarities and differences in seeking, finding and raising the children perceived to be the reincarnations of Tibetan tulkus and Northwest Coast Indigenous high chiefs.

Reincarnation – Is There Any Evidence for it?

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Abstract

The European Values Survey contained two questions concerning the afterlife: “Do you believe in Life after Death?”, and “Do you believe in Re-incarnation, that is that we are born into this world again?”. The data revealed that. 44,3% of Europeans believe in life after death and 41,2% don’t (N=62.223). 21% believe in reincarnation and 65,3% do not. However, of those who believe in life after death, 47% believe in reincarnation. Interestingly, 54% of Lithuanian folks who believe in life after death also believe in reincarnation.

Rarely young children claim memories of a previous life. I will describe three cases that I have investigated.

Thusita Silva, a Sri Lankan girl, claimed since 2 1/2 years to remember being a housewife in Akuressa – some hundred kilometers away from her home - and drowning when she fell off a hanging footbridge. She had been pregnant. Enquiries in Akuressa verified many of her claims.

Nazih Al-Danaf claimed to have been killed in the civil war in Lebanon. He said he had lots of weapons, two wives (in two houses) etc. He made many recognitions of people and places and led the way to his previous home.

Einar Jonsson was born in Reykjavik and brought up by his single mother and grandparents. Quite young he started to speak of life up in the country, of farmhouses, an odd-shaped mountain, a boat that got broken, a tractor accident, etc. It gradually emerged that Einar might be speaking of the life of the older brother of his father who had died in a tractor accident at a young age and in the surroundings that Einar described.

There will be a PowerPoint presentation with photos of relevant persons and places.

Children's Past-Life and Intermission Memories

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Abstract

The database of cases of children claiming to have past-life memories compiled at the University of Virginia reveals that some of these children also had memories between the death of the previous person and the present incarnation. Of these intermission memories 24.8% (N = 721) recalled the funeral of the previous personalities and 23.4% (N = 932) talked about their experiences in other realms. Although relatively little attention has been paid to such memories, if reincarnation is a real phenomenon as suggested by a large number of cases of children with past-life memories verified by documents and first-hand witnesses, it is essential to take intermission memories into consideration to understand the whole process of reincarnation because, unless the process of reincarnation is instant as some religions such as the Druze faith assume, the survived consciousness would have some experience during the period between the death of a previous personality and the new incarnation. In this presentation, I will discuss:

- (1) There are many children with intermission, but no past-life memories: According to an Internet-based survey conducted to estimate the percentages of children with past-life, intermission and other types of memories by the presenter in Japan (N = 10,000), while 4.0% of the responding mothers said that their children talked about past-life memories, 13.3% said that their children talked about intermission (or more precisely, pre-life memories in cases where the children did not talk about past-life memories);
- (2) In contrast to past-life memories, intermission memories are harder to verify, but there are some cases in which they can be regarded as reflecting reality, and are not just a fantasy;
- (3) The contents of intermission memories tend to have positive effects on parents, and they can be a useful tool for fostering a good parent-child relationship.

Evidence of Past-Life Memory in a Mildly Autistic Boy

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Abstract

I describe the case of a mildly autistic North American boy with an inability to speak clearly or well who nevertheless said things that suggest that he remembers the life of his mother's father, who died

a little more than nine months before his birth. His biological father has another child on the autism spectrum, so the boy's condition likely has a genetic origin unrelated to the apparent reincarnation. The mother did not know about her son's father's suspected condition (Asperger's Syndrome, a high-functioning autism) until after her son was diagnosed with autism at age 3. She had been estranged from her own father and did not learn of his death until well into the pregnancy. At that point, she wondered whether he might reincarnate as her child, but she had no reason to wish this. According to the boy, he chose to return to her because he loved her, and the mother-child relationship has allowed them to work through tensions left unresolved while the father was alive.

Although not strong evidentially, this case nonetheless fits patterns seen in other cases of the reincarnation type and allows me to explore psychological dimensions of reincarnation and what we bring back here from the Hereafter. It is hard to interpret this case as the mother's imposition of an identity on her child without assuming a level of inner conflict not otherwise on display, and it makes little sense in terms of paranormal knowledge acquisition on the part of the boy. The straightforward interpretation of reincarnation makes the best sense of the observed facts but raises important questions about cognitive and emotional functioning in autism.

Afterlife beliefs and Folk Reasoning about Personal Identity

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Abstract

Empirical research on folk reasoning about personal identity (e.g. Rips, Blok, and Newman (2006); Liittschwager (1995); Johnson (1990); Nichols and Bruno (2010); Strohminger and Nichols (2014); Berniūnas and Dranseika (in press)) usually proceeds in three-step manner. First, a hypothetical transformation of a person (e.g. amnesia, PVS, reincarnation, radical change of moral character) is described (or made salient in some other way) to research subjects. Second, participants are asked some questions about post-transformation (on rare occasions – pre-transformation) individual (e.g. “Is this still Julie?”, “Is this a person?”, “Does the patient remember the accident?”). Third, these responses are used by the researchers in drawing conclusions about personal identity criteria used by the folk. For example, if participants' responses indicate that they consider full autobiographical amnesia to be compatible with preservation of personal identity, conclusion is made that participants do not treat continuity of autobiographical memory as a necessary condition of identity preservation.

One set of hypothetical transformations used in recent research designs is centered on folk beliefs about afterlife (e.g. White, Kelly and Nichols (in press); White (in press); see also Astuti and Harris (2008); Bek and Lock (2011); Bering and Bjorklund (2004)). There is also a small emerging literature that probes prelife beliefs (e.g. Emmons and Kelemen (2014)). In this paper I provide an overview and methodological critique of existing empirical literature in which prelife and afterlife beliefs are examined in order to study folk reasoning about personal identity.

Parallel session 6

Life Here and Hereafter and its Imageries

Moderator: Aušra Pažėraitė

Christina Welch *Medieval Perceptions of Purgatory; Visualising the Here-After in the Here-and-Now*

Denise Thorpe *Cultural Memory, Identity Formation, and Trauma with a Vélínès Horizon!*

Alfредas Buiko *Electronic Paradise: Death and Eschatology in Transhumanist Subculture*

Cristina Douglas *Medicalization of Life and the Imagery of Bodily Immortality.*

Chadwick Co Sy Su *Hollywood and Dying: Three Films, Three Decades, One Conclusion*

Medieval perceptions of purgatory; visualising the here-after in the here-and-now

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Abstract

This paper explores the perceptions of purgatory in the medieval, with a focus on the late-medieval. Taking as a starting point extant British late-medieval sculptures that commemorate members of the religious and social elite as naked, emaciated and not-resting-at-peace cadavers, it explores the visual and textual sources that have led the author to interpret these unusual funerary memorials as depicting the pains of purgatory. Originally placed in central location in churches and cathedrals, this paper will argue that although theologically incorrect, these memorials played on and to the late-medieval notion that whilst the body physically rotted, the pains of purgatory were experienced both spiritually and physically. Texts such as Dante's fourteenth century *The Divine Comedy* and the anonymous fifteenth century British *Revelation of Purgatory*, alongside extant illustrations of purgatorial suffering, will inform this paper.

The paper proposes that the medieval depictions of the immediate here-after were designed to inform behaviour in the here-and-now; that is to encourage the listener/viewer to lead a more moral life, but that the British cadaver sculptures also acted to encourage prayers for the depicted deceased in purgatory. Further, by drawing on Messaris' concept of iconicity, the emotional response to a presented image, this paper will speculate that the extant British late-medieval carved cadaver sculptures of the here-after are marginalized in contemporary culture due to their power to remind us that we too will one day be in their shoes; gasping out last breath and contemplating our eternal fate.

Cultural Memory, Identity Formation, and Trauma With a Vėlinės Horizon

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Abstract

During the first days of November Lithuanians travel to cemeteries to clean graves, plant flowers, and light candles as they remember and pray for their beloved dead. Though timed according to the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar, scholars suggest that the Catholic celebrations of *Visų Šventųjų Diena* (All Saints' Day—November 1) and *Vėlinių Diena* (All Souls' Day or "Spirit Day"—November 2) were grafted upon older agrarian practices. All Souls' Day celebrations are not unique to Lithuania but they hold a distinctive importance in a country that has known inordinate loss and suffering over the last two centuries. Not everyone who ventures to the cemeteries for *Vėlinės* is Catholic or even Catholic identifying; agnostics, atheists, religious "nones", and some participants in Lithuanian minority religious traditions also bring candles and flowers to place at the graves of family, friends, teachers, and admired public figures. As a scholar of church history describes it, "*Vėlinės* has overflowed the banks of the church."

In my presentation I will explore the significance of *Vėlinės* cemeteries as space that is marked, but not controlled, by the Catholic church's theology and practice in relation to death and the afterlife. With particular attention to the materiality of *Vėlinės* practices and the operations of family, church, and state, I will draw upon the work of Paul Connerton, Pierre Bourdieu, and a group of ritual scholars to consider *Vėlinės* practices in relation to identity formation, cultural memory, and trauma recovery. Highlighting the significance of candles and light in Catholic practice and belief, I will utilize Muslim ethicist Ebrahim Moosa's image of the *dihliz* to suggest that multivalent, *dihliz*-ian *Vėlinės* cemeteries construct porous, liminal space that risks re-inscription of fear of difference while also

inviting understanding and empathy between people who carry vastly different experiences and history with them when they venture to the cemetery. I will argue that the “who” and the “how” of Vėlinės memory hold important implications for Lithuanian imagination of the future.

Electronic paradise: Death and eschatology in transhumanist subculture

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Abstract

Rapid technological advancement has been provoking both fear and hope at least since XIX century, however, to some it has also brought promise of salvation. One of such groups is the transhumanist movement subculture. Main tenets of the transhumanist movement are the belief in inevitable technological progress, and a deep conviction that new and advanced technologies should be used not only to improve human lives, but also to transform human nature (by eliminating, disease, aging and death). Some members of the subculture believe that rapid improvement of technologies will lead to birth of god-like artificial intelligence in near future, which will create a technological utopia (that in turn will make humanity obsolete, and shall give rise to post-humanity).

Transhumanist subculture exhibits a peculiar mix of atheism and religiosity: members deny existence of deities and life after death, however, technological utopia they are hoping for reminds strongly of paradise. Death in transhumanist movement is understood not as natural part of human condition that should be accepted, but as a certain flaw that requires correction, and which can, and should be corrected sometime in near future. This led to popularity of healthy lifestyle and cryonics (freezing the body after death) in transhumanist movement – many transhumanists are trying to prolong their lives so they could witness the utopia, while others freeze their bodies after death, hoping to being resurrected in the future.

Humanity always hoped for life after death, and since these days it becomes increasingly hard to believe in transcendental heaven or hell, it is understandable that certain people began to hope for a technological one. However, it is also very important to understand how these essentially religious ideas (of end of the world and salvation) function in a movement whose members proudly believe themselves to be rational and atheistic.

Medicalization of Life and the Imagery of Bodily Immortality

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Abstract

From the 19th century, medicine started to gain a dominant role in the organization of social and individual life. What Ivan Illich calls “medicalization of life” is reflected not only in the way we live our life according to medical norms, but also in the definitions of death – “a fully medicalized condition” – and discourses of indefinite longevity – the mythical antechamber of immortality. Moreover, due to an increase in the use of life-prolongation technology, whether through body improvements or preservation for a future resuscitation when treatment for an existing disease has been discovered, medicine created a new model of the body and its functions: the so-called bio-medical model. Thus, life became associated with health or good functioning of the body, while disease and death with dis-functionality or the complete stoppage of the “organic machine”. My paper proposes an analysis of the concept of medicalization in parallel with more traditional models of body, health, disease and death, pointing out the continuities and differences, by discussing some of the following aspects: the medicalization of age and the association of old age with disease and death;

definitions of illness/disease, old age and death and their conceptual framing through the institution of hospitals; the role of the pharmaceutical industry and the reflection of increased medicalization in discourses of diet, health, food, drinks and cosmetics; the role of medicalization through the advertising industry in the imagery of longevity and bodily immortality. Additionally, my paper will point to some symbolic and ritual aspects of medicine (medical uniforms or objects with symbolic meaning such as white coats, stethoscopes, the imagery of hygiene and cleanliness etc.) that contribute to the imagery of medicine as the new “religion” through which death and the idea of an afterlife is perceived and represented.

Hollywood and Dying: Three Films, Three Decades, One Conclusion

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Abstract

Death, for all intents and purposes, is the empirical end of existence, there being no independently verifiable and universally-accepted account of resurrection of any one person. This has not prevented people from prognosticating about existence continuing after death, such that there is a wide assortment of beliefs in life after death. In fact, the lack of evidence of resurrection has led to these beliefs lending themselves to purveyors of popular culture, Hollywood being one of them, as storylines and sources of wonderment.

The proposed study shall examine, using a multimodal critical discourse analysis framework, three Hollywood films from the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, namely: *Chances Are* (1989), *What Dreams May Come* (1998), and *Just Like Heaven* (2005). To supplement the analytic framework, comparisons and contrasts of practices depicted in the films and different belief systems will be made. Visual and linguistic cues will take precedence in the analysis, with other semiotic cues to be included.

The following will be discussed in the proposed study: (1) the competing narratives of what Heaven and Hell are; (2) the fascination of the living in regard to communicating with the dead; (3) consciousness surviving after bodily death; and (4) how popular culture may or may not have remained formulaic in its treatment of death. The paper will culminate with a coherent synthesis of these discussion items, that is, of people’s individual egos being a logical explanation for their absorption with the unknown that is life hereafter. The refusal or inability to accept that the world goes on without them may very well explain the creation of such narratives.

Parallel session 7

Life Here and Hereafter in Buddhism

Moderator: Michael Strmiska

Audrius Beinorius *is there an intermediate State (Antarā Bhava) According to Indian Buddhism?*
Agita Baltgalve *Do Latvians Need One More „Book of Living and Dying”: A Comparative Study of „Bardo Thodrol” (Tibetan Book of Living and Dying) Translations*
Marika Laudere *Religious Practice in Buddhist Groups in the Baltic States*
Karl Käsnapuu *Afterlife and Social Imagination. Applying Near-Death Study Tool On The Tibetan Book Of The Dead*

Is there an Intermediate state (*antarā bhava*) according to Indian Buddhism?

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Abstract

The possibility of life after death has always fascinated mankind and Buddhist India was no exception. The theory of such an intermediate state (*anatarā bhava*) was a disputed point among the early and later Buddhist schools. In my presentation by relaying on the Pāli and Sanskrit sources I be trying to display the discussions regarding the theory of intermediate-state and rebirth among various Buddhist schools by answering the question: why according to some early Theravāda schools there is no intermediate state between death and rebirth? How then are related last awareness before death (*cuti viññāna*) and the rebirth linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi viññāna*)? How rebirth (*upapāta*, *punabbhava*, *pratisaṃdhi*) takes place and what role in this plays *cetanā* (“volition”, “intention”)? Why the ultimate goal of Buddhist practices is precisely the cessation of *karma* (*kamma nirodha*) and what was the most significant change made by Buddha to the Indian concept of karma?

Do Latvians need one more „Book of Living and Dying”: A comparative study of „Bardo Thodrol” (Tibetan Book of Living and Dying) translations

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Abstract

Popularity of Tibetan Buddhist teachings about six phases of intermediate states, called *bardo*, is speedy increasing in Europe and also in Latvia. Italian Buddhist scholar Elio Guarisko in 2012, Patrul Rinpoche in 2014 and other masters have given teachings about these Tibetan meditation practices which prepare people’s minds for the death and for the life after it. So called „Tibetan Book of Life and Death” (original title „Liberation through the hearing in the intermediate phase”) explicates three of six bardo states after the mundane life has finished. It helps people to understand and to prepare for the next step already in this very life. As a result they can achieve better condition for the next rebirth or even transcend the circle of death and life liberating themselves from the mundane duality of joy and suffering.

The transformation process through the death as described by Tibetan yogis, is one of versions about future happenings that will surely affect everybody of us. Today not only adherents of Buddhism take interest in this religious path, but also general Latvian audience. The book has been translated into English, German, Russian, Italian and other languages. We also have a translation in Latvian which has been done from English sources. The question I would like to analyse in my presentation is whether we need another translation, a direct translation of „The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying” from Tibetan language.

I have personally been requested three times to take up this translation, and this is an auspicious number of requests. Besides, the requests came from the side of non-Buddhists, thus showing also their interest and spiritual demands. However, the translation of „The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying” is not only a question of linguistic competence, also religious and psychological preconditions should be ripe. So I decided to look through already existing versions of this text in English, German, Russian and other languages as a methodological preparation for the possible translation.

Religious practice in Buddhist groups in the Baltic States

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Abstract

Comparing to other Western countries, Buddhism in the Baltic States is largely the late 20th century phenomena and its ideas are not so widespread among the general Baltic society. Nevertheless, in the last 15 years the number of Buddhist-converts and Buddhist groups in the Baltics has grown, and religious practice they offer has become more diverse. Therefore the main question that arises is how Buddhists, being one of the religious minorities in the Baltics, organize their religious life within the groups they belong to? Using the data acquired during the fieldwork in Buddhist groups in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the presentation 1) will illustrate the main Buddhism strands and the largest Buddhist groups of converts that are present in the Baltic area; 2) will examine the variety of practices that are carried out in these groups. This study will show that despite the low resources Buddhist groups possess, they have organized fixed groups with religious activity carried out on different levels.

Applying Near-Death Study Tool on the Tibetan Book of the Dead

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Abstract

After the well known publication by Dr. Raymond A. Moody “Life after Life.” (1975) the research of near-death experiences has been in rise already for four consecutive decades. Researchers gather more and more data about different subjective experiences. Nowadays people have the opportunity to even report their NDEs anonymously over the internet.

By many investigators of the field (starting already from Dr. Moody, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross and others) it has been noted that reports of the NDEs quite frequently tend to have similarities in their contents with the contents of the well known piece of sacred literature about the afterlife – “The Tibetan Book of the Dead” (originally labelled “Bardo Thodol”, 8th c.)

To test that claim and to evaluate to what extent the claim can hold – a Near-Death Study Tool – the Greyson NDE Scale was applied on the text of Bardo Thodol. The choice fell on the Dr. Bruce Greyson’s NDE Scale because it appears to be the most well-known scale that has been used in considerable amount of cases to give quantitative measures of the NDE and its components.

Using a method of directed content analysis, the Greyson NDE Scale was applied on the text of the Bardo Thodol. Despite of the unusual approach, the aim of the study is well mounted in its inclination first only to fixate and to evaluate the concurrent elements in those two narratives based on quite different sources.

As the results encompassed strong representation of NDE elements in the narrative of Bardo Thodol – it lies in potential for further imagination. Can it be claimed that sufficiently mounted motivation for further studies is demonstrated? Possibilities and dangers. Pros and cons.

Parallel session 8

Popular Religion Practices

Moderator: Ergo-Hart Västrik

Ksenia Kolkunova *The Soil in Russian Orthodox Women Religiosity*

Rasa Baločkaitė *Virgin Mary Apparitions in Soviet Lithuania: Low Profile Resistance and Practices of Faith*

Alfonsina Bellio *Living among the Dead, the Saints and the Angels. Female prophecy and divination in Southern Italy*

Madis Arukask *Physical Contact with the Dead in Finnic Burial Practices*

The Soil in Russian Orthodox Women Religiosity

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Abstract

The Orthodoxy, brought to Russia in 10th century, wasted a lot of time to get rid of Slavic paganism. An important part of the latter was a cult of fertility of all sorts, closely connected to worshiping of feminine. And despite the fact that in folk religion these ideas remained, official doctrine prescribed masculine and patriarchal images as keepers of agriculture. However, remnants of this semantic unity preserved to our days, sometimes giving birth new and unexpected forms of worship.

With three examples of very popular sites of pilgrimage in modern Russian Orthodoxy – Danilovskoye cemetery in Moscow, where Blessed Matrona is worshiped, Smolensky cemetery where the chapel of Saint Xenia of Saint-Petersburg is and Serafimo-Diveyevsky Monastery in Diveevo – we will see what the place of soil in ritual practice is. Whether officially this role isn't usually fixed or not, pilgrims orally transmit these traditions and practice remain.

The soil can be regarded as a source of fertility and/or health; it should be kept close to your body or even eaten. Particular importance could be brought on grave soil (or flowers growing on the graves, another popular practice). This worshiping could be a reason of soil being commodified and sold or authorities could try to dissolve it. But in all cases we are facing women worshiped by women, mostly.

This reappearance of soil in ritual practice could be explained by the fact that these rites are somehow similar to what we know of Slavic mythology and the cult of *Mat' Syra Zemlya*, highly worshiped deity, a personification of the Earth, mother-like figure. Yet another much more complicated question is why these practices are getting more and more popular in Russian orthodoxy today.

Virgin Mary Apparitions in Soviet Lithuania: low profile resistance and practices of faith

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Abstract

As colonial and post colonial studies have revealed, in societies where unequal arbitrary power relations prevail, religious practices turn into instrument of resistance: religious symbols provide metaphor language for coded communication among the subordinated groups, religious rites serve as a pretext for political mobilization, in some cases religious ceremonies are meant to inspire fear among the dominant groups by manifesting the connection between subordinates and supernatural powers, for example, Voodoo practices in Caribbean plantations were meant to cause fear among white slave owners.

Religious practices in Soviet Lithuania have also had elements of resistance, distribution of Catholic Church Chronicles is the best known example. Another, less discussed phenomenon is the apparitions of Virgin Mary. In Lithuania, where were total 38 cases of apparitions. When most of them happened? There was only one apparition both during the interwar period and post Soviet years, yet, during the Soviet years, there were 18 cases of apparitions.

Why and how the testimonies of apparition during the Soviet years were believed, retold and legitimized as true? The apparitions happened in agricultural areas, where people remain less affected by Soviet hegemony, the typical seer was a person, who went through some significant sufferings in life, and the legend about the apparition became wide spread despite seer's further insistence on the vision or her denial. The vision place turned into struggle field between local believers and Soviet authorities (the former continuously erecting crosses and placing candles, the

latter continually trying to erase any landmarks from the place). The seers had typically lost her privacy and turned into public figure, being observed by KGB and worshiped by community of believers, the stronger the persecutions, the bigger the fame.

The last apparition in Lithuania happened on November 5, 1990, being the only one apparition in the post Soviet Lithuania. Why people ceased seeing visions of Virgin Mary after declaration of Independence? The apparitions constituted popular form of the low profile resistance, - indirect critique of political regime, masked under ignorance and backwardness, expressed in the forms of apparently of apolitical religious nature. The testimonies of apparitions were a way of escaping totalitarian ideology, constructing alternative version of reality and de legitimizing the Soviet worldviews and their atheistic nature.

Living among the Dead, the Saints and the Angels. Female prophecy and divination in Southern Italy

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Abstract

Calabria, as well as many Italian regions, shows various mediation forms with the unseen worlds, which were organized in different categories, according to the look of the moment. Between the 1920s and the 1960s, the information derived from oral memory shows a supposed communication with the afterlife defined by women, especially in the Crotona area, *fimmini chi vanu ccu ri mùarti*, “women who walk with the dead”.

This verbatim translation means that, those women, in particular under conditions related to suddenly trance-like states, could communicate with the dead and receive messages for the living, and especially attend to dead processional corteges. Generally, these are people of liminal and marginal social groups, in a system where you could often find a mixing of madness and clairvoyance. The dialectal verb here *ad litteram* means that these women were attributed, in particular conditions, that is to say a trance-like state of lethargy that suddenly came, to have the right to see the dead, communicate with them, and receive messages for the living, but above all else to participate in the corteges of the dead.

The phenomenon of "women who go with the dead," revealed in the Calabrian area as a female history of suffering and deprivation, shows a possibility of comparison with related phenomena in other cultural contexts, both in the past and in the present. In the ancient Mediterranean horizon, female clairvoyance - with a certain ambivalence of expressions - represented an important reference point in the relationship with the sacred. Nowadays, similar events are found in western urban contexts, and involve many people, not just women.

The image of the mediator with the spiritual worlds is now profoundly changed, while retaining aspects of the past. The forms of prophecy and clairvoyance are oriented on the models of mystical inspiration, and are subject to a long process of verification by the clergy. In other cases, contact with the supernatural is inspired by cultural phenomena of heterogeneous origin, such as forms of neo-paganism or neo-shamanism.

Physical Contact with the Dead in Finnic Burial Practices

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Abstract

Unlike in the modern culture in the traditional contact with the dead body seems sometimes needful and has several functions like communicative, identity formational, protective magical. Basing on Finnic (most of all Estonian; Vepsian, Votian) source material these functions will be shortly handled in this paper.

The communicative contact can be seen first of all in post mortal commemoration practices where it has to do with the physical items representing the location of the deceased. Here we talk about ritual touching, sweeping, etc., of the burial mound, cross or memorial column that is especially typical for the lamenters, but also for ordinary people. Lamenting as communicative act and the physical/bodily aspect of this are also expressed in the Finnic lament texts, including the desire to touch the deceased.

Together with the communicative contact the identity on the both sides is specified. The physical touching that takes place at the farewell ceremony or at the 'get-together' at the commemoration events and ceremonies can be taken as the establishment of a borderline. In communication with a dead person this has a critical meaning caused by fear of the dead and their unwilling returns that can be handled in terms of protective magic. The protective magical function can also be seen in the practices that relate to the individual overcoming the fear of the dead.

Today the aspects mentioned here are mixed together and a strong dose of modern individualism has merged with them. Despite this, real contact with the deceased has not entirely vanished in corresponding practices even now.

Parallel session 9

Life Here and Hereafter in the New Religious Movements

Moderator: Eglė Aleknaitė

Julia Andreeva *Interpretations of Reincarnation in the Russian New Age Movement “Anastasia”*
Rasa Pranskevičiūtė *Concepts of “Spirituality” within Nature-based Worldviews in the Post-Soviet Region: Vocabulary of Vissarionites and Anastasians*
László Koppány Csáji *The Hell is Actually in the Heaven*
Anita Stasulane *Beliefs and Practices of Hindu-Related Movements in Latvia*

Interpretations of Reincarnation in the Russian New Age Movement “Anastasia”

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Abstract

Many religions draw more attention afterlife than this-worldly problems. New Age religion conversely focuses on happiness in this life. The Anastasia movement is one of Russian new religions that is based on the books “The Ringing Cedars of Russia” and not linked to any official institution. The main idea of these books is to leave the city and move to sustainable communities – ecovillages (Kin’s Domains). All rites of passage appear to be connected to this concept – birth of a child, marriage and burial should be carried out in Kin’s Domain.

The funeral rites, described in the books, proceed from idea of reincarnation in the family land. To gain immortality you need a place for being reborn in your descendants. While the Anastasians find cemeteries inappropriate place for the relatives because of their impersonality and remoteness, there is a way of being in contact with them and bury in the homeland. But legal issues complicate implementation of this model and some of them have judicial lawsuits. The Anastasians believe that burying on the Kin’s Domain helps living people to respect deceased relatives and to obtain support from them. The other aspect of this concept is the reference to the ‘glorious past’ where

there were no cemeteries and all funerals took place close to house. Then Kin's Domains perform a protective function against the enemies and evil forces.

Actually the Anastasians conduct the funeral rites in prescribed form very seldom. This pursuance transfers them in the sphere beyond the law, and not everyone welcomes this consequence. But this issue provokes discussions and still leaves the important part of the discourse of Anastasian religiosity.

Concepts of “Spirituality” within Nature-based Worldviews in the Post-Soviet Region: Vocabulary of Vissarionites and Anastasians

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Abstract

The presentation focuses on two nature-based spirituality movements which emerged in Russia in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and since have spread to Central and Eastern Europe and beyond: the Vissarion and the Anastasia movements.

The presentation discusses typical for Vissarionites and Anastasians individual or communal (orientated to esoteric, magic, ecology) thinking, which is expressed through the concepts of New Age spirituality. The concepts of Oriental origin (*energy, aura, reincarnation, karma, non-violence, vegetarianism, yoga, program*), which are used in both movements, is an example of how such concepts come through Western cultural influences, are further transformed and take root in the post-Soviet cultural context of New Age spirituality. One part of the research has been focused on the relative importance of social and ideological contexts in the construction of the alternative religious identities of members of nature-based spirituality movements. The presentation also explores the meaning of religious identity and how it influences – and is influenced by – local and global cultures ultimately producing a religious subculture. Particular attention is given to the role of these dynamics in the development of Christian and post-Soviet cultural heritage in Eastern Europe and in the communication of Western cultural influence on the religiosity in the region.

The presented findings are based on data obtained from the fieldwork in 2004-2015, including participant observation and interviews with respondents in the Baltics Russia and Ukraine.

Reincarnation-narratives and visions of Heaven and Hell among a Hungarian New Religious Movement (a discourse analysis based on a case study)

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Abstract

In the last decade I've studied some neo-pagan and Christian fundamentalist religious movements in the Carpathian basin with anthropological fieldwork (participant observation, interviews and online ethnography). In this paper I focus on a Hungarian prophet's religious movement, which was established in 2008). Members live in Romania, Serbia and Hungary. They belong to several distant Christian congregations (some are members of charismatic movement of the Roman Catholic Church, others are Lutherans, Unitarians, Calvinists), as it is not expected by the movement to leave their formal church. So most members have a kind of double religious identity (or religious layers).

There are many accounts of the life after death and the transcendent world in the group. The prophet even remembers his former lives. I concentrate on the rebirth narrative of the prophet, and the visionary excursions led by the Holy Spirit as out of body experiences. These narratives are represented in my lecture by citations of texts collected during my fieldwork. We can easily recognize

elements of Biblical texts mixed with individual interpretations and New Age-like narratives. Prophet signifies he have visited the Heaven, the Hell and distant galaxies. He divides the heavenly creatures (angels) from the demonic beings (spirits), and also explains how to recognize those heavenly souls who had already incarnated into a human body from those who had not yet.

The religious group's members do not incorporate these narratives into their personal vernacular religion in an undiscerning way. The actors' heterogeneous reincarnation-discourse contains certain acceptances, several passive resistances (silences), direct oppositions and token acceptances as well. These all interfere. Long term participant observation can give a more detailed view than we could have concluded on interviews. This case study's methodological aim is to give a frame of possibilities and limitations for the discourse analysis in the ethnology of religions.

Beliefs and Practices of Hindu-Related Movements in Latvia

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Abstract

When much of the fear that the Latvians had after the II World War was lost, many young people began to rebel against communist ideology and to search for deeper meaning of life through Eastern philosophy. Today Latvia does not fall behind other Western European countries with regard to the spread of the new religious movements. Various religious groups whose historical roots are in India, form the religious picture of the country: Sai Baba group, ISKCON, Shri Chinmoy group, Transcendental Meditation, Brahma Kumaris, Osho group, Sahaja Yoga, and a wide range of gurus and of practice, some emphasizing yoga, some devotion and some meditation. None of these Hindu-related groups has reached Latvia directly from India – contact has taken place indirectly through neighbouring or Western countries. These groups do not require their members to abandon their religious identity, since they consider their teaching to be higher-level understanding provided by accessing a special system of spiritual and physical exercises. By putting Eastern spirituality against Western materialism, Hindu-related groups offer various ways for achieving spirituality: inner peace, understanding of the human nature, and realization of the Divine. Hindu-related groups operate according to the principle of spiritual continuity of Indian religions, and this principle is based on relationships between the teacher and the disciple. The religious environment of Latvia is still developing. The Communist regime, which undermined the traditional Latvian institutions of Christian confessions, created a favourable situation for development of post-Soviet religious market where Hindu-related groups have gained ground. Their exclusion from this market seems impossible, since the East, which is still first and foremost associated with India, is a strong source of religious and spiritual inspiration. Hindu-related groups have not created problems by their presence in Latvia. The exception to this is the Durga Temple, which was registered as a Hindu religious congregation.

Closing plenary session

Life Here and Hereafter: Some Insights from the Baltic Countries

Moderator: Anita Stasulane

Room: 201, Faculty of Philosophy, VU, Universiteto str. 9

Atko Remmel *Some Insights into (Non) Religiosity in Contemporary Estonia: Life Here and Hereafter?*

Radvilė Racėnaitė *Visual Images of Death in Lithuanian Mythology*

Some insights into (non)religiosity in contemporary Estonia: life here and hereafter?

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Abstract

Estonia is known to be one of the most secular countries in Europe and probably in the world. The visibility of religion and its importance in everyday life are low, nonreligiosity as a way of life is prevalent. Yet it does not mean the lack of different forms of spirituality, which have been already described as taking the position of mainstream religiosity. Thus the situation is far from being interpreted unambiguously.

The paper uses the data from several quantitative and qualitative Estonian surveys and explores religiosity in Estonia from the aspect of nonreligion. The paper focuses on some specific features of nonreligion in a secular country concerning identities, practices and beliefs – or lack of them.

Visual Images of Death in Lithuanian Mythology

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Abstract

The complex system of the worldview reveals human aspirations to comprehend the fundamental problems of existence. The notion of death can be considered as probably the most expressive phenomenon amongst them. Emotions that are evoked by death, are quite contradictory: the mystery of death, on the one hand, stimulates natural curiosity, while on the other hand, it provokes fear in the face of the unknown. The mythological world concept is not a mere copy of the substantial reality but rather a creative interpretation of the environment in the realm of human consciousness. Therefore, it is characteristic of folk mythology that the world is often interpreted in the anthropocentric context, when abstract objects get a “body” and are complemented with the dimensions of mind and will. In Lithuanian mythology, the mystery of death is also elucidated by means of animation or, more often, personification.

The paper regarding Lithuanian beliefs, narrative folklore and ethnographic material deals with the notion of personified death in Lithuanian mythology. The death is mostly portrayed as a weird woman dressed in white, whereas the widespread European perception of death as a skeleton with the scythe is of little significance there. In addition, death can be seldom portrayed as a man, a child, or an animal. The coexistence of a few different death concepts evinces the idea about the syncretic nature of the traditional mythological world-outlook as well as presents interpretational and regulatory models as to how to transform the mystery of death into appreciable images.