

Cultural Contacts of Seventeenth Century Estonia as Reflected in Clerical and Historical Source Materials

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At the end of the 16th century the European witch-hunting campaign finally reached the Baltic. We do not know when the first trial for witchcraft was held in Estonia and how many were persecuted at the turn of the 16th to the 17th century. Up to the Gustav Adolf court reform of the 1630's the nobility tried their own peasants and the archives contain very few trial records from those years. The first piece of information dates back to 1596, when according to the Tartu Jesuits some witches were burned at the stake in Tartu.¹

Already the first trial records suggest typical *maleficium*-trials. Either the manorial officials or (more often) peasants themselves accused some peasant woman or man of having harmed them through sorcery – the sickness or death of animals and people, crop failure and fires were blamed on witches.² Accusations like these prevail at the trials in Estonia as well as elsewhere in Europe all through the 17th century.³

Estonian trial records also contain data on the all-European themes like pacts with the devil, werewolves and flying to sabbaths. By studying the specific features and spread of these themes we can learn something of Estonian cultural ties and influences.

As we know, one of the so-called ideological pillars of witch-hunting and trials for witchcraft was the image of the devil luring people to enter into contracts with him. The contract was sealed with the man or woman giving three drops of his/her blood and the devil putting his mark on his/her body (the judges always tried to find this mark on the body of the

¹ V. Helk, Die Jesuiten in Dorpat 1583–1625. Ein Vorpost der Gegenreformation in Nordosteuropa (Odense, 1977) 84.

² M.J. Eisen, Eestimaa nõidade põletamine [The burning of witches in Estonia], in: "Agu" 1923, 1587–1590, 1633–1638.

³ J. Kahk, Inimesed ja olud "vanal ajal" Rootsi ajal [People and circumstances in "good old" Swedish time], in: "Looming" 1983, 8, 1102–1103, 1107–1108, 1111–1113.

accused). The contractor could then use sorcery for procuring wealth or harming enemies, but in the end would burn in hell.

Images of pacts with the devil rarely appear in Estonian witch-trials. In 1699, a Rāpina cottar Tatrasandi Mihkel went to the manorial mill to have his master's grain ground. There he was told to wait his turn by the manorial master brewer Preedi Villem. This "irritated him to such an extent that he cast a spell on him at once". The master brewer lost his sanity and almost drowned himself. The local bailiff claimed that "... the peasants have long ago complained of Mihkel being a sorcerer and having harmed many people, horses and cattle".⁴ The bailiff then had him captured and interrogated. According to Tatrasandi Mihkel's confession his father had taken him to some lonely place in his early childhood and invoked an invisible devil. The father had praised the devil's witchcraft and asked him to teach it to his son. As the devil had required a pledge, the father had cut a lock of Mihkel's hair and made his nose bleed and given the hair and the blood to the devil. After that, the devil had tutored him, giving him power to "harm anyone at his own choice".⁵ On his death-bed the father had summoned the devil once more and told him to serve his son as he had served himself in the past. But Mihkel was not half as good as his father at sorcery, who had always been successful at it. While making the pact with the devil, Mihkel's father had used some incantation.

In 1694 an Anija peasant who knew the magic formula for stopping haemorrhage, told that while making the pact with the devil he had given him a piece of meat from his left thigh, which had left a scar as the "mark of the devil".⁶

In Northern Estonia victims of the witch-trials of the first decades of the 17th century sometimes confessed to having turned into werewolves to kill animals. Records of one trial for witchcraft clearly indicate that the "evidence" did not have to be spectacular – an old cottar's wife Sihvri Kai stumbled and fell while crossing a field in the dark and the dog accompanying her ran away.⁷ Often the women who at night cured people with magic formulas at sacred stones were suspected of being werewolves. In

⁴ Eesti Ajaloo Keskarhiiv Tartu (Estonian Central Archive of History in Tartu = EAKT), f. 914, n. 1, s. 84, l. 4–5.

⁵ Ibid. l. 6.

⁶ EAKT, f. 861, n. 1, s. 9124, l. 1.

⁷ Beiträage zur Kunde Esth-, Liv- und Kurlands 2 (Riga, 1874) 325–343.

1667 some church officials on their visitation tour spied on the county of Maarja-Magdaleena a peasants' Midsummer Night ritual to cure illnesses.⁸

Researchers have already pointed out that Livonia became groundlessly famous for werewolves because of the fanciful writings of the 16th century scribe Olaus Magnus. When at the beginning of the 1920's H. Bruining studied the 850 prosecution cases from the years 1630 to 1710 at the Livonian Highest Court Archive, he found that only one of them mentioned werewolves.⁹ R. Winkler, who went through the documents of the gubernial archive, discovered 35 trials for witchcraft for the whole of the 17th century, of which only 3 dealt with werewolves.¹⁰ Folklorists agree that the werewolf-theme is characteristic of Slavonic and German folklore, where it is seldom mentioned and even then from the aspect of wolves turning into humans through eating human food rather than humans turning into wolves.

The central theme of demonist ideology, however, is the witches' sabbath. A detailed description can be found in a book by M. Kunze, based on corresponding literature and records of a trial for witchcraft held in 1600 in Munich.¹¹ The traditional story runs as follows. Riding on broomsticks and oven forks witches fly to a hillock, where devil's apprentices lead them to their seats that form two circles (the inner circle is for the more deserving witches). To the roll of thunder a radiant throne rises from the earth with Lucifer on it, and the witches turn to him in prayer, mockingly distorting the paternoster. The witches offer up dead bodies of unbaptized children that are boiled in cauldrons and eaten at the feast later on. Wild dancing and orgy to flute music follows, the dancers hopping backwards in a long row or in pairs, with the pairs back to back. All sorts of improprieties take place. The newcomers swear allegiance to Lucifer. Lucifer turns into a goat and the witches kiss his genitals. In the end Lucifer turns back into the demonic ruler. At a sign from him the orgy stops, the magnificent grand hall disappears, all is darkness and bleakness and the witches must hurry home, because at the first cockcrow they will lose the ability to fly.

⁸ Keel ja Kirjandus 1980, nr. 11, 678.

⁹ Mitteilungen aus der livländischen Geschichte 22 (Riga, 1924-1928) 167, 175, 185-186.

¹⁰ Baltische Monatschrift 13 (Reval, 1895) 46-56.

¹¹ M. Kunze, Straße ins Feuer. Vom Leben und Sterben in der Zeit des Hexenwahns (Munich, 1982) 258-260.

Of course, witch-sabbaths were the product of fantasy fed with fear and suppressed sexuality. But did they completely lack links to reality?

Concerning secret nocturnal gatherings round campfire, researchers have pointed out that shortly before the spread of witch-hunts several dissenter sects (Manichees, Albigenses etc.) became active in Europe. They held secret meetings and the Official Church accused them of wild orgies and devil worship.¹² Moreover, European village customs included ancient nocturnal rituals for celebrating pre-Christian anniversaries round campfire, which were kept secret from the Official Church.¹³ One was the tradition of Midsummer Night popular in Estonia and Latvia.

Up to 1990, nothing was published on Estonian witch-sabbaths. Historians were of the opinion that in Estonia this rather central theme of demonist ideology was unknown, although M. Madar had found out that from 1580 to 1770 alone 137 trials for witchcraft were held in Estonia.¹⁴ But in the spring of 1990 records of a trial that lasted from January 15 to February 23 of 1619 were found among the Tartu Town Council protocols, containing unique information on a witch-sabbath.¹⁵ It started as an ordinary *maleficium*-lawsuit against Elsa, wife of Piper. But when tortured Elsa and her "accomplice" Rõngu peasant Rein described a witch-sabbath. Let us study this description in detail so as to compare it to the so-to-say classic sabbath model. Elsa said that she and Rein "... always went to the sabbaths held on a hill near Tartu (*zu Dörben*)". All in all, some 50 witches gathered there, but Elsa did not know their names, because most of them were already dead and, anyway, her spirit, "the flying dragon" (*ihr Geist der fliegende Trach*), did not hobnob with them. However, they decided together, who would get good luck and who bad luck. During those gatherings they drank mead and beer from silver mugs. The drink was provided by those who had received good luck. They could go to their gatherings whenever they wanted. But as soon as the feast was over, there was nothing (*so wäre es nichts*).

Elsa was found guilty on January 16 and burned at the stake on

¹² B. Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige* (Lund, 1984) 48.

¹³ *Häxornas Europa 1400-1700. Historiska och antropologiska studier utgivna av Bengt Ankarloo och Gustav Henningsen* (Lund, 1987) 136, 175, 182.

¹⁴ M. Madar, *Estland I: varulvar och giftblandaru*, in: *Häxornas Europa 1400-1700*, 228.

¹⁵ EAKT, f. 995, n. 1, s. 250, l. 496-504.

January 18. The peasant Rein named by Elsa as her accomplice was brought to trial on February 23. He was tortured and 41 questions were put to him. According to Rein, about 1000 witches gathered four sabbaths, where they ate and drank mead and beer from silver plate. He could not say where all those witches came from, as he was no more than their servant, his task being to bring water to the cooks. (According to Elsa, Rein had been the top sawyer – *der Vornehmste* at the sabbaths.) The wife of Saksa Jaak (*Saxe Jackson*) and a widow from “Löwiküllä” (*Witteben*) had been cooks.

After the meal, the wife of Saksa Jaak had gathered up all the knives and put them in a box. Saksa Jaak himself summoned the witches by blowing a brass horn (*kupferen Horn*) resembling a sackbut (*Posaune*). This Saksa Jaak was chief to 300 witches. Rein had met him for or five years ago at Parike Lauren’s. Jaak had hit him twice on the mouth and said, “Come, I’ll show you how to use a good plough”. Rein had refused and to punish him a few days after that, Jaak had set his spirits upon him when he was sleeping in the field, so that for several weeks Rein could hardly move. Afterwards at Elsa’s suggestion, Rein himself had been made chief of five witches. One of the five, named Pikkus, had later told him how he had bewitched a peasant’s crop. The second, by the name of Pülzi, had “given good luck” to two peasants. The third was Billicen from Löwenküll (Leevi Røuge parish?), who had spoilt the eyesight of some people (*die Augen verdorben*) and put a spell on a peasant’s wife to make her barren. The fourth was wife of Tiltzen, who had bewitched some calves. The fifth, Kerna Perscke Peeter, had bewitched his own children and also two orphans. Another witch by the name of Hellida could cope with dragons (*mit dem Trachen umgehen*).

Saksa Jaak taught Rein to become a werewolf and showed him a werewolf-skin, but Rein was captured before he could practice it. Rein also had two spirits (*Geister*), who were called Kaup and Philip, one wore grey, the other blue stockings. They were tall strong men with wide-brimmed hats. Witches came to sabbath in human shape and sat by their masters. Rein himself wore a fur coat. When they flew off they turned into owls, crows and ravens.

Rein claimed that 50 years ago, in Russia, he had learned to bewitch weapons and that he knew the magic formula for childbirth. Once he had lifted a spell off a woman in the name of Father, Son and the Holy Ghost

(in *Namen des V. S. und des Heiligen Geistes*), using salt and wax candles blessed at the Tartu Paarja Church.

He had not dared to speak so long at the interrogations because Saksa Jaak had warned him not to plead guilty to witchcraft no matter what they did to him. In the end Rein named some more witches – two peasants Hürdi Mick and Lõhll, who belonged to squire Peter Prezcowski. Rein was sentenced to death and burnt on February 23, 1619.

When comparing the Tartu trial records to the German sabbath description we can see that the setup is basically the same. There is the flying to the witches' hill, the feast and the music (in both cases the flute), the hierarchy of witches (masters and subordinates) and at last the disappearing of everything and flying home of the witches. However, there are considerable differences in the tone of the two descriptions – the Tartu version lacks such brutal details as the eating of children and sexual obscenities. It seems that the peasants accused to witchcraft remembered details of the dissipated way of life on manorial lords (the sumptuous tableware carefully kept – the knives that are put away into a box).

At the same time the Tartu version was obviously influenced by the local popular culture-Estonian folklore. Witches at the sabbath are engaged in "making luck", giving good luck to some and bad luck to others. This is the typical occupation of the "spark-tails" (*pisuhänd*) and devices endowed with life by the devil for collecting treasures (*kratt*), characters from Estonian folk tales – goblins who move through the air like fiery flying dragons and bring treasures to their masters that they steal from other peasant's outbuildings.¹⁶ By the way, treasure-stealing was practiced by some German flying witches as well.¹⁷

As a deviation from the all-European standard, Estonian witches do not use brooms or oven forks for flying – they turn into birds. Flying in the shape of black birds is, by the way, known to Swedish folklore.¹⁸

A closer examination, however, reveals that these national elements are only loans. A specialist of Estonian national mythology, O. Loorits, argues that the Fenno-Ugric peoples had borrowed them from the Teutons and Scandinavians. According to Loorits, already in the third to second

¹⁶ O. Loorits, *Grundzüge des estnischen Volksglaubens I* (Lund, 1949) 270–272.

¹⁷ Kunze, *Straße ins Feuer* 189, 237–238.

¹⁸ B. Ankarloo, *Sverige i det stora oväsandet 1668–1676*, in: *Häxornas Europa 1400–1700*, 273.

millennium B. C. our ancestors adopted the dualistic world outlook of their neighbours, and later on they took over the goblins mentioned above as well.¹⁹ The role of the Catholic Church as mediator of culture was in this process negligible. He writes: "In Eastern Baltic the occidental medieval culture was actually spread by the international vagabonds – wandering tramps, buffoons, witch-doctors etc."²⁰

Folk tradition of the 16th–17th centuries already contained motifs like the flying of witches to Lokspäri Hill (an obvious derivation from the German seat of witch-sabbaths, Blocksberg Hill).²¹

R. Muchembled maintains that trials for witchcraft originated and spread from the time when books were becoming popular in Europe and the emerging educated middle classes wanted to find more rational explanations to natural and life phenomena.²² It is clear that during the period under discussion there were more educated people in Tartu than in the rest of the country.

The most important conclusion, however, is that, although the "demonist culture" reached Estonia, it did not set roots in the mentality of peasants. Apparently, such "satanic images" were too weird for Estonian mentality. Let us recall that on more than 130 occasions Estonian peasants were accused of witchcraft and that the judges were very keen on sabbaths and pacts with the devil, but only one trial – in Tartu town and its vicinity – yielded data on a witch-sabbath, and pacts with the devil were also a rare motif. By the way, in Finland, too, such motifs were more common to the vicinity of towns and the coastal area, where contracts with Sweden were closer and the number of resident Swedes bigger. Estonian peasants found it easier to believe in the capacity of special people (witches) to harm others (*maleficium*), a superstition typical of the whole of rural Europe.

As we can see by analyzing trial records, we can learn interesting facts about cultural influences. We can find out more by taking a closer look at the magic words, incantations and magic rituals recorded in the course of trials for witchcraft.

A peasant Pavel Willapulck interrogated at Pärnu Country Court in 1640 confessed to having used the following words for healing animals:

¹⁹ Looorits, *Grundzüge* III, 262, 334–335.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 347.

²¹ *Ibid.* 262, 334–335.

²² Häxornas Europa 1400–1700, 131.

"God, Father and Son, save my animals from all suffering, affliction and disease, as you have created animals for our benefit".²³

A Vorbuse peasant Pölve Jüri said in court in 1667 that he used the following words for helping women in childbed: "Virtuous Virgin Mary and God, save this woman in childbed, save her from this misery and death, help on angels, Father God please help this woman in childbed."²⁴

An Illuste peasant Vanapere Jürgen confessed before the Läänemaa Court in 1684 to having cured people by making the sign of the cross three times and saying: "In the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost."²⁵

In the present case we have deliberately selected the magic words and incantations that contain Christian terminology. But can we claim that their meaning is to some extent congruous with church doctrine? Apparently not: The pagan gods and fairies had simply been renamed and Jesus or some other biblical character was asked to relieve pain or improve the crop. Sometimes the positive heroes are coupled with negative ones. In 1723, a peasant by the name Wielo Ado used the following formula: "Help me, blessed Virgin Mary, help me, dear God, and you, Devil, help me too, if God will not hear me."²⁶

From the trial records of the case against Taträsandi Mihkel in 1699 discussed earlier, we can also find interesting data on the peculiar blending of church doctrine with pre-Christian beliefs and folk tradition. Apparently, Mihkel was tortured at the Räpina manor, and later on, at the Tartu Provincial Court, he withdrew a large part of his confession. In Räpina he confessed to having made pacts with two devils, one named Judas and the other Neck. He also told the interrogators that at the age of eight an "evil spirit Judas" had started to persecute him, had "thrown dirt at him and forced him to renounce God and become his servant, for which Judas would teach him witchcraft and magic words".²⁷

In Tartu, Mihkel denied having met or having had any dealings with

²³ V. Uuspuu, Nõiaprotsesse Pärnu Maakohu arhiivist kuni 1642 [Witch-trials from the Archive of Pärnu County], in: *Usuteadusline Ajakiri* 1937,3/4, 117.

²⁴ EAKT, f. 914, n. 1, s. 61b, l. 5-7.

²⁵ EAKT, f. 863, n. 1, s. 4252, l. 17.

²⁶ V. Uuspuu, *Esti nõiasõnade usulisest iseloomust* [About the religious character of Estonian magic words], in: *Usuteadusline Ajakiri* 1938, 1, 23.

²⁷ EAKT, f. 914, n. 1, s. 84, l. 12.

any Judas. He said he had seen a water sprite once, and others had seen her too. The water sprite had looked sort of whitish. But he had not spoken to her. The water sprite had come to the manorial courtyard and tried to seduce the master brewer – the others had noticed it as well. She had worn a white shirt, but otherwise looked just like a human being.

Like other European peoples, Estonians believed that water sprites lived in splendid palaces. Often they tried to seduce men, for marriage to a human being could give them an immortal soul.

Typically, the interrogators and the person interrogated tried to reach an agreement. At first, the water sprite from Mihkel's world of ideas was cast for the myrmidon of the Prince of Darkness. Afterwards, an analogous character was looked for in the Bible and Judas replaced the water sprite.

This kind of infiltration of biblical motifs and mixing of clerical images with the magic imagery of peasants continued up to the middle of the 18th century.

We can learn much from what happened in September 1720 near Otepää. A Nüpli peasant Soo Jaak went home after having worked for the estate, passing Prääma manor. At the same time, someone stole a beer cauldron from Prääma manor.

Local peasants, in order to find the missing cauldron, turned to the local wizard – a peasant by the name of Vahese Jaan. Later on, the latter said in court that he had been taught how to find out thieves nine years earlier by a Puhja peasant Raudate Andrei, according to whom only those could find out the truth who truly believed in God.

Jaan had acted out the followings ritual: He attached a small wax ball to a string and held it over a vessel filled with water, a few inches from the surface of the water. While doing this, he prayed to God from the bottom of his heart, saying: "God Almighty, my creator and savior, let me see through this blessed wax, who is guilty of this crime, and do not keep anything from me or I might hurt the innocent". He stressed in court that the words had to come from the bottom of one's heart, accompanied by deep sighs. After that Jaan recited the names of all the suspects – the culprit's name would make the wax ball move and spin. Thus, the Prääma peasants became convinced that Soo Jaak had stolen the beer cauldron.

Some time later the Müpli bailiff and two Prääma peasants came to the farm of Soo Jaak and told him to return the stolen cauldron. Jaak pleaded not guilty. He was then tied up and taken to a tavern near Otepää. Many peasants gathered there to try his case. It seems that Estonian peas-

ants had learnt a lot from the dozens of witch-trials they had witnessed. They started by torturing Soo Jaak with thumbscrews, then tied him to the tavern's fence and belted him. Jaak still did not confess to the crime and was dragged to the outbuilding where a mock service of the Eucharist was staged. Jaak was given weak sour beer to drink with the words: "This here is the Holy Communion und herewith we pardon your sins and tomorrow you will be burned at the stake". A peasant named Männiku Toomas put salt into the sour beer, saying: "Now you will drink the blood of Christ. As your sins will be forgiven you will tomorrow burn in fire".

As we can see, those events illustrate the blending of the new and old beliefs. Still quite strong is the position of the representative of old beliefs – peasants think of him as a wizard, while the authorities call him witch. It is important to remember that he repeatedly speaks of the need for strong emotions, although the magic words derive from Christianity. The ancient shamanist tradition is camouflaged with a layer of Christianity – key to success is in the collective mesmeric experience. The ancient ritual gets weirdly mixed up with the methods of torture widely used by the Church. As a third aspect there is the mocking attitude towards Christian rituals, as expressed in the derisive Eucharist.

In October 1725 a Valgu peasant Pragi Hans was sued for witchcraft and idolatry.²⁸ A few years before that, his house had burnt down and his wife Els had had a dream, in which her mother had told her that the fire was punishment for not observing the All Souls' Day. Els had then promised God (?) to celebrate the All Souls' Day in the future and told her husband about the dream. Pragi Hans had forbidden her to do this, and learnt only later that his wife and another woman had secretly held an All Souls' Day ritual. Peasants from the neighbourhood had flocked to Els's celebration. Some of them had worn ritual bandages on their heads and carried wax candles. In court, they said that one Sunday night the wife of Pragi Hans had given communion in honour of the dead. On straw in a corner of the room, some food was laid out for the souls of the dead. "Afterwards this was taken away and thrown to the dogs".

Can a dream of a peasant's wife really be important? In the present case it seems so. Anyway, information on a dream dreamt in the first quarter of the 18th century is rather unusual. During the lifetime of the last two generations the Church had intensified its ideological pressure on

²⁸ EAKT, f. 917, n. 1, s. 197.

peasants, trying desperately to uproot the old beliefs, sacrificial rituals at the sacred groves and worship of ancestors on All Souls' Day. Banning of the latter tradition could in some peasants cause a depression deep enough to make them dream of reprehensible ancestors. Here and there, the All Souls' Day was observed in secret and the dead buried into the old burial mounds, but soon church and court officials would find out about it and punish the offenders.

From the turn of the 17th to the 18th century the nature of the cultural contacts of Estonian people changed radically. With the spread of printing, books were beginning to reach Estonian villages (above all the ecclesiastical literature). From Germany the first Herrnhut missionaries arrived, who unlike representatives of the Official Church quickly learned the Estonian language (the local clergymen seldom bothered to do this) and associated with peasants on almost equal terms, living in villages as ordinary artisans.

However, often things happened at the prayer gatherings of the first Herrnhut missionaries that had their roots deep in the local national culture. Shamanic wizards and foretellers of the past used to faint during magical rituals – their souls then travelled in “another world” and could after returning to their bodies tell fortunes. In the 1730s–40s Herrnhut missionaries were amazed to see many of the peasants who had come to listen to them suddenly faint or contract convulsively.²⁹

In Estonia the movement of United Brethren (Herrnhut) started to spread from the Island of Saaremaa. The first peasants to disseminate it were Jüri and his wife Triin from Üpe commune. Soon another preacher became famous – weaver Lund, who said that all people have been atoned through the blood of Christ, and from his words it seemed as if everybody was soaked in blood. A peasant girl claimed to have seen a bloody hand. Two peasant girls declared that blood had rained on them from the sky on their way to church. Another girl met Jesus in the paddock of Tiirimetsa.³⁰

Well-known became a 20-year old woman, Tuleselja Reet. Authorities tried in vain to scatter the crowds who gathered to hear her preach. She also had visions. Among other things, she saw four devils drag two squires

²⁹ J. Eckardt, *Livland im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1876) 224.

³⁰ P. Sass, *Zur Geschichte der herrnhutischen Brüdergemeinde auf Oesel*, in: *Mitteilungen und Nachrichten für die Evangelische Kirche in Russland* 40 (Riga, 1884) 160.

Vietinghof into hell. Some Mustla parishioners saw an angel fight and win the devil.³¹

Data on the United Brethren in Southern Estonia date back to the year 1740. Again, there are the fanaticism and visions. A peasant girl drowned herself to escape from the sinful world. Even children who herded cattle gathered to sing religious songs. A peasant farmer tried to flog the fanaticism out of his daughter, only to hear her say that while he had power over her body, he could not touch her soul.³²

During church visitations peasants and pastors were asked, as we can see from the visitation records of Märjamaa 1790, if “there was still superstition and idolatry among the people, and do peasants still go to their wizards?”³³.

Today, we can study data on the spread of “superstition” in 14 Northern Estonian parishes collected in the course of church visitations up to the end of the 18th century. In nine parishes peasants admitted the continuance of ancient beliefs. The visitation records contain interesting data on those beliefs of peasants. Visitations were made regularly with the aim of inspecting the work of churches. Among other things, the visitors inquired after church attendance and the remnants of old beliefs. We have studied all the visitation records from the 18th and first half of the 19th century preserved at the Tartu Central History Archive and after analyzing them, we have come to the following conclusions.³⁴

While studying data from the 18th century two things strike the eye. First of all, it seems that only about the middle of the 18th century some few peasants betray the tacit agreement of silence of the village and voluntarily inform authorities of instances of idolatry (there is no record of similar acts from the earlier decades of the 18th century). Secondly, in Northern Estonia the old religious traditions, one might say, retreat to the peripheral centres. Peasants of the coastal region of Läänemaa start going

³¹ Ibid.

³² H. Plitt, *Die Brüdergemeinde und die lutherische Kirche in Livland*, in: *Zeitschrift für das Diasporawerk* (Gotha, 1861) 113–114.

³³ EAKT, f. 1247, n. 1, s. 22, l. 21.

³⁴ J. Kahk, *Eesti talupoegade religioossetest tõekspidamistest ja kultuuritasemest kahe sajandi eest* [About the religious ideas and cultural level of Estonian peasants two centuries ago], in: *Keel ja Kirjandus* 1979, 1, 11–20.

to the Island of Saaremaa for their "old religion" and in Eastern Estonia some districts of Virumaa become centres of "idolatry".

For a couple of decades about the turn of the 18th to the 19th century the pastors are very vague on the topic of idolatry in their visitation reports. Usually they say that "maybe there is some" or "some superstitious practices are likely to be observed among peasants", but they cannot give examples. Up to the year 1820 there is some fragmentary data reflecting the existence of ancient customs.

The last random data on "wizards" and "exorcists" again originate from Virumaa-Simuna in 1817 and Viru-Nigula in 1820. After that, the pastors seem to change their views on the local beliefs, ceasing to regard them as a serious threat.

In 1806 a Ridala pastor cautiously said that "superstition has been rather uprooted". In 1836, the pastor of the same congregation wrote: "Most likely some superstition is still practiced everywhere, but its mode of expression is not really harmful."

When a Jüri pastor was asked in 1824, if there was still idolatry in his parish, he answered: "No, or at any rate it does not strike the eye." In 1820, a Kuusalu pastor assured that idolatry "has died out in this neighbourhood". "Here and there some fortune telling may occur", said a Järva-Jaani pastor in 1820, but could not recall anything worth mentioning. The pastor of the same congregation declared in 1836: "If there is any superstition left, it is nothing serious."

Spread of religious literature is inversely proportional to the retreat of old religious traditions. Up to the middle of the 18th century some of the Northern Estonian parishes reported that few peasant farms had Bibles and New Testaments and only some had catechisms and hymnals (the parishes of Jüri in 1740, Viru-Nigula in 1738, Jõhvi in 1753; in 1745 Jõelähtme peasants said they had no money for religious books). At the 1745 visitation, the Viru-Nigula pastor complained that there were only three Bibles in his parish.

From the middle of the 18th century, everywhere in Northern Estonia few peasants had Bibles and New Testaments, whereas all households were equipped with catechisms and hymnals. Churchgoers were obliged to take along their hymnals, and checkups were frequent.

In 1745, the Haljala pastor thought there were some 100 bibles in his

parish. A Türi pastor claimed already in 1722 that some farms had 3–4 catechisms and hymnals.³⁵

Drawing upon the rather fragmentary observations of the turn of the 18th to the 19th century enlighteners (A. W. Hupel, J. Chr. Petri, O. W. Wasing), as well as F. R. Kreutzwald and F. J. Wiedmann, A. Viires comes to the conclusion that in the opening decades of the 19th century the Official Church at last attained the end it had aspired to for centuries – the wide-spread worship of sacred groves and holy trees died out.³⁶

All these data on the spread of ancient customs tells us that, when J. G. Herder arrived in Riga and “discovered” the local folklore for the civilisized world, Estonian peasants were still observing their old traditions, and doing it quite openly.

During the classical period of enlightenment at the turn of the 18th to the 19th century, when Merkel, Petri and Masing were active in the Baltics, the Church furiously persecuted the old religious customs, regardless of which peasants still secretly sacrificed at the sacred groves and stones and turned to wizards and exorcists for help.

The beginning of the 19th century, when Kreutzwald and Faehlman were still young, marks a watershed: Estonians neglected their sacred groves and sacrificial stones and the incantations and magic formulas slowly degenerated into old habits and mere superstition.

A characteristic feature of the cultural development of Estonia is the fact that simultaneously a more profound understanding of Christian ideology and national-romantic ideas started to influence peasant psychology. Baltic aborigines and their cultures were almost at the same time discovered by the Herrnhut missionaries and authors propagating national-romantic ideas. As to the latter, Herder, a representative of German culture, was followed by the locally active generation of Baltic Germans like Merkel and Petri, and then, in a decade or so, by the Kreutzwald–Faehlmann generation of Estonian origin. The latter two generations published on a large scale, and apparently, at least partly, their ideas concerning the ancient Estonian fight for freedom and the crimes of the conquering German knights reached the peasants fairly soon. Clearly in this case too, we are deal-

³⁵ EAKT, f. 1187, n. 2, s. 5181, l. 46; f. 1224, n. 1, s. 21, l. 14–15.

³⁶ A. Viires, *Puud ja inimesed. Puude osast Eesti rahvuskultuuris* [Trees and people. Trees in Estonian folk-culture] (Tallinn, 1975), 50.

ing with the interlocking of ideas – ideas of national-romantic literature connect with the beliefs and images of folklore.

Acculturation may be seen as the changing of objects, traditions and beliefs as result of contacts between societies with different cultural traditions. This may occur peacefully as well as violently – if the culture of rulers suppresses elements of the culture of those subjugated (an example of negative acculturation is Russification). We can speak of the displacement of local popular beliefs by universal all-European beliefs.³⁷

The rather slow and often painful acceptance of Christianity by Estonians may obviously be regarded as a case of acculturation. For Estonians, Christianity was after all an imported religion, spread by people of another nationality. The spread and acceptance of Christian ideology was an extremely complicated process, as we can see from the 1619 Tartu trial records. On the one hand the imagery of witch-sabbaths had come through the so-to-say official channels – the Church, courts and antide-monist literature. The Tartu judges were familiar with it. But when they started to interrogate peasants, they came upon details that had travelled through the so-to-say unofficial channels (the vagabonds mentioned by O. Loorits), probably from towns. The final picture was to a considerable extent influenced by the local atmosphere and traditions.

Acculturation again made itself felt later on in the writings addressed to the Estonian people and authored by Herrnhut missionaries and the first Estonian publicists. It even turned out to be an aspect of the development of national-romantic ideology. But all this is true only if we proceed from the principle that acculturation is a phenomenon that changes with time, and at least in Estonia, but probably more generally as well, we are always dealing with contacts between two kinds of culture and the final synthesis is affected by both – the more international culture of the rulers from above and the national local culture from below. History knows of contacts at many levels (rulers – local common people; foreign common people – local common people), and their nature keeps changing (while the witch-trial period of the 17th century is dominated by violence, from the middle of the 18th century it is step-by-step replaced by cultural activities based on humanist principles).

³⁷ Håxornas Europa 1400–1700, 54.

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Vorwort

Der vorliegende Band von *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* ist seit längerem wieder ein offenes, keiner speziellen Thematik gewidmetes Heft. Dennoch zeigt sich ein gewisser Schwerpunkt auf der Problematik umweltgeschichtlicher Forschung, die jüngst auch in Österreich mehr Beachtung gefunden hat. Die beiden grundsätzlichen, methodisch orientierten Beiträge von Gerhard Jaritz, Werner Schwarz und Verena Winiwarter bzw. von Stefan Poser stehen im Zusammenhang mit der Veranstaltung eines Arbeitsgespräches an der Niederösterreichischen Landesakademie in Krems, das am 13. und 14. Dezember 1991 stattfand. Die Ergebnisse der Diskussion werden im Jahr 1992 in *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* veröffentlicht werden.

Die anderen Beiträge und Berichte vermitteln eine besondere internationale Streuung und zeigen den inzwischen weiten Einzugsbereich unserer Gesellschaft. Wie bereits angekündigt, wird der aufstrebenden estnischen Forschung im Rahmen einer Geschichte von Alltag und materieller Kultur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, die bereits in diesem Heft durch einen Beitrag von Juhan Kahk (Tallinn) vertreten ist, voraussichtlich im Jahre 1992 ein eigener Band gewidmet werden.

Die Planung für die weiteren nächsten Nummern ist bereits weit fortgeschritten. Wir freuen uns mitteilen zu können, daß anfangs 1992 Sonderband II zum Erscheinen kommen wird, welcher die Referate einer im Frühjahr 1991 in Finnland veranstalteten internationalen Tagung zum Thema "*Crudelitas* in Antike und Mittelalter" enthalten wird. Diese Publikation ist als Gemeinschaftsproduktion mit dem Historischen Institut der Universität Turku geplant. Ein umfangreicheres Heft wird die Arbeit eines ungarischen Kollegen, Sándor Petényi, zur Veröffentlichung bringen, welche sich mit "Games and Play in Medieval Hungary" auseinandersetzt. Die bereits seit längerem angekündigte Auswahlbibliographie zum mittelalterlichen Kleidungswesen befindet sich weiterhin in Vorbereitung. Gleiches gilt für den ebenfalls bereits avisierten Band zur computergestützten Analyse mittelalterlicher Bildquellen.

Im Jahr 1992 fungiert *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* zusammen mit dem Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften neuerlich als Veranstalter eines internationalen Kongresses, welcher sich mit der Thematik "Kommunikation zwischen Orient und Okzident. Alltag und Sachkultur" (Krems, 6. bis 9. Oktober 1992) beschäftigen wird. Unsere Mitglieder werden anfangs 1992 ein entsprechendes Vorprogramm erhalten. Wie gewohnt, wird aus Anlaß der Veranstaltung auch ein Heft unserer Reihe erscheinen, das die Kurzfassungen der gehaltenen Referate enthält.

Gerhard Jaritz