



Encyclopedia of Baltic
Mythology in Czech, or
“As Some Sleep, Others
Must Keep Vigil. . .”

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Энциклопедия балтской
мифологии по-чешски,
или “Пока одни
спят, другие обязаны
бодрствовать. . .”

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BĚŤÁKOVÁ M. E., BLAŽEK V., *Encyklopedie baltské mytologie*, Praha, Libri,
2012, 288 stran, ISBN 978-80-7277-505-7

In 2012 the Czech scholars Marta Eva Běťáková and Václav Blažek prepared and published an encyclopedia of Baltic mythology in the Czech language [BĚŤÁKOVÁ, BLAŽEK 2012]. This is a welcome and significant event given the dearth of publications in other languages about Baltic mythology in recent years. Mythology is the core of a people’s worldview, a species of figurative thinking offering solutions to major philosophical and ideological problems. Conversely, the expression of a community’s or a people’s culture is the primary source for learning about that community. To put it another way, if you want to learn about any people thoroughly, about their way of life, their system of values, and their modern existence and perspectives, you have to begin with their mythology.

One can agree partially with the compilers of this encyclopedia in their claim that this is the first such book of its kind, offering etymological interpretations of Baltic mythologems based on primary sources. It must be admitted that, up to now, there has been a lack of attention to the etymology of different mythologems, gods, goddesses, mythical beings, ghosts, and so on in encyclopedias and dictionaries published in Russian, Latvian, and Lithuanian [MYTHS 1980; RELDICT 1991; ME 1993–1994; ME 1997–1999; BERESNEVIČIUS 2001], and these publications present Baltic mythology at rather variable levels of quality and from many different points of view. Works by

certain investigators stand at a higher level, including those by K. BŪGA [1958–1961], V. JACKEVIČIUS [1952], V. MAŽIULIS [1988–1997], V. TOPOROV [1975–1990], and a few others, but none of these could be ascribed to the category of encyclopedia.

Marta Eva Běřáková and Václav Blažek selected the usual structure for publications of this nature: the encyclopedia is made up of a foreword; an explanation of how to use the work (briefly surveying the phonetic features of the Lithuanian and Latvian languages, problems in translation from one language to another, and so on); a dictionary of mythologems arranged alphabetically; appendices (a list of Old Prussian deities and the legend of the founding of Vilnius); and a bibliography (chronological lists of sources and their abbreviations, a list of literature used, and a list of abbreviations for the most-cited works).

The dictionary of terms describing Baltic mythology (mythologems, theonyms, euphemisms, entities, and so forth) constitutes the major part of the encyclopedia, both in terms of volume and meaning. Exhaustive and comprehensive presentation of information is the task and goal for any encyclopedia, although of course the compilers reserve the right to choose what is more important and what is less, and those topics deemed more important are usually presented more comprehensively than those deemed less so. This selection process thus carries with it an important responsibility on the part of the compilers. An encyclopedia is not really thorough if the authors fail to touch upon the criteria used for researching and selecting the entries used in the work—without such an explanation, the reader is left with unanswered questions.

One such question is why the entries do not include or discuss the names of deities listed by Jonas Łasicki (Jan Łasicki) in *De Diis Samagitarum* (presented here in the original orthography): *Datanus, Dvargonth, Dugnai, Gondu, Guboi, Klamals, Kremata, Kurvvaiczin Eraiczin, Lavvkatimo, Peffeias, Pizio, Priparjci, Salaus, Sidzium, Simonaitem, Siriczius, Srutis, Szlotrazis, Tiklis, Tratitas Kirbixtu, Tverticos, Waizganthos, Warpulis, Vblanicza, Ventis Rekičiouum, Vetustis* [ŁASICKI 1969: 40–44] (see also [VĚLIUS 2001, 2: 571–603]). This omission is especially noticeable because these theonyms (euphemisms) were presented in the work by V. Jackevičius noted above, and this work, in turn, was used by Juozas JURGINIS [1963] and other investigators. Jurgis Pabrėža used many of these names of gods to name plants (and thus preserved them for future generations) in his creation of a list of systematized plant nomenclature in the first half of the 19th century [PABRIEŽA 1900]. Furthermore, the authors of the encyclopedia under review reference more than one of these theonyms in their quotations from Łasicki's work in the original language [ŁASICKI 1969: 42–43]. Of course one could claim that one or another of these names became theonyms and were entered on the lists of deities by mistake, or that this was an intentional deception by Łasicki's informants, who collected material in Žemaitija (Samogitia) in the 16th century, but this does not alleviate our concerns. All possible misunderstandings, mistakes, and other such confusions are subjects for research, and thus suitable for inclusion in the encyclopedia as descriptions of theonyms, including controversies, possible falsifications, and the like. Incidentally, three recent publications should be mentioned (two of which, one must note, post-date the publication of this encyclopedia) which more or less solve the entire question of Łasicki's work and the verification of the different deities listed therein [MIKHAILOV 1997; ALIŠAUSKAS 2012A; 2012B].

Along these same lines, it is not clear why the editors of this encyclopedia failed to include the names of deities first referenced by yet another 16th-century author,

Maciej Strykowski: *Goniglis, Gulbi Dievos, Prokorimos, Swieczpunscynis, Seimi devos, Zemiennik* [VĒLIUS 2001, 2: 499–570]. All of these theonyms (euphemisms) have received treatment by scholars of Baltic mythology, who have discussed their functions, probable etymologies, and their connections with other gods and Christian saints, the latter group gradually assuming some of the duties of the ancient Baltic gods after the introduction of Christianity in Lithuania in 1387 and in Žemaitija (Samogitia) in 1413.¹

It is regrettable that—beyond those mentioned above—the names of many other gods and mythical beings were not included in this encyclopedia. Among the more important left out are *Kiškių dievas*, first mentioned in the mid-13th century [VĒLIUS 1996, 1: 260–261]; *Lauksargis (lauka/jargus)*, described by Martynas Mažvydas [Martinus Mossvidius] in 1557 [VĒLIUS 2001, 2: 186]² (although the text of Mažvydas's preface, which refers to this theonym, is quoted on p. 219 of the encyclopedia); the deities *Ladum, Ladonem, Ledy*, and *Ladony*, first referenced by Marcin Kromer and other authors in the 16th century [IBID.: 414–419]; *Diedewayte*, first appearing in a letter by the amtmann of Labguva dated November 26, 1571 [IBID.: 226–228]; *Pagirnej* or *Dugnai*, appearing in a report by the Jesuits of the Vilnius Collegium in 1601 [IBID.: 621]; *Dirvuolira*, appearing for the first and only time in the 1605 annual report by the Jesuits of the Vilnius Collegium [IBID.: 624]; the goddess of fecundity of domestic animals, *Gothio* or *Gotha* [VĒLIUS 2003, 3: 143, 148] and the god of discord *Zallus* [IBID.: 148], first referred to by Matas Pretorijus (Matthaeus Praetorius) at the end of the 17th century; and *Bibcziu Bobelis, Sambarjys*, and *Czuze/Guze*, mentioned by Jokūbas Brodovskis (Jacob Brodowskĳ) [VĒLIUS 2005, 4: 19].

It is true that the authenticity of some of the gods and goddesses named above (*Kiškių dievas, Dirvuolira*, and *Sambarjys*), their exact functions (in the case of *Pagirnej* and *Dugnai*), and even their ascription to the Balts (*Ladum, Ladonem, Ledy*, and *Ladony*) are still being discussed and, it seems, will continue to be topics of interest in the future if new sources are uncovered or new arguments made—nevertheless, this is not sufficient reason to omit them in the registry of names of deities in an encyclopedia of Baltic mythology.

What could (and probably should) be considered in this context is whether this sort of publication ought to include the names of mythical entities originating in different types of literature in the 19th century (mainly legends and other tales), or the titles of holiday characters (spirits), or, for that matter, the names of gods and mythical beings which appeared in Baltic mythology as a result of the writings of Romantic mythologers (Teodoras Narbutas, Adomas Laurynas Jucevičius, Simonas Daukantas, and others). These include the names of different crop spirits (*nuogalis, dirikas, dirvonakis, žaliaakis, ruginis, žvaginis*, and others) [BALSYS 2010: 157, 242–243]; synonyms for the Grim Reaper-type goddess of death; names of personified diseases (*Kaulinyčia, Pavietrė, Kapinių žmogus, Kolerą, Maro mergos*, and others) [KERBELYTĖ 2002: 74–116]; the guardians of bodies of water and fish and kings of the fish (*Ponas Drukėlis, Rundonėlis, Akmenialis, Ploštarkanis, Šventas Viešbonas, alkis, traukutis*, and others) [BALYS 2000:

¹ For more on this, see [BALSYS 2010: 48–50, 110–117, 173–176, 201–205, 424–426].

² Incidentally, M. Mažvydas's *Lauksargis* is to be identified with J. Łasiccki's *Laukpatis (Lawkpatimo)*.

15; LEBEDYS 1976: 213; LKŽ, 1: 104]; various types of mermaids (*čeltyčios, narės, rusalkos, sirenos, and gudelkos*) [JUCEVIČIUS 1959: 79–85; VĒLIUS 1979: 29–30; KERBELYTĖ 2002: 180–182]; mythical characters of calendrical folklore and calendrical and work holidays (*Juodas Kudlotas, Morė, Gavėnas, plonis, and kuršis*); the figures of *Praamžius* and *Praurimė* described by Teodoras Narbutas (Teodor Narbutt); Adomas Laurynas Jucevičius's *Dzīvsvytis*, Simonas Daukantas's *Gražulė*, and many others.

It would have been possible to avoid the question of whether these names could (or should) have been left out of this encyclopedia if not for what I would consider one very important consideration. Some of the names mentioned by T. Narbutas and A. L. Jucevičius, and other names of folkloric characters (especially from Latvian mythical folklore) *do* appear in the dictionary, including Narbutas's *Medžiojma, Milda, and Kaunis*; A. L. Jucevičius's *Jūratė, Kastytis, Audėtoja, and Suverptoja*; and the Latvian mythical folklore characters *Gaujas māte, Miega mate, Miežu māte, and Naudas māte* (the authenticity of the latter, incidentally, was doubted even back at the beginning of the 20th century by Peteris Šmits [ŠMITS 2004: 129–131]).

A similar point might be made about another stratum of figures referenced in the encyclopedia, that of different soothsayers, sorcerers, clairvoyants, and fortune-tellers. Most of the fortune-tellers described in the encyclopedia (*medžioriai, seitonys, vandelučiai, lekutonys, neručiai, vėjonys, and žvėronys*) are known from the works of Matas Pretorijus, although Pretorijus preserved for us many more names of magicians than we find in the encyclopedia. Other types of magicians—*paukštučiai, udburtuliai, vidurionys*, and others—go wholly unmentioned.

The same fate befell the ancient servants of the cult of the Balts. While the encyclopedia does include *Kravis, vaidelotai, Maldinatajs* ("lotyšsky, duch, ktery mate"), it omits the *Tulissones* and *Ligaschones* known from a 13th-century source, the *Treaty of Christburg*; the *viršaitis* (*Wourschkaity*) from the *Sūduva Book*; and the *maldininkas* (*Maldikkas, Maldininker*) from the works by Matthaues Praetorius.

Several euphemisms for *Velnias* and *Perkūnas* crop up in the encyclopedia: *Jupis, Bauba, Baubutis, and Būkas; Dundulis, Dundutis, Dudutis, and Dūdu senis* appear as separate mythical names. These are, of course, not all of the euphemisms used for *Velnias* and *Perkūnas*. It would probably be useful here to recall that Norbertas Vėlius compiled a registry of the names of *Velnias* found in Lithuanian folklore and oral tradition [VĒLIUS 1987: 33–38]. Although it might have been inappropriate to include his entire list in the encyclopedia, it would nevertheless have been useful to indicate Vėlius's work and to note that there is a plethora of names for *Velnias* in folklore and the spoken language, providing several as examples. The same applies to the names of *Perkūnas* in the folklore. These names can be found in the works of Jonas BALYS [1998] and Nijolė LAURINKIENĖ [1996], and it would have been enough to give a similar explanation for both sets of names and provide references to works verifying this.

There are mythologems in the encyclopedia which give rise to the question of why other mythologems of the same sort were not included:

a) p. 110 mentions *lískový keř*, "filbert tree," but the encyclopedia nowhere mentions that the oak is associated with *Perkūnas*, the linden with *Laima*, or the elderberry bush with *Puškaitis*, and so forth;

b) p. 120 references *medvěd* (Lith. *lokys*, Latin *lakis*, Old Prus. *clokis*), whereas p. 207 references *vlk* (Lith. *vilkas*), but nothing is said about *žirgas, ožys, elnias, or jautis*;

c) p. 130 has an entry for the scholar *Narbutt, Teodor*, and p. 161 for *Pumpurs, Andrejs*, but it would be just as worthwhile for such an encyclopedia to include entries for *Matthaeus Praetorius*, *Jan Łasicki*, *Maciej Strykowski*, *Gothards Fridrihs Stenders*, *Jekabas Lange*, *Pēteris Šmits*, *Simonas Stanevičius*, *Adomas Laurynas Jucevičius*, *Simonas Daukantas*, *Johann Vilhelm Mannhardt*, and many others.

A few finer points:

a) in the discussion of the functions of the god *Tavvals*, it would have been helpful to have explained errors in translation passed from the work of one investigator to another [BALSYS 2010: 171–172];

b) it is not really clear how the authors came up with *Veliuona* from J. Łasicki's theonym *Vielona*. *Veliuona* is actually the name of a town in the Jurbarkas district of Lithuania, while *Veliona* (cf. Lith. *velionis*) is the goddess of death [BŪGA 1958, 1: 516–517];

c) in discussing the mythologems of *Mėnuo* (p. 124) and *nebeskā svatba* (pp. 133–141), the authors use the song “*Mėnuo Saulužę vedė*” (The Moon Married the Sun) from a collection by L. Rēza, although it was demonstrated long ago that this text is a reworking of a Latvian song;

d) one senses a lack of attention toward the main holy sites of the Balts (the sanctuaries of *Romow*, *Rickoyto*, and *Perkūnas*) described in the written sources from the 14th to 16th centuries;

e) some of the articles (entries), in terms of their scope and quality of research, differ greatly from presentations in other comparable academic studies, for example, the lengthy treatments in the encyclopedia under review of the subjects **Dēivas* (pp. 57–64), *nebeskā svatba* (pp. 133–141), and *Perkūnas* (pp. 148–156).

None of these criticisms and notes should be considered a reproach and they are only partially intended for the authors of the Czech-language encyclopedia of Baltic mythology under discussion here. These observations are addressed primarily to Lithuanian and Latvian scholars of Baltic mythology. I believe this work by our Czech colleagues will provide a much-needed stimulus to Lithuanian and Latvian scholars who have forgotten that a serious encyclopedia of Baltic mythology based on the latest research is long overdue. This is a project dreamt of by Jonas BALYS [2000] and Algirdas Julijus GREIMAS [2005: 729, 750], recalled again over a decade ago [VAITKEVIČIENĖ 2000], and apparently then forgotten for some time. Recently, Rolandas Kregždys, contemplating this titanic undertaking, has made a good start with his recently published articles and the first volume of *Baltų mitologemų etimologinis žodynas* (Etymological Dictionary of Baltic Mythologems), published in 2012 [KREGŽDYS 2008A; 2008B; 2010A; 2010B; 2012]. As the saying goes, “While some sleep, others must keep vigil.”

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Received on March 15, 2015