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FIRE IMAGE IN ANCIENT LITHUANIAN OUTLOOK: PHENOMENON OF INTERNAL FIRE

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In most of the ancient traditions there existed beliefs that fire, being one of the fundamental initial elements of the world, practically everywhere. Fire, an imperative power, joins separate parts into a united entity. Fire can be discussed as existing, not only on the earth, but also underground, within bodies of waters, and in the atmosphere and the sky. That fire is interconnected with mythical beings and deities from different spheres is probable as well. Data, discovered in beliefs of various countries, also indicates the fact that fire exists in different living beings (flora, fauna, and human beings).

An analysis of the phenomenon of internal fire is presented in this work, based on data from written sources, folklore and speech of Lithuania. This information is compared with material from other Indo-European traditions, first with Rig-Veda customs. Probable is that such an analysis will contribute to a better perception of fire, pertinent to an ancient comprehension of the world, as well as to a more precise reconstruction of ancient religious and mythological beliefs.

In Rig-Veda, it is said that *Agni* entered all the plants (I 98) and that he is the embryo of plants (II 10). *Agni* is referred to as the victorious god among trees (I 67, I 128) and the like. It was believed that fire can be obtained from trees, because it lies within them. *Agni* drowns, while being in a tree; however, as soon as the sacrifice-giver rubs the branches, he awakens once again. This belief about fire lying in the trees is generally transferred into

believing that fire exists in plants, as well. Therefore, there are also sayings about *Agni* being in plants (II 1, III 22). Namely, it is fire that determines the growth of a tree. Most likely is that fire gets into plants together with water (since, as mentioned, it exists in water as well). The combination of warmth (fire) and dampness (water) is the beginning of all life.

Possibly, it was believed that certain plants (or trees) held more fire than others did, perchance being bound with their actual combustibility qualities, and similar aspects. In Indo-European tradition, on oak tree is, first and foremost, bound with fire. At Lithuanian sacred places, namely oak logs were burned in honour of the gods. Moreover, a fir tree and its cone were also considered to be symbolic of fire, including heavenly fire, in various traditions. This may have been due to its direct similarity with the form of fire.¹

There is some contradiction in Lithuanian value beliefs about a fir tree (as well as the oak) during a thunderstorm. Some say that a fir tree is sacred; therefore, thunder won't strike, if one hides under it. One quote is, "It is possible to hide under a bunch of willows or a fir tree, because both are sacred trees; there, lightening won't strike" (LTR 1041/108). Conversely, others believe that when it is thundering, it is dangerous to stand under a fir tree, saying "During a thunderstorm, you should not stand under a tree, because the *velnias* (devil) tries to hide in there. The *velnias* (devil) usually hides in a fir tree; therefore, it is very dangerous to stand under it" (LTR 759/7).

In Lithuania, one herb, the greater celandine (*chelidonium majus*), has many different names. This plant is also referred to, as follows: *akių žolė* (grass of eyes), *cacalija*, *cenavada geltonoji* (yellow *cenavada*), *cindaliija*, *dangdovena*, *gailiapienė*, *gajutė*, *geltonpienė* and *geltpienė* (both names are variations, meaning yellow milk),

¹ Мифы народов мира, 1994, II, p.370

gailiapienė (name associates with milk of compassion), *kaukapienė* (another name with reference to milk), *cacaliija*, *cindaliija*, *dangdovena*, *gajutė*, or *karpažolė*². Interesting to note is that buttercups are also sometimes called the greater celandines. In folk medicine, this plant is used to cure various skin inflammations and acne (recollected is that a person is quite often punished with exactly such sicknesses for disrespectful behaviour towards fire).

Fire lies not only in plants, but in other living beings as well. The warmth of a living being indicates that a fire is lying within it even more clearly. All that matures burns, and all that burns, grows. Fire is life; it is the element, which imparts existence and generates movement in everything. Everything that is alive is warm. Fire is the sign of the life of an entity. Fire is life; life is fire. It passes from one generation to another as "the spark of life". The Russians still use this same expression, *искра жизни* (also akin to spark of life).

In Rig-Veda, *Agni* is called the creator of vital power (I 31), the one who imbues vital power (I 37), and the one who stimulates greater flourishing (I 31). Prayers to *Agni* request a doubling of life's power (I 71), a long life (I 23, I 96, IV 12, IV 115, etc.), descendants, and connections with descendants (I 23, etc.). He is asked for a son to prolong the kin of the sacrifice-giver (III 1, III 5, III 7, III 15, III 27, etc.), and to strengthen life's powers (III 3). Stated in Rig-Veda is that the kin of people extend from *Agni*, and that he shows the way for his descendants. Probably for this reason, he is called the father of people (I 81, II 2, II 5). Nonetheless, this reference about *Agni* might also relate to other reasons. For example, the most important gods are called fathers or mothers in most traditions of belief. According to the beliefs of Rig-Veda, it is possible to understand that *Agni* is both the father and the son to whosoever lights him, whomsoever contributes a sacrifice.

² *Augalai ir kosmetika*, p. 75.

In the nineteenth century, Lithuanian researchers of mythology already paid attention to the fact that in the Lithuanian world outlook, fire was perceived as the power, stimulating life. T. Narbutas wrote³ that in Lithuania, as well as in the other countries, fire was idolized as the deity, inspiring life for nature. According to J. Jaroszewiczius,⁴ fire symbolizes the being, which embodies the spirit of gods and the entire world. This makes it seem obvious that Lithuanian mythology is connected with the mythology of ancient Persians. J. I. Kraszewskis claimed⁵ that by idolizing the sun, stars, and fire, Lithuanians idolized everything that exists, every manifestation of life. Other mythological systems, which evolved later on, could have sprung from this source (i.e. from fire).

Due to the imagining of fire's existence in living beings, popular comparisons with fire, meaning "vigorous, quick" have appeared in the Lithuanian language. For example, there are expressions, such as "arklys kaip ugnis" ("a horse like fire" (fast)), a person who is "greitas kaip kibirkštis" ("quick like a spark" (works very quickly)),⁶ "ugninis viesulas" ("the fire whirlwind" or a very strong wind (implies the meaning of speed, strength),⁷ and "ugnies degiu" ("by the strike of fire" (very quickly)).⁸ Undoubtedly, such comparisons have appeared due to the external features of fire, as well.

The word *agnus* in the Lithuanian language means wild or untamed, brisk, agile, a hotshot, and strong. Direct and indirect parallels can be noticed with the Sanskrit word *agni* – fire. Some examples of expressions, employing this word, are "tas tavo vaikas yra perdaug agnus (that child of yours is too wild)"; "ana sena, o tokia

3 Narbutas, 1992, p. 172.

4 Vėlius, 1995, p. 128.

5 Vėlius, 1995, p. 195.

6 LKŽ, V., p. 727.

7 LKŽ, XVII, p. 380.

8 LKFŽ, p. 285.

agni (she's old, but so spry)"; "agnus nesiuntamas eina (the hotshot will go without being sent)"; "tavo tėvas buvo agnus (your father was agile)"; and "agni karvė (that's a strong cow)". The word *agnus* has another meaning, also – large, firm, of strong bones, and of a sturdy build. Such expressions include "vyriškis agnų kaulų" (the man has strong bones), "ano kiaulė agnesnė už mūsų" (his cow is sturdier than ours)", and "agni boba (a sturdy built old woman)".⁹ These definitions seem to confirm an existence of fire in an organism (or a sufficient quantity of vitality).

The following expressions again relate to the existence of fire in an organism – for example, "širdis dega" ("the heart burns" (to be angry), "nagai dega" ("nails burn" (to strongly wish for something), "akys dega", "veidas dega" ("eyes burn", "face burns" (to feel shame), "dega padai" ("soles burn" (to be very impatient, troubled), "kibirkštis sukelti" ("to incite sparks" (irritate or excite), "pykčio kibirkštys" ("sparks of anger"), "ugnimi apsipilti" ("to spill fire over oneself" (blush), "ugnimi spjaudyti" ("to spit fire" (name-calling), "ugnimi spirti" ("to kick by fire" (snap out angrily), and "ugnį užkurti" ("to set fire" (start quarrels)¹⁰. Other comparisons include such as "nurausti kaip ugnis" ("to flush like fire" (become ashamed), "užsidegti kaip liepsna" ("to light up like fire" (become angry), "ūmus kaip ugnis" ("hasty like fire"), "širdingas kaip ugnis" ("hearty like fire"), "piktas kaip ugnis" ("angry like fire"), "nuraudo kaip ugnis" ("reddened like fire") and other similar ones.¹¹

We can also make an assumption about the connection of four initial elements (fire as well) with the doctrine of four temperaments. "Possessing much fire" is descriptive of being temperamental. Thereby, fire determines spiritual and internal, as well as physical characteristics of a person. Some of these meanings are

9 LKŽ, I, p. 26.

10 LKŽ, I, p. 26.

11 LKŽ (II, pp. 368-370, V, p. 727, XVII, pp. 381-388).

negative. Perchance, these would not indicate an insufficient quantity of fire in the organism, but its surplus. Speaking slang, "apsvilęs (scorched)" denotes "lifeless", "fallen" - i.e. too much affected by fire.

Names of certain illnesses relate to fire, indicating a surplus of fire in the organism. Also, external symptoms of disease can sometimes be similar to fire. The expression "lekiančioji ugnis (flying fire)"¹² refers to a rash over the entire body (reminiscent of the superstition that fire may take revenge by making a person dirty with a rash). In an old Lithuanian spell incantation, the disease erysipelas is compared with fire.

In the opinion of G. Bachelard,¹³ fever and illness witness the dirtiness that appears in the pure vital fire of blood, which assures a person's existence. It indicates an existing dirty soul; so, it is natural that during a fever, the respiratory tracts, especially the tongue and lips, become covered with a thin coating of the black ashes of a fire. It can certainly be recalled that even in the books by doctors-practitioners about various ailments, a great deal of attention is paid to "heat, fever", a burning stomach, or "inflammation".

In folk medicine, usage of various medical herbs, especially the greater celandine, is quite often prescribed to lessen this internal heat. For example, "if there is ulcer, then cover it with the fire-leaf (coltsfoot); it will decrease the fire."¹⁴ Some diseases are cured by revitalizing positive connections with fire, because they appear due to disruptions in relations with fire.

In general, a connection to fire can be found in blood. Blood is one of fire's embodiments in Russian spell incantations. Ancient Russian incantations of which the following are examples: "У него

12 LKŽ, XVII, p. 386.

13 Bachelard, 1993, p. 85.

14 LKŽ, XVII, p. 378.

бы тело тлело, а кровь ключом киппела..."¹⁵, "как печь топится, и из печи платя нашем, — так у меня, раба Божия, кровь и рана утихала и переставала..."¹⁶ – depict blood, as a fire river, a boiling spring. There are also similar Lithuanian incantations in cases of bleeding, such as "Ugniauvystas kraujas, paparčio žiedas. Aprimo upė. Tegu šitas kraujas nustos tekėt" ("Languished-fire blood. Fern blossoms The River has calmed. May this blood stop its flow")¹⁷. In the Lithuanian folklore, the burning of a fire can be descended from the blood of mythical personages – Lucifer¹⁸ or God¹⁹, Jesus²⁰.

Meanings of the word *karštis* (heat), as used in the Lithuanian language, are similar to the meanings of fire (in addition their primary meanings)²¹. In a figurative sense, heat can mean zealous, high-spirited, and inspired. *Karštis* can also mean 1) heat, intense heat, 2) above average body temperature, fever, and 3) high point, enthusiasm, ardour. Expressions with grammatical variants of the word *karštis* (heat), include *karštai ginčytis* (to argue hotly, quarrel very intensely), and *karštai sveikinti* (to congratulate or greet heartily, very sincerely). *Karštinė* (a variation on the word *karštis* [heat]), means a hot or intense period of time, or a very busy season; it is also the word for typhus.²²

In summary, words of the Lithuanian language, connected with fire and its comparisons have the following meanings:

15 Традиционная русская магия, с. 138.

16 Великорусские заклинания, с. 67.

17 LT, V, p. 898.

18 LT, IV, p. 165.

19 LTR, 462/22.

20 BLS, p. 10.

21 LKŽ, V, p. 326.

22 LKŽ, V, p. 325.

- strength, speed, mobility,
- solidity, size,
- shame,
- fever,
- anger,
- illness, inflammation,
- climax, enthusiasm, ardor.

Words connected with fire have similar meanings in different languages, as well, such as Russian, English, French, and others.

A similar Russian word, огонь also has figurative meanings of "zeal, enthusiasm, and passion". The expression, Антонов огонь means gangrene, blood infection. The Russian жар means, not only intense heat or heat, but in its figurative sense, "climax, a patient's heat, fever".

In the English language, *fire* means, not only 1) fire, flame; and 2) conflagration; but also, 4) heat, fever (of a patient); and 5) climax, ardour, inspiration, enthusiasm, and liveliness. Other expressions, involving fire, include the following: *sacred fire* implies not only a holy fire, but also, inspiration; strong alcoholic drinks are sometimes called *liquid fire*; *to fire* means to shoot or to terminate employment; *to fire up* means to inspire, to inflame; *to fire away in anger* means to rouse indignation; and others.

In the French language, *feu* (m) means, not only 1) flame of fire, 2) conflagration, and 3) light, but also, 4) heat, 5) fever, and 6) climax, ardour, inspiration. *Feu sacre* means, not just 1) sacred fire, but also, 2) talent, gift of the god. *Feu de paille*, in a figurative sense is a sudden flare up, and *dans le feu de sa colere* – in a fit of anger. Other examples include *Etre tout feu* – to be of very resolute mood, and *plein de feu* – of lively imagination.

In various countries, beliefs existed that the "heat" of an organism helps in communicating with divine beings. In Australia and Oceania, sorcerers sought a "burning" in their bodies (they

achieved this by eating piquant food and drinking salt water).²³ Similar ideas existed in India, as well. It was believed that people, communicating with god, become "heated".²⁴ There is a very widespread belief that an internal, "magic heat" is strengthened by the usage of narcotic substances. Due to narcotic intoxication, a person becomes "burning". By using such an external aid, the aim was to achieve an "internal heat", and reach a state of trance.²⁵

So long as a human being is alive, fire is contained within that person. Comparisons with an extinguished fire indicate this. In Lithuania, it is said that a person "*užgesė kaip žvakė*" ("went out like a candle" (i.e. died). In ceremonies and beliefs, a candle is generally a symbol of life. In legends and fairytales (particularly in Slavic countries), a person, who goes on a visit to God or the devil, sees a great many burning candles, the length of which show the time remaining for one person or another to live. We can also see a reflection of a similar belief in the custom of setting a wreath with a lighted candle afloat in a river. The wreaths are observed to see, which carry the candles that go out the first. The person, who set afloat that wreath in which the flame of the candle went out sooner, will die earlier than the others will.²⁶

Words in Lithuanian that are said about a person, who is barely alive, include "*jame ugnies kibirkštėlė vos ne vos išlaikoma*" ("the spark of fire is kept glowing with great difficulty").²⁷ "*Nueiti paskui Gabiją*" – "To follow *Gabija* (the most popular goddess of fire in Lithuania)" means to die.²⁸ *Laumės* (witches) predetermine that a newborn baby will remain alive "*kol šita krūvutė malkų nesudegė*"

23 Eliade, 1974, p. 363.

24 Eliade, 1974, p. 475.

25 Eliade, 1974, p. 335.

26 Календарные обычаи..., I, p. 141.

27 LKŽ, V, p. 727.

28 Мифи народов мира, 1994, I, p. 260.

("till this heap of logs has not burned away"),²⁹ or until "*kol meduogalėliai susikūrens*" ("little pieces of wood remain hot").³⁰ Additionally, a person can sometimes hear the spiritual predetermination³¹ that a newborn baby will only live until the logs burn up. In this sense, a fire can also terminate the life of an individual.

Futures about weddings and periods of hard diseases could be foretold by the lighting of a candle.³² *Samogitians*, as told by M. Pretorijus, had *žvakonis* and *dūmonis* (ancient names for seers) in a circle with other magicians, who could predict the future from the lighting of a candle or smoke.³³ Burning candles also help to find the drowned; one is placed on a plate, and set afloat on a body of water. The place, where it stops, is the location of a drowning. An older form of this belief is the following. The location, where the candle goes out, a drowning will occur; wherever the light goes out, death lurks.³⁴

A current superstition that a majority of people knows is that it is best not to light a cigarette from a candle. When asked why this is so, most usually answer, "I don't know", "because it is better not to do so", or "that is wrong". Only some answered more specifically, explaining, "By doing so, you are shortening your own life" (Vilnius). The truth is that this superstition could be connected with a customary ritual of lighting a new fire; it might also be considered, as a modification of an ancient belief that a stick should

29 BLPY, IV, p. 115.

30 ŠLSA, p. 133.

31 LTR 4541/14.

32 Balys, 1944, p. 43; also, see the story of Jeronimas Prahiskis about sorcery from the lighting of a fire (BRMŽ, I, p. 594).

33 Mannhardt, 1936, p. 550.

34 Balys, 1944, p. 43.

not be lit from both ends (i.e. the stick that has already been lit once should not be lit from the other end).³⁵

In Rig-Veda, we can also notice *Agni* connections with death (to be more precise, with the world, which is immortal). It is said that *Agni* will lead people to supreme immortality in order for them to see their fathers and mothers again (I 31). Thus, *Agni* leads the dead to the kingdom of the dead. It is possible that such reasoning is due to the custom of cremating the dead.

Although fire ensures the vitality of an organism, souls can also at times originate from fire.³⁶ Souls may be little lights, which have left the human bodies.

In general, it can be claimed that Lithuanian data attests to an ancient Lithuanian world outlook, which contained, not only the belief of fire's existence in all the spheres of the universe, but also, in its existence in various living beings. It was thought that an abundance of fire especially exists in flammable, "hot" things, and in things from which fire can be obtained. Existence of fire in living beings was considered the power that ensures the vitality of these beings and provides them with positive energy. Plants, animals, and people are alive, because of the fire lying within them. A greater than normal "internal heat" makes a person more enthusiastic and more passionate; it even helps that person to communicate with divine beings.

35 Balys, 1944, p. 42-43. Sticks are gathered by devils and witches, which they use for their own matters. A stick is the key of access everywhere for a devil. Brownies destroy crosses made of the corns with their help, and they carry them away. Devils singe sinners in the Hade with sticks, and other like telling.

36 Sometimes lights are interpreted as souls (LTR 1585/110, LTR 1192/717), souls of suicides (LTR 1039/1639), souls of killed people (LTR 1056/39), and the like.

However, too large a quantity of fire in an organism causes dysfunction - various illnesses, negative emotional states, and such. This is very clearly seen from expressions, existing in the Lithuanian language. A surplus of fire, existing in an organism, is also indicated by the connections of the names for certain illnesses with fire. Symptoms and the name of a disease can sometimes be similar to fire. The relation of fire and life is further shown by the beliefs, recorded in Lithuanian tradition, in which death is compared with the extinguishing of a fire. A person would live, it was believed, so long as fire continues to burn.

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Ugnies įvaizdis senojoje lietuvių pasaulėžiūroje: vidinės ugnies fenomenas

D. Senvaitytė (Kaunas)

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama vidinės ugnies samprata senojoje lietuvių pasaulėžiūroje. Ugnis traktuojama kaip atskiras savarankiškas religijos ir mitologijos fenomenas. Jos analizei naudojamas lyginamasis metodas bei rašytinių istorinių šaltinių, kalbos ir folklorinių duomenų analizė. Lietuvių mitologijos duomenys lyginami su kitų indoeuropietišku tradicijų, visų pirma, Rigvedos pateikiamais duomenimis. Tikimasi, kad šio atskiro fenomeno analizė gali prisidėti prie tikslesnės senosios ikikrikščioniškos lietuvių religijos, mitologijos bei pasaulėžiūros rekonstrukcijos.

Būdama vienu iš pirminių pasaulio elementų, ugnis esti visame kame. Galima kalbėti apie skirtingas ugnies manifestacijas – ugnį žemėje ir po žeme, ugnį danguje, ore ir vandenyje. Ugnis yra persmelkusi ne tik visas visatos sferas, esti kiekvienoje negyvoje pasaulio substancijoje, bet ir glūdi kiekvienoje gyvoje būtybėje (augale, gyvūne ar žmoguje).

Gyvoje būtybėje glūdinti ugnis yra ta jėga, kuri užtikrina šių būtybių gyvybingumą, suteikia jiems pozityvios energijos. Augalai, žmonės ir gyvūnai gyvi todėl, kad juose yra ugnies. Vidinė ugnis veikia ir fizines bei dvasines žmonių savybes. Didesnis nei normalus „vidinis karštis“ daro žmogų aistringesniu, greitesniu, entuziastingesniu, netgi padeda jam bendrauti su dieviškomis būtybėmis. Tačiau pernelyg didelis vidinės ugnies kiekis sukelia organizmo disfunkciją – įvairias ligas, negatyvias emocines būsenas ir panašiai.