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NETWORK

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Will ICH Replace Tradition?

Heidi Henriikka Mäkelä

The ratification of the UNESCO ICH Convention by Finland occurred relatively late, in 2013. Following the ratification, the concept of ICH (or "living heritage", as it is currently referred to by UNESCO) has been disseminated at an astonishing rate within Finnish society. The concept was initially adapted by the Finnish Heritage Agency (FHA), which is responsible for overseeing its implementation in Finland. In 2016, the FHA created a wiki-based open-access inventorying platform (https://wiki.aineetonkulttuuriperinto.fi/) to facilitate the documentation of ICH. The Wiki Inventory of Living Heritage was a notable success, with numerous Finnish organizations and traditional communities contributing articles on their respective objects and ideas pertaining to Finnish intangible cultural heritage. The work still continues, as the Wiki-Inventory is a changing document. Moreover, the convention has been incorporated into the Finland's legislative framework, and the concept of ICH has been employed extensively in the Finnish media since 2016. Initially, scholars in Finland were somewhat skeptical of the concept, viewing it primarily as a tool for heritage administration. However, the number of studies employing the concept has grown rapidly in recent years.

Finland is not the only place in the world where the concept of ICH "plays the strings of people's souls", as the Finnish expression nicely describes. ICH is a metacultural frame (e.g., Kirshenbaltt-Gimblett 2004) and an intentional tool of transnational cultural politics of UNESCO (e.g., Alasuutari & Kangas 2020) that has been rapidly adopted in numerous regions across the globe (e.g., Hafstein 2024). It is an interesting question for folklorists whether the concept of ICH will eventually supersede the term "tradition", with all its multifaceted meanings and ontological underpinnings. This question is also related to linguistic areas: for example, in Finnish, the words "tradition" (*perinne*) and "heritage" (*perintö*) share the same etymological root, and thus seem to be used interchangeably in contemporary usage. Moreover, the Finnish agents associated with communities previously regarded as "traditional" have also demonstrated a notable enthusiasm for adapting the conceptual and ontological framework of ICH. The use of the concept is not limited, for instance, to the field of folk music. Indeed, numerous other institutions and individuals in Finland also emphasize the importance of ICH, including the Finnish Lutheran Church, the Finnish Federation of Local Communities, museums, archives, and a number of smaller organizations, even individuals.

Heidi Henrikka Mäkelä

For a Finnish native speaker, the term *perinne* ("tradition") appears to have acquired a somewhat antiquated quality, something that is a bit old-fashioned, conservative, even "Trump-ish", at least in institutional contexts. ICH provides an innocent cradle, an allegedly neutral and unpolitical space, in which individuals can congregate harmoniously and collectively commemorate aspects of the past. The same kind of processes occurred in multicultural Sweden approximately two decades ago, where words that began with "folk" became somewhat controversial as a result of rapid societal changes brought on by migration (Klein 2006). The relatively small and homogeneous Finland has been a place of "traditions", "folks", and huge and well-organized "folklore" archives up to this day – but now even the Finno-Ugric North has finally faced the ICH-zation of culture and tradition.

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11th Folklore Fellows' Summer School:

Interdisciplinarity and Involvement: Enduring and Emerging Sites of the Vernacular

Helsinki and Tvärminne, Finland,
17th–21st August 2026

Folklorists develop specialized skills and repertoires of methods and theories for investigating the circulation and operation of forms of vernacular culture among groups and networks, including narrative, local knowledge, verbal art, embodied practices, as well as heritage and memory work, while critically examining the ideological underpinnings shaping these processes. This specialization forms a backbone of disciplinary identity. However, this identity is also fundamentally interdisciplinary, requiring individual folklorists to develop specialist knowledge in the area studies and disciplines connected to their particular focus, interests and research materials. Interests in vernacular knowledge and perspectives are booming, making folklorists' skills a valuable commodity. Interdisciplinary research and collaboration are in increasing demand both within academia and in engagements with the public sector. The movement of methods and theories across different disciplines has become increasingly common, yet adapting methods and ideas is not the same as gaining specialist perspectives. The 2026 Folklore Fellows' Summer School (FFSS) focuses on what folklorists can bring to interdisciplinary collaborations and the roles folklorists can fill in today's rapidly changing societies. Rather than focusing on the role of interdisciplinarity in one's own research, this FFSS will help young folklorists develop perspectives on the value and potential of folklorists to contribute to research, debate and societal engagement beyond our field.

This week-long event gathers young folklorists with a team of instructors with extensive experience in different domains of interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral work. The FFSS brings into focus the value and potential of folklore research, highlighting that interdisciplinarity is, by definition, dependent on specialist disciplinary knowledge and skill sets. Such specialization provides foundations for a researcher identity as they engage with and extend their specialization into other fields. As multidisciplinary collaborations become increasingly commonplace in the humanities, this FFSS will introduce young scholars to the potentials and pitfalls of such collaborations, while also equipping them to present their potential, as folklorists, for collaborations when applying for grants and positions in academic, public or private sectors.

The call for participants will be opened in April 2025. Please follow us at

https://www.folklorefellows.fi/folklore-fellows-summer-school/

for current information.

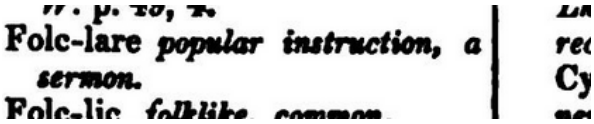
More a Lore than a Literature

Jonathan Roper

University of Tartu

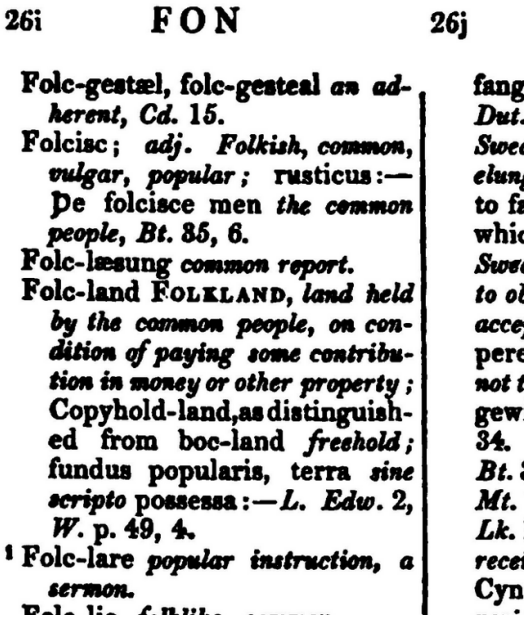
This contribution follows on from Frog's article in the previous *FFN Bulletin*, which addressed the question of whether the word 'folklore' was a calque of the German term *Volkskunde* (Frog 2024). In a nutshell, Frog is correct that it is not. There are two strong reasons why. The first is that if 'folklore' was a loan translation of a German word, it would be of *Volkslehre* rather than *Volkskunde* (i.e. of a word denoting 'the lore of the people' rather than of a word meaning 'knowledge about the populus'), and would display the possessive *-s*, i.e. 'folkslore'. The second reason relates to Thoms' description of his coinage as "a good Saxon compound" (1846: 862). When he uses "good Saxon", does he mean to suggest this is a term he recently heard on his travels in Saxony-Anhalt or that he came across the word in book from Niedersachsen? No. In using 'Saxon', he is not referring to any contemporary region of Germany, but to the Anglo-Saxons, and thus to the earliest centuries of the English language.

If we remark that 'folklore' is the first of the English *folk*-compounds (Frog 2024: 8), we are missing half the point. It may be the first (or among the first) of such *folk*-compounds in the nineteenth century (and hence in the *Oxford English Dictionary* data). But when we look at lexicographical sources focusing on earlier periods of the language, such as the *Dictionary of Old English* or the *Middle English Dictionary*, we find numerous *folk*- compounds, words such as *folc-lond* 'land held by the common people', *folk-mot* 'public meeting', *folc-stow* 'public place', etc. It is these older English terms that will have acted as Thoms' primary model for his famous neologism. Joseph Bosworth's *Dictionary of the Anglo-Saxon Language*, published less than a decade earlier than Thoms' famous 'folklore' note (1838), even has an entry for *folc-lare* (Figure 1). Jeffrey Alan Mazo (1996) already noticed the existence of the word in the Old English period, but assumed that Thoms could not have known it, as the three Anglo-Saxon manuscripts it is found in had not been published by 1846; Mazo had forgotten about the existence of Bosworth's dictionary. In that work, Bosworth defines the word as "popular instruction, a sermon"; an Old English author glosses it in Latin as "popularis institutio vel instructio, homilia, sermo" 'popular education or instruction, homily, sermon'. We might further note that in Bosworth's dictionary, all the *folc*- words are all capitalized and hyphenated (e.g. *Folc-læsung, Folc-land, Folk-lare*, etc.; see Figure 2), just as Thoms' original spelling of the word and its derivatives (Thoms even spoke of *Folk-lorists*). Furthermore, rather than presenting the now-standard form 'folclar' (e.g. Clark Hall 1931: 123), Bosworth's headword form is 'Folc-lare'. If 'folk-lore' can be said to be a calque, it is a calque of an Old English word.



Folc-lare *popular instruction, a sermon.*

Figure 1. Image of the entry for 'Folc-lare' in Bosworth's (1838) *Dictionary of the Anglo-Saxon Language.*



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Folc-gestæl, folc-gesteal *an adherent, Cd.* 15.
Folcisc; *adj. Folkish, common, vulgar, popular*; rusticus:—Þe folcisce men *the common people, Bt.* 85, 6.
Folc-læsung *common report.*
Folc-land FOLKLAND, *land held by the common people, on condition of paying some contribution in money or other property*; Copyhold-land, as distinguished from boc-land *freehold*; fundus popularis, terra *sine scripto* possessa:—*L. Edw.* 2, *W.* p. 49, 4.
Folc-lare *popular instruction, a sermon.*

Figure 2. Image of the entry for 'Folc-lare' in Bosworth's (1838) Dictionary of the Anglo-Saxon Language

I am not entirely sure who the proponents of the German theory are – one twenty-first century scholar hints at a German origin for the word but is circumspect about saying anything definite (Ó Giolláin 2022: 98–99), while a twentieth century scholar doubts whether Thoms knew of the word *Volkskunde* by 1846 (Emrich 1946: 372). We are on firmer ground in identifying the views of the nineteenth-century linguist Richard Trench. He stated outright shortly after the word's coining that it had been "borrowed recently from the

German" (Trench 1855: 60). But Trench seems to be bluffing: he does not offer a German original the word might have been based on and he also supposes that *folklore* means 'popular superstitions'.

Having agreed so far with Frog, I nevertheless disagree with him on a number of other issues. Firstly, Thoms can hardly be described as having an "ethno-nationalistic ideology" (Frog 2024: 8), not at least in the sense we find in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *s.v.* 'ethno-nationalism': "advocacy of or support for the interests of a particular ethnic group, esp. with regard to its national independence or self-determination". Thoms was certainly a cultural nationalist (Roper 2008) and was also intermittently a linguistic revivalist (sometimes he favoured a Saxonism, other times he gloried in a gorgeous Latinism), but he did not emphasize ethnic stock or advocate for the English as an ethnic group. Secondly, from what I said above, it should be clear that I do not believe that *Volksüberlieferung* (Frog 2024: 10) was the model for *folklore* either. Nevertheless, about the main thing Frog is right.

But enough about the word! Focussing on the word means we miss one of the most important theoretical statements Thoms ever made. One reason this statement has been overlooked is because Thoms was not so much a thinker as an energizer, and one does not go to him looking for thought. Another reason is because the theoretical concern is only hinted at and not set out at length. It is nevertheless key. There is a scholarly tradition that Thoms coined 'folklore' to replace the word 'popular antiquities'. To give just one example, Dan Ben-Amos writes of the "notion of 'popular antiquities', which Thoms sought to replace" (1971: 4). Numerous other scholars have asserted the same. I would suggest that Thoms coined the word rather as a replacement for the term 'popular literature'.

The very first sentence in Thoms' famous piece mentions both terms:

> Your pages have so often given evidence of the interest which you take in what we in England designate as Popular Antiquities, or Popular Literature (though by-the-bye it is more a Lore than a Literature, and would be most aptly described by a good Saxon compound, Folk-Lore, – the Lore of the People) –
>
> (Thoms 1846: 862)

If we zoom in on the start, we see Thoms is claiming that 'popular literature' is an inapt term as the phenomenon it designates is "more a lore than a literature". Thoms does not, by contrast, question the word 'antiquities' here, or state that what he is talking about is 'more Lore than antiquities'. Likewise, in 1878, when looking back at the effect reading Francis Palgrave's articles had on him as a youth, Thoms remarks the articles in question were "on popular Literature, Superstitions and Customs, and similar matters, now commonly recognised under the generic name of Folk-Lore" (Thoms 1878: xiii). Once again, it is the term 'popular literature' he is singling out; he does not mention his coinage as having encompassed 'popular antiquities'. In fact, Thoms endorses both elements of the term, 'popular' and 'antiquities'. And why shouldn't he?

Thoms saw folklore as a matter of survival from the past, the "olden days" (XXX), the province of antiquarians, and so we find in the same piece him praising Grimm as an "antiquary" and suggesting that the data his correspondents gather will be useful to "the English antiquary" (1846: 863XXX). Three decades later, while using the soubriquet 'an old folk-lorist', he also describes himself as an "antiquarian" (1876: 12). Just as he is content to use the terms 'antiquities', 'antiquarian' and 'antiquary', he is also happy with the concept expressed by the word 'popular'. 'Folk' for him is a synonym for 'popular' (in both of its senses, the people as a whole and the common people in particular), thus he often uses 'popular'. A few years later, he published the narratives collected in central England by his protegé Thomas Sternberg, some of the earliest fieldwork fruits inspired by his call (Roper 2014). These contributions were entitled "Popular Stories of the English Peasantry" (Sternberg 1852). Another example comes a quarter of a century later, when in a discussion about the formation of a society to document and study folklore, Thoms speaks of "popular mythology and superstitions" (1876: 12). He is not aiming with his coinage to replace 'popular' with 'folk' *tout court*, and he continues to use the two words synonymously in his own writings.

So, whilst 'popular' and 'antiquities' are unobjectional words for him, what he takes issue with in 1846 is the use of the word 'literature' in the context of *knowledge* and *behaviour*. Because his remark was made in passing and without any explicit expansion, one of his key theoretical statements has gone unnoticed for approaching two centuries. Let us restate it here. Thoms recognizes that a lot of what we are interested in as folklorists is lore (something learnt), not something written down, not 'literature' in the etymological sense (not written down that is until the folklorists get to work – but this is another story.)

Thoms may have thought the word self-evident, but in any event, he goes give us some examples of folklore: "the manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs of the olden time" (1846: 862). Contrast this list with that given in the first "Prospectus of the Folklore Society" three decades later: "Popular Fictions and Traditions, Legendary Ballads, Local Proverbial Sayings, Superstitions, and Old Customs" (Folklore Society 1878). When we compare the two lists, we see that there are more forms of custom and belief, and fewer verbal genres, in the earlier list, and that the forms of custom and belief come first in the 1846 list, but only appear after the verbal genres in the later list. I suggest the 1846 order (and number) of phenomena is deliberate, in order to move the focus away from verbal genres (such as ballads and proverbs), which might be

understood as 'popular literature', something which would undermine Thoms' whole case about the unsuitability of the word 'literature'. We might further note that in the 1878 Prospectus, the Society's goal is stated as being the "collecting and publishing of the relics of popular antiquities" and that the very first line of the Prospectus opens: "That there is a wide-spread and growing interest in our Popular Antiquities" (Folklore Society 1878: 1). So much for the idea that Thoms, the Director and Council Member of the new society, wished to abolish the word "popular antiquities", when he is still using it more than three decades later.

Thoms was not against the word 'literature' *per se*, he was against its misuse. When the occasion came to use it correctly, he would. For example, he describes chapbooks as an "interesting branch of our popular literature" (1878: 286). In a way, what is going on with Thoms' coinage is reminiscent of the debates a century and more later about whether 'oral literature' was a useful term or whether it should be abandoned (e.g. Finnegan 1992: 9–10).

Nowadays, Thoms is remembered chiefly for his coinage of the word 'folklore' and maybe also for his role in founding the [British] Folklore Society and establishing the still-extant journal *Notes and Queries*, and its (now-closed) corpus of folklore data. He is not seen as having been a thinker or theorist in the way we might conceive of his successors Edward Tylor, James Frazer, Edwin Sidney Hartland, or Laurence Gomme. This is no doubt just. Nevertheless, there were times he did engage in thought on folklore matters, and the parenthesis my piece has concentrated on was one of them.

One final remark. While Thoms asserts that 'lore' is a *more* appropriate term than 'literature', he does not claim that it is a perfect fit with the material. In other words, a better term might yet be coined. Food for thought, perhaps.

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I am grateful to Paul Cowdell for locating the first Prospectus of the Folklore Society in the society's London archives.

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Biomimetic Figurations in Contemporary Biohacking

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Although undeniably rooted in consumerist newspeak, the term 'biohacking' nevertheless designates a loosely defined yet rapidly expanding assemblage of therapeutic and self-improvement practices emerging at the intersection of self-tracking and alternative health cultures. Grounding its overarching approach in an empirical dataism inherited from its progenitor, the Quantified Self movement, biohacking incorporates a range of techniques from elaborate supplement protocols and experimental technologies like heat, cold, light, and sound therapies to blue-light blocking glasses – designed to filter disruptive wavelengths in the evening in order to support natural melatonin production..[1] Indeed, biohackers seemingly leave no stone unturned in their individualistic pursuit of psychophysical optimization.

While characterized by blatant techno-optimism if not techno-utopianism, assuming that this ethos introduces a radical rethinking of the relationship between **technology and nature** or, more broadly, of entrenched social structures such as **gender, race, class, or ability,** would be misleading. Instead, biohacking often rearticulates these familiar frameworks through a biomimetic imaginary – a suitably scientized vision that seeks to model human health and performance on idealized biological processes while remaining enmeshed in prevailing neoliberal narratives of individual responsibility and self-discipline (for a fuller treatment, see Lindfors 2024).

Biomimetic Figurations

Of course, invoking **'naturalness'** as an idealized state of health is inherently contentious; however, in this context, as an overarching vision, biomimesis—or nature imitation—carries multiple implications. Its figurations are fluid, changing, and shaped by an interplay of cultural, scientific, and ideological forces (cf. Dicks 2022). First, biohackers advocate for techniques and strategies grounded in ostensibly biomimetic logics, such as provoking the body's natural adaptive capacities through cold or heat exposure or consuming 'adaptogens' – plant-based substances with purportedly balancing effects (i.e., returning and restoring the body to its optimal state), usually derived from non-Western medical traditions (for the logics of restoration and optimization, see Derkatch 2022). One of the foundational concepts embraced by biohackers in this regard is 'hormesis', a principle from toxicology and pharmacology that suggests low doses of toxins or stressors can produce stimulating or beneficial effects. However, biohackers extend this idea well beyond its traditional application, elevating hormesis to a conceptual cornerstone for longevity claims and primitivist aspirations – e.g., to an instrument for regaining our mammalian adaptive abilities through progressive exposure to external stimuli from natural elements (as in Carney 2016). In this expanded form, hormesis becomes increasingly speculative and ideological. This is all the more evident when it is further deployed as a means for transcending modern 'soft' (in other words, 'liberal') lifestyles in favor of a resilient nature-connectedness – perhaps bolstered by variations of vulgar Nietzschean maxims of 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger' (often carrying connotations of social privilege).

Second, the figurations of biomimesis within contemporary biohacking are hierarchically structured, privileging certain bodily ideals over others. At the core of this imaginary is an apotheosis of human bodily capacities – simultaneously techno-assisted while remaining rooted in primitivist ideals of raw physicality, heightened sensory awareness, and self-sufficiency.[2] This vision, while ostensibly cybernetic in its all-encompassing synthesis of nature and technology (see Modern 2021; also Dorst 2016), reinforces the implicit expectation of compulsory able-bodiedness (McRuer 2006), where individual autonomy is not only celebrated but demanded. As suggested by Rosi Braidotti (2013), such imaginaries also affirm a belief in the ultimate supremacy of the 'natural order', positioning technology as a mere tool for mimicking and channeling nature's (or in this case, the body's) inherent wisdom. Within this framework, technology is ultimately positioned as secondary – an analogical replication of nature's mechanisms, as when infrared light

1 Historically informed scholars may recognize these 'elemental' health technologies as echoing 19th-century European 'nature cures' renowned for their therapeutic appropriation of environmental elements (Alter 2014; also Whorton 2002).

2 Resonating with my use of this notion of bodily exultation, Ed Cohen (2008) has formulated the term 'apotheosis of the human body' in the context of immunological discourses of bodily integrity and defense.

therapies are framed as emulating the beneficial effects of sunset – while embodied knowledge and intuition are granted epistemic primacy. This underscores the need for scholars to critically examine how biomimicry is framed discursively, attending to the cultural and social logics that underpin its appeal.[3]

Contextual Re-Politicization

No doubt, many of the interventions and tactics promoted by biohackers are materially effective and may prove valuable for individuals seeking innovative methods for self-empowerment and well-being. Some of their efforts, such as advocating for the elimination of xenobiotics like glyphosate, also intersect with broader public health concerns and environmental critiques. Rather, my concern lies in examining the broader ideological imaginaries that are often embedded within these practices – dimensions that warrant both critical attention and case-by-case re-politicization. In embracing non-conventional and experimental methods for achieving well-being, often through a lens that seeks inspiration from 'natural' processes, biohacking provides fertile ground for intersecting with and, at times, channeling anti-modern or anti-progressivist currents such as conspiracism, anti-vax sentiments, and skepticism toward institutional expertise (e.g., public health measures).

Health and wellness practices, perhaps specifically those that trade on primitivist ideals of self-reliance and bodily autonomy, are also increasingly being co-opted by right-wing political forces. Not only are high-profile biohackers like Dave Asprey – the self-professed originator of the term – currently siding with US health secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. in his efforts to overhaul public health institutions, but this trend is also becoming evident in seemingly apolitical practices. Even cold exposure/swimming, a once-niche therapeutic technique favored by older Nordic women but now an internationally booming phenomenon, is part of this shift, with the Wim Hof Method – named after one of its fervent advocates, Dutchman Wim Hof – having begun to attract attention from the manosphere, signaling a subtle but growing politicization (see also Lindfors, forthcoming). (In Finland, I should say, it is still thankfully possible to take cold plunges without being viewed as a political actor!) Oftentimes, scientific rhetoric is employed by these groups as an ostensibly objective, non-political framework, helping to deflect suspicions of ideological bias, even as their practices serve to reinforce political agendas. Rather than attempting to depoliticize or shield such therapeutic practices from ideological co-optation, scholarship should instead pursue a contextual re-politicization by exposing their situated undercurrents so as to help prevent their uncritical assimilation into broader ideological struggles.

3 Another alternative to these naturalized hierarchies can be found in xenofeminism, introduced by Helen Hester (2018) and the international collective Laboria Cuboniks, which seeks to denaturalize essentialized notions of the 'natural' by reimagining technological innovation as a means of collective liberation and actively disrupting normative assumptions about bodies, ability, and nature itself.

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Book Review: The God Perkūnas of the Ancient Lithuanians

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Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore

Nijolė Laurinkienė, *The God Perkūnas of the Ancient Lithuanians in Language, Folklore, and Historical Sources*, FF Communications 327, Helsinki: The Kalevala Society, 2023. 336 p.

Over the last several decades, not many books about Lithuanian mythology have been published in English, and they can easily be listed: two books by Lithuanian mythologists – "The World Outlook of the Ancient Balts" (1989) by Norbertas Vėlius, and "Of Gods and Men: Studies in Lithuanian Mythology" (1992) by Algirdas Julius Greimas, and one by the Czech linguists Marta Eva Běťáková and Václav Blažek titled "Lexicon of Baltic Mythology" (2021). A few more studies of Baltic religions can be added to this list including research about ancient Lithuanian sacred places by archaeologist Vykantas Vaitkevičius, a publication of Baltic religion source materials from the 15–16th centuries with a broad introduction by historian Francis Young (2022), and a book by mythologist Rimantas Balsys about Lithuanian and Prussian religion (2021). Therefore, it is delightful that The Kalevala Society Foundation published this monograph by Lithuanian folklorist and mythologist Nijolė Laurinkienė, dedicated to a very important figure in Lithuanian mythology – the god Perkūnas, as part of their FF Communications series. This is the first publication in English to give a broad and in-depth analysis of a single Lithuanian deity.

True, the book itself is not new as the Lithuanian version was published over a quarter century ago in 1996. Nevertheless, the new publication is not a direct translation of that publication. The author reorganized the book's structure, renewed the bibliography, and what is most important, provided a review of the new research that has appeared over the last several decades, thus supplementing the original publication.

The book is constructed in a way that presents the god Perkūnas as a character of Indo-European mythology. Alongside the Lithuanian version, the author also looks at Latvian and Old Prussian materials and seeks parallels with Slavic, Germanic, Greek, and Indo-Iranian mythology. She also devotes attention to the connections with Uralic peoples and discusses the name and function equivalents in Estonian, Finnish, and Karelian mythology. Nevertheless, the book is not a comparative study: Lithuanian folklore materials remain at the center of the research around the folkloric figure of Perkūnas, and it is research by other scholars that comprises the comparative context that the author draws upon when interpreting Perkūnas in an Indo-European context.

Nijolė Laurinkienė is not a pioneer in folkloric studies of Perkūnas. Even before World War II, the Lithuanian folklorist Jonas Balys wrote a dissertation titled "The Thunder and the Devil in Baltic and Scandinavian Folklore". He published two large volumes of folkloric texts about Perkūnas in Lithuanian. In one of them, Balys compiled Lithuanian tales about Perkūnas alongside analogous examples from the Baltic region – Latvian, Estonian, Livonian, Finnish, Sami, Swedish, and Danish folklore (Balys 1939). His second large publication was on folk beliefs (Balys 1937), which he classified into thematic chapters, i.e. "Origins of Perkūnas," "Relationship between Perkūnas and the Devil *(Velnias)*," "Names of Perkūnas," "Place names and personal names based on Perkūnas," "Perkūnas's family," "How people behave during a storm (forms and means of protection)," "The first thunder," and others. These reflect the most popular themes of the times that were characteristic of folk beliefs about Perkūnas. Laurinkienė extended the tradition set by Balys in her own book by formulating similar thematic chapters, namely "Names of the Thunder God," "Place Names Related to the Word Perkūnas," "The First Thunder in Spring," "Perkūnas Hunts the Velnias," "Protection Against Thunder," and others. The author's chosen primary source material (folk beliefs and tales) dictates such structural logic as does the descriptive nature of the book. The occasional comparison with Indo-European or Uralic mythological figures and tales demonstrates what the author calls a "historical-comparative method" (p.13).

On the other hand, Laurinkinė does not limit herself to folklore and aims to highlight the religious aspects of Perkūnas including his divine functions, rituals, sacred places, and position within the pantheon of Lithuanian (Baltic) Gods. The ninth chapter titled "Rituals, Prayers, and the Temple Dedicated to Perkūnas," addresses these questions as do chapters 15 and 16, "Perkūnas's Place and Role in the Pantheon," "Supervision of Justice" as well as the final, 19th chapter, which offers a summary of Perkūnas's divine

functions, and his cult and place in Lithuanian mythology. The book alternates between a folkloric-mythological and religious analysis of the figure of Perkūnas as the author switches between folkloristic and religious studies approaches. For this reason, the degree of reconstruction differs throughout the book – in some chapters, Laurinkienė describes Perkūnas as a mythical creature of folk beliefs and tales from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, while in others she sees him as a figure of the Lithuanian pantheon characteristic of the pre-Christian Lithuanian state that retained its beliefs until 1387. The author refers to Perkūnas in two ways: "The god of storms, thunder, and lightning" (p. 21), "God of the sky," "God of nature," "personified natural phenomenon," "personified storm" (p. 99), "mythic personage" (p. 319). Hence, the book is not completely coherent, and the reader is left wondering which strata – the folkloric or the religious – is at the center of the analysis.

The book devotes a lot of attention to the problem of Perkūnas's name. Laurinkienė indicates that the name Perkūnas has specific equivalents in Latvian, Old Prussian, Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Polish, Slovak, Czech and Serbian mythologies. The etymology is explained in two ways: on the one hand, it comes from the Proto-Indo-European root *per* meaning "to beat, strike" (yet this version has its limitation due to the uncommon formant of -k-), or on the other hand, from **perkʷu* meaning "oak" (see the Latin *quercus* meaning "oak")(p. 40–45). Linguists who are in favor of the latter etymology draw an explanatory link between Perkūnas and oaks: in Indo-European mythology, the oak is considered to be the tree of Perkūnas, and "the suffix *-no-* is characteristic of Indo-European divine nomenclature, generally interpretable as 'master of'" (p. 47). Laurinkienė agrees with this etymology, yet later states for some reason that the theonym originates from the Lithuanian common word for thunder, *perkūnas*: "a phenomenon of nature named by common word became mythologized: *perkūnas* ('thunder') acquired the meaning of *Perkūnas* ('thunder God')" (p. 45). This turn of logic is not fully explained, perhaps it is just an oversight on the part of the author.

Overall, there are only a handful of words for thunder in Lithuanian, which itself is understood as a complex phenomenon, however, Laurinkienė does not devote much attention to that. There are three important interrelated aspects that describe thunderstorms from different perspectives. The word *perkūnas* in standard Lithuanian and dialects means a bang, a striking, while the word *griausmas* refers to the sound, and *žaibas* – to lightning. The fact that the word *perkūnas,* which is also the name of the deity signifies power can be seen in the verbs that are often associated with it including verbs *trenkti* (to strike), *mušti* (to hit), *daužti* (to shatter), *spirti* (to strike) and *šauti* (to shoot). The name Perkūnas as well as the word *perkūnas* points to the most important quality of this deity – his mighty power to strike. It should be noted that other names used to refer to Perkūnas, mostly through euphemisms, indicated not so much the striking, but only the sound, for instance, *Dundulis (*from the word *dundėti* – to rumble), *Trinkulis* (from the verb *trinksėti* – to stomp), *Bruzgulis* (from the word *bruzdėti* meaning to clamor*)* and others. The Lithuanian concept of Perkūnas as a phenomenon is quite complicated; in addition to what was already mentioned (fire, rumbling, and striking powers), two more components play an important role – *rūdė* (rust) and *amalas* (heat lightning), which Laurinkienė does not mention. *Rūdė* is mythologically understood to be an atmospheric metal: lighting strikes only when there is a high concentration of such metallic particles in the air in a specific place; folk sayings explain that without *rūdė* there can be no lightning. The expression of *amalas* is a sweet dew that falls from the sky when there is lightning but no thunder (in Lithuanian people say *amalą meta* "the *amalas* is cast"). Bees bring lots of honey from such a sweet dew, however, this lightning is dangerous to plants because the heat can scorch the blossoms and cause a disease to befall the plants known by the same aforementioned name – *rūdys*. Hence, when talking about this sort of lightning, people say rust is sprinkled (*rūdą krečia*), or that rust is falling (*rūdys krinta*) (Vaitkevičienė 2019: 127–128). Both the *amalas* and *rūdys* are anomalies that appear wherever there is a lack of the dominant aspect of thunder (*perkūnija*) – the striking power of *Perkūnas*; such lightning is not even dangerous since it doesn't strike.

Probably one of the greatest expectations for the reader of Laurinkienė's book is to find out the position and role of Perkūnas in the pantheon of Lithuanian gods. This question has long interested mythologists who have been discussing it since the 19th century. Some researchers (Teodoras Narbutas, Simonas Daukantas, Gintaras Beresnevičius) claim that Perkūnas is the central figure of Lithuanian religion, the ruler of all gods, while others (including Algirdas Julius Greimas) consider that he is one of four sovereign gods of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania before the conversion to Christianity. A third branch of scholars believes that Perkūnas is subordinate to a higher deity called *Dievas,* i.e. God (Norbertas Vėlius, Vladimir Toporov). Does Nijolė Laurinkienė's book clarify this complex question? Unfortunately, reading the book does not offer great clarity. The author, much like her predecessors Toporov and Vėlius, first seeks an answer in the lists of gods in historical sources, analyzing the sequences in which Lithuanian and Prussian gods are listed. Since Perkūnas is often not the first to be named, but rather second or third (the first-named varies according to the sources), Laurinkienė concludes that he was not the most important god. This conclusion raises doubts not only because of the questionable argumentation (there is no evidence that the gods are listed in order of importance in historical sources) but also because 200 years after the introduction of Christianity, the figure

of the Highest God also appears in the lists, indicating religious syncretism rather than naming the most important deity of the old pantheon. We see the latest stages of such syncretism in the ethnographic records of Matthaeus Praetorius at the end of the 17th century where he describes in great detail the holidays and rituals of peasants: first, the host addresses the Christian God, and afterward the patron god of the homestead, Žemėpatis, or other gods, such as the earth goddess Žemyna or the fire god Gabjaujis. It is common for historical sources of the 16th to 18th centuries that the Christian god is understood as the God of Heaven, while all the other old gods are called gods of the Earth. It comes as no surprise that in the folk beliefs of the early 20th century Perkūnas comes to be understood as the son of God, his servant, and so on, or else he simply hides behind the Christian God or prophet Elijah.

Considering the relationship between Perkūnas and God, Laurinkienė follows the ideas of Vėlius and Toporov about a subordinate dynamic. She differentiates between a high heaven and an atmospheric heaven: according to her, Perkūnas is the atmospheric god who lives "under the clouds" and rules the lower layer of the atmosphere (p. 98). Such a conclusion appears rushed and based on dubious sources of folklore recorded by school students in the 1930s and does not include more data such as ethno-astronomical information that the constallation Big Dipper (part of Ursa Major) is commonly called *Perkūno ratai* 'the Wheels of Perkūnas' (Vaiškūnas 1993: 330).

True, the author does include weighty arguments indicating the leading role of Perkūnas – she shows that Perkūnas is the only god to be called father (p. 279) who exercises justice, and therefore has a high juridical status in the world of the gods (p. 275 – 284). Nevertheless, she stands by the hypothesis that Perkūnas received his judiciary function from the Highest God. Laurinkienė seeks to mediate between conflicting ideas by drawing on Gintaras's Beresnevičius's notion that Perkūnas became the most important god only in the 13th–14th centuries when the Lithuanian religion gravitated toward monolatry, which is to say that the cult of Perkūnas became dominant, even though other gods were acknowledged (p. 272).

Reconstructing the role of Perkūnas in Lithuanian religion is a very difficult task indeed. It requires interdisciplinary research, involving a complex analysis of folkloric, ethnographic, linguistic, historical, and archeological data. Although Laurinkienė discusses place names related to Perkūnas and addresses the question of historical sacred places in different chapters of the book, this is not enough for a deeper comprehensive analysis. This complicated question remains for future researchers.

Yet let us get back to what makes this book such a delight. This book will be a very valuable resource for folklorists who do not read Lithuanian precisely for the extensive folkloric material that was carefully gathered from published and archival sources. Numerous tales, legends, and folk beliefs are presented with accurate citations from original sources, and the translations are often juxtaposed with texts in their original language. Such is the case with place names as well as the euphemistic names of Perkūnas. The book unlocks a multifaceted folkloric world wherein Perkūnas is not only an important character of tales and legends but also a terrifying force, which persisted until the first half of the 20th century, as thunder reminded people of the existence of the deity Perkūnas, albeit the phenomenon gradually became associated with a wrathful Christian God.

Another delight is that the challenge to publish the book after a quarter of a century encouraged Laurinkienė to revisit, revise, and renew this theme in the context of comparative mythology and connect the research on the Lithuanian Perkūnas to those of Frog, M. L. West, Vaclav Blažek, Terry Gunnell, Lauri Harvilahti, Martin Golema, Tarmo Kulmar, Ülo Valk, Rudolf Simek, Vykintas Vaitkevičius and others. Such a renewal of the research on the Lithuanian god Perkūnas will hopefully encourage a broader interest in this topic.

Finally, the book makes an international discussion possible: from here on, researchers of mythology, religion, and folklore will be able to include the Lithuanian Perkūnas in their comparative studies of the Baltic region or other Indo-European cultures. Thanks to Nijolė Laurinkienė and the Kalevala Society Foundation, studies of Lithuanian mythology and folklore return to the arena after a thirty-year pause. Hopefully, there will be more to come.

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