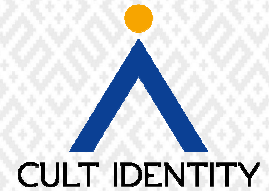


**PROJECT „ANCIENT CULT PLACES FOR COMMON IDENTITY ON THE BALTIC SEA COAST ”**



**RESEARCHER'S REFLECTIONS ON THE ANCIENT SACRED PLACES IN RIGA PLANNING REGION**

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Mapping, assessment and documentation of the ancient sacred sites (hereafter – sacred sites) in Riga Planning Region (hereafter - RPR) have been started with necessity to compile a list of at least 100 ancient sacred sites what turned out to be quite complicated to undertake. Although it has already been gathered sufficient amount of information on various kinds of sacred sites, most of the data especially which comes from folklore records has no link to particular site. As experience shows, finding such sacred sites takes a lot of time and other resources, many surveys, but in the end it still is not guaranteed that the researched site is one of the sacred and can be found in the nature. For these reasons, the previously non localized sites were included in the object list very carefully, which turned out to be the right decision.

Other problem was that the RPR is largely referred to Riga and its relative satellite towns like Ogre, Jurmala, Sigulda, Saulkrasti. Highly urbanized area, sharp change of local population and relief of the territory created unfavourable conditions for preservation of archaeological monuments in general and sacred sites, in particular. Thereby the vast majority of sacred sites which could be included in the list, had to be looked away from Riga – in northern part of Vidzeme and central part of the northeastern part of Kurzeme.

Compiling the list of sacred sites to be inspected, it became clear that database of state protected monuments include information only on few, but not all sacred sites which are secure, verified, localized and which could be used for the project (e.g., Alojās Karogu hill, Sacrificial Caves of Līv in Salacgrīva,

Elk Mountain in Zemītes Laučiņi, Health Source in Irlavas Peņķi (Fig. 1), Churchhill in Babīte, God's mountain in Meņģeles Ģērķi etc.). Assuming that final result is the same as initial list (during field work only few inessential changes were made), only two thirds of 97 sacred sites' list were relatively secure. The rest of them were not previously inspected, their existence, condition and potential value in

we were looking for two separate sacred sites with different names – Churchhill of Menkuļi in the former Riga district, Skulte Parish and Kroņu Mālkalns in Valmiera District Highland Parish – on the spot it turned out to be the same place. At first, list of sacred sites included relatively large number of so-called church sites. From the beginning on it was clear that this kind of sites is very heterogeneous, some even contradictory. Matkule Churchhill at Buse hill is considered to be authentic ancient sacred site which is evidenced by the location near by the ancient castle hill and archaeological findings as well as folklore and name related to sacrality. The same would be largely attributable to the Churchhill at Šķērstēnu castle hill in Keipene.

Other so-called church sites are probably medieval, or more precisely - Catholic chapel sites from Livonia times where the burials of local people were often have been performed. In later times, the Lutheran church denied and fought against such sites severely punishing the visitors who came to the ancient chapel to practice variety of superstitions, for instance, making different offerings. Meanwhile Catholic Church tended to build chapels in the former pagan worship sites. Such chapels, small and even modest buildings, were popularly called as churches. To this kind belong sacred sites of Staiceles Līciems, Limbažu Jaunreži, Skultes Menkuļi, Zantes Venterī, Mazozolu Vaukši and others. Ruins of church in Mazozoli Jāņkalni have survived after World War II and as folklore records indicate - this site is the ancient sacred site. There were three castle mounds surveyed within the project – hill of Vidrižu Kaniņi, Viļķenes Ungurkalns and ancient hill of Sidgunda, where according to nation churches were built.



Fig. 1. Health Source in Irlavas Peņķi. Photo: J.T. Urtāns

the context of the project was not known. On the one hand, it was exciting to search and find such sacred sites which were not previously widely known, on the other hand - a number of sacred sites appeared to be confusion. For example, Vatrane's cup-marked stone turned out to be a misunderstanding – in its finder's opinion it was a hollow marked sacred site, in fact - it was natural rock formation. Or a stone located in Brīvzemnieku Pociems was not approved as artificial hollow stone as it was named before.

Another confusion was when

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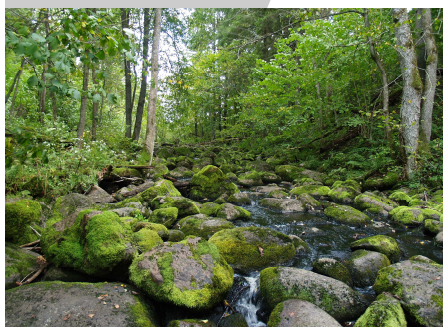


Fig. 2. Devil's ditch of Mazozolu Nāružas.  
Photo: J.T. Urtāns



Fig. 3. Kaive oak wrapped in the national garters.



Fig. 4. Hollow stone of Vilķene. Photo: J.T. Urtāns



Fig. 5. Devil's head formation at Ezerkalns Devil's lap in Aloja. Photo: J.T. Urtāns

Possibly when the mound was still in existence there was a sacred site known as church, or that the Christian church or so-called chapel was built there in later times. But for example, the mound of Kandava is called as churchhill because its silhouette recalls the image of a church, but folklore fixed in earlier times tolerates other explanations, too. For instance, the stones layers of Northern Vidzeme from 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. - 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD (Brīvēzernieku Aišēni, Salacgrīvas Krogkalni) are popularly considered as church sites. We can concede that people in the later times did not recognize the graves in stone layers and began to regard them as sacred sites. In total, church related traditions can be referred at least to 27 from 97 of surveyed sacred sites.

Another issue is the so-called Devil's sites which more precisely are named as mythological sites; archeologically they refer to grave mounds of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. - 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD (e.g., Aloja Ezerkalni and Ungurmuiza, Irlava Daibji, Mazozolu Baltiņi). Nevertheless sites were not considered as human burial sites in later times, but sacred meanings were assigned to them. Mythological devil's sites are usually well known, set in relief and visually remarkable (e.g., Devil's cave in Alojas Graudiņi, Devil's cave of Viksnas, Devil's stone and Devil's Cave in Matkule, Devil's foot of Lanksēde, Devil's stone of Zāgeri and Devil's heel of Mazskudras, Devil's stone of Lauberis Ančiņi, Devil's ditch of Mazozolu Nāružas (Fig. 2), Devil's stone of Rembates Sietiņi, Devil's caves of Krimulda and Inčukalns etc.). Overall, 25 from 97 of surveyed sacred sites are related to tradition of Devil.

Many trees of different kind were surveyed although they belonging to sacred sites was very sceptically viewed (e.g., lindens of Limbažu Ikskiļi and Skomaki, oaks of Umurgas Lieplejas, Oaks of Sēja and Kaive (Fig. 3), Idol linden of Pedvāle). Tree as a living organism has determined lifetime; tree obtains its size and excellence over a longer time span, which means that in earlier times, when it was

still small, it could not be sacred. In the same time modern people regard these trees as sacred and associated them with neoteric tradition. It is difficult to assume that such outstanding trees as Idol linden and Upurozols growing at the rectory really have had some connection with paganism, i.e. in opposition to Christianity.

In recent 20 years there has been large informative increase about previously unknown cup-marked stones in Latvia. Inclusion of cup-marked stones in the list of sacred sites is agreeable if we keep in mind that they could have another meaning, too. Several previously known cup-marked stones were surveyed such as cup-marked stone of Vidrižu Kaķi, three stones of Matkules Buse, the so-called cup-marked stone of O. Feldberg (its original location remains unknown, current location is Pedvāle) and the recently discovered cup-marked stone of Limbažu Unkši. No doubt that also new cup-marked stones will be found in RPR territory.

Another problem appears referring large and extra large sites to the conventional concept of sacred sites; mostly these sites are understood as a sacred landscape. Normally they do not have expressed central point or place (not excluding possibility that one could have) thus they are perceptible as sacred sites as a whole. To such a geographically large sacred sites which might already be named the sacred landscape belong Brīvēzernieku Holly Lake, Holly River of Northern Vidzeme, Holly Lake of Limbaži, Baišleja of Katvari and Vannišu (Katvaru) Lake, Ropažu Devil's lake and marsh, Viesatu hill of God etc.

Particular satisfaction gave the identification of sacred sites which were not previously widely known and the present inventory was the first opportunity to investigate and promote them. As examples can be mentioned - Graudiņu Jāņa hill of Staicele, Mazskudru Devil's heel of Matkule, Brīvēzernieku Spriču Holly site, Limbažu Jaunrēzu Church hill, Oškālns of Birzgale and many others.

A number of ancient sacred sites became a part of new beliefs as well as new sacred sites are formed. For instance, a newly formed stone layer was found at Matkules Busu plateau. Besides, there is a tree on the sideline of the same mound plateau where tradition of offerings is maintained.

Modern offerings are coins, garters, flowers, cloths, candles, etc. which in summer 2011 were found at Sacrificial Caves of Liv in Salacgrīva, at Gutman's cave in Turaida, at Ozoliņu stone in Staicele, bowl-shaped hollow stone of Liepupes Tūjas which is recently moved and placed in the center of the artificial stone circle and bowl-shaped hollow stone of Vilķene (Fig. 4), on Salaspils the stone head which is placed in the Dome Cathedral cloister, at cup-marked stones of Vidrižu Kaķi and elsewhere. Sēmes Kaives oak (Fig. 3) is wrapped in the national belts and garters. Probably following the ancient legends and traditions also the devil's head was installed at Ezerkalns Devil's lap in Aloja (Fig. 5) which was made from wooden block and goat's horns. Perhaps also Midsummer celebration places can be regarded as the new sacred sites in case that people celebrate this pagan holiday every year in the same place.

Object inventory brought additional results to the project discovering sacred sites which respond to all criteria to be included in the List of state protected cultural heritage monuments, as examples could be mentioned Devil's Cave of Staiceles Graudiņi, Devil's Cave of Viksnas, stone with bowl-shaped hollow of Liepupes Tūjas, cup-marked stones of Vidrižu Unkši, hollow stone of Vilķene (Fig. 4), cup-marked stones of Buse Castle Hill etc.

Overall, the inventory of sacred sites in RPR territory led us see in short time limit the current state of one of Latvian cultural identities in particular region and it gave the material to evaluate the sacred preservation and involvement of the wider cultural activities.





On the way to Ozolu Svētkals. Photo: from Kurzeme Planning Region archive



Saules akmens. Photo: from Kurzeme Planning Region archive

## FINALIZING MAPPING AND ASSESSMENT OF NATURAL SACRED SITES IN KURZEME PLANNING REGION

### Kurzeme Planning Region

During autumn 2011 expeditions to sacred sites continued and now 95 sacred sites in Kurzeme region are visited.

The project expert team has come to conclusions that there are only a dozen of sacred sites which can be promoted to public. They are the ones which are not sensitive, are attractive looking, easily accessible and with exciting and informative stories. Several attractive looking sites are already popular among tourists (e.g. Māras kambari, Ventas rumba) but mostly not because of their historical role as sacred sites but as picturesque nature objects. Tourism regarding sacred sites in Kurzeme is not very common and popular.

This is a very important task to work with- is important to explain these sites and their role to public



Grīzu Velna benķis. Photo: from Kurzeme Planning Region archive

media and public attention to these places which keep exciting stories about our past, traditions and beliefs. We believe it

in an attractive and inspiring way which will be the main task for the project team in next periods.

## FINALIZING MAPPING AND ASSESSMENT OF NATURAL SACRED SITES IN VIDZEME PLANNING REGION

### Vidzeme Planning Region

Vidzeme planning region (VPR) team of experts led by Baiba Baika gathered information from existing databases and other information sources on 100 sacred sites. The information was gathered in written and digital (photos, descriptions, studies, archaeological studies, folklore, stories of local people etc.) formats. All sacred sites have surveyed in nature and immortalized in photographs. Although the data collection work is officially completed the information will be regularly updated.

The experts made ownership analysis, which revealed that most of the objects are located in private property - 62, 17 objects are on the State Land, while the 10 sacred sites are located on the land owned by local governments. About the 11 objects information will be gathered further.

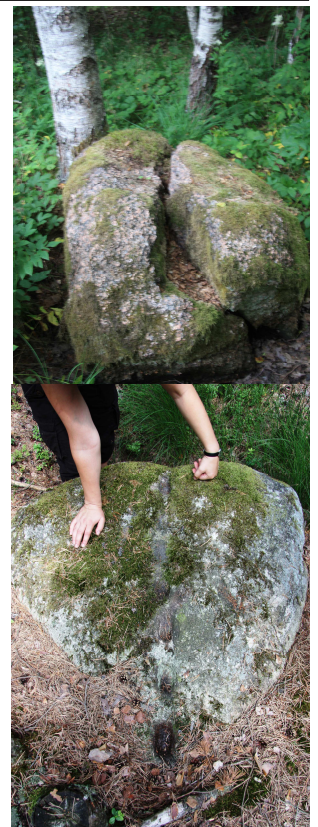
In early December, VPR organized a seminar for inter-

ested parties about the sacred sites in the region and their potential for tourism. Lecturers from Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences and VPR external experts Ilze Grīnfeldē and Andris Klepers gave an assessment of the sacred sites in VPR. Thanks for the seminar, the region has increased the interest in the sacred sites - experts receive phone calls and e-mails with a request to look at an several objects, to collaborate in the preparation of future projects, as well as to participate in different kind of tourism events.

In the end of the 2011th team of external experts started object selection for tourism pilot-routes. Experts chose different criteria, which includes the attractiveness, availability, folk stories, and object sensitivity. The experts also take into account information from scientific studies and folklore sources.



Dreimaņu Devil's Oak. Photo: from Vidzeme Planning Region archive



Paistalu (above) and Anģīšu (below) Devil's Stones Photo: from Vidzeme Planning Region archive



## CALENDAR OF ACTIVITIES JANUARY – AUGUST 2012

### January – April

- 27.01. Expert seminar "Natural sacred sites - tourism potential in the Baltic Sea region" organized in Vidzeme Planning Region for tourism specialists, information centers, experts on cultural heritage, municipalities and others.
- Series of meetings, workshops, discussions with selected experts, landowners and enthusiasts in order to discuss structure, layout and promotion of potential tourism-routes.

### April

- Finalizing of Development and Management Strategy of sacred sites.

### March - August

- Meetings with owners of sacred sites in order to discuss potential pilot-routes.
- Elaboration and publishing of project brochure with mapped sacred sites;
- Development of information stands layout and concept ideas.

### May - June

- PSG and PMT meeting in Zemgale Planning Region.
- Experience exchange seminar to discuss preservation and protection issues of natural sacred sites (potential dates June 5-7, 2012).
- Preparation and publishing the guide handbook „Ancient Sacred Sites in Zemgale,,

### August

- Development of project presentation materials.



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