

Latvian *Laumas*: Reflections on the Witchisation of Tradition

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ABSTRACT. In Baltic languages, the word *laume/lauma* initially referred to a certain supernatural being (Lithuanian *laumė*, Latvian *lauma/laume*, Prussian **laume*). The analysis of written sources and folklore related to this supernatural being allows for the conclusion that Lithuania is both the core and the relic area of the *laumė* tradition, where the original beliefs have been retained; while Latvia, located at the periphery of the tradition territory, is the innovation area, where the perception of this supernatural being was substantially transformed. It was humanised and incorporated in the witchcraft belief system prior to or during the period of witch persecution (the 16th to 18th centuries). The article attempts to analyse the corpus of *lauma* tradition in order to clarify its position in the historical typology of Latvian witchcraft beliefs. The first chapter briefly describes three chronological stages of the development of Latvian witchcraft beliefs (night, dairy, and diabolic witches), characterises the *lauma* folklore sources and previous research. The second chapter analyses the *lauma* text corpus and attempts to find out which stages of the historical typology of witchcraft beliefs are reflected in the *lauma* folklore of the 19th–20th centuries. In the third chapter the hypothesis about the transformation of *laumas* from supernatural beings to dairy witches is argued.

KEYWORDS: beliefs, *lauma/laumė*, legends, witchisation, witchcraft belief system

INTRODUCTION: LATVIAN WITCHCRAFT BELIEF SYSTEM

Latvian witchcraft beliefs, as they circulated in rural society in the 19th–20th centuries, had developed over several centuries and existed prior to the period of witch persecution. According to Éva Pócs, traditional witchcraft beliefs of central and south-eastern Europe were integrated with older beliefs based on various demonic spirits and fairies and on people with magic powers, such as wizards or shamans. On the basis of these beliefs, countless variations of witch characters developed that reflect different transition stages of various beliefs, as well as contaminated and local variants. Consequently, what is known as the witch character can by no

means be considered as being homogenous or unified (Pócs 1991–1992: 308–309). Ülo Valk argues that the records of Estonian witch trials and folklore show three coexisting types of witchcraft beliefs: 1) folk belief that is not influenced by Christian demonology; 2) folklorised demonological concepts, and 3) new beliefs and narrative motifs resulting from the interaction between the two belief systems (Valk 2008: 270). The same conclusions can be drawn regarding Latvian witchcraft beliefs which fall in three chronological stages:

1) The belief in the *night witch* is the oldest of the stages and can only relatively be included into the traditional concept of witches (see Mencej 2017: 349–399 for the definition of night witches and examination of Slovenian beliefs). Night witches are supernatural rather than human or social beings, characterised by their residing in nature and interactions with humans mostly in cases when the latter enter the place where the night witches live or act. Such places were specifically marked and named in the landscape, and any human presence there at the wrong time (at night or midday) could lead to punishment. Within this study, night witches are included in the witchcraft belief system because these beliefs have a certain link with both *raganas* and *laumas*, which is detailed further on.

2) The belief in the *dairy witch* is the oldest of the “classic” stages of witchcraft beliefs which, based on the comparative analysis of the motifs and types of witchcraft legends, existed before the witch persecution period and, depending on the region, survived during that period and after it either in a more conservative or a more or less diabolised form. Dairy witches are closely related to the daily economic life of peasants, especially dairy farming, but also to the economic success in the widest sense. The dairy witch is a human, most commonly a woman, who through magic acts deprives others of their wealth (most commonly of dairy products or “dairy luck”), hence multiplying her own economic success. Nearly all folklore genres deal with dairy witches (legends, beliefs, folksongs, magic spells, etc.), and each of the genres have their own role in settling the witchcraft conflicts. The wide range of customs, beliefs, magic spells, and ritual songs testify to a well-developed set of magic devices, which people used to prevent the harmful acts of dairy witches in advance or to reduce their consequences afterwards. Beliefs in dairy witches are found in all the main Latvian witch traditions (*ragana*, *lauma* and *spīgana*), yet by the 20th century their least modified form was preserved in the *spīgana* tradition in north Vidzeme (Laime 2019).

3) The *diabolic witch* character emerged during the witch persecution period. The most active wave of institutionalised witch persecution in Latvia began in the mid-16th century and ended in the early 18th century, although legal conflicts based on the witchcraft beliefs, just like the church attempts to fight them, continued through the second half of the 18th century and through the 19th century (Straubergs

1939: 41–104; 1941: 469–541). Starting in the mid-1500s, demonological concepts and case law following the new legal regulation (*Constitutio Criminalis Carolina*) not only introduced paradigmatic changes to vernacular witchcraft beliefs and practices, but also affected the way in which conflicts related to witchcraft were handled. Witch persecution became institutionalised, with a legal framework tailored specifically to the crime. At this period, vernacular witchcraft beliefs related to dairy witches more or less blended with the diabolised image of a witch defined by learned demonology. While preserving the set of harmful qualities attributed to dairy witches, Christian demonology widened the definition of a witch. According to it, witches, when entering into contract with the devil, devoted their soul to the devil in exchange for material well-being, whereas they were assigned to perform a variety of harmful activities and participate in witches' Sabbaths on a regular basis. Although the doctrine of Christian demonology reached peasants in various ways, including the church and secular court, the beliefs in diabolic witches were integrated only partly into the Latvian witchcraft beliefs. Diabolic witches are reflected almost exclusively in legends – largely in the form of internationally circulating fabulates, mostly retold because of the exciting plot rather than adapted to the local peasant environment, hence closer to the genre of folktale by their function. Judging by the Latvian folklore records of the 19th–20th centuries, the witch diabolisation process all over the territory of Latvia was neither simultaneous nor homogeneous. The process of diabolisation mainly affected the *ragana* tradition.

The witchcraft beliefs of the period featured regional differences, and various names to designate witches were in use. One of the research tasks related to the historical typology of the Latvian witchcraft beliefs is to determine which of the names are associated with an inherited tradition and which of them are only used as synonyms (mostly names, borrowed from other languages). Tradition is characterised by four main criteria: linguistic (witch's name), narratological (the set of folklore motifs and types associated with the name, i.e., tradition corpus), geospatial (tradition area), and chronological criterion (origin and transformation of the tradition over time under the influence of various factors). *Ragana* is the most widely used word for a witch in Latvian folklore and the modern language (LLVV), although the popularity of this word has differed region-wise. There are areas where this word was rarely used. *Burve* has also been a relatively widespread name for a witch, although its basic meaning is “a sorceress”. As a name for a witch, this word substituted the word *ragana* in the regions where *ragana* was less popular (the central part of Vidzeme, the middle and southern parts of Kurzeme). *Spīgana* was locally used and distributed in a rather small area. The core area of *spīgana* tradition was northern Vidzeme, the territory of the Valmiera district and adjacent

parishes. *Lauma* was another regionally used word for a witch in the western part of Latvia, mostly in Kurzeme. *Viegle* is only mentioned in the lexicographic sources of the 18th century. This word is not documented in folklore, yet it is mentioned in the literary works of the 20th century (Kursīte 2009: 520). In Latgale, the easternmost region of Latvia, the words known elsewhere in Latvia (*ragana*, *burve*), as well as various loanwords from the neighbouring Slavic languages, such as *čaraunīca*, *plāšnīca*, etc. were used to refer to witches.

Lauma tradition sources and previous research

The earliest Latvian *lauma* text was recorded in the mid-19th century or shortly before (J. B. 1850). It is a didactic article targeting a superstition, which gives a negative example of a man who wanted to baptise his child before *laumas* could swap it with their child, as had happened to the man's relatives. Since then, a review of published and unpublished sources lists at least 104 *lauma* texts: 38 legends and memorates, 35 belief records, and 31 folksongs. Considering the relatively vast area of the *lauma* tradition, the number of sources is small, which can be related to the fact that, in this area, the word *lauma* was but one of several witch names in use along with *ragana* and *burve*, and that in the 20th century the *lauma* tradition gradually faded away.

Along with the first records of *ragana*, *spīgana*, and *lauma* folklore, the first remarks of folklorists regarding these traditions were published in the 1870s–1890s. Although no detailed studies on *laumas* have been carried out by Latvian scholars, short comments on the matter were made by Fricis Brīvzemnieks (Трейланд 1881: 163) and Dāvis Ozoliņš (Ozoliņš 1893: 21–22) in the late 19th century, as well as by Pēteris Šmits (LPT XV: 207–208), Kārlis Straubergs (Straubergs 1941: 562) and others in the first half of the 20th century. To sum up, these brief comments refer to the *lauma* tradition as a local one (Brīvzemnieks, Ozoliņš); they conclude that *laumas* were partly diabolised (Brīvzemnieks, Šmits) and state that in the 19th–20th centuries, the distinction among *ragana*, *lauma*, and *spīgana* had vanished in Latvian folklore (Brīvzemnieks, Šmits, Straubergs).

CHARACTERISATION OF LAUMA: NAME, FUNCTIONS, TRADITION AREA

Name. *Laume/lauma* is a Baltic word which initially referred to a certain supernatural being (Lithuanian *laumė*, Latvian *lauma/laume*, Prussian **laume*). In Prussia, the former belief in the existence of this supernatural being is attested only by place names. This word is also shared by modern Latvian and Lithuanian

languages, yet it bears significantly different meanings in the standard language usage. While the basic meaning of Lithuanian *laumė* is “a mythological being” (LKŽ), in Latvian it means a human being – a witch, capable of affecting human life and actions (LLVV). Nowadays, the word has lost the negative connotation that it used to have until the late 19th century. Lauma is a women’s first name, and, according to the Database of Personal Names maintained by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, 1,789 women with this name are currently registered.¹ It has been increasingly common to use a diminutive form of the word, *laumiņa*, in translated fiction, animated films and elsewhere as the Latvian translation of the English word *fairy*. The word *lauma* is commonly employed in the names of companies and institutions – “Lauma” is a producer of ladies’ lingerie in Liepāja², “Laumiņas” is a youth centre in Liepāja³, and “Laumiņas rezidence” is a private nursery school in Riga⁴, among many other examples. A century ago, such a choice of a personal or company name would have seemed bizarre, as only one meaning of the word prevailed – a witch.

Tradition area. In the 19th–20th centuries, folklore about *laumas* was recorded only in the western part of Latvia (Kurzeme), and, less commonly, in the central part (Zemgale). The mapping of places where folklore has been recorded shows that the spread of beliefs and belief legends, recorded mostly at the beginning of the 20th century, is more concentrated and covers a smaller area in the Ventspils district in Kurzeme, whereas *lauma* folksongs, recorded earlier, in the second half of the 19th century, were scattered across a wider area. It is interesting to observe that the easternmost folksongs use a compound name “*lauma raganiņa*” illustrating the transition from the *lauma* to the *ragana* tradition area. Meanwhile in the southwestern Kurzeme (Liepāja district), the word *lauma* is replaced by the phonetically similar word *lauva* (“lion”) which makes the folksong texts senseless and illustrates the extinction process of the *lauma* tradition in this area (Fig. 1).

Typology of lauma beliefs

In the analysed text corpus, the word *lauma* is employed to denote both supernatural beings and humans with supernatural powers. Hereinafter, both beliefs are characterised in detail along with their popularity and geographical spread.

Lauma: A supernatural being. Judging by the abundant Lithuanian folklore material (Vėlius 1977: 83–128), Lithuania was the core area of the *laumė* tradition,

1 Available from: <https://personvardi.pmlp.gov.lv/index.php?name=lauma>, [accessed 19.01.2021.].

2 Available from: <https://laumalingerie.com/>, [accessed 19.01.2021.].

3 Available from: <http://www.liepajasbjc.lv/index.php?id=7>, [accessed 19.01.2021.].

4 Available from: <https://lauminas-rezidence.lv/>, [accessed 19.01.2021.].

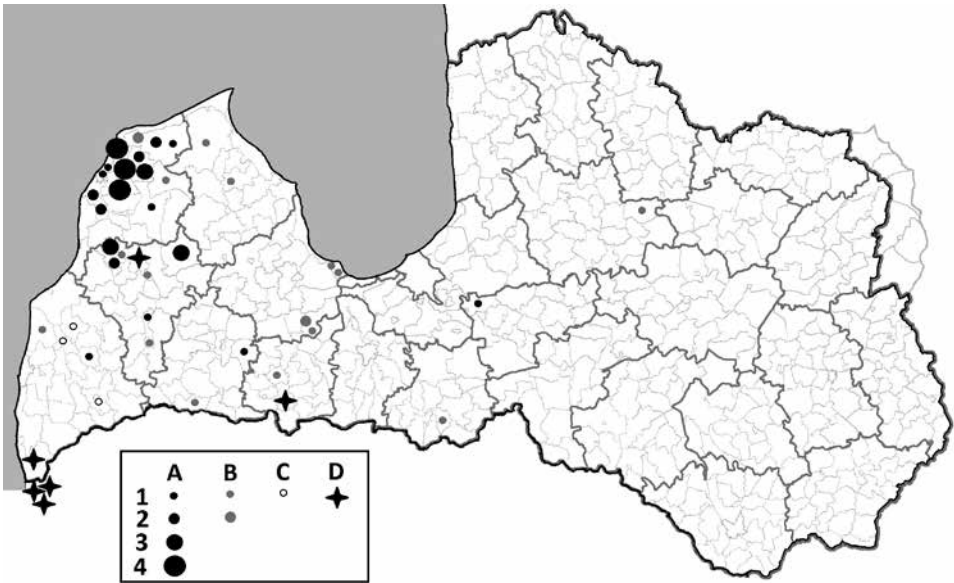


Figure 1. The area of the *lauma* tradition in Latvia. A – legends and beliefs, B – folksongs, C – *lauma* folksongs using the word *lauva*, D – the oldest *lauma* tradition beliefs. Text count: 1–1 text, 2–3 texts, 3–5 texts, 4–10 texts.

hence the beliefs about *laumė* as a supernatural being should be regarded as the oldest belief layer. These beliefs characterise *laumės* as ambivalent nature spirits, which, in certain situations, may become dangerous to humans. Such interpretation of *lauma* is very rare in Latvian folklore; only six relevant legends and beliefs have been recorded, whereas no such interpretation has been found in folksongs. In this material, *laumas* are called *meža spoki* (“forest ghosts”) (LFK 1968, 3930, Bēne). They check the spinners’ work during fasting (LFK 1136, 1469, Padure), they beat laundry (LFK 450, 2225, Sventāja), wash in a bathhouse (LFK 450, 1924, Sventāja), and, most frighteningly, swap or kill children (J. B. 1850; LFK 1968, 3930, Bēne; LFK 450, 1923, Sventāja). *Laumas* become active during dusk (LFK 450, 1923, Sventāja; LFK 450, 1924, Sventāja; LFK 450, 2225, Sventāja). The only text describing the appearance of *laumas* was recorded in 1961, which characterised them as anthropomorphic beings with long hair and animal legs (LFK 1955, 4549, Rucava). Two of the six cases (LFK 450, 1923, Sventāja; LFK 1968, 3930, Bēne) represent the legend type “*Laumas* and infant” which make up about 25% of all *laumė* legends in Lithuania (Vėlius 1977: 100).

The texts typical of the oldest layer of the *lauma* beliefs have been recorded in Sventāja (Lithuanian Šventoji, now administratively a part of Palanga town municipality), which was a part of Latvia until 1921 when it was transferred to Lithuania after the new borders were established (three texts); two other texts were documented in Rucava (the southwestern part of Kurzeme, bordering with Palanga

district) and in Bēne (Zemgale), i.e., in the parishes bordering Lithuania, whereas one text was recorded in the middle of Kurzeme, in the village of Padure. Such sporadic geography of the recorded texts shows that in the 19th–20th centuries, the oldest *lauma* beliefs existed in frontier parishes where the cultural exchange between Latvians and Lithuanians, as well as the population migration over the border, were more active; while elsewhere in Latvia these beliefs either had disappeared or had never existed.

Lauma: A human with supernatural powers, a witch. In most Latvian *lauma* texts, *laumas* appear as humans (mostly women) with supernatural powers who harm their neighbours and increase their own wealth at the expense of other people. In this layer of beliefs, they hardly differ from other “dairy witches”, otherwise known as *raganas* and *spīganas*. *Laumas* are usually women of an older age. 17% of all legends identify *lauma* as a specific person. The corpus of *spīgana* texts has a similar ratio. Referring to specific persons in witchcraft legends indicates the bad reputation that these people had in their immediate or distant neighbourhood and reveals that the narratives were used as community tools to construct the reputation of a witch and to provoke social conflicts that resulted in (legal) accusations and sometimes even executions. According to the presumption of social anthropology, the reputation of a witch is socially constructed, and witchcraft suspicions grew into specific accusations in response to the rising social and interpersonal tensions (Goodare 2016: 104–106; Stewart, Strathern 2004).

About one third of the *lauma* texts deal with the harmful impact that *laumas* had on dairy farming and livestock wealth in general, as well as with the protective magic used against such harmful actions. A distinctive detail, one not characteristic to other dairy witches, is that several *lauma* texts mention that *laumas* not only milk but also suck out the cows. The most popular motif in the corpus of *lauma* legends and beliefs is “Witch’s spittle or vomit” (~20% of all texts). This motif refers to various substances of natural origin (foam nests of spittlebugs, mushrooms, slime molds, etc.) and their sudden emergence, which raised suspicions about the harmful activities of *laumas*. To protect oneself against these harmful activities, a vast range of magic means existed: *lauma*’s spittle was usually collected in a closed vessel, then drowned in water, cured in smoke, or burned, thrashed with nettles, ground, etc.:

A man put *lauma*’s spittle in a bottle and goodness knows what he did with it, threw it in the stove or somewhere else. But the guilty being could not find peace anymore. On the morrow, the old hag arrived and demanded that the farmer return her spittle or replace it with some other thing. But the farmer knew the trick and refused. He called his dogs and sicced them on her. The hag ran to the dunghill, put some of it in her mouth and

left. For her, it was enough. She needed to get but some scrap from his estate though. But, if she gets nothing from the home, she is in deep trouble (LFK 647, 2152, Tārgale).

In the *lauma* text corpus, another popular motif is “Witch releases the soul from the body (in the shape of an animal)” (~11% of all legends and beliefs) and “Witch flies as a bright object” (~15%):

Lauma. Once, my grandmother’s sister was walking along the beach and saw an old wife sleeping, when a little mouse ran out of her mouth, wearing a silver bell around its neck, and ran away. She thought it might be a *lauma* and turned the old hag around to put her legs where the head was before, and the head where the legs were before, and then she left. When returning, she saw that the hag was still sleeping, and the tiny mouse was running around her legs but could not find the mouth to enter. Right away, she turned the old wife as she had been lying at first, and the mouse ran into the mouth. When the mouse ran into her mouth, the old hag woke up and said: “What a sweet sleep it was.” Then got up and left (LFK 680, 11, Tārgale).

Most of the texts about *laumas* flying as bright objects are memorates, i.e., narrators’ experience stories where the extraordinary apparition is deemed as a supernatural encounter with a flying *lauma*.⁵ Contrary to the *spīgana* legends, where the motifs are usually interrelated (a person lies down, lets out her/his soul, which in the shape of a fiery ball flies to milk cows), these motifs are usually narrated separately in the *lauma* legends. There is only one occasion when the release of the soul and flying are mentioned in the same text (LFK 428, 206, Tārgale). Less common in the *lauma* tradition are the beliefs related to their capacity of turning into various animals and birds.

Compared to *raganas*, the diabolisation affected *laumas* on a considerably smaller scale. The corpus of narratives includes just a few texts exhibiting signs of diabolisation. One link to the image of a diabolic witch is the legend type “Baptism of a witch’s child”, which tells about the confirmation of a witch’s child into the arts of witchcraft for which the devil must be paid through a human sacrifice or some other offering (3 legends). In the Renda area, the legends refer to *Laumu kalniņš* (“*Laumas* hill”) as the place of the witches’ Sabbath, while the participants of the Sabbath are called *raganas*. Similarly, the signs of diabolism can be found in the folksong type LD 34060 recorded in three variants in Skrunđa, Lielezere, and the Kuldīga area, which tells about a *lauma*’s daughter who is riding a horse and using

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5 Flying, fiery objects (i.e., shooting stars) in folk beliefs were also associated with the wealth-bringing spirits like Latvian *pūķis* (these beliefs were most popular in northern Vidzeme, i.e., the area of *spīgana* tradition) and Lithuanian *aitvaras* (Būgienė 2011: 101).

reins woven by the devil and a plaited whip made of grass snake. All in all, a certain impact of Christian demonology may be observed in only approximately 9% of all *lauma* texts.

DISCUSSION: TRANSFORMATION OF THE *LAUMA* TRADITION

As stated in the previous chapter, most of the folklore motifs and types in the *lauma* text corpus conform to the characteristics of dairy witches. Compared to the conservative *spīgana* tradition, certain details of the beliefs in dairy witches (e.g., the process of practising witchcraft through releasing one's soul and moving around in the shape of a fiery ball) seem to be slightly less well preserved in *lauma* legends, yet the representation of these motifs is proportionally high enough to conclude that in the 19th–20th centuries the *lauma* tradition in Latvia existed in this stage of witchcraft beliefs. Regardless of the fact that, during the witch-trial period, the word *lauma* was actively used by the authorities (mainly – clergymen) representing the demonological discourse, the learned ideas never deeply influenced the *lauma* beliefs. Although the impact of the learned demonology on the *lauma* tradition is slightly stronger than on the *spīgana* tradition, this layer of beliefs never achieved a considerable impact on the tradition in general.

While Latvian *laumas* in the 19th–20th centuries are typical dairy witches, the tradition corpus of the same period pertaining to Lithuanian *laumės* is characteristic of night witches. The aim of the following chapter is to find out the reasons why, according to the linguistic criterion, the seemingly common Baltic tradition represents different stages of witchcraft beliefs (Lithuanian night witches versus Latvian dairy witches) and to illustrate the hypothetic mechanism of transformation of the tradition.

Night witch transformation into dairy witches: example of ragana tradition

One of the crucial questions regarding the character of *lauma* within the context of Latvian material is whether *lauma* as the dairy witch developed as a result of the transformation of an older belief layer. Taking into account the Lithuanian *laumė* tradition, the answer to this question may be affirmative. In the territory of Latvia and, presumably, also of Lithuania, a similar process of tradition transformation has developed with regard to *raganas*. Geospatial and motif analyses indicate that at the beginning of the 20th century, the *ragana* tradition still existed in several forms. In north Vidzeme (except for the area of the Livonian dialect) and north Latgale, ~300 legends and beliefs have been recorded where, instead of women with supernatural power, the name *ragana* referred to supernatural beings (night witches) usually

residing in various natural locations, e.g. in swamps, lakes, brooks, on hills, near boulders, etc. These places often have the name *ragana* included in the toponym, and frequently coincide with the burial sites of the 12th–18th centuries or are located in their immediate vicinity (Laimė 2013: 190–195). Similarly to Lithuanian *laumės*, these *raganas* are active between sunset and sunrise, and also at noon, when they mostly beat laundry and bathe, swing on tree branches, comb their hair, sing, dance, and carry out other activities not typical of human witches. They only become dangerous to people when the latter wander into the areas resided by *raganas* during the night-time. In such cases *raganas* lead these people astray, strangle them or tickle them to death (Laimė 2013: 95–172). According to the most recent etymology of the word *ragana*, this word initially had a rather obscure meaning and referred to “what is raised, therefore visible”, namely, “a haunting ghost” (Gliwa 2003: 5).⁶ With respect to night witches, this fact conforms with the belief reflected in several folklore texts that the *raganas* of this type originated from the souls of the women who, while living, killed their children. Such interpretation also conforms with the comparative data, namely, in the folklore of numerous nations across Europe the so-called “night washers” derive from “restless souls”, i.e., souls of the women who died during labour, never married, or killed their children, or had a “bad death” (drowned, were killed, executed, etc). These women’s souls were not able to transition to the afterlife for a certain period of time, therefore they wandered the earth and haunted people (Laimė 2013: 207–212).

The link between night and dairy witch traditions: genetic or linguistic?

Dairy witches seem to belong to the oldest layer of the beliefs in human witches. Their characteristic witchcraft technique is releasing the soul from the body and travelling in the form of a fiery object. The essence of these beliefs is reflected in the name of the most conservative Latvian dairy witches – *spīšanas*, a word derived from the verb *spīdēt* (“to shine”, Karulis 2001: 897), i.e., the most characteristic trait of these witches is their appearance as a shining flying object. The first evidence of this tradition comes from the witch persecution period. Namely, the trial of July 22, 1631 examined the case of a fourteen-year-old handmaid named Katrīna accused of theft and binding of a flying *spīšana*. The record of this trial includes magic spells written down in Latvian, which were used to bind and release a flying *spīšana* (recorded as *spīdan*) (Straubergs 1939: 65–66). These spells do not contain any Christian formulae characteristic to the subsequent records of magic spells,

6 Two other hypotheses have been put forward about the origin of the word *ragana*, namely “one who sees the future, i.e., a seeress” (Hirt) and “a mythological being with horns” (Otkupshchikov). Unlike Gliwa’s etymology, these hypotheses are not confirmed in Latvian folklore (for more details, see Laimė 2013: 49–56).

which indicates that in the first half of the 17th century, when the onset of witch trials started in Vidzeme, the folk tradition already featured magic means to bind a flying *spīgana* (Laime 2019: 191). Folklore sources prove that in many cases the words *ragana* and *spīgana* denoted the released, flying human soul rather than the body or the very woman whose soul it was (Laime 2019: 184).

The above conclusion is significant within the context of the etymology of the word *ragana*, as the explanation proposed by Gliwa can be extended. Initially, the word *ragana* denominated not only the human (restless) soul wandering the earth after death but also the soul temporarily released from the body. In both cases it is a short-term apparition, which flashes before the eyes and disappears again. While the beliefs containing this witchcraft technique were gradually disappearing, the meaning of the word *ragana*, which initially referred only to a flying soul, gained the meaning related to the human body itself. Therefore, it can be established that, from the point of view of tradition, the link between night witches and dairy witches is more of a linguistic rather than genetic nature. The various, sometimes even radically disparate *ragana* beliefs originated as the result of narrowing of the word meaning. The subsequent development of the *ragana* character continued during the witch persecution period, when the characteristic traits of dairy witches were supplemented by the features of the diabolic witch.

The correlation between ragana and lauma tradition areas

The example of the *ragana* tradition illustrates the transformation process that the meaning of the word *ragana* went through, which allows for a better understanding why *laumė/lauma* designate such different beings in Lithuania and in Latvia. As explained above, the *ragana* tradition in Latvia has both its relic territory, namely, a conservative area where the beliefs in night witches and the initial meaning of the word were preserved up to the mid-20th century, and its innovation territory where the word *ragana* was used in its transformed meaning and denoted dairy and diabolic witches. The innovation territory is located in the areas where the preceding beliefs in night witches once existed. The former night witch area in Latvia is indicated by the distribution of more than 210 *ragana* toponyms; these are the territories of Eastern Balts (Latgians, Selonians, Semigallians), however, the lack of *ragana* place names suggests that the belief was unknown to Western Balts (Curonians) and the Baltic Finns (Livs) (Laime 2013: 81–84). The distribution of legends about dairy and diabolic *raganas* presents a picture similar to the toponym map; fewer records are detected in the areas that bear no traces of the night witch tradition (legends and/or toponyms).

It is indicative that the area where the *lauma* texts were recorded coincides with the territory with few or non-existent *ragana* place names, i.e., those regions of Latvia where the *ragana* tradition, most likely, never existed. The situation seems

to be rather similar in Lithuania. Norbertas Vėlius points out that in 11% of all texts in the *laumė* corpus, the supernatural being is called *ragana*, and this name for *laumė* has been the most popular in Aukštaitija (Vėlius 1977: 90). Considering the study of the Latvian night witches, it would be reasonable to presume that *ragana* in Aukštaitija represents a separate tradition rather than a synonymic name for *laumė*. According to the currently available data, the area of the Latvian *ragana* – night witch tradition, which once used to cover the eastern and central part of Latvia, but in the early 20th century had shrunk to north Vidzeme and north Latgale, as well as a small territory in Sēlija, also stretched into the eastern part of Lithuania; therefore, a wider territory of the *ragana* (night witch) tradition common for the Eastern Baltic area can be considered. Meanwhile the western part of Lithuania features more data on *laumės*, and, joined by Kurzeme, constitutes the area where, most likely, the oldest *lauma* beliefs were once distributed.

Chronology of the lauma tradition transformation

The above hypothesis regarding the existence of the older *lauma* beliefs in Kurzeme leads to the next question: when did the transformation of the initial *lauma* beliefs into the tradition of dairy witches take place? This question cannot be answered convincingly; nevertheless, it seems that, when the tide of witch trials reached the territory of Latvia, the transformation had already occurred. Linguist Daina Zemzare claims that, based on the first Latvian dictionary published in 1638 – Mancelius’ “Lettus”, many trials of sorcerers, witches and werewolves in the early 17th century already had the necessary judicial terms elaborated in Latvian to designate the trial process, as well as the various categories of offenders (Zemzare 1961: 58–59). As confirmed by the earliest dictionaries, this terminology also included the words *ragana* and *lauma/laume*, the translation of which into German is *die Zauberin* (“a sorceress”) or *die Hexe* (“a witch”):

Raggana, laume “fliegende Zauberin” (Mancelius 1638a: 217);

Ragganas, laumes “fliegende Huren” (Mancelius 1638b: 404);

Laume (raggana) “eine fliegende Zauberin oder Hexe” (Langius 1685: 136 [69a]);

Lauma “eine Zauberin, Hexe; *laumas slota*” (Fürecker: 141).

Researchers are of the same opinion regarding the meaning of the word *ragana* – that, due to the impact of the demonology and witch trials of the medieval and early modern periods, the meaning of this word changed and gained a mainly negative connotation (Vėlius 1977: 255; Biezais 1991: 142–143; Karulis 2001: 732, etc.). The linguist Bernd Gliwa points out that the semantic change of the words, which designate malicious women in modern Latvian and Lithuanian (Latvian, Lithuanian *ragana*, *lauma/laumė*, Latvian *spīgana*, Lithuanian *žiezūla*, *viedma*), but initially referred to mythological beings, may not have occurred before

the 17th century (Gliwa 2003: 12). However, it should be noted that the accused Latvian women were already called *raganas* in the witch trial records of the 16th century; the word *ragana* (*ranggan*) was first mentioned in a witch trial record in 1574 in Riga (Straubergs 1939: 58–59). Meanwhile Haralds Biezais argues that the word *ragana* was incorporated into the terminology of the Christian Church and demonised during the period of the formal baptism of Latvians, already in the 12th–13th centuries (Biezais 1991: 142–143). These opinions suggest that not only the denotation of the word *lauma*, but also the *lauma* tradition itself had already transformed into the dairy witch tradition in the western part of Latvia at the beginning of the witch persecution period.

Svētmeitas – a relic of the lauma tradition?

The last question to be considered within this discussion is whether the relics of *lauma* beliefs have certainly left no trace in Kurzeme. The answer to this question seems to have been already given previously, in the discussion of the six texts from the *lauma* text corpus: based on the locations of their documentation (along the border of Lithuania), they, more likely, were borrowed through cross-cultural relations or cross-border migration. Therefore, it could be deduced that the oldest *lauma* beliefs in Kurzeme had disappeared by the end of the 19th century, leaving no trace. Still, there is another rather interesting fact to consider – the *svētmeitas* tradition that existed in Kurzeme up to the mid-20th century. Although no special study has been devoted to *svētmeitas* and the source material has not yet been purposefully compiled, it seems that the scope of the *svētmeitas* text corpus might amount up to approximately 100 texts. The most characteristic occupation of *svētmeitas* is spinning, less commonly – beating laundry; they live in various natural locations (caves, rocks, hills) and originate from the souls of spinsters or women who had “a bad death” (LTT 29924–29950 etc.). Although the *svētmeitas* text corpus is small in terms of scope, the characterisation of these supernatural beings is very similar to that of Latvian *raganas* (night witches) and Lithuanian *laumės*. The study of *raganas* (night witches) shows that in the 20th century, when the beliefs concerning these supernatural beings were rapidly disappearing and the name of *ragana* was acquiring the meaning of “witch” known elsewhere in Latvia, the word *ragana* was frequently replaced with various borrowed words like *jumpravas*, *preilenes*, *mamzeles*, etc. (Latvianised versions of German *Jungfrau*, *Fräulein*, *Mamsell*) (Laime 2013: 79–81). The compound *svētmeita* consists of two words: *svēts* which means “holy” in the Christian sense and *meita* or “maid” which is borrowed from German *Mädchen*.⁷ Hence it is clear that linguistically the

7 Similarly, one of the alternative names of Lithuanian *laumės* is *deivės* (“goddesses”; Vėlius 1977: 89).

word *svētmeita* is rather new and the supernatural being it refers to previously had another name. Although the territory of the oldest *lauma* beliefs cannot be detected any more in Latvia, as the word has changed its meaning within the entire tradition area, it is possible that the former *lauma* area is indicated by the *svētmeitas* area, which overlaps with the tradition of the humanised *lauma*.

CONCLUSION

The *lauma* tradition is one of the regional Latvian witch traditions, attested in a rather small number of records in the folklore collections of the 19th–20th centuries, approximately 100 legends, beliefs, and folksongs. This material characterises *laumas* as typical dairy witches, the representation of which was relatively unaffected by the diabolisation process during the witch persecution period of the 16th–18th centuries. Although, next to *ragana*, *lauma* was the alternative name for witches circulating in dictionaries, religious songs and sermons of the 17th–18th centuries, the ideas of the learned demonology of this period never took root in the folk tradition. Parallels with the transformation of the Latvian *ragana* tradition and the relation of *lauma* with an utterly different supernatural being, the nature spirit *laumė* from Lithuanian folk beliefs, provide the grounds for the hypothesis that in the western part of Latvia (most likely Kurzeme), there once existed the oldest form of the *lauma* tradition, but it had transformed into the dairy witch tradition by the 17th century. Nevertheless, it is likely that the oldest *lauma* beliefs did not vanish. As the word *lauma* acquired the denotation “witch”, the supernatural beings once called *laumas* could have been renamed *svētmeitas* whose tradition survived in Kurzeme up to the mid-20th century and can be documented sporadically even nowadays. A similar process of transformation affected the *ragana* tradition which was more typical of the eastern and the central parts of Latvia (Vidzeme, Latgale, and Zemgale). The transformation of the *ragana* character is better documented due to the fact that the older beliefs in night witches were preserved in the northern part of Latvia up until the mid-20th century. The former night witch area is indicated by the distribution of *ragana* toponyms; these are the territories of Eastern Balts (Latgalian, Selonians, Semigallians). The lack of *ragana* place names suggests that the supernatural being was unknown to the Baltic Finns (Livs) and Western Balts (Curonians). In the case of the latter, it could be explained by the fact that Curonians had their own very similar *lauma/laume* tradition.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- LD – Barons Krišjānis, Visendorfs Henrijs. *Latvju dainas*, I–VI sēj., Jelgava, Pēterburga: Ķeizarkās Zinību akadēmijas spiestava, 1894–1915.
- LFK – Archives of Latvian Folklore, Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia.
- LKŽ – *Lietuvių kalbos žodynas*, available from: www.lkz.lt, [accessed 04.01.2021.].
- LLVV – *Latviešu literārās valodas vārdnīca*, available from: <https://tezaurs.lv/llvv/>, [accessed 04.01.2021.].
- LPT – *Latviešu pasakas un teikas*, pēc A. Lercha-Puškaiša un citiem avotiem sakopojis un rediģējis prof. P. Šmits, I–XV sēj., Rīga: Valters un Rapa, 1925–1937.
- LTT – *Latviešu tautas ticējumi*, sakrājis un sakārtojais prof. P. Šmits, I–IV sēj., Rīga: Latviešu folkloras krātuve, 1940–1941.

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Latvių *Laumas*: tradicijos „raganėjimo“ atspindžiai

SANDIS LAIME

S a n t r a u k a

Raktažodžiai: tikėjimai, *lauma* / *laumė*, sakmės, tikėjimų apie raganas sistema, raganėjimas.

Žodis *laume* / *lauma* baltų kalbose nuo pat pradžių reiškė tam tikrą antgamtinę būtybę (liet. *laumė*, lat. *laume* / *lauma*, pr. **laumė*). Kiek galima spręsti iš gausios lietuvių folklorinės medžiagos, Lietuva turėjo būti tiek *laumės* tradicijos šerdis, tiek reliktinė jos teritorija, taigi *laumės* kaip antgamtinės būtybės įvaizdis turėtų būti laikomas seniausiuoju šių tikėjimų sluoksniu. *Laumės* juose apibūdinamos kaip ambivalentiškos gamtos dvasios, kurios tam tikrais atvejais gali kelti grėsmę žmonėms. Latvių folklore *lauma* taip interpretuojama labai retai. Latvija, esanti tradicijos gyvavimo teritorijos pakraštyje, pasižymi inovacijomis, todėl čia ši antgamtinė būtybė patyrė esminių pokyčių. Dar iki raganų persekiojimo laikotarpio (nuo XVI iki XVIII a.) ji buvo sužmoginta ir įterpta į tikėjimų sistemą, susijusią su raganavimu. Straipsnyje aptariama visa latvių *lauma* tradicija, siekiant išsiaiškinti jos vietą istorinėje latvių tikėjimų apie raganavimą tipologijoje. Pirmojoje dalyje trumpai apžvelgiami trys chronologiniai latvių su raganavimu susijusių tikėjimų raidos etapai (nakties, pieno ir diabolizuotos raganos), apibūdinami folkloriniai su *lauma* siejami šaltiniai ir ankstesni tyrimai šia tema. Antrojoje dalyje nagrinėjamas su *lauma* siejamų tekstų korpusas ir bandoma

nustatyti, kurie iš istorinės raganų tipologijos etapų atspindi XIX–XX a. su *lauma* siejamame folklore. Trečiojoje dalyje pateikiama hipotezė, kad *lauma* iš antgamtinės būtybės pavirto į pieno raganą.

Tekstų analizė rodo, kad *lauma* priklauso vienai iš regioninių Latvijos raganų tradicijų, kurią sudaro palyginti negausūs XIX–XX a. užrašymai: apie 100 sakmių, tikėjimų ir liaudies dainių. Šioje medžiagoje *laumas* apibūdinamos kaip tipiškos *pieno raganos* (t. y. raganos, atimančios pieną), kurias palyginti menkai paveikė raganų persekiojimo laikotarpiu XVI–XVIII a. vykę diabolizacijos procesai. Nors žodis *lauma*, kaip ir *ragana*, XVII–XVIII a. žodynuose, religinėse giesmėse ir pamoksluose vartojamas raganai apibūdinti, vis dėlto šio laikotarpio mokslininkų demonologų idėjos liaudies tradicijoje taip ir neprigijo. Gretinant su pakitusia latvių *ragana* tradicija ir atsižvelgiant į *lauma* santykį su visiškai kitokia antgamtinė būtybe – gamtos dvasia *laume* iš lietuvių tikėjimų, – galima spėti, kad vakarinėje Latvijos dalyje (daugiausia Kuržemėje) kadaise gyvavo pati seniausia *lauma* tradicijos forma, bet jau XVII a. ji transformavosi į pieno raganą. Vis dėlto atrodytų, kad patys seniausieji tikėjimai apie *lauma* galutinai neišnyko. Žodžiui *lauma* įgavus „raganos“ reikšmę, kadaise šiuo žodžiu vadintos mitinės būtybės buvo pervadintos į *svētmeitas*. Su pastarosiomis susiję tikėjimai Kuržemėje išliko iki XX a. vidurio, o kartais pasitaiko ir dabar. *Svētmeitas* apibūdinamos labai panašiai kaip lietuvių tikėjimų *laumės* ir latvių senosios tradicijos *raganas*, apie kurias tikėjimų dar yra užsilikę šiaurės rytų Latvijoje. Labai panašūs pokyčiai ištiko *ragana* tradicija, kuri būdingesnė rytinei ir vidurinei Latvijos dalims (Vidžemei, Latgalai ir Žiemgalai). *Raganas* tradicijos kaita yra išsamiau dokumentuota, nes senieji tikėjimai nakties raganomis (arba *raganas* kaip antgamtinėmis būtybėmis, priešingai nei antgamtinių galių turinčiais žmonėmis) šiaurės rytinėje Latvijoje išliko užsikonservavę iki pat XX a. vidurio. Ankstesnę nakties raganų gyvavimo sritį nurodo vietovardžių su žodžiu *ragana* paplitimas: tai rytinių baltų – latgalių, sėlių ir žiemgalių – gyventos teritorijos. O tokių vietovardžių nebuvimas liudija, kad *ragana* nebuvo žinoma Baltijos finams (lyviams) ir vakarų baltams (kuršiams). Tiesa, reikia pažymėti, kad kuršiai turėjo savą, labai panašią į *lauma* / *laume* tradiciją.