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The codification and transformations of rue's image in Lithuanian tradition

ABSTRACT. The popular Lithuanian folk cultural image of rue as a symbol of bridal virginity, having controversial and paradoxical intercultural parallels and origins (botanical, medical, hydronymic, mythologic, folkloric, and religious), becomes transformed in modernity into a marker of boundaries between one's own and other cultures. Its ideologized symbolism, narrowed to national identity, displaced the folk cultural meanings linked with broader mythologic concepts. From the ethnosemiotical and iconological perspectives, the study aims to reveal the code importance, complexity, multimodality, and diachronic changes of the rue image symbolism and communication in Lithuanian culture, including customs, names of rivers, settlements, religious-cultural organisations, companies, and human surnames, folkloric, mythopoetic images, professional music, and pop-music motifs, folk art and modern design patterns. It also explains how the image of rue is involved in the processes of 'heritagisation' and how it is related to the borders of the semiosphere. Rue's image was revitalized in modern cultural life in recently shaped contents and communication on the basis of modern ideologic, aesthetic, scientific, and social concepts.

KEY WORDS: Lithuanian rue symbolism, rūta, logos, folklore, mythopoethics, iconicity.

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Кодификация и трансформации образа руты в литовской традиции

АННОТАЦИЯ. Популярный в литовской народной культуре образ руты как символ девственности невесты, имеющий противоречивые и парадоксальные межкультурные параллели и истоки (ботанические, медицинские, гидронимические, мифологические, фольклорные, религиозные), в современности превращается в маркер границ между своей и другими культурами. Его идеологизированный символизм, суженный до национальной идентичности, вытеснил народные культурные смыслы, связанные с более широкими мифологическими концепциями. С этносемиотической и иконологической точек зрения исследование направлено на выявление кодовой значимости, сложности, мультимодальности и диахронических изменений символики и коммуникации образа руты в литовской культуре, включая обычаи, названия рек, поселений, религиозно-культурных организаций, компаний и человеческих фамилий, фольклорные, мифопоэтические образы, профессиональную музыку и мотивы поп-музыки, народное искусство и современные образцы дизайна. В статье также объясняется, как образ руты участвует в процессах создания культурного наследия и как он связан с границами семиосферы. Образ руты оживился в современной культурной жизни и коммуникации на основе современных идеологических, эстетических, научных и социальных концепций.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: символика литовской руты, рута, логос, фольклор, мифопоэтика, иконичность.

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Popular signs of folk culture are often elevated in modernity to the class of symbols of national identity. A message of heritage can be perceived as a medium between the past and the present and can be read differently over time, as socio-cultural circumstances change. However, their popular, somewhat politicised, meaning as markers of the border between one's own and other cultures usually becomes very superficial, replacing their authentic ethnocultural practice and sacralised mythologic symbolism. The image of rue is popular as a modern representation of ethnic or national socio-cultural institutions and phenomena in Lithuania. The contradictions among the modern local identity, the historical, customary, and mythologic backgrounds, and the intercultural universality of this image is the main problem of this investigation. According to A. Baiburin (1993: 217–221), in a traditional world view, natural and cultural elements of human environment (herbs, housing, clothing, etc.) have a prescribed metalanguistic signification related to the mythic world, which provides surplus variance resistance in case of a loss of cultural memory elements (though extinct ones can be substituted with others). Following his insight, it is important to answer the question: Do rue's image and significance still have a mnemonic role in modern Lithuanian culture and society?

This study aims to reveal how the customary artefact, i.e. the folkloric and folk-art image of rue, is currently interpreted as a visual and cultural icon, a representation of modern religious, spiritual, cultural, and economic life, under the influence of scientific and social imaginary concepts related to the heritagisation process. The identity of an ethnic nation is characterized primarily by a common destiny, and unlike in the civic nation model, the most important uniting element is not the law, but the common ethnic culture — customs and traditions (Smith 1986: 134–138). D. Harvey (2018: 14–28), explaining heritage as social processes and human conditions within a long temporal framework, emphasizes that heritage has always been with us and has always been produced by people in accordance with their contemporary concerns and experiences. The signs of national identity are the result of the 'heritagisation process' that involves heritage production and consumption.

This research analyses how the image of rue is involved in the communication process in the semiosphere of Lithuanian culture. The research approach is based on the provisions of the Moscow-Tartu school of semiotics and ethnosemiotics (Y. Lotman, V. Toporov, T. Civyan, M. Zavialova, A. Baiburin, etc.). It conducts complex interdisciplinary contextual, comparative and diachronic study of the denotative and connotative aspects of mythopoethic elements in culture, especially in folklore narratives. Y. Lotman (1990, 22–35; 76–277; 2009: 131–142), analysing culture as an interrelationship of cultural texts and symbols inside a particular semiosphere, emphasized that cultural memory common to a given

cultural space is guaranteed, first, by the existence of certain constant texts and, second, by either the unity of codes or their invariance or the unbroken and lawful character of their transformations. The cultural text (or message) is a complex device that preserves various codes and is capable of coding and decoding each text and to transform received messages and generate new ones, involving their creation, transmission, and memory. The approach of visual semiotics is relevant to analysing the visual-cultural, iconological field of rue's image and its relations with collective iconicity. The iconological field as a socio-cultural construct comprises not only images but also sets of social relations and a circulatory network that consists of different actors responsible for images' existence in the social space and thus for the ideological coding of visual icons, as well as of discourses about them (Kurasawa 2015: 6–12).

The research defines the variability and multiplicity of the semantics of the rue image, its multifunctionality and communication changes over the course of time. The contexts and the ways of transformation of this national image are investigated here from the ethnosemiotical, ethnological, and art historical perspectives. The study is based on the retrieval, classification, and interpretation of Lithuanian ethnographic and folkloric material (records and descriptions) published by other authors or collected in archives and museums from the 18th till the 20th century, as well as on historical records about the rue herb. The research is also based on Lithuanian music, literature, design, and applied folk-art history material. It analyses the ethnobotanical and geographical names, as well as the names of modern enterprises and communities related to rue.

Rue has been studied as a customary artefact (J. Balys; A. Vyšniauskaitė; P. Dundulienė) and a folkloric-mythologic image (Baldauskas 1935; Civyana 1989; Šeškauskaitė, Gliwa 2002; Patackas, Žarskus 2013: 179–195; Sadauskienė 2010) along with its transformations in modern literature (Sadauskienė). However, the controversial origin of the rue herb, its traditional semantics, mnemonic aspects of the transformations of rue's image in modernity, and its code importance for Lithuanian culture require further exploration.

THE BOTANIC FEATURES

The image of rue, one of the most popular symbols in Lithuanian tradition, originated from natural signs reminding of living nature (fig. 1).

The name of the Rue herb in Roman English is known as *Roe*, in Latin — *Ruta*, which derives from Greek *Rhute*. In Polish, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian, it is *Ruta* (Рута), in Lithuanian and Latvian — *Rūta*.

Rue (*Ruta graveolens*) is a small shrub with a bushy stem, doubly-pinnated green leaves, and yellowish flowers, which blossoms in June and July. The plant has a peculiar, disagreeable, and very powerful odour, exceedingly



Fig. 1. Rūta herb (*ruta graveolens*) in Lithuania

bitter, and its juice is so caustic that may blister the skin. Rue growing in Lithuania is an evergreen shrubby perennial, with leaves rich in essential oils.

THE MEDICAL AND SACRAL IMPORTANCE IN OTHER CULTURES

Rue, whether wild or cultivated in gardens, was known from antiquity in Crimea and in Mediterranean coastal countries of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East as a medical herb. It was used to stimulate menstruation and to induce abortion, as well as for anti-spasmodic purposes and also as a remedy for snake bites (Dioscorides Bk. 3; Part. 4).

According to Plinius Secundus, Greeks and Romans valued rue as ‘good for the stings of serpents; the weasels, when about to attack them, take the precaution first of protecting themselves by eating rue’. ‘[...] People rubbed with the juice of rue, or even having it on their person, are never attacked by noxious creatures, and [...] serpents are driven away by the stench of burning rue.’ ‘Rue promotes the menstrual discharge and brings away the after-birth, as well as the dead foetus, even if taken in sweet red wine’ (Bk. 20: Ch. 51).

The New Testament adage indicates that rue was an important herb cultivated in gardens (Gospel of Luke, 11:42).

A very old outstanding rue shrub growing at Macheerus Palace in the Baaras valley in Israel was described by Flavius Iosephus (75: Ch. 6, Par. 3): ‘There grew a sort of rue, that deserves our wonder, on account of its largeness. For it was no way inferior to any fig tree whatsoever; either in height, or in thickness’.

In early Middle Ages, the rue herb was used as protection against sorcery, charms, evil eye, witchcraft, and other 'devilry'. In the Mediterranean region, rue was cultivated near nunneries as a medicinal and decorative herb. The Church started sanctifying rue in the 9th c. Small bunches of 'the herb of grace' were used by priests for sprinkling people with holy water; rue was also used for exorcisms. Associated with the Holy Mother of God, rue came to represent virginity. In floriography, rue stands for purification. It spread all over northern Germany, Poland, and other Christian countries (Burnett, Burnett 1843: 315–316; Mažiulis 1961).

It is remarkable that recently, at the end of 20th c., *Ruta graveolens* was among the species most frequently used for abortions in Uruguay (Ciganda, Laborde 2003: 235–239).

THE ORIGINS OF RUE IN LITHUANIA

J. Baldauskas thought the rue herb to have come to Lithuania from the Balkans via Southern Slavic countries, the Czech lands, and Poland. On the other hand, he held a distinct opinion that rue cultivation in Lithuania had started before Christianisation (15th c.) and had accreted both pagan and Christian symbolism (1935: 232, 233). According to Z. Ivinskis (1953: 365), the 'Christianisation' of rue was started by J. Paškevičius, a Jesuit preacher in Samogitia (he died in 1657), who wanted to wean the local people off the traditional pagan use of herbs. Therefore, he began to consecrate rue and sage and shared them with people so that they would pray to the Blessed Virgin. However, there is no folkloric data indicating that the rue herb was linked with the Holy Virgin in Lithuanian tradition.

J. Balys (1952: 3; 1988: 1) and J. Matusas (1960, 1962) thought that rue had been introduced to Lithuania together with Christianity and had not been intensely cultivated until about 350 years ago, when it had most probably started to be grown in the flower gardens and medical herbariums of cloisters or of local priests. J. Balys thought that rue had spread from Poland (1952: 3) or from Italy (1988: 1). Rue was mentioned in Lithuania for the first time in 1563, as growing in the Rokiškis rectory garden (Matusas 1962). The decorative plants in Lithuania began to spread from monasteries and manors to gardens of peasant homesteads in the 15th–16th cc. (Vaidelienė, Vaidelis 2001).

However, the presumed religious Catholic Italian or Polish origins of rue cannot explain why the oldest and richest Lithuanian customs related to rue were attested in Protestant East Prussia; nor why the Polish customary symbolism of rue was quite different from the Lithuanian symbolism. Nor can they explain why the symbolic motifs of rue in Lithuanian folklore are much more similar to those in Ukrainian and Belarusian traditions. Finally, why were the rivers bearing the name of rue known as early as in the 12th c.?

The question of what constituted the historic rue (*Rūta*) population in Lithuania is quite complicated, as the country is home to various other kinds of wild *Rūta*, growing since old times: the archaeophyte *Žvirblio* (*Paukščių rūta* ('Sparrows' Rue' — *Fumaria officinalis*, *Fumaria vaillantii*); *Jonažolė* / *Laukinė rūta* ('St. Jon's wort,' 'Wild Rue' — *Hypericum*); *Kiškio* (*Pievų rūta* ('Hare Rue' — *Thalictrum lucidum*) (*Lietuvių kalbos...* 1978: 1033). Another herb of the *Fumariaceae* family in Lithuania is known as *Rūtenis* (*Corydalis*), which grows in Europe, Africa, Asia, and North America, mainly in moderate warm climate zones and in the mountains. *Paprastasis rūtenis* (*Corydalis solida*) is a poisonous herb used in ethnomedicine; it is a perennial herbaceous plant with trifoliate leaves, similar to rue. One of the first spring flowers, it grows in deciduous forests, especially on the bushy banks of rivers and streams (Fig. 2). It is quite possible that the local Lithuanian types of the



Fig. 2. *Rūtenis* (*corydalis*) in the forest near Vilnius. Photo by V. Tumenas, 2021.

herb bearing the names similar to 'Rūta' may also have been popular before Christianisation and could have been replaced and semantically enriched by the garden rue later.

RUE IN LITHUANIAN CUSTOMS

The image of rue in traditional culture was closely related to matrimonial rites. The rue is among the most important attributes of a girl's pre-marital life, a symbol of her maidenhood. Every maiden was expected to cultivate a rue garden in her homestead and to use rues for making wreaths for her wedding-eve and wedding. P. Višinskis noted in the 19th c. that a flower garden was a real asset and joy for girls; if there was no garden, this meant that a girl did not live in this house. The better and more beautiful it was, the better everyone considered that girl to be. The most revered was rue; this plant was considered sacred. Rue was a symbol of virginity and a most popular plant in folk songs; it was also a medicine for heartache (1964:165–166).

The oldest ethnographic records of the 17th c. present rue as very popular in the customs of Lithuania Minor. Rues were grown by girls in their flower gardens and used for a bride's and a bridesmaid's wreaths or as a ceremonial decoration. The matchmaker, who rode a horse into a bride's home, held a green hazelnut stem/stick decorated with a bouquet of rue. The chosen bride gave the matchmaker her symbols — a rue, a handkerchief, and a narrow-woven band — as the signs of her final consent to marry to be delivered to the groom. At the last party before the wedding, *žvalgytuvės* ("looking for a bride"), the bridegroom knocked on the roof beam of the bride's dwelling with the matchmaker's stick adorned with rues and asked the girl's mother to invite her: 'Where is she? We need green rue'. After these symbolic words, the maiden would appear adorned with a rue wreath. During the wedding ceremony, the eldest groomsman used a stick decorated with interlaced rue herbs to knock on the house door while asking for the bride to be given away. The wedding 'chariot' in which the bride was conveyed was decorated with rugs or linen towels densely covered with wreaths of rue. The bridegroom's head was also decorated with a small rue wreath. After the newlyweds woke up after their wedding night (which was typically spent in a barn), the groom's sister removed the rue wreath from the dressed-up bride's head and replaced it with a textile head cover (Praetorius 2006: 603–629; Wagner 1999). During the matchmaking, the groom's brother carried a rue wreath and a rue-wrapped cup to the bride's family. At the final stage of the wedding, the bride drank beer from a small cup wrapped up in rues as the consent to move out from her home to her husband's household (Lepner 2011: 163, 167). Rue was also used at funerals for a wreath on the head of a deceased young girl, customary clothed as a bride (Vyšniauskaitė 1961).

Similarly, in Lithuania mainland rue was an attribute of a bride and was used as a sign of a girl's virginity and her agreement to the marriage proposal (Vyšniauskaitė 1963: 482–505; Dundulienė 1999: 143–165, 190–191).

J. Sadauskienė highlighted the main semantic aspects of folk songs about the maiden's garden of rue: it is the place of a virgin's self-consciousness, self-expression and identity, a symbol of vital, reproductive powers; it is a model of the mythologic world centre, a sacred, magical place suitable for worship, exaltation, and fortune-telling (2010: 147, 150).

In Lithuanian phraseology, to sow rue means to be unmarried, to have green rues growing — not to marry, to crush a rues wreath — to marry, to be with rues — to remain unmarried (Frazelogijos... 2001: 595). After the wedding, brides usually no longer grew rues.

MYTHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE RUE SYMBOLISM IN FOLKLORE

The hypothesis about the pre-Christian origin of rue's symbolism may also be supported by the rich mythopoetic content of the image of rue in Lithuanian culture. The oldest variant of the 18th-century legend about the dragon Basilisk of Vilnius bears witness to the magical powers of rue. In the times of King Sigismund Augustus (16th c.), the cave at the Barbican Hill at the crossroads of Bokšto, Subačiaus, and Bastėjos streets was inhabited by the dragon Basilisk, who inflicted a great suffering on people. In order to kill the dragon, it was decided to lower several bundles of rue down into the cave. The first bundle taken out of the cave was all pale, which made the townsmen realise that the Basilisk was still alive. The second bundle of rue taken out of the cave was less pale, but when the third bundle of green rue was lifted out, and the townsmen saw that it was unchanged, the Basilisk was found certainly dead (Naramowski 1724: 144–145). The magical powers of rue in this Lithuanian legend are similar to its image in ancient South European and Middle Eastern traditions.

In one particular Lithuanian grazing song, the mythopoetic image of rue is linked with the images of dew and a cow swimming in the sea: 'Ralia rolia, Cow, rue, / [...] Where have you been? / [...] Mine was swam threw the seas, / [...] Mine was dew rubbed, / [...] Mine a grass was eaten, / [...] Cow is grazed by cowherds, / Ralia rolia, Cow's milk is dranked'. (KTR 120 (35), Ignalina region, Lithuania, recorded in 1987).

In another song, rue is associated with the Morning Star and a flower garden in the yard: "Oh Morning Star / In the yard, čiūto, / In the flower garden, rūto" (Slaviūnas 1959: 365–367).

Songs with the rue motif are characteristic of Lithuanian folklore. The mythopoetic image of rue (or a wreath of rue) in folklore stands for a girl's adolescence, a bride's virginity, pure matrimonial love, maturity, and the intention to wed itself.

A wreath of rue is more of symbolic nature, while in the real customs rue was just one herb among several that would be simply woven into a bride's wreath to decorate the top of the crown, or a small wreath of rue would be attached to a bride's head.

A popular type of wedding songs tells about a boy who rides on a horse that steps into a girl's rue garden and tramples down rue; or a girl asks a boy to return her rue wreath, but he refuses because he has fed it to his horse. Or in the Eastertide songs a strong north wind blows a rue wreath from a virgin's head into the sea; she cries piteously; then the girl asks three brothers — all fishermen — to retrieve her wreath from the water. They agree — but demand a present in return; the virgin promises to give a golden ring to the first, a silk sash to another, and to marry the third. Or a lad swimming to pull a virgin's rue wreath out of the sea starts to drown and binds the girl with a promise to grow rues in his memory on his grave.

According to J. Baldauskas, rues, a wreath of rues, or a rue garden, stand for a virgin herself. Therefore, when presenting a rue to a boy, a girl seems to give herself to him. The wreath symbolically represents the vulva, and the horse's trampling of a rue garden, mentioned in the songs, is tantamount to having a sexual intercourse with a virgin (1935: 235–237).

Growing rues in a maiden's flower garden symbolises the carefree youth and beauty of a virgin. In the Lithuanian hen-party songs, the life of a maiden is often directly compared with a rue, which in its own turn is also linked with mint and lily: 'I sowed rue, / I sowed mint, / I sowed a lily, / I sowed my young days / Like a green rue // [...] A rue blossoms [...] / And the boy is coming / With a steel scythe / He cutted down rue [...] / He cutted down my young days, / Like a green rue [...]' (LTR 4312(11), Varanava region, Belarus, recorded in 1971).

The evident mythologic background of rue's image in the context of the Dragon and the Hero's battle and of the ritualistic transformation of a maiden into a rue, reminding of the mythic story of her fight with a dragon in the Baltic-Slavic folk tradition, was explained by T. Civyan (1989).

Another Lithuanian Advent-Christmas song, 'Oh, palace, palace, leliumoj', depicts a similar mythologic situation. In a greate manor (palace) nobody was walking, except for a young girl. She picked a rue and weaved a wreath. Suddenly a very old unmarried man approached her on horseback. 'Oh, I transfigured, leliumoj, / Into green rue, leliumoj', she says. 'A very old man ran after me with a picker he picked the rue and only its roots are left; I got transformed into a sea fish and the old man ran after me with a spear; I got transformed into a variegated cuckoo and the old man chased after me with a gun; I got transformed into a star in the sky, and the old man chased after me with a cloud; clouds came, rains fell and drowned that old man'. (LTR 2618(1), Šalčininkai region, Lithuania, recorded in 1948).

Rue (pyra) is also a common symbol in Ukrainian folk tradition and similarly stands for a maiden's virginity, beauty, and youth. Rue, associated with maidenhood and wedding, is — again similarly — coupled with mint: 'Oh girl, only get married when a rue-mint sprouts at the edge of the field at the side of the road. [...] And the girl knew her way: she sowed mints, the rain came, the rue sprouted and the girl got married' (Ivanova 1907: 131). In addition, the image of the rue plays the role of an apotropaic artefact against evil forces. Rue, along with the rue-mint and the rose, is a popular image in Ukrainian incantations against bleeding (Voitovich 2012: 443). Green rues and rue wreaths similarly symbolise virginity and a girl's juvenescence in the Ukrainian spring festivals and the wedding folklore. Conversely, the withering or the crushing of a rue symbolises the loss of chastity: 'Where Marusia and Ivan stood / There a fervent rue withered'. Rues were used as a component of bridal wreaths and, additionally, of young girls' wreaths at spring festivals. The imagery of rue is often connected with that of the double-flower 'rue-mint' (pyta-мята): 'Grow, rue-mint, / Cruciform periwinkle! / And on you, rue-mint, / I will break shields, / All the enemies will lie down to sleep / — I'm going for a walk' (Kurochkin 1989: 146–147).

Identical motifs of a girl sewing and growing rues in the garden and of bridesmaids weaving wreaths of rues, mints, and lilies for decoration of a bride's head are also common in the Belarusian wedding songs (Viaselle 1981: 205–226).

There was quite the opposite symbolism of sowing and growing rue in Poland, where girls never sewed on their own and did not plant rues in their gardens because otherwise they would never marry, and spinsters were said to be 'sowing rutka', meaning that they had never stood on the wedding carpet. But similarly to Lithuanians, Poles weave wedding wreaths of rues for young girls and mention them in the songs as a sign of virginity. Deceased young girls and boys are also adorned with wreaths of rues for the funeral. If a widow or a young woman who already has children marries, she puts a wreath of rues on her shoulder instead of her head (Kolberg 1891: 195).

The parallels between the rue-mint images in Slavic (Ukrainian and Belorussian) and Baltic Lithuanian folklore allow us to put forward the assumption that the mythopoetic image of rue has archaic, pre-Christian origins.

THE NAMES OF RIVERS AND SETTLEMENTS

'Rue' as a geographic name of rivers and settlements is most widely spread in Lithuania, Latvia, and in the neighbouring lands of Belarus and Poland.

Two settlements, Old Rut and New Rut (in Polish Stary Rut and Nowy Rut), exists in Wasilków distr. of contemporary Białystok region in Poland.

‘They were known by the river Ruta from the Lithuanian times, in the 15th century’. The river Ruta, also known in Polish as Rutek / Rotka, starts at the village Białacerkow (as the 19th-century records attest) from the confluence of three rivers: the Great Ruta (Wielka Ruta), the Small Ruta (Mała Ruta), and the Ruta. In this Ruta settlement, Rutsky Yosif (the Uniate Metropolitan of Kiev) was born in 1574. Later, in the 19th c. here was the manor Ruta (*Słownik geograficzny*... 1889: 42).

The same Ruta river is known from the ancient Laurentian and Trinity Chronicles. These sources tell about a 12th-century duke of Kievan Rus, the Chernigov prince Volodymyr Davydovych, who joined Yuri Dolgoruky of Suzdal in the fight against his brother Iziaslav Mstislavich, the Duke of Kiev. The fighting parties confronted each other in a battle of an unprecedented ferocity near the same river Ruta / Rutj / Rutec in the summer of 1151. The battle ended in the crushing defeat of Yuri Dolgoruky’s army and the slaying of Volodymyr Davydovych (*Polnoie sobraniie* 1846: 1: 143–144).

In Lithuania, the personal name Felicijus Rūtelis, originating from Rūteliai village (the present-day Rūtėnai, in Molėtai region), is mentioned in *The Book of Metrics* (1665); a contemporary Rūteliai village is known in Šilalė region and a settlement Ruteliai in Kelmė region, Rūtakiemis is known in Panevėžys region. Rutkiškės village exists in Vilnius region and Prienai region; Rutkiškės village (a former manor) in Vilkaviškis region; Rutkiškiai (Rotkėške) in the Jurbarkas region; Rutka village in Alytus region (a manor in 1762).

In Latvia, there are six settlements with the name Rutki (in Tome, Lūznava, Ņukši, Zaļesje, Svariņi, and Maliena parishes). In contemporary Belarus, there is the Ruta / Rutka stream, which is a left tributary of the Servach River (Bel.) / Servečė (Lith.), and the villages Rutka I and Rutka II near this river (Koshelevskiy selsovet distr. and Navagrudak distr. in the Hrodna region). There is Rucica village at the same river and — at a distance — Dolnaya Ruta and Gornaya Ruta villages (Karelchy distr., Hrodna region). The river Rutka is known in Mogilev region. In Podlaskie province in North East Poland, there are settlements as follows: Rutka village in Hajnówka region; Rutki–Kossaki and Rutki–Nowiny villages in Zambrow region; Rutki–Jatki village in Rutki municipality, Zambrow region; Rutka village (Rutka-Tartak settlement) in Jeleniewo municipality, Suwalki region; Rutka Pachuckich village in Suwalki region.

The Rūtupis stream (‘the Small River of rues’) as a tributary of the river Varduva is known near Kražiškiai in Mažeikiai region of Lithuania.

The oldest analogies of associations of ‘Rūta’, ‘Rūtupis’ names with rivers and settlements can be found in Ancient Britain. The rue herb was introduced there by Romans. In 20th c., it was rarely found growing wild on the hills of Lancashire and Yorkshire (Grieve 2013: 683). The locations of such names are mentioned in Roman geographical and historical works

(Ptolemy's *Geographia*; Antonine Itinerary, Ravenna *Cosmographia*, Ammianus, and Orosius) and literature (Lucanus, Ausonius): Rutupi, portus Rutupi, Rutupi portus, Rutupiae, Rutupiai, Rutupis, Rutupias, Rutupiaque, Rutupinus. Rutupi was initially a harbour settlement of the local Celtic people in Kent. After the Roman invasion of Britain in the 1st c., they founded the camp Rutupis / Rutupiae. It grew into a fortress port, whose name was later transformed into Ratteburg, Ratborough, and contemporary Richborough's ruins can still be seen facing the river Stour (Haverfield, Mortimer Wheeler 1932: 38–41). The linguists I. Richmond and O. Craford (1949) and E. Hamp (1976) link the first part of this name, 'rutu', with both the Welsh 'rhwŷ' ('muddy', 'dirty') and the proto-Indo-European 'reudh' ('red'), while they read the second part, 'upiae', as 'water, river'. Consequently, they suggest that Rutupi should be interpreted as 'muddy', 'dirty' water or a river. Besides, the association of the 'Rutupi' name with water is stressed in its Latinised version, Rutupiaque (Lucanus, VI, 67). But nobody has suggested that this particular settlement obtained its name from the river. The proposition that the original 'ruda' was converted into Rutu — and Richborough without the sound 'd' does not seem tenable. Furthermore, even the modern name of this river Stour (reversing, 'mirroring' the order of sounds of word ruts — stour/ruts), does not contain the sound 'd'. Nevertheless, it is clearly possible to read this name in Lithuanian as Rūtupis (a small river of rues — a masculine name), Rūtupė (a small river of rues, a feminine name), Rūtupiai (a settlement by the small river of rues — the masculine plural). Combinations of the word 'river' with a specific feature of water or a natural object are very popular ways to create rivers' names in Lithuanian; for example, Liepupė ("lindens-river"), Rudupė ("brown-river"), and Molupis ("clay-river"). This similarity between the Lithuanian and the Celtic names of rivers raises the question of Celtic and Baltic historical relations. These facts also help to strengthen the premise about the ancient acculturation of rue's image in Baltic tradition and about the existence of other riverside wild herbs with the names similar to 'Rūta'.

RUE'S IMAGE IN LITHUANIAN SURNAMES

In Lithuanian, the following 23 rue-related surname types are known: Ruta, Rūta, Rutaitis, Rūtaitis, Rutavičius, Rūtavičius, Rutelis, Rūtelis, Rutėlis, Rutė, Rūtėnas; Rutis, Rūtis, Rutelionis, Rūtelionis, Rutenbergas, Rutenis, Rutka, Rutkaitis, Rutkauskas, Rutkus, Rutkys, Rutkevičius, Rutkūnas, Rutonis, Rūtonis. In Latvia, several surnames, Rutkis, Rutkovskis, Rutens, are known (Vanagas et al. 1989). These surnames associated with the image of rue show how deeply it is rooted in Lithuanian and Baltic cultures.

If we agree that rue in Lithuania was adopted during Christianisation, the question remains as to why this herb equally became so popular in religiously diverse Baltic cultures – both among mainly Protestant Prussians and Latvians

and Catholic Lithuanians? The acculturation of rue may have taken place before the total Christianisation of the Baltic countries and before the Church schism. The spreading of Rūta as ancient hydronyms and settlement names, as well as people's surnames, can be explained only on the basis of the pre-Christian acculturation of this herb in Baltic tradition.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE TRADITIONAL IMAGE INTO A MODERN SYMBOL

Although Lithuanian girls no longer cultivate rue in their flower gardens, the flower is still sometimes used for decoration at weddings. In modern era, the image of rue often stands for the national tradition, but at the same time it has been stripped of direct links with the genuine ancient sacralised symbolism of maidenhood. Depreciation of the traditional symbolism of rue can be explained not only by the declined tradition of the maidenhood of the bride. In line with the assumption disseminated by several researchers that rue is a relatively new plant of Western Christian origin in Lithuania (Balys 1952; Matusas 1962), the followers of neo-pagan religion "Romuva" (which aims to revitalise and practice ancient national traditions) do not tend to view rue as an archaic Lithuanian traditional plant. For this reason, they use field flowers for the bridal wreath instead of rue in the wedding rituals.¹ On other hand, the popularity of the rue motif as a socially significant symbol of national identity, and the innovative ways of its application in modern times do not only lead to certain assumptions regarding its origin but also to the treatment of rue as a characteristic element of traditional culture.

Developing J. Sadauskienė's insights (2010), it should be noted that in the 19th c., when the family identity in the community started to be replaced by the national or the religious ones, rue as a symbol of family life became associated with a broader sociocultural sphere. The first modern interpretation of the folkloric image of rue was probably the romantic song 'Rue' (ca. 1861) by the famous Polish and Lithuanian composer S. Moniuszko, with lyrics in Polish by J. Prusinowski. This song interprets the image of rue, as a symbol of virginity, wedding, and a funeral attribute of an unmarried girl, in a sentimental way and associates it with the tragic love of a virgin. The girl sows rue in the garden by her window; it grows, and the virgin dreams of a lover, who will weave the rue into her bridal wreath according to the tradition and not because of the beauty or fragrance of the flower. However, the boy forgets 'the honey' of her girlish kisses, so she 'fades' like a rue without water, and ultimately the rue is picked not by her beloved for the wedding wreath but by her sister for the girl's funeral wreath.

1 Mergvakaris. URL: romuva.lt/apieigos/mergvakario/. (accessed 29.05.2020). In Lithuanian.

The popularity of the folkloric rue image in Lithuanian professional culture at the beginning of the 20th c. is reflected in M. K. Čiurlionis' adaptation of a folk song for the choir 'Are you, my sister, not sorry for the rues' (Ar negaila, seserėle, rūtelių). A further exploration of rue's image, associated with the idea of joy and love, on the one hand, and with sadness and death, on the other, took place in the remarkable music video 'Ruta' (2018), created by Folk Vibes, a music group of Lithuanian Polonians. Its modern, ethno-neopagan, shamanistic, mystic spirit is based on the so-called 'folkloric song' 'Oh, my green rue.'² This video tells the story of a girl's love and suicide by drowning herself in a lake and her passage into the dark world of the dead. A set of symbolic motifs is explored: water; a newlywed couple with their bridesmaids and groomsmen; the bride surrounded by shouting mythic twins; shamanic bird-like dances; a ghost-like crow; a girl with the ancient Lithuanian sacral instrument kanklės; nightmarish darkness; funeral black-coloured clothing. However, despite the narrative interpretation of the traditional image and symbolism of rue in this video, the visual image of rue artefact is surprisingly absent here. It is likely that the authors sought to avoid obvious identification with Lithuanian folk clothing. The eclectic synthesis of Slavic and Baltic pagan world's elements with contemporary subcultural youth aesthetics is unique and original.

AN IMAGE OF INSTITUTIONS

Rue started to be used as a very clear symbol of ethnic and national identity for denomination of various Lithuanian cultural societies active in the late 19th c. When the leaders of the Lithuanian Society for Relief and Dissemination of Culture (established in 1893) decided to change that name into 'Rūta', they presented a bouquet of rues to the Livonian governor, trying to explain the national significance of the chosen name. However, their idea was not accepted. Similar cultural activities were performed by another 'Rūta' association in Riga (1924–1934), which arranged excursions to the Kaunas Song Festival and published Lithuanian and Latvian literature (Mačiulis, Jēkobsons 2013).

Another 'Rūta' (1904–1913) involved Lithuanian students of Cracow (later they became famous artists) and those Poles who identified themselves with Lithuania or 'Lithuanity'. The group aimed to practice and popularise the Lithuanian language and culture. The Lithuanian Society 'Rūta' in Odessa (1906–1918) organised similar cultural activities and social work. The Association of Lithuanians of Vilnius 'Rūta' (1909–1914) became a cultural and artistic centre for Lithuanians in Vilnius. It staged about 50

2 Folk Vibes – Ruta (Official music video). URL: facebook.com/folkvibes/videos/2180732232203924. (accessed 29.05.2021). In Polish.

plays and notably contributed to the development of the Lithuanian theater. Another type of ethnic, religious, cultural academic associations also appeared among Lithuanian students at the Catholic University of Fribourg. Initially, they had joined Polish students' societies. However, after disagreements on national questions, Lithuanians established their own society 'Rūta' (1899–1915), whose name emphasised their 'otherness' to Poles. Later, part of this association expanded into the national Catholic youth association 'Ateitis' ('The Future') (Katilius 2015).

The Society of Lithuanian Catholic Students of Moscow called 'Rue' (1910–1918) was established for young Catholics, in opposition to the anti-religious influence of the Lithuanian newspaper 'Aušrinė' ('The Morning Star') (Liulevičius 1989: 204). Rue's image was adopted as the name of an ethnic cultural-spiritual institution, the Home Publishing Company 'Rūta' (1904–1938 in Tilsit, Germany). It was founded by a society with the same name for publishing and distributing the works of the Lithuanian writer, theosophic philosopher and cultural activist Vydūnas. This name comes from the nickname 'Rūta' that belonged to his collaborate woman Morta Raišukytė, who headed that society. At present, the sociocultural association of Lithuanians in Lyda (Belarus) is also called 'Rūta'.

'Rūta' as an institutional name has currently gained most popularity as the name of kindergartens (lopšelis-darželis) in Vilnius, Klaipėda, Marijampolė, and Panevėžys. 'Rūtelė' kindergartens and schools (darželis-mokykla) are open in Plungė and Kaunas. Private companies that have recently sprung up bear the 'Rue' name as an advertising tool that associates them with beauty or the national cuisine, such as Rūta Model Management, the coffee bar 'Rūta of Palanga', or with the names of historical social organisations, such as the Klaipėda City Socially Disadvantaged Residents Club 'Rūta'. Others use the herb's name just as a folkloric name: a car rental 'Žalia rūta', online stores 'Rūta Mėta'. Another type of the 'Rue' name adoption is curiously based on its association with the traditional household garden: the Gardeners' Association 'Rūta', the Home Owners Association 'Rūta', the Apartment House Owners Association 'Rūta', the Garage Operation Association 'Rūta', the Construction Services 'Rūta'.³ The modern treatment of rue's name testifies to the power of the folkloric and cultural tradition in Lithuanian mentality.

VISUAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE IMAGE

A pattern of rues (rūtelės) is found in the tradition of Lithuanian Easter eggs decoration (NMKČDM, Li 101; 1961), in the embroideries adorning the collars and shoulder straps of women's linen shirts and headscarves (Tomkuvienė, Vandytė 2020: 57; Suwalki region, Poland), and in folk

³ The directory of Lithuanian companies. URL: rekvizitai.vz.lt/en/companies. (accessed 29.05.2021). In English.

furniture decorations (LNM, PB 1024; Joniškėlis region, 1863) (fig. 3). It is obvious that these patterns of rue serve as the basis for modern emblematics and logos. The image of rue was used as an iconic and emblematic sign for the first time on the flag of the Marijampolė branch (established in 1918) of 'The Futurers' ('Ateitininkai') association of Catholic students.⁴ (fig. 4). Another example of iconising rue in modernity is the Lithuanian scouts' heraldry, in which the international scoutic lily is accompanied by a rue (fig. 5).

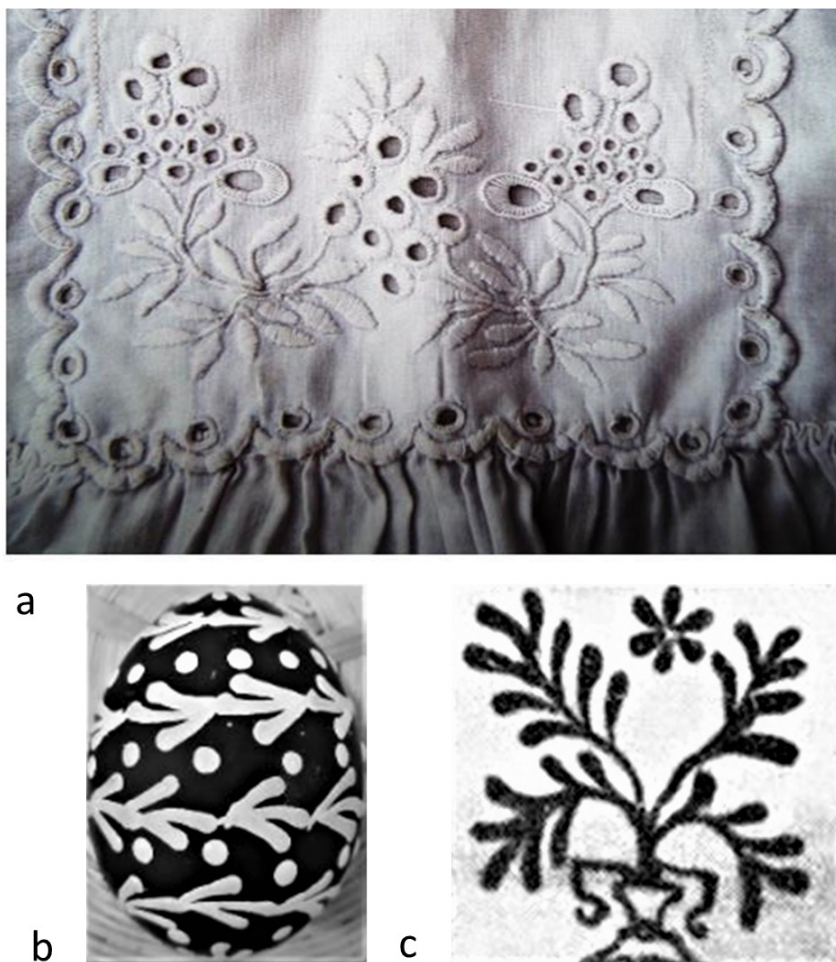


Fig. 3. Rue patterns in Lithuanian folk art: a) Easter egg decoration. (Margučiai. URL: tamosaiciugalerijazidiny.lt/2022/04/16/marguciai-3/. (accessed 25.05.21.); b) women's linen shirt decoration, the first part of the 20th century, Suwalky region, Poland. [photograph]. (In: Tomkuvienė, Vandytė 2020: 57); c) the element of folk furniture decoration (LNM, PB 1024; Joniškėlis region, 1863).

⁴ Ateitininkai. URL: marijampolesbazilika.lt/bendrijos/ateitininkai. (accessed 29.05.2021). In Lithuanian.



Fig. 4. The image of rue on the flag of the Marijampolė branch of The Futurers association of Catholic students. (Ateitininkai. URL: marijampolesbazilika.lt/bendrijos/ateitininkai. (accessed 29.05.2021).

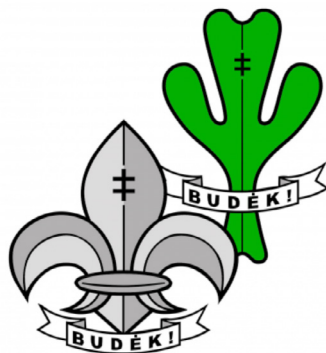


Fig. 5. Rue pattern in the Lithuanian scout heraldry.

The rue pattern is a well-known and recognisable symbol forming the key element of the logo (1977) of the oldest Lithuanian confectionary factory 'Rūta' (from 1913). This name was chosen by the enterprise's founder as he wished to stress his national identity because the other factories in Lithuania had predominantly foreign owners. In present days, this factory emphasises representation of the national culture in its visual communication (fig. 6). Another factory, 'New Rue' ('AB Naujoji rūta'), which in 1993 separated from the elder one, has adopted quite a similar rue image as its logo (fig. 7).

The contemporary national symbol of rue is best known as the logo (from the second half of the 20th c.) of the Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theater in Vilnius (fig. 8). Another famous representation of the double rue image was created by the designer V. Grušėkaitė as a logo for the Lithuanian pavilion in the Soviet Union Industry and Trade Exhibition in



Fig. 6. Rue pattern in the logo | of the oldest Lithuanian confectionary factory ‘Rūta’ (since 1977).



Fig. 7. Rue pattern in the logo of confectionary factory ‘Naujoji ‘aujoji rūta’ (since 1993).



Fig. 8. Rue pattern in the logo of the Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theater in Vilnius (since the second half of the 20th century).



Fig. 9. Rue pattern in the logo of the Lithuanian pavilion in the Soviet Union Industry and Trade Exhibition in London (1968). Designer: V. Grušėkaitė.



Fig. 10. Rue pattern in Lithuanian clothing design brand 'LT identity' (since 1998, led by J. Rimkutė, I. Ševiaikovaite). [online image]. URL: [tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g274951-d5294298-i80191651-Lt_Identity-Vilnius_Vilnius_County.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g274951-d5294298-i80191651-Lt_Identity-Vilnius_Vilnius_County.html); URL: [kulturpolis.lt/dizainas/lietuvisko-dizaino-desimtukas-sodas-ir-darzas/](https://www.kulturpolis.lt/dizainas/lietuvisko-dizaino-desimtukas-sodas-ir-darzas/); URL: [facebook.com/LTidentity/photos/pb.100064377441542.-2207520000./120281631373267/?type=3](https://www.facebook.com/LTidentity/photos/pb.100064377441542.-2207520000./120281631373267/?type=3); URL: [facebook.com/LTidentity/photos/pb.100064377441542.-2207520000./130126300388800/?type=3](https://www.facebook.com/LTidentity/photos/pb.100064377441542.-2207520000./130126300388800/?type=3). (accessed 19.04.2021).



Fig. 11. Rue pattern in the logo of the folk-craft atelier Rūta žalioji. [online image]. URL: rutazalioji.lt/. (accessed 18.04.2021).

London (1968) (fig. 9). Here, the semantics of the rue image is simplified to the national flower, without any traditional feminine or nuptial implications. The most recent interpretations of the rue image are presented by the famous Lithuanian clothing design brand 'LT identity' (from 1998, led by J. Rimkutė, I. Ševiakovaitė). Their interpretations featuring a rue pattern as a textile decoration (t-shirts, pullovers, purses, pillows) in the pop-art stylistics, acquire the aesthetic shape of mass production (fig. 10). This may develop into profanation and deconstruction of both the traditional customary sacralised symbolism of rue and the modern communal idealised one. Another contemporary folk-craft atelier 'Green Rue' ('Rūta žalioji') producing national costumes is an important example of adaptation of the traditional rue pattern in combination with the company title on their logo (fig. 11).

It is obvious that rue on these logos is treated as a national herbal symbol. At the same time, it is associated with the origins of the musical theatre in Vilnius and as a mark of artistic events and cultural organisations. The links of the rue image with art, beauty, sweet taste, and hedonism are close to the mythological classical archetype of Aphrodite. This is similar to the Lithuanian folkloric idealised images of the virgin and of the bride with her rue. It is clear that even up to this day, the image of rue remains a significant

sign of Lithuanian cultural tradition and is still associated with notions of noble beauty and harmony.

CONCLUSION

The identification of the rue herb with the Lithuanian *Rūta* in the context of cultural traditions is considerably complicated. The assumption of most other authors (A. Mažiulis, J. Balys, J. Matusas, J. Vaidelienė, and J. Vaidelys) that there was a later, Christian origin of the rue herb in Lithuania (setting aside the differences between possible religious Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and cultural Slavic or Germanic influences) conflicts with the demonstrated complex significance of the rue code (including customs, folklore and folk art motifs, personal names, hydronyms and place names) and with the similarity of important traditions across different Baltic and Slavic countries. These authors' point of view does not explain the longevity of the non-Christian aspects in the Lithuanian rue image: the mythopoetic folklore imagery and a rich nomenclature of human and geographical names. The reasons for the exceptional popularity and distinctiveness of the rue imagery in Lithuanian culture are very hard to explain by Christian ideology alone. The possibilities of semantical reading in its specific terms are very limited, compared to the abundance of obvious archaic mythological aspects of these images in the folk tradition. Similar aspects of rue's mythological symbolism are found in the cultures of Belarussians and Ukrainians.

The earlier assumption about the relative novelty of the rue image is highly questionable due to the revealed presence of '*Rūta*' and its derivatives as a geographical name in the ancient historical lands of Jotvingians, Dainavians, and other Balts and their Slavic and Celtic neighbours. Furthermore, *Ruta graveolens* in Lithuania may have significant herbal precursors with similar names, forms, and symbolic meanings, for example *Rūtenis* (*Corydalis*). The analysed fragments and parts of messages of cultural memory related to the rue image leads to a reconstruction of mythical concepts. The association of the archaic imagery of rue with love, youth, beauty, wedding (family creation), and protection from evil forces, along with its manifestations in Lithuanian traditions, is much broader than the Christian symbolism of chastity and virginity of girls and brides associated with the Madonna of the Rose.

The rue image in modernity still corresponds to its traditional symbolism of family creation and peaceful feminine culture. This image has become innovatively connected with the concepts of 'a big family': ethnic, national, and religious Christian or cultural communality in the form of cultural-artistic collaboration of institutions; also childcare and education. In association with hedonism, the image of rue has been adopted by several Lithuanian chocolate factories. The symbol of rue as a pagan relict still related to the realm of love, its pleasures and melodramas is being interpreted in music video production.

The Lithuanian rue symbolism is quite similar to the international meaning of the rose as a symbol of love.

The image of rue unfolds as an important element of social imagery in the semiosphere of Lithuanian culture involved in the process of heritagisation. The following aspects of rue as a code image have been distinguished: a) an herbal, geographic, and personal name; b) an ethnomedical flower; c) an ethnocultural sign – a folk art pattern; d) a mythopoetic image: as a symbolic artefact or narrative and a visual symbol of virginity, chastity, youth, beauty, love and melodrama, erotic maturity, and wedding; e) a means of ideological coding and a representation of collective iconicity: spiritual, ethnic, religious communal safety; a sign and image of heritage and the cultural and national creative identity, of cultural uniqueness, and of differentiation from other cultures; f) a modern logo pattern associated with aesthetic and hedonistic values as well as related to heritage consumption and cultural industry.

The very broad dissemination and vitality of the rue image in Lithuanian culture testifies to the unbroken character of its transformations and profound links with the semiotic network of various correspondences among different types of objects and sign systems (body decoration, fashion, botanical and geographical objects, human names, etc.), which are united into a comprehensive sign system in such a way that an element of a particular sign system could have a layer of expression of another system.

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 LNM – Lithuanian national museum
 LTR – The Lithuanian Folklore Archive of the Lithuanian Institute of Literature and Folklore
 NMKČDM – National M. K. Čiurlionis Art Museum

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