

# Modern Pagan Traditions in Lithuania: Navigating Romantic Nostalgia and Creativity in Ritual Year Celebrations

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**Abstract:** This paper examines annual celebrations among Native Faith communities in Lithuania in contemporary society. The analysis is based on ethnographic research conducted by the author between 2015 and 2025. The study investigates both newly introduced holidays and adaptations of traditional Lithuanian festivities within a modern sociocultural context, focusing on exploring the creativity of Lithuanian modern pagan traditions, particularly the observance of the spring and autumn equinoxes. The paper highlights how individual initiatives and socio-cultural factors shape the evolution of these traditions. It also looks at the creative reinterpretation of rituals to illustrate how communities preserve and transform their heritage. Additionally, the dissemination of these traditions to the broader society is presented, revealing a dynamic interplay between nostalgia for ancient pre-Christian practices and contemporary expressions of identity within modern Lithuanian paganism.

**Keywords:** annual celebrations, calendar holidays, Lithuanian paganism, modern paganism, Native Faith, ritual year

## Introduction

Promoting ideas about pagan roots in traditional Lithuanian annual festivities began with the early works of annual ritual year researchers in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This trend gained popularity during the Soviet era, when intense anti-religious – and especially anti-Christian – propaganda was prevalent. It continued after Lithuania regained independence, when interest in Lithuanian ethnic traditions became a popular research subject. Scholars such as Angelė Vyšniauskaitė (1964), Pranė Dundulienė (1979, 1982, 1991) and Juozas Kudirka (1991), among others, contributed significantly to this discourse. Enthusiasts of ethnic culture used this framework to promote Lithuanian ethnographic traditions while downplaying their Christian elements.

These ideas were further expressed in practice, particularly through the Ramuva folklore movement, which emerged in Lithuania in the late 1970s and 1980s. Ainė Ramonaitė and Rytė Kukulskytė examined this ethnocultural movement in Soviet Lithuania, emphasising its connections with paganism and the Native Faith (Ramonaitė 2014).

The Romuva community, which split from Ramuva and was formally registered as a religious organisation in 1992, further emphasised pagan elements in Lithuanian annual celebrations. The established community developed through the formation of subdivisions between followers of the Lithuanian Native faith. Unaffiliated groups and individual followers of the Lithuanian Native Faith also remain active in interpreting the tradition. Scholars like Dalia Senvaitytė (2018) and Eglė Aleknaitė (2018), among others, have investigated this community.

Adherents to the Native Faith adapted older ethnographic traditions to the contemporary context, interpreting them in ways that emphasised presumed archaic ritualism. While elements from diverse ethnographic sources were integrated into these celebrations, they were often creatively reimagined, interpreted, and adapted. As a result, Lithuanian annual holidays celebrated in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were modified and entirely new ones created.

Organisers' perspectives on the role of tradition and ritual in these festivities vary: some point to the importance of gathering information from multiple sources, while others rely heavily on intuition. Regardless of the approach, celebrating the annual feasts remains the most significant religious activity for adherents of the Lithuanian Native Faith, fostering unity among its followers.

The socio-cultural context that contributed to the establishment and spread of modern holiday models in Lithuania has been analysed by Senvaitytė (2013, 2014), Arūnas Vaicekauskas (2009), Žilvytis Šaknys (2014), and others. Researchers have also examined the influence of folk movements and Native Faith ideologies on creating specific customs for the annual celebrations. For example, Saulė Matulevičienė (2007) traced the development and organisation of the first pagan festival, Rasos, in Kernavė; Gintarė Dusevičiūtė (2015) analysed the peculiarities of the Jorė calendar festival among Lithuanian Native Faith practitioners; and Gita Vilčiauskienė (2022) studied the formation and evolution of the Day of Baltic Unity at the beginning of the 21st century, noting its connection to pagan equinox celebrations.

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the annual holidays introduced or modified by adherents of the Native Faith in Lithuania. Although Native Faith followers celebrate holidays such as Easter, Christmas, Shrovetide, St. John's Day, St. George's Day, and All Souls' Day – festivals deeply rooted in Lithuanian ethnographic tradition – they reject Christian church practices and rituals. The primary focus of this study, however, is on celebrations absent in previous Lithuanian ethnographic tradition, with particular attention to the rituals of the autumn and spring equinoxes. The paper also evaluates the dissemination of these newly created holiday or holidays reinterpreted into mainstream society beyond contemporary pagan communities.

It is important to note that in this article, the terms paganism, modern paganism, and contemporary paganism are used synonymously, without evaluating the meaning or in what sense they are 'correct/incorrect', 'true/untrue'. Contemporary paganism serves as an umbrella term for modern religious movements, particularly those claiming continuity with pre-modern European pagan practices. The term modern paganism follows Michael Strmiska's usage in *Modern Paganism in World Culture* (2005). The emic terms Native Faith and followers of and believers in Native Faith are employed when discussing Lithuanian contemporary paganism.

The study is based on an analysis of online materials provided by the organisers of annual celebrations and supported by ethnographic research conducted by the author between 2015 and 2025. This fieldwork involved the observation of discussed celebrations, participant observation, and formal and informal conversations with organisers. The theoretical foundation of this paper draws

on Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's concept of the 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm 1992).

## Rasos

The Rasos (literally 'dew') festival is one of Lithuania's most significant celebrations for followers of the Lithuanian Native Faith. The festival aligns with St. John's Day, which has deep roots in Lithuanian ethnographic tradition.

Romuva members often associate their community's beginnings with the first celebration of this holiday, organised in 1967 in Kernavė, the historical capital of Lithuania, and based on interpretations of ancient Lithuanian traditions.

Researchers have repeatedly examined the distinctive features and transformations of this festival, including works by Matulevičienė, Vaicekauskas, Aleknaitė, Rasa Paukštytė-Šaknienė, and others. Matulevičienė analysed the development and organisation of the first Rasos festival in Kernavė, describing the rituals performed and their meanings for both organisers and participants (Matulevičienė 2007). When discussing St. John's Day traditions across different historical periods, Vaicekauskas used four categories to analyse the feast: 1) peasant traditions, 2) the early twentieth-century public folklore tradition, 3) modern pagan traditions, and 4) modern traditions that incorporate earlier customs with the needs of contemporary consumer society (Vaicekauskas 2009). Aleknaitė differentiated folkloric, local, religious, commercial, and family-oriented practices of the St. John's/Rasos holiday, emphasising differences in their structure, celebratory character, interpretation, and symbolic meaning (Aleknaitė 2014). Paukštytė-Šaknienė examined the festival in relation to Lithuania's political position during various periods: the National Revival (late nineteenth century), the interwar period (1918–1940), Soviet Lithuania (1940–1941; 1944–1989), and contemporary independent Lithuania. Her study highlights the festival's political implications and its instrumental role in diverse undertakings, ranging from national rejuvenation and independence movements to resistance against Christianity, the institutionalisation of a new pagan faith, and the creation of an ethnic cultural sphere for emigrants (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2016).

Some traditional ethnographic elements of St. John's Day were incorporated into Rasos. The search for an alternative name for the feast that would not

be associated with the Christian name for the holiday drew attention to two twentieth-century sources, Teodoras Narbutas (1992) and Liudvikas Adomas Jucevičius (1959), both of which used the term Rasos in connection with midsummer celebrations.

As several researchers have previously analysed the transformation of the feast, its peculiarities will not be discussed here. However, it is worth mentioning that the festival's pagan elements are rooted in agrarian ethnographic tradition. Key elements of the festival include building bonfires on hills, gathering herbs, weaving wreaths from the gathered herbs, and searching for a fern flower. Recently added elements include access of participants to the festival site through a specially made symbolic gate, symbolic sacrifices to the gods at the beginning of the festival, and the ritual importance given to dancing around the fire and singing specific songs, among others.

As noted on the Romuva community's official website ([romuva.lt](http://romuva.lt)), the authentic customs of Rasos embody reverence for nature as the source of human physical and spiritual vitality and respect for ancestral traditions. The main customs of the Rasos festival are:

- gathering magical herbs,
- weaving and floating wreaths on a river,
- building bonfires,
- greeting the sun,
- washing with the morning dew,
- celebrating communality by honouring the powers of nature.

Today, the Rasos festival is celebrated across all Romuva communities, and by other Native Faith groups, and it has also gained popularity more broadly in Lithuania. One of the most significant celebrations is held in Verkiai Park, Vilnius, where participation is open to the public. The 2025 program (20 June) included:

- 19:00 – Kupoliovimas, wreath weaving, herb market,
- 19:30 – Ritual circles at the entrance gates,
- 19:45 – Ritual circles, fortune telling,
- 20:30 – Fire rites, singing sutartinės,
- 21:00 – Greeting the setting sun

21:40 – Lighting the bonfire, dancing, singing,

23:30 – Torchlight procession, wreath floating on the river.

Until dawn – searching for a fern blossom, bathing in the morning dew, greeting the morning sun.

Another major Rasos celebration is held annually in Kernavė, where pagan elements play a prominent role in a broader, publicly oriented event. The 2025 program (23 June) was scheduled as follows:

12:00 – Craft fair featuring artisans and culinary heritage,

17:00 – Kupoliavimas with a herbalist in Pajauta Valley (herb gathering, wreath weaving, tea),

20:00 – Ceremonial gate at the foot of Castle Hill,

20:20 – Ceremonial circles, games, folklore performances on Castle Hill,

21:40 – Sunset ritual,

22:20 – Lighting the altar at the foot of Aukuras Hill,

23:00 – Lighting the Great Bonfire and hilltop beacons,

23:20 – Night dancing on Castle Hill,

24:00 – Wreath floating on the Neris River,

03:00 – Bonfire jumping,

04:30 – Greeting the sunrise and washing *with dew on Mindaugas' Throne Hill and in Pajauta Valley*.

It should be emphasised, however, that these public festivals are primarily organised for broader society rather than being confined to closed circles of Native Faith followers. Celebrations conducted within the Native Faith community are not widely publicly advertised and are instead often observed privately in smaller, like-minded groups.



Figure 1. Rasos celebration on Altoniškių hill (Kaunas district) in 2018. Photo by Virgilijus Avižonis.

In contrast to the more intimate celebrations held within Native Faith communities, modern pagan customs have also been widely adopted in the St. John's Day/Rasos celebrations with cultural institutions throughout Lithuania organising John's Day events (for example, in Jonava, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Šventoji, Kretinga, and other locations). These public festivals are oriented toward a broader audience with participants less directly engaged in the rituals, often acting as observers rather than active practitioners. In addition, such events frequently incorporate elements of popular culture, creating an atmosphere more strongly associated with entertainment than religious practice.

## Jorė

The celebration of *Jorė* originated in the 1970s and 1980s, when Native Faith enthusiasts in the Vilnius district began to ritualise it (Dusevičiūtė 2015). The festival acquired new significance in 1997, when it was organised in the village of Kulionys in Molėtai district, since when it has steadily gained in popularity across the country.

Like Rasos, *Jorė* coincides with a Christian feast as it is observed around April 23, the date of St. George's Day. Both festivals share ethnographic associations with the beginning of the agricultural year. The conceptual foundations of *Jorė* are linked to a pre-Christian spring festival. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-

century sources (for example, Matthaeus Praetorius) mention an annual festival known as Pergubrinės, celebrated in the Baltic region at the start of the farming season, which modern pagans regard as a historical antecedent of Jorė.

In its contemporary form, the festival was reframed as Jorė, symbolising the joy of awakening spring and the first sprouts of the season. The central rituals include reverence for ancestral spirits, the initiation of new community members, offerings to the deities Žemyna and Perkūnas, and sharing ceremonial meals. Music and song accompany these rites, reinforcing the spiritual connection between participants, ancestral spirits, and divine forces. The *vaidilos* (chief priests) recite prayers, which are repeated collectively by the community.

Over time, new elements have been integrated into the program alongside rituals that have become traditional. For example, the 2025 celebration in Kulionys featured the presentation of Algimantas Bučys' two-part work *Kings and Queens of Lithuania*, and a performance by the actor and bard Gediminas Storpirstis.

As with Rasos, the celebration of Jorė has spread beyond its original location and is now marked throughout Lithuania. Today, it is observed not only by modern pagan communities but also by cultural and education institutions, reaching broader audiences and contributing to the visibility of Native Faith traditions in contemporary society.



Figure 2. Jorė celebration on Pypliai hill (Kaunas district) in 2017. Photo by Dalia Senvaitytė.

Dusevičiūtė (2015) has commented on the festival's ongoing adaptations, questioning whether these modifications signify the true continuation of an ancient tradition or are instead constructions shaped by modern needs. Exam-



ining these dynamics provides insight into the broader discourse surrounding modern paganism in Lithuania, where the balance between historical fidelity and adaptive creativity remains a contentious aspect of community practice.

## **Spring and Autumn Equinoxes (Pavasario lygė and Rudens lygė)**

Unlike Rasos and Jorė, the spring and autumn equinoxes are not attested in Lithuanian ethnographic tradition or historical sources. Therefore, their contemporary observance within modern Lithuanian paganism must be explained through influences from abroad or individual initiatives.

As Ronald Hutton (2008) points out, the popularity of solar festivals is linked to the ideas of Edward Williams (nicknamed Iolo Morganwg) and their dissemination in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The context was the ‘discovery’ of the ancient Druids in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and the association of ancient megalithic monuments in Britain with them, which heated the romantic imagination of the time; the intense interest in the ancient teachings of the Druids; and the popularisation of the notion that somehow their knowledge might have survived the spread of Christianity. Nineteenth-century scholars such as Jacob Grimm (*Deutsche Mythologie*, 1835) and James George Frazer (*The Golden Bough*, 1890) further speculated on the calendar year of the ancient Europeans. Margaret Murray (1921) popularised the idea that equinoxes were once central pagan festivals whose traces survived in witchcraft traditions. Although M. Murray acknowledged that British witches did not celebrate the equinoxes, her writings shaped the symbolic calendar adopted by mid-twentieth-century British Neopaganism.

The Wicca movement, initiated by Gerald Gardner in the 1950s, systematised observation of solstices and equinoxes. With the collaboration of Doreen Valiente, Gardner emphasised the solar cycle as part of the Wiccan liturgy, as articulated in *Witchcraft Today* (1954) and the *Book of Shadows* (1957). Initially considered minor, the equinoxes became part of the ‘Wheel of the Year’ after 1958, when the eight major Wiccan festivals were canonised (Hutton 2008). Through oral transmission, ritual manuals, and publications, this model spread across Europe and the United States, merging with countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

In Lithuania, access to these Western Neopagan ideas was limited by the Soviet occupation. Nevertheless, the Soviet Society of Knowledge (est. 1947, Moscow) and its Lithuanian counterpart, Žinija (est. 1948), indirectly popularised astronomical knowledge and non-religious worldviews. Publications such as *Mokslas ir gyvenimas* (Science and Life) and lectures at the Vilnius Planetarium offered alternative cosmological frameworks that later dovetailed with pagan revivalism. Informal channels, including samizdat and contacts with Russian neopagan groups, also contributed to the circulation of related concepts.

The first efforts to commemorate the equinoxes as pagan festivals in Lithuania date to the early 1990s. These inaugural celebrations occurred within Vilnius Kalnai Park, organised by a small collective of like-minded pagans. The central ritual of these gatherings involved the ceremonial ignition of bonfires during the night. These early initiatives were notably influenced by the ideological leadership of Jonas Trinkūnas, a prominent figure within the Romuva community.

Trinkūnas later articulated his vision in *Baltic Faith* (2000), designating the spring and autumn equinoxes as *Pavasario lygė* and *Rudens lygė* (or *Daga*) and prescribing ritual practices such as extinguishing and relighting fire, honouring water, and employing symbols like *verba* branches and decorated Easter eggs (*margučiai*) as survivals of pre-Christian spring customs (Trinkūnas 2009).

Afterward, due to the active participants of those first celebrations, this tradition extended beyond the Vilnius area to other regions of Lithuania. The organisation of equinox celebrations quickly gained power in the Samogitian region. The observances took place at Vainagaii hill (initiated by Rimantas Braziulis and Valdas Rutkūnas), while in Šiauliai, Darius Ramančionis and the Aukuras public club organised gatherings at Salduvė and Bubiai hills from 1994.

While historical and ethnographic material do not provide explicit information about the observance of the equinoxes in Lithuania, organisers frequently drew inspiration from eclectic sources: Pretorius' seventeenth-century description of *Pergubrinės*, Aryan New Year rites, the international Earth Day movement, and others (Ramančionis, interview 2023). Despite limited historical evidence, autumn celebrations were also connected to ethnographic remnants of Sambariai, Ožinės, and Alutinis.

Later, a significant stimulus for establishing innovative equinox celebrations was provided by the Vilnius Ethnic Culture Centre (<https://www.etno.lt/>), formed under the guidance of the Vilnius City Council in 1992. Eglė Plioplienė,

the head of the centre at the time, designed cultural events in Vilnius rooted in Lithuanian ethnic traditions. She intended to reinvent 'traditional' celebrations and adapt them to the modern context of the city. According to Plioplienė (interview, 2023), a primary focus was the creation of new festivals aligned with the astronomical calendar, tailored to an urban environment, while simultaneously integrating mythological significance into these newly introduced observances. In developing these festivals, she consulted various sources, all emphasising the fundamental role of sacrifice to ancient gods in ancient celebrations. While the tradition was developing, the nature of these sacrifices evolved: symbolic offerings to ancient pagan gods replaced animal sacrifice. For example, straw figures were made during the autumn equinox, such as a symbolic straw goat that used instead of the animal offering. During the spring equinox of 1993, trees were venerated by 'offering' them candles and crafting fire patterns that symbolised the grass snake as a revered emblem of life. A ceremonial fire strip was ignited along the Neris River embankment in Vilnius.

The first autumn equinox celebration, also known as *Rudens Lygė*, was coordinated by the Vilnius Ethnic Culture Centre in 1992 on Tauras Hill in Vilnius. Subsequently, the spring equinox, also known as *Pavasario Lygė*, was commemorated in 1993 at Sereikiškės Park (Bernardinai Garden) in Vilnius.

The spring equinox celebrations held from 1993 to 2000, organised by the Vilnius Centre of Ethnic Culture, were also formally linked to Earth Day. Initiated by the United Nations in 1971 and officially recognised in Lithuania in 1992, Earth Day was promoted nationally through the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania. On this occasion, numerous organisations arranged festive performances, creative campaigns, park visits, forest management activities, and bird-nesting initiatives nationwide.

Following a break, spring equinox celebrations in Vilnius were revived in 2008 and have been held annually since then.

The celebration of the autumn equinox also gradually gained popularity. The transition from the period of light to darkness in autumn is marked by ceremonial fires and musical rites conducted along the banks of the Neris River in Vilnius.

During the 2000s, the festival evolved through the introduction of sculptures, each representing a distinct theme annually, for example, commemorating the anniversary of the Battle of Žalgiris (Battle of Grunwald) or honouring prominent figures in ethnic culture who passed away that year (for example,

A. Vyšniauskaitė, V. Toporov). A collaborative team of professional sculptors was commissioned to create straw and wood sculptures that embodied the essence of the autumnal equinox. Symbolic straw figures, depicting goats or other mythological beings, were set ablaze to mark this seasonal transition. Fireworks and musical performances accompanied the burning of these sculptures, forming the visual and auditory centrepiece of the ceremonial fire spectacle. Musical performances included folklore, folk rock, folk jazz, and jazz, often anchored by traditional Lithuanian *sutartinės* (interpreted as ancient ritual songs), providing a rich cultural foundation to the event. The celebration has consistently included symbolic offerings to the pagan gods and commemoration of the year's cyclical significance.

Subsequently, the autumn equinox celebrations in Vilnius began to coincide with the Capital Days festivities, further increasing their popularity. Since 2007, Ugnis ir kaukė (Fire and Mask) has organised the Fire Sculpture Mysteries.

Autumn equinox events have taken place at multiple locations in Vilnius, including Kalnai Park, Sereikiškės Park, and Lukiškės Square, while spring equinox celebrations have focused on the area between the National Museum and Cathedral Square.

In 2000, another significant alteration marked the celebration of the autumn equinox as it became interlinked with the observance of Baltic Unity Day, commemorating the 'Battle of the Sun' (an initiative introduced by the above-mentioned Aukuras club). On this day in 1236, the united Baltic tribes fought against the Livonian Order.

These celebrations are typically held at hillforts, hills, or *alkakalniai* (supposed ancient sacred hills), where bonfires are lit at 8 pm. Participants often follow the recommendations of the event's initiators: prior to lighting the bonfire, collective efforts are made to clean and prepare the surroundings, arrange the fire pit, and ready the site for the festivities. Discussions during these gatherings touch on the significance of Baltic unity, recount Baltic history, commemorate the autumn equinox, revive ancient customs, and perform pagan equinox rituals.

A digital map has been in development since 2014 to indicate the scheduled locations of these events. This initiative was spearheaded by Aukuras as they are dedicated to preserving natural and cultural heritage (<https://www.aukuras.lt>). The map is a valuable resource for planning, coordinating, and documenting these events, as illustrated in Figure 3.

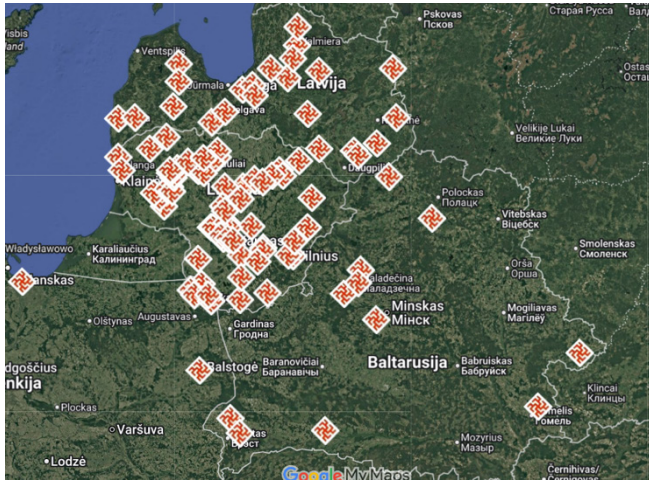


Figure 3. Sites of autumn equinox celebrations in 2025.

Photo from <https://www.aukuras.lt/sasauka-2025/>

Following the launch of the spring and autumn equinox festivities, articles promoting them highlighted their connection to ancient traditions (e.g., Klimka 2002).

Today, the festival is organised on various scales:

1. Public Celebrations. These are held in Vilnius and Kernavė (here they are organised by the Kernavė Branch of the Širvintos Culture Centre; the event takes place in the Kernavė State Cultural Reserve), and occasionally in other Lithuanian cities and locations organised by diverse cultural organisations. Such events are designed for large audiences and, sometimes, for urban settings, emphasising visually engaging elements.



Figure 4. Autumn equinox in Kernavė in 2023. Photo by Dalia Senvaitytė.

2. Gatherings organised by followers of Native Faith communities. These festivals, arranged by followers of Native Faith communities, often attract individuals interested in ancient pagan traditions. Rituals, in accordance with pagan traditions (for instance, an appeal to the ancient gods), are consistently performed. Participants actively organise these celebrations themselves, rather than serving solely as observers.

3. Community-specific events (organised by schools, cultural centres, and similar institutions). The customs observed in these community-oriented celebrations are strongly shaped by the unique characteristics of each community. Nevertheless, organisers frequently seek to incorporate or emulate the traditions practiced within Native Faith communities or larger public celebrations.

The evolution of equinox celebrations in Western Europe and Lithuania reveals a dynamic interplay between romanticised reconstructions of the past, scholarly interpretations, and contemporary cultural creativity. In Lithuania, the spread of equinox celebrations appeared through indirect cultural transmission from abroad. By the 1990s, inspired by Trinkūnas and the Romuva community, local activists began shaping distinctly Lithuanian expressions of

these festivals. Drawing on inspiration from historical sources, ethnographic customs, neighbouring traditions, and global influences such as Earth Day, these events developed into significant public urban rituals. While the historical record offers no direct evidence of pre-Christian Lithuanian equinox rites, these modern practices illustrate how communities – motivated by a desire for cultural continuity, identity, and a connection to nature – have created a living and evolving tradition.

## Other festivities

In addition to the festivals already discussed, modern pagans in Lithuania often celebrate other newly introduced festivals, which, in one way or another, they try to associate with the ancient pre-Christian Lithuanian or Baltic tradition. These include the Day of the Perkūnas, the Day of Gabija, the Day of Milda, the celebration of Eternal Fire, the Feast of the Sun, and the Day of the Krivis, among others.

**The Day of Perkūnas** (The Day of the Thunder God). Observed on 2 February, this day in ethnographic Lithuanian tradition coincides with Catholic customs known as *Grabnyčios* (Candlemas). For followers of the native faith, it is associated with Perkūnas, the most significant deity of pre-Christian Lithuanians and is linked to thunder and atmospheric phenomena. Certain priestesses within the Romuva community or other modern pagan groups perform fire rituals dedicated to Perkūnas. Participants prepare candles to invoke Perkūnas' blessings for protection against storms and misfortune, enhancing the spiritual connection between practitioners and their deity. Today, rituals and emphasis on festivals' pre-Christian roots occur across Lithuania. These festivals are organised not only by Native Faith followers but also by cultural and education institutions. For example, on Sunday, 2 February 2025, at 4 pm, a ceremony was held at the Lithuanian National Centre of Culture in Vilnius.

**The Day of Gabija.** Celebrated on 5 February, this day corresponds in the ethnographic tradition to the Catholic St. Agatha's Day. In modern pagan practice, it honours Gabija, an ancient Lithuanian deity and protector of the fireplace and home. Rituals on this day focus primarily on fire, highlighting its purifying qualities and vital role in Native Faith worship.



**The Celebration of the Eternal Fire:** Since 2017, the Šatrijos Romuva community has organised the Feast of the Eternal Fire on the first Saturday of July atop Šatrija Hill in Telšiai district. This festival references the kindling of the eternal fire, an important pre-Christian ritual practice in Lithuania. The tradition was reinstituted in 1994 under the initiative of the community's early leader, Adolfas Gedvilas (1935–2017). Fires from various locations are brought together on Šatrija Hill, symbolising the unity of Native Faith practitioners. Participants engage in a circular procession after paying homage to the ancient gods and ancestors.

**The Day of Milda:** First organised by Romuva adherents around 2006 in Dvarčiškiai village, Švenčionys district, this festival honours Milda, a legendary Lithuanian goddess of love, known primarily from a single 19th-century reference by the romantic historian T. Narbutas (1992). Celebrated on 13 May (or a nearby date), the festival incorporates elements of the traditional Lithuanian May Days (*gegužinės*), when young people historically organised amusements and festivities in May. Over time, Milda Day has spread to other regions, including Kelmė, Varėna, Panevėžys, Kaunas, and other localities. The festival has gradually gained popularity beyond pagan communities, reflecting its broader cultural recognition and participation.



Figure 5. Milda day on Veršvai hill in Kaunas, 2019. Photo by Dalia Senvaitytė.



**The Feast of the Sun:** This festival centres on the veneration of the sun and is celebrated in July. The exact date of its inception is uncertain, but it is estimated to have emerged around 2020. The festival was first organised by the *Saulės vartų Romuva* (Sun Gates Romuva) community in Dovainonys, Kaišiadorys district. Subsequently, similar events have been held by modern pagan communities in other districts of Lithuania, including Trakai, Šakiai, and Prienai. Notably, the festival reflects influences from other contemporary alternative spiritual practices, incorporating activities such as yoga, rebreathing techniques, and ecological teachings. These elements add a multifaceted dimension to the celebration. However, the Feast of the Sun remains less widely recognised and attended than other modern pagan festivals in Lithuania.

**The Day of the Krivis:** In 2010, adherents of the Romuva community inaugurated a commemorative event known as the Day of the Krivis to honour the consecration of their paramount leader, Krivis Jonas Trinkūnas. This gathering takes place in Vilnius, specifically at Gediminas Tomb Hill, the site where Trinkūnas assumed the role of the community's principal priest, or Krivis. The ceremony begins with the symbolic ignition of a ceremonial fire.

Although these festivals lack direct evidence of continuous practice from the pre-Christian period, they exemplify how modern Lithuanian paganism negotiates the interplay between nostalgic historical imagination, cultural heritage, and contemporary community identity.

## Generalisation

Despite the enduring observance of traditional Lithuanian customs related to Christmas Eve, Easter celebrations, *Užgavėnės* (the day before Ash Wednesday), and the visitation of graves on All Saints' and All Souls' Days, contemporary annual holidays in Lithuania display profound influences from modern pagan practices. While certain traditions began to gain prominence during the 1990s, others have emerged since the turn of the millennium and continue to thrive.

The resurgence of pagan festivals and traditions in Lithuania reflects the contemporary pagan community's aspiration to reclaim and safeguard pre-Christian cultural heritage, which they consider authentic Lithuanian 'ethnocultural heritage'. Modern Lithuanian pagans reconstruct traditional folk motifs – such as fire, bonfires, wreaths, folk songs – into newly devised ritual

calendars. The rites performed by Romuva and the connected communities' rites fit Hobsbawm's concept of 'invented traditions': scripted practices loosely anchored in fragmentary lore, designed to serve contemporary identity needs. This blending of folk imagery with creative innovation reflects ritual adaptation: existing songs and customs are repurposed, and calendars retooled, to produce a seemingly continuous tradition. Participants evoke a nostalgically romanticised pre-Christian pagan past, despite the centuries-long disruption caused by Christianisation.

The Lithuanian case of annual celebrations illustrates how cultural revival and creative invention go hand in hand. Native Faith festivals are deliberately designed rituals – part myth, part scholarship, part activism – that connect communities to an idealised ancient pagan past. They demonstrate how contemporary pagans reinterpret history, selectively preserving pagan survivals, retelling legends, and even inventing deities and rituals to address present cultural and spiritual needs.

Due to the efforts of modern pagans across Lithuania and their engagement with diverse cultural, educational, and institutional settings, newly constructed traditions have spread nationwide. The active involvement of cultural and education institutions, such as the Vilnius Ethnic Culture Centre and others, has been instrumental in promoting pagan cultural values and facilitating the integration of pagan religious beliefs into the broader society.

Various celebratory events related to modern paganism now occur at multiple scales, ranging from large urban festivals to smaller gatherings hosted by cultural and education institutions and contemporary pagan communities or individuals.

The development and spread of these holiday traditions can be summarised schematically (Figure 6):



Figure 6. Scheme of the spread of modern pagan holidays.

The most popular festivities, shaped or invented by followers of the Lithuanian Native Faith, today are Rasos, Jorė, and the spring and autumn equinoxes. These

festivals adapt to changing societal needs and are shaped by the creativity of the organisers, the location, the audience, and the size of the event.

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