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THE IMAGE OF SOULS CLIMBING A MOUNTAIN
IN THE *BYCHOWIEC CHRONICLE*


AN ECHO OF PAGAN CUSTOMS IN RENAISSANCE LITERATURE?

Abstract

Historiography has thus far focused primarily on the pagan rituals and burial customs of Lithuanians (Balts). However, the image of souls climbing a mountain, depicted in the *Bychowiec Chronicle* (likely from the first half of the sixteenth century), has not received specific attention. Traditionally, this image has been presented in the historiography as a pagan rite, associated with pre-Christian burial customs of the Balts. To determine whether this image genuinely is of pagan origin, it is necessary to begin the research with the earliest written sources describing funeral customs of the Balts from the tenth to fifteenth centuries. This article examines how the burial customs of Lithuanians and other Balts, as recorded in medieval sources, correlate with the information provided by the *Bychowiec Chronicle*. It becomes clear that the motif of souls climbing a mountain does not appear in any earlier written sources. This absence suggests that the image in the *Bychowiec Chronicle* may have originated from other influences, either from ancient Indo-European traditions or from the Christian Scripture, with the latter being the more likely source.

Keywords: *Bychowiec Chronicle*, soul, eschatology, paganism, Lithuanians, Balts, funeral rites, medieval sources

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In memoriam Dr Norbert Mika

INTRODUCTION: FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

The image of souls climbing a mountain first appears in the *Broad Redaction of Lithuanian Annals* (commonly known as the *Bychowiec Chronicle*)¹. This chronicle, believed to have been composed either in the late fifteenth century or in the first half of the sixteenth century², reflects the political nation's preferences regarding the origins of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania³. It emphasises the genealogy, military exploits, and political activities of Lithuanian nobles (particularly the Goštautai/Gasztołd family and the dukes of Alšėnai/Holszany)⁴. The theory of Lithuanian descent from the Romans, which

¹ *Хроника Быховца*, [in:] *Полное Собрание Русских Летописей* (further cit. ПСРЛ), т. 32: *Хроники Литовская и Жмойтская, и Быховца*, ред. Николай Н. Улащик, Москва 1975 [*Khronika Bykhovtsa*, [in:] *Polnoye Sobraniye Russkikh Letopisey*, t. 32: *Khroniki Litovskaya i Zhmojtskaya, i Bykhovtsa*, red. Nikolay N. ULASHCHIK, Moskva 1975] [further cit. *Хроника Быховца*], p. 134; cf. *Хроника Быховца* [*Khronika Bykhovtsa*], [in:] *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai* (further cit. BRMŠ), t. 2, sud. Norbertas VĖLIUS, Vilnius 2001, pp. 373–374. For other sources of this image, see *Летопись Археологического общества* [*Letopis' Arkeologicheskogo obshchestva*], [in:] ПСРЛ, т. 35: *Летописи Белорусско-Литовские*, ред. Николай Н. Улащик, Москва 1980 [*Letopisi Belorussko-Litovskiye*, red. Nikolay N. ULASHCHIK, Moskva 1980], pp. 92–93; *Летопись Красинского* [*Letopis' Krasinskogo*], [in:] *ibid.*, pp. 131–132; *Летопись Рачинского* [*Letopis' Rachinskogo*], [in:] *ibid.*, col. 149; *Ольшевская летопись* [*Ol'shevskaya letopis'*], [in:] *ibid.*, p. 177; *Румянецовская летопись* [*Rumyantsevsкая letopis'*], [in:] *ibid.*, p. 197; *Евреиновская летопись* [*Yevreinovskaya letopis'*], [in:] *ibid.*, p. 218. For the oldest edition of the *Bychowiec Chronicle*, see *Pomniki do dziejów litewskich*, wyd. Teodor NARBUTT, Wilno 1846. The text published later in the ПСРЛ series was based on this edition.

² For more about the chronicle's dating, see Mečislovas JUČAS, *Lietuvos metraščiai ir kronikos*, Vilnius 2002, pp. 86–96; cf. Jerzy OCHMAŃSKI, *Nad Kroniką Bychowca*, *Studia Zródłoznawcze*, t. 12: 1967, pp. 155–163. Stephen C. Rowell argued that the idea of Roman origin of Lithuanian rulers could have emerged during the time of Casimir IV Jagiellon around 1450–1480, see Stephen C. ROWELL, *Amžinos pretenzijos, arba kaip turime skaityti elitinę literatūrą*, [in:] *Seminariai. Straipsnių rinkinys*, red. Alvydas JOKUBAITIS, Antanas KULAKAUSKAS, Vilnius 1998, p. 24.

³ Jerzy SUCHOCKI, *Geneza litewskiej legendy etnogenetycznej. Aspekty polityczne i narodowe*, *Zapiski Historyczne*, t. 52: 1987, z. 1, pp. 27–67; Mečislovas JUČAS, *Legenda apie lietuvių kilmę iš romėnų*, [in:] *idem, Lietuvos ir Lenkijos unija (XIV a. vid. – XIX a. pr.)*, Vilnius 2000, pp. 222–241; Rimvydas PETRAUSKAS, *Socialiniai ir istoriografiniai lietuvių kilmės iš romėnų teorijos aspektai*, [in:] *Literatūros istorija ir jos kūrėjai*, sud. Sigitas NARBUTAS (Senoji Lietuvos literatūra, kng. 17), Vilnius 2004, pp. 270–285.

⁴ Кестутис ГУДМАНТАС, *Легендарные истоки Литвы по версиям литовских летописей*, [in:] *Предания и мифы о происхождении власти эпохи Средневековья и раннего Нового времени*, Москва 2010 [Kestutis GUDMANTAS, *Legendarnyye istoki Litvy po versiyam litovskikh letopisey*, [in:] *Predaniya i mify o proiskhozhdenii vlasti epokhi Srednevekov'ya i rannego Novogo*

includes the motif of souls climbing a mountain, was not a unique creation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania intellectual activity. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as Renaissance and humanist ideas spread across Christian Europe, it was not only Lithuanian rulers and nobles but also monarchs from other lands that traced their lineage back to ancient Romans. For example, the Habsburgs claimed descent from ancient Roman senators of Colonna (*de Columpna*)⁵, a lineage also mentioned in the legendary *Bychowiec Chronicle*. This suggests that the legend of Roman descent in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania should be viewed as part of the broader reception of Latin culture. While there remains an ongoing debate in historiography about possible Roman sources for the legend of Lithuanian origin, in some cases it is possible to identify the origins of specific legendary elements⁶. It is widely accepted that the legend itself is a literary construct rather than a folkloric one, though certain fragments of oral tradition may be present in the *Bychowiec Chronicle* (for example – the legend of the founding of Vilnius – Gediminas' dream)⁷. This raises a natural question: could the image of souls climbing a mountain also be a fragment of oral tradition, later inserted into the Lithuanian narrative of Roman origin?

vremeni, Moskva 2010], pp. 46–50; idem, *Legendinė Lietuvos pradžia. Lietuvos metraščių versijos*, [in:] *Saeculo primo. Romos imperijos pasaulis peržengus „naujosios eros“ slenkstį*, sud. Darius ALEKNA (Christiana Tempora, t. 3), Vilnius 2008, pp. 373–396; idem, *Lietuvių kilmės iš romėnų teorijos genėzė ir ankstyvosios Lietuvos vardo etimologijos*, [in:] *Literatūros istorija ir jos kūrėjai*, sud. Sigita NARBUTAS (Senoji Lietuvos literatūra, kng. 17), Vilnius 2004, pp. 245–269. For a review of older relevant scholarly publications, see Николай Н. УЛАШЧИК, *Введение и изучение белорусско-литовского летописания*, Москва 1985 [Nikolay N. ULASHCHNIK, *Vvedeniye i izucheniye belorussko-litovskogo letopisaniya*, Moskva 1985], pp. 130–169.

⁵ For more information on the subject, see Alphons LHOTSKY, *Apis Colonna. Fabeln und Theorien über die Abkunft der Habsburger*, [in:] idem, *Aufsätze und Vorträge*, Bd. 2: *Das Haus Habsburg*, Wien 1971, pp. 7–102.

⁶ Cf. Kęstutis GUDMANTAS, *Hipotetinė „Aleksandro istorija“ ir kai kurie ginčytini Bychoveco kronikos genėzės klausimai*, [in:] *Lietuvos didysis kunigaikštis Aleksandras ir jo epocha*, sud. Daiva STERONAVIČIENĖ, Vilnius 2007, pp. 199–209; Катерина КИРИЧЕНКО, *Галицько-Волинський літопис і створення легендарної частини 2-го зводу літописів ВКЛ*, Український історичний журнал, 2012, № 6 [Катерина КУРЧЕНКО, *Halyts'ko-Volyns'kyu litopys i stvorennya lehendarnoyi chastyny 2-ho zvodu litopysiv VKL*, Ukrainys'kyu istorychnyy zhurnal, 2012, no. 6], pp. 111–129; eadem, *Методи роботи укладачів легендарної частини літописів Великого князівства Литовського: на прикладі запозичень із тексту Іпатіївського літопису*, Український історичний журнал, 2014, № 2 [Metody roboty ukkladachiv legendarnoyi chastyny litopysiv Velykoho knyazivstva Lytovs'koho: na prykladi zapozychen' iz tekstu Ipatiyivs'koho litopysu, Ukrainys'kyu istorychnyy zhurnal, 2014, no. 2], pp. 177–203.

⁷ Sigita NARBUTAS, *Lietuvių kilmės iš romėnų legenda kultūrinės integracijos šviesoje*, [in:] *Literatūros istorija ir jos kūrėjai*, sud. idem (Senoji Lietuvos literatūra, kng. 17), Vilnius 2004, p. 287; Kęstutis GUDMANTAS, *Valdovo ir dinastijos įvaizdžiai vėlyvuosiuose metraščiuose*, Acta Academiae Artium Vilmensis, vol. 65–66: 2012, p. 56.

The image of the soul climbing a mountain is embedded in the legendary account of Lithuanian rulers, which narrates how the legendary Lithuanian ruler Šventaragis sanctioned the custom of cremating the deceased at the confluence of the Neris (Vilija) and Vilnia (Vilnelė) rivers, i.e. in the place where the capital of Lithuania was built, initially as a pagan site, and later as a Christian one: 'And when the body of a Lithuanian duke or nobleman was burned, the claws of a lynx or bear were placed beside him. They [Lithuanians – M.Š.] believed in the approach of the Last Day and envisioned the coming of God, who, seated on a high mountain, would judge the living and the dead. They thought that climbing this mountain without the claws of a lynx or bear would be difficult. For this reason, the claws were placed beside them [the deceased – M.Š.], enabling them, with their help, to climb that mountain and stand before God's Judgment. Even though they were pagans, they imagined God in this way and believed in one God, the coming of the Last Judgment, the resurrection of the dead, and that this God would come to judge the living and the dead'⁸.

The interpretation of this vision, which has persisted to the present day, was originally focused not on the genesis of the Christian image but rather on its pre-Christian (or even Indo-European) roots. Keeping in mind the words 'even though they were pagans' and the mention of lynx and bear claws, which the souls of the dead were believed to use in order to climb a mountain, some researchers were reminded of shamanistic communication with gods. Mircea Eliade, for instance, provided examples of shamans climbing a tree (pillar) or a mountain to meet the gods⁹. However, a shaman climbing a mountain or

⁸ 'Y koli ktoroho kniazia litovskoho abo pana sozżeno tiło, tohdy pry nich kładywali nohty rysij abo medweżyi dla toho, iż wiru tuiu mili, iż sudny deń mił byty, y tak znamenali sobi, iż by boh mił pryty y sedyty na hory vysokoy y sudyty żywych y mertwych, na ktoruii ż horu trudno budet wzoyty bez tych nohtey rysich abo medweżych, y dla toho tyie nohty podle nich kładywali, na kotorych mili na tuii horu lesty, y na sud do boha yty. A tak aczkolwiek pohany byli, a wždy potom sobi znamenali y w biha odnoho wiryli, iż sudny deń miel byty, y wiryli w z mertwych wstanie y odnoho boha, kotory sudył żywych y mertwych'; *Хроника Быховца*, p. 134. Cf. Marcin MURINIUS, *Kronika mistrzów pruskich*, red. Zbigniew Nowak, Olsztyn 1989, cap. VI, p. 19: 'Rysie też albo niedźwiedzie paznokcie palono z umarłymi, bo wierzyli, iż na górę wielką a przykrą ku sądnemu dniowi wstępować mieli, który jakiś bóg wszechmocniejszy nad wszystkim światem czynić miał, a przeto iżby tym snadniej i bezpieczniej tam wleźć mogli, paznokciami rysimi myśleli sobie pomagać. It is clear that Marcin Murinius, writing in the sixteenth century, took this information from the *Bychowiec Chronicle* or, more likely, from Maciej Strykowski's chronicle (also from the sixteenth century), although the latter spoke about Prussian superstitions. For more, see Maciej STRYKOWSKI, *Kronika polska, litewska, żmódzka i wszystkiej Rusi*, t. 1, Warszawa 1846, pp. 308–309.

⁹ Mircea ELIADE, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Princeton 2020, pp. 170, 263–269, 276; cf. Piotr M. A. CYWIŃSKI, *Ślady szamanizmu w religijności wczesnośredniowiecznych Prusów*, *Przegląd Historyczny*, t. 92: 2001, z. 1, pp. 85–92.

a tree (column) in a state of ecstasy is not the same as a soul climbing to reach the afterlife. The shaman would climb to seek healing or spiritual experiences and wisdom, and would return to the earthly world afterwards. A different issue arises when we encounter the image of a mountain as the centre of the world. But according to Eliade, it is not souls but shamans and cultural heroes who can reach the centre of the world, where they meet the gods¹⁰. Other scholars have discussed the Indo-European concept of the afterlife, where the soul travels to a mountain and climbs it with the aid of lynx or bear claws, eventually facing God at the mountain's peak¹¹. In the early nineteenth century, this kind of interpretation gained prominence through Teodor Narbutt, one of the publishers of the *Bychowiec Chronicle*. In the first volume of the *History of the Lithuanian Nation*, issued in 1835, Narbutt claimed that he had heard an ancient story in Žemaitija (a historical part of Lithuania) about throwing wild animal claws into funeral pyres and the journey of the soul to a high mountain called Anafiel: "There were certain visions about the afterlife, imagining it as a place located on an extremely high mountain, a steep and treacherous rock called Anafiel (Anapilis), which souls had to climb. In order to climb the mountain more quickly, one needed claws as strong as those of a beast, along with weapons, horses and servants. The richer the person was, the more difficult it was for them to climb, as earthly riches weighed them down. The poor, light as a feather, could easily reach the top of the mountain, provided that they had not offended God while alive. A rich sinner would be dragged down from the mountain by the dragon Wizun, who lived at the foot of the mountain, and would be swept away by furious winds, much like the poor sinner. Atop the mountain, God – embodying pure justice – would judge the dead according to their deeds on the Earth. In this court, everyone would either be rewarded or condemned"¹².

¹⁰ M. ELIADE, op.cit., p. 269.

¹¹ Владимир Н. ТОПОРОВ, *Vilnius, Wilno, Вильна: Город и миф*, [in:] *Балто-славянские этноязыковые контакты*, Москва 1980 [Vladimir N. TOPOROV, *Vilnius, Wilno, Vil'na: Gorod i mif*, [in:] *Balto-slavyanskiye etnoyazykovyye kontakty*, Moskva 1980], pp. 31–33; idem, *Gora*, [in:] *Мифы народов мира*, т. 1, Москва 1981 [*Gora*, [in:] *Mify narodov mira*, t. 1, Moskva 1981], pp. 311–315; Gintaras BERESNEVIČIUS, *Baltų religinės reformos*, Vilnius 1995, pp. 161, 163, 165–167; Ия В. ГОРДИЕНКО-МИТРОФАНОВА, Василий С. АКСЕНОВ, *Язычество восточных славян (VIII–X вв. н.э.)*, Киев 2003 [Iya V. GORDIYENKO-MITROFANOVA, Vasilij S. AKSENOV, *Yazychestvo vostochnykh slavyan (VIII–X vv. n.e.)*, Kiyev 2003], p. 165.

¹² "Podania o miejscu pobytu po śmierci takie były. Jest góra wielce wysoka, stroma, niedostępna skała, nazywająca Anafielas, na którą cienie wdzierać się muszą. Dla tego paznogie długie, pazury zwierząt, oręż, konie, sługi, itd. potrzebne są dla przedszego na nią dostania się. Im zaś człowiek był bogatszym, tem trudniejszy mu przystęp: gdyż mienia ziemskie ciężą na duszy, ubogi, lekki, jak piórko, może się wdrzeć na górę, kiedy bogów nie obrażał w życiu. Inaczej grzesznego bogacza smok Wizunas, pod górą mieszkający, obedrze i równie, jak ubogiego

While comparing ‘the legend’ presented by Narbutt to the quoted passage from the *Bychowiec Chronicle*, it is evident that Narbutt drew from this particular chronicle, while adding elements of his own. Notably, the name of the mountain, Anafiel, was introduced by Narbutt, and its roots can be traced to the chronicle *Gesta Danorum* (or its later versions) by Saxo Grammaticus, a Danish chronicler who lived in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries¹³. The dragon Wizun, reminiscent of the apocalyptic Christian Beast, was also Narbutt’s addition. By linking the image of souls climbing the mountain to the motif of a hero climbing a glass or iron mountain present in miraculous tales from Slavic culture, the theory of a pagan origin for the image of souls climbing the mountain was further developed¹⁴. As a result, the version from the *Bychowiec Chronicle*, presented by Narbutt was accepted by twentieth-century researchers as an authentic source of folklore. According to Vladimir Toporov, ancient Slavs envisioned the Other World and the chief god of thunder as being beyond the mountains¹⁵. Due to the existence of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Slavic and Lithuanian folklore (the latter being sparse though) depicting souls climbing mountains¹⁶, the researchers expressed the *belief* that the *Bychowiec Chronicle* had preserved the ancient image (or its fragments) of the afterlife world, reminiscent of Indo-European traditions. The authenticity of this image was allegedly corroborated by the Lithuanian and Slavic (particularly

grzesznika, złe wiatry uniosą. Istota bożka, mieszkająca na szczycie tej góry, która pełną jest sprawiedliwości, sędzi umarłych z ich postępków za życia. Każdy według jej sądu odbiera nagrodę lub karę wieczną; Teodor NARBUTT, *Dzieje starożytne narodu litewskiego*, t. 1: *Mitologia litewska*, Wilno 1835, pp. 384–385.

¹³ For Latin and English versions, see SAXO GRAMMATICUS, *Gesta Danorum / The History of the Danes*, vol. 1, ed. Karsten FRIIS-JENSEN, trans. Peter FISHER, Oxford 2015, lib. VI, cap. V, §14, pp. 387–389; lib. VIII, cap. VIII, §9, pp. 568–570. For the Polish translation, see SAXO GRAMMATICUS, *Gesta Danorum / Dzieje Duńczyków*, tł. Henryk PIETRUSZCZAK, Warszawa 2018, lib. VI, cap. V, §14, p. 299; lib. VIII, cap. VIII, §9, p. 431.

¹⁴ Cf. Józef JAROSZEWICZ, *Obraz Litwy pod względem jej cywilizacji, od czasów najdawniejszych do końca wieku XVIII.*, cz. 1: *Litwa pogańska*, Wilno 1844, §103, here the author repeats the information from Narbutt. Cf. Александр Н. АФАНАСЬЕВ, *Поэтические воззрения славян на природу. Опыт сравнительного изучения славянских преданий и верований, связи мифическими сказаниями других родственных народов*, т. 1, Москва 1995 [Aleksandr N. AFANAS'YEV, *Poeticheskiye vozzreniya slavyan na prirodu. Opyt sravnitel'nogo izucheniya slavyanskikh predaniy i verovaniy, v svyazi s mificheskimi skazaniami drugih rodstvennykh narodov*, т. 1, Moskva 1995], p. 62; *Труды Первого Археологического съезда в Москве 1869*, изд. Алексей С. УВАРОВ, Москва 1871 [*Trudy Pervogo Arkheologicheskogo syezda v Moskve 1869*, изд. Aleksey S. UVAROV, Moskva 1871], p. 701.

¹⁵ Cf. В. ТОПОРОВ, *Vilnius, Wilno, Вильна*, p. 32, footnote 82; Елена Е. ЛЕВКИЕВСКАЯ, *Мифы русского народа*, Москва 2000 [Yelena Ye. LEVKIYEVSKAYA, *Mify russkogo naroda*, Moskva 2000], col. 190–191; А. Н. АФАНАСЬЕВ, *op.cit.*, pp. 62–67.

¹⁶ Cf. Henryk BIEGELEISEN, *U kolebki, przed oltarzem, nad mogiłą*, Lwów 1929, pp. 33–34.

Russian and Belarussian) folklore of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries¹⁷. According to folklore and written sources, the Slavic god Perun (and his Lithuanian counterpart – Perkūnas) is associated with a mountain¹⁸. As Norbertas Vėlius noted, ‘the only doubtful aspect in the *Lithuanian Annals* is the claim that Lithuanians believed in the coming of God’s Last Judgment and the resurrection of the dead. This statement most likely emerged under the influence of Christianity. However, the mention of lynx or bear claws in the context of being burned together with the duke (so that he could more easily climb the mountain where the Last Judgment would take place) was mythologically imbued with meaning¹⁹. Some researchers, when describing the existing image of the afterlife in Slavic mythology related to lynx and bear claws, base their ideas on an analogy to the vision of souls climbing a mountain, as mentioned in the *Bychowiec Chronicle* and its later reconstructions (versions)²⁰.

However, the connection between the folklore recorded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the written sources and historiography of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which repeated the message of the *Bychowiec Chronicle*, remains unclear. Narbut’s example of Anafiel mountain suggests that the nineteenth- and twentieth-century folklore may have been influenced by written accounts about souls climbing a mountain or that researchers, drawing from old written sources, described ‘heard’ legends that later became widely known²¹. Since folkloric information cannot be precisely dated, it is difficult to trace their origins or transformations over time, which complicates the task of

¹⁷ E. E. ЛЕВКИЕВСКАЯ, op.cit., pp. 190–191.

¹⁸ Aleksander GIEYSZTOR, *Mitologia Słowian*, wstęp Karol MODZELEWSKI, posłowie Leszek P. ŚLUCPECKI, opr. Aneta PIENIĄDZ, Warszawa 2006, p. 91; Nijolė LAURINKIENĖ, *Senovės lietuvių dievas Perkūnas kalboje, tautosakoje, istoriniuose šaltiniuose*, Vilnius 1996, pp. 91, 93–95. Cf. Gintaras BERESNEVIČIUS, *Dausos. Pomirtinio gyvenimo samprata senojoje lietuvių pasaulėžiūroje*, Vilnius 1990, p. 134: ‘Thus, the tradition of imagining a journey through the afterlife as climbing a mountain, evident in folklore, seems to have been ancient and stable’ [‘Tad tradicija, vaizduojanti pomirtinę kelionę kaip kopimą į kalną, patvirtinta tautosakoje, atrodo, buvusi archaiška ir patvari’]; G. BERESNEVIČIUS, *Baltų religinės reformos*, p. 167: ‘The image of a supreme deity residing atop a mountain and each person’s encounter with him is a sign of a mature religion’ [‘Ant kalno reziduojančios aukščiausiosios dievybės įvaizdis, kiekvieno žmogaus laukianti akistata su ja – brandžios religijos požymis’].

¹⁹ Norbertas VĖLIUS, *Bychovco kronika*, [in:] BRMŠ, t. 2, sud. idem, Vilnius 2001, p. 369.

²⁰ Тамаз ГАМКРЕЛИДЗЕ, Вячеслав ИВАНОВ, *Индоевропейский язык и индоевропейцы. Реконструкция и историко-типологический анализ праязыка и протокультуры*, т. 2, Тбилисси 1984 [Tamaz GAMKRELIDZE, Vyacheslav IVANOV, *Indoevropskiy yazyk i indoevropeytsy. Rekonstruktsiya i istoriko-tipologicheskiy analiz prayazyka i protokul’tury*, т. 2, Tbilissi 1984], p. 512; И. В. ГОРДИЕНКО-МИТРОФАНОВА, В. С. АКСЕНОВ, op.cit., pp. 165–166.

²¹ Admittedly, there is still no scholarly study dedicated to the relationship between the written and oral sources used in the *Bychowiec Chronicle*.

linking nineteenth- and twentieth-century folklore with the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For this reason, folklore data from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cannot reliably inform us about the existence of similar beliefs in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the legend of Lithuanian descent from the Romans was first created.

Interestingly, the *Bychowiec Chronicle* is the earliest known written source to mention the image of souls climbing a mountain. It is also important to emphasise that in the *Bychowiec Chronicle*, Lithuanian paganism is depicted as analogous to Roman paganism: columns and pillars are erected in memory of deceased rulers, and geographical places are named after them. No specific Lithuanian pagan rituals or rites are mentioned in the chronicle. On the contrary, pagan Lithuanians, like pagan Romans, are portrayed as recognising the presence of a single God. For example, this one God is said to have aided the Lithuanian ruler Gediminas in his battles against the Teutonic Order²². Therefore, this article raises the question: is the image of the souls climbing a mountain mentioned in the *Broad Redaction of Lithuanian Annals* (the so-called *Bychowiec Chronicle*) truly of pagan origin? To address this, it is first necessary to analyse medieval written sources concerning funeral customs of the Balts and to investigate other versions of the image of souls climbing a mountain in these sources. The genesis of the mountain motif and other mythologemes will not be discussed here; rather, this article focuses on the image of souls climbing a mountain as presented in written sources.

SILENCE OF THE WRITTEN SOURCES OF THE NINTH–FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

The anonymous author of the *Bychowiec Chronicle*, when presenting the image of souls climbing a mountain, claimed it reflected an ancient Lithuanian view of the afterlife. If this image indeed originated from earlier times and the author of the chronicle was relying on specific information (whether written or oral), we must ask: which of the written sources from before the first half of the sixteenth century could confirm such an interpretation of the anonymous author of the *Bychowiec Chronicle*?

Even though the number of such sources is limited, those that do exist primarily describe the custom of burning the dead along with their possessions, the weapons and horses, suggesting a belief that these items would be needed in the afterlife. While a detailed interpretation of these sources is beyond the

²² 'Y pomože boh welikomu kniaziu Gidyminu, iż nemicow wsich nahołowu poraził, a żemoyt ot nemicow odstąpiła y prystąpiła ko gospodaru swojemu pryżononemu Gidyminu, iż nemicow wsich nahołowu poraził, y pobili vse woysko nemeckoie'; *Хроника Быховца*, p. 136.

scope of this discussion, in this case we are interested in some of the information they contain. It is also worth noting that such a consistent depiction of funerary practices of the Balts (including the Lithuanians) by medieval authors might have been influenced by the *interpretatio Romana*, a Roman model for describing pagan practices. In ancient Greek and Roman culture, the dead were also burned together with different belongings and weapons, as seen, for example, in the funeral of Patroclus mentioned in the *Iliad* by Homer²³. Similar practices were found in the funeral traditions of the Old Germans and Slavs. Additionally, according to the author of the *Bychowiec Chronicle*, pagan Lithuanians were descendants of pagan Romans²⁴. For this reason, pagans Lithuanians maintained the memory of their dead and burned their bodies as the ancient Romans did. Archaeological evidence supports this claim without much doubt: Lithuanians indeed used to burn their dead before the adoption of Christianity (at least those from noble and military classes of the society). Therefore, even though medieval chroniclers described funerary rituals of the Balts in line with the *interpretatio Romana* model of presenting paganism, this approach did not contradict the actual practice of cremation during that time.

One of the more characteristic sources discussing funerary customs, though it focuses on the Prussians rather than Lithuanians, is the Treaty of Christburg (present-day Dzierzgoń, Poland) signed in 1249 between the pagan Prussians and the Teutonic Knights, and the *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle* from the late thirteenth century written by an anonymous author. In these thirteenth-century sources, there is a detailed account of the funeral of Prussian noblemen and warriors, who were cremated together with their weapons, clothes, jewellery and even people²⁵. Allegedly, the dead would be in need of those items in the afterlife. The anonymous author of the *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle* explicitly

²³ HOMER, *The Iliad*, trans. and ed. Peter GREEN, Oakland 2015, book 23, pp. 414–438.

²⁴ Хроника Быховца, pp. 128–130, 134. For more about the theory of the Roman descent of Lithuanians, see footnote 2.

²⁵ *Preußisches Urkundenbuch*, Bd. 1, H. 1, hrsg. v. Rudolf PHILIPPI, Karl P. WOELKY, Königsberg 1882, Nr. 218: '[...] quod ipsi vel heredes eorum in mortuis comburendis vel subterrandis cum equis sive hominibus vel cum armis seu vestibus vel quibuscunque aliis preciosis [...]'; *Livländische Reimchronik*, hrsg. v. Leo MEYER, Paderborn 1876, l. 3873–3877, 3885–3889. For the English translation, see *The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, trans. Jerry C. SMITH, William L. URBAN, Bloomington 1977 (further cit. *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*), l. 3870–3877, 3885–3889, see also l. 4697–4709, 10103–10105. For more about the Prussian burial rites and mythology, see Paweł KAWIŃSKI, *Sacrum w wyobrażeniach pogańskich Prusów. Próba interpretacji na pograniczu historii i etnologii religii* (Monumenta Literaria Prussiae. Seria C: Monografie, nr 8), Olsztyn 2018, pp. 318–342. See also the relevant information provided by the Teutonic chronicler Peter of Dusburg: PIOTR Z DUSBURGA, *Kronika ziemi pruskiej*, wyd. Jarosław WENTA, Sławomir WYSZOMIRSKI (Monumenta Poloniae Historica. Series Nova, t. 13), Kraków 2007 (further cit. *Kronika ziemi pruskiej*), lib. III, cap. V, pp. 52–53.

stated that weapons and horses would be needed for battles in the afterlife, which would mirror the earthly ones²⁶. This ritual is reminiscent of an analogical funeral described by a tenth-century Arabian traveller Ahmad ibn Fadlan, who recounted the funerals of Varangian Slavs²⁷. Similarly, the Scandinavian *Elder Edda* mentions the funerals of the dead together with different items and horses²⁸, comparable to the funeral of Patroclus described by Homer, as well as the funeral customs of ancient Germans described by the Roman historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus²⁹. The compilers of the late thirteenth-century *Hypatian Chronicle*, while discussing the alleged paganism of King Mindaugas of Lithuania after the adoption of Christianity in the first half of 1251, also mentions that Lithuanians cremated the dead. However, it does not go into further details about how these cremations were conducted and what significance they could have for the Lithuanians³⁰.

Attention should be drawn to the fact that ensuring a successful transition to the afterlife was not only dependent on a proper funeral but also on the completeness of the body cremation. The chronicler Adam of Bremen, writing in the second half of the eleventh century, in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, described the peoples living on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, specifically on the island of Aesland (most likely present-day Estonia), stated that they offered healthy individuals, free of defects or wounds, to their demons (dragons and other flying mystical beings)³¹. In other words, only physically intact offerings, and by extension, deceased individuals, were believed to be fit enough to be presented to God and enter afterlife. A similar idea is expressed by Henry of Livonia, a chronicler from the first half of the thirteenth century. While describing the confrontation between Christians, their

²⁶ *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, l. 3875–3878.

²⁷ Władysław DUCZKO, *Viking Rus: Studies on the Presence of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe* (The Northern World, vol. 12), Leiden–Boston 2004, pp. 137–154 (for a new translation of the source by Duczko, see pp. 139–141). See also the information about the burial rites of the Western Slavs: *Thietmari Merserburgensis episcopi Chronicon*, ed. Johann M. LAPPENBERGII, Hannoverae 1889 (further cit. *Thietmari Merserburgensis episcopi Chronicon*), lib. VIII, cap. III, p. 240. For more about the funeral rites of pagans Slavs described in medieval written sources, see Stanisław ROSIK, *The Slavic Religion in the Light of 11th- and 12th-Century German Chronicles (Thietmar of Merseburg, Adam of Bremen, Helmold of Bosau): Studies on the Christian Interpretation of Pre-Christian Cults and Beliefs in the Middle Ages* (East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, vol. 60), Leiden–Boston 2020, pp. 176–187.

²⁸ Snorri STURLUSON, *Edda*, trans. Anthony FAULKES, Oxford 1991, p. 49.

²⁹ Martin L. WEST, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*, Oxford 2007, pp. 496–503.

³⁰ *Kronika halicko-wołyńska (Kronika Romanowiczów)*, wyd. Dariusz DĄBROWSKI, Adrian JUSUPOVIĆ (Monumenta Poloniae Historica. Series Nova, t. 16), Kraków–Warszawa 2017, pp. 322–323.

³¹ *Magistri Adam Bremensis Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. Bernhard SCHMEIDLER (Scriptores rerum Germanicarum), Hannoverae–Lipsiae 1917, lib. IV, cap. XVII, p. 244.

pagan Semigallian allies, and the Lithuanians, the chronicler recounts the wish of the Lithuanians to retrieve the head of their fallen leader for a proper burial³². When discussing the Semigallians, the chronicler also presents their ritual of decapitating dead warriors, which appears to be a deliberate act to harm the dead, thereby preventing them from thriving in the afterlife³³. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand why the Semigallians would seek to desecrate the bodies of their fallen Lithuanian enemies. Without an intact body, these unfortunate souls were believed to suffer great discomfort in the afterlife. Whether this practice of decapitation can be linked to the idea of conscious mutilation of the heads and limbs of the deceased (as suggested by some scholars) to prevent them from harming the living is another question³⁴. However, based on Henry of Livonia's account, we can conclude that the intention was to inflict harm on the dead in the afterlife, rather than out of fear of their return to the world of the living.

Attention should also be given to the travel account made by Wulfstan for the Anglo-Saxon King Alfred the Great (second half of the ninth century), which describes Prussian funeral rituals, including a horse-riding competition to win the deceased's movable property³⁵, a practice some researchers have compared to ancient traditions³⁶. After detailing the horse-riding event Wulfstan

³² *Henrici chronicon Livoniae*, ed. Leonid ARBUSOW, Albert BAUER (Scriptores rerum Germanicarum), Hannoverae 1955, cap. XVII, §5, p. 114.

³³ *Ibid.*, cap. IX, §4, p. 28. Cf. the beheading of St Adalbert (Wojciech) recounted in a hagiographic piece of late tenth and early eleventh centuries: Jan KANAPARIUSZ, *Świętego Wojciecha żywot pierwszy*, tł. Kazimierz ABGAROWICZ, kom. Jadwiga KARWASIŃSKA, Gdańsk 2009, cap. XXX, pp. 174 (in Latin), 175 (in Polish). For more about the martyrdom of St Adalbert (Wojciech) in the context of pagan Prussians' rites, see Seweryn SZCZEPAŃSKI, *Pomezania. Na styku świata pogańskiego i chrześcijańskiego (studia z dziejów)*, Olsztyn 2019, pp. 124–132.

³⁴ Cf. Marilyn DUNN, *The Christianization of Anglo-Saxons, c. 597 – c. 700: Discourses of Life, Death and Afterlife*, London–New York 2009, pp. 9, 11–12, 33–35, 86.

³⁵ For the original Wulfstan's account and its translation into English, see Janet BATELY, *Wulfstan's Voyage and His Description of Estland: The Text and the Language of the Text*, [in:] *Wulfstan's Voyage: The Baltic Sea Region in the Early Viking Age as Seen from Shipboard*, ed. Anton ENGLERT, Athena TRAKADAS (Maritime Culture of the North, vol. 2), Roskilde 2009, pp. 15–17; *Wulfstan's Reisebericht über Preußen um 890–893*, [in:] BRMŠ, t. 1, sud. Norbertas VĖLIUS, Vilnius 1996 (further cit. *Wulfstan's Reisebericht*), pp. 166–167.

³⁶ Владимир Н. ТОПОРОВ, *Конные состязания на похоронах*, [in:] *Исследования в области балто-славянской духовной культуры. Погребальный обряд*, Москва 1990 [Vladimir N. TOPOROV, *Konnyye sostyazaniya na pokhoronakh*, [in:] *Issledovaniya v oblasti balto-slavyanskoy dukhovnoy kul'tury. Pogrebal'nyy obryad*, Moskva 1990], pp. 21–27, 31–32, 36, 47; Rolandas KREGŽDYS, *Baltų mitologemų etimologijos žodynas*, t. 1: *Kristburgo sutartis*, Vilnius 2012, pp. 357–358, 369–370, 382, 386–389. Cf. M. L. WEST, *op.cit.*, pp. 501–503; Seweryn SZCZEPAŃSKI, *Od Homera do Wulfstana – wyścigi jako motyw honorowania zmarłych u ludów indoeuropejskich (I czy tylko zmarłych?)*, *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie*, 2014, nr 3, pp. 313–326; idem, *Pomezania*, pp. 129, 171, 222–223.

presents the specifics of the cremation: '[...] people of any origin must be burnt. If any piece of bone is found not burned then the ransom must be paid'³⁷. This passage reflects the belief that not only must the ritual be thoroughly carried out, but any failure in cremating the body could hinder the deceased's ability to fully transition to the afterlife. An unburned bone may signify an incomplete or 'lacking' component, rendering the soul 'unhealthy', 'invalid', or unworthy of the afterlife. To remedy the 'harm' done to the deceased, a certain offering was required in order to alleviate the anguish of the dead and to ensure the final and successful separation of the soul from its body. It is plausible that a second burial was performed, a practice that seems to have been characteristic of the Germanic world as well³⁸.

Lithuanian belief regarding the necessity of intact and sound bodies for a soul to enter the transcendental realm belonging to gods was also expressed in the *Story of an Old Pilgrim* by a French knight from the second half of the fourteenth century, Philippe de Mézières, who came to visit Prussia under the rule of the Teutonic Order in 1364³⁹. In his work, the French knight recounts a strange tale of the funeral of a pagan Lithuanian king (historiography assumed him to be the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Gediminas⁴⁰) which highlights the necessity of the wholeness of the body, and the burning of weapons, people and possessions: 'When their [i.e. Lithuanian – M.Š.] king dies, his barons dress him in armour and place him on a horse, which is also armoured. Fir tree logs are placed around him, forming a structure resembling a wooden cage. The barons then select the king's closest friend, granting him the honour of accompanying his ruler and his soul by being cremated together, and joining him in his journey to heaven. His friend, considering it a great honour to accompany his ruler, willingly enters the wooden cage alongside his deceased king, who remains seated on the horse as if he were alive. With great devotion, the barons, amidst prayers and lamentations, set the cage ablaze, burning both the king and his loyal companion. The souls of both ascend to heaven, in accordance with the beliefs of those people'⁴¹.

³⁷ J. BATELY, op.cit., p. 17; *Wulfstan's Reisebericht*, p. 169.

³⁸ M. DUNN, op.cit., p. 94.

³⁹ For more about Philippe de Mézières and his writing, see Rasa MAŽEIKA, Loïc CHOLLET, *Familiar Marvels? French and German Crusaders and Chroniclers Confront Baltic Pagan Religions*, Francia. Forschungen zur Westeuropäischen Geschichte, Bd. 43: 2016, pp. 43–44, 49–51. Cf. Juozas JAKŠTAS, *Das Balticum in der Kreuzzugsbewegung des 14. Jhs. Die Nachrichten Philipps de Mézières über die baltischen Gebiete*, Commentationes Balticae, Bd. 6–7: 1959, pp. 159–183.

⁴⁰ Alvydas NIKŽENTAITIS, *Gediminas*, Vilnius 1989, pp. 98–105.

⁴¹ '[...] et quant leur roy est mort, ses barons l'arment de plain arnois et le mettent sur ung cheval bien armé des ses armes, et entour lui ilz font une grant assemblee de sappins composee en maniere que on fait les mesengiers; et par election les barrons prengent le plus grant amy que le roy avoit; et lui presentent cest honneur, c'est assavoir qu'il doie tenir compaignie a son

There is also an account of a one-eyed knight. Initially, he was intended to be burned, but he escaped his fate because he lacked one eye, and therefore could not properly accompany the deceased ruler to the afterlife⁴². This supports the claim that the dead were expected to enter the next world with all their body parts intact, because 'life' was believed to continue in the afterlife. Philippe de Mézières's account is further enriched by the report of the German chronicler Wigand of Marburg from the late fourteenth century, who describes the funeral of the Grand Duke of Lithuania Kęstutis, where the ruler was burned alongside various items, horses, hunting dogs, birds and clothes⁴³. These descriptions of funeral rituals closely align with the description of the funeral of the legendary Lithuanian Duke Šventaragis mentioned in the sixteenth-century *Bychowiec Chronicle*: 'And according to the will of his father, at the place where the river Vilnelė flows into the river Neris, they set a fire and burned his father's body along with the horse which he used to ride, and the clothes that he used to wear, and his beloved slave, whom he had treated kindly, as well as his hawk and his hunting dog'⁴⁴.

Having briefly discussed sources written down before the sixteenth century, it becomes evident that there is no mention of souls climbing a mountain, let alone references to the throwing of animal claws into fire or souls 'living' on a mountain with God in afterlife. They are only mentioned by later chroniclers, those from the sixteenth century, such as the anonymous author of the *Bychowiec Chronicle*, and later – Maciej Strykowski: 'They believed in the Last Judgment Day, though mistakenly: since they [the Lithuanians – M.Š.] believed that if a person were a noble [...], rich or poor [...] then after the resurrection, in the future life, this status would continue. [...] They also burned the claws of lynxes and bears together with the deceased since they believed that on the day of the Last Judgment they would have to climb a mountain where some almighty god would judge all humanity, and these claws would make their ascent easier and safer'⁴⁵.

seigneur, qui tant l'ama, et estre ars avec lui et aler en paradis'; PHILIPPE DE MÉZIÈRES, *Le Songe du Viel Pelerin*, vol. 1, ed. Joël BLANCHARD, Genève 2015, p. 207.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *Die Chronik Wigands von Marburg*, hrsg. v. Theodor HIRSCH, [in:] *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum*, Bd. 2, hrsg. v. Theodor HIRSCH, Max TÖPPEN, Ernst STREHLKE, Leipzig 1863, cap. CXXXIII, p. 620.

⁴⁴ 'И подлуг приказаня отца своего на том местцы на усти реки Вилни, где у Велью упадывает, вчнил жьглищю и там тело отца своего зьжог, и коня его, на котором еждывал и шату его, которую ношывал, и милосника его, на которого он был ласкав, и цокола, и хорта его зьжог'; *Хроника Быховца*, p. 134.

⁴⁵ 'O zmartwych wstaniu na dzień sądny wierzyli, wszakże nie dobrze; bo jako kto był slachcicem [...] bogatym albo ubogim [...], tak też i po zmartwych wstaniu w przyszłym żywocie, w tymże go stanie być wierzyli. [...] Rysie też albo niedźwiedzie paznogcie palono z umarłymi,

DISCUSSION: AN IMAGE OF ANCIENT INDO-EUROPEANS
OR CHRISTIANS?

Attention should be given to the fact that the image of souls climbing a mountain, as depicted in the *Bychowiec Chronicle* and Maciej Strykowski's chronicle is presented within an eschatological context, i.e. that of the Last Judgment and the exchange of the earthly world for the heavenly one. This eschatological framing is absent from earlier sources of the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries. The descriptions of Lithuanian funeral customs and the vision of the afterlife from the sources dated earlier than the first half of the sixteenth century provide no evidence of the existing 'pagan' eschatology that would include the future destruction of the earthly world and the judgment of souls⁴⁶. It seems that the concept of eschatology was also foreign to the early Indo-Europeans – it emerges much later (for example – in Zoroastrianism), where the judgment of souls and their trails are described (although here trials occur by crossing a bridge rather than climbing a mountain)⁴⁷. The eschatological battle between gods and the forces of evil described in the *Elder Edda* also aligns more closely with Christian eschatology than with old Indo-European

bo wierzyli, iż na górę wielką a przykrą ku sądnemu dniowi mieli wstępować, który sąd nad wszystkim światem, jeden jakiś Bóg nawszzechmocniejszy miał czynić, a dla tego iżby tym snadniej i bezpieczniejsz ję wleźli, paznogciami rysimi myśliłi sobie pomagać; M. STRYKOWSKI, *Kronika polska*, pp. 143–144. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 308–309, 386. See also another description by Maciej Strykowski: *idem, O początkach, wywodach, dzielnościach, sprawach rycerskich i domowych sławnego narodu litewskiego, żemojdzkiego i ruskiego, przedtym nigdy od żadnego ani kuszzone, ani opisane, z natchnienia Bożego a uprzejmie pilnego doświadczenia*, opr. Julia RADZISZEWSKA, Warszawa 1978, p. 209: 'Tak, acz pogani byli, wždy o śmiertelności / Trzymali i iż ma być sąd sprawiedliwości, / Na którym miał wielki bóg jeden sądzić wszystkich, / Dobrych niebem, złych piekłem uczcić z złości brzydkich'. Cf. M. MURINIUS, *op.cit.*, cap. VI, p. 19.

⁴⁶ Even though the Polish researcher Paweł Kawiński, when discussing Prussian funeral customs and the possible image of the afterlife, used the notion of eschatology, he did not present any convincing proofs that Prussians had any perception of eschatology before the adoption of Christianity, see P. KAWIŃSKI, *op.cit.*, pp. 318, 326. Another researcher, Kamil Kajkowski, also made some assumptions about the eschatology of pagan Slavic Pomeranians, but he also was not able to present any data proving the existence of eschatology. For more about this subject, see Kamil KAJKOWSKI, *Slavic Journeys to the Otherworld: Remarks on the Eschatology of Early Medieval Pomeranians*, *Studia mythologica Slavica*, vol. 18: 2015, pp. 17, 21, 27.

⁴⁷ Oktar SKJAERVØ, *Afterlife in Zoroastrianism*, [in:] *Jenseitsvorstellungen im Orient*, Bd. 1, hrsg. v. Predrag BUKOVEC, Barbara KOLKMANN-KLAMPT (Religionen im Vorderen Orient), Hamburg 2013, pp. 311–349. Cf. Arash EMADINIA, *The Soul in the Afterlife: Individual Eschatological Beliefs in Zoroastrianism, Mandaeism and Islam* (doctoral diss., Georg-August-Universität Göttingen), Göttingen 2017, pp. 59–82. For an opinion that ancient Indo-Europeans did not have any idea of eschatology and sin, see Hans K. F. GÜNTHER, *The Religious Attitudes of the Indo-Europeans*, London 1967, pp. 12–13; cf. M. L. WEST, *op.cit.*, p. 397.

beliefs, or it may have appeared in Scandinavia through Christian influence⁴⁸. Without the notion of eschatology there is no need to imagine souls climbing a mountain or facing obstacles, since the image of souls climbing a mountain represents the beginning of a soul's journey immediately after death – a journey dependent on the moral actions and behaviour of the deceased. This concept parallels the afterlife ideas dependent on morals declared in attitudes and the transmission of souls to other bodies arising from that, present in the philosophy of Plato and his followers, but strictly opposed by Aristotle⁴⁹. At this juncture, it is important to mention that ancient Slavs did not initially comprehend bodily resurrection or that the soul's posthumous state could depend on the life lived and the prayers of the living, as Christian missionaries taught them⁵⁰. Therefore, the early Western Slavs did not have the concepts of eschatology and a final judgment of souls. Similarly, in *Rigveda* there is no image of souls climbing a mountain or gods residing on its top (instead, an image of the 'beautiful' meadow is described)⁵¹.

Meanwhile, descriptions of Lithuanian and other Baltic (and similarly early Slavic) funeral customs make it evident that the future life of the soul was thought to depend not on the moral character and behaviour of the deceased, but on social status, the way they had lived their lives and proper execution of funeral rituals⁵². Here, it is relevant to mention the myth of Sovij, which addresses the establishment of cremation – a custom that, according to the anonymous author of the *Chronograph* of 1262 (or 1261), was practiced by the Balts and Finno-Ugric peoples, and derived from the ancient Greeks. The *Chronograph* of 1262 distinctly emphasises the theme of improper funeral:

⁴⁸ The same could be said about the eschatology related to Odin and his behaviour at the end of the world. Even though some researchers are trying to find the motif of the end of the world in the old sagas, it reminds the Christian eschatology too much. For more about the possible Scandinavian eschatology and its relationship to the Christian one, see Anders HULTGÅRD, *Óðinn, Valhöll and the Einherjar: Eschatological Myth and Ideology in Late Viking Period*, [in:] *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes*, ed. Gro STEINSLAND, Jón V. SIGURÐSSON, Jan E. REKDAL, Ian BEUERMANN (The Northern World, vol. 52), Leiden–Boston 2011, pp. 301–307, 317–323, 325.

⁴⁹ Cf. PLATO, *The Republic*, trans. Reginald E. ALLEN, New Haven–London 2006, col. 620a–d.

⁵⁰ *Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi Chronicon*, lib. I, cap. XIV, p. 10: '[...] Sclavis, qui cum morte temporalis omnia putant finire, haec loquor, certitudinem resurrectionis et pro qualitate meriti futurae remunerationis firmiter indicens cunctis fidelibus'. For more about the image of the afterlife among Western Slavs, see S. ROSIK, op.cit., pp. 59–73, 178.

⁵¹ *Hymns of the Rigveda*, vol. 1–2, ed. Ralph T. H. GRIFFITH, Harvard 1889, part I, song 35; part X, song 14, hymn 2; part X, songs 16 and 58; Jaan PUHVEL, "Meadow of the Otherworld" in *Indo-European tradition*, *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung*, Bd. 83: 1969, H. 1, pp. 65–66. Cf. M. L. WEST, op.cit., p. 393.

⁵² Cf. the information given in the chronicle by Peter of Dusburg that wealth and prestige would secure a proper standing in the afterlife, see *Kronika ziemi pruskiej*, lib. III, cap. V, pp. 52–53.

only after the third cremation does the soul finally find peace⁵³. Therefore, it is no accident that Wulfstan's account mentions offerings as payment by those responsible for the burial of the dead. Finally, the inclusion (or burning) of various items – weapons, tools or their symbolic representations in the grave reflects the conviction of their necessity in the afterlife, where life 'continues' in the form identical to the earthly life. Archaeological finds offer ample evidence of horse burials in regions inhabited by both Lithuanians and Prussians. These findings corroborate the above mentioned words of the anonymous author of the *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle* and the account of Philippe de Mézières, which mentions that Lithuanians and Prussians who were killed in war would continue their battles or hunts in the afterlife, thus requiring horses for that purpose⁵⁴. All of that would seem unnecessary if the transcendental destiny of souls depended on facing the deity living on a high mountain (or elsewhere) and on moral conduct that would determine the soul's future in the afterlife. Notably, in the beliefs of the ancient Greeks, Germans and other peoples, the otherworld to which their souls were expected to pass was clearly separated from the realm of the gods.

On the other hand, eschatology assumes the possibility of regret not only over the eventual ending of the world but also over past misdeeds that violate public morals. This does not imply that in pagan times Lithuanians lacked moral norms. Such norms did exist but they were not considered a means to achieve a potentially better life in the afterlife. There is a regret expressed in the story of Philippe de Mézières that a friend of the dead king lacks an eye (having lost it in a battle) which prevents him to serve his ruler after death – not because of his moral failing or future eschatology⁵⁵. In other words, the sources discussed above do not support the idea that ancient Lithuanians (or Balts in general) held a concept of sin that would subject the soul to divine judgment, trials, or even eternal death. It seems that the notion of sin also appears in the late Indo-European tradition (e.g. in Zoroastrianism and the so-called

⁵³ *Хронография 1261*, [in:] BRMŠ, t. 1, sud. Norbertas VĖLIUS, Vilnius 1996, pp. 266–268. For more about this source, see Ilja LEMEŠKIN, *Sovijaus sakmė ir 1262 m. Chronografas pagal Archyvinį, Varšuvos, Vilniaus ir I. J. Zabelino nuorašus*, Vilnius 2009; idem, *Пространная редакция Хроники Иоанна Малалы по рукописи И. Е. Забелина № 436* [*Prostrannaja redaktsiya Khroniki Ioanna Malaly po rukopisi I. Ye. Zabelina no. 436*], [in:] *Rýžoviště zlata a doly drahokamŭ...: Sborník pro Václava Huňáčka*, Praha 2006, pp. 513–542.

⁵⁴ Cf. the burial of ancient Scandinavians together with their possessions and their horses, and their belief that they would need them in the afterlife. For more, see Else ROESDAHL, *Princely Burial in Scandinavia at the Time of Conversion*, [in:] *Voyage to the Other World: The Legacy of Sutton Hoo*, ed. Calvin B. KENDALL, Peter S. WELLS (Medieval Studies at Minnesota, vol. 5), Minneapolis 1992, pp. 157–162.

⁵⁵ PHILIPPE DE MÉZIÈRES, *op.cit.*, pp. 207–208.

Upanishads theory of the soul's karma), since before that the Indo-Europeans had not associated their afterlife with eternal suffering or repentance for sins⁵⁶.

In the absence of the category of sin (as a moral imperative) there was no need for a deity (or deities) to oversee human morals, encouraging individuals to live in pursuit of a future (i.e. better) life in the afterlife. Therefore, we can see gods and goddesses of destiny in the Indo-European tradition, where mortals believed in destiny – a force that even gods were subject to. While Plato discussed the influence of morality on state of the soul in the afterlife, he related this to the idea that souls, depending on the morals of the deceased, would have to incarnate into other earthly bodies⁵⁷. This notion differs from the idea of a soul residing in an afterlife realm, and even more from the idea of future eschatology. These ideas of Plato (and philosopher Empedocles⁵⁸) are likely influenced by the Persian (Iranian Aryan) mystical cults and religions in the culture that permeated Greek antiquity (e.g. the Orphic movement)⁵⁹. Importantly, Plato himself mentioned that souls should strive for immortality rather than reincarnation into new bodies and considered the latter an unnatural state for a soul.

With these observations in mind, a logical question arises: is it truly justified to attribute the image of souls climbing a mountain, ascribed to ancient Lithuanians, to the hazy myths of the ancient Indo-Europeans – a connection that some believe to be reflected in very late historic sources, while ignoring the relationship of the vision of souls climbing a mountain to the Judeo (Semitic)-Christian tradition? In the latter, there is a very distinct mythology of the Lord's mountain, which the souls of the chosen are invited to ascend. Consider, for example, Isaiah 2:2–3: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob [...]' (cf. Isaiah 11:9, 25:6–8, 33:15–16, 35:10, 40:9, 56:7, 84:4–6; Revelation 14:1–5, etc.). God invites to climb this

⁵⁶ H. K. F. GÜNTHER, *op.cit.*, p. 22; M. L. WEST, *op.cit.*, p. 397.

⁵⁷ PLATO, *Phaedo*, trans. and ed. David GALLOP, Oxford 1975, col. 108a–b, 110–114; *idem*, *The Republic*, col. 614a–e, 615a–e, 619a. For the influence of morality on the state of the soul in the afterlife, see Elizabeth PENDER, *The Rivers of Tartarus: Plato's Geography of Dying and Coming-Back-to-Life*, [in:] *Plato and Myth: Studies on the Use and Status of Platonic Myth*, ed. Catherine COLLOBERT, Pierre DESTRÉE, FRANCISCO J. GONZALEZ (Mnemosyne, Supplements: Monographs on Greek and Latin Language and Literature, vol. 337), Leiden–Boston 2012, pp. 201–202, 205, 217–220, 225–233; David SEDLEY, *Three Kinds of Platonic Immortality*, [in:] *Body and Soul in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Dorothea FREDE, Burkhard REIS, Berlin–New York 2009, pp. 146–147, 151–161.

⁵⁸ Brad INWOOD, *Empedocles and metempsychosis: The Critique of Diogenes of Oenoanda*, [in:] *Body and Soul in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Dorothea FREDE, Burkhard REIS, Berlin–New York 2009, pp. 72–77, 79–86.

⁵⁹ For more about the Orphic movement, see Walter BURKERT, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*, Stuttgart–Berlin–Köln–Mainz 2010, pp. 440–448.

particular mountain the crowds of the chosen, who are destined to worship him forever: ‘Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?’ (Ps 24:3). This motif is further echoed in East Slavic folklore, which also depicts souls climbing Mount Zion⁶⁰. In these biblical images, the righteous deserve to live by God’s side because of their righteousness and the moral way of life, and the act of ascending the mountain itself is perceived not only as an afterlife journey awaiting them but as a path towards spiritual perfection of the soul (and closeness to God), ultimately leading to a perfect afterlife. Mount Zion in these images becomes a topographical reference in the afterlife which is used by the soul of the deceased in its desire to get closer to God.

CONCLUSIONS

What are the possible working conclusions? Having in mind these remarks and the information from the written sources of the ninth–fifteenth centuries regarding funeral customs of the Balts (including Lithuanians) and their vision of the afterlife, it becomes clear that the anonymous author of the *Bychowiec Chronicle* did not derive the image of souls climbing a mountain from ancient Baltic mythology, but from a different tradition. Since there are no images of souls climbing a mountain depicted in Indo-European myths (as we have mentioned, the mythologems of a field, meadow or water meadow are used as a place of the soul’s afterlife instead), the image of souls climbing a mountain should be sought in the Christian (Semitic-Christian) context.

While shamanistic traditions do contain an image of a shaman or cultural hero climbing a mountain, tree, pillar or column, this ascent does not represent a soul’s journey, but rather a living person’s – a shaman’s quest to encounter deities, but without the intention of staying with them in the other world. This differs from the eschatological vision of the soul, which seeks eternal union with God. Thus, while both shamanistic beliefs and ancient Indo-Europeans traditions feature a mythologem of a mountain (tree, pillar, column), a clear image of a soul climbing a mountain specifically appears within Semitic-Christian beliefs.

It is possible that the anonymous author of the *Bychowiec Chronicle* borrowed the passage about souls climbing a mountain and facing judgment from the Christian Scripture, thus employing the *interpretatio Christiana* model of describing pagans⁶¹. In this model, Christian morals, and even the belief in the Christian God are imposed upon the pagans, as evident in the quoted statement: ‘Even though they were pagans, they imagined God in this way and believed in one God’. Having in mind the legend about the descent of Lithuanians

⁶⁰ А. Н. АФАНАСЬЕВ, op.cit., p. 62.

⁶¹ For the *interpretatio Christiana* in medieval sources, see S. ROSIK, op.cit., pp. 10–38.

from the Romans presented in the *Bychowiec Chronicle*, it is not surprising that the Lithuanians, 'the descendants of Romans' were depicted as noble heroes, earnestly desiring to know the true God. Their honourable lives were portrayed as resembling those of the righteous Christians, with only a lack of knowledge of God leading them to certain superstitions, such as throwing bear claws into the funeral fire or practicing certain customs (e.g. the burning of the dead).

Attention should be drawn to the fact that the reflections of Greek and Roman philosophers on the idea of a single god in the works of the late antiquity and medieval Neoplatonist and Neo-Aristotelian Christian philosophers were associated with faith in the Christian God. For this reason, the anonymous author of the *Bychowiec Chronicle* presented the imagery of souls climbing a mountain in the context of eschatology and belief in one God. Lithuanians, like Romans, were required to believe in one God. Their only shortcoming, like with the Romans, was the absence of Revelation. This is the reason why ancient Lithuanians cremated their deceased. According to the author of the *Bychowiec Chronicle*, this method of burial is not reprehensible. Overall, the chronicle's author did not condemn the heathen Lithuanians and did not recognise their pagan faith as devil worship, as often observed in the writings of medieval authors. In his narrative, the Christian God aided Gediminas in his fight against the wicked Christians, i.e. the Teutonic Knights. In fact, the bodies of Lithuanian dukes and nobles were burned at the site where the Vilnius Cathedral would later be built. In this way, the author of the chronicle created a symbolic bridge connecting the ancient Lithuanians (descendants of the Romans) and Christianised Lithuanians. Therefore, the author of the *Bychowiec Chronicle* did not need to search for the imagery of souls climbing a mountain in distant shamanistic beliefs, ancient Indo-European mythology, or the folklore and the oral traditions of the sixteenth century.

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