

## CROSS-CRAFTING IN LITHUANIA

### 1. IDENTIFICATION

- a) Lithuania.
- b) Cross-crafting in Lithuania.
- c) Local communities, public organizations.
- d) The territory of the Republic of Lithuania.
- e) Lithuanian ethnographic regions: Aukštaitija, Žemaitija, Dzūkija, Suvalkija, Lithuania Minor.
- f) An uninterrupted tradition which has been passed on for centuries.
- g) The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, the Lithuanian Folk Culture Center.

### 2. JUSTIFICATION OF THE CANDIDATURE

a)  
Cross-crafting is a craft exceptionally valuable from the historic, artistic, ethnological and sociological points of view.

b)  
Presently, it is primarily folk artists who are the bearers of the tradition and who maintain and pass on the plastic characteristics of cross-crafting.

There are now around one hundred actively performing cross-crafting masters in Lithuania (those having made over 20 crosses) and about 200 craftsmen who have made 10-20 crosses. There is no statistical information on craftsmen who have created only one or two crosses (these are usually folk artists who make wooden sculptures or other woodwork and who, if circumstances arise, can make wooden crosses, too).

A list of the most actively practicing cross-crafting craftsmen is attached.

The traditions of cross-crafting are primarily cherished by religious and local communities of all five ethnographic regions of Lithuania. A community as an organizational unit can commission crosses, but under certain circumstances the crosses can also be commissioned by private individuals.

The majority of Lithuanians are Roman Catholics (some, however, only in the formal sense) and so are committed (at least partially) to traditional worship practices related to wooden crosses. They participate in events that take place near crosses, attend places of miraculous reputation (The Hill of Crosses, miraculous springs, stones with the Virgin Mary's footsteps, etc.), erect crosses made in a folk manner on the graves of their dead, or in other places where this is traditionally done. Some small town or village communities observe other traditions related to cross-crafting, such as customs connected with calendar-cycle events, church festivals, or harvesting festivals. It must be pointed out that the latter practices are dying out and therefore, need to be protected.

c)

Among the cultural events and activities included in the preliminary official list (e.g., Christmas Eve celebrations, funerals customs, celebrations of the All Saint's Day and the Day of the Commemoration of the Dead, called *Vėlinės*, the making of palm branches in the Vilnius region, ancient polyphonic songs "*sutartinės*"), there is nothing like cross-crafting, which includes both the handicraft, i.e., the practical craftsmanship of woodwork, and its system of related customs and rituals.

d)

Concerning other cultural events and activities of the official preliminary list, we find that in respect to their viability, longevity, and uninterrupted continuity, cross-crafting can only be compared to the celebration of Christmas Eve as well as the customs related to funerals and the Day of the Commemoration of the Dead. Just like cross-crafting both of the above mentioned cultural expressions cover the entire ethnic territory of Lithuania and have characteristics specific to each ethnographic region. The craft of making palm branches, which is also on the preliminary list, exists within a small territory and has a significantly shorter history than cross-crafting.

e)

We consider cross-crafting to be an exceptionally precious form of cultural expression due to the following:

I. Wooden crosses are the most significant syncretic images of folk culture embodied in material form. Traditional crosses are rich in their symbolic meanings and are related in their semantic and plastic expression to both the natural surroundings and the social milieu. Wooden crosses embody the folk's understanding of the world and the sacred. To a greater or lesser extent, crosses reflect the people's perception of the world's cosmic structure, man's place in relation to heaven, the earth, and natural phenomena.

Furthermore, Lithuanian folk crosses are very valuable from an artistic point of view. They are exceptional because of their original forms that include not only local architectural and decorative traditions, but also individually interpreted Christian sacral art styles. Sculptures contained within folk crosses and shrines (*koplytėlės*) can also be exceptionally valuable pieces of art.

II. The Lithuanian tradition of cross-crafting is 400 years old. Its roots go even further back to the times of pre-Christian local cultures. Having been established within local village communities, the folk tradition of cross erection survived various political regimes, stood against restrictions and various bans of civil governments, and managed to adapt to the cultural and social changes in the society. The customs of cross erection as well as forms of their construction preserve multiple relicts of the past, and are thus valuable material for historical research.

III. The cross has usually played a significant role in the traditional village community in that it has reminded its members of important matters and dictated codes of behavior. In this way, the cross strengthened the community's sense of unity. This partially applies to present-day life as well. Crosses "speak in a language" which can also be understood by the members of other communities. When expressing proper

respect to sacred objects of worship, outsiders can become involved in local concerns and joys. Some crosses used to be erected with the purpose of protecting travelers and random passers-by who did not belong to the community. In general, the cross was an exceptional sign in traditional culture and an object that united under its protection all those who believed in its power. The members of the same community did not only share their everyday activities, that took place within the boundaries established by sacral structures, but were also united by communally care of the sacred places of worship. This was especially important during years of repression when it was necessary to protect sacral constructions from destruction and desecration.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, folk crosses mainly served religious and sometimes social purposes. On the other hand, in those times the erection of crosses could also be considered an act of the nation's resistance to ethnic and cultural oppression which would unite not only the members of a particular community, but everyone of the same religion and ethnicity.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, folk crosses received recognition from folk art experts for their originality and artistic qualities. Since then, folk crosses have been considered one of the most significant objects of national art, thus becoming an expression of Lithuanian cultural and ethnic identity. Since the 1920s in addition to their religious purposes, folk crosses started to be constructed to commemorate outstanding events and dates of statehood.

Works produced by present day cross-crafters, their woodwork skills, and artistic means of expression have become an object of cultural exchange. Lithuanian cross-crafters, especially those of the younger generation, have organized quite a few international seminars where they could share their knowledge and skills with their colleagues from neighboring and more distant countries. Lithuanian woodwork masters, in their turn, go to seminars abroad. The richness of traditional plastic forms, so valued from an artistic point of view, as well as the sensitive and respective approach to wood both while it is growing and when it becomes a material for art work, is a treasure that local craftsmen can share with other nations.

IV. The architectural forms of folk crosses, their ornamentation, and the sculptures they contain express the most valuable features of Lithuanian folk art in a most condensed manner. The decorations and constructions of crosses include almost any traditional form of fine arts as well as any woodwork technique and style practiced by Lithuanian masters. Technical skills are very important in this craft; crosses have to endure in open conditions of rainy weather, so proper wood preparation is essential.

V. Many cross-crafting traditions and rituals have survived up to the present day and are developing further. Here, however, one may distinguish two levels: 1) traditions that have been established in original local and religious communities and 2) modified traditions, i.e., such as those that are being safeguarded by public and governmental organizations as manifestations of national culture.

VI. In order to cherish the tradition as well as to support its natural development, the tradition has to be protected on the first level, i.e., in the local and religious

communities of ethnographic regions. Under present circumstances, however, this is not an easy task.

Natural changes in cross-crafting are rapidly taking place mostly due to the diminishing differences between village and city lifestyles and the general globalization of culture.

We hope that means of cultural heritage protection at our disposition might protect cross-crafting and at least partially ensure its continuation. Educational programs can help to maintain the traditional forms of cross-crafting. Nevertheless, all such means may be insufficient to significantly affect the spiritual development of the communities, which is essential to the tradition of cross-crafting.

If the tradition of cross-crafting died in local communities, the practice of constructing crosses, which are very important manifestations of national culture, would also unavoidably suffer changes. At best, it might survive as a repetition or stylization of the famous cultural relicts of the past.

### 3. DESCRIPTION

a)

The term "cross-crafting" in the broad sense applies to the Lithuanian folk tradition of making wooden crosses and shrines that serves various spiritual needs of the community; to the process of the construction of crosses and shrines and their associated techniques and skills; as well as to the commissioning of crosses, selection of the place of erection, and rituals of consecration, along with other rituals that take place by wooden crosses; to the customs of the restoration of old or deteriorated crosses and special rituals for their destruction. Cross-crafting as an art can only be maintained if it is nourished by the spiritual need of the community to express its aspirations in this particular way, namely by believing in the powers of the cross (today, also by believing in its cultural and aesthetic value). The erection of crosses is still taking place in this country, and in this process, one can not only observe the continuity of plastic forms and customs, but also notice new changes determined by the modern conditions of the spiritual and material life of the community.

The cross-crafting tradition has a long, 400 hundred year old history in Lithuania. Some elements of the tradition originate from the pre-Christian world outlook or go even further back in history – one fails to even trace their origin since the tradition fades into the obscurity of the ages. The phenomenon of cross-crafting has spread throughout the entire Lithuanian territory and involves the majority of its inhabitants, as opposed to being located in some particular ethnographic region. The results of the cross-crafting tradition are concrete structures, which, in their construction, appearance, and functions are determined by a system of closely interrelated factors like rituals and beliefs, locally cherished customs, and the relationship between a folk master and a commissioner of his work.

Lithuania is sometimes called the land of crosses. To put it more clearly, this does not refer to crosses in churches, or church spires, or ritual objects, or motifs in art. Rather, this is in reference to big (usually 1.20 to 5 meters tall) wooden structures. Of course,

it can also refer to simple cruciform constructions each consisting of a longer vertical and a shorter horizontal bar. In Lithuania, however, wooden crosses often have a roof and are decorated with geometric and floral ornaments which have symbolic meanings. The ornaments cover the pole and the upper part of the cross is where the main semantic and plastic element of the structure is placed, namely a statuette of the Crucified Christ, some saint, or a group of saints.

Some forms of the folk cross, e.g., the *stogastulpis* are not reminiscent of the traditional cross at all. The *stogastulpis* is actually a pillar-type cross. Sometimes small wooden shrines would be placed on the ground or hung on trees. One of the most popular forms of the cross is the so called *koplytstulpis*, a pillared shrine, a structure consisting of a wooden pole and a small shrine with a statuette of a saint.

One may see such constructions in many places in Lithuania. They can be found in graveyards, as memorials to certain important occasions, in villages and towns, almost by every road, at crossroads, by forests, next to houses, by rivers, lakes, or churches. Today, folk crosses can even be erected next to governmental agencies.

Each cross is erected with a certain purpose, which varies greatly and which determines the functional qualities as well as the designated life span of the cross. The purpose of a cross is expressed not only in its overall structure, but also in its supplementing sculptures. The cross with a statuette of the Crucified Christ, simply called "the suffering" by folk is erected for various purposes: at a place which is special for some reason (where an accident happened or someone perished, where one should be given special protection or in places of exceptional respect), when praying for help or expressing gratitude for help received at a farmstead, etc. It can be erected in cemeteries, as an offering to God, or as a sign of respect to someone deceased, as well as for other purposes. Sculptures of the Pieta and the Christ of Nazareth are also common in crosses, shrines and chapels; they also have universal meaning. The Blessed Virgin Mary is often addressed for help; as a rule, she used to be trusted with the greatest worries and pains that a Lithuanian, especially a woman and a mother, had plenty of. Thus, the images of Our Lady of Sorrows and the Pieta have always been very close to people's heart in this country. In addition, a poetic image of Our Lady of Grace, which appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, excites people's imaginations and inspires hope.

Out of the multitude of saints, only very few appear in crosses and shrines. Typically, only those saints who are very important and useful in man's life are chosen. If a structure is erected near water – by a river, a lake, or a bridge – it will usually contain a statuette of St. John Nepomucene and John the Baptist. Fields and crops will be given care and protection by St. Isidore. Farmsteads, especially farm animals, are said to be under St. George's protection. In case of illness one hurries to build a shrine for St. Roch., St. Florian, and St. Agatha protect against fires. St. Anthony will be a miraculous helper in any matter, especially in regard to stolen or lost valuables (they say that "St. Anthony is the one who finds") St. Joseph is worshipped for taking care of family life. Sculptural images of saints used to be complemented by folk hymns, which also were an important manifestation of faith.

An image of a saint will be adopted into the people's consciousness and folk art can only reflect if the saint becomes a close companion and is necessary in man's everyday life and his existence in general. This intimacy is not only expressed by the selection of a particular saint, but also by the interpretation of the saint's image. Thus, each saint can be recognized from the specific features of his/her person or scripture story, as well as from the typical schemes of composition which craftsmen attempt to observe, even if they feel quite free in their ways of expression. The image of a saint is created as a kind of sign or metaphor. At the same time, because of his or her close relation to the people, the saint becomes a family member who is talked with, asked for help, and thanked for assistance. Among other things, one can easily recognize typical features of the Lithuanian in a saint's appearance as well as details of local traditional clothing.

Certain rites also express gratitude and requests. In southern Lithuania, (Dzūkija), for instance, people would take some soil from their fields and bring it to church to get it blessed on the day of St. Isidore. Afterwards, the soil would be scattered out in the fields and a bit of it would be left at a pillared shrine with St Isidore's statuette or simply by any cross. Occasionally, the same ritual could be observed on St. Roch's day. On the day of St. George day, wax statues of farm animals, eggs, and rosaries were left at the foot of the St. George Cross.

In western Lithuania, (Žemaitija), statuettes of saints, especially those of the Blessed Virgin Mary, would be dressed in elaborate clothing. They would also be decorated with several strings of beads and the shrines would be filled with small mirrors, ribbons, and similar articles. All this can be treated as offerings. If a piece of clothing lost its colour, it would be replaced with a new one. When asking for help in travelling, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people would hang narrow sashes and ribbons on crosses in western Lithuania (Žemaitija).

Southern Lithuanians, the *dzūkai*, would decorate their crosses with home-woven sashes, which, when deteriorated, would be replaced by new ones. The old sashes had to be burnt. When going to the groom's house, a bride would tie sashes around a wayside cross. One can see sashes on crosses in southern Lithuania quite often nowadays, too.

Another very archaic custom is that of an tying apron around a cross. Brides practice this ritual, when they pass a cross on their way to church or their husband's place. Aprons are tied to crosses in order to have children – an apron has to be made overnight and tied around a cross in secret before sunrise without anyone seeing it. Just as in the case with sashes, aprons are replaced by new ones when they are worn out.

The customs of tying rosaries around crosses is still being practiced, however, this is usually done in bigger constellations of crosses, especially on the Hill of Crosses.

Furthermore, crosses and shrines – especially those erected at exceptional places (by springs which are said to have miraculous powers, large stones which are called God's tables or thrones, etc.) – are believed to be miraculous, and therefore must be given offerings (rosaries, little crosses, pictures, etc.) and even money.

The life of a cross starts with its consecration. If a cross has not been consecrated, this should be indicated (by a little wreath, a twig, or even by some straw in order to avoid anyone paying homage to it by mistake). A cross is always consecrated by a priest. People would invite their relatives and friends to a cross consecration ceremony, sing, pray, and celebrate the event afterwards.

Consecrated crosses and all their belongings (anything that is placed or hung on them) are undoubtedly considered sacred. Even old and deteriorated crosses and their belongings do not lose their sacredness, thus, crosses are never to be removed and displaced randomly. Worn out sashes, aprons, and other things must be burned. A cross which has fallen down and cannot be repaired must also be burned. There are special days for this: since old times crosses in Western Lithuania are burned on Holy Saturday before Easter, whereas in southern Lithuania this is done on the evening of All Saints' Day.

The sacredness of the cross is emphasized by a special code of behavior while one is near the cross. Much is forbidden: people must not quarrel, litter, spit, etc. Trees where shrines or little crosses used to hang are also considered sacred. Such trees must not be felled.

When passing a cross, the cap must be taken off one's head, one ought to cross oneself and say a short prayer. The latter may vary: it could be a simple prayer of honoring God, asking for a blessing in the day's work, or some other prayer. In one's prayers, one may also address the particular saint portrayed in the statuette (for instance, St. John Nepomucene is asked to protect against misfortunes in water), one may also pray for those suffering after death, especially when a cross stands at the spot of a fatal accident, or the place has been haunted, etc.

People also demonstrate their respect to a cross by its surroundings. In farmsteads, crosses are usually erected in the gardens of flowers and other plants. In places where there is no such garden, e.g., by a road, in fields, etc., flowers and herbs and an occasional tree or bush. Sometimes people would also construct a bench by a cross.

Although not necessarily on the day of their consecration, but during other events, especially during the Ember Days and church festivals, crosses are decorated by garlands and flowers.

These manifestations of respect do not overwhelm the ritual role of the cross. People gather by crosses on certain occasions. Church festivals and services occur at the places of their erection. Some of these can be organized to pay homage to a certain cross and in some cases crosses serve as a place for prayer and gatherings. Rituals and prayers vary in each region of Lithuania.

The most important time for cross honouring is during the Ember Days which are celebrated before Ascension Day. Processions take place near crosses on this day, people sing the litany of All Saints and hymns honouring the cross. The ceremony ends with the hymn "Oh God of Abraham..." which earlier used to be very important to the Lithuanian folk. (Nowadays, unfortunately, it is hardly ever heard). The

procession lasts one day and in some places it can continue for three days. In eastern Lithuania, Aukštaitija, people gather near crosses at sunrise. In western Lithuania, Žemaitija, they gather in the evening.

In Dzūkija, the Ember Days are celebrated on the third of May. Here this day is meant for visiting crosses as well.

Processions by crosses also take place on St. Mark's day, which is called the day of prayers. On this day, people ask God in joint prayer to bless the harvest. This is the day for the consecration of fields.

Among other church services that take place by crosses and even in cemeteries, one can mention the May prayer gathering which is popular in some places of Lithuania.

In Dzūkija, funeral processions would stop by a village cross in order to let the deceased bid farewell to it.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people started celebrating various national holidays by crosses.

b)

As the principle symbol of the Christian religion and piety, the cross started to permeate the consciousness of the Lithuanian people in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, after the country had been christened. (Lithuania became Christianized in 1387, while its western part, Žemaitija – as late as 1413). This country was the last in Europe to adopt Christianity. Peasants, naturally, were christened by edict, sometimes even by force. For this reason, a significant part of the population, especially people living in remote areas, did not accept the new religion nor relinquish their old beliefs. Plenty of time had to pass before the new world perception and its symbols became an inseparable part of the existence of the local population and before Christianity became just as deeply rooted in their consciousness as paganism used to be. Either way, relicts of paganism had survived for a very long time. The latter factor, along with the specific development of Lithuanian history and the specific way of living and thinking of Lithuanians, determined the creation of unique Christian symbols, including the creation of unique forms of the cross as well as its exceptional role in the life of the nation.

It seems that Christianity, which elsewhere is usually practiced publicly in cult facilities, namely in churches, declared itself within the entire space of human existence in Lithuania. Crosses and shrines became an integral part of the landscape and everyday environment. Nevertheless they do not always coincide in their meaning and function with canonical Christian practices. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, this aspect of folk cross-crafting was repeatedly noticed by high Church officials. We have documents dating to that period that condemn the improper selection of places for cross erection. Even more strongly they condemn the rituals that were performed in those places as containing too many features of paganism.

It has also been noticed that parts of such monuments were erected (or rebuilt) on sacred sites of pre-Christian cults (the existence of which have been either proven or assumed by researchers). Today, legends surrounding such sites have acquired a



Christian content. For instance, a stone of a pre-Christian cult with small pits for offerings is said to be the Blessed Virgin Mary's footsteps in stone. Water from a spring is believed to be miraculous because it is a place where the statue of the Virgin Mary would miraculously "return" after being stolen from a local church. A cross or chapel is erected in such sites, and the sites are visited by a great number of local believers. Old trees (especially oaks and lindens which play an exceptional role in Baltic mythology) on which people hang tiny shrines can also be associated with ancient pre-Christian cults.

Christianity gained a strong foothold in this country in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A dense network of churches was created throughout the whole territory of Lithuania as late as that. They say that it was only then that Lithuanians in the most remote corners of the country started to practice Christianity. Before this time they used to convert back to paganism. It is also believed that the traditions of cross-crafting started to form at that time. It was the peasants who began to construct various sacral structures called crosses in great quantities. A great number of crosses were present in the ethnic territory of Lithuania in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially in those places inhabited by Catholics. In the Protestant areas which were considerably smaller, crosses were erected only in cemeteries. Nevertheless, even those crosses had a distinct local form and rituals taking place by them were also condemned on numerous occasions for being pagan by Church dignitaries.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is the best documented period as regards the relationship between the Church and cross builders, folk crosses became an inseparable part of local Christian culture. The majority of customs practiced by crosses took on ways of expressions that were in line with the official practices of the Church. Crosses were always consecrated by priests, without that the countryside population would consider a cross to have no sacredness and therefore – no powers. Echoes of pre-Christian rituals – some magic rites related to crosses that were not tolerated by the Church – would be happening in secret and would involve only a few people, without the participation of the community. In those times bishops and priests might have criticized folk crosses because of the primitive sculptures which they contained. Some Church officials took it somewhat offensive by that saints were not made according to canonized images. Yet the very custom of the erection of crosses and shrines was acknowledged and even promoted by the local Church as an expression of the folk's piety.

In 1795, the sovereign joint republic of Lithuania and Poland was demolished. The majority of Lithuanian territory was annexed to the Russian empire by force. The regime intended to assimilate the country and systematically worked on this agenda. The individuality of local customs was to be repressed by any means. Since official religion of the Russian empire was that of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Catholic religion was often suppressed; while the activities of other confessions were more or less curbed.

The occupation of the country had a major impact on cross-crafting. Russian officials banned some Catholic worship practices, continued to close churches and monasteries. Repression hit the country especially severely after the rebellions of 1861 and 1863. After the rebellion in 1863, which was mostly carried out by peasants, it

was forbidden to erect folk crosses anywhere but in cemeteries and church yards. At that time, crosses stood in nearly every peasant's farmyard and in private fields. Moreover, village communities owned the crosses by roads and rivers, lakes and springs, as well as tiny shrines hung on old trees. Irrespective of the prohibitions, peasants continued taking care of their crosses because tradition and their religious feelings made them do so. Furthermore, in addition to repairing previously erected constructions, they managed to build new ones when a need was felt. Where the Russian authorities demolished a cross, a new one was urgently erected. Peasants were actively supported in this by most of the clergy. It was during those times of fighting for the freedom of religion and customs that the folk form of the cross came to symbolize national resistance to occupation.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when, in addition to folk art research, folk crosses aroused the interest of the activists of Lithuanian national state rebirth, the folk cross became a symbol of Lithuanian statehood. When the independent national state of Lithuania was re-established in 1918, cross-crafting was promoted by activities of various public and state organizations. It was recommended to erect crosses of the traditional form in order to commemorate great events and dates in the history of the statehood. Yet there were very few guidelines in regard to this. The creation of prestigious monuments by prominent artists strengthened the cross-crafting tradition and influenced its development and continuity in village communities. There crosses are still being erected, albeit on a smaller scale compared to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The incomparably greatest damage to the tradition was done by World War II and the following occupation of the Soviet Union. Atheism was forced on people by harsh methods. Soviets were notorious for the most brutal destruction of crosses as well as for intolerance of any religious manifestation in general. In fact, written and unwritten rules forbade any creation of sacred folk constructions. Moreover, it was even forbidden to repair the existing ones. Any cross could be demolished at any time. Any religious practices outside the church were unconditionally forbidden.

Cross-crafting was not tolerated by the Soviet authorities because it was an expression of the nation's identity against which the regime was also fighting.

The extreme viability of the cross-crafting tradition can be proven by the fact of its survival under such severe conditions. Naturally, crosses were reduced in number. Because of the need to keep their involvement in such matters secret, both those who commissioned a cross and those who made them often had to think of erecting a cross in more remote places and not where this would have to be done according to the customs. Masters often made crosses secretly. Crosses were erected at night time. Rituals would have to be carried out in secret or with invoking the least possible publicity. In most cases, it was not possible to carry out traditional practices of worship by crosses, thus, the new generation has lost the need for them.

The Lithuanian population resisted most powerfully the ban of crosses in places which were considered miraculous. Crosses in such places were erected as offerings, signs of request, or gratitude. Traditionally, there were great numbers of crosses built in such places, commissioned by individuals or communities with a certain purpose. The best

example is the Hill of Crosses which is by the Jurgaičiai mound in the Šiauliai region. People started to massively erect crosses there in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Soviets had destroyed the crosses many times and severely punished those involved in cross erection. In spite of this, new constructions would immediately reappear on this Hill. These crosses were usually brought at night by locals or by some other people from distant regions of Lithuania.

In the 1970s, a loophole was found in the restrictions that allowed publicly carrying out at least some of the traditions of cross-crafting. Crafters started making wooden constructions and sculptural compositions of secular (non-religious) content. These were mostly memorials, although there were also occasional wooden compositions made for purely aesthetic considerations. The creation of such structures served as good schooling for craftsmen; the authors of such new forms would receive public recognition for their artistry. In order to share their professional experience, craftsmen could arrange seminars where one could often obtain information on the plastic forms of cross-crafting particular to the different ethnic regions in Lithuania. Seminars were arranged by the present Folk Culture Center, the Society of Folk Art, and sometimes, by municipalities. This new secular branch of folk memorial crafting proved to be a viable one. It has been continuing presently in independent Lithuania along with the authentic cross-crafting tradition which is getting back on its feet again. Some forms of secular plastic art are being introduced into the craft of sacral woodwork.

Researchers claim that crosses are syncretic images of folk culture. A cross which stands in the open is related to its surrounding in the semantic and plastic sense and is rich in symbolic meaning. The traditional village community used to shape the attitudes and behavior of members with the help of such sacral constructions, which were great in number.

The erection of a cross, which it was to be owned by a whole community, was an exceptionally important event in that it consolidated the community members. The entire village would discuss in detail the anticipated construction – the type of the cross, its size, or the selection of saints whose statuettes would be included in the structure. They would also discuss the selection of the most suitable place for the cross. That plot of land was common property, either bought with money collected from all the members of the community or donated by its current owner. They also had to decide which master would build the cross as well as to agree upon the terms of payment. A master who either belonged to the community or came from another one built the cross according to the requests of the locals. Community members attentively watched the process of cross-crafting and often volunteered their advice. The climax of the whole process was the festival of the consecration of the cross. It usually attracted large numbers of people and was a good social opportunity to invite all of one's relatives and friends from other places. Those people who ordered a cross's construction were held in high esteem. In paying homage to a cross, people remembered their dead (which is a very essential custom for Lithuanians) and discussed other matters of community life.

The countryside cross remained the most important tangible sign that united the community throughout the whole period of its existence; people gathered around a cross for a joint prayer, or to sing hymns. Saying evening prayers by a cross was an

occasion that traditionally allowed local youth to meet and communicate with each other while being watched by the wooden images of God or the saints.

c)

Folk memorial monuments, generally called crosses, are no doubt related by their plastic forms to similar constructions in other Christian countries, especially Catholic European ones. One can also find parallels to the intentions of most of such constructions in the cultures of other nations. The Lithuanian crosses, however, are unique in their appearance, their immensely broad scale of intentions, and their vast quantity.

Lithuanian crosses are related to the pre-Christian spiritual and plastic traditions of this country. It is still a matter of discussion whether or not the prototypes of certain forms of crosses, i.e., pillar-type crosses, were pagan ritual constructions. Two theories have existed since the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first theory says that Lithuanian folk sculpture originates from pre-Christian sacral pole-shaped monuments, whereas the second one claims that it started together with mediaeval Christian customs. Yet supporters of both theories agree that both historical data and modern cross-crafting practice testify evident interplay between the two historical layers – the pagan and the Christian one – in the customs of cross-crafting and cross-worshipping. The shapes of folk crosses which have been researched better than the customs related to cross-crafting also demonstrate the combination of local ethnic and general Christian art styles and iconography, which very often result in the creation of a unique artistic value.

The shape of a cross has always depended on the particular intention of a construction. Thus a great variety of intentions determined the creation of most of the different shapes of crosses. Lithuanian memorial constructions are traditionally divided into the following groups:

1) Crosses, 2) pillar-type crosses (*stogastulpiai*), 3) pillared shrines (*koplytstulpiai*), 4) crosses of plank construction (*krikštai*), 5) shrines with a statuette of a saint, 6) plastic forms close to sculpture, ( a new type which appeared in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.) The items within each group are similar only in the most general aspects of their structure. For example, the pillar-type cross is a monument constructed of two main compositional elements: a pole and a roof. The pillared shrine is a pole with a tiny shrine at its top. Yet the proportions, quantity, shapes, and ornaments of the details, such like poles, roofs, or shrines can be so different that researchers usually divide the five groups into even smaller categories.

The territory of Lithuania is divided into 5 ethnographic regions: Aukštaitija, Žemaitija, Dzūkija, Suvalkija, and Lithuania Minor. The monuments from each region have their specific characteristics which depend not only on the local traditions of woodwork, but also on the local religious practices as well.

The cruciform cross is common in all the regions, only its proportions, compositional parts, and decor vary slightly. Crosses of the Žemaitija region are decorated

comparatively modestly, whereas crosses in Aukštaitija have an abundance of ornaments. Crosses of the Dzūkija region emphasize Christ's suffering which is expressed in arrangements of torturing instruments and other symbols.

Pillar-type crosses are most common in the Aukštaitija region. They often consist of several levels that are covered with a number of roofs and are very richly decorated. One will not find several-leveled pillar-type crosses poles in Žemaitija. However the other forms of classical folk small-scale architecture exist there. Small shrines placed on the ground or on huge stones are among the most common in Žemaitija.

The Suvalkija region used to have the greatest number of shrines hung on old trees. They are much fewer nowadays. The dominant type of monument in this ethnographic region has become the ornamented cross. Its structure and ornamentation differ, however, from the ornamented crosses of Aukštaitija.

In Lithuania Minor – the only part of Lithuania where Lutheranism was the predominant religion – tomb monuments of specific shape, called *krikštas*, were being constructed. The word “*krikštas*” means “a cross” in the local dialect. The *krikštas* is not a pole construction; its base is a thickly carved plank. Constructions of such shape are not found in any other Lithuanian region or in any neighboring country. That is why some researchers trace local pre-Christian influences and relicts of bird and reptile cults in the *krikštas*.

The selection of material for a future work used to be very important in cross-crafting. Again, one can notice evident ties with ancient Lithuanian mythology in this respect. A tree which has been felled for the purpose of making a cross becomes a material which is considered sacred.

Crosses are usually made of oak wood. The reason for this lies not only in the fact that such wood is of the greatest endurance. According to ancient beliefs, the oak tree is a sacred tree intended for the worship of deities. In folklore it is perceived as the symbol of virility, superior to all other trees. That is why it is appropriate to use it for worshipping God.

The linden is traditionally considered a female tree in folklore. A typical plot of a folk song tells about trees growing on the graves of the dead: an oak tree on the tomb of a man and a linden – on that of a woman. These traditions are no longer so strictly observed, but they do appear.

The cross is very rich in its plastic forms. They combine different proportions of local primitive design and decor peculiar to folk woodwork with elements of church art styles from different periods. The folk interpretation of European art styles like Baroque, Classicism, or Neo-Gothic was determined by a master's or a client's wish to relate a monument to a particular work of sacral art, like a painting, sculpture, or a church famous for its festivals which was considered “miraculous” or possessing special powers. Still, most masters used to work and continue to work in their own way, freely combining details of different styles into a more or less harmonious whole.

In some monuments and sculptures that they contain one can trace art forms that are evidently related to a particular style, as a rule to a style from a past period and much more seldom – to a contemporary one. The fact that old and not modern styles are being copied can be explained by the specific character of the sacral folk art. Church paintings and sculptures which are famous for their miraculous powers are usually old and their past is shrouded in legends. Sculptures derived from a miraculous work of art are supposed to move at least some of their power to the owner of the cross and to afford him favors that he is asking for. One can observe certain phenomena that are very interesting from the history of art point of view taking place in Lithuanian cross-crafting. Old plots that had long been forgotten in professional church art have been preserved and reinterpreted in sacral folk sculpture. For example, one of the most popular themes of Lithuanian folk plastic art is called “*Rūpintojėlis*.” It is perceived in the countryside tradition as a figure of the Pensive Christ, the savior and comforter of all the suffering, who is grieving over the sins and misery of the world. It is believed that church sculptures depicting this subject came to Lithuania from Germany in the Middle Ages. Masters in the countryside undoubtedly took it over from church art. There are no surviving sculptures originating from the Middle Ages or later periods depicting this theme in Lithuanian churches today. Moreover, there is no documented proof of their existence in the past. But there are plenty of “*Rūpintojėlis*” sculptures produced by countryside masters. This tradition is so deeply rooted in Lithuanian folk art that sculptures based on this theme are still among the most common.

Every man was supposed to be able to perform at least some woodwork in the traditional Lithuanian village. If he could not, he would be considered a loser. (This attitude is still alive among older people.) Thus, practically every man up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was able, if necessary, to construct at least a crude memorial monument. Sad proof of this fact is that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there are thousands of crosses erected in Siberia in the places of exiled Lithuanians during the Soviet occupation. Those who survived did so under extreme conditions and built monuments in haste to their massively perishing relatives. They considered such monuments necessary. They did not want to simply mark a grave, but rather tried to make monuments as similar as possible to crosses in their home country. They made them tall and even decorated them as much as possible under the miserable exiled conditions. Under normal circumstances, however, only those who had talent and inclination would make crosses for their own use.

The majority of crosses and shrines which were of the greatest artistic value were constructed by cross-crafting artisans. Cross-crafters were part of the same countryside environment. Some of them, like the famous master Vincas Svirskis, did not farm nor have a family. Such masters earned their living by walking from one village to another and making crosses for a relatively small payment. They usually made both the architectural part of the monuments and the statuettes they contained. A master who was making such statuettes was called a “*dievdirbys*” which literary means “a god-maker.” The statuettes were called “*dievukai*” or “*šventukai*” by people which means “little gods or saints.”

It must be observed that all the crosses and statuettes of saints which survived from the 19<sup>th</sup> century that were made by the craftsmen were produced on a very high level of excellence in respect to woodworking techniques. Even statuettes of the most

primitive shape used to be made of very well-prepared dry wood. Masters of woodwork were able to make the bulk of a sculpture from a billet and to join the necessary details to it with great mastership and they knew the ways to protect statuettes from cracking. Sculptures were usually painted in oils after being given a prime coating of drying oil. The same can be said about crosses. Their shapes, constructions, and ornamental parts were made by people well-skilled in woodwork. When a cross is built, an attempt is made to make it stand as long as possible. Lithuanian pillar-type crosses and pillared shrines are quite resistant to humidity. Such monuments made of properly prepared and well-dried wood (usually oak) could stand up to 50 and in some cases even up to 100 years with only some minor repairs from time to time. Pillar-type crosses and pillared shrines were especially resistant to rainy weather. That is why these forms were so popular in the past. The form which is the least resistant to the effects of the atmosphere is the tall cross, richly decorated with carved wooden ornaments. This form became widely used only at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when wood-processing became technically less difficult and modern instruments and equipment enabled a renewal and even replacement of old parts.

Quite a lot of cross-crafting artisans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century made other woodwork along with crosses; they could be, for example, carpenters or joiners. The latter employed not only the most traditional techniques of woodwork using a knife, axe, or chisel, but also more recent technologies borrowed from professional town crafts, like figurative carving with special fretsaws or turning. The most skillful village cross-crafting masters could even become church decorators or constructors of altars without having a special education, although they could get work only in poor provincial churches. Such masters acquired more sophisticated woodwork techniques and learned compositional schemes that they employed in the production of church equipment of different styles. They used some of this know-how when making monuments for villages, which they did alongside the church orders. Young and less talented cross-crafters imitated the work of widely famous masters. Talented masters usually left a very strong and long-lasting impact on a whole region. Sometimes they even created new types of monuments. This, however, can be said only with some reservation. A cross-crafting master who was very much ahead of his colleagues in regards to his technical skills usually had no successors; his art remained a prominent, but lonely peak in the overall stream of folk memorial art.

Modern masters have continued many past traditions. The craft of cross-crafting is still being passed on in the traditional way, i.e., from master to master. This craft cannot be studied in any official educational institution. A future master can only learn some of the general methods of woodwork in a craft or art school. The majority of masters today make do without such studies and are self-taught in their art of cross-crafting, just as their predecessors used to be. Still, they can also have a higher education degree in some other field like engineering or agronomy. There are families in Lithuania where several generations have been engaged in cross-crafting. Some masters started to gather around themselves small groups of children in recent years. (Traditionally – boys, although there are very talented women among cross-crafting masters today.) Children learn general techniques of woodwork and sculpture, while every master has his own teaching methods. Some children very quickly reveal their talent as potential craftsmen and display statuettes that they have made at the exhibitions of traditional woodwork and various contests. It is noteworthy that a great

number of cross-crafters in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century started to learn the craft of sculpture-making and other woodworking from their early childhood, usually by a master who was their relative.

As was mentioned earlier, part of the crosses are made by the people themselves, and this used to happen more often in the past. Such an author of two of three crosses makes a direct and personal interpretation of a sacral topic. In the past, when a cross was made by a cross-master, a spiritual communion could be felt between him and the user of the cross. It happened spontaneously, since masters grew up in the same environment and acquired the religious, cultural, and artistic values of the community to which they belonged as well as employed them in their art. The role of a cross-crafting master was limited to the embodying the aspirations of the community in wood. This is also proven by the fact that more credit for the erection of a cross is given to the person who has commissioned it rather than to the one who has made it. A cross-crafting master never inscribed his name or initials on the monument. Traditional inscriptions, if any, record the date of erection, sometimes the intention, and in some cases – the name of the owner of the construction, but not that of the master. Even till today the country-side community does not realize that a cross-crafting master can claim a copyright or that he can prohibit the person who commissions his work to change anything on his own or to give it to another master for repairs. The majority of older cross-masters have the same attitude. Only in recent years younger masters who have seen more of the world started to defend their artistic property rights for the works that they have produced and delivered to a client, as well as to take care of their fate and regular restoration.

It must be said that the cooperation between a master and the users of his works when determining their form is no longer as direct, as it used to be in the past. Usually their agreement depends on traditions. It is a new tendency, however, that the role of the tradition-bearer more and more often belongs to the master who, again, knows the customs not as a way of life, but by consciously studying them.

e)

The craft of cross-crafting has faced many challenges and withstood them with success. It has markedly recovered after the last and most difficult period, i.e., the one of the Soviet occupational regime's prohibitions. Some very old rituals and customs which one would think were destined to disappear without any bans have even been revitalized and are now being practiced again.

There are still obvious threats which affect the customs related to cross-crafting. It is because of these customs that cross-crafting has survived as a living cultural phenomenon.

Today we distinguish two levels of the functioning of the craft of cross-crafting. First of all, it is a tradition which is alive in naturally formed local and religious communities. Secondly, it functions as an adapted tradition and as a national cultural expression being maintained by public and state cultural institutions. The first level nourishes the second one. The cultural tradition of cross-crafting cannot be separated from the life of local communities and their prevailing world outlook with its concept of culture.



The biggest threat to the traditions of cross-crafting comes from the growing process of cultural globalization which is already felt in the countryside communities. In its light the old forms of cultural expression look outdated to the members of communities, while innovations are introduced too hastily, not by adjusting the new circumstances to tradition as it used to be, but by totally or largely rejecting it.

Another unfavorable factor is the constant decrease in the population of local communities. The older generation who cherished the tradition of cross-crafting is dying out. Forced by the economic development of today the youth move to the cities. Some younger members of the communities are no longer interested in traditional cultural values. The latter phenomenon is not, however, universal. An opposite process can also be observed; some youth seek spiritual harmony in traditional culture. It is for the sake of such people that a well-considered and single-minded policy of cultural education should be developed.

#### 4. MANAGEMENT

a)

Since cross-crafting is a craft embodying the nation's spiritual heritage in tangible form, several governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations are involved in its safeguarding and preservation. These are:

The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania,  
Basanavičiaus 5  
LT-2683 Vilnius

The persons in charge:

Deputy minister Ina Marčiulionytė  
tel. (370-2) 62 30 93, fax (370-2) 62 31 20

Irena Seliukaitė  
Senior specialist in ethnic culture  
tel. (370-2) 22 11 26

The Lithuanian Folk Culture Center which is the only national institution taking care of the dissemination of intangible heritage and maintenance of the living tradition.

Person in charge:  
Vida Šatkauskienė  
Deputy director  
B. Radvilaitės 8  
LT- 2600 Vilnius  
e-mail: lfcc@lfcc.lt  
Tel. (370-2) 61 25 40  
Fax (370-2) 61 26 07

The Cultural Heritage Center which registers cultural heritage monuments.  
The registration of crosses and shrines is undertaken by

Giedrė Vengrytė  
Ašmenos 10,  
LT-2600 Vilnius  
Tel. (370-2) 22 12 62

The Department of Cultural Properties which takes care of the protection and restoration of cultural properties

Person in charge:  
Diana Varnaitė  
Director  
Šnipiškių 3  
LT-2000 Vilnius

The protection of crosses and shrines in their natural environment is being carried out by 4 national parks and municipalities. These state institutions also take care of the preservation of the living tradition.

All the institutions mentioned above are financed by the state budget. Some non-governmental organizations are active as well, especially in the field of the preservation of the living tradition. These are:

The Lithuanian Folk Artist Society  
Jonas Rudzinskas, chairman  
Stiklių 16-18  
LT-2001 Vilnius  
Tel. (370-2) 22 05 64

Lithuanian Ethnographic Society  
Laima Varkalienė  
Deputy chairman  
Aušros al. 21  
Šiauliai  
Tel. (370-21) 523698

b)

The Governmental institutions during the Soviet period took least care of safeguarding and protecting of spiritual culture, traditions, and customs. The greatest efforts were made to protect the material aspect of cross-crafting. It was the community which safeguarded the intangible aspect of the cultural manifestation, such as related customs, traditions, or rituals. Since the restoration of Lithuanian independence, the customs of the community have been revitalized and the influence of parishes has significantly increased in this respect.

The principal means of safeguarding and revitalizing the living tradition of cross-crafting is through seminars, creative workshops and conferences these are being organized by the Lithuanian Folk Culture Center in cooperation with municipalities and national or regional parks.

Legal protection mechanisms are also being strengthened.

c)

I, II, III.

### **Legal machinery**

The tangible forms of the cross-crafting tradition like crosses, pillar-type crosses, pillared shrines, sculptures and their ensembles are being protected by two laws: the Law on the Protection of Immovable Cultural Properties and the Law on the Protection of Movable Cultural Properties. According to these laws, cultural properties (crosses, shrines, etc. in the particular case) are inscribed into the State registers; the Register of recently disclosed historical and cultural properties, and the Transitory inventory (for three years).

Following the conventions adopted by UNESCO and its Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore, Lithuania adopted the Law on the Principles of State Protection of Ethnic Culture. Its provisions protect and safeguard intangible heritage, as well as other forms of traditional culture (traditional culture is called ethnic culture in Lithuania).

Unfortunately, the Lithuanian Law on Copyright and Adjoining Rights does not properly defend the rights of the authors' skills and expertise.

IV. A legal mechanism which would ensure the continuity of the tradition and its transmission from generation to generation has not yet been created in Lithuania. This is done mostly by organizing creative workshops in regions (masters of different ages are invited to them; there are some dynasties of masters) and through the organization of the educational system in the right direction. The most suitable environment for transmission is in the schools of general education where the tradition is taught during classes of crafts, art, and ethnic culture, as well as during extra-curricular activities.

Communities and parishes take active care of the transmission of traditions and rituals.

d The best way to introduce protective measures is education. During the Soviet period, relationships within communities were being destroyed and the traditional community was falling apart. On the other hand, the community, although disintegrating, was taking care of shrines, crosses, and related customs. The children of the Soviet period are now active members of the society. That is why it is very important to strengthen the community and to stimulate its self-awareness.

A great threat to the preservation of traditional properties arises from open borders and the general globalization processes.

e)

### **THE ACTION PLAN**

**For the preservation, support, and promotion of the cross-crafting tradition in Lithuania in the period from 2000 to 2010**

1. To prepare a state program for the development of ethnic culture. (2001)

It will be a post-law act which will provide for the actions stated in the order of priorities and relating to the research, development, protection, dissemination, and preservation of ethnic culture (cross-crafting included) and its traditions, as well as for state funding.

2. To complete the Register of Cultural Properties protected by the State. ( 2004)
3. To set up an inventory of crosses, pillar-type crosses, tiny shrines, etc., and their parts kept in state and non-state museums; to publish a catalogue of iconography; and to organize a conference where the museum collections will be studied. (2003)
4. To prepare and publish a manual on the methods of research in the field of cross-crafting. (2001)

(It will be a complex work undertaken by the Folk Art Department of the Lithuanian Folk Culture Center which will include a questionnaire on wood-carving masters, crosses, pillared shrines and other works, as well as on the transfer of the woodwork tradition and customs or traditions related to cross-crafting.

5. To systemize the accumulated information and to set up the register “Cross-crafting in Lithuania.” (2001-2006)
6. To accumulate filmed material from every Lithuanian region on the woodwork tradition, its masters, and customs.(2001-2010)
7. To transfer all the crosses, pillar-type crosses, pillared shrines, and sculptures which have been proclaimed cultural properties to the state museums and to replace them with their replicates. (2001-2010)
8. To organize seminars on an annual basis for the recorders and masters of the cross-crafting tradition. (2001-2010)
9. To organize seminars, conferences, and training workshops in different regions for woodwork masters, as well as to promote local traditions and to encourage youth to take part in such events. (2001-2010)
10. On the basis of collected documentation, to work out different study materials for schools and cultural workers, such as a methodological manual, films, and CD’s. (2005)
11. To organize educational events in communities and schools.
12. To disseminate the collected material with the help of mass-media: to create TV films, TV program series, and on-line publications.
13. To establish regional centers of traditional crafts. (2001-2010)

14. To create a mechanism encouraging the community to preserve the living tradition.

f)

**The Administrative Structure for the protection of the cross-crafting tradition**

Governmental institutions:

1. The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania.
2. The Department for the Protection of Cultural Properties
3. The Cultural Heritage Center
4. The Folk Culture Center
5. National and Regional Parks
6. The Council for the Protection of Ethnic Culture
7. Municipalities

Public organizations:

1. The Lithuanian Folk Artists' Association
2. The Lithuanian Ethnographic Society
3. Communities (local and religious)

g)

Funding comes from the state budget, although private sponsors are sought and additional funds are used for the financing of training workshops and seminars. These means are minimal at the moment.

h)

About 20 skilled and actively working persons.

i)

There are about 100 masters who are able to pass on skillfully the tradition of cross-crafting.

There are about 20 persons (ethnologists, art historians, museum specialists, ethnic culture specialists) who can teach safeguarding, revitalization, and dissemination practices and who are ready to spread the living tradition. The figures are under constant change; there is a potential of young people.

MASTERPIECES OF THE ORAL AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE OF  
HUMANITY

LITHUANIAN CANDIDATURE FILE

**CROSS-CRAFTING (KRYŽDIRBYSTĖ)**