

Editorial

European Mythologies

Most of the papers in this issue of *Ethnologia Europaea*, in one way or another, deal with what might be called "European mythologies", with the ways in which European identities on different levels are constructed.

In the introductory article, *Roger Bartra* is contributing to the early history of European or Western self-identification by analysing the role of the wild man, the "homo sylvaticus". The wild man appears in mediaeval imagery, but has his roots in classical antiquity. He might be seen as a prefiguration of "primitive" man from the third world, who in the colonial era took over the role as a counter-part of the "civilised" European.

The following contributors are dealing with mythological constructions on the level of nation-state, in Poland, Estonia and Hungary. *Zofia Sokolewics* in her article raises the problem of the role of heroes in the creation of national identity. Taking her point of departure in Polish tradition, she shows that even the heroes of the 20th century – Marshal Piłsudski and Father Skorupka, two important figures from the creation of modern Poland after the First World War, as well as Father Popielusko, the "Solidarity" chaplain who in 1984 was murdered by the secret police – have their fate and life stories structured in accordance with the traditional patterns of heroic figures.

In his article *Ants Viires* is focusing on a specific aspect of the construction of an Estonian national identity. The pioneers in this field, in the middle of the 19th century, were anxious to produce evidence of the venerable age of Estonian culture and i.a. presented a pre-Christian mythology, which as a matter of fact was composed on the basis of Finnish tradition. Although it was later revealed as an example of "invented tradition", it continued to be important for Estonian identity.

Folk culture, or traditional peasant culture, has played an essential role in the construction

of national identities. Folk tradition has been most important in relatively new states, where a "national awakening" was led by new elites recruited from the rural population, but played a minor role in countries like Poland and Hungary with a continuous statehood and leading aristocratic elites. In a comprehensive study of the construction of national identity in Hungary, *Tamás Hofer* is analyzing the "folk culture heritage" from the point of view of – with his own words – an "insider" in two senses: "as a Hungarian, and as an ethnographer who, through employment by the state, is involved in "constructing" this sector of national ideology". In his article Hofer demonstrates how competing groups of the elite developed different kinds of "Hungarianness" and alternative symbolic strategies.

In the next contribution we remain in Hungary dealing with national identity, but the scope and the point of departure is a different one. Through the presentation of a vivid and fascinating piece of ethnographic description, *Ernö Kunt* shows what happens when the distance between the people and the official ideology becomes too great: An alternative mythology on household or family level, building on traditional patterns of meaning and importance, is being constructed to replace the useless official one. To quote *Ernö Kunt*: "There is no culture that could bear a situation in which several generations of people remember in their private life and within the family, things that are different from what they are officially expected to remember".

The two last articles are only indirectly contributing to the main topic of this issue. They are both on local identities: *Eric Venbrux* is trying to interpret the cultural meaning of the burial of a young girl, dressed up as a bride, in a little Swiss mountain village, while *Ulrike Krasberg* is discussing the role of the saints in a Greek village on one of the islands in the Aegean Sea. Here in a little community, on the

edge of Europe, local and national identity has very much been one and the same, and during the centuries of Turkish domination Orthodox

Christianity was the only way to express Greek or European selfidentification.