

The devil is not so black as he is painted

Lithuania has a unique museum which no other country can boast. It is the museum of devils in the city of Kaunas. Today it is an affiliate of the Ciurlionis National Art Museum.

The museum was launched by distinguished Lithuanian artist Antanas Zmudzina- vicus who enjoyed number 13, the devil's dozen, and always respected the characters that not always were human enemies.

Number 13 played a specific role in the life of Zmudzina- vicus. His name-day was on the 13th, he met his future wife on the 13th, and his only daughter was born on the 13th. The artist said he made friends with the devils in childhood. He collected 260 exhibits (20 devil's dozens) and decided to display the collection to the public.

Zmudzina- vicus said he promised to the first devil he met in Samogitija to shelter his brothers in his home and show them to people in exchange for good health and long life. The artist lived 90 years and presented his house with the museum to the city one year before

passing away in 1966. But after his death devils continued to arrive and arrive from all over the world. In 1982 the house had to be expanded to accommodate all devils.

Today the museum collection numbers over three thousand exhibits of various forms and colors, with horns, tails, hooves, wooden, ceramic, metallic, and even woven on carpets. They are all gifts. Some are household items, e.g. walking-sticks, door handles, glasses, plates, and openers. Others pose for musicians, dandies or politicians. The third took on the image of donkeys, dogs or pigs. Like any evil spirit they can acquire any image. The collection is constantly growing due to new and often unexpected gifts. This year which is also the 13th the museum received a clock with a devil from South Korean musicians.

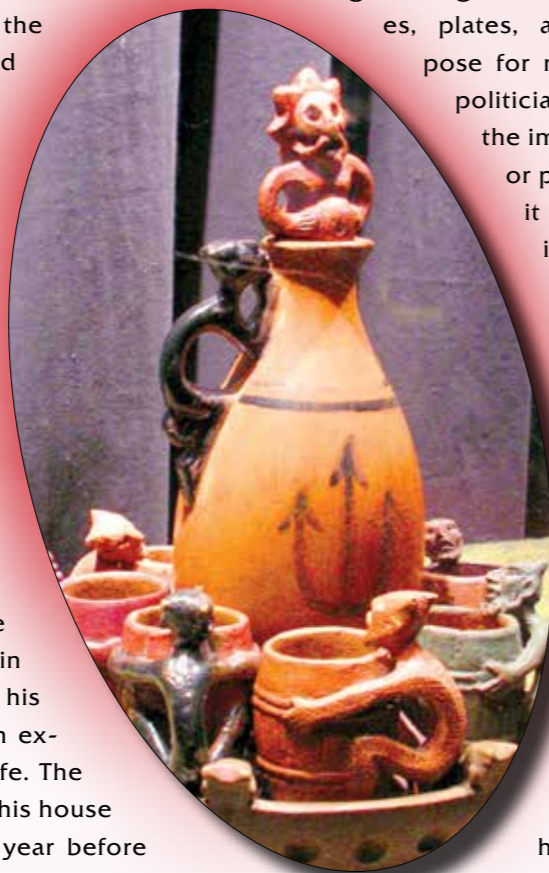
Devils occupy a major place in both Slavic and Lithuanian folklore. The latter has over five thousand

fairy tales and stories related to the important character in folk conscience. Close to 400 places are named after him. Scientists say even the main Lithuanian natural site, the famous Puntukas stone, was pushed to its current place by the devil in the Ice Age. He wanted to crash with it a nearby church under construction but dropped the stone when he heard cockerel sing and thus the divine house remained intact.

In contrast to Slavic ethnography, the Lithuanian one does not always depict the devil (Velnias in Lithuanian) as a bad guy who wants to harm humans and seduce them out of the right way. He helped the spirit of ancestors (veles) maintain contact with those living. Sometimes he helped the poor and did it selflessly by showing treasures and hidden wealth to them. It is related to pagan perceptions about underground spirits that keep buried treasures and protect the poor and honest people and punish greedy and brutal. With the advent of Christianity the devils were moved to a team of evil servants of Satan. However popular conscience preserved a dual attitude to them.

In public conscience the devil was not always a bad guy who wants to harm humans and seduce them out of the right way.

Courageous girls even married them (suffice it to recall popular Lithuanian musical Devil's Mill) and various deals were concluded with devils. They often appeared at various male parties and liked to visit village gatherings. Girls were even warned by strict mothers: if she liked





a stranger dancer at a party she had to step on his foot to check whether it is a hoof. Lithuanian devils worked hard, got tired, and fell in love. Anyway, nothing human was alien to them.

Lithuania was the last in Europe to adopt Christianity and had no rich traditions of religious arts and medieval sculpture. Craftsmen expressed their religious feelings as they could. They cut saints and divine protectors from wood according to established canons. But they gave rein to their imagination in depicting devils and all types of evil force. Some characters were fearful, others were funny and the third resembled outstanding personalities. Zmudzinavicius himself experienced it as his friends-art-

ists liked to depict him as a good devil.

Gradually the devils acquired yet another trait in folk art. All human vice were attributed to them, mostly smoking and alcohol consumption (they invented hebon), lasciviousness, greed, and acquisitiveness. The dark forces personified by devils in modern popular conscience are thus accentuating the bright sides of life. The more devils the brighter the light.

Unfortunately, as demonology experts claim, the number of devils decreased by early XXI century, their power vanished, and Satan ousted them. Their place was occupied by people who better cope with the duties of a devil. May be it is the reason why the world of non-fearful



devils who lost their power and settled down in Kaunas is visited both by adults and children of different age. The museum offers various educational programs for them which tell the history of each exhibit and describe witch parties, teach dances, magic deeds and whistling in order to call a marshland or forest devil.

However they rarely come today. Therefore, it is important to visit the museum where devils found their last shelter and where nobody can offend them any longer.

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