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In search of miracles: pilgrimage to the miraculous places

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to discuss various aspects of the development of the places of apparitions and miraculous images, motives and behavioral characteristics of pilgrims coming to the miraculous places of the Virgin Mary in Lithuania.*

Design/methodology/approach – *The paper reviews literature about miraculous events and presents miraculous places in Lithuania (apparition places of the Virgin Mary and sites of miraculous images). Various classifications are applied. Pilgrims' motivation and behavioral aspects are analyzed based on the quantitative survey.*

Findings – *The research showed that the main motives of religious pilgrims visiting miraculous places were asking for God's grace, health, expressing gratitude to Jesus or Virgin Mary as well as spiritual quest and renewal. These places attract pilgrims who want to solve different problems in their life or to recover from illnesses. Religious pilgrimage has different forms and rituals, and constitutes different models of the specific behavior. During the journey, pilgrims perform various religious practices such as praying, singing hymns, kissing the relics, etc. The grouping of devotional rituals performed during the pilgrimage and at the destination place is presented.*

Originality/value – *The paper is important to the researchers of pilgrimage and religious tourism. For the first time, miraculous places of Lithuania are analyzed in the broader international context. Classifications of the miraculous sites indicate various aspects of the development of these places. Motives and behavioral characteristics of pilgrims enable to better understand the multidimensional reality of religious pilgrimage.*

Keywords *Religious tourism, Apparition places, Miraculous images, Miraculous places, Motivation and behavior of pilgrims, Lithuania*

Paper type *Research paper*

Introduction

The best-known miraculous places in Christianity are apparition places of the Virgin Mary and places of miraculous images. Lourdes (France) and Fatima (Portugal) are the most visited Christian pilgrimage centers after Rome. However, the authority of the Catholic Church is very careful in considering various apparitions. There are a lot of charlatans, visionaries, prophets or simply spiritual invalids who are presented with various visions and dreams.

More than 2,500 visions of Mary have been reported around the world, but in the twentieth century, only nine cases have received the Church's approval as worthy of belief (four of those with Vatican approval). Today exist hundreds of other Marian apparitions that have not received official approval but have been visited by pilgrims and have been approved for faith expression at the site. Marian apparition places become centers of pilgrimage, which are often accompanied by miraculous healings, and other graces and favors. In general, Marian apparition places affect the spread of Marian devotions, awareness of specific Marian dogmas and doctrines and adjustment of various folk beliefs and prejudices. Therefore, the Cult of Virgin Mary becomes multidimensional and multi-layered.

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Researches of Marian apparitions from the sociological perspective are relatively rare (Berryman, 2001, Davis and Boles, 2003). Some researchers focus on the functions of apparitions (Margry, 2009), others on the phenomenology (Perry and Echeverria, 1988, Zimdars-Swartz, 1989, 1991) or psychoanalysis (Carroll, 1983, 1985). The studies often contend that apparitions occur in scarcely developed economical communities, that visionaries are most frequently women and children and that, moreover, apparitions tend to improve the pilgrims' self-esteem, and serve in improving groups' management of social crises (Davis and Boles, 2003, p. 373). Ann Matter (2001) analyzed the increased role of photos in recent apparitions, reminding the reader that recent apparitions of the Virgin Mary are deeply entwined with the political and societal changes of the twentieth century. Horsfall (2000, p. 384), after analysis of common characteristics of apparitions, concluded that "Marian apparitions appear to be the Catholic equivalent of New Age spirituality". Skrbis (2005) points out the similar principles of nationalist imagination and apparitions, because they both partake in the idea of specialness and election (chosenness). Halemba (2011) stresses different approaches (national, transnational or cosmopolitan) to the apparitions of the Virgin Mary.

In general, viewers claim the appearance of the Virgin Mary or a Lady to them and a conversation (external or internal communication) with her. Messages to the visionaries become the subject of discussions, even negotiations, among different stakeholders (visionaries, Church, pilgrims, local community, scientists, theologians, etc.). For pilgrims, apparition places are places of hope, grace and revitalization. It is also recognized as places of discovering the faith, places of conversions and intimate communication with Mary, the Mother of Christ, as well as sites of various personal miraculous signs and events such as healings.

In tourism motivation literature, there have been extensive discussions on the impact of religious miracles for pilgrim's preferences. Motivation and behavior of religious pilgrims have been explored by Post *et al.* (1998), Blackwell (2007), Liutikas (2012), etc. Digance (2006, p. 38) pointed out that religious pilgrims expect to be rewarded with a mystical or magico-religious experience which is something out of the ordinary existence and marks a transition from the mundane secular humdrum world to a special and sacred state. Miraculous places seem worthy travel destinations to achieve this reward.

This paper aims to discuss social aspects of the development of the places of apparitions and miraculous images, motivation and behavioral characteristics of pilgrims coming to the miraculous places of the Virgin Mary in Lithuania.

Literature review

Miraculous apparitions and church position

In general, miracles are prominent in all religions. The direct contact of an individual with an apparition of a divine figure corresponds to foundational moments or key episodes in the internal history of numerous religious traditions (Berryman, 2001, p. 597). In Christianity, the core miracles are Incarnation of God to the Man and Resurrection of Jesus after Death. After the Biblical times, the most known miracles are apparitions of the Virgin Mary. Apparitions of the Virgin Mary belong to the mystical claims. According to Zimdars-Swartz (1989, p. 125), "an apparition may be understood as the appearance within the physical environment to one or more individuals of a person they would not expect to be within the immediate perceptual range". The most famous apparitions have occurred in Guadalupe (Mexico, 1531), La Salette (France, 1846), Lourdes (France, 1858), Knock (Ireland, 1879), Fatima (Portugal, 1917), Beauraing (Belgium, 1932) and Medjugorje (Bosnia-Herzegovina, from 1981).

Virgin Mary appears at a particular time and in carefully chosen places. The relationship among chosen visionaries, the place and the apparition time is usually not random, as it rather shows interdependence and hidden senses. There is a strong and well-established

connection between time of apparition and the public events which have happened during the days of apparitions. The apparitions have played an important role in the construction of national, regional or ethnic identity (the cases of Guadalupe, Medjugorje, Šiluva, etc.). Sometimes, apparitions symbolize the religious identity of a region, or even of an entire nation.

Margry (2009) points out that, since 1945, the world has witnessed a great increase in Marian apparitions, which in respect to frequency, content, structure and representation diverge from those of the preceding centuries. These apparitions were, or are, strongly influenced by, among other things, the rise of totalitarian and atheistic regimes, the Cold War, the Second Vatican Council and the renewal of the Church. The devotion, which arose around them, in the context of the social construction, used by the visionaries and their adherents is the instrument to combat to the societal changes (Margry, 2009). So apparitions of the Virgin Mary involve particular aspects of political or social circumstances. Some apparitions occur just once and Virgin Mary provides only one message, while others are recurring (two, three or more times), or even long-lasting (daily, weekly, monthly; thousands of messages from apparitions in Medjugorje).

The large number of apparitions in the twentieth century, which involved different messages from the visionaries, committed the Church to declare an official position. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith prepared "Criteria for judging, at least with probability, the character of the presumed apparitions or revelations". Pope Paul VI approved these criteria in 1978. These criteria show precaution to acknowledge particular apparition.

The main two positive criteria for judging authenticity of the apparitions are:

1. moral certitude, or at least great probability of the existence of the fact, acquired by means of a serious investigation; and
2. particular circumstances relative to the existence and to the nature of the fact, that is to say:
 - personal qualities of the subject or of the subjects (in particular, psychological equilibrium, honesty and rectitude of moral life, sincerity and habitual docility towards Ecclesiastical Authority, the capacity to return to a normal regimen of a life of faith, etc.);
 - as regards revelation: true theological and spiritual doctrine and immune from error; and
 - healthy devotion and constant abundant spiritual fruit (spirit of prayer, conversion, testimonies of charity, etc.).

Ordinary of the place has to evaluate and to notice possible negative criteria such as:

- manifest error concerning the fact;
- doctrinal errors attributed to God himself, or to the Blessed Virgin Mary, or to some saint in their manifestations, taking into account, however, the possibility that the subject might have added, even unconsciously, purely human elements or some error of the natural order to an authentic supernatural revelation;
- evidence of a search for profit or gain strictly connected to the fact;
- gravely immoral acts committed by the subject or his or her followers when the fact occurred or in connection with it; and
- psychological disorder or psychopathic tendencies in the subject, that with certainty influenced on the presumed supernatural fact, or psychosis, collective hysteria or other things of this kind (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2012).

Bishops of Lithuania officially declared authentic apparition of Šiluva in 1608. However, lots of unrecognized and even controversial apparitions have occurred in various Catholic countries. Pilgrims visit these places and commonly believe the authenticity of such apparitions. Places of unacknowledged apparitions usually have their own spiritual paradigm and devotional traditions.

Main characteristics of approved Marian apparitions include:

- time of apparition related with social and political crisis;
- they were given to a person or a group of people, which is characterized by a certain unity (shepherds, children, etc.);
- the message or messages do not add anything new to Christian Revelation;
- the apparition site aims to be a place of miraculous signs and healing; and
- the apparition site becomes a pilgrimage place, visited by the Pope.

Perry and Echeverria (1988, pp. 76-78) developed the paradigm of an apparition of the Virgin Mary, which includes the following elements:

- background (most apparitions tend to take place in the time of social unquiet, economic or social crisis, or when the Catholic Church is persecuted, its power threatened; usually apparition takes place in the underdeveloped, rural or isolated province);
- visionaries (peasant children, most are from poor family, poorly educated, but generally familiar with the Catholic doctrine and the Cult of the Virgin);
- vision (the Virgin is described as a Lady, who glows brilliantly, her clothes regal, she may float, grow or weep);
- messages (the Virgin delivers messages that tend to be apocalyptic in character, part of it may be connected with the future events, support for the Vatican doctrines; penance, fasting and the rosary are emphasized to avert divine wrath; Mary asks for a chapel to be built on the spot as a new center for processions and pilgrimages);
- miracles (physical cures, miraculous spring, also visionaries and the faithful report public miracles, especially irregular solar phenomena, such as a bouncing sun);
- reactions (initial skepticism from the parish priest, and later acknowledgment, locals remain incredulous, sometimes persecution of visionaries and pilgrims; legal battles over property and marketing rights gets under way); and
- ecclesiastical action (the local bishop, in consultation with the Vatican, chairs the inquiry and thus begins the process of official recognition or denial of authenticity; mostly communication of the visionaries with the outside world has been strictly controlled; step-by-step, the Pope grants indulgences and other privileges to the pilgrims; sanctuary build at the apparition place later will be raised to the rank of basilica).

This overview of the conceptions of the apparitions indicates that particular characteristics of the apparitions indeed do have an impact on the Church's position to acknowledge them. Although the paradigm of an apparition of the Virgin Mary developed by Perry and Echeverria (1988) is theoretically influential, there are further needs to research the relations of social environment with various aspects of apparitions.

Miraculous and coroneted images of Virgin Mary

Miraculous images of the Virgin Mary could be related with her apparitions, or other miracles that have been happening to the image itself or to the prayers who pray to the image. Among the most known miraculous images are the images of Our Lady of Czestochowa (Poland), Our Lady of Guadalupe (Mexico), Our Lady of Copacabana

(Bolivia), Our Lady of Altötting (Germany), Protectress of the Roman People (Italy), Our Lady of Gate of Dawn (Lithuania), the Virgin of Montserrat (Spain) and many others.

Veneration of icons is also an important element of cult in Eastern Christianity, for example the Russian Orthodox Church. Russian pilgrims visit the icons of Christ, Holy Mary and saints. Such images help to direct prayers and endeavors to the God. The most known icons related to Holy Mary: Mother of God of Vladimir, Mother of God of Pochaev, Our Lady of Kazan, Our Lady of Smolensk, etc.

Miraculous images are very important for many pilgrims. They try to see with their own eyes the images with which a lot of past miracles are associated, and to pray for changes and miracles in their lives. Of course, not all images become recognized as miraculous. The miracles or supernatural events should happen on behalf of images. Two types of such events could be identified:

1. miracles on the image itself (mostly on statues: weeping, bleeding, extrication of oil or fragrance, animation; to this category, cases of miraculous origin of the image itself could be added); and
2. miracles with the believers (miraculous healings, and others).

Sometimes various miraculous signs (visions, dreams, voices, lights, etc.) indicate the location at which sacred images could be found for the first time or withdrawn from the oblivion. The same signs could suggest where images have to be moved. Miracles surround the entire history of some images. Rather often they were rescued from burning churches or left untouched, while other nearby buildings or things were incinerated.

Signs of miracles of healing and grace are votive amulets (*lat. votum* – a vow, a promised donation; mostly golden or silver hearts, hands, legs, ears and other parts of a human body), which used to be an extremely popular way of expressing gratitude for a grace received. When a large quantity of these votive amulets was gathered, they were often used for the production of coating for paintings, altar crosses and liturgical dishes. The votive amulets donated at the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius decorate the walls of the chapel. The tradition of donating votive amulets has survived up to the present; however, gratitude is expressed in other ways as well. The simplest of them is lighting a candle, the flame of which is a symbol of the pilgrim's existence and his aspirations or donating money.

One form of reverence frequently shown to the images of the Blessed Virgin Mary is their coronation. It is a formal acknowledgment of the miraculous powers of images. The Catholic Church through the Papal decree gives a privilege to the coronation of images under a specific name (e.g. The Mother of Mercy at the Gate of Dawn). The venerated image has to have the history of religious devotion and miraculous events. The devotion of the image should enhance faith, hope and spiritual renewal in a certain locality.

The tradition of crowning images is very old practice. The first Pope who crowned the image of the Virgin Mary by the golden crown was Gregory III (731-741). The tradition spread, coronations become more numerous in the fourteenth century. However, steady coronations established at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Capuchin Girolamo Paulucci de' Calboli da Forli (1552-1620) was promoting coronations of the images during his missions. In 1636, Count Alessandro Sforza Pallavicino established a foundation entrusted to the Vatican for the financing of the crowning of Marian images. Vatican chapter had to look into the coronation issue; the criteria for the coronation were established. At the beginning, the images could only be crowned in Rome, later on outside the city. Claims for the privilege were sent directly to the Pope and competent Vatican authorities examined them. If the privilege were granted after their recommendation, a decree would have been sent to the dignitary who would have to represent the Pope at the coronation.

In the seventeenth century, a special rite was composed for the coronation of religious images of Jesus, Mary and the saints. In the nineteenth century, a special rite was written for crowning images of Mary. This rite was incorporated into the Roman liturgy. According

to it, the Church proclaims that the Virgin Mary is rightly regarded and betaken as Queen of Heaven and Earth. The Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship approved new rites in Rome in 1981.

The coronation itself takes place with solemnity, according to a set ceremony. If the image of Our Lady depicts her holding the Holy Child, both must be crowned. The crown must be made from gold and adorned by precious stones. The gold for the crowns was usually provided by the faithful of the parish, pilgrims or noblemen. The gold was taken from rings and other jewelry. The crown or gold was taken to Italy to be blessed personally by the Pope before being crowned (Potter, 2009).

There were more than 1,500 coronations of Mary from the beginning of the seventeenth century. Many coronations took place in Italy, Spain, France and Poland. Often, the coronation of the image marks the start of a series of later extraordinary miracles occurring on behalf of the image. The miracles related to the crowned images are diverse and numerous. For example, there have been people who were not able to speak or to see but who regained these abilities after praying next to the crowned image and asking for the Virgin Mary to intercede on their behalf. Behind every one of these images, there is a story of devotion that becomes important enough to merit the image the golden crown. At the Eastern Churches, there is the rite of adorning icons by the offering of crowns (The Catholic Encyclopedia, 2012).

The above description suggests that miraculous images are an important subject for religious devotion. There is no doubt, that these images attract pilgrims and tourists. However, the researches on pilgrims' behavior and their special rites appear to be deficient. Majority researches focus on particular images, their veneration history or other related aspects (Oen, 2011).

Miraculous places in Lithuania

Nowadays, we can identify 20 major Catholic pilgrimage places in Lithuania (Figure 1). This identification is based on the places visited by contemporary pilgrims as well as taking into consideration the visiting traditions, geographical area of attraction, the number of pilgrims who visited the place, the hierarchical importance of sacred places and their significance. Four places are related with apparitions of the Virgin Mary (Šiluva, Imbradas, Keturnaujiena and Skiemonys).

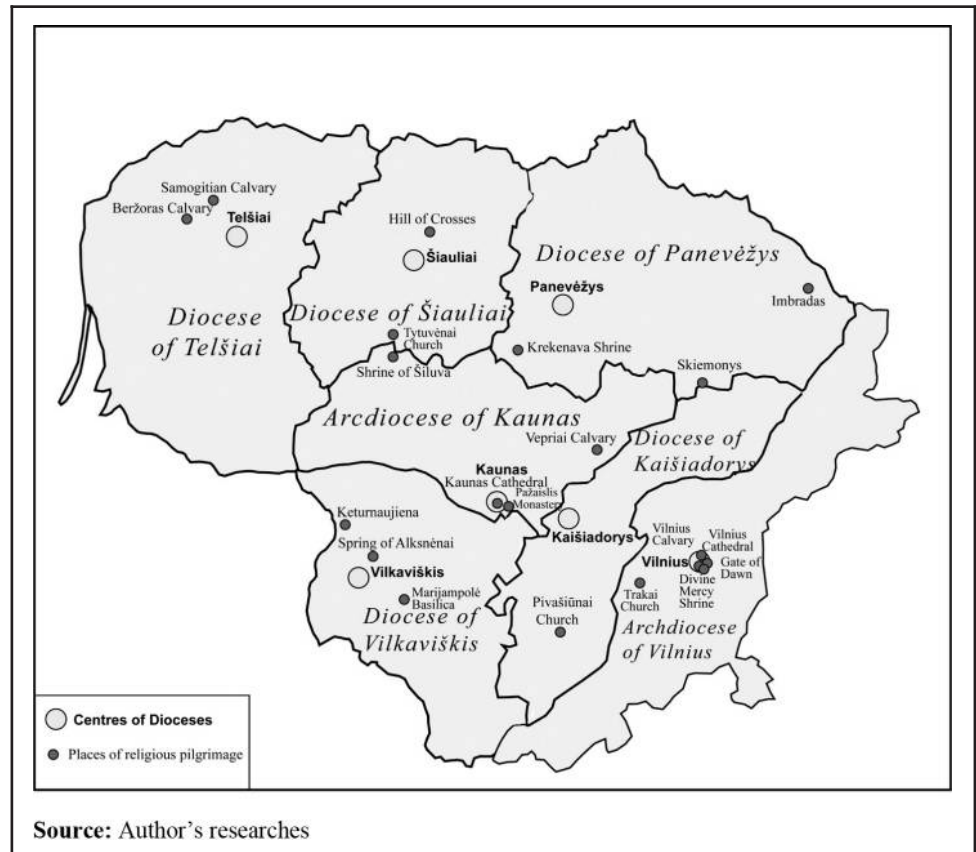
In general, the network of Lithuanian pilgrimage places includes official sanctuaries and informal networks of apparition places, holy springs and miraculous images. This dichotomy between the formal belief system and folk beliefs could be eliminated by pilgrims and recreated by the Church authority.

By the idea of the Lithuanian Bishops Conference, the main Lithuanian pilgrimage places were joined to the pilgrimage route of Pope John Paul II in 2007. This route includes 16 Catholic pilgrimage places, among them almost all sanctuaries had been visited by Pope John Paul II during his visit in Lithuania on September 4-8 in 1993. John Paul II prayed in the most important Lithuanian pilgrimage places: the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius, the Vilnius Cathedral, the Kaunas Cathedral, the Hill of Crosses and the Virgin Mary apparition place in Šiluva.

The only officially recognized pilgrimage place, Šiluva, falls into this route. Other apparition places of the Virgin Mary that comprise the general network of Lithuanian pilgrimage places are places of unapproved apparitions, but spiritually significant expressing private religiosity. There we can describe the apparition of the Virgin Mary in Šiluva according to main elements of the paradigm of the apparition.

Background. The most known apparition in Lithuania of the Virgin Mary occurred in 1608 (some other sources refer the year 1612). Šiluva first became known in the year 1457 when the nobleman Petras Simonas Gedgaudas built a church dedicated to the Nativity of the

Figure 1 Religious pilgrimage places in Lithuania



Blessed Virgin Mary and the Apostles SS. Peter and Bartholomew. In the middle of the sixteenth century, the area of Šiluva became predominantly Calvinist. Nevertheless, as long as the old church was open, people continued to travel to the annual Feast until finally the church was closed and demolished. Around the year 1569, the last parish priest, Father Jonas Holubka, hid all the surviving church valuables and documents in an ironclad box which he buried in the grounds of the devastated church ([Kauno arkivyskupijos kurija and Katalikų interneto tarnyba, 2013](#)).

The Catholics subsequently attempted legal proceedings against the Calvinists, seeking to regain the confiscated church property. The case was complicated, as there were no documents proving past Catholic ownership. Miraculous intervention of the Blessed Virgin Mary helped for the successful ending of the controversy for Catholics. After her apparition, the institutional documents of the Catholic church were found, and in 1622, the case concerning the restitution of Catholic ownership was won.

Visionaries. The apparition story says that visionaries were children of the nearby village who were keeping sheep in the land of the old church.

Vision and message. Atop a large rock, shepherds saw a young woman holding a baby in her arms and weeping bitterly. One of the little shepherds ran to fetch Šiluva's Calvinist pastor. However, he only laughed at the child and told him to come back to the pasture.

Shepherds told the event to their households and relatives in the evening. The next day a lot of people came to this spot. Calvinist pastor together with a Calvinist teacher named Saliamonas Grocijus came to the place of the rock to banish people at home and reproved them for believing in crazy stories of the shepherds. Suddenly, they saw the young woman crying once again, just as the shepherds had. Gathering his courage, the catechist asked

her: “Young woman, why are you weeping?” She answered, “I’m weeping because my Son used to be worshipped in this place, but now people only plough and sow”. Having said this, she disappeared. News about Mary’s apparition spread rapidly.

Miracle. According to another story, an elderly blind man managed to find the place where the ironclad box containing the old church treasures and documents had been hidden. When the box was dug up, he immediately regained his eyesight ([Lithuanian Bishops Conference and Catholic Internet Service, 2009](#)).

Ecclesiastical action. A Papal Decree issued by Pope Pius VI on August 17, 1775, authenticated the apparition.

A small wooden church was built in the place where the original church had stood in 1627, and the famous indulgenced Feasts were re-established. Soon the venerable image of the Blessed Virgin Mary with the Divine Child acquired miraculous fame. In 1786, a new brick church was built – the current Basilica of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a majestic 40-m-tall tower chapel was built on the site of the Marian apparition. The altar within the Apparition chapel is constructed upon the same rock where, according to tradition, the Marian apparition took place ([Lithuanian Bishops Conference and Catholic Internet Service, 2009](#)).

Throughout its long history of political shifts and foreign occupations, Šiluva has remained the center of spiritual attraction for pilgrims. Various sources indicate that in 1629, during the indulgence Feast days, around 11,000 Holy Communion were distributed; in the eighteenth century, during the days of indulgence Feast, around 30,000 pilgrims arrived; in 1866, around 40,000; in 1906, around 50,000; and up to 100,000 during Lithuania’s period of independence between the two World Wars.

During the soviet occupation, various obstructions were implemented to prevent or scare pilgrims from coming to Šiluva. Roads leading to the Šiluva town were blocked, some driver’s licenses were taken away and passengers were forced to get out and walk. The organizers of several pious processions to Šiluva were sentenced to three years in prison. However, young people, and in particular a group called the Friends of the Eucharist, had walked from Tytuvėnai to Šiluva in processions (up to 600 pilgrims in 1975, and up to 1,000 in 1977) ([Lithuanian Bishops Conference and Catholic Internet Service, 2009](#)).

After the reestablishment of Lithuanian independence in 1990, the traditional devotions and celebrations experienced a new revival. During the 400-year jubilee of Mary’s apparition on September 6-15, 2008, about 150,000 pilgrims visited Šiluva (56,000 of them received Holy Communion). Pope John Paul II visited the apparition place of the Virgin Mary in Šiluva on 7 September 1993.

Nowadays, crosses or small chapels mark the other apparitions’ spots. There are no clear messages of the Virgin Mary at the apparitions of Peleniškės, Imbradas and Maženiai. At the Sietynai apparition place, the visionary was asked to make an offering at the church; at Bajoriškiiai, Virgin Mary was asking to pray for the sinners; and at Skiemonys, Virgin Mary was asking to pray and keep the fast on Fridays. It is interesting to note that during the apparition in Maženiai, frightened children tried to escape. At most apparition places, except Sietynai, miraculous healings had been reported; at Keturnaujiena and Imbradas, pilgrims saw various miraculous images of the sun.

Soviet authorities, militia and KGB implemented investigations after apparitions; visionaries were inquired and pressed to resign their stories about apparitions. Soviet press was publishing various articles written in the derisive tone. Another common aspect of apparitions was various tragic events, which happened to the people who had tried or had demolished crosses, candles and images at the spots of apparitions or tried to destroy the spot itself. For example, the chairman of the soviet kolkhoz of the Skiemonys brought and spilled manure on the apparition spot. Later, he sunk while swimming in the sea in Palanga.

Apparitions at the Keturnaujiena village (Šakiai region) are best-known unapproved Marian apparitions in Lithuania. The first apparition of Christ occurred on 14 November 1969. The Christ appeared for Anelė Matijošaitienė (1927-2012), who was an ordinary 42-year-old woman. Series of other apparitions of the Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary followed the first apparition. Today, the apparition place in Keturnaujiena is included in various routes for pilgrims and tourists, and several documentaries present the place and the life of the visionary.

More than 100 miraculous paintings of the Virgin Mary and more than 30 miraculous statues could be found in Lithuania (Skrinskas, 1999). Majority of Marian images in Lithuania are copies of holy images from other Christian countries. At the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth, the first crowned image was Black Madonna of Czestochowa; it was crowned in 1717. In 1718, an image of Trakai Mother of God and Child was crowned. A total of 29 images (one of them in Samogitian diocese and four of them in Vilnius diocese) of the Virgin Mary were crowned in the eighteenth century in the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth. During 300 years in the territory of Poland, almost 200 images of the Virgin Mary were crowned; however, at the same time in Lithuanian territory, only six images were crowned (Table II).

Summarizing, the literature review explains the notion of miraculous apparitions and coronet images of the Virgin Mary. The social and political environment of apparitions and the main elements of their paradigm were tested in the case of most-known apparition in Lithuania. However, despite the numerous descriptions of miraculous places and events, there is the lack of categorization of these places by different criteria. Second, the researches on pilgrims' motivation to visit miraculous place and their behavioral characteristics are very limited (Liutikas, 2012). The general models of tourist motivation and behavior are not the case.

As aforementioned, the research aims to contribute to the development of the miraculous places, motives and behavioral characteristics of pilgrims. In this research, we propose attribution of most important miraculous places in Lithuania, as well as empirical explanation of pilgrims' motivation and behavioral characteristics. The focus is set on multifaceted dimensions of pilgrims' motivation, manifestation of their values and identity during the rites. Characteristic behavior of pilgrims connects miraculous places and images with the social environment and serves as a grounding element for the development of these places.

Methodology

First task undertaken in this paper is the identification of most visited miraculous places in Lithuania. This identification is based on document (including media) review. Two tables containing main characteristics of apparition places and miraculous images are presented. The main criteria attributing one or another place to these lists were number of visitations and visit traditions; constant updated information about the place in the mass media, Internet or other information sources; the number of votive amulets left in the place; and the frequency of mentions of the place during the quantitative survey of Lithuanian pilgrims.

The lack of new researches exists in the analysis of pilgrimages. The research on Lithuanian religious pilgrims is based on the data of the questionnaire inquiry carried out in 2008. During the study, 400 Catholic pilgrims from 14 to 74 years old were interviewed. For the selection of respondents, non-probability purposive sampling was applied. Pilgrims were interviewed in organized groups going to the miraculous places ($N = 250$, mainly Šiluva, Lourdes and Medjugorje) or other religious pilgrimage places ($N = 150$). In total, 23 groups of religious pilgrims were interviewed using a standardized written questionnaire.

In the research, only pilgrims who traveled by a special bus in an organized group were interviewed. All the pilgrims had to cover a distance of at least 50 km from the departure to

the destination point, i.e. this was the shortest distance from their home to the miraculous or other pilgrimage place.

The main demographic characteristics of the respondents are common for organized Catholic pilgrimages. Eighty per cent of all the respondents among the religious pilgrims were females. About 40 per cent of the religious pilgrims were up to 30 years old, and one-third over 60 years old. Accordingly, the majority (two-thirds) of religious pilgrims were schoolchildren, students and retired persons. These social groups typically tend to travel in organized groups by coach.

Most imported miraculous places

Different sources identify various number of apparition sites of the Virgin Mary in Lithuania. R.G. Skrinskas (1999) described 26 Marian apparitions in the current Lithuanian territory; pilgrims themselves (*Lietuvos piligrimų bendrija, 2013*) note the 31 apparition places in Lithuania. There we would like to identify 11 of these apparitions, which sites have traditions of visitations and they are on occasion described in popular religious literature and/or media (Table I). Pilgrims mention majority of these sites. The most popular apparition places are Šiluva (80 per cent of respondents declared they have visited this place),

Table I The main apparition places of Virgin Mary in Lithuania

No.	Apparition site of Virgin Mary	Year	Visionaries	Social or political atmosphere at the apparition time	Comments, remarks
1	Šiluva	1608	Several shepherds	Conflicts between Catholics and Calvinists in the region	Approved by Church authority, Pope John Paul II visited Šiluva in 1993
2	Gelvonai	End of the sixteenth century or beginning of the seventeenth century	Landlady and her maid		Virgin Mary's footmark on the stone
3	Šimonys	Three apparitions in 1446, 1670 and 1941	1446, three children; 1670, forester; 1941, four people (including two Jews)	Religious conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in Europe at 1670; World War II and Lithuanian occupation in 1941	
4	Girkalnis	Several times in 1943	More than 15 people during four apparitions	World War II	In 1998 Commission of the Church representatives declared that apparitions could be left for private devotion
5	Sietynai	1960	Zuzana Kulikauskienė	Soviet occupation, propaganda of atheism	
6	Skiemonys	1962	Roma Pranciška Macvytė saw Virgin Mary two times	Soviet occupation, propaganda of atheism	In the message of Virgin motioned future apparition in Egypt
7	Maženiai	1964	Several children	Soviet occupation, propaganda of atheism	
8	Imbradas	1968	Juozas Kranklys and Albina Skvarčinskaitė	Soviet occupation, propaganda of atheism	Apparition site near a lake
9	Keternaujiena	From 1969 several apparitions	Anelė Matijošaitienė	Soviet occupation, propaganda of atheism	Apparitions of Virgin Mary and Christ
10	Bajoriškiei (near Gulbinėnai)	1982	Bronė Šulinienė	Soviet occupation	
11	Peleniškės	1984	Three adults (shepherds)	Soviet occupation	

Source: Author's researches

Ketrunaujiena (three of ten respondents have visited this place) and Imbradas (14 per cent have visited this place).

Seven of the 11 identified apparitions took place during the soviet occupation (1944-1990). At the time of atheism propaganda and restraints of faith, the places of Marian apparitions had been a strong reminder of trust to faith and hope for freedom. Pilgrims had visited all these places, and soviet authorities had implemented various obstructions to reach them.

Visiting traditions of these apparition sites were created and supported by the devotees as they organized themselves, and their acquaintances to such informal pilgrimages. These apparition places that emerged during the times of social or political tensions could be regarded as an offer for more support in relation to their private religiosity, their own plea and existential questions, than the institutional Church.

Nowadays, the visitations of these apparition places could create unofficial groups of the Church, a sort of sub-institutional movements with their own ideas and images different from the official Church liturgy. An important element of these places is their remoteness from the main cities and towns. This remoteness helps more pilgrims to consider these sites as outer sacred space providing a mystical atmosphere. Miraculous images are located in various churches or chapels. The main identifications of their popularity are the fact of coronation and the number of votive amulets left. These factors and also traditions of visitations let to attribute 14 of the most known and visited paintings. Of course, the most important devotion is concentrated on six coronated images (Table II).

From the ancient times, miraculous powers were attributed to natural objects such as mounds, stones and water bodies. In pre-Christian Lithuania, Balts considered the main natural objects as sacred. They were mounds of various shape and size, forests, groves, single trees, stones, water bodies, hollows and caves. The sanctity of water was illustrated by hydronyms, which originated earlier than Lithuania was baptized at the end of fourteenth century. The rivers Šventoji, Šventupė and Šventelė (engl. Holy, Holy river) and the lakes Šventas, Šventėžeris and Šventišius (engl. Holy lake, Hallowed lake) are just a few examples. Miraculous stones with footmarks had footmarks of animals, humans or deities.

Nowadays, the miraculous powers of water related with the impact of the Virgin Mary. The three most-known miraculous springs are located in the diocese of Vilkaviškis. The Alksnėnai spring (2 km from Alksnėnai, Vilkaviškis region) is the most known for healing eye illnesses. The water from this spring held for long period has not spoiled. The locals believe

Table II Places of miraculous images of Virgin Mary in Lithuania

No.	Place of Miraculous image	Miracles	Date of coronation	Diocese	Comments
1	Trakai	Healings	1718	Vilnius	
2	Vilnius archcathedral	Healings, outrunning fire	1750	Vilnius	
3	Šiluva	Healings,	1786	Kaunas	Found after the apparition of Virgin Mary in the ironclad box
4	Gate of Dawn (Vilnius)	Healings, outrunning fire	1927	Vilnius	Visit by Pope John Paul II in 1993
5	Pivašiūnai	Healings	1988	Kaišiadorys	
6	Samogitian Calvary	Healings	2006	Telšiai	
7	Krekenava	Healings		Panevėžys	
8	Kaunas archcathedral	Healings		Kaunas	
9	Kazokiškės	Healings		Kaišiadorys	
10	Vilnius Bonifratrai church	Healings		Vilnius	
11	Kryžiai	Healings		Vilkaviškis	
12	Pažaislis	Healings		Kaunas	
13	Tytuvėnai	Healings		Šiauliai	
14	Sanctuary of Divine Mercy (Vilnius)	Healings		Vilnius	Jesus Divine Mercy painting

Source: Author's classification

that Virgin Mary visited this area and donated these miraculous springs. The small chapel was built nearby the spring.

Furthermore, Lithuania has several new original mystical places. One of them is the Pyramid of Merkinė that was built according to private visions of Povilas Žėkas. The three-sided pyramid was built in 2002, the glass cupola was built in 2009. The height of the cupola is 12.5 m. People believe that "pyramid and cupola form harmonic energetic space in which the balance of enduring spiritual energy is regained, the health is improved". (*Merkinės piramidė*, 2013). The pyramid is located in the scenic forest area of Dzūkija region. This object was recently included in the tourist routes by Lithuanian travel agencies.

Pilgrims' motivation and behavior

Believer would say, that pilgrimage journeys to the apparitions and other miraculous places are the quest paths to encounter with God through Virgin Mary. In general, pilgrimage journey relates with personal or social values and identity (*Liutikas, 2012*), but, nowadays, as it was in the Middle Ages, some pilgrims travel for cognitive or social reasons. Such persons choose the journey to diversify their holiday or weekend, to experience new emotions or just for curiosity. *Blackwell (2007)* agrees that modern-day religious pilgrimage can be seen as an opportunity for adventure. Many pilgrimage sites (especially sites of Marian apparitions) are situated in remote areas, containing picturesque landscape elements.

The motives of pilgrims for visiting miraculous places depend on many things, the most important of which are the life experience of pilgrims, the level of faith as well as social and cultural influence. The authors' research showed that the major motives of religious pilgrims, which were declared by more than half of the respondents in Lithuania as undoubtedly, were asking for God's grace, health, expressing gratitude to Jesus or Virgin Mary as well as spiritual quest and renewal. Naturally, pilgrims who head to journeys due to health issues are traveling to the miraculous places in hope of regaining their health. Quite often, pilgrimage is the last chance to look for help. Apparition places or miraculous images also attract pilgrims wishing to see the miracle, to solve everyday problems or to achieve the internal goals faster. There is rarely one reason for the journey; however, one major motive is often of principal importance for choosing the journey.

Blackwell (2007, p. 45) emphasizes that motivation for religious tourism and religious pilgrimage, therefore, is complex, multifaceted and multilayered. Motivation, furthermore, can change where the individual switches activities from religious (being a pilgrim) to secular (being a tourist) and vice versa, often without the individual being aware of the change.

Research confirmed that the sacred dimension is not exclusive in religious pilgrimages. The wish for spiritual renewal, penance, thanksgiving or other spiritual motives have been mixed to the wish to spend leisure time well, to have a nice holiday or to establish new social relations. Other not primary religious motives of pilgrimage journey mentioned by pilgrims include: possibility to change or express the self, new impressions choosing this type of journeys, self-renewal, satisfaction overcoming physical difficulties in the journey, getting ready for passing away, etc. Still, a common motive unites the majority of travelers. This common motive is the search for better physical and spiritual life.

The important motive of the pilgrimage is the wish to express one's social or personal identity. Religion is one of the main sources for the formation and maintenance of the religious identity, both involving personal religious experiences and communal connections or actions with the faithful from the same religion. Strong religious identity is typical for Lithuanian religious pilgrims. In general, pilgrims rate the role of religion in their lives as important or essential. Eight from ten pilgrims rate the role of religion in their lives from 8 to 10 points (*Table III*).

Table III Role of the religion in the life of pilgrims ($N = 400$)

Points	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
% of pilgrims	1	1	1	2	5	3	8	14	20	45

Source: Author's research of Lithuanian pilgrims in 2008

However, research of Lithuanian pilgrims shows that not all pilgrims base their religious identity on Catholicism. Three out of ten pilgrims believe in reincarnation and natural spirits or deities. Seven out of ten pilgrims believe in miracles, and eight out of ten pilgrims believe in apparitions of the Virgin Mary (Table IV).

The expression of identity and values often takes place by implementing special practices and rituals during the journey itself or at the pilgrimage place. Of course, some rituals and rites are more general, while others are distinctive to some groups. Some rituals depend on the possibilities at the destination place. For example, if possible, religious pilgrims bring the sacred water from apparition places and visit other churches and special museums. Some pilgrim groups prefer to pray the rosary, whereas others prefer singing or reading prayers from books.

The observation of pilgrims shows that travelers devote their journey to prayer or meditation, communicating on religious topics and analyzing issues of the sense of life. Rituals of a traditional pilgrimage often mingle with the general rituals of religious practice such as daily participation in the Holy Mass and confession of sins.

The experience of faith has an influence on both the motives for the journey itself and the realization of different rituals. Confession and penance for sins are typical components of a pilgrimage. Most of the major miraculous places in Lithuania (Šiluva, Gate of Dawn, Trakai, Pivašiūnai, Samogitian Calvary, etc.) are visited during the indulgence feasts. Penance (non-attachment to sin), the Sacrament of Confession, Eucharist and a prayer for the Pope's intentions in the Catholic tradition are the main conditions for being awarded a plenary indulgence.

We have already mentioned that pilgrims leave votive amulets at the sites of miraculous images. In general, pilgrims tend to leave something in the miraculous places which could give meaning to the journey or mark the journey and its motives. They often leave internal things such as intentions (sometimes written on paper) or prayers. In the Catholic tradition, confession and penance enables the ability to leave sins behind. Gratefulness could be expressed by leaving not only votive amulets, but also various inscriptions of gratitude on tiles and walls and by donation of money.

Religious pilgrims also relate some rites with natural features at the destination place or by the way. Examples of such rites are wading in the water at springs or washing faces. In

Table IV Pilgrims religious attitudes, per cent ($N = 400$)

No.	Do you believe in . . .	Yes, I do	Rather believe, than not believe	Rather not believe, than believe	No, I don't
1.	God	86	10	2	2
2.	Miracles	44	24	15	17
3.	Demons, Satan	34	23	13	30
4.	Existence of supernatural world	44	22	12	22
5.	Life after death	67	14	6	13
6.	Redemption, remission of sins	65	17	7	11
7.	Apparitions of Our Lady	64	17	7	12
8.	Reincarnation	10	17	23	50
9.	Natural spirits, deities	11	15	25	49
10.	Destiny	35	24	14	27

Source: Author's research of Lithuanian pilgrims in 2008

general, pilgrimage is full of different rituals, symbols and meanings. We can group all rites performed during the journey and characteristic behaviors of pilgrims into several groups (Table V).

At the contemporary apparition places, pilgrims try to communicate or make any interactions with the visionary if she/he is alive. The most valuable journey is to witness the apparition or even to notice some miraculous signs during the apparition. As Davis and Boles (2003) noticed, pilgrims are not a passive audience to the visionaries' activities and the organizers' plans. Pilgrims actively construct as well as import meanings about the apparition, their journey and things that they believe signify the presence of the Virgin Mary at a particular time and place. They actively deal with the process of symbolization, attaching meanings to objects, and working at the identification and interpretation of preexisting signs.

In some apparition places, such as Medjugorje, pilgrims try to be the first to familiarize with the messages provided by the Virgin Mary. Central themes in the messages of apparitions of the twentieth century were penitence, peace, prayer (particularly the rosary), conversion of all sinners, anti-communism and anti-atheism and the accompanying degeneration of the Church itself (Margry, 2009). These messages announce that faith, prayer and love could alter the direction in which the world is moving.

One of the most important experiences of pilgrims is sense of community. As Turner and Turner (1978) pointed out, the achievement of *communitas* is the pilgrim's fundamental motivation. Communal feelings manifest themselves when you act at the same miraculous place together with other people who come with similar motives and identity. A sense of connection with the whole group is expressed by a number of future acts such as common meetings, common prayers and journeys and unified explanations of miraculous phenomenon.

Table V Rites, rituals and characteristic behavior of pilgrims

No.	Rites, rituals or characteristic behavior	Religious pilgrims
1.	Internal	Praying, meditation Penance Reading Bible, spiritual literature Contemplation of internal intentions
2.	External oral	Praying, meditation Reading prayer-books Singing of hymns and songs Homily Confession of sins Communication with others pilgrims
3.	External physical actions	Walking by foot, barefoot Walking on knees Kissing the relics or land Touching relics
4.	External attributes	Playing musical instruments Special clothes or symbols Carrying crosses, flags, relics
5.	Complex actions	Participation at the Holy Mass Holy Sacrament
6.	Actions to memorize journey	Photography, shooting Buying souvenirs, devotionals Bringing sacred water Leaving votive amulets, inscriptions at the destination place

Source: Author's classification

Discussions and conclusions

The aim of this paper was to discuss various aspects of the development of the miraculous places related with the veneration of the Virgin Mary and motives and behavioral characteristics of pilgrims coming to such places in Lithuania. Miraculous places have captured numbers of pilgrims and tourists, so the interest of this paper was to grasp the underlying meanings of miracles and traveling to search them.

Pilgrimages to Lithuanian miraculous places analyzed as a case study. However, discussed ideas are applicable more generally. The main Catholic miraculous places in Lithuania are places of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary, places of miraculous images and miraculous springs.

The paper shows that the Virgin Mary appears at a particular time related with social and political crisis in carefully chosen places mostly at rural and remote areas. The best known apparition of the Virgin Mary occurred in 1608 in the central part of Lithuania named Šiluva. Today this apparition site is one of the main national pilgrimage places in Lithuania and attracts thousands of pilgrims.

In general, the analysis let to distinguish 11 apparition places of the Virgin Mary and 14 most important miraculous images in Lithuania. Seven of these occurred apparitions took place during the soviet occupation. In that time, visiting apparition places was an act of expression of religious identity and unrestricted individual religious beliefs. Such places could easily become signs of resistance against Soviet regime and its anti-religious policy. On that ground, soviet authorities implemented various actions to stop pilgrimages into apparition places.

This article argues that the most important motives of pilgrims who visit miraculous places are asking for God's grace, health, expressing gratitude to Jesus or Virgin Mary as well as spiritual quest and renewal. Apparition places or miraculous images also attract pilgrims who wish to see the miracle, solve everyday problems or achieve the internal goals faster. However, the religious identity of Catholic pilgrims is not always doctrinaire. Some pilgrims believe in reincarnation, natural spirits or deities.

While the miracles are understood as heterogeneous, it is questionable to discuss about the spiritual motivation of travelers. Not all pilgrims pursue religious motivation. Some pilgrims travel for cognitive, social or other reasons. So expectations of pilgrims are different and complex. Motivation and inner disposition of travelers are core factors to classify travelers into religious tourists (mainly cognitive motives) and pilgrims or valuistic travelers (mainly spiritual and religious motives) (Liutikas, 2012).

The expression of religious values and identity often takes place by implementing special practices and rituals during the journey itself or at the pilgrimage place. The article presented grouping of all rites performed during the journey and characteristic behavior of pilgrims. Such groups of rites and elements of behavior identified:

- internal (spiritual);
- external oral (prayers, readings, singings, etc.);
- physical without artificial elements (kneeling, walking on the knees, praying with the raised hands, etc.);
- physical using artificial items (playing music instruments, lighting the candles, etc.);
- complex actions (Holy Mass); and
- actions to memorize the journey (photography, souvenirs, etc.).

The most valuable journey is to witness the miraculous signs during apparition or at the miraculous image.

An individual religiosity will remain an important factor for choosing rites. However, pilgrims' actions will be mediated by their experience, personal disposition, values and identity. This suggests that with the development of the notion of pilgrimage journey, it is necessary to deepen understanding pilgrims' motives and behavioral characteristics during the visitation of miraculous places. Further researchers of the miraculous places could reflect both the increasing variety of the miraculous objects and their developing role in the tourism industry. Of course, tourism operators and host communities have an interest better to focus their services, so knowing diverse needs and diverse behavioral characteristics of the travelers could help tourism managers to introduce new tourism products and to promote the message about miracles in different ways. More tailored organized activities and new rituals can be provided. Consumption of miracles enables pilgrims to co-create their motives and their own personal or social values. The emotional experience that pilgrims have in completing each ritual may create a stronger level of attachment to the miraculous place and its further potential consumption.

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