

# Ethnographic Symbols in Latvian Regional Architecture

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## Premise



## Abstract

Geometric symbols arranged in ornaments are an integral part of the existence of mankind as a way of communication in order to pass the life wisdom and skill of living to next generations. The symbol of Latvianity is one of the richest and most complicated symbolic sign systems in the world – the Lielvārde belt, in which ancient information has been encoded that characterizes belief into strong symbol energy and protective magic, includes in us a special relation to nature, the world and universe.

One of the drawbacks in modern architecture is underestimation of semantic significance: building obtains an amorphous character, loses its spatial peculiarity and dialogue with the space user. In Latvia regional architecture the demand for semantic precision means to give back the historical centres their lost content, conformity of forms and hierarchy of artistic expression. Reviving historical experience, including Latvian cultural traits in the revelation of the building's semantic essence, an impulse is given to broader creative searches in order to highlight the affiliation and essence of the building.

**Keywords:** ancient information, belt of Lielvārde, ethnographic ornaments, Latvian regional architecture, symbolic sign system

## Introduction

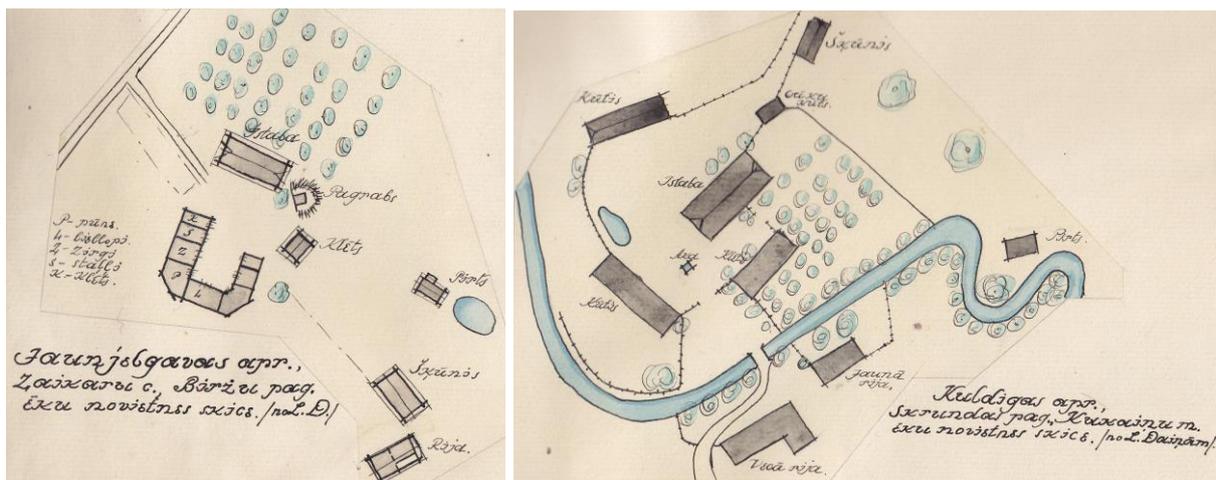
On the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea up to the Vistula in the west, in the south of the Prypiat, the upstream of the Dnieper and east of the River Oka, in the north of the Gauja there stretched the area populated by the Baltic ethnic group representatives belonging to the Indo-European language family. The West Baltic tribes Natangians, Bartians, Nadruvians, Warmians, Pogesians, Pomesanians and Sambians obtained a common name Prussians (*pruzzi*), but in the eastern part of Vidzeme and Latgale at the basins of the River Daugava and Velikaya (Russian: *Великая*, earlier Mude) the East Baltic tribes Latgalians (Latin: *Lethi*, *Letthigalli*) can be found archeologically since the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries, who used to live in farmsteads in forest and swamp areas. *Sēta*, or *viensēta*, *savrupsēta* is called a separate farm with farmstead buildings within the borders of the farmland [3, 423]. In the western part of the populated area the most dominant place of residence was *ciems* (village) – a greater number of farmsteads built closely together, forming a sort of common settlement. However, each farm representing an independent unit and located on its own farmland. On the right and left bank of the Daugava on the border of Lithuanian lands there lived Selonians (*Sēlen*) and their land was called Selonias (Latin: *Selonias*). Curonians (Latin: *chori*, *curones*) lived in the basin territories of the Venta, Tebra and Durbe's junction rivers Saka, Bārta (in the upper course Vereta) and the River Šventoji and Neman's lower course. In the territories northwards from the Daugava Latgalians together with Curonians created the Semigallian (Latin: *Semigalli*) tribe on the plain of the Lielupe River (*flumen Semgallorum*, *die Semgaller Aa*) and partly in Western Vidzeme (Picture 1).



Picture 1. Territories populated by the Baltic tribes on the Baltic Seacoast around 1200. [8]

In the middle of the first millennium BC the representatives of the Baltic tribes started building hillforts or defended settlements on lands appropriate for agriculture in the vicinity of forests rich in game and market places on precipices by river junctions and spring estuaries into big rivers or lakes. Following the peculiarities of the relief, construction of enclosed building complexes was started on top of hillforts. Due to the increase of population the defended settlements became too cramped, so craftsmen and merchants started establishment of urban settlements on the crossroads near market places since the late first millennium BC. In *Latgale* and *Augšzeme* predominated *sādžas* (villages) – a row or cluster of farmsteads, closely built together along a common road, on small lots, but without a direct connection with their tilled fields.

The dominating type of settlement in rural areas was a separate individual farm. The general character of the farmstead was determined by separate buildings which had developed types of their own for each separate function and by the use of log construction. The farmstead consisted of separate buildings such as the *istaba* (dwelling-house), the *klēts* (granary), the *pirts* (steambath-house), cowsheds or barns, and the *rija* (threshing-house). Important features of the general aspect of the farmstead were also fences, gates, orchards, gardens, trees and shrubs [3, 436].



Picture 2. Sketch of buildings placement in a farmyard in Zaikari Village, Birži Parish, Jaunjelgava District. [5]

Picture 3. Sketch of buildings placement in Kundziņi yard, Skrunda Parish, Kuldīga District. [5]

Appearance of *sēta* (courtyards) marked essential changes in the Latvian farmer's life and culture: a proper base for existence was created cultivating a plot, building a permanent house for themselves and cattle, rooms for crop processing and storage. The type of activity and lifestyle related to a farmstead also affected the national physical and spiritual development and character formation – all Latvian generations till the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were born and grown up in a rural courtyard (Picture 2, 3), where the everyday life was important for the development of spiritual culture. Every next generation took over the customs, household order and work techniques tested through a long-term experience. In the rural farmsteads the family has to be mentioned in the first place – the base for the social order of the

farmstead. In the family life the need for unity, youth's growth in good virtues and your parents' honouring were emphasized [3, 375]. The residents of farmsteads tried to avoid sudden changes and innovations which did not comply with their needs in life. Folk traditions were not frozen, they followed the changes. Inhabitants living in farmsteads felt independent from the neighbourhood in the closed lifestyle. Nevertheless, they did try to maintain good relationships, which did not develop into closer social commitments or visits. Life in villages promoted social proximity [3, 376].

The rural courtyard – the maintainer and enhancer of national living force affected the Latvian culture [3, 372], which did not develop in an isolated way from the world, but rather in communication with neighbouring nations: Latvians got involved in the common culture development of the Baltic Seacoast. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the members of the intelligence, descended from the rural farmsteads and broader education acquired people, encouraged the nation released from slavery, to cultivate their abilities in order to raise their welfare, cultivate and strengthen their national awareness. Culture introduced a rapid prosperity of Latvian economic life, prepared the nation for national independence consummation. The sense of national belonging united people. Contemporary Latvian national culture started to develop, which boomed in a short time. The living force of the rural courtyard and the nurtured wisdom flowed into the new stream of the Latvian culture. The national awareness has always been alive in rural farmsteads, but it was felt more strongly together with the resistance to the nobility's power and arbitrariness. The Latvian national culture never broke the link between the traditions of the past and today, but rather cultivating its peculiarities got closer to the level of Western Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 1. Latvian lifestyle and symbols of Latvianity

The Baltic ancient tribes – Curonians, Semigalians, Selonians, Latgalians and Livs – had already their own religious preconceptions and mythology before Christianity was introduced, but merging the cultural heritage into one united Latvian culture the ancient Indo-European roots of the Baltic culture were preserved. Latvians as every comprehensive nation have got its own language and spiritual tribal order cultivated during the development related to the history of civilization – the very base of honour and dignity, which was created by the moral ideals of *Dainas*' (Latvian folk songs) deity, that was manifested in the national wisdom as a moral activity and attitude, cognitions of unworldly realization and universal interconnections. They permeate the ethical core, encoded in the images of *Dainas*' deity, signs and symbols and cultivated in traditions of wisdom, and for the nation existing in historic time they serve as the value measurement from the past to future.

People in farmsteads used to stick to wisdom full of ideals, following positive thoughts and profound virtues. Enmity, envy, malevolence, slander, idleness were rejected. Industriousness was appreciated highly, which created physical and moral satisfaction. Modesty and frugality were acknowledged, which helped to nurture life, but meanness was censured and the lords who made their peasants work very hard and live in poverty were hated. In daily life concord was appreciated more than full granaries [3, 374]. The traditions of deity and cult did not disappear till the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but they transformed due to the impact of Christian Church. In the

enlightened piety the nation obtain power to overcome hardships of life and emerged vices. The religious life also rooted in farms during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where the church order was observed and part taken in all events related to church. A strong impact of church was in Latgale [3, 375]. Cultivating their heritage and refining it with creative contributions, Latvians have confirmed themselves and their Latvianness as an integral part of the European and world's cultural heritage value. The base of the Latvian world-view, culture and creativity is *Dievturība*, but the base of the Latvian god-comprehension is a creative thought – the base of the whole outset.

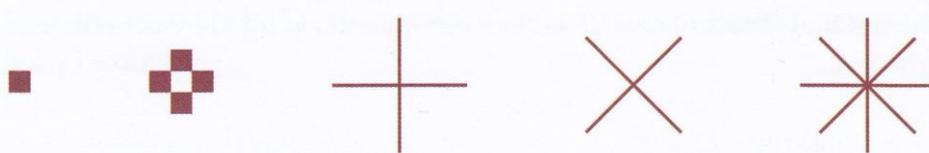
*Dievs* (God) (*Dieviņš* – diminutive form of *Dievs*), the source and causality of everything, the world's soul, the guard of virtues and legal order, is paramount and is manifested in four world's basic elements – earth, fire, water air, also four cardinal directions – east, west, north, south. Latvian wisdom is based on God's realization and the world's creative cognition. In God all opposites are united – light and darkness, mother and father, the good and bad. In Latvian comprehension God is the representative of everything that is light and good, the one who gives advice and benefits. Good is good and everything that is good comes from God – the travelling companion, adviser and helper. God thinks, knows, allows, gives, does not give, takes, helps, guards, protects, takes care, nurtures, raises, pities, punishes, separates, creates and develops the world. On the initial level it is a thought, soulful energy – the light that gradually transforms into formations of material nature. God as the highest advice of advice and creative thought cannot be discovered completely, but realization is created about the order of things in the world, eternal changeability through a constant creating and recreating, as this is the universal principle of the world's existence. God – the former, the current and the almighty one – is united in the variety and wholeness of His manifestations [2, 24], but in the middle there lives a creative manifestation of God's essence, existing everywhere, the common essence of all matters – soul, which is the human being's eternal, timeless part, and it comes from God, whose presence is conceivable in the Universe, surrounding the environment and human being. The world as in the enteral order, where also the human being has own space, is perceived in its wholeness and unity. For Latvians, also the Balts, nature is alive, figurative and sacral. The figurative and intuitively perceptible conform to the rationally perceivable and practical as mutually complementary knowledge about the world and its powers. God is comprehended as Cosmic Intelligence who administers everything with the help of natural laws.

In the sign symbols everything starts with a point, and extending it, a line is formed. The line can be positioned vertically or horizontally, it can also be slanted. The point and lines can be crossed or grouped, supplemented with other points and lines. This is how symbols are created. The level of origin in the pattern is symbolized by points, drops, crosses, straight and slanted crosses, the signs of Sun Wheel or Light and Heaven – stars.

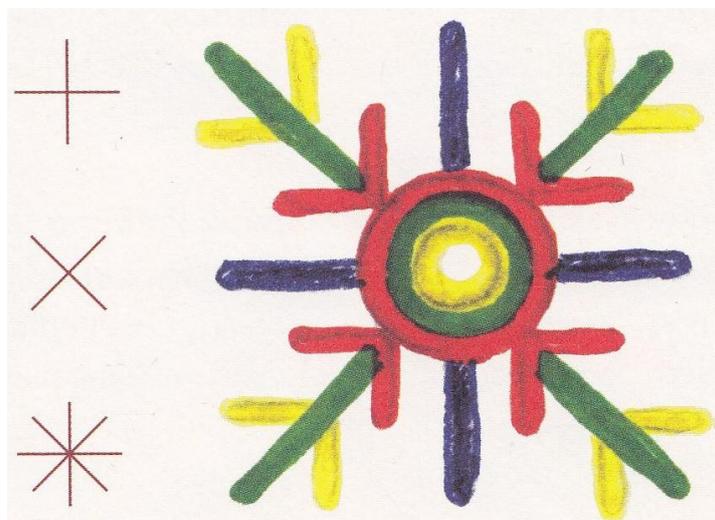
Over hundreds and thousands of years, symbols have an integral part of human existence. Symbols were a form of communication, arranged in ornaments, it was a way to decorate and be decorated. Symbols served to pass on to the next generation the particular family, people's or nation's wisdom and the way of life accumulated over hundreds of years. Latvian ornaments or Latvian cultural symbols are one of such symbolic sign systems. They are characterized by a belief in the

powerful energy of symbols and their protective magic. Therefore, it is not by accident, that Latvian cultural symbols are encountered not only adorning ancient relics, clothing. It is considered that they encompass our special connection with nature, the world and the Universe, bringing people back to themselves.

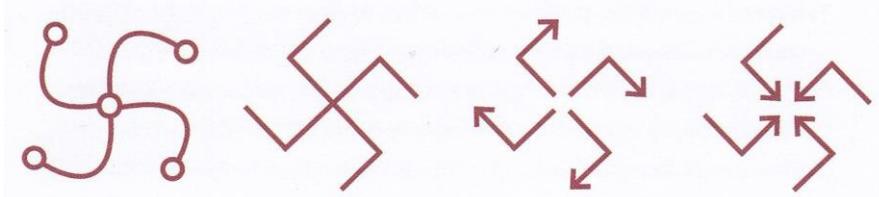
The principal form of God's Sign is the crosses of Heaven's stars – the symbols of the highest and original manifestation levels, which show the world's manifested beginning – the centre, infinity, division of time and space either into eight or four symmetrical parts, the world's rotation (Picture 4). The world's arrangement into this, that and afterlife. The world's cyclic movement created by God – rotation, where life alternates death as logical and natural events. God's Signs are a cross with four equal-length branches, which can stretch out infinitely – similarly to the spiritual world that is infinite beyond all borders of the material world. God's (Golden) Cross has two different states of varied meaning: the straight or rigid cross is the stopped energy, peace, death, darkness, non-creating state, rigidity, but the slanting or moving, also rotating cross [2, 34], called as transverse cross or gold cross, is released energy, restlessness, life force, light, creating state, cyclic movement. In one sign – Sun Wheel, Star both included crosses symbolize simultaneous existence of this and afterlife, cyclic change of light and darkness, life and death (Picture 5). They all are God's Signs in a broader sense: they also come from God the same way as the world and symbolize God in the wholeness of their manifestations [2, 36]. The sign of God-Heaven, which has got a significant symbolic meaning, attracts the divine and creative forces, is used as a link between the highest powers, it is the source of light's energy, manifests God's presence on every step and helps us find the best solution.



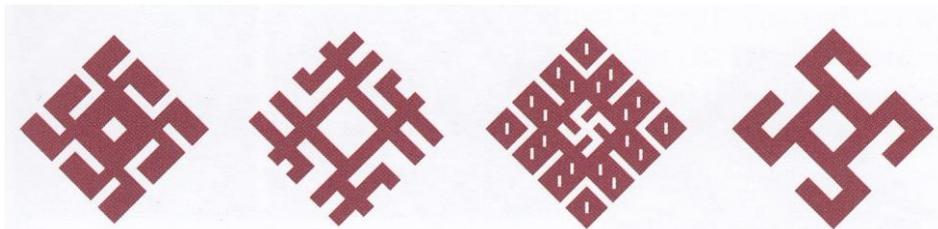
*Picture 4. Crosses of stars – signs of the world's beginning and further development: beginning or the centre, a cross with four branches, the straight cross, slanted cross, rotation cross. [2, 34]*



*Picture 5. Power of cross: the straight cross, slanting cross, rotation cross. [2, 37]*



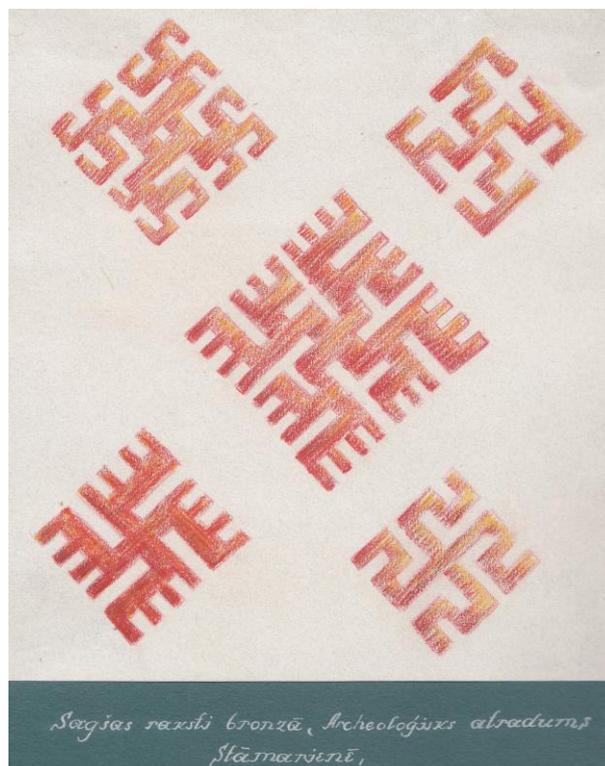
Picture 6. Principal form of Thunder Cross – ends of branches bending due to rotation of God Cross. [2, 44]



Picture 7. Thunder or Sky blacksmith's attributes: axes, Sun and other images. [2, 50]



Picture 8. Thunder develops the world created by God, arranges the main principal elements and forces. [2, 51]



Picture 9. Sign patterns in a wrap. Archaeological find in Stāmeriena. [5]

Thunder is the world's creator and governor, the first manifestation of God's presence in this world as a flash of light in the Universe constantly being created. Thunder is mighty, all inclusive, direct, impatient, relentless, highly honoured and revered. Thunder develops the world created by God, arranges the main basic elements and forces, oversees and restores the world's movement each time when it is under the threat to come to a halt or it has been taken over by darkness, cold, standstill and harmful forces [2, 50]. Thunder is a fair judge, unifier for collaboration and people's helper. Rotation of the Universe is symbolized by the sign Thunder's Cross, whose principal form is created turning God's Cross and bending the ends of its branches due to the rotation (Picture 6, 7, 8). Rays of light and space curve in the Universe. Our galaxy has got such a form, where at one end of the branch there is the Solar System with the planet Earth. The sign shows the centre, unity of four and eternal rotation, cycle of energy accumulation and discharge – the Universe's breathing in and breathing out – motion which has started in one direction, creates preconditions for motion in the other – opposite direction [2, 44]. Fire-cross is a strong and popular sign all over the world, created from two crossed bolts of lightning which symbolize light, fire and life, attracts happiness and energy, protects from the evil and undesirable natural phenomena, including fire disasters.

Due to God and Thunder's initial unity the situation of self-initiative and self-organization is created: in the initial push God's desire is expressed and the God and Thunder's dance starts – motion (Picture 9), from which time and the world as a space starts [2, 44]. Thunder strikes in the cross – in the centre of all events, initiates and causes the creative processes, brings into motion the earth's fertility, initiates emergence of life. Thunder provides continuity of the cosmic time flow, cyclic time flow in the world created by God, arranges energies – the main principal elements of the world's creation, and influences events. And whatever Thunder does, it is done in compliance with God's regulations and advice of advice [2, 48]. Relations between the human inner and outer world are revealed in relationships between God and Thunder: they are reflected as images of consciousness of the individual "I" and the common "we." God is related to the consciousness of the human individual "I" and is manifested in the soul link with the true "I" in the human. Thunder is in the link with the communality's "we" consciousness. The individual's personality consciousness is determined by integration into the human mutual relationship net up to expansion – in the nation [2, 50].



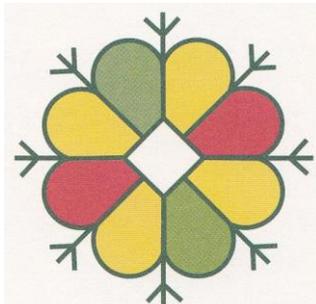
Picture 10. Needle – Laima Sign: a – elements of needle in different groups, b – needle in Laima's whisk. [2, 60]



Picture 11. Thunder Cross includes four directions of the needle. [2, 63]

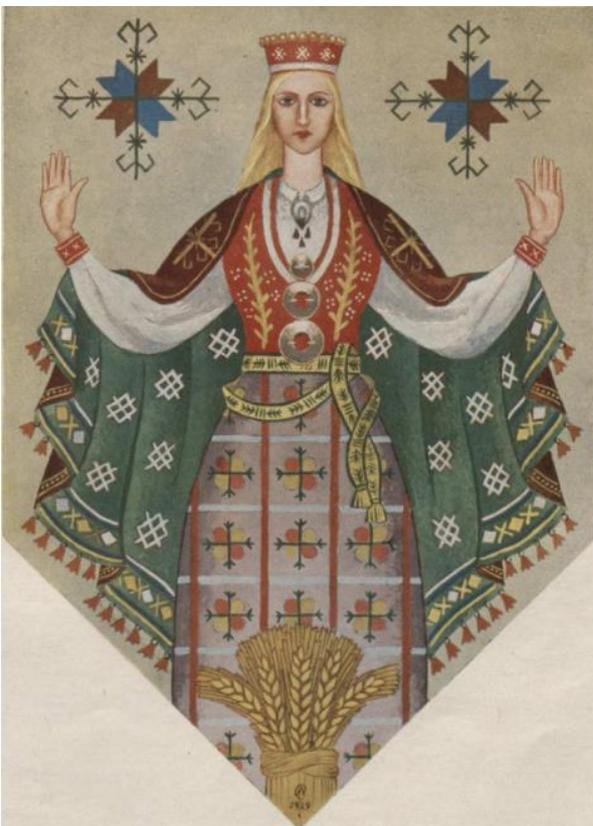
God is the one who provides happiness, but God's daughter *Laima* also *Laima* (*Laima* sign) is the Goddess of destiny maker, giving life to people and nature, happiness carrier which is related to birth and success. She decides upon people's destinies according to the laws created by God. *Laima* forges the person's life activities and arranges the events in life. *Laima* as the promulgator of the highest causal relationship laws decides whether the human will have a happy or unhappy life, compatibility with people and order of all matters [2, 58]. *Laima* spins, weaves and pulls the thread of life, health and welfare. Spinning – the activity due to which the so varied world's powers and events caused by them meet up and are woven or twisted into a united thread of time and destiny (in a belt, rope, wreath, fabric or tangle) – is symbolized by the *Laima* Cross Sign which is created rotating God's Cross and bending the ends of its branches. This is the sign of compatibility, which symbolizes rotation, development of cyclic and rhythmical events and movement around the common centre or the centre of events – God. *Laima* Sign (also Needle), the symbol of the world's tree, harmonizes relationships among people, helps not to give up the circumstances, encourages purposefulness at work in order to obtain a lifelong fulfilment, defends from wrongdoers. Needle is like *Laima*'s footprints (Picture 10), and if one steps on them, the person's life becomes easier, happier. *Laima* shows an even and constant course of events, where moments of tension are equal with moments of relaxation – the same way as the day follows the night, work is followed-up by relaxation. Needle is daily life, daily care daily routine, it is a part of any happier life. The fir and pine needle design is considered as the symbol of fertility, health, and long life. This symbol has many variations.

Both *Laima* and Thunder work in a different area. However, they are closely knit together, for they represent a different scale of a common time flow, provide a course of time and determine or affect the destiny. Thunder is the creator of the cosmic time cycle in macrocosm, in the Universe of planets and stars, but *Laima* is the decision maker of the person's life and destiny in microcosm, in the human Universe. This coherence is confirmed by the principal form (Picture 11), which is equal to *Laima* Cross Sign and Thunder Cross. The unity points to *Laima* and Thunder's common initial essence and their descendance from God [2, 62]. *Laima* is manifested as compatibility and order of all matters, as climbing up a hill, as rhythm, as conformity of events. However, it can also be manifested as lack of this conformity – in a disturbed course of events, misfortune, destroyed conformity and rhythm, in a tangle of different forces, an unfavourable decision. The colours of *Laima* – pulsation of life and success: green, red, yellow (white) (Picture 12).



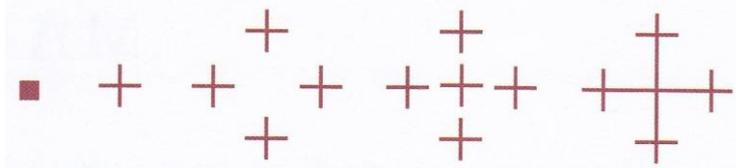
Picture 12. *Laima* – colours of pulsation and luck in Sun: green, red, yellow (white). [2, 81]

In the world all events are arranged like on the waves or hills in an upward or downward sequence. *Laima* is sitting on a hill, *Nelaimīte* (Misfortune) – downhill. *Laima* and *Nelaimē* walk simultaneously along the same life footpaths and they meet up on a foot-bridge [2, 68]. *Laima* as destiny and the human being's free will and mutually supplementary and connected volumes (Picture 13). The Latvian does not look at destiny as unchangeable. The human being is given an opportunity to affect their destiny with their free will and choice and sometimes even to change it essentially. Every man is the architect of his own fortune and destiny. Everything in the world is the sequence of phenomena whose real source is accumulation of causes and conditions [2, 80]. The spruce, pine, needle – the evergreen tree, the symbol of eternal life, which in *Laima's* whisk is manifested as a cyclic coherence, since only the one who gets old and dies can get renewed. The upwards going spruce is *Laima*, but downwards – misfortune, which is the opposite of *Laima*. The middle between the top and bottom is the foot-bridge – the active threshold of balance between the twists of life events which go up the hill or also take down, and it is the border where light and darkness, the creating and destroying forces, the forces of time and destiny meet. The human being's task in life is to overcome the border and optional situation: getting over the foot-bridge means you have to overcome it and it brings you joy of living and wealth. Virtue – the amount of bustle and tension of action – requires from the human certain characteristics in order to be able to work hard, overcome inertia, develop and implement the real values. Vices oppose the good of virtue. Virtues are polarized, they oppose the vice.

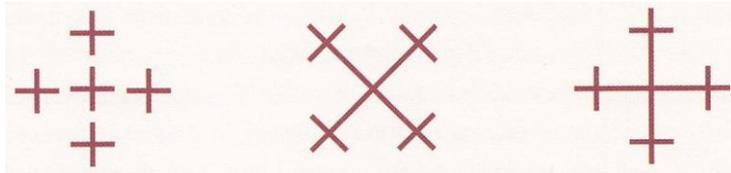


Picture 13. Painter Ansis Cīrulis (1883–1942). *Laima*. [9]

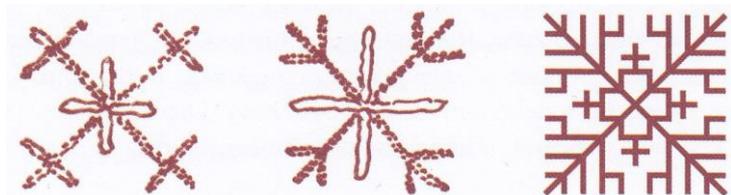
Picture 14. Ansis Cīrulis. Sketch of wall painting “*Māra*”. [10]



Picture 15. Dot, little cross, a set of crosses, Māra Cross or Cross-cross. [2, 96]



Picture 16. Māra is twofold, and twofold is Māra Cross. [2, 97]



Picture 17. Māra's World blossoms beautifully in its diversity as a flower garden. [2, 98]



Picture 18. Māra Sign: a – in Latvia nature [11], b – on the sign trail. [12]



Picture 19. Māra addresses Veļi Mother, Mother of Earth and Mother of Graves. [2,102]



Picture 20. Zig-zag, Little Toad. Grass Snake. [2, 102]

In Latvian folklore deities – Mothers have an important place. *Māra* (Picture 14) as Goddess of the material world, women's defender, fertility provider, governor of the land and underground knows Mother of Forest, Wind, Sea, Milk, Cattle, *Velis* (Ghosts and Soul), keeping under her control also the Kingdom of Underground. *Māra* takes part in people's life activities, also in weddings when two (the male and female) merge into one, creating a new absolute wholeness. The main characteristics of *Māra* is her love and holiness. *Māra* is especially close to a woman helping her in the most important events in life: when getting married, in labour and children's upbringing, she helps in christening, she is the health protector, also cattle purveyor, household supervisor, young people's match-maker and engagement organizer. *Māra* Sign has got lots of varieties: *Māra* Triangle, *Māra* Land, *Māra* Cross also Cross-cross or Fire-cross (this is not the same as Thunder Cross) award profoundness and security (Picture 15). Latvians see *Māra* in different plants and animals (the beetle and black adder); a linden tree is the symbol of a girl, but an oak tree – the symbol of a boy. *Māra* rules over the live and lifeless, it symbolizes the land. She keeps the secret of fertility, but at the end of life when the human being finishes the course of life, their body again gets into Kingdom of Mother of Land – *Māra*. Land is the Great Mother – holy, clear and fair. A human and plant are born from it and return to it. The symbol of Land Mother is a straight, horizontal line, but the second symbol – a hook or triangle, whose 90 degree angle points downwards, also in Indian Yantras means land, substance and Land Mother. Drawing the sign on a horizontal plane the sides are pointing to the north-west and north-east – they are the directions, where the sun sets during the Summer Solstice in Latvia and rises in *Jānis'* morning. The sign has a deeply symbolic purpose and power which opposes God's Triangle. Merging God and *Māra* Signs a rhombus is created which characterizes balance and conformity. The pattern together with other signs create a meaningful symbolism. Both of these signs, covering over each other, obtain a hexagonal star, called as *Lietuvēns'* Cross, who has a strong defence against the evil. *Māra* as Mother of Sea and Mother of Water is symbolized by a zig-zag sign, which reflects the river flow and plain of the land. *Māra* Wave is water, for *Māra* is also Goddess in rivers, lakes and seas. In Latvian patterns *Māra* Sign – Grass Snake (Picture 20) can often be met, which manifests wisdom, inquisitiveness, agility, sharp mind, adroitness. Sages use the sign for serious activities as the symbol of the underground. The Latvian poetess *Māra Zālīte* has said that the numerous Mothers of Latvian folklore are “different manifestations of Mother *Māra*.” In Latvian godliness God, *Māra* and *Laima* are invisible, but their presence can be felt. *Māra* Churches are especially emphasized, which are ancient Latvians' holy groves and sacred places in nature. In *Dievturis'* explanation God is the World's Father and *Māra* – the World's Mother. *Māra* Triangle can be forked and enriched. The typical *Māra*'s colours are white, black, also maranot (red-brown which can be obtained dyeing the material in bedstraw roots (*Galium*)), as well as ginger, bay, brown, grey. *Māra* Cross symbolizes the material part of the world created by God. The symbol of perfection and fertility. *Māra* is a protector of health, custodian of women and supplier of bread. Protects against evil spirits. *Māra* Cross is the sign of the live matter, which is closely connected with fertility, fire and home, protects from the evil spirits, takes care of people and the family and defends the material wellbeing – home, bread and hearth. In comparison with God's Cross, the ends of *Māra* Cross are crossed over, and their

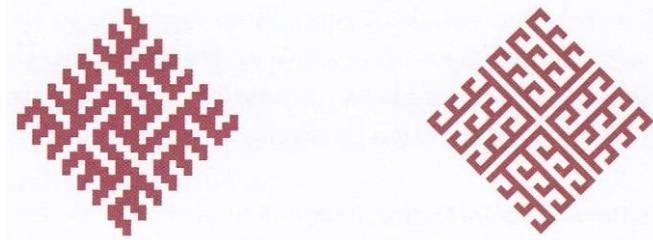
extension into infinity is interrupted with a new dot or little cross, which points to the limitedness and finitude of the material world in contrast to the infinity of the spiritual world [2, 96]. The material manifestations have beginning and end. The human being's life in the physical world is connected with the birth when the soul embodies into the physical body, and dying – the death. *Māra* by her essence is twofold, and also *Māra* Cross can be looked upon in two positions of different meanings: the slanting cross and the straight cross (Picture 16) [2, 98]. The Cross-cross is an enhancement of the simple cross, and is considered as a sign symbolizing the mythological *Māra* – the ruler of the material world. Belief claims that the Cross-cross is the symbol of the mistress of the homestead who would make this sign in the ashes of the hearth so that *Māras*'s luck would guard the home until the dawn in which case it was known as the Fire-cross. Bread would also have this symbol drawn on the top as a symbolic gift to *Māra* who would give the bread her blessing and protection as it baked. The design of Cross-cross and its many variations are also often found on household items frequently used by women. The Cross-cross – a combination of four crosses, this symbol has been carved on ancient sacrificial stones for bestowal of divine favours. Cross-crosses have been found decorating women's wraps during the Iron and Bronze Ages. *Māra*'s World flourishes in its magnificence and diversity as a flower garden (Picture 17). The slanted *Māra* Cross symbolizes the life creating and highday condition of the material world (Picture 18), it points to the borders to be unlocked, birth, diversity of natural forms and their development possibilities in the future (Picture 19), which is best expressed by the set of *Māra* and other signs. Movement blossoms outwards – away from the centre of the sign. The straight *Māra* Cross symbolizes the border between this world and the afterlife world, where everything freezes, closing life borders in the world of four kinds – four cardinal directions, four seasons, four stages in life and the return of matter in its initial stage. The movement for crosses with a life energy smothering character happens backwards to the centre of the sign. The individually short-term essence of growth is emphasized. The material welfare is protected with *Māra* Cross – home, bread, fire (the housekeeper drew Cross-cross on a bread loaf before it was put in the oven and in the evening it was drawn in the ashes of the hearth, so that the fire with *Māra*'s blessing would not disappear till the next morning), as *Māra* herself is a bread baker. Crossing over the ends of the cross a sign is obtained which expresses both seclusion, abundance and death. A thing, on which *Māra* Cross has been drawn, is symbolically donated to *Māra*, receiving back in return her blessing and surveillance. *Māra* Cross is often included in women's jewellery and clothes. Scientists are sure that *Māra* Cross creates a special energy around it, which defends, heals and brings luck. *Māra* Day in the ancient calendar marks the end of the summer. *Māra* Sign is drawn as an equal triangle, a hook or half-circle with the top turned down. Viewing this sign on the horizontal field, the sides of the sign are pointed northwest and northeast, and this symbolizes where in Latvia in the summer solstice sun rises and sets. The sign is related to symbolic roots and is empowered with the opposite force of God's Sign, so when putting them together the balance of powers is gained. If both of these signs are drawn one over the other, the six sided cross of Bad Spirit is gained. *Māra* Cross can also be with smaller crosses and stripes. *Māra* as a symbol has many different kinds, and she has several ways to exist – like a triangle of *Māra*, water of *Māra*, land of *Māra*, cross of *Māra*. All these signs present the basic principles, security, and relations between Heaven and

natural powers.

In the world of four-dimension time space *Laima* represents the time dimension – motion and events in time – destiny, but *Māra* represents space – three spatial dimensions of the world, types, levels and forces of matter arrangement. God, *Laima* and *Māra* know the course of following events (Picture 21). *Laima* and *Māra*'s collaboration is manifested in relation to fire. A purposeful human life and happiness cannot be imagined without fire, skills and ability to control the energies hiding in the depths of matter. *Laima* requires reverence, respect and skill to apply fire for creative and good-natured purposes, but if there is something missing, *Laima* will leave you and Misfortune will come. Fire is sacred and divine, similar to life [2, 86]. Fire as an element is related to the holy-fire dedicated to Thunder, hearth fire of every home and bonfires of Solstice rituals. Fire blazes and whirls, but always precisely in rhythm (Picture 22). Fire has a real and symbolic relation to the original forces of the Universe – God, Thunder, *Laima* and *Māra* in the centre of the ritual action and space. Ambiguity and relation are manifested by Thunder and *Laima* Cross Signs, which is simply called as Firecross (Swastika) relating it to fire.



Picture 21. Painter Jēkabs Bīne (1895–1955). God, *Māra*, *Laima*. 1931. [13]



Picture 22. Fire flames and whirls, but always precisely in rhythm. [2, 88]

God's sons – the morning star *Auseklis* and evening star *Rieteklis*, which alternately die and then are reborn again. *Auseklītis* (also Star) – the morning star with eight rays symbolizes the light's victory over darkness. This sign helps overcome hardships in relationships, finances and career, protects from the evil. Therefore years ago it was drawn on doors and at the end of driveways to defend from the evil. Moon Cross is the people's defender and helper at night. The sign attracts celestial fertility forces.



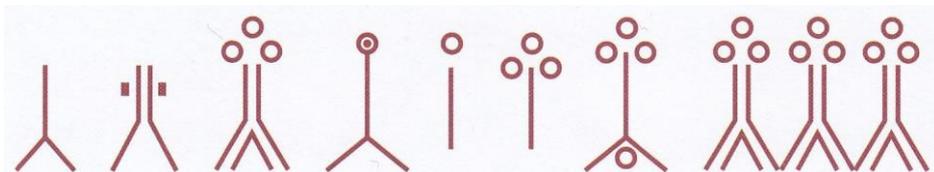
Picture 23. *Ūsiņš* Signs. [2, 123]

*Ūsiņš* – deity of the heavenly light, the usher of the renascent spring Sun that brings light, warmth, green grass, leaves for the trees, opens the door for spring and other goodies. *Ūsiņš* Sign consists of a combination between Moon and Sun Signs (Picture 23): Moon as if takes Sun from the bottom and darkness up to the top, at the same time reflecting the light provided by Sun in the surrounding space. The sign symbolizes the renascent spring Sun in nature, the ability to raise again from a dead condition to a live renewal condition and the ancestors' spiritual energies, advice, effect of knowledge on the human and live world, renascent light of knowledge in the human being [2, 124].

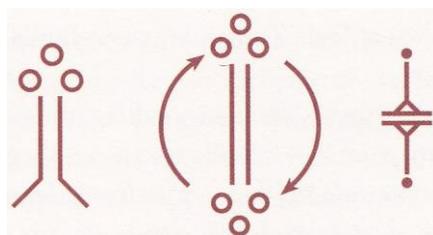
*Jānis* (Picture 24) – the symbol of the heaven and land, unity of masculine power and feminine principle, collaboration and fusion. *Jānis* Sign shows the border between two periods of time and the movement directions of the sun and light, includes the gate on the heavenly hill with three suns at the tops (Picture 25). *Jānis* Gate during the upward journey of the sun and light and downward journey of the Sun and light is like a neutral gap where the sun's movement stops (Picture 26): it is neither going up nor down, but the border is like the abyss of darkness – emptiness, in which the light can disappear and perish if nobody helps to find it. During this time people with ritual bonfires help the light movement not to break, but with songs they overcome the abyss of darkness. God's son *Jānis* returns the whole fertility power to the Earth in order to become *Jumis*, so that fruit of the earth would yield and the cycle close.



Picture 24. Ansis Cīrulis. Jānis. 1931. [14]

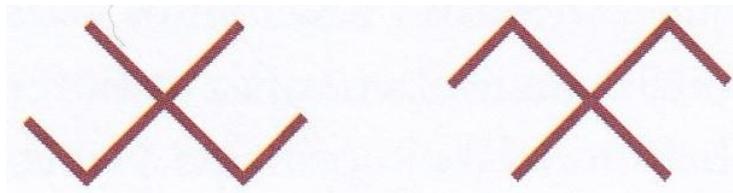


Picture 25. Different Jānis Signs. [2, 128]

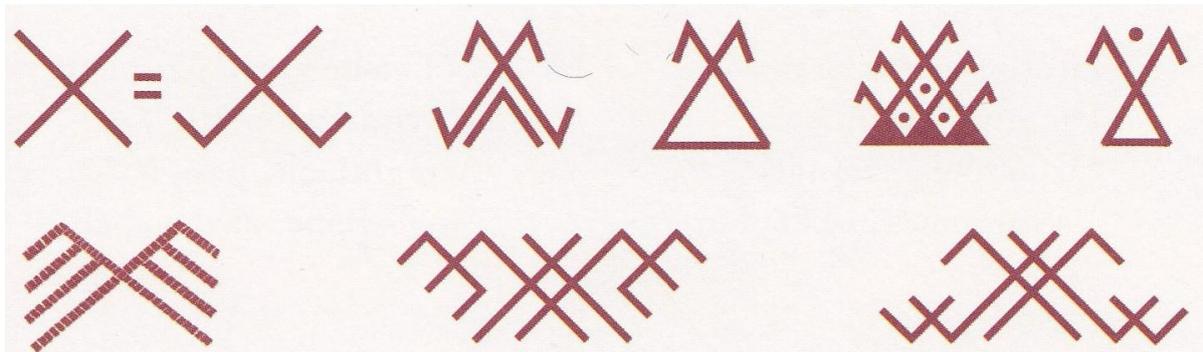


Picture 26. Jānis Sign. Sun's journey from downhill and darkness to light. [2, 129]

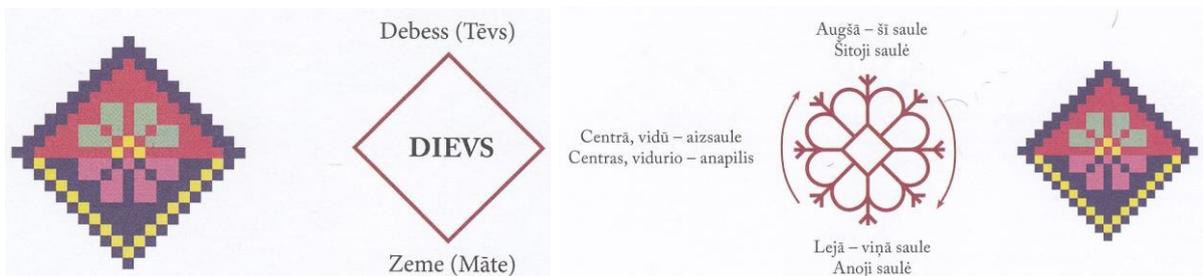
God's presence is in the course of the light and fertility (life) cycle. The ancient deity of fertility *Jumis* includes the unity of the masculine and feminine principle – fertility in nature and in relation to people, and is connected with two directions: during the first half of the year – motion upwards towards light, but during the second half of the year, when grain ears bend due to the heavy weight – motion downwards towards the earth. The principal form of *Jumis* Sign, developed from the slanting God's Cross Sign points to a special condition and direct relation to the world's higher and life reascent powers (Picture 27). *Jumis'* presence provides prosperity and happiness: happiness without prosperity is not only under a threat, but it is also impossible. *Jumis* is the symbol of development (Picture 28), fertility and blessing bearer. It protects and blesses twice. *Jumis* on the roof ridge brings fertility and prosperity. If *Jumis* is drawn on tools, the work will be done much easier and twice better. It is also recommended to keep the sign in the wallet.



Picture 27. *Jumis* Sign in Latvian patterns. [2, 130]

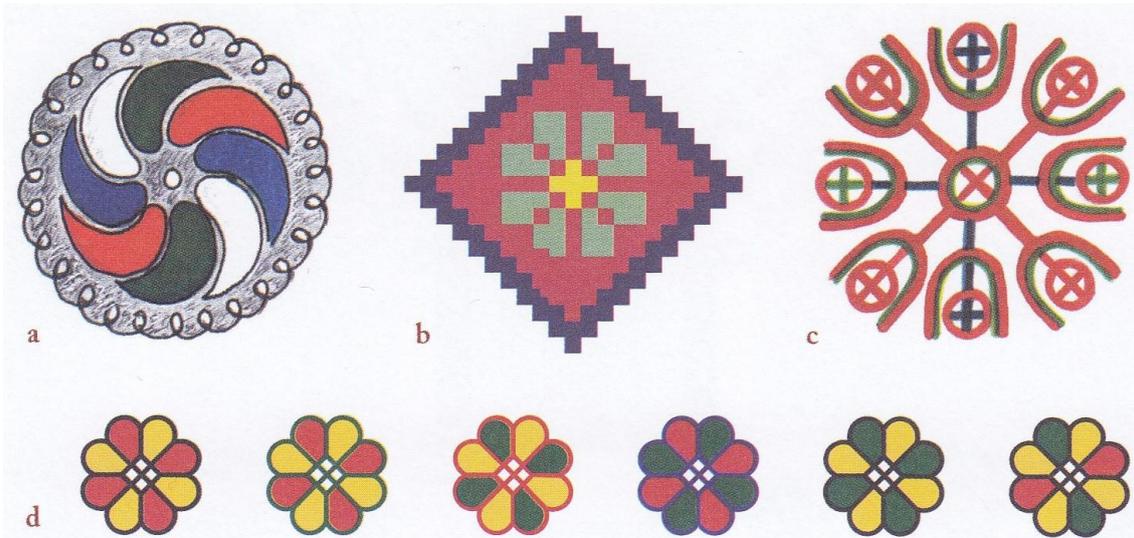


Picture 28. Beginning of *Jumis* Sign from a cross and beautiful expansion with complicatedly woven branches. [2, 131]



Picture 29. God (in the middle) is revealed and Heaven (Father) and Earth (Mother): they symbolize the couple principle of masculine and feminine powers, collaboration, fusion and unity of the powers in order fertility would continue, harvest ripen, children be born. [2, 120]

Picture 30. Sun of two sorts move: uphill – this sun, in the centre – afterworld, downhill- ultramundane. [2, 152]

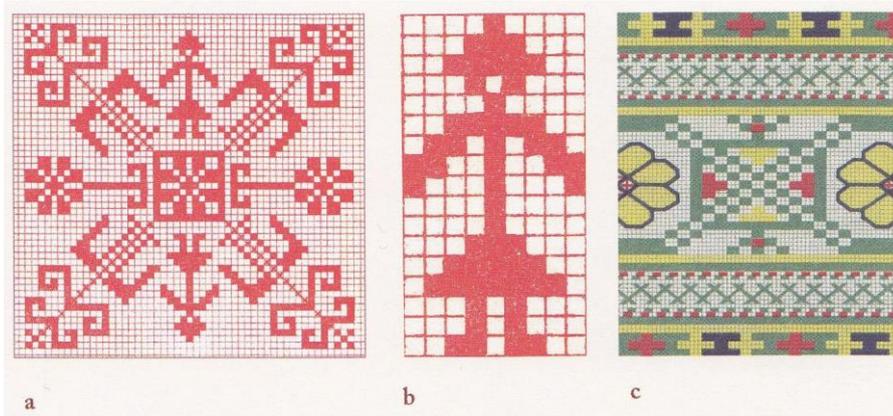


Picture 31. Little suns: a – in a disk fibulae, b – in a mitten pattern, c – in a wrap, d – in fabric patterns. [2, 134]

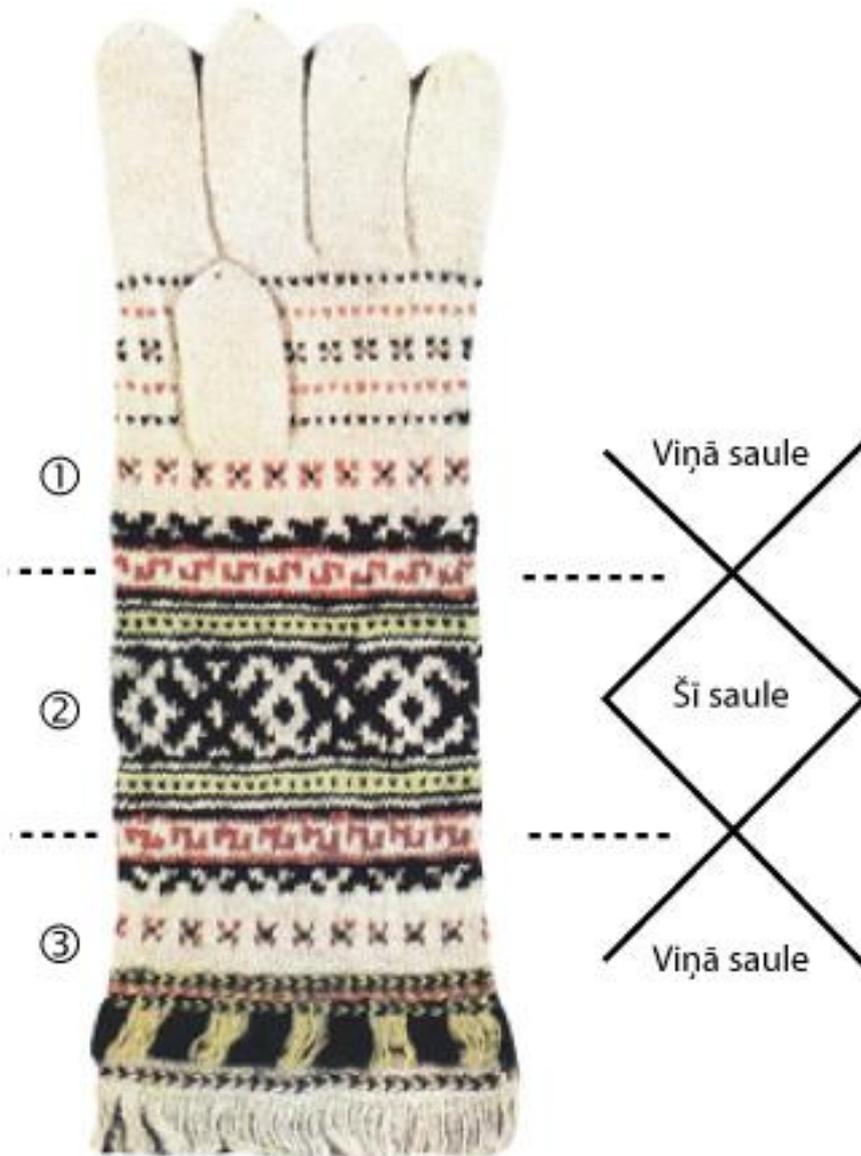
God's sons are four seasons that come starting from Christmas, and each of them arrives in certain time. Sun as a daughter dresses up in the mornings and evenings, adorns herself and waits for suitors – God's son *Jānis*, *Auseklis*, Moon, Thunder or even *Dieviņš* – *Ūsiņš*. Sun is betrothed and given away, taken across the sea. The wedding of Sun and Moon – a part of the heavenly eternity myth – re-echoes again and again in the annual customs on the earth. Sun, once rising up on the heavenly hill, then again setting down, determines the essence of events and traditions happening during a year and the character of the human experiences. The cult of light and fertility, psychological experiences and spiritual development and improvement tasks for every human being's soul in the annually cyclic and life-long course come from the heavenly myth. Sun is the symbol of eternal motion and life. It strengthens confidence and helps to find the right way in life. It protects the kin. Sun Sign was drawn on furniture, blankets, carpets, children's cradles, dowry chests, jewellery, women's garments of honour and mittens and socks meant for men. The circle is a universal symbol representing eternity. It is associated with infinity that has no beginning and end. The circle is the symbol of Sun. The Sun and Moon cults were widely spread in ancient agrarian societies. Latvian folk songs, as well as folk tales and stories place Sun in a position of honour. It is in constant motion and the symbol of life. Sun Symbols can be found in Latvian territory as early as the mid-Stone Age. The circle is combined with other elements. In Latvian design, Sun Symbol can be found on many things ranging from house design elements to handkerchiefs.

The world is formed of three vertically placed spheres – the underground, earth and heaven, but the structure was understood and modelled according to the similarity to a tree in nature, creating the symbol of World Tree. In the centre of the mythical world – in the middle between the heaven and earth, between light and darkness, between the past and future – there is a Man whose image is characterized by a vertical three-part division and a horizontal four-part division, marking seven coordinates: the centre, top, bottom, north, east, south, west. The flow of light never ends, and the World is infinite, but in the narrow daily life we call the world as Mother Earth with her Heaven, people and beings. The infinite and also closed World is God himself (Picture 29) and his *Laidums* (Creation), in the shapes

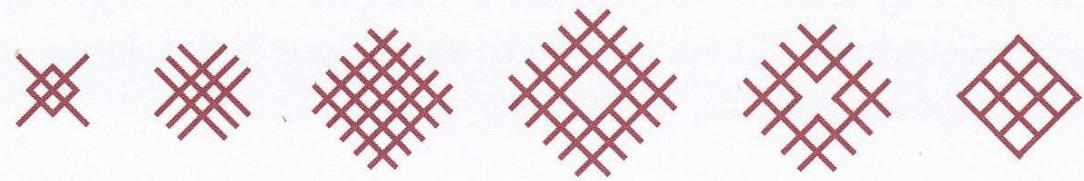
of *Laima* and *Māra*. The principal symbol of the world's comprehension in the complex arrangements of World Trees and varieties of symbolic meaning is characterized by trees growing in several directions even up to their arrangement in a circle. The image of World Tree is related to the sun's way – personification of the sun's rise and set (Picture 30), and is also called as *Austra* Tree of dawn (also Sun Tree, World Bush, World Tree, Little Oak Tree, Great Bush, Little Spruce), which gives people power and advice, protects the kin and family, promotes development, encourages to enhance and preserve moral values. *Austra's* Tree, in which the awareness of our past, present, future, our ancestors, children and ourselves are combined, is enriched with elements of *Auseklītis*, *Māra* Sign: heavenly bodies settle down on the branches in dawn – the Sun (Picture 31), Moon, stars, birds. This is the symbol of human knowledge which shows an upwards aspiration of the world's order. The sign that unites our ancestors, us and our children, past, present and the future. In the simplest version the sign reminds of a new tree that has just started branching, but in more magnificent derivations the sign is as rich as its explanation. Sun or *Austra* Tree is an element of a peculiar pattern that has similar motives also in ornaments of other nations. In other cultures it is also called as World Tree and it divides clearly the world into three spheres (Picture 33): in the symbol of *Austra* Tree the human being's impression about the world is expressed: the roots were related to the underground world, but the trunk is the middle world or the place where we reside together with animals and plants. The foliage of the tree symbolizes the higher – spiritual Heavenly World to which everybody aspires. The leaves of *Austra* Tree were of silver, the roots of copper, but branches of gold. Usually the tree was an oak. *Austra* Tree symbolizes the sun's course and the world order. *Austra* Tree is mentioned into Latvian *Dainas*, it is also encountered in Latvian national ornaments. *Austra* Tree is the symbol of daily rhythm, it reflects the human preconceptions about the world, symbolizes its link with the spirituality. The side branches of Sun Tree are placed symmetrically to the middle part and they “grow” on the slant upwards or both upwards and downwards. The sign of this pattern integrates into the triangular platform whose top points downwards, but sometimes the platform of Sun Tree is a square or rectangle. Candles are used to adorn Sun Tree, also Needle and Moon Sign. Sun Tree is very diverse. Sometimes the treetop is emphasized, in other versions – the middle part in whose extension the sun or another element of the pattern is placed. In decorations Sun Trees are most often placed along the sides of the pattern. They are especially often used in embroideries of woollen shawls (woollen shawls of Krustpils, Latgale, *Augšzeme*, Eastern-Vidzeme). The wives of Latgale and *Augšzeme* also decorated with them their kerchiefs and aprons. In its turn wives of Courland embroidered the shirt sleeves with beautiful motives of Sun Tree (the shirt from Rucava). The sign of Sun Tree is often reflected together with Sun Sign. *Austra*, Sun Tree is the compilation model of human knowledge and preconceptions (Picture 32). The central part of the earth is particularly magnificent, that is – part of our life. This is the preserver of the beautiful and valuable. *Austra* Tree protects the kin, family, unites us with God, and gives us power and advice. Sun Tree – a combination of the basic design elements creates diversified symbol extensions. Such is Sun Tree, which represents reaching upwards and growth. Sun Tree – a combination of the basic design elements creates diversified symbol extensions.



Picture 32. Human, Sun and Tree Sign in a united world's model the connection and dependence between Nature and a Man. Sun in the World's centre. [2, 167]



Picture 33. Pattern signs of the Universe's space-time division in the groom's glove from Krustpils: a – the afterlife, b – this world, c – the afterlife. [2, 150]



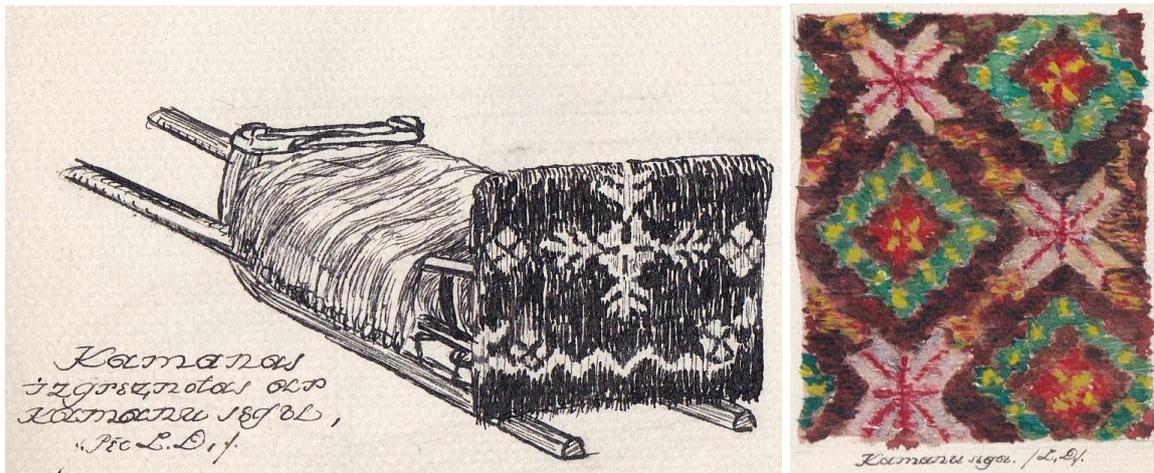
Picture 34. *Symbolism of the world's fabric.* [2, 144]

The symbolism of the world's fabric (Picture 34) provides a supplement to the world's figurative comprehension, which emerges from the awareness that the visible material world has been woven on a grid created by invisible forces, which symbolizes the self-organization of the Universe and is related to diverse events in nature, human society and the world's mythical vision. The intuitively figurative knowledge is reflected in the geometrical pattern.

## 2. Mutual correlation and arrangement of geometric signs in Latvian patterns

Signs are the most laconic, ancient form of information and vibration expression, but their arrangement is related to the world's models and structural development logic of the signs found in the pattern (Picture 35). The principle of the twins was important – Father and Mother, spirit and matter, as well as the signs of the world's wholeness and cyclic renewal for the horizontal division of the circle – Heaven and Earth, and in the nature existing relations of the cosmic forces marked along the vertical. The unity of a Man and Cosmos is confirmed by the comprehension typical to the Indo-Europeans and Balts about the Man's place in the events of the world's space-time created by God. The Man and Tree are revealed in the understanding as the symbol of the world's (Universe) construction, single motion and life – the world's axis, mediator between the Earth and Heaven. Common understanding of the Indo-European and Balts' sacral space on the four-part horizontal structure of the Universe (cardinal directions) and three-part vertical structure (Heaven – Earth – the underworld) is essential. Every nation, which has gone through its development from so distant past, includes the internal terms of preservation and development and spiritual principles in its cultural heritage, historical experience and mythological awareness. The Latvian pattern as a structure embodies also the future development possibilities and it is the feeling code of Latvian life, also the task – the programme for our art, environment and spirit. The pattern has an overall organizing impact: arrange, organize – this is the principal function (Picture 36). The Latvian pattern is the feeling code of our ancestors' life, a united system that covers all its levels of manifestation.

The origin of all signs is the most diverse God's Crosses: they start as dots in the centre and aspire for closing in the grid of the World's fabric. The system of signs has to be looked at as a set of cyclic motions, where one sign changes into another moving into time and space. The same sign can appear in several places, but with a different symbolical meaning. It complies with the universal essence of the signs' geometrical construction structure and symbol's polysemy: a sign is revealed through another sign, but the image through another image. The strict construction of the system's internal links allows some complimentary variations and manifestations.



Picture 35. A sledge with a splendid blanket in whose pattern Sun, Needle and Zig-zag are included. [5]

Picture 36. A sledge blanket with a geometrical pattern. [5]

God is revealed in the Universe, nature and the Man. In the centre of the system there are signs which symbolize God's significance in creation and existence. The world in its most profound essence is diverse and united, cognizable rationally, but changeable. The geometrical signs of ancient deities are revealed in their profoundness and purity, and they obtain a logical justification of mutual relations. The symbols in the system are mutually interpretable and they are interwoven by oneness, cyclic renewal, preserving the ambient character of the world's oneness [1, 151].

The structural construction of the pattern starts with the smallest element – the dot, which is the first flash of consciousness in the darkness, symbolizes an individual object, thought, idea, impulse and is the beginning and end of something. A little cross with a dot or little eye is a star – the smallest dot of light in the sky, also the light or soul given to a human being at birth. The little cross marks the centre – the centre of all activities where the world starts from [1, 152].

All divine is manifested as life, an opportunity to be, flourish and develop [1, 153]. The straight God's Cross – the sign of the world's order which points to immobility, passivity and symbolizes the orientation of four kinds, centre, infinity, unity of the material and ideal, as well as the timeless space – the world, also the afterlife, and the slanting God's Cross – the sign of the world's order in the position that points to motion, activity and symbolizes the activity, rotation, dynamics created by God, at the same time preserving the world's orientation of four kinds, the symbolism of the material and ideal unity, included into one sign, makes Sun Wheel or Cross of Rays which symbolizes the centre, infinity, world's rotation, division of time and space into eight symmetrical parts, also combines the life and death aspects set by God's order. In the world's motion created by God life and death correlate as etiological and natural events of a big Course. Every individual life finishes eventually in order to provide a place for another one, a new one: such is the natural law, and a Latvian accepts it in a deep understanding. Sun Wheel symbolizes simultaneous existence of the afterlife and eternal motion in this world and afterlife. Star Sign on the border between this world and afterlife preserves an open outline. The rays of the star coming out from the centre can continue infinitely [1, 154]. The afterlife is situated in another dimension – beyond the borders of the visible world.

However, at the same time it has as close link with this world and existence in the afterlife as the centre with a circle in all its circling motion stages [1, 159]. The principal form of Sun Wheel and Sun Sign is a closed circle or a closed circle with a centre (Picture 37), which symbolizes togetherness, unity, safety, light and marks the demarcation idea of the internal and external world, the fight between light and darkness or the good and evil. The circle with a dot in the centre symbolizes the sun and the world, the beginning of the world from a bud, from a nucleus. This is also the unity of the male and female, to which just *Jānis*' symbols point at – the big ritual sign formed by people standing in a circle and swaying around the fire raised on a vertical post. In Latvian mythology the circle is the symbol of Sun (also Moon), harmony, completeness and defence related to eternal, tireless motion, recurrence, return, cycle, wholeness, space with no dimensions. The sun does its course along the circuit together with the satellite moon. In Sun Sign concentric circles around the centres of nucleus manifest the idea of radiation, pulsation and mark a new direction of motion – from the centre to sides and back to the centre. Sun is round and it has got spokes so that it can roll. The Sun sits in the wheel or on the branches of the Light Tree whose upper branches help staying up on the heavenly hill, but the branches going downwards are not able to hold it – the Sun slides down the arms of the tree and sinks in order to continue its circuit in the afterlife. A grand and impressive circuit sign of Sun or World Tree is created [1, 156].

Sun is the main stop point in the division of the world's Universe space-time between this world and afterlife. The sun rises and during the day while moving in the sky it is in the slanting cross position, but in the evening it dies and is situated in the straight cross position. In the symbols it has been clearly acknowledged. Duality is symbolized by the Sun Wheel included in the Sun Sign, which divides the circle into days and nights, good times and hard times, as well as prediction about the life after death in the plans of another existence and temporariness of this life, emphasising its cycle. Sun Wheel with Suns at the ends of spokes creates Sun Cross that has two conditions. In the pattern the direction of the Sun's course or the eternal living condition manifests life and is often emphasized by rhythm, colour or form. The signs show the sun's course strictly geometrical and symmetrical: the sun in its circuit both appears and disappears, dividing the time circle into days and nights, good times and hard times. Sun Sign is reflected as a circle, square, rhombus, a wheel, since the sun always rolls over the sky. In its simplest form it is a circle, but it has got lots of extensions, the most common is the eight-pointed sun, where the rays of the sun symbolize the world's tree oak and eight times. Sun Sign with twelve rays directed to four sides symbolize the year divided into twelve months. Latvians have used the solar year as a measurement. The circle in Latvian mythology is the symbol of wholeness, completeness, defence. Observing the sun's course in the sky, the annual celebrations have emerged when the honourable guests are God, *Māra*, *Laima*, Thunder. Walking the sun's direction, i.e. clockwise, the rituals are performed. The circle marks the demarcation idea of internal and external world, fight between light and darkness, the good and evil, defence of the good. In the group of Sun Signs lines of different directions like fibres weave through and create the fabric [1, 155]. In the grid of the world's fabric the system of signs is described by the central symbolism, wholeness, development from the simplest to the most complicated, cycle, structural oneness.



Picture 37. Džems Bodnieks (1910–1987). Kokle 1951. [15]

Picture 38. Hope chest in Vecpiebalga. [5]

For Latvians Sun and white colour is the symbol of the highest values. Human beings with their power of nature and virtues at work become white themselves and similar to Sun. The Sun is as beautiful as a flower (Picture 38, 39), and the expansions of the pattern are shown as flowers, whose form is a peculiar symbol of the events in the world's Universe and harmony. In Sun Sign (sun's circuit) the abstract's understanding (time relativity) of the Sun's life and Human's life mutual relativity is included, as well as the prediction about life after death in conditions of another existence and temporariness of life in comparison to the soul's course in the world. Sun Sign and Sun Wheel manifest the link between the Heaven and Earth, God and *Māra*, spirit and matter. Past and Future meet up in continuous Present [1, 157–158].



Picture 39. Suiti hope chest with painted sign patterns. [16]

Signs do not have any nationalities. In the world the patterns of the Lielvārde belt have one of the richest and most complicated system of geometrical ornaments (Picture 40). The changeable geometrical pattern with ancient information encoded of the red white belt up to 270 cm long and from 5 to 10 cm wide woven from linen threads and woollen yarn of the Latvian national costume around the Daugava's waterway has been created by 22 elements into different combinations (Picture 41). In the middle of the belt or on its sides a blue, green or violet thread has been woven in.



Picture 40. Artist A. Vārpiņš. The Lielvārde belt in Latvian national costume. [17]

Picture 41. The member of National Applied Art Studio "Kalme" from Alūksne Rūta Strada. Signs of Latvian pattern in the Lielvārde belt. [18]

Each geometrical sign of the Latvian pattern is a peculiar structural wholeness with a certain informative inherent value. A sign of the pattern with its structure and vibrations, which it creates during the rational and intuitively imaginative perception, provides an informative preconception about the representable object and phenomenon. The information contained in the pattern and its structure of signs, describes and supplements the levels of the spiritual, astral and physical plan. The knowledge of exact, philosophical, ethically aesthetic and practical character and

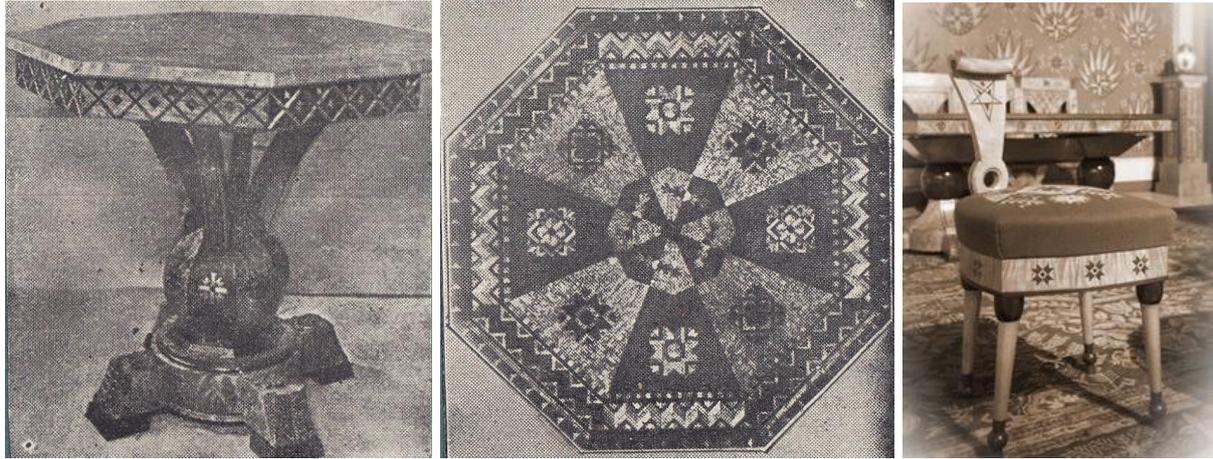
permeated with intellectual cognitions on the world's spiritual reality and our tradition of wisdom promote the skill to perceive, understand and interpret this information. The layers of the identified and also unidentified information in the pattern during a period of time can be revealed in unprecedented situations and interconnection since the pattern as a cosmic grace keeps existing even if the projection in a culture has been lost and it is waiting in an encoded information condition for the one who will understand it. Such an opportunity can also be related to the especially complex structures of the pattern and signs in the Lielvārde belts, where the structures of the symbols reveal their significance gradually on the comprehension level available for our knowledge.

In Latvian contemporary culture, the Lielvārde belt leads its own independent, symbolic existence in people's consciousness and its motifs are often used in contemporary culture (Picture 42).

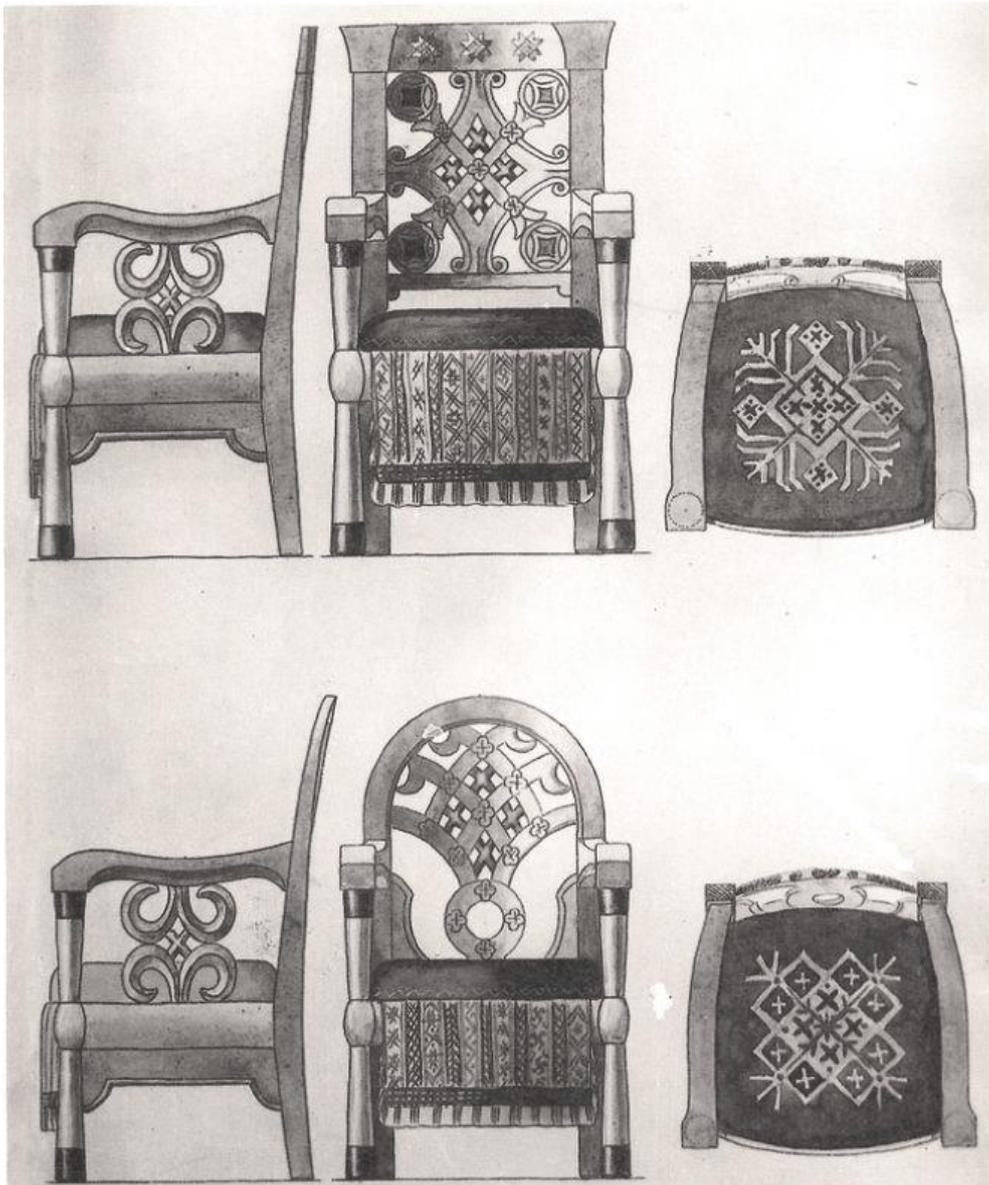


*Picture 42. A mug decorated with the pattern of the Lielvārde belt. [19]*

The outstanding furniture designer Cīrulis, who was able to understand wood well and was well informed about the art and design processes in the world, included the Latvian feeling into the form of objects, but the construction of furniture was supplemented with an ornament in the intarsia technique (Picture 43, 44).



Picture 43. Ansis Cīrulis. A little table and surface made in the intarsia technique. [5]  
Picture 44. Ansis Cīrulis. Art Deco style chair with Latvian patterns. [20]



Picture 45. Ansis Cīrulis. Drawings of chairs-projects. [21]



Picture 46. Ansis Cīrulis. State president's chair in the representation hall. [22]  
Picture 47. Ansis Cīrulis. A little table. [7]



Picture 48. Ansis Cīrulis' furniture in memorial exhibition "The sun courtyards". 2008. [23]

The first President of Latvia Republic (1922–1927) Jānis Čakste wanted to transform the big guest room of Rīga Castle into the Ambassadors' Accreditation Hall and in the adjacent small guest-room make a study, also create a contemporary interior and arrangement in the rooms that would manifest the national self-esteem and introduce the foreign ambassadors with Latvian culture. Therefore in 1923 the procurement for the interior of the hall was announced. The work was assessed by artists Vilhelms Purvītis, Teodors Zaļkalns, Rihards Zariņš, Ernests Brastiņš,

architects Pauls Kundziņš, Eižens Laube and ethnographer Matīss Siliņš. The Jury gave the highest assessment to the versatile artist, master of composition, form, colour and rhythm Ansis Cīrulis' (1883–1942) project "Rebirth" (Latvian: "Atdzimšana"), which was implemented from 1926 till 1929. In the magnificent interior of the hall created by the artist, the ceiling frescos with Latvian deities Laima, Jānis, Mother Earth and White Father and wall paintings, furniture, carpets, curtains, lamps can be seen. The set of furniture in the Ambassadors' Accreditation Hall in Riga Castle created a solemn mood and became the Latvianness canon of 1920s affecting the Latvian applied art, woodworking, furniture design in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cīrulis was inspired by Jūlijs Madarnieks (1870–1955) whose subtle geometrical ornaments in furniture fabric (Picture 45) were called as "*madarojums*" (block printing).



Picture 49. Ansis Cīrulis, Elga Kivicka. A chair of Rīga Castle Ambassadors' Hall: a – overview [24], b – furniture fabric [25]. 1923, implemented 1926–1929.

The embodiment of Latvianness in the subject world (Picture 46, 47, 48, 49) obtained a wide recognition also abroad. Cīrulis's work made in the peculiar "*madarojums*" technique won the "Grand Prix" in the worldwide art exhibition in Brussels in 1935, but the splendid furniture set designed by him from the Karelian birch obtained the gold medal in the 1<sup>st</sup> International Crafts exhibition in Berlin in 1938. The main value of the heritage left by Ansis Cīrulis is the professional design.

The contemporary Latvian artist Brigita Ektermāne has got emotionally light paintings – strength patterns of every month or new combinations of the existing signs: they are alive, developing and changing. Similarly to the Lielvārdes belt – there is not one single real belt, as every weaver has put into it something from herself, something has been changed, and also in the combinations of the signs this process can be observed with respect, as they all come from God (Picture 50, 51). Using the signs in our daily life which are written into our Latvian genes, we can regain belief in ourselves and obtain strength: Latvianness is the way of our existence in the world. Signs are a healing element – energy and information

carriers, but sign paintings – our icons at which to light a candle, stay alone with yourself. It is important not to deplete the spiritual things like old clothes. Wisdom comes slowly, but stays with the human for ever. Right now time is fast when everybody is in a hurry and comfort is really important, the bright side of life, but this is illusory and misleading.

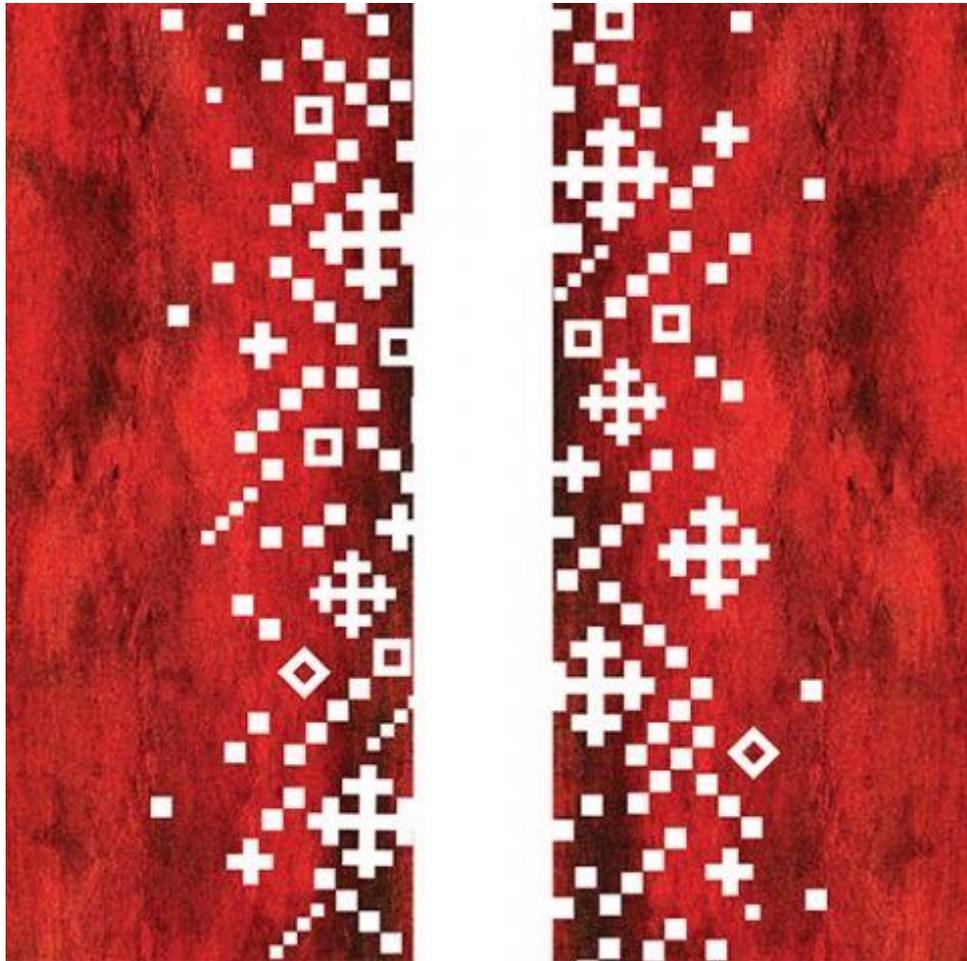


Picture 50. Brigita Ektermane. Motion starts from the centre. [26]



Picture 51. Brigita Ektermane. Māra's zig-zag. [27]

There is an opinion that Māra in Latvian *Dainas* is the same as Maria, Jesus Christ's mother, also called and God's Mother. During the Livonian Crusades in the documents signed by the Roman Pope Māra Land (Latin: *Terra Mariana*) appeared (Picture 52) or the name of Māra Land (*terra matris*) [1,151].



Picture 52. Brigita Ektermāne. Māra Land. [28]

Sun – the symbol of life and eternal motion without which life is not possible. The light of the sun symbolizes inspiration and spiritual vision, protects the kin, brings God's blessing, it is the promulgator of development harmony in the Universe and the highest aesthetic values. Sun Sign (Picture 53, 54) symbolizes togetherness, unity, safety, light, eternity and infinite space without any dimensions. In the centre of the Sun Sign there is the human soul, the highest I. The centre also symbolizes the subtle or thought energy, God's advice. Sun is associated with a good annual harvest, is the farmer's helper. The image is ascribed to the mother's functions. Sun teaches justice and compassion, gives the human an impulse to activate in themselves the inner power and light – it shines for everyone equally. Sun Sign is applied in order to transform, change the bad that has been accumulated in life. The fibula (brooch) is a direct symbol of Sun Sign. Sun Sign, painted in the interior, chiselled in jewellery, woven into clothes, can be applied for self-esteem increase, self-protection, good luck, good mood, encouragement, optimism.



Picture 53. Brigita Ektermane. Latvian Sun Sign. [96]



Picture 54. Brigita Ektermane. Original painting. [30]

In Latvian mythology the Heaven is considered and the most ancient deity of the light cult, it is like the world's roof. The top of the triangle or hook is pointed upwards, so that the pointed end aspires the heaven. This is the base of all signs, crosses and patterns (Picture 55). The Heaven is the realm where the ruling power God stays. Therefore his graphical reflection complies with the symbolical depiction, the three circles above the pointed end mean the sun's path – sunrise, zenith and sunset. God stands over time, space and lifetime (Picture 56), the human can feel best it in the soul experience. In daily life God's presence is manifested in four areas – praying, praising, forgiving and thinking positive thoughts. God Sign symbolizes light, aspiring to completeness, development, masculine energy, God's advice, protection, surveillance and blessing. God – the creator has set the rules according to which live. In compliance with the sign our ancestors made roofs for their houses, thus living under God Sign, as well as when being away from home, remembered, thought about home. Also God Sign is the symbol of trinity, family – mother, father and child. It also symbolizes the past, present and future. Actually they all are God Signs as they the same way as the world come from God. Latvian *Dieviņš* (little God) is present everywhere, a smart and kind advisor, timeless, for ever active, always awake. The ancient Latvians did not have any mediators in the relationships with God, they could communicate in any place- at home, on a field, in a forest under a spruce or oak. Life and the world are like a task, which is an opportunity given by the father: every moment is important and it cannot be lost. The world we create in our imagination and thoughts, we also create in our physical plan. God is one, but the manifestations can be many. God's Sign is sacral and invites to start with oneself, get free from haughtiness, boastfulness, fear, hatred, anger, impatience, condemnation, revenge, envy and offence.



Picture 55. Brigita Ektermane. God Sign – the base of all Latvian crosses and patterns. [31]



Picture 56. Brigita Ektermane. *God stands over time, space, lifetime.* [32]

The roofs of our houses are under God's Sign, also the Heaven is like the world's roof, the spiritual guard, link with the Highest Forces. The sign creates safety, protection, good health, attracts energy, belief into one's strength. God's presence can be felt on every step, also blessing in marriage. If there is one individual sign, then it is one storey, if a combination of signs – totally something different, but if the colour therapy is added, then absolutely other opportunities come up.

### 3. Sign symbols in Latvian regional architecture

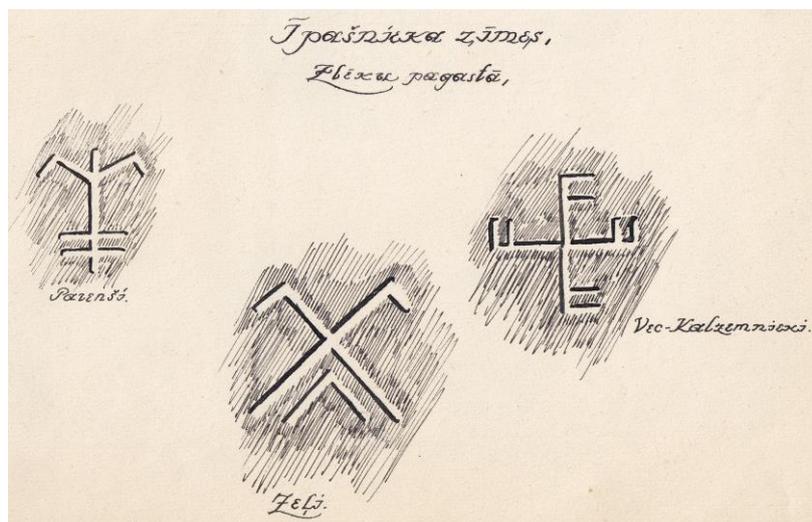
The ancient Indo-European (Aryan) and Balts' common principal feature is also included in the spatial concept of dwelling, where the planning is characterized by a rectangle, also a square with a marked centre. The Balts built form wood and with the houses of rectangular planning with a gabled roof where in the middle the main

room – a common living-room with a stove was placed. The principal form of Latvian threshing barn also included symbolism of the Balts (Aryan) sacral space and time, which reminded of a quadrangle pyramid in whose centre there was fire. It was considered the signs had a magic, sacral meaning (Picture 57), and they tried not to reveal the information to strangers in order not to lose the power.



Picture 57. The barn door with a Latvian pattern in Koniņciems, Kuldīga Region. [5]

In the culture-space of traditions a man marked their things with property signs (Picture 58) and protection signs. One of the most often used signs was *Jumis* Sign, which was used in the affiliation signs, clothing patterns and architecture. In Latvian mythology the deity of cornfields is symbolized by two grown-together pieces of fruit which characterises welfare, luck, development. In the Indo-European and Balts' traditions and symbols the combination of masculine and feminine energy and fertility symbols have got deep roots. The fertility principle is directly related to the principle of twins typical to the Indo-Europeans, which is reflected in symbolism and the structure of the pattern.



Picture 58. Property Signs in Zlēkas Parish. [5]

In the farmyards on doors, walls, but most often on door-posts of residential buildings signs were cut out or painted whose task was to protect from illnesses, plagues, evil spirits, fire and other misfortunes. In all regions of Latvia the most common protection sign was the slanted cross – one of the most ancient protection signs in the world. In Latvia the slanted crosses found on houses most often were drawn on the front door.



*Picture 59. Protection Sign – the slanting cross carved in wood. [33]*

In 2002 in Alsunga five buildings with protection signs were identified and registered. The bipartite barn “Anuži” had a carved year “1834” and on the doors a 40x30 cm big slanted cross was gently cut with a knife or another instrument (Picture 59). The sign itself and the carving fact was important and not its visual effect the sign left. On the left side of the building there used to be a grain barn, but on the right side protected with the slanting cross – a cloth barn in which meat and other valuable things were stored.

In “Lienoti” barn next to the entrance door of the loft a cruciform window was identified which was made as a cross with extended ends, but inside of “Pūpoli” grain barn on the wall not far from the door a slanting cross was found supplemented with two more slanted lines. The tripartite barn was built in the 1930s.

In “Dižarāji” barn, built in 1930, the protection signs – six-pointed little suns (Picture 60) cut on the door jam and on the door-posts of the loft doors a little bit above the floor. The little suns were known only on the barn doors up to now, they have been found in several places in Courland and Vidzeme. According to the “Dižarāji” host’s report, carved little suns and other signs were found on the logs of the old knocked-down house “Žibi”.



Picture 60. Protection Sign – six-pointed sun. [34]

The bath-house “Dūņi,” which in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was converted into a stable and moved closer to the residential building, could have been built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the steambath-house wall not far from one corner three protection signs were carefully and deeply cut in one line – *Lietuvēns* Cross to protect the building from evil spirits, a vertical line and Fire-cross (Picture 61), whose branches are directed leftwards, possibly in order to prevent from fire. Traditionally, the left-side fire had a relation to the rising sun, fire in its most active expression. In its turn the left side Fire-cross symbolized the setting sun, fire in its passive condition. The vertical line in the middle enforces the effect of the two other signs. The Fire-cross cut on the steambath-house “Dūņi” has all ends, except for the right side, broken in a straight angle twice.



Picture 61. Protection signs – *Lietuvēns* Cross, a vertical line and Fire-cross. [35]

The drawn signs on the foundations, walls and doors of old buildings for the 21<sup>st</sup> century people seem like a new discovery. However, for the moment the question is not answered whether the protection signs and property signs are only evidences of historical times and whether in certain conditions they could return in a modified form. It seems that in crucial moments (individual or collective) the deepest – magical function of the ancient protection signs revive, at least partly. In the late 1980s and early 1990s during the time of unclear future perspectives, when Latvia from the Soviet power changed to the national independence renewal, one of the traditionally applicable protection signs *Auseklītis* became a popular decoration on clothes and buildings. When the crucial situation was solved positively and the national independence was regained, *Auseklīši* disappeared quickly. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the ancient culture-signs disappearing from the topical circulation still preserve their ornamental, decorative function. The little suns, the geometrical patterns of *Auseklītis* and little crosses emphasize the necessity of the historical value preservation.



Picture 62. A barn with a porch and decorative supports in a Latvian peasant's yard. [5]

Picture 63. A barn with *Jumis* Sign at the roof end in Nida Village, Rucava Parish. [5]

The symbol *Jumis* of the crop-growers' fertility has got its graphical sign, which in the ornament can be met like an image of a bifurcated ear. *Jumis* is responsible for productiveness. Therefore in folklore *Jumis* of Barley, *Jumis* of Rye, *Jumis* of Linen, Nuts and others are mentioned, and each of them has their own beliefs and rituals to be performed. The roof overhangs of a barn above the porch were supported by decorated posts (Picture 62), but *Jumis* Sign at the roof end of a barn, threshing barn (Picture 63) or residential building decorated the house (Picture 64) and brought blessing to its inhabitants. *Jumis* is double good at everything, and it refers not only to material values, but also to new knowledge, being at the right moment in the right place, recognition in creative work, happiness in family, love, faithfulness, togetherness. The sign manifests dynamics.



Picture 64. Signs on the end wall of a building. [36]



Picture 65. Latvian pattern signs in the overview of the Eastern-Latvia creative service centre "Zeimuļs". [6]

Nowadays in Rēzekne an innovative object was built in the centre for the urban-space development and the creative service centre of Eastern-Latvia municipalities, which would attract young people and a new age would be started in Latgale architecture. In the competition the offered proposal by SAALS architects Rasa Kalniņa and Māra Krūmiņa was acknowledged as the best one. The authors were inspired by the landscape – the medieval hillfort with its castle ruins, but the victory was gained due to the gentle approach to the complex historical place. On September 1, 2012 one of the most peculiar buildings in Latvia was opened (Picture 65): a monolith concrete structure made as a green valley which contrasts with the prismatic volumes of the classrooms – “pencils” stuck into the grass – two towers coated with wooden boards for pupils and youth’s diverse rooms. Yellow, brown, greenish and pink sign patterns painted in colours typical to Latgale.

## Conclusions

Latvian nation, being situated in the European culture-space, has cultivated its life wisdom, language and culture, it has created own identity, setting freedom, justice, honesty, solidarity, family, work as its main principal values. Sign symbols manifested the world perception, vision and aesthetic ideals, applied for a particular ideological purpose in order to preserve the awareness of belonging to the native land, people and create a shield against strange powers and the misery brought with them and ideological manipulations, trying to eliminate independence of Latvian consciousness and spirit of sovereignty. Everybody took care of themselves, relatives and the society’s common benefit in compliance with their own abilities, treated their neighbours, country, environment, nature and future generations well. Sign symbols, which are the most ancient and laconic form of information and energy expression, were closely connected with the meaning and impact of the object, they were placed in certain places and they affected or emphasized the object’s architectonics. The decorative pattern of the objects often complied with good advice, good wish, protected from the evil. Repeating the sign symbols several times, an ornament was created, which in translation from the Latin work *ornamentum* meant decorations. The mutual arrangement, sequence and placement of the decorative pattern had a great importance. Later the pattern was included in chains of changes, and arrangements of ornaments started to differ in the ethnographic regions. The ethnographic symbols expressed the sense of national beauty in the environmental and farmstead building creation.

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