

# **Blindė 'The Goat-Willow': A Tree-Woman in Mythology**

## *Summary*

The identification of human being with a tree or, other way round, of a tree with human being, is the vivid theme of dendromythology, and one of its two 'stems' consists in the figure of woman-tree, or tree-woman. This figure is exactly the subject of this work, with reference, firstly, to Baltic (Lithuanian and Latvian) and, secondly, to Eastern Slavic (Byelorussian, Ukrainian, and Russian) folk traditions, but also presenting examples from all over the world for providing a wider context.

While expounding material, it occurred to be convenient to single out some distinct motifs, though interwoven inseparably in reality and, therefore, not always subject to strict classification:

1) **the sexes of trees**, e. i., the attitude to trees as having sex, usually dependent on the gender of corresponding denomination;

2) **the tree-girl**, e. i., the image of the girl in the guise of a tree, or of a tree in the role of the girl, or bride, from the simple comparison up to the sheer identification;

3) **the marriage of trees**, which amounts to sexual relations between the trees of different 'sexes' and also between a tree and human being;

4) **the tree-mother**, that is, the ability of 'female' tree to conceive and give birth to human being or some anthropomorphic deity, and also the association of the tree fecundity with human birth and *vice versa*;

5) **the tree-breasts and tree-milk** – mythological and folklore images which also presupposes motherhood;

6) **the woman turned into tree** continuing previous love or motherly relations.

These mentioned motifs constitute the titles of corresponding chapters in which various trees are dealt with regardless of families or species. However, some species of trees are quite distinguished in this respect, thus it appeared appropriate to present them separately. Therefore, the last three chapters deals with

7) **the bird cherry** (Lith., Lett. *ieva*);

8) **the willow (*Salix*)** and, finally,

9) **the goat-willow (*Salix caprea*)**, Lithuanian *blindė* or *blendis*. The renowned legends on this tree fixed in Lithuania in the 19th century lead us down to the question of the origin of one notorious Slavic obscenity, *\*blędb* 'whore', which, in the furnished mythological context, might be directly connected with Balto-Slavic dendromythology.