

***Blindė* ‘The Goat-Willow’: The Tree-Woman in Mythology**

Summary

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

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

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

2) **the tree-girl**, i.e., the image of a girl in the guise of a tree, or of a tree in the role of a girl,

bride, from a simple comparison up to sheer identification;

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

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

5) **tree-breasts and tree-milk** are mythological and folklore images which also presuppose motherhood;

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

These motifs constitute the titles of the corresponding chapters in which various trees are dealt with regardless of their 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 deal with:

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

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

9) **the goat-willow (Salix caprea)**, *blindė* or *blindis* in Lithuanian. The renowned legends about this tree recorded in Lithuania in the nineteenth century lead us down to the question of the origin

of one notorious Slavic obscenity, **blędb* ‘whore’, which, in the informed mythological context, might be directly connected with Balto-Slavic dendromythology.