

Pine in Lithuanian Traditional Culture

Summary

The purpose of this article is to explore pine role and function in Lithuanian traditional culture. According to various sources, the article discusses on the comparative basis different aspects of pine role in Lithuanian traditional culture: pine relationship with places of worship, death (afterlife and ghosts turning into repenting pines, place of execution, haunting, etc.), with women and their fertility, health, the Tree of the World and the Tree of Life mythologems. In author's opinion, the crucial and key aspect of pine role lies in its holiness, which is revealed through pine in places of worship and which corresponds to the holiness of oak and other trees, belonging to worship places and performing functions of centralizing sacral space and mediating – the place where deities live and manifest.

Certain features suggest that evergreen pine could also convey the meaning of Tree of the World and its derivative, Tree of Life. Healing power of pine could be associated not only with these images, but also with its wide use in folk medicine, following old belief that the tree itself, not only its parts, can heal people (e.g. feet, eye diseases). The evergreen pine and death-life symbolism

reveals life after death, ghosts hosting in pines. It can also mean “home” after death (coffin), also illustrated by pines planted in cemeteries. In the most cases pine, alongside with lime, is associated with women and symbolizes essence of continuity of life and fertility. Pine and devil links are not clear enough, although they to the larger extend could have been determined by pine growing location, i.e. woods and roadsides. Similar interpretation also applies to the death penalties – their connection with pine might be largely associated with the forest as “disgraceful” place of death, while roadside could serve didactic purposes. In addition, the lower branches of the pine crown are often inconvenient for such an act of violence (sometimes referred to haltering should be proceeded on a horizontal branch).

With regard to what was stated above, it could be concluded that in the broad sense, the pines of worship places are equivalents of the cosmogonic tree, and in the narrower sense, they are evergreen trees, related to life symbolism, which includes afterlife, health and fertility. The latter meaning is characteristic not only to the Baltics, but to also other peoples traditions.

Keywords: Baltic and Lithuanian culture, Baltic mythology, comparative cultural studies, tradition, sacred places, sacred trees

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