

Relicts of Balts' Religion in Christoph Hartknoch's "Old and New Prussia"

Summary

The significance of Christoph Hartknoch (1644–1687), the most famous XVIIth century Prussian historian, and his works have already been mentioned by such Lithuanian scholars as Angelė Vyšniauskaitė, Jonynas Ambraziejus and Norbertas Vėlius. Christoph Hartknoch is recognised not only as an historian but also for presenting the authentic material of the XVII century. His works are generally considered as valid primary sources and important contribution for the ethnology, folklore, language and mythology of Lithuania. However, not all aspects of Christoph Hartknoch work have been emphasized yet. In his book „Old and New Prussia“ (*Altes und Neues Preussen*) published in 1684, Christoph Hartknoch described the features of the religion of Old Prussia and its relics that still remained without conclusive discussion.

The main objective of this publication is to point out and explain the relics of the Baltic religion, which Christoph Hartknoch collected from natives of East Prussia. There are three relics mentioned in „Old and New Prussia“ – Prussian deity Barstukai (Ancient Latin – *Barstucæ*), the belief of the Elder Tree being sacred and tradition of protecting snakes which originated from paganism. Christoph

Hartknoch presented this material briefly by including it in a historical narrative about the old Prussian religion. He was amazed by how these relics remained until XVII century and how come the priests had not eradicated the root of these ancient traditions. But the importance of these quotations in understanding the culture of ancient Balts is remarkable.

There are three episodes from the book „Old and New Prussia“ in this publication. All episodes are given in original – German language, written in Gothic font. Each quotation is followed by translation into Lithuanian with comprehensive explanations made by the author – Elvyra Usačiovaitė. This publication draws attention to the important relic recorded by Christoph Hartknoch's in the 17th century, which existed among the Baltic population in the Eastern Prussia – the prohibition of breaking elderberry branches as it was believed the deity Barstukai lived there. It also verifies the claim that the ancient Prussians kept the snakes in tree hollows. Various written sources support the importance of hollowed tree to the Baltic religion. The Prussian burial observations by Christoph Hartknoch is supported with the quotations from the interesting material collected by K. F. Reusch (1695–1742).

Key words: sacredness, elderberry trees, their branches, snakes, trees with hollows, barrows, urns.