

The First Bite and Mouthful Offered to the Gods

Summary

The main topic of the article is the old custom of the Baltic peoples to start their meals, or to start and finish any important work, primarily the agricultural activities, by offering the first part of their food, drink, or the new harvest, to the gods. Such custom is testified in the ancient sources of the Baltic religion and mythology, as well as in the Lithuanian folklore. The analysis of these traditions primarily deals with primitiae offering related to harvesting crops. The author concludes that similarly to the primitiae offering, the libation of beer or other kinds of drink, as well as offering of the first bite of food to the gods are customs of a very archaic nature, present in the religious

rituals of various peoples. They have been widespread also in the territories inhabited by the Balts, particularly their western part. This is reflected in the written sources from the 13th – 17th centuries, and partly those from the 19th – 20th centuries, describing primeval and subsequent traditions of the ancient Prussians, their descendants, Latvians, and Lithuanians. Such rituals used to be more frequently devoted to the ancient Baltic gods and mythical beings related to the lower – chthonic sphere of the mythical world: *Žemyna*, *Žemininkas*, *Vaižgantas*, *Patrimpas*, *Curche*, *laumės*, and the souls. However, such offerings could be dedicated to the sky god *Perkūnas* as well.

Keywords: offering, primitiae, ritual libation, chthonic and heaven Gods, Baltic religion and mythology.