
**Місце та роль
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**BIRD SYMBOLISM
IN LITHUANIAN (BALTIC)
FOLKLORE AND FOLK ART**

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Introduction. I suppose that the birds are the mediators of heaven and earth. The prophetic chanting of birds, the ability to fly in the sky, the ability to land on plants, the particular behavior of the human senses were associated with the rhythm of nature and its eternal change, the dynamism of space, the continuity of life. In folk art, birds are depicted on both sides of trees and flowers, crosses or roof poles, and if one at the top. Birds are depicted with wheels, concentric circles. They land on either side of the circle or within the circle itself. Folk art continues the millennial tradition of giving importance to birds. Still, one of the most important birds in Lithuanian folklore, especially the singing cuckoo, the destiny maker, the prophet of death, the “ancestor” of the goddess Laima, the fate bird.

Problem statement. Obviously, the image of the bird, which carries various symbolic meanings, is very important in Lithuanian, or rather Baltic, folklore and iconography. Birds in folklore, religion, perform many functions related to all stages of human life (birth, marriage, death), transformation, and accompany throughout human life. Birds are also mediators between heaven and earth, between the living and the dead. The purpose of this work is to discuss and summarize the symbolism of the bird phenomenon in Baltic folklore and iconography. There will also be a comparative study of Slavic folklore and iconography.

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Methods. Complex interdisciplinary research is used — ethnographic, iconographic methods, as well as folklore (both singing and narrative), folk art and ethnolinguistic material.

Keywords: the birds, iconography, folk art, Baltic folklore, the Cuckoo, goddess Laima, incarnation, birds-psychopomps, sacredness, the World Tree, structural-semantic analysis.

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**СИМВОЛІКА ПТАХІВ
У ЛИТОВСЬКОМУ (БАЛТІЙСЬКОМУ)
ФОЛЬКЛОРИ ТА НАРОДНОМУ МИСТЕЦТВІ**

Постановка проблеми. Образ птаха, який має різні символічні навантаження, дуже важливий у литовському, а точніше — у балтійському фольклорі та іконографії. Птахи у фольклорі й релігії виконують багато функцій, пов'язаних з усіма стадіями людського життя (народження, шлюб, смерть). Птахи є також посередниками між небом і землею, між живими і мертвими. *Мета статті* полягає в обговоренні та узагальненні символіки птахів у балтійському фольклорі й іконографії, а також порівняння його із аналогічними слов'янськими символами. *Об'єктом дослідження* стали птахи у литовському (балтійському) фольклорі та в іконографії народного мистецтва. *Актуальність* обраної теми зумовлена недостатньою кількістю публікацій, присвячених символіці птахів у литовському нарративному фольклорі та народній творчості. Образ птахів у литовських народних піснях краще висвітлений, проте у цьому випадку перевага надавалась структурно-семантичному аналізу. Складна і багатопланова тема потребує різноманітних *методів*, серед яких основними стали метод порівняльного аналізу, етнографічні та іконографічні методи, які дозволили вповні проаналізувати литовський етнолігвістичний матеріал.

Результати. У статті автор обґрунтовує припущення, що у литовському (балтійському) фольклорі й народному мистецтві птахи виступали посередниками між небом і землею. Їхню можливість літати попід небесами, сідати на рослини, співати пісні, яким надавали пророцького змісту, здатність відчувати емоції людини пов'язували з ритмами природи, її постійними змінами, динамізмом простору, безперервністю циклів життя. У народному мистецтві птахів розміщували по обидва боки дерев чи квітів, кіл, коліс, на хрестах і балясинах, інколи у верхній їх частині або у середині концентричних зображень. Народна творчість продовжує тисячолітню традицію вшанування птахів. Одним з найважливіших символів литовського фольклору була зозуля, що співає — птах долі, пророк смерті, «предок» богині Лайми.

Ключові слова: птахи, іконографія, народна творчість, балтійський фольклор, зозуля, богиня Лайма, втілення, птахи-психопами, сакральність, всесвітнє дерево, структурно-семантичний аналіз.

Introduction. The object of this work is birds in Lithuanian (Baltic) folklore-folklore and iconography-folk art. The choice of theme is inspired by several factors. I have been interested in birds and ornithology since school. I have been a member of the Lithuanian Ornithological Society for over 10 years.

I also wrote a course paper «Bird Symbolism in Lithuanian Folk Art» in the 1st year art studies course. By the way, in 2019 in North Athens (№ 11) I published an article on the symbolism of the cuckoo in Lithuanian folklore «And the Three Cuckoos Came Out».

There are almost no articles on bird symbolism in Lithuanian narrative folklore and folk art and this is due to paper's *topicality*. The image of birds is studied a little more in Lithuanian folk songs, but more structurally-*semantically*.

Research methods. This is a very broad, multi-layered topic requiring a complex comparative research spectrum. Complex interdisciplinary research is used — ethnographic, iconographic methods, as well as folklore (both singing and narrative), folk art and ethnolinguistic material.

Literature Review: The Image of Birds in Folklore. There are almost no articles on bird symbolism in Lithuanian narrative folklore and folk art. The image of birds is studied a little more in Lithuanian folk songs, but more structurally-*semantically*.

A little bird image was analyzed ethnolinguistically: Birutė Jasiūnaitė masterfully performed the monograph «Saints and the Wicked in Phraseology and Folk Culture» [1]. For example, B. Jasiūnaitė, using comparative phraseology, finds an interesting parallel / pair between the devil and the cuckoo: «neither the devil nor the cuckoo; Only for the eyes to look like devils in the cuckoo; You look like the devil in May». This further reinforces the hypothesis that the cuckoo is a bird associated with the Chthonic, dungeon, and death world.

Pranė Dundulienė discusses birds in Lithuanian folk beliefs in detail in her book «Birds in Old Lithuanian Fates and Art» [2]. The book reviews many aspects of bird image: 1) birds in Lithuanian folk art; 2) birds — creators of the universe out of chaos; 3) the emergence of the universe from the Cosmic Egg; 4) Birds in Archaic Beliefs; 5) Birds in business culture; 6) incarnation; 7) metamorphosis; 8) gods in the form of birds; 9) magical birds; 10) zoomorphic supernatural creatures with bird attributes; 11) anthropomorphic supernatural beings

with bird attributes; 12) sacred birds; 13) bird sacrifices; 14) birds in ceremonies, choreography and hymns; 15) Birds in Professional Art and Fiction.

Still, we should look critically at the book by P. Dundulienė, because some of its hypotheses and interpretations are much strained, and the sources and literature used are somewhat limited (the author uses sources only in Lithuanian, Russian and some — in German).

Vida Olindaitė in 1987 made her doctoral dissertation «Nature in Lithuanian Folk Songs» at the University of Tartu, Institute of Language and Literature of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. According to dissertation V. Olindaitė wrote an article «Nature's treatment of Lithuanian folk songs» (Texts and Contexts: Language Movement, Kaunas: VU Press, 2005) [3]. V. Olindaitė also presented the article «Birds in Lithuanian Folk Songs», unfortunately it is limited to the formal structural analysis of song types. V. Olindaitė discusses in more detail the parallel pair of cuckoo (virgin) and hawk (young man) [4].

It is important to add that ethnologist Daiva Šeškauskaitė, who has published her book «Erotica in Folklore» according to her dissertation, also mentions the fluctuating symbolism of birds. In the aforementioned book «Erotica in Folklore» [5] D. Šeškauskaitė discusses the individual birds and their groups — pigeon; ducks; geese, swans, stork, winches; cuckoos; raven; genius; chicken and cock symbolism in Lithuanian folklore and mythology. According to the ethnologist, birds have a diverse symbolism: they relate to the transformations of life (birth, marriage, death), symbolize the human soul.

According to the ethnologist, every bird has its own role in folklore. Pigeon or dove mean dead people, their spirit. Duck contributes to the creation of the world, helping a girl who has turned into a woman to bring the soul of a child. Wild birds — geese, swans, storks, winches — are involved in the first reunion, sexual intercourse. Stork is asked to bring a child. Crow — the devil bird that helps a guy find a girl. The genus is an ancestral bird that represents rebirth and pairs two mutually appropriate people.

The object of this article is birds in Lithuanian (Baltic) folklore and folk art, iconography. *The purpose* of this work is to discuss and summarize the symbolism of the bird phenomenon in Baltic folklore and iconography. There will also be a comparative study of Slavic folklore and iconography.

The main part. The image of the Cuckoo

One of the most important birds in Lithuanian folklore was the Cuckoo (turning into a falcon / hawk at the end of the summer).

She, like the goddess Laima, one of the main determinants of destiny, mediates between the living and the ghost worlds. The cuckoo, like the crank, the falcon, the owl, the puppet, is one of the main bird-psychopomps. So the cuckoo is the bird of fortune goddess Lima.

According to Gintaras Beresnevičius, «In folk songs, the cuckoo is usually associated with death». It is widely known that a cuckoo can lead to death, misfortune, and the rest of your life. This connection of the cuckoo to the world of death is probably due to the belief that the cuckoo is a girl turned into a bird, cf. «I saw / High mountains / On those mountains / Two birch trees. / On those birches / Two cuckoos / By combing. / — We are not cuckoos / Father's daughters» [6, p. 97]. The cuckoo often shows a virgin or a woman transformed into a bird by God. In this way the cuckoo is transformed into the crying and blasphemous wife of her dead husband [7, p. 18—19, 27—28], even the mother with her father — the father is then transformed into a dude [7, p. 21—22], virgins, the unfortunate girl or stepdaughter of Crying Boys [7, p. 22—23], the unfortunate sister of the deceased brothers [7, p. 39—41], the cuckoo becomes an unlucky lover [7, p. 28—29] — the child then turns into a falcon or a hen [7, p. 29—30].

According to Algirdas Julius Greimas, «May's functions in the first spring invasion are so dual: on the one hand, it announces the end of chaos and the introduction of a new order, and on the other, it re-captures things and people, stiffening human actions and transforming them into states» [8]. Just as the happiness of having a baby at birth captures this event, bringing life to it in a steady state, so with his first stunt — unmoving the cinematic stopping the film's rotation — freeze human activity, turning it into a destiny: a person lying down will be lazy all year long, hunger hungry, and money-rich will be rich. A.J. Greimas adds: «We have seen that Laima is concerned with the advancement of man and the Cuckoo with the renewal of the year, its beginning. But the final act is characteristic of both of them: while Laima solves death issues and sets her time, not only does the Cuckoo predict the end of one or another state of her pooping, her pooping, in her springtime function, means misfortune or death».

Lilija Kudirkienė, using the comparative-historical method, states in her article «Folk Cuckoo Image» that almost all European nations (whites, slavs, germans...) saw first and foremost in the cuckoo [9].

In her article «The Image of the Cuckoo in Singing Folklore», Žemyna Trinkūnaitė uses structural-semantic analysis of Lithuanian folk as well as the method of linguistic geography [10]. She concludes that the cuckoo is most popular in only a few ethnographic regions: Dzūkija and Northern and Central Aukštaitija.

L. Kudirkienė and Ž. Trinkūnaitė's articles lack a broader — comparative — approach and more general conclusions.

The image of the cuckoo is especially common in military-historical songs, as well as in youth songs, love songs, wedding songs.

One of the most memorable, distinguished by its scenery, iconography of the image, its «paintings», this military-historical song: «A boy was riding across the bridge, falling off a horse, lying in the mud. He stayed there for three weeks, nobody paid him. Three spotted cuckoos in the middle of a dark night. One landed at the feet, the other at the head, the third at the heart. Marti at the feet, sister at the head, grandmother at the heart. Marti mourned for three weeks, her sister for three years, and her mother for a colony. The cuckoo here embodies the mourning of a deceased woman».

Functional and symbolic roles of birds

According to M. Gimbutienė [11], birds in Lithuanian and Baltic faiths have a dual function: some of them are related to the forces of fertility and others to the reincarnation of souls. So the swan, the stork, the rooster is associated with the forces of fertility. And the cuckoo, the dove, the nightingale, the volung, the swallow, the falcon and the owl — with the reincarnation of souls.

In general, the Lithuanian, Baltic, worldview has a strong sense of sacredness of the bird. Lithuanians considered storks, swallows, swallows, swords, even crows to be sacred birds.

Rimantas Balsys mentions the Swieczpuncsyn, a god described by Matej Strijkovsky, a god at the disposal of chickens, geese, ducks and all other birds, both wild and domestic; he did not sacrifice that he was a devil [12, p. 547].

D. Šeškauskaitė particularly emphasizes the erotic meanings of birds, most of them appear to be waterfowl:

geese, swans, stork, winch. It turns out that «at Lithuanian weddings, the young is called a goose. In match-making, he says he has a goose in the match and is looking for a goose [5].

It turned out that «the waterfowl or the swan mask was solemnly carried around the village and filled with water or a straw cane was thrown into a well. It wasn't just because of the rain. The soul that had flown the bird had to fly into the water, into the woman's womb, y. for the spirit to find the body».

According to the ethnologist, screaming swans symbolize the sexual intercourse of a girl and a boy: «the arrival and the cry of a swan betrays the passing of the girl from her youth to her motherhood...».

The swan made nine voices, and the virgin did not understand what the navel was.

According to Jolanta Zabulytė, one should use an analysis of the meaningful connections between birds and the heavenly world [13]. Like many other archaic cultures, in the Baltic world, birds play an essential mediator between heaven (God) and earth (human), not only as a result of divine creation, but also as participants in the process of creation itself (Cosmic Egg, individual birds in myths etc). They are sacred beings, and their sacrificial ritual makes sense of the union of the divine and earthly worlds, and so it is no coincidence that they act as prophets. In Lithuanian folklore, various rites and beliefs certain birds — stork, rooster, cuckoo, swallow and others. considered sacred, protected, guarded, shrouded in the mystery of the «Birds of God», which at some point and time opens up in the form of a meaningful prophecy to man: for example, the fatal cuckoo mockery, the roosting of the rooster. Christmas Eve, Stork Settlement at Homestead, etc.

The other divine (celestial) expression of birds is also related to the attributes of individual deities. So the cuckoo — the bird of fortune goddess Lima, the sun-bird — the rooster or the eagle (the legend of Krivis Lizdeika), which begs the glories. In fairy tales, the gods turn into birds and thus visit the earthly world or, for some reason, are transformed by God into birds.

P. Dundulienė puts forward the hypothesis that the Lithuanian Grand-Mother Goddess Lada also came from a bird's egg, most likely from a space duck egg [14].

Daiva Vaitkevičienė states that «Swallow and stork are sacred birds of Lithuanian homesteads». The destruction of their nests has long been prohibited, and the es-

tablishment of these birds has been understood as a special blessing for the home and protection against thunderstorms. «Swallows are believed to be sacred birds. If they dwell in any house, then these houses are holy; disasters do not visit. It was believed that wherever the storks settled, there was no place for evil spirits». However, Lithuanians respect the storks and do not shoot them. Shooting a stork reads like committing a murder. Of course, the stork and the swallow are important not only to Lithuanians — this stork is not only our national bird, but also the Belarussian, Ukrainian, Polish (beside the sea eagle). Swallow, which has become an icon of a rustic farmstead in Europe, has been declared the national bird of Austria and Estonia.

Birds are also mediators between heaven and earth, between the living and the dead. They can be referred to as psychopomps, carriers of souls, gills. Psychopomps (Greek for ψυχοπομπός — psuchopompos, literally «wizard of souls») — beings, spirits, angels or deities in many religions whose duty is to move the souls of the dead into the afterlife. Of birds, this role is usually performed by cuckoos, crows, swallows, dolls. In K.G. Jung's psychology, the psychopomp is the mediator between the realities of the subconscious and the consciousness, and symbolically emerges in dreams as a wise man or woman and sometimes as a helpful animal. In many cultures it is shamans who play the role of psychopomp.

Slavic mythology is also important. For example, Alkonost — a Slavic mythological creature — a bird with a woman's head mentioned in ancient Russian tales. Goddess of the Sun god Hors. The name derives from Alkione, mentioned in Greek mythology, turned into bile by the gods. Alkonost lives in the heavens but descends to earth and announces the future with his heavenly voice. She lays eggs on the sea floor and the sea becomes calm for a week. Later, eggs break down and a storm rises.

Birds in Folk Art

The image of birds in iconography and art was also reviewed by Maria Gimbutienė [11], Elinor Gadon [15] and Prane Dundulienė [14]. According to art critic Jolanta Zabulytė, «Many images of birds in folk culture have been investigated by many authors: P. Dundulienė has devoted a detailed study to this topic, birds in spindles were discussed by A. Čepaitienė, birds' connection with mythical characters and their role Gimbutienė, N.ius, in the context of the concept of the afterlife — G. Beresnevičius.

Both Gimbutiene and Gadon refer to Goddess Bird as the Creator of Space in Ancient Europe, using iconographic material» [13].

In general, as Miglė Kasinkaitė observes, the most abundant motifs in Lithuanian folk art are the bird and the snake — the serpent [16]. We see birds not only on tombstones, roof poles and crosses, but also on roof ridge, cradle chests, doors, windows, wheels, cultures and more. In addition to home decor, birds are also richly depicted in textiles.

According to Albinas Šileika, the bird motif is also frequent in the décor of the refreshments: «The decoration contains birds singing, standing on either side of these lights or running between them. Stylized plant and bird motifs create the image of a tree of life, complemented by horses and riders. Small geometric, stylized flora and, less often, fauna motifs are compiled among the main ones».

The view that the spindle expresses the idea of the tree of the world is confirmed by the analysis of the distribution of the bird and the S-shaped symbols in the vertical plane of the spindle.

It appears that birds associated with celestial space are more often and depicted at the top of the spindle, while S-shaped symbols associated with snakes and snakes are more often found at the bottom and middle of the spindle.

The motif of the bird varies widely in the decor of Lithuanian folk architecture: in planes, doors and skylights. In the regions of Aukštaitija, Žemaitija and Lithuania Minor, the bird-like planes are richly decorated with birds, but in the region of Dzūkija less frequently, but in this region one of the most beautiful and original planes depicting birds is found. In the Aukštaitija region the bird motif is depicted in a stylized way, trying to convey the idea of the bird rather than a specific connection. Most often birds are depicted in Samogitia and the region of Lithuania Minor on a fly decor. One of the most interesting planes in Samogitia is the composition of three birds.

The rich motifs of birds are depicted in furniture decor, mainly in paintings of chests, cabinets, footstools. Alfonsas Keturka [17] and Elvyra Usačiovaitė [18] describe the painting decoration of chests, cupboards and cupboards. As Živilė Dapšauskaitė observes, «The front plane and the ends of the chests (less often the antennae) depict stylized flowers with pots, other plant patterns and birds» [18].

According to M. Kašinskaitė, «The bird motif also exists in textiles. They are depicted in tassels, towel corners and pillow lace. Women try to depict the bird on ritual ceremonial clothing and other textiles. Textiles often depict pigeons, cucumbers and other small forest birds» [16].

It turns out that once the estates in Lithuania started to form, the bird with a blown tail and a crown of feathers on its head began to be depicted in lace. By analyzing lace, it can be predicted that a featured bird was chosen as a bird. The motif of this bird in Lithuania may have appeared «through cultural and social relations». Because of its impressive royal appearance, the mansion was regarded as an ornamentation of gardens, which is probably why it is eventually being portrayed in folk art. The resulting peacock motif also acquires a symbolic meaning in folklore. According to N. Laurinkienė, the peacock emerges as a «cosmological astrological image» in the songs of Lithuanian and other European nations.

According to Vytautas Tumėnas, Lithuanian national bands are characterized by the following bird-related ornaments-motifs: bird, owl eyes, crows, as well as geese [20].

According to V. Tumėnas, in the folk textiles, especially in folk belts, the motif of the goose is important, which in Belarus is associated with the swan and waterfowl in general [21]. The serpent, in the words of V. Tumėnas, is called both serrated rhombus and serrated zigzag. Conversely, very similar or the same patterns have different names in the region. For example, a rhombus is called both acorns, crows, owls, and ravens.

As you know, in Lithuanian folklore waterfowl are popular symbols of marriage. In the archaic wedding dance, the limping steps of a woman resemble the waterfowl walking.

According to D. Šeškauskaitė, «the goose is a symbol of love and fertility, signifying faithfulness in marriage. A woman becomes a wild bird and is reborn in her new life, in a man's family, and brings with her souls — her coming birds. Geese are the prophets of childbirth» [5].

It is also interesting that clogs in Žemaitija, Mažeikiai district, are called «geese».

Another bird with a mythological context is the hen. According to V. Tumėnas, «Lyme's connection with the hen is confirmed by the use of [...] ornamentation of hen's legs, according to P. Dundulienė, in the wedding and wedding ceremony bands» [21]. It turns out that in

Lithuanian folklore both Laima and Laume are closely related to the hen. Fairies are depicted on the hen's feet or on their bodies as hens.

It turned out that during the wedding, Lithuanians went to chickens to neighbors, stole hens and various items. These are the traces of the sacrifice of hens and roosters that survive in the wedding custom known as hen or hen.

By the way, it can be mentioned that there are bird symbolism and peasant outfits, folk costumes, such as shirts. One can detect the motifs of shirts from Samogitia (Palanga), whose sleeves are embroidered with the motifs of mirrored birds gathered along a certain stylized plant, the image of the World Tree.

In Suwalki (Santaka village, Kalvarija district) there is also a lingerie with a flared front and a bird motif in the lace.

It may be added that the bird motifs (solitary birds, birds arranged mirror-like along the tree of the world, etc.) used to decorate woven rugs in rural huts as well as bedding.

It is important to mention that bird symbolism is also important in the decor of eggs, one of the most popular ornaments is the bird's feet. According to the ethnologist Libert Klimka, «According to ancient images, the birds were sent to our land by the goddess Bird». Those birds saved people from starvation because in the spring, people were starving. Therefore, the first egg found with the wild bird had to be given to the goddess Bird, bearing her mark, and then red-colored to the sacrificial color. It is a characteristic color of Easter eggs. «It turns out that the bird, the Easter Grandma, plays a very important role in the Easter ceremony». The little ones wanted Easter to bring eggs, so they were hanging out outside in the nest. Little Easter eggs would usually be brought by Easter, the Easter Grandma.

By the way, the bird motif is also very popular in warps, from which I would like to highlight the extremely delicate, ornate warps with bird motifs by folk artist Odeta Bražėnienė.

Birds in the Decor of Wooden Crosses: Form and Interpretations of Meaning

Jolanta Zabulytė discussed the motif of birds in Lithuanian cross decoration in great detail [13]. The other part of the earlier researchers, who wrote on ornamentation of folk monuments (J. Perkovskis, J. Baltrušaitis, M. Gimbutienė), unanimously emphasizes the local

character of the bird-imaging tradition, pointing out that it is an element inherited from archaic times, but does not analyze the issue. Until now, the questions of composition, stylistics and semantics of birds in cross decoration have not been discussed. Because there are no older ones than the 19th century. examples of monuments and their descriptions, it is difficult to determine the periods of emergence and distribution of these decor motifs, so the developmental issues will not be addressed, but the focus will be on disseminating the causality of this phenomenon.

According to J. Zabulytė, «Because two birds composed on the crosses — on top of each other on a vertical (stem) — have analogies to the mythical tradition of depicting the Tree of the World, ... This significance is also indicated by M. Gimbutienė, who states that «a bird carved in a gravestone symbolizes the dynamic forces of space» [13]. The depictions of the interconnectedness of birds and the divine — heavenly world in the rural worldview are directly related to the existence of the farmer who preserved the essence of the archaic images. Birds have the ability to ascend into spaces that are beyond human reach, and therefore closer to God than was allowed to man. Perhaps that is why the very name sounds close to the sky («bird» — «height»). This is partly confirmed by the specifics of the regional worldview — motifs of two stylized birds are most often found in the decoration of Aukštaitija wooden monuments, where, according to N. Velius, the symbol of heaven is more popular in folk culture, folk art, rites and beliefs.

According to J. Zabulytė, the issues of shape analysis make it possible to distinguish the main tendencies of imaging, when: 1) bird silhouettes are abstracted to the idea; 2) have only an associative relation to a particular species; 3) birds recognized as species-specific (rooster); 4) Symbols of Christian Iconography (Pelican, April) [13]. Storks, chickens and waterfowl, such as ducks, geese and waterfowl, which are popular for painting household items, especially dowry chests, are not accepted as the semantics of these birds are related to the symbolism of family fertility and the female housewife. The natural question is, what could the birds mean by the decoration of the crosses? As they form a part of the ornamentation of the crosses, it is very important to discuss not only the ways of composition and connection with other decorative elements, but also the contents and functions of the monuments in order to trace possi-

ble meanings. Other crosses «radiate» like the sun, but due to the specificity of the centrifugal composition and the possible difference in the contents of the monuments (cross — plant, tree), bird motifs are not used in them (or we could not find any such examples).

The hobby of two birds (or two angels) can only be external, a form inspired by the pursuit of symmetry, but the archaic origins of this compositional principle and its popularity in the decor of other folk art make us think differently. Partial explanation is given by the traditions of the construction of the crosses, that means their functional significance.

It is important to mention that the bird motif was also found in the decoration of Baltic tombstones made of wood — christenings: «The edges of the christenings are profiled with plant, zoomorphic motifs: plants, reptiles, birds, favorite horses, birds and especially original beetle and reptile symbols».

Conclusions

So birds are the mediators of heaven and earth. The prophetic chanting of birds, the ability to fly in the sky, the ability to land on plants, the particular behavior of the human senses were associated with the rhythm of nature and its eternal change, the dynamism of space, the continuity of life. In folk art, birds are depicted on both sides of trees and flowers, crosses or roof poles, and if one at the top. Birds are depicted with wheels, concentric circles. They land on either side of the circle or within the circle itself. Folk art continues the millennial tradition of giving importance to birds.

Obviously, the image of the bird, which carries various symbolic meanings, is very important in Lithuanian, or rather Baltic, folklore and iconography. Birds in folklore, religion, perform many functions related to all stages of human life (birth, marriage, death), transformation, and accompany throughout human life. Birds are also mediators between heaven and earth, between the living and the dead.

Still, one of the most important birds in Lithuanian folklore, especially the singing cuckoo, the destiny maker, the prophet of death, the «ancestor» of the goddess Laima, the fate bird.

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