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The cycle of pre-Christmas winter folk holidays as held in Western Podillya in Ukraine with the processes of urbanization and globalization in the background

Cykl przedświątecznych zimowych świąt ludowych na Zachodnim Podolu na Ukrainie z procesami urbanizacji i globalizacji w tle

Abstract

Ukrainian culture has undergone significant urbanization and globalization influences in recent decades. Under the impact of these factors, the basic features and attributes of national identity which distinguish one cultural tradition from another are leveled and disappear. To a large extent, it applies to national

traditions including winter ones, the functioning of which is actively fading and dying out. A comprehensive and especially regional study of winter traditions enhances the effect and importance of national culture in the context of European and world civilization in general. The article analyzes a cycle of winter folk holidays before Christmas in Western Podillya, examines the symbolism and main components of these holidays: The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary into the Temple (known in Ukraine as Introduction (Vvedennia), St. Andrew's Day, St. Nicolas Day. Today, the traditional winter rituals of Western Podillya still retain their main components, although under the influence of modern globalisation and urbanisation processes, they are increasingly losing its original essence and colouring. During the first and second decades of the 21st century, the gap between the local town residents and the rural population has been steadily decreasing. In contrast to the period of the 20th century, when traditional rituals prevailed mainly in rural areas, currently they are mostly concentrated in cities, where various folkloristic societies, clubs, and theatres are active agents engaged in research, restoration and development of the traditions of our ancestors by preservation of the authenticity and essence of calendar customs and rites, reinterpreting them in a modern way, and explaining their meaning to the younger generation.

Key words: Ukraine, Western Podillya, winter ritual cycle, urbanisation, globalisation

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W ostatnich dziesięcioleciach kultura ukraińska uległa znacznym wpływom urbanizacji i globalizacji. Pod wpływem tych czynników podstawowe cechy i atrybuty tożsamości narodowej, które odróżniają jedną tradycję kulturową od drugiej, są niwelowane i zanikają. W dużej mierze dotyczy to tradycji narodowych, w tym zimowych, których funkcjonowanie aktywnie zanika i zamiera. Kompleksowe, a zwłaszcza regionalne badanie tradycji zimowych wzmacnia efekt i znaczenie kultury narodowej w kontekście cywilizacji europejskiej i światowej w ogóle. Artykuł analizuje cykl zimowych świąt ludowych poprzedzających Boże Narodzenie na Zachodnim Podolu, bada symbolikę i główne elementy tych świąt: Ofiarowanie Najświętszej Maryi Panny do Świątyni (znane na Ukrainie jako Wprowadzenie (Vvedennia), Dzień św. Andrzeja, Dzień św. Mikołaja. Dziś tradycyjne zimowe obrzędy Zachodniego Podola nadal zachowują swoje główne elementy, choć pod wpływem współczesnych procesów globalizacji i urbanizacji coraz bardziej tracą swoją pierwotną istotę i koloryt. W pierwszej i drugiej dekadzie XXI wieku przepaść między mieszkańcami miast a ludnością wiejską stale się zmniejsza. W przeciwieństwie do okresu XX wieku, kiedy tradycyjne obrzędy dominowały głównie na obszarach wiejskich, obecnie koncentrują się one głównie w miastach, gdzie różne stowarzyszenia folklorystyczne, kluby i teatry są aktywnymi agentami zaangażowanymi w badanie, przywracanie i rozwijanie tradycji naszych przodków poprzez zachowanie autentyczności i istoty zwyczajów i obrzędów kalendarzowych, reinterpretowanie ich w nowoczesny sposób i wyjaśnianie ich znaczenia młodszemu pokoleniu.

Słowa kluczowe: Ukraina, Zachodnie Podole, zimowy cykl obrzędowy, urbanizacja, globalizacja

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Introduction

In recent decades, the Ukrainian culture has been significantly influenced by urbanisation and globalisation. Under the impact of these factors, the basic features and attributes of national identity, those which distinguish one cultural tradition from another,

level out and disappear. As a result, cosmopolitan tendencies become more intense. To a large extent, it applies to national traditions, including the winter ones, the functioning of which is rapidly fading. A comprehensive and, especially, regional study of winter traditions enhances the effect and importance of national culture in the context of European and world civilisation in general.

The relevance of the problem lies in the fact that the sources of Ukrainian ethnography contain no thorough comprehensive studies of regional winter traditions which would reveal their essential and cultural features. Therefore, the study of winter calendar rites of the region is necessary to clarify the origins of ancient traditions and their current state.

Some material related to the collection and study of winter traditions in this area can be found in the works of Ukrainian scholars P. Chubynsky, V. Hnatiuk, O. Voropay, S. Kylymnyk, O. Kurochkin and R. Kyrchiv, Polish researchers O. Kolberg and Ż. Pauli, as well as the Romanian ethnographer P. Caraman. Ethnographic data on this issue are also presented in some small publications by other authors, e.g. articles in newspapers or journals by ethnographers and local historians P. Medvedyk, V. Skoropad, V. Papizh, M. Osyka, L. Artiukh, etc.; but this material is not representative enough for holistic understanding of the problem. In view of that, the subject raised must be considered relevant.

The object of research are the pre-Christmas traditions of Western Podillya, rites and rituals which are their constituent part in comparison with the analogues of adjacent and distant ethnographic regions. The source base was provided by scholarly ethnographic and folkloristic sources, as well as field materials collected through interviews with the residents of Western Podillya. This method has made it possible to provide a multifaceted scholarly analysis of Christmas traditions as an integral part of spiritual culture.

The purpose of the paper is to analyze the pre-Christmas traditions of Western Podillya in the Ukrainians' winter ritual cycle, to characterise the traditions of the feast of the Introduction (*Vvedennia*), in which elements of pagan beliefs are clearly visible, to highlight the divinations and amusements featured in St. Andrew's Day celebrations, to describe various forms of St. Andrew's Day ritual actions in the studied area, and to consider the folk and Christian traditions of St. Nicholas' Day and their spiritual significance for the local population.

The methodological basis of the research are the ethnological and folkloristic studies by Ukrainian and foreign scholars V. Hnatiuk, O. Voropay, S. Kylymnyk, R. Kyrchiv, O. Kolberg, Ż. Pauli and P. Caraman. The foundation of their research is the description and analysis of winter rituals as a component of calendar holidays and their extrapolation to the development and formation of worldview and national culture. Valuable field materials collected directly from local residents in Western Podillya, aimed at researching the evolution of ritual creativity and the semantics of ritual actions, also deserve

special attention. The concepts of continuity of the ritual tradition in one or another ethnographic region, as well as the communicative features of its functioning, the role of socio-cultural factors in the process of formation and development of the spiritual culture of the Ukrainians are fundamental in the article.

To solve certain issues and tasks, the article uses the historical-typological, geographical, cultural, structural-analytical and comparative research methods. Such a systematic approach in the application of analytical methods will provide a thorough understanding of the essence of the main pre-Christmas holidays, and will prove the presence of motives determining the onset of both Christmas winter holidays in general and the custom of celebrating the birth of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, in particular.

The geographical boundaries of the study are the historical and ethnographic region of Podillya, in particular its western part. According to the modern administrative division, this territory embraces the Zbarazh, Pidvolochysk, Husiatyn, Borshchiv, Zalishchyky, Chortkiv, Terebovlya, Buchach, Ternopil, Zboriv and Kozova districts, the eastern part of Monastyrsk, Pidhaitsi, Berezhany districts of Ternopil region, along with the south-eastern part of Zolochiv district of Lviv region.

The chronological boundaries of the study are defined by the period from the first half of the 19th until the end of the 20th century. With the final establishment of Soviet power in the western Ukrainian lands in the 1950s, traditional rituals were banned and rapidly declined. Nevertheless, the most common traditions managed to survive to this day.

The scientific novelty of the research is that in the Ukrainian ethnography, the regional pre-Christmas traditions (in the territory of Western Podillya) are comprehensively analyzed in the context of the Ukrainians' winter calendar rituals. The research presented herein reveals the role and significance of traditional Greek Catholic rituals as important factor in the formation of moral values of an individual.

The theoretical significance of the study is that, based on various scholarly sources, the traditions of the local population are shown, and a thorough description of the main pre-Christmas winter holidays is given, which by their essence and significance reveal the most colourful forms of rituals of Western Podillya.

The national calendar of the inhabitants of Western Podillya, as well as that of the Ukrainians in general, is undoubtedly subordinated to agricultural work, that is, it is essentially agricultural. This is due to the fact that it is regulated by the beginning and end of various agricultural activities.

With the advent of Christianity, the traditional calendar rituals of the inhabitants of Western Podillya, and of the Ukrainians on the whole, began to be influenced by the Church calendar; pagan holidays were to some extent combined with Christian

ones. The elements of double beliefs are still clearly traced in calendar holidays and ceremonies. In this peculiar combination of beliefs, Christian and pagan folk rites fused painlessly and have been coexisting until the present. They are united in many ways both in the system of beliefs and in the forms of a ritual.

In Western Podillya, ancient ceremonies, the performance and observance of which could ensure success and prosperity in the economic activities of people in their family life, existed almost until the middle of the 20th century. The most revered of all annual calendar holidays in Western Podillya were the winter holidays. This was emphasised by the informants themselves during the survey, saying: "As many holidays as there are days". December ends the calendar year. At the end of the month, that is, on December 22, falls the winter solstice, which determines the astronomical beginning of winter, and it is on this day that the longest night comes. Our ancestors associated the birth of the sun with this day. The last month of the year is mostly associated with national holidays.

Winter holidays in Western Podillya begin on 4 December with the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary into the Temple (*Vvedennia*), "when summer is introduced to winter". This day foretells what the next year will be: fruitful or not, dry or rainy. From this day on, the land begins to "rest" in the agricultural sense; it cannot be dug with a shovel until the feast of the Annunciation (7 April). In the calendar cycle of the Ukrainian people, this holiday ends the autumn season and begins the winter season. The main purpose of this day's celebrations was to invoke wealth and prosperity for the coming year.

A few days before the feast of the Introduction (*Vvedennia*) begins the Christmas fast, which is popularly called *pylypivka* (Philip's fast). During this fast, the period of vespers continued, although they became somewhat calmer and more prudent. Winter leisure activities were especially interesting. They focused mainly on working the land, with the use of numerous song plots, game skits, and a rich humorous treasury of Ukrainian wisdom.

Traditional folk rites of the Introduction (*Vvedennia*)

The winter cycle of holidays coincides with a turning point in nature marked by the winter solstice and the beginning of a new year, when people have a natural desire to predict the future and at the same time influence it. For this reason the rites of the winter holidays contain many divinations, caroling, and singing of *shchedrivka* songs. With the arrival of winter, the agricultural patterns change, things "freeze", work in the fields stops. At that time, people have the opportunity to prepare for the next agrarian year, and there is also more time for recreation: holding various entertainments and evening parties, with divinations as an important traditional component. Three questions were particularly interesting: when would one get married, when one would die, and what the harvest would be like the following year. Therefore, divination was very important for determining the future both in one's personal life and in the household.

One of the important pre-Christmas winter holidays, which is associated with the birth of the Sun, and the increase of daylight, was Introduction (*Vvedennia*). In Christian tradition, this holiday is called the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple and is celebrated on 4 December. The pagan content of this holiday was the mystical introduction of people to the pre-Christmas celebrations. The most important component of this holiday was the veneration of the nourishing land. Whereas before *Vvedennia* it was still possible to work the land, at least to some extent, in particular to plow or dig, after *Vvedennia* nothing could be done with the soil. Therefore, women stocked up with clay for this holiday to have enough material in order to smoothen the floor in houses all winter long and to seal holes in the oven with it.

The celebration of *Vvedennia* is richest in rituals associated with fire and water. Because of this, on this day, after the Holy Liturgy, inhabitants of Western Podillya asked priests to consecrate water, and in the evening before *Vvedennia*, water was consecrated in the ancient (i.e. pre-Christian) way: it was taken at a point where three streams converged and poured through flames of fire; then the water was used as cure for all diseases and against the harmful influences by means of an evil eye, known as *vroky*.¹ People believed that such water was sacred and very helpful against all kinds of diseases, and also that it could drive away evil spirits, especially witches or warlocks.

In the feast of *Vvedennia* as celebrated in Western Podillya, the elements related to beginning of a new agricultural year are quite distinct. They are primarily seen in the *polaznyk* tradition, which was associated with almost every holiday of that period (St. Nicholas' Day, St. Anne's Day, St. Barbara's Day). At the basis of the *polaznyk* tradition lay the belief in happy or unlucky omens. Local inhabitants believed that the *polaznyk*, i.e. first person to enter home early in the day of *Vvedennia*, prefigured the next year: if a young handsome man came in and had money, then all year round everybody in the house would be healthy and money would be plentiful, whereas when an old sick man, or especially an old infirm woman entered as the first, the household would experience misfortune throughout the year. The *polaznyk* tradition was best preserved until recently in the Hutsul region. According to G. Makovyi's observations, the rule was as follows: "If a little girl enters on *Vvedennia* first, there will be quarrels in the house all year round, if a young boy – cattle will be well kept, if an older girl – older women in the house will fall ill, if a healthy and strong man – there will be good income in household the whole year, if a beautiful young woman – vegetables will grow well, and if a weak, infirm person – there will be trouble on the road" (Makovyi 1993: 82). Therefore, the role of the first visitor was often performed by the owner of a house. Getting up early, the proprietor went out into a yard, bypassed it with wide steps along and across – to stable, fence, barn and apiary, and then came into the house and made a wish: "God, let the livestock be healthy and me with

¹ Based on the ethnographic recordings by Smoliak O. from Zhyga P., b. 1907, from the urban village of Skala-Podilska, Borshchiv district, Ternopil region. Recording made on 12 April 1992.

them, and my wife and children” (Franko 1898: 205). In this wish, the connection between the cult of cattle-honouring and the cult of family fire is particularly noticeable.

In the 19th century, in Western Podillya there was a widely spread tradition of bringing young cattle into a house at dawn: a kid goat, a foal, or a calf. The locals believed that this would bring the household abundance all year round.² A young ox was a frequent choice: “Oxen”, as G. Bulashev writes, “were created by God and are considered to be blessed for the fact that when the newborn Child of God was placed into the manger, the oxen and donkeys covered him with straw and warmed with their breath” (Bulashev 1992: 323). The layering of Christian tradition on the pagan one is particularly significant here. According to local beliefs, bringing young male animals into a house assured numerous offspring for cattle in the following year³. The idea of youth was associated with the revival (renewal) of a generation, its strength, health, fertility, and also with the desire for all this to constantly accompany the family. In Western Podillya, the tradition of bringing young cattle to a house on *Vvedennia* was practised until the 1940s.

Wedding motifs were clearly visible in the *Vvedennia* traditions. They are best represented by maidens’ divinations for a successful marriage. A custom alive in some areas of Western Podillya (mainly in its southern part: the Monastyrська, Zalishchyky and Borshchiv districts of Ternopil region) up to the 1940s was for girls to strive to be the first after a priest to enter the church before the Holy Liturgy of *Vvedennia* and to whisper: “If you take me away as a girl, then in a year you should lead me away as a young woman”.⁴ In these areas, in order to attract attention of young men unknown to them, young women consecrated water from where three streams converged, collected this water in a jug or a bowl, lit a candle and poured the water from a jug to a jug over fire while saying something (Skoropad 1993: 70).

Some magical elements of the *Vvedennia* feast were associated with little girls. In particular, on that day mothers tied hair of their little daughters with red woollen thread, “so that in the future her husband would not betray her”.⁵ An old custom practised on the *Vvedennia* day in the studied area was meant to protect girls from all diseases: mothers stuffed a bunch of freshly dried flowers under the ceiling in a house so that the household’s little daughters would not fall ill.⁶

² Based on the ethnographic recordings by Smoliak O. from Cheremshinsky O. b. 1936, from the village of Velesniv, Monastyrська district, Ternopil region. Recording made on 24 June 1996.

³ Based on the ethnographic recordings by Smoliak O. from Stetskiy M., b. 1926, from the village of Kovalivka, Monastyrська district, Ternopil region. Recording made on 17 July 1996.

⁴ Based on the ethnographic recordings by Smoliak O. from Solomakha M., b. 1917, from the village of Kryvche, Borshchiv district, Ternopil region. Recording made on 7 November 1992.

⁵ Based on the ethnographic recordings by Smoliak O. from Golovetska S., b. 1934, from the urban village of Zoloty Potik, Buchach district, Ternopil region. Recording made on 28 April 1996.

⁶ Based on the ethnographic recordings by Smoliak O. from Tymochko Y., b. 1934, from the village of Drobolyany, Zalishchyky district, Ternopil region. Recording made on 12 February 1988.

The holiday of *Vvedennia* in Western Podillya retained ancient customs associated with water.⁷ In particular, local inhabitants tried to get up in the morning as early as possible on this day in order to wash themselves with water melted from snow. According to the beliefs of older people, this was to “make the face white as snow”.⁸

Therefore, the *Vvedennia* feast accumulated ritual actions that were motivationally associated with the arrival of the most important winter holiday, that is Christmas. This was primarily connected with respecting the land and its return to a new agricultural year, with honouring fire and water, which are the basis of the birth of all life, and with a special attitude to livestock and to crops, without which human existence was impossible.

Traditional customs of St. Andrew’s Day

An important pre-Christmas winter holiday is St. Andrew’s Day (13 December). According to Christian dogmas, this holiday is the day of remembrance of the martyrdom of one of twelve apostles of Christ, Andrew the First-Called.

Ukrainian ethnologists (F. Vovk 1995, O. Kurochkin 1994, K. Kutelmakh 1994) indicate that St. Andrew’s Day has a secular character and its roots date back to distant pre-Christian times. This opinion is also supported by the Ukrainian clergyman and ethnographer K. Sosenko; in particular, he notes: “This is a whole week in a mood dedicated to erotic emotions of young people: parties, music, dancing, socialising. It hides in itself, first of all, the idea of newborn light” (Sosenko 1994: 54).

St. Andrew’s Day traditions can be divided into three groups: the prologue and then two sections: the girls’ part and girls-and-boys’ part.

The prologue is a preparatory period. Before the celebration, girls from one or more streets negotiated with a hostess (usually a widow) the permission to hold an evening party (*vechornytsi*) in her house. As a rule, the girls brought the hostess, by arrangement, a variety of products: cereals, flour, butter, oil, cabbage, dried mushrooms, beans, onions, wine, as well as attributes for divination – candles, threads, needles, rings, wheat, grains, etc. Several girls helped to prepare dishes for the dinner. Each girl invited her boyfriend or a good friend to the party. In the Pidhaisi district, the venue of the parties was kept a secret “so that boys would not interfere with their [the girls’] divination” (Papizh, 1980: 71).

The first part of St. Andrew’s parties in Western Podillya was divinatory and belongs solely to girls. As the evening drew near, only girls came to the house where entertainments were to take place. The the first and most important ritual of St Andrew’s

⁷ About the use of water in the traditional worldview of Western Podillya, see the article “The Image of Water in the Traditional Rituals and Folksongs of the Western Podolia” <https://www.journals.vu.lt/td/article/view/28398>

⁸ Based on the ethnographic recordings by Smoliak O. from Solomakha M., b. 1917, from the village of Kryvche, Borshchiv district, Ternopil region. Recording made on 7 November 1992.

Day was each girl's baking her *balabushok*.⁹ To knead the dough for *balabushok*, girls would carry water from a well or from a stream or river in their mouths. Very often young men prevented them from accomplishing this feat. They tied ropes low across the road, girls tripped on them and fell, spilling the water. After that, girls went for water repeatedly, and boys made them laugh again. Frequently, at this point the young men tried to scare the girls: they donned the costumes of Death, a devil, a dog or a bear in order to force girls to spill the water they held in their mouths. If girls managed to bring the water in, then they immediately mixed *balabushok* with it and baked it on a hot plate, marking it with their own distinctive sign for recognition: an asterisk, a triangle, or the first letter of their name.

After baking the *balabushok*, one of girls brought in a hungry dog. Whose *balabushok* the dog ate first, that girl would be the first to get married the following year. If the dog bit on a *balabushok* and threw it away, the owner of the cake would have some troubles in the relationship with her beloved. And whose *balabushok* was touched, she would wait a long time for her wedding (Lepkyi 1991: 463). In the Buchach district, *balabushoks* were hung on a thread from a beam; which one a dog jumped and grabbed first, that girl would be the first to get married (Osyka 1972: 346).

In the Zboriv and Kozova districts until the first half of the 20th century, in the evening on St. Andrew's Day girls had a custom of bringing a rooster and a hen to a house and letting them out in the middle of the room. If they turned to each other with their heads, the girl doing the divination would live in harmony with her husband in the future, and if they turned to each other with their tails, there would be no happiness in her family. If the rooster abandoned the hen, there would be divorce or betrayal. In the studied area, there was also another way of finding out about a future husband associated with bringing a rooster into a house. A rooster was let out in a room, water and wheat were placed in bowls in front of it. If the rooster started drinking water, the future husband would drink too much alcohol. If it began pecking at wheat, he would be hard-working, and if the rooster ate nothing, the future husband would be lazy.

There were also divination rituals aimed at determining the occupation of a future husband. They were based on pouring hot wax on cold water in a wide bowl. The setting wax acquired various forms and by their shape the girls tried to explain a future bridegroom's profession. If the lump of wax looked similar to a musical instrument, a future husband would be a musician, if to animals, he would be a farmer, if to a house, he would be an official. In the Pidhaitsi district, the wax-pouring ritual was aimed at determining the girl's happiness in the following year. If the poured wax was similar to a wreath, she would get married, if to a horse, her bridegroom would be from another village, if to a cross, misfortune was awaiting her.

⁹ A *balabushok* is a dough mixed with water in form of a dumpling baked on a hot plate greased with oil.

The idea of a future marriage is also clearly visible in the divination by shoes. In the studied area, on St. Andrew's Day girls took off shoes from their left feet, and one girl, blindfolded, put those shoes one after another, starting from the corner of a room (in some villages, from an oven). Whose shoe was the first to reach the threshold, that girl would get married soon, and whose was the last, that girl would look for a bridegroom for a long time¹⁰.

Blindfolded divination based on guessing the identity of objects was common in Western Podillya. A ring, key and matches were placed under three plates. Girls with blindfolded eyes took turns choosing one of the objects. If a girl pulled out a ring, a happy marriage awaited her, if a key – she would be a good hostess, if matches – good relationships with a prospective bridegroom would “burn up” and disappear (Medvedyk 1996: 189). In the Buchach district, a flower, a rosary and a ring were put under three bowls. If a girl chose the flower, she would be unmarried for some time, a rosary – she would go to a monastery, and a ring foretold an approaching marriage.

Divination rituals related to determining the gender of the future children were common in Western Podillya. For a girl to learn whether after marriage she would give birth to a boy or a girl, a ring was tied on a half-meter thread and lowered slightly over the girl's left hand. If it made small circles over the hand, the child would be a boy, when it moved to and for in a straight line, it would be a girl, when the ring was stationary, the girl would remain childless. To find out how many children would a girl have when she got married, the following divination ritual was used: a girl lowered a ring tied on a thread into a glass half-filled with water. The ring swayed and hit the glass with a clink. The more times it clinked, the more children would be born.

In the village of Tovstenke, Chortkiv district, Ternopil region, on that evening girls went to a river, gathered mud in their hands and brought to a house. The object which a girl found in the mud indicated the profession of her future husband. If it was a piece of iron, he would be a blacksmith, if a piece of wood, a wheelwright, if a stone, a mason, if a potsherd, a potter, and so on. In this village, that custom was called “catching happiness in the river”.

The arrival of young men to the house opened the second section of St. Andrew's Day party. In the studied region, boys came to the house in which the *vechornytsi* party was held only in groups; if a boy came alone, it was an evil omen. They always brought gifts: necklaces, apples, candy, wine, etc. Prior to their arrival, the girls tied ropes across the path and the boys tripped and fell down amidst the girls' loud laughter. Boys who delayed and came late were usually ridiculed by the girls: they were sat on the floor and given a spindle or a wooden stick for grinding poppy seed. After that, the girls invited the boys to the table. In the studied area, the mandatory meal at St. Andrew's Day parties were *varenyky* (boiled dumplings) filled with potatoes, cabbage or buckwheat porridge. Some *varenyky* were stuffed by girls with plain flour, salt or paper as a prank on young men.

¹⁰ Based on the ethnographic recordings by Shchur L. from Yuzefiv M., b. 1941, from the village of Kozivka, Kozova district, Ternopil region. Recording made on 2 April 2001.

After the dinner, games and entertainments continued, with both boys and girls participating. The most common was the mystery game known as *kaleta*. In Western Podillya, a *kaleta* is a cake with a hole in the middle, made of wheat dough with added honey and poppy seed, and baked on a stove.

In the evening, the girls smeared a *kaleta* with sugar fondant and fastened it with a ribbon to a ceiling above the average height of a boy. After that, boys or girls straddled a stick like a horse and “riding” it, approached the hanging *kaleta*, trying to bite it. While doing this they were hindered by other participants: other competitors either pulled the *kaleta* up or moved it amidst much laughter. Some clever girl might stand near the *kaleta* and wipe a young man’s face with a rag.¹¹

Each boy approached the *kaleta* three times. Remnants of the *kaleta* were broken into pieces which the girls took with them and put under their pillows. If a young man appeared to a girl in a dream, he would be her fiancé. In the villages of the Borshchiv district, those girls who hung the *kaleta* immediately ran outside and listened from which side of the village a dog would bark; from that side matchmakers would come (Skoropad 1993: 70).

During the *kaleta* ritual, some girls would run outside to count fence poles while chanting: “A widower, a fine fellow, a widower, a fine fellow...”, lightly touching each pole with a hand. If the last pole was a “fine fellow”, the girl would marry a young man, and if a “widower”, her future husband would be a widower. Very often girls doing this ritual came back to a house with dirty hands, because boys would smear fence poles with paint, tar or mud.

On the way back home from the St. Andrew’s Day party, girls cut a cherry twig with a knife, brought it home and put it in a jug of water, or pushed into soil in a flowerpot that stood on a windowsill. If a branch grew leaves and bloomed before Christmas, the girl would have a happy marriage.¹²

After the St. Andrew’s Day party, young men gathered in bands and performed various kinds of pranks in the courtyards where girls lived. They removed garden choppers, firewood or harrows out to the road, or removed wickets and gates from houses to place them in the courtyards of their sweethearts. In the studied area, hoisting a cart or sleighs onto a roof of a house was considered the bravest prank.

Youth entertainments performed on St. Andrew’s Day undoubtedly are almost all of ancient origin. Some of them are explained as pagan magical rituals which served to confuse the evil forces and prevent them from recognizing and entering a place by not being able to find the gate they had been accustomed to, or a door to a house. S. Tolstaya is certainly right in noting the primarily “sacred function” of youth pranks and referring them to the category of “protection and purification rites” (S. Tolstaya 1986: 13).

¹¹ Divination recorded by Smoliak O. from Smoliak M., b. 1924, from the village of Nastasiv, Ternopil district, Ternopil region. The recording was made on 7 December 1998.

¹² Based on the ethnographic records of Smoliak O. from Irkha M., b. 1916, from the village Small Chornokintsi, Chortkiv district, Ternopil region. Record made on June 1, 1998.

A combination of folk and Christian traditions of St. Nicholas' Day

Among the main winter Christmas holidays in Western Podillya is the feast of St. Nicholas (December 19). In the Christian church worldwide, the miracle worker Archbishop Nicholas of Myra belongs to the most revered saints. The Orthodox Church celebrates St. Nicholas' Day twice a year: on 19 December – the “winter” St. Nicholas and on 22 May – the “spring” St. Nicholas (Katrii 1982: 282). The winter St. Nicholas has long been considered a patron of all the poor and disadvantaged, as well as of agriculture and animal husbandry, and of waters, from which he rescued people.

The holiday of St. Nicholas, as well as the celebration of Introduction, are characterised by the *polaznyk* tradition. The function of the *polaznyk* was performed by young men and young domestic animals, as a rule of male gender – a billy goat, a stallion, a bull, a ram or an ox. On this morning, a *polaznyk* must enter into strangers' homes, as well as into his own, in order to bring them prosperity and happiness. Therefore, a tradition formed long ago in Western Podillya was to consider the first to enter a home in the morning as a *polaznyk*. It was considered a good sign if that person was decent, for it foretold luck and harmony for the family. This rite preserves the ancient (i.e. pre-Christian) “magic of the first day” and belief in happy or unhappy omens. Particularly, the *polaznyk*, a ritual guest, was accepted on 19 December in the areas above the river Zbruch, i.e. villages of Dubkivtsi, Rashtivtsi and Soroka of Husiatyn district in Ternopil region (Galka 1862: 16). During St. Nicholas' Day, a *polaznyk* was mainly the household owner, since if someone other than he passed through the yard as the first person on this day, it was a bad omen. Therefore, each householder tried to wake up as early as possible and go walking around the yard, and then, entering the barn, he would say to animals: “May the Lord help you, livestock, to be healthy, and me with you, and also my wife and children”. Only then would he enter the house.

In the feast of St. Nicholas' Day, in contrast to other pre-Christmas holidays, motifs filled with Christian didactics are predominant. This is primarily due the fact that St. Nicholas, according to the views held by the Ukrainians as much as by the whole Christian world, acts as a cultural knight and a creator of goodness. By older generation he is perceived as a people's protector and their defender before God, as well as the initiator of family gatherings. Hence, his figure initiates family assemblies on Christmas holidays. During these celebrations, inhabitants of Western Podillya, as well as the Ukrainians in general, have always tried to be together to honour the ancestors as personifications of the family. Therefore, the tradition of brewing wheat beer, consumption of which united all members in a family during the celebration of St. Nicholas' Day, was preserved in Ternopil region up to the 1940s.

In the Ukrainian mythological pantheon, Saint Nicholas is first and foremost an embodiment of a great-grandfather. In this capacity, he is the patron of the family, a “guardian spirit of the home” (Koverets 2004: 108). It should be noted that the feast of St. Nicholas successfully resisted the atheistic propaganda. Despite all attempts

in the Soviet period to ban the holiday, it was celebrated annually by Ukrainian families, in which children always waited for the winter benefactor because they believed that he would bring them presents. Tales of St. Nicholas coming at night through a window or a crack in a door added mystery and charm to the holiday.

The water element, one of the life-giving principles of the world, is dominant in St. Nicholas' Day. This is linked to the fact that, according to folklore, St. Nicholas protects people from natural disasters, saves them while travelling on water, and takes care of animals. For this reason, fishermen going out to sea took with them his image as a protective amulet against misfortune. Sailors believed that there were two St. Nicholases: the "sea" St. Nicholas and the "wet" St. Nicholas. The first took care of ships, and the second protected people on water. They were convinced that St. Nicholas was always present on ships or boats, but it was impossible to see him (Potapenko & Kuzmenko 1995: 161). In the most dangerous situations, the icon of St. Nicholas was taken out on deck and sailors or fishermen asked him for salvation. In other legends, St. Nicholas is often seen among beasts, who sit around him and listen to his instructions.

St. Nicholas, unlike other saints, is always on earth. In icons, he is depicted as a white-bearded elder with kind eyes. The image of St. Nicholas went through significant folkloristic mythicisation, having inherited, first of all, the Christian personifications of charitable forces.

In the first half of the 20th century, a tradition well-known in the Catholic world, that of giving small children gifts on behalf of St. Nicholas, was widespread among inhabitants of Western Podillya, mainly under the influence of the local Polish population. In this region, it was adopted very quickly, acquired traditional features, and from there it spread throughout Ukraine. In time of the Polish rule, in particular after the First World War, instructive performances on religious themes were arranged in clubs and reading rooms of the cultural and educational society *Prosvita*, where characters representing evil forces – devils, witches, etc., participated along St. Nicholas and angels. After the performance, there was a gift-giving ceremony: from parents to children, from boys to girls, from girls to boys, through the costumed St. Nicholas.¹³

In Western Podillya, housewives baked cookies known as "nicholases", honey cakes baked in the form of an image of the saint, before the feast of St. Nicholas. A mother who dared to bake cookies herself did this secretly, so that children would not see them. Parents put these cookies, together with other gifts, under their children's pillows at night.

According to O. Kurochkin, "St. Nicholas Day is an ancient Ukrainian agricultural holiday. In compliance with folk beliefs, St. Nicholas is an assistant and deputy of farmers" (O. Kurochkin 1994: 364). In ancient times, St. Nicholas' holidays were celebrated for three days, from 17 to 19 December. All relatives and neighbours were

¹³ Based on the ethnographic recordings by Smoliak O. from Teodoziv S., b. 1929, from the village of Postolivka, Husyatyn district, Ternopil region. Recording made on 27 July 1996.

invited to this feast; invited were even those with whom in the household had a quarrel, in order to make the relationship smooth again before Christmas holidays.

In the Christian tradition, men named Nicholas and those who were born on 19 December were visited by their neighbours, friends and relatives who came after the Liturgy in a church, carrying a sheaf-tying braid made of the twisted straw of peas or wheat, and they tied the man in question with it, congratulated him, and wished him health, happiness and well-being.

Thus, in the holiday of St. Nicholas, remnants of a family cult are clearly felt. The main content of the holiday promotes the well-being of each family member as the basic unit of the ancestral way of life. The family and clan nature of the cult that is the basis for the veneration of St. Nicholas may have caused the emergence of the concept of his charity as covering all areas of a family, social and economic life of a village and a town.

The image of St. Nicholas, which gave rise to many legends, still retains characteristic features of pre-Christian ideas. This is first of all viewed in his patronage of forest animals and in the protection of fishermen on water. In the process of Christianisation of social life, however, St. Nicholas came to be perceived primarily as a defender of the poor and disadvantaged people.

Conclusions

The winter pre-Christmas holidays, in particular the Introduction (*Vvedennia*), St. Andrew's Day and St. Nicholas' Day, were closely related to agricultural work by means of rituals symbolizing the closing of the old agricultural year and partial preparation for the new one. On St. Andrew's Day, young people used to participate in magical ceremonies with traditional songs, dishes, and rites connected with love and young people's search for a partner to marry. St. Nicholas' Day celebration reflected the patronage and protection of animals, as well as helping the poor and disadvantaged people and, of course, the giving of gifts to small children, who would wait for this holiday all year long.

Today, the traditional winter rituals of Western Podillya still retain their main components, although under the influence of modern globalisation and urbanisation processes, they are increasingly losing its original essence and colouring. During the first and second decades of the 21st century, the gap between the local town residents and the rural population has been steadily decreasing. In contrast to the period of the 20th century, when traditional rituals prevailed mainly in rural areas, currently they are mostly concentrated in cities, where various folkloristic societies, clubs, and theatres are active agents engaged in research, restoration and development of the traditions of our ancestors by preservation of the authenticity and essence of calendar customs and rites, reinterpreting them in a modern way, and explaining their meaning to the younger generation. Nowadays, traditions and ceremonies have acquired a formal approach; the vast

majority of them have lost their original meaning. Only those compatible with the modern worldview are still practised. In particular, these are the celebration and commemoration of saint patrons' name days, maiden divinations, gifts to children on St. Nicholas Day, and other ceremonies that are features of Ukrainian traditional heritage and emphasise its historical significance. Having been formed over centuries and having accumulated the positive experience of everyday life, folk traditions are fixed in people's memory and passed down from generation to generation. Ukrainian people have been learning certain norms of behaviour established by society through traditions, customs, rites and other folklore activities by consolidating and passing them on to others as accumulated experience of many generations.

Nowadays, the interest in the study and preservation of traditional calendar rites of certain ethnographic regions of Ukraine is increasing rapidly and has prospects of attracting comprehensive research in future. As a multi-ethnic state, Ukraine has a rich material and spiritual culture, in particular calendar customs and rites, which are a considerable area for research, analysis and preservation as important components in the shaping of the worldview of ethnic groups living in different parts of the country, but having collective Ukrainian identity.

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