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SAINTS IN THE KURPIE FOLK CULTURE

ŚWIĘCI W KURPIOWSKIEJ KULTURZE LUDOWEJ

For centuries, Christians have been resorting to patron saints in search of God's help in various life situations through their intercession. This theological truth determined the strength and character of massive religiousness, which had been cultivated in Kurpie over the generations. Today, we may examine the level of the attachment of particular social groups to those ideas, because very often they were manifested as their external dimension, i.e. as funded sacral objects (e.g. statues of saints¹, or wayside shrines²), or also as practices of folk rituals. The external side of a religious cult most often derives from the internal connection of a person to the supernatural world³.

Since the 16th-century, saints were in Poland a well-recognized group of patrons of churches, towns, confraternities and professions. In folk culture, the intercession of saints often took regional forms. Apart from local patrons, there was in history a canon of saints with universal features, who were approved by different communities⁴. They appointed their own saints and turned to them in professional matters (e.g. hunters were looking for support in St. Hubert, butchers and confectioners in St. Matthias, fishermen in St. Peter), the sick were resorting to St. Apollonia (toothache), and pig shepherds were searching support in St. Anthony⁵. The patron of rural people was St. Isidore the Laborer⁶.

¹ Cf Collections gathered in the Museum of Kurpie Culture in Ostrołęka, National Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw and the **Kurpian Open-air Museum in Nowogród (North-Mazovian Museum Department in Łomża)**. In the past, those objects were very important elements of the cultural landscape of the region – cf A. Chętnik, *Z Zielonej Puszczy*. Ziemia. Tygodnik Krajoznawczy Ilustrowany 1914, No. 10, pp. 151–154.

² A. Chętnik, *Krzyże i kapliczki kurpiowskie*. Polska Sztuka Ludowa 1977, No. 1, pp. 39–52; A. Białczak, *Krzyże i kapliczki przydrożne zachodniej kurpiowszczyzny*. Zeszyty Naukowe OTN 2002, Vol. XVI, pp. 263–265.

³ Cf M. Rusecki, *Istota i geneza religii*. Warszawa 1989, p. 80.

⁴ E. Ciupak, *Katolicyzm ludowy w Polsce. Studia socjologiczne*. Warszawa 1973, pp. 246–247; J. Tazbir, *Kultura szlachecka w Polsce. Rozkwit – upadek – relikty*. Warszawa 1978, pp. 117–118.

⁵ T. Czerwiński, *Kapliczki i krzyże przydrożne w Polsce*. Warszawa 2012, p. 222.

⁶ Cf J. Tazbir, *Společna funkcia kultu św. Izydora „Oracza” w Polsce XVII wieku*. Przegląd Historyczny 1955, Vol. 46, No. 3, pp. 89–99; Cz. Deptuła, *Legenda i kult św. Izydora Oracza a problematyka polskiej wsi pod zaborami*. Zeszyty Naukowe KUL 1996, Vol. 39.

In agricultural societies, time was defined by the rhythm of nature. It indicated not only the reliance of a man on nature and seasons but also expressed a specific structure of peasants' consciousness. The observers of nature saw in it mainly the regularly repeated cycles. The pagan calendar, reflecting the rhythm of nature, was adapted also to the needs of Christian liturgy. The nature cycle and the production cycle merged into one cycle of religious rites, ceremonies and celebrations. According to the old pre-Christian beliefs, elements of nature could help people; therefore it was necessary to influence successful working of nature forces by carrying out particular actions. More important production processes were thus accompanied by prayers and quasi-religious practices, and the finishing of the agricultural cycle – by ceremonies and dances⁷. The Church reacted when old beliefs entered too deeply into the world of religious dogmas⁸. In modern times, in short concise sentences, based on the Church calendar, important agricultural actions were defined⁹. Those proverbs show that the Church calendar helped the peasants take regular actions in their farms. In this way, saints mentioned in the Church became important figures in every peasant's life.

Within the Church calendar order, it is worth indicating the most frequently mentioned saints in the Kurpie folk culture. In the foregoing considerations, I would like to point at the ritual dimension of the cult of saints by presenting the local and regional popular practices, which gave particular saints a rich symbolic meaning and, therefore, provided evidence for a long period of Christianizing those lands. The Church calendar helped the peasants make decisions related to beginning seasonal works in their farms. Especially those saints, who were particularly reminisced in the Church every year, became important figures in the social life. Below – with some simplification – we will meet the most popular saints in the Kurpie culture, who will be presented in the order determined by the seasons.

Winter

In the folk culture in Mazovia, it was believed that „From St. Martin winter begins”¹⁰. Also, the reminiscences of other saints were associated with the beginning of this season – St. Leonard (November 6), St. Elisabeth (November 19)

⁷ A. Guriewicz, *Problemy średniowiecznej kultury ludowej*. Trans. Z. Dobrzyński. Warszawa 1987, p. 133; M. Bogucka, *Uwagi o postrzeganiu czasu w Rzeczypospolitej w XVI–XVII w.*, [In:] *Stosunek do czasów w różnych strukturach kulturowych*. Eds. Z. Cackowski, J. Wojczakowski. Warszawa 1987, pp. 347–373.

⁸ S. Bylina, *Chryścianizacja wsi polskiej u schyłku średniowiecza*. Warszawa 2002, pp. 174–188.

⁹ R. Tomicki, *Religijność ludowa*, [In:] *Etnografia Polski. Problemy kultury ludowej*, Vol. 2. Eds. M. Biernacka, M. Frankowska, W. Paprocka. Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1981, p. 44.

¹⁰ So believed A. Gostomski, *Gospodarstwo*. Elab. S. Ingot, Wrocław 1951, p. 65.

or St. Clemens (November 23). This period was attributed with a temporary condition of death, directly preceding the time of the birth of nature.

During neighborly gatherings, fortune-telling practices promulgated. At first, they were carried out on the feast day of St. Catherine (November 25). According to a popular saying – St. Catherine initiates Advent. Probably, those beliefs have a later provenance than St. Andrew's customs, and they complement them. We may find the confirmation of the ludic nature of those holidays in old Polish proverbs¹¹. St. Andrew's Day ("Andrzejki"), which is on the feast day of the Apostle St. Andrew (November 30), did not always occur during the formerly recommended Advent fasting. The origin of this rite is difficult to specify. It derives from an old pre-Christian custom of All Souls' Day ("zaduszki"). It is probably related to the beliefs in the presence of spirits of the dead among the living. Those wandering souls could lend some of their supernatural powers for knowing the future. Fortune-telling – so typical for the winter time of transition – used to be practised in the entire Central and Western Europe, but also in the Mediterranean countries. The time of its intensification began on St. Catherine's Day and finished on Three Kings' Day.

At the beginning of December, there was a pastoral holiday of St. Nicholas (December 6), when people prayed for protection from wild animals, especially wolves. Those beliefs spread across Europe mainly due to the *Golden legend* of Jacob de Voragine¹². In Mazovia, shepherds were fasting on that day with the intention that the wolves would not do any harm to them¹³. Similar customs were cultivated in the Płock Diocese in the second half of the 20th century¹⁴. It was believed that on that day all the wolves gather in one place and share their future prey.

In folk tradition, on the feast day of St. Lucy (December 13), various fortune-telling and apotropaic practices took place. The customs and rituals cultivated on that day were related initially to the period of winter solstice. In fact, in the Julian calendar, until the reform of Pope Gregory XIII in 1582, the feast day occurred astronomically several days later. In the Middle Ages, on that day, the greeting of the Sun was celebrated. There were organized marches of girls carrying candles on their heads. On that day, fortunes – based on weather observations – were told about the following year's aura. The apotropaic actions carried out on that day

¹¹ Cf J. Krzyżanowski, *Mądrzej głowie dość dwie słowie*, Vol. 1. Warszawa 1958, pp. 295–298.

¹² Cf J. de Voragine, *Złota legenda. Wybór*. Ed. M. Plezia. Warszawa 2000, pp. 61–66.

¹³ O. Kolberg, *Dziela wszystkie*, Vol. 24: *Mazowsze*, Part 1. Wrocław–Warszawa 1961, p. 198; S. Poniatowski, *Etnografia Polski*, [In:] *Wiedza o Polsce*, Vol. 3. Warszawa 1932, p. 304. Moreover, in folk culture, there was another pastoral holiday known, which occurred during the spring-summer solstice. Some remnants of this tradition may be found in folk customs related to Corpus Christi.

¹⁴ A. Rojewski, S. Dziekan, *Zwyczaj i obrzędy adwentu i Bożego Narodzenia w parafii Drobín*. Studia Płockie 1984, Vol. 12, p. 171.

were aimed at scaring away witches, who could do major harm to the farmstead. In folk magic, trying to avoid adverse events was common. Pre-emptively, going out of the house was limited to a minimum, particularly after dark. In *Cyzjojan płocki*, we may find a warning not to leave the house on that day. It was important to take special care of little children so that they would not be changed by witches. Therefore, also the blessed herbs were placed in stables and barns¹⁵.

On the feast day of the first martyr – St. Stephen (St. Szczepan) (December 26) – the blessing of oats¹⁶. The custom is related to the pre-Christian cult of god Wodan. During the winter solstice, people used to leave uncovered grain grasses outside their houses in order to ask for the god's blessing for the future harvest. When this tradition was Christianized, St. Stephen was made the patron of horses. It ought to be assumed that scattering grains stems from a pre-Christian tradition. In medieval sources, there preserved a memory of the custom of pelting the bride's face with grains and, simultaneously, shouting out the wishes of good fortune and prosperity. For Jacques de Vitry, this custom belonged to a group of false beliefs. On that day, it was particularly important to throw oats on the priest performing the mass¹⁷. It was a magical measure which was supposed to cause abundant harvest. Occasionally, farmers used the blessed oats for the spring sowing. In the second half of the 18th century, the hierarchy of the Church in Poland took action to eliminate the custom of pelting the priest with oats. In the Płock Diocese, an ordinary taught on the subject: "attracting more for laugh and jokes than for the service. Similarly to the custom of performing in churches the so-called Nativity plays at Christmas time, we recommend that, henceforth, it ceases everywhere"¹⁸.

Typical were the customs on the third day of Christmas, related to the blessing of wine and other drinks on St. John the Evangelist's Day (December 27). It is difficult to define the proper origins of this folk custom. Perhaps, the tradition is connected with the Old German ritual in honor of god Fros. Wine was believed to be the cure for sore throat and toothache. On that day, people brought juniper beer, also called the beer of St. John, to the church for blessing. After returning home, the rooms and barns were sprinkled with that beer. The beverage was also added to

¹⁵ Cf *Cyzjojan płocki*, [In:] *Wybór tekstów staropolskich*. Ed. S. Vrtel-Wierczyński. Warszawa 1969.

¹⁶ In recommendations after a visitation of one of the archdeacons in 1779 it was written directly that those pagan practices were forbidden – the Archive of the Diocese in Włocławek, General visitation of the archdeaconry of Lutomiersk, Szadkowice and Warta in 1779, fol. 98, as cited in: B. Baranowski, *Kultura ludowa XVII i XVIII w. na ziemiach Polski środkowej*. Łódź 1971, pp. 268–269.

¹⁷ Cf The folk proverbs on St. Szczepan: J. Krzyżanowski, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 315–316.

¹⁸ *Rozporządzenia i pisma pasterskie za rządów J.O. Księcia Michała Jerzego Poniatowskiego biskupa płockiego etc. Do diecezji płockiej wydane*. Ed. W. Wargawski, Vol. 1, Warszawa 1785, p. 133.

a traditional dish *breja* (“mush”) and to a ceremonial cake called *nowolatek* (“newly-aged”). Using cereal in this dish was supposed to provide better harvest¹⁹.

Right after the end of the ecclesiastic period of Christmas, there were the memorials of saints who were the patrons of everyday human concerns. On February 3, St. Blaise (St. Błażej) was remembered – the patron of sore throat. On that day, in the church, apples were blessed, and then they were to be used as cures or candles, with which the throat of a sick person was encircled at the moment of pain. On February 5, there is a feast day of St. Veronica. Traditionally, on that day, bread and water were blessed, as the means of protection against the dangers of fire. The blessing of salt was adopted only in the 19th century.

Nowadays, it is difficult to answer the question how popular the cult of St. Apollonia was in Warmia. In the 18th century, in the collection of sermons, she was presented as a patron protecting from toothaches²⁰. This saint’s feast day is on February 9. In some regions of Poland, in churches, there was a blessing of herbs picked up in the summer, which were supposed to ease toothache.

Great popularity gained the folk cult of St. Valentine, whose memorial falls on February 14. Generally, he is treated as a patron who protected from epilepsy. He was also called in case of the threat of epidemics. Numerous weather forecasts are associated with that day.

Spring

Until the 20th century, breaking ice by swallows which, supposedly, spent the winter at the bottom of water reservoirs, was the forecast of spring²¹. Whereas the weather forecast was based on the appearance of the incoming storks. If they arrived dirty, it announced a wet year, if clean – a dry year. In the calendar, spring was indicated by the day of St. Peter’s Cathedral (February 22) or, more frequently, the memorial of St. Joseph (March 19).

Along with St. Matthias’s Day (St. Maciej’s Day), the imminent coming of spring was expected. Agricultural communities were first trying to placate the souls of the dead in order to obtain good crops. With that aim, ritual spring All Souls’ Day took place, as well as ceremonies of an agricultural type and a rite-magical nature. On the fourth Sunday of Lent, there was drowning of, or plunging in mud,

¹⁹ The dish has a long tradition. Already in medieval sources it is indicated that all kinds of „pultes” were commonly consumed, flour-based dishes (A. Kowalska-Lewicka, *Pożywienie chłopskie w średniowieczu i przydatność badawcza źródeł etnograficznych*. Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej 1965, No. 4, p. 763).

²⁰ Cf J. Mąciński, *Kazania odświętne*, Vol. 1. Kraków 1799, p. 87.

²¹ Spending winter by swallows at the bottom of lakes was indicated by M. Kromer. Within the next years, pseudo-scientific research and numerous dissertations were carried out on this issue. Its supporter was i.a. I. Kant. Broadly on the subject: R. Marchwiński, *Geografia Polski Marcina Kromera*. Bydgoszcz 1997, p. 147.

the image of death, symbolizing winter. Those actions were of an above-Slavic nature²². Such customs are confirmed by numerous source descriptions²³.

On St. Joseph's Day (March 19²⁴), peasants started working in the field with their ploughs and, even if there was still snow, they had to plough at least one furrow. The latest time to start ploughing was on the day of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (March 25). Ploughing determined proper fertility of the soil. The beginning of ploughing used to be carried out together in order not to destroy communal fields by going there earlier. An important church holiday was the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, also called the day of Matka Boska Roztworna – opening spring, winter and life²⁵. The inhabitants of villages were awaiting the arrival of storks on that day. Their coming meant a fortunate following year.

In spring, farmers began grazing animals on meadows. It was recommended to collectively graze cattle, horses and oxen, but mainly pigs and geese, in order to limit any harm within seeding and ripening cereal crops. The folk sanctification of the first grazing of the cattle on pastures was making St. Adalbert (St. Wojciech) and St. George the patrons of shepherds and cattle²⁶. There was a warning in folk culture not to hammer stakes in the ground while fencing the fields until the name's day of those saints. Exceeding the ban was to cause a drought²⁷. On April 23, when the Church commemorates those saints, ritual preparing the pastures and watching the fields was done, with particular care of the livestock. On St. Adalbert's Day, farmers could already graze the cattle. The customs of Eastern and Southern Slavs, related to that day, indicate that they are the remnants of the ancient beliefs in the spring All Souls' Day²⁸. Since the Middle Ages, there were known magical rituals, which were aimed at achieving success in breeding by chasing the cattle through the fire, wrapping oxen's horns with hops or preparing ritual feed for animals, containing grains from the Christmas Eve sheaves, Easter

²² A. Brückner, *Wierzenia religijne i stosunki rodzinne*, [In:] Idem, *Mitologia słowiańska i polska*. Warszawa 1980, pp. 40–41; K. Potkański, *Wiadomości Długosza o polskiej mitologii*, [in:] Idem, *Pisma pośmiertne*, Vol. 2. Kraków 1924, pp. 42–62; W. Klinger, *Doroczne święta ludowe a tradycje grecko-rzymskie*. Kraków 1931, p. 8.

²³ J. Długoski, *Annale seu cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae lib. I–II*. Varsoviae 1961, p. 166; Stanisław ze Skarbimierza, *Sermones super „Gloria in excelsis”*. Ed. R. Zawadzki. Warszawa 1978, p. 104.

²⁴ Celebration for St. Joseph was established by Pope Gregory XV. The synod of Archbishop Jana Wężyk in Piotrków in 1628 established the holiday on that day – I. Subera, *Synody prowincjonalne arcybiskupów gnieźnieńskich. Wybór tekstów ze zbioru Jana Wężyka z r. 1761*. Warszawa 1981, p. 132.

²⁵ O. Kolberg, *Dziela*, Vol. 60: *Przysłowia*. Wrocław–Poznań 1967, p. 226.

²⁶ Cf folk proverbs collected by H. Frischbier, *Preussische Sprichwörter u. volkstümliche Redensarten*. Berlin 1865.

²⁷ J. Klimaszewska, *Zakazy magiczne w polskich obrzędach ludowych*. Etnografia Polska 1961, Vol. 4, pp. 109–140.

²⁸ S. Poniatowski, op. cit., pp. 310–311.

egg shells or parts of palms²⁹. The struggle with unsuitable circumstances accompanying the blessing of animals³⁰, taken up yet in the Middle Ages, led to the development of a modern religious ceremony.

On the memorial day of St. Mark the Evangelist (April 25), who was considered the patron of harvest, there were special processions through the fields organized. It was believed that, on his feast day, he blessed winter crops. Pious Warmia inhabitants attended a Holy Mass on that day, so that the Saint would protect the fields from natural disasters and guard them from demons. The Warmia liturgy in honor of St. Mark began in church. After the prayers and singing the Litany of the Saints, people marched in a procession to roadside chapels and crosses. In case of unfavorable weather conditions, the procession took place inside the shrine. On that day, it was often not allowed to work with oxen so that they would not become ill and not chafe their necks from yokes³¹.

Summer

Summer was to begin on the feast day of St. Urban (May 25)³². The best time to collect hay in this region of the Republic of Poland was considered the period around the feast day of St. John, when grasses started to bloom. They were believed to be the most nutritive for animals at that time. The second period of mowing the grass was from St. Lawrence (St. Wawrzyniec) (August 10) to St. Bartholomew (St. Bartłomiej) (August 24).

Within the Christian tradition, two church holidays should be indicated, which were related to old Pentecostal customs: St. Michael the Archangel's Day and St. John the Baptist's Day. The fact that Pentecost can be celebrated until June 14, caused that some ritual elements of this church celebration have gradually permeated into the folk customs associated with the celebrations of the Holy Trinity, Corpus Christi, St. John the Baptist's Day and St. Peter's and St. Paul's Day (June 29).

²⁹ Similar actions took place in nearby territories – W. Łęga, *Ziemia Chełmińska*. Wrocław 1961, p. 104, 212, 287; W. Kętrzyński, *O Mazurach*. Ed. J. Jasiński. Olsztyn 1968, p. 44.

³⁰ Cf. A. Brückner, *Mitologia słowiańska*, [In:] Idem, *Mitologia słowiańska i polska*. Warszawa 1980, p. 313; S. Bylina, *Licitum – illicitum. Mikołaj z Jawora o pobożności masowej i zabobonach*, [In:] *Kultura elitarna a kultura masowa w Polsce późnego średniowiecza*. Ed. B. Geremek, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk 1978, p. 146; Idem, *Kościół a kultura ludowa w Polsce późnego średniowiecza*, [In:] *Literatura i kultura późnego średniowiecza w Polsce*. Ed. T. Michałowska. Warszawa 1993, pp. 208–215.

³¹ J. Hochleitner, *Doroczny rytm pracy chłopów warmińskich w epoce nowożytnej* (outline of the problem in terms of ethnicity and history). Teki Gdańskie 2003, Vol. 5, p. 92; J. Chłosta, *Doroczne zwyczaje i obrzędy na Warmii*. Olsztyn 2009, p. 104; S. Kuprjaniuk, *Mała architektura sakralna na Warmii do 1945 roku ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem kapliczek*. Olsztyn 2016, pp. 334–335.

³² *Cyzjojan kłobucki*, [In:] J.N. Fijałek, *Cyziojan polski z roku 1471, z wiadomością o cyzjojanach w ogóle i w Polsce*. Prace Filologiczne 1927, Vol. 12, p. 446.

The eve of St. John's Day (June 23), the time of the summer equinox, was considered by ancient communities to be a special event. An even pre-Christian tradition was to begin the holiday celebrations in the evening in order to celebrate until the morning. Annual ceremonies took place in holy groves, where an internal flame was burning³³. The analysis of the Midsummer Night customs led the researchers to the conclusion that the holiday, in the religious aspect, preserved some of the All Souls' elements³⁴. In Europe, the customs of decorating on that day roadside figures and singing songs dedicated to St. John were adopted. Frequently, the inhabitants of villages confused the Saint who was remembered by the Church and sang songs about St. John of Nepomuk³⁵. In Warmia, his cult among the villages spread only in the 19th century³⁶. Relatively early did the Church begin to fight the popular practices connected with the celebrations of St. John's feast day. Until the 13th century, fasting was respected before the holiday, which sometimes had lasted since Pentecost³⁷. Traditionally, in folk culture, there was a prohibition on bathing in rivers, ponds and lakes. Until today, the customs related to fortune-telling of a matrimonial nature remained³⁸.

Harvest was divided into big and small. The big harvest was collecting winter crops, and the small – collecting the spring crops, which were ripening later. In folk culture, St. Lawrence's Day was considered to be a partial completion of the harvest, about which numerous sayings inform, including many proverbs related to weather forecasts. Usually, crops were collected in regular intervals: winter crops around St. John's Day, spring crops around St. Margaret's Day (July 19), winter rye around St. Jacob's Day (July 25), winter wheat on St. Dominic's (August 5), oat and peas near the Assumption of the Holy Virgin Mary (August 15). Harvest most frequently finished on St. Lawrence's Day (August 10)³⁹.

Harvest was a significant event in a village life⁴⁰. People had been preparing for it the entire year. Elementary living conditions depended on the crops. Even in the publications of Old-Polish theologians, we may find orders not to add any

³³ Ł. Okulicz-Kozaryn, *Dzieje Prusów*. Wrocław 1997, p. 315.

³⁴ W. Klinger, op. cit., pp. 39–42; S. Poniatowski, op. cit., p. 311; K. Kubiak, *Dzień narodzin głowy. Przyczynek do badań nad problematyką świętojańską*. Polska Sztuka Ludowa 1983, No. 2, pp. 175–180.

³⁵ J. Hochleitner, *Św. Jan Nepomucen jako katolicki bohater kulturowy*. Studia Elckie 2009, Vol. 11, pp. 123–136.

³⁶ J. Hochleitner, *Powiernik tajemnic królowej. Kult świętego Jana Nepomucena na Warmii*. Elbląg 1996, pp. 123–132.

³⁷ R. Mazurkiewicz, *Deesis. Idea wstawiennictwa Bogurodzicy i św. Jana Chrzciciela w kulturze średniowiecznej*. Kraków 2002, p. 167.

³⁸ J. Hochleitner, *Doroczny rytm...*, pp. 205–210.

³⁹ Cf selected proverbs: *Nowa księga przysłów i wyrażeń przysłowiowych polskich*, Vol. 1–2. Based on Samuel Adalberg's work, elaborated by a team managed J. Krzyżanowski. Warszawa 1969–1970.

⁴⁰ J.S. Bystron, *Zwyczajne żniwiarskie w Polsce*. Kraków 1916; K. Zawistowicz-Adamska, *Obrzędy żniwiarskie ludu polskiego*. Wiedza i Życie 1934, No. 7.

additional holidays at that time⁴¹. The day of the beginning of work in the field was important. It was best to start the harvest on Wednesday or Saturday, the days devoted to the Mother of God. The work was expected to be started by the oldest host or a man who was wealthy and commonly respected. Those efforts were supposed to bless the forthcoming work and bring the best crops. The first windrow belonged to the owner of the field. Replacing oneself with a stranger meant lack of respect for the grain, which was destined for baking bread, and badly influenced further work.

In the first half of August, the time of harvest required spending long hours collecting the crops. Little time was devoted then to entertainment and celebrating. The exception was the feast day of Our Lady of Herbs (August 15), when herbs and first crops were being blessed in shrines⁴². An occasion for proper celebration was only “dożynki” (the harvest festival).

On the feast day of St. Roch (August 16), people prayed to the patron of contagious diseases and the caretaker of domestic animals, particularly cattle. Relatively common in Poland on that day was blessing animals. The herds were then gathered in front of a church gate so that the priest could bless them, and after that, they were made to go in particular order next to a smoking fire, which the herbs had been thrown into⁴³. On the feast day of this patron, new fire was lit by rubbing two pieces of wood. The fire was supposed to warm the house through winter and the smoke was to fight off bad air. The cattle were made to pass through the fire in order to protect them from diseases. Water, which was blessed on that day, was to immunize people against epidemics. The folk cult of that saint indicates major similarities between the Warmian⁴⁴ and Pomerania-Kashubian customs⁴⁵.

Autumn

In the 16th century, the remembrance day of St. Bartholomew (August 24) was considered to be the beginning of autumn⁴⁶. In folk calendar, also the feast day of St. Michael (September 29) played an important role. Traditionally, on that day, all the agricultural activities, connected with the end of the summer cycle of field,

⁴¹ Cf P. Skarga, *Kazania na niedziele i święta całego roku*. Ed. J.N. Bobrowicz, Vol. 4, Lipsk 1843, p. 91.

⁴² Jakub Wujek in the 16th c. recommended blessing herbs by a priest – J. Wujek, *Postylle katolickiej o świętych*, Part 1. Kraków 1584, p. 337.

⁴³ Since 2014, celebrations in honor of St. Roch along with the blessing of animals in Mikstat (Wielkopolskie Voivodeship) were placed on the National List of Non-material Cultural Heritage.

⁴⁴ J. Hochleitner, *Kultura ludowa Mazowsza w dorocznej obrzędowości Warmiaków*. Zeszyty Naukowe OTN 2014, Vol. XXVIII, pp. 76–94.

⁴⁵ B. Stelmachowska, *Rok obrzędowy na Pomorzu*. Toruń 1933, pp. 220–221.

⁴⁶ A. Gostomski, op. cit., p. 55.

garden and breeding works, were finished⁴⁷. The last work in the field was winter ploughing, which prepared some lands for sowing winter cereal, but mainly for winter rest, which was believed to guarantee good vegetation in the following year.

After intensive harvest work, there came the time of fruit ripening and seeds maturing. In that period, mushrooms were picked and then salted for the winter, and in October, turnips and carrots were dried, cabbage was pickled in barrels or special holes. The cabbage remained in the holes until spring. Its taste was much worse than the cabbage pickled in barrels. In folk tradition, though, it was assumed to have extraordinary healthy and nutritive properties⁴⁸. Since the early-medieval times, a traditional activity was to gather hay and leaves for cattle and horses as well as acorns and beechmast for hogs⁴⁹.

St. Martin's Day (November 11) was an important caesura for rural community. On that day, only householders worked, employees had that day off work. "Morcinki" was the day of menials and servants working in the farmstead⁵⁰. In the 16th century, numerous writers mentioned celebrating "morcinki". In 1583, in *Epitonium*, Czechowic referred to Catholic customs forbidding millers to work on that day. Similar traditions are mentioned by Potocki in *Ogród fraszek*⁵¹. A ritual dish was "czernina" (a blood soup) made of thick blood. Fortunes were told from the color of the roasted goose dorsal bone as to whether the winter would be: snowy, frosty or variable⁵². That custom was assumed to have arrived on Polish lands through German colonists⁵³. Perhaps it is a remnant of a ritual slaughtering of a cow, a bull or a pig, which were then smoked and salted as winter supply. Such customs were cultivated in the Middle Ages in Germany and England⁵⁴.

During the late autumn and winter, peasants had more time for social life. In that period, they spent time tearing feathers as well as spinning linen and wool together. This last activity was called *prządki*. Those meetings were particularly

⁴⁷ B. Baranowski, *Kultura ludowa XVII i XVIII w. na ziemiach Polski środkowej*. Łódź 1971, p. 304. Interesting iconographic sources, related to garden and agricultural works in the 16th c., are the woodcuts placed in Mikołaj Rej's works: *Wizerunek własny żywota człowieka poczciwego*. Kraków 1558 and *Zwierciadło*. Kraków 1568.

⁴⁸ As far as sauerkraut was known in Europe, pickled cucumbers seem a Polish speciality in modern times – Z. Libiszowska, *Gospodarstwo wiejskie w Polsce w XVII w., w opinii cudzoziemców*. Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej 1960, Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 285.

⁴⁹ T. and R. Kiersnowscy, *Życie codzienne na Pomorzu wczesnośredniowiecznym. Wiek X–XII*. Warszawa 1970, p. 84.

⁵⁰ Broadly on these customs in the material of B. Gustawicz, *O zwyczajach świętomarcińskich*. Lud 1910, Vol. XV and XVI.

⁵¹ As cited in: J.S. Bystroń, *Dzieje obyczajów w dawnej Polsce. Wiek XVI–XVIII*, Vol. 2. Warszawa 1976, p. 69.

⁵² Ibidem, Vol. 1, p. 279; Ibidem, Vol. 2, p. 69; A. Rojewski, S. Dziekan, op. cit., p. 167; B. Wojciechowska, *Od Godów do świętej Łucji. Obrzędy doroczne w Polsce późnego średniowiecza*. Kielce 2000, p. 114.

⁵³ S. Poniatowski, op. cit., p. 303.

⁵⁴ W. Klinger, op. cit., pp. 67–68.

important for passing on local tradition; they were some sort of lessons about the past and regional identity given by the elderly to the youth.

Winter time allowed the householders to take up activities inside farm buildings. Probably, an influence on this custom had the relic of folk prohibition on working in the field during Advent. Not respecting the ban may have resulted in the land's infertility⁵⁵. In folk proverbs for that time we find forecasts about the weather, crops, as well as prosperity and misfortune. Frequently, in folk tradition, weather conditions on every week of Advent were to account for the weather forecast for each quarter of the following year⁵⁶.

It was important – in the traditional communities' consciousness – to determine proper time for work within the whole day. One should work from the sunrise to the sunset. Christianity, in its tradition, applied destruction to the darkness, and creative power to the sun. Working at night disturbed the natural order. Many ritual folk behaviors were based on that symbolism, which proves strong influence of the Church on those practices. Already in the Middle Ages a lot of priests criticized magical procedures. Mikołaj Magni from Jawor scolded anyone who used objects blessed by priests in order to reach temporal goals. He lists here, among others, using holy water for providing abundant harvest or preventing from nature's threats such as hail or lightning. He also condemned using wax from Easter candles or twigs blessed on Palm Sunday to protect the people and animals' lives, or to provide abundant harvest. Stanisław from Skarbimierz, on the other hand, upbraided farmers who sprinkled their fields with holy ash and put Easter palms in the ground so that the vermin would die or they used them for treating animals⁵⁷.

Instead of conclusions

The entire year was divided into two seasons: cold and warm. The cold season includes all the most important Church holidays. It was the time of slowing down the pace of farm work. At that time, more activities were focused on family circles, within the village, contrary to the warm season, when the people were absorbed with farmyard work, frequently carried out on the fields away from the village⁵⁸. Winter time, in rural reality, also meant devoting more time to fun and entertainment. The period of rural entertainment began on New Year's Day or the Three Kings Festival and lasted until Lent⁵⁹.

⁵⁵ J. Klimaszewska, *Doroczne obrzędy ludowe*, [In:] *Etnografia Polski. Przemiany kultury ludowej*, Vol. 2. Eds. M. Biernacka, M. Frankowska, W. Paprocka. Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1981, p. 130.

⁵⁶ Cf i.a. W.I. Thomas, F. Znaniecki, *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, Vol. 1. Warszawa 1976, p. 180.

⁵⁷ S. Bylina, *Licium – illicitum...*, p. 146.

⁵⁸ W. Odyniec, *Duszpasterstwo parafialne w średniowieczu i czasach nowożytnych*. Studia Pelplińskie 1994, Vol. 21–22, p. 19.

⁵⁹ W. Odyniec, *Życie i obyczaje ludu pomorskiego w XVII i XVIII w.* Gdynia 1966, p. 136.

Early did rural communities notice the need for dividing the entire cycle of agricultural activities into smaller periods. The vegetative period was divided into two cycles: the autumn-winter and the spring-summer. That vision of time was of a cyclical nature, known for everyday observation, such as shorter and longer days, developing nature, the time of sowing and harvest⁶⁰.

Ethnographers emphasize the richness of external forms of folk cult, which indicate the dependence of religious visions and experiences on nature-productive and cultural environment of particular communities. The religious form of cult and the entire atmosphere of Church life introduced the faithful to a different from the ordinary world experiences and visions. In that atmosphere, religious sensualism of rural population was shaped. The figures of saints were treated by the peasant population extremely practically. They were supposed to protect from life unhappiness, provide abundant harvest, prosperity and success. The most popular saints in Central Europe of the 18th and 19th centuries were St. Florian and John of Nepomuk⁶¹. The first one protected from fire, the other from water. The worship of the images of saints in folk culture was so great that it frequently meant combining the image with the saint or even their identification. For former art recipients, plastic depictions were the carrier of content defined by its iconography. Therefore, all the changes in the sphere of Christian religiousness resulted in the transformation of art itself⁶².

Major merits for the popularization of the above-mentioned saints have the convents, especially Jesuits, who spread this cult in Kurpie through successful evangelization. Their activities were conducted in the period of the post-Tridentine renewal of the Church since the end of the 16th century. Jesuits adjusted the routine of their missions to the faithful's agricultural rhythm of a day. The missionaries' work in a village was carried out within the months of the least intensity of field works⁶³. Usually, from 4 to 8 missionaries arrived at one parish. The peak period of this activity was in the central third of the 18th century. Such systematic pastoral work gradually sated the Catholicism in Kurpie with characteristic elements of piety, including the cult of the holy guardians of everyday matters⁶⁴. Moreover, the described folk customs were affected by neighboring communities, which was also done by Mazovians⁶⁵.

⁶⁰ L. Stomma, *Antropologia kultury wsi polskiej XIX w.* Warszawa 1986; A. Zadrozńska, *Powtarzać czas początku*, Parts I–II. Warszawa 1988.

⁶¹ J. Hochleitner, *Ludowy kult św. Jana Nepomucena na Kurpiach*, [In:] *Zwykli niezwykli. Kult świętych w diecezji łomżyńskiej. Katalog wystawy*. Eds. B. Kalinowska, K. Mróz Ostrołęka 2016, pp. 47–57.

⁶² W. Stróżewski, *O możliwości sacrum w sztuce*, [In:] *Sacrum i sztuka*. Elab. N. Cieślińska. Kraków 1989, p. 29.

⁶³ J. Delumeau, *Reformy chrześcijaństwa w XVI i XVII w.*, Vol. II: *Katolicyzm między Lutrem a Wolterem*. Transl. P. Kłoczowski. Warszawa 1986, p. 242.

⁶⁴ J. Olędzki, *Rzeźba w drewnie z północnej Kurpiowszczyzny*. Polska Sztuka Ludowa 1964, No. 3, pp. 135–159; Idem, *Kultura artystyczna ludności kurpiowskiej*. Wrocław–

Numerous functions of a religious cult have great influence on an individual life and play an important role in social life: they integrate socially, socialize, raise, and they are also assigned emotional, expressive, esthetic functions as well as affirming values. Exactly through understood in such way cult, an individual enters the social organization of a religious life. Ritual activities in groups such as a parish, family, religious brotherhood, play an integrative role, joining all the members of the group. A cult, particularly its collective and public forms, is within a group a phenomenon passed from one generation to another. Only in a long perspective of history may we notice the periods of fading and development of particular cults.

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Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk 1971, p. 25; K. Piwocki, *Rzeźba ludowa*. Polska Sztuka Ludowa 1976, No. 3–4, p. 132.

⁶⁵ Cf J. Hochleitner, *Wpływ pogranicza mazowieckiego na kształtowanie się kultury religijnej chłopów pruskich diecezji w XV–XVI wieku (ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem dominium warmińskiego)*, [In:] *Mazowsze północne i jego sąsiedzi*. Eds. R. Sajkowski and L. Zygnier. Ciechanów 2009, pp. 143–163.

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SUMMARY

In folk culture, the cult of saints usually took a local form, which tells us extensively about the reception level of Catholic education in rural communities. In this atmosphere was shaped i.a. religious sensualism of a rural community, about

which is also this material. Frequently, the peasant community in Kurpie treated the figures of saints practically. A similar phenomenon is observed in spiritual culture. In the described annual ceremonials, popular saints were supposed to protect the faithful from misfortune in life, as well as provide abundant harvest, prosperity and success.

The Church calendar helped peasants make important decisions related to beginning seasonal works in their farms. Especially those saints, who were commemorated in the Church every year, became important figures in the peasants' lives. We observe various forms of remembering those holy intercessors during particular farmyard works, which were undertaken annually. That cyclically repeated set of prayers and folk practices strengthened the cult of particular saints, enriching it with numerous symbolic references. Those religious accumulations often reflect the long period of Christianization of Kurpie lands, which only due to pastoral activity in the 17th and 18th centuries actually shaped the Kurpian religiousness.

STRESZCZENIE

W kulturze ludowej kult świętych zazwyczaj przybierał lokalny koloryt, który w dużym stopniu mówi nam dziś o stopniu recepcji nauczania katolickiego w społecznościach wiejskich. W tej atmosferze kształtował się m.in. sensualizm religijny ludności wiejskiej, o którym traktuje także niniejszy materiał. Ludność chłopska na Kurpiach często figury świętych traktowała praktycznie. Podobne zjawisko obserwujemy w kulturze duchowej. W omawianej obrzędowości dorocznej popularni święci mieli bowiem strzec wiernych od nieszczęść życiowych, a także zapewnić urodzaj, dobrobyt i pomyślność.

Kalendarz kościelny pomagał chłopom podejmować ważne decyzje dotyczące rozpoczynania okresowych prac w swoich gospodarstwach. Zwłaszcza ci święci, którzy byli co roku wspomniani w Kościele, stawali się ważnymi postaciami w życiu chłopów. Obserwujemy liczne formy wspomnianych tych świętych orędowników w trakcie poszczególnych prac gospodarskich, które co roku podejmowano. Ten powtarzany cyklicznie zestaw modlitw i praktyk ludowych utrwalał kult poszczególnych świętych, wzbogacając go o liczne odniesienia symboliczne. Te nawarstwienia wierzeniowe często są świadectwem długiego okresu chrystianizacji ziemi kurpiowskiej, która dopiero dzięki zabiegom duszpasterskim w XVII i XVIII w. właściwie ukształtowała religijność kurpiowską.

Key words: cult of saints, the Kurpie, historical ethnography, folk rituals

Słowa kluczowe: kult świętych, Kurpie, etnografia historyczna, obrzędowość ludowa

