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KEY PERSONS OF HARVESTING RITUALITY OF UKRAINIANS (on the data of South-Western Historic-Ethnographic Macro-region of Ukraine)

Anotacija

Straipsnyje tiriami su ukrainiečių pjūties darbais susiję papročiai, turintys glaudų ryšį su senovės slavų papročiais, iš dalies – indoeuropiečių mentaline konstanta, kuri turi ikikriščionišką pagrindą. Atminimo ir garbinimo motyvai (dėkojimas mirusiems protėviams už jų pagalbą gyviems palikuoniams) atsiskleidžia pjūties papročiuose.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: papročiai, ritualai, pjūtis, garbinimo motyvai.

Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of the reaping rituality of Ukrainians to demonstrate its close relationship with Old Slavonic ones, and partly with Indo-European mental constants, which has a pre-Christian basis. Thus, memorial motifs (honouring of the dead ancestors for their assistance to living descendants of reach yield) extremely clearly occurs in the reaping rituality.

KEY WORDS: rituals, reaping, memorial motifs.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.15181/rh.v23i0.1789>

A belief, that every important work should be started by the proper person, had consolidated in the traditional culture of Slavic nations. There were a lot of different demands, which considered in determination of ritual aptitude of this individual. Attention was paid on two factors: who should and who should not begin the labor (as same as clarification of work's outset moment). The selection of the person was important, because, according to folk beliefs, success or failure on harvesting depended on it.

Reaping the first few wisps of spikes was a responsibility of the master or mistress of the field. In particular, on Eastern Volyn in neighboring villages (or even in the same village) these two versions could be practiced at the same time (village Hannopil Slavuta district (ds.) Khmelnytsk region (rg.)) (Archive 2007, 16). In ethnographic literature there is no unanimous conception about the person who should start harvesting. Collected by the author of investigation field data witnesses, that in the first quarter of XX century exactly the mistress was charged to begin reaping. However, from time to time, some testimonies were, that in the past, exactly the owner started harvesting, but by the memory of respondents, this work have been making by the mistress¹. An older option is that, when harvesting was started by the eldest man in the family, who went to the field exclusively to reap the first sheaf; after that he went back home and did not take any participation in further harvesting process². In particular, in some volynian villages there is a widespread custom, according to what the harvesting should be started by the eldest man in the village; the others croppers joined to reaping only after him ("*Zažinav samij staršij. Privozât jogo na vozî, âk vîn ne može, daût jomu serpa, vîn zažinaê, vže peršij ložit hrestikom* [two fistfuls], *šob Gospođ blagosloviv užë*" (v. Novostavtsi Hoshcha ds. Rivne rg.) (Archive 2009a, 31)). Such a choice of this custom's

¹ At Volyn the mistress, as usual, was charged to reap the first sheaf, but, according to affirms of aged respondents, in the past this function was performed by the master: "*Perehrestivošis, skinuši kašketa, zžinav kiłka žmen' žita. Perevâzavši pereveslom brav serpa i jšov z nim dodomu*" (v. Velykyi Sknyt Slavuta ds. Khmelnytsk rg.) (Archive 2007, 9).

² Similar custom was fixed by Pavlo Čubinskij at Chernihiv region (here grains have been harvesting in any day, except Monday, what was considered as unlucky, with participation of the whole community, on the basis of its members preliminary agreement) (Čubinskij 1872, 224). Analogous custom was registered by Ahatanhel Krimskij at Cherkasy region: "*Razom iz žencâmi vihodit i starij bałko, či did, či hto staršij*" (Krimskij 1991, 8).

leading person based on the conceptions about the eldest man status in patriarchal society – he was representative of his kin, so he was the main executor of the most important rituals.

On the territory of Western Podillia the field's owner should start harvesting (make a "zažinki"), above all he was considered as a chief of the family. However, at Podillia village Sorotske (Terebovlia ds. Ternopil rg.) local option was spread, when the reaping begun by the master and the mistress at once, but the first sheaf had only one of them – who were quicker reaper: "*Gospodar či gospodinâ, hto borše nažav. Âk nažali peršogo snopa, zavâzali, to pokolâduvali ì dalše žnuť. Âk â borše nažnu, to â stavlû, âk žînka borše – to vona*" (Archive 2009b, 20).

There were also some prohibitions related to persons, who could not start harvesting. In particular, pregnant, widows, women with extramarital children ("*pokrytky*"), women, who in the village were considered as witches, unhealthy women belonged to such a category. It was forbidden to start harvesting by the poor or young man, who had not his own field. It was called to protect themselves from poverty and misery – "*Šob ne ziji na žebraki*" (Žnivar'ski 1990, 47; Boân 2009, 112). According to folk beliefs, when the work will start with someone of previously mentioned persons, their negative characteristics could spread into harvesting field or household.

The most of interviewed respondents affirmed, that in day of "zažinki" reapers made only a ritual reaping and didn't proceed the harvesting ("*Znaû, šo moâ mama-nebožka jšla zažinať. To vona jšla sama, bo v nas ne bilo nikogo... Voni tiľki zažinali, a todi dodomu jšli*" (v. Kolesnyky Hoshcha ds. Rivne rg.) (Archive 2009a, 6)). At the same time, in some villages after "zažinki" ritual was made harvesting continued for the whole day ("*Nu âk počinali, to j žali*" (v. Vilhir Hoshcha ds. Rivne rg.) (Archive 2009a, 9)). In other villages one or a few sheaves, half-shock or even a shock could be reaped in the day of "zažinki" before homecoming. Stepan Kilimnik gave an explanation of this custom: the reason of such actions was to complete the field harvesting as quickly as "zažinki" was (Kilimnik 1994, 475).

Everywhere at the territory of the South-Western Historic-Ethnographic Macro-region of Ukraine was a widespread prohibition to start reaping being dressed on unclean clothes; reapers while starting harvesting should be dressed on festive clothes. In particular, lemko's ascertained:

“*U našomu seli lûdi bagato odežî ne mali, liše do cerkvi ta do roboti. Odnak koli jšli peršij raz zažinati nivu, to vdâgali tu odiž, šo do cerkvi*” (v. Ripnyk Krosno county Poland) (Gorbaľ 2012, 222). Opillia dwellers did similarly (“*V daoninu lûdi âk išli vperše žati zbižžâ, vdâgali svâtkovu odiž*” (v. Selysko Pustomyty ds. Lviv rg.) (Gorbaľ 2012, 222). The best explanation of this custom contains the legend from Western Podillia’s village Zarvanytsia (Vinnytsia ds. Vinnytsia rg.), which referred to that peasant woman went to the cornfield and start reaping alone by herself (because husband had ridden to the forest), without loaf of bread, in dirty chemise, besides, she had started to work when the sun was already high in the sky. No sooner as she had taken the handful of corn in her hands she was pricked in her back by something so hard so she lay down on the ground and had slept, and stood directly on the spot until the night had come. When awaked she couldn’t realize where she was. In the field she was surrounded by creatures dressed like ghosts – in white shirts and chemises. The eldest from them explained that “*zažinki*” is a holiday. So it is necessary to go to the field with the whole family, being dressed in festive clothing, with bread, salt and clean tablecloth, while they (the deceased) walked the cornfield. S. Kilimnik considered that, according to this legend, this festive meal was assigned to deceased relatives. Accordingly, disregard of ritual actions (bringing of bread, meal, time of reaping beginning) and violation of established rules (dirty clothes) is a manifestation of disrespecting of souls of the dead relatives, who can punish for this (Kilimnik 1994, 157). Field data, collected by the author of the article, gives a possibility to make a suggestion about the prevalence of this interdiction throughout investigated territory. Modern interpretation of the prohibition to start “*zažinki*” in dirty clothes mostly reduced to explanation that as a sin (“*Tak ne možna roboti*”; “*Grîh tak roboti*”), or as a tribute of tradition (“*Kolis’ tak robili ì mi robimo*”; “*Kazali, treba v čistomu odâzi zažati*”). One of the most demonstrative explanations of this custom is such interpretation – it has been doing because mentioned negative qualities could “transfer” to the harvest (Kovaľ 2009, 500).

A feast was made in the day the reaping begun directly in the cornfield. An obligatory element of this meal was the bread, what was taken to “*zažinki*” (“*Skrutât žmenû kolossâ, položať na hlib, a gospodar kaže: Gospodi pomagaj!*” (Kolessa 1898, 86)). The following lines from a well-

known song can witness about the bread importance in reaping start ritual: “*Pišla Ġandzâ žito žati, // Ta zabula serpa vzâti. // Serpa vzâla, hlib zabula, // Des’ Ġandzâ vdoma bula*” (Archive 2007, 4). So, the bread was the main attribute of “*zažinki*” ritual, because Ukrainian peasants believed that its absence may cause in future poor harvest for this custom violator.

Masters had begun reaping after the towel (“*rušnik*”), with the bread and other food upon it was outspread on the edge of the field. After the reaping beginning ritual was made, it’s participants prayed and sat down for the meal. All of respondents ascertained that the bread brought to the field was not eaten there but it was taken back home and already here the dinner was started with it. Primarily, this bread was not intended for the living, but for the souls of the dead relatives, who also participated in meal (Kuteľmah 1996, 244–245). Volodymyr Propp, while examination the ritual of meal in the field, had noted: “From the depths of the earth the dead could send the harvest or holdback its strength” (Propp 1995, 178). This was the reason the common meal was made, on what were “present” ancestors who left “the one” world.

In this context the other variant of the meal should be mentioned: it took place in the house of the owner on the eve or directly in the day of “*zažinki*”. Polish landlord Mykhailo Piotrovskyi gave information that in the middle of XIX century at Central Polissia had been establishing ceremonial dinners, on which the owners and neighbors was invited (Voznâk 1996, 333). However, the author was fortunate to record on Western Podillia only one option of the ceremonial dinner on the actual day of “*zažinki*”: after the first reaped sheaf brought from the field owners the same evening established feast for relatives and neighbors.

Reaped customs and rituals also filled with memorial motifs. According to folk beliefs, in specifically determined days (Christmas, Easter, and Trinity Sunday) the souls of ancestors may appear in homes of their descendants, who implemented special ceremonies on their honor. As it was noticed, “*zažinki*” also considered as a day when souls of the dead ancestors visited living beings. That’s why, it seems the thought of the Polish investigator Jan Bystron (based on the data from Volyn and Polissia) about the meal in the field accomplished after the “beard” making, was intended for the souls of the dead ancestors, is quite reasonable (Bystron 1916, 67). Mykola Kostomarov considered honoring of the dead for Slavs as the part

of every festive meal (Kostomarov 1994, 277–278). Also we can assume, that in the past one of reaped banquet functions was to secure deceased relatives honoring.

The way in what the reaping process was started has had an important meaning in traditional culture. According to respondent's information preparation for reaping beginning consisted in the following: the master or the mistress stood toward the sunrise, crossed themselves, spoke a prayer, asking God for help. Only after that the harvesting could be started. Triple bowing of reaping mistress was a local option (Parhomenko 2008, 89). There were cautions existed about with what hand the harvesting process was necessary to start; some of respondents ascertained that it should be done only with the left hand, the others – only right. But, the explanation of this ban in both cases was the same: “*Šob legko žati*”. As for reservation about with what hand the first sheaf should be reaped, so the harvesting started mostly with the right hand. It was related with a traditional ritual opposition “right / left”, according to what the first is “right” and the second – “wrong”.

For the whole Ukraine there was a characteristic belief that the first tuft of ears reaper must stick by his belt, “*šob spina ne bolila*”. Volynians for the same reason lay behind the belt birch rod. The custom of birch using while harvesting can be associated with beliefs in mermaids, who, according to folk conceptions, loved to distract themselves in the rye; in that case this rod was a guarding amulet and a symbol of fertility at the same time (Parhomenko 2008, 89). At Podillia there was a belief that reaper's back will not hurt while harvesting if he will eat standing during the Christmas Eve dinner (“*Govorili, šo âkšo navstoâčki iŝti, to spina ne bude boliti v žniva*” (v. Kryve Pidvolochyisk ds. Ternopil rg. (Archive 2009b, 47)). There was a similar belief at the Western Volyn (Horohiv ds. Volyn rg.), where respondents mentioned that “*čim ranše sâdeš večerâti na Svâtij večir, tim ranše na poli “kozu” vižneš* [will finish the harvesting]” (Savka 2012, 842). In Western Polissia during “*zažinki*” reaper's right hand (or belt) was tied by with red string or hop sprouts to prevent harming their hands or backs. Volynians endowed with healing or protective properties also the first rye wisp if with it the owner or the dough trough were tired up (Parhomenko 2008, 89–90).

There were some individual requirements to executors of reaped rituals. The main attention was paid to the girl, who carried reaped wreath: she had to be “clean”, “of the cleanest morals”, otherwise on the next year it could be a crop failure. Harvesting rituality investigators remarked that the girl, who carried the wreath, “necessarily had to be a virgin” (Kopernicki 1889, 184; Koperžins’kij 1926, 60). This quality of her has received its expression reaped songs, in which an associative model is notable: young – good harvest, old – crops failure. That’s why, mainly young women were charged with carrying of the reaped wreath. We accentuate that girl aged 10 to 12 years was assigned to carry the reaped wreath in many territories of the South-Western Historic-Ethnographic Macro-region of Ukraine. This was because traditional conception of virginity understood as a ritual purity.

After the wreath was brought to the village, the girl usually crowned with this wreath the master – the owner of the harvested cornfield. The owner, accordingly, made a feast for reapers. But before having meal it was in owners’ necessity to redeem the “wreath”. Volodymyr Propp remarked: “The demand of a gift was not begging in any of a kind – it was an imperative requirement of a service in exchange of another service” (Propp 1995, 43).

At Pokuttia reaped wreath was weaved of stems of any harvested culture (even buckwheat, peas or rape). Each wreath was carried by another girl, called “young” (“*moloda*”) or a “princess” (“*knâhynâ*”). She gave the wreath to the host and wished him to wait the next year’s sowing, and for reapers – to wait for the next harvesting. The host regaled all the reapers then. The wreath was hanged on the picket in the passage. It was preserved until autumn (winter) or spring sowing, what were started using grains threshed from the reaped wreath (Boân 2009, 113).

On the period of collective farms system domination in agriculture on the territory of Ukraine, the reaped wreath custom has been existed in a slightly modified form: field team leader, who led the reapers procession, gave a wreath to the brigadier or to the head of the collective farm. Then this harvest festival’s attribute was preserved in the agronomist of chiefs office until the next sowing will start. Then the wreath threshed and grains from it were mixed with the corns, intended for sowing.

Today (the early XXI century) “zažinki” have been preserved mostly in the recalls of aged respondents. In those areas where this custom still prevails it is associated with the inability, for various reasons, to apply harvesting machinery. Accordingly, the individual small parcel (approximately 0,2–0,5 ha) reaps with sickles. In that case harvesting starts by aged women, and the ceremony comes to prayer “*Otče naš*”, verbal formula “*Gospodi dopomoži*” and the first sheaf reaping (occasionally it was taken home).

Therefore, the choice of the performer person for the harvesting start and finish rituality execution was very important, because these individuals had to be the ones to ensure rich crops (due to their successful, ritual purity etc.). Some separate, defined by the tradition demands related to condition of the clothes of the main persons in harvesting rituality or to their behaviour. Failure to complete these requirements threatened the loss of crops (hail will beat crops; lightning will burn already harvested corn etc.). By organizing of ritual meal the circle of harvesting festival participants expanded on souls of the dead relatives, which, according to folk beliefs, by the fact of their presence, in the status of guardians, assisted to the successful harvesting completion.

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Summary

The analysis of the reaping rituality of Ukrainians demonstrates its close relationship with Old Slavonic ones, and partly with Indo-European mental constants, which has a pre-Christian basis. Thus, memorial motifs (honouring of the dead ancestors for their assistance to living descendants

of reach yield) extremely clearly occurs in the reaping rituality. These motifs subsequently were adapted to the Christian world outlook (gratitude to God and the saints). So, memorial motifs in harvesting rituals and customs directly related to the main tilling motifs, namely – with grain yield providing. The same applies to matrimonial and erotic motifs that had the clearest manifestation in customs and rituals. The main role in it was played by the youth. Here we have a symbolic analogy between youth and soil reproductive force. Some separate, defined by the tradition demands were to the person of harvesting rituals executor, because, according to folk beliefs, these individuals provided crops because of their successfulness, ritual purity etc.