

Institut für Slavische Philologie der LMU München

# Ukraine und ukrainische Identität in Europa

Beiträge zur Standortbestimmung  
aus/durch Sprache, Literatur, Kultur

Open Publishing LMU

**Institut für Slavische Philologie  
Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München**

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## RITUAL CALENDAR PLAYING PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE PODILLJA INHABITANTS: THE PROBLEM OF CONFRON- TATION, SURVIVAL AND REBIRTH

*Valerij Ščehel's'kyj*

(Ukraine)

*Summarizing the experience of precursors regarding the studied problem, the author of the article researches in which conditions the ritual calendar playing practical experience of Ukrainians finds itself in a situation of confrontation of different forms of social ideologies.*

*Key words: calendar ritualism, playing practical experience, confrontation of ideologies.*

## КАЛЕНДАРНО-ОБРЯДОВА ІГРОВА ПРАКТИКА ПОДОЛЯН: ПРОБЛЕМА ПРОТИСТОЯННЯ, ВИЖИВАННЯ ТА ВІДРОДЖЕННЯ

*Валерій Щегельський*

*Автор статті, узагальнюючи попередній досвід вивчення проблемної теми, досліджує стан, у якому опинилася календарно-обрядова ігрова практика українців у результаті протистояння різноманітних форм суспільних ідеологій.*

*Ключові слова: календарна обрядовість, ігрова практика, боротьба ідеологій.*

Existing literary and archival sources make it possible to reconstruct the perception of the essence of the game-entertainment phenomena of Ukrainian life in time by various ideological systems. The following scholars tried to highlight this issue at one time or another: T. Haevs'ka, M. Hruševs'kyj, M. Dorochols'kyj, S. Efremov, A. Kuročkin, A. Svydnyč'kyj, M. Simaškevič, J. Sicins'kyj, M. Sumcov, V. Široc'kyj, K. Široc'kyj, M. Javorovs'kyj and so on. The problem is based on the opposition of the major ideological systems: paganism, Christianity and (communistic) atheism.

The purpose of this study is to establish the contents of the ideological and philosophical aspects of life and past epochs' routines and to emphasize the domestic and holiday traditions of Ukrainians during their holidays, especially in the *večornyci* ('evening celebrations') etc.

Ilarion the metropolite (Ivan Ohienko) noted in his studies that the antagonistic relations of persistent paganism and 'young' Christianity between the Ukrainians have led to the emergence of varieties of truth, when for centuries

they opposed each other: "It is completely a natural thing, when two outlooks meet and people are struggling to bring them together" (Efremov 1995, 233).

New religious adherents opposed to the rooted tradition of the Ukrainians' life very actively, jealously and even with humiliation. Haljatovs'kyj says that "the clergy strives to eradicate these prejudices with the Word, but it is not heard; that is why it is necessary to make social authorities forbid them, too. There was too much energy spent on this everlasting struggle with the people's traditions and their prohibition. And there will probably not be any mistakes in fact that all authorities have never spent so much energy on something else before" (Efremov 1995, 234).

The basis of the holiday calendar was a 12-month year. It was associated with four solar phases: the winter and summer solstice, as well as the spring and autumn equinox. There were no clear distinctions between the winter, spring, summer and autumn seasons in the calendar of Podillja. Each of them logically proceeded to the next, creating a locked cycle of the eternal nature cycle as well, alternating work and rest periods. In the historical and religious monograph *The Pre-Christian Beliefs of the Ukrainian People* (in the Ancient folk holidays section), Ilarion the metropolite describes the ancient religious calendar of Ukrainians, calling it "special" because it was firmly connected with nature and grain production throughout the year, and "our ancient holidays are our farming rites, which we have always had, that is why they have created our annual Holy Calendar" (Ilarion 1965, 265). We should note that the game practice of the Ukrainians' calendar cycle is directly related to the ritual, where the game is not only its component, but also a way of expressing the aspirations of achieving the desired.

The most favorable for peasant leisure was the winter period, especially saturated with a variety of customs and rituals. This is the time when the harmony of nature and human labor contributed to its physical rehabilitation and spiritual fulfillment. Traditionally, weddings were also made in Ukraine at this time, which symbolized the end of pre-familial relations, born in game spring songs' motives (the motive for choosing a married couple – "Proso", "Žučok", "Carivna", "Vorotar", "Žel'man", "Bilodančyk", "Zajčyk", "Perepiločka", "Mak", "Podoljanočka") where the movement, the dance and the game were connected to the heterogeneous forms of group gatherings of young people. The so called 'večornyci' (evening parties) were considered to be "the main center of pre-marital communication, leisure and selection of married couples" (Ponomariov 1994, 168). The *večornyci* were a kind of Christmas and New Year holidays' rehearsal, which began in the autumn (Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God, 1<sup>st</sup> October), when the harvest was already in the barns, the general labor staff was weakened and a relative calm before the new agrarian season came. In Podillja these gatherings were called "večornyci", "dosvitky", "reduty", "vodenky", "hodenky", "on denky" etc. In the public village life, the traditional *večornyci* were a kind of institution for the education and communication of young people. Thanks to them the necessary process of socialization of the



younger generation was provided, it also created the most favorable opportunities for acquaintance and choice of marriage couples (Kuročkin 1994, 361). For the most part in Ukraine, “vulyci” (streets, places for people gathering) were the main form of youth entertainment, but fun and music also had an entertaining character. The festive, or great ‘večornyci’ differed from ordinary ones, because they were devoted to fun, games, music, ritual ceremonies and fun. Youth entertainment for such holidays as Saint Catherine’s day (24<sup>th</sup> of November / 7<sup>th</sup> of December) and Saint Andrew’s day (30<sup>th</sup> of December / 13<sup>th</sup> of December) were very prominent in this respect (Ponomar’ov 1994, 361).

Christianity came to Rus’ from Byzantium, having its own traditions and carefully crafted cult. By placing its liturgical events’ calendar of “sacred history”, the Christian church tried to eliminate so called “godless” traditions of pagan beliefs and rituals. This process of religious battles lasted for centuries and had not finished with the final victory of Orthodoxy. And now, in many events dedicated to church holidays, it is possible to recognize the remnants of ancient pagan traditions. In Podillja pagan ceremonies had deep and strong roots, and sacred places of worship that were preserved till this time both in Eastern and Western Podillja bear witness to it. Christianity brought us a new calendar with a distinct division into months and days. In ancient times New Year began on March 1<sup>st</sup>, when all nature awakened after the winter break; this was also accepted by the Church, because due to the Scripture “The creation of the world” took place on March 1st. But later, the church celebrated Greek New Year on September 1<sup>st</sup>, and since 1492, the public New Year was finally tied to the ancient natural time, March 1<sup>st</sup>. And only in 1721, Peter the Great settled New Year on January 1<sup>st</sup> in the East, as it was in most states in the West. But the church New Year has remained on September 1<sup>st</sup> to this day. The time of New Year is visible in our carols, which often does not describe only winter, but the beginning of spring as well; people sang carols in summer during plagues also, to drive them away (Ilarion 1965, 269-270).

The modern year of the Ukrainian Christian calendar cycle is a certain stage in Jesus Christ’s life, as well as the commemoration of the canonized saints who advocated and propagated the Christian faith, therefore, the Church always opposed various impurities to the Christian holy days, and this was mainly followed by two canons of the 4<sup>th</sup> Quinisext Council (*Council in Trullo*). These are Canon 61 and 62, which the entire Orthodox Church guarded firmly. Due to Canon 61, those who are given to enemies, or so-called chiefs (the wise men elders) or the other with the purpose to find out something should come under the Rule of Six-Year Penance according to the previous ordinances. The same penance is imposed on those who put bears or other livestock to the derision and detriment of ordinary people. It touches those also who unite deception with madness, who hex for happiness, fate, ancestry, etc. And those who have been rooted into this and do not leave this fatal and pernicious nonsense are to be completely expelled from the Church, as the Sacred Regulations impose. “What do light and darkness have in common?”, asked the Apostle. Or what is the unity

between the God's Church and idols? What do the faithful and infidel have in common? What is the consent between the God and devil? (6. 14-16). [...] There is the resolution: neither man wears woman's clothes, nor a woman wears masculine clothes. Do not wear comedy, satirical or tragic masquerade. And therefore, those who dare to commit anything from mentioned before are to be expelled from the Sacred Order in case they are clerics. In case they are parishioners they are to be excluded from the church community [...]. The canons of the Quinisext Councils had a great respect in the Orthodox Church, therefore, the Church constantly performed them. These two canons were of huge importance in eradication of pre-Christian beliefs throughout the Christian and therefore our world (Ilarion 1965, 306-308).

The Byzantine priests who came to the Ukrainian lands began to correct and adjust folk life to the ecclesiastical system, considering: "any fun and games, the whole internal sincere peace connected to the poetic and sweet antiquity, that found its expression in songs, games and dances, shortly any fun was pursued as the devil's obsession" (Sumcov 1885, 13-14). S. Efremov sees the interference of the Old Believers, who have taken away all literature samples from Byzantium and Christianity which were limited mostly to church, religious and moral interests as well. People who were literate and spiritual immediately recognized the sinful, shameful deeds and devilish features in the folk poetry samples, that is why they became hostile towards them. Old writers do not even find correct words to express their indignation against the folk customs and to revile so-called "games, dance and fun" or more simply "the devilish singing" that did their disobedient congregation. Being the protectors of the new faith, they saw here the survival of the pagan world view, faith and worship, where the struggle against it was considered to be a holy duty of one's entire life" (Efremov 1995, 233).

I. Batyreva studied the spiritual culture of Podillja of the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which was described vividly on the pages of local and central journals: "Podillja eparchial reports", "Podilsky provincial information", "Orthodox Podillja", and "Kyjivan antiquity" during the period from 1862 to 1915. She notes that more than 70 publications were devoted to the calendar cycle of holidays such as Christmas, Easter, Rachmani Easter, Stritennia; winter holidays – Saint Catherine, Saint Andrew, Saint Nicholas; Ivan Kupal, Petrovs'kyj Fast and Rozgry, Makovey, Vlas, etc. From the characteristics of the publications in those journals, the researcher can find out that "while promoting the revival and preservation of ancient traditions, the church carefully selected from folk ceremonies and folklore what it needed or what could not be eradicated from the people, and the rest was strictly rejected, denied, clinging to the label of 'unholy' or 'pagan'. If folk rituals and folklore did not contain Christian content, did not contradict church canons and were, according to many researchers, no more than the 'fruit of native fancy people's fantasy', the clergy, unfortunately, paid little attention to the study of all these things" (Batyreva 2005, 178).

This situation can be explained by the fact that the historical and ethnological research in Podillja in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is closely connected with the Kam'janec'-Podil's'kyj seminary representatives. It was the ethnographic center of progressive youth – pupils and teachers of the seminary, whose activities were aimed at studying the Podil's'kyj village identity, folk life, customs, folklore and folk traditions, which were of decisive importance for the Ukrainian national rebirth. At the same time, collecting and recording the materials reflecting national identity and serving as Christian faith ministers, the priests purposely made omissions of obscene information, thus distorting the authenticity of documents.

“It is stipulated in many cities and villages that people keep playing scenes of pagan celebration and idolatry, create so-called roles, and on Easter Sunday, on the day of the apostles St. Peter and Paul, on the Trinity Sunday celebrate the demonic feast of the Bereza (birch), and arrange večornyci and horrible songs; on Ivan Kupal people do celebrate the idolatry scenes because of their own misunderstanding, and the priests, being pastors, do not forbid them to do it”, wrote Iosaf Horlenko, the Archbishop of Belgorod, in his instructions to the clergy, from November 10, 1750 (Sumcov 1885, 16-17).

Emphasizing the highly moral behavior of young people during evening parties or their calendar activities, A. Svidnic'kyj condemns the anti-popular actions of the worship ministers, which led to the fading of village traditions, explaining that this, obviously, does not depend on the people's character, but that “foreign intervention is the reason. The clergy is especially distinguished in this respect. Recently, such holidays as Ivan Kupal, St. Andrew's Day, Malanka has been pursued with particular hatred because of the jealousy about the faith. When it comes to večornyci, they pursued it to oppose the debauchery” (Svydnyc'kyj 1985, 465–466).

In addition to the ecclesiastical inquisition, a public court (elderly people, at least four judges elected by the whole community) was also involved in the punishment of ‘faith defectors’, who at a general assembly imposed the punishment ‘guilty’ in the form of cash fines for the church or work during the fast or they refused to let marry people who wanted to. Some landlords supported such actions. However, being a son of a clergyman, A. Svydnyc'kyj comments on such behavior: “The fact that I talked so much about prohibitions might seem to you inconsistent, by the way, having had the opportunity to study all the customs, I could not find the results of those persecutions. On this occasion I can say that not everything has been transferred: people are very stubborn in their attachment to anything. Moreover, I studied the people's habits in my father's parish, who himself was dissatisfied with the prohibitions and remained a Ukrainian. He looks so correctly at the folk games, he, of course, not only didn't forbid them for the people, but also allowed his children to take part in the celebrations of Ivan Kupal, and so on” (Svydnyc'kyj 1985, 467). But, as Ivan Franko wrote, “the regeneration of human views and beliefs with the help of administrative

orders turned out to be the same fiction as the assistance of the spiritual courts and the Inquisition” (Franko 2008, 53).

In the late Middle Ages, and in the last two or three centuries, there was a partial adaptation of some genres to the church calendar. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Podillja and in Galicia, Christmas carols on gospel themes were widespread. Their authors were highly educated monks of the Počajiv Lavra.

Ilarion the Metropolitan, being a minister of Christian faith, a teacher, professor and rector of the first Ukrainian University in Kam’janec’-Podil’s’kyj, thoroughly studied the question of the church’s struggle against the calendar rituals for the people and left the descendants a true history of the Ukrainians’ worldview, which was highlighted in the work *Pre-Christian Beliefs of the Ukrainian People* (Ilarion 1991).

S. Efremov noted in his *History of Ukrainian Writing* (1995) that “there is no more hopeless case than the struggle with a routine, there may be nothing more stable than settled forms of life, which change themselves slowly and under the influence of new circumstances, but never under the influence of prohibitions and orders. The unceasing war with the people was like a Sisyphus task, and people satisfied their aesthetic needs by their own resources, while rejecting bookish moralising, or by reworking it on their own way” (Efremov 1995, 235).

During the Soviet times, the church, as an ideological antithesis to the prevailing power system, came under repression and destruction. At the same time, the persecution of the Christian canons and the national calendar ritual of Ukrainians continued as they contradicted the program of creating the image of the “Soviet man” and “Soviet culture” in general. The Ukrainians’ rituals such as caroling, sowing the houses with seeds, ornamentation of lanterns by “diduch” etc. were almost completely destroyed. For a long time, local leaders forbade and persecuted carol singing groups, accusing them of being “religious” or even “nationalists” (Skuratovs’kyj 1994, 218). It should be noted that during the period of severe taboos and persecutions, the calendar game practice survived due to the older generations’ memory (the transmission experience) and due to childish curiosity and courage, while punishment for children ended with oral remarks and “instructive” conversations of party leaders with parents. However, due to the specific childish memory, they were not able to remember the entire scope of the rite, so for this reason, we have lost some of its fragments.

The atheist ideology, interfering in the sphere of life and the circle calendar custom, violated the order of transfer preservation and continuity of the established laws of the Ukrainian life. More than half a century of aggressive and brutal, totalitarian attitude to traditions, did not confirm the “correctness” of thoughts the atheist ideology tried to set. Having undergone a difficult and thorny path of survival, traditional feasts in independent Ukraine are gaining momentum in their rebirth and rooting into the cultural life of the people. However, the development and availability of Internet games has become a hindrance and a challenge to popular games. The demographic situation in Ukraine and the

breakdown of the village community due to urbanization has also played a negative role. For these reasons, we witness the revival of Ukrainian cultural traditions with the imitation of certain theatrical elements of the rite which were partially forgotten or brought from other areas, including festivities.

The current need for a understanding of the phenomenon of the festivity tradition in its ethno-regional location and nationwide dimension obliges researchers of festive reality to perform an analysis of the folk festivities' texts as national-identical folk forms. The festivity practice analysis of the ethno-region of Podillja shows a certain stability in the life of folk games and variety of poems of their local expression (the empirical material includes the handwritten fund of the educational and research laboratory of ethnology of the Kam'janec'-Podil's'kyj Ivan Ohienko National University (more than 800 folkloric samples) and material, collected by expeditions held during 1992–2015 on the territory of the ethno-region – Podillja). It was found that due to oral transmission new variant festivity forms were formed in the ethno-region, which are grouped and characterized by 1) the similarity of the festivity names, 2) by the conditions of organization and conduction, and 3) use of attributes.

Another peculiarity are the transformational changes, such as an adult game at funeral ceremonies (“Loubok”) and kid’s game called “Lupaka”, the funeral game “Mlyn” (‘Mill’) and a wedding game with the same name and rules “Mlyn” (held in Vinnyč’ja). In the work of V. Hnatjuk, “Funeral Rites and Ordinances” (Hnatjuk 1912, 131–424) one can read about games in the house with the dead person such as “Buy the hare”, “Perstenec” (‘Ring’), “Drag the Beech” (Carpathian region), which today form a separate group of children’s games. There is a significant array of game texts modified by Soviet ideologists. Pioneers damaged the rituals very much. They did not make changes in the rules, but they created samples of folk game culture in a new way. For example, such folk children’s games as “Broke the Chain”, “Koval” (‘Smith’), “Korol” (‘King’), “Vorota” (‘Gate’), “Dzvin” (‘Bell’) got the name “Leader, Leader, Give us the Pioneer”, only nomination system was modified – the rules of the game remained traditional. The same trend is observed in the games “Sonce” (‘Sun’), “Icyk”, “Hrydky”, “Šakuny”, “Mendal” with the changed name “Classics”. A number of catch-up games got new names: “Svitlofor” (‘Traffic light’), and the favorite children’s play “U kvača” (‘Dauber’), “Bring a flag”, etc. It is important to stress that the local addressing of the most popular game activities in the region of Podillja in the last five years remains unchanged. As noted by collectors of games of the family-ritual nature, mostly wedding rituals, namely: “Handzia” (Horodoččina), “Kaperuš” (Čortkiv, Zališčyc’ja district of the Ternopil’ region), “Holub and holubka” (village Kašpirovka, Zališčyc’kyj district), “Verbinka” (Vinnyč’ja region) confirm that fact. According to V. Barašuk, the wedding musician, the participants of the wedding event willingly play the game “Kaperuš” (Zbručans’ke village, Borščiv district, Ternopil’ region.), the game “Ity zbuja” (Kudrinec village, Borščiv district, Ternopil’ region), and also play the game “Holubka”, which is popular in all settlements of the Ternopil’, L’viv

and Ivano-Frankiv's regions. However, there is a tendency towards introduction of samples of modern mass culture game folklore to local sources and their assimilation to the rite. Respondents describe a number of games that are not traditional in a certain locality (Ščehel's'kyj 2015, 322–324, 326–329, 334, 336, 338–340). It is a result of relocation of the family ritual celebration to new untraditional spaces (celebrating family events in cafés or restaurants with a well-thought-out cultural program and the involvement of the toast master).

Calendar-ritual game folklore of the Podillja population, having been released from totalitarian postulates, continues its antique tradition. The largest centers of the “Christmas Nativity”, “Malanka” are the Ternopil' region (Ustja and Gorošova village). In the Kam'janec' region, the “Vertep” has been restored by the group “Renaissance” of the faculty of history students (headed by V. Jakubovs'kyj) and by students of the faculty of Ukrainian philology and journalism (leader-organizer V. Ščehel's'kyj) who take an active part in the annual “Vertep” competitions, greeting their colleagues, residents and guests of the city with “live Vertep”, as well as the public organization of the city of Kam'janec'-Podil's'kyj “Podil's'kyj Brotherhood”, headed by M. Mošak.

At the present stage, school pupils' organizations play a significant role in preserving and popularizing the children's game traditions of the Podil's'kyj region. Members of these organizations are looking for and recording folk games and rites from the first mouth and performing them in the children's team. For example, the district children's organization of pupils “Naddnistrjanočka” in the Zališčyc'kyj district of the Ternopil' region consists of three smaller groups: “Rosynočky” (1<sup>st</sup> grade), “Džerel'ce” (2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> grades) and “Strumočky” (4<sup>th</sup> grade). Their mission is to visit junior pupils during long breaks with the aim of teaching them folk games while providing leisure. From the stories of respondents - teachers who coordinate this work - games such as “Farby” (‘Colours’), “Kitty, Kitty, Sour Cream”, “Chovanky” (‘Hide-and-Seek’), “Lapanka”, “More chvyljujet'sja raz” (‘The Sea is waving’), “Husy, husy” (Geese, Geese), “Frogs” – are the most popular ones; the children also like the ritual games – “Podoljanočka”, “Proso” (‘Millet’), “Mak” (‘Poppy seeds’) and others. It should be noted that such games are easy to play and do not require the organization of a special playground, and, consequently, can be conducted both in school yards and in gyms. The activists working in the Chmel'nyc'kyj area, in the city of Kam'janec'-Podil's'kyj and district educational departments developed a course named “Ukrainian Studies” (the creative group “Regional studies” under the direction of the teacher of Verbec'kyj secondary school N. Jadvihun), the program “Popular game as a means of spiritual and physical education”, Podoljanočka (for elementary school), structural-functional models of collaboration of the school team with the family.

According to the principles of the Ukrainian Expedition of Student Youth “Ukraine is my Motherland” in the Chmel'nyc'kyj region, its participants conduct research work, collect empirical data, record games, statistical information. One of the directions of this expedition is “From the Parent's Well”, which in-

volves studying the traditional holidays, rites, household culture, folk crafts, in particular folk games and fun. Processing the respondents' answers (students of the Faculty of Ukrainian Philology and Journalism of Kam'janec'-Podil's'kyj, Ivan Ohienko National University) to the quiz "Folk Games and Fun" and the folkloristic quiz "Ukrainian Folk Games and Fun" (Ščehel's'kyj 2015, 529), developed by the educational ethnology laboratory staff, a generalized picture of the current existence of the most popular games in Podillja was set. Children play "Žmurky", "Chovanky", "Pidžmurky" (Hide-and-seek), "Farby", "Cepi, cepi, kovani" (Forged chains), "Father Panas", "Kvač", "Dohanjalky" (Catching up), "Kozaky rozbijnyky", "Fights", "Zipsovanyj telefon" (Spoiled phone), "Husy-lebedi" (Geese-Swans), "Nad zemleju" (Above the ground), "Platočok" (Handkerchief), "Zamorozky" (Freeze), "The third wheel", "Pekur", "Father killed a boar", "Lapanky" (Touchings), "The blind cat", "Kvočka" (Mother Hen), "The sea is waving", "Broken dance", "Mak", "Podoljanočka". Students of the Kyjiv Taras Ševčenko National University (V. course, speciality: folklore studies, Ukrainian language and literature, foreign language) conducted the degree of the game practice roots and reflected it in the names in order to compare the existence of popular games. They studied the games "Podoljanočka", "Kvač", "Hovanky", "Kvass" or "Catch us", "Curved mirror", "Kvočka", "Platočok", "Cat and Mouse", "Daughters-mothers", "Bytky" (on Easter), "Spoiled Phone", "Baba Kuca", "Strumočok", "We sow". The students discovered the tendency of giving similar names to the games and of following traditional rules. They also described variational modifications of the games which they recorded.

Thus, having undergone the periods of confrontation, survival and revival, the game practice of the Podillja region shows its resistance and ability for renovation. It maintains the unity of generations, although one can observe new elements in the game reality, which are explained by the process of increasing the mobility of population and use of the contemporary communication technologies.

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