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The Spruce in the Culture of the Podhale Shepherds

ABSTRACT

In this article I tackle the issue of the worship of spruce trees in the culture of the shepherds in Podhale, a region in southern Poland. This is an issue related to the particular significance of the spruce. It has played a great role in the culture of the whole Podhale region, and especially in the pastoral culture of this area. The spruce was elevated to the rank of a symbol of good luck, prosperity and well-being. All activities carried out in the work of shepherds were connected with the ceremonial treatment of spruce trees. It should be noted that these activities were religiously and magically motivated, as spruce twigs were blessed in the church beforehand. However, this does not change the fact that the rituals were magical. An example would be the custom according to which shepherds would pin spruce or fir twigs to their hats, believing that this would keep them and their sheep safe. Nowadays, shepherding culture enjoys great interest among researchers, as well as among Polish and even foreign communities, who apply for participation in shepherding courses organized today. The magic associated with pastoral culture was also reflected in Polish literature and dialect poetry. Readers can refer to the works of such poets and writers as: Seweryn Goszczyński, Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, Władysław Orkan, and Stanisław Witkiewicz or dialect poets Wanda Szado-Kudasikowa and Roman Dzioboń.

KEY WORDS: sacred tree, spruce, magic, Vlachs, pastoral culture, literature, poetry

STRESZCZENIE

Rola świerka w kulturze pasterskiej Podhalan

W zaproponowanym przeze mnie artykule zajmuję się zagadnieniem kultu świerka w kulturze pasterzy na Podhalu, regionie w Polsce Południowej. Jest to temat związany ze szczególnym znaczeniem drzewa, jakim jest świerk. Odegrał on na całym Podhalu, a zwłaszcza w kulturze pasterskiej tego obszaru ogromną rolę. Został wyniesiony do rangi symbolu szczęścia, pomyślności i dobrobytu. Wszelkie czynności wykonywane w pracy pasterzy związane były z uroczystym traktowaniem świerka. Należy zaznaczyć, iż czynności te miały religijno-magiczne motywacje, bowiem gałązki świerka poświęcone były wcześniej w kościele. Nie zmienia to jednak faktu, iż późniejsze rytuały miały charakter magiczny. Przykładem będzie choćby zwyczaj, zgodnie z którym pasterze przypinali gałązki świerka bądź jodły do kapelusza, wierząc, że im samym oraz owcom nic nie zagraża. Współcześnie kultura pasterska cieszy się ogromnym zainteresowaniem wśród badaczy naukowych zarówno z Polski, jak i z zagranicy, którzy zgłaszają swoje uczestnictwo w organizowanych dzisiaj kursach bacowskich. Magia związana z kulturą pasterską znalazła swoje odbicie również w literaturze polskiej oraz poezji gwarowej. Czytelnicy mogą sięgnąć po dzieła takich autorów jak Seweryn Goszczyński, Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, Władysław Orkan, Stanisław Witkiewicz oraz po dzieła twórców poezji gwarowej: Wandy Szado-Kudasikowej, Romana Dziobonia.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: kult, drzewo, świerk, magia, Wołosi, kultura pasterska, literatura, poezja

Introduction

Today, the shepherding culture is experiencing some revival in the areas of the Polish-Slovakian border region, including Podhale and Orava. This is the result of a number of EU projects which are aimed at raising regional awareness and cultivation of native traditions. In 2017, the Małopolska School of Hospitality in Myślenice organized a shepherding course, directed to all those interested in learning under the motto “How to work the Podhale pastures?” One hundred twenty-one individuals signed up for this free course, including people from across Poland, Romania and the UK. The apprentice course included 42 hours of theory and 160 hours of field work and was intended to prepare the apprentices to help with the shepherds’ work. The course was

intended to prepare the participants to work with sheep and to the role of senior shepherd. On the other hand, it was addressed to experienced shepherds who wanted to confirm their skills with a certificate. The shepherding work involves hard manual labor and long-term solitude in the pastures, often for months, which the course participants were fully aware of. The project was aimed not only at supporting the dying out professions, but above all at emphasizing the strengths and foundations of highland culture.¹ In Podhale, an annual Shepherds' Festival has been held annually since the 1980s, around the feast of St. Adalbert [patron saint of spring and shepherds in Slavic folk culture—transl.]. It gathers more and more Carpathian shepherds. They participate in Holy Mass in the basilica in Ludźmierz, celebrated for the purpose of successful pasture. The celebrations of blessing the sheep and shepherd's equipment are also held every year on Tarasówka in Małe Ciche. The celebrations, older than those in Ludźmierz, have a more local character.²

Topics related to shepherding culture occupy more and more place in ethnographic works. Researcher Ewa Kocój has been investigating shepherds' culture related to the cultural heritage of Vlachs, from Albania to the northern Carpathians, since 2015. These studies are part of the NPRH grant "Vlachs in Polish and European cultural space."³ Kocój's current research, as well as the earlier work of ethnographers such as: *Pasterstwo Tatr Polskich i Podhala* by W. Antoniewicz, *Osady prawa wołoskiego i ich mieszkańcy na Rusi Czerwonej w późnym średniowieczu* by G. Jawor or *Językowo-kulturowy obraz Wołochów i Wołoszczyzny w języku polskim* by J. Porawska prove that the Podhale shepherding customs have their roots in the distant statutes of Vlachian law.⁴

1 <https://www.pulshr.pl/rekrutacja/kurs-zawodowy-na-bace-i-juhasa-co-czeka-kandydatow-na-egzaminie,45618.html> (access: 22.01.2019).

2 A. Mlekodaj, *Kwietno Pani. O gwarowej poezji Podhala w ujęciu kulturowym*, Rabka Zdrój 2015, p. 61.

3 E. Kocój, *Śladami ostatnich wędrujących pasterzy karpaccich. Raport z wiosennego redyku rodziny Szczechowiczów (kwiecień 2018)*, "Almanach Nowotarski," Podhalańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Nowym Targu, No. 22, 2018, p. 179.

4 Vlachs are a nation originating from Romania, which includes also Aromanians stemming from the Balkan Peninsula. In the thirteenth century, they began to migrate north, where several Danubian principalities formed and united later in the two states: Moldavia and Wallachia. In the sixteenth century the area was completely conquered by the Turks, which resulted in further Vlachian migration. Grzegorz Jawor, a researcher of the Vlach history, says that in 1202 the Drag (Saxon) people came to the Red Ruthenia, and in 1262 the family of Drohomirecki of the Sas coat of arms is noted. This family belonged to Wallachian peoples. G. Jawor, *Osady prawa wołoskiego i ich mieszkańcy na Rusi Czerwonej w późnym średniowieczu*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2004. Thus, we know that the Vlachs arrived in the area of today's Southern Carpathians in the thirteenth century, from where they expanded on until the fifteenth century, as they reached the area of Podhale. The first village founded by them [in the

In connection with the contemporary revival of the herding culture in my own scientific and personal interests, I made an attempt to investigate the question of spruce worship⁵ in the culture of the Tatra shepherds. In preparation, I mainly used the method of analyzing existing materials on top of the method of diagnostic survey, including interviews. In order to develop a research problem, I reached for such literature as *Wierzenia i praktyki magiczne pasterzy in: Pasterstwo Tatr polskich i Podhala* by B. Bazińska, *Podhalański baca – pasterz, czarownik i protoplasta góralskiego zdobnictwa* by W. Bachleda-Dorcarz, and *Czary góralskie. Magia Podatrzka i Beskidów Zachodnich* by U. Janicka-Krzywda and K. Ceklarz.

Holy trees

Podhale is not an isolated area in terms of tree worship, namely, with honoring them and treating them as symbols of life and fertility, or recognizing them as epiphanies of supernatural power, places of revelation or abodes of deities. It has been around since the dawn of history in many cultures around the world. Many researchers of Indo-European culture

Polish Carpathians—transl.], chartered on the Vlach law in 1416, was Ochotnica. Dawid Wołoch, the founder of the village, received the foundation charter from the king Władysław II Jagiełło. As they migrated, the Vlachs brought original ways of grazing sheep to the new mountain areas, consisting of cyclical moving the herds of summer mountain pastures to lowland pastures for the winter. The livestock farming economy built by the Vlachs is visible to this day among the inhabitants of the Carpathian Mountains (Lemkos and Tatra highlanders). Furthermore, the Vlachs brought with them the skills of processing the products obtained from livestock farming, such as milk, wool and leather. Researchers of the Wallachian culture indicate that the population was of an Orthodox Christian denomination. In addition, there are mentions of the beliefs of Vlachs as imbued with numerous prejudices and superstitions, which in part certainly have left traces in the Tatra shepherd beliefs. J. Porawska, *Językowo-kulturowy obraz Wołochów i Wołoszczyzny w języku polskim*, <https://genealogia.okiem.pl/forum/viewtopic.php?f=19&t=22226> (access: 23.01.2019).

- 5 The definition of worship refers to all religious activities or a system of rites in a particular religion. Worship is part of a religious ritual. It is closely associated with honoring someone or something that has a creative power for the cosmos, the world and people. Worship arises from the need to understand the reality surrounding man, and the desire to encounter the sacred in one's environment. Sacrum in folk culture refers to the world of the supernatural and religious values, i.e. God, angels, Virgin Mary, saints, blessed souls, the Church and the clergy that all shape the sphere of holiness. In a wider perspective, sacrum also applies to objects, features and phenomena. In this sense, qualities of holiness are related to trees, rivers, mountains, celestial bodies, rules of life, the elements, as well as the farm, the family, and work. J. Styk, *Sacrum w kulturze ludowej*, <https://pismofolkowe.pl/artykul/sacrum-w-kulturze-ludowej-2494> (access: 26.02.2019). Sacrum manifests itself in a world in which man lives, so man will look out for such elements of the cosmos through which holiness is expressed in the most understandable ways. For this reason, man has created a whole sphere of religious symbols that allow them to communicate with the sacred. *Mały słownik religioznawczy*, ed. Z. Poniatowski, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1969, p. 241.

claim that the first images of the cosmos in the form of a tree appeared in the fourth millennium B.C., as evidenced by abundant iconography from East Asia and Africa. In many cultures, religious thought remained greatly influenced by nature, which shaped human ideas about the divine essence. Primitive man believed that the world was separated out of chaos and darkness, therefore the creator of that world had tremendous strength and creative power. Mankind searched for the most perfect specimen of nature the surrounding world a chosen by a deity as the personalization of the laws that govern the world. Man attributed this power to the tree, which has become *Arbor Mundi*, the *World Tree*, which stretched around the sacred space, ordering everything that was around.

The symbolism of the World Tree was used to order parts of the world around the horizontal and vertical structure of the Holy Tree. This structure represents the underworld, earth and sky; or the past, present, and future; the ancestors, the present generation, and their descendants; and many other meanings, such as: fire, earth, water in its roots, trunk and branches, respectively. The World Tree embodied an extraordinary life force, giving immortality and knowledge of the universe. It represented the cosmic axis around which life took place in the cyclicity of nature and fertility. *Arbor Mundi* was a connection between the microcosm and the macrocosm, between man and the supernatural world.⁶

The World Tree was present in the religious symbolism of almost all peoples. In the Indian tradition, the Holy Tree was a banyan tree; in the Old Icelandic tradition it was an evergreen ash, and in the tradition of the Greeks and Romans it was an olive tree.⁷ In ancient Greece, we can

6 I. Kaczor, *Kult drzew w tradycji mitologicznej i religijnej starożytnych Greków i Rzymian*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2001, pp. 47-48.

7 In the Indian tradition, the World Tree is presented a reversed form—roots up—which symbolizes the living, constantly renewing universe, while elements such as the trunk, limbs and branches are one unit. M. Eliade believes that the inverted image of the Cosmic Tree, the *Aśvattha*, was inspired by the way sunlight is dispersed. M. Eliade, *Traktat o historii religii*, transl. J. Wierusz Kowalski, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1966, p. 270.

In the Old Icelandic tradition, the Holy Tree was an evergreen ash, which formed the basis of the world. Two wells sprang at its roots: the source of the living water dedicated to the goddess *Urd*, and *Mimir's* well carrying the water of knowledge. Under the roots of the ash tree, the kingdom of the dead and the land of the giants spread. According to Old Germanic stories, war was being waged between the gods and the evil forces. The universe will be destroyed, and only the evergreen ash will survive, remaining the mainstay of the cosmic order. I. Kaczor, *Kult drzew*, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

In ancient Greece, olive tree branches were also a symbol of happiness and prosperity, and they were often placed in cots of newborn children. In ancient Rome, when a boy was born, a tree was planted, the development of which predicted the subsequent fate of the child. I. Kaczor, *Kult drzew*, op. cit., p. 52.

also find symbolism associated with coniferous trees, also with the spruce. In one of the myths, Artemis decided to turn Actaeon into a deer in the valley of Gargaphia covered with spruce and cypress trees.⁸ For the Greeks the spruce was a signifier of death, funeral rituals and mourning.⁹ The worship of trees also played a great role in the beliefs of the Slavs, including the ones inhabiting Poland. The oak was surrounded by a special reverence. For them, it was a symbol of longevity and immortality. Another equally magical tree for the Slavic culture was the spruce, that has played a huge role also in the area of Podhale. For the east Slavs, the spruce tree embodied longevity and the beginning of a new yearly cycle. In Belarus, the spruce was seen as cursed tree that grows in dark places. It was never used as a building material, nor was it ever planted in the vicinity of human settlements. In Ukraine, in turn, on the night before Midsummer, spruce twigs would be placed above doors, in the walls of houses and in the thatch of sheds to protect the households against witches, and pigs against diseases. In Russia, spruce needles were sewn into canvas based on a belief that it drove evil spirits away. In the west, spruce trees were used in funeral rites.¹⁰

In many cultures and traditions around the world, different tree species became objects of worship: oaks, ash and olive trees in Europe or fig trees in the East. In Poland, in the area of Podhale, the spruce played an important role.

The symbolism of the spruce in Podhale

The standard Polish name for the spruce, *świerk*, has many counterparts in folk dialects, such as *aglija*, *choinka*, *chojna*, *dana*, *eglija*, *jeglija*, *jegli-
na*, *jeglaska*, *jegliwina*, *jegła*, *skrzek*, *smerek*, *smrek*, *smrok*, *smroczyzna*, *śrók*,

8 Artemis was the goddess of unspoiled, wild forests and hunting, as well as fertility and death. She was also called the Pure and it was widely known that she did not even allow men to look at herself, which was most painfully proved by the young Akteon, grandson of the founder of Thebes, Cadmus. He was a passionate hunter, which could have made the goddess benevolent towards him, as she loved hunting so much. However, he was lost by his carelessness. One day, as usual, he chases game with his pack of dogs in the woods and mountains from dawn to dusk. Birds fled from him and he reached them with his feathered arrows in flight, and made animals hiding shoot out of the woods animals with his javelin. At noon he stopped next to a forest stream. Hidden among the shrubs, he could watch unseen as the goddess Artemis was bathing there together with her companions. He went a step further and the crack of a dry twig betrayed his whereabouts. The goddess saw him. As if jokingly, she sprinkled some water on him. Immediately Actaeon turned into a stag. J. Parandowski, *Mitologia grecka*, Wydawnictwo Puls, Warszawa 1992.

9 I. Kaczor, *Kult drzew*, op. cit., p. 110.

10 K. Szczęśniak, *Świerk, drzewo proste*, "Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne," Seria Językoznawcza, Vol. 20 (40), Iss. 2.

or *śwer*.¹¹ Around Podhale, the mainly adopted names are: *smerek* and *smrek*, used in virtually every village in the area, also in the shepherds' culture.

In the entire region, the spruce was seen as a mediator between humans and the supernatural. It was credited with protective properties against calamities, evil spirits, or disease. Spruce trees were worshiped as an abode of the sacred according to Tatra highlanders. Podhale Highlanders were convinced that a tree can become angered, which could bring misfortune on people, so no twigs would be ripped off them unnecessarily. It was believed that a spruce tree planted in front of a house protects against evil spells, and the smoke of burnt spruce resin would provide growth and security for the crops.¹²

My grandmother recalls that even in the 1940s, shepherds living in the pastures and all the inhabitants of Podhale would go to Wiktorówki to the sacred *smrek*:

There was a tree on Jaworzynka tree, which was a *smyrek*. First, there was a little figure of the Virgin Mary on it, because the Virgin Mary appear there. Everybody kissed this *smerek*. Then they put a little shrine down below, but we continued kissing this tree. One would always even just touch it with your hand. People came there to treat their teeth so what they would be healthy. They took slivers of wood from this *smerek* home, to bring good fortune.

A shepherd, Wojciech “the Lamé” Łukaszczyk from Murzasichle, remembers events at the Wiktorówki:

A 14-year-old girl, Marysia Murzańska, daughter of Sebastian and Marianna Budz from Groń grazed sheep there. One day fog rose over the pasture. Darkness was approaching, and Marysia was occupied with something in the hut, but she saw that her sheep ran off somewhere. She ran to look for them and directed her steps to the nearby forest on Wiktorówki. She said to herself, Mother of God, where my lambs? Suddenly she saw a dazzling light in a tree, and in this light, she saw a beautiful Lady ... After greeting the Bright Lady, the girl received a reply that the sheep were not gone and that she would see them in a moment. She was also given a command to admonish people to stop sinning and repent for their old sins ... Marysia returned to the pasture and told about everything that happened to her. The

11 A. Wierzbicka-Olejniczak, *Nazwy roślin w gwarach kujawskich, maszynopis rozprawy doktorskiej napisanej w Katedrze Dialektologii Polskiej pod kierunkiem prof. dra hab. S. Gogolewskiego*, Łódź 2001, p. 248.

12 U. Janicka-Krzywda, K. Ceklarz, *Czary góralskie. Magia Podtatry i Beskidów Zachodnich*, Wydawnictwo Tatrzańskiego Parku Narodowego, Zakopane 2014, p. 163.

shepherd of Father Kossakiewicz, W. Łukaszczyk, nailed a religious picture to the tree in an effort to commemorate the site of the revelation.¹³

Since then, the shepherds and the inhabitants of Podhale have come to this holy place, believing that it is a sign of an invisible power, and the spruce standing there has been wrapped in magic. Today the spruce is no longer at the site, but a shrine was placed there commemorating the above-described event.

A story is known of a smerek in Jurgów is known, after which a shrine remains, and the spruce had become a holy tree for the villagers:

Long ago a Jew bought the forest. In the forest there was a tree, and on this tree, there was a little shrine. The people wanted to buy this one tree from the Jewish man, because it was disgraceful to them that a Christian tree should grow in a Jewish forest. Well, they wanted to buy that tree, but he did not want to sell it. The wind came and broke off the top at six meters. Well, alright, this Jew comes in the morning and says: then I will take the top, and I'll leave you the stump. Spring comes, May comes, and the stump starts growing branches. So, God himself chose this place, and God lets this tree grow, and twelve apostles grow out of it! So are these twelve new trunks called, and the thirteenth was a Judas. A tiny one. And you will see it for yourself if you go there, there still are some remains of that stump.¹⁴

In turn, residents of Zakopane talk about the once revered "holy smrek," to which the power of reversing illnesses and misfortunes was attributed. The last spruce to which the Highlanders prayed for good weather, was reportedly cut down in 1759 in Zakopane by people from Nowy Targ brought by the Jesuit Karol Fabiani.¹⁵

The worship of spruce trees in the culture of the Podhale shepherds

The spruce has occupied a special place in the culture of the Podhale shepherds. The spruce chips blessed on Easter Saturday were a symbol and an introduction to all activities performed in the pasture. A fire was started by

13 <http://www.watra.pl/tatry/wiadomosci/2011/07/28/matka-boska-jaworzynska-krolowa-tatr-zaprasza-nas-na-wiktorowki> (access: 26.03.2017).

14 M. Golonka-Czajkowska, M. Maj, *Kapliczki, krzyże i figury przydrożne. Studium sakralizacji przestrzeni*, Bukowina Tatrzańska 2006, p. 96.

15 U. Janicka-Krzywda, K. Ceklarz, *Czary góralskie*, op. cit., pp. 163-164.

the shepherds' huts with fire brought from the church and blessed there. A similar practice applied to the sheep sprinkled with holy water, which also had been brought from the church. The magic rites of the shepherds were closely related to the Catholic faith. All activities performed in the pastures had magical and religious motivations. Although the highlanders of Podhale were Christians, they prayed to God and went to the church, their magical rituals were deeply rooted in their minds and everyday activities. These rituals were designed to protect shepherds against evil spirits and people who conspired with them. The shepherds needed to acquire a whole range of skills, from reading good and bad omens, to telling the time of day and year free from bad spells, to the knowledge of magic formulas and magical gestures. Magic¹⁶ was a crucial sphere of the life of the shepherds, and especially the senior ones. A chief shepherd, called a *baca*, needed to be versatile character, responsible for the skillful use of secret knowledge. He believed it to be a dangerous weapon that used in the wrong way could cause a lot of damage. Therefore, every step in the construction work or other activity was associated with a number of magical treatments. Knowledge of magical rites was a distant and unknown sphere for an ordinary mortal. A senior shepherd would pass on the secret knowledge he had

16 The term “magic” is derived from the Persian language, from the word *majim*, which means a “miracle worker,” or “mage.” Etymologists date the origin of this term to around 1000 BC. Magic has many colloquial meanings, as well as many scientific theories. One of the first researchers of magic was James George Frazer, a classical philologist and ethnologist, for whom magic was a system of insights and actions based on the belief that the person performing a magical procedure is able to control the forces of nature, guide them, or force them to obey. Magic became the link between human beings and the supernatural. It allowed mankind to believe in their own strength, eliminating the feeling of helplessness and powerlessness against the incomprehensibility of the world. Incomprehensible phenomena were explained magically, which led to the creation of a whole system of dependencies, e.g. the possibility of summoning, or spelling out a magical power in a certain way and at a certain time. J.G. Frazer adopted two basic laws of magic: like produces like—the effect is similar to the cause, and whatever was in mutual contact, will always remain in a certain relation to each other—for example, a witch does not need an animal itself, it is enough to have an object connected to it to influence it. J.G. Frazer, *Złota galaz*, transl. H. Krzeczkowski, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1965, p. 56.

These two principles of magic correspond to the principles of associating ideas based on similarity and contact. With time, however, mankind realized that such action to impact the surrounding reality is ineffective. Mankind understood that, apart from the visible world, there are invisible forces that people imagined in an anthropomorphic manner. It is this faith in the mutual dependence of people, supernatural forces and objects that is the essence of magic. According to this principle, man can at least influence nature, which was reflected in the rituals celebrated in Podhale during All Saints' Day and other Church holidays. B. Malinowski, *Szkice z teorii kultury*, transl. H. Buczyńska, H. Stasiak, T. Świąćka, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1958, p. 449.

gathered only to a one, young shepherd, thanks to which the magic did not lose its power.

The shepherds' faith was strongly bonded with their lives in the pastures. Harsh mountain climate, poor soils, unfavorable natural conditions and the nature surrounding the shepherds led to a gradual anthropomorphizing¹⁷ of the nature and the attribution of a symbolic function to it.¹⁸ Due to the fact that the shepherds were especially surrounded by spruces, they began to attribute exceptional strength and power to them, which ensured their safety and allowed them to order the space that surrounded them. In the area of architecture, the starting point for the construction of the shepherding hut and an outdoor sheep fold (*kosor*) was the choice of the right place to start construction work. It had to be a so-called clean place, namely, not marred by the spilled blood of a human being or an animal. Otherwise the shepherds would be haunted by bad luck. In addition, very often, the huts were put in the shade of a spruce tree, because it was believed that this would always bring good fortune to such a home. In the oral tradition we hear: "In the old times, they would put up a hut next to a *smreka* that was old, and had great and low branches and two trunks. Then, the fortune was good."¹⁹ After selecting the place, they would do to collect spruce wood, as it was considered a suitable material. The *baca* himself would bring the wood, since he was the only one who knew what wood was best suited for this purpose. They never used trees felled by lightning, or those on which someone had hung a shrine. It was believed that these were dedicated to God, and cutting them down was treated as sacrilege. A spruce tree destined for the construction of the hut was always cut down in the spring, after the full moon. The work was started in the time of the full moon, because it was believed that this time would bring the shepherds abundance and prosperity. The construction was not undertaken during Lent, on Fridays or on the 13th of any month, because those days were considered unlucky and could bring a long

17 Anthropomorphization—the word comes from Greek in a combination of two words: *ánthrōpos*—human being and *morph*—shape. The term is defined as a variety of animism, attributing physical characteristics, mental behavior and motives specific to man to objects, natural phenomena, plants, animals, abstract notions, divine beings. *Antropomorfizacja*, in: *Encyklopedia PWN*, <http://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/> (access: 15.12.2016). Zofia Charszewska's short story *Jak góralsczyk Kubuś z halnym wiatrem rozmawiał* [How a highlander boy Jack talked to the wind] shows anthropomorphizing of a foehn wind which, although seemingly angry, did not want to hurt people. Z. Charszewska, *Jak góralsczyk Kubuś z halnym wiatrem rozmawiał*, "Płomyczek," Iss. 14, 1938.

18 P. Kuleczka, *Regionalistyczne spojrzenie na Tatry i Podhale* in: *Regionalizm – Regiony – Podhale. Materiały z sesji naukowej Zakopane 4-6 grudnia 1993 r.*, ed. J.M. Roszkowski, Publisher Tatra Museum im. Dra Tytusa Chałubińskiego, Zakopane 1995, p. 166.

19 B. Bazińska, *Wierzenia i praktyki magiczne pasterzy*, in: *Pasterstwo Tatr polskich i Podhala*, Vol. 7, ed. W. Antoniewicz, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1967, p. 160.

streak of misfortune. Before the start of construction, a prayer was said and blessed spruce twigs were inserted in the thatch to protect the shepherds and their belongings. It was believed that the first ax strike on the spruce log had a significant impact on the fate of the hut, the shepherds and their belongings. After placing the first pair of roof beams, a spruce or fir twig was placed in the top, dressed in a red ribbon to protect the hut from evil charms. At the end of the construction work, the chief would incense the hut, its interior and the sheep pen. Incense was used by a *baca* repeatedly throughout the season. The incensing ritual was a magic procedure designed to direct the smoke into a place, on a human or an animal. It was apotropaic, namely, it was aimed at chasing demons away. The huts were also incensed to protect against lightning. The ritual of incensing was connected with a three-time lap, according to the movement of the sun. For this purpose, spruce resin, water from a spring, embers from the fire and herbs blessed on Corpus Christi or on the feast of Our Lady of Assumption [called *Our Lady of the Herbs* in Polish folk culture—transl.] were used. The treatment also was accompanied by uttering certain magic formulas, known only to the shepherd.²⁰ After incensing the hut, the *baca* went to the sheep pens, where he went around the herd and said a prayer. The treatment of incensing was also associated with women entering the pasture or the *kosor*. According to the highlanders, this brought a great misfortune for their enterprise. Incense helped in dispelling evil hexes. The end of the incensing ritual was associated with burying the campfire lit at the entrance to the sheep fold or at the spot where sheep would be milked, to provide constant care for the shepherds and the sheep. After the most important magical steps connected with building a hut were completed, the hut was cleaned and then a fire called a *watra* was lit in the middle, which would burn from the beginning of the grazing season until the end. The *baca* would mark the spot with sign of the cross using a spruce twig. The fire burning on the hearth was respected and regarded as a living, holy, true being, started naturally from by rubbing wood or striking a flint, without the use of matches. Fire defended the shepherds at night, not only from wild animals, but as it was believed, also from evil spirits. Shepherds could not allow the fire to die, because it was connected with the threat of failure in all spheres of life in the pasture. The *baca* would say a daily prayer to fire for good fortune, asking it to accompany the shepherds until the end of the grazing season.²¹

20 U. Janicka-Krzywda, K. Ceklarz, *Czary góralskie*, op. cit., p. 120.

21 W. Bachleđa-Dorcarz, *Podhalański baca – pasterz, czarownik i protoplasta góralskiego zdobnictwa*, Studia Artystyczne, Iss. 3, Uniwersytet Śląski w Katowicach, Katowice 2015, p. 139.

Spruce wood as having a special power, has found its important place in woodcarving.²² Magical powers were attributed to other trees as well, such as the ash or maple. The yew also played an important role, for it was another species, along with the spruce, which was used for making the so-called souls, splinters used to be inlaid in tools, which gave an extra protective dimension to the items. Ideally, such a splinter would come from a tree that was struck by lightning. A tool made from such a tree would have contain the holy element. Shepherds very rarely commissioned the village woodcarvers to make tools because they feared bad intentions on their part. They would take care of the production of tools themselves, in the winter, just before Christmas, between one and the other grazing period. The work was associated with chanting formulas, which were intended to help protect the shepherd's possessions against witchcraft. Due to the fact that the tools manufactured by shepherds had direct contact with milk, the entire process of their creation was permanently connected with magic and beliefs. With the development of woodcarving, also ornamentation developed, inspired by the outside world. The most commonly used ornamental motive was the sign of the cross skillfully integrated into a plant or geometric ornament. Very often, it was combined with spruce twigs. The aesthetic value of the work performed was not as important as the whole magical ritual associated with making tools and decorative elements, i.e. reciting magic formulas and various kinds of prayers. Later, the ornamental motifs used on the tools began to be associated with Christian symbolism and often accompany the initials of Christ (IHS) or Our Lady. Spruce twigs arranged in the shape of a cross and used as a decorative element and in many other rituals have become a kind of a totem,²³ not only in the lives of the shepherds, but of the entire population of Podhale. An important element can be the so-called *podłaźniczka*,²⁴ a Christmas period ornament made of spruce twigs that would be hung under the ceiling

22 Examples of the Podhale woodcarving include the iconic house crossbeams, decorative curtain rods and others. <http://www.ginace-zawody.watra.pl/snycerstwo> (access: 26.03.2017).

23 Totemism is a religious system based on the belief that certain objects, especially plants and animals, considered sacred, become emblems of a given group. The system is based on the worship of a totem, which is an object, plant, or animal. It is particularly widespread in primitive cultures. G. Ritzer, *Klasyczna teoria socjologiczna*, Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2004.

24 The etymology of the word *podłaźniczka* could be both a prepositional phrase: *pod lasem* (old Polish: *near a forest*) or a derivative of the appellative *las* (*forest*). *Podłaźniczka* and the subsequent Christmas tree are associated with the tradition of the Slavic worship of and evergreen trees. The Slavs believed that placing the branches of these trees in their homes would bring them abundant harvest the next year. Already during the November Day of the Dead, they practiced a custom of putting up the last sheaf of rye reaped in the summer in a corner of the room. The corn from it would be used to start the next year's sowing. In Slavic beliefs trees were conceived as the seat of the gods or represented a model of the universe. The Slavic symbolism of the

or on the door in a hut or cottage Spruce branches were used to decorate not only huts and homes during the Christmas holidays, but also altars on Corpus Christi and the streets of all major celebrations.

In the culture of the shepherds, spruce twigs bore special magic substance, also during the ritual associated with grazing sheep. They served as a talisman, a protection against witchcraft and bringing good luck to its holder. Junior shepherds named *juhas*²⁵ would pin spruce or fir twigs to their hats, as they would drive their herds during a *redyk*,²⁶ believing that this would keep them and their sheep were safe. Releasing the sheep into the pasture for the first time was associated with magical procedures that were intended to prepare them properly for possible undesirable action of other shepherds, natural forces or attacks of wild animals. At the exit from the pens, the senior shepherd placed spruce twigs, arranged in the shape of a cross, on the grass. Sheep, walking over it, become partakers of the ritual circle that protected them from evil. Spruce twigs arranged in the shape of the cross were also placed on the cloth used during the first milk straining to prevent its spoiling. In fact, almost all activities associated with the sheep grazing rituals are closely united with the use of spruce, as an element of the sacred, or supernatural. There was a list of dos and don'ts, which could not be broken during a *redyk*. Shepherds were not allowed to break spruce twigs so that they do not break their legs while the sheep were grazing. They had to remember which spruce pole was built into the *kosor* as the first one, so that, if the use of black magic was considered necessary, it could be removed from the earth and stuck back the other side up. Black magic was used by them in the event of suspecting hostile activity of other shepherds.²⁷ When the sheep found themselves in the pen (*kosor*), a may-pole (*mojka*) was stuck into the ground. It was the top of a spruce or fir tree, around which the flock would be led three times by the *baca*. During this procession, the *baca* would usually say *Our Father* and *The Glory Be*, and also the *Angelus*, this, care was applied in many pastures so that the procedure takes place before noon.²⁸ In the fall, on the feast of St. Michael, sheep were returned to the village. The return was called an *oschod*. At the

podłaźniczka was adopted also in Podhale. J. Strzelczyk, *Mity, podania i wierzenia dawnych Słowian*, Rebis, Poznań 2007.

25 *Słownik wyrazów podhalańskich*, in: *Podhale. Tradycja we współczesnej kulturze wsi*, ed. D. Tylkowa, Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Kraków 2000.

26 A parade connected with herding flocks to the mountain pastures in the spring and back to the villages in autumn. *Słownik wyrazów podhalańskich*, op. cit.

27 W. Bachleda-Dorcarz, *Podhalański baca – pasterz*, op. cit., p. 140.

28 This ritual was also visible in the culture of the shepherds in the area of Żywiec.

end of the season, the entire pasture was incensed once again, in thanksgiving for the success of the sheep parade.

Conclusion

To sum up, the spruce has played a huge role in construction, woodcarving, sheep grazing rituals and in the everyday life of Podhale shepherds. The shepherds' life was filled with magic emblazoned around the spruce. The spruce has become the most important element used in practically every religious or magical ritual to protect sheep, huts and shepherds from danger. The senior shepherd, a *baca*, as the most important person in the pasture, would pass on secret knowledge to younger shepherds, so that each activity was preserved in an order. Nature was understood and respected, and therefore proved to be accommodating and gracious. Giving the spruce a special, magical symbolism meets three important functions: practical, cognitive and psychological. The practical function was associated with the everyday life of shepherds, and so with their health and home-making. The cognitive function allowed them to explain the phenomena and laws governing the world. In turn, the psychological function was the most important one because it gave the shepherds a sense of strength, illusory control over the world, so they did not feel lost and helpless.²⁹

Today, the matter of the meaning of the spruce in the life of Podhale shepherds is still an open issue for research. The aforementioned ethnographer, Ewa Kocój, describes some contemporary shepherds' rituals using spruce twigs but she only discusses their practical functions. It is interesting, however, is that the senior shepherd courses organized today are becoming increasingly popular. It is also intriguing because of the culture-related magic rituals. It is certain that once the Tatra mountain pastures, the shepherd's huts, the everyday life of shepherds was shrouded in magic, which has left its mark on Polish literature as well as on the dialect. The time shepherds spent in the pastures was a period of difficult separation from their families, which brought about dreams, longings, and reflections. This has given rise to unique music, poetry and singing. In the space that surrounded the shepherds, a unique spiritual culture was enclosed, which spilled over into the entire Podhale region. It became an inspiration for descriptions of the Podhale nature and the life of shepherds by eminent artists, such as Seweryn Goszczyński, Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer,

29 G. Frazer, *Złota gałąź*, op. cit., p. 56.

Stanisław Witkiewicz, Władysław Orkan and contemporary poets, Wanda Szado-Kudasikowa and Roman Dzioboń.

Seweryn Goszczyński, in his *Dziennik z podróży do Tatrów* published in St. Petersburg in 1853, provides a picturesque description of the spring sheep parade:

The full spring is actually only revealed here at the end of May; but it also manifests itself more fully than anywhere else. The vegetation, muffled by the long cold, develops twofold and more luxuriantly; you can hardly keep ahead of its transition from deadness to full life. The whole region goes out at once in its spring holiday costume like a woman from her dressing room; it strikes you harder that you hadn't witnessed her dressing. In those last days of May, the shepherding migration of highlanders begins, and spills from the depths of the Tatra Mountains into the surrounding countryside. This lovely movement adds up to the young life of nature. I had the joy to be a witness to this, and I was looking from a spot which allowed me to catch the most important parts thereof with my eyes. You see ahead, far away, as from the dark depths of the Tatras, darker caravans are approaching, unrecognized yet, slowly drawing nearer one another, becoming clearer and clearer. Greater and greater. Soon they will all be gathered in the valley, flooding its space, moving around it; you start to distinguish people, horses, cattle of all kinds in this crowd, carts loaded with different equipment; after some time the crowd starts to split into different roads, in different directions; each troop is heading for the foothills until all of them disappear in the hundred ravines; but tomorrow you see all the mountains, the forests. The glades populated with flocks; you can hear the bells hanging around the necks of cattle from all sides; you are struck from all sides by the playing of flutes and fiddles; the singing of shepherds is heard from all the peaks, and the wild rocks echo to their hooting.³⁰

The spruce has taken an important place in contemporary dialect poetry. Wanda Szado-Kudasikowa, an inhabitant of Nowy Targ, author of seven volumes of poems, is in love with the highlander culture. She was a leader of regional culture groups, and she was active in the Podhalań Association and in the "Drogami Tischnera" Association. In her poem *Smreka*, she describes the spruce:

Smreka, household friend, good neighbor next door, be fragrant with your resin, be lovely in your green, get rid of your gloves and warm hat ...

30 S. Goszczyński, *Dziennik podróży do Tatrów*, Wydawnictwo Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 2005.

Mountains, woods and glades will follow you dancing. Already, the whole world is spinning.³¹

Another poem by the same author, *O smrecusiu balladka* (*A little ballad about the little spruce*), again, shows an adoration for the spruce, and an unusual fondness for it. In a fragment below the author emphasizes the connection between the spruce trees, pastures, and the Tatra Mountains. The spruce is treated personally as a literary protagonist:

The little spruce tree mourned being carried to the valley, when he was so jolly up there with his kin ... Come near, my dear! We shall adorn you with straw ornaments, little apples and garlands. We are so happy.³²

These fragments show the honorable place the spruce has occupied in the Podhale area until this day. It is treated as a home friend, a good neighbor, emanating good energy. Just as the power of the spruce used to be spilled over the Tatra mountain pastures, in shepherd's huts and the highlanders' houses, today it is felt in dialect poetry.

The spruce is also featured in the poems of Roman Dzioboń, a resident of Nowy Targ, author of volumes *Podhale, Ojcowizna* (*Patrimony*), *U świętej Katarzyny* (*At St. Catherine's*), and *Gazdówka w mieście* (*City homestead*). Literary critics considered his volume *Gazdówka w mieście* to be

a visible sign that, in the foggy and damp sinkhole between the two Dunajec riverbeds, in the City, which, stunned by the hustle and bustle of civilization, is slowly losing its roots and memory—the need for emotion, the need to understand and describe the surrounding world with poetic speed is still smoldering, which is the need to save everything that is dear to the heart.³³

31 W. Szado-Kudasikowa, *Smrek*, <http://www.pinkwart.pl/warsztat/MOK2004/Wanda12.htm> (21.01.2019).

32 W. Szado-Kudasikowa, *O smrecusiu balladka*, in: *Nastól Godni Cas*, Nowy Targ 2014.

33 Z. Szopińska, *Poetycka gazdówka Romana Dziobonia*, "Podhale," 1991, Iss. 5, Nowy Targ.

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