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Ukrainian Calendar Cry: the Magical Value and Functional Features of the Tradition

Abstract. The article describes calendar laments in the villages of the Dubrovotsky district in the Rivne region. At Pentecost following the liturgy, almost all of the villagers (except for pregnant women and engaged girls) go to the cemetery to visit the graves of their relatives; bringing tree branches with them. Here the women decorate all of their relatives' graves with herbs and tie kerchiefs on the cross; afterwards they cry for recently deceased relatives. The main function of this ritual is to wake up the dead. This feature is expressed by the popular use of the term vozbuzychdati X (to wake up the dead).

Key words: calendar laments, graves, decoration with herbs

Traditional calendar laments (laments performed at a certain time during the ritual year) were quite common in Ukraine in the early twentieth century. Records of calendar mortuary laments are kept from Poliss'a, Slobozhanshchyna, Holmschchyna and Pidlyassya, Bukovyna. However, this custom is not observed in Central Ukraine, where it is believed that the commemoration of the dead is a “light holiday”, during which one should not cry and be sad.

Today, calendar laments are preserved just in only in several villages in Dubrovotsky district in Rivne region. At Pentecost following the liturgy, almost all of the villagers (except for pregnant women and engaged girls) go to the cemetery to visit the graves of their relatives; bringing tree branches with them. Here the women decorate all of their relatives' graves with herbs and tie kerchiefs on the cross; afterwards they cry for recently deceased relatives. The main function of this ritual is to wake up the dead. This feature is expressed by the popular use of the term vozbuzychdati X (‘to wake up the dead’).

This article proposes to examine these calendar funeral laments, using the material of an actual lamentation ceremony held in the village of Svarytsevychi; the field research was conducted by the author in 2011, as well as by her colleagues in 1985–1987 and 2010. For a researcher of ritual culture it is very important to document in real situations. This is especially true as regards folklore in a ritual context; in my case, the funeral laments. There is special moral and ethical difficulty in the process of recording, since it is inconvenient to record during funerals. Hence, in this situation I decided to use the opportunity to make notes on calendar funeral laments, which are very close to the funeral laments. The full scope afforded by firsthand documentation of performance makes it possible to observe some details which would never be mentioned in interviews by respondents in other situations, because they are unable to notice them. In my experience, a very important component in mourning is a special pose held by the lament-performer during the lamentation and ritual calming by the relatives.

Calendar mourning is a genre in the Ukrainian lament tradition which also includes funeral, metaphorical, mock, and obscene texts as well as those lamenting soldiers going off to war and texts written for special occasions. (Koval-Fuchylo 2014: 61–95). The calendar mourning is performed for the deceased in the cemetery on a special commemoration day; mostly it falls on Pentecost (Green Monday) or Khoma’s Sunday, which follows Easter Sunday. It is evident that in the past, the calendar mourning custom was rather common in Ukraine (Sventsitsky 1912: 29, 32), but it is much less so today.

Today, in the Dubrovotsky district of the Rivne region, the day of calendar mourning falls on the feast of the Trinity Sunday. This custom is quite active in the village of Svarytsevychi. In the past, this village was of great interest to the scholars who had searched and studied the folk calendar rites. First of all, the main point of interest is the rite called vodyty kusta (‘to drive kust’, i.e. a bush) (Kitova 1972; Davydyuk 2010). The ritual is performed by girls in groups. One of those girls is decorated with a thick wreath of green leaves and flowers; she represents the kust. With maple branches in their hands, the girls visit homes singing ritual songs. For their visit, the hosts reward them with money and treats. The rite of vodyty kusta and calendar mourning are an integrated set of rites honouring the dead.
Our interest is in the custom of mourning on the graves of the dead on Pentecost (Trinity) morning, which had been recorded before by folklorists in this village. Recordings of the (actual) performance had been made by Stephan Sheychuk in 1987, by Sergiy Leychuk in 1987, by Anderij Voychak and Yurij Rybak in 2010, among others. On the 11th and the 12th of June, 2011, on Pentecost, we made eleven recordings of the funeral laments at the time of the ceremony. During this exploration, we were guided by the method of participant observation. Those recorded materials provide the main sources for this article.

On Pentecost morning, after the liturgy in the church, all residents (except for the pregnant women and engaged girls (Shevchuk 1987: 1)) go to the cemetery with branches of maple, basswood, and ash to awaken (vozbiditi, vozbuždat’) their dead relatives, accompanied by many recorders (folklorists and musicologists). They bring candy with them as well. In the past, they also brought buns and wine, which were left on the graves: “It is the law that we should come here” (Yefemets M.A.); “We have to cry to wake up our relatives, they should hear us”; “We must wake up and tell the dead relatives everything that had happened this year.” Previously one should walk three times around the grave moving clockwise (Shevchuk 1987: 87), but in our case, we did not succeed in recording such a sacred action because it was forbidden.

In Svarytsevychi, they usually lament for the deceased who had died not long before; first of all, they lament for those who died during the previous year; however, feel the need, feel sorry for the family, they cry for those who had died long before. There is a rule that the cry should not be long-drawn; otherwise it will harm the deceased and the unborn children. A woman told me a dream; she heard it from another woman who dreamed of her dead daughter. The woman said:

– To cry for a long time – that is forbidden!
– Do they say the deceased will lie in the tears?
– In tears. So ... I don’t know ... One woman told me a dream about her daughter. The daughter said, “Mom! I am wet to the waist! I can't dry out in any way” ... The first children of my father's mother were dying and dying and dying. Well, my aunt had already been born. She went to the graveyard, to her son; he had studied to be a teacher and died when he was 22 years old. She went there and began to cry. She was crying for a long time, and she fell asleep on the grave. And she saw (in her dream) an old man. This old, old man came and said, “Why are you weeping? Why are you crying? God gave you (a child), and God took (it) away. But if you want, take away the sand from the grave as you need it”.¹ She was...
frightened, and said: “I will get married my daughter², I will sing the first,³ and will no longer cry⁴.” And she did not cry anymore and gave birth to her children. She bore still more children: Genia and Olga, and my father, and Natasha. Four children were born. And there were nine children, and five of them died. It is forbidden to cry for a long time.

– And do they say that for the first child its mother could not cry?
– It was forbidden for her to go on the graves. To cry – she did, but she did not go to the graves.
– Does she not go at all, or on this funeral day?
– On the funeral day. On the second day she goes.
– Why?
– I do not know.
– And maybe they say because every child will be lost with this visit?
– I do not know, I do not know. (Yefemets, M. A.)

The calendar mourning texts reflected syncretic mythological views about the world of the dead, which arose under the influence of pagan and Christian beliefs. For example, people believe that they should visit the grave, bring eggs on Easter and goodies on Pentecost, decorate the cross with an apron or a scarf (on the woman’s grave) and with towels (on the male grave). They do it this way because they believe that they will thus prevent the anger of the deceased; otherwise, the deceased will take the living. These kinds of beliefs were verbalized in the texts of the funeral laments. The things the villagers brought (towels and handkerchiefs) were referred to as gifts.

Oh and my Marusiochka⁵,
My good,
For 20 years, I never said any wrong words about you,
Always I bring gifts to you,
And all the time I cleaned thy grave,
I have brought gifts for you for 20 years.
Why did I not please you?
You took your husband away,
Oh why did you come get him?
Let him he would still preparing himself to go away,⁶
Oh my good home hosts,
Oh I don’t know you,
And I have never said anything against thee,
I have never offended you,
I always cleaned you,
I … always … for you...?⁷
You came to get your husband,
And also my host (Author is unknown).
At the same time, they believe that the best help for the dead is to order a liturgy in the Church:
– … let’s pay for the liturgy – it’s a grace to them, and so we go and cry – they do not hear.
– Maybe (they) hear.
– Aw, I do not know. If they had heard, they would stand up and talk to us. (Shvayko, A. H.)
When they leave the cemetery they are saying: “Let them rest! Let them rest with the saints, and let them wish good for us. Eternal rest, the heavenly kingdom for them” (Yefemets M. A.). This demonstrates the syncretism of archaic folk beliefs and Christianity.

In Svarytsevychi, almost every woman can perform the lamentation, and if the researchers ask them to perform the act, the local women do not refuse to mourn their loved ones. When a woman begins to wail, she always her body at the waist and/or leans the cross. More often she stands near the cross or moves around the grave. During the mourning, the woman can lean on the cross, kissing the photograph on the monument, and sometimes she rearranges a wreath or flowers on the grave. The mourning performs the appropriate melody like a recitative.

The typical motifs of the calendar laments are the stories addressed to the dead, which are about the daily work of their living relatives, asking the dead why he/she left his/her family, describing the pain of losing the relative, listing all the kind deeds of the deceased, appeals for them to stand up, begging them to meetings with deceased relatives, asking them to come in a dream. In the village of Svarytsevychi, the special motif of the kust driving celebration is mentioned. The daughter mourning her mother asked her why she does not celebrate the kust driving anymore, as the mother had loved to sing with the kust group during her lifetime:

Oh and where are you, my mom?
Oh and where are you, my dear?
Oh why didn’t you visit us?
Oh why didn’t you celebrate the kust?
Oh my dearest,
Oh my darling, answer me. (Shevchuk 1987: 7)

In the lament for her father, the daughter tells him that the village is celebrating, people are gathering in groups, and he is not among them:

Oh my darling,
Daddy, our dearest,
In the village all are celebrating,
All are gathering in the group, in the family,
And you do not, daddy. (Shevchuk 1987: 7)

The motifs of mourning tradition may be various. For example, in the mourning for a brother this motif takes the form of antithesis, at the positive pole of which is the past, when the celebration of the Holy Trinity was joyful and merry, and accompanied by songs, while the negative pole describes the modern time which is sad. In the lamentations for children the future is mentioned, when the singer says that she cannot sing anymore and also notes that she will never sing the kust songs.

Another original motif in the Svarytsevychi calendar laments is a call for the dead to come and visit a family at Pentecost. On the eve of this feast, the villagers prepare a funeral dinner named “old men (grandfathers)” and addressed to those “old men”, which call the dead to the commemorative dinner and invite the ancestors to join them. However, contrary to these beliefs, the bitter lamentations uttered awareness of the impossibility of return:

Oh Vouchyk, Vouchyk®!
Oh (you) lie and rest.
Visit us as a guest at Pentecost.
Take Vouchyk,
Take Shajka®,
Your baptized mother,
And come to us.
Say “Mommy! We will not come to you,
But you will come to us.
If we could,
We would fly with wings,
But we have no wings (but we do not have any wings).
How can we step out of the field,
When we lie there?... (Holod’ko, T. I.)

An integral part of the mourning text is an appeal to the dead, and it is often repeated. The frequency of repetition depends on the pain of loss: if the woman experiences more pain, then she repeats the appeal again and again, changing the text of the repetition, reaching out with new epithets:

Oh my dear child...
Oh my dear dove, oh and my flower,
And my doll, and my daughter so good,
And my young, who died so early,
And my so young, and my darling.
Why do you not live, my child, why do you not live?
Arise, daughter, rise, daughter,
Two weeks have been calling, two weeks crying,
But I don’t hear your voice, neither see your footstep.
And my dear child, and my dear,
And my dear bird, and my daughter. (Shevchuk 1987: 7)

The visit to the cemetery lasts about two hours, and then people go home to have lunch. After lunch, the groups go with the kust through the village, and later organize a festival in the main square of the village. Afterwards the participants of the ceremony construct the stage, upon which amateur bands from different villages in the Dubrovitsky area perform authentic folk music, lyric and calendar songs.

Notes

1 This is a metaphor for the uselessness of crying. It means that crying cannot help; it is not possible to bring back the dead this way.
2 It means that she will be an active member in a wedding, and she will not cry anymore.
3 In Ukrainian tradition, “I will sing the first” is a phraseological unit; here, it means that she will be the best singing on the wedding.
4 It means that she cannot raise the dead child.
5 The woman’s name is Maria; here it is a familiar nickname.
6 The second wife had wept for the first dead wife of her husband for 20 years. Now the husband has died; the second wife is weeping, asking why the first wife took her husband away, for after all, she took care of her grave, wept, and made offerings. This is a verbalization of the widespread belief among the Slavs that the dead entice the living to come join them.
7 The informant did not finish the lamentation, she had interrupted it.
8 The boy’s name is Volodymyr; here it is a familiar nickname.
9 Shajka is the boy’s nickname.
10 This is an example of an archaic dialogue between the dead and the living. The dialogue represents the voice of the dead person.

Informants

Shvayko, Anna Hryhorivna, born in 1929, recordings by Iryna Koval-Fuchylo, 12.06.2011.

Yefemets, Maria Andrijivna, born in 1941, recordings by Iryna Koval-Fuchylo, 12.06.2011.


Unknown woman, born in 1931, in the village Dubrivsk in the Zarichnyanskyj district of the Rivne region, recording by Iryna Koval-Fuchylo, 12.06.2011.

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Archaic Magic as Background to Artistic Inspiration and Interpretation

Abstract. There is good reason to believe that the popularity of ancient sacred and magical sites offer reassurance of another reality. Many of these sacred places are associated with a fundamental knowledge of wisdom, divine and mystical, which people of today would like to recapture.

Today’s religions often do not fulfill the needs of the soul, and these remote places hold spiritual powers that are reaching out to help. The rock art, petroglyphs and pictographs that were incised and painted on canyon walls and rock boulders were often the art of vision quests, the shaman emerging from within the stone, carving and painting his sacred visions on the wall. These carvings still emanate energy for those who visit these sites with open hearts.

My art is inspired by prehistoric rock sites. All that I feel and experience at these sites are within every piece of my art. My vision is to introduce the magic and mystery of ancient art images to people of today through my art.

The images I create on paper represent various kinds of ritual magic – vegetation and animal magic, shamanic rituals, ceremonial war rituals and more.

Key words: archaic magic, rock art, petroglyphs, sacred visions

There is good reason to believe that the popularity of ancient sacred and magical sites offers reassurance of another reality. Many of these sacred places are associated with a fundamental wisdom, divine and mystical, which people of today would like to recapture.

Today’s religions often do not fulfill the needs of the soul. I believe, after 28 years of experience searching for and discovering rock art sites, these remote places hold spiritual powers that are reaching out to help. The rock art, petroglyphs and pictographs that were incised, pecked and painted on canyon walls and rock boulders were often the art of vision quests. The shaman or young man finds a remote site and moves himself into an altered state of consciousness by fasting, often smoking hallucinogenic plants, sitting without sleep,
THE RITUAL YEAR 10

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