

EASTER CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS OF WESTERN PODILLYA

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ABSTRACT

The article examines Easter rituals, customs and traditions in Western Podillya ethnographic region of Ukraine. Analyzes the peculiarities of Easter rituals in certain villages and towns of the studied area, including their own local common and distinctive features. Easter is one of the most important Ukrainian holidays and certain pre-Christian customs and traditions can be traced in its celebrations. Ritual food plays an important role in the celebration of Easter, it has a symbolic meaning and affects the entire life of the family. Easter traditions and celebrations continue the spring festivities, they symbolize the awakening of nature from winter sleep and initiate the reproduction of the adult and the birth of a new life. Easter eggs – *krashanky* are symbols or rebirth. The traditions of Bright Monday or Drenching Monday (the second day of Bright Week celebrations) are described in the article as closely related to the water element, emphasizing the pre-Christian origin of this holiday, as well as the traditions of celebrating the third day (Bright Tuesday), which local residents considered to be the day for mutual visits to relatives, friends, and neighbors. *Keywords*: ethnographic area, ritual food, *krashanka* (Easter dyed egg), Easter games, Drenching Monday.

INTRODUCTION

Folk ritual creativity is the most stable conservative element in Ukrainian spiritual culture, and calendar celebrations, in particular, clearly show the specific features of a certain ethnographic region, these features are shaped by the regional internal historical development and external foreign ethnic influences of dominant cultures. Thus, the analysis of spring calendar rites of the studied region has a special role in the investigation of modern Ukrainian ethnological issues.

The spring ritual cycle in the studied area started to develop in the Neolithic period and ended in the Bronze Age, i.e., in the time of the establishment of a settled way of farming in the proto-Ukrainian lands¹.

The agricultural calendar, found and deciphered by scientist B. Rybakov provided valuable information about the celebration of spring holidays by our

¹ Scholars O. Veselovskyi, E. Anichkov, O. Potebnya, M. Hrushevskyi, A. Ivanytskyi, and others supported this opinion.

ancestors (Rybakov 1982: 81). According to the calendar, the spring equinox was one of the greatest holidays.

During the introduction of Christianity to the local tribes of the Ulychi and Tyvertsi, Easter as originally ancient pagan celebration of the spring equinox was dedicated to celebrating of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and retained the traditional meaning of the pagan rites, despite the fact that the Christian church tried to eradicate pagan traditions.

Spring calendar rituals of Western Podillya, having a pan-Ukrainian and pan-Slavic basis, are characterized by certain local features, formed under the influence of the historical, political, cultural, and ethnic development of this region. The most important feature is almost completely preserved ethno-cultural traditions, which have been popular until recent times in the studied region. The main factor was the cultural and educational influence of the priests of the Greek Catholic Church, who tried in every way to preserve Easter rituals of their ancestors and pass on traditions to young people.

PECULIARITIES OF PASCHAL FEASTS IN WESTERN PODILLYA

Easter is one of the most important Ukrainian holidays and culmination of the spring rituals of Western Podillya, as well as the whole Ukraine. Now Easter rituals are mainly reduced to the glorification of the Son of God – Jesus Christ, although the pre-Christian pagan celebration of two natural elements, sun and water, can also be traced in the church rituals. Easter in the villages and towns of Western Podillya would always begin at midnight with the Easter Vigil. Easter hymns were the most solemn of the entire religious calendar cycle, namely “The Angel Called” and “The New Jerusalem Rises”, which “due to their content and melodies inspired deep religious feelings and spiritual upliftment among the present parishioners, and the impression was even more powerful when “Christ is risen from the dead” sounded in the church (Lekhman 1983: 326). During the singing of the last kontakion², the parishioners would leave the church with the shroud, church flags and lit candles and walk around it three times. Then, after several days of silence, the church bells are chiming again, joyfully announcing the resurrection of Christ. If there were several bells in the belfry, the ringers played different melodies. Along with the bells, loud shots from *mozdirs* (handmade muskets) could be heard at that time. They used to shoot three times during the removal of the shroud in the studied region.

Almost all the residents of villages and towns in Western Podillya used to come to the Great Vigil of Easter. Easter Vigil was held under the bright lights and was accompanied with joyful singing of the church choir. This holiday was always enhanced by updated church paraphernalia. After the Easter Vigil a priest would start Easter-Basket Blessing of traditional Easter food, saying a prayer during the ritual. All the parishioners would stand around the church, putting down their

² Kontakia and troparia are short hymn associated with the day of the liturgical year. If it is Sunday, the troparion is for the celebration of Pascha (Easter). If it is a day before or after a holiday, then troparia and kontakia are sung about the holiday.

Easter baskets, covered with colourful towels with the inscription “Christ is Risen! – Truly He is Risen!”

Paska or Easter bread was the main ritual food during Easter (Paschal) celebrations. Traditional Easter basket would always contain Easter bread to be blessed (as people would always say: “we went to church for *paska* to be blessed”). As it was mentioned by V. Sokolova, “one of the important magical ways of celebrating fertility was to bake and eat ceremonial bread in spring. No doubt that this custom is much older than the Christian Pascha, it got its name from it, which proves how important was this ritual bread (*paska*) in the pre-Christian period” (Sokolova 1979: 111).

In most regions of Western Podillya, Easter baskets were carried by a husband (or by the eldest son in the absence of a husband) (Lepkyi 1991: 560). This primarily emphasized the patriarchal status of a man in families, and also symbolized prosperity in the household for the whole year (similar to the first visit of a man on the the feast of Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary into the Temple – Introduction/*Vvedennia* – or New Year’s Day).

After the food blessing, each host and his family hurried home, greeting all passers-by with “Christ is risen” on the way. This kind of Easter “hurry” after the Easter-basket blessing was characteristic not only of Ukrainians, but also of other East Slavic peoples. This tradition is explained as follows: “This is how fast the crops will soon grow, as the master runs”, “They hurry so that the girls will get married soon” (Sokolova 1979: 111).

After coming back home, a host used to go around his farm property – a barn, a stable, a hen house, an orchard, an apiary, a vegetable garden, saying: “Christ is risen!” and answering to himself: “Truly He is Risen!”. Only after that he would come to the house, saying: “Christ is risen!” and all the family members answered: “Truly He is Risen!” In Hutsul region men used to go to the stable after coming home, “where they called on the cattle to give milk as quickly and generously as quickly their master returned home with the blessed Easter food” (Horyn 1994: 144).

When a master entered the house with Easter basket in village of Zhabynya, Zboriv district, he used to bless everyone with the words: “May the Lord give all of you, close and distant family, happiness, health, and may you live till the next year’s Easter egg! Christ is Risen!” All members of the family would answer: “Truly He is Risen!” (Medvedyk 1996: 172).

As recent as the first third of the 20th century, there was a special Easter greeting pronounced by all the neighbours or acquaintances when they visited a house on Easter in the village of Poruchyn, Berezhany district: “may the Lord give you and your family all the best from dew and from water, so that any calamity would pass your house, and happiness would sit on the bench from Resurrection to Resurrection, for the whole next year as long as Mighty Lord blesses you to live. Christ is Risen!” (Lepkyi 1991: 541).

Compositionally (and to a greater extent semantically) it is related to the Christmas greeting. This is another proof of semantic unity of two great annual calendar holidays. As you can see, the very beginning of Easter celebrations is enriched with its verbal glorification, which will be in the centre for the entire festive period.

If there was a young girl in the house, her father would touch her head with the bottom of the Easter basket, and then put it on the table (this was a kind of marriage initiation).

After that, the whole family would sit down at the table in order of seniority: a father would be in the centre, a mother with children would sit on the left, and the elders in the family would sit on the right.

Easter breakfast would usually start from a blessed Easter egg devoured first. The head of the family usually divided a hard-boiled egg into as many parts as there were family members in the house, and he would give it to everyone in order of seniority with a traditional greeting “Christ is risen!” and they answered him with “Truly He is Risen!” The father would kiss his children on the head, and they would kiss his hand. Young and old people kissed each other and exchanged Easter greetings. Everyone was crossing themselves before eating Easter eggs. After that, a mother would cut blessed Easter bread – *paska* and would share it with the whole family.

The custom of cutting off the top crust from the Easter bread and hiding it in a bundle has been preserved in the village of Tovstenke in Chortkiv district. A cow was given the top crust with water “so that milk would flow” when it had a calf (Artyukh 1993: 76). In the whole Western Podillya it was customary to sow crumbs from Easter bread in the kitchen garden, “so that a good harvest would grow”. The same was done with the shells of Easter eggs. The shells were either burned in the oven or stacked, and when potatoes were planted, they were thrown on the bottom of the pits “so that big potatoes would grow” (Ibid: 76). In the first half of XX century it was a customary to throw Easter egg shells on the roofs in Pidhaitsy district (Papizh 1980: 86). There are also elements of a sacrifice to the sun. After all, the egg, according to the beliefs of our ancestors, “was an emblem of the Sun-spring, a part of the great life-giving and magical solar power” (Kylymnyk 1994: 175).

According to the local old-timers, it was customary to throw the shell of Easter egg into the water in Western Podillya, because, according to their beliefs, “it will drift to the Rahmans³ and tell them when Easter is”⁴. According to O. Voropai, similar beliefs were widespread in Central and Eastern Ukraine (Voropai 1991: 409).

The custom of adults drinking one shot of *horilka* after eating the blessed Easter bread and egg has survived till our time in Western Podillya, as well as throughout Ukraine. The host usually is the first to drink, then does the hostess, and then the elder children (younger children usually have sweet drinks). A roasted pig (rarely cooked lately) is eaten last. In the ancient period, pig bones were buried on the borders of their fields “to protect the crops in the fields from storms, rain or hail”⁵.

³According to Ukrainian folk belief, Rahmans are devoted Christians living in a mythical land. Beliefs about the Rahmans are widespread throughout the right-bank Ukraine and Galicia.

⁴ From the ethnographic records by Dovhan O. from Solomakha M., born in 1917 in the village of Krytche, Borshechiv district, Ternopil region. The recording was made on June 11, 2003.

⁵ From the ethnographic records by Dovhan O. from Zhyga P., born in 1925, from urban village Skala-Podilska, Borshechiv district, Ternopil region. The recording was made on April 12, 2004.

The tradition of not cooking any fresh food on all three days of the holidays has been preserved to this day in the researched region, they usually consume the food that was prepared before Easter. A. Svidnytskyi noted this in his work “Easter in Podillya region”: “On the first day of Easter holidays, they do not make fires, they do not cook, and they do not pay visits; all these activities are considered to be indecent for such a great holiday” (Svydnytskyi 1958: 425).

It should be noted that Easter food is more multifunctional than Christmas food. Easter food is included almost in all the rituals of Easter celebrations. It is given to the poor (beggars) near the church after the blessing, it is shared with neighbours and relatives, people exchange *krashanky* (dyed Easter eggs) with acquaintances and loved ones, they let the shells of Easter eggs drift with water to the Rahmans, they offer Easter eggs to the dead, placing them on graves, etc.

The custom of not leaving the table during the Easter breakfast turned out to be quite long-established in the territory of Western Podillya, because, as the old-timers say, “the person will often leave the family throughout the year”. This tradition could be ignored only by teenage boys who tried to run as fast as possible and ring the church bells, “because it is a good sign for a home, and even for a boy himself” (Boiarska 1980: 412).

After the Easter breakfast or brunch, the residents of Western Podillya rush to the church yard to take part in ritual games and Easter fun activities.

EASTER GAMES AND FUN

Children’s Games. The most popular Easter fun for boys is the game of egg-tapping where two players start hitting their eggs together to see whose *krashanka* (Easter dyed egg) is stronger and would come out without damage. Recently, this children’s game looks like this: two boys choose the biggest eggs and hit them over. One holds the egg with the less rounded end up, and the other taps the egg of a friend with the same end. When someone’s egg is cracked, he turns it with the sharp end upwards, and the other boy continues to hit with the sharp end of his egg. The one whose egg is cracked from both ends has lost and has to give the cracked egg to his game partner. The game winner is the last one standing with an unbroken egg. Easter eggs are a widely popular ancient symbol of new life and rebirth. The symbolism of the Sun’s victory over the cold is clearly expressed in the game.

According to the local old-timers, at the beginning of the 20th century it was customary among boys to roll eggs from a hill in the studied area. Several (3–5) boys usually participated in this game. They laid out several of their eggs in the lower part of the hill, and then they rolled their eggs one by one from the top of the hill towards the lower ones. If someone’s egg touched the eggs on the bottom, then its owner took them away as a prize. And when the rolled egg did not touch any of the lower ones, it remained there as a loss⁶.

⁶ From the ethnographic records by Dovhan O. from Solomakha M., born in 1917 in the village of Kryvche, Borshchiv district, Ternopil region. The recording was made on June 11, 2003.

According to V. Sokolova, “egg rolling did not originate as fun game, but as a magical act. The egg, symbolizing the birth of a new life, was supposed to awaken the earth from the winter hibernation by touching it by symbolic fertilization” (Sokolova 1979: 113). Local residents believed “that it will bring the better harvest in future” (Ibid.). So, in ancient times, rolling eggs on the ground had a purely magical character and only adult male landowners used to practice it. Lately, this ritual has been transformed into a children’s Easter game.

In some southern districts of Western Podillya (Buchach, Zalishchyky, and Borshchiv) the game “Hide the Egg” is still observed. It is played as follows: several boys (5–8) put their caps on the ground and hide an egg under one of them; the chosen boy guesses under which cap is the egg hidden. If he guesses right, he takes it for himself, and if not, he continues to play until he guesses. Then the game starts over⁷.

Similar (or even identical) games were common among boys not only in Ukraine, but also in other Slavic nations – Belarus, Poland, Bulgaria, and Russia (Sokolova 1979: 113).

Easter rituals were mainly initiated by little girls (ages 6-9) in the studied region (as well as throughout Ukraine). Recently they have developed a repertoire of *haivka* songs – traditional Easter folksongs, which in the ancient period were performed by adults. These are mainly such *haivka* songs as *Podolyanochka*, *Perepilonka*, *Zaichyk/Bunny*, *Zhuchok/Bug*, *Mak/Poppy*, etc. The most common among them is *Podolyanochka*. Recently, it has gone beyond the spring calendar repertoire and has become a part of the entire summer seasonal celebrations.

Подільночка / Podolyanochka

♩ ≈ 92 L.t. = 24

1. Десь тут бу - ла по-до-ля-ноч-ка, Тут во-на сі-ла,
 десь тут бу - ла мо-ло-де-сень-ка. тут во-на впа-ла.

до зем-лі при-па - ла, бо во-ди не ма - ла.
 сім літ не вми-ва - лась,

2. Ой встань, встань, подільночко,
 ой встань, встань, молодесенька,
 обмий своє личко та личко біленьке,
 біжи по дунаю, бери молоденьку,
 бери ту, що скраю.

⁷ From the ethnographic records by Dovhan O. from Golovetska S., born in 1934, from urban village Zoloty Potik, Buchach district, Ternopil Region. The recording was made on April 28, 2000.

Зайчику, зайчику, та білесенький / Bunny, bunny, and white one

♩ ≈ 96 L.t. = 40
 Зайчи-ку, зайчи-ку, та бі-ле-сень-кий, со-ко-ле, со-ко-ле.
 го-лу-бе, го-лу-бе, та ми-ле-сень-кий,
 А-ні ку-ди, зайчи-ку, а-ні вис-ко-чи-ти, Скоч-ком, боч-ком
 а-ні ку-ди, зайчи-ку, ні перес-ко-чи-ти. та йди, взуй-ся
 шу-кай со-бі
 Ка-ли-нонь-ка
 пе-ре-вер-ни-ся,
 роз-че-ши-ся,
 в че-ре-вич-ки,
 па-нів-нич-ки.
 з лу-гу, з лу-гу, ви-би-рай-си' ша-ру дру-гу.

In Western Podillya, young girls often used to play the games of “Cat and Mouse” and “Handkerchief” on Easter. The latter differs from the game for adults with the similar name “Kerchief” as one of the participants runs outside the circle and throws a handkerchief at someone. If the girl at whom the handkerchief is thrown sees it, she takes the handkerchief and runs after the previous participant until she takes her place.

Over time, little girls from Western Podillya would join the circle of teenage girls or adult mixed groups and together with them to “play *gavka*”, thus inheriting their repertoire.

Games for Teenage Boys. During all three days of Easter holidays, the main fun activity for teenage boys was ringing church bells. As local old-timers recall, the tradition of ringing Easter bells has existed since ancient times. There was a kind of competition between teenagers in every village: whoever ringed the church bell first would be the first in everything during the whole year.

Until the 40s of the XX century church bells were also chimed by landowners (mostly young people) on the first day of the Easter holidays. They tried to chime at least a few times, “so that their field would have a good buckwheat harvest”⁸.

In Zbarazh region, church sextons would often ring the bells after Easter liturgy. Bell chiming in those villages with several bells in the bell chamber was especially interesting. As our field research showed, the function of Easter bells in

⁸ From the ethnographic records by Ovod N. from Yuzefiv M., born in 1941, from village Kozivka, Kozova district, Ternopil region. The recording was made on April 21, 2001.

different areas of Western Podillya was somewhat different. In addition to the generally accepted belief that “Easter bell in a landowner’s hands foretells a good buckwheat harvest”, local residents of the northern regions were sure that “Easter bell rings for the repose and joy of the souls of the deceased”⁹, while in the central part of the Western Podillya “Easter bell used to foretell happy summer harvest” (Lekhman 1983: 326). The belief that “Easter bells give relief to the souls of those who committed suicide” has been preserved in Borshchiv district¹⁰.

As noted by S. Kylymnyk, “Easter bells were not only the music of joy on *Velykden*’ (Great Day), but also meant to drive away all the evil, death and devils from the village” (Kylymnyk 1994: 89). Therefore, church bells (or any other metal or wooden signaling objects) were not only communicating the joy of Easter in the system of great rituals, but also meant to scare away all the evil forces which is largely related to the remains of ancient primitive culture.

The second popular Easter pastime for teenage boys was shooting the *mozdirs* (handmade muskets) from a church bell tower (in Zbarazh district they used to shoot from the muskets named “screws” or “keys”) (Boiarska 1980: 412). They were made of a small metal tube, with one end riveted, and the other opened. The tube had a small drilled hole on top. Gunpowder or sulfur was poured into the muzzle tube, and then wet earth mixed with sand was stuffed into it and lit with a match above the hole. According to the local residents, when a loud shot was fired, it “signaled a great joyful event – the Resurrection of the Son of God”¹¹.

Shooting from such muskets was practiced mainly during the first day of Easter holidays in Western Podillya. So, shooting from the muskets, like bell chiming, also meant to scare away all the evil forces.

On Easter holidays, the game “King” was often played by the teenage boys in Western Podillya. It was mostly played near cemeteries or in the pastures. Usually, a large group of boys (about 30-40) participated in it, they would choose two kings and divide into two groups. Players of the two groups were holding hands and were facing each other at the distance of 10-15 meters. The first “King” would send his “Knight” to captivate several opponents from the second group. The “Knight” would run and try to separate forcefully the clasped hands of the opponents. If he succeeded, he would take two opponents to his team, and if not, he stayed as “captive”. The second “King” used to send his “Knight” in the same way. The game continued until one of the “Kings” remained without “Knights”. At the very end, the “King” himself should run to “break” the ranks of the opponents, if he failed, he also remained as “captive”. After that, a new “Kings” was chosen and the game would start over¹².

⁹ From the ethnographic records by Ovod N. from Malanchuk T., born in 1931, from village Kabariivtsi, Zboriv district, Ternopil region. The recording was made on May 2, 1999.

¹⁰ From the ethnographic records by Dovhan O. from Zazuliak A., born in 1935, from village Verbivka, Borshchiv district, Ternopil region. The recording was made on June 12, 2000.

¹¹ From the ethnographic records by Dovhan O. from Irkha M., born in 1926, from the village Mali Chornokintsi, Chortkiv district, Ternopil region. The recording was made on June 13, 2000.

¹² From the ethnographic records by Dovhan O. from Teodoziv S., born in 1929, from village Postolivka, Husyatyn district, Ternopil Region. The recording was made on July 27, 2002.

The game obviously originated in the tribal period of our ancestors and symbolizes training of strength and vigor for self-defense. The priority move in this game was chest hitting the opponent, which also helped to awaken natural forces.

Adolescent Games. Adolescent games were important part of Easter fun activities in Western Podillya. *Dzvinytsia* (Bell Tower) is the most common among them, it is a game of building a human tower for seventeen boys. It is played as follows: nine strongest young men stand in three rows and put their hands on each other's shoulders. The other six boys stand on their hands. There are three more on top of these six. After that, they move around the church as "Bell Tower", singing traditional Easter songs – *gaivka* songs. The boys used to compete which "Bell tower" would go around the church more times. It was the custom in the village of Poruchyn, Berezhany district, Ternopil region to use the "Bell tower" game as an excuse to meet girls. When the girls were walking in a circle, singing and playing *gaivka* songs, the "Bell tower" boys used to approach their group quietly and the boys on the top would fall down on the girls. If one of the boys caught a girl, he could kiss her. That's why the girls would always run away from the boys and gathered on the other side of the church (Lepkyi 1991: 542).



Youth game "*Dzvinytsia*" in the village Kamianky Pidvolochysk district (early 1980s)

In the eastern districts of Western Podillya (Husyatyn, Pidvolochysk and Borshchiv districts) Easter celebrations used to end with the "Bell tower" game. "As *Dzvinytsia*/Bell tower left the cemetery, it looked as if everyone was swept away with a broom" (Svydnytskyi 1958: 439). In this area the rules were somewhat different compared to the northern regions. According to the stories of the old-timers, five strong lads stood in a circle, holding hands, four climbed on their shoulders, and three others climbed on them, then two, and finally there was one on the top. To prevent the "Bell tower" from falling, the top players held on to a large wooden stick.



Preparation of boys for the game “*Dzvinytsia*” in the village Kamianky Pidvolochysk district (early 1980s)

According to local residents, human “Bell tower” symbolized a kind of ascending to heaven – the abode of the resurrected Jesus Christ¹³. There is no doubt that the “Bell tower” game dates back to the pre-Christian times as it is symbolically connected with the “heavenly bridge” for the souls of the dead descending down to their homes, on the Earth and it is the most frequently observed in the local tradition.

According to the local residents, participation in the Easter game *Dzvinytsa* (Bell tower) used to be a kind of initiation for a young boy to feel equal among the other peers.

The game of *Reminets* (Belt) is also a common boys’ game in Western Podillya during Easter celebration. This game has the following rules: the boys choose two main players among the participants, and the rest make a circle holding hands. The first chosen player is blindfolded and given a belt, and the second is given a bell. When the second player rings the bell, the first player tries to hit him with the belt. If he hits the target, he wins, and they switch places. And if he misses, then the game continues up to a certain number of times (e.g. up to three). Then two other main players are chosen and the game goes on.

The game *Grushka* (Pear tree) is semantically related to the previous one and until recently was observed in the village of Kolodiivka, Pidvolochysk district, Ternopil region. The boys would stick a two-meter “pear tree” in the ground, and then choose a “Guardian”, who holds on to the “pear-tree” stick and runs around it. The players rush up to him and hit him with their hands. The one whom he hits back takes his place, and if not, then he continues running around the stick¹⁴.

As we can see, the main move in these games is played by a hit with a belt or a hand, which is related to a hit with a willow branch on Palm Sunday. According

¹³ From the ethnographic records by Ovovd N. from Demkiv K., born in 1930, from village Rekshyn, Berezhany district, Ternopil Region. The recording was made on March 3, 2003.

¹⁴ From the ethnographic records by Ovovd N. from Irkha M., born in 1936 in the village Kolodiivka, Pidvolochysk district, Ternopil region. The recording was made on June 1, 2001.

to the beliefs of our ancestors, hitting a person (a strong one) during the change of the vegetation period, in this case it is the arrival of spring, “symbolized one’s unity with the forces of the universe and revival of health. It was believed that a person gained cosmic greatness by subordinating a living being to the laws of universal forces” (Potapenko and Kuzmenko 1995: 28). It should be noted that the hitting with a belt or a hand was done on the legs, the most active part of human body during agricultural labor.

The process of invoking the blossoming of nature in Western Podillya was symbolized by the game *Pekar* (Baker), which was played as follows: the players would stick a willow stake into the ground, then moved away from it at a distance of 10 meters and aimed at it, taking turns with their willow sticks. Whoever did not hit the target, he went to the willow stake and began to “bake”. After that, the players used to take back (steal) their sticks. Whoever was caught red handed by a “Baker” took his place, and the game continued.

We can see symbolism of hitting by a willow branch in this game, as well as in the previous two, as a willow tree is the first to bloom in spring. It should be noted that these games are characterized by repetitive rapid movements of the players, as rapid movement evokes rapid influx of spring vital energy.

In the earlier period (approximately at the beginning of the 20th century) *Dovga Loza* (Long Willow) game was also popular among the boy games in Western Podillya. It was also played in the pasture, in the field or in the meadow. The players used to lay down on the ground in a row at a distance of a few paces from each other, and the last one used to run, leaping over the others to the front one, where he also would lay down. All the players used to run and leap over the others in turn. The important move of this game was the right of each laying boy to hit the one who jumped over¹⁵. So, the ritual of hitting can also be traced in this game, which primarily initiated the vegetation in spring, in particular, the growth of the main cereal crops (as this game was mainly performed outside the village).

The game *Vil* (Ox) was widespread in the studied region until the 40s of the XX century. At that time the girls used to gather near the church in groups and they would begin to sing humorous *gaiivka* songs addressing the boys, who were holding hands and lowering their heads down like oxen lowered their horns ready to attack, then they rushed to the girls and hit them. At that moment, the girls would run away, and the boys would catch them and hold them in their arms (mostly they were holding them and kissing), the girls could only “ransom” themselves with Easter eggs¹⁶.

This game is of a definite erotic nature. It provoked the courtship of boys to conquer girls in quite ancient forms – by force (remember the abduction of girls near rivers and ponds during the tribal period of our ancestors). In prehistoric bull worship of the ancient Ukrainians the ox was in the system of solar gods as a god

¹⁵ From the ethnographic records by Dovhan O. from Solomakha M., born in 1917, from village Kryvche, Borshchiv district, Ternopil Region. The recording was made on June 12, 2003.

¹⁶ This game was recorded by Ovod N. in the villages of Saranchuky and Shybalyn of Berezhany district and the village of Siltse, Pidgaisi district on 2000s. It is also recorded in the book: Bohdan Lepky. Works in two volumes. Vol. 2. p. 544.

of strength. “He was depicted as a multi-horned bull with golden wool... The magi associated the union of heaven and earth with the image of the bull (*tur*)” (Plachynda 1993: 50-51).

According to Y. Holovatskyi’s observations “On Easter boys used to be noisy, go crazy, as during mating courtship. They would disturb the girls in the games, breaking their circle. Sometimes it caused collisions and the girls have to push away the attacking pranksters” (Holovatskyi 1878: 20).

As one can see, the main function of Easter adolescent games was to initiate the quick arrival of spring vitality and to evoke intimate energy in the girls for the future marriage mating. Therefore, all the above-mentioned boys’ games were originally associated with the revival of life-giving nature, and actions like jumping, running, hitting, loud shouting, etc. were supposed to stimulate vitality and vegetation.

Men’s Games. Until the 60s of the XX century the tradition of on Easter men’s games was still preserved in Western Podillya. As noted by Ukrainian ethnologists, men’s games took place mainly during the transitional periods when the main solar phases changed (for example, New Year’s fist fights of *Malanka* celebration outside the village, various forms of men’s wrestling on Trinity (Green week) holiday and *Kupala* Night celebrations, etc.)

The tradition of men’s games was especially widespread in the spring period at the time of renewal of nature (in the tribal period it was also a time to defend one’s territory from various invaders). Spring (Easter) men’s games were multifunctional by nature. They were “a means of physical training of the human body, a way of community, a stimulus of the education of national consciousness, developing agility, mobility, cleverness, determination, etc” (Kylymnyk 1994: 133).

The most common Easter men’s game in the studied area was the game *Ryskal* (Spade) (in some areas this game was called *Dupak*). In this game, the first *Ryskal* player was always the strongest man. He covered his eyes with his left hand, and put his right hand under his left shoulder to hit (or vice versa), all the other players stood behind him in a semicircle, and one of them tried to hit him underhand on the shoulder. The task of the main player was to turn around quickly and guess who hit him. If he guessed right, the one who did hit him took his place, and if not, then the game continued. As the local old-timers recall, usually older (strong-bodied) youngsters¹⁷ also used to play this game.

At the beginning of the XX century the game “Breast wrestling” was rather common in the villages of Buchach district of Ternopil region. The group of men was divided into two equal teams, every team would choose an *Okoman/otaman* (Chief). Then both teams would line up facing each other at a distance of 10–12 meters. Two boundary lines were drawn in the middle between them, where a wrestling game took place. The *Okomans* (chiefs) would give the command “Fight!” at the same time, then both lined teams of men stepped between the

¹⁷ From the ethnographic records by Ovovd N. from Demkiv K., born in 1930, from village Rekshyn, Berezhany district, Ternopil Region. The recording was made on March 3, 2003.

boundary lines and pressed their chests on their opponents' chests. If the majority of players from one team were pushed back behind the line, then the team lost. This kind of wrestling would be repeated three times. Every victory was accompanied by a loud shouting. After that, new *Okomans* (chiefs) were chosen and the game started all over again¹⁸.

Thus, men's games, as well as adolescent games, are based on the concept of "victory of the stronger over the weaker", symbolizing Spring victory over Winter. According to local residents, men's (and also adolescent) games were accompanied with noise (loud shouting and commands, etc.). According to L. Biletskyi "making noise as well as splashing with water and cleansing with fire, is included in the system of cleansing rituals against evil spirits" (Biletskyi 1947: 72). According to the animistic beliefs of our ancestors, evil and good spirits are present among living people during Easter holidays and can cause various harm.

Now men's games are not played in Western Podillya any more (in some areas, in the southern regions in particular, young men join the teenagers for a game of "Reminets" (belt).

Girls' Games. After the Easter breakfast, the girls from Western Podillya used to exchange Easter eggs, especially with their closest girlfriends. This tradition was observed in the studied region until the 40s of the 20th century.

In the first third of the 20th century it was customary among the girls of Western Podillya to present their beloved boyfriends with two best Easter eggs tied in an embroidered handkerchief. If a young man kissed a girl after receiving Easter eggs, it meant that he liked her, and she could expect a marriage proposal from him this year. And if he only thanked for the present, then there was no hope for marital relations. After receiving the Easter eggs, a boy had to invite a girl to a dance on the third day of Easter celebrations or *Provody* – next Sunday after Easter.

This tradition was connected with the girls "giving a catch" to the lads (during the last week before Great Lent the girls used to tie a ribbon catch on the arm of the lads, who should take them to a dance on Holy Sunday). This tradition was observed until the 30s of the 20th century in the studied area, in particular in the villages of Buchach district. The girl could "give a catch" to several boys who liked her (the more catches were "given", the more the girl was praised among the boys). S. Kylymnyk points out that "giving a catch" was a custom of Easter spring greeting, a manifestation of sympathy, or better to say, love" (Kylymnyk 1994: 92).

After "giving a catch" the girls would go to the churchyard and start to "play *gaiivka* Easter songs". Easter girls' games always started with the most ancient *gayivka* songs, based mostly on the plots related to mythological characters – *Zhuchok*, *Kostrub*, *Zhelman*, etc.

In the first half of the 20th century the most common girls' games were *Zhuchok* and *Kostrub* in the village of Trostyanets Velikiy, Zboriv district, Ternopil region. The songs would always begin Easter *khorovod* (circle dancing accompanied with singing) (Lokot 1985: 612).

¹⁸ From the ethnographic records by Dovhan O. from Golovetska S., born in 1934, from urban village Zoloty Potik, Buchach district, Ternopil Region. The recording was made on April 28, 2004.

Ходить жучок по долині / Zhuchok walks in the valley

♩ ≈ 75 L.t. = 13

1. Хо-дить жу-чок по до-ли-ні, а жу-чи-ха по я-ли-ні.

Грай, жуч-ку, грай, не-бо-же, най ти' пан Біг до-по-мо-же.

2. На жучкові жупан ясний,
бо сам жучок дуже красний.

Приспів:

Грай, жучку, грай, небоже,
най ти' пан Біг допоможе

3. На жучкові черевички,
бо сам жучок невеличкий

In Pidhaitsi district girls would usually start their Easter singing with the songs with floral names like *Fiyalocky/Violets*, *Mak/Poppy*, *Barvinok/Periwinkle*, *Ogirochky/Cucumbers*, *Soloveiku-spadku/Nightingale*. The two-line *Zhelman* Easter *gaiivka* song was the most common in this area. The girls were divided into two groups (“lines”). One “line” stood opposite the other, holding each other’s shoulders. In the opening stanza, the first “line” approaches the second and sings, and the next stanza is similarly played by the second “line”. The next verses of the song are also performed in this way (Papizh 1980: 88).

*Їде, їде Жельман, їде, їде його брат /
Zhelman is going, going, his brother is going*

♩ ≈ 108 L.t. = 10

1. Ї-де, ї-де Жель-ман, ї-де, ї-де йо-го брат,

ї-де. ї-де Жель-ма-но-ва і вся ро-ди-на.

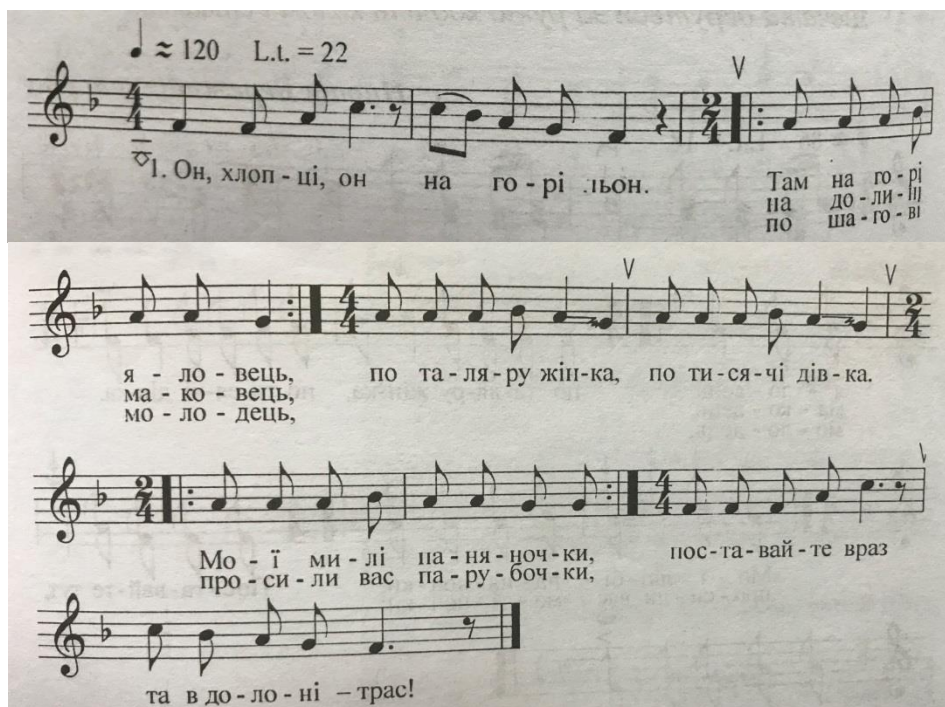
2. На добридень, Жельман, на добридень, його брат,
на добридень Жельманова і вся родина.

3. Чого хоче Жельман, чого хоче його брат,
чого хоче Жельманова і вся родина.

4. Хоче панну, Жельман, хоче панну його брат,
хоче панну Жельманова і вся родина.

In Zbarazh district *gaiivka* singing usually started with *gaiivka* songs dominated by wedding motifs. These are, in particular, *Hanushko-dushko, vstavay ranushko/Ganushka-darling, get up early, Cherez siny stezhky nema/No path through the entryway, On, khloptsi, on na hori l'on/Here, boys, here, there is flax on the hill, Pustite nas z-za hir voyuvaty/Let us fight from behind the hills, Oy ty, staryi didu, chomu sya ne zhenysh?/Hey, graybeard, why are you aren't you married? etc (Boiarska 1980: 416).*

Он, хлопці, он на горі льон / Here, boys, here, there is flax on the hill



1. Он, хлопці, он на горі льон. Там на горі па до-ли-ш по ша-го-ві

я - ло - вець, по та - ля - ру жінок, по ти - ся - чі дів - ка.
ма - ко - вець,
мо - ло - дець,

Мо - ї ми - лі па - ня - ноч - ки, пос - та - вай - те враз
про - си - ли вас па - ру - боч - ки,

та в до - ло - ні - трас!

2. Поставаймо тут, ніженьками – туп!

3. Посідаймо враз, рученьками – трас!

It should be noted that girls' *gaiivka* songs are the key elements of Easter celebration rituals in Western Podillya. In the ancient period, they were represented by the largest number of repertoires (in every village there were about 30–40 *gaiivka* songs, not to mention the mocking songs – *gaiivka-peredyrka*¹⁹) and were performed almost continuously during all three days of the Easter holidays. Lately, the most common Easter songs are also girls' *gaiivka* songs (young boys may also participate, but Easter celebrations can do without them, but not without girls).

Until the 60s of the XX century mixed (boys and girls) games and celebrations were common during Spring paschal feasts in the remote villages of Western Podillya. They mainly took place at the time when the boys finished their

¹⁹ *Gaiivka-peredyrka* – the humorous mocking songs, addressed mainly to boys, making fun of them.

games and began to “interrupt” the girls’ *khorovod* (circle dancing). Actually, they were the first to start these games.

The game *Marusya and Petrus/Mary and Peter* was popular in the studied region (especially in the northern districts) until recently. The players of the game chose two main players *Marusya/Mary* and *Petrus/Peter* among the participants, and then they made a big circle, holding hands. The leading player of the game blindfolded *Marusya* and *Petrus* with handkerchiefs and placed them at a certain distance from each other. After that, *Petrus* would try to catch *Marusya*, clapping her hands. If he managed to catch a girl playing as *Marusya*, he could kiss her, and she would push out another girl from the circle to play *Marusya*, and thus the game continued. If *Petrus* did not catch *Marusya* within a certain time period, then the players would choose other main players and the game started all over again²⁰.

Easter game *Morganka* (Blink) was also observed until recently in Western Podillya. Boys and girls would choose a leading player (a smart guy) among the participants, then all the other players were standing in pairs in a circle, and the leader was in the middle of it. After that, the leading player would look at the girls and wink at each of them. The girl who sees this blinking would run quickly to him and stand next to him, and the one who didn’t see should give him a “token” (a token was anything – a handkerchief, a pin, an Easter egg, etc.) At the end of the game, the game lead used to play out the tokens: each girl was given a certain task – to sing a specific song, to dance a specific dance, “to confess”, “to kiss the watch”, “to sweeten the coffee”, etc.²¹

As you can see, this game defines other subsequent games, which reveal the meaning of the main one and require a separate explanation.

The game *Spoivid’* (Confession) is played as follows: the game presenter asks a girl questions mainly about romantic affairs, and she must answer them truthfully. For example: Do you love Ivan? (calling a boy’s name). If she answers “Yes”, then the presenter gives her a “token”, and if the answer is “No”, then the questions are asked in a similar order until the girl answers sincerely.

The game *Kavu Solodyty* (Sweeten the coffee) is played as follows: the game presenter says “Sweeten the coffee!” to the girl who has to get her “token”. After that, she approaches the guy she was standing next to and asks: “How is your coffee?” He answers: “Bitter!” then she gives him a kiss. If he likes the girl, then the kiss would last until the guy says: “Sweet”. The game can similarly continue with the next guy, or the presenter can interrupt the game after kissing with the first man and give the girl a “token”.

As we can see, kissing in public in large mixed games has survived till nowadays. Therefore, these games are of much later origin than the previous ones. The erotic nature of spring games and pastimes related to the future choice of a partner to marry was repeatedly emphasized by E. Anichkov, who noted: “The love

²⁰ From the ethnographic records by Ovod N. from Malanchuk T., born in 1931, from village Kabariivtsi, Zboriv district, Ternopil region. The recording was made on May 2, 1999.

²¹ From the ethnographic records by Dovhan O. from Tymochko Y., born in 1934, from village Drobovylyany, Zalishchyky district, Ternopil region. The recording was made on February 12, 2001.

motives of the ancestors are the core element of the whole series of pastimes and rituals during Spring paschal feasts” (Anichkov 1905: 300). Hence, there used to be a free choice (primarily public) of a partner for a young couple and it remained this way in Ukraine until the 17th century.

The tradition for older people to gather in church for Easter celebration was observed in Western Podillya until the 60s of the 20th century. The old used to be mainly passive: they observed the games and fun of the young, recalling their youth, etc. According to the local residents, Easter games for the young could not do without the old. On the first day of Spring paschal feasts in the village of Meteniv, Zboriv district, older people used to sit on the graves at the cemetery as they remembered their deceased ancestors. Some were holding hands in the “Crooked Dance” (Petryha 1985: 628).

Recently, older people rarely observe Easter traditional celebrations in the studied area. Easter games and feasts have been significantly reduced in the repertoire. They are played mainly by teenage children. Boys mainly play “Reminets”/“Belt” game, and girls participate in *gaiivka* rites, which are mostly reduced to circular movements. In some villages boys and girls join Easter games only in the evening.

TRADITIONAL CELEBRATION OF DRENCHING MONDAY

Bright Monday is the second day of Easter celebrations in Ukraine and it is called *Oblyvanyi Ponedilok* or Drenching Monday (in some villages it is also called *Zlyvanyi*, *Polyvanyi* or *Vlyvanyi* – different variations of names, related to water). In contrast to the actual Spring paschal rituals, the tradition of splashing girls with water was followed quite actively in the studied area, even with certain exaggeration (in some villages, guys would even pour water on strangers, unfamiliar girls and women who were passing through the village in public transport).

Drenching Monday in Western Podillya, as in the whole of Ukraine, is characterized by common features of traditional customs. Some (minor) differences appear only at the local level, and those primarily describe the elements of the water splashing. In Borshchiv district, men would go around the village and catch girls for fun on Bright Monday. When the guys caught a girl, they would bend her head down and pour some water over her neck three times, saying the traditional greeting “Christ is Risen!” and the girl replied, “Truly He is Risen!” After that, the girl would give two Easter eggs (a symbol of mating) to the man she liked. The father, whose daughter was water splashed, invited the celebrators to the house and treated them to Easter meals and some *horilka*. As local old-timers explain, “girls were splashed so that they were healthy, cheerful and beautiful, like spring flowers” (Kolisnyk 1998: 70). People have preserved the custom of splashing even young recently married women in the village of Strilkivtsi in Borshchiv district. They would pour some water on women’s hands saying “Christ is Risen!” The boys used to splash some water on the girls mostly from a bucket, and sometimes even threw them into the river.

In the village Trostyanets Velikiy of the Zboriv district there was a tradition for a father to splash his children at daybreak of Holy Monday, starting from his daughter as a future bride, saying: “Be washed, my daughter, like the earth is washed with rain in spring, and be rich and beautiful, like the spring sun” (Lokot 1985: 614). After that, the girl used to go to the well to get some water, thinking about her fiancé. If he came at that moment and splashed some water on the girl, “she was sure to marry him by the end of the year”.

Water (like fire) was considered to be “the greatest purifier and sanctifier” in the Easter rituals of Western Podillya. According to the beliefs of our ancestors, it had unlimited power to ward off and drive away evil spirits, gave power to the reborn earth, it influenced fertility, good harvests, and livestock reproduction, as well as contributed to human well-being and wealth. Therefore, our ancestors specially honored and celebrated these two elements with the onset of a new solar cycle and the beginning of a new agrarian year.

To this day, the region under study has preserved the belief that if a girl and a young man are splashed with water in spring, it portends abundant rainfalls in summer, the use of water is said to evoke the spring rains needed to ensure a successful harvest later in the year. Easter water splashing contributed to the health and strength of young people, as predicted the marriage of a young couple this year. According to the local residents, at the beginning of the 20th century girls used to splash boys with water on Bright Tuesday (the third day of the Easter holidays) in some areas of Western Podillya. The girls used to track the boys around the corner of the house or behind the well and tried to pour a whole bucket or a jug of water on them. The girls were supposed to wait until the following Bright Tuesday to get their revenge by soaking the boys, but in practice both sexes throw water over each other on the same Bright Monday now.

The custom of water splashing on Bright Monday was popular throughout Ukraine in the 17th–20th centuries. Although later it was somewhat transformed in certain ethnographic areas. In Chernihiv region, boys and girls used go to the river in the morning to wash themselves or they splashed each other’s faces with river water on the second day of the Easter holidays. This custom was preserved only in some places in Bukovyna and Transcarpathia (Kylymnyk 1994: 124).

In addition to Western Podillya, splashing with water on Bright Monday was actively practiced in Hutsul and Volyn areas (Ibid: 125).

On Bright Monday, as well as on Easter Sunday, teenagers ring church bells all day long, and youth games and fun continue, but with less activity in Western Podillya.

Lately, on Holy Monday, it has become traditional to hold memorial services at the graves of soldiers who died for the freedom and independence of Ukraine. Usually, a great number of villagers always participate in such commemoration.

THE THIRD DAY OF PASCHAL WEEK

Bright Tuesday is the third day of Easter celebrations. Local residents celebrated it as the day for mutual visits to relatives, friends, and neighbors. Up to the 40s of the XX century, local peasants and farmers used to visit their fields

and inspect the winter crops on Bright Tuesday. According to V. Lokot, “the landowners used to come and roll on the field, and then they used to consume the blessed Easter food. They used to bury the shells of blessed Easter eggs in the soil of their fields” (Lokot 1985: 614).

In most villages of Western Podillya, Easter games and celebrations usually end in the evening of Bright Tuesday. Each local celebration is characterized by certain peculiarities and has its traditional Ester *gaivka* songs. In Pidvolochysk district, *gaivka* rite would always end with songs *Horoshok/Peas* or *Lyonok/Flax*. In the central regions of Western Podillya, at the end of the rite, the songs “*Pysar/Scribe*”, “*On Easter Holidays*”, *Gaivkas*, *gaivkas* dominated at the end of the rite. In the southern part of the studied region, *Kryrnyi Tanets* (Crooked Dance) was the final traditional Easter song. Singing the final *gaivka* song, the participants were holding hands and walking through the village, going around each house. If there was a mess in the yard, they could be doing the tricks (scatter untidy items, pick them up and throw them away from the house). The participants left the general group of players near their houses one by one, and thus the rite dissolved into Easter game performances.

In Zbarazh district, the *gaivka* rite always ended with the song *Horoshok/Peas*. The oldest woman would usually lead the performance. Together with other players, she would go first around the church, then around the bell tower, then they would go to the cemetery and around the whole village. At the end, the performance lead would always make a speech, saying that all the villagers had happy Easter holidays and celebrations with God’s help, and wished them to live happily till the next Easter (Boyarska 1980: 416).

In the village of Rashtivtsi in Husyatyn district, the traditional *gaivka* ceremony ended with the “hugging and kissing the church” ritual. All the participants were holding hands, approaching to the church building, and then kissed it three times²².

Until recently, the residents of Western Podillya believed that no evil force can do harm to a person during Bright Week, as the souls of their ancestors descend on the earth to protect it. It was believed that whoever died during Paschal Week, their souls would go to heaven.

CONCLUSIONS

So, Easter spring rites of Western Podillya, having a pan-Ukrainian and pan-Slavic nature, are characterized by certain features that were formed under the influence of the historical-political and cultural-ethnic development of this region. The most important function is the historical preservation of traditional culture. The main factor was the loyalty of the Christian Church, in particular the Greek-Catholic Church, as they contributed in every possible way to the of the preserving and keeping of Easter spring traditions, especially in youth communities.

²² From the ethnographic records by Dovhan O. from Teodoziv S., born in 1929, from village Postolivka, Husyatyn district, Ternopil Region. The recording was made on July 27, 2002.

Easter is one of the most important holidays in Ukraine (as well as in the whole Christian world). It has been long celebrated during three days. As our analysis has shown, in the pre-Christian period this holiday belonged to the period of spring equinox and was completely subordinated to the spring cult. During the introduction of Christianity, Easter as originally ancient pagan celebration of the spring equinox was dedicated to observing the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Easter and its related holidays are moveable feasts, not falling on a fixed date; its date is computed based on a lunisolar calendar (solar year plus Moon phase) similar to the Hebrew calendar and is celebrated during first full moon after the March equinox.

Easter celebration was accompanied by games and fun performances for different age groups: from children to the older generation. These games and performances symbolized the spring phenomena of nature, the arrival of spring, as well as vegetation and rebirth. This symbolism is also found in the ethnographic features of Easter, in particular in traditional *pysanka* (painted) and *krashanka* (dyed) Easter eggs (as symbol of life), in ceremonial cookies (as symbol of the first spring birds), in Easter bells (a symbol of the spring awakening of nature), in girls' games and entertainment (symbols of the sun, water, rain, clouds, reproduction, etc.).

Nowadays, the interest in the study and preservation of traditional calendar rites of certain ethnographic regions of Ukraine is extremely increasing and has prospects for comprehensive research in future. Ukraine as a multi-ethnic state is rich in its material and spiritual culture, in particular calendar customs and rites, which have certain characteristic and coloring and are a considerable factor for research, analysis and preservation as important components of the worldview of each ethnic group living in different parts of our country and having common collective Ukrainian identity.

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