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The folk culture of Southern Poland (Małopolska) illustrated with an example of two ethnographic groups: the Podhale Highlanders and Rzeszowiacy

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INDEX

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Introduction | 3 |
| 2. Historic – geographic background..... | 6 |
| 3. General characteristics of the regions..... | 9 |
| 3.1. Podhale – mountainous country at the bottom of the Tatras..... | 9 |
| 3.2. Inhabitants of Rzeszów | 12 |
| 4. The folk attire | 12 |
| 4.1. The Podhale attire as a symbol of the regional identity..... | 12 |
| 4.2. The attire of Rzeszowiacy | 14 |
| 5. The calendar of folk annual rituals | 16 |
| 5.1. Christmas time | 16 |
| 5.1.1. Christmas in Podhale..... | 16 |
| 5.1.2. Christmas at Rzeszowiacy's | 20 |
| 5.1.3. "Cracow Crib" | 23 |
| 5.2. Easter in Podhale | 25 |
| 5.3. Midsummer night at Rzeszowiacy's | 29 |
| 5.4. Harvest festival at Rzeszowiacy's | 30 |
| 6. Family rites..... | 31 |
| 6.1. Time of marriage and wedding in Podhale | 31 |

1. Introduction

The Polish folk culture is an unusual and complex creation, genetically connected with the formation of a class feudal system. Since the beginning it has reflected the life and situation of peasantry, although it has never been an autonomic unit. For ages it has coexisted with the culture of the whole ethnos – nation, permanently keeping in touch with it. Thus, the folk culture has been composed of peasants' provenience elements – commonly described in the 19th century independence discourse as native or proto-Polish, and general national contents, which remain in the area of influence of other ethnic cultures. Therefore, we can say that both cultures: ethnic and folk ones represented two different though interdependent traditions: a great one and a small one. The former was consciously cultivated by intellectual elites by applying such means as: writing, print, painting, while the latter was passed by means of a direct oral tradition. Therefore, while the ethnos tradition presented and still presents spatial uniformity in its tradition, the folk culture shows its regional variations as functions of concrete historic and physiographic traditions.

The interest in folk culture in Europe is connected with great intellectual trends of the close of the 18th/19th century: Enlightenment, Romanticism and Positivism. In the Polish territory these traditions were also intensified by patriotic and political aspects, aspiring to include the folk and its culture in the orbit of the nation restoring process, which aimed at reviving the national identity and regaining own statehood. Then “discovered” values of the folk culture consequently had to inspire actions aimed at its broader presentation and searching for ways of protecting and preserving the most precious indications of this culture. This mission could be accomplished by the museums which were then brought into being, among them regional facilities were important. Thus, let me remind you that despite the lack of statehood on the Polish territory on the turn of the 19th century a number of museum facilities were founded, where collections documenting the folk culture were gathered. They were, among others: Warsaw 1888, Wdzydze Kiszewskie 1906, Cracow 1911, Włocławek 1909, Łowicz 1910, Płock 1912, Przemyśl 1909. However, the great development of ethnographic museums in Poland took place after the second world war. Consequently, over thirty open air museums of scansen type and about one hundred pavilion museums were founded, which are home to ethnographic collections at present estimated for over 650 exhibits.

As we know, in the folk culture a significant role is played by customs and rituals, which marked the passing of social time, informing about events important to the whole

community related to the change of seasons (annual festivals) or successive stages in a human life (family festivals). The above quoted terms: custom and ritual, which constitute both cognitive and analytic categories, are differently understood in the subject literature. Although they have a different meaning area, in colloquial sense, and often also in a scientific discourse, they are treated synonymously and used interchangeably. In the presented considerations the authors, following the concept of Polish ethnographer Ryszard Tomicki, distinguish these categories and accept the following meanings. A **custom**, in accordance with its primary meaning indicates the repetitiveness of some social fact. Thus, it is the whole of ways or patterns of behaviours of members of a group in specific situations accepted by this social group. A custom is usually a regulative instrument of social relationships between entities, and the sanctions for exceeding them are also of social character. They most often refer to an “indocile”, unsubmitive social subject that is not adjusted to customary standards of behaviour. While a **rite** being in its classic version a realization of a myth (which is at the same time a specific scenario of actions and behaviours), not only serves putting in order human relations but first of all regulates the relationships between a social group and the surrounding reality, including also the supernatural world. Therefore, the rite is protected not so much by social but rather supernatural sanctions, which refer to the existential sphere of the whole group. As the researchers of the problem point, even a small deviation from the scenario during the performance of a rite may have negative consequences for functioning of the whole group. It is also worth mentioning that the rite scenario which refers to the time of the beginning often includes behaviours unacceptable in every day life situations. Moreover, the actors of the rite are welcome to perform them. Thus, we may assume that a rite is an intentionally undertaken activity of a group at certain moments, realized publicly and solemnly with all richness of symbols and magic practices closely related to the philosophy of life and the system of beliefs, as R. Tomicki put it religious – mythological image. There is still a category of a **ritual**, by some researchers, particularly from English speaking countries, identified with a custom, or used interchangeably with the concept of a ceremony. As R. Tomicki points, the latter term is more adequate and emphasizes the specific character of a ritual, which may be both a characteristic feature of rites as well as customary patterns of behaviour. Thus, a **ritual** means a precisely specified mode of certain activities, which may be an element of ritual actions, or refer to customary, we may say ceremonial gestures, as for instance a greeting ritual.

The above outlined concepts of terms: custom, rite and ritual show a high level of generality and merely touch a complex problem which these categories contain. Nevertheless,

as the authors believe, even these general definitions, introduced for the purpose of ordering, will contribute to a clear exposition, and consequently to better comprehension and understanding.

The functions of customs and rituals in societies have always been multiple. One of them is separating the common – every day things from the sacred ones. In fact the whole complexity of cultural reality can be divided into two spheres – *sacrum* and *profanum*. However, either of them can function independently but they supplement each other and they are necessary for life to go on. A festival is something special, the time of joy, enjoyment but also *sacral anxiety*. While every day is filled with common, burdensome activities. This rhythm of human existence makes a person live on one hand remembering the holiday and on the other hand waiting for its return. This division is necessary for proper functioning of a human psyche. However, the transition from the sphere of *sacrum* and *profanum*, bringing a community or an entity in the “stage of suspension” also called “marginal” carries many threats. Thus, the overcoming of this stage is secured by a number of prohibitions and ritual magic activities of protective meaning, which in the literature of the subject are called transition rituals.

Customs and rituals also had a function of a customary law, applied in cases of breaking social standards. They also had an educational, matrimonial function and of a customary asylum. They were exceptionally attractive because extremely important contents were often passed in a form of a social game. We may say, that to a large extent the above quoted functions helped the local communities to survive the incredibly hard times, sometimes even extreme living conditions.

After the second world war the processes of cultural unification of the Polish countryside greatly transformed its so-far cultural landscape. The precise instrument regulating lives of the community members was replaced by a system of standards and behaviours, which may be found anywhere in the world. Thus, a question may be asked: Should the deposit of cultural heritage placed in museums remain only a witness of the extremely colourful and diversified regional culture or should it inspire the actions aimed at co-creating the contemporary reality?

Presenting various situations, phenomena, worlds by means of museum collections is not easy but possible. It takes arduous research procedures resulting in the collector's choice and finally visualization in a form of an exhibition. Moreover, the exhibition besides its scientific, cognitive assumptions is also an artistic composition and its author's creation. Subtleness in constructing the zone where two different imaginations meet, the sensitivity of

the creator of the exhibition and its recipient – visitor, is creating a mutual point of reference. Anthropologists of culture see museums as places where modern rituals are performed. They rightfully claim that the more a modern society moves away from the past the more it is able to regain it under the influence of various museum events. The museum rituals visualize, prove and make real concepts and values important to a society, they introduce certain symbols in the social functioning circle. They, in turn, are a necessary condition for maintaining local bonds leading to realization of their own value and identity. Each community in the globalizing world needs such an inspiration to define its place in the modern world. This feeling of being rooted and settled in a specified system of values makes a man a person deprived of fears brought by the complex modern world and the unknown past. It also makes a man tolerant and open, and consequently undertaking in his/her “small homeland” many valuable social, cultural and economic initiatives. These are, among others, the aims of the exhibition prepared by the museologists from Lubaczów in cooperation with partners from Greece, Bulgaria called: “RURAL HERITAGE AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY. Building the sustainability of rural communities”.

2. Historic – geographic background

The exhibition presents selected issues of culture of two ethnographic groups: Podhale highlanders and Rzeszowiacy. Their spatial range covers areas situated in Małopolska – historical district of Poland, which at the end of the 10th century was included in the Piasts country. The name of the district comes from Latin – “Polonia Minor” which literally translates as “younger Poland”.

Archaeological research note down the traces of a human presence in Małopolska as early as in the period of middle paleolite (about 100 – 35 thousand years ago). The oldest discovered human bones found in the Maszycka cave near Ojców come from the period of upper paleolite (35 – 10 thousand years ago). In neolite period (4500 – 1800 B.C.) in Małopolska the presence of the first farmers and breeders from the circle of the Danube farming cultures (4500 – 3000 B.C.) was marked, and one of the biggest in Europe underground silicon mines in Krzemionki Opatowskie are connected with the settling of the North European cultures (3000 – 1800 B.C.). In the bronze age (1800 – 700 B.C.) the whole of Małopolska was within the range of Łużycka culture (1500 – 400 B.C.). In Tyniec and Zawada Lanckorońska the archaeologists noted defensive estates related to this culture. In the early iron age (700 B.C.) elements of Celtic culture can be seen – factories and castles in Tyniec. During the period of Roman influence (1st – 4th century) almost the whole Małopolska

was within the range of the Przeworsk culture – German Vandals, the remaining north – eastern part was covered by the Wielbark culture - German Goths and Gepids. The period of migration of nations (5th – 7th century) is in turn the period of the Huns invasion, from the east (5th century), the Avars from the south (6th century) and the Slavs. The first castles of the latter in Małopolska from the 6th and 7th centuries were noted by archaeologists in the neighbourhood of Cracow and Trzcinica. In the 9th century the Slavic tribe of Vistulans created on the area an embryo form of a state organization. The Vistulans were defeated by Great Moravia, then by the Czechs and finally, as it was already mentioned in the introduction, in the 10th century it was included in the state of the Polans.

In 1138 Małopolska was composed of two principalities: Krakowskie and Sandomierskie. At the close of the 14th century it was the district in which the unification of the Polish state after the territorial division was initiated. In the 16th century Małopolska included, besides Cracow, Sandomierz and Lublin voivodships, also Oświęcim and principality and voivodships: Ruskie, Bełskie, Wołyńskie, Podlaskie, Braclawskie and Kijowskie. In the effect of the territorial division of the Republic most of the western part of Małopolska fell to the Austrian sector, and the eastern one – voivodships: Kijowskie, Braclawskie and Podlaskie were in the Russian sector.

After the second world war the whole of Małopolska in its original borders and a part of voivodships: Ruskie, Bełskie were within the territory of Poland.

The period when the territory of our interest belonged to the Polish state was characterized by constant migration of people within the frames of settlement actions. They included population of Polish, German, Russian, Valach and Jewish origin. This ethnic, cultural and religious “melting pot” formed throughout centuries an extraordinary richness of cultural landscape.

As far as physiographic aspect is concerned Małopolska is also very diversified. In the south it covers western ranges of the Carpathians separated by valleys: Sandomierska and Oświęcimska from uplands: Lubelska with Roztocze, Kielecko-Sandomierska with the Świętokrzyskie mountains and Krakowsko-Częstochowska.

The south of Małopolska covers complexes of podsolic soils, and in the mountainous parts quart-silicon soils. In the Sandomierska valley there are mainly podsolic soils. In the Lubelska upland and Roztocze the biggest complexes are formed of loess-buff soils and brown ones. The Kielecko-Sandomierska and Krakowsko-Częstochowska uplands are characterized by diversified soils from podsolic, brown loess to brown ones created from heavy clays and loams.

Large forest complexes with majority of a spruce spread in Małopolska in the Beskidy mountains, the Świętokrzyskie mountains, Roztocze and the southern part of the Krakowsko-Częstochowska upland. While pine woods are dominant in the Sandomierska valley and the Sandomierska-Kielecka upland.

The climate of Poland is from one side formed by Euro-Asian high pressure area and from the other low pressure area moving from the Atlantic. Their abrasion causes a large variability of weather and significant changes in seasons. The warmest region in Małopolska is the Sandomierska valley and the coldest the Bieszczady and Podtatrze.

The outlined extremely complex political and social history of Małopolska and its diversified physiography were the basis of forming an exceptionally varied cultural image. Thus, the ethnographers distinguished in Małopolska as many as twenty-four ethnic groups: Bojkowie, Łemkowie, Sądeccy highlanders, Szczawnica highlanders, Spiscy highlanders, Podhalańscy highlanders, Orawscy highlanders, Żywieccy highlanders, Babiogórcy, Kliszczakowie, Zagórzanie, Lachowie Sądeccy, Pogórzanie, Dolinianie, Rzeszowiacy, eastern and western Krakowiacy, Lasowiacy and Kieleckie, Świętokrzyskie, Lubelskie, Roztocze, Powiśle, Sandomierskie and Przemyskie. All the above named groups “manifested” their separateness by a number of elements of cultural “luggage”, such as building, attire, dialect, customs and rituals and awareness of cultural separateness, however, it must be noted that the ethnographic ranges must not be treated categorically like administrative or political ones. Since between particular ethnographic regions there were wider or narrower transitory strips, where the culture elements were mixed. Moreover, at the time of rapid unification of culture we may only talk about ethnographic borders in historical categories.

The choice of the Podhale highlanders and Rzeszowiacy from the whole richness of the cultural image of Małopolska for the museum presentation is not accidental. The culture of the former is probably the most popular in the country and in common meaning it is the essence of the Polish folk culture. The Podhale highlanders carefully cultivate their culture and wherever possible they attempt to include, adopt its elements in the contemporary style of life. The culture Rzeszowiacy formed on the ethnic outskirts is less popular but its colourfulness is still the point of reference on the basis of which the local community creates the awareness ethos.

3. General characteristics of the regions

3.1. Podhale – mountainous country at the bottom of the Tatras

Podhale is a historical – geographical land in the south of Małopolska which spreads at the foot of the Polish Tatra mountains, the highest mountain massif in the Central Western Carpathians (Gerlach 2655 m above the sea level). This relatively small border area (approximately 34 km x 24 km), neighbouring on Slovakia in the south, constitutes a unique centre of the Polish Carpathians not only in the geographical sense but also the cultural one. Podhale is commonly regarded to be a bastion of vivid and genuine folklore, where elements of folk tradition are fostered and creatively developed by its inhabitants called “podhalańscy highlanders “ or “Podhalanie”. This intense emphasis on their own identity makes the discussed area, in comparison to other Polish regions, a unique phenomenon which has no analogies in other ethnic groups. The cultural peculiarity of the Podhale land is intensified by its landscape qualities, first of all the Tatras with their Alps-like sculpture and rich flora, which attract a lot of tourists every year. Of significant importance is also the unique history of Podhale written down and created by the representatives of Polish intelligentsia of the Modernist era and the myth of highlandership which they created at the turn of the 19th century. During the period of national captivity Podhale, which was a part of Galicja – a province of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, was marked by national ideology and it grew to the rank of an “oasis of freedom and Polishship” The capital of this oasis was a small village situated at the foot of the Tatras, Zakopane, sometimes referred to, in patriotic passion, as the Polish Athens.

Geographical conditions, rough and harsh climate, history as well as settlement conditions of the region unquestionably influencing its cultural image were the basis for establishing its ethnographic border. According to the approaches presented in the literature of the subject, it runs in the west along the Czarny Dunajec river, including villages located on its both banks, in the east – it goes along the Białka river, in the north – the range of Gorce and Żeleźnica, and in the south – the Tatras. This area is divided into Pogórze Podhalańskie in the southern part called Skalne Podhale and Nowotarska Valley in the north called Niżne Podhale.

Since the beginnings of the existence of Polish state the area of Podhale was a part of the monarchy property, which greatly influenced the social – legal situation of its inhabitants. As direct subjects of the king the highlanders enjoyed a much wider range of personal

freedoms than peasants in other regions of the country. Besides, in Podhale the serfdom economy did not develop. This fact was considered by many researchers to be decisive for shaping the highlanders' character, their independence and pride. These features are also permanently inscribed in the stereotype image of highlanders, which has been successfully present for 200 years in the awareness of the Polish society. The permanent settlements in Podhale date back to the middle of the 13th century. The harsh mountain climate, infertile soil, forest area did not encourage people to settle there. Also the rulers were not interested in this area, thinking that the natural border zone in the form of the Tatras and the primeval forest are sufficient protection. Only when the danger of losing this land to the Hungarian Kingdom appeared to be real the Polish rulers initiated colonial action. In the first stage of settling the German settlers played an important role. They were mainly brought from Saxony and the neighbouring Spisz. In the 16th century a huge wave of Italian settlers reached the area of Podhale. They were Slavicated shepherds of Romanian origin, coming from Wallahians' land – the land which spread over the Danube. As suggested by the researchers of this matter in 13th century Wallahians left their homeland and together with herds of sheep they started their travel to the north-east, later migrating along the whole arch of the Carpathians. The shepherd economy which was spread by the Wallahians and the tradition related to it, stamped a great influence on the life of people of Podhale, deciding to a great extent on the shape of cultural peculiarity of Podhale, so different, due to the shepherd origin, from the lowland areas of Poland. As late as until the middle of the 20th century in Podhale the basic trade was seasonal high mountain shepherdship with a developed system of shelter grazing and rich ritual sphere. In the beginning of the 20th century the shepherdship in the official interpretation of the Podhale regionalism was recognized to be a foundation of the folk tradition of Podhale, becoming the subject of special protection. At present, although the shepherd economy is being replaced by expanding tourism industry, it is in the centre of priorities of the strategy for the development of the region. The representatives of local authorities as well as regional activists undertake actions intended to preserve this traditional branch of economy. One of measurable effects in this field may be the fact that this year the sheep cheese from Podhale, the so-called "oscypek" was granted the status of a regional product in the European Union.

Today's commonly known and often visited Podhale was "discovered" for the Polish culture of the 19th c. after Poland lost its independence in the result of the third partition performed in 1795 by three neighbouring superpowers, the Tatras and the culture of the local people acted as reviving source. Polish artists intellectuals, enchanted by the landscape and cultural values of Podhale, and also encouraged by the greater than in the remaining

annexations social-political freedom of Galicja, found in this mountain region convenient conditions for their patriotic and artistic activity. Realizing pra-Polish elements in folk tradition of highlanders they postulated to include them in the national output. To the great extent they themselves performed this revival programme creating literary, music and architectural works inspired by the tradition of Podhale, which entered the canon of the national output. The achievements of Młodopolskie elites, and mainly appreciating local heritage and the creative attempt to transform folk contents into higher forms, not only flattered the highlanders but also awoke the considerations over their own past. As early as during the years preceding the beginning of the first world war, the group of native Podhalanie started preparing foundations for the social-cultural activity in the region. In 1904 in Zakopane the Association of Highlanders was founded, and in 1919 the association Związek Podhalański (ZP) was registered. The statute accepted by the Podhale organization defines basis aims of their activity: working on rising the people of Podhale in ethic, mental and economic aspects, inculcating national duties, sustaining unique culture of Podhale. From over 100 years perspective of existence of the regional movement one may say that the work of its members played and still plays an important role in promoting cultural heritage of the region and creating regional identity. At present the Association vigorously acts in the whole territory of Podhale. It has its branches in almost all towns of Podhale. It also covers the neighbouring mountain regions. It has its brother organization in the United States and in Canada.

Since the mid 1880's one has been able to observe in Podhale a specific renaissance of highlandship manifested in the increase of interest in its own past and culture. This specific revival, although often seen as "fashion for highlandship" (which is in a sense the effect of popularity of the regionalistic idea in Polish culture) is today seen, among others, in such disciplines as: highlander attire, folklore, architecture, décor, folk art and literature and social life. Elements from the past which are selected and introduced to modern reality create real image of Podhale culture, also called regional culture. Of course, this image is not an exact reflection or direct continuation of traditional culture model, nevertheless it sustains its Podhale character. And although the elements of old tradition are deprived of the meaning that they had in the society at the turn of the 19th c., they are perceived as carrying significant value – they are highlanders'. In a new context, which is to a large extent unified reality, they gain a different meaning, becoming more often a symbol of regional identity.

3.2. *Inhabitants of Rzeszów*

Jan Stanisław Bystroń (distinguished ethnographer) in his work *Ethnography of Poland* wrote; “And we make one more group separately, namely Rzeszowiacy. And here we also deal with the borderland, which although a direct prolongation of Małopolska to the east, developed separately. The name Rzeszowiacy (...) includes native, long time ago settled Polish people of the western part of previous Ruskie voivodship. The spatial range of the ethnographic group in question covered the areas situated on the right bank of the lower Wisłok river-basin and the left bank of the middle San. In the north it spreads to Sokołów Małopolski, in the east to Jarosław, in the south to Błażowa and in the west to Sędziszów Małopolski.

The folk culture of Rzeszowiacy was formed during over six centuries of historical and social development, initiated by intensive settlement of people of Polish origin in the 14th and 15th centuries on the territory covered by influences of Russian people.

The favourable natural conditions of the Sandomierska valley – relatively rich soils, a well-developed net of rivers and streams and mild climate made agriculture the basic industry of Rzeszowiacy. At the same time, the source of extra money was weaving, mainly producing linen but also woollen cloth. These factors decided that Rzeszowiacy were relatively richer, which resulted on one hand in the feeling of superiority in relation to Lasowiacy who were their neighbours in the north, and on the other hand in forming a separate group ethos expressed in monumental buildings, in which the pillar construction was applied while building houses, richly equipped interior, developed decorations and the attire, in which we can see elements of rural and noblemen fashion, as well as rich customs and rituals.

4. The folk attire

4.1. *The Podhale attire as a symbol of the regional identity*

The Podhale attire, originates from shepherd-Wallahian tradition shared by many groups inhabiting the Carpathians, which can be proved by e.g. “Wallahian” shirt or cloth as a basic material for production of many items of clothing. During the previous centuries both a female attire as well as a male one have changed and adopted new elements. Shaped by environmental and social factors, and also culture fashions coming from both the neighbouring regions and the elitist strata it was a kind of a barometer of changes occurring in the Podhale community.

According to the oldest iconographic sources from 17th c. an old male attire was relatively simple and almost completely deprived of decorative ornaments. It was mainly made of home-made cloth, i.e. materials produced at home: linen, cloth obtained from sheep wool and animal leather. Its basic elements included a linen shirt with wide, loosely falling sleeves; a waistcoat or a short light sleeveless fur jacket; trousers made of white cloth with an Italian cut i.e. with narrow legs and two flies cut out at the front. The highlanders' footwear were "kierpce" made of cattle leather, which were attached by means of leather straps wrapped around calves. The outer clothing – a kind of a coat – was a knee-long "gunia" made of thick dark cloth or a little shorter one made of white cloth "cucha". The basic cap was a black felt hat, which was decorated by a copper chain or a narrow strap with seashells on it. The characteristic finishing of the attire were wide leather bands fastened at the front with a few brass buckles and decorations in the form of big brass pins with which the shirts were fastened at the front. The highlanders commonly carried woolen or leather bags.

Just like the male one, the female casual attire was modest and simple. The typical outfit of the highlander women in the old times, mainly made of home-made linen, was: a blouse with long wide sleeves; a slip worn under the skirt; a long, richly creased skirt with a "zapaska" at the front; a fitted corset with small buttons or hooks and eyes; a short waistcoat of light sheep leather and "kierpce". The female highlanders leaving home on cold days wrapped themselves with large linen scarves, the so-called "płachta". In winter they wore short coats with long sleeves made of thick brownish-grey cloth. The married women obligatorily covered their heads with long linen straps called "zawiązka". Unmarried women did not wear "zawiązka". In summer they were bareheaded and in winter they used linen scarves tied under their chins. However, smart clothes used to be more sumptuous and impressive. The wealthier highlander women could afford luxury outfits made of expensive, noble fabrics. They proudly strolled in brocade corsets, silver aprons or damask skirts. In summer while going to church they put over their shoulders white "rańtuch", i.e. scarves made of gentle fabric. In winter they put on cloth "szubka" hemmed with hare or fox fur. The lavishness and elegance were emphasized by jewellery – brass and silver rings and red natural corals.

In the second part of the 19th c. as the result of opening Podhale to the so-called wide world, improvement of economic situation of highlanders of Zakopane, as well as with relation to the development of textile industry, the Podhale attire was significantly transformed. General availability of decorative haberdashery initiated the process of luxuriant bloom of embroidery art. Colourful embroideries appeared on men's trousers and "cuchas"

with geometrical and flowery patterns. Moreover, highlanders introduced black jackets imitating military uniforms and waistcoats which were adopted from town outfits. Even greater changes appeared in women outfit which was greatly influenced by town fashion, and later on, the folk attire from Cracow. The highlander women started wearing elegant outfits made of factory fabrics: one-colour, long skirts and varied in forms blouses. They decorated their corsets more and more seldom, first applying “sutasz”, later beads and sequins, and finally colourful threads, with which they embroidered large flowery systems. They wore white blouses decorated with English embroideries and flowery skirts, the so-called “tybetki” to richly decorated corsets.

Nowadays the Podhale attire is undergoing the period of its bloom both with respect to abundance and variety of forms as well as the scale on which it appears. What is significant is the fact that the attire is still developing and changing. In this aspect the elegant ladies of Podhale are in the lead of it. They possess more than ten and even a few dozens of sets of clothes. They are the ones who, to a large extent, stimulate the work of Podhale tailor services offering new outfits almost every season. Today just possessing an outfit is nothing special – it must be fashionable. An interesting invention of a few recent years are highlanders’ christening clothes for babies: white corsets and skirts for girls and white trousers and “cuzecki” for boys. As we can see, the outfit in Podhale is not frozen in the artificial frames of a scene, it is not just a museum object, a dead element of the previous epoch. In modern culture it still has numerous social-cultural functions. Being a smart outfit, it is also for the highlanders an important element building up the feeling of the community bond.

4.2. The attire of Rzeszowiacy

The every day outfit of a Rzeszów peasant was until the end of the 19th century relatively poor. Made of home-made linen, of a simple cut it was composed of “porcionki” – trousers and a girded knee-length shirt. A straw hat was worn on heads. On a bit colder days a peasant used to wear a coat called “płótnianka”, and in winter a woollen cloth “gunia” or a fur coat. In winter they walked barefoot or in wooden clogs, in winter – leather shoes with shoe-tops.

The every day women’s outfit was composed of a long shirt with sleeves, a long broad skirt – “fartuch”, “zapaska” (apron), a jacket and a shawl with which the head was wrapped. In winter women used to wear fur coats similar to men’s ones and decorated with colourful saffians.

However, the festive attire, usually made of factory-made fabrics, richly decorated with embroideries, did not only function as a gala outfit but was also a manifestation of wealth and the social position.

In men's outfit a linen shirt with a collar about three cm wide with two buttons had long sleeves ended with a wide cuff – "majszet" of a double linen also with a button. The shirt was let out and girded with a leather belt.

The trousers – "gacie" made of thick linen were short and shallow. They were kept on hips by a strong string tipped on both ends with a few buttons and let through a hem at the top of the trousers. The legs were at the bottom let into leather shoe-tops. A kind of trousers were the so-called "sukieniaki" made of factory-made woollen cloth. They were dyed blue and at the sides they were decorated with appliqués of red woollen cloth.

Men used to put waistcoats – "kamizole" on shirts. They were also made of factory-made woollen cloth dyed blue. The waistcoats did not have sleeves and they were slightly narrow in the waist. Their edges were decorated with red insertions. In the front on the right there were 8-10 buttons, on the left the holes bordered with red thread. Sometimes next to the buttons and holes there were rows of the so-called "kocasio" – in a form of flowers made of red shortly cut worsted. At the height of hips there were pockets in the waistcoat the holes of which were covered with lapels decorated with red insertions.

The overcoat in the men's attire of Rzeszowiacy was a peasant's russet overcoat ("sukmana"). It was made of thick self-made woollen cloth dyed brown. The peasant's russet overcoat with broad shoulders was narrow at the waist and significantly widened at the bottom. The sleeves narrow at the top, then widened were tipped with square lapels – "łapki". The front of sukmanas was done up with large brass hooks and eyes. On the right there was a cut through which one could reach into the pocket of the waistcoat. The peasant's russet overcoats were decorated with strings of colourful worsted which were arranged in a pattern composed of four parallel strings, yellow or white, attached around the collar and falling down to the waist along the cut at the front.

In summer straw hats were worn, on colder days "makowy" hat – black made of felt the head of which was edged by a velvet ribbon and "przęczki" – celluloid plates, beads and artificial flowers. The footwear was leather shoes with knee-length shoe-tops.

In the women's festive attire the shirt was made of thin factory-made linen. The simple neck and the creased back and front. The long sleeves creased at the top and narrowed at the bottom were tipped with cuffs. The shirts were decorated with white or red and blue embroidery with plant motifs.

Another element of women's attire was "spodnik" – a short narrow skirt made of white linen. The proper skirt – "fartuch" was worn on it. It was made of white factory-made linen decorated with white or red and blue embroidery of plant motifs at the bottom. A wide flaxen or cotton belt with 20-30 tucks was worn on it. The bottom of the belt was also decorated with a pattern of white or red and blue embroidery, or sometimes with a wide factory-made lace.

An exceptionally decorative part of the women's attire was a bodice. They were often made of brocade, damask or sometimes silk. The bodices were low-necked and they were very narrow at the waist. They were done up with hooks and eyes or tied with a colourful ribbon and decorated with colourful embroidery in the form of bunches of flowers as well as compositions of sequins and beads.

On colder days women put on blouses – "katany". They were made of factory-made woollen or cotton fabrics. "Katany" were hip-length and they were narrow at the waist. Long sleeves were narrowed at the bottom. They were fastened by tiny, often glass, buttons and decorated with factory-made white or colourful embroideries, with which all the edges were bordered except for the neck. The overcoats were peasant's russet overcoats – "żupany". They were made of blue woollen cloth, and their "wyłogi and łapki" were made of red woollen cloth. The edges were bordered with a yellow string.

The additions to the women's attire were strings of genuine corals and multicolour ribbons arranged in bows and attached to the bodice or katanka just under the hair. The women used to cover their heads with shawls made of silk, tulle or wool. The particularly beautiful ones were made of tulle, machine-edged in notches, decorated with patterns of plant motifs. The footwear was "trzewiki" with highly tied shoe-tops. They were made of black leather.

5. The calendar of folk annual rituals

5.1. Christmas time

5.1.1. Christmas in Podhale

In Podhale the Christmas time called here *Godni Cas* was accompanied by a rich system of rituals and beliefs, in which we can find both Biblical contents referring to events related with the birth of Christ as well as archaic ones, which are the trace of old cult practices particularly related with the period of the winter solstice. Even the period of Advent preceding Christmas was filled with pictures and beliefs which prove that this time was

perceived as extraordinary. The special day was St. Lucy's day 13th December. According to an old proverb "Święta Łuca dnia przyruca" from that day the countdown of the so-called Polish days, from which the weather for the next year was foretold, started. Each day from St. Lucy to Christmas eve represented a month of a year. St. Lucy's eve was believed to be one of those days on which evil and unfavourable powers like witches and "babrosie", which are harmful for households, e.g. take away milk from cows, are activated. Various magic operations were applied to prevent it. In mornings housewives fumigated cows with smoke from consecrated herbs and men served sheep salt consecrated on Holy Saturday for licking. They also rubbed the doorstep of farm buildings with garlic to protect the household from *carownicy*. Another method of preventing witchcraft was recognizing witches among local women and then neutralizing them. For this purpose a resourceful and initiative master of the house on St. Lucy's day started making a wooden chair, systematically adding each day until Christmas eve a new element. During the Christmas midnight mess when he knelt on it at the moment of Elevation he was able to identify witches among the local women. They were said to turn their back at the altar.

An exceptional day was Christmas eve, abundant in a number of prohibitions and magic practices. According to the saying *Jako Wiljo taki cały rok*, everybody tried to live this day in the best possible way, avoiding argument, crying, anger and cursing. As older residents remember: *Rano trza było wstąpić, umyć się i brać do roboty. Chłop, coby unikać zwady, jechał do lasa po drzewo, a baba zostawała w chałpie z dziećmi i ryktowała wieczerze. Dzieci starały się być grzeczne, coby bitki nie zebrać, bo tak byłyby bite cały rok*. In the evening the whole family in festive attires gathered at the Christmas table. The dinner was started by the master. He entered the room well dressed in warm shoes and a hairy fur coat carrying a small sheaf of oats and a green fir twig forked in the shape of a cross, the so-called *podłaznicka*. Fitting the *podłaznicka* over the door he said the wishes. Then everyone said the prayer during which they mentioned and even invited the deceased to joint dinner. The souls of the relatives were believed to arrive from beyond the world that evening. A meaningful sign of this invitation was an empty plate and a spoon put on the table. Nowadays, the empty plate mainly signifies a seat waiting for a visitor. After the prayer, the father initiated sharing the Christmas wafer, which was soaked in honey. Later, the meal consisting of a few fast dishes was consumed. They were mainly: peas and cabbage and potatoes, cooked cabbage, mushroom soup, peas or broad beans and the so-called noodles with the souse made from prunes and stewed fruit. After the dinner, the host went around the farm buildings to bring the animals the remains of the Christmas eve dinner and a colourful Christmas wafer.

Meanwhile, girls with flushed cheeks started fortune-telling about getting married. They drew blades of grass from the hay placed on the table, counted prune stones, listened from which side a dog would bark to find out where the future husband would come from. Many families spent the evening singing Christmas carols and listening to stories about supernatural phenomena which happen at Christmas night: about animals which speak human voices, about spring water which gets miraculous features, or even changes into wine, or wandering souls of the deceased. Before midnight the family made for a solemn Christmas midnight mass to church, after that they did *podłazy* which was visiting houses by farmers and young bachelors. They used to be ritual meetings combined with the activity of bewitching good fortune. *Podłaźnicy* entering a room sprinkled grains of oats over the family imitating the activity of sowing and said the traditional wishes:

*Na szczęście na zdrowie,
na to Boże Narodzenie,
coby się Wom darzyło mnożyło
syćko boskie stworzenie.*

Podłazy, combining the elements of vegetative magic and matrimonial elements also had an important social role, they were a good opportunity to make social contacts and strengthen social relations. Christmas was celebrated in peace and seriousness, in the closest family circle. The range of this holiday was emphasized by numerous prohibitions concerning performing the most simple activities. On that day cooking, making beds, sweeping, entertaining friends were not allowed in order not to frighten away the souls of the deceased coming from the beyond. Only the second day, St. Stephen was devoted to revelling by music and singing. It was then that the carollers started visiting houses. In Podhale they were both groups walking around with a star and “*turoń*” as well as *jaślikorze* walking around with a small crib. *Jaślikorze* dressed in highlanders’ attires performed the scene of the birth of Christ in the Tatras among shepherds of Podhale. Carolling customs were one of the most spectacular and complex ones as far as their origin is concerned. Besides the evangelic elements presenting the birth of the Child of God, ritual gestures, behaviours, formulas related to the magic of fertility were of great importance. The ancient zoomorphic figure of *turoń*, personifying vitality and fertility, was very significant in this context. *Turoń*’s rhythmical movement, striking a stick on the ground as well as the staging of his death and bringing back to life were a ritual act symbolizing stimulation of vital powers asleep in the ground.

The Christmas period was closed by Epiphany when juniper, chalk and water were consecrated. They were believed to have apotropaic properties and they were used throughout

the year for protection of both people, farm animals and households. On that day in Podhale servants were employed, working conditions and wages were agreed. Epiphany also started the time of carnival called “nispoust” in Podhale.

Among numerous attributes which are present in Christmas rituals a special role was played by the so-called *podłaźnicki* which were green fir twigs forked or arranged in a shape of a cross. They were used for decorating homes, a white and black room by fitting them over the doorway, windows and pictures. Thus, a long time before a classic Christmas tree appeared in Podhale in the beginning of the 20th century, there was a custom of decorating homes with green twigs and a green tree, which was hung under the ceiling. Among numerous meanings of a Christmas tree, we can undoubtedly find reference to a cosmic life tree, the motif of which is present in a lot of cosmogonic myths, including Slavic ones. It can be proved by a Carpathian carol noted down in the 19th century which talk about a tree on which two birds are sitting and talking about the creation of the world. This archaic symbol was referred to in order to recall the image of a primary order which is the proto model for all activities. It was additionally enriched by a Christian symbol of a paradise tree. Evergreen *podłaźnicki* were also the sign of life in this dramatic time perceived as a struggle between day and night, light and darkness and waiting for the birth of Christ. They were also attributed strong apotropaic properties. They were to protect not only a house but also farm buildings. On Christmas eve day the host fitted twigs over the entrance to a stable and threshing floor, making the sign of a cross. He also brought *podłaźnicka* to the room before the Christmas eve dinner. Bachelors and farmers at the time of “*podłazy*” also came with green twigs. When the Christmas time was over, the fir twigs were taken down and kept for protection. If animals fell ill, the reason for which was commonly believed to be a cast spell, the smoke from *podłaźnicka* was used to fumigate the ill cattle and all the farm buildings. Oats grains carried the same meaning. A small sheaf of oats was brought before the Christmas eve dinner to the room by the host and put in the corner “*coby w nowym roku był urodzaj*”. During *podłazy* the bachelors sprinkled oats grains over the family. The oats consecrated on St. Stephan’s day was thrown into a barn where the cut crops were stored to protect them from the pest and bring harvest. Also hen were fed with it. Firstly, a circle was made of the grains and later the birds were let into it. The symbolic action of sprinkling oats was also introduced to church, with a specific interpretation. According to the explanations of people who remember this custom, people used to throw oats at each other to commemorate St. Stephan’s stoning to death.

Some customary behaviours originating from ancient Podhale customs related to Christmas have been preserved until modern times. For instance, until present in a lot of households participants of the Christmas eve dinner put a few spoons of each dish away on a separate plate. After the dinner, the host takes this food to the stable to give it to the animals. Bachelors still practice *podłazy*. They are usually of a wooing character and they end in all night revelling, or sometimes even in fixing the date of *namówiny*. In the evenings in many Podhale villages, from Christmas to Epiphany one may also see a groups of carollers visiting both highlanders' homes and hotels full of tourists thirsting for exoticism. The peculiarity of modern Podhale celebrations is also based on outer setting, which is highlanders' attire worn at that time, highlanders' music or pastorals. In many churches during the Christmas midnight mess we can hear traditional highlanders' music composed of string instruments. Another interesting phenomena is literary output in a dialect, namely creating songs and pastorals which talk about the birth of *Jezuska w Tatrach wśród górol*. An example is one of numerous pastorals written by a local poet Franciszek Bachleđa-Księdzuloz:

*Witoj Jezusicku pod holami, zostań tu na zawsze między nami,
Otwieroj serduska nase, ku dobremu, pytomy Cie.*

5.1.2. Christmas at Rzeszowiacy's

Christmas is a Christian holiday. A deeper analysis enables seeing in it a number of proto-Slavic, ancient-Greek culture, Roman, Jewish, Persian elements which were adopted, however with new meaning functions and interpretations. The very period of Christmas overlaps with, among others, rituals celebrated by Slavic tribes in honour of deceased ancestors, thus particularly on Christmas eve we realize clear elements related with the dead. In ancient Rome, on the day of winter solstice (25th December) there were celebrations in honour of Persian god Mithra, who was considered to be the creator of life and mediator between people and gods.

The formation of Christmas traditions took a lot of centuries. And the solemn Christmas eve dinner was separated from the whole cycle of rituals only in the 18th century.

The period of preparations for Christmas and Christmas eve dinner at Rzeszowiacy's, just like in other regions of Poland, was a three-week Advent. The name comes from Latin and means "arrival". Advent was a period of fast, mortification, penance and the time when agricultural work was not allowed. Oscar Kolberg noted down: "Advent is a holiday for our people ... They do not drink vodka, do not eat meat, pork fat, and on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays do not use butter or milk which replaces oil".

The Christmas eve was full of customs and fortune-telling, which were believed to influence the success of the oncoming year. Therefore, all household got up early on that day to do all necessary rituals. So, they washed in water into which a silver coin or sometimes garlic was thrown, which was meant to secure good health. Farmers went to an orchard in the morning to check if the trees were covered in hoar-frost, which augured next year's harvest. Whereas, ploughing once frozen ground was believed to secure a good harvest of the crops. Women, while feeding hens, threw grains inside a circle drawn or marked with a binder, so that the birds stay in the enclosure. All works were done conscientiously, keeping serious, avoiding arguments, anger and crying.

Strangers visiting a home on Christmas eve also forecast good or bad luck. Thus, a man wearing a fur coat forecast disease, while a woman – good breed of cattle.

The room in which Christmas eve dinner was eaten was carefully prepared for this special evening. At the ceiling a top of a fir or pine called “pitka” was hung. It was decorated with apples, sweets, nuts and chains made of paper. Rye straw was put around the table. Oats was sprinkled on the table along with garlic and hey, which were covered by a tablecloth. Legs of the table were tied with a binder. Under the table an axe or a plough knife were placed. All these operations were believed to secure the abounding harvest and good health for the household.

The Christmas eve dinner was called “pošnik”. They made sure that it was composed of twelve dishes (the number of months in a year). The dishes were prepared from the harvest gathered in the field, garden, orchard or forest. So, on the Christmas eve table there were: borsch (called žurek) with potatoes or mushrooms, peas cooked with cabbage, pierogi filled with cabbage, potatoes, mushrooms, cereals and prunes. Also buckwheat, pearl barley, millet with prunes or apples, noodles greased with oil, fingers with poppy and honey, stewed dried fruit, apples and nuts.

The Christmas eve dinner was started when the first star appeared. Children were occupied with looking for it in the sky. They tried to have an even number of people sitting at the table. It forecast that everybody would take part in the next Christmas. If one person was missing to an even number, a single neighbour was invited to dinner. A prayer was said before sitting at the table, and then a wafer was shared and they wished each other merry Christmas.

The dinner was eaten in the serious atmosphere. One could not refuse to eat a served dish. The spoon with which it was eaten could not be put down. It had to be kept in one's

hand and not dropped on the floor, because it forecast the death of the person in the oncoming year. The dinner ended in a joint prayer.

The time until midnight, when everybody went to the Christmas midnight mess “pasterka”, was devoted to fortune-telling. One of them was “bicie kóp” which was throwing straw at the ceiling and counting how many blades stayed in it. They believed that this was the number of stacks that would be collected during next harvest. They also tied the spoons left on the table with hey so that the cattle in pastures stays together. Girls used to run out of the house and shout to hear from which side the echo would reply. It would be the direction from which the future husband would come. Farmers went to orchards and tied the trees with binders so that they have better fruit. It was also common to give the leavings of the Christmas dishes to the live-stock to make them healthy. Whereas, boys going to “pasterka” lit wisps of straw in fields. It was to protect the harvest from damages.

Carollers visited homes at Christmas. The purpose of this visit was to wish the household well. Groups of carollers, composed of young men in fancy dress, bringing a crib, a star, “turoń” or horse arranged various performances. Carolling is started by requesting the host to accept it. On entering the house one of religious carols was sung and then the performance was made after which the proper carolling was started. It was dedicated to particular members of the family, starting from the host, hostess, and then girls and boys. The sung sentences had fantastic contents, among others, about finding a gold ridge while ploughing, hunting for a deer with gold antlers, an orchard giving gold apples, but also about a happy love. The carolling was completed by a girl dancing with the disguised visitors, wishes success and the carollers Christmas food, drink, and sometimes money.

As it has already been mentioned, one element of a carolling group was a crib. it had a form of a small building covered with a pitched roof with a stage in the front wall, on which motionless figures are fitted: God’s Mother, St. Joseph, a feeding trough with baby Jesus, the three wise men, and animals: a donkey, lambs and an ox. At the front of the stage there are movable dolls: a witch, a Jew, a devil, a Gipsy, shepherds, Herod, which were moved by caroller standing behind the crib. The crib rested on four “legs”. The texts of performances of Nativity plays were prepared and learned during Advent.

An attribute of majority of carolling groups was a star. It was usually made of a hoop of a worn-out sieve to which a cardboard arms of the star were attached. It was all covered in colourful paper. The star was attached to a pole with a horizontal axle which enabled its turning round.

Another carolling group visiting houses at Christmas were “Herody”. They presented the performance about the story of king Herod who saw in the birth of Christ the threat for his rule and he ordered to kill all newborn babies not excluding his own son. Finally he is punished for his cruel deeds. The death cuts his head off, a devil takes him to hell. The actors of the performances were older bachelors dressed for king Herod, a knight, the three wise men, a Jew, the death and a devil.

The performances made by carolling groups walking with “turoń” had a different expression. This zoomorphic figure was a remain of archaic rituals aimed at bringing fortune and fertility to the visited households. The culminating point of the show, when the animal fell down dead and after funny actions of bringing it back to consciousness with vodka, sprinkling oats on it, it returned to life, symbolized the nature dying in winter and reviving in spring.

5.1.3. “Cracow Crib”

“Cracow is Wawel, Sukiennice, Barbakan, Wit Stwosz altar, one of the oldest universities in Europe. Cracow is also a city of old folk traditions, where “Cracow crib” was created, the most beautiful of all the cribs in Poland.” (R. Reifuss)

Rating the Cracow crib among the biggest curiosities of Cracow by an outstanding ethnographer whose words were quoted in the introduction, is not an exaggeration. Because it is an essence of this particular city: its history, architecture, customs, tradition, recognized by all citizens of Cracow regardless of their age, social background, political and religious beliefs. The crib has always awoken emotions in wide circles of the city residents, in the past when it was carried from one house to another at Christmas, and now during annual cribs contest which takes place near A. Mickiewicz monument in the marketplace in Cracow. Thus, it is worth briefly mentioning the genesis of this cultural phenomenon.

The “Cracow crib” as well as other cribs originates from a nativity play – it is its plastic composition. In the territory of Poland it appeared at the close of the 13th century. It was exhibited in churches on altars or in chapels. Initially it was a staging of the stable of Bethlehem, filled with motionless statues. They represented: Baby Jesus, God’s Mother, St. Joseph and shepherds. After the Three Wise Men Day the statues of exotic rulers bringing gifts for the Baby: gold, frankincense and myrrh were added. As years passed, the crib was enriched by new figures, which had nothing in common with the Bible story. You could see rich gentlemen in carts, hussars, trading Jews, inn attendants, as well as people at work, having fun, fighting. A colourful, full of movement crib delighted people who crowded

around it in churches. Wanting to see it closely they pushed one another, climbed the altar, benches. It was sometimes necessary to intervene in order not to destroy the crib by the crowd. J. Kitowicz mentions such cases in his diaries from the 18th century writing about a sacristan who scattered the crowd with a whip: "... and beating with it lively those who were standing nearby, made a new representation to the further performance which was much more funny than the nativity play actions. When some of them running away from the whip fell on one another, the others vigorously jumping down from benches and the altar also fell on one another hurting their heads, sides, hands and legs ...". In order to eliminate such scenes in churches, at the end of the 18th century the clerical authorities banned organizing cribs with movable figures. However, the attractiveness of the movable cribs was so strong that they soon moved outside churches, they were usually organized by the clerical services or the youth. They started walking from house to house with the cribs. Initially, the action of a crib – nativity play had a cloth with painted exotic landscape as the background. Before the cloth there was a curtain behind which the carolers were standing moving puppets and saying the text of the performance. This kind of a crib was recorded on the canvas by a famous painter of the Stanisław epoch – J. P. Norblin.

In Cracow walking around with a crib was popular in the first half of the 19th century. Then the dominating model was a crib-stable covered with straw with two little towers and the device used for moving puppets. The further development of the architecture of cribs carried in Cracow took place in the 1860's. The following model appeared at the time. A modest, straw covered Bethlehem stable was replaced by a two-storey construction covered with a dome. At its both sides there were two clock towers with one-storey annexes. The cribs were mainly produced by brick-layers residing in the suburbs and neighbouring villages of Cracow. The seasonal character of this occupation made them look for additional jobs in winter. Small cribs were mass produced, and they were sold near St. Mary's church as gifts for children and the big ones with stages for puppet performances. The latter being a basic requisite of a group of carolers. They gave an opportunity to present artistic talents of their creators. The crib had to delight the audience. The more delight over the crib the more orders for home performances, and consequently the higher income. At Christmas crib teams gathered in the Cracow marketplace waiting for customers who invited them to their homes. Every team had a different crib, other texts of performances. One of the most popular teams at the beginning of the 20th century was run by a brick-layer Michał Ezenekier.

Due to his charming style, artistic and directing talent, he gained the favour of the best homes in Cracow. Ezenekier also played a significant role in the development of architecture of

Cracow's crib. His crib was for many years a pattern which was imitated by other crib-makers – the pattern which initiated “Ezenekier style” in the Cracow's crib. It consists of a wide stage, two narrow side towers, four-storey and more, covered by Gothic helmets. Between the stage and the towers there is a recess with nativity play figures, over it a bit overwhelming Baroque tower with a Baroque helmet. The space between the middle tower and the side ones is filled with small towers covered by “cross roofs”. The whole construction is decorated by colourful pieces of paper, dominating silver colour, with elaborate cut out stained-glass windows.

The great period of the Cracow's crib ends after the first world war. It withdraws from the marketplace in Cracow. It is still cultivated in the outskirts of the city until the end of the second world war. To keep the high artistic level of the Cracow's crib “Contest for the most beautiful Cracow's crib” was organized in 1937. It has lasted, with breaks, until present. In this way a unique event gathering every year in the beginning of December crowds of people of Cracow and tourists from the whole of Poland and abroad in front of the Adam Mickiewicz monument was originated. Nowadays at the bottom of this monument real masterpieces of crib art are exhibited. During this over seventy-year old tradition of the contest history there were such great creators of the Cracow's crib as W. Owsinski, T. Ruta, S. Mitka, F. Tarnowski, Z. Dudzik. They are the ones who elaborated their style, introducing details and elements of Cracow's buildings into the architecture of cribs, which in combination with their undoubted artistic talent produced works which are one of the most attractive exhibits of art, which are proudly possessed by museums in Poland and abroad. Since the Cracow's crib has nowadays become a brand mark of Polish Christmas cribs.

5.2. Easter in Podhale

In traditional culture of Podhale, just like in the whole of Poland, the Easter rituals focused around the victory of life over death. The joy related to the coming spring which woke the sleeping world of nature to life, intensified hopes coming from Resurrection of Christ. The period introducing to Easter celebration was forty-day Lent, which was begun by Ash Wednesday with a characteristic ritual of sprinkling ash on heads. Revelries and music parties were over. The period of quietness, seriousness and at the same time limitations concerning food, dress and social life started. As older inhabitants emphasize, till the middle of the 20th century mainly potatoes and cabbage were eaten throughout Lent, and on all Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays *trzymano ścisły post* – eating bread and drinking water.

This specific mortifying the flesh was a preparation, even a sacrifice, necessary to properly experience and perform the ritual of transition from winter torpor to spring revival of life.

One of the oldest Lent customs practiced in Podhale until the 1960's was *chodzenie ze śmierzdecką*. Starting on White Sunday called *Śmiertna*, which was the fourth Sunday of Lent, little girls usually from the rural poor started walking around the village with an effigy which represented the death attached to a pole. In the beginning it was a straw effigy, later a doll made of pieces cloth, and in the interwar period and after the second world war a factory-made doll covered with a white shawl. The girls participating in the procession stopped under the houses windows and touching the glass with *śmierzeczka* moved it rhythmically up and down singing a song:

Sła śmierzdecka z miasta

Pon Jezus do miasta

Dziewcenta jom niesom

O jojecka prosom.

Next they entered a room and got eggs from the host and hostess. The whole procession ended in a specific execution of *śmierzdecka* which the girls drowned by throwing it into a mountain stream. This action of killing, in which we can find echoes of pagan ritual of destroying winter, brings association with a popular in the whole Poland custom of drowning *marzanna*. Thus, we may presume that the Podhale *śmierzdecka* was a later transformed by Christian tradition sisterly form of *marzanna*. Similarly, as an effect of transformation of an archaic monster into a figure of Christian origin, we may interpret a custom of burning Judas, the apostle who betrayed Jesus, popular in some villages. The youth made a big doll of straw representing Judas, which was first lit and then carried in a solemn procession to a river and drowned.

Holy Week preceding Resolution Day was begun by Palm Sunday which was also called Kwietna (Flowery), in the liturgical calendar commemorated Jesus' solemn arrival at Jerusalem. For this occasion the inhabitants of Podhale villages prepared palms for consecrating. They were made of willow twigs covered in catkins which were tied with flax. Consecrated in church they got healing and magic properties. A whip was twisted of flax for shepherds, and they believed that the animals penned with it would not lose their way during pasturage and *nie dostana uroku*. Single twigs with catkins were thrust on fields and in orchards as well in the farm under the roof. During the first pasturage the cattle was beaten with them. Farmers used to put catkins together with a piece of bread or oats cake called *moskol* under a ridge during the first plough. Catkins separated from twigs were thrown to

seeds and potatoes, *by urodzaj był piękny*. They were also used in folk medicine. Swallowed as a whole directly after consecration they protected from sore throat, and powdered were applied later for various pains. The smoke from consecrated catkins was used for fumigating sheep setting off for seasonal pasturage to the mountains. Nowadays instead of catkins more sumptuous palms are commonly consecrated. They are made of green conifers twigs, dried cereal, willow twigs and real or artificial flowers, richly decorated with colourful ribbons. In a lot of parishes contests for the most beautiful palm are organized to maintain this custom. They are an occasion for social contacts as well as strengthening social bounds. In the evenings for the whole week the whole families, groups of friends and neighbours, folk bands meet in selected houses to prepare together an Easter palm. Rabka, w town in the northern part of Podhale is famous for this tradition. The local museum has been organizing contests for an Easter palm there since the 1930's in 2007 the tallest palm was 32 m tall.

The Holy Week was for the life of rural society the beginning of Easter celebrations when, besides a developed church liturgy, there was also a culmination of practices and activities related to vegetation and agrarian magic. In these spring rituals an important role was played by requisites symbolizing vitality and revival, such as green juniper and ash-tree twigs, eggs and life-giving water. On Good Friday before the sunrise (at night between Thursday and Friday) adults started ritual ablutions in current water. It was commonly believed that they protected from various ailments, securing good health for the whole year. On that day the water got special properties healing particularly skin diseases: lichens, pimples and scabies. The oldest inhabitants of the region even today remember washing in mountain streams and springs as well as in the morning washing children in water from nine springs. Good Friday was also the day of work and farming activities. On that day farmers washed their horses in rivers, *coby były zdrowe*. It was believed that wounds heal quickly on Good Friday so they cut the horses manes and tails when they grew ugly. They also marked lambs cutting notches on their ears. On that days also twigs of trees and bushes were cut so that they grow beautifully and straight. Women used to make butter since early morning that day, which was consecrated in church. Some of the butter was always left until next Easter, and it was used as ointment for healing skin diseases. On Good Friday working in the field was prohibited in Podhale, which is concurrent with magic prohibitions to touch the ground. Under the influence of Christian religion it was subject to a certain reinterpretation and received the following explanation: *We wielki Piątek nie wolno sioć, ani orać. Nie wolno robić, bo Pana Jezusa złożyli do grobu. Ni można nic robić w polu "coby nie rusać ziemi, we ftorej Chrystus ukrzyżowany leży"*.

On Holy Saturday fire, water and food were consecrated. The coals and water called “chrzcielna” were taken home after the consecration and used for both activities of apotropaic character and home medicine. First of all, they were attributed the power of “odmawianie złego” or breaking the spell. Since the morning women had been preparing food for blessing, of which Sunday Easter breakfast was prepared the next morning. *Święcelina*, as the food consecrated in church was called, was mainly composed of the foods produced in the household. They used to put into a woollen bag or a basket made of juniper roots: butter formed in a shape of a lamb, fresh sheep cheese, bread or cake of oats flower and potatoes, the so-called *moskol*, , smoked pork fat and sausages, salt, horse-radish root and eggs coloured in onion peels. Also cut out pieces of potatoes for setting and seeds of oats were added. The whole was decorated with green juniper and myrtle. On consecrating everybody tried to get home as quickly as possible, and then walk around the house three times to *odegnać wselnijaki niesczęście*.

Holy Sunday began the period of joyful celebrations. After a solemn mess and Resurrection procession, the family met at breakfast prepared from the food consecrated on the previous day. Most often they had *żur* prepared on the base of broth made from the smoked meat whitened with buttermilk, to which cut into cubes sausage, eggs, smoked pork fat and a lot of grated horse-radish were added. Holy Sunday, similarly to Christmas day were spent in a family circle, serious atmosphere and peace, limiting the most simple activities to minimum. They avoided cooking, sweeping, and even making beds not to frighten away the souls of the dead coming on that day from the beyond.

It was only on the second day, called *Śmieguszt* or *Polewacka* then the explosion of the joy repressed during the fast took place. The expression of the triumphant vitality was the custom of pouring water on each other abundantly. This activity, with purifying and procreative elements was most actively performed by lads, although adults did not avoid it either, pouring jugs full of water on women and girls. Bachelors, quite often threw spinsters right into mountain streams and rivers to have more fun. And although there was sometimes still snow on fields, the girls did not avoid freezing baths, hoping that they would bring good health and fortune. The magic of living water was active during a few following days. In accordance with the custom they used to pour water on one another *W kozdy piątek do Zielonych Świątek*. (on each Friday till Whitsuntide).

Nowadays the peculiarity of celebrating is mostly expressed by participating in rituals of Holy Week specified by Catholic liturgy of Paschal Triduum and family gathering at the Easter table on Sunday and Monday. Although the zone of old beliefs and magic practices

among young generation has been significantly impoverished but some customary behaviours in a relict form have survived until nowadays. Thus, for instance Easter palms are kept at homes all year long, because they are believed to protect the household from fire and misfortune. The consecrated water is also attributed special protective and healing properties, and on Good Friday farmers do raising works related to animals. On Easter Monday children and youth pour water on one another abundantly and bachelors visit their girlfriends to sprinkle them symbolically with water or perfumes. These visits become an occasion for joint revelries often accompanied by singing and music. Moreover, the memory of old customs is sustained by conscious initiatives. An example can be the already mentioned contests for an Easter palm or younger contests for the most beautiful traditional Easter basket. For example in Biały Dunajec on Holy Saturday children dressed in highlanders' attires bring baskets which, in accordance with the organizers' assumptions, should contain products typical for the Podhale tradition: lambs of butter, *moskole*, sheep cheeses, bread, eggs coloured in onion peels, a horse-radish root, salt and cut out pieces of potatoes. The memory of old customs is also maintained by local highlanders' bands, which in their artistic programmes often reach for topics related to folk rituals. We should add that the peculiarity of celebrating Easter in Podhale is also expressed by the outer setting of religious celebrations. In a lot of parishes the guard at the grave of Christ is kept by boys and men wearing highlanders' attires, and the vigil is performed by highlanders' bands. Similarly, on Holy Sunday inhabitants come for the Resurrection solemn procession dressed in their gala dresses, and the whole liturgy is accompanied by a highlanders' band. These outer, apparently insignificant folk elements emphasize the solemn character of the celebration. They also contribute to strengthening the community bounds creating a specific landscape of the regional culture.

5.3. *Midsummer night at Rzeszowiacy's*

The customs related to the summer solstice, the so-called St. John's eve popular in other regions were unknown to Rzeszowiacy. The culmination point ending the cycle of rituals and spring holidays and starting the summer period were Whitsuntide. They were previously called Pięćdziesiątnica (the 50th anniversary), because they were celebrated fifty days after Easter. The main attributes of Whitsuntide practices were green tree twigs, water and fire. Walls of houses were decorated with green twigs, usually lime-tree and birch. They were stuck into the roof and a double row of trees in front of the house entrance. Also the interior was decorated with them, they were stuck behind sacral paintings, and leaves were glued to the glass of windows. Fields were sprinkled with water, it was also poured into wells, and

they walked around fields with fire or torches called “koczury”. These operations were a form of vegetative magic which was to secure good harvest and success in field works. During Whitsuntide they also forecast what the harvest would be. Thus, sunny days announced good harvest: the first day of the holiday – rye, the second one – wheat.

Decorating houses was also an occasion for matrimonial endeavours. In a lot of places lads decorated girls’ houses with green twigs, which was the sign that they were interested in the girl. This custom was often treated as an official form of engagement. If on the first holiday day during the lad’s visit in the girl’s home he was properly entertained, it meant that the engagement was accepted.

The ritual food during Whitsuntide were eggs. Scrambled eggs were eaten for breakfast in most households. Shells of blown eggs were stuck on sticks which were put on patches of cabbage and fields of flax. This endeavour was to protect the crops from caterpillars and bring good harvest.

Whitsuntide was also the period of celebrations for shepherds. Each of them received from the master two eggs for the so-called “jaśnica”. The frying of it was held in a field. On that day each shepherd took a pot, wood, smoked pork fat and salt. The solemn breakfast was eaten together so that even the poorer ones could get food.

Modern Whitsuntide is mainly associated with church holiday of Sending the Holy Spirit. The custom of decorating houses is still continued, but its old meaning functions are unknown.

5.4. Harvest festival at Rzeszowiaczy’s

The tradition of harvest festival is connected with the completion of collecting harvest. On that day a group of harvesters lead by a leader went to the mansion. They were met by the squire. The harvesters sang a song about the hardships suffered while collecting the crops and praised the generosity and beauty of the squire, who handed them money, inviting to the ceremony of completing harvest on the Lady of the Herbs’ day (Matki Boskiej Zielnej). On that day female harvesters prepared a harvest wreath which was composed of two crossed hoops attached to a ring, which is its base. The hoops were decorated with ears of wheat, flowers, apples, nuts and colourful ribbons. Next the wreath was taken to church and after being consecrated, to the mansion. Here it was received by the squire, who thanked the harvesters for the hardships of work and invited them to a treat – bread with butter, sausages and beer. In front of the mansion there was a party with participation of the squire and his family.

The completion of harvest at rich farmers' had a different form. The celebration took place on the same day. The last sheaf was decorated with field flowers and herbs: camomile, yarrow and carried the farmer's home, who had to buy the wreath treating the harvesters with vodka and or beer. The farmer also paid for the musicians and there was a party in front of the house with dancing.

In the interwar period a new form of harvest was formed – the harvest festival. It was held on the Lady of the Herbs' day regardless of how advanced collecting harvest was and it was composed of two parts. Before the midday the harvest wreath was brought to the previously chosen master of the ceremony, who usually was a n experienced and socially active farmer. Here a small treat was held and next the wreath was taken to church. During the mess the priest consecrated the wreath. In the afternoon the second part of the ceremony was held, usually at the master's home or a People's House, where a loaf of bread made from freshly ground flour lay on the table. Young people staged the return from a field with the wreath, which was handed to the master. He thanked for the hardships of work in the field, and then cut the loaf of bread and gave it out to everybody taking part in the ceremony, wishing they never lack it. The ceremony ended in a party.

The modern harvest tradition is continued in many villages and it refers to the interwar period ceremonies. And the wreaths are real pearls of artistic handicraft.

6. Family rites

6.1. Time of marriage and wedding in Podhale

Ceremonies related to marriage in traditional communities had a rich and developed plot, consisting of ordered string of ritual actions of initiation, social and economic meaning. The act of solemnizing marriage was characterized by complex symbols, pointing out the change of social status of the just married. Similarly as in other rites of transformation, in the wedding action there were both rituals of separation (leaving the group of peer girls and boys) as well as inclusion (entering the group of women and men). An important role was played by magic activities with fertility significance, protective and purifying activities, during which props – symbols were used. Those ritual activities were to meant to on one hand facilitate the transition of the just married to their new status, and on the other hand – ensure successful and prosperous life. The performance of the mentioned activities had a strictly prescribed course: each gesture, formula, action and behaviour were conducted according to the set order. Even a small departure from the obligatory scenario, according to the magic outlook, could cause in

the future unwanted consequences both for an individual and the whole community. The very wedding was just a central element of the course of ritual actions, which in the model approach suggested by M. Maj, may be divided into four basic stages of the wedding action: 1) initial contacts between the bride's and groom's parties, 2) ritual actions within one's "own" group during the period preceding the wedding, 3) main ritual action on the wedding day finalized by "oczepiny", and 4) "poprawiny" feasts finished by moving the bride.

The traditional weddings in Podhale were also conducted according to a similar scheme. Solemnizing marriage was preceded by a string of preparatory activities. After the period of advances the groom initiated preliminary dates, the so-called "dowiady" probing the bride's family's opinion on him. He went on "dowiady" in the company of a matchmaker, who was most often his godfather or a farmer respected by the village. If the wooer was accepted, the preparations for the engagement were started, which were called "zrękowiny" in Podhale. They took place in the house of the future bride with participation of the invited witnesses, community leaders and neighbours. After the initial ritual word game, the families of the future bride and groom began negotiations, i.e. defining the financial conditions. When the agreement was reached the leader started the engagement ceremony. It was symbolic binding hands of the future bride and groom with a white handkerchief and blessing them. This ritual opened the period of preparations for the wedding feast. In the tradition of Podhale the wedding guests were invited by chosen by the future bride handsome men, who had nice voices and the concept. The weddings were usually held on Tuesdays and they lasted until Thursdays. On the wedding day from the morning the guests gathered in the wedding house for the solemn breakfast. In a separate room older women dressed the bride for the wedding, putting on her a few white embroidered white skirts, a light corset and a white "rańtuch" on her shoulders. The head was decorated with a myrtle wreath – a symbol of the spinster status, which at the same time had a protective function. At that time the groom wearing white cloth trousers, a new white "cucha" and a hat necessarily decorated with a feather and a bunch of tiny flowers went to his chosen one. On his way he encountered a lot of obstacles in the form of poles hanging across the road which were removed after giving the ransom. It was the price that the groom had to pay for symbolic crossing the border of his world and entering the strange world of the bride. Another important moment was blessing the bride and groom by their parents and sprinkling holy water on the gathered people. Next the wedding procession conducted by best men on horses moved towards the church for the wedding ceremony. On their way back home the wedding guests again encountered numerous obstacles such as gates constructed of two beams in the shape of a triangle., which this time symbolized the transition

of the just married to another social stratum. The groom had to give a ransom offering vodka to the “gate guards” dressed for beggars and Gypsies. At the doorway of the wedding house the just married were welcomed with bread and salt with wishes: “don’t ever be short of these God’s gifts”. A sheaf of oats was thrown to the feet of the just married crossing the doorway for good luck. When everybody was in the room they sat at the tables and a huge wedding feast began. The highlight of the first wedding day was “oczepiny” called “cepowiny”. It was a ritual during which the hairstyle of the bride was changed and decorated. It symbolized the change of social status. The bride said goodbye to her unmarried status and she entered the group of married women. Cepowiny was started by the best men. They kidnapped the bride, and after obtaining symbolic gifts, they transferred her to “starościnas” (older women) hands. Starościnas took the bride to a separate room where, during ritual singing, they took off her wreath and let down her plaits. The let down hair symbolized the moment of transition, the marginal stage of “being and not being”, when the bride was no longer a spinster and not yet a woman. During this activity women often pinched and plucked the bride to make her cry. When she had cried over her wreath, starościnas started putting on a bonnet (“czepek”), i.e. a white bonnet scarf. Then they entered the revelry room introducing her to the groom and the guests. It was a signal to start solemnly giving presents to the bride. The money for “cepiec” was collected by one of starościnas, and the bride was dancing with the wedding guests. After the presents were handed, the bride was again taken by the best men, and they demanded a ransom, this time from the groom. After paying for his wife, the groom gave her a feather from his hat as a present – the symbol of a bachelor status. This gesture sealed the transition rite. The just married became a rightful married couple and started a new life as a family. On the next day, at early noon the guests gathered for another feasts “poprawiny”, after which on Thursday the bride was solemnly moving to her husband’s house. The parents prepared a dowry for their leaving daughter. They put a chest filled with smart clothes and underwear, pillows and feather beds on a cart. They said goodbye to their daughter, who accompanied by the singing team, set off to her new home. The moving usually ended in a feast.

Highlanders’ weddings, though in a simplified form, are still organized in Podhale. You can even observe a fashion for “having” the so-called traditional highlanders’ weddings. Certainly their modern form is deprived of a developed sphere of primary meanings and ritual behaviours typical for the traditional society, nevertheless in its basic version it relates to the old scenario. Just like in the past, on the arrival of the team with the groom to the wedding house “wypytowiny” the blessing takes place. Next the procession consisting of carriages led by horse-riding best men goes to church. After the wedding, on the way back the wedding

procession encounters a lot of obstacles such as gates, which are opened after obtaining a ransom. Before entering the wedding house the mothers of the just married welcome the couple with bread and salt and invite the guests to an abundant feast and party, where the rhythm of disco polo alternates with solo traditional highlanders' dances. The highlight of the wedding is "oczepiny" sustaining symbolic bargaining for the bride and the ceremony of putting on "czepiec". The whole rite is finished by the groom when he gives his wife the feather from his hat and they dance together. As it was already mentioned, the modern version of the oczepiny rite in comparison to the rites described in the 19th c. sources is much impoverished both in its ritual layer as well as the formal one. A lot of previous ritual behaviours have disappeared, and the symbolic meaning of those that still exist, is not fully conscious. Therefore, one may say that modern oczepiny have been transformed from a ritual which is a closing of the ritual transition of a bride to the group of married women, to a kind of a folk show, which is mainly aimed at collecting money and fun. Of course, the above transformations do not totally degrade oczepiny. Besides the outlined folk functions, they also have an important role for interpersonal social relations, the integrative function. Undoubtedly, modern highlanders' oczepiny integrate the participants of the wedding party making them aware that they are a community which has its own, unique way of celebrating socially important events.

Bread in the wedding rite.

During the performance of the ritual plot various means of expressions were applied: dancing, music, singing, orations, gestures and objects. The latter, also called requisites or ritual attributes played a key role in rites pointing at their character. So, water was for example used in rites of purifying and procreative meaning. In turn a sheaf of oats thrown to the bride's feet while crossing the doorway carried the power of vitality and fertility. Green juniper twigs used for a wedding birch or myrtle plaited into the bride's wreath were to secure health, patience and purity of the just married. A very important wedding attribute was bread. Bread as basic food in every day life, was the symbol of lasting, life, prosperity and God's blessing. In the 19th and 20th c. tradition of Podhale the bread was present in almost each stage of the wedding action. During zrękowiny the starosta tied the fiancé and fiancée's right hands and gave them blessing over two loaves of bread put on the table. After the blessing as the sign of the concluded agreement all participants of zrękowiny ate bread together. On the wedding day, before leaving for church, during the blessing, the mother put bread on the bride's back. Sometimes she also gave her daughter a piece of bread for the journey. On the way back from church to the wedding house, the wedding guests threw small bread rolls to

children, which were later replaced by cookies. On arrival from the church, on the doorway of the wedding house, the bride's mother welcomed the just married with bread and salt. Then she gave the bread to the just married, who carrying it went around the wedding table, kissing the corners in order to, as Kamiński wrote, "God bless them, bring them fortune, because this table is blessed, because Lord Jesus lay on this table [in the form of bread]". After the ceremony the just married put the bread in the middle of the table. After *oczepiny* the bread was cut and served to the wedding guests. Eating bread together was a kind of sealing the act of solemnizing marriage. At present many old meanings have been forgotten, however the bread is still seen as the God's gift, the symbol of life and prosperity. Let this be proved by the lyrics of the modern song:

God bless from the Sky high,

Let the just married never be short of bread.