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## UKRAINIAN FOLK GAMES AS EVIDENCE OF ANCIENTNESS OF PAGAN RITUAL CEREMONIES

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### Abstracts

In *raising of the problem* the question about the unexplored side of the transformation of active games from ritual and ceremonial actions into folk games is put. As exactly in a folk game the hidden ceremonial actions were saved from the ancient times on the Ukrainian territory. As exactly the man of the past tried to influence on forces of the nature by means of playing active actions. As in the ancient times a man, being the object of the influence of the environment, began to build himself and his playing history. Why the folk games, that have remained till now, contain magic motions of ceremonial actions of the ancient Ukrainians, where myths, legends, narrations, relations, labour and military events are traced. *The aim of the work* consisted in finding out of the pre-conditions of the origin of the folk game and clarification of the vision of the world of ancient slavs by means of active actions. In the *summary of the main material* it is said with the transformation of ritual and ceremonial game show into folk games as phenomenon of holistic and universal product, as the centre of constructing relations of the collective with nature. The outlook of the ancient slavs is outlined, namely how by means of movement in the game the man of the past wanted to influence the powers of nature; how movement combined myths, legends and tales in ritual- game shows; in what modern games mythical ritual ceremonies are concealed, which with the passage of time were rebuild into folk games and entertainment. The game is regarded as the means of regulation, preservation, reproduction and development of human relationships and values in social and cultural area. *In the conclusion* the relationship of the ritual and ceremonial active actions of the ancient Ukrainians and of forces of the nature and also transformation of those actions (over historical time) into folk games is stated, and which are the remains of the mythical vision of the world of the ancient Ukrainians.

**Key words:** myth, vision of the world, faith, game, ritual, action, motion.

**Сергій Мудрик, Ірина Кліш, Едуард Навроцький, Андрій Гаврилюк. Українські народні ігри як свідчення давності язичницьких обрядових дійств.** Щодо *проблеми* ставиться питання про недосліджену сторону трансформації рухливих ігор із ритуально- обрядових дійств в народні ігри. Як саме у народній грі збереглися приховані обрядові дійства з прадавніх часів на українських землях. Як саме людина минулого за допомогою ігрових рухових дій намагалася вплинути на сили природи. Як у прадавні часи людина, будучи об'єктом впливу навколишнього середовища, розпочала будувати себе й свою ігрову історію. Чому в народних іграх, що збереглися до наших днів, приховуються магичні рухи обрядових дійств давніх українців, у яких простежуємо міфи, легенди, перекази, стосунки, працю, військові події. *Мета роботи* – з'ясування передумов походження народної гри та спроба зрозуміти бачення світу давніх слов'ян за допомогою рухових дій. У *викладі основного матеріалу* розглядаємо трансформацію ритуально-обрядового ігрового дійства в народні ігри як явища цілісного й універсального продукту, як центру конструювання відносин колективу з природою. Викладено світобачення давніх слов'ян, а саме: як за допомогою руху в грі людина минулого бажала вплинути на сили природи; яким чином рух поєднував міфи, легенди, перекази в ритуально-ігрових дійствах; у яких теперішніх іграх приховано міфічні ритуально- обрядові дійства, що з плином часу перебудувалися в народні ігри та забави. Подано гру як засіб регулювання, збереження, відтворення й розвитку загальнолюдських стосунків і цінностей у соціокультурному просторі. У *висновку* констатуємо взаємозв'язок ритуально-обрядових рухових дій давніх українців із силами природи та трансформацію цих дій (із плином історичного часу) у народні ігри, що є залишками міфічного бачення світу давніх українців.

**Ключові слова:** міф, світобачення, віра, гра, ритуал, дійство, рух.

**Сергей Мудрик, Ирина Клиш, Эдуард Навроцкий, Андрей Гаврилюк. Украинские народные игры как свидетельство давности языческих обрядовых действий.** *Относительно проблемы* ставится вопрос о неисследованной стороне трансформации подвижных игр с ритуально-обрядовых действий в народные игры. Как в народной игре сохранились скрытые обрядовые действия с древнейших времен на украинских землях. Как человек прошлого с помощью игровых двигательных действий пытался повлиять на

силы природы. Как в древние времена человек, будучи объектом воздействия окружающей среды, начал строить себя и свою игровую историю. Почему в этих играх, сохранившихся до наших дней, скрываются магические движения обрядовых действий древних украинцев, в которых прослеживаются мифы, легенды, предания, отношения, труд, военные события. **Цель работы** – выявить предпосылки происхождения народной игры и понять видение мира древних славян с помощью двигательных действий. **В изложении основного материала** рассматривается трансформация ритуально-обрядового игрового действия в народные игры как явления целостного и универсального продукта, как центра конструирования отношений коллектива с природой. Изложены мировоззрения древних славян, а именно: как с помощью движения в игре человек прошлого хотел повлиять на силы природы; каким образом движение совмещало мифы, легенды, предания в ритуально-игровых действиях; в каких современных играх скрыты мифические ритуально-обрядовые действия, которые с течением времени перестроились в народные игры и забавы. Подается игра как средство регулирования, сохранения, воспроизводства и развития общечеловеческих отношений и ценностей в социокультурном пространстве. **В заключении** констатируется взаимосвязь ритуально-обрядовых двигательных действий древних украинцев с силами природы и трансформация этих действий (с течением исторического времени) в народные игры, являются остатками мифического видения мира древних украинцев.

**Ключевые слова:** миф, мировоззрение, вера, игра, ритуал, действие, движение.

**Formulating the research problem.** Each social group, ethnic group, nation has its own spiritual game world, which accumulates a centuries-long history.

Folk games derive from the times of ancient mythology. In that time, they were not cognitive-theoretical, but social-practical, aimed at ensuring the unity of the social group. Any mythology subdued and shaped the forces of nature through the imagination [1, p. 43-59]. The form of such reality exploration can be called ritual game ceremonies.

The game is explored by scientists from many disciplines. But the folk mobile game, its origins, world view in it and the reality exploration are not studied at all. It is mainly considered as a factor of health and mental development, as a need to enrich the motor experience of the younger generation. Some aspects of the folk game are mentioned in the writings of O. Voropaj (1993), AV Tsos (1994), GV Vorobey (1997), VF Davidiyuk (1997), VI Levkiv (1998), O. L. Ivanovskaya (2002), V. Skuratovsky (1987, 1992, 1993, 1994, 2003), T. Vakulenko (2003), S.P. Pavlyuk, M.G. Zhulinsky, G. M. Storcheva, O. Kulik (2006), L. Voloshko (2007), O. Cheryomukhina (2008). They describe ritual games with the help of which the process of involvement in the cultural heritage of the Ukrainian people is described. It is aimed at defining human desires and organizing group actions and suggests both a sense of unity between the members of the group as well as a sense of harmony with the world as a whole [1, p. 44].

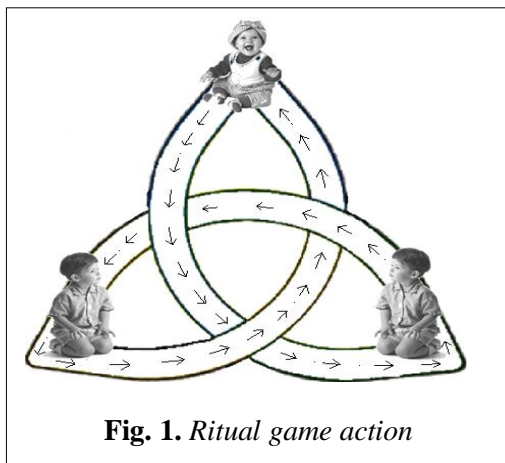
By this time, the history of the emergence, development, formation and preservation of popular mobile games in the socio-cultural space, their transformation from ritual game activities into outdoor action games was not studied. How exactly the person of the past, with the help of motor action moves, tried to influence the forces of nature.

Therefore, the study of the folk games origin history will enable us to understand the vision of the world by ancient Slavic tribes that populated the Ukrainian territory. It will help to understand how the movement

activities combined myths, legends, stories in ritual-action games to transform them into folk games and why the most important feature of mythological thinking, which was reflected in motor action, included objective and subjective [2].

**The goal and the specific task of the article.** To determine the origin of the folk games on the basis of the scientific and methodological literature analysis, psychological and pedagogical observations of action and folk games.

**Presentation of the main material.** Each ethnic group had its own vision of the nature phenomena and human place in it. The evidence are archaeological excavations, folklore material, myths, legends of beliefs preserved to our times. The faith of the Slavs consisted of the deification of nature, recognition of the human thinking power as being connected to objects and



**Fig. 1.** Ritual game action

phenomena of the external nature, sun, water, earth, trees, birds, animals, stones, heaven worshipping, various beliefs, holidays created on the basis of nature deification.

Switching to agriculture, a primitive society falls depends on the on the forces and elements of nature. Soil, precipitation, change of seasons, etc., everything has a significant value, since it determines the results of the activities. Therefore, the central images in the mythology of this period and in games composition are figures of anthropomorphic gods, who embody different forces and elements of nature. Human, influenced by various mythical forces, create themselves and their own history. Many folk games reflect the archaic ritual action games, especially during the spring cycle, which consist of the magic movements with the combination of mythological images. In the past, almost all ritual games consisted of magical movements. The so-called «Kryvii Tanetsj» game almost always starts the spring games. In our opinion, this may indicate the ancient origin of this game, as it underlines a deep primitivity in moves. But, in the very act lies the understanding of the worldview.

Participants of the game - the girls, hand in hand, run around one by one between three poles in the ground or between three sitting children (Fig.1), showing an unusual body movements, sing a simple song (all the participants of the game are singing). The game is repeated without changes.

The original meaning lies, apparently, not in the text or the song, but in the movement and participants of the action. The main task - to raise the mood, to awaken the vital energy, to influence the natural forces, to direct strength into life. The secondary tasks are connected with the myth, the demonstration of feelings, desires, experiences, hopes and the connection with the whole world. These are unique beliefs of the ancient Slavs about the surrounding reality, where the reality connects with the imagination. A distinctive feature of Ukrainian mythology is pantheism, where god is associated with the nature.

In most folk games, the faith and the worldview of the ancient Slavs is reflected. Thus, the location in the game «Kryvii Tanetsj» of three people, at a certain distance from each other and the sitting children points to the three-componential divine principle of the world unity:

- indicates the presence of the main gods of the Great Tryglav (Fig. 2) - Svarog (the mighty lord of the world, god of fire, taught people to use metal), Perun (the most powerful force of heaven and earth, lightning and thunder), Svitovydy (Svyatovyt, Sventovyt - god of the sky and heaven light) [5; 8; 9]. «The Boyanov Hymn» tells about the main gods of ancient Ukrainians.

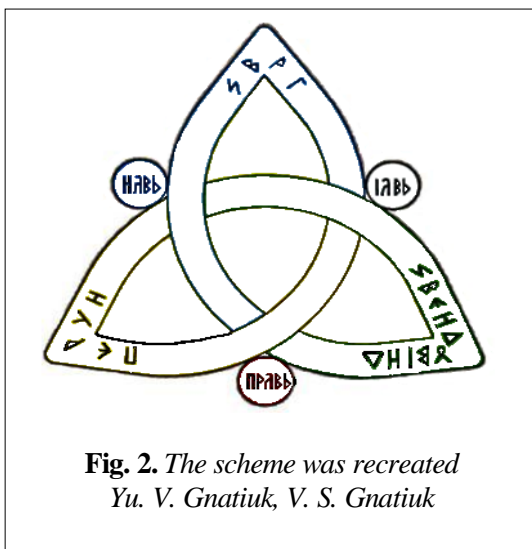


Fig. 2. The scheme was recreated  
Yu. V. Gnatiuk, V. S. Gnatiuk

The essence of the Great Tryglav is in the interaction of the substances of Iav, Prav and Nav (Iav - the world of people and living beings, Prav - the world of gods, Nav - the world of spirits and demons) [7].

Therefore, the children sitting places (doing nothing, just sitting in a triangle and watching the dancing movements of girls) in the ritual game is the symbolism of the ancient Slavs imagination and their gods worshipping. The image of young girls, running around one by one between children, recreates the flow of the river. Water was deified by our ancestors, because it is a healing, purifying, fertile power of nature, a vital energy. People are calling it «Living Water». Therefore, with this movement, the girls honored Dun (Goddess of Water, a virgin and a mother of all living nature, the Goddess of fertility [5; 8]):

- points to the honoring of the Goddess Mokosha (mentioned in the the «Primary Chronicle» list by Prince Volodymyr), who deals with needlework - spinning a thread

which uses later to make a cloth. According to a legend, it is Mokosha who is spinning a thread of life. Therefore sitting children, or the poles in the ground symbolize the spindle (Fig. 3) and the girls, running around between them, are spinning a thread of life. As being the only female divine, Mokosh, probably, was also a patron of other women activities. She was honored because of that. In the ancient cult of the Great Mother who was also considered the Goddess of fate was reflected the image of Mokosha [11]. Among the Ukrainian women, the Mokosha cult was kept as a tradition for centuries;

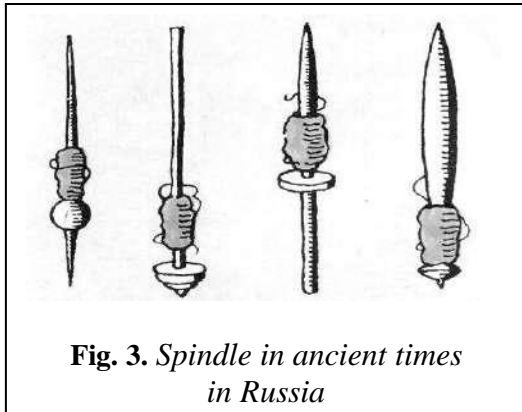


Fig. 3. Spindle in ancient times in Russia

- indicates the annual calendar of the ancient Ukrainians, who connect certain periods of the year - Spring, Autumn, Winter, with the Great Time Tryglav (Rod, Rozhanytia, Lada). Children symbolize the seasons, while girls, moving between them, ask for beauty, feeling, love, passion by addressing Lada (the mother of all months of the year, the Slavic goddess of beauty and love). The gods Rod and the Rozhanytia are asked of fertility and the continuation of the family line [5; 8].

The text appeared with the acceptance of Christianity. Christian faith gradually displaced the pagan gods of our ancestors. Therefore, over time, rituals transformed into a folk game (covering up one's tracks from enemies).

Nature was a religious cult, among Slavs in particular. A distinctive feature of Slavic beliefs was the connection to the earth. Slavs paid special attention to water, rivers, wells, fields, forests, animals. Each settlement had its own gods, each outskirts was believed to be surrounded by mermaids, foresters, etc. A series of games, the names of which preserved history and traditions prove this assumption.

A prominent Ukrainian folklorist V. Davidyuk «organized and conducted expeditions to the villages in Volyn, Rivne, Ternopil, Khmelnytsky, Zhytomyr, Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk regions of Ukraine, Brest in Belarus, and the Bialystok Voivodeship in Poland» [13]. He gathered an information about the customs and traditions of the people, which were transmitted from generation to generation for many centuries.

The folk-dialect collection «Polisska Doma» (V. Davidovuk, G. Arkushin [12]) tells about the folk customs and traditions of the Polissia region in Volyn. In particular, it describes the Rusal Week, when ritual games fully reflect the vision of the universe, showing the combination of reality with the imagination. The image of the mermaid was associated with the souls of the dead, as well as with water and vegetation, which combine the water spirits features.

Ritual mermaid games wires on the polissya were in the active use at the end of the 19th century. On the last day of the holiday 2-3 most beautiful girls (mermaids - deities of the Slavic mythology [5, 9]) were chosen, they let their hair down and decorated them with fragrant herbs and flowers. Afterwards they hid near a river or lake in the bushes or in a reed and lied in wait to catch those who would find them near the water. Within 50 m from them a rope with a length of at least 30 m and an altitude of up to 40 cm was stretched above the ground. Other ritual players are walking near the water. The «mermaids» show themselves and start to catch the players. A final element of the game was to reach the rope and cross it [12]. Those who are caught were out of the game (according to the mythology the caught players were pulled into the water). In ancient times, the caught players did not have the right to approach the water all year round, because they were considered to be under the threat of having great troubles (the mermaids will tickle them to death or pull into the water).

The games «Mara», «Vidjma», «Tanetsj gorbatogo dida», «Didukh», «Lelya» and many others, reflected mythological images, which were displayed in the past through a system of ceremonial movements, which connected a human with the nature as closely as possible.

The games «Ogirotchky», «Goroshock», «Proso», «Siyannia maku», «Petrushka», «Zhnyva», «U konopelj», «Gorishock» simulate an act of agricultural work, which occurred a very tight connection with the magical movements performed by the elder ones before moving on to teenager's games. In the past, such ceremonial events were held with the beginning of the sunny year and through the entire agricultural season. With the help of the games a human of the past tried to awaken, strengthen and develop themselves, to influence the required natural phenomena, as well as to neutralize hostile and harmful ones.

Mythological images of the ancient Slavs in ritual games reflect an unusual vision of the world, where the reality interconnects with fantasy.

**Conclusions and prospects for further research.** Life, being close to nature, initiated the original and unique folk games. The games accompanied our ancestors everywhere - labor, family holidays, religious rituals, during military campaigns and victories.

In the age of paganism, ritual games were an integral part of human life. Many antiquities in motor activity have survived in folk games, leading us to the beginnings of the folk game arts. The game ritual was a bright form of collective human existence, which served as a means of adapting the requirements of life

with the environment. Due to the historical time, ritual games were gradually converted into folk games, a large part of which contains in the hidden form a mythological worldview of ancient Slavs.

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