

Easter in the Kociewie Region

As in the rest of Poland, Easter was always celebrated solemnly in the Kociewie Region. Easter atmosphere could already be felt on Palm Sunday when palms were blessed in the churches in memory of the triumphant entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem. In the Kociewie Region, willow twigs with catkins were simply used instead of palms. The willow branches were brought home and stuck behind pictures. The branches were believed to have a protective power and to scare off lightning. Some farmers also stuck them on their fields and brought them to their barns or apiaries. Swallowing a catkin from a blessed palm was considered to be an effective remedy for sore throats.

On Holy Sunday thorn twigs were blessed. Then, the blessed "thorns" were placed in houses, barns and pigsties.

During Holy Week, usually on Holy Saturday, housewives from the region prepared Easter eggs, painting them in different colours with natural dyes. The green colour was obtained by boiling eggs in winter leaves stock, while various shades of yellow, brown and red were obtained from onion shell and alder bark. It also happened that eggs were decorated with ornaments scraped on the shell in the form of circles, zigzags and dots. At the beginning of the 20th century, a new drawing of a lamb with a flag appeared on the eggs.

Easter Sunday, the first day of Easter, was the most important day. It was widely believed that unusual things happened during sunrise on Easter Sunday. Ladders were put against roofs and the sun disk was observed. The sun disk reportedly "vibrated" and it was even possible to see a jumping lamb on it. At the same time, water also gained miraculous and healing power. Early in the morning, people washed themselves in streams, especially their eyes and faces. Water was also brought home to the sick people.

That Sunday morning was also the time when it was possible to get rid of shag hair from one's head. It was thought that diseases such as rheumatism were localised there. It was believed that by cutting the tangled hair and throwing it into the stream on that day, one was able to effectively remove unpleasant ailments from one's body.

Before dawn on that day, villagers were awakened by the sound of a drum with which bachelors walked around the area and reminded everybody that the important church service of Resurrection was approaching.

After the Resurrection service, the host of the house sprinkled the table set for Easter breakfast with Holy water. The table was set with sausage, ham, painted eggs, yeast cake and bread. A clay lamb was also placed on the Easter table. Local potters occupied themselves with the production of such lambs.

On Easter Monday, bachelors took freshly blossomed birch twigs, which had stood at home in water since the beginning of Lent, and they walked with those twigs from house to house, "whipping" girls on their legs.

Early on that day, parents hid painted eggs near their houses or in the fields and then children looked for them, believing that the eggs had been hidden there by the Easter Rabbit. That funny game was accompanied by various nursery rhymes such as:

"The Easter Bunny is sitting in the field or in the forest
He is carrying painted eggs
Tell us where you have carried them, Easter Bunny"

Easter morning in a cottage of wealthy farmers in Kuyavia at the beginning of the 20th century

On Easter Sunday, people got up before dawn in order to make it in time to the church for the Resurrection service. After the service, residents of Kuyavia washed their faces in streams on their way back home. It was a common belief that the "living water" had special power on that festive morning – that it cleansed the body and ensured health for the whole year and that it guaranteed a beautiful complexion for girls. People hurried back home in order to sit at the festive and richly set table as quickly as possible.

On the Easter table, there was food which had been blessed in the church on the previous day. In the past in Kuyavia, all the festive food was brought to the church in large baskets and it was blessed there.

Before the Easter breakfast started, housewives cut the blessed eggs as a symbol of life so that all the household members could taste it. Everyone also ate blessed horseradish, which was supposed to have a positive effect on health.

The central place on the Easter table was occupied by a butter lamb, a bowl with eggs dyed in onion shell and a jug with twigs of periwinkle.

At the beginning of the 20th century, separate plates and cutlery for each person were not used in villages. Bread, sausage, yeast cake and other foods were cut into large, thick pieces and everyone ate them with their fingers.

During the Easter Holidays, clay floors in peasant cottages were sprinkled with sand in floral patterns. The most patterned sand "carpets" were strewn in the houses with girls in marrying age. Ornaments made of sand adorned rooms even for several days if the household members stepped over them carefully.

During the Easter Holidays, people sang cheerful customary secular songs and religious songs, which they knew from the church. The most popular songs included:

"We have a happy day today,
Which each of us demanded...";
"Alleluia, Jesus is alive, He is no longer hidden in his grave ..."

From the very morning of Easter Monday, boys in Kuyavia walked with buckets filled with water and poured the water over girls. On that day, maidens could not count on the help of their parents, who were grateful to the bachelors for visiting them and offered the boys eggs, sausage and a glass of vodka. "There will be sadness and snivelling in the corners in those huts where no one will come to pour water over the girls because that will mean that the girls are either untidy or that they are daughters of witches and they are not supposed to get married."

In the afternoon of the second day of Easter Holidays, girls walked around Kuyavian villages with "a little grove" or a small pine decorated with colourful ribbons. They visited all the households and sang "Our green little grove, beautifully decorated...", while the hosts gave them eggs and sweet pies.

Holy Saturday in the cottage of wealthy farmers in the Tuchola Forest during the interwar period

In contrast to Good Friday, which was full of reflection and prayer, Holy Saturday was a day of hustle and bustle.

On Good Friday during the interwar period, the inhabitants of the Tuchola Forest were awakened by "God's Wounds" – the father of the family whipped the feet of the sleeping household members with barbed twigs, which was to commemorate the Flagellation of Christ. People attended Good Friday services at church or celebrated the Way of Cross at home. People were reminded of the necessity to pray by the sounds of knockers and tinkers, which replaced the ringing of bells during the last three days of Holy Week.

Holy Saturday was the last day of preparations for Easter. During the interwar period, wealthy housewives from the Tuchola Forest baked sweet Easter cakes and thin yeast pies richly sprinkled with crumble. They also prepared meat dishes which could not be consumed during Lent. Before Easter, richer families killed pigs and smoked ham and sausages so that the festive table could be richly set.

Dyes for painting eggs were prepared in the kitchen. In the past, only natural products were used for that purpose. The golden colour was obtained from onion shells, the burgundy colour from beetroots, the green colour from winter corn and the brown colour from alder or oak bark. The eggs were given luster by rubbing them with bacon or lard.

Painted eggs, baked goods, sausages and salt were put into a basket lined with a white tablecloth and then taken to church to be blessed.

Already on Holy Saturday, boys cut birch twigs so that they could use them to "whip" the legs of unmarried girls first thing on Easter Monday morning. Maidens and their parents were eagerly waiting for the young men with the twigs because it was believed that a girl whom no one would visit was not meant to be married quickly. Until the First World War, no one poured water on young girls in Pomerania. That custom was brought by the people coming from other areas of Poland.

On Holy Saturday, families prepared festive outfits in which they were to go to church on the following day. Clothes were ironed and shoes were cleaned. Children were bathed in tubs.

All the work was done in a hurry so that the family could go to bed early. On Easter Sunday, people got up before dawn and washed their faces with water from streams to have clear skin all year round. At sunrise, people looked at the sun and tried to notice the lamb on the surface. They believed that the lamb would reveal itself to anyone who had gone to Easter confession and was without a sin. Thus, "pure on the soul and body", the festively dressed residents of the Tuchola Forest went to attend the Resurrection service.

Ester customs. *Przywołówki dyngusowe* on Kuyavia

“First number from the mansion
Lives Marysia, pretty and beautiful,
Like a rose.
Let her not be scared,
As Wojtek stands behind her.
Four buckets of water
For her beauty.
Firstly, secondly, thirdly!”

(Brześ Kujawski, 1930)

So-called *przywołówki dyngusowe*, also known as *wołanki* or *wywoływki*, were an important element of Easter in Kuyavia. The custom consisted in rhymed "calling" of all the marriageable maidens along with the names of their bachelors. Although that calling of names took place on Easter Sunday evening, it was actually a solemn introduction to the pouring of water over girls on the following Monday. The preparations for *przywołówki* lasted for several days – the bachelors made a list of the girls to be called already during Holy Week. The details of the boy, who asked to a girl to be "called", were recorded next to the maiden's name. At the same time, appropriate donation was made (e.g. vodka). Sometimes it was the organisers of *przywołówki* who decided which young man should be "called" for a specific girl. They usually chose those lads who made rich donations. The next stage consisted in the creation of rhymed texts, which were usually quite stereotypical, although they differed in content. On Easter Sunday evening, several local boys shouted out rhymed *wywołanki* which described the advantages and disadvantages of the girls. While shouting out, the boys were sitting on trees, roofs or other places in villages which were visible well. Each subsequent *przywołówka* was trumpeted and music was played or noise was made with pot lids in-between. If a girl was pretty, people liked her and a bachelor had made a rich donation for her earlier, then his *przywołówka* was flattering and it heralded a mild course of pouring water on the girl. If a girl behaved badly and no one "had made a donation for her", then she was called "nastily" and water was poured over her without mercy on Easter Monday. *Przywołówki* lasted late into the evening depending on the number of girls. No girl could be omitted. All of them also awaited their turn anxiously because they learned how the others judge them and, above all, which bachelors were interested in them. *Przywołówki* can still be seen in Szymborz (a district of Inowrocław), where the Bachelors' Club upholding that tradition has been active since the 19th century.

Text by Agnieszka Kostrzewa

Palm Sunday in the Kashubian Region at the beginning of the 20th century

Palm Sunday, also known as Bloom Sunday, begins the cycle of Easter celebrations. On that day, the church celebrates the triumphant entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem. That event is commemorated by processions with blessed palm trees.

In the Kashubian Region, as in other Pomeranian regions, the palm trees were modest – willow twigs covered with catkins were arranged in bunches and wrapped in ribbons or crepe stripes. In the morning, the host beat his household members and his neighbours with the palm, saying: "It is the willow that is beating. I am not beating. Easter is coming in three and three nights." Palm trees, and especially the young willow shoots found inside them, were attributed with extraordinary protective and beneficial properties. Therefore, they were placed in rooms behind paintings as well as stables, barns and beehives. The palms were also stuck in the fields into fresh winter corn and they were used to beat cattle driven to its pasture for the first time in spring. When the palms were burned during a storm, they reportedly protected houses against strikes of lightning. When the palms were powdered and added to the seeds to be sown, they also provided abundant crops. It was commonly believed that swallowing a catkin from a blessed palm would protect everyone against throat diseases.

Text by Hanna Łopatyńska

Good Friday in the cottage of a poor family from the Kashubian Region at the beginning of the 20th century

Holy Week is a time of religious practices and home customs preparing for the Feast of Resurrection. On Good Friday, which was called “Płaczebóg” or “Crying God” in Kashubia, hostesses or hosts whipped members of their households with twigs of juniper or gooseberry early in the morning. That custom was called “God’s Wounds” and was supposed to commemorate the Flagellation of Christ. Good Friday was a time of strict fasting. People ate only dry bread with boiled and non-seasoned potatoes. They drank water only. People also participated in Good Friday services in churches and spent their free time at home praying or singing songs about the death of Christ.

Shepherds walked around villages and trumpeted on wooden horns. They were accompanied by boys with knockers and tinkers called “sznary.” They announced the period of mourning with noise and housewives offered them bread and eggs.

Already before sunrise, it was necessary to sweep garbage out of the room and throw it behind the fence. It was believed that thanks to that all fleas and other worms would leave the house.

Text by Hanna Łopatyńska

Lenten songs sung by Zygmunt Stencel from Piaski in the Kashubian Region; recorded by Seweryn Huzarski and Maciej Gorczyński in 2012