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STRUCTURE OF THE TRADITIONAL LIVING SPACE OF NORTHERN POLESIA: UTILITARIAN AND MYTHO-RITUAL ASPECTS

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The article attempts a comprehensive analysis of the structure of the traditional living space of the inhabitants of Northern Polesia. The relevance of the study is a significant expansion of the problem, which lies in the plane of the history of everyday life, an important part of which is the living conditions of the population in the system of natural and climatic conditions, economic functions and mytho-ritual content. An important scientific interest is the study of mutual influences in the sphere of everyday culture of the population of Polesia as an ethnically transitional region, a region of Ukrainian-Belarusian ethnocultural interaction. The goal of the article is a comprehensive analysis of the structure of the traditional living space of the inhabitants of Northern Polesia in its utilitarian, mythological and ritual aspects. The object is the traditional dwelling common in Northern Polesia and its individual components, and the subject of the study is data on its layout, the utilitarian functions of individual elements, their mythological content and ritual content. The source of the study is the work of scientists, historians and ethnographers, such as P. Shpilevsky, N. Nikiforovskiy, M. Ulashchuk, A. Lakotka, U. Lobach, etc. The chronological framework is determined by the thematic focus and the task of the study and covers the period of the XIX — first half of the XX~centuries. The territorial frameworks cover the Northern (Belarusian) Polesia, which includes the territories of the modern Brest region (completely) and Gomel region (major part), as well as some southern regions of the Minsk and Grodno regions of Belarus. The methodological basis of the study was made up of general scientific principles of historical analysis. The study uses historical-comparative, typological, structural-functional methods and the method of field research.

Keywords: Polesia, traditional culture, dwelling, homestead, house, myth, ritual.

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СТРУКТУРА ТРАДИЦІЙНОГО ЖИТЛОВОГО ПРОСТОРУ ПІВНІЧНОГО ПОЛІССЯ: УТИЛІТАРНИЙ ТА МІФО-РИТУАЛЬНИЙ АСПЕКТИ

У статті робиться спроба комплексного аналізу структури традиційного житлового простору жителів Північного Полісся, що дає можливість його історичної реконструкції.

Актуальність дослідження традиційного житла полягає в значному розширенні проблематики, яка лежить у площині історії повсякденності, важливою частиною якої є умови життя населення в системі природно-кліматичних умов, господарських функцій і міфо-ритуального наповнення.

Важливий науковий інтерес представляє вивчення взаємовпливів у сфері побутової культури населення Полісся як перехідного в етнічному плані регіону, регіону українсько-білоруського етнокультурної взаємодії та синтезу культур, зокрема традиційного житлового простору.

Метою статті є комплексний аналіз структури традиційного житлового простору жителів Північного Полісся в його утилітарному, міфологічному і ритуальному аспектах.

Об'єктом дослідження є поширене на Поліссі традиційне житло та його окремі компоненти, а *предметом дослідження* стали дані про його планування, утилітарні функції окремих елементів, їх міфологічне та ритуальне наповнення.

Джерелом дослідження є роботи вітчизняних і зарубіжних вчених, істориків і етнографів, таких як П.М. Шпилевський, М.Я. Никифоровський, М.М. Улащик, О.І. Локотко, В.О. Лобач тощо.

Хронологічні рамки визначені тематичною спрямованістю і завданням дослідження і охоплюють період XIX — першої половини XX століття.

Територіальні межі охоплюють регіон Північного (Білоруського) Полісся, до якого відносяться території сучасних Брестської (повністю) і Гомельської (більша частина) областей, а також окремі південні райони Мінської та Гродненської областей Білорусі.

Методологічну базу дослідження склали загальнонаукові принципи історичного аналізу.

У дослідженні використано *історико-порівняльний (компаративний), типологічний, структурно-функціональний* методи та метод польових досліджень.

Ключові слова: Полісся, традиційна культура, житло, садиба, будинок, міф, ритуал.

Introduction. The materialization of economic life and traditional culture primarily begins with the homestead, the house where all the events of a person's life take place, it is the house that is the epicenter of his life activity [1, p. 275]. The value of the house as a center of human activity is the highest meaning of both an individual and the entire community in traditional culture. In folk proverbs and sayings, the house is often compared to the most expensive for a person — with the image of the mother. For example, a popular proverb says «In my family home, like in my mother's home». The house is a closed, protected space through which family members are provided with contacts with the outside world.

At the same time, a traditional rural homestead and a house are a concentrated realization of the fate of a particular family. A homestead is a complex of residential and outbuildings together with a house, yard, garden and vegetable garden that make up the individual farm of a peasant. The homestead, the house and the family act as a single whole. In the traditional community of Northern Polesia, the fate of an individual has always been closely linked to the existence of the collective and has been an inseparable part of the fate of the entire pedigree, which in chronological terms is represented by a particular family. Therefore, the house was the personification of not only personal, but also family life potentials. At the same time, when building the house, they tried to please the builders in every possible way, claiming: «We must please the builder, because he can destroy our entire family» [2, p. 334].

In the traditional culture of Northern Polesia, the construction of a house is an extremely ritualized event. The homestead with the house should be built on a «happy» place, so that there is a good microclimate, a «magical aura», which in the mythological representations of local residents was associated with images of happiness and well-being [3, p. 2—8]. It was believed that then the family would live in peace and harmony, the spouses would be good hosts, and everyone would be happy.

Main part. The term «homestead» (in Belarusian «siadziba») has been known in Polesia since the XV century, but it is particularly expanded after the agrarian reform in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1557, when new settlements were laid directly on the manor field. The traditional Polesian homestead had a certain functional structure and consisted of a front or clean yard (it was formed by the house and neighboring buildings), a

farm yard (sheds), a complex of structures for preserving, drying and threshing grain. Historically, two main types of peasant households were formed on the territory of Northern (Belarusian) Polesia:

- closed, when a complex of residential and household buildings formed a square or elongated quadrilateral, all buildings in which are connected to each other. This type was most prevalent in the north of the region;
- linear, when housing and household structures formed one or sometimes two rows with a length of several tens of meters [4, p. 116—119].

In most cases, all outbuildings were tightly attached to the house and were covered with a solid roof.

The first type of homestead is the most ancient. It developed in the conditions of haphazard, nesting settlements, when priority was given to protection from external attacks. The second type occurred in the period of settlement in the Polesia lowland tribes Dregoviches. It was stimulated by the spread of the Land law in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Belarusian «Ustava na valoki»): narrow land plots required an elongated development plan. In addition, in the swampy area of Polesia, the most convenient place to build a house was a narrow and elongated island. Over time, there were transitional types of yards: П-shaped and Г-shaped [5, p. 234—235].

The traditional Polesian homestead was a rather complex housing and economic complex, the main structural elements of which were: house; barns (buildings for keeping pets, including a stable); threshing floor (building for long-term storage and processing of grain); construction in a threshing floor with a stone stove for drying sheaves; as well as an outbuilding of a convenient design for storing vegetables, fruits, milk and other food supplies (in the big frosts it was heated by a small stone stove); bathhouse (a convenient structure with a stone stove, it consisted of a vestibule and a room for washing); a building for storing hay; an outbuilding in a peasant's yard for storing agricultural implements (carts, sledges, etc.), as well as firewood; well (spring) — a hole in the ground for extracting water from aquifers, which was strengthened by a tree trunk with a dedicated core, stones or a log house.

The central (main) building of the peasant homestead was a house. As a type of dwelling, the house has gone a long way of historical evolution, developing from a hut and a dugout to a ground construction, often with a log

structure. At first, the house was built without a vestibule, with a stove without a chimney and with narrow windows closed with special shutters. In the XIX century, the house with a stove without a chimney was replaced by the so-called white (it already had a stove with a chimney), and its single-chamber layout became two-chamber (living room + vestibule) or three-chamber (living room + vestibule + pantry) [6, p. 86—89].

The construction of the house began with the laying of the foundation. On sandy, dry places, the first layer of logs, made of thicker, sometimes oak logs, served as the foundation. However, due to uneven freezing, the upper layers of the soil began to move, which over time led to distortions of the structure. To avoid this, oak blocks were dug into the corners of the building at some intervals, and the first layer of logs was already laid on them. In the marshy areas of Polesia, oak blocks were placed around the entire perimeter of the building.

According to the natural and ecological conditions of Polesia, the optimal building material was wood. Most often used pine, less often spruce. The historical experience of construction has determined the optimal size of the log house about 6 by 6 meters. The walls consisted of 11—15 layers of logs with a diameter of 15—25 centimeters each [7, p. 47—52]. In the north and north-east of the region, houses were built mainly from roundwood, in the upper reaches of the Neman river, logs were processed and cleaned, and in the region of the Pripyat river, they were sawn in two, and a house was built from the resulting halves.

The design of the floor also had regional features. Clay floors were common in almost all of Polesia. For its arrangement, the fertile soil was removed, and clay with impurities was poured into the depression. The resulting mixture was made more solid by tamping with a wooden block and treating the floor with a clay solution. In the north of Polesia, the floor in the houses was made mainly of wooden boards.

As for the roof of the house, in the territory of Polesia already in the Iron Age, two main types of roofs were defined — gable and four-pitched (hipped). The first corresponded to multi-chamber buildings of cities settlements, the second-to single-chamber semi-dugouts of rural settlements. The traditional roof covering material is straw and reeds, they were used in all regions of Polesia, but in the region of the Neman and Dnieper rivers, wood chips (thin planks) were also widely used.

The organization of the interior space of the house depended on its orientation relative to the south side and the location of the stove. Traditional Polesian housing was usually oriented to the south, and the stove was oriented to the beginning of the threshold. The interior space of the house can be described as diagonal: diagonally from the stove — the «Red» corner (one of the most sacralized places in the house: there were icons, there was a table, there were ritual meals for Christmas, Easter and other holidays), on the other side — the «Women's» (kitchen) corner (the place of carrying out, including witch and magical manipulations) and a place of rest. This arrangement of the interior space also led to the asymmetrical arrangement of the window openings: one window-opposite the stove in the «Women's» corner, the second window-near the «Red» corner, as well as two windows in the adjacent walls [8, p. 118—123].

The furnace occupied about a quarter of the usable area of the dwelling. The most ancient type is the stone stoves without a chimney (the so-called smoking stoves), which even in the XXI century can still be seen in the old baths of Polesia. Subsequently, they began to make clay stoves (first without a chimney, later with a chimney), and from the end of the XIX century — brick stoves. In the more northern regions of Polesia, due to climatic features, additional small stoves were built for better heating of the dwelling.

The subject environment of the traditional Polesians home began with furniture near the walls: benches, shelves for lying, shelves for household items, a corner cabinet, a table, a bench for a bucket of water, etc. In the dark, the house was illuminated with a kind of lamp, which in its design had regional features. For example, in the valley of the Pripyat river, a pipe woven from a vine, covered with clay, hung from the ceiling, to which a metal grate was attached at the bottom, where wood chips were burned. On the floor, under the lamp, they put dishes with water for the falling coals. In the upper reaches of the Neman River, wood chips were burned on a stone stand or in a special niche at the corner of the furnace. In the north of the region and the Dnieper River valley, wood chips were clamped in special brackets (clamps), which were hammered into the wall or held on a stand.

Describing the peasant homestead, the house and its interior, it is necessary to keep in mind that for representatives of traditional culture, the process of housing construction, as well as the housing itself, had an ex-

tremely capacious mytho-ritual significance. The house (homestead) in the mythological consciousness acted as a microcosm, where the foundation, living room, attic and roof corresponded to the three vertical tiers of the universe (the lower underground, otherworldly, middle human, cultivated, upper sacred, divine), and the walls clearly marked the four-part horizontal structure of the world (north — south, west — east). In this sense, it is no coincidence that it is the house that acts in a significant number of Polesia traditional rites (Christmas, Easter, Dziady, Radunitsa, wedding, etc.) as a single possible space where the ritual can unfold [9, p. 346—354]. The house (homestead) symbolically represented the human world and was contrasted with the surrounding space as an alien, hostile, potentially dangerous environment. Almost all the elements, both the homestead and the house, had a ritual and symbolic meaning. The main structural parts of the homestead (house, barn, bathhouse, etc.), according to popular beliefs, had their own mythical spirits, on the harmonious relationship with which the well-being and vital activity of the entire family (pedigree) depended.

The fence, the threshold, the doors, the walls, the windows, the roof in the traditional worldview acted as a symbolic border between their own and someone else's world, which was very actively used in witchcraft, magic and divination. So, for example, by placing a sick person on the threshold of the house, the healers banished his illness, sending it beyond the threshold, to the other world. Similar manipulations could occur at the window, fence, in the bath, etc. In these same places, as a rule, they used to guess at Christmas [10, p. 40—47].

All elements of the home interior, except for their direct economic purpose, also had a symbolic reading. For example, the table in the mythological and ritual sense was understood as the «palm of God» (compare the table and the ceiling as the upper tier of the house, correlated with the sky) and represented the house (quadrangular in plan). Hence the behavior in the table tightly regulated (you can't stick a knife in the table, put your hat on the table, sitting on the table) on the table always had to lie loaf of bread (for «good share»), and during the birth of a new family member, the baby was carried around him three times, «to love your family, your home».

In the house, special attention was paid to the organization of space, interior and decoration. By tradition, the inhabitants of Polesia had a strict division of labor

duties into male and female occupations, which affected the home interior. A threshold, a stove, shelves for lying down, benches near the walls, a «Women's» corner, a table, a lamp, icons, towels, festive clothes, a chest with a dowry, a cradle, a barrel for kneading bread, a stupa and other objects performed not only practical, but also symbolic and ceremonial functions.

«Women's» corner is a separate place, a zone of cooking, the domination of women as housewives. The symbolic and ritual function of the «Women's» corner is one of the most expressive in the description of the portrait of the hostess. It was located at the entrance to the house, opposite the stove, where suspended kitchen shelves with dishes and other household items were fixed to the wall at the top, and under it was a wide bench where buckets for water and kvass were placed, etc. The presence of these things was a necessary condition for performing economic activities. For example, the water in the bucket should always be clean and fresh, and kvass delicious and cold. Dishes should be at hand to make it easier for the hostess to use them [8, p. 118—123].

The most sacred place in the house, the epicenter of spiritual life was the corner with icons. It embodied the temple in miniature and served as an iconostasis. Keeping order in the corner with the icons was a woman's responsibility. She made sure that the icons were decorated, and that the towels that decorated them were clean. Here hung bunches of rye ears and herbs consecrated in the church; after the grain harvest was over, the first sheaf was solemnly placed here.

During the wedding, the newlyweds sat in the corner with icons, «under God». When a person died, the coffin with his body was placed on a bench with his head to this corner. Here, as if the fates of living and dead family members were united: on the left side of the corner, candles were placed with icons for the health and happiness of living people, on the right side — for the peace of the souls of the dead and in honor of their ancestors. While the stove was symbolically identified with the north and west, the corner with the icons — with the south and east; most often it was oriented to the east.

Next to the corner with the icons was a table, which the hostess had to cover with a clean tablecloth. There was always bread and salt, covered with a towel. At dinner on weekdays, the hostess usually removed the tablecloth and the family sat down at the table in a certain sequence: in the corner under the icons — the owner of

the house, followed by the rest of the family. The table is a symbol of life and prosperity. If the corner with the icons was symbolically identified with the temple, then the table — with the altar. During calendar and ritual holidays, hay was placed on the table, a tablecloth was laid, ritual food was served, and the ancestors were called to the table: «Ancestors, come to us». The table was also the place of a ritual meal on Shrovetide, Easter, etc. [11, p. 96—102].

As you can see, the space of the house was divided into several parts, organized quite rationally, which made it possible to clearly delineate the zones of functioning of men and women. It was believed that the woman, the wife, runs the house, and the man, the husband outside it. This principle was also characteristic of other Slavic peoples, for example, the Slavic proverb says: «A man and a dog are always in the yard, a woman and a cat are always in the house» [8, p. 118—123].

For example, here is how the Belarusian researcher M.M. Ulashchyk describes the home space of the inhabitants of Polesia in his work «There was such a village»: When the house had a separate kitchen, it usually served as a dining room. There was always bread on the kitchen table. On the right was the kitchen equipment — a poker, grappling hooks, broomsticks, etc. From the stove to the wall, and along the second wall to the door, there were benches, where there were buckets of water, a common mug, jugs of milk, a barrel for kneading bread (when the hostess was able to bake bread), and other utensils. Above the bench in the corner were shelves with bowls, where washed spoons were placed. If there was no separate kitchen, all this was located in the residential part of the house... [12, p. 122—129].

How did the village house live, what was the order in it? Let us recall the notes of the researcher of traditional culture and folklore V. Dobrovolsky. He writes that various functions in a large peasant family were distributed among women of different ages and statuses.: the hostess takes care of the young pets, she also milks the cows, and she also manages the milk; the wives of the hostess's sons carry water and firewood, but it is the hostess who heats the stove... In winter, when all the women are at home, they work together to heat the stove: the hostess puts wood in the stove and sets it on fire; the second woman takes buckets and goes to collect water; the third woman prepares food for the pigs, steams it with boiling

water. They pour water into pots, put them in the stove. The hostess brings the grits for soup or puts the cabbage in a pot; she thinks about what to cook for breakfast: or fry a piece of lard, or make dough, fry or boil potatoes, etc. When the boilers and pots in the stove boil, the boiling water is poured into the pigs' food, the pots are removed from the oven, the main heat goes out into a special hole. The hostess of the house should bring lard, fill the pots, which are put in the stove, and then close the pipe. Everyone sits down to breakfast: men, women and children... [8, p. 119—122].

As can be seen from this description, the space of the village house was adapted for the needs of a person, providing for his daily life. This approach was consistent with the values held by the family: it was a collective of people who were united by blood-related relations and concern for the continuation of the family, maintaining family traditions. The strength of the family lay in its collective spirit, its understanding of the need to work together as a condition for survival and well-being. Therefore, the living space of the house corresponded to this.

After the agrarian reform of 1861 in the Russian Empire, the interior space of a peasant house in Polesia changed significantly: several functional rooms were allocated in the house, which were not there before. There was a separate kitchen, a bedroom, stoves without chimneys were replaced by the stoves with chimneys that are familiar to us today, the size of windows increased, which now everywhere had glass, and sometimes shutters; the domed ceiling everywhere gave way to a modern flat one. The furniture in the houses was also changed: instead of shelves for sleeping or in parallel with them, beds began to be used. Sofas, armchairs, more modern tables, stools, and benches began to enter wide use. Near the corner wall, a wardrobe was placed, which replaced the traditional chest. Marked diversity began to differ baby cradle, various cupboards and shelves, containers, household utensils etc. All these changes had a positive impact on the nature of the organization of everyday life, on the possibility of displaying the skills of a woman as a hostess.

The house in a traditional society is one of the key symbols of culture, since all the most important categories of the traditional picture of the world are related to this concept in one way or another. The strategy of behavior was built in fundamentally different ways, depend-

ing on whether the person was in the house or outside it. The house had a special, structure-forming significance for the development of traditional space schemes. In the system of traditional representations, the house and yard act as the personification of «his» space, as opposed to the space of external, undeveloped, uncultured. At the same time, the semantic relationship between the house and the yard is distinguished by a certain ambivalence. In relation to the house, the courtyard is an external space, correlated in the mytho-poetic consciousness with the other world. In relation to the external world, which starts right at the fence of the homestead, yard stands in the traditional picture of the world as internal, maximum developed human space. The involvement of the house and yard in the system of categories by which the organization of human living space takes place, first of all, actualizes the boundary status of many structural elements of the home (windows, doors, thresholds, porch, etc.), as well as outbuildings and fences as the external contour of the yard. The desire to isolate themselves from the outside world among the inhabitants of Northern Polesia was very strong. They believed that housing could protect the family from various hostile dark forces. It was believed that the walls, floor, roof of the house — a strong border, which the evil spirit cannot overcome to harm the owners of the house. But doors and windows, on the contrary, seemed to be a «weak point» in this protection. Therefore, the windows were decorated with various symbolic images (primarily the image of the sun) a horseshoe or other amulets were hung on the doors or above them. In many houses, the door handle was deliberately made in the form of a grass snake, which has long been considered a protector from evil spirits (which makes the inhabitants of Polesia related to the Baltic people). For people from the Northern (Belarusian) Polesia, in contrast, for example, from Ukraine, it was not typical to paint your home with images of stylized objects of the outside world. The reason for this was the Poleshuk's desire to prevent any manifestations of the external world, a priori hostile to humans, from entering the house in this way. The Polesian peasants have long resisted even painting chests, despite the fact that this tradition was widely practiced among their southern neighbors.

Conclusions. Thus, if for a modern person a house (apartment) is a utilitarian soulless space for living (and in large cities often just for sleeping) with a certain de-

gree of everyday comfort, then for a person of traditional culture, the house was not only a daily dwelling, a space for most of life, but also the very standard of spiritual existence, a kind of cosmological model of the world and human environment with the appropriate mythological content of its parts and ritualized behavior. In order not to get lost in this improvised Universe, a person could understand his position in space depending on being in a certain functional zone. He was guided by the so-called diagonal «Oven — Red corner». The stove and the corner with the icons were the sacred centers in the house, which gave a person vital energy. Over time, the dining table has acquired an independent meaning due to its presence in the corner with icons. He assumed the role of the center of the symbolic model of the Universe — the role of the Earth, around which, according to the ancient Polesian ideas, everything in space moved. Polesia is a region with problematic communication due to the presence of a huge number of rivers and swamps there. This led to its certain isolation, and the traditional culture there functioned almost unchanged for the longest time. The interior of a typical Polesian house was quite minimalistic and strictly regulated by tradition. It was only in the middle of the XIX century that the usual furniture and interior items began to penetrate into the Polesian's houses.

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