
THE MAGIC OF THE TIME OF DEATH

A Contribution to the Study of Funeral Customs in the Carpathian Village

Urszula Lehr

117

IZVLEČEK

Magičnost časa ob smrti. Prispevek k raziskavam šeg ob smrti v karpatski vasi

Avtorica v članku prikazuje osnovno obdobje tranzicije v človeškem življenju – smrt – in bogastvo celotnega spektra oblik magičnega in religioznega vedenja, ki so z njo povezane. Način ukvarjanja z umirajočim in umrlim narekujejo ljudska verovanja. Njihova naloga je zagotavljanje miru za dušo umirajočega in preprečevanje njenega vračanja, da bi zagotovili mirno bivanje živih. Tako široko razumljene tradicionalne šege ob smrti so bile globoko prepletene z iracionalnim. Avtorica to ponazarja s primeri stopenj, ki sledijo človekovemu odhodu s tega sveta, kot so, na primer, znanilci smrti (sanje, zlovešči znaki, vedenje živali, zvoki), proces umiranja (magični načini pospeševanja smrti), obredi in šege (ustavljanje ure, pokrivanje ogleдал, prižiganje sveče, uničevanje lastnine umrlega itd.), ter pogreb in pokop (obred odhajanja od doma in družine, prekinitve običajnega poteka zadev, vedenje na pogrebu). Pri magično-religioznih oblikah vedenja in obredih pogosto uporabljajo posebne pripomočke in predmete. Nekatere izmed njih so prilagali tudi v krsto, zlasti kovance, zelišča, platno, ki ga uporabljajo pri krstu itd. Ne glede na spremembe po drugi svetovni vojni se tradicionalno magično vedenje, povezano s šegami ob smrti, v karpatskih vaseh še vedno pojavlja, čeprav v omejenem obsegu.

Ključne besede: smrt, šege, obredi, magija, religija

Key words: death, customs, rites, magic, religion

In the traditional rural community, the time of passing away was always marked by magical and/or religious forms of behaviour and rituals, often accompanied by special accessories and objects. Such practices survived well into the post-World-War-II period and even into the 1990s.¹ Pursued by the village dwellers, they were meant to

¹ The study is based predominantly on the author's own fieldwork on funeral customs, carried out in the years 1991-1994 in the following Carpathian villages: Brzegi, Bustryk, Male Ciche, Zab (the Podhale region in southern Poland). These materials are supplemented with some field data on demonology, collected by the author in other parts of the Carpathians in southern Poland, in the villages of: Łącko (the Nowy Sącz region), Istebna, Brenna (the Beskid Śląski region), Milówka and Sól (the Żywiec region).

allow the dying person to depart in dignity, as prescribed by the religious and social norms, and then to protect the soul of the deceased from eternal damnation. Other forms of behaviour were intended to protect the living relatives from the possible return of the dead, resulting from the failure to perform an appropriate ritual. It thus appears that the measures undertaken were of a preventive and/or protective character. The beliefs underlying such forms of behaviour, which determined the special ways of handling the dying person and then the corpse, give rise to the elaborate concept of the time of death. It goes beyond the purely biological definition based on the bodily functions coming to a stop and can be, generally speaking, divided into four stages.

118 Stage one comprises all kinds of phenomena which are the harbingers of death, including dreams, signs, and unusual forms of animal behaviour, popularly believed to be ominous.

Village dwellers mention certain symbolic themes, connected with things, locations or rituals, whose appearance in dreams signified an approaching death, such as: a falling our tooth (Podhale), a tub filled with water, an empty unmade bed, ash, an owl on the roof, a funeral wreath, crows, a cemetery (Malicki 1947; Silesia), a wedding or a broken tree (Kowalska-Lewicka 1985; the Nowy Sącz region). Other dreams could have a literal meaning; the deceased family members would visit their relatives in their sleep: "When our father was to die, my sister had a dream: she saw our mother come and take father by the hands. He died soon afterwards" (S 1928; the Żywiec region).²

Some disturbing phenomena on the borderline between wakefulness and sleep could also be seen as a kind of an ominous, telepathic message from a dying person:³ "I put the children to bed, made the bed for myself and then I heard something in the shed, a scratching sound as if a cat was there. Then I heard it again, but didn't go to the shed. When I heard it for the third time, I finally went out to see, but there was no cat there. Then I thought my brother was dead and was coming to visit me. Soon my husband was back home and told me my brother had really died" (Z 1905; Podhale); "Mother told me when she was a child ... and [her] parents attended a wedding in the village of Stasikówka, someone fired a shot and a cousin of my mother's dropped dead. She [her mother] told me then she was haunted by a ghost. The house was trembling

Only a small proportion of the data comes from the literature, as few publications exist that deal with the problems in question in the area of the Polish Carpathians.

Quotations from the informants are followed by the name of the village, abbreviated to its initial letter (or, in the case of two-word names, the initial letters of both parts of the name), and their birth date. Some of the field data for which no quotation is given are nevertheless also accompanied by an indication of the region and/or village, usually in an abbreviated form: B - Brzegi, MC - Male Ciche, S - Sól, Z - Zab.

² A quotation in similar spirit, emphasizing the bond between a deceased wife and her husband, has been recorded in Zab. The informant told the story of his father-in-law's miraculous encounter with his deceased wife: "[Father-in-law said:] 'It's time to leave this world. My old woman came to me as I was herding cattle, she took me by the hand to take me along, and I said, How can I go? I won't leave the cattle on their own!' Soon afterwards he lay down on the pasture and died. People would then say: 'And he had to go'" (Z 1924; Podhale).

³ Apart from so-called "strangers' dreams", Auerbach mentions some examples of what might be labelled "farewell dreams". They occur in cases where a strong emotional attachment exists, which gives rise to this kind of paranormal phenomena. The same author believes that some mechanism may exist whereby the dying may communicate with the living by telepathy (Auerbach 1992).

and would not stop until daybreak. Then grandma [mother's mother] came and said the cousin had been killed - and they were friends with mother" (MC 1949; Podhale).

There were also recurring dreams in which a missing relative would show. This kind of occurrence usually foreshadowed the official news confirming his or her death and sometimes gave a clue as to the burial place of the missing person - in case of a sudden death inflicted by another person: "You can see in your dream a murdered person whose body has been hidden and awaits an proper burial" (B 1975; Podhale).⁴

It was a widespread belief in folk tradition that the death of a family member could be predicted well in advance on the basis of certain signs, most of which would appear on Christmas Eve. People would watch the shadows cast by the persons seated at table during Christmas Eve supper: a pale and indistinct shadow augured the death of that person in the coming year. To drop a spoon at supper on the same day was likewise an ominous sign signifying a death in the family (Kowalska-Lewicka 1985; the Nowy Sącz region). In Silesia, it was a custom in the early 20th century to eat walnuts after Christmas Eve supper: finding an empty one was a presage of death, too. People also believed that a person who left the table while Christmas Eve supper was in progress ran a risk of death (*Materiały* 1908; Silesia).

Another group of signs comprised acoustic phenomena. These were generally called "announcements of death" or simply "announcements". They took on various forms and affected - like dreams did - persons who were either related by blood to the deceased or had formed a strong emotional attachment to them. The sounds one could thus hear included the opening of the door or some unspecified knocks: "Some strange disturbance was heard when father was dying" (MC 1914; Podhale); "There was some knocking on the window; it was the dead man coming to let us know he was no longer among the living" (Z 1928; Podhale); "We heard a rapping sound, like our father was there - he used to tap his fingers on the table like that - and the sound went on until we learnt he was dead" (S 1932; the Żywiec region). The "announcements" could also take the form of some inexplicable phenomena, like a clock stopping all by itself at the moment of someone's death, and the like: "My grandma said that when her father-in-law was about to die, a picture fell off the wall" (Z 1905; Podhale); "When granddad was dying, the radio fell down to the ground and the candle at his bedside went out" (S 1920; the Żywiec region).

One more important category of omens was connected with unusual animal behaviour, which made people apprehensive. At least some species were believed to be able to feel or even see the approaching death. The most sensitive in this respect, it was said, were dogs. "When they howl, it means there is going to be a death in the village" (B 1975; Podhale) and they always "face the place where the death is heading, three days in advance" (Z 1928; Podhale), their muzzles pointing to the ground (Kowalska-

⁴ This story, together with the conclusion it leads to, are based on an actual event which took place in one of the villages of the Podhale region a couple of years ago (1992). A relative of the murder victim saw in his dream the place where the corpse had been buried. (The police had staged an energetic search, but to no avail.) Even so, no one would believe in what the man said. Nevertheless, when all other clues failed, the place he had seen in his dream was inspected and the body was there.

Lewicka 1985; the Nowy Sącz region). If horses neighed or were restless, or if cattle lowed, it could also foreshadow death (Malicki 1947; Silesia). When “a mole digs through the snow” (B 1949; Podhale) or “digs underneath the doorstep, it digs a grave” (Z 1924; Podhale), particularly when it proceeds from the doorstep outwards, to the fields (Kowalska-Lewicka 1985; the Nowy Sącz region). An ominous meaning was likewise ascribed to certain bird cries: a hen crowing like a rooster, an owl hooting near the house (Kowalska-Lewicka 1985; the Nowy Sącz region), a crow or a cuckoo - “A cuckoo’s song meant someone was going to die” (MC 1914; Podhale), especially when it was “singing next to the house” (MC 1921; Podhale).

120 The finality of God’s decree necessitated further action to be taken at the second stage of the time of death. At the bedside of the dying person a candle which had been blessed on Candlemas Day (*gromnica*) was lit. Its purpose was not only to light up the way for the soul of the deceased, but also to keep all kinds of evil spirits and demons at bay.⁵ In the presence of the dying or deceased person, the relatives were supposed to behave in a special way. This was intended, on the one hand, to make sure the death would be peaceful and, on the other hand, to guarantee an undisturbed existence of the survivors. First of all, any children or pregnant women present in the dying person’s house were made to leave. The reasons behind this practice were predominantly of magical nature, particularly as regards pregnant women. People feared that the baby would be born “pale as a corpse” (Z 1928; Podhale). Seeing the dead body by a pregnant woman might even have more dire consequences, as “there was a danger of a stillbirth” (MC 1966; Podhale), resulting from the mother “fixing her stare” at the corpse (*zapatrzanie*). This alleged harmful influence of the dead person on the future mother is explained by the *similia similibus* principle (like attracts like) in its purely negative form.

The dying person was censured with a miniature wreath made in the form of a wedding ring (*witka*), or one was placed on his or her finger. This custom, which was still practised in the early 20th century in Silesia (Malicki 1947; Silesia), has never been explained. Presumably, the *witka*, being a form of a wedding ring, was meant to accompany the dying person as a symbol of their new bond - with death. If the agony was prolonged, as was often the case, this was believed to be due to some evil deed performed by the dying person which went unforgiven. In obvious cases, the wronged individual was asked to come so that the dying person could offer an apology and obtain forgiveness (Podhale, the Nowy Sącz region, Silesia). When the reason of the prolonged agony was unknown, it was common practice - as late as between the two World Wars in Podhale and the 1950s in the Nowy Sącz region (Kowalska-Lewicka 1985) - to move the dying person to the floor, strewn with straw and covered with a sheet (*plachta*). It was thought that the closeness to the earth would quicken the death: “When my mother was dying, father carried her to the floor to ease her pain” (Z1905; Podhale).

Placing the dying person on the floor was undoubtedly an act of magic significance, symbolizing the imminent lowering of the body into an earthly. Such an act of anticipating and the downward motion associated with it were believed to assist the dying person in

⁵ For other types of symbolic meaning attached to the word “candle”, including those related to the dead and their cult, see Kopalinski (Kopalinski 1991:417).

departing from this world.⁶ It was not only the action itself that was magic: a similar significance was attached to the straw placed underneath the dying person. According to Fischer, the very structure of straw - its smoothness and lack of knots, which symbolize the bond (in this case) between body and soul, facilitate their severance. The same author states that similar properties were ascribed in Podhale to pea stems (Fischer 1921). He gives, however, no explanation. Means used to quicken the death also included herbs blessed on the Assumption Day (15 August) and a bell which had been blessed in church. It was believed to have “a supernatural power, because its owner had said certain special prayers over it. One rang the bell and the death came faster” (B 1944; Podhale). People would also remove the pillow from underneath the dying person’s head, as it was thought that chicken feathers in the pillow could stand in death’s way (Kowalska-Lewicka 1985; the Nowy Sącz region).

Yet another magic form of behaviour was recorded in the early 20th century in the village of Czarny Dunajec (Podhale). When a farm-owner (*gazda*) was dying, people would wake up his cattle and bees “so that they would not depart together with their master” (Kantor 1907:141), and if the animals were grazing at the moment of their owner’s death, they had to be sold immediately, or else “they would never thrive” (Kantor 1907:141). Similar customs and beliefs existed in the Nowy Sącz region (Kowalska-Lewicka 1985).

The third successive stage of the time of death comprises customs, rituals and practices that follow the death. The first things to do included covering the mirror “so that the corpse should not reflect” (MC; Podhale)⁷ and stopping the clock “so that the dead person’s heart should remain at rest” (MC; Podhale). An important duty of the person who kept vigil at the bedside of the dying person was to wake up all the other inhabitants. This custom may be related to the primeval belief that sleep was a momentary state of death, during which the soul left the body.⁸ On its way, it was believed, it could encounter the soul of the deceased which might take it along into the other world. This is just one of several hypotheses that account for the necessity to wake up the dead person’s family. Special forms of behaviour stemmed also from the belief that the soul remained in this world until the funeral day. Invisible, it observed the actions of the relatives. Thus some magic and religious practices were undertaken for fear that if the traditional rituals were not observed, the dead person might return and take revenge on the family. This also explains the prohibition of weeping and loud lamentation from the time the person was about to die until a certain moment after his or her death: otherwise, those outward manifestations of sorrow might have hindered the soul from going away forever.

⁶ Described by Fischer (1921: 74, 80), who takes issue with Hortland’s views.

⁷ This is just one interpretation of the symbolic importance of mirrors, preserved in a highly simplified form. Following Kopaliński, we may add that by looking at the mirror, the dead person could spot another victim: “The mirror is a door through which the soul may pass to (and from) the other world” (Kopaliński 1991: 206-209). On this last interpretation, the mirror becomes a transition zone or a border between the two worlds.

⁸ This accounts partly for the origin of the belief, inspired by Christian tradition, that a nightmare (*zmora*) might haunt the souls that have left the sleeping body at night. As regards the nightmare, see materials on demonology, Archives of the Ethnology Workgroup, Archaeology and Ethnology Department, Polish Academy of Sciences (items no. 1576, 1596, 1597, 1647, 1719).

122 The belief in the harmful properties of things that had come into contact with the dead was widespread in the Carpathian village at least until the mid-20th century. When the corpse had been washed by a person regularly hired for such jobs, the water was disposed of at some out-of-the-way place “where no one walked” (MC 1921; Podhale), taking care “that it did not get into the stream” (MC 1914; Podhale). People believed that the water in which a corpse had been washed acquired an evil power. A person who came into contact with such water “would wither like a corpse” (MC Podhale). Even before World War II a common thing to do was to burn the dead person’s property. That was done on rational grounds: to avoid contagion or because the clothes or sheets were worn out. In most cases, however, this act had a magic significance, too, its purpose being to eradicate all the traces of the dead and “prevent the deceased person from coming back” (B 1924; Podhale). At the bottom of such practices was thus the fear of the dead. The use of fire to dispose of the dead person’s belongings is explained both by the destructive power of flames and by the belief in the purifying properties of fire. The notion that contact with the dead person’s possessions was dangerous - in terms of magic - to the living is attested to by the practice of making the fire “at some place, like a mountain slope, where few people pass by” (MC; Podhale).

The deceased person would next be dressed in their best clothes, or, as the case may be, in accordance with their wish made before death. During the period between the two World Wars, it was customary in Silesia to sew shirts for the dead. No knots were allowed when making such a shirt, and the needle was not to be used any more afterwards. Usually, it was left in the dead person’s clothes, only to be removed on closing the coffin. It was believed that a person who carried such a needle was lucky at gambling (Malicki 1947).

It was important to make sure that all the wishes of the deceased were complied with and to remember about some of his or her favourite items to be taken to the other world. Were these to be forgotten, the person might wish to claim them and return. Thus, apart from the clothes, the dead person was provided with a prayer book, pictures of his or her favourite saints, a rosary (*korunka*), a handkerchief, sometimes a pipe, if he had been a smoker, a pair of glasses, a walking cane or even a violin bow if the person was a musician (Ząb; Podhale). Other things put in the coffin included herbs, money and so-called “baptism linen” (*krzcielne płótno*). All of these had distinct, magic functions.

The most important herb placed in the coffin was artemisia (*Artemisia abrotanum* L.), blessed on the Assumption Day and subsequently dried. A bunch of artemisia placed in the dead person’s hands would serve to fend off the hell fire. Even though this custom was not observed by everyone, older women attached great importance to it, as is illustrated by the following quotation: “When my mother died, a neighbour came to pay her the last visit and saw there were no herbs in the coffin, so she got angry with me. I didn’t have any artemisia so she fetched me some and I had to put it in the coffin” (Z; Podhale). For the sake of completeness, and to emphasize the persistence of certain customs, let me add that the event in question took place in 1992. Some informants interpret the functions of artemisia somewhat differently: “One gives artemisia to the dead for they need it do drive the devil away” (Z 1928; Podhale), or “The soul

stays at St. Gertrude's place for the night and the soul uses the branch to keep her dog away" (Z 1905; Podhale). Instead of artemisia, one occasionally used bluebells (*Campanulla*) for the same magic purpose - to protect the soul from evil spirits. One of the informants says that her grandmother (who died in 1982 at the age of 92) wanted "blue flowers, that is, bluebells, blessed on the Assumption Day" placed in her coffin after death (B 1944; Podhale).

Equally important, from the point of view of magic, were coins put on the eyelids of the dead. This custom was practised in Silesia, and in Podhale it persisted well into the 1980s. It was motivated by the fear that with half-open eyes, the dead might "catch sight" of a relative, thus causing that person to die soon afterwards. It was believed that leaving the dead with one eye half-open posed a threat to some more distant family member, and if both eyes were left that way, it would be a close relative that the dead might take along to the other world.

Another interesting custom, whose interpretation is not entirely clear, is the placing of so-called "baptism linen" or a piece of clothing made thereof in the coffin. This custom is still remembered and sporadically practised in Podhale. A child would receive from its godmother at baptism a piece of white linen several metres long, which was put inside the christening set. Afterwards, it was either cut into nappies, or carefully folded and stored in a chest. When a maiden was to get married, she used the cloth to make a shirt or a petticoat, which she would keep until death to be buried in. This custom is still alive among older women, as is confirmed by informants: "I kept this linen since baptism and had a petticoat made of it for my wedding. When I die, they'll dress me in it for the funeral" (Z 1928; Podhale). If the linen was not used in any way during the owner's lifetime, it would be placed in the coffin in its original form. The magic and religious significance of "baptism linen" can be explained, to a certain degree, by its sacred properties acquired in the course of the baptism ceremony, which allowed it to avert all kinds of evil.

The corpse was put in the so-called white chamber (*biała izba*), which was the room used for special family or festive occasions only. On the one hand, this was a token of respect for the dead person and, on the other, offered a more convenient place to receive relatives and neighbours, and keep a vigil at the corpse. The body rested on wooden boards covered with a sheet. If a coffin had been bought in advance, the corpse would be placed therein immediately. Typically, however - during the period between the two World Wars - one had to wait for the coffin as it was being made by the local carpenter. The boards were subsequently thrown away or, more frequently, burnt, as they were considered to be impure because of the contact with the dead body.

One should mention at this point a custom which has disappeared in Podhale by now. It was concerned with the wooden shavings left after the making of the coffin, which were once used as a sign of death and a supplication for prayer. They were usually left at some busy place and weighted down with a stone so that they would not be blown away by wind. Fischer provides evidence from the village of Czarny Dunajec in Podhale showing that the shavings were left there in front of the deceased person's house as late as in the 20th century. He interprets this as a warning sign for the passers-

by, for it was believed that the house where a corpse lay was impure and was thus best avoided (Fischer 1921).

The time when the corpse remained at home allowed the inhabitants to become accustomed, to a certain degree, to the phenomenon of death and to the dead body. The beliefs associated with the ritual keeping of the corpse at home for three days point at a psychological explanation of the observed forms of behaviour. People thought that by staying close to the body or even by touching it, one could overcome the fear of the dead: "They come, they want to see the dead body, touch it and gain their peace of mind - they will not be afraid of the deceased person any more" (B 1925; Podhale).

124 Stage four of the time of death begins when the corpse leaves home. This period was also marked by many irrational forms of behaviour, explicable mostly on the grounds of the fear of the dead coming back. Thus before the body left the home for good, the bearers of the coffin would touch every doorstep with it three times: "At every doorstep they stop and put it down for a while" (Z 1928; Podhale). This ritual was accompanied by the words, uttered in the name of the deceased person: "God be with you" (Z 1928; Podhale).

The custom described above,⁹ which is still practised in the Podhale villages under study and in other regions, obviously reflected the fear of the deceased person and meant more than just a symbolic parting of the dead with the relatives and home. It also provided a guarantee for the living that by solemn observance of the traditional norm, they would ensure a peaceful eternal rest for the deceased and an untroubled existence for themselves. The parting was repeated, as described above, at every doorstep, which provided a symbolic border between the inner and outer worlds, or, in this case, between home and the unknown. As this ritual was being performed, the coffin was left for a short while in a state of suspension and the deceased person was led out of the world of the living but not yet quite to the world of the dead.

That ritual parting of the dead with home and family was already practised centuries ago, even though it was considered then to be a form of witchcraft for which one could stand trial in court.¹⁰ Despite the possible sanctions, it has survived to this day, which attests to the ever-present fear of the dead. During the period between the two World Wars, when the coffin was being carried out of the house, relatives and friends of the widow moved the seats (*lawy*) about so that she might be able to remarry. At the same time the cattle were fed, so as to ensure they would thrive (Malicki 1947).

No less important than the parting ritual was the proper way of carrying the coffin out of the house - feet first: "They carry the dead man feet first; maybe it's because he's leaving for good that they do this" (Z 1925; Podhale). Such positioning of the

⁹ The ritual parting of the deceased with their house is described by anthropologists as "separation rites" which consist in the so-called "killing of the corpse". It is followed by further practices whose aim is to sever all emotional relations with the dead (Księga 1993: 219, 411).

¹⁰ In his account of witchcraft trials connected with the rites practised at the doorstep, Zborowski gives a different interpretation of this custom, namely, that such practices were meant to prevent the dead "from taking someone else along" (Zborowski 1932: 74). It seems less convincing, especially in view of the previously mentioned symbolic properties of the doorstep.

corpse was an unequivocal indication of its ultimate and irrevocable exit. In Polish, there is a colloquial expression widely used to refer euphemistically to someone's death: "He left feet first" means "He died".

The next magic practice performed when the coffin had been carried away consisted in knocking over the chairs on which the coffin had been placed "so that the dead person would not return" (B 1934; Podhale). This precaution, which was also taken in the Nowy Sącz region, can be seen as a symbolic disruption of the order the dead person was accustomed to. Thus the deceased who sought to return from the other world would not recognize the old place and go away, leaving the inhabitants alone. Should the dead succeed in returning, the family would be exposed to the danger of a new death. This is one of the reasons why the empty space left by the dead person had to be filled up as soon as possible. Such was the interpretation given in Podhale: "They knocked over the chairs so that there would be no new corpse, no room for it. Sometimes they still do it" (B 1924).

125

Another form of behaviour motivated by magic had to do with arousing the livestock when the body was being carried away: "Someone will go to the cowshed, prod at the cows and replace their chains so that they would not follow him [the deceased]" (Z 1905; Podhale). Moreover, the previously mentioned belief in animals' capacity to sense the approaching death is supplemented by accounts of unusual behaviour of animals in time of their master's death: "When my brother-in-law and my sister died, the cows lowed loudly as they carried the coffin away; and a dog will always keep howling at such moments, until they are gone with the coffin" (MC; Podhale).

Between the two World Wars it was customary in the Nowy Sącz region to pour a pail full of water on the wheels of the cart that carried the coffin away. The pail being normally used for milk, this practice was believed to prevent the dead person from depriving the cows of their milk by witchcraft (Kowalska-Lewicka 1985).

The mourning procession would proceed from church to the cemetery, where the final parting usually took place, to the accompaniment of the church bells. On the one hand, the knell informed the community about the death and conveyed an obligation to say a prayer for the dead. On the other hand, this sound was meant to keep away the soul of the deceased, which, it was believed, would hover round and take part in the funeral until the body was buried. According to folk beliefs, any kind of noise could drive away spirits and evil powers. In this particular case, the ringing of bells was meant to force the soul to take leave of its family for ever. It should be added that the bell whose sound announced death could not be used for any other religious ceremonies or magic practices, such as dispersing hail clouds. If sounded in such circumstances, it would not only fail to achieve the desired result but might even make matters worse.

The funeral procession never went through the fields, as it was believed that it would make the soil barren. Likewise, the cart with the coffin should never be drawn by a mare in foal, since her offspring might be affected (Kowalska-Lewicka 1985; the Nowy Sącz region). The examples of magic and/or religious practices presented above attest to a deep-rooted conviction among village dwellers that the deceased and all kinds of objects associated with them in any way whatsoever exert a harmful influence

on the surroundings. Laying the deceased to his or her eternal rest was the last episode of the time of death. The subsequent stage - mourning - was also permeated with magic and religious themes, but not to such a degree. Together with the ceremonies and rituals it included, the multi-stage time of death was intended to fulfil all the obligations towards the deceased in the spirit one's religion. Most of all, however, its function was to protect the living against those who had departed for good. A system devised for the dead served the needs of the living.

REFERENCES

- AUERBACH, L., 1992, *Ludzie i sny* [People and Dreams], Bydgoszcz.
- FISCHER, A., 1921, *Zwyczajy pogrzebowe ludu polskiego* [Funeral Rites of the Polish People], Lwów.
- KANTOR, J., 1907, "Czarny Dunajec. Monografia etnograficzna" [The Village of Czarny Dunajec: An Ethnographic Monograph Study], *Materiały Antropologiczno-Archeologiczne i Etnograficzne*, Vol. 11, pp. 21-229.
- KOPALIŃSKI, W., 1991, *Słownik symboli* [A Dictionary of Symbols], Warszawa.
- Księga żałoby i śmierci* [A Book on Mourning and Death], 1993, Opole.
- KOWALSKA-LEWICKA, A., 1985, *Wierzenia i zwyczaje związane ze śmiercią. Studia z kultury ludowej Beskidu Sądeckiego* [Beliefs and Customs Pertaining to Death: A Study in the Folk Culture of the Beskid Sądecki Mountains], Komisja Etnograficzna, Wrocław.
- MALICKI, L., 1947, "Materiały do kultury społecznej górali śląskich" [Materials for the Study of the Social Culture of the Beskid Śląski Highlanders], pp. 1-50, an offprint from *Prace i Materiały Etnograficzne*, Vol. 6.
- "MATERIAŁY ludoznawcze" [Ethnological Materials], 1908, *Zaranie Śląskie*, Vol. 1, fasc. 2.
- ZBOROWSKI, J., 1932, "Ludoznawcze przyczynki z Góralstwy" [Contributions to the Ethnology of the Polish Highlands], *Lud*, Vol. 11, pp. 65-92.

ARCHIVE SOURCES

The materials used in the present study come from the Archives of the Ethnology Workgroup, Department of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Cracow: items no. 1556, 1576, 1596, 1597, 1647, 1697, 1717, 1719, 1751, 1761, 1763, 1780, 1788, 1795, 1796.

BESEDA O AVTORICI

Urszula Lehr, dr., je diplomirala na Univerzi Jagellon v Krakovu (etnografija). Trenutno dela na Poljski akademiji znanosti v Krakovu, na Oddelku za arheologijo in etnologijo, v delovni skupini za etnologijo. Njeni glavni akademski interesi so na področju raziskav (temelječih na terenskem delu) demonologije in družinskih obredov v Karpatih, po letu 1998 pa se ukvarja tudi z ljudskim verovanjem o starosti. Objavljala je tako dela o psiholoških, socialnih in religioznih aspektih demonoloških verovanj kot tudi o družinskih šegah.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Urszula Lehr, Ph.D., is a graduate of the Jagellonian University, Cracow (Ethnography). She currently works for the Polish Academy of Sciences in Cracow, Department of Archaeology and Ethnology, Ethnology Workgroup. Her chief academic interests include fieldwork-based studies of demonology and family rites in the Carpathians, and since 1998, folk attitudes towards old age. She has published on psychological, social and religious aspects of demonological beliefs, as well as on family rites.