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Dialogue of Generations as Communicative Dimension of Bread Culture Semantics in the Ukrainian Sacral Tradition

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Abstract

The issue is devoted to the semantic analysis of the bread phenomenon in Ukrainian cultural tradition. The traditional interrelations between a man and bread are considered. The layers of taboos, prohibitions about common bread usage are presented. According to Ukrainian spiritual tradition, bread was a vital symbol, it was worshipped as the Sun in the pagan times and as the Eternal Sun of Truth in the Christian times. Consequently, it is forbidden to swear, deal about dishonest affairs, mention evil spirits (in all sounding variants), have empty talks and to be occupied by a charade, etc. in the presence of "sacred bread". The Christian layer of bread consideration as Jesus Christ embodiment is highlighted. The sinful context of bread usage is provided. The greatest sin was to offend a Mother, Earth, and Sacred Bread, and consequently to be separated from a family (without a family blessing), to lose a piece of land (without an opportunity to confess, as people confessed to sacred land the in old times), and also without any possibility to grow wheat personally (in other words to be deprived by God's protection). The folk wisdom has always mentioned that: "A family table is the palms of God. A loaf of bread on a table is God's Gift. The attitude to this gift should be respectful". The main paradigm of the whole issue claims the following thesis: bread's magic has gone through all Ukrainian spiritual culture, all sacral and mystical ritual nuances, whole mystery sense of Ukrainian folk laws are presented. The exclusiveness of various bread names is considered, hence the names are provided owing to bread's shapes, special holidays' application, specific of bread-making process, etc. The crucial attention is paid to Christmas bread and variants of its production.

Keywords: Ukrainian tradition, bread, tradition, rite, taboo, prohibition, culture.

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Introduction

Bread is a sacral phenomenon, traditional artifact, moral and spiritual standard of relations, the main value factor of ethnical culture, holy criterion of metaphorical language, a symbol of any tradition that is reflected in any culture, particularly, in the Ukrainian culture. Bread has been identified with gold, good, the sun, with the life itself from the ancient times. Traditionally, bread was used for greeting. Furthermore, bread was considered to obtain the strong functions of a charm.

The famous Ukrainian researcher Lidia Artiuch (2016) is writing the following in her work "Ritual Taboos Connected with Bread: Traditions and Modern Usage": "Any ethnical identification can be reflected in the self-consciousness manifestations as well as in the elements of material culture". Such iconic cultural elements are identified by the "own" ethnos and the representatives of "the other" as **ethnical markers** that determine the national identity to some extent. Bread is such a marker that is the most crucial element of the Ukrainian national culture.

Bread has always been a symbol of prosperity, happiness, procreation in the Ukrainian tradition. A man begins his life with bread (loaves of bread that are served during the ceremony of Baptism); he leaves the world accompanied by bread (bread for a deceased man during memorial service). Wedding bread has become a symbol of the Ukrainian wedding (Artiuch, 2016).

The issue of ceremonial bread in the traditional folk calendar (particularly, spring season) is not sufficiently highlighted in the scientific works and other printed materials. The fragmented knowledge of the Ukrainian traditional bread usage is in the works of the following scientists regarding the descriptions of life, beliefs, customs, and rituals: Pavlo Chubynskyi (1995), Vasyl' Domanytskyi (1912), Petro Ivanov (1907), Mychajlo Maksymovych (2002), Mychajlo Markevych (1991), Vasyl' Myloradovych (1992), Anton Onyschuk (1912), Mychajlo Piotrovskyi (1995), Volodymyr Schuchevych (1904), Mychajlo Zubrytskyi (1900). The facts of bread usage were occasionally mentioned by Lidia Artiuch (2011, 1999, 2016, 1977), Petro Bogatyriov (1971), Taisia Gontar (1999), Stepan Kylymnyk (1994), Mykola Muschynka (1999), Vira Sokolova (1979), Oleksa Voropay (1993), Chvedir Vovk (1995), and others, in ethnographic studies.

Mykola Sumtsov (1885) comprehensively studied ceremonial bread on the Common Slavic material. The work was issued more than a century ago and presented the issue in detail; nevertheless, the issue was not exhausted by the publication. Eventually, the author in the introduction admitted inexhaustibility of the issue: "I do not consider my study regarding ceremonial bread to be entirely complete. There is a lot of material. Ceremonial bread can be discussed a lot; nevertheless, something unnoticeable or unsaid will remain". The work of Ludmila Gerus (2012) "Bread in the Ukrainian spring Ceremonies" can be highlighted among the others.

The particular semantics of bread culture can be followed in the works devoted to the Ukrainian ethnical anthroponomics. For instance, considering the ancient folk names the researchers draw attention to the sacral mysterious name "**Knysch**", explaining it as "*an ancient sacral name of the ceremonial bread that is baked solely on Christmas and only family members can consume it*" (Khrypko & Iatsenko, 2019a). Moreover, the phenomenon of ancient Ukrainian surnames is analyzed, so-called "**bread surnames**" are highlighted. According to them: "The surnames connected with human being are national philosophy and motivation... The creation of such a group of surnames permits to represent administrative, social and economic activity of the Ukrainians. The surnames are the embodiment of different food and products of consumption, e.g. Bublik (a bun with a hole in the middle), Pyrig (pie), Palianytsia (a kind of sweet bread for holidays)" (Khrypko & Iatsenko, 2019b).

Consequently, bread and attitude to it can be a source of esthetics, ethics, mentality, cultural and psychological study of a nation.

The purpose of the paper is to present the semantic analysis of bread in the Ukrainian traditional culture and folk customs consideration regarding relations between man and bread. The additional aim is to represent a layer of taboos regarding bread usage and to highlight the Christian understanding of bread in the light of Jesus Christ's embodiment. The context of sinful behavior with bread is considered and described in relation to the name of bread, the holiday, specific nature of its baking, etc. The main attention is drawn to Christmas bread and the variants of its baking, serving, and honoring. All material is presented in the light of antheism (the sacral attitude to land and bread), the main paradigm of all Ukrainian tradition.

The methodological peculiarity of the work is a poetic way of description that is authentic to the Ukrainian tradition. A reader is like a guest on Christmas Eve and every Ukrainian sacral detail of Christmas Eve is carefully explained.

Research and results

The mystery of Christmas Eve has embodied the whole two thousand history. It represented the time when a Man was born, whose fate and words had embarrassed a lot of generations, whose doctrine was accepted as "Revelation of Love", whose life was an example of faith and obedience, whose death became a hope for an eternal life for all nations, societies and cultural communities, etc.

"Yehoshua" is a sounding of the Person's name in authentic language. The name means **"God helps"** in translation from Hebrew. We have accustomed to a Greek sounding of His name – **"Jesus"**. Ukrainian spiritual tradition of icon painting has focused on a sacral sense of His name – **"Savior"**. Traditionally, this word is put under an icon image. However, there is one more form of His name sounding – **"I am Bread of Life"**, **"Bread that came from Heaven"**, such names uses Jesus to explain the depths of His teaching. A miracle of **multiplying the loaves of bread** is the most mysterious among others Jesus's deeds. Another prominent deeds are **"Breaking Bread"** – **"The Blessed Sacraments"** – **"Communion"** as a process of inclusion to the body of Christ (in the form of bread) and to His sacred blood (in the form of wine). Divine Liturgy is based on this mystery; moreover, a sense of any Christian ceremony and the whole Christian faith is connected with it. Bread in all of its forms is presented in the traditions of Christmas Eve and Christmas.

Eucharistic Bread (Prosfora) embodies the symbolic presence of Jesus at the Christmas table. It was laid on a new snow-white piece of cloth (veil) and petals of blossomed cherry tree (a symbol of Angels' wings) were put near. The cherry tree branches were placed at the center of a family table on blessed hay and straw that were prepared in advance. All should resemble the circumstances of Christ birth, namely a cave, a manger, straw, Angels, family, unexpected guests... Thus, straw on which prosphora (the symbol of Jesus birth) was laid obtained some charm functions. The pieces of Christmas straw were put on the roof (in that case we should remember that a roof of all old Ukrainian houses was thatched). The attention should be drawn to the Ukrainian word **"pokriv-Lia"** (roof) which could be explained as a *God's cover*. The process of a roof's cover was not performed by accidental people, however, even material – straw was specially selected, and the whole work was accompanied by a pray. Prayer dolls, cradles, classical Ukrainian hats (Brills) were made from Christmas Eve straw. Furthermore, the pieces of Christmas Eve straw were taken as a charm while traveling. Fire on Easter was made from Christmas Eve straw. The pieces of it were added to bathing water of newborn babies. Additionally, the pieces of Christmas Eve straw occurred in every ritual, namely in girls' wreathes which

were made on Ivana-Kupala Day, in a bride wreath. They were added to pillows, put on beds, ovens, etc.

Straw is something left after reaping. The process of reaping gives a gift of bread. Bread is life. The last sheaf of wheat had been in a house for a year till the following harvest. A famous charm "Diduch" was made from it and occupied a prominent place at the Christmas table.

Close attention should be drawn to the persons presented during Christmas Eve mystery. There are special guests, besides Jesus, Mary and Joseph, – foreign kings (Three Kings according to the Catholic tradition; Three Wise Men according to the Orthodox tradition; Three Magicians according to the Greek translation of the New Testament) and ordinary shepherds. Magicians have magic knowledge, hidden from ordinary people's eyes; in contrast, shepherds belong to the poorest layer of a society, people who do not have a roof over their heads. This fact has a deep symbolic meaning. Admittedly, when such an event happened accidentally people could not have been there.

Ukrainian Christmas tradition has a difficult moment. According to it, each family has an obligation to invite on Christmas Eve an accidental traveler, as nobody should stay "somewhere on the road", "be outside a family" or "be not under a roof". One additional plate is put "for Jesus" and one more is added, "for someone who is led to a house by God". Hence, God can invite to "His Holiday" anyone: "a shepherd" or "a terrestrial king". Nevertheless, a happy sign is when an unexpected guest comes to a Christmas Eve dinner, whereas a personality, social status, man's clothes are not important. The well-known proverb: "An uninvited guest is worse than a Tatar" is not appropriate in this case. "The Holiday came", an arrival of unexpected traveler on Christmas Eve was explained in that way. Obviously, The Son of God Jesus Christ (who is closest to God, Divine Light, Love, and Life) should decide who will be near Him at Christmas time.

Christmas is not a birthday in a secular meaning; it is a birth of Jesus here and now. Spiritual time is not linear (particularly, yesterday, today, tomorrow, next week, etc.). This time is another. Christmas time is Divine time. As it is said: "The Holy Hour has come", "Christmas Time", "Holy Time", "Christmas Eve". **Holiday** according to the Ukrainian language tradition is **a holy day**. It is not only a day of celebration, joy, and opportunity to have a rest; it is exactly a HOLY day. Consequently, it should be devoted to the sacral things, and not to the ordinary, day-to-day actions.

A symbol of Saint Joseph the Betrothed is a blossomed almond stick. Particularly, he is present at every family Christmas table in the frame of this symbol. **"A piece of straw with cherry tree petals and almond"** or **"a blossomed cherry tree branch"** (like a Joseph's stick) – these things **near "prospora on a snow-white piece of cloth surrounded by straw"** symbolize **Saint Joseph's presence** (his father patronage) in the Ukrainian Christmas Tradition at the feast family table.

In this context, it should be mentioned that a cherry tree is **"a life tree", "a holy tree", "a tree from the garden of Eden", "God's tree"** according to the Ukrainian tradition. There are cherry trees everywhere. A cherry orchard is an eternal symbol of a Ukrainian village. **"Flourished like a cherry tree in spring", "blossomed like a cherry tree on Christmas", "has turned red like a cherry"** – all these folk expressions are about a girl who is pretty, attractive, and is loved by others. The national embroidered towels with a sacral ornament were hanged in cherry orchards. The sacral "straw dolls" (*liali*) were sometimes put on the branches of a cherry tree. The sacral dishes were cooked on fire from the branches of a cherry tree. A branch of a blossoming cherry tree that has flourished on Christmas symbolizes God's positive answer to a pray. A cherry tree planted in a barrel was brought into a house instead of a Christmas tree on "Catherine fest" (*on the 7th of December*) in the ancient times. If it had flourished on Christmas, it would be a sign of special God's grace to a family that would last during a

year. Obviously, according to that tradition cherry tree petals were used to decorate Christmas table and feast dishes.

Nevertheless, the main dish and decoration of Christmas table is Bread. In the Ukrainian language culture, a loaf of bread had always been considered as a sacral thing and the word's writing begun from a capital letter. ***The Ukrainian culture is based on bread.***

According to the famous Ukrainian ethnologist Larysa Artiuch (2011), the prohibitions are the main element of traditions, particularly regarding bread; it is one of the most stable elements. Prohibitions connected with consumption can be divided into the following groups:

1. The prohibitions on some products' consumption, i.e. a prohibition regarding some objects, regardless of time of consumption or other circumstances.
2. The prohibitions regarding food preparation and/or consumption (even to sow crops, plant vegetables) at a particular time (hour, day, holiday, phase of a lunar month, season, etc.), i.e. time prohibitions.
3. The prohibitions on some actions are connected with food preparation and consumption, as well as some actions with household appliances: stove (fire), etc., i.e. action prohibitions. This category can be subdivided into two subgroups:
 - a) the prohibitions on some actions with food regardless of a doer, i.e. prohibition for all members of a community;
 - b) the prohibitions on some actions regarding gender age or occupation of a doer, e.g. girls, women or men, pregnant women, women during menstruation (so-called impure), tanners, men who killed pigs for consumption, etc.

There were a lot of traditional prohibitions that included attitude to bread:

- A loaf of bread was not permitted to be cut, only to be broken by hands (*as the process of a loaf of bread breaking was the Easter ritual of Jesus Christ*).
- Bread could not be eaten with a covered head, as a person was in a face of food of God. Consequently, in the face of God (*a loaf of bread was His embodiment*) nothing could be hidden (*hair was considered as a symbol of life*).
- Bread could not be said to be "tasteless" or "not look nice". If baked goods were not well, they would be dug under a cherry tree or put on the branches of a cherry tree (A cherry tree is a sacral Ukrainian tree, "a tree of life"). In that case, a loaf of bread was said "to be baked unsuccessfully".
- Bread could not be the food for cattle. To feed them with the loaves of bread was supposed to be a despicable thing. However, small pieces of sacral bread from Christmas and Easter feast were added into the ordinary food for cattle with a prayer for prosperity, growth, peace in household, etc.
- The dough was not permitted to be mixed in a bad mood, in a bad atmosphere, or by an outsider woman... Moreover, Christmas, Easter, and Wedding loaves of Bread were not permitted to be mixed and baked by a divorced woman (because Jesus Christ considered as Bread of Life and divorces were forbidden by Him), therefore they embodied the symbols of fertility, family, marital bliss. Bread was kneaded only by a female owner of the house (her daughter might help) in complete silence and with a pray. The males were not involved in the

dough kneading process. The process of bread baking was symbolically compared with fertility, the process of new sun birth. Furthermore, a loaf of bread had a round sun shape.

- A loaf of bread had never been taken from a mistrusted person (especially it was related to “broken”, warm, fresh loaf of bread, or Wedding, Christmas, or Easter bread). An unpleasant person was not permitted to eat family bread. Never, he was permitted to come into a family house, under “a roof” (under family God’s cover).
- A wheat palianitsa (*traditional sweet loaf of bread*) in the sun shape is a symbol of happiness and wealth of a household. The special guests are met with a loaf of bread and salt which means respect from an owner’s side, as well as, is a charm. Bread has been the sacral food (*it is supposed never to be poisoned by it, even bread itself is considered to be healthy...*), as it is generally believed that “*a man obtains bread from God accompanied by a fate*”. Those beliefs determined the rules of behavior when people ate palianitsa. It was not permitted to eat a piece of bread after another person, as “your happiness and fate could be ruined”, (however such restriction was not related to Wedding bread, vice versa – who was eating, especially by accident, from one plate a piece of Wedding bread, that person was “a partner from God”). It was not allowed to leave bread, and to eat behind someone’s back, as you “could eat his power”. It was not permitted to leave bread crumbs on a table, or sweep them on the floor...
- Bread is a symbol of life and unity according to the Ukrainian spiritual tradition. It was worshiped as The Sun (in pagan times) and as The Eternal Sun of Truth (Jesus Christ had such title). Hence, there is forbidden to swear, deal about dishonest affairs, mention evil spirits (in all sounding variants), have empty talks and to be occupied by a charade, etc. in the presence of “sacred bread”.

The greatest sin was to offend a Mother, Earth, and Sacred Bread, and consequently to be separated from a family (without a family blessing), to lose a piece of land (without any opportunity to confess, as people confessed to the sacred land in the old times), and also without a possibility to grow wheat personally (in other words to be deprived by God’s protection). The folk wisdom has always mentioned that: ***“A family table is the palms of God. A loaf of bread on a table is God’s Gift. The attitude to this gift should be respectful”***.

Bread magic has gone through all Ukrainian spiritual culture, all sacral and mystical rituals, whole mystery sense of the Ukrainian folk laws are presented. In the words of Metropolitan Illarion /Ogienko/: “Tradition is history... As it could be a suicide for a nation to throw away national history, moreover, a suicide would be to throw away the native primordial... traditions”. Even though Metropolitan belonged to the Orthodox culture, he referred to the Ukrainian spiritual heritage with great respect, studied it, and applied to it in his works. The Ukrainians as other ethnical groups have rich traditions of Christmas Eve and Christmas celebration in the spiritual palette of national cultures. The majority of them have the roots in the ancient times as well as has been formed long before Rus-Ukraine accepted Christianity.

From the ancient times in winter period, when the sun passed the winter solstice and daylight time began to grow, our ancestors celebrated a jolly holiday “Korochun” (devoted to night shortening) which was a sign of human belief in heaven’s protection, light victory, eternal meeting of day and night, winter and summer... in a happy new year, good harvest, health, wealth, generally in birth and revival of everything that was given by God Rod (God appealed to generation, relatives, family, household, family estate... everything that was given by Rod. What had been given was the best as Rod knew better for whom and what should be given). Our ancestors believed that in the tough December and

January days the magic spiritual power had been born which later was inserted into the human souls, earth, water, plants, and animals. As a result, they looked forward to it and celebrated with great joy. A big korovaj (*a traditional loaf of bread*) was baked collectively in the sun shape and on a rushnik (*a national embroidered towel*) with the sacral ornament was together elevated to the Sun on the top of the highest mountain. Rushnik (*a national embroidered towel*) is a folk symbol of a road which contains the sacral symbolic ornament. After that korovaj was broken with the “magic wishes” and divided between all members of the community. (The attitude to a “spoken word” was extremely careful, as everything was decided with “the help of word”; the words were not thrown mindlessly, as believed that for every word a person would be accountable to God who had given a gift of a Word).

The Christian culture has filled ancient traditions with the new sacral meaning, Christian ideals and values of life, ideas of truth, Divine Love, forgiveness, generosity, hospitality, and excellence, has shown a way for the Eternal Truth. The original dual-beliefs have been spread into the sacral spiritual world and Ukrainians’ mentality. The pagan and Christian cultures have been blended in the folk and language traditions; hence the dual nature of the Ukrainian spiritual culture can be suggested. While having accepted a new belief, each nation “reads it in their language”, the Ukrainians have read it “in their language”. The dual-beliefs are “a signature” of the folk sacral tradition. It is generally understandable that some rituals and traditions have obtained changes with the time; however, time has not influenced on their spiritual and integrity base in which such Ukrainian mentality traits as diligence, hospitality, visual imagination, antheism (*connection with the land*), honesty, kindness, melodiousness, linguistic purity (the separate “swearing language” has never been existed), unity and family sacredness, memory veneration of the deceased relatives are highlighted. **The Ukrainian tradition of Christmas Eve** embodies all the enumerated traits as it is **a common dinner of all generations**. Even deceased relatives and all who disappeared should meet each other in this evening in order to “celebrate the Sacral Christmas Eve in a family circle of all generations”.

The Ukrainian Christmas preparations started from summer. The first or the last sheaf of wheat (it was a difference in a tradition according to the various regions) was left unprocessed during the harvest season. Some other cereals could be added and a sheaf should be bandaged with one, two or three ropes or a red woolen thread (the most powerful symbol of God’s protection) could be used. The sheaf embodied the family protection symbols of all generations. That sheaf was brought solemnly into a house in Christmas time. A sheaf obtained different names: “diduch”, “did”, “korochun”, “koliada” in Volyn (*the Ukrainian region in the northwest of modern Ukraine*), “kriil” (a king) in Cholmschyna (*the Ukrainian region on the left bank of the river Bug*), “zazin” in Chernigiv region (*the north region of modern Ukraine*), “baba” in Ternopol region (*the west region of modern Ukraine*)... (In any case, it was male and female unity, birth and bloodline continuation). The straw maiden crafts were called by all versions of male word “diduch” in some regions; nevertheless, hay that was also brought solemnly into a house was named by the female versions: “mother”, “wife”, etc. according to the substance that was soft, fluffy and with a pleasant fragrance. (We need to remind that straw and hay are presented on a feast table; traditionally, prosphora lies on cherry petals that symbolically depict a manger of a newborn which in their order is put on straw and hay).

The special “**Christmas firewood**” was logged for food preparation on Christmas Eve. The firewood ought to be from the best trees and were to be saved in a special place “pokuta” (behind icons) which was also called “a red corner of a Ukrainian house” (*the most honorable place of a house*). There ought to be a minimum of 12 logs that should be fired with “life” fire (*fire from tinderbox*).

Generally, the Christmas preparations involved all aspects of the Ukrainian family life. A female owner of a household (“mother and wife”) must prepare the new tableware and new clothes for

children and husband in advance on Christmas. Even if a family was poor, the clothes and tableware had to be new. Christmas should be met in a clean house with joy and all members of a family ought to wear new clothes. Furthermore, the whole house should be decorated for Christmas. Traditionally, the walls were whitewash, new clay was put on the floor, stove (or even the whole house) was decorated with fantastic flowers and birds. That fact is proved by the history of Petrikiivsky's painting (*The Ukrainian ornamental and decoration folk painting*) of Poltava region. The house walls were decorated by the ancient sacral symbols in the 17th century. Such symbols have been preserved only in pisanka (*a decorated Easter egg with traditional ornament painting*) paintings until modern times; however, the meaning of a symbolic language has been lost in major cases. Moreover, the whole house was decorated by national embroidered towels – rushnyky, in some regions paper flowers were made (***the Ukrainian Christmas paper cutouts art***) to be glued on walls near pokuttia (a place where icon was located).

The special attention should be drawn to ***“the magic of a straw Christmas spider”***. A spider is a well-known symbol of good news and they are not permitted to be killed. Christmas spiders were made from straw and hung on the main roof log in Lemkivskyi region (*the historical territory in the Carpathian Mountains*) and in some Lviv districts. The female masters made spiders from the thin sticks of a cherry tree or wire. The cutouts, pieces of candle, and other decorations were put on the joint places. The history of a Christmas spider is narrated in the old folk legend: *“Escaping from Herod’s soldiers, Mary, Joseph and little Jesus hid in a cave. A spider (the best master of weaving) had immediately covered an entrance to a cave with the web. When Herod’s soldiers saw the thick web, they thought that not only a man was incapable to enter the cave, but even a fly could not squeeze through it. As a result, they rode away. Owing to “a little weaver” the Holy Family was saved”*. Due to this good deed the spiders cannot be killed according to the Ukrainian beliefs.

A married couple of each household made a “Christmas candle” from the own apiary wax a few days before the holiday. The candle was an indispensable element of Christmas Eve.

The beekeepers gave honey to all relatives, neighbors, and good acquaintances to ensure “sweet the holidays and the whole year”. ***A honey jar should be returned to an owner unwashed with a piece of Christmas pie (palianitsa) in it.*** The honey that would be put on Christmas table should not be sold, but to be gifted only. Lavished... The amount of gifted Christmas honey was considered to be returned to a beekeeper accompanied with the high profits the following year.

Before Christmas Eve ***“everything should be returned home, and everything that had been taken should also be returned”***. Everything should be at its own place. Everything borrowed should be returned. All vehicles (symbols of road) should be repaired.

The Christmas loaves, pies, cupcakes, strudels, knyshes, palianitsas, korovajs (*different types of Christmas holiday bread*) were baked in advance, as that work demanded a lot of time and could not be done at the last moment. Moreover, Christmas pastry contained milk and butter was baked. All mess was to be cleaned up in a household, a lot of ritual dishes were to be prepared and Christmas songs (koliadki) were to be learned, and in addition, a soul ought to be prepared to a great holiday. Consequently, fasting before Christmas should be kept (*the folk name of that fasting was Pylypovka*). ***The Ukrainians performed the sacrament of confession and took Holy Communion mandatory before Christmas.***

Nevertheless, the main attention was given to the Christmas traditional bread. The Ukrainians have always been grain-growers; as a result, the bread magic has played a profound role in all rituals and celebrations. For Christmas Eve and Christmas celebrations, various types of bread were baked.

Among them were ordinary loaves of bread eaten during Christmas Eve dinner, and **special ritual sacral bread that had lain on a white table cloth during all Christmas holidays**. Christmas bread had different names (***korochun, krachun, kerechun, knysh, kalatch, strutslia or simply bread***) and forms due to the region where it was baked. It could be made from different types of wheat; it could be unleavened bread or contain milk and butter. Bread contained milk and butter (skoromny) was not consumed during a dinner, it was laid on a table. Bread has always played a special role in the life of the Ukrainian nation. All preceded events of its appearance on a table were filled with hard work, expectations, and hopes. **Bread was honored, sung, with it a man was blessed to have a good fate...** Various objects were put in the ritual bread (e.g. a strawflower, marigold flower, periwinkle, stick or a cherry stone, red thread, garlic – the ancient symbol against evil spirits, etc.), all of them should bring good luck and health, protect from evil forces. All magic actions have lost their meaning, however, a tradition of “special” bread baking exists in various regions and differs from region to region.

Christmas bread (of various shapes) was a symbol of newborn Jesus Christ, owing to that fact some blessed water was obligatory added while kneading the dough. One more type of ritual bread was **strutslia** (*It had a weaved shape with poppy-seeds on the top*) and **was laid in the middle of the table. That bread symbolized fates, roads crossing, generation meetings, and consequently, a bloodline continuation**. Another name of it is “kukelka”, and it should have lain on a feast table for three days. “Kukelka” symbolizes a newborn Jesus in diapers according to the legends. Visually, such loaves of bread with a sheaf of hay on an embroidered towel really look like a little baby in a diaper, extremely tender and sweet. “Kukelka” of a weaved shape has reminded all presented members of a family about the essence of a holiday, about Jesus who named Bread of Life for all dinner time.

There was a special sacral tradition to bake **three ritual loaves of bread** that were put on one another in Podillia (*the Ukrainian region situated near river Dnestr*). The lowest unleavened bread was baked from rye flour (it was called **“The Owner”** or **“Holy Christmas”**), another loaf of bread bigger in size and fine decorated was made from wheat flour (called **“Vasil”**) and the last on the top, the smallest one also made from wheat flour obtained a name **“Jordan”**. “The Owner” was cut on the first day of Christmas, “Vasil” was eaten on New Year (*According to the old Orthodox calendar New Year is on 14th of January and this day corresponds to a Saint Vasil day of memory*) and “Jordan” was consumed on Epiphany day.

A Holy Kalatch presents one more type of ritual bread; it embodies an item of constant life and time circulation. It was put on the top of two rye loaves of bread in Ternopol region. Kalatch was a special loaf of bread consisted of many pinecones from dough that were put tightly into a round shape form. A baked kalatch looked like a big flower. **The hay under a tablecloth was supposed to be a stable; the first ray loaf of bread was to be a manger, the second ray loaf of bread was considered to be a cradle, kalatch was to be newborn Jesus and a candle in kalatch was thought to be a star**. All loaves of bread had lain on a table untouched for three days.

Such called **“doves”** were baked from unleavened dough to Christmas Eve and depicted symbols of Holy Spirit presence. Those doves were gifted to children and koliadnyki (*the men dressed in national costumes and sang Christmas carols*).

There is an original tradition in Cherkassy region; a rectangular loaf of bread is made that has a name **“The Owner”**. The cupcakes with various fillings (cabbage, peanut, pitch, cherry, poppy seeds, etc) should be on a table at Christmas time. The oldest woman in a family (frequently grandmother) gave the cupcakes to grandchildren and everyone should remember what kind of filling he had. It was believed that if a child lost, he would need to remember what cupcake filling he used to have on Christmas Eve and God would help him immediately to find a way home.

There is a tradition to lavish a dinner in the memory of deceased relatives on Podillia (*the Ukrainian region situated near river Dnestr*). A special kalatch is baked to perform such a ritual which has the name “pomana” (*in a ritual name an issue of memory presented*).

However, in any case, the main and the most solemn dish of Christmas Eve feast is **kutia** (**kolyvo**). Kutia is a ritual porridge made from the whole wheat grains. It came for us from the depth of the ages and contained a rich set of family feasts symbolic. Furthermore, kutia is a funeral dish. According to the ancient belief of our predecessors, it ought to be eaten at a funeral dinner. The wheat porridge was served with honey at the top and bore the name “kolovo”. Kutia had not lost its meaning after Christianity and was widely spread; moreover, it obtained the new depths of meaning. Namely, the ancient symbols of whole wheat grains, poppy seeds, and honey became not only the symbols of all generations’ unity, thus they showed a life victory over death. The unprocessed wheat grains are a life which has passed and been reborn, poppy seeds (*a symbol of a dream, generation’s seed and death*) depict the souls of deceased relatives, honey (*bees are God’s insects*) is an ancient symbol of Christianity and has become a symbol of good news that is brought into the world by Jesus Christ and unites all nations in His Church (mystical body of Christ on earth).

A female household owner prepared wheat for kutia from the best wheat, thus, the process could be instructed to nobody in the old times. Kutia was cooked from unprocessed wheat (as God created) in the ancient times.

Nevertheless, there was one more type of sacral bread, attitude to which and its symbolic sense should be considered separately. **KNYSH** (*a special sacral loaf of bread with ritual-funeral sense and simultaneously a ritual Christmas loaf of bread*) has to be on a feast family table. It was a round loaf of bread (palianitsa) with a tiny ear of corn on the top for all deceased relatives’ souls (who spiritually are with the members of a family on Christmas Eve to meet The First Star). Such loaf of bread (*Knysh*) should be eaten only by the members of a family; the strangers were not allowed to taste it.

It was a touch to Eternity, to an Eternal Life Mystery; hence all guests or random guests... had no right to touch that loaf of bread. Additionally, knysh embodies the family’s history; it is a mystical body of a particular family. However, this rule has an exception: any member of a family can invite a guest to taste knysh or allow him to touch a loaf of bread. In this case, it means that a guest is welcomed to become a part of a family (*to taste knish – to enter a family*). Such actions bear the following meaning: all deceased members of a family who have come into Eternity, “here and now”, facing Eternal Newborn Jesus give their blessing to a person to become a family part. They give their permission from Eternity. Nevertheless, all the actions are considered to be extremely serious and occur rarely. Knysh can be decorated by a poppy bulb (*the poppy seeds are symbols of a bloodline continuation and wealth*) or it can be marked by “a generation seal” which is made by oiled jar imprint. Such a sign is called “a soul” on Podillia. Knysh can be filled by special buckwheat porridge (*buckwheat is funeral grain*). At the foot of the Carpathian Mountains such loaves of bread have the following names: “nastilnik” (*derived from their settlement place: are put on a table*), “vasilinka” or “vasilka” (*derived from time they should be consumed: on Saint Vasil day of memory*), “schedrak” (*derived from wishes for family members: to be wealthy*). Knysh symbolizes a unity of family’s generations and protection of ancestors. A clay pot with ritual kutia (*the main Christmas Eve dish*) was covered by knysh (*the meaning of protection presented*). After that kutia was put on pokuttia (*a place near icons*), everything ought to be brought to the parents the following day. Actually, knysh was presented on every holiday: on a Wedding day, on a Christening day, on Christmas Eve, etc. It was necessary on the 9th and 40th day’s dinner after a man’s death and on all other funerals days. According to its meaning, it embodies grief. Moreover, it is a symbol of eternal memory and a search to the roots of the family’s

generations. Thus, a common family pray began from a visual or physical touch to knysh in complete silence of Christmas Eve.

There was... almost always... The ritual Christmas Eve dishes were put on the Ukrainian embroidered towels with sacral ornaments. In the deep silence of Christmas Eve the First Star, which was waiting by all Christian World, had risen. Christmas Eve was passing... Christmas Liturgies began in churches... Christmas came. And always was time to think about His arrival to the Earth and about grace and depth of His name...

Conclusions

Despite the modernization of living conditions, modification of state structure, changes in the social environment, the total spread of atheism during the Soviet times, such elements as customs, consumption prohibitions have still existed, even unconsciously. Such structures are basic for the establishment of the connections between the past and present. Bread is a symbol of unity, peace, prosperity for all, a symbol of cultural and generational connection.

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