

Irina NESEN
Kyiv

THE HORSE IN THE WEDDING RITUAL OF CENTRAL POLISSIA

The wedding ritual as a complicated and developed system conceals various symbols and plots associated with them, which are represented by some characters. Sometimes they are animals reflecting different surrounding objects and phenomena. Such phenomenon forms a special zoological code¹. In old times animals were objects of the cult (zoolatry). But this phenomenon is not always connected with totemism². Horse occupies a prominent place among such animals and it is one of the oldest cultural symbols. But its role in the wedding ceremony is not examined enough because of the lack of the source base. A chief aim of the article is to distinguish horse role and place in Central Polissia wedding ritual. The research is based on the field materials gathered by the author on the region territory during the expedition, exactly in 30 villages of Emilchyns'kyi, Luhyns'kyi, Malyns'kyi, Narodyts'kyi, Ovrysts'kyi, Olevs'kyi districts (Zhytomyr region), Ivankivs'kyi, Polis'kyi, Chornobyl'skyi districts (Kyiv region), Rokytnivs'kyi district (Rivne region), Iziaslavs'kyi district (Khmelnysk region).

In the world's mythology the horse is always associated with the male deities – patrons of different worlds. Very often it is an inhabitant of the upper world air and in this meaning it possesses some birds features and is a zoomorphic deity or a helper at the last³. Among the Indo-Europeans horse is not only an assistant of the god of fire Agni, but a cosmic animal, whose parts are associated with the main parts of our Universe⁴. Among the Greeks it is an erotical symbol. Poseidon transformed into a horse in order to get possession of his wife Demeter, and she turned into a mare to escape from him⁵. Among the East Slavs horse is an animal of the two gods Perun and Veles. The last is associated with agreement, communication and movement and at the stage development of his image was regarded as a family, commune embodiment and their patron. Veles's server with East Slavs is a wizard (volkhv), the choosen member of community. This horse was bred in the saint grove (gai). It was forbidden to ride on it⁶. In some Ukrainian regions (Zakarpattia) were noted the following opinions about the demoniac horse origin: it is able to know about future death and according to other sources – the wedding celebration⁷. So, in the world culture horse is associated with different worlds – with the upper one, with its sun cults, and with the low one, underground, and it is able to be a mediator between these two worlds⁸.

In the wedding ceremony horse as character is associated with several topics. The prominent is the space deployment that has a mythological context except attributive and role contexts. In the wedding ceremony the main character is a horse with a horseman. This character in the local rituals has a function of driving into the house. Its existence is fixed by the author in spite of its significant destruction on the huge area from the Dnipro to the Ubort', but sporadically up to the Horyn'. Here horse as the ritual subject is found with the help of the dialectological examinations⁹. The mentioned ceremony in the wedding system of this region was not described and was not analysed in the Ukrainian scientific works. In different villages it is fixed as strange exotic phenomenon which was existing before the time when kolhosps appeared and in northern parts of this land it was alive up to the 1950s. In some cases ritual is remembered in the fiance's house, in the other in the fiancee's one or in both houses (village Buky, Malynskyi district). The north villages of the region own the fullest information – Luhyns'kyi, Narodyts'kyi, Ovrysts'kyi, Chornobyls'kyi and Polis'kyi regions. Here there are some descriptions: “The bride and groom drove four horses. When they reached the yard, the decorated horse or all four horses were led into the bride's mother house. And only after that the couple entered into the house. The horseman wore red clothes and had sabers. The horse was led into the house by a bridle because it was impossible to ride on it. The horse was decorated with flowers and they gave vodka (horilka) to it” (village Tarasy, Polis'kyi region). “An old man with his naked cock (folk Ukrainian name ‘kischka’) mounted a horse and rode into the house. And we were astonished” (villages Hunychi, Mozhary, Pokaliv, Zhbanksi, Duminske in Ovrutskyi region). “Horse was led into the house in order to be an owner” (village Fenevychi, Ivankivskyi region). “At the groom's place, after they had sat at the tables, the horse was led into the house. It was decorated carefully with a wreath. Boyar was on it. Vodka (horilka) was served on such occasions” (village Sukachi, Ivankivs'kyi region). “Before distributing the wedding bread (korovai) they rode into the bride's house. The horse was decorated with the carpet, strips, rings and belts. The boyar had a saber. Horilka was served to the boyar and his horse” (village Zhovtneve, Polis'kyi region). Sometimes

we meet a game hint about the ritual horse role in the process of bringing korovai into the house for its further distributing: “They bring the korovai, and sing and lead a horse and give it horilka, but he kicks back” (village Koshovka, Chornobyl’s’kyi region).

On the Kyiv Polissia territory this character has military features and a specific folk name – “cherkes”. The bride was taken on Monday. They drove her and cherkes was riding in front of them – druzhba (a man who called people with korovai) was tied up with a special towel (rushnyk) and rode into the bride’s mother house. And we ran to see him. He had a saber. The cherkes and his horse were decorated with the belts (poiasy). Poiasy were bought – red, green and blue. It occurred when the bride was taken” (villages Pavlovychi, Dibrova, Martynovychi, Poliss’kyi region). The role of the horse as a military man is widely known and popular. Among the Romans it is God of Earth that is associated with the military topic and as the result with God of the War Mars whose sacred place is on a plain, in the field, but not on a hill¹⁰. Let’s remember that Perun accompanied with horse is associated with war.

All the collected information is divided into two groups. The first one includes information about such phenomenon when a horse with a horseman drove into the groom’s house during the festive ceremony. The second one comprises villages where horse escorted the couple on their way to mother-in-law’s place. It is the first who rides through the fire made at the gate and drives into the house: “When it is necessary to lead the bride to the mother-in-law’s house, they drive into the house, horilka and pampuschki (kind of fritter) were served. The horseman rode in front of them up to the gate” (villages Vesniane, Bovysche, Poliskyi region). “When the bride is virgin, her uncle and the groom rode from her place. They had to drive through the fire at the groom’s mother gate” (village Dorohyn, Narodys’kyi region). Thus, in this case, the horseman and his horse were the first news about bride’s virginity. Such plot deployment was represented only in some villages (village St. Dorohyn, Buky, Berestovets, Korostens’kyi district, Luchmany, Ovrutskyi district).

The horse presence at the wedding ceremony as ritually marked animal first of all reminds the New Year tradition associated with an animal-”polaznyk” that is able to wish and provides the happy life in the coming year. In our case such wish for a happy new life in their marriage is expressed. At the same time the ritual reality of this period proposes the elements of foreseeing the bride’s virginity by horse: “Boyar rode into the groom’s house. His cap was made from straw-bands. And horilka was served to both of them. When the horse defecates, the bride is not virgin” (village Rubezhivka, Narodys’kyi district).

The given passages have some common positions – fortune-telling, dung, virgin. Let’s examine them on by one. The tradition of fortune-telling by horse as a sacred animal (hipomantia) is a quite ancient and quite popular phenomenon, especially at the ancient Slavs and Balts. Balts when setting out for a battle march tried their luck with the help of specially bred horse – oracle. If it touched one of the soldier’s spears with its coffin, it meant failure¹¹. That’s why bride’s virginity test with the help of a horse is not unexpected and has historic and cultural roots.

Semantic meanings associated with dung are worth learning too. In various territorially and chronologically distant cultures we meet the typologically similar points of view. The Hindus cleared their fields by dung, leaving cattle on them¹². The same way people examined the place for their future house with the help of cattle (dung) on the territory of Kyiv Polissia, leaving cattle for overnight to rest there (village Fenevychi). Even the process of taking dung into the fields in folk consciousness was a period defined by some particular thoughts and beliefs. At this time and during all year holidays it was forbidden to lend anything from the house¹³. V.V.Ivanov makes a conclusion analyzing the Belorussian ethnographic material that front part of a horse is an equivalent of the upper level, positive one but its back part from which dung is thrown is associated with the low level¹⁴. The confirmation to this fact we can find on Central Polissia territory too. “If the bride is not virgin the horse was led into the house by its tail” (village Novi Novaky, Luhyns’kyi district). Or, “if you drink water dropping from horse’s lips, you won’t sleep in summer”¹⁵. In some medieval learners mind its back side is the hidden face mask¹⁶. Low part represents the material world origin, its physiological demands and instincts. This topic is developed in various plots from the body reproduction to the shameful implications of the sexual contact or defecation, the topics of people initial desires and reproduction importance, life non-stopping are interconnected. Human being body as learned microcosm is associated with unlearned Universe macrocosm: “Human body comprises the whole universe in all its sides”¹⁷. So in horse defecation during the wedding ceremony we can see ambivalence of meanings. They are its wish of wealth by the regarding low part as reproduction source and provision by the cleaning of the living territory from the negative results of the not virgin bride stay in the house. At V.Balushok mind girl’s preparation for giving a new life was considered as peculiarity of women’s initiations¹⁸. The premature defloration according to the local notions could lead to the bees death (Olevs’kyi district), cattle plague (village Buky), household’s destruction and at last the whole family death (village Borove, Rokytnivskyi district). Dung as natural substance combines productive and apotropaic functions.

Ambivalence in our opinion is peculiar to the studied plot in general, when the horseman embodying the totem

of the family and a reminder of his ancestry is escorting the bride and the bride groom along their whole way to the groom's house. He is not only the wish to be happy, but a communicative-informative character-symbol of the happy realization of the wedding agreement via the ritual with the name "komora". The horseman overcomes the ritual way between the bride's and groom's locuses binding them together and he is the first who drives in the groom's house where he with his horse is fed and watered. The last action is an old tradition and means respect and worship. Some researches prove that the closest character associated with family and its life among East Slavs was Veles. He as well as Rod is directly reflected in the Slavic cultural and ritual complex: "At the most important moments of life during the so-called "rituals of transition" the full member of the community was identical to the whole community and the whole world and was a symbol of its transformation into Volos. Thus, Volos identified the community itself, the world. He personified it"¹⁹. In the opinion of particular researches Rod was considered to be a patron of family among the East Slavs at the early time of their mythology and later he was substituted by Volos.

Probably, in the process of destruction of matrilineal tradition and carrying out the ritual "komora" exclusively at the groom's place the topic was connected only with his territory where it kept its vivid erotic nature (we refer to showing a sexual organ by a horseman). And even in this case a horse implies an animal that brings news about bride's innocence, but in the other way from the groom's locus to the bride's locus. In this way in some villages the invitation to the second day of the wedding celebration was held by the boyars (groomsmen) (e.g. the village of Mahdin, Ovruch). In the south-western part of the region the ritual was occasionally carried out not with an animal, but with a scarecrow (the villages of Mokliaki, V.Hlumcha, Bobritsia in the area of Emil'chy). Probably, under the influence of the described ritual tradition horsemen in the regional wedding celebration are messengers who bring other pieces of news, namely, performance of church wedding ceremony. To this end, driving in the house by horse was also fixed.

Thus, after the analysis of collected information we become firmly established that there is a direct connection between the determined character and the idea of couple's innocence, in general, the idea of change. The image of horse as a means of transport for the couple from one world into another that the wedding celebration implies was studied by V.Balushok in the context of youth initiations. The researcher considers a horse to be connected with well-arranged inner (own) space as well as with not well-arranged outer (alien) one²⁰. These ideas acquire paramount importance in the context of sort of the forgotten problem which Korniy Cherv'yak tried to solve. The last touches the function of a horse during the funeral ceremonies of unmarried youth. He made travelling notes in the villages of Zhitomir Polissia and fixed the obligatory presence of horsemen during the funeral of a fellow. He tried to make clear their obligatory nature referring to the family complex of only "neighbouring" gentry or a common regional tradition²¹. K.Cherv'yak must have not found final answer to that question. We think the ritual of riding into the house on a horse and placing the horse at the head of the ritual procession is typical for the rural traditions of the region. It was recorded by the author as a part of the funeral ceremony not only in "noble", but in "moujik" vilages. There a funeral of a fellow was impossible without the korovai (wedding bread), the wedding branch and particular clothes as well as a ritual ride of, at least, one horseman. It looks like the widespread tradition in Central Polissia in ancient times was kept in the historic memory of old-timers in only occasionally. By the way, on the investigated area seeing a horse in the dream is evidence of change or news. A black horse is associated with death, but a fair one – with news. The topic of horse as transport is brought up in the regional folk songs.

Blessing the couple's train by a new mother-in-law who rides an oven-fork to do this may be considered an allegoric marker of covering a road on a horse: "The groom's mother mounts oven-prongs like a horse and a boyar imitates holding the "horse" by they bridle. She "rides" around a dough-trough three times throwing back nuts, coins, seeds. Those prongs are thrown by a boyar above the house" (the village of Volianschyna)²². In the given example an oven-fork substitutes a horse. Why does the very allegoric substitution come into existence? Let's recall that an oven-fork as a household object is connected with an oven, it means with fire, light. Above we mentioned the fact that in some cultures the horse was also connected with that substance and its God. The same parallels are found in the Central Polissia wedding folklore. Study the two following texts.

Oh, whose horse is galloping ahead,
Vasyl's steed is galloping ahead,
Oh, you, steed, don't be tired,
Bring us fire (the village of Dibrova)

The more interesting and complete description of the ritual is recorded in the district of Narodychi:

Oh, whose horse, whose horse is striking fire,
Oh, stone, oh, stone, give us fire,

Give us fire, fervent and burning for candles to light,
To light candles and to make this day bright
(the village of St.Dorohyn')

These versions of the same song are practised on the threshold during lighting the family's candles. The very horse brings fire according to the songs. The second song shows the specific information about striking fire from a stone (flint) by a coffin.

A stick (a "cudgel", a "pale stake") as a sign of a horse is mentioned in southern part of Volyn' and is used in making the korovai (the wedding bread). The groom's korovai-makers went to the bride to invite her female relatives to help, they set out with a "horse" in the form of "pale stake" decorated with a wreath on the top (the village of Holyky, district of Iziaslav).

The horse is often depicted in the role of the main character's assistant in the folk tales²³. The vivid use of that function is occasional in the wedding ritual in Central Polissia. Thus, in one of the villages located between the rivers Vuzh and Teteriv, in past this territory was inhabited by the Cheks and Ukrainians, there was a tradition of invitation to the wedding that was carried out by the groom accompanied by a festively decorated horse. Among the decorations ribbons, small bells, a rug were obligatory (the village of Ivanivka, Malyn).

An allegoric image of horse is represented in the words which are pronounced at the moment of sewing a flower on the groom's clothes, the ritual is observed before setting out to the bride:

Oh, I'll mount a stake and ride to the garden,
I'll pick up periwinkle for the groom's flower,
I'll sew on the groom's flower
Let the green periwinkle protect him with its power.
(the village of Zubkovychi, Olevsk)

There is a particular symbolism of colour of the horse hair. The Hindus pictured a horse of winter as white and of summer as bay²⁴. In the Bulgarian wedding celebration a white horse is an attribute of the bride²⁵. The regional folklore also provides information about two types of colour of the ritual horse hair that may indicate the time of wedding or mark out a sacred horse via its colour of the hair:

Jurichok came to his father-in-law yard on broun horses,
Oh, prance my horse under me
His father-in-law's come out of the house with greetings, but Jura doesn't care,
Oh, prance my horse under me,
His mother-in-law greets her son-in-law, but he doesn't care,
Oh, prance my horse under me,
Hannusia's come out, greeting and catching hold of his hand,
Oh, halt, my horse, stop prancing, it's time to stand still
(the village of Zbran'ky, Ovruch)

Seven hundred boyars came to my yard,
Guess, guess, lass Olechka, which is yours,
Who in the yard on a grey horse is not mine,
Neither in a blue coat, nor in a green one is mine,
Mine is on a white horse like a swan
(the village of St.Dorohyn')

Let's sum up. As we see, the image of the horse in the folk culture, namely in the wedding tradition in Central Polissia, represents numerous symbols that form semantic lines and all their meanings are interconnected.

The horse as a wedding character represents several topics in Central Polissia:

– it is a sacred animal that provides information and spread it (it lets know if the bride is innocent, brings news via dreams etc).

– It makes a transition of the couple from the world into another one, from a status into another one, from a territory into another one, thus it has another function of shift (really spaciuos or virtual). In this context a horse is not only an animal that wishes happiness, but it is a subject of binding together the ritual space connected with an initiative and marriage shift that was studied by V.Balushok. Thus, the semiotic code of horse as a wedding character implies a ratifying function of the marriage.

– In all cases it plays a role of assistant of some specific character – in some cases the groom's helper, in other it renders assistance to a groomsman or a boyar.

– Colour of the horse hair underlines its sacred nature.

– In spite of a careful study collected information, regional ethnographic researches reveal separate little known phenomena. It broadens our ideas about outlook traditions of our people by means of introducing new artifacts in the general context of Ukrainian ethnology.

¹ Гура А.В. Символика животных в славянской народной традиции. – Москва, 1997; Клингер В. Животные в современном и античном суеверии. – Киев, 1911.

² Токарев С.А. Религиозные верования восточно-славянских народов. XIX – нач. XX века. – Москва, Ленинград, 1957. – С. 59.

³ Афанасьев А. Н. Зооморфические божества у славян: птица, конь, бык, корова, змея и волк // Афанасьев А.Н. Происхождение мифа. Статьи по фольклору, этнографии и мифологии. – Москва, 1996. – С. 144 – 194.

⁴ Иванов Вяч. Вс. Ритуальное сожжение конского черепа и колеса в Полесье и его индоевропейские параллели // Славянский и балканский фольклор. Реконструкция древней славянской духовной культуры: источники и методы. – Москва, 1989. – С. 83.

⁵ Юнг К. Душа и миф. Шесть архетипов. – Киев, 1996. – С. 143.

⁶ Писаренко Ю.Г. Велес-Волос в язичницькому світогляді Давньої Русі. – Київ, 1997. – С. 50.

⁷ Гура А.В. Ор. cit. – С. 57, 78; Булашов Г. Український народ у своїх легендах, релігійних поглядах та віруваннях. Космогонічні українські народні погляди та вірування. – Київ, 1992. – С. 323.

⁸ Балушок В. Елементи давньослов'янських ініціацій в українському весіллі // Народна творчість та етнографія. – 1994. – № 1. – С. 32.

⁹ Романюк П.П. Лексика весільного обряду Правобережного Полісся // Дослідження з української діалектології. – Київ, 1991. – С. 225 – 251.

¹⁰ Топоров В.Н. К реконструкции мифа о мировом яйце (на материале русских сказок) // Труды по знаковым системам. – Вып. 4. – Тарту, 1969. – С. 54.

¹¹ Slupecki L.P. Wyrocznie i wrozyby paganskich Skandynawow. Studium do dziejow idei przeznaczenia u ludow indoeuropejskich. – Warszawa, 1998. – С.146.

¹² Фаминицын А. Древнеарийские и древнесемирские элементы в обычаях, обрядах и верованиях и культурах славян. – Этнографическое обозрение, 1895. – № 3. – С. 30. Энциклопедия суеверий. – Москва, 2001. – С. 275.

¹³ Гура А.В. Ор. cit. – С. 138.

¹⁴ Иванов Вяч. Вс. Ор. cit. – С. 83.

¹⁵ Рукописний Фонд Інституту Мистецтвознавства фольклору та етнології ім. М.Т.Рильського (далі РФ ІМФЕ). – Ф. 15 – 3. – Од. Зб. 214. – Арк. 93.

¹⁶ Бахтин М.М. Творчество Франсуа Рабле и народная культура средневековья и Ренессанса. – Москва, 1965. – С. 405.

¹⁷ Ibid. – С. 409.

¹⁸ Балушок В. Ор. cit. – С. 35.

¹⁹ Писаренко Ю.Г. Ор. cit. – С. 124

²⁰ Ibid. – С. 34.

²¹ РФ ІМФЕ. – Ф. 1 – 4. – Од. зб. 249.

²² Кравченко В. Пісні, хрестини та весілля. – Т. 1. – Житомир, 1913. – С. 182.

²³ Афанасьев А.Н. Народные русские сказки. – Т. 2. – Москва, 1985. – С. 22 – 26.

²⁴ Афанасьев А.Н. Зооморфические божества... – С. 154.

²⁵ Брак у народов Центральной и Юго-Восточной Европы. – Москва, 1988. – С. 135 – 156.

Ірина НЕСЕН
Київ

КІНЬ У ВЕСІЛЬНИХ ОБРЯДАХ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОГО ПОЛІССЯ

Стаття присвячена з'ясуванню символіки коня, як персонажу весільного ритуалу. Поставлена проблема реалізується на основі польових матеріалів, зібраних автором на теренах Центрального Полісся. Застосування семіотичного коду дозволяє виявити полісемантичність означеного образу в системі весільного дійства. Серед виявлених значень головними можна визнати санкціонуючу функцію коня, яка виявляється в сюжетах "гіпомантії" (ворожіння конем) та коня-перевізника. Кінь також служить помічником окремих весільних чинів (молодого, свата або боярина) та репрезентує символіку світла. Священність ритуально задіяного коня підкреслюється його мастю.