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**THE TRADITIONAL UKRAINIAN
FUNERAL**

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Most of the documentation done on the traditional Ukrainian funeral has been from the region of Hutzulshyna^{et}. This region is located in the western part of the Soviet Ukraine inhabiting the Carpathian mountains. The Hutzuls' unlike other people in Ukraine have kept up many of the ancient customs. This is probably due to the mountains segregating them from cultural exchange as well as the individual personalities of the Hutzul, being very stubborn toward change. Therefore, we can expect a greater deal of paganism encompassed in their customs. In order so that the funeral customs can be easier to understand, 6 subsets will be used to simplify matters. The funeral customs include:

- i) preparation for dying
- ii) preparation of body for burial
- iii) announcing the death
- iv) laments
- v) games and their importance
- vi) the actual burial ceremonies

However the focus of this paper will be on the importance and actuality of games as part of the funeral rite.

i) When signs of death are shown, the body is placed by the window on a table or bench. It is then dressed in the appropriate baggy clothing. His feet and hands are washed by the younger men and the older men dress him. When dying, the person crosses himself and if he is too weak then someone else helps him do so.

Placed on the table by the body is a candle and matches so when the person dies the candle is ready to be lit so that

the soul will leave the body. The person dying then communicates his last wishes to his friends and family often promising them things that he does not have so that he will make them happy at that time. Included in the verbal ^{agreement} would be a payment to go to the priest for his services. It is believed that when one is dying he/she can see into the next world so then everyone around asks the dying person what it is that they can see. In the house of the dying one, all the seeds are left to die so that everything of the deceases dies with him.¹

When the person is near death he is given a candle so that his soul will not stay in his body. At the same time all the windows and doors are opened so that the angels will have a way of entering his soul. If someone dies unexpectedly then the next person he the family who dies after him holds two candle making sure that the candles do not touch because they are to be treated like to different souls. The candle is held with both hands so that hands are clasped as in prayer. When the person dies the candle is blown out and the preparation of his body for burial begins.²

ii) The Hutzuls do not consider death as the final end to life.

They believe that there is life after death and that allowing the body to pass away in peace is very important. This is why they are not allowed to cry when someone dies. As soon as someone dies the family gathers around the body and says "OUR FATHER,"

¹ Shukhevych, Hutsulshchyna, part 3, p. 242

² Shukhevych, Hutsulshchyna, part 3, p. 241.

Then on one side on the deceased's head blessed water is placed and on the other side is placed a burning candle which is burnt until after the church ceremonies are over. The water by the head is so that soul may drink from it and the candle is so that the soul would not fear darkness.³

The body is then dressed in the special death clothing.

The men are dressed in loose and light clothes with a special woven belt around their waist. The women are dressed very neatly and placed in a very orderly fashion. Around the married females neck is wrapped a piece of white linen. If the young woman was unmarried she would then be dressed as if it was her wedding day, with a wreath of myrt (prairie winlke) on her head and a branch of a spruce tree is decorated and placed in her coffin with her. The spruce branch represents the tree of life with many colors. If a young child dies the head is covered with white wool. It is very important that one is dressed at death in the same way you would want them to be in their next life.

After the body is dressedⁱⁿ the appropriate death clothes, everyone prays over the body.

The trembitannyk is then sent for, to send the message that someone has died. After the round of laments have been completed the coffin maker begins to make the coffin outside in front of the house. The rest of the family remains in the home continuing to prepare the body for the burial. In the coffin of a child, on the right hand side in the head area a window is placed. For an adult who dies windows are placed on both sides of the head so that the corps may watch out for other people who in time will take the journey to the next world.⁴

³Kostsiubynsky, Shadows, p.74.

⁴Shukhevych, Hutsulshchyna, part 3, p.242.

After the coffin is completed the carpenter throws away all his tools that he used to make the coffin since a new set of tools are used to make each coffin and they are not to be used again. He then washes his hands over the casket. On the top of the casket is placed a loaf of bread, 1 cup of water and a scarf. Everyone in the house then kneels around the coffin and prays while the pall bearers shout out three times "Say goodbye to us" they repeat this three times and then the family replies "Goodbye."

As a symbol of thanks to the men the scarf, bread and agreement of payment is given. The empty coffin is then placed behind the deceased by the wall.

iii) To announce a death, pieces of white linen are hung on the windows facing the centre of the village.⁵ In front of the house a large fire is built and burnt so that the villagers we see that there has been a death in the family. The women go with their hair down for wailing. The men wear nothing on their heads. Both the women and the men wear the same clothes that they wore when the person died.

In order to let the whole village know about the death a trembitannyk is hired to play the trembita in front of the house. A trembitannyk is a man who plays a trimbita, which is a long "alpen horn" of bark and wood. When the sound of the trembita is heard the church bells are rung. This is so that the sound will block the soul, so that it prevents it from wondering before the verdict is revealed.⁶

⁵Kotsiubynsky, Shadows. p.71.

⁶Kotsiubynsky, Shadows p.71.

Along with the church bells the sound of the trembita signals the mourners to begin to come to the house of the deceased. Each person who comes brings a lit candle from their house just as it is done after Easter service. The guests, upon entering the home, go directly to the window sill or bench placed in front of the deceased and place their candles there. Coins are also placed on the corp's chest, this is so that he will have money for his journey to the next world. Prayers and farewells are said for the bier before the guests acknowledge the presence of the living. The appropriate laments should be said by a female member of the family.

iv) At times a wailer (person who speaks to corps in the form a chants) is actually hired to chant the laments (actual verses in context directed to the deceased). There are separate laments that are said depending on who died. In the novel *Shadows* Rubchak describes in his notes the lament as having three constant elements: 1) to the deceased for his death an apology is given; 2) directly accusing the bier of being selfish in leaving the bereaved fend for themselves; 3) finally questions directed to the deceased about where he/she will be when he/she returns to the world of the living.⁷ Robert b. Klymastz sites a lament recorded in 1963 in Manitoba in an article in wrote. In the first line is an example of the first element of a lament and in the third, and fourth lines are examples of the second elements.

'Why don't you say at least one word to me?

Who will give me advise when you're not around?

To whom am I to draw near to now?

Why are you abandoning me?''⁸

⁷ Kotsiubynsky, *Shadows*, p.72.

⁸ Klymasz, *Funerary Rhetoric among Ukrainians in Western Canada* p. 51.

An example of the third element is in Shadows.

"Where will I find you?

In the forest?

On the bridge?

Or in the field sitting on an ear of wheat?"⁹

v) Laments were not alone in importance. Games played an important role in the ritual as well, along with previously mentioned activities. Games played a distinct role in the ritual of the Hutzul funeral. They were played as a tension reliever and as a distraction from grief and equally important to entertain the guests so that they would not leave the bereaveaved alone with the deceaseds soul. These games which are called "Hrushka"¹⁰ are very physical and many of them have sexual conotations.

In Rubchaks notes in Shadows he discribes this "blatantly erotic" behavior as being "quite obvious... that such games are a residue of the pagan funeral games, often orgistic and openly sexual that were meant to assert life in the face of death and thus to express the cyclical course of temporality."¹¹

There appears to be some order in which the games are played.¹² The first one is called rabbit; the game is based on a dialoge which exists between a boy who trys to sell a mythological rabbit and his friends who try to come up with reassons why they do not want to buy it. The boy who trys to sell the rabbit is dressed in a cap which is inside out. An example of the dialoge

⁹ Kostsiubynsky, Shadows, p.72.

¹⁰ Kostsiubynsky, Shadows p. 72.

¹¹ Kostsiubynsky, Shadows, p.72.

¹² Kostsiubynsky, Shadows, p.72.

would be: Seller: Who will buy my rabbit? REPLY: Not I because it has spots. All the boys are asked and all have to come up with a reason not to buy the rabbit. The last one or the one who cant think of a reply says: Not I because your rabbit is dizzy then the boy in the middle spins until he falls to the ground. Then another boy comes into the centre and the game sarts over again.

Sosokala is another game which is played (twisted towel).

A large circle is formed and in the middle is someone who plays the cat. People in circle attempt to hit the cat hiding the stick under their knees. The cat has to guess who hit him.

While looking for the one who hit him everyone in the circle calls out so- so to the cat. The object of the game is that there would be so much camotion that the dead man would jump up. If the cat guesses who hit him then he can sit in the circle and the one who hit him goes into the middle.

Koza or "the gaot" is also game that was played. One boy takes an axe and attaches two spoons and a beard to it making it look like a goat. The boy then slips it into a sleeve and slips the sleeve over his head. A different person goes around where the people are standing and has a bowl of salt in his hands, while calling the goat amongst the people. The goat not able to see where he is going charges towards the voice calling and butts the people.

Coroka or Magpie is like blinds mans bluff. A person wears a blindfold and walks around with a zagged stick whopping in the area where he hears noises hoping to hit someone.

Stylytsya or bench is a game which we can compare to musical

chairs. Two stoles or small benches are placed in the middle with two people sitting on each chair. Meanwhile people walking around stoles ask "Please give me a stole I have no where to sit." Then the people on the stoles switch places while the people standing try to get a place to sit. The game continues until they get tired of it.

The next game is an example of one which mocks ~~beir~~. It is called Dido (grandfather). This is where two people dress as old people with humps on their backs and go by the corps and start wailing about what a good man he was, always praising the dead man.

Oharchyk: everyone in a circle passing around a burning stick. When the stick goes out the one holding the stick must kiss everyone if ~~he~~/she protests then ~~he~~she is rubbed in soot.

~~Vesa,~~
or Hangmen is a flirtatious game with males and females. One boy hangs on to a hook and says: "I'm hanging" Some ~~one~~ asks "On what?" Then he points to some girl and she must go to him and kiss him on the lips or else her face will be rubbed in soot.

The game continues with a girl name a boy ect. ect.

Pizmoorky: This game is like the one we are familiar with, blindsmans bluff. One man ties his eyes with a scarf and tries to catch someone who is wondering in the area if he catches someone then that person becomes the blind man and the game goes on.

Voohlyk: burning ember, is placed in the middle of the room and everyone makes a circle around it. Each person tries to blow it away from themselves so that it will not burn ~~the m~~. If the fire burns you everyone in the circle laughs at you.

Cklivka: is a game which more like a practical joke. A boy takes a glass of water and a knife and pretends to trim the glass with the knife. The boy drops the knife and who ever picks up the knife he spills the glass of water on him.

Pyts is a game played by two males. The two boys lock arms back to back and one boy places a knife in front of himself in the ground standing up. A dialog goes on between the two boys. One boy asks: "Where are you going?" the other one replies: "To town?"... "What are you going to buy me?"... "Nothing, I will paint your stove." ... "I will paint you pyts."... "Do not kill it."... "I will so." Then they scramble for the knife and the game ends when one of them knocks the knife over.

Pryouhan: this game is also somewhat of a joke. A stick is taken and attached to it is a wrag. Under the stick is a puddle of water when the wrag is wet (turkey) from drinking then the person holding the stick shakes it and gets everyone wet. ¹³

Although the games may mock death their purpose is to amuse the guests so that they will not fall asleep or be lonely. These Hrushku are very commonly played by the young people while the older married people sit around the corps and think of reasons for his/her death.

vi) In the morning after the house is cleaned and the outside rituals are completed the actual funeral begins. Kolachi are placed in the four corners of the house. Along with the four loaves of bread the coffin is put outside, quickly locking the doors so that death can not reenter. The family and guests

¹³ Shukhevych, Hutsul'shchyna, part 3, pp. 242-244

say their farewells and the house is swept. All the sweepings are thrown in the pich and the ashes are later thrown in the first river passed during the procession to the grave site.

The procession is led by the priest who is on horseback. Behind him walks an elderly man carrying a bowl of wheat with twelve candles in it. The man raises and lowers the bowl right throughout the procession. Proceeding after him is the coffin and behind it follows the family and friends. The women then take turns wailing the appropriate laments.

Accompanying the procession are usually two *trebittannyks*, which play at each corner in the road. A prayer is said before crossing the river. The people then enters the church. The coffin is open for the final time for the bereaved. Behind the church at the grave site twentyfour nails are used to nail down the lid of the coffin. The casket is then lowered into the prepared grave and the family throws lumps of dirt onto the casket three times. The Hutzul's believed that if the deceased was a good person the passage across the river of life would be much more difficult than for the unjust person.¹⁴

Before covering the grave a cross, small in size, is placed at the head of the coffin. It then is covered by dirt. In the same way that the carpenter washed his hands over the casket the grave digger does the same thing over the grave, asking for forgiveness for having to do such a job. In addition to a fee the family gives the grave digger the four loaves of bread.

¹⁴Kotsiubynsky, Shadows, p.75.

A large cross is placed at the head of the grave along with a bowl of kutia (wheat). At the end of the ceremonies at the grave site the priest enters the house from the side door and the whole gathering sit down to dine. In belief that the soul may be crushed no one sits on the bench or table that the body lied on.

It is quite obvious that the soul and the body after death are two seperate idetities.¹⁵ Although most of their rituals are very pegan it is important to acknowledge the many Christian symbols. The magic number three comes into play a great deal.

The number three in a Christian sence symbolizes the "HOLY TRINITY." The priest also plays a major role in the funeral ceremonies and is respected by the villagers. Inorder to understand how these people could preform such archaic events one must keep in mind the segregation of the people and the barrier to the outside influences. It seems unusual that games would be played at a funeral. To the Hutzuls however it was not insulting to the deceased but had an important purpose. It is obvious by their discription why the games are not part of the funeral ritual in America today. Although games are no longer a part of the Ukraianian funeral here now, many of the rituals done by the Hutzuls are kept up in families today. Currently, they are modified in a manner in which is exceptable to the church.

¹⁵ Kotsiubynsky, Shadows, p. 75'

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