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## FROM LEMKO CULTURAL PAST IN DUKLA REGION

### SUMMARY

The article describes the Lemko people in the Dukla region and presents some of their cultural aspects in the past. It attempts to define who the Lemkos were and what kind of unique and specific culture they developed. The work also discusses how the Lemko people in the Dukla region manifested their community and cultural life with all their outstanding customs and traditions.

**Key words:** *Lemkos, Lemko culture, Dukla region*

Beskid Dukielski, commonly known as *Dukielszczyzna (Dukla district)*, what can be understood as the Dukla region, constitutes most of the administrative area of Dukla municipality. This name is usually used to describe the middle-eastern part of Lower Beskid. This area stretches from the Wisłoka valley in the west up to the road connecting Królik Polski with Daliowa and Czeremcha in the east. The northern edge of the area is a road connecting Nowy Żmigród, Dukla and Jasionka and the southern edge is the Polish – Slovakian borderline.

The area of Dukla was mostly uninhabited until late medieval times. First prehistoric settlements were situated at the bottoms of mountain areas. Only the lowest part of the huge bow of the Carpathians used to be a trading route. In the early medieval times Beskid Dukielski was situated on the borderline of two state communities: the Wislans, who later joined Poland, and Kiev Ruthenia. In 1340 king Kazimierz the Great took care of developing this area. After Ruthenia had been enclosed to the Polish Crown he was very generous with giving land and privileges to start villages and settlements. It was then that Kały, Skalnik, Brzezowa, Chyrowa, Mszana, Dukla and Cergowa were established and in the end of 14<sup>th</sup> century Lubatowa, Deszno, Królik, Jaśliska, Wola Niżna as well. All of those villages were established on the so-called German Law (system of rules regulating the relations between the land owners). However, this system did not work in the highlands. Also, Polish settlers found it difficult to survive in the mountains.

The solution to the problems of inhabiting the Dukla area was colonisation on Italian Law. New villages were established and the already existing ones were legally reformed, which was also connected with the influx of new settlers. Therefore in the 15<sup>th</sup> century large numbers of economically smart newcomers of the Orthodox faith arrived. The Russian-speaking newcomers quickly dominated the villages and in time created one group – the Lemkos.

A great role in inhabiting Beskid Dukielski was also played by the roman-catholic bishops of Przemyśl, who in 1434 received vast areas of land by the upper reaches of the river Jasiołka, where they developed a well organised management of the settlements.

The history of the region and the history of the First Polish Republic is closely connected to the border of Carpathians where the trading routes crossed (from Jasło, through the river Wisłoka valley until the Grab Pass, from Krosno towards Dukla Pass and from Rymanów onto the Beskid Pass over Czeremcha). The vendors transported mostly Hungarian wine, which was a very popular beverage among the Polish nobles. By three routes three competing towns were established due to profitable trade: Dukla, Nowy Żmigród i Jaśliska. International routes, helping the economical development of the region, also posed a threat. Moreover, numerous attacks on Poland from the south set off through the Dukla region.

The borderline areas had other problems too. One of them was the bandits. In the wilderness all kinds of criminals could find shelter. In 1769 Beskid Niski became the headquarters for Bar Confederation guerrillas who fought the Russian army. As an effect of the First Partition of Poland, the area of Dukla became an Austrian territory for over one and a half century.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time of great changes. Abolition of serfdom, introduction of common military service and the development of education opened new perspectives before the inhabitants of villages in Beskid. However, both of the World Wars were a very tough experience to the Dukla region. In winter 1914/15 fierce combat took place all over the Carpathians. Later, in September 1944, the area of Dukla Pass was severely damaged during the fights. It was then that Soviet armies were vainly trying to break German defensive lines in the Carpathians and unite with Slovakian insurgents. In 1945 the Lemko people from destroyed villages left for Ukraine as part of the "repatriation" operation. Two years later, during the "Wisła" operation all of the remaining Lemko people were deported to western regions of Poland. The villages were left empty for many years. Some of them were colonised later by Polish settlers, usually originating from the overpopulated countryside of Podkarpacie. In the post-war period the National Farm Holding tried to bring the region into cultivation, but it failed to do so<sup>1</sup>. In the 1950's a small group of Lemko people came back to their "mountain motherland", where they made up for 25 per cent of the population<sup>2</sup>. Since mountain farming was not very promising, they switched to forest management and tourism.

The Lemko people played a major part in the rich history of the Dukla region. They are a Ruthenian ethnic group known as the Lemko people in Lower Beskid area. The Ruthenian settlements were stretched along the Carpathian summits, over 100 km (the so-called "Ruthenian Wedge"). The base of this area is made up of the Oślawa Valley and Laborca Valley, and its' peak reaches the River Poprad<sup>3</sup>. The Lemko people are an ethnographic group which was shaped through a long historical process, absorbing and assimilating various ethnic elements. Polish colonisation as well as the nomad shepherds from a distant Balkan, the so-called Aromanians<sup>4</sup> with southern Slaves and Albanians had a part in it. The history of colonisation of the Lemko area can be read from the names of villages and topographic nomenclature, where next to the old Polish names, Romanian and Ruthenian occur as well. At the end of the interwar period the Lemko area was inhabited by over 100 000 Lemkos<sup>5</sup>.

A considerable part of the Lemko people settled down on Polish territories in the times of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic in the area of Dukla. After the administrative changes conducted on the base of a decree of the Minister of the Internal Affairs from June 1934 the so-called group communes were established, favouring the Lemko colonisation. For instance, Tylawa and Polany were inhabited by Ruthenians in over 80 per cent. Moreover, the Lemkos formed a majority in central, typically Polish communes, for example Trzciana (94,3%), Hyrowa (99,7%)<sup>6</sup>. By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War the proportions changed and the Lemko population on these territories made up for 7% of all inhabitants<sup>7</sup>. The source of money for the Lemko people from the Dukla region was first and foremost sheep herding and farming.

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<sup>1</sup> Luboński P.: *Beskid Dukielski Przewodnik*, Pruszków 1999, pp. 14-16.

<sup>2</sup> Żurko J.: *Łemkowie – Między grupą etniczną, a narodem*, [in:] *Mniejszości narodowe w Polsce*, Z. Kurcza (ed.), Wrocław 1997, pp. 51-62.

<sup>3</sup> Reinfuss R.: *Łemkowie jako grupa etnograficzna*, Sanok 1998, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aromanians>

<sup>5</sup> Reinfuss R.: *Śladami Łemków*, Warszawa 1990, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Protokoły Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych z roku 1934*, s. sygn. 320, zbiory Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie.

<sup>7</sup> *Starostwo Powiatowe Krośnieńskie 1944-1950. Referat społeczno-polityczny. Sprawy mniejszości narodowej w latach 1944-1946*, p. 24, sygn. 1188. Zbiory Archiwum Państwowego w Rzeszowie Oddział w Sanoku.

Because the mountain terrain made it difficult to develop sheep herding, the Lemkos deforested the area, receiving enough space for pasturage of mostly sheep and goats. Farming was left for the lower parts of the mountains. Due to difficulties with the ground (stony and muddy) and permissivity of tools, the crops were not very satisfying. Local farming production was not sufficient enough to feed the people. To avoid famine the Lemko people worked seasonally on farms in the lowlands, using the discrepancy in times of fieldwork. The unsatisfying results of the two fundamental branches of the Lemko economy forced people to look for other ways of earning money. The women were often occupied with cultivating linen, from which they weaved various sheets in winter. Those fabrics were later sold on fairs and in towns at the bottom of the mountains. The forest was also an important source of money. The men worked as lumberjacks and carpenters. Boards and planks prepared by the Lemkos were used for building roofs in neighbouring towns. The women were picked up mushrooms and berries which they later tried to sell on markets. In coniferous forests they prepared pitch to oil the carriages as well as melted wood tar, a wanted cure in folk medicine and veterinary. Production of wooden every-day use items was also developed<sup>8</sup>.

Their characteristic language was a very important element of Lemko identity. The Lemko dialect belongs to the Ruthenian languages group, however, due to its' proximity to multilingual groups – Polish or Slovakian – it has lost many of its' linguistic features. This dialect has an invariable accent, placed on the second syllable from the back, just like in the Polish language. This element contradicts the Lemko dialect with any other east-Slavic dialect. Another element of the Lemko language is an adopted “I” suffix in past third person singular, instead of the common for Ruthenian languages “u”. This dialect is also different because of frequent shortenings achieved through constriction of whole syllables<sup>9</sup>.

The Lemko people always underlined their Orthodox faith. This trend was favouring the pre-planned process of integrating Russian emigrants with the Lemkos. During the twenty years of interwar time, the Orthodox faith was often used as a political factor. The seed of propaganda fell of a very fertile soil of the local farmers, who treated the Greek-Catholic Church as an agency of Polish clerical and state authorities. In the process of Lemko people switching to Orthodox faith a large role was played by the people of Trzciana and Tylawa. There in autumn 1926 the official conversion was announced. In the years 1926-1928 about 20 thousand Lemko people converted to Orthodox faith, which then made up for 13 per cent of all Lemko population in Poland. The events from the turn of 1926 and 1927 put Tylawa and Trzciana ahead of all Orthodox centres of the Lemko territory<sup>10</sup>.

Aside from the faith taught by the Church, the Lemkos had their own, older beliefs, which were a completely separated, closed whole. The faith in supernatural power of fire and water was very important. Fire was regarded with respect. The fireplace was always kept clean. It was forbidden to spit or throw dirty objects into the fire. According to Lemko beliefs, fire had cleansing as well as protective and healing values.

Water, used in many ceremonies for rinsing, was also believed to have such qualities. Spring water served as a medication in various diseases. Wind also had a major role in folk beliefs. It was the element that caused fear, as it brought hail clouds and dangerous thunders. Ceremonial character was also attributed to animals (horse and ox) as well as trees (lime and hazel)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Reinfuss R.: *Śladami Łemków*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 28-37.

<sup>9</sup> Stieber Z.: *Dialekt Łemków, Sprawozdanie Towarzystwa Naukowego we Lwowie*, Rocznik XVIII Lwów 1938.

<sup>10</sup> Moklak J.: *Życie polityczne i religijne ludności łemkowskiej Powiatu Krośnieńskiego w latach 1918-1939 (na tle całego regionu)*, [in:] *Krosno. Studia z dziejów miasta i regionu*, part III, S. Cynarski (ed.), Rzeszow 1995, 2004-2007.

<sup>11</sup> Reinfuss R.: *Śladami Łemków*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 83-84.

The differences between the Lemko people and Poles inhabiting the territories in question, were not just in religion. A lot of contradictions responds to traditions of folk culture.

Folk construction of the Lemkos was not homogenous. In western part of the Lemko area multi building farms were in majority, whilst in the Dukla region a characteristic type of construction was a single building farm. Every house had both the living space as well as the farming part. A large attic stretching over the whole building played the role of a barn. Normally there was no vestibule in front of a house; it was substituted by a large yard with huge entrance gates. The roofs of Lemko houses were in a gabled shape with little side eaves and in majority thatched<sup>12</sup>. The interior of every Lemko chamber was covered in stove pitch from ceilings to windows. The rooms were spacious and high, but the floors were not wooden, the rooms normally had two windows which were not opened too often. By the entrance to the left or to the right from the door a stove without a chimney was normally put and alongside the front wall under the windows a large bench and a table were placed<sup>13</sup>.

Apart from their house the Lemkos built beautiful architectonic objects, such as churches. Those buildings possess a completely different style which distinguishes them from other Carpathian churches like for instance Bojkowskie or Huculskie. Lemko church is composed of three basic parts: rectangular or pentagonal presbytery, square nave and a temple porch with a tower above it. The tower, borrowed from the architecture of Latin churches, gives the Lemko church a very characteristic shape. In the Dukla region a the characteristic Lemko churches cannot be seen. There is one exception, the church in the village of Lipowiec, a few kilometres south of Jaśliska village<sup>14</sup>.

Even larger differences between the Lemko people and the Poles could be seen in the traditional Lemko costume. The characteristic feature of male costume was the so-called "czucha". It is a coat made from brown fabric, reaching down to mid-calf, which was worn over the shoulders. The sleeves were sewed up so they could be used as pockets. "Czucha" also had a large collar, falling down the back, which could be tight over a man's head in case of bad weather. "Czucha" were different in the way of making the sleeves and the collar depending on the region which the Lemko people lived in. In the Dukla area a white belt on the sleeves and straps on the collar known as "candles" were the characteristic things. Also a shirt with a slit not on the torso but on the back of the neck is a clothing item specific for this region. An important role in the way a Lemko dresses is played by a short vest made from white fabric known as "lajbik". The people of the eastern territories used to embroider rich, red needle-work on it. In the winter period, men wore woollen anoraks known as "hunia". Trousers were sewed from two kinds of material: white linen (for the summer) and white cloth (for winter). Feet were protected by moccasins and head with a self-made straw hat.

Women outfits were very colourful. Shirts were made from thin linen embroidered on breasts and arms with a cross needle-work. Majority of skirts were dark, decorated by hand with a printed pattern from local dyers. On top of the shirt women put a corset made from colourful sheet with red embroiders. As headwear, women chose skullcap-like coifs, tightly sticking to the head, on which a scarf was placed. Women's footwear was called "kyrpci" and for festivals and celebrations top boots called "skirni"<sup>15</sup>.

Work free days and holidays were for Lemko people a time of joy and fun. The period of Christmas, so-called "Rizdwo" (Róźdzestwo Izusa Chrysta) was preceded by a four week Advent. During that time, there was a compulsory fast with fun and joy dominant. Women were meeting in one house for a party, where various groups of clowns were visiting them. Apart from entertaining performances, social games were organised as well. Their main

<sup>12</sup>Reinfuss R.: *Lemkowie jako grupa etnograficzna*, Sanok 1998, pp. 51.

<sup>13</sup>Kopernicki J.: *O góralach ruskich w Galicyi*, Krakow 1889, pp. 5-6.

<sup>14</sup>Reinfuss R.: *Śladami Lemków*, Warsaw 1990, pp. 284-25.

<sup>15</sup>Reinfuss R.: *Lemkowie jako grupa etnograficzna*, Sanok 1998, pp. 52-53.

objective was to make boys and girls get closer to each other. Christmas Eve, called "ŚwiątjWeczer" was celebrated by the Lemko people thirteen days later comparing to Polish tradition. It was a mysterious day, thus lots of magic activities were practiced. Before a festive dinner all families would go barefoot to the river to wash themselves what according to their beliefs would keep them healthy for the next year. During the dinner, the Lemkos shared a piece of bread and garlic wishing good luck to each other for the next year. Next, everyone would go for the midnight mass, to thank God for the ending year. The night was the dominion of carol singers. Boys aged 10-14 usually wandered around the village with wishes and carols. The Christmas Day was a day of resting, singing carols, fortune telling and the Boxing Day was the day of cleaning. The New Year celebrations were quite modest, yet the Jordan Day, as the day that Christ was baptised, was celebrated hugely. This day was preceded by the eve, which was the exact repetition of the Christmas Eve. Again the carols were sung, fortunes were told and carol singers were received.

The Easters was preceded by a Lent during which not much was eaten and all meals were covered in flax oil. A day before the Lent started, there had been a so-called "puszczania", when women drank vodka and danced. Their aim was supposed to be good crops of tall flax. Easters were preceded by so-called "flowery Sunday" when the palm branches later used as medication for men and animals, were consecrated. During the Great Week Thursday was of great importance as the Lemko people were visiting their ancestors' graves and joined in a mass for the dead. Starting Thursday, women were painting Easter eggs. On Friday a fire was lit close to the church, which was then guarded by the young boys until Sunday. On Saturday the meals were consecrated in order to use all the remaining days for fun<sup>16</sup>.

During the summer and early spring the Lemko people celebrated less, because working in the field took most of their time. The only big celebration in that period was the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, when the herbs were consecrated. The shepherds were also celebrating as from that day on they could herd their sheep.

Kermesz – a church fair, was for the Lemkos quite a characteristic celebration. They took place anywhere with a church and the Lemko people. In the Dukla region one of the first and most known kermesz was a fair in Olchowiec. The event took place by the church of Relocation of the Relic of St. Nicolas from Myrliceans to Bari, which was established in 1934. The religious and cultural celebrations gathered lots of people from the Dukla region. The pre-war kermasz were taking place without artistic performances and huge dances, instead they had a nice, family atmosphere. People were trading with their own homemade products while others sang songs and talked on various subjects.

Other interesting celebrations and rituals were connected with weddings. The groom went with three, five or seven adult men to his fiancée's parents. He always carried some vodka with him. After the parents offered a glass of vodka to the guests, they said the Lord's Prayer what meant that the wife-to-be and her parents agreed to the wedding. If they didn't want the marriage, vodka wasn't given. On the eve of the wedding day, bridesmaids visited the groom and sang songs. It was followed by several rituals performed with songs and music. During the wedding service in the Orthodox church there were also numerous songs expressing wishes, hopes and giving advice<sup>17</sup>.

In the history of the Lemkos there were several events that aimed at destroying their culture. However, in the recent years there were more and more attempts to rebuild and preserve this valuable culture which Lemkos have always been proud of. Lemko cultural

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<sup>16</sup> Cieśla-Reinfuss Z.: *Weczirki na Łemkowszczyźnie*, Materiały Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego w Sanoku 1981, № 27, pp. 73-89.

<sup>17</sup> Sarna W.: *Opis powiatu krośnieńskiego pod względem geograficzno-historycznym*, Przemyśl 1898, s.153-161

heritage should be cherished and protected because of its unique and specific regional character as well as outstanding ethnic features.

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