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A MAUNDY THURSDAY CANDLE AS THE CHARM OF POTTERS OF THE CHERNIGOV REGION AND ITS SEMANTICS

Abstract: This paper talks about the beliefs of the potters from the Chernigov region in the Ukraine. Namely, when the potters prepared the pottery, traditionally they included a plethora of magic activities in order to control the elements directly involved in the process. Candles had a significant role during these magic rituals and this is considered a pre-Christian feature dedicated to the cult of the old Slavic God Perun.

Key words: Maundy Thursday, potters, charm, Chernigov, the Ukraine.

The burning of earthenware in Ukraine in the early 20th century was traditionally accompanied by magic actions, in what a potter himself appeared as an proactive principle. He made special efforts to regulate the fire element, to take it under his control. For all those different apotropaic devices were used. For example, craftsmen, originated from Oleshnya in the Chernigov Region – with the flame of a Maundy Thursday candle cross signs have been made on a potter's wheel and on the ware compartment of a kiln, before the beginning and at the end of burning the kiln was crossed as well without fail [Пошивайло 2000, с. 172].

The technology is inseparable from the symbolization as a method to contact with reality [Мелетинский 1995, с. 56]. Where the zone of assured well-being came to the end, people was obliged to depend on the ritual. Just it impelled to use different magic means. With the help of them people tried to have an influence upon the world in course desired for them. They served for the marking of objects, enabled in the manufacturing of vessels, for the symbolic protection of them or the invasion of hostile forces. The semantics of pottery charms has been still not analyzed, inasmuch as it demands the special way of looking. Considering all these magic items, there is a need to make clear programmes, available in them, reconstructing their role in the organization of man's behaviour during a burning in such a way. Either of them exists as what it is as well as what it denotes. This is a visible embodiment, an objectivation of certain categories of the mythological thought. It is essential to note, that pottery charms in the convolute form carried the meaning of ceremonies, in the course of which they were obtained and encoded. A thing, integrated in the concrete communicative act, remained to be the perceivable material reality with this act completed too, continuing to remind its former participants of it. Owing to this fact, such a thing changed inevitably into the depositary of information, what has been seemed to be materialized. The sameness of social existence, resulting in the repetition of homogeneous situations, ensured the assigning of the symbolical matter, stable for the present culture, practically to every thing. That ritual context, in which these things manifested their symbolical meaning, is to be examined here.

In the Ukrainian ethnoculture of the 19th –20th centuries owing to centuries-old religious syncretism sign of the cross became involved with the cult of Thunder God Perun: «Коби не Перун, многий би не хрестилися» [Вислоцкий 1873, с. 276], «Як не гримить, той не хреститься», «Грім не гряне – не перехреститься», «Грім не гряне – мужик не перехреститься», «Доки грім не заgrimить, мужик не перехреститься», «Як грім не гряне, мужик не перехреститься» [Прислів'я та приказки 1989, с. 64; Номис 1864, с. 139]. It was believed, that, when it is thundering and a lightning is flashing, one ought cross himself and a place around to drive away from himself a devil, because a thunderclap, killing an evil spirit, could kill a man too [Терещенко 1848, т. 6, с. 50; Богданович 1895, с. 76; Демидович 1896, с. 116; Сержпутоўскі 1998, с. 32; Макашина 1982, с. 95].

Candle was originally also an attribute of the cult of Perun. Medieval literary monuments are the evidence of it. «A Life of the Reverend Barnabas of Vetluga» in the mid17th century, being guided by more ancient sources, describes, as in the times of Kievan Great Duke Vladimir Svyatoslavich «по всѣй Россіи» «идолы» of Perun are situated: «со древа учиненный на подобіе челоуѣка; глава у него серебряная, усы золотые, въ рукахъ у него былъ камень драгій светлый, аки огонь. Предъ того идола Перуна идолопоклонники приносили в дары серебро и золото, и свѣщи предъ нимъ палили, и кланялися ему, аки Богу, просили его о помощи во всякихъ своихъ дѣлѣхъ» [Херсонский 1890, с. 6].

А «страсна» candle, with what people spent vespers (so-called «страсти») standing in a church in the Maundy Thursday (Chysty, Velyky chetver), was one of the most commonly used charms in Ukraine, to what both peasants and townspeople resorted. It was named «громнична» too. It was endowed with sacred, divine power. Such candles were brought firing from a temple, watching to have them unextinguished, and burnt cross signs out by them – sometimes in groups of several – on a tie-beam, a ceiling, a cross-beam over «локуть» – the corner, in what a table stood and icons hung, the seat of honor for guests, on doors, doorposts and window frames, over a window, on sleeping-bench, «злуха» wall in a house, on gates, in a stable, in a cowhouse – with the aim to prevent lightning strokes and frighten evil forces off. The head of family was entrusted with this duty. Rooms and utility buildings were fumigated with thursday candle to drive out evil spirits, what have hidden after wintry cold weather and dissipated Shrovetide. Crosses «закурювали» in order that demons, what rages throughout all the Holy week in the likeness of different animals and evil people, seizing passersby in streets, could not spirit anybody from the family away and do not much harm to nobody. That devils who are knocking about the world to intimidate devotees or to catch them, do not dare to come into houses, which are guarded by crosses on doors, ceilings and walls. This sign has been marked, in order that evil spirits would pass by a dwelling. Here and there the Ukrainians burnt out not a cross, but an arrow sign or a cross with two arrows. These candles, what had ability to drive off evil spirits, were kept with especial respect in an icon-case, in «прискринок» in a chest or on upper shelf of a hinged cupboard until the next Maundy Thursday, being used only in especial case. They had power to protect a house against an unforeseen big misfortune. They were, particularly, kindled, when there was a conflagration not far off, as well during the strong storm, tempest, in order to protect themselves from a thunder, put in windows, people go with them round a house and cattleshed.

A candle, lighted in the Maundy Thursday for the first time, was considered to be a charm от storm, tempest and hail. «*Як отсе велика гроза – світять її*». If it will be kindled in rainy weather, it will protect a house from a thunderclap. Smoke from such a candle was considered as a salutary one. A cross, blackened by a Maundy Thursday candle on a tie-beam, here and there was never cleaned, because it protected a house from a thunderbolt. Soot, scraped off с such a cross, was used as a therapeutic agent [Зеленин 1991, с. 391; Сементовский 1843, с. 43; Сементовский 1843, с. 103; Терещенко 1848, с. 99-100; Арандаренко 1849, с. 222; Маркевич 1860, с. 4; Шейковский 1860, с. 21-22; Афанасьев 1868, т. 2, с. 11-12; 1869, т. 3, с. 699; Петров 1871, с. 12; Чубинский 1872, т. 3, с. 13; Покровский 1874, с. 106-107; Максимович 1877, с. 510; Богданович 1877, с. 190; Максимов 1890, с. 7-8; Малинка 1898, с. 163; Чернявская 1893, с. 96; Жизнь и творчество 1898, с. 245, 461; Милорадович 1902, с. 135; Максимов 1903, с. 207, 216-217; Дикарев 1905, с. 167-168; Харузина 1906, с. 161; Иванов 1907, с. 89, 165; Зеленин 1914, с. 70; Кравченко 1927, с. 179-180; Заглада 1929, с. 157; Крымский 1930, с. 294; Чикаленко 1955, с. 52; Іларіон 1965, с. 225, 328; Воропай 1993, с. 249-251; Килимник 1994, т. 2, с. 42, 47, 56-57, 62-63; Гуменна 1978, с. 202; Носова 1975, с. 62; Гура, Терновская, Толстая Материалы 1983, с. 87-89; Толстой, Толстая Заметки 3... 4 1982, с. 53, 58-60, 65; Толстая 1986, с. 28-30; Миролюбов 1995, с. 151; Рижик 1997, с. 252; Толстая 2005, с. 237-238, 262, 399-400; Куракеева 2002, с. 60; Бондарь 2003, с. 98; Коваль 2006, с. 545].

These actions renewed the mythological situation of the tearing of the dwelling away from wintry chaos, establishment of order. A thursday candle destroyed any evil spell of sorcerers and chased witches away as well [Терещенко 1848, с. 29; Балов 1896, с. 263; Балов 1901, с. 103]. Therefore a candle, with what people stood in a temple in Maundy Thursday, was hung by peasants up the cattle-pen door or placed in cowsheds – from hags and werewolves, which were penetrating into there to put an evil curse on cattle. Such a candle was considered to be the most powerful defense against the aggressions of witches. The last ones could not overpass this barrier and gnawed that candle from malice, leaving the traces of their teeth on it [Терещенко 1848, т. 6, с. 29; Покровский 1874, с. 106; Коперникі 1885, s. 195]. The basis of such beliefs was purely pagan. Thursday was devoted to Perun, the heathens practiced the cult of thursday, and a burning candle, on the opinion of some mythologists, not only has had connexions with thunder, but became similar to a lightning as well. In one Russian riddle on a storm: «*Гроб плывёт, мертвец поёт, ладан пышит и свечи горят*» [Худяков 1864, с. 23], the coffin is a storm-cloud, the song is thunder, the candles are lightnings [Афанасьев 1865, т. 1, с. 179; 1868, т. 2, с. 381; Потебня 1865, с. 4-6; Потебня 1914, с. 167-168; Балов 1896, с. 263; Жайворонок 2007, с. 77]. By means of it they drive off devilish forces, hostile to people and Thunder God. Imaging demons, evil spirits in animal aspect, a Slav thought that they, like all the wild beasts too, are afraid of fire. Therefore при lighting of a candle, besides the reverence of good forces, the frightening of the evil ones took place too [Миронова 1961, с. 225]. Our ancestors thrust in the purifying and health-improving power of fire, in the ability of the fire of candle to prevent and stop the heavenly fire related to it. Its lighting during the ceremonial action, although nominally timed to the Christian feast, was correlated with the Slavonic ceremony of the lighting of fire in honour of the Thunderer [Иванов, Топоров 1965, с. 145]. The Ukrainian riddle on a candle says: «*Перед Богом стоить, і всі її кланяються*» [Воропай 1954-5, с. 25]. The demand to carry candle

from a temple unextinguished was connected with a bonfire, what was continually maintained by pagan priests in the face of the idol of Perun in old times [Znayenko 1980, p. 181, 184, 187, 189]. The manufacturing of sorcery candles was repeated cyclically, concurring with the resurrection of stormy deity. It was believed, that in Maundy Thursday Perun awakes out of his wintry sleep [Афанасьев 1865, т. 1, с. 263; Петров 1871, с. 12]. According to an Ukrainian belief, from Maundy Thursday till Ascension Day God goes upon the earth, and a man should not be afraid of anything – neither a devil, nor a wolf at this time. Later on God ascends into heaven [Белова 2004, с. 376].

Such semantics of a candle are corroborated with the Macedonian custom to light candles on trees struck by a thunderclap. The inhabitants of Veles in Macedonia celebrated festal ceremonies «*вон варош*», on the hill of Svet Iliya, around a tree, split by a lightning. Round this tree, sacred for them, peasants slaughtered sacrificial rams throughout the night. Candles were burning on the tree [Селищев 1929, с. 205, 213]. This hill of Svet(i) Iliya, judging by the surrounding toponymy, was the ancient place of the worshipping of Perun, and some relicts of the pagan worship of the Thunderer have being preserved all over the neighbourhood of the city [Иванов 1903, с. 150; Чаусидис 1994, с. 441]. In 1783 priest Nikolay Yakovlev reported on the non-Christian custom to light candles on a fallen pine in St. Elias Friday, found by him in Zacherenye pogost in the Pskov region [Мандельштам 1882, с. 215]. Celebrations in honour of thunder were known to all the Slavs, but the ways of worship were different. A candle played an important part in it. Among the Serbians in the village of Brzo in Leskovac Morava, when lightning had stricken a stack with twelve sheafs of wheat and it had burned, the mistress has come in the burn next morning, fumigated it with incense on live coals, brought from the house, has put out a candle and besprinkled with wine that place, where the thunder has struck («*громимите*») [Ђорђевић 1958, с. 132]. In the night, when thunder was rumbling, lightnings were flashing, it was raining, high wind was tearing roofs down, birds were rushing about, centuries-old trees were swinging and breaking, domestic cattle was bellowing, it was possible to escape only with the help of a prayer, directed to the infuriated Thunderer:

*С этой страсти крестьяна, с переполоху
затопляли свечи да воску ярого,
тут молили оны Бога от желаньца,
оны кланялись во матушку сыру землю:
«Спаси, Господи, ведь души да наших грешных,
от стрелы ты сохрани да нас, от молвии,
пронеси, Господи, тучу на чисто поле,
на чисто поле тучу, за синё море!» [Барсов 1872, с. 245].*

Already the Romans lit huge candles for their gods [Селищев 1929, с. 240]. The slavists consider all the folk ceremonies with candles to be heathen by their nature [Зеленин 1991, с. 386-387, 411]. In the Left Bank Dnipro Ukraine peasants made candles themselves, treating this work with especial awe. They worried about the purity of their work as well as the stuff very much, working in certain days and hours, with prayers. Beeswax for candles was not bought, but worked off, because it was considered,

that *«трудова свіча лучче Богу вгодна»*. Candles in Ukraine turned out very thick and long: they could be two arshins long and weighing about ten pounds [Сумцов 1889, с. 674; Терещенко 1848, т. 6, с. 100; Чубинский 1872, с. 15; Дикарев 1905, с. 167]. Usually they were big, and they now and then would be sufficient for several years. A candle was resanctified during the next Maundy Thursday [Кримський 1930, с. 294]. Clergy and churchwardens persecuted this custom, sometimes in a very abrupt form [Сумцов 1889, с. 675]. It should be noted, that the consecration of wax candles during the Maundy Thursday existed also in some areas of Serbia, but there this rite was taken by this time as a Christian one. particularly, in the Cloister of Tronoshi two huge candles, manufactured by the communes of the surrounding villages burnt at this day without fail [Тројановић 1930, с. 204]. Numerous evidences of the usage of candles in the ceremonial rites of non-Slavonic nations of Eastern Europe, among which Christianity has no time to consolidate its positions, as well among those nations, what did not know Christianity in the least could serve as a proof of the heathen origin of a candle [Дмитриева 1988, с. 53; Селищев 1929, с. 241]. Svyatoslav Igorevich, the last heathen on the grand duke's throne worried about the receipt of wax from Rus in his future capital, that could be considered, on the opinion of researchers, as an indirect proof of the usage of candles in heathen religious ceremonies [Буслаев 1861, т. 1, с. 260]. Candle is a sacred item, what embodies the spiritual content, regarded as a peculiar tribute to divine beings, intended for their help in a begun affair, for their protection against misfortune and so forth. Therefore in Ukraine it was not sold, but bartered. A custom to place a candle in front of icons was the remains of a sacrifice to the gods, a survival of the ceremony of their feeding [Потебня 1865, с. 39; Миронова 1961, с. 225]. In the 14th–15th centuries the church revolted decidedly against those, who during a sacrificial offering for idols *„свѣща вжигаютце”* [Гальковский 1913, с. 61; Аничков 1914, с. 300; Ларіон 1965, с. 328]. On the object-actional level an interesting parallelism could be traced in the old Slavonic custom to cross himself, if a lighted candle has been brought into a room or it is putting out [Харузина 1906, с. 161; Тројановић 1930, с. 214] or if thunder was heard, what was obviously grounded on the worship of the divine being of fire and lightning [Голан 1993, с. 32].

Holy fire of a candle should have an influence on the flame of pottery kiln. Such its usage is very ancient and stays, out of question, in the connection with veneration of fire. Medieval documents report on operational magic practices with candles. In one handwritten collection of the late 17th century it is said on the actions of sorcerers so: *„и свѣщами со огнемь волхвуютъ”* [Буслаев 1861, т. 1, с. 47, 480; Коваленко 1928, с. 38]. It means with the help of candles people realize magic influence on fire. The sacral ones per se, they were marked with complementary sacred significances. Church duties and ceremonies helped to it. Those candles, manufacturing and consecration of what was timed to old heathen feasts, adopted by the new religion, were used in sorcery, as a rule. Cases on sorcery of the late 18th century mentioned Maundy Thursday candle among magic tools [Чепя 1892, с. 123].

Among the Russians of the Novgorod region the Maundy Thursday was identified as a sorcerers' day [Агапкина 2002, с. 393]. Witch merry-making often fell on this day. It was considered, that soothsayers gather in this day, because *right время такое*, in the Holy Week, this is their day, the magical one, *заповедный*, they wait especially for it. Among warlocks and witches the most important meetings with supernatural forces take place by night at this day. At the Maundy Thursday, when, obviously, it was possible to

exert influence on the universe, they conjured. Notions about the connection of witch assemblage with the Maundy Thursday have preserved, particularly, in some Northern and Siberian Russian mythological legends [Криничная 2000, с. 50-52, 115, 136, 138-139, 199; Шапарова 2001, с. 504]. The Slovaks, the Poles, the Czechs, the Croatians, and the Slovenians also believed, that just the Maundy Thursday was the principal witch's day, when witches gather together in a certain place, in particular, on a Bald or Woman's Mountain, make treaties with supernatural forces, make potions, learn to practise witchcraft each other, celebrate, dance, and then fly away right and left, to set their affairs [Агапкина 2002, с. 392-393]. The southern Belorusians believed, that in this day sorcerers confess [Толстая 2005, с. 262], what, apparently, could be the indication of some heathen celebrations.

Evidences of such festivities have preserved in the sources. The *Stoglav* in the 16th century stigmatized wrathfully a non-Christian custom to kindle fire at Maundy Thursday [Максимович 1877, с. 510]. There are reasons consider that exactly the Chernigov region, included into the Muscovite estate, is meant, the Ukrainian population of it adhered strongly their heathen beliefs and ceremonies. The similar ceremonies occurred among other Slavs too. Among the Slovenians at the Maundy Thursday, as at Thursday of Whitsun Week as well, справлялся maidenly feast of the consecration of fire, what, on the opinion of researchers, origins from an ancient custom to kindle fires in honour of Perun. In Germany and the celebrating of the feast of Teutonic Thunder God has passed to this day as well [Срезневский 1848, с. 26; Шеппинг 1848, с. 122]. The succession between the ceremony of the kindling of a new fire, what was carried home, and the consecration of candles could be traced in the Western Europe. In Lorraine, Alsace and other Rhine lands a custom was existed to strike the new fire at Saturday before Easter. In the British isles in the morning, at Saturday before Easter, people extinguished all illumination and heating in a church, raked out ashes and kindled new fire. From this fire the congregation lighted candles in order to kindle new fire at home. Candle-ends were kept for the safeguard against natural disasters. In Germany fire was renovated also in Saturday before Easter as well. A priest struck in a cemetery new fire, what was carried home. In Austria the new fire was stricken or made by rubbing. From it a candle or a torch were kindled and the new fire was carried into every dwelling. A very similar custom has existed once in Florence and other localities of Italy: on the eve of the Easter feast people kindle new fire in a church, and from there it was carried home with a torch. In Poland in Saturday before Easter near Roman Catholic church a bonfire was built, what was sanctified by a priest. From the bonfire splinters or candles were kindled and the new fire was carried home in such a way. The Greeks kindle fires in a church at Easter at midnight. From the main candle of a temple all the congregation lighted their candles and tried to carry home so that they would become not extinct on the way, for the only purpose to pass on the solemn power of the new fire to their dwelling [Стецюк 2000, с. 116]. The most ancient form of this rite, heathen by its origin, can be traced in occasional customs of Bulgaria. In Rhodopi Mountains, when thunder struck and fire flamed up, fires in the houses of a village were renewed from it. When lightning hit a tree, and it caught fire, in the village fire was blown out, and everyone went to take the heavenly fire [Бонева 1994, с. 14, 17]. In the most countries of Europe the ceremony of the consecration of candles, carried over till winter, has separated from the rite of the renovation of fire [Стецюк 2000, с. 115]. It is supposed, that in Ukraine bonfires mentioned by *Stoglav*, were replaced with

the sacred fire of Thursday candles in due course too [Максимович 1877, с. 510].

The Ukrainians fumigated calves, piglets, goslings with a Maundy Thursday candle. They singed also hair to children by it crosswise in order that they would be not afraid of thunder [Толстая 1984, с. 27; Толстая 2005, с. 237]. The stormy nature of the Maundy Thursday candle and its identity with heavenly flame could be traced here as well, because the fire, inflamed by a lightning, was also used for cautery with the aim to safeguard newborn domestic animals – calves, foals – against possible wasting disease among the Belarusians [Никифоровский 1897, с. 176, 212].

With a Maundy Thursday candle people went to seek a flower of fern [Кримський 1930, с. 380, 382], which was also connected with the God of Storm. The blossoming of fern was accompanied, according to beliefs, by earthquakes, thunderclaps, blinding lightnings. All this, like crackling, with what sparkling flower of fern is blossoming out, too, can be explained through its relationship with thunder. This is a metaphor of lightning, fire flower of Perun. The fire of Perun descended, according to folk legend, on fern and blazed up with bright light. Among the Croats a flower of fern is named exactly as Perun's flower («*Переново цветје*»). Right on the strength of this identity fern guards against a thunderclap [Потебня 1914, с. 179-180; Соболевский 1918, с. 24; Буслаев 1861, т. 1, с. 86; Пассек 1836, т. 1, с. 107; Афанасьев 1868, т. 2, с. 375-385]. Just by a Thursday candle one should surround himself with a circle in the place, where fern grows, in the Kupalo night. Then a candle was lighted [Пассек 1836, т. 1, с. 107; Афанасьев 1868, т. 2, с. 379]. It was believed, that its flame scorches evil forces [Кримський 1930, с. 380].

In the ceremonial of Ukrainian potters of the Chernigov Region Maundy Thursday candle acted in its heathen hypostasis – as the embodiment of the Perun's lightning, with the help of which people influence on fire. The semantics of elements within the power of potters was motivated in folklore and ritual texts by archaic natural philosophy associations. Fire in pottery kiln was imagined to be identical to a lightning of Perun, sacred lightning flame, what differed from the terrestrial fire by its characteristics. Its demiurgical potential could constitute danger. Therefore it has to influence on it with the same magical means, which were used for the protection against storm and thunder in the traditional culture of the Slavs. These are things-signs, things-concepts. In the same capacity they were assimilated by the Christian religion. The ceremonial actions of potters during the loading of a kiln and the burning proper outline the institutional priority of the archaic mythological basis of the pragmatics of this phase of pottery manufacture, what depended strongly on natural elements. Considering, that in the traditional culture all the components of the universe were regarded as the huge system of signs and symbols, appropriately, that the substance of technological process, expressed through the rite answered its underlying meaning as making, creation. Moreover this making had creationary character in the final analysis and rested on a sacrifice as the most perfect and effective form of action. The analysis of the sociocultural validity of the pragmatics of pottery rituals denotes the dominance of the natural philosophy principle in its structure, because the object of offerings and magic ceremonial was the fire of pottery kiln. Just on it potters tried to influence in a magic way, with the aim to ensure the positive result of manufacture. Accumulating in itself his complex and integral (productive, industrial, and protecting) functionality, fire in a kiln transformed the matter and invested wares with souls during transmutation. It was identified with the primeval fire, with the flame of Perun lightning, what

has played in due time an important role at the creation of the world.

A series of archaic pottery beliefs and customs, what have been preserved predominantly in rudiments is, evidently, conditioned with this idea, what has been formed in the mythological consciousness. They existed only in the separate pottery centres – where old traditions continued for a longer time, as this one in Oleshnya. A consecrated candle, what influenced on the stormy flame of a pottery kiln, expressed directly the main point of an object symbol as the field and, simultaneously, as the instrument of semantic transformations. On the one hand, ritual symbol, cultural concept became a tool, with the help of what a man tried to influence on nature, on the other hand, – space, in which a man comes into interaction with the nature or with the another world. Therefore a candle, lighted in the spring Perun holiday, was highlighted in pottery ceremonies. Marking signs by it on the ware compartment of a kiln, a potter consecrated his kiln more by a sacred means, raised the level of its holiness over the natural level of the holiness of ambient space. The transformation of an utilitarian item, such, as a candle, into a ritual symbol, was conditioned by such mechanisms, as the semantization of its separate indications, condensation, when a thing became the concentration of those actions, what come to be with its help, as the magic identification of the thing with the element of nature.

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