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CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS THROUGH THE PRISM OF PAGANISM AND CHRISTIANITY

Abstract. The author considers the traditions and customs of Christian Christmas, which are closely related to the pagan traditions of the festival of Saturnalia and Yule. A theoretical analysis of the origin of the traditions of masquerades, dating back to pagan antiquity has been carried out. This highlighted that the pagan customs in “folk masquerades” reached an incredible scope on the occasion of the Saturnalia in Europe and at Christmas in Kyivska Rus, having undoubted similarities.

Keywords: Saturnalia, Yule, Christmas traditions, solar symbol, paganism, Christianity, Chaos and Order.

Christmas originates from two ancient pagan holidays: the Scandinavian holiday Yule (Yule-turn, wheel of the year) and the Roman holiday of Saturnalia. Yule was also associated with ritual dance-rotations, which symbolized the universal projection of the world, where the finite and the infinite acted as a whole.

Yule is one of the oldest Sabbaths (eight-wheel holidays of the year, known as Sabbaths, where Yule was a small Sabbath), which got into the Celtic calendar thanks to the ancient Norwegians. Yule was celebrated during the winter solstice. Despite the fact that Yule fell on the shortest day of the year, and the sun was at its lowest point, it marked the feast of Light and was a new starting point, bringing closer the appearance of the “young and strong” Sun. The Scandinavians celebrated the Yule holiday from December 21 (Mother’s Night) to January 1 – Yule Night (corresponding to 12 days of Christmas time) and ended with burning logs. The Yule holiday is a holiday of fire that promises warmth.

The Scandinavians spread these beliefs among the Celtic peoples long before our era. In Yule, the Scandinavians also remembered the goddess in the

image of the Virgin. On a holiday, it was customary to light candles in houses, filling them with light. Yule was accompanied by feasts, residents gathered in large families to celebrate the birth of the new Sun. The ritual dish of the feast was the boar’s head. Only the virtuous people were allowed to cut the sacred head. After the meal, people, with lighted torches in their hands, left their homes, made a fire and, holding hands, to the sound of the bagpipes they danced a circle dance, shouting “Haile, Yule, Haile!” [1].

The houses were decorated with ivy or mistletoe wreaths. In Scandinavian and Celtic mythology, this plant played a key role. Even 200 years before the birth of Christ, Druid priests regarded mistletoe as a sacred plant, mistletoe was a mandatory attribute in the cycle of winter holidays. The Celts believed that mistletoe had magical healing powers and used it as a defense against evil spirits. Mistletoe was one of the few plants that bloomed in the cold winter months in what is now Britain, the evergreen mistletoe was perceived by the Celts as a symbol of life and rebirth (a prototype of the Christmas tree).

The Romans worshiped mistletoe as a symbol of peace and friendship. According to legend, the en-

emies who met under the mistletoe laid down their arms and made peace. The ancient Greeks celebrated the winter festival of Kronia, decorating their homes mistletoe. Some scholars believe that the pagan tradition of kissing under the mistletoe was inherited from the Greeks, who kissed under the plant during weddings and the feast of Saturnalia. Mistletoe was later banned in churches due to pagan associations.

The cult value in the Yule festival was played by the “Yule log”. The Yule Log burning practice spread throughout Europe, and different tree species were used in different countries. In England – oak, in Scotland – birch, in France – cherry. In the Scandinavian countries, logs were taken from a special kind of tree – ash, which symbolized Life. It was impossible to buy a log, just as it was impossible to buy Life. Ashes from Yule logs were often scattered on the roof of the house [2].

For the Scots, who for a long time were under the control of the Vikings, the ancient festival of burning a huge log on the day of the winter solstice also has Scandinavian roots. Another ancient Scots custom was associated with the cult of fire. The guests were supposed to throw a piece of coal into the owners fireplace and wish so that fire, a symbol of prosperity and life, does not leave this house. Such traditions mainly consisted of pagan (solar symbol of the Divine Fire). In some places in Scotland, for the pagan deity Yola, to this day, cutlery and cheese and bread are left on the table, as was the case with the Slavic peoples (an extra appliance and dinner were left for the brownie in ancient Kyivska Rus) [3].

The traditions that make up the Yola holiday are similar to the traditions of another ancient Roman holiday – Saturnalia. Saturn, Kronos in Greek mythology, is one of the supreme gods of the Roman pantheon. Translated from the Greek word “Chronos” means time.

Hesiod, an ancient Greek poet, wrote that Chaos was the father of the time. After the advent of time, space began to arise. The old year was dying, turning into the past before our eyes. From the chaos of last year, a new year was born, and with it a new order was

born. In this symbolic manifestation of Chaos and Order, later well-beaten in the 17th century English court Masque and Antimasque by the famous English playwright and writer B. Johnson, powerful symbolism manifested itself, the essence of which was well known to the ancient pagans. People always confront Chaos. The idea of chaos frightens a person, since chaos carries catastrophic consequences. Man is characterized by an orderly idea of the surrounding reality.

The festival of Saturnalia was celebrated from December 17 to December 25. From the point of view of the Gentiles, this was logical, since it was precisely this period of the season that corresponded to the period of the winter solstice. The pagans believed that in the last days of the last month of the year the Sun is born, and it conquers darkness. In ancient Rome, the festival of Saturnalia was celebrated with a large-scale carnival, feasts and dances. Based on pagan customs, houses and churches were decorated with evergreens – holly, bay, rosemary, ivy and sometimes mistletoe, which was difficult to obtain in some areas. So, instead of mistletoe, people gathered holly and other greens into a “kissing bush” and hung it from the ceiling. During the festival of Saturnalia, wealthy people gave gifts to the poor in memory of the golden age of freedom and justice, when God Saturn ruled the world. This custom seemed to blur the distinction between gentlemen and slaves. During the holiday, ordinary people chose a liar who ruled mediocre and cruelly, imitating the worst of the kings of the world [4].

Saturnalia was often accompanied by debauchery and drunkenness, symbolizing the complete decomposition of spirituality and morality on the eve of the birthday of the New invincible Sun. The Roman festival of Saturnalia quickly spread throughout Europe, including England.

The Christian theologian and writer Tertullian, in his youth, was an opponent of Christianity, but later converted to Christianity. He succinctly expressed the essence of the religious metaphysics of Christianity, actively fought against paganism, and

openly opposed pagan demons. In one of his many works, he was surprised to note that new Christians ignored the special status of the Sabbath: “By us, to whom Sabbaths are strange, and the new moons and festivals formerly beloved by God, the Saturnalia and New-year’s and Midwinter’s festivals and Matronalia are frequented – presents come and go – New-year’s gifts – games join their noise – banquets join their din! Oh, better fidelity of the nations to their own sect, which claims no solemnity of the Christians for itself! Not the Lord’s day, not Pentecost, even if they had known them, would they have shared with us; for they would fear lest they should seem to be Christians” [Internet resource: <http://www.logoslibrary.org/tertullian/idolatry/14.html>]. So, he openly accused Christians of following pagan rites.

It is interesting to note that in the early Christmas sermons, the Holy Fathers called Jesus Christ the “Sun of Truth” or the “Sun of Justice”, which indirectly indicates that the early Christian church was still closely connected with pagan customs [5, 342]. The church opposed pagan rites, so widely and universally rooted in Europe and England. The Holy Fathers in every possible way opposed pagan holidays to the reverent and spiritual holidays emanating from the Holy Church. But despite the strict laws and punishments that the priests promised for blasphemy and atrocities on the feast of the Nativity of the Lord, the clergy could not turn people away from customs that the Church equated to atrocities and debauchery.

The holiday gradually gained such popularity that it was no longer possible to abolish or ban it. Ultimately, the church recognized this and followed the well-known principle: that which cannot be prohibited must be led.

In the year 354 AD, a Roman priest wrote: “The Gentiles usually widely celebrated the birth of the Sun ... when the Holy Fathers of the Church realized that Christians are prone to this holiday, they gathered a Council and decided that true Christmas should be celebrated on the day of December 25”

[5, 407]. Christmas and a special liturgy began to be celebrated in the ninth century, when the visual picture of the Nativity of Christ was finally formed.

Another pagan custom characteristic of the Christmas tradition is the use of masks and mummers. The custom of squandering was a landmark for the West and East. In the Egyptian, Native American, Greek and Roman world, history finds traces of similar Slavic festivals, which consisted of wearing masks, fortune telling, which probably crossed across Europe and was repeated in Scandinavia. History has preserved evidence that Egyptian priests, dressed in costumes of gods and various animals, walked through the cities on New Year’s Eve. This magnificent festival ended with feasts and dances [2; 5, 342].

Among the Greeks, the transition from the old year to the new was accompanied by the dressing of young men as girls, and girls by husbands, also dressed in animal skins, attaching animal heads to themselves. On the last day of the year, the tradition of eating a meal as a sign of propitiation of the past and coming years also took root.

It is known that the Holy Fathers often called the Greeks and Jews Gentiles and opposed them to the Orthodox Greeks.

Masquerade atrocities confused the Church. In the 16th Rule of the Eighth Council, which was never adopted by the Eastern Church, it was said about the blasphemy of priests dressed indecently, which is incompatible with the ideals of Christianity [2]. Masquerade was strictly forbidden by the church, but the habit of dressing in various costumes and masks was also rooted among the clergy. Since the XII century, parody and masquerade events were timed to the Christmas holiday. So, the feast of the sub deacons (festum fatuorum or festum stultorum) in the 13th century was known as the festival of fools.

S. Zotov, M. Mayzuls, D. Harman in his work “The Suffering Middle Ages. The paradoxes of Christian iconography noted that, in all likelihood, the festival was originally celebrated decorously, and the word “fool” carried a different connotation: humble

and impoverished in spirit. However, later the holiday turned into a parody of worship. For the duration of the festivities, the clergy elected the Bishop of fools: the prototype of Lord Misrule in England, the buffoon in Kyivska Rus. Priests used the Masks, dressed as women, danced and sang obscene songs in the temple, and dined at the altar. The bishop of fools rode around the streets, sitting on a donkey backwards, for example, in Byzantium a man whom they wanted to dishonor was carried along the streets [7].

In Kyivska Rus, fool's day gained no less popularity. Thus, buffoons dressed in crowns with pendants and peacock feathers. This was incompatible with Christian ideals. Gradually, the higher clergy, through the strictest prohibitions and punishments, curbed atrocities.

In the Roman Catholic Church, Christmas masquerades were celebrated at the end of December and were known as December Liberties. Bishops gave freedom to their subordinates, as well as to shepherds and villagers, who, using this temporary privilege, drank, played, mocked, wore women's or buffoon dresses, lion skins, and sang shameful songs. This forced Pope Innocent XI to write to Archbishop Henry about "the inappropriate eradication of this custom in churches, and about the inability to take part of deacons and elders in disgrace." However, despite the prohibition of the church, in the West, dressing continued in clownish dresses, in animal skins or monsters [8].

The Byzantine Emperor Konstantin Bagryanorodny, describing the ceremonies of the Byzantine court, mentions the Gothic games that were held at Christmas at the court, in the presence of the emperor. The people who participated in the games were Greeks dressed as Goths. They were dressed in masks, in fur coats inside out, in their hands they held shields, into which they beat metal rods. In the Gothic games traits characteristic of the Slavic festival of Veles Christmas time are traced [7; 8].

In English villages and cities, professional actors, rural and urban residents took part in masquerades

with dances and songs, which were distinguished by spectacularity, luxurious costumes, fiction, and humor. At the end of the 16th century, Philip Stubbs described this action as a "pagan company" that followed "to the church and churchyard, led by chimney sweeps and drummers". The church opposed licentiousness and fun, which was often associated with the name of Lord Misrule. Lord Misrule, the main steward of the Christmas holiday, chose his helpers – 20 or more "men" who decorated themselves with yellow and green scarves, ribbons, lace, rings and jewelry. Mummers (mummers) and dancers performing the English dance Morris to "live music", were dressed in costumes, decorated with ribbons and bells [6; 7].

In ordinary life, Lord Misrule could be a sluggish servant, but during the Christmas holiday, he turned into the chief manager and rules without fear of retaliation until the Twelfth Night on January 6, when the Christmas holiday ended. The practice of baking puddings with a hidden coin inside is also associated with Misrule, the person who found the coin in his pudding was chosen as the lord. King Henry VII, the first Tudor monarch, continued the medieval tradition, electing Lord Misrule for every Christmas of his reign. During the reign of the son of Henry VIII, King Edward VI, tradition reached its zenith.

In 1583, Presbyterians in Scotland banned Christmas festivities. Puritans were especially negative about the form of the celebration of Christmas, considering it unjustified, and the fun unworthy. Even making traditional plum pudding for Christmas caused Puritans a sense of disgust. Puritans tried to show a worthy example of the celebration of Christmas. On Christmas Eve in 1621, the pilgrims categorically refused a request for help in building a house, motivating it with a biblical approach and strict religious convictions that "the work of devotion to Jesus should be no work, no games, no pleasures on such a big holiday," – thought William Bradford, the English Puritan separatist [9, 112]. However, this custom managed to become so rooted

in English society that even with the Puritans coming to power in the 1640s, attempts to control the Christmas amusements or transform them into a different, spiritual form failed. Although the Puritans objected to the celebration of Christmas, which, by all accounts, was a pagan tradition, the fact is obvious that the government consciously made concessions when it came to the Christmas holidays.

Gradually, Christmas becomes one of the most beloved and desired holidays. The Christmas season lasted about two weeks, from December 25 to January 6. The houses were decorated with greenery, people dressed in elegant clothes, exchanged gifts, arranged general games and dances. For centuries, the Christmas holidays have been an alloy of Christian and pagan rituals.

Modern scholars shed more light on the secular nature of the English Christmas holidays. However, documents that illuminate the Christmas holidays from the spiritual and moral side have been preserved. "The Water Poet" John Taylor in the XVII century wrote that the Christmas holiday began with a visit to the church. After that, "some went to play cards, some sang carols (Christmas songs), others gathered together to listen to interesting stories ... Then came the maids with cakes, white caramel, cheese and minced meat pies" [10, 57]. In the evening, dinner and dancing were arranged in the largest and most spacious house in the English village. Each of the rural men contributed a certain amount of money to his organization or brought groceries with him. Women brought carrots in linen bags, and during the dancing of boys and girls, they nibbled it, thus, for a short time. It is interesting to note the similarity of Christmas traditions among Anglicans, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians. So, the countdown of the Christmas holidays among the Slavs began on December 21 – the symbolic victory of Light over darkness. Winter Solstice celebrations lasted until January 6th. In the houses they put a "tree of life" – a sheaf of grain or mistletoe (pagan rites of the Druids

were also associated with mistletoe). It was also customary for the Slavs to dress up at the Christmas time, that is, to put on, unusual costumes and masks (masks). First of all, it was costumes and masks of animals: bear, bull, horse, goose, goat, crane, fox, as well as fabulous and mythological creatures: kikimora, goblin, merman. Also, people dressed as an old man and an old woman (the older girl was dressed up, and the old woman was a boy), a soldier, a doctor, a master and a servant. Each costume, each mask was traditional, that is, their meaning and significance were passed down from generation to generation. Each mask was associated with specific actions and texts [8; 9].

It is believed that the Slavs turned to dressing because they were afraid of evil spirits, which became more active with increasing dark time of the day. If you dress up and hide yourself under the guise, then evil spirits will not know and will not cause harm. The mummers appeared at home, danced, told jokes, or imagined some kind of life scene or joke. Amusing the guests in one house, they moved to another house. Such images of folk masquerades or clergy are common with the rites of Roman, Gothic, Scandinavian and German similar merrymaking.

Thus, it can be stated that each tradition or custom associated with Christmas has two foundations: the first is Christian, and under it is pagan. The Christianization of nations becomes the cause of the evolutionary transformation of pagan traditions.

Conclusions. The traditions and customs of Christian Christmas are directly related to the traditions of the pagan festivals of Yola and Saturnalia.

Decorating houses with mistletoe and ivy, the tradition of lighting candles, keeping a fire in a fireplace or burning logs in it symbolized the cult of the Sun, fire, vegetation, was directly related to solar symbols, was due to the circular nature of the daily and annual movement of the Sun, is associated with the symbolic meaning of the wheel – in a circle.

The roots of the "holiday of the fool", which has become widespread in Europe and Kyivska Rus, go

back to the deep mythology common to all peoples (Scandinavian – Loki, ancient Greek – Hermes).

The jester is a troublemaker, destroying the beginning, an outcast, a person creating confusion and chaos. In German mythology and among the Scandinavians, Chaos is the beginning of all things. Chaos precedes Order. Subsequently, the appearance of Chaos, opposed to the Order, was defeated in the English court Masque.

Masquerade dressing, leading in the beginning from Greek, Egyptian traditions, spread and gained popularity in Europe and England. Famous Italian masquerades, English court masks, French court ballet, Slavic Christmas time became the highest manifestation of the dressing tradition and have survived in the form of folk festivals to this day.

None of the modern Christmas customs has been taken from the theological canons and, in fact,

is directly related to paganism. What is traditionally considered a Christmas tradition comes from pagan rites. Over the centuries, pagan rites have transformed and melted into traditions that are familiar to us today. From generation to generation, layering, interaction and transformation of traditions and customs took place.

Customs carried a purifying, protective, symbolic and sacred meaning. These days they have received a new understanding.

In fact, paganism and Christianity, on the one hand, were hostile antagonistic movements, on the other, they complemented and closely interacted with each other for several centuries. Christianity can be seen as an alloy of paganism, ethnic elements, and, in fact, Christian dogma. It can be stated that Christianity was not able to completely eradicate the pagan worldview.

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