
ARTICLES AND DISSERTATIONS

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Peasant Child During the Period of Profanum - Educational Contexts (Middle Ages – Modern Era)

*There is an appointed time for everything,
and a time for
every affair under the heavens (Eccl. 3, 1)*

Abstract

The paper discusses the issue of functioning of the rural child during the time of profanum within the period from the late Middle Ages till the 19th century. The purpose of this text is to attempt to answer the questions: how did peasant children participate in the time of *profanum* – understood as the time of non-celebration, thus the working time resulting from the rhythm of nature and the calendar of fieldwork and the time of play. What did rural children learn during that time? What social and cultural skills did they acquire? The analysis of sources: iconographic, memoirs, and literary, is to serve the historical and pedagogical interpretation.

Keywords: education, peasants' children, profanum

Introduction

Profanum – a category as opposed to *sacrum* – is considered a secular and everyday reality.¹ The term comes from the Latin word *profānus* which meant anything that was not consecrated, which was ordinary, secular, uninitiated, deprived of sacred nature.² It seems that *profanum* concerns the secular realm, in which daily human life events occur. *Profanum*, as we understand it, is in opposition to Christian *sacrum*, but this does not mean that it does not contain ancient pagan elements. It must be kept in mind in this con-

¹ KASPERSKI, E., *Święte i świeckie. Przemiany wartości*, in: *Człowiek – dzieło – sacrum*, Ed. S. GAJDA, H.J. Sobeczko, Opole 1998, p. 51.

² *Słownik łacińsko-polski*, Ed. M. PLEZIA, Warszawa 1999.

text that paganism, until the first half of the fifteenth century, still strongly influenced the peasant population. It was not until the end of the Middle Ages that the Polish countryside was actually Christianised.³

The purpose of this text is to attempt to answer the questions: how did peasant children participate in the time of *profanum* – understood as the time of non-celebration, thus the working time resulting from the rhythm of nature and the calendar of fieldwork and the time of play. And the most important question, what did rural children learn during that time? What social and cultural skills did they learn? The analysis of sources is intended to serve as a historical and pedagogical interpretation, therefore no different “types” of customs and traditions will be compared and no changes in rural customs (and their causes) will be characterised. We used various sources in these considerations: diaries, iconographic materials, fine literature. Monika Nawrot-Borowska rightly points out that “Memoirs of the peasantry are very significant in reconstructing the realities of life of the Polish countryside (...). They show important historical events in the rural life, document the economic and cultural transformations, and provide a perfect picture of everyday life of Polish peasants. They also offer the opportunity to learn about rural traditions and customs, they are a gallery of individual characters and human attitudes.”⁴ Also the fine literature, especially the realistic literature, is a valuable source of information about the everyday life of a peasant child.⁵ The analysis of the life of a rural child is supplemented with iconographic sources.⁶ Naturally, we are aware that the study of the history of the countryside is superficial by nature, and contains a large margin for errors and inaccuracy, primarily because of the nature of research sources.⁷

We will try to show, based on the participation of children in the time of *profanum*, the manner and purpose of rural children’s work and play. This will allow for a closer look, in historical context, at the children’s life in the Polish countryside and the factors determining their existence. However, we will point out to “long duration” processes, because the rural environment is an excellent field for analysing social, cultural and educational phenomena, due to the relative inertia in adopting new cultural patterns while maintaining a conservative attitude towards these new phenomena. This allows us to discuss the period from the Middle Ages through the nineteenth century, i.e. the period of modernisation of the countryside. The remarks further on in this paper are primarily to present the cur-

³ More on this topic in: CETWIŃSKI, M., *Kościół i blade wino pogaństwa: średniowieczna historiografia o chrystianizacji ziem polskich*, in: *Kościół w dobie chrystianizacji*, Ed. M. RĘBKOWSKI, Szczecin 2016, p. 103-114. Refer here for further literature.

⁴ NAWROT-BOROWSKA, M., *Zabawy dzieci na wsi polskiej w II połowie XIX i na początku XX wieku w świetle literatury pamiątkarskiej*, „Przegląd Pedagogiczny” 2011, no. 2, p. 41.

⁵ Cf. KABACIŃSKA-ŁUCZAK, K., *Zabawki dziecięce w polskiej literaturze pięknej II poł. XIX wieku*, in: *Zabawka – przedmiot ludyczny i obiekt kolekcjonerski*, Ed. K. KABACIŃSKA-ŁUCZAK and D. ŻOŁĄDŹ-STRZELCZYK, Poznań 2016.

⁶ Cf. NAWROT-BOROWSKA, M., *Zabawy i zabawki dziecięce w drugiej połowie XIX i na początku XX wieku – wybrane problemy z wykorzystaniem grafik z epoki*, „Biuletyn Historii Wychowania” 2013 (30).

⁷ See BAGBY, P., *Kultura i historia. Prologomena do porównawczego badania cywilizacji*, Warszawa 1975, p. 83.

rent state of research into the everyday life of peasant children in history. Undoubtedly, the nineteenth century was a century of rapid economic, social and civilisation development in many areas⁸. The slowest changes were in the countryside, whose traditional character resulted in sceptical adoption of a new way of life. According to many observers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the whole life of a rural man was subordinated to subsistence work. As Henryk Biegeleisen aptly put it, "The life of the folk is only another change of physical works."⁹ "The nineteenth-century countryside was sort of a world parallel to the city. [...] The habits and customs of peasants accompanying the ecclesiastical holidays, family events, manifesting in neighbour relations, between young people and old people, between children and their parents, were rich in content and complex."¹⁰ The very existence of rural people, determined mostly by work, was dependent on two important and mutually complementary factors: religion (liturgical calendar) and nature. However, researchers note that the religiousness of rural people was rather superficial, but strongly linked to the church, customs and traditions.¹¹ Life in the spirit of religious commandments (severely adhered to) was connected with the world of nature, which determined the working time (mainly farming work) and the time of rest and fun. *Homo faber* and *homo ludens* are mutually opposite elements of human life, in which work, likewise fun, is not only a biological,¹² but also a psychological and social need. In human life, the time of *sacrum* (understood as something that comes from God and must be given to God)¹³ is linked to *profanum*. Mutual reliance was clearly seen in the lives of rural people.

Of course, we must keep in mind that the peasantry throughout the period being analysed were strongly differentiated both in terms of material status and sophistication and education in broad sense.¹⁴ There were skilled craftsmen among peasants, such as turners, coopers, wheelwrights or blacksmiths.¹⁵ In the 13th-14th centuries, as a result of intensive settlement action under German or Polish law, the former divisions among the rural population disappeared, while new categories appeared: village heads, farmers, farmhands,

⁸ Cf. KABACIŃSKA-ŁUCZAK, K., RATAJCZAK, K., *Dynamika przemian od społeczeństwa tradycyjnego do ery nowoczesności*, in: *Rekonstrukcje tożsamości w kulturze natchmiasowości*, Ed. D. HEJWOSZ-GROMAKOWSKA, Poznań 2014, pp. 23-97.

⁹ BIEGELEISEN, H., *Gry, zabawy i mętowania*, „Zabawy i zabawki” 2012, no. 1-4, p. 173.

¹⁰ GAWIN, M., *Przemiany cywilizacyjne na ziemiach polskich w XIX wieku*, in: *Historie Polski w XIX wieku*, vol. 1. *Kominy, ludzie i obłoki: modernizacja i kultura*, Ed. A. Nowak, Warszawa 2013, p. 191.

¹¹ Cf. GAWIN, M., p. 220 et seq. and KABACIŃSKA-ŁUCZAK, K., RATAJCZAK, K., *Dziecko chłopskie w czasie sacrum – konteksty edukacyjne (średniowiecze-epoka nowożytna)*, „Studia Edukacyjne” 2013, no. 28, pp. 279-302.

¹² Cf. ZADROŻYŃSKA, A., *Homo faber i homo ludens*, Warszawa 1983; KĘPIŃSKI, A., *Rytm życia*, Kraków 1978, SELYE, H., *Stres okiełznany*, Warszawa 1978 et al.

¹³ More on this topic cf. KABACIŃSKA, K., RATAJCZAK K., *Dziecko chłopskie w czasie sacrum – konteksty edukacyjne (średniowiecze-epoka nowożytna)*.

¹⁴ For the early Middle Ages, see: KORTA, W., *Okres wczesnofeudalny (do połowy XIII w.)*, in: *Historia chłopów polskich*, Ed. S. INGLOT, vol. 1: *Do upadku Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej*, Ed. S. INGLOT, Warszawa 1970, pp. 82-97.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 111-113.

craftsmen. Farmers in villages founded under Polish law were slightly less prosperous than in settlements founded under German law, where the richest farmers had larger plots of land and more livestock.

The realities of peasant children's life were deeply influenced by the fact that the settlements were small and surrounded by farmland. The peasant farm consisted of a cottage and farm buildings. Sometimes dugouts or semi-recessed dugout houses served as dwellings. In the Middle Ages and early modern times, residential chambers often had no window openings, and smoke from an open fire was escaping through the roof.¹⁶ Certain new technical solutions in the rural construction appeared in the late Middle Ages and thus increased the usable area of houses and improved the comfort of residents. The layout of rooms developed at that time, composed of a living room, hallway and storage room, remained essentially unchanged until the late eighteenth century.¹⁷

In the later Middle Ages, the geographical village arrangement was subject to transformations. In villages of a Rundling type (circular-shaped village) there was a square with a pond as a water reservoir in the centre of the settlement. The centre of the village was a place where a church, an inn, and other buildings of general use were erected, and also often a school was built in the area of the clergy house. In the remaining area, children from all over the community could play.¹⁸ An important role of a kind of centre of cultural life of the village was played by inns. One could meet musicians there, take part in dances, organize weddings, christening parties and so on. Travellers, pilgrims, knights were staying there, people listened to stories about faraway countries, legends, biblical stories, historical tales; it was inns and church yard markets where one could hear news on current events.

Upbringing a rural child was primarily based on "the traditional rural social structure and the fact that communities of peasant families were bound with kinship and neighbourhood relations and on common customs."¹⁹ The family consisted of parents, children, grandparents and other relatives. All members of the community had specific roles to perform, depending on their age, experience and health. The rural family was a patriarchal community, where father took the most important place of a role model and mentor for children (especially for boys). "The individualization of family members did not exist because they were all subordinate to the issues of the household the head of which was the father."²⁰ It seems that the purpose of education was first and foremost to acquire competences for the proper functioning of the child in the rural community, both within his or her farm and in the whole village. "It seems that a traditional way of teaching the children work skills was ex-

¹⁶ BURSZA, J., *Kultura wsi wczesnośredniowiecznej*, in: *Historia chłopów polskich*, vol. 1, p. 145.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 234.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 231.

¹⁹ KABZIŃSKA, Ł., KABZIŃSKI, K., *Rola ojca w rodzinie wiejskiej na przełomie XIX i XX w.*, in: *Mężczyzna w rodzinie i społeczeństwie – ewolucja ról w kulturze polskiej i europejskiej*, vol. 1. *Od średniowiecza do początku XX wieku*, Ed. K. KABACIŃSKA and K. RATAJCZAK, Poznań 2010, p. 255.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 256.

tremely important for these communities. It was a multi-layered system of knowledge transfer by introducing a child into the common duties and rules about how to perform them. It was a serious play, but nonetheless a play.”²¹ A rural child is raised in an environment that is perfect for any child: in close contact with nature. The child has direct contact, without any difficulty, any limitations or barriers, with nature both during play, dominated by unlimited motion, imitating, spontaneity and naturalness, and during early undertaken work. In this way he or she gains independent and responsible contact with the world: to some extent already an adult, community world. The second important mechanism of parental influence is following the example (more the behaviour than verbal instructions) of the parents, older siblings and neighbours (within the rural community) in both daily and holiday life.²² Of course, in the earliest period parents and older siblings are most influential, but as soon as the child begins active participation in rural work (about 4-5 years old) such as leading goose and cattle for grazing, the village community (peers but also adults) starts to influence the child too, and the child becomes a sort of “common” child of the whole village, just as the troubles and joys of a rural family become the troubles and joys of all the community.

Children accompanied their parents in their daily work and were also engaged in gathering and fishing.²³ Everyday life was lived within individual families, which included not only parents and children, but often also the wives of the sons together with their offspring. This created a specific educational environment, and a large number of children certainly influenced the character of their socialisation, the nature of play, the ways of spending leisure time. At the head of the “great” family stood the oldest man, so medieval villages followed the patriarchal model of family.²⁴ The authority of parents, especially the father, over the children was practically unlimited. Preparing for work was the most important skill, as witnessed by a memoirist: “to make them industrious and that they do not like sloth[...] They taught children to do the farm work they knew.”²⁵ Older children with their fathers also participated in activities and situations other than work. One of such practices was described by Władysław Reymont in his novel “The Peasants”: “Children too, especially boys in their teens, had followed their fathers; whistling to one another about the messages, they had gathered in groups, loitering inside and outside the tavern porch, in spite of the cruel frost which bit them.”²⁶

The education of a rural child was thus determined mostly by customs and social traditions passed down from generation to generation for centuries. The situation of a rural family child resulted both from macro-social and micro-social factors. The first group in-

²¹ ZADROŻYŃSKA, A., *Homo faber i homo ludens*, p. 94.

²² Cf. MYŚLAKOWSKI, Z., *Rodzina wiejska jako środowisko wychowawcze*, II: *materials*, Warszawa 1931.

²³ BURSZTA, J., *Kultura wsi wczesnośredniowiecznej*, p. 141.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 145.

²⁵ SŁOMKA, J., *Pamiętniki włościanina od pańszczyzny do dni dzisiejszych*, Warszawa 1983, p. 121, after: Ł. Kabzińska, K. Kabziński, *Rola ojca w rodzinie wiejskiej na przełomie XIX i XX w.*, p. 158.

²⁶ REYMONT, W., *Chłopi*, vol.2., *Zima*, Warszawa 1970, p. 93.

cluded undoubtedly the political and economic situation (and its influence on the economic status of the family) and traditional folk culture characterised by isolation of local communities (little social mobility), spatial stability and the well-being of families strongly embedded in local communities.²⁷ Micro-social factors included the economic and social status of the family within the rural community, as well as the number and birth sequence of children born. Not only the family, but also the entire rural community, including the peer group, significantly affected the upbringing process of a rural child. “Besides relatives and neighbours, also peers of the child are closer to his or her mentality and life, and the child also clings to them.”²⁸

Given that rural life was based on the rhythmic and repetitive work of a peasant and his family dependent on natural forces and natural surroundings, and that the network of schools was much poorer than urban schools, it is worthwhile to cite Jan Płatek’s statement that “the self-education factor is definitely decisive in the development of a rural child.”²⁹ The child was very early in the geographically driven mental phenomena, i.e. a complex of influences of rural nature and landscape, affecting the quality and richness of the acquired impressions and emotional and affective evolution in the pupil.³⁰

The rural child was on the one hand subordinated to the family (notably the father), who decided not only on everyday matters (e.g. play, care about the younger, usually numerous, siblings, household work etc.) but also on choosing the way of life (e.g. leaving the oldest or youngest boy on the farm as a heir, the daughter’s marriage, etc.).

“The situation of children depended on their role and fitness for the farm work, the child counted as a labour force and guaranteed the continuation of holding the farm, not as an individual.”³¹ The working time was a reality for a rural child since birth. “Parental pedagogy consists mainly in the training of children for various domestic and farming services.”³² It was rarely seen that parents paid much attention to their child or pampered him or her. Even a small child was taken to a field and left aside in a ridge, because (most often) the mother shortly after the childbirth had to go back to work. A literary example of such a situation may be a fragment of the novel by Eliza Orzeszkowa “Tadeusz”: “She always took him [her son Tadeusz– K.K.Ł.] with her when going out for harvesting and weeding. What else would she do with him? Leave home alone? She had to close the room and it was impossible to lock the child inside. [...] So she took him with her.”³³ Another

²⁷ STYK, J., *Sacrum w kulturze ludowej*, http://www.gadki.lublin.pl/encyklopedia/artykuly/sakrum_w_kulturze_ludowej.html (5.04.2016)

²⁸ PŁATEK, J., *Wieś jako środowisko wychowawcze*, in: MYSŁAKOWSKI, Z., *Rodzina wiejska jako środowisko wychowawcze, materiały II*, Warszawa 1931, p. 92.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 41.

³⁰ Ibidem, pp. 43-44.

³¹ JABŁONOWSKA, Z., *Rodzina w XIX i na początku XX wieku*, in: *Przemiany rodziny polskiej*, Ed. J. KOMOROWSKA, Warszawa 1975, p. 53.

³² BIEGELEISEN, H., *Gry, zabawy i mętowania*, p. 174.

³³ ORZESZKOWA, E., *Tadeusz*, in: ORZESZKOWA, E., *W zimowy wieczór, A...B...C..., Przy docho-dzeniu śledczem, Tadeusz, Gedali*, Warszawa 1888, p. 104.

example may be the situation of children of Antek Boryna's wife Hanka, who "taking the children outside, and cutting some bread for each of them, [...]called Lapa to play with them, while she went in to see after Boryna."³⁴

Usually, parents looked after their children until 3-4 years of age. Then, "daily job started: nursing younger siblings, feeding geese, later cattle, and often ten-year-old children of farm workers worked for farm owners."³⁵ Parents, who did not have time and tradition of solicitous care about the child, use them from their early childhood as an aid, both in farm and household work. "As a result, the rural child integrates extremely fast into the serious world of the older community, and when growing up educates himself or herself and almost unknowingly under the influence of his or her social and physical environment."³⁶ It is also important to remember that due to this situation the period of childhood shortened, which is confirmed by various sources.

Before we go on to further topics, let us think for a moment about the issue of perception of time by rural people in the period being analysed. Danuta Niczyporuk points out that every element of social reality and every kind of social activity, namely the mythical, religious, legal, political, moral, economic and technical elements, operates in its own time. It is determined by the multitude of its meanings.³⁷ It is worth asking what time and temporal nature of human life actually are. This issue was tackled by Alfred Szutz (1899-1959). He tried to understand the everyday experience of ordinary people, assuming that time and temporal nature are integral parts of social interaction and constructing the meanings. He noted that cultural habits create social time and vice versa: People, through their relationships with time, create culture and organise their social life.³⁸

While in primitive cultures time and space were perceived as concrete, qualitatively heterogeneous and discontinuous elements, in industrial society there was a transition from the cyclic concept of time to the linear concept, in other words: from the concept of natural time (qualitative and concrete time) to artificial time (quantitative and abstract time).³⁹ In Bogdan Suchodolski's opinion, time has a multifaceted significance in culture, and its perception varied greatly in particular cultures, with a significant breakthrough in its social perception at the end of the Enlightenment,⁴⁰ which in our opinion is an important turning point. Time is experienced by man at two levels: as a consciousness of time

³⁴ REYMONT, W., *Chłopi*, vol.3., *Wiosna*, p. 35.

³⁵ JABŁONOWSKA, Z., *Rodzina w XIX i na początku XX wieku*, p. 53.

³⁶ PŁATEK, J., *Wieś jako środowisko wychowawcze*, p. 42.

³⁷ NICZYPORUK, D., *Czas i przestrzeń w światopoglądzie mieszkańców wsi*, Lublin 2002, p. 18.

³⁸ See more in: ADAM, B., *Czas*, Warszawa 2010, p. 81-87.

³⁹ More on the topic in: ŠUBRT, J., *Čas a společnost. K otázce temporalizované sociologie*, Praha 2002, p. 8-13. and by the same author *Problém času v sociologické teorii*, Praha 2000. See also important remarks in: SOROKIN, P.A., *Sociocultural casuality, space, time. A Study of Referential Principles of Sociology and Social Science*, New York 1964, pp. 173-192.

⁴⁰ SUCHODOLSKI, B., *Wieloraki stosunek do czasu i wieczności w jednej kulturze*, in: *Stosunek do czasu w różnych strukturach kulturowych*, Ed. Z. CACKOWSKI, J. WOJCIKOWSKI, Warszawa 1987, p. 15-28.

and as a sense of time. Włodzimierz Pawluczuk proposed dividing this time into: “eternal now”, linear time and stationary time.⁴¹ Time is also a social phenomenon, though embedded in the experience of physical reality.⁴² Holy time is associated with the celebration of periodic holidays, while secular time is the ordinary duration in time with events of no religious significance.⁴³

Of course, every social class and group has its own understanding of time and space, which form the framework of collective memory. Time and space affect the course of social interaction, and they affect differently on people of different age. Among many classifications, it is worth mentioning the division of time into time of nature and historical times, as well as time of individuals and time of the society.⁴⁴ Medieval man lived in various rhythms of time: astronomical-natural, economic-fiscal, economic-commercial and judicial. In agrarian society, the astronomical-natural time was most strongly perceived by an individual. The economic-commercial rhythm took the form of annual and weekly trade fairs. Interestingly, despite being opposed by the Church (Mikołaj Trąba Statutes from 1420), trade fairs took place on Sundays.⁴⁵ It is usually emphasized that medieval man, closely related to nature and the pace of agricultural work, long after the Christianisation did not distinguish shorter units of time measurement than the time of day - morning, noon, evening, although some activities could take less time, e.g. “trzy pacierze” (three prayers, literally: three “paternosters”). It seems that in many cases the time of *profanum* intermingled with the time of *sacrum*.⁴⁶ The time of the Church was more precise, as it used the term *hora*: canon hours, and various methods of measuring the passing time were used in churches and monasteries: hourglass, mechanical clocks etc.

The medieval division of full day differed from the present one. The rule was to assume that it began and ended with daylight, so night formed a part of the day before. In the realities of rural life, until the late Middle Ages, there was no need to precisely measure time. Actually, hours and minutes did not matter, though the peasants who went to town for fairs could already meet a burgher lifestyle, which was much influenced by the city clock.⁴⁷ For peasants, the pace of their time was slowing down after harvesting, and such

⁴¹ PAWLUCZUK, W., *Czas w różnych systemach aktywności ludzkiej*, in: *Stosunek do czasu w różnych strukturach kulturowych*, p. 29.

⁴² ELIAS, N., *Esej o czasie*, Warszawa 2017, p. 28.

⁴³ ELIADE, M., *Sacrum i profanum. O istocie religijności*, Warszawa 1999, p. 55.

⁴⁴ MYŚLIWSKI, G., *Człowiek średniowiecza wobec czasu i przestrzeni (Mazowsze od XII do poł. XVI wieku)*, Warszawa 1999, p. 200. See also BYLINA, S., *Kultura ludowa Polski i Słowiańszczyzny średniowiecznej*, Warszawa 1999, p. 73 et seq.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 274.

⁴⁶ PIEKARCZYK, S., *Czas w modelu świata człowieka średniowiecznego*, in: *Stosunek do czasu w różnych strukturach kulturowych*, p. 304.

⁴⁷ ŠUBRT, J., *Čas a společnost*, p. 13. See more in: DOHRN-VAN ROSSUM, G., *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*, Chicago-London 1996. On the significance of mechanical time, clock time, for the development of the civilization see: SOROKIN, P.A., *Sociocultural causality, space, time. A Study of Referential Principles of Sociology and Social Science*, New York 1964, p. 169 et. seq.

activities as hunting by their nature did not tolerate haste. Interestingly, as emphasized by modern-day scholars Janusz Tazbir and Maria Bogucka, this specific peasants' approach to time did not change significantly in the next centuries.⁴⁸ It was only in the second half of the 17th century that the term "quarter" began to be used more often.⁴⁹

Peasants lived in the time of nature, they actually were not aware of consecutively numbered years; this did not matter in the everyday life of an illiterate person.⁵⁰ Some points in time for the peasants were determined by dates of payment of cyclical levies - a levy payable in honey was to be delivered in September, while the levy payable in swine was to be paid in November, and the sheaf tithe was collected within 8 days of the harvest, while the charge payable in oats was to be paid on the St. Martin's day, i.e. November 11th. The introduction of German law, due to the institution of charge exemption for a determined period (Polish: *wolnizna*), entailed the perception of time in perspective of more than one year, as usually the exemption period was 6 years. This change also led to mindset changes.⁵¹ The lifestyle of rural dwellers in most medieval European countries was, according to Aron Gurevich, completely subordinated to the routine, and the geographical horizon was reduced to the minimum. An intrinsic feature of countryside was its conservatism.⁵² The time in which the agrarian society lived was the time of nature, the sequence of annual cycles. In fact, nothing new occurs in the world of peasantry, everything repeats, life from birth to death means one and the same chain of events for all.⁵³ In a community linked to the rhythm of nature, there was no need to know the exact time in terms of hours, not to mention completely abstract minutes. It was the time of year, month, day that did matter.⁵⁴ The time of profanum began to dominate the time of sacrum only with the development of the pre-capitalist economy.⁵⁵

Time, or more precisely certain events occurring in time, could sometimes be "caught up" in the memories of rural children. We mean here the ritual of beating rural children on the last border mound in order to memorize the boundary site and the boundaries of

⁴⁸ See TAZBIR, J., *Czas w kulturze staropolskiej*, in: *Stosunek do czasu w różnych strukturach kulturowych*, p. 321-346; BOGUCA, M., *Uwagi o postrzeganiu czasu w Rzeczypospolitej Szlacheckiej XVI-XVII w.*, in: *Stosunek do czasu w różnych strukturach kulturowych*, pp. 348-359.

⁴⁹ BOGUCA, M., *Uwagi o postrzeganiu czasu*, p. 363.

⁵⁰ FOSSIER, R., *Ludzie średniowiecza*, Kraków 2009, p. 64.

⁵¹ MYŚLIWSKI, G., *Pojmowanie czasu a przemiany społeczno-gospodarcze w Polsce XIII-XIV wieku*, in: *Czas i przestrzeń w kulturze średniowiecza. Materiały XIV Seminarium Mediewistycznego*, Poznań 1994, p. 24.

⁵² GURIEWICZ, A., *Problemy średniowiecznej kultury ludowej*, Warszawa 1987, p. 29.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 162. The author, however, admits that Christianity made a certain change with its different concept of time.

⁵⁴ GUZOWSKI, P., *Kalendarz gospodarczy i finansowy knieci polskich na przełomie średniowiecza i czasów nowożytnych*, in: *Człowiek wobec miar czasu w przeszłości*, Ed. P. GUZOWSKI, M. LIEDKE, Kraków 2007, p. 36 et seq.

⁵⁵ TAZBIR, J., *Czas w kulturze staropolskiej*, in: *Stosunek do czasu w różnych strukturach kulturowych*, Ed. Z. CACKOWSKI, J. WOJCZAKOWSKI, Warszawa 1987, p. 335-340.

the farmland belonging to the village.⁵⁶ Besides, this was not a local custom specific for Poland only.⁵⁷

Below we want to reflect on how peasant children functioned in various “spheres” of the time of *profanum*. We will distinguish the time of play, time of learning/school, and working time.

Time of play

When analysing the everyday life of a rural child, plays and toys should be considered. “As all the villagers formed a village community, so did the children living in the village form a specific community that shared time together in a few moments of fun.”⁵⁸

The toys were made of wood, usually by the children themselves: they were miniature boats made of bark or chiselled from a piece of wood, clay or wooden figures of animals, sometimes cut from skin patches, small clay pots, etc., sometimes also Easter eggs and rattles.⁵⁹ Very little can be said about peasant children’s plays, one can guess that they included chasing, chants, hand clapping, etc.⁶⁰ It seems that children themselves were inventing games, created toys, learned about the surrounding world during “cognitive expeditions.” Of course, this world was very limited in terms of territory, but discovering it must have been fascinating to them.⁶¹ We have only fragmentary findings that may indicate that children played games that required specialised equipment. One of the few evidences of the existence of such equipment is the grave of a boy from Czekanów, in which 20 ram’s metatarsal lobes used for playing were discovered.⁶²

The time of children’s play was most often regarded by adults as useless, a waste of time, and even was forbidden by the parents, as exemplified by a fragment of this diary: “I passed my childhood years away from my peers. I spent the time mostly home and in the yard, because my mother claimed that it was not advisable to let the children go to

⁵⁶ BYLINA, S., *Drogi – granice – most. Studia o przestrzeni publicznej i sakralnej w średniowieczu*, Warszawa 2012, p. 62.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 63, here we have Czech examples: Younger and older lads are to be brought in and flogged in order to remember the border site and the boundary line”, “also adolescents are flogged for better memory in the future, at the same time being instructing about this mound.”

⁵⁸ NAWROT-BOROWSKA, M., *Zabawy dzieci na wsi polskiej w II połowie XIX i na początku XX wieku w świetle literatury pamiątkarskiej*, p. 42.

⁵⁹ Cf. ŻOŁĄDŹ-STRZELCZYK, D., GOMUŁKA, I., KABACIŃSKA-ŁUCZAK, K., NAWROT-BOROWSKA, M., *Dzieje zabawek dziecięcych na ziemiach polskich do początku XX wieku*, Wrocław 2016.

⁶⁰ *Historia kultury materialnej Polski w zarysie*, Ed. W. HENSEL, J. PAZDURA, vol. 1: *Od połowy VII do XII wieku*, Ed. M. DEMBIŃSKA, Z. PODWIŃSKA, Wrocław 1978, p. 313 et seq.

⁶¹ Cf. YI-FU, T., *Przestrzeń i miejsce*, Warszawa 1987, pp. 47-50.

⁶² MIŚKIEWICZ, M., *Życie codzienne mieszkańców ziem polskich we wczesnym średniowieczu*, Warszawa 2010, p. 225.

others because they could learn wrong things.⁶³ Plays and toys of rural children, as compared to plays of children from other social strata, were quite specific. First, because their main aim, from an early age, was to prepare a child for work on the farm and household.⁶⁴ Secondly, children used during play a variety of play items, which cannot necessarily be classified as proper toys, such as manure, water, stones and other “gifts of nature.” Thirdly, they reflected the social situation of rural population, based on well-established religious and lay traditions and customs.

Plays whose having mainly the socialization, preparatory and ludic functions, introduced children into their future rural activities. It is also important that childhood in the countryside was shorter than that of children from other social classes, as these children began working early. This does not mean, however, that they did not play at all. Jan Płatek, when analysing the countryside as an educational environment, noted that “The rural child hardly gets any toys. From time to time his or her mother would buy him or her a rattle, whistle, harmonica or a doll at a church fair or from a hawker.⁶⁵ An example of such behaviour can be a scene from “Peasants” by Władysław Reymont. Hanka returns home with her modest gifts: “He is to be released in three days only,” was the tranquil reply, as Hanka kissed the little ones, and distributed pastry among them.⁶⁶ The lack of toys *sensu stricto*⁶⁷ resulted in the need to create a variety of playing items, both by making them and by using other objects (e.g. sand, water, etc.). As Ryszard Kantor and Ryszard Zięzio aptly noted: “Rural children, especially from poorer families, could only expect, almost till the present day, toys made by themselves or their peers.”⁶⁸ This situation is confirmed both by the fragments from the fine literature of the second half of the 19th century, and excerpts from the 19th century memoirs. As an example, let’s use a fragment of “The Peasants” by W. Reymont: „The little ones were on their grandfather’s sheepskin, spread out as a rug before the fire-place, and he was making a little windmill to amuse them.”⁶⁹ Also, Antek, the title character of Bolesław Prus’s novel, plied various toys. “Antek, humiliated, returned home and said that he would go away tomorrow to seek work and study. The poor

⁶³ *Po co pisać? – pamiętnik nr 12/123*, in: CHAŁASIŃSKI, J., *Młode pokolenie chłopów*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1984, p. 49.

⁶⁴ The preparatory function of plays of rural children is peculiar, as the child, when playing, since the earliest years learned how to function within the family and village community. This caused that childhood was much shorter than in other social classes.

⁶⁵ PŁATEK, J., *Wieś jako środowisko wychowawcze*, p. 80.

⁶⁶ The literature of reference distinguishes toys in the narrow sense as object purposely designed for playing (definition by BUJAK, J., *Zabawki dziecięce w Europie. Zarys dziejów – rozwój zainteresowań*, Kraków 1988) and toys in a broad sense - every object used for fun (n.e.. ZIĘZIO, R., *Wokół naczelnej zasady funkcjonalnej w zachowaniach ludycznych*, „Zabawy i zabawki” 1997, no. 3).

⁶⁷ REYMONT, W., *Chłopi*, vol.3., *Wiosna*, p. 330.

⁶⁸ KANTOR, R., ZIĘZIO, R., *Zabawy i zabawki w życiu polskich dzieci w XIX i XX wieku*, in: *Od narodzin do wieku dojrzałego. Dzieci i młodzież w Polsce, cz. 2, stulecie XIX i XX*, Ed. E. MAZUR, Warszawa 2003, p. 252.

⁶⁹ REYMONT, W., *Chłopi*, vol.2., *Zima*, p. 40.

woman swallowing her tears began to prepare him to the trip. She gave him an old basket, the only one she had in the cottage, and a sackcloth bag. She put some food in the basket, and in the bag she put files, a hammer, chisel and other tools with which Antek has been making toys for so many years.”⁷⁰ The same pastime had little Klimuś – a character from the short story by Adolf Dygasiński, who *was sitting there near the bench, a little four year-aged kid, and was cutting something with a pocket knife.*⁷¹

Little villagers used some natural elements, such as sand, fences, stones, etc.,⁷² as well as other objects. Franka, a character from the novel “Cham” (“The Boor”) by Eliza Orzeszkowa, gave the children “a handful of beads and broken pins”,⁷³ the children later played with.

The preparatory function of children’s plays is already seen in baby’s games. From the cradle children heard songs about the harvest.⁷⁴ “The most popular included those which were preparing the young generation to farming jobs.”⁷⁵ The example may be several games described by H. Biegeleisen. “The child is put on his back and by taking both feet, he is flipped aside, and pretending to plough, the parent says: *Na co orzesz? Na pszenice? Otrząchnij plużyce!* (For what crop are you ploughing? For wheat? Shake off the plough!) [...] In a similar position the lying child has the legs pressed against the tummy and the straightened as if imitating straw chopping, saying: *Panu, panu!* (This for the landlord!) Then *Sobie, sobie*” (and this for me).⁷⁶ Of course, many children’s games have survived to this day, such as the “cat and mouse” game, or „Zgaduj zgadula, gdzie moja (złota) kula?” (“Guess where the golden ball is?”) or other, presented in the first work about plays by Łukasz Gołębiowski from 1831 “Gry i zabawy różnych stanów” (Games and Plays of Various Social Classes).⁷⁷ These plays of the youngest children was mainly located in a cottage. Also in it, usually in the winter, tales were told, about historical or amazing events.⁷⁸

As the baby grew, the space and time of play expanded. However, they were dependent on the season. Children played not only at home, but also within the household, in the field, garden, meadow, forest, etc. From late spring to early autumn, children enjoyed playing in the fields, forests, gardens, etc. most often outside the house, while in the winter and pre-harvest time, they often stayed at home. If the weather was good, they also played

⁷⁰ PRUS, B., *Antek*, in: PRUS, B., *Nowele*, vol. 2, Warszawa 1974, p. 353.

⁷¹ A. DYGASIŃSKI, *Małgorzatka, pieszczoszka matusina*, Warszawa 1890, p. 5; <https://polona.pl/item/11067221/10/>

⁷² Cf. e.g. REYMONT, W., *Chłopi*, vol. 4., *Lato*, p. 74,

⁷³ ORZESZKOWA, E., *Cham*, Warszawa 1932, p. 38.

⁷⁴ Cf. CIEŚLIKOWSKI, J., *Wielka zabawa*, Wrocław 1967, pp. 66-78.

⁷⁵ BIEGELEISEN, H., *Gry, zabawy i mętowania*, p. 175.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 175.

⁷⁷ GOŁĘBIOWSKI, Ł., *Gry i zabawy różnych stanów*, Warszawa 1831.

⁷⁸ Cf. e.g. ORZESZKOWA, E., *Cham*, memoirs of that era.

outside. The playing time of rural children varied depending on the age of the baby and the time of nature, but adults rarely attended it. There was also a division of plays due to gender. The plays of boys was more noisy, active, requiring dexterity and cunningness. For example, the boys often ran in the meadows, jumped, played blind man's buff, hide-and-seek, tumbles (Figure 1, 2), sleigh ride in the winter, skating on frozen ponds.

Girls often wove wreaths, played at home using hand-made dolls and toy furniture, but also danced (Figure 4).⁷⁹ In diaries of that time one can be found boys who played with dolls, e.g. Jan Piechota in his diary recalls a boy nicknamed Wojtuś Laleczka (Wojtuś the Doll). He surely got his nickname because he liked to play with dolls, to dress and take them with him.⁸⁰

Rural children also played with children of the gentry, which can be the evidence of the universal nature of the plays. This may be illustrated by the engraving (Figure 3), on which a young lady from the manor house gives a doll to a little peasant girl held by a boy.

Apart from playing together, rural children, especially boys, often competed. An example of this may be the description of the rivalry and „war games” from the pre-World War I period: „Having reached the village centre, the boys returning from school did not go out to the houses, but were preparing to fight. They divided themselves into two groups, boys from the meadow and boys from the village. The fight has a social-class division nature, be-



Fig. 1. Zabawy chłopięce (Boys' plays), „Przyjaciel Dzieci” 1865, no. 205.



Fig. 2. Zabawa w chowanego (Hide-and-seek), „Kłosa” 1871, no. 291.

⁷⁹ Cf. NAWROT-BOROWSKA, M., *Zabawy dzieci na wsi polskiej w II połowie XIX i na początku XX wieku w świetle literatury pamiętnikarskiej*, pp. 39-64.

⁸⁰ PIECHOTA, J., *Gawęda mojego dzieciństwa. Wspomnienia z lat 1900-1918*, Warszawa 1967, p. 47.



Fig. 3. Na płocie (On the fence), J. Kozłowski, “Kłosy” 1885, no. 1054.

cause the boys from the village, as richer, called us paupers.”⁸¹

There were also evening parties held in peasant’s cottages, where children watched adult games, listened to their conversations, and participated in them (Figure 5).

Children had much more space and time to play in the winter. Then they threw snowballs and made snowmen in the fields and yards.

An example may be the description of children’s reactions to the first snow by Władysław Reymont. “here and there, they dug paths through the snow from cabin to cabin; every heart rejoiced. Especially the children were beside themselves with delight; and dogs rushed about everywhere, barking, licking the snow, and scampering with the urchins, who swarmed on to the roadways, clamoured in the enclosures, shouted, pelted one another with snowballs, built horrible monsters, and dragged each other about on toboggans; their joyful cries and merry sports filled all the place with din. Roch had to give up teach-



Fig. 4. Tańce w chałupie (Cottage dance) “Kłosy” 1868, No. 161.



Fig. 5. Wieczornice (Evening party), “Kłosy” 1868, no. 170.

⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 67.

ing that day, for keeping them in the house over their primers was impossible.”⁸² Likewise, they played on frozen ice: “and the children played about in the lanes, and there was everywhere noise and merriment in plenty.”⁸³

Plays of rural children seem to differ from their counterparts played by their peers from other social strata. “The rural child has a plenty of playgrounds, abounding in a variety of objects. His plays are different from that of urban children, he plays with natural items, not artificial ones; builds houses and stables, where horses and cows are introduced, thus imitating his environment.”⁸⁴ The most important function of rural children’s play is the preparatory function.

With age, the play was “seamlessly” transforming into working time. Rural children were able to combine the times of work and play, as exemplified by a fragment of “The Peasants”: “On its banks, overgrown with drooping alders, flocks of geese screamed and flapped their wings; on the still miry roads, troops of merry children ran about and shouted”⁸⁵ and an excerpt from a diary: “When I started to lead cattle for grazing (...) only after that I found friends, with whom one was doing various jokes, frolics; it was not very safe with girls and we were driving them away with a stick, considering them as something worse, not fitting as playmates. Anyway, it was such a custom at that time.”⁸⁶

Naturally, children sometimes participates in games with adults in the village. Folk rites took place in open space, which was in opposition to the Christian sacred space. Spring and midsummer night gatherings of villagers were held among the meadows, fields, groves, hills, and on the banks of the waters.⁸⁷ In the above mentioned oval-type settlements, the place for celebrating folk holidays included also village squares or passages.⁸⁸

As regards the participation of children in rural games, dances, etc., in the Middle Ages, we do not actually have adequate source of data for Polish lands. The enigmatic mention of “dancing brides” in the monastery gardens, known from the “Book of Henrykow” can not be a hint whatsoever.⁸⁹ Likewise, the accounts about dances that took place in aristocratic mansions cannot serve as a reference here. It is known from Western European sources, that any manifestations of peasant activity in this area were severely criticised in

⁸² REYMONT, W., *Chłopi*, vol. 2., *Zima*, p. 11.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

⁸⁴ PŁATEK, J., *Wieś jako środowisko wychowawcze*, p. 44.

⁸⁵ REYMONT, W., *Chłopi*, vol. 3, *Wiosna*, p. 16.

⁸⁶ *Pamiętnik nr 1226/104*, in: CHAŁASIŃSKI, J., *Młode pokolenie chłopów*, p. 223.

⁸⁷ BYLINA, S., *Kultura ludowa Polski i Słowiańszczyzny średniowiecznej*, p. 73.

⁸⁸ BURSZTA, J., *Kultura wsi średniowiecznej (do końca XV w.)*, p. 246.

⁸⁹ *Księga Henrykowska*, translated from Latin into Polish by GRODECKI, R., Poznań-Wrocław 1949, p. 113: ““women and girls were dancing in our garden on holidays”

moralist texts.⁹⁰ It is well known that boys in Italy, England, France often played football on Sundays and public holidays, which was punished with fines by the church authorities. The authorities sometimes claimed that it was a game for higher classes.⁹¹

Time of learning

For some peasant children the childhood time meant also school time. Unfortunately, the group of children who were able to benefit from the opportunity to attend school was small. There were many reasons for this. The peasants lacked the time, money and energy to collect the funds necessary to send their children to school. In addition, rural children lacked role models that would take into account the need for school education; peasant houses lacked such forms of culture as reading and learning.⁹² As Peter Rietbergen dramatically states: “When did the children of farmers have time to study? As soon as they learned to walk they were helping at the farm. There was neither time nor money to go to school.”⁹³ When analysing the situation in Western Europe, Rietbergen noted that school opportunities were only during the winter. Schools were located in larger villages and towns. How was the case in Poland?

There were no rural parish schooling until the beginning of the fifteenth century, and just during this century there was a tremendous dynamic development of education, which led to the situation that it became almost universal in the early 16th century. Another thing is the number of pupils attending rural schools. It was very small, but on the other hand, it did not differ from the school attendance during the period of the National Education Commission. In schools there were usually 15-20 boys, and the curriculum covered 2-3 years of learning the texts of Latin prayers and mastering some 300 words in Latin, which made it possible to understand and sometimes even keep records in rural court books. It was important for the peasants to learn arithmetic, and the money counting skills among peasantry was confirmed by numerous sources. Roman numerals were used, and from the second half of the 15th century also Arabic numerals. It should be added that some of the peasant youth, especially those from urban-rural parishes, attended urban schools that were at a much higher level in terms of curriculum and organisation than their rural counterparts. Peasant sons could also be found among the students of the Cracow Academy (later called Jagiellonian University). However, it must be said that the teaching covered only a small proportion of young people from rural areas.⁹⁴ It seems that

⁹⁰ See examples in: COULTON, G.G., *The Medieval Village*, Cambridge 2010, p. 93 et seq. [reprint of the edition of 1925].

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 94-95.

⁹² RIETBERGEN, P., *Europa. Dzieje kultury*, Warszawa 2001, p. 169.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 170.

⁹⁴ BYLINA, S., *Kultura ludowa Polski i Słowiańszczyzny średniowiecznej*, p. 79.

graduates of rural parish schools were often organists and sextons, and probably some of the priests.⁹⁵

Time of work

In the countryside of the late Middle Ages, children were raised primarily by mothers, in accordance with the traditional division of work and responsibilities within the family. Children were gradually introduced to the household work. From the point of view of both the child and his or her family, the moment of entrusting him or her with cattle feeding, which involved the appropriate degree of trust in the child as a member of the rural community, was an important point. For the child, it was a great honour and probably made him or her proud. Cattle grazing also meant the child's exit from the domination of the family circle and establishing contacts with a peer group.⁹⁶ Being involved in active work on the farm meant also going out of the care of the mother and becoming covered by the fatherly authority.⁹⁷ On the other hand, the moment the responsibilities related with grazing finished meant for boys the transition to agricultural activities, requiring more strength and physical fitness.

An important moment of "transition" for boys aged about seven years old was the ritual of "postrzyżyny" (ceremonial first haircut). During this ceremony a feast was held similar to that of a wedding, with relatives and neighbours invited. The boy's hair was cut, and the most important guest gave him a new name, or approved the one used hitherto.⁹⁸ Before baptism, children were given a substitute name, such as Zając (Hare), Wilk (Wolf), Nielot (Flightless), Niemój (Not-Mine) which was intended to "mislead" evil spirits, and only the first haircut disclosed the real name which was ceremonially given to the child.⁹⁹ It is not clear when this custom disappeared.

The most common tasks of childhood peasant boys were leading goose and cattle for grazing and caring of them. When the child was little he or she took care of geese: most often they were girls and little boys up to 5 years old.

Girls spent most of their time in the company of women. There were plenty of trips to the forest for fruit and mushrooms. Foraging was one of the most important forms of social life of girl peer groups and one of the ways of introducing children into adult life.¹⁰⁰ Peasant daughters also learned all farm and household work, especially hand-work, sewing, weaving, spinning.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Ibidem, p. 197.

⁹⁶ *Kultura Polski średniowiecznej XIV-XV w.*, Ed. B. GEREMEK, Warszawa 1997, p. 133.

⁹⁷ Ibidem, p. 135.

⁹⁸ BURSZA, J., *Kultura wsi wczesnośredniowiecznej*, p. 147.

⁹⁹ TYSZKIEWICZ, J., *Dziecko w średniowiecznej Polsce: poczęcie, urodzenie, zdrowie niemowlęcia*, in: *Wkład starożytności, średniowiecza i renesansu w rozwój nauk medycznych. Wybór materiałów z sesji naukowej Toruń 12-13 września 1980 r.*, Ed. W. WRÓBLEWSKA, Toruń 1983, p. 167.

¹⁰⁰ *Kultura Polski średniowiecznej X-XIII w.*, Ed. J. DOWIAT, Warszawa 1985, p. 43 et seq.

¹⁰¹ *Najstarszy zwód prawa polskiego*, publ. J. MATUSZEWSKI, Warszawa 1959, art. 22, para. 2, p. 202.



Fig. 6. *Pasterka gęsi* (A girl tending geese), “Staszyc” 1889.06.08, no. 25 and 26.



Fig. 7. *Gęsiarka* (Goosegirl), painting by W. Szerner, “Kłosy” 1874, no. 474.



Fig. 8. drawing by J. Chełmoński, *Pastuszki* (Little shepherds), “Kłosy” 1885, nr 1053.

Geese tending was a main job of rural children. Figures 6 and 7 can be an example of this. The first one was posted in a journal “Staszyc” published in Poznan in 1889, derived from the book “Szkola Domowa” (“Home School”) and presents a poor little girl tending a flock of geese.

Władysław Szerner grasped the moment when a young girl weaves a wreath of wild flowers. “At a stubble field we see a flock of geese, tended by a girl, as such a flock is a wealth of every housewife.”¹⁰² So, geese tending was a very responsible occupation: so crucial that it became an important topic for Maria Konopnicka who wrote *O krasnoludkach i sierotce Marysi* (*About the Dwarfs and Little Orphan Mary*).

Another example may be the motif placed on the painting by Józef Chełmoński “*Pastuszki*” (Little shepherds) (Fig. 8). A group of children of different gender and age entertain themselves while tending the animals. They gathered around an older boy who is playing a violin. It was a very popular play of rural shepherds.

According to Henryk Biegeleisen, a good observer of rural life, “The new period in the life of a rural child is the day in which he or her was first entrusted with cattle for

¹⁰² Author unknown, *Gęsiarka* (Goosegirl), „Kłosy” 1874, no. 474, p. 75.

tending.”¹⁰³ From about 14 years of age, boys participated in harvesting. Cattle tending was a common activity not only for orphans or half-orphans. Many memoir writers mention that they tended cows from an early age of their lives: “When a child has grown up to five or six, he or she was being sent to look after a cow.”¹⁰⁴ One of the memoir authors, born in 1872, after his father died and his mother got married again, tended cows at his stepfather’s farm in summer, while in winter he attended a school nearby,¹⁰⁵ as did the author of other memoirs, born in 1878 in the village of Żytno, who until the fourteenth year of age looked after cattle in summer, and went to school during winter.¹⁰⁶ Another memoirs writer also tended cattle, as he remembered: “And so I passed the young, childhood years with the cows.”¹⁰⁷

Cattle tending was not an easy job for children. A memoir author from the Poznań region recalls the difficulties during grazing: “When I tended cattle only, I managed it, but later on my auntie aunts added me 20 geese and 4 pigs. The cattle fled in one direction, while the geese in another, and the pigs in yet another, so that as a 7-year-old boy I could not manage it all, and sometimes I cried.”¹⁰⁸ The same author also gives evidence that during cattle tending children who were literate spent time reading: “When I was tending cattle in the field, I had a book with me and read it often at the field.”¹⁰⁹ Usually little children were tending cattle, one of the memoir authors notes that when he was 15 years old he was too big to tend cattle,¹¹⁰ another one recalls that he tended cows until he was 14 years old “in the sun and in the rain, in the wind and in the heat”,¹¹¹ yet another that he did it until he was 16 years old.¹¹² It should also be noted that the peasant tradition preserved a conviction that a child who tends cattle was not a free-loader for the family. One of the memoirs recalled this as follows: “I first tended oxen and a calf when

¹⁰³ BIEGELEISEN, H., *Gry, zabawy i mętowania*, p. 174.

¹⁰⁴ Memoirs no. 21, *Wyrobnik częściowo wiejski w pow. miechowskim*, in: *Pamiętniki chłopów* no. 1-51, p. 283.

¹⁰⁵ Memoirs no. 11, *Muzyk, a zarazem gospodarz osiemnasto i pół morgowy w pow. radomszczańskim*, in: *Pamiętniki chłopów nr 1-51*, p. 131.

¹⁰⁶ Memoirs no. 17, *Wielomorgowy gospodarz w pow. radomszczańskim*, in: *Pamiętniki chłopów nr 1-51*, p. 229; cf. Memoirs no. 29, *Gospodarz dwunastomorgowy w pow. puławskim*, in: *Pamiętniki chłopów nr 1-51*, p. 408.

¹⁰⁷ Memoirs no. 16, *Bezrolny, niegdyś sklepikarz, obecnie zarobkujący różnemi zajęciami w pow. łódzkim*, in: *Pamiętniki chłopów nr 1-51*, p. 203.

¹⁰⁸ Memoirs no. 1, *Górnik w Niemczech a później 55-morgowy gospodarz w pow. poznańskim*, in: *Pamiętniki chłopów*, second series, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Memoirs no. 23, *Kowal na gospodarstwie małorolnem w pow. puławskim*, in: *Pamiętniki chłopów nr 1-51*, p. 131.

¹¹¹ Memoirs no. 3, *Syn rolnika, z zawodu kowal, przez znaczną część życia wychodźca za zarobkiem, w końcu wiejski kowal w pow. nieszawski*, in: *Pamiętniki chłopów*, second series, p. 107.

¹¹² Memoirs no. 10, *Syn średnio zamożnego gospodarza, zubożony przedsiębiorca i działacz, rolnik na 47 morgach w pow. sieradzkim*, in: *Pamiętniki chłopów*, second series, p. 819.



Fig. 9. Na własnym zagonie (On one's own field), „Kłosy” 1876, no. 577.



Fig. 10. Żniwo (Harvest), „Kłosy” 1883, no. 961.

accompanied by my father ... I started the life of an independent shepherd, it filled me with pride: for now my older brothers will not tell me that I am a free-loader, a sluggard.”¹¹³

Girls were involved in helping in household work and taking care of their younger siblings. Apart from cattle tending, children had to help with their younger siblings, as already noted, in house cleaning etc. Children, especially girls, also helped in cooking, and also brought the meals to their busy parents. Such a scene was presented in Fig. 9: a girl brought meal in so-called “dwojaki” (double pot), perhaps made of clay.

Apart of looking after younger siblings and running the household, girls also dealt with cattle grazing. An example may be the statement by a peasant woman who was born in 1900: “As a four-year-old girl I used to tend geese and then cows, and at home, seeing how my poor mother is tired of being able to cope with children, and they were born literally every year, I helped her, as I was the oldest one, to nurse these little ones, although actually I needed a nanny myself, because what kind of a nurse could be of a five year old toddler?”¹¹⁴ Then the author of the memoirs adds that at the age of 6 she

ran the farm herself, especially when her mother was leaving; the girl took care of the children, cooked the food, cleaned, washed and tried to milk the cows. Geese tending was the domain of younger children, and when they grew up to about 6-7 years old they were giv-

¹¹³ Memoirs no. 7, *Gospodarz na 10 hektarach najpierw rolnik, potem ogrodnik w pow. bielskim*, in: *Pamiętniki chłopów*, second series, p. 555.

¹¹⁴ Memoirs no. 3, *Żona gospodarza piętnastomorgowego w pow. Warszawskim*, in: *Pamiętniki chłopów nr 1-51*, Warszawa 1935, p. 29. Cf. Memoirs no. 2, *Wychodźca za zarobkiem do Niemiec i Stanów Zjednoczonych a w końcu 30-morgowy gospodarz w pow. jarocińskim*, in: *Pamiętniki chłopów*, second series, p. 31.

en a more responsible task: cattle tending. Often the geese were tended by girls because it was a light work.

Summer was the season most abundant in work for children because it was a time of heavy harvest. An example of it may be the scene in fig. 10. Women arrange cropped cereal in sheaves, a man throws them onto the cart, and two boys rest after hard work, and enjoying their free time, they are watching the surroundings.

A similar scene is shown in another illustration (Figure 11). Young women work on cropped cereals. They are accompanied by children. A few years old one stands next to a young woman who looks after a baby in a cradle made of sheet attached to joined sticks.

The most important autumn duties were helping in potato digging. One of these scenes was shown by A. Kozakiewicz in the painting „W czasie kopania kartofli” („Digging potatoes”) (Fig. 12).

Late autumn is a time of storing harvested crops for the long period of winter. „The whole farm goes into the fenced area, but the cattle still goes to the fields, grazing on meadows or clover fields. This is a favourite moment for rural children; they are eager to tend cows and horses because they can set bonfires in the mornings and evenings, and they can roast in the ashes tasty potatoes which are abundant everywhere.”¹¹⁵ The artist presented in his drawing a rural scene: potato digging. “Anywhere potatoes were planted, there are workers both male and female, and even the youngest children were helpful in collecting dug out potatoes.”¹¹⁶

A similar scene - autumn work in the field - was depicted in another picture from the second half of the XIX century, a drawing by H. Lipinski *Jesienne roboty w polu* (*Autumn field work*). One can see various field works in which children also participate.



Fig. 11. *Żniwa* (*Harvest*), „Tygodnik Ilustrowany” 1869, no. 84.



Fig. 12. A. Kozakiewicz, *W czasie kopania kartofli* („Digging potatoes”), „Kłosy” 1875, no 532.

¹¹⁵ R., *W czasie kopania kartofli* (*When digging potatoes*), „Kłosy” 1875, no. 532, p. 171.

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 171.



Fig. 13. *Jesienne roboty w polu (Autumn field work)*, copy of the drawing by H. Lipińskiego, „Kłosa” 1883, no. 958.



Fig. 14. A. Kotsis, *Zagroda wiejska w Krakowskiem (A farmhouse in the Krakow region)*, „Kłosa” 1875, no. 525.

An iconographic representation of children’s work can be the painting by A. Kotsis *Zagroda wiejska w Krakowskiem (A farmhouse in the Krakow region)*. The author placed, in his characteristic manner, jobs in a peasant farmhouse. Apart from adults, also children helping the adults are depicted.

“The overriding, sacred value for a peasant family was the land and other values were subordinate to it.”¹¹⁷ The time of *profanum* was related to the calendar of nature defining the time for field work. In the more agriculturally profiled areas of Poland, work on the field was finished in the autumn and from that moment on, life “starts to focus in the house by the fireplace.”¹¹⁸ And also in this work children served as aids, learning first all the skills necessary in the future.

However, it must be borne in mind that the time of the *sacrum* intermingled with the time of *profanum*. The everyday life of the peasants was determined not only by the rhythm of nature,

but also by the time of God. An example of this we can find in a fragment of Adolf Dygasiński’s story “Doczekałem się” (“I saw this happen”): Maciej, the main character of the short story, is a very hardworking peasant. “He kept very important rituals from farmers’ forefathers.” Before he took a slice of black bread to his mouth, he always gave it a solemn kiss. “Bread is sacred.” Every morning and evening after the prayer, he also worshipped the holy land on which he worked: he touched her lips, and he beat his breast in repentance: “God the Father, be merciful to my sinful soul!”¹¹⁹

Conclusion

¹¹⁷ JABLONOWSKA, Z., *Rodzina w XIX i na początku XX wieku*, p. 61;

¹¹⁸ ZADROŻYŃSKA, A., *Homo faber i homo ludens*, p. 57.

¹¹⁹ DYGASIŃSKI, A., *Doczekałem się*, in: A. Dygasiński, *Na odlocie. Nowele*, Warszawa 1907, p. 113.

The time of *homo ludens* and *homo faber*, as determined by Anna Zadrożyńska, “were not contradictory, they designated only two extremes of experience. They were mutual, necessary and sufficient to complement themselves.”¹²⁰ It should be noted that the time of celebration is not the same as the time of *sacrum*, holiday time, because “it was the time of human thinking and acting in a different sphere than the one to which work and daily life belonged. It was a time of reflection, holiday, myth, creation of the world, creation of bonds and barriers between people and beings of all kind.”¹²¹ It seems to be a concept semantically wider than the *sacrum*, but dominated by the delimitation of periods of human life with holidays and related rites. The *Sacrum* put in order not only the religious world of the individual, as “daily communion with God was a natural thing. This was done because it was such a custom. That was a mental need. They all in the rural community did so.”¹²²

For rural people, religion and work determined their life. “Religion is one of the basic peasant values. Apart from the family, land, work and local values, it shapes the socio-cultural world. But even stronger footprint on the culture leaves the land, which is the essence of agro-centric systems.”¹²³

The rural child, like every member of rural community functioned in the times of *sacrum* and *profanum*. Only the completion of that time gave full influence on the education and socialisation of the child. The playing time and work time and participation in ceremonies (not only religious) determined the aim of education, namely the ability to function in a rural environment. What is important, education was done mainly through imitation, ranging from play, through minor works, to participation in all farming and social activities. It would be difficult to disagree with J. Płatek’s statement that “the rural education consists, [...] almost completely, in unintentional, practical and not education-oriented exertion of countless suggestions on the generation which is to enter the social group, and countless number of acts of imitation done by the generation being raised.”¹²⁴

It should also be remembered that at all times the child remained completely obedient to his or her parents, especially the father as the head of the family. He brought up (especially boys) in a harsh manner, rigorous, and not showing feelings. “Parents’ views on the upbringing of their children were primarily rooted in folk customs and religious beliefs, and were formed in the process of farm and household work.”¹²⁵

At the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was a decline in peasant culture in Poland. This was due to the increase in the amount of serfdom duties while at the same time reduction of the purchasing power of peasants. The rising amount of serf-

¹²⁰ Ibidem, pp. 203-204.

¹²¹ ZADROŻYŃSKA, A., *Homo faber i homo ludens*, p. 204.

¹²² SIMONIDES, D., *Sacrum jako zasada porządkowania świata w kulturze ludowej*, in: *Człowiek – dzieło – sacrum*, Ed. S. GAJDA, H.J. Sobeczko, Opole 1998, p. 99.

¹²³ STYK, J., *Sacrum w kulturze ludowej*.

¹²⁴ PŁATEK, J., *Wieś jako środowisko wychowawcze*, p. 57.

¹²⁵ KABZIŃSKA, Ł., KABZIŃSKI, K., *Rola ojca w rodzinie wiejskiej na przełomie XIX i XX w.*, p. 259.

dom duties also gave rise to educational problems, as it contributed to weakening the relationships between parents and children. Initially, in the 15th century, serfdom duties covered 1-2 days a week, with a growing tendency in subsequent centuries - up to 4-5 days a week.¹²⁶ Actually, the only defence against gradual pauperization was the parish school, as the skills taught by it could facilitate social advancement. In the countryside until the modernization of the nineteenth century, particular holidays and cycles of holidays defined boundary points between the segments of ordinary time (*profanum*) filled with work.¹²⁷ Actually, only the autumn and winter period was beneficial for the formation of family ties.

As a conclusion, it should be noted that the aim of raising a child, in the strictly joint times of *sacrum* and *profanum* - was to prepare the child for social roles. This was done, as noted by Łucja and Krzysztof Kabziński, by way of life, "by gradually entering into daily life situations, such as those related to running a farm, hard physical work from an early age, as well as pleasures, entering into social and neighbourly life or social obligations in their wider sense."¹²⁸

To conclude the discussion, a question arises: did rural children ever feel their childhood period in qualitative terms? In fact, unlike children of the upper classes, after leaving the infancy and post-maternity care period, the children were gradually introduced to work on the farm, and only a few of them could benefit from the school education or leisure time spent on games and plays.

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¹²⁶ HECK, R., *Gospodarka czynszowa (od poł. XIII do schyłku XV w.)*, in: *Historia chłopów polskich*, vol. 1, p. 191 et seq.

¹²⁷ NICZYPORUK, D., *Czas i przestrzeń w światopoglądzie mieszkańców wsi*, p. 78.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 264.; cf. KABZIŃSKI, K., *Warunki rozwoju dziecka w rodzinie wiejskiej okresu międzywojennego*, in: *Dziecko w rodzinie i społeczeństwie. Dzieje nowożytne*, vol.2, Ed. K. JAKUBIAK, W. JAMROŹEK, Bydgoszcz 2002.

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