I. Research articles

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Folk ways of augmenting the fecundity of plants. Green peas and cabbage*

With the examples of green peas and cabbage, two vegetables commonly grown and consumed in the Polish countryside in former times, the article discusses the folk ways of augmenting the fecundity of plants. The analysis is based on the plethora of 19th- and 20th-c. data (diverse texts of folklore, accounts of beliefs and practices) from the database of the Dictionary of Folk Stereotypes and Symbols. The actions designed to render cabbage heads big and hard, and pea pods full, were above all religious and/or magical in nature and were predominantly based on the creative power of language. The "vegetative force" derived from several spheres, among others the sphere of the sacred (God, Jesus, the Holy Mother, the saints cultivating the farmer's land and thus ensuring good harvest), the "cosmos" (e.g. stars and phases of the Moon, marking the favourable/unfavourable sowing time), the flora (other plants grown to turn away spells), humans and the human body (e.g. fertility dances that triggered and transmitted vital forces).

Key words: Polish folk culture, fecundity of plants, magical practices

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Nearly a hundred years ago Kazimierz Moszyński made the following observation concerning the cultivation of plants:

> Although the essence of growing crops is sowing or planting, cultivation usually involves additional treatment. In the process, the natural conditions of the environment are changed so that the plants can be protected, and their growth and fecundity is enhanced. They must be protected against wild animals and the plants that try to regain the land taken away from them by humans. And an enhancement of the growth and fertility of plants is, above all, a struggle against the impoverishment of soil. (Moszyński 1929: 1138)

In this context, the question arises how Polish country-dwellers of the past strived to enhance the growth and fecundity of their crops and how they protected them. I will address these issues with the examples of two vegetables, peas and cabbage – for centuries they belonged to the most important staple foods in the diet of Polish peasants, and a good harvest of these plants often protected allowed the farmers and their families to survive the winter.

Cabbage and peas were eaten (together and separately) both on an everyday basis and on special occasions, which is why they had become symbols of familiarity and native character. This is preserved in the following proverbs:

(1) When there is pea in the cottage and cabbage in the barrel, we won't suffer poverty, for cabbage is our hostess, and pea is our host. (NKKP)[1]

(2) Without peas and cabbage, a farmer sometimes has an empty stomach. (NKPP)[2]

Numerous references to these vegetables are also found in old ritual and magical practices, e.g. according to a 19th-c. record from the Podlasie region, the father, on returning home with his newly-baptised child, would put the child on the ground at the threshold and would say, beating lightly on the cushions that protected the child with a rod:

(3) And don't you go wandering around the village, and listen to your father and mother, and eat peas with cabbage – you'll be a good farmer. (Was Jag 112)[3]

In a New Year's speech, recorded by Aleksander Saloni in 1908, the author wishes the hosts a good harvest of peas and cabbage in the first

[1] Polish orig.: "Kiedy jest tylko groch w chałupie, a kapusta w kłodzie, to bieda nie dobodzie, boć kapusta to nasza gospodyni, a groch to gospodarz."

[2] "Gospodarz bez grochu i kapusty miewa brzuch pusty."

[3] "A nie chodź po wsi, a słuchaj się ojca, matki, a jédz groch z kapustą – bedzies dobry gospodarz."

place, which shows how important the position of these foodstuffs was in the hierarchy of traditional dishes:[4]

(4) May the New Year bring happiness and health, may you enjoy a good harvest of cabbage and peas, rye as big as a trough, wheat as big as a glove, potatoes as big as stumps, broad beans as big as clogs, and barley as big as a horse. You have baked sweet rolls, so give some to us, too. (MAAE 1908: 116)[5]

A characteristic trait of this speech, whose aim was to bring a good harvest, is that it incorporates cabbage and peas into the context of the greeting formula side by side with the most important cereals, potatoes, and broad beans. This is connected with the fact that in carolling, we are dealing with the acting word, the word as the prime mover in enhancing vegetation, "encouraging" a good harvest for the coming year. Piotr Caraman observes that carols and greetings should be understood as "fulfilled wishes" (Caraman 1933: 186–187). Carolling was "originally an agrarian rite", which was "practised in the spring, before ploughing. It had the momentous task of guaranteeing a fully successful future harvest, and involved ceremonial ploughing and sowing accompanied by various greetings and other magic formulas" (Caraman 1933: 340–342; cf. Bartmiński 2002: 17–52).

To ensure a good harvest of plants, farmers used not only rituals involving action but also verbal practices. In discussing these customs, I will be using examples from the rich collection of nineteenth and early twentieth century data from the Dictionary of Folk Stereotypes and Symbols (SSSL), the volume devoted to plants. Unfortunately, this material is not "symmetrical" genre-wise: it is richer in the case of peas, which are mentioned in carols, wedding songs, legends and descriptions of practices. References to cabbage are mainly found in harvest-enhancing incantations and rituals. I have not found any songs or folk tales that would contain motifs of enhancing the fecundity of cabbage (except the above-mentioned greetings with a magical and vegetation-boosting function). The fact that references to peas appear in a more varied body of documents can be explained in two ways: firstly, peas were one of the oldest staple foods in the diet of Polish country-dwellers,[6] cf. the following riddle:

[4] The collocation *kapusta i groch* 'cabbage and peas' appears in numerous variants of this speech. Sometimes *groch* also collocates with *pszenica* 'wheat', e.g. "Na szczęście, na zdrowie, na ten Nowy Rok, żeby się wam rodziła pszeniczka i groch, i żytko, i wszystko" (May the New Year bring happiness and health, may you enjoy a harvest of wheat and peas, and rye and all things nice; Kot Las: 159).

[5] "Na szczęście, na zdrowie, na ten Nowy Rok, niech sie wám tu rodzi kapusta i groch, zytko jak korytko, pszenica jak rękawica, ziémniáki jak pniáki, bób jak chodáki, a jęczmień jak koń. Piekliście tu szczodráki, bochnáki, dejcie tu i nám."

[6] According to Brückner (1970: 157), peas used to be an inseparable element of the

(5) What cereal is the oldest? Barley, because it has the longest moustache, and pea, because it is bald. (Sych SGKasz 5: 335)[7]

Secondly, it is itself a symbol of fecundity and has the power to increase the fertility of people, for example, Oskar Kolberg noted that the bride and groom after the blessing they received from their parents were showered with peas ("so that they should have as many offspring as there were pea grains") and wheat berries ("so that they should always have plenty of crops and bread") (K 28 Maz: 165). Cf. also the following remark:

> One of the most important features of legumes is their fecundity – from just one grain, there grows a vine with numerous pods containing many new seeds, which is a clear manifestation of the reproductive power of nature. (Kowalski 1998: 128)

This "reproductive power" is attributed to peas in a wedding song that features the archaic image of a hog digging in a patch of peas near a valley. The hog – a Solar animal – digs out golden grains from soil sown with peas, from which a goldsmith will make a golden cup for the bride and groom and their best men and maids of honour:[8]

(6) We sowed some peas at the valley,
and a hog came to dig in this pea patch.
It dug up a golden grain,
as big as a bucket.
What shall we do with this grain?
We shall take it to a goldsmith's shop.
What shall we have him cast from this grain?
Silver spoons – a golden cup.
Who shall drink from this cup?
The bride with the groomsmen
and the groom with the bridesmaids. (K 23 Kal: 169)[9]

In another version of this song, the gold peas are cast into a golden cup for the Lord Jesus and his angels:

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dinner in the homes of old nobility, where to invite someone for peas meant as much as to "invite them to dinner".

[7] "Jakié zboże je nåstarszé? Jiczmin, bo må nadłëgszi wąs i groch, bo je łësi."

[8] A similar motif is found in carols, in which the hog burrows under a fir tree and digs out a lump of gold. According to Bartmiński (2002: 246; cf. also SSSL 1(4): 185–186), this is a poetic symbol of the rebirth of the sun after the December 24 winter solstice.

[9] "Zasialiśmy grosku przy przyłozku, przy dolinie, / a w tym grosku wieprzak ryje. / Wyrył ci on złote ziarno, / a to ziarno zeby wiadro. / Gdziez to ziarno podziejemy, / do złotnika zawieziemy. / Cóz z tego ziarna lać każemy? / Śrybne łyze – złoty kielich. / Kto tym kielichem pijać będzie? / Młoda panna z drużebkamy [drużbiczkami], / a młody pan z druhenkamy."

(7) I sowed peas at the valley,
and a hog came to dig in the peas,
and it dug out a golden grain.
Pick it up, young lady.
And from this pea, (we shall make) a golden cup.
Who shall drink from this cup?
The Lord Jesus himself when he comes to pay his Christmas visit,
the Lord Jesus with his angels,
so let us come to the peas with our spoons. (K 23 Kal: 156)[10]

Pea has "reproductive power" here and the gold dug up from soil further enriches the notion of fertility with a connotation of wealth and sacredness (SSSL 1(4): 180). The joint drinking from the golden cup, on the other hand, is a symbol of human communion (in the original versions) or a mystical communion (secondary versions) with divine persons. The gist of both versions of this motif is elevation and participation in a sanctifying feast (SSSL 1(4): 265). The variant of the song sung at weddings ends in an invitation to join in the eating of peas ("Let us come to the peas with our spoons"). Peas were in fact one of the main dishes served in the past at a rural wedding – a pea dish was brought in solemnly to the room where the dinner was served, and the wedding guests danced with bowls filled with it and sang songs to the pea, telling its "story".[11] Oskar Kolberg gives the following description of a Mazovian custom:

(8) Dinner is served. When the time comes for the peas, a wreath is made of nuts wrapped in paper and a couple of spoons, bowls up, are stuck into a large densely-cooked peas dish placed on the table. The dish is covered with a white handkerchief, the nut wreath is placed on its top and the following song is sung:

When they ploughed for the peas,
They called upon the Lord Jesus.
When they sowed the peas,
They called upon the Lord Jesus.
When they harrowed the peas,
They called upon the Lord Jesus.

The song continues in this same vein, saying that the peas were picked, taken into the barn, threshed, winnowed, brought in, sorted, and stored – with each activity the Lord Jesus was called upon. And finally:

This pea with parsnip, good Mary with a pillow.

[10] "Siałam grosek przy dolinie, / a w tym grosku wieprzak ryje, / i wyrył ci złote ziarno, podnieś-ze go, moja panno. / A z tego prosku [groszku? KP] złoty kielich, / kto tym kielichem pijać będzie, / da sam Pan Jezus po kolędzie, / sam Pan Jezus z aniołkami, / my do grosku z łyzeckami."

[11] Cf. the Bulgarian "kolach (*колач*) story" (Carman 1933: 174–175), and the Polish "bread story" (Bartmiński 2002: 266–270).

And this pea with a lily, good Mary with a feather quilt.

Best man, are you dumb? Take the nut wreath not the one from rue.[12]
The best man takes the wreath and along with the piece of cloth takes it off the cooked peas, and then those gathered at the wedding table take the spoons and eat the peas. (K 26 Maz: 184)

In the "pea story" presented here, an important role is played by the Lord Jesus, who is called upon for help. Another version of this song, also written down by Kolberg, features the Good Mother of God, morning dew and a valley:

(9) Oh, pea! Oh, pea! You've been sown by the pit, by the valley, by (the shrine of) the Good Mother of God. (K 26 Maz: 98)[13]

Janina Szymańska gives the following commentary to this song:

These designations are symbolic and refer to the life-giving power of water and fertile valleys and the protective function of the Virgin Mary. These three symbols – cosmic and religious – protect, in a magical way, the power of the "wedding peas". (Szymańska 2013: 555)

And here is yet another version, recorded in the Podlasie region, in which peas are cultivated with the assistance of God, the Blessed Virgin, all the saints and morning dew:

(10) Oh, pea, Oh pea,
They have sown thee
After the morning dew was off,
With the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary
And all the saints.[14]

In volume 28 (on Mazovia) of Kolberg's collected works, the song about peas is accompanied by an additional description of a magical practice used when eating peas at a wedding:

(11) The bridesmaids and the groomsmen, while partaking of the peas, sometimes slap each other on the faces with their spoons amidst much rejoicing, and they say they are doing this so that the married couple should always have enough peas to have their faces smeared with it. (K 28 Maz: 180–181)

[12] "Na ten grosecek orano, / Pana Jezusa wzywano. / Ten grosecek siejono, / Pana Jezusa wzywano. / Ten grosecek wlecono, / Pana Jezusa wzywano. [...] Ten grosecek z pietruska, dobra Marysia z poduska. / A ten grosecek z lilija, dobra Marysia z pierzyna. / Starsy druzebka, cys głupi? Wianek z orzechów, nie z ruty."

[13] "O rosie! O rosie! [o grosie, grochu? KP] Siano cię po rosie, / przy dole, przy dolinie, / przy Mateńce Bożej."

[14] "Oj, ᵘo rosie, ᵘo rosie, / siano grosek po rosie, / z Panåm Bogåm, z Najświątsą Panną, / ze wsystkåmy świątåmy."

The participation of divine persons and the "cosmos" in the cultivation of peas and the eating of peas at the wedding was believed to guarantee a good harvest and, at the same time, was a harbinger of a future in which the young couple would never run out of this foodstuff. A similar situation can be recognised in New Year's wishing carols in which guests from heaven work the farmer's field, with pea being one of the crops they sow. Bartmiński says:

> An ideal situation, desired by the addressee, is presented as something that has already become reality. An intentional wish is hidden under a statement, as in: "We wish you the kind of life we sing about, so may Lord Jesus himself help you work the land and bless you". (Bartmiński 2002: 37)

A similar technique is used to construct images in a song about the golden plough, in which Lord Jesus together with St. John and St. Peter plough a farmer's field, and the Blessed Virgin brings them breakfast:

(12) They sat down to breakfast, and started to talk,
Started to talk about what they should sow.
What shall we sow in this sacred soil?
Rye and wheat and oats and corn.
Millet and Tartary buckwheat and a measure of peas.
There will be reapers there, all of them yeomen,
There will be sheaves aplenty and stacks aplenty. (Kaz Nuty 1994: 33)[15]

The golden plough here symbolises supernatural power and the sacredness of farmer's work (Niewiadomski 1992: 59–70; Bartmiński 2002: 232). By the same token, the measure of peas sown on sacred land is also blessed. In another carol, God summons the farmer because a hundred heaps of peas have grown in the latter's field. "A hundred heaps" is a magical hyperbolic formula. Pea is mentioned here among basic cereals, such as rye, wheat, barley, millet, and buckwheat (and is itself sometimes categorised as a cereal):

(13) Good evening, good host! To you,
The Lord God is calling on you to come and be joyful.
A hundred heaps of rye have grown in your field,
May God give you happiness and health in this house.
[and so on in subsequent stanzas:]
A hundred heaps of wheat have grown in your field...
A hundred heaps of barley have grown in your field...
A hundred heaps of millet have grown in your field...

[15] "Śniadać posiadali, tak se rozmawiali, / tak se rozmawiali, co będziemy siali? / Co będziemy siali na tej świętej roli: / żyto i pszenice, owies, kukurydze. / Proso i tatarke, no ji grochu miarke. / Będo tam żniwiarze same gospodarze, / będzie snop przy snopie i kopa przy kopie."

A hundred heaps of buckwheat have grown in your field...
A hundred heaps of peas have grown in your field. (K 56 RuśC: 131)[16]

Pea also appears among the many crops that the Lord Jesus puts on a farmer's field. There are, however, so many of them that e.g. Jan Święt limits himself to citing just the first two stanzas of the song:

(14) The Lord Jesus walks around his field,
And gives to him, hey, gives to him!
He [Jesus] stands him rye in three rows
In the field, hey, in the field!
Masters, Brethren, do not envy him
What I have given him.
Happiness and health – may the good farmer enjoy them in his home! (Święt Nadr: 72)[17]

In the second stanza, wheat takes the place of rye, and then the author only mentions the crops that appear later: barley, oats, millet, foxtail, Tartary buckwheat, corn, spelt, hemp, flax, potatoes, peas, beans, cabbage, rutabaga, beets, kohlrabi, turnip, onion, garlic, parsley, and lettuce. The song appears to be just an ordinary enumeration that can contain anything, with peas mentioned only in the thirteenth, less important stanza. Caraman, however, assigns a deeper meaning to this enumeration:

This Polish carol [...] points clearly to the belief in the necessity of enumerating all the kinds of crops there are, because leaving out any product could lead to a poor harvest. Indeed, the carol, which due to the extended enumeration seems long, is in fact very concise as it consists of only a few meaningful lines, which perform the function of a magical formula. The formula is repeated separately for each type of crop so as to attract magical powers to it, hence the two forms of repetition: stanzas and enumerations. In carols of this type, enumeration has the same purpose as in incantations, e.g. when chasing away a disease, one enumerates all body parts. Care is taken not to omit a single one because the disease that has been driven could take refuge in the part that has not been mentioned. (Caraman 1933: 465)

Also folk prose features motifs of divine intervention in the fecundity of plants. There is a legend, for example, which has it that peas were created from the tears of the Virgin Mary weeping over starving people:

[16] "Dobry wieczór, panie gospodarzu, do ciebie, / woła cię Pan Bóg na poradeczek do siebie. / Urodziło ci się sto kup żyta na polu, / daj że ci, Boże, szczęścia i zdrowia w tym domu. / Urodziło ci się sto kup pszenicy... / Urodziło ci się sto kup jęczmienia... / Urodziło ci się sto kup prosa na polu... / Urodziło ci się sto kup hreczki na polu..."

[17] "Chodzi Pánjezus po jego polu, / daje mu, héj daje mu! / Stawiá mu zyto trzema rzędoma na polu, héj na polu! / Panowie braciá, nie zázdroście mu, com mu dáł. / Scęście i zdrowie – gospodarzowi w jego dom!"

(15) God sent famine on people as a punishment for their sins, and nothing could have moved Him; then, the Mother of God began to weep, and Her tears fell to the earth and turned into peas that people gathered and ate. God took pity on people, who henceforth began to sow peas and called them the tears of the Virgin Mary. (PSL 1994 (3–4): 105–106)

In another legend, recorded by Kolberg in the Poznań region, pea grows miraculously inspired by a monk's prayer and by the starry sky:

(16) A monk stayed overnight in a farmer's household but he preferred to sleep in the stable with the farmhand. The friar went to the stable, slept there, and woke up; it could have been midnight or one o'clock. And the frost was horrible, the sky was full of stars, and it was snowing. So, goes out the friar from the stable, stands there in the farmyard, looks up, looks at the sky quite densely freckled with the stars and says: oh, dear God, if only someone sowed peas in this very hour, what peas they would be – they wouldn't be able to pick them all and their threshing floor would be too small to contain all the grains. The farmhand hears the words and sows a sackful of peas. And when the time came for the peas to bloom, they grew so densely that if someone had rolled an egg on them, it wouldn't have fallen to the ground. And when the farmhand cut the peas during the harvest, he filled the barn with the peas alone, so that he had no space for the other crop. The farmer was glad to see that and said that one always should believe in such things. (K 14 Poz: 161–162)

Just like peas, the stars are small and there are many of them, so the magic works here through similarity: the sky supports and nourishes the earth. A similar principle lies at the root of folk riddles in which pea is often a counterpart of stars, e.g.

(17) Roch [a name] walked along; he spilt some peas; the moon knew it but said nothing; the sun rose and picked them up. [i.e., stars] (ZWAK 1884: 322)[18]

(18) I laid the sheet, poured peas onto it and put a piece of bread there. [i.e., the sky, the stars, the moon] (ZWAK 1892: 208)[19]

In one of the riddles, cabbage appears alongside peas as an image of the full moon:

(19) A head of cabbage among peas. [i.e., the moon and the stars] (ZWAK 1882-1814)[20]

There are also numerous examples of ritual and magical practices performed to enhance a good harvest of peas and cabbage. On the one hand, these practices are growth-encouraging actions (verbal and physical, orders and prohibitions) whose goal is to make peas grow lush and with pods filled with many grains, and cabbage to form large, round, firm heads because

[18] "Sed Roch, ozsypał groch, misiąc wiedział nie powiedział, słońce wstało, poźbirało."
[19] "Posłałem prześcieradło, nasypałem grochu, położyłem chleba kawałeczek."
[20] "Pomiędzy grochem główka kapusty."

(20) A human head can be empty but a cabbage head cannot. (Sych SGKasz 2: 134)[21]

On the other hand, they are protective actions intended to keep these vegetables safe from bad weather, vermin, or the influence of supernatural forces.

Incantations to promote a good harvest of cabbage and peas were recited already at Christmas Eve vigil supper, during which these vegetables were served as basic dishes. Jan Kantor describes the following custom:

(21) Before the first meal is served, which is peas or peas with cabbage, the host takes from a bowl (or plate) a spoonful of peas, puts them on the window sill and calls out to the wolf, knocking on the window pane: "Wolf, wolf, come to the peas: If you don't come to the peas now, don't come until the New Year". (Kantor)

Often, instead of peas, shredded and cooked cabbage was used, which was thrown into each corner of the room, while wolves were called on not to do damage on the farm.[22] In many villages, when people ate cabbage with peas, they would grab one another by the head saying:

(22) Form nice pods, pea; form nice heads, cabbage; may the peas grow clean (of vermin) and may caterpillars not eat the cabbage". (MAAE 1914: 218).[23]

A similar custom is described by Seweryn Udziela:

(23) When they eat cabbage, the host hits his neighbour at the table lightly on the head and says: "Form nice heads, little cabbage, do", and the other household members do the same. When they eat round peas, they pull one another by the hair, saying: "Form nice pods, little pea, do". The host then takes a spoonful of peas and, throwing it outside the window, says: "Here, wolf, have a spoonful of peas, and don't come to us until after New Year's Day". (in ZWAK 1890: 39)

Wilhelm Gaj-Piotrowski notes that in the area of Rozwadów, "during Christmas Eve supper, people would unexpectedly beat one another on the forehead with spoons, believing that this encouraged cabbages to make

[21] "Pusto może bëc w lëdzkiė głowie, ale nię w kapustowė."

[22] Caraman notes that Belarusians had the custom of inviting frost during Christmas Eve supper, Romanians invited hail, "and in some villages, both Slavs and Romanians invited wild animals, the wolf and the bear, so that they wouldn't kidnap cattle, which was especially the case in herding areas. The meaning of these spells, which have an animist-anthropomorphic basis, is clear. They were intended as a favour to hail, frost, or other anthropomorphised natural phenomena which could do damage to crops, fruit trees [. . .] or [as a favour to] various dangerous animals. By inviting them to the Christmas Eve feast, people wanted to appease them and render them harmless throughout the following year" (Caraman 1933: 417).

[23] "Strączaj się groszku, składaj się kapusto, by groch rodził się czysty, a gąsienice, żeby nie jadły kapusty" (from Ostrów).

heads as big and round as the human head" (Gaj Rozw: 32). As in the case of the legend cited earlier, what is at work here is the magic of similarity – the similarity of twining pea vines to hair and cabbage to the human head. Words, which themselves have agency, are here reinforced by action (or the other way round), and all this happens at a unique, sacred time of the year.

Another well-known Christmas Eve custom was the throwing of peas against a cottage wall or the ceiling. It was believed that the more pea grains stuck to the wall or ceiling, the larger the harvest of peas would have been in the coming year (ŁSE 1961: 187) or that the peas would have grown taller:

(24) In our village, it was only at Christmas time, when we were having Christmas Eve Supper, that we threw peas at the wall and at the ceiling so that the peas should grow large. (Nieb Przes: 241)

Similarly, Stanisław Dworakowski reports:

In the village of Malec, near Ciechanowiec, household members took handfuls of roast peas from a clay bowl and ate, and the grandfather, who was the eldest member of the family, threw fistfuls of peas around the whole room, so that peas should grow well. (Dworakowski 1964: 37)

He then explains this custom as follows:

The tossing of peas, *kutia* [a traditional dish made from wheatberries, poppy seeds and honey; translator's note] or kissel jelly [a fruit dish thickened with potato starch; translator's note] up in the air was a magical vegetation-promoting ritual. The ideology of this ritual goes back to the times when today's Christmas Eve supper was the All Souls' Day feast. Through realistic gestures and wishes made at the feast, the living drew the attention of their dead ancestors to the most important problems of their existence, as if asking them in this way to make those wishes come true. In these circumstances, the wishes and gestures made became, owing to the intervention of the dead, a kind of magical spells. (Dworakowski 1964: 37)

As for cabbage, it was customary, for example in Podlasie, for a farmer's wife to throw it on the floor on Christmas Eve, "so that it should not send up a flower stalk but form tight heads" (Szym Podl 1: 355). In the village of Charzewice, household members who were eating cooked cabbage on Christmas Eve were warned not to shake it off their spoons or not to brush aside the protruding shreds from their spoons: "Don't touch it, let it dangle". A failure to do so could arouse the cabbage's "counter-reaction" in the new year, leading to a poor harvest (Gaj Rozw: 31–32). An interesting custom prevailed in Gorlice, where the first course of Christmas Eve supper was sauerkraut served straight from the barrel. When it was being eaten, the family and guests at the table had to twist their faces in disgust to deter caterpillars and other vermin from feeding on cabbage plants (Kul Rop: 261).

A good harvest of cabbage was also in focus during Shrove Tuesday celebrations:

(25) On Shrove Tuesday evening, women gathered in one house, where, on the pretence of doing some needlework, they held a party with vodka and dancing. They danced for a good harvest, for flax, for cabbage, for hemp. And the woman who tired herself out more, sweated more, and jumped higher, would have a better harvest. When it came to dancing for cabbage, the women had to be careful to dance around in an even circle, because should any of them have stepped inside the circle, the cabbage would have been wormy. And should any of the women have danced on the side, the cabbage would have been coarse and would have bolted. (Nieb Przes: 232, report from Mińsk Mazowiecki, Grabianów)

A similar description is given by Jan Pośpiech, who writes about dances[24] accompanying the celebration of the so-called King on Horseback, which took place on Shrove Tuesday in the village of Solarnia in Silesia:

The musicians began to play, the horse was prancing and frolicking and the dancers in fancy dresses danced with the members of the household to ensure good fortune and fertility of the homestead. [. . .] There was a custom of ordering, for an extra charge, of special ceremonial dances for cabbage, for potatoes, for mushrooms, for blueberries, etc., with the host uttering the magic formula: "May I prosper this year". The dances and prances that were then performed had a specific purpose: they were supposed to magically cause the plants to grow large and tall. (Pośp Śląsk: 139–140)

Another type of harvest-promoting practice involved appropriate preparation of the fields for sowing. Consider the following custom regarding the growing of peas, celebrated in Masuria:

Ash burnt during the period between Christmas and Twelfth Night, added to a small amount of corn seeds, is sprinkled in spring and autumn onto soil in the shape of a cross, with the following words being uttered: "In the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit". Then the harvest will be good. Such a cross is only made on a field intended for the sowing of peas. (Wisła 1892: 773, the village of Dąbrówno)

Henryk Biegeleisen describes an even more archaic practice:

[24] Henry Biegeleisen looks for the origins of harvest-encouraging dances in pre-Christian rites: "Women in Red Ruthenia dance in the village inn, leaping high into the air so that their flax would grow tall. A similar dance, performed in the carnival by married women in the Czech Republic and Germany for flax to grow beautiful, is a remnant of pre-Christian rituals, during which dance – as is still the case in half-savage tribes – was one of the important component acts of a cult celebrated to beg gods to bless the family, the homestead, and the fields. People danced and pranced in the belief that this would encourage a good harvest, and the higher they leapt, the taller their flax, cabbage and corn would grow. Dancing brought in prosperity and happiness, and was pleasing to gods. Dances are today held by ancient organisations of women and youths who celebrate this cult, just as the Ancient peoples of Greece and Rome used to and as some barbaric peoples are still observed to do" (Bieg Koleb: 195).

[I]n Masuria (Prussia), a custom dating from remote antiquity had survived up to the 19th century: it involved a naked woman or one carrying her shirt in her hands, walking around a field intended for the sowing of peas, to protect the peas from vermin. (Bieg Lecz: 294)

Appropriate preparation of the seeds for sowing was also important: in some regions, farmers used pea grains that they had taken in their pockets to church on St. Stephen's Day (December 26) and thrown at the priest, to commemorate the stoning of the martyr saint – these grains, when sown, were supposed to give a good yield of peas (ZWAK 1890: 42). To protect peas against vermin, the grains intended for sowing was enriched with ash from burnt Easter palms (Stel Pom 1933: 135) or with crushed leftovers of food blessed on Holy Saturday (Karw Dobrz: 198). Farmers also abstained from eating peas on the day of sowing (MAAE 1900: 108) and did not break wind while sowing so as to keep vermin away from the peas (Wisła 1892: 773). Peasants also respected the unwritten law whereby a farmer should not give or sell pea grains to another person before they had sown their own field – if he did, his blessing was given away (Wisła 1892: 773). In the case of cabbage, the various practices were mostly aimed at protecting the plants from vermin (especially caterpillars): cabbage seeds were soaked in wormwood juice (Hens Wiedz: 153), passed through a gut-casing taken off Easter sausage blessed in church (Udz Biec: 146) or through a hole made in the head of a herring blessed on Holy Saturday (MAAE 1904: 44).

As for the sowing and planting, it was important for cabbages to be planted at the right time – the most appropriate dates were holidays or days dedicated to particular saints; cf. the following proverbs:

(26) He who sows peas on Good Tuesday, will gather a sackful for each pot of grains. (NKPP)[25]

(27) Plant cabbage seedlings on Good Friday, and the vermin will not touch them. (NKPP)

(28) Consider this, brethren farmers, Saint Joseph [March 19] tells you to sow peas. (NKPP)[26]

(29) Benedict [March 21] goes to the field with peas, Wojciech (Adalbert) [April 23] with oats, Mark [April 25] with flax, and Philip [May 1] with Tartary buckwheat. (NKPP)[27]

(30) Sow peas on St. Mark's Day [April 25], and you'll harvest a full measure. (Nieb Przes: 26)[28]

[25] "Kto groch sieje w Wielki Wtorek, za garniec zbierze worek."

[26] "Uważcie se, gospodarze: święty Józef groch siać każe."

[27] "Benedykt w pole z grochem, Wojciech z owsem jedzie, Marek ze lnem, a Filip tatarkę wywiedzie."

[28] "Siej groch świntego Marka, to bedzie go połna miarka."

(31) On St. Matthias' Day [February 24], sow a lot of cabbage. (Stel Pom 1933: 97)[29]
(32) Don't sow cabbage on St. Sophia's Day [May 15], cause it will rot away. (ZWAK 1882: 235)[30]

Proverbs also speak of changes occurring in nature that mark the time of sowing:

(33) When the oak breaks into leaves, then you start to sow peas. (NKPP)[31]
(34) When cranes fly for the first time, then it is right to sow peas. (NKKP)[32]

The time of sowing also depended on the weather; for example, pea was sown when the wind blew from the west and south, i.e. from the "soft side", so that the peas should be easy to cook, or when there were little bright clouds on a clear sky (ŁSE 1963: 122). Cabbage was best sown during a fine, gentle, misty rain, a kind of drizzle – actually its name, *kapuśniak/kapuśniaczek*, lit. 'cabbage soup', derives exactly from this tradition (Szym SDom 3: 368). Farmers also believed that the harvest of peas and cabbage was contingent upon the appearance of the stars and the moon at the time of sowing.[33] It was recommended that peas be sown at night, when the sky was lit by numerous stars, because then the plants would grow lush and abundant (Kul Wiel 3: 512) or at the full moon, so that the pods would be full of plump seeds (K 48 Ta-Rz: 51). Sown at the new moon, pea plants were supposed to grow younger every new moon, never to ripen at all (K 15 Poz: 129). Cabbage, in contrast, was best planted at the new moon, because it would then be firm and would not rot in the barrel; sown when the crescent was waning, it would rot in the field, and when put into barrels, it would go soft and rot (OrL 1935: 158). People in the countryside also observed various bans regarding the time of sowing, e.g. pea was not sown on days whose name contained the letter "r", because this would encourage worms (Polish: *robaki*) to feed inside the pods (K 3 Kuj: 94). Cabbage was not planted on the day of a funeral, especially if the deceased had been old, sick, or consumptive, because then the cabbage would dry out completely (Dworakowski 1964: 192), etc. Finally, large importance was attached to the very moment of sowing or planting. Here, the most interesting are the

[29] "Św. Maciej, dużo kapusty nasiej."
[30] "Nie sadź kapusty na św. Zofiję, bo ci kapusta zgnije."
[31] "Gdy pęka dębina, groch się siać zaczyna."
[32] "Jak pierwszy raz lecą żurawie, wtedy się groch godzi siać prawie."
[33] According to Ewa Masłowska, this is related to the belief that the moon governs the underworld and everything that is yet unborn, which means it also affects the development of plants (Masłowska 2014: 46–48).

numerous incantations associated with cabbage, which combine words with magical actions (cf. Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2007: 187–194):[34]

(35) When sowing cabbage, the village women take a stinging nettle (*Urtica urens L.*) and a rock in their hands, then stick the nettle in the ground at the front of the patch and weigh it down with the rock, saying: "Just as this nettle takes root everywhere, let the cabbage do so too; just as this rock is hard, let the heads of cabbage be such". (ZWAK 1882: 235)

(36) When cabbage is planted, a passer-by says: "Let the soul rock back and forth, the seedlings are coming up". The person planting the cabbage answers: "This has happened to me already, may I see a hundred heads of cabbage". The passer-by then takes a handful of sand or dirt from the path and throws it on the patches to keep the caterpillars away. (ZWAK 1885: 36)

(37) In Korytnica, there is a custom connected with the planting of cabbage that involves a man or a woman sticking a nettle in the middle of the patch and saying: "Let the loot I get here be as big as my rear". (Hens Roś: 39)[35]

(38) In Beisce, if two people plant cabbage..., they wrestle one another when the job is done; the person who has been knocked to the ground, remains seated or kneeling and utters the following words: "Grow little cabbage, grow as big as a quarter". (ZWAK 1897: 22)

(39) They thrust a horse's skull mounted on a pole in the cabbage patch to protect the vegetables from a curse cast by a malevolent glare, and they accompany this action with the following incantation: "Lest bad, hostile people should curse our cabbage, we need to attend to it, put a dead horse here close-by".[36] A dead horse's head, and generally skulls and remains of dead people or animals, have the magic power of bringing fertility and happiness. (Bieg Lecz: 351)

Other typically magical practices employed when planting cabbage included: carrying the seedlings intended for planting on a white plate, so that the cabbage should grow white (Wisła 1901: 180); clutching one's head while planting so that the heads of cabbage would grow large (Wit Baj: 155); tumbling to the ground on a cabbage patch so that the cabbage would grow so large that its heads would topple over (Wisła 1901: 180); making nests in the patches and putting eggs into them, so that the cabbage would grow into huge heads (Nieb Przes: 242); burying eggs in furrows so that cabbage stalks would be as white as egg shells (Fed Żar: 278). On leaving the field in the evening, peasants often thrust the stake that they had previously used to make holes in the ground for planting the seedlings, in the furrow with the tiny cabbage plants, so that the cabbage would grow as tall as that stake (ŁSE 1963: 122).

[34] In the dictionary *Slavyanskye drevnosti*, incantations are defined as "short folklore texts, serving as magical means of obtaining a desired thing in therapeutic, protecting, fertility-related, and other rituals" (Tolstaya 1999: 239, quoted from: Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2007: 187).

[35] "Niech będą takie łupy, jak moje dupy."

[36] "Źli ludzie zaciekli, by nam kapustę nie urzekli, trza, byśmy ją opatrzyli, zdechłego konia tu blisko wstawili."

Historical sources record several dozen other practices related to further cultivation of peas and cabbage, their harvesting and storage – too numerous to mention in this article. In general terms, these were rituals intended to protect the plants from adverse weather and pests. For example, to protect peas from lightning, farmers drove wicker poles stripped of bark into a pea patch, so that lightning should not burn the flowers (Udz Biec: 146). Cabbages had to be protected against caterpillars (variously called *gąsienica*, *gąska*, *liszaj*, or *lis*). To keep those pests away from their plants, peasants commonly left various sacramentals in cabbage patches: Easter palms, shells from Easter eggs, twigs from Corpus Christi altar decorations, or herbs blessed on Assumption Day (Our Lady of the Herbs Day, August 15). On St. John's Eve and St. John's Day, girls gathered around cabbage patches, carrying burning torches and singing:

(40) Go away foxes, or I'll burn your ears; go away moths to the Świątniki field. (ŁSE 1962: 139)[37]

Farmers used to bury a crayfish in a patch of cabbage (MAAE 1904: 37); they sprinkled furrows with rue juice (ZWAK 1895: 63); the plants were brushed with a broom that had previously been used to sweep a room after a death (Bieg Śmier: 107); cabbage plants were sprinkled with pulverised remains of the first pierid butterfly of the season (Kul Rop: 87). If the caterpillars were already feeding on cabbage, it was advisable to bite one of them in half and put it on a cabbage plant to deter the other pests (Wisła 1899: 51); cabbage leaves were also sprinkled with a decoction of chicken manure, or chicken manure was burnt on windy days in places where the largest numbers of caterpillars (or aphids) were found, so that smoke would spread over the whole field (Święt Nadr: 3), etc.

* * *

The analysis of extensive documentation shows that the fecundity of peas and cabbage was affected by various spheres of human existence, among others:

1. The sphere of the sacred: God, Jesus, Virgin Mary, the saints, perceived not only as divine guardians from heaven, whom one asks for a blessing, intercession or patronage, but also as persons who, due to the creative power of language, "step down" from heaven to cultivate the land with the farmers and so help them obtain an abundant harvest. The sacred realm of human existence also encompassed holidays and days dedicated to particular saints, associated with specific practices and sacramentals, such as

[37] "Uciekojcie lisy, opole wom usy, uciekojcie mole na świątnickie pole."

Easter palms, blessed Easter eggs, crumbled leftovers from the Easter food basket added to the sowing seeds or plugged into the soil.

2. The cosmos, e.g. the stars or the phases of the moon, which defined what time was favourable/unfavourable for sowing.

3. Other plants or animals, e.g. nettle planted together with cabbage or a horse's skull thrust on a pole into patches of cabbage to reverse a hex.

4. The human being and the human body as a source of "vegetative power": in the case of cabbage, references were made to the head (shape, hardness, and size) and buttocks (size) and in the case of peas – to hair (length, the curledness). This sphere also included dances for a good harvest performed to release vital power and impart it to the plants.

When looking at these issues from the perspective of cultural codes, as discussed by Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska (2016), one notices that one function – here the fecundity-related function of cabbage and peas – can be expressed through several codes. The two main codes used in the material studied are the verbal code (manifested mainly in New Year speeches, carols, and songs to peas) and the action code (the numerous ritual-plus-magical vegetation-enhancing practices), which are sometimes combined together (e.g. in incantations recited during the planting of cabbage). Other codes found in the body of texts being analysed include the music and dance code (e.g. dances to the cabbage), the material code (e.g. putting sacramentals on vegetable patches), the temporal code (e.g. associated with the time of sowing), the locative code (e.g. performing practices in the field where the plants have been sown or planted), and indirectly also the personal code (e.g. the tossing of peas on Christmas Eve was a privilege of the host, while the tossing of cabbage and most of the work related to cabbage were the tasks of the hostess).

But to what extent were the methods of enhancing the fecundity of plants discussed here actually effective? In the passage quoted in the beginning, Moszyński observes that "an enhancement of the growth and fertility of plants is, above all, a struggle against the impoverishment of soil" (Moszyński 1929: 1138). However, the data discussed in this study do not confirm this observation. The texts contain very few references to or recommendations concerning the actual use of fertilisers to enrich soil, e.g. "Peas should be sown on very old manure" (ŁSE 1961: 28) or "Cabbage calls for dung" (Szym SDom 3: 368). It is clearly seen that the folk ways of enhancing the fecundity of plants were primarily religious and/or magical in nature and were largely based on verbal actions. As such, they are difficult to judge in terms of effectiveness.

translated by Klaudia Wengorek-Dolecka

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