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## Ritual and cultural change. Transformations in rituals at the junction of pagan religion and Christianity in early medieval Poland

### Introduction

In archaeology, the achievements of contemporary religion studies or cultural anthropology have been perceived in a very cautious way. This has led to many problems which persist despite several detailed studies on the subject also in Central European archaeology (e.g. Gediga 1976; Szafrński 1979 and Łowmiański 1979 from a historian's perspective). The question of the proper selection and verification of the pieces of evidence used to study prehistoric religions has been extensively discussed. This discussion has mainly taken place in the context of the simplified attribution of some 'cultic' properties to artefacts of unknown or ambiguous functions (e.g. Posern-Zieliński 1982, 189; Gediga 1980, 184). Such division derives from the discrete (i.e. only usable or only cultic) properties of any analysed item or structure and thus reflects a clear division between the sacred and mundane realms. The weak points of archaeological research into religious phenomena based on artefact studies were pointed out by A. Posern-Zieliński (1982, 189–192). These weak points include the following: interpretative schematism, a *priori* classification of finds according to their usable/unusable functions, invalidated comparisons, lack of methodological discipline, interpretative conservatism and the isolationism which separates archaeology from the current achievements of many important humanities (ibid., 190). That has resulted both in a dual vision of life in prehistoric and early historic societies and in the archaeology of religion and ritual being treated in an extremely cautious way which leaves such studies behind the main research interests (Kadrow 2006, 136; Baron 2010, 419).

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The last two decades have however demonstrated an increased interest of archaeologists in ritual and religion studies, what has resulted in the rejection of a division of the sacred and profane areas of human activity and bringing ritual, (viewed as integral to domesticity), into daily life including, for example, such aspects as storage patterns, diet, refuse management or technology (e.g. Brück 1999; Bradley 2005).

## Aims and methods

The paper aims at presenting an interpretation of the changes in rituals against the background of the general political and social transformation witnessed by the early Polish state between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Observations of the remains of cult activities discovered at early medieval sites have demonstrated that some of them appeared as late as the 11–12<sup>th</sup> centuries – that is to say, after the radical actions which were taken against pagan religion. Specific type of rituals connected with construction activities i.e. foundation sacrifices emerge, in my opinion, as active factors of pagan identity confronted with the Christian ideology at the beginning of second millennium.

To demonstrate this, I present examples of the various types of foundation sacrifices which are recorded in the archaeological evidence. The theoretical framework of the interpretation is a concept of moral order introduced by R. Wuthnow (1987).

For the sake of the study I applied a functional definition of ritual which I understand as a process (including its performative and communicative aspects) which can be regarded as a symbolical-expressive behaviour mode in which communicates and consolidates certain social relations. Ritual is a type of activity (collective activity in particular) which „communicates something about social relations, often in a relatively dramatic or formal manner” (Wuthnow 1987, 109). The characteristics of ritual understood in this way include formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule governance, sacred symbolism and performance (Bell 1992, 94–95).

According to Wuthnow, moral order may be understood as a complex of ‘definitions of the manner in which social relations should be constructed’. The moral order is based on a balance between three types of moral codes which Wuthnow denotes as those referring to distinction between: 1) the object to which defined activities are addressed; 2) individuals’ inner selves and roles they play; 3) the inevitable and the intentional (1987, 145). A disturbed balance between the codes or lack of distinction would result in loss of self-worth and frustration (ibid., 70). In Wuthnow’s view, ritual ensures dramatization of collective values and manifests the moral individual’s responsibility for maintenance of them (ibid., 140). Ritual plays a role in the situation of uncertainty and suspense in social relations ordered by the moral codes. The level of intensity of the collectively expressed and enacted ritual depends on the level of uncer-

tainty experienced by individual members of a population. This uncertainty arises from the increasing options available, the crisis of authority, ambiguity in institutional orders, a lack of clarity in values, equivocation in regard to cultural symbols and the precarious nature of social contacts. Intensified ritual actions are a response to increasing uncertainty experienced by the population. Sub-classes of codes, rituals and resources produce ideologies which are the essential components of the moral order. Wuthnow points out that social uncertainty accelerates the production of ideologies. The main factors influencing this process are: a high degree of social heterogeneity, a high degree of transformation (transformations of authority, the redistribution of resources, the establishment of new structures and new social relations), the inflexible nature of cultural codes and authority and their limited ability to control new cultural codes (ibid., chapter 5).

### Early Christianity in Poland

It is not my point to present the Christianization process of Central Europe which has been a subject of detailed study in numerous publications (e.g. Gieysztor 1962; Łowmiański 1979; Sommer, Třeštík, Žemlička 2007; Urbańczyk, Rosik 2007; Berend, Laszlovsy, Zsolt-Szakács 2007; Shepard 2007). What I find important, is that Poland's conversion represents an almost voluntary model of conversion to the new beliefs, without visible or decisive direct external factors (Strzelczyk 2001, 52). P. Urbańczyk listed potential advantages attractive enough to pagan leaders to lead them to promote the new religion despite its radical influence on most aspects of social reality (1998). According to him: 'Conversion offered political leaders reinforcement and stabilization of their power as well as diplomatic acceptance among Christian monarchs. It promoted a deep change of official ideology and the subsequent Christianization of subject populations. This was made easier because of pagan pragmatism which accepted differences in local religious systems and 'judged' the gods by their effectiveness in providing daily prosperity. Thus complex strategies showing the might, opulence and advantages of the new religion often found positive response among pagans who were persuaded to follow their leaders with no need to use coercion' (Urbańczyk 1998, 133). That view is supported by J. Strzelczyk who argues that 'taking what was certainly a difficult decision concerning the break with the existing beliefs and the system of values connected with it, the expected social consequences of the conversion were the ones which counted most' (1998, 53). Mieszko I – one of the first rulers of the Polish state was baptized in 966 thus initializing Christianization within his realms. In 1000, his son and successor, Boleslaw I was given by Emperor Otto III permission to establish the first Polish archbishopric in Gniezno. However, soon after, in 30s' of 11<sup>th</sup> cent., after the invasion of Poland by Bohemian Brzetyslav, the very centre of Poland (Great Poland) experienced a series of events called the pagan reaction.

Scholars point out religious (reluctance to accept Christianization, the suppression of pagan traditions), economic and political reasons of the uprising resulted in chaos in the young Polish state. The reaction was suppressed in 40s' and resulted in decisive actions against the remains of pagan cults (Gieysztor 1962; Łowmiański 1979, 311–313).

We know very little about pagan religion in Central Europe and what little is known, reflects the opinion, or rather distaste of the clergy on this subject. Gallus Anonymus at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> cent ending his sketch history about Poland before the Baptism writes: „But let us not dwell on the history of a people whose recollections are lost in the forgetfulness of the centuries and who mistaken idolatry as condemned, and pass briefly over it to the recording of matters which faithful memory has preserved” (after Strzelczyk 2001, 48). The most recent comparative study of Slavic religion and mythology have been presented by H. Łowmiański (1979), A. Brückner (1980), A. Gieysztor (1986; 2006) and recently by A. Szyjewski (2003). The authors attempted to give a full vision of what is known about the Slavic beliefs, their gods, cosmogony, customs and rituals based on historical, ethnographical, archaeological evidence and language studies. In my paper, information on Central European pagan mythology derives mostly from the last three publications.

### House as a critical space

Clearly the house is an element of the cultural landscape which has profound meaning. In Slavic folklore, the house is regarded as an area particularly exposed to demonic activity together with the air, the forest, fields, water basins and farmsteads. Therefore the welfare of its inhabitants required support from numerous house spirits (Benedyktynowicz, Benedyktynowicz 1992, 53). This was achieved by making various offerings (Szyjewski 2003, 185). Needless to say, there are many different house spirits known from folklore which are represented in human or animal shape (Szyjewski 2003, 166–167) and which bring both good and bad luck.

As anthropologists argue, building rituals belong to activities which reflect the transformation of nature into culture and wild into tamed. Many scholars demonstrate that rituals constitute an inherent essence of technology and thus cannot be separate from daily life activities (Bajburin 1990, 62; Bradley 2005). This is ritual what endows an object with meaning and, finally, connects it with an area of senses comprehensible for a given community. Foundation offerings, recognized as the material remains of building rituals, are recorded worldwide in various cultural traditions and despite the enormous variety of offered symbols and procedures, the basic sense of the rite remains the same. The offering values the space, distinguishes an area of the highest sacral significance, purifies it and authorizes the initiation of the construction. Thus the erection of a house is directly connected with the offering that was made (e.g. Bajburin 1990; Brewster 1996, 36).

Most of the recognized remains of foundation rituals are bone deposits situated under or in the vicinity of various constructions, including houses. What makes the bone deposits different from common food debris? L. K. Horwitz (1987 after Kansa, Campbell 2004) mentions such criteria as: the presence of whole, unbutchered animals or articulated portions of animals, the presence of very young or very old animals, a selection of specific parts, an abundance of one sex and/or a particular taxon, the presence of rare taxa, association with human remains and/or grave goods. According to T. Węgrzynowicz, the criteria of ritual nature of the deposits include unique or unusual features, traces of structured and deliberate deposition, lack on any practical aspects in killing and deposition of animals, selection both on taxon and body part level (1982, 20f). In other words, the deposits are distinguished on the basis of the nature and context of their deposition or their association with other archaeological remains of an unusual or religious character. Obviously any of these characteristics can often be attributed to non-ritual behaviour, however the co-occurrence of some of them may indicate ritual activities of different types.

## Foundation offerings

I have selected several sites to present some issues and research questions relating to these issues.

The foundation sacrifices have been defined on the basis of the context in which they were found – not of the nature of the particular sacrifice. Foundation sacrifices have been found within various types/elements of buildings, including deposits revealed in post holes, along buildings' walls and under floors or hearths (Beilke-Voigt 2007, 48). That these issues have been neglected by archaeologists for such a long time results in a relatively poor body of evidence (*ibid.*). Some remarks on foundation sacrifices have been briefly presented in excavation reports but they have never become a subject of any detailed study (e.g. Kaźmierczyk 1993; Bukowska-Gedigowa, Gediga 1986). Most contributions are lexicon and encyclopedias entries (e.g. Hinz 1976; Hilczer-Kurnatowska 1982). In Polish archaeological literature, a full definition of Central European medieval foundation sacrifices was presented by Z. Hilczer-Kurnatowska, who notices that the custom seems to be common in the early Middle Ages (1982, 52–54).

Foundation offerings were deposits containing vessels, human and/or animal bones which were situated in various parts of buildings. In further paragraphs I will focus on the most common and easily identified animal offerings.

Animal sacrifices connected with construction activities are much more widely recognized in archaeological evidence. In particular horse skulls have been discovered at many early medieval sites. They were recognized under houses in Gdańsk (11–13<sup>th</sup> cent.), Pułtusk (12<sup>th</sup> cent.), Santok (12–13<sup>th</sup> cent.), Kalisz (11<sup>th</sup> cent.), Wrocław Ostrów Tumski (11<sup>th</sup> cent.), Opole (12–13<sup>th</sup> cent.)

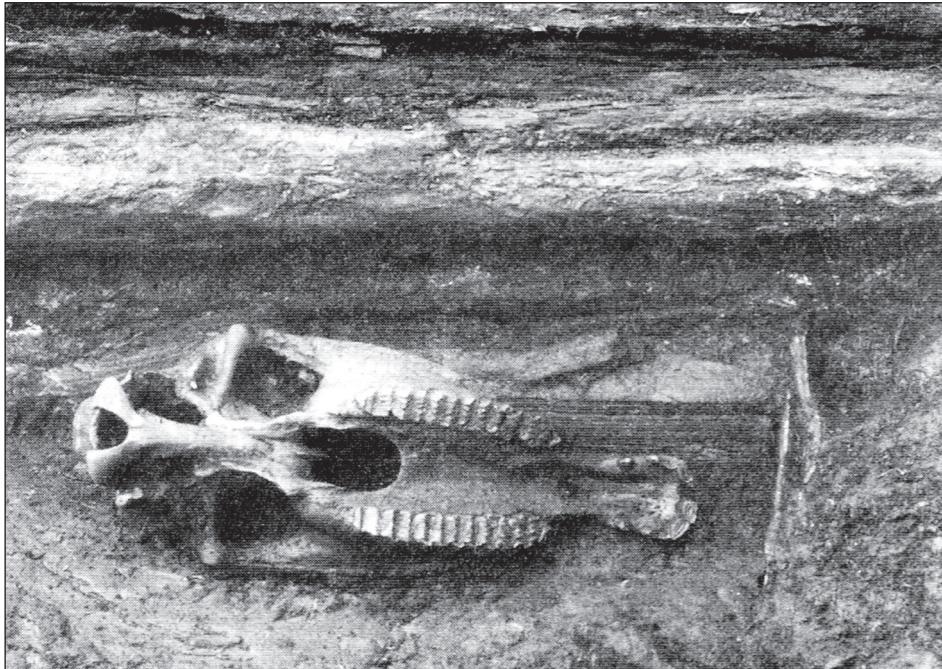


Fig. 1. Opole. Horse skull under a house wall (after Gediga 1996)

or Novogrod Veliky (10–14<sup>th</sup> cent.) – to mention a few after Kurnatowska (1982). Animal sacrifices usually consist of skulls placed under the logs of a house but there are known examples of deposits near wells or under ramparts as presented above. In Wrocław, a horse cranium was discovered at an entrance to a building. Several examples of foundation offerings come from the fortified settlement in Opole where both horse and dog skulls deposited under house walls were recorded (Gediga 1996, 160). The most interesting is a postcranial skeleton of a young horse and a wild boar mandible under a house floor. There is archaeological evidence of very late foundation offerings which reflect older, pre-Christian traditions. For example in Mstěnice (Czech Republic) a complete horse skeleton with horseshoes was discovered under a main gate of a mansion dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 2) (Nekuda 2004, 482).

Ethnographic evidence demonstrates that animal sacrifices were practiced up to the end of 19<sup>th</sup> cent. (sic!). This is confirmed by examples of cock sacrifices known from Poland (Gajek 1934, 115).

Bearing in mind the above mentioned criteria for ritual deposits, one may note that the presented finds seem to represent the remains of animal sacrifices. Usually skulls were selected for deposition. Skulls are regarded to represent the offered life and to embody the most valuable part which was to be given to the gods (Kowalik 2004, 414). Moreover, amongst such remains of animal offerings,

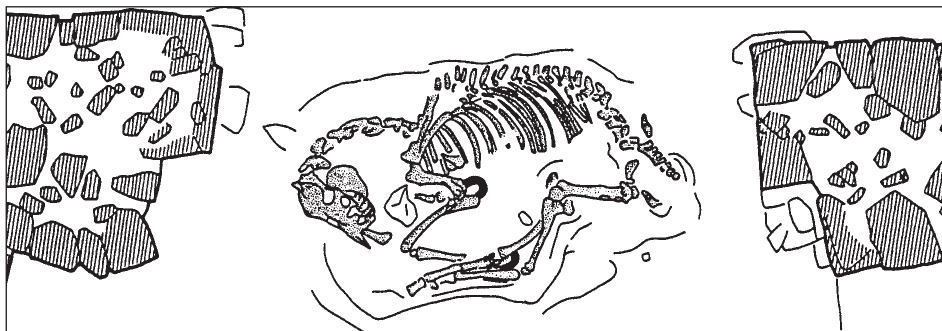


Fig. 2. Mstěnice. Horse foundation sacrifice under a gate of 15<sup>th</sup> cent. mansion (after Nekuda 2004)

horses seem to be the most frequent. Studies on early medieval horse sacrifices recorded in Slavic areas have an extensive bibliography (e.g. Rajewski 1975) and these animals are regarded to be of the highest value in various ritual activities, in particular in divination (Śłupecki 1994, 29; Szyjewski 2003, 144) and spring festivals (Gieysztor 2006, 133–136).

## Discussion

Most of these horse skulls were deposited from the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> cent. while this part of Europe had been Christian for at least a century. Obviously, deposits made of organic materials which are not recorded by archaeologists cannot be excluded; however, it is clear that this certain type of offering appears in this very specific period.

H. Łowmiański argues that in the end of 12<sup>th</sup> cent. the whole Slavic world was Christian including not only elites but the whole society (1979, 282) while pagan cults were, at least in most parts of Central Europe, marginalized (ibid., 301). Of course the level of Christianity varied remarkably even in neighbouring areas and two large settlement centres from SW Poland, Wrocław and Opole, illustrate this issue. A settlement of Wrocław Ostrów Tumski (the Cathedral Island) reaches back to the beginning of 10<sup>th</sup> cent. which in late 10<sup>th</sup> cent. became a part of Poland and after 1000 was granted a bishopric. The cathedral (and soon other churches) and ducal castle were focal points of centre's growing importance (Kaźmierczyk 1991). A fortified settlement in Opole, 80km east from Wrocław, was set in the beginning of 11<sup>th</sup> cent. and never reached the administrative importance of Wrocław (Gediga 1996, 159–160). Discoveries on both sites demonstrated a visibly longer continuation of pagan practices in Opole which are recorded up to the end of 13<sup>th</sup> cent. while in Wrocław they are not visible after the 11<sup>th</sup> cent. (Gediga 1996, 166).

Pagan practices were incorporated into Christian traditions as European Christianity in its early stages demonstrated the ability to adopt many pagan

traditions when confronted with daily aspects of individual and social life (Urbańczyk 1998, 133). The interaction between church ideology and non-Christian belief resulted in a culture-ideological complex which A. Gurevich calls „popular Christianity” (1988, 5). Considered in this form Christianity demonstrated the ability to combine or ‘hide’ old customs in new forms (Urbańczyk 2008, 169). However, there are many examples from early medieval Europe of customs expressing conscious opposition toward Christian ideology or an increase of pagan rituals confronting Christianity (Łowmiański 1979, 398). Deliberate use of prehistoric burial mounds considered as monuments opposite to churches in Western Europe may be considered a good example here (van de Noort 1993). The grave goods including warrior (and thus considered as pagan) grave goods and the graves’ specific location, far from churchyards – which were desired places for Christians – are seen to be a medium for expressing strong pre-Christian opposition directed towards Christian elites (ibid.).

What was the reason for the persistence of old customs on the margin Christianity which already offered its believers complete ideological support? In pagan belief systems an attitude was present which might be described as the concept of usefulness. Gods were expected not only to be favourable but also useful and effective and lack of expected results proved their weakness or disfavour (Strzelczyk 1998, 59).

Why did the foundation sacrifices visibly increase in Slav areas after confronting the new ideology? The competitive nature of pagan beliefs in situations when the new religion failed to have an effect might have been one reason. Pagan religions are believed to have been collective, decentralized, locally changing and difficult to control (Urbańczyk 1998, 131). The gods expected veneration, sacrifices and defined cult practices under threat of revenge if these practices were neglected but, as regarding morality, they might at most disapprove of failure to observe collective customary laws. There were no moral regulations issued from beyond a given group, thus H. Łowmiański argues that pagan practices were activated when certain results, depending on specific (i.e. Christian) moral attitude and qualifications were impossible to achieve (1979, 359–364).

While analyzing the increasing frequency of foundation rituals within the frames of Wuthnow’s theory, based on the moral codes, resources and authority, we can present both houses, rituals and ritual performers as elements of the moral order structure both from pagan and Christian perspectives.

Pre-Christian moral codes defined the whole of reality, including material reality as sacred, and, thus all (construction) activities were regarded as sacred and required specific rituals to re-create the cosmic balance disturbed when house construction was initiated. The sacrifice ritual was to purify and sanctify the space and therefore make a newly built house sacred, durable and safe. The ritual was successful due to its formality and sacrificing sacred animals. On the one hand horses were connected with the idea of a house, and, on the other hand, they supported the cosmic axe as demonstrated in ethnographical evi-



dence (Bajburin 1990; Dalewski 1990). By sacrificing a horse, balance was introduced into a newly built structure. The moral status of a ritual performer, derived from customary laws of a kinship group or tribe, seems to not influence the whole rite.

Christianity has defined terrestrial reality as rather secular with its intangible and generally inaccessible God who offered moral patterns based on a clear system of reward/punishment. The reward was promised and qualified by a moral life according to the church commandments. Constructions, including houses, were meant rather to be durable, and their later spiritual dimension demonstrates the persistence of a pre-Christian way of thinking. Thus, no sacrifices were necessary, moreover, they were prohibited as relics of older traditions and quite often called the devil's works (Strzelczyk 1998, 149).

Application of the codes onto pagan and Christian traditions (with a particular focus on construction activities) is presented in table 1.

## Conclusions

The beginning of the second millennium in Central Europe was undoubtedly a period of intensive ideological, social and political transformations influencing almost all aspects of life, both in towns and rural areas. The emergence of states ruled first by dukes and then by kings utterly changed the former structures and their political orientation. Patterns of social heterogeneity were transformed not only by the political authorities but also by the emergence of a hierarchical church structure. The newly introduced religion represented both an ideological breakthrough and a political movement. Above all, a legal act replacing the old religion with the new one was for most society something completely foreign, unknown or little known, and not wanted at all. The societies were basically agricultural and rural areas have always and everywhere rejected novelties or have demonstrated distrustful and/or hostile attitude towards them. The „conversion moment” i.e. the baptisms were communal experiences, were inspired by, or resulted from, decisions taken by local authorities (Sanmark 2004, 181). The new ideology brought new laws referring to morality, dietary regulations and economic obligations which were taught and controlled by specialists. Moreover, it openly discredited the old traditions and gods and prohibited old cults and customs. In such conditions, the level of social uncertainty increased remarkably and thus, prohibited rituals were enacted, to re-create the moral order. The foundation sacrifices of horses were especially common at that time, and, moreover, they are discovered in the most important centres of early state structures, where both secular and church authorities were situated. The increase in rituals reflects an attempt to manage ambiguity and social uncertainty and thus to maintain identity and balance.

Pagan customs and rituals have been believed to have disappeared gradually after the introduction of Christianity in Central Europe in the end of 10<sup>th</sup> cent.

when the church forbade them. Many of them however were absorbed into Christian traditions and some may be observed even today. This paper suggests that some of the rituals were enacted even more intensively after the introduction of the Christianity. The new ideological, political and social structures introduced new moral codes defining the world and humans place in it, and this resulted in high degree of social uncertainty. The prohibited rituals, illustrated by foundation sacrifices, were on the one hand a mean to express indigenous identity and, on the other hand an attempt to respond to the high level of uncertainty.

Table 1. Construction structure in pagan and Christian traditions according to R. Wuthnow's codes of moral order

CODES	PAGAN TRADITION	CHRISTIAN TRADITION
<i>moral object</i>	– house (sacred, balanced, durable)	– house (durable)
<i>real program</i>	– purifying and sanctification of space	– construction
<i>inner self</i>	– based on moral values derived from collective customary law of rather secular character	– based on moral values derived from normative, taught, regulations definitely of eschatological character
<i>role</i>	– ritual performer; – successful ritual was not qualified by moral status of sacrificer	– every successful ritual was qualified by believer's moral status, based on the Christian ideology and controlled by church regulations
<i>inevitable</i>	– social regulations derive from natural, cyclic, cosmic order and customary law – material reality is sacred – chaos resulted from house construction	– social regulations derive from a secular concept of the terrestrial world – material reality is material – house construction has only its material dimension
<i>intentional</i>	– rituals (incl. sacrifices) enacted to re-bring disturbed balance	– no ritual required, sacrifices are prohibited

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## **Rytuał a zmiana kulturowa. Przemiany w obrzędowości na styku pogaństwa i chrześcijaństwa we wczesnośredniowiecznej Polsce**

### Streszczenie

Zdaniem wielu historyków, chrystianizacja Polski jest przykładem dobrowolnego przyjęcia nowej wiary, bez widocznych nacisków zewnętrznych. Do potencjalnych zalet, wystarczająco atrakcyjnych dla ówczesnych liderów, aby promować nową religię, pomimo jej radykalnego wpływu na niemal wszystkie dziedziny życia społecznego, należało wzmocnienie władzy i uznanie jej przez innych władców chrześcijańskich a także wprowadzenie nowej, potencjalnie atrakcyjniejszej, ideologii. Ta ostatnia, oparta była na religijnym pragmatyzmie cechującym społeczeństwa pogańskie, czyli ocenie panujących bóstw na podstawie efektywności ich działań, co w razie jej braku, dawało moralne podstawy „wymiany” bogów na efektywniej reagujących na potrzeby grupy.

W dotychczasowej literaturze wskazuje się przede wszystkim, że zwyczaje pogańskie stopniowo zanikały lub zostały przekształcone i wchłonięte przez tradycję kościelną. Radykalne działania zostały podjęte po tzw. reakcji pogańskiej w latach 30. XI wieku, a w ich ramach przystąpiono do zwalczania pogańskich kultów, niszczenia nowo powstałych świątyń i posągów oraz rozbudowy administracji kościelnej. Paradoksalnie jednak, niektóre elementy ogólnie rozumianej religii pogańskiej uległy uwydatnieniu dopiero w konfrontacji z chrześcijaństwem. Przykładami mogą być tu świątynie pogańskie, które powstały z inspiracji chrześcijańskiej, czy specyficzne typy ofiar zakładzinowych, odkryte na stanowiskach archeologicznych jednoznacznie określanych jako ważne ośrodki wczesnej państwowości. Z terenów Holandii i północnych Niemiec, w VII i VIII w. znane są przypadki celowego chowania zmarłych w starszych, przedchrześcijańskich kurhanach, z dala od kościołów i wyposażanie ich między innymi w broń. Nasilenie się takich praktyk jest tam interpretowane jako wyraz niechęci do chrześcijaństwa i podkreślanie związków ze starszymi tradycjami religijnymi. Za przejaw opozycji wobec nowej ideologii uważane jest także np. znaczny wzrost liczby grobów ciałopalnych, notowany w północnej części państwa Franków w 1. połowie VIII w.

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Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie propozycji interpretacji zmian w obrzędowości w kontekście ogólnych przemian politycznych i społecznych, jakie miały miejsce we wczesnym państwie polskim w X–XII wieku. Na podstawie obserwacji śladów kultów niechrześcijańskich odkrytych na wczesnośredniowiecznych stanowiskach stwierdzono, że niektóre z takich obiektów pojawiają się dopiero w XII wieku, czyli już po serii radykalnych działań mających na celu zwalczanie kultów pogańskich.

Przykładem będą tu przede wszystkim ofiary zakładzinowe ze zwierząt, najczęściej z koni, odkrywane pod domami i wałami wielu wczesnośredniowiecznych stanowisk. W literaturze dotyczącej ofiar ze zwierząt wyróżniono kilka kryteriów identyfikacji takich obiektów, a są to: obecność konkretnych partii tuszy, pochodzącej z określonego gatunku zwierzęcia, najczęściej nie stanowiącego podstawy struktury konsumpcji, lecz pełniącego ważną rolę w życiu religijnym danej społeczności. Ofiary z koni doskonale wpisują się w tak zakreślone ramy definicji pozostałości ofiar. Odkryto je na kilkunastu stanowiskach na terenie Polski, m.in. w Gdańsku, Wrocławiu, Santoku, Pułtusku czy Opolu, w warstwach datowanych na XI–XIII w. Z drugiej strony, na stanowiskach z tzw. fazy przedpaństwowej, takich obiektów brak lub są one nieliczne. Choć na pierwszy rzut oka może wynikać to ze stanu przebadania obu grup stanowisk, wyniki badań ratowniczych prowadzonych od kilkunastu lat na wielu osadach wczesnośredniowiecznych zdają się potwierdzać te ustalenia. Jak w takim razie można interpretować ślady rytuałów o ewidentnie pogańskim charakterze obecnych w tak istotnych ośrodkach administracji państwowej i kościelnej jak np. Ostrów Tumski we Wrocławiu?

Podstawą teoretyczną proponowanej interpretacji jest teoria porządku moralnego, zaproponowana w latach 80 tych XX wieku przez R. Wuthnowa. Wg niego, porządek moralny należy rozumieć jako zbiór elementów kulturowych, które definiują naturę zaangażowania w przebieg poszczególnego działania, a istotne dla jego struktury mają 3 różniczniki: obiekty moralne i programy, jaźń i rola oraz przymus i wybór intencjonalny. Kody te wskazują, co jest pożądane, oddzielając, ale równocześnie wiążąc wymienione wyżej elementy. Poza kodami, na porządek moralny składa się także system rytuałów, wykorzystywanych często do radzenia sobie w z niepewnością w stosunkach społecznych i stanowiących podstawowy mechanizm jego podtrzymywania. Teoria ta zakłada także, że nasilenie działań rytualnych jest odpowiedzią na wysoki stopień niepewności społecznej, wynikającej przede wszystkim ze znacznego wskaźnika zmiany, obejmującego transformację polityczną, redystrybucję zasobów, ustalanie się nowych struktur i tworzenie nowych typów relacji społecznych.

Początek drugiego tysiąclecia w Europie Środkowej to bez wątpienia okres intensywnych transformacji ideologicznych, społecznych, politycznych, które miały wpływ na każdy aspekt życia ówczesnych społeczności, zarówno w ośrodkach grodowych, jak i obszarach wiejskich. Powstanie państw, pod przywództwem władzy najpierw książęcej a potem królewskiej, zmieniło wcześniejsze struktury oparte na konkurujących ze sobą rodach. Modele społecznej różnorodności zostały zmienione nie tylko przez władzę polityczną ale także przez pojawienie się zhierarchizowanej struktury kościelnej. Nowo wprowadzona religia była nie tylko przełomem ideologicznym i politycznym, ale przede wszystkim, aktem prawnym, zastępującym stare wierzenia nowymi. Nowa ideologia

łączyła się z wprowadzeniem nowych praw dotyczących moralności, zobowiązań ekonomicznych, diety i była nauczana, a także kontrolowana przez specjalistów. Dyskredytowała stare tradycje, bogów, a także zabraniała spełniania starych kultów i przestrzegania starych zwyczajów. W takich warunkach poziom niepewności społecznej musiał wzrosnąć w sposób znaczący, a stare rytuały były przywoływane, aby odtworzyć pierwotny, a w domyśle lepszy, porządek moralny. Wzrost znaczenia niektórych rytuałów, w tym przypadku – budowlanych, których pozostałościami są ofiary zakładzinowe, odzwierciedla zatem próbę poradzenia sobie ze wysokim poziomem niepewności społecznej oraz podkreślenia własnej tożsamości.