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Part I:

Religious background

Sources of religion in Poland

There are one hundred and thirty-eight registered churches and religious associations in Poland.

The biggest numbers belong to the **Catholic Church**, approximately 95% of the religious segment of Polish society. There are four branches of Catholicism in Poland (viz. all four in communion with Rome): **the Byzantine-Ukrainian, Neo-Unité, Armenian, and Roman Catholics**. The last-mentioned is the biggest, and in 1998 numbered over 25 million (9,990 parishes and some 28 thousand priests).

Apart from the Catholic Church there are several large Christian churches and a few score smaller churches and religious groups in Poland. **The Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church** is the second largest official religious organization. About 550 thousand laypersons and 320 priests belong to it. Most of the Orthodox Christians in Poland are members of the Byelorussian minority in the eastern part of the country. **Protestantism**, divided into several denominations, is the third largest branch of the Christian religion in Poland. **The Augsburg Evangelical (Lutheran) Church** accounts for over 85 thousand. The next largest churches are **the United Pentecostal Church** (ca.17 thousand members), and **the Seventh Day Adventist Church** (10 thousand members). The remaining Protestant churches have up to 5-6 thousand members each. Poland also has several Old Catholic churches (viz. not in communion with Rome). They include **the Old Catholic Church of the Mariavites, the Polish National Catholic Church of Poland, and the Catholic Church of the Mariavites**. Their combined congregations amount to over 88 thousand people.

The **Jehovah's Witness Religious Association** has a membership of approx. 130 thousand. There are several other religious groups operating in Poland, including the **Muslim Religious Union (Islam), the Union of Jewish Religious Communities (the Judaic religion), the Karaite Religious Board**

(a religion which combines elements of Judaism and Islam, and is observed predominantly by the Karaite ethnic minority of Turkic origin), and quite a number of organisations related to **Oriental religions**, e.g. **the International Krishna Awareness Society and the Buddhist Society**.

The characteristic feature of Polish religious movements is a fondness for traditional practices and Christian ceremonies such as pilgrimages to holy places, liturgical processions (e.g. for the feast of Corpus Christi), Advent and Lent retreats, and fairs for parish feast-days. Special significance is attached to the cult of Virgin Mary, revered especially at Częstochowa (the shrine of the Black Madonna of Jasna Góra), at Licheń (the shrine of Our Lady the Sorrowful Queen of Poland), as well as in innumerable smaller shrines dedicated to the Virgin Mary and scattered throughout the country.



Jasna Góra's most valuable treasure is the miraculous painting of Our Lady



The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Licheń



Religion in Poland gained a new dimension in 1978 following the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Cracow, to the papacy. The Polish Pope, who adopted the name of John Paul II, revolutionised the Catholic Church, opening it up to the problems of the contemporary world. Within Poland, the person of John Paul II is

viewed in a special light, and his activities are regarded as linked to the enormous socio-political changes of the 1980's. John Paul II remains an unquestionable moral authority, not only for the religious part of society.

The Catholic Church in Poland is an institution which has always been associated with the concept of Polish statehood. The first important date in the history of the Polish state was the adoption of Christianity by the Polanian Prince Mieszko I in 966. The creation of state structures was connected with the spread of Christianity and establishment of an ecclesiastical administrative network in the Polish territories. Since that time, the Church has supported Polish unity and independence, which proved especially significant in partitioned Poland (1795-1918), during the Second World War, and in the period under Communist domination.

Sources of religion in Lublin

During the years, Lublin was inhabited by different nationalities and religious denominations that constituted a rich and varied community. For many centuries Lublin was a vibrant centre of **Hebrew** and **Yiddish** culture and where **Judaism** flourished so much that historiographers referred to Lublin as the "Jerusalem of the Polish Kingdom" or the "Jewish Oxford".

The diversity of Christianity can be seen in the **Roman Catholic** and **Orthodox churches**, the 18th c. evangelical church and the less visible sacral buildings of the **Mariavites**, **Polish Catholics**, **Adventists** and other denominations stemming from **Protestantism**. This is an evidence of a more and less distant past, when the city population included Ruthenians, Armenians, Turks, Czechs, Germans, Italians, the French, the Scots, the Dutch, or the Swiss, as well as the result of the dynamic 20th c. changes within Catholicism.

The city monuments show that Lublin was situated in the centre of the Republic of Both Nations half-way between the two capitals of the multiethnic and multidenominational Jagiellonian state, Krakow and Wilno. It was not by chance that Lublin became the site of the Polish-Lithuanian union of 1569. Its multicultural character can also be seen in its streets names, like Ruska ('Ruthenian'), Tatarska ('Tartar'), Ewangelicka ('Evangelical'), Litewski ('Lithuanian') Square, Czechowska ('Czech'), Bazylianowka ('of the Uniate Basilian order') or the unofficial, now forgotten, name: the Jewish Gate.

The oldest Lublin Christian cemetery (turn of the 18th/19th c.) in Lipowa St. is made up of the Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Orthodox and military parts, while inscriptions on tombstones, apart from Polish, are in Russian, German, Ukrainian or even Czech. Witness to a few hundred years of history of the Lublin Jewry is one of the oldest Jewish cemeteries in Poland (the old kirkut), going back to the 16th c. and including the famous 19th c. tzaddik. the Seer of Lublin, visited even today by Chasidim from all over the world.



The oldest Jewish cemeteries in Poland
(the old kirkut)

During the Holocaust the Germans completely destroyed the magnificent monumental synagogues and the historic Jewish quarter surrounding the Castle.

Nowadays, visiting the city we can admire Old and New Jewish Cemetery, Chevrat Nosim Synagogue, Grodzka Gate and Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin (The Lublin Academy of Sages).

Synagogue inside Chamber of Memory in the new cemetery of Lublin



Part II:

Traditions related to the main events in man's life

Birthdays in Poland

Births

When a child is born it is a big holiday to family. Pretty soon a new-born is baptized at the church by sprinkling water on the head. Later on, parents give a baptism party to whole family and relatives often at their home, or occasionally at a restaurant. The most significant gifts are from god parents, usually related to religion. However, in some regions special presents are given, like a bottle of wine of the birth's year. (the Silesia region, the south, mining area of Poland). Sometimes, a silver tea-spoon is given as a symbol of prosperity in the future.



A baptism In the Roman Catholic Church

Birthdays

Birthdays in Poland are not so wide-spread celebrated as in Western Europe. It is usually celebrated among children. It is a special day for them, they often give special treatment from friends and family, teachers usually do not ask children or give bad marks on this day. Children take sweets to school.

A birthday cake is the most popular dish at the birthday party. It is decorated and covered with lit candles when presented, the number of candles signifying the age of the celebrant. The person whose birthday it is makes a silent wish and then blows out the candles. If done in one breath, the wish is supposed to come true (but only if the person keeps the wish to himself or herself).



It is a tradition to sing the song to the honored person. In Poland this is the "Sto Lat" song. The song's lyrics are:

Sto lat, sto lat,
Niech żyje, żyje nam.
Sto lat, sto lat,
Niech żyje, żyje nam,

Jeszcze raz, jeszcze raz, niech
żyje, żyje nam,
Niech żyje nam!

This translates roughly into English as:

A hundred years, a hundred years,
May he (she) live for us.
A hundred years, a hundred years,
May he live for us.
Once again, once again, may he live, live for us,
May he live for us!

The most notable birthdays in Poland are at the age of 1 (it looks like you are no longer a baby but a child) and 18 and, of course, 100.

In the legal system you become an adult on the birthday of 18. You gain a variety of rights and responsibilities as well (voting, eligibility for military draft, driving licence, purchasing tobacco and alcohol)

When you are 100 you are lucky to receive birthday wishes from the President of Poland in writing as well as from the town hall authorities!



Socializing at a party

However, In Poland the majority of people do not celebrate their birthdays but name days . Polish calendars contain the names celebrated each day. Name day celebrations involve a gathering of friends and family at the celebrant's home at the dinner table, followed by drinking and socializing, similarly to birthday celebrations.

The "Sto Lat" song is obviously sung. Celebrants receive presents, just like on their birthday.

Funerals in Poland

Funerals are very important ceremonies in Poland. Family, relatives and friends take part in funerary ceremonies. As the majority of Poles are religious, the Roman Catholic thus funerals are placed at cementary chapels. The funeral mass focuses on the fact that life has changed rather than ended. Sometimes before the ceremony the closed family and friends gather around the open coffin and give "the last farewell" through praying. After the mass, mourners march in a funeral procession behind the coffin. The final committal is by the grave. Sometimes, family or a friend gives a speech about the dead person, about his or her life. After the ceremony, family gives a funeral banquet at home to relatives and close acquaintants. Polish people remember about their dead members of family. They often go to a cementary to light a candle and put flowers on the grave.

November 1st All Saints Day and 2nd All Souls Day

On November 1st we celebrate All Saints' Day. It is a tradition to light candles and visit the graves of deceased relatives.



All Saints in Poland

All Saints Day, traditionally has been associated in Polish legend with ghosts and wayward souls. In ancient times, when death entered a peasant's house, all doors and windows were opened at the moment of

passing. Mirrors were turned to the wall so that the soul would not be captured in the room. The last rite included a funeral banquet. The vigil lasted until the burial in order to protect the dead soul from evil spirits.

Later, these pagan customs were Christianized and people were encouraged to pray and light candles instead of conjuring up spirits. The candles were to symbolize the eternal light for which the soul yearns .

Today, All Saints & All Souls Day is celebrated in a very solemn manner in Poland. On both days, at twilight, the Poles make pilgrimages to their local cemeteries. The people decorate the graves with chrysanthemums, asters, and autumn flowers and place candles and votive lights. When the graves are decorated and countless flickering flames cast their haunting shadows amid the dusk, the mood is set for an outdoor service and prayers for departed souls.

Wedding tradition in Poland

The Engagement Ceremony

In Polish culture, weddings are preceded with engagement celebrations. Those are usually small parties held for the closest family members of the groom and the bride and are meant to get the two families meet and get to know each other better. In some cases, it is time when the parents-in-law meet for the very first time, so it is a show off time accompanied with fancy dinner, luscious desserts and a variety of non-alcoholic and alcoholic drinks. The engagement dinner party pretty much means that both families accept the engagement.



The Wedding Ceremony

In Poland the young couple ask their parents for a blessing before heading to church. As they begin their way to church, the neighbours and friends create a line so that the couple and guests cannot pass until a bottle of vodka is given. Once the best man gives it to them, they break the line so that the couple and guest can pass and continue to church.



The couple walk into the church together as guests follow. When the wedding ceremony is finished the couple exits the church, but before that, the bride leaves her

bunch of flowers in the church and offer it to the Virgin Mary.

The guests throw coins up in the air as the couple exit the church. The bride and groom have to pick up as many coins as possible, and whichever one picks up the most coins he or she will be in charge of all the money in the household.



The Wedding Reception

Greeting with bread & salt

After this everyone heads to the wedding reception. The parents of the bride and groom greet the couple with bread, salt and champagne. The bread symbolizes the hope of the parents that the young couple will never be in need. The salt represents that life may not always be easy, but they must learn to cope with troubles that come their way, and the champagne is offered in the hope that they will never be thirsty and have a life of happiness with many friends. The couple drink the champagne and throw the empty glasses behind them. When the glass breaks it means the couple will have good luck. Then the guests greet and give presents to the couple.



After this, the orchestra starts playing and the couple invites all the guest to dance.

Music

Music is an important part of the wedding reception. The music must be lively and must continue with very few breaks. Guests typically pay the band for a specific dance. The success of the marriage is thought to depend on the amount of spontaneity and joy at the reception. A Polish proverb states " like wedding, like life"

Table setting

The tables are arranged in a U-shape, with the bride and groom in the middle surrounded by , the bridesmaid and best man and their closest friends. The bride's extended family is seated on the right side, while the groom's family is on the left.



Wedding Dinner

Traditionally, the first course for a wedding dinner is soup, usually chicken noodle soup. The second course is meat, chicken or pork.



Oczepiny - the unveiling and capping ceremony

At midnight is another traditional element of a Polish wedding day, known as the "Oczepiny" ceremony. All unmarried women surround the young bride and dance in a circle. When the orchestra stops playing, the bride throws her veil for other girls to catch. This symbolizes that she gives up her innocence and accepts her duties as a wife, a hostess, and a mother. It's similar for the groom, he throws his bow tie for the bachelors to catch. Whoever catches the veil or bow tie, he or she will be next getting married.

Then some games for the guest the "money dance" is always popular at a traditional reception in Poland. Guests pin money to the bride's wedding

dress, the newly weds might put these gifts of money towards their honeymoon expenses.

Wedding cake

The ceremonial wedding cake is believed to be derived from the Romans. This custom was continued throughout Europe for centuries. The first documented record of a special cake served at Polish weddings dates back to the thirteen century. This was a sweet bread in an oval shape .

Today the wedding cake has become a show piece, prepared by a professional baker complete with sculpted flowers and monograms.



Everyone continues to party till morning. Sometimes there is another party the next day called "do over again" but it is a shorter one with fewer guests.

Once the wedding is over and the couple arrives to their own house or apartment, the groom has to carry his bride over the threshold for the first time they enter the place after being married.



This is to prove that he will always carry his treasured wife in his arms throughout their whole live together. In some cases, the family members play little tricks or tests on the newlyweds to see what kind of husband and wife they will be.

For instance, there may be a seemingly forgotten broom on the floor by the entrance. If the new wife picks it up before moving on, she is believed to be a hard-working and carrying wife. Once the door closes behind the newly wedded couple, it is time to wait for another wedding when another couple decides to close their eyes.

Part III:

Traditions related to the main holidays

Polish Christmas Customs



Christmas Eve

Wesołych Świąt Bożego Narodzenia! That is the way to say "Merry Christmas" in Polish. Among Poles, wherever they are, the most beloved and beautiful of all traditional festivities is that of Christmas Eve. It is then that Christmas Eve Dinner is served. It is a solemnly celebrated occasion and arouses deep feelings of kinship among family members.



Sharing
Oplatek at
the
traditional
Christmas
Eve Dinner,
"Wigilia"

For days in advance, Poles prepare the traditional foods and everyone anxiously awaits the moment when the first star, appears in the eastern sky. For that is when the feast to commemorate the birth of the Christ Child begins.

There is always a thin layer of hay under the white tablecloth in



memory of the Godchild in the manger. Before sitting down at the table, everyone breaks the traditional wafer, or Oplatek and exchanges good wishes for health, wealth and happiness in the New Year. This is such a deeply moving moment that often tears of love and joy are evoked from the family members

who are breaking this symbolic bread. The Oplatek is a thin, unleavened wafer similar to the altar bread in the Roman Catholic Church. It is stamped with the figures of the Godchild, the blessed Mary, and the holy angels. The wafer is known as the bread of love and is often sent by mail to the absent members of the family.

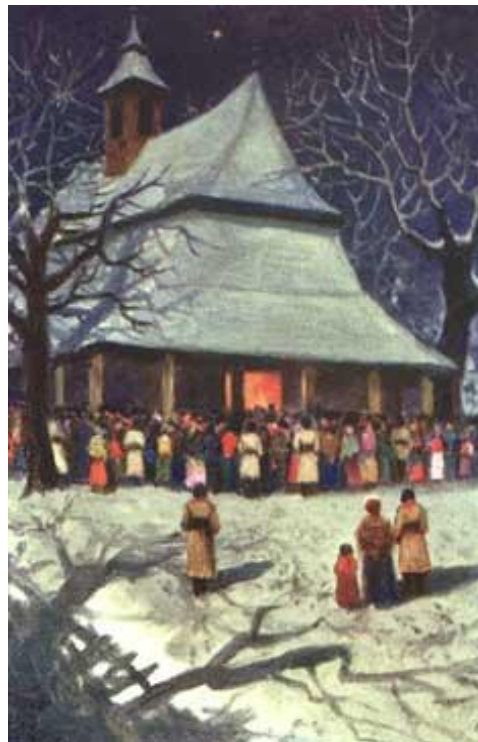
The dinner itself differs from other evening meals in that the number of courses is fixed at seven, nine or eleven. According to myth, in no case must there be an odd number of people at the table, otherwise it is said that some of the feasters would not live to see another Christmas. A lighted candle in the windows symbolizes the hope that the Godchild, in the form of a stranger, may come to share the Christmas Eve and an extra place is set at

the table for the unexpected guest. This belief stems from the ancient Polish adage, "A guest in the home is God in the home."

The Wigilia is a meatless meal, no doubt the result of a long-time Church mandate that a strict fast and abstinence be observed on this day before Christmas. Although the Church laws have been revised and permit meat to be eaten on this day, the traditional meal remains meatless. Items that would normally be included in a traditional Wigilia menu include mushroom soup, boiled potatoes, pickled herring, fried fish, beans and sauerkraut and a dried fruit compote. After the meal the members of the family sing Polish Christmas Carols while the children wait impatiently around the Christmas tree for the gifts to be unwrapped.



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Aside from the beautiful Wigilia, the Polish people have a number of other traditions that they practice throughout the Christmas season. Polish Christmas Carols are numerous and beautiful, especially when sung in Polish parishes at the Christmas Eve Mass. This Mass is called the Pasterka, which means the Shepherds Watch, and there is popular belief in Poland that while the congregation is praying, peace descends on the snow-clad, sleeping earth and that during that holy night, the humble companions of men - the domestic animals - assume voices. But only the innocent of heart may hear them.



Christmas Day itself is spent in rest, prayer, and visits to various members of the family. In Poland, from Christmas Day until the twelfth night, boys trudge from village to village with an illuminated star and a ranting King Herod among them to sing carols. Sometimes, they penetrate the towns in expectation of more generous gifts. In some districts, the boys carry on puppet shows called "szopka". These are built like a little house with two towers, open in the front where a small crib is set. A long-time tradition in Poland during the Christmas season is the building of "Szopki" which are elaborate form of the Nativity scene.

This tradition started back in the 13th century in Krakow, Poland,



and remains an annual tradition whereas major prizes are awarded for the most elaborately decorated and designed Szopki.



The Christmas season closes on February 2, known as Candlemas Day. On that day, people carry candles to church and have them blessed for use in their homes during storms, sickness and death.

Easter tradition in Poland

Palm Sunday

The celebration of Easter is preceded by Holy Week, which begins with **Palm Sunday**. Palm branches and twigs commemorate Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The original palm branch is replaced by a willow or raspberry branch, and is decorated with ribbons, flowers, and leaves. It is believed that a palm branch consecrated by a priest would bring health, and placed behind a holy image until the following year would bring the inhabitants luck.



Easter food - "Święconka"

Holy Saturday services accompanied by processions are held to commemorate the Resurrection. Inside the churches, priests sprinkled holy water on small baskets brought by believers and filled with cakes, eggs - some shelled or some decorated., horseradish, sausages, ham, salt, pepper, and tiny sugar lambs.

After the blessing, the food is usually set aside until Easter morning when the head of the house shares the blessed egg, symbol of life, with family and friends. Having exchanged wishes, all continue to enjoy a hearty meal.

The blessing of the Easter food is a tradition dear to the heart of every Pole. Being deeply religious, he is grateful to God for all His gifts of both nature and grace, and, as a token of this gratitude, has the food of his table sanctified with the hope that spring, the season of the Resurrection, will also be blessed by God's goodness and mercy.



This century old custom is indeed richly symbolic and beautiful. It is one in which the whole family can participate and help prepare. May this tradition endure for many generations to come.

Traditional Easter table

On the Polish Easter table there are found:
Easter bunnies and baby chicks-symbolizing rebirth
Easter bread - a symbol of Jesus, who is our true Bread of Life.

Eggs - a symbol of the resurrection, the emergence of a new life.

Sausage made of pork products indicates God's favour and generosity.

Ham - a symbol of great joy and abundance.

Horseradish with grated red beets symbolises the Passion of Christ still in our

minds but sweetened with some sugar because of the Resurrection. Salt - a necessary element in our daily life, that Jesus used its symbolism.



Easter eggs - "pisanki"

The "pisanki" derive from an ancient tradition when eggs, the symbol of life, were endowed with magical properties and were thought to ensure both a plentiful harvest and good health.

The practice of coloring Easter eggs is very much alive in Poland today as



well as enjoyed by Polish people all over the world. There are several techniques for making "pisanki" including the use of wax flowing from a pipe or funnel, producing richly ornamented designs or the etching of designs onto a previously colored egg. The geometric and floral patterns or the animal and human images produced reveal a high level of craftsmanship and artistry.

These eggs are exchanged among friends and relatives with good wishes. Many American Poles design eggs with the names of their friends written on them. They exchange these decorated eggs with each other during their Easter visitations along with their good wishes.

Wet Monday - "Śmigus-Dyngus"

Śmigus-Dyngus (Wet Monday) is a strictly secular tradition derived from folk beliefs, according to which sprinkling one another with



water was a blessing that would guarantee prosperity and a good harvest. Eventually, the day became an occasion for merry-making and chasing one

another around with buckets full of water. A maiden not sprinkled with water on the day was supposed to become an old spinster. Today, the holiday's idea has been somewhat distorted by Polish youngsters, who treat the day as an opportunity to get away with dousing everyone brave enough to leave their homes.

The Polish Easter is a peculiar mixture of pagan and folk traditions with church traditions. In the end, however, Easter is simply a family holiday.

Independence Day

The 11th of November is a special day for Poles, celebrated as the Independence Day meaning the return to the map of sovereign European states after 123 years of foreign rule. Naturally, regaining independence is not an event that could be discussed in terms of one specific date in calendar but rather a long and complex process. This special date, however, marks a series of important events that gave the day a symbolic meaning: the armistice is signed, ending long and bloody World War I. Most of German troops deployed in Warsaw since August 5, 1915, have been disarmed;

Jozef Piłsudski, the architect and leader of Legions, the most esteemed politician at that time, holds talks on taking over power and re-creating the Polish state 'from the scrap'. The Polish State was wiped out of Europe's map after the Third Partition in 1795. The Partitions of Poland (1772, 1793, and 1795) divided the Polish Kingdom among its three powerful neighbours, Russia, Austria, and Prussia. The opportunities for regaining independence emerged only in the end of the World War I when the three conquerors were defeated. When independence finally came in 1918, it was not only the result of external circumstances, i.e. dissolution of the Russian, German, and Austrian empires at the end of World War I. An equally important factor was an independence movement both within the divided country and abroad. The dominant political figure in this movement became Jozef Piłsudski.



The 11th of November was celebrated in the inter-war Poland as a national holiday. After the World War II, under communist regime, the holiday was repudiated. In line with the doctrine, the communist governments put an

emphasis on the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1917 as the decisive factor in regaining independence by Poland. The first serious historical publications on Jozef Pilsudski and his contribution to the re-emergence of the Polish state started to appear only in the 1970-ties. In the end of the 1980-ties, people opposed to the communist system started to lay flowers on the Unknown Soldier Tomb on the 11th of November 11. In 1989, the 11th of November was re-established as the Independence Day.



November 29th - Eve of St. Andrew's Day

This a special night for young Polish girls who want to find a husband. On this night and the next day, fortunes are told and the results are not taken lightly. Here are a few ways that fortunes are told:

- The most popular way is by melting wax and pouring it into a bowl of cold water. Wax is then picked up from the water, raised to the light, and the girls try to see the similarities of it to real objects. Depending on the shapes, fortunes are told for the following year. If nothing meaningful comes up, there is always a chance that a girl will dream of something important dealing with her future, that night - but only if she could remember it.



- In another traditional way of fortune telling, girls stand in a circle leaning over a bowl of water with a small floating walnut shell containing a tiny lighted candle. Each girl pastes a slip of paper with the name of a favored young man on the inside edge of the bowl above the water. To whichever name the lighted candle sailed to and burnt, a marriage proposal from him could be expected.

- Also, during the day, a girl counts to the fourteenth post on a fence to see what her future husband will look like - fat, thin, short, tall, old, young.

- In another game, a scarf, a ribbon, and a rosary are placed separately under three plates. A girl, her eyes blindfolded, turns around three times while other girls rearrange the plates. If she draws a scarf, it means marriage; a ribbon - single for another year; rosary - becomes a spinster or a nun.



Harvest Day

Harvest Day was a great landowners' festival in the time of big country estate economy (16th - 18th century). It had the characteristics of a feast and a dance, given by the owners of the estate in honor of all their servants and farm workers. The custom of celebrating the end of the harvest and other field works has been kept alive even today as an important feast of the whole agricultural state, In the whole territory of Poland, a special meaning was attached to the last clump or strip of the crops, which used to be left in the field for some time and ploughed around in a ceremonial way. The last handfuls of cereal were called "beard". It was believed to be inhabited by some mysterious forces able to keep up vegetation and decide about next year's crops. The start of the harvest, which was supposed to crown the whole year's efforts, was initiated in a particular ceremonial way - the reapers would decorate their tools with flowers and then pray.

Harvest wreath parades and the act of handing the harvest wreath to the host of the festival, was initially held by the lord of the manor. It was later taken over by the better-off farmers, the local parish priest, and finally by the local authorities. Wreaths coming from all over Poland are exhibited. They are a symbol of the crops and fruits of the earth that have been gathered. Today, they are still respectfully kept till the next year and the grain that shells off is later added to the spring sowing seed.



June 23rd - St. John's night

Saint John's festival, in Poland called **Sobotka**, from the ritual bonfires lighted on that night), or **St John's night** (from John the Baptist) was celebrated the night from June 23rd to June 24th, at the time of summer solstice and used to be held as a summer welcome festival, integrating the rites of fire, water and great love and fertility celebrations.

Young people used to gather at forest glades and hills, round big bonfires lighted by an old technique of rubbing sticks and kept burning with wooden beams. Girls wore white clothes, danced in circles and sang love songs, while boys showed off their agility leaping over the fire.

The amorous frivolities of St John's night were a manifestation of readiness for procreation and giving birth.

What is left from those ancient beliefs and practices is the custom of floating wreaths down a river. Although the custom itself has been kept till the present times, nowadays it is nothing but a form of entertainment.

The St John's night's wreaths, woven of many kinds of herbs and flowers, both from the field and the garden, symbolized virginity, which girls were ready to offer to their boyfriends on that night in return for their love and promise of a wedding.



