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**TRADITIONAL CULTURE OF BELARUS
AS A RESOURCE OF EXCURSION AND TOURIST ACTIVITY**

Natural potential and national colour are the most attractive tourist product in Belarus. The resource potential of folklore for the development of almost all types of tourism is inexhaustible. The centuries-old observations of weather, animals and birds behavior are embodied in a number of weather sayings. They not only decorate the excursion narrative, but also enrich the excursionists with new practical knowledge. Folk etymology has fixed in legends and lore the most significant features of natural objects (representatives of flora and fauna). Legends, folk sayings and beliefs have interwoven into the scenarios of calendar holidays, rites and games, which have been permanent attributes of traditional culture. Mythological characters (especially gods of seasons and spirits of the elements) should become the epicenters of such holidays or animations. Another resource, which is hardly ever used, are cult stones.

Key words: folklore, traditional culture, representatives of flora and fauna, gods of seasons and spirits, excursion narrative, ecological path.

Introduction. One of the main objectives of the tourism development program in Belarus has been the task of the development of inbound and domestic tourism through agroecotourism. Natural potential and national colour are the most attractive tourist product in Belarus, like in other countries of the world that have preserved these resources. The conservation of nature is performed through the creation of the system of national parks, reserves and sanctuaries, while such a system doesn't exist for the conservation and utilization of traditional culture in general, and folklore in particular. Its resource potential for the development of almost all types of tourism is inexhaustible. Researchers believe the folklore to be “the art encyclopedia of folk life” [1, p. 6]. The centuries-old observation of weather, the behavior of animals and birds are embodied in a number of noteworthy folk sayings that will not only improve the excursion story, but will also enrich the tourists with new practical knowledge. They often report on the nature of the future weather, characteristics of the future harvest, explain animals behavior. Some time ago the folk sayings “helped men to plan their activities efficiently, timely sow or harvest crops, to protect themselves and their property from surprises of natural elements” [1, p. 7]. These positive aspects of folklore sayings are still topical in our time, but it's also a great opportunity to use folklore material in the track information during country excursions, draw attention to the relevant natural objects during tours in national parks, nature reserves, sanctuaries and ecological paths.

Main part. Folk etymology describes the most essential features of natural objects in legends and lore. Most legends tell about the plant kingdom. They help to remember the external features and essential characteristics of the plants and trees during excursions.

For example, aspen is accurately identified by foliage trembling. The legend explains that the as-

pen is damned by God, and trembles with fear and shame, as it let Judas hang himself on it. The second legend says that a mother turned her lazy daughter into an aspen, having cursed her for idleness. Each leaf of the tree is trembling, as the daughter is ashamed and scared by the mother's curse. However, when her mother came to her senses and saw what she'd done, her hands hung like whips, and she turned into a birch (*betula pendula*) [1, p. 154].

The essential characteristic of an alder is the bloody color of its timber. The legend says that it's a consequence of a lame intrigue of the devil. He'd cut a wolf out of wood, but the creature wouldn't bite God, but rather attacked his master. He fled to an alder, got scratched and stained the timber with blood [1, p. 150]. That's why alder is used for firewood only.

The phenomenon of contamination (connection) of pre-Christian and Christian beliefs can be observed in mythology. The illustrative example is the idea about our most sacred tree, the oak. In pre-Christian times it was believed it belonged to the supreme God, Piarun. That's why the Kupala bonfire should be burnt by rubbing blocks of oak. Strong and tall oak trees attract lightning, that's why it's dangerous to stand under an oak during thunderstorm. However, it has a different explanation in folk etymology: the devils (the symbols of evil in Christianity) are believed to hide from Piarun's (or St. Elijah's) arrows under its roots. Thus, the rational and superstitious can be very close and relate to the same facts.

Sometimes oral statements aren't based on rational human experience, but rather on erroneous arbitrary opinions. It can be illustrated by the image of a fir tree. It's seen as a blessed tree by folk, as it hid the Mother of God and Christ during their escape to Egypt. “As God has blessed and consecrated this tree and ordered to put a fir tree at

Christmas and Easter at home and put its branches by the icons. When the water is blessed in Jordan River during Epiphany, young fir trees are put around, to cover the water from evil" [1, p. 155]. But the belief, that the lightning never strikes a fir for that is erroneous.

The explanation of an unusual productivity of hazel is also somewhat specific and connected with Christianity. As the story goes, Jesus Christ walked across the wood once and got hungry. He satisfied his hunger with nuts and then blessed that plant. "As one hazel tree is cut, ten hazel trees will grow" [1, p. 151].

Willow thickets were considered a dangerous place after Epiphany, as the devils rushed there from consecrated water, where they had been spending winter.

The origin of the mountain ash, which is often planted along the roads, is connected with the character from the Old Testament; it's believed to be born from the tears of Eve, banished from Heaven. And the tree takes vengeance on everyone, who touches it: the one who cuts it would be in trouble. If you eat the berries in the wrong time (before the frosts come), your teeth would hurt.

Some trees were considered "good". It was believed, that a birch or a maple should be planted near the house, at the estate boundary, as they bring people happiness. The bed had to be made of oak wood, thus the person who slept on it would get the strength and durability of the tree.

Wood was the primary construction material in Belarus. But various trees could be cut down during different lunar phases to avoid cracks: birch during the new moon; aspen during old moon, larch during full moon [1, p. 149].

The man lived in harmony with nature, closely followed the changes in the state of plants in different seasons and accurately chose the plant, suitable for his needs, from the variety of options. Therefore, the plants became specific markers and special participants of the main holidays. One can only amaze at the accuracy of the choice. For example, pussy willow has become the symbol of the Annunciation, for two reasons, a biological and a symbolic one. The biological reason is that it's the first plant to awaken from winter sleep, when all the trees still have no leaves. The symbolic reason is that the shape of its leaves vaguely resembles the shape of palm leaves, with which Jesus Christ was greeted at the entrance to Jerusalem.

There are a few more such festive plants: birch, maple and sweetflag, less common are linden and oak, which are attributes of the spring holiday of the Trinity Sunday, or Siomucha, as it's named in Belarus. Not only churches, but also courtyards and houses. "May decoration" can't be burnt in a stove, but in a Kupala bonfire only.

The trees were seen by humans as some "biological clocks", which marked the start time for different projects or helped to predict the yield or forecast the weather.

Thus, women tried to sow beetroots and carrots, before the bird cherry starts to blossom, otherwise the plants "will go bolting" [1, p. 314].

It was believed, that if the birch bloomed before the alder, summer would be dry, if they were flowering simultaneously, the weather would be wet, but it would be a good year for the crops.

Plenty of acorns on the oaks predicted warm winter, but there'd be a poor harvest of grain.

If there were a lot of mushrooms, the winter would be long.

"If the alder in blossom had many aments, the crop of peas would be rich" [1, p. 314].

The beginning of some actions was also guided by the trees. It was considered safe to swim, only after the forest oaks blossomed. If the thunder was first heard, when the oaks were "naked", a lean year was to be expected.

People feared the lightning and thunder ("pieruny") and tried to protect themselves and the estate against them. The peasants of Palesie believed that marigolds protected from thunder and tried to plant them in every garden [1, p. 157].

The animal kingdom has also been watched over with no less attention than the plant kingdom. Some observations definitely have scientific and cognitive value, accurately highlight the most significant features in the appearance of the representatives of our fauna. But the explanation, sometimes fabulously fantastic, creates a wonderful basis for memorizing these important features and characteristics during the excursions to the enclosures, in hunting estates or nature excursions.

People mostly looked for the answer to the question "why". Why does a hare have a short tail? "God has created so long ears for it, that he lacked clay for the heart. So he tore off the tail and left a small ending... and created a tiny heart. That's why the hare is afraid of everybody, but no one fears it" [1, p. 103].

Why does the owl have "cat's eyes"? It's because the owl wanted to see at night, like a cat, so God switched their heads, as the cat's eyes wouldn't fit into the owl's eyepits. But people were also surprised by the owl's multicoloured feathers. According to the legend, the sparrow had made some trouble, and hid from other birds in a hollow of a tree trunk with a small entrance. The birds decided to keep vigil to catch him on his way out. They asked an owl to watch at night. But the owl, who was yet naked and had no feathers, demanded some payment for her work, one feather from each bird. She didn't manage to catch the sparrow, but kept the multicoloured ap-

parel. The sparrow was punished by other birds yet; they tied his legs ("hobbled him"). Since then he can only jump on two legs.

The origin of all the living lies mainly in creation or transformation. In the latter case it's a punishment for the man, who is turned into something else. As you might know, a bear was an idler and thief, who stole honey from other people's wild hives, a stork was a curious man, who had disobeyed God and looked into the beg behind his back, where something hissed, squeaked and tossed [2, p. 59].

But as all the positive creatures were made by God, according to the legend, all that harms the man and is disliked by him, is the creation of devil. The latter usually spied on God and copied all his actions, but always got confused or spoilt the work with evil intentions. Thus, the Lord threw a handful of sand downwind and created birds, but the devil gave birth to midges, mosquitoes, gadflies, and other blood-sucking insects. Trying to escape their bites, the devil rushed into the bog. That's why various insects whirled near the marshes and waited for him to get out. The marshes and hills were also created by the devil from the soil, stolen from God and hidden in his mouth [2, p. 72].

The bees are "the best insects". According to one legend, they were born from maiden tears, and the bee queen is the tear of the Saviour.

A lot of legends and beliefs on the beginning of spring are connected with animals and birds.

Larks appear on the 8th or 9th week after Christmas. That's why they are considered the heralds of spring. They came so early, that people doubted, they had left to the south, and thought they might spend winter under some stone, in a hollow of a tree trunk or somewhere else.

Almost the same thing is told about swallows, but their hibernation place is considered to be the bottom of the river.

The real summer comes, when a cuckoo begins singing.

People noticed that a raven is the first to brood. But the interpretation is again fabulously fantastic: he needs to hurry, before the ants wake up, as he's lost a bet and has to give away his children to them.

Multiple yield forecasts are connected with birds and animals, in comparison with the plant kingdom.

For example, if the bee left the hive before Annunciation, it meant the year would be good for bees, otherwise not. If plenty of acorns grew on oaks, it meant there would be lots of honey.

If a stork threw an egg out of the nest, poor harvest was expected. If a nestling was thrown away, hunger was expected.

Multiple proverbs and sayings about animals often had a preventive character and played a protective role (sometimes not only for animals, but also for people), in spite of the fact, that they often included improbable assumptions and unscientific statements.

"Taking away nuts from a squirrel is like stealing bread from a human being. The one who did so would lose all his teeth young".

"The one who kills a beaver should live in fear". The traditional beliefs also protected storks most carefully.

The reptiles weren't protected at all: on the contrary, they had to be killed, according to folk traditions. "If a person killed a snake, God would forgive him twelve sins, if the worst sinner killed twelve snakes in one day, all his sins would be forgiven" [1, p. 136]. "The one, who had pity for a snake and didn't kill it, wouldn't be warmed by the sun for three days" [1, p. 137].

Such recommendation must evidence, that people feared such creatures, as were afraid of dying because of their bites.

Legends, folk sayings and beliefs have interwoven into the scenarios of calendar holidays, rites and games, which have been permanent attributes of traditional culture. But they can only be the elements, decoration of the track information, and the scripts of the animation excursions. Mythological characters have to become the epicenters of such holidays and animations.

They lived in tales and legends, when it came to the mysterious universe, the origin of natural phenomenon, and human life in his world. "All the nature, from earth deep to the unreachable Space, was once rich in gods and demons for Belarusians" [3, p. 15].

The most promising characters of our mythology, which can improve an excursion story, and create a theatrical performance, are gods of the seasons.

Not all the mythological characters were equally popular among folk, not all of them were remembered. The example of using the image of Ziuzia should inspire creative ideas (the famous Ziuzia Paazierski was quite popular, which helped to attract tourists to the Pastavy area for a few years).

Lialia and Ciocia are unforgivingly forgotten goddesses of spring and summer, most popular seasons among tourists [3, p. 532, 589]. They should be the hostesses of agroestates and treat the guests with natural seasonal foods and thus popularize traditional Belarusian cuisine, traditional costumes and offer various events from the variety of traditional cultural repertoire, suitable for a particular tourist group.

The possibilities of using the characters of traditional Belarusian demonology have been demon-

strated by Balotnik in Biarezina reserve. The images of various spirits (forest, water and home creatures) have also been used on an ecological path in the botanical garden of Nieharelaje successfully.

One more resource for the development of excursion and tourist activities is the use of the “silent witnesses of the past”, the cult stones, scattered across the territory of Belarus. These legendary monuments are still the objects of worship for local people. Only a slight part of them has been included in tour routes as separate objects. And the unique complex near the Bikulnichy village, which, according to the opinion of some scientists, has not only been a pre-Christian center for Kupallie celebrations, but also an astronomical observatory, Belarusian Stonehenge, is not used as a tourist object and is being gradually destroyed.

Conclusion. The traditional spiritual culture of Belarus has various resources for use in excursion and tourist activities. The legends and lore mostly depict the knowledge about significant features of floristic objects and the animal behavior. Their use might help potential tourists remember these traits in a relaxed form, thus performing an educational function of the excursion. The phenomenon of contamination (connection) of pre-Christian and Christian beliefs can be observed in mythological ideas. However, the top layer, the Christian one, is more visible. The mythological ideas objectively perform a protective function; they prevent the reckless destruction of the forests, certain species of trees and thus contribute to the environmental education of tourists and defend people from the contacts with the animals, dangerous to humans.

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