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THE PERSISTENCE AND INTERACTION OF MULTI-ETHNIC SETTLEMENT REMNANTS IN THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

ABSTRACT. The paper deals with remnants of multi-ethnic settlement: their form, interaction and persistence. In the past, the Podlasie region, situated in northeastern Poland, was an area of multi-ethnic settlement. The interaction of cultures brought the emergence of a new, borderland culture. As the years have passed, the memory of the sources of regional and local traditions has disappeared. Elements of ethnic and religious traditions have spread and survived in the material structures of the rural landscape.

The most significant traces of cultural interactions and at the same time the remnants of past landscape are high roadside wooden crosses with an additional small iron cross on their top, decorated with the crescent moon and sunbeams. The cross with half-moon has its beginnings in old Christian symbolism, regional history and tradition. The crescent was always accompanied by sunbeams and they meant sun and moon, day and night, Christ and Our Lady. Its material durability appears to be greater than the collective memory of the locals.

The roadside wooden crosses embellished with iron crescent cross are an interesting part of regional heritage. The symbol of the crescent was common here for all Christian inhabitants and Tatars, unifying all Podlasie people. This uniting symbol is the most valuable remnant of the interaction of multi-ethnic settlement in the cultural landscape of the Podlasie. These days, the 300 years of tradition falls into oblivion, but regional cultural heritage can be saved through tourism-related product and marketing. In peripheral, economically neglected areas like the study case, the remnants may become an impetus to develop the local economy through recreation and tourism. Furthermore, making new tourism products based on natural and cultural values can be a good opportunity to restore precious elements of the historical landscape.

KEY WORDS: Poland, Podlasie, cultural landscape, multi-ethnic settlement, settlement remnants.

OUTLINE OF THE PROBLEM

The structure of the cultural landscape consists of the functional and symbolic layers reflecting human activity. It is a cultural depository and requires certain skills to read its meanings. The durability of the remains of historical settlements in the cultural landscape of the ancient Polish-Yotvingian-Ruthenian borderland is the result of real mutual cultural diffusion. Elements of ethnic and religious traditions have spread and survived in the material and mental structures of the rural landscape not only in the above-mentioned area, but in many other countries as well (Szymańska, 2009). As the years have passed, the memory of the sources of tradition has disappeared, and tradition is retained in collective memory, toponyms, the mental landscape, and local customs.

Recognizing these traces of historical settlement and clarifying the way that they function in the cultural landscape requires an interdisciplinary approach to the landscape structure and use of knowledge on and examination methods of historical geography and history, ecology and landscape geography, digital cartography and spatial analysis with GIS tools, landscape architecture and management, as well as sociology and cultural anthropology.

How did the multi-ethnic landscape appear in past centuries? Are any remnants of the multi-ethnic settlement still visible in the landscape? What is their persistence in the cultural landscape? The problem is the fading of old traditions in the multi-cultural area. It is worth revealing, explaining and restoring for the public; bringing it to life. This is a story about tradition that was forgotten, people that survived the hell of never-ending wars and totalitarian systems, artefacts that outlived memory, and hope for a better life. This is a story about the Podlasie landscape.

SOME COMMENTS ON THE DEFINITION OF LANDSCAPE

Every landscape can be described with six concepts. Different approaches use various expressions, but any landscape synthesis has to include all of them. One can distinguish the following categories of landscape description: (a) form (view, image, scenery, sight, shape) – the general appearance of the environment, the shape or appearance of something; (b) structure (pattern, arrangement, set-up, relations) – the way in which the parts of a system or object are arranged or organized, or a system arranged in this way; (c) function (role, aim, use, usefulness) – the natural purpose of something, purpose and use; (d) value (advantage, cost, quality, economics) – the beliefs people have about what is

right and wrong and what is most important in life, which control their behaviour, or the amount of money which can be received for something; importance and worth; (e) evolution (development, dynamics, change) – a gradual process of change and development; (f) origins (rise, history, heritage, symbol) – features belonging to the culture of a particular society, such as traditions, languages or buildings, which still exist from the past and which have a historical importance, the way in which something began to exist.

To find an answer to our question on landscape definition, we can divide all realities into two categories: simple and complex. Landscape is complex, a theoretical concept deriving from 16th century painting art. It has at least a dual nature: at the same time it is a both a system and an image of the surroundings. It is an epistemological notion, not an ontological one. The world we experience is a product of our imagination, thus a 'landscape' is a logical structure arising in somebody's mind and is connected to human perception. Daniels and Cosgrove (1989) defined landscape as a cultural image. Landscape is not a steady image but a mental dynamic construct, usually including notions: (a) area; (b) system; (c) image (e.g., geocomplex, natural/cultural landscape). It allows to structure and explain natural and human environment mechanisms.

Sometimes landscape is a synonym for environment (all components in surroundings) or region (spatially heterogeneous area) and landscape geography is regarded as complex physical geography. Landscape geographers use the notions 'geosystem' and 'geocomplex'. Geosystem is a part of geographic space that can be separated from the surroundings with regard to structure (Richling, Solon, 2002). Geocomplex is a relatively closed sector of nature which constitutes a whole due to processes occurring within it and interdependences of geocomponents of which it is composed (Richling, 1983).

There are six research approaches in landscape studies: (a) scenic – landscape architecture and design; (b) structural – physical geography and landscape ecology; (c) functional – planning and management of space, town-planning; (d) genetic – historical geography and landscape archaeology; (e) economic – spatial economy, agriculture economics; (f) humanistic – human geography, sociology, ethnology. The 'landscape' notion used in landscape ecology and physical geography approximates to the term 'environment', but the difference is significant: landscape is subjective, local and temporary (just like a culture), while environment exists objectively, is global and eternal – just like nature. Both landscape and environment are diverse and complex – just like a culture in nature. The notions are associated with each other. In spite of the many approaches and ways of studying landscape, there is only one landscape, it is simultaneously physical and mental. A landscape definition depends on aim of the construct – from this point of view all they are correct.

Landscape is built of layers, just like Geographic Information Systems (Fig. 1). Most popular landscape models are of the geocomplex model (Haase, 1964), patch-corridor model (Forman, Godron, 1986) and linear concepts: landscape boundaries, ecotones and ecolines. What is landscape for? The idea of landscape was developed to gain the desired state of human surroundings. It is a tool enabling the formation of a sustainable human environment and helping humankind to achieve a higher quality of life.

Fig. 1. Landscape layers

Source: Developed by author

The cultural landscape is conditioned by the cultural image of geographic space, formed by people (anthropogenic space). UNESCO documentation states that: cultural landscapes are distinct geographical areas or properties that uniquely 'represent the combined work of nature and of man' (Operational Guidelines, 2005: 83).

THE PODLASIE REGION AND AREA OF INVESTIGATION

The Podlasie Region (Podlaskie voivodship), situated in northeastern Poland, is one of the most valuable natural and cultural regions of Poland, which includes many protected areas. The eastern part of the region is well-known as a place where cultures meet. It is the most culturally diverse of all Polish voivodships (administrative region of the 1st order). The northwestern part still awaits examination.

The investigated area lies in the fork of the lowland Biebrza and Narew Rivers, amid the triangle of the towns of Wizna, Trzcianne and Tykocin, in the buffer zone of the Biebrza National Park (Fig. 2). In this cultural landscape there are valuable and undiscovered cultural traces of Polish, Ruthenian and Jewish ethnic settlements.

Fig. 2. The Podlasie Region and area of investigation
Explanation: A – national parks: 1 – Wigry NP; 2 – Biebrza NP; 3 – Narew NP; 4 – Białowieża NP; B – landscape parks: 5 – Narew Valley LP; 6 – Knyszyn Forest LP; 7 – Bug River LP; 8 – Podlasian Gorge of Bug River LP; C – investigated area

Source: Developed by author

The nearest large city to the area researched is Białystok, located 25 to 50 km away and populated by 300,000 people. Some 30% of the area of the voivodship is protected due to its natural features. Most famous area is Białowieża Forest, that creates a biosphere reserve and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In the region there are four National Parks (Białowieża, Biebrza, Narew, and Wigry), four Landscape Parks (Knyszyn Forest, Bug River, Łomża, and Suwałki), 88 nature reserves, and 15 protected landscape areas. The plant life in the region is extremely rich, and there is a very diverse animal world with hundreds of species of birds and other animals. The investigated area lies next to the Biebrza National Park, which protects the Biebrza Wetlands, the very rare fens in Europe connected with the river valley. The National Park was established in 1993 and

covers 59 thousand hectares. It is the largest national park in Poland. The Biebrza Wetlands are renowned as an important breeding, feeding and stopover site for birds of prey and many waterfowl and wetland birds. Biebrza Valley is one of the last important bird refuges in Europe. Here over 270 species of birds have been recorded, which is about 70% of the total number of bird species living in Poland (according to administration of the Biebrza National Park, see more: www.biebrza.org.pl). In a buffer zone of the park, farmers participate in semi-organic agricultural operations, especially grazing.

To understand regional conditions we have to go back to the Middle Ages and times of Rzeczpospolita, that is *Res Publica* (Republic), being the synonym of the former Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. The historic map of the Republic of the Polish Kingdom and Grand Duchy of Lithuania from 1760 shows the Podlaskie voivodship, which existed almost 300 years from the beginning of the 16th to the end of 19th century. Podlasie was situated in the same centre of powerful republic, between Poland and Lithuania (Fig. 3).
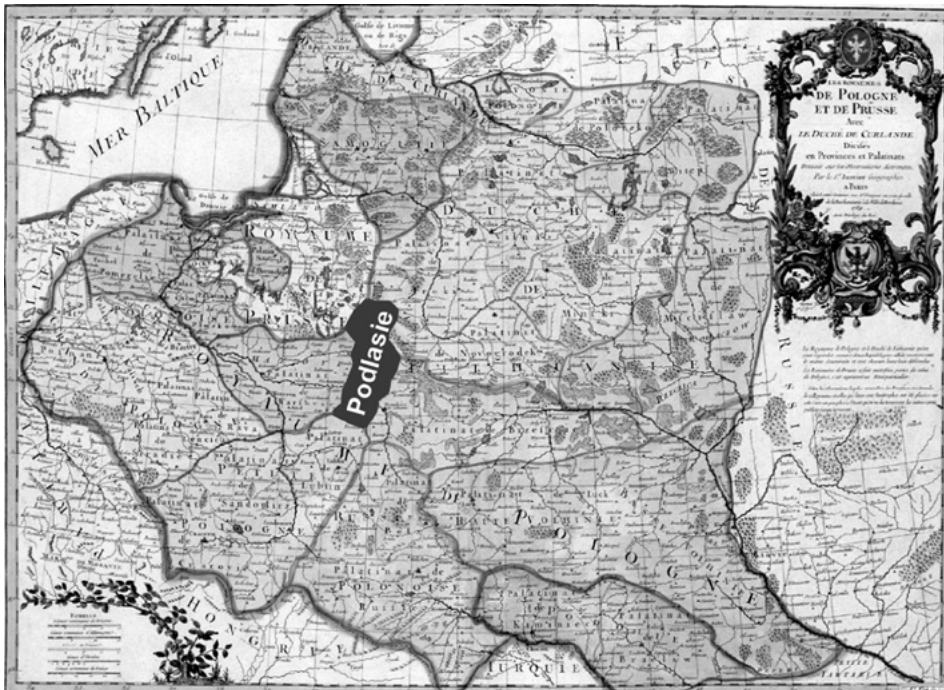
The oldest information on the Podlasie area testifies that it was inhabited by Yotvingians (Polish: Jaćwingowie, Jaćwięgowie or Połekszanie, also called Sudovians, Suduvians, Jatvians) (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 1983). In the 10th–11th centuries the region became the rivalry arena for stronger and more expansive neighbours: Lithuanians, Masovians and Ruthenians. In the course of time Yotvingian territory has shrunk (Fig. 4). Since 1038 the important fortified town of Drohiczyn was occupied respectively by Polish Masovians, Kievian Ruthenians, Ruthenian Galicians, and also Highland (Aukštaitija) and Dainava (Dzūkija) Lithuanians. In 1283 Sudovians took their last stand and after this the present Podlasie stayed empty until the beginning of the 15th century. In 1422, the State of the Teutonic Order, Lithuania and Poland concluded a treaty, partitioning the empty pagan space of Sudovia. Podlasie became a Lithuanian voivodship in 1513, and in 1569 was incorporated into the Kingdom of Poland. Large part of Podlasian area formed in the past Sudovian territory.

Fig. 3. Podlasie in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth (Kingdom of Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania), 1760
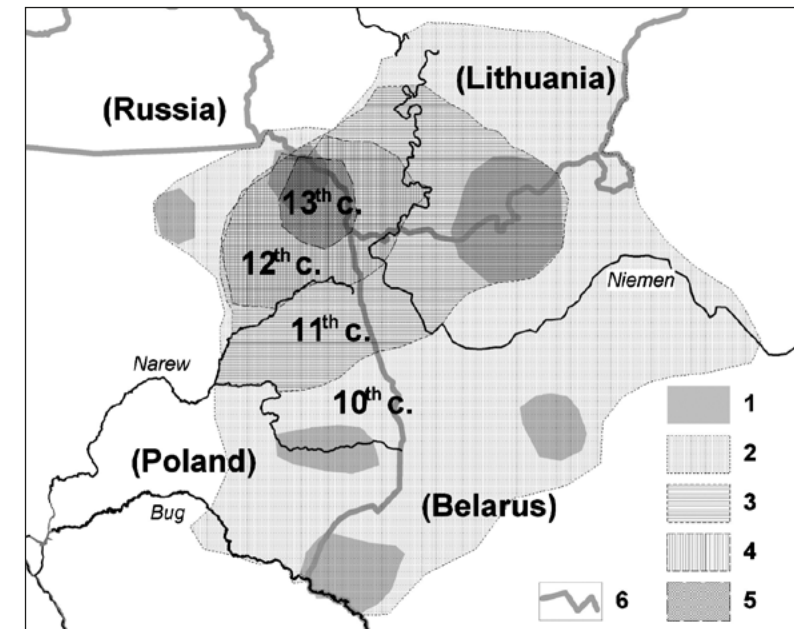
Source: dziedzictwo.polska.pl/

Fig. 4. Gradual shrinking of the Yotvingian tribal area (against present-day borders) Explanation: 1 – concentration of Yotvingian tumuli; 2 – extent of Yotvingia in 10th century; 3 – Yotvingia in 11th century; 4 – Yotvingia (Sudovia) in 12th, and 5 – in 13th century; 6 – present political borders
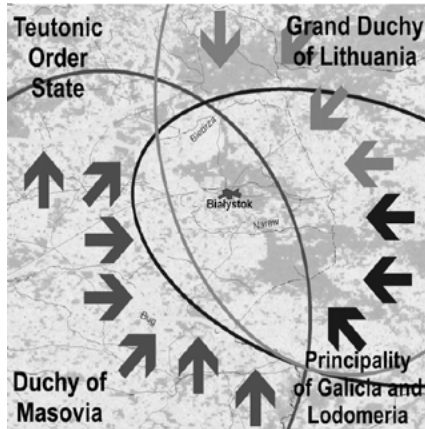
Source: Developed by author

Fig. 5. Settlement race to forests of Sudovia in 11th–16th centuries on the background of today forests, political borders and location of the Białystok city
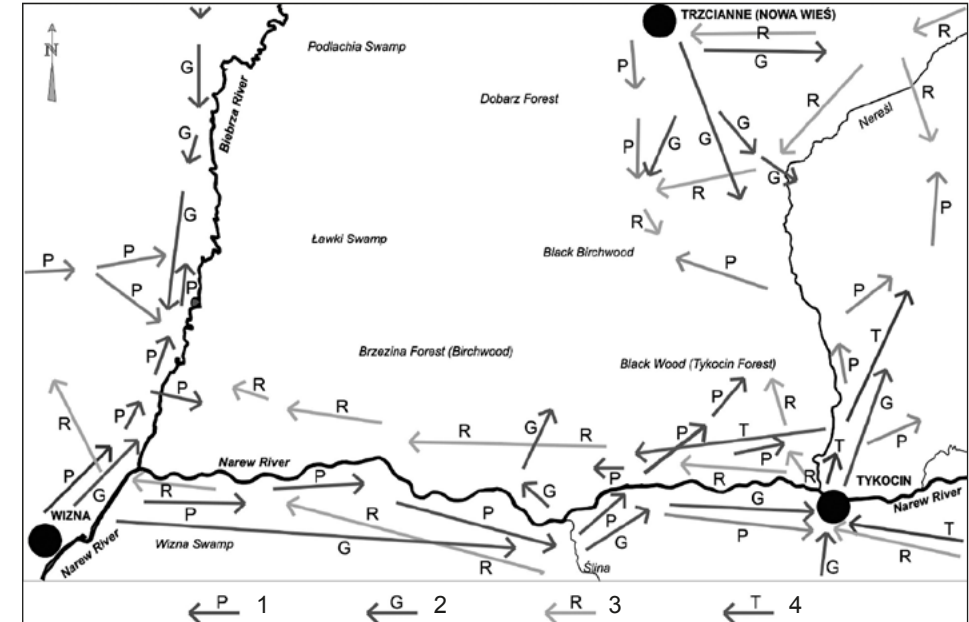
Source: Developed by author

Fig. 6. Directions of ethnic migrations in the 15th-17th centuries
Explanations: 1 – Masovian peasants; 2 – Masovian gentry; 3 – Ruthenian-Lithuanian boyars and peasants; 4 – Tatar settlers

Source: Developed by author

Most of the depopulated area stayed nearly empty for around 200 years. It was covered by vast primeval forests, separating Baltic and Slavic tribes. Their remains is Białowieża Forest National Park, the last fragment of virgin forest in Europe. The settlement started after the Polish-Lithuanian victory over the Teutonic Order in the Great War and battle of Grunwald in 1410. The settlement race continued from three directions: northeastern, southeastern and southwestern. Villages and towns were founded according to Magdeburg or Lithuanian, Polish, and Ruthenian common law (Fig. 5).

THE PAST ETHNIC LANDSCAPE OF THE AREA

The area was – together with the Beskid Sądecki Region in the Carpathian Mountains in southeastern Poland – the furthest range of east-Slavic Ruthenian settlement in Europe. The ongoing mixing and interaction of settlers led to the formation of a regional ethnographic group called Podlasianie (or Podlaszanie).

The most important factor in shaping the former ethnic landscape of the area was the construction of the Tykocin royal castle in the 15th-16th centuries (Fig. 6). The fortress was an arsenal and treasury of Rzeczpospolita. In order to secure the services and defence of the castle, the Polish king settled peasants, wild-bee keepers, craftsmen, knights, and other warriors coming from different parts of the Republic and beyond. Among them were Polish gentry, Moscow boyars and Tatar soldiers (Maroszek, 2000).

Some of the settlers intermixed with other and local people and gradually vanished into the settlement background (Fig. 7, 8). This especially concerns Ruthenians and Tatars. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Tatars were allowed to intermarry with Christians, an uncommon occurrence in Europe at that time. Over a dozen Tatar families were polonized; that is they became Poles. Ruthenian settlers were usually settled as Catholics, but the remains of their eastern origins lasts in the local customs, like eastern tradition of tying a fabric on a cross. Fortunately some of the parish register books survived wars, preserving records since the 17th century and greatly helping to reveal the settlement process.

Next to the castle, on the other side of the Narew River, exists the town of Tykocin, located on a river passage. The town was situated on the route from Kraków to Vilnius and Moscow, on the border of Masovia and Lithuania. Civic rights based on Chełmno (Kulm) law were given to Tykocin in 1425 by Masovian Duke Janusz. From the year 1522, Tykocin was open to Jews. Today Tykocin is a historic, baroque urban complex. It was, along with Cracow, the largest and most important Jewish community in the Republic in the 17th–18th centuries. Until World War II, Tykocin was an important centre of Jewish culture and at the present time is a tourist attraction in northern Poland.
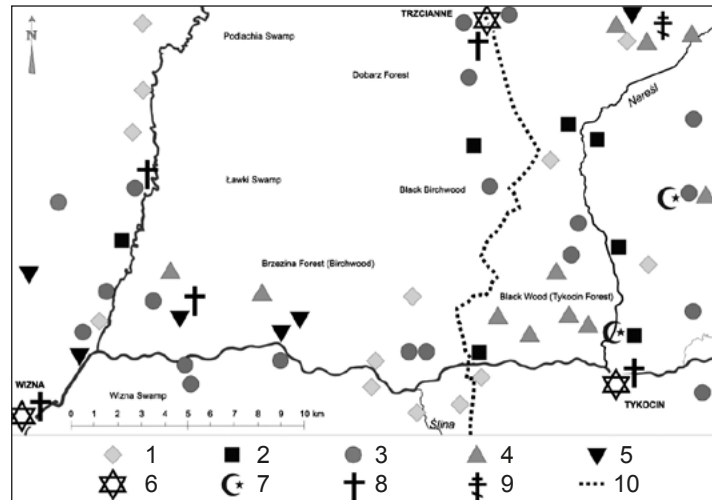
Fig. 7. Ethnic settlement in the area in 17th and 18th centuries
Explanation: 1 – Polish petty gentry; 2 – Polish gentry and peasants; 3 – Masovian peasants; 4 – Ruthenian peasants; 5 – Ruthenian boyars and peasants; 6 – Jewish communities; 7 – Tatar cluster; 8 – Catholic church; 9 – Orthodox Uniate church; 10 – Medieval 'Duke Vytautas' Road' from Wizna to Goniądz
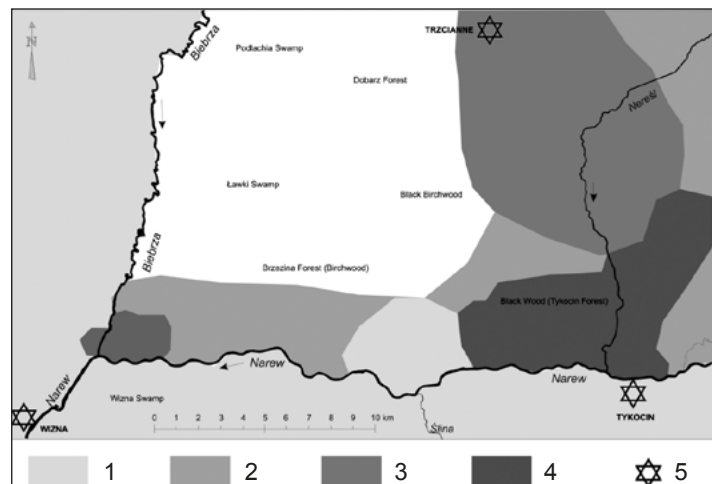
Source: Developed by author

Fig. 8. The ethnic landscape of the area between the 16th and 18th centuries
Explanation: 1 – Masovian; 2 – Lithuanian-Ruthenian; 3 – Lithuanian-Ruthenian-Masovian; 4 – Lithuanian-Ruthenian-Masovian-Tatar; 5 – Jewish

Source: Developed by author

REMNANTS OF SETTLEMENT AND CULTURE INTERACTION

In the Podlasie landscape there are no dominating structures, so the traces of cultural interaction are hardly readable. The culture of Podlasie combines elements of Masovian and Ruthenian folklore, history of Poland, Lithuania and Ruthenia, Catholic and Orthodox beliefs. In the collective memory of Podlasians there exists a vision of a common past, though expressed in different ways. Among the remains of ethnic settlement in the area, one can perceive both the material and immaterial: (a) village layout – there are two kinds of village layouts in the vicinity: regular and irregular. Giełczyn is an example of a regular linear village (*ulicówka* – Strassendorf, road village), established *in situ* in 1559, during land reform in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, called '*pomiara włóczna*' (land survey). Those villages were settled both by Polish and Ruthenian peasants. Łaziuki village represents the other type – the irregular forest settlement, dated to the 17th–18th centuries, functionally connected to the Tykocin fortress. Such villages were often populated by Polish Catholic peasants of Ruthenian origin; (b) wooden architecture: unfortunately, wooden buildings disappear from the landscape. Examples are the wooden catholic church in Giełczyn, built in 1777 and seriously damaged during WWII, and still used by the smallest parish in Poland (100 people). Another: Łazy – a village with wooden houses of the Polish petty gentry with the characteristic veranda, from the beginning of the 20th century; (c) toponyms and anthroponyms: many field objects are traces of the ethnic past. Ławki Swamp is a protected swamp, a part of Biebrza National Park, which possesses many named places, described in Polish as '*uroczysko*' (a special, separated, natural place) – they are situated in forest and are distinguished by unusual natural features. Part of them have Ruthenian or Lithuanian (Sudovian) origins. At cemeteries, one can find Podlasian surnames of eastern origin (Lithuanian-Ruthenian) with depictions of Our Lady of Vilnius along with the crescent; (d) traditions and customs: during centuries of common life, different ethnic groups have exchanged many customs, cuisines, technical solutions, ideas, stories, religious practices, and even cult objects; part of them were memorized and are still passed from generation to generation, while others have vanished; (e) religious and national symbols: they are present in the surroundings of each place, such as at crossroads, village borders, cemeteries, private estates, hills, houses, etc. In Giełczyn, one can find an iron cross with a crescent on top of four meter high wooden cross. Another example is such a cross hanging on the outside wall of the parish church. Initially, it was fixed on a tombstone in the church graveyard, then later hung of the church. In Tykocin there still exist houses with Magen David (the Shield/Star of David), symbolizing Jewish inhabitants of

the town (former *shtetl*); (f) language melody: this is the special intonation of spoken Polish, which derives from East Slavic languages. It is very melodious and 'drawling', i.e., has an East European melody; (g) collective memory and sense of identity: in a multicultural society, identity is a matter of importance. Man needs to define himself in the face of the existence of other groups. In this area collective memory and awareness of identity are weak, but the memory of ethnic origination has survived in the recollections of locals.

The most significant traces of cultural interactions and at the same time the remnants of past landscape are high roadside wooden crosses with an additional small iron cross on their top (Fig. 9). This cross is decorated with the crescent moon, but in fact, this is not a decoration. Roadside crosses can be commonly found all over Eastern Europe. Crosses with the half-moon crown church towers, shrines and figures of Our Lady, from the Canary Islands to Moscow. The exceptionality of the Podlasian roadside crosses consists of the additional small cross with crescent and sunbeams made of wrought iron. Such combinations of large and small crosses, the simple Latin cross with the solar-lunar symbol made of natural wood and handmade iron, is characteristic only for the Podlasie Region.

Fig. 9. Wooden road crosses with iron crescent cross: traditional and two-barred caravaca

Source: Developed by author

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE ARTEFACTS

Poland is the land of crosses: they stand at crossroads, village boundaries, old graves, historical places, private estates, in every place that has a meaning. If we assume that one settlement is accompanied by only one cross, it gives us more than 56 thousand crosses. In fact there are not less than 200 thousand open-air, freely standing crosses in Poland. The most valuable are wooden and decorated, sometimes very ornamented and meaningful. Wooden crosses were founded by village inhabitants as thanksgiving or protection against fire, plague, famine, and war.

There are 5 types of Christian crosses in this part of Podlasie (Fig. 10): (a) plain Latin cross (*crux ordinaria*); (b) Eastern Orthodox cross: a patriarchal cross (*crux gemina*) with a short, slanted crosspiece, common in Byzantine Greek
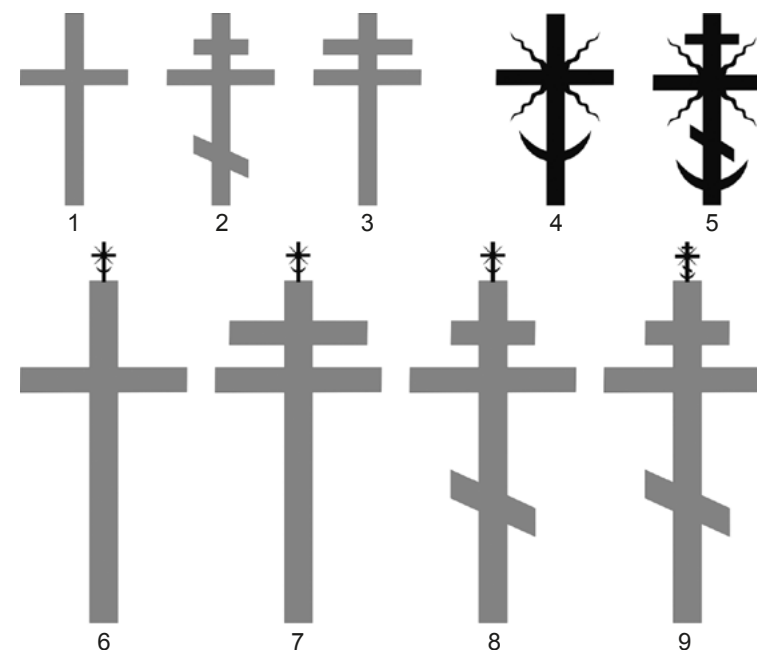

Fig. 10. Types of crosses in the Podlasie Region
Explanation: 1–3 – crosses made of wood, stone or iron: 1 – Latin; 2 – Orthodox, 3 – Caravaca; made of iron: 4 – Latin, 5 – Orthodox; high crosses combined of wood and iron: 6 – Latin, 7 – Caravaca, Orthodox with 8 – Latin and 9 – Orthodox addition

Source: Developed by author

and Eastern European iconography; (c) Caravaca cross (Polish: *karawaka*): two barred cross similar to the patriarchal or archiepiscopal cross, but with the higher bar equal or nearly equal to the lower one, dated to the 16th century from the town of Caravaca in Spain. It was created in order to stop a cholera epidemic (Brückner, 1985). In Poland, it was very popular from the 18th to the beginning of the 20th century; (d) Latin cross with crescent; (e) Orthodox cross with crescent.

There are a total of 66 roadside crosses in the area, in this number 12 are made of wood (Fig. 11). They are very differentiated: made with iron, wood, concrete, stone, mixed materials, built for various purposes, such as for thanksgiving, commemoration, wishes, requests to God for intercession or as a landmark.
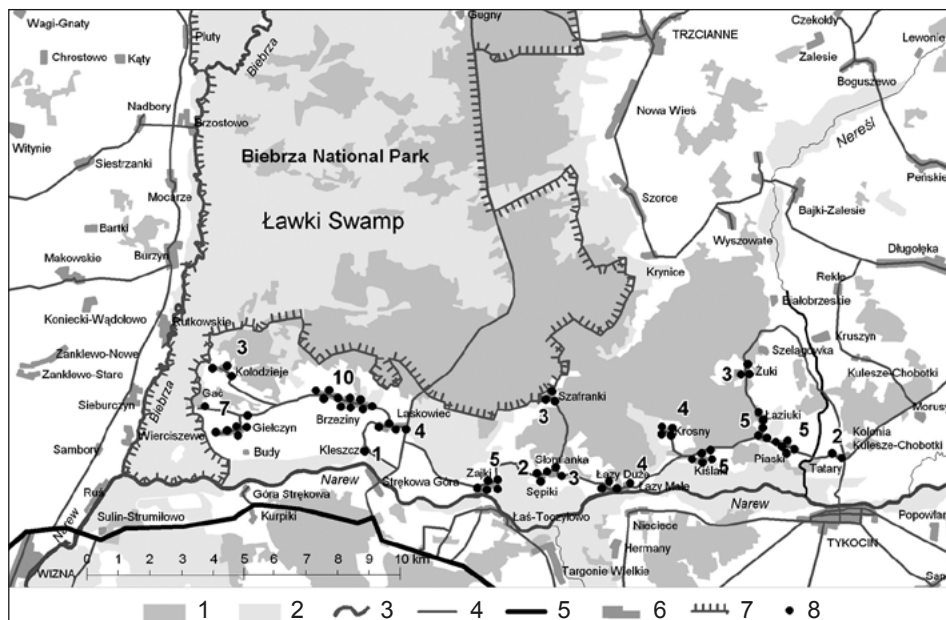

Fig. 11. The location and number of roadside crosses in the area of investigation
Explanation: 1 – forest; 2 – swamp and wet meadows; 3 – river; 4 – road; 5 – main road; 6 – settlement; 7 – border of Biebrza National Park; 8 – roadside cross

Source: Developed by author

The cross with crescent has its beginnings in old Christian symbolism and tradition. An essential place in a church is a tabernacle. It is a locked box containing the Eucharist, called Holy Communion or the Blessed Sacrament, which is considered to be appointed emblem of bread and wine from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The tabernacle contains custody, i.e., a metal liturgical box, used in Catholic church to store Holy Communion in the form of Host. Custody serves to move the Host to monstrance to enable public adoration of Blessed Sacrament. It encloses a semicircular support for the Host, called *luna* or *melchizedek*. Melchizedek was an Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) figure, the King of (Jeru) Salem and priest, who brought bread and wine to Abram, blessed him and received tithes (Genesis, 14:18–20). The *luna* was named after the similarity between Eucharist and Melchizedek – 'the giving of bread and wine'. The luna-melchizedek took the shape of the crescent moon. In this way, the crescent became the symbol of the Christian sacrament and a part of a cross.

In 1710, in the year when Riga capitulated to Russia, disaster fell on Podlasie. During the Great Northern War (1700–1721), Swedish, Russian, Saxonic, Brandenburgian, and Polish-Lithuanian armies brought to Podlasie destruction, plunder, famine, and the plague (cholera epidemic), which led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people in the region. In the vicinity of Siemiatycze, people took refuge from the plague in a forest in the place now called Holy Mountain of Grabarka. All of them survived. Thus the cult of Grabarka Mountain and Holy Spring was born. After the epidemic, people began to built caravaca and other wooden crosses. The crosses were crowned with the additional iron crescent cross to strengthen protection from the plague, famine, enemies, and fire. The tradition thus began.

The crescent was not an ornament, but a part of the cross. The source of the crescent in an iron cross is a luna-melchizedek (Fig. 12). It symbolizes the Blessed Sacrament, the body and blood of Christ. The meaning of the crescent

Fig. 12. The origin of the crescent in Podlasian crosses
Explanation: 1 – a custody; 2 – a luna (melchizedek); 3 – a monstrance; 4 – Our Lady of the Pointed Gate in Vilnius (the votive silver crescent at the bottom of the painting dates to 1849); 5 – the iron cross with crescent, hanging on outside wall of the parish church in Giełczyn; 6 – a wooden roadside cross with iron crescent cross in Piaski Village

Source: 1–3: www.dewocjonalia24.pl [09.08.2010]; 4–6: developed by author

in Christianity is much wider. For many years, the crescent was not affiliated in any way with Islam; it did not become a Muslim heritage symbol until the 19th century. In Christian culture the crescent stands for the: (a) representation of Eucharist (Holy Communion); (b) East European Marian cult (in the area – cult of Our Lady of the Pointed Gate in Vilnius); (c) symbol of glory and the victory of good over evil (along with a cross); (d) sign of hope, especially for resurrection; (e) symbol of faith and fidelity (to the faith); (f) East churches sign (Armenian, Orthodox, Uniate); (g) half-pagan symbol of sin, night, water, silver, vessel, plenty, mystery; harvest, woman (for more see: Kopaliński, 1990); (h) talisman against plague and other disasters (enemies, fire, famine, etc.).

Widespread in Eastern Europe, the Marian cult can be easily seen in the landscape. In Święta Lipka (a village in northern Poland), a sculpture presents the Madonna treading triumphantly on the crescent, the symbol of night and evil. In the old town of Kamieniec Podolski (former Polish Republic, today Ukraine), the sculpture of the Madonna is standing on the crescent on the top of the Muslim minaret, built by Turks next to the Catholic cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul. This is the only church in Europe (not counting mosques changed to churches) with minaret.

The crescent was also used as a heraldic symbol. Some Polish coats of arms have a crescent moon, usually only as a representation of the waxing crescent moon (Polish: *przybywający księżyc, półksiężyc, księżyc w nowiu niepełny*). The roots of

Fig. 13. Examples of Polish coats of arms with crescent
Explanation: 1 – Leliwa; 2 – Szeliga; 3 – Trzaska; 4 – Sas (of Hungarian provenance); 5 – Ostoja

Source: Herby rycerztwa polskiego. Nàpięcioro Xiąg rozdzieloné. Przez Bartosza Paprockiego zebráné y wydáné Roku Pánskiégo 1584, 1858: Kraków: Wydanie Kazimierza Józefa Turowskiego, Nakładem Wydawnictwa Biblioteki Polskiej

the crescent in Eastern European culture can be traced both to Western European heraldy and old Slavic beliefs. Among others, Polish heraldry includes coat of arms called *Leliwa* – the word being explained as a new moon at a moment when the star Venus towers over it (Błaszczyński, 1901; Fig. 13).

The crescent cross is also similar to Asiatic and Eastern European tamgas (in Altaic: *stamp* or *seal*, in Turkish: *mark*, *stamp*), an ownership and tribal sign, a kind of rune-like symbol among Great Steppe tribes and East European Balts and Slavs (confront Lithuanian coat of arms 'columns of Gediminas', Ukrainian national emblem *'tryzub'*, i.e., trident, Kushan royal tamgas and other). Some Podlasian iron crosses resemble a trident crown of a bunchuk (Polish: *buńczuk*), that is a pole with a piece of horse tail hair, decorated with a trident or a crescent, used by the Mongol and Tatar armies as a flag (Fig. 14).
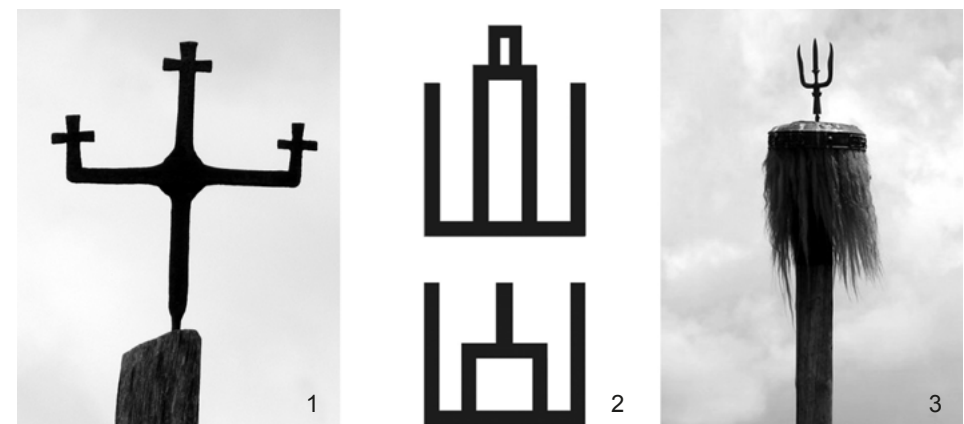

Fig. 14. Podlasian crosses and pagan symbols
Explanation: 1 – iron cross in village of Giełczyn; 2 – Lithuanian tamga (so-called 'columns of Gediminas' – medieval insignia of Gediminas family); 3 – Mongolian bunchuk

Source: 1–2: developed by author; 3: www.edudemo.org.pl

The crescent in iron cross was usually accompanied by sunbeams. The half-moon and sunbeams meant sun and moon, day and night, good and evil, etc. Crescent crosses can be found in Podlasie in many places: a gravestone surmounted with the crescent cross at the joint Catholic-Orthodox cemetery in Boćki, the wooden caravaca adorned with an iron crescent cross in the vicinity of Wiszowate village, etc. Wooden roadside crosses with iron crescent crosses are present only in Podlasie. The largest collections of iron crescent crosses can be seen in the Podlasie Museum in Białystok and the State Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw (Fig. 15).
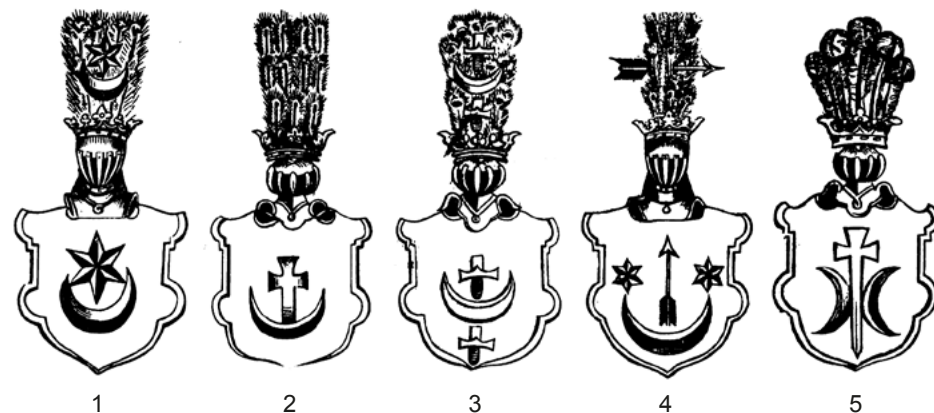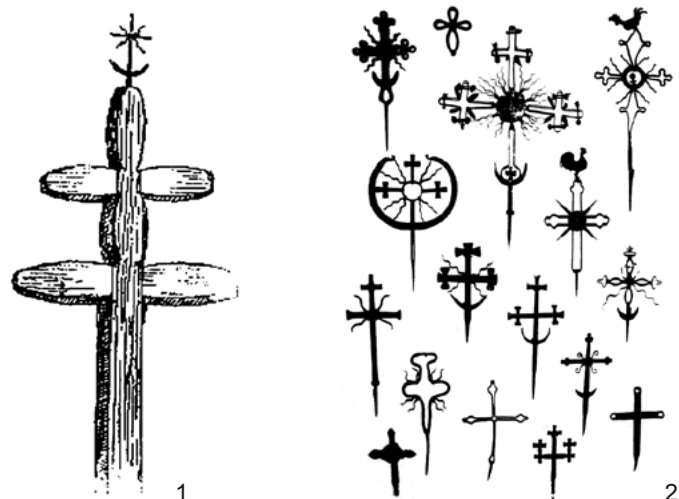
Fig. 15. The Podlasian crosses in regional folklore
Explanation: 1 – the oldest picture of Podlasian caravaca with crescent iron cross from the surroundings of Trzcianne; 2 – the collection of iron crosses in the State Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw

Source: 1 – Gloger, 1865; 2 – developed by author

Fig. 16. Vanishing tradition
Explanation: 1 – graves at old cemetery in Giełczyn; 2 – iron cross tied with fabric due to eastern custom (Piaski village); 3 – new metal cross and old wooden one (Tykocin area)

Source: Developed by author

DISAPPEARING TRADITION

The roadside wooden crosses embellished with iron crescent cross are an interesting part of regional heritage, but the sense of this phenomenon lies much deeper than once thought farmers, who dug from their fields old iron crosses. Old wooden crosses are being replaced by metal ones, with no additional cross. Tradition disappears (Fig. 16).

A short socio-cultural description of the area gives a very traditional image of the society, including the Polish, patriotic ethnos, traditional, multi-generational family. People practise Roman Catholicism and cultivate traditional rural customs. They vote mainly for conservative rightist parties and feel a regional Podlasian identity. Social bonds are strong here, characterized by local ties. Today, the area of investigation has a peripheral location, a weak local economy and poverty. The field research pursued by author in the area revealed surprising attitude of the local people to the crescent crosses: (a) no one remembers the origin and meaning of the crescent; (b) many inhabitants associate the crescent with Islam; (c) most people kindly accept the idea of the protection of melchizedek crosses.

Crosses are worthy of preservation because they involve 300 years of regional tradition, a part of the local identity until WWII. Today, this tradition is disappearing. The symbol of the crescent was common here for all Christian inhabitants and Tatars, regardless of ethnos and rite, unifying all Podlasie people. This uniting symbol is the most valuable remnant of the interaction of multi-ethnic settlement in the cultural landscape of the Podlasie.

The crosses can be preserved by the following activities: (a) protection of remaining old wooden crosses; (b) replacing decayed crosses with stylish wooden ones, supplemented with iron cross; (c) recognition of crosses as a part of regional heritage (cultural park; see the clause 16 of Act of 23rd July 2003 On protection of monuments; Dz.U. z dnia 17 września 2003 r.); (d) making artefacts a promotional tourist attraction.

In the past, the Podlasie Region was an area of multi-ethnic settlement. The interaction of cultures resulted in new qualities, resulting in the emergence of a new regional culture. Remains of the settlement and cultural interactions still exist in the Podlasie landscape, but sometimes are hardly comprehensible. The most significant cultural relics of the past are roadside wooden crosses crowned with a small iron cross and embellished with a crescent. They symbolize faith, hope, life, love, fear, and humility. Their material durability appears to be greater than the collective memory of the locals. These days, the 300 years of

tradition falls into oblivion, but regional cultural heritage can be saved through tourism-related product and marketing. Investigated area is predisposed to bike tourism, and this offers further opportunity for the community. In peripheral, economically neglected areas like the study case, the remnants may become an impetus to develop the local economy through recreation and tourism. Furthermore, making new tourism products based on natural and cultural values can be a good opportunity to restore precious elements of the historical landscape.

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