

**Ethnocultural Dimensions of Existence for the Hagiographical Plot about
ST. Olexiy, the Man of God**

This article is an attempt to demonstrate the functional peculiarities of St. Olexiy's, the man of God, cult in Ukrainian folklore and reveal the mechanisms of a literary legend in the folk environment. In order to develop the abovementioned topic we will use three types of texts: hagiography from the collections of manuscripts, songs about St. Olexiy by lyricists and kobzars, and also texts about the Saint from folk calendars.

St. Olexiy, the man of God, is a commonly recognized Christian Saint, who lived at the end of the IV and the beginning of the V century and was known by special ascetic deeds and was glorified as a venerable. His hagiography became known in Kievan Rus in the XII century as the text about him was included in the *Zlatostruy Collection* as a part of *Torzhestvennyk*. However, the plot acquired greater popularity in the XVII century, with the creation of a great deal of texts of different genres where the saint's deeds and image were reconsidered. It is clear why the legend was reflected in folklore and the Saint became the part of the folk calendar.

First of all, we would like to draw your attention to the hagiographical collections of manuscripts from the XVIII and the beginning of the XIX century from the I. Franko's fund. They were written and used among village clergy. The language used in the texts is an interesting variant of old Ukrainian with various dialectal peculiarities. Of course, the degree of similarity to folklore texts is not the same.

Volodymyr Hnatyuk published an interesting prose legend about St. Olexiy in his *Ethnographic Materials from Hungarian Rus*. We can call this text "a folk hagiography", which was rather far from its literary counterpart. It did not mention either the names of St. Olexiy's parents or where it took place (Rome). On the contrary, we get a fictional name of his fiancé – Febrona. According to the legend, the Saint was hiding in the woods not far from his home and then was travelling around the nearby monasteries. The prayers of his mother, who asked God to let her

son die at home, helped him return home. The hagiography doesn't mention the lifetime wonders or those coming from his relics.

Another source that will help us to see the peculiarities of St. Olexiy's image in folk interpretation is the numerous songs about him by the lyricists. Using these texts as the examples we can see the four basic changes the texts of spiritual songs undergo when they become folklore. First of all, there is the language simplification in order to adjust it to the listeners' level. Secondly, there is a change of plot peripeteia in the hagiography by analogy with hagiographies of others or people's idea of sanctity and saints. Thirdly, folklore interpretation of the plot is marked by the use of the folk song poetics, i. e. funeral mourning. Fourthly, unlike literary hagiographies where the Saint is in the center of narration, lyricists' songs have the accent shifted to the Saint's family. In terms of composition the mourning of the Saint's family take up the larger part of the text.

The so-called folk calendars are the most "folk" source of information about the saints. They depict folklore ideas about the greatest celebrations of a liturgical year. The people's honoring of the saints is divided according to their functions, i. e. under which circumstances one should ask for their help. Olexiy, the man of God, is the patron saint of bees and apiarists.

Thus, we can see that the folk cult can exist without any biographical knowledge about the saint; moreover, such knowledge is often limited to the name only. The same happened with St. Olexiy since his folk "function" is not related to the plot of his hagiography as it is simply related to the time of the year, when he is remembered.

Finally, we can make a conclusion that when the plot about St. Olexiy got into the folk environment, it lost a number of episodes leaving only a certain amount of motives that are consonant with folklore consciousness. They are selected according to certain principles, i. e. simplicity, correlation with the forms of traditional life, analogy to other saints' hagiographies, which are familiar among the people. Everything else, which is impossible to understand using the categories of the folk culture, is left out. The texts analyzed cannot be characterized by having a multi-

episode structure and a developed plot. They use the most general story of the literary hagiography that fits into a different value system. The chronological, dimensional and psychological distance between the events and the moment of retelling is shortened. The folk etymological interpretations of St. Olexiy's name in the folk calendars let us speak about semantic gap between the anthroponym with its purely Christian reference.