

# THE SEALED GRAVE AND BURIAL RITUALS IN THE CONTEXT OF REVENANTS IN UKRAINIAN BELIEF

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## ABSTRACT

The article\* sets the goal of describing the Ukrainian ritual of the sealed grave and its relation to revenants, or the unquiet dead, based both on the author's fieldwork and ethnographic collections of the turn of the 20th century. The meaning of the ritual and its variants are delineated through folk beliefs and institutionalised Orthodoxy and are defined as one of the main reasons for becoming revenants. Depending on a proper or failed funeral, the dead have different possibilities and time boundaries to visit the living. Together with biological reasons, the ritual of sealing a grave allows a seven-year period of return prior to the grave being finally sealed.

KEYWORDS: revenants • unquiet dead • belief narratives • burial ritual • Ukrainian beliefs

## INTRODUCTION

Belief narratives relating to revenants, or the impure or unquiet dead, in Ukraine were collected in the 19th and 20th centuries, and are active beliefs to this day. Being attached to the way one makes a transition to the hereafter or whether there is a reason that keeps one on earth, belief narratives about the unquiet dead embody the necessity of following burial customs. Local Ukrainian Christianity absorbs various local vernacular traditions, therefore funerals consist of lots of vernacular religious elements, such as knocking three times on the house threshold, a wake for the departed, ritual meals, last gifts to the departed, etc. One of these elements, the ritual of sealing the grave (*zapechatuvannya mohyly*), is considered one of the key parts of a proper funeral for Ukrainians and is performed by a priest.

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The ritual of the sealed grave appears both in ethnographic collections of the 19th century (Chubins'kiy 1877: 708) and modern rites in various forms and with different explanations. One of the beliefs asserts that the grave should be sealed in order "to let the soul easily pass away. Because the soul, which has left the physical body, should have an opportunity to fly away to the world." (FM: F, 53b). Others say that it prevents the dead from walking (Ivanov 1909: 248), while Orthodoxy as a dominant religion<sup>1</sup> in Ukraine explains it as a part of the burial liturgy that is directed to the resurrection and eternal life (FM: M, Ch, 50s). The beliefs reveal this ritual is an integral part of a proper funeral. The "consequences of failure in the ritual process" (Boyacıoğlu 2015: 9) could be the creation of a revenant, whose visits to the living would, however, be for a limited time.

As with other rituals of transition, the burial rite involves the church and the priest (both in the funerals and commemorations), even though for some families without strong faith this might be a formality only.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the sealing of the grave is controlled by the Orthodox Church, which Volodymyr Bilyy (1926: 93) described as "taking on the privilege of the only valid mediator between the living and the dead" by unifying all previous signs and amulets into one, i.e. into the cross that is erected at the grave after it is sealed. Institutional control over burial ends in beliefs and rituals that might replace, temporarily or permanently, the sealed grave and compensate, using Ute Hüsken's (2007) terminology, for the 'failed ritual' until the revenant can be calmed down, if necessary. This period before this rest has specific time boundaries that can vary depending on the type of revenant, which will be described below.

The paper aims to describe the ritual of sealing the grave and its interpretations both in folk belief and in institutional Orthodoxy, as well as discussing the possibility of becoming a revenant and how long this could last for. Firstly, I describe the concept of the funeral 'as it should be', including preparations and their contemporary significance. Secondly, I reveal the concept of the sealed grave, since it serves as a point of departure for this research. Thirdly, I describe the dead in sealed graves, delineate the way they can come back and the time limits of these visits. Fourthly, I turn to revenants in unsealed graves, the time limits of their afterlife activity and the possible biological background for such limits.

The majority of my research is based on fieldwork material collected in different regions of Ukraine, as well as from priests. I aim to show a complex picture of Ukrainian burial beliefs and customs. All the narratives were collected in June–October, 2020, during the time of closed borders and quarantine, and therefore the narratives were recorded in online conversations using Skype and Messenger, in written form (through Messenger or Viber) and with the help of friends. This means that some recordings were made by local interviewers using a questionnaire that I prepared. This allowed me to make my informants comfortable, because some of them were not acquainted with me and did not feel comfortable talking to a stranger about funerals and revenants online.

My informants are from different professions (doctor, teacher, musician, translator, professor) and the information they kindly provided is based on their experiences and knowledge of customs. The clergymen whom I interviewed are of different Orthodox affiliations. The priest belongs to the Orthodox Church of Moscow patriarchy, while the chaplain is of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (the former Ukrainian Orthodox Church

of Kyiv patriarchy). Although the ritual canon is supposedly the same, I found it reasonable to have an interpretation from both sides. I will keep my informants anonymous except for some names within my own family. I also use ethnographic collections from the turn of the 20th century (Chubins'kiy 1877; Isayevich' 1883; Manzhura 1892; Hnatyuk 1903) to reveal the transformation of beliefs and customs.

I use Leonard Primiano's (1995: 40) "inductive approach" to "interpret cultural data in a way that is meaningful to [...] informants" and to reveal the transformation and variety of beliefs in revenants as well as funeral rites, especially the ritual of sealing the grave. In the article, I use Primiano's (ibid.) term 'vernacular religion' to avoid an opposition between the institutional and popular religions because I find this polarisation incorrect. I use Arnold van Gennep's (1960 [1909]) theory to interpret the unsealed grave or the other lacking elements as a failed stage in the deceased's separation or incorporation. In defining 'failed' and 'proper' funerals I mean not the precise structure of the funeral ritual, but rather what my informants mean by the phrase 'as it should be'. In addition to regional differences there might be also personal variations depending on religious affiliation or awareness of local mortuary traditions. The terms revenants, unquiet, impure or walking dead are used in the article as synonymous, with revenants serving as an etic term while the others are emic. I also apply some archaeological material and some biological facts about dead bodies to provide a wider context.

#### THE MEANING OF FUNERAL RITES AND PREPARATIONS FOR ONE'S OWN DEATH

Before we turn to analysis of revenants and the concept of the sealed grave, it is necessary to find out what death is considered to be and what place funeral rites have in personal experience. Svitlana Kukharenko (2011: 68) describes death for Ukrainians as "a comfort, a long-awaited event" since one can be reunited with one's family. It is difficult to say whether this final event is considered long-awaited, but at least it can be considered something one should prepare for and something that should be done properly. I will cover these beliefs in chronological order.

Since one's preparation for death starts well in advance, I will first describe the custom related to preparing for one's own death. Two of my grandmothers and my grandfather used to show me a shelf with textile items, clothes and money to make me aware of how to dress them and what to use for their funerals. They were bearers of different traditions – my father's parents lived in northern Ukraine in Zhytomyrshchyna and were Orthodox, while my mother's mother was from the Odesa region in southern Ukraine and had moved to central Ukraine. Although her family were Old Believers, she was not religious, or at least never expressed her religious affiliation. Despite their different backgrounds, the idea that one had to carefully prepare things for death occurred to all of them. Moreover, my maternal grandmother prepared a detailed list of what funeral items were needed, for what purpose, and how we should dress her: "I tell you, my mother had been collecting these kerchiefs all her life. She collected them and told me that this was for death." (FM: F, 53a)

The same custom was described by an informant from north-eastern Ukraine: "Here [in the Chernihivs'ka region], plenty [of things] are needed: embroidered towels, ker-

chiefs. Here, I always say that you even have not had time to be born before it is already necessary to prepare a dowry for death." (FM: F, 63) To some extent this explains the practical reasons for preparation. The significant role of preparation is linked to another folk belief that one should be buried according to the custom. For now, I shall not go further into specific details of the ritual that follows a proper funeral, but rather I shall try to reveal how much the idea of one's burial being performed correctly means to people. As my mother told me,

I: You said that our Grandma buried her mother according to the Old Believer's ritual...

M: [...] Well, I don't know, you know, I was not in there. The things that mother told me, that according to a new [custom], at that time... It seems to me that she died in [19]62 if I am not mistaken [...]. At that time [the Soviet period], one was not buried like that but was [buried] with music, orchestra, with pathetic speeches by party workers, you know, and so on. But her mother, before she passed away, had said... no, you know what, I'll tell you, there were nuances. She had told her: "I'll curse you if you do not bury me as I bequeathed. But you will not bury me as I want because you don't know how". That was the reason, it seems to me, that my mother called the woman who was of the same religion and knew all the nuances, you know. Because her mother said, "You will not bury me like that, because you do not know how. At least do not interfere. Try..." You know what it means – not to bring an orchestra and all these speeches, and so on? Besides, my mum was preparing to become a headteacher. You should understand it properly, those Soviet communist times... At that time, it must have been the end of everything – you would be weaned from the Party, weaned from, excuse me, from the breast, I do not know how else to explain it. But she decided not to prevent such a funeral. You know, it means... I ask, "But what exactly did you do?" and she says, "Nothing. I just was... I was present there. There was a priest. There was a funeral service as it should be. She was even carried under the gonfalons."

I: What is it?

M: Under the gonfalons... I understand what it is. This is a long stick with a big piece of textile on the top of it, where, for example, the Archangel Michael is depicted, or other Saints. [...] Well, my mother said that she was carried under the gonfalons. But what exactly she meant, I don't know. But she said that her mother was buried with Old Believers' rites, everything was as it should be, and so on. The next day my mother was called to the *NarCom*<sup>3</sup> of the Party and was told, "How could you allow this? You!" and she said, "But I am not a communist. And how could I refuse to fulfil the last wish of the old person? Do you understand, I... Would you dare to disobey your mother in her last wish whatever it would be?" Well, the mother was excluded from that position at once, and that's all, she was never offered that position again, even despite her university education. (FM: F, 53a)

The narrative shows how fear of breaking burial law was stronger than fear of political persecution or punishment. This narrative also raises another crucial point for a person who is well versed in burial and conducts a funeral when a family does not know how to do it properly themselves. According to proper mortuary rites, the only person able to provide ritual competence to my great grandmother, an Old Believer, was a

person from the same religious community. Here I use the term 'ritual competence' in Hüsken's (2007: 346) sense, i.e. ritual can only occur properly when performed by certain well-versed and skilful individual.

When talking to my mother about the funeral of her mother it was unclear how it was possible to arrange it correctly as my mother did not know the ritual and my grandmother's religious affiliation was unclear. She explained:

I: This 'as it should be'... Who guided you on how to do it? Did you guide the funeral yourself, or did father guide it, or who?

M: No, no, I'll tell you now, I'll tell you, everything is not so easy. Do you know that there is such a person...? I had never heard of it before, I thought that the *tamada* [toastmaster or conductor] is at weddings only. However, it turned out that there is a *tamada* at funerals too. Well, the mother of that woman, you know her, she was the *tamada* at our grandmother's funeral. [...] I remember that when mother was already, so to speak, in her last weeks, that woman... what was her name... she used to come, she said, "Maria, looks like you give up, come on, rise and cheer up." But she [grandmother] respond to her, "I kindly ask you, help [them] to bury me, take care of my funeral, because... I rely on you very much." And she said, "Maria, what are you talking about? You'll bury me yet", and so on. Thus, when mother passed away, I called her at once... She came... I hardly can recall that time. Father was the one who took care of everything but she was leading, guiding the process. (FM: F, 53a)

This example reaffirms that although the religiosity is unclear, fear of being improperly buried plays a crucial role. The *tamada* is the link between the tradition and fear of a lack of ritual competence (Hüsken 2007: 346).

Today it is also possible to book the services of a *tamada* through a funeral company, at least in the capital city, Kyiv (FM: F, 31), although in this case the *tamada*'s authority would be doubtful because she would be a stranger and would not be a figure of authority or trust for the family. However, it seems that this position definitely should be occupied, especially if the family does not have confidence in their knowledge of ritual nuances. The necessity of ritual competence is so influential and deeply rooted that even funeral companies offer this service.

None of the informants thought that the lack of a proper funeral might cause them to become revenants, but rather stressed that proper burial is necessary. Ritual competence serves as a guarantee of being buried properly. Now it is time to discuss some of the peculiarities of a proper funeral and how the burial ritual can be performed wrongly.

## THE CONCEPT OF THE SEALED GRAVE

Such components of funerals as laments, commemoration and the time and place of burial are integral to funeral rites in general. However, the Ukrainian funeral has one more component of great importance, sealing the grave.<sup>4</sup> This plays a key role in preventing a person become the unquiet dead. Kukharensko (2011: 71), describing archival ethnographic materials from the turn of the 20th century, mentioned that a priest should seal the grave with a shovel to prevent the deceased from visiting the living or

from any activity. However, the idea that the dead should be sealed into the grave is not just a tradition of former times but a widespread ritual today as well, even though its meaning and performance might be distinct in different regions or vary from person to person.

I: You also said that the priest seals the grave at the cemetery. What exactly does this mean?

O: Well, he says [prayers] there and consecrates the earth with holy water, and he makes the sign of the cross with the shovel. It goes this way here, and I also saw that in Chernihivshchyna.

I: But does he make a sign of the cross once or at all of the grave corners?

O: To *all* the corners, on the corners.

I: Ok. Well, does it mean that the graves of those who committed suicide stay unsealed? Does the priest seal their graves?

O: No no, he does not seal those, no. I do not know about there [Ivano-Frankivs'ka region], but here, in Chernihivshchyna I know that it is necessary to go to the Bishop of Chernihiv to gain permission [to seal the grave], but he doesn't give it to everyone. But there [Ivano-Frankivs'ka] no, the graves [of suicides] remain unsealed, that is for sure. (FM: F, 63)

This informant talked about two distant regions, Perehis'ke village is in Ivano-Frankivs'ka region, in Ciscarpathia (where she is from) and Nosivka town in Chernihivs'ka region in north-eastern Ukraine (where she lives). She emphasised that this ritual exists in both regions. Moreover, she described a funeral that took place in 2020. The ritual of sealing the grave is not the same as when the relatives and others present throw soil into the grave. Throwing soil on top of the coffin is considered a farewell to the deceased before the grave is filled in; but the process of sealing is performed exclusively by a priest and is considered separate in folk belief.

Another informant insisted that the priest follows the funeral procession to the cemetery, and should seal the grave just there (FM: F, 51). In Svitlovods'k in central Ukraine the ritual of sealing is different:

Well, I know, if I am not mistaken, that when they dig the grave, one takes a lump of soil and places it in a kerchief, then a priest prays over it when there is a funeral service. And then this soil is put in the coffin. This is called sealing [...]. Because otherwise, he would have to go to the cemetery, and to do it there [...]. And they do not go to the cemetery as a rule. No, for sure, they can, if you pay, he does even... However, it is not the practice, you know. (FM: F, 53a)

This example elucidates a transformation of tradition that comes about for practical reasons – both because people do not want to pay extra and because clergymen have the other duties. This is what Hüsken (2007: 346) described as the “creation of new ritual rules” because of the breaking of old customs, involving what can be identified as a creative process. This change can occur for two reasons: either Orthodox priests evaluate prayer more highly than any other action (this idea will be explained below), or people want to reduce their funeral expenses. In contrast, from the institutional point of view, such a method of sealing can be treated as ‘superstition’ and as paying too much attention to the material side of the ritual instead of prayer, as is the case when folk

belief influences institutional dogmas. It is also necessary to add that Svitlovods'k is a new town that was established in 1961 and that it is inhabited by both resettled locals and migrants from different parts of Ukraine and the former USSR. I assume that this diversity caused a mixing and transformation of the mortuary ritual.

Another informant from Rivnens'ka region in the north-western Ukraine interpreted the concept of the sealed grave as a complex rite with an emphasis on prayer.

L: [He seals] using prayer in the first place. He prays.

I: With a special prayer?

L: Yes, with a special prayer, and then consecrates with holy water, well, and then he makes special notches on three sides of the grave, and so on.

I: Does he use a shovel to make the notches?

L: With a shovel, but it does not matter, prayer is of the highest importance. All the features and physical actions are just performed. He sprinkles holy water, pours it onto the grave, and through the aspergillum into the grave. However, his prayer is the most important thing. (FM: F, 53b)

Although the general description of the ritual coincides with previous descriptions (except the example from Svitlovods'k), the main difference is an emphasis on the prayer and on the explanation of the performative (material) side as unimportant. On the one hand, the last informant is from western Ukraine, where the power of the Church is stronger and therefore prayer is evaluated more highly, while on the other hand the informant from Ciscarpatia did not make such an emphasis despite considering the Church part of the calendar rituals. Accordingly, I conclude that the concept of the sealed grave in folk belief is quite complex and includes both physical actions, signs and prayer. Even though the two last examples underscore prayer and consecration over the sign of the cross drawn in on the ground, all the narratives describe the ground as the thing that should be consecrated. As is apparent from both the Svitlovods'k description and the interpretation from the Rivnens'ka region, the sign of the cross immediately above or on the grave can be skipped, or at least this part of the ritual may vary, the important thing is to seal or consecrate the soil in which the deceased is placed. This is because the soil is believed to be holy and hence can reject sinners (Kukharenko 2011).

The element of sealing the grave exists in Orthodox dogma too, although with another meaning and in another context. Describing comparative ethnographic material Valentin Moshkov (1902: 22) mentioned that people evaluate the sealing of the grave in its material or performative sense as one of the main funeral rites even though the Church tried to fight this 'superstition'. However, it is difficult to say whether it was and whether it is condemned by the Ukrainian Church or Ukrainian priests. One should also take into account the possibility of variation according to the individual practice, and even personality, of each priest, as personal interpretation of dogma is also sometimes relevant. Thus, in September 2020 the Orthodox priest of Moscow Patriarchy in Svitlovods'k explains the sealing ritual as follows:

The sacral act, which is called 'the sealing of the deceased' in folk tradition, is an integral part of the burial of the departed. It occurs after the proclamation of Eternal Memory, [and follows] with the words, "The Lord's earth, and its filling, the universe and all who dwell in it." With these words, the priest takes a shovel of

soil and pours it cruciformly on the surface of the coffin. This is, like many other liturgical elements, a symbolic expression of God's words, "You are the earth and you will go to the earth." (FM: M, P, 30s)

We can see from this description that the priest includes the sign of the cross with a shovel as part of sealing the grave, emphasising, however, the liturgical part of the ritual. Nonetheless, it is difficult to say if he distinguishes it as a separate element of burial in the way it is perceived and interpreted in the folk tradition. On the one hand, he described the sealing of the grave directly. On the other hand, as a response to my clarifying question what the title of this rite in Orthodox Christianity is and if the sealing of the grave has any specific title, he said: "One more time: [the term] sealing is purely folk term, which has nothing in common with a religious term 'the act of burial'"<sup>5</sup> (FM: M, P, 30s). He also mentioned that the sequence of burial acts is described in a church book for priests (NKS 1983) (FM: M, P, 30s), where the same act of pouring the soil cruciformly on the coffin and other following acts are described as "a sign of reconciliation and unity [of the Holy Church] with the soul of the deceased" (ibid.: 484), but is not separated from the whole burial act. This particular book is from the Moscow patriarchy and does not include making the sign of the cross at the grave corners.

According to *The Guide for Rural Shepherds*,<sup>6</sup> which was supposed to embody institutional authority, the Ukrainian Church, or to be precise Ukrainian priests, were accused of being 'spoiled' by the Roman Catholic Church and others. The ignorant priests and clergymen were supposedly spreading incorrect beliefs and rituals. (Krizhanovskiy 1860) The journal also accused Ukrainians of being overly concerned with the manifestations of religion, i.e. attributes rather than prayer; however, Feofan Lebedintsev (1860: 141) emphasised the necessity of adopting and legally consecrating folk customs if nobody made a profit from it. I do not mean to support or refute the accusations, or to recognise or emphasise the idea of the accusation itself, but rather to create a discussion and point out the consequences that occurred among Orthodox clergymen. Nonetheless, if we are talking about the internal and external aspects of religion, another priest from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, who serves as a military chaplain to Ukrainian troops, explained the idea of the sealed graves in a wider context:

The point is that we are aiming for eternal life, a life with God let's say in Paradise or the New Jerusalem, as is described in the Bible. Hence, there is no such ritual of sealing the grave [in the meaning] that pagans had because pagans aim for life in the Kingdom of Dead. [...]

The precise burial ritual in Orthodoxy [...] tells about such points [firstly]: he died in God, or God, rest his body, forgive his sins. The second message is: do not miss the dead because you have the hope of meeting them. And the third point, why it is called 'sealing', I'd take [this term] in very big brackets, because it is not the sealing ritual. Just when the body in the coffin is put into the grave, a priest says, "This body is sealed until the day of the resurrection of the dead." And people picked up the word "sealed", and say, "he should be sealed". But it is not a church term, not a religious term [...].

The point is that people used to dig up the graves in former times, [and] this happened for many reasons, but this precise phrase that one is sealed until the day of the resurrection of the dead... Folks heard it, picked it up and it started to spread,



and [people in a conversation use it] between each other, in slang, you know, that it should be sealed. Well, priests can also use it [the term], but it is not the sealing ritual, it is just a burial ritual. And the difference is that the direction for pagans is the Kingdom of Dead, [but] for Christianity it is the Heaven and the resurrection, but the resurrection of the body. (FM: M, Ch, 50s)

This insightful description of the sealed grave and its relation to pre-Christian religion and Orthodoxy brings up two essential points: firstly, there is no separate ritual of sealing the dead in Orthodox liturgy, just the words “This body is sealed until the day of the resurrection of the dead,” which gave impetus to further develop and distribute the idea in the folk belief context. Secondly, it declares a meaningful difference between the sealed grave in pre-Christian and Orthodox religions, as well as revealing the continuity of the burial rite for the deceased, although it has varying interpretations. However, a meaningful difference in the pre-Christian and Orthodox rite is prominent because the main aim of the Orthodox burial rite is to gain resurrection.

With reference to the performative side of the ritual, the informant asserts that it is not part of the liturgy and is not prescribed in liturgical texts: “What he [the priest] does, the sign of the cross on the edges of the grave with a shovel, this is just folklore” (FM: M, Ch, 50s). It seems important that he also explained why some elements of the burial rite, including drawing the sign of the cross with a shovel, are performed by priests and why some seem to be approved by priests:

Because the folks used to gather near the table and say that this and that should be done. The others say, no, it should not be done. But the others [say], the priest said [to do it]. But the priest has no idea what they are doing on that commemorative table [lunch]. [...] And sometimes the priests just go on about the shepherds, wanting to flirt with them and feeling proud how big their parish is. (FM: M, Ch, 50s)

However, the chaplain’s explanation brings up another question. He does not treat the sign of the cross on the grave corners as a part of the liturgy, while *Trebnik* (2016: *Chyn pohrebinnya*) describes the sequence of actions at the cemetery as follow:<sup>7</sup>

The priest takes a shovel and makes the sign of the cross at the head, feet and at the corners of the grave, each time declaring: “This tomb is sealed [...].” And then, taking a shovel of earth and pouring it on the coffin, he proclaims: “The earth of the Lord, and all that fills it.”

It takes the signs of the cross on the grave with the words “This tomb is sealed....” as constituents of the burial liturgy. Comparing all three institutional notions shows that the first description from the Moscow patriarchy priest and the *Desktop Book for Priests* (NKS 1983) includes only pouring the soil on the coffin in the shape of the cross, but not the signs of the cross at the grave corners. However, I assume that practice varies less between Kyiv and Moscow patriarchies than it does between the priests, who also interpret the church books.

The idea that the sealed grave is part of a proper funeral could be derived from the custom of burying suicides – their graves remain unsealed and there is no funeral service for them (Moshkov 1912; Bilyy 1926). Revenants are supposed to be “the result of a culmination of specific conditions that allow them to come forth from their graves”

(Boyacıoğlu 2015: 8). Therefore, it can be assumed that the unsealed grave facilitates revenants coming back, whereas the absence of a funeral service and absence of a sealed grave can be interpreted as examples of a failed ritual.

Nancy Caciola (1996: 27) distinguishes the way one lived and the way one died as major influences on whether one will achieve rest or become a revenant. However, as we will see, the way one lived does not always guarantee a proper funeral. Going deeper into this in Ukrainian belief, I define the lack of a proper funeral and the wish to undergo the allotted time (Kukharenko 2011: 73) on earth as clues to someone becoming the unquiet dead, although these are not the only factors and the deceased does not necessarily become one of the unquiet dead.

## THE DEAD IN SEALED GRAVES

Ethnographic material shows that there are revenants who, although they died 'good' deaths, come to visit the living. Juha Pentikäinen (1968: 53–54), describing the Nordic context, called them "innocent revenants", interpreting them as those who lack something in the afterlife. Their deaths were controlled in that all the necessary mortuary rituals were applied (Boyacıoğlu 2015: 10). I will describe the reasons for coming back and the possible time limits, if they exist, of such revenants first.

This kind of dead in Ukrainian beliefs might be called by the term, introduced by Maryna Hrymych (2015: 269), ordinary dead (*pobutovi pokiyynyky*). This term signifies departed relatives in a wider sense and expresses a strong relation to the family as well as personalisation. Based on my materials, I group them in three related categories according to the reasons they might visit the living:

1. They lack something in the other world. Deceased relatives can visit their family if they need shoes, feel thirsty or hungry, or want to be commemorated appropriately.
2. Awakened dead. The deceased is awakened by relatives because they feel too much sorrow or cry too much. In this case, the dead cannot rest and continues to come to the living.
3. Warning dead. The deceased visit the living on a particular occasion.

The deceased who lacks something and visits living relatives cannot be interpreted as accidental in Ukrainian belief. It always has a specific meaning and one cannot reject this sign. As Ülo Valk (2006: 33) points out, "they warn the living that the wishes of the dead must not be neglected". Thus, in my childhood, I heard a story from my parents' friend, who said that after his uncle had been buried, he started to come in dreams asking to put on his shoes. Later on, they found out that he was buried in random shoes, neither his own nor specially bought ones. He kept coming until proper shoes were put into his grave. Another story was just recently told:

I also know that when granny Nina passed away, one neighbour came and asked my mum, "Can I put a waist belt for a dress into granny Nina's coffin?" she asked. "What for?" my mum replied. "Listen, because of this and that." Well, her [neighbour's] mother had passed away before, and she was a good friend to granny Nina, they used to work together on the farm, you know. She said, her mother was a

fashionista, so the woman liked to dress up, she should have had everything... you know, a very fashionable woman. And so, my mum said, "Well, listen, we buried her in the dress she wanted. But there was a waist belt for that dress and we did not use it. She died, I dressed her in the dress, and that's it." But she said that her mother kept coming to her dreams, saying, "I want to go out to see people and I cannot because I do not have the waist belt for my dress." And that neighbour saw her mother in dreams every night. "There is no waist belt for the dress!" and that's it. She said, "I came to the priest, and he told me to put that waist belt in the coffin when somebody in the village passes away. Let that person pass down that belt." She came to my mum asking if she can put the belt in the coffin. She [the mother] said, "Ok, put it in." And that's it, she put on the waist belt and that's all. Everything was over. So, these are the stories. (FM: F, 53b)

The narrative illustrates that the deceased has reunited with others in the hereafter, i.e. the deceased has passed the stages of transition (van Genneep 1960 [1909]). Pentikäinen (1968: 51), following van Genneep's theory, emphasises that the last step (incorporation) of the "joining of the dead person to the departed" is even more important than the separation. In this narrative, we can see that the deceased has already united with the other departed, because she wants to live in the afterlife among other deceased who can pass the waist belt down to her. The last action might be possible if they are in the same location, i.e. the hereafter, but the wandering dead cannot communicate with peacefully resting deceased.

Such dead appear because they are bothered by something in the other world and cannot rest. The repeated visits in dreams mean they want to be commemorated. Although dream narratives and incorporeal dead are widespread, the narratives about the departed as a walking dead, who lacks something, also exist:

Well, I would like to tell you, [...] one man died. Well, I don't know [the cause of death], he was an old man. I do not remember what happened at the funeral, but he was our relative. Was I at the funerals or not...? No, I was not, because I studied in the institute and came home, and someone said that Zhzhes'ko had passed away. So, we went dancing in the evening. He was buried maybe a few days before, or a week before... up to a week. Well, we went dancing, boys and girls. We were coming back [...], stepped into that house [where the man died], then I glanced there and Zhzhes'ko was standing in white underpants, in a white long shirt, you know, old-fashioned clothes, long white shirt, white underpants. You know, it was winter, it was cold. So, the boys say, "Oh, look, seems like he is so drunk that he stays in his underpants!" [the informant laughs]. When I looked there, I honestly was terrified. They did not yet know that he was already dead, and I did know he was dead! I was so scared! Well, we went away. You know, we [said] nothing to him, he [did] nothing to us, and that's it. Later on, I woke up in the morning and started to think about what it was! I said, "Grandmother, I want to tell you something," "What happened?" "But do not tell this to anyone!" "I won't. Tell me now." I said, "I was walking in the evening and saw Zhzhes'ko." "How did you see him?" And I told her. I was not the only one who saw him, everybody did. If it was that I was scared or something and [saw him because of fear], but no. I was not scared before. Everybody saw him. "Well, keep silent, calm down, but he visits Nina [his wife]."

She said, "I don't know what she is going to do, but she should go to church and pray, so, she is going to do it because he has visited her already a few nights in a row. He steps into the house and walks through the house." (FM: F, 53b)

The narrative neither explains the aim of the visit nor mentions that the husband's visits caused any harm to the woman. The only description is that he was walking through the house. Answering my question why he came back, my informant explained that something probably had gone wrong at a funeral and the solution was related to prayers in the church. The informant also mentioned that before her next visit home the situation had already been resolved. However, this narrative seems borderline, because on the one hand the funeral for the departed might have lacked any one of the burial elements, although on the other hand the person who saw him and told the story was not a close family member (although his wife experienced it as well). At the same time the deceased is depicted as one of the walking dead, but without any obvious demonisation.

Awakened dead become revenants not through their own wishes but through relatives' overwhelming sorrow, or because some business that the living cannot handle needs their attention. In Ukrainian tradition, they are called *pryplakani* ('caused by one's crying'). Here I consider narratives about close family members (mother, father, husband or wife) who come to feed or rock the baby, to talk or to see loved ones. It is intrinsic for them to appear in dreams complaining about overwhelming grief and tears that prevent them from resting. Ágnes Hesz (2012: 148) describes the popularity of the same narratives in Hungarian culture: "the dead complain that they are standing in water as a result of exaggerated grief".

Inna Golovakha-Hicks (2006) collected a narrative about a girl whose mother passed away causing the girl a great deal of grief, even though everyone warned her of the bad consequence of such behaviour. She kept talking with her mother, and started to look sick. People said to her:

It is not the mother coming to you, it is a devil come looking like your mother. You should not talk to her. Because the dead should be dead, lie in their place and not come to the living. She is going to suck the life out of you. (Ibid.: 232)

Such a deceased cannot come back as a walking dead, since its grave is sealed. Consequently, it is not the deceased relative who visits the family but the Devil in disguise. The same motifs can be found in narratives about a flying serpent who is considered to be the Devil. He disguises himself, flies to women who grieve too much for their husbands, and sucks their blood (Manzhura 1892: 254). However, we cannot undoubtedly assert that it is always the Devil himself, although the demonisation of such visits to the living is obvious.

The warning dead embody ambiguous beliefs relating to revenants. They neither lack proper mortuary rituals nor are considered the Devil in disguise. They appear on specific occasions, which they chose themselves.

The spirits are watching us [...], they see and hear everything that is going on here. However, they cannot exert influence on it. My grandmother used to say that they [spirits] have a few, I do not remember, whether they have one or two chances which they can use and warn us. Well, it means to make use of these chances to

come and communicate with us. How will they use it? It depends. For example, I clearly remember, I was a pupil at that time, one woman passed away and a boy [her son] remained. The husband got married again after some time. The step-mother didn't like the boy very much. [...] people said she did something to that man that he made all her wishes came true, he made a lot of effort to please her. And then she demanded that he drive that boy away somewhere, "I do not want to have him at home" [...]. They took that boy and tied him to the rails. That was Volodymyrets'kyi region [...]. So, they tied him in such a place that... when the train is on its way, it is impossible to slow down, even though one would see him [the boy], it would hit him because it would be impossible to put on the brakes because of the train braking distance, you know. Well, he [the train driver] said that he drove, everything was good, and then all of a sudden, he said, a *woman* was waving with a handkerchief. He took a look again – there was no woman. Then no – she was waving again. You know, he was driving half a kilometre – no woman, and then again, she was waving. He said, "But listen. What is going on, I do not understand. She is, and then she disappears all the time. Am I hallucinate or something?" Well, listen, he already had slowed down [...], but she appeared straight in the rails and was waving. He said he slowed down more. Then he looked and saw that something was lying on the rails or something. He said, he stopped, had a look, there was a tied boy. He took that boy, arrived at the station, called the police, and told, "So this and that. It is a trial." Then one asked him "How did you see him?" It was such a turn that there was no chance for him to see that boy, 100 per cent. Actually, they have considered that he would not have seen him. He says, "A woman kept rushing under the train." [...] "Who was that woman?" he says, "I don't know. Just a woman." Then they started (at that time nobody said about psychologists, but different interrogators) showing him different photos. They showed the photos and asked, "Is that woman there?" "It is. Here she is." And that was the mother who had passed away seven years ago. She used that chance to save her child. It is said, that they [deceased] can come back to help, to interfere somehow. Well, maybe to help, maybe to damage... But to help somehow, to interfere in this life. That's what people say. There were many such accidents. (FM: F, 53b)

The informant mentioned spirits as the embodiment of the departed as conscious beings that are not divided into sinful or pure. Even the idea of the soul in its common meaning seems reductive, because another informant also mentioned spirits and energies, not souls or sins (FM: F, 50). "If people define reality by the special energies that fluctuate between cosmos and earth, then all-natural and supernatural occurrences [...] are explained by this energy" (Kivari 2012: 54). That is what we see in the explanation before the narrative. Apart from the spirits, the narrative also does not explain the figure of the dead mother as the ghost. I can explain it by the fact that the semantic of ghosts is relatively new in Ukrainian culture and was influenced by media content and popular culture.

This interview includes the important notion about the chance that all deceased have in their afterlife an allotted number of chances to come back. It is not clear whether the first group of the dead who lack something also come back through these allotted chances or not. People might consider incorporeal dreams and corporeal appearance as the same phenomenon, because the main point is the message the dead want to send.

The meaning of the message can be, as Hesz (2012: 142) points out, “indirect in the sense that in accordance with speaker’s intention – on occasion they may mean far more than the text itself reveals”. For sure, the indirect meaning of the messages from the dead concerns not only this group of departed but communication with the dead in general.

According to the informant’s comments, the number of chances to visit and warn the living is fewer than the number of visits that the awakened dead can perform. Moreover, the visits of the warning dead and the dead who lack something are far from bringing any damage to the living, whereas the second group of the awakened dead acts in such a way that the living whom they visit become sick. However, the awakened dead run out of allotted time, had had a proper funeral, and cannot act on a regular basis, except when it is the Devil in disguise and not the deceased himself. Although demonisation is possible, not all the visits of awakened dead are demonised.

It is also necessary to mention that the attempt to categorise them does not mean that the deceased cannot appear in any other category and cannot be a part of all of them. It is rather an attempt to show some of the possible reasons and the way the dead might act. In addition, the visits of the dead in sealed graves are not of a precise time limit, or at least time limits were not described by my informants.

#### REVENANTS IN UNSEALED GRAVES

There is a category of restless deceased who are corporeal revenants and whose visits to the living are not motivated by the need to find rest. Marju Kõivupuu (2009: 283–284), describing Estonian roadside burials, mentions those who died abnormally might lack intermediate rites, which makes their transition incomplete. As in Lutheran religion, there is no purgatory in Orthodoxy and souls cannot be purified, and so perhaps the transition cannot be completed.

It means that a man’s soul goes straight to heaven. If he or she believed in Jesus Christ as his/her God and Saviour, who died for our sins and was resurrected [...], then when we die our soul goes to God, to heaven, and we stay with God. There is going to be a moment when our body will resurrect. [...] A person, who did not believe in Christ as Saviour, goes to hell. [...] It is one of the main topics in the Bible, that there will be the resurrection of the dead. Some [people] will be resurrected (in the meaning that the body will be resurrected) for eternal life, some [people] for eternal torment. There is nothing about frying pans, boiling cauldrons in the Bible, this was invented in the Middle Ages to terrify people and force them to go to church. [Hell] is the place where there is no God and no hope. [...] But see, according to the [Orthodox] doctrine, suicides go to hell. This means it was not you who gave you your life, it shouldn’t be you who shortens it. (FM: M, Ch, 50s)

In Ukrainian folkloristics suicides and those who died bad deaths are sometimes called the ‘coated dead’, a term introduced by Russian scholar Dmitriy Zelenin (1916) and which is derived from the custom of passers-by throwing something on their graves (for a detailed description see Ben’kovskyy 1893; Hnatyuk 1903; Bilyy 1926; Vinogradova and Levkiyevskaya 2012; Hrymych 2015; Kukharenko 2015).<sup>8</sup> Their most distinctive feature is the ability to act after death, although they are bounded to the place of

death and continue to live their allotted time after death (Zelenin 1916: 40). I would add that they lack a proper funeral, giving rise to their ability to come back.

M: The point is that the priest does not bury them [suicides]. That's first. And secondly, they are not buried in the cemetery. Like, they were not buried in the cemetery before at all, they were buried on the other side of the cemetery boundary. Now they are buried in the cemetery, but near the boundary.

I: There is no funeral service for them, as well as the grave remaining unsealed?

M: No, [they're] just buried as it is. (FM: F, 53b)

The same rules are followed in Chernihiv'ska and Ivano-Frankiv'ska regions: "No one prays for them in church and even a priest doesn't come. There is a special place at the cemetery in the corner where they are buried." (FM: F, 63) This is a commonplace restriction in Orthodoxy, but as with the performative part of sealing the grave, the way the priests consider suicides is different. A priest from central Ukraine explained that the Orthodox burial rite cannot be applied to those who commit suicide because, apart from the fact one takes one's own life, suicide is a result of deep despair intertwined with pride and despondency (FM: M, P, 30s). A chaplain asserts that you can never know what caused despair, especially during war or when one ages or as a result of mental illness, therefore each case should be approached individually (FM: M, Ch, 50s). This can be taken to show that the custom of depriving a suicide of the liturgy, or in other words providing a failed burial ritual, is rooted in institutionalised authority. At the same time this authority is undermined by clergy who adapt religion to personality, and not vice versa, at least in a modern world.

The suicides who lack a proper funeral (and most of them do) and whose graves remain unsealed, have a special time limit in folk belief to come back. Kukharenko (2011: 72) mentioned that the "suicides were believed to return to the old spot of their death over the next seven years". In Hnatyuk 1903: 154, archival material is published on belief about drowning and how long suicides can act.

When one has drowned, one is allowed to act for seven years, the same as one who is hanged. One should not talk [to him], touch [him] or something – nothing. A drowned person is of such a nature that once he sees a human, he starts giggling like a *rusalka*.<sup>9</sup> He is totally white and appears at the new moon in the place he drowned.

There is a belief that the graves of these people can only be sealed seven years after burial (Kukharenko 2011: 73). The possibility to seal the grave of the one who committed suicide was also affirmed by the chaplain (FM: M, Ch, 50s). It is difficult to say whether this time limit for the revenants and the possibility of the grave being sealed by a priest are intertwined or not, but the limit of seven years is obvious.

There is a division between active visits of the revenant and visits once per month. Thus, in the legend "How the Dead Woman Came Back for Seven Years" (Hnatyuk 1903: 131–132), there is a distinction between the regularity of her visits during the first three years (she used to visit the family every night) and the next four years (at the new moon). Although numbers have symbolic meaning (three and seven as sacred numbers, four is the number of death), it seems clear that such time limits are determined by biological factors. Thus, the 'wet stage' of body decomposition, when the cadaver starts to

skeletonise, starts from the second to fourth years after burial. The process depends on the conditions of the soil, with the full process of decomposition taking up to approximately ten years. Thus, I assume that since flesh upon the bones is needed for the revenant's activity (Caciola 1996), folk beliefs and folk logic follows the rule of sacred numbers. I find it logical to conclude that, considering all the 'wet' stages of decomposition, folklore emphasised three years as an approximate date when the body no longer exists as an entity and seven years as an approximate date when the bones are de-fleshed. Caciola (1996: 33) asserts that the "psychic death and physical death do not coincide. It is only when the body has passed through its 'wet' enfleshed stage and become 'dry' bones" that activity can no longer take place. Thus, time limits for revenants depend on and can be explained through biological processes.

Another intriguing point expressed in the belief about the drowned and hanged is that they are allowed to come back and act for seven years. This leads us to a religious point, i.e. the presence of a body on earth (and here I talk not only about the ability to visit the living, but also about the existence of flesh in the soil) is also under God's control, meaning that revenants are constituents of the hereafter as well as of the world of the living. Considering biological and religious issues, "rationalism and supernaturalism" as "cultural options, competing discourses" (Bennett 1999: 38) can be derived. Another point is that the seven-year time limit for suicides might not coincide with the allotted time that they are supposed to undergo. This time can be both longer or shorter.

Ukrainian beliefs, collected at the turn of the 20th century, included pre-emptive countermeasures to prevent revenants from acting before the seven-year limit expired. One of them was to put poppy seeds around the grave so that the unquiet dead would try to pick them all up by the morning (Chubins'kiy 1877: 712). Another way was to drive an aspen stake into the body of the dead person (*ibid.*), because according to beliefs suicides become *upyr* (vampire), whereas sorcerers can be turned into *upyr* or werewolves (Isayevich' 1883: 100). Similar pre-emptive countermeasures are described by Robert Halliday (2010: 82) when he talks about the English custom of burying suicides at a crossroads to puzzle them and prevent them from visiting. Vitalina Ponomar'ova (2010: 87) noticed that the burial custom for different age groups was different and tried to compensate for elements that the departed might lack in the hereafter when he or she had not lived out their life fully. Pre-emptive countermeasures occur because proper ritual might bring an even bigger disaster "than the irregularity itself" (Hüsken 2007: 345). Another point is that the Church does not want to pray and to provide funeral service for them, as can be seen from the previous examples from the Ivano-Frankivs'ka, Chernihivs'ka and Rivnens'ka regions (FM: F, 53b; FM: F, 63).

The idea of piercing restless dead in order to prevent afterlife activity might be illustrated by archaeological material. Ukrainian archaeologist Lyubov Skyba (1992: 31–40), who worked on burials of Zarubintsy culture, proposed the hypothesis that cremation in a special place and burials of remnants signify the belief in two souls in the Slavic tribes. Another archaeologist Denys Kozak (2008: 164–165), describing excavated tombs of ancient Slavic tribes, emphasises that weapons or other sharp objects were found driven into the ground in the graves. Following Skyba's theory of two souls, Kozak asserts that one of the souls should be tied to the grave in order to prevent it from coming back after death (*ibid.*: 164). Here I do not say that Ukrainians inherited this belief, or that they inherited the custom of driving an aspen stake into the grave or body,



especially because burials changed after the 1st century. I rather want to illustrate that this belief might have ancient roots. If one considers the “nature of bereavement” and the fact that “close family members cannot be replaced” (Bennett 1999: 31), I can assume that this nature remains the same. The belief that the soul stays alive after corporeal death leaves the door for the afterlife open, bringing hope to bereaved people. The continuity of belief, as well as the continuity of the custom of restraining the soul/body, follow a similar logic of causality. The only difference is that in the Orthodox religion the soul goes to heaven or hell straight away, and by piercing the restless dead one pierces the body. The previous statement that only the bodies of people who believed in Jesus Christ as their Saviour can be resurrected raises the question of bodies that act after their death and before Judgment Day.

Another category of restless dead in unsealed graves is unbaptised and stillborn children; however, I will discuss this quite briefly because this belief is not active today, although it does still serve to show the variety of possible time limits for revenants. Unbaptised and stillborn babies were “buried under the threshold of the home” (Kukharenko 2011: 71) to give them the possibility of being blessed, since everybody who steps into the house should make the sign of the cross. In other regions they were customarily buried in a place with many passers-by in order to gain a blessing, since they appear and beg for it. According to belief if these children are unsuccessful in their search for a blessing they turn into *rusalky* or *mavky* after seven years (Chubins'kiy 1877: 713).<sup>10</sup> Some similarities can be found in Europe, for example, Anne O'Connor (1991: 62) mentions that unbaptised children appeared “in the form of flickering lights” in Irish folklore, as did they in Ukrainian folklore. According to Ukrainian belief, they ask for posthumous baptism.

For seven years, before they change into *rusalky*, these souls [of unbaptised children] roam around in the air and ask for baptism at Pentecost, and a lot of people hear in the sky the words “my mother gave me birth, bury me unbaptised”. If a Christian hears this and says “Joseph and Mary. I baptise you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” and then throws a towel to the floor, the infant’s soul goes to heaven.” (Petrov 1871: 35)

Which type of *rusalky* (field, forest or water *rusalky*) these babies are is unclear, but after this shift, nobody tries to put them to rest or kill them, since they have a specific function in Ukrainian festivals.<sup>11</sup> People just try to avoid encountering them. On the other hand, children up to approximately seven years old were considered in a liminal state and death could have taken them at any time. In the scope of social status, they were not living enough, hence they could have been in the liminal position in their demise too. Considering this, it seems that they cannot join the community of the departed since they had not yet been accepted by the living (O'Connor 1991: 57). A time limit of seven years remained applicable in both cases of liminal position among the living children and restless position in the afterlife.

Talking about the category of the dead in unsealed graves, “not all the dead who died abnormal death were demonised; quite often there should be a serious cause for this to happen” (Hrymych 2015: 269). Hrymych asserts that despite an abnormal burial place or ritual, people are quite neutral to them, and “demonisation of the image or the situation makes sense if it is an exception” (ibid.: 275). A good example of this is a com-

plex of belief narratives described by Oleksiy Nahornyuk (2015: 323) about the precise place of death of one poor man's family, who sat down to rest and froze. Although they died abnormal deaths and the place of their death was coated with sticks and rubbish (as with the graves of other coated dead), this place became a sacred place endowed with healing power, according to belief (ibid.: 324–328).

To summarise, beliefs about the unquiet dead do not always depict them as benevolent creatures, and not all the dead who lack proper burial or have time allotted to them on earth become unquiet dead. What is clear is that the dead in unsealed graves, i.e. those who died abnormal deaths, attract folklorisation in one or another way. Demonisation or sacralisation depends on the events that occurred close to the time of death, as well as on people's interpretation. However only demonisation gains time limits of seven years.

### CONCLUDING NOTES

Although the ideas of unexpected or bad death can still be found today, the burial rite is not strongly regulated either by public condemnation or censure, or ritual fear, although the ritual rules are still followed. Acting within the framework of approved custom, everybody is free to decide the kind of burial rite they want, while families are free to say how they wish to bury the departed without considering if the deceased has the right to a proper funeral. The only restrictions one may face is Church regulation, although today it is more difficult for the church to control the way people live and therefore to decide if they merit burial accompanied by Orthodox ritual. Internal migration is high in Ukraine, and in big cities with hundreds of churches people change their addresses many times. Needless to say, not all the people who ask for a burial liturgy have religious affiliation, in the meaning of following church rituals. Thus, institutional authority in the terms of regulation is limited today.

However, fear of the dead and a person's last will being compulsory order stay active and entails the fact that burial custom remains preserved in lots of funeral elements. Talking about the proper funeral, my informants did not mention the consequences of the failed ritual in the meaning of unquiet dead. The burial custom was described just "as it should be", and this proper form was spoken about as undoubted. However, when it went to the beliefs about the unquiet dead both in the sealed or unsealed grave, the suggestion of failure of any kind was applied, although not defined as the main cause.

In the ethnographic material of the turn of the 20th century, time limits for the unquiet dead can be noted from all around Ukraine. The time limit of seven years prevailed both for suicides and unbaptised children, although in different contexts. While suicides might have been active over seven years, unbaptised children asked for baptism and were able to turn into *rusalky* if they did not get it. Those who died abnormal deaths were also bound by the same time limits, with the distinction of regular visits for three years, and irregular visits for four years thereafter. However, the belief in a precise time limit is not active in the narratives from the 21st century – at least my informants did not mention it. On the contrary, the possibility of sealing the grave of suicides after seven years remains, and was mentioned as an existing practice by the chaplain. I con-

sider biological reasons, in this case corps de-fleshing, as a cause of the seven-year limit.

The concept of the sealed grave still serves as one of the essential elements of the Ukrainian burial rite. The ritual of sealing the grave is an ambiguous phenomenon. Although the Orthodox Church does not distinguish it as a separate ritual and does not call it sealing, clergymen still understand which part of the liturgy is called sealing. Orthodoxy defines it as part of the burial liturgy and condemns people who pay great attention to this (material) element of the liturgy. The burial liturgy includes mention of the body being 'sealed', and this serves as one of the possible sources of belief in the sealed grave in vernacular religion, which considers the sealing of the grave a separate ritual of high importance.

The idea of the sealed grave is not limited to Orthodox customs but might have existed in pre-Christian religions too, as was explained by one of my informants (FM: M, Ch, 50s), although in another form. Hence, the ritual of sealing the grave exists more as a concept than as a particular ritual. As was seen, the performance of sealing the grave varies according to region and personality.

The institutional differences in the meaning of grave sealing is intriguing. Folk beliefs relating to the sealed grave do not so much target resurrection, but rather consider sealing the grave a meaningful part of a proper ritual. Hence, the unquiet dead appearing can be explained on some occasions by the fact that the grave was not sealed, as in narratives about suicides, or merely by something being missed during the funeral. Thus, the reasons for becoming a revenant are different, varying from narrative to narrative and case to another. Once it has happened people search for a relevant reason, which might be related to improper burial. Since in recent times beliefs in the supernatural and the unquiet dead have appeared in the media, further explanations and other causes of revenants might appear.

## NOTES

1 The territory of contemporary Ukraine was officially Christianised in 988 by Kyiv *knyaz'* Volodymyr Velykyi. Kyivska metropolis was autonomous from Constantinople and considered official until 1770, when it was liquidated and replaced by Moscow patriarchy, which lasted until 1992. In 15th century Kyiv the metropolis signed the Union of Brest to unite with the Roman Catholic Church and joined the Ruthenian Union Church, which today is called the Greek Catholic Church and had been serving as a sign of resistance to Moscow, especially in the 19th century and during the Soviet period. In January 2019 the Orthodox Church of Ukraine adopted Tomos of autocephaly, and united the Kyiv patriarchy, the Greek Catholics and churches of the Moscow patriarchy. Today there are two Orthodox Churches in Ukraine, the (United) Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Orthodox Church of the Moscow patriarchy. Ukrainians do not always distinguish which church is affiliated with which patriarchy and it is commonplace just to go to the church in your village where one has a priest since childhood.

2 Apart from Orthodoxy there are Catholics (mainly, but not limited to, western Ukraine) and other minor religious groups, although their burial customs and related beliefs are beyond the scope of the current research.

3 *NarCom* was a short form of the affiliation *Narodnyy Komissar* (People's Commissar) in the USSR.

4 The same ritual of sealing the grave was noted in Mohilevskaya district in Belarus and in Gagauzian settlements in Moldova by Valentin Moshkov (1902: 9).

5 A rank/act of burial (*chyn pohrebinnya*) is church burial ritual, which is described in *Trebnyk* (the book of prayers) and includes all the acts and prayers performed by the priest who buries the departed.

6 *Rukovodstvo dlya Sel'skikh Pastyrey* (*The Guide for Rural Shepherds*) is a journal published by the Kyiv Theological Seminary between 1860 and 1917. The journal included precepts, morals and other articles on Orthodox religion, explaining religious issues to priests from rural areas.

7 *Trebnyk* is the higher church book of prayers that is used by the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and describes church acts and rites. It was written by Petro Mohyla in 1646, Kyiv Metropolitan, to purify Ukrainian Orthodoxy. The contemporary version (2016) considers its previous editions.

8 The Ukrainian term *zalozhni merci* and Russian *zalozhnyye mertvetsy* means that these dead were covered with different things: "Every passer-by takes it as a duty to put at least something on the grave of a suicide, a clump of hay, a branch, a fistful of soil" (Hnatyuk 1903: 712). Although the term is sometimes used in Ukrainian scholarship, it does not fully represent the restless dead in Ukrainian beliefs.

9 People who drowned became *rusalky* (plural), creatures with long hair who tickle people and ask them to solve their riddles.

10 *Maoky* is a dialect synonym for *rusalky*, especially forest *rusalky*.

11 *Rusalky* start to be active at Rusalki Easter or during the Green Festival that occurs three days before and three days after the *Triytsya* (Pentecost), the festival that takes on the 40th day after the Easter. For a detailed description see Petrov 1871.

## SOURCES

FM = Author's fieldwork material. The material is in the possession of the author.

List of Informants:

FM: F, 53a = Female, 53 years old, Central Ukraine, Svitlovods'k – July 2020.

FM: F, 53b = Female, 53 years old, north-western Ukraine, Demydivka, Rivnens'ka region – July 2020.

FM: F, 63 = Female, 63 years old, north-eastern Ukraine, Nosivka, Chernihivs'ka region and western Ukraine, Ciscarpathia, Perehis'ke, Ivano-Frankivs'ka region – July 2020.

FM: F, 50 = Female, 50 years old, central Ukraine, Kyiv's'ka region – June 2020.

FM: F, 31 = Female, 31 years old, central Ukraine, Svitlovods'k and Kyiv – July 2020.

FM: F, 51 = Female, 51 years old, central Ukraine, Kyiv – July 2020.

FM: M, P, 30s = Male (priest), in his 30s, central Ukraine, Svitlovods'k – September 2020.

FM: M, Ch, 50s = Male (chaplain), in his 50s, southern Ukraine, Mykolayiv and eastern Ukraine – October 2020.

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