

# **Folklore Fieldwork and Research in Ukraine**

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I am a Ph.D. candidate in Slavic folklore at the University of Virginia. I recently went to Ukraine for four months to do research for my dissertation on Ukrainian funerals and beliefs about the dead in Ukraine. As a graduate student, I needed to collect as much material on my topic as possible at as low a cost as possible. In order to do this, I made arrangements with the Kherson branch of the Institut Mystetsvoznavstva, Fol'klora ta Etnohrafii (Institute of Art, Folklore and Ethnography, or IMFE) to do archival and field work in Ukraine, working with native scholars. Kherson IMFE helped me access archival material and set up my fieldwork. I spent a month at Kiev IMFE, where I examined archival material on funerals and beliefs about the dead. Kiev IMFE has a large repository of folklore sources and some excellent scholars. Kherson IMFE also chose locations for my fieldwork, with the goal of giving me a survey of as many areas of Ukraine as possible.

I did fieldwork in Cherkas'ka obl., Khersons'ka obl., and L'vivs'ka and Ivano-Frankiv'ska obl. Fieldwork in western Ukraine is difficult, due in large part to problems with transportation.

It is now possible to do fieldwork in Ukraine, although a high degree of flexibility is necessary, due to the current economic situation and transportation problems. Salaries and fieldwork funding for native scholars are irregular, and bus and train routes have been cut. Public transportation, primarily intra-oblast' buses, is the primary means of traveling to villages, unless one has access to a private car. Travel on intra-oblast buses is particularly difficult,

due to discontinuation of some routes, problems in getting tickets, and mechanical failures. As a result, the buses are extremely crowded and it is not always possible to board a bus to a desired destination. However, these obstacles are not insurmountable. I was able to collect a great deal of material during my recent trip to Ukraine.

In Cherkas'ka obl., I worked with Mykola and Halina Kornienko of the Cherkas'ka oblast' ethnographic museum, the Oblastnyi Kraeznavchyi muzei-Cherkasy. The museum has a very good collection of material culture, including an impressive number of examples of rushnyks from the oblast'. The Kornienkos have done a great deal of collecting in the oblast' and are very knowledgeable about that region's folklore. Their specialties are material culture and wedding rituals, respectively, although their knowledge extends considerably beyond the boundaries of their specialties. There are a number of very old grave markers in this oblast' and excavation of old burial sites has been done in there. This is a very rich area for collecting.

In Khersons'ka obl., I worked with Hanna Chumachenko, the director of Kherson IMFE, and her graduate students. The branch, in conjunction with the Kherson Pedagogical Institute, held a very successful international conference in June on multiculturalism in southern Ukraine. Hanna Chumachenko has experience collecting in the oblast', is very knowledgeable about the various ethnic groups residing in the region, and her research interests include performance and ritual. This oblast' presents very interesting research possibilities, due to the mix of ethnic groups, including western Ukrainians, Ukrainian Germans, and Tatars.

Through my association with Kherson IMFE, I was able to collect a great deal of material in a short period of time. I returned with copious interviews, old photographs, information from archives, and recent publications related to my topic. I witnessed contemporary funerals, became familiar with village life in modern day Ukraine, and photographed cemeteries and grave markers in central, southern, and western Ukraine.

The Kherson branch of IMFE is willing to work with scholars and has developed a program to do so. Scholars can start in Kiev at the main branch of IMFE, exploring its rich resources, then do fieldwork in Cherkas'ka oblast' with the Kornienkos, and finally work in Kherson'ska oblast', with trips to Odessa, Nikolaev, or Crimea as possibilities. Although my fieldwork focused on funerals and beliefs about the dead, the Kherson branch of IMFE will work with scholars to create an individual plan.

Anyone interested in doing research in Ukraine through Kherson IMFE can contact me at <[ami2f@virginia.edu](mailto:ami2f@virginia.edu)> for further information.