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FOLK SCULPTOR WŁODZIMIERZ NAUMIUK – AS A CARPENTER

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DOI: 10.24427/aea-2023-vol15-02

LUDOWY RZEźBIARZ WŁODZIMIERZ NAUMIUK JAKO CIEŚLA

Abstract

Włodzimierz Naumiuk is a recognized folk woodcarver and sculptor from Kaniuki, Podlaskie voivodeship, N-E Poland. He was “discovered” in the 1960s and invited for art exhibitions, and his sculptures were subjects of press notes, newspaper articles and also research works, including, among others, an extended paper by Jacek Wołowski, published in 1985 in “Polska Sztuka Ludowa”. In this paper, some hitherto unknown aspects of Naumiuk’s technical proficiency related to woodworking and carpentry are presented, with focus on his vernacular carpentry skills and knowledge. The objective of this work is to bridge the gap between Naumiuk’s art and carpentry skills and knowledge, in order to place his art in a wider technology context. This work is based on personal interviews with Włodzimierz Naumiuk, on 05.04.2021, 03.09.2022 and 01.11.2022.

Streszczenie

Włodzimierz Naumiuk to ludowy rzeźbiarz i snycerz ze wsi Kaniuki w województwie podlaskim. „Odkryty” został w latach sześćdziesiątych XX w., później był zapraszany na wystawy, a jego rzeźby opisywano nie tylko w prasie regionalnej, ale też w piśmiennictwie naukowym, poczynawszy od poświęconego mu obszernego artykułu na łamach „Polskiej Sztuki Ludowej” z 1985 r., autorstwa Jacka Wołowskiego. W niniejszym artykule zaprezentowano wybrane aspekty warsztatowe pomijane w dotychczasowych opracowaniach poświęconych twórczości Włodzimierza Naumiuka, mianowicie jego warsztat ciesielski (znajomość tradycyjnej ciesiołki, jako że Naumiuk pracował też jako cieśla). Poznanie i opis aspektów ciesielsko-warsztatowych służyć ma lepszemu osadzeniu twórczości Włodzimierza Naumiuka w szerszym kontekście wiejskiego rzemiosła. Merytoryczną podstawą prezentowanych tu rozważań były wywiady z Włodzimierzem Naumiukiem, przeprowadzone w dniach 05.04.2021r., 03.09.2022r. i 01.11.2022r.

Keywords: Włodzimierz Naumiuk; vernacular carpentry; Podlasie

Słowa kluczowe: Włodzimierz Naumiuk; ciesielstwo ludowe; Podlasie

INTRODUCTION

Włodzimierz Naumiuk is a folk wood carver who lives in the Narew River Podlasie village of Kaniuki in the Zabłudów suburb of Białystok. In his work since the 1960s, he has been supported by ethnographers and folk art enthusiasts and invited to exhibitions, starting with a folk art exhibition in 1971 at Warsaw’s “The House of The Peasant”, where an exhibition of Włodzimierz

Naumiuk’s sculptures was shown against the backdrop of Białystok’s industrial landscape – and most recently his work was part of the EXPO 2020 World Exhibition in Dubai (which actually took place in 2021). In 2005, Włodzimierz Naumiuk was honoured with the Oskar Kolberg Award and the Gloria Artis Bronze Medal for Merit to Culture. His silhouette and works have been

described in scientific publications [J. Wołowski 1985; A. Naumiuk-Jakuc 2019] and many times in regional journalism.

The last half-century of Włodzimierz Naumiuk's sculptural oeuvre, crowned by the above-mentioned achievements, was preceded by a period when this artist, born in 1935, worked as a village carpenter (i.e. up to and including the 1960s). This fact alone is already worth noting, because the older generation of village carpenters knew the old (traditional, folk) woodworking techniques and the associated local customs. The experience and knowledge of such people is therefore worth commemorating, precisely because it includes knowledge of past traditions and customs of vernacular carpentry - which is, of course, cognitively valuable when such customs and technologies have not yet been known to science (in such a case, information obtained from folk carpenters representing the oldest generation has the value of cognitive novelty), but such information is also valuable even when it confirms the knowledge of folk woodworking techniques and related customs and traditions known in ethnography.

Aware of this state of affairs, a series of interviews were conducted with Włodzimierz Naumiuk in 2021 and 2022, asking the folk artist about his carpentry experience and relevant technological knowledge. The results were compiled in 2022 and are presented in this article. The interviews and the compilation of the results are a continuation of similar research from 2018-2019, which at that time resulted in an article on the role of Włodzimierz Naumiuk in the development of wooden architectural decoration of rural houses in villages located in the Upper Narew Valley [A. Naumiuk-Jakuc, 2019]¹.

1. TRAINING IN CARPENTRY

"A professional begets a professional" - this statement, which W. Naumiuk quotes at the beginning of his stories, lies at the heart of the understanding of the carpentry profession. In the 1950s, when Włodzimierz Naumiuk began his apprenticeship in this profession, both the local community and the working foremen paid special attention to the proper - professional - execution of commissioned work. As Naumiuk recalls, times were difficult, after the war the country was rebuilding, people often had problems obtaining material for

construction - it took up to a dozen years: *"Those who were rich and had their own forest could buy wood immediately, but the poor collected it for years"*. Consequently, people who were untrained or unsuited to the job were not allowed to work (*"... but if you couldn't do it, if you didn't have the talent, what are you going to do with it ..."*). The apprenticeship began by becoming an apprentice - an adept of a chosen master carpenter: *"The old carpenters would take apprentices - adepts - and their knowledge would be passed on at the construction site"*. He started his apprenticeship at the age of 16, in winter, when carpentry was usually done, and he learned this at the beginning. He started working on site at the age of 18 (in the 1950s). At the very beginning, he *"planked the beam for the house"* - *"You had to plank the beam on two sides. You had to be able to wield the tool well. The carpenter paid a few pennies for his trousers, because they got very worn out during this work. That was my apprenticeship"*.

The spectrum of basic and absolutely necessary carpentry skills had to involve a number of factors, including personal predispositions, i.e. precision, meticulousness, motor skills and physical fitness. Learning the carpentry tools and becoming proficient in their use was at the core of the apprenticeship. Each young apprentice had to be able to wield an axe well, sharpen it, position it well and make a good "hatchet" so that it would fit the owner's hand. The following were taught: cutting longitudinally, cutting material in half and even working with dykes. The youngest adept was entrusted with drilling holes with an auger. As Naumiuk points out, this was not hard work, depending not so much on the auger itself as on the skill of the doer. At the heart of the teaching was just the explanation, about the fact that the bores had to be made evenly. When making recesses, a line was drawn from the spirit level at the very beginning, which the student then stood on with the auger between his legs and spun it. At the beginning, it was checked how the novice was doing and comments were given: *"Well, maybe still the foreman: 'right, left!'"*, but he would not always stand by him - at first. And the poor young man was always reprimanded - he never drilled the hole straight, the master always grumbled that he had to quit. The hole drilled had to be straight. You set the *tebel* [a type of dowel], if the hole is crooked, then the *tebel* is also crooked later. With the second one, you scoop it and what - the beam gets knocked in. It was a very important thing.

¹ I concluded then, among other things: *"The numerous anecdotes not included here, recounted by Włodzimierz Naumiuk, and concerning (...) [among other things, the influence of social factors], indicate the need for further research into social needs as stimulators of artistic creativity and as a force indirectly shaping the unique landscape of the region's countryside."* [A. Naumiuk-Jakuc, 2019, p. 38]. In the present work, therefore, I return to the material omitted at the time, enriched by new oral information.



Fig. 1. The house built in 1960's by Włodzimirz Naumiuk, Ryboly village; photo by the author, 2023



Fig. 2. The house built in 1960's by Włodzimierz Naumiuk, Wojszki village; photo by the author, 2023

The making of the knots was done by the head foreman. These were the most visible parts of the buildings, whose bad binding was visible to the naked eye. For this reason, only journeymen who had been working for at least a year were taught to make them. An apprentice who had been studying for a year could only make the front (street-facing) coals under the supervision of the foreman. The second coal at the back of the building was made, under the supervision of an assigned worker (and sometimes also a foreman).

The carpenters had to be very physically fit. They walked around the dikes barefoot (*“Like in a circus”*), fast and with various materials in their hands: *“The youngsters were almost like monkeys walking around, because it always feels, oh a beam like that, run over that beam and a hammer in your hands...”*. Sometimes ladders and scaffolding were also erected next to the building, but nevertheless it was necessary to be able to move smoothly on the walls. When asked why they worked barefoot, W. Naumiuk replies: *“Shoes, with shoes, what kind of shoes were there - rubber ones, it gets steamy, it’s better barefoot, lighter. And they worked in shoes, why not, but it was not advisable. If someone could work in shoes, then in shoes (...)but it was not advisable and it was not observed, everyone as they wanted, but everyone knew that it was better like that [barefoot].”*

The work was usually completed after the roof was done and the gables were clad. Depending on the possibilities of the farmer, a house without windows and doors stood for a winter, sometimes a year or a year and a half: *“The doors and windows were boarded up and people didn’t worry about anything happening. Then you still had to do the floor, the ceiling, sometimes you waited another year, sometimes people lived without a floor”*. Usually floors were done in the same house, but this was not the rule - *“sometimes it was other foremen, if we didn’t have time. Sometimes the foreman would leave the young apprentices - do the floors, and us older ones, we would put up a new house”*.

2. CARPENTRY TOOLS AND OTHER TECHNICAL ASPECTS

During the interviews, the following information was obtained regarding the carpentry tools used by Włodzimierz Naumiuk and related to other technical aspects:

- Measures – „arszyny” (arshins)², folded into 4 parts, on which they measured in inches. In the

words of Włodzimierz Naumiuk, the arszyn which he used was probably 73 cm long: *“In the beginning I didn’t have a metre, only an arshin still. A folded beautiful arshin, the foreman always kept in sight for the girls to love, when he was young. Szeleszko [neighbour] carried a pencil behind his ear when he was about to get married - oh, what a fad it was, a man wanted to show off that he was worth something”*. Naumiuk received an arshin when he started working on the construction site: *“I got the broken one, I don’t know how much it served anyone else”*. When there were no measures, a strip was cut and the divisions were copied from others. Naumiuk recalls that in the first years after the war, tape measures did exist, but they were expensive, available only in the city, which was not easy to get to: *“There were no coaches, you had to walk to Bielsk, to Białystok you would walk, basket, fish on your back - he went ...”*.

- Crosscut saw: W. Naumiuk recalls that when he started work, saws could not yet be bought. Therefore, old ones were sought and borrowed or bought back. The acquired saw was sharpened: *“The teeth were sharpened cool, someone there might not know how to sharpen, they might have messed up that saw, then you had to sharpen it, sit at that saw and the tinker’s saw couldn’t be picked up by anyone but the tinker.”*
- Axe: one of the most important tools of carpenters. It was either bought from the market or made by the local blacksmith: *„Łukow there was one, here was a blacksmith, he stayed after the war, a good blacksmith, here in the village. He would make an axe out of springs - a spring from a car or a train, but not every spring was suitable and the axe blade was made out of that spring, and there the shoe could be made out of something and he would weld it together, the handle had to be made exactly to his hand. Everyone was already fitting it to their own hand and everyone had an axe.”*. The axe was sharpened on a “tochak” and a “toczydło” made of sandstone (using water), which the foreman had to have. When the axe was slightly dull, files were used to sharpen it. The axe was also not given to anyone, it was highly respected and everyone had to have their own. W. Naumiuk said: *“And no axe either (...) some villager who doesn’t know it will come and start chopping a tree on a stone, so what?”*

² Arszyn – a former Russian unit of length, being the sum of the length of the cubit and the foot, varying between 71,11 – 81,5 cm.

Once on a tree, the second time on a stone. If someone doesn't know what an axe is and how to use it, (they say) - don't take the axe there, put it back, because you'll break it (...) Simple people don't know what it is, and you could shave with an axe, if they didn't have razors, they shaved with axes"³.

- Hammer: this was used primarily for driving tees. Hammers of various weights were used: 8 kg, 10 kg, 12 kg (with the foreman where Włodzimierz Naumiuk worked, a 12 kg hammer was used). The hammer was of iron with a wooden handle. They were bought or rented from the blacksmith's.
- Teble (tibble, dowel): wooden "nails", made from the waste left over from cutting the dykes, from the same material from which the walls were erected, but "...it was always looked at so that it would be healthier, so that it would have more resin in it, so that it would attract the wood better to itself, because it had to be tight". Their ends were sharpened and the width had to correspond to the holes drilled: "They were made with 4 angles, and then with 6 angles, because a round one doesn't pull the top dagger like that, it doesn't just pull it like that, and there had to be this 6-angled tebel, because that way it would be slippery and it would stand up, and that way you nail it with a hammer and it has to". The length of the tebles depended on the quality of the dowels, and ranged between 15 and 20 cm: "Because it's from the bottom that one drills and from the top two beams after all". The dowels had to be hammered in alignment, otherwise the dowels could stand out where the knots were tied, which had to be done precisely and tightly.
- Szlaga: a type of wooden hammer that was found on every construction site; made of hard wood, preferably oak, although pine slags were also used when no other was available. Szlags were made by hammering a handle (a long, metre-long one) into a wooden stump. The szlags were light, so they were good for driving an axe with, for driving tees they were not suitable: "They were not used for the house, the hammer was".
- Augers: ordered from the village blacksmith. Inch augers were used for coals and one and a half inch augers for dikes. At the end of the auger, a handle was inserted into a circular hole to enable the tool to be turned. The depth of the holes

drilled depended on the quality of the beams: "If the beams were crooked then you had to auger deeper, he'd give up better later on, because that's how the tree froze, and if you gave more tebls, he'd better - they'd pull those tebls".

- Key: made from an oblong piece of wood with a rectangular notch, the width of which corresponded to the dimensions of the dowels. The keys were placed on the dowels, pulled on both sides, straightening the dowel, at the same time the dowels were hammered in with a mallet.
- Hebel: or planer, used to straighten and level the surface of cut wood. Many types were used, both in carpentry and joinery work: "These planers are different to make various forms, each planer has to be different. See what kind here [on the inner door], filongi inserted, how to make it all with small hexagons". The carpenters most often used the so-called trigger, or a long planer, "Because short no, if you do short, you'll also make ripples in the tree".
- Szpachle (paddles) - flat tools of small size used to pound moss between dildos. Moss, which at the time was the best insulator in buildings (linen bundles were also used, but Naumiuk states: "Puffballs are worse, they weather and then the birds take it out for nests; the best way was moss laid when the dyl was not yet "struck". The paddles were used to press the insulation into the walls. After a while, the structure of the moss changed - it became very compact, did not let air through and did not spoil the wood.
- Reissmass: a wooden measuring tool consisting of two movable pieces, one of which terminated in me-toothed teeth. It was used to mark a selected length of wood without using a pencil.

3. CARPENTRY CUSTOMS AND RITUALS ASSOCIATED WITH HOUSE BUILDING

The rhythm of the calendar changes implied the necessity (custom) to perform different works at a certain time and in a certain order. Carpentry work was started in spring and carried out in such a way as to finish in winter, covering the house with a roof. Naumiuk states: "Houses were not built all year round, they tried to build in such a way as to cover the house for the winter. The most important thing was to start in such a way as to finish for the winter." In April,

³ Anna Naumiuk – Włodzimierza Naumiuka's wife, added: „Just like with your axes, no one can touch it”.



Fig. 3. The ax of Włodzimierz Naumiuk (from the collection of W. N.); photo by the author, 2023



Fig. 4. Augers of Włodzimierz Naumiuk (from the collection of W. N.); photo by the author, 2023

Fig. 5. From the top: planer and reissmass of Włodzimierz Naumiuk (from the collection of W. N.); photo by the author, 2023



carpentry work would start: *“As soon as the field was worked, from April onwards, potatoes planted in May, you could go do an additional job”*. May and June saw the start of construction. Work continued uninterrupted until August, when a fortnight’s break was customary for the harvest. The building was to be completed before the onset of winter. In winter,

the carpentry was done, the glazier (carpenters too) installed the glass panes. W. Naumiuk recalls: *“We were doing windows at the school in Soce, I was the one who glazed the windows there. The foreman went away, left me an “almaz” - a cutting knife, I put-tyed and glazed”*. *In the second spring after the building work began, doors and windows were put in”*.



Fig. 6. The gable of the house with decorations made by Włodzimierz Naumiuk in the 1960's, Ryboly village; photo by the author, 2023

They did not work on Sundays, and usually not on Saturdays either. However, the above should not be applied to the first years after the Second World War, as Naumiuk also emphasises: *“After the war nobody was looking, they were building on Sundays, because it was all destroyed. How are you not going to build, when children are sitting in cellars and you have to build a house? Who was looking... Superstition, maybe when there was debauchery, and in poverty there is no superstition.”*

Significantly subject to the rhythm of the changes of the calendar year, carpentry work was in some ways linked to the traditions, or rituals, of a particular community. Among the rituals occurring Włodzimierz Naumiuk describes:

- Dowry

Naumiuk described issues related to the collection of wedding dowries. According to his information, the basic part of dowries at that time was material for building houses. When a girl was born into a family, “her father started to collect wood for the house to give her as dowry”. The money people managed to put aside was spent on wood and even one dike or board each was bought and collected in this way. A short story introducing the essence of dowries at the time is presented by W. Naumiuk’s wife, Anna Naumiuk: *“Aunt Olga was getting married, then they gave away the barn, and they themselves were without a barn for the rest of their lives. Such were the dowries”.*

- Zakładziny (linings)

On the foundations laid, the host was asked to place a coin of his choice (it was not specified what kind of money it was to be) on the south or east side (the side on which icons were hung in the houses), so that there would be money in the house and that it would „not go out”. At that time, the coals were also consecrated with holy water, and this action was usually performed by the eldest person in the family: „– *Grandma, go bless the house as the oldest”, if there is a grandfather, he has blessed the coals we are building on”.* During linings, refreshments were only for the foremen, sometimes a neighbour or family member was invited. The real festivities only took place at the garlands.

There is another old superstition associated with the foundations - at the time of laying the foundations, young women and girls would not go out into the street: *“We used to ask the old grannies - Why? - and they laughed behind the cooker and didn’t tell us. They said: - that’s how it used to be, I didn’t go either, the mothers would say; don’t go out today, stay in today. The idea was that the foremen would make a maiden with child. And we laughed that it doesn’t hurt to have one”.*

- Wiankowe (garland fest)

Wiankowe was celebrated lavishly, because, as recalls Włodzimierz Naumiuk – *It was the first moment where you could say you already had a home, it was almost a home”.* Lots of people were invited to this personal feast of the farmers, including: neighbours, cousins and even people from other villages. The garland festival was also a moment of respite from the hard work of the foremen. On a daily basis, they did not allow themselves a break from their work: *“We didn’t have time every day, people didn’t come over to avoid disturbing us, we didn’t get into conversations while we were working. When we were working, we did our job properly, no one came over, people just walked by and said, - God help us”.* Putting up the rafters meant garland (“garland” - a combination of a bouquet of flowers and a cross was nailed to the rafters: *“We nailed a garland with a cross - like on a house of prayer, like on an Orthodox church - and it was the house of life”*, therefore, the work was planned so that the celebration, which usually took two days, would begin at the end of the week: *“As we want to drink well, we tried to do it well, either on Friday and drinking on Saturday still”.* W. Naumiuk mentions: *“Everyone was in a hurry, then there was drinking all night and the next day and neighbors would come over”.* The time of celebration was also subject to an unwritten rule, namely, it depended on where the garland was nailed: if the garland was nailed on the second rafter and not on the first gable - the host brought two liters of alcohol, as on the third, three. W. Naumiuk mentions: *“The foreman [said] always: ‘beat the garland on the fifth rafter! - five liters of vodka will be”.*

4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES IN THE 1960s

During interviews, Włodzimierz Naumiuk emphasises the impact of the changes that gradually took place after the Second World War. He attributes the greatest importance to the changes in the 1960s. The electrification of the countryside, administrative restrictions and changes related to the migration of the population to the cities particularly stuck in his memory.

Electrification of the countryside

Electricity was brought to the village and the Kaniuki area relatively late. In the 1960s, sawmill workers, carpenters and joiners were still doing everything by hand. In 1963, Włodzimierz Naumiuk worked in electrification, in the 44th Brigade to bring electricity (led from Belarus) to Podlasie villages: including Budy, Postołowo, Szumaki, then the brigade also worked around Białystok. However, electricity was brought to Kaniuki even later, when Włodzimierz Naumiuk was no longer

working there (the electricity was set up there by his former brigade).

The possibility of using electricity, as Naumiuk points out, "relieved" the work of carpenters. Beams were now mostly cut in large sawmills (despite this, the sawmills still had a lot of work, although not as much as before: "They also had, well the rafters were nowhere to be bought, because that kind of material didn't sell, because they were thin trees, but they should have been cut down to the edge, and not at least one plane, so that they could nail the battens evenly". Electric lighting, however, benefited carpenters the most: *"And the light was more useful for the carpentry work, because you could already buy a smaller ball and the light was illuminating, but they were young boys with eyesight ..., but still the light gave a lot, it relieved, you could say, it relieved the work"*. Soon, widely available mechanical circular saws - 'slicers' - were slowly 'taking away' the work of the sawmills. And although mechanical woodworking became easier and faster, Naumiuk emphasises: *"But a slicer could not replace the work of a sawmill, it was for cutting firewood, rails. For the house [material], it was difficult from under the selvedge - because it's thick, it's hard to turn over."*

Building houses and transporting them to cities

In the 1960s, obtaining planning permission became a necessity. The process was not easy: *"With the making of the project it was difficult: it was not given, it was delayed, well there was always some trouble."* Consequently, attempts were made to somehow circumvent the arduous procedures. A loophole allowed a house to be built without the aforementioned permit, provided it was erected overnight: *"Once a man took the house to his yard at night, and by morning, by 8, by 9, as long as the offices were working and the rafters were standing, no one had the right to give any punishment. And at night they asked, right here, a team of peasants, they transported the house by carts."*

Włodzimierz Naumiuk was involved in the process of erecting and transporting houses to Białystok, of which a relatively large number were built in the 1960s compared to those erected in the "usual" way. The process of depopulation of the countryside, which began as people moved to the cities, necessitated a change in the mode and principles of the carpenters' work. Naumiuk recalls: *"At that time, we used to set up the whole house on stumps or stones (...). We would build a house somewhere in the backyard, mark the pieces, disassemble and transport them, to the building site (...). That's why the wooden pegs - the so-called "tebles" - were made loose, because like that, they were made tight, beaten with a heavy hammer"*. Given

the hand-worked nature of the components for construction, which were rejoined together after transport, it became necessary to mark them: *"Because every beam as it ties into a dovetail is different. Otherwise it would be a mess, in a year's time the house wouldn't have been built"*. The marks had to be invisible. They were made with a chisel, and each carpenter had his own way of applying them. Signs were placed according to the directions of the world. Roman numerals were used in particular, or letters or signs were added, i.e. a dot, two dots, crosses, etc. Each foreman had to know what the symbols were. Every foreman had to know what the symbols meant. From the information that Naumiuk has, it is known that this way of building was practised by foremen from Kaniuki and Ostrówek, and perhaps also from other surrounding villages. It is also known that Dojnowska Street in Białystok was built in this way at the time. It is worth adding to this topic the context of the construction of new buildings in the countryside in those years. Due to the relatively large distance from the larger cities, the law was not so respected in the countryside. If the neighbours had no objections to how a house was put up, there was nothing to prevent new buildings being erected freely: *"Here people built normally (...) the village was always, it depended on the neighbours - the neighbour was silent, it was fine"*.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

During interviews with the folk carpenter Włodzimierz Naumiuk on 05.04.2021, 03.09.2022 and 01.11.2022, complementing the 2018-2019 research, new reminiscence information was acquired about his experience in carpentry and the carpentry workshop, and - somewhat incidentally - also about ancient carpentry rituals. Włodzimierz Naumiuk stressed the importance of long-term and reliable training in carpentry under the guidance of an experienced foreman, a need that was somehow reinforced by a sense of responsibility for the outcome of the construction, as in a spoiled society, inadequate construction of a house could result in a tragedy for the owner, who lost the money he had accumulated over many years, and sometimes even his life's possessions. Consequently, the master builder, employing experienced workers and a few apprentices (journeymen), would oversee work assignments according to the experience and skills of each of his helpers. Simpler tasks, assigned to less experienced helpers (nevertheless requiring precision and care), included sawing the wood, planing it and drilling the holes for the tees (tenons), while journeymen were never entrusted with making carpentry locks themselves.

In Włodzimierz Naumiuk's memories of the 1950s, the reminiscences reveal nuances which have been overlooked in previous studies on folk construction in the Białystok region: the gradual transition from the old Russian units of measurement (arshyns) to metric units, and the resulting necessity to replace measuring tools; the necessity to use worn-out or damaged tools due to the difficulty of acquiring such tools by relatively poor carpenters (although still wealthier than the general rural population), which also resulted in a respect for tools, especially the basic carpentry tool - the axe. It seems that some of the information given by Włodzimierz Naumiuk, e.g. that „if they didn't have razors, they shaved with axes”, are like the beginnings of a tool myth - they are probably not so much evidence of actual shaving with a sharp axe, but rather an echo of the publicity stories circulating in the carpentry circles of the time, extolling one's own skill in sharpening and using an axe at the expense of interlocutors (implying that one could not wield an axe so skillfully and subtly) and discouraging novices or competitors from using axes hastily. Yes, every farmer had an axe and everyone wielded it quite well, using it for instance to chop firewood, planing fence pegs, etc., but since this was the case, it made it all the more important for the technical elite – the carpenters - to circulate the opinion that they were exceptional when it came to the art of sharpening and using axes.

Some of the details from Włodzimierz Naumiuk's stories, when compared with similar information from ethnographic writing, attest to local variations in materials and technological solutions. Examples include information about teblocks, wooden pegs. Włodzimierz Naumiuk emphasises that they were always made of the same material as the beams and were given an octagonal cross-section. For comparison, Marian Pokropek and Tomasz Strączek [1993, p. 75] report that in villages from the Ciechanowiec area, which are about 60 km to the west of the village of Kaniuki „The uprights were made of oak or resinous pine”. Jerzy Czajkowski [1961, p. 159] states that in the villages of Nowoberezowo (15 km south-east of Kaniuki village) and Łuka (25 km east) „instead of wooden dowels, the holes between the beams are filled with stone pebbles”. Jerzy Cetera [p. 446 (reference 8)] wrote: „The same dowels deposited in axe holes, used instead of dowels, were found in Usza Wielka commune of Klukowo”, and also states that it was not until the 20th century that round or polygonal dowels, driven into holes drilled with an auger, began to be used throughout the Białystok area because, as he writes, „in the nineteenth century in the Białystok Region, the auger was not a commonly used tool in folk building”, therefore, until this type of tool be-

came widespread, wooden tees of square cross-section were used, driven into holes cut with an axe.

Naumiuk's information on customs and rituals accompanying house building is very interesting. This information is fully in line with ethnographic knowledge, already quite abundant as far as the whole region is concerned (especially as far as house-building customs, considered to be the most primordial; see: [Pokropek, Strączek 1993, p. 70-73]). They prove the continuity of many customs up to the mid-20th century. Here, it is only worth comparing the information given by the interviewee - that “on the laid foundations a coin was asked to be placed by the host (...)” - with a record that is almost two hundred years older, namely with the information recorded in 1830 (but based on earlier research) by Lukasz Gołębiowski about the “Lithuanian peasant” (actually referring to as the North Belorussian people, not ethnic Lithuanians): „The founding carpenter foreman puts a penny, a piece of bread, some honey and salt on the coals of the house from sunrise” [Gołębiowski 1830, p. 50].

Thus, Włodzimierz Naumiuk, a folk carpenter and woodcarver from the Podlasie village of Kaniuki, revealed his knowledge of carpentry tools, techniques and customs acquired in his youth (in the 1950s and 1960s), which complements and confirms his knowledge from the literature on the subject, but also - importantly - shows the local specificity of the carpentry profession in a small village on the Narew river.

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The work was carried out as part of the research project no. WZ/WA-IA/5/2023, carried out at the Faculty of Architecture of the Białystok University of Technology.