

I. RESEARCH ARTICLES

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THE LINGUACULTURAL IMAGE
OF THE POLISH RAK ‘CRAYFISH’*

Abstract. The article attempts to reconstruct the linguacultural image of the Polish *rak* ‘crayfish’ (*Astacus astacus*). Following the model adopted in the *Dictionary of Folk Stereotypes and Symbols*, the relevant data include the word’s etymology, its lexicographic treatment (including phraseology) in dictionaries of contemporary Polish, in dialectal dictionaries and in dictionaries of former stages of Polish, texts of folklore, and ethnographic accounts. The following definition of the crayfish has been proposed accordingly: “The crayfish (*rak*) is a small, hairless and featherless animal of little value, its body being protected by a carapace. It has long antennae, two prehensile and sharp pincers that are used for protection, many legs, and eyes located in the back of the body. It lives in water (rivers and ponds), where it digs holes. It is unknown where it spends the winter. It can pinch, moves backwards in an ungainly and slow manner, makes no sound and kills its victims by biting into their bodies. It is closest to fish. Crayfish are sought for their meat, of which they have very little – they are roasted or boiled. Crayfish are considered exquisite food. Parts of the crayfish’s body are used as medicine for various ailments. The crayfish is thought to be connected with the underworld”.

KEY WORDS: ethnolinguistics; linguistic worldview; crayfish in language and culture

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1. Introductory remarks

The linguistic image of animals and, more broadly, the animalistic themes have been studied extensively. In this context, Anna Wierzbicka article “Nazwy zwierząt” [Animal names] (1993) is particularly important. Other noteworthy publications include: vol. 15 of the series *Język a Kultura* [Language and Culture] devoted to the *homo – animal* opposition (Dąbrowska 2003), Rak (2007) on the linguacultural worldview of animals in highlander dialects, and Bartmiński, Kielak, and Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska (2015) on animals in folk oral accounts. More than a dozen articles present the linguacultural image of domestic and farm animals close to humans, *inter alia*, the horse (Bartmiński 1980; Anusiewicz 1992; Mosiołek-Kłosińska 1998), the cat (Anusiewicz 1990; Mosiołek 1993; Mosiołek-Kłosińska 1995), the dog (Mosiołek 1992; Mosiołek-Kłosińska 1995), the pig (Peisert 2003),¹ the ox (Sierociuk 1980) and the goat (Kielak 2014). As for the linguistic image of the crayfish, only general information has been provided thus far (Krasnowolski 1905: 196–198; Rak 2007: 165–166). This article intends to fill this gap. More attention to the crayfish was paid by Aleksandr W. Gura (1997: 398–402), who also developed the entry for *crayfish* in the dictionary *Slavyanskye drevnosti* (SD IV: 400–401).

The etymology² of *rak* and its presentation in dictionaries of contemporary Polish, of Old Polish and Polish dialects (also in Bernard Sychta’s dictionary of Kashubian dialects; SychSGK³), as well as in phrasematics,⁴ texts of folklore and ethnographic accounts,⁵ will be given in further sections of this article.

¹ For an account of the role of the pig in Danish linguaculture cf. Levisen (2013). [editor’s note]

² The importance of etymology in the reconstruction of linguistic worldview is emphasised by, among others, Wojtyła-Świerzowska (1998), Jakubowicz (1999, 2012), Brzozowska (2009), Popowska-Taborska (2012), Bartmiński (2013), and Kielak (2015).

³ The inclusion of the Kashubian material may arouse some controversy due to the special status of the Kashubian language in Poland (which it obtained in 2005), but it is dictated by the descriptive tradition. For example, in NKPP, the Kashubian material is treated on equal terms with examples from Polish dialects. The same applies to the Dictionary of Folk Stereotypes and Symbols (SSiSL).

⁴ The scope of phrasematics, its division and place in the lexical system is discussed in Chlebda (1991). In this article, the terms *phrasematics* and *phraseme* are also used, since the examined material covers not only proverbs and traditionally understood phrases, but also borderline units.

⁵ According to Bartmiński (1998: 66), proper reconstruction of the linguacultural image of an object should involve systemic, questionnaire-based, and textual data. The first includes information contained in dictionaries, etymology, derivatives, metaphorical uses, phraseology, and fixed collocations. The second type of data (obtained from questionnaires or surveys) is used to examine the scope of the stereotype, the degree of the consolidation of its components, as well as the indication of assessments and valuations related to it.

As the goal of this contribution is to provide a comprehensive description of the Polish linguacultural image of *rak* 'crayfish', the dialectal material is not separated from standard Polish, nor is modern Polish from Old Polish. Such a broad approach to the research material is also motivated by other factors. For instance, in Polish dictionaries the description of the lexeme *rak* is often limited to its two meanings, 'a crustacean species' and 'cancer', and the stereotypical comparison *czerwony jak rak* 'red as a crayfish', on the basis of which it is impossible to reproduce the complete image of the animal. On the other hand, taking NKPP as a source, it is clear that some phrasemes are noted both in dialects and in Old and contemporary Polish, which calls for panchronic⁶ research and the rejection of a differential approach that only impoverishes the analysis.

The linguistic and co-linguistic data concerning the crayfish (following SSiSL) have been summarised in concise sentences that express stereotypical judgements about the animal, understandable in themselves, without reference to other judgements. Linguistic worldview is reconstructed with orientation on the speaking subject (see Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2014: 79) so that these definitional sentences have been subsequently grouped into facets (collection; equivalence; appearance; body parts; features unrelated to appearance; actions performed by the crayfish; its condition; location; use of the crayfish by humans). To avoid unnecessary fragmentation of the data and the repetition of convergent characteristics, a holistic description⁷ is used. Thus, individual defining sentences are accompanied by linguistic, textual, and co-linguistic data.

The branch of science concerned with crayfish is called astacology. The Polish fauna includes two species of native crayfish: noble crayfish (*Astacus astacus*) and narrow-clawed crayfish (*Pontastacus leptodactylus*), as well as two foreign species: spinycheek crayfish (*Orconectes limosus*) and signal crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*). The average users of Polish do not distinguish them and only use the hyperonym *rak*. Obviously, in phraseology and folklore the native crayfish species are referred to (foreign species were brought in in the 20th century) and, similarly to standard Polish, only the general name is used.⁸ In the fishing jargon we may find special terms,

The third type, textual data, are primarily obtained from stereotyped texts (proverbs, prayers, fixed formulae). This article is based on two of the three data types: systemic and textual (no relevant survey has been conducted).

⁶ The need for panchronic research is discussed in Pajdzińska and Krzyżanowski (1999).

⁷ The advantage of this type of description over the segmented description is demonstrated by Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska (2014).

⁸ The two-word names of animals and plants that are known from zoology and botany are principally not used in colloquial Polish or in dialects. Only sometimes, if there

e.g. noble crayfish is called *szewc* ‘shoemaker’, narrow-clawed crayfish is *krawiec* ‘tailor’. These names emphasise a particular feature of the animal’s appearance: large pincers (chela) that resemble shears, i.e. the shoemaker’s and the tailor’s tool. As will be shown later, this motivation will also be mentioned in one of the etymologies of *rak* and will account for the ambiguity of the lexeme.

The scientific approach to the crayfish is different from the popular one in terms of classification. Zoologists classify crayfish as animals, whereas popularly crayfish is taken to lie outside this category because typical animals are domestic mammals of larger size. This is also reflected in the definition of *rak* in ISJP (II: 411): “The crayfish is a water creature with a body covered with thick carapace, it has a multi-segmented abdomen and large, strong pincers”. The entry does not use the hyperonymic term *animal*.

2. Explication

1. Collection

THE CRAYFISH CO-OCCURS WITH FISH. In the song *Tańcowała ryba z rakiem* [A fish danced with a crayfish], also known in other Slavic countries (cf. SD 400), the crayfish is presented as a partner to the fish. This is because the crustacean is perceived as masculine (its antennae resemble a moustache) and the fish as feminine (note also the masculine grammatical gender of the Polish nouns *rak* and the feminine gender of *ryba*).

2. Equivalence

THE CRAYFISH REPLACES FISH. The intra-textual equivalence of *rak* and *ryba* is evidenced in phrasematics, e.g.: *Na bezrybiu i rak ryba* ‘When there’s no fish, the crayfish doubles as fish’;⁹ *Wsio jedno: rak ryba i żaba ryba* ‘It’s all the same: crayfish is fish and frog is fish’ (K 60: 382), but also in the legal formula: *W rozumieniu tej ustawy rak jest rybą* ‘In the provision of this act, crayfish is considered fish’. Inter-textual equivalence is exemplified by *Przed rakami i po rakach* ‘Before crayfish and after them’ (NKPP III: 19; this saying also comes in a variant with fish, cf. NKPP III: 108).

exists a very similar domesticated and wild species, additional specific names are used to distinguish between them, for example, in Podhale dialect: *zajonc choważny* [farm hare] ‘domestic rabbit’ and *zajonc dziki* [wild hare] ‘brown hare’.

⁹ I.e., *Half a loaf is better than no bread* or *In the land of the blind the one-eyed man is king*.

THE CRAYFISH REPLACES THE HEDGEHOG. In the Kashubian version of the fairy tale *The crayfish-and-fox race* (PBL 79), instead of *rak* there is *jeż* ‘hedgehog’. Both animals are perceived as capable to attach themselves to something. Similarly, the lexemes *jeż* i *rak* are equivalent in the comparisons *Idzie jak rak z drożdżami* ‘He goes like a crayfish with yeast’ (NKPP I: 863) and *Pospieszył się jak jeż z młodźkami* ‘He hurried like a hedgehog with yeast’ (K 15: 171). These sayings point to the slowness of the animals.

3. Appearance

THE CRAYFISH IS RED. The perception of the crayfish as a red animal is illustrated in a stereotypical comparison *czerwony/zaczerwienić się jak rak* ‘red/to blush like a crayfish’ and in the saying *Raczek – niezły to znaczek* ‘Crayfish-DIM – a fairly good stamp-DIM’ (NKPP III: 19). Another expression, *spiec raka* (lit. ‘to roast the crayfish’) ‘turn red, blush’, specifies that the crayfish turns red after roasting, whereas in the natural environment it is black, dark green or dark brown, and only the underside of its pincers is reddish (this applies to noble crayfish). Also, such meanings of the lexeme *rak* as ‘a blush’ (SWIL and SJPD) and ‘a red heel’ (SychSGK IV: 315) indicate that the animal is associated with the red colour.

In this context, it is worth recalling folk and children riddles, in which references to this colour are either direct or through allusion to the aesthetic aspect of red, which is considered the most beautiful colour: *Grey in the hand, red in the pot? Crayfish* (SychSGK IV: 315);¹⁰ *When it is black, it lives; when it is red, it is dead. Crayfish* (Folfasiński 1975: 223);¹¹ *Goose! Goose! What kind? Crowned goose. It had red legs. Crayfish* (Folfasiński 1975: 60);¹² *It has two pincers for defence, and a red carapace for protection* (children’s riddle);¹³ *What is more beautiful after it dies? Crayfish* (Gustawicz 1893: 251);¹⁴ *What seems to be the most beautiful after it dies? Crayfish* (Siarkowski 1877: 133).¹⁵ Also significant in this context are illustrations of fairy tales depicting the crayfish as a red creature with a moustache and a pair of prominent pincers.

In connection to its redness, the crayfish was used in folk medicine: weak children were bathed in water with boiled crayfish, which was supposed to give them colour (Spittal 1938: 135).

¹⁰ *Šaré v řéce, červoné v grónku? Rek.*

¹¹ *Kiedě ono je czórne, to źéje, kiedě ono je czerwioné, ono umarło. Rek.*

¹² *Gęś! Gęś! Jaka? Siodłata. Czerwone nóżki miała. Rak.*

¹³ *Dwoje szczy piec ma do obrony, a do ochrony, pancierz czerwony.* Children’s riddles come from <http://zagadkidladzieci.net/Zagadka-o-raku-1467>; accessed Oct 10, 2016.

¹⁴ *Co po śmierci ładniejsze? Rak.*

¹⁵ *Co po śmierci się najładniejsze wydaje? Rak.*

THE CRAYFISH IS SMALL. The perception of the crayfish as small compared to other animals¹⁶ is illustrated by the following use of the word *rak* in relation to:

– people: 1. ‘a small child’¹⁷ (Kapuściński 1899: 63; Ramułt 1930: 65; SychSGK IV: 294; KaśSGO: 726; HodSG: 397); 2. ‘a short person’ (Udziela 1903: 103);

– animals: 1. ‘a small, poorly growing animal’ (KaśSGO: 726); 2. ‘small fish unsuitable for eating’ (SychSGK IV: 294);

– plants: 1. ‘small potatoes’ (SychSGK IV: 294); 2. in plural: ‘a variety of small black round plums’ (SychSGK IV: 315);

– things: 1. ‘wooden beads on a thread tied to the yard which, as the sail is to be lifted, encircle the mast so that the sail could be lifted on them’ (SWil II: 1339; SW V: 470); 2. ‘small brushwood, chips, peat or coal dust’ (SychSGK IV: 294); 3. ‘a speck of cheese in sheep whey, heavily heated, but not yet boiled’ (Herniczek-Morozowa 1975: 156).

Smallness connotes unworthiness; *rak* can mean: 1. ‘garbage’ (cf. also the derivative *rakov’išče* ‘garbage can’) (SychSGK IV: 294–295); 2. ‘waste from the threshing of cereals’ (SychSGK IV: 294). In turn, the sight of small, awkward animals evokes pity, as in the phraseme *rak nieborak*¹⁸ ‘crayfish – poor thing’ (also a diminutive variant *raczek nieboraczek* ‘crayfish-DIM – poor thing-DIM’). It is worth mentioning that the meanings listed above reveal the connotation of sphericity (e.g. potatoes, plums, wooden beads, specks of cheese), hence the crayfish is sometimes defined as being “similar to an egg” (see below).

The perception of the crayfish as a small animal had led to a taboo being put on the word *rak*. The following information comes from Łodygowice (the Żywiec region in south-western Poland): “Young domestic animals cannot be called *rak*, because they would cease to grow” (Kosiński 1904: 24). This shows the fear of transferring a feature of one designatum (smallness of the crayfish) onto another (a domestic animal). A similar observation in relation

¹⁶ The definition of the lexeme *zwierzę* ‘animal’ in ISJP (II: 1397–1398) suggests that the prototypical animal for Poles is the dog or the horse.

¹⁷ The meaning ‘child’ is probably also referred to in the expression *Co zem to z tobom raki krzciet* ‘Did we baptise crayfish together?’, which is “a formula used with reference to a person who likes to be overfamiliar with somebody” (RakSFGD: 94–95).

¹⁸ The noun *nieborak* ‘poor thing’ is not related to the lexemes *rak* (although those are similar in form) or *niebożę* ‘poor little thing’ (despite being closely related in meaning). According to SEBor (357–358), *nieborak* is a deverbal noun derived from a negative form of Proto-Slavic **neboriti* (*se*), **neboriti* (*se*) ‘not to wrestle with, not to grapple, not to fight’.

to another small animal (frog) is noted by Engelking (2000: 82–84), followed by Krawczyk-Tyrpa (2001: 104).

THE CRAYFISH IS UGLY. The humour of the phraseme *racy ogier* ‘crayfish stallion’ (RakSFGD: 115) is based on the combination of the crayfish (considered a small and ugly animal) with a stallion, which connotes magnificence and virility. The ugliness attributed to the crayfish is also directly expressed in the riddle: *When alive it is ugly, after death it is beautiful; it may also be an illness* (Gustawicz 1893: 236).¹⁹

THE CRAYFISH IS BALD. Since the crayfish is not covered with hair, fur or feathers, its name was used in the comparison *łesi jak rek* ‘bald as a crayfish’ (SychSGK III: 16).

THE CRAYFISH IS SIMILAR TO AN EGG. After being removed from the water, the crayfish pulls up its abdomen and because of its hard carapace, it may resemble an egg. Hence the expressions *biały rak* (lit. ‘white crayfish’) ‘egg’ (SWil II: 1339; SW V: 470; SKarł I: 75); in dialects it also refers to male testicles (SKarł I: 75; KSGP). The connotation of sphericity is obvious here.

4. Parts of the crayfish’s body

THE CRAYFISH HAS PINCERS. According to etymological dictionaries (SEBr: 453; SEMlad: 556; SEVas III: 437; SEMach: 506; SEMel V: 19; SEBor: 509–510; WSEH: 530), the Proto-Slavic lexeme **rakō* or **orkō* (with acute intonation) should be associated with Lithuanian *erkė/árkė* ‘tick; wooden goat’, Latvian *ērce* ‘bovine tick; wooden goat’, and Latin *ricinus* ‘tick’ and *arcus* ‘arc; curvature, vault’. These lexemes derive from PIE **ark^u* ‘something bent, curved’. It follows from this that the name of the crustacean refers to the name of the pincers: pincers were considered to be characteristic of and actually identifying the crayfish.

The perception of the crayfish as an animal with pincers is indicated also by other linguistic data, in particular the technical senses of the lexeme *rak*, cf.: 1. ‘a tool resembling large pincers, used to extract broken fragments of pipes from boreholes’ (SW V: 470; SJPD; SWJP: 930; USJP); 2. ‘a hook at the end of the shaft, preventing the chain from sliding over it, connecting the collar with the shaft’ (KaśSGO: 726; HodSG: 397); 3. ‘a hook on which a hinge is placed’ (KSGP Podhale). In criminal jargon, *rak* is ‘a thieving device; pincers used for opening safes’ (SJPD) – after the pincers are opened and then clenched, they can have a binding function. This latter function is referred to in the next three technical meanings of *rak*: 1. ‘a wide iron

¹⁹ *Za żywota brzydkie, po śmierci ładne, może chorobą być.* Recall that the Polish *rak* can mean ‘a crustacean species’ or ‘cancer’.

rod with half-round ends, used to spread the lower bars of ladders on the bottom of the harvest wagon' (Tomaszewski 1930: 178; Sobierajski 1985: 71); 2. 'a vertical iron bar linking the plough beam with the metal sheet and the runner' (MAGP I (2): 48); 3. 'a fork-shaped reel part with hooks' (Falińska 1974: 258).

The transfer of the name *rak* in the dialects to mole cricket (*Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa*) (Waszkiewicz 1977: 138; Dejna 1979: 162) and the children's riddle *In addition to a moustache, it has long pincers...*,²⁰ also confirm that pincers were considered a characteristic feature of the crayfish. In the 19th century, field cricket (*Gryllus campestris*) was also referred to as *German crayfish* (SW V: 470) (perhaps because of the general similarity of the crustacean to that insect²¹). From the context quoted in SW one may infer that the adjective *German* connotes inferiority.

The transfer of the name *rak* to the stellar constellation (SPXVI XXXV: 101; SL III: 10; SWil II: 1339; SW V: 470) in Greek mythology (the Great Cancer was placed in the sky on the order of Hera, after Heracles crushed it with a club) indicates that Ancient Greeks also perceived the crayfish through the prism of its pincers. In this case, we deal with a semantic borrowing from Latin: *Cancer* 'stellar constellation'. This meaning appeared in Latin under the influence of Greek *Καρκίνος* (same meaning). The name of the zodiac is derived from the name of the constellation (SPXVI XXXV: 101; SWil II: 1339; ISJP II: 411; USJP). This, in turn, gave rise to the meaning 'a person born under the sign of Cancer' (SWJP: 930; USJP).

CRAYFISH'S PINCERS RESEMBLE SCISSORS. This observation is confirmed in riddles, e.g.: *It lives in the river or pond and cuts with a pair of pincers like a tailor*;²² *Who has bodily scissors? Crayfish* (Folfasiński 1975: 181);²³ *Who never sharpens their scissors? Crayfish* (SychSGK IV: 315).²⁴ It is the same motivational pattern that is revealed in the fishing sociolect, where the crayfish is called *krawiec* 'tailor' or *szewc* 'shoemaker'.

CRAYFISH'S PINCERS ARE SHARP. One of the dialectic meanings of the word *rak*, 'a moldboard of the lister plough' (KSGP), indicates that

²⁰ *Oprócz wąsów ma on jeszcze długie kleszcze...* (note the rhyme *jeszcze* 'also' – *kleszcze* 'pincers').

²¹ Gura (1997: 398–399) also draws attention to the relationship between the crayfish and insects. In Vladimir Guberniya the crayfish is called *chertovaya voshya* 'devil's louse' and the crab *morskoy pauk* 'sea spider'. On the other hand, *rak* in Ukrainian is used in reference to the stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*).

²² *Mieszka w rzece albo w stawie i szczypcami tnje jak krawiec* (cf. the rhyme *stawie* – *krawiec*).

²³ *Kto ma z ciała nożyce? Rak.*

²⁴ *Xto nie ostři nigdë nožččov? Rek.*

sharpness was also recognised as a characteristic feature of crayfish's pincers.

CRAYFISH'S PINCERS ARE USED FOR DEFENCE. In a children's riddle, the crayfish's pincers are a tool used for defence: *Dwoje szczypiec ma do obrony...* 'It has two pincers for defence...'

THE CRAYFISH HAS MANY SHARP LEGS. In the scientific (zoological) classification, the crayfish belongs to the order of Decapoda; the linguistic image of this animal also emphasises the multitude of sharp legs, as in the following (usually as the plural *raki*): 1. 'spikes attached to the sole of shoes to facilitate mountain climbing and walking on ice' (SW V: 470; SJPD; SWJP: 930; ISJP II: 411; WSJP); 2. 'sharp spikes attached to shoes with leather straps and buckles to facilitate climbing trees or poles' (SWJP: 930; USJP; WSJP). In SKarł (V: 8) *rak* (or in fact, the plural *raki*) is also defined as 'metal tips under footwear for walking on trees while floating'. That feature is loosely alluded to in the meaning noted in Podhale dialect: 'a three-legged stand' (HodSG: 397), and also in the derivative *raczkować* '(about small children) to crawl, to walk on all fours' and the phraseme *rakiem/raczkciem leżać* 'to shamble like a crayfish(-DIM)', i.e. 'to walk on all fours'. In the last two examples, the simultaneous movement on both legs and hands is emphasised, i.e. on the larger number of limbs than in normal circumstances.

THE CRAYFISH HAS A LONG MOUSTACHE. In Podhale dialect, the perception of the crayfish as an animal with a characteristic "moustache" (or, more properly, antennae), at least as long as the entire body of the crustacean, is present in the name of a costume, *raki* 'decorative motifs on cloth trousers, next to stripes at the height of the hips and over the bottom fly, resembling the digit "eight"' (Trebunia-Staszal 2007: 194). The embroidered motif resembles wrapped antennae of the crayfish. Once again, one can recall illustrations from fairy tales, which depict the crayfish with a prominent moustache, or the children's riddle: *In addition to the moustache, it has long pincers. And a carapace on the back. Can you guess what it is?*²⁵

THE BODY OF THE CRAYFISH IS COVERED WITH A CARAPACE. In the children's riddles quoted above, this feature of the crayfish is considered one of the most important. This is also the case in, *It has two pincers for defence, and a red carapace for protection.*²⁶

THE CRAYFISH HAS EYES IN THE BACK OF ITS BODY. This belief is reflected in a few phrasemes that come in several versions: *God felt sorry for*

²⁵ *Oprócz wąsów ma on jeszcze długie kleszcze. I skorupę ma na grzbiecie. Odgadnijcie?* (rhymes: *jeszcze – kleszcze; grzbiecie – odgadnijcie*).

²⁶ *Dwoje szczypiec ma do obrony, a do ochrony, pancierz czerwony* (rhyme: *obrony – ochrony – czerwony*).

the crayfish and gave it eyes at the backside (Ciszewski 1887: 47);²⁷ God felt sorry for the crayfish and gave it a head where the shithole is (NKPP III: 19);²⁸ God felt sorry for the crayfish and gave it eyes in its bottom (NKPP III: 19);²⁹ God looked at the crayfish and gave it eyes where the shithole is (NKPP III: 19);³⁰ God gave a gift to the crayfish: he gave it eyes at the back (NKPP III: 19);³¹ God gave a gift to the crayfish: he gave it eyes where the shithole is (NKPP III: 19);³² When God asked the crayfish, he gave it eyes where the shithole is (NKPP III: 19).³³

All of the above-mentioned units refer to the popular tale (cf. Gustawicz 1881: 59; Hradecka 1903: 67; Krzyżanowski 1975 III: 45–46; SychSGK IV: 315; Gura 1997: 399) that explains why the crayfish moves backwards: in the act of creation, God forgot to give the crayfish its eyes and the offended crustacean hid its head in the burrow. Finally, when the Creator turned to the crayfish, it replied: *Wraź mi [ocój] w rzić!* ‘Stick [the eyes] in my bottom!’ (Pawlikowski 1935). The alleged unique location of the crayfish’s eyes is also referred to in a Kashubian riddle: Why does the crayfish walk home in darkness, even though the sun is shining? Because it has eyes in the bottom (SychSGK IV: 315).³⁴

Crayfish’s eyes (in fact, “calcium pebbles located in the crayfish’s stomach before each shedding of the carapace”, SL III: 11) are believed to cast spells. According to the principle that the spell can be reversed by what causes it, the same eyes were used to remove it (Spittal 1938: 149). It is also possible that the magical meaning of red (cf. CRAYFISH IS RED) contributed to the reversal: red is an anti-demonic colour that staves off bad luck. Red objects (especially strings and ribbons) were treated as apotropeions (Kowalski 2007: 228–231).

5. Features unrelated to appearance

THE CRAYFISH IS DUMB. Like fish, the crayfish cannot speak. This is an important feature (cf. the Latin *homo loquens* in reference to humans) that figures in an entire body of phrasemes which suggest the improbability of certain situations: *When the crayfish whistles and the fish squeals (sings)*

²⁷ *Uźalił się Pan Bóg na raka, dał mu ślepie w zadku.*

²⁸ *Uźalił się Pan Bóg na raka, dał mu głowę tam, gdzie sraka* (with the rhyme here and in a few other versions: *raka – sraka*).

²⁹ *Uźalił się Pan Bóg raka, dał mu w tyłku oczy.*

³⁰ *Spoznął Pan Bóg na raka, dał mu oczy, kędy sraka.*

³¹ *Obdarzył Pan Bóg raka – dał mu w tyle oczy.*

³² *Opatrzył/obdarzył Pan Bóg raka: dał mu oczy tam, gdzie sraka.*

³³ *Kiedy pytał Pan Bóg raka, dał mu oczy, kędy sraka.*

³⁴ *Čemu rek jize po cemku do svojě χęši, χoc stinće sv’ěci? Bo on mǎ očě v řěci.*

(Skor II: 8);³⁵ *When the crayfish whistles under the oak*;³⁶ *When the crayfish whistles and the frog stamps its foot*;³⁷ *When the crayfish whistles on hot ice*;³⁸ *When the crayfish whistles on the barn*;³⁹ *When the crayfish whistles over the sea*;⁴⁰ *This time tomorrow, when the crayfish whistles in the fallow field* (NKPP III: 18);⁴¹ *rakom świstać* 'for crayfish to whistle', i.e. 'futile effort, idle work' (NKPP III: 19).

THE CRAYFISH IS OF LITTLE VALUE. An emphasis on the small size of the crayfish, along with its past abundance (today native species of crayfish are threatened with extinction) and the small amount of meat in its body motivates the phraseme *jakby rak z kobieli wypadł* 'as if the crayfish slipped out of the basket', which means 'a small loss' (with the variant *jakby raka z kobieli wypuścić* 'as if to let the crayfish out of the basket', NKPP III: 18).

The crayfish is perceived as less valuable than fish, as in the proverb *When there's no fish, the crayfish doubles as fish*;⁴² however, it is more valuable than the frog: *Go catch crayfish with the stupid, he will be catching frogs* (SychSGK IV: 315).⁴³ The gradation of usefulness of the various animals is clearly visible here: the frog (completely useless, frogs were not eaten), the crayfish (little value, contains little meat), fish (valuable, good source of food). However, in the proverb *It's all the same: crayfish is fish and frog is fish* (K 60: 382)⁴⁴ there is a perverse identification of fish, crayfish, and frogs, which mainly results from the aquatic environment that these animals inhabit.

6. Actions performed by the crayfish

THE CRAYFISH PINCHES. In children's folklore there is a popular counting-out rhyme *There goes a crayfish-poor thing, one step forwards, and step backwards. There goes a crayfish-poor thing, when it pinches, it'll leave a sign*⁴⁵ – it is accompanied by a pinching gesture. Both the text and the related action reinforce the image of the pinching crustacean. This is also

³⁵ *Jak rak świsnie, a ryba piśnie (zaśpiewa)* (rhyme: *świsnie – piśnie*).

³⁶ *Jak rak świsnie pod dębem.*

³⁷ *Jak rak świsnie, a żaba nogą tupnie.*

³⁸ *Jak rak świsnie na gorącym lodzie.*

³⁹ *Jak rak świsnie na oborze.*

⁴⁰ *Jak rak świsnie za morze.*

⁴¹ *Jutro o tej porze, jak rak świsnie na ugorze* (rhyme: *porze – ugorze*).

⁴² *Na bezrybiu i rak ryba.*

⁴³ *Idź z głupim na raki, on żaby łowił będzie.*

⁴⁴ *Wsio jedno: rak ryba i żaba ryba.*

⁴⁵ *Idzie rak nieborak, / raz do przodu, a raz wspanak. / Idzie rak nieborak, / jak uszczyplnie, będzie znak.*

confirmed by the children's riddle: *It lives in water, pinches everyone, and then it blushes in the soup because of that*⁴⁶ and in the folk tale *Animals in the robbers' cottage* (*Zwierzęta w chacie zbójcekiej*) (PBL: 63), in which the crayfish pinches the robbers. It is also worth recalling the Greek mythology: Heracles fights Cancer the Crab, which painfully pinches his legs.

THE CRAYFISH ATTACHES ITSELF TO THINGS. The ability of the crayfish to get hold of various items has been exposed in the already mentioned fairy tale *The crayfish-and-fox race* (PBL: 79): the fox is first to reach the finish line, but the crayfish wins the bet by clinging to the fox's tail; when the fox turns back to check where its competitor is, the crayfish lets go and falls just right past the finish line. Interestingly, pincers do not appear to be crucial in this respect: in the Kashubian version of the tale instead of the crayfish there is a hedgehog.

Also, in three phrasemes, we find direct references to the crayfish's ability to cling to objects (again pincers are not involved): *The crayfish has nothing to cling to here* (NKPP III: 19);⁴⁷ *Hold on like a crayfish to a sheep-breeder's bag* (SychSGK IV: 315);⁴⁸ *He looks like even a crayfish wouldn't touch him/hook on to him* (unfriendly and unkempt) (SychSGK IV: 315).⁴⁹

THE CRAYFISH MOVES BACKWARDS. When in danger, the crayfish dynamically strikes its telson (the posterior-most fragment of the abdomen), as a result of which it moves backwards – this is reflected in the meanings of *rak* in literary studies or musicology. In the former, it means 'a type of poem which if read from the end has a different, usually offensive meaning' (SPXVI XXXV: 101; SW V: 470; SJPD; SWJP: 930); in the latter, *rak* in polyphonic works is 'a repetition of the theme backwards, from end to beginning' (SJPD; SWJP: 930; USJP). The word can also refer to a homosexual⁵⁰ (Lewinson 1999: 206).

This feature of the crustacean is also exposed in the rhyme *Idzie rak nieborak...* 'There goes a crayfish-poor thing...' and in phrasematics, e.g. *When the crayfish cannot move forwards, it moves backwards* (NKPP III: 18);⁵¹ *The crayfish was advised by its mother to go forwards and not backwards*

⁴⁶ *W wodzie żyje, szczypie każdego, a potem w zupie rumieni się z tego* (rhyme: *każdego – tego*).

⁴⁷ *Rak nie miałby się tu czego czepić.*

⁴⁸ *Třěmac są jak rek strěšack'ě torbě.*

⁴⁹ *Vezdři, žebě go są rek nie j|1EB?|t.*

⁵⁰ Here, it does not relate to moving backwards but to the rear part of the body and its use.

⁵¹ *Kiedy rak nie może naprzód, to się w tył cofa.*

(NKPP III: 18);⁵² *to go backwards like a crayfish*,⁵³ i.e. 'to silently, discreetly give something up' (USJP); *All the girls love men in uniforms but they turn their back on those in tailcoats*;⁵⁴ *jeχac v reka*, 'to move back' (SychSGK IV: 315).

Moving backwards was considered so special that it was explained in tales (cf. THE CRAYFISH HAS EYES IN THE BACK OF ITS BODY) and riddles, e.g. *Why does the crayfish move backwards? – Because its father also moved this way* (NKPP III: 18).⁵⁵

This is also related to folk medicinal practices, where different parts of the crayfish's body, as well as substances derived from it, were believed to cause a disease to recede, e.g.:

1. *The mucky child, after wrapping its rump, is smeared with crayfish butter* (Udziela 1905: 396).⁵⁶

2. *Dried crayfish eyes, ground and mixed with vodka – for fever* (K 17 II: 162; Spittal 1938: 163).⁵⁷

3. *Eye irritation. The eyelashes of the upper eyelid should be held by the fingers of the left hand, and then one should spit or place the crayfish "stone" in the eye* (Petrow 1878: 139).⁵⁸

4. *When a speck of dirt falls into the eye, [...] the so-called crayfish's eye is put under the eyelids, which encircling the eye, falls out by itself and sweeps away the dirt along with itself* (K 46: 468).⁵⁹

The crayfish in its entirety acted as medication for black henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*) poisoning. According to Rostafiński (1895: 8–9), "Datura, hemlock, and henbane are poisonous for boars; they heal themselves by running into the water and eating crayfish!". Undoubtedly, this belief proves that the knowledge and medical beliefs contained in ancient studies were

⁵² *Napominała raka jego matka, aby przed się laźł, a nie wspank.*

⁵³ *(Wy)cofać się rakiem.*

⁵⁴ *Za mundurem panny sznurem, a za frakiem panny rakiem* (rhymes: *mundurem – sznurem; frakiem – rakiem*).

⁵⁵ *Dlaczego rak chodzi wspank? – bo i jego ojciec chodził tak* (with the rhyme *rak – wspank – tak*).

⁵⁶ *Uchynione dziecko, gdy się mu kuper zawinie, smarują rakowem masłem.* Perhaps this refers to the crayfish pulling up its abdomen after it is taken out of the water.

⁵⁷ *Oczy z rakówsuszone, utłuczone zmieszane z wódką – na febrę.* Crayfish's eyes sewn into the ribbon were also hung around the neck of teething children (K 46: 468). According to an account from Belarus (Vitebsk), drinking the water in which the crayfish had been sitting for twelve days was a remedy for fever (Gura 1997: 401).

⁵⁸ *Zaproszenie oka. Palcami lewej ręki bierze się za rzęsy górnej powieki i spluwa się albo wpuszcza się w oko racze żarenko.* In this sense, SStp (VII: 431) mentions the noun *rakówka*.

⁵⁹ *Kiedy proch jaki w oko wpadnie, [...] wkładają pod powieki takzwane oko racze (z raka), które obiegłszy dokoła oko, samo wypada i proch z sobą wymiata.*

being spread to the people. In early 17th century, Szymon Syreniusz (Simon Syrennius) writes:

According to Elianus,⁶⁰ wherever wild boars eat these herbs (datura, hemlock, henbane), they immediately feel their dry veins contract: and immediately they look for medicines for it, they run into rivers and look for crayfish, the consumption of which frees them of these cramps. (Syrennius 1613: 1367)

THE CRAYFISH MOVES IN AN UNGAINLY AND SLOW MANNER. Slowness and clumsiness of the crayfish, observed especially when it is pulled out of water, have been recognised as the crustacean's characteristic features, e.g.: *iść/poruszać się rakiem/raczkciem/na raku* 'walk/move crayfish-style' (Skor II: 8; KSGP); *chodzić raka* 'walk like a crayfish' (KSGP); *je_xac na reku* 'to dawdle' (SychSGK IV: 315) and in verbal folklore.

Gustawicz (1881: 59) mentions a story about the crayfish that, having been told before Christmas to bring yeast, managed to do it only for Easter. As it turns out, direct reference to this text can be found in phrasematics: *idzie jak rak z drożdżami* 'walks like a crayfish with yeast' (NKPP I: 863); also in Slovak: *Idze jak rak s drożdžami* (Buffa 2004: 236); *Ponáhla sa ako rak s kvasnicami* (Záturecký 1975: 554).

THE CRAYFISH BITES INTO A VICTIM, CAUSING ITS DEATH. The crayfish feeds on aquatic plants and dead animals such as frogs and fish. The use of the word *rak* in the sense 'malignant tumour' (SL III: 10; SWIL II: 1339; SJP; SWJP: 930; ISJP II: 411; USJP; WSJP) indicates that the linguistic image of this crustacean also exposes its habit of biting into the victim's body. According to SEBor (p. 509), the word *rak* has been used in this sense since the 18th century. However, it seems that it predates this by at least two centuries back because in SPXVI (XXXV: 101) *rak* is described as referring to any hard-to-heal ulcer. It is actually a semantic borrowing from Lat. *cancer*, which is used, among others and under the influence of Greek, in Aulus Cornelius Celsus's *De Medicina*. Hippocrates of Kos used the term *καρκινος* (> Lat. *cancer*⁶¹) 'sea crab' to describe tumours surrounded by swollen blood vessels resembling crab legs. Paul of Aegina, the author of *Epitomes iatrikes biblio hepta*, explained the association of the crustacean's name with the term for tumour similarly to Hippocrates, but also pointing to the second possible motivation: the tumour attaches itself to the body

⁶⁰ The author refers here to Claudius Aelianus, known primarily for his work *De Natura Animalium*.

⁶¹ WSEH (p. 530) explains that Slavic **rakъ* is an anagram created through shifting the sounds in **kar*. This root is present in Sanskrit *karka* 'crayfish', Greek *καρκινος* and Latin *cancer* (we also deal here with additional reduplication, *car-cer*, and dissimilation, *r...r* → *n...r*).

and is able to take over it, just like a crab does it with its victim (Manton, Akushevich, and Kravchenko 2009: 2–3).

Rak the disease was closely related to the crustacean not only in the opinion of the ancient physicians, but also the Polish people, as in *Cancer. A fly that has been sitting on a dead crayfish transfers this disease to the person* (Dobrzyń region, central Poland) (Petrow 1878: 139).⁶² The same conviction was recorded in Żołyńia (Łańcut region, south-eastern Poland) by Marcelli Cisek (1889: 71), while in the area of Sławków (Będzin region, southern Poland) there was a belief that the crayfish on which the fly has been sitting might as well be alive (Ciszewski 1887: 56). From the Polish part of the Carpathians, Danuta Tylkowa reports other superstitions regarding the relationship between the disease and the crustacean:

In the same region, it was believed that if a fly sat on a crayfish after it came out of water, and then the crayfish was consumed, those who ate it would develop cancer. The same happened when the fly that had been sitting on a living or dead crayfish then sat on the human body. (Tylkowa 1989: 21–22)

It was believed that if the crayfish caused disease, it could be treated with medications obtained from this crustacean. In Założce (now Tarnopol Oblast in Ukraine), Stanisław Spittal observed that “cancer was treated [...] by nicely lubricating it with an ointment made of dried alive crayfish, powdered and then mixed with fat” (Spittal 1938: 217).

The medical meaning of *rak* is closely related to that referring to plants: ‘a growth on a plant, on its trunk, branches or roots’ (SWil II: 1339; SJP; SWJP: 930; USJP; WSJP). As confirmed by KSGP, the word *rak* was also used to describe various parasitic plants: mistletoe (*Viscum*) (AJŚ II: 197), dodder (*Cuscuta*) (Lesser Poland) and polypores (central Lesser Poland). It is also worth paying attention to contemporary derivatives of *rak* as a disease, such as *antyrakowy/przeciwrakowy* ‘anti-cancer’, *rakofobia* ‘carcinophobia’, *rakoodporny* ‘carcino-immune’, *rakotwórczy* ‘carcinogenic’, *zrakowaciec* ‘to become cancerous’, and *zrakowaciały* ‘turned into carcinoma’. Some of them have synonyms based on Latin *cancer*, e.g. *rakotwórczy* – *kancerogenny*, *rakofobia* – *kancerofobia*.

The meaning ‘illness/disease’ has also extended to ‘a destructive phenomenon or process that is difficult to cure’ (SWil II: 1339; ISJP II: 411; USJP; WSJP), e.g. in the collocation *rak korpupcji* ‘the cancer of corruption’.

7. The condition of the crayfish

THE CRAYFISH IS FROZEN. Being an ectothermic animal, when taken out of cold water the crayfish is cold. Perhaps this is why people consider

⁶² *Rak. Mucha, która siedziała na zdechłym raku, zaszczepia tę chorobę człowiekowi.*

it frozen: *zm'ařli jak rek*⁶³ 'frozen like a crayfish' (SychSGK IV: 315), and consequently trembling: *drži jak rek* 'trembles like a crayfish' (SychSGK IV: 315). In another interpretation, the latter comparison relates to the way crayfish used to be prepared for eating: they were boiled or roasted in a bread oven (just after the bread was removed) or on a roasting tin. In both cases, *raki podskakiwały* 'the crayfish were jumping' (the Podhale region, southern Poland), which could be interpreted as trembling.

8. Location

THE CRAYFISH LIVES IN WATER (A RIVER OR POND). In some phrasemes, there is allusion to a fairy tale about fools who as punishment want to drown a crayfish: *He wanted to punish the crayfish and threw it into the water*⁶⁴ and *The crayfish cannot be punished by drowning*⁶⁵ (NKPP III: 17). The crayfish is conceptualised as an aquatic animal also in children's riddles: *It lives in water and pinches everyone. . .*;⁶⁶ *It lives in the river or in the pond. . .*⁶⁷

THE CRAYFISH DWELLS IN A BURROW/HOLE. An alternative etymology of the word *rak* (SEMIad: 556; SEVas III: 437; SEMel V: 19; WSEH: 530) connects the Slavic form **rakъ* 'sth that goes deep, digs, bites into sth' with Lithuanian *ràkti*, *rankù* and Latvian *rakt* 'to dig, to poke'. This explanation suggests that characteristic behaviour of the crayfish is digging and staying in burrows. Of course, the references to the way the crustacean feeds itself, i.e. by biting into the carcass, cannot be excluded here.

The perception of the crayfish as a creature that dwells in a burrow is confirmed in the riddle *In the winter it stays in the water cave and when the sun shines, it comes out to the surface*⁶⁸ (Kasjan 1983: 23) and in three phrasemes: *He who wants to catch crayfish must dig his hand into the hole*⁶⁹ (NKPP III: 19); *To know that crayfish have their holes* (about a person who knows everything)⁷⁰ (SychSGK IV: 315); *You want to catch crayfish, you have to take them out of the hole*⁷¹ (SychSGK IV: 315). It is possible that these expressions come from the fishermen's professional sociolect.

⁶³ Perhaps this comparison is also motivated by another phraseme: *czerwony jak rak* 'red as a crayfish', because of the colour of frozen hands and face.

⁶⁴ *Chcąc skarać raka, w wodę go wrzucił.*

⁶⁵ *Raka nie karze się utopieniem.*

⁶⁶ *W wodzie żyje, szczypie każdego. . .*

⁶⁷ *Mieszka w rzece albo w stawie. . .*

⁶⁸ *W zimie w wodnej jamie siedzi, a jak słońce świeci, to na wierzch wychodzi.*

⁶⁹ *Sięgnąć trzeba do dziury, kto chce raki łowić.*

⁷⁰ *V'ezec, ze reki maj[1EB?] svoje zurě.*

⁷¹ *Xceš rek'i χvatac, mušiš je z zurě vëulakac.*

The crayfish as a chthonic animal (*inter alia*, due to its burrowing habits and nocturnal activity) was considered an enemy to mice and moles, which also belong to the underground world. In Kashubia, there was a belief that a crayfish thrown into the granary protects the grain from mice (SychSGK IV: 315). In the area of Vitebsk (today's Belarus), people would get rid of moles by burying a crayfish in the ground or placing it in the mole's burrow (SD: 400).

IT IS UNKNOWN WHERE THE CRAYFISH SPENDS THE WINTER. Crayfish spend the winter under the ice, which is why it is very difficult to see them, let alone catch them. According to Max Vasmer (SEVas III: 437), the following phrasemes relating to wintering crustaceans derive from fishermen's profesiolect: *pokazać, gdzie raki zimują* 'to show sb where crayfish winter', i.e. 'to tease sb' (NKPP III: 19; SkorSF II: 8); *wiedzieć, gdzie raki zimują* 'to know where crayfish winter' (about a cunning person) (SkorSF II: 8); *Nie bądź taki, powiedz, gdzie zimują raki* 'Don't be a jerk, tell me where crayfish winter' (NKPP III: 18).

9. The use of the crayfish by people

THE CRAYFISH IS FOOD FOR PEOPLE. In most dictionaries of general or dialectal Polish, *rak* is also defined as 'a dish of boiled or roasted crayfish'.

CRAYFISH ARE CAUGHT. As an important part of both the regular and the fasting diet, crayfish were caught from May to September. However, catching them was not considered particularly important, but rather a waste of time (the crayfish is of little value): *iść na raki* 'go to catch crayfish', i.e. 'to loaf around' (SKarł V: 8); *He who catches crayfish thinks that others are like that too*⁷² (NKPP III: 18). In phrasematics we find references to several tools used to catch and store crayfish:

– *kobiel* 'a woven basket made of bast, bark, etc., usually worn on the shoulder' (SJPD): *jakby rak z kobieli wypadł* 'looks like a crayfish fell out of *kobiel*' (NKPP III: 18); *jakby raka z kobieli wypuścić* 'it's like letting the crayfish out of the *kobiel*' (NKPP III: 18);

– *sak* 'a small fishing net': *wybrać jak raki z saka* 'to scoop sth like crayfish from the *sak*', i.e. 'to obtain, approach, catch sth easily' (Skor II: 8);

– *torba* 'bag': *ubawić się jak raki w torbie* 'to have fun like crayfish in a bag' (RakSFGD: 138); *m'evac są jak rek v torbie* 'be doing like a crayfish in a bag', i.e. 'be doing badly' (SychSGK IV: 315); *třěmac są jak rek střěšack'e torbě* 'hold on like a crayfish to a shepherd's bag', i.e. 'hold on tight' (SychSGK IV: 315);

⁷² *Kto chodzi na raki, myśli, że drugi taki* (rhyme: *raki – taki*).

żak ‘a net spread on wooden hoops, used for offshore sea fishing and for fishing in lakes and rivers’ (SJPD): *ceši są jak rak v żaku* ‘to be joyful like a crayfish in the *żak*’, i.e. ‘to be very dissatisfied’ (SychSGK I: 131).

SW lists derivatives of the word *rak*, which refer to:

- a special pond reserved for crayfish breeding: *raczarnia* (SW V: 460);
- the activity of catching crayfish: *rakobranie* (SW V: 470);
- a person engaged in catching and selling crayfish: *raczarz* (SW V: 460), *rakarz*⁷³ (SW V: 470), or *rakarka* 1. ‘a female seller of crayfish’, 2. ‘crayfish-catcher’s wife’ (SW V: 470).

Oskar Kolberg reports in the 19th c.: “Crayfish are the fattest and tastiest in the months that do not contain the letter *r*, e.g. in July” (Polish *lipiec*) (K 46: 491). According to the inhabitants of Łużyce region (western Poland), it is best to catch crayfish when the sun is in the sign of Cancer, i.e. in the second half of June and the first half of July (Gura 1997: 402).

CRAYFISH ARE BOILED OR ROASTED. The methods of preparing crayfish have found linguistic expression in several phrasemes: *Bieda raku, woda wre!* ‘Crayfish, you’re in trouble, the water’s boiling!’ (NKPP III: 17; *spiec raka* ‘to roast the crayfish’ (see above); *O wy raki pieczone* ‘Oh, you roasted crayfish’ (said to lazy horses) (SW V: 470; SKarł V: 8); *Tyle smaku, co w pieczonym raku* ‘So much taste as in roasted crayfish’ (KSGP); *mieć gdzieś pieczone raki* ‘not to care for roasted crayfish’ (SychSGK IV: 315; SychKoc III: 55–56; RakSFGD: 84); *báć sie (kogoś) jako warzonego raka* ‘to be afraid of sb like of a boiled crayfish’, i.e., not to be afraid of them at all (Ondrusz 1960: 25).

CRAYFISH ARE EXQUISITE FOOD. Crayfish dishes are considered exquisite, as reflected in the ironic phraseme What a generous person he is: he ate crayfish himself and left the thin soup for us (NKPP III: 18).⁷⁴ The verb *wraczyć* ‘to treat sb to sth favoured by them; to welcome sb with generous, tasty food’, although similar in form to the lexeme *rak*, has no etymological connection to it, being derived from the root **rōk-*, from PIE **rek* ‘to shout, speak’ (SEBor: 508).

The inconsistency in the image of *rak* (as an animal of little value but simultaneously as exquisite food) may result from an overlap of two cultural patterns: characteristic of “common people” (in folklore) and that of the noblemen. For the peasants, crayfish were an easily accessible source of food, but at the same time providing little meat, and hence of little value; by contrast, for the noblemen crayfish prepared in an exquisite manner were considered a delicacy.

⁷³ *Rakarz* ‘dog catcher, slaughterer’ is a homonym, a borrowing of the German *Racker*, unconnected to the Polish *rak*.

⁷⁴ *Jaki on szczodry, sam raki zjadł, a nam juszkę oddał.*

THE CRAYFISH GIVES LITTLE MEAT. Meat is obtained from crayfish's pincers and abdomen. Because it is a small animal (cf. THE CRAYFISH IS SMALL), there is little meat from a single specimen, e.g.: *miesa jak na raku* 'as much meat as on a crayfish', i.e. 'very little' (from the Świętokrzyskie Mountains, south-central Poland); *tyle smaku, co w pieczonym raku* 'so much taste as in a roasted crayfish' (KSGP, Suwałki region in north-eastern Poland).

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing analysis, a definition of the crayfish can be formulated, which significantly differs from the encyclopaedic approach. The etymological data, among others, suggest that linguistic knowledge is more stable compared to scientific knowledge (cf. Wierzbicka (1993), quoted in the introductory section):

The crayfish (*rak*) is a small, hairless and featherless animal of little value, its body being protected by a carapace. It has long antennae, two prehensile and sharp pincers that are used for protection, many legs, and eyes located in the back of the body. It lives in water (rivers and ponds), where it digs holes. It is unknown where it spends the winter. It can pinch, moves backwards in an ungainly and slow manner, makes no sound and kills its victims by biting into their bodies. It is closest to fish. Crayfish are sought for their meat, of which they have very little – they are roasted or boiled. Crayfish are considered exquisite food. Parts of the crayfish's body are used as medicine for various ailments. The crayfish is thought to be connected with the underworld.

Translated by Rafał Augustyn

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