

# KURBAN IN THE BALKANS



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# КУРБАН НА БАЛКАНУ

*Уредници*  
Биљана Сикимић  
Петко Христов



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# KURBAN IN THE BALKANS

*Edited by*  
Biljana Sikimić  
Petko Hristov



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## **Note on spelling**

In the present volume, the names of places, persons and other special terms, as well as bibliographical references or quotations in the original language, are spelled as follows (unless stated or requested otherwise by the authors):

a) for languages using the Latin alphabet: Albanian, Romanian and Turkish words are rendered in their original spelling; Romani words are also spelled with the use of the Latin alphabet;

b) for languages using the Cyrillic alphabet: Bulgarian, Macedonian and Russian words are transliterated by individual systems of transliteration (however, the spelling might not be consistent, due to the lack of a unitary transliteration system); the Serbian words which were originally written in Cyrillic are rendered in Serbian Latin.

The exceptions to these rules are the names widely known, which are written in their commonly known Anglicized form. The multiethnic and multilingual localities are referred to by their official state name.

As well, specific terms might be spelled differently by different authors (e. g. teke–takke, Bayash–Boyash etc.).





## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

### Why the kurban in the Balkans today?

The collection of studies *Kurban in the Balkans* gathers together a group of researchers from different branches of the humanities in an inter-disciplinary approach to post-modern anthropology, anthropological linguistics and the anthropology of folklore. The connecting thread of our joint work is personal experience of fieldwork in the modern-day Balkans, and the perception of tradition as a process rather than a state. The editors are, therefore, aware that this collection is a scholarly construct, an attempt to pin down insular practices of animal sacrifice, linked only by the fact that they take place in a common geographical location: the Balkans.

This introduction emerges from an ongoing dialogue with existing anthropological and ethnolinguistic literature in an effort to expand interpretations of the contemporary kurban, or that which has been reconstructed on the basis of collective memory.<sup>1</sup> In the Balkans today there is no single pattern for performing the kurban, and it is very difficult to determine if one ever existed. We look, then, for a minimal model of the

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<sup>1</sup>Here we primarily have in mind the studies of Olivier Givre: *Le kourban: pratiques sacrificielles et religiosité populaire en Bulgarie*, Association française d'études sur les Balkans, Etudes balkaniques: état des savoirs et pistes de recherche, Paris, 19–20 décembre 2002, [www.afebalk.org/recontres2002/textes/o.givre.pdf](http://www.afebalk.org/recontres2002/textes/o.givre.pdf) and *Un rituel „balkanique“ ou un rituel dans les Balkans? Approche anthropologique du kourban en Bulgarie et en Grèce du nord*, Thèse de doctorat de sociologie et anthropologie, Université Lumière Lyon 2, [http://demeter.univ-lyon2.fr/sdx/theses/notice.xsp?id=lyon2.2006.givre\\_o-principal&id\\_doc=lyon2.2006.givre\\_o&isid=lyon2.2006.givre\\_o&base=documents&dn=1](http://demeter.univ-lyon2.fr/sdx/theses/notice.xsp?id=lyon2.2006.givre_o-principal&id_doc=lyon2.2006.givre_o&isid=lyon2.2006.givre_o&base=documents&dn=1), as well as the study of Assia Popova: *Le kourban, ou sacrifice sanglant dans les traditions balkaniques*, *Europaea : Journal of the Europeanists* 1/1, 1995, 145–170 and the encyclopedic entry *kurban* by Elena Uzeneva in the ethnolinguistic dictionary of Slav antiquity *Slavjanske drevnosti, etnolingvističeskij slovar'*, pod redakcij N. I. Tolstogo, Volume 3, Moscow 2004.

contemporary Balkan kurban in the given chronotope. As a ritual, the kurbans exist only fragmentarily, if we take the model preserved in collective memory, and insularly, i.e., it is only the research process that gives us the complete construct.

The kurban encompasses an extremely wide concept of sacrifice which does not fit into the usual anthropological definitions. In this respect, we could speak of a ‘family religiosity’, or ‘local religiosity’. The kurban sacrifice is a symbolic and social practice in which people join individually, as a family, or locally. This personalisation is manifested by the intimate relation with ‘our saint’, ‘the saint of our family’, ‘our church’, ‘our village’.

At community level, the practice of kurban oscillates between the private and the public. There is a direct line between home/house and temple/cult place, but in the attempt to define ‘community’, there are no clear boundaries: families who make their own personal or private family promises also participate in the joint, communal, local kurban. Kurban also implies commensuality, or the shared table. Assia Popova writes that kurban is “a prayer during a meal.” The food should be eaten together in the chronotope of the ritual, unlike an ordinary meal or food which must submit to the rules of conservation and preservation. Specific local rituals are included in a kind of transconfessional community of the kurban.

Understanding the kurban ritual requires knowledge of the social, historical and geographical context. The contemporary locale of the kurban is mainly the rural community and the urban periphery, where the practice acts as a marker of belonging and mutual identification and recognition. In the Balkans today, the kurban is usually a local social event and a holiday rather than a religious act. However, this is not always so, especially in some of its other aspects which provide an entire range — from secret and entirely private to public, whether institutionalised or not. Nevertheless, the holiday dimension is common to all. Religious ritual practice and local affiliation are absolutely connected, although with some change in the kurban’s social status coinciding with the emergence of neo-protestant religious communities. The kurban is an act of folk religion, and at the same time a local religion. It is a constituent part of personal and collective identity within a sacral topos. In addition, the kurban is often an opportunity for the urban to return to its rural, and for the rural to take its place in a new, transnational context.

### **Balkan kurban?**

Even though the term *kurban* arrived in the Balkans via the Ottomans, the practice in the Balkans is older than Islam. Among Balkan Cath-

olics there is no ritual killing of a sacrificial animal, which is practiced exclusively by the Orthodox and Muslims. Present-day Bulgarians celebrate a 'white' kurban, at least that is what the dish made of beans is called ("we're killing the beans" or euphemistically: "we're killing the white rooster"), on which, unfortunately, there is no contribution in these collected papers.

The rural dimension of the kurban has enabled folklorists and ethnologists to perceive in it the renewed tradition and dimension of survival. Folklorists attempt to explain this ritual by older or newer traditions of sacrifice, more or less Balkan, and in this endeavour they refer to pagan rituals, myths related to Abraham's sacrifice, or others such as the familiar Balkan legend of the enclosing of a human sacrifice in the walls of a building. This Balkanised reading of the kurban is all the more tempting since the ritual is placed on the border between religions, between myth and customs, between tradition and modernity. Besides, the concept of sacrifice has powerful connotations: it activates associations of archaic practices originating from primitive religion, it renews the myth on isolated survivals among the Mediterranean, Oriental and Balkan peoples.

Theories of survival and substrata are naturally tempting, and they also construct traditional cultures as being stable in time. This avoids the issue of mixing or transversality of religious behaviours or developmental changes: once the bases of the ethnos and its stable forms in tradition are established, everything else is presented as detail, excess or corruption.

We could conceive of an ethno-historical research that would examine how the same ritual was interpreted by different ethnologic traditions, further pointing to their historical contexts and also to various scientific or political contexts. Are these collected papers in themselves an indicator of a new political reality (or at least scientific politics) in the Balkans?

The geographical place of the kurban in the Balkans, where religious identity is closely connected to cultural, linguistic and political identity, poses another difficult question, and that is how to bring together as one all the different communities practising the kurban. If the kurban is understood as a Balkan ritual, it accentuates perception of the Balkans as a very specific milieu, thus falling into the trap of imagining the Balkans (Balkanism or 'Balkanity'), with all its connotations of a mixture of the ethnic and the religious, and the region is perceived as a risky conglomerate just one step away from breaking up and separating, while simultaneously being in a constant process of regression. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Balkans serve the proclaimed European community as a particular source of multi-ethnicity and multi-confessionalism, which is, again, valued as universal and modern.

This is why the work of these collected papers follows the emergence, transformation and disappearance of cultural identities in reality, at the same time affirming that which is inconsistent, transformed or contradictory in reality.

### **Balkan-Slavic kurban?**

Beginning with Elena Uzeneva's summary in the encyclopaedic dictionary of Slav antiquity, the existing image (reconstructed from ethnographic material) of the kurban among the Balkan Slavs can be brought down to the following: the goal of the kurban ritual is to appease the higher powers and secure prosperity for the family and the entire village, but it can also be to obtain protection from hail, fire and natural disasters. The kurban can be dedicated to the 'host' spirit of the house or a Christian saint — the patron of the family, clan or village municipality at the celebration a saint's feast day; to an individual on the occasion of a birth, wedding, illness, funeral or commemoration. It is also carried out for shepherds, during farm work, customs accompanying work, hunting for treasure, establishing boundaries between adjoining estates. For Slavs in some parts of the Balkans, the kurban is a necessary custom when building: sacrifice is made when foundations are laid, when someone moves into a new house or when a home is to be blessed, when digging a well, and during calendar rituals of a transient nature, such as at New Year and the beginning of spring and winter.

The choice of a sacrificial animal is determined by the nature of the holiday: on a church holiday and for health a white animal is killed — as a rule it is a white lamb, for the mythical 'host', the house spirit and for the feast of the village patron — a black hen or a black ram, while birds are rarely used for the kurban. The pig is considered to be an unclean animal, with certain exceptions, primarily among the Serbs — in Serbia today a roast piglet often replaces the lamb — the goat and kid are considered diabolical and, traditionally, cannot be sacrificed. Because of its Christian symbolism, the lamb is considered to be "the sacrifice most pleasing to God", while a calf or an ox is killed for church or general village holidays.

In Muslim communities, the sacrificial animal is fed for a couple of months before the slaughtering, closed up in the stable, separated from other cattle. The animal has to approach the place of slaughter voluntarily, and it is placed on its left side with the head facing the east. Before the sacrifice, the animal is fed and watered "so that it may go well-fed into the other world", its eyes are covered with a white scarf; often this scarf is later given to the sick child with wishes for it to get well.

The place where the ritual is carried out could be: a churchyard, the ruins of a church, a hill, a 'holy' tree, or a sacral place, a hearth. Beside the cult tree there often stands a stone cross or a stone table on which the animal is slaughtered. Around it stone tables are laid for the communal meal of the sacrificial meat. In some communities, the kurban is carried out at a specially dug 'clean' place in which the blood of the sacrificial animal is buried and which must not be trodden upon, or defiled by human waste, nor can a house be built upon this spot.

Special regulations apply to the man for whom the kurban is carried out and for the person who slaughters the animal. With the blood of the kurban, a spot is painted on the forehead and cheeks of the child or man for whom the sacrifice is intended; it is used to cure wounds on the hands and feet, diseases of the eye and headache.

The kurban of the entire village is dedicated to the most revered saints — St George, St Elijah, St Demetrius, the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, St Nicholas, St Atanasius among the Bulgarians and Macedonians. In general terms, the holiday as a rule consists of killing the animal in a certain place (the blood is used to sprinkle on the holy stone, cross or tree) and the communal eating of the sacrificial animal (one or more, usually a sheep, lamb, more rarely a calf), usually cooked in a cauldron. The ritual food — a thick meat soup or a piece of meat — is shared by all those present, and part of the food is taken home for absent family members.

The Muslims perform kurban on the religious holidays of Kurban Bairam and Ramadan Bairam (Big and Small Bairam): the oldest woman in the family decorates the animal to be sacrificed with henna before sunrise or on the eve of the holiday; the men go to prayers in the mosque and then slaughter the animal.

The kurban in honour of the protector spirit is well known in southern areas of Bulgaria, Serbia and Macedonia. The sacrificial animal is always a black hen, more rarely a black ram. The oldest woman in the family kills the rooster at the fireplace, the blood is gathered in a pit and covered with clay, and the feathers are burned. If a ram is killed, the blood, skin and innards are buried in a separate pit. Bread, pie and boiled wheat are also prepared. Part of the ritual food, along with three glasses of wine, is left in three corners for the host spirit, protector of the house.

If the kurban is performed for healing or a miraculous deliverance, often the one offering the sacrifice cannot eat the meat of his animal. Among the Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims) in the Rhodope Mountains, the sacrifice on the occasion of the birth of a child is made on the 7<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> day or when the child is 1–4 months old.

### Transnational kurban?

The collected papers *Kurban in the Balkans* aim, at least in part, to reconstruct the Balkan kurban context through complementary analyses of some examples of non-Slavic kurban practice. The data given in the Slav matrix are partially repeated in this collection, but has been significantly complemented. However, important links in the chain of today's practice of ritual sacrifice in the Balkans, as among the Turks or Greeks, for instance, are missing from this collection. The editors hope that an insight into the non-Slav kurban will, however, change existing research perceptions, as will the transnational extension of the contemporary kurban, at least to an equal degree. These collected papers, therefore, attempt to answer a series of questions: How much does the kurban truly help to bring about a feeling of belonging and cohesion of the community with the saints and cult places? Is a 'kurban-on-the-move' possible, one that re-examines the borders of the chronotop or the sacral area? How much do narrowly linguistic procedures throw a different light on classic ethnographic descriptions? How much does an explicated awareness of the relativity of scientific procedures and conclusions on the kurban also reexamine the borders of the Balkans?

By reexamining the local Balkan knowledge of local Balkan occurrences, the collection *Kurban in the Balkans* becomes part of a series of editions in the project "Ethnic and Social Stratification of the Balkans" by the Institute for Balkan Studies, (SASA), which is dedicated to marginalised or urgent issues of anthropologically directed field work (*Hidden Minorities in the Balkans*, Belgrade 2004; *The Bayash in the Balkans*, Belgrade 2005, *Refugee Kosovo*, Kragujevac 2004; *Life in the Enclave*, Kragujevac 2005; *Torac, Field Work Methodology*, Novi Sad 2006).

These collected papers are the result of international cooperation between the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, Belgrade, and the Ethnographic Institute with Museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia. The initiative came from a meeting in Sofia, in December 2005, attended by: Petko Hristov, Margarita Karamihova, Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov and Biljana Sikimić, and institutional cooperation was established thanks to the understanding of the directors of the two scientific institutions, Dr. Dušan T. Bataković and Dr. Rachko Popov. All the papers in this collection, signed by researchers from different countries, have appeared thanks to the understanding of the authors for the invitation and initiative of the two editors.

*Biljana Sikimić and Petko Hristov*

Andrey N. Sobolev, Sankt-Peterburg

## ON BALKAN NAMES FOR THE SACRIFICIAL ANIMAL ON ST GEORGE'S DAY

Every ontologically unique and unchangeable action, performed for a purpose in a changing context of situations and symbolic forms, renews itself each time as part of a system, functionally, axiologically and meaningfully. As the situations are endlessly variable and symbolical forms are neither precisely defined nor mutually exclusive, the human activities which may take place are equally inexhaustible and undetermined, their interpretation always relative and possible only when there is knowledge not just of their ontology, but of all the other contexts — including the symbolic — in which they take place. For example, in the cultures of the Balkan Peninsula, in the 'ethnographic present' of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, there exist simultaneously, without being in additional distribution symbolic forms (from mythical to scientific)<sup>1</sup> that vary greatly in origin and system, whose recipient, user and creator is contemporary *homo balcanicus*. Because of this, Balkan man's behaviour and 'understanding of the world' should be studied in the context of the various relevant symbolic forms (and their various semiotic codes), which are seen in the endless diversity of situations occurring in everyday life. It is clear that a general, complete and scientific picture modelling the behaviour of man cannot be achieved by addressing only one of the simultaneously existing symbolic forms, but there is also little possibility of constructing such a picture by studying every single form and situation at once. According to present-day canons of learning, in each branch of knowledge or the areas where they overlap, the researcher must be content to study a limited group of symbolic forms and semiotic codes, while bearing in mind that there are oth-

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<sup>1</sup> Symbolic forms are usually taken to include myth, language, science, religion, art, law, economics etc.



ers. As language, however, is a symbolic form which acts as the intermediary thanks to which all the others come about, to concentrate one's work on — not just linguistic — symbolic forms implies working with language. Conversely, the study of language is not always accompanied by the study of other symbolic forms and situations.

Finally, we should bear in mind that in the heuristic tasks of scientific research in the areas of humanistic knowledge it is not the discovery of determinants which is the rule, but rather of hidden tendencies: not the choice 'either... or', but examination of the gradated 'more... less'. Admittedly, the explanation of this relationship is often difficult and requires — at least for easy reference — the use of dichotomously organized instruments. One such instrument is the linguistic, ethnographic, ethnolinguistic or other map, the aim of which is to present a projection of the particular phenomenon against the geographic constants of a selected part of the earth's surface, while showing the area of its distribution. Collecting a number of maps into an atlas can be a good means for a compact organization of individual and different facts, but it can also help to discover and explain the geographical, historical and systematic dependence and interdependence of a whole series of occurrences. For instance, the objective of the Small Dialectological Atlas of Balkan Languages (Malyj dialektologičeskij atlas balkanskih jazykov — MDABJ), compiled as a result of extensive international cooperation, in its lexical series (MDABJ 2003; 2005) was to present the basic lexical content of Balkan languages as a geographical projection, and thus shed light on the more relevant elements of the lexical system of dialects in relation to the material and spiritual culture of the peoples in this region.

Research has already drawn attention to the interesting fact that one of the peculiarities of calendar customs of the spring-summer cycle which distinguishes the Balkan Slav tradition from other Slav traditions is the "hypertrophy of the cult of St George and the feastsdays connected to his name" (Agapkina 1999:79). Several maps of the first volume of the MDABJ *Lexicon of Spiritual Culture* (MDABJ 2005: maps № 42, 43 and 44) show the linguistic and ethnographic aspects of the cult of St. George on the Balkans — the names for the day of St George (celebrated on 23 April by the Gregorian and 6 May by the Julian calendar), the name of the feast and/or ritual bread, and the name of the animal sacrificed on St George's Day. The atlas above all establishes the presence of the saint's cult throughout the entire Balkans, evident from the existence of a feast-, calendar- or working-day (and its names) in the folk calendar for all Balkan peoples without exception — Roman Catholic Croats, Orthodox Serbs, Macedonians, Bulgarians, Aromanians, Greeks and Muslim Albanians

(Orthodox Sunnites as well as Bektashi). In this case, language as a symbolic form mediates directly in the mythological, religious and commercial spheres.<sup>2</sup>

Names for the sacrificial animal on St George's Day cannot in principle be examined outside the myth as symbolic forms with their own semiotic codes but rather on the basis of the fact that the sacrifice, the offering of a sacrifice, is usually defined as "a part of their possessions which people voluntarily surrender to the supernatural forces; and a magical ritual which takes place in order to propitiate the recipient, obtain his help and protection, or health or other worldly treasures, or in gratitude for a fulfilled request" (Buškevič 1999: 208 et seq.). Both generally and in the specific case, explicit ethnographic information is relevant and necessary on the form of the sacrifice (in this case a ritual meal) on the recipient (in this case the Christian Saint George, patron of farm animals), on the *giver* (the individual, family or community), on the *calendar day* when the sacrifice is to be made (in this case the day on which St George is honoured, 23 April/6 May), on the type (here a blood sacrifice), on the ritual (the dividing and eating of the victim at a specific place, ritual acts with the blood, division of parts of the sacrificial animal), on the *persons* who carve up the victim, and on the *ritual meal* (rules of behaviour during the meal and procedures with the remains of the food). In addition to familiarity with the entire mythological context of the action, information is also necessary on religious, daily, economic and other contexts. The sum of all the relevant parameters comprises a hypothetical all-Balkan paradigm of the ritual. I will repeat that only with relevant knowledge of the context in which a specific human action takes place is it possible to interpret its meaning, with the linguistic sphere as the symbolic form which includes a semantic interpretation of the corresponding terminological lexis. That is why in the MDABJ programme of collecting the lexical content of spiri-

<sup>2</sup> For further exposition within this article the similarities and differences among individual Balkan languages in the nomination model shown on the map are not relevant: (a) Greek *aj'oris*, Alb. *shëngj'ergj*, Mac. *sveti žoržija*; (b) Bulg. *g'erg'ovd'en*, Serb. *đurđ'ovden*; (c) Greek. *taj'iu jeorj'iu*, Arom. *d'uua di 'ay'u γ'orγ'i*. As for non-linguistic symbolic forms observations are fairly mixed: practically everywhere it is the day of the beginning of the new half-year which will end on the day of St Dimitri; in some places this is the day when the lambs are separated from the ewe and the beginning of the milking period (in other places this occurs on the day of Sts Constantine and Helen); With the Aromanians and northern Greeks, St George's Day has an even more prominent economic aspect — this is the day when shepherds are hired; for Albanian places it is characteristic that this cult day has been preserved in spite of the Muslim religious canon and that it has been introduced into the same series of calendar rituals with two other holidays — *Dita e ver(ë)s* "Day of Spring" and *Sulltan Novruzi / Nevruzi* "Novruz" (Sobolev 2005).

tual culture in the section *Topics of conversation on the folk calendar*, the researcher was specifically requested to record answers to the questions: “Which animal is chosen for preparing the meal on St George’s Day (*Đurđevdan*) and how is it chosen? How is it decorated, fed etc. before slaughter? Where and how does the slaughter take place? What are the divinations and signs linked to this ritual? What actions take place with the blood and why (a child’s forehead is smeared with it, people watch to see if the earth will absorb it)? With the animal’s bones (they are buried in an ant-hill, thrown into a river)?” (Plotnikova 1996: 57). By adding the lexical question: “Where you come from, how do you call the animal sacrificed on St George’s Day?” the information obtained permits at least the study of the context of its hypothetical “complete all-Balkan paradigm” in a linguistic and mythologically symbolic form.

As was anticipated at the outset, the material gathered over many years of work in the field showed a gradated appearance of the elements of the paradigm, which is especially apparent in the example of the language and action ritual code. For instance, in the tradition of the Montenegrin village of Zavala (the Piperi tribe) only a casual custom of the family ritual on St George’s Day was recorded, where a lamb was killed (it is characteristic that the informants point to the presence of other agricultural activities — the sheep are given salt, dairy products are made, etc.), MDABJ archive, author’s note:

And whoever keeps sheep gives them salt on *Đurđevdan*. [To bring them] salt to eat. The sheep are in the meadow, grazing. Salt is taken to them and given to them there. They are given it, each of them eats it there in the meadow. And indeed a lamb used to be killed and ... that day was marked. There was no ban, it was free to go out, only on that day it was the custom to kill a lamb, to cook the *bijela mrs* there, that’s how we call cheese, this and that. Cooked cheese from sheep’s milk is cooked on *Đurđevdan*, that was the custom. Well, that’s that, nothing, there’s nothing more.

Well, so. We cooked cheese, young cheese we cooked for *Đurđevdan*, *varivo*, as we call it.

On choosing the sacrificial animal people are governed by a personal taste (“the hated lamb”) or by economic reasons (if the sheep has had twins, then one lamb is taken and the other left):

whichever, even the one he likes most. If the sheep has lambed, and has two, we take one and kill it, and one is left.

As a rule, no sacrifice is made when the family is in mourning:

Sometimes we would kill a lamb, for this saint's day, for St George's Day. We didn't slaughter if someone of ours had died, then we were in mourning and didn't slaughter.

It is typical of this tradition that there is no special name for the sacrificial animal, or for *Đurđevdan* (the concept 'lamb' is, of course, not considered a term), and also a certain reduction of the hypothetically complete all-Balkan paradigm of the ritual. It seems that the ritual paradigm is even further reduced in the northern Greek tradition of Eratira village (Zaykovskiy, Zaykovskaya 2001: 163) and in the southern Aromanian tradition of Turja (Krania) village (Bara, Kahl, Sobolev 2005: 419–420), where informants do not explicitly expound on the practice of this ritual.

In contrast, an almost complete paradigm of the ritual making of sacrifice takes place in the Bulgarian Central Rhodope tradition, represented in the SDABL by material from the village of Gela and Široka Lyka (Sobolev 2001). As each village or *mahala* [quarter, neighbourhood] in Široka Lyka and many churches and chapels scattered across this region have their own sabor or church fair on a certain church holiday, sacrifice (*kurb'an*) in this area is carried out quite frequently: at the sabor on St Elijah's day<sup>3</sup> in the village of Gela, on St Parascheva's day in the Mahmutica mahala, at Pentecost in the village of Stikelj and so on. At these gatherings, the kurban (it can be a deer, an ox, a ram or lamb) is usually roasted on the spit in the form of a *чeбepмe* (*vər'k'ot p'ečenu*). The joint church kurban is distributed on the feast of the Assumption (*dəd'emə pər'i i k'up'et edn'o i'egn'ε, zək'ol'ed gō i gō l'oməm nλ c'ərkvatλ*) and at Pentecost (*k'urbanə k'ol'et, d'avat 'aganca zλ nλ č'erkvatλ zλ kurb'anə, ž'ivu udn'isat*); in the event of drought there are church prayers for rain, the kurban is sacrificed and the meat distributed in the village (*l'om'et*). Distribution of the kurban also takes place during the collective village milking of sheep (*tog'avλ pust'av'elə tək'a sufr'ō, sə nar'ed'ət x'orλλ, i zək'ol'et edn'ō ufc'ō zλ kurb'an', tλ gu l'om'et*).<sup>4</sup>

On St George's Day here they offer an animal (*kurb'an'*) in sacrifice which is dedicated to the saint;<sup>5</sup> those arranging the sacrifice are a family that is financially capable of doing so:

<sup>3</sup> In relation to this cult a legend is recorded of a deer which offers itself voluntarily as a sacrifice.

<sup>4</sup> According to local belief, in order to acquire hidden treasure, a human sacrifice should be made (*kurb'an'*), by leaving an item of the victim's clothing on the spot where the treasure is to be found.

<sup>5</sup> By way of comparison we cite here analogous information from E. S. Uzeneva on the tradition of the Pirin-Macedonian village of Gega: "There are no special terms. It has

*nλ g'erg'uv din' k'oitu 'imλ i'egn'ε žε gu zλk'olθ. zλ zdr'avθ nλ l'ud'etθ  
i zλ zdr'avθ nλ ofc'etθ k'atu kurb'ančθk ubr'ečenu. k'olθ gu.*

It is usually a lamb (*i'egn'ε*); there are no strict rules for the prior selection of the sacrifice or any special feeding. However, in order to obtain the largest possible amount of meat to eat and give to others, it is believed that the firstborn lamb that year should be killed (*pθrv'ak*), cf. responses by two informants:<sup>6</sup>

— *p'θrvutu, p'θrvutu i'egn'ε.* —

— *kutr'otu mu sε kupt'isλ θt s'θrcθ, m'ožε i λnλk'o k'urp'ečε.* —

— *čε i i'ε λn'εi žε r'ekλ, kutr'otu sθ bθnd'isλ, 'alλ n'ai x'ubλvu si dλ sθ  
zλk'olθ pθrv'akλ, 'otθ žε nλxr'ani i l'ud'enθ ut k'θštλnλ i g'ostθnθ.* —

The ritual includes burning incense over the sacrifice and lighting a candle:

*'amλ bub'aiķθnu f'anθ i'egn'enu, t'θ čθ m'aiķ'εnλ dθnθs'e  
kλnd'ilnθcθnλ sθs tθm'εnčθk, tθ čθ zλp'alθ sv'εšč'icλ.*

The father of the family crosses himself before sacrificing the lamb, kisses it on the forehead and asks its forgiveness for his act:

*i bub'aiķunu žε sε prāk'θrsti i žε gθ k'udnθ nλ č'elū. žε ištθ pr'oška  
d'enu žε gu zλk'olθ.*

The ritual is carried out beside the house, under a fertile tree:

*ud v'θnkλ pud n'εkλλ čθr'εšλ, pud n'εkλλ sl'ivλ.*

A cross is drawn in blood on the doors of the stable so that St George will accept the sacrifice:

to be a white male lamb. With the blood of the sacrificed lamb a cross is drawn on a child's forehead, 'so that it should be healthy as the animals are healthy'. The bones of the ritual animal are thrown to the dogs" (Uzeneva 2001: 135). On the tradition of the northeast Bulgarian village of Ravna in the Moesia area, data is provided by I. A. Sedakova: "A wreath made of nettles is placed on the head of the chosen animal. The animal is killed in the yard, and the wall of the house is sprinkled with the blood. The children's cheeks are smeared with the lamb's blood (sometimes a sign of the cross is made on their face), so that the children will be rosy and healthy. The future is divined from the animal's shoulder blade: if the bone is white, everyone will be healthy, if it has black spots — sickness or death should be expected. After the roasted sheep is eaten, all the bones are gathered in a basket, they are taken to the field and buried in an ant-hill for the sheep to be fertile" (Sedakova 2004: 246).

<sup>6</sup> Compare with the directly opposite selection, if a *k'urp'ečε* is killed, "the youngest lamb in the spring period"; an analogous selection has been recorded in the northern Albanian village of Muhurr.

*i tug'ava žε gu zak'olā i sās kərft'ɔn žε nam'ažə nā vrat'ana nā kuš'er'ena, k'orsčəg žε st'orə dā mu pr'ima g'os... svət'i g'ε'org'i kurb'an'ε.*

The meat is cooked, guests are invited to the meal, and it is also given to the neighbours:

*'i žε svar'ɔt kurb'an'εn, žε razdad'ɔt nā kumš'iinā, žε pər'ukat g'ostə.*

The lexeme *kurb'an'* in the speech of Široka Lyka village in its original meaning is a general term for ritual blood sacrifice independent of the form, the recipient, the sacrificer, calendar connection, peculiarity of the ritual or the ritual meal, i.e. independent of when and to whom the sacrifice is made, whether the animal to be sacrificed is previously fed and in what manner, whether it is a sheep (or some other larger animal) or a lamb, whether the kurban is held by the entire village, the church or a family, whether the costs of purchasing the animal are shared or whether it is sacrificed only by the man of the house, whether it is killed by the people of the house or is donated to the church alive, or if it is also shared, whether the meat is cooked or roasted on the spit etc.<sup>7</sup> The speakers in this case adhere to a kind of 'hyperonymic' strategy of nomination. The name for the sacrificial animal on St George's Day is no exception. We should bear in mind, however, that any one of the attributes cited can be selected by the speaker to be the basic lexical nomination within the 'hyponym' strategy. Later we will demonstrate examples of how such strategies are applied.<sup>8</sup>

The 'hyponymic' nomination of the sacrificial animal according to the recipient of the sacrifice, St George, is characteristic, for instance, of the tradition of the eastern Serbian village of Kamenica, where the lexemes *žurž'ilko* and *žurž'ilko* are found (MDABJ archive, recorded by A. A. Plotnikova and N. Bogdanović).<sup>9</sup> Both nomination strategies can exist simultaneously within one tradition. For instance, in the speech of the northeastern Bulgarian village of Ravna, the characteristic terms are *kurb'an*, and *g'erg''ofskə 'agn'e* (Sedakova 2004: 246).

<sup>7</sup> It seems that some similarly variable facts (for instance cooking the meat or roasting it) may be characteristic of some regional or ethnic traditions and not of others. These questions should, of course, be left to ethnographers.

<sup>8</sup> Lexemes calling the lamb by the characteristic of age, the above-mentioned *pərv'ak* and *k'urp'ečε* cannot be considered a special signifier for "the sacrificial animal on St George's Day".

<sup>9</sup> At this moment we have no other available information from this area.

In the Albanian speeches of Leshnja village in the Skrapar<sup>10</sup> region and Muhurr village in the Dibyr region, the language is explicit on the blood nature of the sacrifice: a kurban (*kurb'an*) is killed so that they can literally “make, draw blood”:

(Leshnja) *b'ënte gjak, th'errte n'anjë kurb'an që t'b'ëhesh gjak.*  
 “he made blood, killed some kurban, so as to make blood”  
 (Muhurr) *bôj gjak* “to make blood”.

In the Tosk village of Leshnja the sacrificial “lamb for St George” is called by the general and by now familiar term *kurb'an* (characteristically, ritual acts play no part in the slaughter, but take place during the offering of sacrifice on Novruz day):<sup>11</sup>

*për shëngj'ergj th'errin na një qengj.*  
 “for *shëngj'ergj* a lamb was killed”  
*kurb'an q'uhësh, kurb'an. po, e k'emj kurb'an për shëngj'ergj, 'ose og'iç për shëngj'ergj.*

“Kurban it was called, kurban. Yes, we have it as kurban for *shëngj'ergj* or a lamb for *shëngj'ergj*”

*s'k'ishte 'emër ai, og'içi shëngj'ergjit*<sup>12</sup> *'ose kurb'an.*

“it didn’t have a name, the lamb for *shëngj'ergj* (literally “lamb + genitive/dative *shëngj'ergj*”) or kurban”

In contrast, in the Geg village of Muhurr one informant said with conviction: “We don’t hold a kurban for St George. The lamb for St George is eaten by children”:

*Na kurb'a'ona nuk bôjm mo për Shëngj'ergj. K'ixhin e Shëngj'ergjit e hajn fmijt mo.,*

<sup>10</sup> Further in this article due to considerations of space, information will be omitted on other non-St George’s Day kurbans in the areas studied, although it is without doubt relevant, and in a number of cases necessary in order to give the general context of how the terms of the folk spiritual culture function. I will only point out that the Albanian tradition here quite fulfills the paradigm (feastday kurbans, kurban for success, in the event of an illness, in the event of drought, when building a new house, carrying out rituals at home or in a tekija (Muslim monastery), the distribution of the kurban and many others) (Ylli, Sobole 2002; 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Rok Zojzi, in describing the Albanian St George’s Day customs, notes that one month before the feast “the animals intended as kurban for the feast are separated from the herd and fed in a special way”; every family sacrifices one to four kurbans, “depending on their economic situation and the number of family members” (Zojzi 1949: 93).

<sup>12</sup> From the dialogue with our informants, we cannot acknowledge the terminological status of ad hoc expressions such as *og'iç për shëngj'ergj* and *og'içi shëngj'ergjit* as being unique, descriptive and generative, as it seems to be to linguistic researchers.

while another informant doesn't hesitate to qualify the given state of affairs as some kind of kurban:

— *ath'ere ki smilir'eshi m'erret e futet n'gj'akun e kurb'anit...*

“and now that *martenica* (decoration for Spring Day) is taken and dipped in the blood of the kurban...”

— *...të dits Shëngj'ergjit, të k'înxhit, si rr'ushim, sugj'a'eri.*

“(in the blood of the kurban) ... on *shëngj'ergj* day, the lamb we raise and feed, *sugj'a'eri* — the last one in the spring period”

A lamb or kid in that village was killed in the yard of the house and a festive lunch was held within the family circle; the statements of one informant that the children's head, nails and hands, as also the doors of the house were smeared with the lamb's blood are not entirely reliable. On the one hand, parameters such as the date and the family nature of the ritual, elements of the ritual slaughter and eating in relation to calling the lamb after the name of St George allow for this fact to be interpreted in the same way as the ritual of killing the sacrificial animal which is of interest to us. On the other hand, however, in the context of all available information on the language and ethnography of the particular village, it is obvious that for this tradition, whose best representative was the first speaker, the St George's Day lamb does not correspond to the canonic kurban, which above all does not imply the eating of the sacrificed animal within the family circle but rather the distribution of the meat, giving some to the mosque, moving it to a place which Muslims especially revere, known as the “good grave” (*v'orri m'ëir*) and so on, (and none of this is done with a lamb, which are at their youngest in the spring period), cf:

*K'îxhin e Shëngj'ergjit e hajn fmijt mo, s'e ç<sup>q</sup>ojm, kurs'e at'o si e ç<sup>q</sup>ojn, b'ôshin, i ç<sup>q</sup>ojn dis'a n'v'orre t'm'ëira, e ç<sup>q</sup>ojn 'ene e tr'esin ke v'orri m'ëir. E ç<sup>q</sup>ojn n'vorr t'm'ëir, e ç<sup>q</sup>ojn ke v'orri m'ëir. Ka d'ata t'cakt'ume, ka Bajr'a<sup>o</sup>me, për Bajr'a<sup>o</sup>m e ç<sup>q</sup>ojn aq'e. Për Bajr'a<sup>o</sup>me e ç<sup>q</sup>ojn.*

“The lamb of St George is eaten by the children, we don't send it, while they, when they sent it, made it, they send it to the “good graves” (= shrines), they send it and cook it near the good grave. They send it to the good grave, they send it to the good grave. There are certain dates, there are feastdays, Bairams, at Bairam they send it there. They send it at Bairam.”

It seems that the St George's Day ritual is not integrated into the system of religious representations and rituals of the northern Albanian tradition in its contemporary form. Against this background it is no accident



that the standard dictionary of the Albanian language gives only a monosemic definition of the lexeme *kurbani* as a word belonging to Islamic religious terminology:

*Bagëti që theret për bajram a për ditë fetare të shënuara të myslimanëve (në vendet ku vepron feja myslimane)* [Fjalor 1980: 922–923].

“The animal which is killed at Bayram or on a feastday observed by Muslims (in countries where Islam is professed)”

(*në vendet* = in areas, places, but as in 1980 Albania was an atheist state, this means — in countries)

It is also no accident of the Slav and Albanian background that one of the most striking characteristics of the Christian tradition in Greece (both the purely Greek and the Aromanian) is the ejection of the Turkish lexical term *κουρμπάνι* from the active lexicon, although found in many dictionaries (cf. ζώο που σφάζεται σε πανηγύρι (= θύμα), Ανδριώτης 1995: 172). The reason in this case is the common association of the given term with the ritual system of Muslim Turks (see for example definition “το αρνί που σφάζουν στο πανηγύρι, στο κουρμπάν Μπαϊπάμι”, Σπυρώνης 1996: 67), this association is also known to the Romanians (cf. *curban* “Opfer (Note) bei den Türken. Daher: Opfertier” (Tiktin I 1986: 709), but also to other Christian traditions). The Aromanian language either removes the lexeme<sup>13</sup> itself, or by special means removes the Islamic connotation in the meaning of this lexeme, through concretising and neutralising its meaning, while tending to generalise it and turn it into a metaphor. It is very illustrative that already Papahagi (Papahagi 1974: 414) gives only the following meanings of the word *curbane*:

1. agneau, mouton etc. rôti à la broche (*di geaba s' frig curbăn'île*);<sup>14</sup>
2. sacrifice — *aferumă (cădzură tuț curbane)*;
3. adoré; ami dévoué (*te si-ț pitrec, curbanea-a mea?*).

Scholarly description of this fact of Balkan folk cultures as the sacrificial animal on St George's Day is possible only when due care is taken at the same time of the linguistic and mythological symbolic form, that is, only in the correlation of the ritual lexis and ritual practice, which are

<sup>13</sup> Compare the marking of building sacrifice in the Aromanian speech of Turja village with the lexeme that marks the species: *nām'al'u* “small horned animal”.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. with actual Bulgarian dialect meaning (village of S'čanli, Gumjurdžinska area): *kurban* “a dish made of finely chopped meat, cooked in water” (BER III 1986: 144). This is clear proof of the sharply opposed meaning of *kurban* “cooked meat” vs. *kurban* “roasted meat”.

found in a complex gradated inter-relationship, interwoven into individual cultural traditions and into the general Balkan culture. The relevant linguistic and ethnographic information on their correlation can be and should be represented discretely and simultaneously on an ethno-linguistic map. In this way map № 1 attached to this article reflects the geographical distribution of the terms signifying a sacrificial animal on St George's Day, in correlation with the practice of the corresponding ritual. The presence of the ritual is mapped only if the material contains even a minimally explicit mention of the practice of sacrificing an animal on St George's Day.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike the ethno-linguistic map, the aim of which is to fix a term and its meanings as completely as possible in the ethnographic context in which it functions, the lexical map, which has remained a purely linguistic instrument, can only demonstrate the presence in speech of a familiar lexeme in a familiar meaning. This is the nature of map № 2, which shows the terms for the "lamb, left for the day of St George" (the MDABJ lexical questionnaire, question 6.077, Žugra, Domosileckaya 1997: 46). The question is in the section "Characteristics of the lamb according to the markings of gender and age" and is preceded by questions on the names for the oldest lamb in the spring period, the lamb born after the others etc. The lexical question (and the existence of a reply to that question — a lexeme, expression, predicative construction or text) does not always imply the existence of a corresponding factual state of affairs in the world surrounding the informant (this concerns nature and natural phenomena, man's life and economic practice). In addition, the informants' replies are not always accompanied by appropriate dialectological comment. Consequently, the extra-linguistic reality cannot be directly reflected on the linguistic map, it occurs in language only indirectly and peripherally (while the linguist's goal is to grasp the mechanisms of how man conquers the world). In our particular case, the only information available to us is whether the informant is familiar with the action or not, and in no event do we have information on whether the informant himself or herself practices the act which interests us, or whether it is a cousin or an acquaintance, in the village, or the micro-region.

<sup>15</sup> The response "no lexeme" to the corresponding question from the questionnaire with the absence of other information has been of necessity interpreted as not containing the desired explicit information (see. Zaykovskiy, Zaykovskaya 1999: 163). Cf. with information from Rhodes and Carpatos islands: (on the day of St George) "goats, lambs are sacrificed, everything there is" (Ponomarčenko 1999: 187). Information on the sacrificing and eating of the animal's meat which is not accompanied by other ritual parameters (Zavala, Montenegro), is identified as the offering of a sacrifice linked to the day of the saint.

In the MDABJ materials, ‘hyperonymic’ and ‘hyponymic’ nomination strategies have been recorded for the lamb left for St George’s Day. The former includes lexemes, lexicalised or free expressions with the internal form ‘sacrifice’ or ‘vow’ (Bulg. *kurb’an* and similar Greek. *t’ama* and Mac. *t’ama* and Mac. *t’aksano j’agne*.<sup>16</sup>), and the latter includes lexicalised and free lexemes and expressions motivated by the name of St George (Serb. *žurž’ilko*, Bulg. *g’urg’ofsko i’agne* and similar, Greek *to arn’i γ’a t a i γ’orγ’i*, Alb. *k’inxhi i zhgj’ergjit, og’iči shëngj’ergjit*), nominations according to the age of the lamb (Bulg. *pərv’ak*, Alb. *sugj’a<sup>er</sup>*), nominations according to the feeding of the lamb (Alb. *k’inxh i pash’ue* “lamb, fed only on its mother’s milk” literally “not extinguished”; Alb. *p’irës* “lamb, fed only on its mother’s milk”, literally “which drinks”). The latter is typical only of Albanian dialects, the former of both Albanian and Bulgarian Rhodope dialects. These two do not form linguistic areas so attempts at mapping were abandoned. The geographical distribution of the remaining lexemes and expressions (without differentiating the lexicalisation of the expressions) is shown on map № 2. The map indicates the presence in the Balkans of several lexical zones layered on top of one another and intersecting: the general-Balkan area of ‘hyponymic’ nomination according to the name of St George; two mutually unrelated areas — the western (Albanian-western-Macedonian-Aromanian) and eastern (eastern Bulgarian), in which the Turkish expression *kurban* gives a ‘hyperonymic’ nomination having the internal form ‘sacrifice’, and the northern-Greek-Macedonian micro-zone, in which that strategy appears as derivatives of the ancient Greek verb *τάσσω*. As emerges from information from these localities, both the mapped ‘hyperonymic’ nominations are innovative compared to the more archaic ‘hyperonymic’ one. As for the term *kurban* dealt with in this collection of papers, I shall repeat that its diffusion in the Balkans, like the distribution of corresponding ritual practices, has mainly been recorded in eastern Bulgaria on the one hand, and in Albania and the regions immediately along its border on the other.<sup>17</sup> It seems here that the Balkan Slav *kurban* as a cultural concept has great affiliation with the Muslim tradition of Turks or Albanians, more than with the Christian ritual system of the Greeks, Aromanians and Serbs.

A comparison of ethno-linguistic maps № 1 and 2 obviously does not so much indicate the differences between the ethno-linguistic and

<sup>16</sup> From the Ancient Greek *τάσσω* “to dedicate, to intend”, Greek *τάζω* “to promise, to take a vow”.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. reflections on two zones of concentration of Turkish expressions in the Balkans — Albanian and eastern Bulgarian (Sobolev 2004).

purely linguistic approach to studying the living environment of Balkan man, as the undeniable fact that both shed light on only one segment of that world and only to a small degree draw us closer to a complex understanding. One ethnographic question not entirely resolved (especially for the geographical regions of Epirus and Macedonia) is the question of the correspondence or non-correspondence of the *realia* signified as “lamb, put aside for St George’s Day” and as “sacrificial animal for St George’s Day”, in each Balkan cultural tradition separately. All we can be certain of in advance is that further research on this question will not reveal the determinants but rather the tendencies and the gradated relation ‘more-less’.

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The following maps have been excerpted from the Small  
Dialectological Atlas of Balkan Languages

**Народный календарь. Неподвижные праздники.**

I С. 25. Георгиев (Юрьев) день (23.4 / 6.5)

I С. 25.4. Жертвенное животное

Otok

Нет реалии, нет наименования (не картогр.).

Завала

Есть реалия (ягненок), нет специального названия.

Каменица

*žurž'ilko* и *žurž'ilko*

Пештани

*k'urban* «жертвенное животное», о.н.

Гега

Есть реалия (белый ягненок мужского пола), нет специального названия.

Гела

*kurb'an'* «жертвенное животное», о.н. (приносят в жертву ягненка)

Равна

*g'erg'ofsko agn'e*

*kurb'an* «жертвенное животное», о.н. (приносят в жертву ягненка)

Muhurr

*q'ingji zhgj'ergjit* и *k'inxhi i zhgj'ergjit*

Leshnjë

*kurb'an* «жертвенное животное», о.н. (приносят в жертву ягненка)

Εράτορα

Нет реалии, нет наименования (не картогр.).

Καστέλλι

Есть реалия (ягненок или козленок), нет специального названия.

Κρανιά / Turia

Нет реалии, нет наименования (не картогр.).

### Карта № 1 [Map № 1]

Названия жертвенного животного в день св. Георгия



### Легенда [Caption]

мотивация именем (св.) Георгия

- внутренняя форма «ягненок (св.) Георгия»
- ★ *žurž'ilko* и под.
- ⊘ *kurb'an* и под. «жертвенное животное», о.н.
- наличие реалии, отсутствие наименования

**Трудовая деятельность человека. Животноводство.****6.077. Ягненок, оставленный на день св. Георгия**

Оток

Нет реалии, нет наименования (не картогр.).

Завала

Нет реалии, нет наименования (не картогр.).

Каменица

*žurž'ilko* и *žurž'ilko*

Пештани

*t'aksano j'agne* «обетованный ягненок»*k'urban* «жертвенное животное», о.н.

Гега

*g'urg''ofsko i'agne*

Гела

*pərv'ak* «самый старый ягненок в весеннем периоде» (не картогр.)*kurb'an'* «жертвенное животное», о.н. (приносят в жертву ягненка)

Равна

*g'erg''ofsko 'agn'e* и *g'erg''ofče**kurb'an* «жертвенное животное», о.н. (приносят в жертву ягненка)

Muhurr

*kînxh i pash'ue* «ягненок, вскормленный только материнским молоком», досл. «не погашенный» (не картогр.)*sugj'a<sup>r</sup>* «самый младший ягненок в весеннем периоде» (не картогр.)*q'ingji zhgj'ergjit* и *k'înxhi i zhgj'ergjit**kurb'an* «жертвенное животное», о.н.

Leshnjë

*p'irës* «ягненок, вскормленный только материнским молоком» (не картогр.)*og'içi shëngj'ergjit**kurb'an* «жертвенное животное», о.н.

Εράτωνα

*t'ama* «обет»

Καστέλλι

*[to arn'i]* (*γ'a*) *t a<sup>i</sup> γ'orγ'i*

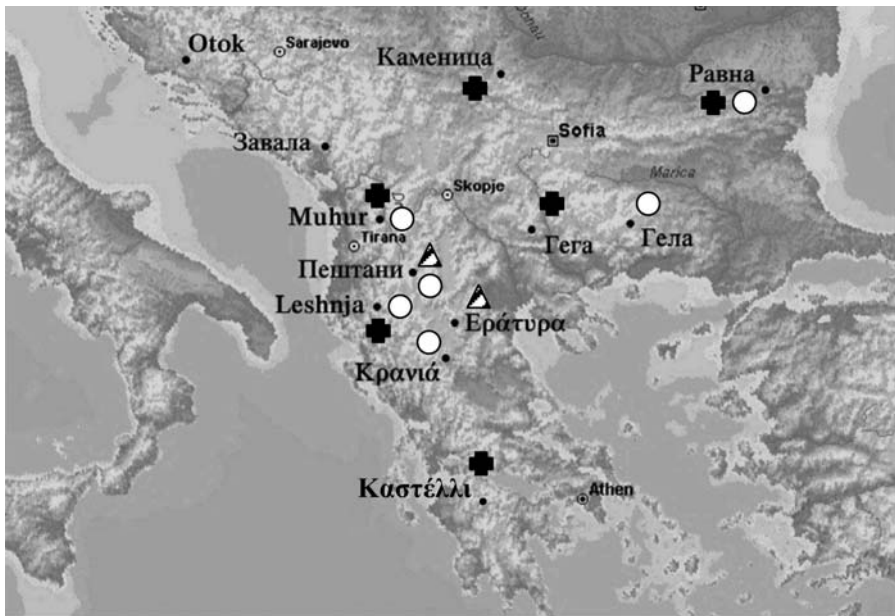
Κρανιά / Turia

*kurb'ani*



## Карта № 2 [Map № 2]

Названия ягненка, оставленного на день св. Георгия



### Легенда [Caption]

- мотивация именем (св.) Георгия
- ▲ рефлексы др.-греч. *τάσσω*, греч. *τάζω*
- рефлексы тур. *kurban*

*Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, Sofia*

THE VANISHED KURBAN  
Modern Dimensions of the Celebration of *Kakava/Hidrellez*  
Among the Gypsies in Eastern Thrace (Turkey)

The region of Thrace, now split between three states (Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey), has for centuries enjoyed the special preference of Gypsies who moved there as nomads and/or settled there.

In fact, the earliest lasting settlement of Gypsies in Europe, who arrived there after long years of migration from India, is in this very region. According to the Chronography of Theophanus Chomologetus there existed “an ardent friendship” between Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus I Gennicus (802–811) and “the Manichees, now called Pavlikiani” and the “*Atsiganois*” (i.e. the two groups were construed as something different), living in Phrygia and Lycaonia, whereby the latter helped him by their magic art in the suppression of the uprising of Vardanes in 803. As a sign of gratitude for this service he allowed them to move freely across the entire Byzantine Empire, and some of them settled in Thrace.

For many years the dominant view was that these earlier data about the presence of *Atsiganoi* in the Byzantine Empire had an unconvincing ring from the point of view of their association with the present-day Gypsies. It was considered that *Atsiganois* (or *Atsinganois*), actually denoted a Manichean sect, whose members dealt in the most varied prophesies, telling fortunes by the lines on the hand, incantations, and the like, and this was only subsequently passed on (analogously to similar occupations) to the forefathers of the present-day Gypsies (Soulis 1961: 143–165). Recently the view is increasingly gaining grounds among present-day Byzantologists that what was noted as *Atsiganois* in the Byzantine sources were originally Gypsies (Speck 1997: 37–51; Rochow 1983: 163–178; Rochow/Matschke 1991: 241–254). This new interpretation of the sources moves the advent of the Gypsies into the Byzantine Empire a fair way

back in time and converges with the views of a number of linguists in recent years about the time when the forefathers of the present-day Gypsies left their original Indian homeland (Tcherenkov/Laederich 2004). In the light of these new studies, this earlier dating of the first Gypsy settlements in Thrace can already be assumed with some reservations.

There are numerous data about the presence of Gypsies in the region of Thrace from the time of the Ottoman Empire (14<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century). Under the names of *Kıptı* (i.e. Copts, in the meaning of ‘Egyptians’) or *Çingene*<sup>1</sup>, Gypsies feature in the rich archives of the Ottoman state and local administration. Notwithstanding the division into two basic categories of the population — ‘of the true faith’, i.e. Muslims, and ‘infidels’ who were all the rest — the Gypsies had a fairly specific socio-administrative status of their own, occupying a dual state, without falling into either of these two basic categories. (This also included the paying of taxes). The Gypsies were differentiated according to the community (in contemporary terminology, ethnic) principle, which was something very rarely encountered in the Ottoman Empire (though not unique). As for the taxes they paid and their social status there was no sharp distinction between Muslim and Christian Gypsies. On the whole, Gypsies in the Balkans at the time of the Ottoman Empire came somewhat closer to the enslaved local population, with negligible privileges for Muslim Gypsies (and fairly bigger ones for those conscripted into the army during the early ages of the Empire’s existence).

There was a special tax register for Christian Gypsies paying *cizye* (a tax paid by non-Muslims) from 1487–1489, according to which they were listed in the administrative entities of Istanbul, Viza, Galipoli, Edirne, Chirmen, Yanboli (present-day Yambol), Philibe (now Plovdiv), Sofia, Nikopol, Vidin and Kyustendil, Krushevats, Smederevo, Novi Pazar and Bosna — a total of 3,237 households plus 211 widows’ households.<sup>2</sup> The fact that such a large number of Christian Gypsies were living a settled life (they were not nomads), clearly evinces that they had settled in these lands even before the advent of the Ottoman conquerors, when Christianity had been the dominant religion. Moreover, judging by the listed regions, Christian Gypsies predominated in the lands of Thrace, where the earliest

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the text and below we use the following transcription: Turkish spelling for Turkish words, ‘consensus’ transcription as used by Romany scholars for Romany, and standard English transcription of Cyrillic for Bulgarian.

<sup>2</sup> According to Ottoman regulations, the heads of families — men — were obliged to pay taxes for the entire family, as were widows with the same status. This is the reason why only these two categories were entered in the taxation registers.

migrations and settlement of Gypsies in the Balkans had obviously occurred (Marushiakova/Popov 2001: 28).

The well-known *Law concerning the Gypsies in the province of Rumelia (Kanunname-i Kıbtıyan-ı Vilayet-i Rumili)* of Sultan Suleyman I the Magnificent of 1530 confirms the special administrative and juridical situation and expanded rights of self-government in terms of taxes for those incorporated in the Gypsy region (*Liva-i Kıbtıyan or Çingene sancağı*). There is yet another special Law of 1541, the *Law concerning the leader of the Gypsy Sancağ*, which, in its entirety, repeats and presents in greater detail the main stipulations of the above-mentioned Law of Suleyman I the Magnificent. In this case *sancağ* does not refer to the customary territorial administrative unit, but rather to a certain category of the Gypsy population, engaged in a number of auxiliary activities in the service of the army (servicing fortresses, repairing weapons and so on). This *sancağ* was headed by the “Gypsy *sancağ-bey*” (who was not a Gypsy), with a seat in the town of Kırk Klise in Eastern Thrace (now Kırklareli in Turkey), and included Gypsy households from Hayrabolu, Viza, Keşan, Çorlu, Panar Hisar, Dimotika (now Didimotichon), Gümürčina (now Komotini), Fere, Yanboli, Eski Zaara (now Stara Zagora) and other settlements, mostly in present-day Thrace (Marushiakova/Popov 2001: 35).

What is lacking in historical sources, however, is information on the customs, holidays, rites and rituals of the Gypsies in the region of Thrace in the past. The first work, in which information on the language and different aspects of the life of the Gypsies in this region can be found is the fundamental work *Études sur les Tchinghianés ou Bohémiens de l'Empire Ottoman* by Dr Alexander Paspatis, published in French in Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1870 (Paspatis 1870). The author, a doctor of Greek origin, tells us that notwithstanding his efforts, he had not succeeded in finding any traces whatsoever of an earlier religion, either among Christian or Muslim Gypsies. The only exception, according to him, was a holiday, “celebrated by their race alone”, which was not familiar to the Greeks or the Turks, and was called *Kakava*, or, in translation from the language of the Gypsies, “the holiday of the cauldron” (*kakava* means ‘cauldron’ in *Romanes* [the Gypsy language]) or in Turkish, *Tencere Bayramı*. We present here a concise description of this holiday.

*Kakava* is celebrated in spring, when the nomadic Gypsies have already left their winter quarters (usually rented dwellings or farm out-buildings) and gather in a field close to water (a spring or a river), where they put up their tents. Every male Gypsy head of a family slaughters a lamb and invites everyone to a feast, where the laden table is decorated with herbs and flowers. In the course of three consecutive days the Gyp-

sies exchange visits to family feasts, accompanied by a lot of wine, songs, dances and general merry-making. At the end of these three days, the Gypsies pay their annual tax to the *çeri-başı* (their leader, empowered by the authorities to collect taxes due) and begin their active nomadic season. (Paspati 1870: 27–28).

It is an interesting question why Alexander Paspati defines this holiday as an exclusively Gypsy one and makes no reference whatsoever to the holidays of the surrounding population, particularly since he himself has noted that the celebration of *Kakava* in Thrace (as well as in the entire Vilayet of Rumeli), began on the feast of St George, April 23 (Paspati 1870: 28). The description of the holiday itself, with its key typological features (going out into the open air, close to a water source, decoration with greenery, the slaughtering of a lamb, a common holiday feast) entirely coincides with the celebration of the feast of St George (*Hidrellez* in the Islamic variant) by different peoples in a very extensive Asia-Minor-Balkan region.

In what concerns the payment of an annual tax by nomadic Gypsies connected to the celebration of *Kakava*, this is yet another proof of the association of the holiday with the feast of St George. The common practice in labour contracts, and other commodity or financial transactions in the Balkans was that the payments should be made during the days dedicated to St George (April 23), St. Demetrius (October 26) or Archangel Michael (November 8), and in this case the Gypsies mapped out their nomadic lifestyle according to the economic calendar cycle of the surrounding population. Their payment of annual taxes on these dates was a well-known phenomenon in the Ottoman Empire, as well as in the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldova. Incidentally, with the very first mention of Gypsies in the Balkans as part of the Ottoman Empire (in 1430 in the *Timar Register* of the Nikopol *sancağ*) (Marushiakova/Popov 2001: 27) and from all later historical data, it becomes evident that the overwhelming majority of Gypsies led a settled life, and that the celebration of *Kakava* was not actually related to their way of life (settled or nomadic).

\* \* \*

In order to make the present-day dimensions of the celebration of *Kakava* by the Gypsies in Eastern Thrace more easily understandable, a few words should be said in advance about the overall Gypsy presence in Turkey. The territory of present-day Turkey is a unique place, where in the past the three main flows of Gypsy migrations divided on their long route from India to Europe, and where representatives of the three main divi-

sions (the *Lom-Dom-Rom* division) of the Gypsies (Turkish *Cingelener*) now live. In northeast Turkey live the Armenian-speaking *Posha/Bosha* (Turkish *Poşalar*, self-appellation *Lomavtik*) from the *Lom* subdivision. Representatives of the *Karac* (Turkish *Karaciler*), sometimes also called *Sozmani* (Turkish *Sozmanlar*), and *Mitrip* (Turkish *Mitripler*) communities, can be encountered in southeast Turkey, whereas in the border provinces of southwest Turkey are the Arabic speaking *Navar* (Turkish *Navarlar*), from the *Dom* subdivision.

Representatives of the *Rom* subdivision (in Turkey the self-appellation may also be *Roman*, or the Turkish *Romanlar*, more rarely *Oromlar*) live mostly in western Turkey, in the regions along the Black and the Aegean Sea (approximately between Zonguldağ to the north and Mersin and Adana to the south), as well as in Eastern Thrace. The community, as everywhere among the Gypsies worldwide, is internally heterogeneous. Unlike other countries in the world, however, here the division is not so much along the lines of individual Gypsy groups (with sub-group divisions and/or meta-group units), of which only a few have been preserved (at least partially) — e.g. *Sepetci* (*Sepetciler*), *Kalaycides*, *Kalburci* and others. New identities are beginning to take over, determined by the settlement and/or neighbourhood, where the individual Gypsy communities live (Marushiakova/Mischek/Popov/Streck 2005). Large parts of the *Romanlar* have lost their language (*Romanes*, in the Turkish variant *Romanca*) and now only speak Turkish. Among those speaking *Romanes*, representatives of the ‘Balkan’ dialects (e.g. *Erlides*) can be found mainly in the region of Edirne, whereas representatives of the ‘Old Wallachian’ or ‘South-Wallachian’ dialects<sup>3</sup> are predominant, often called *Vlachos* or *Lachoja*, and can be encountered both in Istanbul and all along the Asia Minor coast down to Mersin in the South. The latter are mostly progeny of the Gypsies who migrated after the Graeco-Turkish war and the treaty of Lausanne of 1923, according to which an exchange of the population was effected — the Greeks from Turkey (mainly from Asia Minor) were transferred to Greece and Turks settled in their place (and along with them a great number of Muslim Gypsies) from the Greek territories.

The overall picture of the Gypsies in Turkey is also complicated by the existence of Gypsy-like communities. These are communities, encountered in different countries, which, unlike the Gypsies, are not descendants of migrants from India, but have the most varied origins. Because of their nomadic lifestyle, as well as the similarity of some ethnic and cultural

<sup>3</sup> For more on Romany dialect classification, see Matras 2002 and Matras 2005: 7–22; Iglă 1997: 163.

characteristics, the surrounding people usually define them as *Gypsies*. These different communities can be encountered in Turkey, most of which have been poorly investigated (e.g. the Tahtacı) while usually the Abdals (Turkish *Abdalar*) are mixed up with the Gypsies (*Çingeneler*).<sup>4</sup>

In the course of several years we conducted field research of the celebration of *Kakava* by the Gypsies in Turkey, in the region of Eastern Thrace (including Istanbul, which is the economic and cultural centre of this region). In 2004, we stayed in the town of Kırklareli (earlier names Kırk Klise, or Saranda Eklises, in the Greek variant, with the Bulgarian name Lozengrad), in 2005 — in Edirne (earlier name Adrianopolis, and Bulgarian name Odrin), and in 2006 — in Istanbul (earlier name Constantinople, Bulgarian name Tsarigrad). Other settlements in the region were also visited: Vize, Luleburgaz, Babaeski, Keşan, Tekirdağ, Corlu. The field material obtained, combined with some descriptions of contemporary Turkish researchers, enabled us to outline an overall, comparatively complete picture of the celebration of the *Kakava* holiday by Gypsies in the region of Eastern Thrace.

It should be pointed out, in the first place, that at this time a certain difference can be encountered in Turkey among the Gypsies with regard to the names of the holiday *Kakava* / *Hidrellez*. According to some authors, these are two different, though interconnected holidays (Irmak 1999). Among Gypsies in Eastern Thrace, the holiday is called *Kakava*, while *Hidrellez* is considered “an all Turkish holiday”, although it is acknowledged that there are actually no significant differences between the two holidays and that they *de facto* coincide, also in the days they are celebrated (with the exception of Kırklareli, which will be dealt with further on). Among the *Romanlar*, living in Istanbul and in the coastal regions of Asia Minor (Zonguldağ, Bursa, Çanakkale, Balıkesir, İzmir, Mersin, Adana), it is generally considered that this is one and the same holiday, common to Gypsies and for the surrounding population, called *Hidrellez*, and by the Gypsies of Eastern Thrace it is called *Kakava*.

The celebration of the *Kakava/Hidrellez* holiday by Gypsies in Eastern Thrace and Istanbul can be discussed on two levels: within the framework of the community and in the overall parameters of society. Of course, there is no insurmountable wall between these two dimensions — in which the Gypsies live and in which this holiday takes place — and constant mutual influences go both ways; however, such a distinction can be made.

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview of a part of numerous Gypsy and Gypsy-like communities in Turkey, see Benninghaus 1991: 47–53.

The celebration of *Kakava/Hidrellez* among the Gypsies is confined within the framework of a specific community (usually a Gypsy neighbourhood). In this case there is no difference as to whether the Gypsies are permanently settled or live a semi-nomadic way of life (seasonal nomadic migrations). The holiday usually marks the beginning of the active nomadic season, and even if that season had started earlier, all go back home for the holiday (unlike in the past, all Gypsies living a nomadic life already have homes of their own). When there is more than one Gypsy neighbourhood in a town, the celebrations take place within the neighbourhoods, but there are also places, where at certain points of the holiday Gypsies of different neighbourhoods get together (for instance in Edirne, where Gypsies live in Kemikciler, Mengil Ahır, Yıldırım mahallesi (neighbourhood), Kızılk mahallesi, and others, this is the Kırk-Pınar locality on the bank of the Tunca River). A specific case is the huge megapolis of Istanbul, spreading over two continents, where Gypsies live in more than 50 neighbourhoods, and where there is no common site for celebration.

What is common everywhere is also the time of celebration of *Kakava/Hidrellez* (and also the exception of Kırklareli). The centre of the holiday is May 6, the feast of St George (and its Islamic counterpart *Hidrellez*), and also according to the new calendar (i.e. the traditional date has been preserved).

The common model of the ‘traditional’ celebration of *Kakava* (or at least what is thought to be traditional from today’s point of view) is comparatively standardised, performed following a common model and differs only in individual details. The holiday is celebrated on May 6, lasting for two or three days. On the eve of the holiday, about a week earlier, there is a thorough house cleaning. Early in the morning, before sunrise, people go to the river. They pick green branches with which they decorate the doors and windows of the houses. Getting into the water, facing east, people wash and strike each other with the twigs for good health. The maidens make *martival*: in the evening they pour water into a cauldron, drop their rings in it, leave it to for the night under a rose bush and on the holiday a small girl, dressed up as a bride, takes out the rings. All sing *maani* songs, which are prophesies of their future, and dance. During the day all the families go out into the open, “on green grass”, usually next to the river, where each family lays a festive table. Musicians are hired and there is a lot of singing and dancing. In some cases people go to a *turbe* (the tomb of a Muslim saint), where they attach threads or small pieces of cloth (*nişan*) to a tree for good health. Big fires are lit in the evening (by the river, where the celebration takes place, or in the neighbourhoods). Everyone jumps over the fire three times, and it is commonly believed that this is



done for good health and good yields. Again, there is a lot of music and dancing. On the following day visits are exchanged, festive tables are laid again in the houses, or people again gather out of doors (Irmak 1999: 5; Sakaoğlu 1995:34–37, Özkan 2000: 119–126; Alpman 1997: 97–103; Alpman 2004: 39–63).

There are also some elements of the holiday which are not so common, can only be found in individual places and are probably remnants of older forms or a result of contamination by other customs and holidays. For instance, a Turkish author mentions that for the custom on May 6, people go to the river to fill 41 glasses of water, dropping small pebbles in it and then washing in this water (Özkan 2000: 120). On *Hidrellez* in Izmir (the name *Kakava* is unknown there), a fire is built and a boy with a big hat, called *o Vaşili* (obviously a contamination by memories of the celebration of *Vasilica* or *Bangu Vasij*, widespread among the Gypsies in the Balkans) stands beside it; the others try to take his hat, offering him various things in return (mostly small coins). The boy takes everything but does not give up his hat, while the others try to steal it from him. If they fail to take away his hat, the boy finally drops it into the fire, but if someone manages to take it from him, it is this person who drops it into the fire. It is believed that whoever has dropped the hat into the fire will have all his wishes come true during the year.<sup>5</sup>

Concerning the slaughtering of a lamb (the *kurban* sacrificial offering), which, according to Alexander Paspatis is a key element of the celebration of *Kakava*, it has been mentioned by only one Turkish author (without being localized), who describes the custom in the following way: “Until May 6 no lamb meat is eaten. The *kurban* is performed before sunrise. The biggest lamb is slaughtered facing east and before that it is offered water to drink.” (Özkan 2000: 120). All the *Romanlar* we spoke with, from Eastern Thrace and from various neighbourhoods of Istanbul, and from the western regions of Asia Minor, denied in no uncertain terms that a *kurban* sacrificial offering was performed on *Kakava* (or *Hidrellez* in Asia Minor), and had no memories at all of this being done at any time. For people who had grown up in the spirit of the Balkan traditions, where the *kurban* — the ritualised slaughter of a lamb as a sacrificial offering — is the core of the celebration of the feast of St George (*Hidrellez* in the Islamic variant), this has a shocking and incredible ring to it. Or, as a Roma activist from Albania said on becoming himself convinced during a seminar that the Gypsies in Edirne did

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<sup>5</sup> According to information from Mozes Heinschink from Austria (personal communication).

not slaughter a lamb on *Kakava/Hidrellez*, “this is not a good tradition, and this is not *Hederlezi* at all”.

\* \* \*

Over the last 10–15 years the celebration of *Kakava* by the Gypsies of Eastern Thrace and Istanbul has grown beyond the bounds of their own community and has fitted organically into the general parameters of Turkish society. In the course of our field research we paid special attention to this phenomenon, which had entailed considerable changes in the form, content and functions of the holiday.

The celebration of *Kakava* has remained comparatively closer to the ‘traditional’ variant in Edirne. The preferred name of the holiday in Edirne is *Kakava*, which has been declared a city holiday by the local authorities and lasts for three days (May 5 to 7), whereby May 6, within its framework, is called *Hidrellez*. On the morning of May 5, the Gypsies clean their houses; during the day they pay visits to each other, while at night the citizens of the city (not only the Gypsies) get together in the Kırk-Pınar Park. They take walks, swing in the swings, and Gypsy bands play music at several places. Rice is sold everywhere (this is considered to be the ritual meal on this holiday). When dusk falls, a big fire is built, and mostly young people leap over it. Then the Gypsies return to their neighbourhoods; fires are lit in front of the houses, people gather around them, songs are sung and all leap over the fires. In some places (for instance in the Kemikciler neighbourhood) a *martifal* is made, *maani* songs are sung, and the rings are taken out by a girl with a covered head, dressed as a bride.

On the following day, May 6, early in the morning (about 5 a.m.), before sunrise, a great number of Gypsies from different neighbourhoods go to different places by the river (in Edirne there are two rivers — the Maritsa/Meriç and the Tundzha/Tunca). The river Tunca is most visited in the Kırk-Pınar locality, with hundreds of Gypsies coming from different neighbourhoods (both near and far). They are all dressed in their Sunday best; they wash their faces with water from the river, some also fill vessels with water (which they use to sprinkle in their houses). They break off green branches (some of them big armfuls), which they will hang over the doors and windows in their houses. Some decorate the cars or carts in which they have arrived with the greenery. A number of little girls present (aged between 5–6 and 10–12) are dressed up in the bride’s clothes, which they wore while playing and dancing around the fire on the previous night, and now they dance again... Besides Gypsies, there are also quite a few ‘on-lookers’ (local inhabitants, tourists, journalists) attending this part of

the holiday, who take photos and video films all the time of the whole event. Because of this the Gypsies largely “perform” on their holiday, similar to a stage performance in front of an audience.

During the day Gypsy families go out for a holiday feast in the open air, on the green grass, usually close to the city, near the rivers, but also in the centre of the city (on the green areas in front of the famous Sultan Selim Mosque), and these celebrations and plentiful feasts continue on the following day too.

The celebration of *Kavaka* is quite different in Kırklareli. In 1991, by decision of local authorities, the holiday was declared a town holiday and received the official name *Kırklareli Karagöz kultur sanat ve Kakava festivali* (Karagöz cultural holiday and Kakava festival in Kırklareli). The celebration was moved from the traditional dates (May 5–7) and is scheduled each year, usually during the second or third week of May (in 2004, the dates of the holiday were May 22–24 — a Friday, Saturday and Sunday). During the three days, the town administration provides a great number of cultural events — films, concerts, performances, competitions and so on. People from the entire county gather together on Saturday for the holiday proper; the whole town is decorated with banners, there are numerous stalls, a big stage is built in the centre, and folk dance groups and well-known singers perform all day. On Saturday there is a festive procession in the streets with a figure of Karagöz (a famous character in the old Turkish shadow theatre); a competition is organized for the best decorated shoeblack box (the local shoeblacks are mostly Gypsies). At night a big fire is built in the central square and there are also festive fireworks.

It is noteworthy that it has never been officially declared anywhere that *Kakava* is a Gypsy holiday, although this is accepted as a well-known fact. The Gypsies themselves, musicians or dance groups, dressed in ‘traditional’ costumes (no matter how conventional this definition may be), do not explicitly mention the word ‘Gypsy’ either, when they appear on stage in the town, but emphasize that it is “our holiday” that is being celebrated, and the viewers understand very well what is meant. (Like everywhere else in the Balkans, local people know very well what the ethnic origin of each one is).

On Sunday, the Gypsies from the town go out en masse to the nearby river, in the Şeytandere locality, next to a big bridge. Hundreds of Gypsies arrive early in the morning (we have estimated their number at 3,000 — 4,000 people), by horse and cart, in trucks, hired buses and cars. They settle in families and clans on the grass, in the clearings by the river (on both sides of the bridge). They place tables by the river, and tables are even laid in the river; swings are hung onto the trees; the young and the children

wade into the river all the time. The holiday feast, accompanied by many songs and dances, continues until sunset.

According to the explanations of the Gypsies, they were actually repeating the holiday, which they had already celebrated on May 6 as *Hidrellez*, now marking it as *Kakava*. Once, these two were not two different holidays but one, divided into two parts, after the local authorities had decided to make *Kakava* a town holiday. According to those celebrating, *Hidrellez* was anyway “the more truthful”, a bigger holiday, and now this was only its town repetition. At *Hidrellez* there is housecleaning; a fire is lit in the neighbourhood; all leap over it; all go out to the river, where they eat and drink until nightfall. The *Kakava* is celebrated again in the same way; the only additions are the town festivities and the common town fire in the square, i.e. the two holidays already begin to be differentiated, whereby *Hidrellez* becomes a ‘Gypsy’ holiday, and *Kakava* — a holiday “of the whole town”.

This change in the social features and functions of the *Kakava* Gypsy holiday, and its transformation from a holiday of the community into a holiday of the town does not occur in a void. During the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the town had been a centre of the “Çingene sancag” and the seat of the “Çingene sancag-bey”. For centuries, Kırklareli has been a town associated with the Gypsies living in it and in its environs.

The place of Karagöz, the notorious character from the Turkish shadow theatres, is not accidental, either, in the overall framework of the holiday. According to a number of authors, Karagöz was a real person, who introduced novelty into the traditional shadow theatres (that is why the theatre itself is quite often called after him), while according to Evliya Çelebi, he was born in Kırklareli, while his father had been a *fukara-i-kıbtıyan* (a poor Gypsy) (Çelebi 1928, Perdeyi/Viran 2004: 20–23). Today there is a monument to Karagöz in Kırklareli, and he is one of the symbols of the town. A legend commonly told among the Gypsies from Kırklareli (in all probability of recent date), is that Karagöz was born in the nearby Demirköy settlement (the Bulgarian name is Malak Samokov). Incidentally, the shadow theatres itself is already just a memory of the past in present-day Turkey, but its traditions have been preserved in everyday life as a kind of entertainment for children in some Gypsy families in Eastern Thrace. Probably the only place where the Traditional Turkish shadow theatre has been preserved is among the Gypsies of Western Thrace (in Greece).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, one of the first books, published in Romanes in Greece, is dedicated to Karagöz (it includes texts of a few scenes from the repertoire of this theatre) — Voultzidis/Hasan/Hasan/Alexiou 1996.

It is very difficult to describe in detail the celebration of *Kakava/Hidrellez* in Istanbul. This is a huge megapolis with scores of Gypsy neighborhoods and nomadic Gypsies arriving for stays of varying length (not only *Romanlar*, but also other Gypsies and Gypsy-like communities). This is why we shall note only a few cases of marking the holiday, which are already on a new scale, surpassing the framework of the community.

In the evening of May 5, a big street festival is held in the Ahırkapı to celebrate *Hidrellez* (Ahırkapı Hidrellez Şenlikleri). Several streets in the Gypsy neighbourhood and in the residential district next to it are closed to traffic; they are decorated (including an imitation of a “holy site”, where people tie little rags with wishes for good health and good luck). There are numerous stalls and temporary public catering establishments, several stages are built on which music is played (mostly Gypsy bands), and there are dances (performed by folklore groups, in which the audience joins all the time). The celebration of the traditional holiday in this new street format, open to ‘the general public’, came into being a few years ago at the initiative of several nearby hotels, which reached an agreement with the Gypsies of the Ahırkapı neighbourhood (one of the oldest Gypsy neighbourhoods in Istanbul, dating back to the time of the Ottoman Empire), and organise the entire celebration with the active support of the local municipality. It has already turned into a tourist attraction, widely advertised, and attended by tens of thousands of people (including a great number of foreign tourists).

The following day (May 6) *Hidrellez* is celebrated also in the Kağthane municipality with the extensive and many-sided support of the authorities. A great number of people gather in the local park. These are not only Gypsies from a few nearby neighbourhoods, but also many Turks; foreign tourists also come. There are several platforms, on which Gypsy musicians and dance groups perform; women and girls dance; fires are lit (during the day), and all those present leap across them; family feasts are spread out on the grass and the festivities go on until nightfall.

Gypsies also celebrate in the different neighbourhoods of the big city, and the idea of *Hidrellez* being ‘a Gypsy holiday’ has become lastingly established in public life, though everyone knows that in the recent past it was also celebrated by the Turks. In this way, it may ultimately be said that the celebration of *Kakava/Hidrellez* by the Gypsies in Eastern Thrace and in Istanbul has acquired new and enduring social dimensions in our days. In fact it turns out that the local population has *de facto* given up the celebration of its traditional *Hidrellez* holiday in order to accept the same holiday (under its Gypsy name *Kakava*, or even under the same name as is the case in Istanbul), gradually turning it from a holiday of one

community into a holiday of the entire society, but already labeled ‘a Gypsy holiday’.

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It has already been mentioned that the celebration of the *Kakava/Hidrellez* holiday by the Gypsies in Eastern Thrace and in Istanbul can be discussed in two dimensions: within the framework of the community and within the overall parameters of society, whereby the permanent mutual influences go both ways. That is why the changes in the overall appearance of the holiday, as well as in its individual elements, both in its community and public/societal functions are naturally tied up into a common process.

From the point of view of the public dimensions of *Kakava/Hidrellez*, the changes have taken an anticipated direction, as is the case with each one of the ‘traditional’ holidays, continuing to function in the modern age. This implies a considerable simplification of the ritual structure (in practice — its reduction to a few key elements), the boosting of the principle and functions of performance and entertainment (going as far as its transformation, at certain points, into a kind of ‘a custom-performance’), taking the holiday out of its natural environment of existence (the specific community — ethnic, local, regional, etc.), and bringing it to a new social framework (Popov 1993).

The transition from a holiday of the community to a holiday of society is natural, in its own way, since in Turkey the Gypsy identity (in its varied community variants) has always been conceived and experienced as part of the overall Turkish national identity (this has been a realization of the basic principle of modern Turkish nationalism, introduced by Atatürk at the time the modern Turkish state was established). Actually, in the final analysis, the *Kakava/Hidrellez* holiday is now ‘Gypsy’ in both its dimensions (communal and societal), but in a different way.

The issue of the changes in the *Kakava/Hidrellez* holiday in its ‘traditional’ forms is more complicated in its celebration within the community. A satisfactory explanation cannot be provided for some of these changes; only conjectures can be made. This is the case, for instance, with the particularly important place occupied by the building and lighting of a fire, and which all the participants leap over.

The lighting of a fire is unknown in the traditional celebration of the feast day of St George among the Balkan peoples, or of *Hidrellez* by the other peoples in the Balkans of the Islamic faith. The lighting of a fire as part of ‘the ritual scenario’ is unknown among the Gypsies in the Balkans,

for whom this day (*Gergyovden*, *Durđevdan* [feast of St George] and so on, or, respectively, *Hidrellez*, *Hederlez*, *Edrellez* and so on) is one of the major holidays. It does not feature in the description of *Kakava* given by Alexander Paspatis during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Neither is it certain, however, that this is a new phenomenon, within the context of the overall evolution of the spectacular and entertaining element of the holiday.

There are examples of the fire having (or having had) its place in the celebration of *Hidrellez* by the Gypsies. Among the ‘Futadžii’ (*Futadžides*) group in the region of Haskovo (South Bulgaria), after the festivities on the day of May 6 (*Hidrellez*), a fire is built in the evening in the vicinity of the settlement, and all leap over it (Ivanov 2003). Among some of the ‘Turkish Gypsies’ (*Xoraxane Roma*) in Northeastern Bulgaria (Provadia, Kavarna and elsewhere), the lighting of a fire on *Hidrellez* and all the people leaping over it, is just a memory, but only a few decades ago this was an important part of the holiday.

Particularly interesting is the situation of a Gypsy group, known under different self-appellations: *Krimurja*, *Kırımıtika/Kırımilitika Roma* (*Kırım* is the Tartar name for the Crimea), and others. In the recent past (up to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century) they lived mostly in the Crimea, but have now dispersed far and wide throughout the territories of the former USSR (Marushiakova/Popov 2005: 425–444). The dialect of *Romanes*, used by the *Krimurja* belongs to the ‘Balkan’ group of dialects (Tcherenkov 1986: 5–15; Boretzky 1999; Toropov 1994; Toropov 1999; Toropov 2004). It may be conjectured that the forefathers of the *Krimurja* had gradually migrated from the South-West Balkans during the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when there were big migration waves from southwest to northeast. Moving across the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldova, across Bessarabia, which had become part of the Russian Empire, and across the steppes of the northern coastline of the Black Sea, they reached the Crimea in two waves: at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Marushiakova/Popov 2004: 148–164).

One of the holidays, characteristic of *Krimurja*, preserved today mostly as a memory, is *Jagorja*. It was celebrated either around April 20, or on the Friday preceding Easter (for this reason it is called ‘the Gypsy Easter’) among the *Krimurja*, living in the region of Kurban. On that holiday a lamb used to be slaughtered for a kurban sacrificial offering, while on the eve of the holiday, big fires were built, and all the people would leap over them: young men, women and children. This is obviously an old Balkan heritage, refracted in a peculiar way through the new conditions in the Crimea. The *Krimurja*, though being Muslims (at least nominally, in

our time), do not repeat the celebration of *Hidrellez* among the Crimean Tartars (which is celebrated during the first week of May) (Kurtiev 1996: 34–37). They mark the holiday according to the Eastern Orthodox calendar, on the day of St George (Yegoriy, Yagoriy, Yur'ev feast day in the Eastern Slav variant, observed on April 23) (Sokolova 1987: 386–387). However, they themselves explain the naming of the holiday, relating it to the word *jag* ('fire') in *Romanes* (this is a typical example of naïve etymology and secondary explanation), i.e. the meaning of the fire in the overall structure of the holiday is considered particularly important by them.

One possible explanation for the place the fire occupies in the celebration of *Kakava/Hidrellez* by the Gypsies in Turkey is that this is a contamination with the *Nevruz* holiday among the *Alevi* (members of a Shiite sect in Islam). Even Alexander Paspati, in a footnote, explains that this holiday (*Kakava*) could be correlated to the *Nevruz* among the Persians, without being connected to the lighting of fires and leaping over them (Paspati 1870: 28). This explanation is very popular among the public of present-day Turkey, where Gypsies as a whole (both *Romanlar*, and *Abdalar*, as well as all the other Gypsy-like or marginal groups) have always been suspected of being covert adherents of Shiism. The Gypsies themselves usually categorically deny this; they also categorically set themselves apart from the *Abdalar* (considered by them, and by all of Turkish society to be entirely and originally *Alevi*)<sup>7</sup> at least in Eastern Thrace and Istanbul, they are adherents of Orthodox Sunni Islam (in its folk form of course).

It is noteworthy that continuing suspicions (unjustified, naturally) of the Gypsies secretly belonging to Shiism also exist among the Crimean Tartars in the Crimea (where Shiism is generally little known). The fire in the festive structure of *Hidrellez*, however, cannot be an argument along these lines, since during the celebration of this holiday by the Crimean Tartars (usually on the first Saturday and Sunday of May), the lighting of a fire and leaping over it en masse has remained a basic element to this day (Kurtiev 1996: 34).

Of no less interest is the case of 'the vanished kurban', a blood-sacrificial offering that has vanished, the discontinued ritual slaughtering of a

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<sup>7</sup> The origin of the name *Abdalar* most probably derives from a heterodox Islamic order of wandering dervishes, *Abdalan-i Rum*, which came into existence and developed during the 15th century (Mikov 2005: 16–17). It is very disputable, however, whether the present-day *Abdalar* are their successors. This is more probably a matter of name transfer because of poverty (a basic 'ideological' characteristic of the order) and because of the similar, nomadic way of life.



lamb among the Gypsies in Turkey, described much earlier back by Alexander Paspati. All across the Balkans (including among the Gypsies), the festive kurban sacrificial offering has been the core of the celebration of the feast of St George (*Hidrellez* in the Islamic variant). In present-day conditions this is its most important (and not rarely, only part, in combination with a richly laid festive table). The fact that today this element is completely absent in the celebration of *Kakava/Hidrellez* among the Gypsies (at least among the *Romanlar*) in Turkey, implies that the answer to the causes for its disappearance have to be sought in the realities of present day life in Turkey.

In present-day Turkey, the place of the sacrificial offering of a lamb (kurban) is quite peculiar, in the context of the *Hidrellez* holiday. On the one hand, according to the ‘official’ point of view, presented on the site of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Turkey, *Hidrellez Bayramı* (explained as the day of the Islamic holy men Hıdır and İlyas) is an extremely important traditional Turkish holiday, whose key element is the slaughtering of a lamb.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, at least in Istanbul and Eastern Thrace, the local population, generally aware that *Hidrellez* is an old Turkish holiday (regardless of the fact that today they perceive it as ‘a Gypsy holiday’), are categorical that there is no kurban sacrificial offering on that day — this is only possible on *Kurban Bayram* or on some other occasions, e.g. for good health, when building a new building and so on. This shows that a serious divergence exists between the ‘official’ and the ‘folk/lifestyle’ point of view regarding *Hidrellez*.

In this contradictory situation, the Gypsies of Eastern Thrace and Istanbul, who do not want to oppose the macro-society they live in, accept its lifestyle norms regarding *Hidrellez*. The circumstance that ‘their’ *Kakava* holiday has been acquiring new social dimensions in our days and has been *de facto* ‘taking over’ *Hidrellez*, transforming it into a ‘Gypsy holiday’ has also exerted an influence. This transition is possible and definitely easier, if the Gypsies give up these elements of ‘their’ holiday, which run counter to the dominant views of the macro-society. Metaphorically presented, the kurban sacrificial offering on *Kakava/Hidrellez*, turns out to be the necessary sacrifice, in order for it to change, from a holiday confined within the framework of the community, to one finding its new place in the social life of present-day Turkey.

<sup>8</sup> See web page of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Turkey: <http://www.kultur.gov.tr/RU/BelgeGoster.aspx?1C04EA51480895DA7A2395174CFB32E1780C3D9D1D2CA1F8>

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Sanja Zlatanović, Belgrade

## THE ROMA OF VRANJE: KURBAN WITH FIVE FACES\*

The Roma in the town of Vranje (south Serbia) are mainly concentrated in three settlements: *Gornja Čaršija*, *Sarajina*, and *Panadjurište*. *Gornja Čaršija*<sup>1</sup> is one of the largest Roma settlements in southern Serbia. It is located in the upper part of the town, above the river, in an area which, during the period of Turkish rule that lasted here until 1878, was the town centre. The people of *Gornja Čaršija* speak of themselves as the original inhabitants, “the old people of Vranje” to distinguish themselves from the local Serbs who hail mostly from the countryside and settled in Vranje as a result of the rapid industrialisation following the Second World War. In their view, those “old people of Vranje” who are Serbs have long since moved to Belgrade and now the only remaining ‘true’ citizens of Vranje are the Roma from *Gornja Čaršija*, who have lived here for generations. The Roma of *Gornja Čaršija* voice a very pejorative opinion of all those they consider ‘peasants’, and they show this by their facial expression. From the way they speak, the town/village opposition equals culture versus primitivism.<sup>2</sup> They also stress their urban identity vis-à-vis the inhabitants of the other Roma settlements, *Sarajina* and *Panadjurište*.

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<sup>1</sup> This term means the upper town. *Čaršija*, f. (Pers.) the town trading quarter < Tur. *çarşı* < Pers. *čārsū* (Škaljić 1989: 165).

<sup>2</sup> The attitude of the “old” inhabitants of the town towards newcomers from the countryside in Serbia is always very negative (even if these people are well educated and were born in a town). For a detailed analysis of this problem, see: Jansen 2001: 46–49; Jansen 2005: 109–167.

*Sarajina*<sup>3</sup> is less than one kilometre from *Gornja Čaršija* so the inhabitants of both settlements are bound by marital and other connections. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of *Gornja Čaršija* treat them like village Roma, throwing in the added argument that they use different words when they speak. They have a particularly negative attitude towards the very poor group of Roma who live in *Panadjurište* (on the very edge of the town next to the Roma graveyard) and towards the Roma who have fled Kosovo. They describe both as extremely dirty and refuse all contact with them. Likewise, they dislike the Djorgovci who live in the surrounding villages and are torn between a Serbian and a Roma identity (Zlatanović 2006). In addition to their insistence on an urban identity, the Roma of *Gornja Čaršija* describe themselves as ‘true’, ‘pure’ Roma (in the sense of “pure-blooded”), who do not ‘mix’ with others.<sup>4</sup> Most of the inhabitants of *Gornja Čaršija* were born there and spend their whole life there.

The identity of the Roma in *Gornja Čarsija* is a construction similar to the face of Janus. They are (or used to be) Muslims, but from the start of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the disintegration of Former Yugoslavia was followed by bloody civil wars, they suddenly threw off and/or hid the Islamic elements of their culture. In the complex and inter-dependent game played by the many social factors that go to make up identity, two basic factors emerged in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. On the one hand, there is the ethno-nationalism and intolerance by the majority population towards anything different (and the Roma preserve and cherish their Oriental heritage. The history of the Turkish period in Vranje recounted from their angle is quite different from the one told, and imposed as the official version, by the majority population). On the other hand, Islam is perceived as closely connected to

<sup>3</sup> *Sarajina*, a part of Vranje. This was the site of the *seraj* of Suleiman Bey, son of Husein Pasha (Zlatanović, M. 1998: 357). The Roma from *Gornja čaršija* often call it *Sarajina Odžinka* (for what reason I have been unable to determine because its inhabitants call it by its rightful name — *Sarajina*). *Odžinka* is actually the part of the town that continues on from *Sarajina*. The name *Odžinka* is also a Turkish word meaning ‘hodja’s area’. Today *Sarajina* and *Odžinka* are integral parts of the town, and while some way from the town centre, they are not considered suburbs.

<sup>4</sup> According to Marushiakova and Popov, the Roma represent a specific, hierarchical inter-grouped ethnic community with a complex structure and divided into numerous separate groups (which are sometimes mutually opposed), subgroups and metagroups with their own ethnic and cultural characteristics and varying levels of ‘Roma’ identity. As characteristic features of a typical Roma group, they cite endogamy, the use of a common language, insistence on the ‘purity’ of their language in relation to other languages, and the view that affiliation to the group can only be acquired, etc. through being born into it (Marushiakova/Popov 2001: 423–424; Marushiakova/Popov 2004: 146).

the Albanians and since Vranje is near Kosovo, there is increased tension. Since 1999 and the establishment of an international protectorate in Kosovo, ethno-nationalism in Vranje has become a burning and ever-present issue (Zlatanović 2006a: 362). In this new situation the Roma have been trying to get closer to the Serbs.

The people from *Gornja Čaršija* whom I talked to found it very difficult to admit openly that they were Muslims. This happened rarely and then only after a long chat held in relaxing surroundings. Usually this confession came from older men who were ready to explain the current situation more overtly and express their feeling of resignation. They happily talked about their culture and customs, albeit selectively. When the conversation directly touched upon the Oriental layers, they would usually clam up. Whenever they spontaneously started to speak of their rituals, which bear the unmistakable stamp of Islamic culture or if the rule of ‘the Turks’ (the Ottoman empire), Turkish songs and the like were mentioned, there was a sudden turnabout. Although they do not strictly observe Muslim festivals, they do have a knowledge of them expressed through negation.

[1] Every religion has its symbols. We don’t have nothing Muslim here, nothing Islamic. They celebrate Ramazan... we don’t, not their holidays — no. Then there’s that, er, circumcision, then, I don’t, and so on — no. We got nothing to do with all that! Then, Muslims, they don’t eat pork. Man, we eat everything we can get our hands on! Everything we can find! Thank God! (...) Earlier, you know, somehow, I suppose, we held on to some bits of the Islamic funeral, some rites. Though people saw this as part of the custom, you know, which annoys me... Tabut, tabut, tabut. You see, the Turks say ‘tabut, tabut’ for that material which lines the coffin — but not any more.

In one house, the head of the house told me openly that he was a Muslim and he spoke about *kurban*, using that very term. A year later I returned and found several young women, relatives of his, who were happy to tell me about the celebration that held when the ram is sacrificed for the sake of ‘dedication’ of the house. Trying not to lead these women with my questions, I asked them what they called this ‘ram’, and what they called its ‘meat’, but they dodged the question.<sup>5</sup> So then I asked them straight out:

[2] (*Do you use the word ‘kurban’*). No, only the Muslims say ‘kurban’. The Muslims do, we don’t. (*All right, but here in the settlement, in Gornja Čaršija, some people do!*) No, no, not here! No one says ‘kurban’. Because

<sup>5</sup> The researcher — respondent relationship is a sensitive one, encumbered by the problems of transfer and counter-transfer. For the influence of researchers’ questions on the discourse of respondents, see Sikimić 2004: 847–858.

we're not Muslims. We don't say that (...). Naturally, we do say *bakro!* *Bakro* — lamb!

At weddings and other celebrations songs are sung in Romani, Serbian and Turkish. The songs sung in Turkish are part and parcel of a number of rites, for example, the song “for *baklava*” during the celebration of Vasilica. But the people I spoke to were unwilling to accede to my request that they sing some of the celebratory songs in Turkish. One older man, whose daughter-in-law had recommended him as someone familiar with these Turkish songs was happy to talk to me and happy to sing the songs — but only in Serbian. However, he relaxed when talking about his cousin's brass band and ‘gave himself away’ (clearly demonstrating that the Turkish cultural heritage is one of the pillars of their identity):

[3] He knows that I love those Turkish songs. That I love having a good time! (*What songs?*) Turkish songs. (*What Turkish songs?*) Well, I mean, they know them, the musicians know them! Ha! Ha! (*And you don't know a single one?! You love having a good time, yet you don't know them?!*) Ah, I only know how to dance to them. (*And not to sing them?*) I don't know how to sing them, but for dancing, I mean, there's no... (*But do you like the songs?*) You bet he does! (his wife interrupts: author's note) (*And do the musicians still remember them?*) They remember them, they know them, it's tradition!

This distancing from Islam is most obvious in the acceptance of Serbian first names and in everything concerning funerals and grave markings. Up to the early nineties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, headstones always bore a crescent. People I spoke to said that a number of headstones had been deliberately broken and since that time headstones have been put up without any visible sign of religious affiliation. Some of the newer headstones are marked with a cross. The hodja has rarely conducted funerals over the past fifteen years and, if needed, is called from Bujanovac.<sup>6</sup>

Felix Kanitz writes (and this is confirmed by many other sources) that the favourable geographical position of Vranje attracted the more cultured representatives of the Ottoman Empire to settle here and build numerous mosques, baths, wayside lodgings and stopping-places for caravans. In the period after 1878 there was a massive exodus by the Muslims and the mosques, baths and graveyards were destroyed (Kanitz 1909: 252,

<sup>6</sup> In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vranje had a hodja who lived in the nearby village and occasionally stayed in *Gornja Čaršija*. After his death, a hodja came from Skopje (present-day FYR of Macedonia), and later from Bujanovac, a small town about 20 kilometres from Vranje. The people I spoke to told me that the hodja from Bujanovac criticised the consumption of alcohol next to the deceased in the house and at the graveside. For this reason, he refused to come on a couple of occasions.

254–255). There is not a single mosque in present-day Vranje. The only one to survive Turkish rule is the so-called *Krstata* or *Krstasta* (old sources also refer to it as *Krstaška* [Crusaders’]) mosque,<sup>7</sup> which has a very specific history. Sreten L. Popović who, as a civil servant travelled round the newly-liberated regions, left us a description of the *Krstata* mosque dated 1878:

The Turks have a number of mosques, of massive construction, all in the upper part of the town, and they include the so-called ‘krstaška mosque’, thus named because at the top of its minaret, beside the crescent, is a cross! The story goes that this church was ours and when the Turks turned it into a mosque, they added to the church’s west wing a minaret, a tower. As soon as it was built and the crescent placed on top, it collapsed and kept on doing so until a cross was added as well. (...) So the *Krstasta* mosque also testifies to this church having been ours by the fact that there is not a single Turkish grave around it, while there are graves all around Turkish mosques, as there were around our churches in earlier times. (...) Inside this church/mosque there is one grave, though nobody knows whose it is, where the sick come and lie on it to be healed, both Mohammedans, but also Christians. The Turks do not ban this, at least during their rule they did not bar Christians from coming to this grave. (Popović 1879: 489–490).

The *Krstata* mosque was formerly an Orthodox church, the Church of *Sveta Petka* (St Paraskevi). There is no precise data on when it was built, but it is considered one of the oldest churches in the Vranje area. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with the addition of a minaret, it was turned into a mosque (Vukanović 1978: 11, 91). It is also mentioned by Milan Dj. Milićević (1884: 300) as a mosque with a cross at the site of the Church of *Sveta Petka*. More recent research confirms that it really was a church converted in a mosque as proved by the old walls which served as a foundation for the walls of the wall surrounding the churchyard (Documentation from the Department of Modern History of Art, Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade).<sup>8</sup> Legend has it that when the church was turned into a mosque, no one dared remove the cross out of fear and respect, but that when it was removed, unknown forces kept demolishing the mosque until it was put

<sup>7</sup> The *Krstata* mosque is in the upper part of the town, next to the White Bridge, which, according to legend, was built by a respected Turk in memory of his daughter. She had fallen in love with a Serb. Her father saw them embracing and killed them both. Later he put up the bridge (with an inscription in Arabic), which is still called the “Bridge of Love” in Vranje. The White Bridge is one of the symbols of the town (it is incorporated in its coat-of-arms).

<sup>8</sup> I would like to thank Senior Lecturer Dr Nenad Makuljević of the Department of Modern History of Art, Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade, for allowing me use of this documentation and for offering valuable explanations.



back. This is how it got its name — *Krstata džamija* (the mosque with a cross). In the post-1878 period, in fact, for more than a century, the *Krstata* mosque found itself in an undefined denominational position. In a description of the Serbian Orthodox Church's new status in Vranje county dated 1895 there are many details regarding churches and monasteries, but no mention of the Church of *Sveta Petka*, which means that the church did not come under its jurisdiction at the time (PSC 1895: 132–138). Liberation from Turkish rule found south-east Serbia with only a small number Orthodox churches and few priests, but in the Vranje area there were many former church sites which had become places of pilgrimage (Makuljević 1997: 39, 47). The *Krstata* mosque was one such place, visited by both Roma and Serbs and famed for its miraculous cures. At the end of the last century, it officially came under the Vranje bishopric and is now known as the Church of *Sveta Petka*, with regular services being held according to the canon of the Serbian Orthodox Church.<sup>9</sup>

The Roma of *Gornja Čaršija* are very sad that their only remaining mosque has been turned into an Orthodox church. According to them, it was immediately converted into a church following 1878, but they continued to regard it as a mosque and visit it as such. However, in the end even this possibility was denied to them.

[4] We had our own mosque here, but then they went and turned our mosque into a church. They made a church out of it! (...) And we used to go there and light candles on our holy days, Vasilica and Djurdjevdan. Especially on Djurdjevdan, we'd always go there and light candles. Always! Then when they took it over and made a church out of it, we started going to the stone, the Odžin (hodja's) stone.

Even today, the older members of the community are able to give precise locations for the mosques of Vranje, and other buildings from the Turkish period which were burned down or demolished (despite the fact that they could not have seen them, but were obviously told about them by previous generations). One of the people I spoke to drew a resigned parallel with the much later burning of Orthodox churches in Kosovo.

Movements on the general social level during the past 15 years (the ethno-nationalism of the majority population, the proximity of Kosovo, but also trends towards globalisation) have led to suppression of the Islamic identity of the Roma community. Some of its members feel that

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting that on Vranje Council's official website it says that the Church of *Sveta Petka* is better known as the *Krstata* mosque and that when the Turks placed a cross and a crescent on top of the minaret, they were trying to reconcile the two religions in this way: [http://www.vranje.org.yu/vranje/spomenici\\_vranja.html](http://www.vranje.org.yu/vranje/spomenici_vranja.html) (April 2007).

putting a crescent on headstones and calling upon the services of the hodja are “Turkish”, not Roma customs, and as such they should be rejected. A certain number of Roma have opted for the Orthodox faith, even christening, no matter how old the person to be christened. A great number, particularly young people and women, are becoming involved in the activities of neo-protestant religious communities (Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Pentacostal Christians, etc). It is not uncommon for different members to subscribe to different faiths within the same family. Moreover, members of the Roma community who have declared themselves Muslim in a diluted form celebrate the main Christian festivals. A member of the Roma community described the current situation as follows:

[5] Here in Vranje every Roma was a Muslim. (...) (*Did they celebrate Kurban-bajram?*) Of course they did in the past. But nowadays they don’t know what they’re celebrating, what should be drunk or why they’re drinking it. Now everyone does his own thing. They don’t keep to the faith. (...) For instance, in the past the Roma buried their dead with a hodja present. Now the hodja doesn’t come any more. People who have been baptised don’t invite a priest or a hodja. Burials have become completely meaningless! (...) Turkish or Roma, it’s all the same thing! They even eat the same things! I spent fifteen years in Germany and I used to socialise with the Turks. I could see exactly that we share a lot of the same things. The way the food is prepared and the customs — very similar customs! Except that we here in Vranje have lost a great deal of that! (...) We’ve lost our religion and we don’t know where we are. (...) It’s only at weddings that some Turkish customs have survived, and even these are slowly disappearing.

The Roma in Vranjska Banja and Djorgovci describe the Vranje Roma as “Turkish” and/or “Albanian Gypsies” because of the Islamic elements in their culture, whereas they describe themselves as “Serbian Gypsies” (Zlatanović 2006: 140–141). By contrast, the Vranje Roma call themselves “Serbian Gypsies” (meaning that they accept the influence of Serbian culture and they use a lot of Serbian words in their speech), while they attribute the epithet “Albanian Gypsies” to the Roma from Bujanovac.

Ethnic identity is a social construction, defined by situation, changeable, and subject to negotiation. For instance, in the Roma from *Gornja Čaršija* these processes unfold like an accelerated film.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> To understand the interaction in relations between the majority and minority groups it must be remembered that the past 15 years have also seen a clear suppression in the self-identification of the majority Serbian population. On the one hand, there has been a wave of ethno-nationalism, homogenisation of identity and cultural purism regarding the influence of others and this has resulted in attempts to eradicate Oriental influences. At the same time, the Oriental elements in the cultural heritage are regarded as something that

### The meaning of kurban in Islam

In Islam *kurban* means a blood sacrifice, which is offered up with the desire to come closer to Allah. On the day of Kurban-Bajram, first of all bajram-namaz is observed, then the second obligation of Muslims is to offer up a kurban. The time of the sacrificial slaughter is precisely determined in the Islamic faith — it starts after observance of bajram-namaz and lasts right up to sunset on the third day of Kurban-Bajram. Any kurban slaughtered outside this time period is considered unacceptable (Čolović 1985: 17, 25–26). There exist five forms of kurban: 1. The kurban slaughtered by obligation on Kurban-Bajram; 2. The promised kurban; 3. The kurban slaughtered for the health and happiness of a newborn child; 4. The kurban to fulfil someone else's wish; 5. The kurban for the soul of a deceased person (*ibid*, 21–22).<sup>11</sup> A kurban can be an ox or a camel and it is slaughtered in the name of seven people if the animal is more than two years old. A kurban can be a ram, a ewe, a female or a male goat, but no younger than one year old. The animal intended for kurban must be large, healthy, and have no physical defects (*ibid*, 23). The kurban is sacrificed in a strictly prescribed manner: it is laid on its left side, all four legs are tied together and a sharp knife is used to sever the two main arteries, throat and windpipe, all this accompanied by the appropriate prayer (*ibid*, 26–29).<sup>12</sup> The meat of the kurban and its throat and windpipe are not sold; the recommendation is that the skin is taken to the mosque, and the meat divided into three parts, of which one part is given to the poor, a second part to neighbours and relatives, and the third part kept for oneself (*ibid*, 29–31). The bones of the kurban are buried deep in the ground so that dogs do not find them. Kurban has a distinct social dimension and this slaughter expresses a Muslim's gratitude to Allah.

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gives Vranje its specific colour and identity on the symbolic map of Serbia, and as such they are highly valued and constantly being (re)manufactured.

<sup>11</sup> Other sources give more or less varying categories of kurban. The choice of this source was governed by the fact that it was published by the Islamic Community of Skopje (FYR of Macedonia), a city with which the Roma of Vranje have close contacts.

<sup>12</sup> The Islamic practice of sacrificing a kurban in the way described is encountering criticism from the animal rights movement. For interesting arguments in defence of the Islamic method of slaughter, see the site of the Board of the Islamic Community of Podgorica: [http://www.monteislam.com/index.php?akcion=columns&main\\_id=104](http://www.monteislam.com/index.php?akcion=columns&main_id=104) (November 2006).

In the Balkan languages the word *kurban*<sup>13</sup> came directly from the Turkish. It is used as a general term for blood sacrifices, even in cases where these are at odds with those prescribed by Islam.<sup>14</sup>

### **Kurban in the ritual system of the Vranje Roma**

In the system of rituals and identity constructions of the Roma in *Gornja Čaršija* kurban is a blood sacrifice which is offered up during the building of a house (a lamb for the foundations), for ‘dedication’ of the house (a ram), at one of the commemoration dates of a deceased person (a ram or ewe, depending on the sex of the departed), for the feast of *Vasilica* (a goose) and the feast of *Erdelez / Djurdjevdan* (a lamb). Therefore, kurban is mandatory on five occasions. However, kurban in the real sense of the word, with the proper attributes, is the ram slaughtered for ‘dedication’ of the house. This act is usually preceded by the appearance of the *sajbija*, the mythical master of the house.<sup>15</sup> This paper will focus especially on the kurban offered for *Vasilica* and *Erdelez* (holy days which play a key part in the thematisation of identity). The story of kurban is a reflection of the Roma identity, the exodus, the Islamic identity, the urban identity, and the complex me/them relations.

### **Vasilica and ‘seeing off’ the goose**

The Roma of Vranje regard *Vasilica* as their most important feast day in the annual cycle.<sup>16</sup> They call it equally *Vasilica* and *Vasuljica*, though the younger and the more educated prefer the first variant. Celebra-

<sup>13</sup> *Kurbān*, -āna, m. (Ar.) 1. A ram or ox slaughtered by Muslims for Kurban Bayram; 2. A sacrifice < Tur. *kurban* < Ar. *gurbān* (Škaljić 1989: 426).

<sup>14</sup> A detailed ethnolinguistic explanation of the concept of *kurban* is given by Uzenjeva 2004: 54–57.

<sup>15</sup> The Serbs in Vranje also have a blood sacrifice they call *kurban*. Nowadays the kurban is offered when laying the foundations of a new house (a lamb or cock) and for the annual commemoration of a dead person (a lamb). In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century around Vranje a song was recorded dealing with the motif of human sacrifice. In it, a man prays to God to grant him a son who would live for 15 years before the man slaughters the *kurban pred Boga* (‘a sacrifice to God’). A son is born to him and when the child reaches 15, the father prepares to offer him up in sacrifice. The mountain fairy then makes an appearance and advises him not to sacrifice the child, but to take two or three sheep instead as a *kurban pred Boga* (‘a sacrifice to God’) (Zlatanović, M.1969: 103–104). Sacrifice of a child and the replacement of human by animal sacrifice can be found in the Bible — the sacrifice of Isaac (I Moses, chap. 22).

<sup>16</sup> Some segments of this chapter have already been published as separate papers: Zlatanović 2003 and Zlatanović 2004.

tion of *Vasilica* is divided in both time and structure into two parts. The first, which could be termed the period of ‘preparation, welcome and celebration’, is firmly ensconced in the calendar (from 12–17 January, though 14 January is the first and main day of the celebration), while the second part — *seeing off the goose* — is a day chosen by each household as it suits them. In order to understand the interpretations of feast days by members of the Roma community, it is important to mention that 14 January is dedicated to *St Vasilije* in the Orthodox calendar. Moreover, it must be remembered that the Serbian Orthodox Church adopted the old Julian calendar in which 13 January represents the start of a new year.<sup>17</sup>

Preparations for *Vasilica* in *Gornja Čaršija* begin on 12 January when the men go into the woods to collect the *badnjak*, a large oak branch. That day the family fasts, usually eating only haricot beans. Late in the evening, but before midnight, geese or turkeys are slaughtered. It must be an odd number of birds (from three to nine), and this number must contain at least one goose. Every family has to have a goose for *Vasilica*, so relatives and neighbours help those who are not able to get hold of one. The head of the house, who does the slaughtering, must be clean, as must the place where the killing takes place. In the past, the geese, too, had to be clean, so they were taken to the river to be washed, but this is no longer the practice today. Before he kills them, the head of the house blesses the birds and the slaughter itself is carried out by the light of a white candle held by a member of the family. In some households the slaughter takes place when the goose is placed upon the *badnjak*. The slaughtered birds, the *kurbani* (“kurbans”), as they are called by the people I spoke to, are left to hang for a time in front of the house. In the past care was taken that the goose was first meticulously washed, before another bird was slaughtered. This ritual frequently lasted till daybreak. Nowadays the poultry is slaughtered when the household members have time to do this for the meat is often frozen. 12 January is reserved for the formal slaughter of a single goose. Every single one of my informants emphasised that all the important activities connected with *Vasilica* take place at night, that the goose is killed at night and eaten at night. They stressed the difference between this and *Djurdjevdan*:

<sup>17</sup> In the socialist period in Serbia, celebrating 13 January as New Year was banned. Since the early 1990s, marked by a retraditionalisation of the society, 13 January has been publicly celebrated as the “Serbian New Year”. I should like to point out here that during the period of Socialism the Roma feast of *Vasilica* was referred to as the “Gypsy New Year”. However, the Roma rejected this term, saying that they were, in fact, celebrating the Serbian New Year when the Serbs themselves dared not.

[6] “Vasilica — everything at night, Djurdjevdan — everything by day”

The eve of *Vasilica*<sup>18</sup> is the evening of 13 January. The men go out to the central square in *Gornja Čaršija*, while the womenfolk stay at home, making supper and smearing henna on the hands of their young daughters. The men return home before midnight, bring in the *badnjak* and bless it. Supper takes place in the family circle and consists of boiled cabbage with the giblets, head, wings and legs of the goose by the light of the burning candle in which the bird was slaughtered. Next day, 14 January, the *položajnik* (fire-lighter) arrives, a young male child with a “pure soul” to wish the members of the household health and happiness. That day the family members arrange a celebration dinner, the candle in whose light the goose was slaughtered is re-lit, and on the table is the obligatory roast goose and *baklava*,<sup>19</sup> which formerly was made with goose fat (all parts of the kurban have to be used). While the goose is roasting and later when it is set down on the table, a special song is sung to it in Serbian “Izgorela sva taj gora” (All those hills were ablaze). This song is sung to each goose in turn. If there are five geese, the song is repeated five times. The song “for the goose” is sung when *Vasilica* is celebrated and also later at the *seeing off the goose*. My informants explained that this is an old Serbian song sung by their fathers and grandfathers. It is interesting to note that this song is not included in any anthologies of folk poetry from southern Serbia, nor was it familiar to any folklore experts in the area whom I consulted.<sup>20</sup> The text of the song appears in different forms; I have chosen two of them. The song makes no mention of the goose,<sup>21</sup> nor the motifs linked with this celebration.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> The informants use the term connected to the New Year.

<sup>19</sup> *Baklava*, f. (Ar.), a sweetmeat < Tur. *baklava* < Ar. *bāqlawā* (Škaljić 1989: 116). In *Gornja Čaršija* baklava is made by placing sheets of filo pastry one on top of the other on a greased baking dish, and in between large quantities of ground walnuts. Then the pastry is cut across diagonally with a sharp knife producing rhomboid shapes. When baked, a syrup of boiled sugar and water is poured over the pie. This is what is called “Turkish baklava” (and the Roma call it by this name also). Baklava is a favourite sweetmeat with the Serbs in Vranje, too, except that they also make other kinds of baklava.

<sup>20</sup> The Roma of Vranje preserve certain layers of Serbian culture in an archaic form. They used constructions in their speech that are no longer in use, not even among older members of the Serbian community, they know old songs, etc. A deeper knowledge of the Serbian culture of Vranje is impossible without the ‘Roma input’.

<sup>21</sup> In Bulgaria, Marushiakova and Popov noted a song linked to this celebration which calls upon a white goose to come and bring happiness (1993: 169).

<sup>22</sup> The song tells how all the hills have burned leaving but a single tree, in one version, a maple, and in another (not presented here) an ash. Then there is mention of fairies

- [7] Aj, izgorela sva taj gora,  
 aj, izgorela, aj, sva taj gora.  
 Aman, sâm ostalo jedno drvo,  
 aman, i toj drvo Stojanovo,  
 aj, i toj drvo, aj, javorovo.  
 Aman, otud idu tri sestrice,  
 aj, otud idu, aj, tri samovile.  
 Aman, oni nosiv zlatan daro,  
 aj, da daruju, aj, sva taj gora.
- [8] Aj, izgorela sva taj gora,  
 aj, izgorela, aj, aj, sva taj gora.  
 Aj, sâm ostade jedno drvo,  
 aj, i toj drvo, aj, aj, javorovo.  
 More, otud idu tri samovile,  
 aj, otud idu, aj, aj, tri samovile.  
 More, će vi uzmev levu nogu,  
 aj, će vi uzmev, aj, aj, desnu ruku.  
 Aman, desnu ruku, obe oči,  
 aj, desnu ruku, aj, aj, obe oči.  
 More, nemojte mi tri sestrice,  
 aj, će vi darujem, aj, aj, svilen daro.  
 Aj, izgorela sva taj gora,  
 Aj, izgorela, aj, aj, sva taj gora.

After this song, another is sung to every member of the family separately, starting with the head of the house:

- [9] Povrna se Staniša, povrna ti,  
 Bog će ti dade vranoga konja,  
 vranoga konja, srebreno sedlo,  
 srebreno sedlo, tugom pozlaćeno.<sup>23</sup>

Only when all this has been sung do those present start eating the roast goose. After the main course, the dish with the *baklava* is brought out.<sup>24</sup> All the family members put a finger on the dish, but the *baklava* is not served until the appropriate song has been sung to it in Turkish. Most of those I interviewed know only one part of this song in different vari-

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who, in one variant, bring a gift, but in another represent danger and have to be appeased with a gift.

<sup>23</sup> The song says that God will give a black horse to the person named and a silver saddle gilded with sadness.

<sup>24</sup> Nowadays *baklava* is made using sunflower oil. Young housewives are completely unaware that you can use goose fat.

ants, all of which could be translated as “sweet fingers”. I present six variants I noted: “Parmak tatli!”; “Tatli parmak!”; “Tatli, tatli, parmak, parmak!”; “Tatli, tatli, tatli, parmakli!”; “Tatli parmakli!”; “Arabam, parmak, parmak!”.<sup>25</sup> The older members of the community recalled the song “for baklava” in its entirety.<sup>26</sup>

During the night they also sing a festive song whose motif, chorus and melody are the same as in the song sung by Šaban Bajramović, a popular singer of Roma songs. The only difference is that as the Vranje Roma perform it the lyrics are much changed and shortened:

[10] Savo šukar dive o Rom kerela,  
guske, ćurke pese vov ćhinela,  
guske, ćurke von ćhinena,  
o pumaro Vasili von kerena.  
Aj, Romalen, Vasilica bahtali neka ovel!  
Aj, Romalen, Vasilica bahtali neka ovel!  
Sa Roma pare trošinena,  
pumare ćhavoren uravena,  
guske, ćurke von ćhinena,  
pumari Vasilica von ćherena.  
Aj, Romalen, Vasilica bahtali neka ovel!<sup>27</sup>

Are we dealing here with a traditional song that has been artistically adapted or the other way round? That is an open question.<sup>28</sup> One of the older people I spoke to explained this song as follows:

<sup>25</sup> *Tatli*, indecl. adj. and noun. (Tur.) 1. As an adjective: sweet, 2. As a noun: sweet meal < Tur. *tatli*.

*Parmak*, m. (Tur.) 1. plank, 2. finger < Tur. *parmak* (Škaljić 1989: 603, 511).

<sup>26</sup> I recorded the song, but the text is in fragments, with certain words being correctly pronounced in Turkish. However, they do not fit with each other. It may be assumed that these are archaic forms in Turkish, i.e. an archaic dialect of the Turkish language. All the above explanations of the text of the song were given to me by Turkish expert Dr Snežana Petrović of the Etymological Department of the Serbian Language Institute of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and I should like to take this opportunity of thanking her most warmly.

<sup>27</sup> The transcription of this and all the other songs in the Roma language included in this article was done with the greatest care by Baja Saitović-Lukin, a teacher from Prokuplje. I take this opportunity of offering him my heartfelt thanks for his help and cooperation.

<sup>28</sup> Šaban Bajramović, in an interview for Serbia’s most popular newspaper, said: “I have managed to save more than 700 authentic original Gypsy songs from oblivion. Some of them have brought me world fame. Many of them were composed, re-worked or finished by me.” (*Politika* No. 33664, 29. 7. 2007, p. 7).



[11] This is our jolliest song (...) The song talks about how a beautiful day is coming. The Roma will kill geese and turkeys to celebrate their Vasilica, their happy day. And... 'Hi, hi, Romalen, let's have a joyful Vasilica!' The second verse is about how the Roma buy their children new clothes, new shoes, and spend their money on a goose for Vasilica. (...) (*Was this song sung when you were a child?*) Yes. (*So it's an old song?*) An old song.

Another song is sung at night, with variations on the theme of life's transience, which gives a valuable insight into the Roma interpretation of Islam:

[12] Ko marela adala da porte,  
 Ko marela, djanam, adala da porte?  
 Marel pese Jašar o šukar thaj devel,  
 Marel pese, djanam, o šukar taj devel.  
 Vikinen mange daje adale djuvale odža,  
 vikinen mange daje adale djuvale odža.  
 Te dikhela da, djanam, sostar sinjum nasvalo,  
 te dikhela da, djanam, sostar sinjum nasvalo.  
 Alo pese odža ko barvalo Jašari,  
 alo pese, djanam, odža ko barvalo Jašari.  
 Phrav mange, phrav mange odža,  
 phrav mange, phrav mange odža, lele, to kitapi,  
 te dike da odža sostar sijum nasvalo.  
 Phravda pese odža, lele, po kitapi,  
 phravda, phravda odža, lele, po kitapi,  
 te dike da odža sostar sijum nasvalo.  
 Ka da tuke odža šinikova frlja,  
 ka da tuke odža šinikova zlato.  
 Hijel džukel Jašar, lele, te frljende,  
 hijel balo Jašar, lele, te frljende.  
 Nasinjan nasvalo, lele, taro dušmanja,  
 Već injan da Jašar taro šukar devel.

One of the older people I discussed with translated and explained the song:

[13] You know how it goes in Serbian. Some man called Jašar gets ill. He was very rich. And he said that he was ill and asked them to bring the hodja, and the hodja to bring the *kitap*<sup>29</sup>, to open the kitap and see what he was suffering from. So they call the hodja and he comes along and opens the kitap. And he says to him: 'Odža, *djuvalejo*',... *djuvaleja*, you know that... 'you lousy hodja, open your kitap and see what it is I'm suffering

<sup>29</sup> *Ĉitāb-āba, ĉitāp-āpa, kūtāb-āba* m. (Ar.) book, law, a book containing religious teachings and regulations < Tur. *kitab, kitap* < Ar. *kitāb* (Škaljić 1989: 194).

from. And for that, hodja, I'll give you for *šinik*<sup>30</sup> some *frlja* — that's gold, but in Gypsy we say *frlja*. *Frlja* — that means ducats. Then he goes and says a second time: 'You see what I'm suffering from, and I'll give you some gold for *šinik*.' And when the hodja opened the kitap, he saw that it wasn't the *dušman*<sup>31</sup>, but God who had decided it was time for him to die. The hodja says to him: 'Jašar', he says... how shall I put it... bloody hell... how do you say it? 'Your gold'... they used to call it... because the Turks didn't eat pork. Dogs and pigs, that was about the same for them... How shall I put it... it's a bit embarrassing! 'A dog can shit on your gold because I don't need it, because it's not the *dušman* you are sick from. And a pig can shit on it because you're not sick from anything man has done, you're sick from God and I can't save you.'

*Vasilica* continues to be celebrated on the ensuing days: with outside visits, friendly chats, and the 'Roma Ball'.

The second part of the feast — *seeing off the goose* — is celebrated by each household on the day of their choice, but it must be before *Erdelez* or *Djurdjevdan*. In the past, when there was no technical possibility of freezing meat, this part of the ritual took place over a period of three to seven days after *Vasilica*. Nowadays most families 'see off' the goose on *Pročka*<sup>32</sup> (they spontaneously link individual rites and explanations to the Orthodox calendar, with which they are very familiar). On this occasion a dinner is prepared to which relatives are invited. A goose, a whole goose, must be prepared. While the meat is roasting, twigs are added from the *badnjak* or oak branch, which is carefully looked after in the house. Before dinner, the head of the house blesses the meal: "May God grant us good health and happiness." Prior to cutting up the roast goose, a special song is sung to it. After dinner and before midnight, the head of the household takes a lighted candle and, accompanied by the family members and guests, goes out to the house gate, even into the street, to 'see off' an imaginary goose. At this point he says: "Come on, goose, safe journey and come back to us next year with good fortune", "Come on, travel in good health, and come back next year", and the like.

<sup>30</sup> *Šinik*, m. (Greek) a hollow measuring device for wheat, varying in weight in different areas < Tur. *şinik* (Škaljić 1989: 589–590). In southern Serbia *šinik* is a land measure, meaning 100 sq.m. In this song *šinik* indicates a container in which you can put enough gold to sow an area of 100 square metres.

<sup>31</sup> *Dušmān*, *düşman*, *düşmanin*, m. (Pers.) enemy, opponent < Tur. *düşman* < Pers. *dušmen* (Škaljić 1989: 229–230).

<sup>32</sup> *Pročka* is a local name for *Poklade* (Shrove Tuesday), the last day before the onset of the Easter fast. On that day relatives visit each other and seek forgiveness for any offence given during the year.

The celebration of *Vasilica* clearly demonstrates the complex layers of various cultures. It remains an open question whether the feast got its name from the Christian saint, whose day it celebrates. *Vasilica* exhibits obvious elements of the Christmas and New Year celebrations, intertwined with clusters of symbols from the deeper layers of the Roma culture. In *Gornja Čaršija* the most popular explanation for the origin of the celebration is the goose that saved the Roma, or rather, the Roma child that was drowning, so in showing their gratitude to the goose, the Roma survived as a nation (cf. Kolev 2002: 67). At this point I give three transcripts of interpretations of how the goose represents a symbol of salvation for the Roma [14–16]. Equally interesting are the explanations linking the origin of the festival with the goddess Kali [17], and with the sensitive relationship between Serbian and Turkish culture [18].

[14] There were great monsoon rains in India and one village was flooded. (...) A child found itself in the water when a flock of geese came by and saw the child drowning in the water. The leader of the flock grabbed the child in its beak and flew with it to the top of a mountain. The goose spotted a large ram and released the child onto its back. Thanks to the ram and the goose, the child survived.

[15] I heard this from some people who write history. They said that the Roma celebrated 14 January with a goose, that there was no other kurban with the Roma. (...) This *Vasilica* is celebrated, so I heard from older people, and I am 65, that one of our Roma was drowning in water and that there was a goose nearby. He held on to the goose and the goose pulled him out and that's how we have survived for maybe a thousand years. Thanks to him holding onto the goose, the Gypsy was saved and came out of the water.

[16] When there was a big battle and when people got killed, some of them threw themselves into the sea, some managed to swim and some didn't. One of them, while he was swimming, grabbed hold of a goose and the goose pulled him out. Then he came to some country, some village, and hid there, but he was dying of hunger. Then, at night, he got hold of a rag and lit it like a candle to see what he was killing, and that only God would know that he had slaughtered an animal. That's why we slaughter at night. And he slaughtered the goose. And next day he and his children ate the goose. And then, what was he to do, since he had come to this village, he had to earn a living, anyway he knew how, and as he knew the blacksmith's trade, he opened up a smithy, and that's how he survived. But he says to himself: 'It was that goose that saved me, I must buy a goose, to celebrate.' And that's how the celebration remained. (...) When he had been in the mountains before, a lamb appeared. He caught the lamb and slaughtered it. He remembered the date and when he had come to that village or town and started to work, so when he had earned some money, he remembered and said to himself: 'That goose saved me, I have to celebrate. And if it hadn't been for that lamb, none of us would be here today' and that's how these feast days began.

[17] While the Roma were in India (...) they had only one goddess, the goddess Kali. Translated the goddess Kali means the goddess of anger, goddess of rage. When the winter monsoons came, people would offer her sacrifices, feathered animals. Because that's how they saw her, as a woman with feathers. That's how they pictured her. Like a woman with feathers. (...) So that's how we came to celebrate Vasuljica. In January, 14 January, when the winter monsoons begin. Then we slaughter geese and turkeys in honour of the goddess Kali. Not because of St Vasilije or Vasuljica. (...) But to appease the goddess Kali so that these winter monsoons aren't too rainy, so there are no floods, and so on. Later, when the summer monsoons begin in early or mid-May, the dry period starts in India, and then people go hungry. Then the Roma, I mean, my ancestors, used to offer sacrifices to the goddess Kali, also in the form of birds. And in order to appease her, so that there won't be any drought, any hunger. And now we celebrate that as Djurdjevdan here. These feasts days of ours have nothing at all to do with the old Serbian New Year or with Djurdjevdan. In time, the feast got moved and moved again and now it turns out that when the Serbs celebrate, and we were always loyal to the state and these festivals got moved so that now it's considered that we celebrate the old Serbian New Year and Djurdjevdan, whereas they have nothing to do with it. I repeat, that's what I think.

[18] It's not written down when Vasilica started. But we all know about Djurdjevdan. After the time of the haiduks, Sveti Djurdje<sup>33</sup> (Saint George) — Djurdjevdan, that's an Orthodox festival which the church celebrates nowadays. We know that. But Vasilica, whether this was Saint Vasilije's Day or the old Serbian New Year, no one can yet tell us for sure and there is nothing written down. Some say that a Roma was drowning and a goose saved him. I don't accept this version. Because we Roma, during the time of the Kingdom (of Yugoslavia), while there was a kingdom, and maybe even further back, during... the Roma and Serbs have been here for ages, from Turkish times... The Roma didn't have so many rights then. But the majority, because the Turks were here for so long, five hundred years, the majority were Muslims. I think that's how it was. The Serbs celebrated New Year or Saint Vasilije, but they always celebrated it with suckling pig. But as we were Muslims, we didn't want to... they didn't eat, I mean, my father and grandfather died without ever tasting pork! And then all the Roma, to avoid this, took a goose. To celebrate that day, to make some sort of feast, they took a goose. (...) Just look at the Roma in Vojvodina, north of Belgrade, the Roma over the river Danube! There weren't any Turks there. And they don't celebrate Vasilica. (...) And in Belgrade only those

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<sup>33</sup> My respondent calls Saint George *Djurdje* instead of *Djordje* and so reveals his distance from the majority culture (yet is trying to show how different he is). This man I spoke to was selected to talk about the origin of *Vasilica* on the local TV station, which is financed from the council's budget. The complete text from the programme is given in Zlatanović 2004: 162–163.

who fled Kosovo celebrate it. (...) The Bulgarian Roma celebrate it. But the Bulgarian Roma remained true Muslims. (...) Then the Roma in Macedonia celebrate it. So this means, all of us down here, in the southern part, where the Turks were, we celebrate it.

These festivals, which are characterised by a complete maze of symbols, play a key part in thematising identity. The Vranje Roma interpret *Vasilica*, their most important feast day, in different ways (ranging from insistence on what is authentically Roma [17], through repetition of their exodus, real or imagined [14–16], to the need to fit into the ruling Serbian culture [18], by telling stories about themselves. The most widespread explanation is the legend about how the goose saved a drowning Roma. Regardless of the differences in the (frequently confusing) interpretations of how the feast came into being, the goose remains the identity symbol of the Roma survival.

The Roma celebrate *Vasilica* over several regions of the Balkans though there are variations in the structure of the festival and the explanations that accompany it. The Roma in Bulgaria call the festival *Vasilica* or *Vasiljevdan* (13 and 14 January), while 15 January is *Bango Vasil* (literally: “Lame Vasil”). The festival is distinguished by the goose as the kurban (Marušiakova/Popov 1993: 168–169; Kolev 2002: 35). The celebration of *Bango Vasil* is explained by legends which Kolev divides into three groups: 1. *Bango Vasil* is St Vasilije who builds bridges and saves the Roma from drowning; 2. He is a lame shepherd who saves a Roma child; 3. A flock of geese saved the Roma from the Egyptian army, carrying them over the Red Sea (Kolev 2002: 35, 63–67). In Serbia, Tihomir Djordjević has recorded a number of myths containing Biblical motifs on the Red Sea crossing and the Great Flood (1933: 122–144). According to one legend, St. Vasilije rescued a Gypsy woman drowning in the sea during the Great Flood of the Bible. As an expression of their gratitude, her descendants celebrate St Vasilije’s Day (*ibid*, 132). Through the creation of etiological legends, the Roma try to assure themselves respect and acceptance by the “outside” world, but in the spirit of the religious tradition of the society in which they live (Marušiakova/Popov 2000: 82). For this reason, Biblical characters such as St Vasilije are presented as protectors of the Roma (*op. cit*).

### **Erdelez (Djurdjevdan — St George’s Day)**

*Djurdjevdan* (St George’s Day) falls on 6 May and is one of the more important festivals in the Orthodox calendar and Serbian culture as a whole. On the same day, 6 May, the Roma celebrate *Erdelez*, a name which, in their desire to adapt to and fit into the broader social framework, they use increasingly rarely, preferring to call it by its Serbian title.

[19] Its true title is *Erdelezi*. To be precise, I mean, I know, my mother used to say: ‘We’ve got to celebrate *Erdelezi*’. The Roma in Skoplje use its proper name, they say *Erdelezi*. But Djurdjevdan is an Orthodox feast.

[20] For Djurdjevdan we say Djurdjevdan, but its proper name is *Erdelezi*.

*Djurdjevdan* and *Erdelez* have some common denominators: going out into the countryside, picking plants, slaughtering a lamb, etc. In this way, the Roma could, indeed, show to the dominant Serbian culture that they were celebrating its feast day. The Serbian media stress the fact that the Roma celebrate this day, but referring to it as *Djurdjevdan*. Such features are often accompanied by the comment that the Roma celebrate and preserve a holiday which the Serbs themselves are in danger of forgetting. And on such occasions they only portray the elements that are shared, that have been chosen by both groups.

*Hidirellez* is a traditional Turkish celebration which falls on 6 May in the Gregorian, and 23 April, in the Julian calendar. It marks the end of winter and beginning of summer. It is celebrated in the countryside, amid greenery and near water. It is linked to the prophet *Hizir*. There are different theories on the origin of the festival. According to some, it belongs to the cultures of Mesopotamia and Anadolia, while others see it as originating in pre-Islamic, central Asian culture.<sup>34</sup> Due to the manner in which the Vranje Roma celebrate this day, it may be assumed that they adopted this from the Turks when the Turks ruled the Balkans or even before this time. For instance, one of the features of *Hidirellez* is a complete spring-cleaning of the house, for it is believed that *Hizir* will not visit houses that have not been scrubbed clean. The Roma of Vranje not only clean their houses obsessively before this holiday, but whitewash the inside of their houses every single year. In any case, the houses of the Vranje Roma are meticulously clean, nicely furnished, and decorated with lots of small ornaments and multicoloured bunches of artificial flowers.

The key element in the festival is the lamb as the kurban. It must be white and well-nourished. It is usually bought one or two days beforehand. The celebration starts from 5 May after 3 p.m. when people go to *Odžin kamen* (the hodja’s stone), which stands on the hill above the town, a good kilometer from *Gornja Čaršija*. *Odžin kamen* is a cult site,<sup>35</sup> where people go

<sup>34</sup> See the website of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey, a text entitled “Hidirellez Traditions”. <http://www.kultur.gov.tr/EN/BelgeGoster.aspx?17A16AE30572D313A781CAA92714FCE06A5A2497543C96C6> (May 2007); Marushiakova/Popov 2007.

<sup>35</sup> A useful survey of Roma cult sites over a broad area of south-east Serbia is given by Djordjević 2005. Yet Vranje is left out of this survey.

exclusively on the eve of *Erdelez*. In the view of an older man I talked to, the Turks also used to go out to visit this stone. *Odžin kamen* is a cliff, at the foot of which is the grave of a Turkish dignitary, whom the Roma call “(a certain) St Babalar”. Twenty years ago people went out in their droves to *Odžin kamen*, where they lit candles and stayed until evening. On 5 May 2006, when I went out with a group of Roma to *Odžin kamen*, it happened that access to the cliff and the grave was covered with thorns and underbrush, which we had great trouble making our way through. My guides lit white candles on the outcrop of the cliff, kissed it three times, prayed for good health, and bowed to it. One of them poured some beer onto the ground before praying, indicating that the drink was intended for the soul of the deceased person, then he drank the rest himself. Even though it was obvious that nowadays only a small number of people visit the stone, what older people had to tell me indicated that it is a structural part of the festival.

According to the ideal model, the lambs are slaughtered early in the morning on *Djurdjevdan* itself when the young people return from the river bringing willow branches and flowers, which they use to decorate the lamb’s neck before it is killed. Some of the people I spoke to explained that it had been the custom in the past to slaughter the lamb on the eve of *Djurdjevdan* when they returned from *Odžin kamen* bearing flowers. During my time in the field the procedure was different. On 5 May bits of kurban meat hung in front of the houses decorated with willow. The head of the house, if he carried out the slaughter himself, had to be freshly bathed.<sup>36</sup> Mostly this act is carried out by a professional butcher from the settlement, who later takes and sells the animal skin. The lamb’s meat is immediately cut up after it is slaughtered and set aside for various stages of the celebration. Children’s faces are smeared with the blood of the kurban, so that they remain red-cheeked and healthy.

Before dawn on 6 May young people and children gather on the central square in *Gornja Čaršija* and dance to the music of a brass band. Following the musicians, they go *na rosu* (into the morning dew), meaning the river above the town. There they wash themselves, comb their hair, pick willow branches and wrap these round themselves. It is believed that on *Djurdjevdan* the water from the river acquires healing properties and that the plants have a magical effect on one’s health and sexual relations. That morning, the women go out into the settlement carrying trays of food which they distribute to each other and passers-by for the souls of the

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<sup>36</sup> The evening before *Djurdjevdan* members of the household bathe in water to which are added plants and a red-painted egg kept back from Easter. This is believed to bring good health.

dead. The tray always has on it lamb's liver, fresh vegetables such as onion and *samsa*<sup>37</sup> and *sutlijaš*<sup>38</sup>. The women are not allowed to eat fresh Spring food (this ban applies particularly to lamb, mutton, milk and cheese) until they have distributed food for the souls of the dead, for it is believed that otherwise they have eaten before the dear departed. The ban on eating Spring food before it has been given for the souls of the dead on *Djurdjevdan* is also valid for the menfolk, but they usually only adhere to this for a couple of years after the death of their loved ones.

The festive lunch is held exclusively in the family circle. It consists of a thick soup of lamb's giblets, roast lamb, fresh vegetables, *samsa* and *sutlijaš*. The afternoon is given over to mutual visits and a big party on the square in *Gornja Čaršija*.

Next day, *Gornja Čaršija* 'moves' to the graveyard. The festive food is placed on the graves for the souls of the departed. People stay at the graveyard from early morning till late afternoon, and the atmosphere is just like on a picnic.

While *Vasilica* is primarily a family holiday, *Djurdjevdan* involves the whole community, including the dead. *Vasilica* is celebrated at home and at night; *Djurdjevdan* means noisy merrymaking and open spaces.<sup>39</sup>

### Kurban for the house (in 2 scenes)

The ritual of offering a blood sacrifice when building a house or other structure is widespread in the Balkans (see Arnaudov 1920). It may have local particularities, but it generally means offering a sacrifice when laying the foundations. Ethnographic literature rarely mentions a blood sacrifice for a finished building, intended for its mythical owner. The Roma of *Gornja Čaršija* practice kurban for both occasions.

Kurban is required for the start of construction of a home. The lamb must be a male, white, well-nourished and horned. The lamb's head is built into the foundations. The liver and other offal are given to the poor. The meat of the slaughtered animal is then cooked as a *kapama*<sup>40</sup> and

<sup>37</sup> *Samsa*, f. (Tur.) a kind of pastry sweetened with syrup (Redhouse 2000: 982; TR 1977: 749). In the Vranje area a savoury pie filled with a mixture of jogurt and pureed garlic (Zlatanović, M. 1998: 355).

<sup>38</sup> *Sutlijaš*, m. (Tur.–Pers.) a cold sweetmeat made of rice, milk and sugar (Škaljić 1989: 576).

<sup>39</sup> For a description of the celebration of *Vasilica* and *Djurdjevdan* over a wide area of south-eastern Serbia, see Djurović/Djordjević 1996; Jašić 2001: 53–58.

<sup>40</sup> *Kapama*, f. (Tur.) a meat dish with vegetables cooked in a closed pot < Tur. *kapama* (Škaljić 1989: 393). In *Gornja Čaršija kapama* is prepared as follows: the meat is



given to the builders for their lunch. The eating of kurban meat on this occasion is strictly forbidden for the members of the household. The slaughter of the animal to be sacrificed is carried out by a professional butcher and he is given a new shirt as a gift. My informants explained to me that, if all the prescribed procedures followed when laying the foundations, there is no need later to make a *zijafet* sacrificing a ram to the house's mythical owner. However, besides the sacrifice offered for the foundations, some households also feel the need to offer up a *zijafet*<sup>41</sup>.

*Zijafet* is considered the ultimate family celebration. In terms of the number of guests, the merrymaking, the feast prepared, the finery worn and the expenses involved, the people I talked to rated it equal to a wedding. *Zijafet*, just like a wedding, is filmed on camera and shown later to the guests with great pleasure. In the discourse of the respondents this celebration is called 'dedication' of the house. Those invited to this celebration congratulate the members of the household with the words: "Bahtalo svećenje!" ("Happy Dedication!"). *Zijafet* is often arranged out of necessity: *sajbija*<sup>42</sup> was called by my respondents 'protector of the house' or 'master of the house'. He starts to appear and harass the household members, often until they are completely exhausted.<sup>43</sup> Although it is not a rule,

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chopped up with onion and herbs and braised over an open fire. It is then turned out into a shallow dish and baked in the oven. It is like a traditional roast in appearance and taste and the Roma refer to it as such when describing it.

<sup>41</sup> *Zijáfet*, m. (Ar.) a feast; lunch or dinner with various dishes for a large number of guests. < Tur. *ziyafet* < ar. *diyāfā* (Škaljić 1989: 653). The Roma in Vranje use the expression *zijafet* exclusively as the name for the ritual sacrifice of the sheep to the mythical owner of the house, and for the celebration that accompanies it.

<sup>42</sup> *Sahibija* (*saibija*), m. (Ar.) owner, master, head of the house < Tur. *sahib*, *sahip* < Ar. *sāhib* (Škaljić 1989: 542).

<sup>43</sup> For the broad territory covered by the belief in *sajbija*, see Plotnikova 2004: 680–684. The author gives an overview of the term itself and the superstitions linked with the mythical master of the location. The belief in *sajbija* as the mythical master of the house also figures in Serbian culture in the area investigated and has been dealt with in the literature. Vuka Pop-Mladenova in the story "Sajbija" writes that a house in *Gornja Čaršija* inhabited in the past by a Turkish bey and his wives and later bought by a Serb has a *sajbija* — its master of the house. He is invisible, lives in the walls of the house but comes out by night and wanders around causing havoc. After the Serbian family moved out, he calmed down, but resumed his activity when Nata, the main character in the short story, became a widow (Pop-Mladenova 1972: 93–97). The power held over the house by the *sajbija* is likewise depicted in the proverb: "I have changed a hundred bosses, but I'm still the *sajbija* in my own house" (the house may change its owners, but its chief master, the *sajbija*, remains). This proverb figures in a collection under the section heading "power" (Dimitrijević 1935: 175). In the area around Vranje a form also exists in the feminine gender: *sajbika* — "the snake that guards the house" (Zlatanović, M 1998: 353).

he first picks on the women and girls. He comes to them in dreams night after night and threatens to do them harm, to injure someone close to them or hurt them personally. He threatened one woman that her five-year-old daughter would die if she did not make a kurban to him. And he insisted that on that occasion both she and her daughter should be dressed in rich white garments decorated with white jewels. He even got hold of this woman by day, when she was awake, and threatened that he would throw her down the stairs or from the attic. At times this experience was so unpleasant that the woman fainted. He seized upon another woman, who was pregnant, and told her that he would not allow her to bear the child or that he would smother her at the birth.<sup>44</sup> Small girls often dream of him and wake up in tears. Their inexplicable unease, the fact that they cannot get to sleep or that they are forever crying are seen as the work of the *sajbija*. One girl described the appearance of the *sajbija* as follows:

[21] The *sajbija* is invisible, You can't see him. You just hear his voice. He comes in your sleep, he comes to somebody, someone hears him and talks to him, and there can be someone else in the same room, but he doesn't hear a thing. Only the person he comes to hears him. The one he's come for, he sees him, no one else. (...) It's horrible until you do the dedication. When you do that, you're at peace again.

The *sajbija* can appear to men as well, though, judging by the stories, in a much less dramatic way. One man told me that he dreamed that he was buying a ram for *zijafet*. Later, in reality, everything happened exactly as he had dreamed it — what the ram looked like, the village where he went to buy it, his journey home with the ram, and so on. The *sajbija* tormented one family for a long time despite the fact that they live and work abroad. They held off organising *zijafet* for a while, but out of fear of the possible consequences, they were forced to come to Vranje and make *zijafet* before their daughter's wedding. All the people I spoke to were emphatic that once they had decided to organise *zijafet*, they set a firm date for it and made a promise to the *sajbija* ("We'll do what we owe you. You give us health, and we'll do what we owe you"), and thereafter he left them alone. When they make this promise the members of the household gather and ask the *sajbija* to give them a couple of months' time so that they can prepare what is necessary. Great effort is made to organise this celebration in the summer. Some people who were critically ill were

<sup>44</sup> Psychoanalytically speaking, the appearance of the *sajbija* could be deemed a female fantasy in a patriarchal community. One girl told me that she had dreamed him as a big man with lovely eyes. Describing how the *sajbija* harassed both her and her mother at the same time, she was of the view that he did not appear to men as he was a man himself.

obliged to arrange it in the winter, which was awkward for putting up guests. *Zijafet* is the type of celebration which entails boarding guests in the house or, at least, in some outbuilding in the yard, but not with neighbours or in a restaurant. Some families do not even wait for the *sajbija* to appear to them, but to avoid problems, they organise this celebration if they are able to financially. *Zijafet* is held exclusively on a Thursday because this is considered a good day.

The ram selected for *zijafet* is a kurban with all the designated attributes. It is male, white, well developed and a handsome animal, with curved horns and no blemishes. It carries quite a price, but there is no bargaining in this case. A ram which satisfies these criteria is rarely to be found in the marketplace; it is sought in the surrounding villages. From the moment it is purchased, the head of the house treats it with the utmost deference and gentleness.

The ram is brought to the house on Wednesday afternoon and there it stays for a few hours. In the evening, the members of the house, accompanied by musicians, lead it to the house of one of their relatives which has been 'dedicated' and there it spends the night. The relatives who take over the animal take special care of it. They do not sleep the whole night, but dance or sit beside the sheep with food and drink, caress it, kiss it and feed it sugar. On the floor of the room they place a white sheet and a pillow for the sheep. These are specially bought for the occasion. The members of the household where the *zijafet* is to take place do not sleep that night either.

At dawn on Thursday, the members of the family celebrating the *zijafet* put on their best clothes and dance in front of their house. All the women, whether family or guests, are dressed in *šalvare*<sup>45</sup>. In the semantic system of the Roma of *Gornja Čaršija*, *šalvare* represent the most elegant form of dress and they are worn on only two occasions: at weddings, when the women dance *svekrvino kolo* (mother-in-law's round dance) (see Zlatanović 2002) and for the 'dedication' of the house. All family members lead the *kolo* with a wreath of flowers in their hand, which they will later use to decorate the sheep. Then, again accompanied by musicians, they set off for the house of their relatives where they left the sheep for safekeeping. To the sound of music and dancing, they hang the wreath of flowers round the neck of the sheep. The wreath is woven from box (an evergreen shrub), red flowers and red thread. Red is a powerful apotropaion, denoting blood, life, birth, joy and fire. The ram is decorated, but is also protected and closed in by a wreath/a circle of powerful apotropaionic

<sup>45</sup> *Šalvare*, pl. t. (Pers.), very wide pantaloons < Tur. *şalvar* < pers. *šalwār* (Škaljić 1989: 580). Cf. *dimije*, pl. t. (Greek) baggy women's pantaloons < Tur. *dimi* (Škaljić 1989: 218).

strength. Banknotes are likewise pinned onto the wreath. At around 11 a.m. the sheep is brought to the house where the *zijafet* is to be to the sound of music.

Care of the animal is now taken over by the man who is to carry out the act of sacrifice. He also took part in decorating the sheep. He is the most important person in the ritual and after the act has been completed he will be gifted with three things (a shirt and similar presents). Those present will all offer him their congratulations: “Bahtalo daro! Sa stipnate akare!” (“Enjoy your gift! May you wear it in good health!”). Before he proceeds to slaughter the sheep he gives it brandy to drink so that, in his words, the animal is in good spirits. Then he leads it all round the house. If the house has several storeys, then only around the ground floor. At the spot where the ram itself falls the slaughtering is done. The moment when the sheep falls is the highpoint of the proceedings. The family members come up to it and kiss it. At the spot where the ram chose to fall a hole is dug (no matter which room this is or if there is a parquet floor covering or not). Cutting off the head of the ram and the entire slaughter, which is imminent, is done in the house on the spot which the sacrificial animal itself chose. Offering this sacrifice up to the *sajbija* is carried out in such a way as to appear a voluntary sacrifice. The head of the slaughtered animal is placed in the hole that has been dug and so is turned that it faces east (in the discourse of the respondents “facing the sunset”). Round the head is placed the wreath of flowers which the sacrificed animal wore. And all the kurban blood is likewise poured into the hole. Those present throw in small coins. The hole is closed and during the week following a fire is lit daily at this spot. The kurban meat is divided up, the best bits first, as these will be roasted and placed in the attic where supper will be laid out for the *sajbija*. The liver, spleen and other entrails are immediately taken out of the house and given to the poor. It is critical that the entire ritual sacrifice be completed by 12 noon.

All day long, almost literally, the song “Sajbija” is sung. This is part and parcel of the ritual. Roma singer Šaban Bajramović recorded the song “Sajbija” for the film “Andjeo čuvar” (Guardian Angel), directed in 1987 by Goran Paskaljević, which deals with the problem of the sale of Roma children in Italy. Is it a traditional Roma song adapted by this popular singer (incidentally, he lives in the city of Niš in south Serbia) or has the song been adopted thanks to his interpretation of it? This is a question I prefer to leave open.<sup>46</sup> When discussing this song, the people I talked to

<sup>46</sup> This song is sung in Niš during *zijafet* (Jašić 2001: 52), but also in Leskovac and Prokuplje — other towns in south Serbia.

proudly stressed the fact that it was sung by Šaban Bajramović. They explained that this was an old Roma song which used to be sung in a somewhat altered version in Vranje before the popular singer recorded it for the film. I taped two versions of it in *Gornja Čaršija*:

[22] Amo babi baba, sunoro me dikhaljum,  
 E khereso suno, e khereso suno.  
 Zijafeti te kerav sa e Romen te vikinav.  
 Zijafeti te kerav sa e Romen te vikinav.  
 E khereso suno, štare duvarjenca,  
 amo dade, baba, amo daje baba.  
 Zijafeti te kerav sa e Romen te vikinav.  
 Zijafeti te kerav sa e Romen te vikinav.  
 O angumno duvari (...) rodela,  
 o paluno bijav te ikljovela,  
 amo daje baba.  
 Zijafeti te kerav sa e Romen te vikinav.  
 Zijafeti te kerav sa e Romen te vikinav.<sup>47</sup>

[23] Ah, moj babi, babi, sunoro thaj dikhljum,  
 e čhereso suno, e čhereso suno.  
 E čhereso suno, štarje duvarjengo,  
 ah, moj babi, babi, ah, moj devla babi.  
 Mi Romi nasvali thaj mo tihno čavoro,  
 Leko lenge nane ko suno me dikhljum.  
 So te ćerav ćororo kaj me leko te rodav.  
 So te ćerav ćororo kaj me leko te rodav.<sup>48</sup>

At different stages of the celebration when those taking part address the *sajbija*, they call him “babi”. It’s the same at the beginning of this song. Sung in the first person, this song tells how the singer dreamed of his own house and his own four walls. He says that his wife has fallen ill and their small child, too. He cannot find a cure for them. He asks where he should look for a remedy and what he, poor soul, should do. In the chorus, he says — I will organise *zijafet* and invite all the Roma.

After the sacrifice, the guests go their different ways. They come together again in the evening, in an even greater number. The carousing continues to the sound of a brass band.

<sup>47</sup> This is the version by Šaban Bajramović. I was given the recording in *Gornja Čaršija*.

<sup>48</sup> This version is sung by a singer called Cane from *Gornja Čaršija*. In this rendering the term *zijafet* does not appear.

At around 11.30 p.m. all the members of the house, including any small children, walk round the house three times and kiss its corners. They all carry a lighted candle in their hands. The head of the house goes first, he too with a lighted candle in one hand, and a bottle of plum brandy in the other from which he sprays the corners of the house. His wife behind him sprays the corners with a bunch of basil, which she dips into a bowl of water. They then enter the house and repeat the same routine — kissing all the inside corners of the house. All the while they sing the song “Sajbija”.

When this segment of the ritual is ended, dinner is laid out in the attic for the *sajbija*.<sup>49</sup> Carrying lighted candles and the food to be served, the family members climb to the attic. On the floor they spread out a white tablecloth specially bought for the occasion. The plates and cutlery, as well as the white towel left beside the dinner so that the *sajbija* can wipe his hands, are also bought specially for this purpose. The dinner is served carefully and beside it the household members leave the candles they were holding. The dinner consists of *djuveč*<sup>50</sup> made from kurban meat and served in an earthenware pot. He may also be served a pie made of filo pastry, fruit juice, tea, red wine, etc. The family members kneel around the food, bowing and kissing the floor. They pray to the *sajbija* for good health, addressing him by the pet name — “babi”. This is what they usually say:

[24] “Deamen sastipe, vestipe te iljadina amare čhavenca, unukohhenca” (freely translated as: “Give us health and strength so that we may enjoy long life with our children and grandchildren.” “Iljadina” is a word borrowed from the Serbian, meaning, in this context, “may we live a thousand years”).

[25] “Te iljadina amaro čhavenca, sa so radidam amare čhavenca, ikaldjam tuće” (freely translated as: “That we may enjoy long life with our children, for everything we have done and earned, we have brought before you”).

All these acts take place a little before midnight. The dinner must be laid out before midnight: 12 o’clock — both midday and midnight — are deadlines by which the different forms of sacrifice or kurban to the *sajbija* must be completed and great attention is paid to this.

<sup>49</sup> Arnaudov writes that in the Nevrokopi region (today south-west Bulgaria) both Christians and Muslims believe that every house has its *stopana*. He, too, is left food in the attic. On this occasion Christians slaughter a black hen and Muslims a black ram. Women carry out the ritual in the case of the Christians, while with the Muslims it is three men, of whom one should be a hodja. (Arnaudov 1920: 255–256).

<sup>50</sup> *Djuveč*, m. (Tur.) a food dish consisting of pieces of meat mixed with rice, potato and onion and baked in a deep earthenware pot, also called a *djuveč* < Tur. *güveç* (Škaljić 1989: 259).

It is only after dinner has been served for the *sajbija* that the table is laid for the guests. The meat of the slaughtered sheep is prepared as a *kapama*. All those present are duty bound to partake of the kurban meat because it is deemed holy. In this way, through this participation, all are united in the reality of the *communitas* (Turner 1969: 96). The family members, however, are strictly forbidden to eat kurban meat before daybreak.

Since the meat from the sacrificed sheep is not sufficient for a dinner at which there may be a hundred or more guests, veal is added and other different kinds of dishes. In discussing the great quantity of food that is prepared and the choice of meat for the evening meal, those I spoke to spontaneously saw this as a problem linked to Islamic identity:

[26] Except we don't buy pork. Because... it's a sheep, a roast sheep, pork doesn't fit.

[27] Pork doesn't fit, everything is veal!

The merrymaking lasts until the early hours. It practically starts on Wednesday evening and lasts right up to Friday morning. At this point the household members go up to the attic, to the place where they left dinner for the *sajbija*. Sometimes he leaves a trace of his visit (finger marks on the towel, an empty teacup, and the like). Then the family members breakfast, in the attic, eating the food intended for the *sajbija*.

In this particular case, the bones and skin of the kurban have no significance.

*Zijafet* is a great family celebration to which the guests bring gifts (exclusively household items) and money. The people I talked to considered that dedication of the house through the sacrifice of a sheep was typical of the Roma culture throughout the Balkans.<sup>51</sup>

### **Kurban and the death of a community member**

In the first year following the death of a member of the community kurban is obligatory. If the deceased person was a man, a ram is slaughtered, if it was a woman, then a ewe. On this occasion a *kapama* is pre-

<sup>51</sup> According to the data at my disposal, most of the Roma in southern Serbia practice *zijafet*, but with local variations. In the small town of Prokuplje, which I visited in May 2007, this celebration is organised in a simplified form. A ram is sacrificed in the prescribed way, but no dinner is laid out in the attic. The use of the term *sajbija* is avoided in everyday speech for fear that mention of him might make him appear. If reference is made to him in conversation, he is called *čereso manuš* ("the man of the house"). They call this celebration *večera čerese* ("dinner for the house"). For how *zijafet* is celebrated in the city of Niš, see Jašić 2001: 52–53.

pared from the meat of the kurban. The liver and other offal are immediately taken out of the house after the slaughter, for it is believed that members of the deceased's family should not eat them. The offal is usually taken to the house of a relative. Kinfolk and other guests from the community eat the meat of the kurban and other dishes in the house of the deceased. The next day meat and other food is taken and placed on the grave "for the soul of the dear departed". The bones of the slaughtered animal and all the other litter connected with the parastos (food leftovers, cigarette ends, paper) are collected in a bag and thrown into a large ditch beside the graveyard. The skin of the kurban is taken and sold by the man who did the slaughtering.

### Characteristics of the Roma kurban

The Roma kurban, presented here in 5 scenes, exhibits the following characteristics:

1. Ritual cleansing: the location, the person slaughtering the animal to be sacrificed, and the animal itself. Sometimes this cleansing is particularly stressed: when the head of the house slaughters the animal himself, he must previously have bathed or showered. In the past, a complete picture of the sacrifice of a goose for Vasilica meant that the goose itself had been washed (clean = sacred). I should like to point out the correlation with water since, according to the legend, the goose saved a drowning Roma in a "large expanse" of water.

2. The animal to be sacrificed in some way decorated (depending on the family tradition, the goose may be placed on the *badnjak* (oak branches) prior to slaughter, the Djurdjevdan lamb is hung with willow and other spring plants, the ram intended for the *sajbija* — with a wreath in order that the apotropeic and other qualities ascribed to certain plants is magically transferred to the animal through contact). Moreover, these plants are carefully selected as an additional element in the blood sacrifice so that they themselves are offered up to God/the Other side.

3. The time of the sacrifice is strictly regulated (the goose at night, the Djurdjevdan lamb by day, the ram for *zijafet* — a little before noon).

4. Kurban meat is roasted, with or without vegetables. When a *kapama* is prepared, the cooking method is a combination of braising and roasting. Likewise, the meat in the *djuveč* intended for the *sajbija* is first braised, and then roasted in the oven with vegetables.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Summarising the basic characteristics of kurban in the Balkans, Kolev writes that the kurban meat is rarely roasted, usually only for Djurdjevdan. In his view, boiling is the



5. Consumption (participation) by all members of the immediate and extended family.

6. The liver and the other entrails are set aside and given to someone else (the poor, the dead, “for the good of their souls”, etc.).

7. The skin, bones and feathers of the kurban are of no significance.

The kurban for *Vasilica*, Djurdjevdan and especially that intended for the *sajbija*, are much more elaborate both in terms of ritual procedures and their accompanying explanations than the other two types of kurban. The kurban for the *sajbija* is offered up from absolute necessity and every effort is made to observe each and every detail of ritual practice. This kurban is typified by efficacy — in that a solemn promise is given to the *sajbija* that a sacrifice will be made and he, in return, will stop harassing the members of the household. The kurban for the *sajbija* also varies in the general motive behind this voluntary sacrifice, which is believed to be dearest to God/the Other side. The concept of kurban among the Roma of Vranje is most clearly exemplified by this sacrifice of a ram to the *sajbija*.

The liver of the kurban is placed to one side following to the traditional belief in much of southern Serbia that the liver represents the essence of every living creature, its most important organ. Those attributes and expressions which contemporary culture links to the heart, are here ascribed to the liver. In modern society, if someone offends us, someone close to us, we say: “He has bitten my heart”. In this part of the country, they say, and always have said: “He has bitten my liver”. In our modern culture we speak of “a broken heart”, but here they talk of a “burnt liver”. Writer Bora Stanković<sup>53</sup>, in his short story *Stojanke, bela Vranjanke* [“Stojanka, white Vranje woman”], writes that the Turk Šaćir-bey, thinking that the mother of Stojanka, the Serbian girl with whom he was in love, is trying to prevent their marriage, says of her: “My liver is burnt” (Stanković 1970: 36). In south Serbia there is a song in which a young man and a young girl tenderly refer to each other as *crn džiger moj* (literally: my black liver<sup>54</sup>) (Zlatanović, M./Cvetanović 1999: 28). In Serbian, this song is famous for its opening words “Magdo, mori, Magdo” and it is sung in *Gornja Čaršija*. Given

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most usual method of preparation (Kolev, N. 2006: 295). In this sense, the kurban of the Vranje Roma differs from the general custom on the Balkan peninsula.

<sup>53</sup> Bora Stanković (1876, Vranje — 1927, Belgrade) portrays Vranje at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in his literary works.

<sup>54</sup> By *liver* what is understood is both *crna džigerica* (literally “black liver” — the liver) and *bela džigerica* (literally “white liver” — the spleen).

that the whole idea of sacrifice carries within it a hint of identification with the sacrificed animal (Lévi-Strauss 1979: 10), the ban on eating the liver is understandable. This taboo gains special strength with the liver of the ram slaughtered for *zijafet*.<sup>55</sup> Identification with the animal is also clearly reflected in the procedure of selecting the kurban for a commemoration ceremony, which depends on the gender of the deceased. When offering up both forms of kurban to the house, the household members are even forbidden to partake of the meat (it is only on the following day that they are allowed to eat the supper left for the *sajbija*).<sup>56</sup>

The goose that is killed on the eve of *Vasilica* is the sole kurban that is different from the others, not only in the choice of animal, but also in the interpretations that are given. The most usual explanation is that a goose saved a drowning Roma and that it is celebrated through being slaughtered. On the other hand, there were people I talked to who were familiar with this story of the goose which saved the drowning Roma, but who asked at the same time why, then, was the goose being killed:

[28] It saved a Roma, but now they kill it!?

While discussing the sacrifice of the goose, the Roma think back again to their origins, their exodus, their survival in diaspora, and their dream of a land in which they would all live together.<sup>57</sup> The goose linking them to their rescued ancestor, the fast on the day of the killing, the song dedicated to the bird, the “seeing off” of the goose in another part of the ritual — all these are elements which somehow, in a formal and structured way, are associated with totemism (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1979: 10).

To paraphrase Lévi-Strauss (*ibid*, 117), it may be concluded that the kurban is not only “good to eat” (the meat of the animals is healthy and free of contamination, moreover, there is the ban on eating the liver which modern nutritionists see as a dump site for body toxins) but it is also “good for thought”.

<sup>55</sup> Even quite young people spoke of *zijafet* in animated detail. By contrast, it was rare that anyone could furnish even scant information on the kurban sacrificed for the building of a new house.

<sup>56</sup> In her ethnolinguistic description of kurban Uzenjeva writes what if a kurban is sacrificed for reasons of health recovery or some miraculous salvation from death, then the person sacrificing the kurban should not partake of the meat of the sacrificed animal. It is believed that this meat is intended as payment to a saint (2004: 56).

<sup>57</sup> There is a tendency to consider even the Djurdjvedan lamb in this context (see Transcripts [14] and [16]).

### **Ethnic versus religious identity**

The Roma in Serbia are a specific minority whose assimilation, even in cases when this is what they desire, is not accepted. Their ethnic identity is perceived as something that is inevitable, something that is automatically attributed to them because of certain visible indicators (Eriksen 2000: 6). Some groups of Roma resort to particular strategies in their attempt to distance themselves from stigmatism and to belong to the desired identity in the existing ethnic classification. On the face of it, the Roma of *Gornja Čaršija* demonstrate an acceptance of their identity, defining themselves as “true” Roma. This throws up an interesting field for research — the relationship between the ethnic and other forms of collective identity, to wit, local and religious.

The Roma of *Gornja Čaršija* show great pride in the fact that they come from Vranje. They speak of themselves as “true” citizens of Vranje, the “old” inhabitants of this city. In so doing, they identify themselves with the picture of Vranje as portrayed in the literary works of Bora Stanković (the people of Vranje have a special talent for song and dance and a distinct ability to enjoy life to the full). They are very proud of the part they play in the stereotyped picture of Vranje (in the best-known drama of Bora Stanković “*Koštana*”, the heroine is a Roma singer and dancer from *Gornja Čaršija*). They are extremely proud of the exceptional successes recorded by their trumpet bands in festivals at home and abroad. They consider that their orchestras have made famous the traditional music of Vranje. In speeches made by the political élite of the town, these trumpet bands have been called “Vranje’s trademark”. At the same time, the majority Serbian population refer to them as “Gypsies”, with the usual indelible stereotyped qualities (dishonest, dirty, and so on). In this context, it is easy to understand the Roma’s contemptuous reference to the Serbs of Vranje as “peasants”. This term represents a symbolic form of revenge by the downtrodden, which helps alleviate their feeling of resignation (*ibid*, 25).

The Vranje dialect belongs to the Prizren-South Morava type within the Prizren-Timok dialect zone of the Serbian language (Ivić 1985: 115–118). The Roma speak Serbian as their second language and in a variation of this dialect, which is in some ways relatively close to the standard language. It was my view that that the reason for this was that the language is learned from the media and not in direct contact with the local Serbs. I commented on this in the company of a large group of young people. They all burst out laughing and explained that, unlike the Serbs, they speak the “urban” language. It was entertaining listening to them imitating the dialect constructions of the majority group. The language that the Roma speak has a quite different construction on both the syntactical and

syntagmical levels compared to the local Serbian population. In addition, they have preserved the old form of the dialect, a lexical fund that has been lost by Vranje's Serbian speakers (Turkish and archaic terms).

The relationship between the ethnic and the religious identity of the Roma of Vranje is seen as an area full to overflowing with uncertainties. When they talk about certain rituals being more important in the past, they mean the period of 15 years ago. With the disintegration of the federal state and the dominant ideology of the early nineties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the problems of identity of both majority and minority groups became very topical. The metaphor about identity being like a tooth that a person is only aware of when it starts to ache (Mihailescu 2002: 117) expresses precisely the situation in which the Roma of Vranje found themselves. Their previous religious identity, based on Islam, turned out to be unsuitable in the newly emerging situation. Within their community there was disagreement on the question of 'authentic' Roma culture and the influence of Islam — what should be jettisoned and what preserved and supported as a tradition? Young people were turning more and more towards contemporary popular culture.

The kurban in five scenes shows that the influence of Turkish culture, indeed, Islamic culture as a whole continues to dominate. In the Vranje Roma's system of kurban, all the words used are Turkish. True, *bakro* (see Transcript [2]) is a Roma word, but in the linguistic sense it is not a true ethnographic term but a general term for the animal — 'lamb', as it is for 'goose'. The form and content of the rituals described, however, does represent a Roma interpretation of their Turkish and Islamic heritage.<sup>58</sup> The practice of kurban in *Gornja Čaršija* shows a striking divergence from that prescribed by Islamic teaching. The Muslim ban on eating pork is well-known to them and designated a problem in conversations with those I talked to. A large number of people, especially the elderly, continue to adhere to this rule. However, the rule about not consuming alcohol, also well known to them, is not observed. What is more, alcohol enjoys the status of an indispensable requisite in certain rituals. The ambivalent attitude of the Roma of *Gornja Čaršija* towards their Islamic identity is merely true of the present moment in time. This is borne out by the song sung at the celebration of *Vasilica*, which one of the older people I spoke to (born in 1938) claimed had been sung by his grandfather (see Transcript

<sup>58</sup> I discussed the practice of kurban with a highly educated Turk from Bujanovac, who is descended from a distinguished family of beys. Kurban and the customs in general of the Turkish community in south Serbia differ considerably from those practiced by the Roma of *Gornja Čaršija*.

[13]). The song describes the hodja as “louse-ridden” and all sorts of pejorative expressions are used about him, to such an extent that my interlocutor was embarrassed to translate them from the Roma language.

In the radical social changes that took place during the period of transition in Serbia, the identity of the Roma of Vranje was built up, then demolished, and was directly influenced by movements on the global level. Negotiating this identity is still a current theme, but the cultural material on which the entire process is based is fraught with variance.

*Translated by Sheila Sofrenović*

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*Svetlana Ćirković, Belgrade*

## TEMPORAL DIMENSIONS OF KURBAN FOR THE DECEASED: REFUGEES FROM KOSOVO AND METOHİJA

The author of this paper was intrigued by the use of the term *kurban* in the conversation with M. N., encountered in one refugee camp sheltering displaced people from Kosovo and Metohija. Her spontaneous use of this term prompted many questions concerning the speech and ethnic structure of the displaced, methodology in field research and the possibility of processing recorded material from Kosovo and Metohija. Here we will deal with the temporal dimension in the discourse of our Kosovo informant, where the topic of conversation was the traditional funeral and marking of the commemoration after the funeral.

### **1. The refugee camp as a field of research**

This paper is based on parts of an interview with M. N. (1936) from Obilić (married in Suva Reka) in the Radinac refugee camp near Smederevo, Serbia.<sup>1</sup> We recorded several hours of interview with this informant, since she showed an exceptional knowledge of traditional spiritual and material culture and a special gift for narration. Some parts of the

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<sup>1</sup> Field research into displaced people from Kosovo and Metohija in this refugee camp was part of a project called *Slavic Speeches from Kosovo and Metohija*, headed by the Serbian Language Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA) in cooperation with researchers of the SASA Institute for Balkan Studies, and financed by UNESCO. The project was initiated in December 2002 and completed in 2003. The Serbian Language Institute in Belgrade today houses an archive of audio recordings of interviews with the displaced from Kosovo and Metohija and people living in the enclaves there. This work resulted in two collections of papers: *Refugee Kosovo* and *Life in the Enclave*, edited by Biljana Sikimić (2004, 2005), and numerous<sup>7</sup> separate papers in various fields of the humanities.



same interview have already been used as material for linguistic analysis (Ćirković 2008a).<sup>2</sup>

During research in the refugee camps we noticed the great regional, ethnic and social heterogeneity of its inhabitants: besides displaced people from Kosovo and Metohija there were also refugees from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In several cases the occurrence of ethnic mimicry of Roma was observed, which prevented the gathering of data and a more detailed research of the assumed Roma traditional culture, the language spoken by the 'hidden' Roma, as well as their position within the non-Roma refugee community. In the Ugrinovačka refugee camp in Zemun (a Belgrade municipality), for instance, according to the testimony of inhabitants there was a group of Roma who declared themselves as Egyptians.<sup>3</sup> In our study of the same refugee camp none of the researchers succeeded in carrying out interviews with members of this group. In the Radinac refugee camp the situation differed only slightly — the informants pointed to the existence of a group of Serbian Gypsies, but informed us that in conversation with them we must not mention this fact. M. N. is held to be a 'Serbian Gypsy' by the members of this refugee camp, even though she does not declare herself to be a member of this group and does not wish anyone to place her in this ethnic context. The borderline identity and ethnic mimicry we encountered prompted us to carry out a more detailed research of this problem and attempt to explain the position in which our informant found herself. The study of members of this group, thanks to pre-knowledge, has placed a particular accent on possible identity markers and the personal view of the informant of the similarities and differences among members of various ethnic groups from the same Kosovo and Metohija area.

According to Kolstó (2003: 12) the factors which lead two groups to perceive each other as being different and not as members of one and the same collective, are often mythical rather than factual. The differences are in the mind, in perception, and not in any visible social or cultural characteristics. Objective differences between cultures and societies exist, but these differences rarely produce clear, meticulously drawn charts accord-

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<sup>2</sup> Apart from this paper, parts of this interview were used in the author's MA thesis *Terminology of manufacturing of crepulje* [earthenware dish for baking bread] *with Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija*.

<sup>3</sup> The data from international organizations gives the impression that the presence of Egyptians is quite small. Data received from other sources, however, show that in many cases they are counted as Roma or Albanians. Of course, data received from the Egyptian organizations abroad — according to which Egyptians in Kosovo now number 100,000 — should not be accepted uncritically, as community representatives usually give much higher estimates of numbers than other sources (MS 2001: 47).

ing to which the borders of different cultures coincide and reinforce one another. Instead, we shall often establish that a map of traditions in food and dress in a specific region will differ completely from a map of architectural styles, not to mention linguistic or religious maps. Neighbouring communities, bound to the same religion and eating the same food, still frequently perceive one another as being separate on account of speaking different languages, for instance. Such cases are quite common, but they do not prove that language is the ultimate indicator of identity.

## 2. Djorgovci or ‘Serbian Gypsies’?

In Roma literature, the Roma of southern Serbia, Kosovo and Metohija, Orthodox by religion and speaking Serbian as their mother tongue, are called Djorgovci. The Roma language used to be their mother tongue up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is also recorded in literature that they work in agriculture, the blacksmith trade and as hired workers (Vukanović 1983: 140–141). Data from literature and results of research in the Radinac refugee camp near Smederevo, have indicated the problem of identification, in particular the naming of a group of Roma which until 1999 lived in Kosovo in the area between Priština and Vučitrn, and is still living in the Grace enclave near Priluzje. Inhabitants of the refugee camp call these Roma *kiseli*, *dimljeni* [sour, smoked] and *Serbian Gypsies*. The ethnonym *Djorgovci*, common in Roma literature, has not been confirmed, this being the basic difference in relation to the settlements of Roma Djorgovci in the Vranje area (Zlatanović 2006: 139). Anthropologist Sanja Zlatanović (2007) also looks into the issue of identity of Serbian Gypsies in Kosovo, in the villages of Mogila and Klokot (Vitina enclave).

The question arises as to whether the group called by the Serb population in the refugee camp ‘Serbian Gypsies’ is one of the Roma groups which in the course of its history lost its maternal language, Roma, and took on the language of the community in which it lives, and whether we can include this group in a specific, existing group of Djorgovci only on the basis of mother tongue and religion. Bearing in mind on the one hand that this group itself proves its Serbian nationality with its Serb names and surnames, by the existence and celebration of a patron saint’s day (*slava*), and the perception of this group by the other inhabitants of the refugee camp, on the other hand we attempted to find a compromise solution for naming this group, adopting the existing ethnonym from the local environment (Radinac refugee camp) — *Serbian Gypsies*.

According to Sanja Zlatanović (2007), the syntagma *Serbian Gypsies* marks numerous groups on the territory of Serbia, split between the Roma and Serb identity. Even though the cultural context, meanings and

practices vary widely from case to case, the Orthodox faith and aspirations to belong to the more prestigious ethnic group can be singled out as their distinctive markings. While the term *Djorgovci* is in use both as an ednonym and an exonym, the situation is a little more complex with the term *Serbian Gypsies*: in some cases this is how the group identifies itself, and in others this is how it is identified by others. S. Zlatanović uses the term *Serbian Gypsies* only conditionally, since it is an exonym, so in this paper we shall also use the same term.<sup>4</sup>

A group of authors working on the Minority Studies Society's *Studii Romani* concludes:

The Gypsies are not the homogeneous community that they often seem to be in the eyes of the surrounding populations. They are divided into separate more or less endogamous groups, sometimes significantly different in their way of life (some have been settled for centuries, while others were seasonal nomads until recently), in their religion (some Gypsy communities are Christians, some are Muslims and cases of voluntary or forcible conversions are not unusual), and also in a number of their ethnic and cultural characteristics. The surrounding population considers communities or groups with different origins and histories to be Gypsies (MS 2001: 9).

By researching the traditional spiritual culture of communities practicing ethnic mimicry, data can be reached enabling the establishment of inter-cultural parallels. The researched community can further, based on this data, and independently from the realistic situation, be ubicated into a historical, social or ethnic context (Ćirković 2007). Even though there is no ideal solution for the issue of identity with such communities, the researcher always has to bear in mind the informant's personal feeling of belonging to a certain ethnic community. In this sense it is necessary to work in more detail or by applying different methods to the study of the identity of a specific group (solely for scientific purposes, of course), since ethnic belonging and self-identification cannot be deduced on the basis of a couple of isolated statements from informants or information concealed in conversation, not to speak of any definitive answers.

We have argued that what initially appears to be a 'failed' instance of data collection should act as a prompt to re-consider the data collected under

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<sup>4</sup> We encounter a similiar problem with the naming of the Bayash, a small ethnic group that has been living on the present day territory of Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Hungary for at least two centuries. Until recently, the traditional occupation of this group was woodwork. They are of Orthodox or Catholic religion and their mother tongue is Romanian. Due to their semi-nomadic way of life, mentality and certain physical characteristics, they are perceived as Gypsies by the surrounding population (Sikimić 2005a: 7).

such circumstances, the method itself and the social relations of the research. Although the amount of audible data elicited by the interviewer was limited in the case of the group interview under discussion, we have argued that attention to other forms of data regarding embodiment, setting, laughter and silence may provide a richer set of data... We argue that we must be careful as researchers not to rely on simplistic resolutions to dilemmas of researching across difference. Simplistic resolutions include 'matching' interviewers and interviewees on essentialist grounds that can never be fully realised (Nairn et al. 2005: 236).

### 3. The limitations of audio field material

A transcribed interview shows two kinds of limitations in relation to the use and analysis of the material. One limitation comes from the differences between the code of ritual practice and the verbal code. By the code of ritual practice we imply the system of actions applied in the carrying out of a certain ritual. So in the event of a funeral there exists a system of obligatory actions prior, during and after the funeral, there are obligatory participants in the ritual and objects used. The integral parts of the system are time and place, and the anticipated consequences of performing or not performing the actions proscribed by ritual. It is the same with the custom of kurban which is the topic of this paper, and which our informant connects with a funeral. The problem arises when the ritual code has to be expressed by a verbal code, i.e. the use of language as a means to express the actions envisaged by the ritual, the participants in the ritual, the time, place and system of traditionally ingrained beliefs.

As in ethnolinguistics a major portion of the material is based on reconstruction, i.e. oral testimonies of the informants, certain complex rituals can hardly be well documented from an ethnographic standpoint. However, such statements, which describe a certain complex action code, are a topic of interest for linguistic anthropology. An 'objective' description of a ritual which belongs to traditional culture is thus replaced by a personal interpretation, so that the intentional omission of mentioning a certain detail or its spontaneous omission is also of significance. It is clear that an 'objective' description of a certain ritual or event with a complex action code can only be acquired by using a camera (audio-visual method) (Sikimić 2004a: 854–855).

The second limitation is a consequence of methodological shortcomings and inconsistencies in field research, and lack of competence and experience on the part of the researcher carrying out the interview. Interviews with the informant born in Obilić and married in Suva Reka were carried out based on a questionnaire by Anna Plotnikova (1996), to which we strictly adhered at the outset. Later, the methodology of interviews in the field changed significantly, which resulted in the inclusion of broader

commentaries, digressions, biographical stories and oral history of the informants. We acquired the information on kurban during interviews on the topic of funerals, so the discourse of our informant represents a memory of and reconstruction of this ritual. The shortcomings of the interviews can only be noticed after transcription and data analysis.

By shortcomings we mean, in the first place, neglecting the lexeme *kurban* used during the interview, which should have led to conversation on the subject of sacrifice. Consequently, the researcher should have posed questions about the time, place and manner of sacrificing the animal, the actors in the situation, ritual taboos and duties etc. In the interview which is the subject of our analysis in this paper, we can find only some questions related to the kurban, the rest of the interview being on the subject of funerals.

The time gap between recording the interview and analysing the recorded material, during which additional experience was acquired in the techniques of interviewing in the field, knowledge of traditional spiritual culture in Kosovo and Metohija and of current research work on the expression of time in the discourse of displaced people from Kosovo and Metohija, clearly show up the shortcomings of this transcript. We should bear in mind, however, that the recorded material was intended for inter-disciplinary research and that the possibility existed for a researcher pursuing other interests to consider this interview appropriate for individual research, and notice some of its other shortcomings.<sup>5</sup> The material recorded in 2003 for the study of Kosovo and displaced people from there has to be seen as a whole, a delicate and often very stressful interaction between researcher and informant, and certainly should not be taken as a one-sided collection of an-

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<sup>5</sup> Interviews with displaced people from Kosovo and Metohija, four years after their displacement, represents a stressful situation, and researchers must take due care when choosing topics for discussion to avoid provoking an undesired reaction by asking inappropriate questions. The contemporary research ethic requires that apart from topics which interest the researchers, the informants must be allowed, at least in part, to speak of what interests them and of the problems troubling them. In these situations traditional ethnographic information overlaps with oral and personal history, an interpolation of biographical information into the discourse on traditional culture. The complexities of the study of displaced people is manifold, especially in view of the position of the researcher as an outsider. In the 1990s, during the civil war in former Yugoslavia, researchers from the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb analysed oral interviews with Croatian refugees. According to Maja Povrzanović, "from the professional point of view, writing about the war became a learning process — a process of rethinking some fundamental issues in anthropology of which the relations between insider and outsider scholars was but one (...) War ethnography is used here as a general term for articles on war-related issues" (Povrzanović 2000: 151).

Experience in carrying out interviews in the field and in essential control of one's own interests, especially in complex rituals of traditional culture, becomes crucial, but it produces errors.

swers to imposed questions posed by the researcher. From the point of view of our requirements, the information we obtained on kurban from interviewing the informant from Obilić can be considered a hapax.

**Transcript of interview with M. N. (1936) from Obilić in Kosovo, married in Suva Reka (Metohija)**

On returning from the cemetery, at that house where the funeral was, there the hands are washed. There is a towel there, they go in for supper. Some want to have supper, some only want coffee, but it is obligatory to return where it was [the funeral]. (*And how many tables do you set?*) Well now, no number, there just shouldn't be an even number. (*Only odd numbers.*) Odd. For instance, if there should be three tables, and there aren't three, two are full, and at least two women or two children sit at the third, that counts as the third table. (*And not the men?*) Men come as well. (*So, it can be anyone?*) Anyone. If there are no people, two children sit down and those women that bake, the *mešalje*, the cooks, they can sit down too. At least one table. At least one so that a third table could be counted for him. (*And what is prepared then?*) The same dish. There have to be three dishes. Three. (*Three dishes. And what is usually prepared?*) Beans are obligatory, at every *daća* [funeral feast] beans are counted as one dish, potatoes are counted as the second dish, then if there is some *sarma* [cabbage leaves stuffed with minced meat] or something, three dishes. And the roast meat doesn't count. That's separate, when it's meat. (*So, the roast meat is obligatory?*) Obligatory. (*And it isn't counted as a dish?*) No, that's kurban. A lamb is sacrificed if it's a male, a ram, a male lamb, if it's a woman, a barren ewe, if it's, God forbid, if it's a child, a lamb. (*And what did you say for a woman, what kind of ewe?*) If a woman dies, a ewe, a barren ewe which, just a ewe. And for a child, if it's [a child], a lamb. And for a male a ram, it has to be, it has to be that way and ... And of the kurban the bones are gathered, everything from the *daća*, the bones are not thrown away, they are gathered, and in one place, you bury it outside the house, in a little hole. (*Is that in the yard or outside of it?*) Outside, outside, not in the yard. Some field or a brook or if someone has nearby, they have a wood, but not there, those are bones. (*And what happens if some dog, for instance, digs it up?*) It's not good. (*So it's not good.*) He (the deceased) will then eat that kurban with the dogs there in the other world. Then the dog will lick it and he will lick those bones. Those bones from the kurban, the other ones don't matter. Only for him and what is slaughtered for his soul, great care was taken with that. So they say, so it has remained. (*And when this supper is cleared away, then everything is cleared away, and then laid out again?*) Yes, the same again.

In the transcript of another interview, carried out by Sanja Zlatanović with an informant, a Serb woman, a refugee from Mušutište (the vicinity of Suva Reka) on the topic of building a house we find interesting information on the sacrifice of an animal, which could complete the isogloss of the

extent of distribution of the ethnographic term *kurban*, as well as the isogloss of rituals involving the sacrifice of an animal. However, based on the transcript of this interview we cannot be certain whether the local Serb community calls this ritual or the sacrificial animal *kurban*:

*(All right, and was there some custom, was something placed in the foundations?) A lamb was slaughtered. (Come on, tell me about it.) A lamb was slaughtered, and its head is placed in the foundation. And the lamb was roasted for the builders. (A-ha, and the head, which side does it face?) And the head is placed to look towards where the sun shines, when the main foundation is begun, where the foundation is begun that's where the head is placed. (Before beginning?) Yes, when you dig the foundation, and where you've started, from which place, they see, that's where. That's where you should bury the head. (So, the head is not built in, but rather dug underneath?) It is not built in, it is placed, the head is placed in the foundation, and then the building is done above, as builders used to build before, and the head stays inside. (Is it just the head, or is something else placed there as well?) Just the head. Just the head. And all the rest you are supposed to cook for the builders for the builders to eat. That's theirs. (Is wheat placed there?) Ah, wheat, wheat, yes.*

#### 4. The kurban custom for the dead

##### 4.1. Ethnographic and (ethno)linguistic data

Ethnolinguistic literature shows that our field data on the slaughter of kurban for the soul of the deceased in Kosovo and Metohija — is not a hapax. Ana Plotnikova, in her study on the ethnolinguistic geography of the South Slavs, when differentiating between the terms for a sacrificial animal at a funeral and at commemorations of the deceased, also differentiates between two areas — the western, in which the term *(po)dušni brav* is in use and the eastern (this includes Kosovo and Metohija), where the term *kurban* is in use (Plotnikova 2004: 194). In this study the author also provides charts representing the extent of the isogloss, which makes it easier to follow the term's distribution (Plotnikova 2004: 599–601). Unfortunately, the relevant source for Balkan linguistic geography, the Small Dialectological Atlas of Balkan Languages (Sobolev 2005), does not include the areas of Kosovo and Metohija.

In South Slav ethnographic literature we find numerous data on the *kurban* covering a very wide area (among others: Djerić 1997, Živković 1996, Trojanović 1986, Radan 2000, Popov 2000, Danova 2000). Plotnikova's study (2004) for the area of Kosovo and Metohija relied on the field material of ethnologist Tatomir Vukanović published in *Serbs in Kosovo II* (Vukanović 1986). This study, unfortunately, does not provide data from the entire area of Kosovo and Metohija, but only from some set-

lements, apparently chosen at random. Thus in Kosovo and Metohija, as Tatomir Vukanović (1986: 314, 317) records:

The food for the *podušna* meal, given after the funeral of the deceased, is prepared by two women, the *mešalja* and *bačica*. If the funeral takes place during the fast or on a fast day (Wednesday or Friday), all the dishes are fasting fare; during ordinary (non-fasting) days, the man of the house would always slaughter a kurban. Care was always taken for the table to be laid in odd numbers. The kurban had to be 'in odd-numbers' as well, one or three should be killed. If the household is a poor one, then they killed a hen (in Ranilug village). When a female member of the family dies, and if it is a 'non-fasting day', a 'female kurban' (a ewe) is killed, and when a man dies, a 'male kurban' (Petrovce village). For the 'mourning' the family will not kill a 'bad' ewe for the kurban, but a good one (village of Donje Ostraće). When someone in the family dies, if it is a non-fasting day, a ewe or hen is killed for the kurban, more rarely a calf or a piglet. And following this one, a second kurban is slaughtered at the forty days, half-year or year (Novo Brdo). A rooster is slaughtered as kurban when someone dies and *janija* (a kind of stew) is prepared, which is 'eaten at the cemetery' (Gnježdane on Rogozna mountain). It is an old custom in Kosovo that when someone dies, the man of the house chooses the ewe which is to be sacrificed as kurban for the soul of the deceased. In Titova Mitrovica (now Kosovska Mitrovica, S. Ć.) it was the custom in the past when two people died in one year to at least 'kill a chicken' as kurban, then place the head of the kurban at the feet of the dead man in the grave and throw the meat into water for the water to take it away. The man of the house sacrifices the kurban... They sacrifice a rooster, when two die in one year in one family, 'so that a third one wouldn't die'. This is the kurban and the meat is distributed to the poor, and the head placed in the coffin and buried with the deceased. Wealthy people sacrifice a ewe instead of a chicken, and the uncooked head is placed beside the dead man in the grave, and the meat distributed to the poor for the deceased's soul (Suva Reka). (Vukanović 1986: 317)<sup>6</sup>

#### 4.2. Time dimension of kurban for the dead

Ethnographic and ethnolinguistic data show that the ritual of sacrificing an animal in the Balkans is extremely complex and that it is not easy to draw an areal, ethnic or confessional border. The ethnographic resolution of this issue requires research of a different type — research related to ethnographic and archive material, or field research of a different type from linguistic ones. However, the linguistic picture that emerges from the

<sup>6</sup> The same, unchanged and unsupplemented data have been included in the *Encyclopedia of Folk Life, Customs and Beliefs of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija* (Vukanović 2001: 212).



recorded material is not at all simple either. M. N. was born in Obilić (the speech of Obilić belongs to the Kosovo-Resava dialect of the Serbian language), and married into the village of Suva Reka (the speech of this village belongs to the Prizren-Timok dialect of the Serbian language). The interview with her took place in a refugee camp, four years after her displacement, so the idiolect of this informant could have been influenced by the changed circumstances of place and time — the influence of the speech from the area in which the refugee camp is located, for example, or the influence of the different speeches of the people in the refugee camp who come from different dialect areas, on the other. Moreover, the interview is institutionalised — M. N. is talking to a researcher from Belgrade, the interview is recorded on to an audio device, and it has been explained to the informant that the recorded data have scientific use and value. The dialectologist's task was to observe and analyse possible dialect layers in the idiolect of M. N. The same criteria apply in the case of the lexeme *kurban*, used by M. N. during the talk on posthumous customs. Contact with people of different confessions in the area in which the interviewee used to live before the displacement may have influenced her perception of traditional culture, or its interpretation during the interview with the researcher. We should also bear in mind the self-representation of the informant as one of the significant components of the interview. These and many other characteristics of M. N.'s discourse and way of life might be of interest to specialised linguistic disciplines or studies of the humanities in general: sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and even psychology.

On this occasion we do not pretend to deal with the ethnographic details of the *kurban in situ*, nor with the informant's psychological profile, we will rather attempt to research the time dimension of this ritual in the narration.

As the preparation of the *kurban* for the dead belongs to the life cycle, it is an occasional ritual, since it is enacted in the event of a funeral. On the other hand, the preparation of the *kurban* has a time-determined rhythm in view of the fact that it is prepared for every commemoration. It is this dichotomous use of the *kurban* that motivated us to analyse how time is realised in discourse and what time thus expressed means to our informant in relation to her own perception of it: the daily organization of time, how she organises time on an annual level etc.

When the *kurban* is connected to feastdays of the traditional calendar cycle it, naturally, has a precise time determination.<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding that

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<sup>7</sup> The blood sacrifice — *kurban* — is precisely defined in time in traditional culture, in the customs of the calendar cycle. Cf. for instance works of Marushiakova and Popov,

every feastday of the traditional calendar falls on a certain date, in the traditional culture it is the traditional holiday which tends to be the principle time marker, not the date itself.

A study of the kurban's time dimension in the event of a funeral could take several directions. On the one hand, the precise time determination of the kurban in the event of death is logically missing, but seeing that the preparation of the kurban implies a process which lasts the entire day, parts of the day could be examined as time parameters in relation to which the ritual procedures are carried out. As the kurban is also a ritual connected to commemorations after the funeral, a time cycle could be determined by which the commemorations are marked, and thus also the cyclic preparation of the kurban. In our case, the data relevant to this kind of research are missing due to the previously mentioned shortcomings in the field interview, so that on this occasion we shall only examine the time dimension available to us in the transcribed interview.

The time dimension of the ritual as described may be observed on both macro and micro level, which correlate to the meaning of the kurban. As the term frequently applies to the actual ceremony of sacrifice, the ritual animal and even the place in which the ceremony takes place, we may assume different time dimensions of the kurban. As we lack almost all details relating to the ritual of sacrificing an animal and indeed the animal itself — in our case the time micro plan — we can only observe this ritual in its macro context — the time dimension of the ritual which is an integral part of the funeral and the commemoration which takes place after it.

The time context in the discourse of our informant is marked by two situations — the funeral and the commemorations i.e. the *daća* or funeral feast. In the reconstruction of the ritual, the funeral represents a time marker which determines the beginning of observance of the ritual, while the commemorations show its iterativeness. The time period between *daća* is not fixed by an equal number of days, but by regular time cycles (the first morning after the funeral, a week — the time period be-

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Sorescu-Marinković, Hristov and Manova, Hristov, and Popov in these collected papers. On the website <http://www.csdbalkans.org/roma/holidays.shtml> contemporary data are provided on Roma holidays in Kosovo. Among the customs connected to the Đurđevdan or St George's Day holiday (which, according to the information on the site, is celebrated by both Roma Muslims and Roma Christians) the sacrifice of a lamb is mentioned, and for the holiday of Vasilica a goose is sacrificed. (On the significance of celebrating Vasilica for the construction of a Roma identity in Vranje see Zlatanović 2004). The only data, which also includes the term *kurban*, relates to the celebration of Bajram, but this holiday is connected solely to the Muslim tradition.

tween the funeral and a week, depending on the day when the funeral was held — forty days after the funeral, six months after the funeral, a year after the funeral). These time markers outline the temporal macro frame of the ritual.

#### 4.2.1. Context of the kurban for the dead

The transcribed interview contains only a part of a longer interview on posthumous customs, but as in this paper we are only dealing with kurban, we will not go into the time parameters of funerals and *daća*, which have no specific connection to the kurban since the existing transcript of the interview on this topic does not provide sufficient data. As the posthumous customs are comprised of a series of complex individual rituals (ethnographic descriptions usually begin with omens of death, continue with the preparation of the deceased for burial with the inclusion of different participants in the ritual, rituals connected to the actual day of the funeral, and secondary rituals not closely connected to going to the cemetery and the burial of the deceased, rituals connected to the period following the funeral etc.) a detailed and complete analysis would require a complete, integrated interview on all these sub-topics.

Kurban is mentioned in the context of preparing food for the funeral and *daća*. On the one hand, kurban is time-determined in accordance with the time cycle of *daća*, even though the time specification of that cycle is lacking in the recorded testimony.

Beans are obligatory, at every *daća* beans are counted as one meal, potatoes are counted as the second meal, then if there is some *sarma* [cabbage leaves stuffed with minced meat] or something, three meals. And the roast meat doesn't count... (*And it isn't counted as a dish?*) No, that's kurban. A lamb is sacrificed if it's a male, a ram, a male lamb, if it's a woman, a barren ewe, if it's, God forbid, if it's a child, a lamb.

Although in traditional culture the *daća* signifies a commemoration which has its own time gap in relation to the death and the funeral, in the statement this term is qualified by the adjective *every*, and with the construction *at every daća* it acquires a precise temporal definition. *Daća* can thus be taken as a time localiser<sup>8</sup> of the traditional culture, and the preposition-case construction of *at every daća* is one which localises the situa-

<sup>8</sup> The time localiser in situations marked by sentences is usually some unit of time measurement, whether conventional (second, minute, hour, week and days of the week etc), or periods more markedly determined by natural occurrences (the day and parts of the day, years and parts of the year etc), and also historical periods (e.g. the Neolithic, feudalism, the Renaissance) or different situations whose duration is taken as a time localiser (e.g. lectures, a walk, war) (Piper 2001: 123–124).

tion within the time localiser<sup>9</sup> without stressing the starting or ending time limit of the object of localisation (Piper 2001: 124). In the discourse, however, we find a different semantic realisation of the lexeme *daća*:

And of the kurban the bones **are gathered, everything from the daća**, the bones are not thrown away, **they are gathered**, and in one place, you bury it outside the house, in a little hole.

In the first example *And of the kurban the bones are gathered, everything from the daća*, we come across the ablative-limitative meaning (Piper 2001: 128), where it is pointed out that the initial border of the object of localization is placed within the framework of the time localiser. Considering that the *daća* has the meaning of commemorations which repeat in a precisely determined time cycle, this meaning would have to be present in the discourse. We find this repetition in the use of the imperfective verb in the second statement *the bones are not thrown away, they are gathered* and from this we may assume that the semantic whole of the ritual process is expressed through the relation of the finite to the imperfective verb in one part of the discourse.

We should bear in mind that, at linguistic level, the statements represent a part of a dialect discourse, and that the analysis applied could be questioned, since the theoretical framework of the time localisers used is based on examples from standard Serbian.

The question might be posed as to how this strictly semantic analysis reflects on anthropological linguistics, i.e. what can be concluded from an analysis of this type about the time dimension of such a complex ritual as the kurban? Considering that our informant is reconstructing a complex ritual, itself within the framework of another complex ritual — the funeral — we may assume that the reconstruction of the kurban is based on examples from personal experience, and is not an ideal model of the ritual (Example: *And of the kurban the bones are gathered, everything from the daća, the bones are not thrown away, they are gathered*), and that this condition is also reflected on the linguistic level.

(Ethno)linguistic field research, as we have already said, is based on interviews on set topics. In these interviews, researchers often insist on a reconstruction of an ideal model of the ritual, but practice shows that very frequently, examples and memories from the informants' personal biographies are cited. According to Marija Ilić, in the debate surrounding meth-

<sup>9</sup> As cited by Predrag Piper (2001:124), by analogy with preposition-case constructions for spatial meaning, this construction can be termed an immediate (direct) time localisation, terminologically more exact and closer to the concepts of semantic localization theories, such as: time intra-localisation.

ods of field work, the question arises of the relation of the model to the personal story: to what extent can getting to know the ideal model mislead us in our examination of the traditional culture and how much might we lose without the personal stories and models which often bear no relation to the ideal model, as if these were two separate cultures (Ilić 2003: 71). Our linguistic feeling shows us that in the present statement, the later use of the imperfective shows repetition of procedures and thus the temporal duration of the same ritual. Considering that this is in a dialect idiom, and that our linguistic feeling enters into the domain of standard language competency, this assumption may be questioned.

#### 4.2.2. Non-fasting vs. fasting days

A second time dimension of the kurban found in the recorded interview is connected to the changes in the annual cycle in accordance with non-fasting and fasting days. In the traditional calendar the change from non-fasting to fast is very precisely defined, and in the traditional Orthodox calendar this is mainly connected to two major religious holidays — Christmas and Easter, although the fasts throughout the year are also connected to other feastdays, and there are also fast days during the week.

In the discourse which forms the subject of this analysis, kurban is connected to the non-fasting period of the year (the transcript does not contain any question by the researcher on kurban and fast days):

And roast meat doesn't count. That's separate, **when it's meat**. (*So, the roast meat is obligatory?*) Obligatory. (*And it isn't counted as a dish?*) No, that's kurban. A lamb is sacrificed if it's a male...

We can conclude that the ritual food is closely connected to the time schedule of non-fasting and fasting days. From material gathered in the Bayash village of Trešnjeвица (central Serbia), anthropologist Otilia Hedešan builds the hypothesis that the motivations of organising time are a priority expression of the behavioural strategy typical of one (in her work professional) group (Hedešan 2005: 67).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The author points out that all the holidays celebrated by the Bayash in Trešnjeвица occur in the first half of the year, i.e. from Christmas (which is close to the winter solstice) up to St John the Baptist's Day (the day following the summer solstice). The imbalance can be understood only in relation to the old way of life of this community; the customs in fact mark the group's sedentary season, while the time of their absence indirectly points to the nomadic way of life in the corresponding seasonal period (Hedešan 2005: 66).

In the interview recorded on the topic of funerals and kurban a time dimension of these rituals which would correlate to events linked to important social, intimate or family relationships is lacking. The time in the kurban ritual as described is not organised according to the time associated with the individual carrying out the ritual. According to Sacks (1992: 36–37), this personalised use ensures that time becomes organised in relation to an individual's 'relationships or biography' (cited from Hogden 2006: 329).

Moreover, in the transcript we come across a spontaneously used time determination of the ritual, organized in relation to the daily duties, as is the case with the organization of time in the discourse on daily life,<sup>11</sup> and on the basis of these differences we can speak of differences in ritual time and private time. We cannot, however, draw general conclusions in relation to ritual time. An interview with more information on the ritual itself, as well as more extensive material would perhaps show a different picture of the time dimension of the ritual, since, as Huang (2004: 35) states, through the different aspects of social life in a Taiwanese village, it seems that the villagers are attempting to combine their own cultural tradition with certain cultural elements of 'superior' others.

#### 4.2.3. Kurban in the other world

Another time dimension in the discourse of the informant from Obilić, which should also be analysed, is the one expressed in the following statement:

And in one place, you bury it outside the house, in a little hole. (*Is that in the yard or outside it?*) Outside, outside, not in the yard. Some field or brook or some have nearby, they have a wood, and not there, those are bones. (*And what happens if some dog, for instance, digs that up?*) It's not good. The deceased will then eat that kurban with the dogs there in the other world. Then the dog will lick and he will lick those bones. Those bones from the kurban, the other ones don't matter.

In this fragment we come across the use of the future tense. In field interviews questions are mainly focused on the past, considering that the primary goal is the research of traditional spiritual culture, reconstructing rituals and a former way of life. Replies to such questions are for the most part in the past tense, although the present can also be found. The use of tenses and their meaning in a specific statement is a separate issue which we will not deal with here. The future tense is extremely rare in the state-

<sup>11</sup> For the organisation of time in the autobiographical discourse of displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija see: Ćirković 2008.

ments we usually register, although it would be interesting to examine its use in the discourse of displaced persons.<sup>12</sup> Considering the displacement and altered way of life, the possibility exists that the spatial component influences the way of expressing the future. We believe that following their displacement, the future of people from Kosovo and Metohija changed considerably, and that this is reflected linguistically. However, the particular transcript we are analysing contains a reconstruction of the ritual, so the future tense can be viewed as a special expression of ritual time. This can be affected by the change of the spatial component in the discourse. Anthropologist Otilia Hedeşan believes that the difference between ‘descriptive’ of a wedding and ‘narrative’ of a funeral (author’s terms) lies in the difference between the experienced and the imaginary. The descriptive of the wedding is based on actions which have been directly lived through and experienced; they are visually perceived. The narrative of the funeral is based on the informant’s imagination and vision. It is expressed in metaphors and parables. The conversation on the funeral and the other life often has a completely different spatio-temporal dimension — nothing is what it seems to be (Hedeşan 2006: 103).

In the discourse recorded on the ritual of sacrificing an animal at funerals and wakes, we come across several special actions, commentary on which reflects the informant’s view of the other world. As an analysis of these details of the ritual would require greater ethnographic knowledge, we will only mention them here, and focus in further analysis on the informant’s idiom as used in the recorded statement.

One of the ritual actions, mentioned in the discourse, is the burying of the bones of the sacrificed animal. In Slav traditional culture the burying of bones represents a complex and important ritual, practised to bring prosperity to the community which observes it on calendar holidays (SD 1999: 628–629), although it can also be carried out for an occasion (e.g. when building a house). It is especially important, as our informant M. N. states, that the bones of the kurban intended for the deceased are properly treated and the ritual is carried out in the manner proscribed by tradition.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> In the research of meanings of the future tense in the southwestern speeches of Kosovo and Metohija, dialectologist Radivoje Mladenović concludes that the narrative and iterative future are confirmed throughout the area. Suva Reka, the village our informant settled in following her marriage, belongs to this speech area. In his paper, R. Mladenović does not deal in other meanings of the future tense (Mladenović 2000: 364).

<sup>13</sup> The burying of bones as ritual behaviour is also reflected in folklore. As stated by folklorist Mirjana Detelić, however they may be viewed, whatever may be done with them and wherever they may be — bones always, on all occasions and in every kind of context, show a joint attribute: great power is preserved in them which can be used for magical

It is necessary to also mention the role of the dog in this ritual, i.e. its function in the event of the ritual not being carried out correctly. In this context the dog is clearly a chthonic animal, bearing an important function in the other world: in the event of an incorrectly carried out ritual, the dog is the executor of the undesirable consequence in the other world:

He (the deceased) will then eat that kurban with the dogs there in the other world. Then the dog will lick and he will lick those bones. Those bones from the kurban, the other ones don't matter.

Extensive audio material recorded with this informant enables the role of the dog in the traditional culture to which M. N. belongs to be partially observed from another angle. As M. N. states, when a child loses its first tooth, it is obligatory to give this tooth to a dog to eat, so that the child may have strong teeth. Furthermore, with its howling the dog warns of the presence of evil forces.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, M. N. also knows a legend of the transformation of an evil woman into a dog. Because of her evil deeds, in the other world she wore a chain around her neck: "she was a bitch in this world, and a bitch she has remained".<sup>15</sup> The importance, role and meaning of the dog in traditional culture of the 'Serbian Gypsies' from Kosovo and Metohija could become a separate topic of research, and its study and processing certainly requires a more thorough knowledge of this field, as well as more material. In view of the disputable and borderline identity of our informant,<sup>16</sup> one of the tasks would be a comparative study of the traditional culture of 'Serbian Gypsies' and 'non-Serbian Gypsies', and of 'Serbian Gypsies' and Serbs in Kosovo, pointing out the possible similarities, differences and mutual influences of these cultures.

Analysing this part of the transcript and taking into consideration the researcher's question (*And what happens if some dog, for instance, digs that*

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purposes. The aim of this use is, however, defined in two ways: when they serve as a means for gaining an attribute or power of someone or something outside themselves, the bones are an intermediary between this and the other world, an agent which releases chthonic powers, channels them and secures their controlled effect; when actions with bones are directed towards the bones themselves, the means used have a different origin, and the expected goal is to activate the vital forces which they bear in themselves (Detelić 1997: 114).

<sup>14</sup> In Tatomir Vukanović's Encyclopedia we find the information that the howling of a dog among the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija forebodes a death in the family or in the village (Vukanović 2001: 329).

<sup>15</sup> The information can be found on audio-tape, archived under number 345-R-Obilić-4-SC.

<sup>16</sup> The ethnic identity of M. N. is disputable and border-line only from the perspective of the researcher and other inhabitants of the Radinac refugee camp, but from her own perspective there is nothing of the kind: she declares herself as Serbian.



up?), we should bear in mind the possible induction of at least one part of the informant's reply.<sup>17</sup> The course of the interview is shaped in such a way that the informant speaks of the actions in "this world" which should be carried out on the occasion of funerals and *daća*, and then, after the question, she speaks of the consequences of an irregularity in performing the ritual. The change in spatial dimension is noticeable in the discourse:

And of the kurban the bones are gathered, everything from the wake, the bones are not thrown away, they are gathered, and in one place, you bury it **outside the house, in a little hole.** (*Is that in the yard or outside of it?*) Outside, outside, not in the yard. **Some field** or **brook** or some have nearby, they have a **wood**, and not there, those are bones. (*And what happens if some dog, for instance, digs that up?*) It's not good. (*So it's not good.*) He (the deceased) will then eat that kurban with the dogs **there in the other world.** Then the dog will lick and he will lick those bones.

With the change of the spatial dimension in the discourse, the time dimension also changes — in the part of the statement on 'the other world' the informant uses the future tense. This change of tenses could be considered a reflection of the informant's perception of change of the life cycle into the post-life cycle, manifested in the spatially successive change of 'this' and 'the other' world.

Moreover, expressing a causal-consequential relation of ritual proceedings can lead us to observe this discourse as one of the forms used in religious instruction or sermons. We were led to view this statement in this way by the research and conclusions of anthropologist Bambi B. Schieffelin. Researching innovations in the expression of time during the early colonisation and missionary activity among the Bosavi People in Papua New Guinea, Schieffelin (2002) focuses on how new ways of marking time entered conversation and how different temporalities were used to constitute genres previously unknown in this part of Papua New Guinea (Schieffelin 2002: s6). As Schieffelin states (2002: s6):

In addition to issues of language choice, all missionizing activities depend to varying extents on complex translation activities involving comprehension of cultural concepts and linguistic structures. Furthermore, new speech events, such as church services, deploy new genres, discursive practices, and interpretative procedures — for example, sermons, prayers, and confessions — all of which must be introduced and established. (...) How one speaks and what one says indicates how one positions oneself with regard to these changes. They are also a major indicator of belief. (...) Local pas-

<sup>17</sup> The taboo on digging up the bones by a dog occurs continually in interviews on the kurban carried out by Biljana Sikimić with the Bayash in Grebenac (Banat, Vojvodina). For more details see article by B. Sikimić in these collected papers.

tors (...) focused on temporal relationships and other dualities, always oppositional, that are central to Christian rhetoric — light/dark, heaven/hell, saved/unsaved, center/periphery. Along with Christian dualities, which carried clear moral implications, two local temporal relationships — one oppositional (before/now) and other causal (now/later) — also took on strong moral inflections. These temporal dichotomies, semiotically associated with Christian dualities were elaborated in two related genres, sermons and lessons.

On the expression of time and space Schieffelin concludes:

Remembering of lifecycle events such as marriages and deaths was not subject to calendrical accounting. Instead, place and place-names, important in everyday experience, discourse, and ritual expression, were used to demarcate all memorable events (...) Locality and place-names were anchors for significant ceremonies and events as well as remembrance of personal experiences (Schieffelin 2002: s9).

However, in order for us to reach relevant conclusions on the relation between religious and oral discourse on the topic of kurban, and to eliminate the possibility of a naïve interpretation of it, we would have to dispose of a far greater quantity of field material and material on the language structure of the religious discourse, especially from the aspect of its time dimension.

## 5. Concluding remarks

In contributing to these collected papers our objective is to show that the time dimension of a ritual can be examined from the aspect of anthropological linguistics. Using recent theories in the area of semantics and syntax, we have demonstrated that they can be applied to the recorded oral discourse, but that we must not draw definite conclusions since this concerns two different language idioms: the theory of semantic time localisation is based on examples from standard Serbian language, and the material we have analysed represents a dialect oral discourse. These two language idioms, then, should perhaps not even be compared.

Analysis of the recorded material has shown that the traditional division of the calendar year into non-fasting and fasting periods determines the time of carrying out rituals, but the incomplete material has prevented us from examining the transformation of the kurban during the fast.

We have also introduced the hypothesis that the use of the present and future tenses and their alternation, depending on change in the spatial dimension ('this world' : 'the other world') may indicate some similarities between oral discourse on the ritual and the discourse of religious instruc-

tion, although for conclusions to be relevant we would also require a quantitative analysis along with the qualitative one.

From the ethnographic data and the field material we can anticipate certain time parameters suitable for research in traditional spiritual culture. Ethnographic data on the kurban for the deceased may indicate ritual behaviour in accordance with the daily timetable, and interviews carried out with women and men separately could also be analysed. The gender identification of these interviews may point to a difference between men and women in the daily organisation of time, and then based on this gender division of daily time the time dimension of the kurban could be studied. Moreover, research should be made into the time dimension of the kurban for the deceased in relation to the days in the week, as well as the existence or non-existence of ritual taboos in relation to them. Compared with the funeral, which is a ritual of occasion, the *daća* takes place at a certain time, so the time dimension of the kurban for the deceased can also be examined in relation to these precisely determined cycles (e.g. if care is taken to commemorate the annual *daća* a couple of days before the real anniversary of the death, then the positioning in time of the preparation of the kurban must be kept in sight). For research of the time dimension of the kurban for the deceased, the interview would have to be more complete from the aspect of noting ethnographic information.

Data on the tradition of Orthodox and ‘non-Serbian Gypsies’ from Kosovo and Metohija could show whether the kurban for the deceased exists in the entire Roma Orthodox Christian culture or only in the culture of ‘Serbian Gypsies’. It is equally important to examine the inter-religious parallels and influences among the Islamic tradition and the Orthodox Christian community of ‘Serbian Gypsies’. The analysis of this data, with the possible discovery of elements of a substrate, Roma culture, may throw more light on the extremely complex identity of the ethnic community to which M. N. belongs.

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*Katalin Kovalcsik, Budapest*

GURBANE AS A REPRESENTATION  
OF TRADITIONAL IDENTITY AND CULTURE  
IN AN OLTENIAN RUDAR COMMUNITY

In this paper, on the basis of a field research\* I am going to analyse the most important feast of an Oltenian Rudar community — the *gurbane* — which plays a crucial role in traditional self-identification. This requires touching on another two areas of cultural representation: one is the traditional discourses of identity and culture, that is, the representative elements of the community's narrative identity; the other is the ideology and practice of the new Pentecostal congregation, which has brought about changes in this discourse.

The Rudari belong to the ethnic groups of Romania that speak Romanian yet their environment regard them as Gypsies.<sup>1</sup> During my researches so far, I have come to know three such groups (*table 1*).

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\* The paper is the elaboration of a partial topic of my Romanian fieldwork carried out within the project "Comparative research of Boyash Roma in Hungary and Romania". The research was conducted under the exchange agreement of the Hungarian and Romanian Academies of Science, with support from the fund for Social Science Researches of Hungarian National Importance (OKTK) between 1999 and 2002 (A.1739/VIIIb, B.1959/VIII/02). The data was recorded in participant observation and in interviews.

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<i>Name of group</i>	<i>Main area of residence</i>
Rudar	Oltenia, Muntenia <sup>2</sup>
Băiaş	Banat, Transylvania <sup>3</sup>
Băniaş	Banat <sup>4</sup>

*Table 1. Studied Romanian-speaking groups regarded as Gypsies by outsiders in Romania*

In Ion Chelcea's classification the Rudari are a unified group (1944: 32) but their name differs by geographical region: they are usually called Rudar but in Transylvania Boyash (*băieşi*), in Moldavia Lingurar (*lingurari*, 'ladle-makers') is their name (ibid. 38–39). The communities of the three groups I met regarded themselves as separate from one another. In the western part of Romania, in the Banate and Transylvania each group knows of the existence of the other two. By contrast, the Rudari of geographically more closed Oltenia and Muntenia have not heard or know very little about the other two groups. The etymology of all three designations traces the words to '(gold)miner' according to Romanian linguistic researches (Calotă 1995: 16), although some researchers opine that the word Rudar means 'iron-' or 'metal-miner', the latter also referring to the word *băiaş* (ibid.).<sup>5</sup> In spite of that, today the traditional occupation of each group is woodworking. In the studied Oltenian community the interviewed Rudari reckon with four Rudar subgroups, each named after a typical procedure of woodworking. The first group has an endonym, the other three are exonyms as they are used by the members of

<sup>1</sup> In the fieldwork both Romanians and the Rudari used the word *Gypsy*. I only heard Roma use the word *Roma* to designate themselves and other Romani-speaking groups.

<sup>2</sup> On their dialects, see Calotă 1971, 1995. On Muntenian Rudari: Chelcea 1943, 1944.

<sup>3</sup> Detailed ethnographic description: Chelcea 1944. For their present-day life in Transylvania, see e.g. Fosztó 1997. On the language of the Boyashes in Croatia, see Saramandu 1997, on that of the Hungarian Boyashes: Papp 1980, 1982, 1982a, Orsós 1997, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> A larger number of them live in Voivodina (Serbia), see the ethnographic description of Maluckov 1979 and Flora 1969 for the language. Exemplifying the greater activity of research in the new millennium, see Sikimić 2003, Sikimić ed. 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Anna Borbély also refers to Calotă 1995 in defining the etymology of the word Rudar (Borbély 2001: 79). The two-tome Romanian-Hungarian dictionary says *băiaş* (also *băieş*) means 'miner' in colloquial Romanian, while Rudar means 'tub-carver/ladle-maker Gypsy' (eds. Petrovici et al. 1964 vol. I: 113 and vol. II: 438).

the first subgroup to designate the others. From among the mentioned groups I have gained first-hand experience of the first three (*table 2*).

<i>Name of subgroup</i>	<i>Origin of name</i>	<i>Traditional occupation</i>	<i>Day of gurbane</i>
Rotari (Oltenia)	‘wheel-makers’	wheel-making, plus: making spindles, spoons, saddles, milking stools, etc.	Orthodox feast of St George
Corzeni (Oltenia)	‘?’ <sup>6</sup>	making tubs, ladles, plus: chopping-boards, chairs, etc.	Orthodox Ascension Day (June)
Albieri, incl.: N’emțoi/Unguroi (Muntenia)	‘tub-makers’, incl.: ‘Germans/Hungarians’ (originating from Banat/Transylvania)	making tubs, spoons, plus: milking stools, etc., baskets, brooms	not celebrated by the ‘Germans/Hungarians’
Băltăreți (?) <sup>7</sup> (Oltenia)	‘puddle-folks, swampers’	collecting and selling Danubian tree-roots	?

*Table 2. The mentioned ethnic subgroups of Rudari in Oltenia and Muntenia*

From among the above categories, the name ‘Germans/Hungarians’ derives from the place of origin of the group: their predecessors arrived in Muntenia from Banat or Transylvania (The members of a Rudar colony in Muntenia claimed they called themselves *albieri* and the Oltenian Rudari tagged them *nemțoi* and *unguroi*). The linguist Calotă (1995: 15) says there are the following Rudar subgroups in Oltenia probably with endonyms: *albieri* or *lingurari* (‘tub-makers’ or ‘ladle-makers’), *corfari/coșari* (‘basket-weavers’) and *rotari* or *cărari* (‘wheel-makers’ or ‘cart-makers’).<sup>8</sup> As I have found so far, basket weaving is an auxiliary or female oc-

<sup>6</sup> Our respondents did not know the meaning of the word.

<sup>7</sup> Not everyone was certain that the group existed. A partner in the conversation humorously remarked that the members of the *băltăreți* group are ‘on mission’ in Hungary and other countries.

<sup>8</sup> In addition, Calotă (*ibid.*) relying on Chelcea 1943: 22, 30 and the accounts of his own informants, also mentions a Romanian-speaking *cărămidar* (‘brick-maker’) group in Teleorman county, who changed occupations and whom his informants also called *aurari* (‘gold-washers’). It needs to be added that I met with a group called *cărămidar* both in



cupation among some Rudari in the Muscel valley (Argeş county, Muntenia). From among the mentioned groups, the *rotari* and *corzeni* are culturally closest to one another, as is revealed by their occupations and the celebration of gurbane.

### Traditional discourses of identity and culture

The central topic of the traditional discourse in the studied Rotar community is the listing of the historical cultural merits that — the narratives claimed — enabled the people to move from the woods to the Rudar colony (*Rudărie*) on the edge of the village — that is, into the village precincts — in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, then after World War II to receive farmland which was given back to them after the regime change of 1989. The next stage of rapprochement with the Romanian population was the expansion of contacts, integration among them as much as possible. That was in a period when the population of the village lived under extremely hard conditions, irrespective of ethnicity. After the regime change, most of them lost their industrial labour jobs in cities (at the time of the field research only two (!) Rudar men had work in the city) and tried to live from the land. Very small parcels of land are tilled (the owners use the measure *pogon* ‘half hectare’ instead of hectare to determine the size of land) and most product is consumed at home. The Rudari usually get some cash when they manage to guest-work in agriculture in neighbouring Serbia or do some work in the gardens in villages nearby.

In the rhetoric themes of their discursive system the Rudari principally wish to prove that contrary to the ideas of the outside world, they are not Gypsies but a special Romanian ethnic group. The Romanian peasants of the village are tolerant and lenient to the local Rudari calling them “our Rudari” (*rudarii noştri*), but by the word Rudar they mean Gypsy. They prize the Rudari’s effort to learn agricultural work but they regard them as a coloured minority, using a condescending discourse (see also Fosztó *ibid.*). Although some Rudar families moved to parts of the village populated by Romanians, the majority remained near the Rudar quarters. No one remembers of mixed marriages, or at least they are not spoken about. In spite of that, our Romanian conversants thought that the Rudari of a lighter complexion derived from earlier mixed marriages or liaisons.

It is important for the Rudari to be recognised as Romanians because they hope to have equal treatment with the members of majority society thereby. Their discourse alludes to presumed events, facts in the past that

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Oltenia and Banat (the latter having intricate kinship relations in Bihor), but all were Romani-speaking Vlach Roma.

promoted their gradual social advance compared to which they experience their current situation as regression. After Friedrich, linguist Jane Hill talks about such nostalgia-discourses based on the past:

The discourse of nostalgia is ‘ideological’ in both the ‘ideational’ and ‘pragmatic’ senses. ... Not only is it made up of a set of propositions about the past, but, through the implicit and explicit positive evaluations of the past that the discourse asserts, people who benefit from practices that they believe are legitimated by tradition put forward their political interests. (Hill 1992: 263)

The themes of the Rudar discourse clearly reveals that their mythic world view consists basically of three ethnic elements: the Rudari, the Romanians and the Gypsies, as well as the historicized relation of the Rudari to the other two groups. In both relations there are dichotomous and analogous elements. They adduce the following arguments to verify their Romanian origin:

1. Most of the respondents said the name Rudar came from the word *rudă* ‘relative, family, clan’, although some thought it derived from the phonetically similar word for ‘pole’ which might allude to their traditional occupation. A myth of origin has it that when the Romanians set out from “the tower of Babel”, they asked: “Who is coming [with us]? Well, our relatives, the Rudari.” (*Șine vine? Păi și rudele noastre, rudarii.*) Many therefore think that even their name suggests they are related to the Romanians. No myth of origin was recorded in connection with the Gypsies.

2. Their ideology of origin claims that they are descendants of the Dacians from among the forefathers of the Romanians. They substantiate this statement by their “love of nature” and their attraction to wood. That this view has a considerable past among them is proven by their first researcher Constantin S. Nicolăescu-Ploșor, a nobleman who examined Gypsies from an ethnographic viewpoint and also settled some in his estates. In his article of 1922, Nicolăescu-Ploșor wrote it was a general view among the Rudari that they were of Dacian origin (1922: 38).<sup>9</sup> For

<sup>9</sup> László Fosztó did not find rivalry “around the problem of the ‘ancestry’ and locality” in a Transylvanian village where three ethnies (Hungarians, Romanians and Boyashes) lived (Fosztó 2003: 89). The local Boyashes agree to the ‘Gypsy’ origin. The situation is the same among the Hungarian Boyashes (Kovalcsik 1996).

As regards the “love of nature”, strangely enough Chelcea also deemed the Rudari “an ethnic group of the nature” (1944: 36) as they lived in woods and picked (‘gathered’) fruit. The ideas of the researchers had an impact on the ideology of the researched: a respondent had heard a researcher on the radio sometime earlier and he referred to him when the ideology of origin came up.

the time being, the source of this ideology of origin is unknown, but most probably it derives from the period of scholarship when the current social situation and way of living were projected back into the past via a mythic time concept, and groups were brought into imagined kinship on the basis of social status and way of life. However, the Dacian origin is not generally maintained. Some think the Dacians were the immediate predecessors of the Rudari. Others claim that both Romanians and Rudari originate from the Dacians (and the Romans), but the Rudari have preserved a lot of elements of the ancient way of living.

3. The myth cited at point 1 ends like this: “And since then we have borne the Rudar name, but we don’t know any other language” (*Și d-atunci ne-a rămas numele rudari, dar altă limbă nu știm*). That is, their Romanian mother tongue is also an argument for their Romanian origin: their forebears were “Romanized” (*au fost romanizați*) just as the rest of the ancestral groups. Although their language has several deviations from the local dialect, they stress a single main feature, speaking with ‘sh’ (similarly to other Boyash/Rudar people earlier living in Banat, they utter a palatalized *sh* in place of *ch* of the literary language), but this is not prevalent everywhere due to schooling and adaptation to the environment. The Rudari look upon the Gypsies as a separate people who originated from India and have a language of their own.

4. Out of the traditional elements determining their cultural identity, they stress two: their occupation and the gurbane. The traditional occupation is a source of pride because they feel it is their hard work that won the esteem of the neighbouring Romanians. Besides, their traditional occupation is a physically taxing skilled work that can only be pursued by those who are competent. That gives them a sense of superiority over the peasantry who are not good at their craft. In the village all Rudar craftsmen are old, above sixty (That is not everywhere so, because in other villages younger wood-workers can be met, too.). There is no wheel-making at all in the settlement as the rubber wheel has ousted it. There is a single man who makes yokes (*jug*), two or three others make wooden spoons for the *pomana* (feast in memory of the deceased) and some women produce spindles (*fus*) on home-made lathes (*strung*) (Spindle-making is a female job.). The memory of former craftsmanship, however, helps them over the difficulties they encounter due to their smaller proficiency in farming.

It is their special occupation, however, that links the three ethnic communities, with Rudari in the middle. Within the Romanians, the Rudari are the group that are traditionally craftsmen and not peasants. Having a craft, however, also brings them closer to the Gypsies, because

Gypsies are also craftsmen and not farmers. The difference is that the Rudari work wood (*lemn*), the Gypsies work iron (*fier*) (with reference to the metal-working occupation of some Romani groups). It is not the dichotomy of agriculture (sedentary living) and itinerant crafts that this fact strengthens in their thinking — they opine that their ancestors were sedentary people in the forest — but it distinguishes them as a group that is tied to the other two groups more than those to each other. They badly need this awareness in a situation in which their self-conscious Romani acquaintances demote them to a low position within the Roma because of their presumed loss of language, low-income farm labour and the condemnation that the Rudari fail to face up to their ‘Gypsy’ origins.

5. The Rudari are not proud of their artistic activity. In the art of the village, decorative art is most conspicuous both among Romanians and Rudari. Both groups include some craftsmen who make the colourfully painted wooden crosses (*cruce/cruce*) placed in the cemetery and on fences and wells in the village (including the Rudar colony) in memory of the dead and to ensure a harmonious relationship with the departed. The Rudari do not think they can rival the Romanian peasants in music or dance. They hold in general that their songs and dances are close to those of the Romanians, as they are Romanian themselves. Apart from folksongs, they like popular songs very much, while the operetta-like performing style mediated by the Romanian media is not alien to some performers. Among professional performers they keep in evidence who is of Rudar and who of Gypsy origin, mainly when they are from Oltenia and Muntenia, and they listen to many popular Romanian singers. The least problematic field of ‘Gypsy friendship’ is music since the Rudari like both traditional Gypsy music (*muzică lăutărească*) and the new popular genre said to be of Gypsy origin, *manele* (Garfias 1981, 1984, Beissinger 2003).

The first three points of the above discourse (folk etymology of the name Rudar, ideology of origin and language) are the themes of the nostalgia discourse that make the Rudari believe they used to be in the focus of interest of the majority society, the larger and stronger ‘relative’ who made patronizing and integrative gestures towards them. The Rudari are passive subjects of these acts, accepting what they get. Their independence within the Romanian nation are listed in point 4: occupation and ceremony. Finally, point 5 reinforces both directions. On the one hand, the Rudari identify with the culture of their relatives the Romanians, but on the other hand, they have a few tiny specificities. The nostalgia discourse shows up the lost childhood, as it were, when passive reception and adaptation were successful. That this passivity is not perfect is revealed by the cultural peculiarities of Rudari integrated in the past.

**The most important representative of traditional Rudar culture:  
the gurbane**

The meaning of the word *gurbane* also pronounced as *corban* by some is ‘sacrifice’ (Rom. *jertfă*). The first, rather sketchy summary of the celebration was given by Nicolăescu–Ploșor in his brief study of 1922. Together with a description of the gurbane, he also included the word in his glossary of special Oltenian words (1922a). Although the other known researcher of Roma and Rudari, Ion Chelcea considered the gurbane an ‘enigma’ of the Rudari, he never met with it in his research area (Transylvania and Muntenia), which made him think it was only valid in Oltenia (Chelcea 1944: 140). Calotă opined that the feast spread in Rudar communities that used to live together with Turkish and Bulgarian people in their former places of abode (Calotă 1995: 31–32).

Originally, gurbane was a healing sacrifice which gradually turned into a family feast. In the studied community its date was St George’s Day. The local Rudari know little of the Roma analogies of the feast in the Balkans (see e.g. Vukanović 1983, Dunin 1998, Pettan 2002, Radulovački 2004), and the little they know is from a local woman whose daughter married a Rudar there when on guest-work in Serbia. The Romanians do not celebrate St George’s Day, and they do not sacrifice lambs.

The Rudari incorporate the feast into Orthodoxy. The offering is the lamb that God gave Abraham so that he would not have to sacrifice his son Isaac. Traditionally, those families carry out the immolation that have (mainly) paralytics among them and wish to promote their recovery. Our respondents emphasized that it is effective against illnesses that have visible, perceptible symptoms and it is useless against the conditions of internal organs. They listed the following illnesses that occurred in the Rudar colony: crippled arm or leg, distorted mouth, rickets, loss of hair, ‘sewn’ eye (probably chronic conjunctivitis), initial blindness, deafness, dumbness. Nicolăescu–Ploșor (1922: 35) found it was used for those who were *possessed by the saints* (*de cei luați din sfinte*, Nicolăescu–Ploșor’s italics), who had a limb *paralysed* or mouth distorted *by stroke*. Speaking about such phenomenon, our informants said: “he had a hand and leg taken away from him in his sleep, or in the field on his way, along the path” (*i-a luat o mână ș-un picior din somn sau pe câmp pe unde a trecut pe potecă, pă cărare*). And: “when the prophetesses settle on someone” (*ursătorile când să puñe*). “The belief of being possessed by the saints is familiar to the Romanians, too”, Nicolăescu–Ploșor writes, “but they do not hold a ceremony to please the saints and benefactors to get them to heal the sick” (1922 *ibid.*).

The saints or sibyls are the three Dire Sisters called prophetesses in Romanian who presage the fate of the child after its birth, as the Romanians and Rudari believe (Evseev 1998: 475–476, *ursitoarele*). Some Rudari are proud that they believe in the existence of the Sisters more strongly than the Romanian villagers. In their traditions, the role of the Fatal Sisters is extended with their function in the gurbane.

The good grace of the Fates can principally be won for the health and well-being of the newborn and the adult population by cleanliness in the first place. The Sisters come the third night after the birth of the child, a little before midnight. They are three maidens in white, who are guarded by an angel also in white, the charioteer (*vizitu*). Some believe that the Sisters come from heaven in a chariot. Others think they fly like whirlwind or with or without wings. Aged people claim the Sisters could be seen a few centuries ago, when God was walking the Earth and the sky was so low you could touch it with your hand. But even today their arrival can be felt. When the appearance of the Fates is expected, the neighbours quickly go to bed lest they should incur the wrath of the illness-dispensing Fates by catching sight or sound of them.

Preparing for the visitation of the Fates, there is thorough cleaning (done traditionally by the midwife) and a sand path is strewn for them in the courtyard. In the room where the mother is sleeping with the baby a table is set with sweet unleavened bread spread with honey, two glasses of water, a glass of wine and objects alluding to the desired future of the child (The next day the food on the table is distributed among children passing by in the street.). If the Fates do not find cleanliness, they “throw up” the bed and may cause illness among the adults in the house. The Sisters put their hands on the child. The two elder women prophesy favourable things: the first tells the child’s expected occupation and life-path, the second wishes to determine the length of its life-time. The third and youngest woman, who is less benevolent, may change these prophecies as hers is the last word. The Rudari believe that difficulties are primarily caused by the lack of cleanliness around delivery and the gurbane. Some of the adults fall ill because the Sisters failed to find enough cleanliness around the newborn. For them, of course, a gurbane has to be conducted. Another risk is having insufficient cleanliness or breeching the rules at gurbane. The family in which I took part in the gurbane in three consecutive years (2000–2002) was forced to hold the immolation because earlier their three-year-old daughter had stolen a piece of meat and bread from the table before the prayer (see later) and as a result, she lost her hair. “She looked like Kojak,” the host explained. The girl was in her late twenties at

the time of the research. The youngest ill person at that time was a girl around ten, whom the gurbane cured of rickets.

The prophetesses can be designated by their status names in everyday speech but after the birth of the child and in prayers around the gurbane it is prohibited. At that time, only flattering addresses are allowed: “you saints, good, beautiful, sweet, merciful, gentle misses” (*voi sfintelor, bunelor, frumoaselor, dulcelor, milostivelor, coconițelor*).<sup>10</sup> Since they wish the Fates to give them health, “to speak nicely to them”, they also speak flatteringly to them, giving due respect. Thus, among the Rudari the role of the Fates is extended: they do not only predict the future but also see to the healing of certain illnesses. At the same time, this feast gives the Rudari a sense of superiority — in addition to the traditional occupation — because it gives them the impression of health. Many of them

<sup>10</sup> It is noteworthy that the Fates also survive in the beliefs of the Hungarian Boyashes under the name *urând'e* (written with Hungarian orthography: uringye). Teacher and ethnographer Ernő Eperjessy collected several data of them in the late 1950s, early '60s. In his summary paper (1993) he states that after the child's birth three birds alight on a tree next to the house, on the roof or the window-sill. They have birdlike bodies with women's head. He also published the drawing of a 15-year-old Boyash girl of this creature. Others said the Fates were not birds but women in white. Most informants said the greatest weight in the decision was delved upon the oldest of the three. Eperjessy attributes the survival of the belief to the fact that in the habitat of the Boyashes in South Transdanubia they are in contact with Croatian groups among whom the Fates are also known (called 'Fatal women' or *sudjenice*). The *urând'e* are frequent motifs in Boyash tales where they only have the role of fortune-telling. In Eperjessy's Boyash story collection (1991) they appear in three tales: The three fates (AaTh613), Truth and Falsehood; László Királyfi and Farajon (Prince Leslie and Farajon) AaTh303–516+556F, The Twins; Talált Gergő (Found Gergő), AaTh461+300, Three hairs from the devil's beard (in the role of presaging the future). In the first mentioned study (1993: 86) Eperjessy publishes a tale in which the Fates tell the future of a boy who dies on a well, which is also known by the Croats along the Drava (The Fates tell the parents that their newborn son will drown in the well in the courtyard. The parents cover up the well. The boy can't lift the cover and dies on top of the well.). Anna Orsós also published a Boyash tale in which there is a single fortune-teller (Fate) (1998, in Boyash: 15–16, in Hungarian translation: 72–73, AaTh934) which is related to the previous one. It is about a little girl who — the prophetess predicts — will be struck dead by lightning when she has turned 16. However, with the help of an old woman the girl is saved since they pray together. The word *fortune-teller* appears in the tale in a different phonetic variant, *ursândă*.

I herewith express my thanks to Boyash language teacher Terézia Kalányos of Pécs for the following oral communication: commenting on the latter tale, her mother told her that she would not call the tale *Ursânda* (spelt in Hungarian: *Urszînda*) / The Prophetess but *Mândrel'e* (written in Hungarian: *Mîndrêlye*) / The fair misses. The Rudari in Oltenia received the question whether the fortune-tellers can be named “you prophetesses” in prayers with surprise or fright. In the Romanian tradition the Fates are also addressed by the above names (Evseev op. cit.: 476).

stressed that there were no cripples among them because they had gurbane. Besides, the Fates do not only visit the Rudari at the birth of a child but every year, to hear their prayer at the gurbane. Thirdly, the Rudari claim that earlier some peasants used also to come to them for a cure. The peasants' visit to them has a tradition as on such occasions they "lent help" to the peasants, and not vice versa. The conversion of gurbane into a family holiday with the beliefs slowly overshadowed was not only essential in preserving a Rudar specificity but also helped them to maintain and strengthen their social contacts.

In its early history, the gurbane as a lamb sacrifice (*sacrificare*) was only used for healing by families who had some member taken ill. Nicolăescu–Ploșor's report dates from that period. The function of gurbane as a family feast has changed. Gurbane for the sick is staged out of necessity (*de nevoie*) and the families in which nobody is ill hold it for pleasure (*dă drag*). The phases of a traditional gurbane are the following:

a) Somebody falls ill in the family, and they decide on a healing sacrifice. People stress that it is only required when the medical doctors cannot help the patient and the visit to the church or monastery is also without effect. Visiting the church was a problem because at the time of the research there was only a wooden church in the cemetery, and the village had no priest for decades, until the end of 2001. Nor does a monastery visit often precede the gurbane because travelling costs a lot. A gurbane can take place when the sick person (the mother or grandmother for an underage person) has found out while asleep how the ceremony should take place. The respondents had different opinions whether an adult's relative could also have a prophetic dream about the gurbane's scenario. In Nicolăescu–Ploșor's article (1922: 35) an old woman who has already obtained absolution of her sins prays for the sick and sees the script of the feast in her sleep. The Rudari in the village had not heard of such a thing. An old couple told us that when the man had fallen ill and often fainted, the woman dreamed for him. Others claimed that there must always be a relative sleeping with the sick person prepared in the same way.

b) The house is thoroughly cleaned. The respondents stressed that "even the door-handle has to be washed" and "the boards of the bed are also washed". I presume that by stressing these two objects, they allude to protection against the impurity of publicity and sexuality, respectively. Preparing for the dream, the sick person must abstain from sexual intercourse for a few weeks. This period is defined from two to four weeks. On the eve of the dream, the person washes ritually and lies down on a white sheet in a white shirt or wrapped in a sheet, the women also tie their heads



in a white kerchief. The above-mentioned old woman emphasized that the mattress had to be removed from the bed. It generally holds that everything must be white. The precondition of the right dream is “to think of something” (*pui de gând*), i.e. the person must concentrate on the right dream (Some informants used the term “think of something” meaning you plan the healing ceremony.). If the dream does not contain the scenario of the ritual lamb offering, the gurbane cannot be held. No one, however, reported of such a case. The central moment of the dream is the decision how to prepare the lamb: roasted (*fript*) or boiled (*fiert*) i.e. roasted on a spit, or prepared for soup. The great majority of people dreamt of roast lamb, and only a single — now dead — person dreamed of a lamb soup. The dream also indicates the venue (whether it should be “in the green”), the accessories (e.g. the meat has to be salted, what ingredients to add, e.g. fish) and the ritual of the meal. After a successful dream, the patient prays to the Fates and promises to hold the gurbane the next feast of St George. Then he/she recovers. The gurbane must be held every year as long as the person lives, or else the illness might relapse. Several relevant stories were heard. Traditionally, the only cause for missing a gurbane was poverty (they cannot afford to buy a lamb). Only in the case of an old couple did the illness not return, although they had not been able to hold the gurbane for the man for six years because they did not have enough money. In someone else’s opinion, if the gurbane is held in three consecutive years yet the person fails to recover, then the illness “had a different cause”.

c1) The gurbane is held on St George’s Day. In the preceding weeks a big cleaning is done again. That is not a difficult rule because the feast is little after the Orthodox Easter and Easter is already awaited in cleanliness. The fences and the interior walls are whitewashed, sometimes the outside of the house is also painted anew. But they stress that a more thorough cleaning must precede the gurbane than Easter. Only those can take part in the ceremony — they stress — who had observed sexual abstinence (of two, three, four or six weeks, depending on the speaker). Any impure person who sits by the table to eat will be hit by the illness for the healing of which the ceremony is held. In earlier times, before the 1980s, everyone had to do ritual washing — from hands and not from a dish, and put on white clothes. These two conditions are not observed any more. Those, however, who do not wash before the gurbane will have their hands stripped of skin or will faint.

c2) The lamb is bought a few days earlier, today from the shepherds who counting on the gurbane appear in the village with a truckload of lambs weighing about 20 kg each. The lamb can only be male (wether)

and pure white. The respondents said there were no longer lambs without at least a few darker spots, but the most flawless has to be selected. No bargaining is allowed, the price said by the seller is to be accepted, and “don’t buy it by the kilo, it mustn’t be weighed.”

c3) Preparations for the ceremony begin around seven in the morning. The women sweep up the house and the court. Traditionally — but not compulsorily — the women go to a nearby hill to gather sand and green oak branches. As was seen with childbirth, sand is a symbol of cleanliness; it can only be taken from places where no one has trodden on it. Green twigs symbolize youth, health: they gather them to “green out”. The sand is carried home in a wooden tub on the shoulder or head, the branches are carried by the children or young men who accompany the women to help them cut branches. In the meantime the men prepare the place for the fire. Traditionally, the gurbane was held in a forest clearing but today most people remain at home in the garden. Since the village is in a valley surrounded by gentle hills, some families move up the slope of one of the hills.

c4) As soon as the sand arrives, the fireplace is strewn with it, smoothed down and the women make a fire. The men dig two forked poles into the ground and prepare the spit that will hold the lamb. To bury the waste of the lamb, they dig a pit (*groapã*) of about 20 cm in diameter near the fireplace. The lamb’s blood is let into it and later various accessories of the ceremony. The men cut the lamb’s throat with a knife and skin and wash it squatting (Otherwise they hang animals to be skinned on a hook and work standing.). Traditionally, the skin should be put into the pit, but nowadays they salt it and set it aside, because on the day of the gurbane or the following days leather merchants come and purchase it. They remove the haslet and the women boil it in a cauldron on a pole next to the lamb. They stitch together the belly of the lamb with a twig, spit it and begin to roast it. There are no spices except salt. A small pail is set by the lamb with salted water. A leafy twig is prepared and from time to time the twig is dipped in the pail and the lamb is wetted.

c5) When the chitterlings are cooked, the lamb is removed from the fire, the haslet filled into its belly and it is sewn up again. It is a sign of the slackening of the custom that even some of those who take the ritual seriously serve the cooked chitterlings up to the guests for breakfast.

c6) The lamb is roasted for 7–8 hours on the spit, so it is ready about 4 or 5 in the afternoon. During its roasting the family and the guests chat, play cards. In the last few hours events accelerate. Three low round

three-legged tables are brought out. The women knead three or five round Oltenian unleavened bread loaves (*azmă*; as instructed in the dream) and bake them in the ash under the lamb. In a cauldron maize porridge (*polenta*, *mămăligă*) is cooked, one, two or three portions. When the polenta is ready, it is turned out on one of the tables. The roasted lamb is put on the three tables pushed together and the spit is removed. A bread is put on each table. Either there are three bottles of red wine, one for each table, or there is only one bottle, which they put at the lamb's head. The informants said red wine is the blood of God so no other alcoholic drink can be consumed around the sacrificial table, nor can anyone smoke. A green twig is placed behind the lamb's ear and in the bottle, and the ritual begins.

d1) One of the greatest authorities in the family is 'the priest' (*popă*), who says the prayer. He sits on the ground by the lamb's head. Behind him stands the sick person with the right hand gripping a green twig held at his/her heart. 'The priest' can also put a green twig behind his ear. The rest of the participants sit down on the grass around the three tables. Most family members also change for the ceremony, but not into white. They wear their customary Sunday clothes. 'The priest' then recites the prayer to the Fates in a loud voice three times. The basic text of the prayer is relatively constant, more or less the same as the two variants Nicolăescu–Ploșor published.<sup>11</sup> There is not much room for variation in the original text. Below there are Nicolăescu–Ploșor's variants first, followed by a version recited to a request in 2001, after which the detail of a prayer variant recorded in function is given:

1. Two variants published by Nicolăescu–Ploșor, Mehedinți county, Oltenia (1922: 36):

a) *Voi sfintelor, voi bunelor, să dați snaga și puterea lui cutare, că el v'o prăznui din an în an, c'un berbece gras, cu trei buți de vin și cu trei cuptoare de pâine. Dați snaga și puterea lui, din vârtutea lui, că el v'o prăznui din an în an și v'o prăznui cât o fi el.*

You saints, good ones, give strength and perseverance to *this and this person*, for he will celebrate you with a fat wether, three barrels of wine and three ovenload of bread from year to year. Give him strength and perseverance and courage, for he will celebrate you from year to year and will celebrate you as long as he lives.

<sup>11</sup> However, it is interesting that Nicolăescu–Ploșor does not use the word priest. He writes of "an elderly person" who says the prayer, and there is information of three persons praying. In the researched village, the priest need not be old; it suffices if he has a family and he can speak well.

b) *Voi sfințelor și milostivelor, aduceți-vă aminte de cutare. Dați-i snaga și puterea și vârtutea, în tot corpul lui, în toate oasele lui, că el v'o purta de grije din an în an, c'un berbece gras, c'un cuptor de pâine și c'o butie de vin.*

You saints and merciful ones, remember *this and this person*. Give him strength and perseverance and courage in his whole body, in every of his bones, for he will provide you with a fat wether, an ovenload of bread and a barrel of wine from year to year.

2) The variant recited upon request, 2001:

*Voi sfințelor, bunelor, coconițelor! Aduceți-vă aminte de Ioana că ea vă poartă dă grije din an în an, c-un berbece gras, c-un cuptor de pâine, cu azmă de grâu. Ce-am aurat să fie deplin.*

You saints, good ones, gentele misses! Remember Ioana because she takes care of you with a fat wether, an ovenload of bread and wheat from year to year. What I have blessed should come true.

3) Excerpt from the functional version, 2000:

'Priest': *Voi sfințelor, bunelor, dulcelor, coconițelor! Aduceți-vă aminte de Elena, dați-i snaga și puterea și virtutea în mâinile ei, în corpul ei, în tot ce are ea, să nu aibă fel de boală, să fie cea mai tare, să ia și bărbatu la pumn. Să aibă, să poartă de grijă din an în an, un berbece gras, un cuptor de pâine, o butelie de vin. Amin.*

Audience: *Amin.*

'Priest': You saints, good ones, dear ones, gentele misses! Remember Elena, give her strength and perseverance and courage in her hands, in her body, in her everything that she should not have any illness, that she should be strong enough to punch her husband. Let it be that she takes care of you with a fat wether, an ovenload of bread, a bottle of wine from year to year. Amen.

Audience: Amen.

In the functional variant of the rite held for the daughter who had lost her hair, the father interpolated a family problem. At the first recital of the text he only wished strength for his daughter. In the second variant cited above he already alluded to a family dispute, and in the third he made it explicit what he had against his son-in-law. This process reveals that the prayer is not a rigidly formal text — at least at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> centuries — but is adjusted to the needs of its users. It is not simply addressed to the Fates but it has a role in clarifying domestic matters by making them public. During the festivity the problem was not dis-

cussed. The ‘priest’ always finishes with an amen which the audience reiterates three times.

d2) Then the priest hits the lamb’s head, removes its tongue and brain and hands it to the sick person. The patient first drinks some wine, then eats a little tongue and finally some of the brain. Now everyone starts eating. No one may take more than once from the wine and it must not be wished to anyone’s health. Only hands can be used for eating: everyone takes a piece of the meat, the bread and the polenta. The green branches are for cleaning hands. After the meal water is poured on everyone’s hands, green branches are handed for drying.

During the day mainly sparkling soft drinks are drunk (but the men may also drink beer, even brandy, far away from the fireplace; in my host’s house in the front garden or in the house). They do not drink coffee or tea because it is expensive (There is a single Rudar family in the colony that can afford to offer coffee to their guests sometimes. Coffee is rarely drunk in the Romanian part of the village, too.).

e) As regards the leftover food, there is considerable change from earlier times. The respondents of Nicolăescu–Ploșor put half the meat and polenta and two pieces of bread by the side of the pit for the Fates at the beginning of the meal, and those who did not have enough at the table could take from it — only by the side of the pit. This custom is unknown in the studied village, but traditionally the leftover should be put into the pit. After the meal everything including the water used for washing the tables, the spit, the forked branches and the charcoal goes into the pit and is buried. The remaining food, however, is more often put aside in a wooden tub covered with leafy branches for later or for the next day, with reference to poverty. So they only bury the tools used. At one of the houses I saw an old woman sprinkle water around the three tables as is customary at a pomana. To my inquiry they said it was probably instructed in the dream. There may be minor deviations from the dream. When someone forgets to salt the meat, it entails no disadvantage but it has to be repeated in the next years, too.

f) The meal is followed by a party. Today it means a street ball held in the main street of the Rudar colony. Though there is not always a live band (twice there was out of the three times I spent there, in 2001 and 2002) — I think because of their little purchasing power — the people speak of the ball as if it did belong to the feast. The Romani musicians of the town arrive late in the afternoon.<sup>12</sup> First they play for free and only

<sup>12</sup> A third Romani group (in addition to the Vlach Romani guests and the professional musicians) includes Romani soft-drink and icecream vendors who appear in the

children dance. When towards evening the adults appear, they begin to play for money (“only for money” — *numai pe bani* — one of the musicians in charge of gathering money keeps shouting in a strong voice), in blocks whose lengths are proportionate with the received sum (People usually pay 10–20 thousand lei, equal to about 30–60 Eurocents.). Earlier, people made merry singing at home in family circles. In our case, during roasting the lamb and after the meal people listened to the radio music programs or cassettes a lot.

The appearance of gurbane held ‘for pleasure’ also changed the traditional gurbane. As mentioned earlier, an important goal of extending the custom is the fostering of relations with non-Rudar clients. Although accounts claim that earlier Romanians used to come to them for a cure (confirmed by Nicolăescu–Plopșor as well, but there is no knowing whether he got his information from experience or from narratives),<sup>13</sup> today it seems impossible. We tried to find — unsuccessfully — a Romanian woman in the village who allegedly went to the Rudar colony to have a gurbane. One informant did not remember her name, the other said she had died. Thus, healing had to be replaced by more up-to-date things to be able to entertain guests.

The Rudari try to ensure the support of the Romanians in several ways. It is a prevalent custom among them to ask Romanians to be god-parents; some orphaned Rudar children are brought up in Romanian families, and as for work, some are employed in the farms or gardens of Romanians and earlier, in the decades of socialism, they commuted to common workplaces. God- and foster parents, employers, former schoolmates, earlier and current colleagues are welcome guests at a family gurbane. It enhances the significance of the gurbane that both Romanians and Rudari have to save up because few can afford to buy a lamb any time. Although this aspect — that Romanian guests also “like lamb meat” — is included in the discourse about gurbane,<sup>14</sup> they do not speak about

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main street of the colony in the morning. They are not among the affluent strata of the Roma, they sell their ware very cheap (In 2002 a glass of soft drink cost 1,000 lei, less than half an Eurocent.).

<sup>13</sup> Nicolăescu–Plopșor included the word gurbane in his Oltenian glossary because he heard of Oltenian settlements where Romanians also held gurbane. But the feast and the word were only known by Romanians where Rudari lived, too (1922: 37).

<sup>14</sup> The social significance of gurbane must not be belittled. Not only do people rarely have the chance to relish lamb meat, but also anyone may eat as much as they can. The Rudari carefully portion out food not only on weekdays but also on holidays (The latter fact, as I observed, is contrary to local Romanian ideas who try to prepare as large an amount of milk bread and cakes to be offered at festivities as possible.). It is highly impo-

the fact that the slackening of the beliefs associated with the custom is largely attributable to the effort of families laying great weight on contacts with Romanians to satisfy the presumed or real expectations of the outsiders in order to adapt to their value system or to entertain them. After the Romanians, Vlach Romani friends or god-parents also appeared in better-off Rudar families. The son of our host made friends with a Vlach Rom during his military service, who visited them for the gurbane with his family (three small children) in several years. On the three occasions we were present, the first was attended by the close family, that is, five people. In the next year this friend brought along some young acquaintances, that raised the number to nine. In the third year, these visitors did not come, because, the host explained, the family had liked gurbane so much that they organized a lamb-roasting feast at home.

Each family tries to lay aside the money for a lamb to be able to celebrate the Rudar holiday and, not least, to be able to invite their Romanian and Romani clients. They preserve some of the customs associated with gurbane because they regard them as particular and worthy of being admired by outsiders.<sup>15</sup> The guests usually sit on the ground during an entertainment gurbane, too, eat with hands and clean themselves (mostly) in leafy branches. Some housewives already use a knife to divide the meat and the polenta, and they also drink brandy by the tables, which was traditionally forbidden. There is also a priest in the family gurbane, usually the head of the family, but the prayer may end up in joking. It was obvious in the hosting family that although originally they started gurbanes more than twenty years earlier for the cure of the daughter, it gradually turned into

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lite to take a second slice of the festive milk bread because other guests may come who also have to be offered some by the hosts. The guest's voracity thus weakens the host's contact capital. That, however, does not apply to gurbane when they even force the others to eat. As they do not expect to see a large company from outside the colony except those who have accepted the invitation, and they know that nearly every Rudar family kills a lamb, and since there are often more than one ill persons in a family, the relatives often roast their lambs side by side, they may safely indulge in generosity. The host is filled with pride when his guest is well fed to nearly bursting. An old woman told us a story about this from her youth: during the gurbane held in a clearing in the woods the local policeman chanced by. Since he felt like eating, he had to wash ritually and accept the white clothes lent to him by the hosts. But he liked it so much "he couldn't tear himself from the tub" in which the leftover meat and polenta was put.

<sup>15</sup> The new practice implies several comic moments. It is well known that the price and weight of the sacrificial lamb of the traditional gurbane cannot be the subject of bargaining. I was witness to a scene in which a guest of a Rudar family, a middle-aged Vlach Romani man, brought out a pair of scales from the house and weighed the lamb. There was some dispute about the weight. The family who had invited this fun-loving guest did not hold the gurbane out of necessity but for pleasure.

merry-making. During the priest's prayer those around him were more and more overcome by mirth so much so that in the third year they kept scaring each other with the spit used for roasting the lamb. This histrionics was perhaps put out more for the Romanian than for the Romani guests, including two sad women who were jobless at the time of the research (the younger one was a former classmate of the earlier sick daughter and came to the gurbanes with her mother), and even more for some prestigious men the family were in working relations with. With the slackening of the prayer's serious tone, other external features began to be diluted. The pit was not backfilled in the third year. The custom is coming closer to what the girl married in Serbia experienced in her new family and what the local people spoke with aversion of. The girl's mother said the lamb was roasted in the open but then taken into the house and all they said before the meal was: "For the family!" She did not see any other rule.

#### **The impact of the new Pentecostal congregation upon the evaluation and practice of gurbane**

The life of the Rudar colony was stirred by the emergence of the Pentecostal congregation led by a local Rudar preacher in the mid-1990s. Though only some 6–8% of the adult population are members — number and part of the persons constantly changing — the new value order, customs and not least the international financial aid for the believers (clothes, food, the building of a church in the Rudar camp) brought substantial changes to the life of the families.

The new religion invigorated the people's thinking and debating spirit. In addition to religious disputes that are utterly new to them, it also boosted speculations about the origin and nature of the world and the place of the Rudari in it. The new faith prohibits lots of things that are dear to the people: drinking alcohol and smoking, performing the traditional oral genres and dancing, and also the gurbane as idolatry (because of praying to the Fates). In exchange, it offers a strong community with new bases of self-confidence. The believers have their own creative oral culture: they recite their own prayers to God and may compose songs. The Pentecostals are not supported by the local Romanians but by an international community, and the Romanians who are curious about the new faith (and there are some, since apart from the three pubs in the village, there is no local entertainment) have to enter the precincts of the colony to go to church. After the regime change a new development in cooperation was a Rudar's involvement in the local government but he cannot promote the colony's advancement for the time being as there is no money (With Romani parties the Rudari do not seek contact, for the above described



reasons.). The Rudar church building, however, aroused the competing spirit: in 2001 an ambitious young Orthodox priest was transferred to the village — a native, to boot — and with the help of the mayor he began building an Orthodox church in the middle of the village. The young man is open to the Rudars, too: at Epiphany he consecrates the Rudar homes, not only the Romanian houses, and he does not expect remuneration for that. In the year of the appearance of the Orthodox priest, the Rudar preacher enrolled in the Pentecostal theology in Bucharest, which means that he will be the first Rudar diploma holder in the village in addition to acquiring a lot of important cultural contacts and social capital (*table 3*).

	<i>Orthodoxes</i>	<i>Pentecostals</i>
Power relations:	separate families; local gov'n't helped by a Rudar councillor (no contact sought with Romani parties so far); the young Orthodox priest visits the colony at Epiphany, the mayor at the gurbane	the group has an organized core with an agile leader (the preacher), with extensive domestic and foreign relations for Pentecostal interests; some interested Romanians also come occasionally to the church
Use of church service:	wedding (not general), baptism, funeral, pomana, and some church feasts (Christmas, Easter)	2–3 times/week involved in the congregation: wedding, baptism, funeral, church feasts
Holidays:	first of all gurbane, then church feasts and rites of passage	church feasts and rites of passage (gurbane is prohibited)
Artistic activity:	traditional oral genres demoted into the background, dancing is functional (after gurbane, as well as at Rudar and Romanian weddings)	singing 2–3 times a week in the congregation, dancing and singing secular songs are prohibited
Expression of Rudar identity in the discourse:	elements of traditional discourse including gurbane	historical elements of traditional discourse, equality in religion for the converted, new family festivity to replace gurbane

*Table 3. Main values of Orthodoxes and Pentecostals*

As regards traditional discourses, the Pentecostals bring new hues in some areas but reject the customary attitude in others. They agree with the folk etymology of the word *rudar*, with the Dacian origin and the Romanian origin proven by their Romanian mother-tongue. The dispute between the Orthodoxes and Pentecostals have two basic areas: the beliefs and duties of the faith and making a living.

Some Orthodoxes are worried about the afterlife of the dead. To die without candle-light, to miss a pomana for an interim immersion may be dangerous for the deceased. It is also an argument of the Orthodoxes that those escape into Pentecostalism who have some flaw in their past and hope for atonement in this way. Some think the Pentecostals worship another god than they. As regards the manner of living, the Orthodoxes find it prejudicial that the Pentecostals only distribute the regular aids of food and clothes among themselves and sell the surplus.

There are many who long to be among the Pentecostals but cannot give up smoking or drinking alcohol. Young people mentioned dancing and amusements. I heard two young women snap back at their mother's evangelizing words that they would be Pentecostals when they were old and no longer felt like having a good time.

The Pentecostals counter these arguments by claiming that their religion is not restricted to feasts and rites of passage but offers a way of living. The preacher says a new religion always destroys old values and it must be accepted. Through their contacts the Pentecostal leaders can offer material help to the believers, while the Orthodoxes have to pay their priests for the services. People of an archaic mentality seek mythic signs in the rivalry of religions. They attribute illnesses to conversion or missing conversion to the new religion, and in the third year of the research when the area was hit by extraordinary aridity both sides thought that there was no rain because of the presence of the other religion.

It was a Pentecostal who told me another explanation of gurbane. It says that the custom can be traced to the liberation of the Jews from Egyptian slavery. After the exodus, God asked Moses to sacrifice an animal, and they sacrificed a lamb. This explanation was also heard by the young Orthodox priest from Rudari, but — as he said — both explanations were acceptable for him because they were the expression of a religious sentiment. The Pentecostal young man narrated this story with the hope that the gurbane could be saved in this way. The believing families are reluctant to give up this specific Rudar feast, not to speak of the Romanian guests

whom they try to keep in such a way that on the day of the feast they stage a picnic, usually sacrificing and roasting a goatling instead of a lamb.<sup>16</sup>

The religious disputes turn family members against each other. The wife of our host, for example, converted to Pentecostalism by the second year of our research, so she did not help with the gurbane. Her husband also sacrificed a kid for her sake (and skinned it standing, hanging the carcass on a hook), but since the woman only turned up for a short time at the venue of the lamb-roasting and only came to preach to her son, the host got so angry that he could hardly be talked into saying the prayer. It was unfortunate because it was his pleasant and honourable duty to say the prayer at the gurbane of the in-laws of his daughter and at that of the former rickety girls. Of course, the wife was also unhappy because she did not roast the kid with the family in the daughter's garden but spent time in a dark corner of their own house's garden, in the company of a few Pentecostal women popping in from time to time. By the next year, however, the host restored order. The woman could not be Pentecostal because then she could not put the wine glass before her husband when he wished to drink. In other families, the goatling was the problem as its meat is not as good as lamb meat and some invited guests would not eat it. Some already found out how to solve the problem: they have the lamb killed by a non-Pentecostal family member.

For these people, sacrificing a lamb has become a 'necessity' of another kind because they have to see to it or at least tolerate it despite their religious conviction if the other family members want to welcome guests. A woman around fifty, who had just converted before we arrived in the village, explained to us with ardour how important the gurbane was in the life of the Rudari and in her lucky recovery. In that year, the lamb was still sacrificed in her house by her daughter's family living with her. In the next year, however, the lamb was sacrificed in the other daughter's house since the woman had been immersed in the meantime. By the third year the woman had 'forgotten' what an important role gurbane had played in her life. When drought was mentioned on the day of the gurbane, she just said: "when there is gurbane, it always rains" meaning that God was sad about that pagan custom. The sharp-witted and agile woman also persuaded her husband to convert to Pentecostalism and the couple got into the central core of the local religious community. The self-awareness that was generated by their rise in status covered up her earlier attraction to

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<sup>16</sup> To the question why they roast a kid they only answered indirectly, like "nothing else is good". This led Lóránd Boros to the pragmatic conclusion that that was another animal that could to be skinned and thus its roasting resembled that of the lamb.

Rudar (and Orthodox) traditions. Since in the meantime they moved to a separate house from her daughter's, the latter decided to revive the gurbane to be able to entertain the god-parents of her children, a settled Romanian couple with two daughters who always visited them for the gurbane smartly dressed.

### Conclusions

The traditional discourse of the Rudari, which places historical cultural elements in the fore and, adjusting them to the present, tries to obtain advantages, can be ranged — after Jane Hill and Eagleton — *among the types of representation that locate the crucial nexus between dialogic action and social order, not between reference and reality* (Hill 1992: 264). The environment hardly accepts the Rudari's historical arguments (regarding them as Gypsies). In the dialogue of the two Rudar values acknowledged by the environment — which the Rudari tend to see as the only differentiating features from the Romanians (good work based on the occupational precedents and the entertaining, even useful gurbanes) — the Rudari are undoubtedly fairly successful yet they can hardly make both ends meet because of their poor network capital. Consequently, the historical arguments can not get positive answers from the surrounding Romanian population. The frequent mention of earlier diligent skilled work is to strengthen their conviction that they can and want to work. That, however, is no longer enough because of low education and village isolation.<sup>17</sup> The gurbane is the only argument that successfully adjusted to the changing requirements until the mid-1990s, but has been drifted into crises because of the emergence of Pentecostalism.

The Pentecostal discourse is closer to the second type of representation, as striking roots and extending their connections forced the believers to permanent argumentation and activity. Their successes are due to the interest of a superhuman power — God — that has recently turned to them, and His worship is the cementing force among them. The Pentecostal Rudari do not seek new arguments to adapt to their majority environment but accept the old ones that are proof of it in their eyes. Their advantage is that God expects of them presentday creativity both in secular and ecclesiastical spheres. They are eager to have something happening all the time: they keep embellishing their church and its surrounding, organize meetings with other denominations in the village, see to aids and distribute them, and so on. The leaders are also aware that in the forest of prohibi-

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<sup>17</sup> Some young Rudari have already completed twelve years of education, but it is of no use whatsoever in the village.

tions they have to make concessions, too. The traditions the people lay great weight on may be continued if they are adequately modified. The preacher prohibits the gurbane and lamb-killing, but allows a picnic-like goat-killing.

Also, it is the Pentecostals who began to address themselves to the ‘Gypsy’ problem. Traditionally, the Rudari — similarly to the Romanian peasants — were averse to the Gypsies who did not do any agricultural work. Nevertheless, they have to face up the fact that some Roma — a firm layer of merchants and musicians — live far better than they, some even acquiring high social positions. On the other side, there are also better-off Roma who patronize some Rudar families as god-parents or employers.

Under the doctrine of equality before God, a positive Romani image begins to appear on the horizon of the Rudari, which confirms to them that it is no shame to belong to the Roma. They try to overcome the frustration thereby that is felt by most Rudari seeing the richness of some Roma. They also share the prejudices against the Roma and even those against the Rudari, but show a way out in religion where everyone is equal as they “may improve”, adopting — of course — the Pentecostal value system. That does not mean that they accept the theory of the Gypsy origin of the Rudari but they cherish good relations with another marginalized group. At the same time, the Orthodox-Pentecostal question remains open, since the majority society is also opening towards the Rudari, as attested by the Rudar representation on the local government and the responsive behaviour of the Orthodox priest. There were hardly any changes perceptible of this rapprochement during our research, but the Rudari will certainly profit by it in the course of time.

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*Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, Belgrade*

## THE *GURBAN* DISPLACED: BAYASH GUEST WORKERS IN PARIS

The word *kurban* as used in the Balkan region is a borrowing from the Turkish, but is in fact of Biblical origin. It refers to a blood sacrifice, the aim of which is to appease the divine powers and secure the well-being of the family and of the entire community (Uzeneva 2004). The custom to which this word refers is traditionally practised by various ethnic and confessional groups (both Christian and Muslim). In the Balkan countries, the term denotes both the sacrificial rite and its victim, but can also refer to the place where the sacrifice is performed.

While in the Balkans this custom is very well represented and can be found at every level of the ritual system — seasonal agricultural and pastoral rites, rites when building, family rites, etc. (Popova 1995: 146) — in Romania it was known only among a small ethnic group in the south of the country. The word (Rom. *curban*) can be found in some dictionaries of archaisms of the Romanian language, with the explanation: ‘1. sacrifice, religious offering; 2. (figurative) feast, banquet; 3. the animal sacrificed for the banquet’ (Bulgăr/Constantinescu-Dobridor 2003). Even if no reference is made to the area where this sacrifice is performed or to the people who perform it, and it is understood that the rite is common to all of Romania, a look at the older ethnographic studies can shed some light. Nicolăescu-Ploșșor’s article of 1922 on the custom of *gurban*<sup>1</sup> clearly says that *gurban* or ‘the holiday of the Saints’ (Rom. *Sfinte*, fairy-like creatures in the Romanian folklore) is celebrated by people known as the Rudari on St George’s Day or at the feast of the Ascension. The author

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<sup>1</sup> In the present contribution we will use the phonetic variant *gurban* because it is characteristic for the Bayash vernaculars.

emphasizes that the sacrifice is only made by crippled Rudari who have been ‘possessed by the Saints’ (Rom. *luați din sfînte*), and, even if the Romanians also believe in ‘the Saints’ (Rom. *Șoimane, Iele, Milostive*), they have no holiday intended to appease them. Further, the author says that no other Gypsy group practices this custom. This is what one of the oldest and very few descriptions of the custom looks like: As soon as somebody is possessed by the Saints, (s)he goes to an old woman who has the power to talk to them and asks her to pray to the Saints, who reveal to her in a dream what kind of holiday must be celebrated for recovery and when. After that, the sick person buys a white lamb, three bottles of wine and, at St George’s Day or Ascension, goes to a ‘clean’<sup>2</sup> glade, together with ‘clean’ friends and family. They dig a pit, slaughter the lamb above it so all the blood pours into it, and then rip the lamb open, take the giblets out and throw the offal into the pit. They boil the giblets, put them back in the lamb, sew it and roast the lamb on a spit made of fresh wood. At the same time, polenta and bread are made. When the lamb is roasted, it is split in two, one half is placed beside the pit, the other one on the tables, together with the wine and polenta. Before starting to eat, the oldest person says a prayer to the Saints, asking them to cure the sick one, who, during the prayer, holds her/his right hand on the chest. After that, s(he) eats the lamb’s tongue, which is a signal that everybody can start eating. Everything which has not been eaten, be it even half of the lamb, is thrown into the pit, together with the spit and the coal used for fire, and then covered with soil (Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1922: 35–36).<sup>3</sup>

Twenty years later, Ion Chelcea, another Romanian ethnologist who dedicated his career to the study of the same ethnic group, the Rudari, wrote about this custom, quoting Nicolăescu-Plopșor and making the observation that he himself had never come across the custom during his fieldtrips, so it might be that it belongs only to the Rudari from Oltenia (the southern region of Romania). He sums up that this custom belongs to the south-eastern folk ‘cultural circle’, with roots among the peoples of the near East (Chelcea 1944: 140–143). Thirty years later, a Romanian linguist, Ion Calotă, tried to solve the mystery of the origin and language of this enigmatic population, the Rudari, but his book was not published until 1995, due to the political situation in the country. However, with regard to the gurban, he only mentions the observations made by his predecessors and offers a few transcriptions of recordings on the topic of gurban made

<sup>2</sup> Here ‘clean’ must be understood as ‘ritually clean’.

<sup>3</sup> For more details on Nicolăescu-Plopșor’s brief study see Kovalcsik’s paper in these collected papers.

in the 9 villages where he has done fieldwork research (Calotă 1995: 184, 186, 191–192). He is also left to wonder, as do the other two, where the name of this Oriental sacrifice among the Rudari in Oltenia might come from. Can we consider a return of the migrants? What is the origin of this sacrifice? In what follows, we will not try to answer these questions, but rather focus on the further ‘displacement’ of this ‘travelling’ custom.

The Rudari are considered as one of the numerous categories of Roma in Romania (see Achim 1998). Nevertheless, their mother tongue is Romanian, they have no knowledge of the Romani language and try to distance themselves from other Roma groups. The term *Rudari* is most of the times used as a synonym of *Bayash* in scholarly circles, when referring to these small ethnic groups speaking different dialects of the Romanian language and dispersed throughout Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and, in smaller numbers, in Macedonia, Greece, Ukraine, Slovenia and Slovakia. They do not know Romani and the vast majority are bilingual, also speaking the language of the country they live in. The Bayash, because of their semi-nomadic way of life, mentality and certain physical characteristics, are considered Gypsies by the others and sometimes they themselves identify as Gypsies or Roma (Sikimić 2005a: 7–8).

The traditional occupation of the Bayash was woodwork, namely carving tubs and making wooden spoons (see Sikimić 2005b). This is why they are often called spoon- or spindle-makers, even if this occupation is only pursued by few today. Now some of them are adjusting to village life and the tillage of the land (Orsós 1997); others still pursue a semi-nomadic way of life, travelling in order to sell different things, but the wooden objects have mainly been replaced by plastic ones; some of them ‘re-oriented’ towards other crafts, such as wickerwork; and many of them are working as guest workers<sup>4</sup> in the countries of Western Europe (Hedeşan 2005).

The terms used to refer to the groups of Bayash in different countries are: *Banjaši* in Serbia, *Beás* in Hungary, *Bajaši* in Croatia, *Karavlas* in Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Rudari* in Bulgaria and in Romania. The ethnonym *Banjaši* in Serbia is known only among the group of Bayash settled

<sup>4</sup> For more details about the variety of terms used for addressing the phenomenon of Yugoslav people working abroad see Marjanović 1995: 248 and Sorescu Marinković 2005: 202. Today, the term *guest worker* is no longer accurate, insofar as more and more of them have become permanent residents and are in no meaningful sense ‘guests’. In political discourse, the term has also become loaded, having been used sometimes by right-wing extremists in conjunction with the demand to expel foreigners and their children. As a historical term, however, referring to the guest-worker program and situation of the 1960s, it is neutral and remains the most correct designation.

in the region of Bačka, along the Danube, near the border with Croatia and Hungary. This term is only sporadically understood, but not used among other Bayash groups in the region of the Serbian Banat. In Serbia, south of the Danube, aside from professionyms (*Lingurari*, *Fusari*, *Koritari*, *Rudari*), the following ethnonyms are also used: *Țigani/Țăgani* (Gypsies), *Cigani Rumuni / rumunski Cigani* (Romanian Gypsies), *Vlaški Cigani* (Vlach Gypsies), or *Karavlas* (Black Vlachs), both by the members of the community and by the macrosociety (for details about Bayash ethnonyms in Serbia see Sikimić 2006, about Gypsy ethnonyms and professionyms see Marushiakova/Popov 2006).

It is thought that the Bayash from Romania started migrating to Serbia around the year 1850, when slavery was abolished in the Romanian principalities, in successive migration waves of different amplitudes, from different regions of Romania. However, historical data are very scarce and the lack of documents is counterbalanced by myths of foundation and aetiological legends, incomplete data, memories, fragments of oral history, old and new historical or geographical evidence (Sorescu Marinković 2007a).

The number of Bayash settlements in Serbia, estimated with the help of perceptual dialectology and qualitative analysis, is around 180, but this figure can be misleading, because some of them are very small or even separate satellite settlements under a special name. Furthermore, this estimation relies on the subjective attitudes of the Bayash alone towards the language of their community and towards other Bayash communities familiar to them (Sikimić 2006).

In Serbia, the Bayash practice the custom and sporadically understand the term *gurban*, while in Hungary and parts of Croatia inhabited by the *Ardeleni* group (see Sorescu Marinković 2007b), the custom is unknown. This might support Chelcea's theory that *gurban* was characteristic only for the Rudari of some regions of Oltenia, who brought it with them to Serbia. In ethnological studies of the Roma of Serbia, data on the Bayash and the *gurban* are very scarce. Mirjana Maluckov is one of the very few ethnologists who has described this custom as performed by the Bayash of Grebenac (a village in Vojvodina, north of the Danube) at one of three dates: Pentecost, St Peter's Day or Ascension, for the recovery of sick children (Maluckov 1979: 147–150). This custom is also known among the Bayash in Serbia south of the Danube, with a few reservations. Firstly, the term *gurban* is not always used or understood, *praznik* (holiday) being the word of choice in many local communities. Secondly, the date of the ritual differs from region to region, the most usual, however, being St George's Day (6<sup>th</sup> of May). Thirdly, in some villages we came across the term *gropańe* (plural), which stands for the place where the sacrifice is

performed. The term *gropan* (singular) is also recorded by Ion Calotă in the language of Rudari from Romania as meaning a ‘place where water springs’ (Calotă 1995: 218). Dictionaries of archaisms and regionalisms of the Romanian language mention it as meaning ‘large hole with water (for watering the vegetables), made in gardens’ (Bulgăr/Constantinescu-Dobridor 2003). However, participant observation in different Bayash communities of Serbia showed us that *gropan* refers to the pit in the ground under the grill, where the fire burns for roasting the lamb. We believe that because of the similarity of the two terms *gropan* and *gurban*, the latter disappeared and the former took on some of its meanings.

The village of Urovica (near Negotin, north-eastern Serbia) was visited a few times in 2006 by a multidisciplinary team of researchers from the Institute for Balkan Studies, Belgrade, who conducted linguistic, ethnologic and anthropologic field research there. The village is inhabited by Vlachs, Bayash and Roma, most of whom are guest workers in the countries of Western Europe. Many recent Romanian migrants, mainly women, have also settled there or are working temporarily in the village. It must be noted that all ethnic groups in Urovica speak Romanian (this language being the mother-tongue of the Vlachs, Bayash and Romanians) and Serbian (the only schooling available is in Serbian). Furthermore, due to the fact that much of the population works in the countries of Western Europe, bilingualism has transformed in some cases in multilingualism. Thus, for example, the Vlachs and the Bayash speak Romanian, Serbian and German or French (according to the country they live and work in), the degree of competence varying from generation to generation (the older generation is fluent mainly in Romanian, the middle generation has a good command of Serbian and German or French, while those of the youngest generation speak German/French as their mother tongue, have a poor command of Romanian and almost no knowledge of Serbian). The Roma are competent in even more languages, taking into account that their mother tongue is Romani, they communicate in Romanian with the surrounding village population, attend school in Serbian and work abroad, in a French or German speaking environment.<sup>5</sup>

During fieldwork research in Urovica, we interviewed a few members of the Vlach and Bayash communities and also talked to some of the Romanian women working in the village.<sup>6</sup> Generally, the conversations

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<sup>5</sup> For more details of the use of French by Vlach and Roma guest workers of first generation from north-eastern Serbia, see Ašić/Stanojević 2007. This study evaluates the language competence of the people who learnt French not by any didactic method but entirely spontaneously, from the daily interaction with the new linguistic environment, in a context characterized by problems of sociocultural adaptation.

aimed at reconstructing the traditional spiritual culture of the first two ethnic groups, and in the case of Romanian women, revolved around the outsider's perception of the local community. We were guided in the main by the principles of qualitative research, focusing on how individuals view and understand the world and construct meaning out of their experiences. All the interviews were recorded, which resulted in about ten hours of audio-material. This material is preserved in the audio archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies from Belgrade.

The first discussion with a Bayash interlocutor revealed that the community celebrates St George's Day by ritually sacrificing a lamb. According to her, this holiday is a *praznic dă nujdă* (approx. 'a holiday of necessity'), and is held for a child who fell ill because it 'stepped on Their table' (stepped on the place where the *Șoimane* eat). This holiday is supposed to mollify the *Șoimane* and help the child to recover. The term *gropan* is used by the participant to refer to the place where the fire is made for roasting the lamb, in a glade by the river.

In the following we will focus on a second discussion with a Bayash participant, who has been living in a Paris suburb for 30 years. The discussion was conducted in Romanian and lasted approximately 30 minutes (the transliterated fragment at the end of this contribution represents only the last part of the conversation). The participant was around 65 at the moment of the interview and our conversation took place on the bench in front of his house, an imposing one, as are all the others in the village, an investment made after years of hard work and self-denial in France. It must be stressed that this is part of the 'prestige games' among migrant households, discussed by the sociologists and anthropologists of migration. Schierup and Ålund, two Scandinavian researchers, in a study which deals with the formation of a Vlach immigrant ethnic community in Denmark and Sweden and discusses the reasons for obstinately preserving the ethnic identity and traditional customs, believe that migrant investments in the Vlach villages of origin are definitely connected to these 'prestige games' among migrant households, but the competition for prestige in the

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<sup>6</sup> We cannot speak of a Romanian community in Urovica while referring to the Romanians working in the village. Proximity or shared territory are not by themselves a sufficient condition for the forming of a community; the relational dimension is also essential, family and kinship being the perfect expressions of community. The Romanians from Urovica come from different regions of Romania, are of different educational backgrounds, social status and age and do not interact much amongst themselves. For details on the stereotypes about the Romanian women married in Romanian speaking communities in Serbia and interlocutors attitude towards the researcher, herself a Romanian woman from Romania, see Sorescu Marinković 2006.

local village context cannot be compared with cumulative investment or the quest for social status mobility in an industrialised capitalist society:

House building is not primarily a way of showing that one is richer than one's neighbour. It represents the justification for emigration and conveys a social status from which the migrant is alienated in Scandinavia. At the same time, a continued social attachment and loyalty to the community of origin is demonstrated. In this sense 'investments' can be regarded as a sort of 'sacrifice' to the community, and social continuity on a par with the huge expensive tombstones and mausoleums which emigrants erect in honour of their dead in their communities of origin (Schierup/Ålund 1996: 468).

Marjanović, also in a study on Vlach guest workers, concludes that, "bearing in mind the reasons for leaving, they (the migrations) are first and foremost 'prestige migrations', not 'existential migrations', meaning that they are, in these fertile regions, some kind of 'prestige games'" (Marjanović 1995: 249).

We quoted only studies dealing with Vlach guest workers for two reasons. On the one hand, there are no studies of Roma guest workers from Serbia in general, and therefore even fewer about Bayash guest workers. It is an unfortunate fact that the Bayash from Serbia have not been subject to scientific debate, with some notable exceptions (see the volume *The Bayash of the Balkans. Identity of an Ethnic Community*, edited in 2005 by Biljana Sikimić, Institute for Balkan Studies, Belgrade). On the other hand, the case of the Vlachs is not unique and can be compared to the Bayash: both ethnic groups speak dialects of the same language (Romanian), both of them are marginal communities in Serbia (the Bayash are not even a national minority, while the Vlachs attained this status only a few years ago), and the members of both groups have migrated as guest workers in large numbers to the countries of Western Europe. The Vlachs, a highly conservative and traditional ethnic group, forced by their poor economic situation, became very mobile in the last fifty years. However, among the Bayash, this 'return migration'<sup>7</sup> might also be considered a new type of existence pattern which, metaphorically, continues their traditional 'wood transhumance'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Return migration* is defined as "the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle. Migrants returning for a vacation or an extended visit without the intention of remaining at home are generally not defined as return migrants, though in some settings it is difficult to distinguish analytically the migrants returning home for a short visit or seasonally from those who have returned permanently" (Gmelch 1980: 136).

<sup>8</sup> *Wood transhumance* is an expression used by Chelcea (1944: 54–56) to refer to the relative mobility of Romanian Rudari, dictated by their occupation and the need to find and process wood.



In an informal interview with our participant, he talked about his life in France, the years of hard work and his family still living there. He also mentioned that he is living in Urovica in order to guard the family house he built and is looking for a maid to help him cope with the household problems.<sup>9</sup> As we can see from the transcript, St George's Day and the celebration of gurban abroad as themes of discussion were accidentally touched upon and were initiated by the participant, in response to my question about celebrating the holiday in the village. The description of the custom and its celebration is extremely schematic and this might be due to two kinds of limitations. On the one hand, the researcher did not expect the conversation to take such a turn, and amazement at hearing for the first time that the sacrifice of gurban is practised abroad prevented her from activating ethnographic knowledge of this ritual. Hence, the researcher's inability to ask the right questions added to the sketchiness of the interview. On the other hand, the interlocutor is probably not a good bearer of tradition and his competence is thus reduced, being more interested in the present day situation. His recounting of the practice of gurban in his native village is quite diluted and he constantly moves the emphasis from 'then' to 'now'<sup>10</sup>, saying that today they do not roast the lamb anymore on the fire, but instead use electric roasters and that today they buy meat products from the shops. When he starts talking about the same custom in Paris, again the emphasis is not on the ritual proper, but on the fact that French colleagues and acquaintances also attend this celebration, being treated with food and drink.

This short text raises a few questions. What has been lost and what has been transformed, as far as the practice of gurban is concerned, from Romania to France, via Serbia? Of course, we cannot offer an exact or complete answer to this question for a variety of reasons. Apart from the fact that it is not known when, where, how and from whom the Bayash 'borrowed' this custom, the data available in older Romanian ethnographic studies allow us to conclude that the custom *still* existed in Romania in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As for Serbia, the very few Bayash interlocutors from Urovica we had the chance to talk to (most of the population being abroad) offered only a 'reduced' description of the custom. From all the elements registered by Nicolăescu-Plopșor, the following are still pre-

<sup>9</sup> In fact, when he heard that I came from Romania he proposed to me to be his maid and offered me a relatively large sum of money in exchange for my possible services. For more details about the way the researcher is perceived by her interlocutors in different regions see Sorescu Marinković 2007c.

<sup>10</sup> This is a very frequent occurrence in the speech of older people. See, for example, Spăriosu 2006.

served: the term *gropan* — denoting the place where the lamb is grilled; the custom as a sacrificial offering for the *Şoimane*, intended to cure a child; the belief that the sick child has involuntarily stepped on ‘Their’ eating place; the interdiction on giving the bones of the lamb or remains of food to the dogs, any leftovers being thrown into the river instead or buried in the ground. But going even further, following in these modern, *reinvented nomads’* footsteps, we must ask ourselves what remains of the practice of *gurban* in the conditions of immigration and urbanization familiar to many Bayash families? How can this originally rural practice be transposed into an urban setting?

We must start from the premise that the account of *gurban* we obtained does not necessarily render the real event, but the personal subjective perception of the speaker. Because anthropological linguistics makes use of oral statements by interlocutors, some complex rituals can hardly be documented from an ethnographic point of view (Sikimić 2004: 854–855). Additionally, as far as field interviews are concerned, the relation between the ritual itself and the personal story must always be questioned: to what extent does knowledge of the ideal model delude us when examining the traditional culture and how important are the personal stories/models (Ilić 2003: 71). It is highly probable that the ritual of *gurban* in France still preserves some of its original features, but because of the limitations of the method we use we cannot offer a complete description of the celebration.

As emigrants establish themselves in the countries of immigration and become immigrants, their ‘cultural baggage’, social organization and earlier experience begin to acquire new meanings. The Bayash leaving their homelands carried with them a consistent set of views and probably put some effort into reproducing these norms in their new homes. The basic traditional pattern is recognisably reproduced and maintained, but the degree of fidelity is expected to be reduced, due to the new meanings the new context imposes on them. Hence, the reduction of the custom on the language level (which can be noticed in the interlocutor’s discourse) does not necessarily imply a reduction on the performative and traditional level, but a mere transformation which causes the participant, in his discourse, to focus only on the elements which differ from the ‘traditional’ form of the custom.

Structural conditions faced by Bayash immigrants in France will in a great measure come to redefine the meaning of customs and tradition in the sense of ‘inventing tradition’. Namely, it is about the adaptation of the old in the new conditions and the use of familiar models for new purposes. For Hobsbawm, these ‘invented’ traditions establish or symbolize the social unity and/or membership of groups and communities, thus coming

closer to the integrative functions of the traditional rituals (Hobsbawm 1983). Mitchell, before Hobsbawm, also warned against comparing apparently traditional customs as they are practiced by migrants in urban-industrial areas with corresponding customs in the rural areas of origin of the migrants, saying that “a custom practiced in a rural situation, when transferred to an urban one, may take on a new meaning for participants and observers alike” (Mitchell 1960: 169). A custom or social practice must be studied as an integrated part of the field of interaction in which it appears. Schierup and Ålund suggest that customs are not loose, instrumental tools for adaptation, but must be seen as reflections of the social consciousness which is transformed and developed in confrontation of historical experience and social practice with the new social facts of life. They also add that:

This process of transformation is no simple product of or adaptation to ‘objective circumstances’ or ‘systems’. It represents the confrontation of active dispositions and potentials of immigrant minority groups with specific historical conditions for their development. It is a process whereby these ‘objective’ conditions are themselves modified. Forms of behaviour and way of thinking are culturally specific tools which help the migrant community cope with day to day conditions. In this context, ethnicity becomes the expression of a variety of cultural predispositions, resources and strategies of integration (Schierup/Ålund 1986: 229).

The two Scandinavian researchers quoted above write about the celebration of 29<sup>th</sup> of November by the Vlach immigrants in Denmark. The features of celebration are related to the wider field of social relationships within which immigrant experience is embedded. They argue that under changed circumstances, ‘traditional customs’ become the exponents of the new social content. At first sight, people appear to dance their round-dance just in order ‘to keep up tradition’. However, this communal locus of tradition helps develop ethnic consciousness, thus generating new forms of collective behaviour. Probably 6<sup>th</sup> of May (St George’s Day) and gurban, as a social gathering, have for the Bayash the same function as the Vlachs’ celebration, bridging historical and social time, uniting the consciousness of common historical origin with the insight of shared present experience.

It might be possible that the ritual in present-day France is only an occasion to meet, where people demonstrate their adherence to a common identity. Similar to the Vlach immigrants, the Bayash also assume a Yugoslav identity abroad.<sup>11</sup> Thus, they symbolically raise themselves from the level of a marginalized and even ridiculed minority in the ex-Yugoslav

<sup>11</sup> Williams commented upon the special ties between the Serbian Roma from Paris and the other Serbians living in the capital of France, noticing that probably the situation

context to the level of a 'national Yugoslav tradition', most probably combining elements of the 'Yugoslav' celebration of Djurdjevdan (St George's Day) and Bayash gurban. In other words, the urban ritual overcomes, at the same time, the spatial dispersion and segmentation of social relationships by gathering members of the Bayash community, Yugoslav immigrants, together with friends or colleagues from the country of adoption. Thus, the 'naturalization' of the ritual transferred into a new context and the 'ritualization' of social relationships among guest workers which appear in an urban area (Werbner 1988: 80) take on the form of picturesque folklore. Folklore plays the function of an unthreatening exoticism and escapism from everyday life in the increasingly standardized French and Western society in general. Therefore, in the eyes of the French natives, this 'traditional' custom might be the most legitimate expression of 'immigrant culture' and a favorite medium of cross-cultural communication. "Radical urbanization, emigration and other modernization processes", which resulted in a "rather growing limitation of usage of kurban" in some communities,<sup>12</sup> in the case of the Bayash provoked the exact opposite phenomenon, namely the reinvention or reinforcement of the custom.

Another question raised by the short fragment from the participant's discourse is why this celebration is carried away abroad and not practised in the land of origin? In other words, why are some customs 'displaced' and how do they function in the new environment? In order to answer it, we must note that celebrations in the region of origin are especially lively during summer and winter holidays when the villages are revived by the presence of vacationing migrants. All important rites of the migrants are firmly tied to the homeland. Schierup/Ålund, talking about the Vlach guest workers in Scandinavia, noted that "to our knowledge, not a single Wallachian wedding, baptism, burial or *pomana* took place in Scandinavia during the two decades of migrancy" (Schierup and Ålund 1996: 469). It is a fact that short term labour migrants rarely perform certain ritual acts away from home. Nevertheless, as the migrants' stay is prolonged and extended, there is a shift in their symbolic orientation. Compelling reasons grounded in migrants' beliefs and current circumstances create a need to make offerings and sacrifices away from home (Werbner 1988: 94). One of the possible reasons for performing the ritual of gurban in Paris might be its date. As we said before, the migrants usually return home for summer and winter holidays, so they are compelled to celebrate this spring

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of being immigrants, being strangers, reinforces the ties between the Serbian Gadze and Roma (Williams 2003: 30).

<sup>12</sup> See Halili's study in the present volume.

holiday in the adoptive country. Also, migrants vary in their 'rootedness', in their very perception of where home is. If important rituals which regulate the life of the community are carried out in the adoptive country, this can be a sign that 'home' is slowly moving away to 'abroad'.

The cultural dynamics implicit here lead us to think that the 'displacement' of *gurban* leads not to a loss of function of the custom, but to the transformation of the cultural heritage of the migrants in accordance with the new environment. This study, mainly based on the oral statements of one person, could represent the starting point for ethnologic and anthropologic research in France, the Bayash's adoptive country, at the other end of the so-called displacement chain (as Schierup/Ålund 1986, Brisebarre 1993 and Werbner 1988 did in their studies on the migrants), without which we cannot completely understand the phenomenon.

**Transcript:**<sup>13</sup>

(Here Saint George's Day is the most beautiful holiday, isn't it?)

Yes. Saint George's Day. Now in August everybody comes from France for vacation, to us. France, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, all our people get together here, for a month.

(Do you slaughter a lamb for Saint George's Day?)

Yes, yes.

(I heard from an old woman here in the village that before there were *gropañe*.)

Yes, yes.

(Where were these *gropañe*?)

What do you mean by *gropañe*?

(*Gropañe* where you make the fire...)

Yes, you make a nice *gropan*, you light the fire for the lamb and... Now we are not roasting manually anymore, but have electrical roasters.

(But before you were roasting manually.)

Yes, before we were roasting manually.

(And what do you call *gropan*, what was a *gropan*?)

You make, you know, for example, *gropan* here, like this, here, like this (he draws circles on the ground).

(I see.)

And you make the fire there and there are embers, fire, when the wood is burnt, completely, and you roast the lamb gradually.

<sup>13</sup> The researcher's questions are put in brackets.

(I see.)

You grill it nice and brown. If you took a bite, you'd love it. But now we have also started to buy from the shops, salami. Ok, now I'm alone...

(I see.)

Yes.

(But the bones, I heard you were not allowed to give the bones away to the dogs.)

No.

(No.)

No, we would throw them in the river.

(In the river.)

Yes.

(How would you translate *gropan* in Serbian?)

Well...

(Is it a hole?)

Hole.

(Hole.)

Hole, of course. Yes.

(You haven't heard of *gurban*.)

I haven't.

(No. *Gropan*.)

E, there the French people would come to us, in France, when we roasted lambs in a nice glade...

(You would also roast lambs there?)

Yees. What do you think?

(Where can you do something like that in France?)

Eee, we have a glade there. It's called Châtenay-Malabry (?).

(How?)

Châtenay-Malabry (?), Division Leclerc. Yes. There we would stand in lines. All of us, the Yugoslavs, the Serbs, would roast lambs there. And they would come to us, for example, my boss would come to me, my acquaintances, my people would come to me. Yes. They would have lunch, have something to drink, everything. And after that they would leave. We would give them some meat in a bag, because it's nice, it's fair like this.

(And you would also throw the bones in the water there?)

Yes, yes.

(What kind of water is there?)

Well, there is some water. And we would throw the bones in it.

(Would you also slaughter the lambs there?)

Yes, yes. We would sacrifice them there, everything, there at the *groban*, there, sacrifice them there and the blood would pour there...

(In France?)

Yes, you have my word. Yes, yes. I'm not lying to you.

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*Biljana Sikimić, Belgrade*

**GURBAN IN THE VILLAGE OF GREBENAC:  
BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS' MEMORY  
AND RESEARCHERS' CONSTRUCTION**

The idea of this article is to show through analysis of the ritual sacrificial killing of a lamb in the village of Grebenac in southern Banat in the province of Vojvodina, Serbia, the ways and means by which information was obtained on a small ethnic group, provisionally called the Bayash. The mother tongue of this group is Romanian, and they are known to their surroundings (and occasionally the group itself) as 'Gypsies'. The killing of a sacrificial lamb for the good of someone's health is not a characteristic of all Bayash communities in Serbia and the neighbouring areas in which they live today, such as Croatian Baranja and northern Bosnia. The communities still practising this ritual do so in different ways: in the valley of the Morava River, the date and manner of carrying out the gurban was until recently decided by specially gifted women who would fall into a trance and "speak with the fairies", and today this date is usually revealed in a dream to the sick person. In the Bayash community in the village of Grebenac the date of the gurban ritual has been fixed for July 12.

**Researching Bayash communities**

The almost random logic of the order in which anthropological and linguistic field research of the Bayash took place did not set out to cover all details of the culture; these were arrived at gradually by observing elements, both shared and different, in neighbouring traditions of which there are many in Serbia, especially Vojvodina. In Banat, for instance, the Bayash live in the same villages as the Romanians and Serbian Roma, and in Bačka with Croatian and Hungarian populations. It has been shown that the other local communities often know very little about the 'neighbouring' Bayash culture, due to the language barrier or a certain stigma which

regularly accompanies this small ethnic group. Culturological differences, perceived by the 'neighbouring' (usually majority) community, mainly relate to publicly practised rituals such as the ritual trance and the gurban (Ilić 2005: 133–140).

This study of the gurban custom was made owing to a somewhat unforeseen set of circumstances, when the author unexpectedly encountered the Bayash culture in northeast Serbia for the first time in May 2001. This was during field work in the Vlach village of Podvrška near Kladovo, when some members of the Bayash were interviewed for their knowledge of the local music folklore. Apart from the information requested on the joint ritual procession around the village on the day of St Lazarus (Rom. *Lazara*), we heard a fascinating story on the celebration of St George's Day in the local Bayash community, whose basic features were an insistence on ritual cleanliness, a communal meal where leaves were laid on the ground and a ban on using utensils.<sup>1</sup> The search for any elements of the gurban ritual still living in other Bayash villages yielded a considerably more complex picture: principally departure from the calendar determination of St George's Day, and how the appropriate sacral time is decided. Having begun with initial information on the collective St George's Day holiday, the Bayash gurban outside the village of Podvrška presented itself in an entirely new light, that of a holiday of occasion for the health of an individual.

The question on the ritual of the sacrificial killing of a lamb (but not on the existence of the term *gurban*) was then regularly posed in all studies of the Bayash settlements south of the Danube.<sup>2</sup> The ritual is still preserved today in a group of settlements near the River Morava in Serbia proper: Stržilo, Trešnjevica and Suvaja, as well as the village of Osaonica near Trstenik. East of the Morava it is practiced by Bayash communities near the town of Despotovac, in the villages of Lukovo, Grljan, Brodica and Urovica. The gurban custom was also mentioned in the course of conversation with Bayash from Bulgaria who during the summer of 2006 were working as seasonal workers in the village of Vidrovac near Negotin in eastern Serbia. This well-attested ritual in northeastern Serbia and its absence in the northwest and west is another argument in favour of the hypothesis of a road running from east to west south of the Danube, of the movement of the Bayash to Serbia and onward across the Drina river into northern Bosnia. The Bayash in the village of Brodica near Kučevo, north-eastern Serbia (field research carried out in the spring of 2005) have a

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<sup>1</sup> The transcript of this first interview on St George's Day customs and the ritual killing of a lamb, originally in the local Romanian vernacular, was published in its Serbian translation in Sikimić 2002.

long tradition of seasonal movement to southern Banat, with more significant collective relocations of entire families during the 1950s and 1960s. However, field research of the Bayash settlements in southern and central Banat have shown that even with strong waves of migration from the area south of the Danube, ties still exist with fellow countrymen on the other side of the border in Romania.

Linguistic field research has put an end to a discontinuity in ethnographic narration on the Bayash in the Balkans. Besides the classic early 20<sup>th</sup> century studies of the ‘Gypsies’ by ethnologist Tihomir Djordjević, another exceptionally important ethnographic contributor to the study of gurban was Persida Tomić whose studies of Bayash settlements near Jagodina immediately after World War II (Tomić 1950), focused on ritual trance, the only way of deciding the date of the gurban in these communities at that time.<sup>3</sup> A similar discontinuity of scientific interest in this ethnic group is a feature of the humanities in Romania, which might, if only for linguistic reasons, be considered most apposite for this subject (for more detail see Hedešan 2005).

### Representing Bayash culture

Anthropological linguistics as we see it, is at all events postmodern. Postmodernism problematises conventional anthropological representations of *cultured others* by placing the epistemological framework in the structures of power — including colonial heritage — and introducing a critical method in an inter-disciplinary spirit.

Through radical critical procedure, postmodern ethnography accentuates writing, narrative and dialogue as opposed to the mere scientific record-

<sup>2</sup> A preliminary census of the Bayash settlements in Serbia and a list of the settlements researched up to 2005, see Sikimić 2005. The number of settlements studied had considerably increased by the end of 2007 and includes some Bayash settlements in Croatia and northern Bosnia.

<sup>3</sup> The ritual trance phenomenon among the Vlachs of northeastern Serbia has been the subject of many ethnographic and medical studies. For a complete survey of the *rusalje* and *kalušar* rituals, which include trance elements, and their spread in northeastern Serbia, see Antonijević 1990. In more recent team-filed studies by the Institute for Balkan Studies, even greater detailed detail has been obtained on falling into trances on the eve of major feast days among the Vlachs of the Mlava river regions and in the Mt. Kučaj area. Older ethnographic material shows that even among the Serbs in central Serbia (near the town of Vlasotince), when someone falls and hurts himself very badly, a small loaf is brought for *the samovile* and prayers are addressed to them for healing (Djordjević 1985: 126); also that there used to be local soothsayers who fell into a trance on various occasions, were not baptised in church “because they were not allowed to by the sisters, the samovile”, or who sung songs to their “blood sister, samovila” (Djordjević 1985: 148–149).

ing of facts. However, postmodern ethnography does not reexamine the ability of the outsider to access the cultural space. Instead, ethnographic knowledge is based on a philosophical view of the limited nature of narrative knowledge and is re-articulated by an inclusive procedure which includes 'the native voice' in an authentic expression of diversity. This is a redemptive procedure which fails to test the limits of knowledge and reproduces the conventional ethnographic requirement that the other should speak out. From a de-constructivist reading, Mutman proposes that the ethnographic text should open itself to the limit, recording the resulting radical loss as the ethical opening of the other and questioning on the part of the other; this is the limit where the name 'Man' is written down as the name of the 'native informant' (Mutman 2006: 153). In this sense see also recent re-examinations of the South Slav ethnographic discourse (Plas 2007).<sup>4</sup>

This contribution on the gurban among the Bayash in Grebenac attempts to simultaneously follow both perspectives — that of researcher and participant — by insisting on the authentic reports of traditional ethnography on the one hand and on the most detailed transcript of field interviews on the other.

### **Restudying the gurban in Grebenac**

The problem of the reliability of ethnographic research carried out just as anthropology was formalising theory and methodology and becoming a science with its own institutions recognised by society, was raised in the mid-twentieth century. Incidentally, the problem was recognised indirectly during attempts to monitor cultural change by using previous studies of the same cultures. The initial phase of systematic and planned restudy of the anthropological classics led to checking and refuting the findings of predecessors and a new trend in research: restudy. Clearly, small differences can be found in every example of ongoing research into a particular issue, region or community. The auto-corrective nature of restudy, one of the general criteria of the 'science' of anthropological practice, becomes apparent only where there is academic, professional and media tension, a special interest in having the facts produced again. Of course, subsequent study of the same issue must conform to academic standards (for more detail see Milenković 2003:137–149).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For latent and overt ideologies, categories and 'performances' of identity in the ethnographic text-as-interdiscursive-construction, see Plas 2007.

<sup>5</sup> On the problematisation of restudy in anthropology see Kemper 2002, Roth/Bowen 2001.

The use of the anthropological term *restudy* (in Anglo-Saxon terminology the terms in use are *replication*, *re-inquiry*, *restudy*) stands for current thinking in applied methodology in anthropological linguistics in Serbia. Special attention is dedicated to the secondary analysis of transcripts of field material. From the methodological aspect, secondary analysis was problematised only in recent material, recorded and transcribed according to the same rules (Ćirković 2005, 2006, 2007).

By repeating the field research of some earlier point already explored by other researchers, the very concept of methodology in linguistic field work is reexamined and the application of the material obtained is expanded to include other disciplines.

The southern Banat Romanian village of Grebenac has frequently been the subject of serious field research on account of its particular folklore heritage, primarily carnival customs (Maluckov 1985; Pavković/Namović 1996) which definitively mark the local Romanian identity. The Bayash community is to this day located on the margins of Grebenac village, the street is not paved, the houses are for the most part humble. According to the 2002 census, Grebenac has a population of 1,017, of which 51 are Roma. The majority population is Romanian (837).

In an attempt at re-describing ethnographic knowledge on the gurban in Grebenac village, field material will be used gathered in November 1967 by ethnologist Mirjana Maluckov, specialist in the Romanian national minority in Vojvodina (Maluckov 1979: 140–150). Today's population of this village is half what it was at the time of her research. In the heterogeneous Roma community in Grebenac, Maluckov distinguished 'Romanian Gypsies' (mother tongue Romanian), settled 'Serbs from Brodica' (mother tongue Romanian), the *Lajeci* (mother tongue Roma, but in Grebenac they also speak Romanian) and 'Serbian Gypsies'.

As Maluckov's field material on the Bayash in Grebenac village is unique in every respect, we give below her description of the gurban in full, translated from the Serbian original. This ethnographic description incorporates the only existing recording of 'prayers to the fairies' in Serbia. In this example of classic descriptive ethnology, the linguistic competence of the researcher was equally important in recording the sacral text and authentic ethnographic terms in the speech of the particular community (in this case the local Bayash dialect of the Romanian language).

Gurban is the feast of the protector of the individual. Gurban is held so that a certain saint will protect the person for whom he or she was chosen. It is connected only to this person and his descendants do not have to honour it

following the death of the person to whom the gurban belonged. Gurban can be one of three feasts: Pentecost (Rom. *Rusalili*), St Peter (Rom. *Sânt Petru*), Holy Mary (Rom. *Sânta Maria*).

One of these three holidays is chosen, but it does not have to be exclusive. Usually the gurban is determined or chosen for the child if it falls ill or if some other misfortune befalls it. Then the parents decide to choose a gurban — a holiday for the good fairies (Rom. *zânele bune*).

Today the gurban is no longer celebrated as before, but there are still a couple of families in the village that uphold it.

The way the gurban is chosen is that three round breads are baked on a Friday and a slip of paper placed into each one. On three different slips are written the names of three saints: St Peter, Holy Mary, and Pentecost. The round breads are placed on the table and the child for whom the gurban is being chosen is brought into the room. The round bread which the child approaches, or reaches out a hand to grasp, that round bread is taken, the note is read and the feast day of the saint whose name is written on it is taken for the gurban.

Then, with a certain man that knows how to carry out all the necessary rituals (known as a *popa*), the child goes to the field (*Poiana* near the settlement where the Gypsies in Grebenac were first settled, in *Vale*), takes a branch, a willow rod (Rom. *creangă de salcă*) to which a white scarf is tied and a red ribbon — in Romanian this is all called *steagu* (flag). When the rising sun appears, the child and that man, the *popa*, they kneel, they both grasp the *steagu*, look towards the sun and pray:

Zânelor buni	Good fairies
Mă rog de voi	Please
Să vă întoarceți	Look upon
La copilul ăsta	This child (boy)
Și să îi dați	And give him
Mau și miciau.	Strength and agility
Și să îi dați	Put his hand
Mâna la loc	In its right place
Și picioru la loc.	And his foot in its right place.
Că el v-o dărui	And he will bear you gifts
În ziua de Sân-Petru	On St Peter's Day
Cu un berbec fript	Of a roasted ram,
Și cu nouă cuptoare de pită	And nine ovens of bread,
Și cu nouă ordouri de vin,	And ten flasks of wine,
Și cu un ducian de cârpe	And a shop of scarves,
Și cu un stup de mere	And a beehive of honey,
Și cu un ducian de pantlicuri	And a shop of ribbons,

Șî cu o grăgină de flori	And a garden of flowers,
Că să fie înaintea voastră	To have before you
Pă tot anu cât o fi viu.	For all the years that he lives.
Mă rog dă voi	I pray to you
Să îi dați mâna	To give him his hand
Șî miciau.	And agility.

The popa, kneeling with the child in the grass, repeats this prayer three times. When St Peter's Day arrives, all that is promised in the prayer should be prepared. A young man comes to slaughter the lamb. This should be a pure young man (Rom. *fecior cinur*, boy). Before he slaughters the lamb, he places two apples on its horns, and ties a red ribbon around its neck. The lamb is taken to the same field — the boy for whom the gurban is held also goes — they turn towards the sun (the lamb is also held turned towards the sun), pray, and then they return home where they slaughter the lamb. The willow branch that they took the first time, the *steagu*, is placed beside the pit in which the innards are thrown along with everything else from the lamb that should be discarded: the blood, the horns. Before they used to slaughter the lamb at an open window, and under the window they also dug the pit for the offal — so that the sun might see what was taking place. The willow branch was then stuck beside the window. Nowadays they slaughter the lamb in the yard, in front of the door, since the rooms have floors. The branch is stuck outside by the door for all the neighbours to see that a gurban is being held.

Then he takes the lamb and puts it on the spit (Rom. *îl chiceșce la frigare*). The same roasting-spit is kept in the house for years. The liver, intestines and all that should not be roasted is put in a pot and cooked, and is then taken out and stuffed inside the lamb, and the liquid in which it was cooked is kept. The lamb's legs are also stuffed inside and the lamb sewn up. Then they take the lamb and go to the field in which they prayed. They dig a ditch there, make a fire from vine branches and all those invited sit around the fire and wait for the lamb to roast. Before, all the Gypsies came (and Romanians) and all those present had to partake of the meal. When the lamb is almost done, it is sprinkled with the liquid in which the innards were cooked. The lamb is roasted (the spit turned) by a youth of 12–13 years, who is unmarried (Rom. *care e iertat să frigă mielu*) or an old man of 60–70 years. He just turns the spit and others take care that the roast is well prepared. When it is done — at around 3–4 in the afternoon, they call out that it is ready. The boy for whom the gurban has been prepared goes to the front end of the spit, while the one who roasted it takes the back, and thus they carry the roast home. At home they place the lamb lengthwise on an already prepared table.



At home, the women prepare nine round breads — they are prepared by a nine-year-old girl. Nine round breads, nine litres of wine, nine flowers and pot with honey (Rom. *mere de stup*) are placed on the table. Salt is put on all four corners of the bare table, but no saltshaker. The lamb is placed lengthwise between.

Before, no one was allowed to be in the room apart from the one saying the prayer, the *popa*, but now all the guests stand at the table. When the *popa* begins the ritual, everyone stands up. All those present must have their heads covered and must not be bare-headed. The women wear white headscarves, and the children should wear white. On entering the house, the *popa* stands at the door and asks all the arrivals if they are clean (Rom. *Esi curat?*) i.e. if man and woman have been together. There cannot be any intercourse between man and woman, and if such were to come, evil might befall them (Rom. *Să nu îi iau mâna, picioarele... zânele bune*). If they are unclean, they turn back.

The *popa*, i.e. the one who prayed with the child, holds up the lamb and says:

Bună ziua oameni.	Good day, people.
Cum o fos' gazda căși și gazdărița	Look how the host and hostess
s-ar chinuit	Have gone to trouble
și ar muncit	And worked
tot anu de zile	During the whole year
pentru praznicili zânelor buni.	For the holiday of the good fairies.
Și s-o aratat,	And they have proven themselves
Înainte de zânelor bune	Before the good fairies,
Pe ziua de Sân Petru	On St Peter's Day
Cu un berbec fript,	With a roast ram,
Cu noua cuptoare de pită	With nine ovens of bread,
Cu noua ordouri de vin	With nine flasks of wine,
Și cu stup de miere	With a beehive of honey,
Și cu o grădină cu flori	With a garden of flowers,
Și cu un ducian de cărpe	With a shop of scarves,
Și cu unu de pantlici	And one of ribbons,
Să fie înaintea zânelor bune,	To place before the good fairies
Și îi ajuce lu Dumitru	To help Dumitru
(or some other name).	(or some other name)...

All respond with: Amen!

This is repeated three times. Then the *popa* spreads honey with his hand on all the round breads and over the entire lamb. He then takes the lamb from the spit by extracting the spit.

With the person who is celebrating, he grasps the lamb around the middle and breaks it in two. The back half he gives to the host, taking the innards out and placing them on the table. He breaks off the head and puts it aside for the *popa*, and the rest he breaks into pieces and places in three piles. Three round breads are broken and everyone begins eating with their hands. After the meal, they drink wine (they also drink wine with honey), and then they go outside and dance.

If the person for whom the gurban is made dies, then that gurban is no longer held in the house. It sometimes happened that two gurbans would be chosen for the same person, if the child was sickly. Otherwise, the parents choose a new gurban for each child. The ritual with the child of choosing the name of the saint and going into the field to pray takes place only when the gurban is chosen. Later, the lamb is taken to the field to be roasted, but without the prior rituals.

If the host is poor and cannot afford to sacrifice a lamb, then the entire ritual can be held with only the head of lamb which is bought at the butcher's. The lamb that is slaughtered has to be white and for a boy it has to be a male lamb. If the child is not too sick, then in place of a lamb the fairies can be offered a rooster for a boy, and a hen for a girl.

The guests who come to the gurban tuck a flower behind their ear.

The ritual and especially the texts connected to the gurban are considered a secret and the superstitious believe that telling them to a stranger can bring evil to the one who revealed the secrets of the custom.

If the gurban is held on St Peter's Day, then the dancing that takes place at the dance held after the eating and drinking is for the memory of the deceased (Rom. *joc de pomană*) (Maluckov 1979: 147–150).

In 2004, I left for Grebenac bearing in mind the verbal information passed on by Mirjana Maluckov on the tragic fate of her informant in Grebenac, a Bayash man, S., who was killed following an interview on the subject of the gurban, the taboo nature of which is cited in the above detailed quotation. S. was killed by his own oxen. After this tragedy, most of the Bayash people who had come from northeastern Serbia moved away, mainly to western European countries. The tragic fate of the informant S. is known in the Bayash colony in Grebenac to this day, almost forty years later. I recorded the story of S. and his descendants as late as 2007 during a field study of the Roma in the village of Lokve in central Banat.

The transcripts of the more recent interviews which follow contain only the memory of former practice of the kurban and the description of its form today, although the researcher is asking about the Bayash who settled here from Brodica in northeastern Serbia. None of the dozen informants in Grebenac made the connection to the local tragedy that followed

the former ethnographic study, probably because of the length of time that had elapsed. On the other hand, neither did they confirm the research hypothesis that the gurban was brought to Grebenac by settlers from north-eastern Serbia.

### Transcripts of interviews in the Bayash colony in Grebenac

1. L.N. (male, 1937), interviewed by B. Sikimić on 25.09, 2004.

(Când au fost aici dân Craina, dân Brodița, tu ai văzut cum fac ei gurbanu? [...])

LN: Ei s-a răstrâns mai mult. Cu totuș că ei are mare bucurie la ghiorbanu ăla, unii ar făcut dă l'ipsă, unii ar făcut dă drag. În druștvo. Or cumpărat mei, or luat și băutura, p'ei'l'i l'i-a dat pă vin, or tras vin cu baloani'l'i dă la gazdă care a dat piel'a. Și, dă unde a luat mielu, acolo a dat și piel'a. Și i-a dat vin. Ș-atunș ar făcut groap'e în pământ, și s-o dus fiecar'e ș-or adus prăjân d-al'a, frigătoare, l-o rânduit frumos și o pus, și care l-o făcut dă nujdă i-o pus doo miare în cap, în coarîe, nu i-o coborât coarîl'i, berbec. Ș-atunș a s-or astrâns toț, or adus l'emnie, or făcut priveghiu mare dă jâg, dă, câtă patru la un foc. Ar fost mult, unii or făcut și dân casă asta a făcut unu moș în tot anu cu ei o făcut. El n-o făcut, mă gândesc dă l'ipsă, el a făcut dă drag, c-a avut și el copii, a-vut nepoț, și, știi cum. Când vede copii la alții să bucură și ei. Ș-or făcut, nu pot să spun, or făcut frumos, tare frumos și, or, ei n-o tăiat cu cuțātu, ei numa or frâmt. Că, da ní să n-ajungă să mânșe câinii dân oasel'e al'ea, numa or astrâns tot într-o oală și or lăpădat p-apă, v'edz că așa o fost bun, să meargă nărocu cum m'erje apa. Și or pitrecut tare fain. S-o iubit lumea, nu-i ca acuma. Acuma-i mare dușmañie. [...]

(When there were people from the Krajina, from Brodica, did you see how they made gurban? [...])

LN: They have moved away mostly. They look forward very much to this kurban, some made it out of need, some made it for happiness. Together. They bought lambs, and drink, they exchanged the skins for wine, they brought the wine in demijohns from the landlord they gave the skins to. He gave the skin to the people where he bought the lamb. And he was given wine. And then they made pits in the ground, and then they brought, everyone brought this long stick, a spit, they arranged it nicely and put it, and the one who made it [the gurban] because of misfortune would put two apples on the head, on the horns, they didn't remove the ram's horns. And then they would all gather, they would bring wood, make a big fire from the embers, four to each fire. There were many of them, some made it, from this house also an old man made it every year with them. He didn't make it, I think, because of misfortune, he made it for entertainment because he too had children, he had grandchildren, and you know how it is, when children see other people enjoying themselves. And they made it, they did it very well, I can't say they didn't, and they didn't cut it with a knife, they just broke it up. So that the dogs wouldn't come to eat those bones, they just gathered them in a dish and threw it in the water, you see, because this is good for fortune to flow as the water flows. And they had a very good time. People liked it each other, not like today. Now there is great enmity. [...]

(Când au făcut acest gurban s-au pus și flori?)

LN: Și flori s-a pus și miare în coarne i-a pus.

(Pita?)

LN: Și ar făcut o pogașe, ar uns-o cu miere dă stup. Și-atunși a dat la copii să mânșe. Și-a fost un moș care a rugat sănătațe la copii, la gloațe, la naintare să aibe în casă. Dacă a fost șiineva bićag să i să traga bićejugu, să fie zdravă, să fie, cum să vă spun, norocos pã lumea asta, și așa să rugat întotdăună la biñe. Și o și mers biñe.

(When they made this gurban, did they also put flowers on it?)

LN: They put flowers too, and apples on the horns, they did.

(Bread?)

LN: They made round bread, spread honey on it. And then they gave it to the children to eat. And there was an old man who prayed for the health of the children, the people of the house, for prosperity in the home. If someone was ill for his illness to pass, for him to be healthy, to be, how should I say, happy in this world, and so he always prayed for good. And all went well.

2. D.M. (male, 1958), interviewed by B. Sikimić on 31.07, 2005.

(Și alt lucru care fac este că fac gurbanu, pentru vii. Pentru sănătațe. [...])

DM: Da. Și-aiașă fac gurbanu, unu dă la noi, c-a noștri ai bătrâni ar ținut, doamnă, toș. E acuma nu mai țân nima nimic. În doisprezece iulie aia, cam pică Sfântu Pătru, gurban. E, un văr d-a ei baș țâne gurbanu, el e în Austria acuma dus. El în tot anu viñe. Aia pãntu bićejug. [...] E, dar ei țân în șaselea mai, Djurdjevdan, dân Brodița. Toș. Aia-i pãntu ei a mări mare sãrbãtoare șe poaće să fie. Ii care nu poaće să vină acuma, ii, năinće, doamnă, toș ar viñit acasă. Alți lucru s-or pierdut dacă n-o vrut gazda să-i deie drumu, nu s-o uitat, o viñit cu famil'ia acasă. Îs pierde lucru acolo în Austria. E, acuma, au acolo, sa strâng toș la o poiană, l'-o dat voie c-or văzut că nu mai iasă cu ei în cal, și toș să strâng acolo în șaselea mai și fac. Miei friže tot acolo, bătură, tot. L'-o dășchis, că io șciu când am fost în Austria pã unu l-o prins, cu doisprezece an înapoi, n-o

(And the other thing that they make (in Brodica) is the gurban for the living. For health. [...])

DM: Yes. They make the gurban here too, one of us, because our elders used to hold it, Ma'am, everything. Well, now no one holds anything anymore. That's on the twelfth of July, on the day of St Peter, this gurban. Well, one of her cousins, actually, holds the gurban, he is in Austria now. He comes every year. That's for illness. [...] Well, but they hold it on sixth of May, St George's Day, in Brodica. Everyone. This is the biggest holiday that could be for them. Those that cannot come now, they, earlier, Ma'am. They all used to come home. Some even lost their jobs if the boss didn't want to let them go, they didn't pay any heed, they came home with their family. And they'd lose their job over beyond in Austria. Well, now there they have, they all gather in a meadow, they'd let them when they saw that they couldn't stop them, and they all gather there on the sixth of May and they do it. They roast lambs there, drinks, everything. They're allowed, because I know when I was in Austria, one was caught, twelve years ago, he didn't have a permit to roast a lamb and they, and he ran

avut voie unde să frigă miel, și i-or, și el o fužit, i-o pus caznă și l-o prins namtu și o trebuit să plăcască și l-o lat în obi... ș-acuma nu șcim dă še, șci, un veșin așia o stat și mie m-o fost jăl dă el. Iao, cătră una spun: ce-i? Ș-asta să duše întreabă, intră și *kaže*, spuñe: are dă plăcīt ceva, când acolo dă loc sudu și spuñe: doisprezece añ napoi, spuñe, ai fript miel unde n-ai trebuit, n-ai avut voie. Și el n-are să plăcască, asta scoace bañi, m-am rugat dă ea, dă muierea aia, și o plăcīt și i-or dat drumu. E, acuma l'-o dat, n-o mai ieșat cu ei pã apã, l'-o dat poiana mare, acolo toț s-a strâns.

(La Beč, sau unde?)

DM: Da, la Viena. S-or învățat și nemți cu noi.

(Dar asta fac și țagañi și voi? Da?)

DM: Toț. Și sârbii, aia-i sârbească, Djurdjevdan. Și ei dăstui țân, dar ei nu șcie că še însamnă aia mulț, că pãntu ei aia-i sãrbãtoare mai mare, doamnă, dar aia-i ca pãntu aiduș. Aia-i *ajdučka slava*, cum spuñeț, și aia, ii aia dăstui niș nu șciu. Îl întreb — pã biñe, dă še țân tu aia? El friđe dă sãnãtaće aia. Nu șcie.

(Și acest om care face la Sãnpietru aici, el e de strãinatate? Vine să facã aici?)

DM: Vine anumitã ziua, cum spun — *godišnji odmor*, urlapu, liberã să ia o lunã dă zâl'e, ș-atunș când viñe dãn primã pãnã, el e acasă. Numa pãntu aia vin. [...]

Wife: Fatã mare care n-a fost mãritatã fașe pogãș.

DM: Aia trebuie tri fieće, doamno. Maica mea când a țãnut gurbanu, tri fieće, ciñere, curaće, să mã prișepeț

away, he was punished and arrested by the Germans and he was supposed to pay, and they took him. And now we didn't know why, you know, he was my neighbour and I felt sorry for him. Oh dear, I say to a woman: what is it? And she goes and asks, she goes in and says: he's supposed to pay something, and there's a court case there and he says: twelve years ago, he says, you roasted a lamb where you weren't allowed to, you didn't have a permit. And he has no money to pay, she takes out the money, I asked her, that woman, and she paid and they let him go. Well, now they've allocated them, they didn't take the lambs to the water anymore, (the Germans) gave them a big meadow, that's where they all gather.

(In Vienna, or where?)

DM: Yes, in Vienna. The Germans have got used to us.

(But you do it as well as the Gypsies? Yes?)

DM: Everyone. The Serbs as well, it's a Serb holiday, St George's Day. And many of them hold it, only many of them don't know what it means, since for them it's the biggest holiday, Ma'am, but it's like for the *hajduci* [Serb outlaws during the time of Ottoman rule]. It's a *ajdučka slava* [feast], as you say, and many of them don't know that. So I asked them — well then, why do you celebrate it? He was roasting it for health. He didn't know.

(And this man celebrating here on St Peter's Day, he comes from abroad? He comes here to celebrate?)

DM: He comes on a certain day, as they say — his annual holiday, *urlapu*, he takes a month off, and then he comes from the first to, he's at home. They come just for this. [...]

DM's wife: A girl who has never been married bakes the round breads.

DM: You need three girls for that, Ma'am. When my mother used to hold the gurban, three girls, young, clean, if you understand my meaning. They should make small round breads out of

cum să spun. Treb'e să facă pogășiț d-al'i miś, dân făină, nu? Să faše, ș-atunś la pogășițâl'-al'a merze miere dă stup, și flori. Ș-atunś aia să dă în sănătaće, să dă și nu-i voie cu cuțātu cu ševa, numa mielu să puñe pã masă și cu mânăil'i toț să, faše bucaț, nu cu cuțātu. Și după se să mânca oasâl'-al'a care rămâne, așa o fost la noi, la maică-mea, s-o pus într-un ches dă năilon, în ševa, și s-o lăpădat după pod în apă. Să l'e ducă apă, n-o fost voie s-ajungă câni, s-ajungă șiñeva să mânse. Iac-așa s-o țanut la noi, ș-acuma fac și ei, numa totuș mireu aia, nu-i mai aia, să zăuită, nu baș fac tot cum trebe.

(Asta se mânăncă acasă sau un-deva?)

DM: Ș-acasă, ș-aia, dar năince, doamnă, năince, acolo pã poiană, noi am avut cătră apă o poiana v'erde, eci acolo așa ar trebui să. Unde faś. Dar locu care-l faś, unde friź mielu, aia cam treb'e să fie loc curat, să n-ajungă niś o l'imană să duc-afar-aśia o un băiat o sel. Ș-ai-ar trebui aśia la locu ăla.

Wife: Acuma toț acasă.

DM: Așa curat treb'e să să facă, da, aia nu-i mai aia, aia-i većim.

Wife: Năince pã poieñ.

DM: Pa, dă se treb'e la loc curat să-l friź, nu la loc pogan, macar unde, și la loc curat și să-l mânś, c-aia dai în șărea lu Dumnezău, zâl'el'-al'a buñe aia, d-aia faś pogășițâl'i și aia.

(Și te rogi de Dumnezeu?)

DM: Da. Îi mulțăm'eșć pãntru tot și dă zua aia, vez. Ș-aśia nu-i voie să meargă șiñeva afară, ș-aia-n većeu, că vun copil trei locuri a mai mult pățat ș-aia. Năince ăi bătrân așa ar pãzât: —

flour, no? They're made, and then on these round breads you put honey and flowers. And then this is given for health, it is given and it is not allowed to cut it with a knife or anything, the lamb is just put on the table and everything is torn apart by hand, not with a knife. And after it is eaten, the bones that remain, that's how it was with us, at my mother's, are placed in a plastic bag, into something and thrown under the bridge into the water. And the water takes them away, there couldn't be any dogs that could come along, for something to come along and eat them. There, that's how we used to hold it and now they do it too, but not so often, there's no more of that, it's being forgotten, the custom is not upheld quite as it should be.

(It's eaten at home or where?)

DM: Both at home and like that, Ma'am, before it was eaten in the meadow, we had a green meadow near the water, that's where you should do it. Where you make it. And the place where it is made, where you roast the lamb, it should be a clean place, so that no animal can come and take it away or some boy or something. And this should be in this place.

Wife: Now everyone does it at home.

DM: It should be done cleanly like that, yes, but there is no more of that, it's already...

Wife: Before it was in the meadows.

DM: Well, why you have to roast it in a clean place, not in an unclean place, anywhere, but in a clean place to eat it as well, otherwise you're giving it "Behind God's back", that's for the good days, that's why you make those round breads and such.

(And you pray to God?)

DM: Yes. You thank Him for everything and for that day, you see. And it's not allowed for someone to go outside, to the toilet like, since one boy in three places, he was sick a lot and so.

še cauți acolo pă poiană? Dă loc cătră copii-ăi miș și aia să nu să ducă, vez, că nu-i bun să fie pogan.

Wife: Num-acuma tot să pierde obiăciu.

DM: Și-naince s-ar cemat ai bătrân să-s lasă copiii, fetițâl'i l'-a spus — av'eț grijă, nu macar unde, pică, vă dușeț afară, ș-aia să să șcie unde că nu-i bun pă flori, că nu-i bun la. Că estă zâl'il'i buine, vez, să trif'eșce dă toace, poace să rămână oloz, ș-aia nu-i dă dus macar unde. Acuma vețim nu, nima niș nu-s învață copiii aia ș-aia, decât io, io l'e-am spus și de miș și lor ș-aia, av'eț grijă, tot picaț unde, unde nu-i vețeu, nu-i aia, și nu țai nopca, ai văzut cum, tre să șciț unde. Nu-i bun dă subt l'emn, dă su pom nu-i bun, unde-s flori, iarbă v'erde, curată. Mai mult așa, unde-i pământ, unde-i, unde-a.

(Acolo la Brodița a fost moașa, sau baba care a știut, și care a cazut. Știți asta? Și când cage atunci spune care zi trebuie să fie gurban? Acum nu mai este, au murit toace.)

DM: Să vă spun, ar fost naince așa care baș în zăua aia, și când aia ar căzut, ș-ar vorbit, v-aț uitat zos, vorbeșce, ș-aia.

(Ați văzut voi asta?)

DM: Io am văzut aia, io cu ochii mei baș am văzut aia, copil am fost, am uitat.

(Și aici au fost?)

DM: Da.

(Și aici au căzut?)

DM: Da. Iar așa. Și audz că vorb'eșce, ce uiț tot. Numa aia, doamnă, cum să vă spun, aia, dân el'-o mie una care a fost, spuine că cu

Earlier the old ones watched out: — What are you doing in the meadow there? They immediately tell the small children, and so, not to go, you see, because it's not good for it to be made unclean.

Wife: Only now the custom is dying out.

DM: Before the old ones were afraid to let the children, the girls, they used to tell them — watch out, don't [go] just anywhere, it falls, you go outside and to a certain place, since it's not good for the flowers, it's not good on... Since there are those good days, all kind of things happen, they can be maimed, it's not good to walk just anywhere. And no, not anymore, no one teaches the children [to do] so and so, only I do, I told them both the small ones and them and so, look, sometimes you find yourself somewhere where there is no toilet, there isn't one, and you can't hold out the entire night, did you see how it is, you should know where to go. It's not good [to do it] under a tree, under a fruit tree it's not good, where the flowers are, green grass, clean. More like, where there's earth, where it is, somewhere.

(There was an old woman in Brodica, who knew and who used to fall into a trance. Did you hear about that? And when she fell [into a trance] then she'd say on what day the gurban should be made? Now there are no more, they have all died.)

DM: Let me tell you, before it was like that, some would fall on that exact day, and when she would fall [into a trance], it was said, we looked into the ground, she was speaking, and so.

(You saw it?)

DM: I saw it, I saw it with my very own eyes, I was a child, I watched.

(And this happened here?)

DM: Yes.

(They also fell here?)

DM: Yes. Again like that. And you hear her speak, you watch everything.

zâl'el'-al'e buñe-a vorbit, așa s-ar spus aia. Care a căzut. Cu el'e, ș-aia înseamnă ea-i pântru lucru ăla, pă ea ar primit-o, ar al'es-o, și ea când făcut rugașuñil'-al'a, când aia atunș, ea o căzut și ai auzât tot până vorb'eșce, tot. Ș-atunș s-o sculat, după căta vreme. Ar fost aiș mai mulce, c-aișa o fost și vrăjmaș dăstui ș-aia, ai bătrân naince alcum o fost, așc-ai cíneri nu șcie atâta ș-aia.

(Și ele au căzut de nevoie? Când se îmbolnăvește cineva, sau când? La zi?)

DM: La zî dă gurban, da.

(Asta e Sânpietru la voi? Sau poate să fie și altă zi?)

DM: Gurbanu îi doisprezece iulie, el cam așa să, Sfântu Pătru i vecim altă še. [...]

(Și când cade atunci vorbește cu, cu ele?)

DM: Da, ai bătrân spuñe că cu el'e, zâl'el'e buñe vorb'eșce.

(Nu s-a vorbit că vorbește cu șoimane?)

DM: Nu. Numa că cu zâl'el'e buñe, vez. Așa s-o spus aiș.

(Și atunci spune când trebuie să faci curban?)

DM: Nu, vezi că naince dă aia n-a căzut că să i să spună când, numa curat în dzâua aia ș-a căzut și după aia s-o pus prânzu s-o sculat și tot.

(Pot să trec în sârbește, da vidimo još jednom? Da li sam vas dobro razumela. Znači one su, na taj dan, dvanaestog jula, samo padale?)

DM: Samo tada, to je bilo pre, mislim dok su stavili to jagnje i to, znači, pre toga ona je pala, pričala, svi su rekli da sa svecima priča, kaže, i to,

Only that, Ma'am, how should I tell you, that, of thousands of them there was one, they say she spoke with the good days, that's how it was called. The one that would fall into a trance. With them, and this means that she was for this work, she was accepted, they chose her, and she when the prayers were carried out, when that was, then she would fall [into a trance] and you could hear everything she was saying, everything. And then she woke up, after a time. There used to be several here, since there was a lot of hatred here also and such, with the old ones before it used to be different, now these young don't know so much and so.

(They fell [into a trance] because of some misfortune? When someone falls ill, or when? On that day?)

DM: On the day of the gurban, yes.

(That's St Peter's Day with you? Or could it also be some other day?)

DM: *Gurbanu* is on the twelfth of July, that's how it is, while St Peter is something else. [...]

(And when she'd fall then she'd speak with them?)

DM: Yes, the old ones used to say that she spoke with them, with the good days.

(They didn't say that they used to speak with the *șoimane*?)

DM: No. Only with the good days, you see. That's what they used to say here.

(And then she'd say when you should make the kurban?)

DM: No, you see, before they didn't fall to say when, but on that very day they fell and afterwards they set the table, they would get up and everything.

(Could I switch to Serbian, to see once more? If I understood you correctly. So, they, on that day. On the twelfth, they fell only then?)

DM: Only then, that was before, I mean while they put that lamb and that,



i posle ustala, nekog vremena al niste razumeli ništa šta je pričala i to sa njima, al stariji ljudi koji su znali, kažu — manite je, dajte joj mira, ona priča.

(A gde je ona padala, napolju?)

DM: Dole, u dvorištu mislim da je. Evo tu je pala.

(A šta ona tom prilikom govori?)

DM: Gundja nerazumljivo, pa poneki reči se razumelo, ali ja tada se ne setim dobro, bio sam dete, al ovi stari, jel odma su sklonili decu — manite je, dajte joj mira. To radi, to je njeno.

(A kažite mi, jel onda, kad se recimo neko razboli, nagazi, to što ste pričali, na mesto koje nije čisto stane ili uradi nešto što ne treba na čisto mesto, onda se on leči tako što.)

DM: Uzme tu slavu.

(Ali to mora da bude samo ta slava? Zato što u Brodici može bilo koja, druga, mislim, može da bude recimo i Djurdjevdan i neki drugi praznik. Ne mora da bude samo Petrovdan. [...])

DM: Vi znate vrlo dobro šta je Djurdjevdan, koja slava.

(Znam. Na Djurdjevdan ne može?)

DM: Ne može, jel je tako. Šta može Djurdjevdan? Al gurbanu, on je baš za te bolesti, za sakate, za te.

(*Ologi?*)

DM: Da, *olog*. E, ondak ne bi moglo druga slava, sad da uzmemo drugu slavu, na primer, ili ko Sveti Ilija šta je ili to, znaš, moraš takav svetac da uzmeš, znači samo on. Ovde, koliko ja znam.

(Znači, ako ima sad više kuća koje daju gurban, onda one pre nego što se zakolje jagnje, onda padne?)

so, she fell before that, and afterwards she would get up, after some time, but you couldn't understand what she was saying and that, with them, but the older people who knew, say — leave her, give her peace, she is talking.

(And where would she fall, outside?)

DM: Down, in the yard I think. Here, this is where she fell.

(And what would she say on this occasion?)

DM: Muttering, you couldn't understand, well some words you could understand, but I don't remember well, I was a child, but the old ones, they would remove the children immediately — let her be, give her peace. She is doing it, that's hers.

(And tell me, whether then, when someone falls ill for instance, steps on, what you said, steps on a place that isn't clean or does something that he shouldn't in a clean place, then he cures himself that way.)

DM: He takes that patron saint's day [*slava*].

(Does it have to be only that patron saint's day? Because in Brodica you can take any other, I mean, it can be for instance St George's Day and some other holiday. It doesn't have to be just St Peter's Day. [...])

DM: You know very well what St George's Day is, what patron saint's day it is.

(I know. On St George's Day it can't be done?)

DM: It can't be done, because that is so. What can St George's Day do? But *gurbanu*, it's exactly for these illnesses, for the crippled, for those.

(For the crippled?)

DM: Yes, for the crippled. Well, then it couldn't be another saint's day, to take another saint's day now, for instance, such as St Elijah or that, you know, you have to take a saint like that, so just him. Here, as far as I know.

DM: Da to se desi, tog dana. I to.

(A jel ta žena možda bila iz Brodice?)

DM: Ne, baš odavde rodnom, iz Rumunije. A otac odavde. [...] A majka iz Rumunije.

(Isto je rumunski govorila?)

DM: Rumunski sve, al što on odavde se oženio u Rumuniju, jer znate pre kako bilo. [...] I on isto Rumun bio odavde. Ciganski Rumun. [...] Al ona je bila polutankinja, bila. Majka čista Rumunka je bila iz Rumunije. [...] Njena majka se udavila tamo i on se preselio ovde došo, u njegovo selo i odranio je i poraso i tako ona to.

(Ona je to ovde naučila?)

DM: Da. Pazi, taj gurban, još nešto, gospođo, izvinite. [...] To i u Rumuniji se drži, isto.

(To ste videli tamo? Ili ste čuli?)

DM: I čuli, jel imamo i familiju tamo, u stvari supruga ima familiju tamo u Rumuniju. I oni, kod nji to je zakon, isto ko i ovde, držidu to, nema. I don danas oni to držu, bolje nego ovde.

Wife: Tamo još bolje se drži.

DM: Jel ovde samo pre stari koji su bili su držali i ja ko dete pantim i čak i moji su držali ovde, i svi. Čim oni to pomreli, ova omladina, nema. A to bi trebalo, primer, ta kuća koja drži, sin da nasledi, ali ovde već to ne. Sve se izgubi. A u Rumuniju i don danas to ima. Naročito Romi, Cigani, oni to održavaju. Rumunski Cigani, mislim i tako to.

(So, if there are now several houses giving the gurban, then before the lamb was killed, then she'd fall into a trance?)

DM: Yes, that happens, on that day. And that.

(And was this woman perhaps from Brodica?)

DM: No, from here originally, from Romania. And her father is from here. [...] And the mother is from Romania.

(She also spoke Romanian?)

DM: All Romanian, but he married from here in Romania, since you know how it was before. [...] And he was also a Romanian from here. A Romanian Gypsy. [...] But she was half and half, she was. Her mother was a pure Romanian from Romania. [...] Her mother drowned there and he moved, he came here, to his village and raised her and so she used to do it.

(She learnt it here?)

DM: Yes. Look, this gurban, another thing, Ma'am, excuse me. [...] This is also held in Romania, the same.

(You saw this there? Or have you heard about it?)

DM: We also heard, since we also have relatives there, actually, my wife has relatives over there in Romania. And they, with them it is the law, the same as here, they hold it, nothing to it. To this day they hold it, better than here.

Wife: It's held even better there.

DM: Because here only the old ones that were before held it and I remember also, as a child, that my folks held it here, and everyone. As soon as they died, these young people, no more. And it should be, for instance, the house that holds it, for the son to carry on, but it is no more. It has all been lost. And in Romania to this day it still exists. Especially the Roma, the Gypsies, they hold it. The Romanian Gypsies, I believe and so on.

In the anthropological-linguistic sense, these two interviews which took place within a comparatively short time of each other point to an inconsistency in the terminological system of the gurban ritual compared to the situation described by Mirjana Maluckov forty years ago. The informants in Grebenac today speak of the “good days” (Rom. *zilele bune*), while the older recording (Maluckov 1979) mentions “good fairies” (Rom. *zânelor buni*), as invocation in the text of the prayer. It is not likely that this is a correction of the ethnographer herself, an expert in the Romanian language and traditional culture. The Bayash Romanian term *șoimane* ‘fairies’ suggested by me in the interview (a term familiar from previous researchers of the Bayash near Jagodina, Serbia proper) is obviously not known to the informant.<sup>6</sup> When we switched to another code, the researcher’s mother tongue, it emerged that the informant in Grebenac logically translates the ‘fairies’ with whom the woman in the trance communicates, in the same demonological key as ‘the saints’ (*everyone said that she spoke with the saints*).

The transcript shows all the features of the contemporary state of local Romanian Bayash speech, with interference from local Banat dialect and standard Romanian. It also reflects the language strategies of the researcher (whose mother tongue is not Romanian) in communication with speakers of a specific vernacular. Oral data obtained in Grebenac confirmed the possibility of the existence of the gurban ritual independently of its assumed importation by settlers from Brodica, south of the Danube.

### Reconstructing semi-nomadic paths

A careful reading of ethnographic material on the Roma in southern Banat gathered in the 1960s shows that the custom of gurban is not exclusive to the Banat village of Grebenac, and that it also existed in some form (and perhaps continues to exist today) in other Bayash settlements of southern Banat (Maluckov 1979). Ethnologist Milan Milošev researched the Roma in southern Banat in the mid-1960s.

There is a detailed description of the gurban from the town of Bela Crkva in southern Banat by ethnologist Milan Milošev dating from 1968, with an explicit mention of the ritual’s south-Danube origins:

The settlers from Serbia celebrate St George’s Day. They call the saint’s day *gurban* or *kurban*. On that day a white male lamb is slaughtered. The place where the lamb will be sacrificed has to be completely clean. The one killing the lamb has to have a bath beforehand, put on clean underwear and

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<sup>6</sup> On construction in anthropological-linguistic research see Sikimić 2005; research subjectivity is the topic of an article by Sikimić 2004.

clean clothes. On the preceding night he has to observe sexual abstinence. This also applies to all the members of the household, and even to the guests. Everyone who comes to the house then has to wash his hands. This is done to prevent all kinds of diseases, and for the recovery of the sick. At the entrance to the house a basin of water is placed, and above it a towel or large white kerchief with a red band. When the hands are washed, they are wiped with this towel or kerchief. Only then can the lamb be slaughtered. The guts are taken out, cleaned, washed, and then, along with the blood, replaced into the stomach of the animal and sewn up. Then the lamb is roasted on the spit. Until the roast is done, nothing is eaten. When the lamb is roasted, it is brought into the house and placed on a table covered with a clean, white tablecloth. Then the roast is spread with honey. Along with the meat, a white round bread is brought out, and it is also spread with honey. The men of the house and the guests then sit at the table. One of the people present, usually the oldest guest, gives a speech, a toast, in which he cites all that the host has prepared, how much it cost etc. He mentions the living members of the household, wishes them health and longevity etc. This speech is repeated three times. When he is finished, all those present cry out 'amen' together. The one who cries out the loudest gets the head of the roast. Bits of the roast are broken off and eaten by hand. Neither knife nor fork are used. The round bread is also broken by hand. On this occasion, there is no smoking in the room, nor can alcohol be consumed. When the men finish the meal, they stand up from the table, and the women sit down. The scene is now repeated. When lunch is over, all the remaining meat, bones and round bread are gathered up and placed in a clean white cloth, which is then tied up, taken and thrown into the Nera river. After that the merry-making begins. They say that this lamb is the sacrifice for the health of the host, his family members and all the guests present. Poorer families, if they cannot buy a lamb, celebrate gurban with a rooster (Maluckov 1979: 113–114).

The same ethnologist, Milan Milošev, in the same period covered another three southern Banat Bayash settlements familiar with the gurban ritual. In the village of Gaj "On St Peter's Day they hold the custom called *Kurban*-sacrifice. On that day a white lamb, without a blemish, is killed. They do not strictly adhere to the ritual, so in some places a piglet is killed, or a gander or rooster" (Maluckov 1979:139), and it was also like this in the village of Kusić:

The Bayash celebrated St Peter's Day and the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. There was also a *gurban*-custom. "They make it" on St George's Day and on the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. Then they slaughter a white male lamb, but it can also be a piglet or a rooster. The killing is carried out on the threshold of the house. The blood of the sacrifice is buried beneath the threshold. In the event that the sacrifice is slaughtered away from the threshold, the blood is gathered and buried beneath the threshold. It is

roasted on the spit. With the roast, round bread is also made. If a lamb is slaughtered then five round loaves are baked, and if they sacrifice a rooster then three. The women preparing the round loaves have to be clean. The baked round loaves are spread with honey or sugared water. Honey is also spread on the roasted sacrifice. The roast and the round loaves are broken up and everyone at the table gets one piece each. Knife and fork must not be used while eating. The food is eaten by breaking it off with the fingers. After the meal the bones are gathered and buried at the bottom of the garden. "It would not be good" for cats or dogs to eat them (Maluckov 1979: 200).

Milan Milošev studied the settlement of Banatska Palanka in 1966. He recorded that in about 1948, along with others, three families comprising eighteen members were settled there from the village of Voluja (i.e. Brodica) near Kučevo, in Serbia (Maluckov 1979: 95). From the general commentary on all the Roma in Banatska Palanka and the mention of crafting wooden utensils as an occupation, it is clear that there were Bayash among them. However, there is no direct confirmation of the gurban/kurban: "They celebrate the Feast of the Assumption and St George's Day. The Feast of the Assumption is their joint saint's day — *neđeja*. Four families also celebrate St George's Day. It is common to slaughter a white beast, without blemish, for both holidays. They usually kill a yearling lamb, and even a ewe. This is roasted on the spit. The saint's day cannot be held without a spit." (Maluckov 1979: 96).

Similarly, Romanian ethnologist Nicolăescu-Plopșor in 1922 presents the first data on the practice of the gurban in Oltenia, southern Romania: gurban is made only for people 'taken by the Saints' (Rom. *luați din sfinte*), on Ascension-day and St George's Day, for the 'crippled' (Rom. *damblagii*). Gypsies in Romania do not have the custom of gurban, but there is information that some of the 'Gypsies' have come from Serbia, and that besides the Romanian language they also speak Serbian (Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1922: 37).

### **Reconstructing the folklore text 'prayer to the fairies'**

We now approach the topic of gurban in Grebenac from an entirely different perspective: analysis of a folklore text will be proposed as a possible method for reconstructing Bayash traditional culture. During our re-study of Grebenac, the text of the prayer to the fairies was not obtained, even as a fragment. Perhaps the reason for this is that the custom has been abandoned, or that there is still a taboo on passing on information of the kind to an outsider. The fact is, however, that several records exist from the Oltenia district of Romania of variations on this prayer, dating from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to contemporary ones recorded by

ethno-musicologist Katalin Kovalcsik in her recent field research (see her paper in this collection). They are cited here in chronological order:

1. Voi sfintelor și milostivelor, aduceți-vă aminte de *cutare*. Dați-i snaga și vârtutea, în tot corpul lui, în toate oasele lui, că el v-o purta de grije din an în an, c-un berbec gras, c-un cuptor de pâine și c-o butie de vin. (Hinova, Mehedinți, Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1922:36, quoted later by Chelcea 1944: 142)

(You saints and merciful ones, remember *so-and-so*. Give him strength and perseverance and courage in his whole body, in each of his bones, for he will provide you with a fat wether, an ovenful of bread and a barrel of wine from year to year.)

2. Voi sfintelor, voi bunelor, să dați snaga și puterea lui *cutare*, că el v-o prăznui din an în an, c-un berbec gras, cu trei buți de vin, și cu trei cuptoare de pâine. Dați snaga și puterea lui, din vârtutea lui, că el v-o prăznui din an în an și v-o prăznui cât o fi el. (Baia de Arama, Mehedinți, Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1922:36, quoted later by Chelcea 1944: 142)

(You saints, good ones, give strength and perseverance to *so and so*, for he will celebrate you with a fat wether, three barrels of wine and three ovenfuls of bread from year to year. Give him strength and perseverance and courage, for he will celebrate you from year to year and will celebrate you as long as he lives.)

3. Voi sfincelor, bunelor, cocoșițelor, veniz lin ca apa, și dulce ca mierea j v-adușeț amince dă (șetățanu-ăla, cum îl cămă, numele lui, care-l are mielul), să-i daz znaga și pučerea și vârtuca în corpul lui, în mâinile lui, în pișuarele lui, că vă prăznișeșce di ian în an c-un berbec gras, c-o buce cu vin, c-un cuptor dă pâne, amin! (Pârâieni, Vâlcea County, Calotă 1995: 179, recorded in 1967)

(You good holy ladies, come lightly as water and sweetly as honey and remember (that citizen, what he's called, his name, the one who has the lamb), and give him strength and power and force to his body, in his hands, in his legs, since he will celebrate you from year to year with a fat wether, a barrel of wine, an ovenful of bread, amen!)

4. Voi sfint'elor, bunelor, dulșelor, milost'ivelor, adușeți-v-amint'e dă Naie, dați-i znaga și put'erea și vârtut'a și averea, că iel vă prăznișeșt'e dâan an în an c-un berbec gras, c-o but'e dă vin, c-un cuptor dă pâne. Și la urmă spunea că amin. (Calotă 1995: 184, recorded in 1970, Dăbuleni)

(You holy, good, sweet, merciful ones, remember Naie, give him strength and power and force and property, since he will celebrate you from year to year with a fat wether, with a barrel of wine, with an ovenful of bread. And afterwards (he) says amen.)

In all variations of the prayer the promise of the annual repetition of the sacrificial offerings is made prominent, the extension of the individ-

ual's life span (*from year to year; as long as he lives*). Time in magical folklore texts is similarly determined and segmented — 'for ever': in the Eastern Slav tradition, the usual motifs are those which towards the end of human life limit the effect of incantation as a healing ritual by which the person's health is prolonged until the moment of his death, and any lacunae occurring in time are closed (Agapkina 2004).

### 1. Sacral vs. magical text: the offerings

The text lists the gifts offered to the 'fairies' in return for healing, and the gurban, the sacrificial lamb, is only the first and probably obligatory one on the scale of offerings. Ritual text gives offering central prominence. Such a text always includes performative elements in addition to descriptions of offering *per se*.

All four variants of the prayer typically contain hyperbolisation<sup>7</sup> of the gifts intended for the fairies (*a fat wether, three barrels of wine and three ovenfuls of bread*), which is even more noticeable in the ethnographic recording from Grebenac (nine ovenfuls of bread, /And with ten flasks of wine, /And with a shopful of scarves, /And with a beehive of honey, /And with a shopful of ribbons,/ And with a garden of flowers). This hyperbolisation of real and existing gifts in the context of ritual in the Bayash prayers to the fairies, correlates to texts familiar in both Slav and Romanian folklore (cf. e.g. Maluckov 1985: 224) of the wedding ritual where the objective is to belittle and play down the value of the wedding gifts. The procedure of diminishing the worth of gifts in the system of wedding anti-behaviour is the direct opposite of the hyperbolisation of gifts in sacral texts.

South Slav magical texts (incantations) contain comparable lists of offerings to the demonic beings, which are comprised of, for instance: "baked round bread, roast chicken, a vessel of wine and a bunch of flowers" (Radenković 1982: 64, eastern Serbia); "a supper, white round bread, wine and brandy" (Radenković 1982: 81, eastern Serbia); "round bread, roast meat, wine" (Radenković 1982: 83, eastern Serbia); "a supper, sweet wine, honeyed brandy, a roast hen and a silken bed" (Radenković 1982: 89, eastern Serbia) but only to help create an 'attractive place' for exorcising demons. These offerings do not exist in the real, action context of incantation.

<sup>7</sup> For examples of hyperbole in the structure of South Slavic texts of toasts for fertility, see in Petrović 2006: 67–75.

## 2. Sacral vs. magical text: invocation

South Slav magical texts also contain semantically comparable formulae in addressing the demons of sickness (their merciful nature is compared to honey and water): “(red winds) be tender as honey, be cold as water” (Radenković 1982: 80). In the anthology of Serbo-Croatian incantations (Radenković 1982), only a group of texts *od noćnica* (against night fairies) from eastern Serbia contain an explicit request to the demons (“I pray to you, I kneel to you”), and after the invocation come the offerings (honey, bread and a comb): “I bring you honey to lick, / I bring you bread to eat; / I do not see you off with empty hands. / I bring you a comb, to comb yourself” (Radenković 1982: 226), but these magical texts usually contain a threat and an exorcising formula. Some variants which begin with an invocation but without the flattering attributes (fairies, *samovile*, *noćničine*, *namernice*, *polonočnice*, *ale*, *veštičine*) are followed by single, non-repeating offers (bread, water and light): “see, I have left for you here / white bread to eat, / sweet water to drink, / a candle to shine for you” (Radenković 1982: 227).

A collection of articles on contemporary Bulgarian incantations (Todorova-Pirgova 2003) shows even more clearly that only incantations against the *vilski nagaz* are in the form of a prayer for forgiveness with invocation and even a formula of ‘adoption’, ‘becoming blood-sisters’: “Sweet mothers, sweet sisters, forgive this and this” (e.g. No. 255 from Blagoevgrad, Nos. 259 and 262 from Mihailovgrad).

A real parallel to the Bayash prayers to the fairies is provided by Romanian magical texts (incantations) ‘against the fairies’ (Rom. *de iele*, Gorovei 1985: 110, 321), which also string together synonyms for euphemistic appellations for the fairies intended to mollify them: for example, from Gorj County: *Aminte să v-aduceți, sfintelor, / bunelor, / îndulcitor, / aminte să v-aduceți, / leacul să-i aduceți* (Remember, holy, good, sweet one, remember, bring him medicine); from Ploești: *Doamnelor, / împărăteselor, / vrednicelor / și harnicelor, / puternicelor / și sfintelor, / iertați pe (cutare)...* (ladies, empresses, industrious and diligent, powerful and holy ones, forgive (this and this) (Gorovei 1985: 114). Aromanian texts recorded in Kruševo, Macedonia, also have synonymous sequences in the appellation of the fairies, ex.: *Zâna albă, / zână curată, / zână fără prihană, / zână fără spurcăciune, / iaca venii la tine, strălucită... / vindecă-mă de lingoare*. (White fairy, pure fairy, unblemished fairy, fairy without stain, here I have come to you, resplendent one, heal me from the fever) (Gorovei 1985: 114, 325). Romanian folklore also contains other variants of incantation ‘against the fairies’ in which they are driven out to



a non-place (Gorovei 1985: 320) or have the classic structure of magical texts (Gorovei 1985: 322–324).

Having seen the parallels between neighbouring traditions, South Slav and Romanian, we are prone to accept the hypothesis of ethno-musicologist Katalin Kovalcsik (in this collection) on the connection between the prayer to the fairies as part of the gurban and the Romanian folkloric texts addressed to the ‘the Fates’. A fact in favour of this hypothesis comes from Romanian dialectologist Emil Petrovici who in 1933 made note of a dialectological text on the Fates (Rom. dial. *Ursătuorile*) in the village of Strehaia, Mehedinți County, Oltenia district, Romania. This is an informant’s description of the custom of giving offerings to the Fates on the third night after a baby is born, which also contains a short prayer of the same structure as the Bayash prayer to the fairies:

A person that knows prays to the Fates. He says the following:

Sfintelor, bunelor / să venidz la aceas prunc / line ca apa / moi ca pânea, /  
dulci ca mierea, / să-i dadz zâle multe fericite. / Cu zâlele să trăiască, / cu  
nărocii să-să hărănescă. (Petrovici 1943: 279)

(You Saints, good ones / come to this child / light as water / soft as bread, /  
sweet as honey, / And give him many happy days. / To live for days, / and  
feed on happiness.)

The same female informant in Oltenia also provided a description of the customs on Holy Thursday when the spring, the anthill, and the balm plant in the garden (Rom. *mătăcină*) are each given a gift of three small loaves of bread along with the magical text in dialogue form, hyperbolizing the bread: *Io te dărui pe tine cu trii cuptuare de pâne* (I present you with three ovenfuls of bread) (Petrovici 1943: 277–278).

The text of the Bayash ‘prayer to the fairies’ is undoubtedly a sacral text and every comparison with magical texts only comes down to similarities or congruity with certain folklore formulae or segments of folkloric text. Some serious diseases in traditional medicine cannot be treated by magic (incantation), in these cases, amulets are made or sacrifices brought, i.e. kurbans (for more detail see Todorova-Pirgova 2003: 73). This involves a prayer on the occasion of making a sacrifice, not a magical exorcism text of the incantation type. Magical power has the effect of ordering only lower class demons, on whom the person doing the incantation imposes his/her own imperative will and orders them to withdraw. Higher category demons and deities are addressed only by way of supplication and prayers. The form of the prayer indicates the high status of the fairies in Bayash tradition and could help in the reconstruction of some of the older layers of Roma mythology.

### Concluding remarks

This contribution attempts to address the question of representing others: who speaks in a text on discourse in the name of whom and how, as a political and ethical problem (Mutman 2006: 156). A classic ethnographical description of the kurban is viewed from an anthropological-linguistic aspect as an identity marker of a small community, physically located on the margins of a settlement of a majority population with which it shares the same language and confession. Notwithstanding its local marginality in the Grebenac settlement, the kurban has also proved to be an important element of Bayash identity. This is the marker that divides Bayash communities into those that practice the kurban and those that do not. However, this is only a 'scientific' and therefore a constructed, not a 'private' awareness of the existence of a kurban 'community', perhaps only contributing to a positive vision, or even the stereotype, of cultural diversity in the Balkans (see Givre 2006, Popova 1995, SD 3 2004, Trojanović 1983<sup>2</sup>).

Unlike the individual kurban for the health of a specific individual (as is the case today in the village of Trešnjevica, Hedešan 2005: 89–97), the kurban in Grebenac has shown itself to be the ritual and holiday of the entire local Bayash community by being connected to a fixed date — St Peter's Day — instead of several possible dates, decided in Trešnjevica by falling into a trance. Determining the date meant specific ritual knowledge and skills, and with the disappearance of the persons who possessed these, the kurban was fixed in calendar time, thus turning it from an individual into a collective ritual. However, even today the practical organisation of the kurban implies certain specific ritual knowledge and skills, together with obligatory personal involvement.

The existence of the kurban ritual could indicate certain historical trajectories of this semi-nomadic group, i.e. Oltenia district in modern-day Romania as an area inhabited by Bayash communities practising the kurban for some considerable time. Another confirmation of the continuous semi-nomadic character of the Bayash community is the explicit need on the part of temporarily dislocated members to return to Grebenac on a certain date. Has the abandonment of traditional semi-nomadic occupations (crafting and sale of wooden objects) and the acceptance of the social status of workers working abroad (the *gastarbeiter*) significantly changed the nature of the Bayash community? What is it that causes the regular return to their own settlement or a chain of places of personal or family origin (Brodica — Grebenac — abroad)? Traditional ethnographers, used to researching autochthonous, sedentary populations, register the complex net-

works of relocation, unplanned and individual, of 'Roma communities' only in passing.

In an attempt to answer the question of whether religious and festive traditions constitute marks of local and/or religious affiliation, a distinction in the *gurban* has been discerned within the 'Roma' population (i.e. those defined as Roma from 'outside'). By surviving within different Christian confessions, the practice of the *gurban* is one of the indicators on the Bayash traditional scale of values: The Bayash practising the *gurban* in Serbia belong to the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Orthodox Church, but some individuals are also close to neo-Protestant religious communities. The Bayash *gurban*, as well as the other *kurbans* practiced on the Balkans by the Roma communities, clearly contains two groups at local level: one that practises it and another that does not.

Bearing in mind the traditional marginality of the Bayash (in the sense of their living on the margins of the settlement), the *gurban* marks how one belongs to one's own, locally marginalised community, not necessarily to the settlement as a whole. Even at linguistic level, translating the term *kurban* into *gurban* helps to overcome and ameliorate the distinction of the Balkans vs. Central Europe, but this is also achieved by the *gurban* as the luggage of a semi-nomadic way of life. The River Danube, historically a mighty boundary between the two worlds, shows itself in a somewhat different light in the example of this semi-nomadic community: there is a south-Danube continuity of migration of Bayash communities and another which extends north of the Danube; historically, both were affected by the borders existing at different times between countries in this part of Europe.

The *gurban* in this article however, partially re-examines the concept of 'the Balkans', not in the sense of a genetic relationship to other quite independent forms of blood sacrifice, but rather by way of re-examining its own research weaknesses and limitations, whether within or beyond the author's control. In the awareness of the limitations of local knowledge of a local phenomenon, in the very ability to choose to speak, research and analyse to the maximum, there is an attempt at transcending the local and moving towards the universal. There is a responsibility on the part of researchers to avoid the trap of local methods in studying and interpreting the world, to shake off the hegemony of local knowledge and the absolutes of ruling local scientific methods. There is also the responsibility not to go down the road of pre-set topics and objectives, typical of Balkan scholarly circles suffering from 'national sciences', and which is in fact the selection of the marginal and individual. On the other hand, there is the responsibility of avoiding the traps of 'universal knowledge': viewing the Roma as a seamless whole, a community, without an awareness of its internal

stratification. Linguists could perhaps stratify the Roma according to their mother tongue, but the linguistic distinction of the Bayash as a group whose mother tongue is Romanian has proved inadequate to portray existing inter-group stratification. A fragmented ethnic group such as the Bayash is just a paradigm for the fragmentary nature of knowledge of the Balkans. From the point of view of research, it is an unknown, and subject from the outset to conflicting interpretations and conclusions.

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*Gerda Dalipaj, Tirana*

## KURBAN AND ITS CELEBRATION IN THE SHPATI REGION IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY.

A case study of local social structure and identities.

### **Introduction**

*Shpati*, administratively included in the district of Elbasan, lies in Middle Albania, south of the ancient city of Elbasan (formerly known as *Skampini*), between the rivers Shkumbin and Devoll and the roads of their valleys which followed the route of the ancient *Via Egnatia*. This geographic position carved out the specific physiognomy of the Shpati region, be it the consequence of resistance and isolation, or of adaptation and openness to continuous change. This because, from a systemic point of view, the area appears involved into further regional networks, and meanwhile remains prominent for its being at 'the edges' of that time's state society.<sup>1</sup>

The region is composed of two sub-regions: *Shpati i Sipërm*,<sup>2</sup> meaning 'The Upper Part of Shpati', commonly known as the 'Mountain Shpati'; and *Shpati i Poshtëm*, meaning 'The Lower Part of Shpati', known also as the 'Field Shpati'. The upper part of Shpati is composed of three communes (Zavalina, which includes 6 villages; Gjinari, with 11 villages; and Shushica, with 9 villages). The lower part of Shpati is composed of four communes (Shirgjani, which includes 7 villages; Gjergjani, with 7 villages; Tregani, with 12 villages; and Gostima, with 7 villages) (Dalipaj 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see Tirta 1987a.

<sup>2</sup> All the local terms are spelled in the in local dialect, followed by the English translation.

In this paper I will present some results of my ongoing research in the region of Shpati, Albania. The aim is to give an overall view of the local context in which the ritual of sacrifice is performed and celebrations take place. These rituals find different expressions according to the different units of social structures, in the time and space we are referring to, engaged in each act of sacrifice and in the various celebrations. These social units and their networks which overlap or intermingle with each other, also form the basis for the regional belonging and identification, for people's dealing with their differences and for their representations on the similarity and difference.

The main data come from my ongoing field work in the region of Shpati and among the newly-settled (post-1990) families from these villages who moved to the city of Elbasan (eastern and south eastern outskirts). I will try to give an overview of social life at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, based on collective memory, taking into consideration the questions this type of methodology raises. Cultural practices are processes, in terms of the space and the time in which we base our research. In such a case the researcher should be aware of the difficulties of writing the past through living in the present, while basing mainly on the people's memories in the field. This requires gathering of all possible information in context, however the precise locating of the period of time to which we refer through people's memories is a highly difficult target.

### **The Shpati region**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century both sub-regions differed in their religious affiliation, modes of subsistence, social organization etc. The Upper Shpati was composed mostly of Orthodox villages, which lived as self-sustaining peasant communities. This area is known especially for its crypto-Christianity. People say of themselves that they are *laramanë* (pied, many-coloured), and the term 'crypto-Christian' is found mainly among formally well-educated people of the region, and in textbooks. The Lower Shpati was composed of more Muslim villages, which lived under the system of *chiflig* (feud / farming).

The two sub-regions can be better understood not as isolated dyads and not only in terms of their resemblances, but also in their ways of dealing with difference and similarity in further regional terms, as they both appear to hold and express differences versus one another while remaining interdependent (Keesing/Strathern 1998: 68-79; Dalipaj 2007). Historical evidence shows that in time many of the families of the Field Shpati were

detached from huge families of the Mountain Shpati<sup>3</sup> (Tirta 1987b: 32; Muka 1987: 98) and there were other populations from different areas, who also jointly settled in the same villages of Lower Shpati (Tirta 1987b: 29–35).<sup>4</sup> The relief and geographical location of both sub-regions (the Field Shpati and the Mountain Shpati), have also shaped specific needs which solidified the bases for reciprocity between both areas.<sup>5</sup> It must also be mentioned that each sub-region had both its own and a common council of elders (*kuvendi i pleqve*).<sup>6</sup> Although the unwritten law of *shpataraks* has never been noted down by an authority, people in both areas carefully obeyed the norms which they called *zakon vendi* (local custom), or *vendçe* (through local customs).<sup>7</sup> According to Nikolaidu, the metropolitan (archbishop) of Pelagonia named Kozma, wrote to the Orthodox leaders of the Shpati, inviting them to abandon the old customs and to behave

<sup>3</sup> Huge families were characteristic of the Upper Shpati, numbering around 30–40 and sometimes even 50 or 80 members. The families in the Lower Shpati did not extend beyond 7–8 members (Muka 1987: 95–97; the conclusion is drawn by the author based on the characteristics of the dwellings in both areas).

<sup>4</sup> The informant K. Dedja from Zavalina tells us that in 1933 R. B. from Osteth of Sulova came to his house and stayed there with his whole family. K. Dedja tells that his father hosted the family from Sulova although they belonged to the Islamic religion, because they were of the same kin (originally R. B. was from the kin of Dedaj). He also adds that he has heard a lot the expression *o i farë* (“is the same seed” – meaning ‘of the same kin’) from his father (as reported by Tirta 1987b: 37). Also the ethnographer Rrok Zojzi, in his report on an expedition to the valley of the river Shkumbin, writes that friendship was sacred for the *shpatarak*. When a Mohammedan died in the house of his Orthodox host, the hosting family called the imam to conduct the proper religious funeral ceremony for the Mohammedan, just as “the ancestors’ custom asked them to behave” (Zojzi 1949: 44–45).

<sup>5</sup> For example, the villages of Field Shpati have been historically much more exposed to the invasions. As such, the families retreated to Upper Shpati and shared a common living with the inhabitants of the Mountain Shpati villages (Tirta 1987a; 1987b). On the other hand, because of high mountains in the Upper Shpati, the most important economic resource was transhumance pastoralism. This required the movement of cattle to higher grass plots during the summer and the usage of fields of Shpati during winter. Due to possible lack of necessary land to feed the cattle during winter, the villagers from Shpati Mountain used to settle for a part of the year in the villages of Field Shpati, who were involved in agriculture, as the dominant mean of production.

<sup>6</sup> For example: In the Mountain Shpati, in Gjinar, the place called *Fusha e Kuqe* (The Red Field) was known to be a meeting place for this sub-regional council of elders; in the Field Shpati, *Kodra-Bujarës* (The Hill of *Bujarës*) was the sub-region’s meeting place for elders. As well, *Hunda e Bregut* (The Nose of the Riverside) in Gjergjan (Field Shpati) served as a meeting place for the whole region of Shpati (Zojzi 1949: 41; Gjergji 1987: 65).

<sup>7</sup> A lot has been written on this local unwritten law; see, for example, Zojzi 1949, Hasluck (1954) 2005, Nikolaidu 1979, Tirta 1987a and 1987 b, Ulqini 1987, Gjergji 1981 etc.



according to the canons of the Church and instructions of the Bible (Nikolaidu 1979: 118). Local beliefs have it that old men knew and could ponder the issues through these norms, and an old man (*plak*) was “a wise man who arranged the world”<sup>8</sup> (Ulqini 1987: 209). In addition, communal feasts took place in each sub-region. As an example, in Zavalina, in the place known as *Breg Shëndlli*, on July 20<sup>th</sup>, people from all the villages of the Mountain Shpati and beyond celebrated a huge feast, which they called *Shëndëllia* (St Elijah’s Day).

### The *kurban* of the village community

Some of the religious feasts in the villages of the Shpati include the blood sacrifice. It seems that the *place* and *time* in which the sacrifice is made precedes in importance other rules in sacrificing, furthermore it conditions these rules. Each feast has its own place and time of celebration and this depends widely on the social unit celebrating it.

To begin with, the village in the region of Shpati is called *fshat* and *katund* and represents a small social unit, which lies in a well specified territory with widely recognised unalterable borders. The geographic location has been a determining factor in the organization of territory, and the land property was of three kinds: of the village community, of the specific families, and the third one was the land which belonged to specific families but was in collective use at specific times of the year.<sup>9</sup> Each village had its own council of elders, and their meeting was known as *gjyq* (court). Each kin had its own representative who sat in the first row and each family was represented by its own *burrë për derë* (man of the family) (Zojzi 1949: 40–41; Ulqini 1987: 209, 211). So, each village had certain independence and self-sustainability, and an obligatory cohesion of the group. This is shown also by the pattern of marriages, which were mostly oriented within the village itself with people of the same religion.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In local everyday language *bota* (the world) means both the surrounding space and the people living in it. People also differentiate among the world of humans, the world of dead people, the world of *largëqoftit* (in the meaning of devil creatures from which humans ‘should keep away’, creatures which should not even be mentioned, hence this naming) etc.

<sup>9</sup> This phenomenon was known as *hapja e vërrinit*.

<sup>10</sup> There were two criteria for marriage: belonging to the same religion as a prerequisite and belonging to the same village as a strong preference. If marriages within the same village were not possible, they could take place outside the village, but always within the same religion. People use the expression “A good daughter is married within the village”.

In the Shpati region, each village has its own feast. This feature has survived in the Orthodox villages, being also present in rudimentary form even in the Muslim villages, which widely celebrate feasts such as *Kurban Bajram* and *Bajrami i Madh* after the fasting month of Ramadan, and other feasts. In the Upper Shpati, the Orthodox village of Selta celebrates *Shëmrinë* (the feast of the Assumption) on 15<sup>th</sup> of August; Zavalina celebrates *Shëndëllinë* (St Elija) on 20<sup>th</sup> of July; *Gjinar* celebrates *Shmrenën* (St Marina) on 17<sup>th</sup> July, in Jeronisht people celebrate *Shën Premten* (St Paraskevi), Pashtrash celebrates *Shëmrinë* (the feast of the Assumption) and so on. It is evident that all the feasts have their own typical unchangeable places of celebration and also their specific dates in the year. It must be noticed however that different people report different dates for these celebrations. One and the same informant may even report two different dates. When asked on the reasons of this difference, the informants name two, one of which is the use of the *alla turka* calendar. They report it as “our own calendar”, telling the researcher that it “is different from your calendar, which is *alla franga*”. They say that *alla franga* calendar precedes the *alla turka* by 13 or 14 days.<sup>11</sup> According to the informants, the calculation of these religious feasts by the *alla turka* calendar is a prerequisite,<sup>12</sup> otherwise calamities may occur. So it happens that people mention different dates if they switch between *alla turka* and the *alla franga* calendar, but the feasts must be celebrated according to the *alla turka* one. When people are asked what they mean by *alla turka*, they say: “It was the Turks who brought this calendar” or simply: “Because this calendar is very, very old”. Due to the fact that these village feasts were celebrated in a very similar way, I will focus on the description of one of them: *Shmrena* in *Gjinar*.

On 17<sup>th</sup> of July in *Gjinar*, people go to the mountain, to a place 200–300 metres wide, which is called *Qorraz*. Local people call this place *Kisha e Shmrenës* (The Church of Saint Marina)<sup>13</sup> or *vakuf* (sacred place). A star from the Mountain of *Bukanik* is said to have fallen here and to have shown that this place was sacred. People say the place was pointed to

<sup>11</sup> For example, the first day of spring, in the case of *alla franga* calendar, is 1<sup>st</sup> of March, while according to *alla turka* it is 14<sup>th</sup> of March.

<sup>12</sup> During my interviews in June 2007 among the *Bërdufi* families, who settled gradually after 1989 in the eastern outskirts of *Elbasan*, I recorded a story about a boy from the *Ranxha* kin. Three or four years before, they say, the boy came back from migration, and insisted to celebrate Saint Mary’s Day not according to *alla turka* calendar. And the people in *Selta* did so. The next morning the boy died without reason. People believed that was a curse for changing the date and from that time they decided to follow strictly ‘their own’ *alla turka* calendar.

<sup>13</sup> Actually the Great Martyr *Marina*, called *St Morena*.

through a *gumërata*. By these terms in the region is meant a huge stone which in people's everyday life has juridical significance as it was used to demarcate the unalterable borders of private territory. It is here that the inhabitants of Gjinar village celebrated the common feast. The participants were mainly men from Gjinar, but many other people joined in. The whole village shared the expense of buying a cow and sacrificed it at the door of the church, sprinkling the stones of the front door with its blood. Then the cow was prepared for lunch. The blood sacrifice, and also the cooking, was done by the *akçi* (cooks). These were village cooks who offered help for no financial reward at each ceremony and celebration.<sup>14</sup> Their reward was mainly, but not only, a moral and prestigious one. The meat was boiled and not fried, hence the name of the place.<sup>15</sup> People believe that long ago, on the day of this feast, a deer would approach the place where men were sitting, and would sit down with them. After it took a rest, the villagers would catch the deer and sacrifice it. But one year they caught it before it took a rest (some informants say "without waiting for it to lap some water"). Since then the deer has never approached again, and the villagers substituted a cow or an ox. According to Tirta, the legendary belief in the sacrifice of wild animals such as deer and wild goat guides us to the attributes of *Zana*,<sup>16</sup> the deity of wild nature, and in the places it has survived it is also associated with legends on the existence of this deity (Tirta 2004: 116).<sup>17</sup>

Each villager brought *raki* (plum brandy) and *meze* (starters) which were communally shared. The ceremony was led by the priest. The toasts began only with *raki*, greeting the day of Saint Marina and wishes for abundance, well-being and good luck. Then, toasting to each other, people recalled their family and kin members, making general or specific wishes for each of them. Afterwards the meal started. Not all the meat of the sacrificed cow was served. Half of it was put aside and divided in pieces for each family of the village. Each member should eat a piece of it, even a tiny one, to enjoy abundance and well being.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> They were prominent and at the time we are speaking about in Gjinar there were three *akçi*: Petër Kërçyku, Muç Mufali and Kol Shnjaku.

<sup>15</sup> People call the place *veni ku zihet mishi* (meat boiling place) and it is found 100 m away from the church.

<sup>16</sup> In the dialect of Shpati it is *Zara*.

<sup>17</sup> The legend of the building of the castle of *Petro Petroshi* in Lleshan is conveyed through a song. The pattern is the same as in many countries: the wife of the youngest brother, in our case called *Zara*, is sacrificed so that the castle may stand (Tirta 2004: 349).

<sup>18</sup> These reports come from my own field work data, and also make use of some field work materials of A. Gjergji, from the Archive of Ethnology, IKP, Tirana.

It is interesting to mention that after the joint meal, after people had entertained and toasted to each other, men gathered to determine the order for the irrigation water. Considering the many quarrels, troubles and even death threats for this reason (Gjergji 1981: 5–6), the sharing of the irrigation water throughout the year was a very important event. Another important event which began to take place during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the propagation of the written Albanian language within these feasts, according to the informants.<sup>19</sup>

Another type of sacrifice to be performed by the village community, which is not related to specific religious feasts, is made in case of communal problems, for example, in case of drought, overflow of streams, at the foundations of bridges etc. Interesting to mention is also the symbolic sacrifice of straw in fires. These fires are attested in Shelcan, in the late evening the whole village gathered to put fire to straw. The cinders were gathered and brought back to the fields, in the belief that the abundance of the harvest was burned down in the fire and reborn (Tirta 2004: 277–278).<sup>20</sup>

### The kurban of the kin group

A kin group is called in Shpati *fara* (seed) or *fisi* (kin). The people of one kin acknowledge that they come from the same ancestor, although their memory does not recall this ancestor. Different branches of the same kin have settled in different villages of the region, or even in other regions.

Most of the prominent kin groups of Shpati celebrate together a specific religious feast; if different kin groups live in the same village they celebrate different feasts on their own. This does not mean that other people, from other kin groups, do not join the feast. The celebrations are held on various days of the year and consist of the sacrifice of an animal and of eating together, entertainment and sharing of food. As an example, in Gjinar village, the kin of *Mufalak* celebrated *Shën Mhillin* (the Archangel Michael), the kin of *Dedaj* celebrated *Shën Gjergjin* (St George), the kin of *Kërçyk* celebrated *Shën Shtjefnin* (St Stephen), the kin of *Bezhan* celebrated *Shën Mitrin* (St Demetrios), the kin of *Peçi* celebrated *Shënkollin* (St Nicholas), the kin of *Topi* celebrated *Shëmartinë* (St Martin), the autochthon *Shqau* celebrated *Shën Premten* (St Paraskevi), the kin of *Karaj* celebrated *Shënkollin* (St Nicholas), the kin of *Uruç* celebrated *Shën Mhillin* (St Archangel Michael). Informants say that there are kins which arrived later to the

<sup>19</sup> Informants said that Lef Nosi and other patriots used to come for these days and teach and propagate the written Albanian language.

<sup>20</sup> Burning the straw and bringing the cinders back to the land is found in the Field Shpati, where the inhabitants live mainly from agriculture.

village, for example the kin of *Karaj* and the kin of *Bezhan*, who came from the village of Selta. Everywhere a branch of a kin settled, it vigorously continued to practice its own feast and the feast of the present village, and also, but faintly, the feast of the village from which they came. It is interesting to mention that in Lleshan, a Muslim village between Gjinar and Shelcan, two Orthodox villages, a branch of the kin of *Gjolli* settled, who came from Selta and remained Orthodox. They continued to celebrate the feast of their own kin and of the Selta village.

As opposed to the village feast, they rarely sacrifice a cow, but rather a ram or a lamb. The feast of the kin group is organized in one of the houses of the kin, probably the most distinguished one among them. As mentioned above, the animal is cut and cooked by the *akçi* of the village. Later it is distributed among the relatives who bought it and also to other people around, this act being called *bëj hise* (make part for / share).<sup>21</sup> The feast was joined also by daughters from the kin group married within or outside the village, affines, godfathers and blood-brothers.<sup>22</sup> Tirta suggests that these feasts are given in the honour of the leader of the kin group (Tirta 1987: 13).

In Gjinar, *Shtanasi* (St Athanasius)<sup>23</sup> is also celebrated jointly by the whole village, not only by the kin of *Shqau*. Informants say that there are two types of *Shqau* kin. One of them is autochthonous, the other comes from *Hija e Tomorrit* (Shadow of *Tomorr*)<sup>24</sup> and were probably Slavs. Although I have not witnessed any significant difference among these groups, the latter has been excluded from the celebration of *Shtanasi*, due to the above mentioned explanation, but not from the village feast of *Shmrena*.

### The family kurban

In the Shpati region, different names for 'family' are used, such as *familje* (family), *shpi* (house, household), *tym* (smoke), *zjarr* (fire), *derë*

<sup>21</sup> The Alb. word *hise* conveys not only the meaning of sharing, but also a kind of predestinated or sacred right that the others have over this share, as such it should not be contested by either party.

<sup>22</sup> Blood-brotherhood is a form of institutionalizing close friendship between two men from different families. It involves mutual duties and rights, just as in the case of two brothers, with the exception of property rights. This is why sometimes it is called also *vëlla pa hise* (brother without the right to property share).

<sup>23</sup> The feast of *Shtanasi* is celebrated twice a year: in winter, on January 18<sup>th</sup>, and in spring, in May or mid-April.

<sup>24</sup> *Tomorr* is a mountain in South Albania.

(door). According to the concept of *shpatarak*, family and house are inseparable. The family — the patriarchal one — was the smallest economic and self-representative unit.

There were also celebrations that included sacrifice, which took place only within the family. These were not feasts of specific families, as in the case of the feasts of the village and of the kin-group. They could be celebrated by all the communities, but each of them only within the small group of family. This is the case of *Pashka* (Easter), *Dita e Verës* (The Day of Spring), *Shën Gjergj* (St George), *Uji i bekum* (Blessed Water — the Epiphany) etc. Except for Easter, when a lamb was sacrificed in the yard of the family early in the morning, on the other sacred days a fowl would mostly be sacrificed and its blood would sprinkle the stones and stairs of the house. It happened that people would arrange for the sacrificial animal to be the first being to enter the house in the early morning, and in this case the animal was called *përshëndetsi këmbëmbarë*. The term refers to the first creature that enters into the house in the very morning of the sacred day. The creature may be a human or an animal and is thought to bring luck to the house. It was strongly preferred that the creature be the animal that ought to be sacrificed. In such a case it was brought everywhere in the house so to bring prosperity to every corner of the dwelling and only afterwards it was sacrificed. Hence the name which can be translated as “the first salutatory that brings prosperity.”

The family kurban is not related only to religious feasts but also to specific important moments of family life. As an example, kurban is present when a new house is built, when two members of the same family die in close succession, when members of the family survive a serious accident etc. We can suppose that, in this case, kurban has a specific place as a *rite de passage*.

Building a new house was an event of huge importance. As stated above, the concept of house and family were inseparable for the people in Shpati; if the building was damned the curse would fall upon the members of the family living within. Thus, before starting the foundations, the place where the house was to be built had to pass various tests. It was believed that building the house over sacred places brought calamity to the family (Tirta 2004: 340–341).<sup>25</sup> When starting the foundations, the work began always from the east (as the sun rises in the east, as a symbol of a new be-

<sup>25</sup> Informants in Gjinar declare that they have tried to sow the lands of the churches after they were pulled down during the communist regime, but nothing came of them. Also they report how many calamities have occurred to the families who used the stones of the churches to build houses.

ginning). With the head towards the eastern horizon, men of the family sacrificed an animal, mostly a lamb or ram, very rarely a black chicken or cock. Here the colour of the sacrificial animal gains importance. There is a strong preference for black. When asked the significance of the black colour in such a case, informants say that the colour white 'shines' i.e. attracts attention and does not allow good luck for the family; but the black one does not 'shine' so good luck is not distracted but remains to the family. There is a belief that the colour black also turns away curses and bad luck. The foundations of the house are spattered with the blood of the sacrificed animal. Sometimes people leave the head of the animal in the foundations, other times they detach the horns of the animal and put them on the front of the future house. The explanation is that the horns will protect from the evil eye. The meat of the sacrificed animal is the *risk*, *hise* (share) of the workers, who eat it during the building of the house. This belief in the act of sacrifice in the foundations of the house is so strong that no house has ever been built without a sacrifice, even during the dictatorship. Even the workers before beginning work ask whether a kurban has been made in the foundations. If the kurban took place, all problems during the work are said to be from God. But if there is no kurban, the ground is expected to counteract during the building process, such as causing accidents for the workers. Apart from the head of the sacrificed animal, people also put into the foundations some money and golden or silver women jewellery. According to Tirta, these elements are the objectization of the head of the family (be it man or woman); they are thrown in instead of the persons. It is widely believed that the building of a new house seeks the head of the head of the family (Tirta 2004: 340–357).<sup>26</sup>

Even when entering the new house people sacrifice an animal, usually a chicken or cock, the blood of which is sprinkled on the threshold, the stairs and the stones just outside the house. The animal sacrifice is practiced also when members of the family have survived a serious accident. In this case it is believed that the human being has gained a second life. A chicken is sacrificed at the site of the accident and its blood is spattered around, and then sugar is poured out. The chicken is not eaten but thrown away, because it is believed that it traces a way back to the bad luck. Almost the same happens when two members of the family die. A black chicken is sacrificed and put into the coffin with the dead person, in the belief that it is the death of the animal that the deceased will take with him/her, and not the human.

<sup>26</sup> In Albanian: *Shtëpia e re ha një kokë njeriu.*

### Concluding remarks

We have seen briefly how different events which include the act of sacrifice, and even the act of sacrifice in itself, can be classified according to the social units of the communities. As Keesing and Strathern note “the supernatural order to some extent modelled the human social relationship... People with fragmented clans often have a cult of ancestral spirits for each clan, and people with a centralised state are more likely to have a high god or centralised pantheon... The supernatural world which religions posit is a transformation of the one humans live in, as well as a projection of it” (Keesing/Strathern 1998: 308). This draws us to the approach of understanding the act of sacrifice within the social structure in which it takes place. The size of the specific kurban of the social unit also expresses the presumed size of the social unit which practices it — for a village kurban it should be a cow, for a kin kurban — a lamb and a chicken in the case of a family kurban. The size of the sacrificial animal should also be in keeping with the function the meat must fulfill — it should be a cow because the whole village will celebrate, it should be a lamb as the workers will be fed with the meat, it can be a chicken in case of restricted participation in the meal or in case the sacrificial meat is not going to be used for eating purposes (as in the case of gaining protection from accidents or from the death of family members). Extending the issue to the emotional attachment to the act of sacrifice, in the kurban of the village, we clearly see the predominant importance of celebrating the event in itself. People of the same village and others from other villages (relations of friendship, god-fatherhood, and blood-brotherhood, affinity etc.) join in the celebrations, and the same situation appears in the case of celebration of the kin group. The localisation of celebrations can be seen also in the light of divided gender space; the participants in the celebrations outside are male, in those inside the house, male and female. The celebration in itself can be seen as a regenerative act for the community: people meet, recall each other, proper relatives and ancestors refresh collective memories, recall various events; different units of communities get together to greet or get to know each other and build new relations; delicate issues of community are solved — as in the case of sharing the irrigation water; the community asserts the proper self and the own boundaries — the village as a territorially based collectivity, composed of families of different origin, but who live in interdependence and in a partially common economy, versus other villages of the region; the kin group, as a collectivity, based on the memory of a common ancestor / ancestors versus other kin groups; and the



family, the smallest unit of decision-making, a small collectivity based on a common descent and economy, versus other families of the village. All these imbue the individual with the feeling of prestigiously belonging to one or even more communities at the same time. Last but not least, it must be stated that all the above groups refer to the acts of sacrifice — and in broader terms of celebrating, mourning and practising rites of passage — en bloc: as Orthodox rites and as *zakon vendçe* (according to local custom). It is through these Orthodox rites and local customs that members of Upper Shpati villages, explain and find their solutions; validate the social acts and sustain the moral and social order; and reinforce the ability to cope with difficulties and unforeseen events (Keesing and Strathern 1998: 304). As such, they refer to themselves as the Mountain Shpatarak: they are similar because together they practice the Orthodox rites and remain loyal to local traditions and norms. At the same time, they refer to God as the God of every human being, be it a Muslim or an Orthodox, and beyond proper social boundaries they deal with the people who belong to the other religion in a huge range of affairs. They refer to other Muslim people as formerly Orthodox ones, and it is in this ‘origin’ that they rationalize and build a representation of the similarities with them. As an example, in the village of Dumre, Rrasë, populated by Muslims, after sacrificing a chicken or a cock for *Shën Gjergj* (Saint George), people draw a cross with its blood on their foreheads. In the Upper Shpati, people explain that the above mentioned villagers do this because they were formerly Orthodox, and they “mix up the cultural features”. Muslims of the Lower Shpati say that Orthodox rites are not purely so, but intermingled with theirs, hence the similarities. Each community explains that the others have borrowed cultural features from their own. On the other hand, as already mentioned, there are Muslim families from the Lower Shpati, which originally came from Orthodox kin groups of Upper Shpati, as there are also many families, who remained loyal to Orthodoxy even after settling in the feuds of a *beyler*. Meanwhile, to a certain extent, both sides admit to participating in the celebrations of the other. As an example, Orthodox women who could not bear children joined in the *Sulltan Nevruz* celebrations in Lleshan, a Muslim village in Upper Shpati. It was a kind of pilgrimage to a *vakuf*, formerly the church of *Shmrija* (Saint Mary), where the women moved some pieces of clay over which they believed had remained carved the traces of a horse. The women’s action aimed at gaining fertility. What is important is that these people, beyond their differences, retain a considerable common code of understanding in public life. All of them call themselves *Shpatarak*, and have engaged together in certain historically impor-

tant initiatives, for example resistance to Ottoman expeditions in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup>

The act of remembering / gathering and also of expanding beyond the borders of social units (village, kin, family) is important in economic life — many fights took place between villages in case of intrusion into each village community's common property — of marriage and family property share, as in the case of exogamous kin groups and endogamous village communities. Each community appears to be at the same time well-defined — to use the word 'definition' instead of 'isolation' in use hitherto — and in continuous communication and mutual exchange. Also these different groups penetrate each other and overlap, playing a significant role in the foundations of a common belonging.

As Barker explains it, "in a seminal article on the questions of cultural identity, Stuart Hall (1992) identified three different ways of conceptualizing identity, namely: the enlightenment subject, the sociological subject and the postmodern subject" (Barker 2003: 223). With the sociological subject Hall calls the inner core of the subject non-autonomous and self-sufficient, but formed in relation to 'significant' others who mediated to the subject the values, meanings and symbols — the culture — of the worlds he/she inhabited (Barker 2003: 224). We have seen how different social units are represented and shape different forms of cultural features in higher and parallel units. And we have followed the directions of perceived similarity. We have seen how penetrating and overlapping social units, sharing a common spatial living, form the basis for dealing with difference. "In sum, identity is about sameness and difference, about the personal and the social, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from them" (Weeks 1990: 89 as quoted by Barker 2003: 223).<sup>28</sup> This point of view guided us towards considering regional identity not as a homogeneous entity and the individual identity not as a unified whole, but formed by multiple identities in hierarchical cycles of more peripheral and more central identifications. Meanwhile, this remains a conclusion dependent on the time upon which this brief research was centered (first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century). The regime which followed brought about a strong controlling force and the centralised invention of identities, as we have seen above.<sup>29</sup> The confronting of an immense

<sup>27</sup> The *Shpataraks*, Muslim and Orthodox, were famous for their fairly organized resistance to the Ottoman Administration. Since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the area has been marked by strong patriotic movements (see Tirta 1987: 23–25).

<sup>28</sup> Quotation from Weeks in 'The Value of Difference' in J. Rutherford (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990.

<sup>29</sup> Attempts at orienting identity were present before this too. Refer to footnote 20.

‘spaceless’ otherness after half a century of isolation, growing individualism and consequently a stronger agency, the shifts in reference groups and wider alternatives in ‘important others’, guide us to Hall’s postmodern subjects: “The decentred or postmodern self involves the subject in shifting, fragmented and multiple identities. Persons are composed ... of several ... contradictory identities... at different times, not unified around a coherent ‘self’... pulling in different directions ... constructing a comforting ‘narrative of the self’” (Hall 1992: 277, as quoted by Barker: 2003: 224).<sup>30</sup> All these demand the adoption of different concepts to approach this same topic in different times, which remain prone to further explorations.

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*Rigels Halili, Warszawa — Tirana*

## KURBAN TODAY AMONG THE ALBANIANS

The practice of kurban, at both social and personal level, was and is still present among all Albanians living in the Balkans. However, due to historical development and political circumstances there is a difference in practicing kurban between Albanians living in Albania and Albanians living in Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia. Only after the fall of the communist regime<sup>1</sup> in 1991, similarly to many other religious phenomena and rituals, the kurban reappeared in the social and individual life of Albanians living in Albania. Whereas, due to the liberal attitude of the regime (at least in this aspect) in the former Yugoslavia, Albanians living in Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro were able to continue the long tradition of kurban facing no political barriers or sanctions. Nevertheless nowadays, in both cases, the influence of radical urbanization, emigration and other modernization processes has resulted in a rather growing limitation of us-

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<sup>1</sup> In 1967 Albania declared itself the first atheist state in the world and this declaration was contained also in the Constitution of 1976. All churches, mosques and tekes were closed down, many of them, despite their cultural values, were destroyed, or used for other purposes. For instance, the mosque in Gjirokastra dating from 1734 was turned into a circus arena, one of the Orthodox churches, dating from 1804 was turned into a depot for a nearby furniture factory, another was closed down and the frescoes were painted over in white. The buildings around one of the tekes were turned into small public houses, and another teke dating from the XVII century lapsed into ruin. The situation in other towns in Albania was very similar. Any sign of religious practice was sentenced by up to 8 years of hard-labour. Literally all clerics were imprisoned. And despite the survival of some religious rituals in private life, within two generations the communist regime managed to create an almost entirely secular, if not atheist, society. Mixed marriages were common and religious taboos (such as the consumption of pork by Muslims) were no longer treated as such. The influence of these years is felt also nowadays, despite quite a massive turn towards religion in the first years of the post-communist period. Albanian society appears today as a combination of a secular public life with some presence of religious practices in private. However, the revival of religious life in Albania after 1991 is a problem that needs to be analysed separately, see: Bartl 1968; Popović 1986; Jacques 2000.

age of kurban. This paper intends to present in brief the main social appearances of kurban in the everyday life of Albanians today. Research has been carried out on almost all the territories they inhabit in the Balkans, with a specific focus on predominantly rural areas in south and north Albania and in western Kosovo.

Needless to say, the act of sacrifice (the original Arabic word *qurban* means precisely that — sacrifice) is a sort of contract between men and some divine or semi-divine forces or beings. It has a very pragmatic aim: the sacrifice should secure a better future, a greater concern on the part of these supra-natural forces or beings for men, or on the contrary, persuade them not to take action against men. Needless to say, the act of sacrifice is in one way or another present in every human society, from the very primitive to the post-modern. The sacrifice may appear as a general social practice in which every member of the community is included, and due to which perhaps the community exists, or as an individual practice, in which the beneficiary is only one man or his family. Both these aspects are to be found in the practices of kurban among Albanians nowadays.

Although the word itself shows an Islamic influence, kurban is present among Albanians of all three confessions: Muslim (Sunni and the mystic Shi'a Sufi brotherhoods), Orthodox and Catholic. Kurban as an act of sacrifice appears under this particular name associated with two social practices. The first takes place during different religious feasts. Of course, for Muslims kurban is an obligatory act during the feasts of Kurban Bajram (Alb. *Bajrami i madh*) and Ramazan Bajram (Alb. *Bajrami i vogël*). Moreover, for adherents of all beliefs many saints' days are very often associated with pilgrimage to 'good places' (Alb. *vende të mira, vende të shenjtë*). However, regardless of religious affiliation, people of various denominations make pilgrimages to such places in order to ply their requests to the holy person that once upon a time used to live there, as common belief has it. This is a very typical case of religious syncretism, since Christians go on pilgrimage to Muslim 'good places' and vice versa. Very often, during those days thousands of people gather around the central object, a cave, source of water or mountain peak, usually carrying sheep with them which are sacrificed following an act of kurban. This would be the strict religious aspect of kurban.

However, very commonly in the past as well as nowadays, among all Albanians kurban was and is present as a ritual during the building of houses or other objects of public use. This does not mean that kurban in this case has a secular character, because it still consists of interceding for favours from supra-natural forces. Nevertheless, the difference lies in the purpose of the act of those who conduct it. It is no longer a general action associated with the

religious activity and hierarchy of the community as such, but an act of individual or personal communication with the supra-natural world.

### **Kurban during religious feasts**

For Muslims the act of kurban carried out during the feast of Kurban Bajram recalls the sacrifice of Ibrahim (Abraham). However, it also has various social aspects. It is an act that re-confirms the covenant between God and Man, and at the same time re-confirms the shape and existence of the very community of men. Those who are financially able to afford the expense are usually supposed to provide a sheep (or several of them, but always an odd number) to be sacrificed for this occasion. Not everyone can conduct this act of sacrifice, not only in terms of technical ability, but also in those of being clean before God and the community. For this reason, people go earlier to the mosque in order to cleanse themselves of sin (through the ritual of Namaz). Afterwards, the kurban takes place in the courtyard behind the mosque, but very often it also takes place in open spaces, near houses, or in neighbourhood centres. The meat of the sheep is roasted, divided into pieces and then consumed by the people gathered there. The religious ritual turns into a social spectacle and entertainment. The same ritual is repeated in the tekes also. The act of sacrifice takes place in the courtyard behind the teke in a special place. Blood is not dispersed on the soil, but is collected into a special pit otherwise always kept closed (see illustrations). In this case the meat is rather consumed in front of the teke, the invited people (not necessarily all Muslims) take their seats and the feast continues in quite a secular atmosphere.

Kurban also takes place on other days, especially during pilgrimages to shrines. A very important celebration for Bektashi believers is the commemoration of Abbas Ali, a Muslim holy man who lies buried in a *tyrbe* (mausoleum) on the southern peak of Mount Tomor in southern Albania. There is a Bektashi teke nearby. Every year, from August 20–25 Bektashi believers, but not only they, climb and visit the *tyrbe* and the teke. Despite the religious motive, the commemoration has the character of a popular feast, or even picnic. Whole families from Albania and many emigrants from different parts of the world come to this place. It is customary that many animals are sacrificed during those days. This kurban is in honour of these days and of Abbas Ali, and has another very practical purpose — the feeding of all the pilgrims.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For the celebration of these days in the past, see: Swire 1937: 251–253, and Hasluck 1943. For the revival of this custom after the fall of communism, see: Clayer 1990; Tirta 1996: 8–12.



The kurban for the feast of Sari Salltëk,<sup>3</sup> which is celebrated in different places (mainly Kruja and Mount Pashtrik, near Kukës), where people believe the grave of this holy man to be, has a similar character. The day of Sari Salltëk is commemorated on August 22, or August 2, which is also Ali's Day. This last feast (known also as *Aliđun* from Turkish *Ali ğünü*) is also very popular among Albanians in Kosovo and Muslims in the Sandžak. Although in this case kurban does not have a strictly religious purpose, it is present as part of the whole celebration.

Another religious celebration that involves kurban is Chicken Saturday, or the Saturday of the Souls (Alb. *e shtuna e pulave, e shtuna e shpritrave*). There are several reports of the existence of this customary practice among Albanian Orthodox in the region and town of Korça, in southeast Albania. On the last Saturday before Orthodox Carnival a chicken was slaughtered early in the morning. Every member of the family made the sign of the cross on their chests and foreheads with the animal's blood and then all of them went to the church. After the mass, they tried to go to sleep for a while, believing they would see in their dream the soul of a dead person. Afterwards they went to the cemetery, and near the graves they ate a special dish called *qumështor*. At the end of the day everybody returned home to eat the chicken slaughtered in the morning and to give parts of the food to the poor and elderly people in honour of the soul of the dead man (Elsie 2001: 55–56). The custom has reappeared today, but in a more simplified form.

### **Kurban on the occasion of building buildings**

This form of kurban is present in almost every area inhabited by Albanians in the Balkans. It has mainly a twofold appearance, but its traces are also to be found in some new customs connected with the building of a house. The most frequent case is the sacrifice of a sheep in the actual foundations of the new house about to be built. However, several rituals precede the act of kurban and the sacrifice comes as one of many other acts that are undertaken in order to secure a firm and happy future for the newly built house and the family that is going to live in it.<sup>4</sup> First of all the head of the family has to find a 'good' place for building the house. After securing such a place the foundations are opened. A healthy and good

<sup>3</sup> For biographical data on this Bektashi holy man, see: Elsie 2001: 225–229.

<sup>4</sup> For more details, see: Tirta 2004: 329–339. During the building of the house, the builders or any other person has to take care that his/her shadow is not immured in the walls of the new house. Otherwise, he or she may die. In northern Albania and Kosovo people believe that if someone from the family dies within 5 years of the building of the house, their shadow must have been immured in the walls.

looking sheep (male, sometimes it has to be black) is then chosen to be sacrificed. The act takes place near the open foundations. The blood of the animal streams first towards the eastern corner of the house and then all around the foundations. Sometimes the head of the animal is buried under the threshold of the house. After the blood, money is also thrown into the foundations by the people present at the ceremony. The meat is then consumed with relatives, neighbours and the builders. At the end, the horns of the sheep must be hung on the main door of the house as an omen against the 'evil eye'. In other cases, instead of a sheep a rooster is very often used for this kind of kurban. Similarly, the blood is dispersed all around the foundations of the new house and the meat is consumed afterwards during a small dinner with relatives, neighbours and builders (Tirta 2004: 340–347).

However, kurban takes place even during small repairs to the house, especially if an important element (such as pillars or parts of the roof) has to be repaired. In this case a rooster or a chicken is sacrificed, often in the yard of the house, and the blood sprinkled on those elements of the house that are to be built or repaired. Even if the householder forgets about this act, the builders are very careful and request the act of kurban before starting work. Kurban is supposed to secure not only the health of the family of the house, but also to preserve the builders from any untoward accident during the work. Old stonemasons in Gjirokastra nowadays recall many different situations when the omission of kurban brought some ill fortune first to the builders and then to the family of the house. The necessity of kurban comes as a consequence of the common belief that every new house, or repair of an old one, needs some blood in order to be built or repaired without any harm.

Even in the not very distant past there have been reports of human sacrifice in buildings of public usage. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the case of the bridge in Drashovica, near Vlora was reported, where a person was allegedly immured by the master-builders (Tirta 2004: 356). Findings also exist showing that the human sacrifice was a fake one. For instance, in the foundations of the bridge built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century over the River Drinos in Kordhoca, near Gjirokastra, the old master workers say a thread was immured, the length of which matched that of a sick man in the town. Therefore, it was the image of this man that was immured in his stead. In this context another fact should be mentioned. The well-known song about the building of the Castle of Skadar (or many variants of the same motif in the building of bridges or monasteries) was sung very often during such important ceremonies as weddings.

This conviction of the necessity of sacrifice in order for the house to stand and to endure is still present nowadays but frequently takes forms that are totally new and sometimes funny. Walking in the streets of Albanian

towns and villages one can observe toys such as plush bears and other animals (see illustrations), or even simply figures similar to human beings hanging over main doors, on the roofs of houses under construction, or in the yards. As many owners claim, this act has a twofold purpose. On the one hand, the animal serves as a kind of kurban, and on the other it helps keep the evil eye away from the house and the family. Funnily enough, very often, side by side with these guards of prosperity of the new houses there are also flags: Albanian, Italian, American or EU. Therefore, one can conclude that if one obtains the guardianship of dark and supra-natural forces, why not secure also the care of earthly and secular institutions, especially if the building is built without a clear permission?

Obviously, these new forms of ensuring preservation have less in common with the idea of kurban itself, despite the fact that they are interpreted as such by the actors. Kurban nowadays appears among Albanians similarly to many other ritual or religious practices. It reveals at the same time the will to preserve the tradition and persist in following old patterns, although such wisdom has been lost due to social and political turmoil, as well as the need to enrich, enlarge and accommodate those ritual patterns to new needs and conditions. Kurban thus appears today not only as a traditional ritual, but also as a social act of the community and therefore as a declaration of identity.

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The pit for collecting the blood of the kurban.



Place of kurban in Tege e Zallit.



New form of kurban, Gjirokastra.



New form of kurban, Gjirokastra.



Teqe e Zallit, Gjirokastra.





*Petko Hristov, Tsvetana Manova, Sofia*

## THE NEW 'OLD' KURBAN A Case Study

This investigation, carried out in the spring of 2006 in the villages of Popovo, Krlev Dol and Yardjilovtsi in the Pernik region of West Central Bulgaria, observes the use of traditional ritual practices in the general revival and enrichment of village life in the years of post-socialism. Our analysis focuses on the present-day forms of a common village kurban, a holiday with an outstanding social function, traditionally associated in the Balkans with the ritual keeping up of the identity system of the community.<sup>1</sup> The emphasis is on newly emerging forms of the ritual offering of sacrifice, and an 'old' kurban practiced in the same region will serve as a reference for comparison: the traditional sacrificial offering at the *Petrovski Krast* [Peter's Cross] locality on Chepan Mountain above the town of Dragoman, which we observed in the summer of 2000.

The ritual with an obligatory blood sacrifice, referred to among all the Balkan peoples as *kurban*, a word of Turkish (or rather Old Testament, Aramaic) origin, is traditionally performed among various ethnic and confessional groups in the Balkans, Christian as well as Muslim (Popova 1995: 145–147). The ritual of sacrificial offering operates on different social levels, individual by one person and as a collective sacrificial offering by family and kin and/or the village (parochial) community. The investigation of the village kurban as a social holiday, i.e. not only as keeping up the relationship of the community with its patron saint, but also being a condition for the (re-) production of group identity and community cohesion (Assman 1997: 143), is particularly typical for the post-socialist revival of some elements of the ritual process in the village, and the fading away of others. The collective ritual sacrificial offerings (*kurbans*) and the

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<sup>1</sup> Along these lines cf. also the other article by Petko Hristov in this collection.

festive common feasts accompanying them are some of the best examples of the integrative and communicative aspect (on a social scale) of this ritual in the Balkans (Hristov 2004: 172).

As an interpretative framework for investigation, we have used the concept of ‘invention’ of new traditions in European societies in the period following the industrial revolution. By ‘invented’ traditions, Eric Hobsbawm denotes the diversity of newly-emerged formalised practices of a ritual and its symbolic nature, whose target is to be inculcated in the community via repetition as values and norms of behaviour (Hobsbawm 1983: 1, 5). A guarantee of this is the reference to the past and (in an overwhelming number of cases), the structuring of continuity for some of the traditional models. A key process for Hobsbawm is the *adaptation* of the old under new conditions and the use of familiar models for new purposes. Most of these ‘invented’ traditions establish or symbolise the social unity and/or membership of real or invented groups and communities. In this way they come closer to the integrating functions of the traditional rituals. For us, as well as for Hobsbawm, “the object of primary interest is rather their appearance and establishment (of these ‘invented’ traditions — P.H.), than their chances of continuing to exist” (Hobsbawm 1983: 1).

Our working hypothesis has been that notwithstanding the diversity of newly emerging symbolic forms and practices in post-socialist Bulgaria, they keep the umbilical cord linking them to tradition. In these particular villages of West Central Bulgaria, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, these new ‘old’ kurbans function as essential markers of local identity. In the case of the so-called ‘Youth Kurbans’, we see this as a specific way of ‘lending personality’ (building a separate group identity) to a whole generation brought up in the years of active socialist atheism, with the help, moreover, of ritual practices from the wealth of traditional folk (Eastern Orthodox) religiosity.

In this paper we intend to present three types of new kurbans, whose beginnings can easily be traced and dated to the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the wake of democratic change in Bulgaria. Of these three types of kurban, only the first, on Chepan Mountain above the town of Dragoman and taken as a basis for comparison, clearly shows the perceptible continuity in West Central Bulgaria of pre-socialist traditional ritual practice, i.e. of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The direct connection with the kurban at the *obrok* ritual site for sacrificial offerings at *Petrovski Krast* [Peter’s Cross] Peak on Chepan Mountain as place, calendar date, with donors of the sacrificial offering (with hereditary succession) and participants has been preserved, but the festive forms have been greatly modified, becoming more reminiscent of village festivals (*sabor* gather-

ings) in the years under socialism. The rest of the examples testify to the newly emerged forms of the ritual process in the small village communities of a traditionally conservative region such as *Graovo* (the present-day Pernik district in Bulgaria).

### **Kurban at the *Petrovski Krast* Peak of Chepan Mountain above Dragoman**

The stone cross at which the sacrifice was traditionally made and where there was a kurban sacrificial offering for the feast day of St Peter, is located at the *Petrovski Krast* Peak (1,206 m) of the Chepan Mountain ridge, the highest in the Sofia region. On its southern foothills lies Dragoman, declared a town in 1969, having four years earlier integrated the old villages of Dragoman and Yarlovtsi around a major railway station on the international line connecting Istanbul via Sofia and Belgrade to Central Europe. Dragoman is the centre of the Burel region, very close in its ethnographic characteristics to neighbouring Graovo and the Sofia *Shopluk*.<sup>2</sup> Since antiquity, the Chepan Ridge has been a natural votive place for ritual practices by the surrounding population. Remains (with inscriptions) of a Thracian temple to Sabazios have been unearthed at the Petrovski Krast Peak, along with a medieval Bulgarian Christian monastery with a chapel and baptismal fonts cut into the rocks, and a ritual cross (*obrochishte*) for the Feast Day of St Peter, probably erected in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today just a part of the kitchen premises has survived, where the kurban used to be cooked in the past.

The ritual stone crosses in the field, at which the family communities of the village offer a blood sacrifice (kurban) to honour the patron saint of the blood-related kinship group, are characteristic both of all West Central Bulgaria and of the villages of the Bulgarian-Serbian frontier region (Hristov 2001: 27–34; Hristov 2002: 28–48). They not only outline a sacred 'framework' for the village lands, but with the offerings (kurbans) made at them, they ritually cover the most important spring, summer and autumn holidays of the Christian (Eastern Orthodox) liturgical cycle, a kind of 'service in the open' (Hristov 2002: 44). The former villages of Dragoman and Yarlovtsi, merged in 1965 into the town of Dragoman, are no exception to this traditional all-Bulgarian practice (Mutafov 1989:

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<sup>2</sup> The *Shopluk* denotes a broader cultural and historical region in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula, on which the political frontiers of the Republic of Bulgaria, the FYR of Macedonia and the Republic of Serbia now converge. For greater detail on the differently determined boundaries of the *Shopluk* and its characteristics as an ethnic and cultural region, cf. Hristov 2004: 67–82.

194). In the lands of the two villages there are numerous family stone crosses, most of them erected in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These crosses mark sacred sites, both for family and kin groups and the entire village community. For that reason at the boundaries of the present-day town of Dragoman there are two crosses for sacrificial offerings dedicated to St Peter: one is in the Del locality, where up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the inhabitants of the village of Yarlovtsi, no longer on the map, gathered together for a kurban sacrificial offering, and the other one at Chepan, where at the stone cross a kurban sacrificial offering was made on the feast day of St Peter by representatives of the Dragoman kin of the Mokerovs. As the Chepan Ridge is considered a sacred site by the whole population of Burel, however, this kurban, sacrificed by the men of one particular family in the old village of Dragoman, is perceived to be common to the entire surrounding population. That is why on the Feast Day of St Peter (July 12, according to the Julian calendar) up to the early 1960s, people of all the villages around the Chepan Ridge — Dragoil, Letnitsa, Golemo Malovo, Berende, Vassilovtsi, Rayanovtsi and, of course, Dragoman — gathered together on the Petrovski Krast Peak. People from Yarlovtsi, however, did not come to the stone cross on Chepan Ridge. Their ritual actions were focused on the Del locality. At the same time, the Feast of St Peter was declared a village holiday (a *sabor* gathering) in Dragoman even before the merger.

According to the testimony of local people, throughout the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century the ritual actions (service) on the Feast Day of St Peter at the stone cross on Petrovski Krast Peak were performed by men of the extended family of the Mokerovs in Dragoman. Initially, the sacrificial offering (kurban) was made by the grandfather, and then, until the end of his life in 1984, the tradition of sacrificing a lamb and of cooking and distributing the ritual meal was kept up every year by his younger son Ivan Filipov. The ritual, the sacrifice and the common feast are generally called a *kurban* but here, as in the villages all along the mountains of the Balkan Range, the dish, distributed of the cooked sacrificial lamb is indicatively called *molitva* [prayer]. During the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ‘the decade of transition’ in Bulgaria, the joint ritual feast for the Feast Day of St Peter on Chepan Ridge was in turn provided by Ivan’s son, Blagoi Filipov, born in 1945, and having grown up in the decades of socialism. It was he, as the main ritual personage that we observed and interviewed in 2000 at Chepan Ridge.

It became clear from the story that the tradition of holding a kurban on the Feast of St Peter at Petrovski Krast had never been interrupted, even in the years of socialism. Initially, the ritual meal was cooked in the monastery kitchen on the peak and up to the 1960s, a priest climbed up to

the peak to bless it. Later on, after a fire in the monastery kitchen, people began cooking the kurban meal in the village, where the food was also blessed (a little of it was taken to the church for blessing), and then vessels containing the cooked kurban were taken by donkey up to the peak, where it was distributed to those present. Every family climbed the peak with an obligatory set of ritual foods: bread (*kolach*) with a hole in the middle into which a candle was stuck and lit, cooked wheat (*kolivo*) and cheese pastry (*banitsa*). The men carried brandy and wine. Rounded stones called “chairs” can be seen to this day, arranged in the shape of an ellipse next to the stone cross. Each family placed the bread and wheat on them, while the provider of the sacrifice, a man of the Mokerov family, went around handing each one a serving of the kurban, pouring it into the bowl that each family carried to the peak. The family of the Mokerovs had their reserved place next to the stone cross, where they placed the pail containing the kurban. The ritual feast included both the joint eating of the kurban and the distribution among those present of bread and cooked wheat (by the women), and brandy and wine (by the men). After the common ritual feast, each of the families went back home to Dragoman, where they received the guests invited for the town holiday (*sabor* gathering) — relatives and friends. This model of celebrating continued until about the 1980s. Subsequently the holiday on Chepan Ridge turned into a common feast without, however, the offering of a sacrifice or distribution of the kurban.

Since the early 1990s, Blagoi Filipov has resumed the practice whereby the Mokerov men “make a sacrificial offering for health at Petrovski Krast”. This, however, is not the former blood sacrifice, abandoned in his view because of impoverishment, a shortage of farm stock and the desertion by their inhabitants of the villages in the region. In 2000, the holiday feast included a barbecue and drinks, organised by him, and every one of those attending carried from home either some kind of drink or a few bottles of beer, which everyone could buy. Helping the organisers with contributions were workers on the nearby forestry farm, who accepted the holiday as their own. The ‘traditional’ kurban, of which all the participants proudly said that it had never ceased to be celebrated, even in ‘Todor Zhivkov’s time’ (the rule of Todor Zhivkov<sup>3</sup>) had turned into a common holiday feast with small grilled skinless sausages and beer — a familiar picture from the village *sabor* gatherings of the last years of the age of socialism. The date of the holiday changed too from the beginning of the 1990s. At the insistence of the priest (“the priest has so decided”),

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<sup>3</sup> Head of state and Communist Party leader of Bulgaria during the socialist period, he headed the country between 1956 and 1989.

Blagoi began organising the holiday feast on Chepan Ridge for the Feast of St Peter on June 29, according to the official Gregorian calendar of the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church, rather than the celebration previously popular among the population on July 12 ‘the old way’ (i.e. according to the Julian calendar).<sup>4</sup> In spite of this shifting of the traditional date, many people gathered not only from Dragoman but also from some of the remaining villages, traditionally joining in the holiday at Petrovski Krast. People who had moved to the capital, Sofia, came specially for the holiday, bringing their children with them.

In the words of Blagoi Filipov, as long as he is alive, he will keep up the way of celebrating the kurban at Petrovski Krast Peak. He intends to hand it down in the form of a ritual obligation (*obrok*) after his death to his only daughter, who, in his view, “willingly and joyfully joins in the preparations for the festive meal at Chepan Ridge”. But in the summer of 2000, Blagoi was not yet sure whether the young woman, who had long since migrated to Sofia, would take over this family obligation.

#### **The kurban of the village of Popovo (“the village of the caravans”), Pernik region**

The villages of Popovo<sup>5</sup> and Krapets in the Pernik region are among the villages transformed by accelerated modernisation under Bulgarian socialism into virtual toponyms of the old geographical maps. In 1953, the inhabitants of the two villages were forced to move from their native places in the foothills of Mount Vitosha, because their lands (and some of the houses in the case of Krapets) were to be flooded by the waters of the newly built Studena Dam. Forced to leave their native hearths, the people

<sup>4</sup> In 1969 the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church adopted the immovable feasts of the Gregorian calendar. Easter and the movable Christian feastdays related to it, however, continue to be celebrated officially according to the Julian calendar. It is common practice among the Eastern Orthodox population of Bulgaria to celebrate the Christian holidays both “in the new way”, as the Church requires it, and “the old way”, as tradition has it.

<sup>5</sup> As its former inhabitants recall, the village of Popovo has three times been moved within its surrounding lands and three times renamed, as local legends have it. Historical sources show that this was an old village with a Bulgarian population, engaged in farm work. During the Middle Ages (13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century) there were primitive iron ore foundries/smelteries, populated by Saxon miners (*Sassi*), “who had come from the Serbian land”. For that reason the village was named Srabski [‘Serbian’] Samokov, under which name it also features in the Turkish documents of the Ottoman Empire (15<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century). After the Liberation of Bulgaria (1878) the village was given a new name — Popovo, and after the establishment of the socialist government in 1946, it was again given a new name, viz. Vitoshko. After the restitution of land in post-socialist Bulgaria, in the early 1990s the village appears in the official documents of the Bulgarian state under its established name, Popovo.

of Popovo and Krapetz settled in the town of Pernik, in immediate proximity to the newly built V. I. Lenin Metallurgy Plant, declared to be “the offspring of Bulgarian-Soviet friendship”, today “Pernik Stomana [Steel]”. In this way, forced industrialisation in the first decade of the socialist period, combined with the mass (and sometimes forced) collectivisation of agriculture transformed this mountainous rural population into workers in the metal industry and the coal mines of Pernik.

Though remaining on the edge of the dam, the houses of Popovo were pulled down after their owners migrated in 1953 and the village cemetery was wiped out. The old village church, built in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, was also destroyed,<sup>6</sup> and later blown up and covered with earth, because built by its side was one of the residences of the ruling elite of the Bulgarian Communist Party. A forestry farm was established on the lands of the villages of Popovo and Krapets, under the administration of UBO, an organisation engaged in guarding the safety of that elite. The inhabitants were denied access to their inherited lands and to their native homes, under threat of heavy fines and reprisals. They were allotted plots in the Iztok [East] residential district of Pernik, where they could build their new homes. In the neighbourhood of their new homes, a new Eastern Orthodox church was built in 1955 for the former inhabitants of the villages of Popovo and Krapets, with their financial support. The church was dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin (the folk holiday of *Golema Bogoroditsa*), like the church in the village that had been destroyed. The local people say: “It was built for our people and by our people after the model of our old church up in the mountain”.<sup>7</sup>

After the restitution of farm land in Bulgaria<sup>8</sup> and the restoration of the status of Popovo as a municipality, the inhabitants of the village who had moved in the early 1990s, twice organised a kurban and a feast on the

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<sup>6</sup> The church was destroyed by local communist functionaries, whose names are known in the village and there are stories among the inhabitants of Popovo that “all of them had been struck by misfortune” [informant Veneta Tancheva, born 1930 in Popovo]. In the words of Krum Ignatov Hristov, born 1926 in Popovo, who now takes care of the icons of the Holy Virgin by the ruined church, “Those, too, who raised their hands against the church, they all died like beasts!” Granddad Krum is not particularly pious; he worked for 16 years in the coal mine and 16 years in the metallurgical plant in Pernik, and yet he believes that these misfortunes are a punishment, meted out for the destruction of the temple.

<sup>7</sup> Informant Krum Ignatov Hristov, born in 1926 in Popovo, now living in Pernik, and Boris Krumov Kostov, born 1934 in Popovo, the initiator of the first kurban in the deserted village, on the bank of the dam in 1993.

<sup>8</sup> A number of acts of restitution began in 1991 with the Bill on the Ownership and Usage of Farm Lands and the Bill on the Restoration of the Ownership of Expropriated Real Estate of 1992.



holiday of the Assumption (*Golema Bogoroditsa*): at the new church in Pernik on August 15 “according to the new calendar” (i.e. according to the Gregorian calendar, officially adopted by the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church), and according to tradition on August 28, “the old way”, (i.e. according to the Julian calendar) by the side of their destroyed homes and the ruins of the old church on the edge of the Studena Dam. Though having regained the ownership of their lands, the people of Popovo have no right to rebuild their homes there, because this is a region supplying drinking water. Next to the pillars of their old homes everyone has now placed a caravan, but no one can have permanent residence in the village. That is why during our visit in the spring of 2006 we called the sad sight of what Popovo used to be: “the village of caravans”. Its scattered inhabitants get together at their native hearths only for the holiday (the *sabor* gathering) and their common kurban on the feast day of *Golema Bogoroditsa*. During the rest of the time, Popovo is a deserted village.

The traditional gathering of the whole village for the Popovo kurban used to be held on the Christian holiday of the Assumption next to the church, where six hosts (“elderly people”) donated the sacrificial animals for the kurban. The kurban meal was handed out by the side of the church, but all the inhabitants of the village gathered on the *Dabo* elevation, where there was a common feast under the branches of an ancient oak tree. Every housewife prepared ritual bread (a *pogacha*, or round loaf) and cooked wheat (*chenitsa*), specially prepared for the holiday, “for well-being”;<sup>9</sup> the women handed out and exchanged these at the common feast. Besides the common kurbans, held on the feast day of *Golema Bogoroditsa* and on *Gergyovden*<sup>10</sup> (the Feast Day of St George), two other festive kurbans were held (for the feast days of the Holy Trinity and of St Pantelei), provided by individual extended families for the entire village or by individual persons who had overcome misfortune or survived a long illness. The

<sup>9</sup> According to Keranka Grigorova Rangelova, born in 1923 in Popovo, the cooked wheat (*chenitsa*) for the kurban is finely crushed in advance, sugar and candies are added, and a pastry is made “for well-being”. The cooked wheat “for the dead”, for memorial services of the deceased (*zadushnitsa* — All Souls’ Day) is not crushed and the grains are cooked whole.

<sup>10</sup> In the traditional culture of the Bulgarians, the feast day of St George is one of the most important holidays in the calendar cycle. In West Central Bulgaria, according to tradition, every host sacrifices a lamb for kurban. Unlike the other holiday kurbans, for which the meat of the sacrificial animal is cooked, for the Feast Day of St George in this region, the lamb is always roasted on a spit (*no rozhan*) and in this way it is taken to the stone cross, dedicated to St George, so that the priest may bless it. A common feast is not held; each host makes a holiday feast at home.

village holiday thus described (*sabor* gathering) was celebrated in Popovo until its inhabitants were forcibly displaced in the autumn of 1953.

The inhabitants of Popovo, forcibly resettled, carry on the traditional holiday cycle of the village and their ritual practices. The earliest attempts to organise a common kurban sacrificial offering by the inhabitants of Popovo for the traditional holiday of the village on *Golema Bogoroditsa* date back to the 1950s, immediately after their resettlement in the Iztok district of Pernik. At the newly built church, during the first two or three years a kurban was organised for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, similar to the traditional one held in the abandoned village. After a ban by the communist authorities on the holding of a kurban on a religious holiday, a group of young married women decided to organise a common kurban offering in the *Zhivkovi Livadi* [Zhivko's Meadows] locality during the first week of September, soon after the feast of *Golema Bogoroditsa*. In the early 1960s they bought meat, cooked the kurban meal in their homes and with the ritual round loaf of bread (*pogacha*) organised a common feast "for good health" for all the settlers from Popovo and Krapets close to their new houses. When even that version of the festive kurban for the inhabitants of Popovo was banned, the women made up a folklore group of their own and went on to win awards at various festivals. This was a way they could get together without provoking a negative reaction from the local communist top crust.<sup>11</sup>

There were similar examples of "domestication" and "privatisation" of religious behaviour and ritual practice as "a spontaneous strategy of adaptation to the restrictive and often repressive policy" (Benovska-Sabkova 1996: 157–164) on the part of the socialist authorities towards traditional Christian holidays. These have been observed in different forms and variants both in Bulgaria and neighbouring countries.<sup>12</sup> At the end of the 1980s an attempt was made along administrative lines to organise a festive Day of the Residential District, in the socialist way "with speeches, a variety show and actors and actresses", but it failed. The inhabitants of the Iztok residential district did not adopt this variant of enforced cultural management.

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<sup>11</sup> "At the beginning, when we settled here (in the Iztok district of Pernik, after 1959, my note P.H.) a few young brides like me got together and decided to hold a kurban on our own initiative, whenever we decided to. But always in the autumn... And it was very good and very merry, but then the authorities (the communists) began to murmur and some of the women gave it up", informant Evdokia Vladova Hristova, born in 1926 in Popovo, now living in the Iztok residential district of Pernik.

<sup>12</sup> For examples from West Bulgaria and neighbouring Serbia cf. Hristov 2002: 42.

Immediately after the democratic changes in Bulgaria in the beginning of the 1990s, an Initiative Committee (with a Managerial Council of 7 persons) was set up for the return of the lands of the inhabitants of Popovo who had been forcibly displaced, and for the restoration of the village. On their initiative, the old church on the bank of the dam was excavated and an organisation was established for the resumption of the traditional settlement holiday (*sabor* gathering) with a kurban on the day of *Golema Bogoroditsa*. Simultaneously with this initiative, in 1993, Boris Kostov<sup>13</sup> on the occasion of his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday made a kurban sacrificial offering “for good health” on the holiday of the Assumption, inviting all the men and women of his generation to the dam in the old village.

In subsequent years the kurban for the feast on the traditional village holiday for *Golema Bogoroditsa* was organised by the Initiative Committee for the restoration of Popovo, for all the displaced inhabitants of the village and their guests. Individuals from the village often joined in the collective sacrificial offering, distributing their individually assigned kurban “for good health”, becoming part of the common holiday: in 2004 a local businessman, born in Popovo, personally purchased the sacrificial animals for the common kurban offering; in 2005, four sheep were sacrificed — two of them paid for by the Managerial Council and two individually donated by separate people, but meant for all the inhabitants of Popovo and the guests at the feast; in 2003 the sacrificial animals (three ewes) were purchased out of common funds which the Managerial Council had received from the Forestry Farm in exchange for use of the restitution lands of the inhabitants of Popovo.

Over the past few years, the village holiday (the *sabor* gathering) has been held in the square in front of the building of what used to be the Popovo cooperative (the only solid building in the village preserved after 1953) on the feast of *Golema Bogoroditsa* “in the old way”, or on the Saturday preceding August 28 if it falls on a week day. The former inhabitants and their descendants, now scattered throughout Bulgaria, have been coming together for it. The kurban is prepared on the eve of the holiday; it is cooked during the night and a priest is brought in the early morning of the holiday to bless it. He does this in front of the altar amidst the ruins of

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<sup>13</sup> Boris Krumov Kostov was born in 1943 in Popovo, and is currently living in the Iztok district of Pernik. Due to the disagreement with the Managerial Council regarding the date of celebration, after 1993 Boris Krumov continues to sacrifice and hand out his personal kurban sacrificial offering, “destined for good health”, but this takes place on the church holiday on August 15, at the new church in the Iztok district. He says that he will keep up his personal kurban sacrificial offering as long as he is alive, because “Once dedicated, the kurban should not be discontinued”.

the old village church. For the holiday, the inhabitants of what used to be the village of Popovo, who have gathered here, place an icon of the Blessed Virgin — considered to be their patroness — on the iconostasis out in the open. They encircle the icon with flowers and light candles. After the blessing, the kurban is handed out to all those present, both locals and guests. Every one of the former hosts in Popovo gets some of the kurban and takes it to the pillars of his destroyed family house; there the families of those forcibly displaced make a joint feast with their descendants and their guests. According to the local people, in this way all close relatives get together and show that they have not given up their native hearths and their lands.<sup>14</sup> After the festive dinner, merry-making with music and dancing is organised in the village centre.

At night what used to be Popovo is deserted again. According to its resettled inhabitants, however, they will go on with their attempts to restore not only their property in the village, their destroyed homes and church, but also the social life the village once knew. For them the kurban by the side of the dam will continue to operate as a marker of local cultural identity in the post-socialist reality of Bulgaria. The people of Popovo commented on the wedding of the daughter of a member of the Managerial Council,<sup>15</sup> who had brought her future husband from Italy to marry him amidst the ruins of the old church in the deserted village, the birthplace of her father. “The village of the caravans” is increasingly becoming a symbolic asset, manipulated even by the descendants of its forcibly moved former inhabitants.

### **The Youth Kurban in the villages of Kralev Dol and Yardjilovtsi, Pernik region**

Unlike the revived ‘new’ kurban described earlier of the village of Popovo, now submerged under the waters of the Studena Dam, the new Youth Kurban in the villages of Kralev Dol and Yardjilovtsi, which we attended in the spring of 2006, have no original model to copy in the traditional holiday and ritual cycle of Graovo. Both villages are part of the his-

<sup>14</sup> “We began to make it here, by the side of the dam ‘in the old way’ on August 28, out of the desire to have it as it was once. We were born here, our houses and our lands are here, we feel touched here and we want to get back to our own land! We have to prove to them that this is ours, that we have to revive it here and to live on!” Informant Georgi Lazarov, born 1934 in Popovo, living in Pernik. In 2006 he was the chief organiser of the preparations for the festive kurban sacrificial offering.

<sup>15</sup> Lyubcho Stoilov, the former mayor of the town of Pernik, born in Popovo, whose daughter lives and works in Italy.

torical Graovsko Field, including villages from around the towns of Pernik and Breznik, but far apart from one another. In this sense, the new ritual practice of the Youth Kurban “for good health”, has not been borrowed from among them. Our investigation has shown both the independent emergence of the idea for such a kurban, new to local tradition, and the independent evolution of ritual practice in the two villages. For the time being the only documented parallel of such a kurban “for good health”, registered in ethnographic literature (Yordanova 2006: 301–303), initiated after the death of young people from a local community, is the one in the former village of Vlahovo, included within the town of Smolyan.<sup>16</sup> The unique character of the new Youth Kurban in the ritual process of the post-socialist Bulgarian village is beyond any doubt.

#### *Variant A. The Youth Kurban in Kralev Dol*

The village of Kralev Dol, located in close proximity to the above-described villages of Popovo and Krapets, now submerged under the waters of the Studena Dam, lays at the eastern end of the Pernik Field (*Graovo*), on the foothills of Mount Vitosha. Remains of an ancient Roman villa and ruins of a medieval fortress<sup>17</sup> testify to the continuity of an inhabited locality reaching back to ancient times. Now the village has a population of around 600, but in the words of the mayor, one of the initiators of the new Youth Kurban, “now we are about 50 or so people, who

<sup>16</sup> Living in two neighbourhoods (Gorno and Dolno Vlahovo), now a district of Smolyan, is a compact Bulgarian population of Islamic confession. In 2001, after a series of misfortunes with young men, the local people decided to resume the traditional kurban sacrificial offering for good health, abandoned during the age of socialism (specifically during the 1970s–1980s). Starting from 2001, every year on the first Saturday of June, the inhabitants of Gorno Vlahovo and Dolno Vlahovo organise a kurban sacrificial offering “for good health and good luck” for the people of this small region, inviting guests from the neighbouring villages with Bulgarian Muslim and Eastern Orthodox populations. For the inhabitants of Vlahovo, the new (the resumed “old”) “June kurban” is a time of vigorous social contacts within the community and beyond (Yordanova 2006: 305).

<sup>17</sup> Far from the historical truth, legend identifies this fortress, as well as various natural phenomena in the lands of the village (“the footprints of Krali Marko’s Sharko horse”) with Krali Marko, the best-known hero of the South Slav epic tradition; the name of the village of Kralev dol [the Valley of the King] is also associated with him. According to another local legend, originating from Kralev Dol was Paisius of Hilendar, a prominent figure of the Bulgarian National Revival Period, who wrote in 1702 the renowned “Istoria Slavyanobalgarska” [Slav-Bulgarian History], a seminal work for the emerging Bulgarian national ideology; there is a “Paisius’s neighbourhood” to this day in the village. In Bulgarian historiography, however, the thesis has become established that the birthplace of Paisius of Hilendar was the town of Bansko in Southwest Bulgaria (cf. Ivanov 1982: 209).

are the driving force of the village".<sup>18</sup> Notwithstanding the closed-down school, there is vigorous social life in the village. There is a small workshop and local building companies, a prestigious community centre organising the leisure time of the young people (a library, a folksong-and-dance group, a dance ensemble) and their own football team. The organising of the Youth Kurban is also to the credit of the active members of the population of Kralev Dol (those aged between 30 and 50) strongly backed by the mayor and the community centre activists. Mayor Plamen Georgiev says: "A kurban sacrificial offering in the village is like a world football championship in the capital. The kurban is a holiday for every inhabitant of this village! ... A kurban is important for the village, but it lasts just one day! What is important for me is the overall social life in the village. We have a singing ensemble; we would like to assign a room in the community centre for a museum; we take care of the Christmas carol singers (a folklore group for the traditional wintertime masquerade rituals in January, P.H.), of the football team, etc."

Traditionally, two all-village kurbans are held in Kralev Dol: one for the temple holiday of the village church, dedicated to SS Peter and Paul (June 29, according to the Gregorian Calendar). This kurban involves the sacrificing of a weaned lamb (i.e. 'meat'). And the other one for the feast day of the Summertime St Nicholas (May 9), for which a fasting kurban dish of beans without meat is always cooked. These two kurbans are for all the inhabitants of the village and are accompanied by a common ritual feast — for the feast day of St Peter by the side of the Church, and for the Summertime St Nicholas — by the side of a group of ancient trees in the *Trite Buki* [Three Beech Trees] locality.<sup>19</sup> The traditional practice of making kurban sacrificial offerings in Kralev Dol itas not beenhalted even during the decades of socialism in Bulgaria. Every year the elder local inhabitants, with the assistance of the church board, organise the two Christian holidays. The holiday of the village (the *sabor* gathering) is different from the village kurban. This is on *Krastovden* [The Feast of the Holy Cross], September 14. Guests are invited to the village and every host welcomes

<sup>18</sup> Plamen Georgiev, born in 1963 in Kralev Dol, elected mayor of the village in 2003. In his story he specially emphasised that they held the first Youth Kurban long before the election campaign.

<sup>19</sup> The feast day of the Summertime St Nicholas is more traditional Christian than canonic. The traditional service involving a meatless kurban is called *Svetogo* by the local people. Unlike the church holiday, it is associated with the making and distribution at the *Trite Buki* locality of bean soup without meat, also referred to as *kurban*. Besause the place is abandoned and there are no conditions, for several years now the local inhabitants of Kralev Dol cook and hand out this meatless kurban too by the side of the village church.

his relatives and friends by laying a feast table at home. No common kurban sacrificial offering is made for *Krastovden*.

Unlike these traditional kurban sacrificial offerings (“for centuries”), the newly created ritual practice of the Youth Kurban in Kralev Dol has its specific date of birth: May 1, 2003; its performers (“the young people in the village”) and its assignment — “For prosperity and good health of the young people in this village!”<sup>20</sup> The first Youth Kurban in Kralev Dol was prompted by misfortune and a few lethal accidents involving young people from the village: a young man, aged 27, died in an accident; another had a heart failure; there were misfortunes with broken limbs and the like. The series of misfortunes and accidents always took place in spring. Initially, two of those affected, the mayor and the proprietress of the village pub,<sup>21</sup> intended to organise their own individual kurban sacrificial offerings, but after discussing with the rest of “the youth” in the village (inhabitants aged between 30 and 50), it was “spontaneously” decided that a kurban be held jointly, for the good health of all young people in the village.<sup>22</sup> The first date considered was March 22, perceived to be the holiday of First Spring. But, subsequently they decided that the Youth Kurban should be organised on May 1. They settled on the first day of the month of May because the first day of spring, March 22, happened to be during the great fast, whereas May 1, International Labour Day, is an official holiday in the Republic of Bulgaria and a non-working day.

The first three years of organisation connected with the preparation of the Youth Kurban was “just bare enthusiasm, without much thinking”: each of the young people in the village left small sums of money for the kurban in the pub. The sacrificial animals (“two weaned lambs”) for the kurban were to be purchased with that money and the sacrifice was to be made in the village centre, in front of Lyubka Tosheva’s pub, “because the kurban animal is slaughtered where the offering will take place”. In her words: “The kurban is handed out by the one who has cooked the meal”.

<sup>20</sup> Plamen Georgiev, born in 1963 in Kralev Dol. Traditionally, the sacrificial animal for the kurban is slaughtered by a man. For the Youth Kurban, this is Hristo Toshev (born in 1953 in Kralev Dol), the husband of one of its initiators. In his words, every time at sunrise on the day of the holiday, before sacrificing the weaned lamb, he pronounces a blessing: “For the good health of the young; may they be hale and hearty!”

<sup>21</sup> Lyubka Tosheva, born in 1958 in Kralev Dol.

<sup>22</sup> “We thought that by making a kurban sacrificial offering, we would cut short these misfortunes, involving the young people in the village. And indeed, ever since (after the first kurban in 2003 — P.H.) we have not had any grave accidents involving young people in the village, we have not had grave disease!” Plamen Georgiev, the mayor of the village, commented.

For the first three years, she cooked the meal for the kurban in the pub and handed it out to the local people present in the square. The first kurban in 2003 was distributed to the young people who had come, each one taking home his serving of the meal, while only some of the organisers remained in the pub. There Lyubka Tosheva handed out cooked wheat and ritual bread (a round *pogacha*) for good health, as it is done at the traditional kurban on the feast day of St Peter. The following year the organisers decided, and it was announced by the mayor, that the young people would jointly eat the kurban “on site”<sup>23</sup> and tables were taken out of the pub and arranged in the village centre. Besides the common kurban, the organisers also supplied the bread and the beer for the common feast. The kurban soup was served by two young female clerks in the community centre, who were also commissioned to buy the bread using the common funds collected. In this way a joint holiday feast was organised in the village square. The rule whereby the kurban meal had to be completely distributed was observed.

After the first three years, the model of celebrating the Youth Kurban was changed in the spring of 2006. According to the beliefs of the local people, once dedicated, the kurban sacrificial offering has to be made at least three years in a row. After the third year it could be halted, but if it was held for a fourth time, it would then be kept up without any interruption every year. That is why the fourth year the organisers decided to transfer the entire holiday, the preparations for the kurban and the holiday feast by the side of the village church, to the site where the traditional kurban sacrificial offerings of the whole village are held. On May 1, 2006, the Youth Kurban we observed was also distinguished by the active participation of the elderly inhabitants of Kralev Dol in its preparation. During the initial years, the old people in the village took no part either in paying for or holding the kurban or the common feast. And although the conviction has remained that “this kurban is theirs, the young people’s”, the elderly have gradually also started to join in, contributing small sums and helping in its preparation. The women, who cooked the kurban soup in the early morning of the holiday in 2006, were quite proudly saying: “We are the support of the young! But we are just helpers. Our kurban is the one on the Feast Day of St Peter and the fasting one — on the Summertime Feast Day of St Nicholas.”<sup>24</sup> The standard answer to the question of how many kurbans are held in Kralev Dol, is three: one “fasting”, one “with meat”

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<sup>23</sup> This is also the conviction of the rest of the organisers. According to Lyubka Tosheva: “The kurban has to be eaten in common”.

<sup>24</sup> Informant Stoina Efremova Yordanova, born in 1931 in Kralev Dol.



and one “Youth”. The elderly women also showed by their behaviour that they were “guests” at the youth feast. Whereas for the traditional kurban each one makes a ritual loaf of bread (*pogacha*) and cooks wheat, for the Youth Kurban they arrived carrying just flowers, which they stuck around the icons in the church. And they brought along their grandchildren.

The festive Youth Kurban “for a good harvest and good health of the young” in Krlev Dol shows the diversity and unique combination of established traditional and newly emerged ritual practices. The presence of the Christian Church as an institution also evinces great diversity: whereas in the early years, an official representative of the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church, a priest from the neighbouring village had been invited to bless the kurban (for payment), in 2006 that blessing was entrusted to the two young priests who are *starovertsi*<sup>25</sup> [professing the old faith]. Regardless of a certain distrust of them among the elderly people in the village, they have undertaken the obligation, with the tacit agreement of most of the laity, to bless the kurban free of charge, and to hold a service in the village church in compliance with the dates of the Julian Calendar. The inhabitants of Krlev Dol approve of the services held in “the old way” by the new priests; in addition to their education and lack of mercantilism, they also point to their skills.<sup>26</sup>

According to the organisers, the entire holiday pattern of the Youth Kurban is open to negotiation among the young people of Krlev Dol taking part. “The kurban is ours, we will do whatever we want! ... We make it for the youth, that means what the young people want — a disco club with a DJ, meatballs, grilled meat, beer — that’s what it would be! And on July 12 (the traditional kurban for the feast of St Peter, according to the Julian calendar — P.H.) we make it the way the old women say; on that day they decide...”, Plamen Georgiev, the village mayor, comments.

#### *Variant B. The Youth Kurban in the village of Yardjilovtsi.*

Yardjilovtsi is a big old village in the western part of the Pernik Field (*Graovo*). It is made up of four neighbourhoods: Gorna, Krastina, Sredna and Dolna. In the village there is a building company, a pastry workshop, a functioning school and community centre, with active work

<sup>25</sup> Representatives of this trend among the clergy of the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church, whose followers do not recognise the replacement at the end of 1969 of the Julian calendar, used up to that time, by the Gregorian calendar. They observe all the Christian holidays “according to the old tradition”, i.e. according to the Julian calendar.

<sup>26</sup> “They sing very nicely, like in the Alexander Nevsky Church.” (a cathedral church of the Patriarchate of the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church).

on the organisation of the local amateur folk song-and-dance groups. The best known among them is the folklore group of the so-called *survashkari* [Christmas carol singers], traditionally consisting of young masked men, making ritual rounds of the village at night on the eve of the feast of St Basil [*Vasilovden*] (on January 14 according to the Julian calendar or “the old way”). This custom is known in local tradition as *Surva*. The group takes regular part at the International Festival of Masquerade Games, held in January in Pernik, where it has won numerous awards. In January 2006, the *survashkari* folklore group of men won an award, the money of which was donated by the village for the purchase of the sacrificial animals (two rams) for the Youth Kurban.

The motives for organising the first kurban in May 2001 were similar to those already described for the village of Kralev Dol. During the preceding year, 2000, there had been seven deaths of young men (“aged between 18 and 26”<sup>27</sup>), casualties of misfortune, disease and accidents. That stirred recollections in the collective memory about “the blackest year in the history of the village” — 1944 when, joining the local partisan detachment (part of the antifascist resistance in this region), “18 young men from the village left, of whom 11 never came back”, as they were killed. Among some of the people in Yardjilovtsi, representatives of the young and middle-aged generations, the parallel between the two “black” years for the village gave birth to the idea of making a kurban for the good health of the young, as well as of all inhabitants of the village. What proved to be an issue was the lost connection with the old tradition of organizing *kurbans* in the village: throughout the entire age of socialism (i.e. from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), no sacrificial kurban offerings had been made in Yardjilovtsi, while the village church, dedicated to St Nicholas the Miracle Worker, had only functioned as a cemetery church.<sup>28</sup>

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a kurban sacrificial offering used to be traditionally organised in the village of Yardjilovtsi on the feast day of St Nicholas of Summertime (May 9 according to the currently used Gregorian calendar). On that day the procession of the young people from the village, carrying church gonfalons and headed by the priest, made a round of the village lands, forming the traditional religious procession (*po*

<sup>27</sup> Informant Grigor Hristov, local mayor of the village of Yardjilovtsi, born in 1953. He is one of the key organisers of the ‘new’ old kurban on the feast day of St Nicholas of Summertime in Yardjilovtsi.

<sup>28</sup> According to the sexton, the local people had to ask and again to learn, in connection with the Youth Kurban, how the church bell rings “for a holiday”. In the course of decades the bell of the local church, located at the cemetery, had only rung “for death”.

*krasti*), and winding up with a litany for rain. A festive kurban used to be organised for the whole village, for which every neighbourhood sacrificed a weaned lamb or a ram and in this way up to 4 cauldrons were collected for the kurban.<sup>29</sup> Most of the inhabitants of Yardjilovtsi got together for a common feast by the side of the church, where each one of the housewives brought a ritual loaf of bread (*kolach*) with a cross fashioned on top and a hole in the middle for a candle, as well as flowers to decorate the icons of St Nicholas and the Holy Virgin. Each housewife put the ritual loaf of bread (*kolach*) into a baking dish on top of the cooked wheat and then placed it in line to be blessed by the priest. It was the men's obligation to prepare the kurban and to ensure the drinks — brandy and wine — for the common feast. After the priest had blessed the kurban dishes and the ritual loaves of bread, a festive common feast was held, at which each family sat in the places traditionally assigned for each neighbourhood. The holiday ended in merry-making for the people — *horo* round dances and songs. That kurban for the whole village differed from the village holiday (the *sabor* gathering), celebrated on the feast day of *Golema Bogoroditsa* (the Christian feast of the Assumption on August 15 according to the Gregorian calendar), or on August 28 'the old way'. "The whole village comes to the kurban sacrificial offering — men, women, children, old and young — everybody living comes to the kurban. Only those who cannot walk do not come to the kurban... Here (where the kurban is cooked and handed out — Ts.M.), people eat for good health! You have to bring a bowl with you and eat here. Here it is for good health!"<sup>30</sup> After the change of political power on September 9, 1944, however, the traditional all-village kurban in the village of Yardjilovtsi, was gradually abandoned. The first decade after the imposition of the socialist ideology the elderly people still organised and handed out "personal" kurban sacrificial offerings at the side of the church: for a newborn child, for seeing a young man off to the army and so on, but in the early 1950s that practice of kurban sacrificial offerings also died out.

The decision to hold a Youth Kurban for the good health of the young in Yardjilovtsi, posed a dilemma for the mayor of the village and the other initiators in 2001 as to when and how to make the kurban sacrificial offering. It was decided that an Eastern Orthodox chapel should be

<sup>29</sup> In case the feast day of St Nicholas of Summertime fell on a fasting Friday, a vegetarian meal was cooked — a dish of beans. Informant Ginka Spasova, born in 1923 in Yardjilovtsi.

<sup>30</sup> Informant Grigor Hristov, Mayor of the village of Yardjilovtsi, born in 1953. Regarding the opposite conception and the new ritual practice in our times, cf. Margarita Karamihova's paper in this collection.

built on the site, because “a kurban sacrificial offering is held by the side of a chapel”. The traditional site of the kurban by the side of the old church was abandoned, because in the conception of the local people it functioned as a cemetery church and “no kurban sacrificial offering for good health can be held next to the cemetery”.<sup>31</sup> Due to the risk of political division, the idea that the kurban be held in the Martvak locality, where the young men joining the Partisans came out and were killed in 1944,<sup>32</sup> was rejected and the Oslome locality was chosen, which had once been part of the old village of Yardjilovtsi. The decision was that simultaneously with the kurban, the building of a chapel should also be started, which was to be dedicated to the feast day of St Nicholas of Summertime, because he was considered to be the patron saint and guardian of the village. In this way the restored traditional kurban sacrificial offering on May 9 has been lent a new content; the significance of the ritual practice has been specially emphasised “for the good health of the young”.

The newly selected site in the Oslome locality for the restored ‘new’ kurban sacrificial offering and the chapel assigned to it have been consistently and purposefully made a sacred site. In the spring of 2001, a few days prior to the first kurban, a special person from among the organisers went to the site very early before sunrise, to see precisely where the sun rose, so as to specify the orientation of the building of the new chapel. The first kurban sacrificial offering, for which about 400 inhabitants of Yardjilovtsi gathered on May 9, 2001, was accompanied by breaking the ground (by the mayor and the rest of the organisers) for the building of the new chapel and consecration (by a priest) of the stone altar. In subsequent years, people gathering for the kurban sacrificial offering lit their candles on that altar. Voluntary donations were made during each kurban sacrificial offering for the completion of the new chapel, whose construction was exclusively carried out by the labour and donations of the local people and businessmen. In the words of the mayor, neither the administrative authorities in the town nor the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church have helped in the construction.

But for that matter, the enthusiasm of the local people has been great — both in the construction of the chapel and in the ritual practice of the kurban sacrificial offering. With every passing year the number of inhabit-

<sup>31</sup> “The site for holding a kurban and the chapel must not divide the village, but unite it!”, Grigor Hristov, mayor of Yardjilovtsi, born in 1953.

<sup>32</sup> In direct proximity to that old settlement, a Thracian mound has also been unearthed dating back to antiquity and providing evidence of the long history of the present-day village of Yardjilovtsi as a settlement.

ants of Yardjilovtsi coming for the village kurban offering has been growing. In the wake of 2002, more than 600 have been coming together. Forewarned by the old people that once started, the kurban sacrificial offering should not be discontinued, the organisers prepare the common kurban sacrificial offering and the feast every year, both by personal donation and using collective funds (for instance, using the money collected by the *survashkari* (Christmas carol singers) during their ritual masquerade rounds of the village). The kurban is made and handed out in “the traditional way”, while to this day every one of the elderly women makes and brings to the common feast a *kolach* ritual loaf of bread, in a baking dish on top of the cooked wheat. They bring, to this day, flowers to arrange around the icons, donated for the new chapel, and light their candles on the uncompleted new iconostasis.

“The year of trial” for the new practice of the kurban sacrificial offering was the third one (2003) after its resumption, when on May 9 it rained cats and dogs for a long time over the village. The local people proudly said how “no one budged” from the meadow, where the kurban sacrificial offering had been prepared; though drenched to the bone, all remained to eat the kurban meal there, on the site. In this way the common ritual feast was salvaged and the kurban practice — reaffirmed.<sup>33</sup> In May 2006 we observed a similar “trial”: there was heavy rainfall on the festive day of the kurban sacrificial offering. The explanation of the locals was that it was raining because in the past they had held a litany and prayers for rain. Few were those who preferred to be given a serving of the kurban to take home; the majority waited for the sun to dry the meadow out and spread a common feast table in the early afternoon of May 9, greeting each other with: “Best wishes for the kurban sacrificial offering and this feast of ours! He who drinks, may he drink again; he who donates, may he donate again!” According to the practice, established with the very first kurban offering in 2001, what remains of the meal not eaten on May 9 in the Oslome locality is taken to the canteen of the village school and handed out to the schoolchildren and the children in the kindergarten on the following day.

### **The ‘new’ and ‘traditional’ kurban sacrificial offerings in West Central Bulgaria**

The new ‘old’ kurban sacrificial offering we have observed in the region of Pernik hardly fits the classic ethnographical model of reconstruc-

<sup>33</sup> “This was a test for us, whether the kurban sacrificial offering would take place or not. This was the day of trial — the third time!” Grigor Hristov, mayor of the village of Yardjilovtsi, born in 1953, commented.

tion of tradition. We agree with the finding of Margarita Karamihova, based on observation of the present-day practice of kurban sacrificial offerings by Christian and Muslims in Thrace, that “(the kurban sacrificial offerings) are a specific living and vital social norm, which does not ask questions, but rather provides specific answers to specific needs” (Karamihova 2006: 325). Our purpose in this paper has been to discover, by way of an age-old traditional cultural matrix characteristic of the Balkans, as a ritual of blood sacrifice (kurban sacrificial offering), how different local communities in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century are building and/or reconstructing their socio-cultural identity. Our observations have shown that the common kurban sacrificial offering and feast have become both an inseparable part of everyday local religion<sup>34</sup> at the start of the new millennium and an essential element of the rituals defined as ‘marking the boundaries’ (in the social and cultural aspect) (cf. Cohen 1985: 53) of the various local and social communities in the post-socialist Bulgarian village.

In line with E. Durkheim, we could state that it is precisely by way of common ritual action that society gains self-awareness and “there is no society which has not felt the need of the periodical upkeep and strengthening of the collective feelings and ideas which make up its unity and originality” (Durkheim 1998: 495, 504). Within the context of the Bulgarian (and, more extensively, Balkan) social, cultural and political realities of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, new (reconstructed or ‘invented’, in the spirit of E. Hobsbawm) community rituals such as the kurban sacrificial offerings described, acquire an unexpected meaning for the ethnologist observing them. The kurban by the waters of the dam becomes an essential symbolic marker of a virtual social community such as that of the displaced inhabitants of the submerged village of Popovo; by making the kurban sacrificial offering and handing it out every year on the feast day of *Golyama Bogoroditsa*, the local people demonstrate (and confirm again) their ideology of local origin. The Youth Kurban makes use of an old-time cultural matrix for producing a new (separate) social identity of a whole generation in the post-socialist village. If we paraphrase Maurice Godelier, it is precisely by way of ritual practice that ideas are elevated to the level of their social existence, insofar as man makes society in order to live (Godelier 1993: 1200). It is our view that this is a guarantee of the continuing vitality in the new millennium of the Balkan ritual of blood sacrifice — the kurban sacrificial offering.

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<sup>34</sup> The conception of the local religion, based on Bulgarian materials from West Central Bulgaria, has been developed by Galya Valchinova (Valchinova 1999: 15–16).

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*Margarita Karamihova, Sofia*

## KURBAN SACRIFICIAL OFFERING FOR GOOD HEALTH AT A 'STRANGE' PLACE

In 1994 I attended and recorded two kurban sacrificial offerings at two sacred sites in the Rhodopes — one Muslim and one Christian. These kurban sacrificial offerings strongly impressed me, to an extent close to cultural shock. The confidence with which they were held and the tranquility with which they were received by observers are the cause, prompting me to present these cultural products, constructed as “diverging from the norm/wrong”. These family kurban sacrificial offerings — pledges (*adak*)<sup>1</sup>, then, seemed like exceptions from the point of view of the classical Balkan traditional kurbans (Popova 1995). The working hypothesis with which I approach the presentation of the two cases, is that notwithstanding that both ritual sacrificial offerings were made at regulated sites for religious ritual activity — an important cultural specific for Bulgaria, and with some provisions for the Balkans — the actors in the ritual enjoy a high degree of freedom. Their ritual freedom seems to be part of an unsigned agreement to keep the delicate balance of good neighbourly relations between those belonging to different religious, ethnic and social groups, particularly important in the critical time of the transition. I have referred to this ritual freedom as ‘active’ tolerance, setting it apart from the idea of the competitive nature, by all means, of the joint worship of the holy places, commented by M. Hayden as ‘passive’ tolerance (Hayden 2002).

The testing of this hypothesis calls for the placing of the two kurbans within a broader context.

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<sup>1</sup> *Adak* — kurban sacrificial offering, promised on a specific occasion — for the granting of a great wish or for the curing of a disease.



### Ideological framework

During the past 16 years, ethnologists and historians have been repeatedly raising questions related to the culture and historical fate of the different ethno-cultural groups in Bulgaria. Particular interest has been shown in the study of the processes taking place in the groups of Gypsies and Bulgarian Muslims, kept in anonymity by the totalitarian authorities (Todorova, Marushiakova/Popov, Konstantinov, Karagianis, etc.). The two kurban sacrificial offerings which I intend to present were made by a family of Gypsies and a family of Bulgarian Muslims.

By the exonym *Gypsies*, I denote here a specific ethnic community, consisting of a number of sub-ethnic subdivisions, with the common endonym *Roma* (Marushiakova/ Popov 2001). The different groups fit differently into the macro environment surrounding them (cf. Marushiakova/Popov and the quoted references). For the needs of this text it should be pointed out that as everywhere on the planet, in Bulgaria, too, the Gypsies possess a high degree of specific selective adaptation of the main ideas or individual elements of the religions of the surrounding population (Marushiakova/Popov 1993: 160). Their religious flexibility, comparative isolation and in some cases nomadic life, presuppose distance from the official religious institutions and authorities.

The general group of the *Bulgarian Muslims*, who also make up small subgroups, speak the Bulgarian language and profess Islam. Most of the Bulgarian Muslims inhabit the frontier parts of the Rhodope Mountains, living in small isolated local communities. Until the end of the Second World War, their settlements were far from the impact and control of the big city centers. There are fading traces, evincing a strong influence of Heterodox Islam in the Central Rhodope Mountains (Gruev 2000; Clayer/Popovic 1995) at least up to the end of the First World War. These specifications are important so that the impressive diversity of local beliefs and practices can be understood, which are often contradictory to Sunni Islam, perceived by their bearers as “most purely Muslim”.

The formation of the Bulgarian nation and the national liberation struggle have, as an essential characteristic, the opposition of the Eastern Orthodox Christianity to Islam. The Third Bulgarian Kingdom (1878–1944) definitively included the country in the family of the Christian European Nations. As far back as at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the course of the ultimate formation of a Bulgarian national ideology, the Bulgarian Muslims were condemned as “Bulgarians who had given up their [Christian] faith”. This stand determined the conducting of a long-term policy of assimilation. The administrative and police measures were often spear-

headed simultaneously at them and at those groups of Gypsies in Bulgaria, which professed Islam.

The assimilatory policy of the Third Bulgarian Kingdom and of the totalitarian regime (1944–1989), stood out in its purest form during several campaigns to brutally carry out the ‘conversion’ (meaning “turning into Bulgarian”) of the Bulgarian Muslims: 1912–1913, end of the 1930s – early 1940s; the Bulgarian Muslims and the Muslim Gypsies in the early 1960s and the 1970s (Gruev, Karamihova, Marushiakova/Popov). The assimilatory policy included the whole range of known possibilities, clearly formulated by O’Leary (O’Leary 1993: 1–40): hegemony and total control on the part of the majority, displacement/settlement (within the confines of the country) and forced emigration, an attempt at integration on a supra-ethnic basis (“fraternity of the socialist working class”), enforced assimilation. During all the campaigns the Muslim names were substituted by ‘Bulgarian’ ones. By the last campaign, which wound up around 1974, the totalitarian authorities considered that they had ultimately assimilated the Bulgarian Muslims (Marushiakova/Popov); they nevertheless rigidly controlled their public and private life up to 1989, not allowing any practices which could be construed as specifically ‘Muslim’. The two holy places where I registered the kurban sacrificial offerings had been placed in a prohibitory or at least restricted regime for visitors during the 1980s. Both groups of pilgrims, as I shall show, had been the target of a long-term assimilatory policy on the part of the central and local authorities (Karamihova 2000). It has turned out quite accidentally that both the observed groups have been living in the city of Plovdiv, in radically different environments and without any points of contact whatever between them.

In the early 1990s, sociologists found out that no more than 5 percent of each religious group in Bulgaria believe themselves to be and describe themselves as religious and strictly practicing their faith. Actually, the idea had been inculcated in the mass consciousness that in our rational modern time religion as “an opium for the masses” can be inherent and left to exist until it disappears naturally only among the poorest, uneducated (presumably old, rural Muslim) strata.<sup>2</sup> With the liberalization of religious life, living and active beliefs and practices explosively “came up to the surface” in the public space among all religious groups. It has turned out that the umbilical cord of tradition had never been broken,<sup>3</sup> and wher-

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<sup>2</sup> An increasing number of scholars are abandoning the obsolete conception that modernity is presumably connected with complete secularization. In my view, a more detailed commentary on this topic would only add to the length of the article.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. P. Hristov’s paper in this collection.

ever there is shortage of tradition, it's being invented (Hobsbaum 1983:1). The processes of the new religiosity are neither specific to the countries of the former Eastern Block, nor characteristic of the people, belonging to some of the world religions. Suffice it to note for this article that both the Eastern Orthodox Christianity (Valtchinova 2006: 230), and traditional Islam in Bulgaria tolerate a wide range of non-canonic beliefs and practices, labeled by those who practice them as 'truthful' and 'right'.

#### **Kurban sacrificial offering in the tekke of Osman Boba<sup>4</sup>**

The *tekke* (heterodox monastery) of Osman Boba is located at the entrance to the Teketo neighbourhood of the village of Trakiets, 15 km away from the town of Haskovo (for more details about the tekke of Osman Boba, cf. Karahimova 2002; Mikov 2005). This holy shrine of the Bektashi heterodox order has been in existence from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to date. The regime of visits and the performance of rituals in it were greatly restricted during what has been referred to as "the rebirth process" (1984–1989).

The place has experienced a boom in pilgrimages since 1991, when the celebration of the *maeh* (celebration fest) was restored. Every Saturday and Sunday, throughout the whole year, Muslims from near and far come to sacrifice a kurban animal, to pray to Osman Boba, and to meet close relatives and friends.

At the time of our study the local population amounted to 460 people, predominating among whom were the Alevi, as the followers of heterodox Islam have in recent years preferred to be called in Bulgaria. As part of their policy of purification of Islam, during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Ottoman authorities settled Sunni Turks in the Teketo neighbourhood (Karamihova 2002). Their successors (four households) invited Alevi from the Eastern Rhodopes at the end of the 1950s so that the settlement and the holy shrine might be preserved, as they were threatened by administrative closedown. The newly arrived Alevis restored the traditions of worship of Osman Boba in a regime of active tolerance to the local Sunni. A mosque was functioning for the Sunni, too, in the neighbourhood.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, a religious entrepreneur, a Gypsy woman from the Izgrev residential district ('Stolipinovo'<sup>5</sup>) of the city of

<sup>4</sup> In an effort to ensure correctness and respect for the local culture, I have adopted the Rhodope pronunciation of the term *boba* (father, religious leader).

<sup>5</sup> This region has all the features of a modern urban ghetto, established in totalitarian times. According to respondents, more than 40,000 people live in it. These data are exaggerated. According to official statistics, the entire Izok region has a population of about 25,000. Parts of it, apart from Stolipinovo, are in fact other residential districts. Roma ac-

Plovdiv, began to organize one-day pilgrimage trips to the Teketo every week. The residents of Stolipinovo were peacefully, or with some tension, visiting the strange sacred site. They prayed in a way they know, gave generous gifts, and donated their work for repairs and cleaning of the shrine. The local Muslims received “the Gypsy invasion”, with mixed feelings which opened up a new direction of contact at the holy site.

On September 1, 1994, a white Volkswagen van stopped in the courtyard of the tekke. Three young families climbed out of it, an elderly woman and a dozen or so small children. One of the women was carrying a baby in her arms. They told us that they were Turks from Stolipinovo. The ladies were adorned with impressive gold jewellery. The leader of the group, a young man, was also wearing a solid gold chain. Two extremely big rams were lying on the floor of the van. The man looked for the *bekchiya* (guardian) of the tekke, so that they could agree as to how the kurban sacrificial offering was to proceed. He insisted that the prepared sacrificial animals be ‘preached to’ by a hodja. The guardian of the tekke actually occupies an important position in the religious hierarchy of the local Alevis. The insistence that someone else perform the sacrificial prayer obviously displeased him, but loyal to the principle of *takija* (concealment of the faith in front of strangers) he sent for the hodja.

I got permission to attend the kurban sacrificial offering and started a conversation with the women. While waiting for the hodja to come, the hostess of the kurban — Mineshe, mixed up natural henna in a small bowl of German silver. She used it to mark the rams, taken to the sacrificial site on their heads, backs and tails. The *bekchiya*, with whom I had already established a relationship of trust, and who felt he was helping me to learn ‘the truth’ about the tekke, murmured that it was sinful for the animals to be sacrificed while “still wet with henna”. He was also displeased by the fact that the rams were shorn. It is a categorical rule for the tekke that the skins of the kurban animals be left as a gift and after their sale, the money be used to cover the costs of electricity or water. The shorn and smeared skins obviously lose some of their market value. Probably because of that precedent, weeks later I saw an announcement from the Mayor of the village at the kurban site: “All visitors to the Osman Boba *tyurbe* who believe in its power are requested, having sacrificed their kurban animals, to leave the skins or hides for the *tyurbe*”.

The hodja came and asked the names of the members of the family giving the kurban. The hostess tied two banknotes of 100 leva each in two

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tivists and the NGO-s working with the Roma always greatly exaggerate the figures, but this phenomenon is common not only to Bulgaria.

new men's handkerchiefs (their approximate value now is about 5 euros), and placed them on the necks of the rams. The residents of Stolipinovo took up their prayer stations and the hodja started the prayer. The *bekchiya* was calmly sharpening the knives to one side.

After the prayer, the men began to tie the legs of the rams. At first they made a mistake as to which of the back legs had to be left untied, but the hodja quietly corrected them. The *bekchiya* sacrificed the rams one after the other over the *yasak* (the place for the drainage of the blood). One of the men placed underneath a small bowl to collect the blood from the two animals. Before the start of the skinning, a banknote of 50 leva was cast in front of the hodja with the words "Bizden hair olsun!" and he answered them "Sen de hair olsun, çocum!"<sup>6</sup> Then the hodja and the *bekchiya* collected the handkerchiefs with the money.

The husband of the hostess, Orhan, with the bowl of blood in his hands took the hodja to the van. He requested him again to read a *duva* (prayer). During the prayer he seemed deeply concentrated and serious. On completion of that Orhan asked the hodja to smear the van with blood. The hodja began to smear the fenders from left to right. Orhan curtly made him smear the front bonnet and the doors. The hodja obliged. The bus acquired a shocking appearance with the traces of blood...

During that time the *bekchiya* and the other two men found it hard to hang the very large animals on the hooks. Groaning and cursing they managed eventually and the skinning began. The women smoked and watched, commenting on the good and bad sides of making a kurban sacrificial offering in the tekke. They had visited it before "for good health". "They, the Turks, they sleep here," Mineshe commented with disapproval. I reacted: "Why 'they'? Aren't you Turks?" Later on, in the course of the conversation, they specified that they were "Turkish Gypsies". Mineshe imparted that they had dreamt of buying a van so that it could be of service to their business (she did not specify what their business was). They had prayed and promised a kurban to the Boba. He heard their prayers and here they were now, with their new van, fulfilling what they had promised. While we were chattering, the old woman fried doughnuts and served them to us still hot, on a toothpick. In line with the provincial etiquette, familiar to me, at first I was confused and refused (it is right for the guest to show that he "is humble" and to refuse at least once, while the hosts are insistently offering to him). Orhan snapped at me that if I was refusing, this meant that I was not a person of faith. While the carving of the rams

<sup>6</sup> "From us, to be counted, for good", "To you too, children" (approximate translation M.K.).

was going on, the old woman fried the innards. She offered us a dish of liver pieces, a soft drink and some bread. Then she went to collect the carved meat in plastic bags. They said that according to them, the meat was to be handed out raw to close friends from the neighbourhood. The *bekchiya* and the hodja each received a piece, the *bekchiya* murmuring that such a “raw kurban” would not *belli* (be counted). Mineshe entered the *türbe* (shrine), she prayed for some time and hung up a large cloth as a present over one of the framed pictures on the wall (it is local practice to place the gift on the tomb). Everything done, the women cleared up and the group piled into the van.

This pilgrimage of the Gypsy Muslims (rather Sunni Muslims) is not isolated; neither is it unique. Lilyana Marsol, for example, comments on the growing number of Roma pilgrims also in the monasteries (*tekke*) of Macedonia (Masulovic-Marsol, 1996: 126). A more detailed investigation shows that in Macedonia, as in Kosovo and Bosnia, there are Gypsy subdivisions of Dervish orders (Petrovski 2003). For the time being no group of Gypsies belonging to any of Dervish orders has been registered in Bulgaria.

The gates of the *tekke* are open equally to Sunni Muslims and Christians. The imposition of ones own rule of behavior at the sacred shrine, strange to them, is not unique either. The emphasis of their message can be presented in this way: “We are people of the faith, we do what is necessary, because our prayers have been granted.”

### **Kurban at Krastova Gora**

During that same year I attended a double kurban sacrificial offering at the Krastova Gora site. That place, widely popular in Bulgaria during the last few years, is a fairly low peak (1413 m above sea level) in the Central Rhodope Mountains, not far from the town of Laki. The villages around the peak are Borovo (Eastern Orthodox Bulgarians), Belitsa (Bulgarian Muslims) and Mostovo (Bulgarian Muslims).<sup>7</sup> As part of the establishment of the national idea and a discrete attempt at assimilation in the period between the two world wars, this new site of pilgrimage, ‘discovered’ and reaffirmed in Bulgaria, was dedicated to an Eastern Orthodox symbol of the highest order — The Holy Cross of Christ. The glory of Krastova Gora was rapidly overgrown with legitimizing legends and became a famous pilgrimage center. Under totalitarianism, the access to it was greatly restricted. At the very beginning of the 1990s, under the skilful management of Priest Vasilii Arininski, a religious entrepreneur, the Krastova Gora was experiencing a

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<sup>7</sup> Krastova Gora and the region around has been a constant object of study for Bulgarian ethnologists. Cf. the references.

veritable boom of pilgrimages, promoting the sacred site in the national and international network of pilgrimages.<sup>8</sup>

To go back to the topic of the kurban, I shall only note two more important factors: 1. A pilgrimage of Muslims to a newly elevated Eastern Orthodox site is not an exception. On the contrary, as pilgrims they are particularly openhearted and assist those arriving from all over the country (the pilgrimage has rapidly developed local business). The land on which the Cross has been erected was donated by a Muslim from the village of Mostovo; 2. The Eastern Orthodox cult of the Holy Cross of Christ requires stringent fasting and by definition renounces the blood sacrifice but a double standard clearly began to take shape in the pilgrimage to Krastova Gora as far back as the early 1990s. Priest Vasilii's behaviour demonstrates a flexible model of active tolerance to the different practices of the worshippers.

Former inhabitants of the village of Mostovo, Bulgarian Muslims now living in Plovdiv, arrived by two cars at Krastova Gora in the late afternoon of the feast of the Transfiguration (August 6). They carried with them two weaned lambs. They made their camp in a small sheltered meadow above the church, at a place from where no buildings, the cross or the pilgrims could be seen. The women started collecting wood, while the men unloaded what they had brought and set up a bivouac. When everything was ready, the oldest woman bound the eyes of the weaned lambs with white linen clothes. She mentioned that a prayer (*duvichka*) had to be said, but the men, frustrated by the late hour, scolded her that there was no time and took the knives. The kurbans were dedicated to a woman, aged about 40, and a man in his fifties. They placed little bowls under for collecting the blood. The man said that he did not feel like going to the cross and requested the sick woman to do whatever was needed instead of him. So that they would not mix up the blood from the respective kurbans, a green twig was dropped in one of the little bowls. The women, headed by the sick woman, set out for the church with the two bowls. They bought candles and gave money to the priest to hold a service 'for health' on the order of close friends and relatives of theirs (probably Muslims, too).

They reached the cross. Each of the women smeared blood on the four corners of the cement pedestal. The candles were lit. The sick woman was helped to climb up the stairs. In front of the cross she prayed for a

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<sup>8</sup> As I write, the media has announced that the Krastova Gora locality has been listed among the 40 most representative places for Bulgarian history in the European advertising strategy of the tourist entrepreneurs. Why this invention of the 20<sup>th</sup> century should rank side by side with the real medieval Bulgarian capitals is the object of another investigation.

while and smeared it with blood from her bowl. The women showed her how to make the sign of the cross. The sick woman made a clumsy but correct sign of the cross. Not one of the dozen or so Eastern Orthodox Christians present paid any attention to the strange procession, neither on the way to the cross, nor during the ritual. This done, the women silently made their way back to the men. The latter had already lit the fire and prepared the two *cheverme* (spitted lambs) for roasting. Bottles of beer were opened. They explained to me merrily that they would drink alcohol at this kurban despite the Muslim rule — never drink alcohol especially with sacred food: “Well, who would mind, anyway...” They warmly invited us to join them, but unfortunately our time was running out. We took our leave, wishing them help from the kurban.

### Checking of the working hypothesis

Both places — the tekke of Osman Boba and Krastova Gora — are symbols of local religious identity with a clear-cut trend of extension, spatially, as well as ideologically, of their model influence since 1990. This might suggest that they offer their own set of practices, which are to reaffirm the respective local and general (religious) model. But the religious entrepreneurs of the two sites stimulate eclectic beliefs and practices in a situation of a pilgrimage boom.

In both cases, the pilgrims are strangers to the sacred site. They are present there for a short time and are not of any essential importance for the local community. Therefore they are perceived neither as a threat nor as a potential object of training. The pilgrims, or rather those offering the kurban, have their distinct tasks and reassurance in the right ritual model they perform. In neither case did they seek new knowledge, nor did they object to being subjected to minor correction. It turns out that this kind of journey on pilgrimage goes beyond the pattern of the pilgrimage per se. The sacrificial offering is the central act, the dominant ritual. The blood sacrifice, deeply embedded in our Abrahamic religions eliminates the contradictions. The emphases of the particular cult site are removed from the parentheses of religious specificity and assumed closeness, and placed instead on faith in healing and prosperity. In this way, Morinis’s idea is once more borne out, namely that the instrumental function of religion is the most viable (Morinis, 1992: 1). Some of the causes, underlying the digressions of the two kurbans from the ‘right’ matrix may possibly be contained in the time rupture, in the control of the process of ‘forgetting’ the tradition (official and everyday), in the absence of knowledge of abstruse local rules. As a result of continuous secularization, assisted by the aggressively atheistic policies of totalitarianism, the frontiers of ‘true’ official religious



practice eroded, which in the pre-totalitarian period in Bulgaria, usually gave rise to variants among all the religious groups (cf. the Eastern Orthodox Bulgarians, cf. Valtchinova 2006). The two kurbans point out that religious mentality and attitudes in Bulgaria continue the tradition of being free to recombine knowledge as is seen to be fit and necessary at this respective point.

Besides the fact that for a long time among all the religious groups in Bulgaria there has been no rigid trend of disciplining religious life, as is known to exist in the Western world and in the world of Islam, the acting religious leaders are representatives of the old generation, sensitive to diversity, keeping up the spiritual tradition in the world they know. Practically, the noisily proclaimed dissent, both in The Synod and in the office of the muftis (I have informal data of such a trend also among the very few Jews remaining in Bulgaria) since the early 1990s has been extending the frameworks of freedom. No need for the believers to package their behaviour in a form that will be externally acceptable or to be discreet in their behaviour either at home or during a pilgrimage to any holy place. The local shepherds understand and accept the sacrifice of Abraham/Ibrahim.

The quiet confidence in the preparation and the attendance of the two groups at the pilgrimage centres, new to them, testifies to the fact that there is a steady network of information when searching for and finding a place which will answer a specific need. This network is the classic type of an oral culture: "a close friend of mine told me". However, the fact should not be omitted that the liberalization of the media and enhanced interest by way of compensation in the new attractive sites for practising the faith in the wake of 1989, have made an unprecedented advertisement both for Krastova Gora and the tekke of Osman Boba.<sup>9</sup> During the recording of the two kurbans, small popular booklets were already available on the two sites. In this way new information channels opened up, developing the traditional network of exchange of needed and useful knowledge. Along these channels, knowledge is spread about alternative practices, which seem to be perceived as the 'most correct' (in the sense of the most useful). The two kurbans show cultural structures of the new and powerfully expressed religiosity which is being sought. This religiosity finds expression by way of inter-group reconstruction and practice of the blood sacrifice (kurban), characteristic of the Balkans. What is observed in the be-

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<sup>9</sup> My own statements to the media also contributed to popularising the two sites, but the question of the impact of the researcher on the processes s/he is observing is not among the problems I shall comment on here.

havior of the two groups is the short-term symbolic control and marking of the acquisition of the pilgrimage centre. It is possible not only because of the openness of the holy places to ‘strangers’ and the faith in the many times greater power of ‘the strange’ in a moment of crisis. It is not a matter only of the expansion of one’s own spiritual map, either (Cooney 1994: 33), as a mechanism of expansion of the knowledge and space of the personality and the group. I shall point out yet another layer, which could be deciphered in the two kurban sacrificial offerings: those participating in them become included, through them, in wider supra-regional and supra-religious networks of *believers and guardians of tradition*. The new useful identity of inclusion in a nationally advertised religiosity lends a new value to the small group as a part of the ‘modern traditional’. We are observing a process of updating of tradition, which each one of the two groups invents (to some extent, by mutually borrowing) and acknowledges as sufficiently old, to be of crucial importance for the specific ritual. If we had any detailed recordings of the older practices in the two groups in their own cultural space we could set apart, or at least speculate for some time about what elements had been selectively borrowed from the others; how they had been adapted, transformed and assimilated to ensure the survival of the basic values or *paideum* of their own cultural system (Huntington 2005: 103). What is possible is registering, to some extent, the process, whereby through dialogue and a combination of elements, a new religious product is obtained. It is experienced in both cases simultaneously as “pure Orthodox faith” and as “our old tradition”. What has been seen has to be situated neither in the field of ‘superstitions’, nor of ‘folk religion’. It is as much part of the everyday religiosity — as it is understood, made and proceeds in the specific time at the specific place, as is the regular visit to a temple (for details cf. Valtchinova 2006). Concealed in this play of symbols is the sign of vitality of society (Peatfield 1996: 20).

In my view, the high degree of active tolerance, particularly at Krastova Gora, had one more reason at that time. For the generation born after 1944, the war was an abstract concept, taking place “somewhere out there”, far away in Indochina. The beginning of the 1990s proved to be cruelly marked by the war ‘here’, right by our side, in the land of our neighbours — Yugoslavia. Moreover this country, which seemed to the ordinary Bulgarian citizens to be a more developed, more motley type of socialism and opposed to theirs, flared up in a bonfire of interethnic and religious conflict. To is dangerous precedent one should also add the of nascent Bulgarian nationalism; it mobilized the cultural mechanisms for preservation of inter-group security (Karamihova & Valchinova 2006). The active tolerance among the different ethnic and religious groups in the

regulated religious centers acquired new, even more valuable dimensions. Being an ethnologist, I would say that within the pattern of the cultural model, the sacrifice of the lamb saved man again and again. As a representative of Balkan culture, I would say that the kurban of Mineshe and Orhan brought them success in business. I hope it has also brought healing to the nameless sick people who come to Krastova Gora.

P.S. On the day I was completing this short article, for the umpteenth time I found this advertising leaflet in my mailbox:

“Don’t miss this opportunity!

Krastova Gora

Your programme:

- Departure from Sofia
- ENTERTAINING ADVERTISING SHOW
- Delicious lunch in a cosy atmosphere
- Possibility to visit historical sights
- Free time to walk about in the fresh air
- Return to Sofia at night

For the incredible price of 10.99 leva + free lunch and gifts. For ladies — free soap dish. For gentlemen — free thermometer.

THESE GIFTS TO YOU ARE FREE OF CHARGE”

The organizing company, which had chosen this form of advertising campaign, markets German magnetic bed covers and blankets. Its employees contribute to the new mythology of the centre for pilgrimages.

P.P.S. †Father Vasilii Arininski passed away in the autumn of 2004. Nothing is the same at Krastova Gora anymore.

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*Petko Hristov, Sofia*

## CELEBRATING THE ABANDONED VILLAGE: THE RITUAL PROCESS IN THE POST-SOCIALIST BALKANS

In recent years the ethnology of southeast Europe, created as a science focused on traditional beliefs, rituals, and folklore, and interested in the century-long traditions of its own people, has been facing challenges of both new social processes and cultural phenomena, and the intensive changes of its scientific priorities. Even though rituals are supposed to be among the main topics of ethnologic study, after a decade of intensive research in different regions of southeast Europe, the existing ethnology of post-socialism still pays insufficient attention to the analysis of rituals (Creed 2002: 57). Authors investigating the process of transition from socialism to democracy have studied in detail the shift from planned to market economy, the agricultural sector, and the ‘revival of tradition’ under economic crisis, but have shown less concern for the peculiarities of ritual practice in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this context, attempts by ethnologists from Balkan countries to analyze the ritual process in the Balkans are both necessary and timely.

My research focuses on one important group of ritual sacrifices with an expressed social function. To this day these rituals have been a characteristic element of popular tradition in both the FYR of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria. They are connected with the cult-ritual support of the identity system of different social groups (Assmann 1997: 143) in the village. The ritual of blood sacrifice, known among all the Balkan people (Albanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Macedonians, Turks, Serbs, Gypsies) under the name of *kurban*,<sup>1</sup> is traditionally performed by different ethnic and

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<sup>1</sup> The word *kurban* used in the Balkan languages is derived from Turkish, but its initial origin is from the Old Testament, from the biblical *korban* (Rengstorf 1993: 860; Popova 1995: 145).

confessional groups — both Christian and Muslim. The kurban functions on different social levels: as an individual sacrificial offering of an individual person and as a collective sacrifice of the kinship-based or territory-based community. My analysis focuses on the social aspects of village sacrificial offering (kurban) as a feast, supporting the connection of the Christian community to its patron saint but also as a ritual, reproducing community identity and cohesion. This kind of study is especially interesting in the conditions of the post-socialist village, where some elements of the ritual process are revived, while others fade away.

My immediate observations of this ritual process took place during fieldwork in the autumn of 2001, in the eastern regions of Macedonia<sup>2</sup> and in the spring of 2003, in the southwest part of the Republic of Bulgaria.<sup>3</sup> They have been complemented by available descriptions and studies of the festive kurbans in the two countries (for Macedonia, see Nedeljković 1939: 5–9; Palikrusheva 1989: 57–62; Prokopek 1997: 229–244; Kotev 1999: 147–159; Botsev 1999: 76–85; Botsev 2001: 113–119; for Bulgaria cf. the bibliography in Hristov 2004: 53–73).

Collective festive rituals, dedicated to the patron saints of the village community (*sobor*, *slava*, *sluzhba*, *panagjur*, *obrok*, *kurban*), of the family and kin group, of the household and of the individual, are most usually viewed in ethnology as being uniform, but performing various functions at different levels in the social structure of the traditional village (Rheubottom 1976). I underline that despite the sacred pretext, the function of the *sobor* is a wholly secular celebration (cf. Rice 1980: 115). A typological distinction is made between the ritual actions of ‘private’ (family) and ‘public’ cults (Čajkanović 1985(1922): 338; Zečević 1973: 47), as well as between the mundane village *sabor* and the religious feast (Marinov 1981(1914): 724). All authors point out that the South-Slavs’ *collective sacrifice rituals*<sup>4</sup> are representative of the corresponding type of social community in the Balkan village (Pavković 1978: 54–56; Stamenova 1985: 154–158; Palikrusheva 1989: 57–58; Čapo Žmegač 1997: 69–82; Barjaktarović 1998: 37–41; Vlahović 1998: 23–32). Ethnologic literature on this subject emphasizes the archaic origin of village community feasts, as well as their integrative functions and their signifi-

<sup>2</sup> The villages of Orashats, Dolno Gjulgantse, Ljuboten, Karaorman, Kozjak, Char-daklija, Kuchichino, Krupishte, Gabrevtsi, Piperovo, Vrteshka. All materials are kept in the Archives of the Ethnographic Institute with Museum in Sofia, Bulgaria (AEIM № 513–III).

<sup>3</sup> The villages of Laskarevo, Ladarevo and Ljubovka (the region of Sandanski). The fieldwork was conducted together with Prof. Assia Popova from LACITO-CNRS, Paris.

<sup>4</sup> Sacrifices in the name of and with the participation of the entire community (see Tokarev 1983: 196–197).

cance as group markers for different levels in the social structure (Obrembski 1977: 2–3; Stamenova 1985: 157; Čapo Žmegač 1997: 75; Bandić 1997: 254; for Greece see Georgoudi 1979: 287). It is also emphasised that the term *village ritual* may refer to ritual actions, performed by all members of the village community (in a formal aspect) or to ritual actions on behalf of the village as a whole (in a functional aspect) (Bandić 1978: 112, 117).

The common village feasts, centered around blood sacrifice (*kurban*) in both Macedonia and Bulgaria are the best examples of the integrative and communicative functions of the ritual (at social level) as a basis for the consciousness of community cohesion.<sup>5</sup> These collective offerings became widely known among scholars in connection with nationalistic debates, on the ethnicity of the Slavic population in Macedonia (on the analogy of *Gde je slava, tu je Srbin!*<sup>6</sup>), accompanying the national emancipation and stabilization of the young Balkan states at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> The contradistinction between the ‘Serbian’ *slava* and the ‘Bulgarian’ *sabor* with *kurban* in Macedonia,<sup>8</sup> as well as the variant of ‘imposed’ *imen den* (name day), could be followed throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hristov 2002: 69–80).

In fact this is a cultural phenomenon, typical of the Eastern Mediterranean, whose prototype and ritual matrix can be found in the Old Testament — in Abraham’s sacrifice (Popova 1995: 146–147) or the sacrifice in the Temple at Jerusalem (Katsis 2005: 158–186). As early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Orthodox Christian churches, including in their diocese the territory of Macedonia as a geographical region,<sup>9</sup> attempted to replace the collective village sacrificial rituals (*kurban*) with the bloodless Christian communion, whose ritual matrix is the New Testament Eucharist (Popova

<sup>5</sup> In this sense, cf. the text of Vladimir Botsev in this collection.

<sup>6</sup> *Where there is slava, there is a Serb!* is a motive often used in the propaganda discourse in the nationalistic milieu in Belgrade throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>7</sup> On propaganda usage of scientific facts, the inclusion of known scientists from different Balkan countries in these political-propaganda disputes at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and especially around the Balkan wars and World War One, and how in the Balkan capitals parts of the truth were omitted so that another part of it may stand out: cf. Ilchev 1995.

<sup>8</sup> During this period the Bulgarian Exarchate’s newspaper *Novini*, published in Istanbul, carried a series of descriptions of the families’ and villages’ *sluzhba* and *kurbans* in Macedonia (the regions of Kumanovo, Tetovo, Mariovo, Ohrid, Resen, Maglen, Gorna Djumaya, Veles and Shtip), which were proclaimed as “truly Bulgarian” (cf. Stoilov 1925: 28–31).

<sup>9</sup> After the dissolution of the Archbishopric of Ohrid in 1767, the territory of Macedonia was consecutively under the ecclesiastical domination of the Constantinople (Greek) Patriarchate, the Bulgarian Exarchate and the Serbian Orthodox Church after 1912.



1995: 146–147). The pressure, exerted by the church in this direction, and presented as ‘liberation from the pagan remnants’, succeeded in some regions (Kitevski 2002: 27), but in the Republic of Macedonia the common village feasts with collective sacrifice (kurban) are performed to this day. The attempts of Tito’s government to ban them in the first decade after World War II, in some places even with the use of force (on the Maleshevo region cf. Palikrusheva 1989: 59), have also proved unsuccessful. Collective offerings (kurbans) were also the most important and necessary element of many annual village feasts — *sabors* — in the Republic of Bulgaria throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In both countries the last ‘transitional’ decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked a specific ‘revival’ of the kurban ritual practice in the village as well as in the town.<sup>10</sup>

In the Macedonian villages we studied in 2001, the denominations *sobor* and common village kurban were used for various feasts and religious practices, devoted to the patron saint of the local church and/or monastery. The feast implies a common festive table for the relatives in the house or a common kurban ‘for health’ for the members of the village community in the shrine’s yard (Kotev 1999: 150, 154). These common tables differ from the home feast (*kukjna slava*). This peculiarity of villages in northeastern Macedonia has also been noted by British anthropologist D. B. Rheubottom: “In Skopska Crna Gora (...), four different types of *slava* were celebrated. Only one of these, the household *slava*, could possibly symbolise common descent. The others — the village *slava*, church *slava*, and monastery *slava* — have no association with lineage and the notion of descent” (Rheubottom 1976: 19). The denomination *slava* is comparatively new to popular tradition in Macedonia and, according to informants, it was imposed under the influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the denominations were *sluzhba* and *kurban* and all common village feasts, devoted to the patron saint of the local church or monastery, or to the elected patron saint of the village, were called *panagyur* or *sobor*. Similar denominations can be found in the regions of southeast Serbia and west Bulgaria, which I have studied (Hristov 2003: 249–268). Even today, in some places the bearers of tradition in eastern Macedonia denominate as *sobor* all village offerings (kurban), performed during the whole spring and summer season at the village’s sacred places (*obrochishta*), marked with stone crosses.

Up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the studied regions the festive ritual cycle of the common village kurban used to begin in spring, on St

<sup>10</sup> For earlier materials on Berovo and Pehchevo regions during the 1970s, cf. Palikrusheva 1989: 58–59.

George's Feast Day (Hristov AEIM<sup>11</sup> № 513–III), to whom each household offered a lamb (always male). In winter (from St Petka's Day to St Athanasius Day *Zimni*) in these villages the home feasts *kukjna slava* were performed, but after St George's Day the common village ritual offerings began. They were performed simultaneously in the house and in the village — at the church (if there was one), at the monastery<sup>12</sup> or at the village fountain in the center of the village. On St George's Day in some of the villages (Vrteshka, Radovish region; Preseka, Kochani region; Virche, Dramche and Kosevica, Delchevo region) the priest consecrated all sacrificial lambs together: every household took the lamb, already roasted on a spit (*na rozhanj*), to the stone cross<sup>13</sup> in the village. Each kin had its own ritual stone placed around the cross and its members took their places on (or around) it, according to the family-kin principle also observed in the villages of the Bulgarian-Serbian boundary regions. Following World War II, the new socialist government of the Republic of Macedonia tried to ban these common village gatherings as a 'religious anachronism', so every household offered a lamb to St George at home,<sup>14</sup> and this practice has continued to this day.

On St George's feast day, as on the rest of the feasts from the summer-autumn calendar cycle in East Macedonia (at least three or four in every village), a common table was arranged at the sacred stone cross (*obročishte*) with a dish prepared from the obligatory blood sacrifice (*kurban*). This common table, where men and women sat separately, was also connected with the common sharing and distribution of the ritual loaves of bread, prepared by every housewife, and with the consumption of substantial amounts of alcohol (*rakiya* and wine).<sup>15</sup> In this way the festive common *kurban* was carried out until mass migration from the village as a re-

<sup>11</sup> Archives of Ethnographic Institute with Museum in Sofia, Bulgaria.

<sup>12</sup> A very popular practice of the ritual process in the village during the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was to find and reconstruct some old church or cloister (*manastirishte*) according to a vision. The pattern is the same as in the traditional folk religiousness (on the village of Garmen in southwestern Bulgaria cf. Pesheva AEIM № 517–II, p. 26).

<sup>13</sup> Usually there are sacred trees as well (oak) — *Gjurgjov dab*, *Gjurgjovo dabje*.

<sup>14</sup> Similar examples of 'domestication' and 'privatization' of religious conduct as a "spontaneous strategy of adaptation towards restrictive and often repressive politics" (Benovska-Sabkova 1996: 157–164) of socialistic governments towards traditional celebrations could be seen in different forms in all post-socialistic countries in the Balkans (see examples in Hristov 2003: 260).

<sup>15</sup> *Everyone drinks, in our parts both men and women drink...* — respondent Vasil Jovevski, born in 1934 in Stantsi, region of Kriva Palanka (Hristov, AEIM № 513–III).

sult of forced industrialization and abandoning of these mountain villages in the 1960s.

On the days devoted to St Elijah the Prophet and the Holy Mother of God kurbans were also given in the studied villages in Macedonia during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In traditional culture St Elijah's day was celebrated for the health of the cattle, so the sacrifice for kurban on that day was traditionally "an animal with a big hoof"<sup>16</sup> (a bull calf or an ox). Usually, the offering was given on the night before the feast at the cult place in the village's lands, marked by a sacred tree or trees, which no one dared cut down. On the actual feast day a common table was laid for everyone in the village. The kurban (meat boiled with potatoes and beans) was distributed among the participants and some of it was taken to the sick and elderly at home, so that they could "taste it for health" (village of Gabrevtsi, Radivish region). Due to a decrease in cattle breeding in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in these villages, the traditional calf or ox was replaced by several lambs.<sup>17</sup> The table was still common and according to the respondents, only people from the village were present.

The common village kurbans on St Elijah's Day are known throughout Macedonia (for the Maleshevo region see Palikrusheva 1989: 59; for the Strumitsa region in the 1990s see Kotev 1999: 151–153) and in many places it is still practised in the traditional manner with the offering of an ox.<sup>18</sup> Though abandoned after disasters in the village (including epidemics among people and cattle, as well as devastating hailstorms), it was resumed with even greater zeal (for Yablanitsa, Struga region see Filipović 1939: 111). In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the festive kurbans became an integral part of the celebration of St Elijah's Day as the national holiday of the FYR of Macedonia and of the anniversaries of the *Ilinden* Uprising in 1903. The 'use' of traditional holidays in the process of constructing and consolidating national identity during the socialist period was a policy, characteristic of all East-European countries. The FYR of Macedonia, just like the Republic of Bulgaria, was no exception. As Creed notes: "The contemporary political potential of ritual is greatly influenced by former socialist practice", when the state made efforts to homogenize and nationalize folk culture; in this manner "the socialist emphasis on

<sup>16</sup> Respondents: Vasil and Dobrina Jovevski, born in Stantsi, region of Kriva Palanka, but moved to Chardaklija, Shtip region; respondent Lazar Dimov, born in 1939 in Piperovo, Shtip region (Hristov, AEIM № 513-III).

<sup>17</sup> These lambs are always male, "since St Elijah has a male name".

<sup>18</sup> On the kurban in Yablanitsa, Struga region, in honour of St Elijah but celebrated during *Goljamata nedelja* in September, cf. Prokopek 1997: 237; Botsev 1999: 79; on Strumitsa region cf. Kotev 1999: 151–152.

folklore enhanced the affiliation between ritual and national identity” (Creed 2002: 69–70). My immediate observations show that the festive kurbans on St Elijah’s Day in the years of post-socialism are already an integral part of national identification strategies for the population and part of the political vision of the FYR of Macedonia.

In villages in the eastern regions of Macedonia, a large common village kurban was also traditionally offered on the day of the Assumption of the Holy Mother of God (15/28 August).<sup>19</sup> In some villages (for example Vrteshka, Radovish region) a kind of “sacrifice of the first fruits” was practiced: every household brought out all kinds of fruits to the village stone cross for the Virgin. The common village kurbans on Assumption Day, as well as the cult of the Virgin as a whole, were especially popular over large stretches of territory among the Orthodox peoples of the Balkans until the mass migration to the towns. In southwestern Bulgaria (villages in the region of Sandanski), the feast of the Assumption was the only holiday, apart from the patron saint’s day, when all the inhabitants of the village gathered at a common table and every household brought out its festive food (sacrificial lamb and ritual bread). The principle of family-kin offering and sitting at the common village table was observed in Bulgaria too — each *tayfa* (patrilineal kinship group) sat at its ‘own’ sacred tree near the chapel or the stone cross, devoted to the Virgin. The same family-kin (patrilineal) principle of sitting at the table has been observed to this day in the villages at the common tables in commemoration of the dead (*zadushnitsa*), because “when the dead relatives come, they look for the person in his place”.<sup>20</sup>

The patrilineal principle is also fixed in festive tables with common village blood sacrifices (kurbans) in the villages of northeast Greece (Thrace): every lineage has its own place (in some cases these are stone tables) in the church yard and its members sit there in accordance with their status and age (Georgoudi 1979: 286). It is obvious that many of the ritual elements, actions and terminology are uniform over quite a broad area of the Balkans (for contemporary Greece cf. also Varvunis 2001: 177–178; for the Bulgarian-Serbian border regions cf. Hristov 2003: 249–268).

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<sup>19</sup> Two hundred and fifty lambs were sacrificed for the kurban in Virgin Mary’s honor in Berovo in 1977 for the 6,000 people present (cf. Palikrusheva 1989: 59); in 1996, 190 lambs were sacrificed for more than 15,000 people present, and after lightning struck in the middle of the celebration, on the next year “more than 8,000 people from Berovo, citizens of the neighboring villages, and visitors from other towns in Macedonia” were present (Kotev 1999: 155–156).

<sup>20</sup> Respondent Evdokiya Hadzhieva, born in 1930 in Laskarevo, region of Sandanski.

In summary, the common village feasts in the FYR of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria are of two types: the first (the village *sabor*) marks the functioning of the village as a 'birthplace' and is connected with the visits of migrants from the village or relatives (and friends) from other places. In this meaning "the Macedonian *sabor* is a celebration in which the focus of interest is the village as a unit of social structure" (Rice 1980: 113). The second type marks the functioning of the local community as a religious unit and is connected with a common offering (kurban) and a common table only for the members of the village on the day of the patron saint of the local church<sup>21</sup> or monastery. The feasts of monasteries (*slava*, *sluzhba*) often turn into big regional collective feasts with common kurban.

The feast in honor of the patron saint of the village shrine in both countries is accompanied by a common village offering (kurban) and a common table for all who are present. Gifts for the common table (money, provisions, wheat) are collected from every household, but there is no fixed input — everybody gives "as much as he wants to" (*koj kolko miluje*). It is believed that these gifts are given for the health and progress of the whole village and its inhabitants. A specially elected group of men from the village (*crkoven odbor*) takes care of the collection of gifts and the preparation of the kurban. They also call the priest who has to consecrate (*otpee*) the sacrificial lamb (a service for which he is paid).<sup>22</sup> In many villages the representatives of the official church hierarchy have no decisive presence and participation in the common village feasts, except in the bigger monastery kurban.

According to records from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the past the priest not only consecrated the sacrificial animal, but also slaughtered it on his own in order to preserve its skin whole, which traditionally belonged to him (Kitevski 2002: 26).<sup>23</sup> However, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in a number of villages in eastern Macedonia (Piperovo and Ljuboten, Shtip region), the priest was not called even for the shrine feast.

<sup>21</sup> In the villages of the central part of Stara Planina Mountain in Bulgaria this village kurban as a patron saint's day even bears the name "a church of bones" (*kokalanska cherkva*), alluding to the collective blood sacrifice in honour of the patron saint of the village church.

<sup>22</sup> The "fee" was about 50 DEM during the 1990s.

<sup>23</sup> This practice is not canonical, but it is traditional and wide spread in many places throughout the Balkan Peninsula. In Dobrudzha in northeast Bulgaria at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, cf. Archbishop Kesarij: "When they asked a priest in Dobrudzha: 'Is it permitted to kill a buffalo for the kurban?', he replied: 'Yes, as long as you give the hide to the priest.'" (Archives of Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, fund 41/No 61).

In some cases, the duties of the priest are performed by a man (*domakin* of the village feast),<sup>24</sup> chosen by the organizers, who consecrates the sacrificial lambs. Before the sacrifice he makes the sign of the cross with the knife over the lamb's chest, because "Orthodox people are going to eat it" (Piperovo, Shtip region). In the village of Laskarevo (Sandanski region, Bulgaria) the sacrificial ram was killed in the early morning of the Ascension Day in such a way, so that the blood could be spilled on the eastern part of the shrine's foundations (*temeli*) at the moment when the sun rose. Each villager and guest gets a share of the festive kurban and of the ritual loaves of bread. The common consumption of ritual food, including the sacrifice, has the meaning of communion and is conducive to cohesion of the village community ('*communio*' according to Weber 1992: 360; cf. Popova 1995: 160).

The functioning of a collective offering (kurban) as a ritual for community identification and a marker for empathy and unity among the members of the group is clearly demonstrated in one extreme variant of the festive sacrificial ritual — *kurban in an abandoned village*. The preservation of the shrine feast with a kurban, even when the village is completely deserted, is an interesting phenomenon of the ritual process and popular religiosity dating from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I have registered such cases during my fieldwork in both the FYR of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria: the former inhabitants of the village of Preseka, who left it for Karaorman (Shtip region) (Hristov AEIM № 513–III) during the 1960s, even now return for the kurban on the Day of the Holy Saviour at the old church; in the village of Badilen, the people who have migrated to the region of Strumitsa return to their "old fireplaces" to offer a sacrifice to the Virgin (Kotev 1999: 153). Nobody has lived in the village of Papavnitsa for more than 20 years, but every year on the village feast with a kurban sacrificial offering on the day of St Constantine, the patron saint of the local church, the inhabitants, scattered in different parts of the FYR of Macedonia, gather together (Botsev 2001: 115). The villagers of Darzhanovo (Sandanski region, Bulgaria), who migrated in the 1950s after their cattle were taken away by collectivisation, return to their native village to make the kurban on the Day of the Assumption. During the rest of the year these villages are deserted.

An indicative example is the village of Popovo, Pernik region (Bulgaria), whose fields were submerged under the waters of the Studena reservoir in the 1950s. Since the restitution of property at the beginning of the 1990s, they have been going back every year for the village feast

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<sup>24</sup> His ritual function is in some places hereditary (Botsev 2001: 115).

(*sabor*) on the feast of the Assumption to their destroyed houses, making a common kurban on the bank of the reservoir. Each one of them takes a share of the ritual sacrificial food to the foundations of his old house and eats it together with his family.

The dispersed migrant inhabitants return every year and perform the ritual of collective blood sacrifice and a common table with a kurban with the idea that in this way the village continues to exist in time: “Though we have no village, we make the kurban as if the village were there” (for Papavnitsa cf. Botsev 2001: 115). In the past, when the village was “alive”, every family offered a kurban and hosted relatives and friends from other places in their home. The migrant inhabitants of these deserted villages turn the collective kurban into a community marker, into a ritual, reviving their unity with the patron saint of the shrine, but also the relationships among themselves. The common village kurban comes to be a kind of *ideology of local origin*.

The personal vow, however, which is a part of the group ritual relations with the patron saint of the village, is realized notwithstanding the spatial parameters of the community. “Giving away” some of the sacrificial food (kurban) is an important part of the ritual actions: “If you don’t give away some of the food to three houses, it is not a real kurban” (village of Laskarevo, Sandanski region in Bulgaria). An indicative example is a villager from Papavnitsa who has moved to Switzerland. Since he is not able to be present at the village kurban in his native village, he “takes it along” with him and every year makes his own kurban for health in Switzerland, giving away meat to three neighboring households (Botsev 2001: 117).

Collective ritual offerings, known in the Balkans as *kurbans*, can be subject to ethnological analysis using different interpretational models. The kurban may be viewed as a “symbol of the gift exchange”, understood as *reciprocity* between this world and the beyond (Popova 2000: 91), and the sacrificial offering as a *gift, tax or penalty*, paid to God and the saints, or to the demons. The *sacred places* of sacrificial offering could be interpreted as ‘intermediary bridges’, which allow the individual from traditional society to establish a relationship with the world ‘beyond’ (Leach 1976: 71, 83). Finally, it is possible to search for the mythological-ritual roots of sacrificial practice as an ancient tradition in the Balkans (Tsivyan1989: 119–131). However, what has been important for me to show in this article is that the common village kurban in the FYR of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria represents a significant part of the ritual basis of collective communal consciousness, upon which local and na-

tional identity is built. And this is probably a condition for their future development in the contemporary process of globalization.

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*Rachko Popov, Sofia*

## KURBAN SACRIFICIAL OFFERINGS ON THE FEASTDAYS OF THE SUMMERTIME SAINTS IN THE CALENDAR TRADITION OF THE BULGARIANS

In the summertime calendar cycle of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Bulgaria, sacrificial offerings (*kurbans*) dedicated to the Christian saints very often fit a common model, revealing the causes of their appearance and functioning with the passage of time. This model is based on the etiological legend concerning their origins. For its part, this repetitive legend recreates the mythological story of the selfless sacrifice of a deer or a doe, interpreted by a number of Bulgarian researchers within the context of Thracian mythology, and, more specifically, in connection with the passionate ancient hunter Rezos, a Thracian king in the Rhodope mountainong (Katsarov 1943; Georgieva 1991: 49–51). The legend has it that every year on a particular day, a deer (a doe) comes to the people, remaining of her own free will to be sacrificed by the hunters. But one year the deer came later than the appointed hour. She had been very tired by the long journey and had come late because she wanted to feed her offspring. She wanted to take a rest, but the men did not comply with her desire and killed her immediately. Since then the deer has ceased to come on her own and became a sacrificial offering of the village (“because people had turned into devils”). That is why men began using other animals as sacrificial offerings. A variant of the legend from Haskovo says that the deer used to come to St George himself at the site of a church dedicated to the saint, where images of its branching horns and the metal rings, by which the animal had been tied by the saint, can be seen to this day on the stones (Koleva AEIM 701–II: 12).

The deer is a sun symbol in Bulgarian mythology, as in the mythologies of other peoples. According to folk belief, the sun rides on the back of a deer. During the holidays of the winter solstice (the feastdays of St An-

drew, St Barbara, St Anna, St Spiridon), the common belief is that “the sun turns to the summer” and the day begins to increase as much as the leap of a three-year-old deer (*elen-tripar*). The solar symbolism of the deer has also passed into Christian beliefs and has been connected with Jesus, often presented in iconography in the midst of deer with horns in the form of the Christian cross (Prior 1999: 29; Chevalier, Geerbrant 2000: 331).

Even a most cursory review of ethnographic sources shows that the mythological model of the voluntary self-sacrifice of the deer is more widespread in the south Bulgarian lands and has been referred, in terms of the calendar, to feastdays of saints celebrated during the summer time. Featuring among them are St Elijah, the ruler of heavenly lightning and rains, and his closest assistants St Athanasius of Summertime — May 2 (Milcheva, Gogova 1999), St Nicholas of Summertime — May 9 (Nikolova 1945: 216), SS Constantine and Helen — May 21 (Vakarelski 1935: 280; Stamenova 1986: 307; Milcheva, Gogova 1999), the twin brothers SS Peter and Paul — June 28 (Drazheva 1980: 467; Popov 1996: 225) and St Panteleimon — July 27 (Rangochev 2000: 131). The blood offerings in their honour usually take place at sites considered sacred by the local community, and associated with the myth of the deer-sacrifice (the toponyms are usually of the kind of *Elenin Vrah* / Deer Peak, *Elenina Cherkva* / Deer Church) or bear the name of the respective saint (*Ilinden* / Elijah’s Feastday, *Ilieva Mogila* / St Elijah’s Mound, *Panteleja*, *Kostadinka* and *Elena* — in this case Emperor Constantine the Great and his mother Helen have been construed in the folk mind as two sisters). In the Sakar Mountain, the oblation takes place each year on Maya Bair hill on the Sunday following the feastday of St George and all the neighboring villages take part in the holiday (Ganeva-Raicheva 2002: 363).

According to traditional folk beliefs of the Bulgarians, St Elijah is the major and most important ruler of the top sphere of the three-part integral cosmic space — the sky. Clouds, mist, fog, wind and rain, thunder, lightning, the hailstorms are all subordinate to him. It is for this reason that he has been referred to as *gradushkar* (ruler of hailstorms). In folk imagination and folklore, the saint is described as an old man with a long white beard. He wears an *aba*, a traditional jacket of homespun woollen cloth, and holds the ice grains of the hailstorm in one sleeve, and in the other is hidden his spear — the lightning. His head is often covered by nine or twelve veils. In this way the Lord prevents him from glancing down on the earth and letting loose the heavenly elements. He rides the heavens on his fiery chariot, driven by two or four swift white or scarlet horses. Perching on his right shoulder is an angel, holding the harnesses of the horses. In the summertime the saint is very busy. He wages continuous

fierce battles with the demons of the natural heavenly elements. Taking pride of place among them are the dragons and the whirlwinds, which in the old pagan beliefs were the lords of the clouds, lightning, rain and fog. Throughout Bulgaria, the summertime thunderstorms are explained by the battle waged by the saint against them. This theme is also particularly popular in Bulgarian folklore.

St Elijah is also the lord of the wind, which he keeps locked in his heavenly cave. In the folkloristic way of thinking, the summertime strong winds and whirlwinds are also of demonic origin. They are brought about by the souls of the unclean deceased (drowned and hanged people), by storm demons and wood nymphs, by winged dragons and other evil spirits.<sup>1</sup> Bulgarian Karakachani people believe that with his fiery arrows, St Elijah persecutes the evil fairies (Pimpireva 1998: 117). With the passage of time, the old-time pagan demonic personages have often become united to make up the group of the so-called *dyavoletini*, *gyavolii*, *pogantsi*, *vragove* or *besove* (devils' acts, heathens, enemies and rages), whose chief spokesperson and leader (*tartor*) becomes the devil (*Satan*, *Judah*, *Anti-Christ*). The Christian legends of the saint began presenting him as the tireless persecutor of the unholy (*the one-legged, the limping, the short, the horned, the tailed, the sly*). Using his main weapon — lightning — he ceaselessly persecutes the antagonists of the Lord, hiding between the horns of the animals or in the branches of the trees. For this reason folk tradition bans shepherds and ploughmen from standing close to the animals or hiding under trees during summertime thunderstorms.

According to common Bulgarian belief, during winter St Elijah “puts on his sheepskin coat and stays where it is warm”. He is rather a chilly old man who dislikes the cold. During that time, he is substituted by the winter time St Athanasius, his top assistant and ruler of the cold spells and of ice in winter. Moreover, during the winter St Elijah has other occupations. During that time he watches and directs the souls of the sinful deceased in their heavenly workshops. Because of their earthly sins, these souls are doomed and punished to manufacture snow, frost and hail day and night. They fill bags, kegs and the cart of the saint with hail, which he will spread over the fields and gardens of the farmers who do not give him tribute during the summer.

<sup>1</sup> According to a belief from the region of Yambol, the whirlwinds are evil middle-aged women. They are dressed in old, ragtag and dirty clothes. They carry sticks, which they use to hit people on the heads so that they become dizzy. Afterwards they make these people sick (Bozakova 1947: 113). If there is a thunderstorm on St Elijah's feastday, maidens do not drink water from the vessels. Otherwise, they believe that a dragon, coming as a lightning bolt from the sky, would fall in love with them (Hristov 1937: 67).

Though not very often, some folk stories present St Elijah as a shepherd, particularly skilled in playing his pipe. And people often call the summertime little white clouds in the sky “the sheep of St Elijah”. Once, the saint was grazing the herds of a Turkish rich man. But he fell asleep for a short spell in the meadow and the sheep scattered. As soon as the saint awoke, he prayed to the Lord to bring back the sheep and promised a votive offering, should his prayer be fulfilled. And it was fulfilled. For that reason on the feastday of St Elijah housewives knead and give out special round loaves of bread and rolls to all the shepherds in the village (Enchev AEIM No. 915: 66–67; Strateva: 230).

For the feastday of St Elijah is one of the most outstanding and solemn summertime holidays Bulgarians. It is often considered to be “the middle of the summer”, because the saint “has put on his sheepskin coat and has gone to the Lord to request Him to send in the winter already”. The population along the Black Sea coast and along the Danube banned bathing on the feastday of St Elijah, because according to folk belief this is when “the waters reverse”, and then St Elijah takes a victim (someone drowns). According to tradition, on the feastday of St Elijah the oldest, last year’s rooster (*peinik* [songster], *father of the roosters*) is slaughtered as an offering to the heavenly master. Researchers of mythology have long been aware that the rooster is a solar zoomorphic symbol and its sacrifice as a tribute to St Elijah is quite natural and easy to explain. In Northwest Bulgaria the women stick a feather from the tail of a cockerel over the gates “to drive away evil and evil spells”. Almost every village organizes common celebrations and gatherings, an important part of which is the kurban sacrificial offering. A large male animal is slaughtered (an ox, a bull, a ram or a billy goat), which had been bought with money collected from the community. The sacrificial offering takes place at a sacred site in the lands of the village — under the branches of an aged oak tree, on top of a hill, by a spring, at a stone votive place or a chapel, bearing the name of the saint. At one time the sacred site had been associated, on the local level, with the legend of the voluntary sacrifice of the deer, at other times — with the site, considered to be a refuge, or, where the mythical farmer — guardian of the village, called in the south Bulgarian mountain lands of the Strandja, Sakar and the Rhodope mountains *the Holy Proxy*, *Yunak* (Valiant Young Man) or *Selskoto* (of the Village)<sup>2</sup> is believed to appear.

<sup>2</sup> In some villages of the region of Gotse Delchev, the sacrificial offering honouring St Elijah is also dedicated to the *Selskoto*. This is so, because precisely on the feastday of St Elijah many years earlier, the village had been ploughed by two black oxen (Doneva 1947: 258). Concerning the appearing of a Holy Proxy on the Hill of St Elijah in the region of Ivailovgrad, where a sacrificial offering is organized in his honor, cf. Benovska-Sabkova 1991: 223.

This farmer is usually a winged dragon, flying like a fiery yarn-beam, and perching on the branches of old sacred trees (an oak or an elm tree) or an awe-inspiring night-time horseman, coming out of the village well. The sacrificial offering is always consecrated by a priest, who often also initiates a common prayer for rain.

I would like to describe here a sacrificial offering on the feastday of St Elijah in the village of Dryanovo, Popovo region. St Elijah is the patron saint of the local church there. As a tribute to the saint, every year 9 or 11 barren sheep used to be slaughtered in the churchyard. After the meal of the sacrificial offering had been cooked by 9 cooks, the bell would announce the start of the ceremonial feast of the whole village by its solemn ringing. Every woman was obliged to bring brandy, a boiled chicken and home-baked loaves, made of “new grain”. The priest consecrated the offering and the feast. A candle was lit on all the loaves of bread. Each woman would also hold a lit candle in her hand. Then everyone passed in front of the icon of St Elijah, which had been taken out of the church and placed on a makeshift altar. Everyone bowed in front of it or kissed it and left some money for the church (Milenov 1936: 166).

It is noteworthy that according to statistics, St Elijah heads the list of the patronage of saints of family and settlement stone sacrificial offering crosses and holy sites in Central, West and Northwest Bulgaria. The saint, and his “brothers” Peter and Paul are often qualified in inscriptions on the stones as “guardians of the field” (Petrunova 2001: 123–125). “The guardian of the vineyards” is also St Nicholas of Summertime. The following is a description of a sacrificial offering in his honor in the village of Pop Nikolaevo, Belogradchik region. In the 1880s, in the course of several summers, the vineyards were ruined by hailstorms. Then the men of the village got together to choose a guardian saint of the vineyards. The choice fell on St Nicholas of Summertime. A stone cross was made as a sacrificial offering to him. The priest consecrated water, sprinkled the site of the cross with it and read a prayer. A male lamb was slaughtered by the site of the sacrificial offering in such a way that its blood sprinkled on the stone. Ever since, every year on the summertime feastday of St Nicholas a sacrificial animal is slaughtered on the site. A few days before the holiday, men go round the village to collect money and produce from everyone — onions, peppers, beans, cabbage, and eggs. They sell the produce and with the money thus earned buy lambs. They load the lambs on a cart and go to the site of the sacrificial offering, where they slaughter the lambs and cook them in a common cauldron. The sacrificial offering they call “of the gathering”. The women come, each carrying two patterned loaves of bread, referred to as *St Petka*. As soon as the church bell announces that the offer-



ing is ready, everybody sets out with bowl in hand to get some of the meal cooked. The feast of the sacrificial offering, the bread and the lit candles are arranged on top of woven cloths, spread on the ground. After the priest has consecrated the food and each one has broken off a piece of the bread for the priest, the feast begins (Nikolova 1945: 216–217).

The celebration of the feastday of St Nicholas of Summertime in the village of Chernichevo, Karlovo region, is similar. Before the holiday, four men collect money and food from their fellow villagers and use this to buy lambs. The animals are slaughtered by the river under the branches of a poplar and five oak trees and are cooked there in a Communal cauldron. During that time, the priest and the young people, carrying the church gonfalons, make a round of all the sacred trees and springs in the vicinity. The priest spreads holy oil on the trees, piercing a hole in the tree barks, where he pours holy water and holy oil. All this is done as a tribute to St Nicholas of Summertime, who is expected to guard the village from hailstorms (Yankova 1942: 189–190). It is noteworthy that by tradition, the skins of the sacrificed animals are always presented to the church (Sources 1999: 257, 276).

In view of the modern manifestations of the folk tradition regarding the common village or family sacrificial offerings, I would like to add that the family and settlement sacrificial offerings, tribute to patron saints of the fields and of the family and the clan, performed next to the sacrificial crosses dedicated to them, have been resumed since the political changes of 1990 and continue to be partially practised to this day (Grebendarova 1996; Benovska-Sabkova 1999).

Besides on the feastday of St Elijah, sacrificial offerings dedicated to the heavenly Christian ruler of lightning are also made in critical situations: continuing natural disasters like hailstorms, rains or droughts. Particularly intriguing in this respect is a story originating in the village of Velichkovo, Pazardjik region, recorded around the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Whenever there was a hailstorm, three men — they had to be by all means widowers — had to steal a lamb, “which was to be black all over”, from a sheepfold, and three pots from a potter. Then they gave these to the local priest. He slaughtered the lamb in the churchyard. He filled the three pots with the blood of the sacrificial offering. Then the four men went to the borderline with the neighboring village “where the others’ land began”. They chose precisely such a place, “because the hailstorm always falls next to a border”. They buried the pots with blood into the earth and soon afterwards the natural elements calmed down (Peneva 1946: 202–203). According to other ethnographic sources, the villagers take the lamb that is table sacrificed to some high rocky place, where there are eagles’ nests.

It is generally believed that the *krastati* [cross-shaped] eagles fly across the hailstorm clouds and guide them. For that reason, on the level of world outlook, the eagle is a kind of an ornitho-morphic symbol of the Thunderer, himself.

In the traditional calendar of the Bulgarian people the sacrificial offerings, tribute to the summertime saints, are characterized by yet another essential functional characteristics. In a previous research of mine I have already had the opportunity to prove that the thunderstorm saints of the heavenly retinue of St Elijah have outspoken healing abilities (Popov 2002: 211–228). Pride of place among them is occupied by those saints, whose lives presented them as healers: St Panteleimon and the holy brothers Cosmas and Damian, also called *Vrachi* [Healers] and worshipped as patron saints of medicine-men, physicians and fortune-tellers (July 1). Other thunderstorm saints are also patron saints of various diseases: St Bartholomew (June 11) wards off madness and headache; St Elisei (June 14) protects from falling hair; St Vid (June 15) helps blind people start to see again. Distinguished by her healing skills are also: “the sister” of St Elijah — St Marina (July 17) and St Petka of Summertime, revered on the Friday following Easter. According to folk beliefs, the water of their curative springs cures blindness. The holy sites of these summertime saints — curative springs, mountain peaks, stone sites for sacrificial offerings and chapels — are visited by sick and handicapped people en masse. They arrive there on the eve of the feastday; they spend the night at the holy site, wash their faces in curative spring water, light candles and leave gifts hoping for a cure that will shortly come. A frequent practice is to dedicate an offering as a tribute to the saint, so that he might bestow good health upon them. According to information by H. Vakarelski, the sacrificial offering — a tribute to St Panteleimon in Thrace — is sometimes a goat; an animal, which is interpreted as ‘unclean’ in the folk mythology, because it is a re-incarnation of the devil and “would not do for a sacrificial offering” (Vakarelski 1935: 445). In the region of Belogradchik, on the feastday of St Panteleimon “the bad illnesses” are ceremoniously led out of the lands of the village and the space around. For this purpose a few Gypsy women, carrying a wooden table with bread and other foods, lead a procession with local musicians to the end of the village. A table is laid in the lands of the neighboring village with a fresh loaf of bread and *nenachenata voda* (water not yet used for drinking). This is meant to feed the plague, cholera and measles (Georgieva 1943: 284–285). According to a legend from the village of Svirachi, Ivailovgrad region, the Greek population living there bequeathed to the Bulgarians the tradition of slaughtering a cow on the feastday of St Panteleimon every year. The sacrificial offering aims to pre-

vent an early demise of the female part of the village community (Yunakova 1968: 110).

Personal offerings for good health are very often dedicated to the healers Cosmas and Damian on their feastday in the regions of Plovdiv and the Rhodope Mountains. On that day, people suffering from mental illnesses and physical handicaps are taken by their relatives to the curative springs of the saints.

All spend the night by the spring and early in the morning the sick people bathe in the curative water. The sacrificial animals are slaughtered and the offering is cooked and eaten on the site (Stamenova 1986: 275).

In the spring of 1996, together with colleagues of an ethnographic expedition in the Sakar Mountain, I happened to attend a sacrificial offering made by a sick woman. It took place in the village of Sladun, Svilengrad region. There is a curative spring, carrying the name of the Holy Spirit, in the rocky elevations behind the village, which is visited by the local population in cases of illness or misfortune. The bushes and trees around the spring are decorated with multicolored threads from the clothes of the visitors (the threads are left there, so that the disease “may be left”). Tied onto them are kerchiefs (gifts to the illness), there are traces of burnt candles. At the foot of the spring, two men slaughtered the lamb presented by the sick woman and brought in a cart. Three women skinned it, cleaned the meat and prepared it for the offering. The blood of the victim was drained on the site. Then the skinned lamb was boiled in the churchyard. The sacrificial offering was consecrated in a solemn liturgy by a priest, who had specially arrived from town for the occasion. The feast was laid out on cloths on the ground in the churchyard. Every woman came with a bottle of brandy or wine and with a loaf of bread, personally kneaded and baked. Women, who could not attend for some reason, each received a bowl of the meal at home.

From the information gathered on the sacrificial offerings as tributes to the summertime saints, we can determine two basic types: 1) general village gatherings, meant to earn the good will of the thunder saints and to protect the fields from natural disasters during the summer; 2) personal offerings, dedicated by sick people with the purpose to gain the mercy of the healer saint and to regain good health. Whereas for the first type the sacrificial animal is bought by common funds and is most often male (unless it is dedicated to a female saint), in the second case it is a personal offering and its sex depends on the sex of the sick person (a female animal is dedicated by a sick woman). The color of the animal — white or black — depends on the semantic and functional characteristics (solar or chthonic) of the sacrificial offering. Otherwise the rituals and rites associated with the

two types of sacrificial offerings do not differ essentially. They are subordinated to the traditional model, constituting every blood sacrificial offering.

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*Vladimir Bocev, Skopje*

## KURBAN AMONG THE MACEDONIANS

One of the most widespread rites practised by the Macedonians is the blood sacrifice, or *kurban*. Practised throughout Macedonia, it is deeply rooted in folk tradition. This is confirmed by the existence of numerous cult places, where animals were, and still are, sacrificed. Although the Church has been constantly trying to eradicate it, the *kurban* has succeeded in surviving through the ages. From the second half of the 1940s up to the mid-1950s, it withstood the pressure of the communist regime. Today, the *kurban* in FYR of Macedonia is enjoying a renaissance. In 1994, when the research project “Sacrifice in the Ritual Life of Macedonians” began, we believed that we would find little data on *kurban* rites, and that the *kurban*, as described in the literature by previous research, was rarely practised. But the first field studies give quite the opposite picture. We came across many *kurbans* that have not only survived but gained a fresh impulse in the period of our research. The informants, who told us about their *kurban* with affection, respect and pride, were numerous.

The offering of a blood sacrifice is most often connected to the Orthodox Church calendar, holidays such as Easter, or those dedicated to particular saints such as St George, the Holy Savior, the summertime feast of St Nicholas, St Constantine and Helen, St Elijah, the feast of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin, the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, the feast of the Holy Cross, St Demetrius, the feast of the Archangels. The blood sacrifice or *kurban*, as it is called, takes place once or twice a year in a particular rural or urban community, and is usually a major event in the ritual life of the community. During these holidays the members of the community and their guests from other places gather in great numbers. In some villages, several *kurbans* are celebrated in the space of a year, as is the case with the village of Voislavtsi, near Radovish, where 14 *kurbans* per year are practised, or the village of Sushitsa, near Skopje with 7

kurbans each year. Nevertheless, one of these kurbans is the most important for the community, usually the one performed on the feast of the saint to whom the local church is dedicated.

The kurbans are celebrated in the churchyard, at a stone cross — most often located above the village — consecrated to the saint whose day is celebrated when the kurban is celebrated, at old graveyards or holy trees. In villages where several kurbans are performed in the same year, there are several sites marked with stone crosses. For instance, in the villages of Trstenik, Preod and Pavleshintsi in the Ovche Pole region, there is a stone cross where the kurban is slaughtered on the feast of St George (May 6), besides the one for the feast of St Elijah (August 2).

In the village of Gorni Lipovik, near Radovich, the kurban for the feast of St Demetrius (November 8) is slaughtered at the village graveyard, and for the feast of St Elijah at an oak tree above the village. In the village of Badilen, near Strumitsa, the kurban is slaughtered above the village, near a huge, solitary oak tree with an engraved cross, on the feast of St Elijah. In the village of Lesnovo, near Probishtip, the kurban has been until recently slaughtered at the threshold of the monastery church of St Gabriel of Lesnovo, and in the monastery yard on the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary (September 21).<sup>1</sup> Several years ago, monks moved into the monastery, and ever since there has been no kurban slaughter in the monastery itself. On the threshold of the monastery church of the Blessed Virgin, near the village of Sogle in the vicinity of Veles, the kurban is slaughtered on the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary (September 21). At the monastery of the Blessed Virgin in the village of Matka, near Skopje, the kurban is slaughtered in the monastery yard on the feast of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin (August 28). On the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, kurban is also slaughtered at the monastery of the Blessed Virgin near Kichevo. One of the largest and most visited kurbans in Macedonia is the one in Berovo, where for the feast of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin more than 130 sheep are slaughtered, and meals are cooked in about 90 cauldrons.

The kind of animal sacrificed and its sex depend on the day when it is offered. Most often a sheep is offered, i.e. a lamb or a ram, also an ox or a bull. A sheep is sacrificed on the feasts of the Dormition and the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, as well as on the feast of the Archangels (November 11). A ram is sacrificed for the feasts of St John (January 20), St Athanasius (January 31) and St Elijah. It is interesting to mention that in

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<sup>1</sup> In Macedonia, the folk and Christian feasts are celebrated according to the Julian calendar.

the village of Deylovtse, near Kumanovo, on the feast of St Elijah only a black ram is sacrificed. Oxen and bulls are sacrificed on the days of St Demetrius and St Elijah. For example, in the villages of Sushitsa, Dabile, Ilovitsa, Novo Selo, near Strumitsa, bulls are sacrificed on the feast of St Demetrius, while in the village Piperevo, in the same region, on the summertime feast of St Nicholas (May 21). In the village of Yablanitsa, Struga region, an ox is sacrificed on the feast of the Holy Cross, but the location where it is performed is called St Elijah. In the village of Rogachevo, near Tetovo, a calf is slaughtered on the feast of St Elijah. A legend connected to this kurban says that at the place called *Kaluger* (monk) where a calf is offered now, in the past a deer that came by itself to the place of sacrifice was slaughtered.

If the saint to whom the holiday is dedicated is male, then the sacrificed animal is male too, and if the saint is a woman, then a female animal sacrificed. But, this is not always the case. A sheep is very often sacrificed on the feasts of St Elijah and St George, as in the villages of Trstenik and Pokraychevo. On the feast of the Archangels, sterile sheep are regularly sacrificed.

Kurban is offered not only for the important holidays, but also for the start of house construction, or when moving into a new house. It is also offered for funerals, and the 40-day, six-month and one-year commemorations. In the Probishtip region the kurban is offered for health and good luck of the miners in the Sasa mine, on the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary (September 21).

One day prior to the kurban, women gather in the church and exchange food with one another for their health's sake, thus announcing the forthcoming holiday. In the village of Pokraychevo, Radovish region, one day before St Demetrius' day, called *svetok*, the women with the prepared fasting food encircle the stone cross at the village church. The women from the village of Rogachevo, near Tetovo, distribute fasting meals at the place called Kaluger, seated on the stone table near the church of St Elijah, the day before St Elijah's Day.

The preparation of the kurban is most often a task of the church committee, whose members are invariably men. It takes care of the acquisition of the animal which, in some villages, is to be bought only from the locals (Yablanitsa, near Struga, Piperevo, near Strumitsa). When buying the animal, they do not weigh it or bargain, for its price should be fixed. In some villages the committee takes care of collecting supplies for preparing the ritual meal, the kurban, such as onions, cabbage, potatoes, oil, salt, etc. In the village of Podaresh, Radovish region, the church committee appoints men who would collect the supplies from the village households. In the vil-



lage of Yablanitsa, near Struga, each household brings the ingredients to the churchyard. Men butcher and cook the ritual meal, while women prepare the ingredients — peel the potatoes, chop the cabbage, tomatoes, paprika, etc. The impression that men are the main protagonists of the kurban ritual is acquired by this picture, and confirmed by the informants in the villages. But, although men are those who organise the kurban, most often women are the ones who manage it, i.e. they say when, what and how things are to be done. Such is the case in the villages of Pokraychevo and Podaresh near Radovish. On the other hand, in the village of Yablanitsa, near Struga, women are not allowed access to the place of sacrifice or the preparation of the meal, up to the moment the ritual food is cooked.

All the members of the community, to a greater or lesser extent, participate in the preparations for the kurban — collecting the ingredients and necessities, preparing them, cooking the ritual meal, and taking part in the rites during the kurban, the distribution and consummation of the food, the rejoicing and the final acts. In Yablanitsa, a new host for the kurban is elected each year, according to the disposition of the households in the village neighborhoods. It is believed that St Elijah himself directs the preparations of the kurban. When one of the participants in the kurban rite, the *akchiya* [cook] was asked: “How will Petko come next year to be the *akchiya*, when he lives in America?”, the answer was: “Don’t you worry. St Elijah himself will get him here”.

Care is always taken that the animal to be sacrificed should be healthy, and if possible white and faultless. After the animal is chosen, in some places it is kept separately, not with the other cattle, as in the villages of Yablanitsa (Struga), Pokraychevo, Gorni Lipovik (Radovish), Piperevo (Strumitsa).

The period immediately preceding and the actual act of animal sacrifice are the moments when the kurban rite reaches its culmination. It is accompanied by a number of customs and beliefs. The one who slaughters or sacrifices the animal should be a healthy male of some authority. Very often the head of the animal is turned towards the east, and care is taken that the blood falls on the stone cross at the eastern part of the house foundations, or on the church threshold, and sprinkles the holy tree or something green, most often a boxberry. In the village of Vrbeni/Ekshi Su, Lerin district (Greece), it is believed that the kurban has not been properly carried out if the blood of the lamb sacrificed on the feast of St George does not fall on the threshold of the house.

In the village of Podaresh in the Radovish region, after the animal is sacrificed, the women light a candle on the horns of the ox and burn incense, making circles around the stone cross. In the village of

Pokraychevo, Radovish region, the wife of the host lights a candle on the head of the lamb, while her husband, slaughters it as a sacrifice for the feast of St George. In Yablanitsa, the kurban is slaughtered in complete silence at midnight before the holiday, i.e. at its very beginning.

The meat of the sacrificed animal is most often cooked with the other ingredients in cauldrons, and afterwards distributed to the members of the village community present. There are cases when only the cooked meat is distributed, and afterwards everybody prepares a meal with it at home, or only raw meat is distributed to be prepared at home. The last two examples are quite new, and have a practical character. In fact, according to the tradition, the kurban should be cooked and eaten at the place of sacrifice. But with time, this became impracticable, as the preparation of the ritual meal takes a long time, while the community has either enlarged, as in Dabile near Strumitsa, or more frequently, the number of inhabitants has decreased, or many have grown old, as in Martoltsi near Veles.

In some villages the distribution of the ritual meal, the kurban, has its own specifics. In the village of Pokraychevo, Radovish region, the ritual meal is first distributed to the women and the children and afterwards to the men. In the village of Mitrashintsi, in Maleshevo, there are separate cauldrons for men and women respectively, while in the village of Yablanitsa, the ritual meal is first given to the priest and then to the others.

The bells of the village church toll, or the village *protoger*<sup>2</sup> shouts the news in order to inform the people that the kurban is prepared for distribution, as is the case in the Radovish villages of Podaresh and Gorni Lipovik. Prior to the distribution of the ritual meal, the priest burns incense over the cauldrons. Some of the priests do not approve of this practice, but they point out that they cannot act against the will of the people. Others, again, have pledged to keep the traditions, and are the initiators of the event. Today, the church is not officially against the kurban, the offering of sacrifice, but it endeavours to minimise its significance and to adapt it to ecclesiastical teaching. Thus, for instance, when the sacrifice day falls on a fast days, some of the priests insist on making it a day later or earlier, and if they do not succeed, then they allow the killing of the animal, but mention that proper Christians do not eat meat during the fast.

The committee determines the fee that is to be paid when the kurban is distributed. The price of the kurban and the weight of the animal are determined according to the number of families in the village, in order to pay back

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<sup>2</sup> The *protoger* is a man assigned to inform the members of the village community of all the events in the village and all decisions made by the local community. He shouts from the most convenient place in the village, so that everyone can hear.

the money spent on it. By the act of paying the kurban, the participation of each family, i.e. each member of the community in its preparation and ritual action is confirmed. The ritual meal is also taken for those members of the community who, for various reasons, are not present at the event.

Each of the participants in the kurban has his or her own place while consuming the ritual meal. Thus, for instance, during the kurban on the feast of St George, in the village of Pokraychevo, Radovish region, the women and children are seated next to the stone cross at the western entrance to the village church, while the men sit in the porch of the churchyard. In the village of Rogachevo, Tetovo region, each family has its own place, usually under a tree. The inhabitants of the village of Stanjevtsi in Ovche Pole, during the kurban on St Elijah's Day, which takes place above the village, sit at stone tables near the stone cross. One of the tables is for the men, the other for the women. The men's table is placed next to the cross, laid towards the east so that the cross is at the head of the table. The women wait on the seated men. The women's table is immediately to the left of the men's table. The women, before they are served with the ritual meal, exchange items of food with one another for their health's sake. Before sitting down to the table, the women offer gifts to the cross, which are later sold at auction. During our study in 2002, the women were still sitting at the stone table, while the men started using wooden tables and benches. It is interesting to mention that during my field research I passed among the women standing in two lines in front of the stone table, wishing to gather as much information as possible. Then one of them said to me: "Listen, son, it's not good to tread here, this is a table!" In the village of Trstenik in Ovche Pole, during the kurban on St Elijah's Day, the women and the children are seated around the cross and the men at the stone table, just above the cross on the western side. The one seated at the head of the table looks towards the stone and the east. The oldest man in the village sits at the head of the table, and the others, according to age, downwards from the cross. The one who is seated at the head of the table has the privilege of being served the head of the sacrificed animal, the kurban.

Generally speaking, we may conclude that the spot where the kurban is killed and the place where the ritual meal is consumed, the table, is also divided into male and female areas. In the village of Yablanitsa, near Struga, not only place, but time is divided into a time when only men can be present at the place also sacrifice, and one when the presence of women is allowed.

The belief that everyone present at the kurban must eat at least a bit of the ritual meal is widely spread. If not, it is believed that it could provoke the rage of the saint to whom the kurban is dedicated. "It is not good

not to do so.” Informants in Berovo, for instance, told us that once there was a woman who did not want to eat from the kurban dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. “How should I eat this? This is not clean!” she said. After she had come home the Blessed Virgin appeared in her dream and said to her: “Are you the one who did not want to eat of my food?” The woman was so frightened that she immediately hurried back to the place of sacrifice and asked for some of the food. But there was none left, and she had to scrape the leftovers from the cauldrons.

Participants in the kurban rite believe that both their personal and communal welfare, fertility, prosperity and peace still profoundly depend upon the practice of this ritual. This is confirmed by the blessings of the villagers from Papavnitza, uttered during the kurban on the occasion of the holiday SS Constantine and Helen: “I gave money to St Constantine to bring health, not only for me, but for everybody, to bring peace and to make the young get married.” This is one of the reasons why the members of a particular community attend kurbans at their birthplace in great numbers, although many of them may not have lived there for long periods. That is why some of those who cannot come to the kurban offer a kurban in the place where they live now. Thus, one former inhabitant of Papavnitza, Radovish region, who had lived for 18 years in Switzerland slaughtered a kurban in his apartment and distributed its meat to three houses.

This attitude of members of a particular community towards the kurban shows another important function, the integrative role of the kurban and its significance for the community as a marker of personal and group identity.

The endurance of the kurban through time and all the changes in the society, and its functioning as an important segment of the life of the Macedonians is due to its adaptability and flexibility. The kurbans in the villages of Pavleshintsi in Ovche Pole, Martoltsi near Veles and Papavnitza near Radovish are examples of these characteristics of the kurban. The kurban on the feast of St Elijah in the village Pavleshintsi is slaughtered in front of the stone cross, above the village, where the ritual meal was distributed and consumed just a few years ago. Today, the kurban — a calf — is still butchered at the same stone cross, but it is cooked and consumed at several places in the village. In fact, each neighbourhood has its own cauldron and a table. This change is due to the fact that the stone cross is on the hills above the village, about 20 minutes walk away. Most of the present inhabitants of the village of Pavleshintsi are old and could not walk so far. That is why it was decided that the young people from the village would slaughter the kurban at the stone cross and bring the raw meat to the village, divide it among the neighborhoods where it would be cooked

and eaten, while the rest of the rite is the same as it used to be at the place of sacrifice.

Up to 2002, in the village of Martoltsi, the kurban for the feast of St Athanasius (January 31) was served at the place of sacrifice in the village centre. Since then, the meat is only cooked in water there, and then each family prepares a meal at home, as they wish. A diminishing and aging population is the cause of this change.

As the village of Papavnitza, Radovish region, was abandoned in the 1980's, the family kurban was replaced by a communal one. The former inhabitants of the village prepare the kurban on the feast of SS Constantine and Helen, or on St Constantine, as they call it, but the slaughtering, the preparation and the consuming of the ritual meal is collective.

Examples showing the persistence, adaptability and profound need for keeping the kurban ritual among the Macedonians are numerous, but depict its actual status clearly enough. One thing is certain, that the kurban ritual would have disappeared from the traditional culture of the Macedonians if it were not for the enormous power it exerts upon their entire lives.

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*Smiljana Djordjević, Belgrade*

## **DUŠNO: BLOOD SACRIFICE IN THE POSTHUMOUS CUSTOMS OF COLONIST SERBS IN OMOLJICA**

### **1. Notes on methodology**

Field research in Omoljica was carried out on several separate occasions between 2004 and 2007. The objective of the team, composed of researchers from various disciplines, was to gather a wide range of material which would serve a variety of purposes and provide a basis for further studies in ethnolinguistics, folkloristics, sociology, anthropology and dialectology.

My own field research in Omoljica was primarily directed at the problems of acculturation of Serb colonists from western Serbia. There was no fixed questionnaire, so the narratives elicited cover various thematic points (oral history — the ‘colonist’ story, traditional culture, autobiographical stories and folklore).

This paper represents a part of the material coming from four interviews, in the text marked by numbers 1–4. It describes and analyses one element from the system of posthumous customs which form part of the traditional culture of Serb colonists in Omoljica. In the perception of the informants, this ritual is key in defining the difference of one’s own culture in relation to that of others (mainly native Serbs, followed by Romanians, Roma, Bulgarians and Muslims). More attention, therefore, was devoted to analysing the interviews from the anthropological aspect: how the local micro-identity of an ethno-cultural community is formed.

A model of the custom was formed by fitting together elements from the testimonies of different informants. It cannot give an objective picture but is rather an abstraction derived from various subjective constructions. As informants differed in gender, level of education, language and cultural competence, the need arose to point out differences in the perception of one’s own culture and its peculiarities as conditioned by these factors.

### **Informants from Omoljica**

DJ — born 1930 in Uzovnica, settled in Omoljica in 1946, no formal education (interviewed by S. Djordjević in June 2006);

VJ — born 1930 in Uzovnica (husband of DJ), settled in Omoljica in 1946, no formal education (interviewed by S. Djordjević in June 2006);

OT — born 1933 in Carina (Pecka), settled in Omoljica in 1946, university education (degree in agriculture) (interviewed by S. Djordjević in June 2006);

MJ — priest in Omoljica, originally from western Serbia (interviewed by B. Sikimić and M. Ilić in 2004);

IJ — born near Mali Zvornik, settled in Omoljica in 1946, no formal education (interviewed by S. Djordjević in February 2007).

### **2. Omoljica: an ethnic and cultural mosaic**

The settlement of Omoljica is located on the outer edge of the loess terrace of south Banat in the province of Vojvodina, 16 km southeast of Pančevo. The long history of this settlement (there is information on Omoljica dating back to the Neolithic and Bronze ages, and to the Celtic and Roman eras) has been marked by frequent mass movements of the population.

It is assumed that the present village formed after the migration of the Serbs led by Arsenije Čarnojević in 1690 (Ratković 1964: 41, according to Bukurov 1970: 18). In the autumn of 1717, Germans arrived and settled in Omoljica. They were mostly miners and craftsmen from the Tyrol, Carinthia, Silesia, the Czech lands, the upper reaches of the Danube and the middle Rhine (Jankulov 2003: 9).

In 1764, the native Serb population was augmented by an influx from the Marches of the Tisa-Moriš basin which formed a military border. Between 1765 and 1768 more Germans arrived, mostly veterans and war invalids from Alsace-Lorraine, and the Ilyrian-Banat and German-Banat border regiments were formed. In 1767, Omoljica became the centre of a German company, a fact which, according to some sources, caused some of the Serbs to move to Dolovo in 1774 (Bukurov 1970: 18). A new wave of Germans arrived in Omoljica two years later (1776), but since the old settlement was endangered by the waters of the Danube, they moved to higher ground, thus forming the present-day village (Bukurov 1970: 18). In the wake of the Austro-Hungarian war (1788–1790), 334 families arrived from Serbia. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century Serbs from Lika and a number of Croatian families settled in Omoljica. The arrival of Romanians in

1783–1784 from Žitište (when it fell under the rule of the Ottoman spahis), and of Roma, increased the ethnic diversity (Bugarski et al. 1996: 60–61; 194–195, Ćurčić 2004: 345, Bukurov 1970: 17–18, Jankulov 2003: 31, 50).

Major demographic change followed World War II with far-reaching consequences. The Germans, who along with the Romanians had up to that time comprised the largest ethnic group after the Serbs, were moved out, creating room for settlers from western Serbia.<sup>1</sup> From the Azbukovica, Radjevina, Jadar, Mt. Cer and Mačva areas, from the Sava and Tamnava river valleys, 336 households, or 1,795 people, were resettled (Bugarski et al. 1996: 195).

According to the latest population census (2002), Serbs comprise 90% of the population in this place. Other notable ethnic groups are the Romanians (1.2%, 79 inhabitants), the Hungarians (0.9%, 61 inhabitants). Only 27 inhabitants (0.4%) declared themselves as Roma, 74 (1.1%) as Macedonians, and 18 (0.3%) as Croats.<sup>2</sup>

Today, more than sixty years after the settling of the Serb colonists, an awareness still exists of the different origins. This is even more marked by the clear spatial demarcation between the different cultures. The Serb colonists were allotted houses which formerly belonged to the Germans, while the native Serbs live mainly in a part of the village called Zlatica. Since the German community used to inhabit the centre of the village (in which there was also a Catholic church, torn down after the war), and this community was both economically and culturally dominant and more advanced than the Serb one, a certain spatio-cultural inversion has taken place. The semantics of the spatial positioning and of a border has been vi-

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<sup>1</sup> The emigration of the German population had already begun in the early inter-war period, after the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Đurđev 1986: 111). It is estimated that from the beginning of World War II to the census of 15 March 1948, the number of Germans in Vojvodina decreased by about 300 thousand. The largest number of Germans from Vojvodina moved away in the autumn of 1944, while of approximately 75 thousand in prisoner-of-war camps the majority left when the camps were disbanded. The emigration of the German population was justified by claims that they had “behaved like typical fifth-columnists”, fought in Wehrmacht units and committed crimes (Gaćeša 1984: 404). The fact is, however, that the civilian German population also perished in these camps (see Janjetović 2004). In the discourse of Serb colonists on the Germans (in Omoljica) there is a feeling of latent discomfort. The narrators have recourse to strategies of rationalisation — the Germans left of their own accord and had demanded to leave — and/or a minimisation of one’s own supposed benefit at the cost of the unfortunate German community.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that there are also Bayash living in Omoljica. They are Roma, members of the Romanian culture and language. As there is no possibility for them to ethnically declare themselves in this manner, they are not recorded in the censuses. On the issue of Bayash ethnic identity, see Sikimić 2005a.



olated, or rather re-defined. This inversion of the social order is vividly illustrated by the recollections of OT:

(SDj: *Do you recall how the locals here received the colonists?*) OT: Well, you know how, how they received us... Some of them received us very well. When we arrived we were well received by those who were 'activists'. But, upon my word, some of them were never glad to see us. To this day, even when these political parties started up, they said: — You'll end up stuck across the Danube... I don't know why, but they never accepted us. Although, when the colonists arrived, when they settled in, they were from various areas, they were very loud, while the natives here were quiet people. We must have seemed almost like wild people, when we arrived here among them. And they were very quiet. Because there used to be Germans here who were very civilised, they took on a lot from them. I was told by one of their natives that the locals here were compared to the Germans like the Gypsies are compared to all other people... Well, when we colonists arrived, then we were the ones...

### 3. Blood sacrifice in posthumous customs

#### 3.1 Ethnographic sources

The custom which forms the subject of this paper is the ritual sacrifice of an animal, usually a sheep or a ram, on the commemoration of the fortieth day of a death, or on the day of a funeral. Classic ethnographic sources testify to the existence of a blood sacrifice in the system of posthumous customs throughout the South Slav area. The area from which the colonists in Omoljica originally came was the central part of the western South Slav lands (central and east Bosnia, west and central Serbia), a fairly compact region as far as the terminology of the custom is concerned (it is connected to the concept of the soul — *duša*). The sacrificial animal is called the (*po*)*dušni brav* (a ram or wether) or *dušno* (Plotnikova 2004).

The sparse data in ethnographical sources pertaining to Radjevina, Jadar and Azbukovica help to reconstruct the model thus:

#### a) the sacrifice

The sacrificed animal is a white sheep or ram, whose gender corresponds to the gender of the deceased (the region of Azbukovica — Trojanović 1911: 89–90; the region of Jadar — Jeftić 1964; the region of Radjevina — Djurdjev 1988: 55–56).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The sacrifice of a goat (and often a pig) is mentioned in several ethnographic sources as strictly forbidden. — “The meat for the soul (*zaduša*) has to be lamb or beef. Pork or goat's meat should never be taken to the grave for *zaduša*.” — the region of Skopska Crna Gora (Petrović 1907: 488, 494); “The *podušni brav* should be male for the a male, and female for a female. A nanny goat or a kid should never be slaughtered for the

According to ethnographic sources, the animal's age should also correspond to the age of the deceased (it must be a 'horned' ram).<sup>4</sup> In this way, the animal becomes a sort of double of the deceased.

b) the time of sacrifice in the system of posthumous customs

Ethnographic sources for northwest Serbia speak of the connection of this custom to different points in the system of posthumous customs: the fortieth day commemoration (Radjevina area — Djurdjev 1988: 55–57; called *četresnica* in the Jadar area, Jeftić 1964: 437–439), the day of the funeral — if a *mrsna daća* (funeral feast with meat) in which the *dušno* along with the *koljivo* (wheat cooked, sweetened, flavoured with walnuts and blessed) is the most important element, is held on the day of the funeral (Jadar area, Jeftić 1964: 437–439).

c) synopsis of the customs

- the *vodeničar* (server at a funeral or *daća*) on returning from church where he took the *koljivo* to be blessed, slaughters the *dušno*;
- the *vodeničar* first takes the *koljivo* that has been prayed over in church, sticks a candle in it and lights it;
- the woman of the house (or one of the family members) presents him with a gift (usually a towel or a shirt);
- after the giving of the gift the woman of the house takes the wheat and holds it above the head of the sacrificial animal (Djurdjev 1988: 56); in some cases a candle is lighted on the ram's right horn (or beside the head in the case of a ewe), and the rest of the candle is thrown into the fire on which the food is prepared for the *daća*, the funeral feast (Jeftić 1964: 437); the candle must burn until the slaughtered wether is completely still;
- the *dušni brav* is cut up and all of it is cooked;
- when it is time to go to the cemetery, the *vodeničar* goes first and in his bag he carries the right shoulder-joint of the *dušni brav*, some garlic, a round loaf of bread and a bottle of brandy; the food at the cemetery is eaten with fingers;

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*dušni brav*, nor a black sheep, or a black ram killed, but rather take care that the sheep is white" (Trojanović 1911: 89–90).

<sup>4</sup> According to contemporary data from western Serbia (Lozničko Polje), the sacrificial animal has to be more than one year old, a sheep that has lambed. If the deceased is a younger person (a child, a youth or young girl) then a sheep that has never lambed is sacrificed, or a young ram. The significance of the deceased's age in the choice of the animal to be sacrificed is also indicated by data from Kosovo Polje (Debeljković 1907:240). According to this author, for children under the age of ten a sheep is not slaughtered.

- the skin of the *dušni brav* is placed in a sack under the table on which the food for the funeral feast is laid.<sup>5</sup>

Ethnological interpretations of this custom tend to differ. The sacrifice of a sheep (usually accompanied by the prohibition on sacrificing a goat) according to T. R. Djordjević signifies a clean/unclean opposition. Djordjević also points to the closeness of such a concept to the Christian tradition and its reception in traditional culture (Djordjević 1958: 190–192, cf. Zečević 1982: 49; cf. Rečnik slovenske mitologije (Dictionary of Slav Mythology) *koza* [goat]). S. Zečević interprets the elements of ritual slaughter such as the obligatory candle in the context of the importance of the role of light in the cult of the dead. With the candle, the wether lights the deceased's way to the other world (Zečević 1982: 49). To V. Čajkanović the *dušni brav* represents one of the elements of a sacrificial meal for the deceased, the sacrifice of a white sheep is analogous to the rules of sacrifice in cults of the divine, and the obligation for the *dušni brav* to be entirely eaten (so that not even the intestines remain) is a counterpart of the 'burnt offering' (Čajkanović 2003: 69).

### 3.2 *Dušno* in Omoljica as seen by the informants

Information obtained from informants in Omoljica does not entirely coincide with the model supplied by ethnographic sources.

- On the 40<sup>th</sup> day commemoration (forty days, *daća*<sup>6</sup>) the *dušno* ceremony is held.<sup>7</sup> If the *daća* is held on the day of the funeral then the *dušno* is also slaughtered on that day. The animal sacrificed is a ram or a sheep, there is no difference even if a child dies: (*And let's say, if a small child dies?*) (IJ: *The same. Male or female, the same is given...*) [1], and in the informants' accounts there is no particular mention of the colour

<sup>5</sup> According to contemporary data from western Serbia (Lozničko Polje), the blood of the animal is collected and buried with the bones. Formerly, the skin was usually sold and the money donated to the church. As nowadays the skin would be difficult to sell and the price would not amount to much, it is always buried together with the bones and blood.

<sup>6</sup> The term *daća* is usually taken to mean the fortieth day commemoration of the deceased.

<sup>7</sup> Ethnographic literature does not specify whether the designated object is the entire sacrificial animal or some of its parts (except for the mention of the right shoulder-joint in Djurdjev 1988: 56). The accounts of informants from Omoljica lead to the conclusion that the designated object is the entire sacrificial animal, especially the lights (or right shoulder-joint).

white. The *dušno* has to stay overnight in the house of the deceased (if it is bought), and is sacrificed in the morning.

- In the morning, first three plates of cooked and sweetened wheat with walnuts are taken to the church (*penaija* [3] / *panaija* [4], *žito*[1], [3], [4]<sup>8</sup>, *pšenica* [2]).<sup>9</sup> The priest reads the prayer and pours wine over the *koljivo*.
- The *dušno* is always slaughtered in the yard of the deceased's house (*It is slaughtered in the yard, in the yard of the house in which the man died. It cannot be slaughtered in someone else's house, it has to be in that particular yard* [3]). On returning from church, *koljivo* is first partaken of and a candle is stuck in it and lit. A white towel is placed over the *dušno*. Then incense is burned over it and it is dedicated to the deceased by the verbal formula: *Nek mu je pred dušu* — Let it go before his soul [2]. One of the *redare* (women who cook and serve at funerals and *daćas*) holds the *koljivo* with the candle over the head of the *dušno*. The *dušno* is slaughtered by the *aščija*. The *aščija* plays a central role in the funeral rites (*The other things that are slaughtered, this can be done by some other man, only this is obligatory, this chief one who leads that funeral... He is consulted about everything...; And the one that invites people [to the funeral], he slaughtered the dušno* [3]). The household members present the *aščija* with socks, a towel and drink.
- The lights of the *dušno* are prepared separately (chopped up and fried). The right shoulder-joint can serve as a substitute. The rest of the *dušno* is cooked or roasted (the informants themselves see the roasting as a kind of innovation to the custom).
- The *dušno* is eaten at the cemetery after the honey, round bread, garlic and *koljivo*.<sup>10</sup> Informants' accounts indicate a ritual element in the order in which the sacrificial meal is taken (*it goes from person to person in order as they stand around the grave. You cross yourself and take some, cross yourself and take some...* [3]). Although not

<sup>8</sup> The term *žito* (wheat) appears as a part of the meta-textual commentary to explain the term *koljivo* (cooked and sweetened wheat with walnuts), e.g. IJ: *and one koljivo, as a koljivo for that man, that's wheat* [1].

<sup>9</sup> The term *pšenica* (wheat) is confirmed only in the discourse of the priest, MJ, who also uses the term *koljivo* [2].

<sup>10</sup> It is compulsory to give the deceased three *koljivos*. Of this, the one that is given at the funeral is counted as the first.

emphasized by the informants, it can be assumed that at the cemetery the *dušno* is taken and eaten with the fingers.

- On return from the cemetery the hands are wiped with the towel which covered the sacrificial animal prior to the ritual sacrifice. This towel is presented to the *aščija*.<sup>11</sup>
- The hide of the *dušno* is placed in a sack. The sack lies under the table on which the food prepared for the *daća* is set. Before the ritual supper, the cut-up meat of the *dušno* is brought out, incense is burned over it and a prayer is read.
- According to the informants, there is no burying of the *dušno*'s hide and bones.
- It is believed to be good to eat the *dušno*, and also all the rest of the food prepared for the *daća*. The left-over food is given to the guests to take home.

It is difficult to establish with certainty whether the differences observed are a consequence of territorial displacement of customs or whether it is because of diachronic change. Classic ethnographic sources hardly ever supply information on the exact spot where the facts were recorded or on any minimal differences which might be expected from place to place. A special problem is the fact that the colonists in Omoljica originally came from different villages and so cannot be considered as an absolutely homogenous community.<sup>12</sup>

The absence of burying of the bones, blood and skin of the *dušno*, the simplification of the choice of sacrificial animal (no care is taken that the animal's years should correspond to the age of the deceased),<sup>13</sup> then the roasting of the *dušno* instead of boiling it, could indicate a certain level of reduction and partial desacralisation of the ritual.

### 3.2.1. Social roles and metatext

The model thus defined represents an abstraction, a synthetic image acquired by blending the views of different informants with subjective in-

<sup>11</sup> Information on presenting the towel to the *aščija* and using the towel for the wiping of hands after returning from the cemetery was received from different informants. It is not entirely clear whether these two elements of the custom occur together or if there are possible minimal differences.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. for example the statement of informant OT: *With some it is the custom to also set forks and spoons, knives, and with some it is the custom, from village to village, not to set either forks or knives. Just spoons...* [3].

<sup>13</sup> This information was received from informant IJ who provided abundant and reliable testimony on the elements of traditional culture.

terpretations of the ritual text. The testimonies differ according to how informed they are, the degree of narrative development (which also depends on how motivated the informant is to speak on the subject required by the researcher), the positioning of the informant, his or her possible experience of having participated in the ritual, and the relation towards one's own traditional culture (trust or distance).

### 3.2.1.1. "I was a *redara* (cook) in many places": Between the position of actor and neutral model

The testimony of informant IJ was exceptionally reliable from the dialectological standpoint, as was her knowledge of traditional culture. She has a very positive relationship with traditional culture and is well acquainted with its 'hidden' aspects (magic, elements of belief etc) and, which is probably most important, she is willing to speak about them openly. To her, traditional culture is not something which belongs to the past, it is an active living part of her, with the addition of certain innovations, of course. IJ is known in Omoljica and the vicinity as "the woman who takes away fear" (a magic practice), and 'clients' contact her on a telephone of which she is extremely proud, because it has the capacity to memorise missed calls.

The picture formed by IJ is reliable and precise. It specifies how the sacrificial animal is selected, provides indications of a time code, the locus and a dense narrative explanation of the action code and implements. The actors are not clearly defined ("one person holds it"), and the impersonal constructions used in delineating the picture produces a somewhat neutral model:<sup>14</sup>

[1.1.] IJ: I was a *redara* in many places. How is it done? For instance, the *dušno* is bought. If it's a male, a ram is bought, if it's a female then a ewe is bought. The *dušno* is brought to the man of the house's place in the evening, and there it spends the night. In the morning a candle is lit, and the candle is placed on the *dušno*, and a *koljivo*, as a *koljivo* for that man, that's wheat (...), a small candle in the wheat, and it is placed over the *dušno*, one person holds it. And then the ram is slaughtered. And then the skin is taken off and put in a sack. And the lights of the *dušno* are cut in small pieces and this is taken to the cemetery for the people to eat at the funeral, and then, this is taken first. It is taken when the man is buried, first honey and round bread is taken, and garlic. Then the *koljivo* is taken, this is given out, and if it's forty days then there's one more and two, for the forty days this is how it goes. And some roast the *dušno*, some cook it. It depends. *Dušno*. They, er, that *dušno*, it should be...

<sup>14</sup> The use of an impersonal construction may have been a reaction to the researcher's question which was formed in the passive.

Another question from the researcher, who by this time had picked up some knowledge of the field, produced more specification of time, actors and implements in posthumous customs:

[1.2.] (SDj: *And can you explain this to me, you told me just now when you were speaking about the dušno, you said this is done for forty days?*) IJ: Yes, but it depends. For example, you don't actually wait forty days, it is always held earlier. But it depends, for example, if someone wants to hold it immediately. Then he buys the dušno, holds it immediately, at the time of the burial, or on the eve. Others won't. And those who want to, hold the forty days. I waited for forty days and then I held this same dušno. This is how it's done with us. No, but you see, it's not the same with everyone, for example with the Bulgarians it's not done, they don't have dušno... And with us Serbs there is the dušno... (*And when it is slaughtered, there is a white towel?*) Yes. You place a towel on it. One towel, or you wrap up that candle. You also put out the koljivo, you put out everything, and a woman holds it from below. And he slaughters the ram and then he removes it... So that's the dušno for you... And that's why a towel is placed. And this towel which is placed, later on they wipe their hands on it on returning from the cemetery... There... (*And where do you put that towel?*) On the ram from above when it's being sacrificed. (*Like that?*) Yes. Yes, yes. It is placed on top. (*And who holds it?*) Well one person holds it, one of those redaras holds it, the redaras who do the cooking, they hold it.

The truthfulness of the testimony is accentuated by the mention of personal experience, the role of the actor/participant:

[1.3.] IJ: I was a redara in many places.

[1.4.] IJ: I was a redara in many places. When I started working in a firm, afterwards I couldn't manage it. I worked in a firm, and I couldn't just leave. I had to earn my pension, then I had to, it was more important to me to earn my pension than to go to some wake or other and be a redara. Very sorry, but...! I used to before I began working, but when I started working, you just can't do that! I've got more important things to do than do that for you! Find another woman and that's it! However, I did all that, because I also worked at the cemetery. I actually worked at the cemetery, where the funerals are actually carried out. Because there are many of those, those kinds. I watched this, how people do it, how...

Through the position of the actor the emotional relation is also revealed:

[1.5.] IJ: Well, yes, yes, I couldn't watch that, yes... I said: — Just don't give me the dušno. Even if I am the redara, I don't like watching while the dušno is slaughtered. I can't. I can't do it, because I feel sorry.

The discourse also offers a testimony on the preservation of characteristic, very archaic elements in the complex of posthumous customs (the suit as a substitute for the deceased, belief in the presence of the deceased during the ritual meal).

[1.6.] (SDj: *And tell me what is done with the skin afterwards?*) IJ: Afterwards the skin is brought in when supper is set in the evening, it is brought in in a sack and placed under the table. Then the table is set, for example here, at the head of the table a plate is set, when the table is being set, and everything is placed for him, for the deceased that has died. And it's placed underneath. And it's put there and it stays there. His whole suit is there, his suit, coat and such, like my jacket right there, all that is hung [there], on that chair, and it stays there. And underneath there is that, then it is read, what-you-may-call-it, someone comes and reads. And the skin is there, then afterwards the skin is removed. And afterwards you can throw it away, you can pluck it, some people pluck it for the wool, you know. Then afterwards the skin is thrown away, you know, they don't need it afterwards. That's after the daća. And when it's the dušno, when that happens, when they slaughter, for instance, when there's the burial, when it's the funeral, if they don't have a daća, then they don't slaughter the dušno. They only slaughter piglets, or if it's a time of fasting, they buy fish, and make lenten fare. If it's not a fast, then they prepare meat, piglets are slaughtered, poultry, broth, soup, what have you, what's prepared. This is laid on the table and again that suit of his stays there, and everything is laid out for him.

As IJ sees it, the complex of established ritual procedures is not without certain internal developments, a trust in tradition, acceptance of the customs not as a social obligation but as a series of actions of sacral character and significance. The neutrality of the model is disrupted by the pragmatic judgement (cf. [1.1.] — *That dušno, it should be...*) indicating the desirability of respecting a custom accepted by tradition and a personal subjective belief in its rightness and indispensability. In oral collective knowledge a firm system of regulations has been formulated for ritual behaviour. It functions on the principle of opposite pairs such as good/not good, allowed/not allowed:

[1.7.] IJ: The more of the dušno that's eaten, the better, you understand. And for instance when you go to a forty days, it's not allowed to prepare an empty bag for anyone... A little of the meat is put in, a little of the pork, a little of the dušno, a little of the pie is put in, you take away a little of what you brought, what have you, a cake is put in, no way, no one is given back an empty bag. And for instance, when the pigs are slaughtered, and what remains, that is not put in the freezer, that's not good, it's prepared immediately.

The dedication of the sacrifice (and the entire ritual supper) to the deceased is indicated by the verb 'dedicate' (*brought many things and ded-*



*icated them* [1.8.]). Not naming the place where the deceased is now dwelling, ‘the other world’, may point to an original taboo on pronouncing the deceased’s name or anything connected to him (*The more he eats, like, the better it is over there* — [1.8.], cf. also [1.6.]).<sup>15</sup>

The affirmation of all elements of the traditional model in the discourse of IJ culminates in a digression which, although she cites a newspaper article as its source, comes in the form of a classic folklore subject on punishment in ‘the other’ world which corresponds to the gravest sins in ‘this one’:

[1.8.] IJ: The more he eats, like, the better it is over there... Ajde (come on)... I read a newspaper. A woman was describing her mother-in-law. She said that the mother-in-law was so spiteful that she never gave anything to anyone... And the old woman dies. But she hadn’t died, and some Gypsy woman came along, and asked her to cut a head of cabbage to cook for her child. And the old lady was sorry to cut the cabbage, but, all right, she took one with bird droppings on it... And she cut it. Yes, she, you know... And when, and her daughter-in-law was good, she gave to everyone, she hid it all and gave to everyone, she gave food and drink to everyone, you know. But the other one gave to no one! She was some kind of idiot. And the old woman dies... And she comes to her [in a dream], she came to her every night. She says: — Please give me, she says, at least one sofa [a table laid with food for the dead], you have, she says, a lot there, and I only have that cabbage with bird droppings on it that I gave to the Gypsy (...) She brought many things there and dedicated them [to the dead], and she invited those, you know, poor people, to eat it, and they ate it... And on the second night she dreamt of her: — Well, thank you, daughter-in-law, she says. You gave me, now I too have, she says, a full sofa... So, it doesn’t do to be spiteful, never hide things, if someone is hungry give it to him... Always give...

### 3.2.1.2. “And I read it, there is a special prayer for that”: The participant’s perspective

MJ, the priest in Omoljica and originally from western Serbia, constructs an entirely different picture. He depicts his active role in certain segments of the customs as that of regulator, a central actor:

[2.1.] MJ: And then it’s read, if it’s forty days, in the morning it is brought to the church, I read it, there is a special prayer for it, three candles are lit, wine is poured over it, they take it back with them, and then a candle is lit in the first wheat...

[2.2.] MJ: And then they cut it up, and then I tell them: — Ajde, you should have cut that up earlier. — And then, if I’m there, then I read the prayer, then they bring out the dušno in a pot, like that, and they bring out a whole

<sup>15</sup> For the taboo on naming the deceased, see Ćirković 2005: 171.

piglet, I don't want them to carve it. And then I wave incense over it, the prayer is read and they remove it, and then they put the round loaf there, you have to ask if you want me to read the prayer for blessing, because they have to bring out the bread. And then they bring out a plate of meat and soup, and I immediately read the prayer over the food, so that they don't have to get up twice, and afterwards they remove it and set out the food for everyone.

The I/they relationship implies a certain hierarchical opposition in which one's own role is represented as the dominant one, the justified position of one in possession of 'additional knowledge' (seeing that as a priest he had also been in western Serbia — cf. [2.2.]). The role of regulator also implies the status of 'censor' who preserves the assumed original 'purity' of the custom:

[2.2.] MJ: I had the good fortune, I was there, and so I personally saw the custom, to uphold it completely, and so... That's it, that's it, everything according to the rules...

[2.3.] MJ: Srbijanci [Serb settlers from Serbia] hold the forty days, they slaughter a dušno. For the half-year they bring out [a gift for the deceased] to the cemetery, I'll read the memorial service, but at the cemetery, and for the year's commemoration, and for the year's commemoration, they come out to the cemetery and hold a memorial service.

The connection between the dead and the living is made explicit in the explanation of several elements of ritual practice.<sup>16</sup> Dedicating the sacrifice to the deceased is connected to the, in traditional culture extremely complex, concept of sin in relation to not fulfilling obligations toward the deceased:

[2.4.] MJ: All three wheats, all three, the koljivo, the wheat signifies forty days, half a year and a year. Yes. Because the wheat signifies life after death, without death there is no life, and so on.

[2.5.] (MI: *And what did you say, that a towel is placed on the sheep, when is that placed?*) MJ: That is a gift to the deceased, and then it is placed, it is intended for his soul.

[2.6.] MJ: It is alive, and that is tradition, it mustn't be omitted. He takes that as being a mortal sin...

<sup>16</sup> Informant DJ judges the sense of the ritual in a similar way. In her statement, however, some uncertainty is perceptible, a degree of scepticism. This is corrected by her husband who points to the desirability of respecting the traditional model: (DJ: *This is the dušno... The main thing... Listen, there's nothing there. They [the dead] don't see anything, they don't hear anything, they neither see nor...*) (VJ: *Well, all right, that's how the custom is.*) (DJ: *Yes, the custom. There is something, there's something there...*)

### 3.2.1.3. "They count that as *dušno*": Testimonies from the border

OT was not a suitable informant for dialectological analysis, as her language is close to standard speech, probably owing to her education in Šabac and Zemun. In her discourse there is a certain instability in attitude towards the community to which she belongs. Colonisation as the topic of the interview gives the informant a sense of belonging to the colonist group (OT: *We were settled as colonists here...*). This is not questioned even when it means ascribing negative traits.

OT: Although, when the colonists arrived, when they settled in, they were from various areas, they were very loud, while the natives here were quiet people. We must have looked almost like wild people when we arrived here among them. And they were very quiet (...) Well, when we colonists arrived, then we were the ones...

However, a certain distancing is perceptible with topics touching on posthumous customs. This is probably also due to the fact that the informant herself respects some elements of the burial customs and takes part in them in a very reduced form. The sacral significance is replaced by a kind of social obligation:

[3.1.] (SDj: *And for the zadušnice* [a commemoration of the dead, similar to All Souls, occurring three times a year among the colonists in Omoljica] *do people go to the cemetery?*) OT: *Zadušnice*, there is the winter one, I don't know exactly on what date in February, er, then everybody goes, it's a big thing, crowds go [to the cemetery]... Well now, there's some spring one, some summer one. I don't know where they got that one from, for the main part, they say, there are the autumn and the spring ones... And this, of course, the winter one, this is obligatory, everybody goes... People go in droves, the whole cemetery is covered with people... (*Is food taken?*) Everything is taken. They even roast a hen, they come and set it out, and sit down, and eat. Different people in different ways. Mostly, er, for food, they take a little cake, a little fruit, a little of that, a little of this, cured meat, then, actually everything you can eat is taken to the *zadušnice*, the winter one, of course. And the summer one, to tell you the truth I don't know, er, I never went to it (...) (*You haven't done it?*) I go, but I usually bring flowers. I don't observe that, when I go. And on that day for the winter *zadušnice* everybody brings something and I'm ashamed not to bring anything, so I also take something, like that, some sweets, some...

When speaking of the *dušno* the informant shows a similar distance. The description of the rituals and implements connected to the killing of the *dušno* is somewhat unreliable, since the informant has probably never witnessed the act of sacrifice (OT: *I think that people carry a candle when*

*the slaughter takes place... When it is sacrificed, I'm not really sure, but, I haven't, I haven't...*). The degree to which she is informed and reliable increases when there is talk of the segments which take place at the cemetery and in the house of the deceased during the *daća* (since these are public elements of the ritual undoubtedly well known to the informant).

The picture formed is a neutral model (the use of impersonal constructions), however, the frequent use of the second person plural indicates a certain distance from the ritual described (the strategy of assigning to someone else the practices of a custom which are judged to be negative, or at least problematic from a personal standpoint).<sup>17</sup>

[3.2.] (SDj: *Is it slaughtered, the dušno?*) OT: It's slaughtered of course. That's regardless of whether they believe, not everyone believes, not everyone is a believer, but the Serbs always slaughter it, especially those colonists, er, it's obligatory, it's a fundamental thing... the *dušno*...

[3.3.] OT: When the deceased is buried, they, er, lay a tablecloth and set it again. The round loaf is obligatory, er, for the *daća* and for the funeral... Then the lights are taken. That's, they count that as being the *dušno*, that's the *dušno* for them.

[3.4.] (SDj: *After that there is no holding of the custom of forty days?*) OT: Yes, there is no forty days. They, for the forty days, they go to the cemetery and so on, the nearby neighbours are invited and so on, people go to the cemetery for the forty days, but nothing happens. All right, the host usually prepares a lunch and such, but there are none of the ceremonies, there's nothing for the forty days, when it [the sacrifice] takes place on the day of the funeral... So they mostly *observe*, since if there aren't many people in the family who can do it, there has to be a lot of people there to do it all, a lot of people have to be gathered, to be brought in, to be fed and all, on the day of the *daća*, on the day of the funeral... Since it's cheaper for him, it's one supper. He has to give a supper and so on and so forth, but a *dušno* has to be slaughtered in any case. And that's the difference from an ordinary supper. That he sacrifices the *dušno* and holds, like, a forty days...<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> On the strategy of 'assigning to another' a ritual practice which the speaker wishes to conceal in examples from an analysis of the discourse of Serbs from Trešnjevica, see Ilić 2005: 127.

<sup>18</sup> The use of the third person is not necessarily proof of distancing, but might be due to a personal tendency to construct a picture by ascribing an action to a person assumed to be a neutral actor. For an analysis of verb forms in describing the ritual of pouring water on Holy Thursday in villages in the Negotin area, see Ćirković 2005: 169–170. However, as our informant's attitude towards the entire complex of posthumous customs was not entirely positive, the premise that she used the third person in order to indicate her own rather doubtful approach seems to be justified, particularly in [3.3].

However, even besides an obvious or more covert attempt to distance herself from the community to which she belongs and its ritual practice, in OT's discourse there is an ever-present idea of the unusual and indisputable importance of this ritual (OT: *There has to be a slaughter. That's regardless of whether they believe, not everyone believes, not everyone is a believer, but the Serbs always slaughter, especially those colonists, er, it's obligatory, it's a fundamental thing... the dušno... — [3]*). The irrational power of the archaic mindset, evidently, cannot be entirely suppressed.

#### 4. Construction of the picture of 'the other' in the ethnographic key

Interviews on posthumous customs led as a rule to digressions on the relation of one's own cultural model and customary practice towards the cultural and custom models of other communities. As these digressions were spontaneous, not initiated by the researcher and were a regular occurrence, not remarks made in passing but very developed thematic segments, the assumption is that it is actually this custom that represents a very important demarcation point in defining the micro-identity of Serb colonists in Omoljica.<sup>19</sup>

The colonist perception of 'others' is extremely complex. The outward definition of identity (Jenkins 2001: 93–99) includes attitude towards 'other' members of the same ethnic community (local Serbs), towards the Romanian and Roma community, Bulgarians from neighbouring Ivanovo<sup>20</sup> and Muslims from Banatski Brestovac.<sup>21</sup> The discourse of Serb colonists about the Germans is quite specific since it is not the result of any personal experience of contact, and represents a reinterpretation of the picture provided through the prism of the memories of other inhabitants.

##### 4.1. Marking the differences: From neutral standpoint to stereotype

The relation towards a different custom practice is a gradated one. It is possible to mark and interpret the differences noted on a scale, from a comparatively neutral standpoint to the forming of a negative stereotype.

A neutral marking of differences grows into a leitmotif in IJ's discourse about the *dušno*. Something which is almost impossible to mark in the transcript, however, is her tone of mild questioning and wonder at the differences:

<sup>19</sup> On the construction of a community's local identity in the example of the Priluzje enclave, see Sikimić 2005. For the analysis of a picture of 'the other' in the example of the discourse of Serbs from Trešnjevica on Roma from the same village, see Ilić 2005.

<sup>20</sup> On Paulician Bulgarians in Ivanovo, see Vučković 2007. The author also provides an extensive list of relevant literature.

[1.9.] IJ: However, there are some parts which don't hold [the *dušno*]. For instance, the Bulgarians... My sister-in-law is a Bulgarian, so [I know]. She, her people, don't have the *dušno*. However, the Gypsies have a *dušno*... Now, as for the Muslims I don't know if they have it, I think that they have a *dušno*. But the Bulgarians don't, the Švabe [Germans] don't, the Romanians, they don't slaughter a *dušno* either... And we Serbs, we slaughter the *dušno*... (SDj: *And the natives?*) The natives as well. They do the same. They're partly from Montenegro, they're Montenegrins, and they slaughter a *dušno* too, and they do the same... But there, when my friend died recently, my sister-in-law's father, they didn't have a *dušno*...<sup>22</sup>

[1.10.]: IJ: This is the way with us... No, but you see, not everyone has it, for example the Bulgarians don't have it, they don't have the *dušno*... But we Serbs have the *dušno*...

[1.11.] IJ: The same. Male, or female, it's held in the same way. The *dušno*... with us Serbs. Well, now, the Muslims, I don't know, and these, the Bulgarians, they don't have it, the Švabe don't, the Romanians don't. They prepare it [a meal] in the ordinary way. With the Romanians the custom is different. For instance, now tonight someone of yours dies. We come to your house. We gather tonight. You will prepare supper, prepare it, and we all sit down and have supper. And when we go to the funeral, the man is buried, and everyone goes home. There is no feast after the burial. All that is done, is done then. And when it's forty days, only they go to the cemetery, the relatives, no one else. That's the way with the Romanians, I went to the Romanians because I have Romanians here, I do...

In the discourse of IJ there is a tendency not to segmentalise the ethnic identity (*And we Serbs we have the dušno...; the dušno... with us Serbs*). The dominant group in relation to which all the other informants usually position themselves are the native Serbs. The *we/they* opposition is built on minimal cultural differences which then become the foundation for the building of (negative) stereotypes which these two communities have formed in contact and dialogue with each other.<sup>23</sup>

Differences are most easily recognized and defined in the customs related to going to the cemetery, as a form of public ritual:

<sup>21</sup> Muslims from the Sandžak were resettled in Banatski Brestovac following World War II (Bugarski et al. 1996: 182–183).

<sup>22</sup> The informant's statement that the same custom is observed by the native Serbs in Omoljica does not correspond to the actual situation. The Muslims do not practise it either.

<sup>23</sup> The first generation of Serb colonists for the most part still speaks in the original dialect. These language differences, however, do not represent an obstacle to communication. The informants mostly perceive them as lexical.

[3.5.] OT: It's like at a wedding, almost, so many people, people are invited, especially with the Bosnians<sup>24</sup> and with these colonists... While these locals, they take it to church, I mean, what they prepare they take to church, and whether they invite anyone to supper after forty days I don't know rightly...

[3.6.] (SDj: *Is there some custom by which the colonists differ more from the natives here?*) OT: Well now, to tell the truth, there is no difference, so. Only perhaps with funerals. With the colonists everything is taken to the cemetery, and I believe that they don't carry, the don't carry any food... And I don't know about their daća, er, what they're like, but in any case they are not so, er, plentiful as with the colonists. With the colonists a lot of people come and that. With them [the natives] if someone comes, it is only the close family... They hold memorial services in the church... They prepare cakes and wheat, and that is taken to the church and the memorial service is held there. This is mostly the custom with them...

Describing a different custom practice is rarely devoid of certain emotional overtones. This attitude is marked by intonation (*But not them!*), explicit emotional reactions (e.g. laughter), lexically (the use of verbs which in context take on a negative meaning — not to stay behind at the cemetery after the funeral is interpreted as “running off”):

[4.1.] DJ: Not with the locals. They slaughter a goose, or a turkey, or... But not us! They wonder at the way we do it.

VJ: Well, there's no two ways about it, they, when they come to the cemetery and lower him into the grave, they run off home!

DJ: They, they, in a flash there's no one!

VJ: They turn around and leave.

DJ: They turn around... They don't even wait until he's buried. [laughs] You know!

VJ: Not with us. We wait until the end, and then the redare, the woman who's the redara and the one that is the aščija, a man, bring the food, a bit of roast, a bit of that, a little of everything and a tablecloth is laid down and over...

DJ: Yes, over the grave.

VJ: Over the grave and there, the panaija, and that (...) of wheat, and we eat the panaija, and (...) And afterwards another two, when it's a daća, then it's held.

DJ: But not them, just as soon as they lower him down, they run off!

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<sup>24</sup> The ethnonym *Bosnians* pertains to the settlers from Bosnia. Their arrival in Omoljica was not organised, they settled sporadically in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mostly following family ties.

VJ: Those Croats are,<sup>25</sup> Romanians, all that is...

DJ: And these locals really.

VJ: Well the locals, I mean. They got it, I suppose from these Švabe, from these...

DJ: Yes. From these. You know, they lived a little with the Švabe<sup>26</sup> and ...

In this kind of discourse, the digressions do not stop at establishing what the differences are but seek an explanation, duly found in assimilation with members of the other communities. This is seen as the suppression of one's own model and mere imitation of someone else's (*Those Croats are, Romanians, all that is...; They got it, I suppose, from these Švabe, from these...*). This is almost always judged negatively.

Emphasising one's own model as the 'right one' broadens into a stereotype based on the perception of ethnos or nation as an absolutely homogenous collective with the same language and customs (cf. [2.7.]). Whatever is found outside the model thus defined is thought to be proof of degeneration, moving away from an assumed original purity (cf. [2.8.]). This stereotype is augmented by the myth of the place of origin as an idyllic, promised land.

[2.7.] (MI: *And what does that mean — the dušno is slaughtered?*) MJ: A sheep [ewe]. Because this was an old woman. If it's a man then it's a male lamb, a sheep, or, I don't know, that's the custom of Loznica. The purest part of the custom, and the purest part of Serbia, brother, is from Loznica up to Valjevo, Šumadija, you know, up there. The same dialect, the same accent, the purest vocabulary. Our Vuk [Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, 1787–1864, linguist and major reformer of the Serbian language, born in the Jadar area] you know, the purest vocabulary, unique customs, the same way of celebrating the saints' days, the same way of proposing those toasts, everything completely the same, and that's what it's like here also...

[2.8.] MJ: Maria Theresa left some trace on them all the same. These people are, er, a little pharisaic, fond of a bit of pomp, a bit of that, a bit of pride. But a Serb Christian, on the other hand, has a soul, has gentleness, care for others, no lies, no haughtiness. They are, er, the locals are good people, but they have something decorative and fancy about them which we don't have.

<sup>25</sup> In the given context it is not entirely clear to whom the ethnonym *Croat* pertains. It is possible that it refers to a Croatian community from the next village of Starčevo. During the interview, the informant himself also mentioned that there were two or three Croatian families living in Omoljica. It should be mentioned that a similar ethnonym *Arvačani* functions in Omoljica as a demarcation for native Serbs believed to have come from Croatia.

<sup>26</sup> On the ethnonym *Švabe* in Hungary, where it is preserved to this day, see Janjetović 2004: 121.



Because someone else's feathers mean nothing to them. They also have the custom of forty days, but they hold a memorial service, and almost always in church, after forty days, after the half-year and after a year.

Different historical experience is seen as the crucial factor in the forming of differences (*Maria Theresa left some trace on them, all the same*). The external and internal definition of identity are in sharp contrast. To one's own group the desirable and positive attributes are ascribed, while the existence of anything seen as negative from an ethical point of view is denied. To 'the other' is ascribed the opposite axiological model (colonists / locals = real Christians / Pharisees = soul, gentleness, care for others / pride, pomp, fanciness). This one-dimensional picture is disrupted only for a moment by the comment: *the locals are good people*, by way of response to the presence of an invisible 'foreign voice', a momentary awareness of the possible incorrectness of the opinion being revealed to the researcher.<sup>27</sup>

The 'we' — 'they' relation can also correspond to the opposition 'village' — 'town' (or Omoljica — Pančevo):

[1.12.] IJ: There, for instance, in the town, nobody takes anything to the cemetery... Only candles are lit and goodbye! At the cemetery. And here we take [food] to the cemetery. Not there! At the gate! They wait at the gate, serve cake, whatever you want to eat, at the gate at the exit to the cemetery. That's how they do it in the town, and here we lay out [the meal] in the house. Well now, those who have close relatives in the town, they then go home, the close relatives, for example. They go home, eat, or they take them to a restaurant, and they pay for their dinner, and so on. Because the town is the town, and the village is the village!

## 5. Conclusion

The preservation of archaic elements in posthumous customs of Serb colonists in Omoljica (with a noticeable minimal reduction and desacralisation of some segments) testifies to the great stability and perseverance of this element of traditional culture. It is interesting to note that a different process has also been established in the field — the adoption of a 'found' ritual practice, e.g. *korindjanje* (a procession of children around the village on Christmas Eve). This could indicate the special importance of elements closely linked to the cult of the dead as a system which is most difficult and slowest to change.

<sup>27</sup> This discourse strategy which justifies the assumed questionability of one's own view towards 'the other' is described in Glasińska&Glasiński 2003: 852–854.

Dislocation has not, therefore, had any significant influence on the structure of the ritual practice, but it has contributed to its being perceived as an important factor in defining the micro-identity of the group. This topic frequently brought out an awareness of differences — from curiosity to stereotype. Speaking of the *dušno*, informants spoke indirectly about themselves, revealed their own relationship to tradition and to the community to which they belong. For a more complete analysis it would be useful to include the other perspective, the discourse of the other communities (especially local Serbs) on their own and colonist posthumous customs.

#### Note on local terms:

*Dušno*: 1. An animal sacrificed for the forty-days' commemoration of the deceased, or on the day of the funeral. Usually a ewe or a ram. 2. The lights of the sacrificial animal.

*Redara*: Woman who cooks and serves at funerals and funeral feasts (*daća*), not of the deceased's household. Among the Serb colonists of Omoljica, there are always three. At the forty-days' remembrance they receive an obligatory three gifts from members of the deceased's household, usually towels, stockings and material to make a skirt or dress.

*Aščija*: A server at funerals and *daća*. The man responsible for all aspects of the posthumous customs. Like the *redare*, he is not of the deceased's household. He also receives gifts, usually a shirt, socks and the like.

*Daća*: A funeral feast. Among the Serb colonists of Omoljica, it usually refers to the rituals linked to the forty-days' commemoration of a death.

*Zadušnice*: In the Orthodox calendar of the South Slavs, days of remembrance of all the dead. The rituals include a number of elements such as lighting candles, food sacrifice to the dead, taking candles to the cemetery and so on. Among the Serb colonists of Omoljica, this takes place three times a year.

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## About the Authors

Vladimir Bocev, MA, Museum of Macedonia, Skopje  
bocmuseu@freemail.org.mk

Svetlana Ćirković, MA, Institute for Balkan Studies of Serbian Academy  
of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade  
scirkovic@hotmail.com

Gerda Dalipaj, MA, Institute of Folk Culture, Tirana  
gerda\_dalipaj@yahoo.com.uk

Smiljana Đorđević, MA, Institute for Literature and Art, Belgrade  
smiljana78@yahoo.com

Rigels Halili, MA, Graduate School for Social Research, Institute of Philo-  
sophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Tirana — Warsawa  
rigelso@yahoo.co.uk

Petko Hristov, PhD, Balkan Ethnology Department, Ethnographic Institute  
with Museum at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia  
hristov\_p@yahoo.com

Katalin Kovalcsik, PhD, Institute of Musicology, Hungarian Academy of  
Sciences, Budapest  
kovalcsik@zti.hu

Margarita Karamihova, PhD, Balkan Ethnology Department, Ethnographic  
Institute with Museum at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia  
karamihova\_m@abv.bg

Tsvetana Manova, MA, History Museum, Pernik  
c.manova@mail.bg

Elena Marushiakova, PhD, Balkan Ethnology Department, Ethnographic  
Institute with Museum at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia  
studiromani@geobiz.net

Prof. Rachko Popov, PhD, Balkan Ethnology Department, Ethnographic Institute with Museum at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia  
eim\_ban@abv.bg

Vesselin Popov, PhD, Balkan Ethnology Department, Ethnographic Institute with Museum at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia  
studiromani@geobiz.net

Biljana Sikimić, PhD, Institute for Balkan Studies of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade  
biljana.sikimic@sanu.ac.yu

Andrey N. Sobolev, PhD, Institute for Linguistic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Sankt-Peterburg  
sobolev@staff.uni-marburg.de

Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, MA, Institute for Balkan Studies of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade  
annelia22@yahoo.com

Sanja Zlatanović, MA, Institute for Ethnography of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade  
szlat@eunet.yu

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