

CULT-RURAL

Promotion of a Cultural Area Common to European Rural Communities

"Culture 2000"

Framework Programme in Support of Culture

1st Transnational Workshop

Stockholm November 2006

Bulgarian Participation in the CULTRURAL Project

0. Introduction

Presentation of the National Museum of History

National Museum of History was founded in 1973 by a decision of the Bulgarian government. Until now, the NMH has accumulated enormous funds and functions as a treasury of national dimensions. It stores monuments and artifacts of world significance and is one of the largest museums on the Balkan Peninsula.

The first representative exhibition of the museum was arranged as a part of the celebration initiatives on the 1300 anniversary of the Bulgarian state. The exhibition encompassed 10 000 m², and was opened in 1984 in a sector of the Courts of Justice, especially reconstructed for the purpose. In 2000, the NMH shifted to Boyana, in the representative residential area at the foot of Vitosha Mountain. The present exhibition displays around 10000 artifacts on an area of 6000 m². It covers the history of civilizations that developed in the Bulgarian lands between the 7th millennium B.C. and mid-20th century. In the park surrounding the museum, lapidary monuments and aircraft from the 1980s when the Bulgarian army was still a member of the Warsaw Pact, are displayed. The 5th and the 4th centuries BC mark the golden age of the Thracian culture. Items of the Thracian toretics, grave offerings, numerous gold and silver treasures are exhibited in the museum. Each archaeological season surprises with sensational discoveries and amazing finds.

The medieval Bulgarian state strengthened in the 9th century and won recognition as the third empire in Europe, after the Byzantine and Frankish empires.

The creation of the Slavonic alphabet in 855 and the dissemination of the old-Bulgarian literacy by the two brothers Constantine-Cyril and Methodius was a revolutionary act in the context of the medieval European civilization.

The Preslav and Ochrid literary centers/schools established in the 10th century were of importance to the entire Slavic world.

In the time of the Ottoman domination, the Bulgarian people struggled to preserve their national identity and historical memory. The Bulgarian artistic

talent manifested itself in the field of the applied art and especially in goldsmith's produce. Magnificent icons and church plate, finely illustrated manuscripts, silver and gold ornaments as well as articles of daily life of the Bulgarians between the 15th and the 19th centuries are displayed in the museum rooms.

The period of the restored Bulgarian state is evidenced with various exhibits. The most attractive among them is the "Royal collection" from the Third Kingdom Royal Palace.

The ethnographic exhibition displays a great diversity of traditional costumes, various interesting decorations and pieces of embroidery, fabrics, knitwear, woodcarving, weaving and articles of everyday life.

The National Museum of History has 5 branches:

The "Boyana Church" museum, a medieval church (1257), a protected monument of culture on the world heritage cultural list of UNESCO.

The "St. John Theologian" Monastery of Zemen, an 11th century architectural monument in Central Western Bulgaria.

The "Radetski ship" National museum, the reconstructed Austrian ship, on the board of which the revolutionary poet-Hristo Botev and his detachment crossed the Danube in 1876 from Rumania to the Bulgarian bank to take part in the April Uprising and help the struggle of their compatriots against the Ottoman empire.

"Bulgaria and the Slavonic world" museum with ca. 100 000 exhibits.

"The Holy Forty Martyrs", a 9th century church in Veliko Turnovo, reconstructed in honor of the victory of the Bulgarian tsar Kaloyan over the ruler of Epirus Theodore Comnenos at Klokotnitsa in 1230. The tombs of tsar Kaloyan and St. Sava of Serbia have survived in the church.

The NMH staff numbers around 170 people, experienced professionals. The museum restoration and conservation laboratory is the largest in the country.

Presentation of the associated partner.

The **Academy of Balkan civilization** is a comparatively new non-governmental organization aiming at improving the quality and the efficiency of the Balkan and the European cultural cooperation; of the education in the country at all levels; for the integration of national research and educational programs and initiatives; for participation in projects and programs with regional and European dimension; enhancing the cooperation with national and international organizations that share common goals in the sphere of education, science, art, literature, ethnology and of culture in general.

In the period of 2003 – 2006 the Academy either participated or organized numerous scientific events in Velesino, Athens, Orestiada and Thebes (Hellenic

Republic), Nicosia (Cyprus), Nuremberg and Wirtsburg (Germany), Sofia (Bulgaria), Venice (Italy), Tirana (Albania) etc.

The Academy has published works of Greek writers (Vassilis Vasilikos, Thasos Athanasiadis, Ilias Simopoulos, Ino Balta and others), as well as the monograph of Prof. Kiril Topalov “Rakovski and Rigas in the Cultural-Historic Models of the Balkan Revival”, Veska Nikolaevska’s research “Life and Accomplishments of Natanail of Ohrid-Plovdiv”, the “Bulgarian Revival Poetry” anthology, “Collected Works of Hristo Botev” etc.

1. General concept. Definition and use of the following terms.

1.1. *Culture* (with emphases on the rural culture)

Bulgaria is situated in the center of the Balkan Peninsula, one of the most diverse geographical landscapes and fertile regions in Europe – a circumstance that predetermines the extreme wealth of cultural forms of lifestyle - the rural type of culture occupies a very significant place among them. After a period of dynamic migration, the old Slavs and Bulgarians, the two ethnic components of modern Bulgarian nation, did not develop nomadic culture as soon after they had arrived in the northern peripheral regions of Byzantium (7th c.), they founded a new Slavonic-Bulgarian state to the south of the Danube. For centuries, the population of Bulgaria suffered wars with Byzantium and other neighboring and distant antagonists. However, the Bulgarians developed reflexes of peaceful, active and biologically regenerate/reproductive lifestyle, rather than of a military one. We do not know much about the rural culture of both the Bulgarians and the Slavs from the time-period before the foundation of their state in 681. Indirectly, we can form opinion of certain features of this type of culture through evidences from Central Asia, the Bulgarians’ first and vast homeland or from the other Bulgarian states, smaller or larger in territory, of shorter or longer existence, founded in different places along their way to Europe. Recent researches based on new evidences revealed interesting parallels between certain ethnographic characteristics of the Bulgarian traditional culture and the traditional cultures of some peoples now inhabiting different regions of the former Russian empire. These shared cultural features as well as other historical evidences point at those peoples as the supposed successors of the one-time Bulgarian states that mark the road of the Bulgarians from Asia towards Europe. A historical example is one of the largest Bulgarian state formations, founded on the Volga riverbank before the old Bulgarians settled on the Balkan Peninsula. Even nowadays, the historical memory of the Volga Bulgarian state has survived among the indigenous population. Many of the archaeological evidences and ethnographic features that have come to us

through the tradition show astonishing similarities to those of the historical and the present Bulgarian population on the Balkans.

Bulgaria adopted Christianity in the 9th century. During the Middle Ages she was the second largest and most powerful state in Southeastern Europe after Byzantium. Her culture bridged the civilizations of Antiquity and Byzantium with that of the Slavonic world as the Bulgarian became the first literary, liturgical and official-administrative Slavonic language. Besides, as the emerging of Bulgarian humanitaristics, including ethnology entirely resulted from the European 19th century cultural and scientific development, it becomes clear why it shares the specificity of that development and why the terms “culture”, “heritage”, “sustainable development” can not be used otherwise than in the context of their European definition. In other words, the history of culture is identified to the greatest extend with the history of the socio-natural adaptation of man. The subject of culture is the spiritual and material creativity of the man in his striving to understand and interpret the world and to synchronize it with his daily material, socio-cultural and purely spiritual needs. That is, we have neither difference as to the proposed definition of the term nor have we any suggestions on its further precision.

Consequently, the traditional culture study (in the Bulgarian ethnology the term denotes mostly the rural culture - it dominated in the country up to the beginning of the 20th century, but many of its basic parameters have survived till nowadays) in the context of the Bulgarian ethnography from its very beginning in the second half of the 19th century has been mainly occupied with investigation of everyday life of the population in all its socio-anthropological aspects: organization of the village space and the homestead, the house furniture, crafts and occupations, food and clothing, jewellery, cosmetics and ornaments, transporting vehicles and ways of traveling, farming and stock-breeding, festivals and customs with the respective rituals, games and entertainments, expressive behavior, traditional knowledge, myths and legends, philosophy and religion, socio-normative culture, spiritual and material creative works. The verbal (folk)lore, musical and vocal performance, dancing, games and entertainment, dramatics and artistic crafts and traditional arts are the subject of the folkloristics, an extremely important component of ethnography with a number of its own characteristics allowing studies that are more specialized.

Partially this may be explained with both the total lack of institutions of cultural and especially of the artistic and creative life caused by the 5 centuries long civilizational syncope in the development of the Balkan nations under the Ottoman rule and the complete marginalization of the literary activity limited solely to the medieval-ecclesiastic literature until nearly the early 19th century and closed in the monastic periphery of the cultural area – a situation which made of the folklore almost the single form of aesthetic expression of the spiritual and creative (literary, philosophic, musical, artistic) genius of the

Balkan people. This compensatory function predetermined the amazing wealth of the Balkan, respectively of the Bulgarian folklore, a wealth much greater than the European Commonwealth where the folklore had purely accompanying function in the cultural development understood in the modern (individual and professional) sense of the word. Folklore there was often a quantitative and qualitative dominant but never of entirely compensatory function.

1.2. *Specific development feature* of the Bulgarian rural culture is the accumulation and infiltration of various elements characteristic of different ethnic and religious cultures. It is enough to mention here the fact that the population of the Bulgarian state on the Balkan Peninsula inherited rich and well-developed local cultures – and the mighty Thracian cultural tradition should be the first to mention among them. On the other hand, Bulgaria entered the Byzantine cultural and Christian area – a circumstance that challenged not only the cultural mode of life of the upper classes, but also of other social strata and caused changes via the church and education whose activities affected more and more people in the course of time. On the other hand, in the 14th century Bulgaria was invaded by the Ottoman Turks and great portions of the Christian Slavonic population were converted to Islam. The rural culture of the new converts suffered further changes. Although the traditional character of that culture had been preserved to a large extent, it incorporated certain new elements introduced at first via the compulsory and entirely different religious canon, but gradually infiltrating into a larger number of activities and reflexes of that population's daily life.

Obviously, the research field of the so-called “cultural heritage” in the Bulgarian ethnography is extremely large and allows detailed studies of the rural culture both in diachronic and synchronic aspect. Even from its emerging in 19th century, the Bulgarian ethnography began to collect and document the artifacts of the rural spiritual, material and socio-normative culture. At present, it has accumulated satisfactory documentation in every area of the ethnographic landscape that makes a good basis for research work of the shared/common as well as of the specific ethnic, religious, regional and other dimensions of the Bulgarian rural tradition both historically and in all defined aspects of the ethnographic problematic. These studies will shape the general and the more concrete agenda of our exhibition, of the seminars and the summer courses on rural culture as well as of the various initiatives we plan in order to popularize the subject among the young people and particularly among the pupils/students.

2.1. This is the proper place to specify the types of rural culture and heritage most characteristic of our country. As we have already said, Bulgaria occupies the central area (a territory even larger in the past) of the Balkan Peninsula, an area of fertile plains and mountains with abundant vegetation. Due to specific historical circumstances, Bulgaria failed to develop strong maritime

cultural reflexes similar to those of some other Balkan states. For this reason, those reflexes are less specifically characteristic for the Bulgarian rural culture. Agriculture, fruit-growing, stock-breeding and forestry as well as the various crafts, an integral component of the human life mode, traditionally concerned with the rural at first but later also with the urban culture – textile and clothing, metalwork, wooden, leather, ceramic articles, house building and other similar occupations – these are the major types of rural culture that have traditionally developed (and some are still developing) in Bulgaria. Gradually some of these activities became independent from the village culture, understood in the usual ethnographic meaning and became individual professions and occupations. With the rapid urbanization in the 19th century and particularly at the beginning of the 20th century, some of these occupations cut entirely their rural roots and became typically urban, increasingly specialized and industrially organized. Logically one can conclude that ethnography has concentrated on the traditional rural culture as it was documented before the above-mentioned processes. Thus, our participation in this project will be framed by this specific circumstance.

Among the most interesting topics that shape our two institutions' participation in the program is the study of the dynamics of changes in the rural culture provoked by the industrialization and the globalization in the village life, the interaction and the mutual impact of the typical “urban” and the typical “rural” (within the traditional understanding of these categories) in the different cultural strata, the adaptation and rejection attitudes of these two cultures. In this way, it should be easier to define those features of the modern rural culture that will most efficiently guarantee the sustainable development of culture and of significant aspects of life of the indigenous population as well as of the identity of the communities themselves. The practical value of these researches will be measured with the motivation for permanent living in the country, with the rural tourism development, with the preservation of the indigenous cultural landscape, nature- and natural resources-linked industries, etc.

The study of these processes in the Bulgarian rural culture (in historical and contemporary aspects) will inevitably be influenced by a specific circumstance that left deep imprint in its development, i.e. by the forced cooperation of the rural economy immediately after the World War II. This brought to an abrupt end of a number of traditional occupations vital for the natural functioning of the individual and private, i.e. traditional rural economy. After the social and political changes in Eastern Europe the Bulgarian rural culture also underwent serious changes related to resuming the individual, private mode of life in the village, with certain restitution of arable land, forests and live-stock in order to ease the establishment of small and larger farms, of new forms for cooperation of land, of means of production, of human efforts in farming and exploiting of the local natural resources.

2.2.

The cycle of the rural life is to be represented in its daily and twelve-monthly dimensions. Every people has its own idea of the life cycle – the accompanying rituals and customs (initiation), foodstuff, clothing, behavior rules, work experience and training, kinds of labour.

The wheel of life cycle covers the long life path from birth to death (from child to grown-up). The rotation of the life wheel is a part of the other circles – spring - winter, sunrise - sunset, day - night etc. The traditional villager is a component of a closed ecosystem, operated by his never-ending efforts. Simultaneously, he is a part of a strictly hierarchal social system of sustainable moral and aesthetic standards. Christianity on the folklore level of the Bulgarian village gives the standard rules, but it is also a synthesis of practices, inherited from the ancient Thracians. The cosmogonic perceptions, the idea of a boundary between life on this side and beyond, a boundary that is crossed by fortune-tellers, the imitative magic and the apotropaic practices, together with the great festivals of the Christian calendar, structure the public life within the annual cycle. The material and spiritual landscape fills every event in the life both of the individual and the community. The village fair on the day of the village patron saint is in fact an institution facilitating the preservation of the family/lineal memory. Nowadays, the family gatherings and the reviving of the “obrok” (votive) offering in certain places, highly respected by the stock-breeding families for example, are developing in parallel with the village fair.

The “kukeri” games, public masquerades in celebration of the New year that imply the ancient idea of fertilization the earth through symbolic ploughing and setting the territorial boundaries of the community, are especially effective in representing and popularizing the traditional culture among the pupils and the young people. These entertainments of orgiastic elements are the most persistent European ethno-cultural phenomenon from antiquity to our days. The kukeri participants as ritual characters carry large masks symbolizing their role of mediators. These masks making is special act for the engaged participants (epigones of the satyrs, accompanying the god Dionisus). In this context, the organization of an atelier within the framework of the exhibition will be extremely attractive.

Investigation of the daily life offers interesting close-up of the rural culture. Usually seen as a background of the heroic deeds only, the ordinary life is scarcely represented in the museum exhibitions. However, it is very intriguing effort to investigate the rural culture in depth and via the holistic approach to it as an ethno-cultural system within the natural landscape. The question how the people lived in the past oftener finds no detailed answer. Many of the most important things – bread and wine/brandy, sleep and death, love and sin, the labour and the festival – they perish with the life they were part of. Investigation and representation of various food dishes – ritual, festive, daily, seasonal, and connected with different jobs and calendar fasts – reveal a perfect natural life

mode. Life whose agenda begins before sunrise, and is full of work and songs – connected with the harvest, with the life of the haidouks/rebels, and the horo/dance-accompanying songs.

The research documentation will follow the turns of time course from the morning until evening. The separate chronological segments are the framework in which the daily human behavior and attitudes, state condition and things, verbal formulas intertwine. The “compact documentation” in which the studied reality interprets its own self in the life cycle investigation will naturally be orientated towards the climax in the traditional man’s life – the wedding. When and whom the villagers of a definite region marry? What is the nature of the migration processes to the urban centers? How does the village exist within the marketing economy? Video portraits of contemporary farmers, keepers of old food-production secrets, for example, should shape the actual focus of the investigation efforts. Conservation of food products and winter pickles practice, wine and brandy produce follow the traditional recipes. Bee keeping and honey making as well as the highland stockbreeding, preserving the old indigenous breeds and variety, offer subjects of investigation exactly in the sustainable rural culture development context. The main livings and occupations – grain growing and stock-breeding with an accent on sheep-raising, can shape the sub-subjects of several investigation works – that of nutrition stressing on home-baked bread and associated customs and of weaving with an emphasis on clothing, textile and embroidery.

2.3.

The ethnographic methods of study seem appropriate for work on the project. It offers the field investigation as a main form of documentation in the course of which the movable and immovable property of the traditional culture is described, oral legends and stories are registered, and direct observations on the material and non-material heritage of the rural culture are carried out. Parallel with these activities, artifacts, metonymically representative of the respective processes and phenomena are collected.

Other methods of study such as those of ethno-archaeology, cultural anthropology etc. can also be applied in the in-depth investigation of some issues. The exhibition planning and preparations are based on the museological approach to the interpretative presentation as a specific communication means aimed at socialization of the cultural heritage.

Doubtlessly, the attempt of reconstruction the daily life history can be helped by various approaches – typological, functional, system etc. History realities, however, are very dynamic, changeable and many-sided. As daily life behavior, notions, symbols, and things are property of different groups and families, we can say that they simultaneously co-exist and interact. From this point of view it might be very successful to search for the logical motifs in the natural association of things – we should speak of the oven when bread is made and not

when the organization of the house and the yard is discussed; the use of aromas (perfumes) should be discussed not in connection with personal hygiene but when we speak of the different ways of sexual attraction etc.

The contemporary rural culture in Bulgaria has preserved many elements of the traditional popular culture, especially in relation with the customs and rituals and old technologies in food production and nutrition. As components of a larger culturological framework (“The wheel of life”), a number of vertical investigations of certain smaller subjects (the apple, the lamb/ram, the swine, the poultry and the egg, the brandy making, the bread, honey etc.) may be carried out with the means of the **interdisciplinary approach**.

Objects

The National Museum of History stores in its funds materials that directly concern the **rural culture**. They are distributed in several collections: “Every day life articles and tools and implements”; “Traditional costumes”; “Traditional textiles”; “Embroidery”; “Ornaments”. Here is their brief presentation.

The collection of **Articles of every day life and tools and implements** contains approximately 1500 inventory numbers. The Tools and Implements collection includes digging and land cultivation tools and implements, harvest tools, threshing fittings. The articles of daily life include various crafts produce – for domestic needs and for specialized use. Potter’s work-shops output – kitchen- and tableware, ritual vessels, packing containers, food storing vessels, coppersmiths’ produce: copperware of various size and use – cauldrons, plates, bowls; blacksmith’s produce – land cultivating tools, fire-irons, window gratings, house and church candlesticks, large-headed door nails and knobs, bell-founder’s shop produce – bronze and copper bells of various size and shape, tin vessels for drinking brandy, articles of wood – bridal/wedding chests, turned low round dining tables, mortars, wooden bowls and wine vessels etc.

The **Traditional Textiles Collection** comprises all types of handloom woven textiles, knitwear, as well as a comparatively small group of industrially made textiles. The collection contains approximately 2000 items. The different types of textiles are classified by purpose: household and furnishing textiles, textiles for various in and outdoor agricultural activities, textiles for clothes making, etc.

The collection of **Traditional costumes** consists of approximately 2400 items which form two main groups. The first includes full sets of men’s, women’s, and children’s costumes from the different regions of the territories populated by Bulgarians.

Traditional costumes are classified by gender: men’s, women’s and children’s costumes. There are about 150 full costumes. The majority are **women’s costumes**, which are divided in three main groups: two-apron, *soukman* (low-cut sleeveless dress), and *saya* (long open dress with trimmed front and sleeves)

costumes. **The men's costumes** are considerably fewer in number. They are divided in two groups: 'white-dress' (*belodreshen*) and 'black-dress' (*chernodreshen*) costume.

The second group features separate elements of Bulgarian traditional dress – shirts, chemises, aprons, overcoats etc.

The **Embroideries** collection comprises approximately 900 items, mainly embroidered pieces of different elements of female and male dress.

Embroidered decoration was typical of traditional Bulgarian dress until the late 19th – early 20th centuries. Semantically embroidery was charged with apotropaic functions and the embroidered ornaments are usually worked on the sleeves, front and skirts of the chemise or shirt thus marking the “own-strange” boundary.

The collection of **Traditional ornaments** contains approximately 7000 items – components of the rich headdress ornaments, worn by the bride and the married woman, earrings, hair pins, headdress pendants with chin-chains, forehead bands, belts, belt clasps, finger rings, bracelets etc.

Elements of the traditional rural material and spiritual culture were shown in a number of exhibitions, arranged by NMH in Bulgaria and abroad:

“**The ethnographic wealth of Bulgaria**”, 1881, Pittsburgh, USA.

“**Adornments and textiles from Bulgaria**”, 1989, Kitsee, Austria; Berlin 1989, 1991.

Now, three temporary ethnographic exhibitions are arranged in the NMH.

“**Bulgarian Calendar Festivals**” represents the 5 greatest festivals in the traditional Bulgarian calendar – Christmas, Surva (New Year tide), Tsvetnitsa (Palm Sunday), Easter, St. George's day through traditional costumes, articles of every day life, ritual requisite etc.

“**Sun of Embroidery**” represents Bulgarian traditional embroidery from late 19th century until early 20 century through pieces of embroidery on women's chemises, sleeves, and skirts as well as through embroidered handkerchiefs.

“**Ready gold, pure silver...**” represents rare adornments of extraordinary make and fine traditional fabrics.

Conclusion

Popular culture (in a narrower sense) is the layer of human culture that was created in the course of centuries by anonymous, unknown people in order to satisfy the daily needs of their existence. This kind of culture is passed from generation to generation through the traditions that survive mostly in the family environment. During the period of the Ottoman rule between the 15th and 19th century the traditional culture functioned as an ethno-differentiating factor for the Bulgarians. With the rapid industrialization, the functional field of the

traditional culture narrowed. The attitude towards the village life as it was documented in the literary classic works and paintings from the end of the 19th century and the 1st quarter of the 20th century expressed itself either by idealization of the country life or by disregarding its conservatism. The social shocks in the middle and the end of the 20th century deeply affected the way of life in the village and its economy. Collectivization changed fundamental industrial stereotypes. Restitution of private property after the democratic reforms in the 1990s proved to be a great challenge for many farmers who remained indifferent to the private initiatives. The accession of Bulgaria in EU in January 2007 will provoke serious transformations in the economy of the rural population.

The characteristics of the traditional mode of life survive longer in the field of the spiritual popular culture. Migration and globalization processes lead to crises and the survival of the traditional culture in whole regions becomes uncertain. The tendency towards creating products for the purpose of cultural tourism deprives the popular culture of its natural intimate scenery of existence. It seems that the traditional culture isolates itself in “reservation”-like villages because of stylization and overexposure of the tradition in the rural tourist objects.

There is no museum of the village culture in Bulgaria. There exist separate “exotic” museums – of the beans, of the donkey etc. as well as small ethnographic displays arranged in village schools, libraries or community centers. The regional museums represent the living and traditional occupations in the region they cover as well as the customs typical to the indigenous population. The CULTRURAL project will allow focusing the attention on the rural heritage. On the other hand, it will popularize the experience of those who have much earlier looked upon the rural lifestyle as cultural heritage. As to the National Museum of History, the CULTRURAL project reveals possibilities for the museum professionals to enlarge their standard activity on investigation and documenting the ethnographic wealth with studies of the present life in the Bulgarian village, helping in this way its sustainable development.

Dr. Leonora Boneva-Trayanova

National Museum of History
Sofia

Prof. Dr. Kiril Topalov

Veska Nikolaeva
Academy of Balkan
Civilization – Sofia