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FROM SYMBOLISM TO COLLECTIVE IDENTITY BUILDING SUSTAINABLE RURAL COMMUNITIES

RESEARCH REPORT FOR THEME 3

The wealth of elements of different ethnic and later on of different religious cultures, strongly influenced the rural culture in Bulgaria and determined its basic characteristics and development. On the Balkan Peninsula, the population of the Bulgarian state inherited traditions of various well-developed indigenous cultures, the most outstanding of them being the mighty Thracian cultural tradition.

The integration of Bulgaria into the Christian Byzantine cultural area caused changes in the mode of life not only of the upper classes, but also of larger social strata of the population via church and education. A significant change in the traditional culture became apparent with the coming of the Turks in the 14th century and the mass converting into Islam in some regions. To a great extent, the rural culture preserved its traditional character; however, it adopted new characteristics, primarily connected with the compulsory new and entirely different religious canon and later increasingly penetrating into more and more activities and reflexes of everyday life.

It is only natural then, in the academic terms of the Bulgarian ethnography, the so-called “**cultural heritage**” is an extremely large field with great potential for investigations of the rural culture both in synchronous and diachronous plans. Since its very beginning in the 19th century, the Bulgarian ethnographers have been gathering and studying the traditional rural culture; to date much knowledge has accumulated in all areas of its material, spiritual and societal-normative culture. This provides good perspectives for investigating the history of both the shared and the specific ethnic, religious, regional and other characteristics of the Bulgarian traditional culture in every challenging aspect of ethnography as surveyed earlier in this work.

Next problem concerns the circumstances that determine in historical and modern aspects, the amazing wealth of forms of cultural behavior, the rural type of culture being a very significant segment of this wealth. Undoubtedly, the

essential circumstance is the fact that Bulgaria is situated in the middle of the Balkan Peninsula – one of the geographically most varied and fertile regions in Europe. The two components of the Bulgarian nation – proto-Bulgarians and Slavs, after a certain period of dynamic migrations, did not create a nomadic culture because they founded their common state. For centuries the Bulgarian population had to carry the burden of frequent war campaigns with neighbouring and distant opponents; nonetheless, it developed much more a peaceful, economical and biologically reproductive (i.e. typically rural) behavior than confrontational reflexes.

The third problem is connected with clarifying some basic terms and with the European identification of the Bulgarian development. We should inevitably remind the reader that Bulgaria adopted Christianity in the 9th century and that apart from Byzantium it was the largest and the most powerful state in the European Southeast during the entire Middle Ages. Together with Byzantium and under her cultural influence, the Bulgarian culture played the role of a civilizational bridge, connecting Antiquity and Byzantine culture with the rest of the Slav world (as a part of the European world) – the tool that helped the civilizational interaction was the Bulgarian language, the first Slav liturgical, literature and state-administrative language.

In addition, we should remember that humanitarian studies in Bulgaria, including ethnology as a part of them, resulted entirely from the European cultural and scientific advance in the 19th century and that fact explains why the Bulgarian ethnographic works share every specificity of the European cultural and historical development and the terms “**culture**”, “**cultural heritage**”, “**sustainable development**” etc. cannot be understood and used otherways than in their shared and traditional European meaning/context.

It is an accepted principle that the history of culture in the greatest extend identifies itself with the history of societal-environmental adaptation of man; the acknowledged subject of cultural history concerns the spiritual and material creative potential of man to understand and accept world and to make it synchronous to his/her material, socio-cultural and purely spiritual needs. Consequently, by investigation of the traditional culture (the Bulgarian science understands this term as related namely to the rural culture, which was dominant in Bulgaria up to the early 20th century, but retained many of its features till now) the Bulgarian ethnography understands, since its very beginning in the second half of the 19th century, the study of all sides of man's everyday life in its socio-anthropological aspects: village and household organization, house furniture, crafts and occupations, food and clothes, adornments, cosmetics,

traveling and transportation, agricultural activity and stock-breeding, traditional festivals and customs and the related rituals, games and entertainments, ways of expressing gaiety and sorrow, traditional wisdom, myths and legends, philosophy and religion, socio-normative culture, the extremely rich traditional poetry and arts, both in material and spiritual field.

The expressive culture, including oral/verbal folk art, music, songs, dances, games, drama, applied and pictorial traditional arts, has always been the subject of a traditionally separate field of study, the academic discipline folkloristics – an extremely important subdivision of ethnography, which, however, has in many respects specific characteristics allowing studies that are more specialized. During the Ottoman reign, the Balkan nations suffered a five-century long civilizational syncope in their development - absolute lack of institutionality in culture and marginalization of literature, which survived almost only as medieval-ecclesiastical activities in the monastic periphery of the cultural area until early 19th century. Given those circumstances, the folklore (inseparably connected with the traditional holidays and ritual system) remained almost the single form of aesthetic expression of the creative spirituality (literature, philosophy, music, arts, dances, games etc.) and genius of the Balkan people.

This compensatory function explains the unbelievable wealth of the Balkan (and Bulgarian) folklore - much greater than the common European one, because the function of the folklore was to the rest of the European world merely a concomitant of the art and cultural development, often qualitatively and quantitatively dominant, but never entirely compensatory. The festive-ritual system turned out to be a fundamental factor for preserving the cultural identity of the Balkan man and of the Balkan Christian communities and its further sustainable development.

Because of the fertile and flat fields, abundant vegetation and mountainous countryside and of specific historical circumstances, Bulgaria failed to develop strong maritime-cultural reflexes. The main rural economic activities, traditionally developed (and some still developing nowadays) in Bulgaria were agriculture, fruit-growing, stock-breeding and wood/timber industry, craftsmanship, connected both with the rural and later with the town culture and traditionally comprising textile and clothes, metal/leather/ceramic and wooden wares, building and other occupations for the needs of everyday life.

Slowly but surely, some of these occupations lost touch with the rural culture, understood in its traditional ethnographic context, and gradually turned into individually exercised professions. Eventually, due to the increasing urbanization in the 19th and particularly in the early 20th century, they

completely divorced their rustic milieu and acquired the features of typically urban, narrow specialized, professionally and industrially organized production. This explains why it is so difficult to examine the dynamics of the changes in the traditional rural culture as a result of the worldwide industrialization and globalization of life in the countryside, of the interweaving and interaction of different cultural strata - either typically “rural” or typically “urban” (in their traditional meaning), of the adaptation to and alienation from each other. Consequently, the features of the **new rural culture**, which in the greatest extent would guarantee **the sustained development** of the culture itself and of significant aspects of life in these regions, as well as of **the identity** of the communities themselves. The practical value of the research works corresponds to the possibilities for furnishing the people, living in the countryside with **permanent and solid motives** to remain there – such motives as developing rural tourism, preserving the local natural and cultural tourist attractions, starting economic activity connected with the environment and the natural resources, etc. As it is universally accepted, in all its paradigms the human perception of the world (since the very beginning when man became aware of and made sense of the world around) has been based on bipolarity; its dynamic antinomy has placed that awareness between two mutually dependant and equally excluding opposite extremities: birth-death, beginning-end, day-night, white-black, light-dark, good-evil, etc. In the field of this antinomous dichotomy, it is normal to situate our research work on developing sustained rural communities in the sophisticated discourse upon their mental shift from the **world of symbols** to the **collective identity** formation.

Of course, the rural culture do not rely only on these two fundamental symbolic massifs, conveying the idea of the “dark” and “light” beginning in life; yet these patterns play decisive role in the traditional calendar of the yearly village ritual practices - they are not however separate schemes but exist in a dynamic and sometimes seemingly illogical cohabitation. It is worth mentioning that they set the pattern for the **carnival apotropaic rites** (the **Twelve Days** of Christmas) via the concept of human/sun nativity as the securest protection against death - of family/life; they lie in the roots of **the fertility-bringing rites** (Easter, *Lazarovden*, *Tzvetnitsa*, *Babinden*), again conveying apotropaic (however not openly expressed again) fear from possible lack of fertility, but also bringing expectations and eager wishes for a positive perspective. Thanks to the mighty symbolic energy of the apotropaic rituals, the dialectics of the **ecstatic** collision of the chthonic with the “divine” energies determines the sophisticated semantics of the **nestinar’s rituals**; the “light-dark” symbolism on the other

hand, determines the variety of **rituals of the passage**, the most significant among them being the **wedding** with its extremely rich and polysemantic customary behavior and ritual system.

APOTROPAIC AND PROTECTIVE RITES

The apotropaic (protective, defending) customs and rituals are among the earliest or, perhaps, the earliest customs and rites in the human cultural history. They emerge as a protective reflex of the primitive man against the elements of nature and the appalling beasts and his inability to oppose and cope with them. That is why the apotropaic rites are an inseparable part of the traditional rituality of the village culture – they are extremely capable of surviving even nowadays. In spite of the numerous ways and tools of protection against the malevolent and harmful forces of nature and against vicissitudes of fortune, man could not completely throw off and overcome his dependence on them. This explains why the protective rituals retain their important place among the rites and customs of the “dark” zone in the traditional calendar during Christmas and especially the Twelve Days of Christmas between Christ’s Nativity and Epiphany (*Yordanovden*).

On Christmas, one of the greatest Christian holidays, the pagan cult of Sun’s birth, connected with the winter solstice was adapted to the Christian legend of Lord’s nativity according to the thousand-year-old logic of replacing one religion with another.

Like many other people, the old Slavs set up their calendar on the solar phases – two solstices and two equinoxes. These four solar phases determined the image of the Sun as a young god with four faces (hypostases).

Christmas Eve is one of the most popular and adored holidays in Bulgaria. It is also called *Bozhich*, *Bozhik*, *Golyama Koleda*. The Christmas rituals are the most completed and characteristic winter festivity. They repeat many of the traditions of the holidays in December and January. Seen in this context, they are both manifestation and factor for the sustained development of the rural spiritual culture down the ages. Their rich and various forms and presentations of the Christmas festivity guarantee this sustainability even in modern times. In

spite of the historical, political and ideological vicissitudes of the social life, the wealth of rituals and people's adherence to them guarantee their survival as reliable integrating societal and spiritual factor.

The Christmas system of rites and customs provides the best possibilities to look deep into the wealth of the symbolic system that helps building the cultural identity and particularly into its two extremely important functions – the apotropaic and wishful targets, in fact two aspects of the same principal function, the wishful aspect being another expression of the apotropaic. These two functions of the symbolic system obtain meaning through the wide-ranging symbolism of the *kukers* and *koledars*' emergence on the scene immediately after midnight when the God (the New Sun) was just born.

According to the Bulgarian tradition, the *koledars*, carol singers, (bachelor, engaged or newly married young men), are the acknowledged characters in the sacred night rituals. Their leader (*stanenik*, king) is the oldest of the group. The *koledars* carry shepherd crooks in hands; they are dressed in traditional holiday costumes and wrapped in heavy hooded cloaks, with high fur caps, decorated with strings of popcorn, dried fruit, bunches of flowers or box-sprigs. The entire requisite symbolizes not only the biological power of life but also the power of man to oppose the evil forces that roam about the world that night.

Similar is the function of the *kukers*, who in some regions of Bulgaria set on the village round either together or simultaneously with the *koledars*. The deafening clattering of the huge bells, fastened to the *kukers*' belts has to warn the village folk that the group is close by and coming but also to drive the evil forces off.

The appalling beastlike masks of the *kukers*, the bells and the incessant shouts, together with the deep symbolic meaning of its theatricality, maintain the connection with the chthonic and chaotic anti-hypostasis of the orderly world where man has settled to live. In other words, they convey the idea that if one wants to understand and strengthen the system in which one's life is situated, s/he would temporarily go out of it. This is achieved namely by means of the anti-image of that system, the commonplace and everlasting model of the human positioning among the things of life. This carnival, parallel with the *nestinar*'s rites, provides the most accurate idea of the theatrical specificity of the symbolic and ritual systems of the rustic culture on its way from symbolism to identity.

Led by the experienced *stanenik* (king), who carries a wooden wine vessel (*baklitsa*) and a *ritual tree* – most often an apple or fir branch, the *koledars* set on their round – they visit every house in the village, sing carols, say blessings for health and prosperity to the family and are in turn rewarded with gifts and corresponding blessings. The hostess hands the *koledars* a sieve with wheat,

which they scatter around the house in order to bring fertility to the house. Their leader (*stanenik*) then starts his blessings in a recitative rhythm; they often sound amusingly praising. At the end of each blessing, the *stanenik* summons his comrades to say “*Amen*”. The host invites the *koledars*’ group at the festive table and treats them with wine and brandy.

If the hosts have a marriageable daughter, she gives the *koledars* small ring-shaped buns (*kravay*). If her sweetheart happens to be in the group, he is presented with a decorated *kravay*, specially baked by his beloved. If there are no marriageable girls in the household, the *kravays* are offered to the *koledars* by the hostess – she also gives them dried beans, meat, bacon, flour, wine, fish, cash, dried fruits, dried grapes – in short, what is available in the house as those gifts symbolize the desire and the expectations for a good crop next year. While his wife is thus presenting the *koledars*, the host offers his blessings for health, happiness and prosperity. The *koledars* again sing carols and repeat their blessings and best wishes for good health, love and happiness for the whole family, for a happy and prosperous year.

The repertoire of the Christmas songs is extremely rich. The greater part of them is about young girls, whose beauty is so bright that they dare to concur with the sunlight; they sing better than the nightingales, dream of their first sweethearts and welcome white doves, i.e. match-makers. Numerous are the songs about brave young men, who carry out heroic deeds, oppose invaders and even go underground to the “lower earth” to defend their relatives and friends and to deliver their loves from imprisonment.

The symbolism of every element in the Christmas festivity conveys the idea of the eternally reviving nature, of announcing the birth of the new solar year, of the new beginning for man and universe. This explains why the *world tree* motif has survived in many carols and why Christmas predictions are so crucially indicative. At the same time, the strong wishful nature of the rituals for human and animal fertility and for fertility of nature expresses in a specific way their apotropaic functions to defend man and stock against starvation in case of food shortage, illnesses and insufficient increase in population and domestic animals. Some investigators consider the *koledars*’ traditional round from house to house and particularly the request of the youngest to be allowed to join the grown-ups in their tour around the village, to have remained from the ancient pagan rites of initiation.

The *koledars* set on their round after midnight and complete it at dawn, as it is believed that the hordes of evil emerge then and that only the *koledars* with their

songs and the *kukers* with their frightening masks and deafening noise of bells are capable of driving them off. The Bulgarian mythology has it that during these twelve days, also called *Pagan*, *Karakondzho*, *Dirty*, the earth is visited by the evil-doing ghouls, vampires, goblins and by the most malicious and frightful demon *Karakondzho*. People are afraid of those harmful creatures; they avoid being overtaken by night on the road and do not gather with friends or relatives, never engage or get married or commemorate departed during these twelve days. They carry cloves of garlic in their pockets or sew them onto the children's clothes, for it is believed that garlic smell drives the evil away.

We cannot but see in this apocalyptic bacchanalia of the nasty demons and demonic creatures immediately after the new Sun was born, the symbolic recollection of the chthonic (to man) chaos, when after the Sun's birth (i.e. life's birth) inevitably comes the moment when man begins to recognize the preceding frightful chaos.

A typical feature of the *kukers*' tradition (spread in various variants through the entire Balkan Peninsula and the Danube-Carpathian region) is its "theatricality", although the distinction between "actors" and "audience" is not as clear as it is with the *nestinars*' rites, for example. With the *kukers*' games, almost every present takes part in them in one or another way. Namely for that collective participation, even though the *kukers*' performance looks much more "non-theatrical" than the *nestinars*' tradition, some scholars search for their roots in the Thracian Dionysian rites. Furthermore, by one of the most commonly accepted hypotheses, the ancient Greek comedy originates from the Dionysia, part of the Dionysian Mysteries. In any case, the important thing to us is that this holiday, like many others, has "overcome" its symbolic rituality, related to the memory of the victory over the chthonic powers of chaos, and has obtained new features related to the collective rural identity building. As a result, the everyday struggle for sustainable survival and development gradually has driven that recollection out of the collective mind at the expense of the practical demands of the "now" contemporary life. The societal memory has retained mainly decorative traces – the "frightful" beast-like image of the *kukers* and the appalling clattering of the huge bells and various ritual requisites.

Ethnographic narratives of early 20th century describe the Thracian *kukers*' carnival-spectacle in two parts – in the morning, the *kukers* visit the houses in the neighbourhood, dancing, giving blessings and gathering gifts. Towards the evening, in the churchyard or in the village square, they stage a "plough-saw" scene, in which the participants play different roles. The most impressive is the *kuker*, who wears a horrifying fur mask or blackens his face;

his costume is made of sheep, goat or deerskins and is girdled with lots of bells and an enormous wooden phallus. He is accompanied by a hunchbacked old woman (*baba*) on crutches, with blackened or lipstick-checked face. She is dressed in ragged clothes, carries a basketful of yarn and a distaff; she huddles a “baby”, sometimes the “baby” is merely a wooden piece, wrapped in trappings; sometimes she imitates childbirth or just “steals” a child.

The other “actors” in the spectacle are the king, the priest, the judge, policemen, tax collectors, a doctor, a barber, maidens and lads, gypsies, etc. A plough is brought in the square, in which they harness the *kuker* (or the king) and someone from the spectators. Most often, the *kuker* ploughs in a circle and the king throws the seeds in “the furrow”, all the time saying blessings for good crops and happiness. The *kuker* falls on the ground – or is pushed down by some of the participants – for the wheat to grow thick and likewise “fall” down in the fields. Sometimes the *kuker* is “killed”, but he again comes back to life – imitative act of nature’s regeneration in spring. The king rolls the wooden bushel down to make a guess as to the future crop. When the “plough-sow” ritual ends, the carnival entertainments begin.

Very often, the disguised “*baba*” (old woman) and “*staretz*” (old man) perform imitative erotic scenes, symbolizing expectations for rich crop; similarly to the Macedonian “*rusalii*” they are unambiguous hints at the connection with some much older, pre-Christian orgiastic rites. The erotic atmosphere is often emphasized with obscene words and acts, again related to the symbolism of fertility and delivery – all these give a good idea of the “dramaturgical” parameters of the rite and of the mass participation of the whole community in the “theatre” – some as “taxpayers” when they meet the tax collectors in the street or in the yards; others as clients of the “barber” who will shave them with his wooden razor, or as patients of the doctor, or merely as passers-by whom the “priest” will give his blessing and sprinkle for health with “holy water”.

This crowded carnival-theatre is held not only on Christmas, but also on *Sirni Zagovezni* (first Sunday after Lent) and Clean Monday (first day after *Sirni Zagovezni*), i.e. in time, when the Balkan man is inclined to get married, to meet kinfolk or associates, to indulge in merriment and gastronomic pleasures, in a few words – to eat and drink from everything he gathered in summer and fall and prepare himself physically and emotionally for the forthcoming hard working seasons of spring and summer.

The carnival on *Sirni Zagovezni* includes elements of various carnivals – *kukers* and *kukers’* games, masks (most often of wild beasts for a

better disguise from the evil or for inflicting greater fear in them), travesty and blackening of face, etc. targeted at the same effect. Apart from this, the rituality on *Sirni Zagovezni* (also called *Sirnitza*, *Pokladi*, *Proshka* etc.) has features belonging to the dark and light calendar zones. Asking/giving one's "forgiveness", a tradition carried out among very close relatives/associates, is not only an ethic-social corrective in the community, it also expresses the cold premonition for the inevitable "forgiveness" at the threshold to the "dark" zone of a man's life, a moment to happen sooner or later. So, the ritual practices are observed as a chain of symbols, which build the personal human, social-national and religious identity every day and on every joyful event, due to the century-long reiteration of those practices.

In the Bulgarian tradition, the ritual jumping over a fire is a typical feature of the *Sirni Zagovezni* carnival. In some other countries, this specific entertainment is more characteristic of *Enyovden*. The customary-ritual dance complex, performed on the holiday, functions as a tool by means of which fertility, health and prosperity (of nature and man) is to be achieved. At the same time, the popular tradition of setting fires, jumping over them, swirling large flaming rings is not only ritual sign of submission and gratitude to the heavenly fire. If some of those symbols involve the memory of overcoming the chthonic fire, the vital to the human civilization mastering of its might and sharing in its purifying power, in shifting the traditional fires from the summer *Enyovden* (June, 24) backwards to the transitional zone between winter and spring, we can see manifestation of very significant philosophy and meaning – preparation for the forthcoming (in about two months) *nestinars'* affiliation with fire, for the glorious finale of conquering its power, when the *nestinars* will be triumphantly treading on the subdued but still living and dangerous fire.

The scholarly works make obvious that the *kukers'* games show the basic elements of the theatrical approach: dramaturgical "scenario", be it not written, acting characters with specific masks, costumes and other typical travesty signs, dances, music and too much pantomime, which in many cases substitutes the "dialogue" – a manifested ambition for better role-playing. The concern that the aesthetic moment in the *kukers'* games was entirely replaced by 'real profit' principle (stimulation of fertility), by the must for protection against the evil (by means of masking and travesty) or by acts aimed at frightening the harmful forces (by the appalling appearance, shouts and rumble of the bells), this fear seems to be groundless. Both, the most enthusiastic and the most inert participants in the carnival merely indulged themselves in merriment; later, they may have become curious about the meaning of certain symbols in the *kukers'*

costumes, of their acts or of the words in the spectacle in which they participated.

According to some researchers, the *kuker* rites possess all the features of the classical drama but yet they have not developed into real drama; they have remained only spectacular games. The dialogue is considered an important distinction of the drama actions; however, it is worth mentioning that *kukers* games also contain many conversational “nuclei” either serious, almost conjuring, (as the questions and answers in the dialogue between the king-sower and his retinue at the ritual *kuker's* wedding) or humorous (as in the improvised *kuker's* court) or even obscene-frivolous (as in the rude erotic dialogues and actions).

Other researchers define the theatricality of the *kukers'* carnival as protective magic intended to defend the helpless human being from the much more efficient forces of nature. There are also opinions that the Dionysian Mysteries are “nucleus form” of the Bulgarian medieval theatre and that the *kukers'* and some other popular folk theatrical performances have their origins in the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice.

The typically “Dionysian” orgiastic and theatrical nature of the *kukers'* carnival has long ceased to be appropriate, due to the global changes in the life both in town and in countryside. The *kukers'* games have turned into attraction – sometimes as an entertaining show program in restaurants, but mostly connected with various carnivals, folk festivals, celebrations, etc, i.e. the *kukers'* “theatre” from typically Dionysian spectacle in which actors and audience are one entity, has gradually become more authentic and nowadays a small company of “actors” performs for and is applauded by a much larger public and sometimes the actors get paid for the performance.

This transformation challenges the folkloristics to centre the investigating efforts on a new and specific task – to document the transformation of the authentic ritual systems (as in the 20th century, the ethnography almost completed recording and studying those rituals after they ceased to be authentically practiced) into a new quality forms, corresponding to the contemporary modes of life.

An interesting modern form of the *kukers'* carnival is carried out in the Pernik region during the New Year's celebrations. The local carnival has become an established event; among the participants in the carnival, here called “*survakars*”, the spectators notice the figures of typical *kukers* with their masks and bells, “adorned” with multi-coloured trappings, of a priest and a uniformed

revolutionary – a champion of freedom, a fighter against the Turkish authorities, who stars and distributes the cast, directs the “spectacle”, etc.

In almost all regions of the Bulgarian territory, the role of the *koledars-kukers*’ carnivals in strengthening the collective identity and the resulting from it sustained development of the rural culture, is especially well manifested in the morning of December 25, the day of Christ’s Nativity. The *koledars* then pass their time feasting – they eat and drink what they have gathered, display the decorated ring-shaped buns in the square for everybody to decide whose is the best; then they sell the gathered buns by tender; and the cash they donate to the church, the school and the community centre – the three essential village “institutions”, that help developing and maintaining the reflexes of the community mode of living both in historical and in contemporary plan (to a certain degree).

A very exhilarating tradition is still observed in the city of Yambol in Eastern Bulgaria. On 25, December, koledars from the neighbouring villages gather in the central square, where they perform the festivity-concluding dance, lately known as “*Yambol buenek*” or “*koledars’ buenek*”. Everybody participates; the *kukers* also contribute to the cheerful atmosphere by joining the merry crowd in the square. As it is known that from this day until Epiphany, the twelve-day period is “dirty”, “pagan” and the earth is invaded by hostile dark forces, it is the *kukers*’ duty to defend life against them by simultaneously imitating and driving the evil away.

In many regions of Bulgaria, the day before Christ’s Nativity is celebrated as *Malka* (small) *Koleda* or as the commonest ***Badni vecher*** (Christmas Eve). *Badni vecher* is the last day of the Lent; its very name implies the apotropaic-benevolent meaning of its symbolism – the prosperity of the whole family in the forthcoming year, the fertility of the domestic animals and the good crop of the fields are predicted by signs and omens of that particular night. The essential result that is targeted by all rituals and even by certain gestures on Christmas Eve, is to secure protection against starvation, shortage of food, bad crop, low livestock growth; hence the respective wish everything to come to a favourable end.

According to the traditional practice of century-long duration but now almost vanishing, the preparations for the holiday begin early in the morning. Special attention is required for the **ritual breads** kneading as they symbolize the bloodless sacrificial offerings. Women in white festive clothes knead the breads

with the best flour while maidens and recently married young women sing songs, performed only on this occasion.

The Christmas ritual breads are round, decorated with birds, leaves, crosses, images of the Sun, circles etc., plastically shaped with rolled dough. The breads are mostly of three kinds – the first is dedicated to the holiday and is adorned with a cross, rosettes, flowers, swastika, etc. The other kind of bread is dedicated to the two major livings of the rural man – agriculture and stockbreeding – its decoration consists of doughy representations of animals, sheep/cattle pens, vineyards, wine barrels, etc. The third kind of bread is a twisted bun with a hole in the middle.

Another significant moment in the preparation for the holiday (in the opinion of most researchers this is the real start of Christmas rituality) is the “*badnik*”, i.e. the Yule-log, an enormous log of freshly cut oak, beech or pear wood which is carried to the house with great ceremony. A hole is drilled in the log, then it is filled with incense, wine and olive oil symbolizing fertility and the hole is sealed with wax. Finally, the log is wrapped in white linen or hempen cloth. The consecrated *badnik* is now ready to be sacrificed to the newborn Sun. The master of the house places it on the hearth, sprinkles the trunk with oil, then the “new” fire is lit. Some researchers think that the ancient Slavs used to light such anointed log when childbirth was expected – they believed the burning log would drive away the ghosts of malicious dead members of the family, of wizards and of evil creatures. After the adoption of Christianity, that custom changed like many other customs, and the contemporary interpretation says that the Yule log is lit in honour of the newborn God. The “*badnik*” is expected to symbolically guard the house against the wandering hordes of *karakondzhols* and other “dark” evil forces. Because of that, it is set upright in the fireplace and is kept burning until morning in order to provide with enough light both Christ’s Mother and the deceased ancestors who are believed to come and participate in the holiday. The more sparkles from the *badnik*, the better the crop, the more the children, and the living-stock. The *badnik* not only symbolizes the young sun, it also is the image of the World tree. The burning *badnik* has magical and healing capacity and it is kept burning all through the night – if the *badnik* is let to extinct that means misery and unhappiness await the household. The power of the burning *badnik* is an indication of the outcome of the blessings – the higher the flames, the higher the wheat stalks in summer.

In some places, the *badnik* is extinguished in the morning with wine; the wood is then used in making parts of the plough or of small decorative crosses; the male members of the family go away and only the girls and the young women

remain around the hearth – for more female domestic animals. The remains of the *badnik* are lighted and put out every night until Epiphany (*Yordanivden*) for protection of the domestic animals against ill health. The ash from the *badnik* is also considered healing; therefore, it is dispersed or dug into the fields, vineyards and meadows for fruitfulness.

The traditional meals on Christmas Eve consist of vegetable dishes. In the district of Vratza it is called “six-lined”, “seven-clothed”, “golden” and is laid on a round, low-legged table (*sofra*), covered with many-coloured table-cloth (*mesal*); a bushel with straw and chaff is placed under the table; straw is also scattered on the ground round the table. The plough is sometimes brought into the room and left there during the Christmas supper as a symbol of the hard rustic toil, but also as a symbol of fertilizing the earth, the human and the animal’s womb. On the other hand, straw is to remind that Christ was born on it. The festive table is laid early for an early ripening of the crop. Nobody is recommended to rise from the table for the hens to remain in their laying nests and hatch more chickens. If someone is to rise from the table, s/he lowers her/himself for full-eared wheat and heavily laden fruit trees which to bend down in the similar way. People around the Christmas table are to keep silent and avoid speaking for the living stock to remain calm and not to go mad (the Vratza region).

The ritual table is arranged by the hearth, so that everybody faces the fire – the hearth is the most sacred place in the house. The number of the shared dishes vary from region to region; the tradition requires most often stuffed cabbage or vine leaves, dried red peppers (stuffed with dry beans, rice etc.), dry beans, pumpkin meat, salt, boiled sweet corn, stewed dried fruit, frumenty (boiled, cracked wheat), garlic cloves (against evil unclean force), onion bulbs (for the family to enlarge and the property to increase in number like the many coats of the onion), honey (for a “sweet” life of the young), nuts and other fruit, *banitza*, a pie of pumpkin meat/sauerkraut/leek filling, red wine, brandy and other drinks – all dishes symbolize fertility and convey the expectations of the family for a prosperous year. On the other hand, the dry beans, wheat, rice, lentils, dried fruit and red peppers, raisins swell when cooked – thus they can be interpreted as symbolizing child conception and particularly pregnancy, with the developing foetus in the womb and the emergence of a newborn infant.

The eldest man in the family (in Strandzha and Thrace that could be the eldest woman) smokes with incense (very often on a ploughshare) the table, the rooms, the pens, the granary, the sheds and the yard to push off the evil and invites God

at the table. A prayer is offered; the master and the mistress of the house raise the round flat bread with a silver coin kneaded in it high above their heads for high crops and ritually break the bread. In some places the bread is raised over a child's head, the child jumps up three times, and then it is broken into pieces.

The first piece of the bread is left by the home icon with Christ's Mother. Whoever gets the bread with the silver coin is considered the luckiest individual next year. After the bread pieces have been distributed, the elder man announces the working and the social obligations of every member of the family for the next year. Thus, the integration and the unity of the latter is stimulated; they become aware that the personal and the common well-being and happiness depend on the efforts both of everyone and of the whole family.

A curious and anti-traditional symbolism of the Christmas "breaking of the bread" ritual is the apotropaic significance of the action in Eastern Bulgaria, where the housewife kneads vegetarian bread in order to mislead the evil god *Koleda* with it.

In North-Western Bulgaria, people believe that whoever refuses to have some of the incensed white baked pumpkin is threatened with poor health and bad diseases. An apotropaic tradition is to watch who will step first over the threshold on Christmas, *Ignazhden* and New Year. It is believed that some newcomers bring good others bring bad luck to the house.

The first piece from the ritual bread and the remains from the Christmas supper are placed on a high shelf - for the crops, children and domestic animals to grow up as high; the walnuts and wheat grains and the not completely burnt down candle should be preserved for the next twelve "incensed" evenings. In some regions, this candle is used during the year in order to drive away the hail clouds, endangering the crop.

All leave the table together for the wheat to grow better and the table is not cleared until next day, as people believe that the saint-patron of the house and their dead relatives will enjoy it during the night. Apart from this, the not cleared table is a kind of invitation to delayed travelers to enter and have a meal. The old Balkan Slavs used to leave some dish on the table in case a hungry man needs food – for that reason, they always had their houses open.

Christmas festive rituality is one of the most resistant to changes in the Bulgarian calendar. In spite of certain modifications, it has survived until now. The first serious adjustments took place after the liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman yoke as reflections to the dynamic changes in the Bulgarian society, which were unavoidable because of the increasing urbanization. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the number of the

koledars' groups was sharply reduced. A behavioral change took place with the *koledars* who now set on their rounds for charity reasons – to aid sick and poor people, orphans – therefore, they visit selectively the houses of only the wealthier families.

The **Christmas tree** gained popularity as a sign of the increasing European influence in Bulgaria. A transitional association of the Christmas tree with the traditional Christmas table is observed – at first the festive tree was adorned with dried fruits, popcorn, and self-made toys. Later on, it started to be embellished with shiny multi-coloured decorations especially made for the occasion. By the traditional thinking, the abundantly decorated Christmas tree stands for the *Tree of Eden*, heavy with fruit, the everlasting green of the fir-tree symbolizes the expectation of and the belief in the spring revival of nature.

The researchers articulate different hypotheses on the question whether the Christmas tree originates in pagan time or it was introduced by the Christian church. By some legends, the pine/fir tree was first celebrated as a Christian tree by the Benedictine monk St. Bonifacius, who saw the sign of the Holy Trinity in its triangular crown. According to others, it was Martin Luther.

Almost through the entire 20th century the usual Christmas tree was a cut fir or pine tree fixed on a wooden cross (for stability, but a secondary “post-functional” symbolism is also possible). In the depressing post-war years (the 40s, 50s and 60s), many people adorned the Christmas tree with beautifully cut paper decorations and garlands, they spread cotton fibrils on the tree imitating snow. The glass decoration on top the tree, symbolizing the Bethlehem star or an angel, was replaced for almost half a century by another star – the pentacle, the essential ideological mark of the new political system. The tree was embellished with garlands, nice multi-coloured glass balls, bells, etc.

In the first half of the 20th century, in some villages and towns in North-Western Bulgaria an innovation started to replace the century-long tradition to welcome Christmas as a family holiday – to celebrate Christmas and even Christmas Eve in groups. For example, in 1926 the tourists in the Vratza region organized a collective celebration of Christmas Eve in the hall of the newly built Tourist's Centre. In the 30s and 40s, the population of the Catholic village of Bardarski geran, found another way to turn the Christmas holidays into working socio-integrating factor by means of a village Christmas fair that was visited by many people from the neighbouring villages. In the following years, the people from Bardaski geran, who had moved to Sofia or other villages, started to come to their native village especially on that day. The brass band from the village of Galiche joined the celebrating folk and for three days, horo-dance chains wound

in the square, common tables were laid, everybody brought food, wine and brandy for the festive table and treated the guests and all the presents. Late at night, the cheerfulness shifted to the hall of the village library and reading centre. In spite of being contrary to the settled Christmas practices, this local development of the tradition united the people and helped them strengthen their group identity.

We do not even know exactly when the image of the good present-giving *Dyado Koleda* (Father Christmas, Santa Clause) was introduced into the Christmas festivity. The greater part of the investigators derive his name from the Latin word “*Kalendi*”. The Balkan version of *Dyado Koleda* does not differ much from the common European legendary old man, who lives on the North Pole. Almost as widely spread is the belief that he climbs down the chimneys at night and leaves the presents under the Christmas tree.

In the second half of the 20th century, the figure of the non-Bulgarian “*dyado Mraz*” (Jack Frost) who also used to bring presents to the children, substituted for “*dyado Koleda*” and completely ousted him. For several decades, Christmas was fully replaced (especially on institutional level) by the New Year celebrations. For around four decades after the World War II, the greater part of the population submitted under different considerations to the ideological manipulations of the totalitarian regime and to the officially recognized atheistic propaganda, (Christmas was declared religious holiday) – the expectation of New Year’s celebrations took the place of the traditional family gathering around the festive table on Christmas Eve. This imposition brought to mutual contamination of both holidays. At present, several friendly families gather to welcome Christmas, which is a grave hesitation of the tradition. On the other hand, however, this departure from the norm brings non-relative families together and facilitates the social integration and the local friendly/neighbourly/group identity.

Another innovation in the recent 4-5 decades is that now presents are given not only to the children (as was the tradition for a century and a half) but to the grown-ups, too – inside the family and the in the closest circle of associates.

The name days that are celebrated on December 25th and 26th strengthen relationship in the family, friendly and professional rural communities. The name day celebrations are the traditional ground for family/associates gatherings and entertainment. This festive practice is one of the pleasantest forms of maintaining the collective identity and the stable connections in the community that have survived to date.

The great social significance of the Christmas/New Year dinner lies in the family gathering that strengthens the feeling of harmony, community of interests and unanimity. For this reason, the old tradition says that those working abroad should return to their families on that day notwithstanding the distance. Nowadays, families with grown-up children – learning, working, married in other places or absent for some reason, stay with their parents/grandparents, brothers and sisters in the old home thus strengthening the family ties that become looser and looser in modern time. The branching family gathers for the shared dinner either on December 25 or on January 1.

Christmas traditional and ritual events, although with strongly reduced content (gone is a huge part of the symbolic practices, enriched and detailed in the course of the centuries) demonstrate constant stability in preserving their basic components and in retaining the important function of the family as socially integrating factor of the sustained rural development, independent from the stormy socio-political changes in the Bulgarian society during the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.

FERTILITY AND HARVEST RITUALS

The vigorous and optimistic by nature (geographically, traditionally and culturally grounded) reflex of the Balkan man to the surrounding material and spiritual world has satiated the ritual space of fertility with enough holidays of joviality, of expectation of prosperity and good birth-rate of both humans and domestic animals. Thanks to those holidays, we can now discover important mechanisms of building sustainable rural communities and reveal the role the symbols play in building collective identity.

In no case accidentally, on 8/21, January, i.e. immediately after the twelve-day festive cycle, connected with Christ's birth, **Babinden** (Midwives' day) comes, a tradition concerning childbirth and female fertility.

The holiday is very old, most probably it is related to the Mother-Goddess worshipping rituality as well as to the goddess-guardian of the family hearth (Hera in Greece, Juno in Rome and Lada of the Slavs). The scholars admit that the Slavs had a similar pre-Christian holiday, which survived to a much later period due most probably to its association with the cult of Christ's Holy Mother. This explains why midwives are so much respected – obviously in the course of the cult development people began to perceive them as representatives of Christ's Holy Mother on Earth – such is the logic by which a cult survives

and develops. Nevertheless, the holiday remains non-canonical and only in the traditional folk calendar. In many cases, the midwives are also experienced healers of children, expecting mothers and young women of recent childbirth. The health-giving séance is usually carried out on the threshold of the house – thus it symbolizes the midwife’s “interference” in the moment of passage from the womb darkness of pre-delivery to the light of the new life-emergence.

Early in the morning the aged midwife (*baba*) visits every house in which she helped in childbirth during the year and washes the eyes of the child with fresh water, spreads honey on its forehead and sticks a fibril of red wool, pronouncing a blessing.

The young mothers kiss the midwife’s hand, pour water for her to wash her hands and pin a flower to her head kerchief. They also visit the midwife’s house to show respect to her and to ritually “bathe” her. The young women bring ritual bread and other table luxuries, a *baklitza* (kind of vessel) of wine or brandy. The feast soon turns into a turbulent merriment; the participants rapidly break the extremely restrictive patriarchal norms and embark on a wild and provocative *horo* dance with obvious elements of dissipation and orgiastic insanity – an unambiguous symbol of erotic ecstasy and of powerful instincts for life reproduction. In the evening a large *horo* winds in the square and its meanders reach the midwife’s house. In 20th century, the dying function of the traditional midwife brought to that many elements of the rituality got lost. In 1951, January 21 was declared a Day of Maternity Aid – another forced transformation of a holiday in accordance with the new political situation. By the church calendar, however, it continued to be celebrated on January 8th – therefore, two dates for the same holiday exist. The holiday began to be respected not only as a day of the aged women but also as the day of mothers-in-law – in a few words, respect was offered to all women with grandchildren – which enlarged its function as a factor of social integration and collective identity.

In some locations, the midwife sometimes takes the part of a fortune-teller, divining the child’s future destiny.

Since the second half of the 20th century, *Babinden* is respected as the day of mother-in-laws or of all grannies”, called “*baba*”, which generally look after the grandchildren. This shift of meaning enlarged its function of a factor for the social integration and the collective identity. These changes brought to two positive things – firstly, the memory of a tradition was preserved by retaining a few of its elements, and second, certain social integration was achieved, new acquaintances were made, the medical workers received the deserved respect once paid to the midwives. In some neighbourhoods (Dabovnik village, Dobrich

district, North-eastern Bulgaria), interesting “transient” moments can be observed – forms of an old culture infiltrate into and continue functioning in the context of another, different culture - the contemporary culture in the case – the rite is replaced by a theatrical-musical performance with lots of comedy nuances.

On January 21st, the women from the same village, dressed in folk costumes, stage the ritual-theatrical childbirth as it was in the past. “Disguised” as participants in the “drama”, they take the parts of a son-in-law and a young expecting mother, midwife and even of a newborn. At the end of the show, they sing a relevant song to the mayor; say blessings with a *baklitza* (wooden wine vessel) of wine or sweet brandy for health, good luck and more children in the village.

Such transitional moments not only bridge tradition and modernity, they consolidate folk people and strengthen the collective identity (closely connected with the most important moment in a man’s life – birth of a child), simultaneously supporting the connection with the tradition and contributing to the stable development of the rural rituality, material and spiritual culture.

The Christmas notion of man/god/sun’s birth is particularly “enlivened” in spring by the symbolism of the reviving nature. The traditional “maiden” rituality of *Lazarovden* and *Tzvetnitza* specify them as true female “replicas” of the “male” *Koleda* – this time the *lazarkas*, young unmarried girls who had reached sexual maturity, are the only participants in the event – they act as heralds of the spring wakening of nature. In the Sofia region and in many other locations in Western Bulgaria, the girls – of various ages – form groups (*cheta*) of 6-7 coevals – grown-up girls, beautifully adorned and dressed in bridal costumes. This “bridal disguise” symbolically hints at the desire of the young girls to get married during the year. Their heads are adorned with flower wreaths and sometimes with peacock feathers. Finally, they select the prettiest among them for a “*kumitza*”. The rest of the group show respect to her by “*goveene*”, i.e. by keeping silent. They break their silence a week later, on Easter.

In Eastern Bulgaria – in Dobrudzha and Thrace – all girls keep the holiday together regardless of their age. Like the *koledars*’ groups, the *lazarkas* go from house to house, in some villages they walk to the fields, the sheep/cattle pens and to the meadows; they sing cheerful glorifying songs for good health, for good crop and many rewarding moments for the farmers and the entire household, for well-bred living stock. The *lazarkas* are usually rewarded with gifts. In some regions, they perform the distinctive *lazarka*’s ritual *horo*, called

“*buenetz*” dancing round the baskets with the donations. Again, it is performed for good health.

In the eastern Rhodopes, the girls make a doll, named Lazar – a cloth-beam or a section of a spinning wheel, dressed in wedding clothes and the *lazarkas* carry it with them during the two days – *Lazarovden* and *Tzvetnitza*. They sprinkle the doll with water for health; at the end, they wash up the cloth-beam in the river wishing for blessed rain.

The *lazarkas* go round the village, all the time singing. They enter and come out of the houses; in the yard, they sing their blessing songs facing the hosts and the sun.

The *lazarkas*’ songs are magical incantation, expressing hope that the desired thing will come true if wished exultantly and properly, in harmony with the reviving nature. Songs and dances, words and gestures, fascination and magic confidence, ritual clothing, adornments and symbolic actions successfully merge in one impressive tradition on that day.

When the *lazarkas* have completed their round, they gather in the village square. It is time for the large open *horo*, led by the tallest or by the prettiest among them, mostly known as “*kuma*”. Everybody joins the winding *horo* chain – the dance goes for a long time and there is no end to the glorifying songs of the *lazarkas*. Finally, they go to the river and let their wreaths drift on the running water and watch whose wreath gets ahead – it is believed that girl will marry first.

Thus, new chances emerge for social integrity, strengthening the feeling of social belonging, for greater harmony, completeness and better prospects of the common living.

The *lazaruvane* tradition involves reminiscences from ancient Thracian, Slav and proto-Bulgarian rituals, related to the spring revival of nature (later adapted to the Christian myth - the resurrection of Lazarus) and to the wishful positive impact on the community life and the future of every member of that community. Therefore, the *lazarkas* are in the age, critical to every young woman – on the threshold of her female maturity and full social integration; the *lazaruvane* is the last boundary – after a girl has participated in the rituals, she is considered marriageable. It is not accidental, that every element of the rituality – the choice of the “*kuma*” (best woman), the “*goveene*”, the amorous-bridal specificity of the *lazarkas*’ songs is a “replica” of the wedding rituality.

It is also non-accidental, that the shifting from one biological and societal status to another finds its equivalence namely in the passage of nature from one state to another. If a girl had not participated in the *lazarkas*’ festivity, she would not be

able to get married. Besides, this participation can be done just once in a maid's life – as it is a sign she has acquired a different biological and social quality.

On *Tzvetnitza*, i.e. on Palm's day, (in many villages even on *Lazarovden*), after the church service, the people take consecrated willow-twigs home and made wreaths and garlands and decorate the doors of the house with them. The willow-twig decoration is made for good health and is saved until next year. The women even wind willow-twigs round their waists in order to be healthy and strong for the forthcoming harvest. The willow-tree symbolizes the eternal youth and the reviving nature, as it comes earliest into leaves at this latitude.

Seen in the context of the sustained spiritual rural development, *Lazarovden* and *Tzvetnitza* are essentially leveled out in their traditional practice and ritual. Although they precede a complex festive dichotomy, related to martyrous death and resurrection, the emphasis is definitely on the latter. This preference is an expression of the long-standing positive and markedly optimistic, practical and emotional leaning of the vigorous Balkan people. Even in the dichotomic symbolity (life-death) of the Easter egg, the "death" element has gradually vanished and today this symbolity is known only in the narrow scholarly circles; for centuries, the red egg has been thought by the Balkan people predominantly as a symbol of life, health, enjoyment and success and never as a symbol of Christ's blood. In the rapturous gamut of this positive festive reflex, the joyful songs and fiery maiden dances, inherited from the ancestors, the multi-coloured wreaths, the splendid garments, the beautiful and tender faces of the young people rouse positive feelings and strengthen the social and emotional integrity – in short, they are confident warrant for the sustainable development of the rural culture.

Velikden (Easter) is the only comparable to Christmas holiday in terms of its importance as social and integrating factor for the sustained civilizational development. It is reasonable the two holidays not only have ancient origins (they are connected with the beginning of the new solar cycle and the spring revival of nature, respectively), but also are very capably settled in the church calendar (Christ's birth and resurrection). Due to these two circumstances, the two holidays used to enjoy a great stability in the Christian festive and respectively Bulgarian calendar even in periods when the celebration of the two holidays (and particularly Easter) was forbidden and the enthusiasts were exposed to serious negative political and public sanctions.

The week from *Tzvetnitza* to *Velikden* is called Passion/Holy (or Great) week. Dying of the eggs is the most important tradition on *Veliki Chetvartak* (Sweet

Thursday). For a long time it was done in monasteries and villages; much later, it became an element of the town's ritual practices, too. It is believed the egg-dying practice was borrowed by the Slavs in the 5th – 6th century and is a reminiscence of the old mythological concept (in ancient Egypt, too) that the egg is the beginning of the world - it symbolizes emergence of life, regeneration and revival of nature and every living being in the spring.

In ancient times, the symbolity of the egg was dichotomic – according to the myth, the two brothers – Osiris and Set (Seth, Seteh) were born from one egg – however Osiris symbolized the Good, while Seth was the Evil god. The medieval man considered the egg a symbol of the surrounding universe – in his thinking the eggshell was the earth, the egg membrane – the air, the egg white – the water and the yolk – the fire. The medieval dichotomic concept of the egg as a symbol of life and death is evidenced by the practice the leader (*staretz*) of the *kukers'* group, to carry an egg in his hands.

The compulsory norm is the first eggs to be dyed red. One is put in the home iconostasis; the second one is rubbed on the face of every child for health. They keep these eggs throughout the year, as they are believed to possess healing properties.

Red is traditionally most frequently used dye (together with yellow and green). Red symbolizes Christ's blood that would be shed on the cross. Red dye was derived from herbs, mainly marjoram or from some dried insects (in the Rhodope Mountain). Wax and a special nib were used in painting the eggs. The nib itself was made from bent thin silver coin, mounted on a thin hollow stalk of elder, frail or some other fitting small tube. The "painted" eggs have rich decoration of geometric and stylized anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and vegetation representations (birdies, butterflies, fish, snakes, spiders, solar swastikas etc.). Most of the eggs have the initial letters of the festive greeting "Christ has risen"

In some regions, the eggs are dyed next day, on Friday. The day is known as *Veliki Petak* (Good Friday) - then the imposed banning on any work is the strictest. The only exception on that day is for the preparing the ritual breads and bread rings (*kravay*). The variety of Easter breads is great. They are usually round or oval pleat-shaped buns, sometimes with a hole in the middle (the round bread), but always with a red egg on them.

On *Velika Sabota* (Holy Saturday), every kind of work is banned. At midnight before Sunday, the church bells start ringing cheerfully and exultantly and herald Christ's resurrection that will be celebrated in the next three days. The host breaks the ritual bread (the second important Easter symbol); the first piece

he dedicates and leaves for God, the rest he distributes among the members of the family. Next day, on Sunday, the festivity becomes public; all the villagers are in the square – they sing songs, dance closed, i.e. round, *horos*, the girls swing on swings for health and for the love of a good-looking young man and not of a dragon.

Close relatives and friendly families visit each other, share the festive table, exchange ritual breads (during the last century they are generally called “*kozunaks*”) and dyed eggs. A traditional game is played where each player hits the other player’s egg with his own. This is known as “egg tapping” and the holder of the last intact egg will be the healthiest person throughout the year. On that day, people greet themselves with “Christ has risen” and get the answer “He has truly risen”.

The entire symbolity of the holiday is concerned with the expectations for good health of both people and animals, for good crop and prosperity for all.

In mid-summer, at the end of harvest, the last of the spring-summer prosperity-bringing customs comes. Then the so-called “**brada**” (beard) is made from the largest full-eared wheat spikes, especially left uncut by the reapers. The spikes are tied with a red thread and the ground around them is dug with the point of the sickle, then it is watered and “fed” with pieces of bread in the four cardinal points. In some regions, they are adorned with wild flowers or a clove of garlic is added for protection from “evil eyes” and a small coin for good luck. The women harvesters start singing and dancing around the “*brada*”. The best of the harvesters ritually washes her hands and cuts the spikes in one cut; then she weaves them in a pleat (“*brada*”). The decorated “*brada*” is solemnly carried to the village and is left in the granary where it is kept until next year. This imitative magical act is meant to secure the future good harvest. In the larger farms, the reapers’ group carries the beard to the landowner and gets reward.

ECSTATIC RITUALS

NESTINARS

About a month after *Velikden*, the greatest spring holiday, on May 21st, comes the second (after *Koleda*, Christmas) most-loved holiday of the “dark” calendar zone – the *nestinars*’ festivity of Sts. Constantine and Helen (Greek *anastenaria*). The *nestinar* dance in the fire, like that of the *kukers*, is obviously

one of the oldest customs on the Balkans, preserved and practised until now. The cultural context of both its nature and observance goes back to the ancient pre-Christian times.

Abundant scholarly literature on the *nestinars* and the *kukers*' festivities has accumulated until now. Many investigators of those two customs have personally watched the entire course of the ritual lay-out of the mysterious feasts, known not only in the Balkan countries, but also in some European countries, too, in the same, modified or partial form.

Their origin is also disputable. Their nature, spread and plausible relationship with the emergence of the ancient Greek, respectively European comedy, the syncretism of very old indigenous Thracian rites and the similar customs of the Slav tribes that settled in the Balkan Peninsula after the 5th century – these are problems that still await their final solution.

Nearly all investigators, even those who question the connection of the *kukers* with the ancient theatre, admit certain “theatrical features”, specific “theatricality” of the two customs festivity.

The *nestinar* ritual complex has survived in comparatively “authentic” form in Eastern Thrace, where Bulgarians and Greeks co-existed for centuries. The very practicing of this ecstatic dance confirms that the civilizational phenomena that bring the Balkan people together are much more and time resistant than the political ones that separate them.

Particularly indicative to this respect is the fact that before the tragic re settlements of Bulgarian and Greek population in the 1920s, the *nestinars* from the Strandzha villages Balgari and Kosti used to meet at the boundary between the territories of the two villages on the day of Sts. Constantine and Helen, to “kiss” the Bulgarian and the Greek icons of the saints (the two made from the same wood), joining the icons like a two-sided icon, then they observed the traditional requirements. Contemporary accounts state that even now the people from Balgari go to the once meeting site on May 21st where they “expect” their neighbours. It is worth mentioning that on the same day, the emigrants from Kosti, now living in North Greece, take their icon by the road to the village in a kind of an “expectation”.

The distant prototype to the *nestinar* ritual was most probably a certain act of sacrificial offering on fire. Elements of the earliest prehistoric human culture, ancient priestly rites and Sun-cults are clearly perceptible in the *nestinar* festivity. The touch with the living fire, a rather hazardous tradition, has lent a thrilling fascination to the mysterious dance, which to the greatest degree provokes a feeling of a fatal boundary between life-death and the real

parameters of that boundary. Very early, the church became aware of the fact and, pretending to have the supreme right of sanctioning such extreme states of the human existence, repeatedly (and not always without success) attempted to impose a ban on the *nestinars'* tradition. That may be the reason why the fiery ritual dance is limited to a few locations. The ban perhaps triggered a folk strategy of outwitting the church (quite successful sometimes), of "implanting" some elements in the church ritual system and becoming the major medium of the cult of Sts. Constantine and Helen in a few Bulgarian and Greek villages in Thrace and the Black sea Thracian area.

The pursuit of sustained sacralization of the custom, gradually imposed a complete aura of accompanying characteristics on its observance – holding the icon of Sts. Constantine and Helena with raised hands, falling in a deep religious trance ("*prihvashtane*", "*obzemane*", meaning "obsession"), acquiring the capacity of foretelling events, specificity of the *nestinars'* cries during the fire-dance, dancing crosswise or in circles around and in the live coals, etc.

In the second half of the 20th century, the *nestinars'* dances were completely banned in Bulgaria and they were sanctioned as mysticism and religious superstitions by the atheistic propaganda. At the end of the 1970s, the *nestinars'* dances were permitted in some Black seaside restaurants; they became merely a tourist attraction and often the gypsies were the main performers.

Today in Bulgaria, the attempts of commercializing the *nestinars'* rituality and making of it just a show in restaurants or at local trade fairs, become more and more offensive.

The traditional observance of the *nestinar* festivity (*anastenaria*) on May 21 in different villages in Strandzha is shared by their Northern Greece neighbours who come especially for the day. The joint celebration strengthens its authenticity and by increasingly attracting young people, the *nestinar* tradition becomes not only interesting and arresting attention but it also turns into a stable interaction of traditional and modern spiritual cultures and a factor of social and ethnic rapprochement.

RITES OF PASSAGE ENYOVDEN

June 24th is celebrated as the day of St. John the Baptist's nativity under the name of *Enyovden*. According to the astronomical calendar, this is the day of the summer solstice, which divides the year in two. The Christian church connected an ancient pagan feast with the old Roman cult of the goddess Fortuna (also Fors Fortuna) and the oracle on June 24th via the name of St. John the Baptist. A 12th-13th century Bulgarian written source known as *Synodic of Tzar Boril* provides data on the persecutions by the church of the observers and adapts of the ancient pagan divining, magic, stealing of crops, "blasphemy" administered in the black of night and other customs and practices, forbidden by the church canon.

Obviously, since very old pagan past, seen as the cosmic turning point and the passage of nature to a new state of potency, *Enyovden* has been particularly suitable for divinations and magic acts with symbolic meaning. People believe that heaven opens in the night, the stars come down close to herbs, flowers, providing them with greater curative power; the upper and the lower worlds gather, and the universe is crowded with magicians, vampires, dragons, wood nymphs.

Because of its transitional nature, *Enyovden* is suitable for public acknowledgment of a significant change in the girls' life – they have now reached sexual maturity and are ready to get married and to have children.

Even before sunrise, maidens, young married and old women go to pick up fresh herbs and flowers – they tie them into a posy, called *Enyo's bunch*, as it is believed that the herbs have the greatest healing power on that day and that this curative property weakens every day until it is completely lost (this phenomenon was scientifically proved). The herbs and flowers picked up at dawn are plaited into big wreaths, through which all family members pass for health.

The emblematic *fire jumping*, evidenced by sources in Byzantium and cursed/anathematized by the church, has survived in the Bulgarian tradition, although it has shifted to *Sirni Zagovezni*.

The interesting custom of *Enyova bulya* (*Enyo's bride*) is directly connected with the maiden's passage to a new status. The main character is a small girl – St. John's mortal bride, whose wedding attire is a sign of the girl's wish of getting married. The maidens solemnly carry "*Enyo's bride*" to every house, to the fields, pens etc. After that the traditional "singing over the rings" is performed. The previous night every girl put her posy with a ring attached to it in a *copper of silent water* (the vessel is filled with water from the spring and carried home in silence, thus water is believed to preserve its magic mediatory power). *Enyo's bride*, blindfold, takes the bunches out of the vessel one by one, while the girls sing songs hinting at what their future bridegrooms will be like.

These short refrains, in fact riddles-metaphors, reveal different aspects of people's everyday life. Such divinations via singing are performed for prosperity, health and better future to the entire family. Because of the ancient character of the custom, similar songs-metaphors are well known to some other Slav and Balkan people. The custom reflects the never-ending natural desire of man to learn his fate and to guess his future in important transitional periods of his life.

When the *Enyova bulya* completes the act of divining, the “maiden” *horo* begins with music and in happy atmosphere; everybody joins the dance. With the water in which the flower bunches were dipped the previous night, sick are washed up for health or childless women for a happy award of their expectations.

Like in many other rites and customs in the second half of the 20th century, a number of the traditions of the *Enyovden* festivity died away. In the 1960s, the custom of “*laduvane*” was restored by means of theatrical/musical performances of various amateur folk groups. Due to its specific nature, however, the renewed tradition could not completely return in the real life of the people. It shared the lot of almost all magic practices concerned with achieving definite economic goals and with the reality of every-day existence as well as of a number of religious-canonical rituals that turned out to be inappropriate for the contemporary conditions of life, though the spiritual traditional culture (particularly rites and customs) has proved its capacity to be much more sustainable than the material culture. Because of the long-lasting habits of the people to pick up herbs for preparing tea or for healing different deceases, the tradition to gather herbs and flowers at dawn on *Enyovden* has survived in many locations. The revived interest in the traditional rituality reduced the custom to a merely eye-catching and emotional element of the sustainable rural development. Nevertheless, it facilitates the communication among people, makes the acquaintances easier and strengthens the established relationships and collective identity on an increasing scale, joins people who appreciate the benefit from the herbs and their usefulness both in everyday life and in man's healing practices. It also helps gathering more information on subjects of mutual interest, thus creating stronger motives to preserve the traditions as a tool of more harmonic communication and of achieving common targets.

Wedding is the most important passage event in the life of the rural man – it opens a new path for her/him to follow towards an independent, both individual and collective (with his/her new family) social integration. This step is very

significant and complicated – it determines the intricacy of the symbolic rituals that appear to be the most magnificent, luxuriant and expensive Bulgarian festive ceremonies. The wedding guarantees the reproduction of life (both of the individual existence and of the human species) and the magnificent rituality – the sustained development of the socio-ethnic community. Wedding has retained its basic and secondary, constant and variative ritual elements in a greater extend than the other family or calendar ceremonial complexes.

Until mid-20th century, the wedding ceremony was preceded by “match-making” and engagement. The so-called “match-makers” – associates (relatives, neighbours, and friends) of the young man visit the family of the future bride to talk with her parents. Engagement is the next step – the two parties arrange the details of the future event, exchange presents, the pleasant gathering of the relatives is in fact a prelude to the marriage itself.

The wedding day is usually fixed some time in autumn or winter, when the crop is gathered and the hard farm labour has ended.

In the lustrous wedding spectacle, the parts are clearly defined. Every different day of the marriage ceremony, different people perform different segments of the entire nuptial complex, each one with its own significance. The main characters are the *bride* and the *bridegroom*, the *best man and his wife*, the *bride's brother-in-law*, the *bridegroom's sworn brother*, the *old parents-in-law*, *sisters-in-law*, the *matchmakers*. The most respected and honoured among them are the *best man* and the *best woman*. The wedding guests are invited with a *baklitza* (small wooden vessel) of wine or brandy. In some regions, the church icons are also “invited” to the wedding party by sprinkling them with wine.

The wedding ceremonies usually begin in both families with kneading the ritual *wedding bread* for the festive table (*zasevki*) - an act that symbolizes the successful start of the wedding and the happy future life of the young. Sometimes, the young couple's rings and the girl's bracelets are placed in the flour, further the flour is put successively through three sieves. From this sifted flour ritual breads (often – ring-shaped *kravays*) are kneaded and distributed among the participants in the custom.

The decoration of the wedding ritual breads is extremely symbolic and intricate. They are of several types corresponding to the different stages of the wedding ceremony, which often continued for days on end.

In the two houses, *wedding banners* (white and red, or both colours), with a flower or a golden apple atop are prepared. The *wedding-tree* – a pine or fruit tree – is adorned with gaily coloured threads (against evil eyes), with flowers (for happy and long-lasting marriage) and fruits (for the young couple's fertility)

Corresponding bridal *songs* accompany every stage of the marriage ceremony. The most heartbreaking songs are performed while the bride's close friends plait and unplait her hair for the nuptial ceremony. The end of the bridegroom's bachelor life is marked with a ritual shaving by his close associates. Sometimes, separate farewell parties are arranged for the bridegroom, the bride, and their friends.

Before the bride leaves her home, her close friends *prepare* her for the waiting party – they adorn her hair with a *maiden wreath* of fresh flowers and ritually *cover her head* with a thick red or white cloth sheet, through which she is unable to see the present people expecting her appearance, nor could they see her face – so she had to be led out of her parents' house.

In the early 20th century, the bridal cloth was replaced with a transparent white veil, which is now necessary at the modern wedding ceremony. Nowadays, the bride most often is dressed in white, symbol of her immaculacy and spiritual purity. Sometimes her face is “hidden” behind a transparent white veil, a remake of the earlier ritual, when she was brought to the bridegroom's house under a non-transparent cloth – therefore neither could she see the lad whom she was taking, nor could anybody else see her face.

“Taking” the bride from her home was traditionally done in two ways: either the bridegroom overcame certain obstructions and “fought” for her or he paid a symbolic “ransom”. In some locations, the bridegroom dropped a golden coin in the bosom of the bride's mother for the milk with which she had nurtured her.

The bride makes her leave-takings – she says goodbye to her parents, brothers and sisters as well as to her home. On taking her out of the house, as it is at the engagement, associates of the girl throw around wheat, millet, walnuts, dried fruits (nowadays – sweets and small cash) for fertility and good crops.

The ceremonial kiss is often provoked by the shouts of the wedding guests who insist, “The wine is bitter”. The young couple should pacify them with a long kiss. Wedding-rings they exchange are worn on the forth (ring) finger for two reasons: one practical (not to hamper everyday work) and one symbolic (it is believed that from there blood flows to the heart)

The flame of the wedding candles symbolizes the warmth of the familial hearth and pushes off the evil spirits. Comparatively recent is the tradition of throwing the bride's bouquet, a symbolic indication whose wedding comes next. (An association is possible with the tradition of catching the cross in the icy cold sea/river/lake waters on St. Jordan's day (Epiphany).

Particularly significant moment of “passage” is when the bride and the bridegroom arrive at his home - the young couple first steps on a white cloth

(sometimes-on scattered straw or a rug) and then the two enter the house. The bridegroom's mother hands the bride a piece of bread, honey and fruit in order to provoke the "*bereket*", prosperity, which the bride is expected to bring to her new family. In most cases, the bride's mother-in-law leads the young married couple into the house with a kerchief over their heads; sometimes they pass under an ox-bow, an act symbolizing the hardships they would share in the future. On entering the house, the bride is handed a child symbolizing her future childbirth. When in the room, she is taken to the family hearth to make her bow to it. The songs accompanying the introduction of the bride to the house are cheerful – she is the hostess's expected aid. Up to the early 20th century, the bride (sometimes the bridegroom, too) remain silent and avoid talking before their parents and the best man and his wife (*goveene*) for a certain time (weeks or months), thus showing respect and obedience to them.

The public proof of the bride's virginity was a very important element of the patriarchal tradition. The bloody spots on the white nuptial chemise were officially exposed to the waiting party as the proof of the bride's immaculacy. Another significant moment of the "passage" is the "unveiling" the bride and taking off her bridal wreath. Having done this, she is permitted to go to the well and fetch water - a symbolic act, marking the start of one of her main home functions.

The *maiden chest* with the bride's dowry also had a deep symbolic significance. Such symbolic meaning was invested in every moment of the making, keeping, opening, airing, exhibiting and carrying the chest to the bridegroom's house. Heavy symbolic meaning was put in the function of the maiden chest further in the life of the married woman – the chest was the only item the bride brought into her new home and the only thing she would take back if she was separated from her husband somehow. Therefore, the ritualization and the reglamentation not only of its material but most of all of its symbolic meaning as well as its guaranteed sanctity in everyday life, were of great importance to the tradition.

The chest was brought to the bride's new home as solemnly and ritually-symbolically as she herself was introduced into it. The researchers speak of "symbolic identification" of the chest and the bride, expressed by means of various contextual elements. The chest is inseparable from the woman; it symbolizes/duplicates her presence, her individual "space" in the foreign house. With the years, it becomes "mum's chest" - the children's plaits and navels are kept and the daughter's dowry is gradually assembled in it.

The maiden chest can be thought as the symbolic equivalent of the female bosom, of the woman's reproductive function. The chest is identified with the "woman's area" as a sign of the pairs inner/outer, open/close, light/dark, familiar/unfamiliar etc.

With the increasing social differentiation and urbanization of the 20th century society and of the rural lifestyle in the Bulgarian village, the wedding rituality also underwent serious changes – it was simplified, reduced and modified. A great part of the ritual folklore with the corresponding requisites and characters, magic content and symbols died out. Generally altered was a basic principal of the wedding tradition – parents no more decided the choice of the matrimonial partner and the wedding ceremony was sometimes arranged in the town. The large patriarchal familial community was destroyed, boys and girls went to study in the town and when the moment came, they preferred to get married there.

These grave and abrupt changes became much obvious after the World War II when the Bulgarian village was forced to collectivization and the established tradition of the old rural life was destroyed in the course of the struggle against "the religious prejudices" which developed even in the specific field of the rural culture. The unification of the calendar and the family holidays and traditions ran very rapidly - the wedding traditional complex retained only a few basic ritual practices. The unificatory process was exceedingly effective in the towns, but it took place in the countryside too, due not only to the radicalism of the political transformations but also to the drastic pauperization of the village folk in the first post-war decades.

A peculiar "revival" and restoration of certain important elements of the wedding traditions occurred in the 1960s when a planned and purposefully quickened interest to folklore and ethnography was carried out – amateur groups began producing theatrical versions of various family and holiday traditions and rituals – reproducing them wholly or partially.

Urbanization and depopulation of the Bulgarian countryside (it hit hard especially the young people) made the traditional folk wedding rare but not altogether extinct phenomenon. The still living generation that witnessed and remembered a wedding rituality relatively close to the old tradition helps to the restoration of some specific rural components of the wedding customs. In many places, the housewife prefers to knead and bake the ritual bread at home, the wine and the brandy that are served at the wedding table, are often domestic produce. However, the preliminary communicating gathering of the engaged couple is now rarely practised; as a rule such gatherings of young people on the wedding, provide a good communicating atmosphere for friends and

schoolmates, many of whom live and work in the big towns. The marriage gathering is a good chance for a relative strengthening of the already loose contacts, for maintaining a feeling of collective identity based on the same native or living place, shared recollections and interests.

The institution of the “*kumstwo*” (best man’s position) has also been changing for decades – instead of respected old family members now the young people prefer to invite young people for the position, making them in this way their “relatives”. The nature of the maiden “dowry” is very far from the tradition – instead of the traditional chest, the bride brings furniture or a car to her new home. Well-established procedures, concerning the financial aspect of the marriage arrangements have now completely replaced the preparatory period (matchmaking and engagement) before the true wedding event. More and more its various components (taking of the bride, the church service and the public marriage contracting, the official dinner) are carried out with great ostentation and demonstration of material comfort.

The officially not declared half-century long taboo on the church wedding was removed and now the young people living in the countryside, go to the church for the traditional Christian ceremony (*venchavka*) and then the official purely administrative act is carried out (a short procedure followed by a small treat with Champaign and chocklets). The wedding ceremony includes throwing the bridal bouquet to the unmarried girls, the traditional pictures of the new weds with relatives and guests, throwing of sweets and coins to the wedding party and finally - the formal dinner. The dinner is increasingly arranged in the village tavern or in a restaurant where the traditional rituals, sometimes including very specific acts, are carried out. For example, the best man leads the newly-married along a white cloth; the ritual bread (*pita*) is broken up above their heads and the bridegroom’s mother “feeds” them with morsels of bread dipped in honey for a “sweet” life together; the bridegroom takes the bride in hands and carries her over the threshold of the restaurant. Often, when the newly married couple returns home the mother-in-law repeats the same rituals.

Some post-wedding elements of the tradition have also survived – mutual visits of the two families, mainly of the young couple’s parents, thus the newly established social connections enlarge and consolidate and join in the perspective for a more complete and adequate communication.

The variety of the wedding happenings is great as they often are based on the recollections of the aged relatives. Young couple, the best man and his wife, (sometimes the parents of the boy and the girl join them) sit at the central table and the formal dinner starts under the conduction of the best man, who

according tradition, is the most important figure at the wedding celebration. He orders the music, conducts the present-giving ceremony, under his command the traditional kisses of the married young couple are exchanged, he invites the bride for her first dance and finally he delivers her in the hands of the bridegroom.

At present, a D.J. usually cares for the musical background – a new figure that replaces the best man in many of his functions. The music he chooses is sometimes too far from the traditional wedding musical accompaniment – the oriental and gypsy-tavernal sounding and rhythm of such music is very insistent and nation-wide phenomenon, but is especially popular in the countryside – a fact which challenges the capacity of the Bulgarian society to habituate the young people to a qualitative aesthetic taste. The interference of the D.J. and the manager of the restaurant, who also sometimes takes part of the best man or the mother-in-law's privileges, have also brought to a series of changes in the traditional wedding scenario.

The ritual of testifying the bride's virginity has completely died out and vanished from the wedding scene. Often the young people have sexual intercourse even before marriage, sometimes the bride is already pregnant or the wedding ceremony comes after childbirth.

It is worth mentioning that the young people understand the advantages of this revival of the wedding traditions; they are positively disposed toward this return to their roots and follow the rituals with pleasure and curiosity. They see the principal socio-integrative part the wedding traditions play; by means of that role, the collective identity is firmly established and supported as a significant factor of the sustained development of the countryside.

The different rituals and ceremonies, the music, the dances, the adornments, the rich symbolism of the magnificent wedding festivity turn it into exciting theatrical performance with every present participating – which makes of it an efficient factor of building and strengthening the collective identity and the rural socio-cultural community. The heathen nature of the wedding (and the familial on the whole) interacts with the later Christian rituality, at the same time remaining very strong.

The socio-regulatory, ethnic and entertaining function of the wedding complex is one of its most important aspects. The semantics of the wedding rituality developed from the ancient mythological understanding of the world that stimulates the rich artistic imagery –it is included (in different degrees) in the socio-cultural integrity as an important pre-condition for the successful transformation of tradition into effective factor of the sustained development.

All these simultaneously determine and result from the stable relationship between ritual and symbol, image and reality, time and space, characters and requisites in the common system of the wedding rituality defined as a system of both transition and creation.

Naturally, the wedding ceremonies are symbol-marked in the greatest degree as the process of shifting from symbols to collective identity, together with the process of developing sustainable communities are outlined extremely clearly and are so representative for the rural lifestyle namely in the wedding ceremonies.

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The processes in the Bulgarian rural culture (both in historical and in contemporary context) cannot be identified and fully comprehended unless a specificity of this development is taken into account – this specificity concerns the post-war forced cooperation in the rural economy which broke up a number of activities typical for the naturally functioning of the private i.e. traditional rural economy. Thus, the enforced annihilation of the individual farming and stockbreeding deprived the festive-ritual system of its natural and nourishing background and exhausted its capacity as a factor of guaranteeing and maintaining the rural identity and of its sustainable development.

In the 50s, 60s and 70s of the 20th century, an ideological modification of the traditional holidays was attempted – by means of the thousand-year-old religious-transformational mechanism *Babinden* (Midwives' day) was named "Day of Maternity Aid", *Gergyovden* (St. George's Day) – "Shepherd's Day", *Trifonovden* (St. Triphunos' day) – "Vine-grower's day", *Dimitrovden* (St. Dimitrios's day) – "Farmer's day", *Nikulden* (St. Nicholas's' day) – "Fisherman's day" etc.

The ideological transformations in the traditional folk calendar were marked by those basic principles and mechanisms by means of which a certain religion/ideology/mythology replaces the other: the new holiday takes the place of the old one (or is slightly "shifted" in time when the period between the two celebrations is short enough - which is the case with Christmas and New Year); the old "**hypostasis**" is ousted by the new one, which is of similar characteristics and functions, but belongs to a new conceptual/religious/mythological convention; similar rituals retain certain elements of the old rite system but suffer complete or partial re-functionalization with more or less obvious

repression of conservative behaviour or of unyielding attitude to the forced transformation, sometimes achieved within one generation's life etc. Typical feature is that the traditions and rituals connected with the domestic and everyday life and especially with its "table" discourse are more unwilling to change. (Obviously, that this largely applies to such holidays as Christmas, Easter and *Gergyovden* is an expected fact).

Tradition, however, proved to be more persistent and ingenious - it managed to outwit the manipulators. The semi-official (without its own rituality) celebrations of the "new" holidays too soon were replaced by the yet unforgotten old customs, which surprisingly appealed to the young people from the countryside.

The process was facilitated by the beginning crisis of spiritual values in the society, caused to a degree by the enforced disregard of the authentic traditional festive rituality – in the face of that crisis, a change in the 1960s cultural policy of the state began. Ethnographic field expeditions carried out investigations by regions, local amateur folk collectives/teams emerged; various folk festivals gathered those groups to compete and show the most characteristic selections from their indigenous traditions, i.e. from the ethnographic and folk culture of the region; a series of customs and rituals began to be staged in a theatrical and musical fashion. Although they were restored on a familial and living level, their functions of cultural-identificational and socio-integrative media were retained.

The socio-political changes in Eastern Europe affected seriously the Bulgarian rural culture – the individual, private type of agriculture was re-established in all its aspects – land/woods/livestock property, small or large-scale individual farms, cooperation of land, means of production and labour based on new principles, etc. The basic transformations in the rural economy caused serious changes in the societal behaviour of the rural population – naturally lots of the forcibly or inevitably abandoned traditional forms of building rural identity and maintaining the sustained development of that identity in its natural background, revived.

At the folk festivals, participants and guests exchange useful information on the content and nature of the ritual complexes, (it concerns all the rest calendar and family celebrations) thus helping traditions and rites turn from musical-theatrical performances into functional, real and constructive element of the festivity. In the time of the advanced technologies, the cultural rural heritage can play an important part in preservation and formation of individual and collective rural identity. Even more, - the electronic media contribute to the extension of the

process as they provide via documentaries and reporting abundant information about the customs and traditions on a nation-wide scale and enrich the local practices with unfamiliar versions – a circumstance, many times increasing the social and national-integrating functions of the rural spiritual culture.

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Abbreviations/Съкращения

БЕ – Българска етнография

ГСУ–ИФФ–Годишник на Софийския университет, Историко-филологически факултет

ИЕИМ – Известия на Ентографския институт и музей

ИЕМ – Известия на Ентографския музей

ИНЕМ – Известия на Народния етнографски музей

СбНУ – Сборник за народни умотворения, наука и книжнина