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THE VILLAGES IN THE ETHNOGRAPHIC REGION OF GORNA REKA AS RELIGIOUS-RITUAL COMMUNITIES

Abstract: While abiding by the individual, but especially by the collective rules of behavior, and living in an exceptionally isolated geographical area, left on their own, the inhabitants of Gorna Reka (area near the border between Macedonia and Albania in the northwest) display a pronounced attachment to specific ritual activities. This paper analyses the collective rituals of the people of Gorna Reka at the level of the village community in general. The analysis is of the apotropeic, protective and initiating power that the activities taken have, which are represented by the collective participation principle (village *slava* - feast), the delegation principle (*vasilicari* - participants in St. Basil's Day festivities and *dodole* - ritual for inducing rain) and the principle of individual representative (village godfather of St. John's godfathership).

Key words: the people of Gorna Reka, the collective participation principle, village *slava*, the delegation principle (*vasilicari* and *dodole*) and the principle of individual representative (village godfather of St. John's godfathership).

Since for a number of centuries the Gorna Reka ethnographic area was geographically separated from the more developed parts of Macedonia and the surrounding area, and especially because of the lack of more modern communication links with the other areas and the absence of a major urban centre even in Reka's broader ethnographic area, it was destined to rely on itself and its knowledge in all areas of life. As a result of extensive stock-raising and emigration and work abroad, the relatively small villages with only a few inhabitants - often only women, old people and children - were not greatly influenced in regards to the customary way of living and survival in this area isolated both by nature and by history. In this context, the life followed a very steady, deeply ingrained traditional pattern coupled with a belief system which couldn't be unbalanced by anything or anyone. While living in such an isolated environment, the Gorna Reka people were compelled to heed **the collective** rules of conduct as much as or at times even more than **the individual** ones. Survival and acceptance of the family in the broader community have always been subordinate to the collective rules of conduct. While there were no exceptions to any joint-collective behavior, certain individual actions were exempted. The Gorna Reka village community barely even attempted to introduce some novelties in any part of life. This is especially true of the deep-rooted beliefs and customs tinted with pre-Christian and Christian or Islamic elements. The changes to the village as a ritual-religious community slowed down to a crawl. By definition, the customs included strictly defined norms of behavior which fully adhered to a certain time and space for a concrete reason. Rituals constitute an integral part of the customs, and "are a showcase of continuity and tradition with their **conditional-symbolic** action", thus important for the community they belong to (Petar Vlahovic, 1990: 14). Simultaneously, the joint village rituality was of key importance to the village

community consolidation process. The basic aim of the collective village rituals was protection, so they were performed at times when the whole village needed protection (*dodole*), but also when, according to belief, the ritual had to be performed as a precaution (rituals with masks, *pokrsti* - ritual procession for protection of the village and the sown fields) regardless of the current situation. That is precisely why the ritual itself is considered a symbolic expression - it contains a religious idea, feeling or activity, which by way of an imagined action affects certain objects or events (Petar Vlahovic, 1988:9). The ritual which is aimed at protecting the whole village can be performed in several ways. The first is the **collective participation principle**, when the whole village takes part in the performance of the ritual (that's village *slava* in Gorna Reka), the second is the **delegation principle**, when a group of people is chosen to become a representative of the interests of the whole community (in Gorna Reka that's *vasilicari* and *dodole*) and the third is the **individual representative principle** (Dusan Bandic, 1978: 111-119) (in Gorna Reka that's the village godfather of St. John's godfathership, in some situations different *bajackas* (sorceresses)), when a man/woman from the community is chosen to assume the role of protector of joint neighborhood and village interests.

Examples of the **collective participation principle** in the Gorna Reka villages include customs and rituals performed by all villagers - community members when they celebrate **village *slava***. The same word, *slava*, is used in mutual verbal communication in Albanian¹ (Dusan Nedeljkovic, 1934: 104). Each village has its patron and the name of the patron usually corresponds to that of the village church. The celebration of the local village patron is deeply embedded in the consciousness of the local population. The Gorna Reka villagers say the day of the *slava* is the most important for all those who live in the village. On that day the everyday duties are neglected and all the respect towards the village patron is expressed by making the ritual bread, by attending the service at the village church and by welcoming guests or visiting others. Because of the small number of citizens, there was no regular priest in most of the Gorna Reka villages, but the priest used to come whenever there was need, at *slavas*, weddings or funerals. On the day of the village *slava*, the priest was carrying out the church service throughout the morning while consecrating the bread at the same time. Each household kneads a *petolebie* (five ritual breads) - *denie* (a kind of a ritual bread ornamented by using wooden pattern) with *proskurnik* (the abovementioned wooden pattern), one of which is used as *nafora* (Communion bread), two are *pean leb* (consecrated bread) and two are taken by the priest. The *petolebie* was made of "pure flour", and each family even in severe poverty stored 4-5 kilograms of maize flour for the *slava* bread. The guests, however, used to come on the eve of the holiday, because on the day itself they had to attend church service, and in the afternoon the men visited the saint's namesakes². The food that was prepared for them was with or without meat, depending on the *slava*. However, the main course was beans with dried veal, potato *mandza* (a kind of a traditional dish) or cabbage. At the *slavas* without meat, the *gurbetcii* (migrant workers) brought dried Constantinople *cilojnki* fish stringed up on a thread all the way from Constantinople. Since most of the feasts are in winter, they used to drink heated plum *rakija* (kind of brandy) of the sort *dzagali*, as well as red wine which was also brought from Constantinople³.

¹ The situation hasn't changed even today, Personal field research, 1999, 2000.

² Informant - Jakimovska Milica, village of Volkovija. (Personal field information).

³ Informant - Avramovska Bosilka, village of Vrben. (Personal field information).

It is interesting to note that the Gorna Reka villagers do not make any distinction between the role and function of the village *slava* and the domestic or house *slava*. Both have the protective, apotropeic function and power. The only difference is that the village patron protects the whole village, everyone, and the domestic only the family which celebrates it. Even though there are several accounts in books about the reasons why the patrons are celebrated (Veselin Cajkanovic, 1985: 13; Petar Vlahovic, 1985: 138-147), the Gorna Reka villagers believe that the patron, the saint, should shield the village-family against all kinds of accidents, and make sure the people and the cattle are healthy and the land fertile. It is always a celebration for the living. A ritual feast, that is lunch or dinner is also organized in their honour, and the guests verbally express their wishes for well-being, health and fertility. The ritual dining table is not only the basic marker of the domestic *slava* in order to express hospitality⁴ (Milenko Filipovic, 1985:159), it is also one of the markers of the village *slava* with the same function, and at the same time it is a "sacrifice imploring for fertility" (Jovan Janicijevic, 1986: 212). Since each village has its own *slava*, the people of one village are hosts to the guests from other villages. This is a two-way relationship, because the visitors are obliged to become hosts to their current hosts when they celebrate their village *slava*. So the celebration of *slava* is in periods which recur each year on the same date. One of the major features of the celebration of the village *slava* was the chance to establish, preserve and maintain inter-village communication in the area, which, in turn, contributed to the reinforcement of the community and its ethnic identity.

Since the Gorna Reka population is mixed, i.e. it underwent internal migrations, the families which have moved from one to another Gorna Reka village celebrate their previous *slava*. For example, the people who have moved from Nicpur to Vrben celebrate St. Archangel Michael as their village *slava*, which is the village *slava* of Nicipur, and not Saint Nicholas which is a Vrben *slava*⁵. Today, since the majority of the Gorna Reka villages have been abandoned, the village *slavas* are celebrated only in a few villages, where there is at least a single family member. Thus, for the *slava* St. Dimitrija's Day (8 - 26 November) in the village of Volkovija, Milica Jakimovska who lives alone in her house was visited by her three sons from Skopje and her two daughters from Vrben with their families⁶. Some of the Gorna Reka villagers who have moved out celebrate the *slava* even in the cities they live in today. Generally, the celebration is only a bloodless sacrifice, which is manifested by breaking a cake by hand in the church, "for good health", without the ritual *trpeza* (dining table), which in such cases is organized only for the house *slava*, not the village one.

According to **the delegation principle**, a group of people is selected to carry out certain activities with a collective aim - to provide protection, initiation, incitement or summoning to the village community as a whole. The *vasilicari* are an example of the protective function. The ritual was performed on January 1 O.S. / January 30 N.S. The main participants in the ritual were only males, between 10-14 years of age. No grownups took part. The children gathered around at about 4 a.m. on the eve of the Day of St. Basil the Great, which is the source of the name of the participants in this ritual, and started the

⁴ For further information about the role and function of hospitality please refer to: Cajkanovic Veselin, *Gostoprinstvo i teofanija*, Mit i religija u Srba, Belgrad 1973.

⁵ Informant - Avramovski Ranko, village of Vrben (Personal field information).

⁶ Informant - Jakimovska Milica, village of Volkovija (Personal field information).

ritual visit of all houses in the village. They were not allowed to leave out a single house, all families had to be visited. In exchange for this visit of the village houses, the children were given beans, eggs, lard, flour, meat and potatoes by each housewife. The children took the provisions to the house of one of the participants in the procession, and the mother prepared a meal. The meal, made with the gathered provisions, was intended only for the *vasilicari*. According to this description, this ritual was almost identical to the already known rituals performed during St. Basil's Day in the other parts of our country⁷. However, apart from the difference in appearance, or in other words the fact that the masks were not used at all in this ethnic region, there are other differences. The Gorna Reka villagers believe that the bear used to wake up every St. Basil's Day and went out for food⁸. The children were supposed to serve the meal. Even though the informants could only remember these two sentences in regards to linking St. Basil's Day holiday to the already forgotten bear cult, broader literature gives other examples of similar phenomena in other ethnic regions in the Balkans⁹. Besides the children, a housewife also takes part in the ritual in the Gorna Reka villages. Since the provisions are raw and most of them (flour, meat, beans, potatoes) can't be consumed as such, somebody needs to cook them. That is done by the housewife - the mother of one of the *vasilicari* who prepares the food by using the provisions collected from all village households. However, only the children - *vasilicari* eat the food for the ritual. The explanation for this matter given by Iven Kovacevic (Ivan Kovacevic, 1985:28) is related to the special code in the relation between "man: nature = man: bear", which leads us to the decoded material:

	St. Basil's ritual (exchange of cooked-raw)	society and culture
man: bear →	-----	= -----
	mythical hero (St. Basil)	superhuman and supernatural forces

We eventually reach the final formula, which in our case is the following:

	something which can be solved by man	society and culture	St. Basil's ritual
man: nature →	-----	= -----	= man: bear → -----
	something which can't be solved by man	superhuman and supernatural forces	mythical hero

Generally speaking, if we carry out a semiotic analysis of this custom we conclude that even though the old beliefs in regards to the bear were related to the "traces

⁷ This topic is discussed in greater detail in the Collection of Wapers from the international simposium "Obicai so maski", Vevcani - Struga, 1996.

⁸ Informants: Avramovska Bosilka, village of Vrben; Spirovska Ana, village of Krakornica, Stankovska Petkana, village of Vrben (Personal field information).

⁹ By tradition, "the bear used to a man who was transformed into a bear because he was kneading the bread with his feet," according to Ducic Stevan, *Zivot i obicaji plemena Kuca*, SEZ, kn. XLVIII, Beograd 1931, Kulisic Spiro, *O ulozi i znacanju zivotinskog i ljudskog polazenika*, Etnoloski pregled, kn. 6-7, Beograd 1968, Same author, *Iz stare srpske religije*, Beograd 1970, Levi-Stros Klod, *Totemizam danas*, BIGZ, Beograd 1979, Djordjevic Tihomir, *Priroda u verovanju i predanju naseg naroda*, SEZ, kn. LXXI, Beograd 1958, Kovacevic Ivan, *Semiologija rituala*, biblioteka XX vek, Beograd 1985, Bandic Dusan, *Primena dijalekticke dihotomije u analizi obreda*, Etnoloske sveske, br. 1, Beograd 1978.

of totemism" (Spiro Kulisic, 1970: 17-19), more recent research reveals that "the human's attitude towards the bear is part of the general attitude towards nature, which is necessarily described as antagonistic by the elementary fight for survival" (Ivan Kovacevic, 1985:28).

Another example of performing rituals by adhering to the **delegation principle** is the ritual for inducing rain, known in Macedonia as *dodole*, *vajdudule*, *ojdodole*, *dozdole* and similar names. The established church-Christian system of celebrations in the past was to a great extent established on the basis of the popular agricultural/stock-raising calendar, "and its content was only partially adjusted to some religious notions" (Ilija Manolov, 1977:139). Controlling rain by magic was one of the most important things that a specially designated person could carry out for the benefit of the community. In this context, the most important activities are the ones that should provide sufficient quantities of rain (James J. Frazer, 1992:92). The people of the Balkans, as well as many other peoples beyond the Balkans peninsula, almost always perform rituals for inducing rain by magic. As a result of the Balkans cultural background and the territorial connection between the different peoples on the Balkans, their customs for inducing rain are either identical or quite similar (Blaze Ristovski, 1977: 37). Since people believed that draught, or no rain, was God's punishment for a sin committed previously (Tihomir Gjorgjevic, 1958: 58), "something" had to be done in order to please God and make him "let" the rain. According to Blaze Ristovski, even though the origin of these customs is not fully discovered, and we can not completely leave out the fact that "the native peoples of the Balkans adhered to their own customs for making their various gods let rain and that later, while an area **becomes limitrophic**, different contaminations and changes came about and the stories got so interlaced that today it is becoming exceedingly difficult to identify the paths of this development" (Blaze Ristovski, 1977:37), we can still characterize them as general Slavic. It is precisely in limitrophic areas such as the one in which the ethnic area of Gorna Reka is located where we may find elements that can be traced back to the old Balkans culture, but also to the pre-Christian and Christian traditions of the Gorna Reka people. Even though some authors think that the villages in the high mountains do not require rituals for inducing rain, since "rain is not a problem", they were recorded in the Karakacan area even though these people are stock-raisers. Like in most of ethnic Macedonia, this ritual was called *dodole* in Gorna Reka as well. In most of the cases it was performed at the beginning of summer if there was no rainfall. The *dodole* was a girl aged 9-12, not older, adorned with greenery and lilacs¹⁰. The age of the *dodole* was conditioned by the need for it to be "sexually pure, i.e. a girl before her first period" (Ivan Kovacevic, 1985:79). Adorned like this, the *dodole* and the other girls who took part in the custom would go round the village. They would stop in front of each house, sing *dodole* songs and praye to God to let it rain, and the housewives would pour water over them. In this way, by imitative or homeopathic magic, they believed that the earth will become humid from the rainfall in the same way the *dodole* was moistened. The well known belief that there is a resemblance between the producer and the produced, that is there are similarities between the cause and result is also noticed in this population. However, Vesna Culinovic-Konstantinovic argues that, apart from the principles of imitative magic, we must also lay emphasis on the principles of contagious magic manifested by the greenery placed on the subject of the ritual or the *dodole* (Vesna

¹⁰ Informant - Josifovska Milica, village of Volkovija (Personal field information).

Culinovic-Konstantinovic, 1963:86). The *dodole* is given food and food produce (oil, meat, sugar, flour) which are used to prepare a meal in the home of the *dodole*. *Gostii* (participants in *dodole*) gather around, that is the ritual food is eaten by the girls who have taken part in the *dodole* procession¹¹. If there was insufficient rain, the *dodole* ritual was repeated; however, all informants emphasize that after the *dodole* was taken out it rained in a week at most¹². While in Gorna Reka the ritual was done whenever necessary, in the village of Mavrovo in the Mavrovsko Pole region, which in regards of ethnic style of living is very closely related to Gorna Reka, the ritual was carried out only on Ascension Day (*Spasovden/ Voznesenie Hristovo*). However, this holiday is always on Thursday¹³, forty days after Easter. Perhaps this helps preserve traces of the pre-Christian tradition of following the cult of Slavic thunderer Perun "as master of rain and thunder" (Slobodan Zecevic, 1975:127-128). Author Slobodan Zecevic goes even further and argues that even the term *dudule* was probably derived from god Perun's alternate name, who apart from his general Slavic name had another, Dodo, which was used only by the South Slavs. Milenko Filipovic also pinpoints traces of the cult of Perun in terminology, in the term *peperuda* which is an alias of *dodole* (Milenko Filipovic, 1948:77). In some regions of the Republic of Bulgaria, however, the ritual *peperuda* was intertwined with the ritual *german* (Mihail Arnaudov, 1934:585), when attempts at inducing rain are done in two different ways, by imitative magic (*peperuda*) and by offering a substitute of a human sacrifice represented by a mud doll (*german*) in order to please the evil demonic forces. Even though literature reveals authors who find different ways of linking the rain inducing rituals (Petar Petrovic, 1952:378), it still seems that considering the etymology of the word *dodole* (*perperuda*, *perperone*, *prporuse*) we can assume that the explanations offered by M. Filipovic and S. Zecevic are probable. The Gorna Reka people haven't performed this ritual in over 40 years, so their basic knowledge about it is limited to the reasons why the ritual was performed as well as to some elements directly related to the *dodole* (gender, age, family status, greenery). Since many elements pervade this ritual as it is performed by all Balkan people (Macedonians, Serbs, Bulgarians, Croatians, Albanians, Greeks), we can talk of common pan-Balkan cultural elements. Similar rituals with the same purpose have been carried out throughout Europe and beyond (Natalija N. Veleckaja, 1977:87-100). We can freely say that no matter where they were performed, these rituals were always related to asking the forces which rule over nature for well-being, that in the past used to be a basic precondition for life.

The **individual representative** principle as a protector of the village community in Gorna Reka is symbolized by the **elected godfather** of St. John's godfathership, or with an individual representative in the village neighborhood, the whole village or a cluster of villages, on *Bogojavlenie* (Epiphany Day) (January 18, 19, 20), commonly referred to as *Vodici*. The holiday is made up of three days of festivities: *Vodokrst* (January 18 O.S.), *Bogojavlenie* or *Vodici* (January 19 O.S.) and *sobor* (congregation) of St. John the Baptist. These holidays in fact signify the end of the so-called "non-baptized days". According to the Christianized version of the popular

¹¹ Informant - Jovanovska Filka, village of Vrben (Personal field information).

¹² Personal field research in Gorna Reka, 1999-2000.

¹³ In the more distant past, the people Mijalci from the village of Smilevo (near Bitola) also performed "vajdudule", but on Thursday: compare with Konstantinov Hr. Dusko, *Letnite obicai, pesni i igri vo mijackoto selo Smilevo (bitolsko)*, Makedonski folklor, year X, no. 19-20, Skopje, 1977, p. 179.

religion, it's a period between Christ's birth (January 7 O.S.) until his baptism in the Jordan river during the *Vodici* (January 19 O.S.). Tradition has it that in that time the "netherworld" is open, and all kinds of *karakondzula*, *tolosum*, *japer*, *lugat* (mythical demonic creatures) roam the earth and harm people. That is also when the dead people leave their tombs, enter houses and attend *gozbas* (feasts) (Veselin Cajkanovic, 1973:50). In this critical period, the church was offering prayers as a solution, however the people still clung on to their old beliefs (Petar Vlahovic, 1972:88) and to their ways of protection. Among the different protective measures they employed, our people in this period refrained from most of the house chores: they did not spin, knit or sew, "because Mother Mary was still nursing, and the water wasn't baptized". (Marko Cepenkov, 1972:56-68). This shows how much the population believed in the power of water. In this case, water symbolizes the place where the impure forces were forced out (Ljubinko Radenovic, 1996:49,51), while consecration at the same time gives it a new, positive, protective, magic power. In fact, the Macedonians in general put great faith in the protective power of water filled on *Vodici*, even if the cross was not cast in it and it was not blessed. It is believed that on that day all water possesses healing and exceptional prophylactic powers. The water's healing power is even more pronounced if it is blessed by casting the cross in it. This water is kept in the home of every family, and it is used for drinking or rubbing in case of sickness, to avert jinx or to avert other bad influences from people as well as cattle. By celebrating *Vodici*, the Gorna Reka people have much in common with the *Mijaci* of Dolna Reka. Since they lived in very close proximity, the activities of the *Mijaci* were also part of the celebration of the holiday in Gorna Reka. There are certain differences, but they do not change the custom in its essence because the selfsame rules were applied by both the *Mijaci* and the Gorna Reka people¹⁴. The ritual practice starts on January 17, after midnight¹⁵, when the cross is wound¹⁶. Unlike the *Mijaci*, who twine the cross in the house of the old godfather, the Gorna Reka people do that outdoors. Two women take two clews, one of white and the other of red woolen thread, and go to each side of the road; then, while uncoiling, they intertwine the two threads into a single red-white thread. The intertwining must end at the *ajazma*, i.e. healing water¹⁷. The authors who study the symbolic value of colour pay special attention to white and red. In their view, white symbolizes light, purity, truth, it is related to holidays (Jack Tresidder, 2001:15-16), and has the power to create. Red, however, which is considered to be the most important in all tradition culture, is a symbol of blood, joy, life force and health. The relation or the link between white and red can also be a symbol of the male and female principle, that is the position of change which includes healing and purification, or in other words protection from the impure forces (Ljubinko Radenovic, 1996: 281-294). Apart from an apotropeic function, red also possesses a pronounced prophylactic power, while certain authors associate white with the underworld (Gabriela Schubert 1984:141). The red-white threads, intertwined in a clew,

¹⁴ In fact, some authors believe that in former times Gorna Reka and the *Mijaci* were a whole, Smiljanic Toma, *Mijaci, Gornja Reka i Mavrovsko Polje*, SEZ, kn. 5, SKA, Beograd, 1925, p. 74.

¹⁵ The ritual in fact begins in the early morning hours on January 18 O.S. (at *Vodokrst*). Informant - Avramovska Bosilka, village of Vrben (Personal field information).

¹⁶ In certain areas in Macedonia, *Vodokrst* was almost considered a work day, and did not have festive elements, Obremski Jozef, *Makedonski etnosocioloski studii*, knjiga II, Institut za staroslovenska kultura - Prilep, Skopje - Prilep, 2001, p. 236.

¹⁷ Informant - Jovanovski Jovan, village of Vrben (Personal field information).

are taken to the godfather's house where the cross is kept. At around noon, at 1-2 p.m., some women gather at the house of the godfather and knead the ritual bread, the *pogaca*. The ritual bread is sweet, it is kneaded by using "pure" flour, yeast and sugar. It should be big enough "so that there is enough for everyone". Since the bread is a bloodless sacrifice, its offering should bring prosperity to the whole community. The ritual way of eating each ritual bread is intricately linked to both stock-raising and agricultural rituality, and at the same time belongs to agricultural and stock-raising magic (Aneta Svetieva, 1984:136-137; 1990:22). The consumption of the ritual bread is also symbolic, and it is linked to the collective, or rather village community, because the act of having lunch together is yet again a ritual offering of a joint sacrifice, by which uniquely, with sacrifice, a new religious life is started (Mircha Elijade, 1991:270). The ritual embellishment of the bread is performed by a girl or a young bride by using dough to create vegetative motifs on top of the dough and a plait which circumscribes the bread. Additionally, the silver cross which is worn over the chest attached by chains and is a part of the festive national dress of the female Gorna Reka villagers is used to engrave decorative prints inside the vegetative motifs. As evident in the supplied empiric material, only female rituals are performed in the first part of *Vodopost* (until 6 p.m.), whereas the male rituals are performed in the evening and in the next two days of these festivities. At night, the old godfather carries the cross, the red-white thread clew, a pinewood twig and basil to the village church of St. Nicholas. Basil plays a key role in the spiritual living of Macedonians, and so the Gorna Reka villagers also believe in its apotropeic, prophylactic and "divine" power like the other Slav peoples. The smell of the basil symbolically links the earthly and the celestial, but since during the rituals it's often sprayed with water it also receives an underworld meaning (Ljubinko Radenkovic, 1996:214). As part of a coniferous plant, the pinewood twig, on the other hand, was very resilient and durable tree which quickly grows back¹⁸. What's more, it was the only green tree in winter in the region, and had foliage and needles. The church clerk, the pope, starts to twine the thread on the cross. The godfather carries on with the twining until he runs out of thread. After the cross is wound, it is placed in a bowl filled with water together with the basil. In this way the water in the bowl is consecrated and acquires its protective function. The cross stays overnight in the church and the next day it gets its new owner - the godfather, the protector of the village. The next day, on the morning of January 19, the priest joined by the previous and current godfather and all males in the community, go to the *ajazma* where the priest casts the cross in the water and the boys try to catch it. In some Gorna Reka villages the whole ritual was performed in the vicinity of the church in a big bowl of water. It was believed that the person who could get hold of the cross, as well as the whole community, would have great luck for a whole year. On the same day, on *Vodici*, all men who were called Boge celebrated their name day, and at night they received *vizitari* (guests). The people whose name was Jovan also celebrated their name day, but on January 20. The new godfather organized a ritual lunch for all guests from the

¹⁸ "Even if you don't plant it, the pinewood grows on its own accord. We cut the woods, but the pinewood quickly grows back, it's tough..." Informant - Josifovski Metodija, village of Krakornica (Personal field information, 1999, 2000).

village¹⁹ and from the other villages if the godfather was chosen jointly. In the past, the guests in the village of Vrben were offered lunch, while now the godfather offers only *meze* (traditional appetiser), salad and *rakija*. St. John's guests used to go to each house in the village in which there was a young bride, i.e. in which the marriage happened less than a year ago. They used to stay there for a drink and leave.

St. John's Day is given really special importance in rural Macedonia. Despite the fact that the situation has greatly changed in many ethnic regions where rituals used to be performed on this holiday, the people still manage to remember some of those customs. The holiday is still preserved to this day in the broader ethnic region of Reka. The essence of the ritual of St. John's godfathership is that the power to protect a neighborhood or the whole village is vested in a single representative - the godfather. We can see how much trust was laid on its protective role if we take a look at the Mijalci. While the cross was in the church and not in the house of the godfather-protector, in each family a hay cross was made, which assumed the role of protector until the next day. Then the new godfather would take the cross and thus prevent any danger from happening to the community as well as the individual (Galaba Palikruseva, 1975:65-66). Several godfathers were elected in some of the Gorna Reka Villages, i.e. the number of neighborhoods coincided with the number of godfathers. In some places "two neighborhoods joined with a single cross" and performed the rituals together. This happened in larger villages with a larger number of people (like Vrben, for example), and so two or three neighborhoods joined and celebrated the cross together. They joined in this manner because all villagers got a chance to "take the cross", since otherwise many years would pass and some of them would never in their lifetime have a chance to have St. John's godfathership in their home. In this way, the godfather would get elected by the village community and would perform a certain ritual on behalf of the community. This village godfathership was transient (Jozef Obrembski, 2001:237) and enabled every family to have that role. However, the majority of the Gorna Reka villages were small and only a single godfather was elected. The village of Vrben was an exception, since it had five St. John's godfathers (one for each neighborhood). Some of the villages joined and "twined the cross" together. That was done by the villagers of Ribnica, Nivista, Tanuse, Zuznje, Bibaj, who twined the cross in the village of Nicpur²⁰. The situation today is quite different, and even the Nicipur villagers do not twine the cross in Nicpur but in Gostivar. The way it was described, the St. John's godfathership tradition is still maintained in the village of Vrben, mostly because it's the only Gorna Reka village inhabited by Macedonians where migration has stopped momentarily; this is happening because of the Vrben hydro power station where some of the people are employed.

¹⁹ In the village of Belicica in 1995 the cross was in the home of Kirko and Verica Rafajlovski, and "on the day" they organized a lunch for 95 guests. Informant - Jovanovski Jovan, village of Vrben (Personal field information).

²⁰ Informants: Ignjatovski Slavko, Ignjatovska Trenda, village of Nicpur. (Personal field information, 1999, 2000).

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