

He Is a Dog, But I Am a Bigger Dog Than He Is

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The subject of this article is one specific ritual that has been practised in Macedonia during Orthodox New Year (Vasilica), when the village boys have violently beaten and expelled the village dogs. The goal of the investigation is to stress the social and the religious codes of the ritual related to the affirmation of the male principle, as well as the ambivalent relation of the humans towards the dog in general, that speaks in favour of the symbolic duality dog-wolf, which leads towards emphasised elements of the wolf cult in the New Year ritual cycle. In a certain sense the article is following the recent investigation of these phenomena done by Mirjam Mencej and others.

In the frames of the folk rituals there is certainly a logic of action which stems from beliefs. Unfortunately, the logic of the rituals is often difficult to grasp, due to the fact that there are a number of transformations which happen from the moment of its establishment or real action to the present, when one can speak of certain traits that have survived and have a relatively new ritual content. Still, the interest in finding out the specific logic of certain rituals exists. This is particularly true when it comes to those rituals that are being performed solely based upon the strength of the belief that a certain ritual “should be done, because this is how it was done in the past”, while at the same time the memories of why this was done in the first place have disappeared.

Such specific ritual, which is accompanied by numerous mysteries, is the violent beating of the dogs at Vasilica. An identical ritual has been noted in Kosovo where the dogs were beaten at Vasilica and Epiphany¹.

If we take into account the fact that in many folk proverbs there are certain reflections of beliefs and rituals, starting from these proverbs, such as “He will be treated as a dog on Vasilica day”² or “Even a dog on Vasilica day did not suffer as much as he did”³, we can conclude that this ritual praxis of dog beating on Vasilica was well known.

The earliest notes on this ritual that was practised in certain parts of Macedonia, which at the same time state the mystery regarding the reasons why it was practised, date from the first quarter of the XXth century⁴. However, it is in human nature to try to

¹ Ш.Кулишић - П.Ж. Петровић - Н. Пантелић, Српски митолошки речник (понатаму: СМР), Београд 1970, с.в. пас; пасја недеља.

² This proverb is from the town of Bitola and its region. I myself was born in Bitola, and I have learnt this proverb in childhood.

³ Мил. С. Филиповић, Дебарски Дримкол, Ск.1939, 114.

⁴ Мил. С. Филиповић, Дебарски Дримкол, Ск.1939, 114.

give sense to the apparent “ritual senselessness”. This was done by the village population, but as well by the investigators themselves. Sometimes it is almost impossible to extract what is an authentic information and what is a recent creation of the villagers, the author. In that sense we would like to note two examples covering two neighbouring regions - Maleš and Pijanec, one of Jeremija Pavlovic, 1928 and the other more recent by Dimitar Uzunski, 1995.

1. Jeremija Pavlovic gives the following data on this ritual in Maleševo⁵

The day before New Year all young people gather on one place, everyone holding a stick or a shovel, they split into three groups and prepare for the beating of the dogs. The owners of the dogs know this, they have already released their dogs and expelled them in the fields. There is a belief that if a young boy does not hit a dog on this very day he will die the same year. Young boys go through the village in groups shouting: ha! and u! and if they meet old people they toss them on the back saying: “Surova dedo!” or “Surova babo!” (meaning something like Happy New Year - translator’s note). This ritual starts at three in the afternoon the day before New Year’s Eve and lasts until sunset. It is a very old custom. At that time all dogs go into the fields and if the youngsters find a dog that is on a rope it can even die of the harsh beating. This expulsion of the dogs aims towards “educating” them to do their duty - to chase the wolves which are near the live stock and not in the villages.

2. Dimitar Uzunski, 1995⁶, gives the following data:

Our New Year in fact starts with the expulsion of the dogs. The dogs are being “led” by a special device called “topuz” (a stick 80cm long, extended at the end in a form of pyramid). The length of the stick depends on the age of the boy that carries it. The main participants of this ritual were the village youngsters, and later on just the children. They are beating the dogs so that they start barking - as a sign to remind everyone who has forgotten that New Year is approaching. The dogs are beaten so that they survive, so that they stay healthy and resistant during the year. The dogs are expelled outside of the village, anywhere, but not close to the houses. Then the children go home and change clothes, somewhere around 12 o’clock. Then the adult men start preparing for other customs”.

These two models give numerous relevant data that correspond in terms of the time of the ritual action, the ritual space, the ritual target/victim (dog), the participants (youngsters) and ritual instruments. However, the explanation of the reasons, the function and the logic of the ritual does not correspond totally with the above mentioned elements of the ritual. The most significant example in this sense is the information that the dogs have been violently expelled in order to perform their duty - to chase the wolves, and on the other hand that they are beaten in order to become healthy, to survive the winter. We can assume that this explanation is an attempt to rationalise the ritual on behalf of the village population (the informants) and the authors. Besides, it is well known on the basis of field research that with few variations this is an usual way of explaining the ritual by the participants.⁷ This “explanations” can, however, be very

⁵ Јеремија М. Павловић, Малешево и Малешевци, Београд, 1928 , 202, 203.

⁶ Own field research in Pijanec 1995. Informant Dimitar Uzunski, teacher from the village of Trabotivišta.

⁷ Бл. Ристовски, Машките еротски песни околу коледниот огин во некои места во Македонија, МФ, 8, 15-16, Скопје, 1975, стр.225.

relevant in the frames of some other investigations of the ritual, but for us the most important moment is the absence of correspondence of the ritual structure with the function of the ritual that has been suggested by the informants or the authors.

It is without any doubt that all these data speak about the violent beating of the dogs with sticks. However, the material that concerns the expulsion of the dogs is not very clear when it comes to the way this ritual action was done. According to some data⁸, the village people were expecting this procedure and they were releasing the dogs and expelling them outside the village beforehand. According to some recent data⁹, the memories of who has released the dogs and how they were expelled are not clear. There is one short information on the celebration of Vasilica in the village of Volkovija, which says that early in the morning a group of young boys and men, so called “vasilichari” have gathered. One of the groups were the so called “keepers”, they were entitled to defend the group from the village dogs with sticks.¹⁰ They had another function, to bless their sticks by placing them into the fire saying “žar pilinja” (birds of fire) etc. The author states that in the first quarter of the 20th century, the ritual was transformed into children’s ritual and folklore.

These different data create a confusion regarding the function of the ritual of beating the village dogs. In that sense, it is a question whether these are different ritual variants which were present in different Macedonian regions, or whether it is a matter of a once unique ritual praxis of surrounding the village by a group of youngsters and young men who were expelling the village dogs by using sticks. One of the possible assumptions is that in the past the unique ritual was separated into two according to the function: the status and the age of the participants. The youngsters’ task was to defend and triumph over the dogs, and when it comes to ritual timing they came first. After them the second group of adult young men — both married and not married, so called “vasilichari”/”surovari” – appeared on the scene, wearing masks.

Having in mind that most of the data refer to two ritual activities of the male persons, who are clearly distinguished by status, function and age, the subject of our interest in the article will remain the same and will focus upon the ritual form including youngsters that beat and expel the dogs.

In order to examine the data in a more detailed manner, we would define five key codes of the ritual: 1. ritual time 2. ritual space 3. participants (male, youngsters) 4. ritual instruments 5. direct ritual target / victim - dog.

1. Ritual time

- Surva/Vasilica 01.01 (old calendar) / 14.01 (new calendar)
- Koleda 24.12 (old calendar) / 06.01 (new calendar)
- beginning of ritual time = audio markation = barking of dogs
- day = high visibility part of the day = public character of the ritual

⁸ Јеремија М. Павловић, Малешево и Малешевци, Београд, 1928, 202, 203.

⁹ Informant Dimitar Uzunski, teacher from the village of Trabotivišta.

¹⁰ Мил. С. Филиповић, Божићни обичаји у Волковији (у Пологу), Јужни Преглед, 1, Скопје, 1937, 29-31.

Most of the data regarding the ritual time when the boys were beating the dogs refer to Surva/Vasilica. According to Blaže Risteski, “In the region of Tikveš the kids beat (“to death”= the household dogs - “so that they can pass the winter”¹¹, and early on Kolede, according to the same belief, they beat lightly the girls “koledashki” and their own parents”. It is not very clear if in this case it is a matter of rescheduling of ritual time or a matter of usual ritual praxis in this region. Still, the ritual time refers to thr few key days of the New Year cycle, and it does not destroy the temporal ritual concept.

The data show that the “beating of the dogs” is a first interval of the ritual time on Surva/Vasilica. This beginning of ritual time is marked by an audio signal - the barking of the dogs. The ritual was performed during daytime or in the afternoon. This determines the public character of the ritual. In that sense everyone could be a direct witness of the events related to the victim and the participants and could fully identify them.

2. Ritual space

- Village - village yards/houses = code belongs to the category of culture
- Outside of the village borders = code belongs to the category of nature

The ritual started inside the borders of the village as a ritual space. Upon that very moment the dogs were considered as part of nature in the frames of culture, and they had strictly defined functions as keepers of the house, the live-stock, the people and the property. The process of beating, expulsion and in some cases killing of the dogs shows that they were not desired in the ritual space during Surva/Vasilica. This relation defines the dogs as “dangerous”, “filthy animals” during Vasilica. The creation of a state of chaos begins with them being beaten and paralysed / dissabled or expelled outside the ritual space, outside the village borders, in the wilderness. In one way or another the dogs are temporarily put outside the category of “culture” and they are moved to the category of “nature”, back to the circle of their predecessors - the wolves.

3. Participants in the ritual - young boys

- male persons - village division according to gender
- young boys (in a phase of transition) - village division according to age
- usual working obligations of the boys = taking care of the livestock
- male principle in the frames of the Surva/Vasilica rituals
- breaking the fear of the wolf/close encounter with a shepherd dog = ritual of initiation
- social+religious pressure = belief that a boy who did not hit a dog will die that year

In the frames of the village division according to the gender in traditional culture, the male gender is synonymous with the kin, the family “slava”, the continuation of the family tree and the existence of the house. Desired characteristics of the male

¹¹ Бл. Ристовски, Машките еротски песни околу коледниот огин во некои места во Македонија, МФ, 8, 15-16, Скопје, 1975, стр.225: заб.37.

person were his physical abilities for hard work, ability to organise work, ability to make the right decisions, strong character, honesty and bravery. The man proved these characteristics in the frames of the family and the village community all his life. In the frames of the village division of labour according to gender and age, the boys were mainly obliged with taking care of the livestock.

The village division shows that the young boys were still without a real status related to accepted gender values, up to the moment of establishing a family. In that sense, the already married were much more appreciated. The first year of the marriage was in fact a test period for the new status.

Before that the young boys went through ritual procedures which were a phase of attaining the real status. The boys' teams through certain ritual procedures of initiation have gradually become closer to the traditional social values of adult man. In that sense they appeared as defenders of the village, the village endogamy, the moral norms and other values of traditional culture. During this test period it was important that the boys showed fearless behaviour and courage that were the most valued characteristics of an adult man. An important courage test that served as a ritual initiation of the boys was their ritual clash with the dangerous village dogs. This fight is a procedure that is not appropriate for the real men since it gives them unjustified strength over the victim.

There was a strong social and religious pressure upon the boys to undergo this ritual of fighting their own fear. This can be concluded based upon the belief that "if a boy does not hit a dog on that very day he will die".¹²

There is a realistic possibility in this case that the dog represents a symbol and substitute for a wolf, having in mind the magical form of healing when it comes to children, that is - using wolf body parts for that purpose. Even the recent field investigations from 2001 in the region of Kumanovo¹³ have shown that for that purpose a "wolf howl"¹⁴, a dry wolf heart, wolf fur and other wolf parts were used.

The noisy performance of the young boys against the village dogs establishes the beginning of ritual time and emphasises the domination of the male character of Surva/Vasilica. The ritual activities at Vasilica promote the female principle as well, through transferring the female roles to the man, through ritual transvestity, which is not a subject of investigation at this moment. This totality of the ritual does not exist now even when it comes to the memory of the informants. Today the date mainly refers to the masked teams and the data on the ritual beating of the dogs are reduced.

4. Ritual tools - stick ("topuz")

- massive stick extended at one end = weapon = phallus symbol
- "colored" stick = "dren", fruit tree = code of the vitality of the green plants

All data show that the ritual instruments of the boys were the special sticks. Unfortunately there are no data regarding their appearance. One of the relatively new

¹² Јеремија М. Павловић, Малешево и Малешевци, Београд, 1928, 202, 203.

¹³ Field material from the project "Pirajhme" - Public museum Kumanovo, village Malotino, 2001. Research person Vesna Petreska, PhD, informant Trajan Mladenovski, born 1934, village of Malotino.

¹⁴ In order to make a "wolf howl" one should cut in a circle the soft parts around the wolf's mouth.

examples from Pijanec describes the stick as extended at one end (“topuz”) and says that at Surva another colored stick was used, to lightly hit the girls.¹⁵

The investigations, including our own, concerning the stick, especially the one that is extended at one end, show that it is a matter of a significant phallus symbol.¹⁶ If two sticks were used at Surva/Vasilica, we can then speak of two functions of the stick. The stick with extension of the “topuz”, “surojca”, “grabovica” etc., besides its connotations as an erotic symbol had a weapon function since it was more massive and it weighed more. The slap with that stick surely differed from the symbolic “hit” of the girls that was done with a colored decoration stick. If we take into account the proverb “The stick is used according to the (size of the) bear”¹⁷, it is logical that according to the weight of the boy and the strength of the enemy (the dog) the weight of the stick was established.

The boys, through carrying such sticks, have actually and symbolically demonstrated maleness and violence having a tendency towards gender distinction.

5. Direct ritual target/victim - dog

culture (control) = positive (good)	nature (no control) = negative (bad)
good dog = good + bad	
+good	bad -
fidelity	infidelity
goodness	badness
	danger
	egoism
	blood thirst
supernatural characteristics:	
genesis: dog=wolf/wolf=dog	
dog: wolf:	
resistance towards evil spells	resistance towards evil spells
resistance towards diseases	resistance towards diseases
naturalisation of a vampire	naturalisation of a vampire
foreseeing of death	foreseeing of death
ritual dirtiness	ritual dirtiness
capability for metamorphosis	capability for metamorphosis
capability for contamination through indirect contact	capability for contamination through indirect contact
communication with a wolf	communication with a dog
the wolf is afraid of the dog	the dog is afraid of the wolf

It is a question if the data saying that in the past Vasilica or “Clean Monday” were considered as “dog’s holidays”.¹⁸ We do not have enough arguments in that sense. At the same time we are not in a position to resolve in a simple way the question of the dog - target/victim at Vasilica as a way of communicating with the “holy”. There are numerous

¹⁵ Own field research in Pijanec 1995. Informant Dimitar Uzunski, teacher from the village of Trabotivišta.

¹⁶ Анета Светиева, Еротски елементи во обредите со маски кај Македонците, Обичаи со маски, Музеј на Македонија, Скопје 1998, 9, 10.

¹⁷ Марко К. Цепенков, кн. 8: Пословици, поговорки, гатанки, клетви и благослови, “Македонска книга”, Скопје 1972, поговорка бр. 2382.

¹⁸ Ш. Кулишић - П. Ж. Петровић - Н. Пантелић, Српски митолошки речник (понатаму: СМР), Београд 1970, с.в. пас; пасја недеља.

unsolved questions since it is not a matter of a “classical” act of sacrifice with regulated sacrifice rituals. The fact that a dog could die as a result of the severe beating shows that it is a matter of a “collateral” blood sacrifice and not a matter of special ritual rules on the selection of the sacrificed object and the act of sacrifice itself.

Since the dogs present a direct target/victim of maltreating on Surva/Vasilica we assume that there are other reasons for that kind of ritual behaviour. There are a few realistic assumptions related to the dog in the world of the culture and nature related to its genesis, its function and mythological attributes that are assigned to it.

Although the dog is considered as the oldest companion of man, obviously its taming was reduced to the most necessary level since it was thought that it is only the wild and not the tamed dog that could properly do its function of a keeper and assistant at work. This attitude is obvious when one examines the folk proverbs of the following type: “The bad dog can take care of the sheep”.¹⁹ Nourishing the wild nature of the dog as a useful characteristic for certain economical activities of man was realised through limited procedures of taming and through selection, so that one could say that “a selection of the dog was done so that it stems from a good family”.²⁰ How highly the “natural” dog was valued could be seen from the fact that for a killed high quality shepherd dog in the Skopje valley a half or a whole “krvnina”²¹ of the money sum that was paid for a killed human had to be compensated. According to information from the region of Gevgelija, during the division of a household the dogs remained in mutual ownership and they were fed together.²²

On the other side, this component of the wild nature of the dog created binary oppositions when it came to the feelings of man, that are also characteristic when it comes to the phenomena of the “holy”. The ambivalent relation of the man towards the dog is reflected in two contradictory directions: positive (good-loyal) - negative (bad-dangerous).

If one takes into the account the quantity of the data, one can notice that the position “positive - good” is less present than the position “negative - bad”. The dilemma when it comes to the formation of folk beliefs concerning the negative characteristics of the dog remains. In that sense it is also a question as to how much Christianity influenced its formation. In the Bible there are numerous examples where the dog is not mentioned in a direct or indirect negative sense.²³

In the folk beliefs the dog is, however, connected to the most positive virtues since it is loyal to man, and in this sense it became a symbol of these virtues - “loyal as a dog”. The ritual bread of the “badnik” type presents a dog as a keeper of the symbol called “argach”.²⁴ On the other hand, due to its aggressiveness, thirst for blood

¹⁹ Marko K. Cepenkov, kn. 8: Poslovici, pogovorki, gatanki, kletvi i blagoslovi, “Makedonska kniga”, Skopje 1972, pogovorka br. 1329.

²⁰ Idem, proverb n. 919.

²¹ “Krvnina” is a transformed blood revenge where the term refers to the stipulated money sum for a killed person. This form of “blood returning” was not always acceptable.

²² Idem, 251.

²³ It is a question why Christianity had advocated a negative aspect of the dog in a direct or symbolical form. According to some investigators this is because in Israel there were many street dogs that were hungry and attacking the people. According to others the term “dog” was used to describe someone belonging to the lowest social class. There is another assumption related to the fierce and negative attitude of Christianity towards the prehistoric beliefs connected to worshiping certain kinds of animals, among others the dog. See: Донка Петканова, Средновековна литературна символика, Софија, 1994, (куче - 82-84).

²⁴ “argach” is a local term for a fence. Editorial: Збирка на обредни лебови од Македонија, 1982-1990. (Ed. Aneta Svetieva PhD). Институт за фолклор “М. Цепенков” - Скопје.

and unpredictability, the dog has created fear and distrust. In that sense it became a symbol of a bad temper, so that even for a bad man one should say “a dog” and a “bitch” for a female person. In a few Macedonian folk tales and sayings the woman, being described as a sexually addicted “bitch”, is presented as having sex with a dog in an act of sodomy²⁵, while the result of such a relationship, the children, are persons with dog’s characteristics²⁶.

The symbolic tie between the dog and the wolf belongs to the group “negative-bad-dangerous”. In the frames of the folk tale there is a belief in the two-way genesis of the dog. According to some examples, the wolf is the predecessor of the dog²⁷, while according to others the dog is the predecessor of the wolf²⁸. In the Macedonian variation of the story, the creation of the wolf is a result of the Devil’s work, and the creation of the dog of God’s work. The dog (wolf) as an animal with dual functions, presents a zoomorphic code of nature and the non-organised space. The population assigned identical mythological attributes to the dog and the wolf, for example the resistance to bad spells²⁹, resistance regarding sickness and wounds (“healthy as a wolf”³⁰ = “the sickness passed as if he was a dog”³¹), the relation with the underworld as a fore-teller of death³², power for vampire neutralisation³³, “ritual dirtiness”³⁴, ability of metamorphosis³⁵, contamination with skin wounds through indirect contact - a touch of the body part where a dog/wolf has scratched his nails³⁶, etc. It is also believed that the wolves and the dog communicate. According to some stories whose topic is the “mute language”, the “unloyal” dogs have made an agreement with the dogs to let them into the sheep-yard and then to split the fortune.³⁷ There are also beliefs that intercourse

²⁵ Јозеф Обрембски, Фолклорни и етнографски материјали од Порече, кн.1, Скопје 2001, 99-101 (Ed. Tanas Vrazinovski); Истиот, Македонски етносоциолошки студии, кн.2, Скопје 2001, 278.

²⁶ Note: In this case it is a matter of the genesis of the Turks.

²⁷ Народна митологија на Македонците, кн. 2, Етнографски и фолклорни материјали. Редакција: Танас Вражиновски, Соработници: Лјупчо С. Ристески, Владимир Карацовски, Лола Симовска, Прилеп 1998, story number 233: “The devil has created the wolf and God has created the dog”.

²⁸ Тихомир Р. Ђорђевиќ, Природа у веровању и предању нашег народа, књ. 1, СЕЗб, књ. LXXI, Живот и обичаји народни, књ. 32, САН, Београд, 1958, 207.

²⁹ Idem, 209 (materials from Krushevo), 246 (materials from Gevgelija)

³⁰ Тихомир Р. Ђорђевиќ, Природа у веровању и предању нашег народа, књ. 1, СЕЗб, књ. LXXI, Живот и обичаји народни, књ. 32, САН, Београд, 1958, 209.

³¹ Марко К. Цепенков, кн.8: Пословици, поговорки, гатанки, клетви и благослови, “Македонска книга”, Скопје 1972, поговорка бр. 3111; Proverb “I am healthy as a wolf”(village Malotino Kumanovsko, 2001. Informant Trajan Mladenovski from Malotino, Investigator Vesna Petreska PhD).

³² Тихомир Р. Ђорђевиќ, Природа у веровању., n. d., 250 (materials from Debar), 237.

³³ Танас Вражиновски, Народна митологија на Македонците, кн. 1, Assistants: Лјупчо С. Ристески, Владимир Карацовски, Лола Симоска, Скопје-Прилеп, 1998, 226 (vampire).

³⁴ Ш. Кулишиќ - П. Ж. Петровиќ - Н. Пантелиќ, Српски митолошки речник, Београд 1970, с.в. пас; пасја недеља; вук.

³⁵ Танас Вражиновски, Народна митологија на Македонците, кн. 1, н. д., 121,199, 226.

³⁶ Ш. Кулишиќ - П.Ж. Петровиќ - Н. Пантелиќ, Српски митолошки речник, Београд 1970, с.в. пас; пасја недеља; Тихомир Р. Ђорђевиќ, Природа у веровању и предању нашег народа, књ. 1, СЕЗб, књ. LXXI, Живот и обичаји народни, књ. 32, САН, Београд, 1958, 236; Марко Цепенков, кн.9: Народни Верувања - Детски игри, Кирил Пенушлиски (Ед.); Лепосава Спијровска, “Македонска книга”, Скопје 1972, 96 (п. 510: “Goast - dog”); Јозеф Обрембски, Фолклорни и етнографски материјали од Порече, кн.1, Танас Вражиновски (Ед.), Скопје, 2001, 211.

³⁷ Branislav Rusić, Nemušti jezik u predanju i usmenoj književnosti Južnih Slovena, Filozofski fakultet na Univerzitetu Skopje, Istorisko-filološki oddel, Posebni izdanija, kn.5, Skopje, 1954, 60-62.

occures between the dog and the wolf. The physical similarity between them has been so great that sometimes it happened that the village people would catch a dog thinking that it is a wolf.³⁸

The duality dog-wolf can be established also upon the beliefs that the wolves were dogs on the day of St. George and St. Sava.³⁹

Although there are signs of equality between the mythological attributes of the wolf and the dog, the folk tradition sets a thin line between them that marks the difference. In that sense, the border between the former and the latter animal is the fear they feel of each other, since “the wolf is scared of a dog” and the “dog is scared of the wolf”.⁴⁰ The data show that the intercourse between the wolf and the dog was considered as a sign of bad luck.⁴¹ There is a cult towards the wolf that is manifested at St. Luka (Kumanovo area)⁴² and Marta/martinici/Wolf’s holidays, as well as during holidays at the beginning of the shepherd’s year (Gjurgjovden, Eremija), while there is no such ritual praxis when it comes to the dog.

The above mentioned data show that the dog had a special status in the traditional community as an ambivalent animal that belongs to the world of nature more than to the world of culture, so that his natural instinct could prevail at any given time. As such, this animal was a continuous challenge for man to become its master in all possible situations. The tying up as a method of taking away its strength, the beating, its rotation on ropes over water (“cirene” - Bulgaria⁴³) were methods of controlling its wild nature and its introduction to the world of culture. These rituals of taming / domination were a part of the male ritual praxis and work. Thus, one of the ways of proving the “male value” in a traditional community was the power of managing the unpredictable “dog’s nature” through demonstration of cruelty that was even greater than the one of the dog itself. This wish for a dominant position of the man over the dog is reflected in the folk saying “he is a dog but I am a bigger dog than he is”⁴⁴, although, as usual, it refers to inter-human relations. Having in mind the beliefs in supernatural characteristics of the dog that are similar to the ones of the wolf, the domination over the dangerous village dogs was most probably comprehended as a magical supremacy over the wolves. It was expected that the boys should pass this ritual maturity test through the limited clash with the tied or untied village dogs during Surva/Vasilica, a test that according to its essence was equal to the close encounter with the wolves.

However, there are still open questions related to the ritual logic of these events, the “thing” that is in direct relation with beliefs.

³⁸ Idem, 231.

³⁹ СМР, с.в. Св. Ђорђе, Св. Сава; Словенска митологија, Београд 2001, с.в. пас.

⁴⁰ Тихомир Р. Ђорђевић, Природа у веровању и предању нашег народа, књ. 1, СЕЗБ, књ. LXXI, Живот и обичаји народни, књ. 32, САН, Београд, 1958, 212.

⁴¹ Idem, 209.

⁴² Village of Malotino, Kumanovo area. Informant Trajan Mladenovski 2001. Field data of Vesna Petrovska, PhD, “Pirajhme” project - Museum Kumanovo.

⁴³ Стоян Раичевски, Валерия Фол, Кукерът без маска, София, 1993, 95-96.

⁴⁴ Марко К. Цепенков, кн.8: Пословици, поговорки, гатанки, клетви и благослови, “Македонска книга”, Скопје 1972, proverb n. 3361.

If the data are correct, that in the past during winter the villagers have expelled the dogs outside of the village in order to protect the village space from wolves⁴⁵, this can be an explanation of an essential code of ritual logic related to the behaviour of the adolescents who have provoked the violent dog nature on this day of the New Year cycle. The religious basis of the ritual procedure of expulsion and beating of the dogs could be a result of the beliefs that are correlated to the cult of the wolf⁴⁶. A few pieces of information from Macedonia from the 1930s, that refer to two important holidays of the New year cycle - Ignjat and Badnik (Christmas), show that these days in the frames of the shepherd communities, among others, were important “wolf’s” holidays. As is well known on the basis of the past investigations, they are a part of the dangerous period of “crazy wolves”⁴⁷. According to sources from Poreche, Star Badnik (Ignjat) and Mal Badnik (Badnik - Kolede)⁴⁸ were considered as “heavy” days. It was forbidden to say aloud the name of these holidays, as well as to say aloud the term “wolf” that has been replaced by the alternative general name, “gadotija” (something dreadful), “loshotija” (something very bad) etc.

Star Badnik (Ignjat) was celebrated for the livestock, following the same restrictions as the Martinci (Wolf’s holidays).

“At Star Badnik⁴⁹ one should not work. We do not use the broom, we do not touch the needle, we do not put on our collars. The broom is hidden the previous evening. We hide the wool so that we do not work with it. You would put your wool aside so that you do not see it. One should not plough on that day. The one who is smart should not plough. To protect one from a snake, from a wolf, from everything”⁵⁰.

Similar procedures are related to the cult of the wolf, and they were performed on special days, until Eremija holiday, when there is a visible step by step change of the magical procedure, of the one of “raspust” (release) to the one of “zaključ” (locking up - the wolves, the bad ones).

Clean Monday⁵¹ - “we would collect everything that we have. We wash everything, we steam everything. And the housewife would not talk. when the washing is done she would tie the scarf on the back and say:

*I am tying up the mouth of the eagle,
The mouth of the snake
And the mouth of the wolf.*⁵²

⁴⁵ Јеремија М. Павловић, Малешево и Малешевци, Београд, 1928, 202, 203; III. Кулишић - П. Ж. Петровић - Н. Пантелић, Српски митолошки речник, Београд 1970, s.v. pas; pasja nedelja: (It has been noted that a similar ritual praxis of dogs’ expulsion and killing of the ones who were not realised existed on Kosovo).

⁴⁶ Mirjam Mencej, Volčji pastir v kontekstu dosadanjih raziskav na področju slovanske mitologije, Studia mytologica Slavica, 4, Ljubljana 2001, 159-188.

⁴⁷ Idem, 179.

⁴⁸ Јозеф Обрембски, Македонски етносоциолошки студии, кн.2, Редакција Танас Вражиновски, Скопје, 2001, 215-217.

⁴⁹ 20th of December according to the old calendar = 2nd of January according to the new.

⁵⁰ Јозеф Обрембски, Фолклорни и етнографски материјали од Порече, кн.1, Редакција Танас Вражиновски, Скопје, 2001, 125.

⁵¹ First day of the Easter.

⁵² Јозеф Обрембски, Фолклорни и етнографски материјали од Порече, кн.1, Редакција Танас Вражиновски, Скопје, 2001, 130,131.

Letnik⁵³ - We do not work. We hide the needles, we do not use the brooms, we do not wash- nothing. To protect us from the bad, the snake, the wolf⁵⁴.

Gjurgjovden and Eremija - "locking up the ugly ones"⁵⁵.

Gjurgjovden - "this holiday means that the ugly ones are locked up".

Jeremija⁵⁶ - you would take a bell from the goats, you would go around the house, around the sheep yard and you would put one stone below the tongue and you would push behind you a piece of wood and some people would go after you - you would go ahead and say:

"Go away you ugly one, go away you wolf.

You to the sea, me to the field

You away from the sun, me on the sun

Go away you ugly one, go away you wolf!"⁵⁷

The investigation shows that in the materials that refer to the beating of the dogs during the change of the seasons in the frames of the New Year ritual cycle there are variable and constant elements:

Variable elements
1. holidays: a) Vasilica (Surva); b) Kolede
2. participants: 1) a ritual group of boys: vasilichari and "guards" b) two ritual groups
3. position of the dogs: a) dogs on a rope; b) released dogs
4. ritual punishment: a) beating; b) beating and expulsion
5. function of the ritual: a) expulsion to perform a duty; b) health-fertility
Constant elements
1. the character of the ritual: noon/afternoon-day=public character
2. period of the calendar: New Year cycle
3. critical ritual period: "non-baptised days" - released wolves
4. participants in the ritual: young boys - period of transition
5. ritual clash: beating/torture/death of the dogs - domination/provocation/supremacy - initiation
6. ritual instrument: massive stick-weapon-phallus symbol
7. dog=direct ritual target/victim - ritual dirtiness - nature
9. function of the ritual: initiation-supremacy of the male principle - cult towards the wolf

⁵³ 1st of March old calendar = 14th of March new calendar.

⁵⁴ Јозеф Обрембски, Фолклорни и етнографски материјали од Порече, н.д., 131.

⁵⁵ Јозеф Обрембски, Фолклорни и етнографски материјали од Порече, н.д., 143.

⁵⁶ 1st of May old calendar = 14th of May old calendar.

⁵⁷ Јозеф Обрембски, Фолклорни и етнографски материјали од Порече, н.д.,132.

When it comes to the variability of the data regarding the holidays, as a stable average value we stress the ritual time, as an interval in the New Year cycle: Kolede - Surva/Vasilica. The data on the participants of the ritual are also a variable element. In that sense, one piece of information shows that it is a matter of the activities of one ritual group being split into two parts according to their ritual function. Other data show that it is a matter of two ritual groups that step on the scene one after the other and could be defined as different according to their function, status and the age of the participants in the ritual system. The third variable refers to the position of the dogs - some data say that the dogs were tied up to a rope during the ritual action, while others say that the dogs were not tied up and that they were expelled outside of the village. These data could be very important if compared to the general “encyclopaedia” data referring to this ritual praxis, which say that “once upon a time” during the winter the dogs were expelled out in the fields to chase the wolves, while humans went through the village and killed the tied up dogs.⁵⁸ I did not succeed in identifying the true empiric source of this short information, but if it is correct it also speaks in favour of the older and recent data from Pijanec that people would expect such violent behaviour directed towards the dogs and that this was the reason why they untied them.

When it comes to the ritual group and functions, we think that neither the first nor the second form (tied/untied dogs) does disrupt the basic concept of the ritual in the part that refers to the close contact of the boys and the dogs. The same attitude applies to the variance of the ritual action: beating and expulsion or just beating, since they are related when it comes to the identical expected effect: fighting the fear - supremacy.

The constant elements speak in favour of the public character of the ritual since the ritual action was done at noon or in the afternoon, in daylight. Concerning the period of the calendar, all known examples speak about the New year ritual cycle, especially about the critical period of “non-baptised days.” At the same time this period is a time of “released” wolves. Other data show that in the New year cycle this ritual could be noted starting from Ignjat (Star Badnik), that speaks in favour of the ritual activities related to the cult of the wolf.

The boys in the period of transition were expected to clash with the dangerous village dogs. For a successful ritual action the boys constantly used the same instruments - sticks with a realistic function of a weapon and a symbolical function of a phallus symbol. It was expected that the boys should pass this ritual test of maturity in the limited clash with the village dogs at the time of Surva/Vasilica, to fight their fear, as a precondition for their own survival in nature. The ritual clash of the boys with the village dogs is a procedure not worthy of real men since it gives them an unjustified advantage over the victim. In that sense, the very nature of the activity shows that it is a matter of a ritual of initiation.

There was a strong social pressure upon the boys to pass through this ritual of initiation. This can be concluded starting from the belief that “the boy who would not hit a dog that day will die the same year”.

Now there is a logical question: “what would be the reason for the boy to die the same year”? If one were to examine the ritual contents of a few separated days starting from Ignjat to Gjurgovden and Eremija, one could conclude that there is a regular ritual praxis related to the wolf cult and cult towards other “ugly things” (snake etc.). Having

⁵⁸ CMP, с.в. Пасја неделја.

in mind the village division of the work, the boys were mainly in charge for taking care of the livestock, which includes spending time in the mountains, fields etc. - places full of dangers, especially wolves. This element taken from real life has strengthened the reason for continuous beliefs in dangerous creatures and animals. In that sense, there is one more possibility that this hides traces of beliefs in which the child appears as one of the potential victims of the wolf, that is the chief (shepherd) of the wolves.⁵⁹

The dog is also a constant element, it is a direct ritual target/victim, under constant attacks by boys, fighting on unequal terms: tied up or facing on its own a violent group of boys with sticks. The examination of folk beliefs on the dog show that there was an ambivalent relation towards it, in which – having in mind the quantity of the data – the negative characteristics prevail. Christianisation had a certain influence over this religious attitude, since the Bible contains the negative attitude towards the dog. It is even more likely that there is a symbolic dog-wolf tie. The ambivalent relation towards the dog is visible when one takes into account that only the bad dog is considered as a good (useful) dog, as well bearing in mind the identical elements of the genesis and the mythological attributes which speak in favour of the duality dog-wolf, which finally leads us to the emphasised elements of the wolf cult as one of the significant codes of the ritual beating, torturing and expulsion of dogs at Vasilica.

⁵⁹ Mirjam Mencej, Volčji pastir v kontekstu dosadanjih raziskav na področju slovanske mitologije, n.d.163,164.

И тој пес, ама и јас уште попес

Анета Светиева

Во Македонија е забележан еден карактеричен обред на суровото тепање на кучињата на Василица, каде учесници биле селските момчиња. Идентична обредна пракса е забележана на Косово каде кучињата ги тепале на Василица и Водици (Богојавление), а слични форми на обредна суровост кон кучињата е забележана и во Бугарија. Обредната пресметка на момчињата со селските кучиња, претставува постапка недостојна за вистинските мажи бидејќи им овозможува неоправдана предност над жртвата, што оди во прилог на мислењето дека се работи за обред на инициација. Се очекувало, момчињата да го поминат овој испит на зрелост во лимитираниот судир со селски кучиња како обредна постапка на совладување на стравот како услов за сопствен опстанок во услови на живот во природа. Покрај силната општествена и религијска присила за реализација на овој чин на инициација од страна на младите момчиња, тука е присутна симболичката врска **куче** → **волк**. Амбивалентноста по однос на кучето се гледа од ставот дека само **лошото куче е добро** (корисно) куче, како и по однос на идентичните елементи во генезата и митолошките својства што зборуваат во прилог на двојството **куче** → **волк**, што во крајна линија не води до изразени елементи од **култ кон волк** како еден од битните религијски кодови на обредот со тепање, сакатење и гонење на кучињата на Василица.