

The Festivities of St. Barbara, St. Ignatius - the God Bearer and Nativity Eve in the Area of the Town of Kratovo

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On the bases of the empirical material we can conclude that the New Year's Eve festivities and rituals begin in the period of the winter solstice, on the day of St. Barbara (4th of December in the Old Style Calendar) and St. Ignatius (20th of December in the Old Style Calendar), when the women from the older generations perform some magical actions in the agrarian rituality. These days are in direct relation with the agrarian character and the folk calendar. They denote the turnover of the trace of the Sun, a period when according to the folk beliefs the sun rises again in the sky and the day becomes longer. During the festivity of the nativity eve the women symbolically show all the phases of the agrarian activity through magic rituals, which initiate good atmospheric influences for the vegetation and the welfare on all the levels. Because of this they give to the fire a vegetative sacrifice from raw, holy tree (oak), cereal sacrifice (ritual breads), a plough (as substitute for the plowing and the fruitfulness), there is symbolical ritual sowing (with a mash of different cereals), they communicate with magic oral formulas etc.

The researches in the area of Kratovo, as part of North-east Macedonia, have shown that the New Year's ritual cycle performed by the traditional folk calendar is present even today.¹

There is a certain hesitation concerning the day of the beginning of the New Year's cycle. In some villages it is the day of St. Barbara (04. 12. Old Style Calendar), and in some St. Ignatius (20. 12. Old Style Calendar). Barbara and Ignatius as predecessors of Christmas, confirm the previous researches of the folk calendar of the South Slavs that the rituality of the winter solstice has to do with the beginning of the new solar and economic year, as a religious layer of the pre-Christian times, present somewhere in Europe, especially in the borders of the former Roman Empire and its neighboring areas.² The changes that happened in the church calendar did not cause great changes in the habit of celebrating Christmas as a New Year. Yet there are some disruptions regarding the period of the holy time, so that after the changes in the calendar at the end of the XVII century, which establishes the 1st of January as New Year, the rituals connected with Christmas remained, while the other holidays and rituals in this cycle, remained in the period before and after the Christmas fasts. For example in the Macedonian tradition, some holidays of the New Year's ritual

¹ The New Year's rituals in the area of Kratovo were researched with questionnaires and interviews, in the period of 1989/90. The terrain researches were done in the villages of: Bliznaci, Knezevo, Muskovo, Šlegovo, Pricovci, Železnica, Turalevo, Filipovci, Sekulica, Tatomir, Ketenovo, Šopsko Rudare, Konjuh, Krlatica, Trnovac, Kumlica, Topolovič, Stracin and the city of Kratovo.

² M. Gavazzi, *Godina dana hrvatskih narodnih običaja*, Zagreb 1939.

cycle, such as St. Barbara and St. Ignatius, have remained before the Nativity Eve in the period of the Christmas fasts, and the Holy period lasts over the "12 unbaptised days" until St. Nicolas the Wonderworker (25. 11. - 06. 1.). There is evidence that in Kratovo the Holy times begin a week before the nativity Eve and include St. Barbara and St. Ignatius, in the ban on women working, and because of this they are hiding their spindles, so that they will not be seen.³

St. Barbara (4. 12. Old Style Calendar)

According to the folk beliefs, on the day of St. Barbara, the day is "weld" and time stops for a 1 minute-dikika⁴. On that day the night is the longest one in the year and the day is the shortest. In the village of Stracin it is considered that from St. Andrews (30. 11) until St. Barbara (04. 12), the day stands on one measure, for four days, and from St. Barbara on it enlarges "like a chicken in an egg" ("ke se pokazue kako pile u jajce"). According to Taseva Desanka (village of Konjari) the winter begins on St. Dimitrius and the night is longest on St. Stephen, so it is said: "if I were daughter in law there, I would get more sleep." ("da sam snaa na Martinicite, da se naspizam")⁵. Despite certain differences, we can conclude that from the day of St. Barbara, the day begins to enlarge and the sun shines stronger.

St. Barbara is a female festivity. On that day the women do not do household chores. It is usual to boil grains from different cereals: barley, maize, wheat etc., which is eaten by everyone, beginning from the oldest member of the family, and even the babies are given a little of this in their mouths. The people give from the boiled cereals to their neighbors and vice versa. In some villages (Pricovci and others), the boiled cereals are brought to the church and in some villages the people cook sherbet. The making of the mash, on the day of St. Barbara or any other day, by mixing or boiling cereals, is widespread in Macedonia, as well as among all Christian South Slavic people (Catholics and Orthodox) and further in Europe. This custom has a strong chthonic character and is connected to the cult of the dead. The sources confirm that a custom like this existed even in ancient times.⁶

Beside this layer in the ritual, there is another one, connected with the agrarian magic, with the extreme wish for fruitfulness of all cereals in the following calendar year. This aspect of the custom is more present in the South-East part of Macedonia (Radovis and Strumica), where on this day the first crawlers come with the typical rituals and blessings for rich fruitfulness of the fields, the people and the cattle.

The elements of the custom show clearly that the festivity is not connected with the church connotation of the cult of St. Barbara as an early Christian Martyr in the Catholic and Orthodox calendar.⁷

³ Information from the village of Blizanci.

⁴ Dakika - (Turkish) minute -: A. Škalić, Turcizmi u srpskohrvatskom - hrvatskosrpskom jeziku, Sarajevo 1985, s.v. dekika.

⁵ According to the informer Ilija Kitanovski, teacher and collector of customs and folklore from the area of Kratovo, about 80 years old; Ruža Petkovska, born 1931 in the village of Trnovac, living in the village of Krilatica; Stojan Neškovski born 1912, in the village of Stracin (terrain researches 1990).

⁶ M. Gavazzi, 163.

⁷ Erno Eperjessy, verovanja i običaji u vezi s Barbarinim danom, Etnografija Južnih Slovena u Madjarskoj. I, Budimpešta 1975, 51, 52; Mile Nedeljković, Godišni običaji u Srba, Beograd 1990, 275.

Today, in the region of Kratovo, only the older women celebrate the festivity of St. Barbara, while the young people do not consider this day as a special festivity. This leads to the conclusion that the festivity is losing its ritual function.

St. Ignatius - the God Bearer (20. 12. Old Style Calendar)

“On St. Ignatius the day enlarges as the top of a needle” (“Na Ignjat denot porastuva kolku iglen vrv”), / in other villages /: “as a cock can jump from the house’s doorstep” (“kolku petel što može da ripne od kukjen prag”)⁸. In the village of Konjuh - St. Ignatius and Christmas are not separated” and in the village of Stracin “it looks like Christmas” and that day is considered as New Year⁹. From St. Ignatius until Christmas the day will enlarge as far as cock can jump from the doorstep.¹⁰

The main holy rituals on the day of St. Ignatius were:

- a) ritual cutting of the oak branches;
- b) blessing of the crawler;
- c) oak branches with leaves;

Key words: “wood”, oak branch with leaves, Nativity Eve;

The older informers note that it was customary for the people to go on this day into the wood in order to cut oak branches with leaves called “little wood”. From the previous researches for the ritual significance of the Nativity Eve, we can see that there are different opinions. In my opinion it is a ritual of sacrificing, considering the large number of data for the ban on cutting the (holy) oak all over Macedonia. The vegetative sacrifice, as a special ritual activity of cutting parts of the holy tree on the days of the ritual cycle, is well known to other peoples of the world.

In this ethnographic area there are some bans connected with the Nativity Eve tree, as for example the use of the axe (village of Topolović). In some villages of Kratovo the people crawled and congratulated each other with the oak tree. In the village of Stracin even today the people cut oak branches and carry them to the city of Kumanovo to sell them.

As is already known from the previous researches, the custom of cutting an oak tree or oak branch with leaves is considered as the most typical and most widespread relic in the Christian rituals. According to this the presence of the “little wood” and the customs associated with it, on the day of St. Ignatius, show a certain hesitation about the date/day of the New Year. According to the Bulgarian ethnologists Ignatius is New Year in the Bulgarian calendar festivities¹¹, and similar data can be found in the calendar rituals of the Serbs in Leskovačka Morava.¹²

The older informers remember that on the day of St. Ignatius the first crawler of the New Year’s ritual cycle came. This element of the custom is present today in the area of Kriva Palanka. The younger informers of Probištip remember the same, where the custom is better kept.¹³ In the village of Stracin the host of the house is the crawler. Early in the

⁸ Kitanovski Ilija, informer from Kratovo, 1990.

⁹ Taseva Desanka, born 1937 in the village of Šopsko Rudari, living in the village of Konjuh.

¹⁰ Stojan Neškovski, born 1912, in the village of Stracin.

¹¹ Etnografir na Blgarir, III, Sophia 1985, 97.

¹² M. Nedeljković, 106.

¹³ Lenče Cvetkovska from the vilage of Štlakovica, living in the village of Krilatice, terrain researches 1990.

morning he would go into the wood in order to cut the oak branch. He would bring the branch into the house and would stir the fireplace and bless it with the following magical formula: "Happy New Year with bountiful harvest, with lambs, with cereals, with milk." ("Aj, sretna nova godina, s's beriket, s's jagnjca, s's zelen klas, s's vedro mleko") Some one else could do the crawling on the day of St. Ignatius from the village.¹⁴ It was believed that on the day of St. Ignatius the pregnant woman should be crawled by a male person - if she wants to have a boy, and by a woman if she wants to have a girl.¹⁵ In the village of Prikovci, there is a note on the supernatural power of the crawler, that if he enters a house where a woman is giving birth, she could not have the baby.¹⁶ The custom of St. Ignatius shows a similarity with the custom of the Bulgarians and Serbs.¹⁷ The contemporary condition of the ritual in the area of Kratovo shows that it is fading away, because there is a lack of ritual elements known in the older records of the wider central part of the Balkan (cutting wood, oak branches with leaves, crawlers, feeding hens in a rope circle, ritual bread, fast dinner, etc.).

Nativity Eve (24. 12. Old Style Calendar)

In the area of Kratovo, the festivity of the Nativity Eve has kept almost all the characteristics of a main New Year's festivity connected with the winter solstice and the cult of the dead. There are all the main elements of the ritual and the relics.

a) NATIVITY EVE - TREE AND OAK BRANCHES

The preparation of the vegetative sacrifice is a special ritual action. The raw oak or oak branches are cut early in the morning before sunrise, the day before Nativity Eve, or in the morning of the same day. In some villages (Topolovič) the Nativity Eve tree is cut in a special form. If the people cut big branches from a big oak tree, they take care to cut it with the top /little wood /, and if it is a smaller tree it is cut as a whole. Because of fear of an evil spell, the host is careful not to be seen when he goes to cut the tree, as well as when he returns. Before he cuts it, he hits it with the blunt side of the axe wishing it a Happy New Year.

The big raw tree, so called "matina", or thinner, about the size of a male hand, is carried on the shoulder. When the host gets home he puts it against the wall with the leaves standing upwards. When he carries it into the house he cuts it, and this is followed by some ritual actions. With ritual silence he hits it and trims it. The other members of the family say: "Do not cut it, it will be fruitful" ("Ne go seči, ke rodi") three times, all in one voice.

Today the male informers talk about the cutting of the Nativity Eve tree with an axe, but some data from the village of Topolovič note that in the past there was a ban on cutting with an axe. The data do not state clearly whether the ritual was in breaking the tree with the hands. This possibility is indicated with the breaking of the tree, by the host, with the hands before putting it on the fire.

b) PLOUGH

An important relic of the agrarian magic on the day of the Nativity Eve is the plough, as a substitute for the ploughing and the fruit of the crops for the following year. The ritual activities connected with the plough are part of the male rituality done on the Nativity Eve.

¹⁴ Stojan Neškovski, born 1912, from the village of Stracin.

¹⁵ Ilija Kitanovski, informer from Kratovo.

¹⁶ Jula Aleksova, born 1955, in the village of Gornji Stubol, living in the village of Prikovci

¹⁷ Etnografija na Balgarija, 97, 98; M. Nedeljković, 7104-106.

The plough is brought in by the host and put near the main homely cult - the fireplaces or under the rag-carpet on which the family will dine that night. In some villages, as for example in Filipovci, the plough is stuck and lit with a candle, and the villagers cross themselves in front of it.

c) STRAW

Local term: "čukanica. r'zanica"

The bringing in of the straw, as one of the main ritual activities is also done by the male sex. The host brings it on the nativity Eve day. The straw is put in crossways under the rag-carpet on which the family will dine. Over the straw they spill mixed cereals. The straw, which according to some theses is connected with the sacrifice, and to others is a substitute for the cereal or item for the oldness of the custom¹⁸, i.e. connection to the cult of the dead, has supernatural power in the folk beliefs, because through it the people transfer the ritual-ity of the Nativity Eve on to the houses, the trees, the bees etc.

d) THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE RITUAL DINING TABLE

The preparation of the ritual dining table is a female activity. The hostess of the house begins the preparations even on the Friday before the Nativity Eve: dishes for fasting, like the dishes connected to the cult of the dead. The main dishes are: white beans with garlic and pepper, pie with leeks/pastry with green vegetable filling, fish, stuffed cabbage, sweet pie, halva from wheat flour and more types of ritual bread. The ritual breads as part of the female ritual-ity are not only a symbol of the non-blood sacrifice, but also relics through which the women foretell the fruitfulness of the house and the property in the following year. The ritual breads can be divided into two types: 1- breads from fresh batter and 2 - breads from sour batter.

Firstly the hostess kneads the dough for the pie of fresh batter. With the first rolled layer, put on the rolling pin, she goes around the yard - "so that the chicken will have more eggs" (village of Topolchani). From the same fresh batter, they make a round loaf with coins. In the village of Kuklica, together with the coins the women also put in maize. The round loaf is baked in the ashes, which indicates the oldness of the ritual compared to the baking of the other ritual breads for the ritual dining table.

The ritual function of the round loaf was to provide positive atmospheric influences, good and fruitful cereals, especially to that person or activity to whom or to which the coin will go. The round loaf is the most typical relic through which people foretell on the Nativity Eve. The round loaf is broken by an already established order.

From the sour batter, in which there is cereal yeast and chick-pea yeast, the hostess makes the ritual bread called in the village of Planinci - "večernik", in Kotorci - "povečernik", in Krivorečie - "večernjak".

The bread is made in a circular form as an unleavened cake. On the upper side there are elements presenting the village household. Because of this the hostess kneads the dough in circular, oval and rope forms from the batter and spreads them on the surface. An obligatory element is the circle from a rope form, which is not finished at the ends. According to the female informers from the area of Kratovo that circle represents the house and the estate. At the unfinished ends of the circle, the women put one or a few oval, lengthened forms (local terms: door, shepherd-with-stick, dog etc.). Some women make the circle from two equal rope forms almost joined by their ends. This circle has a protective, apotropeic meaning - "everything to be available" ("sve da bide u kup")¹⁹. The inner part of the rope

¹⁸ M. Gavazzi, 148, 149.

can be free or divided into areas. In both cases, in the frames of the free area, or in the areas, there is rich iconography, connected with the man and his agrarian and cattle-breeding work. The symbols represent the economic activity of the family or the village. The symbols of certain forms for people, cereal, cattle, vine etc. are shown with oval, circular and rope forms, which are made into their basic forms and as numerous as the space allows. So for example in the village of Blizanci we come across: stable with goats, horses and cattle, bees, plowman with cattle, shepherd, dog. In the village of Knezevo: bunch of cereals, field ranger, plowman and ox, dog, horse, stable with sheep, scarecrow etc.

The ritual function of this kind of bread is to provide fruits in the fields and youngsters for the cattle. Its power is transferred to the cattle and the people by oral way /they eat from it/, and one part is kept for the day of St. George, this piece of the breads is put under three sheep while they are milked and then it is pinned on the milk churn. In this way the rituality of the Nativity Eve is transferred to the day of St. George. In order to determine precisely the forms of the household the hostess "marks" them. So in the village of Turalevo, Dimitrova Stojanka when placing the figures says: "Now we will mark." She remembers the marks, so that she will know precisely which form represents what during the ritual of the breaking of the bread. The terrain researches have shown that this iconography is, basically, well known in a certain ritual rural area. If we consider the "marking" as an older form, because marking with fingers can be found on the round loaf, then the marking with form-signs is a higher degree of plastic folk work and represents an organized agrarian society.

Beside the evening bread, the hostess makes from the sour batter different kinds of Christmas buns, for boys and girls. The buns for the girls are made in the form of an almond - so-called "bossy", and also in the form of a spiral with curved ends - so-called "cookie", round cookie with a hole in the middle with three diagonal bands, which resemble a baby in diapers. For the boys they make typical cookies in the form of a bagel with crossed ends - so called buns, as well as flattened round cookies that are placed on the fork of the Nativity Eve tree.

The ritual function of the Christmas buns is the gifting. The hostess gifts the carol-singers with buns, nuts, figs etc. (local term: Christmas). In some villages (village of Sakulica and others), one of the buns is kept until Easter, and with it and a red egg the sheep are milked on the day of St. George. In this way, through the Christmas bun the rituality of the Nativity Eve and Easter is transferred to St. George.

Beside the ritual breads - the round loaf, the evening bread and the Christmas buns - the hostess kneads the dough for ordinary bread-unleavened cake. The kneaded dough breads from sour batter used to be baked under a "vršnik" (cast-iron convex lid), and today are baked in the stove. The ritual dining table is presented with nuts, apples and chestnuts, and the people intend to buy figs and other dishes, in order for everything to be in abundance because it is a big dinner. The people say: "You have to buy, it is Christmas." (In the village of Kuklica).

We can judge, from the prepared meals, the seed and the fruit, of the character of the ritual dining table, where the elements of the cattle-breeding and the agrarian magic are connected with the cult of the dead / fasting dishes, nuts, chestnuts etc./, as parts of a unique ritual.

¹⁹ Tasevska Desanka, born 1937, living in the village of Konjuh.

For the ritual table of the Nativity Eve, the women mix different kinds of cereals. They throw the mixed cereals over crossed straw; when they bring it into the house (in the village of Krilatica and Kuklica), they put them onto a plate, or under the rag-carpet on which the family dines, or they make ritual sowing, early in the morning of Christmas, during the ritual crawling. The host of the house, as part of the male rituality, does "The sowing".

d) FIRE-LIGHT-CANDLE

In some villages, as for example in Kuklica, Konjuks and others (area of Kriva Reka²⁰), the villagers did not light candles on the Nativity Eve. They used only the light from the fire, i.e. the Nativity Eve tree.²¹

In other villages (Prikovci, Filipovci and others in Kotorija²²) the people used to make special candles from wax. In some cases the smaller candles were bought and the thick one was made in order to burn all night, but part of it was left for some other occasion. In the villages of Kratovo²³ the people make special candles for this occasion, with three legs; this kind of candle is present in the area of Radoviš.

The differences that appear in this small area, connected with the light and the candles, show two different levels in the custom. The first one would be connected to the Nativity Eve tree, i.e. the fire as a source of light and heat which is in accordance with the old way of life in the mountain villages, when it was usual to use the light of the fireplace during the night. The difference is only in the fact that on this night the raw holy tree - the oak-burns / is sacrificed. The other source of light is the well-known hand made thick candle from the burial rituals. Although Gavazzi claims that the Nativity Eve tree and the wax candle are two old elements of the custom related to the Nativity Eve of the South Slavs²⁴, the terrain researches done over the past two decades in Macedonia, show that there are two forms of fire-light-heat, mentioned above, which can be considered as two levels of the ritual that were performed at the same time in Macedonia.

e) KOLEDARI (CAROL-SINGERS, CRAWLERS)

Regarding the carol-singers (koledari - people that go early in the morning of Christmas and sing, collecting gifts from the houses), there is a widespread belief among the Macedonian people in the East and North-east part of Macedonia, where I have done detailed research into the New Year's rituals, that they are crawlers. The same folk opinion of the carol-singers as crawlers is present in the area of Kratovo as well. According to this, the carol-singers are a publicly accepted group which acts in the name of the village community.

The carol-singers in the area of Kratovo began to visit the houses on the Friday before the Nativity Eve. In the past the carol-singers were married men and older boys, and today this is part of the children's folklore. The carol-singers go in smaller or bigger groups. They carried bags and typical sticks with three forks called "baton". The baton was made from a raw branch of corneal tree (oak, hazel) - "in order to be healthy". They stopped in front of

²⁰ "Krivorečje" is area surrounding the river Kriva Reka, from the middle ages known as Slavište.

²¹ Slavka Pavlovska, born 1935 in the village of Trnovac, living in the village of Kuklica; Tasevska Desanka from the village of Konjuh.

²² "Kotorija" is the folk name for the upper northern part of Ovče Pole. Certain villages from this area are included in the north-eastern part of Macedonia and represent the bordering ethnographic area where the elements from the two traditions are mixed.

²³ The villagers from several villages in the Osogovo Mountains identify themselves as "mountain people" - Planinci, because they consider the name "Shopi" as negative.

²⁴ M. Gavazzi, 129-131.

the house and sang carol-songs. They struck with the batons and called out: "Good morning, Christmas is coming." The hostess brought out mixed cereals and glowing embers. The carol-singers hit the cereals and the glowing ember with the batons and blessed: "may you have lambs, may they be female; may your daughters- in -law have babies etc." The hostess gifted the carol-singers with buns in the form of a bagel and in the form of a flattened roll. "The buns" were put on the top of the fork of the tree. The carol-singers received other gifts such as nuts, figs, chestnuts, apples, money etc. They put these gifts into their bags. Before 1944, when the carol-singers were grown up men, at the end they gathered in a house and made a mutual feast. The carol singing of the children has an entertaining character.

From the character of the Nativity Eve folklore, we can see that the basic structure of blessing, congratulating and gifting²⁵ is well kept. The function of the custom was to provide fertility in all the houses in the following year.

f) THE RITUAL DINING TABLE

The preparations are firstly done in the room with the fireplace. The people bring in the Nativity Eve tree broken in two parts, or the whole raw tree. The whole tree or parts of it - crossed over each other- are put into the open fireplace. This is then burned in the middle. Because this tree is raw, dry wood is placed in order for the oak to burn easily. In those houses where the open fireplace is used no more, the tree is put in the stove, but in some mountain villages, the ritual is still done in the old fashioned way /in an open fireplace/. Special accent is placed on the burning of the Nativity Eve tree in the middle. This moment was attended with great seriousness and everybody looked at the fire. It is believed that the one who would first see this would be happy in the year to come. The burnt tree was thrown into the yard and kept there so that when the company of "sirovani" (people who visit the houses on New Year)²⁶ came, they would have it thrown at them, and the other part was kept for apotropism.

For this occasion, the people dine on the ground, on a reed mat, goat's hide carpet - ("chul") or a sheet ("cedilo"). Today it is still believed that the dinner should take place on the ground, although the villagers use tables and chairs. Before the dinner the men take off their hats, and the women their kerchiefs /in the village of Topolovič/.

There are some minor differences regarding the beginning of the ritual dinner, in the rituality of different villages. One of the less practised rituals is in the village of Knezevo²⁷, where the main ritual dishes are put one above another, in the following order: the evening bread, the pie with green vegetable filling and the concave- formed bread. These dishes were taken out by the host and carried to the hinge where he three times pronounced the magic formula: "God where ever you are, come and dine with us, and afterwards may we never see each other again." In other villages the host brought the evening bread to the sheep to come and to eat, which is a much commoner custom. Then he returned to the house and knocked at the door. From the inside of the house the family talked to him with a magical formula, up to three times, with questions and answers. For example:

Question: "Grandfather, what is the weather like?"

Answer: "It is clear above all houses, only above ours, there is a cloud." The answer suggests opposition: good (cloudy) - bad (clear) or: our - someone else's. In that context,

²⁵ Same, 200-211; B. Drobnjaković, *Etnologija naroda Jugoslavije*, Beograd 1960, 186, 187.

²⁶ "Sirovani" are masked groups of people who visit the village on the day of the Old New Year.

²⁷ The villagers are identified by the name of "Mountain People" - Planinci.

“our” has the mercy of the supernatural forces and the “someone else’s” does not. Most of the villages still perform the ritual, but the magical formula is lost.

The magical formulae, said in the village of Blizanci is: “Hey, you cloud, come this evening and have dinner with us, but do not approach in the following year.”

Similar spoken formulae connected with the respect of German as the power that rules the sky, the thunder and the storm, we find on the Nativity Eve on the wider part of North-Eastern Macedonia. So for example, in the older materials from the area of Kjustendil, There is the following formula: “Hey, German, cloud! Come to dine!” “We want you to come now, and we do not want to see you neither above a field, nor above a meadow in the summer.” “Now we have prepared bread, beans, nuts, seed, garlic - we have everything and mostly plum-brandy!”²⁸ There are similar data for the area of Pirot²⁹. In the village of Kuklica, the ritual dishes were brought by an old man, the host or the oldest member of the family, who said: “Good evening, Happy New Year”. During this the children imitated the sound of the chicken.

The comparison of the structure, of the magical spoken formulas said on the Nativity Eve, on St. George and other festivities in Macedonia, show that the basic belief is in a power that regulates the atmospheric appearances as a cloud, thunder, storm etc.³⁰ This could attribute the presumptions for the existence of remains to the mutual belief of the Slavs in some God of the atmospheric (celestial) powers.³¹

Before or after the dinner, there was a custom for everyone to take off their shoes- “so that there will be lambs” (in the village of Filipovci), “so that there will be chicken” (in the village of Kuklica). During this the hostess imitated the sound of a hen, and the children of a chicken. The ritual is action with magic, where the imitations of animal voices and birds, contribute to their fertility in the coming year. The female rituality is in accordance with the traditional participation of the women in the agrarian activities. The host performed a similar custom in the village of Kuklica, when he returned with the evening bread. He would leave the ritual bread on the table and take the bag with nuts, apples, chestnuts and other fruits. He was followed by the children, and they ritually rotated around the house. The man imitated the hen and the children the chicken - “so that he would have more chickens”. This shows that there is no strict division of the female and male rituality. The most significant element during the ritual dinner is the breaking of the ritual breads. We have come across four different variants of this ritual action:

In the village of Krilatica, the host, sitting cross-legged, breaks the bread and distributes it: first to God, then to the family beginning from the oldest member, to the cattle and to the fields. The one that gets the coin will be happiest in the following year.

According to Ilija Kitanoski, there used to be a custom where the woman that kneads dough for the bread hits it three times and gives it to the host.³² This action indicates the transfer of the ritual role from the woman to the man. The coin in some villages (Kuklica) is taken to the barn and in some (Blizanci) to the sheep.

²⁸ Jordan Zahariev, *Kjostendilsko Kraice*, SBNY, XXXII, Sophia, 1918, 163, 164.

²⁹ Vl. Nikolić, *Iz Luznice i Nišave*, SEZb, XVI, Beograd 1910, 140.

³⁰ Aneta Svetieva, *Gjurgjovdenskite obredni lebovi vo Makedonija i nivnata funkcija vo obichaite i veruvanjata*, *Makedonski Folklor*, XXIII, 46, Skopje 1990, 113-25.

³¹ Mircha Elijade, *Istorija verovanja i religijskih ideja*, I, Beograd 1991, 163.

³² Ilija Kitanovski, informer from Kratovo, 1990.

Two men, the host and the oldest one, sitting, cross-legged break the evening bread on the dining table. Firstly, they break it in two parts. The halves of the bread are kissed, lifted up and blessed: - "may we have blessing and fruit this year." (Kuklica, Krilatica). In some villages the bread is divided among the family, and part of it is kept for the day of St. George and "against sickness" (in the village of Knezevo). In other villages, both halves are crossed and left on the table.

In the village of Knezevo, the host broke the bread while standing. Half of it he divided among the family and the other half he put on a high place for three days. This piece of bread was given to the cattle.

The customs with the ritual breads show sacrifice to God (celestial power), to the Earth and to the protector of the family. The character of the ritual indicates comparison with the harvesting rituals of the Baltic Slavs, based on quoted sources from XI-XII century in the holy place of Svetovid, because they show related elements with the custom of "mijanje" whose remaining attribute is to the existing rituality with the ritual breads and magical spoken formulas, in the area of Kratovo and wider in Macedonia, as well as among the other Slav people³³. The elements of this ritual are kept in the anecdotes in the northeastern part of Macedonia, as for example in Pijanec (region of Delčevo) about a villager harvesting in the field. When another villager passed by he asked: "Do you see me?" The passenger answered: "I see you now, but may God give I do not see you this following year!" (Note: from the height of the maize)³⁴.

The ritual dinner begins after the rituality with the breads. Everything that is prepared is placed on the dining table. Beside the dishes, on the table there are items that serve for some magical action, as for example plates with flour, candles, parts of the ritual breads etc. During the dinner it is forbidden to get up from the table, or to reject a dish ("you will eat everything that is on the table" in the village of Prikovci). Quarrels are also forbidden.

After the dinner the people eat nuts, figs, apples etc. The chestnuts for this occasion are eaten raw, not baked.

The remainders of the dinner are left on the table and stay there during the night.

It is forbidden to sweep - "not to sweep the happiness", which is a widespread folk belief³⁵. In some villages (Konjari), the people sweep mixed cereals and put them into the corner, an element connected with the cult of the dead.

The older informers from the area of Kratovo, remember that on that night, the people sleep on straw, near the fireplace. The children rolled on the reed mat - "so that the crops will roll"; or everybody slept on the same side - "so that the crops will be large" (in the village of Knezevo and others).

An important moment on the night of the Nativity Eve was the foretelling of the marital partner. The young girls brought mirrors to the hinge and left them there during the night. In their dreams appeared the figure of the boy they were to marry. The role of the hinge as a homely wooden idol is confirmed in many rituals and beliefs in Macedonia, as well as among the South Slavs.³⁶

³³ M. Gavazzi, 182-184; Špiro Kulišić, *Porjeklo i značenje obrednog hlijeba u Južnih Slovena*, GZM VIII, Sarajevo 1953, 10-12.

³⁴ Statement of Blagoja Stoičkovski (from Pijanec).

³⁵ Marijan Stojković, *Sobna prašina, smeće, metla i smetište*, ZbNZO, XXX, 1, Zagreb 1935, 17-31.

³⁶ Aneta Svetieva, *Stozerot kako kultno mesto i domašen drven idol vo obredite, obiçaite i veruvanjata kaj Makedoncite, Narodnoto tvoreštvo na počvata na Makedonija*, book 4, MANY, Skopje 1997, 53-64.

On the bases of the empirical material we can conclude that the New Year's ritualy begins in the period of the winter solstice, on Barbara and Ignatius, when the women from the older generation perform some magical actions from the field of the agrarian ritualy. These days are in direct relation to the agrarian character of the folk calendar. They denote the turnover of the sun's path, the period when according to the folk beliefs the sun rises in the sky, and the day begins to enlarge. It is generally believed that the festivities of the Nativity Eve and Christmas are devoted to an old man with a white beard who comes on the nativity Eve riding a donkey. The folk image of the Nativity Eve leads us to think of the chthonic character, which is confirmed by the cult of the dead and the fast-time dinner. The place of his appearance - the house - indicates that his origin is in the cult of the family, in the image of some mythical ancestor of the family, possibly remaining from the animatistic belief of death as a region near the living beings, a place where the "living dead people" are the ancestors. Similar elements can also be found in the beliefs of the vampires as living corpses.³⁷ This thesis can be supported with the contents of some stories for the killing of the old people, where they are shown as creatures that can not get rid of life, although they are powerless.³⁸

In the communication of the members of the family with the grandfather of Christmas, we can see that in the firm structure of the magical formula there is a different addressee: God, Grandfather, and cloud. The magical formula contains in itself elements of fear and admiration: ("wherever you are come and have dinner, and may we never see each other again."). The content shows that the real addressee to whom the invitation is given is God, who rules the atmospheric appearances.

During the Nativity Eve, the people symbolically show all the phases of the agrarian activity through magical actions, which initiate good atmospheric influences for the vegetation and for welfare at all levels.

Because of this they bring to the fire a vegetative sacrifice from a raw, holy tree (oak), cereal sacrifice (ritual breads), plough (as a substitute for ploughing), there is symbolical ritual sowing (with a mixture of different cereals), they communicate with magical spells etc.

The older generation celebrates the Christmas ritual cycle with some elements from the past. The young people change the customs, as for example dishes from the city cuisine, decorated fir, etc. The ritual period is reduced to celebrating Nativity Eve and Christmas. As in the past, also today the main bearers of the tradition are the women. Although the ritualy is done at two levels: female and male.

From the exhibited material, we can see that the North-Eastern part of Macedonia, as a bordering zone and passive area, is an area for research into the folk beliefs and ritual practices, which is confirmed by the example of the folk calendar of the winter ritual cycle. The imigrants from this region, whom I contacted in some villages near Veles (Mamutćevo, Sojklari and others) and in the villages in the area of Radoviš, have firmly kept their tradition, although we cannot speak of the functioning of a model of a traditional North-Eastern ethnic community. This shows that certain ethnical groups in Macedonia still function through reduced forms of the folk spiritual and material culture.

³⁷ Dušan Bandić, *Tabu u tradicionalnoj kulturi Srba*, Biblioteka XX veka, 47, Beograd 1980, 129.

³⁸ Vojislav S. Radovanović, *Narodna predanja o ubijanju starih ljudi*, Glasnik Skopskog naučnog društva, volumes VII-VIII, Skopje 1929-30, 314; a different answer to this question is offered by: Bojan Jovanović, *Tajna lepota*, BI SANY - "Prometej", Novi Sad 1999.

Praznovanja sv. Barbare, sv. Ignaca - Božje rojstvo in božični večer v okolici mesta Kratovo

Aneta Svetieva

Na osnovi empiričnega gradiva avtorica ugotavlja, da se novoletna slavja in šege, povezane s tem obdobjem v času zimskega solsticija, začenjajo na dan sv. Barbare (4. 12.) in so izrazita na dan sv. Ignaca (20. 12.), ko ženske starejših generacij izvajajo določena magična dejanja v znamenju poljedelskih šeg. Ti dnevi so v neposredni povezavi z ljudskim agrarnim koledarjem in se navezujejo na prevrat sončeve poti, ko se po ljudskem verovanju sonce ponovno dvigne na nebo in postajajo dnevi vedno daljši. Ta dejanja naj bi omogočila dober začetek letine, oz. želijo vplivati na atmosferske, vegetacijske in rodovitnostne razmere v novem letnem ciklu. Zaradi tega žrtvujejo ognju vegetativne darove v obliki svetega drevesa - hrasta, dalje žitne daritve, kot so ritualni kruhki in ralo (ki simbolizira oranje in življenje). Med drugim uprizarjajo ritualno sejanje z mešanico različnih žitnih semen. Med obredjem izgovarjajo magične ritualne obrazce.