

**Mirchevska P. Mirjana (Skopje, Macedonia)**

## **HOLIDAY CELEBRATION OF THE POPULATION OF GORNA REKA RELATED TO FOLK RELIGION**

*Abstract:* The author analysis religion as an important non-verbal ethnic symbol, as well as folk celebrations in the ethnographic area of Gorna Reka. The formal affiliation to a concrete faith (Orthodox Christianity versus Islam) in Gorna Reka is a potential non-verbal symbol of ethnic separation, through which in contemporary conditions the ethnic affiliation is defined. In this case only the formal religious belonging has a status of a defining ethnic symbol, in the concrete case for the definition of the ethnic identity of the Macedonians, i.e. Albanians in the area. In the context of folk religion of all Gorna Reka inhabitants, there are mutual holidays, beliefs and ritual praxis, which in most part are related to the economy, and refer to the sheep herding cults, the beginning of spring/summer and people's health, rituals for gaining rain, belief in the protective power of certain objects - apotropeons, etc.

*Key words:* population of Gorna Reka, folk religion, village feast, house feast (slava), St. John Bigorski, Letnik, Prochka, St. George's day.

The ethnographic area of Gorna Reka, as a border area, contains many specific phenomena and processes characteristic for the area and the population of Gorna Reka. In a spatial and geographic sense the area covers the extreme North-west part of Republic of Macedonia. It borders with Dolna Reka, Mavrovsko Pole, Gorni Polog (Macedonia), Gora (Kosovo) and the area behind Korab - Pishkopeja (Albania). Such liminal position of this area led to extreme isolation of the population of Gorna Reka, but on the other hand to migrations of different types. The Gorna Reka population, having their own specific ethnic features of a local type, borders with population that also has its local ethnic characteristics. Those are the Mavrovci, the Goranci, the Gornopolozani, the Myaks and their Torbesh sub-group, as well as the Pishkopejci. All of this resulted with a development and existence of a population that, at least at the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, is very specific. The geographical factor of isolation, which is extreme when it comes to Gorna Reka, has influenced ethnic processes as a determining factor concerning ethnic culture. Figuratively speaking, Gorna Reka in terms of the natural ambience is an "ethnic thromb" isolated from the neighboring areas with natural obstacles: mountains and rivers. It seems that the general argument stating that "in Europe there is almost no other area which is so ethnographically turbulent, with new movements of the population and big ethnographic processes of assimilation and disturbances, as the Balkan Peninsular", could be used, almost as a textbook example, to describe

the ethnic area of Gorna Reka, that through different historical periods suffered influences and changes in numerous segments of cultural life.

\* \* \*

Religion is often considered as one of the ethnic symbols that are considered more or less as ideal or real ethnic features, according to which the ethnic affiliation of the individual or the group is estimated. It often dominates the definition of national feelings of the individual, especially if some of the element of material and spiritual culture cannot differentiate between the neighboring or historically close members of the different/same ethnic groups. In this context Robertson Smith says that: "in relation to each religion, being it old or modern, we on one side find beliefs, but on the other institutions, ritual praxis and rules of behavior. A modern habit is to consider religion more from the aspect of beliefs than from the aspect of actions". The same author then says that "the analysis of religion mainly meant analysis of Christian beliefs, and instruction in religion usually started with faith" and thus "when analyzing a certain ancient religion we naturally assume that our first task here is to examine faith" (Ретклиф Браун, 2001: 74).

This is why the "highly perfected ritual and ceremonial praxis, together with religious liturgy, serves as a continuous reaffirmation of identity, since they strengthen the feeling of community and in a visible way separate the believers from other religious groups" (Павловић, 1990: 99).

After the penetration of the Turks, among the Balkan, but in a major part among the Christian people, another religion enters - Islam - which was not known up to that moment, with a totally different ideology and culture. The religious relations were a field of big conflicts between the Christian population on one side and the Turkish-Muslim population on the other. Since Islam was at the same time a state religion of the ruling class, non-Muslims saw it more as a state and feudal governance, than a theological idea and thought. Even the first religious clashes had a class character, but also vice versa. The whole Debarsko-Rekanska ethnographic area, before the arrival of the Turkish army, was an area of Orthodox Christian religion mixed with relicts of all beliefs that were present in the pre-Christian era. As a result of those processes a so called folk religion in a sense of religious system was formed. The monastery St. John Bigorski was considered a religious object of great importance for the keeping of Orthodoxy, but also keeping of beliefs and customs from the time before Islamization, of a part of the Islamized and partly Albanized population of Reka. In these areas, that belonged to the Debar eparchy, Greek propaganda has never entered, on the contrary "in certain churches and monasteries the church Slavic language was used, while Greek has never had any influence" (Трајановски, 1992: 59–61). For the population of Gorna Reka Bigorski was the biggest center where one went for each bigger holiday. For 22 years an igumen (head) of the monastery was Joakim from the village of Bibaj (Bibanje) (Дракул, 1992: 84). In the oldest

registry of the Bigorski monastery, written in the last third of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Historical Archive of Ohrid, number 367), 12 populated places of Gorna Reka are mentioned (Целаќоски, 1992: 87). The number of Reka people that have been registered as affiliates of the monastery in relation to the rest of the population of Reka is really big. Most of them are in Vrben - 62, Grekaj - 53, Belichica - 42, Nistrovo - 33, Ribnica - 32, Zuznje - 19, Strezimir - 10 (Целаќоски, 1992: 89–90). If one takes into account the relative small number of population that inhabited those villages, then it is a matter of a really high number of people who donated to the monastery. At the holiday called Severing of the head of St. John the Baptist (11.09), when the monastery also has its feast, the villagers from Gorna Reka had their own rooms (room for Vrbeni, Nistrovo or Belica) where the villagers came one day earlier, before the holiday, have put fern and carpets on the floor and spent the night there.<sup>1</sup> Another information shows how important the religious element was for the population of Gorna Reka. Besides the Bigorski monastery which was without any doubt respected by the population, there is another important object, the church St. Mary, Mother of God in the village of Sence (Велев, 1990: 45). The whole construction of the church is done without "kushaci", and the interior part together with the iconostas is similar to the one in St. John Bigorski.<sup>2</sup> In all remaining churches in the Gorna Reka villages the icons are a gift from the richer sheep-herding families and economic migrants. It was a custom that each Gorna Reka inhabitant, when migrating from the village, should leave the family icon in the village church.<sup>3</sup> The fact that religion was very important for this population in this isolated ethnic area is proved by the data that each house had a "paraklis" - small area where the icon of the saint, protector of the family was kept, together with an icon lamp, a baptized water, Eastern egg and the icon of St. Mary and Jesus Christ. The bigger and richer houses had a small room with many icons, that played the role of a paraklis, where the members of the family, mostly women, prayed to God for health and prosperity.<sup>4</sup> Important ritual activities also took place in or in front of those spaces, especially if one takes into account the robbery of the Gorna Reka villages by the Albanian "katchaks" that made the free going to church of the women of the village difficult.

---

<sup>1</sup> Informant Jovanovski Jovan, village of Nistrovo, lives in Vrben (personal field info).

<sup>2</sup> Almost all village churches in Gorna Reka have beautiful iconostases made in deep carving where the motif of an oak is dominant, as well as the marigold flower (personal field research).

<sup>3</sup> In the village church St. Nikola in Kichinica there were many icons that were left by the inhabitants when they left the village; informant Lichkoski Alekso, village of Kichinica, lives in Mavrovi Anovi (personal field info).

<sup>4</sup> "My grandmother went every day to that room and lit a candle praying God saved the economic migrants: "God save my children", and then she started all domestic chores". Informant: Rafajlovska Verica, village of Sence, married in Belichica (personal field info).

Each of these Gorna Reka villages had a village "slava" (Филиповић, 1937: 463). The bigger villages even had two slavas - one village and another church slava, but in few of them the village and the church slava was done in honor of the same saint. Thus, in Vrben and Zuznje winter St. Nikola was celebrated (19.12 new calendar) as a village and as a church slava, while in Voklovija a village and a church slava was St. Dimitrij, i.e. Mitrovden (8.11 new calendar)<sup>5</sup>, in Kichinica a village and a church slava was summer St. Nikola (22.05 new calendar), in Sence St. Mary - small (21.09 new calendar) and Big St. Mary (28.08 new calendar). Still, in a part of the villages the village slava was done for a saint that was not the same as the church saint, which is not rare in other ethnic areas in Macedonia (Филиповић, 1937: 467). This is the case of the villages: Krakornica, where the village slava is summer St. Nikola (22.05), and church slava is St. Archangel (26.07); in Nichpur village slava is St. Archangel Mihail (21.11), and church slava is St. Atanasij in winter (31.1); in Bodevo village slava is Mala (21.09) and Golema (28.08) St. Mary, but church slava is Mitrovden (8.11); in Nistrovo village slava is St. Paraskeva (27.10); and church slava is St. Spas - Spasovden (on Thursday, 40 days after Easter); in Bibja, as a settlement of Nistrovo, St. Paraskeva is also a village slava (27.10).<sup>6</sup> On the day before the village and church slava, the church was cleaned. All those icons, the iconostas and other church elements were carefully cleaned. This was the obligations of the epitrop, but if he was an older man then younger brides and women helped him.<sup>7</sup> The next day in front of the church a "panihire" was set, a table on which candles were sold. At the village and church slavas each village had a "gostija" - guests from other villages. People went to celebrate name days after the liturgy, only man went before noon to visit everyone that had the name of the saint. no matter if they were relatives with this person or not, and in the evening they went with their families. Since in the villages of Gorna Reka the local migration is also present, i.e. migration from one village to another in the same ethnographic area, the families that have immigrated celebrated their own village slava.<sup>8</sup> Thus, two families that immigrated from Nichpur in Vrben celebrate St. Archangel Mihail - village slava that is celebrated in Nichpur.

<sup>5</sup> In Volkovija Mitrovden is celebrated as a village slava with guests, but on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November at the "zaslog" people go to church with "denie" (five breads). Informant Jakimovska Milica, young girl from Nistrovo, married in Voklovija (personal field info).

<sup>6</sup> Informants: Jovanovski Jovan, village of Nistrovo, lives in Vrben; Jovanovska Filka, village of Volkovija, married in Nistrovo, lives in Vrben; Josifovski Metodija, village of Krakornica; Serafimovska Cveta, village of Volkovija, married in Sence; Lishkoski Alekso, village Kichinica, lives in Mavrovi Anovi; Ignjatovski Slavko, village of Ribnica, lives in Nichpur (personal field info). The dates are noted according to the so called new, Gregorian calendar.

<sup>7</sup> Informant Rafajlovski Kjirko, village of Belichica (personal field info)

<sup>8</sup> Informant Jovanovski Jovan, village of Nistrovo, migrated to Vrben (personal field info)

Each Orthodox family from Gorna Reka also had their "house slava". According to the Gorna Reka people, slava was celebrated in the honor of the saint that at the same time has a function that protects the house and the family from all miseries, illness, famine, poorness, but at the same time to help the family to be healthy, fertile.<sup>9</sup> Besides this interpretation that is present in Gorna Reka, and science accepts this as a possible explanation (Влаховић, 1985: 138–139), in literature there are few different opinions when it comes to the function and identity of family slavas (Христов, 2004: 169–174). Most often it is a matter of celebrating the same holly protectors, but there were also others such as: St. Varvara (17.12), St. George (16.11), St. Alimpij (people know it as St. George fasting, 9.12), St. Peter (12.7) and St. Petko (13.07). In Gorna Reka, as in most of Macedonia, dominant are slavas from the autumn and winter calendar, so that in this context most dominant house slavas are St. Nikola, Mitrovden, St. Archangel Mihail (Филиповић, 1937: 464). Each slava has two parts. The first, a family one, has religious features, while the other has a social character (Бандић, 1986: 12–15). The women of the house prepared a sweet slava bread ("kukjni lep") that was baptized and broken by the priest at the "zaslog", day before the holiday, before dinner. Although "pure flour" was not easy to find in this area, still each house bought 4-5 kg wheat flour for this occasion.

While the priest performed the holiday Christian ritual, besides the round bread there was also wine at the table, as well as the slava candle. After this ritual the religious part of the holiday ended, the one that took place in the house with only the members of the family community attending. The day after, at the holiday, the guests arrived at "ritual feast" (Филиповић, 1985: 159–167), which were a part of the social character of the slava. Then a candle was not burned.<sup>10</sup>

The number of church objects, the number of people attending the celebrations related to the church calendar, prove that Christianity has left an important mark upon folk religion of the population of Gorna Reka. Compared to this situation, Islamic religious objects were very rare or non-existent. Still, this does not mean that Muslims did not respect the main holly periods and days in Islam (Ramadan, Bayram etc.)

The numerous rituals and customs that are practiced by the population of Gorna Reka are full of magical beliefs, aiming to tame the forces that have a crucial role in human life and his existence. Part of them is related to the calendar cycle, part to the Christian holidays, and some of them refer to family life and customs. But all of them are related trough a simple link, that people through a certain ritual could tame "some unknown" evil forces, could obtain

---

<sup>9</sup> Informant: Nestorovski Jelenko, village of Belichica, Rafajlovski Verica and Kjirko, village of Belichica, Serafimovska Cveta, village of Sence, Ignjatovski Trenda and Slavko, village of Nichpur (personal field info).

<sup>10</sup> Informants: Jakimovska Milica from Nistrovo, married in Volkovija and Tripunoska Darinka from Volkovija (personal field info)

health, fertility, well-being for themselves and the wider community. According to a semilogical interpretation, "the function of the ritual is less to inform and more to provide unity" (Giro, 1975: 101). At the same time, through it the solidarity of the individual with the religious, national, social obligations that the community has taken upon itself is manifested (Giro, 1975: 101).

The church has incorporated many old pre-Christian beliefs as part of its Christian doctrine, while accepting some that are not part of its teachings, but are practiced nevertheless by the people, who relate them with Christian celebrations. In fact, Macedonians, as well as other Balkan people, have lived in an extremely patriarchal environment in which, on one side, created difficulties for the entrance of new elements (Bandić, 1997: 230). In this context Christianity as a religion was not promptly and easily accepted, especially in the villages. According to Dushan Bandic "often the Christian form was accepted, but it hid a non-Christian content and meaning" (Bandić, 1997: 230), while Miodrag Popovic says that the very process of full Christianization is not complete yet (Поповић, 1976: 129–130). It is exactly those conserved Balkan and Macedonian rituals and customs that were/are present among the population of Gorna Reka.

Part of the folk celebrations that were practiced by the population of Gorna Reka are the customs practiced on Letnik<sup>11</sup> (1.3 new calendar), at Prochka and St. George's day (6.5 new calendar). Letnik is a folk holiday<sup>12</sup> that everyone from Gorna Reka, no matter today's confessional affiliation, consider as a beginning of spring/summer, i.e. the summer half of the year. The celebration starts with picking up plants. Both girls and boys attend, but girls are up to 11 years old, while boys up to 15. They pick up branches of cornel tree and hazel, as a symbol of health and longevity (Софрић, 1990: 86–87). Both plants as symbols are located in the category "bordering between 'social' (cultivated) and 'wild' (not conquered) space" (Раденковић, 1996: 198), due to which different ritual roles are ascribed to them. On the very day girls got up early so that they would not be "dembelki", i.e. so that they would be laborious and hardworking all year long.<sup>13</sup> Most common is the belief that "the way this day turns out, this is how the whole year would be".<sup>14</sup> A good omen was if in the morning one sees a bird, a young child, and not an old or sick person. They kneaded "sweet" that was given to "everyone that would enter the home". On Letnik no one used a rolling pin, no one did any embroidery, did not use any needle, since "it was not

<sup>11</sup> The rituals that take place on this holiday are practiced more by Albanians than Macedonians from Gorna Reka.

<sup>12</sup> Up to ten years ago the holiday Letnik was registered in the Orthodox Christian annual calendars published by the Macedonian Orthodox Church, but during the last ten years it has been deleted.

<sup>13</sup> Informant Jakimovska Milica, village of Nistrovo, married in Volklovija (personal field info)

<sup>14</sup> Informant Tripunoska Darinka, village of Volkovija (personal field info)

good for the cattle".<sup>15</sup> "If your head hurts, you would not say that, since then it would hurt the whole year round" (Целакоски, 1973: 213).<sup>16</sup> How important Letnik is as a sign of a new beginning, new life, is shown by the following custom. Girls and younger brides went to the young brides in Gorna Reka that still had no babies and brought with them a "baby", a doll made of rugs, and were offered Turkish delight (lokum). The bride behaved as if she did not want the baby, "prait dzilvinja", as if she is not interested. In this way girls wanted, according to the model "what happens on this day will be the same the whole year round", to initiate the bride to really have a baby that year. The principle of imitative or homeopathic magic, according to which the similar initiates a similar act (Фрезер, 1992: 31–32), in this case is fully reflected in the rituals of the Gorna Reka population. The described beliefs and ritual activities were common for all Gorna Reka inhabitants no matter the religious affiliation.

Prochka is a holiday that is celebrated seven weeks before Easter and has a mobile date. It happens that its celebration is done even before Letnik. The rituals that are performed on this day are related to spring, in spite of the Christian elements that are added to it. This is the last day before Easter when oily food is eaten. The next day the big Easter fast begins. These celebrations include many elements from the pre-Christian period, and the rituals are not related to Christian teachings. The night before Prochka each maalo makes a "koliba"<sup>17</sup> using willow branches and straw (Попоски, 1973: 206), around one meter high. The hut is burned, people dance around it and when the fire calms down everyone jumps over it. Children and young people put ashes and blacken their faces. The celebrations including fire are known to all European people, and their origin is date long before Christianity (Фрезер, 1992: 727–728). The dancing around the ritual fire is called by some author "magical cyclical movement" (Зечевић, 1970: 32–33) that aims to establish magical connection between the object and the participants of the ritual, so that they gain a part of the power that the object has, in this case the fire. The jumping over the fire is done for health, i.e. for protection against diseases, since fire has healing and purgative power (Арнаудовъ, 1934: 491–492). This is why everyone wanted to jump over the fire. These rituals are part of the common rituals of the whole village, but besides them there are rituals for health performed at home, at the level of family rituality. At Prochka the family performs the ritual "amkanje" of an egg, known to all Macedonians. The Gorna Reka population calls it "da hamkate mi", and it was done in this way: in the evening, when everyone gathered for dinner, a long wool thread was tied to the ceiling and an egg at its end. All members of the family tried to catch it only using their mouth, not their hands. The one that succeeded in doing this would be healthy the whole year

<sup>15</sup> Informants Jakimovska Milica, Tripunoska Darinka, village of Volkovija (personal field info)

<sup>16</sup> Informant Jakimovska Milica (personal field info)

<sup>17</sup> Such a hut is made in other ethnic areas in Macedonia. In Strushki Drimkol it is also called "koliba" (personal field research)

round. At last everyone had a piece of the egg. The thread that tied the egg to the ceiling was used for predicament through magical tying. A part of the thread would be tied in knots. Then each of the knots had its protective function, and its function was pronounced aloud so that everyone could hear it: to tie the mouths of the snakes, and then the thread was burned; to tie the mouths of the enemies, and then the thread was burned; to tie the mouths of the wolfs, the bears and the foxes<sup>18</sup>, and again a knot. The procedure was repeated until the last knot would burn, and then it was kept for putting spells.<sup>19</sup> This role of protection, i.e. prevention that is inscribed to the knots is known to other people too (Фрезер, 1992: 305–310). Everyone drank some water from the eggs crust, and in the morning threw it in water, at the well, while they got water in "bukarinja". this water had a healing, regeneration power (Антонијевић, 1982: 64; Елијаде, 1986: 123–125). On the other hand, water is an element that chases bad, dirty forces (Раденковић, 1996: 51).

In Gorna Reka especially important are celebrations related to St. George's day (6.5 new calendar). Since the basic economy relates to sheep herding, a number of rituals that were practiced on this day concerned health, prosperity and fertility of the sheep. This holiday is celebrated by a number of Balkan people, especially the ones that engage in sheep herding (Симитчиев, 1973: 97), so often one could hear that the most important shepherds' holiday is exactly St. George's day. On this day the village 'sobor' gathered where all male villagers attended, when the village cattle-keeper, the field-keeper, their helpers and the shepherds were agreed upon. The ritual activities took pace before the holiday and on the very day. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of May (new calendar) at noon girls and young brides would gather, they went to the mountain above the village and gathered "healing plant", that should be eaten on an empty stomach, for health.<sup>20</sup> After their return, while it was still day light, people would go "for plants", outside the village, "na gumnata po planinata". Then the first spring flowers would be picked up, "petoprst", "gorocvet", "mlechajka" and branches of cornel tree. These branches would be put on the entrance of the house, but also above the door of the "klet" where the animals were kept. Among the folk cornel tree is considered as a very strong apotropheon, with a clearly accented protective function. The "butin" (the milk vessel) is decorated with flowers, and the cattle would eat from it for health. The next morning, at the very holiday around noon, people would go on a meadow where there was a water spring, separately women from men. They took food with them, they ate and washed on the spring. Christians carried boiled, red eggs, that they tossed in the air, competing who would toss it higher and then catch it. All these rituals were done for health,

<sup>18</sup> "Wolfs, bears, foxes, all of them have done great harm, so this is why we tied knots for them", Informant Karajanovska Kalina, village of Duf, married in Brodec, now lives in Kisela Jabuka, Skopje area (personal field research, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Informants from the village of Vrben (personal field research).

<sup>20</sup> Informants: Avramovska Bosilka, village of Mavrovo, married in Vrben, Jovanovska Filka village of Volkovija, married in Nistrovo, lives in Vrben (personal field info).

fertility, prosperity, protection from diseases and purification from all negative influences that gathered during the winter. At the same time the presence of the idea of renewal is present. After returning from the meadow everyone weighted themselves on a big scale (kantar) to see how much they weight in comparison to the previous St. George holiday. It was very important that body weight is higher than the previous year. In certain ethnic areas in Macedonia the symbolic weight was provoked, so that people put stones under their arms (Беќарова, 1973: 239). From the previously presented rituals it is clear that they present elements of the folk religious system in which there is an indirect (partly) presence of Christian religious elements. A certain relation exists with the Christian saint St. George, since some authors find that he is only a Christian variant of the underground deity, i.e. inheritor of a former pre-Christian pagan deity that was a protector of the cattle (Чајкановић, 1973: 366–367).

For the population of Gorna Reka from both confessions folk religion has a value of a unique non-verbal ethnic symbol. Living in the same natural habitat, the active participation and following of the same historical events that led to certain influences and changes in the life of the Gornorekans, also led to the conservation of the elements of folk pre-Christian and pre-Islamic religion (some present only as relicts) in many segments of life and customs. Especially vivid are the elements of folk religion related to beliefs in sheep herding cults, as well as the ones related to health, prosperity, fertility, of people as well as of the cattle. Believing in the power of the apotropeons (plant and animal, water), and in predicament, is especially powerful and present among today's Gornorekans in the area. Common are the beliefs in the healing power of water springs ("ajazma"), the protective power of the "house snake", beliefs in the healing and homeopathic features of the cornel tree, hazel and willow etc. Family and church slavas are the only exceptions of this non-verbal symbolic values, since they are non-verbal ethnic symbol for the Christians. The have the role of a differentiating element, at the same time being symbols of the Macedonians from Gorna Reka. On the other hand, elements from the Muslim religious calendar, in the sense of important holidays as Ramadan, Ramadan feasts, then Bayram (big and small) are elements of separation in function of non-verbal ethnic symbols of Gornorekans, at the same time manifesting the symbolic of the identity of the Albanians from Gorna Reka. Although faith is almost the only differentiating factor on the line Macedonian-Albanian from Gorna Reka, it was never an obstacle in their mutual communication. Due to a different religious affiliation people from different confessions did not marry with each other, but all other segments were similar. Today the situation has not been changed. In the villages where they still live together (Vrben, Sence, Volkovija, Nichpur) the need of mutual communication when religious holidays are in question is evident. Mutual customs, although today partly put in the context of Christian religion (St. George's day), are still mutual. According to informants Christians, "Muslims today celebrate more than us these same holidays. They are more joyful, they expect them more than us. They have young people, we are

older"..."And for Bayram they always invite us. They invite us for Bayram, we invite them for Easter"..."For slava and for name day guests come to visit, but after the slava, after the day, when there are no other guests"<sup>21</sup>..."...and when someone dies from the house, they also visits. Only man at funeral, while women come later on, another day, to have a coffee. You would tell them: "You should be alive, healthy" and they would say: "Long live friends"..."Earlier we did more common things, but now...now we still do it but not so much".<sup>22</sup>

As an important non-verbal ethnic symbol - the Gornorekans with Muslim religion today identify themselves as Albanians, although from the censuses one could see that in certain periods some of the declared themselves Turks, while Orthodox Christians declared themselves ethnic Macedonians. All other verbal and non-verbal symbols are similar or almost similar with small variants. Christianity in this area has deep roots, which could be concluded upon the written, visual and narrative sources on the church-related persons that originate from Gorna Reka, as well as the donations by the believers. Each Christian house had a "paraklis" - a small area where the icon of the saint - protector of the family was kept, baptized water, Easter egg and an icon of St. Mary the Virgin and Jesus Christ. The rich Gornorekans had whole rooms that had a function of a small church - paraklis. Although in some near-by areas Muslims made in their houses similar holly spaces related to the function of the mosque, the Gornorekan Muslims did not have such custom. However, this does not mean that they did not respect the main principles of their faith, especially the Muslim religious calendar, in the sense of important periods and celebrations such as: Ramadan fasting, Bayram (big and small) and other important holidays that are elements of separation in function of a non-verbal ethnic symbol of the Muslims from Gorna Reka. The same behavior is present with the Orthodox Christians of Gorna Reka that respect the holidays and fasting periods of the Orthodox calendar, as well as the family and church slavas, that are non-verbal ethnic symbol of Christians.

Besides the fact that the formal religious affiliation is a defining non-verbal ethnic symbol of the relation Macedonians-Albanians, there are certain relating elements in the domain of faith that are based upon folk religion as basic religious system of the population of Gorna Reka. This fact explains the existence of many common beliefs, rituals, holly places and relicts. It is well know in the folk culture in Macedonia that a certain holly object, place, building etc. could be equally holly and important for the spiritual life of members of different confessions. In this sense, St. John Bigorski is the most important holly center (object, place) for the population of the wider ethnic areas, Debarsko and Reka, no matter their confession. This is proved by the fact that in the circle of

---

<sup>21</sup> Informants: Serafimovska Cveta, village of Volkovija, married in Sence, Josifovska Milica, village of Nistrovo, married in Volkovija, Ignjatovska Trenda, village of Nichpur (personal field research, 1999/2000).

<sup>22</sup> Informant Serafimovska Cveta, village of Volkovija, married in Sence (personal field research)

this holly area the regional gatherings of the village heads was held. Many of them brought presents to the monastery, believing in its healing power.

In relation to the function of the village as a ritual community, the Gornorekans respected the individual but also the collective rules of behavior. This especially refers to the deeply rooted beliefs and customs with pre-Christian, Christian and Islamic elements. The changes in the customs related to the village as a ritual-religious community were minimal. Customs, by default, included strictly defined norms of behavior that were implemented in certain time and space, with a concrete reason. The basic function of collective village rituals was protective, thus they were practiced when the whole village had a need of protection ("dodole") but also at times when according to the belief one should perform the ritual as prevention ("pokristi"), no matter the current situation. The realization of the ritual is done at a number of levels. The first level was realized upon a principle of collective participation, when the whole village participates (village slava, Letnik, Gjurgjovden), the second upon the principle of delegation when a certain group of people is chosen that takes upon itself the role of the representative of the interests of the whole community ("vasilichar" and "dodole") and the third upon a principle of individual representative (village kum of St. John, known magicians etc.), when one man/woman from the community takes upon the role of protector of collective interests of the village or of the maalo. The biggest number of the mentioned rituals was common for all Gornorekans no matter the religion (Orthodox Christianity/Islam) and in this sense they were common non-verbal ethnic symbol.

According to a semiological interpretation, "the function of the ritual is less to inform and more to provide unity" (Giro, 1975: 101). At the same time, through it the solidarity of the individual with the religious, national, social obligations that the community has taken upon itself is manifested (Giro, 1975: 101).

## References:

Антонијевић Драгослав, *Обреди и обичаји балканских сточара*, САНУ, БИ, посебна издања, књ. 16, Београд 1982.

Арnaudовъ Михаил, *Праздниченъ огънь, Очерки по българския фолклоръ*, София 1934.

Бандић Душан, *Функционални приступ проучавању породичне славе*, ГЕИ, САНУ, бр. 35, Београд 1986.

Бекарова Олга, *Ѓурѓовденски обичаи во Реканските села (Леринско)*, МФ, год. VI, бр. 12, Скопје 1973.

Велев Илија, *Преглед на средновековни цркви и манастири во Македонија*, Скопје 1990.

Влаховић Петар, *Прилог проучавању крсне славе*, зборник: О крсном имену, библиотека Баштина, бр. 13, Београд 1985.

Дракул Симон, *Достоинствено изнесена климентовска традиција*, БНКС, IX научен собир, Кичево 1992.

Елијаде Мирча, *Свето и профано*, Књижевна заједница Новог Сада, Нови Сад 1986.

Зечевић Слободан, *Мотиви наших народних веровања о летњој солстицији*, ГЕМ, бр. 33, Београд 1970.

*Историски архив на Охрид*, инвентарен број на ракопис 367.

Павловић Мирјана, *Срби у Чикагу, проблеми етничког идентитета*, Београд 1990.

Поповић Миодраг, *Видовдан и часни крст*, Београд 1976.

Попоски Аритон, *Пролетните обичаи и песни кај Македонците муслимани во Река (Дебарско)*, МФ, год. VI, бр. 12, Скопје 1973.

Раденковић Љубинко, *Симболика света у народној магији Јужних Словена*, САНУ, БИ, Београд, посебна издања, књ. 67, Ниш 1996.

Редклиф Браун, А. Р., *Структура и функција во примитивното општество*, Скопје 2001.

Симитчиев Коле, *Гурѓовденски народни песни и обичаи кај Македонците, Србите и Бугарите*, МФ, год. VI, бр. 12, Скопје 1973.

Софрић Павле Нишевљанин, *Главније биље у народном веровању и певању код нас Срба*, БИГЗ, Београд 1990.

Трајановски Александар, *Црковно-просветните борби за еманципација од Цариградската патријаршија во Дебарската епархија и во Полог во 60-тите и почетокот на 70-тите години на XX век*, БНКС, IX научен собир, Кичево 1992.

Филиповић Миленко, *Етничке прилике у Јужној Србији*, Споменица двадесетпетогодишњице ослобођења Јужне Србије 1912–1937, Скопље 1937.

Филиповић Миленко, *Слава служба или крсно име у писаним изворима до краја XVIII века*, зборник: О крсном имену, библиотека Баштина, бр. 13, Београд 1985.

Фрезер Џорџ Џејмс, *Златна грана, проучавање магије и религије*, библиотека Посебна издања, књига шеста, Београд 1992.

Христов Петко, *Обичаји и празници*, БАН, ЕИМ, Софија 2004.

Целакоски Наум, *Пролетни обичаји и песне во Охрид*, МФ, год. VI, бр. 12, Скопје 1973.

Целакоски Наум, *Населбите и антропонимите од најстариот поменик во Бигорскиот манастир*, БНКС, IX научен собир, Кичево 1992.

Чајкановић Веселин, *Мит и религија у Срба*, Београд 1973.

Bandić Dušan, *Carstvo zemaljsko i carstvo nebesko. Ogledi o narodnoj religiji, XX vek*, Beograd 1997.

Giro Pjer, *Semiologija*, Beograd 1975.