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НАЦИОНАЛЕН И КАПОДИСТРИЕВ АТИНСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ

THE SONGS FOR THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS „DIRTY DAYS“ IN
VEDA SLOVENA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE TRADITIONS IN
BULGARIA AND GREECE

ПЕСНИТЕ ЗА „МРЪСНИТЕ ДНИ“ ВЪВ ВЕДА СЛОВЕНА ОТ ГЛЕДНА
ТОЧКА НА ТРАДИЦИИТЕ В БЪЛГАРИЯ И ГЪРЦИЯ

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Резюме: През последната четвърт на 19ти век Стефан Веркович, познат вече със сборника си Народне песме македонски бугара (Белград, 1860) издава два тома с песни събирани сред българите мюсюлмани (помаци) в Родопите. Първият том на Веда Словена (Белград 1874) предизвиква сензация, но учени го обявяват за фалшификация. Вторият том (Петербург 1881) разделя академичната общност, като преобладава мнението, че песните не са автентични. Става въпрос за славянски фолклор, на български родопски диалект, като сензационното е, че се съдържат песни с предхристиянски елементи и древни митология, включително гръцки и източни. Сборникът остава една мистификация, която и до днес „грабва вниманието“ на читателите. През последните години научният интерес в България се увеличи и бяха издадени нови публикации и изследвания. В Гърция песните и съдържанието на Веда Словена не са познати и с работата си се по темата се надяваме предизвикаме интереса и у гръцкия читател, който може да открие общи черти със своя фолклор. Така избрахме за тема на работата си песните за „Мръсните дни“, между Рождество Христово и Богоявление. Народните традиции през тези дни имат много общи черти между България и Гърция. Проучването ни се провежда в рамките на проекта Живописна България, за който възнамеряваме да допринесем и с преводи на избрани песни от Веда Словена на гръцки език. Доколкото ни е известно досега са правени преводи само на руски и френски.

Through his excellent work in the field of linguistics and of course ethnography and culture, С.И. Веркович, managed to bring back to life, marvelous songs from the multicultural tradition of Rodope mountains, where the Balkan heart still beats untouched and pure. In this article we shall see a glimpse of his efforts and we will focus on the phenomenon of «Мръчни дни», which is still part of the Greek and Bulgarian tradition until today.

The present paper was prepared on the occasion of participation of the Department of Russian Language and Literature and Slavic studies, university of Athens in the international project Bulgarian Literature roots (Живописна България; Български литературни маршрути), Part II, 2020-2021.

Our attention is drawn to the “Veda Slovena”, a collection of folk songs from the region of the Rhodope Mountains composed in the 19th century and edited by Stefan Verković in two volumes. This edition is defined as a “sensational discovery” or a “mystification”, which divides scientists into two main camps “for” and “against” (Todorovski, 1967). In recent years, it has been noted that the question of “falsification” is more in the titles of the songs and in the title of the corpus, which directly and purposefully alludes to the Indian Vedas. It was noted that questions about whether these songs are authentic or forged displace more important questions as the study what exactly the content was, and only then to consider the question of the authenticity of the songs. (Rangochev, 2014). The “strange” songs are written in a Bulgarian dialect, related to dialects in the neighboring countries of Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia and Turkey. Their content is even more interesting, as it seems to reflect “memories” of the Pre-Christian era, of ancient mythologies, including Greek. This cycle of songs is not known in Greece and thus, we were motivated to borrow the theme.

The first thing, that we have learned as undergraduate students in the field of Slavic Studies, is the fact that many existent records, still maintaining past knowledge, have been composed by monks from Slavonic counties of Greece.

None of us had ever thought of studying songs, which is a representation of the inner voice of people speaking various Slavic or Bulgarian dialects. There were some scientists, who attempted to collect many of these songs and study their content. But how could this be done, when people were interested in geographical rights of their region and did not focus on scientific evolution?

The aforementioned question had a rhetoric character. Those years were extremely difficult and demanding, until Stjepan Ilija Verković (Stefan Verkovich) was appeared to illuminate the scientific field (Dinekov, 2007).

The reason why we chose to attend to the aforementioned issue was our eager and interest to discover and examine the folkloric genre with title “Veda Slovena”. We considered the fact that many studies were not conducted in Greek region

and we were motivated by the eager to conduct a study from our country and side. Furthermore, as Balkanian citizens we would like to search and comprehend further notions of Balkan tradition. It is essential to mention that our Academic studies have contributed to raise our interest on examining phenomena such as “Veda Slovena”. Last but not least it is an important and fundamental basis to continue further studies in the field of Slavic research.

It is essential to present author’s life and works, before analyzing our work (Doklešić, 1981).

Stefan (Stjepan) Verković was one of the most important folklorist, ethnographer and archeologist from the region of modern Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and he was born on March 5, 1821 in the village Ugljar. When he was still a child, he accomplished his studies at Zagreb’s Catholic French school, and he chose to focus on monastic life and study about it at the end of his school years. However, when he realized that his life does not align with the monastic demands, he left the monastery. As a young person, he was influenced by the theory of Illyrism. Later, he began to discover countries, such as Serbia, Kosovo, Croatia and Turkey.

The young author achieved many accomplishments related to his work environment until the year of 1885. In 1850 he settled in Serres, where he began to gather ethnographic material and traditional songs from Rodopi and Macedonia. Firstly, he released his book Folk Songs of the Macedonian Bulgarians (Народне песне македонски бугара), in 1860 in Belgrade (Mollov 2007), and later two volumes from the book, which arouse our interest:

1. Veda Slovena vol. I – Вѣда Словѣна. Belgrade 1874
2. Veda Slovena vol. II – Вѣда Словѣнахъ. Saint Petersburg 1881.

After his marvelous authorial achievements, he decides to live in Philippopolis (Plovdiv) permanently. In 1893, he dies at the age of 72 in Sofia.

In Verkovich’s two-volume work Veda Slovena an attempt from the author and his contemporary, teacher and folklorist, Ivan Gologanov (1839–1895) is made. Verkovich wanted to prove that Slavs have their own prehistory and played a fundamental role in the evolution of history. He hired Gologanov to find texts for him to publish. According to Verkovich, Slavs have maintained an epos, which is equivalent to Homer’s epos. Songs and tradition continue to preserve Slavs’ ancestors. These elements, that have survived through songs and myths, have a pre-Christian character and existed before the Christianization of South Slavs.

The content of Veda Slovena refers to Bulgarian folklore songs of Pre- Christian period of the region of Thrace and Macedonia. In order to perceive the content of Veda Slovena is crucial to detect and refer the historical circumstances of Bulgaria.

From the 14th century Bulgarian region was a part of Othomanian Empire. Bulgarians should raised their national awareness and identity in order to be liberated from Othomanians. The firsts steps of consciousness raising were held when a significant part of population became financially independent and comprised the upper class. Crucial point was the time when Bulgarians demanded on establishment of autonomous Church. This means that, Bulgarian millet was created and as consequence many subjects were divided from Othomanians with religious criteria.

The Bulgarian religious issue concerned Russia. Russia conceived Bulgaria as the signal to delve into the Balkan region and consequently their action would have financial correspondence. Population did not stand in the issue of Church, they created and took part in various revolutions, with educated people as lead members. Unfortunately, revolutions were not succeeded owing to the fact that many soldiers of Othomanian army were Christianized.

During Russian- Turkish war, an archeological conference was conducted in Kazan of Russia. Verkovich participated in this conference and he presented his work about traditional songs of Pomaks. He raises the interest and the affinity of Tsar and his environment. Although, many believed that the document was valid (mainly aristocratic members from the Russian court, Russian, Bulgarian, Serbian intellectual elite and many littérateurs), there were people who inclined to believe that the document aims to impress readers and its content was false¹. Under these circumstances, the second and last volume of Veda Slovena was published in Saint- Petersburg.

In the first volume the migration of groups of the population is mentioned, alongside various secular events, such as marriage, birth, etc. The paradox is that the latter speak not of something ordinary, but of something paradoxical, such as the birth of Orpheus (according to certain song titles) or the marriage of the Sun with the daughter of the Balkans. This is an indication that the traditional man was looking for ways to explain historical, cosmic and natural phenomena happening around him, unable to easily remember them, let alone explain them. Because of this, we see elements of population movements, but also customs like that of marriage.

We read in detail the following traditional songs, in the following categories:

1. Migration:

- The migration of people from the edge of the world to Danube.
- A different story about people's moving from a different perspective

2. Marriage:

¹ С. И Веркович, «Ведя Словян: Болгарские народные песни», том 1 и том 2; перевод с древнеболгарского языка В.Г Барсукова», Москва 2011, предисловие переводчика: «The fact that the document is talking about non-Slavic deities (for example diety Шива, as we read in the two books, mainly is a part of Indian pantheon) can be regarded as heresy for researchers.»

- The marriage of the Sun with the maid (daughter or woman) Balkana
- The marriage of the king from Talatin to the daughter of King Sitsky.
- The marriage of the king from Talatin to the daughter of King Sitsky, but differently
- The dispute between the king from Talatin and Suroi Lamie from the country of Ritsna
- Orpheus marries a daughter of the king of the Arabs

3. Birth:

- The birth of Orpheus
- The birth of Orpheus again, but from a different perspective

In the second volume, we read songs sung only at specific celebrations. The author refers that it was difficult to gather all the traditional songs in this volume, so he forced himself to pick some songs from his collection in order to present a complete portion of songs.

We read about songs, which people sang on special occasions, such as Christmas, Epiphany and so on. Obviously, those days were not celebrated by Pagans, but somehow, we must realize how the time period related with celebrations goes for them. We enlisted a part of the songs included in the second volume, down below:

- Праздник Коледов день/ Celebration of Koleda
- Мрачные дни/ Celebration of Dirty Days or Unbaptized Days
- Праздник Суров день/ Celebration of
- Праздник Велесов день/ Celebration of Happy Days
- Праздник Гюргиев день/ Celebration of George's Days
- Праздник Вышний день / Celebration of
- Праздник Августов день/ Celebration of August days
- Праздник Дравин день/ Celebration of

These songs came from Pomaks or Bulgarians Muslim, who lived in a wider area, exclusively². Here is when arouse the problem of the language issue.

² Ελένη- Σέλα Μάζη, «Η Διγλωσσία στην Ελλάδα», στο Ε. Σκούρτου, , Β.Κούρτη-Καζούλλη , Ε. Σελλά-Μάζη, «Διγλωσσία & Διδασκαλία της Ελληνικής ως Δεύτερης Γλώσσας», Αθήνα 2016, page 37: «Οι Πομάκοι κατοικούν σε συμπαγείς ομάδες στη δυτική Ροδόπη εκατέρωθεν των νοτιοανατολικών ελληνο-βουλγαρικών συνόρων. Πιο συγκεκριμένα, στη Βουλγαρία ζουν στη βουλγαρική πλευρά της Ροδόπης και στην κοιλάδα του ποταμού Νέστου (100.000 έως 250.000 περίπου άτομα),38 στην δε Ελλάδα εντοπίζονται κυρίως στα ορεινά του νομού Ξάνθης, ως επί το πλείστον (ελληνική Ροδόπη), στο νοτιοανατολικό τμήμα της Ροδόπης (νομός Ροδόπης) και στον νομό Έβρου (σύνολο 35.000 περίπου ατόμων) και διακρίνονται από σαφείς τάσεις αστυφιλίας.»

Throughout both volumes we came across with the Pomani dialect. We had never tried to read or understand the dialect before, so it was challenging and at the same time intriguing to learn more about it.

The Pomani as a dialect originated in Rhodope mountains. It is mostly used by Pomaks, who leaved in a large area across Rhodope. In that area were included parts of today's Northern Greece, like the northern parts of Serres, Drama, Xanthi etc. and of course a vast area of Bulgarian Rhodope. Its form is a peculiar one, as it combines three languages: Bulgarian, Greek and Turkish. We understand the usage of Bulgarian and Greek to the dialect, but we could not understand the usage and the formation of the Turkish one.

As you can see, Turkish was the only language people used to read and pray, as it was a mandatory for Pomaks, who were Muslims in any case you would not be aware of. That does not mean that all of them are Muslims, because we know that the Christian Pomaks spoke the same language too. That is why in the texts we learn about customs existing only either in Muslim or Christian traditions, a fact that we found out trying to translate the songs from our the abstract of „Dirty Days“. It is noted that the Pomak language has common features with other Slavic dialects and languages in the Balkans and is influenced by Greek and Turkish. Some scholars, also, view the linguistic phenomenon in the area as a typical example of ausbau language.

After having started translating the chosen songs, we found that there were many old and local words and forms and as a result, producing a satisfying translation was quite a difficult task but nevertheless fascinating. That is when we started looking about ways to understand the norms of the language and specifically the dialect. During our investigation we found that in Bulgaria, the dialects in the Rhodopes have been studied for a long time, whereas in Greece, the topic of the language of the Pomaks has also been of interest to scholars but only in recent years.

The Rhodope dialects are not codified yet but are well studied. A fundamental study on this topic is one written by Lubomir Miletich from 1912. In his study *The Rhodope dialects of the Bulgarian language* Miletich discusses all the significant features in Rhodope Mountain dialects. Of course, there are differences among the different regions, but the similarities of these dialects are frightening, because on the one hand they were all created under the roof of one language, the Bulgarian, but on the other hand they have a different evolution in the same place and time. An explanation to that may be the lack of accessibility in most of the Rhodope villages and regions. People could not have the required time or simply could not afford the transportation.

The recordings of L. Miletich helps us interpret and see the true nature of the so-called Pomak dialect, which is part of the Rhodope dialects. Verkovich explains this in his own introduction, when he tells us about the origin of the people who sing and narrate traditional songs.

After all these and due to the fact that we managed to translate the smallest part of the book, we would like to share with you some of the words that raised our curiosity and prove that dimension and the beauty of a language evolving with and by time.

1. Самувила, Самовила, Самодива: They are Goddesses of sorceresses, who can rule forces of nature, and can also be an embodiment of good or evil dark forces. In the content of Yuda's songs are Goddesses who represent both sides like in "Dirty Days", as well as intermediaries between Supreme Gods and people. Mostly they are presented as heavenly beautiful girls in beautiful clothes with loose braids and a pleasant voice.

2. Юда: The same celestial maiden as «Самувила». The name «Юдо» means «водная» (eng: "Watery"), since initially Yudas were considered mermaids.

3. Треба: Offerings to the Gods in the form of gifts that were included in the rite of worship. The animal offerings as a symbol of rite, was legalized in biblical times during worship among the Jews, and was brought to Islam, where in honor of the sacrifice of the son - the biblical Abraham holiday Kurban - Bayram with animal offerings. In the Pagan traditions, as stated in «Велесовой книге», the Slavs glorified the Gods and brought them any kind of demands from exclusively labor: such as fruits, milk, fruits, redneck, honey and milky flowers, and on separate holidays and lamb. (R. Pesic) In the Pomak lyrics for «треба» (which we could also translate with the word: "sacrifice"), it is used the Arabic term "qurban", which is absent in the Bulgarian and Slavic languages. Unlike other countries, which carried the pagan religion, the Slavs were everywhere engaged in hunting and cattle breeding, in this regard, they were not vegetarians. Therefore, gradually the best part of the regular food eaten on the holidays, began to be considered a requirement of God. From the «Велесовой книге», we also learn that the Normans and Alans brought human sacrifices to the Gods, which later in history was attributed to the Slavs. When excavations of the ancient capital of the Slavic-Aryans Arkaim, numerous were the remains of sacrificial animals (horse, cattle and small ruminants).

4. Бог, Боже: One of the names of the Supreme Heavenly Gods of the Slavic pantheon, Сварог. The Slavs believed in the Supreme Being, Almighty, All-creating, whose name was simply God. He is the common master, the creator.

5. Жива Юда, Жива: In the Pagan traditions Жива is the Goddess of life, spring and youth. She gave life to man, and the harvest in the fields depended on her. But she was alive not only a representative of earthly harvests, but in general she was a patroness of marriage and love delights. Whole trees were dedicated only for her. In early May, people celebrated in her honor, because it was the best month of the year. Girls and boys were making corsets and they exchanged them. After that, everyone proceeded forward for dance and/or games. That revered the source of life, asked for long and prosperous health.

6. Суров празник: At the celebration of «Суров празник», the whole village gathered, so that they could sing and honor the coming of the New Year, when of course the "Dirty Days" were passed. At the celebration, people worshiped the God Suru «Боры Суру», so that He the whole New Year gave to the village health and for that they asked also for a good life.

7. Хоро: In Bulgarian «хоровод»; it is a Bulgarian national dance.

8. *Посох*: An obligatory attribute of the sorcerers, priests, magicians. Yu. P. Mirolyubov wrote that in the South of Russia they remembered white magicians, they always carried a stick from sherry wood in their hands. For some, it ended with a silver or copper mace. In Poland, Lithuania and Belarus, the stick of the sorcerer had three tops, as a symbol of power, and on the stick of the village's elder sorcerers, who were also priests, only one.

9. *Змея*: This is sacred animal that could not be killed. Because of that, the image of a snake has become a symbol of medicine.

10. *Сурьяная, осуренная, сура*: These words are derived from the word Surya - the Sun God, one of the main Gods in the Indian religion. They show the powerful, luminous power of the Sun.

As it was mentioned from the beginning of this paper, our interest is especially drawn to the second volume (Veda Slovena II: 79-93). Specifically, on the topic of Dirty Days. We read about songs, sang on special occasions, in the period between Christmas and Epiphany.

Throughout that time period, people believe that some creatures invade to our world and try to harm them. For their safety they must stay home during the night and complete the 12-day cycle. Every home had to deliver a black chicken, because black was the color of those demons. The delivering black chicken, had to be handed to a woman, who had to cook it without the man see the procedure. During the delivering a young girl with beautiful voice, sung the first song we read at this chapter (Song 1), where we learn how the God is getting angry with the demons and what should the people do to prevent getting harm from those creatures.

The song that follows (Songs 2 and 3), shows us how the Goddesses start to cooperate with other ones, to find the sacred water and save in that way the humankind. By the time the girl finishes the song the black chicken is ready for serving. The woman that cooked the chicken, is calling three different families, from three different houses, to make all the preparations. The three girls, who each one of them sung at their own house the previous song, create a quire and begin to sing again. This time (Song 4), the theme of the song is rather optimistic and shows us the anticipation of the people to be saved by the God, as God manages to find the sacred water and shares it to each household.

In the last two songs (Songs 5 and 6), we learn about the celebration. Before the last day, people had to eat and sleep well. The next morning, began the Survak day celebration. Young boys and girls were singing and dancing where they could, even at the fields until dawn, celebrating life without the danger from the evil creatures.

Today, this tradition existing all over the Balkan peninsula, in all three countries: Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece.³

³ <https://www.balgarskaetnografia.com/praznici-i-obichai/kalendami-praznici-i-obichai/mrasni-dni.html>

According to the traditional worldview, time has a heterogeneous character, as people believed then the barrier between the two worlds has fallen and the boogeymen and other dangerous creatures - vampires, goblins, fairies roam through the human realm. Night is the universal time that people define as demonic. Seasons are also associated with certain demonic beings. The appearance of dragons and fairies belongs to the spring-summer cycle. Apart from the spring, another period, "loaded" with a demonic presence, is the transition from the old to the new year.

According to the traditional beliefs of the Modern Bulgarians, from Christmas to Epiphany's Day (From December 25 to January 6) are the so-called "dirty" (unbaptized, pagan) days. People in Bulgaria also call these days as Karankoncolos' or mrusni days (bg; мръсни дни»). What happens in those days, is that the cosmic order is disturbed, chaos ensues, and the boundary between the two worlds is permeable, with evil forces invading the earth. This is the time when Karakonjul is active and harms people.

To protect themselves from these supernatural creatures during the 12 days, people observe many prohibitions⁴. The most important is to not go out from sunset until dawn. Therefore, at that time of the year people don't go to the traditional evening gatherings. Against evil and demons, the clothes were stitched with garlic. Men clothes should not be sewn, else the wolves would devour men.

The birth of a person during these days predetermines his incarnation during his life or after his death in Karakonjul. But if a child is born, a new shirt is made for it immediately or a dragon would fall in love with it when it grows up. Adults do not bathe because the water is unlit, and before a baby is bathed the water is cleaned with burning charcoal. Sexual intercourse is not recommended as the conceived children during that time were to become thieves or magicians.

It is believed that these days are unbaptized (pagan) and therefore during them Christian rites such as baptism, wedding, memorial service for the deceased, are not to be performed. Ashes were not thrown out of the hearths. In southeastern Bulgaria on the day before St.Basil's holiday (which is celebrated on January 1st) a big fire is set up in the center of the village. It is maintained for three days and three nights to purify the area. Everyone in the village throws wood in the fire and on the third morning the coals are turned and if they sparkle, there will be health and prosperity.

The metamorphosis of man-animal is also connected with the dirty days, because they said any failure to observe any of the taboos imposed for the respective period is considered as a reason for the manifestation of demonic beings. It is in such border periods that the socialization of young people takes place, only with caroling.

The last day of the so-called Dirty Days of Unbaptized Days is Epiphany or Theophany. The night before the feast, the sky opens, the Lord Himself appeared to the

⁴ <http://www.burgasmuseums.bg/index.php?page=encdetail&id=160&lang=en>

gates of heaven and if you wish yourself something important, it will come true!⁵ The consecration of the water by the priest on Jordan's Day puts an end to the dirty days.

The notion of dirty days is characteristic of the traditional worldview, when the view of the cyclical nature of time prevails. With the modernization of life in the twentieth century, with the advent of scientific ideas about time and space, the belief in the supernatural nature of dirty days is disappearing and they remain an element only in some fairy tales.

A similar tradition takes place also in Greece, during the same period. Greeks, at the time when Веркович did the research were already Christians. So, the following traditions, which do remain until today, only survived with the same way as the pomak's ones; from grandfather's tales and songs to grandchildren. The only difference is that in Greece in those days, people dress up like demonic creatures in order to distract them and do gather with caroling.

To be more specific, we should clarify that in every region of Greece, we come across a different version of this myth or traditional beliefs. The common feature is that in all cases, calipers are small scandalous beings who like to do damage. According to the traditional beliefs, they live in the center of the earth where they shed the trunk that holds it. During celebrations, they come to the surface. The reason and the way they go vary from region to region.

In some areas it is considered that they grab anyone who is walking around at night and dancing with him until they are exhausted (dancing of calipers), like the Bulgarian кукери nowadays.

Bamboogeras, (Greek: Μπαμπόγεροι- the dance of the calipers) is one of the most interesting traditions in Drama and Serres, that relates with Epiphany day⁶. The etymology of the word seems to be related to the Slavic and Bulgarian baba, babo (Bulgarian: баба, бабо)- grandmother.

After the end of the water sanctification ceremony, the bamboogeras gathered outside the church. Dressed like animals, gather groups or separate, run in the streets of the village chasing those who meet, and asking symbolically for a tip⁷.

What we gained through this demanding work, was that we need to know and expand our knowledge to this uncharted field. We owe to our ancestors to find out, using such modern technics as we do today, what was their reality and their world and

⁵ <http://www.burgasmuseums.bg/index.php?page=encdetail&id=160&lang=en>

⁶ V. Kosmidou, «Epiphany and folk customs related to this holiday: common traditions in Bulgaria and Greece», at Bulgaria and the European Cultural Heritage, on the occasion of the European Cultural Heritage, Vienna 2018

⁷ V. Kosmidou, «Epiphany and folk customs related to this holiday: common traditions in Bulgaria and Greece», at Bulgaria and the European Cultural Heritage, on the occasion of the European Cultural Heritage, Vienna 2018

moreover way of living for a further understanding and reason to continue the research and last but not least maintaining such endangered traditions today.

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