

BELIEFS, CUSTOMS, PRACTICES AND SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS ON MIDSUMMER DAY AMONG THE ROMANIANS AND THE SLAVS

CREDINȚE, OBICEIURI, PRACTICI ȘI REPREZENTĂRI SIMBOLICE ÎN TOIUL VERII PRINTRE ROMÂNI ȘI SLAVI

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Abstract

This article aims at analyzing in a comparative perspective some beliefs related to Saint John's of Summer day and some customs performed on this day in a transitory cultural area spanning Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine. The author tries to underline the connections between Romanian and Slavic cultures visible at different levels like beliefs, customs, images and symbolic representations. It is supposed that analyzed items belong to a common stock of beliefs and reflect a similar system of representations relevant for identity of each ethnic group with some lines of coherence as resulting from a presumable co-inhabitation.

Rezumat

Scopul acestui articol este de a analiza dintr-o perspectivă comparativă unele credințe legate de Saint John's of Summer day și niște obiceiuri care au loc în timpul acestei zile într-o zonă culturală tranzitorie dintre Bulgaria, România, Serbia și Ucraina. Autorul dorește să sublinieze legăturile dintre culturile românești și cele slave vizibile la diferite nivele ca și credințe, obiceiuri, imagini și reprezentări simbolice. Se presupune că elementele analizate aparțin unei serii de credințe și reflectă un sistem similar de reprezentării relevant pentru identitatea fiecărui grup etnic cu unele linii de coerență rezultând dintr-o probabilă coabitare.

Key words: *beliefs, customs, practices, Romanian and Slavic cultures*

Cuvinte cheie: *credințe, obiceiuri, practici, culturi românești și slave*

Cultural context

Romanian-Slavic cultural contacts have sparked the interest of numerous researchers who analyzed ethnographical and linguistics aspects of a possible 'co-inhabitation' (Bărbulescu 1906:7, 1929:20, Giurescu 1972: 32, Kernbach 1998:140, Pătruț 1971:242, Russu I.I.1981: 218), 'co-territoriality' (Shevelov 1964: 252) of two ethnic groups. The last decades, the field has been studied by border sciences like anthropology and cross-cultural studies in complementary approaches. Remaining still a subject of academical controversies, the Romanian-Slavic cultural relations and reciprocal influences found a rich and productive field of research. It is supposed that many beliefs and customs belong to paleo-Balkan stock which was enriched by bogomilism and transported by Church Slavic language to different regions from Bulgaria and Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine.

The summer agricultural customs span the period of summer solstice soon after seeding until the first harvest. Customs of this cycle take place mainly in the field, on the streets of the villages or in the woods and are connected to the first walks of the youth. Joyful dances and songs are performed, and rituals of appeasing making better the spirits of fields, remembering traces of

animism. This most intensive time of the cycle begins with celebrations corresponding to summer solstice that have Summer Saint John's day or John the Christener's Head Cut in religious calendar and cuckoo's dumbing day in the popular one (June 24th) and ends by Saint Peter's day (29th of June). The celebrations of the summer are marked by numerous agrarian rituals, folk beliefs and magical rites performed either by collecting herbs, magical dances, ritual baths, and twisting wreaths. Moreover, some wolves' celebrations give coherence to time flowing marking 'cosmical horologes' (Ghinoiu 1988: 236, Tolstaja 1995:32) in the popular calendar.

Midsummer – a celebration of love and flowers

Midsummer day is a holiday marking the summer solstice in the popular calendar as the sun is waning, the year is winding slowly to the end of the year and the days are becoming shorter. As a cosmical reflection on the earth of their agricultural work and animist vision on nature, the Romanian and Southern Slavs, mainly Bulgarian and Serbs from the both banks of Danube perform soon after summer solstice some ritual activities believed to bring happiness in family and to enforce the harvest.

The celebration has different names that overlap and vary in time as *Drăgaica*, *Enovden*, *Krajlica* or *Sânziene*¹, but the complex rituals performed have the same depictions and functions. There is a geographical distribution of the terms: *Drăgaica/Dragaika*² are used in Bulgaria and South Romania (Gheorghiu 1893: 106, Marinov 1891:253), *Enovden* or *Sfântul Ion de Vară* 'Summer Saint John's day' (Ghinoiu 1988:108, Vasilieva 1980: 224) are Midsummer day all over Bulgaria and Romania, the term *Sânziene* is used in Northern Romania either for yellow flowers, for wreaths made up of herbs and yellow flowers or for girls wearing these wreaths. The terms *crăița/crăiasa/ krajlica* are used within Romania and Serbia to designate the yellow flowers twisted in wreath and used for divinatory and magic practices. The name of Romanian *Sânziene* generated academic debates: it seems the fairies replaced an autochthonous goddess of vegetation and the name was derived from Latin Sanctae Diana (Eliade 1993: 231, Poruciu 2010:55-56, Paliga 1989:141-149).

It is mainly a solar celebration and people believe that who sees first the sun dancing and trembling should take a bath at the breakday to be healthy throughout the year (Ghinoiu 1988:244, Kravtsov 1973:57, Stoianova 1972:84, Veseleva 2002: 139). The night of the bath is a wonderful one: a celebration of charms, of girls and of love. It is believed the skies are open and the happiness wonder across the earth. The girls are looking for yellow flowers to charm their beloved starting with midnight.

In a song from Ukrainian Bukovina the entire mysterious picture shows the girl attraction to the predestined husband:

' On Ivan's day at midnight even the club rush blossom/ Who found it that will live forever, //Ah, on Ivan's night I will get up early morning and I will take a bath in the dew/ To appeal the one who I love. //While I will be bathing in the dew, the day will come/ And my beloved will never leave me. / On Ivan's day I took water and I washed my hands of Peter,/ I took with me that one long time I have loved. //Ah. On Ivan day I took water to give it to my lover/ Don't think to fall in love with other girl. //Ah, in that garden the white cedar will blossom,/ It seems beautiful girl you won't be mine / Why my beautiful lover don't want to be mine?/ Then give me those herbs so I will forget you. /I will have those herbs near my fence,/ And soon after drinking on Ivan's night suddenly you will forget me! (Malkova Malevici 2004:176)

¹ Alike customs performed at Midsummer day are described in Ardaunov 1971-1: 204-209, Bârlea 1981: 407-408, Budiș 1998: 119, 231, Cantemir 1973 [1716]:185, Ciușanu 1915:31-33, Emilianova 2009: 295-301, Fochi 1976:116-119, Ghinoiu 1996: 108-109, 2002:329, Ghinoiu et alii 2002: 223-226, Kravtsov 1973: 56-59, Marinov 1994: 655, Pamfile 2001:65-67, Plotnikova 2004: 43-44, Pop .D. 1989: 14-18, Pop-Miculi 2006:66-83, Săbotnikova 1998:152, Shepping 2001:92, Talos 2007: 52, Veletskaja 1978:13-15, Veseleva 2002: 139-142, Vulcănescu 1987: 399, 489-491.

² Along the Danube in Bulgaria and Romania the name of celebration survived in toponymes. See Emilianova 2009: 295-301, Vulcănescu 1987:490.

[*На Івана опівночі папороть цвіте, / Тому рай на світі буде, хто той цвіт знайде*"/"Ой на Йвана встну рано, в росі скупаюсі, / Аби-м була тому мила, з котрим кохаюсі. / Як в росі скупаюсі лиш стене зорети, / То мні любка не покине, потій буде жити. / Ой на Йвана воду-м брала, на Порта-м сі мила, / Таки-м того повернула, що-м давно любила. / Ой на Йвана-м воду брала, дам любкови пити, / Аби його не кортіло до других ходити. / Ой у твоїм городчику зеленіє тоя, / Здає ми сі, файний любко, що не будеш моя. / Ой, як же ти, файний любко, не хоч моя бути, / То дай мені таке зілля, аби ті забути. / А в мене є таке зілля коло перелазу, / Як на Йвана він"єш рано, забудеш відразу.]

The first sequences of the custom depicts people taking ritual baths in the dew and gathering flowers and herbs. In doing so, it is believed the girls will become beautiful and pure as fresh water. In some Bulgarian and Romanian songs the girls look for hidden place next to the rivers, on the meadows or open fields to take a ritual bath of dew:

‘Margita³ and a shepherd: Early got up Margita lass, / early got up that day, on Yanevden,⁴ / early got up, early to go / in the field, in the dewy meadow, / to gather aromatic flowers, / to make a yanevden’s bunch. / Saw her a shepherd with a curved shepherd’s crook, / and to Margita quietly spoke: / - Stay a little, stay, Margita lass, / until I come with my curved shepherd’s crook, / to beat the dew on the grass, / so you don’t moisten your white skirts, / so you don’t wet your yellow slippers. / Margita quietly spoke: / - Hey shepherd, porous white cheese, / if I have been watching such, / I would have gathered them in the sheep-pen. / Here comes a ploughman with a curved plough, / and to Margita quietly spoke: / - Stay a little, stay, Margita lass, / so I could take my colourful goad, / to beat the dew on the grass.’ (SNU-2 :32)

[Bg. *Маргита и овчарь*:

Рано рани Маргита девойка, / рано рани на ден, на Яневден, / рано рани, рано да отиде / у полето, у росно ливаге, / да набере цвеке миризливо, / да увие яневската китка. / Съгледа я овчар с крива гега, / на Маргити потихом говоре: / - Постой, постой, Маргито девойке, / доде дойда сас кривата гега, / да обия роса по тревата, / да не росиш твои бели поли, / да не мокриш твои жълти чехли. / Маргита му потихом говоре: / - Ей овчарко, шупливо сирене, / да бих язе таквия гледала, / язе бих ги пълнобор набрала. / Ей че иде орач с криво рало, на Маргити потихом говоре: / - Постой, постой, Маргито девойке, / да си зема моя шарен остен, да обия роса по тревата.]

The same agricultural and pastoral vision on the world found in the carols create the scene in which the beautiful girl Margita having the name of the flower and wearing white dress is protected by the shepherd who wants to clean grass of dew. A ploughman is also expected in the field. As in the spring rain invoking rites, in this custom are depicted magical dances and the preparation of the bunches of flowers (Arnaudov 1971-1:207, Bârlea 1981:407, Fochi 1976: 117, Plotnikova 2002: 44, Vulcănescu 1987: 543).

A second sequence in the organization of the day is picking up the flowers, making bunches and twisting them in wreaths. On one hand, it is believed that the herbs collected on this day have the biggest healing force which will be lost by the sunset and on the other hand the yellow flowers have magic powers being used for learning news about marriage or protecting people against bad spirits (Ghinoiu 1988:246, Vasileva 2002:141) :

Collecting flowers for this celebration implies the participation of people of different professions and social statuses like maids, fortune tellers, witches as well as the fairies and saints: ‘Saint Ivan’s and Saint Peter’s flowers/Red on Saint Ivan’s day/ Blue on Saint Peter’s day/ Ivan gathers them, gathers them/ And Peter twist them in a wreath, / Ivan gathers them, gathers them, / And he gives flowers / To his younger brother Christmas.’ (available online at www.starisloveni.com.)

³ The name is derived from Margarita, Margery, meaning daisy.

⁴ Similar celebration dedicated to Summer Saint John’s day and implying ritual baths can be found in large cultural areas under variants of names Bg. *Enovden*, *Yanev*, Rom. *Ioan*, Srb. *Iovan*, Russ. *Ivan* (*Kupala*).

[Srb. *Ivanjsko cveće petranjsko, /Ivanjsko cveće rujano, /Petranjsko cveće plavetno! / Ivan ga bere te bere, /Petar ga plete te plete. /Ivan ga bere te bere, /Daje ga bratu do sebe /Svom mlađem bratu Koledu.*]

Both practices of collecting and twisting wreaths are put under the protection of the saints who mark the borders of the season -Saint John and Saint Peter. In Romanian and Slavic tradition, it is believed the sun smiles in the sky this period (Georgieva 1993:20, Ghinoiu 1998:146, Vulcănescu 1987: 499). Notably, in the Serbian song, Saint Ivan collects the flower, Saint Peter twists them in a wreath which is given to his younger brother- Christmas. This ritual of handling the wreath to Christmas suggest the importance of the celebration in unifying the sacral moments of old year. Significantly, the flowers known as yellow, change their color from Saint John's day until Saint Peter's day from red into blue (Arnaudov 1971-1: 207, Vulcănescu 1987:543):

'Gana gathers herbs: Mother speaks to Gana: - Gana, my child Gana, /why have night overtook you on this day, on Enyovden, / with workers at the field, with mowers at the meadow? / Have you dragged sheaves, have you burned stooks? / have you gathered hay, have you piled stacks? /Gana speaks to mother: - Mother, dear mother, / when you are asking me, /I'll tell you the truth: /I haven't dragged sheaves, neither have I burned stooks, / nor have I burned stooks with workers on a field; /I haven't gathered hay, /neither have I piled stacks, /nor have I piled stacks with mowers in a meadow/ They met me, mother, my dear girlfriends, /and we went, mother, to a day Enyovden /on a wide field to gather herbs, to gather herbs, to lure lads.' (Arnaudov 1963:368)

[Bg. *Гана бере билки: Мама Гани дума: /- Гане, синко Гане, / що си замръкнала на ден, на Еньовден/ с аргати на нива, с косачи в ливада? / Снопи ли си влякла, или кръстци клала,/ сено ли си брала, или купи трупа? /Гана мами дума:/ - Мамо, мила мамо, / ти кога ме питаши, право да ти кажеш: / не съм снопи влякла, нито кръстци клала, / нито кръстци клала с аргати на нива; / не съм сено брала, ни купи трупала, /ни купи трупала с косачи в ливади./ Срецнаха ме, мамо, моите мили дружки, /че ходихме, мамо, на ден ми Еньовден /във поле широко билки да си берем, /билки да береме, момци да мамиме.]*

The scene displays apparently a dialog daughter -mother about agrarian works and it is built up in an enumeration about what the girls should do. First of all, the mother asked the girl why and where the night took her over and what she did. The verb implies an additional meaning in characterizing the the personage: she belongs to the demonic spirits of the night who took her over, so she is chosen and taken in a nocturn experience. The dialogue contrast mother's thoughts and daughter confession unveiling gradually the real identity of the character: the essence of the texts stays in revealing the condition of the girl - in the last lines about the maidens' group aiming at gathering herbs and luring lads is expressed her belongingness to the gentle fairies (Arnaudov 1963:367, Vulcănescu 1987:534).

In Bulgarian and Romanian beliefs, the ambiguity flower-girls-fairies is suggested by the dance of flowers and herbs: at the dawns time they suggest a fight between moon and sun, between masculin and feminin in a vegetal marital ritual that keeps the cosmic and marital suggestions:

'-Go away sun, come you moon/ and Sânziene subdue/ to grew them the flower flower/ yellow and strongly smelling/ Let girls collect the flowers/ And put them in a wreath/ And put them on the hat brim/ As flower bunch for coronation/ the seed to grow up/until autumn they enough breed [...] /- Go away moon, come in sun/ Because we [lads] have a wish to get married/ The unpredestined wreaths/ lay thrown under the chimney /Up to noon wearing the flag/The lads chase the hinds/ because those unadorned/ do not want be brides.' (Vulcănescu 1987:399).

[*-Du-te soare, vino lună/ sânzienele îmbună/să le crească floarea floare/ galbină mirositoare/Fetele să o adună/ Și le pună în cunună/ Să le pună la pălărie/ struțuri pentru cununie/boabele să le răstească/pân' la toamnă să -nmulțească [...] - Du-te lună, vino soare/ Că tragem la-nsurătoare/ Cununile neursite/zac sub hornuri azvârlite/ Până'mniez cu steagu-n frunte/trec feciorii după ciute/c-alde alea nedirese/nu vor să fie mirese !]*

The poem was recorded in South Romania, county Gorj, in an ethnographic field work and has a dialogic structure. First part is interpreted by girls, in the evening, when the preparations for

gathering flowers start and has ritualic character. The scene depicts girls' invocation to moon to come and tame the powerful yellow flowers as the maidens gathering to collect and to twist them in a wreath in order to enrich and rape the seeds. The second part has the opposite meaning representing the lads' aspiration to marriage, it is performed the second day in the morning and has the function to ironize the maids failure in getting married. The fade crown-wreaths lying thrown under the chimney are the metaphor of this. The motives does and ritual hunting from the carols function here together with another symbol of wedding and kaloushari -the flag. If the maidens are the goddesses of the moon, the lads are solar knights. The last part is an ironic lad's repartee to solemn behaviour of girls. Above all the scene is a joyful dialog expressing attitude to marriage between girls as rational and lunar characters and lads as solar dionisiac and whisper the stances of love ritual in the bif frame of nature.

Premarital ground works are suggested by the girls'weaving practices in Bulgaria and Romania where the girls – as well as the flowers used for wreaths - work with threads to weave a shirt for Sun:

'Iana, Sânziana!/ Iana weaves and adorns/ And for wedding get prepared/ She weaves flax and silk/ To make for Sun shirt/ Thread with thrown silk/ To make for Sun homespun coat!' (Pamfil 2001: 59-71).

[*Iano, Sânziano! / Țese Iana, dichisește/ Și de nuntă se gătește/Țese în și cu mătase/Lui Soare cămașe/ Fir cu ibrișin/ Lui Soare/Zăbun!]*

The initial addressing formula combine a Slavic name Iana with a Romanian one. As well as in carols the girl weaving indicate marital preparations but her groom is the sun to whom she dedicates her work- the shirt and the coat.

The custom of weaving wreaths in Bulgaria and Romania also involves divinatory practices: the girls twist wreaths and put them on the in a cauldron or on the , adorn the houses and children's heads.

interpreting the guessing practice the direction and the forms are very important: if the wreaths drown it means unhappiness; if the crown floats on the water, it forecasts luck. The twist is also taken to the cattle pen or under the pillow in order to see the beloved. It is also believed the wreaths protect all members of families against illness and they are put at the borders of the villages to be blessed by priests, at the doors to bring fruitfulness and in the hair to bring health.

Additionally, in Romania, Serbia and Ukraine (Ghinoiu 1988:356, Kravtsov 1976:59-60), in the afternoon of the same day, magical dances supposed to enforce the harvest are performed in the grain field by girls and men disguised in bride and groom costumes. The ceremony remembers the ancient practices through which the protecting deities of harvests were invoked to care of the grain field wearing crowns made up of ears while were dancing and fighting. It is believed the young girls dancing in the field have the magic force of spreading healthy energies and strengthening the grain ears. Their crowns have rounded shapes, while men's crowns have the the form of the cross. It suggests the marital, sacral, and solar implications. The crowns resemble the wedding in the church and by shape the sun while the dance performed in the time of grain maturation induce them the force to survive over summer.

Agrarian and heroic vision are combined in the dance and the duel of scythes among the girls insinuate the Diana Goddess' fight with priest-king, Rex Nemorensis to drive away the enemies and anticipate the fate of the grain which has to die by being transformed into bread. However, the ritual contains magical forms connected to the signification of the last ears, called the 'beard of the earth' (Ghinoiu 2002:329, Veletzkaia 1978:13) to the conservation of the last vegetal sample of the agrarian cycle ('the golden woman', the last sheaf) (Grushko& Medvedev 1995:129-130, Kravtsov 1976:60, Talos 2007:47) and the mace of the wheat (Kravtsov 1976:61, Vulcănescu 1987: 555) .

A ritual of purification is made at the end of the wheat harvest on two different days, the one on the day of solstice, and the second one later, on Saint Peter' day called the 'roaming with the torch' (Ghinoiu 2002:315, Plotnikova 2004:69, Vasileva 2002:143). Bachelors go on the top of the

mountain and rotate the torches in the direction of sun's motion reminding the solar practices suggested by fire performed from Christmas to autumn.

Conclusions

Expressing the 'revenge of our non-Latin stock of beliefs' (Blaga 1973:48) the customs and practices performed on Saint John's day display pre-Christian images and the names of the celebration are more connected to flowers and wheat wreaths.

Top summer holidays are celebrations of flowers, harvest, herbs and love combining guessing rituals with magical dances meant to protecting people against the illness and the wheat against bad sprits and insects. Moreover, Midsummer day is a feast of love and inducing fertility to wheat ears by circular movements expressed in round shaped dances.

At symbolic level, feasting at the moment of cutting the wheat suggest a spiritual transformation to enjoying the result – the bread- round like the sun.

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