

## BOOK REVIEWS

### A BOOK ABOUT ETHNIC MINORITIES IN BULGARIA

Екатерина Анастасова. Етничност, традиция, власт. Етюди за прехода. София: Академично издателство Марин Дринов (Ekaterina Anastasova. *Ethnicity, Tradition, and Power. Essays on tradition.* Marin Drinov Academic Publishing House). Sofia. 2006, 148 pp.

Ekaterina Anastasova, who has graduated the Moscow University, is a recognised ethnolinguist, and author of more than 60 scholarly works. Since 1989, she has been working as senior researcher studying Old Believers in Bulgaria at the Institute of Folklore, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia. Her interest in ethnic minorities in Bulgaria was inspired by the study of Old Believers. Anastasova's new book *Ethnicity, Tradition, and Power* discusses the period of reconstruction not only in Bulgaria but also in other former socialist countries (e.g., Ukraine) during 1992–2002.

Bulgarian ethnographer Professor Ivanichka Georgieva, who has written the preface to the book, writes that Anastasova's work is characteristic of her good knowledge of the material and objective analysis of fieldwork materials. Anastasova has recorded and collected material among different ethnic and religious groups: Turks, Roma, Serbs, Ukrainians, and Russians. As a student of the Moscow ethnolinguistic school (supervisor academician Nikita Tolstoy), she is also the follower of the French school of ethnology and, owing to the cooperation with French ethnologist Jean-François Gossiaux and studies at the Anthropology of Social Institutions and Organizations Lab in Paris, was forced to take an outsider's look at Bulgarian ethnology. Some Anastasova's articles have already been published in French. Both the Russian as well as the French school have exerted significant influence on the conceptual development of Anastasova and the terminology used in her work.

Ethnic minorities in Bulgaria have been given a special emphasis in the book. 84% of the population of Bulgaria (7.7 million) are ethnic Bulgarians, which is a good figure, compared to, for example, Latvia or Estonia. Bulgaria has had no problems with Russian Old Believers (only around 15,000), who are loyal to the country's authorities. The two largest ethnic minorities are the Roma and the Turks. For centuries, Bulgaria had been under Turkish rule and was liberated from the Ottoman rule only in 1878. Bulgarians also have complicated relations with the Roma, who have a very high birth rate while the employment rate is rather low. The book is illustrated with colour photographs, which illustrate the life of ethnic minorities. The most conspicuous among these are not the houses of the rich Roma but the wall built by Bulgarians in front of a



Roma district in the town of Sliven. Even in the case of the most complicated course of events in the relations of Estonians and Russians, even the existing of such a wall in Estonia would be impossible.

The religious self-identification of the Bulgarian population differs considerably from other Slavonic countries (e.g., Russia, Ukraine, Belarus). The majority of the population are Orthodox Christians, but there are also nearly a million Muslims living in the country. The Muslim community does not consist of only Turks but also of Roma. From the assimilation policy of ethnic minorities, characteristic of socialist Bulgaria, the country is gradually beginning to establish a dialogue with ethnic minorities in order to patch up ethnic relations inside the country as well as with the neighbouring countries. Tolerance towards Turks in Bulgaria, for example, has helped to mend Bulgaria's relations with Turkey.

The aim of the book is to analyse phenomena related to the ethnicity in the transition period and the ethnic identification of different groups (Wallachians, Bulgars, Roma, Turks, Ukrainians and Old Believers) on the large area encompassing Bulgaria, Odessa region in the Ukraine, and Yugoslavia. These are areas that historically formed a common culture area. In the introduction to the chapters, Anastasova determines the goals and aims of the book and explicates terminology.

Anastasova's book discusses three main issues of the transition period: ethnicity and nationalism, popular and mass culture, power and politics. These issues are observed in the material that Anastasova regards as commonly shared by the traditional and contemporary culture. According to the scholar, the culture is a unique mediator of the urban and the rural, traditional and modernist, national and transnational.

The book consists of three relatively independent chapters joined together by a common concept. Chapter One discusses the traditional unity of Wallachians (Romanians and Aromanians). In this community the democratic changes have brought along a series of processes associated with the activities of the Wallachian élite in founding organisations and publishing periodicals. The intellectual élite worries about the codification of ethnic education and language, which is expressed in the communal desire to create an adequate model in a new social and political reality.

The second chapter of the book observes traditional culture on the example of that of Romanian Wallachians. The chapter focuses on three complicated features of the communal culture: 1) the dream of the netherworld; 2) the ritual of "commemoration of the living", an initiation rite related to death, which is highly characteristic of the community (traditionally, only the dead are commemorated in the Orthodox culture); 3) specific mantic practices. Changes in the latter have been given most attention in the chapter: for example, old forms of divination are still in use (e.g., divination with corn). Also, modern psychics have appeared in the villages instead of former soothsayers. According to Anastasova, the stories and the imagery of the stories by soothsayers in the Balkans are influenced by melodramatic Latin-American soap operas. Typically of folklore in the Balkans, the divinations combine the physical and the spiritual world.

The third chapter of the book is perhaps the most interesting, discussing the relations of ethnic minorities and power. Ethnic minorities in Bulgaria try to distance themselves from the historically shaped negative ethnic stereotypes. Some better or-

ganised minorities have taken on an active role in the political scene of Bulgaria. For example, the Turkish party of minorities, the Movement for Rights and Liberty (*Dvi-zhenie za prava i svobodi, DPS*), was founded in 1990 and is represented in the parliament.

A characteristic and distinct feature of the book is oral narratives collected by Anastasova. For instance, taxi drivers, interviewed by the author, call the Prime Minister of Bulgaria a Gypsy, the parliament speaker a sodomite, etc. Such expressions are by no means accidental but serve as a persuasive connection between ethnic coding and power. Both the Bulgarians and non-Bulgarians take the ethnic background of politicians very seriously. Following the rule of Simeon the Great, the first monarch of Bulgaria (ruled the country in his childhood in the 1940s), it was long debated whether Simeon was Bulgarian or not. A part of the non-Bulgarian population emphasise their identity by telling oral stories of the ethnic background of Bulgarian politicians. For example, a story about the Roma background of Ivan Kostov, former Prime Minister, is very popular among the Roma. Wallachians take pride in telling stories about Todor Zhivkov, the long-time leader of Socialist Bulgaria (1956–1989).

The book is an interesting and valuable source not only for Bulgarians but also for scholars abroad. Presently the book includes only a summary and the list of contents in English. It would be very advantageous, though, if the entire book by Anastasova was translated into English and published also in digital form, being thus made available to scholars all over the world.

Galina Ponomareva

## ON TWO NEW BOOKS ON VEPSIAN MATTERS

My visit to the international seminar on Vepsian issues in St Petersburg in October 2006 (see the news in volume 34 of *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*) was advantageous in many respects, including bringing back several books, either bought or given. And, as would be expected of the nature of the conference, the books – two of which I will review below – discussed Vepsian issues.

The books are widely different in language, the discussed topics and approach, but both shed new light on the belief world, or in more general terms – the worldview of the Vepsians.

**Kaija Heikkinen. *Metsänpelko ja tietäjänaiset. Vepsäläisnaisten uskonto Venäjällä* (Fear of forests and wise Aomen. The beliefs of Vepsian women in Russia). 2006. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura: Helsinki, 276 pp.**

The first book *Metsänpelko ja tietäjänaiset. Vepsäläisnaisten uskonto Venäjällä* is written by Kaija Heikkinen from Joensuu, Finland. The author has studied Karelian issues and has worked on academic exchange in St Petersburg, Russia (then Leningrad),



already in the Soviet period. She has a good knowledge of Russian, which is, in fact, a prerequisite for any professional study of such peoples as Karelians and Vepsians.

Kaija Heikkinen started conducting fieldwork in Vepsian areas at the beginning of the 1990s. In summer 1995, I accompanied her at fieldwork in Voilaht, Kuja and Pondal villages. The third, but most important member of our group was Nina Zaitseva, *Voilahten tytär*, 'daughter of Voilaht', one of the most distinguished Vepsian linguists and cultural figures. In the light of the above reasons, the book intrigued me considerably, since I have also studied Vepsian forest spirit lore.

Having read the book, it appears that the topics of forest, grazing in forest, forest spirits, getting lost in the forest and saving the lost ones are covered less thoroughly than the title would suggest. The book is a monographic treatment of the Vepsian religion today, and in most general terms, discussed both Christian and non-Christian elements. The focus of the book seems to be on phenomena associated with the Christian folk religion in a society in which institutional church has been completely suppressed for decades.

As the major focus in the book is on village festivities, these are also connected through cattle with forests. Here it is important to note that the book is written from a feminist viewpoint. The first part of the introduction is entitled 'Women praying on the field', in which the author describes how she first witnessed the celebration of a village festivity in 1991 in its modest form, which is characteristic of the recent decades. The titles of the following chapters and subchapters, some of which are definitely quotes, are emotionally loaded and at the same time revealing something important (e.g., 'Yearning for festivities', 'Gifts to god', 'The might of holy water', 'Women cannot live without god').

Grazing in the forest and village festivities have been related with cattle-breeding and, thus, directly with making food, which is clearly women's domain. Heikkinen believes that this explains why 'tea time' (eating, drinking tea, and, certainly, a shot of vodka) is such an important part of village festivities.

In the introduction to her monograph, Heikkinen has quoted Susan Starr Sered, American anthropologist and religion researcher, who has gathered material from many highly different cultures and religions in Asia, America, and Africa, including syncretic religious cults, and who has introduced the concept 'female dominated religions'. Heikkinen now uses the same concept. Gender issue also prevails in the chapter on the relationships of church and folk beliefs. I would like to hold on to my view, though, that for the past few decades the entire Vepsian village has been 'female dominated', which explains such tendencies in the religion.

An overview of research so far has been presented on a few dozen of pages. It must be noted that the earlier Russian sources include highly interesting material. In addition to that, there is also the material collected by the author – *kerrottu*, or 'what has been told'. In relation with this, issues connected with the theory and practices of

fieldwork emerge time and again, whereas the latter are much more interesting. Comparing the material collected by myself and Heikkinen, it appears that Kaija's material is more limited in time and thus more condensed. Her informants are, on average, a generation younger than the informants I interviewed during my first years of fieldwork, and this, in a way, determines the nature of the material. In theory, it is interesting whether and to which degree has the generation gap or the personal qualities of informants (the narrator's reliance on authenticity, narrative abilities, etc.) influenced the nature of the material.

Heikkinen has named such fragmentary, sometimes jumbled and imprecise narratives of bygone times *perinnepuhe*, 'a lore tale'. This seems to be a rather fortunate term referring to the reflections about celebrating festivities in the past, or funeral traditions, etc. by an averagely cooperative informant, who does not have particularly good or systematic memory. Having taken a retrospective look at my own material I realised that many recollections about past festivities express only nostalgia for the past: the recurrent motifs being *papid pajatiba; äi narodad oli; taljankoil vätiba; adivoihe käeliba...*, 'priests were singing, it was crowded, accordion was played, people visited each other'. Shards of information sparkle in free-flowing narration, or have to be drawn forth from the informants by asking numerous questions.

The book features informants' narratives in Vepsian, with a Finnish translation. Even though the translation contained inaccuracies and errors, the presentation of source texts was definitely a right choice. Heikkinen herself explains it as a salute to the new Vepsian literary language. Her serious empathy towards people who have shared their knowledge with the author and welcomed her in their homes is clearly felt throughout the book.

An absolutely positive factor in the book is the high quality of the illustrative black-and-white photos by Mikko Savolainen, who has also authored an album of black-and-white photographs about the Vepsian areas.

**Ирина Юрьевна Винокурова. Животные в традиционном мировоззрении вепсов (Irina Iu. Vinokurova. Animals in the Traditional Vepsian World-view). 2006. Petrozavodsk: Izd-tvo PetrGu, 448 pp. + illustr. and tables.**

Irina Vinokurova from Petrozavodsk has focused on studying folk calendar holidays since the very beginning of her research career. Next to articles, she has published two weighty monographs on the topic, which have been widely used by Estonian scholars, and which, like her other works, have been highly appraised by Kaija Heikkinen. The new book, which was published in 2006, is dedicated to the topic that has attracted scholarly interest in the form of presentations and academic articles in the past few years – namely, wild nature, the animal kingdom in the broad-



est sense. Vinokurova's bulky *Animals in the Traditional Vepsian Worldview* resembles in many ways the series of articles published by Estonian folklorist Mall Hiiemäe on species of fish and birds in Estonian folklore journal *Mäetagused* (vols 1–5:11–13), which Vinokurova has also referred to. The book is essentially a reference source, but the single articles are rather lengthy and elaborate, though small in number. In any case, the structure greatly facilitates the search for information in the book. The doctoral dissertation, defended by Irina Vinokurova on November 6, 2007 in St Petersburg, seems to be largely based on the said book, though it is not structured in the same manner. In addition to the works by Hiiemäe, references are made to other works by her and other Estonian scholars. At the same time, the academic edition of Vepsian proverbs was not included in the list of references or as in-text references, although proverbs have been used next to other genres of folklore, and references have been made to archive materials or minor publications.

The book is based on a remarkably large corpus of material, collected and published by Vinokurova and other Karelian scholars, but also the material collected by Finnish during war in the Folklore Archive of the Finnish Literary Society. Inclusion of the material held in the Estonian archives might not have introduced anything new, or may have done so in single instances, for instance, specified migration routes.

A single glance at the table of contents reveals that bats have been included under the category of birds. In the very first chapter the author provides an explanation – to our knowledge, bats are mammals, but according to the ethnozoological categorisation it is grouped among birds, like whales are grouped among fishes. (An overview of the categorisation is presented on p. 378). The article on whales is quite short, because, as the author has also pointed out, the whale (*kit*) has been introduced to the Vepsians only recently, motifs of it are borrowed from Russian and literary sources, and it is associated with cosmological conceptions, from where it has been introduced in incantations. Another fine example of such popular categorisation is Chapter Four, a subchapter of which is entitled 'Ophiomorphs' and discusses snakes (as long and interesting as one might have expected), lizards, but also earthworms, snails and horsehair worms, notorious in folk medicine. The third subchapter, 'Mouselike Creatures', discusses mice and rats, but also insectivores moles.

The structure of the articles could be observed on the following example: the rather lengthy segment discussing hares. Hare is an indigenous animal with some economic value. Nevertheless, the article, somewhat surprisingly, opens with the description of a witchcraft trick, which was not used to lure the hare into the trap but was used to prevent hares from damaging turnip fields. Be that as it may, but the description is apt.

The author has emphasised that the Vepsians' conceptions about hares and the symbolism related to the animal are based on its actual biological qualities. The Vepsians also believed that hares abandon their offspring after they have turned three days old, and by that symbolise women who abandon their children – the parallel is employed in the following incantation for weaning a child – 'Like a hare who doesn't know its sons, may you not know the teat of your mother.' But what are the real biological qualities of the hare and which are the anthropomorphic preconceptions of people? The moralising addressed to female hares by the 19th-century German zoologists Brehm and Rossmessler, whom Vinokurova has quoted, sound completely comical.

The taboo of eating hares was followed in eastern Vepsian villages, since it was considered an impure animal. Shimozero, by now a disappeared village, in which lie Vinokurova's roots, was a place where hare meat was believed to be *pagan*, 'impure'. A nice illustrative example is a family narrative about the author's great-grandfather, who had lived in St Petersburg, had married a woman from Tver Province, and did not observe the ancient food taboo. So it happened that his brother, who had come to visit, ate and first gladly approved the hare meat and only upon learning what he was eating, started to spit and curse. Eventually, Vinokurova relies on Dmitriy Zelenin and suggests that the taboo is rooted in the food code of the Old Testament; this seems definitely more plausible than its explaining with totemism proposed by Vladimir Pimenov.

But the association of hare with devil? This is illustrative: it is believed that devil himself had created hares; hare serves as a minion of the devil. The Eastern Slavonic people are known to have had analogous beliefs. Thus, it is no wonder that such an animal is considered impure.

Associations with folk medicine are also interesting: hare skin and liver were considered medicine. The former was inspired by rational reasoning: a warm skin might have helped, while the latter conveyed magical purposes: hare liver was used to treat night-blindness.

The hare example presents the most questionable problem in the book. The title suggests that this does not only concern the issues related to religion, though these have to be considered as well. Hare's long ears have inspired plant names: in Vepsian language, lilies of the valley are called *g'änišankorvaižed*, 'hare ears'; about those who squinted may have been said that their eyes are squinted like the hare's; timid people have been called hares, and, accordingly, so have passengers without tickets. The book contains repeated references to Aleksandr Gura's book on animal symbolism, which has contributed greatly to the study. At the same time, it is difficult to agree with the inclusion of such material, mostly proverbs and riddles, which do not reflect the role of animals in the traditional worldview. Consider, for example, riddles: *jänis jädmed, a villad madmed – Hiinregi*. 'Hare along the ice, fur along the ground. – A sleigh for pulling hay.' And the best example of the distancing from hare symbolism is, of course, the universal proverb about chasing two hares at the same time. The same meaning is conveyed by chasing two foxes, two beauties, two whatever that remain unattainable. Be that as it may, if hares from fairy tales are added, the book contains information not only what has been believed about hares and other creatures, but also about the sources where their name has been mentioned.

After having completed this chapter, which is quite representative of the entire book, it is worth taking a look at the chapter on insects, or a part of it. The list, compiled according to ethnozoological categorisation, is the following: 'Ladybird', 'Butterfly', 'Wasp', 'Bee', 'Midges and Mosquitoes', 'Horseflies, Deerflies, Flies', 'Dorrs', 'Grasshopper, Cricket', 'Ant', 'Spider', 'Tick', 'Domestic Parasites: Lice, Fleas, Bed Bugs, Moths, Roaches'. It must be admitted that the overview of these rather repulsive creatures was rather interesting, especially in terms of names: a tick, for example, in Vepsian language is *kägentäi* 'cuckoo's louse', which instantly reminded me that the name used in my home dialect was 'wood louse'. And while talking about repelling the bugs, the narrators have arrived at a comparison with the modern day (or, to be more precise, the wisdom of yesterday: *dustid oma n'ügude, eduu iilend*, 'Now there is DDT, before there wasn't').

As it is the case with wild animals, birds, fish, etc., as well as with domestic animals, the general overview is followed by treatments of single animals. It seems quite natural that a longer discussion has been provided on horse, also cattle and dog, which is explained by their longer history and economic significance to man. In terms of horses, it was interesting to discover that even the Vepsian tradition contained lore about using horses to choose the location of a future church: the church was built wherever the horse decided to stop.

The proverb, known also among the Vepsians, says that ‘a trough doesn’t come to the horse, but the horse can go to the trough’.

Paraphrasing the well-known proverb, we might say that the book does not happen in the hands of the reader, but that the person desiring food for thought must go to the bookshelf. These two books on Vepsian topics are worth picking up and reading.

Kristi Salve