

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF RITUALS AND PRACTICES

On June 26–29, 2012, the Eighth Annual Conference of the SIEF (International Society for Ethnology and Folklore) Working Group “The Ritual Year” (established in 2004) took place in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

The conference under the general title “Migrations” was organised by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnography Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and the Paisii Hilendarskii University of Plovdiv, with Lina Gergova at the head of the organising committee. The subject of migration came up due to the topicality of the phenomenon and relating problems, which attract the attention of ethnologists, folklorists, linguists, historians, sociologists and specialists from other fields of humanities from many countries.

The call for papers evoked responses from researchers of twenty countries, and forty presentations were given within the four conference days. Each day started with an introductory lecture. On the first day, after the official opening, **Jurij Fikfak** (Slovenia) in his presentation “Crisis and Ritual Year” discussed participation in rituals and practices as a possibility for negotiating difficult situations, crises and traumas, including change in place of residence (migration). In his paper, the researcher made a distinction between rituals as regular practice (rather rare nowadays) and as intellectual heritage – the basis for the national idea. In his opinion, regarding national-cultural tradition as the mental basis is necessary for determining identity, and this approach could contribute to the restoration and continuity of holiday rituals. According to discussants, these processes are under way in several countries.

The second day of the conference was opened by **Emily Lyle** (Scotland), Chair of the Ritual Year Working Group, with her presentation “The ‘Life Cycle’ of Crops in Relation to the Ritual Year”. The researcher compared the vegetation period of main European grains with people’s seasonal life and ritual practices. E. Lyle’s idea that in vegetation periods the most significant are the beginning and the end, not their cyclicity, aroused heated discussion. The main issue argued was to what extent could mythological year be structured and whether we could disengage ourselves from concrete climatic conditions that have impact on grain growing in different regions of Europe.

On the third day, the keynote speech was given by **Irina Sedakova** (Moscow), who talked about time and space in the Balkan and Slavic rituals of separation. In her analysis of real (departure, leaving of migrants, recruiting, etc.) and symbolic (transition moments in life cycle – birth, wedding, funeral) leave-taking, the researcher offered a classification of ‘separations’, based on temporal dichotomy – the separation is either temporary (until the next meeting) or permanent (forever). The associations between separations in calendar and family rituals were also discussed. This topic evoked many memories of personal life as well as from fieldwork. For instance, grandmother saw her grandchildren off by blessing them with loaves of bread (Latvia); parents, when bidding farewell, said: “God in front of you, and we will follow” (Bulgaria), etc.



Moment from the meeting of the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group. From the left: Leander Petzold, Irina Sedakova and Emily Lyle. Photo by Andres Kuperjanov 2012.

On the last day, **István Povedák** (Hungary) talked about strategies for identity preservation, giving a detailed introduction into the ethno-cultural, public awareness and political activities of the students' association of Szekler University (SZEFE). The organisation advocated and created rituals (including an anthem popular even nowadays) to support the identity of Transylvanian Hungarians who returned to Hungary in 1920. Rituals and politics are closely connected, and on national basis rituals can either separate or unite people – this idea was conveyed by many speakers at the conference.

The panel “Ritual Year of Migrant Communities” was opened by **Laurent Sébastien Fournier**, who talked about the ritual games of the Scottish Diaspora in the United States. The researcher analysed calendar ball games that have been spread all over the world by Scottish emigrants and have acquired specific local features. He proposed to view these games as a ritual genre that has preserved its ritual foundation regardless of the great variability and specific local features. The Scottish exodus started in the 18th century, and the descriptions of games in American literature date back to 1846. By the late 19th century these games had nearly died out, only to make a powerful re-appearance after World War II. Today the games are losing their connection with the calendar, and their sacral character has faded; however, identity issues, Scottishness and its material signs have become more significant. The following discussions elaborated on the notion of the ‘ritual genre’ as well as the ethnic stereotypes of the Scots. According to David Stanley (USA), Americans do not regard them as greedy and stingy but rather as courageous, brave and tenacious in the spirit of Romanticism inspired by the works of Water Scott. The topic of ethnic stereotypes in the context of migration was also investigated in other papers.

David Stanley in his paper “Rituals and Customs in an Immigrant Community” noted that American experience in the sphere of migration and relating issues is ex-

tremely important today, as many countries feature multiculturalism. He dwelt upon the situation in the State of Utah which, due to the development of coal industry in the 19th century, attracted workers from nearly thirty nationalities. The use of the signs of national belonging (clothing, hairstyle, attributes) as well as confession, ritual and everyday food, music and dances helped the newcomers preserve their identity; yet, sometimes the migrants found themselves in a situation in which they had to hide their origin and adopt local rituals and customs.

Jaka Repič (Slovenia) in his paper “The Role of Rituals, Celebrations and Festivities in Slovene Diasporic Community in Argentina” discussed the history of the preservation and maintenance of customs among emigrants who fled their homeland in the 1820s. By operating with the notions ‘personal trauma’ and ‘collective memory of roots’, the researcher described the mechanisms for mythologizing the past, native places and holidays. The presentation raised questions about the return of emigrants to their homeland, the ethno-cultural problems related with visiting cult sites (for the Slovenes, Mount Triglav) and the ways of overcoming stereotypes.

Petko Hristov (Bulgaria), who has been investigating work migration on the Balkans, discussed in his paper “Seasonal Labour Migrations and Ritual Cycles” how seasonal work migration of the past and today’s migrations fit into and influence the ritual calendar. Earlier on, winter was the time for weddings and autumn for baptismal ceremonies, whereas today wedding celebrations take place in the summertime, when all migrants gather in their native villages; baptismal ceremonies usually also fall on spring or summer. Today these celebrations feature certain ‘European’ characteristics conditioned by migration, and sacrificial rituals (*kurban*) have been transformed to a considerable extent. The researcher pointed out frequent changes in state borders in some regions (for example, in Macedonian villages these changes have occurred up to five times during the past century), which has had a significant impact on both the migration processes and rituals.

Tatiana Minniyakhmetova (Russia – Austria) in her paper “The Ritual Calendar of Migrants” dwelt upon changes in the annual cycle of rituals and in the calendar (including division into weeks) on the example of the Udmurts moving to other regions of Russia. Environment has a great impact on the Udmurts’ historic rituals, and therefore change in place of residence also influences the semantics of rituals. **Aigars Leilbārdis’s** presentation “Calendar Customs in Latvian Village Timofeyevka in Siberia” also reviewed the influence of neighbouring cultures; yet, doing it on the basis of rather different material. The Russian setting has had a considerable impact on the Latvians’ holiday calendar (borrowing of some concepts of Midsummer Night) and terminology, but a number of rituals inherent in Latvia, such as celebration of Palm Sunday and specific omens relating to this, have persisted.

A special section was dedicated to the fieldwork carried out within the project for studying culture in Bulgarian-Turkish borderlands. **Valentina Ganeva-Raycheva** and **Nikolai Vukov** in their joint paper discussed commemorating cases of Bulgarians and Turks’ forced resettlements, **Meglana Zlatkova** spoke about inhabiting divided territories and rituals on the two sides of Bulgarian-Turkish border, and **Lina Gergova’s** paper was dedicated to the national commemorative meetings on Petrova Niva, Bulgaria, focusing on local/national and traditional/modern. The rituals of the Bulgar-

ians in Turkey and of the Turkish resettlers in Bulgaria include regular visits to native places in their former homeland, ritual meetings and common meals in sacred places.

A significant subtheme of the conference was New Paganism, which has recently been in the centre of attention of several members of the Ritual Year Working Group. This year, unusual formats were used. **Kamila Velkoborská** (Czech Republic) and **Leon van Gulik's** (Netherlands) joint presentation dwelt upon the history of New Pagan movement Wicca, its spread and rituals, which have acquired specific features in each country. The paper was illustrated by a live interview with Morgana Sythove, who calls herself a witch. She told the audience that in the 1970s she was travelling in Europe and discovered the Wicca movement in the Netherlands, and made it her life-work. Morgana, who participates in all the rituals of the annual cycle and also performs other magic rituals, declares that all the Wicca components function well and this is the reason why this movement is popular all over the world. Morgana's current trip to Bulgaria also testified to the quick migration and attractiveness of this movement: after the conference she participated in the celebrations of the summer solstice as well as initiation rites organised by the Bulgarian New Pagan Association.

In the section of migration of rituals and ideas, **Katarina Ek-Nilsson** (Sweden) talked about female representations in the Swedish midwinter tradition and their roots. The paper was mainly based on archival materials (the researcher works at the Archives of Onomastics and Folklore in Uppsala, Sweden). St. Lucia's Day (December 13) is regarded as a purely Swedish holiday in Sweden, relating to abundant rituals and social-political activeness. However, the speaker maintained that the roots of St. Lucia can be traced back to ancient goddesses of light and femininity and the female biblical characters. **Ana Stefanova** (Bulgaria) in her paper "Nestinarski Ritual Complex in Stomanovo Village – A New Place for an Old Tradition" expanded upon a topic of interest for many anthropologists: migration of rituals in space and time, as well as increase of their spectacularity and esotericism. By analysing the custom spread in Bulgaria and partly also in Greece of dancing on burning coals on St. Constantine's Day (May 21), holding icons of saints, in a village where such rituals have never been observed formerly, she proved that it could be just one person in a village who takes over and develops a ritual complex. In the village of Stomanovo it was a middle-aged person who assumed the role of the performer and leader of the rituals, claiming to be a clairvoyant and a prophet, descending simultaneously from Mother Theresa and Vanga by his mother's line. In addition to the common fire-dancing (with his grandmother's picture instead of an icon in his hands), he also performs rituals relating to shamanism, modern esotericism, eastern religions, etc.

Irina Stahl's (Romania) presentation spoke about healing rituals in post-communist Romania and introduced the cult of St. Nectarios of Aegina in 'emigration', which started to evolve after part of his remains had been removed. The Saint of Aegina (he died on this island in 1920) has been attributed several miracles, healing cases, conceptions, etc., which have not been observed in Greece. Chapels and springs are put up in his honour, and Nectarios has become one of the most popular names given to children. A similar case was treated also by **Vihra Baeva**, who spoke about Greeks who lived in Melnik, Bulgaria, and after the Balkan War in 1912 had to emigrate to Sidirokastro in Greece, taking with them the icon of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (Bulgarian:

Света Зона), the upper part of which depicted the handing over of the Holy Girdle of Virgin Mary to apostle St. Thomas. The Bulgarians who remained in Melnik preserved the local custom of the veneration of the Holy Girdle; they ordered a copy of the icon and built a chapel. On the day of the veneration of the Holy Girdle of the Virgin Mary associated with this icon and the cult, the day of the city of Melnik is also celebrated – this is a clear indication of the cult being part of local identity. Here we should point out that the popular name of the holiday, as well as the icon, the chapel and the spring is Holy Girdle. The researcher mentioned that both in Bulgaria and in Greece the Holy Girdle is personified as the Virgin Mary – a fact that informants were not able to explain. The elements of the cult and the details of miracles differ in the two countries.

Evy Johanne Håland's (Norway – Greece) paper was dedicated to the veneration of midwives characteristic of Bulgaria and some northern regions of Greece, which in northern Greece is celebrated on St. Dominica's Day (January 8). According to the researcher, this custom is not observed in other regions of Greece; yet, it is widely followed in Bulgaria. It is obvious that the holiday was transferred to Greece by the Balkan migration.

An interesting example of the migration of the veneration of saints from one confession to another and its celebration by both the Christians and the Muslims (including a joint pilgrimage) was presented by **Manoël Pénicaud** (France) in his paper about the myth of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

The section of the comparative approach to rituals opened by two papers under the same title: **Marlene Hugoson** (Sweden) and **Nancy Cassell McEntire** (USA) compared tree cults in Europe and America. M. Hugoson described, on the basis of ethnographic archival materials, a healing ritual that has survived until today and consists in pulling a child through an opening in a tree. N. McEntire analysed a modern belief relating to the curing power of an oak tree in the state of Illinois, and conjuring practiced in the vicinity of this tree. **Nikolemma Polyxeni Dimitrou** (Great Britain) introduced, on the basis of her master's thesis, Scottish and Greek calendar rituals and the periods of the activation of evil spirits. **Chiara Quagliariello** and **Sabine Lamour's** (France) paper compared family traditions of European and non-European origin as well as their preservation and observation in migrant communities in today's France. The processes of adaptation and acculturation, which involve renunciation from former beliefs and rituals exotic for the host society, are rather painful for migrants.

The section "Rituals and Representations" started with a joint paper by **Mare Kõiva** and **Andres Kuperyanov** (Estonia), entitled "The View from the Migrant's Window", which was based on archival materials and newspaper articles and gave an overview of the customs of Estonians who had fled to Stockholm as refugees during the Second World War. St. Lucia's Day with the obligatory visit to the home of a girl wearing white all over and carrying candles either in hand or on her head, seemed to Estonians as a strange, solely Swedish holiday; also, Estonians' and Swedes' traditions of New Year celebrations with families and friends were different, etc. Humour played an important role in Estonians' adaptation to Swedish traditions, which was pointed out and demonstrated by examples by the researchers.

Ekaterina Anastasova (Bulgaria) focused in her presentation "Mixed Families and Ritual 'Diet' in Emigration" on the migration conditioned by the conclusion of interna-

tional marriages. She pointed out the importance of ritual food in the preservation of domestic calendar rituals. **Maria Kissikova-Petrova** (Bulgaria) continued the topic of mixed marriages, describing in her paper “Migration and Ritual: Religious Identity in a New Cultural Environment” the case of a Bulgarian woman who had married an American and joined the activities of a local religious sect. In the course of the discussion, David Stanley dwelt upon the activity of USA religious sects, their extensive network and the erection of enormous churches, including even drive-ins, which means that you can participate in the service without leaving your car.

Janika Oras in her paper entitled “Song Fights in Contemporary Estonian Weddings: Experiences and Meanings” described the traditional wedding as a subtype of migration (leaving home). She pointed out one part of the ritual, in which the bride’s and bridegroom’s families sing humorous and game songs. J. Oras, who is a specialist in Estonian folk music, often conducts such song fights at weddings. **Olga Pashina** (Russia) spoke about the ritual disharmony in the ‘inaccurate’ singing of seasonal ritual calendar songs, which is caused on purpose on specific dates by migration of the songs inside the calendric year.

Inese Runce (Latvia) described how Halloween celebration tradition reached from America to Latvia. The festival that was totally unknown to Latvians twenty years ago was adopted quickly and today it is celebrated both in the capital and in the diaspora in Great Britain, Germany and other countries. **Bożena Gierrek** (Poland) talked about how Polish students studying the Irish language and culture celebrate St. Brigid’s Day.

Rachel Sharaby (Israel) analysed in her paper “Crossing Boundaries. Between Absorbers and Absorbed in Ethnic Holiday” how the ethnic Mimouna holiday that the immigrants from North Africa brought to Israel in the 1970s, changed from a local ritual into a national public holiday. This is a good example of how the marginal and peripheral in the ritual cycle can become central during a particular period of time.

Skaidre Urboniene’s (Lithuania) presentation “Commemoration of Well-Known Lithuanian Emigrants: Signs and Rituals” focused on the form of the ritual (mounting a plaque), the place (home, schoolhouse, college, etc.) and date (birthday, date of publishing a well-known book, etc.).

Miha Kozorog’s (Slovenia) paper dealt with the annual festival of the newest art organised in Topolò, a Slovene village in Italy. The festival was treated as a ritual complex which is meant to enhance the status of the minority group and revive their national identity. **Lina Midholm** (Sweden) dwelt upon Midsummer, the most ‘Swedish’ holiday in the calendar, pointing out its most important components in the society that was the first in Europe to become multicultural. It is namely the diversification of ethnic cultures that the researcher holds as essential in the processes of globalisation and localisation of the customs of the ritual year.

The same conclusion was drawn also by **Māra Kiope** (Latvia) in her paper “One Year in Latvia: Ritual as the Model of Migration-Open Society”. **Karine Michel** (France) talked about the Jews’ migration from the post-Soviet Russia. She said that the Jews who emigrated from the former Soviet Union do not know Jewish traditions, holidays or rituals and, besides, their self-identification is really low. They have special centres of Jewish culture where they are introduced to Jewish holidays and ritual year traditions.

Several presentations were dedicated to the historic and ideological aspects of festivals as well as the problems of the diaspora and minority groups. **Arbnora Dushi** and **Arben Hoxha** analysed in their joint paper the adoption of Albanian national holidays by the Albanian population in Kosova; **Nadezhda Pazukhina** spoke about the identity problems of the Old Believers in Latvia; **Marija Klobčar** (Slovenia) discussed the impact of ideology on Ash Wednesday traditions in the village of Kamnik; **Grigor Grigorov** (Bulgaria) dwelt upon sports award ceremonies since the times of Ancient Greek, drawing attention to the mythological roots of the rituals; **Marie-Laure Boursin** (France) presented a comparative analysis of the ritual closing the religious learning at the Islamic schools in France and Bulgaria.

To conclude, the conference theme “Migration and Ritual Year” was depicted from various perspectives and inside different societies. The Ritual Year conference materials will be published in a collection. The next, ninth international conference of the SIEF Working Group on the Ritual Year will be held in Szegedi, Hungary, in March 2013, the topic being “Politics, Holidays, Festivals”.

The cultural programme for the participants of the conference organised by the hosts was noteworthy, including a city tour, an opera night at the ancient theatre, a trip to Bachkovo Monastery, visits to the Thracian Crypt and the Rose Museum in Kazanlak, as well as to ethnographic museums.

Irina Sedakova