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The ritual emerged at the dawn of human culture, when man had a vision of the world as a permanent struggle between two major principles – the good, creating the world, the creative principle, and the evil – destructive forces striving towards chaos. In this epoch, called archaic, the myth telling about the “beginning” of the world and the rite symbolically reproducing the creation, occupy a central part in human culture.

The myth and the rite, indistinguishable in the archaic society, present events explaining the origin and the history of everything surrounding man – the initial chaos, the separation of the earth and the sky, the land and the water, the emergence of the people, the animals and the plants, and later of the social hierarchy, the cultural activities, etc. The necessity for the “initial” events to be permanently and very strictly symbolically reproduced is based on two main notions. The first one is the idea of the cyclic flow of time, time being in a constant circumrotation in which the same events take their turns: birth, adulthood and death, poverty and abundance, joy and suffering. The second one is the belief that at the end of every cycle the power of the good weakens and is in need of support, the latter being provided through certain ritual actions. The ritual actions are considered sacred, having a magic power capable of influencing the world that surrounds man. They restore the balance between good and evil, order and chaos, the cultural and the wild, and settle the contradictions on all levels – natural, social, cultural.

In the archaic society the ritual has several basic functions:

- a) religious-legal – to maintain morality, laws and order (rites confirm the religious conceptions of the community, legalize social stratification and the organization of society);
- b) military – to protect from outside enemies (special practices foretell the outcome of the forthcoming battle, sacrifices provide the help of gods);
- c) productive and economic – to provide the welfare and the necessary food (ensured through special rites are the fertility of the land, the abundance of fishing and hunting, etc.).

Thus the rite is also the first “pre-science” of man, giving answers to all questions, as well as the basic “school of life”, modelling man’s and society’s behavior.

The rite is an exceptional cultural phenomenon, a high form of the ancient mythological and poetic creativity of manhood. It has a collective nature and unites the creative activity of the “actors” and the “spectators” in an inseparable symbiosis. It is accompanied by highly emotional states, among which festivity is especially manifest, dividing everyday life into feasts and workdays.

In later, so-called traditional societies (pre-industrial ones), the functions of the rite to a large degree coincide with the archaic ones. Ritual cycles, related to the eternal reproduction and commemoration of ancient events, are a basic part of the everyday life of the people. The syncretic character of the rite (uniting *the texts* that it narrates; *the actions* that take place; *the objects* taking part, as well as the *music* and the *dance* accompanying it) is inseparably linked to folklore poetry, folklore dramaturgy, crafts, musical and dance traditions. But if in archaic societies the rite is the centre of existence, full of profound semantic and symbolic content, in traditional culture it gradually loses its initial, archaic sense, thus acquiring new religious dimensions, and in many cases it simply cedes a number of its functions to festiveness.

In spite of this, it is in the very essence of the rite, directed to the permanent and invariably cyclic reproduction of the same myths, that its extreme conservativeness is contained. The transmission of ritual knowledge from generation to generation is a major concern of society. Thus, it preserves its holy rhythm and order, imposed by tradition, but also maintains its identity (distinguishing oneself and “one’s own” from “others” and “theirs”, by means of “one’s own” rites and the notions associated with them).

In industrial and post-industrial societies, as a rule, traditional religious rituals are more and more giving way to the civil ones. There are, of course, many cases in which they become part of city life (such as the celebration of All Saints Day, the carnivals or St. Valentine in the West, and in recent years in

Bulgaria, as well), or remain closed in villages (a prevailing model for the countries in Eastern Europe).

The study of the rite today answers a lot of questions. On the one hand, it is inseparably connected with history, with the ethnic, sub-ethnic and religious characteristics of its bearers, with the specificity of their culture. The Bulgarian ethnic society consists of different sub-ethnic groups (*Balkandzhii*, *Shopi*, *Ruptsi*, *Kapantsi*, *Harsoi* and others). Apart from Orthodoxy as a traditional religion, some of the Bulgarian population confesses Catholicism (Bulgarian Catholics) and Islam (Bulgarian Muslims, *Pomaks*). But, together with the Bulgarians, representatives of other ethnic communities have also been living in Bulgaria for centuries. These people are today considered Bulgarians – but with a different ethnic origin: Greeks, Romanians (Wallachians), Turks, Tatars, Russians, Jews, Armenians, Gypsies and others. They carry with them their own religious traditions – from the ancient Orthodoxy of the Russian *staroobredtsy* (old believers) and the Armenian apostolic church, through the major Muslim denominations (Sunni and Shii), to Judaism, etc. Thus, along with the predominating Bulgarian traditional rituals, there are also many other traditions in the country that are, undoubtedly, of a significant scientific interest.

The description of Bulgarian rituals is impossible without a short historical retrospection. It is well-known that traditional Bulgarian rituals (this is also valid for Bulgarian culture in general) are based on three substrate layers: the heritage of ancient Greece and Rome and the paleo-Balkan traditions, strongly influenced by them, which unite the culture of today's Balkan peoples (fundamental for the Bulgarians is the ancient Thracian culture); Slavic culture (that penetrated the Balkans in the period of 6th-7th century A.D.) and Proto-Bulgarian culture (from the 7th century A.D.). It was on these three cultures that the Bulgarian state was established in 681. In the 9th century Bulgaria adopted Christianity, setting the beginning of a new cultural world – the Slavic-Byzantine one, that later turned into an inseparable part of Slavic Orthodoxy (*Pax Slavia Orthodoxa*). Thus Eastern Christian mythology and rituals commemorating the basic events of Christian history and its saints (the so-called Eastern Orthodox calendar), is in the basis of Bulgarian traditional culture

which, however, bears the traces of pre-Christian beliefs as well. (It is interesting that in the 10th century in Bulgaria the dualist school of *bogomils* emerged, a heresy later developed in Western Europe, which is considered to be the forefather of today's Bulgarian Catholics: the *pavlikyans*). They can be found in the beliefs in saints-horsemen, traditional for the Bulgarians, probably connected with the Thracian *heros* (for instance St. Todor, whose characteristics are rather demonic – lame, angry and fearful, and who is celebrated on his feast with horse-racings, called *kushii*); in the cult towards the Thracian God Mother, that transferred her characteristics to the Holy Virgin; in the beliefs in the Slavic god of “goods” (cattle) Volos-Veles, who turned into St. Vlas, and whose celebration is related to some ancient rituals for the health of the cattle – baking special *kolacheta* (small loaves of bread), threaded onto the horns of cows for health, and the wallowing of people on the ground accompanied by mooing (dialect Bulg. *mukane*), imitating the voice of a cow.

The early Middle Ages of Bulgaria passed in the spirit of “competition” with the high and aristocratic Byzantine culture. This stimulated the development of literary schools and the boom of literature. It was a period in which we learn about folklore rituals mainly from the polemic literature, dealing with “*besovski* (diabolical) games and magic” and “sacrilegious, pagan actions”.

In the 14th century the Bulgarians were conquered by the Ottomans, who brought with them a radically different type of culture – the Muslim one, which reigned in the Bulgarian lands until the Liberation from the Ottoman rule. The Muslim culture tells other myths and carries with it different rituals, typical for the Turkish population, rituals, later adopted however, for different reasons, by a certain part of the Bulgarians. This was a hard period for the Bulgarian church and for Christian culture, which for a long time remained without literature and became overgrown with different folklore visions, distanced from the severity of church books and from the explaining power of liturgy.

The modern Bulgarian state at the end of the 19th century revived the Christian traditions, and in most cases manifested

tolerance towards the ethnic and the religious minorities inhabiting it (having in their majority lived in the country from as early as the Middle Ages or having been inherited from the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire), as well as to the new immigrants who settled in it. This tendency was especially markedly manifested later, in the years of the Second World War, when Bulgaria was one of the very few European countries that saved its Jews from fascist concentration camps.

In the years of totalitarianism, atheistic propaganda, typical for the communist ideology, was imposed in Bulgaria. But if religion was stigmatized in all possible ways, the people's culture was valued and protected. It was precisely at that time that many regional and national forms for its stimulation were created. Along with folklore rites and feasts (that are the object of profound investigation and reconstruction), many other rites and feasts (of the town or the village) are celebrated, as well as national and international ones. In the spirit of "socialist internationalism", a consistent policy for the integration of minorities was pursued, in which there were different tendencies – raising the educational, the economic and the living standards of minority groups, but also violent changing of names, religious and cultural restrictions, etc.

After the democratic changes that took place in Bulgaria after 1989, the interest to the religious church culture increases, as well as the desire to restore the somewhat forgotten ethnic traditions. These processes are the result of the need to create a new identity, different from the communist one. These trends are observed among Bulgarians, as well as among the different ethnic and religious communities in the country.

After this short historical panorama the following basic ambitions in the preparation of the national and the regional lists of rites and feasts in Bulgaria will be outlined:

- a) to present the nowadays's state of traditional Bulgarian rituals;
- b) to reveal the most interesting and specific rites and feasts of the different ethnic and religious communities in the country according to their own views, i.e., those rites and feasts that they consider dominant for their identity.

Of course, these two aims are confronted with some difficulties. The first one is the very essence of folklore (therefore of the rite too) which, as is well-known, is a “culture of variants”. The rite is subjected to the specificities of the local culture, to the specificities of the region, which are expressed in different terminologies and different peculiarities of the poetry, some concrete actions, the specific music and dance. In other words, every fixation of a folklore phenomenon is relative, and rather relative is its generalization even within the borders of one town or village, to say nothing of one region or of the national tradition (the so-called invariant that is built up on the basis of the common features).

The second difficulty consists in the choice of a classification according to which ritual phenomena in today’s Bulgaria should be represented, uniting communities that are so different: town and village ones, farming and animal-breeding, settled or recent nomads (the Karakachans and the Vallahs known also as Aromanians, some Gypsy groups), adherents of different religious beliefs. Each one of them has different cultural specificities, is associated with different myths and notions, and marks its time in a different way (according to the solar-lunar calendar, according to the “old” or the “new style”, according to the lunar calendar, from different starting points). An interesting example is the time measurement in the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox tradition, which underwent a number of changes. In antiquity the so-called Roman calendar was used in today’s Bulgarian lands, marking the New Year from the month of March. In the year 46 A.D. Julius Caesar introduced a new calendar (known later in Bulgaria as “the old style”), which was gradually adopted by all Christian states. Its inaccuracy led to a new calendar reform – that of Pope Gregory XIII in the 16th century, the so-called (in Bulgaria) “new style” (a 13-day displacement), that was adopted in Bulgaria in 1916. In 1970, however, the Bulgarian church re-established “the old style”, i.e., the Julian calendar (according to the “new style” only feasts such as St. George’s Day and Sts. Cyril and Methodius’ Day are celebrated). It was natural that in many places there would occur a mixing up of the “new” and the “old” style and one and the same feast in the different places would be celebrated on different dates. On the other hand, along with the solar calendar, Christians also make use of the lunar calendar, on which the

so-called “movable feasts” depend from Easter: Strict Shrovetide and St. Todor’s (St. Theodore’s) Week, St. Lazar’s (St. Lazarus’) Day, Ascension Day, Pentecost/Whitsunday. Therefore, as a basis of the classification preference was given to the contemporary civil calendar, associated with the astronomic New Year.

Still, the rite is divided into several basic types according to its social functions: the first and universal type is represented by the so-called *family rites*, accompanying the passage of the individual from one social status into another – the rites of the life cycle (birth, marriage, death). It is common knowledge that these underlie one common schema: separation – marginalization – affiliation of the individual with the new social group.

Rituals in child birth are related to the general notion of the “wild” creature arriving from nothingness who must be separated from the “chaos” by being bathed, clothed and given a name and must be united with the organized “cosmos” of the community and its religious conceptions according to the established canons (for example the rite of baptism). There also exist a number of rites related to the gradual socialization of the child distinguishing the different traditions. For example, such is the Bulgarian mantic rite *proshtapulnik*, connected with the first steps of the child made without anybody’s help. The child must choose one of the objects arranged in front of him by his parents, objects symbolizing different professions (scissors – a tailor, a pencil – a clerk, etc.) and foretelling the child’s future occupation. In the different traditions these are rites such as circumcision, the first haircut, confirmation, etc.

The second ritual from the life cycle is wedding – one of the most intricate ritual complexes, associated with a large number of actions. The traditional marriage ritualism, the church religious ritual, as well as the civil registration, which is obligatory in Bulgaria, unite a number of cultural layers. It is interesting that in Bulgaria some archaic forms of marriage still exist, such as “buying of a bride” by the future bridegroom in some Gypsy groups (*kaldarashi*, *yerlii*, etc.), “stealing” of the bride or her “eloping” (the maid’s voluntarily escaping to the lad’s home).

The last ritual from the life cycle is connected with death. Its basic aim is to ensure the good transition of the dead person into the “world beyond”, which should take place according to a system of strict rules, established by the tradition. One of the most interesting and unique funeral rites is *Pomana prizhive* (a commemoration performed while you are still alive) of the Wallachian tradition, a rare example of a living initiation rite associated with death. It rests on the belief that there is an opportunity of ordering the “world beyond”, through its preliminary structuring by the future dead person while he is still alive. By performing special ritual actions (pouring water into the river that has to bring it into the “world beyond”; placing lit candles in the water that should provide light in the “world beyond”; “sending” fruits, flowers, etc. that should “grow” in the sky), the “nature” of the “world beyond” is built. Later, by means of a special dinner, during which the future dead person plays the part of a “deceased”, also “the culture” of the world beyond is catered (ensured) – food, clothes, furniture, and delicacies, even songs and dances which, through the magic formula “to find it there for him” must reach “the other world”.

The second type of rites represents the so-called *calendar rites* that mark the transition from one cycle of nature into another – from winter to summer, from dying to revival; they are associated with vegetation and agrarian culture, as well as with fertility and abundance in the broadest sense of these words. Closely linked to the corresponding religious tradition (marking certain events from the holy history), these are concentrated on sun’s winter and summer solstice.

The winter feasts of the Bulgarians are associated with the belief that evil powers penetrate nature: hobgoblins, vampires, fairies, dead persons who did not find peace beyond. These must be overcome by masquerade dances and lit fires. According to popular notions during the “*dirty, unbaptized, pogani* (pagan) *days*” (Western Bulgaria) or “*Karakoncho’s* (the Hobgoblin’s) *days*” (Southern Bulgaria) – the days between Christmas and St. Jordan’s Day (Epiphany), and in the church narrative the interval between the Christ’s birth and baptism – an evil force travels on the earth and good and evil merge into one. These are unfortunate days when no one should go out into the dark, and garlic must be hung on the

doors. To drive evil forces away (in Southwestern Bulgaria) “*dzhamali, startsi*” – masked unmarried lads, go around the villages and greet the landlords with long and solemn blessings. In the meantime, the villages are also visited by *rusalii* (ritual dancers), who are armed men, accompanied by musicians, and who heal different diseases through ritual dances. *New Year*, or *St. Basil’s Day*, is celebrated with a special “incensed supper”, on which should be served roast pork, *pogacha* (round loaf), *banitsa* (cheese pasty) and *pita* (round, flat bread) with fortune slips. The *survakari* children go around the houses with decorated cornel twigs with which they tap the backs of the hosts and express their best wishes for the New Year, receiving in exchange money and things to eat. On that day maids “sing over rings”, making guesses about their future husbands. On Epiphany (*Voditsi, St. Jordan’s Day*) “consecrating of water” is performed and the priest throws the cross into the sea (or the river). It is believed that the person who reaches the cross first and takes it out of the water will be healthy all the year round. The people in every house fill their containers with fresh consecrated water, and the icons of the house are washed in the wells. In the Rhodopes the feast is also called *kapanki* (from Bulg. *kāpja* ‘bathe’), because on this day the newly married couples are bathed in the river. On *St. John’s (St. Ivan’s) Day* the newly married couples visit their godparents and the *kapanki* continue by bathing again the newly married couples and the engaged ones, as well as those who celebrate their name day. *Babinden* (Granny-Midwives’ Day) is an ancient women’s feast on which the old woman-midwife is celebrated. She is visited by the young mothers who present her with gifts and she lays a rich table for them. The festivity ends with the bathing of the midwife. It is considered that on *St. Atanas’ (St. Athanasius’) Day* winter goes away, hence fires are lit and people jump over them for health (in Sofia region). It is believed that *St. Haralampi (St. Charalampios)* prevents from all diseases, especially from plague. Similar are the views about *St. Vlasiy*, the protector of the cattle’s health, as was already discussed above.

The transition between winter and spring is marked by Strict Shrovetide (*Proshka* – Bulg. ‘forgiveness’), the beginning of the Long Lent. On this day all people beg pardon from each other and visit their older relatives. On the table are served milk, eggs and fish, and in the evening white *halvah* or an

egg is hung on a thread from the ceiling. The whole family members gather in a circle around it and everyone tries to catch it with mouth without using hands (like a dog). The person who succeeds is the lucky one. Shrovetide fires drive the winter away, and in the evening the last *horo* (folk dance in a chain or circle) before the Lent is played. *St. Todor's* (*St. Theodore's*) Week follows, also called *the Black Week*, marking a whole ritual week in which every day has a special name, connected with ritual actions – *Pesi ponedelnik* (Dog's Monday) – when dogs are swung against rabies, *Losh vtornik* (Bad Tuesday) – no work is done so that animals should not catch diseases, *Luda sryada* (Mad Wednesday) – again no work is done so that there should be no diseases and bad weather, *Vartoglav chetvartak* (Staggers Thursday) – cattle is not harnessed in order not to get ill, and *Lud petak* (Mad Friday), when no work is done – against hail and drought. On Saturday is *St. Todor's Day* itself, called also *Konski Velikden* (Horse's Easter), celebrated with horse races for the health of the horses. Throughout *St. Todor's Week* masked lads, *kukeri*, again go about, dressed in furs turned inside out, who visit the houses acting different (often erotic) scenes with plots on birth, death and revival, and are given gifts.

According to the folklore belief *Baba Marta* (Granny March) is a capricious old woman with a changeable mood, sometimes joyful, sometimes frowning, just like the month personified by her. She must be greeted in a cleaned house and with a *martenitsa* (a twined red and white thread). The feast of *Baba Marta* is in fact the only traditional feast that acquired national dimensions, and today the production of *martenitsas* has turned into a profitable industry. Related to the spring cycle and the revival of Nature is *Blagovets* (Day of the Good News, i.e. Annunciation) – marked by the church as the day of the announcement received by the Virgin Mary of the Incarnation. It is believed that on this day all creatures that hid in the winter wake up. During the feast snakes and lizards are symbolically driven away, the rubbish is swept away and set on fire, and people jump over the fires for health and against snake bites.

On *St. Lazar's* (*St. Lazarus's*) Day maids sing and dance and people give them white eggs as presents. On Palm Sunday

Lazar's maids perform the *kumichene* rite – a ritual of throwing bunches or small wreaths of flowers or pieces of bread into the water. The maid whose wreath swims ahead of the others becomes a *kumitsa* (a godmother) – a person who is given special respect. According to folklore notions, “a lad who did not join the Christmas rite and a maid who did not join St. Lazar’s Day rite will not be able to get married”.

One of the most solemn feasts is *Easter*, dedicated to the Passion, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus. This is a feast of commemorating the dead, of colored eggs and the egg cakes, but also of magicians, who in this period can steal the fertility of the fields. The end of spring rituals is *St. George’s Day* – the day on which seasonal summer activities began in the past and craftsmen left their homes to go abroad and make a living. The saint is regarded as a protector of herdsmen and herds and for him every household sacrifices a lamb. On this day herbs are gathered, at dawn women wallow on the dew for health, in certain places fruit-trees are menaced so that they should give more fruit during the year, younger people sway on swings, there are sports competitions and wrestling.

One of the most interesting feasts is on the day of *Sts. Constantine and Elena*, celebrated in Strandzha. On this day women with icons in their hands dance on glowing embers – the so-called *nestinary* (fire dancers). It is believed that they are “caught” by a divine power which allows them to prophesy. Another belief is that on *Ascension Day* God takes back to heaven the dead who were allowed to descend on earth on Easter.

One of the biggest summer feasts is Midsummer Day (*Enyovden, Summer St. Ivan*) – the day of the summer solstice, when herbs are gathered and the sun is believed to bathe in the streams along with people. In Thrace they make *Enyova bulya* on this day: a small girl is dressed in special clothes and is carried in hands by the maids around the village; after the tour or on the following day the maids perform ritual foretelling for marriage. It is thought that when the rite is fulfilled the rain will be enough and the year will be fruitful.

Gradually come the rites related to harvesting and processing the crops (collecting the apples – on *Sts. Peter and Paul's Day*, the grapes – on *Transfiguration*, the corn – during *Dormition and Nativity of the Holy Virgin*), rites that mark the transition from summer to autumn. One of the most interesting autumn feasts is related to the celebration of *St. Petka (Paraskeva) the Bulgarian*, whose day is considered to start the celebration of family protector saints. In the days around *St. Petka* no women's work is done, and in Thrace a *kokosha cherkva* (hen's church) is made – sacrificing of hens as a votive offering: with their blood a special *pita* (round flat bread) is kneaded and is sanctified in the church, and the hens themselves are boiled as offering.

Then gradually come the feasts of *St. Demetrius*, when people who went abroad to make their living return home, of *St. Catherine*, who protects against mice and children against diseases, *Andreevden* (Andrew's Day) – the bears' feast (Northern Bulgaria) and *St. Nikolas* – the protector of sailors and fishermen, but also of maids whom he helps to find a good husband. And finally there comes *St. Ignatius' Day* or *polaznik*, when, depending on the guest who first comes into the house in the morning (a fortunate and a rich man or a poor and a wretched one), the luck of the following year is foretold, the year itself beginning with Christmas Eve and the expectation of the Birth of Christ – *Christmas*.

As can be seen, feasts from the agrarian calendar are closely associated with church feasts – Christmas, Baptism, Annunciation, Easter, etc., but among the Bulgarians they have a traditional rather than a religious character. For example, everyone could say how *St. Lazar's Day* ritual is performed, but very few people know the story of the revived Lazarus. On the other hand, many of the feasts, along with nature's transitions, mark social ones (such as the bathing of the newly married couples, *petlyovden* (Cock's Day), *St. Lazar's Day* ritual). It must be pointed out that most of these are also related to the different stages of man's seasonal activity in the fields.

If, largely speaking, these are the major accents with Orthodox Bulgarians celebrating their feasts according to the so-called "old style", different is the situation with the Bulgarian

Catholics who celebrate Catholic church feasts according to the “new style”. Here is a part of them: *St. Lucia* (Light – 13 December), from where the 12 advents begin, marked by various prognostic practices; the New Year or *the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God*; Epiphany (*Tri kralya, The Three Magi*; on the eve of the feast grandmothers sing their grandchildren’s hair for health, and boys visit every house, ringing bells and pronouncing blessings); *Pepelyana sryada* (Ashy Wednesday) is the day on which the priest sprinkles all believers with ash from willow sticks with the words: “Remember you are made of earth”; also the traditional *Baba Marta* (Granny March) when fires are jumped over; *Easter*, with the solemn liturgy, with big dishes full of white boiled eggs surrounded by pink and spicy smoked ham flavored with horse-radish, with *kozunak* (Easter cake) of the *kugluf* type; *Ascension Day*, when fields are blessed, and others. The essence of these feasts, much more subjected to the church legend than in the Bulgarian Orthodox tradition, again is the same – related to the success and welfare and to the everlasting commemoration of the events in the holy Christian history.

It is in the same way that the traditions of the Armenians in Bulgaria can be described, celebrating Christian calendar feasts according to the traditions of the Armenian apostolic church but, along with them, also their national historical events and heroes, related to the fate of this nation having lived for centuries in the Bulgarian lands: the commemoration of the military commander Vartan Migomomyan, canonized for his exploits by the Armenian church (*Vartanank* – celebrated on the third Thursday of February); 24 April – *the Day of the Killed in the Genocide against the Armenian people* (in 1986, 1915, 1922); *the Day of the Declaration of the Independent Armenian Republic* (1918).

The culture of the Bulgarian Jews respects feasts related to the events of the agrarian calendar (according to the lunar calendar) and to the history of its people: *Pesach* marks the departure of the Jews from Egypt, a story that the father of the family tells to his children; *Shavuot* tells about the adoption of the Ten Old Testament God’s commandments, but also marks the end of harvesting; *Rosh Ha-shanah* – the New Year, commemorates the Creation of the World and is celebrated at the beginning of the autumn; *The Day of Redemp-*

tion marks the banishing of the Jews from the promised land; *Sukkoth* is connected with the abundance of the crops gathered; *Hanukkah* is the feast of lights and celebrates the restoration of the Jerusalem temple and *Purim* is devoted to the brave queen Esther who saved the Jewish people from the Persians (on this day Jewish children mask themselves and gambling is allowed).

Muslim ritualism is concentrated around *Ramadan* (“*Sheker*” – ‘sugar’) *Bayram* and *Kurban Bayram* – celebrated according to the lunar calendar. In the ninth month of the lunar calendar year is Ramadan and from sunrise to sunset a strict fast is held for the redemption of sins. The temple (the mosque) and the relatives are visited then and alms are obligatorily given. But when the fast ends, there is an abundance of foods (mainly sweet ones – hence the second name of the feast), men compete in different sports games and girls sing songs. And if the Bulgarians share their red Easter eggs and cakes with their Muslim neighbors, in this month they also enjoy with them the magnificent Turkish sweets. The second important feast – *Kurban Bayram*, is a feast of oblation, when everyone offers a sacrifice to Allah with gratitude and a request to be protected and forgiven. The Turks believe that the animal presented to God will carry them to Heaven after their death. Just as in the former feast, the meat is given out both to the “true believers” and to their Christian neighbors.

The enumeration of the feasts of the different ethnic and religious groups could continue, but here we will restrict ourselves with the third group of feasts, represented in the national list – those related to the celebration of the patrons of the towns and villages, often called *sabori* (fairs) or *kurbani* (offerings). They are connected to the patriarchal traditions of the settlements, based on the belief in patron saints that protect the village, the kin and the family. As a rule, they are celebrated around the day of the local church’s saint, to whom an offering is given – an animal (most often a sheep), with which all the guests are treated. The feasts manage to gather together relatives and fellow-villagers from near and far, fairs and various festivities are organized on the occasion, as well as rich tables and folk *horo* dances. To this type of feasts some later town feasts can be also added – the

Day of the Town, marked with cultural celebrations, carnivals, fairs and other festivities, as well as feasts associated with the prevailing occupational activity in the region. Such a feast, for instance, is the Day of Grapes in Perushtitsa, celebrated on *Trifon Zarezan (St. Trifon's Day)* – the protector of vine-growing and wine-making, when the grapevines are trimmed. The Tsar of the Vineyard is chosen on this day, and the festivities and the abundant tables are accompanied by an exhibition of the products made from grapes: from must and wine, to treacle and grape Turkish delight with walnuts and hazelnuts. The best vine-growers are chosen on this day, too.

Thus Bulgarian traditional rituals, intertwined with the rituals of the different ethnic and religious communities and their different historical development, reveal an inimitable and unique picture, outlining the specificities of the ritual culture in Bulgaria.



The desire to present the traditional rites and feasts in their optimal fullness determined the questions in the preliminary study on the project “*Living Human Treasures – Bulgaria. List of Activities*”. They were oriented towards the ethnic structure and the religious characteristics of the inhabitants of the settlements and towards the specific features of their rites and feasts in the outlined types. The answers obtained contained extremely interesting information but also had many deficiencies. This imposed the use of the principle for representing folklore realities through the setting of an “ideal” (conventional) schema of the rituals that is, rather, of an orientating nature.

The essential thing that determines the consideration of a particular rite as part of the “*living human heritage*” of Bulgaria, is its life in a natural environment and in intact links with the ancient practices and notions that it reflects in a possibly most wholesome way, preserving the traditional meaning transmitted in the given community from generation to generation.