

INTRODUCTION

This volume of *The Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies* comprises the papers presented during two international conferences: “Balkan and Baltic States in United Europe – History, Religion, and Culture IV: Religiosity and Spirituality in the Baltic and Balkan Cultural Space: History and Nowadays” (11–13 November, 2020, rest of them published in *The Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies*, Vol. 4) and the 15th Congress of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF, 19–24 June, 2021, within two panels organised by the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group, “Perf01: Calendric Rituals: A Time to Break the Rules” and “Perf03c: Old Rituals, Changing Environments, New Rules”).

The work on this volume and its publication coincided with significant geopolitical cataclysms separating nations and academic institutions. This issue demonstrates our will to continue strengthening bonds between academics, both within the European Research Area (ERA) and in wider contexts.

The articles of the volume discuss various issues: what is happening with the traditional, religious and secular landscape in the Balkan and Baltic countries, Europe, and the world? What are the new aspects of the development of modern spirituality? What happens to memory, historical interpretations, and visions of the future in modern contexts? Are traditional beliefs, folklore, and rituals still relevant in the modern world? How is cultural heritage being preserved during migration and in new surroundings?

The first part of the volume “Concerns of Modernity: Memory, Religion, and Communication” addresses the issues that were discussed during the meetings of the fourth Balkan and Baltic conference. The first two articles scrutinise the topic of heritage and communication in migrant communities. **Tanya Matanova** (Sofia, Bulgaria) focuses on the sites commemorating prominent Bulgarian peo-

ple in Germany, and **Mariyanka Borisova Zhekova** (Sofia, Bulgaria) presents forms of Bulgarian national consolidation in the Maghreb country, namely, a Bulgarian school, a folklore dance ensemble, and cultural events organised by the Bulgarian community in Morocco. **Irina Dushakova** (Moscow, Russia), just like T. Matanova, addresses prominent historical figures and their perception by our contemporaries in her article on Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and the way his personality and memory of his deeds are framed by the Russian media.

Politics and religion are at the centre of the study presented by **Yuliia Uzun** and **Svitlana Koch** (Odesa, Ukraine). The researchers analyse the religious legislation of Baltic and Balkan countries and consider the changes in state-religion relations of the last two decades. The article by **Evgenia Troeva** (Sofia, Bulgaria) also deals with the changes that occurred in European culture in the last decade of the twentieth century and later. She addresses the topic of apocalyptic expectations in Bulgarian society and shows the palette of the modern images of the future, concluding that secular apocalypticism is coming to the fore.

The last article of this section was prepared by **Monika Balikienė, Jurgita Dečiunienė** and **Vytautas Navickas** (Vilnius, Lithuania). In their study of the traditional taboo in Lithuania, the authors demonstrate how generational change reveals itself in the cultural lexicon with the change of living conditions, the image system and family relations.

The second part of the volume, under the generalising title “The Ritual Year in the Context of Changing Rules” begins with the contribution of **Oleksandr Ganchev** and **Oleksandr Prigarin** (Odesa, Ukraine) on the fluctuations in the seasonality of births and marriages among Bessarabian Bulgarians. The authors lead us to the field of historical demography while establishing links with the issues relevant to the studies of traditional culture (those of family rites). This article serves as a bridge connecting the discussions held during the fourth Balkan and Baltic conference and the other five proceedings of the two panels organised by the Ritual Year Working Group at the 15th SIEF Congress.

The next four articles are written in a diachronic key and consider transformations of the traditional rituals and symbols in different Balkan and Baltic countries. The issues related to birth and marriage are analysed by O. Ganchev and O. Prigarin and are also addressed by **Rasa Paukštytė-Šaknienė** in her study of Lithuanian material. She scrutinises the ritual actions with two key participants of these events (a midwife and a matchmaker) and shows the development of respective rituals in the historical perspective.

Natalia Golant (St. Petersburg, Russia) centres her research on a symbolic object – a shirt made by Romanians in ritual circumstances to combat plague – and considers the changes in its functions and perceptions over time, while **Alexander Novik** (St. Petersburg, Russia) considers the border between the sacred and the profane, examining diachronic relations within the Albanian community.

The transformation of ethnological terminology in Lithuania is considered by **Dalia Senvaitytė** (Kaunas, Lithuania). The final article of this section by **Mare Kõiva** and **Andres Kuperjanov** (Tartu, Estonia) is devoted to the transformation of roles between a student and a teacher in the context of Estonian Teachers' Day.

In the closing section of the volume the reader will learn about the Bulgarian conference on the ethnology of socialism and will enjoy the short essays on the jubilee of Emily Lyle, the founder of the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group. The publication of this issue coincides with the ninetieth birthday of this exceptional scholar, to whom we are delighted to express our gratitude, respect, and admiration.

The studies presented in this volume address important and topical issues of our time related to memory, the ritual year, culture and heritage, religiosity and ethnicity, history and the future. We hope that this issue will find its reader and raise new questions.

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