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CALENDRIC FEAST BANS AND THE PUNISHMENT FOR VIOLATING THEM IN THE BULGARIAN TRADITIONAL CULTURE

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Abstract: The paper offers an interdisciplinary ethnolinguistic and semiotic analysis of the Bulgarian calendric prohibitions and the consequences of violating them. Special attention is paid to linguistic data – the chrononyms which characterize these days as ambivalent, both blessed and malevolent, days which must be observed as work-free and free from other types of activity. Folk etymology of some terms for holidays reveals how language constructs the calendric order and offers an insight into the ritual restrictions of some feasts. The list of bans in an ethnographic context is scrutinized according to which holidays are "dangerous", who is the subject of the bans, and what punishment will follow for breaking the rules. Holidays for which non-observance is most seriously punished are Christian calendric feasts which often have many pre-Christian elements and occasionally reflect the cult of animals. Many restrictions affect women only, especially those who are pregnant and mothers, as they concern female biological and social functions. Folklore parallels to the theme of the article are investigated and a poetic means of depicting the punishment for the sins is shown. A reverse development of the motif of 'sin and punishment' is represented in the songs about Saint Nedelia, who does not punish the sinners but suffers herself because people work on 'her days', Sundays. Some of the bans and recommendations relevant for calendric rituals are still evident in Bulgarian society, confirming the continuation of certain features of the archaic worldview. The paper is based on field research data collected by the author during the last three decades and on published and archival materials.
Keywords: Bulgarian folklore, cult of saints, ethnolinguistics, prescriptions, punishment, ritual year, semiotics, sins

INTRODUCTION

The title of this paper alludes to the general heading of the 15th Congress of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF) (19–24 June 2021), "Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression", and addresses an

array of complex linguistic, ethnographic, and folklore facts analysed in the ethnolinguistic prospective, with special attention to the semiotic approach.[1]

Traditional folk culture is strictly regulated, and the bans and recommendations are one of the means to transform the chaos into cosmos and to culturally adapt the nature. The very calendar and the ritual year, the division of time into meaningful fragments and marking the holidays are seen as culture opposed to nature, as mythological conceptualization of time, and following the rules guarantees the society's safety and prosperity (Braginskaia 1980: 502).

Vladimir Toporov notes, "In the archaic mythopoetic and religious tradition, [a holiday is] a temporal period that has a special connection with the sacred sphere, suggesting the maximum involvement of all the participants, and is marked as a kind of an institutionalized (even if it is improvisational) action" (Toporov 1980: 329). The holidays are strictly delimited as concerns time and space (locations), performers (male/female, married/unmarried men and women, old/young people, children), types of activity and speech, usage of special objects and garments, etc. On holidays, special rules of behaviour are prescribed for the people, and especially for women (pregnant, mothers, young wives), children, and old people, as they are the most vulnerable group of any community. These recommendations reflect the idea of the importance of the cosmic world order; they also fit into the ethics and moral directives of the traditional way of life in a community.

The lists of the calendric bans on various types of work and activity, with depictions of what consequences would follow if the rules are broken, are a common phenomenon in all ethnographic and folkloric field data and in the research studies discussing feast days. The consequences of breaking the festive rules constitute the general subject of some Bulgarian narratives and folk ballads, with corresponding poetic means and didactic alignment. The proverb "They say that on the Day of the Annunciation (25 March) even a bird does not make a nest"[2] supports the idea of the importance of being idle on great holidays. Legends narrate that the way the holidays should be celebrated has been set by the saints. For example, St Sabbas[3] demanded his day (12 January) to be celebrated as 'an empty day', a day without routine work:

> *Once, St Barbara* [4 December] *and St Sabbas had a talk, and St Barbara said that she would like people to venerate her by baking bread and working as usual. But her sister*[4] *St Sabbas answered that she did not want bread nor fish, but she wanted the people to respect and venerate her and they were not supposed to work. That's why women's work is not carried out, so the children do not get ill.* (Popov 1994: 84)

In this article, I will firstly examine the most "dangerous" holidays, the rules for their celebration, and the typical punishment for breaking the bans. This is the case when people sin and then suffer or provoke the sufferings of their family and the whole village. I will also scrutinise an unusual consequence – when people sin, but it is Saint Nedelia who is punished and who is suffering. In this section, the specifics of folklore texts with ethnographic motifs – the links between ethnographic knowledge and its representation in folklore genres – are of great relevance. The paper is based on the archival and printed materials and on the field data I have collected during the last three decades in Bulgaria.

CALENDRIC HOLIDAYS AND BANS IN LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Folk terminology

The rules of celebrating and the restrictions of everyday activity on a holiday relate to the semantics of the corresponding terms for a feast. In the Bulgarian language, a holiday is denoted by the common Slavic word *празник* (*praznik*), which literally means 'an empty day', 'a day when people do not work'. This term underlines the uniqueness of a holiday when time stops; thus, a feast is opposed to ordinary, non-holiday days – weekdays (Toporov 1980: 329). Other Bulgarian words for a holiday reflect the idea of a sacred blessed day *благ ден* (*blag den*) similar to other Slavic terms: Ukrainian *свято* (*svito*), Byelorussian *свята* (*svita*), Czech *svátek*, Polish *święto* (Vendina 2015: 221).

The epithets that characterize feasts reveal the ambivalent essence of these days. They are exposed as a blessed and, in the meantime, evil time period. A frequent Bulgarian epithet for a feast day is *личен ден* (*lichen den*) 'outstanding', and it is positively marked as 'great' and 'beautiful'. Other epithets are *лош, опасен ден* (*losh, opasen den* 'a bad, dangerous day') and *тежък празник* (*tezhuk praznik*), or synonymous *хаталия* (*hatalia*) 'a heavy, dangerous day' (from Turkish *hatalı* 'an error, a misfortune'). The epithet directly alludes to a potential punishment, e.g., it contains the idea of the perilous results of breaking the regulations. Other folk terms for a holiday are Slavic *лют ден* (*liut den*) 'fierce day', *проклет ден* (*proklet den*) 'cursed, damned day', which also qualify a feast as a dangerous and malevolent day.[5]

The terms denoting ritual and everyday rural rules, bans, restrictions, and recommendations (Bulgarian *правило*, *рекомендация*, *регуляция* (*pravilo*, *rekomendatsiia*, *reguliatsiia*)) should also be commented on. They are bookish, literary, and belong to the vocabulary of scholars, not to the lexicon of the

bearers of the folk tradition. The scholarly metalanguage reflects the artificial system of terminology, while the authentic language of restrictions and recommendations uses different words and expressions. The vernacular vocabulary for patriarchal order is very metaphoric, and its semantics fits into the traditional ethical and moral binary oppositions of good – bad, safe – dangerous, sinful – righteous, etc.

The bans are often expressed by the modal verb *should not*, by impersonal verbal constructions *it is forbidden to*…, by nouns signifying a sin or a mistake,[6] by adverbs meaning 'it is bad', 'it is not good', or just by a statement 'on that day people do not…'.[7] In the Bulgarian ethnographic publications, there are lists of bans and restrictions which constitute a short folklore genre, a certain model of behaviour, and they are published in special sections, occasionally called *нефела* (*nefela*, literally 'bad', in this context 'not recommended'). This word gives an excellent example of a typically Balkan linguistic case when one borrowed word (*нефела* comes from Greek ἀνωφελής 'useless' (BER 2012: 629)) obtains a Slavic particle of negation *ne-* and then goes through many formal and semantic modifications to become a key denotation of the prohibitions. The polysemic *нефела* and its versions (*неела*, *нихела* (*neela*, *nikhela*), etc.) fall into the lexicon of negative, frightening, and dangerous, and are reasoned. The Bulgarian and common Balkan term *нефела* 'not good' is used in its full semantic diversity to verbalize the regulation of ritual and non-ritual activity. One can also suggest Romance roots in this lexical net; compare *valeo* 'to be healthy' and *invalid* 'disabled' (see Sedakova 2007: 86–91). Even more, some scholars see a Turkish trace in these words: *nafile* 'in vain' (BER 2012: 565, 629). Thus, the word *нефела* and similarly sounding words exemplify the processes of language interinfluence, typical for the Balkan Slavs and the Bulgarians due to the contacts and the Balkan neighbourhood. Interestingly enough, this is a parallel to the cultural multilayer and inhomogeneous folk tradition of Bulgaria with the Thracian substrate, cross-Balkan influences, and a combination of pre-Christian and Christian views.

Folk etymology and rules of behaviour

Folk etymology is a relevant process in the folk perception of the saints' names and the terms of the feasts, which influences the choice of rules and the corresponding punishment for sins (Tolstoi & Tolstaia 1988). I will analyse those which are related to the theme of the article.

St Panteleimon (27 July) is known as the patron of diseases, but his name is taken as an allusion to the root **put* 'a road', and he is known as *Пантелей*

Пътник (*Pantelei putnik* 'Panteleimon the Traveller'). Other allusions take into account the ending of the name *-лея* (*leia*) 'to pour', and the very day of his commemoration is celebrated "against gales, storms and floods". According to Khristo Vakarelski, many stories narrate events from the lives of the relatives whose houses, cattle, or fields have been flooded or taken away by water because the people did not venerate St Panteleimon. On this day, children cry in the streets *"Пантелея-лея, Пантелея-лея!"* (*Panteleia-leia, Panteleia-leia* 'Panteleimon, pour, pour!') (Vakarelski 1943: 91).

Folk etymology links the Bulgarian name *Прокоп* (*Prokop* 'St Procopius', 8 July) with the verb *прокопсвам* (*prokopsvam* 'to prosper'), and people are not allowed to work, so as to avoid misfortune in the family and losing good luck (G. Mikhailova 1999: 317). The similar sounds of the Bulgarian terms for *Ирминден* (*Irminden* 'St Jeremiah's Day', 1 May) and for the illness of the women in labour *ирминясвам* (*irminiasvam*) prevent the pregnant women from working on this day so as to avoid getting ill after the delivery. St Simeon's Day (1 September) is associated with the verb *сименьосвам* (*simeniosvam* 'to mark') and thus it is believed that working on his day is dangerous for the unborn babies – they will be 'marked', born with pigment spots on the body or with a defect.

St Ignatius (20 December) is thought to be the master of fire, due to folk etymology, because the regional pronunciation of the name of the saint is analogous to the Bulgarian word 'fire': *Игинят – огинят* (*Iginiat – oginiat*). There is a belief that the person who does not venerate the saint will suffer from fire (Primovski 1963: 238). Similar folk etymological associations with the fire can be found in St Paul's name: the Bulgarian dialectal *Палювден*[8] (*Paliuvden* 'St Paul's Day', 30 June) is associated with the verb *паля* (*palia*) 'to burn'.

Folk etymology reveals that language reflects archaic beliefs and, meanwhile, it creates new models for structuring nature.

SINS AND PUNISHMENT IN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

As mentioned above, under the title *нефела* one can find lists of bans and recommendations for proper behaviour to avoid misfortune. Not all of them, though, cover the ritual year restrictions. We can find more rules in the ethnographic accounts of calendric holidays and the ways they should be celebrated: "St Elijah's Day [July 20] is an evil day. If it is not venerated, a disaster will follow" (Popov 2002: 369); "2 February is the Day of St Blaise, Bishop of Sebaste, the cattle day. Those who work, their fingers will ache" (Genchev & Georgieva 1993:

245); "On 26 November [the Day of St Stylian of Paphlagonia], mothers do not work, so their children do not get ill" (Popov 1994: 84), etc.

Occasionally, there are no prescriptions for staying idle. There is just the date of the holiday and an epithet: St Panteleimon's Day is "a heavy holiday" (Popov 1994: 113). This means that there is a certain sample of behaviour, and that people should be very careful, otherwise misfortune will follow. Misbehaviour is sinful and therefore perilous: "On St Tryphon's Day [1 February] it is forbidden to touch sharp objects – needles and knives – because it is a sin, and St Tryphon will punish you with cuts and wounds" (Primovski 1963: 239). The fact that the villagers are afraid of being punished is expressed openly: "On St Barbara women do not touch sharp objects, needles, scissors, knives, because they are afraid that St Barbara would bring them disasters" (Primovski 1963: 245).

A conditional clause is another means of expressing the ban, which sounds like a real menace: "If on Todor's Saturday[9] women cook, the lambs would be born with defects" (Genchev & Georgieva 1993: 246). This logic is often transformed into explanations and longer stories of the cases when there is mischief: "The lambs have been born with defects because you have cooked on Todor's Saturday" (see more on these logical transformations in Sedakova 2007: 93–94).

The rules defining righteous behavioural models are not written down. In the communities, they are transmitted orally – usually within the family by older relatives, in the church by the priesthood, or by fellow villagers. Dimitar Marinov, a Bulgarian ethnographer of the nineteenth century, gives precious information on that:

> *On Sundays and great holidays, the priest does not allow people to go to the field and to work (this is not good for the village). Nor do villagers let people work. If somebody goes and starts working, the villagers stop him. If the person is too bull-headed, the villagers can break his plough or cart … During the Great Lent, the priest does not perform marriage ceremonies, and people do not allow weddings to be performed because it is not good for the village and for the cattle. On the eve of Sundays and great holidays, the priest does not perform marriage ceremonies, and people do not allow weddings to be performed, because it is not good for the young (newlyweds).* (Marinov 1907: 102)

Other ethnographic sources underline that "the heavy holidays" are known for strict bans on any kind of work, and those who wish to work are spoken against and even beaten.

In April, May, and June, there are many feasts which are celebrated to prevent hail. On St Mark's Day (25 April) and the Great Thursdays (a series of

Thursdays starting from the Holy Week till Ascension), people are not allowed to work. There are many disputes, quarrels, and even fights, if someone decides to work, especially if the village has suffered from hail before.

The number of "dangerous" holidays which do not allow people to work is amazingly huge.[10] They include all the great feasts of the Christian ritual year, smaller church holidays, commemorations of saints, and pre-Christian celebrations. The lists of such "dangerous" feasts and the cults of the punishing saints vary from region to region. Apart from the saints, the evil spirits have their own days of veneration. In certain festive periods, for example from Christmas till Epiphany, the demons *караконджалы* (*karakondzali*) prescribe certain restrictions in behaviour. If somebody breaks the rules, they will die or get ill (Sedakova 2021: 55–75).

The descriptions of bans and the consequences of breaking the rules range from very general ones to very detailed advice.

"People do not work on St Nicholas' Day" (G. Mikhailova 1986: 246).

"On the day of the beheading of St John the Baptist (29 August), people do not start any work. Especially they try not to touch sharp objects – the wound would never heal up" (Zakhariev 1935: 227).

On St Charalambos' Day (10 February), no work should be done at home so as to prevent the epidemic of plague.

On St Catherine's Day (24 November), women do not work so as to avoid fires and fever, and do not "make houses black [wearing black clothes for mourning]". They do not touch sharp objects – to secure their hands from wounds (Popov 1994: 83–84).

Often, there are real stories with real protagonists (mother, father, neighbour, etc.) exemplifying the efficacy of the bans if they are broken. These didactic texts also vary in their form and length. They can consist of just one sentence, as an illustration. The statement "There is a ban on baking bread on St Blaise's Day [*Власовден*]. The person who does not follow the rule will develop a disease in the mouth like having hair [*влакна*]" is exemplified by a real case: "My mother baked bread on this day and until she ate it, she got some hairs on her tongue and she could not eat. She said, 'Venerate this day'" (Popov 2002: 338). On St Charalambos' Day, Bulgarians said, do not sew, do not start new work. One woman whitewashed the walls. They had a gun at home. She decided to move it. And then the gun shot. People commented: "Kurta [the name of the lady] worked, and she was shot in the hand" (Popov 2002: 337–338).

For many holidays, the bans relate to all the grown-ups who work, but there are many feasts with restrictions exclusively for women or women of reproductive age. It is connected with the female biological and social functions to bear

and give birth to a child, then to bring the children up, to take care of their husbands, and to look after the household.

We can speak of a women's ritual year which includes the cycle of Virgin Mary's feasts and the holidays of the female saints. Many days in this calendar are venerated by pregnant women, as there is a saying, "If somebody does not venerate a holiday, the Lord will mark the child" (RKS: 353). From St Ignatius' Day till Christmas, there is a period of strict regulations for pregnant women, since it is believed that the Virgin started to feel delivery pains. This belief is supported by the all-Bulgarian Nativity song "Замъчи се Божа майка от Игнат до Коледа" (Mother of God Felt the Labour Pains from St Ignatius' Day till Nativity). The Virgin Mary's great holidays: Annunciation, Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary (2 February), Assumption (15 August), and Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple (21 November) are supplemented by the days of women saints: Assumption of St Ann (25 July), St Catherine, etc. There are other feasts chosen for various reasons which are venerated by women, e.g., St Tryphon's Day and St Simeon's Day when women of reproductive age, and especially the pregnant ones, do not work, so as to give birth easily and to avoid having a handicapped baby (G. Mikhailova 1986: 273; Popov 1994: 87). Many narratives depict the real events when a pregnant woman cut something on St Simeon's Day, and the baby she gave birth to had a harelip, or fingers were missing (see more examples in Sedakova 2007: 79–82). Some bans for women are focused on preventing the tragic deaths of children – mostly in fires. On St Barbara, apart from general bans on housework, there are special restrictions regarding bathing the children – otherwise they will die in the fire (G. Mikhailova 1986: 245).

Women also venerate the Day of St Anastasia (Bulgarian *Наташа* (*Natasha*), *Черна* (*Chiorna*, 'black'), 22 December, one of the folk personifications of death), and leave their work aside. According to a belief, if you do not follow the bans, St Anastasia will make the house of the working woman black, i.e., the household will be in mourning.

Of special women's attention are the so-called Wolves' Days (occasionally Martin's Days, Bulgarian *Мартиньок* (*Martiniok*)), which are timed to Christian feasts, but in their essence are based on the archaic cult of the animals and the real fright of them (Gura 1997: 122–159). There are several periods in the ritual year, different in their area of distribution, when women are not allowed to touch anything that can be associated with making clothes for men. Wolves' Days are usually spread in the calendar between several saint days and festive periods, but mostly the dangerous days are those of St Tryphon, St Demetrius (26 October), St Menas (11 November), and St Philip (14 November) (Kabakova 1995). The strict bans on women's work, especially knitting and sewing, and even

touching scissors, needles, etc., are reinforced and illustrated by many shorter or longer stories. They usually narrate that a man was followed by wolves, and he was miraculously rescued when he remembered that the clothes (or gloves, or hat) had been made on Wolves' Day, and threw them to the wolves. These stories circulate in the villages and support the strong faith in the inevitability of punishment. I will quote the texts which exemplify the ways and means by which traditional views are transmitted.

> *One woman knitted a pair of gloves for her son on St Menas' Day. He went to the forest to get some firewood, and wolves reached him. He climbed a tree and threw down the gloves. The wolves ate them up and ran away.* (G. Mikhailova 1999: 294–295)

> *People began to forget about venerating the Wolves' Days and did not celebrate them anymore. One woman put a patch on her husband's clothes. When he went to the woods, a wolf approached the man and bit the patch off. It makes it clear that it is forbidden to work on wolves' holidays.* (Radulov 1890: 166)

These stories convey direct messages: if you violate the rules, you will be punished. They lack folkloric poetic details but depict a really frightening situation and a miraculous escape, so as to keep the ritual order and to avoid misfortunes.

Restrictions on women's work on holidays are associated with snakes – another mythic and meanwhile real danger in the Balkans. Rituals to drive away snakes are a constituent part of the Bulgarian calendric feasts, and restrictions on women's work are part of them. Starting on St Jeremiah's Day, women do not work at home and in the field and do not touch sharp objects for the entire week to symbolically protect themselves from snakes and worms (Popov 1994: 107). The days of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (9 March), Annunciation (25 March), and St George (6 May) are also the holidays with prescribed bans against snakes. The ethnographic data turns into poetic folklore ballads, where the chthonic nature of snakes becomes evident, as is shown below.

The final ethnographic episode I will shed light on is dedicated to the so-called Hot Days (15–17 July, Bulgarian *Горешляци*, *Горешници*, *Горещи дни* (*Goreshliatsi*, *Goreshnitsi*, *Goreshti dni*)) and ritual prevention from fire. Though one of these days is St Marina the Martyr's commemoration (17 July), a Christian feast, this period being in the middle of summer is known for many restrictions and recommendations "against fire". People do not cook and bake, do not use fire, they have to avoid working in the fields. In some regions, there is a total ban on any kind of work (Genchev & Georgieva 1993: 256; G. Mikhailova 1986:

276). Other days dedicated to fire are St John (24 June), St Paul, SS Cosmas and Damian (1 July), SS Quiricus and Julietta (15 July), and St Maccabees (1 August), all in the middle of summer and thus tightly associated with natural heat and fire. It is worth mentioning that the real stories illustrating the results of the violated bans depict Turkish landlords.

> *The Day of SS Quiricus and Julietta was venerated very strictly, so that even Turkish landlords were watched by their workers and were forced to follow the rules. A well-known folk anecdote says that one mean landlord did not let his workers to have a rest in summer. He made them work day and night so as to harvest as much as possible. He would say, "Holiday-Moliday, but it is a necessity." On the Day of SS Quiricus and Julietta, the workers told the landlord about the dangerous holiday, but he started to swear at them. In the morning, when they were returning from the fields with carts full of sheaves, a storm came. They hid themselves under the carts, and suddenly a bolt of lightning struck one of the carts. Next year, the landlord started to ask when the feast was one week before the date so as not to work on that day.* (Vakarelski 1943: 87–88)

The figures of Turks as protagonists do not appear here accidentally. They belong to alien faith with a different ritual calendar and norms of behaviour. Besides, they take higher social positions as conquerors of Bulgaria and rich landlords. Still, they are punished for making people work on a feast day. This indication doubles the force of the inevitability of punishment, which is indispensable for all sinners, for all who break the rules.

SINS AND PUNISHMENT IN FOLK BALLADS

The motif of punishing people in folk ballads

In the Aarne-Thompson Index (Aarne & Stith 1961 [1910]), the motifs of breaking the rules to work fall into the section AA*750-779, "God repays and punishes", cf. AA *795, "Lord does not forgive the woman who washes on a holiday".[11] These motifs are often documented in Bulgarian folklore ballads. Some of them are love songs sung at girls' village gatherings. Among the punished people, there are mostly young girls and boys who are chastised for their work on holidays and for not listening to their mothers. These songs have didactic motifs, but they transmit the traditional worldview in another way, a poetical and cliched one, which is well remembered.

The content of the ballads includes almost the whole ritual year. They mention the bans on the Great Week before Easter, Easter itself, St George's Day, St Jeremiah's Day, SS Peter and Paul's Day, Rusalia Days (the week after Pentecost), St Marina's and St Procopius' days, and Sundays.

A ballad titled "A Girl Gets Ill Because She Has Worked on a Holiday"[12] narrates a girl who was sewing on Great Saturday before Easter and now, being terminally ill, she laments for her relatives (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 416). The ballad does not mention who punished the girl and how it happened. This motif is given as common knowledge and a logical development of events. This section of the song is an introduction to the more important part of this love ballad – the dialogue between the girl and her sister-in-law, where the girl explains why, when she dies, she will grieve for everybody but not for her beloved one.

Another song titled "A Bride Gets Ill Because She Worked on a Holiday" gives a detailed picture of how the girl got ill: she started to work on a holiday and her head started to ache. She got a fever, lay down and could not get up. Again, this is the introduction to the main part of the song, which in the form of a dialogue shows the love of the girl who arranges her groom to find another bride.

Apart from terminal illness, blindness and muteness are the divine punishments for working on a holiday. A girl named Grozdomena, who has been stitching embroidery on Great Friday, gets blind and numb, and she asks her mother to invite her friends to undo the stitching. When they finish, she can see and talk again (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 416). Another ending of a version of this song is that the priests are invited, and their nine-day prayers return to the girl the ability to see and to talk (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 416).

For poetical reasons, in some ballads the style is even more expressive – thus the victims are doubled and they are brothers. When all the villagers of Huzhali celebrate a holiday (without defining the day, just mentioning that Bulgarians *църква църкуват tsurkva tsurkuvat* 'were celebrating a religious feast'), two brothers, Pahun' and Mitio, go to a ravine to dig out stones. They find a huge stone, which they think can serve as the foundation for a well, but the stone starts to move and kills them. Before they die, one of them says, "The villagers celebrate the church feast, while we, dear brother, dig out the stones" (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 425–426).

A young man who shears sheep on St Elijah's Day finds a tragic death – he stumbles and falls down on something sharp, which stabs his heart. Before he dies, he cries: "Those sons who do not listen to their mothers should be damned three times if the mother says, 'Do not shear sheep on Elijah's Day', but the son does not listen to her" (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 424–425). This final direct didactic message follows two goals – to call for obedience in the family (to listen to the elders) and to keep the ritual order.

Another tragic development of a punishment introduces a song narrating how two clouds decide to chastise the man who collects tribute money on St Elijah's Day – they decide to kill his twin sons to make him understand that it is forbidden to work on a holiday.

A longer song, "Punished by the Lord for Working on St George's Day", narrates a story which can also be found as a tale. Here, the landlord makes his servants work on the holiday in spite of the fact that they admonish him (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 422–423). The Lord punishes the sinner by setting his bulls on fire.

These songs do not always specify who actually castigates the sinner, but occasionally the actor is mentioned – it is the Lord or a definite saint. There are no songs of how wolves attack a person who wears clothes made or patched on the Wolves' Days, in spite of the fact that there are so many prosaic texts illustrating the corresponding rule. There are, however, many ballads depicting snakes as the punishers of girls who work on holidays (see above about the bans to work on certain holidays so as to escape snake bites). Below is an example of such a song portraying the punishment of a girl working on St Jeremiah's Day, known for strict restrictions "against snakes" (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 418–419).

Тъкала Рада на голям праздник,	Rada wove on a great holiday
на голям праздник, на Иримия...	On a great holiday, on Jeremiah holiday…
Майка й обед готвела,	Her mother was cooking lunch to her,
Да дойде Рада да яде,	So Rada could come and eat it.
да дойде Рада, няма я...	But Rada did not come…
Майка й отишла да я види.	Rada's mother went to see her.
Кросната станали змейове,	Weaving loom has turned into snakes.
На Рада очите изпили,	They have drunk out Rada's eyes,
щото тъкала на Иримия,	Because she wove on Jeremiah's Day,
На Иримия, на проклетия.	On Jeremiah's Day, on this damned day.
	(G. Mikhailova 1999: 310)

There are other ballads which refer to other holidays. A girl does not listen to her mother, who tries to prevent her from working on St Marina's Day, and a snake bites her. A mother does not let her daughter to go to the field and to harvest on St Peter's Day, but the daughter still goes and works. A snake bites her in between the eyes and eyebrows (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 423–424). These songs end with a direct speech in which the danger and inevitability of punishment are stated (ibid.: 423).

The snakes serve as mediators of the Lord's will. They connect the chthonic world of the dead with the world of the living. Sight and eyes have mythical connotations, and the association of the snakes with sight (eyes, blindness) is a frequent motif in folklore and in rituals (Tolstoi 1995a: 501).

All the songs depict the tragic events with poetic means, which are not typical of practical prosaic bans and prescriptions. I will show the poetization of the plot below when describing the sufferings of St Nedelia.

The motif of St Nedelia's sufferings

In Bulgarian tradition, St Kyriaki the Great Martyr of Nicomedia is known as Saint Nedelia ('Sunday'), which in the Bulgarian language literally means 'not-doing'. The semantics of this name correlates with the firm bans on working on Sundays, as they are documented in the ethnography of Bulgarian rural communities. These rules are supported occasionally by folk stories,[13] but more often by folk ballads.

St Nedelia takes her place in the same line as the other personified days of the week – Wednesday and Friday (Veselovskiy 1876; Tolstoi & Radenkovich 2001: 375–376, 423–425, 508–509; Belova 2004; Popov 2008; Amosova 2016; Vinogradova 2017; K. Mikhailova 1999) – the saints who punish women working on these particular days. The ballads of St Nedelia present another consequence of breaking the rules – the girls and women work and sin, but it is St Nedelia who suffers.[14] Such motifs are frequent in South Slavic ballads, and they are included in the indexes of the folklore plots (Ikonomov 1893: 127; Boiadzhieva 1982: 153–154).[15]

These songs are published in the folklore collections in the sections "sacred ("religious", "mythological") songs" with the note that they are performed during the girls' gatherings and harvesting. The length of the songs differs from several brief lines to very long ones, with detailed depictions of St Nedelia's woes. Here is one example of St Nedelia's sufferings with explanations of the reasons for them:

Яз не съм млада дивойка,	I am not a young girl,
яз съм най свита Ниделя,	But I am the very Saint Nedelia,
ют пусти вашти българи	Your damned Bulgarians,
в ниделя ягни колиха,	They work on Sundays,
затуй ми очи кървави;	And my eyes are bloody;
в ниделя ляб печаха,	They bake bread on Sunday,
затуй ми ръце тистяни;	And my hands are covered with dough;
дето на пътя митяха,	They have swept the footpaths,
затуй ми крака прашуви.	And my feet are dusty.
	(Kaufman 1982: № 1251)

The ballads usually narrate a hero, a robber, who sees a monastery in the forest, and in one of the rooms he finds a girl lying in a coffin. The place where St Nedelia is discovered – in most of the versions it is the coffin in a monastery or in a church – is very meaningful. Thus, the saint is correlated with the

cosmogonic functions and with transformation of chaos into cosmos, since she acts as the establisher of the rules and norms of peoples' behaviour.

The wounds of St Nedelia, her dirty clothes are explained by the fact that women work on Sundays. One version of a ballad, after picturing the sufferings of St Nedelia, directly conveys that she was sent by the Lord to control whether people follow the bans and do not work on Sundays.

Мене ме й Господ проводил	The Lord has sent me
да дойда да ва нагледам	To look after you
работите ли в неделя,	Whether you work on Sunday,
копайте ли си папурите,	Whether you dig out corn,
жените ли си житата,	Whether you harvest wheat,
метете ли си дворове.	Whether you sweep your front yards.
	(Bogdanova et al. 1993: 414)

The portrait of the dirty, wounded saint serves the aims of the poetics and structural composition – the sufferings are depicted three times, and they contain rich ethnographic details. The analysis of all the ballads with this plot allows us to make a list of bans which includes the following: to sweep the front garden, to sew, to prepare the dowry, to sew on buttons, to bake bread, to comb hair, to throw the hair into the fire, to slaughter, to wash and to pour out the water after washing. The most frequent restriction is to sweep the yard, because due to this activity, St Nedelia would have "dusted clothes", "dusted face", "dusted eyes", or "dusted feet". The second most frequent ban in the list is that of sewing and stitching, because otherwise St Nedelia's "eyebrows and fingers are stabbed", "the hands are pitched", "the eyebrows are sown", "her body is in blood". Another important ban is making dough and baking bread, as otherwise St Nedelia's hands and nails are covered with the dough. Occasionally the prohibition against slaughtering animals is mentioned (the blood is poured over the saint, her eyes are bloody), the bans to wash the clothes and pour out the water (St Nedelia's clothes are wet), to brush hair (St Nedelia's hair is uncombed), and to throw the hair into the fire (St Nedelia takes the hair out and burns her hands).

In the ballads, the physical sufferings of St Nedelia appear in triads with depictions of the face – the eyes – the eyebrows affected; face – eyes – hands; face – clothes – the whole body; eyes – nails – fingers; eyes – hands – feet; eyes – hair – hands. The most vulnerable are her eyes, and this undoubtedly confirms her role as the mediator (Tolstoi 1995a). The most important opposition related to the saint is the definitions of clean and unclean, because Nedelia originally is pure, as she is a saint. Due to the sinners, she loses her purity, and the con-

sequences of breaking the rules are depicted in compliance with the poetic and didactic orders. In the choice of the ethnographic recommendations for Sunday to be depicted in the songs, the idea of the visualization of sinful behaviour dominates. The poetic version differs considerably from the prosaic concise recommendations. This list of the violated bans is much longer, while the "sinful" activity is much more detailed and picturesque. St Nedelia suffers as a result of "girls sewing", not just any girls, but betrothed girls; the dough is beaten not just by any mothers, but by mothers with many children. Further on, the girls are not just sewing, but they are sewing on buttons or the dowry. Besides, the very actions are covered with smaller details, for example, brooming the front yard.

There are other means typical of folklore poetics: permanent epithets (white Bulgarian girls, white breads, white hands, black lambs, bright lambs, young girls, young women, young guys, old women, small girls, large breads, flat front yards, heavy silver, black blood, yellow candle); repetitions, numeral symbolics, tautology, synonyms; hyperbole. The ballads use the typical addressing forms to the young guy, depicting him as a hero, as a heroic man, repetition of the name and traditional folklore particles: *Стуене лудъ гидийо; Стоене, холам, Стоене* 'Stuene, brave guy; Stoene, hey, Stoene' and to the young girl: *Девойко, млада хубава* 'Young and beautiful girl', etc.

Short folklore genres organically enter the ballads, such as curses, where the Lord is supposed to be the punisher:

Да даде Госпуд да даде,	Let God make so
ръцети да ти изсъхнат,	That your hands wither away,
мисата да ти укапът.	That your flesh falls away.
	(Dabeva 1934: 17)

To sum up, the song plots have not drastically changed in terms of their content and the ideas of the logical conclusions, but they are artistically elaborated with expressive details, typical of the folklore traditions. While the prosaic casual bans and restrictions are just a summary of the major idea expressed in a short form, like good – bad, recommended – forbidden, the poetic texts give a comprehensive cluster of illustrations.

CONCLUSIONS

The bans and recommendations to avoid working at home and in the field, as well as other types of activity on holidays are very stable in Bulgaria. Contemporary field research reveals that many calendric rituals fade away, but the

bans on working on a holiday are still observed. In the village of Pavel, Veliko Turnovo region, many of the Christmas customs are forgotten, but the rule for women not to wash their husbands' clothes to avoid the attacks of the wolves (Kolev 2007: 93) is still topical. Nowadays, in the villages, people remember the rule not to build houses on the Hot Days to prevent fires. When a fire happens, there is an explanation that there was work on the roof of the house on the holidays.[16] On 9 May 2022, St Nicholas' Day, the Facebook page of the village of Ovchartsi, Kustendil region, Bulgaria,[17] posted a folk song about a girl getting ill because she worked on a holiday, and commented: "On the day of Summer St Nicholas[18] one should not work, so as not to make the Saint angry and avoid His punishment with natural disasters and calamities." The contemporary ethnographers observe the growing restrictions on work on St Stylian's Day. The cult of this saint, the children's protector, used to be regionally restricted (Popov 1994: 84), but now it is developing into a strong all-Bulgarian (and even transnational) worship (Karamikhova 2020: 20).

Reminiscences of the beliefs regarding breaking the rules and the corresponding misfortunes are found in Bulgarian mass media, while the interpretations are occasionally wrong. The tragedy that took place off the Black Sea shore on 2 August, when a 17-year-old young man was drowned, is commented as "On Elijah's Day the sea took its sacrifice" in regard to the widely known ban to swim on St Elijah's Day (Bedrosian 2020). There are many other similar reports of the drowned people on St Elijah's Day, written with the same allusion to the ban to swim in the sea.

Thus, the behavioural rules and the traditional worldview are still observed in the Bulgarian society. These remains are supported by the language, folklore texts, and memories of the elderly. It is not important who is supposed to be the punisher – God, saints, or the nature – the beliefs in the penance for breaking the rules are still alive. There is a philosophical folk saying, "There is one power", often heard when people are speaking of misfortunes and accidents and trying to explain the reasons for them. Widely spread in Bulgaria, it confirms that people believe in the cosmic order, and if it is broken, "one power" will punish the sinner.

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NOTES

[1] Semiotic approach is a constituent feature of the Moscow School of Ethnolinguistics, established by Nikita Tolstoi (Tolstoi 1995b; Tolstoi & Tolstaia 2013). In 2022, the year of the centennial of the world-famous semiotician, literary critic, and culturologist Yuri Lotman, I would like to stress the value of the semiotic methodology and the input of the works of the Moscow-Tartu semiotic school in particular (Nikolaeva 1997; Nekliudov 1998; Velmezova 2015) in humanitarian studies and, correspondingly, for this article.

[2] There are regional versions of this saying. For example, in Sakar, people say that birds do not nest from St Ignatius' Day (20.12) till Christmas (25.12) (Popov 2002: 329).

[3] The ethnographic information is occasionally contradictory because the regional versions of customs and beliefs vary considerably. Thus, in the Plovdiv region, people believe that they should work on St Sabbas Day, so as to work easily through the year (G. Mikhailova 1986: 145).

[4] St Sabbas the Sanctified, in the folk view, is often seen as a woman, partly because of his name, which has the morphological composition of a feminine anthroponym.

[5] In the Russian idiom of Don Cossacks, a holiday obtains negative epithets as well: *злой* (*zloi*) 'angry', *грозный* (*groznyi*) 'fearsome', *карательный* (*karatel'nyi*) 'vindictive', *наказной* (*nakaznoi*) 'punishing' (Vlaskina & Shestak & Terskova 2012: 160).

[6] In the folk tradition, many kinds of breaking the rules are often seen as a mistake, as the word *грех* (*grekh*) 'a sin, a mistake' denotes them (Tolstaia 2000).

[7] For comparison, see an analysis of the idioms characterising as the bans in the tradition of the Russian Old Believers (Svalova 2019).

[8] St Paul is commemorated with St Peter on 29 June, but in the folk version of the ritual year St Paul is bestowed with his own day, 30 June.

[9] The Day of St Theodore of Amasea (Tiron) is celebrated on the first Saturday of Lent.

[10] For comparison, see the detailed account of the "dangerous" holidays in the Don regional version of the Russian folk tradition (Shestak 2010).

[11] The Russian Index of Fairy Tales (Comparative Index of Subjects) denotes related motifs as 846A*: "The poor man ploughs on the Day of the Forty Martyrs, because he does not have his own plough. The saints send him a plough. The following year, he ploughs again on a holiday to get a good harvest and, as a punishment, falls ill for forty years" (Barag et al. 1979).

[12] The names of the songs are not authentic. They are given by the scholars and publishers according to the plot.

[13] A widely spread story narrates: "People do not work on Sundays since people dreamt of the saint, and she appeared as she was dirty, because women wash themselves on Sundays and pour the dirty water on the saint. That's why she is that dirty and wears ragged clothing."

[14] St Nedelia chastises a young girl who works on this saint's day, a Sunday. Early in the morning on a Sunday, Iana sweeps the yard, feeds the horses, and goes out to the field to work. A girl comes and frightens the horses, and they kill Iana (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 414). Compare similar motifs in other Slavic traditions (Amosova 2014).

[15] About a more detailed analysis of the versions of these ballads see Sedakova 2008.

[16] Information from Georgi Mishev, village of Starosel, Plovdiv region, 2021.

[17] Following the development of internet media and online networks, there is a growth of interest towards folk traditions, rituals, songs, costumes, etc. Such pages follow the ritual year and make posts with the corresponding information of the holiday.

[18] In the Orthodox calendar, Saint Nicholas is commemorated twice: on 6 December, on the day of his death, and on 9 May, on the day of the transfer of the saint's relics from Myra of Lycia to Bari. In Slavic traditions, the first day is often called Winter Nicholas, while the second is Summer or Spring Nicholas.

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