https://doi.org/10.7592/RY14.05

Winter Carnival in Vevchani (North Macedonia): Between Commercial Festivity and Folklore Tradition

Oksana Mykytenko
oksana_mykytenko@hotmail.com

Abstract: This paper is based on fieldwork conducted in the Republic of North Macedonia, where in 2019 I observed the Vasilitsa winter folklore carnival held annually on January 12–13 in the village of Vevchani, near Ohrid. The tradition of winter masked carnivals exists throughout the Macedonian cultural area, with local variations and different names for the participants. The core structure of the event is a ritual drama that parodies a wedding ceremony and symbolically enacts themes of fertility and renewal. Masking practices and the use of noisemaking implements – jingling, clattering, and striking – serve both traditional ritual and modern entertainment purposes. The performances combine elements of folk drama, with prescribed roles, alongside improvised satirical scenes addressing contemporary political and social issues. Today, the carnival demonstrates the coexistence of traditional ritual forms and modern expressions, including theatrical spectacle and tourism-oriented activities. This interplay sustains the event's status as a marker of both local identity and national cultural heritage. Examined in the context of globalisation – with its emphasis on multiculturalism and consumption – the Vevchani Carnival exemplifies the dynamic synergy between inherited ritual culture and contemporary festive practice. It reveals how tradition can be adapted and reinterpreted within modern frameworks, without losing its cultural resonance.

Keywords: Vevchani, winter carnival, folk tradition, cultural identity, commercialisation.

Introduction: Holiday as a Sign of Identity

Ritual, as a semiotic system that constructs a *model of group identity*, plays a central role in the structure of traditional culture (Havryliuk 1999: 7). It functions as a marker of a specific local tradition and determines the affiliation of individuals

and rural communities to that tradition. *Ritual identity* emerges during ritual performance: it brings participants into sensuous and emotional unity, forming a shared atmosphere and revealing the sacred values of the group. Within this framework, the traditional festive custom – understood as a process that channels emotions and sentiments, thus generating a sense of *"we-ness"*, or community (Skyba 2004: 33) – acquires particular significance in the formation of identity. It becomes a meaningful phenomenon of sociocultural life operating at both micro- and macro-levels, including ethnic and national dimensions.

Social integration and self-identification – whether at the collective or individual level – are widely recognised as core functions of festive practice. These functions become especially evident in the context of globalisation and multiculturalism. Unlike in traditional society, where the holiday served to sacralise foundational cultural values, contemporary festive forms often lose this sacral dimension. Today, a holiday is not only part of cultural heritage but also a modern cultural construct. It actualises tradition while responding to the needs, opportunities, and challenges of the present. Amidst a crisis of cultural identity, the national holiday, as an integrative framework, serves as a cultural nexus. Owing to its deep *emotional legitimacy*, it fosters interpersonal engagement and becomes a basis for intercultural communication.

The Traditional Vasilitsa Holiday: The Example of Vevchani Village

The calendar cycle of traditional rituals – distinguished by their high symbolic density and mythological meaning – includes, in particular, festive events and rites connected with the New Year and Christmas season, many of which remain vibrant today. Folkloric celebrations in North Macedonia represent a multilayered cultural phenomenon that merges Christian rites with pre-Christian customs and beliefs. These holidays were highly significant in the past and continue to hold meaning in the present (Kitevski 2001: 5–28).

In 2019, I had the opportunity to observe such a folk celebration, *Vasilitsa*, a vivid carnival held annually in the village of Vevchani, located approximately 25 km northwest of Ohrid. The Vevchani Carnival has never lapsed or been discontinued, and since 1993 it has been a member of the International Federation of Carnival Cities[1]. Inspired by its example, a national association of carnivals was formed, including towns such as Strumica, Prilep, and others. In this and other New Year-related festivities in Macedonia, one can trace traditional patterns of celebration alongside more recent models and elements introduced over time.

A key feature of the Vevchani Carnival involves two groups of participants setting out from opposite ends of the village. Central characters in the ritual performance

include the son-in-law, the daughter-in-law, and the fool. The celebration involves masquerading, greeting fellow villagers named Vasyl, visiting water sources, gathering in the village centre, and collective merrymaking (Kytevsky 2009: 91).

The name of the festival is linked to the feast of St. Basil on January 14 (January 1, Julian calendar), which symbolically opens the new year. It falls within the twelve so-called "unbaptized days", a liminal period between Christmas and Epiphany, traditionally considered one of heightened supernatural danger and governed by numerous ritual prescriptions and taboos (Popovski 1975: 251). These twelve days, infused with beliefs originating in the pre-Christian era, are perceived by Macedonians – like many other peoples – as especially perilous. According to popular belief, demonic entities such as fairies, *karakondzuls*, vampires, and *tolosums* are particularly active during this time, threatening humans, livestock, and property. The entire period is accompanied by prohibitions meant to ward off these dangers (Mirchevska 2008: 162). New Year rites and songs from this cycle are among those in which pagan features have persisted, while Christian elements introduced later remain marginal or absent (Kitevski 2002: 123). Ritual merriment, regarded as a protective charm against otherworldly forces, played an especially important role in these practices (Tolstoy 1995: 306). The most widespread was a folk performance, traditionally restricted to men, which incorporated all the elements of dramatic action: personae, masks, monologues and dialogues, staging, scenography, audience, and more. This ritual play was taken with great seriousness, and the performance itself was considered of crucial importance (Kitevski 2001: 49; Kytevsky 2009: 89). According to popular belief, the primary aim was to expel all that remained evil from the old year, most notably to drive out *Karakondzhula*, a mythological creature embodying evil, thereby demonstrating the participants' own power and agency (Mladenoski 1975: 380).

Among the characters in the Vasilitsa ritual performance – held from midnight until sunrise – were lead figures such as the old man and old woman, the son-in-law and the daughter-in-law, and village elders, as well as auxiliary roles such as the army (priest, guards, gendarmes, blackamoor, camel-driver, etc.). Disguise and role-playing were central aspects: participants transformed themselves through masking and costuming to embody these figures. In the past, faces were painted with soot or vivid pigments, whereas today ready-made cosmetics are used. Traditional masks were crafted from paper or animal skins and often adorned with horns. Beards and moustaches were made of hemp or wool. Ritual accessories included bells and wooden clappers tied to belts, believed to possess protective power. An essential attribute of the participants were branches of cornelian cherry or other fruit trees, which were used playfully to whip girls, family members, and even domestic animals. This action held ritual significance and aligned with the broader symbolic logic of the festive performance.

Morphology of the Ritual Text: Geography, Terminology, Participants, Verbal Communication

The 'grammar' of a ritual text consists of a sequence of symbols organised according to ritual syntax, while the 'action' code – embodied in ritual practices – forms its predicative structure. Within this structure, actions take on the meaning of ritual behaviour, integrated into the broader code system of traditional culture. According to Ljubinko Radenković, elements such as participants, temporal and spatial coordinates, ritual objects, and verbal formulae constitute a symbolic ensemble that not only enacts ritual but also sustains the transmission of tradition (Radenković 2019: 96).

Across different parts of Macedonia, the masked participants in these rituals bear different names. In the case of the widely known Vasilitsa rite, local terminology varies: near Ohrid, Struga, and Veles, they are called *vasilichari*; in the Prilep and Bitola regions *babari*; in Skopje and Tikveš *džamalari* or *džalamari*; near Razlog *survakari*; and in Kostur and other parts of Aegean Macedonia *eshkari*. Among the southern Slavs, further variants include *surati*, *mechkari* or *machkari*, *kamilari*, *bushari*, *buchani*, *zvonchari*, *kugachi*, *nap hantsi*, and others (Kitevski 2001: 50; Plotnikova 2004: 105; Mirchevska 2008: 162; Konstantinov 1975: 375). Considerable differences can be found in the symbolic systems and performative structures of the ritual across regions. For instance, in Smilevo, the ritual was performed as a pantomime, devoid of verbal elements; in other areas, such as near Kruševo, Bitola, and Prilep, songs and spoken dialogues were integral components (Zdravev 1975: 369; Konstantinov 1975: 377).

Petrovska-Kuzmanova notes:

> In our region, we encounter vasilichari – masked groups known under different names ("vasilichari", "sirovari", "babari", "jamalari", etc.). What is common to all is that only men participate, enacting a symbolic wedding procession which includes: 1) the 'fortune-teller' and 'father-in-law'; 2) the 'feller', 'blackamoor', and 'son-in-law'; 3) the 'daughter-in-law'; 4) the 'priest'; 5) the 'bear' and 'bear-leader'; and 6) the 'master' of the house, who plays an important role in the ceremony (2006: 70).

The name of the ritual often corresponds to its principal characters – masked members of the ritual troupe – who show striking similarities across different local traditions, a trait typical of Balkan customary practices (Mishkova 2017: 300). The region encompassing Macedonia, southern Serbia, and western Bulgaria is often

regarded as a coherent cultural complex within the South Slavic domain of festive masquerade (Tolstoy 1995: 115).

According to Nikita Tolstoy, there are "dialectal features" in the ritual performances of Macedonian and western Bulgarian masking traditions, reflecting a broader pattern of dialectal diversity in ritual practice (1995: 115–118). For example, terms such as сурвакари – derived from the Slavic root *суров-* 'strong', 'healthy', 'raw' – are common across South Slavic territories for winter ritual rounds, while New Year's games marked by *obscene motifs* and imitation *weddings* are typical to Macedonia, western Bulgaria, and southeastern Serbia.

The most general semantic value of these processions is symbolic inclusion: to *encompass, belong*, or *be admitted* to the community (Radenković 2019: 111). Ethnographic data identifies two types of New Year's procession in Macedonia, for example carnival-style masked games, and ceremonial processions of groups such as the *survakari*. While the use of surva-related terminology is limited in Macedonia – sometimes the procession has no fixed name –, the word *сурва* appears in traditional greetings and folklore texts (Plotnikova 2004: 104–105; Kitevski 2001: 50). Symbolic acts such as whipping with branches, considered "universal manifestations of ritual behavior", are a form of symbolic communication (Radenković 2019: 107). The term суровење refers to the rite as a whole, in which the semantics of *суров-* are enacted in language, gesture, and ritual paraphernalia.

Greeting formulas derived from *сурва* were common in the Christmas and New Year ritual cycles, often accompanied by raking ashes in the hearth to encourage the birth of a male child. In Ohrid villages, *vasilichari* processions included ritual striking with plum twigs and the wish to be healthy "Суров*(а)* да си*!*" In Peshtani, similar wishes were uttered during New Year's bread rituals. In Maleshevo (eastern Macedonia), boys walked the village on New Year's Eve, gently striking elders while saying "Сурова дедо*!*" or "Сурова баба*!*", and parents would wake their sons at midnight to run outside shouting "Сурва*!*" to herald the New Year (Plotnikova 2004: 106).

Traditionally, children participated separately from adults in Christmas and New Year customs, with similar but age-specific roles and songs. Today, children play an active role in *vasilichari* carnival performances. They dress in bright costumes, wear masks, and visit the homes of relatives and neighbours. However, the structure has changed: where previously children went in small groups, each embodying a ritual figure such as the 'son-in-law' or the 'daughter-in-law', today they often go individually (Petrovska-Kuzmanova 2006: 77). Ritual songs performed by children differ from those of adult groups. While adult *vasilichari* often sing songs with erotic or coarse content, children's songs during *Vasilitsa* resemble or directly replicate Christmas carols (Kitevski 2002: 128).

Blaže Ristovski was among the first to emphasize the need to collect and study ceremonial male erotic folk songs, performed on Holy Evening and St. Basil's Day around the communal fire, songs which exhibit a distinct *orgiastic* character. He stressed their importance for understanding *human experience and spiritual culture* (Ristovski 1975: 219).

At *Vasilitsa*, as at Christmas, groups of school-age children would first gather around a communal fire before moving through the village, entering homes and chanting greetings akin to carols. These wishes for the New Year were rewarded with sweets, nuts, apples, and other small gifts (Kitevski 2001: 53; Kitevski 2002: 128–129; Nikolovski 1992: 195). Carrying *surva* twigs made of plum, hawthorn, or other fertile trees, the children would gently strike people, especially the elderly, as well as livestock, wishing them good health for the coming year. Common phrases included: "Suro, suro, in a year even more cheerful, even happier" (Kitevski 2001: 50–51; Malinov 2006: 217; Nikolovski 1992: 195).

In each district and village, the composition of the groups and the actions performed varied. In the Ohrid and Struga region, where the rite took place on the eve of St. Basil's Day, the groups – often comprising 30 to 50 young unmarried men and several older men known for their wit and knowledge of custom – divided into two processional troupes, one from the lower and one from the upper part of the village. The leaders, dressed in folk costume, represented the bride and bridegroom and led their group from house to house. The presence of this symbolic bridal couple is also noted among other ethnic groups (Mirchevska 2008: 162). Traditionally, the group gathered on the eve of the festival in the village centre, lit a large fire, and at midnight set out with music and singing. Older instruments included the гајда (bagpipes), кавал (large flute), and шупелка (flute); in more recent times, clarinet, accordion and drum are commonly used. The group would return by dawn to the same central point from which they had departed (Nikolovski 1992: 194).

Ritual Game: Masks and Texts

At the core of the concept of calendrical ritual performance lies the antinomy of the old and the new, when, following Bakhtin, the "dethronement of the old and the crowning of the new" takes place. The fusion of various forms of folk spectacle with the concept of time – time becoming "the true hero of the holiday" – defines the carnivalesque character of the event, where time acquires the features of "festivity" (Bakhtin 1990: 243).

Magical merriment in the context of Christmas and New Year celebrations manifested itself in both verbal and actional forms and constituted ritually prescribed behaviour. This reflected the semantic and functional equivalence of action, word, and object within the broader pragmatics of ritual games associated with festive

masquerade. "All three codes serve to express a single meaning, a single idea, which gives many rituals a cumulative character, that is, the quality of 'stringing together' synonyms along one ritual 'axis'", as N. I. Tolstoy emphasized. "Such a three-coded ritual structure … allows for the relatively free and easy reduction of certain inter- or intra-code 'synonyms'; or, conversely, their excessive accumulation and emphatic intensification, following the principle that 'you can't spoil porridge with butter'" (1981: 46).

Given the ambivalent meaning of carnival as "a death pregnant with life" (Bakhtin), carnivalesque is defined not only as a set of features forming the festive atmosphere but also as a manifestation of a specific worldview intrinsic to folk culture. This worldview is based on the notion of the unity of essential oppositions – birth and death, high and low, praise and insult, weeping and laughter, and so on. The intensification of themes of death, funerals, and beings from the "other world" continues the cult of ancestors, which in ritual merges with both solar symbolism and the cult of fertility (Tolstoy 2003: 17).

The system of travesty (disguise, mystification, costuming) and of inversion (hierarchical or role reversals, opposition to official norms, disproportion, etc.) is considered a defining feature of carnival performance (Nekrylova 1993: 110). At the same time, given that the notion of carnival is somewhat conventional in the context of Slavic traditions, since, unlike in Western Europe, the process of unifying diverse local phenomena has not been completed, various forms of folk festive merriment (Shrovetide, Christmas, fairground entertainment, etc.) have remained unintegrated. Thus, it is more accurate to speak of the "carnivalesque atmosphere" of folk festivals and the "genetic sources of festive and ludic imagery" (Bakhtin 1990: 242, 259). The world represented by costumed performers, into which they drew the audience, was not comparable to the world of everyday life as it was a world of play and celebration. The semantic 'gravitational pull' and the lexico-semantic correlation of the concept of play with the nominative field of merriment, joy, delight, all deriving from the Old Slavic root **vessel-*, underlie the synonymy of the verbs *to play* and *to rejoice,* both of which share the notion of vital energy, as demonstrated by Tolstoy. One of the primary semantic spheres of this convergence is "the celebration of Christmas and its ritually and mythologically connected counterpart, the New Year (the feast of St. Basil)", where the magical force of well-wishes for prosperity is inseparable from the broader sacred semantics of the beginning of the year and of the life cycle (Tolstoy 1995: 294–312).

In Slavic traditional culture, the term *igrishche* has long been used to denote the carnivalesque atmosphere of a ritual festival, an event in which songs, dances, disguises, games, fortune telling and other performative elements were organically combined. In Vladimir Dal's *Dictionary*, the term is glossed as "gatherings, evening festivities, especially those during Yuletide" (Dal 1955 [1881], vol. 2: 7). The

carnival igrishche was characterised by its tragicomic nature and its vivid diversity of expressive and artistic means, including costumes, disguise, songs, dances, instrumental music, and verbal forms (Gusev 1993: 91). At the conceptual level, the affinity between carnival and masquerade in the context of the Slavic Orthodox tradition can also be observed in contemporary New Year masquerade games practiced among ethnic Macedonians in the villages of Kali Vrysi, Volakas, and Petroussa in the Drama region of Greece (Mishkova 2017: 300).

Ritual games involving masks are a distinctly male domain of festive performance (Mirchevska 2008: 162). Women, in contrast, typically participated in the celebration through visits to relatives and neighbours, during which they would throw small pieces of firewood into the hearth while uttering ritual wishes such as "let children be born, and also chickens, lambs, calves, goats, foals…" (Nikolovski 1992: 195).

The ritual masking performed by male *vasilichar* groups in Macedonia, as elsewhere in the Balkans, belongs to a group-based form of ritual travesty. This form of costumed performance functions as an expression of *anti-behaviour*, a temporary suspension or reversal of everyday norms characteristic of the liminal period between Christmas and the New Year. As Radenković notes, "the mask, in the eyes of the observer, transforms one reality into another: from the everyday and real to the fantastic; through it, ordinary people become mythological figures" (2019: 127). In a broad sense, a mask is also a character into whom the masquerader transforms, regardless of whether a facial mask is physically present or not. As with other attributes of masquerade, the mask facilitated the performer's role transformation, served as a marker of a specific character type, and helped create a distinctive play situation. One of the main aims of the masked figures, particularly in the South Slavic folk tradition, was to frighten the audience.



Fig. 1. Vevchani, North Macedonia.
Photo: O. Mikitenko, 13 January 2019.

The masks worn by Christmas carollers in southeastern Serbia and North Macedonia, or by the Bulgarian Shrovetide masqueraders known as *kukeri*, were intricately crafted ritual objects. These masks were often combined with towering constructions on the head, composed of exotic headdresses adorned with feathers, plants, strings of red pepper pods, beads made of beans and minerals, brightly coloured ribbons, and other decorations (Vinogradova 2004: 192). Today, however, the practice of masking has shifted notably: it now represents a mixture of traditional and contemporary expressive forms in which the *magical dimension* has largely disappeared (Mirchevska 2008: 164).



Fig. 2. Vevchani, North Macedonia. Photo: O. Mikitenko, 13 January 2019.

In a broader cultural and philosophical sense, the role of the mask in folk festivity has been explored by Mikhail Bakhtin, who describes it as one of the "most complex and ambiguous motifs" of traditional culture. "The mask," he writes, "is associated with the joy of change and transformation, with a cheerful relativism, with the playful denial of fixed identity and singular meaning." It symbolises transition, metamorphosis, the crossing of natural boundaries, and acts of ritualised mockery. It represents "the playful principle of life", grounded in a relationship between reality and image that is characteristic of the most archaic ritual and performative forms. This meaning of the mask is most fully revealed when it functions within the *organic wholeness of folk culture*, where the mask signifies the "inexhaustibility and diversity of life" (Bakhtin 1990: 48).

The term *mask*, derived from Latin, is not native to the Macedonian language and did not appear in local usage until the early twentieth century. Within the

South Slavic cultural tradition, the related Macedonian term *маскара*, *машкара* – meaning 'mask', 'man in a mask', or 'person in disguise' – was borrowed from Judeo-Spanish dialects and originally carried an unpleasant or mocking connotation (Konstantinov 1975: 376). In contrast, the word *cypam/u* (from Arabic, via Turkish mediation) has been more widely used historically and remains common today. A synonym of *maškara* 'disguised' is *krabonosica* (from *krabulja* 'mask'); numerous derivatives carry the meanings 'to joke', 'to make merry', 'to mock', 'to play the fool', 'to dress grotesquely', and the like (Skok 1972: 381).

In particular, carnival events in Ohrid, known by the name *Cypam*, involved both the purchase and creation of masks by local residents. These masks were crafted from a wide array of materials, including fabric, cardboard, animal pelts, bones, wood, dried grasses, and metals. The most popular characters represented in masks included the "Arab in a turban with a tassel", "son-in-law and daughter-in-law", "grandfather and grandmother", and "male and female Roma figures" (Malenko 1975: 385). Among the customary roles in groups of *vasilichari* were the masks of the 'bride' (*невеста* or *неста*) and the 'groom' (*зет*), played by appropriately dressed young men (the 'bride' was usually a boy who had not yet started shaving, wearing women's clothes and a headscarf); the 'roller' (*валкач*, *валегач*), also called *тркаљаш*, *тркалач* ('the one who runs errands'), dressed in a *gunj* (thick shepherd's coat) with a straw hump on his back (this character could sometimes represent the 'groom'); and the 'healer' (*гаталец*, *гатач* or *багач*), occasionally also the 'father-in-law' (*свекор*), an older and experienced participant, a jester who was not shy of bawdy jokes, dressed in a tattered *gunj*, his face smeared with soot, and with a beard and mustache made of hemp. Both the 'roller' and the 'healer' wore belts with small bells and rattles attached, which jingled and clattered as they moved. They carried sticks used to knock on doors, and the 'healer' would beat the 'roller' on his straw hump with one of these sticks.

In other cases, the masqueraders included two ragged 'beggars', a 'bride', and a 'prostitute'. When the main characters included a 'priest', a mock wedding ceremony would take place. Sometimes this 'wedding' was staged in the centre of the village and featured a 'guard' and 'elders', who were supposed to protect the 'bride' from being kidnapped by onlookers (Malinov 2006: 213; Spirovska 1975: 366). Other group members wore normal clothing and included musicians who accompanied the *vasilichari*, as well as collectors of food offerings such as flour, meat, *rakija*, wine, onions, and so forth.

The ritual play, generally known as *The Death and Resurrection of the Old One*, usually began in the courtyard. The 'healer' would knock on the door and shout: Очкрапи домаќине, ух. Да не ти влезам втемнина да ти ги рушам децата. Да видиш домаќине наша војска, кое куцо, кое слепо, све е на врата. Да видиш наша невестица како ука на врата. Домаќине, ако ти е куриштето во

пеплиштето, удри го од кланичиштето! (Open up, householder, oof. If we come in in the dark, we might scare the children. Look, householder, at our army, lame, blind, but all at your door. Look at our bride, how she weeps at your doorstep. Householder, if your rooster is in the ashes, strike it on the butcher's block!)

The host would open the door, and the 'healer' would continue: Добро вечер, домаќине. Да е среќна Новата година, да даде Господ здравје во луѓето и стоката, голем бериќет по нивите, мир во земјата и слога меѓу луѓето. Дали е слободо да влеземе во куќата? (Good evening, householder. May the New Year be joyful. May God grant health to people and livestock, a bountiful harvest in the fields, peace in the land, and harmony among people. May we enter your home?)

Upon gaining the host's permission, the group would enter with singing and music. The 'groom' would begin to lead the *oro* (traditional dance), but after one round, he would suddenly collapse. Panic ensued among the *vasilichari*, with cries that something had happened to him. The 'healer' would turn to the host and say: Е, домаќине, што е ова несреќа што не снајде во твојата куќа. Преку Црно море поминавме на лушпа ореова, ова чудо не не снајде. Да не имаш некоја беља направено со домаќинката. Кажувај сега што да правиме. (Oh, householder, what misfortune has struck us in your home! We crossed the Black Sea in a walnut shell and nothing happened to us, yet now this horror! Perhaps you and your wife have committed some sin? Tell us what to do).

A suggestion would follow that the house was unlucky, draughty (*ветерничава, аталија*, 'holey', 'ill-fated'), a place where evil spirits gathered. The host, shrugging, would respond: Вие го донесовте и што сакате правете му! (You brought him, do with him as you wish!)

The 'bride' would wail over the 'dead'. The 'healer' would then ask: *Таксај што ќе таксаш за да го извадиме од овдека*, *башто ако ти го оставиме ќе се смерди* и *орлите не ќе го креваат*! (Say what you will give us to take him away. If we leave him here, he'll stink so much even the vultures won't touch him!)

To which the host would reply: *Аман*, *се ќе таксам само да го однесете*! (All right, I'll give whatever you want, just take him away!)

The 'healer' would list the required offerings: *Таксај каца со месо*, *низалка колбаси*, *каца сирење*, *вреќа брашно*, *шише со ракија*, *бочва со вино*, *каца со зелка*, *венец кромид*, *низа пиперки* и *др*. (Give us a tub of meat, a string of sausages, a tub of cheese, a sack of flour, a bottle of rakija, a barrel of wine, a barrel of sauerkraut, a wreath of onions, a string of peppers, and more.)

The host would comply, and the 'healer' would begin a mock incantation over the 'dead'. This would involve rhymed gibberish, vulgar language, and a list of body parts that might be useful on the farm and could be given away to the crowd. The 'healer' would then ask the 'bride' to 'inject' the 'dead' man, upon which she would lift her skirt, bend over, and touch him three times with her knee and breasts. The

'groom' would then revive, leap up, grab the 'bride' and toss her in the air three times. In other versions, the 'groom' would be revived by being given a 'medicinal' herb with life-giving power. Music played, people rejoiced, sang, and danced. The housewife distributed gifts such as flour, meat, peas, oil, wine, rakija, and so on. The 'healer' would bless the host and his household with traditional formulas: *Колку зрна*, *презрна – толку амбари пчејница*! *Колку капки сланина – толку прасци и кочиња*! *Колку трошки сирење – толку* јагиња, јариња! (As many grains, grainlets – as many granaries full of wheat! As many drops of lard – as many piglets and goats! As many crumbs of cheese – as many lambs and kids!) Each blessing was echoed by the entire group with a resounding: *Амин!* (Amen!).

The *vasilichari* would then proceed to other homes throughout the night, ending their circuit by sunrise. Afterward, they would go home and sleep until noon. In the evening of January 14, they would gather in someone's house and prepare a communal dinner from the collected food, inviting all villagers. Everyone who came brought firewood for the bonfire and received a share of the food. The celebration would last late into the night (Nikolovski 1992: 194–195; Kitevski 2009: 90; Malinov 2006: 214).

Gift-giving was an essential part of the traditional ritual. The symbolism of donation, rooted in the principle of reciprocity, represents one of the most meaningful ritual acts establishing mutual obligation between the giver and the receiver. The actualisation of this gesture during rites of passage – especially those of the calendrical cycle – is primarily tied to its function of establishing order at the threshold between one state and another (Radenković 2019: 105), thus reflecting the overall purpose of the ritual text.

The act of giving could form a separate ritual itself, as seen in the region of Kičevo and nearby villages, as well as in other parts of Macedonia. Boys would go from house to house greeting residents for the New Year and singing *vasilicharski* ritual songs, calling on the master of the house to give them "whatever the soul desires": *Честита*, *честита*, *честита*, / *да ни* е, *чичо*, *Нова година*! / *подари не*, *чичо*, *што ти душа сака*, / *а Бог да ти наплати стократно*! (Congratulations, congratulations, congratulations, / may the New Year be joyful, uncle! / Give us, uncle, whatever your soul desires, / and may God repay you a hundredfold!) (Linin 1975: 328)

The Ambivalence of Anti-Behaviour as a Manifestation of Ritual Pragmatics and Carnival Entertainment

"What makes a carnival a 'carnival' in the most general sense?" – asks Vesna Marjanović, to which she responds: "First of all, the carnival is distinguished by the shifting boundaries between allowed and forbidden behavior" (2011: 12). Carnival

inversion is not to be understood as chaos opposed to reality, but rather as a ritual rotation of reality, a creation of an imagined, alternative world, and a ritualisation of both order and disorder (Lozica 1997: 242). Forms of *anti-behaviour* as ritual acts express the underlying logic of the celebration, operating within a system of binary oppositions that reflect the inherent ambivalence of the traditional text. Alongside masking, other performative expressions, such as "carnival-brutal communication" and the "elements of ancient cultures of laughter", underscore the mythological dimension of the ritual. As Bakhtin puts it, these elements "at once reduce and destroy, and simultaneously regenerate and renew" (1990: 23).

Anti-behaviour was especially evident in the ritual game *Death and Resurrection of the Elder* (Spirovska 1975: 365). The speech addressed to the imaginary deceased comprised improvised rhymed nonsense, vulgar phrases, and playful listings of the body parts of the 'corpse' to be redistributed for practical use: for example, "the head for the children to play football", or "the hands for a wool-combing tool". The "spindle" would go "to the daughters-in-law for spinning", and so on. The length and inventiveness of such episodes depended on the performer's wit and the number of onlookers each of whom was assigned an object, provoking general amusement and applause.

If the *vasilichari* were denied entry into the house, typically to avoid *obscene performances*, they would stage the rite in the courtyard, and still receive gifts. If refused any offering, however, they might inflict symbolic damage: breaking a plough, harrow, or cart left in the courtyard, or stealing firewood for the common fire during the night. These actions, while disruptive, were not condemned; on the contrary, they formed an accepted part of ceremonial behaviour (Kitevski 2001: 52; Ristovski 1975: 223). Villagers also made efforts to prevent encounters between two *vasilichari* groups, which could lead to fights, and at times even fatalities (Malinov 2006: 214). Although such ritual 'conflicts', as Petrovska-Kuzmanova explains, originally aimed to "ensure the community's prosperity and well-being", their function has gradually diminished or transformed, along with the symbolic meaning of ritual disguise. Typically, the two groups – each from a different part of the village (upper and lower) – would meet at the end of the event in the village centre, where they performed a ceremonial *коло* (circle dance). This was explained by the desire "not to divide the audience" (Petrovska-Kuzmanova 2006: 69), indicating a shift from ritual opposition to performative unity, a transformation of the rite into a staged communal spectacle. The symbolic role of costume, once tied to chthonic forces, now leans increasingly toward comic effect. The inversion embedded in parody, props, and garments is foregrounded as part of carnival entertainment rather than ritual magic.

One structuring principle of ritual *anti-behaviour* was the presence of a symbolic centre, especially the *vasilichar fire*. Songs performed by children while waking the

adults on St. Basil's Day included coarse and even profane expressions. Around the communal fire, men chanted erotic ritual texts, brief, rhymed, and rich in obscene vocabulary, that served as "explicit glorifications of the genitals and sexual union". This *carnival atmosphere* remained vibrant in many parts of Macedonia into the 1970s. According to elderly interlocutors, such songs were performed not only "in the time of the Turks", but also during the Yugoslav period, when even the *gendarmes* would join the festive fire (Ristovski 1975: 220–225).

This dimension of *anti-behaviour,* deeply rooted in the pragmatics of the rite, embodied the semantics of *суров-*, an imperative linked to strength, vitality, and fertility. According to Tolstoy, "the primary function of the ritual was to call forth fertility" (1995: 118). Comparable manifestations of ritual reversal can be found in other Christmas and New Year traditions in which male groups take on the role of a symbolic army (Anastasova 2004: 25).

In this light, *anti-behaviour* – as the reversal of normative conduct – should be understood not as deviance, but as a magical practice directed toward *protective functions* and the modelling of an idealised state of being (Levkievskaia 2004: 680). As with other traditional rituals, these actions aimed to guarantee fertility, regulate seasonal transitions, and reaffirm the symbolic boundaries of the local world within the annual calendar cycle.

The fertility motif also informs interpretations of the rite as a visualised myth in which masked male groups of unmarried youth act as metaphors of initiation narratives, retold through parody (Boiadzhieva-Peeva 2013: 227). Scholars drawing on both Slavic and wider Balkan traditions, particularly the motif of ritual play with the dead, situate these processions within the broader framework of ancient solstice and equinox cults. The rite marks the beginning of a new temporal cycle and confers upon it social, cultural, and spiritual meaning. Participation in such magical practices reaffirms a person's role in co-creating this cyclical renewal of time, granting it a humanised and communal dimension (Malinov 2006: 217).

Divination as a Form of Symbolic Communication

According to Bakhtin, "all forms of divination, fortune-telling, and wishing" are "inextricably linked" to the festive atmosphere of folk celebration (1990: 255). On *Vasilitsa* (St. Basil's Day), acts of divination for well-being, health, and a prosperous year traditionally accompany the holiday. These actions, which serve as symbolic forecasts of time and fate, are deeply rooted in the seasonal ritual complex of the New Year and Christmas cycle. Even today, they remain among the most enduring elements of contemporary custom.

In the village of Vevchani, for instance, one can observe a practice where a small coin is baked into freshly made puff pastry for the holiday dinner. It is be-

lieved that the person who finds the coin will enjoy good fortune and prosperity throughout the year. A similar tradition is preserved in southwestern Bulgaria, where a special festive supper is prepared for the New Year or St. Basil's Day, including pastries containing tokens of *happiness* (*късмети*) and a roast suckling pig (Anastasova 2004: 25).

Records from Struga and Ohrid collected by 19th- and early 20th-century authors such as Eftim Sprostranov and Kuzman Shapkarev describe the practice of placing a coin in *топљеница*, *топеница*, *топејница* (pieces of bread soaked in hot lard), a type of Macedonian New Year's pastry. It was believed that whoever found the coin would be lucky in the coming year. The coin, believed to *attract wealth*, might be kept in one's wallet or tied with a red thread around the neck of the first-born lamb (Malinov 2006: 218).

In the Ohrid and Struga regions, divination also involved placing grains of wheat into hot ashes or on heated shards of pottery, observing how many times the grain would jump, considered an auspicious sign indicating success. These acts of prognostication extended to both family members and agricultural matters, including livestock and crops. Another practice involved placing a frying pan between two hot tiles and interpreting the nature of the ashes: white ashes signified a positive outcome, while darkened cinders were viewed as an ominous sign, foretelling illness or misfortune. It was likewise customary for each person to wear at least one new item of clothing for Vasilitsa, a practice believed to ensure prosperity and good fortune throughout the year (Kitevski 2001: 52–53; Malinov 2006: 218).

As a ritual act aimed at establishing contact with the otherworld in order to obtain knowledge of the future (Vinogradova 1995: 482), divination symbolically activates a series of binary oppositions, for example *up–down*, *white–black*, *new–old*, and others. In doing so, it reflects a broader Slavic worldview grounded in traditional antinomies. Within this cosmological framework, divination constitutes a structured form of symbolic communication that affirms cultural notions of order, time, and existential balance.

From Ceremonial Syncretism to the Modern Theatrical Carnival Holiday: Macedonian Vasilitsa

Characteristic features of the carnival include a system of travesties (disguise, mystification) and inversions (hierarchical or role reversal; subversion of normative behaviour and daily life), along with the violation of proportions, ambivalent laughter through mockery or playful aggression, reduction of elevated imagery, alogism, and the absence of absolute negation. These traits collectively frame the carnival as a time of sanctioned disorder and symbolic reversal.

Within the South Slavic cultural space, the general equivalent of carnival is often the Serbian term *Покладе* (Shrovetide), despite the existence in the Orthodox liturgical calendar of four designated time periods associated with carnival-like celebrations. These are perceived as ritual expressions of liminality, enacted on the threshold of major Christian feasts (Marjanović 2011: 11). The word derives from the Proto-Slavic root *klad-* ('to place', "'to lay down'), which is connected with notions of laying something aside or giving something up. This semantic association underlies the ritual and symbolic meaning of the term in many Slavic traditions, where it often marks the last day before Lent, a time of abstaining from certain foods or pleasures. Although the form *Poklade* is most commonly used in Serbian, closely related variants occur in other South and West Slavic languages, such as Croatian (*Poklade*), Bulgarian (*Поклади*), and Slovak (*Fašiangy*, though older dialects sometimes preserve similar roots), reflecting a broader Slavic heritage. As noted by Max Fasmer, the term is rooted in Proto-Slavic *pokladъ*, related to the verb *pokladati* ('to put', 'to offer'), with possible sacral connotations in the ritual context (Fasmer 1964: 367). The ritual semantics is evident in Polish *pokłady* meaning 'funeral' (Brückner 1957: 426–427), as well as in the Russian dialectal *pokladishche* meaning 'cemetery' (Dal 1955 [1882], vol. 3: 241).

Theatre scholar Petrovska-Kuzmanova, analysing the *Vasilichar* carnival in the village of Vevchani as a form of cultural performance or *folk drama*, underscores the centrality of *play* as generating the action, assigning roles, and providing a "theatrical invariant" of the rite. This "play" structure, she argues, lays the groundwork for the transformation of magical practice into ritual action and, eventually, into theatricalised folk drama. Through this evolution, the magical and symbolic functions of the rite gradually diminish, while domestic, humorous, and entertainment elements become dominant. This process has been described as a form of *customary travesty* (Petrovska-Kuzmanova 2006: 68; Anguélova-Georguéva 1975: 361).

Observation of the Vevchani celebration today reveals its bifurcated structure: one segment preserves elements of the traditional rite for the local population (for example, visiting households and wells, greeting individuals named Vasyl on the evening of January 13), while the other segment, the carnival procession, has become a stylised performance for both locals and visitors. This transformation marks a shift from ritual engagement to performative detachment, turning the event into a folkloric spectacle.

Traditionally, *Vasilichar* games were performed in the village centre, alleyways, and homes, with no shortage of spectators. Viewers often formed a semicircle or full circle around the performers; when staged in the village centre, the drama could also be watched from surrounding balconies. The physical setting of the action is a crucial structural feature of the carnival. In earlier forms, the rite was enacted within a common space that reinforced a sense of communal unity, while

the domestic space (the home) retained collective significance. In its contemporary form, however, the event has predominantly been relocated to public streets and open areas where the energy of the assembled masses flows toward the centre of communal space, symbolically opposing the interior stillness of the household.

Today, the rite is increasingly shaped by performative logic and commercial appeal. Audience engagement is more pronounced, and interaction between performers and viewers lends the festival its rhythm and dramaturgy. The event unfolds in stages: anticipation, crescendo, climax, and resolution, culminating in the symbolic burning of old masks in the village centre, followed by the informal exchange of impressions and discussions among participants.

The Vevchani carnival, as an open, public festivity, reflects broader processes of cultural globalisation. It draws inspiration from well-known European carnivals and often incorporates their visual elements. Parodic representations of current political and economic events both local and international have become central to its content. One of the key masquerade figures is the Macedonian *Глупавиот Август* ('Silly August'), a carnivalesque clown who embodies absurdity and irreverence. Satirical impersonations of politicians, clergy (*pop*, *hodja*), fortune tellers, 'Gypsies' and 'Turks' are common, with performers stopping passers-by to offer mock predictions (Petrovska-Kuzmanova 2006: 77).



Fig. 3. Vevchani, North Macedonia.
Photo: O. Mikitenko, 13 January 2019.

These performances include group sketches, scripted dialogues, and the continual introduction of new characters, while others, such as the 'devil', 'widow' or 'horsemen', gradually fade from memory. Costumed depictions of political figures, government officials, transvestites, aliens, and other symbols of otherness and exoticism (often inspired by science fiction and fantasy genres) reflect the influence of Western

models. Costumes painted directly on the body and face are now common. All these elements contribute to the improvisational expansion of the carnival text, especially its burlesque and parodic dimensions (Boiadzhieva-Peeva 2013: 229; Zdravev 1975: 371).

Vevchani Carnival: Commerce as Part of Polyfunctionality

In most European countries, carnival structures have gradually undergone commercialisation and are increasingly subordinated to the vast contemporary consumer industry. This trend is reflected in numerous media and digital platforms, including the Federation of European Carnival Cities (FECC), which asserts that carnival is not only a cultural phenomenon, but also a "global industry" (Marjanović 2011: 12).

Unlike many countries where the revival of carnival culture began only in the late twentieth century, the Vevchani Carnival "never faded or ceased", and today its model inspires other regional celebrations in Macedonia such as the pilgrimage-related carnival in Strumica and Christmas events in Skopje (Kytevsky 2009: 91). With the growth of cultural tourism in Macedonia, various cultural and artistic festivals have gained significance, especially in Ohrid, where the renowned Balkan Festival of Folk Songs and Dances has been held annually since 1962.

Media narratives emphasize the uninterrupted 1400-year tradition of the Vevchani Carnival, its historical and cultural significance, and its uniqueness among Balkan festivals due to its ancient ritual roots and mysterious masks. The carnival attracts over 50,000 spectators annually, both domestic and international. Every home and street transforms into a performance space, a "theatre without borders" where costumed participants enact traditional ritual games and impromptu dramatic scenes. Among modern masks, three archetypal characters remain central: the '*bride*', the '*groom*', and the '*silly*' (fool), accompanied by musicians. Other masks, represented by smaller or larger carnival groups, engage in exaggerated, parodic performance using gestures, costume, and satire to critique politicians, mock social ills, or highlight social anomalies.

An example of grotesque political allegory is the satirical text of the statute of the metaphorical *Zoo Parliament*, published in Vevchani Carnival leaflets. The document proclaims the *Zoo Parliament* as "our pride and main attraction for three decades", with its unique composition dominated by lions, eagles, and wolves, supplemented by bears, hyenas, crows, etc. It claims to function on the principle of "parliamentary democracy": "I am for you, you are for me, he is for him, we are for us, you are for you, they are for them; when two quarrel, the minority profits, the majority suffers; consensus among groups exists only in the division of prey", and so on.



Fig. 4. Vevchani, North Macedonia. Photo: O. Mikitenko, 13 January 2019.

As a phenomenon of global culture, the modern carnival has transcended sacred time and merged various traditions into a syncretic whole. Today, in many countries, carnivals are held year-round as vehicles of cultural policy, tourism promotion, and popular entertainment. Marked by the hallmarks of mass culture, carnivals have become integral to cultural practices around the world. They enhance a region's tourist appeal, become its cultural brand or symbol, enjoy broad media coverage, and receive support from local authorities and private sponsors, thereby forming a complex infrastructure of tourist consumption.

Simultaneously, the contemporary festival is embedded in the logic of endless consumption. Holiday culture in the modern sense exists in a different context than traditional festivity (Haevska 2019: 100). "Celebrate this day joyfully, with red Vevchani wine and homemade [pork] sausage. Cheers!", urge the leaflets distributed before the Vevchani Carnival. Given that the experience of time is closely linked to food as a key communicative medium in culture, the *folk feast* has become a necessary segment of the festival and is actively incorporated into contemporary tourist packages. During the carnival, local restaurants offer themed menus with traditional dishes (meat, yeast-based pastries, desserts, etc.) that enhance the carnival's economic potential.

As an important marker of cultural identity, the *gastronomic code* is listed among the five carnival commandments or *Vasilichar* precepts: eat meat and sausages, drink homemade wine, rejoice, play, and become a *Vasilichar*. Performing these actions symbolically grants the right to receive a passport from the *Republic of Vevchani*. These bilingual (Macedonian–English) parody documents, which claim to be "valid in all countries", are cherished souvenirs for all participants.

Advertising actively encourages the consumption of local goods. Carnival behaviour not only allows, but expects, excessive indulgence, especially in food and drink. The commercial element is thus successfully integrated into the celebration and helps reinforce a collective I–we identity. As a fundamental component of self-awareness, the festival plays a central role in shaping communal identity. The community's pride in its intangible cultural heritage increasingly transforms the tradition into a resource for tourism and socio-economic development.

This prompts the question: can the so-called *marketing of tradition*, with its emphasis on cultural tourism, foster the development of tradition itself, even as the latter evolves, losing some of its original features and local specificity? Veselka Toncheva suggests that, despite inevitable commercialisation and the transformations triggered by tourism, a conscious attitude toward tradition and one's own local values can, paradoxically, contribute to a renewed sense of identity (Toncheva 2013: 155).

As Radost Ivanova points out, "in the classical sense of the word, folklore is an intricate cultural system, closely tied to the calendar of the patriarchal man and to his family and settlement life in the past. This system contains its own internal meaning, its own symbols, and encodes popular conceptions and understandings of life." In the present, "the stage enables the transformation and development of folklore as a performance art and turns it into a specific form of *folklorism*" (Ivanova 2001: 288–289).

While fulfilling somewhat different functions than in their traditional ritual contexts, today folklore and carnival have acquired special significance in terms of socio-cultural communication and pragmatic use. They increasingly serve as mechanisms of social dynamism. Traditional forms that once fulfilled spiritual and communal needs are now reinterpreted within the frameworks of mass culture and transformed tradition. By accepting this process as natural, we can define the Vevchani Carnival – paraphrasing Ilia Velev – as an example of the "modernization of folk tradition and the traditionalization of folk modernity", affirming that "man can neither escape time nor be lost in the past" (Velev 2009: 87).

Conclusions

The study of the Macedonian *Vasilitsa* as both a ritual and a modern carnival event reveals the complexity and resilience of the traditional cultural practices that are undergoing transformation in contemporary contexts. Rooted in ancient winter solstice celebrations and bearing strong connections to Slavic and Balkan ritual systems, the rite embodies a rich symbolic structure, in which masking, parody, divination, and symbolic violence converge in a coherent ritual grammar.

The anti-behaviour encoded in the performances through inversion, vulgarity, and laughter emerges not as chaos, but as a structured and pragmatic form of symbolic communication aimed at fertility, regeneration, and the cyclical renewal of time. While the traditional function of the rite was embedded in the ritual calendar and oriented toward magical efficacy, its contemporary manifestations – particularly in the village of Vevchani – demonstrate a shift toward theatricality, tourism, and mass cultural performance. Despite this transition, core structural features remain identifiable: the centrality of the masked male group, the binary oppositions organising ritual actions (life–death, order–chaos, sacred–profane), and the embodiment of fertility through both verbal and non-verbal codes.

The transformation of *Vasilitsa* from a magical ritual act into a folkloric spectacle, and ultimately into a commodified, tourist-oriented event, illustrates broader patterns of folklorism and cultural adaptation. The coexistence of traditional and modern elements such as ritual texts and carnival improvisations, fertility invocations and political satire, indicates the polyfunctionality of the contemporary carnival. This hybrid form preserves elements of symbolic heritage while simultaneously acquiring new meanings in a consumer and media-driven environment.

Commercialisation, though often viewed critically, also enables the tradition's visibility and viability. The incorporation of local gastronomic practices, parody of contemporary political life, and the issuing of symbolic passports affirm the carnival's function as both cultural memory and social commentary. Rather than signalling the death of tradition, such transformations suggest a dynamic process of cultural negotiation and identity-making. Ultimately, the Vevchani Carnival exemplifies how traditional ritual practices can endure and evolve under changing social, political, and economic conditions. It stands as a compelling case of how folk culture, when consciously maintained and creatively reimagined, continues to serve as a meaningful mode of collective expression, negotiation of identity, and cultural continuity in the modern world.

Notes

[1] Founded in the 1980s, originally as an association between the cities of Patras (Greece) and Amsterdam (Netherlands), with its centre in Amsterdam. Among the first member countries were Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece, Luxembourg, Great Britain and Malta. In 2003, a convention was signed between the members of the association in Portugal, and in 2004, at a meeting of member countries in Pernik, Bulgaria, during the Biennial Game of Masks, the association changed its name to the Federation of European Carnival Cities (FECC). Among the main tasks of the federation is the exchange of experience and ideas regarding the carnival, as well as the preservation of intangible cultural heritage (Marjanović 2011: 11).

References

Anastasova, Ekaterina 2004. Tradicionni obredi i praznici (Traditional rituals and holidays). In Santova, Mila H., Dimitrina N. Kaufman, Albena L. Georgieva-Angelova, etc. *Zhivi choveshki skrovishha – Blgarija*. Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Marin Drinov", pp. 17–32.

Anguélova-Georguéva, Rossitsa 1975. La culture théâtrale folklorique chez les Slaves du Sud à travers leurs coutumes et leurs jeux d'hiver en travestis et avec masques. *Makedonski folklor*, 15–16, pp. 353–362.

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1990. *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaja kul'tura srednevekov'ja i Renessansa (The works of François Rabelais and folk culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance). Moskow: Hudozhestvennaja literatura*.

Boiadzhieva-Peeva, Emilia 2013. Nauchna konferencija s mezhdunarodno uchastie " Maskaradnite igri – vizualen razkaz" (Scientific conference with international participation "Masquerade Games – Visual Narrative"). *Blgarski folklor*, 5, pp. 227–231.

Brückner, Aleksander 1957. Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna.

Dal, Vladimir 1955 [1881,1882]. *Tolkovyj slovar' zhivogo velikorusskogo*. Vol. 2–3. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo inostrannyh i nacional'nyh slovarej.

Fasmer, Max 1964. *Etimologicheskii slovar' russkogo yazyka*. Vol. 3. Ed. Trubachev, O. N. Moscow: Progress.

Gusev, Viktor 1993. Karnaval (Carnival). In *Vostochno-slavjanskij fol'klor. Slovar' nauchnoj i narodnoj terminologii*. Ed. Kabashnikov, K. P. Minsk: Navuka i tjehnika, pp. 108–109.

Havryliuk, Eleonora 1999. Vstupne slovo (Introductory remarks). *Narodoznavchi Zoshiti*, 2, pp. 6–11.

Haevska, Tetiana I. 2019. Suchasni svjata – mehanizmi ta umovi ukorinennja "novih-starih" svjat: komercializacija svjata (Modern holidays – mechanisms and conditions for the establishment of 'new-old' holidays: commercialisation of holidays). *Kulturologichna dumka*, 15, pp. 97–103.

Ivanova, Radost 2001. Folklore in the Post-Socialist Balkans: Forms of Preservation and Development. *Makedonski folklor*, 58–59, pp. 287–292.

Kitevski, Marko 2001. *Makedonski praznici (Macedonian holidays)*. Skopje: Menora.

Kitevski, Marko 2002. *Studii za makedonskiot folklor* (Studies of Macedonian Folklore). Skopje: Institut za makedonska literature.

Kitevski, Marko 2009. Dramatichni elementi u fol'klori – tradicija ta aktual'nist' (Dramatic elements in folklore – tradition and relevance). *Narodna tvorchist' ta etnologija*, 3, pp. 88–92.

Konstantinov, Dushan Hr. 1975. Kon prouchuvaneto na maskite vo zimskite obichai vo Makedonija (On the Study of Masks in Winter Customs in Macedonia). *Makedonski folklor*, 15–16, pp. 375–378.

Levkievskaia, Elena E. 2004. Perevorachivanie predmetov (Transformation of the objects). In *Slavjanskie drevnosti. Jetnolingvisticheskij slovar'*, Vol. 4. Ed. Tolstoj, N. I. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenija, pp. 679–681.

Linin, Aleksandar 1975. *Odnosot pomegju melodijata i tekstot na makedonskite zimski obredni narodni pesni* (The relationship between the melody and the lyrics of Macedonian winter ritual folk songs). *Makedonski folklor*, 15–16, pp. 323–333.

Lozica, Ivan 1997. *Hrvatski karnevali*. Zagreb.

Malenko, Dimche 1975. Nekoi beleshki za zimskite obichai i obichajni pesni od Ohrid [Some notes on the winter customs and folk songs of Ohrid]. *Makedonski folklor*, 15–16, pp. 383–385.

Malinov, Zorancho 2006. Novogodishniot obreden kompleks vo Ohridsko-Strushkiot region (The New Year Ritual Complex in the Ohrid-Struga Region). In Velichkovski, Bone (ed.). *Folklorot vo Ohridsko-Strushkiot region* (Folklore in the Ohrid-Struga Region). Institut za folklor "Marko Cepenkov", Posebni izdanija 63, pp. 205–224.

Marjanović, Vesna (ed.) 2011. *Milosh Matich: Na kraju i na pochetku Karneval (Milosh Matich: Carnival at the End and the Beginning). Beograd: Etnografski muzej u Beogradu.*

Mirchevska, Mirjana P. 2008. Rituals with Masks in the Republic of Macedonia with a Special Focus on the 'Twelve Days'. In *The Ritual Year and History*. *The Ritual Year*, Vol. 3. Strážnice: National Institute of Folk Culture, pp. 160–166.

Mishkova, Iglika 2017. Maskaradet v Dramsko (The Masquerade in Drama). *Balgarski folklor*, 3, pp. 300–315.

Mladenoski, Simo 1975. Dzhamalarstvoto vo Kozjachijata (Kumanovsko) (Dzhamalarstvo in Kozjačija (Kumanovo Region)). *Makedonski folklor*, 15–16, pp. 379–381.

Nekrylova, A. F. 1993. Karnaval'nost' r., Karnaval'nasc' b., Karnaval'nist' (Carnivalesque), In Kabashnikov K. P. (ed.). *Vostochno-slavyanskii fol'klor. Slovar' nauchnoi i narodnoi terminologii*. Minsk: Navuka i tekhnika, p. 110.

Nikolovski, Risto 1992. Periodichni i prigodni rituali vo selo Svinishta (Okhridsko) (Periodic and Occasional Rituals in the Village of Svinishta (Ohrid Region)). *Makedonski folklor*, 50, pp. 191–214.

Petrovska-Kuzmanova, Katerina 2006. Narodnata drama vo Okhridsko-Strushkiot region (Folk Drama in the Ohrid-Struga Region). In Velichkovski, Bone (ed.). *Folklorot vo Okhridsko-Strushkiot region*. Institut za folklore "Marko Cepenkov", Posebni izdanija 63, pp. 67–84.

Plotnikova, Anna A. 2004. *Etnolingvisticheskaia geografiia Iuzhnoi Slavii (*Ethnolinguistic Geography of South Slavia*)*. Moskow: Indrik.

Popovski, Ariton 1975. Vodicharskite obichai i pesni vo s. Bitushe (Reka) (Vodicharski Customs and Songs in the Village of Bitushe (Reka)). *Makedonski folklor*, 15–16, pp. 24–3252.

Radenković, Ljubinko 2019. O simbolici obrednog ponašanja u narodnoj kulturi Srba (On the Symbolism of Ritual Practices in the Folk Culture of the Serbs). *Glas Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti*, CDXXIX, Odeljenje jezika i književnosti, 31, pp. 95–132.

Ristovski, Blazhe 1975). Mashkite erotskite narodni pesni okolu koledniot ogin vo nekoi mesta vo Makedoniia (Male Erotic Folk Songs around the Christmas Fire in Some Areas of Macedonia). *Makedonski folklor*, 15–16, pp. 219–228.

Skyba, Mykola 2004. Tsinnisnyi zmist i funktsii khramovykh sviat iak chynnyk transformatsiy u strukturi lokalnoi identychnosti ukrayinskykh selian XX – pochatok XXI st. (The value-based content and functions of church feasts as a factor in transfor-

mations of the structure of local identity among Ukrainian rural communities in the 20th–early 21st centuries). *Narodoznavchi Zoshyty*, 1–2, pp. 30–36.

Skok, Petar 1972. *Etimologijski rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika.* Mirko Deanović, Ljudevit Jonke (eds.). Knjiga druga. Zagreb: JAZU.

Spirovska, Leposava 1975. Nekoi dramski elementi vo obichaiot Vasilitsa vo selo Lisiche (Titovveleshko) (Some dramatic elements in the Vasilitsa custom in the village of Lisiche (Titov Veles)). *Makedonski folklor*, 15–16, pp. 363–367.

Tolstoy, Nikita I. 1981. Verbal'nyi tekst kak kliuch k semantike obriada (The verbal text as a key to the semantics of the ritual). *Struktura teksta*, 81. Moscow, pp. 46–47.

Tolstoy, Nikita I. 1995. *Iazyk i narodnaia kultura. Ocherki po slavianskoi mifologii i etnolingvistike (*Language and Folk Culture: Essays on Slavic Mythology and Ethnolinguistics*)*. 2nd ed. Moscow: Indrik.

Tolstoy, Nikita I. 2003. *Ocherki slavianskogo iazychestva* (Essays on Slavic Paganism). Moscow: Indrik.

Toncheva, Veselka 2013. Lokalna identichnost – upotrebi na termina (Local Identity: Uses of the Term). *Balgarski folklor*, 5, pp.153–168.

Velev, Ilia 2009. Folklor i folklorystyka – tradytsiia chy suchasnist (Folklore and Folkloristics: Tradition or Modernity). *Narodna tvorchist ta etnologiia*, 3, pp. 85–87.

Vinogradova, Ludmila N. 1995. Gadanie (Divination). In: Tolstoy, Nikita I. (ed.). *Slavjanskie drevnosti. Jetnolingvisticheskij slovar'*, Vol. 1. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenija, pp. 483–486.

Vinogradova, Ludmila N. 2004. Maska (Mask). In: Tolstoy, Nikita I. (ed.). *Slavjanskie drevnosti. Jetnolingvisticheskij slovar'*, Vol. 3. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenija, pp. 191–194.

Zdravev, Gorgi 1975. Igrata "Dzhamala" vo Agino selo (Kumanovsko) (The game "Dzhamala" in the village of Agino Selo (Kumanovo region)). *Makedonski folklor*, 15–16, pp. 369–373.

Bibliographical Note

Professor Oksana Mykytenko is a Doctor of philological sciences and leading scientific worker in the Department of Ukrainian and foreign folklore studies, Rylsky Institute of Art Studies, Folklore and Ethnology, Ukrainian National Academy of Sciences (Kyiv). She Graduated from the Taras Shevchenko National University (1978) and completed her PhD studies at the Institute for Balkan Studies in Moscow (1986). Mykytenko works in the sphere of Slav folklore studies and ethnology, ethnic and cultural history, and Slavistics. She is a member of the editorial boards of multiple scientific publications in Ukraine and abroad and is the author of more than 300 publications in scientific editions in Ukraine and other countries, including two monographs (1992, 2012).