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**GURBAN IN THE VILLAGE OF GREBENAC:
BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS' MEMORY
AND RESEARCHERS' CONSTRUCTION**

The idea of this article is to show through analysis of the ritual sacrificial killing of a lamb in the village of Grebenac in southern Banat in the province of Vojvodina, Serbia, the ways and means by which information was obtained on a small ethnic group, provisionally called the Bayash. The mother tongue of this group is Romanian, and they are known to their surroundings (and occasionally the group itself) as 'Gypsies'. The killing of a sacrificial lamb for the good of someone's health is not a characteristic of all Bayash communities in Serbia and the neighbouring areas in which they live today, such as Croatian Baranja and northern Bosnia. The communities still practising this ritual do so in different ways: in the valley of the Morava River, the date and manner of carrying out the gurban was until recently decided by specially gifted women who would fall into a trance and "speak with the fairies", and today this date is usually revealed in a dream to the sick person. In the Bayash community in the village of Grebenac the date of the gurban ritual has been fixed for July 12.

Researching Bayash communities

The almost random logic of the order in which anthropological and linguistic field research of the Bayash took place did not set out to cover all details of the culture; these were arrived at gradually by observing elements, both shared and different, in neighbouring traditions of which there are many in Serbia, especially Vojvodina. In Banat, for instance, the Bayash live in the same villages as the Romanians and Serbian Roma, and in Bačka with Croatian and Hungarian populations. It has been shown that the other local communities often know very little about the 'neighbour-

ing' Bayash culture, due to the language barrier or a certain stigma which regularly accompanies this small ethnic group. Culturological differences, perceived by the 'neighbouring' (usually majority) community, mainly relate to publicly practised rituals such as the ritual trance and the *gurban* (Ilić 2005: 133–140).

This study of the *gurban* custom was made owing to a somewhat unforeseen set of circumstances, when the author unexpectedly encountered the Bayash culture in northeast Serbia for the first time in May 2001. This was during field work in the Vlach village of Podvrška near Kladovo, when some members of the Bayash were interviewed for their knowledge of the local music folklore. Apart from the information requested on the joint ritual procession around the village on the day of St Lazarus (Rom. *Lazara*), we heard a fascinating story on the celebration of St George's Day in the local Bayash community, whose basic features were an insistence on ritual cleanliness, a communal meal where leaves were laid on the ground and a ban on using utensils.¹ The search for any elements of the *gurban* ritual still living in other Bayash villages yielded a considerably more complex picture: principally departure from the calendar determination of St George's Day, and how the appropriate sacral time is decided. Having begun with initial information on the collective St George's Day holiday, the Bayash *gurban* outside the village of Podvrška presented itself in an entirely new light, that of a holiday of occasion for the health of an individual.

The question on the ritual of the sacrificial killing of a lamb (but not on the existence of the term *gurban*) was then regularly posed in all studies of the Bayash settlements south of the Danube.² The ritual is still preserved today in a group of settlements near the River Morava in Serbia proper: Stržilo, Trešnjevica and Suvaja, as well as the village of Osaonica near Trstenik. East of the Morava it is practiced by Bayash communities near the town of Despotovac, in the villages of Lukovo, Grljan, Brodica and Urovia. The *gurban* custom was also mentioned in the course of conversation with Bayash from Bulgaria who during the summer of 2006 were working as seasonal workers in the village of Vidrovac near Negotin in eastern Serbia. This well-attested ritual in northeastern Serbia and its absence in the northwest and west is another argument in favour of the hy-

¹ The transcript of this first interview on St George's Day customs and the ritual killing of a lamb, originally in the local Romanian vernacular, was published in its Serbian translation in Sikimić 2002.

² A preliminary census of the Bayash settlements in Serbia and a list of the settlements researched up to 2005, see Sikimić 2005. The number of settlements studied had considerably increased by the end of 2007 and includes some Bayash settlements in Croatia and northern Bosnia.

pothesis of a road running from east to west south of the Danube, of the movement of the Bayash to Serbia and onward across the Drina river into northern Bosnia. The Bayash in the village of Brodica near Kučevo, north-eastern Serbia (field research carried out in the spring of 2005) have a long tradition of seasonal movement to southern Banat, with more significant collective relocations of entire families during the 1950s and 1960s. However, field research of the Bayash settlements in southern and central Banat have shown that even with strong waves of migration from the area south of the Danube, ties still exist with fellow countrymen on the other side of the border in Romania.

Linguistic field research has put an end to a discontinuity in ethnographic narration on the Bayash in the Balkans. Besides the classic early 20th century studies of the ‘Gypsies’ by ethnologist Tihomir Djordjević, another exceptionally important ethnographic contributor to the study of gurban was Persida Tomić whose studies of Bayash settlements near Jagodina immediately after World War II (Tomić 1950), focused on ritual trance, the only way of deciding the date of the gurban in these communities at that time.³ A similar discontinuity of scientific interest in this ethnic group is a feature of the humanities in Romania, which might, if only for linguistic reasons, be considered most apposite for this subject (for more detail see Hedešan 2005).

Representing Bayash culture

Anthropological linguistics as we see it, is at all events postmodern. Postmodernism problematises conventional anthropological representations of *cultured others* by placing the epistemological framework in the structures of power — including colonial heritage — and introducing a critical method in an inter-disciplinary spirit.

Through radical critical procedure, postmodern ethnography accentuates writing, narrative and dialogue as opposed to the mere scientific record-

³ The ritual trance phenomenon among the Vlachs of northeastern Serbia has been the subject of many ethnographic and medical studies. For a complete survey of the *rusalje* and *kalušar* rituals, which include trance elements, and their spread in northeastern Serbia, see Antonijević 1990. In more recent team-filed studies by the Institute for Balkan Studies, even greater detailed detail has been obtained on falling into trances on the eve of major feast days among the Vlachs of the Mlava river regions and in the Mt. Kučaj area. Older ethnographic material shows that even among the Serbs in central Serbia (near the town of Vlasotince), when someone falls and hurts himself very badly, a small loaf is brought for *the samovile* and prayers are addressed to them for healing (Djordjević 1985: 126); also that there used to be local soothsayers who fell into a trance on various occasions, were not baptised in church “because they were not allowed to by the sisters, the samovile”, or who sung songs to their “blood sister, samovila” (Djordjević 1985: 148–149).

ing of facts. However, postmodern ethnography does not reexamine the ability of the outsider to access the cultural space. Instead, ethnographic knowledge is based on a philosophical view of the limited nature of narrative knowledge and is re-articulated by an inclusive procedure which includes 'the native voice' in an authentic expression of diversity. This is a redemptive procedure which fails to test the limits of knowledge and reproduces the conventional ethnographic requirement that the other should speak out. From a de-constructivist reading, Mutman proposes that the ethnographic text should open itself to the limit, recording the resulting radical loss as the ethical opening of the other and questioning on the part of the other; this is the limit where the name 'Man' is written down as the name of the 'native informant' (Mutman 2006: 153). In this sense see also recent re-examinations of the South Slav ethnographic discourse (Plas 2007).⁴

This contribution on the gurban among the Bayash in Grebenac attempts to simultaneously follow both perspectives — that of researcher and participant — by insisting on the authentic reports of traditional ethnography on the one hand and on the most detailed transcript of field interviews on the other.

Restudying the gurban in Grebenac

The problem of the reliability of ethnographic research carried out just as anthropology was formalising theory and methodology and becoming a science with its own institutions recognised by society, was raised in the mid-twentieth century. Incidentally, the problem was recognised indirectly during attempts to monitor cultural change by using previous studies of the same cultures. The initial phase of systematic and planned restudy of the anthropological classics led to checking and refuting the findings of predecessors and a new trend in research: restudy. Clearly, small differences can be found in every example of ongoing research into a particular issue, region or community. The auto-corrective nature of restudy, one of the general criteria of the 'science' of anthropological practice, becomes apparent only where there is academic, professional and media tension, a special interest in having the facts produced again. Of course, subsequent study of the same issue must conform to academic standards (for more detail see Milenković 2003:137–149).⁵

⁴ For latent and overt ideologies, categories and 'performances' of identity in the ethnographic text-as-interdiscursive-construction, see Plas 2007.

⁵ On the problematisation of restudy in anthropology see Kemper 2002, Roth/Bowen 2001.

The use of the anthropological term *restudy* (in Anglo-Saxon terminology the terms in use are *replication*, *re-inquiry*, *restudy*) stands for current thinking in applied methodology in anthropological linguistics in Serbia. Special attention is dedicated to the secondary analysis of transcripts of field material. From the methodological aspect, secondary analysis was problematised only in recent material, recorded and transcribed according to the same rules (Ćirković 2005, 2006, 2007).

By repeating the field research of some earlier point already explored by other researchers, the very concept of methodology in linguistic field work is reexamined and the application of the material obtained is expanded to include other disciplines.

The southern Banat Romanian village of Grebenac has frequently been the subject of serious field research on account of its particular folklore heritage, primarily carnival customs (Maluckov 1985; Pavković/Namović 1996) which definitively mark the local Romanian identity. The Bayash community is to this day located on the margins of Grebenac village, the street is not paved, the houses are for the most part humble. According to the 2002 census, Grebenac has a population of 1,017, of which 51 are Roma. The majority population is Romanian (837).

In an attempt at re-describing ethnographic knowledge on the gurban in Grebenac village, field material will be used gathered in November 1967 by ethnologist Mirjana Maluckov, specialist in the Romanian national minority in Vojvodina (Maluckov 1979: 140–150). Today's population of this village is half what it was at the time of her research. In the heterogeneous Roma community in Grebenac, Maluckov distinguished 'Romanian Gypsies' (mother tongue Romanian), settled 'Serbs from Brodica' (mother tongue Romanian), the *Lajeci* (mother tongue Roma, but in Grebenac they also speak Romanian) and 'Serbian Gypsies'.

As Maluckov's field material on the Bayash in Grebenac village is unique in every respect, we give below her description of the gurban in full, translated from the Serbian original. This ethnographic description incorporates the only existing recording of 'prayers to the fairies' in Serbia. In this example of classic descriptive ethnology, the linguistic competence of the researcher was equally important in recording the sacral text and authentic ethnographic terms in the speech of the particular community (in this case the local Bayash dialect of the Romanian language).

Gurban is the feast of the protector of the individual. Gurban is held so that a certain saint will protect the person for whom he or she was chosen. It is connected only to this person and his descendants do not have to honour it

following the death of the person to whom the gurban belonged. Gurban can be one of three feasts: Pentecost (Rom. *Rusalili*), St Peter (Rom. *Sânt Petru*), Holy Mary (Rom. *Sânta Maria*).

One of these three holidays is chosen, but it does not have to be exclusive. Usually the gurban is determined or chosen for the child if it falls ill or if some other misfortune befalls it. Then the parents decide to choose a gurban — a holiday for the good fairies (Rom. *zânele bune*).

Today the gurban is no longer celebrated as before, but there are still a couple of families in the village that uphold it.

The way the gurban is chosen is that three round breads are baked on a Friday and a slip of paper placed into each one. On three different slips are written the names of three saints: St Peter, Holy Mary, and Pentecost. The round breads are placed on the table and the child for whom the gurban is being chosen is brought into the room. The round bread which the child approaches, or reaches out a hand to grasp, that round bread is taken, the note is read and the feast day of the saint whose name is written on it is taken for the gurban.

Then, with a certain man that knows how to carry out all the necessary rituals (known as a *popa*), the child goes to the field (*Poiana* near the settlement where the Gypsies in Grebenac were first settled, in *Vale*), takes a branch, a willow rod (Rom. *creangă de salcâ*) to which a white scarf is tied and a red ribbon — in Romanian this is all called *steagu* (flag). When the rising sun appears, the child and that man, the *popa*, they kneel, they both grasp the *steagu*, look towards the sun and pray:

Zânelor buni	Good fairies
Mă rog de voi	Please
Să vă întoarceți	Look upon
La copilul ăsta	This child (boy)
Și să îi dați	And give him
Mau și miciau.	Strength and agility
Și să îi dați	Put his hand
Mâna la loc	In its right place
Și picioru la loc.	And his foot in its right place.
Că el v-o dăru	And he will bear you gifts
În ziua de Sânt-Petru	On St Peter's Day
Cu un berbec fript	Of a roasted ram,
Și cu nouă cuptoare de pită	And nine ovens of bread,
Și cu nouă ordouri de vin,	And ten flasks of wine,
Și cu un ducian de cârpe	And a shop of scarves,
Și cu un stup de mere	And a beehive of honey,
Și cu un ducian de pantlicuri	And a shop of ribbons,

Șî cu o grăgină de flori	And a garden of flowers,
Că să fie înaintea voastră	To have before you
Pă tot anu cât o fi viu.	For all the years that he lives.
Mă rog dă voi	I pray to you
Să îi dați mâna	To give him his hand
Șî miciau.	And agility.

The popa, kneeling with the child in the grass, repeats this prayer three times. When St Peter's Day arrives, all that is promised in the prayer should be prepared. A young man comes to slaughter the lamb. This should be a pure young man (Rom. *fecior cinur*, boy). Before he slaughters the lamb, he places two apples on its horns, and ties a red ribbon around its neck. The lamb is taken to the same field — the boy for whom the gurban is held also goes — they turn towards the sun (the lamb is also held turned towards the sun), pray, and then they return home where they slaughter the lamb. The willow branch that they took the first time, the *steagu*, is placed beside the pit in which the innards are thrown along with everything else from the lamb that should be discarded: the blood, the horns. Before they used to slaughter the lamb at an open window, and under the window they also dug the pit for the offal — so that the sun might see what was taking place. The willow branch was then stuck beside the window. Nowadays they slaughter the lamb in the yard, in front of the door, since the rooms have floors. The branch is stuck outside by the door for all the neighbours to see that a gurban is being held.

Then he takes the lamb and puts it on the spit (Rom. *îl chiceșce la frigare*). The same roasting-spit is kept in the house for years. The liver, intestines and all that should not be roasted is put in a pot and cooked, and is then taken out and stuffed inside the lamb, and the liquid in which it was cooked is kept. The lamb's legs are also stuffed inside and the lamb sewn up. Then they take the lamb and go to the field in which they prayed. They dig a ditch there, make a fire from vine branches and all those invited sit around the fire and wait for the lamb to roast. Before, all the Gypsies came (and Romanians) and all those present had to partake of the meal. When the lamb is almost done, it is sprinkled with the liquid in which the innards were cooked. The lamb is roasted (the spit turned) by a youth of 12–13 years, who is unmarried (Rom. *care e iertat să frigă mielu*) or an old man of 60–70 years. He just turns the spit and others take care that the roast is well prepared. When it is done — at around 3–4 in the afternoon, they call out that it is ready. The boy for whom the gurban has been prepared goes to the front end of the spit, while the one who roasted it takes the back, and thus they carry the roast home. At home they place the lamb lengthwise on an already prepared table.

At home, the women prepare nine round breads — they are prepared by a nine-year-old girl. Nine round breads, nine litres of wine, nine flowers and pot with honey (Rom. *mere de stup*) are placed on the table. Salt is put on all four corners of the bare table, but no saltshaker. The lamb is placed lengthwise between.

Before, no one was allowed to be in the room apart from the one saying the prayer, the *popa*, but now all the guests stand at the table. When the *popa* begins the ritual, everyone stands up. All those present must have their heads covered and must not be bare-headed. The women wear white headscarves, and the children should wear white. On entering the house, the *popa* stands at the door and asks all the arrivals if they are clean (Rom. *Esi curat?*) i.e. if man and woman have been together. There cannot be any intercourse between man and woman, and if such were to come, evil might befall them (Rom. *Să nu îi iau mâna, picioarele... zânele bune*). If they are unclean, they turn back.

The *popa*, i.e. the one who prayed with the child, holds up the lamb and says:

Bună ziua oameni.	Good day, people.
Cum o fos' gazda căși și gazdărița	Look how the host and hostess
s-ar chinuit	Have gone to trouble
și ar muncit	And worked
tot anu de zile	During the whole year
pentru praznicili zânelor buni.	For the holiday of the good fairies.
Și s-o aratat,	And they have proven themselves
Înainte de zânelor bune	Before the good fairies,
Pe ziua de Sân Petru	On St Peter's Day
Cu un berbec fript,	With a roast ram,
Cu noua cuptoare de pită	With nine ovens of bread,
Cu noua ordouri de vin	With nine flasks of wine,
Și cu stup de miere	With a beehive of honey,
Și cu o grădină cu flori	With a garden of flowers,
Și cu un ducian de cârpe	With a shop of scarves,
Și cu unu de pantlici	And one of ribbons,
Să fie înainte zânelor bune,	To place before the good fairies
Și îi ajuce lu Dumitru	To help Dumitru
(or some other name).	(or some other name)...

All respond with: Amen!

This is repeated three times. Then the *popa* spreads honey with his hand on all the round breads and over the entire lamb. He then takes the lamb from the spit by extracting the spit.

With the person who is celebrating, he grasps the lamb around the middle and breaks it in two. The back half he gives to the host, taking the innards out and placing them on the table. He breaks off the head and puts it aside for the *popa*, and the rest he breaks into pieces and places in three piles. Three round breads are broken and everyone begins eating with their hands. After the meal, they drink wine (they also drink wine with honey), and then they go outside and dance.

If the person for whom the *gurban* is made dies, then that *gurban* is no longer held in the house. It sometimes happened that two *gurbans* would be chosen for the same person, if the child was sickly. Otherwise, the parents choose a new *gurban* for each child. The ritual with the child of choosing the name of the saint and going into the field to pray takes place only when the *gurban* is chosen. Later, the lamb is taken to the field to be roasted, but without the prior rituals.

If the host is poor and cannot afford to sacrifice a lamb, then the entire ritual can be held with only the head of lamb which is bought at the butcher's. The lamb that is slaughtered has to be white and for a boy it has to be a male lamb. If the child is not too sick, then in place of a lamb the fairies can be offered a rooster for a boy, and a hen for a girl.

The guests who come to the *gurban* tuck a flower behind their ear.

The ritual and especially the texts connected to the *gurban* are considered a secret and the superstitious believe that telling them to a stranger can bring evil to the one who revealed the secrets of the custom.

If the *gurban* is held on St Peter's Day, then the dancing that takes place at the dance held after the eating and drinking is for the memory of the deceased (Rom. *joc de pomana*) (Maluckov 1979: 147–150).

In 2004, I left for Grebenac bearing in mind the verbal information passed on by Mirjana Maluckov on the tragic fate of her informant in Grebenac, a Bayash man, S., who was killed following an interview on the subject of the *gurban*, the taboo nature of which is cited in the above detailed quotation. S. was killed by his own oxen. After this tragedy, most of the Bayash people who had come from northeastern Serbia moved away, mainly to western European countries. The tragic fate of the informant S. is known in the Bayash colony in Grebenac to this day, almost forty years later. I recorded the story of S. and his descendants as late as 2007 during a field study of the Roma in the village of Lokve in central Banat.

The transcripts of the more recent interviews which follow contain only the memory of former practice of the *kurban* and the description of its form today, although the researcher is asking about the Bayash who settled here from Brodica in northeastern Serbia. None of the dozen informants in Grebenac made the connection to the local tragedy that followed

the former ethnographic study, probably because of the length of time that had elapsed. On the other hand, neither did they confirm the research hypothesis that the gurban was brought to Grebenac by settlers from north-eastern Serbia.

Transcripts of interviews in the Bayash colony in Grebenac

1. L.N. (male, 1937), interviewed by B. Sikimić on 25.09, 2004.

(Când au fost aici dân Craina, dân Brodița, tu ai văzut cum fac ei gurbanu? [...])

LN: Ei s-a răstrâns mai mult. Cu totuș că ei are mare bucurie la ghiorbănu ăla, uîi ar făcut dă l'ipsă, uîi ar făcut dă drag. În druștvo. Or cumpărat mei, or luat șî băutură, p'eil'i l'i-a dat pă vin, or tras vin cu baloanil'i dă la gazdă care a dat piel'a. Șî, dă unde a luat mielu, acolo a dat șî piel'a. Șî i-a dat vin. Ș-atunș ar făcut groap'e în pământ, șî s-o dus fiecar'e ș-or adus prăjân d-al'a, frigătoare, l-o rânduie frumos șî o pus, șî care l-o făcut dă nujdă i-o pus doo miare în cap, în coarîe, nu i-o coborât coarîil'i, berbec. Ș-atunșa s-or astrâns toț, or adus l'emne, or făcut priveghiu mare dă jâg, dă, câtă patru la un foc. Ar fost mult, unii or făcut șî dân casă asta a făcut unu moș în tot anu cu ei o făcut. El n-o făcut, mă gândesc dă l'ipsă, el a făcut dă drag, c-a avut șî el copii, a-vut nepoț, șî, știi cum. Când vede copii la alții să bucură șî ei. Ș-or făcut, nu pot să spun, or făcut frumos, tare frumos șî, or, ei n-o tăiat cu cuțātu, ei numa or frâmt. Că, da nî să n-ajungă să mânșe câinii dân oasel'e al'ea, numa or astrâns tot într-o oală șî or lăpădat p-apă, v'edz că așa o fost bun, să meargă nărocu cum m'erje apa. Șî or pitrecut tare fain. S-o iubit lumea, nu-i ca acuma. Acuma-i mare dușmaîe. [...]

(When there were people from the Krajina, from Brodica, did you see how they made gurban? [...])

LN: They have moved away mostly. They look forward very much to this kurban, some made it out of need, some made it for happiness. Together. They bought lambs, and drink, they exchanged the skins for wine, they brought the wine in demijohns from the landlord they gave the skins to. He gave the skin to the people where he bought the lamb. And he was given wine. And then they made pits in the ground, and then they brought, everyone brought this long stick, a spit, they arranged it nicely and put it, and the one who made it [the gurban] because of misfortune would put two apples on the head, on the horns, they didn't remove the ram's horns. And then they would all gather, they would bring wood, make a big fire from the embers, four to each fire. There were many of them, some made it, from this house also an old man made it every year with them. He didn't make it, I think, because of misfortune, he made it for entertainment because he too had children, he had grandchildren, and you know how it is, when children see other people enjoying themselves. And they made it, they did it very well, I can't say they didn't, and they didn't cut it with a knife, they just broke it up. So that the dogs wouldn't come to eat those bones, they just gathered them in a dish and threw it in the water, you see, because this is good for fortune to flow as the water flows. And they had a very good time. People liked it each other, not like today. Now there is great enmity. [...]

(Când au făcut acest gurban s-au pus și flori?)

LN: Și flori s-a pus și miare în coarne i-a pus.

(Pita?)

LN: Și ar făcut o pogaše, ar uns-o cu miere dă stup. Ș-atuns a dat la copii să mânse. Ș-a fost un moș care a rugat sănătațe la copii, la gloațe, la naintare să aibe în casă. Dacă a fost și neva bičag să i să traga bičejugu, să fie zdravăn, să fie, cum să vă spun, norocos pã lumea asta, și așa să rugat întotdeauna la biine. Și o și mers biine.

(When they made this gurban, did they also put flowers on it?)

LN: They put flowers too, and apples on the horns, they did.

(Bread?)

LN: They made round bread, spread honey on it. And then they gave it to the children to eat. And there was an old man who prayed for the health of the children, the people of the house, for prosperity in the home. If someone was ill for his illness to pass, for him to be healthy, to be, how should I say, happy in this world, and so he always prayed for good. And all went well.

2. D.M. (male, 1958), interviewed by B. Sikimić on 31.07, 2005.

(Și alt lucru care fac este că fac gurbanu, pentru vii. Pentru sănătațe. [...])

DM: Da. Ș-aișa fac gurbanu, unu dă la noi, c-a noștri ai bătrâni ar ținut, doamnă, toț. E acuma nu mai țin nima nimic. În doisprezece iulie aia, cam pică Sfântu Pătru, gurban. E, un văr d-a ei baș țâne gurbanu, el e în Austria acuma dus. El în tot anu viine. Aia pãntru bičejug. [...] E, dar ei țin în șaselea mai, Djurdjevdan, dân Brodița. Toț. Aia-i pãntru ei a mări mare sãrbãtoare se poațe să fie. Ii care nu poațe să vină acuma, ii, nãince, doamnă, toț ar viinut acasă. Alți lucru s-or pierdut dacă n-o vrut gazda să-i deie drumu, nu s-o uitat, o viinut cu famil'ia acasă. Îs pierde lucru acolo în Austria. E, acuma, au acolo, sa strâng toț la o poiană, l'-o dat voie c-or văzut că nu mai iasă cu ei în cal, și toț să strâng acolo în șaselea mai și fac. Miei friže tot acolo, bătura, tot. L'-o dășchis, că io șciu când am fost în Austria pã unu l-o prins, cu doisprezece an înapoi, n-o

(And the other thing that they make (in Brodica) is the gurban for the living. For health. [...])

DM: Yes. They make the gurban here too, one of us, because our elders used to hold it, Ma'am, everything. Well, now no one holds anything anymore. That's on the twelfth of July, on the day of St Peter, this gurban. Well, one of her cousins, actually, holds the gurban, he is in Austria now. He comes every year. That's for illness. [...] Well, but they hold it on sixth of May, St George's Day, in Brodica. Everyone. This is the biggest holiday that could be for them. Those that cannot come now, they, earlier, Ma'am. They all used to come home. Some even lost their jobs if the boss didn't want to let them go, they didn't pay any heed, they came home with their family. And they'd lose their job over beyond in Austria. Well, now there they have, they all gather in a meadow, they'd let them when they saw that they couldn't stop them, and they all gather there on the sixth of May and they do it. They roast lambs there, drinks, everything. They're allowed, because I know when I was in Austria, one was caught, twelve years ago, he didn't have a permit to roast a lamb and they, and he ran

avut voie unde să frigă miel, și i-or, și el o fužit, i-o pus caznă și l-o prins nămțu și o trebuit să plăcască și l-o lat în obi... ș-acuma nu șcim dă še, ști, un veșin așia o stat și mie m-o fost jăl dă el. Iao, cătră una spun: ce-i? Ș-asta să dușe întreabă, intră și kaže, spuine: are dă plăcīt ceva, când acolo dă loc sudu și spuine: doisprezece an napoi, spuine, ai fript miel unde n-ai trebuit, n-ai avut voie. Și el n-are să plăcască, asta scoațe bañi, m-am rugat dă ea, dă muierea aia, și o plăcīt și i-or dat drumu. E, acuma l'-o dat, n-o mai ieșāt cu ei pã apã, l'-o dat poiana mare, acolo toț s-a strâns.

(La Beč, sau unde?)

DM: Da, la Viena. S-or învățat și nēmți cu noi.

(Dar asta fac și tãgañi și voi? Da?)

DM: Toț. Și sãrbii, aia-i sãrbească, Djurdjevdan. Și ei dăstui țan, dar ei nu șcie cã še însamnã aia mułț, cã pãntru ei aia-i sãrbãtoare mai mare, doamnã, dar aia-i ca pãntru aiduș. Aia-i *ajdučka slava*, cum spuñeț, și aia, ii aia dăstui niș nu șciu. Îl întreb — pã biñe, dă še țan tu aia? El friđe dă sãnãtaće aia. Nu șcie.

(Și acest om care face la Sãnpietru aici, el e de strãinatate? Vine sã facã aici?)

DM: Vine anumitã ziua, cum spun — *godišnji odmor*, urlapu, liberã sã ia o lunã dã zãl'e, ș-atunș când viñe dãn primã pãnã, el e acasã. Numa pãntru aia vin. [...]

Wife: Fatã mare care n-a fost mãritatã fașe pogãș.

DM: Aia trebuie tri fieće, doamno. Maica mea când a țanut gurbanu, tri fieće, ciñere, curaće, sã mã prișepeț

away, he was punished and arrested by the Germans and he was supposed to pay, and they took him. And now we didn't know why, you know, he was my neighbour and I felt sorry for him. Oh dear, I say to a woman: what is it? And she goes and asks, she goes in and says: he's supposed to pay something, and there's a court case there and he says: twelve years ago, he says, you roasted a lamb where you weren't allowed to, you didn't have a permit. And he has no money to pay, she takes out the money, I asked her, that woman, and she paid and they let him go. Well, now they've allocated them, they didn't take the lambs to the water anymore, (the Germans) gave them a big meadow, that's where they all gather.

(In Vienna, or where?)

DM: Yes, in Vienna. The Germans have got used to us.

(But you do it as well as the Gypsies? Yes?)

DM: Everyone. The Serbs as well, it's a Serb holiday, St George's Day. And many of them hold it, only many of them don't know what it means, since for them it's the biggest holiday, Ma'am, but it's like for the *hajduci* [Serb outlaws during the time of Ottoman rule]. It's a *ajdučka slava* [feast], as you say, and many of them don't know that. So I asked them — well then, why do you celebrate it? He was roasting it for health. He didn't know.

(And this man celebrating here on St Peter's Day, he comes from abroad? He comes here to celebrate?)

DM: He comes on a certain day, as they say — his annual holiday, *urlapu*, he takes a month off, and then he comes from the first to, he's at home. They come just for this. [...]

DM's wife: A girl who has never been married bakes the round breads.

DM: You need three girls for that, Ma'am. When my mother used to hold the gurban, three girls, young, clean, if you understand my meaning. They should make small round breads out of

cum să spun. Treb'e să facă pogășiț d-al'i miș, dân făină, nu? Să fașe, ș-atuns la pogășițâl'-al'a merze miere dă stup, și flori. Ș-atuns aia să dă în sănătațe, să dă și nu-i voie cu cuțatu cu șeva, numa mielu să puñe pã masă și cu mânil'i toț să, fașe bucaț, nu cu cuțatu. Și după șe să mănăcã oasâl'-al'a care rămâne, așa o fost la noi, la maică-mea, s-o pus într-un ches dă năilon, în șeva, și s-o lăpădat după pod în apă. Să l'e ducă apă, n-o fost voie s-ajungă câni, s-ajungă șineva să mânșe. Iac-așa s-o țanut la noi, ș-acuma fac și ei, numa totuș mireu aia, nu-i mai aia, să zăuită, nu baș fac tot cum trebe.

(Asta se mănăcã acasă sau unde-
deva?)

DM: Ș-acasă, ș-aia, dar năinće, doamnă, năinće, acolo pã poiană, noi am avut cătră apă o poiana v'erde, eci acolo așa ar trebui să. Unde faș. Dar locu care-l faș, unde friz mielu, aia cam treb'e să fie loc curat, să n-ajungă niș o l'imană să duc-afar-așia o un băiat o șel. Ș-ai-ar trebui așia la locu ăla.

Wife: Acuma toț acasă.

DM: Așa curat treb'e să să facă, da, aia nu-i mai aia, aia-i veçim.

Wife: Nainće pã poieñ.

DM: Pa, dă șe treb'e la loc curat să-l friz, nu la loc pogan, macar unde, și la loc curat și să-l mânș, c-aia dai în șărea lu Dumnezău, zâl'el'-al'a buñe aia, d-aia faș pogășițâl'i și aia.

(Și te rogi de Dumnezeu?)

DM: Da. Îi mulțăm'eșc pãntu tot și dă zua aia, vez. Ș-așia nu-i voie să meargă șineva afară, ș-aia-n veçu, că vun copil trei locuri a mai mult pățat ș-aia. Nainće ai bătrân așa ar pãzât: —

flour, no? They're made, and then on these round breads you put honey and flowers. And then this is given for health, it is given and it is not allowed to cut it with a knife or anything, the lamb is just put on the table and everything is torn apart by hand, not with a knife. And after it is eaten, the bones that remain, that's how it was with us, at my mother's, are placed in a plastic bag, into something and thrown under the bridge into the water. And the water takes them away, there couldn't be any dogs that could come along, for something to come along and eat them. There, that's how we used to hold it and now they do it too, but not so often, there's no more of that, it's being forgotten, the custom is not upheld quite as it should be.

(It's eaten at home or where?)

DM: Both at home and like that, Ma'am, before it was eaten in the meadow, we had a green meadow near the water, that's where you should do it. Where you make it. And the place where it is made, where you roast the lamb, it should be a clean place, so that no animal can come and take it away or some boy or something. And this should be in this place.

Wife: Now everyone does it at home.

DM: It should be done cleanly like that, yes, but there is no more of that, it's already...

Wife: Before it was in the meadows.

DM: Well, why you have to roast it in a clean place, not in an unclean place, anywhere, but in a clean place to eat it as well, otherwise you're giving it "Behind God's back", that's for the good days, that's why you make those round breads and such.

(And you pray to God?)

DM: Yes. You thank Him for everything and for that day, you see. And it's not allowed for someone to go outside, to the toilet like, since one boy in three places, he was sick a lot and so.

se cauți acolo pă poiană? Dă loc cătră copii-ăi miș și aia să nu să ducă, vez, că nu-i bun să fie pogan.

Wife: Num-acuma tot să pierde obicăiu.

DM: Și-naince s-ar cémnt ai bătrân să-s lasă copiii, fetițâl'i l'-a spus — av'eț grijă, nu macar unde, pică, vă dușeț afară, ș-aia să să șcie unde că nu-i bun pă flori, că nu-i bun la. Că estă zâl'il'i buine, vez, să trif'eșce dă toace, poace să rămână oloz, ș-aia nu-i dă dus macar unde. Acuma vecim nu, nima niș nu-s învață copiii aia ș-aia, decât io, io l'e-am spus și de miș și lor ș-aia, av'eț grijă, tot picaț unde, unde nu-i vețeu, nu-i aia, și nu țai nopca, ai văzut cum, tre să șciț unde. Nu-i bun dă subt l'emn, dă su pom nu-i bun, unde-s flori, iarbă v'erde, curată. Mai mult așa, unde-i pământ, unde-i, unde-va.

(Acolo la Brodița a fost moașa, sau baba care a știut, și care a cazut. Știți asta? Și când cage atunci spune care zi trebuie să fie gurban? Acum nu mai este, au murit toace.)

DM: Să vă spun, ar fost naince așa care baș în zăua aia, și când aia ar căzut, ș-ar vorbit, v-aț uitat zos, vorbeșce, ș-aia.

(Ați văzut voi asta?)

DM: Io am văzut aia, io cu ochii mei baș am văzut aia, copil am fost, am uitat.

(Și aici au fost?)

DM: Da.

(Și aici au căzut?)

DM: Da. Iar așa. Și audz că vorb'eșce, ce uiț tot. Numa aia, doamnă, cum să vă spun, aia, dân el'-o mie una care a fost, spuine că cu

Earlier the old ones watched out: — What are you doing in the meadow there? They immediately tell the small children, and so, not to go, you see, because it's not good for it to be made unclean.

Wife: Only now the custom is dying out.

DM: Before the old ones were afraid to let the children, the girls, they used to tell them — watch out, don't [go] just anywhere, it falls, you go outside and to a certain place, since it's not good for the flowers, it's not good on... Since there are those good days, all kind of things happen, they can be maimed, it's not good to walk just anywhere. And no, not anymore, no one teaches the children [to do] so and so, only I do, I told them both the small ones and them and so, look, sometimes you find yourself somewhere where there is no toilet, there isn't one, and you can't hold out the entire night, did you see how it is, you should know where to go. It's not good [to do it] under a tree, under a fruit tree it's not good, where the flowers are, green grass, clean. More like, where there's earth, where it is, somewhere.

(There was an old woman in Brodica, who knew and who used to fall into a trance. Did you hear about that? And when she fell [into a trance] then she'd say on what day the gurban should be made? Now there are no more, they have all died.)

DM: Let me tell you, before it was like that, some would fall on that exact day, and when she would fall [into a trance], it was said, we looked into the ground, she was speaking, and so.

(You saw it?)

DM: I saw it, I saw it with my very own eyes, I was a child, I watched.

(And this happened here?)

DM: Yes.

(They also fell here?)

DM: Yes. Again like that. And you hear her speak, you watch everything.

zâl'el'-al'e buñe-a vorbit, așa s-ar spus aia. Care a căzut. Cu el'e, ș-aia înseamnă ea-i pântru lucru ăla, pă ea ar primit-o, ar al'es-o, și ea când făcut rugașuñil'-al'a, când aia atuns, ea o căzut și ai auzât tot până vorb'eșce, tot. Ș-atuns s-o sculat, după câta vreme. Ar fost aiș mai mulce, c-aișa o fost și vrăjmaș dăstui ș-aia, ai bătrân naince alcum o fost, ășc-ai ciñeri nu șcie atâta ș-aia.

(Și ele au căzut de nevoie? Când se îmbolnăvește cineva, sau când? La zi?)

DM: La zî dă gurban, da.

(Asta e Sânpietru la voi? Sau poate să fie și altă zi?)

DM: Gurbanu îi doisprezece iulie, el cam așa să, Sfântu Pătru i vecim altă se. [...]

(Și când cade atunci vorbește cu, cu ele?)

DM: Da, ai bătrân spuñe că cu el'e, zâl'el'e buñe vorb'eșce.

(Nu s-a vorbit că vorbește cu șoimane?)

DM: Nu. Numa că cu zâl'el'e buñe, vez. Așa s-o spus aiș.

(Și atunci spune când trebuie să faci curban?)

DM: Nu, vezi că naince dă aia n-a căzut că să i să spună când, numa curat în dzăua aia ș-a căzut și după aia s-o pus prânzu s-o sculat și tot.

(Pot să trec în sârbește, da vidimo joș jednom? Da li sam vas dobro razumela. Znači one su, na taj dan, dvanaestog jula, samo padale?)

DM: Samo tada, to je bilo pre, mislim dok su stavili to jagnje i to, znači, pre toga ona je pala, pričala, svi su rekli da sa svecima priča, kaže, i to,

Only that, Ma'am, how should I tell you, that, of thousands of them there was one, they say she spoke with the good days, that's how it was called. The one that would fall into a trance. With them, and this means that she was for this work, she was accepted, they chose her, and she when the prayers were carried out, when that was, then she would fall [into a trance] and you could hear everything she was saying, everything. And then she woke up, after a time. There used to be several here, since there was a lot of hatred here also and such, with the old ones before it used to be different, now these young don't know so much and so.

(They fell [into a trance] because of some misfortune? When someone falls ill, or when? On that day?)

DM: On the day of the gurban, yes.

(That's St Peter's Day with you? Or could it also be some other day?)

DM: *Gurbanu* is on the twelfth of July, that's how it is, while St Peter is something else. [...]

(And when she'd fall then she'd speak with them?)

DM: Yes, the old ones used to say that she spoke with them, with the good days.

(They didn't say that they used to speak with the *șoimane*?)

DM: No. Only with the good days, you see. That's what they used to say here.

(And then she'd say when you should make the kurban?)

DM: No, you see, before they didn't fall to say when, but on that very day they fell and afterwards they set the table, they would get up and everything.

(Could I switch to Serbian, to see once more? If I understood you correctly. So, they, on that day. On the twelfth, they fell only then?)

DM: Only then, that was before, I mean while they put that lamb and that,

i posle ustala, nekog vremena al niste razumeli ništa šta je pričala i to sa njima, al stariji ljudi koji su znali, kažu — manite je, dajte joj mira, ona priča.

(A gde je ona padala, napolju?)

DM: Dole, u dvorištu mislim da je. Evo tu je pala.

(A šta ona tom prilikom govori?)

DM: Gundja nerazumljivo, pa poneki reči se razumelo, ali ja tada se ne setim dobro, bio sam dete, al ovi stari, jel odma su sklonili decu — manite je, dajte joj mira. To radi, to je njeno.

(A kažite mi, jel onda, kad se recimo neko razboli, nagazi, to što ste pričali, na mesto koje nije čisto stane ili uradi nešto što ne treba na čisto mesto, onda se on leči tako što.)

DM: Uzme tu slavu.

(Ali to mora da bude samo ta slava? Zato što u Brodici može bilo koja, druga, mislim, može da bude recimo i Djurdjevdan i neki drugi praznik. Ne mora da bude samo Petrovdan. [...])

DM: Vi znate vrlo dobro šta je Djurdjevdan, koja slava.

(Znam. Na Djurdjevdan ne može?)

DM: Ne može, jel je tako. Šta može Djurdjevdan? Al gurbanu, on je baš za te bolesti, za sakate, za te.

(*Ologi?*)

DM: Da, *ologi*. E, ondak ne bi moglo druga slava, sad da uzmemo drugu slavu, na primer, ili ko Sveti Ilija šta je ili to, znaš, moraš takav svetac da uzmeš, znači samo on. Ovde, koliko ja znam.

(Znači, ako ima sad više kuća koje daju gurban, onda one pre nego što se zakolje jagnje, onda padne?)

so, she fell before that, and afterwards she would get up, after some time, but you couldn't understand what she was saying and that, with them, but the older people who knew, say — leave her, give her peace, she is talking.

(And where would she fall, outside?)

DM: Down, in the yard I think. Here, this is where she fell.

(And what would she say on this occasion?)

DM: Muttering, you couldn't understand, well some words you could understand, but I don't remember well, I was a child, but the old ones, they would remove the children immediately — let her be, give her peace. She is doing it, that's hers.

(And tell me, whether then, when someone falls ill for instance, steps on, what you said, steps on a place that isn't clean or does something that he shouldn't in a clean place, then he cures himself that way.)

DM: He takes that patron saint's day [*slava*].

(Does it have to be only that patron saint's day? Because in Brodica you can take any other, I mean, it can be for instance St George's Day and some other holiday. It doesn't have to be just St Peter's Day. [...])

DM: You know very well what St George's Day is, what patron saint's day it is.

(I know. On St George's Day it can't be done?)

DM: It can't be done, because that is so. What can St George's Day do? But *gurbanu*, it's exactly for these illnesses, for the crippled, for those.

(For the crippled?)

DM: Yes, for the crippled. Well, then it couldn't be another saint's day, to take another saint's day now, for instance, such as St Elijah or that, you know, you have to take a saint like that, so just him. Here, as far as I know.

DM: Da to se desi, tog dana. I to.
(A jel ta žena možda bila iz Brodice?)

DM: Ne, baš odavde rodom, iz Rumunije. A otac odavde. [...] A majka iz Rumunije.

(Isto je rumunski govorila?)

DM: Rumunski sve, al što on odavde se oženio u Rumuniju, jer znate pre kako bilo. [...] I on isto Rumun bio odavde. Ciganski Rumun. [...] Al ona je bila polutankinja, bila. Majka čista Rumunka je bila iz Rumunije. [...] Njena majka se udavila tamo i on se preselio ovde došo, u njegovo selo i odranio je i poraso i tako ona to.

(Ona je to ovde naučila?)

DM: Da. Pazi, taj gurban, još nešto, gospođo, izvinite. [...] To i u Rumuniji se drži, isto.

(To ste videli tamo? Ili ste čuli?)

DM: I čuli, jel imamo i familiju tamo, u stvari supruga ima familiju tamo u Rumuniju. I oni, kod nji to je zakon, isto ko i ovde, držidu to, nema. I don danas oni to držu, bolje nego ovde.

Wife: Tamo još bolje se drži.

DM: Jel ovde samo pre stari koji su bili su držali i ja ko dete pantim i čak i moji su držali ovde, i svi. Čim oni to pomreli, ova omladina, nema. A to bi trebalo, primer, ta kuća koja drži, sin da nasleđi, ali ovde već to ne. Sve se izgubi. A u Rumuniju i don danas to ima. Naročito Romi, Cigani, oni to održavaju. Rumunski Cigani, mislim i tako to.

(So, if there are now several houses giving the gurban, then before the lamb was killed, then she'd fall into a trance?)

DM: Yes, that happens, on that day. And that.

(And was this woman perhaps from Brodica?)

DM: No, from here originally, from Romania. And her father is from here. [...] And the mother is from Romania.

(She also spoke Romanian?)

DM: All Romanian, but he married from here in Romania, since you know how it was before. [...] And he was also a Romanian from here. A Romanian Gypsy. [...] But she was half and half, she was. Her mother was a pure Romanian from Romania. [...] Her mother drowned there and he moved, he came here, to his village and raised her and so she used to do it.

(She learnt it here?)

DM: Yes. Look, this gurban, another thing, Ma'am, excuse me. [...] This is also held in Romania, the same.

(You saw this there? Or have you heard about it?)

DM: We also heard, since we also have relatives there, actually, my wife has relatives over there in Romania. And they, with them it is the law, the same as here, they hold it, nothing to it. To this day they hold it, better than here.

Wife: It's held even better there.

DM: Because here only the old ones that were before held it and I remember also, as a child, that my folks held it here, and everyone. As soon as they died, these young people, no more. And it should be, for instance, the house that holds it, for the son to carry on, but it is no more. It has all been lost. And in Romania to this day it still exists. Especially the Roma, the Gypsies, they hold it. The Romanian Gypsies, I believe and so on.

In the anthropological-linguistic sense, these two interviews which took place within a comparatively short time of each other point to an inconsistency in the terminological system of the gurban ritual compared to the situation described by Mirjana Maluckov forty years ago. The informants in Grebenac today speak of the “good days” (Rom. *zilele bune*), while the older recording (Maluckov 1979) mentions “good fairies” (Rom. *zânelor buni*), as invocation in the text of the prayer. It is not likely that this is a correction of the ethnographer herself, an expert in the Romanian language and traditional culture. The Bayash Romanian term *șoimane* ‘fairies’ suggested by me in the interview (a term familiar from previous researchers of the Bayash near Jagodina, Serbia proper) is obviously not known to the informant.⁶ When we switched to another code, the researcher’s mother tongue, it emerged that the informant in Grebenac logically translates the ‘fairies’ with whom the woman in the trance communicates, in the same demonological key as ‘the saints’ (*everyone said that she spoke with the saints*).

The transcript shows all the features of the contemporary state of local Romanian Bayash speech, with interference from local Banat dialect and standard Romanian. It also reflects the language strategies of the researcher (whose mother tongue is not Romanian) in communication with speakers of a specific vernacular. Oral data obtained in Grebenac confirmed the possibility of the existence of the gurban ritual independently of its assumed importation by settlers from Brodica, south of the Danube.

Reconstructing semi-nomadic paths

A careful reading of ethnographic material on the Roma in southern Banat gathered in the 1960s shows that the custom of gurban is not exclusive to the Banat village of Grebenac, and that it also existed in some form (and perhaps continues to exist today) in other Bayash settlements of southern Banat (Maluckov 1979). Ethnologist Milan Milošev researched the Roma in southern Banat in the mid-1960s.

There is a detailed description of the gurban from the town of Bela Crkva in southern Banat by ethnologist Milan Milošev dating from 1968, with an explicit mention of the ritual’s south-Danube origins:

The settlers from Serbia celebrate St George’s Day. They call the saint’s day *gurban* or *kurban*. On that day a white male lamb is slaughtered. The place where the lamb will be sacrificed has to be completely clean. The one killing the lamb has to have a bath beforehand, put on clean underwear and

⁶ On construction in anthropological-linguistic research see Sikimić 2005; research subjectivity is the topic of an article by Sikimić 2004.

clean clothes. On the preceding night he has to observe sexual abstinence. This also applies to all the members of the household, and even to the guests. Everyone who comes to the house then has to wash his hands. This is done to prevent all kinds of diseases, and for the recovery of the sick. At the entrance to the house a basin of water is placed, and above it a towel or large white kerchief with a red band. When the hands are washed, they are wiped with this towel or kerchief. Only then can the lamb be slaughtered. The guts are taken out, cleaned, washed, and then, along with the blood, replaced into the stomach of the animal and sewn up. Then the lamb is roasted on the spit. Until the roast is done, nothing is eaten. When the lamb is roasted, it is brought into the house and placed on a table covered with a clean, white tablecloth. Then the roast is spread with honey. Along with the meat, a white round bread is brought out, and it is also spread with honey. The men of the house and the guests then sit at the table. One of the people present, usually the oldest guest, gives a speech, a toast, in which he cites all that the host has prepared, how much it cost etc. He mentions the living members of the household, wishes them health and longevity etc. This speech is repeated three times. When he is finished, all those present cry out 'amen' together. The one who cries out the loudest gets the head of the roast. Bits of the roast are broken off and eaten by hand. Neither knife nor fork are used. The round bread is also broken by hand. On this occasion, there is no smoking in the room, nor can alcohol be consumed. When the men finish the meal, they stand up from the table, and the women sit down. The scene is now repeated. When lunch is over, all the remaining meat, bones and round bread are gathered up and placed in a clean white cloth, which is then tied up, taken and thrown into the Nera river. After that the merry-making begins. They say that this lamb is the sacrifice for the health of the host, his family members and all the guests present. Poorer families, if they cannot buy a lamb, celebrate *gurban* with a rooster (Maluckov 1979: 113–114).

The same ethnologist, Milan Milošev, in the same period covered another three southern Banat Bayash settlements familiar with the *gurban* ritual. In the village of Gaj "On St Peter's Day they hold the custom called *Kurban*-sacrifice. On that day a white lamb, without a blemish, is killed. They do not strictly adhere to the ritual, so in some places a piglet is killed, or a gander or rooster" (Maluckov 1979:139), and it was also like this in the village of Kusić:

The Bayash celebrated St Peter's Day and the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. There was also a *gurban*-custom. "They make it" on St George's Day and on the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. Then they slaughter a white male lamb, but it can also be a piglet or a rooster. The killing is carried out on the threshold of the house. The blood of the sacrifice is buried beneath the threshold. In the event that the sacrifice is slaughtered away from the threshold, the blood is gathered and buried beneath the threshold. It is

roasted on the spit. With the roast, round bread is also made. If a lamb is slaughtered then five round loaves are baked, and if they sacrifice a rooster then three. The women preparing the round loaves have to be clean. The baked round loaves are spread with honey or sugared water. Honey is also spread on the roasted sacrifice. The roast and the round loaves are broken up and everyone at the table gets one piece each. Knife and fork must not be used while eating. The food is eaten by breaking it off with the fingers. After the meal the bones are gathered and buried at the bottom of the garden. "It would not be good" for cats or dogs to eat them (Maluckov 1979: 200).

Milan Milošev studied the settlement of Banatska Palanka in 1966. He recorded that in about 1948, along with others, three families comprising eighteen members were settled there from the village of Voluja (i.e. Brodica) near Kučevo, in Serbia (Maluckov 1979: 95). From the general commentary on all the Roma in Banatska Palanka and the mention of crafting wooden utensils as an occupation, it is clear that there were Bayash among them. However, there is no direct confirmation of the gurban/kurban: "They celebrate the Feast of the Assumption and St George's Day. The Feast of the Assumption is their joint saint's day — *neđeja*. Four families also celebrate St George's Day. It is common to slaughter a white beast, without blemish, for both holidays. They usually kill a yearling lamb, and even a ewe. This is roasted on the spit. The saint's day cannot be held without a spit." (Maluckov 1979: 96).

Similarly, Romanian ethnologist Nicolăescu-Plopșor in 1922 presents the first data on the practice of the gurban in Oltenia, southern Romania: gurban is made only for people 'taken by the Saints' (Rom. *luați din sfinte*), on Ascension-day and St George's Day, for the 'crippled' (Rom. *damblagii*). Gypsies in Romania do not have the custom of gurban, but there is information that some of the 'Gypsies' have come from Serbia, and that besides the Romanian language they also speak Serbian (Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1922: 37).

Reconstructing the folklore text 'prayer to the fairies'

We now approach the topic of gurban in Grebenac from an entirely different perspective: analysis of a folklore text will be proposed as a possible method for reconstructing Bayash traditional culture. During our re-study of Grebenac, the text of the prayer to the fairies was not obtained, even as a fragment. Perhaps the reason for this is that the custom has been abandoned, or that there is still a taboo on passing on information of the kind to an outsider. The fact is, however, that several records exist from the Oltenia district of Romania of variations on this prayer, dating from the beginning of the 20th century up to contemporary ones recorded by

ethno-musicologist Katalin Kovalcsik in her recent field research (see her paper in this collection). They are cited here in chronological order:

1. Voi sfințelor și milostivelor, aduceți-vă aminte de *cutare*. Dați-i snaga și vârtutea, în tot corpul lui, în toate oasele lui, că el v-o purta de grije din an în an, c-un berbece gras, c-un cuptor de pâine și c-o butie de vin. (Hinova, Mehedinți, Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1922: 36, quoted later by Chelcea 1944: 142)

(You saints and merciful ones, remember *so-and-so*. Give him strength and perseverance and courage in his whole body, in each of his bones, for he will provide you with a fat wether, an ovenful of bread and a barrel of wine from year to year.)

2. Voi sfințelor, voi bunelor, să dați snaga și puterea lui *cutare*, că el v-o prăznui din an în an, c-un berbece gras, cu trei buți de vin, și cu trei cuptoare de pâine. Dați snaga și puterea lui, din vârtutea lui, că el v-o prăznui din an în an și v-o prăznui cât o fi el. (Baia de Aramă, Mehedinți, Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1922: 36, quoted later by Chelcea 1944: 142)

(You saints, good ones, give strength and perseverance to *so and so*, for he will celebrate you with a fat wether, three barrels of wine and three ovenfuls of bread from year to year. Give him strength and perseverance and courage, for he will celebrate you from year to year and will celebrate you as long as he lives.)

3. Voi sfințelor, buñelor, cocoșițelor, veni lin ca apa, și dulce ca mierea și v-adușeț amince dă (șetățanu-ăla, cum îl cămă, numele lui, care-l are mielu), să-i daz znaga și pučerea și vârtuca în corpul lui, în mâinile lui, în pișuarele lui, că vă prăzniseșce di ian în an c-un berbece gras, c-o buce cu vin, c-un cuptor dă pâne, amin! (Pârâieni, Vâlcea County, Calotă 1995: 179, recorded in 1967)

(You good holy ladies, come lightly as water and sweetly as honey and remember (that citizen, what he's called, his name, the one who has the lamb), and give him strength and power and force to his body, in his hands, in his legs, since he will celebrate you from year to year with a fat wether, a barrel of wine, an ovenful of bread, amen!)

4. Voi sfințelor, buñelor, dulșelor, milost'ivelor, adușeți-v-amint'e dă Naie, dați-i znaga și put'erea și vârtut'a și averea, că iel vă prăzniseșt'e dâan în an c-un berbece gras, c-o but'e dă vin, c-un cuptor dă pâne. Și la urmă spunea că amin. (Calotă 1995: 184, recorded in 1970, Dăbuleni)

(You holy, good, sweet, merciful ones, remember Naie, give him strength and power and force and property, since he will celebrate you from year to year with a fat wether, with a barrel of wine, with an ovenful of bread. And afterwards (he) says amen.)

In all variations of the prayer the promise of the annual repetition of the sacrificial offerings is made prominent, the extension of the individ-

ual's life span (*from year to year; as long as he lives*). Time in magical folklore texts is similarly determined and segmented — 'for ever': in the Eastern Slav tradition, the usual motifs are those which towards the end of human life limit the effect of incantation as a healing ritual by which the person's health is prolonged until the moment of his death, and any lacunae occurring in time are closed (Agapkina 2004).

1. Sacral vs. magical text: the offerings

The text lists the gifts offered to the 'fairies' in return for healing, and the gurban, the sacrificial lamb, is only the first and probably obligatory one on the scale of offerings. Ritual text gives offering central prominence. Such a text always includes performative elements in addition to descriptions of offering per se.

All four variants of the prayer typically contain hyperbolisation⁷ of the gifts intended for the fairies (*a fat wether, three barrels of wine and three ovenfuls of bread*), which is even more noticeable in the ethnographic recording from Grebenac (nine ovenfuls of bread, /And with ten flasks of wine, /And with a shopful of scarves, /And with a beehive of honey, /And with a shopful of ribbons,/ And with a garden of flowers). This hyperbolisation of real and existing gifts in the context of ritual in the Bayash prayers to the fairies, correlates to texts familiar in both Slav and Romanian folklore (cf. e.g. Maluckov 1985: 224) of the wedding ritual where the objective is to belittle and play down the value of the wedding gifts. The procedure of diminishing the worth of gifts in the system of wedding anti-behaviour is the direct opposite of the hyperbolisation of gifts in sacral texts.

South Slav magical texts (incantations) contain comparable lists of offerings to the demonic beings, which are comprised of, for instance: "baked round bread, roast chicken, a vessel of wine and a bunch of flowers" (Radenković 1982: 64, eastern Serbia); "a supper, white round bread, wine and brandy" (Radenković 1982: 81, eastern Serbia); "round bread, roast meat, wine" (Radenković 1982: 83, eastern Serbia); "a supper, sweet wine, honeyed brandy, a roast hen and a silken bed" (Radenković 1982: 89, eastern Serbia) but only to help create an 'attractive place' for exorcising demons. These offerings do not exist in the real, action context of incantation.

⁷ For examples of hyperbole in the structure of South Slavic texts of toasts for fertility, see in Petrović 2006: 67–75.

2. Sacral vs. magical text: invocation

South Slav magical texts also contain semantically comparable formulae in addressing the demons of sickness (their merciful nature is compared to honey and water): “(red winds) be tender as honey, be cold as water” (Radenković 1982: 80). In the anthology of Serbo-Croatian incantations (Radenković 1982), only a group of texts *od noćnica* (against night fairies) from eastern Serbia contain an explicit request to the demons (“I pray to you, I kneel to you”), and after the invocation come the offerings (honey, bread and a comb): “I bring you honey to lick, / I bring you bread to eat; / I do not see you off with empty hands. / I bring you a comb, to comb yourself” (Radenković 1982: 226), but these magical texts usually contain a threat and an exorcising formula. Some variants which begin with an invocation but without the flattering attributes (fairies, *samovile*, *noćničine*, *namernice*, *polonočnice*, *ale*, *veštičine*) are followed by single, non-repeating offers (bread, water and light): “see, I have left for you here / white bread to eat, / sweet water to drink, / a candle to shine for you” (Radenković 1982: 227).

A collection of articles on contemporary Bulgarian incantations (Todorova-Pirgova 2003) shows even more clearly that only incantations against the *vilski nagaz* are in the form of a prayer for forgiveness with invocation and even a formula of ‘adoption’, ‘becoming blood-sisters’: “Sweet mothers, sweet sisters, forgive this and this” (e.g. No. 255 from Blagoevgrad, Nos. 259 and 262 from Mihailovgrad).

A real parallel to the Bayash prayers to the fairies is provided by Romanian magical texts (incantations) ‘against the fairies’ (Rom. *de iele*, Gorovei 1985: 110, 321), which also string together synonyms for euphemistic appellations for the fairies intended to mollify them: for example, from Gorj County: *Aminte să v-aduceți, sfintelor, / bunelor, / îndulcitelor, / aminte să v-aduceți, / leacul să-i aduceți* (*Remember, holy, good, sweet one, remember, bring him medicine*); from Ploești: *Doamnelor, / împărăteselor, / vrednicelor / și harnicelor, / puternicelor / și sfintelor, / iertați pe (cutare)...* (ladies, empresses, industrious and diligent, powerful and holy ones, forgive (this and this) (Gorovei 1985: 114). Aromanian texts recorded in Kruševo, Macedonia, also have synonymous sequences in the appellation of the fairies, ex.: *Zâna albă, / zână curată, / zână fără prihană, / zână fără spurcăciune, / iaca venii la tine, strălucită... / vindecă-mă de lingoare*. (White fairy, pure fairy, unblemished fairy, fairy without stain, here I have come to you, resplendent one, heal me from the fever) (Gorovei 1985: 114, 325). Romanian folklore also contains other variants of incantation ‘against the fairies’ in which they are driven out to

a non-place (Gorovei 1985: 320) or have the classic structure of magical texts (Gorovei 1985: 322–324).

Having seen the parallels between neighbouring traditions, South Slav and Romanian, we are prone to accept the hypothesis of ethno-musicologist Katalin Kovalcsik (in this collection) on the connection between the prayer to the fairies as part of the gurban and the Romanian folkloric texts addressed to the ‘the Fates’. A fact in favour of this hypothesis comes from Romanian dialectologist Emil Petrovici who in 1933 made note of a dialectological text on the Fates (Rom. dial. *Ursătuorile*) in the village of Strehaia, Mehedinți County, Oltenia district, Romania. This is an informant’s description of the custom of giving offerings to the Fates on the third night after a baby is born, which also contains a short prayer of the same structure as the Bayash prayer to the fairies:

A person that knows prays to the Fates. He says the following:

Sfintelor, bunelor / să venidz la aceas prunc / line ca apa / moi ca pânea, / dulci ca mierea, / să-i dadz zâle multe fericite. / Cu zâlele să trăiască, / cu nărocu să-să hărănescă. (Petrovici 1943: 279)

(You Saints, good ones / come to this child / light as water / soft as bread, / sweet as honey, / And give him many happy days. / To live for days, / and feed on happiness.)

The same female informant in Oltenia also provided a description of the customs on Holy Thursday when the spring, the anthill, and the balm plant in the garden (Rom. *mățăcină*) are each given a gift of three small loaves of bread along with the magical text in dialogue form, hyperbolizing the bread: *Io te dărui pe tine cu trii cuptuare de pâne* (I present you with three ovenfuls of bread) (Petrovici 1943: 277–278).

The text of the Bayash ‘prayer to the fairies’ is undoubtedly a sacral text and every comparison with magical texts only comes down to similarities or congruity with certain folklore formulae or segments of folkloric text. Some serious diseases in traditional medicine cannot be treated by magic (incantation), in these cases, amulets are made or sacrifices brought, i.e. kurbans (for more detail see Todorova-Pirgova 2003: 73). This involves a prayer on the occasion of making a sacrifice, not a magical exorcism text of the incantation type. Magical power has the effect of ordering only lower class demons, on whom the person doing the incantation imposes his/her own imperative will and orders them to withdraw. Higher category demons and deities are addressed only by way of supplication and prayers. The form of the prayer indicates the high status of the fairies in Bayash tradition and could help in the reconstruction of some of the older layers of Roma mythology.

Concluding remarks

This contribution attempts to address the question of representing others: who speaks in a text on discourse in the name of whom and how, as a political and ethical problem (Mutman 2006: 156). A classic ethnographical description of the kurban is viewed from an anthropological-linguistic aspect as an identity marker of a small community, physically located on the margins of a settlement of a majority population with which it shares the same language and confession. Notwithstanding its local marginality in the Grebenac settlement, the kurban has also proved to be an important element of Bayash identity. This is the marker that divides Bayash communities into those that practice the kurban and those that do not. However, this is only a 'scientific' and therefore a constructed, not a 'private' awareness of the existence of a kurban 'community', perhaps only contributing to a positive vision, or even the stereotype, of cultural diversity in the Balkans (see Givre 2006, Popova 1995, SD 3 2004, Trojanović 1983²).

Unlike the individual kurban for the health of a specific individual (as is the case today in the village of Trešnjevica, Hedešan 2005: 89–97), the kurban in Grebenac has shown itself to be the ritual and holiday of the entire local Bayash community by being connected to a fixed date — St Peter's Day — instead of several possible dates, decided in Trešnjevica by falling into a trance. Determining the date meant specific ritual knowledge and skills, and with the disappearance of the persons who possessed these, the kurban was fixed in calendar time, thus turning it from an individual into a collective ritual. However, even today the practical organisation of the kurban implies certain specific ritual knowledge and skills, together with obligatory personal involvement.

The existence of the kurban ritual could indicate certain historical trajectories of this semi-nomadic group, i.e. Oltenia district in modern-day Romania as an area inhabited by Bayash communities practising the kurban for some considerable time. Another confirmation of the continuous semi-nomadic character of the Bayash community is the explicit need on the part of temporarily dislocated members to return to Grebenac on a certain date. Has the abandonment of traditional semi-nomadic occupations (crafting and sale of wooden objects) and the acceptance of the social status of workers working abroad (the *gastarbeiter*) significantly changed the nature of the Bayash community? What is it that causes the regular return to their own settlement or a chain of places of personal or family origin (Brodica — Grebenac — abroad)? Traditional ethnographers, used to researching autochthonous, sedentary populations, register the complex net-

works of relocation, unplanned and individual, of 'Roma communities' only in passing.

In an attempt to answer the question of whether religious and festive traditions constitute marks of local and/or religious affiliation, a distinction in the *gurban* has been discerned within the 'Roma' population (i.e. those defined as Roma from 'outside'). By surviving within different Christian confessions, the practice of the *gurban* is one of the indicators on the Bayash traditional scale of values: The Bayash practising the *gurban* in Serbia belong to the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Orthodox Church, but some individuals are also close to neo-Protestant religious communities. The Bayash *gurban*, as well as the other *kurbans* practiced on the Balkans by the Roma communities, clearly contains two groups at local level: one that practises it and another that does not.

Bearing in mind the traditional marginality of the Bayash (in the sense of their living on the margins of the settlement), the *gurban* marks how one belongs to one's own, locally marginalised community, not necessarily to the settlement as a whole. Even at linguistic level, translating the term *kurban* into *gurban* helps to overcome and ameliorate the distinction of the Balkans vs. Central Europe, but this is also achieved by the *gurban* as the luggage of a semi-nomadic way of life. The River Danube, historically a mighty boundary between the two worlds, shows itself in a somewhat different light in the example of this semi-nomadic community: there is a south-Danube continuity of migration of Bayash communities and another which extends north of the Danube; historically, both were affected by the borders existing at different times between countries in this part of Europe.

The *gurban* in this article however, partially re-examines the concept of 'the Balkans', not in the sense of a genetic relationship to other quite independent forms of blood sacrifice, but rather by way of re-examining its own research weaknesses and limitations, whether within or beyond the author's control. In the awareness of the limitations of local knowledge of a local phenomenon, in the very ability to choose to speak, research and analyse to the maximum, there is an attempt at transcending the local and moving towards the universal. There is a responsibility on the part of researchers to avoid the trap of local methods in studying and interpreting the world, to shake off the hegemony of local knowledge and the absolutes of ruling local scientific methods. There is also the responsibility not to go down the road of pre-set topics and objectives, typical of Balkan scholarly circles suffering from 'national sciences', and which is in fact the selection of the marginal and individual. On the other hand, there is the responsibility of avoiding the traps of 'universal knowledge': viewing the Roma as a seamless whole, a community, without an awareness of its internal

stratification. Linguists could perhaps stratify the Roma according to their mother tongue, but the linguistic distinction of the Bayash as a group whose mother tongue is Romanian has proved inadequate to portray existing inter-group stratification. A fragmented ethnic group such as the Bayash is just a paradigm for the fragmentary nature of knowledge of the Balkans. From the point of view of research, it is an unknown, and subject from the outset to conflicting interpretations and conclusions.

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