

BURIAL CULTURE OF ROMA FROM THE CITY OF PIROT*

THE HISTORY OF ROMA IN THE CITY OF PIROT

Very few records made in passing by rare scientists and diplomats travelling to Constantinople and Thessalonica are the only testimonies about the inhabitancy of Roma population on the territory of South Serbian regions up to the liberation from Turks. Thus, for instance, referring to the recollections of older people, Vladimir M. Nikolić (1974, 12) notes down that „in Pirot, on the eve of its Liberation, there were only about 1500 households, namely 900 Serbian, 500 Turkish, 60 Tsigani and 40 Jewish.“ Felix Philipp Kanitz states that, immediately after the expulsion of the Ottoman invader from Pirot, out of 262 Muslim inhabitants only 13 of them were Turkish while 259 were Romani (Stojančević 1981, 140). Romani population mostly lived in separate *mahalas* on the town's periphery or city approach lanes; in the first statistical reports they were represented at times separately, at times together with Muslim and other non-Serbian people.

According to the 1884 overall Population Census of Serbia, „in the new counties“ as many as 5860 Roma were recorded, the smallest number of them living in the County of Pirotski (889 souls). The 1890 Population Census registered a considerable increase of Roma population on the observed territory, first of all, in villages, partly due to population growth and partly because of immigration from the countryside and neighbouring countries (not in the area of Pirot – 876) (Стојанчевић 1981, 141–143). In the period after 1910, up to the Population Census after the Second World War, Roma are, in the census registers, in evidence only according to their mother tongue or faith but together with other Muslim and non-Slavic inhabitants of particular counties. Concretely, after the First World War, in the County of Pirotski, the evidence is, in this way, kept of 1202 Roma (Стојанчевић, 1981, 144):

„In a small town of Bela Palanka and in the town of Pirot Tsigani *mahalas* are formed in the Christian part of the old downtowns while in the villages Tsigani settlements were distributed on the village periphery, in scattered smaller groups of houses and in mobile stopping places of nomads, roamers“ (Стојанчевић 1981, 146).

The observation and studies of the Roma *mahalas* distribution in the city organism¹ was devised by Jovan Ćirić (1979) as a peculiar historiographic methodical procedure for reconstruction of the spread of the city limits in the Balkan Peninsula between the 17th and 19th centuries. Thus he states that the quarter of *Tsigani Chiflik*

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¹ “To sociologists the story about Roma settlements, especially those in the old inner city, is important for two reasons: firstly, it proves that Roma in Serbia abandoned, quite early, their nomadic way of life, and secondly, that their further survival, however, speaks about their continuous spatial segregation with respect to the majority population” (Đorđević and Todorović 2011, 44).

on the swampish field Tiyabara as well as the quarter in the *Mečka Alley* by Constantinople Road, behind the former Turkish cemetery, delineated the ultimate northwest and southeast peripheries of Pirot in the 18th and the first half of the 19th century.

It is between the two world wars that a second wave started of pulling out and resettling Roma to the periphery of Pirot. The regulation of the Nišava riverbed opened up a possibility for Pirot Roma to set up, in a semi-dried riverbed as a newly-risen free communal ground, their *cherga* and in this way, to form, on the east periphery of the Tiyabara, their new *mahala* with some twenty households. The last location on the periphery of the urban frame of Pirot took place in the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century when the largest number of Roma from the old Tiyabara *Tsygani Chiflik* and from the settlement in the *Mečka Alley* came to live in the *Nova Mala*, an enclave planted in the then-suburban settlement at the far south of the city, on a field next to the Christian and Romani cemetery (Ђирѓић 1979, 223).

According to the last Population Census results, in Pirot there are 2.576 Roma (1.878 in its inner city and 698 in villages). Unofficially, there are between 3000 and 3500 Romani souls living in the city, mostly in three settlements, namely, those of Rasadnik, Tiyabara and Prčevac. Rasadnik is classified among the best arranged Romani settlements in Serbia, with houses of firm building material, paved streets and necessary infrastructure (water supply, electricity, telephone).

BURIAL OF PIROT ROMA

Borisav Jovanović (2912, 100-101) mentions that, up to the liberation from Turks, Roma from Pirot performed their religious rites together with other local people of Islam faith in three *tekkes*, under the watchful eye of *hodja* Mohamed Medžid Hasanović. After the Turkish rule of the town had ended, there was only one *tekke* left in the town; it was now exclusively used by Romani people. The religious service, up to the post-First World War period, was supervised by a Romani *hodja*, Riza Kratovac, who had come from a town of Kratovo, Macedonia. Also recorded is the name of another Roma *hodja*, Salija, who had remained in this city on the Nišava all the way through till the Second World War broke out. Later on, the appearance of Islam clergy only occasionally took place, at the times of great Roma holidays (St. George's Day, Vasilica) or important personal life events such as baptism, death, and the like.

The Roma from Pirot have three ways of confessional identification. Those settled down in the villages around Pirot are exclusively Orthodox while in the inner city there are living together mixed populations of Orthodox and Islam Roma. The largest number of them, however, does not agree to any confessional classification. Though they regularly celebrate their home patron saints' holidays, together with St. George's Day and Vasilica, they simply declare themselves as „Roma“ thus uniting into one identity their ethnic and religious affiliation. Christian Roma are, in the largest number of cases, buried together with the Serbian majority population, on village and city cemeteries. Muslim Roma from Pirot, mostly coming from the families settled from the South, as well as so-called „confessionless“ ones, build their „eternal homes“ on their own cemetery located in the *Nova Mala*.

Burial of Roma at the Old Pazar Cemetery

The old Orthodox Pazar cemetery is located in the New Tigar settlement and it is reached by a long Kozaračka street. Its maintenance is taken care of by the local communal company „Komunalac”.² The cemetery has been out of service due to the lack

² It so happened that at the time of our visit a worker from the mentioned company was cutting down the overgrown grass all along the cemetery fence.

of free space but a great number of tombs are regularly visited at the times of the great religious holidays. We notice that the cemetery order is at a high level (with no space overrun with grass; paths between plots are passable).

Thanks to the kind assistant worker at the cemetery we were taken to the plot with many burial places at which mostly Roma are buried. These are Orthodox families (Simić, Nikolić, Kočić, Kostić, Petrović, Jovanović, Banković, Pavlović) who rented these places for themselves and members of their families at the time when the cemetery was active.³ Individual cases of Roma tombs are at many locations in the cemetery. Mostly these are old Roma urban families baptized generations ago and well accepted by non-Roma population (artisans, musicians, etc.).⁴

Older concrete tombstones from the sixties and seventies of the last century are of simpler making and smaller dimensions with carved-in basic data about the deceased, simple ornaments and a photo of the deceased (Fig. 1). They are well kept; there are no cases of tombstones toppled over. In the eighties there appeared first tombstones of black marble (Fig. 2). The most recent ones dating the early third millennium are made of granite or marble of modern design and of larger dimensions; they reflect economic status of particular Romani families. Also some kitschy elements pop up with, for example, the deceased shown on the front or back side of the tombstone. Epitaphs are absent. The tombs are usually fenced off with an iron railing or small marble columns (Fig. 3).

Burial of Roma at the Romani Cemetery

The Romani cemetery in the Nova Mala records many decades of existence. It is exactly unknown when the first burial of a deceased was done but it is known that it is fenced off and that an iron gate was set at its entrance in 1981 (Fig. 4). It is numbered among the best preserved Romani cemeteries in Serbia. To us, though, this impression is spoilt. When we visited it, we found knee-high grass left to grow uncared for since nobody was officially assigned to take care about the cemetery maintenance. The cemetery is occasionally tidied up usually before some greater religious holiday. Vladimir Jašarević, our guide in the visit to the cemetery, proudly shows to us a chapel that he has set up with his own efforts and with an unselfish help from the municipal authorities,⁵ thus wanting to facilitate to his compatriots the performance of death rites at one place and, also, to show to them how there is nothing impossible to him who wants to do it (Fig. 5).

The oldest Romani families in Pirot include the Jašarevićs, Durmiševićs, Askovićs, Useinovićs, Hasanovićs, Pujićs, Mašićs, Manićs, Ibrahimovićs, Bajramovićs, Kasumovićs, Salićs, Ličićs and others. At first, the Romani cemetery was intended exclusively for the burial of the families of Islam religious confession.⁶ The Orthodox did

³ We are thankful for the useful information and explanations to two of Pirot Roma: Vladimir Jašarević from the Romani non-government organization *Atsinkani* and Radovan Asković from the non-government organization *Prelipe*.

⁴ Radovan Asković has presented us with his view of Orthodox Romani: "At this cemetery were buried Orthodox Roma who accepted Orthodox faith in many cases because of the sickness of their family members or belief in their health recovery or in bringing to an end the sickness that kept on passing from one member to another for years (such as tuberculosis, asthma or some other lung disease). Then, there are also those who accepted Orthodox faith for their career prospects or increasing their fortunes."

⁵ Vladimir is a member of "The Coalition for Pirot", partner of the present municipal government in Pirot

⁶ As in the case of Orthodox faith, as explained to us by Radovan Asković, the affiliation to the Mohammedan religion was also rather declarative than essential. Neither was Kurban

the same together with the majority population at the town and village cemeteries. Some families would enclose a certain space and declare an unwritten rule that it is on this plot that the burial of all its members would be done. The reasons for such behaviour were diverse: some did it for fear that in the meantime all free space will be taken; others did it fearing that in the future they will have no money enough to buy a tomb place; others followed fashionable trends. That is why this is the greatest problem of this cemetery: the freedom of choice had an effect upon a misbalanced outlook of tombs; some are unjustifiably large; many are built upon others thus leaving no empty space to walk among them – but this is beyond any intervention now. Moreover, almost completely are exhausted the present cemetery capacities so that the local Roma community will have to face the lack of empty space for organized burials. One possibility is to buy off, for this purpose, the grounds belonging to the former agricultural cooperative which is adjacent to the existing cemetery border – this is the matter of negotiation with the municipal authorities.

A decade or two ago, however, what was given up was the prohibition to the Orthodox to bury their dearest ones, first of all, some village Roma. Now the cemetery is “ornamented” with a colourful variety of religious symbols. In addition to the star and half-moon and cross, an observant visitor would not miss a few five-pointed stars or the Star of David. At the very end of the cemetery Vladimir points his finger at the tombs of a few Turkish citizens who got killed in car crashes or similar accidents and who were, because of their Mohammedan religious affiliation, buried at this cemetery.

The oldest tombstone features date from the pre-Second World War and after its ending. The chiselled stone with the basic facts about the deceased has resisted, for decades, the ravages of time (Figs. 6 and 7). The greatest number of the tombstones contains only a star and a half-moon⁷ as clear indications of Islam (Fig. 8). Those of older dates are decorated with some traditional ornament (flower, rhomboid) (Fig. 9) while some of the most recent ones have no particular mark whatsoever (Fig. 10). The monuments of Orthodox deceased do not differ from those belonging to the majority population of Orthodox faith (Fig. 11).

Judging by the tombstones at least, once again our attention is drawn to the Pirot Roma lack of assigning special importance to the confessional origin. The founders of particular family lineages undoubtedly were of Islam affiliation; yet, their heirs departed from this world as Orthodox. At the cemetery they lie buried next to each other with no dispute whatsoever. For instance, a stone monument to Omer Mašić, born in a bygone era of 1870, tells us that he passed away as a devout Muslim. The same stands for his wife, Tana. Najden Mašić was buried in 1983 also as a Muslim while his wife Mira was buried in 2003 as an Orthodox. Usija Mašić was buried in 1975 as an Orthodox and so was, in 2013, Mašić Jelinka (Fig. 12).

A greater number of resting places is fenced off with a modest metal railing, sometimes with no empty space left between the grave plots. Only a few of them, as a rule, of later date, are different from others by having shelters designed for protection from the sun and bad weather.

Bayrami nor other festivities celebrated in the way which is expected from every devout Muslim: “The only thing they did was not to eat new vegetables and meat from the New Year’s to St. George’s Day, especially those who had had a death in their family in the previous year. They had refrained themselves from eating the mentioned food until they donated it, on St. George’s Day, to at least three households in their vicinity.”

⁷ We have also noted that on some monuments the half-moon is on the left side while on some others it is on the right side of the star which points to the specific nature of the Roma experience of the traditional religions.

PREDEATH, DEATH AND POSTDEATH RITES OF PIROT ROMA

In the book *Roma from Pirot* by Borisav Jovanović it is written that in the past the predeath, death and postdeath rites with Roma Orthodox and Roma Muslims did not differ to any considerable extent:

“The dealings with the dead man body were almost the same as with the Orthodox: washing, shaving, nail cutting, putting clothes on, chin and jaw binding and putting into the coffin. The difference is that the Gypsy deceased are obligatory, after washing and before having the clothes put on, wrapped in some special rags and cloth. The burial itself, up to the forties of the last century, consisted of transporting the deceased to the cemetery in the coffin, reading prayers and giving speeches before the taking the deceased out of the coffin and putting him into the grave pit at whose bottom matting or some other material had been placed earlier; over it there were poles or boards that later on the earth was thrown on while the coffin in which the deceased was taken to the grave was given back to the undertakers’ company or was brought home for another deceased. This ritual, in the presence of hodja, was preserved all along until the last hodja left Pirot. Since then the deceased Tsigani have been buried according to the Orthodox customs.

On the day of the burial nothing is prepared; only a candle is lit in the house of the deceased.

On the seventh day a seven-course meal is cooked and the sofra (dining table) is set.

On the twentieth day it is customary to prepare three round breads and one dish, salty snacks, sweets and fruit as well as obligatory halvah and rice.

For the fortieth day, if one is so poor that he cannot afford slaughtering a lamb, he must find – for the memory of a dead male – a ram’s head and for a dead female, a sheep’s head.

The same ritual is repeated for a half a year memorial and a year’s one.

All the postdeath meals (daće) are taken in the house, on the set sofas where the deceased used to lie” (Jovanović 2012, 102-103).

Interested in finding out what changes these rites have gone through in the present day, we have interviewed, in her home, Zeka Pačić, an older Romani woman from Pirot, born in 1937 (Fig. 13).⁸ She told us she was literate and that her mother tongue is Romani. Yet at the very beginning she expressed an already noticed lack of interest in confessional identification; to our question, “What faith are you?” she insisted upon answering, “Romani.” Though we tried to make clear to her the meanings of the concepts of “nation” and “faith”, she stuck to the attitude that the “Romani” is a common way of describing her ethnic and religious affiliation.

Predeath Romani Rites

A sick man in the house is taken care of in every possible way including maximal attention paid to hygiene. If possible, he is placed in a special room in order not to be disturbed but the whole day watching over him is organized. Help is sought exclusively from official medical care institutions. The sick man is encouraged with the expressions that he will be better and that he must obey doctor’s orders as they are to help him recover. If he feels seriously sick, the patient addresses higher powers for help with the following words, “God, please, help me recover, I am begging you!”

⁸ We would like to thank to Radmila Nešić, a Roma woman from the local Romani non-government organization *Ternipe* for mediating for us to find a partner for talks about predeath, death and postdeath rites of Roma from Pirot.

In the cases when it is obvious there will be no recovery, the sick man is asked to pass, in the other world, greetings to the family and other dear people who had passed away before him. If he has any special wishes at his deathbed, efforts are made to fulfil them. In the case that the sick man starts uttering incomprehensible words, or starts to “talk with the dead”, this causes no fear among the present ones; instead, they use affirmative words to approve of what he is saying. Prayers are addressed to God and other saints for the patient’s recovery till the very last moment of his life. However, if it does happen that the patient falls into comma, nothing else is done any longer but waiting, in peace, for the moment of death. The informing starts of the closest relatives, friends and neighbours about the serious situation the sick man is; this serves, at the same time, as announcement of a tragic outcome. Each individual is allowed to visit the patient, regardless of whether they have previously been in friendly or unfriendly relations. The custom also assumes that those who have fallen out are to make up in such moments. The visitors offer comfort to the patient by encouraging him to struggle against the disease and by expressing their wishes for his quick recovery. Zeka admits to us that she believes that dreams anticipate some bad events. She mentions apparitions in her dreams before her mother’s death and her daughter’s traffic accident. She also brings up cuckoo’s song and dogs’ howling in the yard as omens of bad developments.

At the moments when the diseased parts with his life, no one says anything and all the communication is done by mime: there is a fear that in the next forty days the soul will struggle to leave this worldly life. Before that, all the present in the room part with the patient by kissing his hands and asking for forgiveness for all the misunderstandings they had with him. If having enough strength, the patient gives his forgiving and sends his last messages which most often refer to the care about his offspring. Very often such desires are expressed to the family members in the form of a pledge that they are obliged to respect regardless of their nature. Zeka mentions how her mother-in-law, at her deathbed, made her vow that she would never stop celebrating her husband’s patron saint holiday that he had started observing after having recovered from a serious illness that he had suffered from for three years. Previously the dying man’s confession was to be attended by the *hodja* who was invited for it but this is no longer done since Muslim Roma from Pirot have had no *hodja* on their own since the end of the Second World War. At the moment of death, the present relatives start to wail. The dead man’s eyes are closed by the oldest person in the room. There is no fear of the dead since he is believed to go to paradise.

Romani Rites At Death

After the death takes places, the candles are lit before his death bed and the black clothes are to be put on as a sign of mourning. The body is washed by the family members (female persons wash a female body while men wash a male one; this rule can be broken if there is no other person of the same gender who should do it). In the washing practice, no fresh water is added. Once it is over, at a distant place are thrown all the things used for this purpose, namely, water, sponge, soap, primarily to avoid, in this way, the contagion to be passed on to other household members. The household members, on their part, dress the corpse into for this purpose intentionally and earlier bought clothes. Before putting the corpse into the coffin, a new blanket, bed sheet and pillow are put in it. The families also put other things into the coffin, namely those he wore in his lifetime or that were of immediate use to him such as glasses, walking stick, cigarettes. If it is a female corpse, they put new things such as scarves, aprons, slippers, soap, medicine, etc. Similar new clothes are also put with the male corpse believing that they would be of good use to him in the other world. There is not obligation

that people who practise these things have *avdes* (body washing in Islam) which is a rule that is assumed with devout Islam believers. One of the customs is to put a piece of bread into a handkerchief before putting it into the dead man's hand. There it remains till the dead man is carried out of the house when it is put away on a special place in the house, for instance, cupboard or special shelf. It is believed that in this way the dead man is prevented from taking with himself happiness and progress of the whole household. In some places it is practised to pierce the deceased's heels with a needle to prevent him from turning into a vampire. Special care is also taken of the scarf or cloth used for binding the dead man's legs or jaw.

The deceased remains in the room for the next twenty-four hours but he is never left alone. The wake within the house is mostly done by women who constantly talk about the qualities that characterized the dead man and his life in general while the men are outside the house. The exhausted household members are allowed to fall asleep during the wake but it's forbidden for pregnant women and small children to attend it. Those present at the wake are offered food but, as for alcohol, only *Rakia*. If it happens that someone sneezes at the wake, he has some part of his clothes obligatory torn apart. Beneath the table with the coffin there is a dish with water; in addition, strict care is taken that no people or animal skip over the dead man's body.

During his stay in the house, the dead man is paid visits by relatives, friends and neighbours. Firstly they declare condolence to the present household members and then they light up candles saying, "My condolence" and "God forgive him." They are advised not to cry over the deceased between the midnight and the first roaster's cry since in that case, after the burial, the dead will never appear in their dreams. It is also customary to endow the deceased with trifles (cigarettes, sweets, Turkish delight) which are intended for other dead ones that the visitors had been closely related to. The household members offer them sweets, cakes, coffee and fruit juices.

Before being taken out of the house, the deceased is given last goodbyes by his closest relatives who kiss his hand while the household members also kiss his forehead and cheeks. It is also customary to fulfil, at these very moments, the last wishes of the deceased that he has left as a pledge such as, for instance, singing a song with or without orchestra. All the lit candles are put out; the coffin is covered with a special blanket; the lid is closed and the coffin is placed in such a way that the deceased's head is turned westwards while his legs eastwards. From the house the coffin is taken to the cemetery with the deceased's legs turned forward so that he is enabled to get to his resting place in peace. Also, while the coffin is put into a funeral vehicle, the head is directed forwards. The coffin is carried to the hearse by the closest relatives and household members. Around their arms there are towels or handkerchief tied up. At the place where the coffin used to be, a brick is put; lime is used to mark off the place where the deceased head used to lie while a nail is hammered into the floor. Later on, the brick is broken with an axe while the women who remain in the house to tidy it up clean all this and take it out of the house. It is an unwritten rule that the room in which the deceased used to be is obligatory white-washed up to the date when forty days expire. The deceased's exit from the house is accompanied with wailing and cries of the household members but this is later replaced by the music performed by a Romani orchestra (that plays a funeral march or some such melodies). This is a special occasion when small children are woken up from their sleep for fear that something might happen to them while the funeral procession taking the deceased to his final resting place passes by.

The funeral procession is joined by all household members, regardless of gender, age or nationality. The baptized Roma are also accompanied in the procession by a clergyman (though we should remark that he almost never dares to perform religious

rites on the Romani cemetery itself) unlike non-baptized Roma; the deceased is not carried into the church. The procession stops before the houses of the nearest kin of the deceased. Before lowering the coffin into the grave, if the deceased was a person of rank in his lifetime, a short speech is made in his honour or some other action is performed as defined by the pledge (music playing and the like). No extracts from the Bible or Koran are read.

The gravedigger digs a grave for the deceased; the family symbolically thanks him for this by throwing to him, at his feet, a certain amount of coins (in practice, this service amounts to between thirty and fifty euro). He lowers the coffin into the pit with the help of those who carried it. All the people present throw handfuls of earth over the coffin. When the grave is covered with earth, it is strewn with garlands and flowers. The tomb is also sprinkled with water from a special dish which is broken afterwards. For the last time the music plays, if there is music, and all those who were present at the burial go away. The nearest kin goes back to the home of the deceased while the others go home. Unlike the Orthodox customs, the Roma from Pirot do not organize *sofras* with dinners served immediately after the burial. Neither is wheat cooked; the only thing served at the cemetery is *halva*, prepared before lowering the deceased into the grave pit. Nor is there any such custom as taking the funeral procession participants to a restaurant for lunch.

The funeral procession participants who return to the home of the deceased wash their faces and hands before entering the house. Then they sit down (not in the chairs but) on blanket covered floors, light up candles, pour water in a special cup and on the spread sheets they serve the prepared food. At the end they have coffee, put out the candles, put a cover on the cup (whose contents had previously been emptied into a flower pot) and leave the house with the following words, "Now, go to your place, you, dead man!" In the winter season the candle is lit every afternoon around 3 pm and so is it lit around 5 pm in the summer with no interruptions till the fifty-first day since the deceased's burial. On the seventh day after the funeral the families usually serve an odd number of *sofras* depending on the number of those invited to the memorial. On the twentieth day since the funeral the *sofra* is taken to the cemetery as well with the gathering of all the closest family members. For the fortieth-day memorial again an odd number of *sofras* is served in the house and so is done for the memorial on the fifty-first day from the deceased's burial. It is customary to announce the memorials around noon at the tomb plot when *halva* is also brought and put on the grave.

The house visits are paid without a break for the first seven days by the people who came from the burial to the deceased's home (except for the cases when someone is duly prevented from doing it, for instance, for business reasons). During the first after-funeral week it is obligatory for someone to stay overnight with the household members in their home. On the first evening in the house of the deceased the following meals are prepared: Serbian casserole, stuffed peppers, stew, roast meat and baby beef and mutton dishes. Pork and chicken are not used for the belief that these animals dig the earth so that they could, in this way, sap the tomb of the deceased.

Postdeath Romani Rites

The house is cleaned and prepared for going out on "morning rites" on the first morning after the burial was done at the cemetery. Only an intimate family circle goes to the tomb. They bring along a hand-made round bread as well as *kashkaval* (yellow) or white cheese; in a cup there is boiled rice while of recent date is the practice to bring fruit juices, *Rakia* and beer as well. The people present are offered food and drinks but not before smaller quantities of all which is served are put on a special plate as intended for the deceased. Finally, the water they have also brought is spilt over the

grave. In silence people leave the tomb; on leaving it is customary for all of them to crouch and rise again for three times since they believe it to be the way of ensuring that the deceased should remain in his resting place without leaving it (custom characteristic for Muslims).

The subsequent visits to the grave are done after the first week and on the fortieth day – exactly on this very day. Half a year and year memorials can be observed a day or two earlier depending on the household members' duties. Or the visits can be paid after fifty-one days have expired but not with all Roma. The deceased's grave is also visited on the Souls' Day and on this occasion candles are lit. Afterwards cousins and friends are invited to pay a call on the deceased's former house and on this occasion they are offered a variety of meals (Serbian casserole, stuffed peppers, stew, pies, buns, roast mutton but no pork and chicken meat), pastry or cake. It is irrelevant whether the dishes are fat or fat-free. Then the food is served in at least three *sofras* or some larger odd number. Non-Roma are also invited to the memorials. Pirot Roma, on these very days, do not go to church. Yet, they stress their going to church on greater holidays and then they light up candles for the dead on the places specially reserved for this.

The mourning period lasts for a year and black clothes are worn for the whole period until the year memorial when the black scarves are left on the tomb. Men from the most intimate family circle do not shave for forty days (others may do it before seventh-day or twentieth-day memorials); in the same period no festivities are to be organized (such as wedding, baptism). It is customary to erect a monument to the deceased after forty days. The monument should have inscribed the basic data about the birth and death of the deceased as well as about the person who has set it up. If the family is stricken by two deaths in a year, then a specially made doll should be put in the second deceased's coffin so that deaths would not happen again.

In the situations when the deceased was not a rich person, the local community organizes the collection of the necessary financial means to cover the expenses of the burial. On rare occasions the means are also allotted by the local Centre for Social Work.

CONCLUSION

Once the Turks had left, the traces of Islam culture and faith were swept away in the liberated South Serbian regions. The support was lost for expressing religious feelings among a small number of remaining Muslim population, primarily those of Roma nationality. A faint remembrance of Mohammedanism was kept only in giving Muslim names and surnames.

The last *hodja* left the city on the eve of the Second World War thus depriving devout Pirot Muslim Roma of the possibility to properly observe religious customs. Many decades of co-living with their neighbours, Serbs, has led to interweaving of the previously adopted religious patterns with the existing Orthodox practice; this is given, in the Serbian ethnological literature, the name of *ljaramanstvo* (biconfessionality)⁹. To this we should also add the beliefs whose source is people's religiosity – by which Roma are not different from other neighbouring peoples – in order to completely co-

⁹ “This specific Romani/Tsigani/faith/kind of *ljaremanstvo* is characterized by the fact that they adopt some Christian elements and observe them in Islam such as patron saint's holiday together with some rituals that the clergyman performs in the church just as the family does it on its own at home. Along with it, there also stand out some Islam elements applied by Christian Roma in their religious rites” (Вукановић 1983, 222).

ver a multitude of varieties that the researchers of Romani culture encounter with in their everyday activities (Панајотовић 1986; Марјановић 2007).

The research of the burial culture as practised by Pirot Muslim Roma is important since it represents the last link that connects them with their ancestral faith. The Romani cemetery in the *Nova Mala* is a silent witness for the Romani generations from the second half of the twentieth century, grown up in the era of socialism, as to the beliefs of their grandfathers. The symbol of Islam – a star and a half-moon – on the tombstone unambiguously testifies about a clandestine choice made at the last moment of life or left as a pledge to the descendants despite Serbian names and surnames.

In this worldly life the Muslim Roma from Pirot give up their confessional identity and on the whole they cover it up with a national coating. They are directed towards the safeguarding of the people's matrix in which special places are taken by Romani language, family relationships and emancipation through work and education. The predeath, death and postdeath rites have lost every connection with original Islam. Their everyday contacts with Serbian neighbours have, to a considerable extent, led to such intertwining with Orthodox rituals that the characteristic enshrouding of the dead body in chiffon cloth of 12 metres in length is replaced by the placing of the fully dressed body into the coffin. The candles are being lit; the black clothes are being put on but no clergyman is invited to participate in the rites. The only thing still valid is not to eat pork. The traditional religious practical behaviour has inundated older pagan superstition which is equally rejected by devout Orthodox and devout Muslims. The star with a half-moon, at times turned towards the inner, at times towards the outer side of the tombstone is increasingly rare on the Romani cemetery in the *Nova Mala*. Taken together with "confessionless" statements, all the chances are that in a few years even the last traces of the Islam origin of Pirot Roma will disappear.

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APPENDIX

PROCEDURE DBD2001

PROCEDURE DBDJ2001 FOR GATHERING OF DATA ABOUT ROMA, ROMANI-ORTHODOX AND ROMANI-MUSLIM CEMETERIES IN VILLAGES IN SOUTH-EAST AND SOUTHWEST SERBIA

(Professor Dr. **Dragoljub B. Đorđević**)

Name of the place, village: Pirot **Distance from municipality place (in km):** –
It has a church: **yes** **no** **It has a mosque:** a) **yes** **no**
Population (census from 2011): 57.807 **Number of Roma** (exactly or approximately): 3.000
Prevail (circle): a) **Orthodox Roma** **Muslim Roma** c) **Protestant Roma**
Does the number of Roma increase or decrease?
 increases **decreases**
Reasons for moving: –
If there are no Roma, were there any before? a) **yes** **no**

Orthodox Roma celebrate: 1) *Only Đurđevdan* 2) *Only Vasilica (so-called Romany New Year)* 3) *Only slava (name day)* 4) *Đurđevdan and Vasilica* 5) *Đurđevdan and slava* 6) *Vasilica and slava* *Đurđevdan, Vasilica and slava* 8) *They do not celebrate anything from the above*
Orthodox Roma celebrate *litije (religious procession), zavetina (village religious festival)*, a) **yes** **no**
Are Orthodox Roma so-called believers of three-four rites (baptizing, marriage, slava, funeral service): **yes** **no** (describe): Apart from marriage in church, they follow all other Orthodox customs.

Muslim Roma celebrate: 1) *Only Đurđevdan* 2) *Only Vasilica (so-called Romany New Year)* *Đurđevdan and Vasilica*
Some Muslim Roma celebrate *litije (religious procession), zavetina, that is village religious festival*: a) **yes** **no**; *slava*: **yes** **no**
Muslim Roma:
1. *circumcise children*: a) **yes** **no** 2. *Go to mosque on regular bases*: a) **yes** **no**
3. *bury according to Muslim law*: a) **yes** **no** 4. *Fast for Ramadan* : a) **yes** **no**
5. *celebrate Ramadan and Kurban Bairam*: a) **yes** **no**

Roma are buried:
 In their own, so-called Gypsy cemetery which is physically separated (how and how much) **from so-called Serbian, that is Muslim**; Gypsy cemetery is very close to town village in Pirot, but it is physically separated;
 In their own, so-called Gypsy cemetery which is physically connected (how) **with so-called Serbian, that is Muslim**;
 In so-called Serbian, that is Muslim cemetery (how) mixed with other citizens;
 In some other cemetery, outside place of living (reasons: prohibitions, tradition and so on.)

Description of cemetery. Majority of Roma from Pirot are buried in their own, so-called Gypsy cemetery which is physically separated from so-called Serbian cemetery (Type A). This cemetery is very close to town cemetery in Pirot. It should be remembered that part of the Orthodox Roma from Pirot bury with Serbs in the town cemetery.

The Gypsy cemetery in Pirot is one of the neatest Romani cemeteries not only in southeast Serbia but also in the entire country.

It is a big and old cemetery. There are lot of beautiful old headstones, and the newer, concrete and marble ones.

In this cemetery both Muslim and Orthodox Roma are buried, although there are more Muslim ones. On the majority of headstones there are clear signs of this.

On the bases of the latest fashion of building headstones and curving symbols, it could be assumed that Islamic ornaments will soon be completely lost and replaced with Orthodox, since the trail of Islamic roots is now visible only in last names. Finally, Roma from Pirot do not perform a single Muslim ritual.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Fig. 1. Older Romani tombstones at the old Pazar cemetery in Pirot

Burial Culture of Roma from the City of Pirot



Fig. 2. Older Romani tombstones at the old Pazar cemetery in Pirot



Fig. 3. Romani tombstones at the old Pazar cemetery in Pirot in the early new millennium



Fig. 4. Entrance to the Romani cemetery in the New Mala in Pirot



Fig. 5. Chapel at the Romani cemetery in Pirot



Fig. 6. Markers of the oldest tombstone at the Romani cemetery in Pirot



Fig. 7. Roma soldier who died in the Second World War



Fig. 8. More recent tombstones with distinct Islam markers



Fig. 9. Older tombstones with distinct Islam markers



Fig. 10. Tombstone with no Islam markers



Fig. 11. More recent tombstones with Orthodox markers



Fig. 12. Grave plot of Mašić family – example of transition from Islam to Orthodox

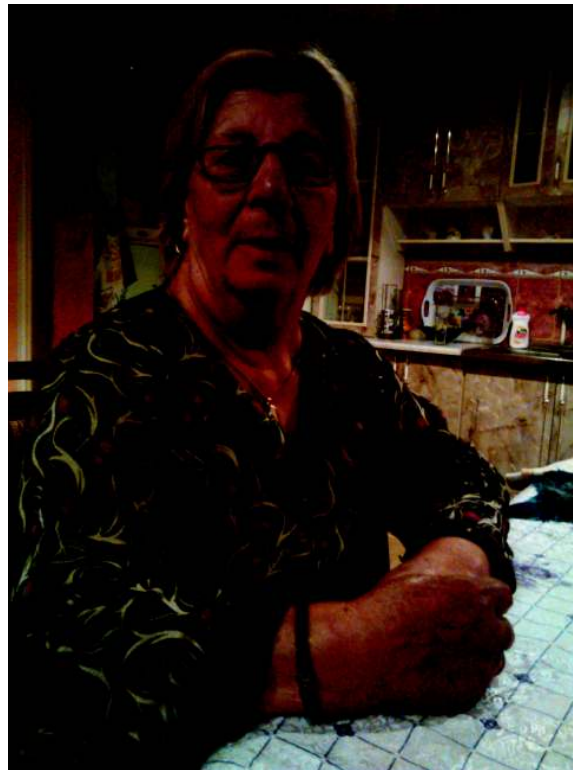


Fig. 13. Zeka Pačić – interlocutor about predeath, death and postdeath rites of Pirot Roma