

ROMA CULT PLACES: THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NIS*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary romologists face a practical question: *how to research the Romani history?* Do Roma, as a part of their cultural heritage, have serious scientific articles and studies which deal with different segments of the Romani history? Unfortunately, one cannot give a positive answer to this question. Roma are one of the rare people in the world for who can be provisionally said that they do not have its own written history. It is overwhelming and absurd that this group of six million people, which has been existing in the history for more than two millenniums, does not have one of the biggest cultural treasures. Owing to constant resistance to different social norms, traditional isolation and illiteracy, Roma could not leave many written observations about themselves. It were mainly other peoples in whose surrounding Roma lived, who wrote something about Roma; however, even that is not enough. For example, in our country, there are very little historical facts in the national archives to be found about Roma.

When there are no written documents, which are priority sources, what is the solution in writing history? That is, of course, *oral tradition, folklore, myths and legends and relics of the material culture*. For a long period in the future, Romani history will have to rely on such sources, that is, will have to use residues of the past. This is why romologists of different orientations – historians, ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists – refer to patient gathering of wide spread cultural treasure and making connections between rend fibers of the Romani history.

As a specific field of study, attention of the researches was not drawn to the *Roma cult places*. These places are invaluablely important for any people, thus Roma too, no matter if we talk about cult places which are still in use or those which are not functioning any more. Relying on previously set typology¹, this paper will deal with the attendance of the Roman Catholic Church in Niš, on the Day of Assumption of the Holy Mother of God (15th of August), as an example of the third variation – *sacral temples, as cult places where Roma gather*. (See annex)

HISTORY OF CELEBRATING OF THE DAY OF ASSUMPTION OF THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

The Greek expression for the Day of Assumption (Falling Asleep²) of the Holy Mother of God is *χοίμησις (ἀνάληψις) τῆς παναγίας χαί νεομητέρος*; in Latin were at first used expressions *dormitio, transitus*, and later *assumptio B. Mariae Virginis*; in Serbian it is *Velika Gospođa, Velika Gospojina, Gospodin dan*.³

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¹ Typology of cult places: A) cult places which are being attended only by Roma; B) cult places which are being attended by Roma together with other peoples; and, C) sacral temples, as cult places where Roma gather.

² OUSPENJE comes from OUSNYTI (old letters OUS\PncTI), which means to fall asleep, that is, to day. The end of life of the Holy Mother of God Christian Church calls "Assumption" not death, because it is believed that her body and soul ascended to Heaven. In XVIII century, Pope Benedict XIV wrote: "Whoever tries to study the old documents, in which this holiday is called Falling Asleep, will find the following answer: falling asleep and assumption means the same" (Antonović, 1998: 179).

³ Source: Mirković, L. (1961), *Heortologija ili istorijski razvitak i bogoslužjenje praznika pravoslavne istočne crkve (Heortology or hisotrical development and Religous services in the Eastern Orthodox Church)*, Sveti Arhijerejski Sinod SPC, Beograd, pp. 47-56

In the beginning only one Day of the Holy Mother of God was celebrated in general, and not the Assumption, right after Epiphany, who celebrated the Birth of Jesus, and today that is, according to the Christian Orthodox calendar, Synod of Holy Mother of God, the second day of Christmas. Annual general remembering of the Holy Mother is transferred from January to August, whereas the particular connection of the Assumption with the 15th of August in Jerusalem was done during VI century, by connecting the story of ascending with older Church of Notre Dam in Gethsemane. Introduction of the Day of Assumption of the Holy Mother in Byzantium ascribes to tsar Mavrikis (588-602). In the ancient Roman pseudo-Jeronim martirology (VII century) on 18th of January was celebrated *depositio* (the death) *beatae Mariae*, while on the 14th of August was celebrated *assumptio* – ascending to Heaven. In the later Roman calendar from the VIII century, the former of the two celebrations was omitted and because the influence of Byzantium only the latter celebration on the 15th of August was kept, which has been celebrated in Rome since the time of Pope Sergio I (687-701). Since the XIII century, Christian tradition is cohesive in belief about Maria's ascending to Heaven with both soul and body. The II Vatican Synod in the eight chapter of *Church Regulations* states the words of dogmatic bulla about Maria's assumption expressed by Pie XII: "At last the Sinless Virgin, maintained pure from any shame of eastern sin, fulfilling the earth life, was ascend with soul and body to the glory of Heaven" (Antolović, 1998: 179).⁴

The Assumption Day is the most pompously celebrated in the subterranean Basilica in Gethsemane, where the grave of the Holy Mother lies. In the Jerusalem, at the land belonging to monastery of Gethsemane, veil with image of the Assumption of the Holy Mother is kept. At 2 o'clock in the morning on the 12th of August, this veil is carried from Jerusalem to Gethsemane, as a way of remembering carrying of Holy Mother's body from Zion (Sion) to Gethsemane. The veil is then laid in the stone cavern on the place, covered with white marble, where the body of the Holy Mother lied, and where the veil stays until the Day of Assumption, when is again pompously carried to Gethsemane's porch in Jerusalem, in the same way it was brought in.

ROMA IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NIŠ

The Roman Catholic Church in Niš is situated in the Jug-Bogdan Street, next to Kralj Aleksandar Karadorđević Square. With the permission of the Serbian government, the church was built and sanctified by Abbot Willibald Tschok on 8th of December 1887, and it was dedicated to Immaculate Conception of the Blissful Virgin Mary. After fire in the church in 1983 and restoration that followed, the church was dedicated to "Holy Heart of Jesus". The church also has attendees from Leskovac and Aleksinac.⁵ We found out that there is no Catholic Roma in Niš.⁶ There is possibility that there are Catholic Roma among "gastarbaiters" /people who work abroad, mainly in Germany; translator's note/, who originated in this region. There are also rumors about one and only Roma Catholic family in Leskovac.

Despite that, on every 15th of August, on the Day of Assumption of the Holy Mother (the same Day is in the Orthodox calendar celebrated on 28th of August as *Velika*

⁴ Opposite to Roman Catholicism, which completely exempted Maria from the *eastern sin*, there is belief in the Christian Orthodoxy that She was cleaned from the *primo genetic* sin later when the angel Gavril implied that she conceived by the Holy Ghost.

⁵ We have interviewed pater Srećko Cetinić and administrator of the church Tomislav Brajdić. We will also use the findings of student essay written by Mladen Tomić "Roma as believers in the Roman Catholic Church in Niš", prepared as a final essay for the optional course *Sociology of Roma Identity*, coordinated by prof. dr. Dragoljub B. Đorđević and assistant Marijana Filipović at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in Niš.

⁶ This is statement of church representatives. However, we find out from a Rom from Niš, Maksa Maksutović, a pensioner and an ex musician in the Symphonic Orchestra, that in the Šumatovačka Street live heir of Slovenians who married a Roma woman – Roma family Franc, of Roman Catholic confession.

Roma Cult Places: The Roman Catholic Church in Niš

Gospojina), the church yard becomes too small for hundreds of Roma from Niš, Aleksinac, Pirot, Negotin, even from abroad, who come to give respect to the Virgin Mary. And they have been doing so for decades now.

Roma pilgrimage to the Catholic temple in Niš has its history. After the Second World War, Roma of all religions and confessions and from different regions of Europe used to massively visit the Catholic monastery St. Holy Mother of Letnica in Kosovo and Metohija, about which we find record in the works of Tatomir Vukanović⁷. The fact that the service was also held in the Roma language told us how many Roma believers visited this monastery. The statue of Virgin Mary was, primarily because of Roma believers, dressed in dresses and taken out into the yard. Gathered Roma would cut peaces of her clothes and take them home as holy things. Pilgrims came asking for health, women asked for pregnancy and children. At least one night should have been spent in the monastery, and clergy was given money, expensive things and sacrifices in blood (lamb, sheep, and rooster). Occurred ethnic conflicts in southern Serbian province in the beginning of '90s in the last century, complicated unobstructed visits to the monastery; thus, majority of Roma started visiting closer and safer location – the Roman Catholic Church in Niš.

Every year the statue of Holy Mother, situated on the very entrance of narrow but esthetically decorated yard, welcomes Roma believers of different confessions. Roma visit it during all day, most often in late afternoon and evening hours – tells us pater Srećko Cetinić. The river of the young and old, healthy and sick, content and unhappy men and women merges into Jug-Bogdan Street, making it look like pure “Roma” chancel. Until the last year’s 15th of August there was a possibility to light a candle in the eastern part of the Church – in twenty improvised round pots made of cut barrels (20 cm in height) and filled with sand. Because of the lack of space, clergy decided to stop that practice. Complaining tempestuously, Roma continued with practicing this, for them specific, religious expression, by lighting candles in front of the entrance or along the street wall of Železnica bank, opposite to the entrance gate. Many Muslim Roma were confused when Roman Catholic clergy explained them that they could not make sacrifice *kurban* (sheep or lamb), since they used to do this in Letnica. Brought ritual animals are taken back home, and sometimes clergy accept animals as a gift.

However, all these do not deter Roma from worshiping the Holy Virgin Mary, who they call “Mother of God” or “Our Mother”. By saying only to them known prayers – tells us Mr. Brajdić – Roma give her a towel and soap, rarely money. It is not unusual for them to take one banknote from the wallet, pass with it over the statue and then put it back; by doing this, Roma hope to have financial successes until the next meeting with the statue. During the Church holiday, Roma also take blessed water, which is after that kept but is used for bathing children, as well.

Thanks to kindness of the Archbishop’s office in Belgrade, we started e-mail communication with Zvonko Blaško, a priest-assistant in the church of St. Paul in Cleveland (Ohio, USA), who used to be co-vicar in Niš between 1994 and 1998. During this period, he met with Roma population in the church of Heart of Jesus every August. Although Roma were not religiously educated members of the Roman Catholic Church⁸, father Blaško fell in love with their straightforwardness, spontaneity, and simplicity in expression of religious feelings. Father Blaško further says: “It must be stated that they had their own piety... It is

⁷ Vukanović, T. (1982), *Romi (Cigani) u Jugoslaviji (Roma/Gypsies/ in Yugoslavia)*, Nova Jugoslavija, Vranje, pp. 291-292

⁸ Administrator of the Church Tomislav Brajdić stated that Roma did not take part in the church services, apart from more educated individuals from abroad, who were on their vacations. According to Mr. Brajdić, one can hardly talk about Roma as true believers who have good knowledge of the basic principles of the accepted religion and are also reverent followers of canonic demands. However, he does not negate their enormous worship of the Holy Mother, which is result of pagan religiosity.

interesting to see with how many faithfulness they come to the church and to the statue of the Holy Mother, always facing the altar and the statue, never turning their backs to the altar; they are getting out 'backwards', still facing the altar and the statue... They pray with great faith, to the extent that miracles happen, that is, a miracle is proof of their sound pray."⁹

Roma confirm the feeling of presence of God and his Mother Mary in the holy place of the Church by the fact that they often enter the Church barefooted, thinking that they are not worthy of standing shod in front of God. They come to see the Mother because of different troubles; from serious to tragic, such as asking for personal and family health and wishing for children, to strange¹⁰ and comical¹¹.

CONCLUSION

Our previous research projects¹² show that in southeastern Serbia, and we can say the same for the whole country, there are only few examples in which a sacral temple has a function as cult place where Roma gather. It is maybe possible that the Roman Catholic Church in Niš is an exclusive case. However, there are clear background reasons why Muslim and Orthodox Roma visit this Catholic chancel.

During different migration waves Roma were losing their genuine religion and as a rule and because of survival, they accepted religion of domicile population, adding to it original ingredients.¹³ We interpret this ply as a pronounce willingness of Roma – always and everywhere during their many centuries long history in transnational situation – to live in intercultural community. While multiculturalism stands for passive “co-life” of many “others”, idea of interculturalism comprehends active “co-life”, exchange of life experience, life styles and values of different ethnic groups. In religious realm, Roma, without ruining their own religious identity, have manifested readiness to constantly magnify richness of majority religion and culture in general. Contemporary researches (D. B. Đorđević) name such a be-

⁹ Reverend Zvonko Blaško states an example of unhappy Romani woman who tearstained prayed in front of the statue to get children. Together with a nun, Ozana Marija Gucić, she started daily prayers of “ninth” (specific prayer to the Mother of God for help to become pregnant). “And they prayed. We can only imagine how passionately. And the year that followed, the Romani woman brought a child to the Church, as a result, a miracle of her prayer and prayer of the nun. And she named the little girl Mary. I met that woman in the Church yard. She proudly introduced herself, by saying that the child (sweet girl, five years old) was a gift (miracle) for which she was praying here, in the yard of the Church, by the statue of the Holy Mother. They also videotaped her for TV when I praised her great faith. There is no miracle if a person does not believe and if a person does not pray. You can see here what a sound prayer can do, a prayer with faith. A prayer of a simple Romani woman.”

¹⁰ The old vicar of Niš remembers a Rom who came to give a vow to the Mother that he would not drink for a year. When Vicar Antun Pečar asked him why he did not give life long vow, he answered: “I am afraid that I will not be able to fulfill it and I do not want to lie. A year is gone now and I have not been drinking. I started drinking again and I can see now that it is not good. I would like to quit drinking again, but only for a year and I will stick to it.”

¹¹ “...I wish God and Holy Mother to give me a wife and 100 mistresses, but they all have to be housewives!”, writes Zvonko Blaško about a prayer of a Rom comic, who after all does not want mistresses to ruin his home.

¹² Projects: *Socio-cultural Adaptation of the Roma in Serbia in the Transition Processes – Integration, Assimilation or Segregation?* (1998-2000); *The Roma between the Serbs and Albanians in Bujanovac and Presevo (Political and cultural causes of conflicts)* (2000-2001); *Religious Life of Orthodox and Muslim Roma in Western-Southeast Serbia* (2000-2002); *Romani Places of Cult and Culture of Death* (2002-2005).

¹³ We remember the words of two famous romologists, Mirga and Mruz (1997: 136): “Romani indifferent attitudes towards big religions as well as the existence of authentic religiosity were, on one side connected with imposed status of foreign, marginal group, which during couple of centuries of their stay in Europe, were repressed outside the societal and church circles, and on the other side, with defense mechanisms which their culture built during migrations and nomad way of life. It is also worth of noting that certain Romani beliefs and rites are not indirectly taken from sublimated and highly abstract religious doctrine but from its adapted version of folk religiosity which is by form and content closer and more understandable to them.”

havior of Roma as *intercultural integration*¹⁴, while those from the last century tended to find its roots in a specific type of *ljaremanstvo*¹⁵ (T. Vukanović).

In Europe and Balkan, Roma are members of Orthodox, Muslim, Catholic and Protestant religions. In Serbia, especially in Southeast Serbia, *majority of Roma are Orthodox and Muslim, whereas the number of Catholics is small*. Believers from all three sides do not accept them easily. Islamic community suggests to them not to say that they are Roma but Muslims, Albanians, Turks... Although some Orthodox churches did a lot for Romani believers and expression of their religious feelings – by holding services in Romani and by translating church books into Romani – in the Orthodox world there still are residuals of xenophobia and racism. Vatican works very hard on evangelization of Roma and it founded a separate committee for Roma.¹⁶ Being marginalized for centuries, persecuted and banished, linguistically and religiously disheveled, culturally backwards, forced into magical circle of misery – Roma nation is easily responding to *the network of religious, social, and financial reasons* which are stubbornly accented by different, small and big, Protestant communities; we are facing their specific conversion into the third leg of Christianity.

Researchers, representatives of the three big confessions and not a small number of laics, claim that Roma are religiously very tolerant and labile, that they do not have autochthon religion, that their religion is most often a mixture of a number of them, with elements of pagan cults. In this way, for example, Orthodox Roma will strictly follow ritual procedure of Christian celebrations, but they will also celebrate other holidays outside Christianity, or they will celebrate Christian celebrations in non-Christian ways. Their knowledge about official teachings of religious communities is modest, supported by sharp fatalism, superstitions, and belief in success of magical rituals. Generally speaking, their attitude towards religion is simply hearty and warm, without stressed fear from God's punishment. This is the root for a doubt that they can be "good" believers just like any other people.

Not enough effort was put into true understanding of the Roma multilayered confessional identity. Almost without any exception, revealed religions have odious attitudes to-

¹⁴ "Interculturalism, as a theoretical and practical model, is something different from multiculturalism; to be more precise – his survival and existence tend to more qualitative community in which minority ethnic groups will not be completely integrated or absolutely assimilated. They will keep every kind of independency and in equal interaction exchange with dominant culture other goods too" (Đorđević, D. B. and J. Živković, 2002:9).

¹⁵ "That specific Romani/Gypsy religion/type of *ljaremanstvo* is characterized by the fact that they accept certain Christian elements and apply them in Islam, such as: *slava*, with certain rites which priest in church conducts and also family in the house. Along with that, there are Muslim elements, which Christian Roma apply in their religious rites. Those are especially *kurban/ sacrifice*, which is done to Christian temples, to Orthodox / monastery Gračanica in Kosovo/ and Catholic ones /Holy Mother of God in Letnica in Kosovo/" (Vukanović, 1983: 332).

¹⁶ About dominant attitudes of majority people towards Roma, on the crossing between XIX and XX century, our well known ethnologists Tihomir Đorđević writes: "... Some in such occasions copied Serbs and thus took from priest water for newly borne children, prepared cake for *slava* (family religious celebrations, translator note), the same as Christians, but that was not all. They gave birth and buried dead without any religious rites. Nobody made records of their newborns and dead people, because a priest who is responsible for that was not present on those occasions. They bury their dead similarly as Ottoman Turks do, but without Muslim priest and without a prayer. In one word, they did not have any religion. Such religion some Gypsies call their own, pharaoh (!) religion." However, Ottoman Turks thought that Muslim Roma were not worth of Islam and too dirty to be real Muslims: "They were not allowed everywhere to go to mosques, they were not allowed to be buried in Turkish cemeteries but only in Gypsy's; during the circumcision they were put aside and so on. And it is not unusual at all that Gypsies, negatively oriented towards religion in general, only shallowly accepted religion of Mohammedans and in many ways they only copied it; and did many parts from it in their own ways. Gypsies do not go on pilgrimage to Mecca, nor do they worthy of doing everything Ottomans do. A Gypsy drinks all drinks; a Gypsy woman does not cover her face and so on. Whatever is true for Mohammedan Gypsies, it is mainly true for Orthodox Gypsies too" (Đorđević, 1984: 42-44).

wards true inclusion of Roma believers, forgetting that if they accept and treat them as equal with other believers, Roma can be good believers. In this way religious tolerance would become a model of tolerance and intercultural praxis for other social subsystems.

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ANNEX

INTERVIEW WITH VICAR OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

ANTUN PEČAR*

Rade Vučković: Respectable listeners of the “Radio Nišava”, we are in front of the Roman Catholic Church in Niš and we are talking to Vicar Antun Pečar. Mr. Pečar, Roma from Niš, and not only from Niš, traditionally come on this day to Your Church. They have been practicing lighting candles in Church’s yard for years now. This year, for the first time, after restoration of the temple, they are not allowed to do so. What is the reason for such a decision?

Antun Pečar: Well, I am sorry that we are not in position to fulfill that wish people have to light candles. This is, as you can see, still construction site, and secondly, the space is so small that we really cannot accept so many people and let them light candles. In the previous years, the candles would catch big fire and that was not good. There are, I am sure, other ways in which the problem can be solved. One of them is to leave the candles in the Church, to donate candles to the Church and they will be lit sometime or they will be melted again and used as bigger candles in the services, so that intention of the donor will always be fulfilled. People certainly prefer to light the candles themselves and to see them burn, but it used to happen that all of the candles would light together into a big flame. What is important and what people can do today, they can come and bow to the Holy Mother, whose assumption to the heaven we celebrate today, because that is the first important thing, to pray. The same as believers come, leave their gift, kiss the statue of the Holy Mother, the candles can be either given to the Church and we will light it sometime or we will melt candles again and make bigger candles. What people have in heart, they ask Holy Mother for that and she hears that for sure and accomplishes all prayers. This is, in a way, a day for preserving some unity and order, we cannot act differently now.

R. V.: Our previous talker said that he lit a candle, left it burn to the half and then brought it home. Did you know that?

A. P.: Yes, that is also possible; also people who cannot light a candle in the Church because of technical reasons, they can take it home and light it there. So, God has a deeper understanding of our wishes. And of course it is important where and how the intention is expressed, if somebody burns candle to the half and then takes the other half home.

R. V.: And what is the use of water that Roma take?

A. P.: Water as it is does not only serve for cleaning the body from outside, but also for cleaning of the inside, that is it serves for giving blessings. So, the water is also blessed, it also carries God’s blessing where it is used, where it is used for sprinkling that is a sign of God’s blessing.

R. V.: What will you wish to believers today?

A. P.: Today, when we celebrate completion of life on Earth of Jesus Christ and our Mother Mary who was ascended to Heaven, I wish to our believers to experience real, do feel that motherly love which Holy Mother has for every man. I want this to all believers who are Christians, who are

* Interview was conducted on 15th of August 2002, in the Romani Radio Station “Radio Nišava” in Niš.

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Catholics, and also, since today come those who are not Catholics or Roma, who are maybe Muslims or of some other confession. Mary was, in every case, mother of all people. Mother is the one who loves all people equally and every man comes from God and Holy Mother, so she is mother of all of us. Thus, may this gathering of people of all colors, all nations and religions, have further echo in our every day life; may we be more brothers and people to each other, especially when the times are difficult, may we have more eye and more heart for others and may we tend to contribute to unity, order and peace and better life of all people. Hello to everybody, I am sorry that I cannot greet Roma in the Romani language, but I will do my best to learn it for the next year.

INTERVIEW WITH ROMA VISITORS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH*

Malićević Caka: I have been visiting this place for years now, on every 15th of August and I sell flowers to our Roma. This is now a new church, but I do not know why they do not allow lighting candles inside, only they know that, that is their mistake... Today is our celebration, the Holy Mother Day, Mother of Jesus; I kiss her hands and feet. She saves everybody, especially our Roma. May God give us happiness, health and prosperity. And may we have peace for our little children... Our Roma may be alive and healthy, may only be prosperity and peace. This is what I wish to all our Roma.

N. N.: Here, this is the second year that I come and light candles in the church and it is difficult to see that we are not allowed to light candles. Possibly because they made a new church, so that it will not be sooty... I stay here for a little while, wait for candles to burn to the half, and then I take them home... I take them home in order to have happiness and health; that is why I take them back... I wish to all Roma health and joy, I wish to all everything the best in their lives, may God and Mother help them.

Kika: I came to ask Mother for health, for me and my children, for my husband, I believe in her, as everybody else. I wish to everybody everything the best, but before all health, and after that whatever they want from sweet God, may sweet Mother give them.

Jovica Azirović: I am Orthodox and I have 40 years. I come every year to light candle with my wife and children, because sweet Mother helps me and I wish to pay her back... I give money as much as I have; we greet her, me and my family, and leave... To all who have problems in their lives I wish to be alive and healthy.

Žaklina Azirović: Today is Mother's Day, Day of Mother of Jesus Christ. On today's day I do not anything, I don't know about others... I light candles and take water home to bless the house, and for luck, health of all of us... I also make rich lunch, because it is my daughter's birthday, she will have 6 years; she was born on today's date at three o'clock; her name is Eva.

Zejna: Although I am old, I come here every year to light candles, for entire family, grandchildren, daughters, for everybody, for prosperity. I wish to everybody to be good and healthy.

* For the needs of the radio show in the Romani radio station "Radio Nišava", Roma answered to question why they come to the Roman Catholic Church, which rituals they do and what they would wish to each other. Interview was conducted by Rade Vučković Niški, on 15th of August 2002.

Roma Cult Places: The Roman Catholic Church in Niš

PROCEDURE DBDJ2003 (IC)

PROCEDURE *DBDJ2003* FOR GATHERING DATA ABOUT ROMA CULT PLACES IN SOUTHEAST SERBIA

(Prof. Dr **Dragoljub B. Đorđević**)

GENERAL DATA ABOUT ROMA CULT PLACE

Official name of the CP: Roman Catholic Church "Holy Heart of Jesus Christ" in Niš
Disseminated name of CP among Roma: There is no special name
CP structure belongs to: a) <i>Serbian Orthodox Church</i> <input type="checkbox"/> b) <u>Roman Catholic Church</u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> c) <i>Protestant community</i> d) <i>Islamic community</i>
Location of CP: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>in town</u> b) <i>in village</i> c) <i>in village area</i> (in v. area distance from the village.....)
Age of CP: Couple of decades ago
Number of Roma (exact or approximate): more than 30.000
Number of Roma according to the Public Census 2002: <input type="text" value="5.687"/>
Settlement (town/village) has a church: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>yes</u> b) <i>no</i> It has a mosque: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>yes</u> b) <i>no</i>
Prevail (circle): a) <i>Orthodox Roma</i> <input type="checkbox"/> b) <u>Muslim Roma</u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> c) <i>Protestant Roma</i>
If there is no Roma, were they present before? a) <i>yes</i> b) <i>no</i>

TYPE OF ROMA CULT PLACE

I TYPOLOGY
A) Cult place attended exclusively by Roma;
B) Cult place which Roma attend together with surrounding people/s;
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> C) Sacral temple (church, mosque and similar) as a Roma cult place.
II TYPOLOGY
<input type="checkbox"/> A) Extinct, silent cult place;
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> B) Active (alive), still functioning cult place.

IC) SACRAL TEMPLE AS A ROMA CULT PLACE

Description of CP
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Detailed description of appearance and content of CP• Detailed color photographing of CP and ambient/surrounding (use one film)• Gathering, if there is any, older photos, drawings and written material (literature) about CP• Noting down interviews with older Roma about CP• Noting down interviews with Roma who now attend the CP• Interview with the principle of the sacral structure
Dynamics of visiting of CP
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I Once a week: a) <i>on exactly set day</i>.....b) <i>on any day</i> II Couple of times during one week• I Once a month II Couple of times a month• I Once a year: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>on exactly set date</u>.....b) <i>on any date</i> If <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> a), why? What is going on at that date? <i>Catholic religious holiday Assumption of Holy Mother of God</i>• II Couple of times per year
Visitors of CP
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CP visit: a) <i>only Roma from the settlement</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>Roma from other places and area too</u>• CP visit: a) <i>only Orthodox Roma</i> b) <i>only Muslim Roma</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>both of them</u>• CP is visited more by: a) <i>older Roma</i> b) <i>middle aged Roma</i> c) <i>young Roma</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>there is no difference</u>

ROMA RELIGIOUS CULTURE

- CP is visited more by: a) *Roma women* b) *Roma men* *there is no difference*
- CP is most often visited: a) *by the whole family* *parents with children* c) *individuals*
- CP is honored by: *giving presents, which presents? Towels, soap, money* b) *giving money* *lighting candles, which candles? Wax candles* d) *flowers* *kissing* *in other ways, how?*
By praying and vowing

Behavior and rituals at CP

Detailed description of behavior of Roma visitors and rituals held at the CP

- Orthodox and Muslim Roma usually do not attend morning mass, they come during all day, especially in the afternoon and evening and they stay for a while in front of the statue of the Holy Mother.
- The Church does not allow lighting candles inside of the Church; this is why Roma light them in front of the Church entrance
- They have special respect towards the Holy Mother. It is believed that she can help; this is why people pray for love, health, recovering, good financial situation, etc. People pray both in Serbian and Roma.
- The statue is kissed and given small gifts (soap, towel), rarely money; usually people pass one banknote over the statue (and then keep it), for the sake of good financial situation during the year.
- Blessed water is necessarily taken and is kept throughout the year.

Reasons and background for visiting CP

Detailed description of reasons and background for Roma visiting of CP

- Roma have been visiting the Roman Catholic Church in Niš on the Assumption of the Holy Mother day (15th of August) for decades now. The number of attendants is especially increased during '90s of the last century, when, as a result of Albanian separatism, situation got worse in the southern Serbian Province, Kosovo and Metohija. Namely, until then, on the same day, Roma primarily attended Catholic monastery of St. Holy Mother of Letnica, in Kosovo. Those who, because of financial situation or any other reasons, were not able to undertake such a long journey visited the Roman Catholic Church in Niš.
- Roma are specific because of their peculiar feelings of religiosity. They do not have autochthon religion, but it is usually a mixture of many religions, with elements of pagan cults. Centuries long migrations brought them in constant contacts with culture and customs of other people, which they overtook, modified and by adding some of their characteristics, they continue to practice it. Thus, their practicing of religion is not bound by rigid compliance to canons of any of revealed religions. This is why majority population, sometimes supported by attitudes of the clergy, most often accuses them for inconstancy and infidelity.

Additional notes

- Roma reacted tempestuously to prohibition of lighting of candles in the Church, which was allowed until the last celebration of the holiday. Vicar and clergy supported this decision by restoration of the Church, lack of space, as well as setting up of great fire as a result of burning of big number of candles.