

VOTIVE CROSSES OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF DIMITROVGRAD*

“While digging up these church relics, they found a votive cross in the ground: a cross-like antique monument of soft and delicate sandstone in which letters and other signs are chisel-engraved with such an ease as in flour and of the sort whose making came to an end here a long time ago... Having three half-apples on the upper arm of the cross and on its side arms which are chiseled in a daisy-chained manner and archly connected to each other, with narrow slots in-between, and with a short strong body part, a powerful head of the cross looked like leaning against as much powerful yet somewhat clumsy and heavy body. This votive cross laid with its face towards the heart of the earth; common people, rather than experts, interpreted it as being quite like some very ancient god of stone or earth (...) Having remembered all this... they lifted it and there, near the given ruins, they drove this votive cross into the ground. That is how it – with its ancient, thin and uniformly drawn and by now illegible letters, as if they were from Athos or Morea – still stands, to this day, there, in the field.”

Slobodan Džunić, *Votive cross (Obrok)*, 1982, 190-191.

ON THE TRADITION OF VOTIVE CROSSES

Dejan Krstić (2010, 130–133) is one of the rare ethnologists who has developed a complex cult sites typology of eight items: 1) *natural objects*, 2) *monuments with religious markers*, 3) *graves and places of death*, 4) *auxiliary objects for performing parts of the rites*, 5) *houses*, 6) *sacral edifices*, 7) *archeological remains* and 8) *small inventory*. The monuments with religious markers, according to the building material, are divided into *wooden monuments*, *stone monuments*, *metal crosses*, *brick monuments*, *concrete monuments* and *niches*. Further on, stone monuments can be divided, regarding their function, into *celebratory* and *tombstone* or *those at the places of death*. As for their form, they can be divided into *crosses* and *pillars* or *plaques*. Tombstones are common among Christians as well as Muslims, in the whole region of the Balkans, while the votive ones, as a rule in the form of a cross, are found only among Christians, most often in Central Balkans.

A varied and multivalent use of free standing stone crosses was a wide-spread and well-known custom in medieval Serbia. Serbian charters, hagiographies and other writings have systematically registered the instances in which they were used as *markers* for defining borders as well as on many other occasions in the social and religious life of the parish ((Бојанин 2008). Outstanding among them is the performance of a church rite near the cross as one of the basic characteristics of the parish religiosity in which all the community members participated regardless of their social position (Бојанин 2004). The writer consulted here states that such a

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use of crosses in the folk lore can be regarded as a “precursor” of so-called *votive crosses* whose religious and social element becomes especially prominent at the times of church celebrations (village patron saint celebration or *zavetina*) “when they had people gather round them for the sake of common celebration or were involved in a procession (*litije*) around the whole village community” (Бојанин 2008, 326).

On one hand, the celebratory crosses (votive crosses) represent a specific segment of sacral architecture and ethnological cultural legacy while, on the other, they are further carriers of the functions pertaining to previous, even much older cult sites. According to Tihomir Đorđević (1984, 406), upon the foundations of old churches and monasteries that people knew about or only believed they had existed in those places since times immemorial, new religious objects were erected. In the cases when restoration could not be carried out, the ruins had stone crosses – *obroci* or votive crosses – posited on them while the site was called *votive site (obročiste)*.¹ The votive crosses were usually dedicated to some Christian saint (St. Elias, St. George, St. Savior, St. Prokopios, St. Petka or Paraskeva) or respective religious celebration (Whitsunday, Ascension Day); people treated them with respect and in fear of punishment from accidental or intentional desecration (Спасова 2013). The tradition of putting up votive crosses is characteristic for the terrain of Southeast Serbia and Northwest Bulgaria (Младеновић и Радовановић 1983; Енчев-Видю 1994; Живковић 1996; Любенова 1996; Беновска-Събкова 1998; Радовановић 1998; Петрунова, Григоров и Манолова-Николова 2001; Христов 2004; Крстановић и Радоњић Живков 2006; Драгићевић 2009; Јеременковић 2009; Маринковић 2009; Стајић 2012; Миливојевић 2014) though they can also be found in southern Serbia and Macedonia.

“Serbian monuments show ritual (and, later on, obligatory) offering of food and drinks as a sacrifice in celebration as well as a ritual meal shared by people from one settlement on the village patron saint day’s celebration. The Bulgarian votive cross has many meanings: a) something promised or bequeathed to be done (as in the statement, „I’ve made them vow to go out on St. Elias’s Day“); b) a religious service (*slava*) for the patron (protector) saint; c) cross, inscription („I made a vow on St. Elias’s Day“); it can also mean making a vow to God or saint or keeping one’s promise (pledge). In western Bulgaria the votive sites are consecrated, usually marked with a stone cross (...) A votive site, Serbian and Bulgarian, is the one where the prayers are taking place or were taking place till recently, namely those in the springtime, devoted to God and saints or deities, to protect crops from bad weather. According to popular belief, a vow is a shadow while „votive“ means shadowy. The ancient belief has it that the votive stone comprises a shadow or spirit of a deity; it is the same as the belief in the existence of shadowy trees. After the reception of Christianity, votive crosses took on Christian features and were dedicated to Christian saints but polytheistic rituals were preserved (...). On the patron saint holidays, on votive sites, a cake is prepared and then broken on the votive cross, as a rule, in the evenings, before a burning candle. On St. George’s Day a lamb is killed and a cake is being made... In the villages around the Upper Nišava River the cross is the name of an enclosed space in the village having a stone cross in its center; around the cross there is a circle of stones and each family has, on these stones, its own sitting place during the meal (Кулишић, Петровић и Пантелић 1970, 229-230).”

¹ Petko Hristov (2001/2002) gives an example of two villages from Dimitrovgrad community, namely Visočki Odorovci i Dragovita that had no church till the thirties of the 20th century; that is why all the rituals such as baptisms, weddings, funeral services, were done in the open, before the village votive cross situated near the holy tree considered as a magical inscription (*zapis*).

It the village community it was usually possible to find several votive crosses posited on the places easily accessible to local people. They were driven into the ground for the sake of protecting people from evil forces and sickness as well as crops in the fields from hail and stormy clouds and animals' ravaging. They were set up by the whole village, clans and families or even individuals grateful for the performed good deeds or because of the vows made. The messages from the saints that crosses should be put up were received by some persons in their dreams. Not rarely were stone crosses dug in under the shadow of a tabooed holy trees (a centuries-old oak tree, elm, mulberry or pear tree) (Крстић 1998). Those of a more recent date were roofed over by *bowers* or extended square timber structures, on the pillars, wall-less and tile-covered which also served as a space for performing the ritual. By periodic visits during the agrarian season, from the mid-springtime till the early autumn, there were relations of affiliations renewed between individuals and groups within a given community (Бандић 1978).

Today there are two kinds of votive crosses prevailing:

1) those dedicated to the patron saint whose holiday is celebrated by the whole village, and,

2) those for whose maintenance and visits, on the days marked red in the religious calendar, are held responsible particular village families with the participation of other local people.

They are made of sandstone and mainly originate from the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. These are classically sculpted crosses, with upper vertical and horizontal arms clearly kept apart while the lower arm is connected to the supporting plaque and dug into the ground. Very often they are decorated with the representations of repeated crosses on the upper vertical arm, or with letters of Christ's monogram IC XC and inscription NI KA (victory, victor); other decorative elements are also possible. The majority of them has a contour line along the arm edges while only some of them have half-spherical projections – one, two or three “apples”. On the crosses of older date the inscriptions are in Old Slavic while those of later date carry the letters of Vuk's alphabet. Due to their age, it is very difficult to determine whether they had ever changed their original place. Though they are unavoidable parts of the annals' truth of the areas in which they are located, many of them are left to fade to oblivion and decay due to migrations and reductions of the population number as well as religious rituals abandonment and ideological impacts.

The religious ritual included endowing the votive cross with flowers, boiled wheat and wine, candle-lighting and cutting up of the ritual bread by the local priest. On the family's vow crosses, the host whose ancestors were ktitors (founders) in the ancient times, practiced “butchering of a prayer”, that is, offering of an animal sacrifice, usually a lamb or sheep, whose meat was later used for making a thin *chorba* (stew), *jahnija*, distributed to those present at the ceremony.

VOTIVE CROSSES IN DIMITROVGRAD

On the territory of Dimitrovgrad region (divided into five micro-entities: Visok, Zabrđe, Ponišavlje, Burel and Derekul) there is a systematic evidence of a great number of votive crosses, namely 226 in 45 villages (Игов 2013, 8; Иванов и др. 2013); about some of them there are preserved detailed ethnographic accounts (Христов 2001/2002, 2002; Попова и Манолова-Николова 2004; Николов 2009; Мирковић Марић и Марић 2011). Plenty of them are on the slopes of the Stara Mountains; a somewhat smaller number is in the Nišava River valley.

Motives for building crosses and legends about it. The basic motive for erecting crosses was to win personal, family and property protection of higher

powers or, later on, a concrete protector-saint, from implacable natural activities. Sometimes the most immediate stimulus was a certain prophesying dream; not rarely it was a great human misfortune (death of children or the closest kin or some sudden disease), dying of domestic animals or protection of crops and harvest from inrush of water, wind and fire.

“Protopopinci: My grandfather Dragija was for many years an envoy in the Monastery of St. Ćirik above the village of Smilovac. No children were born to him. He had a dream in which he was told to build a cross to St. Savior so that children would be born to him. He firstly adopted his nephew and then he became a father to a son. He took equal care of both of them as his true born ones. Grandfather built a votive cross on the Ascension Day, above the lake. It stands there to this day, beneath an old pear tree.

Baljev Dol: My great-grandfather Kira had a big family but, in his youth, he had children dying. Some old woman from the neighborhood dreamt that his children would stay alive if he built a votive cross and start bringing a 'prayer' to it. That's how it was. The great-grandfather built a votive cross to St. Ćirik, as the old woman had told him, and started bringing him, every year on that day, „a prayer“ in addition to cake cutting. This practice was carried on by his descendents as well while the tradition is kept alive today by Ivan Gerov.

Vlkovija: There is a legend which is passed on from one generation to another. As a young man I heard it from the oldest people in the village. It says how people started to die suddenly in Vlkovija when plague attacked. To save themselves from evil, the people of Vlkovija chose twin brothers to harness a team of likewise twin oxen and take them before the sunrise to a rock on the western side of the village. When the sun rose up above the rock, they started plowing the soil thus making a furrow around the village in the form of an irregular closed circle. When they returned, just before the sunset, to the rock they had started from, they noticed that it had split into two. This was believed to be a sign that the disease would disappear (Игров 2013, 220–225).”

In addition to trying to placate the patrons, people used crosses as means of expressing gratitude for fulfilling their appeals (birth of children, healing, end of misfortune). In some places there were even several ones; in Radejna as many as fourteen. Like eternal guards – on mountain heights, next to old tree trunks, on the ruins of churches and monasteries, close to water springs or graveyards – they encircled a zone of protection around the village community.

The votive crosses were devoted to several Christian saints: St. George (Visočki Odorovci, Iskrovci, Radejna), St. Demetrius (Kamenica, Lukavica), St. Elias (Gornja Njevlja, Donji Krivodol, Peterlaš), St. Petka or Paraskeva (Brebevnica, Dragovita, Protopopinci), Holy Godmother (Bačevo, Mazgoš, Trnski Odorovci) and to great religious holidays: Ascension (Bračevci, Gradinje, Gojin Dol, Prača, Smilovci) and Trinity (Banski Dol, Vlkovija, Grapa, Držina, Dimitrovgrad). A special celebration is reserved for St. George's Day, him being protector of cattle; that is why every family puts a roasted lamb on its festive table.

Age and outlook of the crosses. Votive crosses in the region of Dimitrovgrad have an authentic historical and artistic value. The majority of them originate from the nineteenth century; the oldest pieces are from the late eighteenth century (Gulenovci, Bračevci, Brabevnica, Gornji Krivodol); only a few of them were erected in the early twentieth century (Gojin Dol, Borovo, Prača), partly replacing the ruined but previously existing crosses, partly because of the lore saying that there had been, likewise, in the past, stone monuments at these very places. Those from the earliest period were made of sandstone, later on, of limestone and the least frequent are those of marble.

The prevailing ones are regular isosceles ones or crosses with arc-like bent arms up to the crosses with rounded edges with their arms connected in a garland form (Николов 2009, 305). The basic decorative element is a carved Christian cross of a simple form in the central part while the cross ends, at richly ornamented votive cross, are ornamented with rosettes. The lines in the form of a rope or braid, twice-interwoven or broken, can also be seen. As for motives, there are solar and floral ones as well as, here and there, a human figure.

“On the cross in the village of Gojin Dol, St. Onuphrius is represented as a full-size figure. In the same village, at the time of St. George’s Day celebration, on another votive cross there is a figure of St. George killing the dragon. On another votive cross dedicated to an unknown saint in the village of Petrlaš there are two carved-in representations, of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion and of Godmother. In the Monastery of St. Demetrius near Caribrod, on the front side of the votive cross, there is St. George on the horse represented while killing the dragon and so are, on the back side, St. Peter and St. Paul with the other apostles. In the village of Vlasi, on the votive cross dedicated to St. Trinity there are two unknown saints represented. On the votive cross dedicated to St. Peter in the village of Vlkovija there is an interesting form of the human head. A similar form of the stylized human figure can also be found on the votive cross of St. Elias in the village of Banski Do (Иров 2013, 18).”

On the majority of the nineteenth century crosses, on the sides of their arms and on the upper surface of the central arm, there are three to five half-spherical decorations or so-called apples. The inscription is, as a rule, on the western side of the cross and it comprises, in Old Slavic letters, data about the saint-protector as well as the names of those who erected it and the year of its building – around the central ornament there are abbreviations IS CH and NI-KA very often. The richest in relief are votive crosses in Visoko and Zabrdje; the simplest in their expression are those in the region of Derekul. The inscriptions and decorations on the crosses as well as, here and there, the crosses themselves are dramatically damaged by the ravages of time.

Votive rituals. Votive rituals can be somewhat different depending on whether the whole village or just particular families are assigned to perform them.

At great village celebrations, on the day devoted to the saint-patron such as, for instance, the celebration of St. George’s Day, the leading role was allotted to the “cake-maker” (*kolačar*) or host chosen to watch over the performance of all the religious rites. It has happened that the role of the „cake-maker“ has been carried out by the same person for a few years in a row. First of all, his task was to offer „a prayer“, a collective animal sacrifice dedicated to maintenance and progress of the livestock. It is usually a roast lamb and ritual bread.² The local parish priest would bless the offered blood sacrifice, keeping for himself a lower jaw of the lamb and part of its shoulder blade. Then he would cut and pour wine over the ritual cake made in the household of the „cake-maker“ and would later do the same with the cakes of other local people. And other village households used to offer, formerly to the pagan and now to the Christian saint, the identical gift, with the obligation to take a snack of meat and bread of the main ritual sacrifice. All ended with an abundant village table and a festivity with songs, music and dances.

To “go out to the cross”, according to the clan-family principle, is a matter of vow made by families-inheritors of the established custom. The obligation is passed

² In the first half of the twentieth century, the „prayer“ was prepared on the very cult site, behind the votive cross, under the tree; today the hosts prepare it in their household, put it in a dish and take it to the cross.

on from father to married son who are, in terms of their property, independent of each other.³ (Where it happens that this could not be done, because of disease or poverty, the sacrificial offering on the ritual cross was taken up by other non-kin families thus ensuring continuity to a many-centuries old practice). The main ritual was carried out at dawn: once they decorated the cross with flowers and lit candles, the representatives of one or many families killed, over it, a designated lamb or infertile sheep. The meat of the sacrificial animal was used for making “a prayer” on the spot, that is, for making, as it is called in the region, *jahnija* or lamb *stew* (in the days of fasting there was a fat-free sacrifice: a bean stew). All the family members, individually, as well as other guests, participants in the ceremony took, in their dishes, the *stew* they blessed and ate for lunch. The Orthodox priest would consecrate the very spot; he would cut and bless the ritual cake of the people who made a vow and, later, the cakes of the other village families. A special curiosity of these places is the existence of the special votive stones in a ellipsoid or rectangular sequence in front of the familiar votive cross. Without special markers, each stone belonged to a particular family that would put on it and around it its own “feast”: bread, boiled wheat,⁴ wine and lamb; then, it would have a meal together with its guests. The ritual sacrificial offering was exclusively done by men while women prepared a ritual table.

In the course of time important innovations have been introduced into the ritual: home-made bread is replaced by industrial ones; the priest takes money instead of the food offered to him; music follows the ritual with the young, children and men participating with drinks; the motives for the ritual are replaced by new ones (so that socializing takes place of religious drives) and the like.

**THE VOTIVE CROSS DEDICATED TO SAINT GEORGE IN RADEJNA:
AN EXAMPLE OF COLLECTIVE VILLAGE CELEBRATION**

Radejna is a farming and cattle-breeding village of compact type, seven kilometers north-east from Dimitrovgrad, spread on both the sides of the asphalt road from Dimitrovgrad to Smilovci. It originates from the seventeenth century (as exactly testified by the remains of the stone crosses dating from 1617). St. George’s Day is celebrated as a local patron saint holiday (Владимиров 2001, 521). The population is mainly of Bulgarian nationality and Orthodox; it is in a constant demographic decline. The last Population Census registered 84 inhabitants of advanced age (Population Census 2014).

St. George’s Day celebration always takes place on May 6 and it marks the beginning of the summer vegetative cycle in the live of the village in the highlands of the Municipality of Dimitrovgrad. That is why St. George Day’s celebration is a specific tribute to nature and its powers, the time of making sacrifices and of prayers for a fertile season.

Location and outlook of the crosses. Two kilometers away from a hamlet, at a place called Selište, a well-trodden earth road leads to a single-nave and single-apse church of Saint George, with its gable roof, vaulted ceiling and a small canopy over the entrance door. The dimensions of the home of prayers are eight times six meters, with the walls of half a meter in thickness. The southern and the northern sides are made of carved stone while the western and the eastern ones are plastered and whitewashed. The church was renewed in 1997; an iconostas was set up but it is still without icons; neither is the church consecrated (Иванов and others, 2013, 57).⁵

³ Occasionally the right was to remain only for the son who opted to remain on his village household.

⁴ In some cases it is sugared while in others salted.

⁵ People from Radejna often refer to their church as a „monastery“ since it is believed to have been built on the former monastery of St. Kirik and Judith that was moved to some other place (Миланов 2002, 186).

In the churchyard, at a recently-added stone pedestal, there is a votive cross also dedicated to the same Christian saint (Fig. 1). The upper arm is trapezoid and it ends in a reflex angle; the lower one is rectangular. The rectangular form is also that of the left and the right arms, only smaller in dimensions. The body of the cross has the following inscription: “СТИ/ ГЕОРГЕ/ СПАСЬ/ СТАН/ КО/ ТРЕНА/ НОЦА/ СТОАН/ КОЦА/ ПАВЛА”. At the base of the cross there are more of those illegible letters and symbols. The height of the cross without the pedestal is 80 cm (the pedestal being of the same height); its thickness is 16 cm while the arms are of 60 cm in width (ИГРОВ 2013, 174-175).

The pedestal is of more recent date; previously the cross was dug into the ground. Next to the cross there is a high tree – I have been told it is not a holy magical one (*zapis*). The cross is taken care of by the local people from Radejna. In fact, no special care is there at all: once a year, on St. George’s Day, local people gather together around the cross with their kin and friends; along with the priest’s service, they thus celebrate the village patron saint holiday.

Talks with local people.⁶ We have come to the home of Nikolajče Manov (1955), member of the National Council of the Bulgarian National Minority in Serbia. This respected dweller of Radejna, with his wife Rozica (1962), son Miša (1985) and daughter Katarina (1989) was all in a hurry to prepare a guest room of his family house built in the fifties of the last century. He was aided by another guest who had just arrived from Kosovska Mitrovica, his sister Zlatka (1960) with her husband Zvonko Pavličić (1960), full-time professor of the Faculty of Engineering Sciences of the University of Priština temporarily located in Kosovska Mitrovica.

I am asking Nikolajče whether he knows that in his village there are as many as 14 votive crosses. He answers he knows and adds that there is a rational explanation for this:

“The plague took the lives of whole families in this region. The reason for this lies in the fact that Radejna has no running water; all the water is obtained from numerous wells dug after a great drought that befell this region in 1954. This is standing water; it is not spring water or running one; it has a low level in the wells, just sufficient enough to fill in the jugs. The quality of this water is highly problematic. It is not a surprise that in the past many people died of bacterially impure water. Well, to placate gods and prevent further deaths, people have built crosses.”

No reliable data exists; neither is there any clear memory of the origin of this many-centuries old cross. Two or three oldest local people are no longer capable of clear articulation, thus, unable of answering the posed questions. Those belonging to the middle generation remember the stories told by their grandmothers and grandfathers; their memories of St. George’s happenings are still fresh. Zlatka is telling us:

“Vivid are the pictures I cherish from my childhood regarding St. George’s mores. Early in the morning we wove small garlands of field flowers and grass. We needed one for the bucket in which the sheep was milked, another for the sheep that brought forth a St. George’s lamb and another for the lamb sacrificed for the table. Early in the morning Father killed the lamb always at the same place, there, underneath the window facing the fence while I was sent to throw the garlands into the stream not faraway from the house. The stream went dry a long time ago.

⁶ We would like to thank Cvetko Ivanov (1949-) from Borovo, at present living in Željuša, an engineer technologist, high school teacher and devoted chronicler of Dimitrovgrad region for his helping us kindly to get in touch with good masters from Radejna and Gradinje.

Once upon a time these cross celebrations exclusively involved villagers from Radejna; the preparations were done in early morning hours while the roast lambs were laid on the table in the afternoon. The old and the young remained in the field; they socialized, talked and had food and drinks; there was music, there was singing; a general joy. The guests were to arrive on the following day.

Today many things have changed. Cattle-breeding died out; many have no lamb in their cattle pen but they buy it somewhere else; they even kill lambs in advance and keep them in the fridge so that they could have them roasted on that Day and bring them to the cross. People generally hurry to complete all the preparations by noon so that they could go back home for lunch with their guests. They ritually take a few snacks from the roast meat and rush to collect the served food. The place of our family is immediately to the cross, on the left, and since the priest is offering cakes in the opposite direction, it very often happens that when he gets to our cake, many have already, in large numbers, started to leave our collective party. Even not all of the people come to the cross as they used to.”

The people from Radejna have always celebrated the village patron saint holiday. Even in the days of the most oppressive communist opposition, the “coming to the cross” on Saint George’s Day was justified as being a cattle-breeding rather than a Christian holiday.

Ritual. An hour before noon the first cars start coming to a spacious field before the church and the cross. The atmosphere is festive; a joyous feeling shared by family members and guests. Greetings are exchanged between men and women who are meeting here after so much time. Children are cheerfully running around. People toast to each other with drinks; a few cigarettes are lit. The families have their photos taken before the extended dining table (*sofra*). I also notice a cameraman eager to register all the developments on the plateau. The incoming families firstly stay in the small church, lighting up candles and endowing St. George’s icon with paper money and coins of smaller value (ten, twenty, fifty and hundred *dinars*) (Fig. 2). The common custom gathers together, in the native region, several generations of offspring, otherwise spread (residentially and professionally) all over the country and abroad.

Dressed-up people stop at the marked places which every village household has taken around the cross (Fig. 3). In the past, there used to line up, one by one, the oldest representatives of the households thus forming an irregular circle; meanwhile, the multiplied households started to form parallel lines within the circle interior. At two places – close to the right side of the votive cross and diagonally in the corner – we spot walled-in stone tables; we are explained that some families wanted to specially mark their position on the holy spot thus emphasizing their reputation and wealth with regard to others. Yet, the sight is the same, regardless if it is a meal served at the stone table or on a clean cloth on the ground. Next to each other, there is a line of offerings: the roast lamb in a big metal casserole, a ritual cake, a bowl with boiled wheat, a cup of red wine and a small wax candle (Fig. 4). We have counted 23 ritual cakes and casseroles with roast meat as well as some hundred people on the plateau (our hosts testified later, at lunch, that last year and the year before that there were twice as many people).

The priest was waited upon. The first to appear is Father Aleksandar Đorđević, Father Aca as he is called by his parishioners (Petrović and Jovanović 2013). He says that he came to this region, a long time ago, in 1966 and that he has been officially retired since last year. Now he has come to give a hand to his colleague, Slobodan Ilić, who has recently been appointed to this place by the Bishop of Niš Jovan. A young priest is late for being held while giving a service in the neighboring village (a

price to pay for poor organization of assignments, says Father Aca with a smile on his face). He hastily puts – before the cross decorated with lilies and field flowers – a bowl with water, a bunch of basil, a metal cross and a censer with incense, thus starting the reading of prayers and parts from the Gospel from the Holy Scriptures (Fig. 5). The joyous parishioners show a little interest to participate in the liturgy in the open; they murmur and casually chat while the curious ones, in a tourist manner, record for good the ritual ceremony by photographing it. Still, behind the clergymen cassocks a queue is slowly forming: namely, the custom requires people to receive a blessing with holy water and to kiss the holy cross as well as to symbolically drop a few coins or a paper money before it – contribution remaining for the priest (Fig. 6).

Then the main part of the ceremony starts: cutting of the celebration cake. It is proper for the priest to stop before every cake, cut it with the host, spill red wine over it and give a blessing to the whole family (Fig. 7). Immediately after that, the family members would take a few snacks of the roast meat (Fig. 8). On that particular occasion, it happened that at that very moment it began to drizzle, a fine spring rain. In order to quicken the procedure and in fear of a greater shower, Father Aleksandar took to another ritual activity: he skillfully used his knife to cut off the shoulder blade of the roast lamb which he put down in a big canvas bag that one of the older villagers dutifully carried for him (Fig. 9).⁷ While some of the people were still waiting for their turn of cake-cutting, others started to collect the food and drinks laid out on the tables. No socializing was felt among the people (partly because of the rain); neither was any festive atmosphere felt; there was neither music nor dance: Everybody seemed to be in a hurry to go back to his home and take to their holiday meal. The field was soon empty; only here and there a village dog was sniffing the remains of the food.

THE VOTIVE CROSS DEDICATED TO THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD IN GRADINJE: AN EXAMPLE OF THE CLAN-FAMILY CELEBRATION

Gradinje is a farming and cattle-breeding village of compact type, four kilometers east of Dimitrovgrad, located close to the international highway and railroad Niš-Sofia. A settlement entity of Gornje (Upper) Gradinje belongs to the ancient settlements; it dates back to as early as the Roman period. It is at the sea level of 550 meters. Close to the traffic lines is Donje (Lower) Gradinje, formed after the Second World War and, as a whole, adopted to the functioning of the road customs office “Gradina” (a forwarding organization within the customs terminal, car depot of the Auto Moto Association of Serbia, tourist-catering objects, petrol station, private car services) (Владимиров 2001, 515). Of 161 inhabitants the prevailing ones are of Bulgarian nationality and Orthodox faith (Population Census 2014).

Location and outlook of the cross. A few hundred meters from the last houses of Gornje Gradinje, on the south-west side of the village, on a plain that a winding and pebble-covered road leads to, there is a single-nave and single-apse church of Saint Savior. It is built of carved stone and brick; its dimensions are 10,7 times 4,5m; it is covered with roofing tiles and paved with ceramic tiles. It is believed to have been built on the foundations of an older stone church destroyed in an earthquake in 1939. Next to it is a newly-built bell tower (Иванов и др. 2013, 74-75).

Thanks to the efforts and money donations by the local people, the present outlook of the Church was completed in 1998 while its iconostasis was painted in 2012. Around 2006 additional works were done of the space, namely, the ground around the Church was leveled; two water fountains from the 19th century were restored with the curbs around them; an effort was made to divert a small river flow by

⁷ I was suprised to see a boy triumphantly waving with a lamb blade taken from the canvas bag. Laughing, Nikolajče Manov told me how from the times immemorial there is a custom challenging people to „steal“ the lamb blade reserved for the priest and eat it secretly in a nearby bush. The idea is not to abuse the priest but it was believed that in this way the thunderous clouds would pass by the village.

concrete cascades (unsuccessfully, since the water undermined the concrete foundations) and a small artificial bridge was made over it.

These building endeavors have brought back the reputation to the centuries-old votive cross: it was taken from the nearby abundant vegetation where somebody had put it many years ago and placed on a supported concrete stand, opposite to the Church, under the shadow of the almond and poplar trees (Fig. 10).⁸ The upper arm has a smaller cross engraved in it, with triangles on its ends. The surface of the left and of the right arms, as well as the central part of the cross, is taken by the inscription “ПЕТРА/СПАСЬ”, while underneath the lower arm there is inscribed the year of its making: 1890. The arms are bordered with a contour line, each of them having two spherical protrusions or “apples”; the lower arm is separated from the cross body by a twice-interwoven line in the form of a braid. The cross is seventy centimeters high; the arms are thirty and six centimeters wide; its thickness is ten centimeters (Игров 2013, 87). At its bottom, placed on the concrete stand, lay fragments of another cross: its upper arm, with an also improvised small cross with triangular ends as well as parts of its sides with the inscription “ПОСТОЛ/АНГЕЛКО/ЙОНКА.”

This does not complete the story about votive crosses in Gradinje. They can be found on several other locations in the immediate vicinity. They are dedicated to some particular dates in the religious calendar. Care about them is taken by one or, collectively, more families. The village has its patron saint celebration, St. John, but on St. George’s Day the cross some ten meters away from the village graveyard is attended collectively (Fig. 11). The spring vegetation hides a true picture: the human eye tends to skip over the white stones which, in an irregular circle, border the sacral space within which each family has its own particular place. The custom requires the butchering of a young and horny lamb; the gathering assumes ubiquitous celebration, with the whole day of singing, dancing and music. Such a practice gradually lost in intensity and it was completely abandoned in the second half of the twentieth century; a bitter fate, however, did not befall the Cross of St. Savior.⁹ Quite the contrary, the last decades have witnessed the renewed interest of the third generation of descendants in ancient customs that are being breathed some contemporary elements.

Talks with local people Our visit to Gradinje started in a family home, restored with love and building dexterity, of the retired construction engineer Grigor Stančev (1937) nicknamed Goša and his wife Ana Stančev (1943). The aged marriage partners of joyous spirit and of sound minds, are not typical representatives of the community. Goša was born in Sofia but the family returned to its household hearth in 1948, after Father’s retirement and a pressing desire to take care of his own parents. The professional duties took him at quite an early age to faraway Slovenia where he remained till his retirement. Now he customarily spends every spring and every summer at his ancestral estate. With a smile on his face he answers to our questions about the customs related to the cross on one of the greatest religious holidays in the Christian world; yet, he also discloses to us that the village has collectively attended another cross, also on St. George’s Day:

⁸ Local people confirm that the cross has never changed its location unlike the objects in its vicinity. Firstly in its background there was a modest church mansion (*mađarnica* or the place where people find a shelter from rough weather; also eat and drink for the souls of the dead); it was destroyed in order to make space for building a primary four-classes school with a hall for cultural and artistic activities and a playground for children. With the building of a new village school, the old one was extinct and later on torn down to its foundations in 1963.

⁹ By shrugging in doubt when asked why something like that happened, the villagers find the main reason, firstly, in former fear of sanctions because of disrespecting the proclaimed atheist agitation. In the border area much more care was taken about the party discipline; in a moment one could lose a state employment if charged for flirting with so-called retrograde religious practice. Collective mores were abandoned, such as, for instance, a common celebration of St. George’s Day unlike deeply rooted habits of individual families, especially of their oldest members.

“Even from my early childhood days I have preserved the memory of going to the cross on every St. Savior’s Day and that the cross had existed for decades before that. Firstly the whole village went to another stone which was located immediately above the graveyard; it is there even now but the field is overgrown with grass and shrubs. I remember well, people went there on St. George’s Day. As a child, the whole thing pleased my heart since every family brought there a roasted male lamb, with horns, in addition to thick yogurt and cheese. Priest Ilija came up the slope on a horse and he put, with the help of the envoy, in his saddle bag, a lower jaw of each lamb, a shoulder blade and part of the cake. Now the priests have taken to modern habits; they only take money.

I do not know the reason why this practice was abandoned. As a young man I went to work in Slovenia; when I was back, the custom existed no more. Probably this was done under the impact of police prohibitions since this is a border area and people were much scared of losing their hard-won state employment because of religious rites. Another thing surely has contributed to all this: with people’s departure from these regions, cattle-breeding has died out; no more people were there to tend sheep.

The hosts of the St. Savior's Cross are the families coming from three village lineages: the Božins, the Džurins and the Badins.¹⁰ All of them together prepare a „prayer“, jahnija; they bring it all to the cross and distribute it to the people present at the celebration. Together with jahnija, they obligatory bring a cake, wheat, wine and a candle as well. The priest first incenses jahnija on the cross and cuts the cake of the host family; then he takes turns in cutting the cakes of the other village families pouring, at the same time, wine over it. All people approach to take a sip of stew and a piece of cake and then a collective lunch starts. All that has been brought here (sweets, pies) people offer to each other.

The attendance of the cross has never been interrupted – nor even in the communist times – only the number of people was smaller, usually only old wives. Surely someone on behalf of the families who made a vow was obligatory present.”

Ana Stančev joins the conversation:

“There used to be Vasil the Confectioner who brought sweet colorful sticks and lollipops, candy roosters; now no such a thing is done; now they are bringing the sweets bought in a store.... Previously we all sat on the ground (in Zabrde and Burel there are stones for each family unlike in our place; but we know what family is assigned what particular place around the cross); a few years ago these blocs were used for making dining tables. Firstly, each one enters the church, lights up a candle (I light up candles for good health of the living; as for the dead ones, I light them up in the graveyard), says a prayer, leave some smaller gift or coins.”

Goša is taking up:

“Other invited guests can also participate. Partying lasts for two hours (unless some rainy cloud disperses us like it did last year). Some people come earlier, others later and stay longer; some people, by God, take to drinking, on this very spot, in front of the cross.

There used to be music all the time. There were many self-educated accordion players in Dimitrovgrad. We were regularly visited by Pera with a Roma, Slavko Kolev; they both died in the meantime. The last time, two years ago, there came accordion-player Boba, with my namesake Goša who played a goblet drum. Last year no musicians came; I do not know what is going to be like this year on St. Savior’s Day.”

We all get in the car and around ten o’clock we set out to the village church.

¹⁰ In fact there were five of them (the Lilaš family and the Pckov family along with the above-mentioned ones) but in the case of two families their family line was extinct, meaning there were no living descendents to carry on the family tradition.

Family-clan principle of the celebration. Today the cross is taken care of by three family lines from Gradinje, the Božins, the Džurins and the Badins (Fig. 12). The oldest representatives of each of these families are no longer alive. Nikola, on behalf of the Božins, left behind his son Aleksandar Dimitrov and daughter Finika; the tradition has been taken up by Finika, married Georgiev, with her husband Vasil; they have grown-up children, a son and a daughter. Petar and Lila are from the Badins; they have left a son and a daughter; the carrier of the tradition is Asen Petrov who, together with his wife Divna, has two daughters, Lila and Nataša. Finally, the Džurins were represented by Milan and Pavlina Stančev; they left behind a son and a daughter; by the male line, care about the cross was taken over by Ivan with his wife Snežana; they have a daughter to inherit them.

In preparing a sacrifice, that is, cooking a lamb *stew*, the families take turns every year; last year this was Finika's duty while this year is Ivan's; the next year is Asen's. Still, they emphasize that all of them together share expenses for the lamb. Ivan reveals to us that their elders used to carry a special cauldron to the cross; they started preparing ritual food very early in the morning. Even today the *stew* is being cooked in early morning but this is done in the family home, on the electric stove; thus, it is easier and faster. The day before is reserved for butchering a lamb, cleaning its meat and, together with other sauces, the chopped meat is ready for further cooking.

Asen Petrov tells us that his Grandfather Kola has decided "to go out" to the cross because of the cattle dying out, i. e., the moment they buy a sheep or some bigger cattle, it dies of some disease. Ivan Stančev explains that in their case the health care is of decisive importance for making a vow, only this time human health; i. e., Grandmother Milja could not walk; taking out a "prayer" to the cross was meant to make her feel better. The skeleton of the evidence is kept in the memories of the postwar generations; the details have got lost somewhere together with the deceased who knew more about them.

All of them are proud to say that the custom has never been broken. One could always find a few head-covered old women who lit up candles and observe the tradition even at the times when the practitioners of these ancient customs were looked upon depreciatingly or even pay a strict penalty. The young people, questioned by party commissioners, helplessly shrugged while explaining they could not have any impact on their elders. It was more important that this was not done by those having a membership card of the Communist Union; somehow the defiant and obstinate practice observed by old men and women was somehow passed over in silence. When in the nineties of the twentieth century this Balkan historical episode ended, firstly somewhat shyly and then more and more with a sense of obligation towards the still alive tradition, the grey-headed fifty-year old people, those who returned from urban centers and of a well-off social standing, got organized in order to renew the "prayer" as well as links with Orthodoxy. Slightly as a fashionable deed or rather with a not-so-developed feeling for religious things, the collected money was used for renewing the Church and its accompanying objects in its immediate vicinity; the cross overgrown with grass (or maybe pulled out from its original position by force and by some hard-headed Communist) was cleaned and, with pride, its original function was restored to it. A message reached them from their parents what to do and how to do it as the memories dictated and St. Savior's Day again became an important date in the annual celebration cycle of Gradinje.

Religious rites. We are early; no one there to keep us a company. We notice how the grass on the plateau before the cross is tidily mowed. Goša and Ana take their seat defined in advance. They have brought with them folding chairs and a table; after covering it with a clean cloth they put on it a cake, a bowl with wheat, a bo-

title of wine and some bread for the ritual.¹¹ Half an hour before noon, the number of cars before the renewed water fountain is multiplied; people begin to exchange greetings and the youngest make noise. Each group of celebrants stops right before its place, near a small improvised two-row wall of hollow blocs. The first thing to do is to pay a short visit to the small church along with lighting of candles and giving gifts to the icons: paper money of smaller value (Fig. 13). Then, on the covered tables, people hastily lay down bowls with food and ritual bread. Few candles also burn at the bottom of the cross while its arms are decorated with field and garden flowers (Fig. 14). For this year's "prayer" the obliged is Dr Ivan Stančev's family; their arrival is waited for with impatience. Finally, the representatives of the Džurin clan do come bringing a lamb *stew* in two metal casseroles to the cross at whose edges thin wax candles are arranged (Fig. 15). The ceremony is launched by the retired priest Aca, who has, for many decades, followed ebbs and tides in the religious life of Dimitrovgrad villages. Saying a short prayer in one breath, he blesses, with holy water, the cross and the dishes with *jahnija* as well as all those present who leave, on the concrete pedestal, coins (Fig. 16). He starts cutting the cake of the three vowed families and then of all the present; the cake-maker usually puts in his hand a bill of hundred or two hundred *dinars*. We have counted 11 village families and some fifty people; there are babies in the prams but no representatives of older generations who are the most deserving ones for keeping the custom alive in the hard times; they are either already dead or their health is seriously damaged so that they have passed on the entire celebration of St. Savior's to their sons, daughters, grandchildren and their guests (Fig. 17). The next thing to do is to start pouring the "prayer" into metal and plastic dishes and to distribute pieces of one of the three main cakes to all the holiday celebrants (Fig. 18); the stew is consumed at the very spot, along with the rest of an abundant meal (Fig. 19). On the sun-lit clearance before the cross, the lunch lasts for almost two hours in the spirit of nice talks, laughter and jokes and mutual offerings of the displayed food (Fig. 20).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The desire to placate powerful natural forces and to suppress their negative consequences for agricultural production and sheer physical existence of villagers has made the traditional village community develop, in the days of old, a system of collective *ritual* or *cult* practice.¹² The magical-religious procedures were to satisfy general village needs as well as those of a separate village household or, in its turn, the very individual (manifest function of the ritual). At the same time, it has intensified the awareness of the members about their belonging to the community as well as inner cohesion of the collective under the difficult living conditions (latent function of the ritual).

Collective village rituals are considered to be all those different forms of the ritual practice which involve all the village community members as their participants (formal aspect), thus becoming an important component of the traditional popular culture (Бандић 1978, 112). These celebrations include village holidays, church and village patron saint holidays, dancing and singing processions dedicated to the goddess of rain (*dodole*), maidens' processions for Lazarus Saturday (*lazarice*) as well as visiting votive crosses on great religious holidays.

¹¹ The tradition which is abandoned is to take out food and put it on the ground. Except for two cases, all the village families have brought, as disciplined to do, in cars or tractors, handy tables and chairs. The newly built concrete blocs, on the left and right sides of the cross, also serve for the people to sit in.

¹² Much later, these collective rituals were fit in into the Christian holiday calendar.

The continuance, for many centuries or millennium, of Orthodox Christianity has been enabled by adopting ancient spiritual legacy, that is, by gradually modifying the achievements of popular religiosity. Any other substance of the new model of faith has not, however, taken deeper roots in people's souls; original beliefs and authentic ideas are wearing a Christian cape but they have not turned into expected ecclesiastic piety (Петровић 2013); even more so in the unfavorable periods faced by the Orthodox Christian faith at the Balkans such as, for instance, five centuries of enslavement by the Turks and half a century of atheization and secularization after the Second World War.

The revitalization of the religious-ecclesiastic complex in Serbia initiated in the late eighties of the last century launched anew a debate about citizens' attitude towards religion in terms of its being either "devotion to faith" or just "coming closer to religion and church." The research projects have shown that the declarative statement in religious terms has not been accompanied by respective religious awareness and practice; salvation is counted upon though neither religious duties were carried out nor a set of ecclesiastic ritual activities were observed (Blagojević 2009, 2011; Đorđević 2009; Радловић 2012; Тодоровић 2013). Contrary to the expectations of ecclesiastic hierarchs, the greatest number of "Orthodox" believers has remained within the limits of the ritualistic folk religiosity. What has been renewed is, in fact, "people's Orthodoxy" (Bandić 2010), a simplified and unconventional version of ecclesiastic Orthodoxy which, in socialism, was additionally reduced to the level of cultural tradition observance. Or, as some domestic sociologists of religion have defined it: "the Serbs, in the early twentieth-first century are religious in the traditional way – without believing" (Đorđević 2009, 62).

Among the most consistent manifestations of people's religiosity from the spring-summer celebration cycles of the village households in Dimitrovgrad region are all-village or family-clan rituals around a *stone celebration/votive cross*.¹³ These rituals have deep mythological and pagan roots; they are related to the cult worship of nature. In the process of Christianization they more or less adopted the form of worship of a particular chosen saint or made vows. As a sign of worship of the patron-protector a blood animal sacrifice is offered either as a roast lamb (village celebration) or ritual food of lamb meat such as Kurban Chorba, "prayer" (family celebration). No one in particular is invited to the celebration around the cross though, as an unwritten rule, the collective gathering involves all the living descendents otherwise dispersed all over the country and abroad. The prepared ritual food is served to all those present at the celebration regardless of their kin relations with the family under a vow. The custom is inherited by the patrilineal principle, that is, a straight male-line. With their faces turned to the east, members of particular families, together with their guests, take a strictly defined place before the cross; they perform previously-defined ritual activities in the presence of an Orthodox priest: they cut and pour wine over a ritual cake; then they endow the present with pieces of bread, a snack of boiled wheat and a peace of meat or a ladle of ritual dish (the priest preserves for himself a lamb shoulder blade and gifts in money).

To the centuries-old efforts of the official Orthodox to completely Christianize them, the masses of village people in Serbia have responded by constructing a specific "people's religion", that is "people's Orthodoxy"; by accepting ecclesiastic rituals but interpreting them in an un-Christian magical way. St. George is, for instance, celebra-

¹³ Unlike the majority Serbian nation, the Bulgarian population in Serbia does not celebrate their cross holiday though they actively participate in the rituals related to the village holidays or going out to family votive crosses.

ted as one of the most favored saints but the rites for St. George's Day include, without exception, milking of sheep through small garlands of interwoven plants as well as ritual butchering of a lamb exactly on the votive cross dedicated to St. George.

Similarly to other instances of people's religiosity, (Bandić 1997; Ивановић Баришић 2007; Тодоровић И. 2007), the first change of contextual concept related to the votive cross was done under socialist secularization when the prevailing *magical-religious* festivities gave way to the *social* character of feasting. In order not to lose the holiday itself in the orchestrated marginalization of Orthodoxy, the villagers turned into a universal ranchers' celebration. The participation of privileged household members – usually family heads, familiar with the meaning, power and force of particular ritual activities – was given a festive atmosphere (with music, singing and dancing). By participating in the rituals, the other family members got to know their formal side though their religious essence eluded them. The sacred deeds were made profane; their primary magical content was diluted; the place of old celebratory content which was familiar to people's memory was taken over by entirely new ones.

Faith in efficiency of the supernatural protectors of people and property started to additionally lose its vitality under the changed circumstances of life, i. e., decline of the volume of agricultural production in the villages. Younger generations started to base their fundamental values and future life goals upon the achievements of industrialization and urbanization. The village stopped being an autarchic community, dependent on the vicissitudes of nature and oriented towards strict practice of the routine habits. The oblivion of the attitudes taken by their fathers and grandfathers occurred under the impact of the official atheist upbringing in educational institutions. In emptied villages, with the last old men and women, there died also the remembrance of the ancient habituated practice from the annual calendar cycle. The next reversal in the concept of ritual practice came with the ubiquitous Orthodoxization of Serbia which started in the late twentieth century. It aroused the contemporary dwellers in Dimitrovgrad villages to “revive” – relying on their own fading memories and interpretations of the eldest household folks – the holiday customs around votive crosses. As the main performers, the present generations, in their adult age, from Radejna and Gradinje, have taken to celebrating important dates from the church calendars. Yet, they do it more as a habit and less from the conviction in the efficiency of the undertaken activities, as well as with many *distortions* of the habituated practice.

Persistent manifest function of the ritual unlike its latent one. The needs of an individual village household are still met (a material welfare of some families proved by building stone support under the holy spot around the cross; gathering of otherwise dispersed members of a narrow and extended family on – state-approved – non-business days and school holidays: or simple observance of tradition and folklore) but the gathering, on a village holiday, with “going out to” the cross is not, by any means, what it used to be - a factor of uniting and integrating the village community.

Reduced participation of village households. In the years when the village community collectively was at the mercy of natural disasters there was an obligation to participate in ritual activities of all the households while today particular families do not participate in the village festivities due to their physical weakness, or poor material state or a drastic decline of the household members.

Changed structure of holiday participants. Once the celebration organization included almost exclusively people of a village, together with neighbors and close cousins; today guests include friends, acquaintances and business colleagues.

Change of duration and place of celebration. Socializing of villagers before the votive cross in the second half of the twentieth century lasted for the who-

le afternoon of St. George's Day (Radejna), along with mutual exchange of food and drinks as well as rejoicing and festivities; the next day was reserved for guests. At present, efforts are being made to perform all the rites before "small-scale sacred objects" before the end of the first afternoon hour while the central event is lunch with guests in individual households.

Reduction of some pagan motives. Lack of livestock in the villages has caused people to abandon the customs for ensuring cattle fertility and abundant yields in cattle-derived products (no garlands are made of grass; neither are they used to decorate lambs and milking buckets with). In the first half of the twentieth century the "prayer" (ritual dish) was made in the cauldrons at the very cult site, behind the votive cross, under the tree; today it is prepared in the household and then taken in big casseroles to the cross. Likewise, the butchering of a sacrificial animal used to be done before the cross along with indispensable sprinkling of the cross with the lamb blood; with the introduction of the Orthodox customs, this was replaced by offering sacrifice in the village household.

Simplification, shortening or introduction of new Orthodox customs. The participation in the church liturgy and gift-giving to the Orthodox priest in natural products (ritual bread, a lamb's shoulder blade and a lower lamb's jaw) are replaced by ritual candle lighting in the church, a shortened address by the priest and blessing people before the cross as well as endowing the priest with modest monetary contributions.

Introducing innovations into the ritual. Walking along an earth road to the cross has been replaced by car drives; ritual sacrifice preparation is now done by modern appliances (instead of a skewer and hearth there are electric stoves and big metal casseroles); food is not put on the ground but on folding tables; wooden and plastic chairs are used for sitting; home-made wine and brandy (*rakia*) are replaced by industrial brands while lollipops and sugar sticks of the former confectioner are now replaced by industrial sweets.

On the wave of retraditionalization of the public role of religion and religious feelings in the Serbian society, the official church doctrine openly tries to impose itself again on three generations of the people from Dimitrovgrad villages: an ever-declining number of the *eldest family members* who have forgotten so many things about the original forms of the holiday ritual proceedings, the *middle generation* that has not accepted a sufficient amount of systematic knowledge about practicing popular customs and the *young* one that, even if it wanted to, has no one to teach it about folk legacy. Therefore, regarding the third change of the collective pre-Christian and para-Christian conceptions – more precisely, the prevalence of the Orthodox-Christian semantic context in people's belief and practice – the newly-appointed priest Slobodan Ilić will have to make the most of all his knowledge and patience since an undeveloped religious conscience is ruling over his flock. From a long-term perspective, the results might be the most fruitful in the theological shaping of a village offspring.

That is why the renewed interest in worshipping votive crosses in the villages of Dimitrovgrad, from the last two decades, could be considered as a traditional popular religion rather than an expression of Orthodox churchization.

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PHOTOGRAPHS



Fig. 1. The Church of Saint George and Saint George's Votive Cross in Radejna



Fig. 2. Candle Lighting and Endowment of Saint George's Icon



Fig. 3. People from Radejna before the Votive Cross



Fig. 4. Roast Lamb, Candle, Boiled Wheat and Red Wine – Indispensable on the Ritual Dining Table



Fig. 5. Young and Old Priests Reading a Prayer before the Votive Cross



Fig. 6. Participants of Village Celebration Receiving Holy Water Blessing



Fig. 7. Priest Cutting a Ritual Cake



Fig. 8. People Taking a Snack of the Sacrificial Roast Meat



Fig. 9. Priest Cutting the Meat and Preserving a Lamb Shoulder Blade



Fig. 10. St. Savior's Votive Cross in Gradinje



Fig. 11. Decaying St. George's Cross in Gradinje



Fig. 12. Father Aleksandar with Representatives of the Celebrating Families (Božins, Badins and Džurins)



Fig. 13. Candle Lighting in the Church of Saint Savior



Fig. 14. Decorated Votive Cross in Gradinje



Fig. 15. "Prayer" – Ritual Stew of Young Lamb's Meat



Fig. 16. Blessing of the Votive Cross and Ritual Meal



Fig. 17. Cutting the Ritual Cake



Fig. 18. Distributing the "Prayer"



Fig. 19. Dining-table before the Votive Cross



Fig. 20. People from Gradinje in a Relaxed Atmosphere before the Votive Cross