

ТМ	Г. XXIV	Бр. 3-4	Стр. 305 - 311	Ниш	јул - децембар	2000.
----	---------	---------	----------------	-----	----------------	-------

UDK 397/398(=914.99)(497.17)

Оригинални научни рад

Примљено: 19.07.2001.

Trajko Petrovski

Institute of Folklore

Skopje (Republic of Macedonia)

**THE MAGIC IN SOME RITES OF THE LIFE CYCLE
AMONG THE ROM IN SKOPJE
(with a special emphasis to the child birth and marriage)**

Summary

In the present report entitled "The magic in some rites of the life cycle among the Rom in Skopje" we pay special attention to the magical and religious dimensions of the rituals and practices of child birth and marriage among the Rom in Skopje. The cycle of rituals regarding the pregnancy, the child birth and marriage are of a particular existential significance for the Rom. The rituals concerning the child birth and the marriage are often named "social rituals". Separated from their fatherland of origin, after their arrival on the Balkan Peninsula, due to various geographical and cultural circumstances, the Rom have safeguarded or lost some of the characteristics of their previous culture, have accepted and assimilated certain elements of the culture of the local population. The role and importance of magic in the Romani culture can be considered in a larger sense through the role and the ritual practices which suppose a certain magical significance. The customs in relation to child birth encompasses a large complex of magical practices. Children mean a lot to the Rom and they are of a great importance for the life, social and cultural continuity of the family. Thus, the practices that lead to the realization of a marital link and fertility in marriage begin with the child birth followed by the celebration of sexual maturity, reaching their culmination with wedding rituals.

Key words: culture of the local population, magical and religious rituals, birth and wedding rituals.

According to Evans-Pritchard, the magic represents a system of ritual practices and not a simple linkage of the phenomena in the consciousness¹. This author recognizes the fact that "the magic is particularly expressed in the societies which do not have technologically and politically developed organizations", while in the societies with an efficient technology and complex organizations small is the number of the magical rituals and bigger is the number of the religious rituals, while in the societies with a very high "technical efficiency" almost there are no magical rituals and the religion is not developed. According to Bronislaw Malinowski, there are no qualitative differences between the consciousness of the primitive and the civilized man. Malinowski thinks that there are no people, and no matter how primitive they are, without religion and magic². The magic in the form of a word or action is a means of the man's protection and defense from the unknown forces in situation of existential helplessness.

In the present report entitled "The Magic in Some Rites of the Life Cycle among the Rom" we pay special attention to the magical and religious dimensions of the rituals and practices of child birth and marriage among the Rom in Skopje. The cycle of rituals regarding the pregnancy, the child birth and marriage are of a particular existential significance for the Rom. The rituals concerning the child birth and the marriage are often named "social rituals"³.

Separated from their fatherland of origin, after their arrival on the Balkan Peninsula, i.e. in Macedonia, due to various geographical and cultural circumstances, the Rom have safeguarded or lost some of the characteristics of their previous culture, have accepted and assimilated certain elements of the culture of the local population. The role and importance of magic in the Romani culture can be considered in a larger sense through the role and the ritual practices which suppose a certain magical significance.

The customs in relation to child birth encompasses a large complex of magical practices. Children mean a lot to the Rom and they are of a great importance for the life, social and cultural continuity of the family. Thus, the practices that lead to the realization of a marital link and fertility in marriage begin with the child birth followed by the celebration of sexual maturity, reaching their culmination with wedding rituals.

With the arrival of a new member of the Romani family into the world, some ritual practices express a magical belief in their need for the future life, destiny, choice of the wife or husband, etc. For instance, spe-

¹ Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology*, Belgrade, 1983, p. 87.

² Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*, Belgrade, 1971, p. 33.

³ Petar Vlahović, *Rituals, Beliefs and Superstitions of the Peoples of Yugoslavia*, Belgrade, 1972, pp. 16-65.

cial attention is paid to the moment of bringing *tiganitse* (a kind of donut) for the newborn baby and presents for the mother (pajamas, scarf, etc.). It is believed that the child who did not receive *tiganitse* could not be married or would realize it much later in his life. Rituals concerning the ceremony of sexual maturity are particularly important as affirmation of the male and female principles symbolically through which the society recognizes the new status of the individual. So, for example, among some Orthodox Rom in Skopje there is a ritual concerning first female menstrual period. There is a practice of throwing out the first water, in which the girl was washed, onto a fruitful tree.

According to the traditional beliefs, the biological reproduction is one of the principal aims of marriage, and it is quiet understandable that in the frame of the wedding customs, some particular magical practices aimed to secure the fertility in the future family union are still observed.

The link between two ritual cycles, the wedding cycle and the cycle of the child birth can be considered in the light of their mutual relationship, i.e. of the practices observed in the frame of the first, and with its magical objectives are directed to the content of the second ritual complex. As for the magical practices in relation with the future posterity, we can say that in the frame of the wedding rituals among the Rom are firstly observed those practices for securing the fertility and then follow the practices which influence the determination of the child's sex.

To the group of magical practices belong those practices which are aimed to forecast premature child birth, the end of the capacity of child bearing, or the permanent infertility.

Among the Rom (Orthodox Rom, Dzhabazi Rom, etc.) special significance is given to the symbol of the knot (*kombo*) and its magical meaning. Namely, because of its explicit symbolic sense of closing, knotting and stopping⁴, the Rom tried to avoid wearing the knot especially during so called critical life moments such as child birth and the wedding⁵. However, in case of temporary or impossibility of giving child birth, the making and wearing of knots in those moments is expressed a completely concrete magical intention of the ritual subject. In this sense the symbolism of the knot could be identified with the act of counting which has the objective of postponement of the very act of child birth.

Nevertheless, during the whole wedding ceremony public and evident magical practices express the aim of securing fertility in the marriage and the birth of male children. Thus, according to the customs of the Muslim Rom in Skopje, after the first wedding night the bridegroom was served fried eggs for lunch in the house of the bride in order to have a

⁴ J. Chevalier, A. Gheerbrant, Dictionary of Symbols, Zagreb, 1983, p. 99.

⁵ J.G. Fraser, The Golden Bough, Belgrade, 1937, p. 305, 308; M. Eliade, Images et symbols, Paris, 1952, p. 146.

fertile marriage. The care of the community for the fertility in marriage of the newlyweds is expressed through a whole range of magical practices in the wedding customs among the Rom. Among some Muslim Rom, the Dzhambazi, the wedding bread (*e boraki bokoli*) is made by a girl (*bek-yarka*). Among all the Rom in Macedonia is known the custom of throwing some fruits (chick peas, rice, candies, coins, raisins etc.). It is done by the bridegroom (*o dzhamutro*) or by his mother during their return to their house with the bride and these rituals are mainly observed for the magical initiation of fertility⁶. Before entering the house, the bride should paint the upper part of the door with a bit of sorbet and then a member of his family fixes three nails in the right side of the threshold. It has a magical significance and it is done in order to impede the return of the bride to her father's house. After entering her new home, some of the present members of the bridegroom's family hands the bride a male child; she is supposed to hold the child in her lap, which should initiate and symbolize the continuity of the fertility in her own marriage. In the framework of these magical practices which are done in the prospect of having posterity in the future marriage, a special place occupies the practices related to the influence of sex of the child which is expected to be born. The favoring of male children among the Orthodox Rom in Skopje is also expressed in the well known custom of handing out a male child into the arms of the bride. During this act the child puts his hand on the breast of the bride. The wedding ritual also contains magical practices whose role is to secure and initiate health, prosperity, happiness and richness in the Romani family. Also, if she wants to have male children, it is necessary that a woman who gave birth only to female children should take the placenta of another woman who gave birth to male children, and put it on a pole and pronounce the following words: *Devla, de ma mange murshe chaven te biyanav, a lake de dzhuvlya!* (God, let me have male children, and let her have female ones!).

From the moment a woman surely knows that she is pregnant, first of all because of the cessation of her period and then from the moving of the fetus, she enjoys a special status which separates her from her previous usual life context. In that sense the pregnancy could be understood as a participation in a holy reality which, because of some immanent features, enables another different method of research⁷. The pregnant Romani woman pays special attention to her behavior, to what she can or cannot do during that period.

The pregnancy, first of all, belongs to the intimate life of the woman until the moment it becomes evident. In this sense numerous pro-

⁶ T. Đorđević, *Our Folk Life*, 1, Belgrade, 1984, pp. 315-316.

⁷ D. Bandić, *Taboo as an Element of Organisation of the Cultural Time and Space*, In: *Gradina*, Niš, 6-7, 1981, pp. 48-49.

cedures and rules are undertaken related to that period of the pregnant woman, which are very important to her individual and personal behavior. It is believed that during her pregnancy the woman has to avoid eating fish so that the child should not be dumb (*laloro*), and also it is forbidden to the pregnant woman (*kamni*) to carry heavy things or to bend which represents a danger for the fetus. The pregnant woman should also avoid eating rabbit meat so that the child should not sleep with open eyes. She should not sit on a bed made of lamb's skin or on a shaggy blanket, otherwise the child would be hairy all over his body⁸. Too, a pregnant woman should not eat a head of lamb or her child would be sniveling. It is not good for a pregnant woman to see a snake because of analogous repercussions on the child. To this cycle of magical relation between the pregnant woman and the milieu belongs her contact with some persons with physical defect and this is very sensitive in the very moment when the future mother becomes aware of the first movements of her baby. In other words, it is believed that the child would have all those characteristics of the person at whom the woman would look at that moment⁹.

The pre-ritual magical practices in the period of the pregnancy are aimed to secure the pregnant woman with the necessary emotional security and to diminish the existential insecurity. Since the pregnancy puts the Romani woman into a particular psychological situation, the observance of special magico-religious rules by her implies a special status of the woman too, during this period. In order to keep alive the wanted child and to secure him with health, immediately after its birth, the observance of various magical practices and customs begins. The Romani woman from the city of Skopje is given drinking water in which all the locks in the house were washed earlier in order to give an easy birth to the baby (among the Muslim Dzhambazi Rom) or holy water from a church (among the Orthodox Rom). It is interesting to point out the custom (among the Muslim Dzhambazi Rom) that, in order to give an easy birth to a baby, the pregnant woman offers some bread out of her apron to those persons who sell wood loaded on horses or donkeys and says: *Sar so loke ulyaren akala kashta katar o samari, agya me da lokeste te bi-yanav* ("May I give birth to my baby as easy as this wood unloads from the packsaddle")¹⁰.

The time of the delivery of a baby is determined by the pregnant woman herself, i.e. when she feels labor pains in the lower part of the stomach (*telo vogi*); she knows by herself when the parturition time (*bi-*

⁸ According to the telling of Čeriban Avdulova, born in Skopje in 1945.

⁹ S. Zečević, Beliefs and Customs about the Child Birth, In: Glasnik Etnografskog Muzeja, 42, Belgrade, 1978, p. 343; D. Bandić, Taboo in the Traditional Culture of the Serbs, Belgrade, 1983, pp. 33-60.

¹⁰ According to the telling of Čeribana Jonuzova, born in Skopje in 1944.

yandipaske) comes. Among the Rom, the hiding of the child birth by the pregnant woman from the closest neighbors has magical meaning. Before the delivery, all the knots of the pregnant woman are untied, even her hair is undone and everything in the rooms has to be unlocked; this practice has the magical property of an easier delivery¹¹.

Once the child comes into the world, there are many beliefs related to his staying alive and to his happy future. When the umbilical cord will fall out (*ka perol*) in the next few days, the midwife takes a piece of a black broom, a bit of bread and salt; she folds and fixes them to the swaddling clothes of the new born baby. It has to be attached to the swaddling clothes for 40 days as a protection against the evil eye and spirits¹²; and the navel has to be kept because it is believed that it secures happiness and success in the life of the child.

From the aforementioned examples we can come to the conclusion that the magic in the customs and beliefs in the life cycle among the Rom (the child birth and the marriage) have persisted, and the Rom themselves know them very well and observe them, but this is, of course, another opportunity for further ethnological investigations of the Romani material and spiritual culture.

Трајко Петровски, Скопје
(Република Македонија)

**МАГИЈА У НЕКИМ ОБРЕДИМА ЖИВОТНОГ ЦИКЛУСА
МЕЋУ РОМИМА У СКОПЈУ
(са посебним нагласком на рођење детета и венчање)**

Summary

У раду насловљеном 'Магија у неким обредима животног циклуса међу Ромима у Скопју' обраћамо посебну пажњу на магијске и религијске димензије ритуала и обичаја при рођењу детета и венчању међу Ромима у Скопју. Круг ритуала који се односе на трудноћу, рођење детета и венчање је од посебног егзистенцијалног значаја за Роме. Ритуали који се тичу рођења детета и венчања се често називају 'друштвени ритуали'. Одвојени од своје отаџбине, после доласка на Балканско полуострво, због различитих географских и културних прилика,

¹¹ Trajko Petrovski, The Customs and the Rituals in Relation to the Child Birth among the Rom in Macedonia, In: Makedonski Folklor, 48, Skopje, 1991, p. 207.

¹² Trajko Petrovski, The Customs and the Rituals in Relation to the Child Birth among the Rom in Macedonia, In: Makedonski Folklor, 48, Skopje, 1991, p. 207.

Роми су сачували или изгубили неке карактеристике своје пређашње културе, прихватили и асимиловали одређене елементе културе домаћег становништва. Улога и важност магије у култури Рома може бити посматрана у ширем смислу кроз улогу ритуалних радњи које претпостављају одређену магијску важност. Обичаји у односу на рођење детета обухватају широк комплекс магијских радњи. Деца значе много Ромима и она су од велике важности за живот, друштвени и културни континуитет породице. Стога, радње које воде реализацији везе међу супружницима и плодности у браку почињу са рођењем детета које је пропратила прослава сексуалне зрелости, достижући кулминацију са ритуалима венчања.

Кључне речи: култура локалног становништва,
магијски и религијски ритуали, ритуали рођења и венчања