

Traditional calendar performance contexts

Pagan Days

The construction of a Christmas-New Year male ritual cycle comprising two group rituals – *Rusalia* and masquerade is typical for Southwest Bulgaria. The earliest description of the *Rusalia* as an active tradition in the mid-19th century was presented by Kuzman Shapkarev. According to him a set of about 20 to 60 lads and men goes and dances raising money for the building of a church in the Bulgarian villages between Enidzhe Vardar and Kukush northwest of Thesalonica from *Bozhik* to *Voditsi* (from Christmas to Epiphany). The set is militarized, divided into couples, moving and dancing in a chain. The leader is a *baltadgija* (<Turkish “axe man”) carrying an axe (he rules over the whole set) and *kesadgija* (<Turkish “vagabont, robber”) ruling over the *horo*; their assistant is the *juzbashija* (<Turkish “foreman”) *tanchar* leading the *horo*. The set has a couple of *chaushi* (<Turkish “constables”) guarding the *horo*, a couple of *kalauzi* (<Turkish “watchmen and messengers”) and a couple of servants. Shapkarev has especially noted that *Rusalia* sets are accompanied by *zurnaci*: “two couples of players, i.e. two *mehteri* (*tapanari*) with their *tapans* and two *zurnaci*”. All of them are dressed in their Easter best: in white loose *fustani* (*frangi*), with red kerchiefs (*shamii*) crossed at the breasts, with strings of golden coins and adornments and obligatorily with a drawn scimitar in hand. During the twelve pagan days (between Christmas and Epiphany), while going about the villages, the *Rusalia* keep ritual silence. They do not cross themselves, do not greet anybody and dance without holding each other by the hand. Only those suffering from an illness can join their *horo* to find a remedy. Every day before dawn the *tapanaci* beating the drum wakes up the *Rusalia*. An hour later, having dressed and breakfasted the members of the set get together. The axe man inspects the set and gives a sign to the *zurnaci* to play *Iol avasi* (*Hod avasi* – a walking march). Under this ritual music they march from one settlement to another. In the settlements they dance at the broad places (e.g. the village square, the largest yard in the village or the crossroads) accompanied by *zurnaci* music. Meanwhile the constables and the servants go around the houses and workshops, cross with their scimitars the owners for good health and prosperity and get money. The *Rusalia* may also dance at the homes for health, believed (as they have often actually done) to cure seriously ill people by their ecstatic dances. On the eve of Epiphany they go back to their village wherein the village priest reads a prayer to them. Thus the set is released. Shapkarev has omitted the information about the *zurnaci* repertoire. He only mentions that “the *Rusalia* dance their dances to the voice of the “*zurnski* and *tapaniski*” performances, which usually are always monotonous”. An evidence for the importance of *zurnaci* music in the ritual are the notes that the players signal the gathering, the inspection, the departure and the marches of the set, as well as the fact that their place is next to the axe man: “next to the chief stand also the musicians, two of them” [Шапкарев, 1968:711-725; Арнаудов, 1972:138-140].

According to the classification of sound activity in the rituals from the male ritual cycle, the *zurnaci Rusalia* music belongs to the most abstract level of the sound-ritual realization of the ritual’s signification – the instrumental sound [Захариева, 1998:165]. The *zurnaci* perform several ritual melodies, called by Shapkarev “always monotonous”. This is a specific feature, disclaimed by Ilia Manolov, who suggests a detailed survey of the *Rusalia* music. According to him the *Rusalia* melodies are performed only within the frames of the ritual and have a uniting and coordinating function in the *Rusalia* set. In the