

THE POLYPHONIC SINGING IN A FEMALE RITUAL OF SOUTH WESTERN BULGARIA

The female ritual of *Ěàçàðà/Lazara*, *Ěàçàðèöà/Lazaritsa* (lit. attrib. *Ěàçàðóâàí â/Lazaruvane - Lazaring*) was practiced within Christian population though the whole of Bulgarian territory. In different local performances, there are beliefs, characteristics and practices in common. *Lazaritsa* was realized by girls just getting into maidenhood (called *Ěàçàðêà/Lazarka*, pl. *Lazarki*) and engaged ones, who participated for some years to the wedding. In the past, a maiden could not get married without *Lazaring*. Since the middle of 20 century, the ritual gradually was dying out as a traditional ritual norm, but it is still vital in the memory of old participants. Nowadays it is performing by tradition as a spectacle.

Lazaritsa is considered as a relic of past female initiations (Ilieva, 1989; Kaufman, D., 1982; Neykova, 1988). In the folk milieu that was reconsidered to the ideas of fertility, health, welfare of the society... and to commemorations. It is difficult to say when and how the naming of “Lazar” was adapted to the pagan essence and nature of that ritual, still more, that the biblical story of St. Lazar’s resurrection and Palm Sunday was and still are terra incognita for the most of the old women. In the course of the linear time the esoteric (female) ritual has been transformed into exoteric one, but some single activities in the region of Ograjden mountain (the most southwest part of Bulgaria) still keep the survivals of a distant and ancient ritual prototype. Its overt and hidden substrate and its strong – both solar and chthonic layer reveals in different characteristics (in the time and places of the ritual, in its syncretic musical forms - as unity of tune, word and movement/dance, in the semantic of the verses, in its notions and behaviors, in the unspeakable...)¹.

Brief Description

Until the middle of 20 century in Southwest Bulgaria, the ritual was running on in the period of Long Lent and ends on the very Easter. The so called *Lazar’s Sundays*, known in the region of mountain Ograjden was three to five weeks through the Lent (in the different villages), including Palm Sunday, when, in the dead of Saturday nights (after the first cock-crow) the maidens gather on the cemetery. They outrun each other because of the belief that first one will be married through the year (the village of Igraliste), or “who will light the fire first will live longer than the others” (the village of Bogoroditsa). On that purpose, the girls carry firebrands from their homes. After setting the fire (on the meadow in front of the church), the maidens sing three songs around it in a slow circle chain *horo* dance, or standing in front of the church, facing east. In every one of the villages, this micro-song-cycle is sung only on the graveyard before sunrise; it has three

different verbal contents but by one common *glas* (lit. - *tune*)² – a typical sigh for the olden traditional style.

Great, Variegated, Motley Lazaritsa is the last Lazar's/Palm Sunday, when the girls first in their lives put on new, maiden's clothes with some bride's attributes on. In the many Ograjden's villages, the rite is "only for women" and men are not allowed to present at all. Lazarki and the women from the village gather in the morning at the cemetery – on the meadow in front of the church, where, arranged in a circle, every family took its definite place. The maidens' groups has a common leader (*izvojnîk*) at the head, chosen in the very morning – a slender, well built lazarka with alive parents, skilful in leading the circle dance and the ritual actions at all. As a rule, the girls make way for some already engaged or "older maiden, ripe for marriage". At the very beginning Lazarki circle the church three times on a song *horo* dance and then move without interrupting it in the centre of the meadow. Here, the dance chain starts to round in an open circle and begins the refrenation of young brides, married since last Lazaritsa on, and the "dandling", "for-dancing" of the babies, born in the same period. According to the beliefs, the for-dancing of the babies is for "knowing to dance" and for health. It is the first children's initiation and their ritual entering in and incorporation to the society. Quite recently the old Bulgarians asked each other for their age "how many *Ėàçàđí ěêà/Lazarnica*" are you?" It was only the leader, who can detach from the dancing chain by that situation. The Lazarki hold each other strongly (by belts) as they believe that who disjoins soon will die. The refraining of brides and babies is followed by giving out the food by women, in between "for health", including to the Lazarki (breads, meals, prepared with rice, boiled corns, etc.); then, they put some food on the graves of young deceased (young men, maidens, children) from last Lazaritsa on. In every village there is one Lazar's tune "on tomb", which the maidens sing with different verses, according to the deceased. They light some candles and take themselves from the food on the grave (for "he/she rests in piece") – if given on hand, "some of them may die". After singing on tombs, the maidens "scatter"/end Great Lazaritsa on the meadow with the same song, they circled the church at the very beginning.

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In the progress of the ritual action, all musical forms have a definite place and time of performing. The old women say that once, it was "sinful to sing Lazar's songs at some other time of the year". As a rule the girls learn them through the Long Lent gathering into groups (mostly of two), each in threes to five girls. According to the local diaphonic style, every group has a *ěçâěěâ-ěâ/izvikachka* (lit. – the one who is "calling", singing the melody = the first layer of the diaphonic songs) and the others two to four girls are "laying/setting" the bourdon. It is quite rare the *izvojnîk*/leader on Great Lazaritsa and the *izvikachka* is the same person – only if the requirements of the both correspond. The first group sings one verse of the song (= to one musical semi-sentence) which the second one usually repeats as overlaps the final tones of the first

group (an *antiphonic* style of singing). As a whole, the Lazar's cycle shows the specifics and the stylistic features of southwest musical tradition – varied and rich of forms and principles of musical making. Within these songs there are more or less musically elaborated pieces and big diversity of verbal contents. Concerning metro rhythm, there are songs in 2/4, 3/8, 5/8, 5/16, 7/8, 7/16, 8/8, 9/8, 9/16 measures and in Rubato style, too.

Once, according to their time of performance, the Lazar's songs could be examined as different in semantics and functions. Alongside, considering the musical specifics of the songs, in a general plan we see the outline of two musical levels, each consisting of common features (concerning the forms and the structures of the tunes, their scales and ranges, the principles of diaphonic singing...). Under condition, these could be related to different stages of preservation and development of the melodies, to the different types of situations and behaviors – figuratively speaking, to the esoteric side and exoteric “inside” in the ritual. Under condition, because within these two levels there are “transitional” forms, displaying different stages of unfolding and widening of melodious and structural principle in the songs - an intrinsic phenomenon to the development of a given genre.

The first and the mostly spread musical level encompasses ritual tunes of an older, more archaic way of *musical thinking* and sounding, determined by the close connection with the context of ritual situations. These Lazar's songs are consisting mostly of two musical semi-sentences depending on length of the verses and their versification. In most cases, the second semi-sentence is modified version of the first one (most often within final tones). This type of melodies is frugally built/constructed in length and in range (within discord, three chord, followed in tetra chord and pent chord) and the sub tonal movement is quite rear. The modus of *Phrygian* tetra chord (according to the old Greek system) is the typical base of the melodies, followed by *Dorian* and *Ionian*; the *Pentatonic* scales as the scales with hiatuses, peculiar for the southwest song tradition are quite rear.

The Lazar's songs within the region of Ograjden are a typical example for the so-called conservatism of ritual sounding. They are homogeneous and much unified on their structural and mode-intonation level, as in the old tradition of singing and refraining different verses on the same *glas*. Very typical for their performance is the asynchrony within the dancing/steps of the slow, chain horo and the musical pulsation of the tunes. In most pieces, the both layers keep closely each other. The second one is almost non-active (quite dwelling on the keynote), while the first, performing the melody often descends below the bourdon, resulting in the so-called “crossing seconds”. A uniting stylistic and constructive feature of the songs is also their figure-tune construction. Many of them consist of one melodic motive and its improvised repetitions. The narrow range, predominating of one musical base (tonal center) of the tunes, the dominant correlation into syllable-note, the winding/harping movement around the keynote³, melodic lines poor in ornaments and the musical plainness as a whole are peculiar features of the southwest Lazar's songs

at all; that concerns too, some songs consisting of longer musical lines, resulted from the lyrics' length, e. g. from the repetition of the second verses or refrains. The later are quite rare within that cycle. Alongside, within Lazaritsa "only for women" there are some pieces more elaborated or developed in range, with a different content of the second semi-sentence.

The entity of Lazaritsa "only for women" is manifested in one-type ritual actions, motivated by the same beliefs, in the syncretism of music, verses and dance, consisting of similar idiosyncrasies. It is due to the common regional style and as their ritual meaning and function. In spite of the musical variety these songs are performed always with definite ritual texts/verses and functions. Their sounding could be taken as semantically bounded to the substrate esoteric side of the ritual, revealed through the Lazar's Sundays and Great Lazaritsa at the cemetery and at the village square (also "only for women"⁴). That does not mean at all that some "plain" songs are not available in other types of situations and rituals... However, these very antiphonal tunes belong to, as an integral part only to these ritual activities and their sacred places. Sounding over and over again (with different verbal content) adding in the tense, piercing sound and the typical for the region "snake-like" intonation – whole that in Rubato style, "dissolve" somehow the feeling of beginning and end. In fact, there is not a melodious "image" but a *symbol sounding* of an "open" situation, which probably brings out a musical concept of the *beyond*. Singing these, in the words of old women, "You pray to the church... and make it for health" (the village of Bogoroditsa). Namely, the faith in this performing bounded with ethos and the semantics of time and place, of a definite type of ritual behavior and even with some psychological adjustment assign the tunes to an older ritual and musical layer. Such a type of female ritual songs was very characteristic of the so-called transitional period (from Lent to Ascension Day), when, according to the common Bulgarian concept "the dead are loosen". The concept and the symbols of the *Beyond* penetrate Lazaritsa on different levels. In many villages, the St. Lazar's day is All Souls' Day, when excavation and second burials are taking place⁵. Following D. Kaufman (1982:22-23), Lazaritsa is built "upon a ritual of a commemorative function..." The transcendental specifics of the period and of the ritual itself are voiced also into the "crossing" Lazar' tunes "on tomb" on the day of Great Lazaritsa – only for young deceased since last year/Lazaritsa on. They have common musical and stylistic idiosyncrasies and some typical lament' features: Rubato style of singing, free versification, the peculiar appealing to the deceased at the beginning of the song, a typical balladic fabula "voice from tomb"... The second layer is almost static and dwells on the musical base of the songs. The sounding of the verbal content is realized mostly by the lead singer in succession of melodious and recitative fragments. In parallel, a ritual moment at Great Lazaritsa in the village of Logodash bears close, *chthonian* semantic traces too: while the lazarki are dancing on the square a "calm"/mild-tempered open-circle horo the young brides

are giving away round loafs. The numerous repetitions of a plain motive-structured Lazar' tune voices a specific verbal content ("A Soldier Maid")⁶. According to the unwritten law, without this ritual moment one is not entitled, has not right going at "*umereshka*" (lit. – a memorial service or funeral).

Within the traces that genetically assign that tradition to an older not only mythical but ritual strata are some *orgiastic* remains (according to the old original meaning of *orgy* as a mystery of initiated) as well the taboo on the male's presence until Great Lazaritsa. In most of the villages goes out through the Lent as well the very beginning of Great Lazaritsa are bounded to specific high/sacred places (as meadows, hills, places with "cave like stones", graveyards, votive places with old oak-trees...)⁷. To the older data, through the Lazar' Sundays "the maidens, dressed in white chemises run from hill to hill at the end of the village, dance and sing..." In the village of Krastiltsi, there was a "strict prohibition for men to come into the maidens' side and to annoy them... If someone youth or a man appears they may beat or kill him with brands and stones..." That kind of female ritual' behavior (as well as running, wallowing, whirling...) is considered as "archaic and ecstatic [by my opinion – *enthusiastic*] type of sound-motive activity" (Ilieva., 1989:71-72). Along these lines, some past records (16 century) could be remind, telling about synchronous increasing the tempo of dancing and the sounding of singing ("at the end they/lazarki was running in gallop... and the song turned to a loudish", lit. shouting – Hinkova, 1976:213).

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The ritual content of the Lazar's Sundays determine to a higher degree the belief in and the actions on Great Lazaritsa. The complete ritual localizes and actuates the beginning of a new vital cycle in the patriarchal village – the socialization of a newborn, moving the alive to the next stage ahead in the society, the passage of the diseased. At the "for-dancing" and refrenation on Great Lazaritsa in Ograjden' villages (at the cemetery, on the square) the songs are following without interruption. The maidens, holding each other tightly in the dance chain keep singing all the time. The transitions and the merging of the melodies into one another "construct" a dense, most likely protective sounding "screen". Some twenty years ago, the whole situation was believed as meditative and deeply influencing. An implied meaning for that too, was the belief in the phenomenal possibilities of the maiden's group. I should add that its behavior is a survival of old collective *magic*, forcing, constraining the deity not to hear and support, but to fulfill the asking... (About the old, original meaning of *magic/gohte...a*, see Fol, 2004: 64)⁸ Their semantic and similar stylistic sounding could support also the supposition for theirs old time origin.

In difference with Lazaritsa "only for women" the most popular form of the ritual through the Bulgarian territory as in its southwest parts was the Lazaring at the houses (usually on Saturday before Palm Sunday) and at the village square (on Palm Sunday) in the attendance of the whole rural community. It is hard to say when the closed,

secret character of Lazaritsa seized to be its essence. On practice, the process of “opening” of the ritual led on to some considerable changes into the style of behavior, in the musical figurativeness of the songs as well in their verbal symbolism, which gradually faded and was unified under the common sign and purpose of “health”. There are quite a lot of examples within corpuses and periodical editions showing of the verbal diversifying and expansion of the Lazar’s songs cycle. Within that process, to some old and typical Lazar’s tunes was adjusted some obviously new verses, distinguishing briefly from the old ones; many of these too, are building in plots some “daily-style” or love-story fables.

The new meanings given to the situations of performance inevitably reflect to the essence of musical tunes. In the villages, where the maidens act in the presence of the whole community, there are too, more musically developed songs, consisting of different tendencies — a wider tonal ambitus of the first layer as the second one keeps at the key tone (e. g. the searching of second’s intervals and the crossing of the levels is quite rare), the formulation of a complete musical “image”, a constant altered interpretation, different musical content of semi-sentences... By my opinion, this type of songs represents the second level within the Lazar’s cycle. Some authors consider them as “new ones... as different type of polyphonic singing” (Kaufman N., 1968: 90). This kind of tunes, at all their plainness and small amount differs from, let’s say the old ones by one main reason - they are not songs-symbols but some sort of public musical performances. Just them the old singers recall as a personal manifestations and appearances, appreciated by the community mostly by vital and aesthetic aspect (e.g. as distinguished or not singers and dancers, as future brides...). A “performance” and a song and with such a “secular” nature could exist and survive outside the vanishing ritual form – even in another song cycle.*

Since the middle of XX century on in the region of Ograjden Lazaritsa just fall away quite “clearly” – without acquiring a new meaning and forms (which kept in the memories of the old performers the songs and the situations they was sung in the first half of the century). About the same period, the ritual has been dropped out bit by bit as a sacred and a vital norm quite everywhere through the Bulgarian territory. In different local performances (including southwest parts) there was sounding from old musical and verbal fables to the newly ones. Their co-existence and consolidation in the ritual is due to the multi-stage character of that tradition itself and to the process of giving a new meaning to its contents. Of course, the defining of the ritual activities as “syncretic/esoteric” and “open/exoteric” ones, even under condition, is an effort of an outside observer who never ran to light the fire on the graveyard... Similar delimitation is unthinkable for the people “inside” who just believed without asking “why”... Even today in the village of Bogoroditsa the old women feel deeply about Lazaritsa and its sacred, magic power (“for a time, they abandon the Lazaring, the maidens began to die one by one and they started

* See examples in thi appendix

Lazaring again...”). Probably, such a kind of belief underlies in the revival of Lazaritsa, though as an innovated tradition form during the last years in some Ograjden’ villages. I would like so be it.

Notes

¹ The research is based on my observations upon Lazaritsa since 1982, as well on earlier data and musical records from different villages in the region.

² According to folks, *glas* means the tune, the melody of the monophonic song and the whole sounding complex of the diaphonic one.

³ For the winding movement as an analogous of the dancing spiral – a peculiar solar, sign [or vice versa? – RN] (Kaufman, D., 1998:119).

⁴ On the basis of the semantic identity within space, verse, musical idiosyncrasies and ritual acting of one and the same kind as well as on the taboo over the male’s presence the Lazaring at the square (in the village of Ribnitsa, Palat, Mahalata, Bogoroditsa ...) could be considered as a semantic variant of Lazaring at the cemetery.

⁵ E.g. digging out the grave after 3, 5 or 7 years (according to the local practice) followed by second burial of the bones, called “a veritable funeral”.

⁶ The song (over 100 of verses) tells about a young woman, who joined the army instead of her father. The subject is known in different versions and from different parts of Bulgaria. It is considered to have preserved elements from the ancient Tsar’s initiations

⁷ In the Bulgarian ritual system the celebration of a rite starts in the evening. E. g. in the village of Krastiltsi Great Lazaritsa begins on the Saturday eve with thrice rounding of Lazar’s hill (probably an old tumulus) on a slow chain horo-dance, which the maidens gradually wind up in a spiral (Neykova, 1988; Ilieva, 1989:72).

⁸ Suchlike are the callings through the Lent on “God Nicola and Saint Grandpa Ilia” – the most representative, medieval hypostases of the supreme God within Bulgarian tradition (Kareavelov, 1940: 214-215, the data refers to Lazaritsa in 19 century in former Middle west Bulgarian territories).

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მაგალითი 1. სასაფლაოზე ლაზარეს კვირების დროს; დიდ ლაზარიცაზე (სოფელი ბოგოროდიცა, რნ 1985).

Example 1. On the cemetery through the Lazar's Sundays; on the Great Lazaritsa (The village of Bogoroditsa, RN 1985).

M.M. ♩ = 160

ზა - სა - ღა ე სვე - თა ზე - დე -
ღა, ზე - სა - ღა ე სვე - თა ზე - დე - ღა.

მაგალითი 2. ბიჭუნათა “საცეკვაო” (სოფელი ვრანია, რნ 1984).

Example 2. On “for-dancing” of male child (The village of Vrania, RN 1984).

M.M. ♩ = 108-116

ი - მაშ სი - ნა პი - ტი მი' ი - მაშ სი - ნა პი - ტი მი - ჯ.

მაგალითი 3. გოგონათა/ბიჭუნათა “საცეკვაო” (სოფ. იგრალიშტე, რნ 1984).

Example 3. On “for-dancing” of female/male child (The village of Igralishte, RN 1984).

M.M. ♩ = 160

რო - დი - ღა მაი - კა კერ - კა რა - ინ - კა, რო - დი - ღა მაი - კა
კერ - კა რა - ინ - კა.

მაგალითი 4. საფლავზე (სოფელი იგრალიშტე, რნ 1984).

Example 4. On tomb (The village of Igralishte, RN 1984).

M.M. $\text{♩} = 92$

Ех, ти ми Слав - ке ле, кит - ко ле, раз -
ша - ре - е - на.

მაგალითი 5. საცეკვაო სიმღერა* (სოფელი ვრანია, რნ 1984).

Example 5. Dance song* (The village of Vrania, RN 1984).

Льс - ка - ви - че, бьс - ка - ви - че, що ми
льс - каш лс, що ми бьс - каш.

* სიმღერას აქვს ერთადერთი მიზანი – ცეკვა სოფლის სკვერში ბზობის კვირას. ხნიერმა ქალებმა ამიხსნეს, რომ ვერბალური შინაარსი ჰქმნის არა გრძნობას, არამედ “სიმღერა მხოლოდ ცეკვის მიზნით იმღერებოდა”.

* The song is with the sole purpose of dancing on Palm Sunday at the village square. The old women explained to me that the verbal content makes no sense at all, but they “sung the song just to dance”.