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## **SACRAL SETTLEMENT-ADJACENT TOPOI IN MIDDLE STRANDJA – REAL AND VIRTUAL ASSEMBLIES**

*The middle part of the mountains Strandjanska is active contact area which offers a lot of special places associated with legends and traditions. This topos, which «tell» on the folk language of the meetings of the various peoples who lived or passed through these lands: Bulgarians and representatives of other Slavic and Balkan peoples. The memory of these places is preserved to this day, and for the local population, they are sacred. They can turn into an attractive center of cultural and historical tourism.*

**Key words:** *sacral geography; mythological precedent; Ethnology of space; cultural and historical memory.*

Ethnologists have long established the existence of *sacral geography* (In: Етнос и сакрална география. 2012: 7) – it is a form of mental structuring of space via the means of communal culture. This model of space is connected with the temporal parameters of the social ideology, it functions as a *heterotopia* (Foucault 1986 : 23) – real locations, which are the stages of society's utopias and ideas, maintained and passed on through traditional cults and oral legends.

The study is focused onto the territory of the villages Drachevo, Rosenovo, Fakiya, Golyamo Bukovo, Dolno and Gorno Yabalkovo in the Strandzha Mountain. Their populace has an almost entirely Bulgarian ethnic identity. Strandzha, however, is an active ethnic-cultural contact zone and ethnic identity reflexes are strongly exhibited here. The settlements' territory is perceived as the proprietary, absorbed territory, it is the core of the local microcosm, with the zones around the core serving as limits, they are the borders separating the domestic from the foreign, but also the place where the two meet, communicate or compare their strengths – overtly or covertly (Мопоз 2012 : 46).

The topoi and the narrative forms related to them in this area share the common features of their typology.

Regardless of the diversity of landscape features, the cult activities traditionally practiced in their vicinity, as well as their plots, they always structure and translate through time the communal world model. This model has an axiological character, it is structured along the axis of us – them, with the idea of our space being considered in positive terms, while the foreign space – in negative terms (Ташфел 1990 : 149).

A so-called *sacral precedent* (Мапазов 2012 : 65) is always present – it is the event that turned the featureless

point in space into a value-loaded site, significant for ethnic self-identity. The sacral precedent almost always reproduces a mythological matrix – it is dislocated to the unimaginably distant or historically irreversible periods of the past.

An established cultural method for rationalising and structuring this settlement-adjacent spatial model is the naming of the site. Once named, the location is taken out of its landscape anonymity; it is legitimised in culture and is included into the community's mental area of control, while the name itself speaks of the ethnic stereotypes of the people, who have faced and tackled their destinies – for real or imaginarily within the specific point in space.

Cultural-narrative phenomena within the studied region can be generally typified into two presentative groups.

– The first can include seemingly ethnic and religious-neutral complexes.

– The second includes local phenomena, which have an expressed ethnic conflict character.

We will present these two groups of sacral topoi in order.

Three topoi belonging to the first group are related to the so-called Marko cycle. About 2.5–3 km away from the village of Drachevo stands a century-old tree known as Krali Marko's Cane.

It is crooked and looks like a giant crutch. According to the legend, it served as a walking stick for the hero who passed through these lands. The people never cut it, so that they would remember Marko's passage through the region.

In the area of the village of Dolno Yabalkovo are two more sacral topoi, which belong to the Marko corpus. One of them is called Marko's Stone by the locals. It is located 2 km southeast from the village and is a large egg-shaped natural rock. Supported by several smaller adjacent rock formations.

According to the legend, the stone once stood upon the hill of Markova Tumba near the village's outskirts. Marko, however, was mistreated when his father's inheritance was divided, he felt angry and pushed the rock with his pinkie finger, throwing it all the way to its current resting location.

Upon the smooth top surface of the rock are two indentations, which are believed to be Marko's footsteps. It is believed that drinking water from them, as well as squeezing under the rock, can treat infertility.

Krali Marko is the primary protagonist of the southern Slavic folklore epos, as well as of an entire legendary cycle, as he was a symbol of ethnic resilience, superhuman strength and health. The hero's name, his presence in the area, even if only imagined, is apparently rationalised as a toponymical and verbally anchored code of Bulgarian identity.

Within the area of the nearby villages of Dolno and Gorno Yabalkovo, almost in the middle of the imaginary four-kilometre line that connects them in the direction northeast-southwest, lie the ruins of a late Roman fortress. The local populace calls this place Kervasraya and tells this legend: it was once a castle built by three sisters – Kerva, Sara and Yana, and there was a tunnel underneath it, leading all the way to Odrin, and this castle stood right in the middle point of the road between the Black and White Sea.

The site's original name certainly was Caravan Sarai, and it very likely that there really was a large inn offering shelter to merchants who constantly traveled through Strandzha towards Odrin because this is where the so-called Diagonal road, built in Roman times, passed through, connecting the Black Sea ports with Thrace and the White Sea region.

The legend, however, aims to justify the site's name in terms of its own language, in Bulgarian. Odrin was considered to be a Bulgarian city, populated by compact Bulgarian groups, even during the Ottoman period. The Kervasraya supposedly marked the exact middle point of the road between the Black and White Sea. The measuring, scaling and working with measures and numbers was a sacral technique of structuring space and time in traditional societies.

The second group of acute settlement-adjacent topoi openly expresses ethnic stereotypes and activates historic collisions through plots borrowed from mythology. One such topos, which is based upon the tragic clashes upon the Bulgarian ethnic land, is Gelin mezari – the Bride's grave. According to the legend, which circulates within the narrative complexes of the populations of the villages Fakiya, Rosenovo and Debelt, a great wedding procession passed through the woods many centuries ago. Daali marauders attacked the wedding and slaughtered everyone – from the bride and groom to the oldest woman. The bodies remained there for several days, unburied and desecrated by the wild forest beasts, until all the wedding-goers turned into vampires, and thus the place was considered cursed and no one dared go there anymore.

The location and the legend are apparently based upon two primary cultural fragments. On one side, they demonstrate the established ideas of Balkan mythology: wedding-death; demonization of violently killed and improperly buried characters. On the other hand, this complex is obviously a reflection of deeds and events,

which were not uncommon during the troubled times of Ottoman rule, especially during the times of the Daali marauders, when the Ottoman Empire itself was incapable to deal with these outlaws.

About 3 km away from the village of Drachevo is a topos known as «The two graves». Legend relates this place to the village's old history. When, during the last Russian-Ottoman war, Osman Pasha left these lands, he threatened to burn down the village and the villagers sent two young men – Georgi and Stanko, who climbed upon the highest cliffs to keep watch as sentinels. The Cherkess, however, attacked them from behind, caught them and beheaded them. This is where they were buried initially, giving the place its name. After the Russian's arrival, however, they dug out the bones and buried them with full army honours at the village cemetery.

International clashes can also give rise to the exact opposite plots, in which our own take revenge upon the ethnic aliens for offenses inflicted by them. Such a topical-legendary complex is Shaban's grave near the village of Golyamo Bukovo, about 3 km northeast of the village. According to the local legends, it was the burial site of a Turkish man, named Shaban, who was killed by a Bulgarian out of revenge and then secretly buried there.

The presence of members of a foreign ethnic group within the region can be proven via more locations and legends. Somewhere near the village of Drachevo is an area known as the Hellenic graveyards, lying about 2 km to the east. It is a plain barren place littered with large sharp rocks that emerge naturally from the ground. According to the legend, Hellenes came here during Byzantine times to conquer these lands, yet they died and this place became their burial ground. It is considered to be a bad and unclean place, and that's why it is believed that walnut trees should never be planted there.

It would be too hasty to assume that Hellenes means Greeks in this case. The people of this region believe in the existence of demonic entities, which they call Hellenes. They, according to the legends, were evil man-like creatures, giant in stature, dwelling within abandoned mills and appearing before late travellers ta night, in order to scare them. These characters' name, being an ethnonym for the other ethnoses, indicates one of the main features of the reaction towards ethnic foreignness – interpreting it as demonism, and relating it to reactions of fear and hostility (Мицева 1991 : 194).

Sacral geography and the legendary narratives that have merged with it within the region of Sredna Strandzha are forms of ethnic interpretation of space through the means of memory. The space itself functions as a text (Топоров 1983 : 227), which contains within itself different messages about the human communities inhabiting it – be they local, ethnic or religious. The ethnology of space is above all else a topography of the various community types.

Therefore these places can be attractive objects for rural and cultural tourism. Tourists are attracted by their simple, rural way of life and their unspoiled, tranquil environment. These are the characteristics that cause their more affluent and powerful neighbours to regard them as backward. By developing tourism they hope to modernize and escape from the stigma of backwardness (Boissovain 1996 : 8).

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## СВЯЩЕННІ НАВКОЛОСЕЛИЩНІ ТОПОСИ У СЕРЕДНІЙ СТРАНДЖІ – РЕАЛЬНІ ТА ВІРТУАЛЬНІ ЗУСТРІЧІ

Середня частина Странджанських гір є активною контактною зоною, у якій відкривається безліч спеціальних місць, пов'язаних з певними легендами та переказами. Це топоси, які «розповідають» фольклорною мовою про зустрічі різних народів, що проживали чи проходили через ці землі: болгар та представників інших слов'янських та балканських народів. Пам'ять про ці місця зберігається донині, а для місцевого населення вони є священими. Вони можуть перетворитися у привабливі центри культурного та історичного туризму.

**Ключові слова:** сакральна географія; міфологічний прецендент; етнологія простору; культурно-історична пам'ять.

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## СВЯЩЕННЫЕ ТОПОСЫ ОКОЛО СЕЛЕНИЙ В СРЕДНЕЙ СТРАНДЖЕ – РЕАЛЬНЫЕ И ВИРТУАЛЬНЫЕ ВСТРЕЧИ

Средняя часть Странджанских гор является активной контактной зоной, в которой открывается множество специальных мест, связанных с определенными легендами и преданиями. Это топосы, которые «рассказывают» на фольклорном языке о встречах различных народов, проживавших или проходивших через эти земли: болгар и представителей других славянских и балканских народов. Память об этих местах сохраняется по сей день, а для местного населения они являются священными. Они могут превратиться в привлекательные центры культурного и исторического туризма.

**Ключевые слова:** сакральная география; мифологический прецендент; этнология пространства; культурно-историческая память.

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