

FOLKLORE BRIDGE

**Music and Dances in Checha
Collection**

The set of collections „Folklore bridge“ **is elaborated in pursuance of the project „Folklore Bridge“ within the European Territorial Cooperation Programme Greece - Bulgaria 2007 – 2013.**

The leading partner for the project implementation is Municipality of Satovcha and the other partners are Municipality Kato Nevrokopi, Greece and Community Centre Prosveta 1937, Pletena village, Municipality of Satovcha. The main project goal is to contribute for the long-term preservation of the specific cultural heritage of the cross-border region of the Mesta river valley. Preservation and popularization of the local traditions through common cultural and social events creates new image of the cross-border region, which undoubtedly increases the interest of the visitors of the cross-border region and contributes to the improvement of the quality of living of the local people.

The project activities contribute to, although partially and in a limited format, the documenting of the cultural heritage in the region. The region is known for the well-preserved unique culture, including folklore, way of living, traditions, local food and other cultural elements. This project not only aims to activate partnerships between communities on both sides of the border but also to rising the proud of the local residents by presenting the unique cultural heritage. The ultimate project goals is to put the foundations of a **cross-border school for the cultural traditions. It will operate within the Community Centre Prosveta 1937, Pletena village**, which will attract in future interest and resources for studies and for gradual overall revealing and documenting of the cultural heritage of that cross-border region. The school will develop further as one of the forms of activity of the community centre.

Surveys and expeditions were carried out in the region with the participation of local historians and historians from the Municipality of Satovcha, students from the municipal high schools and a group of teachers and students from the National High School for Ancient Languages and Culture St. Konstantin Kiril Filosof, Sofia and a culture expert from Greece.

Each collection in the set focuses on one particular theme:

- The nature and the people of Checha;
- Veda Slovena - a magic testament;
- Means of living, customs, traditions of life;
- The songs and the dances of Checha;
- The stone fountains of Checha.

It was very difficult to allocate the information and the materials between the five collections. The reason is that in the real life these are different aspects of the same thing - everyday life, culture, way of living of the people from that area. As the personality of everyone has its integrity and it is impossible to separate an individual's temper from the knowledge of that person or the way such person communicates, it is also impossible to separate the song from the dance, from the customs, the costumes, the nature and the everyday life and the history of the people from that area. Therefore the separation into five collections is only conditional.

These collections do not claim to be scientific work and to be exhaustive or ultimate. They provide only **the modest but successful attempt to involve the people from the project region in the process of studying and preserving the cultural heritage in order to reveal and preserve the identity of the local community with its traditions and overall cultural history.** This attempt is only one of the ways to ensure the merited and the peaceful

future in the cross-border region between Greece and Bulgaria as two European Union Member States. The collections aim to document a successful attempt for practical application of the European values for cultural diversity and identity of the communities not only as content but also as an approach for involvement of the local people for the preservation of the cultural heritage.

In the cross-border region of Mesta River valley live people with common roots, with their common specific cultural identity, which has its specificity from both sides of the border and thus in the course of years it has become richer and more various.

The merit of this project is that it is connected with the fact the local historian and students from the high school were not just involved by external experts in the collection of information. They were the actual implementers of the whole project and the external experts in the face of teachers and students from the National High School for Ancient Languages and Culture were their consultants. This approach is more complex and demands more efforts and time instead of a group of experts from a scientific institute doing all. However we are convinced that this approach gives the real meaning of the efforts because the preservation and the communication of the cultural heritage is necessary most of all for the life of those who carry it in themselves.

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The territorial scope of the expeditions is the geographic area Chech, but the specific interviews and records have been made in the settlements of the Municipality of Satovcha for Bulgaria and Kato Nevrokopi for Greece.

The set of collections is created to be **used in the next years by the project partners in their intention to continue organizing different schools for young people, for scientists and researchers**, who will explore and preserve the cultural heritage of the region. Information in the collections has the only purpose to serve as a reference point for deeper and long-term studies depending on the interests of the researchers.

In addition to the information from the carried out expedition in the summer of 2012, they are based on a series of studies made so far by academic institutes, universities and by different researchers.

These collections are intended to got to teachers, community workers, public leaders and educators from the project region, **so that the information in them is brought to the knowledge of the people who live in the region, especially the young people from the region**. They should obtain information about the cultural heritage of their kin and settlements so that they are proud and calm and with the spirits of deserving citizens of the diverse Europe.

From the authors

Folklore - the bridge between the legend and the reality

Lilko Ayvazov

Teacher of History and Leader of the Folklore Group of Satovcha village

The knowledge about the life of a nation is about its origination, its roots, its name, its origin, its geographical areal and movement, its history and originality, its culture and way of living, its everyday life and labour, its language, syllables, words, couplets and songs that were born in the different eras of the existence of that nation, in the course of its hard work from the onset of civilization to nowadays. The folklore is the mirror of the human development and its variety helps us understand the national psychology of different societies, to go deep into the individual's world, which remains hidden and mysterious without the knowledge about life. It is quite simple to understand from a song, a legend, a custom, a feast, a costume, what did a man pass through, what did he put on the table, what did he dress and what did he believe since times immemorial. So the folklore is the living history and may reveal a different world by getting to know its ornaments. Certainly we may say that the folklore exists along with the first civilizations and its main actor is the farmer. So, step by step, from the ancient time through the medieval ages and until nowadays, every nation has left its specific features and prints on its own folklore. Especially in the ancient times, when every exclamation, ring from somewhere and human action meant something, but the more interesting thing is that the roots of the folklore are preserved along with the existence of the nation.

Yet before the legendary Thracian singer Orpheus appeared about 1400 B.C., the first kingdoms, monarchies and empires had known the music and the dance and used them for various rituals and customs. The talent of Orpheus, however, given by gods, made him the greatest ancient performer and it is worth mentioning that everywhere he was named "the Rhodopes singer". Orpheus, the son of Apollo, was presented by the Ancient Greek authors as if his appearance was the onset of the music in the world. However the concept "the Rhodope singer" makes a reference to the river deity of the Thracians Eager and instantly transfers us into a well known world i.e. the gorgeous Rhodopes mountain. But why the Rhodopes? This is a great mystery until today however the answer is not difficult. Is there a person in the world who while passing through the Rhodopes would not feel the magnificent atmosphere of the Orpheus home and would feel the numerous villages and their inhabitants who keep the song in their souls and hearts; who would not feel the originality, the harmony between the human and the nature as if the nature and the Rhodopes man are one and the passer-by would hardly find the difference? From far back they live together and share their bread, bead and song. And if the mountain was not inhabited, would a singer or a poet go there to show their arts? What would a singer chosen of God do in the lands of the Bessi and the Satrae unless they are their and participate together with him? These are the first mysteries, which we have to answer according to the legend today. It is ridiculous that the people of the Rhodopes search the roots of their music elsewhere as it comes from the Rhodopes through the lira and the voice of the world recognized singer Orpheus. It is even more ridiculous that no one so far has endeavoured to protect and present this legendary heritage left in the mountain. Now, when you hear a Rhodopes' song in the air, the first thing you will feel is the glory of the mountain and Orpheus. It is different but its style is not complex and quickly fascinates the ear with its

tonic and harmony. Its simplicity makes it easy to understand because it penetrates in the human soul and he remembers it easy. The minor Phrygian mode is not accidentally used from the ancient times until today. It is not by chance that most of the songs in the Rhodopes are minor. When the Slavs came, they brought a major element with exclamations, however these songs are few, the so called Ionian mode. Considering that almost all conquerors passed through the Rhodopes and this song has survived, you can make conclusions for its strength and sustainable mode through the centuries. When Dorians came about 1100 B.C., the Phrygian mode became harder as they were carriers of the strength and the iron. The Orpheus's lira is MI LA SOL tuned, which is another evidence about the origin of the Rhodopes melody. However the question about the area inhabited by Satrae is difficult. According to N. Ovcharov, it was in the East Rhodopes but according to the Ancient Greek maps, the lands of Satrae were to the east of Mesta River and they were the protectors of Dionysos and his sanctuary on Pangea Sq. On all images the Centaur guards Dionysos. The Bessi had almost the same characteristics as the Satrae but they lived further to the north, near the region of Velingrad. But the folklore was in the same mode there and they were always allies to the Satrae. In the Roman times and the Byzantium times no changes occurred in the folklore of the Thracians but when the Slavs came, especially the Smolyani, the Slavonic element penetrated - the exclamation in both modes. However the stability of the minor and the pentatonics are preserved and it seems that become domineering.

And today, while travelling by car or by bus and when entering the Rhodopes, the passenger would always feel something different, something distinctive in the atmosphere, namely the beauty and the majesty of the Rhodopes. The numerous villages in the West Rhodopes create the feeling of another world - harmonious and preserving the living truth throughout the centuries with unforgettable folklore. You would find everything in a song sung from the soul of an inhabitant of the historical and geographical region Chech who saw everything in his life. A song created in action, for the good and the worse, for love and parting, for wedding and for funeral, for feast and rite, for work and laziness, for the field and the working-bee, for draught and abundance, for the sun and the magnificent nature of the Rhodopes. Yes, by having the melody, preserved through the centuries, the words of the wild nature in freedom are quickly uttered. Especially in the villager Pletena, Satovcha, Kochan, Dolen and Vaklinovo, where the Balkan, the wood, the field and the man are very close. Thus the inspiration of the singer is bigger, more harmonious and free. He sings and while singing he tries to overmaster the magnificent nature by his voice i.e. to reach its majesty because it protected him throughout the centuries, it is his real mother and in the nature the singer finds a safe place and is untouchable and in nature he may set free his soul, he merges with nature and they may not live without each other. But didn't the legendary Orpheus feel the same? Otherwise what would he do in the Rhodopes in the lands of the belligerent Bessi and Satrae? It looks the same today and nothing has changed. And when the Pletena villagers start singing, and the women from Satovcha raise their voices "in the high", and the Kochan villagers join them, it seems that every living creature holds its breath because the song is equal to the nature; it may not be weaker. And when the young women from Vaklinovo and Kochan start dancing their ring dances, the whole Chech gathers to enjoy their movements, shaped by the gorgeous nature and melody. They are the song and every word has its reflection in the heart of the woman and natural movement with the whole body and harmony symbolizing the magnificence of the song and the nature.

So it is seen that in one place just several kilometres long is concentrated great volume of authentic folklore preserved through the centuries as a stable mode. It would be a crime if our classification of this wealth of the earth of songs and dances is not started with the anthem of Chech, the song "Zalvero, bela kadano" (Zalvero, white Turkish woman), based on a true story from two big families in our region - the Ayzov and the Dzeynelevs. The young woman from one family and the young man from the other family. The action takes place in the Trapi region, near Satovcha village. Aga Tsanyo liked Zalvera, a handsome woman from the Ayzovs family and he went to help for picking potatoes so that she liked him too, however he was 20 years older than the woman. To check him and to make him give up, she told him: "Lift your sack aga Tsanyo!" He tried twice and failed, faltered (i.e. stepped back) and then she told him (in the song) mockingly that his moustaches were white for a long time and that his time had passed away. This song is sung everywhere, and now in Vaklinovo, by an amateur group with Community Centre Parvi Mai, where people dance on this song. The interesting thing is that when wedding-guests sang songs near the house of ago Tsanyo, he came out and threw at them angrily from the veranda, so he really took fancy on Zalvera nevertheless she married in Dospat.

The fame of Chech however was spread in phases throughout the years by the Kochanski slavei (the Kochanski nightingales) - a group for authentic folklore from Satovcha village, the men's group from Pletena village, the school and community amateur groups in the villages Pletena, Satovcha, Kochan, Vaklinovo, Valkosel, Slashten, Kribul and Tuhovishta. And we will always ask the question: would this wealth of songs and dances be here, if it was not delved out by the late Iliya Terziev from Satovcha village, Tsanko Madzhirski from Kochan village, Antoaneta Bektasheva from Pletena village, the late Ivan Belev from Satovcha village, Rumen Bilyarov from Vaklinovo village, the late Shakir Moyukov from Kochan village and their colleagues from the villages Valkosel, Slashten, Tuhovishta and Kribul?

We, the young people, would not only continue their deed but will pass it on to the future generations so that they live forever...

The people, the customs, the costumes, the music

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A concert in Dabrash. Dance and music folklore.

We met the first day of July "in the high" - directly and figuratively. The high singing is the unique folklore wealth of this region and the wonderful place where we touched it live for the first time was high too. We found ourselves on a green glade on the top of the Rhodopes ridge Dabrash, from where we had a wonderful view to the surrounding hills and where the mountain wind added to the feeling of freshness and space.

The initial delight of the beauty of nature soon was overwhelmed by the strong impression, which made to us the amateurs who were coming in groups on the glade. What a wealth of colours! The gorgeous and diverse local costumes and the smiling faces and the eager participants made us move our eyes from the abundant rosewoods around us and were in spectacular harmony with the surrounding beauty of the sunny day.

Dancing and singing groups from different parts of the Municipality of Satovcha had prepared incredible show - an outdoor concert. Authentic ring dances, rich traditional costumes, ringing voices, fresh, natural, beautiful faces... our senses were full of joy yet before the start of the concert!

Difficult to achieve but sweet task was to absorb all these impressions simultaneously without missing any small but important detail. With the local students from the Satovcha region and their guest from the Sofia schools, we had the ambition and the great desire to avoid it... The joy and feverous bustling before the concert, the tests of the equipment, the official greetings...all that flew away at once when the overwhelming song of the female singing group "in the high" with the Community Centre St. Cyril and Methodius, Satovcha village, as well as their joint performance with the children's group - their heirs, for joy, pride and hope that the unique singing for Bulgaria will not die.

Hand by hand or holding each other's irama (the apron) the singers rocked their hands or wove a piece of cloth while dancing their frisky, joy and lively ring dances with song accompaniment or the male hoyliyas - slow, heavy ring dances with instrumental accompaniment. The ring dances are easy and simple but they are performed with great fleetness and beauty! The female ring dance of Pletena with the accompaniment of the songs "Golem bayrem pomina" (the Big Bayram passed away), "Brala moma zelen zdravets" (A young woman picked green crane's bill); the reapers from Pletena met us with the song "Ayro, Ayro", the working-bee women from Godeshevo wondered "Otkade sme dhanam zalyubili" (How have we, dear, fallen in love", Vaklinovo presented the richest repertoire, our eyes were full of the authentic local ring dances and songs and deservedly they hit the spot. The participants from Slashten village touched our hearts with the beautiful love songs "Petlite peyat za somnuvane" (The cockcrow at the dawn) and "Saya vecher" (Saya evening).

The people from Valkosel presented to us a scene of a local wedding, with beautiful costumes, songs and ring dances; the singers from Tuhovishta sang the love songs "Ayshe le, libe le" (Ayshe, my love), "Shto be, Rade" (Why, Rade)...

The Rhodopes, the Pirin mountain and even the remote echo of the Shopluk met on this glade. The costumes - authentic, colourful. There were short blue or heavy white Macedonian sayas, striped scarlet tunics with exuberantly embroidered shirts and satiny sleeveless jackets, decorated with spangles. On their heads - tepalaks (a kind of ornament for the top of the head) or coloured kerchiefs printed with big flowers; on the feet - gaily-coloured socks and elegant slippers, and the coloured aprons - with the colours of the world. The gold coins jingled richly and mysteriously on the foreheads and the bodies of the young girls.

With the accompaniment of tambourine or zourlas, a drum or a tarambuka, the ring dances wound, the songs flew away and the slippers of the young girls slightly and easily touched the grass like the soft bends of the Rhodope hills. The white kerchiefs waved in the blue sky. The festal ring dances Shirto, Arap and Pravo alternated with the slow, full of dignity and beauty rituals steps of the young women from the wedding ring dance. The sun, the colours, the sounds - everything on this day was bright, colourful and clean. Beauty!

The children's folklore group Slantse with the Community Centre 1937, Pletena village performed the ring dance Aydar avasa and a bunch of local ring dance songs including the ritual wedding song "Couscous is being made". The young women stepped in a slow ring dance, low to the ground, with the accompaniment of the song "Oti si Fatme plakala" (Why are you crying, Fatme" (with distinctive Rhodope flavour). The specific for this region is the free averagely high holding of the hands with slacking elbows, which spring as an accent. The ring dance leader waves the piece of cloth high, within the rhythm of the song, and the free right hand whirls the piece of cloth counter-clockwise, and the person at the end of the ring dance - opposite, low, in the free light hand. The ring dance reminds of very simplified as to shape Pirin's ring dance - Arap or Petrichko ring dance.

The girls wore the local colourful and rich costumes: shirts and embroidered skirts, on the top - aladzha (a kind of saya), hats with blue beads on the forehead and tepelaks on the top of the head, and on them - white kerchiefs. On the feet - embroidered socks and slippers - taralotsi.

The young women without kerchiefs on their heads from the folklore group with the Community Centre Prosveta 1938, Kochan village wore coloured kerchiefs with big flower prints on their shoulders, with short, embroidered and edged satiny sleeveless jackets over the aladzha, aprons with big flower prints too. On their waist they carry decorated wool triangle shawl, which puts an accent on the thighs. Girls danced with the accompaniment of different common songs with specific Pirin mountain flavour.

Community Centre Parvi May 1953. Vaklinovo presented the richest and the most various as to size and form dance and sing repertoire and deservingly hit the stop of the public. They carried one of the prettier costumes of the type of saya (interiya or aladzha) - a tunic opened on its whole length on the front, together with long shirt and belted/

The instrumental accompaniment of the ring dances - by accordion or tambourine and tarambuka alternated with "female ring dances" - with the accompaniment of a song. The songs had typical Pirin mountain flavour ("Salzi ronya" (Crying bitterly) and "Rusa kosa

imam" (I have blond hair) or Rhodopes sound ("Gaydine sviryat na horishteno" (Bagpipes playing), "Zaspala e Ruzhka" (Ruzhka is fallen asleep) or mixed flavour and thus they alternated until the end of the bunch of ring dance songs. The metre of the most of the ring dances was the typical for South-west Bulgaria, 7/8B, 9/8 and 2/4. The choreography comprised movement of the circle in 2-3 figures in a chess-board order, only with the key step. The ring-dances - authentic and unique for this region, according to the announcement of the accordionist - of the type elementary Arap, Shirto, moderate Daychovo, Maleshesko type and 4-figure Shirto. At one moment hands put an accent together with the music in swings and bends, at other moment they twisted pieces of clothes stretched forward.

The dancers from the Community Centre Probuda 1928 from Slashten village performed a bunch of different melodies of Shirto - authentic, Bulgarian, local songs and ring dances. They wore costumes comprising the white Macedonian saya, without kerchiefs on their heads. The Slashten villagers presented also a different and variegated typical Macedonian, slow and smooth male ring dance with the accompaniment of zourlas and tarambuka. The dance group named "Communicating by Dancing", again from Slashten village, declared that they would perform dances specific for this regions from centuries. They presented records of choreographically processed ring dances - Macedonian songs and modern instrumental.

The folklore singing group for Tuhovishta village was interesting for its different costume - short blue saya, longer white shirts, edged with embroideries, slippers on their feet, without kerchiefs. Men and women sang one by one and with their accompaniment, the children played several simple but authentic ring dances.

So in South-West Bulgaria the instrumental accompaniment of the ring dances was with zourlas and drums although accordion is preferred in the modern orchestras. Albena Poyukova, Kochan village, tells - *Accordion, penny whistle, wooden flutes play for the maiden customs ...as their melodies are tenderer*. Zourlas and drums play at the bachelors' rituals.

The simultaneous singing and dancing - the ring dance songs - are very popular in the region of Gotse Delchev. While dancing men hold each other's shoulder and while dancing women hold their hands. Men and women dance together rarely and mainly in the modern age. In the past the Muslim women were forbidden to play ring dances outdoor, but this is not the case today. Traditionally male and female ring dances alternate, the female ones accompanied with songs, the male ones accompanied with instruments and then the musicians start playing a mixed ring dance and they all dance together.

The ring dancing and singing tradition, which is not much developed in the Rhodopes, hasn't died away completely among Bulgarians who took the Islam. The ring dancing songs often turn into Bayram plays. The unity in the instrumental music of the Bulgarian Muslims and Christians has been proven. The religion contributed to the replacement of the bagpipe with tambourine, however the typical instrumental Rhodope music form didn't change.

The folklore music of the Bulgarian Muslims is ancient, more preserved and closed and therefore more representative for the local music style. Some songs for the Peperuda (Butterfly) ritual "Vay Duduley" unknown among the neighbouring Christian population represent an interesting example. The song tradition in the region of Gotse Delchev has best preserved the West Rhodopes song and just here occurred one o=unique song format - the songs "in the high" from Dolen and Satovcha. The songs tell about farming and love, they are song mainly during field work (harvesting, hoeing, etc.), at the working-bee, they are met

in the wedding rituals and not so often in the ring dance when a group of women sings the melody and another group "drawls" with specific high exclamations, with unique sound effects.

Songs and dances in the rituals and customs.

The pre-Christian and pre-Islamic ethno-cultural fund of the Bulgarians is the foundation on which is created and developed the folklore culture in the South-West Rhodopes. In the region of Gotse Delchev, the Bulgarian ring dancing and singing tradition adapts to the Bayram feast - many Bayram songs originate from the local Bulgarian ring dancing and singing tradition - in the case of Gotse Delchev - from the tradition of Pirin.

In the community centre of Kochan is made artistic performance of a traditional ritual associated with the beginning of the harvest-time, interesting and somewhat naturally related to how the young people get to know each other, engagements and "stealing" the young women.

From the pagan period have remained traditional beliefs associated with water and the related rites for fertility, purification and health - they have impacted the later beliefs, lyrics and rituals performed on Yordanovden (Jordan's day), Jeremiah, St. George's day and Enyov den (Enyo's day). In the West Rhodopes there are songs related to the customs Pereruda (Butterfly) and Enyovden (Dolen village and Satovcha), but they are rather preserved as an art and their relation with the ritual has faded. The custom praying for rain - Peperuda (Butterfly), in Slashten called also "Kebyo" aims to induce rain by magic in drought-time. Green ivy is stuck on the head of the Peperuda - at her home or near the river.

In Pletena told us about an interesting exception - the Peperuda could be an orphan boy and not only an orphan girl! (And in Dobarsko village in Razlog - "a feeble-minded" boy or the baby of the family), Wearing a shirt and barefoot, the child tramples and jumps in one place surrounded by other girls, waving hands, or as the historian Irina Boshnakova tells (and the singer Ivanka Kartalova testifies), the child runs around the village, followed by the other children - participants in the ritual and sings ritual songs about rain, often chanting "God, send us rain" // "Allah be merciful to this orphan" and the others spray water on the Peperuda. This is most of all a pagan ritual as to its origin, form and content. However with the fading away of that customs and the relevant practical function of this custom, it remains only a part of the cultural heritage of the Rhodopes and finds its place in amateur art. Teybie Kyoybeshieva, head of the group from Tuhovista describes another ritual for rain - *Aminkane*. *Children gather together and go from house to house. A person goes out and pours water. The children say: "Come here rain so that maize gives grain to sate the orphan's hunger: Then children go to a widow's house and she should make kachamak (hominy) for them.*

Among all ritual songs, those connected with the wedding, matchmaking, engagement, the bride going for water and povratki (the first visit of the young family to the bride's parents) are most fully and diversely preserved. Songs are sung on the wedding day, respectively when shaving the groom, braiding the bride's hair, dressing, leave-taking, the way, welcoming in the groom's house. In South-East Rhodopes the sad ritual songs are sung "na bulgur" (over groats) and they tell about the sadness of parting and the difficult life of the Rhodopes woman (Dolen village). All these songs are downbeat, accompanied by

slightly stepping or almost static female ring dances on the poton (balcony) or in the yard of the bride's house.

From Kochan village originates a very curious traditional local customs - "Parvi momarya" (First wedding guests). The custom refers to the preparation, the visit of a group of momari (wedding guests) from the groom's side to the bride's house; they perform a series of preparations for the consent to take the young woman, who after that would become "nevesta" (bride). These people bargain about the trousseau on behalf of the master, the husband. When they arrive at the groom's house, welcoming of the bride is organized; she is dressed in a special costume for that case and then start the real wedding, which lasts several days with lots of music, ring dances and fun for relatives, friends, neighbors and guests. This custom is recreated in several authentic ring dancing and wedding songs that are performed by two groups, the last word on the one are overlapped by the first words of the second. Here are two examples:

„Мари идиме ви първи момаря, (Here we come, first wedding guests)
мари идиме ви първи момаря! (Here we come, first wedding guests)
Мари елате ни първи момаря, (Welcome, first wedding guests)
Мари елате ни първи момаря, (Welcome, last wedding guests)
Мар ша ни дадете ли майшката мома, (Will you give us this young woman)
Мар ша ни дадете ли майшката мома, (Will you give us this young woman)
Мари водите я ваша да си е! (Well take her, she will be yours!)
Мари водите я. халал да ви е! (Well take her, and good luck!)

„Невестичко, младичко (Young bride)
Невестичко, младичко джанъм, (Young bride dear)
зорно ли е в чужда къща? (Is it bad in another's house?)
Зорно ли е в чужда къща, джанъм, (Is it bad in another's house, dear,
зорно ли е, арно ли е. (is it bad or is it good.
Не е зорно, не е арно, джанъм, (It is neither bad nor good, dear)
не е зорно, не е арно”. (It is neither bad nor good).

Mixed folk group from the Community Centre "izgrev", Valkosel village presented traditional wedding from Valkosel, with songs and ring dances performed in this region. The performance presenting a part of a wedding from Valkosel - typical, authentic ring dances and songs, zourlas and tarambuki, slow, solid Macedonian wedding music, ritual songs for ring dances, without accompaniment, and melodies of the Rhodopes style and the Pirin style followed one after another. Girls - singers singing for the maiden ring dances and thus a king of a singing dialogue took place - male singing, female counter-singing. The Rhodopes flavour of the songs was combined in an interesting way with the twang singing by men and women in the region. The participants wore costumes quite similar to the ones from Razlog - the red saya in wide red vertical stripes and shallow hat with gold coins on the forehead and ashmak on the top.

In the community centre of Kochan village was reproduced traditional wedding from Kochan and it was video recorded. This video presents the rich local musical and dancing folklore and indirectly - the design of the costumes.

In Slashten village are woven scarlet tufted rugs connected with the wedding rituals - a white mare is covered with a red tufted rag, which the bride rides on the road to the

groom's house or when she is on a visit to a neighbouring house (Godeshevo village, Slashten village). In South-West Rhodopes the wedding carpets for horse from specific knotted fabric, called dressed up fleecy rugs (Slashten, Pletena, Godeshevo) have the main function to cover the white horse of the bride on the wedding day. White iran hangs down over the packsaddle and a scarlet rug is put on it and on the top - white cotton sheet with decorated edges - prebiri (woven patterns). The bride is covered to the waist with a scarlet rug to hide her legs (Slashten)

The costumes

Female costumes

The traditional female costume for the villages of Satovcha comprised three types: the archaic two-apron costume; the saya - interiya worn by the Christian woman; shalwars, yashmak and veil - for the Muslim women.

The Christians in Satovcha and Dolen preserved the typical "sayana" costume with all its specific elements. In Vaklinovo, Kochan and Satovcha we find a costume typical only for the Chech region. Although it carried the features of the all-national "sayana" costume, still it has some distinctive features, it has changed negligibly and is preserved in its authentic form. It consists of tailored home-made woven fabric or ready-made fabric (interiya or aladzha) made of sham or aladzha - outwear similar to the saya, sewn from ready-made silk fabric with varicoloured, wide, vertical stripes that are colored mainly in warm colours, red (alino or giviziyno) with an admixture of orange (kamenichavo). The pattern is like the "saya" however unlike the saya it has two deep cuts almost reaching the hip and these two cuts transform the front part of the saya into two individual elements. These two cuts extending to the hips - unique for the Chech highlight the beauty of the Rhodope's woman figure. The saya may be many-coloured or uni-coloured with woollen braiding.

A long white shirt was worn under the saya. Since in this region embroidery has no specific features, it was always finished with rich lace. The main colour of the shirt is white; white is typical for Bulgaria in general but in this region it is associated with the heritage from the times before the Islamic period.

On the saya was put the so called kasak, which still exists. It usually comprises two patterns. For the unmarried women it was buttoned with one button at the lower end so that the bust of the woman shows up. For the married women it had several buttons. The kasak was copiously decorated with woollen braiding and gold-lace for the formal clothes. A. Bektasheva, Pletena village: *the female costume is added by the so called setra, which is put in winter. It looks like the today's short coats. It is always woollen-braided and from velvet, with caddis.* Shirt is made of embroidered white fabric. The saya may be many-coloured or uni-coloured with woollen braiding.

Another element of the clothes, which exists until today was the decorated woollen triangular scarf, which was put on the waist and outlined the hips of the woman. It was girder with vaza (string) in different colours. Then a belt is put, which is also knitted or weaved, copiously decorated with beads, tiny silver coins and then it ends with belt buckle.

In front, at the place where the two parts of the interia (saya) join, a long woven apron descends, in which the Bulgarian woman revealed her creative fantasy upon combining colours and forms. Usually the pattern of the woven apron was formed with coloured luri (horizontal stripes), the prevailing colours were dull yellow to giviziyno

(intensive red). Then follows green in its diversity, blagoto (pink), kamenichavoto other colours from nature.

Knitted multi-coloured woollen socks reaching a little bit above the ankle, with special patterns and colours are put on feet. Only during holidays unmarried women wore konduri (shoes).

The kerchief was also multi-coloured. The head is covered in quite ordinary manner - the yashmak is a square piece of cloth with dimensions about 1 - 1.5, folded in triangle and tied under the chin and in Satovcha - at the back of the neck. The girls (younger than 14 years) do not wear kerchiefs. In Slashten village the colour of the kerchiefs of unmarried women is white and the colour of the married women's kerchiefs is black. The bride's costume during the wedding consists of a red preves, silver ornaments for head, belt buckles. The so called prezrknitsa is typical for Satovcha - it is a white piece of cloth with decorated edges, flinged over the bride's arms while she holds them in front.

One of the ornaments for head called tepelak is very interesting both for the costume of the Muslim women and for the Christian women in that region. This is a flat and arched round plate decorated with plant patterns, which is put on the crown near the forehead and is most often sewn to a cylindrical hat or over a kerchief, and on the top of it a second more formal kerchief is put. In Kochan, Vaklinovo and more rarely in Satovcha women wear tepelaks made of silver or another material and below it is put a special felt for convenience. At the side of the metal part there were small holes, on which different decorations were hung, mainly silver and golden coins and in the centre above the forehead was put a big gold coin (usually pendulira), which was a token of the property status of the woman. For Pletena village are specific the so called "pulavi yashmaks" - a white kerchief with buttons for the top of the hat decorated with many bead and gold coins on the forehead part.

The metallic headgear are worn by the glavenitsi, who receive them as a marriage proposal or a contract already concluded - a vestige (Dolen village) - and these are buckles, bracelets, rings, etc., and are worn by the fiancée during the whole period of engagement , usually two - three years until the wedding. One of the compulsory gifts from the fiancé to the fiancée is a belt with buckles.

In the South-West Rhodopes and especially in the region of Chech according to the historical data, the female costume has been inspired by the Islamic traditions. This refers mainly to the shalwars (loose Turkish trousers) and the yashmak. Any other elements of the clothes from the pre-Islamic period have remained unchanged. There is something different in the original shalwars. Women from the villages Kochan, Satovcha, Pletena and Vaklinovo wear more wide shalwars, which legs end with 4-5 cm abundantly braided and twisted laces (vazi), named karmi. The colours of the shalwars are quite varies, in the beginning they were made of weaved fabric then from ready-made fabric, mainly velvet. They are praised in the texts of the local songs such as Nayle and Golyam si Bayram otide (The Big Bayram passed away). Here are two variants of the texts of the second song:

"The Big Bayram passed away, the Small one is to come.
But I would not meet it since I have no kasachi.
Kasachi or shalwars...
The Big Bayram passed away, the small is to come
But it wouldn't come since I have no shoes
I have no shoes, no shoes....

(Pletena village, a song for the end of the first Bayram)

With the accompaniment of the second song (with specific Rhodope sounding), which was sung by an old woman from Pletena village (the local historian Irina Boshnakova put us in touch), was shown a slow female ring dance, which looks like stepping aside, in both directions.

The female costumes of the Muslim women in Dolen village and Slashten village in the past as a formal outwear, though not absolutely compulsory, included a veil of black cotton fabric, with the cut of saya, open in the front and in the middle. The veil was put by the young women during the glavezha (engagement) or when they get married, as well as during formal visits and trips. The veil is most often worn with tucker up skirts, similar to the klashnik. More practical and everyday elements of the clothes are the iram, the anteria (padded jacket) made of aladzha and the sleeveless kasaks, lined with blue braids on the edges, made of wool or silk black fabric, worn only by brides (Slashten village). These ancient outwear became obsolete when the Agrarian Cooperatives entered into the life of the settlements in the region of Gotse Delchev and were replaced by more modern and sleazy clothes.

Shining metallic ornaments, necklaces, belt buckles are an important part of the clothes of girls and young women - "A young woman without necklaces and bracelets, is not a woman." They made them by themselves, said Ibrim Dzhildzhov from Satovcha village.

A woollen belt is put on the waist; it has a red field of multicoloured stripes. The apron is made of woollen cloth of varied colours arranged in horizontal stripes. Female costumes are complemented by yellow and black slippers or shoes for the wealthier. Another traditional and quite newer saya costume is established in the villages in this region - it comprises a shirt with lace on the edge of the sleeves and skirts, with velvet jacket - lined and padded, knee-length.

The male costume is with prevailing black colour – white shirt like tunic, black or brown woollen pants, with long legs down to the ankle with socks or gaiters put on them; men put also a red belt, a sleeveless jacket of dark blue, brown or black fabric, braided, with long sleeves, which is worn fastened (the pattern follows the shape of the body) or silk jacket of striped fabric - for the young men. The male costume is completed by a flat astrakhan hat (capa) and sandals.

According to Adem Kyoybashiev, an accordion player, Tuhovishta village, "the old costume" consists of a headscarf, padded jacket (anteria) and full-bottomed breeches (poturi). Teybie Kyoybeshieva, the leader of the folk group of Tuhovishta village, describes the composition of their costume - socks, kerchiefs (shamiya), Iram (an apron, woven on a loom), embroidered in blue and red. In the Pletena village claim that "the pulaviat yashmak" is a unique element of their costume - the female white headscarf with sequins and small beads on it, put on a forged tepelak - once it was custom-made, like the tepelak shown to me by Tony Bektasheva, which belonged to her mother and is over 60-years old. The flat cylindrical cap, on which sometimes the tepelak is sewn, has a blue tassel on the forehead, as an Islamic religious symbol. Nadzhomi Arnaudov from Pletena village listed the elements of the local costume i.e. a shirt, a saya, a setra (short jacket) and yashmak, and said that most clothes were made of hemp and the decoration of costumes consisted primarily of braiding, laces, sequins. **Baadin Musov, Valkosel village**, shared that with a view to the traditional clothes, today only the older women put on a kerchief. He determines the local

traditional costume as "many-coloured" - lighter colours for young women and darker for older women. Women also wore coats called shopeta/ shutatsi, decorated with gold coins. Decoration was multi-coloured embroidery on the shirts and outdoor wear. Male clothes were braided. **Zvezditsa Pachedzhieva, Slasten village:** The unmarried women didn't wear kerchiefs, but the married women put them on. Special decorations (buckles and other) were worn when there were feasts. Costumes were decorated with embroideries and the colour patterns is according to the age - from lighter to darker shades, the nuances of red were dominating: buckles, braiding and belts. Albena Poyukova from Kochan village adds that female costume became lighter over the years due to the weight and the inconvenience to wear it in everyday life. Albena Poyukova defines it as specific and "totally local". She points out the so called "koshak" - only in this region an apron is woven by yarn. **Naum Strandzhev** from Satovcha village - typically for the costume dominate red colours and braiding, which are supplemented by buckles.

Male costumes

In this particular region, the male costume belongs to the black-coloured type, traditionally in Gotse Delchev it is black in colour. It consists of black, brown and light-brown full-bottomed trousers, tunic-like shirt, girded by a wide belt and on the top - sleeveless jacket (brown, blue, red). On feet - socks, sandals or shoes. Also, in Slasten village, for example, for the groom's costume is compulsory the outdoor wear that reflects the craft or the material capabilities of the man: a cap, homespun coat with long sleeves. Among the formal male costumes, the groom's costume is the richest as to composition and decoration. Around his neck he wears an embroidered cloth that falls on his chests; embroidered cloth tucked into his belt; flowers are stuck on his chests, behind his ear and on the fur cap (Slasten village). The wealthier bridegroom wear clothes edged richly with braids chepkeni or fur-lined coats.

The narrators

Our wonderful hosts, specialists, local leaders, our informers and valuable associates upon studying the folklore dances were Antoaneta Bektasheva (Pletena), Albena Poyukova (Kochan), Naum Velichkov Strandzhiev, a leader of the authentic folklore group to High General School St. St. Cyril and Methodius in Satovcha, Sai Saitov (Valkosel) Irina Boshnakova - historian; Irina's mother-in-law; In Satovcha - Ivanka Kartalova, singer and founder of the legendary singing group "in the high" and Mr. K. Karakolev - teacher, local historian. The museum collection in Vaklinovo provided to us videos of the performance of ring dances and local costumes. A film was made for the participation of the group from Kochan in a TV folklore show, where local ring dances, instruments and singers were presented. Unfortunately, there was no time to pay detailed attention to costumes and names of their parts, ornaments and functions. If you ever need any information about the traditions and history of Kochan - contact Lilka Ayvazov - a keen champion of the preservation and presentation of the local folklore treasure. He combines multiple pursuits - historian, teacher, keen local historian, accordionist, rehearsal pianist of the Kochan's folk group.

When studying local folk dances, along with following the movements it is equally important and necessary to know the history of the concerned dance or ring dance, what

occasion and who performed them, what is the connection between the costume and the performers and what was their function in the custom. Unfortunately, throughout the years, this information fades away quickly.

Ayse Drenkova, from Pletena village, knows and can play Aydar avasa, and Nebet - performed with zourlas and drum, as well as the Turkish ring dance - Chanakta kalia. The interesting thing is that the folklore of the shopski region has penetrated Chech with the Petrunino ring dance. The mixed ring dances, which are performed, are Aydar avasa, Bovo - a type of Shirto, and Yuch ayak is a male ring dance. The performers are called players, the dancing - playing; playing is primarily for the younger. At the working-bees no ring dances are played, but mainly songs are sung. The veil is called yashmak here - a white kerchief, decorated with sequins, which are called pulove - pulav yashmak. The shamia (kerchief) is always white; a custom-made or ready-made tepelak is put on the head and the shamia over it. Mrs. Bektasheva showed us a unique tepelak more than 60 years old, hand-made, which belonged to her mother. Head is covered so that the edges of the kerchief are tied to the back of the head.

N. Strandzhev says that ring dances are played on St. George's Day, Bayram, the Easter. Z. Pachedzhieva from Slashten village says: *Dramsko, Pravo ring dance and Shirto are the most widely distributed ring dances in our region. Zaeshkata is a male ring dance only. Svatba (Wedding), Pryadoy, Syunet and Molitva za dazhd (Prayer for rain) are among the favourite ones. A. Bektasheva, Pletena village, adds: They are played on Bayram, on wedding days, on working-bees. They are played on Bayram and on wedding days. On the Bayram day, the young women stand in a row and sing "Ago, Syuleyman", "Oti si Fatme plakala" (Why have you cried, Fatme" and this dance is called "Na prachka" (On a stick). The songs "Nevestichko mladichka" (young bride), "Pukni se tresni momina mayko" (Weep and cry, bride's mom) etc. One song is sung on this Bayram "The Big Bayram has come now, the small one will come too" (Kurban Bayram). The female ring dance Ayshinite buzi (the Ayshe's cheeks) is also distributed - several narrators from different settlements.*

Ibrom Alilov Dzhildzhov - Eheto (over 80 years old) - If a young woman has not bracelets and necklaces, she is not a woman. Women did them by themselves. The bride is adorned with varaks and pulove. She rides a horse to attract the groom. Her brother or uncle hold her on the horse. The groom is the first who raises her bridal veil. The bride gets water for good health and good luck. Sock are give as present to the groom at the engagement. Three days zourlas are playing: 1) zourlas, 2) the bride goes to her new home, 3) ring dances are played and the bride takes a rest at home.

The songs of Chech

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The songs 'on the high'

Every time I listen to these old song, on my mind come vague association and I am overwhelmed by an unknown feeling. Contrary to the logic, to the routine, even to the holiday, this singing makes me go into a deep and hidden secret that can not be explained by reasonable arguments. I would even call it "voodoo" of sound. The feeling is like touching the prime source, like drinking water from the spring....

In the early 50s our famous folklorist Rayna Katsarova found by chance, while touring around the region of Pirin and Rhodopes, this unique singing. The interesting thing is that in 1951 she brought with her an unknown researcher, a collector of songs from around the world who came carrying only a bag over his shoulder, with a microphone and recorded music from different parts of Bulgaria, including the singers of the Ensemble Philip Kutev. This singing in four voices from Dolen village and Satovcha viillage entered into the collection of Allan Lomax "The folk and primitive music of the world".

The surviving community centre in Satovcha maintains and expands the group for "high singing". In the fifties of the last century, several women from Dolen village married in the then Satovitsa and created the Satovcha group "in the high": Stoyanka Pavlova, Geza Karamiteva, Ivanka Kartalova, Galya Mavrodieva, Vera Popova, Zlata Nacheva, Katerina Popova, Yordanka Popova and Maria Chobanova are the first. Today, this group has a youth section and is led by Katerina Kodjamanova - a singer and a choreographer. Their prizes, participations and successes throughout the years are so many. They are proud winners of the Herder Prize for authentic folklore. They hope to get funding to create a songbook and CD in order to search, preserve and promote old songs. The municipality supports them, the poet Lachezar Selyashki wrote a collection of biographies, interviews with singers and lyrics, and the composer Nikolai Krastilov will write down in notes the melodies. Rodina TV has filmed a few videos of the whole group, and the young girls successfully deal with difficulties in learning the specifics of sound retrieval.

Nature and specificities of "the high"

These songs hide a kind of archaic, actually songs in two voices "in high" or "visichkite" are songs that are performed in the field, while working in the field, at harvest-time or when hoeing. Specifically, they are highly non-tempered, a charming sound of a group of sounds like listening and watching a dialogue between a man and the mountain. The base is in two voices and it's nothing special - one singer starts the melody, the others drawl it. Such drawling is not something special, however it reminds me the ison that occurred yet in the ancient times in Syria and Palestine, then it underwent its development in the Middle Ages in Byzantium as an important element in religious chants. The specific about this singing is found in the exclamations, which are in the that in the high range near the octave repetition of the basic tone. And thus the name "in the high" or "visichki" has originated. These are really unique and archaic in their nature songs. The multivocals are

combined thanks to a common bordon, which is performed in different heights concurrently by different singers. The songs "in the high" have their specific semantics. It is associated with the loud sounds to cover as larger area as possible that is handled daily by women. It is these loud sounds and effects while singing that bring fertility to the land and the farmers who cultivate it. There are popular beliefs that as far as the girl's or the woman's voice sounds, there will be no hail, natural disasters and crop diseases. The woman's voice keeps land clean so that it is able to give birth to the long-awaited good and beautiful fruits.

The original style of singing "in the high" is actually from Dolen village, and in Satovcha village this style was brought by settlers and until today the tradition is kept and passed on to the next generations. The songs are mainly related with the field work, but they started to occur in the festive cycle too - wedding days, working-bees, where usually penetrate various genres. At working-bees and field work, most of the work was done by women and they were the performers of this unusual type of singing. There is no doubt that its roots are precisely in this region, as women serve and care for rituals, and they didn't travel even in the vicinity of the village in difference to men. For this reason, they are the holders of the roots of the singing tradition "in the high" because they do not consume other ideas and thus no significant changes in the manner of performance may occur.

The performers tell

The performers from the group for songs "in the high" share that one of the most difficult elements in that singing is the drawling of the second voice:

„It is difficult when the first voice makes twills as the second voice must twill while drawling.. The songs, which we will sing at the concert, will be slower and they were usually sang on the field. In other places the ornaments are not like ours, it is poorer. In these songs there are interactions between Macedonia, Pirin and Rhodope music. Our songs are songs of kinship, we pass them on from generation to generation. Today no such songs are created, as there are many.“

Mariya Tomova Chobanova, leader of the groups, tells about the history and the establishment of the group for "high singing":

"The songs in our repertoire are about 250 and all they come from Dolen village and Satovcha village. I am from Satovcha, I was born in the Dikchan area on January 1st, when the forest-guards celebrated the New Year. I have been leading the group for 10 years now after our conductor passed away and I should mention the name of our secretary Ivan Belev who asked me then what shall we do with the group, and I told him that he should not worry, the group would exist, because I know that singers were selected by gene. There are whole families that know these songs. So when I gathered the group, he was very happy, however after 2-3 years, he passed away. It was very sad but we continued. We taught this to the children and one spring we take them sing with us and we won the gold medal. We gave our medal to the children so that they are joyful and sing, I don't know when this happened, it was just 4 years ago. We showed for the first time that the work of the group will be continued by the younger. We all were happy with our participation at the Sofia Spring Festival.

For these songs Maria tells us that they used to sing them on the filed, while hoeing, on Petrovden and when forests were planted. There are also songs for the bigger feasts such

as Lazarovden, Easter Day and St George's Day. They are always sung in groups, which alternate between each other, and if there are four vikachki (high singers), the "high" singing started. Maria was 10-11 years old when she heard and learnt the first song from her mother. This song was for the feast Lazarovden. The other songs in her repertoire she learned from her grandmother, her aunts and Ilia Terziev, who has great contribution to the development and preservation of this musical phenomenon. The singer shared that the songs were recorded so that their melodies are remembered. She spoke in all sincerity that in the sleepless nights these songs are her therapy. This is a proof of the spiritual wealth, represented by the "high" songs in this region.

In the home of Grandma Ivanka from Satovcha villager we were welcomed with great warmth and hospitality. While Grandma Ivanka told about the life of the song in this region, we got to know the roots of the "visichki". In her 85-years road of life, the singer devoted 50 years to the music. She is the founder of the first group for "high singing". She started singing when she was 5-6 years old, while listening to her mother, who was singing while working on the field. She learnt how to catch second voice or the so called "drawling". She learnt by herself 4-5 songs, which is an evidence that there are "visichki", which were composed by the singers. Additionally she has about one hundred songs written in a notebook, which she keeps at home. Due to their specificity these melodies would never be sung individually and usually they were sung by three women. Grandma Ivanka drew attention to the fact that these songs are not recorded and are kept in the minds of the singers, which in turn enriches the tradition and stores it in its entirety. And we met here a wonderful succession in the face of the granddaughter of Ivanka who had already learnt the song "Kitchitse, kitchitse" (Oh, bunch, bunch)

The wealth of songs of the region

With authentic folklore programme greeted us the beautiful, inspiring area of Dabrash. A heavenly place in which one can feel most really the strong connection with the nature, which every one of us has yet from his birth. The groups that participated in the concert program, with all their hearts and with much emotion presented their rich and varied repertoire. Yet during the preparation before the concert, I felt again that the folklore is another evidence of the relationship between a man and the nature. There neither scene nor spotlights. All happened between us - those who had gathered on the glade and listened in daze the voices of the mountain. They were singing a few steps away from us, filling the whole area with beautiful melodies and ornaments, born centuries ago and passed on from generations to generations so that we may hear them today. And the songs on and on tell stories about past times, human life, the field work, about love and family. With every next performance the relationship between man, nature, sounds, costumes, colours stood out more clearly. A living picture. As if time had stopped for everyone to enjoy truly the spiritual and emotional wealth, which gave us the folklore of Chech. The mountain listened to and sang in turn to inspire the young and the old artists. The diversity that we had the chance to hear illustrate more clearly the specificity of the song tradition in this region, as well as the beautiful transfusion of the Rhodope, Pirin and Macedonian songs.

In a talk with Naum Strandjev - a music teacher from Satovcha village emerged two main theses about the origination of "the high singing." The first one described the singing competition between women on the field that were divided into two groups and the second

one joined the singing competition with one octave higher. The second thesis was different only for the place where the singing competition took place, namely the working-bees. In both cases it refers to work, which is done entirely by the women in the village. All singers "in the high" in the region are women.

After the concert I had the pleasure to talk with Toni Bektasheva - the leader of the Children's Folklore Group "Slantse" from Pletena village. A wonderful singer and a guardian of the musical tradition in Pletena with over 26 years experience. In this case, we meet the well-known way to collect authentic folklore, namely recording of songs by older women and men in the village and the region. The main source in Pletena are the elderly women, from whom Tony Bektasheva has collected more than 600 songs. Some of them tell about true stories like the song "Ayro, Ayro". The story is about a family tragedy where a wife died in childbirth and her husband forgot the child as he was stricken with grief for his beloved wife. I was very impressed by the approach by which the leader passed on the singing tradition to the children.

"During the rehearsal children must learn what the song says, what story it tells because every song has a story and I tell it to them. They know that and they always ask. First I learn the songs and then I pass them on to the children."

And while in the performance of the group from Pletena was felt the Rhodope sounding, especially in the song "Oti si Fatme plakala", performed by a soloist and a slow pravo horo (ring dance), the group of Kochan village stuck to Macedonian sounding specific for that region. When we visited the village I met uncle Tsanko Madzhirski, who for 30 - 40 years led the amateur groups in Kochan village. He told:

"I inherited music from my sisters. They used to sing a lot. They used to sing while they worked, and at the working-bees there was a lot of singing too. The working-bees were rich, so rich! The girls used to make jokes with boys, we sang humorous songs. There was singing competition between young men. They sang in one voice all the time, some of them held it back, others continued. Our songs are related to harvesting, domestic customs, wedding traditions, called Momari. There were lots of amateurs in the village. There were 40-60 people, some sang to others and there were many young people who were keen!"

Our meeting ended with the last pages I went through while studying the two collections of songs from the region and the Rhodopes, which uncle Tsanko had wrote and drawn by himself. Two priceless books, written and drawn with much love and devotion to the folk song.

An amateur male choral group from Godeshevo village took part in the concert in Dabrash. We listened to authentic Rhodopes groups that were sung at working bees with the accompaniment of accordion and tarambuka. The group performs its repertoire with the typical nasal sound extraction, which is often met here.

Pirin and Rhodope met each other in the beautiful monophonic melodies of the singers from Vaklinovo village who presented a varied and rich repertoire as to size (7/8, 2/4/9/8). The combination of tambourine and tarambuka supplemented the live picture.

The dances of Chech

Lyuba Ilieva

Doctor of History

The ring dance.

Every village had dancing areas, called horalishta and in mountain villages - these were also the threshing grounds, the high open grounds above the village, as it was in Pletena village. For weddings and domestic revelries, people used to dance on the balconies - krotenki ring dances "on the poton" and there were special songs for these ring dances. The ring dances are played in half-circle or they were led. The names of the steps were also interesting - kutskani (= leap + step), sukhati (= tiny steps). By the early 20th century, a strict hierarchy was observed on the ring dance - the male and female ring dances were separate; now that is not valid for the festive ring dances and finds place only in the amateur art.

Usually ring dances move counter-clockwise, but there are many that are played in two directions. In some female ritual ring dances, for example in Kochan village and Vaklinovo village, women make a circle, holding their hands in pairs, facing each other and with their backs to the neighbouring pair, as we saw on the video of the folk group to Community Centre "Prosveta" in Kochan village. A working-bee was presented where the young women were singing and dancing, and the young men accompanied the female ring dances and songs with tambourine, tarambuka and accordion female song and dance playing melodies in size 2/4 and 7/8. The songs that were performed were mainly with Rhodope sounding as well as instrumental melodies for ring dances with Macedonian sounding; we listened to two typical female ritual songs for the region - "Konyo, konyo, sivi konyo" (Horse, horse, grey horse) (women dance slowly, forming a chain) and the pre-wedding song "Couscous se pravi" (Couscous is being cooked) that are popular in all villages of Satovcha region.

It sometimes happened at the working bee to make a girl's bunch was taken or even stolen (on this occasion at the working bee was sung the wedding song "Brala moma zelen zdravets" (A girl was picking green geranium). At the working bees mainly songs were sung but sometimes almost rarely some krotenki ring dances were played - young women hold each other's belts (the iram) and step low on the ground playing a very moderate pravo horo (ring dance).

According to their shape, the ring dances are led dances (with one or two ends), closed - in a closed circle, lesa and two intercepting rows. The torn form is also met - dancers dance alone or in pairs. The closed ring dances were played mainly by women and girls. The led dances (the torn ones) - by women and men and mixed. Ring dances "lesa" are quite rare and these are mainly male dances. We saw this dance here in the female dance from the performance presenting a wedding in Valkosel, where young women played their ring dance holding each other at the front "lesa". Mixed ring dances are mostly led ones and they move to the right or equally to the left and to the right. The dancers usually arrange in a semi-circle, oval or straight row. Usually men lead the ring dance and women are in the second half.

The ring dances on the square and those played on family occasions (in the room, on the balcony) have different character. **The tempo of this play in this region generally is slow and moderate.** The female lyrical and gentle ring dances differ from the male dances and they differ from the mixed ones - especially when unmarried men and women dance together and tease each other. It was considered indecent if the dancers leave the ring before the end of the dance. In Satovcha is observed the influence of the dances of the neighboring folk areas - Shopluka, Rhodopes, as well as those ring dances brought by the refugees from Macedonia. In Pletena village, at Bayram people play a mixed ring dance, the leader spins vigorously a chain or a piece of cloth with a knot in its free end. The first woman in the row should hold a boy, who must be her relative and not directly by hand but with a piece of cloth. On the female ring dance, two women start to sing, and two respond to them.

The local people identify their dances as krotlenki (tender) and slow although sometimes they play ring dances, which are more vigorous. Many of the slow dances end with a faster part, however still in moderate tempo. The contained and heavy dancing is a distinctive feature for the beginning of many folk dances - smooth and wide, expressive movements, masterful gestures and improvisation. Men dance slightly squatting with continuous springing; their game is very light, the movements are smooth and soft - both for men and women. Arms participate greatly in the dancing - for women - smooth, soft and gentle movements in different directions, often spinning a piece of cloth in their hands. Male hands move with strong and sharp movements and breadth - they also often spin a piece of cloth in their hands.

Usually the ring dances last all day, pausing only at noon - until dark, the end of the harvest-time was also celebrated by dances. Ring dances are usually accompanied by songs - half of the singers sing, others sing back or otherwise men sing, women sing back.

Ring dances accompanied by a song are called female dances and those accompanied by a drum, whistle (kemenche, wooden flute, tambourine, penny whistle or zourla) - male dances (Satovcha and Dolen). The big Sunday ring dances were tender dances and they were played all the year round; only songs changed from a season to season.

The feast dance begins with women dancing with the accompaniments of a song, usually a female dance that men interrupt and arrange for their heavy dance with the accompaniment of whistles and tambourines. Women draw back in a semi-circle, on a separate ring dance. Then the musicians start to play a mixed ring dance, women arrange among men and this continues until dark. Drums and zourlas fill the square; heavy ring dance songs alternated with hoylii - lively ring dancing melodies. Female plays and ring dances are played in moderate even slow tempo, rarely - lively. As a natural continuation of the long and pretty female costume, the movements are performed with low, running and springing steps, with straight body. Dancers hold each others hands, arms bend in the elbows or freely dropped, rarely they hold each others belts. The most common is the ordinary holding of hands; or dancers hold each other's belts or aprons - "the iram". Many male dancer are performed by the dancers holding their shoulders (Valkosel, Kochan, Satovcha). At the partition between the male and female half of the dance, as it was mentioned, the traditional holding was with a piece of cloth. The mixed dances often combined the two different types of holder - men holding their shoulders and woume - their belts or hands.

Male dance movements are high and springy and light steps are specific for them, especially the slow dances. Usually men hold each others hands, with arms bent in the elbows or freely dropping, for a shoulder, for a belt. The slow or the so called "heavy dances" are played hand by hand, and the fast danced - of the chetvorno type - by holding each others belts. The moderate ring dances played by holding each others shoulder include also the so called "**starski (eldrely) ring dances**". The name of the starski ring dances implies not only the age of the dancers, but also the role of the performers. The old people are disguised figures, similar to the mummers - in this region they are called "startsi, babugeri, survakari".

Among ring dances and plays in this region prevail simple and some more complex ring dances in size 2/4; the ordinary Paydushko in 5/16; ruchenitsa type (7/16) - either as a ring dance or a solo dance or dance in pairs, known in this region as Nebet - female and male. The moderate ring dances in 7/16 size and first extended section are another distinguishing feature of the local ring dances. They are simple as to structure and figures and are named after the first line of the ring dancing song. In the same size are played ring dances, which names tell about the foreign influence (but with our structure) - Sirto, Shirtom, and the so called Greek ring dance. This ring dance is played in all South-West Bulgaria, in the Satovcha villages and reaching the region of Dospat. Most ring dances in 9/16 size have wide distribution in Bulgaria with their triple time structure - two times to the right, one to the left. When dancing belly-dance, Bulgarian Muslims keep their body calm and do moderate movements compared to the passionate style of Gypsies. The belly dance is played solo, in groups of two, three or more persons. The wrists move freely at the height of the shoulders or the head. Most often the structure of the ring dances is two-time, as the one of a number of ring dances performed with daychovs steps by the local population. Many of the ring dances, which we saw at the concert in Dabrash, were of this type. By the nature of movements, these ring dances belong to the Daychovo ring dance type - they are always played with a leap in "one". The ring dances in the so called wide sevenths (7/8) and big ninths (9/8) are also widely spread in the region of Gotse Delchev. Much later, after the Balkan wars and through the route of the amateur art, ring dances from other regions penetrated here - for example the Northern Elenino, Gankino etc. A typical thing for that region is that such imported melodies are matched to the ring dances with local structure.

Many rituals and ritual ring dances are built on one move only performed within the time. Such are the traditional wide-spread girls' plays of the Muslim population, performed in a circle. The singers stand in pairs - a girl against a girl, holding their hands or not or they just make an ordinary ring dance holding each others hands. Twisting may be performed in various rhythms 2/4, 3/8, 7/16, 9/16. Structured over a minimum move, they are performed very slowly and the movement is counter-clockwise. Feet barely go off the ground and they are even shuffled along - as for example in the female ring dance "Golem se Barem pomina" (Satovcha village) or the female Bayram ring dance in Pletena village accompanied with the same song, which was shown to us by the mother-in-law of Irina Boshnakova from Pletena village.

The most common ring dances in Gotse Delchev are moderately fast, most often gentle and they are played mainly with the accompaniments of a song. They name them after the first line of the song - as those presented to us at the concert in Dabrash "Brala moma zelen zdravets", etc. As a rule, both the simplest and the more complex ring dances start with moderate speed, then become faster, slow down, and usually end with a lively,

fast part. Another part of the ring dances are a combination of slow and fast ring dance in one (as in Drama Yuch ayak etc.).

According to the size in which the ring dances are played, they are as follows: in 2/4 size - festive and female ritual ring dances with the accompaniments of a song, ring dancing songs in faster pace, which are played on the square and ritual, instruments, type "pravo horo" type peshachka; in size 5/16 - "Paydushko "; in 7/16 -"rachenichni" and in 9/16 size - type Gankino, Daichovo and Belly dance.

Great variety of male, female and mixed ring dances - the local ones are purely Macedonian in nature, although in Pletena village the traditional female ring dances tend to resemble the ones from the Middle Rhodopes. The maiden and the female ring dances are contained and are played with a lot of ease and precision. The springiness is clearly expressed, dancers hold each other mainly by hands with elbows bent - almost always they bounce in unison with the dancing moves of the legs - or with arms dropped down to the body. In quite many ring dances people hold their hands down to their body and rhythmically swing them forward or backward. Typical for the style and the character of the performance of maiden and female ring dances is the shyness, modesty and purity of movement. The male ring dances are mainly led ring dances - the ring dance leader almost always spins a piece of cloth in his right hand. The opashkaryat (the last person on the ring dance) holds the end of the ring dance and very often springs a piece of cloth in his left hand. Among the male ring dances in this region are the Three steps in 4/4 and 9/8 - Aydarovo horo. In two parts – a slow one and a fast one – in different music sizes are performed the male ring dances brought by the refugees like Drama (4/4 + 2/4). Dancers hold each others hands, with elbows bent, and often they drop down to the body and swing forward and backward. Male dances feature abundant movements and rhythms, from slow to lively tempo. Typical local ring dances are Trite stapki (three steps) (in 4/4 size) and Aydarovo (in 9/8); Arap (4/4); Shirto(7/8). The ordinary "pravo" ring dance, which is played everywhere in Bulgaria, in Pletena village, Gotse Delchev region is known as Fustansko or Aur avasa. In Pletena village and Kochan village is played the shopsko Petrunino ring dance and the forward-backward ring dance in 9/8 is called Aydarovata. The ring dances in the Gotse Delchev region traditionally are known for their populousness - all villagers dressed up in their Sunday's best went to the Sunday and festive ring dances.

Female dances are played in different sizes and pace - from slow to moderate (Maleshevsko - in 2/4 size, Shirto and Troyno - in 7/8).

"Drama" is a male ring dance brought by refugees from Aegean area; its variant is played in Gotse Delchev with high spirits, accented movements, clapping and spins. It is played in two parts - slow (4/4) with dancers holding each others shoulder and fast (2/4) with dancers holding their hands dropped down. The typical accompaniment is with zourla and drum and quite rarely in the Christian village - with bagpipe and tambourine. Lads are arranged in a semi-circle, holding each others shoulder and play the fast part (2/4) holding their hands dropped down. This is a very popular ring dance in the region of Gotse Delchev. It is performed emphatically, valiantly, with much internal power and dignity, with contrasting slow and fast part.

The Pirin's ring dance Trite stapki, which is called hear Yuch ayak or Yucheyak (Pletena village, Kochan village) is a male led ring dance - it is played in Pletena village and in Kochan village in 4/4 size. People dance it by holding each others hands, with elbows bent,

which are moved a little bit forward upon twisting. At other times the left hand is placed on the back, while the right one is pushed forward to the right at the height of the head, waving a piece of cloth. Trite stapki is a ring dance typical for the region. The slow part is played softly, with underlined bouncing, with a little bit squatting legs and body slightly bent forward. The fast part - with leaps and upon twisting the left hand is placed on the back, while the right one is pushed forward to the right at the height of the head, waving a piece of cloth.

"Aydarovo" - a male led ring dance in 9/8 size with a fourth long section, from Kochan village, which is performed with bouncing, the body turning to the right and the left, with jumps and squats, by holding each others hands with the elbows bent. The pace is moderate and gradually becomes faster and faster The bouncing is made by command of the ring dance leader or is released - at the wish of the participants. Aydarovo ring dance is a typical ring dance for the region, it is performed with light, initially bouncing and subsequently jumping movements and with high spirits. The accents are in one, down to the ground, with the typical squatting for the ring dance. The arms bounce in the elbows, in the rhythm of the dance and are dropped down to the body in certain moments.

"Nebet" - mixed dance with the accompaniment of a song, in 7/16 size with third long section. Hands are placed around the waist or move by raising them above the head or forward to the chests and holding a piece of cloth. One hand from time to time is put on the waist, while the other rotates a piece of cloth and then they mutually change their position. Dancers are arranged in a row and in some moments they dance against each other in pairs like then return to their original position in the dance. The dance is very smooth, with light jumps, moderate pace, in rooms and balconies; at weddings and on family occasions - in a mixed manner. Very rarely it is performed at the square, in pairs, participants hold the two opposite ends of one piece of cloth. Hands are extended forward or raised highly. From time to time the pairs hold each others shoulder - right hand on right shoulder, and some dancers dance face to face, and the other - back to back.

Nebet from Pletena village is a solo and female dance. The specific for the ring dances in the village is that the male ring dances are danced by holding each others shoulder and the female dances - holding each others hands. Mixed ring dances are played more rarely - men and women dancing together. The musical accompaniment is most often by zourlas and drums. The ring dancing singing is widely spread (singing and dancing simultaneously). Only in Pletena, for example, is played Pletenska rachenitsa, and in Kochan village - the male ring dance "zaeshko vreme" (rabbit time). **"Zaeshkata" is a local ring dance, originating from the famous all over Bulgaria the male wedding play.** The male dance "Zaeshko vreme" is a modern ring dance similar to the pravo ring dance. "There was no such name earlier", says Ibrim Alilov Dzihldzhov - Eheto (over 80 years old, from Satovcha). Zaeshkata - or Taushan avasi is a wedding male ring dance, which imitates the rabbits in the spring, when they are in the love period.

Grandma Ivanka Kartalova, a singer "in the high" from Satovcha village says that ring dances are played for Easter, Christmas, Petrovdnen, Ilinden - even when there is deep snow - they trample it down and dance again! Baadin Musov, Valkosel village (a teacher of history and geography) says that Daychovo ring dance is called here Yumer - and that was authentic; he remembers that it was played in the village 50 years ago. He also mentions the male dance 'Drama' (brought to the region of Gotse Delchev by the Aegean refugees). People here dance usually at Bayram and on wedding days, and the most common here - as well as

in Bulgaria today - is the so notorious pravo ring dance. The elderly but very brisk, with lively eyes and smiling Ayshe Drenkova from Pletena village participates in the folk group with the community centre, led by Antoaneta Bektasheva and the two of them readily showed to me some of the ring dances played here - Chanakta kalia and Boyuvoto - a type of shirto with the instrumental accompaniment of zourlas and drums. They told me that other ring dances typical for Pletena are the female Nebet, the male Yuch ayak (Yucheyak) and Aydar avasa. An interesting fact is the penetration of ring dances from other folk areas such as the shopsko Petrunino ring dance, although locally it has acquired a different form and style. The repertoire of ring dances in the village today is the same for weddings and festivals, and for the various occasions. The performers are called players, the dancing - playing - "the young are playing". Antoaneta Bektasheva is married in Pletena village; she has been leading the group at the community centre for 26 years. First they started with a dance group, which subsequently fell apart and was transformed into a male folk group for authentic folklore of Pletena village. She learned the ring dances and songs from her parents and from other old people. She knows 5-6 authentic ring dances, which are played mainly here. Yucheyak - male ring dance only, Aydar avasa - mixed, Aishinity buzi - female. A 68-year old man comes to the community centre to show them the steps of the ring dances. Nadzhomi Arnaudov states that Aydar avasa is a dance that is played in Pletena village, but generally all people play it in the region of Gotse Delchev. The most famous in Pletena village were the female ring dance with the accompaniment of the song Ayshinite buzi and the Maleshevsko ring dance, as well as the male dance Yucheyak. Most of the ring dances are mixed. The dancers are called ring dancers and today in Pletena there is not special place for ring dancing - "people just come and dance". Ring dances are played mostly on Bayram, on wedding days, on working-bees. Zvezditsa Asenova Pachedjieva has lived in Slashten village since 1986; she is an amateur and a leader of a folklore group at the high school in Slashten (club "Communicating by dancing" under the project "Uspeh") and Community Centre Probuda in Slashten village. She says that the ring dance Drama brought by refugees is played locally at least two - three generations backwards. The most popular ring dances, which people love, are Dramsko, Pravo and Shirto in our region. The ring dances in our region are mixed. In the past there was separation - Zaeshkata is a female ring dance. There are no bans for dancing. The places where people danced are called megdan (square) and the dancers are called orodzhii. Ring dances are played only on the square and at home only at wedding days or other family occasions.

The major feasts and customs are inevitably connected with playing ring dances - wedding, Bayram, Pryadoy. On the stage was reproduced a wedding, with making-up the bride, singing songs and playing ring dances. Dramsko ring dance is spread in the whole region of Chech and it was brought from Drama by refugees and merchants. Pravo ring dance, Dramsko, Shirto and Elenino ring dance are played at weddings; all people (young and old) play ring dances. Ferat Masarliev is the best ring dance leader among the old people in Slashten village, and the best singer of local songs is Emiliya Shirova. During the Bayram any kind of ring dances are played and the participants are all - children, unmarried men and women, married men and women. No dancing, singing and playing is allowed during funerals. There are no other prohibitions. Mehmed Bayramov - a drummer of the Pletena singing group "Slantse", Pletena village confessed that he can not play ring dances, but when he hears the music, "his heart is thrilling." He doesn't know. long time ago he played in a dance group when he was a boy but he remembers nothing. In the village there was an amateur dance group, which had broke up because the men went to earn their living abroad. Dancers, dance. Pravo ring dance - this is a mixed dance. Uncle Tsanko Madzhirski

from Kochan village has been a leader of amateur groups in the village since 1970. Songs are sung for the special customs too - for example Momari or Bayram. Momari is a wedding custom in which take part more women and girls who mainly sing songs. There are specific songs for each custom. Now Pirin Ensemble and the Nevrokopi Ensemble use our ring dances, says proudly uncle Tsanko. We, from Kochan village, know our ring dances for their music and their steps. They are very specific, there are slower and faster dances. The ease of the steps depends on the dancers. You will enjoy them. They dance solidly and it's a pleasure to look at them especially when they wear the costumes". The male dances with their typical steps are specific too. The male ring dance is always played with accompaniment (a drum or a zourla) in difference to the female dance. **Albena Poyukova** – Kochan village: Pravo ring dance and Greek ring dance are played here. Otherwise ring dances are played around fountains, in the houses, during weddings but not at the square. Naum Strandjev from Satovcha is the leader of the authentic folklore group at High School St. St. Cyril and Methodius. He knows all ring dances, which are played here. Pravo ring dance, Pirin ring dance, Yuchiyaka, Daychovo ring dance. Yuchiyaka (Yucheyak) is totally male ring dance. Mixed ring dances - pravo ring dance, Pirinsko ring dance. The typical size for the village is 7/8 (Pirinsko ring dance). They are named igraltsi/ igraene. Ring dances are played at all big feasts - St George's Day, Bayram, Easter. At weddings all people play pravo ring dance, daychovo ring dance and pirinsko ring dance. Ring dances are played mainly on the square. In the past men and women didn't play together - men were in the first half, then followed women, and men and women were separated by a piece of cloth held by a younger maiden. Today men join the ring dance wherever they like. Adem Kyoybashiev - amateur, leader of singers, accordionist from Tuhovishta village mentioned a male ring dance "Na ramu" (i.e. by holding their shoulders) - slow and heavy. The dancers and the square are called here horadzhii and orishte. "Singing, dancing and music playing is typical for all big feasts and customs - Ramazan Bayram, Kurban Bayram and Pryadoy". "A ring dance without audience is not a ring dance," Ibrim Dzhildzhov summarizes on the occasion of the mass participation of the local population in the celebrations - the male ring dance is lead with a chain (which the leader spins it in his hand). "The one who dances is called igralets".

Music accompaniments and traditional instruments

Singing is the most typical accompaniment for ring dances. It is almost compulsory for the traditional female ring dances in this region. In Kochan village and Vaklinovo village, the songs of Pirin style and Rhodopes style exist together and alternate between each other. This is testified by Severin Chaushev - a music teacher in Kochan village, who notes the specific style of the folklore in this region, created by the fusion of elements from the Rhodope and Pirin region.

Mainly men play musical instruments – in the past the tambourine and the shepherd's flute were widely spread. Drum is available everywhere and is often used for accompaniment. The tambourine is used mainly for domestic music playing and for accompaniment of songs; it is used for wedding only by exception. Bagpipe is quite rarely used here; in the past was used mainly by the Christians, especially in combination with a large tambourine and bagpipe. In Gotse Delchev region were made the so-called pair of shepherd's pipes with a soft and quiet sound used as an accompaniment for the singers, especially in one-voice songs, typical of this region. Zourla players are not a local phenomenon, they are hired for special occasions from neighbouring villages, however

zourlas are very common in the musical life of this region. The short type of zourlas are common for the Gotse Delchev region. Their sound is strong and ear-splitting, appropriate for outdoor playing. The zourla players and the drummers very often accompany the ring dances - often in combination of one or two zourlas and one drum. The big drum and the tambourine are the most favourite and widely used percussion instruments in this region. Traditionally ring dances were accompanied by a flute, penny whistle (short wooden pipe) dvoynka (tin whistle), mandolin (dranka), zourlas and drums; and for Christians - by bagpipe too.

The musicians were much sought after and very respected persons in this region. Many musicians were hired for important occasions such as wedding (Kochan village, Satovcha village) and syunets (circumcisions). The zourlas in Gotse Delchev penetrate relatively late in the music practice of the local population, including among Bulgarian Muslims. It was brought by gypsies, the travelling musicians on the Balkans who mainly played this instrument. Drum is combined with the zourla and this noisy accompaniment was practised mainly for the male plays. Ibrim Dzholdzhov, Satovcha village underlines that the gypsies are those who play the kranlet (clarinet). In Satovcha the music sounds quietly; the ring dances are also played quietly and tenderly. The instruments, which are used in Satovcha - mandolin, zourla, tambourine, bagpipes, shepherd's pipes. The shepherd's pipes must be always a pair. Bagpipe is less known and there was only one. Mandolin was used more often. In Pletena village the musical accompaniment is most often by zourlas and drums. The ring dancing singing is widely spread (singing and dancing simultaneously). Most often the dancing is accompanied by mandolins and bay amateur orchestras, which include shepherd's pipe, tarambuka, mandolin. According to Nadzhomi Arnaudov from Pletena village traditionally dancing was accompanied by zourlas, and now by orchestral music. Mehmed Bayramov - a drummer of the Pletena singing group "Slantse", Pletena village learnt how to play drums by older musicians - amateurs in the group, and by amateurs - clarinetists from Gotse Delchev he learnt how to play the clarinet. Rumen Bilyarov from Vaklinovo village showed a preserved beech dvoynka (pin whistle) and tried to demonstrate how to play this instrument. Baadin Musov from Valkosel village considers that the instruments, which were typically used for ring dancing melodies, were the tarambuka and the zourla, as well as the pin whistle, however no ring dance was played with the latter's accompaniment. Uncle Tsanko Madzhirski from Kochan village explains that female ring dances were not played with the accompaniment of music, however male ones were always accompanied by instrumental music - drums, zourla. Grandma Ivanka from Satovcha tells how during holidays - in summer and winter, people played many ring dances, mostly with the accompaniment of songs and rarely with clarinet and tambourine. Many ring dances (i.e. ring dancing songs) existed in Satovcha and rarely they were played with instrumental accompaniment (shepherd's pipe or kranle - clarinet). Albena Poyukova - a singer, born in Brashten village and married in Kochan village, for 20 years was the leader of the children's group in the village. That's how she describes the modern amateur art and feasts - accordion, penny whistle, shepherd's pipes play for the maiden customs ...as their melodies are more tender. Zourlas and drums play at the bachelors' rituals. According to Naum Strandjev from Satovcha, zourla groups are invited for the Bayram, and in some villages whole orchestras with accordion and clarinet. Men dance and sing with the accompaniments of mandolin, so do women. Other traditional instruments are tamboura and zourla. Zvezditsa Asenova Pachedjieva is an amateur and a leader of folklore groups at the high school in Slashten village (club "Communicating by dancing" under the project "Uspeh") and

Community Centre Probuda in Slashten village. According to her, men and women dance with the accompaniments of zourlas and drums, and today groups include various modern musical instruments.

Dances at fairs and working-bees

The fairs are crowded - they took place in the high glades out of the villages, near chapels, etc. Fairs of the Christians took place most often near Easter, St. George's Day, Spasovden (Spas's Day), Petrovden (Peter's Day). They always put tables, gather their families, relatives and friends from neighbouring villages, all that accompanied with many songs and dances. In Gotse Delchev region were famous the fairs in Hadjidimovo on St. George's Day, when there was a kind of review of the costumes and dancing competitions between the villages with their specific ring dances. In the Pirin region, many Muslim villages celebrate also the Christian holidays like St. George's Day and St. Demetrius Day by dancing and playing games. Today fairs mark a decline. In Vaklinovo village there was a big fair during the summer Bayram, where people came from remote Rhodope villages. Muslims celebrate Bayram twice a year and they often danced at two dancing places simultaneously - in Gotse Delchev Muslims never stopped dancing as it happened elsewhere in the Rhodopes - here the Bulgarian ring dances are in the heart of the local population, and often young men and women form separate rings while dancing. Gradually in most of the villages they started dancing jointly. Married women who in the past adhered to the ban of the Koran not to dance in public places, did it at the female working-bees and weddings - in the female wards. Gradually maidens started joining the male ring dances in the second half of the ring and were separated from men with a piece of cloth and today ring dances are played jointly and even the married Muslim women dance ring dances. **Baadin Musov, Valkosel village:** Among the fairs where local musicians take part are the big folklore forums "Rhodopes sing", "Pirin sings" in Predela, Koprivshtitsa. **Zvezditsa Asenova Pachedzhieva, Slashten village:** Fairs take place on the St. George's Day in Satovcha village, in July in Vaklinovo village and in August in the town of Dospat. At the fairs songs are sung and rituals are reproduced, dances are played on the stages. Pryadoy is a ritual celebrated by the local population in the second week of June. **Antoaneta Bektasheva, Pletena village:** Today the bigger fairs are those in the village of Vaklinovo and in the town of Dospat; People dance with the accompaniment of orchestral music or zourlas, the same ring dances are played, and mainly the Bulgaria's most common pravo horo (ring dance). **Mehmed Bayramov, Pletena village –** Dances are played at many fairs - regional or the more famous national fairs like Pirin sings, Koprivshtitsa, Rozhen, Nedelino, Zlatograd and abroad. The regional ones - in Satovcha, in the Palashova ryak place. Rumen Bilyarov, Vaklinovo village: Our group has participated at the national festivals Pirin sings and Koprivshtitsa. **Uncle Tsanko Madzhirski** from Kochan village – „They sing while they work and much more at the working-bees. The working-bees were rich, so rich! The girls used to make jokes with boys, we sang humorous songs. Groups of men made singing competitions. In a friendly way...". Naum Strandjev from Satovcha village distinguished the fair in Vaklinovo village. The ring dances that were played were Pravo, Daychovo and Pirinsko horo. Adem Kyoybashiev - a leader of singers, accordionist, Tuhovishta village - his memories of the working-bees are related to singing, "various plays and ring dances" - people used to dance also in their own yards and at the fountains. Antoaneta Bektasheva, Pletena village - at working-bees rather songs were sung than ring dances were played. Mainly love songs were sung. Albena Poyukova - a singer, born in

Brashten village and married in Kochan village, for 20 years was the leader of the children's group in the village. According to her, the most typical local custom is the artistic representation of the "Rhodope idyll" - bells were put on goats, rams. "When shepherd came home with their flock, bells started ringing. The sound fused with the songs at the working-bees. The bachelors went from a working-bee to a working-bee. At the working-bees we used to work - stringing tobacco, hemp. We used to sing for two hours and more. The places where the working-bees took place were the upper neighbourhood and the lower neighbourhood. Songs were sung for two hours and more. **Ivanka Kartalova from Satovcha village** remembers: In the summer songs were sung in the field and in winter - at the working-bees. The saibia (the owner), in whose house the maids gathered and sang to attract young men, initially locked doors so that men may not enter but then the maid let them in. "Songs used to be sung at the ring dance, without other accompaniment. Finally when the work at the working-bee was done, young men and women played a ring dance."

Festive and ritual ring dances and plays

The festive ring dances and plays are the common wedding ring dances on the balcony, the Sunday ring dances, the ring dances on the square, the ring dances at feasts, fairs, mixed ring dances at weddings.

The ritual ring dances were associated both with rituals like lazaruvene (the feast celebrated on the day before the Palm's Day) and wedding plays, as well as with seasonal feasts. This makes the ritual dances relatively stable and keeps them partially until today despite of the serious cultural, historical and domestic changes in the people's lives. St. George's Day, Lazarovden, Petrovden, fairs, local festivals, rituals praying for rain or at harvest-time - all these were occasions for games and fun. Generally ring dances associated with the customs are simple and rarely do they represent an impressive choreographic innovation.

The main types of ritual dances include bachelor and maiden ritual ring dances and plays as well as wedding dances - male and female. The celebrations of the calendar feasts (St George's Day, Enyovden and Easter Day) started with the female ritual ring dances with the accompaniment of a song. These ritual ring dances were based on the typical for the region ring dances but their steps in the relevant form were performed only on the specific ritual occasion and moreover by the maids who have already performed the ritual on St. Lazar's Day (lazaruvane), and they had grown up for marriage.

Singly, the group ritual dance is a type of ancient ritual activity. It is mainly preserved in the male ritual wedding dances, in the dances of the elderly, babugeri, etc. In female rites, solo play is not typical, it occurs mostly in the dances on the St. Lazar's Day and the dance of the butterfly, as well as in some ritual moments of the wedding.

Male ritual dance are represented by the visits of sourvakars (boys going from house to house wishing people a Happy New Year) and the winter masquerade games, accompanied by the game of old men or babugeri (at weddings the babugeri are a kind of mummers). From the male wedding ritual games specific development gets the Zaeshko horo, "Zaeshkata" (Rabbits dance). It is a stylized dance in the style of the male heavy ring dances, with typical pantomime movements. This is a solo performance with symbolic rabbit movements. The male play of the wedding dance "Zaeshkata" combines the freedom of

improvisation - squats, lying, jumping, etc., with more gentle, controlled expressive dance forms.

The solo "starski" (old man's) or babugerski plays, wild, scary and funny plays are performed with ritual steps, which are mainly jumping in one place or by moving in all directions. Men jump wildly, trampling in a chaotic manner to the sound of the bells shaking from these jumps. Improvised movements, imitating animals, making jokes, etc., based on the fertile primitive meaning as content. The names starsko, heavy, holding shoulders, etc. refer to the old time, ancient local festive ring dance. From these ritual games, the sanctifying starsko ring dance goes into the festive fair repertoire. Old man means wise, elderly, respected dancer who leads the ring dance with dignity. Except as a festive dance at feasts and festivals, this ring dance is played at home too - on the balconies, "while on a visit". Naum Strandjev, Satovcha village remembers that only survakars went around the village as ritual groups.

Similar variant of a single but group game on St. Lazar's Day is preserved in Dolen village. The lazarki (girls performing the St Lazar's Day ritual) sing and dance simultaneously, their dance is heavy, tough, with alternating step - jump - "pristapyane" and "skakanye" and from time to time they turn around. The girls dance one by one in a circle, one after another. Their upright body, holding pieces of clothes on their waist, the heavily ringing ornaments at every jump, supplement the atmosphere of a strict ritualism. The songs on the St. Lazar's Day have explicitly preserved ancient ritual nature.

Dances associated with the St. George's Day

The St. George's Day is considered the biggest feast, even more important than Easter. It is celebrated everywhere in Gotse Delchev region - by Christians and Muslims. The traditional celebration includes the consecration of bread, roasted lamb, and dances and revelries, games and swings for health organized on the surrounding meadows. In the eve of the feast women dance slow ritual ring dances or twisting with the accompaniment of a special song. Often the same lyrics are played with more lively melodies and more vivid ring dances are played. An interesting fact is that the celebration of St. George's Day by the Muslims has never stopped - they observe numerous ancient, pagan Bulgarian traditions and even traditions that had long time ago vanished from the ritual practice of the Christian population. Such is the custom "singing for the bunches" - a separate song is sung for each bunch (only initial verses just to remind of the notorious content) and this song foretells the fate of the bunch's owner. And as the Bulgarian ritual traditions include singing for the bunches, breads, etc., in Satovcha used to sing for the tobacco, as it was mentioned during the interview with Ivanka Kartalova. Once the celebration of St. George's Day continued with roast lamb at lunch time and dancing ring dances by young women and men (the same as the celebration of Bayram), who then twisted the horalishte (the ring dancing area). On Bayram and St. George's Day, the young tied rope swings on high trees and swung there for health, all that accompanied with songs and jokes.

Gyulezara Kochenlieva from Vaklinovo village tells about an ancient custom, which was observed apparently without knowing and remembering its original meaning: "Girls join the ring dance and dance... "On the St. George's Day early in the morning before sunrise women went to the Chuka place to pick up geraniums, hips, sloes, if they were ill they spent the night there to get healed and rolled on the grass for good health. There were trees and

we swung there to prevent ache of our backs. They plucked blades of nettles and dipped them in the nearby fountain and then threw them away - and they did it three times. Zvesditsa Assenova Pachedjieva from Slashten village remembered a pagan custom that formally reached her time and was observed then - on the St. George's Day women rolled on the meadows for good health. **Rumen Bilyarov, Vaklinovo village:** The St. George's Day was named Gergiden. Whoever has sheep and cows should put a green birch twig on them so that they are in good health until the next St. George's Day. This is one of the basic and biggest holidays along with the Bayram. People adorn themselves with greenery, geranium, birch twigs on heads - for good health. All people - young and old - join the feast. Rumen Bilyarov from Vaklinovo village notes how in the traditional celebration of St. George's Day the religions are intertwined: "The feast is known as a Christian feast from the past". On the St. George's Day in Pletena village a swing is made, the bachelors swing the maids.

Dances associated with rituals praying for rain

The Peperuda (butterfly) ritual (praying for rain) is known everywhere in Bulgaria It is performed every year in the days determined according to the local tradition and at drought, at the end of the spring (after St George's Day) and in the early summer when the crops most need moisture. The participants in the custom are young girls, who are not ripe for marriage yet. The main figure of the ritual - the butterfly should be an orphan.

The custom for praying for rain in Pletena village is very curious and the singer Ivanka Kartalova born in Satovcha in 1927 told us about it: "An orphan girl or an orphan boy should be dressed in a long shirt. They call it peperuda (butterfly) and adorn it with willow twigs. It goes around the village and sings. The ritual for praying for rain is called Peperuda and it must be always an orphan. The other girls sing songs in a circle surrounding the peperuda and pray for rain. The Peperuda ritual is for drought times - an orphan girl is decorated with willow twigs from head to toe (and here in Satovcha it could be a boy too!), then the participants go around the village and sing a special song that Ivanka sang to us:

„Дай, Боже дъжд, да се роди ръж (God give us rain so that rye grows
Да омесим колачета, да нараним сирачета (so that we knead bread and feed the orphans).

Дай, Боже дъжд, да се роди ръж (God give us rain so that rye grows
Да омесим колачета, да нараним сирачета (so that we knead bread and feed the orphans).

Дай, пеперудо, на ви пеперудо, (give us butterfly, here you are butterfly)
летна пролетешна (summer time, spring time)

Дай, Боже дъжд, да се роди ръж (God give us rain so that rye grows
Да омесим колачета, да нараним сирачета (so that we knead bread and feed the orphans).

During the tour the group accompanying the butterfly spray it with water, and she shakes off the water, sprays around and cries: God, give us rain, give us rain, God"

"Finally they go around the village and from every house a gift is made" - cooking, "maize meal", beans, eggs and other products and when the tour is over, they go to the

river, make a fire, cook hominy with the collected flour. They sit in a circle on the meadow, they eat and say - Here, a cloud is coming - it will rain!

Zvezditsa Asenova Pachedjieva from Slashten village describes the contemporary form and content of the custom "Prayer for Rain" as a group of girls who walk around the village. In Valkosel village the ritual for praying for rain is also known but it has no specific name. Obviously nowadays the ritual exists rather as a cultural tradition than as a living ritual. The group goes from a house to house and gets gifts in the form of food, drinks, money. Teybie Kyoybeshieva, the leader of the folk group of Tuhovishta village - a local custom for praying for rain is performed - "Aminkane" Children gather together and go from house to house. A person goes out and pours water. The children say: "Come here rain so that maize gives grain to sate the orphan's hunger: Then children go to a widow's house and she should make kachamak (hominy) for them.

Teybie Kyoybeshieva, the leader of the folk group of Tuhovishta village tells about "Pryado" (Predoi) - an ancient, pagan custom that has become a feast for the village. Fair takes place at Pryadoy in Tuhovishta village. **Adem Kyoybashiev, Tuhovishta village says:** "The feast "Pryadoy" here is celebrated every third Saturday of June; there are ring dances and songs - just lika Bayram - even mixed ring dances." Pryadoy (Preduy) is a ritual milking of sheep, which is made by the husband on the morning of the St George's Day. The first lambed ship is milked. If the lamb is male, it is given as an offering (kurban) to St. George and if the lamb is female it would be left for breeding purpose; the quantity of milk is considered prediction for the coming year. The vessels for the milk, the sheep-pens and the other buildings are adorned with green twigs for successful growing of flock and more milk. Zvezditsa Asenova Pachedjieva, Slashten village tells about the customs observed until today - the wedding, "Pryadoy" syunets (circumcision) and "Prayer for Rain" (Peperuda).

Gyulezara Kochenlieva, Vaklinovo village told that they also celebrated Jeremiah and Nevruz - a common-Balkan Muslim feast associated with the onset of spring. Nevruz is known as "Spring Equinox" and means a new day, the beginning of a new life. The feast Nevruz is to see off the winter and to meet the summer. The popular belief is that on day of Nevruz, the earth awakes. Women should not launder and should not do handiwork on this day. Men should not do work either. In Vaklinovo the bans connected with the pagan content of the feast are observed. "We do nothing on the Nevruz day, we do not touch soap or needle. We cut nothing. Men do not shave on this day - to prevent something bad from happening."

And a custom associated with traditional religion in the region - 15 days before the feast Ramadan there is "arfe" (All Souls' Day) - baskets of cakes, pastry, bread, delight are given for commemoration. Yucherla is the Big Ramadan. It happened that we were in Satovcha on this day to do some field work and Emilia Kastamanova and other villagers gave arfe to us too.

Bayram customs and plays.

In the past widely distributed was the so called "twisting" - ritual surrounding, which blends the traditions of the church services and the pagan customs for abundance and protection from evil forces. Such processes were performed to ensure health and prosperity

around centuries-old trees, crosses, churches and monasteries, or consecrated grounds and places where Bayram was celebrated.

Upon twisting the dance is performed only by women - twisting for Muslims is preserved as a formal ritual without its original content and represents slow ritual stepping. The Bayram's place is twisted both by maid and by bachelors. In Pletena village the one-time traditional "twisting" of the place for offering by a ring dance played by girls is no longer practised - the main actor for the offerings is the imam. In Pletena on the Bayram day the young women stand in a line and sing the songs "Ago, Syulyumane" "Oti si Fatme plakala" (both were presented at the concert in Dabrash) and the related ring dance is played on them - "On the rod." There are songs and dances, usually the young women dance. There is a Bayram swing at the end of the village and the bachelors swing their the maids that they like, they choose wives and husbands. A special song is sung: "The Big Bayram came, the small one is to come" - for Kurban Bayram (that song was sung for us by Antoaneta Boshnakova from Pletena). "Nadzhomi Arnaudov added - on the Bayram day - girls are arranged in a line and sing: "Last night I came around" "The Ayshe's cheeks", "A bright colour is out." As they arrange in a line, it is called "on a rod". Adem Kyoybashiev, Tuhovishta village - In the morning of the Bayram Days, people go to the mosque, then at home and in the afternoon there are dances and music for the whole village. **Uncle Tsanko Madzhirski from Kochan village:** "There were rituals that were performed at feasts - Bayram. The young women danced and they made very interesting steps. Male ring dances were specific with steps differing from those of the female ring dances. Many men took part." Gylezara Kochenlieva from Vaklinovo: "We played other songs, from ancient times. On the Bayram days women danced and played two by two and then the caught hold of each other. A swing was made on a poplar." During the Bayram days, women made a semicircle or a line ("two by two women made a circle") and also in pairs - face to face and sang the song "Zagalil sa (Caressing)." The whole ring moves as a circle or in a row and proceeds to the Garloto area near the village. This ritual ring dance with the accompaniment of a song was made when our informant was young, but for decades it has not been practised. A swing was made for the girls on the Bayram days - on a poplar. Teybie Kyoybeshieva, Tuhovishta village: The Bayram is the other main local feast accompanied with music and dances. The common pravo ring dance is mostly played as well as the local ring dance Devoychitse. On Friday (Jumaya) no work is done and no dancing. People must just sit quietly. The elderly go to the mosque. During the Bayram fairs are organized in Tuhovishra and the slaughtering of a lamb is compulsory. Ibrim Dzildzhov, Satovcha village - in the Bayram days the young men and women didn't dance together at the ring dance. **Nadzhomi Arnaudov:** "Bayram is our most important feast" and he remembers a maiden ritual according to which in the past the wreaths of the girls were thrown.

The wedding dances

The various moments of the wedding, performed for more than a week, always were accompanied by songs and dances. When the best man and the groom went to take the bride for the marriage ceremony, they were accompanied by a group of women - relatives and neighbours - arranged in 3-4 rows - who were singing and dancing. A bagpiper led that group and around him men danced in quite free style. In Dolen village after the bride was taken, rachenichno ring dance was played and it was led by the best man and the bride. Wedding banquet were also accompanied by many ring dances in the most common sizes

(2/4, 7/8 or 9/8) - with the accompaniment of song or whistle, the Nebet dance or rychenica. There were many dances at the weddings in Gotse Delchev region!

During the meeting with Ivanka Kartalova in Satovcha village, she told us that upon sending the bride the song "Nevesto mari ubava" (Hey you beautiful bride) - a song brought by refugees from the Aegean region. Locally the song was further developed so that its second part was performed in the style "on the high". Albena Poyukova - a leader of children's folk group in Kochan village for 20 years told about the traditional pre-wedding ritual song - "Couscous is made." In Dolen village the so called ritual songs "on groats" were sung - sad wedding songs for the separation from the native home, and the difficulties in the future family life.

Ibrim Dzildzhov, Satovcha village: the engagement ritual is performed as followed: The bachelor sends his relatives to the young woman, who bring to her yashmak as a gift and she gives socks to the fiancé. Then starts the wedding, which lasts three days. Three days zourlas are playing: 1) zourlas, 2) the bride goes to her new home, 3) ring dances are played and the bride takes a rest at home. The heaviness of the wedding was determined by the number of drums. The more were the drums, the heavier (bigger) was the wedding. On the first day, the young man gives gifts to the relatives of the bride; zourlas play and the bride distributes the gifts to her relatives. On the next day the bride's brother or uncle would bring her on a horse to the groom's house. The bride would carry arkumichka (a metal vessel with a cover) full of water and sprays water along the way for good luck. The bride's face is decorated with varatsi and pulove and covered with a red kerchief. The meaning is that she would go to a new home and she must have a new face. When she arrived at the house in which the groom waited for her, he was the first to remove the kerchief. They were songs and dances but they would not go out. On the third day the shirt was shown to see whether the bride was a virgin. If she was a virgin, dances and songs start. However if she was not a virgin, she would return to her native home together with the musicians.

Ibrim Dzildzhov from Satovcha village told us about "Taushan avasi" or Zaychevsko ring dance - one male wedding ring dance, which imitates the rabbits in the spring when they are in love period. Men "run like rabbits... animals are better cultivated than the people". Yuch ayak is a ring dance, which only men play. Women dance slowly with the accompaniment of "Konyo, konyo, sivi konyo" (Horse, horse, grey horse). Ibrim explained also: "Pisan nikyah" means that there is a marital contract executed. The dowry here is called prikia (Kochan) or "preka" (Satovcha). Adem Kyoybashiev, Tuhovishta village told that some old traditions about engagement and wedding continue to be observed today - "Momari" (coming for the bride) and the writing of "nikyah" (marriage contract). Tsanko Madzhirski from Kochan village: The important thing is that there are songs for special rituals. For example Momari. A famous ritual. These are wedding rituals, and at different moments different songs are sung; the song depends on the subject matter of the ritual.

Baadin Musov, Valkosel village, a teacher of history and geography keeps a memory of a traditional wedding in Valkosel:

The wedding lasted three days and was accompanied with music - zourlas and drums. The well-to-do-families hired more musicians for the celebrations. The wedding in Valkosel went through various rites and rituals, among which the most interesting were the decoration or make-up of the bride's face, the konene/ konuvane of the bride, the bringing of the prikyota (the dowry) of the bride, so-called **pampur** (mummer), vozzvratki.

The decoration of the bride's face is local Muslim custom. It is made for beauty and to hide the blushing of the bride. After she is dressed up, she goes out on the balcony, if the house has a balcony, or on a higher place in the yard so that people may see her. The konene include playing ring dances accompanied by a special song, which is sung by the bride's relative and friends. This moment of the wedding was reproduced at the concert in Dabrash by the mixed folk group with the Community Centre "Izgreiv 1950" from Valkosel village who presented traditional wedding in the village and in particular the ritual "Konuvane" (konene) of the bride. The face of "the bride" was decorated with various pulls - sequins and covered with red veil. Every group was wearing costumes that had different details. Men and women played two separate ring dances, which formed figures; and the played in a row in two groups, the men were holding each others shoulder and women - their hands. **Ring dances with "lesa" holding are quite rare and these are mainly male dances. We saw this dance here in the female dance from the performance presenting a wedding in Valkosel, where young women played their ring dance holding each other at the front "lesa".** Ring dances that were presented by the group from Valkosel were local and authentic, with the accompaniment of songs. The choreography for the women was interesting for the public because they went around in groups and the made a ring together. The performance of men was exciting for the local students because in Valkosel village in the recent years rarely sang men. The group of Valkosel managed to convey the stylistic differences in the dance of men and women, which is a very important skill and is one of the most essential elements for authenticity upon the performance of authentic ring dances in general.

The traditional wedding in Valkosel present a very interesting element - a man dressed like a mummer. They call him pampur and he stands there all the time close to the bride and the musicians and makes fun to the wedding guests. Dressed in goat-skins, with a hood on the head, with chanove (sheep bells) and hlopatari (cow-bells) around his waist and wearing a bag full of ash. He chased children and "threw" ash on the people - against spell and to deviate evil eyes from the bride. The role of the pampur in the traditional wedding is obviously a part of the pagan heritage, a residue of the male ritual games.

The groom's attire consists of homespun or frieze full-bottomed breeches with narrow legs at the bottom and often with braids around the pockets and from the knees to the ankles, the sleeveless jacket or the coat are braided, belt is woven of wool and has tassels at both ends; he wears woollen socks with decorated edges. If the groom is wealthy, he wears shoes or sandals and puts a fez or a cap on his head.

The bride is dressed in cotton print or silk shalwars that end with a wide pleated frill. The formal clothes included also the so called fota (apron), which is woven from wool, in different colours. Colours are woven in "party" (parallel light lines) in yellow, red and brown colour. The outwear is made of cotton print or other fabrics and the short jacker has a cotton lining. The kondak is a kerchief - it has rectangular shape decorated with lace or fringes at the edge, which were made by the young girls. It is folded in triangle and is put on the head in a special way so that fringes fall freely on one side of the face; The shamia is put on the head in a special place so that the fringes of the kondak are seen. On the top it is covered with yashmak. And again depending on her wealth, bride wears shows - high-heeled shoes and wears a rod (a string of gold coins) on her chests.

At the second wedding day, people went to the bride's home to take the prikyota (the trousseau). A relative of the bride stands next to the trousseau, usually this is a child,

and asks "a ransom" for it. The trousseau is taken after paying the ransom. The wedding guests take the bride's trousseau and set off to the groom's house, accompanied by music, dances and ring-dances. The bride on a white horse with red fleecy rug on it back is at the front. There are competitions on the third wedding day - kushia (races - early in the morning, outside the village) and free wrestling.

The wedding ends on Friday. On this day the closest relatives gather together at the home of the bride and the groom. Then food is prepared and in the evening all go to the bride's house where the celebrations end. When the groom enters the house, his shoes are hidden and he must buy them back. The bride and the groom spend the night in the bride's home and in the morning the groom must go for wood to prove that he is a worthy husband.

The wedding in Tuhovishta village

Early in the morning the bride is taken from her home and is brought to the groom's house. The local imam is present at the event. There is a unique traditional ritual, which has a kind of equivalent in the today's practice - it is a kind of premarital contract. The imam asks the groom what he would give to the bride, the so called „**meher**“. The imam writes his answer in a formal document, the so called "nikyah" (contract). Teybie Kyoybeshieva, a leader of the folk group from Tuhovishta village told that in Tuhovishta is known the wedding custom "povrashki" - the first Friday after the wedding, the newly married woman and her husband visit her parents. In Godeshevo, where Teybe was born, this custom is not observed.

The wedding in Pletena village

Few wedding rituals are observed today in Pletena village - the fiance and the fiancée give presents to each other. The engagement is called "oglavavane" - in Pletena call it also "chestito". The following wedding ritual is interesting: at the wedding there is a guy among all who carries a loaf and the other have to find out who carries the loaf. And everyone who eats a piece of this load will be lucky and will not become ill. At the weddings the songs "Nevestichko mladichki" (Young bride), "Pukni se tresni momina mayka" (Bride's mum is grieving and crying), etc. Mehmed Bayramov, Pletena village, added that after the wedding the bride's friends play a female ring dance on the balcony of her house with the accompaniment of a song. There are male ring dances too where men hold each others shoulder. Dances on the square last three days just like the wedding! There are mixed dances between men and women, in front of the groom's house too.

In the past in Chech were woven scarlet wedding rugs for a horse called decorated fleecy rugs (Slashten village, Pletena, Dolen, Satovcha), used as wedding ritual fabric. The bride's wedding rugs covered the white horse, which the bride rode on the wedding day. Immediately over the saddle hangs the ancient white Iram and a scarlet carpet on it, and on the top - the bride sits on a white cotton sheet, decorated on both sides with woven patterns. The bride is covered with the rug down from the waist. The mesal, used as a ritual cloth - the so called wedding bridal mesal - is a cotton/ hemp fabric, decorated at both ends with a frieze of geometrical figures. In the past the bride's mesal was a constant element of the trousseau of every girl and had strictly specified wedding function. In a festive decorated coloured mesal of two fabrics is wrapped also the ritual food, when people go to a wedding, on a a visit, christening or fair. Gradually the mesals have become decorative items, especially the festive ritual mesals, which have more complex decoration and become a part of the costume.

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