

Chapter Six: Complex Identities

THE MACEDONIAN EXPERIENCE of the late nineteenth century was not merely Christian and European. To this point we have assumed populations that were relatively homogenous in their ethnic, occupational and religious character. However, nineteenth century Macedonians were rather more diverse than these categories would suggest. A significant minority of the population (perhaps 10-15 per cent) were Turkish Muslims or Macedonian Muslims. The slow process of an evolving Macedonian identity was made the more complicated by these alternative realities.

6.1 Contrast between typical Macedonian Muslim village (Reka district) and typical Macedonian Christian village (Bitola region)

Churches and mosques

CHURCHES WERE FOUND throughout the Dolna Reka Christian villages. Some were hundreds of years old, such as the church in Gari built in the thirteenth century. Churches generally remained standing in mixed Macedonian Christian - Macedonian Muslim villages. However, in the case of Rostusha, the fifteenth century church Sveti Bogorojca was transformed into a mosque after the partial Islamicisation of the village. In exclusively Macedonian Muslim villages there were few churches standing in 1912. Usually they were left unattended and slowly deteriorated (this could take place over a period of hundreds of years) whilst the fate of others remains unknown.

In religiously mixed villages, particularly when the Muslim element was dominant, a mosque was generally constructed in the village. It is not clear whether mosques were built by the village inhabitants or organised by Ottoman officials or *begs* from nearby urban centres (Debar, Gostivar, Tetovo). In the nearby Dolna

Zhupa district village of Golem Papradnik, a mosque was constructed between the upper and lower quarters of the village at the instigation of three Macedonian Muslim brothers, Adzho, Mimidin and Ayredin Adzhi, in 1839/40.¹ The oldest mosque in the district was in the neighbouring village of Balanci and was the only village in the district settled with Albanian Muslim colonists (they arrived at the beginning of the nineteenth century, from the Pshkopija district in Albania).²

It is generally accepted that Macedonian Muslim villages that no longer had churches standing at the end of Ottoman rule, did indeed, during earlier Ottoman rule, possess a Christian Orthodox church. Although there is no trace of a church in Zhirovnica at the end of the twentieth century (one of the sample Muslim villages), it is common knowledge that there once existed one, and that it was destroyed after the Islamicisation of the village. The former village schoolteacher, Abdula Odzheski, stated that ‘today no one is certain who destroyed it, however it is considered doubtful that the villagers would have destroyed it voluntarily; they feared doing such a thing’.³ Evidence of the existence of a church in the village was confirmed in the early twentieth century when an elderly Macedonian Muslim villager uncovered a church bell whilst ploughing his field. Securing the bell to his donkey, he took it to the church in the distant village of Velebrdo ‘to be safely kept where it belongs’.⁴

¹ U. Tairovski, *Slovenskata makro i mikro toponomija vo Dolna Debarska Zhupa* [Slavic macro and micro toponyms in Dolna Debarska Zhupa], Skopje, 1987, pp. 282-283. Up until the construction of the mosque in Golem Papradnik, the villagers used the mosque in the neighbouring village of Balanci. The Balanci mosque was the oldest one in the district. Returning from Balanci, having attended for the Muslim religious day of Dzhuma, the Adzhi brothers agreed to donate a parcel of agricultural land situated between the two *maali* for the construction of a mosque. Along their journey home they each carried a large stone and placed them on the intended mosque site and decided that the name Adzho Adzhi would be written on the mosque. The three brothers built the mosque and after the first celebration of Dzhuma in the mosque, whilst exiting Adzho Adzhi collapsed and died beside the doorway. He was to be buried at that very spot beside the doorway and to this day villagers give their respect to him with prayers beside his grave. The name of Adzho Adzhi was written on the wall of the mosque and stands there to this day.

² Ibid, p. 285. The seven villages of Dolna Zhupa were overwhelmingly Macedonian Muslim. Approximately 20 per cent were Macedonian Christian. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the ethnographer, V. Kanchov counted Balanci as the only village in Dolna Zhupa with Albanian inhabitants.

³ Abdula Odzheski (born 1945 in Zhirovnica, Dolna Reka district), interview conducted 25 March 2000 in Zhirovnica. Abdula Odzheski was the village schoolteacher from 1965 to 1999, he has received numerous awards for his teaching service and is a prominent member of the village community. At the beginning of the twenty first-century, Zhirovnica has a population of approximately 3,500 people.

⁴ The Velebrdo church keeper related this story to the writer on 25 March 2000.

The previous existence of Christian churches in Dolna Reka Macedonian Muslim villages is evident from religious icons (some dated 1891) handed to the Velebrdo church by villagers during the construction of the church in the 1930s.⁵ Similarly, a religious icon in the village church in Gorenci (Dolna Debarska Zhupa) testifies to the previous existence of a church in the Macedonian Muslim village of Balanci (Dolna Debarska Zhupa).⁶ There are instances following Islamicisation where Macedonian Muslims continued using Christian cemeteries to bury their dead. The ethnographer, J. Hadzhivasilevich stated in 1924 that for an extended period both Christians and Muslims from Rostusha used the same cemetery.⁷ In 1979, the ethnographer, N. Limanoski identified three Muslim graves in the Rostusha cemetery with both Muslim and Christian characteristics, notably an opening on the eastern side of the graves for the lighting of candles, as is typical of Orthodox grave sites.⁸

Macedonian Christian villages in the Bitola region commonly contained at least one church that was serviced by a priest on a part-time basis. A single priest looked after the religious needs of up to half a dozen local villages and attended each village on a rotational basis to perform mass, conduct christenings and wedding ceremonies, and visit particular villages on their respective saint's day. Dolna Reka *oji* (Muslim clerics), unlike Orthodox priests, did not rotate around a group of villages but were instead attached to a single mosque. Ethnically, *oji* were Macedonians as well as Turks. There are instances of Macedonian Muslim families producing a line of *oji*,

⁵ Ibid. (Velebrdo church keeper). These icons were placed in the church and have adorned its interior walls since construction. They came from surrounding villages in the district. The church in Velebrdo was constructed during the period of Serb rule in Macedonia and it is interesting to note that during this period the local authorities constructed several new village taps in the shape of Christian crosses. Macedonian Muslims in Velebrdo claim that prior to the construction of the village church in the 1930s there had been no other church in the village. Before Islamicisation, the Rostusha church serviced the needs of both villages. The two villages were closely situated to one another and were almost joined as one, but as a result of a landslide problem (due to water flowing down the mountain) that has existed over many years the two villages became separated. The inhabitants of Velebrdo traditionally used the cemetery situated beside the church in Rostusha.

⁶ U. Tairovski, op. cit. p. 286.

⁷ J. Hadzhivasilevich, *Muslimani Nashe Krvi u Juzhnoj Srbiji* [Muslims of our blood in Southern Serbia], Belgrade, 1924, p. 40.

⁸ N. Limanoski, *Izlamizacijata i etnickite promeni vo Makedonija* [Islamicisation and ethnic changes in Macedonia], Skopje, 1993, p. 164. An eminent ethnographer of the Macedonian Muslim population, N. Limanoski's publication *Izlamizacijata i etnickite promeni vo Makedonija* can be considered to be the principal work in the field of Islamicisation of Macedonians.

as was a tradition with some Christian families that produced generations of Orthodox priests.⁹

As Macedonian Exarchate and Patriarchate priests did not attempt to modify the cultural characteristics of Macedonian Orthodox villagers in the Bitola region, Macedonian *oji* also displayed tolerance towards the age-old Christian-based customs and cultural practices of Macedonian Muslims in Dolna Reka. Macedonian Muslim women in Dolna Reka did not cover themselves as is the Islamic tradition. In the village of Yanche their dress was identical to Macedonian Christian women and it was an Albanian *oja* from Gorna Reka who attempted to modify this practice to conform with Islamic culture.¹⁰ At the end of the nineteenth century, the most important religious figures with the Exarchate and Patriarchate in Bitola were typically Bulgarians and Greeks respectively. Similarly, in Dolna Reka, according to the ethnographic notes compiled by a villager from Galitchnik, Shtiljan Trajanov Chaparoski (1870–1934) regarding the Debar region at the end of the nineteenth century, the most influential and distinguished Muslim in the district was the Turkish *oja* based in the village of Trebishte, Azhi-Iljas.¹¹ Indeed, it was Turkish and Albanian *oji* who were most likely to display intolerance towards Macedonian customs – a Macedonian *oja* was unlikely to be intolerant towards Macedonian customs.¹² In the

⁹ Limanoski explains that according to traditional stories, Islamicisation of Christian settlements first commenced with the Islamicisation of the village-priest as a method designed to accelerate and assist the acceptance of Islam amongst the entire Christian inhabitants of the village. In the village of Restelica (Gora region), the conversion to Islam of the village-priest (from the Pandilovci family) hastened the religious conversion of the villagers. Following Islamicisation, the former priest continued on as the village *oja*, and subsequent generations maintained the tradition of being the village *oja* until the second half of the twentieth century. Following Islamicisation, the family name 'Pandilovci' was changed to 'Chaushevci'. (Limanoski obtained this information from interviews conducted in Restelica during 1984 with Yonus Kala, Dzhindo Hikmet and Zevdan Chuvta). Ibid, p. 46.

¹⁰ According to interview conducted by N. Limanoski with Boris Dichovski (born 1894 in the village of Yanche). Ibid, p. 292.

¹¹ S.T. Chaparoski, *Mesnost(ite) od Debarskoto okruzhie* [Places in the Debar region], document from the Macedonian Academy of Sciences (MANU) archive, Catalogue Number NR54, p.8. Chaparoski refers to the *oja* as being '*najperv chovek*' (literally, 'the first man'). S.T. Chaparoski commenced compiling data at the end of the 1880s. The final entries were made in 1900.

¹² Abdula Odzheski interview, op. cit. Asan Asani (born 1911 in Velebrdo, Dolna Reka district), interview conducted 25 March 2000 in Velebrdo. Asan Asani is from the 'Asanagovci' family (Asan's father's grandfather was named Asan) and he was able to trace his male ancestors back four generations to his grandfather's grandfather, Kara Mustafa. Between 1890 to 1912 the *oja* in Dolno Kosovrasti was a native Macedonian from

mosques, Macedonian *oji* commonly conducted religious services in Macedonian, and the few educated and religiously trained *oji* such as *Mula Muso* in Rostusha conducted services in 'Arabic, then Turkish, and finally in Macedonian so we could understand'.¹³

Schools

EXARCHATE AND PATRIARCHATE schools in Macedonian Christian villages were most often situated beside the church. Similarly, Turkish schools in Macedonian Muslim villages were located beside the mosque in an adjoining building no larger than a typical classroom. It is not clear how many schools existed in Mala Reka or the rate of attendance, however, it is believed that students were exclusively male and instruction in the schools was provided by the *oja*. The curriculum consisted of two core subjects, numeracy and literacy in the Turkish language.¹⁴ Although Turkish schools were present in the Dolna Reka district, there is no evidence that the Turkish language was successfully introduced into the village community as the language used in public or the home. The population had little contact with ethnic Turks in the district, and in the mosques Turkish *oji* conducted religious services and prayers in Arabic.¹⁵ Turkish schools poorly equipped a limited number of men with an

the village. When fronting funeral processions he burned incense in a *kandilo* whilst walking to the cemetery. In 1912 Mula Hasan (from Dolno Kosovrastı) was appointed the new *oja* in the village (having received religious training in Turkey and the Middle East). He condemned the use of incense and the carrying of the *kandilo* by the *oja* as a *kaurska rabota* ('a Christian matter'). Mula Hasan was successful in introducing some Muslim religious traits in ceremonies such as funerals, but was unable to eradicate the customs and traditions that the Macedonian Muslims had guarded and performed for centuries. The anthropologist, D. Gulioski, *Pogrbenite običaji kaj Makedonskite Muslimani vo selata Gorno i Dolno Kosovrastı* [Burial customs of Macedonian Muslims in the villages of Gorno and Dolno Kosovrastı], Skopje, 1987, p. 396.

¹³ *Toj prvo ke zborеше na Arapski, pa na Turski i na kraj na Makedonski jazik za da razberime.* According to Fazlo Feyzuli (born 1890 Rostusha), interview conducted by N. Limanoski, 1993, op. cit. p. 292. Macedonian Muslim interviewees agreed that Macedonian *oji* during the Turkish era commonly conducted religious services in Macedonian, and believed that Macedonia *oji* were also familiar with the Turkish language.

¹⁴ Asan Asani interview, op. cit., Redzho Muslioski (born 1946 in the village of Gorno Kosovrastı, Dolna Reka district), interview conducted 27 March 2000 in Dolno Kosovrastı. Redzho Muslioski's family is originally from Gorno Kosovrastı and moved to Dolno Kosovrastı in 1967. He is from the 'Musliovci' family and his grandfather's grandfather was named Musliya.

¹⁵ During the nineteenth century Macedonian *oji* appear to have been on a similar educational level with typical Macedonian village priests. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that Macedonian *oji* obtained training abroad, in Istanbul or the Middle East.

elementary knowledge of Turkish, though according to Asan Asani, born in the village of Velebrdo towards the end of Ottoman rule, ‘the language of the home and between members of the village community remained Macedonian’.¹⁶ Furthermore, as women were excluded from attending school and rarely left the village, they had no access to develop new language skills and later as mothers they raised their children upon their native language¹⁷, as was the case in Christian villages which were under Exarchate and Patriarchate influence.

Turkish schools in Macedonian Muslim villages in the region had limited success in introducing the Turkish language to the people. According to Redzho Muslioski from Dolno Kosovrasti, ‘the old folk spoke very little Turkish, they only learnt some basic words through Turkish education’.¹⁸ Men who served as conscripted soldiers in the Ottoman Turkish army acquired greater familiarity with everyday Turkish, as already noted.¹⁹ Those who never left the village did not acquire any significant Turkish language skills, however those who left the district as *pechalbari*, spending extended periods working away from their homes, were likely to have some level of fluency in the Turkish language.²⁰ Asan Asani stated, ‘the old people knew Turkish because they were *pechalbari*’.²¹ This *pechalba* experience deserves particular attention.

Pechalba

ACCORDING TO THE inhabitants of Dolna Reka and the surrounding districts, the tradition of *pechalba* was born in their region. The inhospitable mountainous terrain meant that significant agricultural production was impossible, and as a

¹⁶ Asan Asani interview, op. cit.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Redzho Muslioski interview, op. cit. Redzho Muslioski stated that this was the case in his village and believed it was similar throughout the district.

¹⁹ Asan Asani’s uncle (mother’s brother) learnt Turkish as a result of being conscripted into the Ottoman army. Asan Asani interview, op. cit.

²⁰ Redzho Muslioski interview, op. cit.

²¹ Asan Asani interview, op. cit.

consequence men were compelled to leave their homes for extended periods in search of work. *Pechalba* became a necessary and normal part of life in the region.²² As *pechalbari*, men from the district were predominantly engaged in building and construction trades. Popular destinations within Macedonia included Seres, Drama and Kavala, and their skills were to take them into the distant corners of the Ottoman Empire, as far as Egypt. Constantinople was a popular destination and served as a central port in which men could find work and transportation to any popular work destination. Dolna Reka Macedonian Muslim builders also worked in Anatolia (upper and lower Anatolia – Turkey), Konya (Turkey) as well as Dures and Drech in Albania. Although building and construction was the dominant trade, there were other men who engaged in alternative occupations, such as Mustafa Asani who operated a cake shop (*slatkar*) in Drama for many years.²³

The most striking contrast between *pechalbari* from the Dolna Reka region and the Bitola region relates to their destinations. Macedonian Muslim *pechalbari*, unlike the Macedonian Christians from the Bitola region, did not travel to the neighbouring liberated Christian lands, particularly Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania, which were popular destinations with Christians from Bitola. Macedonians of both religious persuasions from Dolna Reka engaged in *pechalba* and shared similar destinations in Southern Macedonia. Although building and construction was popular with Macedonian Christians from Dolna Reka, other prominent areas of occupation included confectioners, dairying and inn-keeping. Macedonian Christian *pechalbari* from Reka travelled to Southern Macedonia, Thessaly, Athens, Belgrade, Bucharest, Bulgaria and Constantinople.²⁴ Typically throughout the entire Reka district, *pechalba* was equally popular and necessary for Macedonian Christians as it was for Macedonian Muslims. The historian G. Todorovski estimates over 90 per cent of the

²² *Pechalba* continues to be a widespread tradition in the Reka district at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

²³ Asan Asani interview, op. cit. Asan Asani recalled hearing from his father that the dominant ethnic group in the towns of Drama and Kavala were Turks.

²⁴ D. Silyanovski, editor, *Makedonia kako prirodna i ekonomska celina* [Macedonia as a natural and economic unit], Sofia, 1945, p. 211.

Mala Reka adult male population sought work abroad. In Galitchnik over 800 men left the village annually, and it was not unusual for adult men to be accompanied by their sons, introduced to *pechalba* at 12 years-of-age or earlier.²⁵

In contrast to the Bitola region, where returning *pechalbari* routinely purchased *chiflik* land and built new and larger homes, in Dolna Reka returning Macedonian Muslims constructed new homes but did not purchase agricultural land due to its limited supply. Parcels of land were small and often inaccessible. Even modern farm machinery such as tractors and harvesters could not penetrate parcels of land along the mountainsides. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in many Dolna Reka villages, such as Zhirovnica, Velebrdo and Dolno Kosovrasti, there are no examples of traditional architecture remaining at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Residential homes have come to reflect the architecture of popular *pechalba* destinations in Western Europe (Germany, Switzerland, Austria, etc). Traditionally homes in the district during the Ottoman era were constructed of stone with slate roofs. The contemporary commentator, S. Gopchevich noted in 1890 that homes in the Reka district village of Galitchnik were large, and well built of stone.²⁶ At the beginning of the twenty-first century in the Bitola region there remain numerous examples of mud brick homes in the plain, and homes built of stone and slate in the upper areas and Mariovo, in contrast to the Dolna Reka district.

Layout and features

IN GENERAL, THE layout of a Macedonian Muslim village in Dolna Reka at the end of the nineteenth century was not unlike a typical upper village in the Bitola

²⁵ G. Todorovski, *Malorekanskiot predel* [The Mala Reka region], Skopje, 1970, p. 68. Kipro Kiprov (1879-1963) from Lazaropole, took his eight-year-old son with him on *pechalba* to Bitola in 1919. Earlier, Kipro operated a tailoring business in Solun, a trade he had learnt from his uncle, and he also spoke Turkish fluently. Popular destinations within Macedonia for men from Lazaropole were Solun, Seres, Drama, and Kavala. Beyond Macedonia, Belgrade and Sofia were common destinations, others travelled to Sarajevo and some went as far as Alexandria in Egypt. Morpha Temelkovska (born 1950 Bitola), notes of interview, Skopje 3 March 2000. Note: Kipro Kiprov is Morpha's grandfather and the eight-year-old son her father.

²⁶ Spiridon Gopchevich, *Stara Srbija i Makedonija* [Old Serbia and Macedonia], Belgrade, 1890, p. 201.

region. Characterised by narrow winding paths, many were constructed with cobblestones, others as dirt roads linking a concentrated layout of homes and limited agricultural land. Homes commonly were situated at the front of the property, with the exterior wall often forming the boundary along the path or road. The property would contain three or four buildings inside, thus creating a square or private courtyard. These would generally consist of the original family home, a new one built by one of the sons, a barn for housing animals and possibly another barn like construction for various supplies. In other instances there might have been two, three or even four homes creating a courtyard, as was the case with the Beshirovci family residence in Velebrdo.²⁷ Similar courtyards existed in both Macedonian Christian and Muslim villages respectively, and may have served as private areas where the women could move freely without attracting attention. The most obvious contrast between Macedonian Muslim homes and Macedonian Christian homes was the existence of high fences at the front of the home, and sometimes all around the property boundary. Although far more common in Albanian and Turkish Muslim homes and villages, it also existed to a lesser degree in Macedonian Muslim villages. Macedonian Christians believed that high fences were constructed primarily for the purpose of concealing women from gazing eyes.

As a rule, nineteenth-century religiously mixed Macedonian Christian and Macedonian Muslim village communities were not physically segregated from one another. Generally they did not live in separate Muslim or Christian *maali* and this was the norm throughout the Reka district and the wider regions of northwestern Macedonia.²⁸ The ethnographer J. Hadzhivasilevich's observations are comparable throughout the entire Debar region in shared Macedonian Christian-Macedonian Muslim villages, it was customary for the two religious groups to live together,

²⁷ Asani Rejep (born 1915 in Velebrdo, Dolna Reka district), interview conducted 25 March 2000 in Velebrdo.

²⁸ Ismail Bojda (born 1953 in Brod, Gora region of Kosovo), interview conducted 7 March 2000 in Skopje. Ismail Bojda is currently the president of the Association of Islamicised Macedonians of Macedonia. Asani Rejep interview, op. cit. Abdula Odzheski interview, op. cit.

integrated as one community without any outward signs of division.²⁹ In ethnically and religiously mixed Macedonian Christian-Turkish Muslim villages, one of four sample villages were physically segregated.³⁰ According to interviews conducted with Ismail Bojda from the village of Brod in Kosovo and with Jovche Petrovski from the village of Chelopek in the Tetovo region, mixed Macedonian Christian-Albanian Muslim villages were most likely to have physically segregated communities.³¹ For instance, in the village of Chelopek (Tetovo region) a main roadway, as well as smaller roads and pathways in the village, formed the separation point between the two groups. Where there was no distinctive barrier between the two groups, they continued to be separated by an ‘invisible barrier’.³² Furthermore, in the neighbouring mixed Macedonian Christian-Albanian Muslim villages of Miletino and Teanovo, physical segregation was the norm. In Miletino and Teanovo, as in Chelopek, Macedonians were situated upon the higher ground in the village whilst the Albanian population was located in the lower end of the respective villages.³³ As such the principal factor behind physical segregation does not appear to have been religious, but ethnic.

The eleven inhabited Dolna Reka district villages were situated between 625 to 1,110 metres above sea level and had a combined total of 809 hectares of agricultural land. Only two villages – Zhirovnica and Trebishte – had more than one hundred hectares of agricultural land (195 and 120 respectively). Total grazing pastures amounted to 3,116 hectares. The Bitola upper villages situated along Mount Pelister and the Baba ranges were renowned at the end of the nineteenth century and early

²⁹ J. Hadzhivasilevich, op. cit. p. 22. There were only three instances of physical segregation between the two groups throughout the entire region. J. Hadzhivasilevich outlined the case of Rostusha, where the two communities lived physically segregated from one another. They were isolated from one another to such a degree that there was no communication ‘between men, women or children in the village as though they did not know or disliked each other’. (*Ni ljudi, ni zheni, ni deca nikako i ne govorejedni c drugima. Kao da se i ne poznaju ili kao da imaju tesbku pizmu*). Ibid, p. 22.

³⁰ See section titled ‘Mixed Macedonian Christian and Turkish Muslim village’ in this chapter.

³¹ Jovche Petrovski (born 1939 in Chelopek, Tetovo region), interview conducted 27 March 2002 Melbourne. Ismail Bojda interview, op. cit.

³² Jovche Petrovski interview, op. cit. Jovche Petrovski advised that in approximately 1912, Chelopek was made up of approximately 230 homes – 80 Macedonian and 150 Albanian.

³³ Ibid.

twentieth for sending scores of their young men abroad in search of work. Bitola upper villages also presented far greater opportunities to extract a livelihood working the land. Situated between 650 and 1,100 metres above sea level, the eleven highest Macedonian populated villages contained a total of 6,312 hectares of agricultural land and 4,701 hectares of grazing pastures, significantly greater than that available to the villagers in the Dolna Reka valley. In order to further emphasise the limited agricultural land available in Dolna Reka, a sample of eleven randomly chosen Macedonian populated Bitola Pelagonia Plain villages shows that they had a combined total of 11,721 hectares of agricultural land,³⁴ whilst another eleven villages from the Mariovo district had 6,916 hectares of agricultural land.³⁵

Turkish towers are commonly found in villages located along the plains where the bulk of the land was under the ownership of Turkish feudal landlords, as was the case along the Bitola Pelagonia plain where towers were a common sight. The difficult terrain of the mountainous Dolna Reka district and limited agricultural land averted the imposition of a feudal landlord and his symbol of oppression, the tower.³⁶ In comparison, the Bitola region upper villages were not situated in such difficult landscape and contained considerable more agricultural land. Approximately half the upper villages were free of *chifli* estates.

³⁴ M. Panov, *Enciklopedija na selata vo Republika Makedonija* [Encyclopedia of villages in the Republic of Macedonia], Skopje, 1998. The eleven Dolna Reka villages refer to Zhirovnica, Vidushe, Trebishte, Bitushe, Rostusha, Velebrdo, Adzhievci, Prisojnica, Skudrinje, Gorno Kosovrasti and Dolno Kosovrasti. Boletin is omitted as it became an uninhabited village in the second half of the twentieth century and therefore there is insufficient data available. The eleven Bitola Upper region villages refer to Bistrica, Brusnik, Bukovo, Orehovo, Lavci, Rotino, Capari, Srpci, Gavato, Metimir and Oblakovo. Eleven randomly chosen Bitola Pelagonia plain villages refer to Dobrusevo, Trn, Karamani, Novaci, Logovardi, Mogila, Porodin, Ribarci, Dedebalci, Poeshevo and Novo Zmirnevo.

³⁵ The eleven villages are - Budimirci, Gradeshnica, Grumazi, Grunishta, Iveni, Makovo, Orle, Polog, Rapeshe, Skochivir and Staravina.

³⁶ There were no instances of interviewees from Dolna Reka being aware of the existence of Turkish towers in the district.

Table 6.1: Contrasting Physical Characteristics Between Dolna Reka and Bitola districts

District - 11 villages each	Metres Above Sea Level	Agricultural Land in Hectares	Grazing Land in Hectares	Approx. population
Dolna Reka	625 - 1110	809	3,116	6,000
Upper villages Bitola	650 - 1100	6,312	4,701	7,920
Pelagonia Plain	550 - 700	10,909	478	3,960
Mariovo district	600 - 1090	6,916	16,643	3,985

Source: M. Panov, *Enciklopedija na selata vo Republika Makedonija* [Encyclopedia of the villages in the Republic of Macedonia], Skopje, 1998; and, V. Kanchov, *Makedonia Etnografija i Statistika* [Macedonia ethnography and statistics], Sofia, 1900.

Regardless of whether village lands did or did not include *chiflik* land, it was the norm for land parcels to be known by specific names. The naming systems of land parcels (and other topographical village locations) in Islamicised Dolna Reka villages in general remained Macedonian in origin. In the village of Zhirovnica the following names existed in the agricultural fields: *Bela Voda*, *Bel Kamen*, *Bunarcheno*, *Govedarnica*, *Golem Dol*, *Dupka*, *Gjurchina*, *Ezercheno*, *Yablina*, *Laykovche* and *Mechkarnik*.³⁷ Other names existed, and are evidence of the Christian heritage of the village. For example, there were areas known as *Krstec* (Cross) and *Manastir* (Monastery), and the common name used for the Zhirovnica cemetery was *Popovci*, whereas the name for cemetery in the Macedonian language is *grobishta* and the name *Popovci* typically refers to a family of priests.³⁸ Toponyms of a distinctive Christian character exist in many exclusively Macedonian Muslim villages throughout the Republic of Macedonia a century later. The village square in Preglovo (Kitchevo) is known as *Crkolnik*, the area around the mosque in Prisojnica (Dolna Reka) is known

³⁷ Abdula Odzheski interview, op. cit.

³⁸ *Popovci* is the name normally used by a *soi* (extended family) which has a history of priests. *Pop* is the term for priest in Macedonian. In the village it is believed that a village church was once located beside the cemetery.

as *Na Crkov/Crkov*, *Kalugerec* in Mal Papradnik (Dolna Debarska Zhupa), *Crkov* in Golem Papradnik (Dolna Debarska Zhupa), *Crkvishte* in Broshtica (Dolna Debarska Zhupa), *Crkvishte* in Dolno Kolichani (Skopje), *Bogorojca* in Urvitch (Tikvesh), and *Crkvishte* in Timjanik (Tikvesh).³⁹ Similar to typical Macedonian Christian villages retaining their distinctive Macedonian origin village names, Macedonian Muslim villages reflect Macedonian origin names rather than Turkish or Muslim names. However, village *maali* (quarters) in Macedonian Muslim villages have adopted Muslim names similar to that that occurred in large urban centres such as Bitola. In Zhirovnica at the beginning of the twenty-first century, there are five *maali* – *Gornomalo* and *Dolnomalo* (Upper Quarter and Lower Quarter – common in Macedonian Christian villages), *Mechkar malo* (Macedonian in origin), and the distinctly Muslim named quarters of *Beshir malo* and *Osman malo*.⁴⁰

Perhaps one of the most interesting differences between a Macedonian Muslim village and a Macedonian Christian village can be attributed to the strategy of self-preservation often encountered in Christian villages but also evident in the single case of Islamicisation in the village of Leunovo (Mavrovo region). As a consequence of continued attacks on the village by Albanian bandits (working in collaboration with *pashi* from Tetovo and *begs* from Debar), in 1850 Angel Kaloshovski converted to Islam and adopted the name Amet. Thereafter as a Muslim he managed to safeguard the village from further tyranny by Albanian bandits. The remaining Christian villagers, rather than harbour antagonistic feelings towards the Ametovci family for converting to Islam, were grateful and maintained great respect for them. The Ametovci family was known to maintain the Orthodox Christian tradition of the *domashna slava* (family saint's day) after Islamicisation and also maintained family links with Christian relatives in the village.⁴¹

³⁹ U. Tairovski, op. cit. pp. 279-287; and, N. Limanoski, 1993, op. cit. p. 328.

⁴⁰ Abdula Odzheski interview, op. cit.

⁴¹ N. Limanoski, 1993, op. cit. pp. 104-105.

6.2 Celebrations and rituals

STRIKING SIMILARITIES EXISTED in the rituals and celebrations of the Macedonian Muslim villages of Dolna Reka and the Christian villages of the Bitola region. Generally, religious differences at the end of the nineteenth century did not significantly impact upon age-old customs and traditions which no doubt contain elements of a pre-Christian character. The rituals we celebrate represent our culture, customs and religion. The anthropologist, C. Geertz, confirms this: celebrations are ‘the ordered system of meaning, of expressive symbols, and values in terms of which individuals define their world, express their feelings, and make their judgments’.⁴²

Wedding rituals are amongst the most complex, as every phase during a traditional three-day Macedonian wedding had a corresponding ritual associated with it. Only certain elements of a wedding are being examined and compared for the purposes of this project. Funeral rituals as practised in Gorno and Dolno Kosovrasti are examined, as well as collective village celebrations, celebrated as seasonal festivities in Muslim villages but with a Christian overtone in Orthodox villages.

Weddings

THE TERM FOR engagement is known as *zbor* (literally meaning ‘word’ – ‘to give word’). Typically the period between an engagement and wedding in the Bitola region, as well as in Dolna Reka during Ottoman rule, could last twelve months or more. In the Bitola region it principally catered for the preparation of elaborate gifts whilst in Dolna Reka it was due to the high rate of *pechalba* in the region, allowing ample time for the village men to return from abroad for the wedding festivities. Traditionally men had returned home from *pechalba* by *Krstovden* (September 27 - an Orthodox Christian holy day, ‘The Exaltation of the Precious and Life Giving Cross’)

⁴² C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, 1973, pp. 144-145.

as Macedonian Muslim weddings were commonly conducted two weeks before and two weeks after *Krstovden*.⁴³ The timing of weddings around *Krstovden* also coincided with the agricultural life of the villages, as by this date the bulk of the work in preparation for winter was complete. Similarly, in the Bitola region, the wedding period coincided with the agricultural cycles and weddings were commonly held during the autumn months from September to November.⁴⁴

A similar pattern is evident in respect to systems of marriage in both the Dolna Reka and Bitola region villages. Typically a young man took his bride from a neighbouring village in the district.⁴⁵ There were certain exceptions where specific villages practiced endogamy, but these appear to be periodic episodes (with greater frequency later in the twentieth century) rather than long-term customs.⁴⁶ However, it is interesting to note that in the Gora region (Kosovo - Serbia, where there existed a compact group of eighteen exclusively Macedonian Muslim villages) it was rare for one to marry outside the village. In instances where this occurred, 'people considered such individuals to have something wrong with them, for it was a matter of great

⁴³ D. Gulioski, *Svadbenite običaji vo selata Dolno i Gorno Kosovrasti, nekogash i sega* [Wedding customs in the villages Dolno and Gorno Kosovrasti, in the past and the present], Skopje, 1984, p. 262. *Dve nedeli pred i dve nedeli po Krstovden e najubavo vreme za svadba* ('Two weeks before and two weeks after Krstovden is the ideal time for a wedding') was a common saying in Dolno and Gorno Kosovrasti.

⁴⁴ Dragica Kleshteva (born 1934 in the village of Vrajnevci, Bitola region), interview conducted in Melbourne on 1 November 1999. Dragica Kleshteva married into Gorno Aglarci village in the Bitola region when she was 22 years-of-age. In 1961 she moved to the suburb of Gini Male in Bitola with her young family. At the end of 1964, her husband, Mihailo, arrived in Australia, and Dragica followed with their two young children in 1965.

⁴⁵ Macedonian Muslims interviewed from the Reka district stated that it was normal practice for marriage partners to be drawn from the district. A similar comment is made by J. Hadzhivasilevich. He also gives an example of Adzhievci village, whose men typically took brides from the neighbouring village of Prisojnica. Op. cit. p. 22. According to ethnographic data compiled by S.T. Chaparoski at the end of the nineteenth century, Christians that 'live in the villages of Mala Reka do not take brides nor give brides to other villages outside of Mala Reka'. It is worth noting that the author does not distinguish between the two districts and treats both Dolna and Mala Reka as one. Chaparoski does not exclusively relate the giving and taking of brides as a regional issue, but instead connects it to the type of traditional costumes worn by the women (Christian female costumes were specific and unique to the district). The only exception where brides were given or taken outside the district occurred with the village of Elovec in the Kitchevo district, because the women there also wore identical costumes (this was the case due to migrations away from the region due to Albanian terror. Colonies were established in towns as far as Krushevo, Bitola and Veles regions). S.T. Chaparoski, op. cit. pp. 29-30.

⁴⁶ In both regions there are certain villages at the beginning of the twenty-first century that are considered to be 'out of bounds' for young men as it is common knowledge that girls in such villages marry within the village. Marrying within the village has become more common within the Dolna Reka region and this was described as being 'a recent development'.

pride to marry within the village, in order to preserve it'.⁴⁷ Macedonians of both religious persuasions clearly did not look towards other ethnic or religious groups for possible marriage partners. A Macedonian Muslim rarely married a Muslim Turk or Albanian, and a Macedonian Christian equally sought a marriage partner in someone of the same ethnicity and religion. Marriages in both communities generally occurred for people aged in their late teens or very early twenties, and arranged marriages were common.⁴⁸ An adult male representing a family in search of a bride was known as a *stroinik* and negotiations for a potential bride were conducted within a strict set of rules and rituals.⁴⁹

Wedding celebrations in both the Christian Bitola region and the Muslim Macedonian communities of Dolna Reka were characterised by a three-day-long celebration that adhered to an elaborate order of rituals. There existed rituals and corresponding songs for every immediate family member of the groom and bride, as well as the best man and godparents. Within the intricate nature of a traditional Macedonian wedding, certain ritual elements can be isolated.

Both Christian and Muslim Macedonian weddings traditionally commenced on a Thursday (whereas the Muslim tradition called for it to commence on a Friday).

⁴⁷ Ismail Bojda interview, op. cit. In support of Bojda's statement it is interesting to note that he married within the village (Brod). Both his parents are born in the village, and both sets of grandparents are also from the village.

⁴⁸ Since the later stages of the twentieth century, in the Bitola region Christian Macedonians marry far later than was once the norm. Arranged marriages are a thing of the past and the trend has become for people to marry later in life. There are also economic considerations related to people marrying later. Due to high rates of unemployment amongst the youth, many are unable to secure a basic income with which to support a family. In the Dolna Reka region the situation is different. Macedonian Muslim marriages continue to occur for people in the late teens to early twenties, and this appears to be influenced by economic factors rather than religious considerations. Young people continue to maintain the tradition of *pechalba* in the region, largely working in European Union countries (the most popular destination in the last ten years has become Italy). Furthermore, unlike the Bitola region, where many villages have been slowly diminishing with the inhabitants either moving to the city or leaving altogether to countries such as Australia, Canada, USA, Germany and Sweden, this process did not occur to the same extent in Dolna Reka villages that are considered large (2000 plus inhabitants) by Macedonian standards. It is interesting to mention the system of marriage in the village of Skudrinje in Dolna Reka. In recent years villagers have been reluctant to marry their children outside the village and children as young as fourteen and fifteen are becoming married.

⁴⁹ M. Hadzhi-Pecheva, *Običaj okolu skopuvajne brak vo Prilepsko-Bitolsko pole* [Engagement customs on the Prilep-Bitola plain], Bitola, 1981, p. 582.

In Dolna Reka and Bitola, women from the groom's side gathered to clean the wheat to be consumed in the coming days. A red flag with an apple placed on top of the pole was prepared to be ceremoniously carried during the celebrations.⁵⁰ The red flag in the Bitola region was adorned with a Christian cross, whereas in Dolna Reka there is no available data to confirm whether there was a symbol of any kind on the flag. Numerous similar customs and rituals common to peasant culture revolved around a bride's purity, the fertility of the bride and a desire for male children. Traditional greetings to the groom's father and individual family members (this also applied to the bride's family) were identical with Christian and Muslim Macedonians, and specific ritual wedding songs were alike in Dolna Reka Macedonian Muslim and Christian wedding celebrations.⁵¹

A common ritual performed in both regions involved a symbolical shaving of the groom by the godfather (*kumot*) prior to the groom's wedding party leaving for the bride's home. Traditionally this ritual act occurred before the entry to the home and two young girls held open a towel which was to be used to wipe the groom's face and which the wedding guests used to throw gifts of money into.⁵² In the Bitola region the ritual was identical except the towel was held open by a brother and sister.⁵³ Women and girls sang a customary song during the shaving of the groom.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 585; and, D. Gulioski, 1984, op. cit. pp. 262-263.

⁵¹ D. Gulioski, 1984, op. cit. p. 260. J. Hadzhivasilevich considered that wedding customs in the Debar region were identical between the Christian and Islamicised community at the end of the nineteenth century. op. cit. p. 44.

⁵² D. Gulioski, 1984, op. cit. p. 271.

⁵³ M. Hadzhi-Pecheva, op. cit. p. 586.

⁵⁴ The ritual act of shaving the groom continues with widespread popularity amongst Macedonians in Australia. Interestingly a number of ritual elements associated with wedding customs persist in Australia, whilst some of these same customs no longer play a part in wedding rituals in Macedonia (particularly in urban centres).

Dolna Reka shaving of the groom wedding ritual song (Dolno and Gorno Kosovrasti):⁵⁵

Sedni zetje, sedi zetje
Na srebreno stolche.
Nechit zetje, nechit zetje
Berber da go briche.
Dur ne zemat, dur ne zemat
Izni od babayi

Sit groom, sit groom
 On a silver stool
 The groom doesn't want, the groom
 doesn't want
 A barber to shave him.
 Until they get, until they get
 Permission from mother-in-law.

Bitola region shaving of the groom wedding ritual song (Podmol village - Pelagonia plain):⁵⁶

Koj e berber zeto da zabrici
Berber mi e negov chesen nunko
Stani, stani, chesen nunko
Da zabricish tvoe kershteniche.
Chesen nunkomi mi go zabrikuva
Starosvato mi go dobrikuva

Who's the barber to shave the groom
 The barber is his honourable godfather
 Stand up, stand up, honourable
 godfather
 To shave your baptised child.
 The honourable godfather begins
 shaving him
 The second witness finished shaving him.

⁵⁵ D. Gulioski, 1984, p. 271.

⁵⁶ M. Hadzhi-Pecheva, op. cit. p. 586. Note, Hadzhi-Pecheva considers Podmol a Bitola region village. According to the boundaries of the Bitola region used in this study Podmol village is situated immediately over the administrative boundary in the Prilep region.

Photo 6.1: A new bride's mother-in-law leading a female procession to the Radika River for the 'Gathering of Water' ritual (*leyanye na voda*). Dolno Kosovrasti, 27 March 2000.



Leyanye na voda ('gathering water') was performed on the last day of a wedding celebration. It was exclusive to women and the ritual continues at the beginning of the twenty-first century in the village of Dolno Kosovrasti much as it was a century earlier.⁵⁷ Celebrations commence with a family gathering at the groom's home and traditional dancing to the tunes of a band. Later, a large procession of women, led first by a young male child and followed by the mother-in-law, the groom's sisters, first cousins and the bride (all women of the village may attend) walk down through the village to the crystal clear waters of the Radika river. The bride is required to fill various drinking vases (*bardina* and *stomni*) with water and pour it so that her mother-in-law may wash her hands, as well as other close relatives (in order of importance). The ritual is symbolic of the respect the new bride will show to her mother-in-law

⁵⁷ During field research in Macedonia, the writer recorded and photographed the wedding ritual of '*leyanye na voda*' in Dolno Kosovrasti on 27 March 2000.

and the women of the family that she is entering. Similarly, in the Bitola region on the last day of the wedding festivities, the bride was led to the village water supply, be it a river, village tap or central well and comparably gathered water and poured it so that her mother-in-law may wash her hands.⁵⁸ Whilst approaching the village water supply, the bride carried a silver coin in her mouth and basil leaves in one hand. Once the drinking vases were filled, both the coin and basil were dropped into the water.⁵⁹ The mother-in-law may instead wait for the bride at home, and once the washing of hands was performed the bride walked into the home, whilst the mother-in-law followed pouring the same water behind her so that ‘her housework may flow like water’.⁶⁰

Photo 6.2: The bride pouring water from the Radika River so her mother-in law may wash her hands (*Leyanye na voda* ritual). Dolno Kosovrasti, 27 March 2000



⁵⁸ Dragica Kleshteva interview, op. cit.

⁵⁹ M. Hadzhi-Pecheva, op. cit. p. 594.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 594.

Funerals

NUMEROUS ELEMENTS OF funeral rituals reflected pre-Islamic customs in Dolna Reka villages and were on the whole similar to burial traditions in the Bitola region. Unlike Albanian and Turkish Muslims who prior to burial took the deceased to a neighbouring home of a relative, Macedonian Muslims kept the individual in his own home. In the case of an elderly person often clothes and accessories had been pre-prepared, anticipating the eventual day.⁶¹ The body was laid out and positioned in an easterly direction (towards Mecca). Immediate family members, close relatives and friends visit to pay their respects. Female family members mourn the departed and express their grief through the wailing of messages to the deceased. The following is a typical example of the type of wailing message (for a deceased unmarried brother or sister) in the Dolna Reka district:⁶²

<i>Mili (brate, sestro)</i>	<i>Of-Of</i>	Dear (brother, sister)
<i>Te ženime, te tazime</i>	" "	We wed you, we moan you
<i>Ni ostavi cheisite</i>	" "	You left us the dowry
<i>Cheisite izgorite</i>	" "	A burnt dowry

⁶¹ D. Gulioski, 1987, op. cit. p. 394.

⁶² Ibid, p. 395. A prominent scholar of Macedonian folk literature, T. Sazdov considers that 'laments show the existence of early rituals connected with the occasion of death, rituals inspired by primitive folk beliefs and conceptions. Burial rituals reveal traces of ancestor worship and a belief in life after death... The songs which were sung during burial ceremonies are highly lyrical. Lacking a fixed form and content, they depended upon the improvisation of the singer, a professional mourner who had the ability to adapt the details to the situation, to create a poetic work of art on the basis of his or her acquaintance with the departed, his character, his life and his family. The talented singer of laments, often paid for such services, would fashion a song giving a concise characterisation of the deceased, stressing his positive features and the more memorable events of his life. Laments are, thus truly lyrical, elegiac outpourings, expressing the infinite grief and pain caused by the loss of a near one. Vuk Karadzich asserts that good mourners (usually women) 'could cause a stone to weep'. Such laments are characterised by their extreme emotional tension. Grief is let loose in the repetition of endless passages, often lacking stanza structure and almost never rhyming. There is frequent use of exclamations and questions, as in the following typical excerpt:

<i>Lele, maro, lele kerko,</i>	Oh Maria, oh my daughter
<i>Shch' ova chudo shcho mi stori?</i>	What is this you have done unto me?
<i>Me napravi da te redam,</i>	You have caused me to bemoan you,
<i>Denya noshya da te kukam,</i>	Day and night to wail above you,
<i>Kako crna kukavica</i>	like a cuckoo, black and mournful

In modern time, of course, laments have lost their ritual nature and are used solely as an outlet for the mourner's grief. T. Sazdov, *Macedonian Folk Literature*, Skopje, 1987, pp. 37-38.

<i>Drugarite se dotebe</i>	" "	Your friends are beside you
<i>Te plachijet, te zhalijet</i>	" "	They cry for you, they mourn for you
<i>Kaj ke gniyet tvojata snaga</i>	" "	Where will your body rot
<i>Ke zhalime, ke plachime</i>	" "	We will mourn, we will cry
<i>Ne pejme, ne igrane</i>	" "	We won't sing, won't dance
<i>Ne pocerna, ne izgore</i>	" "	We are blackened, we are burnt

According to the anthropologist D. Gulioski, Christian heritage is expressed directly in the wailing through the statement '*ne pocerna, ne izgore*' ('we are blackened, we are burnt').⁶³ Black is a symbolic colour worn at Christian funerals, whereas Albanian or Turkish Muslim women wear white scarves as a sign of mourning. In the Dolna Reka region Macedonian Muslim women wore black, as did their Christian counterparts. Unlike other Muslim groups in Macedonia, but significantly similar to all Macedonian Orthodox Christians, the men of Dolna Reka did not shave for a period of six weeks as a sign of mourning a close relative.⁶⁴ Furthermore, before the burial, the body was washed according to Muslim tradition and then smoked with incense in conformity to the rites of the Christian Orthodox Church.⁶⁵

Rituals at the completion of a Macedonian Muslim funeral service in Dolna Reka were identical with Orthodox traditions. A handful of earth was thrown into the grave, commencing with the immediate family members and later by the others in attendance. This act represented '*izrac na lesna zemja i pokoj na dushata*' ('relief of burden and spirit at peace').⁶⁶ Following the burial food was consumed (including boiled wheat) at the grave sight '*za dusha*' ('for their soul'), aimed at sending off the deceased into the other world with food. Food was also ceremoniously eaten at the grave sight after six days, six weeks, six months, one year and three years.⁶⁷ When

⁶³ D. Gulioski, 1987, op. cit. p. 395.

⁶⁴ Abdula Odzheski interview, op. cit. Redzho Muslioski interview, op. cit. Both interviewees recalled men wearing beards as a sign of mourning for a period of six weeks and were aware that earlier it was common to do so. Abdula Odzheski stated that women no longer wear black scarves to funerals and during periods of mourning. Instead, the scarves are generally dark blue.

⁶⁵ D. Gulioski, 1987, op. cit. p. 396.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 398.

⁶⁷ Abdula Odzheski interview, op. cit. D. Gulioski, 1987, op. cit. p. 398. During the course of the twentieth century the ceremonial act of eating food at the cemetery ceased, but continued to be performed at home in Dolna Reka Macedonian Muslim villages.

leaving the cemetery, each individual returned directly to their own home. To not do so would be to invite death into the home of the family visited. Whilst travelling home, the first opportunity was taken to wash one's hands under running water, to rinse the *'loshotijata'* off ('to wash the evil/sins').⁶⁸

Several characteristics of burial ceremonies in the Dolna Reka region were not only identical to those in the Bitola region but interestingly continue to be observed in many Macedonian homes (from the Bitola region) in Melbourne at the beginning of the twenty-first century.⁶⁹ For instance, on the day of the funeral it is forbidden for members of the immediate family to clean or work in the home, in particular to sweep the floor (for fear that someone else in the home may be 'swept' away). Those who have attended the deceased person's home to pay their respects are not escorted out of the home for fear that no misfortune follows them.⁷⁰

Stretching over centuries after Islamicisation, the extent to which Christian traditions and customs continued to persist in funeral rituals is evident by the following illustration from the Macedonian Muslim village of Debreshte in the Prilep region. An elderly male villager kept a small locked trunk in his home without revealing the nature of its contents to his family. In his eighties and anticipating that his time on this earth was limited, he summoned his grandchildren to his home to notify them that when he departed they were to open the trunk. There they would find two items, one to be equally divided between themselves, and the other for himself. Eventually the fateful day arrived and the grandchildren carried out his instructions as agreed. Their grandfather had left them gold in the form of Turkish

⁶⁸ D. Gulioski, 1987, op. cit. p. 398. This ritual act continues to be common at Macedonian funerals in Melbourne (Australia) at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

⁶⁹ A significant portion of the Macedonian population in Melbourne (Australia) originates from the Bitola region.

⁷⁰ D. Gulioski, 1987, op. cit. pp. 398-399.

liras (coins) and a Christian crucifix for himself. The old man was buried together with his cross. This event occurred sometime during the late 1970s.⁷¹

Holy Days

CELEBRATED RITUALS, CUSTOMS and traditions, although corresponding with particular Orthodox Christian Holy Days, were not directly linked to Christianity publicly. Nor was the relevance of the customs (to their new religion) questioned by the people themselves, as there was no perceived conflict between the rituals and their Muslim religion. Instead, these traits were viewed as being an integral part of their identity. Identical rituals were performed by their parents, and their parents before them, and constituted a natural expression of self, family, village and a proud association with their district. The links to their Christian ancestry, and even to the earlier pre-Christian era, are numerous and take many forms.

Orthodox New Year is known as *Vasilica* and is celebrated on the fourteenth of January each year. It is a significant celebration for all Orthodox Christians and comparably so in Macedonian Muslim villages of Dolna Reka. Young children in Zhirovnica celebrated *Vasilica* in an identical manner to children in Macedonian Christian villages in the Bitola region. Gathered in large groups, children in Zhirovnica would walk around the village whilst beating sticks and cans together singing '*Vasil den dobar den, kade da si doma da si*' ('Vasil day, good day, where ever you may be, home you should be'). From door to door they were greeted by the man of the house. The children greeted him with the words '*Domaikine airliya neka ti bide denot*' ('man of the house, may you have good luck today'). He would thank the children and give them items such as flour, beans, plums or a token amount of money. After visiting all the homes in the village the food was taken to a specific home where it

⁷¹ Ismail Bojda interview, op. cit. Ismail Bojda was informed of this event through a friend from the village of Debreshte.

was used to cook a feast for the children. Whatever remained was equally distributed between the children to take home.⁷²

Macedonian Muslims did not directly celebrate Easter, but partook in the custom of boiling and colouring eggs on Easter Thursday. In religiously mixed Macedonian villages, eggs were exchanged between Christians and Muslims. Whereas Christians discarded the shells and consumed the eggs, Muslims retained the shells from red eggs for *Gyurgovden* celebrations (May 6). Young children were bathed by their mothers with the red shells placed in the bath water in order that the children may have good health (*‘za zdravje na deteto, da e belo i crveno’*).⁷³

Gyurgovden may be considered one of the most significant (non-Muslim) celebrations in the Dolna Reka region and traditionally (in Zhirovnica) it is the day when *pechalbari* are obliged to return home.⁷⁴ Macedonian Muslims commonly assert that *‘Kade da si da si za gyurgovden doma da si’* (‘where ever you are, on Gyurgovden home you should be’).⁷⁵ Celebrations commence a day earlier and this day is known as *zapatki*, when the village girls (young boys may also be present) walked through the village fields, pasture lands and forests to gather herbal plants.⁷⁶ Whilst engaged in the collection of herbs, certain *Gyurgovden* songs were sung,⁷⁷ amongst which the following is well known throughout many Macedonian Muslim villages in Dolna Reka and beyond.⁷⁸

⁷² Abdula Odzheski interview, op. cit. This *Vasilica* custom was maintained in Zhirovnica until the 1960s.

⁷³ In Zhirovnica a herb (*ugoyachka*) was also placed in the bath together with the red shells from the boiled Easter eggs. The herb was also seen as giving good health (*‘da bide zdravo, da ugoya, da bide debelo’*). Abdula Odzheski interview, ibid.

⁷⁴ Returning home from *pechalba* for *Gyurgovden* celebrations was not exclusive to Macedonian Muslims in the Dolna Reka region, but also applied to the Macedonian Muslim villages in the Gora region (Kosovo - Serbia) who also had a strong tradition of *pechalba*. Ismail Bojda interview, op. cit.

⁷⁵ Asani Rejep interview, op. cit.

⁷⁶ Aysha Muslioska (born 1945 in Velebrdo, Reka district), notes of interview, Dolno Kosovrasti on 27 March 2000.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ N. Limanoski, *Izlamizacijata i etnickite promeni vo Makedonija*, [Islamicisation and ethnic changes in Macedonia], Skopje, 1993, p. 332.

O *Gyurgovden* more *Gyurgovden*
 A *koj ti reche da doesh*
 Mene *mi reche Veligden*
 so *shuma i gora zelena*
 so *buchibutin po mene*
 So *gorocveyke po mene*

O Gyurgov day, Gyurgov day
 Who told you to arrive
 Easter told me
 with green woods and forest
 with a loud churn behind me
 with youthflower behind me

Collected herbs were woven into wreaths and decorated with flowers. Young women placed these upon their head and upon returning home the wreaths were placed on the *butim* (yoghurt making instrument). A metal coin was also attached to the wreath so the cow may continue to produce milk. Gathered herbs were also mixed in with sheep and cow feed in order that the animals maintain good health. It was also common practice on *Gyurgovden* for villagers to touch a cornelian cherry or red dogwood tree as it was considered strong and healthy, and that those who touched such trees would take on these characteristics. Young girls dressed in colourful traditional costumes would swing themselves on the trees that were thought to have ‘magical powers’⁷⁹ and sing traditional *Gyurgovden* songs (women-only songs).⁸⁰ Village men engaged in their own activities such as various competitions of strength, including the throwing of large rocks and tug of war in Velebrdo,⁸¹ whereas in Mogorche the men were known to compete in a horse race.⁸² In the early hours of the morning on *Gyurgovden*, men and women gathered hellebore plants (considered as a symbol of strength and health) from the nearby hills and obtained as many plants as there were members of their household. In some villages (for instance Velebrdo and Zhirovnica) they distinguished between male and female varieties of the species and gathered them according to male and female members of the family.⁸³ A large celebration was also conducted in the village square with musicians typically using the drum. On *Gyurgovden* men gathered on one side of the square to conduct village

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 336.

⁸⁰ Aysha Muslioska, record of interview. Asani Rejep interview, op. cit.

⁸¹ Asani Rejep interview, op. cit.

⁸² N. Limanoski, 1993, op. cit. p. 334.

⁸³ A. Odzheski, *Nekoi verski praznici i obichaj kaj Izlamiranite Makedonci od Dolnorekanskiot region na Zapadna Makedonija* [Religious celebrations and customs practised by the Islamicised Macedonians in the Dolna Reka region of Western Macedonia], Skopje, 1987, p. 321; A. Odzheski, *Zhirovnicata vo prostorot i vo vremeto* [Zhirovnicata a place and a time], Skopje, 2000, pp. 76-77; N. Limanoski, 1993, op. cit. p. 334.

elections, as done in Macedonian Christian villages, to appoint a *kmet* (village headman), *goidar* (grazer of cattle), *pobyak* (watchman of the village fields), *vodar* (person who waters the village fields) and *ofchar* (grazer of sheep).⁸⁴

Other celebrations

THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY a dozen dates over the course of twelve months where village celebrations and rituals took place which had no religious connection to the Muslim religion and were instead related to Orthodox Christianity. Other village celebrations were seasonal celebrations with pagan roots. The burning of incense does not occur in the rituals of a Muslim *oja*, but plays a large part in the rituals of an Orthodox priest. Although *Letnik*, *Nevrus* and *Eremija* were seasonal celebrations, Macedonian Muslim women ritually burned incense on these days. For example, on *Letnik* (1 March), incense was used in the ritual act to smoke the animal enclosures in order that they not be attacked by snakes or other animals, that they be healthy and produce in abundance. Similarly, *Nevrus* (25 March), is considered the day when bugs and insects appear in the fields, women smoked the fields with incense on that day to

⁸⁴ Asani Rejep interview, op. cit. Abdula Odzheski interview, op. cit. Redzho Muslioski interview, op. cit. *Gyurgorden* celebrations were also held in Macedonian Muslim communities in other regions such as Strushki Drimkol and Kitehevo. Macedonian Muslims were known to attend the *Sveti Giorgi* (St George) monastery in the village Vozarci (Tikvesh region) to wash themselves with the natural spring water. *Gyurgorden* was celebrated at the monastery with a large festival. It was common for Macedonian Muslims to attend the festival dressed in their best clothes. J. Hadzhivasilevich, op. cit. p. 42. The widespread significance given to *Gyurgorden* amongst Macedonia's ethnic and religious minority groups is particularly interesting. Along the hillside between the Dedebalci and Armatoush village fields (Bitola region), there is a particular spot renowned in the district as being *vakaŕsko* (religious ground). There are two large rectangular rocks in an upside down V position and known as *dupen kamen* (there is also a natural spring beside it). On *Gyurgorden* it has been a tradition for Macedonians from the surrounding villages, as well as Turks from the villages of Budakovo and Kanatlarci, to visit *dupen kamen* seeking 'good health' (*'za zdravje'*). People crawl through the opening between the rocks and it is believed that those who manage it without difficulty are the 'the good ones' whilst those who experience difficulty 'are not so good'. People suffering illness also go there on *Gyurgorden*. Ljuba Stankovska (born 1923 in Gorno Aglarci, Bitola region), interview conducted 15 March 2000 in Dedebalci village, Bitola region. Ljuba Stankovska married into Dedebalci village, which is a neighbouring village to the one she was born in. Justref Metovski (an Albanian born in 1908 in Resen, Prespa region) and interviewed in Bitola on 23 March 2000, stated that *Gyurgorden* was celebrated by his family for generations (*'od dedo prededo'*). *Gyurgorden* was celebrated with the slaughter of a lamb and all the neighbours were invited. Justref Metovski also recalled that sick Muslim children were taken to the Sveti Naum monastery in Ohrid, both during the Ottoman era and afterwards. Justref Metovski stated, 'Sveti Naum was respected as a holy place, even by Muslims'. In addition in Bitola, *Gyurgorden* is marked by a grand celebration by the Gypsy Muslim community.

encourage an abundant harvest. *Eremiya* (13 May), was a ritual celebration aimed at bringing good health to the farm animals and was signified by groups of young men visiting all the village animal enclosures and making loud noise with bells, pots and sticks, aimed at driving away snakes and insects.⁸⁵ Young men also sang a particular song reserved only for *Eremiya*.⁸⁶

Begaj begaj poganio
Evetiya Eremiya
co cvetoga Tanasiya
ke ti motat cherevata
so zbelezno motovilo

Run run you filth
 Here's Eremiya
 with Saint Tanasiya
 they will twist your guts
 with a steel windlass

Varvara was the village saint's day in Zhirovnica before the village was completely Islamicised. Even after Islamicisation, *Varvara* (7 December) continued to be revered by the villagers. In the nineteenth century people in the village would not perform any work whatsoever on that day, as was the custom in any Orthodox Christian village celebrating its saint's day.⁸⁷ Often Macedonian Muslim women secretly kept Christian religious icons in their homes and their veneration for the nearby eleventh century Monastery of Saint John Bigorski situated on Bistra Mountain was expressed through secret visits to the monastery.⁸⁸ Macedonian Muslim villagers in the district maintained contact with the monastery through visits and donations. Women, in small groups, on any given day presented gifts to the monastery for the purpose of receiving good health (*'za zdravye'*). Often visits were conducted first thing in the morning or very late at night in an effort to avoid being noticed by Christian villagers from the district. Macedonian Muslims were known to visit the monastery in larger numbers late on the 10th September each year, the evening before the celebration of Saint Jovan Bigorski on the Orthodox calendar. The monastery contains a famous icon of Saint Jovan Bigorski which attracts particular attention from all visitors, including Macedonian Muslims who are known

⁸⁵ Redzho Muslioski interview, op. cit.

⁸⁶ N. Limanoski, 1993, op. cit. p. 337.

⁸⁷ Interview conducted 28 March 2000 in Dolna Reka region. Interviewee spoke on condition of anonymity.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

to proclaim, *‘zhiv e ikonata, zhiv e svetetsot’* (‘the icon is alive, the saint is alive’).⁸⁹ Erected upon a frame with an open space beneath it, Macedonian Christians and Muslims alike would crawl underneath in order to receive good health (*‘za zdравje’*) from the saint. Macedonian Muslim women also brought sick family members to the icon – young children or married women who were unable to have children. The casket of Saint Moshtiye, with bone fragments of Saint John the Baptist and small pieces of timber from the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, was also given great respect by Macedonian Muslims, and others seeking ‘good health’ would also crawl beneath it. Although Macedonian Muslims did not cease paying their respects to the monastery and Saint Jovan, they did, however, refrain from crossing themselves, as is the Orthodox Christian custom when entering any church or monastery.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ The icon has acquired a legendary status in the region. According to tradition it was found in the natural springs at the site where the monastery stands today, and the monastery was built upon the site in the year 1020. Local legend has it that the icon was once transferred to a church in Kitchevo, but it mysteriously vanished overnight and re-appeared the next day back in the Saint Jovan Bigorski monastery. Stories abound regarding instances during past wars when attempts were made to steal the icon, but it could never be found, and would miraculously re-appear the following day.

⁹⁰ Anonymous interview, op. cit. It is interesting to note that Macedonian Muslims from Dolna Reka have continued to display respect for the monastery of Saint Jovan Bigorski a century later. An elderly male from the district was personally responsible for connecting electrical power to the monastery in 1995, including the erection of power poles up the mountain, and he bore the financial cost of the operation. After the Second World War the Yugoslav-Macedonian Communist authorities unfortunately did not view Macedonian Muslims as a part of the Macedonian nation. State policies encouraged Macedonian Muslims to declare themselves as constituting a part of other ethnic groups, mostly Turkish but also Albanian. Consequently there was an exodus of Macedonians to Turkey between the years 1954 to 1962. The interviewee, Abdula Odzheski, stated that not a single Macedonian Muslim village was left untouched in Dolna Reka. ‘Families were torn apart’. The village of Boletin was left completely uninhabited as a result of migration to Turkey. The first to migrate was the prominent villager Beadin Shiyakoski with his sons Shukriya and Faik. Beadin was a wealthy man whose properties were confiscated after the war as a result of the nationalisation program. He was also interned at Cheshme (Shtip region) for daring to protest against the government action. After his release he sold his home to Osman Selami (an Albanian) from Vrbyane and moved to Kodjayle-Izmir (Turkey). Beadin’s action was seen by the community as a sign that they could not trust the government and this left the people feeling insecure. Furthermore it brought about a negative reaction against Christians, at the same time, Turkey began to be promoted as their genuine homeland. A. Odzheski, 2000, op. cit. pp. 35-36. Tens of thousands of Macedonians were to migrate over the course of a decade to various Turkish cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, Adana, Izmit and Karshiaka, establishing concentrations in particular areas of these cities. However settlement in Turkey was not what they expected according to the interviewee, Ismail Bojda. ‘Many of our people found themselves not accepted as Turks, but as foreigners’. Ismail Bojda explained that Turkey sought to assimilate Macedonian Muslims and many were forced to change their names to reflect typical Turkish names. Ismail Bojda’s uncle, Maslar, had his name changed to Demir Ali Kemal. His wife, Dafka, had her name changed to Beshkardashle. Contact between relatives and friends continued after the move to Turkey. People visited one another during the holiday periods and for celebrations such as weddings. In Zhirovnica, particular customs such as the colouring of eggs on Easter Thursday ceased after the exodus to Turkey. Relatives visiting from Turkey ‘discredited such practices with comments that they were a *kaurska rabota* (‘a Christian thing’ - *kaurska* - a derogatory label signifying Christians from the Ottoman period) - even though such customs were always considered to be *our customs*’. Abdula Odzheski interview, op. cit. Negative attitudes conveyed by some

Table 6.2: Religious/Ritual Calendar in Dolna Reka Macedonian Muslim Villages, circa 1900

	Non-Muslim Celebrations	Muslim celebrations	Other
January	Vasilica Tanasovden	Ramazán Fiter Bayram	
February			
March	Letnik Nevrus	Kurban Bayram	
April	Blagovec		
May	Gurgovden Ermija		<i>pechalbari</i> return Weddings
June		Mevlud	
July			
August	Petrovden		
September	Krstovden		<i>pechalbari</i> return Weddings
October			
November	Mitrovden	Ramazán	<i>pechalbari</i> leave
December	Varvara	Ramazán	

Macedonians in Turkey have impacted upon age-old customs and traditions, but have not wiped them out. In fact, at the beginning of the twenty-first century Macedonian Muslims in Turkey have maintained elements of their native customs, traditions and rituals.

6.3 Macedonian Christian-Turkish Muslim village

THE LOT OF the Turkish villager was not dissimilar to the Macedonian villager. Both worked the *begs' chiflik* estates, were economically exploited,⁹¹ and sought to maximise their own grain supplies for home use by hiding what they could from the tax-man and *beg*.⁹² Living conditions for both Macedonians and Turks were generally difficult, and economically 'the Turks were undermined and exploited just as we (*Macedonians*) were'.⁹³ Personal relationships with Turks pointed to a common respect displayed during respective religious holy days. For instance, at Easter Macedonians gave Turks coloured eggs, and on Islamic holy days such as *Bayram*, Turks presented Macedonians with sweets such as *baklava* and *kadayif*.⁹⁴ The exchange of traditional dishes on religious days appears to have been a widespread practice throughout Macedonia generally.

On the surface, relations between the two groups appear to reflect a harmonious co-existence, but in fact the relationship between the two communities was coloured by implicit recognition of the social order. Turks were an integral part of the Sultan's empire, and the cultural and religious differences between the two groups were further obstacles preventing the bonding of them as a single community.

⁹¹ Trajan Popovski (born 1939 in Lazhec, Bitola region), interview conducted 14 March 2000 in Lazhec. Trajan Popovski is from the Popovci family. Mihailo Todorovski (born 1921 in Dolno Orehovo, Bitola region), interview conducted 30 March 2000 in Makovo. Mihailo Todorovski moved to the nearby Mariovo village of Makovo in 1948. Vasil Slaveski (born in 1954 in Dolno Orehovo, Bitola region), interview conducted on 31 March 2000 Dolno Orehovo. Vasil Slavevski lives with his family in Bitola, however, due to his strong connection with his village, he has renovated his parents' home in Dolno Orehovo and spends time there when on holidays. Vasil Stojanovski (born 1915, in the village of Rakovo, Lerin region), interview conducted on 19 June 2001 in Geelong. Born in the village of Rakovo, Lerin region, Vasil Stojanovski's family arrived in Lazhec in 1915, together with nine other families from Rakovo. During the course of the First World War (and up until the 1920s) there was an influx of new Macedonian Christian settlers to Lazhec from the Struga region, the villages of Veleshta and Zavoj from the Ohrid region, and from the Lerin region - Buf (12 families), Sveta Petka and Negochani.

⁹² Kocho Duakis (born 1934 in Petoraci, Lerin region), interview conducted on 20 January 2001 in Melbourne. Kocho Duakis is from the Duakovci family, and although he was able to trace his roots back in the village four generations, he explained that the Duakovci family are descended from the Bitola region, near the village of Bach. Mihailo Todorovski interview, op. cit.

⁹³ Vasil Slaveski interview, op. cit. Vasil recalled this statement from his grandfather Petre Slavevski.

⁹⁴ This was a common response by interviewees from mixed Macedonian Christian and Turkish Muslim villages.

According to Mihailo Todorovski, from Dolno Orehovo (Bitola region), ‘beneath the surface we (*Macedonians*) were conscious that the Turks were of a higher status compared to us’.⁹⁵ Kocho Duakis from Petoraci (Lerin region), recalled that ‘generally the two groups lived well but the Turks enjoyed more rights’.⁹⁶ Whereas Vasko Altiparmak from the mixed Macedonian - Turkish village of Dolenci (Bitola region) recalled hearing from his parents and other elderly people from the village that, ‘the Turks were hard to live with’.⁹⁷ Vasil Stojanovski from the village of Lazhec (Bitola region) stated, ‘the Turk was of a higher class than us, regardless whether he was rich or poor. They exerted an authority over all Christians in the village. The state was theirs, the land belonged to them and the Sultan was theirs. The Christian would walk by a Turk with his head bowed’.⁹⁸ A common issue raised (by respondents) was the attitude of some Turkish men towards Macedonian Christian women. This was a point of tension for Macedonians and particularly resented by the men. ‘It was of no concern for a Turk to give attention to a Christian woman, but it was totally unacceptable for one of our men to behave in such a manner.’⁹⁹

Typically the Macedonian woman’s role extended beyond home duties, particularly in the warmer months when her labour contribution was significant, working alongside the men in the fields. In contrast, Turkish women did not work with their men in the fields, and generally did not venture out in public. Turkish women were rarely visible outside their homes, emerging either in the presence of a husband or together with an elderly mother-in-law or mother. The role of the Turkish woman was restricted to maintaining her home duties. She was not permitted

⁹⁵ Mihailo Todorovski interview, op. cit.

⁹⁶ Kocho Duakis interview, op. cit.

⁹⁷ Vasko Altiparmak (born 1912 in Bitola), interview conducted on 30 March 2000 in Bitola. Although born and raised in Bitola, Vasko Altiparmak is descended from the mixed Macedonian-Turkish village of Dolenci in the Bitola region. The surname Altiparmak is not a traditional Macedonian name, but is based on a nickname given to his grandfather Veljan, who was born with six fingers on each hand. The Turkish word for six is *alti* and the word for finger is *parmak*. Vasko Altiparmak is the retired former director of the Yugoslav National Bank in Bitola.

⁹⁸ Vasil Stojanovski interview, op. cit.

⁹⁹ Tale Naumovski (born 1929 in Optichari, Bitola region). Notes of interview, Novaci village (Bitola region) on 28 March 2000.

to visit her Christian neighbours least she may come into contact with men. Turkish women visited one another during the day when the men were out working, and only whilst accompanied by a mother-in-law.¹⁰⁰ A building beside the mosque was utilised as a meeting place for Turkish women on certain days, and even their husbands were prohibited from entering (*Lazheci*). Similarly, when Muslim families visited one another, women and men did not share the same room. They sat in separate rooms as Turkish women were not permitted to socialise with the men.

Inter-ethnic communication in shared Macedonian Turkish villages appears to have been conducted predominantly in the Macedonian language. Turkish men appear to have been able to speak Macedonian adequately, whilst Macedonian men appear to have had a basic understanding of Turkish. It is not surprising that each had some understanding of the other's language as it was not uncommon for the children (particularly males) of both groups to play together. Later as adults, even though Macedonian and Turkish men generally socialised within their own ethnic groups, some socialisation between them nevertheless continued. Communication in the Macedonian language (between men) was the norm in Lazhec, Dolno Orehovo, Petoraci (Lerin region) and Tearce (Tetovo region).¹⁰¹ Due to the isolated lifestyle of Turkish women and limited contact with Macedonians, they were unlikely to be familiar with the Macedonian language.¹⁰² Although Macedonian women enjoyed a greater public presence compared to Turkish women, they too were generally not presented with the opportunity to acquire new language skills, particularly in a village environment.

¹⁰⁰ The interviewee, Jelena Jovanovska, stated that in her native village of Tearce (Tetovo region), 'Turkish men were very strict about hiding their women and would wait until dark before visiting their relatives in the village'. Jelena Jovanovska (born 1924 Tearce, Tetovo region), interview conducted on 15 February 2002 in Melbourne.

¹⁰¹ Vasil Stojanovski interview, op. cit. Kocho Duakis interview, op. cit. Jelena Jovanovska interview, op. cit. and Stefan Trajchevski (born 1913, Dolno Orehovo, Bitola region), interview conducted 1 April 2000 in Dolno Orehovo. Stefan Trajchevski is from the Tanevci family, one of the oldest families in the village. In exclusively Turkish villages Turks were not likely to be familiar with the Macedonian language.

¹⁰² Jelena Jovanovska recalled that as a young girl in Tearce, elderly Turkish women could not speak Macedonian, although she was aware that elderly male Turks could. Jelena Jovanovska interview, op. cit.

Shared Macedonian Turkish villages were in some instances, but not always, two physically separated communities within the one rural settlement. A dividing line between the two groups could take the form of a road, river or creek. If the village contained religious buildings such as a church or mosque, these structures were likely to be located in the vicinity of that part of the village occupied by the corresponding religious group.

At approximately 1900 there appears to have been no physical segregation between Macedonians and Turks in the village of Lazhec in the Bitola region. Turkish homes were scattered amongst Macedonian homes and there was no distinct boundary separating them. Similarly Petoraci in the Lerin region and Tearce in the Tetovo region had no separate ethnic quarters in the village. Each village contained a single village square (*sred selo*), whereas in Dolno Orehovo distinct ethnic quarters existed and the respective communities each had its own village square (but in this case the ‘Turkish’ village square may have been formed by Macedonians moving away from that part of the village). As village squares were primary places of collective socialisation, separate village squares ensured minimum social interaction between the two groups. To the Macedonian the village square (*sred selo* literally meaning ‘middle of the village’) was a popular meeting place over the warmer months. It was the central place to celebrate village religious rituals, weddings and annual gatherings of men to elect the village headman. In Lazhec, Macedonians considered the village square as their domain, and this was respected by the Turkish inhabitants of the village.¹⁰³ Unlike Macedonians, Turks did not utilise the village square for community celebrations.¹⁰⁴ During all Macedonian village square celebrations, Turks did not participate in the festivities. They would, however, sit around the fringes of the square and observe.¹⁰⁵ Over summer both Macedonians and Turks gathered in the

¹⁰³ Vasil Stojanovski interview, op. cit.

¹⁰⁴ The absence of Turkish community gatherings and celebrations in the village square appear to be related to the non-public life of Turkish women. Turkish celebrations were confined to private homes with men and women isolated from one another in separate rooms.

¹⁰⁵ Vasil Stojanovski interview, op. cit.

village square, but these were either groups of Macedonians or Turks respectively, with limited socialisation between the two groups.¹⁰⁶ Whereas the Macedonian built his church on the fringes of the village, the Turk built his mosque to one side of the village-square. 'Our people viewed it as an imposition upon our village square.'¹⁰⁷ Mosques were situated on the periphery of the village square in both Lazhec and Dolno Orehovo respectively, and located beside each mosque was the Turkish cemetery.¹⁰⁸ Rarely are there two village squares within the one small village. In Dolno Orehovo the square containing the mosque was discarded by the Macedonians and a new square emerged to be exclusively used by Macedonians. Whether the new square emerged because of the mosque being situated in the original square is unclear, however 'the old square became known as the Turkish one'¹⁰⁹ even though the Turks in the village, as in Lazhec, 'do not have village square celebrations'.

Macedonian homes in villages co-habited with Turks were identical in construction and style to those in exclusively Macedonian Christian villages in the region. In mixed villages both Macedonian and Turkish homes were constructed in a similar manner and architecturally there appears to have been no visible difference between them. Properties were generally unfenced with boundaries often marked with stones. In Lazhec, only a handful of Turkish homes were surrounded by high fences.¹¹⁰ Alternative structures (both in design and style) also existed in mixed

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ In comparison, in Macedonian villages partly Islamicised, such as Lin (on the western bank of the Ohrid lake), where a portion of the village converted to Islam under fanatical pressure from Albanian bandits in the eighteenth century, both Christian and Muslim Macedonians continued to live together as the one brotherly community. According to the stories handed down in the village, the old Orthodox church was divided into two sections and shared by both faiths as a place of worship. Similarly, in the partially Islamicised village of Boroec (in the Strushki Drimkol district), the Macedonian Christians of the village agreed for a mosque to be built within the church grounds, beside the existing church. N. Limanoski, *op. cit.* pp. 105 and 111.

¹⁰⁹ Mihailo Todorovski interview, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁰ High fences around Turkish homes were a normal feature, apparently to prevent outsiders from viewing their women. The few homes in Lazhec with high fences were limited to those who could afford the construction. Vasil Stojanovski interview, *op. cit.* In the mixed Macedonian-Turkish village of Budakovo, it was forbidden for a Christian to ride a horse through the village, for fear that he may gaze upon Turkish women over high fences. Ljuba Stankovska (born 1923 in Gorno Aglarci, Bitola region), interview conducted 15 March 2000 in Dedebalci. Ljuba Stankovska was aware of this as she had heard the story from her aunty who was a

villages, built by the feudal landowner to accommodate workers and their families. These were unlike typical homes found along the plain or upper regions. In this particular style of housing up to six or more separate families resided under the same roof, separated by an internal dividing wall which did not always reach as high as the roof or ceiling, but could also be as low as 1.5 metres in height.¹¹¹ One respondent describes them as ‘barracks’¹¹², and the French contemporary commentator Edmond Bouchie de Belle also used this term in an early twentieth century publication.¹¹³ ‘Barrack’ style homes in Petoraci were used to house only Turks in the late nineteenth century,¹¹⁴ however, the Naumovski family shared such a home together with a Turkish family in Optichari during the 1920s.¹¹⁵

In Christian Macedonian villages, typically all homes kept a certain number of animals (the number depended upon whether the village was located in upper mountainous areas or along the plains) that were required to be taken out to pasture, such as cattle and sheep. Normal practice required an individual to be assigned the role of collectively herding the village animals to pasture from spring to autumn (*goidar*). Utilising a single person to herd the village cows or sheep was a matter of practicality, as this allowed the people to work the fields. In the mixed Macedonian Turkish village of Lazhec, both Macedonian and Turkish men gathered to vote on a herder (*goidar*). Similarly they also voted for a keeper of the village fields (*polyak*).¹¹⁶

resident of Budakovo during the Ottoman period. Ljuba was born in Gorno Aglarci but married into the neighbouring village of Dedebalci.

¹¹¹ Barrack homes were rectangular in shape with several entry points into separate quarters that consisted of no more than a single room. The last remaining ‘barrack home’ in Petoraci (it remained standing until the 1960s) comprised five separate dwellings under the one roof, with individual rooms roughly six by ten metres in size. Each single room/residence was used as a bedroom, living room and kitchen. It was constructed of mud brick and was approximately thirty by ten metres in size. Kocho Duakis interview, op. cit.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ E. Bouchie de Belle, *Makedonija i Makedoncite*, Skopje, 1992, p. 95. Original title, *La Macedoine et les Macedoniens*, Paris, 1922.

¹¹⁴ Kocho Duakis interview, op. cit. Kocho Duakis stated that he did not believe Turks and Macedonians shared these homes.

¹¹⁵ Tale Naumovski, notes of interview, op. cit.

¹¹⁶ Vasil Stojanovski interview, op. cit. *Polyaks* were not always appointed through democratic election, but at times appointed by the *beg*. See Chapter Three.

The appointment of a *goidar* and *polyak* represents one of few instances when both groups voluntarily gathered as a single community.

Farm animals were of tremendous importance to the villager, as working animals, for products such as milk or wool, and as a source of meat. Macedonians and Turks equally valued their animals, but due to religious considerations Turks refrained from consuming pork and subsequently did not keep pigs. On the other hand Macedonians routinely kept pigs to the displeasure of the Turks. 'If a Turk should happen to walk by it was not uncommon that he would display his disapproval by spitting at the pig and cursing it.'¹¹⁷ Far greater intolerance was demonstrated by the Turks in Budakovo who 'prohibited their Macedonian co-villagers from keeping pigs or cooking pork because they claimed they found the smell offensive'.¹¹⁸ Extreme opposition to pigs saw a Macedonian in Budakovo village beaten because his pigs offended a Turk. Afterwards it was forbidden to keep pigs in the village: a house-to-house search was conducted to ensure the village was free of the animals.¹¹⁹ Albanians from Drevenik also reacted vehemently when confronted with pigs from neighbouring villages. 'They did not want to see our pigs and would throw insults to our people because we eat pork. If an Albanian saw a pig drinking water, he would yell that it is polluting the water.'¹²⁰ Vane Tancevski recalled that when the old folk spoke of Albanians and Turks, we knew they were a different people, 'but the link between the two was their religion - and they both didn't hesitate to demonstrate their dislike for our pigs'.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ljuba Stankovska interview, op. cit.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. The Macedonian beaten by fanatical Muslims in Budakovo was Ljuba Stankovska's uncle.

¹²⁰ Vane Tancevski (born 1935 in Lopatica, Bitola region), interview conducted 6 March 2002 in Melbourne. Vane Tancevski is from the Tancevi family and was able to trace his family back five generations on his father's side.

¹²¹ Ibid. It is interesting to note that to the end of Ottoman rule in 1912, the Ottoman Turkish administration in Bitola did not allow the sale of pork in the Bitola marketplace. Christian butchers were forbidden to sell pork. Bitolas Christian inhabitants could only purchase pork at the bridge near the village of Gorno Orizari, a distance of approximately 3 kilometres from the centre of Bitola. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Turks authorised the sale of pork in the vicinity of the Sveta Nedela cemetery. Later it was transferred outside the confines of the Sveta Bogoroyca church in Bitola. M. Konstantinov, *Zanaeti i Esnafî vo Bitolsko* [Trades and Guilds in Bitola and in the Bitola region], Bitola, 1966, pp. 25-26.

In Lazhec, Dolno Orehovo and Petoraci, Turks did not use alternative names for village fields or the village itself. Parcels of village fields owned respectively by Macedonians and Turks, as well as parcels within the *chiflik* estates, were overwhelmingly known by their traditional Macedonian names to both groups of people. Distinctively Macedonian in origin, parcels of land in Lazhec included *Crvenica*, *Dolno Crvenica*, *Begovi Livadi*, *Ograege*, *Dragosbnica*, *Pesok* and *Kumanica*. The Turks did not have a parallel topographical naming system in the village, but modified some existing names such as *Bunarche* to *Lato Bunarche*.¹²² In Dolno Orehovo both Mihailo Todorovski and Vasil Slavevski stated that Macedonians inhabited the village before the Turks arrived. Trajan Popovski from the village of Lazhec believed the village was originally exclusively Turkish Muslim and Macedonians settled there to work on the *chifliks* during the 1820s or 1830s.¹²³ Fifteenth century Turkish tax records confirm that the village of Lazhec existed in the year 1468 and was made up of 80 Christian families and one Muslim family.¹²⁴ From the village of Petoraci (Pelagonia plain - Lerin region) Kocho Duakis claimed Petoraci was a recently constructed village, no more than a couple of hundred years old, and that

¹²² Vasil Stojanovski interview, op. cit. On the other hand exclusively Turkish villages in the Bitola kaza generally did have distinctly Turkish village names such as the unidentifiable villages of Kara Han, Akkachel and Umerler (unable to establish whether these villages were in the Bitola region or surrounding regions). Other exclusively Turkish villages were known to their inhabitants by Turkish names, however, use of a Macedonian equivalent was maintained by the general population. For instance, the village of Kenali was known to Macedonians as Kremenica and the village of Medzhitli (Turkish) was known as Medzhitlija (Macedonian). Turkish equivalents to Macedonian town names have been identified in other regions of Macedonia and include larger urban centres. Two obvious cases that appear on various maps from the era are the urban centres of Skopje and Tetovo. Officially the Ottoman administration referred to Skopje as Uskub and Tetovo as Kalkandelen. According to V. Kanchov, the Muslim element in both cities was overwhelmingly Turkish, with very small Albanian minorities present in either town. V. Kanchov, *Makedonija etnografija i statistika* [Macedonia ethnography and statistics], Sofia, 1970 (1900), pp. 505-510. There is evidence of at least one exclusively Macedonian village in the Bitola region (Gorno Aglarci) having a corresponding Turkish name (Lahklar). Interestingly, Macedonian inhabitants interviewed for the purposes of this research project from the village had no knowledge of the existence of a corresponding Turkish name. Furthermore, names of agricultural land parcels in Gorno Aglarci appear in their identical form on the Turkish land titles. Ottoman land titles – Volume 52, document 20, number 91, dated 21 July 1906; Volume 52, document 29, number 100, dated 21 July 1906; Volume 52, document 31, number 102, dated 21 July 1906; Volume 52, document 34, number 105, dated 21 July 1906; and, Volume 52, document 38, number 109, dated 21 July 1906.

¹²³ Trajan Popovski interview, op. cit.

¹²⁴ From 'Bitolska nahia, opshirni popisni defteri broj 993 i 988 od 1468 godina' [Bitola nahia, detailed census registers, numbers 993 i 988 from 1468] M. Sokoloski, editor, *Turski Dokumenti - Opshirni Popisni Defteri od XV veka* [Turkish documents - Detailed census registers from the XV century], Vol II, Skopje, 1973, p. 156.

Macedonians had not inhabited it for a lengthy period.¹²⁵ However, in the year 1481, Turkish documents record the village of Petoraci as being an exclusively Christian village with 74 families.¹²⁶ It is possible such villages may have taken on different ethnic appearances at various intervals. For instance, following the arrival of the Turks, there may have been an exodus of Christian inhabitants (there is evidence of Christians leaving their villages after Muslim colonisation), only to see Christians re-enter the village at a later date either voluntarily or involuntarily as workers on *chiflik* land.¹²⁷

Table 6.3: Perceptions of Village Make-up in Mixed Macedonian-Turkish Villages, circa 1900

Name and year of birth:	Lazhec - Number of homes		D. Orehovo - Number of homes		Petoraci - Number of homes		Optichari - Number of homes		Dolenci - Number of homes	
	M	T	M	T	M	T	M	T	M	T
Altiparmak, V. b. 1912									15	30
Trajcevski, S. b. 1913			30	20						
Stojanovski, V. b. 1915	125	45								
Todorovski, M. b. 1921			15	15						
Naumovski, T. b. 1929							25	6		
Duakis, K. b. 1934					23	10				
Popovski, T. b. 1939	110	60								
Slavevski, V. b. 1954			35	35						

¹²⁵ Kocho Duakis interview, op. cit.

¹²⁶ From 'Lerin nahia, opshiren popisen defter broj 16 od 1481 godina' [Lerin nahia, detailed census register number 16 from 1481], M. Sokoloski, editor, *Turski Dokumenti - Opshirni Popisni Defteri od XV veka* [Turkish documents - Detailed census registers from the XV century], Vol II, Skopje, 1973, pp. 316-317.

¹²⁷ See chapter three regarding voluntary and involuntary settling of Christians in *chiflik* villages.

In exclusively Christian villages, there was limited contact between villagers and the Turkish feudal landowner (*begot*). *Begoi* generally resided in Bitola, and occasionally traveled into the countryside villages. In Novaci the *beg* would ‘sometimes visit during tax time, or when the harvest was being gathered, staying in his *kula* (tower). Villagers were instructed to prepare and deliver meals to him’.¹²⁸ Similarly, in Gorno Aglarci, ‘the *beg* used the *kula* as a place to rest when visiting the village. From there he would summon the villagers to cook and deliver food to him’.¹²⁹ *Chiflik* villages did not compulsorily have only one landowner; in some there were two or even three *begoi* owning separate parcels of village land. Three *begoi* owned the village fields in Lazhec, and all were full time residents in the village.¹³⁰ Although rare for a *beg* to live in a village, Lazhec was no ordinary village. On the Pelagonia plain, it was blessed with an abundance of natural spring water utilised for personal home use as well as for irrigation of the fields.¹³¹ *Alush aga* was the most powerful of the three *begoi*, renowned in the district, extremely wealthy, and influential. The bulk of the *chiflik* land in Lazhec belonged to Alush and his land holdings extended into the villages of Sveta Petka, Negochani, Mogilica (Turkish village), Zhabeni, Kanino, Velushina, Graeshnica and Dragosh. Furthermore, in Istanbul, he owned nine commercial properties and according to villagers he was responsible for the construction of the officers’ building in Bitola.¹³²

A number of Macedonian and Turkish villagers in Lazhec owned their own parcels of land, separate from the large *chiflik* estates. These private lots were usually

¹²⁸ Trajan Micevski (born 1930, in Novaci, Bitola region), interview conducted in Novaci on 22 March 2000. Trajan Micevski is from the Masnikashovci family, one of the oldest families in Novaci village.

¹²⁹ Ljuba Stankovska interview, op. cit.

¹³⁰ In the nineteenth century there were at least two Turkish towers (*kuli*) in Lazhec village. Lazhec is the only remaining village in the Bitola region where a tower can be seen standing at the end of the twentieth century.

¹³¹ It is not clear whether the *begs* lived in their village homes on a full-time basis, although this appears to have been the case. Typically in villages, during the period under investigation, water supply in villages came from village wells, however the *begs* in the village each had a water supply in their homes - a tap of constant running water. Trajan Popovski interview, op. cit.

¹³² Vasil Stojanovski interview, op. cit. Vasil Stojanovski stated that Alush *beg* reputedly owned 4000 *pogoni* of land. Ashim *Aga* was another village *beg*, the name of the third *beg* is unknown. Alush *Aga* had two sons Beshir and Daut. The older son Beshir married a Turkish woman from Prilep and Daut took a Turkish wife from Bitola. The married sons also lived in the village, in their father’s large home which contained twenty-two rooms and had running water inside. The house was situated on five *pogoni* of land with a high fence around it.

small, ranging between one to three acres and were vital to the owners as they provided an added source of sustenance and offered greater economic security. It was rare for Macedonian Christian villagers to sell their land. Normal practice was to go abroad on *pechalba* for the purpose of buying more land upon their return. The unhindered and despotic rule of a *beg* meant that he could virtually do as he pleased with 'his village'. In Lazhec a number of Christian villagers were compelled to dispose of their precious land against their wishes, and sell to Alush, who would predetermine the sale price. The manner in which forced sales occurred involved Alush's bodyguard visiting the landowning villager and presenting him with a note written by Alush outlining the sale price. 'There was nothing that one could do but sell the land. Alush was Czar, God, everything.'¹³³

For the religious needs of the Turkish population of Lazhec, a mosque was established in the central part of the village on the southern side of the village-square. Its date of construction is unknown, however it stood in the village before the church was constructed in the nineteenth century. During the first half of the nineteenth century the Christians of Lazhec used the church of Sveti Spas in the neighbouring village of Graeshnica for religious ceremonies. In order to construct a church of their own, approval was first required from one or more of the village *begoi*.¹³⁴ Permission to construct a church was granted, on condition that the church be located a considerable distance outside the village (often village churches are on the fringes of villages). The *beg* even donated a parcel of land for the church. The Christian villagers would have 'preferred it to be closer to the village but had no option but to accept the offer'.¹³⁵ Establishing a church in Lazhec was a long and arduous process.

Construction commenced on the village church on three occasions, but each time the *beg* ordered its demolition. The church was successfully constructed in 1861

¹³³ Vasil Stojanovski interview, op. cit.

¹³⁴ It is not clear whether approval was required from all three *begoi*, or from Alush *beg* only.

¹³⁵ Vasil Stojanovski interview, op. cit.

only after the villagers sought assistance from the Russian Consul in Bitola. He brought the matter to the attention of higher diplomatic authorities in Solun, and the matter then went to Constantinople and gained approval.¹³⁶

As Orthodox Christians, Macedonians strictly observed the numerous saints' days with reverence. It was strictly forbidden to work on such days, just like every Sunday. The superstitious nature of Macedonian peasant culture created many myths about the repercussions of working on religious holy days; to do so was seen as 'upsetting the saints' or 'upsetting God'. One could expect some type of punishment to occur, which could take the form of an accident or bringing bad luck to one's family.¹³⁷ One particular Easter Sunday,¹³⁸ around the end of the nineteenth century in the village of Lazhec, 'after mass the *beg* summoned all the Macedonians in the village and forced them to work on the fields. The villagers deeply resented this act which was simply aimed at insulting and undermining us as Christians'.¹³⁹ By all accounts Macedonian Christians were exploited and undermined, but it was a rare occurrence for a *beg* to collectively treat Christian villagers with such contempt on an important religious holy day.

Sometime between 1908 and 1912, an incident occurred in Lazhec which demonstrated that Alush *beg* was capable of even-handed rule and could on occasion support the village Christians in their legitimate grievances.

An Albanian from Kishava, whilst walking through the village and carrying his rifle, took aim at a bird perched on the cross above the village church. His bullet hit the cross. The Macedonian villagers notified Alush and he sent his courier to find the

¹³⁶ Trajan Popovski interview, op. cit.

¹³⁷ In many respects this continues even at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Numerous stories abound of examples where individuals or people have experienced some misfortune connected to 'upsetting the saints'. Whilst conducting field research in Macedonia during 2000, a particular village religious day in eastern Macedonia fell on a weekday, however the villagers decided to celebrate the event on the weekend so as not to interfere with their work. During the church service on the weekend, the church was struck by lightning and two people were killed. The event was widely reported in the media and the fatalities were attributed to the 'angry saints', because the congregation did not celebrate the religious day on the actual day it fell on and chose to work instead. It is not uncommon in Australia for Macedonians to not work on certain religious days.

¹³⁸ Easter being one of the holiest of all religious days on the Christian calendar, Macedonian Orthodox Christians strictly fasted for a period of six weeks leading to Easter.

¹³⁹ Sime Mishevski (born 1943 Lazhec, Bitola region), notes of interview, 8 September 2000, Melbourne.

Albanian responsible. The *beg's* courier brought the Albanian to Alush from Kishava, having dragged him with a rope tied around his waist.¹⁴⁰

There were other instances when the Macedonians respected some of Alush *beg's* decisions. 'Sometimes he stood up for the Christians, and was spoken of highly when he did so.'¹⁴¹

Although not permanent residents in most villages, sometimes *begoi* remained in 'their' villages over extended periods, especially during the summer months, and this enabled the *beg* to develop personal relationships with individual Christian villagers. Friendships ensued and these were advantageous in certain circumstances. In Petoraci, Giorgi Duakov was to befriend the village *beg* and as a result of their relationship he was to escape what should have been inevitable incarceration. At the beginning of the twentieth century the *beg's* representative (known as *kea* or *keata*) attended the property of Giorgi Duakov to collect the annual tax. The *kea* went to the property during the threshing of wheat and,

the two men began arguing about the amount of tax to be paid. The argument became heated and in a moment of anger Giorgi fatally stabbed the Turk with a pitchfork. Giorgi's sons immediately went to Lerin in search of the *beg* and explained what had occurred, the *beg* advised the sons to send heir father to Bitola and not to return until he sent word. After a period of time living in Bitola Giorgi was advised that it was safe to return to the village, the matter passed without any further consequences.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Stojan Spasevski (born 1922 Graeshnica, Bitola region), interview conducted in Melbourne 30 March 1999 and 18 February 2002. Graeshnica is a neighbouring village, Stojan remembers hearing the story from his father (1876 - 1968).

¹⁴¹ Vasil Stojanovski interview, op. cit.

¹⁴² After the division of Macedonia, Petoraci fell under Greek rule and Giorgi was known to say '*kaj e Turbinot da ne vadi od zqator sega*' ('where is the Turk to release us from prison now'). Kocho Duakis interview, op. cit.

6.4 Commonalities

PART OF OUR post-colonial understanding of nineteenth century Macedonia is the recognition that the Muslim experience, although a minority expression, was historically relevant to the process by which people were beginning to see themselves as ‘Macedonian’. Just as the Islamic influence was apparent in Spain and in other parts of the Balkans, so too the Islamic presence in Macedonia cannot be ignored. In this post-colonial reading, Islam did not solely inhabit the world to the east of the Bosphoros.

Following on from Turkish colonisation, Islamicisation was a process that expanded over centuries, whereas the rivalry between the Balkan States for Christian Macedonians took place over a far shorter time frame – during the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. These contestations sought to mould Macedonians into new entities, although despite the intensity of the contest, widespread cultural commonalities continued to endure between Macedonians of the Christian and Muslim religions at the end of the nineteenth century. Not only did Macedonian Muslims culturally remain largely indistinguishable from their Macedonian Christian neighbours, as shown in this chapter customs and traditions practised by Macedonian Muslims in the Reka districts remained surprisingly comparable to those celebrated by Macedonian Christians in the distant Bitola region.

Commonalities between Christian and Muslim communities extended beyond those of the one ethnic group but also included Macedonian Christians and Turkish Muslims. Although Turks inhabited Macedonia as a foreign colonising population, a common lifestyle was evident in that the average village Turks were also landless peasants working the *chiflik* estates of a village *beg*.

Social interaction in shared Christian – Muslim villages should also be considered from the viewpoint of physical segregation. The significance of physical segregation between particular groups should not be understated. It has been shown that Macedonian Christians routinely did not live in physically segregated communities when sharing a village with Macedonian Muslims, and physical segregation was not typical in villages shared with Turks – however, segregation was likely in shared villages with Muslim Albanians.

It has been demonstrated that Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians were non-existent minorities in the Bitola region villages, and on a wider scale the presence of these people in the Macedonian countryside is questionable (except for a minority Greek population living in the extreme south of Macedonia). Subsequently, social interaction in the Macedonian countryside between Macedonians and Greek, Serb and Bulgarian populations respectively was clearly negligible.

A number of commentators have taken the view that the rivalry of the Balkan States over Macedonia played a role in the emergence of a distinct Macedonian identity. Perhaps too much emphasis has been placed on the activities of the Balkan States at the expense of the development of Macedonian identity in nineteenth century Ottoman Macedonia through the diverse experiences and interactions with Islamic influences.