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## Urbanisation, Migration, Depopulation and Virtual Ritual Community – The Village Kurban as a Shared Meal

**Abstract:** The paper deals with the specific use of collective rituals focused on blood sacrifice and a shared meal among Orthodox Christians in the Balkans, known mostly as *kurban*. In studying a variety of feasts, the analytical focus is on the collective gathering and the shared meal, which is celebrated by the small village community as its “homeland”, a sense of belonging to a virtual community consisting of people from all over the world. This paper pays particular attention to examples of the collective *kurban* in depopulated villages. Among migrants in big cities born in the same village, the *kurban* is understood as part of a common cultural heritage and a ritual that helps produce and/or re-produce a group identity within a broader national framework and urban social milieu. The *kurban* is also perceived by the participants as a ritual way of creating social cohesion for kinship-based and territory-based communities, beyond confessional attachment. In a selection of cases, the paper demonstrates how a blood sacrifice and a shared meal, as well as the symbolic use of the patron saint of a birthplace, recreates cohesion between the former members and the new migrants from the city to the village.

**Keywords:** migration, urbanisation, depopulation, virtual community, *kurban*.

Almost two decades ago, when we were preparing Biljana Sikimić's book “The Kurban in the Balkans” (published by the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA in Belgrade, 2007), I wrote that Bulgarian ethnology, which emerged, like ethnography in other countries of South-Eastern Europe, as an academic discipline focused on traditional beliefs, rituals and folklore, continues to be mainly interested in the cultural heritage of its people, which we, the contemporaries, know from older publications and museum collections (Hristov 2007, 245). The situation has not changed much by the mid-2020s. Bulgarian ethnologists and

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anthropologists still face the challenges of new social processes, new cultural phenomena and intense changes in the research priorities and methods. The new generation of scholars studying the process of transition from socialism to democracy trace in detail the social changes in the conditions of a market economy, the “revival”, or rather the construction, of tradition in the new, global world of migration amidst pan-European mobility but pay less attention to the peculiarities of the celebration system and ritual practices at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And although rituals should be among the main topics of ethnographic research, intensive ethnological studies in various regions of post-socialist South-Eastern Europe still tend to neglect the analysis of the ritual process (Creed 2002, 57). I have written before about the processes of (re)constructing tradition in the new pan-European mobility era (Hristov 2012, 985–994), and we believe that each new generation develops its own version and understanding of the cultural heritage of its ancestors, and the importance of ritually-maintained local identity increasingly takes precedence in wider social groups and communities. This applies, in particular, to regions of demographic crisis and depopulation, which we generally call “regions of declining functions”.

One such region in Bulgaria is *Znepole*, the region of the town of Tran in Central Western Bulgaria, which, despite its proximity to the capital, Sofia, has experienced depopulation since the socialist era. The region has little fertile land, which has forced the local male population to practice seasonal labour mobility for at least two centuries. Legends are told about the Tran craftsmen – builders who built the capital of Sofia after the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule (1878) and a number of other cities in the country (Hristov 2015, 38). In the decades after WWII, in the course of accelerated socialist industrialisation and urbanisation, the builders from Tran took their families to larger places like Pernik and Sofia in a short period of time, and seasonal labour mobility very soon turned into permanent resettlement. Furthermore, in the big city, they settled relatively compactly and created the famously efficient Tran communities for mutual help. The connection with their native villages in the Tran region became rather virtual, but the cultural memory and sense of local belonging were preserved in the next generations, already born in the big city. This article discusses the peculiarities of the ritual cycle inherited from the pre-modern era, which helps new generations maintain their ideological cohesion and local identity in the social environment of the big city.

This study<sup>1</sup> is a continuation of the studies of processes that we have been following as trends and characteristics for the last two decades in Bulgaria, but also in some neighbouring countries (Hristov and Manova 2007, 211–231;

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<sup>1</sup> The study by Petko Hristov was carried out within a joint Bulgarian-Polish academic project titled *Creation of tangible and intangible heritage. Central and South-East European Perspectives* (IC-PL/16/2022-2023).

Hristov 2007, 247–260). It is dedicated to an important group of celebrations with ritual sacrifices and a shared meal with a pronounced social function in some villages of the Pernik region (Central Western Bulgaria), for which the former residents who moved to the city and their descendants return to their birthplaces. To this day, these rituals have remained a characteristic element of the folklore tradition in various regions of the Balkans. They are related to the ritual maintenance of the identity system of various social communities (Assmann 1997, 143; cf. also Cohen 1885, 53). The ritual of joint sacrifice, known among all Balkan peoples (Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Turkish, Serbian and Roma) under the name *kurban*<sup>2</sup>, is traditionally performed by various ethnic and religious groups, both Christian and Muslim. In folk traditions, the *kurban* functions at different social levels – both as an individual sacrifice performed by one person and a collective sacrifice performed by a kinship- or a territorially-based community.

Our analysis focuses on the social aspects of the village sacrifice (*kurban*) as a celebration and ritual communal meal, reproducing community identity and virtual cohesion. Among the Orthodox people in the Balkans, these ritual practices very often coincide with the day of the village (*the village fair*) and the feast day of the local church's patron saint. This kind of research is particularly interesting in the context of post-socialist migration to big cities and increasing pan-European mobility, where some aspects of the ritual process are revived and others fade and are abandoned. The focus of this study is the social functions of the celebration in the depopulated villages of Central Western Bulgaria and the possible dependence between the demographic crisis and the spontaneous festive reactivation of local identity.

Our question is whether and how the ritual shared meal attracts the inhabitants of the (almost) abandoned villages who have moved to the big cities and to what extent it helps the integration of the newly-settled residents in some of them.

Our direct observations in the various depopulated villages were carried out during the field studies of Tsvetana Manova in 2023 in the western regions of Bulgaria.<sup>3</sup> The ethnographic literature on the matter emphasises the archaic origin of the holidays of the village community, their integrative functions and importance as group markers for different levels in the social structure (compared in detail in Hristov 2004, 166–167). In fact, it is a typical cultural phenomenon of the Eastern Mediterranean, the prototype and ritual matrix of

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<sup>2</sup> The word *kurban* entered the Balkan languages via Turkish but originated from the Old Testament, from the biblical *korban* (Rengstorf 1993, 860).

<sup>3</sup> The field materials have been submitted to the Ethnographic Archive of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at BAS.

which can be found in the Old Testament – in the sacrifice of Abraham (according to Asya Popova – cf. Popova 1995, 145) or the sacrifice in the Jerusalem Temple (Katsis 2005, 158–186).

The collective gifts (*kurbans*) and the shared meal were, and still are, the most central and necessary element of many annual village fairs (*sabors*) in Bulgaria throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marked a kind of “revival” of the sacrificial practice both in the village and the city, including the almost abandoned villages with a dozen or even fewer permanent residents. The feast with a shared meal marks the functioning of the village as a birthplace and is associated with the visits of emigrants from the village or relatives (and friends) from other places. Furthermore, by participating in the celebration every year, the villagers bring life to their birthplace and join the symbolic capital (according to Pierre Bourdieu) of their local community.

In the past, when the village was “alive”, each family took from the *kurban* and entertained relatives and friends from other places as guests in their house. Migrants from these depopulated villages turn the collective *kurban* into a sign of their community, a ritual marking unity with the patron saint of their church, but also the relationship between people. The ordinary village *kurban* becomes a kind of ideology of local origin and birthplace consciousness (Hristov 2004, 165).

There are 161 villages in Central Western Bulgaria (Pernik region). The population of many of them is alarmingly small. For example, fifteen of the fifty villages in the Tran region have fewer than ten permanent residents, eleven have no more than twenty, and seventeen have no more than fifty. It is similar in the other regions of the district. In most of those villages, however, the traditional village celebrations, the *kurban* and the *sabor*, are still alive today. This fact is of particular interest from the point of view of ethnology, folk psychology and demography.

The celebration in honour of the patron saint of the village church in the Pernik region is accompanied by a joint village gift (*kurban*) and a shared meal for all present. Gifts for the shared meal (money, provisions, wheat) are collected from each household, but there is no specific contribution – everyone gives according to their desire and ability (“*whatever they wish*”). It is believed that these gifts are given for the health and prosperity of the entire village and its residents. A specially elected group of men from the village (usually a church committee) takes care of collecting the gifts and preparing the *kurban*. They also invite the priest to bless the sacrificial lamb.

For the purposes of this paper, suffice it to list just a few examples of such *kurbans*. The text follows the *kurbans* in some of the places and focuses on the conclusions drawn from the presented facts. The examples are from our latest field research campaign in 2023.

In some of the villages, the *kurban* ritual has ceased for decades due to depopulation. For example, today, there is only one resident in the village of Kashle. In the 1930s, the population was 224.<sup>4</sup> Here is what one respondent said:

Back in the 1970s, a *kurban* was celebrated on Krastovden in our village. They would buy an animal, slaughter it and hold a *kurban* in the open space in the centre of the village. I was a child, and I remember those *kurbans*. Then there were no more people, and the *kurbans* stopped. For several decades now, there has been no living person in the village and no *kurban* either. [S. M., 51 years old].

Today, the village of Berende near Zemen has ten permanent residents. In 1980, the village had 200. The *kurban* was held on *Spasovden* in the Kumov Dol area, under an ancient oak tree. Even children participated in it. While the women prepared the sacrificial animal, the schoolchildren wove a wreath of flowers at school, went up to the area and wrapped the wreath around the trunk of the tree. In the 1970s, the oak tree fell and the local people moved the date and place of the *kurban*, marking it on 2 June in the village centre near the monument to those who died for the freedom of Bulgaria. Nowadays, the ten elderly residents of the village no longer hold a *kurban*. (G.G. – 80 years old)

The mayor of the village of Kasilak, which once had a population of 603 people<sup>5</sup> and today has only twenty, shared: “Yes, we used to hold a *kurban* every year on Ilinden. But we don’t do it anymore because there is no one to cook it, and there is no one to eat it – there are no people.”

Here are some interesting examples where the village *kurban* was interrupted but resumed years later:

Today, five people live permanently in the village of Studen Izvor near Tran. The *kurban* is on 12 July (St. Peter’s Day according to the old style) in the courtyard of the Church of St. Peter and Paul. One of the respondents, b. 1936, says that the *kurban* once existed, but when the population dramatically decreased, it ceased. In 2005, the hunting group from the villages of the Tran region gathered for the opening of the season and decided to hold a fair in the village to gather and see the former residents and to organise a *kurban* on the same day for the “health of all the people of Izvor”. The animal is always given by people born in the village, even if they live elsewhere now. Here is what one respondent related:

It doesn’t matter that nowadays only a few people live in the village. We are very close to one another. All the people of Izvor who now live in Tran, Pernik, Sofia or other places come to the *kurban*. They also come from the surrounding villages: Radovo, Kozhintsi, Mramor, Busintsi, Vulkan, Kosturintsi and Yarlovtsi.

<sup>4</sup> Population and housing stock census of 4 December 1985. C., 1986, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Results of the population census in the Kingdom of Bulgaria, S. 1911, p. 8.

People from abroad also come specially for the *kurban*. There is a woman from Izvor who lives and works in Brazil but comes every summer on this day. The next *kurban* will be given by her. [B.E., 51 years old]

Without describing the *kurban* itself in detail, it suffices to note that this year, about 130 people attended it, including many young people – 16–18–years of age. (Photo 1)

There are five or six people living permanently in the village of Gorna Sekirna today. In 1910, it had about 451 residents.<sup>6</sup> In the 1950s, the *kurban* was held in the St. Iliya area, on the feast of the Holy Trinity. Then the village was completely depopulated, and naturally, “there was no one to do it”. Five or six years ago, several families from Sofia bought villas in the village and now often spend the summer there. Shortly after their arrival, they decided to organise a *kurban* every year but on Ilinden, “so that the village will liven up, to have some life here in the summer because there is none in the winter”. (Sn.T., 75 years old)

Today, eight people live permanently in the village of Transka Bankya. In 1926, its population was 274.<sup>7</sup> Until the 1960s, two *kurbans* were held in the village – on Spasovden, in the Razkrasye area, which is in the centre, and on the Holy Spirit Day, in the Mladenovi Koshari area. Then, due to the depopulation of the village, both *kurbans* stopped. In recent years, on the initiative of the people born and raised there but currently living somewhere else, the Spasovden *kurban* resumed. Money is collected from everyone who wants to participate to buy the animal and all the cooking supplies. One of the local women boils it in three cauldrons. Two more women from the village help her. The *kurban* is held in the centre, and many guests gather together. People born in Bankya attend, their friends come, the administration from the town hall of Tran comes, and the tourist association from Surdulitsa in Serbia always attends. One of the respondents told us:

The village gets buzzing and full of people. There must be two or three thousand! There is a flag pole in the centre of the village. At that time, the Bulgarian flag, the Tran flag and the flag of the tourist association of Surdulitsa are flown. First, the priest blesses the *kurban*; then they give a little bowl of it to each person. People eat their *kurban* for health and the festivities begin. Music plays, and everyone dances and has fun. The party lasts late into the night. When it gets dark, there are fireworks. Then those from Serbia go, and those from other places depart, too. But if you have relatives in the village, you can sleep over at their house. It's very nice at these *kurbans*. They started again about ten years ago. And we haven't missed a year, even during the pandemic. People get together... The village comes to life on this day; this is why we hold it. [G.M., born 1946]

<sup>6</sup> Results of the population census in the Kingdom of Bulgaria, S. 1911, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> The Bulgarian village. Jubilee collection. S., 1930, p. 482.





Photo 1. Kurban in the village of Studen Izvor (photo Tsvetana Manova)

In the village of Ezdimirtsy near Tran, only nine people live permanently, but on the first Saturday after 2 August, Ilinden “in the old style” (Julian) calendar, an annual *kurban* is held in the Svetats area half a kilometre away from the village. Twelve years ago, two enthusiasts, who have roots in this area, decided to build a chapel on that spot. They built it in 2011 and named it “St. Iliya” after Father Iliya associated with the history of the village. They bought a bell for 4,000 BGN and erected it next to the chapel. Since then, the *kurbans* have been an annual event. In the interview with them conducted this year, they said that they did all this “so that there are people, to enliven the village, to enliven the place”. About 60 people attended the *kurban*; they came from Sofia, Pernik and Tran. Most are young families with children, but there are some older people, as well. Each of the interviewees explained that they did not live there, but their parents came from the village. There were also several families whose friends or relatives were from there, and they had come with them.

These examples lead to the conclusion that the renewal of the *kurban* usually happens because of the will and desire of people who originate from the given village but have long lived elsewhere. There are a few villages where this is done by families who have bought houses and live in them only in the summer. However, they pointed out that they did it to give life to the otherwise dying village.



Despite the small number of residents, some of the villages we studied hold two *kurbans* per year. For example, in the village of Lyalintsi, which has a population of only twenty<sup>8</sup>, the *kurbans* are on Holy Spirit Day and on Nikulden. The Holy Spirit Day *kurban* is held in a clearing above the village where there is a cross and an ash tree. The Nikulden one is in the church courtyard. The young people who live there only in the summer renovated the roof and reinforced it; they organise the Nikulden *kurban* every year. Traditionally, it is a fish *kurban*. During the pandemic, when gatherings were prohibited, they waited a little until the summer passed and held the *kurban* in the autumn, when the prohibitions were not as strict. On the Holy Spirit *kurban*, about 70 people gather because villages are livelier in the summer. (T.M., 40 years old)

The population of the village of Radibosh is 25. They hold their *kurbans* on Spasovden and Petkovden. Both altars are in the courtyard of the old school. For Spasovden, a sheep is bought and cooked with beans, and for Petkovden, a calf is slaughtered and cooked with rice and potatoes. For both *kurbans*, everyone born in the village, even if they live and work in the nearby towns, comes home; people from the nearby villages of Kopanitsa and Bornarevo come, as well. Here is part of the respondents' account:

They sit at the tables in the old school courtyard, eat from the *kurban* in a bowl, munch on the salads, chat and drink. Then we fill their containers, they pay and leave. We cover all the expenses for the sheep or the calf and other products. There is some money left, and the church board keeps it. Part of the money was used for some repairs in the church. One year, the *kurban* was special and very interesting. There had been a terrible drought before Spasovden. An awful drought! People were scared and desperate. We held the *kurban*. The priest came, blessed it, and then said a prayer for rain. On the *kurban* – a prayer for rain... And just a few minutes after the prayer, it started to rain. Imagine that! We were shocked! [L.I., 72 years old, mayor]

The almost deserted villages in which the *kurban* has never stopped deserve special attention. We will present three cases we attended this year.

First case: The village of Radovo is a typical village from the Tran area. Today, it has 15 permanent residents. Traditionally, on St. George's Day, a *kurban* and a shared meal are held, which, according to the respondents, have never stopped. In the past, the *kurban* was held at the local church and accompanied by the first ritual milking of the sheep for the year, locally known as *premlaz*. After many young residents moved to Pernik and the capital, Sofia, the celebration with the shared meal was moved to a public building in the centre of the village, called "the club", where not only local people but also their offspring and relatives, young families with children who have newly purchased properties and many friends of the locals gathered. For St. George's Day (6 May) this year (2023), a

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<sup>8</sup> There were 625 in 1926, The Bulgarian Village. Jubilee collection. S., 1930, p. 482.



Photo 2. Kurban in the village of Radovo (Photo: Tsvetana Manova)

lamb was donated by the son of the long-serving village mayor – “for health”. Each housewife prepares ritual bread, and the men take care of the alcohol – everyone brings their homemade *rakiya*. They greet each other upon entry with “Happy Holiday!” Lined up at the shared table, they wait for the priest to come and bless the *kurban* and then have their meal. The celebration ends with music and dancing. For next year, a man who has returned to the village and keeps 30 cows in an abandoned building promised to donate a lamb for the holiday. (Photo 2)

Second case: Spasovden *kurban* in the village of Potsarnentsi, near Radomir. Officially, there are 30 residents in the village, but there are also some holiday homes where people come to spend the weekends. The Spasovden *kurban* has never been interrupted, even under socialism. It was traditionally held about 2 km away from the centre of the village, where the Monastery of the Ascension of the Lord used to be. In the 1980s, the local people decided to hold the *kurban* in the village square since the monastery was too far away and difficult to reach for the residents, who were mostly elderly. They built a new church near the school, dedicated it to the Ascension of Christ and moved the *kurban* ritual to its courtyard. As a rule, the locals attend the ritual, but there are also many outsiders who have bought properties in the village and come from Sofia,



Photo 3. Distribution of the kurban in Potsernentsi (Photo: Tsvetana Manova)

Radomir, and Pernik on this day. They arrive especially for the celebration, stay for the day and leave in the evening. This year, on Spasovden, fires were lit early in the morning next to the church to prepare the *kurban* in three large cauldrons. Two sheep were bought and slaughtered for the purpose the day before. The sheep and other foodstuffs (beans, pepper, tomatoes, onions, carrots, and oil) were bought with the funds from the previous year's *kurban*. The celebration was organised by a Sofia family who bought a house there and now live permanently in the village. There is a shed with tables and benches near the fireplace. Some men bring tablecloths, arrange bowls and spoons on the table and sit down to a glass of *rakiya* while waiting for the priest and the others to arrive; the priest is to bless the *kurban* and the set table. Gradually, local residents and guests start to arrive, including young people with children – the locals' relatives or newcomers who have recently purchased houses in the village. The women bring ceremonial bread (*pogachi*), and the men bring Tupperware containers for their *kurban*. The *kurban* is blessed by the priest and given away to all the people present in exchange for some money, and each family takes it home, "for health". There are usually about 90 people at the *kurban*. Many stay at the table "to see each other and eat there". One of the respondents shared: "The kurban makes us closer to each other and better people. It really does, and everyone feels it. This is why we look forward to it." (O.A., 81 years old) (Photo 3)

Third case: The village of Rakilovtsi now has a permanent population of 30. It had 616 in 1910<sup>9</sup>, and in 1934 it had 877.<sup>10</sup> The annual *kurban* has always been on Spasovden near a thousand-year-old oak tree, 2 km away from the village. Now all local residents are elderly and cannot walk this distance, so the *kurban* has been moved to the centre of the village. They buy the lamb and the other products with pensioners' club money. People from the town or other places where they now live also come for the *kurban*. Everyone stays until late in the afternoon, happy to be together, feasting on the bread and sweets that the women have prepared, and in the evening, only the local residents remain.

The village of Shipkovitsa near Tran is a special case. Today, it has six permanent residents. In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were 608 (i.e. a hundred times more). The *kurban* is held every year in late October. Locals call it the "Soldiers' Saint" and associate it with the many residents of the village who died during the wars.

The social aspects of the *kurban* as a celebration and ritual practice are particularly visible in villages that no longer exist. The example of the village of Popovo near Pernik, whose fields were submerged under the waters of the Studena dam in the 1950s, is illustrative. Since the restitution of property in post-socialist Bulgaria in the early 1990s, the former residents and their descendants return to their destroyed houses every year for the village day and hold a *kurban* on the banks of the dam. Each of them takes part in the ritual sacrificial food to the place where the foundations of their old house are and eats it together with their family. In the era of accelerated industrialisation in socialist Bulgaria, these former village residents were forcibly made into metallurgists working in the town (Pernik), and some were scattered throughout the country. After the democratic changes in Bulgaria, the former residents of Popovo gather every year at the village *fair* to make the traditional collective sacrifice (*kurban*) "like in the old days" and "to show everyone that they are still there and that it is their place" (Hristov and Manova 2007, 219). Aside from that time, the village is completely abandoned. Thus, every year, the former peasants, turned into industrial workers, restore the connection with their predecessors and with the past near their destroyed homes.

Depopulating villages support their community identity and social life through new collective blood sacrifices. An interesting example in this regard is the village of Divlya. It now has about thirty residents, but in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was almost a small town, with a population of about 1,500.<sup>11</sup> Twenty years ago, on 28 August 1993, a woman from the village lit a fire in the

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<sup>9</sup> Results of the population census in the Kingdom of Bulgaria, S. 1911, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Population and housing stock census of 4 December 1985. S. 1986, p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> Statistics of the Principality of Bulgaria, S., 1881. State Printing Office.





Photo 4. The communal table for the kurban in Divlya (Photo: Tsvetana Manova)

hearth of her yard to prepare a meal. She lay down to rest for a bit until it boiled but fell asleep. The fire from her hearth ignited the yard, spread next door, then through the neighbourhood. The whole village caught fire. From that day, 28 August, residents have held a *kurban*. Two people go to each house and collect money. Everyone gives what they can. People who live in Sofia, Pernik or elsewhere but spend the summer in Divlya also donate. They may not be from the village, but they give money for the *kurban*. A dozen tables and benches are built in the churchyard. People come with cakes, salads, sweets and drinks. They call a priest from Zemen to bless the *kurban*, and they distribute it. Everyone brings a container to take some home. People sit at the tables for a few hours together, socialising and having fun, then someone plays the *kaval* and everyone gets up for the wonderful Divlyan dances. They stay together until late in the afternoon. According to the recollections of the respondents, they have not missed a single year since the big village fire. They hold an annual *kurban* on the *Golema Bogoroditsa* day. (Photo 4)

It was important to us to show that the shared village meal with a sacrifice in the deserted villages of Central Western Bulgaria represents a significant part of the ritual basis of the collective community consciousness, on which the local and national identity rests in the conditions of pan-European mobility. This is

probably a factor in their future development in the modern process of globalisation but also the depopulation of entire regions.

We drew the following conclusions from our study:

- In small villages, the *kurban* and the *fair* (*sabor*) have been the only village celebrations in recent times.
- In the smallest villages of the Tran area, with fewer than 15 inhabitants, the festive *kurbans* are the most popular.
- In the smallest villages of the Tran area, with 15–20 inhabitants, the festive *kurbans* are the most regularly held.
- Most permanent residents of the neighbouring villages also attend each of the *kurbans* in other small villages near Tran.
- Very often, the *kurban* and the village *fair* are on the same day: the *kurban* is held in the morning until around 12–1 pm, and the fair is in the afternoon, at 6 pm. In some villages, they run one right after the other.
- *Kurbans* can also be organised by people who do not live permanently in the village, even some who live abroad (e.g. this year's *kurban* in the village of Studen Izvor near Tran).
- In some villages, the *kurban* is no longer held due to the small number of residents (e.g. Kasi Lak, Slishovtsi, etc.), but some small villages hold two *kurbans*.
- The money collected during the payment for the *kurban* is kept for the next *kurban* or used for the village church.
- Those who attended the *kurban* themselves concluded that this gathering “awakens” the village and brings people back to it, at least once a year.

The functioning of the collective sacrifice (*kurban*) as a ritual of community identification and a marker of empathy and unity among the group members is clearly demonstrated in all variants of the festive sacrificial ritual. Holding the celebration with a collective sacrifice (*kurban*), even when the village is completely deserted, is an interesting phenomenon of the ritual process and folk religiosity at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These villages are almost deserted for the rest of the year. Territorially scattered, the migrant residents return every year and perform the ritual of collective blood sacrifice and a shared meal with a *kurban*, with the idea that, in this way, the village continues to exist in time: “We might not have a village, but we hold our *kurban* as if we have one.”



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