

BODY HYGIENE OF SOUTHERN SLAVS – RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL ASPECTS: THE CASE OF BULGARIA

Maria Schnitter

Abstract: The article aims to analyze the characteristics of the attitude towards personal hygiene among the Southern Slavs from the Middle Ages to present days. Based on primary sources and ethnographic literature of the period from 9th to 20th century, it reveals the picture of personal hygiene as an important marker of ethnic and religious identity at the Balkans in the past and present days.

Attention is drawn to religious doctrine as an important normative factor in public attitudes. It traces the various stages and transformations in the concept of „pure“ and „impure“ in the Balkans, occurring under the influence of overlapping cultural, ethnic and religious contexts. Based on the facts, two main conclusions can be drawn. First, under the rule of an alien confession, the attitude towards hygiene becomes ethnic and religious differentiation sign, moreover the association of hygiene practices with the cultural tradition of ‚the other‘ (i.e. Islamic culture) most likely prevented their adoption in the Orthodox Christian environment, i.e. „pure“ is interpreted as „unclean“ and vice versa. Second, outlined is the process of transforming bathing from a public affair to an intimate and private action that takes place in the second half of the 20th century.

Key Words: Southern Slavs; hygiene, body, Orthodox-Christianity, Islam, pre-modernity, modernity; norm.

Attitudes toward hygiene and towards the human body are among the essential and historically variable markers of different cultures. Scientists have described and characterized different types of such attitudes; from the cultures of the Far East, where ritual washing is a mandatory element of daily religious practices, through the Hellenistic cult of the nude body and keeping it in a state of health and cleanliness, to the Roman baths – these later having been centers of social networking and indispensable elements of urban social life.

As for the Balkans, in our lands attitudes to bodily cleanliness went through several substantially different stages. Thus far, science has no comprehensive data on the hygienic habits and requirements of the Thracians. We can only

assume that the mandatory cleansing rituals practiced by those initiated into Thracian Orphism also included purely hygienic prescriptions. More information can be obtained about Roman times – archeological studies have found a considerable number of public baths, built not only in the vicinity of thermal springs, but also in city centres. A network of aqueducts, covering the outskirts of cities, ensured the supply of fresh water and provided an opportunity for Roman society to practice its traditional cult of the healthy body. With the spreading of Christianity some of these facilities are regarded as surplus and their impressive structures were re-constructed and re-interpreted as sacred spaces¹. The fate of these facilities in late antiquity was quite interesting - most of the aqueducts continued to function for centuries after Thrace was no longer a Roman province (e.g. the aqueduct from the Rhodope Mountains, built in 1st-2nd century CE, supplied Plovdiv with clean water until the Middle Ages and even later), but the public and private baths in Philippopolis and Serdica built in antiquity were abandoned after the devastation and depopulation of the city at the end of the 5th-6th century.²

The question that concerns us is to what extent this process is connected to the enforcing of Christianity. Although it doesn't state a concrete opinion on the hygiene of the body, the Orthodox Church emphasizes the priority of taking care of the spirit. Furthermore – the inherited from paganism hygienic norms are oftentimes considered as harmful to chastity. Although ap. Paulus considers the body “a temple of the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor 6:19), which is fundamental to the whole doctrine, even in the apostles' messages you can see the contraposition of the “body” (σῶμα) and the “flesh” (σάρξ). There the body is also mentioned as a part of a “sacrifice to God” (“... I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, [which is] your spiritual service.” (Romans 12:1, American Standard Version) or “Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience: and having our body washed with pure water.” (Hebrews 10:22). On the other hand, in the context of the basic Christian dualism of body and spirit attitudes towards the body were somewhat negative, and caring for the body was thought of as vanity and a departure from the path of salvation. In the process of enforcing the doctrine that sexual intercourse is the main way to sin, any action related to the (naked) body (including bathing) was condemned as leading to prurience and threatening the salvation of the soul. Gradually the theme of the (cleanliness of the) body was pushed to the periphery of normative discourse, the body (as σῶμα and as σάρξ alike) being permanently marked with a negative sign. Even talking about the body was avoided or eloquent euphemisms were chosen, as if even only mention of the body might lead the faithful to stray.

¹ See for example the story of the transformation of one of the public baths in ancient Serdica into the “Saint George” Church – [Динчев, 2011: 113-116], especially p. 115.

² I would like to thank my colleague Assoc. Prof. Ivo Topalilov for the thorough information he gave me on the topic as regards Philippopolis; as for Serdica – see the conclusion of Dinchev [Динчев, 2011: 121] that “in the time around the middle of the 5th century the usage of public baths in Serdica has a tendency to diminish”.

A possible source for knowledge of daily hygiene practices on the Balkans could be the famous “*Responses of Pope Nicholas I to the Questions of the Bulgarians*”, which has not been thoroughly studied from this perspective yet. This document is widely known, repeatedly published and commented on.³ Although briefly mentioned in historical surveys dealing with Bulgaria in the 9th century [Мутафчиев, 1986: 158–160; Гюзелев, 1969: 202–208; Божилов, 1996: 72–73; История на България, 1981, vol. 2: 220–223], historians rarely review it as anything other than evidence of the ecclesiastical and political events of the time. Vasil Zlatarski made detailed comments on it and interpreted it as the attempt “of both the Bulgarians and their knyaz, even after the adoption of Christianity, to preserve some of their old pagan customs, beliefs and views.” [Златарску, 1971, vol. ½: 85–112, here 103]. However, Zlatarski’s attention is focused mainly on the religious and legal aspects of the text. An exception to the popular interpretations of the text is the opinion of Mutaftchiev that “these “Responses” are the most important testimony not only of the dead end, to which the life of the just-converted (into Christianity) Bulgarian society came; and not only of the Bulgarian culture in the period of paganism; but also of the spiritual status of (Knyaz) Boris himself...” [Мутафчиев, 1986: 158–159].

Let us discuss the everyday life of the medieval Bulgarians, reflected in the “Responses”. Question No 6 apparently refers to bathing: “... you say that the Greeks [Byzantine missionaries in the Bulgarian court] contend and declare that in no way should you go to a (public) bath on Wednesdays and Fridays ...” [ЛИБИ II 1960: 71]. The idea behind this is that the days observed as fast day – Wednesday and Friday – would be “become unpure” by something as “anti-ascetic” as having a bath. Can we find in this surprising for the Bulgarians ban the meaning known in the Judaism and obviously accepted in the early Byzantine church?⁴ In any case, it is clear that imposing of Christianity introduces the newly baptized in a different system of norms that they will assimilate by marginalizing their own traditions.

Although we have no clear idea of the hygienic practices of the Slavs, we may assume that the question raised that way stems mainly from the proto-Bulgarian hygienic traditions. The common concept of proto-Bulgarians as being primitive nomadic people has long been rejected by numerous archaeological studies and other data. It is an established fact that in the period between the 7th and 9th century they built numerous baths (and obviously – used them). Proto-Bulgarian baths were discovered during archaeological excavations in Madara, in the towns of Pliska and Preslav (Bulgaria), in many monastery centres near

³ Knyaz Boris I addressed his question to the Pope during the second half of 866, therefore this text is one of the few precisely dated evidences of the earliest epoch of the Bulgarian Christianization. See the edition in [ЛИБИ II, 1960: 65–125].

⁴ According to that tradition in Judaism, people are not supposed to bath on fast days. On major fast days they are not even supposed to wash their hands, if they need to go to the bathroom, only to wash afterwards up until the knuckles. This is because on fast days they are supposed to afflict the flesh and bathing is seen as a luxury.

the capital cities, and even in the temporary auls (fortified military camps) where sometimes soldiers had to spend the winter.

The technique of heating the water was the traditional hypocaust system known from the Roman baths, but proto-Bulgarians also built a large number of smaller and larger pools.⁵ It is hard to imagine that all these facilities were used only by the extremely limited circle of senior nobles (bolyars) and dignitaries accompanying the king. Bathing as a favourite pastime of the Bulgarians (St. Vaklinov suggests that this inclination for bathing is due to the long time spent in the arid Asian steppes!) appears even more significant, if we bear in mind that at this time, even in the sophisticated Byzantine Empire, the old Roman hygienic traditions had long been neglected and most of baths which had survived the past centuries, were dry and buried in weeds [Mango, 1981: 338-341]. We recall as well, that in Western European castles such intricate conveniences as running water and sanitation were still unheard of and emerged only a few centuries later.⁶

The response of the Pope to the Bulgarians is evasive – he quoted Pope Gregory I at the end of the 6th - early 7th century, and recommended having a bath at any time “if it is necessary for the body” and rejects it in all cases “if it is for the joy of the spirit and for pleasure”. Undoubtedly, the boundary between these two functions of the bath is rather vague and in fact the Bulgarians received papal permission to bathe, as they used to, every day. An entirely different question can be raised: when and how regular bathing ceased to be a part of everyday life and how the Christian Church, far from always being as tolerant as Pope Nicholas, contributed to this. According to Rule XXX of the Council of Laodicea “None of the priesthood, nor clerics [of lower rank] nor ascetics, nor any Christian or layman, shall wash in a bath with women; for this is the greatest reproach among the heathen.”⁷ Although the rule refers to the *washing together* of men and women, and besides this, an interesting statement is made that the ban is in response to accusations “by the heathen”. Washing together or separately, it seems obvious that, with the gradual alienation from the Hellenic tradition, having a bath gradually became less common for the Christians. However, we have evidence that in the High Middle Ages and the Bulgarian Revival (19th century), bathing was considered a highly unacceptable

⁵ See details on the matter by [Ваклинов, 1977: 91, 95, 110, 118, 122, 126, 194, 195] and literature cited there

⁶ Against this background, we cannot but be amazed by the artistic hit of the writer Emilian Stanev, who opens his novel “The Legend of Sybin, the Knyaz of Preslav” with the sentence: “The prince had returned from hunting and was now bathing” [Станев, 1968: 7]. Later on the writer sets a series of key scenes of the novel - including the final one! - in and around the bath complex. Without being a medievalist, the writer has caught an essential feature of day-to-day life in the Bulgarian Middle Ages, although he has anachronistically transferred it several centuries later.

⁷ Literally the rule also corresponds to Rule 77 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Third Council of Constantinople), which adds that such an alleged clergyman should be expelled, and a layman - excommunicated. In Rule 11 of that council there is the same penalty for anyone who comes into contact or bathes in the same bath complex with Jews.

activity for certain categories of Christians – e.g. monks, and for others it was limited to several times a year – before major holidays. In these cases, bathing was considered mandatory (eg. before confession and receiving communion at Easter), however, here again there are no instructions from the church – the tradition was maintained as a form of custom. Interestingly, according to the same (folk) tradition we have several mandatory ritual bathings unrelated or only partially related to Christian rites (e.g., bathing in the dew before sunrise on St. George's day, nameday bathing, showering the midwife on Midwives' Day, the bath of the bride and groom, the mandatory bathing of the newborn and the dead, etc.).

Regarding the bathing of the monks, we will only add that, according to orthodox traditions, it is considered unnecessary even today. A good example is the “new” saint Seraphim Rose (1934-1982)⁸ of whom his biographer Hieromonk Damascene writes: “In his life as a hermit, father Seraphim didn't have running water in his cell, and didn't bathe, never took a shower, but only cleaned himself with a wet cloth. As time passed, his unbelievably long beard (up to his waist) became felt. One would think that if someone doesn't bathe for so long, he would stink. But father Seraphim never did. One could observe this in other monasteries too, like Mount Athos, where the monks follow the same regulations. As St. Nicodim Svetogorets once wrote, “it's due to self-restraint, to absence of excesses, to the hard labour of the monk – a way of living that evaporates and assimilates all unnecessary body liquids. In later times, the Elder Paisii Svetogorski indicated: “through ascetic life, a person becomes somehow immaterial and although not washing, shines and smells sweet...” [Дамаскин, 2007: 628]. It seems that there is a paradoxical process of de-materializing the body, parallel to the ascension of the individual on the ladder of spiritual virtues, which is presented, among other things, as a falling away of the elementary standards of bodily hygiene.

Returning to the laymen, according to the study of everyday urban life in the Bulgarian Revival period (19th century) made by Rayna Gavrilova, “traditional society ... perceives washing as unnecessary health risk ... A typical person at that time undresses very rarely – in some special rituals. All other activities – washing and bathing, sleeping, sex, are done with clothes on.” Furthermore, “one should wash those parts of the body that get dirty – hands and arms, legs, face, ears, hair. The body covered with underwear shirt has no visible signs of dirt, therefore, does not need washing” [Гаврилова, 1999: 174-184, 174-175 here especially].

On the other hand, there is a specific area, implicitly related to water and bathing (as pleasure) and it is clearly marked as “alien”, “beyond-normal” and “dangerous”. This is the space of female mythological creatures (fairies, mer-

⁸ Father Seraphim Rose (born Eugene Rose) was born in San Francisco on 13.08.1934. During the seventies after a long spiritual search (a PhD on Chinese studies and Eastern religions) he converted to Orthodoxy and in 1972 founded a monastery in Platina, California where the monks followed the rules of the monasteries on Mount Athos established in the 10th-11th centuries. He died in 1982 and is currently in the process of being canonized.

maids, etc.) that are known to inhabit areas around water sources (springs, wells, rivers, lakes and swamps), where they bathe “in the moonlight” (to the sweet sound of the kaval (wooden end-blown flute) of a enchanted shepherd). Although having attractive appearance, these bathing girls are considered extremely dangerous and a meeting with them usually ends with “treacherous” disease and death. In general, to see a woman who is bathing is considered a moral violation (those peeping from behind the bushes by the river or through a hole in the wall of a bathroom are subject to a mandatory punishment). Additional negative connotations attributed to bathing (this time from the point of view of the church) stem from the fact that in many cases the medical practices prescribed by traditional healers and sorceresses include (ritual) pouring of herbal water onto the diseased person, washing the problematic area of the body at a certain water source or other hygienic activities. Following the principle of “alien” = “bad”, here too, bathing is associated with non-Christian behaviour, and is therefore interpreted as dangerous and harmful (if not for the patient’s body, then for their soul).

The disappearance of bathing as a daily practice in the Balkans in the Middle Ages is a subject that deserves a special study. Given the Muslim conquerors’s cult of bodily cleanliness, we can hardly blame the “Turkish yoke” for that change. A study of the bathing culture in Sofia [**Ivanova, 2012**] determines that the period after the Ottoman conquering is also a period of flourishing in terms of construction work and the actual use of baths in the city. According to information from multiple travellers in the 17th century, there are five hamams (public baths) in Sofia – Evliya Chelebi describes them being separated and unique not only because of the different qualities and mineral contents of the waters in them, but also according to the different religious and ethnical characteristics. There is a Turkish hamam, but also a “Christian” one, a “Greek-Latin” one, and a “Jewish” one (mikve). We can conclude that the traditional prohibitions of people from different religions bathing together still exist. Naturally, there is a strict separation between the women’s baths and the mens’ ones. However, it is important to note that there is no separation in terms of social class – even though bathing is more a part of the everyday life of the “elite”, everyone has cheap access to the baths. At the same time all sources emphasize that from a purely spatial point of view, the Muslim baths are significantly larger. Whether this is a form of “ethnoreligious discrimination” or a result of the fact that “the non-muslims and especially their women were sometimes too self-contained to use the public baths” because “the baths were connected to the Muslim parts of the cities” [**Ivanova, 2012**: 178], is hard to determine without more research. However, it is beyond doubt that during the “classic” Middle Ages, as well as during the Ottoman period, the public bath is predominantly an urban attribute. The majority of the (Christian) population, living in rural regions, rarely had access to such facilities.

According to ethnographic data from the 19th and 20th centuries [**Marinov, 1994**: 654], “our peasants, and sometimes even citizens, have a somewhat reluctant attitude to bathing, reluctantly have a bath. ... A baby is bathed every day for 40 days after its birth and then bathing is put aside. People are also washed when they die ... in both cases a person is bathed by other people without real-

izing it ...”⁹ Here we have to add, that even until the mid 20th century in the public baths it was a common practice the services of “telyak” (specialist, that professionally and for a small sum of money will “ritually” wash the body of the bathing person) to be used. Maybe the disappearance of that profession marks the moment in which the Bulgarians learn how to wash on their own? Of course we have a variety of local options. It is quite likely that in areas with thermal springs, the Ottoman cult of hygiene contributed to a greater penetration of daily hygiene practices among the Christian population. Yet, we must bear in mind that **the association of those practices with the cultural tradition of “the other” (i.e. Islamic culture) most likely prevented their adoption in the Orthodox Christian environment.** If we step on the theory by Mary Douglas we can conclude that here we have the case of oscillation of the “inner boundaries” among different communities, and “there where the boundaries are unclear, in their defense we discover the idea for impurity. The physical crossing of the social barrier can be viewed as a dangerous impurification with all the consequences... The violator is transformed in dual vicious object of reprimand...” [Дъзлас 2005: 214]. If we accept that as true, we can suggest that the boundaries separating the two major religious communities on the Balkans during the Ottoman period probably have not been so clearly represented as we are interpreting and understanding it today.

Systematic attention to personal hygiene was understood as a sign of low morals. A confession questionnaire, preserved in the Zaykovski prayer-book¹⁰, in Mount Athos, contains the following question: “Have you washed yourself after making love? Have you washed yourself for no reason?” It seems, washing after sexual intercourse was considered as particularly immoral, perhaps because in the Islamic tradition it is required both before and after the act. Paradoxically, it appears that **the hygienic practices of the Islamic population were interpreted as a marker of ritual impurity**, as opposed to the concept of their own (Christian) tradition of forbearing from bathing to preserve the immanent (sacred) bodily purity obtained once “in the source of eternity” (by the ritual of baptism). Naturally, we should also comment on the ritual function of Holy Water in the font, which by definition has qualities putting it apart from “normal” water and, therefore, guaranteeing her “permanent” purifying effect.

In the Revival period, in some of luxurious town houses, private bathing facilities were designed, but this was mostly in the ethnically mixed regions and was perceived more as a form of “foreign” lifestyle.¹¹ At least until the middle of the

⁹ Here it’s necessary to draw a parallel with the complex education of ritual washing through which the Muslim child have to go, before crossing the line between the childhood and adolescence and have the right to be included in all the basic rituals of the community, on the first place – in the prayer (namaz). The task for the personal hygiene as a “knowledge and skill” in every culture is learned in early childhood and it’s strongly influenced by the specific view of accepted or unaccepted bodily behaviour.

¹⁰ Prayer book from the National Library Sofia No. 960, parchment, first half of 14th century f. 39r

¹¹ See Hindliyan house in Plovdiv and Karlovo and especially Rhodope houses with bathrooms and home hamams - [Замеб, 1955: 106-110, 115-126], [Поноб, 1967: 45-52, 57-61, 81-83]. The multiple bath spaces (every bedroom has direct access to one) in the “Agushevi

20th century in Bulgarian cities, where there was an abundance of public baths, tradition required to go there once a week. Moreover, in the town of Velingrad for example – where there were seven public baths with different mineral water, and hundreds of mineral springs whose water freely poured through taps and fountains in the streets into the so-called “topila” (hot pools) – going to the public baths was a real ritual, which required at least half a day off. There were strict rules as to which day of the week people from which neighbourhood should go to which public bath (not necessarily the nearest to the neighborhood); who it is proper to assist scrubbing their back; what the order (hierarchy) of bathing is... Grandmothers would first bathe their grandchildren (boys and girls younger than 5-6 years were bathed by grandmothers and mothers in the ‘female’ baths), then put them on special couches, wrapped in towels, to sleep or at least have some rest after the intensive treatment (due to both the high mineral content of the water, and the high temperature, humidity, noise, as well as the rough massage they received while being scrubbed clean). While children were dozing off under their sheets, it was time for the mothers, and grandmothers to bathe, while carefully observing another set of rules – who can sit where, how to wash/cleanse the seat prior to sitting, in what order to wash the parts of the body, and so on. There were days of the week when Gypsies would go to the public bath, other days for Bulgarian Muslims (called Pomaks), etc. On those days Christians would visit the bath only as an exception. Visiting the public bath at a time when it was almost empty was considered a special pleasurable experience. On such occasions grandmothers would say they have had “gemish’ bath”, explaining to us that this was the name of the ritual bathing of the bride in Islamic cultures on the day before their wedding, which (linked with a series of rituals having their hair hennaed, their skin depilated, etc.) not only prepared young women for the upcoming event, but also allowed the female relatives of the bridegroom to inspect and evaluate the would-be-daughter-in-law for possible bodily defects. This “gemish’ bath” is a synonym for a prolonged pleasure – it takes almost a whole day, while from time to time women would go out to have some pastries, sorbet and pickled vegetables or fruit.

Bathing in the premodern era was definitely a collective activity. The nakedness of the body was seen as natural and trouble-free – to the horror of the modern Western observer.¹² Here is the place to mention that this tradition (of “collective bathing”), of which our generation has living memories, is actually pretty old. Let us recall the famous description of 1717 by Lady Mary Wortley

konatsi” (residential complex in the middle Rhodopes, built from 1820 to 1840, for the rich Turkish feudal Salih Aga and his three sons), deserve our special attention. They point towards the high hygienic standard of the Muslims, even far away from the town centres, in a time when baths were still exotic in the civilised West and on the Balkans alike.

¹² As a child – in 1968 – I brought friends from Germany to one of Velingrad’s public baths to show them “what it is like”. Their Puritan sensibilities were shocked by the thought of taking their clothes off in front of so many people. Today the reaction of the young Bulgarians will be probably similar. Meanwhile the bathing on the Balkans have become “private matter”. However that paradoxically is not in controversy of the mass distribution of public presentation of nudity – in the media, commercials, websites, nude beaches etc.

Montagu of her visit to a public bath in Sofia. According to her the scene could have had a strong impact on the oriental fantasies of a London artist: “To tell you the truth, I had wickedness enough to wish secretly that Mr. Gervase could have been there invisible. I fancy it would have very much improv’d his art to see so many fine women naked in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking coffee or sherbet, and many negligently lying on their cushions while their slaves ... were employ’d in braiding their hair in several pritty manners. In short, ’tis the Women’s coffee house, where all the news of the Town is told, Scandal invented, etc...” [Wolf, 2004: 7-8]. Naturally, this description more probably referred to the customs of Muslim women (in the XVIII century), but similar practices were adopted and undoubtedly inherited also in the Christian community in the following centuries. Of course it is mostly valid for the urban settlements. The present of baths in the villages can be viewed as an exclusion from the rule; the baths in the villages were built during the communist era and in present days, because of transforming of bathing ritual to a private matter, still exist as exotic SPA-centres.

We should also mention male bathing, which has its own rituals¹³. Alongside the tradition of scrubbing each other’s backs clean with scrub-gloves, there were the usual attempts to peek into the “women’s room” or at least to throw some ice-cold water over the dividing wall in order to cause confusion and joyful screams on the other side – immediately followed by the intervention of the strict telyaks clattering with their wooden pattens and restoring the order and good-mannered behaviour of the public bath visitors. An important part of the fun in the male bathing rituals was the time after the bath, in the pub opposite. Men would look at the maidens and the young women who come out of the public bath with an appreciating look and make corresponding ‘salty’ comments.

The adoption of bathing as an indispensable part of urban life in the 19th-20th century was actually a rather late innovation, especially in the Christian communities. Of course, it happened in quite different ways in the different regions (e.g., in the absence of unlimited running hot mineral water). Maybe a different hygienic culture was existing in the regions with hot springs which was not directly influenced by the religious context. For me – who grew up among the gushing mineral water springs – it was a real shock to read an inscription in a public bath in another city in Bulgaria during the 70’s of the 20th century which read “Save water!”. It was hard to imagine that water could and should be saved¹⁴. As to the villages, the changes described took place even later; even today in some parts of the country the bathroom is not a compulsory element in the plan of a village house. In regions where there are no mineral water springs

¹³ Although, as Sv. Ivanova rightly remarked [Ivanova, 2012: 17], with the availability of six different baths in Sofia in 1870, separated strictly by gender and ethno-religious characteristics, “there is no clear place for male non-muslims to take a bath”, i.e. there isn’t a systematic custom for such an activity, related to a specific facility. She obviously means orthodox Christians, as she talks about the baths of “Latins and Jews” prior to that.

¹⁴ In ancient Rome fountains had no taps – it was believed that to regulate and restrict the flow of water would be an insult to the god of the Tiber River.

in the immediate vicinity, going to a public bath in the past was a real journey with rituals of its own, planned and tied to certain times and seasonal activities and/or Christian holidays. People in the mountain town of Bansko still tell an old anecdote about a man from Razlog (a small rival-town nearby) who, having returned from the public bath in Dobrinishte (a town with mineral springs) found out that his sleeveless jacket was missing. He had just put up with the loss, when three months later he went to the public bath again and found his jacket – it turned out that the previous time he had put it on under his shirt.

However, it should be taken into consideration that the personal memories described here refer to a small town at a time of modernity and modernization – very soon after that time the majority of houses already had indoor bathrooms – whether especially constructed or adapted into washrooms, though far from complying with the European idea of a luxurious bathroom. Only in the 80s and 90s did bathing cease to be common and community activity and became something individual and intimate. The hectic renovation of bathrooms and their transformation into a luxury hallmark of social prestige happened in front of our own eyes during the last decade of the 20th and the first decade the 21st century. Members of the current young generation don't consider undressing in a common space as natural and prefer to wear swimming suits even under the showers in the separate closed off booths near the thermal pools...

The history of bathing in Bulgaria and on the Balkans is still to be written¹⁵. In this case what is important for us is whether the attitude of the Christian church to bodily hygiene determined the behaviour of the believers. So far, we dare formulate a hypothesis that the traditional folk concept of the nude body being unclean and obscene is in direct conformity with the Christian world-view model. This has a negative impact on attitudes towards personal bodily care beyond the strictly determined Christian rituals. Probably, the early influence of the Islamic ideal of a clean body on the everyday beliefs and practices of the whole community only occurred in regions of mixed religious population. However, this influence too, even until modernity, was restricted by the association of hygiene with the lifestyle of the “other” and the “enemy”¹⁶. On other hand, we can clearly see the process of transformation of the personal hygiene form “public and communal” to “intimate and private” action; it takes place in the last couple of decades. In this sense, we should ask how long the Bulgarian Christians remained “pre-modern” in their attitude towards bathing. Churchill's acrid note that “in the Balkans to this day there are people who say ‘Congratulations’ after a bath“ is not just an expression of (undue) Eurocentric arrogance, but also a classical example of divergence of interpretations within the framework of two religious and cultural contexts difficult to compare.

¹⁵ See the brief but useful work of [Popov, 1956: 79-84], so as [Ivanova, 2012].

¹⁶ Yet the scope of this convergence should not be exaggerated - even in the middle of the 20th century, with the construction of the first mineral pool in the village of Ladzhene (today a district of Velingrad) in 1936-7, the then mayor - the initiator of the work was threatened with excommunication for promoting immorality, and the local old women informed him that “if there is a pool, there will be no rain” (i.e. God will be angry and will not send rain) - information from his son, A.S., 87 years old.

REFERENCES

- Божилев, Иван.** 1996. *Културата на средновековна България*. София: Абагар.
- Ваклинов, Станчо.** 1977. *Формиране на старобългарската култура*. София: БАН.
- Гаврилова, Райна.** 1999. *Колелото на живота. Всекидневието на българския възрожденски град*. София.
- Позелев, Васил.** 1969. *Княз Борис I*. София: БАН.
- Дамаскин, Йеромонах.** 2007. *Отец Серафим Роуз: живот и дело*. София, покров Богородичен. [Hieromonk Damascene. Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works, 2003, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood. Platina, California].
- Динчев, Васил.** 2011. *Обществени бани на Serdica*. – В: Станев, С. и гр. (съст., ред.). *Изследвания в чест на Стефан Бояджиев*. София: БАН, НАИМ, 2011, 101–124.
- Дъглас, Мери.** 2005. *Чистота и опасност. Анализ на понятията за омърсяване и табу*. София: ЛИК.
- Златарски, Васил.** 1971. *История на българската държава през средните векове*. Т. 1/2. София: БАН.
- Златев, Тодор.** 1955. *Българската къща през епохата на Възраждането*. София.
- Иванова, Светла.** 2012. *Банята. Стандарти за отгих и общуване в ежедневието*. – В: Мутафова, Христова и гр. (съст., ред.). *Стандарти на всекидневието през Средновековието и Новото време*. Сборник материали от Първа и Втора научни кръгли маси. Велико Търново: Фабер, 2012, 169–193.
- История 1981.** *История на България*. Т. 2. София: БАН,
- ЛИБИ II.** 1960. *Латински извори за българската история, т. II* (= Извори за българската история, т. VII). София: БАН, 65–125.
- Маринов, Димитър.** 1994. *Народна вяра и религиозни народни обичаи*. София: БАН.
- Мутафчиев, Петър.** 1986. *История на българския народ (681–1323)*. София: БАН.
- Попов, Димитър.** 1967. *Архитектурното наследство на Карлово*.
- Попов, Мирослав.** 1956. *Върху историята на санитарното състояние на България и здравните схващания и навици на населението ѝ през средните векове*. – *Природа*, 3, 79–84.
- Станев, Емилиан.** 1968. *Легенда за Сибин, преславския княз*. София: БП
- Улф, Лари.** 2004. *Изобретяването на Източна Европа*. София: Кралица Маб.
- Mango, Cyril.** 1981. *Daily life in Byzantium. XVI. Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress Wien, 4.-9. Oktober 1981. Akten I/1.* (= *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 31/1) Wien, S. 338-341.

Correspondence address:

Maria Schnitter – Assoc. Prof., PhD
Paisiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv
Faculty of Philosophy and History
24 Tzar Assen Str.
4000 Plovdiv, Bulgaria
Phone: (+359) 899 192 857
e-mail: mariaschnitter@hotmail.com