

OPINION

by Prof Aneliya Yaneva

South-West University "Neofit Rilski", Institute for Arts Studies at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
on dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

in professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art

Doctoral program Choreography

doctoral candidate Martin Stoyanov Petkov

title of the dissertation: *The Wedding Ring Dance – Specific dance practices and rituals from the region of Sliven*

Academic supervisor: Anton Andonov

The doctoral student Martin Stoyanov Petkov is enrolled in the Department of Choreography of AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" on 30.11.2016 to 21.10.2024 and discharged with the right of defense on 12.12.20219.

Martin Petkov has a Bachelor's degree (2013) and Master's degree (2014) in Bulgarian Folk Choreography, as well as Master's degree (2014) in Art Management at AMDFA, Plovdiv. In addition to being a performer in the Dance Team of AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev", Plovdiv and in the dance formation Ethno Rhythm, during the period 2010-2015 Martin Petkov is also the leader of amateur and children's ensembles such as: Ensemble Sedenchitsa, Plovdiv and Ethno Dance in the village of Zvanichevo. Since 2017, he has been a performer in ensemble Trakia, Plovdiv and head of the Bulgarian dance club Gaitani (2020).

The connection of the doctoral student with his birthplace - Sliven is also associated with his work as an organizer of the concert activity of Folklore Ensemble Sliven (2016), and subsequently as a choreographer in Ensemble Zagore and in Ensemble for Folk Songs and Dances Zornitsa, Stara Zagora.

Martin Petkov's dissertation - *The Wedding Ring Dance – Specific dance practices and rituals from the region of Sliven*- is 165 pages. It consists of introduction, five chapters and conclusions, to which is added a bibliography (p. 185-189), including 96 sources in the Bulgarian language. A List of 23 respondents and an Appendix with photographs of traditional costumes and accessories are attached.

The first two chapters are introductory - an overview of the literature on the subject (chapter 1) and Social rules and beliefs related to the wedding (chapter 2). The remaining three chapters are devoted to pre-wedding (3), actual wedding (4) and after-wedding customs (5).

The study is based on information received in the villages of Glushnik, Topolchane, Kaloyanovo, Gorno Alexandrovo, Zhelyo Voivoda, Kamen, Ichera, Bozhevtsi, Stara Reka, Byala, Chokoba, Krushare, Kovachite, Mechkarevo, Samuilovo, Nikolaevo, Zlati Voivoda, Gavrailovo, Seliminovo; the towns of Kermen and Sliven and the information stored in Regional History Museum Sliven. This is how the "Wedding" custom from the Sliven region is analyzed, with a focus on the ritual practices, dances and games performed during the custom itself and the way they were performed in the past.

Martin Petkov's dissertation continues the work of his academic supervisor Prof Anton Andonov with his study *Wedding Games and Dances from Yambol Region* published in 2014. But Martin Petkov's

dissertation is also based on the previous research of many Bulgarian scientists and choreographers, to which the doctoral student has devoted (in the first chapter) a sufficiently detailed analysis of their work and activity, including the study of Anna Ilieva - *Historical layers in the dance folklore of Sliven district*.

The doctoral student defines geographically two groups in the Sliven region, which approach the wedding in a different way – in the mountain villages, the choice of the young is respected by their parents; while in the villages in the valley, the word of the "old" is the law.

An interesting detail in the pre-wedding customs (chapter 3), characteristic of the Sliven region, is that on the "Official Engagement" the girl is taken to the boy's home, where until the wedding she sleeps with his unmarried sisters or with his parents, who must make sure that the young abide by the social rules established at that time.

Another pre-wedding customs is introduced - the so-called "*talks*" when the resulting long-term material benefits for both families are discussed – the "dowry", the so-called *baba hak*. The *Talks* can take place both during the Big Betrothal, or on a selected day after it, but always before the wedding.

The wedding customs (chapter 4) are quite similar to the traditional customs from other regions of Bulgaria – making the flag; kneading and baking the wedding breads (ring breads); shaving the groom; braiding the bride.

There are also differences. Due to the fact that the maiden (the bride) already lives in the groom's home, the groom sends special confidants for the bride's dowry, who in "enemy territory", must perform this important task. There they are subjected to various tests by the maiden's family, such as the *buy-off the dowry*. The second of the mentioned two rituals is related to the carrying out the Ring Bread at the village square on Saturday, before the "actual wedding". Around the Ring Bread are performed ritual dances. Another important moment is on the Saturday evening, before the actual wedding, the girl's family comes to the boy's home to sell the girl's "wedding shirt". In Sliven this ritual is called *Sifting* and has nothing to do with "wedding breads". In the presence of the "godparents", who, although not assigned such formal role, in this case can be defined as "mediators", is performed ritualistic paying-off of this extremely important item. The future newlyweds do not participate in the bidding – representative of the groom is his father, and the bride's representative is a woman close to the family. The procedure ends with the purchase of the future bride's shirt.

Again, due to the fact that the bride already lives in the groom's home, during the actual wedding the bride must first be ritually escorted out of the groom's home, and after the wedding, she must again be formally welcomed by the father-in-law and the mother-in-law. The welcoming of the newlyweds (after the church wedding) is extremely solemn. But the idea of a church wedding gives the impression that the custom is more recent.

The actual wedding ends with the "sweet brandy", which is brought to the bride's parents, after the first wedding night if the bride turns out to be "honest" - i.e. a virgin.

The after-wedding customs (Chapter 5) are sweeping the yard and carrying water, and so on. called "*povranki*", when the bride goes to her parents' home for the first time after the wedding; and when, after fasting, he asks forgiveness from his godparents.

The after-wedding customs (Chapter 5) are the *sweeping of the yard* and the *carrying of water*, as well as the so-called "*Visits*", when the bride goes to her parents' home for the first time after the wedding; and when, after fasting, she asks for the blessing of her godparents.

The rituals related to the wedding, the props used, the names, the songs, the music and the dances in the Sliven region have important functions. After them is the ring-dance around the *trash*, which the sisters-in-law dance around the Wedding Flag at sunrise on the Saturday. The brother-in-law then buys-off the Wedding Flag and again leads a ring-dance, now holding the wedding flag in hand. Another example of this type of ritual dance is the performance of a ring-dance around the dowry during the feast in the maiden's house. During the "*veiling*", the father-in-law and the mother-in-law dance around the bride *old man's rachenitsa*, and the crowd sprinkles them with flour for blessing. After the unveiling of the bride, a copper vessel full of wine and small coins is placed on the ground, around which the brother-in-law with the flag in his hand leads the ring-dance, and the bride, the groom and the others join him. And after the first wedding night, the wedding guests burn the old clothes of the groom's parents, and at the end of this cleansing ritual, the father-in-law leads a dance around the fire.

The author also comments on the ring-dances during the wedding such, as, *rachenitsa*, *buenek*, *men's dance*, etc. An important part of the wedding are also the theatrical games that are performed during the first wedding night "*gypsy saleswomen*", "*bear wrangler with a bear*", and most of all the "ritual fight" between the groom's father and mother.

Three articles have been published on the subject of the dissertation:

1. Petkov, Martin, *Characteristic rites, games and dances on the Sunday wedding day from the Sliven region*, e-Journal VFU - Varna: Varna Free University, Section "Arts and Design", issue 13/2020, ISSN 1313-7514.

2. Petkov, Martin, *Ritual practices in the wedding custom Ring Bread from Sliven region*, Science, education and innovations in the field of art, second edition, 2019, Plovdiv, p. 340 – 347.

3. Petkov, Martin, *The Sweet Brandy - another way to communicate that the bride is "honest"*, Spring in the festive ritual calendar: tradition and modernity, 2019, Sofia, p. 203 – 209.

The **abstract** corresponds in meaning and content to what is written in the dissertation.

I believe that Martin Petkov's dissertation is valuable for the preservation of knowledge about ethnic groups, which in our modern society could be blurred. And I confidently propose to the highly respected Scientific Jury to award Martin Stoyanov Petkov the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 8.3. – Music and Dance Art.

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