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VOYVODOVO IDENTITIES AT THE CROSSROADS
OF INTERPRETATIVE PARADIGMS. SYMBOLIC
INTERPRETATION OF VOYVODOVO RELIGIOSITY

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Abstract. The article is focused on Voyvodovo, a village in the Danube region of north-western Bulgaria. The authors discuss collective identities of Voyvodovans, before their resettlement to Czechoslovakia after WWII. Founded by the Protestant Czech speaking families from Romanian Banat, Voyvodovo has traditionally been labelled as ethno-confessional community. The authors analyze this assumption and show – using mainly the written memoirs of Petr Klepáček, a Voyvodovan by descent, – that, although the faith was the main factor shaping villagers’ collective identity, it was possible to be a non-believer in Voyvodovo. They argue that religious “vocabulary” was used to communicate relationships of different types and served as symbolic tool. Faith provided a platform for resolving disputes of non religious nature, so even people who were not religious (did not believe) respected the priority of faith on a symbolic level.

Keywords: Voyvodovo; northwestern Bulgaria; collective identities; religiosity.

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NORTHWEST BULGARIA AS AN ETHNOGRAPHIC TERRAIN

The village of Voyvodovo, located about 15 km from the Danube port of Oryakhovo, was founded around 1900 mainly by Czech-speaking settlers from the Banat village of Svatá Helena¹. In terms of identity, religion and language, the Voyvodovans were unique within the Bulgarian speaking Orthodox majority of the region of northwestern Bulgaria. The Voyvodovans were not, however, by far the only exception in the region. There are several specific ethnographic groups in the region that differ from the majority of the population, such as the Vlachs, the Banat Swabians, or the Karakachans². The town of Chiprovci, located about 30 km west of the city of Montana, had a significant Catholic settlement since the Middle Ages. This Catholic island within the Orthodox world was further strengthened in the 14th century by the arrival of Saxon miners. After the unsuccessful Chiprovtsi Uprising of Catholics against the Ottoman Empire (1688), the local Catholics were either massacred or fled to neighboring Wallachia. Later, they moved to the Banat area, where they practically merged with other groups of Bulgarian Paulicians. After the liberation of Bulgaria in 1878, Banat Bulgarians settled in northwestern Bulgaria, for example in the municipalities of Asenovo, Gostilja and Bărdarski Geran³.

¹ JAKOUBEK, Marek. *Voyvodovo – etnologie krajanské obce v Bulharsku*. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury (CDK), 2010. ISBN 978-80-7325-230-4; JAKOUBEK, Marek. *Voyvodovo: kus česko-bulharské historie. Tentokrát převážně očima jeho obyvatel*. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury (CDK), 2011. ISBN 978-80-7325-261-8.

² FATKOVÁ, Gabriela. Karakačani v Bulharsku – pastevecká historie. *Lidé města*, 2011, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 51–72. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.14712/12128112.3576>; FATKOVÁ, Gabriela. *Bulharští Karakačani a usedlý život: Dům, jméno a identita*. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury (CDK), 2015. ISBN 978-80-7325-376-9.

³ JAKOUBEK, Marek. Voyvodovští Paulikiáni (banátští Bulhaři). *The Journal of Culture*, 2015, vol. 1, pp. 32–36. ISSN 2336-7849.

Apart from hosting a few specific communities in terms of collective ethnic or religious identity, northwestern Bulgaria has always been a unique region from ethnographic point of view. For example, there is historical evidence of the existence of *zadruga* here, jointly farming complex families that were not frequent in the eastern parts of the country⁴. Research on vernacular architecture and family in western Bulgaria carried out by Václav Frolec in 1960s documented the cohabitation of adult married brothers or even cousins existing in northwestern Bulgaria until the mid-20th century⁵. In many places, therefore, *zadruga* existed practically until the spread of socialist agricultural cooperatives. Moreover, only in northwestern Bulgaria, remarriages, *i.e.* subsequent marriages of widows, were generally rejected in the past, albeit they were common in other parts of the country⁶. It was only in northwestern Bulgaria that the custom of naming of children after godfathers was preserved until 1950s (sometimes until the 1970s), while in other parts of the country it had long been replaced by namings after grandparents or saints⁷.

In the following pages, we will focus on Voyvodovo, one of the “strange” villages of northwestern Bulgaria, and we will try to offer a new conceptualization of the traditional interpretation related to the local collective identity.

VOYVODOVO, THE MOST RESEARCHED, YET STILL UNKNOWN VILLAGE

In the past quarter of a century, works dedicated to Voyvodovo – the only Czech village in Bulgaria – have been so numerous (14 monographs and well over a hundred scholarly studies), that some authors are already talking about a distinctive discourse, “voyvodovology”⁸. In other words,

⁴ TODOROVA, Maria. *Balkan Family Structure and the European Pattern. Demographic Developments in Ottoman Bulgaria*. Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2006, pp. 142–143. ISBN 978-963-7326-45-5; ГРУЕВ, Михаил. *Преорани слогове. Колективизация и социална промяна в Българския северозапад 40-те – 50-те години на XX век*. София: Спела, 2009, с. 297–312. ISBN 9789542804818.

⁵ FROLEC, Václav. Vliv rozkladu velkorodiny na vývoj lidového obydlí v západním Bulharsku. *Český lid*, 1965, vol. 3, no. 52, pp. 164–175. ISSN 0009-0794. ISSN (Online) 2570-9216.

⁶ TODOROVA, Maria. *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁷ КРЪСТЕВА-БЛАГОЕВА, Евгения. Личното име в българската традиция. София: Академично издателство „Проф. Марин Дринов“, 1999, с. 58–59. ISBN 954-430-599-8.

⁸ FATKOVÁ, Gabriela. Fenomén Vojvodova v rámci české sociální a kulturní antropologie. In: *Voyvodovo: historicko-etnologická ohlédnutí*. Gabriela FATKOVÁ (ed.). Plzeň: Západočeská univerzita (ZČU), 2013, p. 10. ISBN 978-80-261-0333-2.

[N]o other colonization village has been so well researched, including the repatriation of colonists after 1945 and their further fate in Czechoslovakia, as this former Czech Bulgarian village⁹.

Does this mean that the research on Voyvodovo has already come to an end? Is it still possible, in this situation, to come up with any fundamental findings? We think so. A shift in the exploration of Voyvodovo can be expected on two basic levels. On the one hand, on factual level, this would be the case if previously unknown facts were revealed (a typical example of a breakthrough on this level would be the identification of the location of Sesek – the first village of resettlers from St. Helena, who later became founders of Voyvodovo on Bulgarian territory). In this respect, however, we would probably not be able to do without discovering a new, hitherto unknown source. Secondly, it is possible to move forward on the level of interpretation, by presenting a new interpretive perspective. The following pages will be an effort to implement the second of these options.

FAITH, THE RED THREAD OF VOYVODOVO HISTORY (AND A KEY FACTOR IN THE VOYVODOVO COMMUNITY CHARACTER)

Starting with the first important studies dedicated to Voyvodovo, namely the contributions of Bulgarian ethnologist Vladimir Penchev, the faith or religion of the Voyvodovo community was understood as a key element determining the character of this group. In his first text from 1988 – the very first study dedicated to Voyvodovo based on fieldwork – Penchev already writes, in this framework, that

among the factors determining ethnic contacts and interactions between the Czech ethnodiaspora and the surrounding Bulgarian population in northwestern Bulgaria, religiosity is the key factor [...] religiosity plays the key role of a mechanism for regulating mutual relations within the ethnodiaspora, as well as its mutual relations with the surrounding ethnic environment¹⁰.

In a following contribution, Penchev reformulates his findings into a brief thesis, widely quoted in the following years, stating that, in the case of the Czech diaspora of Voyvodovo, religion played the role of an ethno-differentiating and ethno-pre-

⁹ ŠTĚPÁNEK, Václav. Bádání o českých menšinách na Balkáně – staronové téma české slavistiky. *Slavica Litteraria*, 2016, vol. 19, no. 2, p. 131. ISSN (Online) 2336-4491; BOČKOVÁ, Hana; KŇOUREK, B.; BUDILOVÁ, L. J. Dům ve Vojvodovu. Stavebně-historický vývoj, kulturní a sociální rozměr (book review). *Studia Ethnologica Pragensia*, 2016 (2015), vol. 2, p. 132. ISSN 2336-6699.

¹⁰ PENČEV, Vladimir. Některé problémy adaptace českých usídlenců v severozápadním Bulharsku. *Historická sociologie*, 2016, vol. 1, p. 119. ISSN 1804-0616. ISSN (Online) 2336-3525.

serving factor¹¹, “for this reason”, he continues, “we can consider this community as *ethno-confessional*”¹².

At the end of the same decade, Zdeněk Nešpor published a study¹³ introducing a relationship between the Voyvodovo community and groups from the Bohemian-Moravian borderlands which refused to accept any of the “tolerated” confessions after the issue of the Patent of Toleration (1781), and, as a result, their members found themselves in Transylvania and Banat, either voluntarily (because they were looking for a place where they could freely profess their faith) or through forced emigration. Here, Nešpor found them and/or their descendants among the inhabitants of the Czech village of Svatá Helena, and these inhabitants, according to Nešpor, descending from those religious groups, left for Bulgaria in 1897 and founded Voyvodovo in 1900. Although Nešpor’s hypothesis was frequently refuted by subsequent contributions¹⁴, this author managed to establish religion as an element accompanying the entire history of Voyvodovo, much like the proverbial red thread.

More particularly, articulating explicitly the specific character of the Voyvodovo community, the contribution of Marek Jakoubek and Tomáš Hirt¹⁵ was fundamental in research on Voyvodovo where religion first appeared as *dominant organizing principle*, or rather as the privileged institutional order of a given community, determining other spheres (morality, economy, law, politics, folklore and kinship). Another key achievement within the established line of interpretation was – mainly thanks to the work of Lenka J. Budilová, based on a detailed analysis of

¹¹ PENČEV, Vladimír. Tempus edax rerum aneb O minulosti a současnosti vojvodovských Čechů. In: *Neco Petkov Necov: Dějiny Vojvodova, vesnice Čechů a Slováků v Bulharsku*. Marek JAKOUBEK; Zdeněk NEŠPOR; Tomáš HIRT (eds.). Plzeň: Občanské sdružení Voyvodovo ve spolupráci se studijní a vědeckou knihovnou Plzeňského kraje, 2006, p. 96. ISBN 80-85093-97-9.

¹² *Ibidem* (emphasis added).

¹³ NEŠPOR, Zdeněk; HORNOFOVÁ, Marie; JAKOUBEK, Marek. Čeští nekatolíci v rumunském Banátu a v Bulharsku. Část první – Počátky Svaté Heleny. *Lidé města*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 66–88. ISSN 2571-0958.

¹⁴ Especially JAKOUBEK, Marek. On the Process of National Indifferentiation. The case of Bulgarian ‘Czechs’. *Nations and Nationalism*, 2018, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 369–389. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12381>; PAVLÁSEK, Michal. Případ Svatá Helena. (Re)interpretace náboženských dějin české obce v Rumunsku. *Český lid*, 2010, vol. 97, no. 4, pp. 363–382. ISSN 0009-0794. ISSN (Online) 2570-9216; PAVLÁSEK, Michal. Hledání vojvodovské Pravdy ve světle probuzeneckých hnutí. *Lidé města*, 2011, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 27–49. ISSN 2571-0958; PAVLÁSEK, Michal. Obec Svatá Helena jako vinice Boží misími oplocená. Krůčky k přehodnocení chápání české (e)migrace na Balkáně. In: *Balkán a migrace. Na křižovatce antropologických perspektiv*. Lenka BUDILOVÁ; Gabriela FATKOVÁ; Ladislav HANUS *et al.* (eds.). Plzeň: AntropoWeb, 2011, pp. 111–145. ISBN 978-80-905098-1-8.

¹⁵ HIRT, Tomáš; JAKOUBEK, Marek. Idea krajanského hnutí ve světle konstruktivistického pojetí národa: proměny kolektivní identity vojvodovské náboženské obce. *Český lid*, 2005, vol. 92, no. 4, pp. 337–366. ISSN 0009-0794. ISSN (Online) 2570-9216.

Voyvodovo genealogies¹⁶ – the reinterpretation of Voyvodovo endogamy. While earlier authors, including Penchev, understood the endogamy of the Voyvodovo community as ethnic, Budilová showed that it must be understood in religious terms; *i.e.* it was not that *the Czechs married Czechs* (and they did not marry Bulgarians, Germans or Romanians), but that *believers married believers*. The argument on *the ethnic indifference of the Voyvodovo community*, presented and elaborated in several contributions by M. Jakoubek¹⁷ can be considered as the last significant conceptual step in this framework.

Although there were still different opinions among the individual authors regarding the *origin* of the specific religiosity of the Voyvodovo community, we can say that, in principle, there was a general consensus among all interested parties that,

[...] it was religion that constituted the central organisational principle in Voyvodovo's community, and that this community defined itself by intense religiosity and a central concept of "the exclusiveness of salvation", to the degree that the Voyvodovo community considered itself – in contrast to the others – the only "true believers"¹⁸.

FAITH AS A PRIVILEGED MODUS OF SYMBOLIC PRODUCTION WITHIN THE VOYVODOVO COMMUNITY

The authors cited so far are, without exception, "professionals", *i. e.* they are trained experts working in the academic world. Nevertheless, we dare say that the text allowing the reader to gain the deepest insight into the faith of the Voyvodovo inhabitants was not written by any of these authors. The contribution we have in mind was written by Petr Klepáček, a native of Voyvodovo (his "Loose sequel to

¹⁶ BUDILOVÁ, Lenka J. Některé aspekty příbuzenství a sňatkových vzorců u „vojvodovských Čechů“. *Český lid*, 2008, vol. 95, no. 2, pp. 127–142. ISSN 0009-0794. ISSN (Online) 2570-9216; BUDILOVÁ, Lenka J. *Dědická praxe, sňatkové strategie a pojmenovávání u bulharských Čechů v letech 1900–1950*. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury (CDK), 2011. ISBN 978-80-7325-263-2; BUDILOVÁ, Lenka J. Patriarchát na Balkáně – dominantní ideologie nebo škála možností? (Na příkladu Vojvodova, obce Čechů a Slováků v Bulharsku). *Sociológia*, 2017, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 405–426. ISSN 0049-1225.

¹⁷ JAKOUBEK, Marek. Druhá půlka Pravdy: Opominutá dimenze víry vojvodovských Čechů. *Lidé města*, 2010, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 527–567. ISSN 2571-0958; JAKOUBEK, Marek. Zastavení nad vztahem kultury, víry a konfese u vojvodovských Čechů. *Slovanský přehled*, 2013, vol. 99, no. 3–4, pp. 371–384. ISSN 0037-6922. ISSN (Online) 2788-3248; JAKOUBEK, Marek. On the Process of National Indifferentiation...; JAKOUBEK, Marek. National Indifference in post-Ottoman space. A case from Northwest Bulgaria. *Nationalities Papers*, 2021, vol. 50, no. 2, pp. 395–416. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2021.5>.

¹⁸ JAKOUBEK, Marek. From believers to compatriots. The case of Voyvodovo – „Czech“ village in Bulgaria. *Nations and Nationalism*, 2010, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 684–685. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2010.00452.x>.

‘Remembering and Telling about Voyvodovo’¹⁹ – this time a look at their mutual coexistence and relationship to faith, the Bible, God...” from 2012). One of the reasons Klepáček manages to make the subject of the faith in Voyvodovo more accessible than experts is undoubtedly the fact that Klepáček was himself a member of the Czech community of Voyvodovo and thus had the opportunity to experience what he writes about “from the inside”. But Klepáček is far from being just a witness and his text is far from the typical memoirs of a native. In fact, his reflective approach is much closer to texts written by professional researchers (it is not for nothing that our first meetings with him gave us the impression of talking to a professor emeritus of sociology, who happened to be born in Voyvodovo). And, as we will try to show, more than a decade after its publication, Klepáček's text continues to provide new and fresh perspectives on the issue of Voyvodovo faith and religion.

Klepáček's argumentation related to the changes in Voyvodovo religiosity is above all very complex. One of the aspects of this complexity is its multi-layered nature – in the parts of his text dedicated to the topic, he combines historical, sociological, ecclesiastical-confessional and individual psychological factors, while their convincing integration is another example of his perfect knowledge of the issue, as well as his authorial mastery. Some of the phases or moments of this religiosity's development commented by Klepáček have their predecessors, for example, in the work of Pavlásek²⁰, others reflect processes that have already been captured in narrative form in texts of other eyewitnesses²¹. Yet other moments within Klepáček's relevant development, however, have only fragmentary parallels or none at all. One of them is Klepáček's unprecedented capture of the “symbolic” function of faith and religion within the Voyvodovo community.

¹⁹ This is the title of Klepáček's earlier study, KLEPÁČEK, Petr. *Vzpomínání a vyprávění o Voyvodovu*. In: *Voyvodovo: kus česko-bulharské historie. Tentokrát převážně očima jeho obyvatel*. Marek JAKOUBEK (ed.). Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury (CDK), 2012, pp. 165–214. ISBN 9788073252618.

²⁰ PAVLÁSEK, Michal. *Hledání vojvodovské Pravdy ve světle probuzeneckých hnutí. Lidé města*, 2011, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 27–49. ISSN 2571-0958; PAVLÁSEK, Michal. *Obec Svatá Helena jako vinice Boží misiemi opločená. Krůčky k přehodnocení chápání české (e)migrace na Balkáně*. In: *Balkán a migrace. Na křižovatce antropologických perspektiv*. Lenka BUDILOVÁ; Gabriela FATKOVÁ; Ladislav HANUS *et al.* (eds.). Plzeň: AntropoWeb, 2011, pp. 111–145. ISBN 978-80-905098-1-8.

²¹ HRŮZOVÁ, Amálie. *Pamětní vzpomínky Amálie Hrůzové*. In: *Neco Petkov Necov: Dějiny Voyvodova, vesnice Čechů a Slováků v Bulharsku*. Marek JAKOUBEK; Zdeněk NEŠPOR; Tomáš HIRT (eds.). Plzeň: Občanské sdružení Voyvodovo ve spolupráci se Studijní a vědeckou knihovnou Plzeňského kraje, 2006, pp. 106–111. ISBN 80-85093-97-9; HRŮZOVÁ, Amálie. „Odkaz mojim dětem, vnukům a právnickům“. In: *Voyvodovo: kus česko-bulharské historie. Tentokrát převážně očima jeho obyvatel*. Marek JAKOUBEK (ed.). Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury (CDK), 2011, pp. 46–55. ISBN 978-80-7325-261-8.

Klepáček's key thesis, which we consider to be completely unprecedented, or unprecedentedly revealing, is that, within the Voyvodovo community, "behind the curtain (or behind the façade) of faith and the church were addressed problems related to other areas of coexistence"²². Although Klepáček explicitly mentions the area of conflicts, the use of religious "vocabulary" in communicating relationships of different types was common even in many everyday situations. This vocabulary was used even in light-hearted form, as a joke, when people made relevant references to the religious sphere, even though the real motivation for their relevant action came from a completely mundane and secular sphere. Such a case is well illustrated by an incident told by another Voyvodovo native, Barbora Čížková (b. 1921):

... Dad got up in the morning and fed them – Dad used to get up before the day to get the horses, everything ready – and went and woke them up: "Get up, boys, we're going to the field". And he had everything loaded and... Franta may have been out by now, but Štěpa wasn't – *he was kneeling... pretending he was praying*. And dad said: "Štěpa, come on, I've got the horses out... And Štěpa: "*Hey, you won't even let a man pray!*"²³

Although this strategy was one of the structural principles throughout the history of the Voyvodovo community, its culmination, according to Klepáček, occurred mainly at the time of the clashes between the supporters of the original Methodist congregation and the newly constituted camp of Gottlob Kowal's followers which divided the originally confessionally united community into two "churches", called "upper" (Darbyst, led by Kowal) and "lower" (Methodists). Although the period brought many unprecedented attitudes and situations in the Voyvodovo community, a number of key aspects of the previous regime remained intact. For example, it was still not possible to publicly declare "we are the better ones" or "you are the worse" at intergroup level and the issue was addressed precisely on the level of faith – *i.e.* "our faith is better than yours". Similarly, on interpersonal level – to which the dispute soon shifted, – it was not possible to speak openly and negatively about someone, or, as Klepáček writes, "to say negative things outright". It was not acceptable to explicitly question someone's actions or attitudes and to publicly label them as shameful or vile ("bad deeds were not discussed"); however, the privileged "code" made it possible to question the status of the faith of a specific person. It is precisely at the level of personal relationships that many Voyvodovans have now begun, as Klepáček says, to "settle scores", but even now they did so in accordance

²² KLEPÁČEK, Petr. Volné pokračování „Vzpomínání a vyprávění o Vojvodovu“ – tentokrát pohled na jejich vzájemné soužití a vztah k víře, Bibli, Bohu.... In: *Vojvodovo: historie, obyvatelstvo, migrace*. Marek JAKOUBEK (ed.). Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury (CDK), 2012, p. 149. ISBN 978-80-7325-292-2.

²³ Barbora Čížková, Mikulov; 9. 3. 2012.

with *the key symbolic sphere* of the community. So faith, or disputes about it, provided a “platform” for resolving disputes related to other spheres, whether it was politics, economics, morality, etc.

However, to grasp the core of Klepáček’s principle, it is probably necessary to go even further. As we have seen, practically all authors we have cited have always assumed, albeit rather implicitly, that, in the case of members of the Voyvodovo community, we are always talking about *believers*. The fact that – as Klepáček shows in a number of examples – the Voyvodovo believers were able to communicate relationships of different types under the symbolic guise of discussions about faith is a significant finding and Klepáček rightly deserves respect for it. Nevertheless, the core of the argument is yet to come, because Klepáček does not stop here and goes further. Thus, he openly states that some of the people of Voyvodovo did not experience the personal or existential dimension of faith; to put it radically, they were not believers. According to him, especially in the later phase of the history of Voyvodovo, belonging to this part of the population corresponded primarily to a generational affiliation²⁴. To this extent, Klepáček’s argument is quite predictable (although it should be noted that he is the first author ever to explicitly point out the existence of this phenomenon!).

However, in this context, it is much more important that the people in question *continued to respect the priority of faith*, even though (from their perspective) they did so “only” on a symbolic or instrumental level. Members of this part of the population of Voyvodovo, as Klepáček says, “learned the phraseology and rhetoric of the Bible and the phraseology and rhetoric of faith quite well”²⁵ and they communicated and commented on their activities in accordance. In other words, they continued to recognize the dominance of faith but understood it primarily (or exclusively) as a means of communication, as “rhetoric”. Thus, in Voyvodovo, faith, or rather the sphere of religiosity, provided – and to everyone without distinction – a “language”

²⁴ However, a lukewarm or even negative approach to faith was already present in at least some parts of the Voyvodovo community (or at certain stages of life?). This is well shown, for example, by the memories of Josef Kopřiva (born 1916) captured in Voyvodovo by V. Penčev on 3.7.1984: JK (Josef Kopřiva):

I’ll tell you how I remember it. In the evening, when you go to bed, you have to pray. In the morning when you get up – again. When you go to breakfast, you have to pray, when breakfast is over, you have to pray again. And for lunch too. *That was what I hated the most, but otherwise I couldn’t eat, otherwise they wouldn’t give you anything.* They lived very austere and strict. Especially on Sunday. After the service, an old woman or assistant preacher led a “Sunday school”, that’s what it was called. There they taught songs and handed out these cards where they wrote about Palestine, the Holy Sepulchre and so on. ... *If I didn’t go and someone told my mom that I wasn’t there, I would get beaten* (qtd. in JAKOUBEK, Marek. Penčevovy Folklorní materiály z obce Voyvodovo (výběrová edice). *Porta Balkanica*, vol. 4, 1–2, p. 52, italics added. ISSN 2570-5946).

²⁵ KLEPÁČEK, Petr. *Op. cit.*, p. 123.

through which it was possible to formulate attitudes and relationships that we would articulate today in terms belonging to completely different spheres. That is, at the level of the idioms used, or the overall “vocabulary”, there was no difference between believers and non-believers within the Voyvodovo community – the latter also spoke the language of the Bible and faith, and they also performed their deeds “with a Bible in his hand” (and, of course, as Klepáček adds, “without blushing”²⁶). It is only this observation of Klepáček that represents a radical novelty in research on Voyvodovo, changing the existing view of this village and its inhabitants in a very radical way.

CONCLUSION

Within the framework of the critical reception, or rather, within the reinterpretation of structuralism, Marshall Sahlins (especially in his work *Culture and Practical Reason*²⁷) concludes that “[e]ach type of society is defined by a privileged source of symbolism”²⁸. We suggest that, in this perspective, we could conclude this article by underlining that the specificity of this community and, in a comparative perspective, its constitutive element and defining characteristic was not (as has been commonly stated so far) that its inhabitants were *religious* – some of them were certainly not – but that *the privileged source of its symbolism was faith*, or that *religious symbolism was structurally determining within a given community*.

* * *

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²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 135.

²⁷ SAHLINS, Marshall. *Culture and Practical Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976. ISBN 0226733594.

²⁸ KUPER, Adam. *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account*. London: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 170. ISBN 0674000977.

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ГОДИШНИК НА СОФИЙСКИЯ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ
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ПАРАДИГМИ. СИМВОЛНА ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ
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Резюме. Статията изследва село Войводово, разположено в Дунавския регион, Северозападна България. Авторите разглеждат колективните идентичности на войводовчани преди преселването им в Чехословакия след Втората световна война. Основано от протестантски семейства от румънския Банат, говорещи чешки език, Войводово традиционно е определяно като етноконфесионална общност. Авторите анализират това гледище и показват, използвайки основно писмените спомени на Петър Клепачек, който е по произход от Войводово, че макар вярата да е основният фактор, формиращ колективната идентичност на жителите на селото, в него все пак е било възможно човек да не бъде вярващ. Според тях религиозният „речник“ се използва като символно средство при общуването в контекста на различни взаимоотношения. Вярата предоставя поле за разрешаване на спорове от нерелигиозен характер, така че дори тези, които не са религиозни (вярващи), проявяват уважение към предимството, което ѝ се отдава в символен план.

Ключови думи: Войводово, Северозападна България, колективни идентичности, религиозност.