

ASPECTS OF THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF THE VOTIVE IN THE BELIEFS OF THE BALKAN PEOPLES

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The report presents the place of the various types of votive objects in the rituals of the population of part of the Balkans. Since when are the first role models, what role do they play in people's beliefs and rituals, both in pagan times and in Christianity. The present state of this type of ritual and the attention of the community and the church are presented. Projects are presented that promote these little-known ones.

Keywords :

Votive, rites, Christianity, Balkans

1. INTRODUCTION

From their existence people pray to supreme powers for health, prosperity, and dress all their requests and wishes in prayers. They forward them to their deities in different forms, according to rituals in different religions. In the rites left over from prehistoric times, people try to resemble their desires in the form of physical images. As man depicts his deities in the form of statues and paintings, the work of voyages that have the image and shape of the desired object is likewise practiced. Votive comes from the Latin verb *voveo*, which means a vow or a promise. The past participle of *voveo* is *votum*, which means a vow, or a promise made to God. Thus, the voice means something that is offered / consecrated / sanctified in accordance with the vow. For example, if a prayer wishes to recover his or her sight - a tile formed in the shape of eyes is left; if a woman asks for a child, she leaves a child-shaped figure. The same happens with livestock and harvest themes. (fig 1,2)

2. HISTORICAL SITUATION

Apart from prehistory, similar objects were found in ancient Egypt, Assyria, Greece, Rome, Etruscan and Thracian. Since ancient times, people have sacrificed something for deities because of their consciousness of dependence on them or of gratitude for mercy. The ancient Egyptians brought into their temples figurines with the shape of hands, ears, eyes, etc. in cases of sickness of different parts of the body. There are often various bronze and clay primitive figurines found during excavations around the altars of the ancient gods as well as in the family altars. Reliefs of whole bodies or separate parts of the it, are left in different parts of the world. Ancient inscriptions reveal to us that they are presented as gifts on pledge to the revered gods. Apart from Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome there are many votive figures in our lands. Ancient Thrace is known for thousands of votives. However, some of the Thracian treasures that are not funeral gifts can be interpreted as godly gifts for deities. (fig 3)

The word votive is used both for the act of the dedication itself or for the promise and for the committed subject. The notion of a votive plate is often found - these are places in shrines and sacred places where sacrifices of animals, food, and this type of figures were made. Naturally, these pagan practices also accept their Christian form, through the sacrifices of church feasts and the vicious figures placed on the icons. (fig. 4)

There is also another type of votive - when you light a candle in the church, the candle itself is called an echo, but the candle light is an act of offering something according to the vow or promise. In Christian terms, what is happening is to offer a prayer to God on behalf of someone or something and to light the candle as a corporeal sign of this prayer. In the various branches of Christianity, the candles are in different forms. In Orthodoxy they are long and in Catholicism they are low and broad. (fig 5.)

3. SPECIFICITY OF SURFACE

The transition from pagan to Christianity is a complex process. For a long time among Christians, different pagan concepts and customs continued to exist. The church struggles with them, trying to Christianize them or eliminate them. They have not only a pagan but also a magical character, because they are based on imitation magic. We resemble (imitate) a healthy part, offer it and expect to get the same but healthy. This is also the case with the vovels. One of the popular monuments, which testifies to the struggle of the church with the artistic gifts, is the famous *Indiculus*. It lists the pagan beliefs and customs that are subject to prohibition, among which is the *superstitionum et paganiarum* by the time of Carl the Great. In Eastern Orthodoxy, the Greek Orthodox Church uses the terms *Τάματα και αναθήματα*. The first means a vow. The word *αναθήματα* originates from the verb "*ανατίθημι*", which means trust, dedication. The prayer offers the saint an object, and in return awaits the fulfillment of desire or request.

Votives are made of different kind of materials, the most common being those of precious metals. They aren't used directly at the service itself but are placed in holy places - on icons in the temples, in consecrated grounds attached to a red thread. This way they are situated in a sacral conceived area - an orchard, ancient sanctuary, healing waters, and temples. Votives are most often placed on the icon of the saint who is believed to be able to help with healing or well-being. There are special prayers to fill the vows in the Christian tradition. Often, small rings are placed on the votive figurines so they can be energized from the sacred place and then worn as an amulet. This the idea of the abstract, omnipotent deity materializes, and the icons receive preternatural abilities. In such an environment is the practice of refreshing the icons with voices, coins, orders, etc.

In Bulgaria and the rest of the Balkans there is a combination of pagan images placed in the middle of the context of Christian identity. An example of this is the images of a Thracian horseman placed in the figurativeness of St. George. In Strandja there is a chapel with a similar combination of these two images.

4. MANUFACTURE AND TYPES

The early patterns of the pledges have an elementary silhouette of dots or circular traces that play the role of eyes. Archaeological discoveries include other types of processing that are more detailed and more elaborate. (fig.6)

The vows are made of thin silver plaques, contoured cut out and taken off. They were hanging on a red thread that has been hung on the icon or were directly stuck with wax on it. The figures depict humans, animals and human organs. (fig.7)

The votives show a good knowledge of the anatomy of the human body. They lack the master's pursuit of individualizing the image, as it is the style of the era in which it was created. They are interesting for the idea they wear and are perceived as a symbol of this idea. Some of them are further processed, while others are without additional decoration. In Christianity, the cross embodies immortality and resurrection, life. Placed on the chest, it has a protective function, in the votives it denotes the diseased place.

Preferred materials for making are precious metals - silver keeps from evil forces and is anti-inflammatory, and gold is associated with light, sun and wealth. (fig.8)

They were most often placed on the icon of the saint who was believed to be able to bring healing and prosperity, as well as the motives of offering, the votives can be divided into two groups: Votives whose motive is desire or gratitude for health and votives, whose motif of serving is a wish for a child or a child's gratitude. In both cases, the gifts are personal. Less often, they are donated by one person to another one or family, as is the case for pregnancy or infertility barrenness.

The pledges are from the Renaissance era and are made in the same iconographic style typical of the Bulgarian lands of this period. In the 1950s, the master-jeweler presented the human body naturally with its distinctive clothing and decoration. The votives differ from the church fittings with their not so elaborate treatment. They are often made by goldsmiths, who over time become more and more skillful in making them. The votives - legs mainly cover the lower part between the knee and the ankle, and the arms – the place around the wrist, so they resemble gloves with an ornate cuff. The most common decoration in this type of pledges are stylized margaritas, tulips, leaves, twigs and granules amongst them. There are also whole figures of saints, which are depicted as close as possible to the canon, with their specific attributes. (fig.9)

In the western parts of the Balkans and parts of Europe it is popular to make wax votives. They are not only parts of the body but are often complete figures. This is a combination of the tradition of lighting a candle that is made of wax and the volitional tradition of symbolic figures. (fig.10)

5. MODERN SITUATION

Today, such traditions have left memories and artifacts that can be seen in different museums around the world, but the practice is still alive today. And as in every tradition, and in the course of time, there have been various changes and transformations with time. In Bulgaria there are exhibitions of various regional museums where visitors interpret the votive tradition in the following way: the extemporary tree is affixed with cards of votive images, and on the back of the card is the prayer's wish. (fig.11)

Another interesting regional project related to the pastoral peoples is the international project is Kanepal. It includes a variety of areas of pastoral life, and in the field of art, it is directly concerned with the theme of the votives associated with livestock and shepherding. The shepherds often prayed gods for figurines of animals from ancient times, they are directly related to human survival and livelihood. In the project there were made new votives and were interpreted also in contemporary shapes.

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Fig 1. Silver votive figures.



Fig 2. Votive figure for treating a sick leg.



Fig 3. Thracian votive tile.



Fig 4. Votive figures tied with a red thread with a request for health.



Fig 5. Candles as a species of votives, traditional candles with a long form, characteristic of Orthodoxy.



Fig 6. Votive figure of a saint, with the function of a mascot.



Fig 7. Votive figures representing different parts of the human body.



Picture 8. Figures representing different wish.



Fig 9. Votive figure from the Renaissance.



Fig 10. Votive wax figures.



Picture 11. A tree of desires, instead of votive figures, people pick up cards with this kind of images.