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SECULAR OR RELIGIOUS GESTURE IS A "BET" IN BULGARIAN CULTURE?

Gesture "bet" is not a part of some Bulgarian custom or ritual. It does not appear also as binding gesture in the liturgy of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, the gesture has a special place in Bulgarian culture as traditional behaviour. Until now it has not been tested by our ethnological science, therefore the notions of its appearance, function and semantics in our culture are ambiguous. Also lacks detailed ethnographic descriptions of the conditions of its use. Therefore, this study can use only partially documented scientific evidences and examples from literature. From this position the study of a similar sign loaded gesture is a difficult task. Only by using a special method can be achieved some success in solving the problem. In order to obtain greater clarity on the way of this research is necessary here briefly to be present the used scientific instruments, by which we'll make an attempt to resolve the problem.

Gesture, posture, action, facial expression and gaze, which create gestures behaviour are the basis of the ritual complex. Very often, science explains the specific gestures behaviour depending on the ideological and mythological framework in which the culture exists. The study ignores the analysis and interpretation of specific gestures behaviour in the context of the situation. Not taking into account internal functional, cultural and conceptual links between different gestures it leads to incomplete or inaccurate explanation of the functions and semantics that arise from this gesture.

This is one of the reasons that compeled us to pay particular attention to the study of gestures behaviour. The interest of Ethnography, Ethnology and Anthropology aims to study the culture of societies in their traditional and contemporary events. Daily communication in these societies is carried out except by words but also through gestures, postures, actions, facial expressions, gazes. This gestures behaviour is one of the major media in the process of communication, which requires its careful study. Gestures behaviour clearly distinguishes participants in communication by gender, age, social and ritual status, religion and ethnicity, etc. It not only stresses but also validates the status of the participants in this kind of communication. Even it is used to create new statuses and to transmit social powers. In rural and urban societies, without literacy, gestures behaviour plays a role of public document. It certifies expressed desire, agreement or disagreement, contract and other interpersonal and social relations, with

positive or negative direction. Traditional societies are built on the strong relationship between ideology, morality and behaviour. Therefore, the daily actions of individuals are subject to strict rules and regulations. This naturally leads to uniformity in the behaviour of individuals so-called **stereotypization**. On the other hand, individual and collective relations with the divine forces are also subject to certain stereotypes, which mean uniformity in their cyclical reproduction in the form of rituals, customs, festivals, etc. These ritual links are carried out mainly through the application of sign loaded gestures behaviour, which adds another important meaning and nuance to this piece of culture or in some cases deny the accompanying verbal information. Sometimes the absence of known ritual and expected stereotypic gestures behaviour creates negative information. That can cause problems for the individual and be reason for community conflicts.

In culture gestures behaviour does not appear as random, accidental or chaotic operation. Rather, it is subject to a strict logic, which is well known and understood by every member of the community. Therefore, individual gesture, posture, action, facial expression and gaze are never a self-serving action. They are always subject to intra-cultural logic that perform certain functions and are accompanied by an understandable meaning. In essence, gestures behaviour, even made without the visibility of the other participant, is always a form of communication that has a specific **addresser** - visible or invisible. Therefore, reproducing gestures behaviour - the **addressee** knows that it will always reach the addresser, who is present or absent, visible or invisible, human being, spiritual object or divine / demonic force, on the moment or after a time, here or there, on this or another world, etc. This feature of conscious gestures behaviour implies its existence in clear outlined **sign systems** within each culture. This means that every gesture has an exactly fixed, thought through and accepted method of use in different cultures, clear daily and ritual **purpose (function)**, and also **meaning (semantics)**. As a result of this by different cultures around the world we can meet same gestures, which have differences in their uses, functions and semantics. The opposite situation is also true, that different gestures can have the same or similar uses, functions and semantics. This fact gives us grounds to talk about the group, ethnic, national, regional and even continental peculiarity of gestures behaviour, its use, function and semantics.

The task for science is how properly and fully to disclose and explain these complex gesture's relations that exist between **form, function** and its **semantics**. We think this can be achieved by separating the study of such movements and actions of the human body that are not sign loaded -

kinemas, and focusing mainly on the study of those who are sign loaded – **kinemamorphemes**. These two terms are first used by the American psychologist Ray Birdwhistall. For last phenomenon is assumed to be also used the term **gesture**. In ethnological and anthropological aspect this round of testing can be further reduced by subtracting from it these movements, postures, actions, facial expression and behaviour of the eyes, which are an outward expression of internal emotional states of the individual or group. It is true that in this latter category, there are many elements which define the ethnic, national and common cultural backgrounds of gestures behaviour. Admittedly, these parts of culture are in the research field of Ethnography, Ethnology, Anthropology, Popular psychology and other scientific disciplines. The reason to separate this latter category sign loaded movements and actions are because of their origin. As Desmond Morris uses to say some of them are **congenital** others are **rediscovered**. This means that they are elements of universal man's behaviour. Therefore, they are subjects to examination by such basic sciences as Medicine, Psychology and others.

In researches we focused our interest mainly to those sign loaded movements and actions that have been absorbed by the social surrounding in which individuals live. They are used by them and are characteristic of their culture. Never mind that they also reflect emotions they are not that spontaneous expression of individual emotion, but rather stereotyped reproduction of perceived and learned behaviour. Therefore the latter category movements is called with the term **gestures behaviour**. This sign loaded individual and collective behaviour, within the social interaction of the culture, incorporates the movements, postures, actions, facial expressions, eyes behaviour, the sum of the successive movements of the human body and another subject, and also the absence of such. Much of this behaviour is repeated many times in the precise observation of a common accepted form so-called **standard**. This stereotypic reproduction depends on the conditions that are determined by the framework of the worldview system. Using research methods from Medicine and Psychology for the study of this type of gestures behaviour we could not give comprehensive results. The reason for this is that in first place must be taken in consideration the different models of man's behaviour, which exist within the same culture, as well as to be analyzed the cultural activities of these gestures in various historical layers. The main problem standing in front of Ethnology and Anthropology is how successfully and efficiently to examine gestures in different cultures.

Initially it is necessary to begin by studying and analyzing every separate sign loaded gesture in the context of a single culture, by tracing its

existence in historical layers. At the same time there is made a review of the internal cultural ties to this event with gestures or other related derivatives thereof. Only then we begin comparing the use of gestures identical forms in different cultures. Here in the survey, however, another problem arises. Frequent are those cases where in the composition of the same culture we have two or more of the same gesture forms that have distinct use, purpose and meaning. The question is how in this case the ethnologist has to approach in his study in order accurately to determine the role of each form in the context of culture.

Firstly, when talking about the gesture, we should see what kind of characteristic elements it is composed from. Longtime our observations and research on this topic led us to the following conclusions. Each gesture event has its visible part the so-called **physical form** that distinguishes it from others. This form is used alone as a single sign loaded gesture - kinemamorphema or in combination with others, which may represent - a **gesture bundle, gesture set or gesture family**. In rituals and customs often a separate gesture form is applied not only in conjunction with others, but also in parallel use of sign loaded or symbolic objects, special clothing, at a specified location, space, period of time and other elements of the social surrounding. This second characteristic element of gesture event we agree to call - **surrounding**. Every gesture is reproduced by someone or something and it is directed at someone or something that necessarily involves the presence of the **link addressee - addresser**. Each gesture event in the context of culture has its practical purpose, or in other words its **function**. Finally, every gesture, in the context of culture, carries certain information that is its **meaning**. The latter may be different in different historical layers of the culture, so there should be used a broader concept like **semantics**.

All these five specific elements that always accompany the reproduction of gestures in the researched culture and allow its complete description, we accept to name a **system of the dimensions of gesture**. The use of this system in research allows properly to be assessed each element of the gesture event, to be analyzed the relations of various dimensions with others in synchronous and diachronic plan, to be revealed their exact role and importance of the case. Clarification of the five specific dimensions of gesture allows unmistakably defining the role, importance and place of the gesture in the context of culture.

This system of the dimensions of gesture has the following content:

1. **Physical form**. This dimension includes the visible part of each sign loaded movement, body postures, facial expressions, eyes and eyelids movements. The term also covers those cases where several

kinemamorphemes, associated in a joint action have a single function and semantics and are **gesture bundle**. These include also the cases where several separate kinemamorphemes are reproduced simultaneously or sequentially in the range of one observed action, but where they have different roles, functions and semantics in communication and they are **gesture set**. **Modality** as part of this dimension incorporates an understanding of how to perform particular physical movement - full or in part, with much emotion and effort or hurry, just by ticking the main elements, etc. The dimension also includes the cases where compulsory stereotypical physical form is absent - deliberately not reproduced or accidentally omitted. This action always carries negative information in the process of communication.

2. **Surrounding**. This dimension takes into account all those responsible sign loaded and symbolic objects, which must participate in the reproduction of specific gesture's form. With their location, role in culture, with their connections with worldview system they give clarity to those small details on the purpose and content of studied gesture, which can not be decipher only by its physical form. In this sign loaded and symbolic busy round of events should be placed as follows: movement accompanying verbal forms (phrases, proverbs, songs, etc.); clothing of the addressee and the addresser (daily, festive, ritual); place and space for recording gesture; exact time for recording the gesture (a day in the calendar year, a period longer than a year cycle, important age in the life of individual); characteristics associated with religious, social, political or other circumstances; place in daily or ritual situation, and all other phenomena that accompany the reproduction of gesture form and have respect for clarification of its function and semantics.

3. **The link between addressee and addresser**. This is another important dimension that clarifies the function and semantics of the gesture. The link between gesture reproducer - the addressee and the subject (object), to whom he / she addresses - the addresser is not always completely clear, because very often unless there are visible and invisible plan. In many cases, the addressee is obvious (visible). If in front (visible) plan of action the addresser may be only one, then in the back (invisible, mythological) plan, they may be several, but different in nature. The disclosure of the back (invisible) plan of addressers is a major difficulty for proper identification of the studied gestures form. **The etiquette behaviour**, claimed so by Russian researchers A. K. Bayburin and A. L. Toporkov, is also a part of gestures behaviour. It suggests at least two addressers - **direct one**, to whom the movement (behaviour) is directed and **monitored one**, that / those who follow from the side the gesture event. Because of their

specific research tools Medicine and Psychology are unable to make any wide-scale search of possible addressers in the layers of culture. This type of study is inherent in the opportunities only of Ethnography, Ethnology and Anthropology. These disciplines have full knowledge of the studied culture, its interconnections, allegiances and hidden addressers in the historical layers of collective memory. The last come to light only after applying the appropriate method for investigating gestures behaviour. This research approach takes into account the composition of participants in gestures behaviour considering the following factors: gender, age, number, social status, performed ritual role, relationships of the participants (in term blood kinship, symbolic kinship and marriage) at the time of reproduction of the gesture - in **synchronous term**, and also in respect of previous periods - **diachronic perspective**. Take into account the sign and symbolic status of subjects and objects that come into the role of addressers. All these details are extremely important in the analysis, because even a small change in one of these elements leads to a change of the function and semantics.

4. Function. This is one of the most important dimensions, which is not always clearly understood, and sometimes requires long-term study in the various layers of culture. In essence this is the purpose of gesture form to transfer certain information, to exert influence, to change status, etc. Behind this seemingly visible and understandable part are facing several other layers like serving the link between addressee and addresser, the implementation of **symbolic loaded actions** such as changing the state of matter and living status, the protection from demonic forces, causing injury, illness, death, etc.

5. Semantics. This is the dimension of the gesture, which is revealed as a result of testing several historical cultural layers. That is the meaning of the gesture from the standpoint of how it is perceived, understood and interpreted by individual and community - level of **reasoning**. Secondly what memory (trace) of previous meanings left the gesture in different historical layers of culture and what effects they have on its modern meaning. This is the level of **motivation** (according A. K. Bayburin and A. L. Toporkov), which may explain the reasons which have raised and changed the use of studied gestures behaviour in the culture. Motivation is a kind of overview of the historical and regional meanings of the gesture in assessing the accuracy of information documented in the literature. This is its new approach in the context of ethnological study. Semantics requires clarification of the **group, regional, ethnic, folklore and religious significance** of the individual gestures and gestures behaviour. We take note of the information contained in local and national name of the gesture, and

the existence of different phrases that originated, can be assigned or may be related to studied gestures behaviour.

Thus, the presented method focuses mainly on ethnological study of the elements, which constitute the sign loaded gestures behaviour. Like other research tools it has its natural limits of application. The method gives very good results mainly in the study of ethnic characteristics of gesture and gestures behaviour. It is applicable in the analysis of daily and ritual sign loaded gestures behaviour that takes place within one worldview system.

After this presentation of the method we can safely consider the problem raised for secular or religious character of the gesture bet. On first place, the physical form of gesture is an assembly of kinemamorphemes - licking (spiting at) a thumb, stretching the hand forward, straightening a thumb, squeezing and slipping it on the thumb of the other person. By its physical form, this assembly presents a gesture bundle with the compulsory participation of at least two people. In this situation, apart from higher powers, they are each addressee and addresser simultaneously.

Traditional Bulgarian culture lacks commitment of the researched action with a particular environment such as: a designated place for the application, time, clothes of the participants, accompanying ritual objects, commitment by sex, age, social and ritual status, etc. It can be concluded that by its nature the gestures action is not a ritual or sacred. It is not profane also, because some of its elements are symbolic characters, thus it is distinguished from everyday life human behaviour.

Firstly, it should be mentioned that the bet is made only by hand, and mainly with the right one, if neglected leftism. According to the canon of the Orthodox Christian religion with the right hand is carried blessing and with the left - curse, anathema. Making bet always ends by using the thumb of the right hand. It is reasonable to ask why this is not done with the pointer,

middle, ring finger or little finger?

It is known that in ancient cultures the human hand was a symbol of power and authority. In Christianity upright, appearing from the clouds palm of the hand is a symbol of God and his cosmic power. In Islam is known the "Hand of Fatima", which is synonymous with God's hand, i.e. that of Allah. There is a similar phenomenon in Judaism. If we move out from the hand to its constituents we'll see that each finger is symbolically loaded, i.e. has its semantics and function in different religious systems. In Christianity the thumb, of lifted in front of the body right arm, is identified with God the Father, the pointer - the Holy Spirit, middle finger - with Jesus, etc. In Islam, Prophet Muhammad is the thumb; pointer - Fatima (Muhammad's beloved daughter), middle finger - Ali (fourth caliph,

Fatima's husband), etc. In the last religious system the number of fingers is associated with the symbolism of five. So each digit (finger) means a definite thing: a declaration of faith (probably related to the thumb), prayer, pilgrimage, fasting, charity.

Going back to **thumb** we'll see that not only in these two religious systems, but in other religious and cultures, it is highly symbolically loaded part of the human body. For example, in bambara tribe (Africa) thumb embodies not only the physical but also the mental power of man. In other cultures, the thumb is associated with the creative power of people. From the foregoing it is seen that in some cultures, the thumb is a strong symbolically loaded part of the human body that has a religious aspect too.

The other element involved in the issue gestures behaviour is human **saliva**. By principle in many cultures saliva and its social events - **spittle** and **phlegm**, i.e. saliva after the spitting, is seen as vital power of man. This is the second most important body fluid after blood, which has important magical properties. According to the biblical idea saliva is the "seal of faith". Christian religious dogma requires the belief that the saliva of Jesus has a healing power. With it He cured the blind at birth. According the Bible the Saviour itself says to tempting Him Satan "My saliva is sacred". The positive connotation of saliva can be found also in the Bulgarian traditional culture. According to traditional medicine saliva can heal hurts of man and beast. But saliva, and rather its social events - spittle and phlegm, have also a negative connotation. Their negative perceptions may be seen in some manifestations of Christian behaviour and also by ritual activities in Bulgarian traditional culture. This is because saliva, spittle and phlegm, except their perception as natural human secretions are associated with the notion of possessing magical and supernatural impact of force. Examples of the latter claim are: the spitting of Job in the Bible; the practice, when a witch swears or makes magic, to spit on the subject of his / her magical effect or at his / her direction. When searching in the deep layers of Proto-Bulgarian culture can be found that in pre-Christian period, saliva, rather than spittle / phlegm, possesses a wholly negative connotation. Interesting basis for comparison will give us a research of the connotations of saliva and spittle / phlegm, within the traditions of other Turkic peoples, as well as in Islamic cultures.

From the researched gesture bundle - licking (spitting at) a thumb, stretching the hand forward, straightening a thumb, squeezing and slipping it on the thumb of the other person - **the licking**, as a gesture with particular sign character, is without analogue in Bulgarian culture. It should be mentioned that functionally and semantically different is the widespread practice in the tradition of protection from evil eye, when a mother licks the

forehead of her child or squeezes it by finger with saliva on it. True, the physical form of the gesture is close, but here the function is protection. In Bulgarian traditional culture there is no other gesture action with physical form like lick, which has a similar function and semantics. This presumes that the researched sing loaded gesture can be borrowed from another culture.

If we look at gesture bundle only by side of its function, it can be assumed that it is intended solely for betting. This is true only with regard to implementation of the gesture action in our time. If we look at this behaviour from a historical perspective, then we'll see that things are not the same. In the Christian Middle Ages gesture with right hand raised and outstretched fingers of the hand - thumb, forefinger and middle finger (without been spitted) is a sign for calling on God the Father as a witness to something under oath. On the other hand in the ancient Semitic cultures the lifted and outstretched fingers serve as function of swearing, but at the same time also of blessing. In ancient and traditional cultures in some Asian and other nations, including Proto-Bulgarians and Bulgarians we can meet the ritual practice of concluding a blood contract and fraternization. In this case, the men cut their hands (usually the thumb or other finger) and then press the bloody part of hand against the hand of the other participant. In the latter case, the ritual is a combination of sacred / ritual action involving the main body fluid - blood, which is essentially similar to the combination - action involving saliva.

From everything said up to this moment we can conclude that from the ancient layers of culture derive the following two main functions of the gesture bundle: sacred / ritual gesture, grown into a ritual action, which is used for sanctioning a status (contract, fraternization); gesture, by which deity is call as a witness to confirm and prove the veracity of anything said or done. In the latter case the deity (God the Father, Jehovah, the Prophet Muhammad), which is symbolized by the lifted thumb, played the role of guarantor of truth. Because of the latter fact we accept that the likely initial function of gesture form - upright thumb, was precisely to ensure the authenticity of something. By the time a person has a clear understanding of the relationship between his thumb and divinity we can speak for the use of this gesture as a sacred and religious. Since when this context begins to blur, wipes and saliva appears on a thumb, then we began to talk about the gesture desacralization, and its entry into the secular sphere of everyday use. Probably during this period in the collective consciousness begins to dominate pre-Christian idea that the touch of a foreign human body has a magical effect. This notion is reinforced by the presence of saliva, which is an active element in the magic act. On the one hand it can be assumed that

the bet is targeted magical effect with an expected positive result. However in Bulgarian traditional practice before bet there are always statements of various opinions and dispute on the matter, only after then the participants proceed to apply gesture. That is always preceded by verbal prompts such as "Let's make a bet!" or "I stand a bet". In case of bet obligatory must be made conditions, which loser dispute must meet. This suggests another direction of interpreting the nature and function of this action in the traditional culture.

It turns out that the semantics of this gesture bundle is also very complicated. Latter passes through different stages of change and development in the structure of culture. In XIX-XX century on level of reasoning the Bulgarian people explains and makes sense of gesture only like bet. If we look at the semantic level of motivation we'll see that historically it is quite complicated and very confused, because it contents sacred, ritual and religious semantics. At this stage of the study, with limited data available, it is difficult to identify in which historical periods transitions occur from one to other semantics.

It is logical question from where and how the gesture came in the Bulgarian culture? Is it derived from this culture or borrowed from other? Currently, these questions also raise many problems. First, outside Christian layer the Bulgarian culture lacks information on that thumb of the hand to be loaded with some special function or symbolism. The only exception is the above mentioned ritual of fraternization and the presence in folk tales of a character like Thumb Thumbelina, which migrates in a broad cultural range. In our traditional culture absent other similar acts with fingers of the hand, that puts the gesture in quite an isolated position. This implies that in this physical form the bet may be a cultural borrowing. One of the probable direction of its penetration may be Western Europe, through the Catholic community of Germans (Saxons), who settled in the western Bulgarian lands during the late Middle Ages (XVII-XVIII century). Possible penetration direction may be the lands of Ottoman Empire, from Muslim converted Arab cultures. To support this last hypothesis stands the observation that at present time, in the culture of Arabs, it is common practice, after concluding a bargain each participant to spit on the palm of his hand, then heavily to hit (slap) this of his partner. The common accepted meaning and function of this behaviour is a confirmation, a "sign" through a ritual gesture, of already achieved commercial agreement. In essence, however this is a stereotypical secular, but not sacred or religious gesture. If we link the above mentioned opinion, with the second line of interpretation of the nature and function of studied gesture, it is reasonable to assume that the bet is used for confirmation and "documentation" by gesture of

allegations, raised by participants in the dispute. In essence, the gesture has a public function to verify the affiliation of expressed opinions, to "sign", to "seal" the arrangements and conditions made by wager.

Last on the list of possibly used facts stands the Bulgarian name of gesture form – "бациране" (bet). If we look in dictionaries we'll see that the consumed in Bulgarian language word "бас" ("басъ", "бахъ"), derives from the Arabic "bahsi" and passes through Turkish "bahis" to enter the Bulgarian use. This is likely during the XIV-XIX century. In Bulgarian language to indicate the elaboration, conclusion of conditions, between parties in a dispute, except this word are used more Slavic lexical forms like – "облор", "обзалагане", "залор", "залагане". These latter facts confirm that the phenomenon of "bargaining condition" is long ago present in the life of Bulgarian people and is not a medieval cultural borrowing. It is fact that in Bulgarian traditional practice the gesture bundle - straightening - licking (spiting at) – and squeezing a thumb, is used exclusively only with the phrases "Have a bet", "Let's make a bet!", "I stand a bet". On the other hand here we may mention the process of gradual occurrence of different phrases from this physical gesture form, which in practice means the use of phrases only, without being accompanied by the examined gesture.

In conclusion we can say that betting phenomenon is an old traditional practice in the culture of Bulgarian people. Probably in the Middle Ages this practice accepts new physical form of gesture using licking (spiting at) a thumb. Perhaps in Bulgarian tradition the studied gesture practice is a cultural borrowing from Turkic-Arab Muslim converted cultures. Basis for this claim gives the functional and semantic similarity of the bet with other gestures practices that are widespread in the Middle East and Northern Africa. Upon its entry and development into Bulgarian culture that gesture form of bet takes a few features that shape its different characteristics. On the first place, the environment dimension of studied gesture bundle, lack sign and symbol loaded elements that would associate it with some calendar, or life cycle rituals. The gesture is applied at any time, in the absence of characteristic of ritual action conventions. This places a bet gesture in the category of everyday action. But by its nature the gesture is not a profane, because it is associated with certain assumptions and conventions in its application. From the position of its function, semantics and method of use the gesture bet can be defined as daily action, but with a ritual character.

The fact that in Bulgarian traditional culture the thumb of the hand is not perceived and interpreted as a personification of God the Father, it can be concluded that the use of that gesture is not loaded with religious function and semantics. This means that in practice the traditional gesture of

bet is not a religious, but has secular characteristics. The above facts allow us to conclude that during the nineteenth-twentieth century in Bulgarian culture the bet with the use of thumb appears as everyday secular gesture, which plays the role of ritual in solving the dispute. The function of gesture using the thumb is public certification, "documentation" of raised allegations and set conditions that must be met after resolution of the dispute.

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Джени Маджаров

Жест „държат пари“ - светски или религиозен в българской культуре?

Проблема с жестом „държат пари“ в българской культурной традиции весьма неясна, как по ее происхождению и функции, так и по ее семантике. В попытке изучить это явление применяется возможность этнологического метода использования системы для измерения жеста. На основе данного метода делается последовательное изучение всех элементов, участвующих в этом жестовом поведении. В различных культурах и религиях рассматриваются семантика и функции физической формы жеста, руки человека, ладони, пальцев, большого пальца, слюны, плевка, облизывания и других. При этом отмечается различие между магическим, священным, ритуальным, религиозным и светским характером жеста руки. Метод позволяет уточнить вероятное направление его вступления в болгарскую культуру, а также характеристику функции и семантику его использования в традиционной практике.