

## THE SYMBOLICS OF BREAD ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS

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*The paper deals with the research and study of bread, rolls and cakes in Croatian customs, based on written sources from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The author studies their symbolics when they are given as gifts, in the context of birth, marriage and burial customs. The outcome of this study is the discovery of the belief of the Croats in the present and future life whose keeper is, in the first place, a woman.*

The regular use and primary meaning of bread is for everyday food. Secondly, its symbolic role can be observed in various customs and contexts among the Croats, so I set my curiosity and research towards that point. Some of the research results have already been published.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, a few authors before me touched this topic but mainly within a bigger theme (Gavazzi, Đaković, Supek).

Within the mutual project Krakow-Zagreb from the very beginning (1986), I took part in researching the theme: *The Cultural Function of Gift* with emphasis on bread and rolls which are given as gifts. My research results showed that bread was given as a gift of life, not only for fertility and reproduction, or for strengthening mutual relations, but also in ordinary, less important situations (for example, the roll *lepinja* is given to children, the weak and sick (1987)). My main purpose has been to try to reveal such significance in important life situations, so I chose customs at birth, marriage and burial, but using only data from the end of the 19th century, published in the *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje Južnih Slavena* (The Journal of Folk Life and Customs of South Slavs).<sup>2</sup>

1. I presented papers dealing with the following themes:

a) *Bread and Rolls - Signs of Life and Revival in the Traditions of the Croats*, at the 12th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Zagreb, 1988; partly published in "Jarunska lađa", Zagreb, 1990, II, 2, pp. 14-15, II, 3 (7), p. 10.

b) *Decorated rolls (paprenjaci) - a problem of a tradition*, at the symposium *Tradition and Contemporaneity*, Beograd, 1988. This paper, detailed and in French is in print (Poland).

Other published articles on this theme are mentioned in references.

2. The authors of articles in series *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje južnih Slavena* (The Journal of Folk Life and Customs of South Slavs) are mentioned in reference no. 9.

Each piece of data I analysed according to place, the name of the gift (kind of bread), its shape, the time of giving, person that gives the gift, person that receives the gift, the way the gift is handled and the interpretations of the informant or ethnographer. It is confirmed that giving bread, rolls or cakes in all three contexts is very common. We have most data for marriage customs, less for birth and the least for burial customs.

### Birth

The two most important moments are customs concerning lying-in (post child-birth period) and baptismal fête. Lying-in is divided on small and big lying-in, or lying-in and baptism joined in one day. On lying-in (Poljica), on baptism (Poljica, Vrbnik) or three days after child-birth (Šušnjevo Selo), bread is brought or eaten in the form of flat bread (*pogača*), cake (Donja Poljica, Vrbnik), *turte* and doughnuts (*uštupci*) (Donja Poljica). In Vrbnik on the island Krk, there is:

*Beli, šenični kruh... za ženu koja ima rodit, a zovu ga boji kruh (Žic, 15); ...panada<sup>3</sup> za ženu od rojena koli perva, ali biva još ze sirom; Panadu jedu ženi od rojena, mali dica i nemoćnici... Kada se dite kersti, biva južina: frigana utrobica, kruh (beli)... (Žic, 33). U Šušnjevu Selu kad je žena rodila... najprvlje smi jist samo friganje i suv kru kroz tri dana (Božičević, 234).*

*White, wheat bread for the woman who is going to have a child, and they call it better bread (Žic, 15); A woman who is giving birth for the first time, little children and weak people eat panada<sup>3</sup>. When the baby is baptised, breakfast consists of fried giblets, white bread... (Žic, 33). In Šušnjevo Selo when the woman gave birth, she could eat only fried food and dry bread for three days (Božičević, 234).*

Flat bread (*pogača*) is often mentioned; it is mostly of round shape, ornamented with the lines cut with a knife, or circles made with a glass, or without any ornaments at all (Božičević, 197). It is noted that *pogača* is valued the most, "it is given as a gift", and in Poljica there is a saying: "Your eyes are pretty - beside the flat-bread" (Ivanišević, VIII, 283). In Koprivnica, the *pogača* is a basket with some cakes, a bottle of wine and roasted chicken which a godmother sends on the eight day after birth.

In Prigorje, returning from the baptism, godparents come to breakfast (*froštik*) and get flat-bread and wine:

*Zemète, zemète, kuma, malo pogače, pak se napijte - za pogaču se mare piti (Rožić, 41).*

*Take a bit of flat-bread, godmother, take it and then take some wine - after flat bread it's good to have a drink (Rožić, 41)*

On departure, they put some of the flat-bread from baptism in the godmother's scarf or in a basket, so that they can take some to their children (Rožić, 42). On lying-in, only kin comes and brings meat, wine and flat bread (*pogača*). The big lying-in is three weeks after delivery, when only female kin and the godmother visit, each carrying on their heads a basket full of gifts (elsewhere known as "godmother's basket" - *kumine košare*),

3. Panada: "Nadrobi se kruha va lončić, ali va lonec, vlije se va njega žlicu sirova ulja i dobro razmiša, pek stresne va časicu (čašu) i jī panadu" (Žic, 33).

(Panada: "Crumble bread into a cup, or a pot, pour a spoonfull of oil, mix well, put into a glass and eat panada" (Žic, 33).

and among other things a "big bread (*velika lebača*), *vrtanj* or *štruca*, cheese-cake (*gibanica*), meat, wine, *mlinci* and pasta with eggs" (Rožić, 42). In Poljica, the gift given on lying-in is called *matula*, consisting of "cakes, *turte*, white bread and eggs" (Ivanišević, VIII, 299). In Donja Poljica, it is called *matala*, consisting of eggs fried on butter with bread; children are given to eat it too. In Doce, a woman that gave birth is called *mâja* (Ivanišević, X, 61), and in Ravni Kotari in Dalmatia, on the child-birth day, women (neighbours and kin) "bring doughnuts and cakes, saying: Lucky child-birth, lucky day, lucky be all" (Zorić, 199).

*Velike babine su nakon tri tjedna kada dolaze samo žene iz bliže rodbine i kuma, te svaka na glavi donosi punu košaru darova (drugdje su poznate "kumine košare"), a između ostaloga "veliku lebaču - veliki kruh, vrtanj ali štrucu, gibanicu, mesa, vino, mlincev i rezancev mešani z jajci" (Rožić, 42). Matula je naziv za dar na babine u Poljicima; a to su: "kolači, turte, bili kupovni kruv iz grada i jaja" (Ivanišević, VIII, 299). U Donjim Poljicima naziv je matala: "Vrigaju se jaja na maslu i u to se topi kruv. - Stoga se rugaju malon dici, kad jin mater rodi: Manja (jidi) matala, manja matala..." "U Docu reku rodilji, da se omajila i zovu je mâja" (Ivanišević, X, 61). U Ravnim Kotarima u Dalmaciji zabilježeno je da na dan poroda žene, susjede i rođakinje, "donose na dar uštupaka i kolača uz formulu: Sretan porod, snašo, sretan dan, sretni bili svi" (Zorić, 199).*

### Marriage

Bread and rolls are present in the context of marriage customs under various names and forms:

"... samo kao kruh (*Gruda, Prigorje, Sušnjevo Selo*), *tvrđi kru'* (*Gruda*), *komadići kruha* (*Gruda, Sušnjevo Selo*) ili *pogača, srećna pogača, velika pogača, vrtanj, kolač ili kolač kruva* (*Donja Poljica*); "*pandišpanj - Pan' di Spagna - dúbak od pirnog luba, kruh velik kao somul, lijepo na kraju izreskan, a po sredini ima zvrk učinjen u koga se utakne grančica masline okićena slastima, kordunićima, kozarom i knjigom (papirom) šarenom*" (*Balarin, 283, 285*)".

"... as mere bread (*Gruda, Prigorje, Sušnjevo Selo*), *hard bread* (*Gruda*), *pieces of bread* (*Gruda, Sušnjevo Selo*) or *flat-bread, lucky flat-bread, big flat bread, vrtanj, cake or cake-bread* (*Donja Poljica*). *Pandišpanj (Pan' di Spagna) is bread decorated with sweets, coloured papers and with an olive branch in the middle*" (*Balarin, 283, 285*)".

While the preparations for a wedding are going on, the bridegroom (in Prigorje) and the mother-in-law (in other parts), at their first visit to the bride's home, bring presents among which is bread, or bread and cakes. At the bride's house, on the eve of the wedding, girls make *gora*<sup>4</sup> (*Sušnjevo Selo*).

4. Večer uoči svadbe zove se: "kitiće večer". "Cure... deladu goru. To je jedan kru, a u sredini tega kruva zataknu kitiću, ka će bit na zastavi. Oko ove velike kitiće, zataknu u kru one druge, ke ćeđu svatom prišit kitičarice za krljake. Ovaj kru opašedu s tračkom, širokim tri prsta. Izmed ovi kitić nasiplju lišnjakov, kukuruza, žita... metnedu kru na stol, a barjaktar onu tovariju vina... Cure ne puščadu iz ruk svoju goru, a ni barjaktar svoju... počmedu falit svoju goru, a špotat se onoj tovariji vina, dičaki opet špotadu se njivoj, a svoju falidu...: "Naša je gora bogata, plodna, ima lišnjakov, jabuk, kukuruza, žita. Naša je gora zelena, lipa daj dva oka, da se je nagleji; a kakva je vaša: crna kaj ugljen, usta, nigdi niš na njoj, ružna je kaj ciganica..." (Božičević, 238-239).

(The evening before the wedding is called "*kitiće večer*". "The girls make *gora*. This is bread with flowers in the middle which will be put on the flag. Around this big bunch of flowers they put other small bunches, which will be put later on the hats of guests. A ribbon is placed around the bread and among the flowers they put hazelnuts, corn, wheat... The bread is put on the table, the flag-carrier (*barjaktar*) brings the wine... The girls holding their *gora* praise it and mock the wine; holding the wine, the flag-carrier and the boys mock the *gora* and praise the wine: Our *gora* is rich, fertile, has hazelnuts, apples, corn, wheat. "Our *gora* is green, look at it, and look at yours: it's black like coal, bare, it has nothing, it's ugly like a Gipsy..." (Božičević, 238-239).)

There are many elements and rituals associated with bread at the wedding day. In Šušnjevo Selo, the guests at the wedding arrive at the bridegroom's home and receive bread and brandy, while at the bride's home, they are offered bread and wine. After the wedding ceremony, the bride enters first the bridegroom's house. She divides the bread into four parts and places them at every corner of the table "so that her crops go well". This symbolizes taking possessions of a new home, and at the same time, a union between two homes since the bread is from the bride's home. I think it also has meaning associated with the calendar, harvest, and the renewal of life. This is emphasised by the fact that bread and wine come together, alcohol being a symbol of life-energy and creative inspiration.<sup>5</sup> For example, in Prigorje, parents-in-law welcome the bride with a piece of bread and a glass of wine which she takes into the house. This symbolizes the integration of her life and energy into the new household (Supek, 51).

Other elements that confirm this interpretation, bread as the symbol of the revival of life, come from very persons that give or are given bread (pieces of bread or cake). These are: parents, parents-in-law, children, the bride, a middleman who is in command, or other women involved. If we know that parents are the donors of life and that the bride is a future mother, then this also confirms this meaning of bread.<sup>6</sup>

M. Benža from Bratislava wrote about the symbolics of bread as a symbol of life in marriage customs. During the wedding ceremony almost everywhere in Slovakia, rolls and especially round or ring-shaped bread, have an important role. They are carried from the bride's home to the bridegroom's, as symbols of life and eternity. The author associates this practice with the fact that a woman is the keeper of life and mediator of eternity (Benža, 54-55).

### Burial

I will present only a few details concerning burial customs in Vrbnik and Poljica.

*"Oblije je beli kruh, kako i drugi, ali se daje popon na mertvin god, a to biva četiri puta na leto"* (Žic, 17).

*Čuje se od staraca i starica: "E, mi smo naš krv izili" (Ivanišević, X, 88). U kući pokojnika sve kućne starješine dolaze kroz tri ili sedam večeri na molitvu (za pokojnika) i dobiju piti, a negdje (Tugari, Poljica) još i kruva - "pokvasnicu - u sitnome - ... Te godine kuća ne peče o Božiću zaoblicu, a rodbina nosi na dar stalo (četvrt kozlića) i kolač u onu kuću koja je u korutu" (Ivanišević, X, 94). O Uskrsu po drugome (tko ne pripada zajednici) šalju na blagoslov kruh i jaja...*

*"Oblije is white bread, like other, but it is given to priests on the day of the dead and that is four times a year"* (Žic, 17).

*Old people used to say: "Oh, we have eaten our bread" (Ivanišević, X, 88). For three or seven nights after a funeral all household heads come into the house of the*

5. Elsewhere in my research work I also found alcohol (wine or brandy) and bread in combination (Svirac, 1987, 1988a, 1990b).

6. a) Similar meaning is found in birth customs in the role of the godmother; she is the mother of new, blessed life ("krsna matka" in Polish).

b) In Slovakia, the main wedding cake is baked at the bride's or her godmother's home - "jej krstnej matky" (Benža, 54).

*deceased to say prayers for deceased. They are offered a drink and in some places bread "pokvasnica" (Tugari, Poljica). That Christmas they do not roast meat (zaoblica) and relatives bring to the house in mourning a quarter of goat (stalo) and cake as a present (Ivanišević, X, 94). At Easter, that household sends a non-member to church for the blessing of bread and eggs./*

These examples introduce several meanings: first of all, the belief in life after death and connection with the deceased. Although these acts have magic meaning, they also denote the agricultural year. Christmas and Easter are holidays of the newborn Sun and life. If we were to see only the meaning of fertility in these or similar elements it would be mere reproduction. In my opinion, these examples show life worthy of man. In marriage customs, they show help offered to a young couple (or a woman giving birth) so that they can be ready to accept new life in the community, to live together with the living or dead members. At the wedding in Gruda, in the bride's house, before the toast everybody rises: "They light the candle stuck in the cake. Everybody stands up, says a prayer for the dead souls from this home, and then says the toast" (Balarin, 285). This is explained as a necessary deed to condescend the deceased, and at the same time as faith in God and life after death.

This symbolism and other corresponding elements show how much studying bread and gift-giving is an interesting matter. It shows that giving bread as a gift is a way of uniting people, since bread is a symbol of life, eternity, universe and the Sun. All this is a part of Croatian tradition mainly from the second part of the 19th century.

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## SIMBOLIKA KRUHA U POSEBNIM PRILIKAMA

### *Sažetak*

Stalna upotreba i prvotno značenje kruha jest svakodnevna hrana. Druga, simbolična uloga nazire se u raznim običajima i kontekstima koju tek treba otkriti. Svoju samoznatiželju i istraživanje kod Hrvata usmjerila u tom pravcu. Neke rezultate istraživanja iznijela sam ranije u pismenom ili usmenom obliku (Bilješka br. 1; Literatura br. 8).

Budući da sam dobivala rezultate koji su pokazivali značenje kruha u ulozi dara života (ne samo plodnosti i reprodukcije ili međusobne povezanosti...) u običnim, manje važnim događajima (*lepinja* se daruje djeci, nemoćnima i bolesnima, Svirac, 1987), osnovna mi je namjera pokušati otkriti takvo značenje u jakim životnim trenucima. Stoga sam odabrala običaje oko rođenja, ženidbe i pogreba, a ograničila sam se samo na pisane izvore podataka s kraja XIX. i početka XX. stoljeća koje donosi građa iz nekih Zbornika za narodni život i običaje južnih Slavena (Literatura br. 9).

Pojedine izvještaje analizirala sam prema razradi građe po kategorijama: mjesto darivanja kruha, naziv, njegov oblik, vrijeme darivanja, osobe koje daruju, koje dar primaju, način na koji se s darom postupa bilježeći pri tom tumačenje kazivača ili zapisivača. Potvrđena je pretpostavka da je darivanje kruhom, pecivom ili kolačima veoma prisutno u sva tri slučaja. Najviše podataka daju običaji oko ženidbe, nešto manje oko rođenja ili još manje oko pogreba. Kod rođenja je zabilježeno da se *pogača* najviše cijeni i nosi na dar više u sjevernim krajevima nego drugdje. Kruh se pojavljuje u ženidbenim običajima kao cijeli ili u komadićima (često vrlo ukrašen) više od kolača, peciva ili alkohola (najčešće vina) i mesa pod raznim nazivima: *tvrdi kru'*, *srećna pogača*, *velika pogača*, *vrtanj*, *kolač*, *kolač kruva*, *pandišpanj* ili, kod pogreba *oblje - beli kruh...* Osobe koje dar pripremaju, nose daruju, primaju ili uzvraćaju jesu uglavnom žene, nešto manje roditelji, kuma ili vrlo rijetko muškarci. Iz svega proizlazi da je simbolika kruha kroz darivanje u ovim životnim trenucima i običajima u prvom redu vjera u život (i dimenzija vjere u život poslije smrti), nešto manje magija plodnosti i sreća za cijeli ljudski vijek kao i kroz kalendarsku godinu (poljodjelsku i stočarsku).