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A contribution to the research of beliefs in the Lepoglava area

The author presents a synthesis of the results obtained during ethnographic field research carried out in Lepoglava and the surrounding villages in 2011. Envisioned as reconnaissance, it focused on a number of topics related to traditional everyday life, different beliefs in particular. Because of the extremely great number of acquired data, the author decided to pay particular attention to them and elaborate them in a separate paper, structured in several units: fantastic beings and people with supernatural powers, souls of the deceased and nocturnal darkness, magic healing procedures, and the evil eye.

Key words: supernatural beings, magic healing, the evil eye beliefs, Lepoglava and its environs

Introduction

Lepoglava, a small Zagorje town at the northern foothills of Mount Ivanšćica, enjoys worldwide renown for its bobbin lace, primarily owing to its inscription on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009 (cf. Eckhel 2006: 115-124; 2012: 144). However, apart from the phenomenon of lace-making in Lepoglava, extensively present in ethnological references, the ethnographic heritage of this region had hardly been explored, i.e., published.[1]

1 Some short notes on the traditional culture of Leopoglava and the surrounding villages can be found in local and regional publications, e.g., *Lepoglavski zbornik, Ivanačke škrinjice, Kajkavski kolendar, Hrvatsko Zagorje,* and the *Kaj* journal. Other sources of ethnographic information include some catalogue publications of the Varaždin City Museum and various collected papers, e.g., the

As the idea to brand Lepoglava as the town of lace and lace-making began to be implemented in 2010, the idea arose of field reconnaissance intended to outline the contours of the traditional daily life of the local population and define the specific themes for systematic research through which lace-making would be presented in a broader culturological context. At the proposal of Tihana Petrović Leš, Ph.D., Professor at the Faculty of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Zagreb, and manager of the project Croatian Heritage in the Context of Cultural Policies, in which I participated as a part-time associate, I started to plan the field research funded by the town of Lepoglava.[2]

Field research was run on two occasions, in early May and late August 2011, and it covered the following localities: Lepoglavska Ves, Borje, Sestranec. Gorica, Purga Lepoglavska, Kamenički Vrhovec, Crkovec, Vulišinec, Viletinec, Šantalabi, Gornja Višnjica and Donja Višnjica. Research was based on the technique of free and semi-structured interviews, and on my field visits I talked with about thirty narrators, mainly of advanced age. My reconnaissance included quite a few themes: customs during the annual and life-long cycle, folk piety, pilgrimages, small sacral architecture, elements of traditional economy (livestock breeding and farming crops, tools), building and housing, traditional food, water supply, traditional handicraft elements (wickerwork, pottery, shoemaking, cooper's trade, hemp growing and processing, lace-making), and spiritual culture elements (traditional stories about fantastic beings, magic healing and the evil eye, beliefs within the context of customs during the annual and life-long cycle). After field work I transcribed the audio-recordings of my narrators and systematically arranged the material on the basis of acquired information.

In this article I have decided to present the preliminary results of our research regarding specific elements of spiritual culture, i.e., of its segment dealing with a broad spectrum of beliefs – beliefs in fantastic beings, perceptions about the souls of deceased persons and nocturnal darkness, magic healing procedures and the evil eye. Our reconnaissance achieved splendid results

Collected Papers on Ivanec during 600 years, and many proceedings from scientific meetings and expert symposiums held during the International Lace Festival in Lepoglava.

2 On this occasion I would like to thank the Mayor of Lepoglava, Mr. Marijan Škvarić and Dr Tihana Petrović Leš for securing the conditions for my smooth field work. I would also like to express my gratitude to the group of my field collaborators with Mr. Mirko Varović at their head – Mirko Duško, Karmen Šoštarić, Slavko Štefičar, Slavica Cingesar, Karmela Geček and Milan Tvarog.

and we acquired a substantial volume of material. My narrators agreed, with unusual ease, to talk about themes which otherwise do not lend themselves to research from an outside position. The tone of our interviews suddenly turned from loud laughter full of scepticism to conspiring whisper concluding, softly spoken, with "what I told is the plain truth". More often than not the interviewees dictated themselves the pace as they enumerated their memories of all kinds of events, often interpreting them independently and freely, and I didn't have to ask them for their opinion about the event they were narrating.

Because of the sensitive theme I decided not to mention the narrators by name or specify in greater detail the village they came from, because the project covered a really small and homogeneous area. This is why I am referring only to their age (in decades) and gender. I have also endeavoured to quote their words as accurately as possible.

Fantastic beings and people with supernatural powers

The recorded stories on fairies in the Lepoglava area are related with no exception to specific localities. At Masni Kamen/Jasikovica, a forest waterfall overlooking Lepoglavska Ves, people used to see fantastic beings dancing in a circle. They believed that such beings lived on the near-by peak bearing the indicative name of *Vilinska Špica* (Fairies' Peak) at 725.7 m above sea level, overlooking the village of Sestranec. Encounters with fairies on a hill overlooking the village of Vileinac were also mentioned at length. They were described as beautiful young girls wearing long white dresses and head wreaths. The narrators stressed their harmonious line, slimness and beauty, with no sign of deformity or any other disagreeable physical feature. Only positive associations were linked with the fairies, and stories often highlighted their good nature and readiness to help people in a fantastic way. Thus, according to some stories, fairies dwelling in a hollow near Donja Višnjica helped people with farming work. If the need arose, people would leave some bread and buttermilk near the hollow, and they dealt with all the work overnight "and nobody ever saw them".[3]

Real persons, predominantly women from the immediate environment, were mainly considered to be witches (*coprnjice* or *coprnje* in the local dialect). The existence of their male counterparts (a male witch was called *coprnjak*) was

3 Female narrator born in the nineteen-twenties.

also mentioned in stories, but to a much smaller extent. Several stories clearly referred to the belief that there were also married couples in which both partners belonged to "that organisation of theirs."[4] A singular institutionalisation of witches in folk literature is a fairly widespread phenomenon in the Lepoglava area, and there are many stories about their night-time meetings and even orgies. A female narrator born in the nineteen-thirties remembered how a man, suspected of being a *coprnjak*, told her father that female and male witches met under a pear-tree on a rise overlooking the village of Borje near Lepoglava:

"We have fun, said he. And he even said they were like that, that each could take any woman he liked! That's what he said, and we children listed to him. And my daddy said, my God, what is happening?! Male and female witches, all having sex with everybody and anybody! Jesus Christ!"

One of the main protagonists of such meetings was also the *devil*. Loyalty to the devil, i.e., betrayal of faith and the Christian teaching, was an important in the transformation of a person into a witch:

"These witches, you see, were women from the village, and they became witches because they sold their souls to the devil. They spoke how they went to the Holy Communion, and took the host, wrapped it in a kerchief and left. And then they sold their soul to the devil, that is sacrilege, they gave the body of Christ to another, to the other side."[5]

Although mentioned frequently, the sale of the soul to the devil was not only condition for transformation. According to several stories, the witch has to be born on a precisely fixed date, and a narrator born in the nineteen-forties said that she must moreover "be trained for the craft by a colleague":

"A local neighbour, she was believed to be a witch, said that she had told her granddaughter... 'You must be born in such and such a month and on such and such a day, and only people born on that date can learn, others cannot. And, said she, you have the power, I will teach you, but she did not want to."

My narrators mainly agreed that people knew who was the witch in the village, i.e., said that they were different, also in terms of their appearance. They were mainly elderly women, particularly slovenly, with markedly sharp features. Moreover, they often disregarded social norms. Thus, people believed that women who first came to wish a Merry Christmas to their neighbours

4 Male narrator born in the nineteen-forties.

5 Female narrator born in the nineteen-forties.

on St. Stephen's Day (26 December) were witches, and people often refused to open the door to them.[6] In connection with Christmas there was another specific magic way of detecting witches reserved exclusively for men. On St. Lucy's Day (13 December) someone had to start making a wooden stool and add a single element ever day until Christmas Eve. When attending Christmas Eve Mass, he had to bring the stool to church, put it on the threshold and stand on it, during mass, when the other believers stood up. It was believed that *coprnjice*, witches, could be discerned in the crowd because they would turn towards the observer and not towards the altar. But then he had to run home, as fast as he could, for otherwise the unmasked witches would be after his head in order to keep their secret.[7]

Unlike fairies perceived as benevolent being, witches were characterised as being malicious; however, according to some narrators, there were women with special powers who used them for magic healing of people and cattle, i.e., warding off the evil eye.[8] Witnessing a witches' sabbath was a life-threatening situation, and at night people avoided passing by suspicious places such as solitary pear trees[9] (as an example cited earlier obviously shows) and, especially, crossroads with roadside crucifixes. One of such spots was a crossroads with a crucifix between Gornji Vulišinac and Crkovec; the people in these hamlets had many stories about it. Thus, according to a female narrator born in the nineteen-forties, "people said that devils were there, that those fiendish hags rallied there." She remembered a story her father had told her: he was passing there and he recognised one of the witches, but shrank from telling anyone, fearing her retaliation. Soon thereafter his cow was supposed

6 Beliefs and the related practices regarding the so-called *poležar*, the first Chistmas well-wisher, are especially widespread in the Kajkavian region (cf. Gavazzi 1998: 178-179; cf. Albus 2013: 45). According to social convention, the master of the house had to treat the first well-wisher who came to wish the family a successful next year. However, the master of the house certainly cared about who would be the first well-wisher. If the well-wisher was a man, as young as possible, that was a propitious sign; however, the arrival of a woman was perceived as a sign that the year would not be propitious. As an exception confirming the rule, as I noted during my research, a young and beautiful girl was welcome as a well-wisher because in that case hemp "would grow tall".

7 In the early 20th century Josip Jedvaj recorded the same belief in Bednja, with the difference that stool-making had to start on St. Cecily's Day (22 November) (cf. 1929: 164).

8 See more in the section on *Magic Healing and the Evil Eye*.

9 "... in popular beliefs the pear-tree was considered as a bad, unfortunate tree, because witches, demons and dragons assembled under and on it" (Vinšćak 2002: 110).

to calve but, as it happened they pulled a dead calf out of her. Just because he had recognised her.
People also used to see witches around wells or along streams, and especially along the river Bednja, where they washed their laundry in the middle of the night:
"And they said that at night they used to come to a stream, usually about midnight, and did the laundry there. And then, they say, someone came by and saw them, and they did so that he could not find the way home. You know, that is the truth, that happened down there by the Bednja."[10]

The motif of witches doing the laundry is present throughout almost every story on the subject. Indeed, many narrators tried to provide a rational explanation by referring to a sequence of events after the authorities forbade, in the first half of the 20th century, the soaking of green hemp in the Bednja. Since soaked hemp released toxic substances, the authorities banned the practice because of its detrimental effect on fish. Bednja was regularly inspected by gendarmes who destroyed soaked hemp, and people caught soaking were fined. Because of this, as my narrators explained, women soaked hemp at night and "drunks returning home late at night saw the women and then talked about having seen witches doing the laundry."[11]

A dose of scepticism was obvious during interviews with the narrators, men in particular. As they talked about night-time encounters they often exchanged jokes; one of my narrators remembered a man telling him how a witch forced him to carry her on his back. All of a sudden the story took a jocular turn and he concluded (imitating the protagonist by speaking in the first person):
"...and when we came to a steep slope she was so fair that she got off my back so that I would not get a rupture if I jumped down with her on my back."[12]

On the other hand, the tone of the interview sometimes changed all of a sudden as my narrators started recounting their own experiences, especially if the cases involved the witches' powers focused on harming people. With considerable unease, a female narrator born in the nineteen-thirties told me what she had experienced soon after the wedding:
"One day we were driving manure to the field, and just as we reached a field by the Bednja owned by a male witch we stopped. And not an inch further

10 Female narrator born in the nineteen-thirties.

11 Narrator born in the nineteen-forties.

12 Narrator born in the nineteen-fifties.

from that field. No way! I could not move either. We left the cart and the manure there, everything. The next day a neighbour came, and the witch stopped his horses too. And all that time I was in bed and could not budge."

The malicious actions of a witch were especially pronounced in cases when people stopped giving her what she wanted or when they ran afoul of her. People as well as livestock and crops suffered because of spells. A female narrator born in the nineteen-forties remembered what had happened in her childhood to a wealthy family in the neighbourhood:
"They had oxen and horses, that was their house, about two hundred yards further on. And there was a witch, and she said... They had not given her something she wanted. When the cattle was inside, and after the church bell rang for the second time, an ox in the stable moaned and dropped down. Dead! Then they called my grandpa, he was the village butcher, but he did not want to come. People knew what had happened. Then they brought a convict from the near-by prison, and when he opened the animal, there was only coarse flax inside. A ball of flax! Now where did that come from?"

A female narrator born in the nineteen-thirties told me a similar story:
"Chicken mainly croaked when we ran afoul of a witch. All our neighbours told us, don't run afoul of her, she'll let you have it!"

Along with the know-how to cast the evil eye, the witch also had the power to control nature. A narrator born in nineteen-forties told us what had happened to his father one night near Lepoglava during his rounds in the woods; he was a forester and, as the narrator mentioned several times, a teetotaller and a very serious man:
"He came from there, from Očura, along the trail. And there was this plum orchard, with several trees. He came to that orchard and the wind started to blow, and all that got tangled so much that he could not pass. Then he went back to the trail, looked behind him and everything was as if nothing had happened."

Among the many supernatural abilities of witches, my narrators referred most often to transformation into a frog. If people found a frog in the field or in the vineyard, that was considered a very bad sign, especially if it suddenly appeared in the stable. Several stories confirm that the frog was really a witch:
"That witch, they said, turns into a frog! And this is what happened! They caught that frog, those that were more plucky. And than they poured melted butter into that frog's mouth. And that woman did not leave the house the

next day because she was all scalded, and her throat ached."[13]

A female narrator born in the nineteen-thirties remembered a similar event from her childhood:
"There is our vineyard, dad went there to remove the old poles, and pottered around. And then, it was already late evening, a big frog turned up! And just jumped about! Says dad, you're not a normal frog, I'll show you, you and your dastardly work... And he impaled it on a pole and left it there... And when he came the next day, the frog was gone. The frog just wasn't there any more... And the frog pierced by my dad, now I'll tell you... It was our neighbour! We thought, where is she now, the auntie. She was nowhere to be seen. And she was hurt. Yes, it was her."

Among the many ways in which witches could harm people, the most widespread belief was that witches could milk cows without any physical contact. When the cow stopped giving milk for no special reason, people believed that a witch had milked it by pulling a rope, that is, simulating milking, and the milk pail under the cow would fill in a fantastic way. A woman in Gorica, so the story went, was combing her hair over her neighbour's milk, after which his cow *dried up*, while her cow gave more milk than could be possible. Buying a cow from a person said to be a female or male witch was particularly unpropitious because people believed that the witch would continue to milk it in the other byre. According to a female narrator born in the nineteen-thirties, in her childhood her family was forced on one occasion to buy milk from some people in Sestranec. She had gone to fetch milk from them with a friend, and the mistress of the house asked them to wait in the yard while she milked the cow. When the woman entered the byre, the girls approached a crack in the wall and watched what she was doing:
"We saw her pouring milk from a small barrel! Now, who ever kept milk in a barrel? And then I told dad what I had seen, and that Verica was with me, my neighbour, and he said 'Jesus Christ! Who knows whose cow she had milked! You shall never go there again! Never! And both were witches, she and her husband."

The scarcity of cow's milk, staple food in the everyday diet of the population in the Lepoglava area, would certainly mean starvation for the whole family. The possibility that a witch might milk the cow or cast a curse in any way was taken very seriously, and the household members had at their disposal a number of practical procedures which, as they believed, could protect the

13 Narrator born in the nineteen-forties.

animal(s). First and foremost, no suspicious person was allowed to enter the byre, and if a frog was spotted in the yard, people took all steps to prevent the frog from entering among the animals. Different apotropaic objects were used for protection, e.g., horseshoes fixed to the wall above the byre entrance, or a small wreath used to adorn cows on St. George's Day (23 April). The latter date was considered to be particularly unpropitious because, according to a belief, witches had "power" over livestock at that time. Nevertheless, that could be limited by adorning cattle with small green wreaths and symbolic fencing of byres with thorny brier. Similarly, on St. George's Day a fire would be lit in front of the entrance into the yard, and sometimes even in front of the house and the byre, as protection from witches and evil forces in general.

Stories about *trute*, beings attacking people as they slept and preventing them from breathing, were also widespread in the Lepoglava area. People often connected them with a sudden feeling of impotence and weight, and compared it to the presence of a phantom person sitting on their chest. Quite a few stories recorded during our research had a personal dimension, i.e., had a memorate-like character (cf. Bošković-Stulli 2000: 23).

"And when I was a little girl, my sister and I slept one night, and something blew over our little legs... And then, all of a sudden, I ... [the narrator imitated the sound of choking]...I could not call mom or dad, as if something were sitting on my chest. I just gasped, gasped and gasped. That was a truta. Then I told dad about it, and he said, yeah, it was a truta."[14]

Just as with witches, people believed that these beings could be warded off by specific procedures, whether magic[15] or of practical nature. The words of a narrator born in the nineteen-forties can serve as an illustration:
"And then, you know what – take a board and drive several nails into it so that the points stick out on the other side. They must stick out. And put that board on yourself. And somebody said that he felt something on his back, but it went away immediately. And she no longer came."

For some narrators *trute* were the same as witches, real people, as they said, from their environment, with supernatural powers, more precisely single girls and boys. Others agreed to such opinions to some extent, and highlighted an indicative detail as the essential difference:

14 Female narrator born in the nineteen-thirties.

15 In most cases, surrounding oneself with apotropaic objects of Christian provenance, e.g., holy water, crucifixes or holy images hung in a visible spot close to the bed.

"Our dad told us that trute were bachelors and spinsters. And then they seek, that is their task since they did not have anybody in this world, they seek other people to plague them now when they're they dead."[16]

The souls of the diseased and nocturnal darkness

Although the Christian concept of afterlife is present as a leitmotif throughout all death images, there are many beliefs about restless souls that may be encountered in various forms in night-time settings. The most widespread image involves souls of the dead manifested in the form of small lights visible as they roam the fields at night. They are called a variety of names, depending on the locality: *kresniki, krsniki, kresnjaki* and *svećari* [candle-bearers] or *križari* [crusaders]. On the one hand, these lights are interpreted as the souls of dead newborns captured between two worlds because, being unbaptised, they cannot enter paradise. On the other hand, it was believed that the lights represented people who had sinned in life, and that regarded especially people who had moved boundary stones in the fields. According to a female narrator born in the nineteen-forties:
"There is truth in it, I saw a krsnik. They could be seen, they said, in the field along the boundaries. Old people also said that they came from the other world to correct their mischief in youth. There used to be a lot of that, but now they are not seen."

Or:
"Dad said, and we were little, the svećari are coming. That's what they used to be, svećari. They were, he said, foul devils. Children listened to him with great attention. And then he said, put a blanket over the window, the svećari are coming. And we watched through the window, and over there, in the direction of Ivanec, you could see lights. And he said that they were foul, impure, and that they moved boundary stones. And confused neighbours over land ownership."[17]

Along with the already mentioned crossroads, graveyards were also mentioned as sites of frequent potential encounters with the supernatural. Thus, according to one story, in the mid-20th century some slightly drunk young men were returning home in Bednjica late at night. They were passing near the grave-

16 Female narrator born in the nineteen-thirties.

17 Female narrator born in the nineteen-thirties.

yard at Višnjica, and one of them, "the tough guy" according to the female narrator born in the nineteen-fifties, entered the cemetery in order to demonstrate his fearlessness. Suddenly, in the middle of the cemetery a huge white horse appeared out of nowhere and pounced upon him; the young man fled home head over heels. In the epilogue of her story the narrator emphasised the young man's unfortunate fate. Namely, he was never the same after the event, and owing to the shock suffered that night he died several years later.

The folk oral literature motif of the fantastic funeral is also present in narratives. A female narrator born in the nineteen-forties remembered the stories of her fellow villagers:
"People saw a whole funeral procession in the middle of the night. And praying, all of them! And a little further off, nobody in sight! Because the cemetery was close, and people used to carry the deceased… And, said he, I saw the whole funeral procession, and went a hundred yards further, and when I turned – not a soul stirring".

The souls of deceased persons could haunt living people, as confirmed by a story about the ghost of a priest which a female narrator born in the nineteen-fifties heard from her father:
"Once he went to a wedding in a neighbouring village, there at Bedenec, and when he returned home he had to cross three streams and pass through the woods. And when he jumped over the third stream, said he, he turned to pee, he had to relieve himself, and he saw a priest some ten yards behind him. He had his vestments on, as if he was going to hold midnight mass. And as he went, the priest followed him, but at the same distance. And when dad stopped, the priest stopped. And when they came to a crossroads, the other one disappeared".

On the other hand, according to another story, like the earlier account of the young man scared to death by a white horse, about a man from Crkovec, shows that sometimes people were to blame for problems with the supernatural:
"And that man called a ghost, really! And it came, and touched the grindstone, and…. And it ground and ground all night. And the man went to the priest, but the priest could not drive it away. And it ground and ground on that grindstone until the man died."[18]

However, the spread of such images was also fertile soil for funny nighttime adventures, as shown by the account of a female narrator born in the

18 Male narrator born in the nineteen-forties.

nineteen-thirties:
"There, they say that fear has a hundred eyes! They bet, I heard that, it's the truth, not a fabrication. The friends were drinking and they bet that he would go to cemetery and take a cross and bring it here. And then take it back. But as he wanted to return, whenever he wanted to push the cross back into the ground, he was pulled back because his coat had stuck, and he yelled whenever he wanted to take off, so that everybody thought he had gone cuckoo. And he thought that the dead person was pulling him to the grave. And he stuck his coat himself. The story went on a lot in the village."

Almost all my narrators confirmed the custom of leaving food on the kitchen table on the eve of All Saints' Day (1 November). On that day, it was believed, the souls of the deceased returned to this world and visited their former homes. Therefore, they left them a full glass of wine, a piece of bread or pastry with cottage cheese, and some people even left cigarettes. A female narrator born in the nineteen-forties described what would happen the next morning:
"And in the morning dad would get up first, drink half of the wine in the glass, and then we, the children, came and he said, look, granddad came and tasted the wine a little."

Many elderly narrators confirmed that they still used to leave some food and wine for the souls and explained to their grandchildren in the morning what had happened, just as their grandparents had done. Asked why they were doing that, they disavowed without exception the practice saying that they did not believe that the souls of their close deceased relatives came to visit them at night. They highlighted the emotional aspect of the custom through the prism of nostalgia for their own childhood, which they wanted to evoke to the youngest members of the family by such practices.

At several localities we recorded the belief that the bells of all chapels rang on the night between All Hallows (1 November) and All Souls' Day (2 November). Even today the bells in the small chapel of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Lepoglavska Ves ring about ten o'clock in the evening. As noted by older narrators, in *old times*, that is, before the Second World War, the chapel bells rang all night. Some of my narrators said that this seemed to be a sign telling the souls that the time had come for their return to the other world.

Nocturnal darkness is not only a set design element in the images about the obliteration of boundaries between this world and the other world, it is also personified. A number of recorded beliefs and related practices conjure up

the view that darkness is especially harmful for infants and small children. Thus, it was believed that a person coming into the house at night should not approach a child immediately after entering, and should rather stand a short while in the light; otherwise the child might have nightmares. Similarly, narratives highlight another taboo regarding the drying of diapers outdoors at night. Mothers-in-law regularly warned their daughters-in-law:
"Mother [mother-in-law] asked all the time if I had brought the nappies in. They must not be left outside in darkness. That's what she used to say, bring those diapers or your child will be in trouble."[19]

In the opposite case, the child could get diarrhea or a greenish stool , and in that case magic healing would become necessary.

Magic healing procedures

According to many narrators, before the Second World War magic healing was customary, although most of them noted that this form of medicine existed parallelly with conventional treatment methods. However, people relatively rarely went to a physician, as compared with seeking help from people skilled in the secrets of eliminating symptoms perceived as actions of supernatural forces. At the same time, more often than not such people were also considered to be witches: the narrators often pointed out that people capable of curing spells were also capable of casting them, and vice versa.

Pouring water over live coal was mentioned as a universal way of treatment:
"There was an old woman in our village, in Purga, she knew how to prepare water, She carried a brazier. Well, it was holy water, what do I know. And she poured it. The sick child shrieked and shrieked, and it would stop when she poured."[20]

Or, in the context of warding off spells:
"And when someone bespoke her, if he had problems, she took water from a point where three rivers met. That meant that whoever had cast the spell must have passed through one of those waters. And then that water worked against her."[21]

19 Female narrator born in the nineteen-forties.

20 Female narrator born in the nineteen-twenties.

21 Narrator born in the nineteeen-forties.

Some narrators also pointed out certain Christian features of such practices, emphasising that the inverted prayer elements made this *magic* benevolent – in other words, that it served as a clear marker of delimitation from the spell. According to a female narrator born in the nineteen-thirties:
"She put the water and threw live coals into it. And she had to say three Our Fathers backwards. If the coals died out, the man for whom they were thrown would die, but if they surfaced he remained alive... That was magic, but not bad. Because one prayed backwards."

The other side of magic healing were practices linked with the Christian concept of vows to various patron saints and closely related to pilgrimages. Thus, people seeking healing went to Marian shrines like Marija Bistrica and Lobor, while for animals people went to the church of St. Isidor and Mary in Bednja (St. Isidor's fête, *Židorsko proščenje*).

According to the account of a female narrator, born in the nineteen-forties, her mother vowed her children to Our Lady of Bistrica, because they were ill, and every year, from the earliest childhood, they went to Marija Bistrica in summer to perform the vow:
"And when we went around the altar three times, we performed our vow. And left a candle there, prayed and left a gift. Then mom told us that the Holy Virgin would protect us if we needed it."

Another female narrator, born in the nineteen-thirties, remembered how her mother had taken vows in Klenovnik on behalf of her son, i.e., the narrator's brother, who suffered from epilepsy as a child. She went on speaking how she performed the vow, but she never told anyone how. As a joke, she added that brother, already an adult, asked her mother whether she was going to that place "where she had insured him, just in case."

In the shrines and at church fêtes people bought apotropaic objects of Christian provenance, especially scapulars. As a female narrator born in the nineteen-fifties told us, she also had one as child, and she got it when she was ill. Her mother told her to wear it round her neck at all times because Our Lady *of the Scapular* would then protect her.

Spells

As already mentioned, spells (*coprlije*) were understood primarily as instruments of the malicious action of people with special powers – male or female

witches. The collected narratives clearly showed that a person was a witch precisely by virtue of his/her skill in casting spells over someone or something in order to produce an unpropitious effect. In other words, spells are as often as not causes because of which people resorted to magic healing, i.e., they relation was complementary. The narratives on this phenomenon – and that is an essential point - were often in the present tense as my narrators alluded that such things often occurred even today:
"We still come across it! This is also a spell. He puts an egg up there on the beam. No sign of breaking in, and the egg is inside. At the bottom of the hay or of wicker. And an egg under that! An egg! Or take a bale of straw. You know how hard that is! And in the middle of the bale an egg! An unbroken egg! Interestingly enough, we also find it in the vineyard and in the field down there. Nothing in sight, and then you find an egg!"[22]

An egg buried in the field or hidden somewhere in the house was certainly the most frequently mentioned means of casting spells. As stressed by some narrators, such an egg was not an ordinary egg. It had to be laid by a special hen and placed in the desired place on a special day:
"And you know what that witch did when she wanted to hurt you, to see that your land and your garden and your vineyard bear no fruit. A man, he was also said to be a male witch, also told me that. And I remembered it. You take an egg laid by a black hen, take it and burry it in the vineyard or in the field. But on a given day, I don't know which. That's that... I found it in the vineyard many times and broke it with a hoe. They said I had to burn it, but I did not dare to touch it with my hand..."[23]

The previous account clearly shows the existence of some fear concerning the treatment of such an object. However, people were getting advice on what to do after finding an egg from the very persons that dealt with warding off spells:
"And then they said, and they were also witches, if you know that a neighbour or somebody else holds a grudge against you, throw that egg over his roof. And when it breaks, he will not be able to do anything against you."[24]

The words of a female narrator born in the nineteen-thirties confirms one of the earlier accounts stating that the best way to get rid of trouble was to burn

22 Narrator born in the nineteen-twenties.

23 Female narrator born in the nineteen-thirties.

24 Narrator born in ther nineteen-forties.

the egg, but taking great care not to break it:
"And that woman said that all the eggs found buried should be thrown into the kitchen range; however, not through the door but rather through the ring on top. You must burn them! And if you happen to break it, nothing can save you."

Spells could also be cast by a look, considered to be very dangerous for people, but primarily for young animals. Thus, a female narrator born in the nineteen-forties remembered a case from her childhood when all their calves died within several days after calving over a period of several years. The narrator's mother solved the problem, after consulting a woman from the village, by forbidding all the neighbours to enter the byre. In her words, "there was a woman that could not be allowed to see the calf. Because it would croak right away!"

However, many narrators pointed out that there were also people who could cast spells by a look but were not conscious of it. According to some narrators, they had the power but never learned to control it, and the community did not treat them as witches. To be sure. Such persons were also mainly avoided, but my narrators generally sympathised with them, stating that such people were not to be blamed because they could harm others.

Conclusion

In summarising the presented research results, let me review a few details. The recorded narratives are unique if they are regarded in terms of the positioning of the motif complexes in the narrator's environment – the action takes place on real locations, and the protagonists are people with names and surnames. Therefore, one could say with every right that the collected narratives reflect a value system which can be regarded as part of the identity of the community (cf. Grbić 2001: 459). However, failure to emphasise that the beliefs underlying the very same narratives are part of the traditional heritage in a greater area would be potentially detrimental. For the requirements of this presentation it would be pointless to resort to the genealogy of the local (Lepoglava) images of the supernatural. However, mentioning some potentially interesting moments would be worthwhile for the sake of subsequent research.

We recorded disproportionately few narratives about fairies, most of which can be reduced to brief accounts about some of their characteristics or about the place where people came across such phenomena. More complex stories,

the so-called memorates or fabulates (cf. Bošković-Stulli 2006: 23) are very rare and often very fragmented, which is unusual taking into account the onomastics of the area. One could assume that stories about fairies – arguably the most frequently represented beings not only in the Croatian setting but also on the European scale (cf. Šešo 2012: 96) – were definitely very present in the Lepoglava area in the past, and then almost disappeared for some reason. On the other hand, beliefs related to witches are numerous and largely match the results of a complex study completed on the basis of extensive research by the Slovenian anthropologist Mirjam Mencej. During her field work she identified two layers in the narratives regarding witchcraft – the social and the supernatural – in a non-specified microregion in eastern Slovenia, physically very close to the Lepoglava area. The social aspect is particularly interesting because of the distinction of relations with the village witch (*vaška čarovnica*) and the witches from the neighbourhood (*sosedske čarovnice*). The first is the regular culprit at the level of the whole community whereas the second, in simplified terms, is much closer, more direct and therefore potentially more dangerous, i.e., that very witch that should not be rubbed up the wrong way (cf. Mencej 2006: 93-136). Moreover, the *trute* are also an interesting phenomenon deserving closer consideration. On the one hand, there is a striking similarity with *mora* [incubus], the fantastic being oppressing (like a nightmare) man in his sleep and sitting on his chest (cf. Šešo 2012: 118-125). However, in beliefs *mora* is almost always a female being linked with a witch, and sometimes even a singular interphase in that line of transformation. On the other hand, *trute* are in a great number of cases described as the souls of spinsters and bachelors which torment sleeping men and women because they were left alone when they were alive, i.e., because of the failure to observe the norm of the social convention - marriage.

The soul of deceased persons as a leitmotif in beliefs is closely related to the nocturnal motif, which need not be surprising. The link originates from the existential discourse the concept of which is universal and in manifested in the ancient image about evil potentially harmful forces arriving in the human world under the cover of darkness (cf. Grbić 2001: 465). The narratives about the return of the dead among the living can serve as an example of the complex perception of otherworldliness. In the traditional stories elements of the Christian concept of afterlife mix with the apparently unconnectable narratives of a macabre tone. Hence the importance of placing the narrated story under the cover of darkness, in the time when boundaries between worlds but

also between world views are obliterated.

Oral folk literature texts relating to magic healing and spells – other than the segment relating to pleading with saints for healing – are related to some extent with a broad spectrum of images about witches, i.e., they show the delimitation between the moral categories of good and evil and the traditionally conditioned standards of the community. In other words, although the skill of casting spells greatly outshines the equally fantastic witch's abilities of divination, magic healing and spell elimination, the examples from Lepoglava show that the witch need not be considered a plastic figure. Resisting conventions is in the nature of the witch.

Considering the result of our reconnaissance, I am convinced that the story about the beliefs of the population in the Lepoglava area is not finished. Indeed, this article has only covered one segment in the immense sea of discourse about the supernatural. I certainly intend to continue my field research along the same line, but also to deepen some other, complementary themes that have appeared to be rewarding during reconnaissance, e.g., customs in the annual and life cycles. Similarly, I believe that future research should also consider modern life, i.e., the relative present[25], explore the traditional niches in modern terms but also the avant-garde moments of the past. In this way the results would form a body of material open for more specific research and, on the other hand, open the possibility of its presentation in the form of a publication, exhibition or a third option, bringing it back to the local community from which it derives.

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25 Implying the period from the end of WW2 to the present day.

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