



Baština
Dusty Covers

Stories on Wooden Blocks

Berislav Majhut

The contract signed in 1924 between Želimir Mažuranić (1882–1941), the brother of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić (1874–1938), and the English publisher George Allen & Unwin Ltd included the latter's obligation to issue the collection of stories *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* (first published in 1916 and published in English in 1924, see the note below), and also to print 10,000 sets of illustrations in colour by Vladimir Kirin (1894–1963) on a special kind of paper. Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić considered these illustrations especially successful, so the printed sets were also used in other editions of the *Tales*. The third extended Croatian edition was published in 1926, and Vladimir Kirin made additional illustrations for two new tales: "Toporko and his Nine Brothers" and "Yagor". It seems that it was necessary to print more sets of Kirin's illustrations for the fourth Croatian edition of *Tales* in the early 1940s published by Radoslav Horvat (Lovrić Kralj and Dvorščak 2018: 81). Yet, after 1945, there remained a number of Kirin's illustrations in colour. While in the earlier period it was possible to count on the fact that the unused remaining illustrations would be used in another edition, the year 1945 brought a dramatic reversal of circumstances.

By the end of World War II, Vladimir Kirin was one of the most highly acclaimed Croatian artists, having had a European education and enjoying many international artistic contacts. He was an esteemed and reputable painter and graphic artist. This is why the government of the Croatian puppet state, the so-called Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945), pronounced him head of their Art Department and assigned him jobs that required his expertise. However, with the establishment of communist rule after the war, Kirin was convicted of "collaboration with the Ustasha government" so that he became a *persona non grata* overnight. In fact, at the Assembly of the Society of Artists of Croatia, on 29 August 1945, Kirin was expelled from the Academy of Arts of the University of Zagreb, where he had been a full professor, because he had organised exhibitions of Croatian art in Venice, Berlin, Vienna and Bratislava, and because he had produced designs for the banknotes of the "Independent State of Croatia": "The decisions made at this assembly largely dictated a multi-decade neglect of fine art opuses of anathematised artists" (Rauter Plančić 2006: 38).

After 1945 it was out of the question for anything created by a man who, among other things, made blueprints for Ustasha currency, to appear in the public. Thus, when the communist literary authorities finally agreed to publish the *Tales* again, in 1950, the book appeared with images by another artist, Albert Kinert (1919–1987). The remaining prints of the illustrations by Vladimir Kirin, were lying around somewhere in Vila Ružić in Rijeka, the home of Nada and Viktor Ružić.

Then, unexpectedly, on the other side of the world, in far-away Argentina, in 1951, the grandnephew of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, Teodoro Darko Mažuranić, received a gift



Fig. 1. The box
Sl. 1. Kutija

from Croatia for his second birthday: a box of wooden blocks and a visual puzzle at the same time (Fig. 1 and 2). The present arrived from Rijeka, sent by his aunt Nada Ružić, nee Brlić (1893–1964), the eldest daughter of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić.

The box contains twelve cubes (with dimensions of 35mm). Choosing the proper sides and arranging the wooden blocks in four rows and three columns, following the attached templates, one could put together six of Kirin's images from *Tales of Long Ago*: three scenes from the story "How Quest Sought the Truth", two from "Bridesman Sun and Bride Bridekins" and one from "Fisherman Plunk and His Wife" (Fig. 3). The toy is an interactive puzzle intertextually related to the book, which evokes tales known to the reader/puzzle solver, and thus also a kind of wordless picturebook. According to Teodor Darko Mažuranić, all the children in the family had their own box of blocks. Yet, as this box that he brought back on his return to Croatia is the only preserved specimen, it is impossible to establish whether all the sets included the same illustrations or different ones. There were ten colour illustrations in the English edition of *Tales of Long Ago* and

two more, twelve in all, in the Croatian edition of 1926. There is no trace of any kind of mark or logo of the producer on any part of the object; it is obvious that the company or business involved took care to conceal its involvement. Thus, it is most likely that the blocks were not publicly distributed.

In addition to the wooden blocks, similar to those we can still find in many chests of children's toys anywhere in the world, this little box contains loads of history of a family, in its ingrained journey from Croatia to Argentina and back, as well as some history of Croatian people in the mid-twentieth century and their relationship to cultural memory and the preservation of the national heritage.

Dimensions

Wooden blocks (cubes): 35 x 35 x 35 mm.

Outside measurements of the box with lid: 154 x 118 x 39 mm.

Dimensions of the templates (5 loose images and the sixth on the lid): height: 141 mm x width 104-107 mm (the templates were probably cut by ordinary scissors).

A note

Priče iz davnine [Tales of Long Ago], a collection of original literary fairy tales by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, was translated into English by Fanny S. Copeland. It was published under the title *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* in London by George Allen & Unwin Ltd. (also the publisher of JRR Tolkien's novels), and in New York by Frederick A. Stokes Company in the same year (1924). Vladimir Kirin made black-and white and colour illustrations for the first English edition. The book is in the public domain, and the American edition is available at The Public Domain Review <<https://publicdomainreview.org/collections/croatian-tales-of-long-ago-1922>>/. It is mistakenly dated 1922. Kirin was still working on the images in 1923, so that the book includes images dated 1923 by the artist himself (cf. Lovrić Kralj and Dvorščak 2018), and the archived sources, including the contract between Želimir Mažuranić and the publisher of 1924, confirm 1924 as the year of publication.

Acknowledgments

Libri et Liberi is grateful to Mr Teodor Darko Mažuranić for his kindness, his permission to include this unique puzzle-toy-picturebook from his private collection in the *Dusty Covers* section and for his help in its preparation. His own memories which he gladly shared with us represent a significant contribution to the understanding of the Croatian history of children's culture. We also express our gratitude to Maja Homen Pavlin for the photographs of this multi-layered interactive object, which she also prepared for publication.

Priče na kockama

Berislav Majhut

U ugovoru između Želimira Mažuranića (1882. – 1941.), brata Ivane Brlić-Mažuranić (1874. – 1938.), i engleskoga nakladnika George Allen & Unwin Ltd. iz 1924. dogovoreno je da oni, osim što će objaviti *Priče iz davnine*, na posebnom papiru otisnu i 10 000 kompleta ilustracija u boji Vladimira Kirina (1894. – 1963.). Te je ilustracije sama Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić držala vrlo uspjelima pa su otisnuti kompleti poslužili i u drugim izdanjima *Priča iz davnine*. Treće prošireno hrvatsko izdanje *Priča iz davnine* Ivane Brlić-Mažuranić objavljeno je 1926. a Vladimir Kirin morao je načiniti dodatne ilustracije za nove priče, „Jagor“ i „Lutonjica Toporko i devet župančića“. Čini se da je već za četvrto izdanje *Priča iz davnine* kod nakladnika Radoslava Horvata, iz ranih 1940-ih godina trebalo dotiskati Kirinove ilustracije (Lovrić Kralj i Dvorščak 2018: 81). Ipak je i nakon 1945. ostala neupotrijebljena određena količina Kirinovih ilustracija u boji. I dok se prije uvijek moglo računati s tim da će se neiskorištene, preostale ilustracije iskoristiti u nekoj skorjoj prilici, 1945. dogodio se dramatičan obrat.

Do kraja Drugoga svjetskoga rata Kirin je bio jedan od najuglednijih hrvatskih umjetnika, europskoga obrazovanja i brojnih međunarodnih umjetničkih kontakata. Bio je uvažen i ugledan slikar i grafičar. Stoga su ga vlasti pronacističke Nezavisne Države Hrvatske imenovale nadstojnikom umjetničkoga odsjeka svoje vlade i zadužile ga za poslove koji su tražili njegovu ekspertizu. No s uspostavom komunističkih vlasti nakon Drugoga svjetskoga rata, osuđen je za kolaboriranje s ustaškim vlastima te je preko noći postao *persona non grata*. Naime, Vladimir Kirin je na Skupštini Udruženja likovnih umjetnika Hrvatske, održanoj 29. kolovoza 1945., izbačen s Likovne akademije Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, gdje je bio profesor, zato što je organizirao izložbe hrvatske umjetnosti u Veneciji, Berlinu, Beču i Bratislavi te izrađivao novčanice za NDH: „Na toj sjednici, odluke su u mnogome diktirale višedesetljetno zanemarivanje likovnih opusa anatemiziranih umjetnika“ (Rauter Plančić 2006: 38).

Nakon 1945. nije dolazilo u obzir da se u javnosti pojavi išta što je naslikao čovjek koji je, između ostaloga, izrađivao nacрте za ustaške kune, pa kada je komunistička cenzura književne vlasti 1950. napokon ipak dopustila ponovno objavljivanje *Priča iz davnine*, one su izišle s ilustracijama Alberta Kinerta (1919. – 1987). Preostali otisci ilustracija Vladimira Kirina ostali su ležati negdje u Vili Ružić na Pećinama u Rijeci gdje je živjela obitelj Nade i Viktora Ružića.

A onda na drugom kraju svijeta, u dalekoj Argentini, 1951., za svoj drugi rođendan, pranećak Ivane Brlić-Mažuranić, Teodoro Darko Mažuranić dobio je iz Hrvatske na poklon kutiju s kockama za slaganje, vizualnu zagonetku (Sl. 1 i 2). Poslala mu ih je iz Rijeke njegova teta Nada Ružić, rođena Brlić (1893. – 1964.), najstarija kći Ivane Brlić-Mažuranić.

U kutiji je bilo 12 kocaka (35 mm) i iz njih se izborom odgovarajućih ploha i rasporedom drvenih kocaka u četiri retka i tri stupca prema priloženim predlošcima



Fig. 2. Open box
Sl. 2. Otvorena kutija

moglo složiti šest Kirinovih slika iz zbirke *Priče iz davnine*: tri prizora iz priče „Kako je Potjeh tražio istinu“, dva iz „Sunce djever i Neva Nevičica“ a jedan iz „Ribar Palunko i njegova žena“ (Sl. 3). Riječ je o interaktivnoj slagalici koja u intertekstualnom odnosu prema knjizi *Priče iz davnine* priziva pojedine čitatelju poznate priče, poput svojevrsne slikovnice bez riječi. Prema sjećanju Teodora Darka Mažuranića sva su djeca u obitelji imala svoju vlastitu kutiju kocaka za slaganje. Budući da je kutija kocaka, koju je Teodoro Mažuranić na povratku u domovinu ponio sa sobom, jedini sačuvani primjerak, nemoguće je znati jesu li svi kompleti s kockama imali iste ilustracije ili pak različite. Naime, bilo je deset ilustracija iz engleskoga izdanja odnosno dvanaest iz onoga iz 1926. Ni na kutiji ni na kockama ni na predloščima ne postoji ni najšturija oznaka proizvođača koji se očito dobro čuvao da se ne sazna tko ih je načinio. Stoga je više nego vjerojatno da kocke nisu bile u javnoj distribuciji.

U toj kutiji osim običnih dječjih kocaka, kakve je moguće još i danas naći u svakom odjeljku s dječjim igračkama na svijetu, mnogo je povijesti jedne obitelji, sadržane u njihovu putovanju do Argentine i nazad, ali i povijesti jednoga naroda sredinom dvadesetoga stoljeća i njegova odnosa prema kulturnomu sjećanju i čuvanju nacionalne baštine.



Fig. 3. Ready to play
Sl. 3. Igra može početi

Mjere

Kocke: 35 x 35 x 35 mm.

Vanjske mjere kutije s poklopcem: 154 x 118 x 39 mm.

Mjere predložaka (5 slika Vladimira Kirina i jedna (šesta) slika na poklopcu kutije: u visini, Kirinove reprodukcije su jednake (141 mm.) ali u širini variraju nekoliko milimetara, od 104 do 107 mm. Vjerojatno su rezane običnim škarama.

Zahvale

Libri et Liberi duguje zahvalnost gospodinu Teodoru Darku Mažuraniću na susretljivosti i velikoj pomoći u pripremi priloga o jedinstvenoj slagalici, koja je i danas u njegovu vlasništvu, te na njegovu svjedočanstvu i doprinosu razumijevanju hrvatske povijesti dječje kulture.

Također zahvaljujemo Maji Homen Pavlin koja je snimila fotografije toga višeslojnoga interaktivnoga predmeta i pripremila ih za objavljivanje.

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Kirin's illustration for "Bridesman Sun and Bride Bridekins"
Kirinova ilustracija bajke „Sunce djever i Neva Nevičica“





Another of Kirin's illustrations for "Bridesman Sun and Bride Bridekins"
Još jedna Kirinova ilustracija bajke „Sunce djever i Neva Nevičica“





Kirin's illustration for "How Quest Sought the Truth"
Kirinova ilustracija bajke „Kako je Potjeh tražio istinu“





Another of Kirin's illustrations for "How Quest Sought the Truth"
Još jedna Kirinova ilustracija bajke „Kako je Potjeh tražio istinu“





Yet another of Kirin's illustrations for "How Quest Sought the Truth"
Treća Kirinova ilustracija bajke „Kako je Potjeh tražio istinu“





Kirin's illustration for "Fisherman Plunk and His Wife"
Kirinova ilustracija bajke „Ribar Palunko i njegova žena“





Six templates for puzzles based on Vladimir Kirin's illustrations for *Tales of Long Ago* by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić and the cardboard box of the toy-picturebook from 1951
 Šest predložaka za slagalice Kirinovih ilustracija za *Priče iz davnine* Ivane Brlić-Mažuranić i kartonska kutija interaktivne igračke slikovnice iz 1951.