

ISTRIAN NARRATIVE FOLKLORE IN STUDIES BY MAJA BOŠKOVIĆ-STULLI AND MILKO MATIČETOV

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This article is dedicated to the memory of Croatian eminent folklorist, Maja Bošković-Stulli, who dedicated much of her research to Istrian narrative folklore. She was one of the leading folklorists of the second half of the 20th century and a contemporary of Slovenia's Milko Matičetov, another exceptional folklorist and field researcher. Together, they are responsible for the collection of Istrian narrative folklore and studied the role which narratives had in the lives of Istrian people. The proximity of different ethnic groups in this territory led to the diversity and richness of narrative culture and folk storytelling up to this day. This article discusses some examples of narrative culture from Slovenian and Croatian Istria from the point of view of vital shifts and changes that can be traced through different historical periods until today.

Keywords: folktale, narrative folklore, Istria, Maja Bošković-Stulli, Milko Matičetov

INTRODUCTION

Narrative culture is a social process incorporated into the dynamics of the learning process and historical development. Folklorists explore and analyse various influences on narrative culture and its development. In this article I explore the changes that took place in narrative folklore of Istria following the development of storytelling since the time when two prominent folklorists – Maja Bošković-Stulli from Zagreb and Milko Matičetov from Ljubljana – studied it in the second half of the 20th century.¹ My research focuses on

¹ For more on the work and scholarly cooperation between Maja Bošković-Stulli and Milko Matičetov see Ljiljana Marks's article (2022), where she systematically compares the scholarly careers and interests of both folklorists.

selected examples of narrative motifs which they collected, some of which are still present to this day. As will be seen from this study, they are mostly connected to particular places, local monuments, extraordinary nature, folk beliefs, history and other characteristics of the local landscape and places of memory. A so-called *site of memory* strongly attracts people's attention today: it enables them to memorize a message easily, while simultaneously encouraging them to become immersed into a story and space (Valk and Sävborg 2018: 11). Many researchers (e.g. Chittenden 2011) note that the presentation of narrative heritage of places by means of oral performances has a significant impact on sightseeing and cultural and educational activities, since it helps people to imagine the lifestyles of the past and the events of a particular area more easily, and to remember traditions more vividly. Both Milko Matičetov and Maja Bošković-Stulli dedicated a significant part of their research to Istrian narrative folklore and collected a lot of narrative material in the field, which remains quite invaluable today. Traditional forms and contents of storytelling adapt to cultural and social changes; thus, new forms and genres arise, which are subject to new means of transmission, and they consequently undertake new functions and roles. These changes and new forms of narratives from traditional storytelling which were discussed already by Maja Bošković-Stulli and Milko Matičetov are also presented in this article.

KRESNIK, KRSNIK

As early as 1641 the bishop of Novigrad and historian Giacomo Filippa Tommasini wrote that people in the Province of Istria believe that some persons, who were born under certain circumstances and usually in the placenta, become *krsniks* or *vukodlaks*. At night, their spirit would go to a crossroads, particularly at the time of Ember days, and they would fight for a good or bad harvest against each other (Tommasini 1837 [1641]: 519; Šešo 2022: 17).

Among the first people who wrote about Istria and its people from the ethnographic perspective was also the polyhistor and polymath from Carniola, Johann Weichard Valvasor. In his most important work, *Die Ehre dess Herzogthums Crain* (The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola, 1689), he presented Istrian cultural history, including a description of folk beliefs and narratives (Valvasor 1689: II. vol., VI. book, X. cap., p. 327ff).

Among other folk beliefs from Istria and its surroundings, specifically the region of Pivka, Valvasor wrote that narratives from the region focused on *Sentiansavèze* (*šentjanžvci*, as *krsniks* were also called), presenting them as protectors of villages and as seers with supernatural abilities who fought against sorcerers *Vedavèze* (*vedavci*) who drink children's blood. These fights usually took place on *Badnjak*, as Christmas Eve was referred to (Valvasor 1689: III. vol., XI. book., p. 456; cf. Bošković-Stulli 1959: 231).

All these data and sources prove that *kresnik* or *krsnik* has a special place in Istrian folk beliefs, since local folklore about him is preserved to this day. In her collection of

Istrian folktales, Maja Bošković-Stulli published 18 stories about the *krsnik* from Croatian Istria (Bošković-Stulli 1959: 147–153), and later also published several studies on this supernatural being (e.g. Bošković-Stulli 1960, 2003). Many stories about the *krsnik* relate to his role as a protector against witchcraft, in charge of ensuring a good harvest, a being with the properties of a *zduhač*. Bošković-Stulli accompanied these interpretations with a substantial commentary in the notes to her book (Bošković-Stulli 1959: 224–238). Later, based on the findings of Nikolaj Mikhailov (1996, 1997) and Zmago Šmitek (2004: 137–178), she further expanded her studies and did not dispute narrative folklore – mainly from Slovenia – where the *kresnik* appears both in the mythological role of the sky or sun god, as well as in the extatic role of the *benandante*, a guardian protector of crops; although she insisted that to prove this it would take more research (Bošković-Stulli 2002: 29–34).

Matičeto did not discuss *kresnik* at length; he only stated, in his article about Slovenian supernatural beings, that *kresnik* appears on both sides of the eastern border between Slovenia and Croatia (Matičeto 1985: 26).

Today *kresnik* or *krsnik* is preserved in narrative folklore of Slovenian as well as Croatian Istria, and is also documented elsewhere in Slovenia and in Dalmatia. Recently Luka Šešo published an in-depth study of the *krsnik* from the perspective of the socio-anthropological structure of the folk belief in the *krsnik* as a real person with healing abilities (Šešo 2023). On the basis of historical and archival material, Matija Drandić studied healing and extatic properties of *benandante*, *viandante* and *krsnik* in the territory of Friuli and Istria in the 16th and 17th century (Drandić 2020). Specifically, he analysed the case of *viandante* from the Diocese of Poreč and compared it to the case of Friulian *benandante* studied by Carlo Ginzburg (1972, 1998). Although outside the scope of the present article, it is significant for the understanding of the role of extatic *krsnik* in the region.

In Slovenian Istria, in the village of Krkavče, the “Krkavče Stone” – with a relief depicting a figure which could be a deity connected with the sun – was found. It is still preserved to this day and erected by the road leading to Krkavče. It bears a chiselled stylized human figure with spread out arms and a crown of rays on both sides; while it is said to have once had another, or perhaps even three additional heads on top of the stone. The locals claim that some generations later the stone was used as a pillory stone where people were tied and shamed as punishment. In the past, the stone was worshipped; on St Vitus Day people placed hands on it believing this brought fertility. For Christmas, people might stay by the stone overnight, putting an oak (*badnjak*) on the fire to burn until morning. At dawn all the villagers gathered, making a toast. The “Krkavče Stone” was also traditionally said to assist in nature’s abundance. In the folk memory, a story is preserved that the stone was brought there by ship, and that it was used to tie other ships to it (Puhar and Pleterski 2005; Cerar 2009: 214–219).

It is accepted that the stone is one of the rare monoliths in Slovenia to have survived long centuries. As such, it is a remnant of pre-Christian worship and an important heritage

of ancient cultures in Istria. It is possible that the “Krkavče Stone” originally presented some kind of a sun-god, with the relief on it possibly being reminiscent of Indo-Iranian Mithra (Župančič 2006). However, the Slavic *Kresnik* could be possibly considered a figure to replace the former sun deity in the role of the sky or sun god.



Figure1: The “Krkavče Stone” in Krkavče.
(Photo by M. Kropelj Telban, 2022)

This could be possible, since it can be concluded from Slovenian narratives that *Kresnik* was also considered as a deity or a supernatural being connected with the sky and the sun, supposedly close to Perun, as presented by Nikolai Mikhailov and later Zmago Šmitek, as has already been mentioned. This belief mainly comes from the Eastern part of Slovenia, but it is possible that it was part of wider Slavic perceptions in Istria as well.

Narratives collected in Istria in the 19th century depict *krsnik* mainly as a person with supernatural abilities fighting on crossroads for a plentiful harvest in the village, as recorded, among others, by Ivan Milčetić in Krk and Kastav (Milčetić 1896: 224; Šešo 2022: 35), and in the vicinity of Gorica, where Stepan Kociančič documented narratives about *kresniks* fighting against witches (Kociančič 1854: 157; Kropelj 2008a: 72).

Stories about the *kr(e)snik* in Croatian as well as in Slovenian Istria which were recorded towards the end of the 20th century present him more as a healer or protector of people, as we can see, for instance, in the tales published by Marjan Tomšič. One of them recounts of “Krsnik Saving the Maidens” (Tomšič 1989: 47), and another of “Krsnik and the Nobleman from Gračišče” (ibid.: 166) where the *krsnik* is presented as follows:

Krsnik was the one who lifted curses and spells from people. And so, people came to him from all parts of the land to ask for help with all manner of ailments: when they were sick, when their animals suffered, when someone was bitten by an adder, when a cow stopped giving milk and so on. Everyone was convinced that the krsnik was able to help with these and other afflictions [...] (Tomšič 1989: 166)

Such narratives were recently also collected in Istria by Evelina Rudan (Rudan 2016), and Luka Šešo (Šešo 2022), as well as Uršula Čebren in the village of Sveti Anton near Koper (Čebren 2008: 117–118). It is interesting that the healer – *krsnik* from the village of Sveti Anton explained his healing as fighting against evil causing the sickness. In Pazin Tamara Nikolić Đerić and Nikolina Rusac recently recorded narratives about the *krsnik*. One of them speaks about the disappearance of sheep on the crossroads in Katun Lindarski near Žminj, where later in 1890 a chapel was built to prevent similar occurrences. People believed that the disappearance of the sheep was caused by štrige, and that the *krsnik* fought against them. These narratives were presented within the project Living Magic of Pohorje and Istria,² and published in literary form in a book stemming from it (Cunta 2019: 102–105).

HISTORICAL TALES

The Bishop of Novigrad, Giacomo Filippe Tommasini (1595–1655), was a prominent polymath of the 17th century, who wrote about Istrian towns, their culture and history. He also described the life of Istrian people. After twelve years of service in Novigrad, he left behind unfinished but no less significant records entitled “Historical and Geographical Commentary on the Province of Istria” [*De Commentari storici-geografici della Provincia dell’ Istria*, 1641], which were published much later (Tommasini 1837).

Another priest, and later (since 1686) the Bishop of Koper, Paolo Naldini (1632–1713), published his “Ecclesiastical Topography or Description of the City of Koper” [*Corografia ecclesiastica o’ sia descrizione della città e della dioscesi di Giustinopoli detto volgarmente Capo d’Istria*, 1700] in Venice. Both Tommasini and Naldini were foreigners from Padua, but their accounts included Croatian and Slovenian Istria, especially the area of Koper and Novigrad. Their works contained historical narratives, anecdotes about clergymen and saints connected to these places, as well as descriptions of events taking place in this territory. Perhaps it is owing to them that many historical tales and folk stories concerning various landmarks, events and personalities, as well as the incursions of the Huns, the Lombards (Langobards), Ottomans, French and other invaders, were preserved. Thus, in Koštabona, for example, memory is kept of the Blessed Élio (Élij), who brought Christianity from Aquileia and spread it across Istria:

² The Project Interreg V-A Slovenia – Croatia Živa coprnija / Živa strigarija (Living Magic) (2017–2019).

Blessed Elio

Blessed Elio comes from Koštabona near Koper. The lore says that he was a deacon preaching the Holy Gospel in these parts. Bishop Paolo Naldini stated that Elio was a student of St Hermagoras. Where his birthplace had been, a small church was built, existing to this day. Some years after the Second World War, the church was turned into a cooperative warehouse. Thanks to dedicated efforts of the local priest, Rev Alojz Kocjančič and his flock, the church was ultimately restored to its original purpose. Now the people of Koštabona maintain it in perfect order, out of respect to their patron saint. Bodily remains of the Blessed Elio are kept in the Koper monastery church, on the second side altar to the right, with the proper inscription. They were once open to public worship. (Morato and Pahor 2002: 81)

This is only one of many Istrian historical tales that were part of the oral tradition in this region. It talks about a local saint, Blessed Élio, who was worshipped by the inhabitants of Koštabona and the surrounding towns and villages many years ago, but now the only reminder of Blessed Élio and tales connected with him is the church dedicated to him.

Both Milko Matičetov and Maja Bošković-Stulli documented narratives on Attila, which were widespread in all parts of Istria – in Italian, Slovenian and Croatian Istria alike. Up to this day many narratives on Attila the Hun and his feats are preserved. Attila, known as “the scourge of God”, was a ruler of the Hun tribes united by him in 445. Among the cities he conquered were Cividale and Aquileia, while the people also told stories of Attila building the Udine Castle, and being buried in three coffins – a golden, a silver, and a copper one – in some part of Tolmin; in Korte they said he was buried in a golden coffin where waters flow together, and all the gravediggers were then killed (Morato and Pahor 2002: 84, nr. 79). There are numerous tales of Attila’s hidden treasures and his terrible raids of these lands (Morato and Pahor 2002: 84–85). A folk narrative widespread not only in Slovenian but also Croatian and Italian Istria, was the one of Attila always barking before speaking, since he had supposedly been the son of a woman and a hound (Bošlović-Stulli 1959: 126–130; Morato and Pahor 2002: 84, nr. 80). According to a legend from Topolovec, he was finally killed near Pazin, where they managed to “boil him in some devilish oil” (Matičetov 1972: 132).

In his article on Attila in the stories of the Italians, Croats and Slovenes (1949), Milko Matičetov added some more folk narratives on Attila to the study and materials collected by Giuseppe Vidossi (1910). He published a story about Attila, half dog–half man, and the photograph of Attila’s stone-carved head from the Church of Sv. Marija na Božjem polju / St Mary in the Field in Vižinada/Visinada (Matičetov 1949: 117, 119). In her collection “Istrian Folk Stories” (Istarske narodne priče) Maja Bošković-Stulli published 14 stories about Attila and an extensive commentary studying this folklore, also presenting and analysing the works of other researchers (Bošković-Stulli 1959: 126–130, 190–194).

Comparative aspects of the narratives and the diverse motifs of the stories on Attila were later presented in detail by Zmago Šmitek (1994). In Croatian Istria some tales about Attila and his carved heads on the churches were documented by Kristina Prodan (2021).



Figure 2: Attila's head carved in stone on the frontage of the Church of St Mary in the Field in Vižinada/Visinada. A similar head was also carved in the chapel of St Anton of Padua in Gračišče and in many other churches in Istria. (From: Matičetov 1948, 1949).

RELIGIOUS AND FAIRY TALES

In the 19th century folktales and songs in Istria were collected by a priest of Slovene origin, Jakob Volčič (1815–1888). Until 1845 he served in Slovenia, in Goričana and Boršt near Trieste, and later in Pazin, Zarečje and other towns of the Croatian Istria. Most records he collected come from the Croatian parts of Istria (cf. Fikfak 1988, Bošković-Stulli 1988), and among them, those which also appear in the Slovenian part of Istria include, for instance, the legends “Mary, the Jews and Young Sunday”³ and “The Child and the Gatekeeper of Heaven”.⁴ In Smokvica, the variant of the latter tale was later recorded by Marjan Tomšič: “How the Dry Tree Wept”, recounting the story of a little girl who was born, baptized and died within an hour. She was given a barrel (can) by Jesus to fill with water from a dry tree if she wished to go to heaven. Wandering for seven years, she finally reached a parched tree, where two men were roasting a stolen ox. When she told them her story they wept, she collected their tears and was thus allowed into heaven (Tomšič 1989: 112).

Maja Bošković-Stulli did not include Volčič's materials in her first book on Istrian folktales (Bošković-Stulli 1959), whereas in her second collection entitled “Buried Gold” (Zakopano

³ Published in *Slovenski glasnik* 1865: 153 Marija, Judje in mlada Nedelja; reprint: Kropelj, Dapit 2008: 42.

⁴ Published in *Slovenski glasnik* 1856: 152–153 Ortok i rajski vratar; c.f.: Fikfak 1988: 224.

zlato) she relatively frequently quoted stories from his manuscripts and publications⁵ (Bošković-Stulli 1986).

Istrian fairy tales are largely variants of international folktale types. Matičetov collected nearly fifty of them. Many were recounted in July 1950 by his favourite Istrian storyteller Bepo Umer – Malnar, from the settlement of Babiči near Marezige. Among the folktales he told was also *The Three Musicians* (ATU 1654) and the Istrian variant of the *Fiddler's Ballad* about a musician who was returning home at night from a wedding with his violin (škant), and upon hearing a wolf howling in Draga near Labor, he howled back in jest. The big wolf leapt from its pack and caught up with the fiddler in three minutes, followed by two more. Terrified, the fiddler climbed a mulberry tree, which the wolves started chomping up, biting off so much wood that it began swaying by the morning. Before his impending demise, the helpless musician played one last swan song. Lo and behold! At the clarion sound of the fiddle, the wolves scattered on all sides, and the lucky fiddler managed to return home safely (Matičetov 1964: 203).



Figure 3: Istrian storyteller Bepo Umer – Malnar from Babiči near Marezige (Photo: Milko Matičetov).

In her collection “Istrian folktales” (1959), Maja Bošković-Stulli published 67 fairy tales, most of which fit within the international catalogue of folktale types (Uther 2004), listed in the book’s appendix alongside other Croatian variants of these tales.

The štorije of Istria reflect the historical experience of the local folk, amalgamating pagan elements with Christianity as well as pronounced traces of Istrian culture. The folk-

⁵ The manuscript collection “*Narodne pripovijetke*” by Jakob Volčič was kept by the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts (JAZU) in Zagreb (Bošković-Stulli 1988: 79; more in: Bošković-Stulli 1972).

tales are often humorous and zestfully presented, thus maintaining their narrative power and curious air of mystery.

Interestingly, both Maja Bošković-Stulli and Milko Matičetov recorded folk weather wisdom in Istria belonging to the genre of a tale or a fable about the Blackbird and St Gregory, or the blackbird and the month of March. Milko Matičetov documented it in the village Osp, in September 1949, published by Boris Merhar:

Gregory and the Blackbird (ATU 71*)

St Gregory went to a fair through the woods and heard a blackbird singing a beautiful song. Asked Gregory:

“Why so happy, little one? I’m off to fetch my mother a pelt, the winter is about to bite!”

The blackbird replied:

“I’m as merry as can be, since I already have young!”

Gregory:

“Already? We’ll see about that on my way back!”

Indeed, they met once more as Gregory was returning from the fair, bringing his mother a heavy pelt.

Said Gregory:

“Little one, why so sad now?”

The blackbird replied:

“Keep on walking, I’m too miserable to speak ...”

– his little birds had all perished by the frost.

“Haven’t I told you to wait till I was back?!” (Merhar 1956: 192)

A similar tale entitled *Saint Gregory and the Animals* from Croatian Istria was published by Maja Bošković-Stulli in her collection of “Istrian Folk Stories” (1959: 39–40). It was recorded in Krasica near Buje and is slightly different from the Slovenian variant. It talks about how St Gregory went to buy his mother a pelt on 12 March, meeting a blackbird, a shepherd, and a dog on his way. The first two bragged about doing well, while the dog lamented it had nothing to eat. On Gregory’s way back, it was the blackbird and the shepherd who were sullen, since – because of the unexpected cold weather – the bird lost its progeny and the shepherd his flock of sheep and goats. Only the dog was content, feasting on the carcasses. In the Kajkavian dialect, the month of March was also called *gregorščak*.

The fable “The Blackbird and the Month of March”⁶ originated in the observation of nature. Namely, the blackbird is considered a tireless lover, often chirping its song of seduction as early as February. Saint Gregory’s name day is at the beginning of March (12 March), hence the popular saying: “Birds wed on St Gregory’s Day”. However, people knew that March can still bring freezing cold, and this warning is intertwined within the fable’s narrative. The connection between March and St Gregory reveals close ties between the

⁶ It was already Valentin Vodnik who recorded the folk story “*Kos in Brezen*”, later setting it into verse (1798).

saint and the start of spring, which were strong since before the implementation of the current Gregorian calendar in 1582.⁷

The lore of the blackbird and the month of March was also known elsewhere across Europe, a fact brought to wide attention by Niko Kuret twenty years after Merhar's study, having encountered a variation of this kind of fable about the bird and the month of March in Romance nations. He mentions a French variant from Champ-le-Duc, which talks about how the blackbird female, brooding in her nest, made fun at the expense of the temperate March, but at its end, the month threatened her thus: "Three days I have left, and three I shall borrow from my brother April – and you and your nest shall be no more!" (Kuret 1974: 197). The Slovene proverb "March has a curved tail" (archaic: *Sušec z repam zvija*)⁸ is closely related to the Basque proverb stating: "March wags its tail, and April wags its chest".⁹

This type of folklore narrative represents folk meteorological wisdom in the form of a story or proverb, which spread through oral folklore as well. It communicates the rationale that the sudden volatility of weather during parts of certain months must be respected, and one should not celebrate spring already in March (February or April), since at that time – despite the sun's warmth – there can often be severe cold, causing frost and hypothermia.¹⁰

A REFLECTION ON CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVE FOLKLORE IN ISTRIA

It is evident from the works of Maja Bošković-Stulli and Milko Matičetov that folklore storytelling in Istria was still vibrant in the 1960s, although it has been gradually sinking into oblivion since. However, shorter folktales, anecdotes and contemporary narratives were still often told among Istrian people and were presented in book collections and research. The authors include Marjan Tiomšič, Jasna Majda Peršolja, Nada Morato, Špela Pahor, Nelda Štok-Vojška, Alberto Pucer, Davor Šišović, Jakov Mikac, Drago Orlič, Evelina Rudan and others.

As Marjan Tomšič wrote at the end of the twentieth century, while collecting stories in Istria, he and his students had to offer local people some encouragement to aid their memory, and they turned out to be splendid storytellers: "It often happened that they would tell me stories for hours upon hours, most eagerly those about witches and their

⁷ As the first saint of the equinox and the beginning of spring, he was also mentioned by Primož Trubar, who, in 1557, published what was at the time accepted folk calendar lore, encapsulated by the proverb: *Sveti Gregor, mali križi dasta noč, dan v eni viži*. (Merhar 1956: 188, 191).

⁸ Merhar 1956, 188.

⁹ Vinson 1883 as cited in: Van Gennepe 1947: 952.

¹⁰ For more see Kropelj Telban 2022.

dealings. Once they got started, there was no end to the chilling tales. They remain just as talkative as thirty years ago, but only after one has gained their trust” (Tomšič 1989: 7–8).

With the development of online communication and technology, narrative folklore has necessarily changed in structure, function, and performance. Some folktales have been preserved as part of cultural heritage, with tourist guides narrating them to visitors at various locations with which they are meaningfully connected. For example, before the Venetian House (*Benečanka*) where the inscription “*Lasa pur dir*” (Let them talk) is preserved, folklore tells of a much-gossiped love story between a rich Venetian merchant and a Piran girl of striking beauty. Another narrative is connected to the Church of the Vision of St Mary in Strunjan, where folktales recount that Virgin Mary had appeared before two vineyard guards, asking that her church be repaired (more in Krojež 2013: 193–196). Legend about the white pigeon (or a dove) saving Izola at the time of attack from the troops from Genova are still told today; this also includes the legend about St George, the patron of Piran:

On a summer night, a hurricane raged over Piran. Lightning flashed everywhere; the sea raged. At that time, St George appeared to two fishermen, and assured them that he would save the city from disaster. The storm immediately subsided, the city was saved and so were the surrounding fields. Word about the solution immediately spread throughout Piran, and the people of Piran made St George their patron and dedicated a church on top of a hill above the city to him. The cross from the shield of St George is depicted in their coat of arms. (“Legenda...” 2013)

Even ancient Greek myths were revived and became a part of neo-traditional contemporary storytelling performance, among them tales about the Greek Argonauts sailing on their ship *Argo* and reaching the Adriatic Sea along the Mirna River; and about the shield of the goddess Athena that fell into the sea and became a rock on which the city of Koper was founded (Pucer and Titan 2013).

Many narratives which are part of contemporary storytelling serve as a tourist attraction for visitors. In Croatian Istria there is a narrative about a vampire Jure Grando from the village of Kringa near Pazin. The narrative, documented by Johan Weikard Valvasor (Valvasor 1689, II. vol., VI. book, X. cap., p. 335), is very popular and often told by tourist guides at festivals and other performances. Also popular today are contemporary tales about Henry Morgan, the famous pirate of Istria. Often remembered is also the giant Veli Jože, a story retold from the epic novel written by Vladimir Nazor in 1908. There are numerous narratives circulating in Istria; in Kùbed they narrate how giants built castles around the surrounding hills:

In ancient times, when castles were built around Istria, giants lived in these parts. They were busy as bees, and people liked them immensely. The castles in Čùbed and Podpeč were built by these enormous fellas. All the giants, the lot of them, had just a single bat between them, and so they lent it to one another from hill to hill. The giant from Podpeč yelled at the one on Čùbed: “Brother, pass me the bat!”. Then, the other one yelled at this

one from Podpeč: “Brother, return the bat to me!” These giants were so large that when they ate lunch, they sat on Bareda, a hill between two other hills, cooling their feet in the Rižana River [...] (Morato and Pahor 2002: 104)

In the Mirna Valley, visitors’ attention is attracted by legends about giants who created Istrian rivers:

An old Istrian legend says that the valley of the Mirna River used to be inhabited by giants who tended to the land and went about their business, with one named Dragonja as the giant in charge. According to the legend, Dragonja was out working on his fields one day; when he ploughed a deep furrow from the Čícarija mountain to the sea, water filled the groove and created the Mirna River. Apparently, Dragonja named the river Mirna after his wife, but also because the water filled the furrow slowly – *mirna* means still or steady in Croatian. Pleased with the fruit of his labour, Dragonja took to the plough once again and ripped through the soil of central Istria, creating another river that he named after himself – well deserved. Encouraged by this repeated success, Dragonja headed to the castle of Pazin to make yet another stream come to life, but just as he was about to get to work, a woman from Pazin called out from a window and started to mock his efforts. Offended by this unnecessary provocation, Dragonja decided to leave, and water continued to run underground, right below the city’s foundations. Stricken by panic, residents of Pazin started to implore Dragonja to return and finish the job, but it only made him furious, so he stomped in frustration, the ground cracked, and the famous Pazin Pit was formed. (Online source 1)

This narrative is told today because it is connected to the landscape, explaining how the Mirna River and the Dragonja River were created, and how the famous Pazin Pit was formed. In this way local natural sights and monuments are presented to the young generations, tourists and other interested audiences during guided tours, storytelling events, festivals or by other means.

Today, narrative folklore is often placed in the cultural landscape by means of fairy tale routes, mythical parks that map local folktales in space.¹¹ In this way, narrative maps are created in the sense of cognitive mapping reflecting the conditions in which people live or had lived years ago (Hiemäe 2016: 179–181; Koski 2016: 32).

Folktales and narratives are also preserved through cultural events, storytelling festivals and organized storytelling performances. An example of such anchoring can be seen in Pićan near Pazin where an annual festival, LegendFest, is organised by the Val Kulture society. A great shift has been made from old traditions to contemporary presentations; this is visible, for instance, in how vampires and supernatural beings are depicted and dramatized at such festivals (Šešo 2020). Thus, presentations of narrative folklore and the perception of folktales have undergone major changes.

¹¹ For more about this see: Ivančič Kutin and Kropelj Telban 2018; Ivančič Kutin and Kropelj Telban 2021.



Figure 4: The LegendFest festival in Pićan, May 24, 2019, organised within the European Interreg project Slovenia – Croatia (Living Magic – Živa coprnija – Živa štrigarija, 2017–2019).

CONCLUSION

Legends are a way to preserve the knowledge of folk beliefs as well as memories and historical events connected with certain places, and this function continues even to the present day (Valk and Sävborg 2018: 11). This is the reason why contemporary researchers of narrative culture often focus on the role of reconstructed narrative tradition in cultural and tourist services (Chittenden 2011); in folklore and storytelling events (Pöge-Adler 2010); and in the revival of folktales in mythical parks (Hrobat Virloget 2021). As is evident from the several examples from Istrian narrative folklore, vital shifts in its content as well as in its research can be traced through time. By examining documents preserved in Istria as well as the present situation in the field, we can trace the development of narrative culture, currently largely tied to the space and place to which it relates. Narrative culture is often presented as a neo-traditional storytelling performance, and used for commercial purposes. Although it is sometimes exploited, it is still a part of intangible cultural heritage and as such transmits heritage to local people and to visitors.

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Online source

Source 1: <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/lifestyle/24508-legends-of-istria-giants-of-mirna-valley>

ISTARSKI NARATIVNI FOLKLOR U SVJETLU ISTRAŽIVANJA MAJE BOŠKOVIĆ-STULLI I MILKA MATIČETOVA

Ovaj je članak posvećen uspomeni na istaknutu hrvatsku folkloristicu Maju Bošković-Stulli, koja je velik dio svojih istraživanja posvetila istarskom narativnom folkloru. Bila je jedna od vodećih folkloristica druge polovine dvadesetog stoljeća, a zajedno s još jednim istaknutim folkloristom i terenskim istraživačem iz Slovenije, Milkom Matičetovim, zabilježila je impozantan korpus istarskog narativnog folkloru te istraživala ulogu pripovijedanja u životu ljudi u Istri. Blizina različitih etničkih skupina na ovom području utjecala je na raznolikost i bogatstvo narativne kulture i pučkog pripovijedanja do današnjih dana. U članku se raspravlja o nekim primjerima narativne kulture iz slovenske i hrvatske Istre iz perspektive ključnih pomaka i promjena koje se vide kroz povijest do danas.

Ključne riječi: narodna pripovijetka, narativni folklor, Istra, Maja Bošković-Stulli, Milko Matičetov