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The Christmas Period in the Traditional Culture and Literature of the Duvno Region

The paper presents and interprets contemporary field notes of rituals, customs, and beliefs related to the Christmas period. Invaluable ethnographic data about Christmas customs in Duvno can be found in texts written by authors such as Stojan Rubić, Anđelo Nuić, Ivo Bagarić, Klement Galić, Anamarija Mamić, Ivana Krstanović, Mirjana Kukavica, Ante Matić-Mijušić, Ante Matić-Borčanac, Ante Matić-Lib and Vinko Vukadin. Furthermore, authors such as Petar Miloš, Željko Musić, Iva Bagarić have highlighted glimpses of the festive atmosphere and the influence of migration on Christmas customs in their literary works. These texts collectively point to a rich yet insufficiently researched culture of Christmas customs in the Duvno region, highlighting the need for more systematic research. In response to this, field research was conducted between August 2023 and December 2024, with the aim of documenting and interpreting contemporary practices and oral traditions related to the Christmas period. Christmas holidays are associated with apotropaic and panspermic traditions, as well as divinatory practices. Under the influence of religious, political, and social factors, Christmas customs developed and over time underwent numerous changes in their performance. A large number of recorded customs are no longer practiced and are preserved mainly in the memories of individuals. This further emphasizes the need for systematic documentation of these cultural elements to prevent their irretrievable loss.

Ključne riječi: Duvno region, Christmas customs of the Duvno region in published sources, Christmas customs of the Duvno region based on original field research.

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1. Introduction

The Duvno Field (*Duvanjsko polje*) is located in the central part of the large Dinaric mountain range and represents one of the characteristic karst fields of this region. Situated at the intersection of Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Dalmatia, Duvno serves as a natural and cultural link between these regions. Throughout history, the area of Duvno has witnessed the presence and influence of various peoples and cultures, shaping its contemporary cultural and ethnic identity. The name Duvno is associated with two main etymological theories: one links it to the Illyrian word *Delminium*, meaning *pastoral land*, while the other derives it from the Indo-European root *dal-*, denoting *a valley*. The term Duvno refers to the Duvno Field itself, the former municipality (now Tomislavgrad), the eponymous Catholic parish (the term Tomislavgrad parish is also in use), and the historical name of the town. From 1945 to 1990, the town was officially named Duvno, after which the name Tomislavgrad was reinstated.² In contemporary usage, the term Duvno is also most often used as a traditional or colloquial name for the wider region (centered around Duvno Field) and its inhabitants. Special attention in this paper is given to ethnographic data from the villages of Borčani, Brišnik, Bukovica, Crvenice, Mesihovina, Miljacka, Mrkodol, Kongora, and Lipa.

Shorter texts related to Christmas customs in the Duvno region can be found in certain publications, on various online platforms, and in literary texts presented in this paper. Across publications, web sources, and literary texts, authors have preserved glimpses of Christmas customs in the Duvno region, conveying their atmosphere and cultural significance.

Festive customs in the Duvno region marked a departure from the routine of daily labor, providing opportunities for family gatherings, communal celebrations, and the expression of religious and spiritual values. In this paper, the Christmas period refers to the time from Christmas Day (*Božić*) to Epiphany (*Bogojavljenje*). Christmas holds a central place in the celebration of the festive season. The customs associated with it include attending holy Masses, greetings, exchanging gifts, prayer, Christmas meals, spending time with loved ones, as well as apotropaic and panspermic customs and beliefs.

The second and third days of Christmas, St. Stephen's Day (*Stipanjdan*) and St. John's Day (*Ivanjdan*), held particular significance for young men and women. After attending Mass, young people would gather at local fairs, where

2 Jolić, „Opći uvod: Kratki geološki presjek; Zemljopisni i klimatski položaj Duvna; Kretanje (katoličkog) pučanstva na području duvanjske općine; Duvanjska naselja – etimologija i prvi spomen”, 7-35.

they could socialize and get to know each other better. Additionally, these days were marked by the custom of the symbolic *abduction (umicanje)* of a girl by her suitor. The feasts of St. Stephen and St. John were also accompanied by visits to the homes of individuals named after these saints. The straw that had been brought into the house on Christmas Eve was removed on St. John's Day. In some places, it was essential to remove the straw before sunrise, whereas in Tomislavgrad, this custom had to be completed by noon.

The Feast of the Holy Innocents, locally known as *Mladenci*, was marked by a ritual in which parents would symbolically *whip* their children with a twig as a gesture wishing them health and prosperity in the coming year. Afterward, the children would receive small gifts, typically walnuts or dried fruit. Nowadays, this practice is no longer recorded in this region.

The Feast of St. Sylvester (*Silvestrovo*), the last day of the year, was characterized by attending a thanksgiving Mass (*misa zahvalnica*), sprinkling holy water, and preparing for New Year's celebrations. In the past, social gatherings on New Year's Eve were rare, with most gatherings focused on anticipating the next day's festivities and fairs. In contemporary times, however, significantly larger social gatherings take place on New Year's Eve (*Stara godina*), particularly among younger generations.

New Year's customs are closely connected to Christmas traditions. On New Year's Day, the remaining part of the yule log was rekindled, while the charcoal from the burnt wood was preserved until spring, to be used during the first plowing. It was believed that this practice had protective and fertility-enhancing properties. New Year's fairs provided young people with a chance to meet and arrange future marriages. Engagements or wedding plans were often revealed on New Year's Day.

The Feast of the Three Kings marks the conclusion of Christmas customs. On this day, salt and water were brought to church for blessing, and in the evening, household members would sprinkle their homes, barns, livestock, and fields with holy water while reciting the Creed. Additionally, Epiphany was the day when Christmas trees and decorations were removed from homes, further signifying the end of the Christmas season.

2. Ethnographic Data and Methodology

The ethnographic data were collected through field research conducted in the area of Tomislavgrad (Bukovica, Mesihovina, Miljacka, Mrkodol, and Kongora) between August 2023 and December 2024. Interviews were condu-

cted with 11 narrators. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The material was supplemented by relevant scholarly literature by domestic and international authors, professional publications, a graduate thesis on the intangible cultural heritage of the Duvno region, web sources, as well as literary texts.

The following methodological approaches were employed: field research (recording, transcription, and note-taking), analysis, the inductive-deductive method, classification, description, comparison, and synthesis. The analysis primarily focused on the author's own collection of records gathered through ethnological fieldwork. This analysis was further supported by the use of relevant academic literature. Based on previous scholarly findings, the collected material was categorized using inductive-deductive reasoning and classification methods. Through descriptive analysis, and where applicable, the influence of various factors (theological, political, sociological, and cultural) on the emergence, transformation, decline, or disappearance of certain customs was identified. A comparative approach was used to determine similarities and differences between the author's collected records and already published material related to the studied region. Furthermore, similar practices were observed among Croats residing in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in the Republic of Croatia. Following the collection of material, the review of relevant literature, and application of a multidisciplinary approach, a synthesis was conducted, leading to the final conclusion on the role of systematic documentation and preservation of Christmas customs in the Duvno region. This process highlights their significance as elements of intangible cultural heritage and their importance for understanding the identity of the local community in both historical and contemporary contexts.

3. Christmas Customs of the Duvno Region in Published Records

Short records of Christmas customs from the Duvno region can be found in the articles and other publications of various authors; however, more systematic research on the subject has been lacking. In 1899, contributions by Stojan Rubić and Anđelo Nuić about Duvno were published in the *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje Južnih Slavena (Journal of Folk Life and Customs of the South Slavs)*. Nuić combined his own contribution with Rubić's and emphasized the importance of continued ethnographic research, expressing hope that future observers from the Duvno region would take an active interest in documenting

local folk life.³ The authors wrote that twelve days before Christmas, the weather is closely observed. It is believed that the conditions during these twelve days will reflect the weather for the next twelve months.⁴ In the *Spomenica Bukovica (Jubilee Book Bukovica)*, published on the occasion of the centenary of the parish, Ivo Bagarić points to the gradual extinction of folk customs in the Duvno region. He emphasizes the importance of documenting them as a way to protect them from being forgotten.⁵ In 2002, in the book *Duvno kroz stoljeća (Duvno Through the Centuries)*, Robert Jolić also emphasized the need for research into the life, language, customs, beliefs, and superstitions of the Duvno region.⁶ In the same book, there is a contribution by Klement Galić on folk customs in the Duvno region, including Christmas traditions. In addition to a detailed description of Christmas Eve customs, such as meal preparation, evening prayers, and special rituals like the burning of the yule log and the offering of bread and wine to a sheep, Galić describes the celebration of Christmas and the following days.⁷ In her graduate thesis *Nematerijalna kulturna baština u duvanjskom kraju (Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Duvno Region)*, author Anamarija Mamić analyzes Advent and Christmas customs in the village of Sarajlije in the Duvno region.⁸

Texts related to Christmas customs in the Duvno region can be found on various online platforms. The availability of these stories on an online platform ensures broad readership and contributes to the preservation of folk heritage. Writing about Christmas customs in Herzegovina, author Ivana Krstanović vividly evokes the family tradition of singing Advent and Christmas songs in Tomislavgrad. She notes that this custom has, in recent years, disappeared from her own household.⁹ In 2019, author Mirjana Kukavica described the vibrant and well-preserved Christmas tradition of greeting in Lipa (Duvno region) and its local community of Vrbica.¹⁰ Author Ante Matić-Mijušić describes the traditional Christmas customs of his native village of Borčani. He nostalgically recalls practices such as bringing in the yule log, spreading straw on the floor, exchanging Christmas greetings, attending early morning Masses (*zornice*),

3 Rubić; Nuić, „Duvno (Županjac)”, 244.

4 Rubić; Nuić, „Duvno (Županjac)”, 252-253.

5 Bagarić; Kozina, *Bukovica (uz stotu obljetnicu osnutka župe)*, 165-168.

6 Jolić, „Etnografski pregled: Duvanjski ljudi, njihovi poslovi, govor, pjesme, običaji, nošnje i tragični egzodusi”, 465-467.

7 Galić, „Duvanjski narodni običaji”, 480-481.

8 Mamić, „*Nematerijalna kulturna baština u Duvanjskom kraju*” Diplomski rad. 12-25.

9 „Krstanović, Ivana: Predbožićni i božićni običaji kod nas – koliko se toga promijenilo?”

10 „Kukavica, Mirjana: Božić u Lipi“.

and family gatherings.¹¹ The author Ante Matić-Borčanac expresses regret over the disappearance of Christmas customs, especially among those who have left their homeland, although he notes that these traditions continue to be preserved within certain diaspora communities, such as those in Velika Gorica (Republic of Croatia) and Australia.¹² Set in 1970, the text by author Del-Mat presents a nostalgic portrayal of Christmas traditions in the Duvno region, shedding light on family rituals, *ganga* as a form of cultural expression, and the gradual decline of rural customs.¹³ A vivid portrayal of Christmas customs in the village of Borčani is provided by the author Ante Matić-Lib who also expresses concern over the disappearance of tradition.¹⁴ A traditional belief related to Christmas candles is documented on the portal tomislavnews.com. If during the festive lunch one of the three candles were to extinguish by themselves, it was believed that someone from that household would die.¹⁵ In contemporary times, Grandma Anđa awaits the arrival of her son and other family members from Germany, accompanied by a constant concern about them reaching their destination safely.¹⁶ The theme of people coming home from Germany¹⁷ for Christmas is also mentioned by Vinko Vukadin, who recalls how children in his region knew Christmas was approaching when their fathers returned from Germany.¹⁸

Christmas customs are also depicted in literary works.¹⁹ Petar Miloš humo-

11 Matić-Mijušić, Ante: „Običaji u mom selu“.

12 „Matić-Borčanac: Božićni običaji u duvanjskom kraju.“

13 „Del-Mat: U POHODE DUVANJSKOJ PROŠLOSTI (27): Božić dođe običaji nekada u duvanjskom kraju!“

14 „Matić-Lib, Ante: Božićni običaji u Duvanjskim selima“.

15 „s. a.: Badnjica je, Božić dolazi – nekadašnji običaji u duvanjskom kraju!“

16 „S. Z.: Božić, djetinjstvo i djevojaštvo brišničke bake Anđe Čurčić“.

17 Migration has long been a key factor in the socio-economic life of the Duvno region. Migration has played a crucial role in the socio-economic life of the Duvno region, as local people often struggled to make a living from the land and were forced to leave their families in search of work both near and far away. (Bagarić, *Duvno, Povijest župa duvanjskog samostana*, 39). Bagarić notes that until the 1960s, residents of Duvno primarily migrated to Vojvodina, Slavonia, or Montenegro, returning home only in winter or for major holidays such as Christmas and Easter. Later, they increasingly sought employment in Western European countries, particularly Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (Ibid). Migration to Western countries between the 1960s and 1970s contributed to the construction and renovation of houses and churches. Beyond improving material living conditions, migration also strengthened ties to the homeland. Returning home for Christmas held special symbolic and emotional significance for the people of Duvno (Bagarić, *Fra Mijo Čuić - život i djelo, Spomenica u povodu 40. obljetnice smrti*, 56).

18 „Vinko Vukadin: Badnjak u mom selu: (Na) dobro Vam došla Badnja večer!“

19 In 1990, the book *Za zvijezdom Duvanjskom (Duvno u zrcalu hrvatske književnosti)* was published, edited by Dubravko Horvatić. The book presents analyses and research on literary works that focus on Duvno, its history, customs, and notable figures. Special attention is given to writers who drew inspiration from this region, as well as to the role of Duvno

rously presented many aspects of daily life in Duvno. He wrote about the lives and customs of the people of Duvno, especially guest workers (*gastarbajter*). His style is infused with irony and the authentic speech of the Duvno region. He explained that after traveling the world with his relatives from a young age and later living in his hometown of Crvenice, he did not invent stories but rather re-told real events and folk anecdotes he heard daily, which formed the basis of his literary work.²⁰ In his work *Legende o Rodijaku Ćipi* (*Legends of Cousin Ćipa*), Miloš also addresses some of the Christmas customs of the Duvno region. One of the most recognizable elements of the holiday tradition was the custom of gift-giving, in which family members working abroad, particularly in Germany, would bring presents.²¹ In the story *Mandin svitnjak* (*Manda's Bonfire*), people from Glavičani boasted during Christmas gatherings about their God-given talents that helped them achieve professional advancement and financial success.²² In the story *Mostovima* (*Bridges*), it is stated that between 1963 and 1973, Duvno residents typically returned home for vacation only once a year, specifically for the Christmas holidays.²³ In the story *Klecini križevi* (*Kleco's Crosses*), Miloš once again addresses the theme of guest workers returning from Germany and the practice of gifting family members, which he symbolically connects with the figure of Santa Claus. Through the character of grandpa Kleco, the author highlights the importance of preserving tradition, questioning the idea that newer and more expensive objects are inherently more valuable.²⁴ In his debut work, *Posljednja oaza slobodnih ljudi* (*The Last Oasis of Free People*), Željko Musić fondly remembers tasting his first cookies just before Christmas.²⁵ As part of the column *Dašak moga zavičaja* (*A Breath of My Homeland*) on the tomislavcity.com portal, Bagarić publishes short stories that realistically and humorously depict everyday life in the Duvno region, authentically capturing its spirit through local dialect, customs, and humor. In the story *Ćaćino*

in Croatian literary tradition. The book is divided into three main sections: *Croatian Oral Literature from Duvno and about Duvno*, *Croatian Writers from Duvno*, and *Croatian Writers about Duvno*. In the preface, editor Dubravko Horvatić emphasizes the significance of Duvno in history, noting that, despite the common perception, it is not a *literary desert* (Horvatić, *Za zvijezdom Duvanjskom* (*Duvno u zrcalu hrvatske književnosti*), 12).

20 „Sjećanje na Petra Miloša - Rodijak Ćipa: Hrvati još ne znaju šta bi s nama Hercegovcima”.

21 Miloš, *Legende o Rodijaku Ćipi*, 58.

22 Ibid., 104.

23 Ibid., 121.

24 See Miloš, *Legende o Rodijaku Ćipi*, 190.

25 Musić, Željko Ćile. *Posljedna oaza slobodnih ljudi*, 35.

milosrđe (*Father's Generosity*), Christmas gift-giving is depicted through the reflections of Mara and Anđa on the presents received from their children. The recurring mention of the mother-in-law's often-forgotten bag subtly highlights tensions in the daughter-in-law – mother-in-law relationship.²⁶

4. Christmas

Christmas is traditionally celebrated as a holiday of peace, love, and new beginnings, marking the birth of Jesus Christ. It is associated with the values of equality, community, and reconciliation, which are conveyed through religious, social, and familial customs.

Four holy Masses are associated with the celebration of Christmas, each with its own significance and historical development. The first, the Vigil Mass (*misa bdijenja*), is celebrated on the evening of December 24 and marks the beginning of the Christmas festivities. It is often referred to as the Early Evening Mass (*Rana večernja misa*), or the Little Midnight Mass (*Mala polnoćka*),²⁷ for children and the elderly who may find it challenging to attend Midnight Mass (*polnoćka*). This is followed by Midnight Mass, held at midnight, which originates from Palestinian liturgical tradition and is linked to the Book of Wisdom, in which the Word of God enters the world. The third Mass, the Dawn Mass (*misa zornica*), is celebrated in the early morning hours and is notable for its Gospel readings that emphasize the shepherds' homage to Jesus. The fourth, the Christmas Day Mass (*božićna misa*), commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ, highlighting his arrival as a new beginning and a source of peace and unity for the world.²⁸

Writing about Christmas customs and folk piety, the Croatian ethnologist Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin emphasizes that the study of Christmas traditions inevitably encounters elements originating from the pre-Christian period. Referring to German ethnologist Edmund Schneeweis, she states that these elements are present in almost all key symbols of folk Christmas customs, such as greenery, exchanging gifts, fire and candle lighting. Furthermore, she highlights German ethnologist Ingeborg Weber-Kellerman's conclusion that, although Christianity did not entirely eliminate non-Christian customs, their continuous presence over time is difficult to prove.²⁹ Christmas, as a feast celebrating the birth of Je-

26 „Iva Bagarić: Dašak moga zavičaja: Čaćino milosrđe”.

27 In the Duvno region, in addition to the terms Vigil Mass and Little Midnight Mass, the term Children's Midnight Mass (*dječja polnoćka*) is also used.

28 „Zvonko Pažin: Božić i Bogojavljenje – povijest, liturgija, teologija”.

29 Rihtman-Auguštin, „Božićni običaji i pučka pobožnost”, 9.

sus, began to be observed only in the 4th century, following the Edict of Milan (313 AD), which granted Christianity freedom of worship, and before it became the state religion of the Roman Empire in 380 AD. The earliest records of Christmas celebrations date back to 336 and 354 AD. In 360 AD, Pope Liberius I built the Church of the Nativity in Rome, today known as the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. The period in which Christmas was introduced was marked by rivalry between Christianity and Mithraism, a religion of Asia Minor origin. One of the significant Mithraic and folk festivals was the Birthday of the Unconquered Sun (*Dies natalis Solis Invicti*), celebrated on December 25, which at the time corresponded with the winter solstice. For this reason, the Church established the feast of Jesus' birth on the same date, and soon Christmas became one of the most important holidays in the Empire.³⁰

In the book *Saure Wochen, Frohe Feste*, Weber-Kellerman highlights the complexity of the relationship between religious and secular customs, particularly in the context of annual holidays. She emphasizes how religious and secular elements of holidays are inextricably connected and that it would be erroneous to view them separately. She also underscores the role and authority of the Church in shaping and institutionalizing holidays, which had an impact on rural life, where calendar holidays marked a break from the workweek.³¹ German theologian Karl-Heinrich Bieritz points out that human beings are both *homo faber*, the *working person*, and *homo festivus*, the *festive person*, who finds expression through leisure, celebration, and play. He adds that the balance between these two aspects of life can be disrupted when their rights and value are not fully recognized, and one is subordinated to the other.³²

In the past, exchanging gifts for Christmas either did not exist or was very modest. A change began to occur in the 1960s, when many men began to go to Germany for work. Upon returning home for Christmas, they would bring clothes and shoes for their children and loved ones.³³ In modern times, parents usually leave gifts for their children under the Christmas tree,³⁴ which the children joyfully open on Christmas morning. Various names and beliefs are associa-

30 Belaj, *Hod kroz godinu*, 165.

31 Weber Kellerman, *Saure Wochen, Frohe Feste (Fest und Alltag in der Sprache der Woche)*, 58.

32 Bieritz, *Crkvena godina: svetkovine, blagdani i spomendani u povijesti i danas*, 19.

33 The narrator mentions that during the year, it was also possible to tell whose father had come from Germany based on their new clothing (Zdravko Kelava, born 3.1.1959), Bukovica, interviewed in December 2024.

34 In 1939, Gavazzi states that the Christmas tree is a newer, young tradition among Croats and that it arrived in Croatian homes from Germany (Gavazzi, *Godinu dana hrvatskih narodnih običaja II. (oko Božića)*, 27-28).

ted with Christmas gift-givers, such as *Father Christmas* and *Santa Claus*, the latter increasingly under the influence of American culture.³⁵ These gift-givers are associated with commercialization, which has led to a shift in expectations from modest gifts and practical clothing to gifts of greater financial value, including various toys and children's favorite electronic devices.

On Christmas morning, family members wish each other a merry Christmas with the words: "A merry Christmas and the holy birth of Jesus to you." Others respond: "And may God grant the same to you." Attending holy Masses was accompanied by singing and joy. Traditional songs, commonly known as carrier songs (*kiridžijske pjesme*), were often sung. One such song, recorded in the Tomislavgrad area, is presented by Bosnian and Herzegovinian cultural anthropologist Marko Dragić:

"Deder kume daj da zapivamo,
ako mogli i ako se dalo,
ako bi nas grlo poslušalo.
Sve u strahu Boga Velikoga,
da nam Bog da zdravlje i veselje.
Tilu zdravlje da se veselimo,
a spasenje da se ne gubimo.
Najsvetije ime Isusovo,
a po njemu ime Marijino,
Bogu hvala i slava u vike."

"Come, *kume*, let us sing,
if we can and if it's possible,
if our throats will cooperate.
All in the fear of the Great God,
that God may grant us health and joy.
Health so we may rejoice,
and salvation so we do not lose our way.
The most sacred name of Jesus,
and through Him, the name of Mary,
Thanks and glory to God forever."³⁶

In the village of Sarajlije, after attending holy Mass, young men exchanged Christmas greetings while toasting with *rakija*.³⁷ Gatherings took place at the village bridge, where they sang and danced before visiting homes to extend Christmas greetings. This tradition lasted until the early afternoon, with house visits being exclusively reserved for men, while women stayed at home, preparing for the Christmas feast. Once the visits concluded and the men returned home, the festive family Christmas lunch commenced.³⁸

Christmas lunch was considered the most plentiful meal of the year. Since food was not abundant, it was carefully distributed among family members throughout the year. In some households, especially common among larger

35 See Rihtman-Auguštin, *Knjiga o Božiću, Božić i božićni običaji u hrvatskoj narodnoj kulturi*, 37-43.

36 Dragić, *Hrvatska usmena književnost Bosne i Hercegovine, lirika, epika, retorika*, 87.

37 *Rakija* is a traditional fruit brandy, commonly distilled from plums, grapes, or other fruits.

38 Dragić, „Hrvatski tradicijski čestitarski ophodi, pohodi i običaji od Božića do Sveta tri kralja”, 197.

families, the tradition of distributing food was also present on Christmas.³⁹ However, there were also homes where, on Christmas, everyone could take as much as they wanted. The Christmas meal traditionally consisted of sauerkraut, meat, and pie (*pita*). In many homes, this food is still enjoyed on Christmas. In addition to food for themselves, people would prepare special food for the animals.⁴⁰ In Poljica (Croatia, approximately 60 km west of Duvno), a belief has been recorded that animals can sense the special nature of Christmas Day compared to other days.⁴¹ Fr. Silvestar Kutleša notes that the cattle rejoice at the full manger on Christmas.⁴² In addition to food, three candles were essential on the table, placed in wheat or grain on Christmas Eve (*Badnjak*).⁴³ Before the meal, the candles would be lit from the fire of the yule log that had been saved from the previous day: “Onaj prvi badnjak koji se unese na Badnju večer, odmah se stavi u šporet i onda se od toga prvoga badnjaka ugljen ostavlja do Božića, on se opet vrati da se malo podžari i onda sa šibicom na taj ugljen i tom šibicom pališ sviće.”⁴⁴ When the old hearths were present in homes, the tradition was to burn yule logs, or large pieces of wood, of a size that the fire could burn for several days.

The Christmas candle holds special significance and is considered a sacred object in Croatian households.⁴⁵ It was believed that the candle flame could predict the fertility of the land: “Ako je jači plamen od brda, onda će bolje rodit u brdu, a ako je plamen jači od polja, onda će bolje bit u polju.”⁴⁶ In the Rama region, which separates the Ljubuša Mountain (1797 m) from the Duvno region, the custom of observing the direction of smoke was recorded. It was believed that if the smoke rose straight upward, the mountains would be fruitful,

39 Slavko Bagarić, born 13.3.1953, Miljacka; interviewed in January 2024.

40 Zdravko Kelava, born 3.1.1959, Bukovica; interviewed in December 2024.

41 “Pripovijedaju, da zec, ‘di ugleda najbolje žito, ostavi ga za Božić.” (“It is said that the hare, wherever it finds the best grain, leaves it for Christmas”), (see Ivanišević, *Poljica, narodni život i običaji*, 434).

42 Kutleša, *Život i običaji u Imockoj krajini*, 269.

43 On Christmas Eve, three candles are prepared and placed in a container with wheat or grain.

44 “The first yule log that is brought in on Christmas Eve is immediately placed in the stove, and from that first log, the coal is kept until Christmas. It is then returned to be re-lit, and a match is struck on the coal and then used to light the candles.” Slavko Bagarić, born 13.3.1953, Miljacka; interviewed in January 2024.

45 Dragić, „Sviječā u kulturnoj baštini Hrvata”, 468.

46 “If the flame is stronger towards the hills, the harvest will be better in the highlands; if it is stronger towards the fields, the lowlands will be more fertile.” Jozo Kelava, born on 10.11.1950, migrated to Germany in April 1971 and mostly resides in Bukovica, with occasional stays in Zagreb and Zadar; and Bože Kelava, born 1952 (migrated to Australia in May 1971 and has lived there ever since), both from Bukovica; recorded in August 2023.

whereas if the smoke bent downward, the fields would yield better crops.⁴⁷ The accidental extinguishing of a candle during Christmas lunch was considered an ominous sign. If one of the candles went out during the meal, it was believed that someone in the household would pass away within the following year.⁴⁸ The same belief was recorded in the Croatian Jaska Prigorje region.⁴⁹ According to the beliefs of older generations, the direction of the smoke after the Christmas candle was extinguished, symbolically foreshadowed the death of the person towards whom the smoke drifted.⁵⁰

After the meal and prayer, the candles would be extinguished with a piece of bread dipped in wine. Reflecting on the significance of wine in both daily life and the liturgy of ancient peoples, with an emphasis on Jewish tradition, Croatian theologian Zvonko Pažin writes that wine has held great liturgical importance since ancient times.⁵¹ The bread and wine used to extinguish the candles were usually preserved until New Year's, when the candles would be extinguished again in the same manner. Various customs are associated with the extinguishing of candles. In Bukovica (Duvno region), two candles were extinguished with bread dipped in wine, while the third was extinguished with the grain in which the candles had been placed.⁵² In Miljacka (Duvno region), all three candles were first extinguished with bread dipped in wine, after which each candle was sprinkled with grain.⁵³ In some places, Christmas wine is kept in a special place, regarded as *sacred*, and used as a remedy for sore throats.⁵⁴ The bread used to extinguish the candles is also regarded as sacred. An informant from Bukovica, who keeps Christmas bread from previous years, highlights its special nature by noting that it remains unspoiled over time.⁵⁵ The

47 Dragić, „Etno-filološki prinosi ramskoj crkveno-pučkoj tradicijskoj kulturi, Rama – nekoć i danas”, 274.

48 Zdravko Kelava, born 3.1.1959, Bukovica; interviewed in December 2024.

49 Rihtman-Auguštin, *Knjiga o Božiću, Božić i božićni običaji u hrvatskoj narodnoj kulturi*, 76.

50 Nada Bagarić (née Naletilić), born 19.1.1959 in Široki Brijeg, has resided in Miljacka since marriage in 1979; recorded in January 2024.

51 In Jewish tradition, wine plays a key role in the Passover meal ritual. This symbolic importance is further emphasized in Christianity, as the establishment of the Eucharist by Jesus during the Paschal meal reaffirmed wine's sacred role in religious ritual. Pažin emphasizes that from the very beginning, the Church used bread and wine in the celebration of the Eucharist (Pažin, „Vino u bogoslužju”, 231.).

52 Matija Kelava (née Zrinušić), born 23.12. 1940, Bukovica; recorded in August 2023.

53 Nada Bagarić (née Naletilić), born 19.1.1959 in Široki Brijeg, has resided in Miljacka since marriage in 1979; recorded in January 2024.

54 Ibid.

55 Matija Kelava (née Zrinušić), born 23.12. 1940, Bukovica; recorded in August 2023.

liturgical significance of bread and wine is reflected in folk customs, attesting to their enduring value in both religious and folk tradition.

After the family lunch, people would gather at Andrića Hill (Andrića brig) to celebrate. The event brought together the wider parish, including residents from Cebara, Anići, Kelave, and sometimes Gornja Bukovica.⁵⁶ In Mrkodol (Duvno region), Christmas celebrations were especially anticipated by girls. An informant recalls how their aunt would fill an old syrup bottle with a little wine and water, which they would carry in their pockets as they headed to Andrića Hill with their siblings and friends.⁵⁷ In Miljacka, children also had a small taste of wine.⁵⁸ At fairs, young men and women would get to know each other, and the festivities would last late into the night. In Bukovica, it was customary to visit households on Christmas Day that did not have a family member named *Stjepan* or *Ivan*. On St. Stephen's Day, visits were made to homes where a person named *Stjepan* lived, while on St. John's Day, households with a family member named *Ivan* were visited. Nowadays, after Christmas lunch, all houses in the village are visited. In Miljacka, house visits on Christmas Day were traditionally not practiced. Instead, visits took place on St. Stephen's Day in households that had a family member named *Stjepan* and on St. John's Day in those with a family member named *Ivan*. The custom of visiting homes on Christmas Day in Miljacka only emerged in more recent times. While in the past, only men participated in these visits, women have increasingly joined the tradition. At the end of the day, men, women, and children gather in the last house visited, where the communal celebration continues late into the night.

5. Post-Christmas Holidays

The oldest saintly calendars include several feast days that follow immediately after Christmas. German theologian Adolf Adam states that in these saints, the Middle Ages saw an honorary entourage of the Christ Child, referring to them as *comites Christi*, or *Christ's companions*. In the Roman liturgy, these are: St. Stephen, the first martyr; St. John, the apostle and evangelist; and the

56 Jozo Andrić (born in 1940 in Mrkodol, migrated to Germany in 1962, now resides in both Zagreb and Mrkodol; interviewed in August 2023) mentioned that conflicts among villagers were not uncommon during celebrations. As a result of such disagreements, members of one village would sometimes temporarily stop attending the event. (Kata Petrović, née Landeka, born 10.6.1951 in Mrkodol, has resided in Mesihovina since marriage in 1972, interviewed in December 2023).

57 Ljuba Kelava (née Landeka), born 9.9.1953 in Mrkodol, migrated in Germany in 1975, currently resides mostly in Bukovica with occasional stays in Germany and Croatia (Zagreb, Zadar); recorded in December 2023.

58 Slavko Bagarić, born 13.3.1953, Miljacka; interviewed in January 2024.

Holy Innocents. Additionally, December 29 marks the optional memorial of Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury and martyr, while December 31 commemorates Pope Sylvester. On the Sunday within the Christmas octave, the Feast of the Holy Family is also celebrated; however, if Christmas and its octave fall on a Sunday, this feast is observed on December 30.⁵⁹

In Tomislavgrad, the celebrations of St. Stephen's Day, St. John's Day, the Feast of the Holy Innocents, New Year's Eve (St. Sylvester's Day), New Year's Day, and the Feast of the Epiphany hold special significance.

5.1. St. Stephen's Day

The Feast of Saint Stephen is celebrated on the second day of Christmas and holds special significance as a continuation of the festive spirit. This day is dedicated to the first Christian martyr, whose life symbolizes faithfulness and courage. Saint Stephen was born in the first century AD. He was one of the seven deacons chosen by the apostles after Christ's Ascension. He distinguished himself through his care for the poor and his fervent preaching of faith in Jesus Christ. Because of his words and actions, he provoked opposition among the Jews, who accused him of defying the Law of Moses. When brought before the high priest, he delivered a passionate speech, but an enraged crowd condemned him and stoned him to death. In his final moments, Saint Stephen prayed to God to forgive his persecutors.⁶⁰

The personal name *Stjepan* originates from the Greek Στέφανος (Stéphanos), meaning *wreath* or *crown*, symbolizing a victor or a knight crowned with a laurel. According to the 2011 census of the Republic of Croatia, *Stjepan* ranks as the fourth most common male name in the country. In contemporary Croatian anthroponymy, the name *Stjepan* has been recorded with 28 male and 29 female variants.⁶¹ In Herzegovina, the standard form of the name *Stjepan* is most commonly used in official documents and formal occasions, while the forms *Stipe* and *Stipan* are frequently used in everyday speech. In the Duvno region, the feast of Saint Stephen is referred to as *Stipanjdan*.

The Feast of Saint Stephen is celebrated in a special way in households where there is someone named *Stjepan*.⁶² In Bukovica, there is a longstanding tradition of visiting the house of Marica Kelava, whose father-in-law was named

59 See Kelava, „Božićno razdoblje u tradicijskoj baštini posušškoga kraja”, 163.

60 Dragić, „Sveti Stjepan prvomučenik u hrvatskoj kulturnoj baštini”, 39-43.

61 Čilaš Šimpraga, „Prilog proučavanju odraza svetačkoga imena Stjepan u hrvatskoj antroponimiji”, 1-2.

62 Bože Kelava, born 1952 in Bukovica (migrated to Australia in May 1971 and has lived there ever since), recorded in Bukovica in August 2023.

Stjepan. Although Stjepan passed away many years ago, his fellow villagers continued to uphold the tradition. Today, only Marica, the daughter-in-law of the late Stjepan, lives in the household, yet the tradition of visiting her home remains alive: “Evo Marici se i danas ide, njezin svekar je bio Stipan. Možda blizu sto godina da se išlo u njegovu kuću, a evo, i danas se ide.”⁶³ The visit to Marica’s home takes place in the morning, around nine o’clock. Guests are offered food and drinks, and this long-standing tradition reflects the preservation of customs that connect different generations and strengthen the community.

St. Stephen’s Day (*Stipanjdan*) was a day of courtship for young men and women. After Mass at the Tomića Graveyard (*Tomića groblje*), the young people would take walks, while the older generation would observe who was socializing with whom. Since the period from Christmas to Shrovetide was a time for marriages, St. Stephen’s Day, St. John’s Day, and New Year’s Day were key holidays when young men and women had the opportunity to meet, take a walk, and discuss their future plans. In the 1970s and 1980s, a practice of *kidnapping* (*umicanje*)⁶⁴ or elopement emerged.⁶⁵ The informants testify that during that time, *abduction* became popular, with numerous instances of this custom cited. The most common cases were *mutually agreed-upon abductions* (*međusobno dogovorene otmice*), and the reasons for the *abductions* varied.⁶⁶ The custom of *abduction* in the Tomislavgrad region gradually disappeared.

63 “People still go to Marica’s house today; her father-in-law was Stipan. For nearly a hundred years, people have been coming to their house, and even now, they still do.” (Jozo Kelava, born on 10.11.1950 in Bukovica, migrated to Germany in April 1971 and currently mostly resides in Bukovica, with occasional stays in Zagreb and Zadar; interviewed in August 2023).

64 Croatian ethnologist Zorica Vitez mentions three types of *abduction*: the staged one, which was mutually agreed upon; the partially agreed one, in which the girl, the young man, and his parents were usually aware of the abduction, while the girl’s parents were unaware that the abduction would take place; and the true abduction (see Kelava, „Svadbeni običaji u posuškom kraju”, 506).

65 Bože Kelava, born 1952 in Bukovica (migrated to Australia in May 1971 and has lived there ever since), recorded in Bukovica in August 2023.

66 One example describes how a girl wanted to make her boyfriend jealous, so she arranged with another young man to come and take her away. After her boyfriend found out, he went to bring her back, she returned home, and the two of them eventually married. Another example illustrates how the young man’s parents did not allow him to marry his girlfriend. Upon learning this, the girl was hurt and arranged with another young man to come and elope with her, after which she married the young man she eloped with. The reason for the *abduction* was often the disagreement of the parents with the marriage of the young couple. In most cases, the parents eventually reconciled with the decision of the young man and woman, but there were also situations in which the parents refused to speak to their daughters for a long time after such events. All three examples of *abduction* were mentioned by Marica Kelava (née Šteko), born in 1955, Bukovica; recorded in December 2024.

Nowadays, the Holy Mass on St. Stephen's Day is no longer held in cemeteries, but in churches. Furthermore, the walks after Mass, once customary, are no longer observed. The second day of Christmas is most often reserved for visits to family and relatives, with special attention given to homes where a person named *Stjepan* resides.

5.2. St John's Day

Saint John, the apostle and evangelist, is traditionally considered the author of the Gospel of John, the Johannine epistles, and the Book of Revelation. Bieritz writes that Saint John is identified with the son of Zebedee and the brother of James, who was one of Jesus' disciples and later became a key member of the Christian community in Jerusalem. According to tradition, John worked in Ephesus, and during the reign of Emperor Domitian, he was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation. It is assumed that after returning to Ephesus, he wrote the Gospel and the epistles, and that he passed away around the year 100. By around 200, his tomb was venerated in Ephesus.⁶⁷

The straw,⁶⁸ brought into the house on Christmas Eve, was removed on the feast of St. John. It was typically removed in the morning hours and placed on the fields, where it would remain until spring, eventually being plowed into the soil rather than discarded, burned, or fed to animals.⁶⁹ Rihtman-Auguštin notes that, according to most descriptions of Christmas customs, the straw remained in the house throughout the Christmas holidays. It was typically removed on the third day of Christmas, the feast of St. John, early in the morning before dawn, often placed around young fruit trees to ensure a better harvest.⁷⁰ In the Cernik region (Croatia), the straw was taken out on the fourth day of Christmas, on the feast of the Holy Innocents. Some of it was brought to the stable to ensure the prosperity of the livestock, some was placed near the hens to promote better egg-laying, while the rest was distributed throughout the orchard.⁷¹ In certain Croatian regions, the straw was not removed until the feast of the Epiphany.⁷²

67 Bieritz, *Crkvena godina: svetkovine, blagdani i spomendani u povijesti i danas*, 102.

68 The spreading of straw, or less commonly hay, throughout the house is a tradition known among Slovenes, Serbs, Montenegrins, Bulgarians, Romanians, Hungarians, Albanians, Germans, French, Czechs, Swedes, English, and others (Dragić, „Hrvatski panspermijski običaji, ophodi, obredi i divinacije u europskom kontekstu”, 63).

69 Zdravko Kelava, born 3.1.1959, Bukovica; interviewed in December 2024.

70 Rihtman-Auguštin, *Knjiga o Božiću, Božić i božićni običaji u hrvatskoj narodnoj kulturi*, 61.

71 Zorić, *Obred i običaj*, 87.

72 Vitez, „Iskorak iz svakidašnjice”, 196.

In Mesihovina (Duvno region), a fair was traditionally held on St. John's Day. Similar to St. Stephen's Day, St. John's Day placed particular emphasis on social interactions among young people. Elders paid close attention to who walked with whom, who showed interest in whom, and ultimately, who was planning to marry soon. Since weddings were only held until Shrovetide, a young man would soon visit the young woman in the company of select family members to request an *omanet*⁷³ - a symbolic item signifying her consent to marriage. If the young woman accepted the proposal, she would offer an *omanet*, such as a handkerchief or a pair of socks, indicating her agreement to wed.

5.3. The Holy Innocents

The Feast of the Holy Innocents (*Nevina dječica*) is celebrated on December 28 in remembrance of the newborn children who were killed on the orders of King Herod. This memorial has been observed by the Church since the first half of the 5th century, and until 1955, it even had its own octave. The Church considers the Holy Innocents to be martyrs who are now in paradise.⁷⁴

There are various names associated with the Feast of the Holy Innocents. Croatian dialectologist Sanja Vulić writes that the official church name Holy Innocents is the least represented in popular tradition. She notes that in the Kajkavian regions, the term Herod's Day (Herodeševo) is commonly used. Among Kajkavians and Štokavians, the term Šibarevo appears, while the most widespread name is *Mladenci*, which is used throughout almost all Štokavian and Čakavian areas.⁷⁵ In the Tomislavgrad region, the feast is most commonly known as *Mladenci*. Traditionally, on this day, there was a custom of gentle, symbolic whipping (*šibanje*) children with a twig (*šiba*), accompanied by the words: "Rasti u dužinu, rasti u širinu!"⁷⁶ which symbolized a wish for their health and progress in the coming year. It was believed that this ritual would bring the children good health and encourage their development. After the whipping, parents would give the children gifts, such as walnuts or dried fruit. In modern times, this custom is no longer practiced in the Duvno region.

73 In Tomislavgrad, the term *omanet* is commonly used. Bosnian-Herzegovinian researcher Ante Kraljević mentions three different terms: *amanet*, *omanet*, and *manet*, and provides two meanings: "jabuka s novcem, koju prosici nude divojci na rakiji; dar koji daje momak divojci (i divojka momku) prilikom zaruka" ("an apple with money, which suitors offer to the girl with *rakija* (a traditional drink); a gift given by the suitor to the girl (or by the girl to the suitor) during betrothal") (Kraljević, *Ričnik zapadnohercegovačkoga govora*, 4).

74 Dragić, „Sveta nevina dječica u hagiografiji i hrvatskoj kulturnoj antropologiji”, 52.

75 Vulić, „O nekim pučkim imenima blagdana Nevine dječice”, 99.

76 "Grow in length, grow in width!"

6. St. Sylvester's Day

On New Year's Eve, the feast of Saint Pope Sylvester is celebrated. He was born in Rome, and his papacy lasted from January 31, 314, to December 31, 335. Sylvester was known for his kindness, mercy, and dedication to Christian ideals. According to legends, he was responsible for the conversion of Emperor Constantine I the Great to Christianity, which allowed the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. Sylvester is also famous for the legend that he tamed a dragon in Rome. He is often depicted with symbols such as a bull and a dragon, emphasizing his victory over evil. He was the first pope to die a natural death on December 31, 335, and his feast day, *Silvestrovo*, is celebrated on the same day.⁷⁷

On New Year's Eve, preparations were made for the arrival of the New Year. Meals for the New Year's Day lunch were prepared, and Masses were held to express gratitude to God for the past year. The customs of food preparation and participation in the thanksgiving Mass have been retained in contemporary society. The practice of sprinkling homes with holy water has been partially preserved, while the blessing of barns and fields remains a rare custom, typically observed by older generations. The celebration of the New Year has undergone significant changes over time. In the past, social gatherings on New Year's Eve were rare. Collective gatherings were primarily focused on the anticipation of the celebrations and festivities that would take place the following day. It was common for most people to already be asleep when the New Year arrived. In contemporary times, New Year's Eve is characterized by heightened anticipation, often accompanied by organized celebrations. Young people typically gather with friends and celebrate together in private homes or hospitality venues. Additionally, many households tune in to New Year's television programs. With the decline of traditional New Year's fairs, the celebration now begins on New Year's Eve itself. Midnight is marked by the use of fireworks and pyrotechnic displays, which are associated with driving away evil spirits.⁷⁸ In the modern era, in the Duvno region, pyrotechnics and fireworks are viewed as universal symbols of celebration and joy.

7. New Year

The New Year is celebrated on the eighth day after Christmas. Among the ancient Slavs, the new year traditionally began in what is now March, marking

⁷⁷ Dragić, „Silvestrovo u hrvatskoj tradicijskoj kulturi”, 303-309.

⁷⁸ Dragić, „Hrvatski tradicijski čestitarski ophodi, pohodi i običaji od Božića do Sveta tri kralja”, 219.

the early days of spring.⁷⁹ With the adoption of Christianity, Slavic peoples, including Croats, began celebrating Christmas on December 25, while in some regions, New Year's celebrations were also observed on that date. Following the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in the late 16th century, January 1 became the official beginning of the New Year among Catholics.⁸⁰

The New Year is also referred to as *Young Christmas* or *Little Christmas*.⁸¹ In some places, the term *počelo* (*beginning*) is mentioned.⁸² Christmas and New Year are traditionally closely linked, and many customs symbolically associated with fertility, renewal, and prosperity are often repeated on New Year's Day.

On New Year's Day, houses, stables, and fields were sprinkled with holy water. The candles that burned during the Christmas meal would be lit again during the New Year's meal. As on Christmas, the remaining yule log would be placed in the fire, and candles were lit using the same flame. In Miljacka, after the yule log had burned down, its charcoal was preserved until spring, when it was taken to planting sites. This custom, of a panspermic nature, reflected the belief that such a practice would ensure a better harvest. Writing about beliefs associated with the power of yule log remnants, Croatian ethnologist Milovan Gavazzi notes the frequent practice of relighting and reusing them. In certain regions, this custom was tied to New Year or Epiphany traditions. The remnants of the yule log held protective and fertility-related significance, with charcoal often scattered in fields to promote crop safety and abundance.⁸³ Dragić also emphasizes the apotropaic and panspermic significance of the custom of leaving *charcoal, ash, and unburned yule log remnants*.⁸⁴

Just like on Christmas, on New Year's Eve, the candles were extinguished with bread dipped in wine. In certain areas of the Tomislavgrad municipality, the candles were then sprinkled with grain. The grain in which the candles had been placed, was then taken to the fields with the belief that this act would ensure a better harvest.⁸⁵ The wine used to extinguish the candles was also kept in

79 A significant indirect indication that the Slavs began their year in the spring is the practice of adding an intercalary or leap month to harmonize the lunar and solar calendars. This additional month was inserted every few years, and ethnographic evidence suggests that among Slavic communities, it was typically added after March (Belaj, *Hod kroz godinu*, 164).

80 Belaj, *Hod kroz godinu*, 164.

81 Rihtman-Auguštin, *Knjiga o Božiću, Božić i božićni običaji u hrvatskoj narodnoj kulturi*, 134.

82 Braica, „Božićni običaji”, 9.

83 Gavazzi, *Godinu dana hrvatskih narodnih običaja II. (oko Božića)*, 6.

84 See Dragić, „Apotropejski obredi, običaji i ophodi u hrvatskoj tradicijskoj kulturi”, 372.

85 Iva Jolić (née Landeka), born on October 31, 1955, in Mrkodol, lived in Kongora for nine years after her marriage in 1973, while her husband worked in Germany. In 1983, she joined

Miljacka until spring, or until the first plowing of the fields, when it would be poured onto the fields to enhance soil fertility.

The New Year's fair in Borčani, held at Pažarin (Duvno region), served as an important social event, particularly for young men and women, as it provided an opportunity for courtship and social interaction.⁸⁶ Fortune-telling about future husbands was commonly associated with Christmas festivities. Dragić presents multiple examples of love divinations.⁸⁷ In Mrkodol (Duvno region), young women would gather in a designated house, socializing while practicing fortune-telling with coffee grounds. After drinking their coffee, they would turn their cups upside down onto a saucer, allowing the remaining grounds to dry and form various shapes. These shapes were believed to be symbols that, according to popular belief, could reveal future events such as romantic encounters, happiness, or obstacles.⁸⁸ That type of fortune-telling in the Duvno region was perceived more as a form of social entertainment and playful symbolic interpretation rather than serious divination. Additionally, on New Year's Day, people of the Duvno region would visit relatives in neighboring villages for a communal meal, further strengthening social bonds.

8. The Feast of the Three Kings

The Feast of the Three Kings is celebrated on January 6. It is also known as Theophany or Epiphany, which means *manifestation* or *revelation*. The first traces of this feast appear at the beginning of the third century in Alexandria, and the selection of the date is linked to the pre-Christian celebration of the birthday of Aeon, the patron of Alexandria, a port city on the Mediterranean Sea in ancient Egypt. Initially, in the Eastern Church, it marked the birth of Jesus, and later, the commemoration of Jesus' baptism and the first miracle in Cana were added. By the end of the fourth century, the Eastern and Western Churches had divided the meanings of the feast – in the East, January 6 was dedicated to the baptism of Jesus and the miracle in Cana, while in the West, the focus was on the arrival of the wise men, the baptism, and Jesus' first miracle as signs of His divinity. During the Middle Ages, the feast became popularly known as the

her husband in Germany, and since 2016, they have both been living in Kongora.

86 Jozo Andrić, born in 1940 in Mrkodol, migrated to Germany in 1962, now resides in both Zagreb and Mrkodol; interviewed in August 2023.

87 See Dragić, „Ljubavne divinacije u kulturnoj baštini Hrvata, Bošnjaka, Srba i Poljaka”, 103-123.

88 Ljuba Kelava (née Landeka), born 9.9.1953 in Mrkodol, migrated in Germany in 1975, currently resides mostly in Bukovica with occasional stays in Germany and Croatia (Zagreb, Zadar); recorded in December 2023.

Feast of the Three Kings, emphasizing the arrival of the wise men.⁸⁹ The Feast of the Three Kings is characterized by religious rituals such as the blessing of water, sprinkling with holy water, and the blessing of homes. Certain folk customs are repeated during Christmas Eve, Christmas, New Year's, and the Feast of the Three Kings.⁹⁰

In the area of Duvno, customs such as lighting candles, relighting the yule log, and keeping the charcoal, come to an end on New Year's Day. On the Feast of the Three Kings, Christmas decorations are removed, and the family Christmas atmosphere concludes.

9. Conclusion

Christmas customs in the Duvno region are documented in various publications and on online platforms through the work of local researchers, journalists, and cultural contributors, including Stojan Rubić, Anđelo Nuić, Ivo Bagarić, Klement Galić, Anamarija Mamić, Ivana Krstanović, Mirjana Kukavica, Ante Matić-Mijušić, Ante Matić-Borčanac, Ante Matić-Lib, and Vinko Vukadin. Additionally, literary authors such as Petar Miloš, Željko Musić, and Iva Bagarić have portrayed Christmas celebrations in the context of migration, particularly emphasizing the tradition of returning home for the holidays.

Christmas customs among all Christian nations have a long tradition and often contain elements of pre-Christian origins. This is reflected in various customs, rituals, and beliefs of protective and fruitful character, as well as in divination practices. The same can be observed among the Croats in the Duvno region. For example, it was believed that the flame of a candle could predict the fertility of the land. Additionally, there was a belief that a candle that extinguished during the family meal was a sign that someone from the household would pass away in the coming year. Wine and bread, which were used to extinguish the candles, were also attributed with protective and fruitful properties. Special significance was placed on straw and the charcoal from the burnt yule log in the studied area. The straw would be placed on the fields on the feast day of St. John, and left on the land, while the charcoal from the yule log would be kept until spring, when it was taken out to the fields on the day of the first plowing. Today, straw is most commonly seen in Duvno homes only in nativity scenes. Although the custom of burning the yule log continues in homes with wood stoves or fireplaces, the practice of leaving and preserving the charcoal until the first plowing has become extremely rare.

⁸⁹ Adam, *Uvod u katoličku liturgiju*, 302.

⁹⁰ See Dragić, „Sveta tri kralja u hrvatskoj tradiciji”, 96-117.

In addition to the aforementioned customs, the Christmas holidays provided a break from daily work obligations. Since weddings were held exclusively before Lent, it was during the Christmas period that one would learn who planned to get married. During the 1970s and 1980s, the phenomenon of *kidnapping* girls often appeared which has since disappeared. Walks after Mass and celebrations during the Christmas holidays are no longer held in the Duvno area.

On the Feast of the Three Kings, salt and water are brought to church for blessing. In addition to sprinkling the house and yard, in the past, the women of Duvno also sprinkled the fields, praying the Credo. The Christmas tree and decorations are taken down from the homes, marking the end of the Christmas period.

A comparison between published texts documenting Christmas customs in the Duvno region and data collected during the author's field research provides a broader perspective on the continuity and transformation of these traditions. In previously published works, elements of Advent, Christmas Eve, and Christmas customs are often mentioned within a single text, though the descriptions are frequently brief and fragmented. In contrast, the more recent records gathered through fieldwork encompass customs observed from Christmas Day to the Feast of the Epiphany, offering a more detailed insight into contemporary practices and their changes over time.

The Christmas traditions of the Duvno region reflect a rich cultural heritage passed down through generations. Many of these traditions have changed or disappeared under the influence of social, political and migratory processes. Some of their traces continue to live on in memories, literary works, and the few remaining practices. Therefore, systematically documenting and studying these customs is crucial for preserving and understanding the cultural identity of the region in the context of Croatian cultural heritage and literature.

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Božićno razdoblje u tradicijskoj kulturi i književnosti duvanjskoga kraja

Sažetak

U radu se navode i multidisciplinarno interpretiraju suvremeni zapisi obreda, ophoda, običaja i vjerovanja vezanih uz božićno razdoblje. Vrijedni etnografski podaci o božićnim običajima u duvanjskom kraju nalaze se u tekstovima autora kao što su Stojan Rubić, Anđelo Nuić, Ivo Bagarić, Klement Galić, Anamarija Mamić, Ivana Krstanović, Mirjana Kukavica, Ante Matić-Mijušić, Ante Matić-Borčanac, Ante Matić-Lib i Vinko Vukadin. Nadalje, autori poput Petra Miloša, Željka Musića i Ive Bagarić u svojim književnim djelima oslikavaju blagdansko ozračje te utjecaj migracija na božićne običaje. Ovi tekstovi u cjelini upućuju na bogatu, ali nedovoljno istraženu kulturu božićnih običaja u duvanjskom kraju, čime se pojavila potreba za sustavnijim znanstvenim proučavanjem. Iz toga razloga provedeno je terensko istraživanje u razdoblju od kolovoza 2023. do prosinca 2024. Uz božićne blagdane vežu se molitve, pjesme, tradicije apotropijskog i panspermijskog karaktera te divinacije. Pod utjecajem religijskih, političkih i društvenih čimbenika božićni su običaji nastajali te su kroz vrijeme doživljavali brojne preinake u izvođenju. Velik broj zabilježenih tradicija više se ne prakticira te je sačuvan uglavnom u sjećanjima pojedinaca što dodatno naglašava potrebu za sustavnim bilježenjem tih kulturnih dobara kako ih ne bismo nepovratno izgubili.

Ključne riječi: duvanjski kraj, duvanjski božićni običaji u publikacijama, duvanjski božićni običaji s vlastitih istraživanja.