

Research into textile handicrafts in Istria

Textile handicrafts in Istria have become to die out during the late 19th century, induced by the ever more often usage of the purchased materials. All the way into the half of the twentieth century, weaving was a male profession in Istria, and it was dealt with by half-professional craftsmen. Processing of raw materials, and in Istria these were wool, hemp and flax, was female work. Each family tried to fulfill its own need for textile products. The prepared raw materials were then taken to the weavers, and then to tailors. After the World War II textile handicrafts in Istria reached their last stage. The last weavers were active until the late 1960s, and they mainly produced linen for rugs - tapete, bed sheets - lancuni, bags - vriće, bad covers - koverture, bisage... As a part of the project "Weaving in Istria", the Ethnographic Museum of Istria has become with the research into the weaving activities, the ways of weaving, and the very procedure of producing the materials for weaving.

Key words: textile handicrafts, weaving, processing of raw materials, folk costumes, female traditional costumes, Istria

Project "Weaving in Istria"

In early 2001 the Ethnographic Museum of Istria has started working at the project under the work title "Weaving in Istria". The project "Weaving in Croatia" has been initiated by Dr. Tihana Petrović from the Department of Ethnology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, and the Ethnographic Museum of Istria is a carrier of the part of the project that deals with the textile handicrafts in Istria. The project aims at supplement the knowledge about the textile production in Istria and make this

knowledge public through workshops, exhibitions and catalogues. The project is planned in three phases: in the first phase, the Ethnographic Museum of Istria has organized the production of a copy of a loom (krosna), which is documented on video. In August, September and October 2002 the workshops of traditional weaving have taken place at the Ethnographic Museum of Istria. They were (and will be) taught by Ivan Voščon, a weaver.

An exhibition about the textile handicrafts of Istria, together with a catalogue, will follow, and finally, we plan to publish a more detailed volume containing the results of our research. The research is still going on, so that this paper is merely an outline of one segment of this comprehensive subject-matter.

Keeping in mind that the female traditional costume from Istria has been thoroughly dealt with in the doctoral thesis of Jelka Radauš-Ribarić, which was five years ago also published as a representative monograph, I have aimed my research towards processing of the raw materials needed for weaving (hemp, wool, flax...), but towards the activities of the weaver as well, the way they work, communicate with the buyers, and live.

In this paper, I have limited my research to the processing of hemp and flax (although flax was used to a much smaller extent), as well as to some of the segments of the weaving activities.

Introduction

Most commonly used materials for the production of textile in Istria were hemp and wool. Flax was also produced in Istria, but to a significantly lesser extent. Due to its lower stalk, it gave shorter thread and demanded more water, and therefore was not suitable for wider usage. Mostly the wealthier people and in exceptional circumstances have used flax for the textile production.

Costume made of home-made materials has been abandoned in Istria quite early - already around the year 1880, when people started to use purchased materials. However, the weaving activities in Istria have survived up until the mid-twentieth century. The last weavers in Istria have worked until after the World War II, until the mid-1950s (Šoštari, Čipri), some until the mid 1960s (Brinjani), and it was only Mario Hrelja from Žminj who dealt with weaving until the late 1960s.

Processing of hemp and flax

Facts about textile production in our territories reach into the far history (Radauš-Ribarić, 1988: 14). Autarky was one of the features of the rural way of life until the beginning of industrialization and urbanization at the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. This way, the processing of textile raw materials was for the main part also in the hands of the families themselves, in the first instance of the

women. Unlike in other parts of Croatia, weaving was in Istria a male work (besides Istria, in the region of Zagorje the weavers were men), of a half-professional character, while the raw materials for the weaving were prepared by the women.

Sowing

Hemp was sown in many parts of Istria, while I have received the confirmation for flax only in the regions of Žminj, Pazin, Motovun, and Lanišće. In Lanišće it was seed that was later used for food and as a medicine for animals¹. In Rakotule (the region of Pazin), the family of Anton Rabak has sown flax for textile production, and the informant remembers that his sisters have spun the flax. In other places, for example, in Brinjani, people emphasize that they have not sown the flax, because it demanded lots of water, and since there was a lack of water in Istria, it was not the most appropriate culture for production.

Hemp used to be sown in March, until the beginning of April. It used to be sown thick, into a well fertilized ground. Sowing was done on a small, narrow, but very good piece of land - *liha*. Since it was usual that the ground was called after the culture that was sown on it, *liha* soon got the name after the culture it contained - *kono-pljak*. Hemp that was sown in order to get seed was not sown very thick. The informant from Lanišće mentions two sorts of hemp: *sjemenice* (for seed) and *vršenjice* (for textile production). *Sjemenice* used to be plucked (*rile*) later. It was the thicker and firmer hemp that was usually left for the seed. In Radetići the ground was first fertilized and then ploughed and only then raked. This was followed by sawing of hemp, and then the ground would again be raked. The informant Ana Voščon said that her family had no land and therefore her aunt gave them her land for them to saw hemp. At the end of the whole work, the girls used to make two bed sheets for themselves, and the same number went to their aunt. It was a custom for the wealthier people to give the yarn to the poorer, who would spin yarn for them. This way, people who did not have sown hemp could get yarn.

The informant says that the sawing of hemp was both male and female work. A bowl called *sića* was used for sawing. Only corn and wheat were sown from *bisaga* (a linen bag made on one piece of linen whose ends would be folded down and sewn together in order to make two *pockets*, worn on the shoulder so that the pockets face outside; there are also bigger ones, intended for the donkey to carry the load), and it was exclusively male work. When sawing, one had to be careful, because the seeds have to be equally placed into the ground. This procedure would be repeated once again.

¹The informer Marija Žmak Spinotti from Lanišće mentions that the flax grain was cooked and the fluid was given to the cow that has just calved. It was supposed to make her eat more. It was generally considered to be good for the cattle (blago). The same informer told me that the pigs that were weak or were not able to sleep and were generally at unease, were given to eat the hemp grain.

Picking and soaking

Hemp was *potrpila*, that is, it took the summer drought well. It was not cut, it was plucked with hands, *gulilo rukami* (Radetići, Brinjani) or plucked - *rilo, skublo* (Lanišće). All over Istria, it was done in August, for example, after *petnajstog angušta* (15th August), that is, the Assumption (*Sveta Marija Velika*, Brinjani). When a handful or *rukova* (in *Križeština*, the area of Kringa, where there are Brinjani and Radetići) or *macić* (Ćičarija) of hemp was plucked, it was tied together with hemp or with a willow rod (*Salix viminalis*). Ten *rukov* or *macić* were tied into a *faš*. Usually people tried to pluck hemp in a single day and therefore they asked their neighbours or workers for help. However, it was mainly the women that plucked hemp and came to help each other. The same day, the bundles of hemp were loaded on woods on a cart and were taken home - *nakrgalo na voz i popeljalo doma*.

After that, hemp had to soak. In Radetići, hemp were soaked in Limski kanal, whereas people from the nearby village of Brinjani drove to the puddle not far away. The puddle was called *močilje* or - in the region of Pazin (Ćipri) and Žminj (Žminj, šoštari), *puč* or *kalić* (with the difference that *puč* is deeper and narrower, whereas a *kalić* is shallower and broader puddle). In Ćičarija, hemp also used to be transported to the nearby *lokva*.

It was usual to go to Limski kanal already at two a.m. (Brinjani). *Faše* would be placed in the sea water one next to another. People were careful not to leave *faše* dry during the low tide. They would place stones on so composed *faše*. An informant from Radetići remembers that other people have also brought their hemp there and composed them so that it was possible to walk on them². Some kind of a sign, for example, a stone or a piece of wood, was put into the water at the place where hemp was soaked.

In Limski kanal, hemp used to soak for about four to five days, and in ^{močilje} they would stay for up until eight days. The informants from Lanišće and Žminj talk about ten days. All the informants recall the intense smell. In *močilje* or *puč* the water was fresh, whereas sea, salt water was quicker and nicer so that hemp soaked in sea water was whiter than the one soaked in fresh water. However, it would break more easily, emphasize the informants. The longer hemp was soaked, the easier it was to take the wooden part of the stem later. Besides in a puddle or in the sea, an informant from Rakotule mentions that hemp was sometimes left to soak in a trough, usually used for the treading of olives. In Rakotule it was otherwise usual to soak hemp in sea near Poreč.

² Informer Ivan Voščon told us that, as a child, he almost drowned at one of the weaving workshops while trying to untie the hemp. Floating on the hemp, he started to drift away from the coast and members of his family walked after him for as far as they could. As they could not swim, he went further and further. Luckily, someone who could swim was there and he was saved.

Drying and braking

After soaking, hemp was washed out and the leaves were left in the sea, while the hands were taken home and were left to dry, usually against a wall. In his doctoral thesis, Josip Miličević says that such vertical handfuls of hemp were called *stava* (Miličević 1987: 67). Hemp would dry for three to four days (and two to three on Čičarija), until it was time and the women gathered to beat the hemp.

For this, tree-stumps called *coke* had to be prepared. Such pieces of wood would be cut vertically in the middle and a diagonal niche would be made. In Roverija (the region of Vodnjan) such piece of wood (*drvo*) was called *daska za konoplju* (Miličević 1987: 68). A handful of hemp that was beaten with a *tukač* or *tucalo* (the region of Žminj and Križastina) in that niche. *Tukač* or *tucalo* is a tool intended for the hemp. It is knifelike shaped, with a wooden handle with a right-angle piece of pointless metal. It was used to beat hemp. Besides the *tukač*, the pointless side of *maršan* or *kortelač* (a tool with a turned blade) was used for the same purpose (the region of Pazin, Čičarija). It was the not sharpened side that was used for beating the hemp. People used to beat the niche in which a handful of hemp was put, and the handful itself would be moved a little. The wooden part of the stump (*pozder*) would fall out and a form from which a long thread - *vlas* - was made would stay.

Hemp was beaten when the weather was warm, from eight a.m. to five p.m. and while it was sunny. Work that was not finished until five p.m. was left for the next day, so that it would be warm again. Women tried to finish the work within a day. When they would beat two handfuls, each of them separately, they would put them together and beat again. Beating of hemp with *maršan* was called *griča* in Radetići.

An informant from Žminj says that children would also beat hemp, and that they would do it just for the fun of it - *iz gušta*.

After that, hemp would be left in the sun and then on the hemp-brake. The hemp-brake could either have four legs and two brake places, so that two women could work on it simultaneously, or two legs and one place for braking, so that a stone would be taken out of a wall and another end of the hemp-brake would be placed in. This would be well fixed, because the hemp-brake had to be firm. Usually the older, more experienced women braked because it was a difficult and demanding work. Hemp was folded, taken on the centre and put into the hemp-brake. A movable wooden dull part was used for beating the hemp and it would be dragged.

The yarn would be placed on *greben* or *gradaša* after that. It was a wooden board with nails stuck in. All of the shorter threads remained on the *greben*. It was called *štupa* and older women used to collect it into a basket and made *kudilja*, *kudelja* out of it (the region of Žminj). Longer threads - the longest and the most beautiful, called *vlas* - would remain in the hand during the process and were used to make hank or *povisma*, *povesma* (the region of Žminj). *Štupa* from *kudilja* would be spun for the weft threads and *vlas* from *povismo* for the warp threads.

Spinning

During the 1950s, in the house of Ana Udovičić from Radetići, there were thousand of henks and tow - *miljar povismi i kudilja* - and the informant remembers that she and her sisters have managed to spin all of it during one winter. It was the year when even their grandmother did some of the housework, like washing up, so that the girls could spin. And if they started talking to each other, she would warn them with the words: "Work, don't look at each other, spin, because winter will come to an end, and you have to finish spinning, for there is a lot of yarn". The informant was thirteen at the time and was not a skilled spinner, so that sometimes she would drop the spindle. She remembers her sister saying to her "Don't drop the spindle. It is not very nice to hear the spindle falling".

One of the most common obligations of girls and women was spinning. When spinning, one had to be careful that the spinned thread was thin. The spindles were most often made of ash-wood. The spindle used to circle in the direction of the clock, except in the case when two threads had to be joined into one, then it would be spinned in the opposite direction. It was actually winding, so that the informants used to say "we have combined two threads into one backwards".

The distaffs were usually wooden and carved - *našarane* (Milićević1987: 70). Young men used to make them for their girlfriends. However, an informant from Radetići remembers that women would use reed that they would simply cut off from somewhere nearby as a distaff. They would make a hole - *škulja* - on the upper part with the knife and pull through a ribbon with which they had tied the yarn - *povismo* - for the distaff. Informant Ana Udovičić has herself made such a distaff and showed us how it worked. Women used to tuck the distaff into their girdle and used another ribbon to tie it under their armpits. In Istria, *povismo* could be wrapped with a piece of skin made of sheep's or goat's bladder. Such a distaff was called *preslica s botom*.

The first thread was done with the rope - *vuže* - which was later on hung in the room which served as a storage - *konoba*. In the procedure of spinning, it was necessary to moist the thread with the saliva. It was called *pljukanje*. Since a woman lacked saliva, she would drink a little smrikva (a non-alcoholic drink made of juniper-tree berries, *Juniperus communis*) and continued with her work.

Women usually spinned during the winter, in the evenings. The informant says that their grandmother would clean *kudilje*, that is, she would throw out the remaining *pozder* so that they could spin it. The girls would sit next to a candle or an oil-lamp, and later also a paraffin lamp, while the men could sit in the dark. If their grandfather was around, the girls mostly kept silent, while they were a little looser - *prošperije* - in front of their mother and grandmother and talked about girls and boys, the ones they fancied, getting married, etc.

The quality of yarn differed from region to region - for example, the women from *Križastina* claim that besides them and the girl *Bezice* across the Draga also spinned nicely - *prele lipo* - while the girls *Benećanke*, towards Sveti Lovreč, spinned roughly - *prele grdo* - for they were more urban types of women.

There were also days when one was not supposed to spin. These were so-called *Sveti neprelci*. On these days spinning was not allowed and the grandmother used to tell the informants: "You have to work and spin until February, as we would nicely put it in Istrian: *šičanj - do šičnja*". This was because after that day there was a series of *Sveti neprelci* - St Agatha (5th February), St Fosca (13th February), St Valentine (14th February), St Bride and Groom (28th December)³, St Mary *Marčenica* (25th March). It was forbidden to spin on the day of St Mary *Marčenica* and it was said that if someone would spin on that day, each time she would hurt herself with a needle, she would hurt the Mother of God. When spinning was forbidden, people usually did not spin. In Radetići and Brinjani, or more precisely, in Križaština, it was forbidden to spin on shrove-tide "because he would see the toady" (*aš da biš vidija guža*). When asked what was *guži*, the informant said that they were *gadi* - reptiles - "snakes and reptiles, and *gad* is black, we call him *guž*, and some people say *gad*. During the summertime, you know, when the spring is about to begin, the reptiles are going out. We would hide our spindles, move them into a corner. My mother used to cover them and hide them, because otherwise we would see the reptile".

An informant from Radetići has seen the spinning-wheel or, as it was most often called in Istria, *makina za presti*, only in a house of a wealthier women. According to her testimony, older women did not consider the spinning-wheel to be good, because it did not produce a firm and nice thread, but always a thick one. In other areas the spinning-wheel was new and only some of the women have used it.

Women have knitted whenever they had a chance, because they could do it by heart, while for spinning they needed to be more concentrated so that the spinned thread would be nice and regular. So, they spinned when grazing the cattle, when looking after the sheep or cows, but never when walking.

Besides, on the *Pust*, it was danced for hemp. In the winter, the dances were held in the closed space, in a house, and older people did not like that *aš da se dere pod*. And the young would talk them into it: "*Ma dajte, neće vam konoplja uroditi ako ne puštite. Danas je Pust. Danas treba da puštite plesati kad imate mista. I treba vam uroditi konoplja, ko ne, ne bi vam konoplja urodila*".

Transposition, whitening, colouring

After the women have spinned the yarn, it was rolled into hanks - *štrene*. Three spinned spindles made a hunk - *štrena*. This was done with a tool called *rašak*. In Istria, it could look like the double letter T, while the upper and lower board were placed as a cross. Besides a *rašak* like this one, it could be different: it was possible to roll with moving a handle that moved four handles places as a wheel and that had at their ends niches shaped like the letter U, in which the thread would go. After that, *štrene* were connected at one end and then they would be soaked in lye or whitened.

³The informer was not sure about the exact date.

A wooden vessel - *čabar driveni* - was used for this purpose. Each hank would be stretched, although it remained connected on one spot (so that the threads would not get intermixed), and then hot water in which ashes - *lug* - were cooked would be poured over them. It was essential to be careful and not to allow threads to merge with each other (*zakrasnaju*). They would get soaked and then left to soak in wet *lug* for five or six days, after which women place them on their hands and put the ashes away (*strunile ča taj lug*). After that, they would again place them into *čabar* and cook *lušija* (warm water with ashes). At the top of the hank, a piece of linen - *tarač* - would be placed. Warm water with *lug* was always poured into *čabar*. *Čabar* had a plug on its bottom and when the water would get cold, the plug would be taken off to allow the cold water to run out, and women would pour some more warm water in. Hanks had to remain into the warm mixture of water and ashes for three or four days. The water would be changed immediately - *zajno gambijevala* - as soon as it was possible to hold hands in this water, it was time for it to be changed. It was a hard work (*mučno delo*), usually dealt with in the wintertime, when there was no work to attend to in the fields. After soaking in lye, water had to be squeezed out and women would take *čabar* with hanks with them to a puddle and wash them on a large stone beside the puddle - *perilu* - *velikoj škrljji*. Hanks would be washed with a wooden board which was used for hitting the clothes - *peranica*.⁴ After being washed, hanks had to get dried on a pole or some reed.

Hanks used to be coloured mainly as bags were made out of hemp, as they were rarely white, they always had some stripes - *na rige*. The most usual colour was black or red - all of the informers I talked to remember using only industrial colours.

Rewrapping

Hanks used to be wrapped into balls on a tool called *motovilo* or *motovilnjak*. *Motovilnjak* or *motovilo* is an axle fixed in cork with two crossed sticks which are broader at the bottom and narrower at the top. Their ends were connected with four diagonal sticks that had a slight decline. The hank was placed on the *motovilo*, and then slowly rewrapped into balls.

Yarn used to be rewrapped into balls - *na vitve, vitle*. Ten such balls were tied together into a *tombol*. Such *tombols* were taken to a weaver.

Picture four: *Virva, vitta* (wooden, not hemp) and the way it is tied together into a *tombol*, Brinjani. Photo by Olga Orlić, 13th March, 2002.

Dowry

An informer from Radetići says that a girl needed an even number of bed linens - *lancuni* - four, six, eight and most commonly twelve for her dowry - *dota*. Also pillow

⁴The name *peranica* is also used for a part of the loom. It is a wooden part placed in the post which served as holder for a stick that pulled tight the back shaft. It looks like a small *peranica* used for doing laundry, and therefore was also named after it.

cases - *intimele* - and bed covers - *koverture* - were needed. Ana Voščon's mother had six thick and two thin *lancuni*, a blanket (*punjava*), a couple of dresses and skirts (*kotula*), as well as four or five towels (*šugaman*). All the informers agree upon the fact that the quantity of dowry's contents depended on the economic position of a family. For example, an informer from Radetići mentions a neighbour that got married without having her *dota*. All of them emphasize that the bride did not get any clothes upon coming into a new household. She had to wear what she had brought with her, if anything. Or, as a popular saying goes, "as much as they could afford" (*Kako je ko ima dugi špag*). Usually, the parents were the ones who would choose a bride for their son or a husband for their daughter, and the informers all agree that the usual pick was to pair the poor with the poor and the wealthy with the wealthy. Or, again, as popular sayings go, "The poor doesn't go with the rich" (*Ne kumpari siromah s bogatim*) and "Saddle-bag with saddle-bag and sack with sack. Although it is always better to get a sack than a saddle-bag" (*Bisaga s bisagom, vrića s vrićom. Ali vajk je bila bolja vrića nego bisaga*).

Taking yarn to the weaver

Unlike in other parts of Croatia, the women in Istria did not weave themselves, but carried threads wrapped into balls to a weaver, semi-professional craftsman who would produce the linen for the women, after which the linen would be taken to the tailor, who would make the ordered clothes. Girls from the region of *Križastine* have never taken the yarn to weavers themselves. They always had their mothers or grandmothers as chaperons. The mothers and the grandmothers were indeed the ones who would place the order. However, weaver Ivan Voščon remembers that the *Bezice* girls from the other bank of the Draga river took the yarn themselves. Informer Ana Voščon stresses that those girls used to be different than the rest. She wanted to say that in her region, women mainly stayed at home and went out only with their mothers, brothers or sisters as chaperons, while the *Bezice* were much more liberal and went places on their own.

When ordering, mothers would point to the yarn and say which yarn was used for which purpose. This way, the best yarn was used for *lancuni*, a little less good was used for somewhat worse *lancuni*, and the worse yarn was used for the production of *vriće*... The weaver would afterwards check the yarn himself and then classified it. There usually were three types - the one consisting of the best thread or *vlasi*, then even better one - *kudilja* - and finally the worst kind of yarn called *škart*, which was mainly used for sacks.

The weavers used to note down the data on the ordering parties in their books, so that they knew exactly who had ordered what and what was the course of the order. Unfortunately, all of the weavers I have talked to have either thrown their books away or burnt them, having considered them worthless and useless.

The balls that were brought by the women have been weighted on a scale, and the measure unit were pounds (*funte*) - *pezi na funte* (1 kg is 1,8 pound). This figure was

noted down in the weaver's book. Both the weight (expressed in pounds) and the thickness of the thread were indicative to the number of the goods (*robe*) that the weaver was able to produce. The weaver would inform the ordering party about the quantity straight away. For example, Iva Vošćon has noted down the weight of the balls, name of the ordering party, place of residence of the ordering party as well as the supposed quantity of the goods to be produced. He would put a tiny piece of paper with the owner's name into the balls themselves, so that they would not mix up with other people's balls.

Mario Hrelja and Romano Maretić used to approximate the quantity of the linen they had produced on basis of the weight expressed in pounds and the thickness of the thread. For example, one pound of thin yarn would be enough to produce two ells (one ell - *lakat* - was about 70 cm⁵) of linen, and sometimes even two ells and 20 cm (if the yarn was of exceptionally high quality, spun very thin). Second-class thread would be enough to produce an ell and three quarters, and very thick thread would give an ell and a half. The worst spun thread called *štupa* was to produce up to an ell in length.

Independently of their wages, the weavers would get special rewards from the women. Sometimes it was a litre or two of wine, and it was also customary to bring fat or bacon as well as rye flour. Rye flour was given to a weaver because he used to apply the mixture of rye flour and water to the warp threads spread on the loom. This mixture, called *mazilo*, would be fried in a dish called *padela*. *Mazilo* was applied with a brush made of plant *rdobrada* (*Chrysopogon gryllus*) what is in Istria called - *kartača* or *kršina*. The weaver would hold the brush in his right hand above the threads, and he would go over the threads with his left hand or with another brush underneath the threads. That way, the threads would be smoothed so that the yarn would become smooth - *da preja dode glatka*. After that, he would paint them with fat as well. He would place the shuttle (*navižela* or *barketa*) the same way, so that it would slide more easily.

The weaver would tell the women who brought the yarn when to come to pick up the produced linen. Most often it was a few days later from the time necessary for the production of the linen. The weavers also took care of finishing the linen of people who lived far away in time, while for those who lived nearby it was possible to give an oral notice at the Sunday mass or an occasional encounter.

The woven linen was put to dry and was rolled in to a ball (*bala*) connected with a string (*špaga*). A piece of paper with its owner's name and the length expressed in ells was once again put within the ball and it waited for its owner to come to pick it up. Women used to carry a ball like that over their shoulders and take them home.

⁵An ell is an obsolete unit of length equal to approximately 45 inches

Weaving

The majority of weavers I talked to has started weaving after their fathers, who also were weavers, had died. When the fathers died, there always was some unfinished orders, so that the sons used to continue with their fathers' work, that is, they finished the orders their fathers took. However, people continued to come with their orders. So, some of the weavers worked on this way for another four to five years. Some of them (Ivan Voščon, for example) even had their own craft, fully registered and with paid taxes. However, the market grew smaller and many of them have turned to the textile industry or mining.

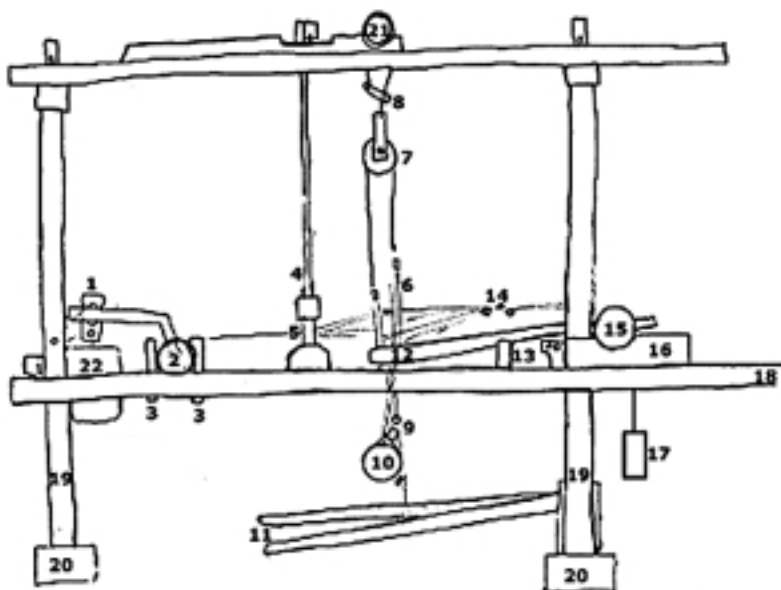
Before starting to weave, a weaver would usually call God or make the sign of cross.

The weavers usually got an assistant, someone who helped them reel the threads to weft. They used to be roll on a piece of reed on a tool called *špoladur*. A thread so reeled on a piece of reed was called *špola*. *Špolas* used to be put into the shuttle, called *navižela* or *barketa*. Some of the weavers I have talked to have mastered their skills by helping their fathers and doing exactly the described thing - reeling *špolas*.

They used to weave on the loom, which is in Istria called *krosna* or *krošnje* (in the region of the mountain Čičarija - Lanišće), and in the region of Buje Italian names are still in use: *telajo*, *taler*, *telarija*... (Miličević, 1987: 74).

In his doctoral thesis, Josip Miličević (Miličević, 1987: 75) stresses that the Istrian type of the loom is similar to the Friulian one, which is quite logical, bearing in mind that the weavers from Carnic region, that is, the Alpine region between Friuli and the Carinthia, used to come to Istria to weave on a seasonal basis, and some of them even found their permanent home in Istria (many of the immigrants from the Carnic region have been nicknamed *Krnjel*) (Radauš-Ribarić, 1972: 26). The same author (Miličević, 1987: 74) also concludes that we cannot argue that weaving was exclusively male work, because in the sixteenth century a great number of new inhabitants immigrated to Istria from the Dinaric Mountains, which was the region where only women had woven.

Parts of the loom were, as follows: grede (lower horizontal beams), *gređice* (beams on which large and small axes were placed), *stranice* (vertical beams), front axle or *malo vrtilo*; back axle or *velo vrtilo*; *podložnjaki* or *podložnice*; *češlji* or *ničanice* which were tied with cord to *škripce* or *kolature*; then brdo or *kartela* (first made of reed, and later of iron) which were fixed in a wooden, mobile part called *prebijaka* or *prebijavnica*; then there was *tiran*, a piece of wood used to strengthen the front axle so that weaving would be stretched; *navižela*, *navićela* or *barketa* (shuttle); then various wedges called *klini*; *palica* used for tightening the back axle at the same time the *tiran* would be let loose; *peranica*, a wooden part named after the washing tool it was similar to, and used for holding the *palica*; usually, there are also three *bakete*, used for keeping the warp threads apart in *zijevo*, weight that pulled *bakete* back so that they would not move together with the warp threads, two pieces of wood that connected *škripci* and *podložnjaci* and used for regulating the height.



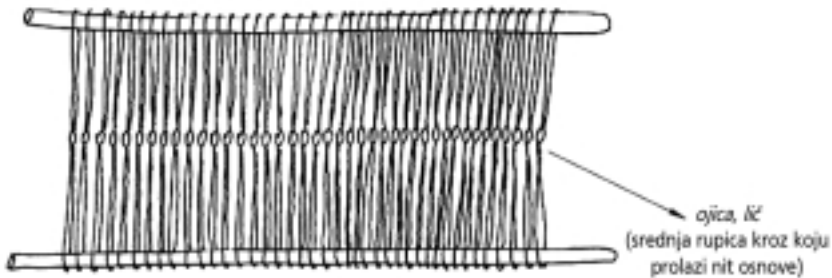
Drawing 1, by Arsen Pletenac, edited by Robert Bilić

Technical terms:

- 1 tool for tightening the front axle
- 2 front axle
- 3 wedges
- 4 ridge
- 5 brdo (hill?)
- 6 nićanice
- 7 shuttles
- 8 regulators of height of nićanice and shuttles
- 9 treadle base
- 10 lower axle
- 11 treadles
- 12 cane that tightens and loosens the back axle
- 13 cane holder
- 14 canes that keep the warp threads apart
- 15 back axle
- 16 back axle holder
- 17 weight
- 18 upper horizontal beam
- 19 vertical beam
- 20 lower horizontal beams
- 21 upper axle
- 22 sjedalica

Dialectal terms:

- 1 *tiran*
- 2 *malo vrtilo*
- 3 *klini*
- 4 *prebijavnica*
- 5 *kartela*
- 6 *češlji*
- 7 *koloturi, škripci*
- 8 *ključ*
- 9 *balancini*
- 10 *malo vrtilo*
- 11 *podložnice*
- 12 *palica*
- 13 *peranica*
- 14 *bakete*
- 15 *velo vrtilo*
- 16 *cokule*
- 17 *uteg*
- 18 *gredica*
- 19 *stranica*
- 20 *greda*
- 21 *malo vrtilo*
- 22 *sjedalica*



Drawing 2, by Arsen Pletenac

ojica or *lič* (a central hole through which a warp thread passes)

Technical term:

nićanice

Dialectal term:

češlji, ličari (Žminj)



Drawing 3, by Arsen Pletenac

Technical term: Cane holder

Dialectal term: *peranica*

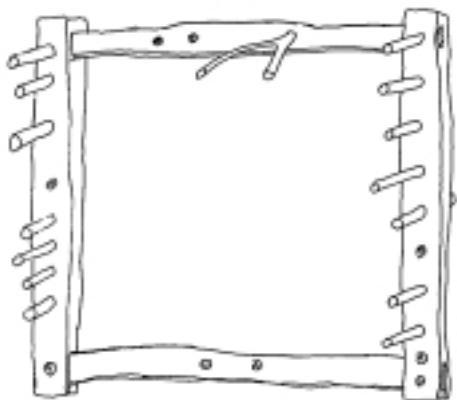
The woven linen used to be stretched on the front axle, and when there was too much of it and when it started to bother the weaver, the weaver would roll in into the axle that was tied with cord to the beam and that used to hang between the *podložnica* and the linen. Later on, they have invented the system with the mobile cog-wheel and thus moved the linen to the third axle.

The weavers used to mention the *cindela* (Žminj, Čipri) and *raspinjač* (Kringa) as well. It was an iron or a wooden (Kringa) foldable tool with four teeth. When *cindela* was tightened, it used to hold the linen tight - otherwise, the *kartela* would break.

Krosna were usually placed against the wall in *konoba*, because its supporting beams were fixed into the wall and the ceiling, so that they would not move. This *konoba* in which a *krosna* would be placed was called *krosnarica*.

Linen was woven with four *nićanice* - *češlji*, so that the warp threads were pulled into the first and the third, that is, into the second and the fourth. Sacks and *bisage* were woven with two *češlji*, but in this case, two threads were pulled through *brdo* or *kartela*. *Češalj* had a small hole called *ojica* in its centre, through which the warp threads passed. In Žminj, *ojica* was called *lič*, and *češalj* was called *ličar*. *Češalj* could be *unjeli* (two *nićanicas*) or double (four *nićanicas*). Sacks and *bisage* were woven with two *nićanicas*, and wool with four. However, more skilled weavers (in Istria it was only the late Romano Maretić from Šoštari near Žminj) used to weave with eight *nićanicas* some more complex patterns.

In Istria, the weavers used to design (*snovali*) themselves, that is, they decided on the width of the linen. They did that on a wooden frame called *snovači* placed against a wall. Wedges were put into the frame and fixed with beams. A forked piece of wood was put into the upper horizontal beam, and it was used for crossing (*križanje*) of the threads. The tool called *snovača* could be of different sizes. The weaver designed



depending on the width he was supposed to produce. He designed as many times as necessary to get the desired linen, and he fixed the length with the wedges. For example, he pulled the warp threads through the eighteen alternating holes and for the eighteen holes on the *kartela* when producing sacks, and through twenty-two when producing linen... It all depended on what he was about to weave. Each of the weaving types, for *lančuni*, for *vriće*, for wool, for flax, demanded different *kartela*, *češlji* and thus also different designing.

Drawing 4, by Arsen Pletenac

Technical term:

Design frame

Dialectal term:

Snovača

The designed (*nasnovane*) threads would be connected on the spot where they were crossed and then they would be taken off the design frame like a chain. The threads had to be connected so that they do not mix up and unknit - *raskrosnaju*. The weavers had more pairs of *češlji* and *kartela* through which the threads were already pulled through - *prodite niti*, so that each pair of *češlji* and their *kartela* was for a different type of weaving.

The balls used to be arranged into the weaving box called *škatula* or *kašeta za snovali*, a wooden box that had a certain numbers of compartments in which the balls were placed. *Škatula* also had a handle around which cord would be wrapped (Brinjani). Underneath that cord, threads of each of the balls would be pulled through, so that they would not accidentally get mixed. It was these threads that the weaver used to start designing.

The threads had to be assorted - *prebirati* - each time the forked part called *rogi* was reached. On this part, the threads were crossed - *skrižati*. The threads were lowered along the wedges, depending on the desired length. After that, they would be turned around on two wedges and back designed. It was essential not to make any mistake at this stage, for each mistake was visible in the weaving. If the weaver would go around the wrong side of the wedge with the thread and continue with designing, this mistake was called horse - *konj* - and the whole designing was ruined.

Nando Brajković from Čipri (near Pazin) remembers not paying the weaver for the designing separately. However, since it was impossible to weave without designing, it means that the weaver had to do it approximately once a week - "this means, he worked for free" (*Znači dela je za nič*).

The width of the linen that was used as a measure was an ell, which was 69-70 centimeter. The weavers themselves admit to have been using the width of 69 centimeter, although the official measure was 70. They used a wooden cane with special markings called *sinjan* as a means for measure.

After designing, it was necessary to wrap the warp threads on the axle - *vrtilo*. It took three people to do that. One of them arranged the threads with a grate-like tool with a mobile upper part called *grablje*. He put the warp threads in a groove at the *grablje* and arranged them. When it was done, the thread needed to be wrapped on the axle. The ends of the designed threads had to be tied with cord. One man would hold the cord tightly and gradually let it loose, while the other would wrap the warp threads on the back axle by moving the stick - *palica*. After that, those threads, called *žice*, needed to be pulled through the *češalj*. The threads were cut and then tied one by one to the ones that had already been pulled through *češalj* and *kartela*. It took two to three hours for a good tier - *vezač* - to finish this work. Romano Maretić claims to have been able to complete the whole thing within an hour, because his teacher was one of the best - Toni Maretić. The cords produced during the binding had to be pulled through *češalj* and *kartela*, after which it was possible for the weaver to start with the weaving.

Designing was considered to be the hardest and the most significant part of the preparation for weaving. A masterful weaver who had his apprentice would have him up to three years in this position, and it was only during the last six months of his service that he would teach him how to design. He would not teach him this skill any earlier, because the apprentice could leave him. Ivan Voščon confirms that the apprentices were the ones who used to weave, while the weaver only did designing.

Towels called *šugamani*, usually with chequered pattern called *mandule* by weavers, were made from flax. It took six to eight *ničanicas* to produce the pattern. Lancuni were made from flax for the wealthier people from the area of Žminj. Flax was softer and smoother, while the hemp linen used to be more rough. One of the weavers even told us how the girls, when they wanted to look blushed, used to rub hemp against their cheeks.

Weavers from the area of Žminj could not agree upon whether it was possible to live solely off weaving. Romano Maretić claims that it was possible, even better than in other professions, while Mario Hrelja did not agree with him, saying that agriculture was the main source for survival. As a comparison, he says that a miner could support a large family with his work, while a weaver could not. However, Romano Maretić remembers being paid much better than miners.

It took an hour for the weaver to produce an ell's length of linen (it partly depended on the thread and whether it broke more often). After Mario Hrelja's testimony, it was possible that a weaver would produce around ten, and sometimes even more

(twelve, thirteen, depending on the yarn) ells a day. The thread that broke had to be found and pulled through češlji and kartela again, as well as tied once more.

Weavers usually had day off on holidays and Sundays, although they themselves say that this custom was observed more out of respect for the elderly and that they worked whenever it was needed. The weavers made an effort to produce as high quality weaving as possible, so that the ordering parties would come back again. They emphasize that it was important to do good compressing - if compressing was not good, the threads would show (*ako se nije dobro zbijalo niti bi se vidjele*) - which was not good. Each weaver had "his" territory. For example, when Mario Hrelja provided his services, there were around ten weavers in the area of Žminj, who used to weave for the whole areas of Žminj, Kanfanar and Barban. In šoštari (not far from Žminj) there were weavers who served Lindar, Gračišće, the area of Pazin and even the area of Žminj. Nando (Ferdinand) Brajković from Čipre near Pazin used to weave for the inhabitants of the area of Tinjan, even that of Žminj, as well as the area of Pazinsko Polje. He emphasizes that even some customers from Črišnjevica (a place near Čipre) brought their yarn to a weaver in Senj. They all used to weave mainly lancuni, šugamani, intimele, rugs - tapete, saddle-bags, etc.

If a weaver was left with the surplus of yarn from an ordering party, it was customary for women to leave two or three balls to the weaver. He would keep it and thus create his stocks. This way, he had many different yarns stocked and in case that he ever lacked some yarn to finish the ordered products, he would use his stocked goods.

The way the weaver justified his taking the rest of the balls was also interesting. It has to be taken into consideration that weavers sometimes took a ball without the ordering party's consent or knowledge. Mario Hrelja and Romano Maretić told me that they would first throw the ball towards the ceiling and asked:

"Will God take it?" (*Ajde ćeš ga Bog?*) - "It fell down" (*Je palo doli*)

After that, they would throw the ball onto the floor and said:

"Will the Devil take it?" (*Ćeš ga ti vrag?*) -

"The Devil did not want it either" (*Ni vrag ga ni stija*)

"God doesn't want it, the Devil doesn't want it, so I will take it"
(*Neće ga Bog, neće ga Vrag, ću ga ja!*)

Or, in shorter variant:

"Do you want it, God?" (*Ćeš ga Bog?*)

"Do you want it, Devil?" (*Ćeš ga Vrag?*)

"I will take it" (*Ću ga ja!*)

The informers stress that it was all a kind of joke and so they would keep the ball, because it was almost a rule that a ball would remain - *klobak osta*. This stocks of theirs have not merely been used for finishing their orders, but also for production of saddle-bags and similar things, and for selling them to the ones who wanted to buy them. Mario Hrelja describes that people from Rovinj or Rovinjsko Selo used

to come to him to Žminj and ask him "Master, do you have some saddle-bags", and I have always had some ready (*Majstore, imaš koje bisage, a ja sam uvijek ima spremno*). Romano Maretić added that they would give saddle-bags free to good looking women (*anka dabe za lepe ženske*). The same way the surplus of products was sold at fairs.

Textile handicrafts have survived in Istria up until the second half of the twentieth century, when the industrialization and modern textile industry caused dying out of this craft. In the Pazin area the firm "Pazinka" took over the leading role in producing textile, so that many of the weavers took jobs there and abandoned their former occupations. During this last stage, the textile handicrafts have been reduced to a minimum. Only simple textile products, such as bed-linen, rugs, sacks and saddle-bags (*bisage*) were made, and even that for a considerably smaller number of ordering parties. This skill has eventually completely died out. Individual weavers who were semi-professionals and who continued with their work after the World War II, still gladly remember their former work, but their awareness of the value of the materials they had owned is unfortunately very low. So, they have unfortunately thrown away or burnt most of the products themselves, including their weavers' books. Only a minority has sold their equipment to our museum back in the 1960s. Some of them sold their materials to the places dedicated to country-tourism, places that try to exhibit authentic, domestic objects.

Although even today many households still keep and appreciate objects linked with the former way of life, including objects that testify to the textile production, there are ever less of these objects and it is not rare that the owners themselves burn the objects, not knowing their value.

This project, which is merely at its early stage, will attempt to renew this traditional handicraft, because we are aware of the fact that its renewal is only possible in this forced way. Our aim is to introduce the younger generations with the traditional handicrafts of Istria, to strengthen the awareness of the inhabitants of Istria of the value of such skills and activities and to provide the visitors of the Ethnographic Museum of Istria with different kind of services. We will also do further research in order to broaden our knowledge of the textile handicrafts of Istria.

Prevela: Sanja Kalapoš Gašparac