

LOVE DIVINATIONS OF THE CROATS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Abstract

The paper carries about ten love divinations of the Croats published in the scientific literature. It also contains about thirty modern original field records of examples of love divinations. Love divinations are of ancient origin, and are associated with Christian feasts. Most divinations are associated with St George's Day, the Nativity of St John the Baptist, and St Lucia's Day. Love divinations of the Croats are also associated with the following feasts: All Saints' Day, feast of St Andrew, feast of St Thomas, feast of St Sylvester (New Year's Eve) and Ash Wednesday. Of the given examples of love divinations, according to the testimonies in the field, here and there a custom has survived to write the names of the persons you feel a liking for down on twelve small slips of paper on St Lucia's Day. In addition to Croatian love divinations, the paper also brings a few Bosniac, Serb, Polish and Italian love divinations. The said love divinations contain an exceptional ethnological and anthropological treasure. The average age of tellers is 69 years. This warns us that a large number of love divinations, as well as of immaterial cultural heritage in general, have fallen irretrievably into oblivion.

Keywords: Beliefs, marriage, giving in marriage, love, traditional culture

Introduction

Divination is a word derived from the Latin word *divinatio, onis, f.* = augury, prophecy, prediction, premonition, clairvoyance, guessing; soothsaying, sorcery. Divinations are a part of the oldest archetypal customs dating back to the ancient civilisations, and are in the core of cultural heritage. In the pre-Christian times girls used to go to a beech tree believing that in this way they would accumulate enough of the positive energy, and that their marriage and life would be happy.

However, in the Croatian scientific literature, the data about love divinations, and divinations in general, are extremely scant. Luka Ilic

Oriovcanin in his work “Folk Slavonian Customs” published in 1846; Mijat Stojanovic in his book “The Pictures of the Life of the Slavonian People from Nature with the Addition: Slavonian Folk Dances” (1858); Frano Ivanisevic in the monograph “Poljica, Folk Life and Customs” (1906.) do not mention divinations at all. Tomislav M. Macan in his paper “Sorcery and Soothsaying” (1932) mentions the love divination method that girls used to practice on the Island of Mljet for the Nativity of John the Baptist. In his book “A Year of Croatian Folk Customs” (1939) Milovan Gavazzi states that soothsaying has been known with us of yore, but that it seems to have spread widely only in the recent time (Gavazzi 1990: 120).¹¹² In this work Gavazzi cites five love divinations. Ljubo Micevic in his work “The Life and Customs of the Popovo People”, which had been written before World War II but published only in 1952, mentions two love divination methods of Orthodox girls. In 1975 Josip Milicevic published five love divinations in the Article entitled “Folk Life and Customs on the Island of Brac”.

Methods

The analysis of the elements of love divination methods of the Croats requires an interdisciplinary approach. The research is based on the analysis of the published documents (monographs, works published in scientific periodicals, collected papers). However, due to the lack of investigation into love divinations of the Croats, the paper brings and interprets the examples that are a result of a years-long field research of the author. This paper contains some thirty examples of love divinations of this kind. Most of the examples were recorded in the field in the Republic of Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2007 to 2013. More than one hundred tellers were interviewed, and only a score of them remembered love divinations. The examples of love divinations are cited and interpreted by the method of description. The material gathered is interpreted by a structural analysis, and especially by anthropological and ethnological arguments. The method of comparative analysis is used for the comparison of the material gathered. By the method of synthesis one will first identify the common characteristics, then the disparities, and finally, using comparison, point out the similarities and differences between love divination methods of the Croats and those of the Bosniacs, Italians, Poles, Serbs and other European nations. By the method of synthesis, the main characteristics of love divinations of the Croats in the context of the European cultural heritage are identified.

¹¹² GAVAZZI, M.: Godina dana hrvatskih narodnih obicaja, III izdanje. (Hrvatski Sabor kulture, Zagreb, 1991, 120.)

Results

Love divinations are presented and interpreted by year cycles.

Spring Cycle

Before St George's Day girls used to plant certain plants, for example two onion seedlings tied together with various threads. It was believed that the girl would marry in the direction in which the plant inclines.¹¹³ In the area of Vares one would rise early on St George's Day every year. One would rise at three o'clock in the morning, but the evening before one had uprooted a few nettles in the moonlight to be planted by the roadside as one went. When the girls got up early the next morning, they would observe in which direction the nettle inclined believing they would marry in that direction.¹¹⁴ The orthodox girls in the Popovo Polje Valley had the same belief and custom.¹¹⁵

In the area of Stolac girls used to put Dalmatian laburnum (Laburnum – also known as beam-trefoil, golden chain, pea-tree – is a deciduous shrub reaching a height of up to 3 metres) under the pillow. It was believed they would marry the man they saw in the dream that night.¹¹⁶

On St George's Eve Orthodox girls in the Popovo Polje Valley used to go to the mountains to pick various herbs: buttercups, daisies, feverfew, and other herbs. Before going to bed, they would take the herbs and use charms: *Daisy, don't daisy me, feverfew, don't feverfew me! Rather tell me who my intended one is.* They would leave these herbs and roots under the pillow. It was believed that they would marry the man who appeared to them in a dream that night.¹¹⁷

Muslim girls burnt powder on St George's Day and watched where the wind would drive the smoke believing that they would marry to a village or town lying in that direction.¹¹⁸

A custom has been preserved in Orasje up to this day that Bosniac Muslims celebrate St George's Day. All girls in the village, or at least those who had not been betrothed, would plant onion a few days before St George. The girls would take special pains about this onion. A night before St George's Day the girls would give each onion the name of the boy they liked. When they woke up in the morning, they would look which onion had

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, 57.

¹¹⁴ Jelena Rodic, born in 1932 at Vares, said this in 2007.

¹¹⁵ MICEVIC, LJ.: *Zivot i obicaji Popovaca.* (Knjiga LXV Srpskog Etnografskog Zbornika, Beograd, 1952., 160.)

¹¹⁶ Nada (Palameta) Aleksic, born in 1950 at Prenj, told this at Hodovo near Stolac in 2008.

¹¹⁷ MICEVIC, LJ.: *Zivot i obicaji Popovaca.* (Knjiga LXV Srpskog Etnografskog Zbornika, Beograd, 1952., 160.)

¹¹⁸ Told to me by several women tellers at Kovacevo Polje in 1990.

grown highest. The name of the highest onion stalk was the name of the future bridegroom. The boys used to go around the houses of the girls they liked, eager to hear whether the girls would give an onion their name. However, the girls were cunning, as always, and spoke the names in a whisper so that nobody could hear them. It was not enough just to think of a name; they had to pronounce it aloud. Should they fail to do so, the name of the onion in question would not count. Having seen which onion had grown highest, they had to pick it and in the evening give it to the boy whose name the onion bore. The boys made special preparations for that night. They were all eagerly waiting for a girl to give them an onion. They would put on their new clothes, especially bought for the dancing-party. In the old days the parties used to start at seven and end by ten; one danced *kolos* (*kolo* = a reel dance) and sang the accompanying songs (so called *hop-songs*), including this one:

*O you lad, you young lad!
Rise early, rise early,
hasten to the girls' gardens,
harness your fiery stallion!*

*Look, the girls are leaving,
plucking their soothsaying herbs,
choosing their sweethearts,
looking after the horses.*

*The girls have plucked their herbs,
chosen their sweethearts,
will you eat or throw them
will you detest or savour them!*

At the end of the dancing-party the girls would give the boys the respective onion. The boy who accepted the girl who had given it to him had to eat the onion. If he refused to eat the onion, it would mean that he did not like the girl. This rarely happened, but it did happen that a boy got more pieces of onion. Then there was a problem. The next day they would go on living and working as before the St George's Day, but they were all looking forward to the next St George's Day.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Told by Tukulj Abdulah at Orasje in 2013, born in 1940.

Summer Cycle

On the eve of the Nativity of St John the Baptist, at Brnaze near Sinj every girl would singe slightly three burdocks on the bonfire, and imagine three boys intending a flower for each. They would leave all the three flowers in water on the window sill till the morning. The boy whose flower bloomed up again would be her spouse. The girls used to take an oxeye daisy and pluck its petals off to see whether their boyfriends loved or didn't love them.¹²⁰ On that day, and otherwise, they would take a ladybird and say, "Ladybird, fly off to where my intended is!" and then would watch where the ladybird would fly believing that her future husband would come from that side.¹²¹ This is a common belief with the Croats.

At Zrnovo near Split there was the following belief: if on the Nativity of St John the Baptist a girl meets a man in the morning, her future husband will have the same name as that man. Should she want to know what occupation her husband would have, she had to take a piece of lead, melt it and then pour the melted lead into a vessel with water to get various shapes: the shape of a sitting man meant that her husband would be a clerk, the shape of a ship meant that her husband would be a sailor, etc.¹²²

On the Island of Brac girls would sow wheat about ten days before St John the Baptist's Day, and on the very feast would watch how much the wheat had grown. If the wheat stood upright the girls believed that they would marry an upright and handsome boy, not a hunch-backed or an ugly one. After the supper on St John's Eve girls used to fold the tablecloth and shake it out early the next morning. Should on this occasion they hear somebody call out a male name, they believed that their future husband would be called by that name. Again on St John's Eve girls used to melt lead and pour it into a glass with water. The next morning they would watch the lead figures and guess what the occupation of their future husband would be. The custom was to take three thistle flowers, to give each flower a male name, to singe them a bit on the bonfire, and put them into a glass with water. In the morning they would look which flower had turned red and continued to grow believing that the name given to the flower would be the name of the future husband. One would guess whether a boy loves a girl by her plucking the petals off the flower saying "he wants me", "he wants me not".¹²³

¹²⁰ MILICEVIC, J.: Folklor Sinjske krajine zapisi iz 1957., 1965. i 1966. godine. (Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, rkp. 758/1966. Navodim prema: BOTICA, I.: Brnaski narodni obicaji za vrijeme svetkovina iz usta Ande Ivkovic. Brnaska strana, god. 1., br. 1., Brnaze, 2005., 20.)

¹²¹ *Ibidem.*

¹²² Told by Frano Jericevic in 2013, born in 1949 at Zrnovo.

¹²³ MILICEVIC, J.: Narodni zivot i obicaji na otoku Bracu. NU 11/12, 1. (1975) 456.

At Donji Dolac, at Gornja Poljica, on St John's Eve girls would divine whom they would marry. In order to know that, they would pick a few heads of thistle giving each head the name of a boy. They would sing the heads and put them into a vessel with water. In the morning they would look which head had bloomed up or opened again, and decide that in the future they would associate only with that boy believing that they would marry him.¹²⁴ At Trnbusi girls and boys, would already in the morning of that day pick three thistles each, giving each of them the name of the boy or the girl they loved. In the evening they would sing the thistles on the bonfire and put them under the bed that night. It was believed that the thistle that bloomed up in the morning bears the name of the future spouse.¹²⁵

At Blato on the Island of Mljet in the evening of St John's Day girls would pick three thistles giving a name each; they would sing them on the fire and then put them under a pillow when going to bed. It was believed that the girl would marry the boy whose name she had given to the flower that had bloomed up by the next morning.¹²⁶

Krijesovalje (ladarice, ivancice) were the girls who on St John's Day would go about the villages in the groups of four, somewhere of eight, crowned with wreaths, and before the houses would dance the *kolo* and sing songs praising the head and the mistress of the house. Once the procession was over, they would throw the wreaths into the running water believing that they would marry to where her wreath floats off.¹²⁷ It was believed that the girls carrying the wreaths would be immune to headaches.¹²⁸

In the Polish tradition *Noc Kupały* is today most often called *Wianki*. It is a Slavic holiday which was formerly celebrated on the summer solstice, June 21. Later it started to be celebrated in the evening of St John's Eve, June 23. This night is also called *Noc Swietojska*. It is a holiday of fire, water, sun, moon, fertility, joy and love. *Kupała* was most probably the Slavic god of fertility.¹²⁹ In the old times in Poland it was the parents who decided about marriages. For the girls who had not been married yet and who wanted to avoid the practice of their fathers choosing their husbands, *Noc Kupały* was a great opportunity. The girls used to weave wreaths, and the boys would catch them and after that they had the right to marry them. That

¹²⁴ Told in 2012 by Irena Pezelj, née Bilic – born in 1926 at Putisici, married to Rosci (hamlet of Donji Dolac) where she lives today.

¹²⁵ Stanic Ivan – born in 1938 at Trnbusi (a village in Gornja Poljica), told this in 2012.

¹²⁶ MACAN, T. M.: ZNZOJS XXIX, 1, (1932) 225.

¹²⁷ GAVAZZI, M.: Godina dana hrvatskih narodnih obicaja, III izdanje. (Hrvatski Sabor kulture, Zagreb, 1991, 57.)

¹²⁸ ILIC ORIOVCANIN, L.: Narodni slavonski obicaji. (Zagreb, 1846, 168.)

¹²⁹ KEMPINSKI, A.: Encyklopedia mitologii ludow indoeuropejskich. (Iskry, Warszawa, 2001, 245.)

night they were allowed to go away from others and walk together alone in the forest looking for a fern flower. Upon returning, they would come to the fire and holding each other by the hand would jump over the fire, which was a symbol of the marriage contracted.¹³⁰ The rites performed that night were aimed at preserving good health and fertility. During the night a fire was burning in which plants were burnt; various games and dances were also played. The girls used to put the wreaths with candles on the water and wait to see what was going to happen to them. If a youth had caught a wreath, it meant that the girl would marry soon. If a wreath had continued floating, it meant she would marry but would have to wait a bit longer, but if it had burnt up or sunk, the girl would become a spinster.¹³¹

In the night of St John's Eve girls and boys used to adorn themselves with wreaths in the following countries as well: Russia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, and others.

In the traditional culture the ladybird brings luck, prosperity and patience, and delivers from problems. If a ladybird alights on a sick person it is believed that he or she would recover. If a ladybird alights on somebody's hand and then flies off, it is believed that it forecasts nice weather in the next week. It is also believed that if a ladybird lands on your hand and then flies away, the direction at which it flies is the direction from which your future spouse will come. Marijan Vidulic from Vela Luka has the following story: When he was thirty a ladybird alighted on his hand while he was digging in the garden. According to an old Vela Luka belief he was not allowed to touch it but to patiently wait and watch in which direction it would fly away. That was the direction he was supposed to follow in search of his future wife. The next day Marijan set out in the direction in which the ladybird had flown off – towards the town of Orebic. While he was walking about the town he saw a girl in a garden who was about thirty years old. He made friends with her and in the end married her.¹³²

Autumn Cycle

It is an ancient Vela Luka custom that after the family supper on All Saints' Day the girl clears away all the plates, glasses and everything else from the table except the crumbs. She then waits for the midnight, folds the tablecloth with the crumbs, goes to her room and shakes out the crumbs through the window. It was believed that by the first sound or voice she

¹³⁰ GOETZ, M.: Noc Kupały a Noc Swietojanska to nie to samo.

<http://www.obliczakultury.pl/publicystyka/obyczaje-swiata/2441-noc-kupaly-noc-swietojanska> (20. 11. 2013.)

¹³¹ OGRODOVSKA, B.: Zwyczaje, obrzędy i tradycje w Polsce. (Wydawnictwo Ksiezy Werbitusow, Warszawa, 2001, 168.)

¹³² Mirjan Vidulic, born in 1960 at Vela Luka, told this in 2007.

heard (something like the sound of the sea, of the wind...) she would divine the occupation of her future husband.¹³³

In the Polish traditional culture St Catharine is the patroness of the boys who want to make an acquaintance with a girl and enter into a happy marriage with her in the future. During the night of November 24 *Katarzynki* were held when boys tried to divine their future sweetheart or wife.¹³⁴ In the Catholic Church the rite of *Katarzynki* is always held on the Sunday before November 29. It is believed that „*W noc swietj Katarzyny pod poduszką sa dziewczyny*“¹³⁵ (In the night of St Catherine the girls are under the pillow). This saying was accompanied by the girls putting under the pillow various girls' objects to make a boy dream about his future wife. Boys would also put slips of paper under the pillow with the first letter or full female names written on them. The paper with the name that was first drawn out right upon the waking up was the paper with the name of the future wife.

In the Croatian tradition St Catherine of Alexandria is the patroness both of girls and boys. That is why on this feast mass weddings were arranged. The reasons for that are of historical nature and are associated with the *Droit de Seigneur* (Right of the Wedding Night).

From St Andrew's Day onwards weddings ceased to be performed, which is also testified by the saying *Saint Andrew's Day, weddings nay*. It is the day when girls used to divine of the future bridegroom and of the future in general. Divinations also reflected themselves in the fact that on St Andrew's Eve girls would fast, and before going to bed they would put men's underpants or underpants waist string, a mirror or something else under the pillow. This custom was widespread all about Europe, and in Croatia especially in the north-western regions.¹³⁶

In the Polish cultural heritage Andrzejki (Jędrzejki and Jędrzejowki) is an evening of divination which falls on the night of November 29. Andrzejki is a special occasion for organising the last party before Advent. At the beginning unmarried women would tell their own fortune, but later collective fortune-telling was organised. The origin of this customs is not fully known. Some researchers consider that it originated from the ancient

¹³³ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁴ BIERNACKI, M.: *Katarzynki*.
<http://dzisiajswietlebiblii.blogspot.com/2010/11/katarzynki.html> (20. 11. 2013.)

¹³⁵ ANTA, A.: *Katarzynki – zapomniany zwyczaj*. <http://www.katarzynki.swieta.biz/> (20. 11. 2013.)

¹³⁶ GAVAZZI, M.: *Godina dana hrvatskih narodnih obicaja, III izdanje*. (Hrvatski Sabor kulture, Zagreb, 1991, 114.)

Greece pointing out the similarity of the name Andrzej (Andrew) and the Greek words *aner*, *andros* which denote man and husband.¹³⁷

Winter Cycle

In 1939 Milovan Gavazzi wrote that on St Lucia's Day girls would write the names of marriageable boys on twelve slips leaving the twelfth slip empty. Every day till Christmas they would burn one slip, and the remaining one they would open and by the name on it divine whom they would marry. Should the last slip happen to be the empty one, it meant she was not going to marry in the forthcoming year.¹³⁸

In the Bosnian Posavina (Sava River Basin) girls used to throw one slip into the fire without first reading the name on the slip they had thrown. This would continue all way up to Christmas, and on Christmas morning they would open the last slip and read the name that was left. The name that remained last represented the person she would marry. In the more recent time most of the young people at Matici near Orasje have never heard of this custom.¹³⁹ At Tolisa in the Bosnian Posavina the girls who want to know the name of their future boyfriend, on St Lucia's Eve would write twelve male names on twelve slips of paper folding them several times, and put them in a special place mixing them thoroughly. From St Lucia's Day till Christmas midnight mass, after the early service they would take one slip and throw it into the fire without looking at it. After the midnight mass the girls would open the last slip, read the name of the man that had been left believing they would marry him.¹⁴⁰ This custom is present till the present day with the young girls at Tolisa. As grannies passed it on from generation to generation, the girls believe in it, and even today, on St Lucia's Day, they write the names of the boys on the slips of paper hoping for an early marriage.¹⁴¹ At Kostrc, in the Bosnian Posavina, grannies remember that this was a special day of fortune-telling about marriage. The custom was that on that day girls used to write the names of the boys on eleven slips of paper, leaving the twelfth one empty. Every day they would take one slip and throw it into the fire without opening it. On Christmas they would unfold the last slip and should it happen to be the empty one it meant they would not marry, but should the slip carry the name of a boy, it was the sign that the next year they

¹³⁷ WITKOWSKI, CZ.: *Doroczne polskie obrzedy i zwyczaje ludowe.* (Wydawnictwo Muzeum Etnograficzne, Krakow, 1965., 68.)

¹³⁸ GAVAZZI, M.: *Godina dana hrvatskih narodnih obicaja, III izdanje.* (Hrvatski Sabor kulture, Zagreb, 1991, 120.)

¹³⁹ Told at Matici near Orasje in 2007 by Ana Martinovic, née Pejic, born in 1954.

¹⁴⁰ Slavica Marosevic, born in 1963, said this at Tolisa in 2013.

¹⁴¹ Manda Dominkovic, née Ivkic, born in 1936 at Tolisa, said this in 2013.

would marry just him.¹⁴² In former times the preparations for Christmas started from St Lucia's Day: one would sow wheat and stick a sprig behind a cross or a holy picture. Should the sprig flower up, it meant that a girl from that house would marry the next year. During Advent there was no merry making about the village, no playing of music, everything was in silence. One would associate in the houses, and the girls would play games such as *Who are you burning after* and *Turn around, louse*. *Who are you burning after* was played in the following way: all the girls would write the names of the boys they liked on twelve slips. Then they would mix it up all in a vessel and take out one slip every day without opening it. The name found on the last slip meant the future husband. Anica Zivkovic from Privlaka said she had drawn out the name of her husband Martin three times "and, you see, thank God, we live well".¹⁴³

On St Lucia's Day the girls in Herzegovina would write twelve names of the boys whom they knew and liked on twelve slips of paper. They would put these slips, for example in the region of Posusje, under the pillow, and every morning they would throw one slip away without opening it and looking whose name was written on it. On Christmas only one slip would be left and this one they would open to see the name. It was believed that they would marry the boy whose name was on the last slip. At Goranci near Mostar the girls had the custom to write thirteen boys' name on as many slips of paper and put them into a big glass out of which they would draw out a slip every morning. On Christmas they would draw out the last slip and the boy who was left over "was destined to the girl".¹⁴⁴ In the region of Capljina the girls would write the names of boys on eleven slips of paper leaving the twelfth one empty. Every day they would throw one slip into the fire unopened. On Christmas they would unfold the last slip and should it happen to be the empty one, they knew they would not marry, but if there was a name on it, the next year they believed they would marry that very boy.¹⁴⁵

Croatian girls and boys from Backa would deliberately lose one slip of paper while returning home from the early service, and on Christmas Eve they would read out the name of their chosen one from the last slip. Gavazzi points out that the girls would leave one of the slips empty, and if that very one should remain last, it meant the girl would not marry.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Told in 2013 by Ljubica Zivkovic, née Mikic, born in 1938 at Kostre.

¹⁴³ Anica Zivkovic (Miljevic) born in 1948 at Privlaka, told this in the village of Privlaka in Slavonia in 2013.

¹⁴⁴ Danica Kresic, née Maric, born in 1938 and Pavica Dzidic, née Dreznjak, born in 1932, told this at Goranci near Mostar in 2008.

¹⁴⁵ Told at Capljina in 2002 by several women.

¹⁴⁶ GAVAZZI, M.: *Godina dana hrvatskih narodnih obicaja*, III izdanje. (Hrvatski Sabor kulture, Zagreb, 1991, 120.)

At Badljevina near Pakrac, on St Lucia's Day the young girls wrote on twelve slips of paper the names of twelve boys they liked and wanted to marry. Out of the pile of these slips they would pick one and throw it into the stove every day. The name of the boy on the last slip was supposed to be the name of the boy they would marry and have children with.¹⁴⁷

In the region of Ilok the girls and boys used to write the names on twelve slips of paper, and one slip could remain without a name. Every day one should burn one slip, but one was not allowed to look which name was on it. The name that was left on the last slip would be the name of the chosen one. Should it happen to be empty, it meant that the girl or the boy respectively would not marry in the forthcoming year.¹⁴⁸

In some parts girls used to fast on St Lucia's Day, convinced that they would marry the boy they would dream of that night.

At Usora, on St Lucia's Day a boy catches a bat and tears off its wing. It was believed that when he touches a girl with its wing she would "go mad"¹⁴⁹ about that boy.¹⁵⁰

Although the feast of St Thomas was shifted to July 3, in the Croatian tradition this feast is observed on December 21. This is a day of fortune-telling about the future bridegroom. On the eve of this feast girls fast, and in the evening they grease themselves with the fat of a pig suckling slain that day, and under a fertile fruit tree recite a prayer to Doubting Thomas that their destined one may appear to them in a dream. They pray three times a day that their future husband may appear to them in a dream, that St Thomas may make him come to her. The girl recommends herself to this saint and makes a vow to say this short prayer to him three times a week through all the months of the year, and prays to St Thomas and St Vincent that they may send her the man of her heart to whom she will be a faithful spouse. If the desired boy failed to come, the girl would curse him and pray to St Thomas to find her future spouse on his list. After the ritual the girl returns home.¹⁵¹

On St Thomas' Day the girls, for example at Ilok, would try to get to know their fate and would pray in this way: "Holy Thomas, I beg you, in the bed I beseech you, to tell me this night who will be my knight." The man the girl dreamt of that night was believed to be her future husband.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Told at Badljevina near Pakrac in 2007 by Emilija Kop (née Magdic, born in 1936). Her father was a German who disappeared in World War II.

¹⁴⁸ Jelica Matkovic, née Boban, born in 1944 at Ilok, said this in 2009.

¹⁴⁹ go mad = to fall madly in love.

¹⁵⁰ Ruzica Ivic née Nikolic, born in 1948, told this in 2008 at Usora.

¹⁵¹ KEKEZ, J.: Poslovice, zagonetke i govornicki oblici. (MH, SHK, Zagreb, 1996, 301-302.)

¹⁵² Jelica Matkovic, née Boban, born in 1944 at Ilok, said this in 2009 at Ilok.

In Bologna one believed that if a girl at Christmas night watches her reflection in the mirror with her hair loosened she will see the image of her future fiancé.¹⁵³

It is an old belief on the Island of Brac that the first name a girl hears while shaking out her tablecloth through the window on the New Year's Eve will be the name of her husband.¹⁵⁴

On Shrove Tuesday the girls of Skabrnja would gnaw at pork bones, more exactly at the ribs or legs. The girl would leave outside every bone she has gnawed clean. It was believed that the girl whose bone a dog snatches first would marry first.¹⁵⁵ At Strosinci, a village in the municipality of Vrbanja in the Vukovar/Srijem county, at the border with Serbia, the girls used to cook ribs. The meat was stripped off from the bony part of the rib leaving only bones, and every girl would choose her own bone. Then they would arrange all the bones in a circle on the kitchen floor. After that the house dog was called in to take the bones. It was believed that the girls would marry in the order in which the dog had taken the bones.¹⁵⁶

Discussion

Love divinations are of an ancient pre-Christian origin. However, all these divinations are associated with Christian feasts.

In the spring cycle love divinations are associated with the feast of St George. St George was born between 275 and 281, and died a martyr's death during Diocletian's persecution of Christians on April 23, 303. He was of a noble family. Love divinations are most frequently associated with a plant. So once girls, both Catholic and Muslim ones, planted onion before St George's Day, giving it the names of the boys they liked. On the very feast day they would look to which side the tallest onion leaf had inclined, believing they would marry to that side. The onion was grown in Mesopotamia and Egypt 6,000 years ago. In many countries the onion was a holy plant and was not allowed to be eaten. Well-known is the old Slavic saying that onion is a remedy for seven illnesses. The onion is the most frequent plant on the frescoes of Egyptian tombs. In the ancient Egypt an oath before the onion was the highest form of oath. The Catholic women of Vares and the Orthodox women in Eastern Herzegovina used to bed out the nettle on the eve of the feast and on the feast itself would look to which side the nettle had inclined, believing they would marry a man coming from that side. The nettle is one of the healthiest plants and has been exceptionally

¹⁵³ Told in 2013 by Anastasia Bertani born in Bologna in 2000, based on her father's account.

¹⁵⁴ Told on the Island of Brac in 2013 by Zorka Martinic, born in 1964.

¹⁵⁵ Told at Skabrnja in 2010 by Zoran Razov, born in 1965.

¹⁵⁶ Told in 2013 by Janja Vivic, born in 1939, at Strosinci.

appreciated since times immemorial. The Renaissance painter Albrecht Dürer (1421-1528) painted an angel holding a nettle. On St George's Eve both Catholic and Orthodox girls in the Eastern Herzegovina used to put laburnum under the pillow (the Orthodox put also some herbs in addition) believing they would marry the man appearing to them in a dream that night. The laburnum is an endemic plant growing in Herzegovina, south-western Bosnia, in the Valleys of the Neretva and Cetina Rivers, the central and southern Dalmatia, the coastline of Dubrovnik and on the Adriatic islands. Blossoming time lasts 30 days. Its blossom is similar to the blossom of the yellow acacia. The honey from this blossom is of an exceptional quality. During Austria-Hungary all laburnum honey went to the Austrian court in Vienna.

John the Baptist (24 June of the first year after Christ – 29 August of the year 29 after Christ) was an ascetic preacher of penance, the greatest and the last prophet of the Old Testament. Christianity celebrates only the nativity of John the Baptist (June 24) and of the Blessed Virgin Mary (September 6). (In the Orthodox tradition St John the Baptist is among 15 most honoured saints. St Nicolas and St Elijah the prophet are most honoured by the Orthodox.) In the summer cycle the main love divinations are associated with the Nativity of St John the Baptist. In these divinations the flower of the thistle takes a special place. In the Croatian cultural heritage an important place is occupied by the thistle, which in Croatian has a dozen of different names. Folk attributes to the thistle healing properties and in the popular medicine it is used as a natural medicine against bile and liver diseases. Girls would pick three thistle flowers, give each the name of a boy and then sing them a little on the Midsummer-Day bonfire, put them into a glass and believed they would marry the boy "whose" thistle had bloomed up. In the divination methods the flower of the oxeye daisy was also used. Girls and boys adorned themselves with wreaths in which, apart from flowers, the fern was very important. (Adorning with the fern included was widespread with many European nations.) Luka Ilic Oriovcanin wrote in 1846 that in the wreaths the fern is the most important for it was believed that the person who has the fern in the wreath around his head will be immune to headaches. That is why people adorned themselves also on St John's Eve and on the feast itself.¹⁵⁷ One believed that the fern was a strange plant, which blossoms, ripens and gives seed which falls down all from half past eleven till half past twelve on St John's Eve. The people attributed magic powers to this seed believing that he who has at least one grain of the fern seed will know what is being done in the world and understand the song of birds and the howling of beasts. However, in order to get a grain of the

¹⁵⁷ ILIC ORIOVCANIN, L.: Narodni slavonski obicaji. (Zagreb, 1846, 162.)

fern seed one had to go at the specified time to the place where the fern grows and, carrying holy water and white earth, encircle the space where the fern grows with a pair of compasses, strew that space with the white earth, then sprinkle the earth with holy water, and finally light the Marian candle (the candle blessed on Candlemas). But, evil spirits would start howling around the pair of compasses so that the seeker would be struck with fear and his effort was in vain.¹⁵⁸ The fern grows in shady forest valleys hiding its refinement and beauty which can only be noticed by him who looks for it sincerely. Therefore, in Christianity the fern symbolizes humbleness, honesty and sincerity.¹⁵⁹ Some ten days before the feast the girls on the Island of Brac used to sow wheat and on the feast itself would watch the wheat and divine what boy they would marry. The wheat is the most important plant for food. In Christianity wheat symbolises welfare. In the traditional culture lead is used when practicing magic to remove spells, but by means of lead figures girls divined what the occupation of their husband would be.

In the Polish tradition *Noc Kupały* is today most often called *Wianki* and *Noc Swietojska* (St John's night). On that night girls and boys were allowed to go away from others and walk together alone in the forest looking for a fern flower. Upon returning, they would come to the fire and holding each other by the hand would jump over the fire, which was a symbol of the marriage contracted.

On the Nativity of St John the Baptist, and through other summer days as well, by means of the ladybird one used to predict where the future spouse would come from.

The All Saints' Day is celebrated in memory of all known and unknown Christian holy men and women. At first this feast was celebrated on the Sunday after the Pentecost, and in Ireland on November 1. The son of Charles the Great, Luis the Pious (778-840), at the request of Pope Gregory IV, who was pope from 827 to 844, with the concurrence of all bishops, declared the feast of All Saints to be a feast of obligation. It is the old Croatian tradition that, after the family supper on All Saints' Day, the girls, by shaking out the tablecloths with crumbs, divine the occupation of the future husband.

St Catherine of Alexandria (282 – 25 November 307) in the Polish traditional culture is the patroness of the boys who want to get acquainted with a girl and enter into a happy marriage with her in the future. That is why on the feast of St Catherine of Alexandria boys tried to divine their future bride. In the Croatian tradition St Catherine is the patroness both of girls and

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 167-168.

¹⁵⁹ BADURINA, A.: Leksikon ikonografije, liturgike i simbolike zapadnog krscanstva i Uvod u ikonologiju Radovana Ivancevica. (Krscanska sadasnjost, Zagreb, 1990, 448.)

wives. Because of the *Droit de Seigneur* by which during the Turkish occupation beys and agas practiced to spend the wedding night with a Christian bride, Croatian boys and girls used to marry on the feast of St Catherine of Alexandria. On St Catherine's Day at Kastav about a score of pairs used to get married.¹⁶⁰ Informants remember that this custom kept all way until the year 1965. In 1995 Ivan Aljinovic at Kraljeva Sutjeska reported that 53 pairs had got married in a single day in 1941. Numerous are such testimonies in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well. In many places tradition has survived of marriages not being solemnized during Advent. That is why the girls in the region of Vares used to sing: *Saint Catherine, separate me from my mother / don't let me wait till the bald Andrew.*

St Andrew the Fist-Called, St Peter's brother, was crucified on an X-shaped cross on November 30 in the year 60 after Christ. In the Croatian and European cultural heritage girls used to divine about the future bridegroom and their future by fasting on St Andrew's Eve; before going to bed they would put men's underpants or underpants waist string, a mirror or something else under the pillow. The boy they dreamt of that night was believed to be their future husband. In the Polish cultural heritage St Andrew's Eve is called *Andrzejki* (*Jędrzejki* and *Jędrzejowki*). That evening the girls once used to prophesy individually and later collectively about the future bridegroom.

Saint Lucia was born in 284, and died a martyr's death on December 13, 303. In the Croatian traditional culture the days of St Lucia till Christmas are called visionaries and one associates them with several different divinations. In the Croatian parts exceptionally widespread was the custom for girls, and also for boys, to write twelve (somewhere 11, and somewhere 13) names of their favourites on as many slips of paper on St Lucia's Day. Often one slip would remain empty. Every day running up to Christmas, mainly after the early service, they would be losing or throwing into the fire one paper and after the midnight mass on Christmas they would open the last slip believing they would marry the person whose name was on that slip. Should the last slip happen to be the empty one, it was believed that the respective girl or boy would not marry in the forthcoming year. This custom survived, for example, at Tolisa. (In the region of Siroki Brijeg children write out slips of paper with the greatest wishes for the upcoming year predicting, like girls and boys, which of their wishes would be realised.) In the former times on St Lucia's Day they would stick a sprig behind a cross or a holy picture. Should the sprig flower up, it meant that a girl from that house would marry the next year. In some parts girls would fast for marriage

¹⁶⁰ RIHTMAN-AUGUSTIN, D.: *Knjiga o Bozicu, Bozic i bozicni obicaji u hrvatskoj narodnoj kulturi.* (Golden marketing, Zagreb, 1995, 24.)

on St Lucia's Day, convinced they would marry the youth they were going to dream of that night. Of an ancient origin is the belief at Usora that if a boy catches a bat on St Lucia's Day, tears off its wing and touches with it a girl, she will "go mad" about that boy.

St Thomas is often called *Doubting Thomas* because he had refused to believe in Jesus' resurrection before he saw and touched the Resurrected for himself. A tradition has it that he did not believe in Mary's assumption into heaven either. Christ called Thomas to see for himself by putting his hand into his side, and Mary convinced him by dropping her girdle from heaven. St Thomas died in the year 72. In the Croatian traditional culture St Thomas marks the beginning of the first Christmas holidays. People go to confession and take Communion, and slaughter the animals designed for Christmas. At Merolin in Slavonia one blesses Christmas candles on this day.¹⁶¹ At Rujani near Livno everybody had to return home by this holiday wherever they were.¹⁶² In the Croatian cultural heritage girls used to divine also on St Thomas' Day whom they would marry. In these divination methods, ancient pagan magic rites interweave with the prayers that the girls direct to Doubting Thomas to make their future spouse appear to them in a dream.

The Christmas Eve has very much of a fairy-tale quality characterised by: bringing the Yule Log into the house, sprinkling the Yule Log and the one who brings it in with corn; straw; candles; prayer; supper; Christmas tree; crèche; keeping vigil for the midnight mass; toasts; congratulatory processions: singing Christmas carols; Bethlehemers, visits of friends and neighbours; going to the Midnight Mass Service. In addition to this, in the Croatian cultural heritage the cult of the deceased is especially pronounced.¹⁶³ At Gromiljak near Kiseljak a girl would go and visit her aunts to wish them a Merry Christmas. In this way she would gather honey-biscuits. If she managed to get ten honey-biscuits it was believed she would marry. Should she gather a lot of honey-biscuits it was believed she would marry a rich man.¹⁶⁴

In Bologna the girls used to let their hair down and stand in front of a mirror believing they would see the image of their future fiancé in the mirror.

Sylvester I, native of Rome, was the thirty-third pope. His papacy lasted from January 31, 314 to December 31, 355 when he died. He baptised Constantine the Great who in 313 issued the Edict of Milan, a royal decree that Jesus Christ should be worshipped in the whole Roman Empire as the

¹⁶¹ Recorded at Merolin in Slavonia in 2006.

¹⁶² Recorded at Rujani near Livno in June 2007.

¹⁶³ See: DRAGIC, M.: Cro. et Slav. Iader. 6 (229-264)

¹⁶⁴ Told at Gromiljak near Kiseljak in 2010 by Dragica (Dzonderas) Frankovic from Kakanj, born in 1950, now living at Gromiljak.

only true God. In the Croatian tradition the feast of St Sylvester on December 31 is also called the Old Year. On this feast girls prophesied by what name their future husband would be called.

On Shrove Tuesday, that is, on the eve of Ash Wednesday, girls used to prophesy about their marriage by, for example at Skabrnja, gnawing at pork rib or leg bones and leaving them outside. It was believed that the girl whose bone a dog carries away first, would marry first. In the north-eastern parts of Croatia the girls used to cook the ribs from which the bony part would be removed. Every girl would choose her own bone. Then they would arrange all the bones in a circle on the kitchen floor and call in the house dog to take the bones believing that the girls would marry in the order in which the dog had taken the bones. In Christianity the dog symbolises vigilance and loyalty.

Conclusion

Love divinations of the Croats and European nations are, by their belief, of an ancient pre-Christian origin. However, these divinations are associated with Christian holidays. The only exception is the love divination method with the ladybird, which is performed on the Nativity of St John the Baptist, but also through other summer days. The same applies to the oxeye daisy. Most divinations are associated with the following feasts: St George's Day, the Nativity of St John the Baptist, and St Lucia's Day. Also associated with these feasts are other divinations as well as multiple customs, rites, processions which have apotropaic and panspermic importance. Love divinations of the Croats are also associated with the following feasts: All Saints' Day, St Andrew's Day, St Thomas' Day, St Sylvester's Day and Ash Wednesday.

This paper presents and interprets about ten love divinations of the Croats published in the scientific literature so far, and about thirty original modern records in the field. Of the given examples of love divinations, according to the testimonies in the field, here and there a custom has been preserved to write the names of the persons you feel a liking for down on twelve small pieces of paper on St Lucia's Day. However, it must be born in mind that many woman tellers are shy, and one has the impression that they use certain love divination methods secretly. The said love divinations contain an extraordinary ethnological and anthropological treasure. There were fifteen woman and five man tellers who talked about love divinations. The oldest woman teller was born in 1926, and the youngest in 1963. (The woman teller who told about the love divination method in Bologna was born in 2000.) The oldest man teller was born in 1938, and the youngest in 1965. The average age of all tellers is 69 years. This warns us that a large number of love divinations, as well as of immaterial cultural heritage in

general, has fallen irretrievably into oblivion. For this reason it is necessary to record in the filed the immaterial cultural heritage, which is very important for the identity of a nation and of the whole mankind.

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