

SUMMARY

The Bunjevci Studies

The book consists of several short studies of the Croat ethnic group of Bunjevci, and various aspects of their traditional culture, ethnicity and the way of life. The Bunjevci are a group of the ethnic Croats, originating from Dalmatia, southwestern Bosnia and Hercegovina; in the 17th century they migrated to the regions of Primorje, Lika and Gorski kotar in the western Croatia, and the Danube area in the north (Hungary, Serbia and Montenegro).

The book is divided in three units. The first unit deals with a branch of the Bunjevci in Primorje, Lika and Gorski kotar, the second unit with the Bunjevci branch in the Danube area, and the third one with the ethnocultural processes concerning the Bunjevci ethnic group in the context of South East Europe.

The introductory chapter deals with the question: **How to Approach the Study of Bunjevci group identities** (which is also the chapter's title). The holistic approach to the research of their cultural heritage, and the ethnocultural processes through which the Bunjevci have been formed as a distinct ethnic group, could contribute to the better understanding of the way in which the identity of an ethnic group has been, and is being, formed, as well as in which the manifold identities of each particular branch have been constructed. The author points to the differences in the construction of two Bunjevci branches' identities (the Primorje and the Danube area Bunjevci), based on the analysis of their perception of the way of dressing. In both cases the way of dressing stands as a symbol of the collective identity. Different attitudes, one positive and the other negative, towards the symbolic expression of their identities through traditional costume, is the result of different environmental influences, as well as of the ethnic, cultural, social, historic and political factors in which their identities have been constructed.

The first unit, dealing with the Bunjevci branch in the regions of Primorje, Lika and Gorski kotar, consists of five chapters. Chapter one, titled **First Results of the Traditional Culture Research of the Primorje Bunjevci**, introduces the platform on which the traditional heritage of the Primorje Bunjevci research has been based, and the first field researches in the Primorje region. The aim of the future project has been established in accordance with the initial research results: the study of their traditional heritage, the construction of their ethno-regional identity and the comparative research including the other branches of the Bunjevci ethnic group.

Chapter two, **Research of the Traditional Heritage, Identity and the ethnogenesis of the Bunjevci in the Primorje Region** presents the aims of the scientific project

Identity and Ethnogenesis of the Bunjevci in the Primorje region. It is based on the presumption that the cultural heritage of Bunjevci has been developed in an ancient layer in the South East Adriatic-Dinaric border zone, which leads all the way to the border dividing Montenegro and Albania, described by the Byzantine sources of the 11th and 12th centuries as «Red Croatia». The holistic approach to the problem of the ethnogenesis and identity of the Bunjevci ethnic group could be achieved through the combination of the research of their traditional and contemporary culture.

The next two chapters give an insight into the life in extended families (the so called *zadruga*) in the territories of Primorje and Lika inhabited by the Bunjevci population. The first one deals with **The Rukavina-Jauci Extended Family from Smiljan Filed near Gospić** (Lika), and the next one with **The two Extended Families in the Region of Krivi put** (near Senj in Primorje): the family Prpić-Grgajice from Kosovo Buljima village and the family Tomljanović-Puljiz from Podbilo village. These two chapters contain data on each particular *zadruga*: on the family members, on the *zadruga* household, on property, on economy and work, management, organisation of their everyday life, regulation of its members' duties and rights, and on the partition of the *zadruga*. The author follows the developmental phases of the Rukavina –Jauci family, whose members lived together up to 1985, which is an exceptional example of the continuity of the traditional family life-style. The autor points out some interesting indicators of gradual partition of those three extended families through specific transitive forms from the extended to the nuclear family, also observed in other families in Lika, among the Bunjevci in the Danube area and in some South East Dinaric regions.

The first unit's last chapter, **Traces of the Elements of Bunjevci Croats in the Wedding Customs of Lika, Primorje and Gorski kotar**, deals with certain specific elements of Bunjevci in these regions, confirmed through recent reasearch held on the hillside of the Senj ridge. All the considered elements of the wedding customs make a common heritage for all the relocated Bunjevci branches, and can also be traced back to their possible originating area. The author puts these elements within the wider context of the South East Europe. Their arrangement in space and connections with the Roman or Romanized groups in the Balkans indicate rearrangement of indigenous and Slavic cultural elements in the South-Adriatic border area, as well as their later spreading towards west and north, where the final points of their appearance are the areas where the Bunjevci migrated to in the west (regions of Lika, Primorje and Gorski kotar, even Istria) and in the north (the Danube area).

The second unit of the book deals with the Bunjevci branch in the Danube area (the surroundings of Budapest and southern Hungary, and the Bunjevci in the county of Bačka in the region of Vojvodina) in Serbia and Montenegro. It consists of ten chapters.

Chapter one, **The Life on Salaš**, describes the way of life of the Bunjevci from Bačka from the end of the 19th century up to the middle of the 20th century. The central institution of rural life in Bačka was the *salaš* – the farm, comprised comprising the farmhouse and farm buildings erected right next to the fields under crop. The

description of the life on *salaš* is illustrated with photos relating to the covered period of time, and of certain characteristic objects used in a *salaš* household, selected for the exhibition depicting the heritage of the Bunjevci Croats in Bačka, mounted in the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb in 1998.

Chapter two, **Connections Between Living on the *Salaš* and in the Town**, deals with the correlation of the rural and the urban life among the Bunjevci from Bačka. It points to the fact that many of Bunjevci joint families along with the *salaš* also owned a household in the town. In some families the master lived in the town with his wife, separated from their sons, but they still functioned as an economic and family whole. The reason why the members of the *zadruga* had a separate home in the town could lie in the fact that there was neither organized commerce nor administrative and religious institutions near *salaš*.

Chapter three deals with the **Continuity of some Customs of Bunjevci Croats in Bačka**. Some elements of Christmas and Easter – two most important Christian festivals; and the wedding – the central event in the life of the community, are described, which are still practiced in a modified form in the contemporary society. An example of the continuity of some specific traditions is the art of straw decoration. Bunjevci women apply this technique in decoration of greetings for Christmas and Easter, as well as for decoration of Easter eggs. The other example may be a specially decorated box in which the engagement gifts are carried. Both traditions are still practiced nowadays among the Bunjevci in Bačka.

In chapter four **The Bride's dance** is described. This custom originally does not belong to the tradition of Bunjevci, because it is unknown among other branches, in the territory of their possible homeland and in the Croatian traditional heritage as well. The author comes to the conclusion that the bride's dance was taken over from the Hungarian wedding customs and adapted to the Bunjevci tradition. The bride's dance is a distinctive Hungarian tradition. On the formal level the custom is more or less the same in both ethnic groups. There are some related elements, such as bride's kissing of the wedding guests and getting some money for doing that, which has been replaced with the bride's dance in some Bunjevci villages in Hungary. Sometimes both customs coexist. Both have a common goal, to collect money for the bride, which the author considers to be the main reason why the Bunjevci adapted a foreign traditional element, which has also happened (*bolje*: occurred) among other ethnic groups in the surroundings.

Chapter five describes the **Balažević-Marinkić Zadruga Families Tracing Several Generations from the Middle of the Nineteenth Century till 1946**. It contains data on the members and individual families in the *zadruga*, on the *zadruga* household, on property, on economy and work, on the organization of the *zadruga*, i. e., the regulation of its members' duties and rights, on the daily and annual course of work and life, and, finally, on the partition of the *zadruga*. The Balažević- Marinkić *zadruga* was specifically organized, since it was divided whenever its members considered it to be overpopulated. When they grew in number, each brother founded his own household with the members of his family. The family members did not live under the same roof, but they still worked together till 1946, when they definitely parted.

The next chapter also deals with the life in *zadruga*. Its title is **Following the Characteristic Occurances in Bunjevci zadruga**. This chapter is based on the author's field research among the Bunjevci in the vicinity of Baja in southern Hungary and in the vicinity of Sombor and Subotica in Bačka. It deals particularly with certain characteristics of the life in *zadruga*, such as the role of the master and the mistress of the *zadruga*, her duties and the distribution of female work, and specific transitional forms of family life from the *zadruga* to the nuclear family, characterised by the tendency of a gradual partition of the *zadruga*. The variety of possibilities and differences point to various influences on the structure and organisation of Bunjevci zadrugas: Pannonic (Hungarian and Slavonic) as well as Dinaric (which covers the broader territory of the Bunjevci homeland). The analysis has pointed to the existence of almost the same or similar elements in the Bunjevci *zadruga* and in the southeastern territories of the Dinaric cultural zone. A comparative study of the *zadruga* of the Bunjevci in the Danube area and in the Dinaric area might throw light on the *zadruga* in a broader context of South East Europe, as well as on the ethnogenesis of the Bunjevci ethnic group.

Chapter seven has a symbolic title **Ritual Fires are Burning...** The starting point of this chapter is disclosure of the different traditions of seasonal fires among two Croatian groups, the Bunjevci and the Šokci, in Bačka. The tradition of lighting fire on the Easter eve among Šokci is primarily of religious character, characteristic of the eastern Pannonic-plain population. The lighting of bonfires on St. John's Day is the tradition of Bunjevci. Some specific features, such as terms *svitnjak* and *cvitnjak* denoting St. John's fires, are interesting because they are used widely in northern and central Dalmatian area, western Hercegovina and some southwestern and central regions of Bosnia, and sporadically in eastern Hercegovina and southern Dalmatia. These analogies point to the ethnic and cultural kinship of these areas' population. The analysis of the lighting of annual bonfires tradition has led to the conclusion that the differences between two Croatian groups, Bunjevci and Šokci, are caused by their different cultural heritage.

The next two chapters deal with questions concerning the ethnicity of the Bunjevci. In the chapter **Bunjevci from Bačka in the Context of the Ethnic Changes in the Last Century** the author points out how the political factors have influenced the national structure of the multiethnic province of Vojvodina, today the part of the state of Serbia and Montenegro. Over history Vojvodina has been frequently shifting borders and changing rulers. In the 17th century, groups of Serbs and Croats settled there, while in the 18th and the 19th century the Austrian government encouraged Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks, Czechs and Ruthenians to settle in the region. In this way the province of Vojvodina has become multiethnic. The author deals primarily with ethnic aspects of colonisation of Vojvodina throughout the 20th century, after the First and the Second World Wars, with special reference to the position of the Bunjevci. As the consequence of the wars and the colonization, Serbs became a dominant nationality in Vojvodina, which was the reason why Vojvodina was constituted as an autonomous province within the Republic of Serbia in the former Yugoslav sta-

te. In spite of the constant political pressure, both in the past and in the present, the Bunjevci in Bačka manage to preserve their ethnocultural identity and integrity.

The following chapter deals more specifically with the **Attempts to Deny the Bunjevci of Bačka the Rights to Belong to the Croat Nation** during the existence of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes between the two World Wars. Under the cover of the common name for three people living in one state, three basic forms of manipulations with the ethnic name of Bunjevci came to light: 1. Neutralization of the Bunjevci by emphasizing their distinctiveness: they are neither the Serbs nor the Croats; one explanation being that they are the fourth tribe of the unique Yugoslav people, and the other one that they are the fourth nation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. 2. the Bunjevci can be both the Serbs and the Croats, which is the matter of individual choice; it is irrelevant anyway, since both the Serbs and the Croats are in fact Yugoslavs. 3. Denial of the Croat ethnicity of the Bunjevci, through a manipulation with their religious belonging, expressed in the claim that the Bunjevci, as well as the Šokci are Serbs of Roman Catholic religion. Manipulations of the kind can be found in different forms in various published sources, especially in the period between 1920 and 1930, and again in 1939 and in 1940. The author demonstrates these attempts through quotations from the available and relevant sources. On the basis of the documents, the author reaches a conclusion that writings of the kind in the local newspapers reflected the attempts that had been initiated in certain Serbian scientific circles, whose intention was to prove that the Bunjevci and the Šokci were the Serbs converted to Roman Catholicism at one point in the past, or at least to persuade them to neglect their Croatian ethnicity. The leading Serbian scientists offered many unconvincing and senseless statements as «proofs» of the Serbian origin of the Bunjevci, such as the language, the conversion to the Roman Catholics and the ethnic constitution of the expanse (*nejasno mi je na što misliš*), wherefrom the Bunjevci have most probably originated. The author also refers to the reactions to the attempts that appeared in other local newspapers, which were clear about the Croatian ethnic origin of the Bunjevci. The Croats in Vojvodina (the Bunjevci and the Šokci) are constantly the objects of manipulation of the Serbian state. In the 1991 census their traditional ethnic names were used to denote nationality. The means of manipulations have become different today, but its essence remained the same: the manipulators count on devotion and loyalty of the Croat ethnic groups of Bunjevci and Šokci to their ethnic names.

The last chapter of this unit of the book considers **The Local Community of the Ethnic Bunjevci in Croatia**. It is about the Bunjevci who settled in Croatia from Bačka in different times in the 20th century. They appear to be a local community at the occasions of gathering for some common purpose, initiated and organised by *The Society of Croats from Vojvodina and the Danube region*, created in the late eighties of the last century. One of the central events of their common activities, initiated and organized by their *Society*, was the exhibition *From the Heritage of the Bunjevci Croats in Bačka*, held in 1998. The author selected a few traditional articles represented at the exhibition to present a positive attitude of some Bunjevci individuals to their cultural

heritage. They keep them today in their new homes in a quite different environment. They have become the symbols of their identity. The exhibition served as a special occasion of revealing their cultural heritage, which could be well and holistically presented due to the high level of their cultural identity awareness.

The third unit of the book deals with the Bunjevci cultural heritage in a broader perspective, dealing with the Bunjevci in the context of ethnocultural processes in South East Europe. The introductory chapter titled **Role of the *Starješina Svatova* among the Bunjevci**, establishes the boundaries of the regions within which the Bunjevci are proposed to be studied; the area is much wider than that covered by J. Erdeljanović, who was first to study the origin of the Bunjevci ethnic group. Three wedding officers may have the role of the *starješina svatova* (wedding party leader) among the Bunjevci: *stari svat*, *kum* and *staćel*. The analysis of the role shows great differences between the role the *stari svat* has in the Danube regions and in the other Bunjevci branches. The Danube Bunjevci do not have the *stari svat* in the role of *starješina*, but the *kum* and the *staćel* appear in the role with equal frequency. These two wedding officers are found in other regions in the same roles, notably in Gorski Kotar, Primorje and Lika, with higher frequency of the *kum* in the role, which points to the similarities between the Bunjevci in Primorje and Lika and in the Danube regions. In certain regions of that area the *stari svat* appears in the same role more frequently. The author concludes that in two Bunjevci groups and in some parts of their potential area of origin, the *kum* and *staćel* are elected *starješina svatova*, which seems to indicate that the roots of these roles must be sought in the area from which they originated, where generally the *stari svat* has obtained the role of the wedding party leader.

The following chapter, titled **Comparable Occurances in Wedding Customs of the Bunjevci and the Romance Language Speaking Inhabitants of the Balkan Peninsula**, introduces, as indicated by the title, the elements of the Bunjevci wedding customs which might be formed, according to certain indicators, in contact with the Balkan Romance-speaking population. The survey starts with the *staćel*, a particular wedding officer, followed by another wedding officer, the *kum*. The following occurances are considered further on: specific procedures with the wedding cake; the bride kissing the guests during the wedding ceremony for a financial reward; separation of the bride from the wedding guests; the wedding guests throw coins into the pail (možda bolje: bucket) full of water before entering the house; the bride enters the bridegroom's house stepping over the white cloth; a special manner of inviting the wedding guests: the bride's parents invite relatives by offering them an apple, and so on. More thorough research of each particular element may bring more light to the origins of at least one part of the cultural heritage of all the Bunjevci branches, as well as to the processes of their ethnogenesis.

The **Role of the Cake in the Blessing and the Engagement Rite among the Danube Bunjevci in the Surrounding of Budapest** is the next chapter, in which the author, through analytic procedure, tries to point to the connection and the common cultural origin of these two rites. The blessing at wedding is given through a specific procedure: by hitting the bride and the bridegroom's backs with a ritual cake. Two variants of

the same basic procedure (the other variant consisting of the hitting or touching the newlyweds' heads with the cake, or making a sign of the cross over their heads with it) have been established in the large stretch of the Adriatic zone (Istria, Dalmatia, particularly its southern areas: from the peninsula of Pelješac to Boka Kotorska – the Bay of Cataro), and in some isolated regions of Slavonia, Srijem and Bačka in the Pannonian plain. The cake also has an important and symbolic role in the engagement rite, with a similar distribution in space as the rite of blessing, additionally including the territory of southern and southeastern Serbia. Similar procedures with the cake also appear in the wedding ceremony in some regions of Macedonia, Bulgaria, the coast of Montenegro and among the Vlach groups in northern Greece. Some specific procedures with the ritual cake at the wedding ceremony in southern Dalmatia and in the coast of Montenegro were practiced in the engagement rite among the Danube Bunjevci in the 19th century. This element makes only one of the many common traits that have been confirmed in the territories described as «Red Croatia» in the medieval Croatian history (according to the Byzantine sources). Ethnological indicators point to the Croatian (Bunjevci) traces in the southern territories of South East Europe.

In the chapter *Kravaj – Heritage from the ancient past* the author deals with the ritual cake *kravaj*, which is an old Slavic tradition, known in the wedding customs among the South Slavs in different regions: in the eastern Pannonic area (eastern Slavonia, Baranja, Vojvodina) and in eastern Serbia, in parts of Macedonia and Bulgaria. Its meaning is somewhat different in Vojvodina among the Danube Bunjevci branch, as well as among other groups in the region. Here it denotes at the same time the ritual cake and the food which the wedding guests are obliged to carry to the wedding party. Occasionally the *kravaj* of the wedding officer *kum* should be specially attractive (both in quality and quantity). The analysis of the *kravaj* has proved that the role and procedures with it have the same meaning and function, despite its different regional variants. The author also considers the etymology of the term *kravaj*. Her conclusion is that the root of the word might be in the verb *kraviti*, the argument which she supports by the ethnologic evidence.

The next chapter bears the title **Marriage twig is not only a Decoration**. Similar to the *kravaj*, the marriage twig is also an old Slavic tradition, known in certain South Slavic areas: in the eastern part of the Pannonian plain, in eastern Serbia, in parts of Bulgaria and Macedonia and in southern Dalmatia with Konavli. Isolated, it appears in western Slavonia, in northern and northwestern Croatia, in Lika, Bosnia and among the Bunjevci in the surroundings of Budapest in Hungary. It is unknown to other regional branches of the Bunjevci in the Danube region. That fact, including facts about specific procedures with the ritual cake in the blessing and engaging rite, analysed in one of the previous chapters, may mean that the cultural heritage of the Bunjevci group is not unique; they might have migrated to the North from the different regions of their possible homeland, and in several migration waves. An analysis of the marriage twig, of its forms and functions, in the context of South East Europe, points, on the one hand, to the common elements in various South Slavic areas, and, on the other, to certain regional characteristics. The analysis shows that the origin

of the marriage branch is common to different South Slavic groups. That hypothesis can be a starting point for a research into its origin in the wider Slavic and even Indoeuropean context.

The concluding chapter deals with **Critical Review of the Work of Serbian Ethnologist Jovan Erdeljanović about the Origin of the Bunjevci**. The author's book *On the Origin of the Bunjevci*, published in 1930, has been thoroughly evaluated. It was the first work to deal with the problems of the Bunjevci origin. It is an important contribution to the study of the traditional heritage of the Bunjevci ethnic group, because for a long time it was the only book dealing with the origin of the Bunjevci, taking all of their branches into consideration. The author gives a critical account of the book. One of Erdeljanović's conclusions is not in accordance with his previous analysis of cultural heritage of the Bunjevci group. Erdeljanović concludes that Bunjevci are Serbs of the Roman Catholic religion, without arguments for such a statement in his previous analysis. Such tendencies were initiated in certain Serbian scientific circles, whose intention was to prove that the Bunjevci were Serbs who had been converted to Catholicism at one point in the past. The author illustrates the «evidences» which Erdeljanović offers to prove the Serbian origin of the Bunjevci and points to many contradictory statements in his book.