

07.00.00 Historical sciences and archaeology

07.00.00 Исторические науки и археология

UDC 93

**Etnographic Characteristics of Serbian Orthodox Peasants at the Beginning of the 20th Century from Vrlika Region, North Dalmatia, Croatia**<sup>1</sup>Rastislav Stojsavljević<sup>2</sup>Jovan Plavša<sup>3</sup>Milka Bubalo Živković<sup>4</sup>Tamara Lukić<sup>5</sup>Bojan Djerčan<sup>6</sup>Vuk Garača<sup>7</sup>Nemanja Tomić

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**ABSTRACT.** There is a very small number of Serbs in Dalmatia today. The wars which took place in this area influenced their emigration, mostly to Serbia. They brought along their customs and culture which are slowly being forgotten by their descendants under the influence of modern values. This paper should provide the reader with a glimpse of the most significant ethnological characteristics of Orthodox peasants from the area of Vrlika in North Dalmatia at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century which were passed on to their descendants. The greatest value of this paper lies in the fact that the major source of literature is oral tradition passed on by people born in the rough Dalmatian region. \*

**Keywords:** ethnology; Otišić; Dalmatian Orthodox peasants; habits; Dalmatia.

**INTRODUCTION**

Country life in the past was much harder than it is today. It was a time when people worked with their two bare hands, a time when machinery was yet to arrive, thus one had to put a great deal of effort into earning a living. Ethnology also remains one of the reigning sciences of nationhood. When historical sources are lacking, only ethnological analysis can identify the arguments justifying national and state continuity (Laruelle, 2010). Today, ethnographic tourism can be seen as one of the possible strategic directions for conservation and economic development of the traditional economy (Vasina, Muhametova, 2012).

During the Venetian rule, Dalmatia was largely inhabited by the Dinaric emigrants. They mostly settled in towns, especially during the influx of the Turks, however, as the threat from the Turks withdrew, more and more people moved to the country. In the period from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the First World War, the majority of Dalmatian Serbs lived in the area of Ravni Kotari, Bukovica, Petrovo Polje, Kosovo, Knin and Vrlička Krajina (Almanah, 1971).

Significant migrations, which took place in the first half of the twentieth century, had an influence on the movement of the population at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Population from the passive areas of the then newly-formed state, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, i.e. Kingdom of Yugoslavia, inhabited this area. After the Second World War, there was an even greater emigration of the German population which left empty houses and property behind and a new wave of immigrants from the passive areas of the Yugoslavia of that period. Those migrants increased the number of inhabitants in Vojvodina by approximately 15 % (Đurđev, 1995). The disposition of these migrants had a significant influence on the disposition of the great number of immigrants at the end of the twentieth century who arrived after the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

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\* Oral tradition told by Milorad Stojsavljević (born in 1933) and Zorka Stojsavljević (born in 1935) in the interview published on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and Marija Stojsavljević (born in 1930) and Bosiljka Bogovac (born in 1932) in the interview published on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

These migrations also included population from the area of Dalmatia whose descendants inhabit Vojvodina today, saving their ethnic heritage from falling into oblivion.

A number of papers describe the customs and *modus vivendi* of peasants in the areas which are close to Vrlička Krajina, both in terms of geographical position and similarities in ethnological features. One of the oldest pieces of writing on the mode of life of Orthodox peasants in Dalmatia was created by A. Fortis in 1774 as well as V. Ardalić, in the second half of the 19th century, who described the people of the Bukovički region. I. Pederin (1989) collected German travel writings of Dalmatia, while G. Stanojević (1987) pointed out the ethnological characteristics of people who lived in the area of Dalmatinska Krajina in the 18th century. S. Obad (1990) wrote about the characteristics of Dalmatian villages in general while some of the scientists who studied the demographic and ethnological characteristics of the people of Kninska Krajina and Dalmatian Kosovo included J. Plavša (1998) and I. Smiljanić (2006).

The subject of this research paper are the very ethnological characteristics of Orthodox peasants from Vrlička Krajina at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the aim is to preserve in writing the oral tradition passed on from generation to generation. In this way, some of the basic ethnological characteristics of our ancestors with an exceptional cultural and historical value are prevented from falling into oblivion.

### **Geographical Position and Physical-geographical Characteristics of Vrlička Region**

Dalmatia is a region on the east coast of the Adriatic Sea in Croatia which spreads from the mouth of the Zrmanja River and canals between the island of Pat and Ravni Kotari to Boka Kotorska in the southeast. The width of Dalmatinska Zagora, the hinterland of Dalmatia, ranges from 50 km in the north to several kilometres in the south. In the central part, its length is 400 km while its width is 70 km. It is divided into four counties while the most important cities of the region include the following: Zadar, Šibenik, Split and Dubrovnik. Other large cities in Dalmatia include Biograd na moru, Sinj, Solin, Omiš, Knin, Metković, Makarska, Trogir, Ploče and Imotski (Crkvenčić, 1974).

The largest Dalmatian islands include Dugi otok, Ugljan, Pašman, Šolga, Brač, Hvar, Korčula, Vis, Lastovo and Mljet.

Vrlička Krajina is a region spreading from the area around the source and upper flow of the Cetina River to the place where it flows into Peruća Lake. It is situated between the mountain ranges of Dinara and Triglav in the northeast and Veliki or Zagorski Kozjak and Svilaja in the northwest. This region may be also considered as part of Cetinska Krajina.

The villages situated on the northeast slopes of Svilaja also belong to Vrlička Krajina. The northeastern sides of Svilaja consist of more compact units (Razvala Otišićka, Razvala Maovička, Gradina etc.) leaning quite steeply towards a settlement at an altitude of 420 m. The area is dominated by sinkholes which are plenty in number around the following hamlets: Stojšavljević, Subotić, Krunić, Petrović, Despinić, etc. As progressing towards Peruća Lake, the terrain gradually rises up to even 510 m on certain places, while the lake is at an altitude of 380 m. In the south, between Svilaja and Peruća Lake, mountains Mačkula (959 m), Gradina (804 m) and Gubavica (787 m) rise.

The prevailing karst surface is reflected in the rich and complex circulation of underground waters and a proportional lack of surface waters. The climate is altered Mediterranean due to the high mountains which prevent the influence of the Adriatic Sea to a certain extent.

The geological structure of the terrains on which the Otišić settlement is situated mainly consist of limestone as well as other Mesozoic and Paleozoic rocks which are extremely pure and which contain few uneroded elements. There are also layers of dolomite. Under the thick series of Mesozoic carbonate rocks, in small areas, shales of an older layer emerge on the surface (Crkvenčić and associates, 1974).

In terms of geomorphology, the terrain on which Vrlička Krajina is situated consists of surface karst formations. The limestone terrain influenced the formation of karst sinkholes which are transforming into pock-marked karst in the eastern area, next to Peruća Lake (Military and Geographical Institute, 1960).

A very important element for the farming method of the peasants of this area is soil whose most typical representative is the red soil which occurred as the result of carbonate base, limestone and dolomite decomposition.

### General Characteristics of Vrlika Region Inhabitants

The area of northern Dalmatia was inhabited by Palaeolithic hunters in the Middle and Late Pleistocene. Favourable natural circumstances influenced the quite early settlement of people in this area. Even though the standpoints of scientists regarding the origin and time of the Illyrian settlement on the Balkans are not uniform, the standpoint that they settled these areas during the second and first millennium BC was dominant up to now (Plavša, 1998).

By means of a census from 1771, it was established that continental Dalmatia counted 180,989 inhabitants while the most densely populated areas were the areas of Zadar and Knin. Afterwards, there was an increase in the number of inhabitants until the First World War. After the war, the number of inhabitants increased despite the emigration (Plavša, 1998).

According to the 2001 census, Dalmatia counted 890,373 inhabitants. The largest emigration from this area took place after the Second World War and during the Civil War in the period from 1992 to 1995.

### FARMING METHOD

The specific terrain influenced the inhabitants of Vrlička Krajina to turn more to animal husbandry than to crop husbandry although crafts were also quite developed.

Due to the karst terrain which is dominant in these areas, **land cultivation** is quite difficult while the yields as per hectare of surface are much lower than in plain areas. Also, arable lands are limited. Due to the previously stated reasons, crop husbandry was not so present with Dalmatian peasants at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Land was mainly **plowed** by a plough and oxen. A plough was actually a type of a wooden plough, a curved piece of wood which was thrust into soil and pulled by oxen, fixed to a wooden cart in front of it. It was called "**lemeš**" in Dalmatian Kosovo (Smiljanić, 2006). Yokes encircled the necks of oxen, i.e. wooden circles made of branches. The circles were connected by loops and this was altogether called "**gužva**". The loops were joined by a peg while the bows kept the necks of oxen under the yoke. Bows were made from ash while yokes were made from oak. As it may be noticed, all the machines were made from wood both due to its availability and low weight. An iron plough replaced the wooden plough in the 1870s (Obad, 1990).

On the mountain sides, people hoed soil manually due to the inaccessible limestone terrain and distance between arable plots. The handle of the hoe was wooden – it weighed around 7 kg and it was around 1m long. The people did not use the word "to hoe" to denote digging soil, but the expression "trapilo se". Potato, cabbage and other types of vegetables were usually sowed.

**Sowing** was performed manually and with the use of a wooden 1.5-meter-long structure pulled by oxen. A man would stand on the wooden structure which helped in covering the plowed soil with seeds. In mountainous areas, the wooden structure was pulled by people. The land surface was counted in days, i.e. the surface of land oxen can plow in a day. From four to six oxen were usually harnessed for the purpose of plowing.

**Harvesting** was performed manually with a jagged sickle with a wooden handle, similar to a today's saw. After harvesting, the crops were tied up in bundles upon which three bundles of crops would be put in a pile at an angle of 120 degrees, a process known as "trojićenje". Afterwards, the bundles were taken to the threshing floor ("guvno") where they would be untied, the crops spread and the seeds collected in a way which included horses stamping on the crops. Cords were made from sheep wool. Rye was beaten with the aid of sticks. A wooden rake was used to separate the straw while wooden brooms were used to separate the chaff. Grain was taken to water mills. Wheat was milled in millstones, i.e. hollow stones with wooden handles. The upper stone rotated while the lower remained passive. Once the corn would become ripe, it was cut below the cob, taken to the threshold floor and husked with the aid of sticks.

The **fertilization** method was an interesting one. Namely, wooden pens were placed on the field where the cattle would produce a natural fertilizer which was used to cover the soil before plowing. The pens were relocated from one end of the field to the other until the entire field was fertilized. The pens were usually replaced every other day. There was also another fertilization

method when the cattle was not in the field – the fertilizer was carried on one's back in an "arar", a type of sack made from goat sackcloth or sheep wool. Women carried the "arar" on their backs while men carried it on their shoulder. In these areas, the system of leaving the soil fallow was applied, i.e. the land would rest for a year and nothing would be sown on it (Stanojević, 1987).

When it comes to **cattle breeding**, the **Vlach type** of cattle breeding prevailed in this area. It included the practice of seasonal livestock movement up to pastures on high mountains such as Velebit and Dinara and to seasonal settlements - housing (huts or barns) (Milojević, 1925). Goats were the most common animals. They were not always fed in households but were taken to pastures on a daily basis; goats produced milk which was used in the human diet. Sheep were mostly fed in households although they were occasionally taken to pastures while horses mostly served for riding. Cargo was carried on donkeys. A donkey was a much appreciated animal, especially in inaccessible mountainous areas. Cows spent the summers on pastures and the winters in cowsheds. Horses and donkeys were not used in the diet. The number of wild animals decreased as the population of Dalmatia increased. The number of livestock on the Dinara Mountain in the period from 1792 to 1900 ranged from 100,000 to 180,000 per season (Marković, 1975). There were even cases when the peasants from the area of Cetina fed the cattle of the peasants from Vrličko and Petrovo Polje on their pastures (Stojaković, 2006).

When it comes to firearms, the peasants had long rifles ignited by a flint called flintlock rifles. Every shepherd had a rifle in case a wolf would appear.

**Fishing** was mostly present at the Dalmatian seaside. Fish was caught in many ways: with the aid of rafts, nets, as well as fishing baskets which were called "drums".

When it comes to fruit, the following were mostly grown: wild apples, "mednjača" pears and "oskoruša" pears (*Sorbus Domestica*), which are similar to medlars. The following was grown at the seaside: olives, wild greengage plums called "srdelije", grape vine, figs and Cornelian cherries although these were also grown in the inland area, in Otišić. The fields were enclosed by rocks while demarcation rocks, i.e. border rocks were placed for the purpose of separating fields.

#### *Household Appliances and Crockery*

Old, specific, indigenous settlements keep the spirit and tradition of times gone by while their cultural importance is increasing more and more in the process of rapid urbanization and globalization. Due to the previously stated, the role of regional houses, which may present the traditional architecture and life of people, is extremely important (Ivkov, 2002). The basic type of house until the middle of the 19th century was the log cabin – a one-storey house, a ground-floor single room house which was square or rectangular in its base (Rodić, 2006).

In the second half of the 19th century, **houses** began to be built of stone, mainly without mortar, and covered by rye straw. In the beginning, there was only one room with a fireplace where both people and cattle stayed, separated only by intertwined twigs. Later, houses began to be built of shaped stones and mortar (lime and sand). Limestone and bare stone, which are dominant on the terrain surface, were the most common construction material. Sand for the purpose of constructing houses was brought from the seaside. The inside walls of the house were made from small stones called "šakavac".

The rye straw roof was later replaced by a stone plate. The beams which supported the roof were mainly made from oak, sometimes from acacia and pine, and they were three meters away from one another. Boards called "žioke" were also used for the purpose of supporting the roof. The covered opening on the roof was called "badža". Twigs were intertwined above the fireplace in order to prevent the roof from catching fire. For heating purposes, peasants used nothing but wood. Above the fireplace, a so called "škip" was hanging, a piece of wood on which a pot, similar to a today's kettle, hung. The pot was hooked onto a pothook. Pothooks were either wooden or metal. Some houses had a «basement» for the cattle.

**Furniture** was meager. Beds were made from beech or oak while people would also lay on corn husk and the so called "mutap" – a rug made from sheep and goat wool. People covered themselves with blankets called "**biljac**" and "**sukanac**" made from sheep wool. "Sukanac" was a rolled cloth used for covering oneself while "biljac" was similar to it. Tables were round and they had three legs. They were from 25 to 30 cm high (Rodić, 2006). Chairs were called "katrige". Small tables had the shape of a half moon.

Crockery was mainly wooden. For certain items of crockery, Dalmatians used their own localisms:

bowl - zdjela	fork - pinjur	spoon- žlica
plate - pijat		knife - bekuta

Moreover, a bekuta was a blacksmith's knife carried at the waist in a casing made from a ram's horn. People cooked in pottery and clay pots. Milk was cooked in a "kotluša", which was a container similar to a pan. Cheese was made in goat skin. A mortar was called "lukotucanj". The oval container used for bringing water from the spring was called "vučija" and it could store approximately 30 l of water. It was covered by a cloth. A glass was also made from wood and it was called "bukara".

Since the rough Dalmatian region is a mainly arid region, rainwater was collected in wells which were covered by stones while the holes were closed by mortar, if it was used for the construction of the house. Rainwater could also be collected in a cistern called "čatrnja" which represented a natural dent above the waterproof layer set up by men.

"Bronzin" was the name of a massive pot made from bronze thus it was most often called brass "bronzin". It was encircled by a thick cord by means of which it was hooked on the pothook.

"Verige" (pothook) was a thick chain made from wrought iron whose one end hung on the beam while the other had a hook on which the "bronzin" pot was hooked above the fire in the fireplace. The hook was elongated and bent on each side thus the length of the pothook could be adjusted, depending on the intensity of fire.

"Sitnica" was the name of a sieve or a round sieving wire net with a high wooden rim which was used for sieving flour.

"Maša" was the name of a fire iron, made from wrought iron, with a long handle which was used for stirring fire and turning bread in the fireplace.

"Tara" was the name of a handmade beech device for weaving.

### Folk Heritage

Folk heritage presents one of the topics which are subjects of ethnological research. It is based on analyzing national costumes worn in the past as well as customs, songs, games, cultural events and so on (Ivkov, 2002).

#### National Costumes

Characteristic clothing together with embellishments and jewellery is called a costume. A costume represents everything that people wear in order to protect and embellish themselves as well as the ways of wearing certain items of clothing (shawl or scarf – on the head, around the neck, over the shoulders, around the waist; cap – at the forehead, at the back of the head, at the side etc.) (Barjaktarević, 1968).

It was characteristic of mountain villages to be closed to the infiltration of the modern civilization's attainments to a smaller or bigger extent. Due to that reason, ethnological changes occurred more slowly and more gradually (Jovanović, 1974)\*. V. Medić (2006) states that the Dinaric national costume can be divided into the one worn in North and Central Dalmatia and partially in Lika (nomadic lifestyle) and the one worn by the inhabitants of Banija, Kordun and Lika (worn by frontiersmen on the Military Frontier).

**Male clothing.** Therefore, male clothing could be divided into clothing worn by frontiersmen and clothing worn by cattle breeders and farmers described further on in the text. M. Jačov (1987) states that the male costume consisted of 9 parts in the 18<sup>th</sup> century including the following:

\* The paper of Milka Jovanović was published on the Symposium "Ethnological Research of Contemporary Changes in National Culture" held from January 28<sup>th</sup> to January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1974.

1) <i>Festive attire</i>	2) <i>Opanci (peasant shoes)</i>	3) <i>Navlakaze*</i>
4) <i>Jačerma<sup>†</sup></i>	5) <i>Japundžija<sup>‡</sup></i>	6) <i>Cap</i>
7) <i>Kalpak<sup>§</sup></i>	8) <i>Red woolen waistband<sup>**</sup></i>	9) <i>Pipe carried on the shoulder</i>

At the beginning of the 20th century, clothing changed. Both men and women wore mostly woven clothes. They wore red baize caps usually woven with tassels attached by black thread.

Their shirts were similar to the today's turtleneck with metal threads and/or golden threads. They also put cuffs on the shirts. They wore a woolen waistcoat called "krožet" and on top of a waistcoat, they wore a jacket called "koparan" on festive occasions.

Underwear was made from linen; trousers did not have a slit but "lakme", which is something similar to pockets. There were buckles on the trouser legs. They wore knee-high knitted socks. Longer socks were called "terluke" while the shorter ones were called "tožluke". Knitted peasant shoes called "opanci" were worn over socks; they had soles made from oxhide while the upper parts of "opanci" were made from goat sackcloth.

In the winter, they wore a mantle with a hood on top of all the stated clothes. During the winter, men would also wear a hand-knitted woolen sweater called "guća". Also, they wore the so called "gunj" <sup>††</sup> **which presented an upper part of the costume – black thick broadcloth decorated with red embellishment on the edges.**

They also wore black trousers which were called "benevreci". At the waist, they wore a pipe with a long stem called "kamiš". Tinder was called "čakmak". Tobacco sacks were made from pork bladder. Also, they wore small rifles at their waists as well as the so called "mašice" which contained ember.

As far as caps are concerned, Š. Batović and O. Oštrić (1968) state that «the Dalmatian, Lika and Montenegrin cap have the same shape as the cap of Illyrian tzars from the era of tetrarchy».

**Female clothing.** M. Jačov (1987) listed 7 parts of the female costume in the 18th century including the following:

1) <i>Blouse</i>	2) <i>Modrina<sup>‡‡</sup></i>	3) <i>Sadak<sup>§§</sup></i>
4) <i>Opanci (peasant shoes)</i>	5) <i>Opute<sup>***</sup></i>	6) <i>Cap with a skerlet<sup>†††</sup></i>
7) <i>Red socks</i>		

At the beginning of the 20th century, there was a difference between the clothing worn by girls and the clothing worn by married women. Girls wore caps made from baize. In the church, they also differed from married women by the fact that they were wearing a peacock feather in their hair. One half of a girl's cap was covered by white linen called "bošča". The linen was attached to the cap with pins called "špijade".

Girls wore white blouses whose front part had a collar while the sides were embellished with a pattern made from black thread. The blouse was not entirely buttoned up. Over the blouse, a type of waistcoat called "sadak" was worn; the waistcoat was not buttoned up and it was of a half thigh length.

Footwear was buckled up by means of little hooks placed in the inside of a shoe which were called "klašnja". During the winter period, woolen dresses were worn; a 4-5 cm wide blaize was

\* White woolen socks

† Type of a male waistcoat also called krožet, zubun and lajbek (Medić, 2006)

‡ Mantle made from warm broadcloth

§ Type of a turban above the cap

\*\* The red woolen waistband had two guns ("handžar") and a small coin and tobacco box on itself

†† "Gunj" was also called aljak, kaporan and trlagan (Medić, 2006)

‡‡ Modrina – a type of dress ([www.vrlika.hr/podstranice/kultura](http://www.vrlika.hr/podstranice/kultura))

§§ Sadak – a longer sleeveless dress ([www.vrlika.hr/podstranice/kultura](http://www.vrlika.hr/podstranice/kultura))

\*\*\* A type of material used for making belts on footwear in the combination with tanned cowhide

††† If the cap was red, it denoted virginity

worn on the shoulders while the blaise on the thighs was three-coloured. An apron with a special Dalmatian pattern was worn over the dress and it was similar to the today's apron with tassels on the edges. Girls wore the "opanci" peasant shoes with small spikes at the top.

On the other hand, women did not wear caps but a round "kovrljak" which was covered by a white "bošča". Women covered half of their forehead. They wore blue dresses while on their legs they wore linen called "bječve".

**Children** up to 10 and 11 years of age wore dresses and not trousers, regardless of their gender. The national costume from Vrlika was known far and beyond. Bags called "uprtnjače", which are similar to the today's rucksack, were worn on the shoulder. They had usually darker multicoloured patterns similar to the ones on an apron. They mostly served for carrying food to the field to ploughmen and workers. A woman's apron was called "traveža" – it was of a dark blue colour with patterns. A black skirt for women was called "vuštan".

The clothing which was worn for church was made entirely of blaise. Necklaces were also worn. The embellishments worn around the waist were called "džidže" and they were made from sea shells. Men wore metal discs around their necks called "ljuštine". People wore shoes called "postole" to church. Women wore ear-rings, pearls around their necks, while the more affluent ones wore the so called "kov" which spread from the neck to the knee and was woven from coins and linen. The more fortunate ones had a "kov" made from Austrian coins while the less fortunate had ones made from silver coins.

### Habits

Habits are norms (rules, regulations, practices, modes of behavior) which are in time imposed to a certain group of people by the circumstances of life. These occurrences first appear within a group sporadically, occasionally, from case to case; however, when the conditions last for a longer period of time and an occurrence appears more regularly and repeats itself, within time it begins to be considered as regular, it becomes common. Such rules, practices and similar common relations and states accepted by a group are called customs (Barjaktarević, 1968).

A gathering called "dernek" was held in front of the church every week. After the service, people danced a national dance called "kolo" and an instrument called "duple" was played - an instrument made from goat sackcloth, similar to bagpipes. This was the most common meeting place of young people. Food and beverage were brought from home.

People would fast on **Christmas Eve** while many would not eat anything at all. Unlike in Vrlička Krajina, the people in Bukovičko Polje would drink wine for lunch because it was believed that it gave strength (Ardalić, 2010). Food was prepared on olive oil. The famous Dalmatian food was called "pura", the name of today's hominy or polenta. Yule logs were made from oak logs; they were around 2 m long while their diameter ranged from 20 to 30 cm. Yule logs were placed on both sides of the fireplace and burned up to 3 or 4 days. Prior to being put in the fire, a sign of the cross was made on the yule log; wine was poured over it while the housewife waited with a bowl of grains and sprinkled them on the ones bringing the yule logs inside. The custom of burning a yule log stems from ancient times when the old Slavs accepted Christianity and renounced their ancient pagan gods. In remembrance of the previously stated, the Serbs burn a yule log every year in order to repeat their renunciation of ancient pagan gods. Straw was spread in the entire house and afterwards people had dinner. In more affluent houses, people ate cod while the poorer people ate fasting beans. Shots were fired from the so called "prangije", a piece of pipe filled with sulphure, as well as from rifles. Yule logs were burnt around the church as well.

Unlike Šumadija, where mainly cerris and oak were cut for yule logs or Gruža villages, where people preferred to cut young cerris trees with moss, in the central part of Dalmatia, the place where Vrlička Krajina is situated, people used only oak for yule logs (Nedeljković, 1990). Also, there was the custom of starting the preparation of a roast early in the morning. This custom was followed by the inhabitants of Bukovičko Polje (Ardalić, 2010).

For **Christmas**, people went to the midnight liturgy while the entire following day was spent in celebration around the church. No one has ever expressed better the necessity of this celebration than the hero of Njegoš's "Mountain Wreath", the blind abbot Stefan, who sang: "A day is not a day without the sight of the eye nor is a celebration true without Christmas" (Nedeljković, 1990).

A national dance called "kolo" was danced and other games were played. People threw a stone from their shoulder; they played a game called "balota" which is similar to today's bowling. Long

jump was called "uskakivanje". Christmas breakfast was called "marenda" and people would have it immediately after waking up. Lunch was served quite early, already around ten o'clock in the morning. People would have a snack around two o'clock in the afternoon while dinner was served at seven o'clock in the evening.

**Epiphany** was another holiday which was celebrated. People would go to the liturgy at midnight because it was believed that the sky would open at midnight and that God would present himself.

**Saint Sava** was also celebrated by Orthodox Dalmatian peasants. During this holiday, the tradition was to prepare fritters. Afterwards, the time would come when people ate only meat ("**mesne poklade**") followed by weeks when people ate primarily cheese ("**bele poklade**") after which the fasting period would start.

People also fasted for **Good Friday** and the church bells did not ring until Sunday. On Friday, people coloured eggs for Easter. People fasted on Holy Saturday as well. Eggs were mostly coloured with onion skin as well as wool colour and nettle.

For **Easter**, people played games in front of the church just like for Christmas with the only difference that during Easter people also raced on horses.

On the occasion of a Slava, people also gathered around the church. Saint Ilija was the Slava celebrated in the settlement of Vrlika. People usually did not do any fieldwork on Sundays or during major holidays.

"**Prelo**" was a noted custom of the people of these areas. Young people would gather, dance and sing. It was usually held in late autumn or winter, before the season of Slavias and Christmas began. Each village had its own "prelo".

In some villages, there were also people called "**prponoše**" who would go around the village during the dry season and pray to God for rain. They would cover themselves with branches to protect themselves from the sun, go around the village and sing. While going through the village, from house to house, people would feed them, give presents to them, and pour wine and water on them, all of which would cause rain to fall, as the belief said.

"**Vučari**" was a custom to rip off the skin of a wolf after catching one, fill it out with straw and put an apple in its mouth and then carry it around the village. Women would put various pieces of jewellery on the wolf. Also, the wolf was given bacon, wool, wheat, wine and so on.

"**Maškare**" was a carnival organized before fasting periods or around the All Souls' Day, usually for the younger population. Men would put on a mask; some would even dress up as women and dressed so, go from house to house. People would give presents to them. These manifestations were called "**čaroice**" in the Bukovac area.

"**Revena**" represents a feast prepared by people, i.e. neighbours who make a deal to prepare food, meat and wine and have lunch together. This event was organized in the autumn, when wine is in plenty and sheep are fattened. A ram was always prepared, but each time by a different host. Each participant brought a cask of wine.

"**Moba**" presented work which was done together including hoeing vineyards and corn fields, scything straw, harvesting etc. Especially prosperous houses would be the ones to gather people for such an event. The number of villagers participating in this event was from 10 to 20 or even more.

**Solidarity** was expressed when a man in the village would lose cattle or when his house would burn down. Neighbours would come to his aid – they would go around the village and collect donations in material or money in order to compensate for the man's loss.

**Fraternization** in the Otišić settlement was respected from the earliest times. Friendships were made between two men or two women thus they were called brothers and sisters respectively. Fraternalization was arranged before the altar in the church, either at Christmas or Slava, while the duties of the brothers were to help one another in the course of their lifetime. Apart from fraternalization, it was highly appreciated to be a best man or godfather, a relationship which was passed on for generations.

**Customs related to childbirth and baptism** were kept for a long period of time. If a boy was born, people would shoot from rifles. Children were born in the house and women helped during the labour. After the child was born, the woman was usually placed near the fireplace in order to get warmer. Each baby had a hand-made cradle and wore linen shirts. A child was baptized in a church approximately six weeks after its birth. On the occasion of baptism, cookies



called "krsnice" were baked. The godfather presented the godchild with linen in which he carried the baby and he was given plentiful of presents. A. Fortis (1774) wrote down that women who gave birth could enter a church only 40 days after the childbirth with the previous blessing of a priest.

**Wedding customs** were not neglected either. People would usually get married after the Christmas Fast. The size of the wedding celebration depended on the wealth of the family. The best man was the main figure at the wedding while the host of the wedding was called bridesman, i.e. "stari svat" or "starojko". The groom's brother was called "djever". The groom's sister, a bridesmaid, was called "jegnja". She followed the bride and gave presents to the wedding guests. Presents were sewed on the best man's back and/or jacket (little bags, socks ...) which tightened him. The bride wore the female national costume, she had a veil yet, she was not wearing white. The flag was usually carried by the groom's brother-in-law. The flag was decorated with scarfs and there was an apple on the top of it.

**Customs related to death.** The deceased was usually buried in family tombs, in a coffin or not, depending on the wealth of the family which buried the person. The deceased was not covered with soil; the tomb was closed with tablets, which is the consequence of the terrain of that area. A stone cross was placed on the tomb while the epitaph consisted of a surname and name, but only of the person who was buried first. The epitaph was turned towards the tumulus. The head of the deceased was put on the west so that the deceased would look at the Orthodox East. After the funeral, people would go on a post-funeral reception "daće" which was called "sedmina" or "podušje" in these areas. A flag was carried along with the cross for men who served the army or who died in war. Men sometimes grew a beard in order to express mourning.

Our people have always cherished the idea that a person is alive until the moment his soul loses its identity or while memories of his personality are alive. That can only be achieved by deeds which shall not fall into oblivion, which shall be remembered and retold (Bandić, 2008).

#### CONCLUSION

This paper has shown only some of the most important characteristics of Dalmatian Orthodox peasants of Vrlika Region. More extensive data, which is to be kept from the passage of time, does certainly exist. Unfortunately, only a small number of Serbs live in these areas today. Wars which were waged during the 1990s as well as banishments led to the neglected state of this area.

Dalmatian Serbs emigrated to Serbia on several occasions while the majority came after the First and Second World War. They settled the area of Vojvodina as well as other parts of Serbia and the world where their descendants almost forgot the customs of their ancestors and merged with the environment in which they live.

The time described was a time difficult for living, especially in hilly and mountainous areas such is the rough Dalmatian region. However, people got by in the best way they could, they were pious and sociable which made labour and agony easier to bear. It goes without saying that it was the high enlightenment of people which influenced the preservation of customs and tradition that descendants should save from falling into oblivion.

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УДК 93

### **Этнографические характеристики сербских православных крестьян из района Врлика, Северная Далмация, Хорватия в начале 20 века**

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**Аннотация.** Сегодня в Далмации проживает очень мало сербов. Войны в этом районе вызвали их миграцию, по большей части в Сербию. Они принесли с собой свои обычаи и культуру, которые постепенно забываются их предками под влиянием современных ценностей. Данная статья знакомит читателя с наиболее значительными этнологическими характеристиками православных крестьян из района Врлика в Северной Далмации в конце XIX века и начале XX века, которые перешли к их потомкам. Наибольшая ценность данной статьи заключается в том, что большинство литературных источников – это устная традиция, передающаяся людьми, родившимися в суровом районе Далмации.

**Ключевые слова:** этнология; Otišić; православные крестьяне Далмации; традиции; Далмация.