

Saints: Ethnological Research in Croatia

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Abstract

The author presents selected outcomes from her research on belief in patron saints in Croatia. The emphasis is placed on contexts in which such beliefs are manifested, on the ways in which they are expressed and on the significance that believers appear to attribute to patron saints. The analysis of these questions is based on the nature and forms of relationship to patron saints on two levels: community religiosity, and individual religiosity. At community level, patron saints are not only associated with economic betterment, but are also given a significant role with respect to the identity formation of a given community and its social life. At the level of individual religiosity, the patron saint is seen as a personal protector who is called on at various moments in life, which leads to the annulment of the acknowledged “specialization” of the different saints. The author outlines a number of guidelines for future research into this and associated topics, primarily the research of sacred places and the processes involved with their consecration.

Keywords:

*Popular religiosity,
patron saints,
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Systematic research into the place of patron saints in people’s everyday lives has only been recently introduced in Croatian ethnology. There are at least two reasons for this. On the one hand the institutionalization of ethnological dealings with religion in Croatia is of very recent date (see Šantek 2004) and on the other hand, the topic is open to various religious phenomena, thus necessarily encompassing them at the same time.

It is common knowledge that in the everyday lives of Catholics¹ some Christian saints are considered to be protectors from various illnesses, foul weather and other harm, and patrons of good health, of cattle and plants, and of specific jobs and occupations. The worshipping of saints as patrons is expressed through various forms of popular religiosity, such as:

– specific prayers and their associated

- practices: everyday prayers, Rosaries, vows (and the associated fasting, paying for Mass, walking around the altar or the Church – sometimes barefoot or kneeling, the touching or kissing of sacred pictures or objects, the lighting of candles, the gifting of flowers, money, jewelry, wax, wooden or metal votive offerings, hair, parts of clothing, gratitude plates, fruit, etc.), pilgrimages, the use of blessed objects and blessings, processions and rituals against bad weather and other misfortunes, customs linked to important life situations or with the annual cycle;
- art and architectural forms: the display of paintings in the home, the carrying of pictures of saints, the building of Chapels, pillars, crucifixes, altars, etc.
 - organizations: fraternities and other organizations that nurture different forms of religiosity.

Stories, poems, proverbs and divination formulas can also express a form of worship of saints and can therefore be considered part of popular religiosity.

Even if each of these forms of veneration can be considered a specific topic of research, we find that in religious practice, many of them are intertwined. Thus, for example, vows are usually combined with pilgrimage, i.e. the pilgrimage itself can represent a kind of vow; blessings are commonly linked to calendar customs, while processions can frequently display other forms of religiosity such as the touching of sacred objects.

In this paper I will present some of the results of my research. I will focus on how and to what extent the belief in saints as patrons is present in people's everyday lives, i.e. what is the nature of their relationship with specific saints. My interest is to estab-

lish the occasions at which such beliefs are evident, the ways in which they are expressed and the meanings that appear to be attributed to patron saints. I looked for answers to these questions by focusing on the nature of the believers' relationship with patron saints and how this was expressed, i.e. primarily research of non-institutional religious practices and accompanying beliefs. (This will be explained in more details in the next chapter).

The comprehensive results are based on material gathered in the course of 12 periods of fieldwork conducted in Croatia (2001-2005), on the analysis of unpublished archival sources (1960-1989) and on published material (1896-2000). Problems that were apparent throughout the course of research will be presented through two case studies. I will also introduce data from other areas of scholarly interest as necessary. I have chosen to present the results in this way in order to avoid partial and fragmentary understanding of the worship of patron saints, i.e. to ensure better insight into the complexity of the issues.

I would like to point out that my intention is not to draw a final conclusion or provide a set of firm definitions; it is rather to outline some analytic categories which, according to Charmaz, synthesize and explicate the experiences and the processes in the different worlds with which we are dealing (Charmaz 2001:265).

Thematic framework and points of departure

The worshipping of saints as patrons belongs to the non-institutional segment of religiosity which includes 'informal, unofficial practices, beliefs and styles of religious expression' (Badone 1990:4-6). The official Roman Catholic Church² encourages the

worshipping of saints as *role models and ideals* or as *mediators* in communication with God. The worshipping of saints as *patrons* is however not supported by the official Church, unless it is covered by the saint's role as an intermediary, which is often not the case. As Church historian friar Emanuel Hoško explains, the stress put on the saints' protecting role in popular religiosity redirects their worship into the role of a helper. Apart from serving to establish a closer relationship with the saint, this means that worshippers will mainly turn to them when in trouble, thereby attributing powers to them which they theologically do not have (2001b: 432). The worshipping of saints as protectors is frequently based on legends that contain no authentic biographical data, but are full of non-Christian elements and represent products of prolific imagination.

In this sense the worshipping of saints as patrons does not represent something prescribed, but lived, i.e. it is practiced by people. These religious phenomena are in the relevant literature united under the title *popular/traditional/folk religion* or *popular religiosity*. Since we are describing a religious phenomenon which is not prescribed under a single, monolithic religious system (religion), I prefer a syntagma which includes the idea of *religiosity*, thus pointing to the 'attitudes, practices and feelings through which people express their relationship towards the sacred' (Hoško 2001a:381), regardless of their appropriation in religious symbols and institutions (Rebić, ed. 2002:806). 'Religion is institutionalization of religiosity' (ibid.) – it prescribes worship and the practices by which this worship is expressed and confirmed. However, this does not mean that there are no other forms of worship and ways to express veneration which are perceived as

belonging to the same religious framework – the same religion can be practiced and lived through different forms of religiosity in ways other than those prescribed.

Consequently, it appears that from the point of view of cultural anthropology it would be wrong to perceive the worshipping of saints as patrons in opposition to the official creed of the Roman Catholic Church. According to the field data, the belief in patron saints is always interrelated with the Church creed (e.g. *It is all kind of mixed up a bit, some magic, some Church stuff and so, a bit of everything*, Istria – Gologorica, 2002), and people perceive it as a legitimate part of the same religious system. Therefore, as Ellen Badone suggests, it is more useful to focus on the dialectic character of the relationship between *popular religion*³ (of which the worshipping of saints is a constituent part) and the official Church (1990:6). She also suggests that *popular religion* should be interpreted as part of the consistent symbolic system in which individuals and communities provide meaning to the worlds they inhabit (ibid. 9). Some Croatian ethnologists, for example D. Rihtman-Augustin (1991:10) and D. Zečević (2000:72-74), write on the reciprocal relationship between the two, the practiced and the prescribed, and on the exchange of ideas between them, following the famous historian of religion M. Eliade (1970:153-156), as well as Croatian theologians:

'Folk' religiosity is not contrasted to official liturgy, approved or prescribed by Church authorities (...). The relationship between religiosity and liturgy is a complex one and varies from peaceful coexistence to a lively dialogue, which enriches them both (Bezić 1981:314-315).

After all, the entire historical development of popular religiosity and the official Church⁴ in general speaks of their interrelatedness.

Before I continue my discussions, it is important to point out some basic facts. The central position in the whole concept of belief in patron saints in Croatian popular religiosity is occupied by canonized saints. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that these are not the only saints worshipped by Croatian believers. They also worship individuals who have not been officially sanctified, but who are recognized and perceived as "holy". These individuals have usually had supernatural healing powers ascribed to them and hence they are worshipped in their lifetime, or people visit their graves after their death (comp. Šantek 2002). Furthermore, forms of popular religiosity present in the worshipping of patron saints can also be found in the honoring of important historical figures, as was the case with the statue of Josip Broz Tito, a communist leader from ex-Yugoslavia, in the village of Kumrovec (Belaj, M. 2006a).

This article primarily deals with *dulia* (from Greek δουλειά⁵), yet it is sometimes impossible to arrive at the correct interpretation of the worshipping of saints without taking account of the veneration of the Mother of God (*hyperdulia*, from Greek υπερδουλεια), and hence I will refer to this context as necessary.

Selection of research topics

In Croatian ethnological bibliography only a few ethnographic articles dealing with the cult of saints have been published in scholarly journals. There is also a monograph on the cult of St. Martin of Tour and the tradition of this cult in Croatia (Zaradija Kiš 2004). Even though this particular work is

quite systematic, its main purpose was not to engage in a detailed analysis of the forms of religiosity directed towards St. Martin and hence its data appear sporadic and indirect. The same can be said about its content. Consequently, I found I had to start my research on the belief in patron saints at the very beginning.

Christian (1981:178; 1989:x,xiv) and some other authors (e.g. Badone 1990:6,8; Brettell 1990:55; Čapo 1991:17; Dubisch 1990:113-114) understand religiosity as 'religion as practiced'. This includes not only research on the rituals through which religiosity is expressed, but also research on the beliefs on which they are based. According to T. Asad, the research of religiosity includes „the entire range of disciplinary activities, of instrumental forms of knowledge and practice, within which selves are formed, and possibilities of 'attaining to faith' are marked out" (Asad 1983:249).

It is well known that worshippers frequently express their religiosity towards several saints and that religiosity towards one saint does not exclude other saints; some people direct their religiosity towards specific saints (comp. Christian 1989:47). Based on this premise, I have tried to determine the nature of such relationships with specific saints by analyzing the phenomenon on two levels: community religiosity and individual religiosity.

Patron saints in community religiosity

My fieldwork in a number of communities has shown that patron saints are present in the lives of people in a multitude of ways and that these are linked to the ways in which people perceive and understand the term *patron saint*. Most commonly, the term is linked to the titular saint of the local church and altars, or the neighboring churches and

altars. Local patron saints are usually given a special status. My informants would frequently refer to their *local* saint as ‘our patron’, or say something like ‘we have’ [saints/a procession etc.], in contrast to ‘their patron’, ‘they have’, etc. while talking about *neighboring* saints. In this context patron saints, i.e. the titular saint of a local church, frequently gains a certain profane character – by pointing to *our* saints as different to *their* saints, a community expresses its identity and ascribes to these saints the role of communal symbols. For example, the villagers of Krivi Put (Northern Velebit) refer to the Lady of Snow as ‘our patron’, ‘our saint’, or ‘Our Lady of Snow’ (*Don't confuse Senj and Krivi Put⁶. St. George is the patron of the town of Senj, and not of Krivi Put! Our patron is the Lady of Snow. Then talk about the Lady of Snow. Don't talk about St. George, Krivi Put, 2004.*). There is also a local legend about the building of the local church and its consecration to the Lady of Snow, which also shows that the Lady of Snow is an important factor in this community's formation of identity. The legend is similar to the legend about Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, but all events take place in Podbilo, the area in the village of Krivi Put where the church is situated.

Local legends about particular saints frequently symbolize communal identity. They openly attempt to make a particular saint ‘their own’, and to link him/her to their own place. This can be seen, for example, in the legend from the towns of Buje and Momjan (Istria) about St. Servol, the patron saint of Buje. According to the legend, St. Servol was born to a rich family in the town of Trieste in 260 A.D. and spent some time away from his family, hiding in the caves near Trieste. But the people of Buje tell a different story:

In these parts and in Momjan, people

say that when he escaped from home to that cave, he was hiding not in the caves near Trieste but here, in the region of Momjan, near Kremenje; there is a cave near Singarela. And the story goes that he lived there for a year and that the people of Momjan wanted him to be their patron (...) [During the celebration of St. Servol's Day in Buje] we used to place green branches in windows along the streets where the procession would pass, usually laurel [until the 1950s]. Laurel leaves were picked in the fields, usually near the Singarela cave. These were the most beautiful (Istria – Buje 2002).

The identification of the *patron saint* with the titular saint of the local church, the setting of significant episodes from the saint's life in one's own landscape through local legend - in other words, ‘claiming’ the saint - and the creation of a sense of identity through the image of the saint; these are all common practices in many localities in Croatia, and in other regions as well (for example, comp. Christian 1989:xiv-xv, 44, 72-73). It is however important to emphasize that the mentioning of a ‘patron saint’ as the titular saint of a church or an altar does not necessarily imply a living belief in his/her role as a patron.

The same can be observed in connection with the celebration of the days of patron saints – the titular saints of the local church. The term ‘patron saint’ usually also refers to the celebration of the day dedicated to the titular saint of the local church, i.e. the parish fair. On this occasion the whole community is gathered and the social significance of the day is, according to my research, clearly predominant. Members of the community participate in religious rituals, yet it appears that this is

more of an expression of belonging to the community than an expression of a definite belief in the patron saint. For example, in Čilipi in the region of Konavle (Southern Dalmatia), St. Nicholas, the titular saint of the local church, is considered to be the patron of sailors and travelers. His Day is celebrated by an official procession in which his statue is carried round the church and by an evening *fiesta* which has now become commercialized. The role of St. Nicholas as the patron of sailors and travelers is ignored even on this day, notwithstanding the fact that there are many sailors among the inhabitants of Konavle. According to one of my informants, even when the need for this particular kind of protection exists, help is requested from the personal patron saint ('I have bought my husband the locket of Our Lady to keep him safe, and not that of St. Nicholas'; Čilipi, 2005). St. Nicholas's role in building social cohesion within the community is considered more important. However, the fact that the members of the community mention patron saints in this context, too, says something about their understanding of their personal religiosity. It seems that their participation at the parish fair, the main purpose of which is social, has not in any way diminished their sense of personal piety. We could therefore say that in the minds of my informants this social component of the parish fair also represents an expression of belief in patron saints, although the 'practicing' and sometimes even the knowledge of the role of the saint is not crucial. In other words, we are talking more about religiosity for the community's sake than for the sake of the saint's patronage.

Furthermore, I need to emphasize that these examples, if numerous, do not represent a unique pattern of behavior towards

patron saints - especially in the case of Croatia's most popular saints, namely the Virgin Mary and St. Anthony of Padua. For example, in the village of Krivi Put the Day of Our Lady of Snow (August 5), who is also the titular saint of the local church, is the key social event of the year, gathering all the locals and visiting expatriates. Contributions from numerous informants and two ethnologists participating in the celebrations made me realize that the majority of Krivi Put's inhabitants consider socializing and entertainment to be among the most important elements of the Day of Our Lady of Snow. A significant detail was that during the celebrations, local residents would refer to their local pub as 'the little chapel'. However, apart from being the focal point for identity formation and the social life of the community of Krivi Put, the Virgin Mary is strongly present in individual religiosity as a personal patron saint. According to my informants, people seek her help through personal prayers or vows in different life situations (marriage, birth, preservation of health), in connection with their own problems or problems suffered by their loved ones. Vows made to the Lady of Snow are performed on her Day and usually include walking around the altar three times whilst praying.⁷ However, some data (Kulišić and Vuković 2004:255) suggest that walking around the altar does not always have to be a performance of a vow, that sometimes it is just an expression of deep piety. Whilst walking around the altar, people will touch the left and right hand corner of the altar. Some people will cross themselves while touching the altar with their palm or, while walking around the altar, will carry a Rosary or a candle in their hands, which they will light in front of the statue of the Virgin Mary situated to the left of the altar (ibid.). Some of them will

also touch or kiss the statue. Expressions of gratitude to the Virgin Mary for help received are usually offered in money. People will also light candles, give away flowers or pay for Mass. Sometimes people will put personal valuables in the altar basket, such as jewelry and written notes. The pilgrimage itself sometimes seems to be an expression of gratitude for prayers answered. According to an informant from Krivi Put, women will sometimes bring an altar cover or a carpet. The villagers of Krivi Put are not familiar with votive offerings and the village priest confirmed that he had never found any in the church. Prayers or expressions of gratitude to Our Lady of Snow are also written at the back of her altar.

For the people of Krivi Put a special part of the celebrations is the procession around the church with the statue of Our Lady of Snow, before Mass commences. During the formation of the procession and its exit from the church many people approach the central aisle, through which the procession passes, in order to touch the statue. It was also noted that during this procession with the statue of Our Lady of Snow some female worshippers were touching the back apse of the church with their hands. When asked about this practice, the informants said that by doing so the women would be strengthening their prayers (Kulišić and Vuković 2004:256).

The strong presence of Our Lady of Snow in the practices of personal religiosity (and in the narratives about personal religiosity) shows that her existence and meanings are deeply integrated into this community. Thus her influence lowers the popularity of other saints as personal patrons among the people of Krivi Put. The same can be said of other researched localities in Croatia, especially those situated close to

major pilgrimage sites dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

I will here mention another interesting detail linked to the religiosity of the people of Krivi Put directed to the Virgin Mary. Close by the local church consecrated to Our Lady of Snow, in the vicinity of Krivi Put, there is a pilgrimage site dedicated to Our Lady of Krasno⁸, which also plays an important role in the religiosity of the people of Krivi Put. As I have already mentioned, the people of Krivi Put primarily worship their local patron saint, Our Lady of Snow, and she is commonly present in their personal pieties, as a personal patron and during difficult times. However, according to some of my informants, if affected by serious disease, they will also address Our Lady of Krasno and perform their vows in the church at Krasno. The Virgin Mary is therefore, in the religiosity of some people from Krivi Put, divided in her role as patron into two separate characters, that of Our Lady of Snow and Our Lady of Krasno, each of whom has a dedicated place of 'dwelling'. This attitude towards the Virgin Mary reflects some general characteristics of patron saint veneration and popular religiosity in general. Research conducted in Krivi Put, but also in Croatia generally as well as elsewhere (comp. Betteridge 1992:189) shows that sacred places have different roles ascribed to them in providing specific forms of mercy (which are often clearly determined with respect to that particular place). Certain holy places are considered to be more powerful than others, and hence we can talk about a hierarchy of places established by the people who live in their vicinity. Judging from popular belief, the hierarchy of places consecrated to a particular saint is linked to the powers ascribed to that particular saint. And since saints are common-

ly localized in popular religiosity (for example: 'Let's visit the Holy Mother in the City', Konavle – Southern Croatia, 2007; 'They are going to Krasno to visit the Mother of God', Krasno – Northern Velebit, 2005), i.e. they are provided with an earthly address in the localities consecrated to them, these places have the same powers attributed to them as the saint who 'lives' there.

I will discuss the worshipping of personal saints in more detail later and will now return to the question of veneration on community level. I have tried to demonstrate that the term 'patron saint' is primarily used to refer to the titular saint of the local church or altar or to the celebration of his/her Day. Since devoted religious participation instigated by the belief in the patron role of saints is not crucial, we can hardly talk about *belief* in patron saints. The issues of communal identity and a village social life in which patron saints play a significant role in an ethnological context should not be overlooked, but when talking about research on popular religiosity, we should clearly distinguish between the *knowledge of* patron saints and the *belief in* patron saints. In order to distinguish between the two, I made use of a specific research context – the context of calendar customs. This provides a more coherent account of the patron saints who, as protectors, are actively present in the religiosity of a certain community, of the interrelations involved, and of the importance that the community ascribes to them in everyday life. Even though the context of calendar customs places emphasis on the saints' Days rather than on their patron roles, it gives us better insight into the relevant non-institutional activities that occur on these Days, and the accompanying beliefs. The most prominent are the popular bless-

ings, processions, predictions of the future, prohibitions, etc. Furthermore, in this context the emphasis is placed on emotional reality, which is an important component of popular religiosity. Moreover, many scholars have pointed to the possible drawbacks of looking at the position of patron saints in the piety of a given community solely on the basis of the church's titular saint or the artistic representations of saints found inside the churches. As I will show by example, there is no artistic representation in the local church of the majority of patron saints who are present in community religiosity, and neither are they the titular saint of the local church or chapel. The context of calendar customs proved to be extremely useful in proving this argument.

While studying the religiosity of the community of Krivi Put, the context of calendar customs proved useful for pointing to the worship of other patron saints, besides the Virgin Mary, to the numerous roles and occasions in which they are present as well as to the diversity of forms through which this worship is expressed.

By pinpointing the Days of the most important saints and looking at the practices and beliefs associated with these Days and saints, it was established that at least seven other patron saints are present in the religiosity of the people of Krivi Put: St. Joseph, St. George, St. Mark, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Elias, St. Nicholas and St. Lucia. Their role in the religiosity and the lives of the people of Krivi Put are directed towards obtaining economic benefits.

The common feature of all the rituals performed by the people of Krivi Put on the Days of the above-mentioned saints, is that they are non-institutional. They are performed individually in people's homes. There are variations in the details of performance, but the ideas behind them are

the same and the accompanying beliefs and equipment are closely related. Sometimes the patron role of the saint is not verbalized, but the practices performed on his/her Day place him/her in a direct relationship with that specific area of human existence.

For example, not all the people of Krivi Put will directly mention St. George as the patron saint of cattle, but cattle will be included in celebrations of his Day. Also, many inhabitants of Krivi Put consider him to be the patron saint of the fields. On St. George's Day the people of Krivi Put will use the blessed objects (the branch blessed in the church on Palm Sunday or the holy water blessed on Epiphany) to bless cattle and the stables. The blessing includes an improvised prayer or invocation for the health of cattle followed by hitting the cattle with the blessed branches and sprinkling the stable with the holy water or, alternatively, by sprinkling the cattle with the holy water and lighting the blessed branches so that their smoke fill up the stables. In addition, on the Day of St. George the people of Krivi Put will try to predict their future economic success by observing nature. It is believed that if 'St. George arrived on a green horse' the following year would be fertile, and 'if he arrived on a black horse' the year would be barren and bad. As my informants explained, on the Day of St. George they would look to the woods to see if the trees were in leaf.

The belief in patron saints can also be expressed by respecting a ban on certain activities and jobs on the Days of specific saints. In the village of Krivi Put it is forbidden to stay in the forest on St. Joseph's Day (the patron of the forest); plowing with one's own cattle is banned on St. George's Day; it is forbidden to lie on the ground on St. Mark's Day (the patron of

crops); and stashing hay is banned on St. Elias's Day (the lightning-wielder). On the Day of St. Lucia (the patron of sight) it is forbidden to work with needles, and for some people fasting to promote healthy eyes is obligatory.

According to the data gathered in the village of Krivi Put, but also from other localities in Croatia, the characteristics of specific beliefs in patron saints can be divided into two basic groups – the first group includes traces of pre-Christian beliefs linked to natural events which have gained a Christian coating, the second group includes beliefs that primarily stem from the Christian creed, but which are re-interpreted by people according to their needs. Irrespective of the type of belief, people consider them all to be Christian, notwithstanding their non-Christian elements.

The first group includes the beliefs and accompanying practices of the people of Krivi Put linked to St. George. Detailed studies of the mythical background to certain customs and beliefs associated with St. George point to a pre-Christian origin (comp. Belaj, V. 1998). According to these studies, the mythical George (the god of vegetation) was the son of the god Perun (the god of Heaven, in Proto-Slavic mythology the Thunder God), who was stolen by the accomplices of the god Veles (the god of the Underworld, the World Snake), and who returned to the earth as the personification of the Day (his return occurring on the Day of St. George on April 23), bringing fertility (ibid. 168-206, 349). The popular practices and beliefs linked to St. George, traces of which (still) exist in the village of Krivi Put, indicate a pre-Christian origin. However, during the centuries of Christianity St. George has become the main character associated with

these practices and beliefs. Moreover, it appears that the mere mentioning of the name of a Christian saint in the context of practices and beliefs that exist because 'that's how it has always been', is sufficient 'justification' for the people of Krivi Put to interpret their actions and beliefs as Christian.

The same can be said of St. Elias who, according to the people of Krivi Put, is the lord of thunder. According to mythological studies, St. Elias can appear in Christian versions of the Proto-Slavic story of the pagan Thunder God: Perun kills (hurts) Veles (the snake) with a thunderbolt.⁹ 'Different characters may participate in the story, using different equipment or even undertaking different actions, but the story remains the same. It is completely irrelevant whether Perun killed the Snake or St. Elias killed the Devil. The difference is only found on the level in which the story becomes realized' (Belaj, V. 1998:70). In the stories about St. Elias, there is 'a fragment of a myth which has gained a Christian cover over the long centuries' (ibid. 69). Perun and Veles were 'both dangerous to men (...). Contrary to some expectations, there are no indications that the Proto-Slavs had a dualistic concept of these gods: the god of good and the god of evil' (ibid. 87). In the above mentioned belief from Krivi Put we cannot find the whole structure which could link it to the mythical story – first of all, we miss the opponent. However, St. Elias is presented as a vengeful and murderous saint who makes use of thunder: 'When he strikes, everything goes away' / 'He is a club, not to be messed with' / 'God save us all, Elias will kill us all!'. In Krivi Put his Day is marked by prohibitions caused by the imminent danger of thunder which, according to the belief, is Elias's weapon. He is a vengeful

saint, and in his merciless anger he uses his weapon, the thunderbolt, and may even kill a man with it. While with other saints we talk primarily about their role as patrons, their kindness and their willingness to help in times of need, the stories about St. Elias primarily emphasize his power. Besides, his main characteristics, being vengeful and dangerous, point to the conclusion that he has probably absorbed another divinity from the past, from a different religious system, in which he was not opposed to other kind gods, but was primarily imagined as mighty powerful.

In the second group of beliefs (re-interpreted Christian beliefs), selected from those found in the village of Krivi Put, I have included the belief in St. Anthony of Padua, who is described, together with St. George, as the patron of cattle. According to the data I obtained from my informants, neither the known legends about St. Anthony of Padua, nor any story directly linked to him, could explain his popularity as a patron of cattle or his link with cattle in general. However, I found the story of St. Anthony the Abbot, whose day is celebrated on January 17, to be helpful. In popular belief in many Croatian regions he is accepted as the patron of cattle. Legends about St. Anthony the Abbot, and especially his most frequent artistic representation which shows him carrying a pig (because of which he is also commonly called Anthony of Pigs), have probably contributed to the fact that he is proclaimed the patron of cattle in popular religiosity. According to generally known differentiations of saints according to their roles, the role of shepherd is ascribed to St. Anthony the Abbot. However, when talking about the popularity of saints in Croatian popular religiosity, hardly any saint can measure up to St. Anthony of Padua. St. Anthony of Padua, 'saint of the whole world', is the most

popular among Croatian worshippers, and the ‘importance of his cult in Croatian popular religiosity comes right after the cult of Mary, and in some regions maybe even ahead of it’ (Šagi 1996:114). ‘St. Anthony [of Padua] is the most typical model of a patron saint used for all human needs’ (ibid. 121). Therefore it seems logical that in some regions the role of the patron of cattle have transferred from St. Anthony the Abbot to his more popular namesake St. Anthony of Padua, who in Croatian popular belief is a very ‘versatile’ saint anyway. Data from various Croatian regions, but also from outside Croatia (for example Slovenia, Kuret 1989:377-378; and from Spain, Behar 1990:99-102), point to that conclusion. This transfer could result in the blending of the two saints of St. Anthony into one, whose Day is then celebrated twice a year (for example in the region of Northern Littoral, Jardas 1957:38-39, 69) or in the complete omission of St. Anthony the Abbot from religiosity, in which case St. Anthony of Padua completely assumes the role of the patron of cattle, as is the case in Krivi Put and the neighboring village of Krasno.

To this group of reinterpreted Christian beliefs we could add the well known belief in St. Nicholas as the gift-giver and the patron of children. This role was ascribed to him by late Medieval Christian legends.¹⁰ The belief in St. Nicholas is accompanied by the placing of gifts into children’s boots which are deliberately put on the window sill on the Day of St. Nicholas. This is a common example of popular religiosity throughout Croatia, without any local variants or deviations.

However, as I mentioned earlier, knowledge of the origin of a certain belief or its associated practices does not imply that we are able to uncover their recent

meaning – no matter what type of belief we discuss, people interpret them as Christian, regardless of their non-Christian elements. For example, to them, practices involving cattle on the Day of St. George are simply blessings performed on a Christian holiday involving branches that have been blessed in the church and with holy water. Generally, the religiosities we are discussing here show a significant degree of intertwining of Christian and non-Christian elements: people mark the Days of Christian saints, but celebrate them independently from the Church. Here I refer to the abundant use of blessed branches and holy water in popular blessings, as well as to the notion that Christian saints influence changes in nature and our earthly needs, sometimes so that certain everyday jobs may be banned. The belief in patron saints generally, as well as the practices and prohibitions associated with the saints’ days, are actually directed towards the solving of earthly problems, whereas the problems of salvation are not expressed at all. And even though, judging from some community prayers, the saints are given the role of mediators in communication with God, it seems that faith stops at their level.

It is important to mention that changes in the way of life also influence the worshipping of saints. For example, when people stopped raising cattle, there was no need for a saint who would help them with their herd, in the words of my informants from Krivi Put. However, as one of my informants emphasized, while her need for St. Anthony of Padua in his role as the patron of cattle is gone, her other needs for his help remain. She has therefore ascribed other roles to him, and so invoked him while giving birth.

I consider it important to point to some other features of beliefs in patron

saints. These beliefs are usually analyzed on the basis of artistic representations of saints in churches, or on the basis of the titular saints of churches and altars. This is an understandable approach for, for example, art historians. However, research on the presence of patron saints in religiosity linked to calendar customs in the village of Krivi Put and other locations, points to the possible drawbacks of such an approach. For example, the villagers of Krivi Put state that the closest church of St. Elias is in the village of Sinac (50 km away) and the closest church consecrated to St. George is in the town of Senj (15 km away), but the religiosity they describe towards these two saints has never been practiced in these churches. In the church in Krivi Put there are paintings of Our Lady of Snow and St. Anthony of Padua and the expressions of religiosity towards these images are very vivid; in the same church there is a painting of St. Theresa, but I saw no signs of worship directed to this saint. We should also take into account the possibility that a statue or a painting in a church does not necessarily play a continual part in religiosity. Contrary to this finding, there are no material representations of St. Joseph, St. Mark, St. Elias, St. Nicholas and St. Lucia in the church of Krivi Put and yet these saints play an extremely important part in the villagers' religiosity. These facts suggest that the worshippers themselves constitute the key source of understanding with respect to their religiosity.

Personal patron saints

While analyzing the form of religiosity that the people of Krivi Put express towards Our Lady of Snow, I came across the belief in personal patron saints and a set of associated practices. Here I will list some of the

characteristics of personal piety which in many ways differ from community religiosity. Even if personal religiosity has received a mention in cultural-anthropological writings, the topic has never received too much attention.¹¹ Accordingly, the nature of the bond between the worshipper and his/her personal patron saint, or the place and significance of a particular personal patron saint in a person's life, has not been the subject of much scholarly analysis, even if choosing a personal patron saint from the 'pantheon' of local saints according to Christian assertions is a common feature of rural Catholicism (Christian 1989:133).

Personal religiosity allows individuals to choose, from a range of local patron saints, the one saint who according to their personal values, he/she considers special, 'their own', i.e. a personal patron.¹² I found through my research (Belaj, M. 2006b) that several factors are important to the choice of saint and the formation of personal religiosity in general. Alongside the tradition of worshipping a particular saint in one's local community and worshipping one or more of these saints within one's family circle, miracles appeared to be especially important. When explaining their choice of a particular patron saint, my informants would commonly emphasize one or two occasions in life when, according to their belief, that particular patron had appeared or intervened ('I prayed to St. Anthony to give me happiness. And he gave me happiness, his namesake Ante', Krasno 2005; 'I prayed like this when I was young, I prayed for him to give me the boy I wanted, the boy I desired. I prayed only for that. Then it happened; it happened for real.' Ustrine, the Island of Cres, 2001; 'But the greatest coincidence, why I was so sure that I was given help, was St. Anthony. Because it happened on the Day of St.

Anthony, practically in front of his altar (...) I still remember it all and every year I perform a vow to St. Anthony, because I'm directly grateful to him. (...) Well, you might call it pure luck, but I believe that only 10% was down to luck and the other 90% I am sure was linked to a higher force', Zagreb – Čilipi, 2004). Actually, people recognize certain coincidences as 'signs' and proclaim certain events to be miraculous. Moreover, these miraculous events serve not only as confirmation of the 'right' choice of saint, but also as 'strengtheners' of religiosity. Croatian theologian, Vjekoslav Bajsić claims:

Worshipping of saints includes also the accompanying propaganda and therefore describing certain extraordinary events or miracles is quite frequent in emphasizing the power of a saint; hence through the miracle or miraculous event ascribed to the saint we can measure – or at last estimate – his/her transcendental, supernatural features (Bajsić 1974:53).

And while Bajsić claims that 'the miracle itself does not contribute greatly to the revelation itself and is therefore not the source of faith' (Bajsić 1974:54), Croatian ethnologist Žarko Španiček emphasizes that miracles are not the instruments of Christianization, i.e. cannot serve to promote the practices of saints' worship if they do not fulfill both real and symbolic needs and gain direct benefit. The attitude of the official Church towards miracles is highly ambivalent – the Church is suspicious towards miracles in the context of folklore and is wary of possible fake miracles, while at the same time they remain affirmative towards the idea that miracles are signs and confirmations of holiness (Španiček 2002:217).

The personal patron saint is actively present in the life of a worshipper. He/she is considered to be a lifelong companion and guardian. People communicate with their personal patron saint in times of need, sometimes on a daily basis, but most often in connection with matters of health, their own or the members of their family, or in order to ensure their economic well-being, a good marriage or for some other life needs.

The most frequent form of communication with a personal patron saint is the vow. W. A. Christian claims that a vow is an instrumental prayer which specifies what the person will do in case of a positive outcome and lists a number of ways a vow is performed (comp. Christian 1989:119-121). He sees the vow as an observable and concrete physical act. I would however like to add that, according to my research data, a vow can simply be an expression of gratitude towards the saint for mercy received (which can be ascribed to that saint in popular belief and does not have to be asked for in advance), and that it may include a period of spiritual preparation before the act itself as well as a period of contemplation in its aftermath. Furthermore, the act itself frequently involves a degree of personal modification in the ways in which it is performed, compared to communal practices, such as the sacrifice of that part of everyday life which the person considers to be an important characteristic of his/her personality. The form of the personal vow need not be constant – it can be changed, for example, as a person grows older, it can be modified to suit the place in which it is being fulfilled and sometimes, in emergencies, another person can perform the vow in the worshipper's stead (comp. Belaj, M. 2006b:96-100).

Generally speaking, according to popular belief personal patron saints can help in

various life situations, not only in those prescribed by the common knowledge of the patron roles of respective saints. Therefore, at least when we are talking about personal religiosity, we can discard the acknowledged differentiation of saints according to their roles, i.e. we can claim that the specialization of saints does not exist.

Perspectives

While Catholics and Orthodox Christians believe in saints, Protestants do not. However, it is well known that during the spread of Christianity, many elements of pre-Christian religiosity were integrated into Christianity and given Christian interpretations. Furthermore, during the long history of Christianity and even today, popular religiosity adopted many non-Christian elements. Since the phenomenon we are discussing here, the worshipping of patron saints, includes both pre-Christian and non-Christian elements of the later period, we should allow for the possibility of its development in regions where we would otherwise not expect it.

During my research into the belief in patron saints, the question arose about the significance of sacred places and pilgrimages, since they reflect the need for continuous protection being provided by the saints and the need for them to remain close at hand in times of need. In this context, the processes of consecrating certain places seem extremely interesting, especially when these places have not been officially institutionalized. Some of these places will never be officially consecrated due to their very nature – instead, their consecration takes place in uninhibited popular interpretations which, by their meaning, belong to the realm of religion, and by their

power and characteristics transform the locality into a real pilgrimage site. Special practices, and the notions of the people themselves, can be so powerful that they bring about a complete reversal of the meaning of a certain place which otherwise, in its provenance, was conceived of as completely non-religious, and even anti-religious, as I found while studying the continued celebrations of the Day of Youth, the birthday of former communist leader Josip Broz Tito, in the village of Kumrovec (Belaj, M. 2006a).¹³ The processes and mechanisms of consecration (and de-consecration) of certain places are the next areas of study for Croatian ethnology. With this conceptual framework, we have begun the systematic research of the town of Međugorje (Bosnia and Herzegovina), a place which is considered by Catholics, as well as members of other churches, to be one of the most attractive and powerful European pilgrimage sites, regardless of the fact that the official Church is still reserved when it comes to the ‘phenomenon of Međugorje’. Since 1981, when the development of Međugorje as a pilgrimage center began, until today, the place has been visited by more than 20 million people, and what has been inscribed into this place surpasses the questions of religion and religiosity.

Notes

1. Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion in Croatia. (According to the 2001 census, 87.83% of Croats were Roman Catholics; Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske, <http://www.dzs.hr/>, 5/11/2007).
2. In the following, ‘Church’ stands for the Roman Catholic Church, unless otherwise stated.
3. I use the term ‘religion’ instead of ‘religiosity’ here, since I am quoting Ellen Badone.
4. When speaking about the history of the Church in general, we must keep in mind its unity before the Schism in 1054 and the unity of the Western

- Church before the separation of the Evangelical Church in the 16th century.
5. In Catholic and Orthodox Religion we can distinguish between the cult of God (latria), the cult of the Mother of God (hyperdulia) and the cult directed towards saints and angels (dulia). In the Protestant Church, the veneration of saints is rejected as something which is not based on the Gospel.
 6. The villagers of Krivi Put frequently identify themselves in opposition to the townspeople of the neighboring town of Senj, the closest urban centre. Many inhabitants of Krivi Put have moved to Senj in the past. The villagers of Krivi Put belong to the branch of the ethnic group of Coastal Bunjevci and are perceived by the people of Senj as the 'rural Others'.
 7. Until some thirty years ago, people would walk to the church on foot, sometimes even barefoot as part of the vow. Today only a few come on foot, and nobody comes barefoot.
 8. According to the number of pilgrims who visit Krasno each year, it is the fourth largest pilgrimage site in Croatia.
 9. The Thunder God (Perun) represents the principle of Order (Cosmos), and the Mythical Snake (Veles) represents Disorder (Chaos). When the Snake, which belongs to the bottom of the water, climbs the mountain (the ordered world of the Thunder God), conflict arises between the two of them – the Snake introduces disorder to the world of the Thunder God and the Thunder God, in order to restore Order, defeats the Snake and returns it to the bottom (Belaj, V. 1998:67-88).
 10. There are some legends on the life of St. Nicholas that support this belief, for example, that he resurrected a group of murdered school children who had been put to salt by a mean inn-keeper; that he brought back to life a child burnt on the hearth; that he secured a dowry for the poor girls whose father wanted to send them to a brothel so they could earn their dowry, by throwing a bag of money into their room at night.
 11. Susan Tax Freeman draws attention to what is happening inside the religious person, privately, independent of periodic collective festivals (Tax Freeman 1978:120). Stanley Brandes also thinks that the job of an anthropologist is to pay more attention to private forms of religious expression and that by ignoring personal religiosity as an object of research, we could miss out from our analytic framework all those who refuse to participate in church-sponsored events, since that brands them as irreligious (Brandes 1990:194). Croatian ethnologist, Žarko Španiček, in his article on popular saints and prophets claims that various forms of popular beliefs and religiosity are materialized in the personal aspect of an informant's religiosity which makes it the most interesting aspect (Španiček 2002:16).
 12. Personal patron saints should not be confused with the idea of the Guardian Angel, which is promoted by the Church. A Guardian Angel is simply given to a particular person, while the patron saint is chosen by the individual, under the framework of his/her cultural context.
 13. The results of systematic research on this celebration will be published in the English language edition of the book *Tito Revisited. Celebrating the Day of Youth in Kumrovec*.

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