

Katarina Bušić. Croatian Diaspora Folk Clothing Collection.
Zagreb: Ethnographic Museum, 2019, p. 348

Catalogue Review

A look at the book and the sense of touch that we get when we take it in our hands from the beginning make a first impression – an impression that can be more or less pleasant for us. This is certainly a book – a bilingual, Croatian-English monograph on the Croatian diaspora folk clothing collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb – which from the very first moment gives a feeling of comfort and warmth. The golden imprint of optimally selected letters for the cover and its carefully arranged silk with printed patterns (locally referred to as *drukani*), weaving and materials with sequins (locally referred to as *šljoke*), like the tidiest wardrobe full of fabrics, invite to the pleasure of turning over the pages, reading and looking through and turning over these fabrics in discovering rich patterns. This is the sixth catalogue of the Ethnographic Museum collections.

The concepts of diaspora and migration, in general, need to be briefly addressed. Since the medieval migration of Croatian merchants and miners from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Kosovo in the 13th century, where they have preserved their identity and religion to this day and then from the early modern period with the Ottoman invasion in the 15th century, a large number of emigration waves has been recorded from Croatian territories to other, safer regions – Italy, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, Bačka (in Vojvodina, Serbia). It needs to be highlighted that at that time it was one state, the Habsburg Monarchy and subsequently the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and different migrations were also motivated and encouraged by the authorities at the time because defence and economic interests have always been strategically important. These emigrated Croatian communities are normally referred to as the old Croatian diaspora. They carried their culture with them and embraced the culture of the communities with which they met and lived, hence shaping the specific culture of a particular, so-called, diasporic branch.

From the perspective of ethnology and folklore today we can very clearly monitor how important it is for the members of these communities to come to the native country, for example, to the International Folklore Festival in Zagreb. To appear in their folk clothing, perform songs and dances and present customs that may still be preserved only on stage to this day, but at the symbolic level, they are unusually important for this community. In doing so, they express their belonging, national and religious feelings that have been passed down in symbiosis, as we see it, for centuries. I would also like to highlight an exhibition that we could see at the Ethnographic Museum four years ago to mark the 50th anniversary of the International Folklore Festival, staged upon the incentive of Zorica Vitez. In the exhibition catalogue “Folklore Festivals and Symbols of Identity”, in her extensive text about folk clothing in cultural practices of

the 19th and 20th century from the usable to the symbolic, through a large number of photographic and documentary materials, Katarina Bušić stated all that the clothing can communicate and show – the types of messages that it can convey. Clothing is an unusually important expression of pride because it is kept, renovated and recreated in families. If we also recall those forced, recent migrations, caused by the war, we heard many stories about how the refugees saved photos and clothing that they could take with them as the most valuable possessions from their homes. And when they had to leave with nothing, it was primarily folk clothing that was sewn and embroidered by many women refugees in search of mental peace. It was what they knew best and what they could do to help themselves and their families and even the wider community. The colleague Josip Forjan in the Department for Preservation, Reconstruction and Lending of Traditional Costumes helped them greatly and together they achieved truly enviable results.

In the chapter on the history of collecting objects in the Collection, it is clearly evident that in the beginning, from the end of the 19th century, these were individual actions of Croatian intellectuals, professors, clergymen, priests, wealthy families – reflecting social reality and state-of-affairs – from the idea of establishing nation-states and building a national identity. Individuals were aware of their value, so they collected them and donated them to the Museum Collection.

Sources and references have been meticulously presented, from which the context of the development of national consciousness and the need to symbolically present the values of national culture have been carefully presented, which is in line with socio-economic and historical changes to the latest research. This idea has been additionally developed in the chapter on the appearance, value and presentation of folk clothing in which this phenomenon has been observed from the last quarter of the 19th century to date and the conclusion is reached that clothing is determined not only by its shape and material, typological and stylistic features, but above all by the context of use in the community culture and the complex system of added meanings that varies over time. The author points out that from the analysis of the use and the meaning of clothing, one can also identify the current attitude towards the traditional culture in the specific period, as well as the prevailing attitude and influence of the ethnological profession upon specific cultural phenomena, i.e. that clothing should be interpreted and understood against the backdrop of a complex and dynamic system of its communication functions in the community within various past and contemporary cultural practices.

A very detailed description of the Collection ensues which includes the folk clothing of the Moravian Croats in the Czech Republic, the Burgenland Croats in Austria, the Podravina Croats in Hungary, the *Šokci* Croats from Reçaş and Krashovani Croats – Karaševci (Caraçova) in Romania, the *Šokci* Croats in Vojvodina and Hungary, the Bačka Croats Bunjevci in Vojvodina, as well as the Latvian Croats in Kosovo.

The author concludes very interestingly that recent selfless donations show how much Croats outside their homeland still care about the testimonies of their material culture being kept in the native land and that, like all the included materials since the

late 18th century, they have permanently obliged the national Ethnographic Museum institution and its employees to research curiosity and dedicated professional and scientific work on various topics. From page 144 onwards a catalogue review of each item in the collection has been provided, with dating, material description and object dimensions, photography and inventory number. At the end there is a list of sources and references, information on photographs, acknowledgements and a list of abbreviations. The catalogue has a total of 348 pages.

And to return to the pleasures that a book, the collection catalogue, can offer. In collaborative synergy, encouraged by the collection manager and based on joint reflections, one can really enjoy top-notch visual and photographic solutions, which have been made possible by modern printing. In order to get this impression of excellence from the aspect of design, by Nikolina Jelavić-Mitrović, first of all it was necessary to attentively reflect about how to present the existing material so that the whole could be seen, but in such a manner that one could at least partially feel the emotion of creating details in printed form. In order to give the impression of pleasure from the aspect of photography and design, first many individuals, primarily Croatian women in the diaspora, had to come up with all this and create it with their own hands, using their sense of beauty, in order to be able to follow it all documentarily as part of a museum collection, stored, documented, well-processed and with such beautiful cover design.

Speaking of pleasures and emotions, finally it needs to be stated that they can be found in any work. Both good and bad. However, when such an edition sees the light of day, we must be aware that the collection curator has poured an immense amount of her love into each small vignette of the presented gold embroidery with bird symbol, a sketch of the cut of some clothing item, an old photo that was found or a new one and a wide range of details with which different embroideries or craftsmanship can be compared. Aware that she is striving to show details, while simultaneously having to include all the materials that she has, it was certainly not easy to make such a good choice, with high aesthetic criteria. Knowing the collection curator and the author of the catalogue Katarina Bušić, I can really calmly state that she is a very conscientious person who truly enjoys her work and approaches it with true commitment. It is also difficult to evoke the joy that she once expressed and which sparked from her eyes when she heard the news that she received folk clothing from Karaševo (Caraçova) as a gift to the Collection – a copy they do not yet have in the Museum and then a few days after that she shouted: "Imagine, we have got something else, because you know, this is our colleague who is now studying, so she is aware of these values..."

On the occasion of the centennial celebration of the activity of the Ethnographic Museum, this is an extremely valuable contribution both to the celebration and tradition of the Museum as an institution that from the very beginning collected objects that are also included in this Collection. The catalogue is a closed book, but the collection is always open for further extensions and new objects. A new, extended edition of such a beautiful and valuable catalogue, one of many, is highly desirable.

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