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The Bizovac Culture and Art Society

The Bizovac Culture and Art Society, which continues the tradition of its parent society called Seljačka sloga founded in 1968, today cherishes the rich heritage of the traditional arts and customs of its native region. Those who love the authentic richness of Bizovac's traditional arts have pulled remarkable and original costumes out of their old-fashioned wardrobes, begun to sing already forgotten songs and danced the forgotten wheel dances to the sound of the tambura. With their numerous appearances at concerts, traditional arts reviews and festivals, the ensemble has made the name of Bizovac known both in Croatia and the world. In addition to the authentic traditions of Bizovac, the Bizovac Culture and Art Society proudly presents the customs and traditions of other parts of Croatia in its broad programme.

Geographical position

Bizovac is situated 18 km west of Osijek, and 9 km south of Valpovo at the road and railway traffic direction Zagreb-Našice-Osijek, and it is connected to the international traffic directions toward Central Europe and inter-regional traffic directions toward the western part of Croatia, through the neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina further toward the Adriatic and the east.

Bizovac through history

The discovery of a hoard of 332 well-preserved usable objects from the Middle Bronze Age proves that there were people who lived here during the prehistoric time. It was plowed by one farmer from Bizovac on the field of Lepodrevci in 1885. Among the excavations there are bronze-sickles, wedge-shaped axes, lances, jewellery, tools and so on.

According to the written documents, in 1333 Bizovac and Ladimirevci had the common church dedicated to St. Kuzma and St. Damjan in Ladimirevci. The medieval town name was Byezafalva in the manorial estate of Karaševo and it was owned by the Chivalry St. Ivan of Jerusalem. The register of Požega sandak (sandak is a word of Turkish origin, means "region") from 1579 bears out that the village of Bisofzy had 8 houses. It belonged to Kadiluk (a word of Turkish origin, means "county") Osijek and Nahija (a word of Turkish origin, means "town district") Karas under the rule of Turks. From 1721 Bizovac belonged to Valpovo manor with 23 households. In one old church register it is recorded that Bizovac settlement, where it is today, was established in the period between 1752 and 1755 by the means of forced resettling from the surrounding farms, which were located on the same fields of today's Bizovac territory. In the beginning of the year 1737 according to the Bizovac census here were the following native surnames and they have continued in existence: Bošnjak, Domanovac, Erić, Grlica, Glavaš, Glavašić, Kolarčić, Mihaljević, Škarić, Sršić, Sudar and Vuković.

The parish church of St. Matthew, apostle and evangelist, was built in 1802 in a modest baroque-classical manner. The parish fete is celebrated on 21st September. In the centre of Bizovac there is a castle of the Valpovo count's family Normann-Prandau, which was built in the first half of the 19th century for the needs of clerks and manor government. After the baroness Marijana Prandau married the count Konstantin Norman, the castle was redecorated for the residence and it is almost the same today. The royal post-office was opened in 1809, the first mill was built in 1890 and the second one in 1910. The school in Bizovac was established in 1849. The football club and the fire department have been active since 1926 and the Peasant unity branch was established in 1935. For almost four decades the folklore group has been active in the village, and it has cherished the original traditional heritage of Bizovac region, and with unique recognizable and specifically woman's folk costume presents itself around Croatia and beyond. It is worth mentioning that the following people were born in Bizovac: Antun Ullrich – gallery operator, Bratoljub Klaić – linguist, Ivo Pavlič – mathematician and Stjepan Glavaš – chemist. Bizovac has become even more attractive to live in, due to its proximity to the town of Osijek, excellent traffic connection, developed manual trade, fertile and cultivatable soil, it's shops and tourist potentials, and especially after the discovery of therapeutic water.

Folk costume of Bizovac

The festive female folk costume of the Bizovac type is so characteristic that it can be easily recognized at first sight. Due to its specific features, we may consider it as a special type of the folk costume worn in the eastern Croatian region of Slavonia. Along with Bizovac, it is also characteristic of the neighbouring villages of Brodanci, Habjanovci and Ladimirevci. The traditional attire of Bizovac stands out for several traits. Its starched linen petticoats and the skirt are distinctive, since they are visibly shorter than the costumes of other Slavonian areas and reach right under one's knees. They cover the lower part of the body in several layers, which makes the clothes very wide. A prominent mark of this attire is perforated whitework embroidery called šlingoč. Although this technique of textile decorating is known in a wider space of lowland Croatia, it is extremely common on festive skirts and pinafores of the Bizovac area. The following specific trait of the female attire is the still and richly folded collar called reklja, which in combination with hooped skirts resembling the crinoline reminds us of the late-18th-century French feudal fashion. The recognizable appearance of this clothing is complemented with colourful woollen socks and velour sandals embroidered with golden wiring. Girls distinguished themselves from married women by their hairstyle and headgear. The headgear characteristic of girls included the trimming and straightening of the hair that falls over the forehead, two thick braids formed at the back of the head and a wreath worn on top of the head, made of artificial flowers in the shape of a diadem. Married women covered their heads with a kerchief (šamija), folded in a special way so that it formed a kind of cap. A kerchief that was called bleđašica and folded so that it formed a ribbon was frequently worn around the forehead. A sort of silk blouse with wide sleeves named oplećak, string tightened around the wrists, came in combination with this wearing apparel. While the clothes covering the lower part of the body (petticoats, the skirt and the pinafore) was made of the ready-made cotton weave fabric called šifon, the silk oplećak was home produced, made of mixed cotton and silk threads, in the basic colour of white or yellow. Flower ornaments consisting of several longitudinal stripes are applied to the oplećak sleeves, created by the decorative weaving technique of plucking (ubiranje). Over their shoulders women used to wear large kerchiefs with long fringes, folded in a triangle shape. Rows of gold coins (dukati) and a long multiply bent necklace made of fragile glass beads adorned the chest.

The described festive female costume is one of several diverse types of traditional female attire worn in Bizovac and neighbouring villages from the beginning of the 20th century until the World War II, when drastic abandoning of folk costume occurred, and industrial material and town dress were accepted instead. The male folk costume hardly had any local trait, but rather merged into the general inventory of the Slavonian folk costume. It was abandoned as early as right after the World War I. Still, in parallel with the weakening and vanishing of its practical function, the symbolic meaning of the folk costume from Bizovac intensified. The clothes for use have been gradually transformed into a part of cultural heritage of this Slavonian area. The process had started even before the World War II and reached its peak in the continual period from the 1960s until today. Nowadays it is gladly worn as a most prominent cultural trait of the area of Bizovac.

As the clothes for work that has turned into a folk costume, the costume of Bizovac does not correspond completely to any of these categories, although it unites features of both of them. As the attire for work, this costume still lives on, dressed on festive occasions and during folklore performances. It has been changed and enriched in the process, it abandons the previous patterns of clothing and introduces new ones, while it's carriers show full awareness of cultural significance of their own traditional attire.