

# CROATIAN SACRED WATERS

## From Fairies and Healing Water in the Imaginarium to Contemporary Water/River Art

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This article broadly surveys the role of water in Croatian ethnic tradition. Beginning with pre-Christian perceptions of healing (*babas* or hags) and fairies associated with watery sites, the essay offers a summary of previous works on Croatian water lore. Moving into the present, this article considers water traditions of the Slavic folklore, how these have endured and been renegotiated over time and how they now find expression in contemporary water and river art.

Keywords: mythical water, fairy/healing water, water/river art, Croatian ethno-tradition

### An *aquatic* introduction

This essay considers multiple facets of Croatian water lore. The first part of this article<sup>1</sup> documents the sacral role of water in the Croatian ethno-tradition – as is the case, e.g., with *sniffing*, *stone babas* (Vince Pallua 1996), which is one of the evidential matrices of the dyadic Slavic goddess that figured both as a fairy and as a *baba* (a witch) (Marjanić 2003). The second part of the article features an overview of the manner in which the authors of the *Proceedings for Folk Life and Customs* of South Slavs (*Zbornik za narodni život i običaje*) wrote on water in monographs concerning individual sites, according to instructions of Antun Radić from his *Basis for Collecting and Studying the Holdings on Folklife* (*Osnova za sabiranje i proučavanje građe o narodnom životu*, 1897). A subsequent section deals with two contemporary examples of *aquatic* stories that originate from local oral lore. The first is the legend of Croatia's most famous well and fountain, the Manduševac Fountain in Zagreb. The second example is taken from the publicity around the mineral water Jamnica, Croatia's oldest mineral water, which also saw its industrial production in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The last segment of the article frames the three aforementioned segments on the role of water in the Croatian ethno-tradition with the contemporary visual practice of water/river art, which literally returns to its sources, as well local knowledge of water.

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## Mythical waters: fairy healing *topoi*

The German ethnologist and Slavic researcher Edmund Schneeweis affirmed that the cult of water has been noted in all Slavic nations, pointing out that the worship of water is further evident in annual festive traditions (at Christmas, New Year, Easter, St. George's Day, St. John's Eve) and in life customs (childbirth, weddings, and deaths). "The water in the week of a crescent moon is considered by Serbs to be especially therapeutic (*potent*)" (2005: 48, translated by Mirta Jurilj). Some South Slavic sacred water traditions are like those elsewhere in Europe that focus on holy wells, which may be dedicated to saints or held to have healing properties. For example, St. John's Spring (in the village of Grabovac near the small south-western Croatian municipality of Šestanovac) was deemed to have healing power for the eyes. People also washed their faces with it and covered themselves in mud from the site. Instead of aspirin, they treated aches and pains with this water.<sup>2</sup>

After the process of Christianization, the lustral and healing aspects of water is today perhaps remembered through pre-Christian legends and beliefs in *fairy* waters. Fairy water, i.e., water in which fairies bathed, possesses healing properties according to the South Slavic folklore *imaginarium*,<sup>3</sup> it restores sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and if a barren or widowed woman drinks it, she will become pregnant (*Srpski mitološki rječnik* 1970: 74). In regard to the category of space in the folklore *imaginarium*, fairies are particularly bound to water. It is believed that many springs and waters belong to fairies, which is testified by toponyms and hydronyms, e.g., Fairy Water (*Vilinska voda*, cf. *Slovenska mitologija: enciklopedijski rečnik* 2001: 80); Fairy Caves (*Vilinske jame*), a complex of several small caves above Breganica stream near Samobor; Fairy Cave (*Vilina špilja*), previously known as Fairy's Dwelling (*Vilin stan*), located above a spring source of the Ombla River in the region of Rijeka Dubrovačka; Fairy Spring (*Vilin izvor*); Fairy Dance (*Vilinsko kolo*); Woodland Fairies' Spring (*Samovilski studenac*, cf. Drndarski 2001: 88). *Fairy's Dwelling*, known now as Fairy Cave, was associated with a deity that remains unknown; however, Domagoj Perkić assumes that the veneration of this site, as well as of other water springs and caves, likely dates back to the religion of the ancient Illyrian era (2020: 12). Perhaps also deriving from more ancient beliefs, the presence of fairies was also believed to give healing power to certain springs in the Macedonian folk tradition (Filipova 2020: 241).

In the Karlovac area of Central Croatia, Lorković notes that on "Young Sunday" (the first Sunday after crescent moon), no *maiden* or bride draws water from a well too early in the morning, for fear of coming across a fairy (1863: 243). The aforementioned fairy legends were also recorded or, more precisely, literally translated by

<sup>2</sup> Many holy wells and sacred springs are thought to contain treasure; Ottoman treasure was thought to have been buried by St. John's Spring (Toldi 1994: 202–204).

<sup>3</sup> I use the term *imaginarium* according to Le Goff's titular syntagm *The Medieval Imagination* (1985). I use the syntagm *folklore imaginarij* in the context of folklore belief at the intersection of imagination and reality, as is the case, e.g., with the healing properties of certain springs being ascribed to their fairy origin, i.e., contact with fairy phenomena.

Marin Držić in *The Joke about Stanac* (*Novela od Stanca*, 1551), in which he describes the arrival of a masked party dressed as fairies, and one of them jokingly offers rejuvenating water to Stanac (Scene Six, *Novela od Stanca*).<sup>4</sup>

Following Friedrich Max Müller's interpretation of myth known as "solar mythology," the Croatian mythologist and philologist Natko Nodilo further notes how the motif of rejuvenating water permeates the myth of Iuturna, the goddess of springs and rivers, whose main healing spring is located near Numicia River, while her other name, Diuturna, also testifies of her healing properties, namely the immortality her water bestows (Nodilo 1981: 162). Furthermore, Nodilo notes that fairies mostly show themselves to the folk in June, on St. John's Eve when they dance on water, and should one encroach upon their dance, one would turn as young as a "molting dragon" (Nodilo 1981: 356).<sup>5</sup>

In the exceptional 2020 book, *In Search of Spring-Water: Images of Water in South Slavic Oral Lyric Poetry*, Ana Vukmanović identifies the different meanings of water in the ritual performance, the imagery and language of oral lyric poems, and in terms of the fertility, erotic, lustral and medicinal symbolism. She also documents the ways in which fairies appear in relation to water in the South Slavic area: a fairy is created from snow or comes to life by drinking dew, controls rain, lives near water, has the power to poison water (by bathing her children in it) or to purify springs, and to open or close springs; she is the guardian of the entrance to the other world, or rather the border between worlds, and charges a crossing toll or takes away reason so as to induce the building of a settlement on the water (Vukmanović 2020: 253). Residents of Zlarin (a small island off the Dalmatian coast) have a legend of fairies in which they are stated to have bathed in the water called Lokvica (Little Puddle), which is "a cistern on a hill, and the fairies dance there at night" (qtd. in Marks 1980: 261).

In 1846, the first Croatian folklorist to explicitly focus on fairy lore, Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski, developed a triadic division of fairies according to their dwellings: aerial, terrestrial and aquatic. He further divided the aquatic fairies into two subgroups. Those who live in the sea are called sea maidens or sea damsels (i.e., mermaids), and those who live by lakes, rivers and wells are called waterway fairies (see Marjanić 2012). He defined aquatic fairies as conditionally evil, since natural religions do not distinguish between good and evil deities. Specifically, fairies and all other deities of natural religions act ambivalently within the framework of cosmic activities. Kukuljević thus points out that aquatic fairies lure handsome young men into water so as to drown them and poison the water itself with a spell. They inflict trouble or death on those who muddy their lake or spring. Offended waters become "demonic" fairy water and become taboo for drinking or other uses. Water in which a fairy bathed her child can simultaneously become a sacred gateway to

<sup>4</sup> In the context of genre (this is a comedy, a carnival play, a rustic farce – *farsa rusticale*), Stanac, an old man, confides in the masked party (whom he believes to be fairies) that he has a twenty-year-old wife, who would "benefit" from him returning to her as a young man.

<sup>5</sup> Echoing the mytheme of the fairy dance and the fairy shoal.

another reality, the fairy world, as well as a poisonous site (see Vukmanović 2020: 85). Additionally, aquatic fairies (mermaids) in Dalmatia also cause tempests, windstorms, and hail, and can be seen jumping among the waves following a shipwreck (Kukuljević 1851/1846: 88–104). Alongside water fairies, there are also legends of water spirits. Some describe them as long-bearded men who live in the water and, if *given the opportunity*, can even pull humans underwater (Lang 1914: 139–140). Fairy creatures can cross between realms of existence. Ethnologist Mirjam Mencej has explored how frequently the mythic notions of water represent it as a dividing line between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Upon finding literary folklore, customs, and beliefs in support of this idea across the Slavic world, she argues that the notion could have been “part of a common Indo-European, or even more likely, pre-Indo-European heritage” (Mencej 1997: 178). With Christianization, the correlation of water with fairy phenomena was replaced with that of Christian female saints.<sup>6</sup>

### The “sniffing” *Babas* of stone

Water has an exceptional place in the sacral interpretation of landscapes and toponymic remains (e.g., the names of holy springs, rivers, and other water sources) that indicate their importance to pre-Christian Slavs (see Belaj 2009, 2014; Brgles 2014: 195). The veneration of wells and rivers in Croatia (and the larger Croatian ethnic territory) underwent changes and disruption with the ascendancy of Christianity, but the mythic matrix is still evident in Croatian local customs and beliefs. The Slavs viewed sites of specific geomorphology as spatial manifestations of their mythology.

In reconstructing the “old faith” of Serbs and Croats (1885–1890), Natko Nodilo stressed that the supreme Old Slavic goddess could figure in her dyadic aspect both as a fairy and as a “Baba” (i.e., a witch; the Croatian word *baba* means “old hag”) (cf. Marjanić 2003). Croatian sacral topography includes lore about stones as “*sniffing Babas*” (amorphous stone monoliths associated with fertility and fruitfulness, which are wet to the touch like a sniffing nose). Stone Babas are related to the element of water; a Baba is always found in the direct vicinity of water: near wells, fountains, watering holes and streams (Vince Pallua 1996). In some instances, a Baba’s epithet is “sniffing” or “runny,” whereas other sites it is a constant physical wetness that is deemed a prerequisite for fertility.

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<sup>6</sup> When analysing the traditional songs of Medimurje, Podravina and Croatian Zagorje recorded by ethno-musicologist Vinko Žganec and ethno-choreologist Ivan Ivančan, and on the track of mythological research by Vitoimir Belaj and Radoslav Katičić, ethnologist Lidija Bajuk interpreted, for example, how swamps, seas, rivers, lakes, chasms and wells, which are connected with deities or supernatural beings, testify of the influence of pre-Christian Croatian beliefs on Christian spirituality (Bajuk 2017).

## Ethnographic records on water in the *Proceedings for Folk Life and Customs of South Slavs*

The first Croatian journal of ethnology and folklore research, titled *Proceedings for Folk Life and Customs of South Slavs*, provides a rich resource on water lore.<sup>7</sup> An assessment of South Slavic sacred waters requires an inventory of references in the *Proceedings*. Water lore was an early focus of scholarly inquiry, and the influential folklorist Antun Radić even noted the necessity of research into the names of rivers, streams, springs, lakes, ponds, swamps, and caves, as well as the terms related to them (e.g., bend, armlet) in his 1897 guide, *Basis for Collecting and Studying the Holdings on Folklife (Osnova za sabiranje i proučavanje građe o narodnom životu)*. He also suggested conducting a survey among locals on medicinal springs, posing questions such as, “Is there a warm, mineral, therapeutic spring? Does the area benefit from it in any way?” (Radić 1897: 15).

Editors and contributors to *Proceedings for Folk Life and Customs* conceived a series of monographs on individual locations with separate sections on hills and waters; a few of them will be mentioned here. In his ethnographic research on Poljica (an area in Dalmatia east of Split and extending to Omiš) in the monograph *Poljica: Folk Life and Customs (Zbornik za narodni život i običaje Južnih Slavena, Zagreb, 1903–10)*, Franjo Ivanišević documented the exceptional significance of water to the islanders, as well as the fact that, prior to the introduction of water through “iron pipes” (he uses this construction to denote an aqueduct) from Solin to Split in the late nineteenth century, the islanders of Brač arrived at Poljica Littoral by ships in the summer and took water onboard to bring home. He lists an array of names for wells that testifies to the fact that water sources were esteemed and protected by the people of Poljica; for the well named Bagina Puleševa, he recounts that it is completely dry at high noon, “and full to the brim sometime later, they say fairies drink from it” (Ivanišević 1903: 15). When responding to all of Radić’s suggested survey questions on water, Ivanišević documents that the aforementioned area lacked therapeutic springs.<sup>8</sup>

Records from Kijevo (a municipality in Šibenik-Knin County) provide evidence that there were issues with the water supply in the early 1990s:

Around the year 1990, the construction of the village aqueduct began. The water was supposed to flow from Cetina to the reservoir on Glavica, which was meant to also be used by the villages of Cetina, Civljane, and Polača. Even though the necessary ducts had been dug and the water pipes had been installed, unfortunately, the war put a stop to this. (Jurić-Arambašić 2000: 74)

<sup>7</sup> Published by JAZU.

<sup>8</sup> Not all fieldworkers pursued water source documentation with equal zeal. Unlike Ivanišević’s exceptionally detailed list of named wells for Poljica, Vladimir Arđalić does not provide such a record for Bukovica (a karst area in the central part of Adriatic Croatia) (Arđalić 2010: 8).

For the area of Pisarovina (near Zagreb), Ivan Pokupčić notes that, prior to the First World War, springs were used from which the locals had supplied themselves with water until they dug wells in their yards (Pokupčić 2009: 26). The digging of wells began around the First World War; as late as the 1960s, there were households in Pisarovina that did not have a well in the yard (Pokupčić 2009: 47). The role of water carriers was thereby mostly performed by daughters-in-law or other younger women.<sup>9</sup>

The ethnographic records of Ivan Žic from Vrbnik offer a variety of lexical determinants for water, through which he distinguishes between running, dead, and living water. He stresses that in Vrbnik, there were no large bodies of running water. Granted, there were many *potočine* (an augmentative plural form of *potok* [“creek”], meaning large creeks, swollen creeks, or gorges through which creeks used to flow); Žic states that water flows through them when it is raining or “when a cloud spills over.” Natural “dead water” features are often referred to as a *kajug* (a place in which water is retained when it rains) or a *kajužin* (where water is retained for a longer period of time, but nevertheless dries up eventually). Other areas of “dead water” are referred to by the terms *kal*, *lokva*, *zdenec*, and *guštirn* (a local, communal, or household well for rainwater harvesting in littoral areas), which are all man-made. A *kal* is a pit that retains water for most of the summer, and sometimes for the entire summer; a *loki* is somewhat larger than *kal* and can retain water even after summer. A *zdenec* is a pit in the ground, enclosed and roofed with stone from which only humans drink, while animals would drink from a *kal* or *loki*. Furthermore, he accentuates that living water flows from the earth and never dries up, and thereby notes that a spring (*vrutek*) is recognized by water “sizzling” from the earth, which “flows for a while and then dries up once it is exhausted” (Žic 1899: 228–229). Twenty years later, Josip Matasović further categorizes therapeutic waters in Croatia in a schema he saw as common to other Indo-European magical traditions. He defines “intact” water as that which is freshly drawn from the well, “holy water” as coming from a source near a church (in Christian areas), and “*omaja*” as water collected from underneath a mill wheel. Such water was used in its magical sense for healing, divination, and benediction through rubbing the patient’s body with it, boiling and drinking it, bathing in it (Matasović 1918: 53).

For Samobor (a city in Zagreb County’s Sava River Valley), Milan Lang writes of waters that are in turn harmful to human health. He notes the “Well of Hunger,” which made people hungry, and the well on Peskovčak Hill, which causes fever. He interviewed a local, “citizen Janko Herceg,” who was badly hurt by the latter on one occasion (Lang 1992: 14). Near Sisak (in Central Croatia where the Posavina or Sava basin begins) lies the settlement of Trebarjevo, in which Kata Jajnčerova docu-

<sup>9</sup> “First, a woman would place a mat on her head, and a pot with water on it; then she would crouch looking straight ahead, take hold of the pot with each hand, and stand up while maintaining balance – she straightened up and carefully walked home” (Pokupčić 2009: 46). Remark: Pokupčić’s entries are not from the *Proceedings for Folk Life and Customs of South Slavs*. Ivan Pokupčić neither mentions the correlation between the source of Jamnička Kiselica and the lore of fairy beings, nor remembers any such correlation, as he told me in a subsequent conversation related to the aforementioned topic.

ments neither creeks nor rivers, but notes that behind the village, there is the “living and dead” Odra River (Jajnčerova 1898: 56).<sup>10</sup> Specifically, Sava River divides all the villages of Posavina, from Sisak to Dubrovščak, along its left and right banks; the villages are situated on both sides of the river, and thus we have Lijevo Trebarjevo and Desno Trebarjevo, Lijevi Dubrovščak and Desni Dubrovščak, etc. These examples from the *Proceedings for Folk Life and Customs of South Slavs* illustrate the rich source of local water knowledge in these records. This Local Ecological Knowledge also documents biological, cultural and linguistic diversity in different areas of Croatia (cf. Maffi 2014: 8).

## The more recent studies of healing waters and associated rituals

One of the initiators of modern environmental thought in Croatia, Tomislav Macan, notes how in Župa Dubrovačka and Konavle, it was believed that the water from Dubac was,

good for the eyes and sight, it helps cure poor eyes. The people of Konavle held it in even higher regard than did those from Župa. They poured it in glass bottles and decanters and took it home whenever they went past Dubac. (Macan 1975: 436)

He further elaborates the healing properties, noting that “these waters were particularly sought after by the people of Konavle who moved to the City. They used to say that this water from Dubac was a true blessing for those with sore eyes” (1975: 437). He also explains the hydronym “Water on Dubac” when describing practices south-east of Dubrovnik, writing that “in Župa Dubrovačka, every spring is called *Water*. This is usually its local proper name. However, every water also has its own name, and both names are combined when spoken of” (ibid.).<sup>11</sup>

In 2011 and 2012, Jadranka Grbić Jakopović published her comprehensive work on the role of water’s wondrous and mysterious power in the beliefs and rituals of the Croatian ethno-tradition. The author states that the belief in the apotropaic, lustral, prophylactic, healing, and divinization power of water has been consistently implemented in practice, and stresses that even though the starting points on which the

<sup>10</sup> The author does not explain why she simultaneously defines the Odra as a living and dead river. Specifically, the Municipality of Martinska Ves is situated upstream, north of Sisak, in the so-called Upper Posavina of Sisak. It borders on Lonja River and the former Črnc river (the well-known Črnc Field) from the east, and the Odra from the west (cf. *Wikipedia*).

<sup>11</sup> He also mentions how travellers used to stop and rest by the *Water on Dubac*: “The old path passed along the water itself, across today’s Lokanj valley. There stood a white mulberry tree, which made a convenient shade. Such trees were always planted alongside waters because they provided shade. You could drink some water in the shade, take a nice break from the trip and rest, and break into a traveller’s song” (Macan 1975: 438). The fact that mulberry trees were planted by wells is also testified by the monograph *Waters of Croatia (Vode Hrvatske, 1991)*, which noted that gatherings around a well were becoming less frequent.

beliefs were based were often irrational, their application became a logical process that was eventually integrated into systems and mindsets.<sup>12</sup> The author specifically demonstrates how many rituals and customs with water are considered magical and/or purifying. She provides numerous examples of the ritual bathing of people and cattle, including the spraying of water and washing rituals on various occasions (e.g., weddings, funerals, and seasonal customs).<sup>13</sup> The power of waters are particularly beneficial on certain days, such as on the days of particular patron saints, hence magical and religious elements are merged in folk religiosity, particularly at holy wells by churches. Jadranka Grbić examines a case in the Prigorje Region in which water must not be deceived, or else the deceiver risks repercussions (Grbić 1998: 307). By employing data from the *Proceedings for Folk Life and Customs of South Slavs*, ethnologists and curators of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, Željko Dugac, Aida Brenko, and Mirjana Randić, published the article “Water in the Magical Rituals of Folk Medicine,” which focuses on the role of water in magical rituals connected with folk medicinal practices and life and annual customs, and includes an account of the chasing away of evil spirits by means of hot charcoal cast in water, the chasing away of *strava* (a kind of stupor) by casting molten lead in water, the use of magical scripts inserted in water, and the collecting of *daiara* (a special kind of spirit-invoking ritual in the Muslim world) (2003: 238).

## Contemporary revisions of localized lore on water

In the third part of this essay, I note two contemporary examples of *aquatic* stories that originated from local oral lore. The first example is the legend of Croatia’s most famous well/fountain, Manduševac in Zagreb. This site can be considered a “revived myth” after the re-digging of the well in 1986 and its 1987 “return” to Zagreb’s main square after nearly 100 years absence (Marks 2020: 63). The second example is a recycled origin story for the mineral water “Jamnica,” Croatia’s oldest mineral water, which was first bottled in the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

The legend of Manduševac is probably the most famous Croatian aquatic story in contemporary times and relates to its use in tourism promotion. Ethnologist Ines

<sup>12</sup> Essential to the study of Croatian water lore is the themed issue of *Croatian Waters: Journal of Water Resources (Hrvatske vode: časopis za vodno gospodarstvo*, no. 44, 2003), which featured works from the 2003 symposium *Healing with Water: Approaches and Paradoxes (Liječenje vodom: pristupi i paradoksi*, Zagreb, 23 November). In 2008, another related conference took place in Zagreb, resulting in published proceedings (2011): *Water and Its Role Through History: Proceedings from the Scientific Colloquium Dies Historiae*, (editor-in-chief Filip Novosel). A Croatian documentary “*Water – a Mystery of Life (Voda – misterij života)*,” directed by Robert Bezbradica and Mladen Đaković, and authored by Robert Bezbradica, Mladen Đaković and Manuel Paljuh was released in 2011. Other significant contributions to the subject include the themed issue of *Gazophylacium: Journal of Science, Culture, Arts, and Economy* from 2012 (no. 1–2); as well as the conference *Sea Change: Wavescapes in the Anthropocene* organised by the University of Split, Split, Komiza, 3–6 December 2018.

<sup>13</sup> See also Jadranka Grbić Jakopović (2011 and 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia*, NN 13/2012 (30 January 2012), List of Acknowledged Natural Mineral Waters and Natural Spring Waters in the Republic of Croatia.

Prica interpreted the events related to the newly restored Manduševac Fountain on Zagreb's main square.<sup>15</sup> The Manduševac spring was used by Zagrebians as a water source for centuries. According to legend, drinking water with therapeutic qualities suddenly burst from the earth and brought about the initial settlement that eventually became the city. The legend continues with the tale of a beautiful girl named Manda who met a knight at this well, who asked her for some water. He said to her: "*Mando, dušo, zagrabi vode*" ("Manda, darling, draw me some water"). Both Zagreb and Manduševac were allegedly named after this statement: Manduševac after "*Mando, dušo*" ("Manda, darling,") and Zagreb after "*zagrabi*" ("draw"). In 1898, Ban Jelačić Square was reconstructed and paved in stone, and Manduševac was buried in the process. In 1987, the Summer Universiade (a biennial international multi-sport competition for university athletes) was held in Zagreb, organized by the International University Sports Federation; the city's main square (then called Republic Square, today known as Ban Jelačić Square) was renovated for the occasion. During construction work, Manduševac was located again (cf. Marks 2020: 51–87).<sup>16</sup> The legend of Manduševac is depicted on the coat of arms of Zagreb County, and Ljiljana Marks documents how the citizens of Zagreb started to consider it "a symbol of their identity" (Marks 2020: 86). The story serves to demonstrate that sacred and healing springs are closely associated with ancestors and identity (cf. Ray 2019: 265). The rediscovered spring of Manduševac was turned into a fountain of happiness and, rather than coins, locals tossed in paper money so that a local newspaper soon declared it to be "the only fountain in the world into which banknotes are thrown" (1991: 223). The banknotes quickly became a city issue as no adequate location existed where they could be dried or where the sporadic coins could be stored. Prica points out the economic reality of such "ample" bestowment: "The truth that was constantly hanging in the air, but was publicly articulated only once the city authorities were completely exhausted by this subject, is the fact that, given the official inflation of around 800 percent, this money was essentially worthless" (1991: 224). As noted by Marks, a further irony to the popularity of the story is that the contemporary versions of the legend suggest that if anyone drinks from the fountain, they will never forget Zagreb (qtd. in Marks 2020: 80),<sup>17</sup> but there is no access to free drinking water on the city's central square. Even though the number of tourists grew alongside the number of Zagreb's citizens visiting the fountain, they cannot drink from it.

Hence, the unfailing Manduševac is merely a city backdrop, with no free drinking water in sight. The legendary stories are pointless, as well as the legends and sayings, since nobody can drink water on Ban Jelačić Square, let alone heal

<sup>15</sup> The former Republic Square and today's Ban Jelačić Square.

<sup>16</sup> On the subject of Zagreb as a city that lies on water, cf. Milčec 1991: 202–204.

<sup>17</sup> The aforementioned legend of the healing properties of Manduševac's water and the category of memory has been recorded in the legend of the medicine man, a soothsayer named Zagreb, who treated people with this water; the legend was recorded by Nikola Bonifačić Rožin in 1967. "Word spread of Zagreb the medicine man and how he was helping people. One of them said: 'I'm going to see Zagreb the medicine man' – and others named that spot with the well Zagreb, after the medicine man" (cf. Marks 2020: 351).

themselves or become spellbound with water in such a way that they never forget Zagreb. (Marks 2020: 87)

Today, money is no longer thrown into Manduševac, and only secondary school seniors bathe in it at Zagreb Graduation Parade (*Norijada*). For the last few years, a debate has waged about returning a drinking water source to, or nearby, the fountain.<sup>18</sup> Manduševac Fountain remains a contested and popular site, as well as the chosen venue for performance art, including a cult performance by the doyen of the genre, Tomislav Gotovac.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 1. Tomislav Gotovac: *High Noon, Fall into Manduševac Fountain*, 2002, a free-fall performance presented on the occasion of filming the documentary *Happy Child* (*Sretno dijete*, directed by Igor Mirković), Ban Jelačić Square, Zagreb. Photograph provided by the Tomislav Gotovac Institute and the Sarah Gotovac Collection (cf. Marjanić 2020b).

<sup>18</sup> Saša Šimpraga, from the initiative *1 Percent for the City* (*1postozagrad*), has been carrying out a systematic campaign of introducing drinking water to Manduševac. In 2019, however, the City Institute for the Conservation of Cultural and Natural Heritage refused to grant consent for drinking water to be returned to Manduševac, thus treating the fountain as décor and not as a source of drinking water. The Institute thereby listed arguments that drinking water on Manduševac would “smother” and “overwhelm” the Square (Orešković 2019, URL).

<sup>19</sup> Gotovac presented the performance *High Noon, Fall into Manduševac Fountain* (*Pad u Manduševac – Točno u podne*, 2002) at the sound of the Grič Cannon (as he did with all of his public performances presented in Zagreb), as a reflection on the film *High Noon* (directed by Fred Zinnemann, 1952). Vlasta Delimar and Milan Božić presented a re-enactment of this performance under the title *High Noon* (*Točno u podne*) at the Manduševac Fountain on 30 June 2011, in his memory as part of the funeral ceremony of Tomislav Gotovac a.k.a. Antonio G. Lauer. In this dual homage-performance, Milan Božić and Vlasta Delimar, dressed in black suits and accompanied by the collective “Evil Drummers,” led a procession on Zagreb’s main square, stopped in front of Manduševac Fountain, and jumped into the water or, more specifically – surrendered their bodies to a face-down vertical fall (Marjanić 2020b).

A second example of the contemporary revision of localized lore, is the story of Jamnica, whose water was initially used only for medicinal purposes.<sup>20</sup> I have already stressed how Antun Radić's formative work encouraged ethnographic research of mineral and thermal waters. Four kilometers south of Pisarovina (near Zagreb) lies what is probably the most famous settlement in the area, Jamnička Kiselica, Croatia's best known mineral water.<sup>21</sup> Today, Jamnica is Croatia's largest producer of mineral and spring waters and non-alcoholic beverages. The mineral springs were discovered in 1770 but had been visited since prehistoric times, as indicated by the 1828 discovery of old catchments, a bronze spearhead tip, and deer antlers. A health spa was established in 1828, but from 1899 onwards only the bottling plant remained in operation. It seems surprising that the Romans did not use the water, "but the possibility of Celts using it is not excluded, since they 'particularly appreciated mineral waters'" (Čepelak 1998: 28). Planned development for the springs' use began on 18 October 1828, when the first bottles intended for the market were filled.<sup>22</sup> Today, "Jamnica" is the most representative mineral water in Croatia and while it is mixed with wines and fruit juices in present times, it was once even recommended to be mixed with milk, as is testified by advertisements. Specifically, it is a lesser-known fact that Jamnička Kiselica was initially sold only at pharmacies as therapeutic water (Arslani 2008, URL). Ivan Pokupčić pointed out that following the Second World War, the mineral water was not drunk as frequently as today, but rather primarily at Christmas, Easter, and at other major holidays. He states that, at the time, the bottle bore the inscription "He who fondly drinks Jamnica, remains young at heart and lives a full life." The water had broad appeal, even those curing hay or grazing cattle in the surrounding area of Pisarovina/Jamnica took a break to visit Kiselica to fetch water. Ivan Pokupčić, the chronicler of his home region, the Jamnica Parish, also authored a poem about the therapeutic water of Jamnica, entitled *Oh Jamnica, Our Mineral Spring* (*O Jamnice, vrelo kiselice*, 2009: 210).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The etymology of the settlement Jamnička Kiselica is derived from the Kajkavian word *jama* ("cave" in standard Croatian), meaning swamp, lake, river armlet, as, e.g., in the legend of Pozoj (dragon) in Čičanjska Cave near Donji Vidovec (Međimurje) (Marjanić 2010: 136).

<sup>21</sup> According to the legend of the origin of Pisarovina at its present location, there existed a count's estate, which is also a historical fact. "Here lived countess Sara, who became severely ill. There were numerous vineyards around the count's estate, and Sara probably liked to drink wine. Her servants were offering her wine at that moment, saying: 'Pij Saro vina!' ['Have some wine, Sara!'] (...) The hydronym Pezariewo from 1328 is the first (hitherto) found mention of the settlement which we now know as Pisarovina." Cf. <http://www.visitzagrebcounty.hr/mjesta/pisarovina/uvod/>

<sup>22</sup> Physicist and natural historian Jakov Franjo Tkalac states that it remains unknown whether the Romans were also familiar with the therapeutic water (1863: 6), and thereby notes a series of conditions for which the water can be used (Tkalac 1863: 15–18). Cf. <http://www.giupp.hr/hr/jamnica-d-d/>

<sup>23</sup> He also states that the water has always been known as Jamnička Kiselica, while today's brand name is Jamnica. Furthermore, he critically asserts that the old plant "had been buried already prior to the Homeland War, and now it is in a terrible state of neglect," and that people are no longer familiar with the bottle-filling process of Jamnička Kiselica (2009: 49).



ZLATNA  
MAMICE  
MENI  
MALO  
JAMNICE

Alkalinsko-muriatička  
naravna  
**Jamnička kiselica**

je jedina hrvatska ljekovita, najjeftinija i vrlo teška ki-  
sela voda, bez koje ne bi smio nijedan hrvatski stol biti,  
jer se ista u svako doba godine sama, i sa mlijekom kao  
liek, ili sa vinom veoma ugodno i osvježujuće pije. Ne bi  
trebalo dakle tuđe, kojekakove i manje vrijedne kiselice piti.

**Jamnička kiselica**  
je za dobiti u svim gostionama, krčmama i trgovinama, kao  
i kod vlasnika vrela

**V. Lovrenčić**  
Zagreb, Gajeva ulica 33,  
Telefon 87,  
i na vrelu u Jamnici.

Figure 2. An advertisement for Jamnička Kiselica (1901) from *Obzor*, a newspaper from Zagreb. The children ask their mother for water with the following performative, put together in rhymed diminutives: “Zlatna mamice, meni malo Jamnice” (“Mommy dearest, some Jamnica for me”). The natural alkaline-muriatic Jamnička Kiselica “is Croatia’s only therapeutic, cheapest and pleasantly fluent mineral water.” It is recommended to be drunk with milk as medicine, or with wine as a refreshing beverage. It is available at all inns, taverns, shops, as well as through the spring’s owner Vilim Lovrenčić in 33 Gajeva Street in Zagreb, or at the spring in Jamnica. Photocopied from the article Ivanišević, Čepelak 1998: 24

While advertisements for Jamnička Kiselica in the era of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) propagated unitarism within the SFRJ in the late 1980s, the advertisements for this mineral water in the period of transition, as well as today, are of local character. In 1987 (when the end of Tito’s unitarist state was already palpable), a series of advertisements for Jamnička Kiselica were produced featuring songs in the Kajkavian dialect as the determinant of Croatian identity within SFRJ, such as in the advertisement *Jamnica – A Celebration Ringleader, Jamnica – Uncle Jura*. Linguist Branko Vuletić points out that the commercial messages also frequently use dialectal speech, “since this speech is non-standard, original, it also guarantees,

<sup>24</sup> The aforementioned issue of the journal *Balneoklimatologija* was dedicated to Jamnička Kiselica and its 170<sup>th</sup> birthday. In the introductory note, editor Radovan Čepelak thereby states, inter alia, that Jamnica Ltd. is the principal sponsor “of this unique balneological-climatological newsletter of ours.” I would like to note an interesting fact that the label of Jamnička Kiselica from 1932 said that the bottles should be kept lying down and, naturally, in a cold place (Pokupčić 2009: 246).

in a certain way, the originality, naturalness of the product offered. Therefore, it is no wonder that dialectal speech is not used to propagate technical, industrial products, but rather exclusively foodstuffs” (Vuletić 1976: 417–431).

An advertisement featuring members of the Cibona basketball team, filmed in the 1980s, was unique for the period of socialism “since, save for the fact that top basketball stars of that time appeared in it, it was the first time that a domestic company hired athletes for its advertising campaign.” While it is now common for athletes to promote a brand, the four Cibona players went down in history as the first athletes to be used in marketing in socialist Yugoslavia (Arslani 2008, URL). Current bottle labels feature an image of a young woman in a folk costume with a pitcher of water and the discover date of the source (1828).

Both the revived fountain of Manduševac and the commercial promotion of a water source (Jamnička Kiselica) through dialect and folk costume demonstrate the ongoing ties of local identities and springs.<sup>25</sup>

## From aquatic lore to the contemporary performance of water, river/water art

The preceding discussion on the role of water in the Croatian ethno-tradition, while of interest in themselves, provide background for understanding contemporary performance art and water/river art in response to environmental threats (cf. Kochhar-Lindgren 2013: 2). Not only are pollution, poorly planned development, and the misuse of water sources environmental hazards, but contemporary environmental issues also endanger Croatian biocultural heritage. Below I address how river/water art, defined as land art/river art and *artivistic* (a portmanteau of “artistic” and “activist”) practices,<sup>26</sup> raises environmental consciousness.

A leading light of women’s and feminist art, Vlasta Delimar, dedicated the sixth edition of her land art project *My Land, Štaglinec* (2010), near Koprivnica, to the subject of water. The artist opened this one-day performance event with her own performance, *The Water Well or Draw-Well*, which consisted of a simple gesture – she invited those who gathered to try their hand at drawing water from the well (Delimar 2020: 36). As Vlasta Delimar herself highlighted on the occasion of her performance:

I am quite proud for having my own water (the water well or draw-well) in my own yard of my own estate. It is a big deal today to have your own water. However, I perceive this possession of water as fully romantic: it reminds me

<sup>25</sup> “The import of bottled water in Croatia is negligible and domestic manufacturers dominate the market. Considering the quantity of drawn water, Jamnica holds a stake of around 70% of bottled water production in the country, of which around 75% is sold on the domestic market, while 25% is exported” (Tomašević 2016: 5).

<sup>26</sup> Artist art practices equally use artistic and activist strategies to seek to influence reality, in this case environmental protection (cf. Milohnić 2009).

of my childhood, my father, my formative years. Drawing water from a well is to me primarily a poetic act, and only subsequently a matter of necessity. The physical effort of pulling a bucket of water from the depths of the earth does not leave me indifferent. It is so exciting when a bucket filled with fresh water emerges on the well's surface. It is much more exciting than turning on the tap in the bathroom or the kitchen. A single bucket of water gives us a limited quantity of water. If I want more water, I must make another effort, I must pull out another bucket of water. Such act can teach me modesty as a good spiritual discipline. The words *well* and *source* differ by their sensibility. The well is darkness, and the source is light, but actually, they are both. (Delimar, qtd. in Marjanić 2010: 46)

While drawing water from a renovated and cleansed well/source, and before she also invited the visitors to do the same, the artist pointed out that her father had built this well when she gave birth to her daughter Dolina, and that he thereby named it after his granddaughter.<sup>27</sup>



Figures 3. and 4. Vlasta Delimar, the performance *The Water Well or Draw-Well*, Štaglinec. With the performance title, the artist sought to underline that both names were used in her childhood and youth. Photography is from the Archive of Vlasta Delimar *My Land*, Štaglinec (2010).

<sup>27</sup> As for her father, the artist states the following: "My father grew up extremely poor, and as a twelve-year-old boy, he had to leave his family and stay at a rich family's home, where he worked as a servant and slept in a barn. When he grew up, he swore that his family and children would never go hungry, and that there would always be enough food in the house. Instead of conventional gifts, my father was therefore coming up with ways to give somebody something with long-term value. The well for Dolina is not part of a tradition, it was simply my father's idea, as was the walnut tree which he also planted for Dolina. When Dolina was little, such a gift meant nothing to her and, naturally, she could not understand it at the time, as well as many other older people, since children are usually presented with toys and sweets. Later, however, Dolina was thrilled, and she accepted her grandfather's gifts as original ideas" (from email correspondence with the artist).

Since 2019, professors Alen Novoselec, Zvezdana Jembrih, and Ida Blažičko of the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb have developed Croatian art practice with their Land Art, Earth Art, *Earthworks: Earth and the Anthropocene*, two instalments of which address river/water art. In 2020,<sup>28</sup> multimedia artist Alen Novoselec presented micro-criticism under the performative title *I'm Sorry, Thank You, I Love You* (*Oprosti mi, hvala ti, volim te*) and through a performative diptych, *Breaching the Dam* (*Proboj brane*), on the bank of Kupa River (at Obrež Vivodinski near Ozalj), inundated and destroyed within an approximately 2-meter scope from the edge of the river, due to the negative impact of a concessional mini-hydropower plant. As stated by the artist himself in the description of the work:

The water level occasionally rises two meters, inundates the entire upstream vegetation belt, and causes the dying of trees and other vegetation along said belt. In the study of the mini-hydropower plant's impact on the environment, which they were obliged to conduct, the investor claimed that the negative impact is non-existent. All that was left was to apologize, give thanks, and express love towards nature as a whole, and particularly towards the destroyed part. The destroyed belt is roughly the measure of a man (as well as of his fault). I lie on the ground, spread from the river's edge within the belt of the destroyed bank, and by turning over from stomach to back I gradually move along this belt while uttering the words from the title of the land art performance: *I'm Sorry, Thank You, I Love You*. I mark the size of the desired scope of movement with two lines: the starting one, built out of the dried branches of dead trees, and the final one, the line of newly-planted plants that can survive in the newly-created conditions. (Novoselec, qtd. in Marjanić 2020, URL)



Figure 5. Alen Novoselec: Breaching the Dam on the bank of Kupa River (left bank of Kupa at Obrež Vivodinski near Ozalj). Photographed by Nataša Hrust (2020).

<sup>28</sup> They are two land art programmes – *Land Art Circus*, Jakovlje Castle and International Sculpture Park, 18 October 2020, and the field land art performances at Obrež Vivodinski near Ozalj on 25 October 2020, organised by multimedia artist Alen Novoselec (cf. Marjanić 2020, URL).

In the second work, which can also be defined as river art, *Breaching the Dam*, the artist collects smaller logs (which he can pick up by himself) alongside the bank, brings them to the river and releases them downstream, as corpses to which we say goodbye with honor and dignity. Simultaneously, he releases them downstream as a symbol of final resistance, in which they drift towards the dam as *rams* that seek to break it open and return life to the bank. The aforementioned problem in the land art event of 2019 was also recalled by multimedia artist Zvezdana Jembrih in her work on Kupa River, *Red Cloth for the Tree* (*Crvena krpa za stablo*, 2019), *artistically* pointing out that the trees on Kupa's left bank from Kamanje to Ozalj are dying because of the recently built private hydropower plant (cf. Marjanić 2020). A year later, the artist performed her next river art under the title *Blue for the Tree* (*Plavo za stablo*) at the same place (the left bank of Kupa River near Obrež Vivodinski), but at a different time – in the transition from autumn to winter. The artist hermeneutically closed the performance with words, whereby she poetically wrote the following:

The tree to which last year's Red Cloth was dedicated is no longer alive. Just like many other trees alongside Kupa on this part upstream from Ozalj, it could not withstand environmental changes – the river's elevated water level caused by the building of a private hydropower plant. What remained was the aquatic, deep shadow, as in/visible as the nearby waterfall that had also been inundated. Blue, light blue is the color of disappearance, the color of change, of silence and in-depth consecration. In noise and rage, in the multiplication of parades and/or catastrophes, amid surface layers and cheap metaphors that seduce and dilute us, the covert blue fabric in the cold pre-winter water celebrates the dying, the nameless call of winter, the overflow and the serenity – so that we could have a listen to something again. So that young summer could come again. (cf. Marjanić 2020a)



Figure 6. Zvezdana Jembrih: *Blue for the Tree* (*Plavo za stablo*), river art (left bank of Kupa River near Obrež Vivodinski). Photographed by Zvezdana Jembrih (2020).

The work of multimedia artist Robertina Šebjanič from Ljubljana (Slovenia) further contributes to water-themed *artist* practices. She has used a hydrophone since 2016 “to record the subaquatic world’s sounds, in order to draw attention to the abundance of sounds created by subaquatic animal species and the conflict arising as a consequence of sonic pollution” created by humans (Ivančević 2018). Her sound composition *Aquatocene / Subaquatic Quest for Serenity* played at the 58<sup>th</sup> Poreč Annale.<sup>29</sup> By mixing sounds generated by subaquatic inhabitants, the sounds of water’s movement, and noise generated by human activity, Šebjanič raises awareness of the need for preserving natural sound balance for the benefit of marine species.<sup>30</sup> She collaborates with experts from various fields of humanistic and natural sciences and arts to highlight the sonic pollution of seas, oceans, and other aquatic places (Ivančević 2018, Šebjanič 2017).

Her complimentary piece at the 58<sup>th</sup> Poreč Annale was the sound installation *Dark Drops*, in which participants (by opening the corks on glass bottles) could recreate sounds generated by water dripping in caves. The next year, in her work *aqua\_forensic | Underwater Interception of Biotweaking in Aquatocene* (2018), she conceived in collaboration with Gjino Šutić (a new media artist and biotechnologist, innovator, scientist and postmodern intermedia artist from Croatia) a work that emphasizes “monsters in the waters” (invisible pharmaceutical and other chemical pollutants, the ways in which they enter the sea via sewage waste and affect the overall maritime ecosystem). This is an example of an artistic, new media practice that shows how water lore can provide information for water conservation and activism. As he himself points out in his biography, Gjino Šutić invented the term *biotweaking* (enhancing living organisms or their parts to completely express and make use of their full potential). As a biohacker, he has designed and developed numerous DIY tools and materials. Apart from developing his inventions and innovations, he works as an educator in the areas of “biotweaking and science.”<sup>31</sup>

As most ecologically focused scientists warn us of near-future challenges to global water security (see Rockström et al. 2014), I wish to conclude this essay by framing the interpretive segments on fairies, healing water, famous Croatian springs and rivers, and the contemporary visual practice of water/river art as *longue durée* memories of water in the local context (i.e., the area of Croatia). From performance artist Tomislav Gotovac free-falling into the waters of Manduševac (the spring that gave birth to the city of Zagreb) to Vlasta Delimar incorporating rural knowledge of the well/source on her estate in Štaglinec (near Koprivnica), conceptual art advocates a return to our sources for knowledge and calls on us to protect them. Water lore and art illustrate the biocultural web of life documented by Luisa Maffi (2014: 10). Folk tales and ethno-lore about water and contemporary water/river practice can also be

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<sup>29</sup> Poreč Annale, Croatia’s oldest group exhibition of fine arts, is held annually in early August at the Istrian Assembly Hall.

<sup>30</sup> The gathering was on the subject of *Nature, Culture and Other Stories*, and curated by Nataša Ivančević.

<sup>31</sup> For more details about the artist and *biotweaking*, cf. [biotweaking.com](http://biotweaking.com)

artivistic<sup>32</sup> narratives of resistance to poor environmental planning and the dangerous, globalized and neoliberal practice of privatizing domestic water sources.<sup>33</sup>



Figure 7. Zvezdana Jembrih: Golden Spiral I, from the cycle Spirals (Veliko Rujno, 876 m, Velebit). Photographed by Branko Lenić (2008).

Translated by Mirta Jurilj

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<sup>32</sup> (I use the term by Aldo Milohnić in the sense of unification of artistic and activist practices.)

<sup>33</sup> Since 2019, four water sources in Croatia (Radenska, Lipički Studenac, Sveti Rok, and Cetina) were passed to the hands of foreign companies. For example, as reported by the web portal Šibenik News, Cetina was taken over in 2019 by an offshore company from the US state of Delaware – for a period of 50 years (cf. Ferić 2019).

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## Hrvatske sakralne vode. Od vilinske, ljekovite vode u imaginariju do suvremene vodne/riječne umjetnosti

Članak interpretira ulogu vode u hrvatskoj etnotradiciji, s naglaskom na vilinskoj, ljekovitoj vodi, sa završnim segmentom o suvremenoj vizualnoj praksi *land arta* – vodne/riječne umjetnosti (engl. *water/river art*), koja se doslovno vraća svojim izvorima, kao i lokalnom znanju o vodi. Ili kao što Celeste Ray naglašava: "Paradigma svete vode je sveljudska, a sakralnost izvora naročito se iznova imaginira i ponovno se međukulturalno i transvremenski interpretira" (Ray 2019: 267).

Ključne riječi: mitska voda, vilinska/ljekovita voda, vodna/riječna umjetnost, hrvatska etnotradicija