

Branko Đaković

University of Zagreb
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of Ethnology and Cultural
Anthropology
bdakovic@ffzg.hr

UDK 398.332.12(497.52)

398.3.01:81'373.6

Original scientific paper

Received: May 11, 2006

Accepted: June 23, 2006

Easter Bonfire

Vuzmenka/vazmenka/vuzmenjak

*Turpe est, scribere incipientum veniam petere.*¹

In the cycle of annual customs, especially in the spring and summer period, an important custom is that of burning fires, which is a form of expression of 'folk piety', and the date of which is usually linked to the Christian liturgical calendar. As a tradition inherited from other cultural areas and patterns, of different origins and periods in which they were created, the custom is today still preserved in different variants of ritual practice.

Annual fires (in Carnival period, around St. Juraj's Day, Easter or St. John's Day), bon fires, kr(i-je)sovi, through their symbolism and impressive form are the elements of the rich cultural mosaic, and can be an 'eternal' source of inspiration for a researcher.

Well-known, but still inadequately researched, these fires, such as vuzmenka, vazmenka, vuzmice...are the topic of this article.

Key words: Easter customs, Easter fire, North-western Croatia

The hilly region of Jaska and St. Jana on the southern slopes of the mountain of Plešivica - April 16, 2006. The break of dawn. *Slepočki k vuzmenki, slepočki k vuzmenki...vuzmenka gori, vuzmenka gori*, the sounds of children voices were rising against the metal gray horizon, as the first signs of light marked the birth of a new day. An atmosphere of suspense and waiting. People were gathered in groups on specific places in the village and on its

¹ It is unfortunate that the one who only started writing should ask for mercy.

outskirts waiting for the beginning of a festive, apparently profane, ritual, embedded in (non)everyday situation, but with a clear indication of its sacral character. It was time to light up the Easter bonfire – *vuzmenka*, *vuzmenjak*, *vazmenka*.

Easter is the greatest Christian holiday. Without the intention to enumerate all the details of the various discussions on the origins of Easter in beliefs and religious ideas that preceded the celebration itself, (Assyrian - Babylonian worship of the goddess Ishtar, Phoenician Astarte and many old civilization cults on ritual death and rebirth of gods of vegetation, Jewish holidays marking different historical dates and the early Christian links between the Jewish Pasha and the Passion and Resurrection of Christ), I will outline a few, mostly known, facts.

The starting points in the analysis of the 'evolution' of Easter are the debates dating from the 2nd century AD on the exact date of Pasha and the Resurrection of Jesus, occurring between the Christians of Jewish and pagan background, and the discrepancy between Alexandrian and Roman canonic spring equinox and therefore, the date of Easter.

Easter was celebrated on the 14th day of the Jewish month of Nisan or on the Sunday after Pasha, which was celebrated by the Jews on the first Sabbath after full moon and after the spring equinox, while at the Niceian Council in 325 AD, when the Church also accepted Julian calendar, it was decided that the Easter will be celebrated on the first Sunday after the full moon and spring equinox.

As a moveable holiday which could be celebrated on different dates, in Julian calendar the date of Easter was calculated from the canons of Victorius and Dionysus (which in Catholic countries were used until the end of the 16th and in Protestant countries until the end of the 18th century, while in some Orthodox churches they are still used today), and in Gregorian calendar it was calculated from the canon of Clavius as well as different tables and formulae from astronomical measurements. So, the celebration of Easter can be shifted in a span of five weeks. According to Gregorian calendar, the earliest date on which it could be celebrated is March 22 and the latest April 25, while according to Julian calendar the earliest date could be April 4 and the latest May 8. However, it cannot be celebrated on the same day as Jewish Pasha.

Let us briefly examine the above mentioned names for this greatest Christian holiday. In the new Stokavian dialect and the standard Croatian language the most common name for this holiday is *Uskrs*, while the names *Vazam* and *Vuzem* appear as characteristic for Chakavian and Kaikavian dialects (and are sometimes accepted as possible variants in standard language). In church terminology, and due to theological reasons, they can also cover a wider meaning which includes the Good Week and the period from Good Thursday to Good Saturday, therefore connecting the two aspects of this Christian celebration: the aspect of suffering and endurance – Lent, and the aspect of celebration – Easter. However, there are certain indications that the name *Uzem* was used in Dubrovnik and that the same name was also used by the speakers of the new Stokavian ikavian dialect in certain Diaspora groups.

Commonly accepted explanation for the etymology of the name *Uskrs* is that it was derived from the verb *uskrsnuti* (to resurrect), and is thus linked to the Christian truth of Christ's resurrection.² The etymology of *Vuzem/Vazam* which was, in ethnological literature, considered to be the most convincing and reliable was that it was derived from the verb *vzeti, vazeti* (to take), with the pre-Slavic stem *vōzet, vuzeti* (Gavazzi 1988:44, Belaj 1988:128-129), which supported the premise that this name was created as a clear dichotomy to the name *Mesopust*, with *Pust* and *Vazam* being the starting and ending date of the forty-day long Easter fasting – Lent.³

However, theologians are offering some other explanations (*interpretatio christiana*). For example, according to one interpretation, *Vazam* is derived from the Greek word – *azima*, which would literary mean 'azymous bread' and is also a short name for the Jewish Pasha. Pasha is than linked to the Greek word *pathein* (to suffer). A prominent theologians, translator and Biblical scholar, Fra Bonaventura Duda, thinks that the word *Vazam* was introduced to Croatian language by the Holly Brothers St. Cyril and Methodius, through Slavicization of the Jewish name *Pesah* (*Pasha*, in Latin form), where the original meaning of the word *pesah* (delivery, crossing) denotes the exodus from the Egyptian slavery. Eventhough it would be difficult to bring these idioms in any kind of semantic relation with the names *Vuzem/Vazam* as synonyms for Easter (Easter Sunday), in the context of church liturgy these names have, as it was outlined before, a wider context.

The customs of lightning bonfires on the evening before or exactly on the date of certain church holidays, together with their distribution and different names (for example, among Croatian population: *krijes, kres, kris; svitnjak, koleda, vatra; vuzmenka, vazmenka, vuzmenjak, vuzmica*, etc.) are known and documented among almost all European nations and point to the intertwining of religious and folk customary practices, while the ritual itself, even though it has a religious background, does not necessarily have to be (and is usually not) connected to Christian liturgical year, i.e. with Easter.

The exception are the church-customary practices of lightning of bonfires in front of the church (*ignis pashalis*) on Good Saturday, the purpose of which was the bless-

² Croatian linguists are linking the word *Uskrs* with the verb *krsnuti*, which means to become alive, to rise. Petar Skok, famous etymologist, whose opinion was accepted by Gavazzi, thinks that the stem of this word was the old Slavic *krijes-* (крьсѣ) which denoted the Sun at the period of summer solstice, and was derived from *o(kretati)* – 'to turn, to move'. According to the new etymology, advocated by Belaj, *krijes* is derived from the Indo-European verb *kre-s*, which, in turn, is derived from the Indo-European stem *ker(ʰ)* – to grow, to feed, and linked to the Latin *creo* – 'I create', *creasco* – 'I grow' and the name of the Roman fertility goddess Ceres and old High German *hirso* – millet, thus putting the rites and customs related to *krijes* in the context of the myth on the vegetation growth. The identical situation can be found in the Old Slavic *vzkrosnoti* – to resurrect (Belaj 1998: 129, 223).

³ We should also mention an interesting interpretation provided by Belaj: "It needs to be said that under this rather obvious layer of meaning, we could also find an older layer. In pre-Slavic language, *vzeti* meant not only 'to take', but also 'to start, to initiate'. If we accept the idea that Easter replaced pre-Slavic New Year, than it would not be completely impossible to conclude that the word *Vuzem/Vazam* carries in itself a trace of the pre-Christian name for the first day of the new year..." (Belaj 1998:129).

ing and renewal of the house fires (Gavazi 1988:31-33, Černelić 1994), as well as the lightning of fires near the church on the day of the church titular or the village's patron saint, but which are not discussed in this article.⁴

Intrigued by the research on ritual fires which are lit throughout the year in Southern Slavic, but also broader European regions, and which present a tradition which does not have exclusively church-religious character, I got interested in the lightning of Easter fires and bonfires. As my primary sources of data were the questionnaires of the Ethnological Atlas (topic on *Annual Fires*) and my own field research conducted at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century and, based on the memory of my informants, related to some earlier periods, I tried to, by relying on modest accounts found in literature, give a cartographic presentation of the distribution of the profane Easter fires which are lit outside the church area, usually early on Easter morning or on the evening of Good Saturday, as well as the distribution of the name *vuzmenka*, including its variants.

The description of the current situation is based on my direct observations and impressions I partly gained during my field research in the villages on the slopes of Kalnik Mountain, especially those around the town of Jastrebarsko. However, for the region of Plješivica Mountain (most villages near the town of Jastrebarsko on the southern slopes of Plješivica), Vatroslav Rožić wrote in 1908: *Vuzam* is the greatest festivity for boys and shepherds. Soon after midnight, they would go to the '*vuzmenak*', which they made on the top of the hill on Good Saturday. They would put four long poles into the ground and fill in the space between them with pine branches, twigs, pieces of wood, etc. The bigger the heap, the greater their joy, because the fire would be bigger then. Each participant would bring some eggs, bacon and wine, and they would bake food, eat and drink, next to the *vuzmenak* which they would light up from four sides, if *vuzmenak* burned well and the fire was big then indeed they would all be very happy. They would stay at the *vuzmenak* until it burned down – sometimes till dawn. In the past they would light up the bonfire on the top of every hill, and the greatest honor went to the group whose bonfire caught the fire first and was the largest; today you rarely see people lightning bonfires (Rožić, 1908: 242).

Furthermore, Gavazzi has established that 'the lightning of Easter bonfires is spread throughout northwestern Croatia (without the coastal region with islands, the regions of Lika and Kordun) and is vanishing towards the border with Slavonia' and 'cannot be found among the Serbs or Bulgarians', but that 'similar fires are lit on Easter by the Gradišće Croats, but it remains unclear whether the Croats have brought that

⁴ There are several problems in differentiating Eastern fires of religious and profane character. According to Zender (1980), the Frank Bishop Bonifacius asked the Pope in 751. to explain the origin of celebration of the Good Week and especially of the liturgical custom of blessing the fire. His answer can lead us to conclude that the custom was present in the Frank liturgy, but was not present in the Roman liturgy. Furthermore, Zender claimed that there was a connection between the profane Easter fires and the fires lit on the First of May, which were also documented in Europe from that period onwards.

custom to Gradišće region from their old homeland or whether they have accepted it after arrival to the new land'. Namely, the Easter bonfires were frequently confirmed among the Slovenes – as well as among the Germans in the Alpine region and in other parts of Germany (and among some other European nations). That, together with some other findings, pointed to the conclusion that the Croats did not light Easter bonfires in their old homeland, nor that their original, broader, distribution is now confined to a smaller region, but that this custom spread to the Northwestern regions of Croatia, mostly Kaikawian regions, from the neighboring Slovenian regions as an important and rather expansive Central European custom (Gavazzi, 1988:34-36).

Recent field research and the ethnographic maps in the appendix, confirm Gavazzi's opinion, and so do similar claims done by Mojo Medić in 1915 about the distribution of Easter fires, even though significant changes have occurred in the seventy years that have passed from the first edition of Gavazzi's famous book 'Croatian calendar customs in a year' and a hundred years from the publication of Medić's article. Today this tradition has unevenly spread towards the south and southeast. Easter fires are not so common in Slovenia (according to the data from the questionnaires of Ethnographic Atlas), and it seems that they are partly supplemented by the fires lit on the first of May.

Generally speaking, the rituals of driving the cattle through the ashes, and taking the burnt coals and ashes to the vineyards and fields have also disappeared, together with the belief that 'the evil forces (demons and witches) will have no power in the places which were reached by the light (or smoke) of these bonfires.'⁵ *Tempora mutantur*.

The fact is that in our times *vuzmenke* are not commonly lit (and especially this is not done by the shepherds), however, in the last ten years we can observe a tendency of renewal of this custom. Regionally it is spread in the regions around the towns of Karlovac, Ozalj and Duga Resa, around the village of Dugo Selo situated to the east of Zagreb, and on the northeastern part of Zagorje, reaching to the regions of Podravina, Međimurje and Bilogora. People taking part in this custom are usually self-organized groups of young or middle-aged boys and men as well as the youth gathered in various folklore groups or nature-preservation and sports organizations. From the point of view of a person interested in the research of ethnological heritage of the region she is coming from, Ivanka Kunić (six decades after, compared by a good description provided by Vinko Pinter), described the *vuzmenice* in the following way: 'A few days before Easter children would collect branches and twigs and carry them to the top of the highest hill, from which the flame would be clearly visible. They were especially attentive so that the children from the neighboring village would not steal

⁵ 'On Easter they would light up the *vuzmenjka* (*vuzmenjak*) very early. A day before they would pile up a heap of pine branches, and on Easter morning they would light it up: they would let the cattle out of the stables and when the fire diminished, they would drive the cattle through it, so that the witches would not harm the cattle that year (Kotarski 1917:198).

the collected material. *Vuzmica* was built on the Good Saturday. They would place pine branches, twigs, fir and spruce branches and corn stalks around a tall pole, and form a large cone structure. Some would built a pyramid around three or four main poles ('*ražnji*') connected by wooden logs, *soki*, which were criss-crossed in pairs, and the space between was filled in with pine branches. On the top of the construction, called *frljunc*, they would tie the poles together and decorate them with colored ribbons, *pantlike*, and paper, *kinč*. All these decorations are called *paheta*. The people would light up smaller fires next to the *vuzmica* and stay awake close to them, keeping watch of the *vuzmica*, so that someone else would not light it up, and they light it at different times, most commonly at the 'break of dawn' on Easter' (Kunić 2001).⁶

During my field research in the villages on the slopes of the Kalnik mountain (Selanec, Čučevac, Mikovec, Gornje and Donje Borje, Šopron, Kamenica, Kalnik, Sv. Petar Orehovec, Šiljevec, Finčevac) on the Good Friday and Good Saturday in 2005, I found groups of villagers who were very meticulous in preparation or were already in different phases of the building of *vuzmice*. Next to *hute* (huts), made of corn stalks and branches, in good spirits, with wine and barbeque (sometimes a whole roasted lamb), and next to a small fire they lit close to the site of future *vuzmica*, they spent at least one night before burning the bonfire.

Vuzmice were built in a pyramidal shape, to the maximum height of approximately 20 meters, so that the logs and a few old automobile tires ('for better burning') were inserted between three or four central poles dug into the ground. The competition on whose *vuzmica* will be taller was enhanced by loud yelling and frequent comments. It was lit in the evening of the Good Saturday (around 9 PM). While it was burning, the majority of villagers jovially gathered around the fire waiting for it to burn down, after which they went home.

In 2006, I spent the period just before the Easter doing fieldwork in the region around the town of Jastrebarsko. Unusual activity could be noticed these days in the villages just around Jastrebarsko (Cvetković, Čabdin, Domagović, Volavje, Petrovina, Donja Kupčina, Brleniči, Brezari, Krupače, Čačkovina, Krašić, Hrženik, Pribič,

⁶ The most common names in the region of Hrvatsko Zagorje are *vuzmenica* and *vuzemnica*. Especially impressive are the ones built in the region around Ivanec, with (sometimes double) constructions up to 20 meters high. The local iPortal.hr brought the following description: 'The work around building the *vuzemnica* would start as early as two months before Easter. In this period, people would prepare the wood, collect branches and twigs and the building of the bonfire would start on the Good Saturday. Sometimes *vuzmenice* were built on the highest hill above the village, so that the flame was visible from far away, but today they are build on sites which are more easily approachable, on the meadows and fields near the villages. Two types of *vuzmenice* are built in this region. Some villages build *vuzemnice* in the shape of cone made of wood and braches placed around a central pole, and in other villages logs (*soki*) are placed between three or four vertical poles. The building of bonfire also meant a competition with the neighboring village and some pranks were commonly part of the ritual. The harmless ones included stealing of the collected material, and more serious ones were related to pre-mature lightning up of *vuzemnica*, which was considered to be a great shame. Therefore, the builders would carefully watch over the collected material and over the finished *vuzemnice*. The exact time of lightning the bonfires depended on the customary practices in

Svrževo, Dol, Puškarov jarak) - preparations for the building of *vuzmenka* (around the village of Krašić), *vazmenka* (around the village of Pribić) or *vuzmenjak* (the village of Cvetković)⁷.

In the past the preparations lasted, according to the accounts from the villagers, for longer than a month, and today they last for a week or two (from the Sunday preceding the White Sunday). They find the blackberry branches with which they build the *vuzmenka/vazmenka* in the Nature Park Žumberak. Since blackberry branches are getting hard to find, they use pine branches instead. On the top of *vuzmenka*, from 10 to 20 meters high, they link the construction poles (cut from hornbeam wood) with ivy (*sirobat*), and place a *kokot*, *kokotić*, made of the specially selected, most beautiful, blackberry branches. They prepare wooden logs a few days before Easter and they cut and drag the construction poles (*stožine*) on Good Friday, usually from the woods in the region of Crna Mlaka, more specifically from the locality of Glogovac.

Next to the bonfire, they also build an improvised *house* made from corn stalks (*debelišće*, *debelina*), branches, blackberry leftovers and boards. The activities accompanying the building and watching over the *vuzmenka* were very similar to those described in the regions around the mountain of Kalnik. The gathered villagers prepared meat, like roasted lamb (or even a calf in the village of Krašić). They all emphasized the fact that *vuzmenka* should be carefully watched over, so that someone

different villages. Usually the bonfires were lit in the break of dawn, but today in many localities this is adjusted to young children who have difficulties staying up all night, so the bonfires are frequently lit at midnight... *Vuzemnica* in the village of Kamenica was once built on top of the hill above the village. Everything was done by hand, so the whole process of creating a *vuzemnica* lasted much longer than today. During this period school children would sometimes bring home bad marks. The wooden material was donated by all the villagers and we used to compete in building the bonfire with the villages of Grdi and Crkovec. The bonfire was lit at 5 in the morning and we, the children, would bang in some pots and run through the village yelling: *vuzemljica* is burning, *vuzemljica* is burning... - in a story told by professor Antun Rodek' (See: http://portal.hr/clanak_.asp?ID=2180; the article titled 'Folk customs of burning *vuzemnice*', from April 18, 2006). Pinter (1934), however, mentioned Easter bonfires ('simple heaps of branches and twigs) which he distinguished from *vuzelnice*, and which were lit on the southern slopes of Bednjanska valley on the Easter eve. In the last few years on the web-sites of different organizations, tourist offices, local and county papers we can find very interesting and informative data on various current cultural events. As a specific oddity, we outline the following account: News from April 22, 2000 (Saturday): Today at 9PM, the Social Democratic Party – Branch Kotoriba organized a folk custom of burning *Vuzmenka*. A lot of young people attended this traditional custom. Radio station Međugorje took care of the good atmosphere and played some good music, and those who were thirsty could order and buy themselves a refreshing drink at the bar' (<http://mnovine.hr>). Other political parties also could not resist to pull a similar trick on various occasions regardless of their ideological frameworks and political options. That, however, is not specific only for Croatian region. We have information from our neighbor Slovenia, that the politician Janez Podobik, the president of the Slovene Popular Party on June 24 2004 (Midsummer's Eve), 'in the presence of *kresnice*, lit the bonfires in the celebration of the 13th anniversary of our independence... *Kresnice* were dressed in white silk tunics and they were ceremonially standing by the bonfire with torches in their hands.' *O tempora, o mores*.

⁷ Together with a group of ethnology students and a colleague from the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Tanja Bukovčan, I have documented a few hours of audio-visual material

else would not come and light up their bonfire, thus bringing them great shame.⁸ Before the bonfire was lit, children ran through the village carrying torches in their hands and crying: *Slepočki k vuzmenki...* (*Sleepers to the bonfire...*). In the majority of the villages, *vuzmenka* was lit on Easter morning, between 4 and 5AM, and in the villages of Čabdin and Domagovići around midnight. Children cried: *Vuzmenka gori...* (*The bonfire is burning...*), the rest of the crowd happily waited till the bonfire burnt down and then went home.

Since most of the people who took part in building of the *vuzmenka* were not present at the evening mass on Good Saturday, which included the blessing of fire and light (which was not looked favorably upon by the priests), those who were not overcome by work and staying up all night, went to the first morning mass.

It seems important to mention that the activities from the folklore repertoire were completely missing - such as some characteristic songs or processions which are otherwise commonly related to some other dates when bonfires are lit. These bonfires, according to the dates, or sometimes regions, are the bonfires lit on St. George's Day (procession of *jurjaši, durđari*), May the 1st (procession of *filipovčice, drva*), Holy Thursday (the procession of *križari, krstari*), Whit Sunday (procession of *kraljice, ljelje*) and Midsummer's Day (the procession of *ivančice, ladarice*).

It is interesting to notice that the custom of lightning Easter bonfires is not, even in some transformed variants, accepted in the urban regions, as is the case with St. George's Day and Midsummer's Day bonfires, which are today accompanied by different activities such as lightning of torches, fireworks and show programs, but with certain historical reminiscences⁹.

Conclusion

Without the further analysis of the still unresolved questions on the origin and duration of the custom of lightning Easter bonfires, and without providing some far-

⁸ Some would even built smaller, 'fake' *vuzmenkas* and light them up pretending that they were real, so as to provoke the observers from the neighboring villages to light up their bonfires earlier. Therefore, when they would light up their real bonfire, it would last longer. In the village of Krašići several competing groups lighting the bonfires are: Stepinci, Peničarci, Brebrići, Šimanci, Matošinci, Prstaci, Seljanci (Čuk), Židani and in the village of Cvetković: Sredanci, Vrčići, Vuličari and Dolenjci. The older villagers remember a bonfire lit on the Midsummer's Day (St. John's Day in Catholic calendar), especially in front of the houses where a person named Ivan (John) lived.

⁹ In Florence, for example, people gather every year on Easter day on Piazza del Duomo to watch the launching of the rocket named *Colombina*, when the wagon from which *Colombina* is launched is lit up. The custom is a combination of historical religious artifacts and modern pyrotechnics, and the fire is ritually lit using the flint from the Holy Grave. The lightning of the wagon is traditionally dedicated to the memory of the legendary Florentine knight, Pazzino de Pazzia, the templar knight who was the first one to climb the walls of Jerusalem in 1099.

fetched interpretations based on speculations, but on the basis of the known, available facts presented here, I can reach a few conclusions.

This custom, limited to certain regions of the northwestern continental part of Croatia, is of medieval origin and has spread to these parts from the northern European regions.

It seems that the names *Vazam/Vuzem* were formed under the Church's influence. For example, the Franciscan Jakov Pletikosa, while describing a location called *Galgala* in the Holy Land, in his travel accounts from 1752 stated: 'When the people of Israel crossed over dry Jordan, they made a camp and raised tents and here they did the *Vazam*'. It seems that Pletikosa used this name to denote the Jewish holiday of Pasha, commemorating the delivery from Egyptian slavery, and not the Easter.

Alongside the already mentioned theological interpretations of the above mentioned names, we should also remember the name *Uzam*, found in the medieval Dubrovnik (Belaj 1998:128), and documented by Nikša Ranjina, the author of the collection of Biblical excerpts – *Ranjinin Lekcionar*.¹⁰

In the course of duration of certain customs, the periods of their regression or the regression of the accompanying rituals are not uncommon, as well as the periods of their renewal, in the more or less changed form, in the new circumstances.

The data presented by Rožić (*today the Easter bonfires are not commonly lit*), point to the fact that as early as the beginning of the 20th century the custom of lightning Easter bonfires, commonly lit by the shepherds on the top of the hills, was vanishing. Close in time to the bonfires of St. George, they were probably replaced by them, even though both dates were closely linked to the spring awakening of vegetation.

Almost without an exception, the contemporary informants insist on the fact that the social gathering, the purpose of which was the building and the lightning of Easter bonfire, was considered inappropriate during the socialist period, and was sometimes obstructed or even prevented.

Some of the informants mentioned that the Church did not look too favorably on this custom. However, as the social role of the Church became increasingly important in Croatia during the 1990-ies and the collective consciousness of the religious background of this custom became more prominent, this custom became manifested as a form of popular religiousness, even though it is differently experienced and interpreted.

¹⁰ A Dubrovnik aristocrat, a member of the Great Council and several times elected Governor of the Republic, Nikša Andrečić Ranjina (1494-1582) was the author of the chronicle *Annali di Ragusa* and a collector of the renaissance Croatian poetry and Petrarchan lyrics published in his collection better known as *Zbornik Nikše Ranjine*.

Furthermore, the use of automobile tires for lightning of the bonfire has diminished or completely ceased. The participants explain that with the development of the 'ecological conscientiousness'.

While observing the enthusiasm, zest and hard work, even a significant amount of danger the builders of the bonfire were faced with, not accompanied by some 'old-time' rites, and an almost hurried departure from the scene even before the bonfire completely burnt down, a neutral participant in the event was logically faced with the question whether there were elements of absurdity in their behavior. In any case, this showed that some traditions, with certain 'self-understandable' values, even though questionable with regards to credibility and content in formal expression, appear very functional. They exist as a self-confirmation and identification of groups or individuals with certain worldviews and broadcast to the *others*, through a specific act, the message on their own cultural and social identity.

Through the unconscious acceptance of selective and controlled memory as a desirable form of affirmative behavior, in which the 'determined alternative' is the pattern within which the ritual function becomes secondary, the custom again serves as a regulator of social relations.

Translated by Tanja Bukovčan