



● Settlements where Bibijako Djive is celebrated on the third Friday from the beginning of Lent

◆ Settlements where Bibijako Djive is celebrated on 31 January

▲ Dates when Bibijako Djive is celebrated, which do not coincide with either of the previously mentioned

2.5

Bibi and Bibijako Djive in Serbia



III. 1 Settlements mentioned in ethnographic literature, as well as where field research was conducted, referenced in this contribution.

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Bibijako Djive is one of the most important feasts celebrated by Eastern Orthodox Christian Roma. The belief in Bibi and the celebration of her feast, Bibijako Djive, is linked to Romani communities in Serbia, south of the Sava and Danube rivers and north of the city of Niš. By celebrating Bibijako Djive, Bibi is appeased, and therefore Romani children are protected from illness.

INTRODUCTION

Ethnographic literature on Romani people registers and describes Bibijako Djive as an element specific to traditional Romani culture. What is common for all ethnographic sources is that they associate the Bibi cult with Eastern Orthodox Christian Roma. It is believed that the Roma adopted the belief from the Serbs that cholera appears in the form of a woman, and because there is a verbal taboo linked to this disease, the Serbs call this disease *Tetka* (Aunt). Some ethnographers such as Aleksandar Petrović (1937) believe that the Roma adopted this concept from the Serbs and used the Romani term for aunt, *bibi*. Ethnographic literature does not provide reliable information on whether Muslim Roma celebrate Bibijako Djive. According to Petrović, Muslim Roma in Kruševac had adopted the Bibijako Djive feast from Christian Roma, and they celebrate it on the same day, but at night. Leading up the holy day, they fast for several days and the celebration starts at sundown. Dragoljub Acković, the author of two mono-

graphs on Bibi (2004; 2010), also reports that ethnographic literature does not contain information on the celebration of Bibijako Djive by Muslim Roma. However, in the 2010 monograph Acković references information gathered among Muslim Roma from Prizren, Uroševac/Ferizaj (Kosovo) and Belgrade which indicates that these Muslim Romani communities celebrated Bibijako Djive for the sake of protecting their children from disease, but that the celebration of the Bibi cult lasts an entire month, from 31 January to 1 March.

Eastern Orthodox Christian Roma celebrate the same Christian feasts as the Serbs (with partially altered elements of certain feast rituals). This is why Bibi is rightfully given special attention in ethnography. Bibi is a non-canonised saint whose feast is not included in the Eastern Orthodox Christian liturgical calendar. The elements of the sainthood cult (legends, miracles and dreams, ceremonies and rites, the time and place of celebrating the feast of the saint, as well as iconography) have developed over time. Contemporary field research of Romani communities in Serbia indicate that Bibijako

III. 2

The legend of Bibi

Fragments from an interview conducted in Knjaževac in 2016.

(P - Participant, R - Researcher)

P: E Bibi, sose amen ikharas la Bibi? Amen ikharas la, ikhara la Bibi, a e gadže, e purane gadže, ikharena la čuma, e.

R: Sose?

P: E pa, džane sose? Po pričū, po legendu, sar pričol pe katar e purane, sar me ašundem, voj sasa, voj phirela pese ando gav, voj sasa cikni, a gasavi, naj sasa bari. Thaj cikni trasta, phiravela, džala pese ando gav, prosila, lači trasta našti vazdena trin džene, ako sas gači cikni. E ko dela la, ko ni, xoljarela la, razumi, ništa. Ko xoljarela la, ikljel avri andar e čhera e gadžendje, samo gija čerela vastesa, sa del pe jag, sa uništila. Možda ašunden, neko dela rromaja, šaj ašunda e Buba nekada, e purane amare ando Pirot: „Čalavel te e čuma“ a?

(Source: Digital Archive of the SANU Institute for Balkan Studies.)

P: Bibi, why do we call her Bibi? We call her Bibi and the Gadže, the old Gadže called her Čuma.

R: Why?

P: You know why? According to stories, according to the legend, as the old folk told it, as I heard it, she went around the village. She was small, she wasn't big. And she carried a bag, she went around the village, begging. Three persons could not lift her bag. Some gave [things] to her, and those who did not give – they would anger her. Who angered her – when she would leave the house of the Gadže, she would do just like that [waves his hand] with her hand, and burn everything, destroy everything. Perhaps you've heard someone curse, our old folks in Pirot say "May Čuma strike you down."

Djive, as the feast of the Romani saint Bibi, is known in the Eastern Orthodox Christian Romani communities in Serbia, south of the Sava and Danube rivers; Romani communities in Vojvodina do not celebrate this feast. The important elements of the Bibi cult that still exist today are the time and place of celebration of the feast, segments and elements of the rite itself, while the legends, miracles and dreams have faded over time, or exist in fragments in oral tradition.

THE LEGEND OF BIBI

Aleksandar Petrović recorded the largest number of legends about Bibi in his work *Contributions to the Study of the Serbian Gypsies No. 10*, published in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* in 1937. Petrović recorded legends in Eastern Orthodox Christian Romani communities, in settlements on the territory of Serbia. One of the first ones was recorded in the settlement of Kloka (III. 1), with a participant called Kona, who died in 1935, at the age of 99. This legend is very important, bearing in mind that the legend published in the *Romano Lil* newspaper in 1935 was identical to the one published two years later (1937) by Aleksandar Petrović. According to this legend, Kona claimed that Bibi first appeared in her home during winter-time. The family was finishing supper, when someone knocked on the door and asked whether anyone was home. The man of the house opened the door and welcomed the person in. It was Bibi, skinny, bony and tall, with long dark hair. She wore a red dress and was barefoot. Standing in front of her were two girls, dressed in white, and behind her – two lambs. Bibi asked whether they could come in. The man of the house allowed it, asked whether she was tired, whether she was hungry, and offered her to sit and rest. Bibi asked for *opanaci* (peasant shoes), because she was barefoot, and the lady of the house, Kona, found a pair and gave it to her. As soon as she handed over the shoes, Bibi, the children and the lambs disappeared; the door had not been opened, they only heard the sound of her voice saying "Let God always give you whatever you may need."

When the couple went out to look for her, they saw her outside, knocking on the door of the wealthiest Serbian household, looking for a place to spend the night. The Serbian woman chased her away, swearing at her. Bibi cursed her house and returned to Kona and her family. After warming up, she put the children and lambs to sleep, and said that she was Cholera and that she had suffocated the Gadže (Serbian) children. She then told her hosts to start celebrating her feast, to make a *zapis*,¹ for their children to gather at the *zapis* and to shout out "An' Bibijako satipe, taj ande laće **čavore!**" (To the health of the Aunt and that of her children!). They all fell asleep around the fire and in the morning, when Kona woke, the place where Bibi, the children and the lambs had fallen asleep was empty. Shouts rang out from the Serbian house, where Bibi had sought shelter the previous night; the children from that house had died from cholera. From that day on the Roma celebrate Bibi.

The legend of Bibi has many versions; according to Petrović's notes, they were recorded in Kragujevac, Kruševac, Jagodina, the Belgrade outskirts of Rušan, Resnik and Mirijevo (III. 1), where Bibi was portrayed as a woman (often elderly) with long hair, wandering the world with two children (usually female), and in some versions of the legend accompanied by two lambs. In some places, she is the embodiment of the cholera disease, but because of the verbal taboo, instead of Cholera she is called Aunt, i.e. Bibi in Romani. In some variants, Bibi is a Romni, and in some, she is a Serb. She appears during cholera epidemics that kill many children. Bibi usually speaks to people, asking them to fulfil certain requests and tasks (to start celebrating her feast; to leave clean water, a comb, basin, clean towel in the attic; she appeared to one man and asked him to give her a ride to the village, etc.), and in return she will protect their children from the disease.

1 Zapis (inscription) is a cross or mark carved into a tree. On a certain day, usually on a holy day, a procession of people goes to the zapis and a priest recites a prayer (Petrović 1937: 116).

III. 3

Description of the ritual in Svrljig, fragments from an interview conducted in Knjaževac in 2016. The participant is originally from Pirot, living in Knjaževac since 2002.

E, pravilnim putem, o Bibijako djive si dvajesdevetog januara. Ali amare Rroma ni praktikuin goda. Von mislin, preslavin trijes prvog, a trijes prvog si ispračaj, a džane so si ispračaj gova? E akana ka objasniv tumije. Dvajesdevetog slava slavil pe, kolako, memeli, djiv, bi golesko ni slavil pe, thaj mol. Pe gada prazniko, ko slavil, galama naj, muzika naj. Trin djive ni š lavel pe kaj postavil pe. Ko slavil, razumi, ni š laven. Čiston o djubre, al čiden pe jekh than i trin djive si prazniko. Trin djive, na jekh djive, od dvajesdevetog do trijesprvog. E, trito djive, so si o djubre š laven. Onda spremon, ranije spremona, čerena cikni trasta, suvena e rromnja cikni trasta. Andre mora te avel ogledalo nevo, sapuj čisto, kangli čisto, i indjarel pe, odredime kaj si čisto than, ke kaj kaš goda obesin, gothe phanden go trastisa.

(Source: Digital Archive of the SANU Institute for Balkan Studies.)

According to the rule, Bibijako Djive is on 29 January. But our Romas don't practice that. They celebrate on the 31st, but on the 30th is the ispračaj (sendoff), and you know what the ispračaj is? Well, I'll explain it to you. On the 29th the slava is celebrated, the kolač, candle, žito are prepared – there is no celebration without that – and wine. On the holy day, who celebrates – there is no clamour, no music. For three days there is no sweeping of what has been arranged. You understand – who celebrates doesn't sweep. They clear the garbage, but they collect it in one place, and it is a feast for three days. Three days, not one day, from the 29th to the 31st. Well, on the third day what has been swept up is thrown out. Previously they made a small bag; the women sew bags. The bag must contain a new mirror, a clean soap, a clean comb, and that bag is taken to a certain [place], pure, they hang it by some tree and that's where they close the bag.

Variations of the legend of Bibi also record the consequences of disrespecting her and her requests, and it is mostly Serbs (Gadže) who do not respect Bibi, so their children become ill and die; entire houses and villages are left completely empty.

Variants of the Bibi legend were also recorded by Rade Uhlik and Ljiljana Beljkašić (1958), in their study “Čergari Gypsies or Gurbeti” in the village of Čajniče (Ill. 1), in Čačak (in the Tamari community), as well as two non-localised legends. In these versions, Bibi is portrayed as a tall woman, in large gowns, shining like gold. Bibi does not walk, eat, drink, speak, or sing; she flies everywhere at night, but no one sees her – she hides from people. She is wealthy and beautiful; she does not have any children or a husband. She is believed to be the protector of children, especially protecting them from disease. Those who do not celebrate Bibijako Djive will see their children die.

MIRACLES AND DREAMS

The legends about Bibi also include stories about the miracles that she performs, as well as stories about dreams where Bibi came to certain people, which was the reason and beginning of the celebration of Bibi's day.

As reported by Aleksandar Petrović (1937), Romani people can name at least one miracle that happened to them or someone they know. When Bibi comes to someone in a dream, she usually asks them to fulfil certain demands related to the celebration of her feast, the way that she should be honoured; otherwise she comes to people who do not observe her feast.

In one of the recorded legends, Bibi came to a man in a dream and told him how to prepare Bibijako Djive. The “miraculous” element in this version is that he did not have to pay for the provisions, and after he prepared the supper, he started celebrating Bibijako Djive every year. Bibi came in a dream to a woman from Županjac (Ill. 1), whose husband would not let her attend the celebration of Bibijako Djive, because they had no children, and Bibijako Djive is a “children's

feast”. Because she did not respect Bibi, Bibi came to her in a dream and mentioned how long the woman would live. Legends about Bibi also describe miracles in which Bibi came to people who did not respect her; for example, in a dream she came to a man who had torn up a picture of Bibi and she told him to buy a new one; Bibi broke all the dishes of a woman who had not washed them ahead of Bibijako Djive,² an outsider who cut down a pear tree around which the Roma from Belgrade gathered died on Bibijako Djive, as did his entire family; in Resnik, today an outskirts of Belgrade, there was a woman who had laughed at Bibi, and after that she was left paralyzed. In addition to punishment for not respecting Bibi and the rituals related to the celebration of her feast, the legends about Bibi view assistance to those who pray to Bibi or who ask for her help as miracles. Bibi answered the prayers of a young student who was doing his military service in a distant town, and who prayed to Bibi ahead of Bibijako Djive that he would be at home for her feast. He was sent home to Belgrade the following day. The legends of Bibi's miracles were also recorded by Sreten Petrović (1992) more than 50 years later in Svrljig (Ill. 1), in which Bibi helped a sick child, after which the family started celebrating Bibijako Djive.

More recently, ten interviews were conducted during an anthropological and linguistic research in Knjaževac and Minićevo (Ill. 1) in 2016,³ documenting the rituals related to Bibijako Djive. In the fragments of interviews discussing Bibijako Djive, there is a notable absence of memory about

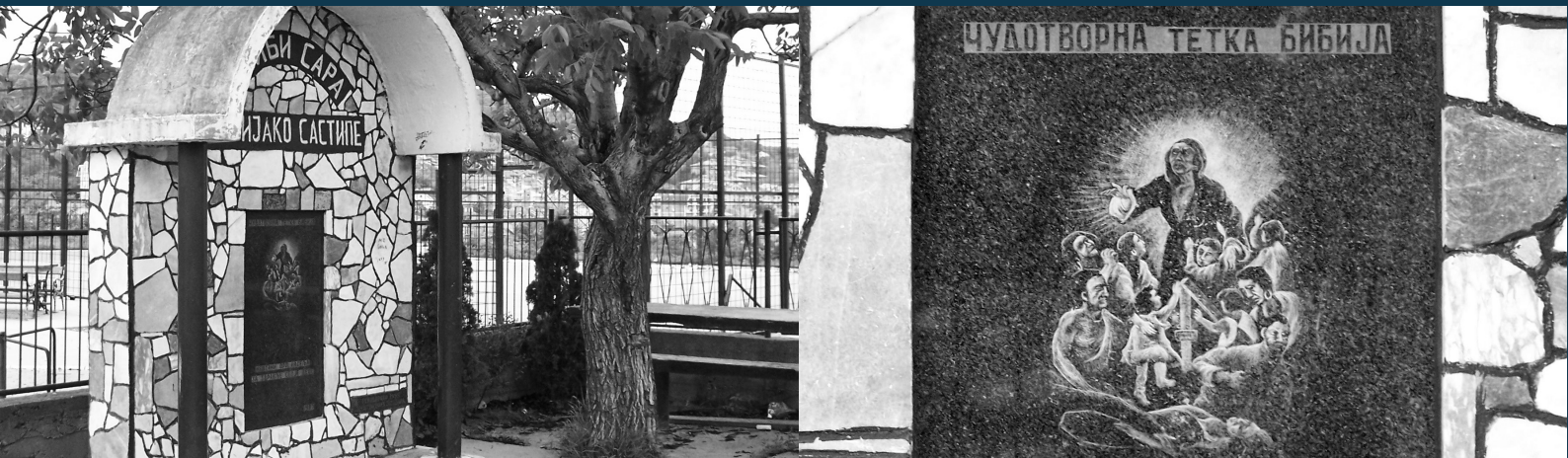
2 The reason for such “behaviour” on Bibi's part is that a segment of the ritual associated with Bibijako Djive is the cleaning of the house, so that it shines like new.

3 The research was part of the project *Exploring the Language and Folklore of Roma in Knjaževac* (2016-2017), headed by the “Njegoš” National Library from Knjaževac and financed by the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia.

III. 4

Monument to Bibi in Orlovsko Naselje,
Belgrade, 2010.

Source: Digital Archive of the SANU Institute for Balkan Studies.



who Bibi is, as well as of nearly all elements of the legend (miracles and dreams) recorded in traditional ethnographic literature. Only one interview recorded fragments of the legend (Ill. 2), mentioning that Bibi is a woman who went around the village, carrying a sack and begging. She was small and feeble, and she could not pick up her sack because it was so heavy. Those who would not give her anything, and those were mostly Gadže, would anger her, and after leaving their houses she would torch and destroy everything with a sheer movement of her hand.

TIME AND PLACE OF THE CELEBRATION OF BIBIJAKO DJIVE

The time and place of the celebration are very important to the feast of Bibijako Djive and the related ritual. Ethnographic literature predominantly mentions the third Friday from the beginning of Lent as the time when Bibijako Djive is celebrated.⁴ In Belgrade (Petrović 1937: 124; Vukanović 1983: 275), Smederevo and its surroundings, Smederevska Palanka (Vukanović 1983: 275; Acković 2010: 11), and Kragujevac (Petrović 1937: 124), the celebration of Bibijako Djive depends on the date of Easter (Ill. 1). A slightly smaller number of ethnographic works mentions the celebration of Bibijako Djive coinciding with the Eastern Orthodox Christian feast of Saint Athanasius (31 January),⁵ affixing the holy day to a specific date. Literature states that in Niš (Trajković 1997: 229) and Svljig (Petrović, S. 1992: 348) (Ill. 1), Bibijako Djive is celebrated on 31 January. This date is also mentioned in the recent documentation of the Bibi cult in in Eastern Serbia, namely in Knjaževac and

Minićevo. In addition to these settlements, Bibijako Djive is also celebrated on 31 January in other localities of Eastern Serbia, such as in Boljevac, Bor, Zaječar and Negotin, as well as in Paraćin, in central Serbia (Ill. 1).

The place considered cult in the celebration of the Bibijako Djive is a pear tree, less often an apple tree, around which the Roma gather for Bibijako Djive, bringing food and performing certain rituals. As reported by Aleksandar Petrović (1937: 129), only in Belgrade was there a place dedicated to Bibi; in all other places, whether cities or villages, the Roma had a space in their settlement where Bibi was celebrated. A fertile tree – a pear tree or an apple tree, containing the *zapis* – was located in the centre of that space. The site in Belgrade dedicated to Bibi, the Čubura Creek, was one of the most significant sites mentioned in ethnographic literature. Čubura, formerly an outskirt of Belgrade and now one of the city's centrally located neighbourhoods, was a gathering place for the Belgrade Roma for the celebration of Bibijako Djive.

In a recent field research on Romani communities, conducted between 2010 and 2018 in Orlovsko Naselje, a settlement in the Belgrade outskirt of Mirijevo, as well as in Knjaževac, Minićevo and Vlaško Polje (Ill. 1), photos were taken of the space where Roma gather to celebrate Bibi (Ills. 4, 5 and 6). A pear tree is also located next to the monuments erected in celebration of “Saint Bibi”.

RITUAL/CEREMONY

In Romani communities in Serbia where Bibijako Djive is celebrated on the third Friday after the beginning of Lent, the food prepared for the celebration is Lenten. The day before Bibijako Djive, the houses are cleaned, as is the space around the pear tree. People come to the celebration site, light candles and pray to God for Bibi's health, and the health of her children and their children. They wear their best clothes, bring their children and a priest says a prayer. The *kolač* (ritual bread) is cut and brandy is consumed. Believing that

4 In Eastern Orthodox Christianity Lent lasts 7 weeks.

5 The Orthodox Church in Serbia follows the Julian calendar, which is why all dates in this contribution have been converted to the Gregorian calendar.

III. 5

Monument to Bibi in
Vlaško Polje, 2018.

Source: Digital Archive of the SANU Institute for Balkan Studies.



when Bibi enters the house she first goes to the attic, the Roma first clean their attics ahead of Bibijako Djive, and there they spread kilims and place on them a basin of water, a mirror, a towel and an unused piece of soap (Petrović 1937: 128-132; Vukanović 1983: 275; Uhlík and Beljkašić 1958: 204).

In Romani communities where Bibijako Djive is celebrated on 31 January, the food prepared is not Lenten, but rather poultry as the ritual meal – most commonly turkey (Petrović, S. 1992: 348), and in some places goose (Trajković 1997: 229). Unlike the rituals described by ethnographers Aleksandar Petrović (1937), Tihomir Đorđević (1984) and Tatomir Vukanović (1983), which involve the entire Romani community and their gathering is accompanied by merriment, at the celebration of Bibi in Svrljig there is no music, festiveness or singing. The hosts must not taste the food prepared at home. After the supper, the leftovers are collected and buried in a *čisto than* (pure place, in a ritual sense); two or three members of the household take the leftovers away and that segment of the ritual is called “the *ispraćaj* (sendoff) of Saint Bibi”. The festivity starts upon their return from the sendoff, and it lasts throughout the following day (Petrović, S. 1992: 348).

The descriptions of the rituals practiced in Eastern Serbia (Ills. 3 and 9) contain the following elements: in Svrljig the Bibijako Djive celebration commences on 29 January, when the *kolač* and *žito* (cooked wheat pudding) are prepared, and the candle is lit. There is no festivity, music, or clamour. The house is not cleaned (swept) for three days. The garbage is collected in one place and on the third day, 31 January, it is taken out. The women sew small bags into which they place a mirror, soap and comb, and everything is taken to the tree, which is considered a pure place. In Knjaževac and Minićevo the ritual differs in certain elements: instead of the candle and *kolač*, the only food prepared is poultry. They go to the fertile tree, say a prayer to Bibi, and light candles for the children’s health. It is preferable to leave gifts: soap and a comb. The interview fragment provided in Ill. 9 gives certain details not mentioned previously: the chicken that is slaughtered for ritual purposes must not be black, it is killed in a

special place considered “pure”, the feathers must not be singed, rather the chicken must be plucked. People go to the fertile tree, taking food and lighting candles for Bibi’s health and the health of her children. Small pieces of clothing are sewn using special fabric: skirts and blouses, towels are sewn and they are all taken to the tree. Also, small bags are crafted in which a mirror, comb and facial cream are placed, and they are all left at the tree:

ICONOGRAPHY

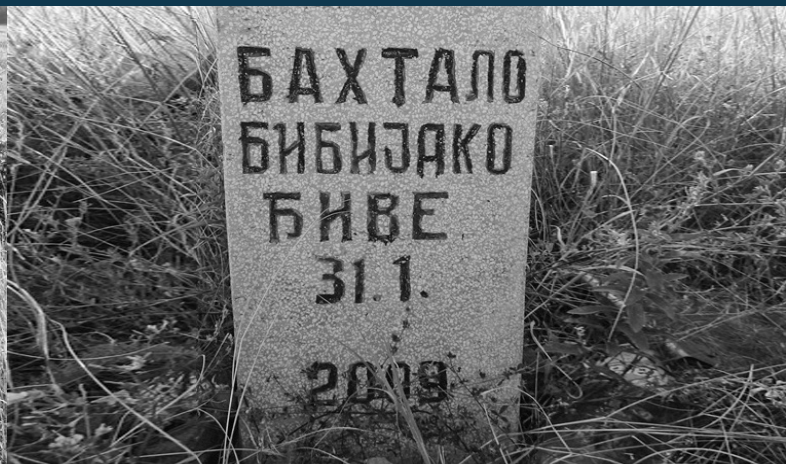
The first mention of an icon of Bibi was recorded in Aleksandar Petrović’s study in 1937, stating that after the First World War the Bibi Association was created; for seven or eight years Roma collected membership fees and managed to buy a small plot of land on Pašino Brdo (then an outskirt of Belgrade), and celebrated Bibijako Djive there. A shrine to Bibi was erected, including Bibi’s banner and an icon of Bibi. Guests who entered Bibi’s sanctuary were met by the icon of Bibi, kissed it, the bread was cut and every person took a piece, as a blessing. Bibi’s chapel had the same appearance as an Eastern Orthodox Christian temple. On the eastern side was a plaque with the inscription “U slavu svojoj Tetkici podiže ovaj spomenik Dušan Simić 1927” (In honour of his Aunt, Dušan Simić erects this monument 1927). To the left was the icon of Saint Parascheva, and on the rear wall two icons of Bibi.

In 1929 Bibi gained her first true icon: Petrović believes the icon was painted by P. Daničić (Petrović 1937: 134), and it was later lithographically copied and the reproductions sold (Acković 2010: 11) (Ill. 7). The icon depicts “miracle worker Aunt Bibi”, typically portrayed as a Romni wearing braids and earrings. The foreground shows a Romni lying on her back, hands stretched out over a gravestone, with the year 1929 engraved on it. A child’s grave with a cross is depicted. Bibi has her hands spread, as a symbol of the protection of children. An identical reproduction of the icon of Saint Bibi exists on the monument in the Orlovsko Naselje settlement, in the Mirijevo outskirt of Belgrade (Ill. 4). The Cyrillic alphabet inscription on

III. 6

Monument to Bibi on the road between
Minićevo and Knjaževac

Source: Digital Archive of the SANU Institute for Balkan Studies.



the monument to Bibi, on the reproduction of the icon on black marble reads “Čudotvorna tetka Bibija. Meštani Orł. Naselja za zdravlje svoje dece” (The miracle worker Aunt Bibi. Residents of the Orł. Settlement, for the health of their children). The reproduction of the icon, i.e. the depiction of Bibi, is not present on every monument erected in Bibi’s honor. The monument erected on the road between Minićevo and Knjaževac (Eastern Serbia) contains the Cyrillic alphabet inscription “Бахтало Бибџако ђиве” (Happy Bibijako Djive), the date of the celebration of the feast, 31 January, and 2009, the year when the monument was erected (III. 6).

It is important to note that before Bibi gained her icon in the places where Roma gather, the celebration of Bibijako Djive included an icon of Saint Parascheva in its place. For example, reports in the daily newspaper *Politika* from 1921, 1922 and 1927 stated that Roma in Belgrade, who had gathered to celebrate Bibijako Djive, kiss the icon of Saint Parascheva (Acković 2010: 55). A similar report from 1926 indicated that on Pašino Brdo in Belgrade, at the entrance to a small Roma-owned estate, stood an official representative of the “Gypsy community” holding the icon of Saint Parascheva (Vuksanović Macura and Macura 2014-2015: 168); the same information about the icon of Saint Parascheva being kissed by the Roma on Bibijako Djive is reported by Aleksandar Petrović (1937: 126). A reproduction of the icon of Saint Parascheva, on black marble, exists today in the place dedicated to Bibi in Vlaško Polje (III. 5). The only explanation offered as to why the icon of Saint Parascheva preceded the icon of Bibi is that in many Serbian cities the feast of Saint Parascheva is celebrated as a female feast (Petrović 1937: 124).

RECEPTION OF THE BIBIJAKO DJIVE IN PRINT MEDIA

The importance of Bibijako Djive as a significant Romani feast is indicated by the inevitable reports on the celebration of this Romani holy day by daily newspapers in Serbia. Two publications by Dragoljub Acković, „*Tetkica Bibija*“: *Prosla-*

va Bibije u ogledalu dnevne i periodične štampe u poslednjih sto godina (“Aunt Bibi”: *The Celebration of Bibi as Reflected in Daily and Periodical Press in the Past Hundred Years*) (2004) and *An Bibiako Sastipe* (*To Bibi’s Health*) (2010) contain news reports from the newspapers *Politika*, *Vreme*, *Pravda*, *Vjesnik*, *Borba*, *Danas*, *Večernje Novosti*, *Ekspres*, *Blic* and *Nedeljni Telegraf*, and based on these reports it is possible to monitor the reception of this significant Romani feast over more than one century, although only in Belgrade. The first newspaper report on the celebration of Bibijako Djive was published on 19 March 1905, in the daily newspaper *Politika* (Acković 2004: 21). Up to the 1980s, newspaper reports contained nearly identical content regarding the celebration of Bibijako Djive, presented in a very similar manner: gathered Roma moved in a procession to the Čubura Creek, where they celebrated Bibijako Djive; adults and children, dressed in their best clean clothes, carried food to the site of the *zapis* dedicated to Bibi, where they lay down kilims, pillows, and arranged the food that they had brought, eating it on the ground (III. 8). The priest and the *host*⁶ sliced the *kolač* (although this segment of the ritual was sometimes carried out without the priest), the children shouted “Bibijako sastipe”, and the day continued with festivities (Acković 2010: 55-97). Rarely did reporters include any additional “trivia” about the Roma and the specific day and feast. On 19 March 1905 the reporter for *Politika* wrote about an incident during the celebration, where a wife of a Rom killed his mistress at the celebration (Acković 2004: 23). The following day, on 20 March 1905, the report in *Politika* stated that a poor man was cho-

6 The *host* of the feast (not only the feast of Bibi, but any collective feast of an Eastern Orthodox Christian saint) is the person who responsible for providing the candle, preparing the *kolač*, food and drinks. Sometimes the host of the feast was chosen by the community, and sometime they would volunteer to be the host the following year. Being the host of a feast represented an exceptional honour.

III. 7

Reproduction of the icon of Bibi painted by P. Daničić, downloaded from the Internet.

Source: Digital Archive of the SANU Institute for Balkan Studies.



III. 8

Celebration of Bibijako Djive in Belgrade, in 1937.

Source: Vreme daily newspaper (1937).



sen to host the celebration the following year, and that he was not delighted about the duty. *Politika* reported that at Bibijako Djive in 1921 a fight broke out at the corner of Orlovska Street and Čuburska Street (Acković 2010: 58). In the late 1930s the *Udruženje beogradskih Cigana svečara Bibije – Tetkice* (Association of Belgrade Gypsies Celebrators of Bibi – Aunt) started organising the celebration of Bibijako Djive.⁷

Since the 1980s, newspaper articles in the listed newspapers have reported completely different information related to the celebration of Bibijako Djive, as well as a different way of reporting about the feast. The celebration moved from the traditional cult location dedicated to Bibi to prominent Belgrade restaurants and hotels, with one of the compulsory segments of the celebration being the Romani beauty pageant (the newspapers even listing the names of the candidates, winners and runners-up), and the obligatory mention of the number of people who had gathered at the restaurants (ranging from 500 to 800), and in addition to Roma from Belgrade, the celebrations were also attended by Roma from other cities in Serbia and those temporarily working abroad. Significant information included in the newspaper reports on the celebration of Bibijako Djive includes the names of prominent singers who provided entertainment for the gathered Roma, as well as politicians who attended the celebration (and the names of the political parties that the attending politicians

belong to). Especially emphasised is the fact that when the Roma who gathered to celebrate Bibijako Djive were asked by reporters who Bibi was/is, they could not provide an answer. In the process of transformation, the Bibijako Djive ritual lost its sacral character, important elements that represent the foundation of the cult of Bibi are missing; it appears that the original purpose of the feast has been lost. It could be presumed that the cult of saint Bibi among the Roma has become exoticised, in accordance with the times when such newspaper reports are created.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Certain ethnographic contributions have attempted to explain the origin of Bibi and her significance and function in traditional Romani culture; some Roma consider Bibijako Djive their greatest feast, even greater than their family feast or Saint George's Day. Bibi is a disease – Cholera; the Roma celebrate Bibijako Djive with the aim of protecting their children from the cholera disease. Houses and family members must be clean, Bibi must be presented with gifts and certain rituals are to be performed. Petrović believes that regardless of the fact that the cult of Bibi is gradually spreading, Bibijako Djive remains a feast only for the Eastern Orthodox Christian Roma who speak the Romani language (Petrović 1937: 137). Modern field research in Eastern Serbia, in Knjaževac and Minićevo, where two Eastern Orthodox Christian Romani communities live – Gurbet and Lejaši (Leyash), who differ in the dialect that they speak (the Gurbet speak a southern Vlax dialect of the Romani language, and the Lejaši speak a northern Vlax dialect of the Romani language; see Matras 2002: 7-8), and also in traditions and elements of everyday life – have shown that Bibijako Djive is celebrated in these two towns in Eastern Serbia only by the Gurbet Roma, while the feast is not a feature of the traditional culture of the Lejaši Roma, regardless of the fact that they are Eastern Orthodox Christians.

7 The Association of Belgrade Gypsies Celebrators of Bibi – Aunt was registered with the Ministry of the Interior on 1 May 1935. The rules of the Association stipulated that the goal of the Association was to bring together followers of Bibi, for its members to get to know each other and assist each other, for establishing new and supporting existing cultural and social institutions, contributing to the raising of the cultural level of its members, providing for talented students and youths, especially war orphans, within the limits of the financial means, to help with their accommodation for the purpose of education and learning crafts (Acković 2010: 29).

III. 9

Description of the ritual (most likely in Svrlijig), fragments from an interview conducted in Knjaževac in 2016. The participant is originally from the village of Galibabinac near Svrlijig.

Source: Digital Archive of the SANU Institute for Balkan Studies.

(P - Participant, R - Researcher)

P: [Bibijako djive] si dujto maj bitno prazniko, tradicionalno rromano prazniko, Sveti Antanasije ikharen e gadže. Inače gova si Bibijako djive, tetkin dan u prevodu gadžikane. Bibijako djive slavil pe trideset i prvog januvara, ili tranda jekhto djive januar svako breš. Znači, sose si goda gija gova pazniko, gova prazniko naj avil kaj već uskoro te, trubul te das ando milaj, gadže kontra mislin goda kaj si amen kaj čeras kontra nešto, kaj tradas e čuma, a naj gova tačno. Gova si Bibijako djive i amen činas goda djive khanjen. Ali slično si gada prazniko kaj ni troma kale khanja te činen nego mora bilo savi samo te ni avel kali khanji, e. Niti šaj te čine, na primer, bilo so aver nego isključivo mora te avel khanji ili čurka, ali isključivo, znači, mora te avel baš khanji. E khanji našti činela ande ći avlija negde, nego mora pe kaj livada te avel pe kaj čisto than te čindol e kanji, i s tim mora te čupil pe khanji, a šaj tol pe ando tato paj, al ni tromal te prlil pe pe jag. E goda si problem, ni tromal pe gova. I kana spremol pe, čerdol pe, verovatno svude si goda an svako foro, džan pe kaj livada kaj si rodno kaš i ćidel pe sasti familija, narodo, komšije, prijateljura sasti rromani malava kompletno, džan i goda rodno kaš i onda indjaren, katar goja khanji indjaren zala mas, indjaren ako čeren kaj torte, kolakura, sokura, ali si bitno k-indjaren i o djiv, thon po djiv bombone, ovaj, memelja ando sastipe inače mulendje ni troman te phabaren ke goda kaš. Znači samo ando sastipe Bibijako laće čhavengo, postojil goja bibi, verovatno. [...]

R: A indjarel pe kaj darura e Bibijaće pe gova?

P: Obavezno, upravo goda. Čerdol pe stvar, katar e čisto kaj basmava kas si ili ćinel ande prodavnica ranije sas goda, ali možda

(Source: Digital Archive of the SANU Institute for Balkan Studies.)

si i akana, ni džanav, ali verovatno si ke Kinezura. [...] E, katar goda

čisto, parče kaj ćines, ćerdol cikne bočave, ćerdol bluza, kaj peškiri ćindol pe, ogledalo, kangli, pomada, tol pe pare an kaj torbica i gova sa ando sastipe Bibijaće laće čhavendje, tol pe ko kaš, tol pe pare i goda si gijate. E, to je to.

P: [Bibi's day] is the second most important feast, a traditional Roma feast; Saint Athanasius the Gadže [Serbs] call it. Incidentally, Bibi's day translates to Tetkin [Aunt's] day in Serbian. Bibijako Djive is celebrated on the 31st of January every year. The Gadže think that we exorcise Čuma on that holy day, but that is not true. It is Bibijako Djive and on that day we slaughter chickens. But they must not be black chickens, they just can't be black chickens. Nor can anything else be slaughtered, it can only be a chicken or a turkey. The chicken cannot be slaughtered in the yard, but in a meadow, in a pure place, and the chicken must be plucked, and it can be put in boiling water, but it must not be singed. And when the feast is prepared, and that is probably done in every town, you go to a meadow with the fertile tree and the entire family, people, neighbours, friends, the entire Roma hamlet goes to the fertile free and they take some meat from the chicken, cakes, pastries, and juices, if they make them. It is important to bring žito, and place candy on the žito; candles are lit for health; candles are not lit for the dead at that tree. Candles are lit only for Bibi's health and the health of her children. We Roma are pious and we believe in those things. [...]

R: And is Bibi presented a gift?

P: That's obligatory, precisely that. Things are from pure textile [basma]. One used to buy it in shops, and now I don't know, they probably buy it from the Chinese. [...] Well, you use it to make a small skirt, blouse, towels were made, in a small bag you put a mirror, comb, facial cream, money, and all that is for Bibi's health and the health of her children. Those are left at the tree; you also leave money, etc.

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