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From the Serbian Fair to the Russian Museum: On the Ethnographic Relevance of the Gingerbread Collection from 1902

Serbian figured gingerbreads owned by the Russian Museum of Ethnography are described, the history of the collection is provided, and its cultural meaning is evaluated. Ethnographic parallels are analyzed, and archaic examples are cited. The custom of baking gingerbread results from the commercialization of the agricultural tradition of baking ritual bread. In terms of cultural anthropology, the question may be raised whether the replacement of destroyed originals by plaster replicas preserves the information potential and ethnographic value of the collection. Its interpretation is relevant to national identity in new Balkan nations such as Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia. Another problem is if and how a craft shared by several peoples can be an ethnic marker. In terms of ethnographic museology in the globalizing world, the prospects of acquiring recent collections are discussed. The role of such collections in constructing new national identities may be considerable.

Keywords: *Exhibit, craft, identity, replica, fair, Balkans, tradition.*

Introduction

Museum items convey various messages to descendants about accumulated human achievements, and various facets and shades of life in the past. Each item represents a separate historical narrative. However, its contents are not always obvious. This is the most important aspect of the process of comprehending museum exhibits, which makes scholars search for methods of revealing their information potential and valuable content in the context of cultural heritage.

The depositories of the Russian Museum of Ethnography (REM) contain more than 700,000 items—inanimate witnesses to historical epochs and human destinies. They are the result of someone's thoughts, knowledge, skills, collective and personal worldview foundations. However, in the existing practice of exposition, the multidimensionality of the information potential of items and collections is often lost owing to their diversity and thematic-descriptive engagement. A detailed study of museum items through scientific methods makes it possible to identify their informational and cultural value. That is why figured gingerbread, which made up the first collection of the Serbian traditional culture in the Russian Museum of Emperor Alexander III in the early 20th century, deserves a special study.

This paper examines the collection of Serbian figured gingerbread in terms of its information content, museum and cultural value. In this regard, it is important to refer to the history of the collection's formation, its exposition in the museum, ethnographic information about the existence of such items in culture in the past and present, as well as to analyze modern trends in the interpretation

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of museum heritage in the context of geopolitical shifts and the desire of ethnic communities to use the old items as a tool for updating their identity. This issue belongs to the framework of ethno-museological and source study discourse, and relies upon a comprehensive analysis of the collection. This analysis is based on the cultural-anthropological, structural-semiotic, functional, comparative-typological, and other approaches. The source base of the study included collection items, museum records, early minutes of the museum council meetings, and other archival documents. In general, the chosen strategy makes it possible to reveal the multifaceted nature of ethnographic objects, to determine their place in the museum collection, and to extend a kind of logical thread from the past to the present through updating the evidence of the bygone era.

The problem of material and preservation of the exhibits

The interpretation of artifacts is among the most important factors of heritage actualization in museum practice. It is of fundamental importance in cases when the items have lost their expositional attraction, yet they still bear the function of recording ethnographic facts. The problem is that even under specialized storage conditions, the items are hardly protected from decay. Over time, they are destroyed and loose much of the information they could convey to descendants. Museums react to this process by making replicas, which do not record all the characteristics of the originals, and only conditionally convey the information about their external features. In this regard, the scientific coverage of the information potential of fragile items made of impermanent materials seems to be a particularly important task.

Owing to the ethnographic specialization of the museum, its collections at the early stages of their formation included items made of rapidly decaying materials, in particular, samples of ritual food—loaves, gingerbreads, sweets, etc. Irreversible organic processes led to the loss of the originals; so, the practice appeared of replacing them with plaster models. This was the case with the first collection on the traditional culture of the Serbs—30 figured gingerbreads brought to the museum when it still had the status of the Ethnographic Department (ED) of the Russian Museum of Emperor Alexander III.

In 1902, these vivid and colorful products of various shapes and ornamentation, an attribute of the Serbian fair "vashar", were purchased in Belgrade by the first head of the ED, the outstanding ethnographer D.A. Klements (1848–1914). As a result of biochemical processes, several gingerbreads had already been lost by 1935; in 1955, they were excluded from the accounting records (REM, collection No. 217-1, 3, 4, 10, 24, 29). Foreseeing the fate of the remaining items, museum specialists came to the conclusion that it was necessary to create plaster replicas identical in shape, size, and color (this decision concerned not only the Serbian collection, but also similar cultural artifacts of other peoples—Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and others) (Smusin, 1974: 158). The replicas were made in a museum workshop and recorded under the numbers of the originals, which meant an authorized replacement of the originals. However, time turned out to be merciless to plaster as well: many models split and lost the paint layer, which made them unsuitable for exhibition. However, this did not lead to the final loss of information about the originals. Data on the contents of the collection have been preserved in the inventory compiled by P.P. Slavnin (1878–1957) in January 1903.

Slavnin arrived in St. Petersburg in 1902 after graduating from the Tobolsk Theological Seminary (Ioganzen, 1962). In the capital, the future Tomsk local history expert and ethnographer became an external student at the Imperial University and the Archaeological Institute. In the Ethnographic Department of the Russian Museum, he worked part time as a registrar and was one of those who happened to hold in his hands the elegant Serbian gingerbread pieces in their original form. In the collection inventory, he briefly recorded their external features (color, shape, and decoration), but did not give any information about their use in the Serbian traditional culture. In those years, the museum was intensely forming collections, and owing to haste and lack of registrars, many artifacts were described formally. In addition, there was no experience in describing such items; Serbian gingerbread was the first massive addition of such artifacts to the collection. However, now, more than a century later, it is exactly the inventory that allows us to reconstruct the appearance of the lost originals and continue to consider them an integral part of the collection (REM, inv. No. 217).

Having been included into museum collections, ordinary items acquire semantic value and are memorialized as cultural phenomena. Nowadays, museologists admit that the material side of a museum item is not its only and key component (see, e.g., (Suvorov, 2017: 76)). The item conveys important information about itself as a component of culture, thereby enriching the informational capacity of the collection. Within the framework of ethnographic collection, the most important function of each item is to add a feature to the general image of the culture of a particular ethnic group. Thus, the collection of things forms a kind of dossier on the ethnic community, and characterizes the specificity of its material code. Consequently, the fact of including the set of gingerbreads in the museum collection suggests that this attribute of the Serbian traditional

culture was important for its appropriate representation in the museum.

In this regard, the role and place of plaster replicas in the history of this collection is of considerable interest. The idea of a "non-standard" appearance of "affected" artifacts allows us to consider replicas as a material reincarnation of the originals and as a part of their biography (Leonov, Grusman, 2019: 67). At the same time, these casts can be considered a separate narrative, telling about a certain stage in the work of the museum itself. The casts, keeping a semantic connection with the originals, continue to function as a conditional source of information. Correlation of museum data on the collection items with the information presented in ethnographic literature, as well as with similar items from other collections and the current state of tradition, makes it possible to reconstruct many historical and semantic aspects of figured gingerbread in the Serbian culture; and their scientific coverage allows for the presentation to the public of an unexposed part of the REM collection (Mylnikov, 1987).

Thanks to the replicas, the collection extended its visual functionality for a while. However, from the point of view of source study, its ethno-marking function has become doubtful. When considering gingerbreads as three-dimensional sources of information, the relationship between the original and the replica in recognizing them as historical documents becomes fundamentally important (Andreeva, 2017: 13). Discrepancies are found primarily in the material and the circumstances of manufacturing these items. Replacement of dough with plaster means the change of the information carrier; not only did it entail the loss of the original "text", but also provoked the appearance of attributes that have no common features with the originals. Approximately repeating the sizes and outlines of the originals, the replicas did not coincide with them in weight. The difference in the material determined different texture, taste, color, smell, and other characteristics that ensured the morphology and semantics of items (Balash, 2015: 42; Baiburin, 1981). A plaster cast does not provide information on whether the gingerbread was mint-flavored or toasted; it does not cause the visual and gustatory sensations that a person has when looking at an edible object. From a cultural and anthropological point of view, the sensual perception of properties of the observed items is important. Thus, the replacement of material leads to the loss of a whole block of initial information that makes it possible to characterize these items as a cultural phenomenon.

The material of goods is of great importance for the museum's representation of ethnic culture (Rudenko, 2017: 21). The reference exhibits for the ethnographic museum are the items made in natural economy, from natural materials, and using traditional techniques. Researchers note that the material sets the grammar (structure) of the thing: any manufacturing technology invented by people, like also the methods of decoration, is determined by the material's nature (Baranov, 2016: 36). For instance, the technology of making plaster casts does not provide for high-temperature thermal processes; so, their texture differs from baked dough in the absence of internal air. Also, a cast does not convey the lightness and sophistication of sugar patterns. The semantic properties of items are lost as well: folk ideas about the magical properties of bread, honey, and dough are inapplicable to plaster replicas.

Different compositions of input materials and manufacturing technology give rise to other differences. The shaping of the plaster mass does not use kinetic codes associated with the muscular memory of a skill that has been passed down from generation to generation in traditional culture. Neither does the motivation for creating plaster models stem from certain functions in the life of the ethnic community. It is determined by the need for a visual and symbolic demonstration of the object for informational purposes. All these factors ultimately affect the strokes, rhythm, plasticity of items and placement of creative accents in their pictorial details. No matter how obvious it may be, it should be noted that in the Serbian traditional culture of the second half of the 19th to early 20th century, there circulated no products made of painted plaster that would outwardly resemble figured gingerbread.

The thesis that the shells of things hide the ideas inside makes it possible to consider originals and replicas the personification of meanings that are completely different in nature (Nikonova, 2006: 11). Plaster models do not carry the inner thought that was fundamentally important for depositing things into an ethnographic museum. They have become part of a completely different cultural history. However, despite all the losses and distortions, these timely made models provide an idea of the Belgrade gingerbread tradition of the late 19th to early 20th centuries.

History and content of the collection

Preservation of various samples of archaic forms of the traditional culture under the conditions of the modernizing world was one of the priority tasks of the young museum. Its leader D.A. Klements paid particular attention to the conceptual side of the acquisition of exhibits. In particular, he believed that the museum collection should reflect the ethnography of not only the peoples of the Russian Empire, but also "all Slavic tribes, regardless of political boundaries" (Dubov, 1998: 116). Particular emphasis was placed on the ethnography of the Balkan Peninsula, thus highlighting the strong

ties and cultural kinship between the Balkan peoples and the Slavs of the Russian Empire (Makarenko, 1917: 19). This approach was in line with the current political moment: in that situation of the Slavophilic sentiments, Russia acted as the patroness of the Slavs of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, as well as the young Balkan countries.

Especially close historical ties developed between Russia and Serbia. Having attained independence in the last third of the 19th century, Serbia sought to establish itself in the international arena in various ways, including representation of the traditional culture. In particular, at the First International Exhibition of Historical and Contemporary Costumes, which opened in November 1902 in the Tauride Palace, the Serbian queens Natalija and Draga Obrenović personally presented the collections of Serbian traditional clothes (Kael, 1902: 5). The head of the Ethnographic museum in Belgrade S. Trojanović (1862–1935) took an active part in the preparation for the exhibition from the Serbian part (Menković, 2002: 169). The professional contacts between S. Trojanović and D.A. Klements seem to have been established at that time. According to archival sources, in February 1902, at the meeting of the ED council, Klements reported that the Serbian envoy and head of the Belgrade Museum Trojanović proposed to assemble ethnographic collections for the Russian Museum (REM Archive. F. 1, Inv. 1, D. 13, fol. 25). However, the proposal was not accepted, owing to the objections of a member of the museum council E.A. Lyatsky, who said that collecting Serbian ethnography for the museum was a "leisurely" task, and therefore it could be postponed.

Contrary to this position, the Serbian ethnographic collection was soon on display in the St. Petersburg museum. In the summer of 1902, Klements visited the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade (Ibid.: Fol. 59). From there, he brought a collection of figured gingerbread, which marked the beginning of the museum's collection of items from the Serbian traditional culture, currently totaling about 800 units (Mikhaylova A.A., 2013: 196). Today, the Serbian collection of REM is quite rich and varied in content. It includes several dozen outfit sets and separate items of traditional clothing, jewelry (including silver items), specimens of weaving, embroidery, ceramics, ritual items, household utensils, and labor tools. Many of the exhibited items are unique, have no parallels in other museums, and are of constant interest among foreign specialists (Niškanović, 2005: 82). Thus, the gingerbread collection, despite the loss of the original content, is still among the most valuable attributes, since it was the first acquisition, from which the collection of the heritage of world-wide significance began.

Descriptions made by Slavnin indicate that the gingerbreads were coated with multi-colored icing, decorated with paper pictures and sugar patterns, and sprinkled with almonds. In their artistic design, characterized by slender lines, bright colors, and sophisticated decoration technology, they differed from Russian gingerbread products. However, the images of the figurines were thematically similar to those found among other peoples of Eurasia, which is supported by the gingerbread collections of other museums (Shkarovskaya, 1988: 255; Gantskaya, 1972: 257). For example, the gingerbread from Belgrade included stylized figurines of women, men, children, horses, lions, rosettes, and hearts. Similar anthropo- and zoomorphic, as well as rosette-like, motifs of gingerbread products and backing pans are noted in the East Slavic, Baltic, and Far Eastern REM collections of the 20th century (e.g., coll. No. 524 (Belarusians), No. 625 (Ukrainians), No. 1264 (Russians)). Heart-shaped gingerbreads are recorded in the Czech (coll. No. 8542), Polish (coll. No. 8541), Lithuanian (coll. No. 8291), and Hungarian (coll. No. 8543) collections*. In other words, the shapes of the gingerbread presented in the Serbian collection were quite typical for this kind of product, which existed in the culture of other peoples, while the decor and manufacturing technologies had regional differences.

The specificity of the images and decoration of the gingerbread is sustained in the traditions of the licider (or licitar) craft, which was widespread in those years in the eastern part of Austria-Hungary. The word "licider" in Serbian language comes from the Austrian "lebzelter" – 'gingerbread baker'. It comes from the Latin "libum" – 'sacrificial bread'. The phenomenon of ritual bread in one form or another existed in the traditional culture of all agricultural peoples of Eurasia. This suggests that the gingerbread tradition among the Balkan Slavs had a ritual-ceremonial nature (Andrejić, 1977). For example, among the Serbs, figured ritual bread (flatbreads in the form of livestock, household features, and solar symbols) were baked at Christmas and presented to carolers (Kostić, 1971: 76). However, the question of whether the licider craft was a substitute for older local traditions remains open.

The licider craft was based on processing beekeeping products, from which wax candles, votive figurines (sacred figurines in the form of parts of the body, humans, or livestock), mead, gingerbread with honey,

*In the 20th century, REM acquired more than 2.5 thousand gingerbreads, with three quarters of them being a part of the famous N.D. Vinogradov collection. The overwhelming majority of the items represent the Russian gingerbread tradition, one fifth that of other peoples: Ukrainians, Belarusians, Serbs, Poles, Czechs, Lithuanians, Latvians, Jews, Uzbeks, Azerbaijanis, and Chinese. Very few original items have survived; some of them were replaced by plaster replicas, the others are irretrievably lost.

and other sweets were made (Belančić, 2016: 53). Gingerbreads with honey were known to the Balkan Slavs even before the advent of this craft. Their semantic functions were associated with the magical properties attributed to honey, including love magic, symbolism of immortality, fertility, divine principle, etc. (Valentsova, 1995). However, as a handicraft product with a specific recipe and a recognizable brand, gingerbread became widespread thanks to Austrian and German liciders. One of the distribution centers of gingerbread business was Styria (Biškupić-Bašić, 2002: 120). With the development of trade relations in southeastern Europe in the 18th century, gingerbreads were introduced into the fair culture of Pannonia. The archives have preserved clear evidence of how the licider craft penetrated Vojvodina—the Austrian territory adjacent to Serbia, with a mixed population, including Serbian. In particular, one of the documents reports that on April 17, 1769, the licider Michael Schmidt appeared in the city of Subotica; he got from the city "permission to settle and a six-year exemption from taxes and other payments, as well as guarantees that other visitors would be prohibited from selling the same products in the local market and in its vicinity" (Ulmer, 1995: 156). Austrian Serbs quickly mastered the technology of production and decoration of honey gingerbread, and from the second half of the 18th century began to sell them in small tents at urban and rural fairs, as well as in monasteries on cherished holidays (Gavrilović S., 1984: 80).

In the 19th century, liciders of Serbian origin also appeared in Serbia itself. Their professional terminology consisted of distorted German vocabulary, which emphasized the alien character of the craft. Serbian craftsmen acquired gingerbread molds and tools in large cities in Austria, which explains the repetition of types of figurines reproduced throughout the region. Thus, we can conclude that for the Serbian folk culture, the licider products were a sign of its modernization and Europeanization rather than a symbol of archaism. At the same time, they soon became its organic component.

In the second half of the 19th century, gingerbread baking flourished in many parts of Europe. Exactly at that time, the phenomenon of collecting gingerbread boards, metal molds, and the products themselves emerged. In ethnographic collecting, these items were valuable not only as attributes of a peasant holiday, but also as a kind of folk art (Galueva, 2003: 35). In purchasing a collection of gingerbreads for the museum, Klements considered these a fairly representative attribute of Serbian ethnicity, and the museum council considered the collection to correspond to the profile and purpose of the museum.

In Serbia, gingerbreads were a favorite folk fun and an attribute of the holiday. These were sold mainly in the streets from a distribution tray or in a mobile shop. Until the onset of the 20th century, only men were liciders; the craft skills were kept in strict secrecy and were inherited from father to son or passed on to apprentices (Biškupić-Bašić, 2001: 195). In the late 19th century, in Belgrade, there lived eight master-liciders (Marjanović, 2009: 73). Perhaps one of them baked the items of the collection brought to St. Petersburg.

In the folk culture of the 19th-20th centuries, figured gingerbread most often acted as a gift. The gingerbreads were presented to relatives, lovers, friends, and children, for whom the sweet present served as both a delicacy and a toy. People took gingerbread with them when they were going on a visit, brought them from a trip, or presented them as an expression of high regard. The holidays of the Glory of the Cross (Serbian Slava), weddings, Christmastide, and others could have been a reason for making such a gift (Ŝutić, 2008: 189). Gingerbreads served as a ritual meal if they were handed out at a commemoration for the repose of the soul of the deceased (Trajković, 2012: 23). The possibility of long-term storage of gingerbread also made it a convenient supply.

There is no information about the use of products of the licider craft in ritual practices*. The figured gingerbread was not baked in the household. It was a commercial production, and the masters who manufactured the figured gingerbreads obeyed the workshop rules governing the procedure of making products and selling them. To buy gingerbread, discretionary income was required, something always lacking in peasant life. Such a product, therefore, was acquired on a special occasion and presented as a gift and an expression of high regard. Thus, in the late 19th to early 20th century, figured fair gingerbread served as a communication tool. Although the craft itself had features of modernization, the use of its products as a gift was functionally associated with archaic practices aimed at strengthening friendly relations between the parties of communication (Moss, 2011: 165).

The ethnographic literature provides descriptions of recipes and technology for making such gingerbread. The dough consisted of honey and flour, eggs, water, potash, baking powder (ammonium bicarbonate), as well as spices—cloves, anise, ginger, or pepper (Marjanović, 2009: 74; Trajković, 2012: 26; Radulovački, 2005: 314; Kašpar, 1980: 79). It was quite stiff, which made it possible to form a figured biscuit by embossing "kalup" molds, carved from apple or pear trees or cast from clay (printed gingerbread). In the late 19th century, gingerbread

*It is known from ethnographic materials that it was customary for Russians to bake ritual cookies for certain calendar holidays: "kozuli" on Yegoryev's day or Semik, "ladders" on Ascension, and others (Propp, 2000: 33–36).

boards were replaced by aluminum "stecher" molds, with which the dough was figuratively cut according to one pattern (silhouette gingerbread) (Šarić, 2013: 119). The finished products were painted with special red, yellow, blue, and white confectionery paints, and decorated with sugar paste, skillfully squeezed out in a thin layer onto the surface in the form of rosettes or a "lace" border. Colored paper, forming various motifs, could also be a component of the decor.

In the late 19th to early 20th century, gingerbreads were decorated with colored pictures printed on paper, which enhanced the art image. The silhouettes of anthropomorphic forms of gingerbread were rather arbitrary—only the outlines of the head and shoulders were clearly shown; the limbs often merged with the body in a trapezoid or an oval. To give the gingerbreads a more expressive look, pictures with a male or female face were pasted on the upper part, and the lower part was painted with confectionery paints and decorated with a sugar border. The image of a man was usually conveyed in the Baroque style—with long hair and a hat, in an elegant coat with a fur collar, and striped trousers; that of a woman was shown in traditional outfit—an ornamented shirt, sleeveless jacket, apron, and headdress. Gingerbreads in the form of a male figure were presented to men, and those in the form of a female figure to women. The girls were presented with gingerbreads in the form of a baby in swaddling clothes. The paper pictures with painted children's faces in lace caps were pasted thereon. Boys often got gingerbread in the shape of a horse with paper images of the muzzle and saddle, standing on the grass, i.e. resting his feet on a rectangular base with floral patterns. Gingerbreads with religious and dynastic symbols (angels, crosses, faces of saints) were also widespread. They were usually presented to older people. Thus, an important attribute of gingerbreads as a tool of intracultural communication was their sex and age targeting and symbolism, based on the folklorization of the ideas about the gender-social structure of society and the archaic-traditional need to emphasize the social identity of community members in the public space.

There were no two identical gingerbreads, since each was decorated by hand. Sometimes a cake was decorated with a piece of mirror. After the end of the 19th century, such gingerbreads were used for decorative purposes. However, according to ethnographic records, the southern Slavs had a tradition of decorating ceremonial bread with a mirror for protection from the evil eye (Tolstaya, 1995). Among the licider products, mirrors occurred most often in the heart-shaped gingerbreads, which were presented as a sign of sympathy. When giving it to the girl, the young man meant that the one to whom his heart was given would see her reflection in the mirror. According to the other tradition, a guy held out his heart-shaped gift with a mirror while standing behind the girl, so that she could see there the reflection of her "betrothed". Researchers believe that the tradition of making heart-shaped gingerbread came to the Balkans in the 17th century from Northern Europe, together with religious ideas about the heart of Christ (Kus-Nikolajev, 1928: 135). Anyway, at present, gingerbreads of this particular form are the most widespread at Serbian fairs.

Analysis of the description inventory allows us to conclude that the content of the collection coincided with the "classic" assortment of gingerbreads sold at Serbian fairs in the late 19th to early 20th centuries (Fig. 1). Ten figured gingerbreads were shaped like horses standing on the grass (REM, coll. No. 217-1–10). Given the differences in the orientation and position of the horses' legs, it can be assumed that at least three different silhouette metal molds were used to make these cakes. "Horses" differed from each other in their decoration features: "gingerbread in the form of a horse, the upper part is covered with a red paint layer, decorated with white and yellow patterns, and a purple paper saddle decorated with zigzags and flowers is glued on the back"; "gingerbread-horse, covered with fine patterns and decorated with pieces of colored paper in the form of an asterisk and two tassels" (REM, inv. No. 217), etc. One of the gingerbreads, figured as a lion, was "coated with yellow paint with short red lines representing mane and tail; colored paper tassels descend from the neck" (REM, coll. No. 217-11).

The collection contains only one piece of gingerbread, stylized as a male figure (REM, coll. No. 217-12). Its plaster replica shows the outlines of long curly hair and a voluminous collar. The gingerbread was decorated with fine sugar patterns and pieces of colored paper. There were six female figures in the collection (REM, coll. No. 217-13, 14, 16–19); three different molds were used to make them. One of the figures, like the male one, had no distinct anatomical features except the head and shoulders, and ended in an oval at the bottom. The gender symbolism of this form of gingerbread was conditional and was indicated by a picture of a woman's face. Two other specimens had more vivid features of the female figure—waist, skirt, arms, and legs. Another gingerbread piece depicted a baby, as was indicated by a picture on it, showing a child's face in a cap.

The rest of the gingerbreads were manufactured in the form of circles and hearts of various sizes (Fig. 2). Slavnin described one of them as a "white rosette-shaped gingerbread, decorated with yellow paint with red dots at the edges" (REM, coll. No. 217-20); the other three samples he designated in the inventory as "flatbread" (REM, coll. No. 217-21, 23 a, b). On the surface of the plaster replicas that replaced them, there is a decoration in the form of embossed concentric circles. Features of the shape and decoration suggest that the prototype of such products was Christmas

Fig. 1. Plaster replicas of gingerbreads in the form of zoo- and anthropomorphic figurines (*1–3*) and with solar symbols (*4*, *5*) (REM, coll. No. 217-5, 12, 16, 20, 23). *Photo by O.V. Ganichev.*

Fig. 2. Plaster replicas of heart-shaped gingerbreads (REM, coll. No. 217-25, 26, 28). *Photo by O.V. Ganichev.*

crispbread with solar symbols. The "oblong gingerbread sprinkled with almonds on top" (REM, coll. No. 217-22) had a simple shape, but apparently tasted delicious. Seven heart-shaped gingerbreads were decorated with mirrors, colored glaze, sugar patterns, and colored paper appliqués (REM, coll. No. 217-24–28). One gingerbread bore a portrait of the Serbian king Alexandar Obrenović (1889–1903), who ruled at that time, the other a picture of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus (REM, coll. No. 217-24, 25). Portrait of the king on the figured gingerbread served as a symbol of Serbian independence. As for the image of the Virgin Mary, noteworthy is her special veneration by the Catholic population of Slavonia, from where the licider craft came to Serbia; but at the same time, this image emphasizes the natural closeness of her cult to Orthodox Serbs.

Despite their conventionality and schematicity, the symbolism of the images presented in the collection attracts attention. When considering the issue of ethnic markedness of figured gingerbreads as ethnographic artifacts and their connection with Western culture, this quality seems to be important. Some features point to the correspondence of the symbolic and semantic content of gingerbread images to the archetypes of Serbian traditional culture; while commercial orientation and technology of production represent purely borrowed components.

Researchers of the phenomenon of dough figurines in folk culture strive to find archaic meanings in these products, relying on folklore heritage and pre-Christian beliefs (Galueva, 2003: 37). For example, it has been proposed that in Slavic mythology, the figure of a horse symbolized the sun, and this was semantically close to the image of lion—a solar archetype that conquers evil and darkness. The female figure could represent the deified mythical ancestor—Mother-raw-earth (see, e.g., (Shkarovskaya, 1988: 243)). Experts are unanimous in the opinion that in agricultural cultures, ritual flour figurines were most often associated with the magic of fertility (Propp, 2000: 34). By presenting the girls with gingerbread in the form of a baby, the prospect of their procreation was indicated. S. Marković connects the origin of the baby motif in the gingerbread tradition with the Christmas mysteries and the image of the newborn Christ (2011). Religious themes (images of angels, crosses, and saints) penetrated the gingerbread tradition around the 18th century (Scheybalová, 1974: 158). Thus, it can be concluded that the ritual nature of figured gingerbreads has lost its primacy with their transformation into a product of craft and a component of fair culture (Sergeeva, 2014: 49). Exactly the fair as a mass commodity-consumer phenomenon determined the decorative look of these products and made them the subject of special aesthetics in the folk culture. Despite the archaic roots of gingerbread images, by the end of the 19th century, they did not bear deep semantics any longer.

The Yugoslav licider gingerbreads reached their peak of popularity in the period between the two world wars. At that time, new cake forms appeared, such as cars, pistols, handbags, shoes, etc. Colorful gingerbread figures were made with strings and used as Christmas tree decorations, neck decorations, and home decor items. In the second half of the 20th century, licider craft gradually fell into decay owing to the emergence of other types of confectionery products and their mass production (Trajković, 2012: 28). At present, there are few liciders left in Serbia. They still run their workshops, mainly owing to the existing programs for the protection and revival of old crafts (Stari zanati…, (s.a.)), and sell their products in vashar fairs and in souvenir shops (Mikhaylova A.A., 2015: 333). Over the past 100 years, the production technology has remained practically unchanged; gingerbreads are still made by hand, but with the use of modern tools and brighter edible colors. It is symptomatic that the variety of forms has disappeared. The heart has become the dominant type of figured gingerbread. Today, the licider heart is not only a favorite fair souvenir and delicacy, but also an attribute of a wedding celebration: it is often presented as a gift symbolizing love and strong marriage. Nowadays, when producing these commemorative items, liciders add sand and other composites to the dough, which ensure durable storage. Thus, the emergence of inedible items that perform an exclusively decorative and symbolic function, but retain their traditional form, has become a characteristic feature of this craft today.

Significance of the collection in the context of modernity (instead of conclusion)

The trend towards transformation of the most striking elements of the material code of the pre-industrial era into souvenirs and symbols in the post-Yugoslav space is quite widespread. Reproduction of well-recognizable images of the past, including products of old crafts, allows ethnic culture to legitimize its connection with ancestors and history. Theoretically, this can be attributed to the phenomenon of ethnocultural neo-traditionalism, which has been studied intensely in recent decades, and which is a kind of reflection of ethnic culture on the strengthening globalization processes (Popkov, Tyugashev, 2012). The popularization of images of traditional culture, withdrawn from their original cultural context, associated with this phenomenon, is called folklorization, and the resulting objects are called folklorisms (Kurinskikh, 2016: 252). The desire of certain ethnic groups to brand the attributes of

their cultural heritage as symbols of national identity, despite the translocal nature of many such symbols, has become a side effect of folklorization in the 21st century (Mikhaylova N.G., 2011: 266). For example, in 2010, with the support of UNESCO, the licider craft has received the status of intangible cultural heritage of Croatia. Slovenia also claims the right to consider this craft its national treasure. In 2018, the Croatian Ministry of Culture officially recognized this status for the figured gingerbread craft (Nesnovna dediščina, (s.a.)). Such competition for cultural heritage among the young Balkan countries is associated with the unfinished process of constructing their national identities. The attributes of the past, which awaken nostalgia and are close and understandable to the general public, become convenient tools for the ideological consolidation of society in the absence of new stable symbols (Gavrilović L., 2012: 48). The Western European origin of the licider craft is another factor in its actualization as a phenomenon of national significance. In the desire of the Balkan countries for economic integration into the European Union, the emphasis on cultural kinship with Western Europe helps to justify these ambitions.

In the light of the described tendencies, the importance of ethnographic museum collections as a source of reliable facts about the traditions of certain peoples is growing significantly. Material exhibits testify to the origins of cultural phenomena, their localization, and historical fate. Scientific analysis of the heritage allows distortion to be minimized in its modern interpretations. It is in this vein that the thesis that museum artifacts are a bridge from the past to the present acquires its specificity. In the context of globalization, ethnicity strives to confirm its historicity through objectified forms; therefore, its need for contact with the museum heritage is intensified. This also explains the tendency towards the revival of traditional crafts in a folklorized form. The collection of Serbian gingerbread of 1902, despite the losses, allows us to conclude that in the 19th to early 20th century, it was a single cultural phenomenon widespread both in Serbia and in the Austrian territories inhabited by Croats, Slovenes, Serbs, and other peoples. The layering of modernization trends on the local archaic in this region was explained by the rapid facade of westernization (Mikhaylova A.A., 2016: 81). In this context, labeling ethnicity with a craft tradition, which is common for several ethnic groups, has acquired a controversial character. However, the trans-ethnicity of the considered phenomenon does not exclude its value for individual peoples as a tradition and heritage.

More than 100 years have passed since the collection of Serbian gingerbread appeared in the museum. It can be said that it recorded a certain stage in the development of the gingerbread tradition, at which the craft, having unified the basic technological principles and the forms that were in demand in folk culture, turned the latter into a recognizable product. This, in turn, allowed the tradition not to dissolve under the influence of modernization and, with some changes, survive in the 20th and 21st centuries. In the last 50 years, the Serbian REM collections have practically not been replenished, which fact is associated with both political factors and the weakening of the Slavophil rhetoric in general, and also with the peripheral (in relation to the rest of the collection) place of Balkan ethnography in the conceptual basis of the museum. However, they do not lose their importance as sources for a comparative study of the common Slavic cultural fund and modern ethnic processes in the Balkans. In this regard, another polemic question in ethnomuseology becomes important, about the expediency of replenishing the museum fund with modern exhibits—objects-symbols and folklorisms participating in the process of constructing new identities. As the collecting practice of the last century shows, the adoption of this strategy would make it possible not only to replenish the Balkan collections, but also to record the transformations of ethnic consciousness during periods of crises and their overcoming.

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