

Living the Intangible Culture

Licitar craft

The interview with Aleksandra Jakovljević was conducted by Gordana Đurađević Prvanov in early March 2022 in the National Museum Pančevo



Aleksandra Jakovljević is 63 years old. She was born in Pančevo and she still lives there. She holds a degree in Ethnology and Anthropology and works as a curator at the National Museum Pančevo.

Gordana Đurađević Prvanov (GDjP): **Alexandra, today we met to talk about the licitar craft. You have studied this craft as curator in charge of ethnological collection at the National Museum Pančevo. However, I want to ask you what does this craft means to you personally?**

Aleksandra Jakovljević (AJ): As a curator of the National Museum Pančevo in charge of the ethnological collection of the museum I am also engaged in identification and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, living cultural treasure of Banat region in Vojvodina province. Among living cultural treasures that I studied special place in my heart holds the licider craft, craft that produces honey cookies. Its origins date back to the Middle Ages and even today it represents the so-called "living heritage". Earlier, there were dances during the winter with performances and a lottery every Saturday, where young people used to gather and exchange gifts in the form of licider cookies of various shapes. At the market, parents used to buy licider cookies for their children as toys, which they would later eat. The craft was considered profitable because the earnings were good enough for a husband and wife practicing this craft, to at least provide for their household and put their children through school. Licider craftsmen were bakers who mastered baking honey cookies decorated with colorful patterns, small mirrors, and appropriate pictures. Cookies are shaped like hearts, houses, slippers, purses, horses, scissors, flintlocks, guns. At village fairs, festivals and dances, cookies are given by parents to children, grandparents to their grandchildren, lads to girls... The old and the young alike love them and there are so many occasions to give someone for example Licider heart!

For me, the licider craft is an example that culture has no boundaries. Germans, who call these cookies *Lebkuchen* or *Lebzelter*, brought the craft in Vojvodina Province. Then, it was spread to other parts of Serbia so that communities, groups, and individuals throughout Serbia today recognize it as part of their cultural heritage.

When I see these honey cookies on the fair stalls, in shapes of houses and hearts and in other forms, fairy tales and stories come to life before my eyes. Perhaps rather than any other, the story about Hansel and Gretel who were written down by the Grimm Brothers. I imagine the witch's hut just like a gingerbread house made by licider craftsmen.

GDJP: What kinds of knowledge and skills does the licider craft convey?

AJ: The craft of licitar has been passed down from generation to generation in Serbia for centuries, even today. That is what makes it a “living” heritage. Communities and groups recreate it depending on the environment, their interactions with nature and history, giving them a sense of identity and continuity, i.e. duration. At the same time, one should keep in mind their connection with other trades, especially beekeeping, cake making, and waxing. Bakers who mastered skills to make quality honey cookies had a special, higher, status. At one point, in the 19th century, the wax craft and the licider craft merged. The craftsmen who mastered this knowledge and skills made candles in the winter, while in the summer, during the fair seasons, they were making licider cookies. The use of candles has decreased with the electrification of the country. Licider cookies on the other hand, have remained dear delicacies that convey various messages in their diversity. Messages of love.

GDJP: Why, in your opinion, is the Licitar craft important for the communities in Banat and Serbia?

AJ: Knowledge about the recipe and skills of making cookies is passed from generation to generation. Since 17th century, when Germans brought the craft in Vojvodina province, it was considered lucrative, especially in conjunction with the beekeeping and wax craft. Although craft recessed in late 20th century, nowadays it is again recognized as prosperous. It is characteristic of the Serbian population in our country, although other ethnic communities in Serbia are also engaged in this craft, but in smaller numbers. Women and men are equally involved in this craft. The folk tradition of making these honey cookies in villages is mainly preserved by women organizations. Lately, younger generations increasingly recognize licider craft to make a living. In Banat itself, today the centers of the Licider craft are Dolovo, Kikinda, and Zrenjanin, and in other parts of Vojvodina, Novi Sad (Bačka) and Ruma (Srem) stand out. The craft is also present in other parts of Serbia.

Licider cookies used to be placed primarily at dances and fairs. Today, liciders offer their cookies at various events - fairs, village, church panagyr, celebrations, gatherings for Christmas and New Year. Along with the quality popularization of the craft, the willingness to explain elements of crafts and symbols of various forms of honey cookies with residents and tourists, liciders' cookies have become very popular both as sweets and as souvenirs. In that way, profit is provided for both craftsmen and the social community. At the same time, the characteristic of these craftsmen is great mobility - they reach their market traveling all over Serbia, and sometimes beyond the country's borders. Throughout the year, licider cookies can be purchased at, for example, the Cultural Center of Belgrade. Museum “Old village” in Sirogojno, and tourist centers such as Mokra Gora, etc.