

Rahela Jurković

*The Traditional Carol Singing
Custom of Neviđane*

Neviska Koleda



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Neviđane, Island of Pašman

Asesor, Rahela Jurković

Zagreb, 2023

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The Traditional Carol Singing Custom of Nevidane
(Neviska Koleda)

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Introduction

According to the 2021 census, Neviđane on the island of Pašman in northern Dalmatia is a settlement of 353 inhabitants. The cultural and historical rural complex of Neviđane has been declared a cultural asset by a Decision of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia of 2007 (class: UP-1° 612-08/06-06/0490). Regarding the origin of the name and the first mention of Neviđane, the Decision states the following:

“It is quite probable that the name of the settlement originates from the Latin *Nevius*, as the property of a certain Nevius. In written sources, Neviđane is mentioned in 1097 with the church of St. Michael (today a burial chapel). The records of the Zadar monastery of St Chrysogonus mention saltworks in the village of *Nevinani*. There used to be a medieval village in the location of *Mirište*, with the small church of St. Martin’s.¹ Since the village was devastated by the plague during the 15th and 16th centuries, the population moved a few hundred metres to the east around the Church of Our Lady of Health. During the Ottoman invasion of Kotare in the 16th century, and during the Candian War in the 17th century, new settlers, who escaped from the mainland, arrived in Neviđane. The settlement obtained its final street-type look at the turn of the 18th century, from when we can date the present buildings. The houses were being reconstructed for the whole of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century as families

¹ Ruins of the church can still be seen in this part of the village.

grew. The new parish church of the Heart of Jesus was built at the end of the 19th century.”²

Neviđane is dotted with old stone houses, some of which have been abandoned and others are now inhabited. According to the above-mentioned Decision of the Ministry of Culture, the old part of the village was built in an aligned structure, with dense agglomerations of courtyards (*dvori*) arranged along the main road, a street now called *Neviske Koleda*. Neviđane is one of the rare examples of street-type island villages. The Decision also states: “this type of settlement is somewhat unusual for the Zadar archipelago”.³ The courtyards were built according to clan affiliations and are named after the owners’ surnames. They include one-storey stone houses with two-gable roofs covered with barrel roof tiles typical of traditional Dalmatian architecture. The walls are mostly plastered with lime mortar and sand, and built of more regularly carved reddish *parparota* stone. The courtyards are divided by winding paths and alleys leading to the main street. The entrances to the courtyards have lintels on the doors called *volte*.

Neviđane holds a custom which since 2013 has been protected as an intangible cultural asset of the Republic of Croatia.⁴ This is the **traditional annual custom of *Neviska Koleda***.⁵

² Decision of the Ministry of Culture of 1 March 2007, p. 2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Decision of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia of 30 July 2013, Class: UP/I-612-08/13-06/0186.

⁵ I also write about the people of Neviđane and the *Koleda* in *Otoče moj lipi* (R. Jurković, Asesor, 2023) so the text of this booklet partially overlaps with that book, as well as with the booklet *Neviska koleda* (R. Jurković, Asesor, 2021).

In order to provide information about the cultural heritage beyond the very local community where this custom is fostered and maintained, this publication was created with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Media, within the framework of the programme on *Neviska Koleda* that I had proposed to the Ministry for co-financing in 2021, 2022, and 2023. The programme included research conducted by interviewing those that keep the customs alive in the local community, and by reviewing and analysing available scientific and other sources about the *Neviska Koleda*.



Picture 1: An old courtyard in Nevidane.

The protection of an intangible cultural asset, according to the Decision on the protection of the traditional annual custom *Neviska Koleda* (hereinafter: Decision), includes the following system of “protection measures”:

- “ - ensure public access to the cultural asset;
- encourage the participation of the community, groups and individuals who play a part in the heritage of the asset in the identification, definition, performance and passing on of the asset;
 - popularise and promote the cultural asset by organising exhibitions, conferences, folk events, festivals, through electronic media, audio and video recordings, and in any other way;
 - incentivise the passing on and fostering of the cultural asset in the source community and in other communities;
 - train professional staff to transfer knowledge and skills through seminars, workshops, and formal and informal education;
 - continue to research the asset by adequately documenting it in all modern forms and means of recording, and through expert and scientific evaluation;
 - protect the asset, while strongly acknowledging the globalisation and social transformation processes, in order to avoid the danger of its disappearance or destruction”.⁶

⁶ Decision of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia of 30 July 2013, Class: UP/I-612-08/13-06/0186.



Picture 2: *Neviske Koleda* Street

Neviska Koleda: description of the custom

The traditional annual custom of *Neviska Koleda* has been held in Neviđane, as stated in the Decision on its protection, since the 17th century. The people living there vowed to God that they would glorify Him and thank Him three times a year if He protected them from the plague. The three days when the *Koleda* is held are Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve and at Epiphany. On these occasions, the inhabitants of Neviđane (*Nevici*) in a location designated for this custom (*Koledišće*) build a large bonfire (*koleda*), which is visited as a ritual by a group of men, carollers (*koledari*), who sing an appropriate traditional song invoking God's blessing. Then, other inhabitants join the carollers in their dance around the bonfire and the celebrations continue with dinner and socialising.



Picture 3: The bonfire (*koleda*), 31 December 2021

The custom was revived in 1995,⁷ after a period from the second half of the 1940s to the mid-1990s, when the custom had not been fully observed, to include all the elements that were recalled by Krsto Štoriċ who had participated in it as a child and young man (Krsto Štoriċ died in 2000 at the age of 90).



Picture 4: The carol singers (*koledari*) with Krsto Štoriċ (in the centre holding a cane), 1995/1996.

The Decision on the protection of the *Neviska Koleda* includes quotations from the statement on the origins and the description of the custom as told by Krsto Štoriċ:⁸

⁷ The date of the first video that Albert Štoriċ holds in his private archive.

⁸ The narration of Krsto Štoriċ, as told by Albert Štoriċ, was recorded by Vidoslav (Vido) Bagur in the mid-1990s.

“Evil wanted to kill all the inhabitants. It rode on a horse and bellowed: ‘By two, by two! By two, by two!’ Hearing this, one inhabitant who was the bravest, confronted Evil and shouted: ‘By four, by four! By four by four!’ All the animals in the village who walked on four legs died, and only the people and chickens survived. After that, the *Nevisi* vowed to God that each year during the Christmas holidays they would build three bonfires (*koleda*) on the *Koledišće*. Bonfires are built on Christmas Eve, on New Year’s Eve, and at Epiphany. The people who do this job are called *koledari* and, to reward them, a dinner is served. At Epiphany, when the bonfire is lit up for the last time, the *koledari* designate the houses (families) that will prepare the dinners the following year. The families that must prepare dinners on the *Koledišće* bring dried figs, fritters and raki for all the *koledari* and for all the other people who come.”



Picture 5: Participants of the *Koleda* in the mid-1990s



Picture 6: Preparing the wood for the bonfire, 31 December 2021

As part of the programme on *Neviska Koleda*, I conducted research in 2021, where the main narrator was Albert Štorić, son of the late Krsto Štorić. He said that his father had been a seaman, and also a church choir singer, a baritone. He added that he had a strong voice and liked to sing, which is also true of Albert who, after his father's death, took on leadership of the *Koleda*, but he also emphasised that all the *koledari* are equal.

Albert Štorić described the custom and recited the words of the carol. Later on, he and carol singers Ivica Medić and Dean Travica sang the carol. When listening to him discussing the carol, and after that, to the three of them singing it, what stood out was the dialect of Neviđane, which is important not only for carol singing itself, but also for the entire custom. Therefore, below is a transcript of Albert



Picture 7: Parish church in Neviđane

Štorić's narration which he subsequently reviewed and corrected so as to correctly record the local dialect.⁹

“The Hail Mary rings out at the church at half past five, the Hail Mary for Vespers always rings at dusk, or at around 9 o'clock, and in the winter at 5, in the evening, of course, while the morning one is always at 6 o'clock. There, on the Koledišće, we gather before 5 p.m. and wait to hear the ringing of the Hail Mary. After that, we start the Koleda, or the carol singing.”

⁹ The local dialect cannot easily be rendered in English, so the translation of the carol and Albert Štorić's description of the custom is written in standard British English.



Picture 8: Carol singing on 6 January 2022

The words of the carol are as follows:

*Christmas is here, joy to the world
Christmas brings prosperity and joy
Christmas is here, joy to the world
It brings prosperity and joy*

*After Christmas spring will come
And will bring prosperity and joy
After Christmas spring will come
And bring us joy*

*Christmas is here, my Lord
It brings us prosperity and joy
Christmas is here, my Lord
And it brings us joy*

*I sing a beautiful song
A beautiful song*

*I sing a beautiful song
A beautiful song*

*There's a beautiful olive tree
A beautiful olive tree*

*There's a beautiful olive tree
A beautiful olive tree*

*Birds are sitting in the olive tree
Sitting in the olive tree*

*There are birds sitting in the olive tree
Sitting in the olive tree*

*Three little doves fly out of the tree
Bringing us prosperity and joy
Three little doves fly out of the tree
Bringing us joy*

*See each dove carrying a gift
Bringing us prosperity and joy
See each dove carrying a gift
Bringing us joy*

*The first is carrying health and goodness
Bringing us prosperity and joy
The first is carrying health and goodness
Bringing us joy*

*The second is carrying grain and wheat
Bringing us prosperity and joy
The second is carrying grain and wheat
Bringing us joy*

*The third is carrying olives and vine
Bringing us prosperity and joy
The third is carrying olives and vine
Bringing us joy*

*The one carrying health and happiness
Bringing us prosperity and joy
The one carrying health and happiness
Bringing us joy*

*She nested in the midst of our village
Bringing us prosperity and joy
She nested in the midst of our village
Bringing us joy*

*The one carrying grain and wheat
Bringing us prosperity and joy
The one carrying grain and wheat
Bringing us joy*

*She nested in the middle of our field
Bringing us prosperity and joy
She nested in the middle of our field
Bringing us joy*

*The one carrying olives and vine
Bringing us prosperity and joy
The one carrying olives and vine
Bringing us joy*

*She nested right in our vineyard
Bringing us prosperity and joy
She nested right in our vineyard
Bringing us joy.*

“This is how the integral text ends,” explained Albert Štorić, “and then comes the last stanza”:

*Joy to our village
Joy to our village
Joy to our village
Joy to our village.*

“This is sung on Christmas Eve, New Year’s Eve and at Epiphany.”



Picture 9: Carol singing on 6 January 2023

After that, everyone makes the sign of the cross: “Then we all cross ourselves. There’s a large pile of wood prepared there, we say the Lord’s Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be, and then one of the *koledari*, that is, one of the people who sing, crouches down, and lights the bonfire, and when the fire starts to catch, he says:

*May this bonfire burn bright
and may each girl become a wife.”*



Picture 10: Lighting of the bonfire, 31 December 2021

Anyone can light the bonfire, but usually this is an older resident.

“We don’t fight over it,” Albert explains with a smile, “but it’s always one man, Vito Škrokov, if he is in Neviđane on those days. He’s the oldest person involved. We call him *nefer*,” he adds, “the person lighting up the bonfire.”



Picture 11: Spreading the burnt incense, 6 January 2022

“And then, when the fire starts burning, it smells good; there is pine there. When it burns down, not completely, but when some embers form, then the person chosen for this takes the embers with a shovel and puts them in a barrel tile [a type of roof tile usually used on Dalmatian houses - author’s comment]. We call it *kupa konalica*,” Albert explains, and to make it clearer he adds: “We don’t say *kanal*, but *konal*.”

And he continues:

“Then, a little of the already prepared incense is placed in the embers. The incense starts to burn and smoke, and the *koledari* then go from person to person, and there are not just the *koledari* there, but lots of people, hundreds come. And then, he carries the tile around from one to the other and presents the incense to each person. The *koledar* carrying the barrel tile is usually always the same person, Romano Kučina.



Picture 12: Local women dancing and singing in a circle, 6 January 2023

During the *Koleda* each year, three families are nominated to prepare the small dinner, and one is designated to prepare the big dinner.”

The family making the dinners the following year are chosen at Epiphany, when Ivica Medić and the other carol singers visit those who might be eligible for the big dinner, and then they arrange where it will be. The small dinners are prepared by the neighbours of the family who is to prepare the big dinner.

“We are here in the southern part, and there up to that large dock is the seafront part. In between, there is a brook. No one here calls it Veruga, as it says on the maps. We call it *Potok* (brook). But this is not a brook unless there is a big rainfall. This is a drainage channel. Otherwise the water would flood the whole field. This *Potok* is some kind of middle point. If this year the dinner was in the southern part, the following year it will be in the middle part, and the year after that in the part near the seafront. And then

it goes back to the middle part, and then to the southern, and so each year it changes by following this rule.”

For the small dinner, the villagers who organise it bring “raki, wine, some liqueur, dried figs, fritters, *hroštule* [crunchy deep-fried pastry - translator’s note]. There is enough for everyone. These three families bring these things all three times, on Christmas Eve, New Year’s Eve and at Epiphany. And they put them there on the bench, or there is a table there where fish is usually sold. This is for everyone who is there. And the big dinner is only at Epiphany. This is the final dinner.”

Going back to the events on the *Koledišće*, Albert Štorić further explains how the custom unfolds.

“When the incense burning is over, then we sing. We sing all kinds of songs, Christmas carols, women from the cultural-artistic society also come, and those from the church choir, other people and my *klapa* [a small male-voice choir - translator’s note].

There are fewer people on New Year’s Eve, because some of them usually go somewhere else, but a lot of people do come. Especially this year there were lots, and I was surprised since it was during the Covid pandemic. This year [at Epiphany 2021 - author’s note] we didn’t have the big dinner because of Covid, or the Corona, as we would say.

A few hours after lighting the bonfire, the *koledari*, and not only those that sing, but also the young people who prepared all that wood and the large pine tree, we go to the person who is giving the big dinner, to that house. This is usually in silence, and then we sing our carol.



Picture 13: The *koledari* departing for the big dinner, 6 January 2023

It is only at Epiphany that we carry the reed cross with three apples attached to it. The person leading the carol singing, who starts the carol (and this is me), carries it in his hand. But not on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, but only at the main event. And then, at Epiphany, after we have done that on the *Koledišće* (the square is called *Koledišće*), the *koledari* depart to the house giving the big dinner. We sing while we walk and carry that cross. At this time, it is quiet because the weather is generally bad, the bora starts some days later, so you can hear it well.



Picture 14: The host of the big dinner, Marija Serena Ribić, receives the *koledari*, 6 January 2023

When we arrive in front of the house of the dinner host, then we sing:

*And here is the host who has always done well
And here is the host who has always done well.*

We sing this a few times, and those inside are expecting us, and they probably hear us much before we arrive to sing this.

Then the hostess opens the door and a set dialogue follows:

Good evening, can we come inside?

And she replies:

And which faith are you chasing away?

And the *koledari* respond:

Turkish.

And which faith are you bearing? asks the hostess. She pretends not to know us when we come to her door.

Christian.

These are obviously ancient roots, and Ottoman people were here only on the periphery.

And then we say that we bear the Christian faith, and she says:

If it is so, then come inside.

And then we go in, singing:

*The hostess says that the guest is merry
The hostess says that the guest is merry
The hostess says that the guest is merry
The hostess says that the guest is merry.*

Inside, we make ourselves comfortable, and dinner is waiting for us. There is stockfish, for sure, and there is also prosciutto and cheese. Some even roast a lamb, or a suckling pig. We cross ourselves when we sit at the table, and pray before we eat.

There are lots of us, *koledari*, the youngsters also gather, and more than those that participated. The host has friends, so they also come. If there is room, the women also come later. There can be around 20 to 30 people.

Everyone has to give a big dinner once in a lifetime. Each year one house, and there are over two hundred houses here.”



Picture 15: The big dinner on 6 January 2023 at the Ribić's



Picture 16: Danko Ribić known as Bade, the host of the dinner on 6 January 2023

The meaning of Neviska Koleda for the local community and promoting the Koleda outside Neviđane

When researching the *Koleda* ethnographically – conducting semi-structured and open-ended interviews with those who participate in this tradition – I discovered the importance of this custom for the inhabitants of Neviđane. One respondent told me that, besides funerals, this is the only event that brings together such a large number of local people.

Taking part in the *Koleda*, and particularly in organising the big dinner, is a great honour for the inhabitants of Neviđane, the *koledari*, and those who help prepare the bonfire (the *neferi*, as Romano Kučera names those preparing the wood for the bonfire).

To Vitomir Škrokov's mind, the *Koleda* gives “great satisfaction”, and is “an event which people live for... to get together, to rejoice, which is what the *Koleda* has always meant.” He also adds that it is an honour for every person “who is from Neviđane” to “prepare the dinner” and to receive, at this big dinner, as many people as possible because this means that “you like to welcome people.”

Ivica Medić said that the *Koleda* is an “ancient custom, a cultural asset that we locals appreciate immensely.” There was only one year when he was not a *koledar*, and that was when his mother died. He added that in Greece he saw a cross with apples, such as the one carried by Albert Štorić when they go to the big dinner, and he mentioned that the apple had once been for them the only fruit that they had, besides figs.

Dean Travica, who lives in Mrljane, the neighbouring village, participated in *Koleda* as a carol singer. For him “it is fascinating that this originated from the people.” He explained that “to formulate so well,” meaning the lyrics, and to compose such good music as the carol, in addition to maintaining this tradition, was for him almost “inconceivable.” Dean has been a carol singer for a few years, and he joined the *koledari* on the suggestion of Albert Štorić with whom he sang in the male vocal group (*klapa*).

Anka Kučina, a true *Nevidanka*, as she calls herself (which means that her parents were, just like her, from Neviđane), explained that, for her, *Koleda* “means a lot. It is great, we love it, it is wonderful that it has been revived and that it lives on.” Her son, Romano Kučina, added that the *Koleda* was “a custom and tradition that we keep and pass on.” Romano’s wife, Jasminka Kučina (born in Varaždin), has for a great number of years been the leader of the Cultural-Artistic Society (*KUD*) *Nevijana*, which, through its performances at folk festivals, enacts part of this custom on stage.

KUD Nevijana was established in 1997, shortly after the restoration of the *Koleda*, and its first president was Albert Štorić. One of the carol singers who is also a member of the *KUD* explained that during the performance, the words of the carol are shortened, and one part of the custom is enacted: “... the girls take an armful of wood, the *nefer* holds the incense that is lit up and burns, but this is not dangerous for the stage.” It must be emphasised that when they enact the *Koleda* on stage, the members of the *KUD* dress up in folk costumes, while when performing the custom in Neviđane, the *koledari* do not wear special clothes, rather, as Albert Štorić explained, they put on old clothes because the carol singers who sing and the



Picture 17: *KUD Nevijana* performing in Zadar, May 2023

locals who gather there stand around the fire, so the clothes can easily get dirty or destroyed.

The stage enactment of *Neviska Koleda* has also become part of the repertoire of the national professional folk ensemble *Lado*. Ethnomusicologist Joško Čaleta contributed to adapting the *Koleda* for the stage. He also published a paper previously presented at the Symposium of Ethnochoreology in Italy in 2004.¹⁰

The *Koleda* just “goes on,” as Anka Kučina said, and many young locals already take part in it, either as carol singers or in preparing the wood that will be burnt during the three nights of the *Koleda*. A few years ago, the locals also specially prepared the area of the *Koledišće* by paving with bricks the part of the street where the bonfire was to be lit.

¹⁰ Čaleta, J. 2008. *Nevijska koleda - Music and Movement of the Reconstructed/Transformed Ritual*. In: “Proceedings of the 23rd Symposium of the ICTM Study Group for Ethnochoreology”. Edited by Dunin Ivancich, E. & von Bibra Wharton, A. Zagreb: IEF, pp. 167-172.



Picture 18: The young men of Neviđane resting after having collected wood for the bonfire, 31 December 2021

Finally, I will mention something that is self-explanatory for those who carry on the *Neviska Koleda* tradition, while for those outside Neviđane, this might not be as clear or well known. These are the names that the inhabitants in Neviđane call themselves. These names have already been used in this text.

The inhabitants of Neviđane are called *Neviđanci*, but “among the older folk,” as one of my interlocutors told me, you can hear (for me) a more poetic expression, *Nevici* (male form) and *Nevike* (female form). A man can be called *Neviđanac* (but not a *Nevik*), while a woman can be called both *Nevika* and *Neviđanka*. I heard from the younger people in Neviđane that a woman is only a *Neviđanka*, and that *Nevika* is obsolete, which shows how the old local dialect is disappearing and being forgotten in time.



Picture 19: Members of *KUD Nevijana* on the seafront side of Nevidane, July 2022

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