



Film title: **“docuMAJA”**

Short documentary film “docuMAJA” –Maja Festivity - Acquaviva Collecroce Kruč – Molise

docuMAJA©Mosaico Italo Croato Roma–Midge S.Z.L.2018–2022

"Fešta do Maja" ("Festa de MAJA ""Maja Festivity") is the procession on the occasion of the spring festivity, which symbolically connects one of the smallest Italian regions with the world. In fact, this traditional ritual celebration brings together the residents of all the settlements that have kept their linguistic idiom "na-našu" or "na-našo" - in our way - "Nostro", in Croatian of Molise - and guests from various parts of Italy who are presenting themselves with their folk groups or simply coming as tourists. This welcoming and hospitable town is populated by Croats from Molise.



Traditional and ritual celebration of May 1st see inhabitants and guests of the city gather, and sing and dance along the alleys, squares and historic fountains of the town, such as the historic chant that they bring and sing "s one bane mora" ("on the other side of the sea").

"Kako je lipo hoditi, hoditi, kako je lipo hoditi hoditi, , kako je lipo hoditi hoditi usrid mora".

(How beautiful it is to walk, walk, how beautiful it is to walk, walk, how beautiful it is to walk in the middle of the sea".)

Singing and dancing, they accompany and escort the Pupazza (the gigantic doll built from wicker and adorned with the flowers of the marvelous meadows and fields of Molise - a symbol of fertility.

"Fešta do Maja" collects, brings together and resurrects the integrity of the Croatian minority of Molise in this joyful ritual that has some similarities with the rituals of the Croatian cultural peasant tradition. In the long narratives with Professor Giovanni Piccoli (legendary living guardian of the Molise Croats, of their origin and of the history linked to the Molise territory since the distant fifteenth century), we will discover how much the Fešta do Maja "has analogies and harmony with the traditional festival of" Zeleni Juraj "-Jurjevo" ("Green George") - in the popular Croatian tradition often celebrated as the first day of spring, true beginning of the year. On that day (in the first days of May) in northern Croatia they gather in the same way, with similar rituals to defeat any diseases and for good wishes.

The docuMaja is imagined as an original and attractive storytelling that poetically crosses various images imprinted during the celebration: the preparation of Professor Piccoli ("Professore"), Filomena and Marianna ("La Fioraia"), the picking of flowers, the decoration and the embellishment of the Pupazza, the various vicissitudes during the procession etc. Emphasizing various stops of the Pupazza, the municipal square from where the procession starts, the fountains, the stops near the butcher's house and near the old church, and so on.

The arrival of folk groups from other parts of Italy, not only from Molise.



During the three years of preparation and monitoring of the territory, the Mosaico Italo Croato Roma association has developed a very intimate, identity-based and authentic relationship with the Croats of Molise and this is precisely the engine for collecting a docufiction experience linked to this authentic and unique event. This direct and symbiotic relationship helps to complete a documentary work with the poetry of the territory and exclusive and original knowledge.

Mája of Acquaviva Collecroce

Acquaviva Collecroce (Campobasso) is a municipality in Molise populated by a wave of Slavic migration from the first half of the 16th century, as Milan Rešetar states: «All the reliable information we possess on those Slavs from Molise, whose last residues remained in the three well-known localities, agree in fact in the statement that they were settled in the localities in question during the first half of the sixteenth century and speak of them precisely as of people who had come from Dalmatia to Italy not long before [...]».

In this town, which has about 740 inhabitants, an important research activity on the Slavic language took place, according to the neologism proposed by the authors of the local Molise Croatian dictionary. The enhancement of the language, which also includes cultural exchanges, especially in the school environment, with Croatia, is accompanied by the updating of the most characteristic traditions of the place.

In addition to the Christmas Smercka, the feast of May 1st, revived in mid-1980, represents an opportunity for collective sharing of a particularly heartfelt tradition. The Mája procession is part of the propitiatory spring festivals, but it also has the intention of strengthening fraternity among the population, which still keeps alive the memory of its origins. As happens in the analogous manifestations that have the figure of the haystack or straw-bearer at the base (the pile of straw raised in a conical shape to protect from the rain), a conical frame is covered with plant elements.



Compared to the other compositions, the Májá by Acquaviva Collecroce has an anthropomorphic appearance, in fact it also has a head and arms. The result is truly surprising and evokes the imaginative complexity of certain Arcimboldeque images, not so much in a grotesque sense as in a joyful one. The preparation begins the day before the festival, with the collection of flowers and first fruits, which continues as long as possible, to avoid drying.

The structure, more than three meters high, is made of flexible branches, reeds and straw and, unlike those of Fossalto and Colle d'Anchise, is not covered by a metal mesh. The decoration is performed by a group of young people and some adults: as the Májá takes shape, everyone contributes to the improvement of the composition with proposals and suggestions. In front of the room used for the preparation, some visitors stop briefly to follow and comment on the preparation.

The morning of the following day the final touches are made, when the figure is completed, in the covering and in the almost human features, accentuated in the large eyes of the face, the Májá is ready to be animated. This personification has a rather feminine appearance: she has a crown on her head, long hair and the underside looks like a wide skirt. In the representation observed in 2007, the Májá does not wear a cross on her head but a showy tuft, unlike the analogous figures of Fossalto (2005, 2006) and Colle d'Anchise (2007), where even Pagliaro enters the church.

Alberto M. Cirese, based on the information collected during his research, which attests to the vitality of the festival until 1940 and its interruption caused by the war, mentions the presence of a cross of ears of wheat, placed on the top of the cone, the religious blessing and final destruction of the Májá, at the ruins of a church, performed by boys.

On an internet site dedicated to Acquaviva Collecroce, the festival is photographically documented, from 2001 to 2007, and the introductory text reads: "As for a few years now, a pagan festival has been held on May 1st handed down from our ancestors (fortunately resumed): it is the feast of the Májá". Scrolling through the images, we notice how the forelock is different, from year to year, which



indicates how the holidays can be different, from year to year, even though they have basic distinctive features, inevitable traces on which the protagonists proceed with variable trends.

Finally, thus composed, the luxuriant plant dress is put on by a young man and the procession begins, first towards Piazza Nicola Neri, then along the streets of the town. Among the dances of costumed groups also coming from other places in Molise, and to the sound of traditional instruments, the spirit of vegetation continues its procession, accompanied by the discreet eyes of women who look out from the threshold of the houses or from the balconies. It is a particular day of celebration and remembrance, and in all there is a feeling of serious participation, especially in the children, who are busy singing with the help of written texts.

This testifies to the importance of learning about tradition in festivals, not only through involvement and observation, but also in ways guided by local, cultural or school associations. As the procession advances into the town, the dances of the participants and the distribution of food dissolve the initial composure and lead to more joyful expression: young and old sing and dance in a circle around the Májá, which moves with its heavy floral load.

Testo: La ricerca è a cura di Emilia De Simoni



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