

SUMMARY

Grinding cereals in the region has had a long tradition. Several ways of grinding are known: by grindstone, by water-mill, by dry-mill, by windmill, by steam-mill, and finally, by modern electric mill. This book aims to describe dry-mills in Otok regarding their specific historic significance and character, preserved in the memory of the local population as a unique tribute to traditional art of mill building in Croatia and south-eastern Europe.

A dry-mill was driven by oxen, cows or, most commonly, horses. It was used for grinding cereals, such as wheat, barley, maize or oats. In addition, it would also grind salt for human or animal use.

The first records mentioning dry-mills date back to the second half of the 18th century. As early as in 1751 Mary Therese, Austrian queen and empress, supported the construction of dry-mills by ordering water-mills to be dismantled in order to increase the efficiency of water level and flood control. The water-mills on the Sava were obstructive to navigation and slowed down the water course. They were also used as salt-smuggling points, and even were believed to help spreading diseases. There was even a greater number of water-mills on brooks between the Sava and the Bosut because of which flood waters withdrew more slowly back to their beds. In winter water-mills were chained with ice, and in spring and autumn season access roads were sodden with rain. It turned out that dry-mills were comparatively advantageous to water-mills in many of the above respects. Dry-mills were usually built inside the villages, they were operational independently of the season, and villagers knew their exact grinding schedule. Grinding in a dry-mill was cheaper, and flour was produced from one's own cereals. Thus water-mills were gradually replaced by dry-mills in the 19th century.

However, the decisive breakpoint leading to the construction of a greater number of dry-mills in Otok were the years 1784 and 1785, when great floods, caused by snow melting and heavy rains, flooded cultivable land for a long period of time. For this reason in 1786 the General Military Headquarters suggested closing down the water-mills and replacing them by dry-mills. The conversion was stimulated by three-to-six-year tax free operation and free timber for their construction. In the area between the Sava and the Bosut the existence of dry-mills was recorded in the villages of Privlaka, Andrijasevci, Jankvci, Rokovci, vinkovci, Stitar, Babina Greda, Vrbanja and Strosinci.

The dominant social form of organization used to be a home community composed of several families of the same kin. Thus associated, the community members could do the farming and cattle raising more easily. Equally, the military authorities of the region had an easier task in controlling and organizing life as subdued to their demands. The construction of a dry-mill was rather an endeavour even for a rich home community, so often more communities would join in and share a dry-mill. Their contribution in construction would give them proportional usufructuary rights, determined by the right to grind measured in days and hours. The construction of a dry-mill required authorisation by the military authorities, which in turn allocated an adequate site and approved delivery of the required quantity of timber (oak, hornbeam, hawthorne, elm or deal). Oak timber was the principal construction material. Dry-mills were covered with shingle, thatch or straw. The walls were made of brick, and quite often, wicker. The construction and adjustment of a dry-mill was carried out by the most skilled masons and carpenters.

There are reliable records on eight dry-mills built in the 18th and 19th centuries. Those are Galovic's, Pavlovic's, Djurkin's Sokalic's, Matan's, Franjko's, Marinko's and Tomasevic's or Klara's dry-mills. They were named by the home communities that had built them or by the owner of the land where the mills were situated. The only preserved dry-mill is Tomasevic or Klara's one, with the year 1863 carved in one of its beams. It is believed that the mill had been built even earlier than that date. It has been registered as a national heritage monument of highest category in Croatia since 1972. This dry-mill has been restored three times. The first restoration took part between 1968 and 1970 and the second between 1981-82. Both restorations were partial. The first restoration was the most complete, occurring between 1997-2004.

Seven out of eight dry-mills have been irretrievably lost, and there is only Tomasevic or Klara's one left. Its operation is described below.

The mill has three main parts: a cone-shaped roof with the driving section, the milling section with transmission and grinding mechanisms, and the miller's quarters.

The most typical part of the mill is its driving mechanism situated within a big cone-shaped, 8.55m-high roof 8.55. It consists of a large wheel of 14 m in diameter, being the reason for the roof's typical circular shape. At the outer side of the wheel there are 520 wooden pins, so that the wheel has the function and appearance of a cog-wheel. The wheel is connected to a central wooden pillar by a system of horizontal and hip beams, also called *the spindle*. The mill operator, who was also a coachman, let between one and four horses into the mill by opening the wooden gate of the mill. When the horses were let in, the mill had to be «lifted», that is, the large wheel was tilted on the side opposite the entrance by dragging its rope, and then put back so the horses could be harnessed.

The miller and his family, often a numerous one, lived in the miller's quarters. The quarters is now furnished with old household items from Josip Basic's ethno-collection. People interviewed for this book were related to dry-mills in a variety of ways some had been millers themselves, some were born in a dry-mill, and some were mill co-owners or coachmen.

Dry-mills were different for the efficiency of their management, which depended highly of the skill of the miller and the «chief tutor» who looked after the mill and maintained its operation. They were responsible for their work to the mill management. The co-owners had grinding rights and they had to participate in maintaining the mill and paying the miller. The co-owners to Tomasevic or Klara's dry-mill were divided in nine «orders». Every order had a 24-hour grinding right in order of the timetable expressed in days and hours in their co-owner's booklet. Every order was headed by a «tutor», and one of the nine tutors was the «chief tutor». Every tutor had a list of his order's co-owners, from whom he used to collect money for the mill maintenance, and then deliver it to the chief tutor. In 1972, for example, there were 49 co-owners of this mill. Every year the co-owners used to gather at their annual assembly on 2 February.

The disappearance of dry-mills was gradual. By the end of the 19th century a first steam-mill appeared in Otok. The farmers kept using the dry-mill widely even by the mid-20th century, as they didn't have to queue, and the flour ground from the farmer's own cereal was much tastier. However, the electric mills finally squeezed out the dry-mills, leaving only their memory to the present.