

CROATIA AND SLAVONIA.

CROATIA and Slavonia are sister countries whose people speak one and the same tongue, the Serbo-Croatic, the Slavonians, however, being purer in speech. The written language is alike in both countries. In ancient times they fought together against the common enemy, the Turk, but being finally overcome by him, peace was only made at the price of Slavonia, which remained subject to Turkey for a hundred and fifty years, till at the end of the seventeenth century the soldiers of Islam were slowly but surely driven back and finally conquered. Then Turkey was forced to resign Slavonia, and since that time the two countries have been united both politically and racially.

But the fact that Slavonia was so long subject to Turkey is of importance in considering the art of its peasants, which shows a marked Oriental influence. The Slavonians, moreover, are mainly of the Greek Orthodox Church ; the Croates are Catholics. Both countries belong to the South Slav group, which rightly considered includes Dalmatia, for in ancient times Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia were one kingdom.

In Croatia and Slavonia the peasants are chiefly engaged in agricultural pursuits and the culture of the vine. As in other lands, the art of the peasant of the mountains differs from that of the one dwelling in the plain. The shepherd has his own distinctive manner of expressing his inborn love of the beautiful. He forms his own reed on which he carves as fancy leads him—the Slavonian in some Oriental design, the Croate's efforts showing signs of many influences, Greek and Egyptian amongst others. But the more cherished artistic occupation of the shepherd and cowherd is the engraving, or rather etching, of his wine-gourd ; and in this he shows a peculiar aptitude. His single tool is a small knife ground to a very fine point. With this he cuts into the dried skin of the gourd ; his design he knows by heart. The next step is to stain it ; this he does with the colour obtained by cleansing his pipe : finally he etches it with vegetable acids. The process is extremely simple. He is eminently practical, and if he has no tobacco will have resort to any fatty material obtainable. A similar method of etching gourds obtains in Russia and Corsica. In Tyrol the gourd is also popular, but the Tyrolese peasant makes little or no attempt to adorn it.

The architecture in the interior of Croatia differs from that on the seaboard, where it has been strongly influenced by Italy. The houses are of stone and have pleasant gardens. Here the vine flourishes. In the villages near and on the River Save the façades

and gates of the wooden cottages are carved ; the others, both in Croatia and throughout Slavonia, bear little trace of adornment.

The old custom of living in social communities still prevails in some parts of both countries, though it is gradually but surely dying out. This is said to be the women's fault ! but it is in any case a pardonable one, arising from a natural desire to be mistress of her own home. But the custom is an interesting one, and many of the beautiful pieces of embroidery here reproduced were executed by the maidens of these communities ; for the young girls are set to work at the loom and with the needle while the older women are in the fields. Here it is a woman's birthright to do the hard labour, the men choosing the lighter employments. This is a residual legacy dating from those times when the women did all the hard work while the men were forced to go to war. A *sagruda*, as these social communities are called, consists of a number of families ranging from six to ten or even twelve, who work together for their mutual benefit. Each male member as he arrives at manhood has equal rights as son. The female members of the community share in these rights insomuch as they enjoy those of their husbands. The chief man, or *supan*, is chosen by common consent. His wife, the *supana*, is the chief among the women. She guards the larder, from which nothing may be taken without her consent.

The "family" house (No. 810) consists of a main building containing the common rooms, a number of single dwellings for the young married people, containing but one sparsely-furnished room, and separate blocks for the unmarried men and women. Early marriages are encouraged, so that when the men leave for enforced military service their wives are there to do their work. The farm buildings and outhouses occupy two sides of the quadrangle, the dwelling a third side, while the fourth is fenced in, with the exception of the gateway. The great common-room does service for many offices—a living-room by day, work-room in the evening, and bed-room by night, for the older couples rest here. A number of beds are arranged along the wall, under these are kept the children's beds, which are drawn out when occasion requires. A long oak table, covered with a hand-woven cloth, occupies the window side, and on either side of this are high-backed wooden benches for the men of the community. The women and children have their place near the tiled stove, which, however, is never used except in winter. A crucifix, holy pictures, a few painted chests, and perhaps a cupboard or two, complete the furniture of the common-room.

The women of Croatia and Slavonia excel in spinning, weaving, embroidering, drawn-thread work, and, to a certain extent, in lace-

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making. To that wise woman, Queen Maria Theresa, the introduction of the silk-worm was due, and for a long period silk-weaving flourished till it became neglected and now only lingers in some few parts. Some of the embroideries here reproduced will serve to show how expert these peasants are in the use of the needle. But even before the needle came into use there was nothing these peasant-women could not weave on their looms, no manipulation so difficult but that they could master it. In no country, except perhaps Sweden, can they boast of such traditions in weaving as in Croatia. The reason is not far to seek if the geographical position of the country be taken into consideration. Both Croatia and Slavonia lie on the threshold of the Orient, and the latter country has been mainly influenced by Byzantine culture, the former by that of the western countries. For centuries Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines came one after the other bringing in their train mercenaries of all nations, Coptics, Egyptians, Persians, Albanians, and even, it is said, Germans. No doubt some of these remained in the country, which they saw was good, and taught their ancient art of weaving. And in this way the craft has been handed down to this day, thanks to the exertions of Herr Berger, who rescued it from oblivion some thirty years ago, though all attempts to introduce modern looms have been energetically opposed. The weaving of carpets was at one time an important office in every household, for carpets had many and distinctive uses. They served as wall-hangings, to be taken down on Sundays and holy days for use in the church, or as shawls in winter to combat against the bitter winds and drifting snows. Men of high honour were shrouded in them; indeed, it was the greatest sign of respect which could be offered them. Then some of the designs are of peculiar interest, bearing a strong resemblance to that of the textiles found by Graf on the mummies in El-Faijum in the eighties of last century.

The Croatians and Slavonians still keep to the peasant dress. It is always interesting and in good taste and of the women's own spinning. But by far the most beautiful and most interesting is that worn by the women. The Croatian women on Sunday wear white garments, and it is a pleasing sight to see both old and young in their snowy garb of soft hand-woven material. In other places white and red are the favoured colours. The Slavonian women elect a semi-transparent, diaphanous material. They wear but one garment and an embroidered apron. Through these the outline of their fine figures is suggested; often the garment is looped up above the knee. There is unconscious dignity in all their movements. The *opanken*, as the leather shoes are called (No. 803), adds another

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charm, while an enormous amount of thought and time is spent on the dressing of the hair, especially by the young girls. Indeed, it is no uncommon sight to come upon a number of village maidens seated one behind the other each busily employed in braiding a companion's hair. This is also done in some parts of Croatia. In this country also the women wear but a single garment; but it is of a far heavier material than that worn in the sister country. The women of Slavonia are more lavish in their designs, which are essentially Byzantine in feeling, and prefer gold thread as a means of expressing this. They have a fine feeling for harmony of colour; and this may also be said of the Croatian women. In both countries caps have their place. They are the sign of honour due to the state of womanhood: a cap is placed with some ceremony on the bride's tresses when she returns from church. Another point of interest is the handkerchief, which is always hand-woven and embroidered. It is the bride's gift to the bridegroom, it then does duty for an invitation to the wedding, for the "best-man" carries it round the village tied to a stick adorned with gay ribbons. He is accompanied by a youth carrying a flagon of wine and the people at whose houses they stop are thus invited to the feast. As a rule the whole village is asked.

The Croates and Slavonians still retain their ancient customs and ceremonies, and it is indeed a fascinating sight to behold them in their festal attire, when old and young are assembled to enjoy life in their own manner. Youth joins hands in the slow rhythmical dance, the *kolo*, which consists of a few stately steps, first to the right, then to the left, to the long swirling sounds of the *Dudelsack*, which is somewhat distracting to those unaccustomed to its fearsome tones. White and blue are affected for mourning. The hired women perform the weeping and wailing; the peasant wife buries her grief in her heart.

Both the Croatians and Slavonians are proud races and beautiful. The former people are taller and even finer built than the latter. Their art, like that of other peasants, is a spontaneous one, arising out of man's first idea for ornament, a desire to bring something bright into their lives, a natural longing to possess comely homes and comely dress. It is something their very own which they cherish as such. Only those in true sympathy with the peasant can rightly measure it.

A. S. LEVETUS.

CROATIA



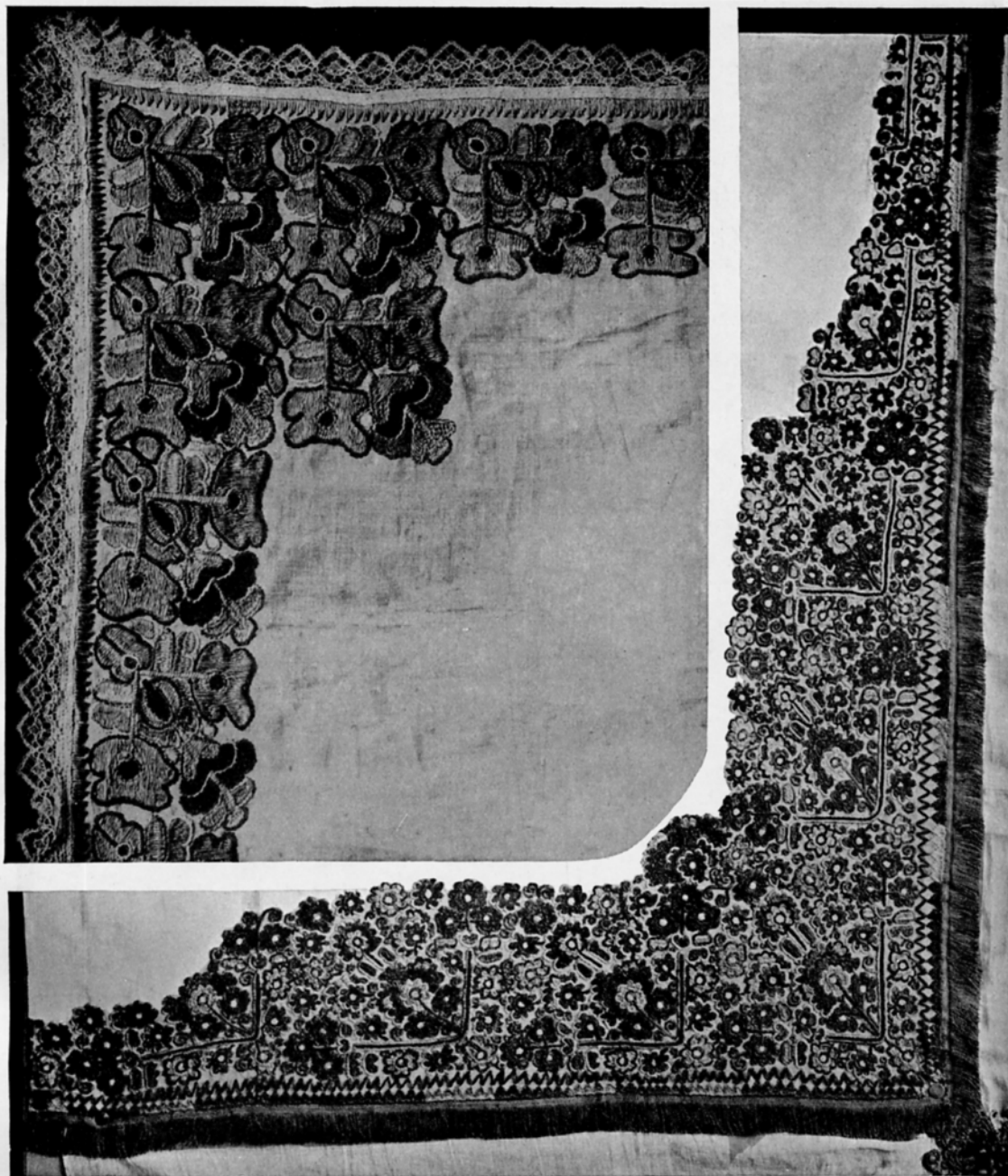
784 & 785 EMBROIDERED HEAD-SCARFS (17TH CENTURY)
FROM THE COLLECTION OF MR. S. BERGER, AGRAM (ZAGREB)

CROATIA



786 to 789 CAP BANDS EMBROIDERED IN SILK (17TH CENTURY)
FROM THE COLLECTION OF MR. LEVIN VON HORVATH, AGRAM (ZAGREB)

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790 & 791 CORNERS OF EMBROIDERED
CHURCHING-SHAWLS (17TH CENTURY)

CROATIA



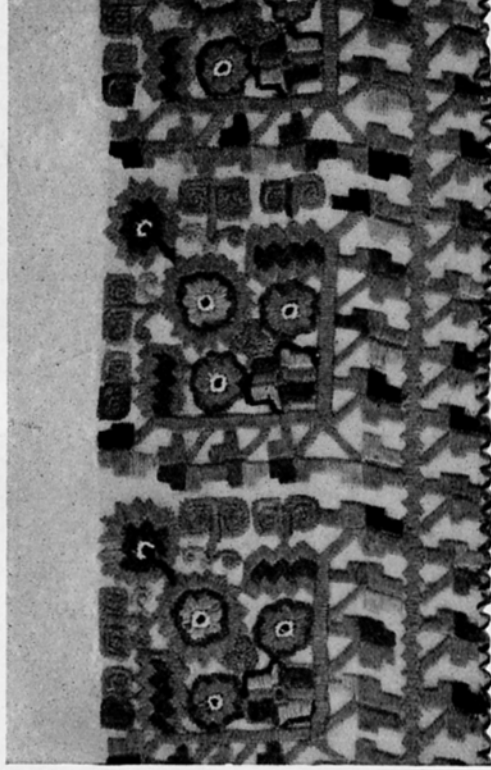
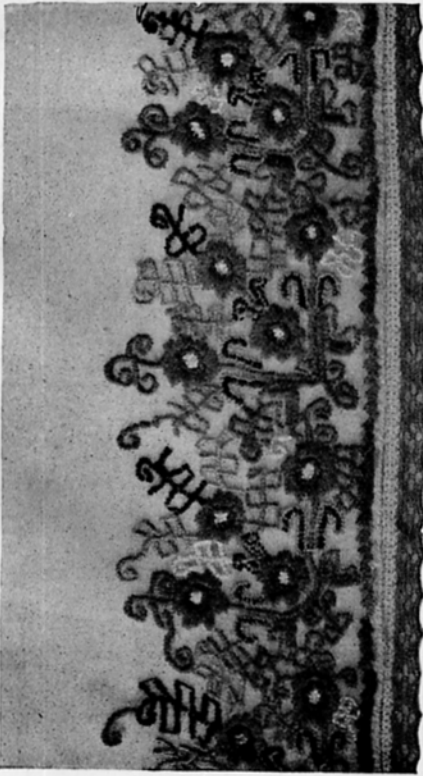
792 & 793 . CORNERS OF EMBROIDERED
SHAWLS (18TH CENTURY)

CROATIA.



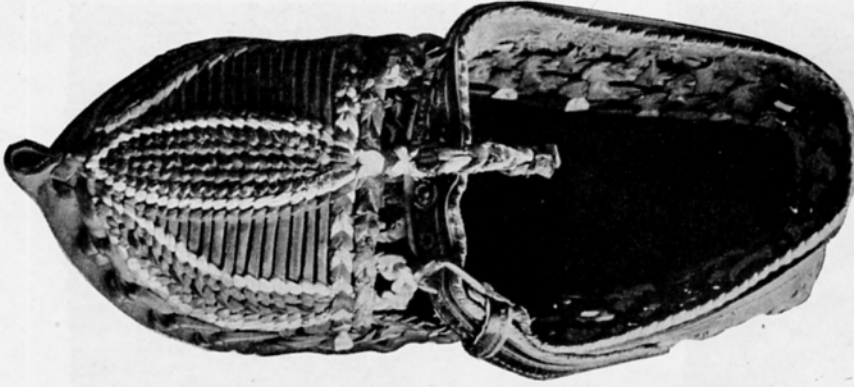
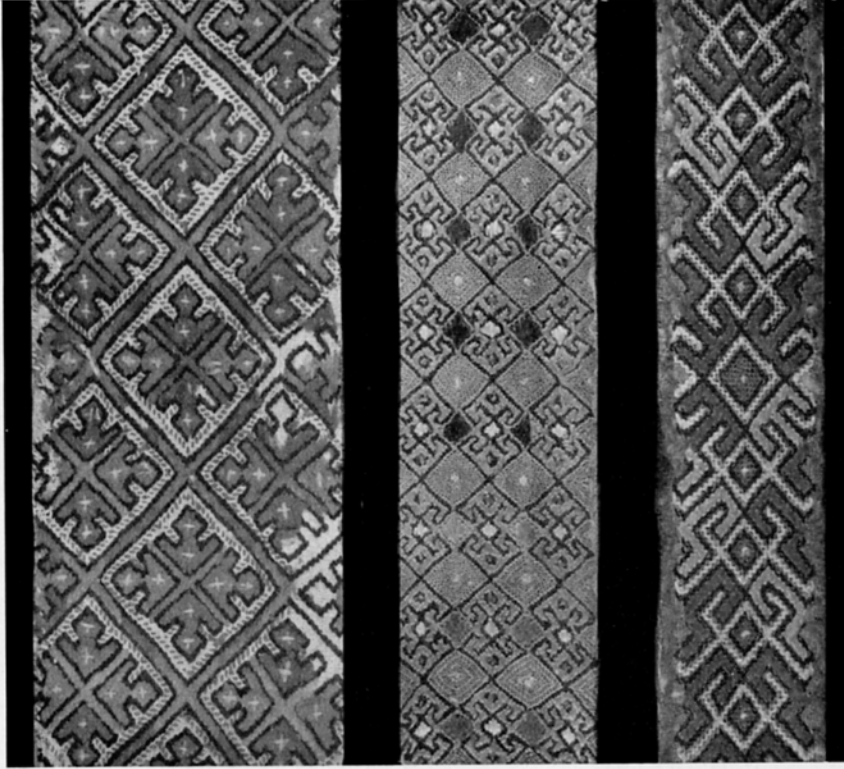
EXAMPLES OF EMBROIDERY
FROM THE COLLECTION OF MR. S. BERGER, AGRAM (ZAGREB).

CROATIA



797 TO 800 EMBROIDERED BORDERS OF HEAD-SHAWLS (18TH CENTURY)

CROATIA



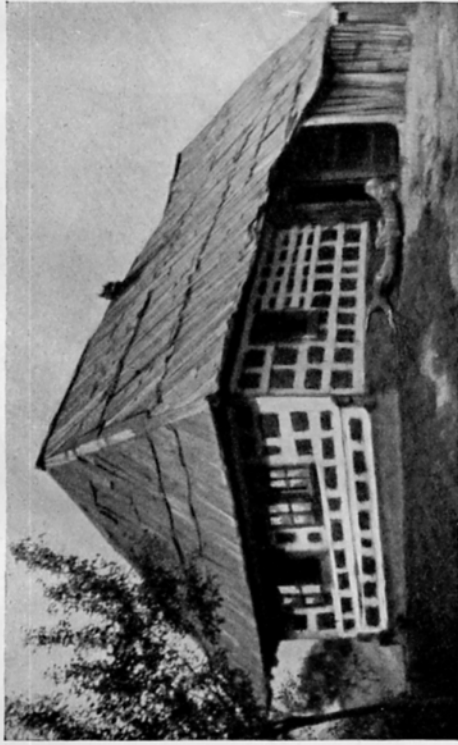
801 TO 804 PAIR OF SHOES (OPANKA) AND
EMBROIDERED CAP BANDS (18TH CENTURY)

CROATIA

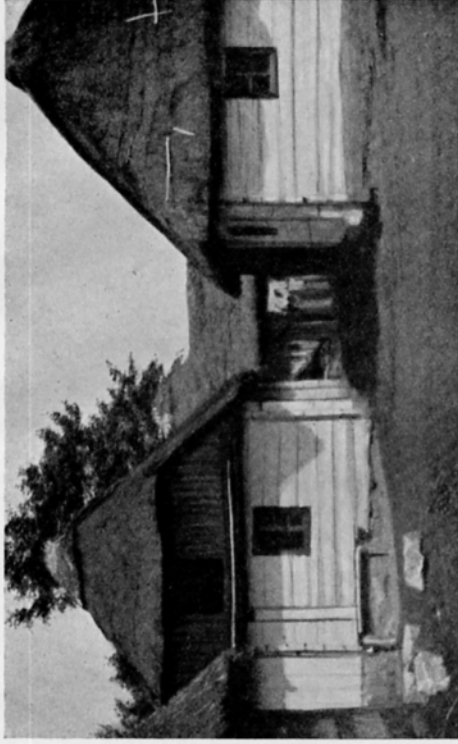


805 TO 808 EXAMPLES OF SILK EMBROIDERY FOR CAPS (17TH CENTURY)
FROM THE COLLECTION OF MR. LEVIN VON HORVATH, AGRAM (ZAGREB)

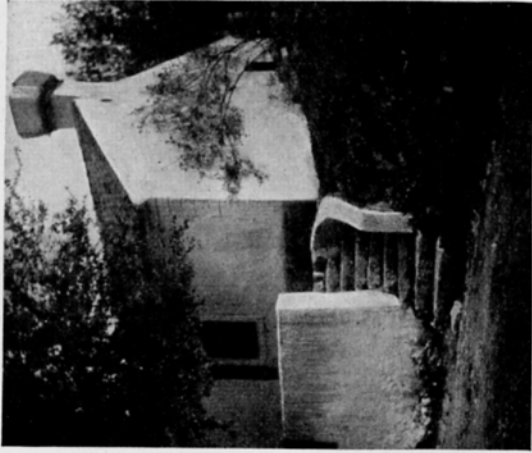
CROATIA



809 PEASANT'S HOUSE AT OGULIN



810 PEASANTS' "FAMILY" HOUSE AT DUGARESA



811 PEASANT'S HOUSE AT PORTO-RÉ



812 PEASANT'S FARM-HOUSE AT DUGARESA



813 PEASANT'S HOUSE AT PORTO-RÉ



814 EXAMPLE OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY EMBROIDERY



815 WOMAN'S EMBROIDERED MANTLE



816 WOMAN'S EMBROIDERED DRESS