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RESEARCH PAPER

Ethnobotany of the ritual plants of the Adriatic islands (Croatia) associated with the Roman-Catholic ceremonial year

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Abstract

Various aspects of blessing plants in Roman Catholic churches throughout the year were recorded on 33 Croatian islands. The fieldwork was carried out by using 131 semi-structured interviews. Altogether, 74 species were mentioned. Plants are blessed mainly on Palm Sunday and St. Anthony's Day (13th June). Flower petals are strewn in processions on Corpus Christi. In very few locations, plants are also blessed on Good Friday, St. John's Day (24th June), and a few other occasions. A very interesting find is the blessing of thirteen herbs on some islands, mainly of northern Dalmatia. The cycle of plant blessing is adjusted to the Mediterranean climate, as plants are blessed mainly in late spring and early summer when vegetation is fully developed.

Keywords

ceremonial plants; ritual plants; apotropaic plants; religion; rituals; ethnobotany

1. Introduction

In the past, most societies tended to have elaborate ceremonies and rituals, both in the case of primitive animistic religions and the more organized monotheistic religions that dominate nowadays (Durkheim, 1912; Eliade, 1978; Frazer, 1922; Hollenback, 2016; McKenna, 1999; Shepard, 2005). In many cases, these acts also involved using plants or were even centred around them. Some of these rituals may also exist outside religion as minor superstitions and magic rituals, often as vestiges of previous animistic beliefs. The examples of ritual uses of plants are innumerable. Many of them can be found compiled from the whole area of Europe by de Cleene and Lejeune (2003). Some information on the ritual plants used in Central and Eastern Europe have been recorded in ethnobotanical publications from Slavic countries (Kolossova, 2009), e.g. Poland (Kujawska et al., 2016), Belarus (Knurjeva, 2019; Shaŭchjenka, 2016), Ukraine

(Stryamets et al., 2021), Serbia (Matejić et al., 2020), Slovenia (Fišer, 2022; Mlakar, 2020) and Estonia (Kalle et al., 2022a, 2022b). The ritual and magical plants of North America can be easily searched in the Native American Ethnobotany Database (2023). Much has also been written about plants in the symbolism and rituals of other continents, i.e. Asia (Dafni et al., 2006; Dolon & Mukherjee, 2015; Hariyadi & Ticktin, 2012; Vilayleck, 2021), Africa (Laydevant, 1932), Central and South America (Brandon, 1991; Voeks, 1997) and Australia (Clarke, 2007). While some ritual uses of plants may have only cultural or historical meaning, some of the apotropaic plants used are medicinal plants, and very often the ritual and medicinal strongly overlap, having been intertwined for centuries (de Cleene & Lejeune, 2003; Łuczaj, 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Łuczaj et al., 2021; Pombo Geertsma et al., 2024; Shepard, 2005).

Roman Catholicism is one of the most widespread religions in the world and the most widespread denomination of

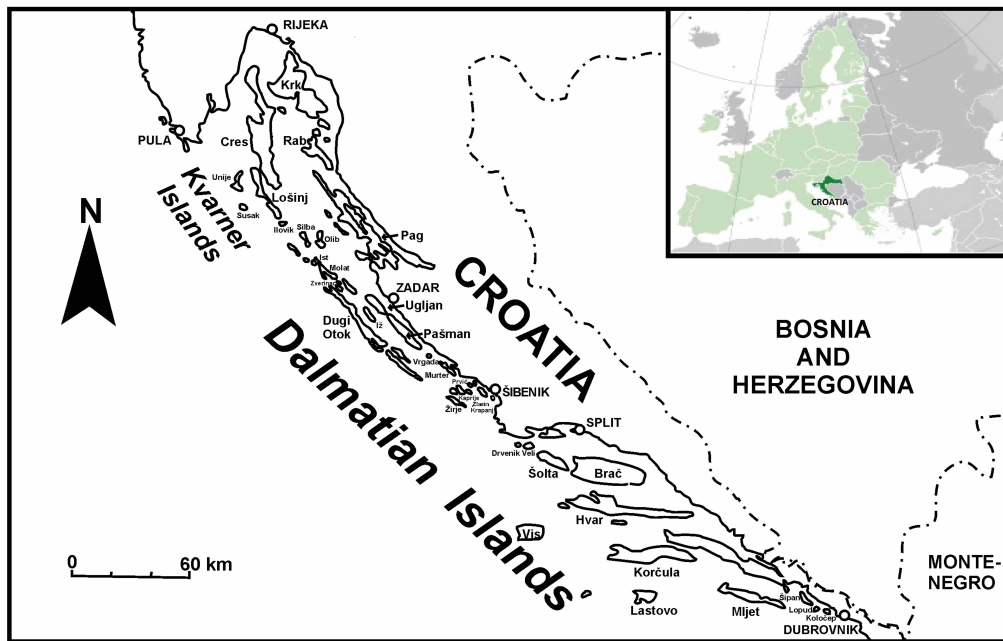


Figure 1 Map of the studied islands.

Christianity as well as the oldest uninterruptedly functioning legal institution. In contrast to Protestant Christian denominations, it did not cut off local ethnographic rituals and holidays that were often vestiges of paganism. Christian temples were often built on previous pagan holy sites (Kotula, 1974). The level to which ancient folklore is intertwined varies from country to country, and Catholic holidays range from austere religious ceremonies to festive occasions that have absorbed the pre-existing folklore. Catholicism and plant folklore are definitely very closely connected in Poland. In this country, plants are blessed in churches on Palm Sunday (March/April), the Octave of Corpus Christi (May/June) and Assumption Day (August 15) (Köhler, 2016; Łuczaj, 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Łuczaj et al., 2021). Magic rituals with plants have occasionally been performed on different days of the church calendar (Kujawska et al., 2016). In the last decade, much research has been done to document ethnobotanical traditions in another Slavic country – Croatia. The use of wild foods, medicinal plants, and plants for flavoring alcoholic beverages has been recorded in its coastal areas (Dolina et al., 2016; Łuczaj et al., 2019a, 2019b, 2021; Pieroni & Giusti, 2008). Bryophytes used in Christmas decorations sold in Croatia were also identified (Bučar et al., 2022). Unfortunately Croatian folklorists usually paid little attention to plants (Gavazzi, 1988).

There is only one archival information on plant blessing from the studied islands, a paragraph in Žić's (1900) description of plants used on the island of Krk. He wrote that on St Peter's Day women and children made herbal wreaths made from *magriž* (i.e. *Helichrysum italicum*), *judina* (i.e. *Pistacia terebinthus*), *mačić* (most likely some *Iris* sp.), *miščić* and *kuš* (i.e. *Salvia officinalis*). On Corpus Christi, they blessed roses (*rožice*), sage (*kuš*), and flowers of strig (unidentified), and on Palm Sunday, they blessed olive branches.

During this research we also asked about rituals with the use of plants, especially bringing them to churches on specific

occasions. Croatia is predominantly a Roman Catholic country, with religion being very important for older generations. The proportion of Roman Catholics is very high, 88% in 2021 (Croatian Bureau of Statistics: Population, 2024). The aim of this article is to synthesize these data and give an overview of plant use in rituals on the Croatian islands of the Adriatic.

2. Material and methods

The study is part of a larger research project on the ethnobotany of the Adriatic islands. So far, data about wild vegetables, alcohol flavoring, and medicinal plant use have been published (Dolina et al., 2016; Łuczaj et al., 2019b, 2021). The fieldwork was performed between 2013 and 2023, with most interviews carried out in 2016 and 2017. One of the questions addressed by these studies was which plants are brought to churches on specific occasions and why. There are 47 inhabited islands in the Adriatic Sea. However, some of them are inhabited only in summer by single families or newcomers. We interviewed people from 34 islands, including all the largest islands (Figure 1, Table 1): Brač, Cres, Drvenik Veli, Dugi Otok, Hvar, Ilovik, Ist, Iž, Kaprije, Koločep (Kalamota), Korčula, Krapanj, Krk, Lastovo, Lopud, Lošinj, Mljet, Molat, Murter, Olib, Pag, Pašman, Prvić, Rab, Silba, Šipan, Šolta, Susak, Unije, Vis, Vrgada, Žirje, Zlarin and Zverinac.

Information on ritual or religious uses of plants was given in 131 interviews with 152 respondents. The mean age of respondents was 71 years (median 72, minimum 34, maximum 96; 74% were female, 26% male).

We used the customary methods of ethnobotany: in-depth semi-structured interviews, starting from freelist and supplemented, if possible, by walks around the places where the respondents had gathered plants and could identify the supplied names. Some key informants, who claimed that they still collected wild food plants, were also selected by walks through the fields. The interviews were performed in Croatian, the

Table 1 Plants used in various ceremonies on Croatian islands.

Taxa and voucher specimen numbers	Origin	St. Blaise (February 3)	Palm Sunday	Good Friday	Easter egg decorations	St. George (April 23)	St. Mark (April 25)	Ascension Day	Corpus Christi	St. Anthony (June 13)	St. John (June 24)	St. Peter and St. Paul (June 29)	Bijela Nedelja (1st Sunday of Oct)	All Saints' Day (November 1)	St. Clement (November 23)	Christmas (December 25)	Wreaths, wrappings decoration
No. of taxa		1	13	7	6	5	3	1	25	34	13	1	3	2	2	1	12
<i>Acanthus</i> sp.	N									1							
<i>Achillea millefolium</i> L.	N									1							
<i>Allium cepa</i> L.	C				3												
<i>Antirrhinum majus</i> L.	C/F								1								
<i>Artemisia absinthium</i> L.	N									1							
<i>Arum italicum</i> Mill. WA0000066915	N																1
<i>Bellis perennis</i> L.	N		1														
<i>Calendula officinalis</i> L. WA0000066413	C/F									1							
<i>Calicotome</i> sp.	N								1								
<i>Chrysanthemum</i> × <i>morifolium</i> (Ramat.) Hemsl.	C													1			
<i>Cistus incanus</i> L. WA0000066353	N								1								
<i>Citrus aurantium</i> L. WA0000071108	C									1							
<i>Citrus</i> × <i>limon</i> (L.) Osbeck WA0000066464	C									1							
<i>Clematis vitalba</i> L. WA0000066933	N									1	1						
<i>Clinopodium nepeta</i> (L.) Kuntze WA0000066389	N									1			1				
<i>Cota tinctoria</i> (L.) J.Gay (syn. <i>Anthemis tinctoria</i> L.)	N									2							
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i> Jacq. WA0000066394	N									1							
<i>Cupressus sempervirens</i> L.	C																1

Continued on next page

Table 1 Continued.

Taxa and voucher specimen numbers	Origin	St. Blaise (February 3)	Palm Sunday	Good Friday	Easter egg decorations	St. George (April 23)	St. Mark (April 25)	Ascension Day	Corpus Christi	St. Anthony (June 13)	St. John (June 24)	St. Peter and St. Paul (June 29)	Bijela Nedelja (1st Sunday of Oct)	All Saints' Day (November 1)	St. Clement (November 23)	Christmas (December 25)	Wreaths, wrappings decoration
<i>Cycas</i> sp.	C								1								
<i>Cyclamen</i> sp.	N		3														
<i>Dianthus</i> sp.	C/N								5	8							
<i>Erica manipuliflora</i> Salisb. WA0000066301	N			1													
<i>Ferula communis</i> L. WA0000066493	N				1												
<i>Ficus carica</i> L.	C/F	1															
<i>Hedera helix</i> L. WA0000066362	N								5								
<i>Helichrysum italicum</i> (Roth) G.Don WA0000066460	N			1		1	1		4	9	2						
<i>Hyacinthus</i> sp.	C		1														
<i>Hippocrepis emerus?</i> (L.) Lassen WA0000066490	N		1														
<i>Hydrangea</i> sp.	C								1	2		1					
<i>Hypericum perforatum</i> L. WA0000066461	N								3	14	3						
<i>Jacobaea maritima</i> (L.) Pelsler & Meijden	N									1							
<i>Juglans regia</i> L. WA0000072310	C								2		2						
<i>Juniperus phoenicea</i> L. WA0000072338	N			1													
<i>Juniperus oxycedrus</i> L. WA0000072331 and <i>J. macrocarpa</i> Sm. WA0000066351	N					1	1		1								

Continued on next page

Table 1 Continued.

Taxa and voucher specimen numbers	Origin	St. Blaise (February 3)	Palm Sunday	Good Friday	Easter egg decorations	St. George (April 23)	St. Mark (April 25)	Ascension Day	Corpus Christi	St. Anthony (June 13)	St. John (June 24)	St. Peter and St. Paul (June 29)	Bijela Nedelja (1st Sunday of Oct)	All Saints' Day (November 1)	St. Clement (November 23)	Christmas (December 25)	Wreaths, wrappings decoration
Lamiaceae unidentified species called <i>meta</i>	?									1							
<i>Laurus nobilis</i> L. WA0000072381	C/F		9	2					3	1							1
<i>Lavandula</i> spp. (<i>L. × intermedia</i> Emeric ex Loisel. WA0000071147 and <i>L. angustifolia</i> Mill. WA0000066937)	C/N									19	5						
<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i> Lam.	N								1								
<i>Lillium candidum</i> L. WA0000071156	C/F					1			3	33	1				1		1
<i>Limonium</i> sp. WA0000066927	N									1							
<i>Malva sylvestris</i> L. WA0000066400	N								1								
<i>Matricaria chamomilla</i> L. WA0000066408	N										1						
<i>Matthiola incana</i> (L.) W.T.Aiton WA0000066930	N		5														
<i>Mentha</i> sp.					1				1		1						
<i>Myrtus communis</i> L. WA0000066307	N																1
<i>Nerium oleander</i> L. WA0000066468										5							
<i>Nigella</i> sp.	N/C									1							
<i>Ocimum cf basilicum</i> L. WA0000071155	C									1							2
<i>Olea europaea</i> L. WA0000072282	N		63	1					1		1						
<i>Origanum vulgare</i> subsp. <i>viridulum</i> (Martrin-Donos) Nyman WA0000071146	N									1							

Continued on next page

Table 1 Continued.

Taxa and voucher specimen numbers	Origin	St. Blaise (February 3)	Palm Sunday	Good Friday	Easter egg decorations	St. George (April 23)	St. Mark (April 25)	Ascension Day	Corpus Christi	St. Anthony (June 13)	St. John (June 24)	St. Peter and St. Paul (June 29)	Bijela Nedelja (1st Sunday of Oct)	All Saints' Day (November 1)	St. Clement (November 23)	Christmas (December 25)	Wreaths, wrappings decoration
<i>Papaver rhoeas</i> L. WA0000066381	N								2								
<i>Parietaria judaica</i> L. WA0000066338	N				1												1
<i>Pelargonium</i> sp.									2								1
<i>Petroselinum crispum</i> (Mill.) Fuss	C/F				1												
<i>Phoenix</i> cf. <i>canariensis</i> H. Wildpret WA0000071102 and possibly other palm leaves	C		15														
<i>Pistacia lentiscus</i> L. WA0000072373	N																1
<i>Prunus persica</i> (L.) Batsch	C									1							
<i>Rosa</i> spp., especially <i>Rosa</i> × <i>centifolia</i> L. WA0000072284 and <i>R.</i> × <i>damascena</i> Herrm. WA0000072279	C/F		1						11	9							1
<i>Rubia peregrina</i> L. WA0000066398	N				3												
<i>Ruscus aculeatus</i> L. WA0000072372	N													1			4
<i>Ruta graveolens</i> L. WA0000072320	N		4						1		1						
<i>Salvia officinalis</i> L. WA0000072368	N		1	2		1		1	2	2					1		
<i>Salvia rosmarinus</i> Spenn. (syn. <i>Rosmarinus</i> <i>officinalis</i>) WA0000072388	N		5	2		1	1		5	1	1						1
<i>Satureja</i> cf. <i>subspicata</i> Bartl. ex Vis.	N												1				
<i>Satureja montana</i> L. WA0000066477	N									1			2				

Continued on next page

Table 1 Continued.

Taxa and voucher specimen numbers	Origin	St. Blaise (February 3)	Palm Sunday	Good Friday	Easter egg decorations	St. George (April 23)	St. Mark (April 25)	Ascension Day	Corpus Christi	St. Anthony (June 13)	St. John (June 24)	St. Peter and St. Paul (June 29)	Bijela Nedelja (1st Sunday of Oct)	All Saints' Day (November 1)	St. Clement (November 23)	Christmas (December 25)	Wreaths, wrappings decoration
<i>Scolymus hispanicus</i> L. WA0000066345	N										1						
<i>Silene vulgaris</i> (Moench) Garcke WA0000071139	N									1							
<i>Spartium junceum</i> L. WA0000071157	N								15	7							
<i>Stachys cretica</i> L. WA0000072297	N									1							
<i>Tanacetum balsamita</i> L. WA0000066414	C									1							1
<i>Tanacetum vulgare</i> L.	N								1								
<i>Teucrium polium</i> L. WA0000066373	N										1						
<i>Thymus longicaulis</i> C.Presl. WA0000071151	N									1							
<i>Viola odorata</i> L. WA0000066363	N		2														

Origin: N – native or a long established species (archaeophyte), C – only cultivated, F – feral (neophyte).



Figure 2 Example of woven palm leaves (left) and olive branches (right) for blessing on Palm Sunday sold in the market the day before the holiday (Dubrovnik, 2012; photography by Ł. Łuczaj).

native language of the inhabitants. The interviews concerned different aspects of plant use, but here we present data only on the ritual uses of plants gathered from respondents who possessed such knowledge. The informants were born on the islands and had their ancestry there.

Plants were identified using standard floras available for this area of Europe, including the works of Domac (1994), Nikolić (2019), Pignatti (1982), and the Flora Croatica Database (2023). Plant names were updated to be consistent with the Plants of the World Online website (2023). Voucher specimens were deposited in the herbarium of Warsaw University (WA).

3. Results

Altogether, the ritual use of 74 species of plants was recorded (Table 1). The vast majority (63%) are native components of the flora or long-established (archaeophytes). The remaining species are only cultivated or their status is unclear. It must be borne in mind that many native species are commonly cultivated (e.g., *Salvia officinalis*, *Ruta graveolens*, *Salvia rosmarinus*). Thus, a clear identification of the status of the actual specimens used is difficult.

We identified a few occasions when plants are used for ritual purposes. The most important of them is *Cvjetnica* or *Cvjetna nedjelja*, on *Cres Maslinska nedelja*, in *Lošinj Domenica delle Palme*, i.e. Palm Sunday, the Sunday in the week before Easter. Plant arrangements woven from real palms (usually *Phoenix canariensis*) and olive branches (*Olea europaea*) are blessed on that day and kept throughout the year (Figure 2; for author names in the scientific plant names, see Table 1).

Although usually composed of these two species, other plants were incorporated on some islands, e.g. *Salvia rosmarinus* (syn. *Rosmarinus officinalis*) and/or *Ruta graveolens* on Hvar. In Srednje Selo on Šolta, *ljubica* (*Viola odorata*) flowers were soaked in water the night before Palm Sunday, which was then used as facewash the following morning; bachelors would throw violets on girls on the morning of Palm Sunday. On Unije, people washed themselves with rose petal water before Palm Sunday.

The next occasion is St Anthony's Day (13th June), when either white lilies (*Lilium candidum*) or bunches of various herbs and flowers are brought to church. On some northern Dalmatian islands, there is a tradition that there must be exactly 13 species included in the arrangement (Figure 3, Figure 4, Figure 5). The most frequently mentioned plants, apart from lilies, were *Lavandula*, *Hypericum perforatum*, *Rosa*, *Helichrysum italicum*, *Dianthus*, *Spartium junceum* and *Nerium oleander*. Altogether 35 taxa were recorded (Table 1). The bouquets are dried and kept throughout the year as protection for the house. Some of the species are consciously added to the bouquets (especially medicinal and aromatic plants, such as *Lavandula* and *Hypericum*), but occasionally accidental flowers are used just to reach the number 13.

Another occasion, for which plants are brought to churches, is Corpus Christi, usually called *Tijelovo* (*Korosante* on Lopud), when flower petals are gathered for processions through towns or villages. All species are suitable, but the most frequently mentioned are *Spartium junceum*, *Rosa*, *Dianthus*, *Helichrysum italicum*, *Hypericum perforatum*, *Lilium candidum*, and *Salvia rosmarinus*. Altars are sometimes decorated with *Hedera helix*. In Račišće on Korčula, *gospino cvjēće*

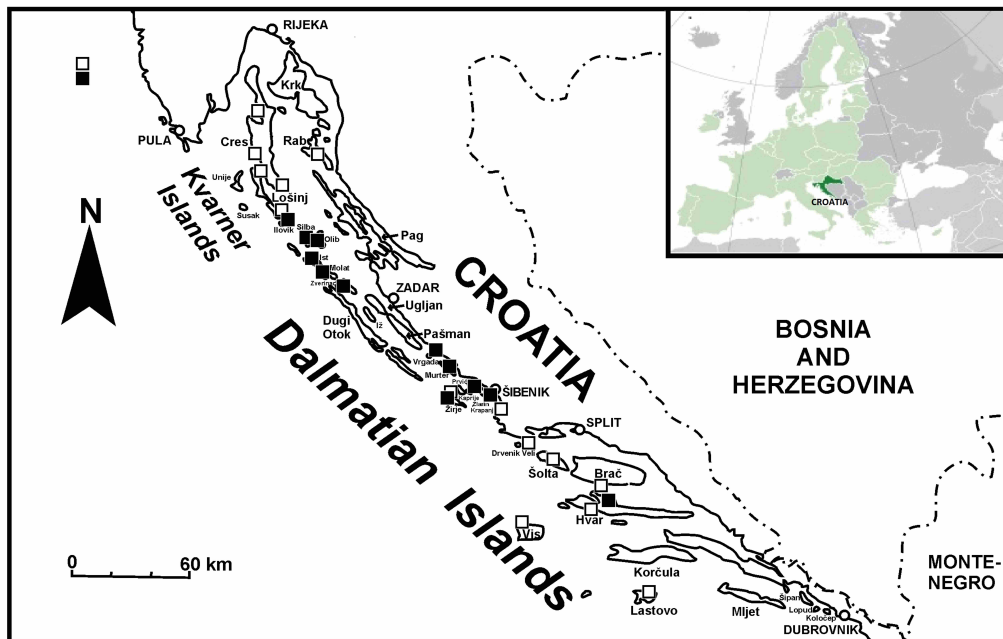


Figure 3 Places where flowers are brought to church on St. Anthony’s Day (13th June). Black squares – bouquet of 13 species; white squares – single species (mainly lilies).



Figure 4 Example of a bouquet blessed on St. Anthony’s Day (13th June) on Molat (2017; photography by Ł. Łuczaj).

(*Hypericum perforatum*), *smilje* (*Helichrysum italicum*), the branches of *orah* (*Juglans regia*), *Sv. Josipa cvijeće* (unidentified, red) and *garofula*, also called *karanfil* (*Dianthus*), are blessed on that day and later used on *Sveti Vlaho* (St Blaise; February 3) to cure ill people. In Babino Polje on Mljet, *gospina trava* (*Hypericum perforatum*) and sometimes roses are blessed in church on that day. In Srednje Polje on Šolta bouquets of *smrič* (*Juniperus oxycedrus/macrorcarpa*) and



Figure 5 Painting by El Greco from 1580 showing St. Anthony with *Lilium candidum*. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_of_Padua#/media/File:AntoniusGreco17.jpg)

magaruš (*Helichrysum italicum*) used to be brought to church on Corpus Christi. In Vrboska on Hvar, on that day, fishermen lay down nets covered with rosemary; this was practiced until

World War II. On Krk in Oštrobradići, bouquets of flowers with **kuš** (*Salvia officinalis*) are blessed in churches and kept (burned and fumigated) to protect against thunder. On Mljet in Maranovići, **pelin** leaves (local name for *Salvia officinalis*) were spread out on the ground on the way to church before processions.

There are also some local traditions, usually restricted to a single island or church. For example, on St John's Day, plants (mainly but not only *Helichrysum italicum*, *Hypericum perforatum*, and *Lavandula*) are blessed only in a few places on Rab. In Groboto on Šolta, a bouquet called **bremenca**, made of *Teucrium polium*, *Juglans regia*, and *Salvia rosmarinus*, was blessed on Corpus Christi. Bouquets were then taken to the fields and left there until *Sveti Ivan* (St. John's) when they and/or olive branches were burned.

On Good Friday, bouquets of flowers are blessed in parts of Korčula (Smokvica, Blato), and olive branches are taken to church on Lastovo. On Ilovik, *Hortensia* bunches are brought to church on St. Peter and Paul's Day. Only rarely are plants blessed on the day of *Sveti Jura* (St. George), *Sveti Marko* (St. Mark), *Sveti Klement* (St. Clement), *Sveti Blaž* (St. Blaise), and *Sveti Petar i Pavao* (St. Peter and Paul). In Pražnice on Brač, *kadulja* (*Salvia officinalis*) branches are blessed on *Sveti Klement* (23rd November) and *Sveti Jura* (23rd April). People use the bouquets to brush the statues of the saints and take them home for later use in case of illness.

Plants are also used to make church decorations, especially for Christmas or weddings, and to adorn graves. In Vodice on Cres and in Dobrinj on Krk, *Ruscus aculeatus* is used to decorate graves, but this practice is probably much more widespread. Graves are decorated with *Chrystanthemum* sp. flowerpots throughout Croatia on All Saints' Day. In Gonje Selo on Šolta, on *Markovo* (St. Mark, 25th April) and *Jurjevo* (St. George, 23rd April), **brimenci**, e.g., bunches of **cmilj** (*Helichrysum italicum*), **ružmarin** (*Salvia rosmarinus*) and **smrič** (*Juniperus oxycedrus* / *macrocarpa*) are blessed. They were also used for blessing fields and burned in vineyards on *Sveti Ivan* (24th June).

Plants useful for the making of Easter egg decorations form another interesting category. Onion peels (*Allium cepa*) were used in Maranovići on Mljet and in Dinjiška on Pag as a brown dye for Easter eggs, whereas *Rubia peregrina* roots were used as a red dye (in Ropa on Mljet, called **trnjak**). In Maranovići on Mljet, the leaves of *Ferula communis*, *Mentha*, and *Petroselinum crispum* were used to make interesting patterns on eggs dyed with onion. In Luka on Dugi Otok, *Parietaria judaica* was used to make the letters *ISUS* (Jesus) on Easter decorations (as its leaves stick to objects).

Below, we list all the plants associated with church rituals and holidays in the Adriatic islands alphabetically. For each species, its scientific name is followed by local name(s) (bold italics) and then the description and location of use.

Acanthus sp. **primog**; blessed in St. Anthony's bouquets on Silba.

Achillea millefolium L. **stolisnik**; blessed in St. Anthony's bouquets on Molat.

Allium cepa L., **luk**; the outer part of onions used for dyeing eggs on Koločep, Mljet, Pag, and probably elsewhere.

Antirrhinum majus L., **mačkice**; flowers strewn in Corpus Christi processions on Koločep.

Artemisia absinthium L., **pelin**; blessed in St. Anthony's bouquets on Zlarin.

Arum italicum Mill., **kozalač**; leaves used for wrapping bouquets for church decoration on Lastovo.

Bellis perennis L., **tratinčica**; used for decoration of Easter palms on Pašman.

Calendula officinalis L., **neven**; blessed in St. Anthony's bouquets on Iž.

Calicotome sp., **kapinika**; flowers sprayed in Corpus Christi processions on Šipan (in Šipanska Luka).

Chrysanthemum × *morifolium* (Ramat.) Hemsl., **krizantema**; used for grave decoration on *Svi sveti* (All Saints' Day), e.g. on Mljet (probably on all the islands)

Cistus incanus L., **bušina**; in Maranovići on Mljet, the leaves are spread on the way to church before processions.

Citrus aurantium L., **naranča**; leaves in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day on Molat.

Citrus × *limon* (L.) Osbeck, **limon**; **limun** leaves in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day on Molat.

Clematis vitalba L., **klematis**; shoots in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day on Molat.

Clinopodium nepeta (L.) Kuntze, (**divlja met(v)ica**); in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day on Vrgada; blessed on *Bijela nedelja*, the first Sunday of October, in Vodice on Cres.

Cota tinctoria (L.) J.Gay (syn. *Anthemis tinctoria* L.), **klobučić**; blessed in St. Anthony's bouquets on Olib and Silba. *Crataegus monogyna* Jacq., **glog**; shoots in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day on Silba.

Cupressus sempervirens L., **čempres**; Christmas decorations for altar and church gates in Suđurad (on Šipan).

Cycas sp., **čikas**; used for decoration during Corpus Christi on Lopud.

Cyclamen repandum Sm., **grguša**, **grguč**, **grguć**; part of Palm Sunday palms on Pašman (in Nevidžane and Mrljene).

Dianthus sp., **gariful**; flowers strewn in Corpus Christi processions in Vela Rudina on Hvar.

Erica manipuliflora Salisb., **temeriš**, **vrjesak**; bouquets blessed on Good Friday in Blato on Korčula.

Ferula communis L., **fierla**; brought to church at Easter in Maranovići on Mljet.

Ficus carica L., **smokva**; dried figs are blessed for *Sveti Blaž*, 3rd February, in Stivan on Cres.

Hedera helix L., **bršljan**; important for decoration on Corpus Christi on Lopud (the local name of this holiday is *Korosanti*), and on Unije.

Helichrysum italicum (Roth) G.Don, **smilje** (Korčula, Ist, Krapanj, Molat, Olib, Silba, Vrgada), **smilj** (Korčula), **smij** (Vrgada), **magaruš** (Šolta), **cmilje** (Mljet), **cmilj** (Šolta); in Račišće on Korčula bouquets of *Helichrysum italicum*, *Juglans regia*, *Hypericum perforatum* and *Dianthus* sp. are blessed on Corpus Christi; in Srednje Selo on Šolta similar bouquets of

Helichrysum italicum and *Juniperus oxycedrus* / *J. macrocarpa* are blessed on Corpus Christi; in Maranovići on Mljet it is blessed both on Good Friday and on Corpus Christi; in Rab (on the island of Rab) it is used in mixed bouquets blessed on St. John, and old bouquets are burned or given to eat to animals the following year; these bouquets are also blessed in Kampor on Rab; in Gonje Selo on Šolta on Markovo (25th April) and on Jurjevo (23rd April) *brimenci*, i.e. bunches of **cmilj**, rosemary and juniper are blessed, and were used for blessing fields; they were burned in vineyards on St. John's Day (24th June); they form a part of the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day on Ist, Krapanj, Molat, Olib, Silba and Vrgada.

Hiacinthus sp., **arkiš**; palms on Palm Sunday made of olive branches, *Matthiola* and *Hiacinthus* in Pučišća (on Brač).

Hippocrepis emerus (L.) Lassen, **žuka, pucavica**; in Stomorska on Šolta used in palms for Palm Sunday.

Hydrangea sp., **hortenzija**, is one of the 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day on Molat; used for decoration on Corpus Christi and St. John's Day on Ilovik.

Hypericum perforatum L., usually **gospina trava**, also **kantarion** (Lošinj, Silba), **lušiola** (Rab), **gospino cvjeće** (Korčula), **Svetog Ante cvjeće** (Murter), **cvijet Svetog Ante** (Molat); in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day on Molat, Murter, Silba, Vrgada; in Račišće on Korčula bouquets of *Helichrysum italicum*, *Juglans regia*, *Hypericum perforatum*, and *Dianthus* sp. are blessed on Corpus Christi; in Babino Polje on Mljet *H. perforatum* and sometimes roses are blessed in church for Corpus Christi; in Sv. Eufemia and Lopar on Rab the species is blessed on St. John's Day.

Jacobaea maritima (L.) Pelsler & Meijden, **cineraria**; in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day on Silba.

Juglans regia L., **orah**; in Račišće on Korčula bouquets of *Helichrysum italicum*, *Juglans regia*, *Hypericum perforatum* and *Dianthus* sp. are blessed on Corpus Christi; in Rab (on Rab) in mixed bouquets blessed on St. John's Day, which are burned or given to eat to animals the following year; in Grohote on Šolta *bremenca* – made of *Teucrium polium*, *Juglans* and *Rosmarinus* blessed on Corpus Christi; after blessing, *bremenca* is taken to the fields and left until St. John's day, when it was burned; olive branches can be used with it or instead of it.

Juniperus phoenicea L., **somina**; bouquets of rosemary, bay leaf and *J. phoenicea* blessed on Good Friday in Smokvica (on Korčula).

Juniperus oxycedrus L. and *J. macrocarpa* Sm., **smrič**; in Srednje Selo on Šolta bouquets of *Helichrysum italicum* and *Juniperus oxycedrus* / *J. macrocarpa* are blessed on Corpus Christi; in Gonje Selo on Šolta on Markovo (25th April) and on Jurjevo (23rd April) *brimenci*, i.e. bunches of **cmilj**, rosemary, and juniper are blessed; they were used for blessing fields and burned in vineyards on St. John's Day.

Laurus nobilis L., **lovor** (Korčula, Hvar, Šolta, Vrgada), **lovorika** (Lopud, Šipan, Korčula), **javor** (Hvar, Drvenik Veli); component of the Palm Sunday palm (Drvenik Veli, Maslinica on Šolta and Vela Rudina, Vrbanj, Pitve, Jelsa, Svirče – all on Hvar); blessed on Good Friday in Blato and Smokvica (in the latter with rosemary and *J. phoenicea*); used as a church decoration on Šipan in Suđurađ and on Lopud.

Lavandula spp., **lavanda** (mainly), also **levanda** (Cres, Ist, Rab, Murter, Hvar) and **livanda** (Cres); in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day (Lošinj, Molat, Ist, Krapanj, Molat, Murter, Olib, Prvić, Silba, Vrgada); blessed on St. Anthony's Day (Cres); blessed on St. John's Day (Rab).

Leucanthemum vulgare Lam., **margaričele**; sprinkled in Corpus Christi processions on Koločep.

Lilium candidum L., **lilijan, ljiljan** (Brač, Hvar, Molat, Hvar, Cres, Rab, Šolta, Silba, Vrgada, Zlarin, Žirje, Prvić, Šipan, Ilovik), **lijer** (Šipan, Lastovo), **cvijeće svetog Ante** (Kaprije), **cvječe svetog Ante** (Murter, Prvić), **cveće od sv. Antona** (Unije), **cviče sv. Antonja** (Hvar island), **cvijet sv. Ante** (Mali Lošinj), **đildi** (Susak), **cvijeće sv. Antuna** (Susak), **žij** (Brač in Praznice, Jezera on Murter), **žilj** (Stevan on Cres), **žulj** (Olib), **ži** (Orlec on Cres), **džilijo** (Orlec on Cres); blessed on St. Anthony's Day (Hvar, Ilovik, Molat, Šolta, Brač, Cres, Rab, Kaprije, Murter, Olib, Prvić, Silba, Šipan, Vrgada, Žirje, Zlarin); bouquets made on Corpus Christi (Ilovik, Hvar), church decorations (Susak, Unije).

Limonium sp., no name given; blessed on St. Anthony's Day (Krapanj).

Malva sylvestris L., **sljez**; flowers sprinkled in Corpus Christi processions (Kolan on Pag).

Matricaria chamomilla L. or/and *Anthemis* sp., **divlja kamilica**; blessed on St. John's Day (Palit on Rab).

Matthiola incana (L.) W.T.Aiton, **viola** (Nevidžane, Mrljene and Barotul on Pašman, Vrgada), **viol** (Pučišća on Brač); woven into Easter palms blessed on Easter Sunday.

Mentha sp., **metvica** (Mljet), **metica** (Rab); blessed on St. John's Day (Lopar on Rab); pressed on Easter eggs to provide a pattern during dyeing in Maranovići on Mljet; flowers sprinkled in processions on Corpus Christi in Babino Polje (Mljet).

Myrtus communis L., **mrta**; branches used for cemetery wreaths (Krapanj).

Nerium oleander L., **oleander, delanda**; in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day on Ist and Molat.

Nigella sp., no name given; in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day (Krapanj).

Ocimum basilicum L., **bosiljak** (Smokvica on Korčula, Cres on Cres), **murtelica** (Prvić); worn with clothes when going to church to give them a pleasant smell (Cres); used for the decoration of churches (Korčula); in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day (Krapanj).

Olea europaea L. **maslina**; used throughout the whole coast as the main component of Palm Sunday palms; in Grohote on Šolta a bouquet called *bremenca* was made of *Teucrium polium*, *Juglans regia* and *Salvia rosmarinus* blessed on Corpus Christi. After blessing, they were taken to the fields and left until St. John's Day, when they and/or olive branches were burned.

Origanum vulgare subsp. *viridulum* (Martrin-Donos) Nyman, **majčina dušica**; in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day (Zlarin).

Papaver rhoeas L., **mak**; flowers sprinkled in processions on Corpus Christi in Kolan on Pag.

Parietaria judaica L., **ščirenica**; plants used for Easter to make the inscription 'ISUS' in Luka on Dugi Otok.

Pelargonium sp., **čoke(te)** (Hvar), **čerošpanja** (Babino Polje on Mljet); brought to church on Corpus Christi and to the field afterwards in Vrboska on Hvar; used for church decoration in Zastrazišće on Hvar; flowers sprinkled in processions on Corpus Christi in Babino Polje on Mljet.

Petroselinum crispum (Mill.) Fuss, **petrusin**; leaves used for making patterns on dyed eggs blessed on Easter Saturday in Maranovići on Mljet.

Phoenix cf canariensis H. H. Wildpret and possibly other palm leaves, **palma**; Bol, Sumartin, Škrip on Brač; Drvenik Veli; Lastovo; Babino Polje, Korita, Saplunara (Mljet); Šipanska Luka (Šipan), Dračevo Polje, Vis, Komiza, Oključna, Marine Zemlje (Vis); used for Easter Palms.

Pistacia lentiscus L. **trišja**; generally used to make wreaths in Suđurađ (on Šipan).

Prunus persica (L.) Batsch, **breskva**; in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day in Zapuntel on Molat.

Rosa spp., especially *Rosa × centifolia* L. And *R. × damascena* Herrm., **ruža**; in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day (Ist; Veli Iž; Bargulje on Molat; Prvić; Vrbanj on Hvar); flowers sprinkled in processions on Corpus Christi (Unije, Koločep (Kalamota), Lopud, Molat, Šipan); petals sprayed around holy statues, flowers for altar decoration (Zastrazišće on Hvar).

Rubia peregrina L., **trnjak** (in Ropa on Mljet), **broč** (on Koločep), **brandoč** (Suđurađ on Šipan), used for dyeing Easter eggs.

Ruscus aculeatus L., **pundžitopo** (Vodice and Cres on Cres), **kataroška** (Dobrinj on Krk), **veprina** (Sutivan on Brač), **oštrica** in Kolan on Pag, used for decorating graves on Cres and Krk, especially on All Saints' Day; used to make wreaths for churches or graves (Sutivan on Brač, Kolan on Pag); used to make Jesus' thorny crown during Easter celebrations in Kolan on Pag).

Ruta graveolens L., **ruta**; in Kampo on Rab planted in the garden to protect the household from witches (*vještica*); in Lopar on Rab blessed on St. John's Day; component of Easter palms on Hvar (Vela Rudina, Pitve, Jelsa, Svirče) because witches disliked it (Pitve on Hvar); in Vela Rudina on Hvar these palms consist of *Olea europaea*, *S. rosmarinus*, *Ruta graveolens* and *Laurus nobilis*. In Jelsa on Hvar *polme* (Easter palms) made of the same components were carried by male children; one was kept for the house, and others left in fields by their owners.

Salvia officinalis L., **kadulja** (Korčula, Brač, Hvar), **kuš** (Krk), **pelin** (Mljet), **slavulja** (Murter); in Vrbanj on Hvar and Betina on Murter in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day; in Korita on Mljet its leaves used to be strewn during the Corpus Christi procession; in Oštrobradići on Krk on *Spasovo* (Ascension Day) flower bouquets were blessed in churches, mainly with *S. officinalis*, and burned and fumigated to protect from thunder.

Salvia rosmarinus Spenn. (syn. *Rosmarinus officinalis* L.), **ružmarin** (Mljet, Rab, Šolta), **ruzmarin** (Vrbanj and Pitve on Hvar), **rozmarin** (Jelsa on Hvar), **lucmarin** (Murter, Unije), **zemorod** (Vela Rudina on Hvar); until World War II, fishermen in Vrboska on Hvar lay down nets covered with

rosemary for Corpus Christi processions; bouquets used for Corpus Christi processions (Babino Polje on Mljet, Stomorska on Šolta); bouquets blessed on Good Friday on Korčula in Blato and Smokvica – in Smokvica the bouquets consist of *S. rosmarinus*, *Laurus nobilis* and *Juniperus phoenicea*; in Barbat on Rab the *bremenca* bouquet is made of *Teucrium polium*, *Juglans regia* and *S. rosmarinus* and blessed on Corpus Christi; bouquets were then taken to the fields and left there until St. John's Day, when they and/or olive branches are burned; in Gornje Selo on Šolta and on Markovo (25th April) and Jurjevo (23rd April) '*brimenci*, i.e. bunches of *cmilj* (*Helichrysum italicum*), *ružmarin* (*Salvia rosmarinus*) and *smrič* (*J. phoenicea*) are blessed, and were used for blessing fields; they were burned in vineyards on St. John's Day; component of Easter palms blessed on Palm Sunday (Vela Rudina, Vrbanj and Pitve on Hvar, Saplunara on Mljet, Barbat and Palit on Rab). In Vela Rudina on Hvar these palms consist of *Olea europaea*, *Salvia rosmarinus*, *Ruta graveolens* and *Laurus nobilis*. In Jelsa on Hvar '*polme* (Easter palms) made of the same components were carried by male children; one bouquet was kept for the house, and others were blessed and left in fields by their owners; in Betina on Murter, part of the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day; on Unije attached to the chests of the newlyweds for luck.

Satureja cf subspicata Bartl. ex Vis., **salza**; in Vodice (Cres), blessed on *Majka Boža od Rožala* (the holiday of the Virgin Mary of Rosary), the first Sunday of October.

Satureja montana L., **salza** (Cres), **vrís** (Hvar); in Beli (Cres), blessed on the first Sunday of October; in Vrbanj on Hvar in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day.

Scolymus hispanicus L., no name recorded; blessed on St. John's Day in Lopar on Rab.

Silene vulgaris (Moench) Garcke, **zvončići**, in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day on Vrgada.

Spartium junceum L., **žuka** (Vrboska on Hvar, Lopud, Šipan), **banestra** (Olib), **barnestra** (Molat), **barniestra** (Unije), **berništra** (Kolan on Pag), **brnestra** (Molat and Silba), **brneštra** (Lun and Kolan on Pag, Palit on Rab), **brništra** (Molat, Mali Lošinj), **bunestra** (Žman on Dugi Otok); petals used in Corpus Christi processions (Dugi Otok, Hvar, Lopud, Olib, Pag, Rab, Šipan, Unije); in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day (Molat, Silba, Vrgada).

Stachys cretica L., no name recorded; in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day (Vrgada).

Tanacetum balsamita L. **kaloper**, in Smokvica on Korčula used for church decorations; on Zlarin in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day.

Tanacetum vulgare L., **bakuk**; in Vela Rudina on Hvar used for Corpus Christi processions.

Teucrium polium L. **janjetovo zelje**; in Grohote on Šolta a bouquet called *bremenca*, made of *Teucrium polium*, *Juglans regia* and *Salvia rosmarinus*, was blessed on Corpus Christi; after blessing, bouquets were taken to the fields and left there until St. John's Day, when they and/or olive branches were burned.

Thymus longicaulis C.Presl. **majčina dušica**; on Olib in the bouquet of 13 herbs blessed on St. Anthony's Day.

Viola odorata L., *ljubica*; in Srednje Selo on Šolta flowers soaked in water the night before Palm Sunday, used as a face-wash in the morning; bachelors would throw violets at girls on the morning of Palm Sunday; used for decoration of Easter palms on Pašman in Nevidžane.

4. Discussion

The use of ritual plants can be compared with similar data from other southern Slavic regions. For example, in the region of Lika, *Cornus mas* twigs, and not olive branches or palm leaves, are blessed on Palm Sunday. In the same region, face washing with *Bellis perennis*, *Primula veris*, and *Viola odorata* flowers steeped in water is practiced on Palm Sunday, similarly to face washing with *V. odorata* on the island of Šolta (Vitasović-Kosić et al., 2022). In a region of eastern Serbia, medicinal herbs are usually collected on St. George's Day, 6th May (or 23rd April according to the Julian calendar), and on St. John's Day on 7th July (or 24th June according to the Julian calendar). Some people even collect 77 kinds of herbs. Willow branches are blessed on Palm Sunday (Matejić et al., 2020). In Slovenia, some rituals are similar to those of Poland rather than coastal Croatia, as bunches of cereals and medicinal herbs, including *Tanacetum vulgare*, are blessed on Assumption Day (Mlakar, 2020). The blessing of palm leaves and olive branches is widespread in the Mediterranean and was already recorded in medieval pre-Crusade Jerusalem (Shagrir, 2015). The symbolism of the date palm (*Phoenix*) as a tree of life, existing since antiquity, should not be neglected as the reason for its use in rituals (Nixon, 1951).

The use of onion peels as Easter egg dye is widespread in Europe, including Croatia (Vitasović-Kosić et al., 2022), Serbia (Matejić et al., 2020), and Poland (Köhler et al., 2023). Poland is another country where systematic ethnographic work has been performed on ritual plants (Łuczaj, 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Łuczaj et al., 2022). Although both Poland and Croatia are Slavic countries strongly dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, the occasions on which plants are blessed in churches slightly differ. In both Poland and Croatia, plants are blessed on Palm Sunday, and flower petals are thrown in processions on Corpus Christi. However, on the Croatian coast, St Anthony's Day (13th June) is the main blessing day for flowers, whereas in Poland, it is the Corpus Christi Octave (the week after Corpus Christi, usually in June) and Assumption Day (15th August) (see refs cited above). The difference probably stems from climatic reasons, i.e., in Croatia, Assumption Day occurs at the end of the dry Mediterranean summer, when few flowers can be found, whereas St. Anthony's Day, the 13th of June, falls at the beginning of summer when many medicinal herbs can be blessed. Another difference is the strength and spread of the traditions. The blessing of herbs on St. Anthony's Day occurs mainly in northern Dalmatia; on some other islands only lilies or other single species of flowers are blessed, while on others – nothing at all. Meanwhile, the Polish blessing of herbs on Assumption Day is universally practiced throughout the whole country. The difference may also have historical causes – the Adriatic islands have been under the influence of Mediterranean culture and Italy, whereas the blessing of herbs on Assumption Day was probably introduced in Medieval times by Germany (Rostafiński, 1926).

Interesting local traditions can be restricted to single islands or even parishes, e.g. blessing herbs on Good Friday in parts of Korčula. These could be vestiges of older and more widespread traditions, but we see them rather as signs of innovation and invention of traditions. The blessing of 13 herbs on St. Anthony's Day may have been the invention of a local parish, which later spread to neighbouring islands.

Two situations probably co-occur on the archipelago – some traditions are last vestiges of old customs (e.g. the use of plants on St. John's Day) connected with pagan and/or early Christian rituals of other Slavs or pre-Slavic Illyrians. Some are part of medieval folklore (Corpus Christi processions); others, like the blessing of 13 herbs on St. Anthony's Day, may be more recent inventions. St. Anthony of Padua (1195–1231) himself was a medieval saint with a strong following, venerated in Italy and Croatia (Maračić, 2009; Pezzetta, 2015). He is usually associated with white lilies, e.g. in Pula (Maračić, 2009). The custom of blessing 13 herbs may have been introduced by a priest on one of the islands that spread and became popular on several neighbouring islands. This matter needs further historical investigation. In Catholic devotional practice, the number thirteen is also associated with St Anthony of Padua, since his feast day falls on 13 June. A traditional devotion called the Thirteen Tuesdays of St. Anthony is performed by praying to the saint every Tuesday over a period of thirteen weeks (see Light your candle to St. Anthony, 2023). Another devotion, St. Anthony's Chaplet, is made of thirteen decades of three beads each (see Liturgical Year: Prayers: Chaplet of St. Anthony, 0000). Thirteen was also associated with the apparitions of the Virgin of Fátima in 1917, which were claimed to have occurred on the thirteenth day of six consecutive months (Bennett, 2012).

The little importance of midsummer rituals (i.e. those concentrated around St. John's and Day) is surprising. Practically only in Rab is this day celebrated with the use of plants. This is in contrast with northern Europe, where in many countries and regions this is the most important day of blessing plants or making bouquets or wreaths (de Cleene & Lejeune, 2003; Kalle et al., 2022a, 2022b; Kujawska et al., 2016; Mlakar, 2020; Moszyński, 1929). Herbs are also blessed on this day in parts of Serbia (Matejić et al., 2020). The reason for the difference may be climatic, as most herbs in coastal Croatia flower before that day. According to our informants, lighting midsummer bonfires was quite common in the past, but the tradition died out partly due to fire hazards and the ban on making fires in summer.

Another argument that Croatian plant-based ceremonies are very different than those in central and northern Europe is the lack of traditions of decorating houses with tree branches on Pentecost (de Cleene & Lejeune, 2003; Kujawska, 2014; Kujawska et al., 2016). The herb blessing traditions in Croatian islands seem to be somehow disconnected from Slavic traditions with their pagan relics (midsummer, Assumption Day bouquets) further north and are mainly focused on the three Christian holidays of Palm Sunday, St. Anthony's Day, and Corpus Christi.

Surprisingly, a highly toxic plant, *Nerium oleander*, is blessed on the 13 of June. In Poland, people tended to avoid highly toxic plants in their Assumption Day bouquets (Łuczaj, 2011a, 2011b). *Nerium oleander* is widely known to be highly toxic (Farkhondeh et al., 2020), and this knowledge is also common

among Croatian islanders. The plant is not used in the local pharmacopeia (Łuczaj et al., 2021). Its blessing must probably stem from its ubiquity and the fact that the bouquets are not directly used as sources of medicinal infusions or incense.

We probably have not recorded all the islands' ritual plant customs, and our focus was on blessed plants. None of the interviewed subjects mentioned St. Martin's Day, an important holiday on Korčula, during which groups gather for joint dinners in houses or inns. The people of Korčula follow this custom even when outside their hometown. Korčula's St. Martin's Day delicacy is *lojenica*, bread with raisins and walnuts with various spices, especially tallow, eaten while hot (Ogurlić & Radojčić, 2019).

It is interesting that our respondents did not mention conifer trees, i.e., "Christmas trees" (*Picea*, *Abies*), placed in churches. They are most likely imported to the islands and used as decoration, but the interviewees probably took them for granted as something generally ubiquitous during the Christmas season.

A major problem in passing on traditions is the depopulation of the islands, especially concerning young families and children (Graovac, 2004). Smaller islands rarely have schools or school children. This completely disrupts some traditions, especially the sprinkling of flower petals performed by little girls during Corpus Christi processions.

5. Conclusions

The paper is one of very few studies to systematically document the use of ritual plants in a region of Europe. The ritual calendar concerning plants is not very complicated in the studied area and is mainly restricted to Palm Sunday, Corpus Christi and St. Anthony's Day. The most interesting and unique phenomenon is blessing thirteen species of herbs on St. Anthony's Day on some Dalmatian islands. Further secularization of society and depopulation may restrict the practice of the studied traditions.

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