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RAZPRAVE



ARTICLES

Medical Geneticists' Interpretations of Genetic Disorders in Roma Communities in Post-Socialist Hungary

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The article investigates the utilization of ethnic classification by human geneticists in Hungary, with a particular focus on the Roma minority. Drawing on qualitative expert-interviews, it analyzes how historically situated social imaginaries inform the production of genetic knowledge. The study explores how human genetics constructs heritable disorders as ethnic diseases, exposing the epistemological and ethical tensions inherent in translating sociocultural difference into biological terms.

• **Keywords:** population genetics, race/ethnicity, Roma, public health, East Central Europe

Avtor na primeru romske manjšine preuči uporabo etnične klasifikacije pri genetikih na Madžarskem. S kvalitativnimi intervjuji s strokovnjaki analizira, kako zgodovinsko umeščeni družbeni imaginariji oblikujejo ustvarjanje znanja o genetiki. Raziskuje tudi, kako človeška genetika konstruira dedne motnje kot etnične bolezni, pri čemer razkriva epistemološke in etične napetosti, ki so neločljivo povezane s prevajanjem družbenokulturnih razlik v biološke pojme.

• **Ključne besede:** populacijska genetika, rasa/etničnost, Romi, javno zdravje, vzhodna in srednja Evropa

Introduction

This paper examines the complex relationship between genetics, ethnicity, and public health, with a specific emphasis on the Roma population in Hungary. It provides an in-depth exploration of how human genetics has historically understood, classified, and addressed various health disparities and susceptibilities among ethnic groups, especially focusing on how these perspectives and methods apply to the Roma community. Research in population genetics seeking to map genetic predispositions to particular diseases among different ethnic groups has produced medically important studies, since its results can influence public health programs that help the management of epidemiologically significant diseases. In Hungary, the disparity in health outcomes between Roma and non-Roma populations has been particularly stark since the political transitions of the early 1990s. Roma populations face disproportionately high rates of unemployment, low educational attainment, and increased exposure to poor living conditions, which collectively impact their health. Consequently, research has shown that Roma individuals report lower health standards and greater difficulties in accessing healthcare services. Studies emphasize the importance of culturally aware healthcare practices, as Roma communities often encounter discrimination in medical settings,



exacerbating their health disparities. This acknowledgment led to various efforts, especially with Hungary's aspiration to join the European Union, which imposed criteria requiring improved minority health outcomes as part of a commitment to minority rights. Genetic studies, contributing to this strand of research, further underscore the need for targeted health interventions. Research has demonstrated that Roma communities have a higher frequency of certain genetic mutations that increase their susceptibility to a spectrum of conditions (i.e.: cardiovascular disease, congenital glaucoma). Population genetic maps reveal the statistically significant diseases, and thus genetic screening programs could mitigate these health risks by facilitating early diagnosis and encouraging preventive measures. However, researchers also caution against attributing all health disparities to genetics alone; socioeconomic factors, cultural practices, and historical marginalization are significant contributors to the observed health inequalities between Roma and non-Roma populations.

The following work begins with a brief historical overview of genetics, because it is important to demonstrate how genetics became a dominant scientific discourse in public health. After the Second World War, a paradigm shift occurred, and the production and use of genetic knowledge to address both individually and socially relevant medical problems became the accepted goal. This historical overview is important because the geneticists' narratives of the post-1990 discourse resonate with the scientific understandings of the state socialist period. Following a historical overview, the methodological principles, data collection, ethical considerations, and method of analysis are presented. The analysis addresses three main perspectives: (1) ethnic grouping (the ethnicization of medicine), (2) the medical meaning and interpretation of isolation, and (3) the medical issue of inbreeding. These aspects reveal the medical genetic logic of mapping diseases in relatively closed groups to promote the health of Roma. The logic of group formation and its medical interpretation will here be traced with the aim of developing an understanding how ethnicity is applied in medical genetics.

Genetics as a source of information for public health

Medical genetics began to establish itself as a distinct field in the latter half of the twentieth century. Harper compares this progression to the separation of human genetics from the broader discipline of genetics, which began in the 1940s. Although the roots of medical genetics can be traced back to the mid-1950s, its development was uneven. Focusing especially on the United States, Harper notes that medical genetics had emerged as a recognized discipline by the 1980s. In Europe, while the scale of development was comparable, it was more fragmented, as different nations evolved along separate paths following the Second World War. Harper defines medical genetics as a hybrid science, combining human genetics with medical and scientific applications

(Harper, 2008). With the advent of genetic analysis, it became possible to detect mutations that place individuals at increased risk for certain diseases (Kosztolányi, 2000). This allowed medicine not only to diagnose conditions but also to offer patients and clients information about lifestyle changes that could help prevent disease. This proactive approach represents what Kosztolányi describes as real prevention – the ability of medical genetics to identify genetic risks and guide individuals in maintaining their health (Kosztolányi, 2000: 2423). Initially, medical genetics concentrated primarily on individuals and families, diagnosing inherited diseases and providing options once a diagnosis was made. However, its focus expanded following the results of the Human Genome Project (HGP), which enabled the medical community to address conditions of broader epidemiological importance, such as asthma, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer. These conditions are significant because genetic analysis allows for the prediction of susceptibility, giving medicine a more active role in preserving public health and quality of life. Among the major achievements in this field, the HGP stands as a landmark in the history of medical genetics. Allison (2004) highlights the importance of its findings, noting that genetic research is now capable of clarifying the underlying mechanisms of diseases and developing targeted treatments. The latter is no longer a distant goal – according to Allison, such genetic knowledge is already being applied by researchers to identify genomic targets and create molecular genetic therapies.

While a substantial body of literature highlights the role of genetic knowledge in advancing individual and collective health promotion, it is important to recognize that pre-existing social inequalities and tensions may hinder the realization of these medical objectives. From a public health standpoint, the application of genetic knowledge is frequently referenced as a positive exemplar in the context of screening programs for conditions such as Tay-Sachs disease and β -Thalassemia. The earliest cases of Tay-Sachs disease (TSD) to be systematically examined occurred within the American Ashkenazi Jewish community. According to Ruth Schwartz Cowan (2008), the relative success of TSD screening programs can be attributed to their being organized, financed, and disseminated both within and by the Ashkenazi Jewish community itself. A critical factor contributing to this success was the voluntary nature of both the program's workforce and its participants. Equally significant was the support the initiatives received from religious authorities within the community, which further legitimized and encouraged participation in the screenings. A comparable example is the state-organized, clergy-supported β -Thalassemia screening program in Cyprus. Here, voluntary nationwide screening efforts have led to a substantial reduction in the prevalence of this hereditary condition within the Cypriot population (Schwartz Cowan, 2008; Kakuk, 2013). Both cases exemplify how community-based, culturally sensitive, and voluntary genetic screening programs can empower individuals – whether identifying as Ashkenazi Jews or Cypriots – to access genetic services when they perceive themselves at risk of transmitting hereditary disorders. In contrast, the history of sickle-cell



anaemia screening in the United States offers a telling counterexample. This genetically inherited, life-threatening disorder was first studied within African American communities. Despite its epidemiological significance, comparable to that of Tay-Sachs or β -Thalassemia, screening programs for sickle-cell anaemia were largely unsuccessful. Rouse (2009) identifies two principal reasons for this outcome: firstly, these initiatives were organized externally, without the active involvement of the African American community; and secondly, the programs unfolded within a broader historical context of systemic racism and medical mistrust. As a result, African American communities viewed the predominantly white medical establishment with scepticism, undermining the effectiveness of these public health interventions.

In the post-WWII period of state socialist Hungary, physical anthropological research persisted, with a primary emphasis on the description of the physical characteristics of various populations (Bartucz, 1954, 1955; Lipták, 1954; Nemeskéri, Deák, 1954). These studies often intersected with research on heredity, producing applications such as methods for paternity verification (Fehér, 1954) and investigations into the inheritance patterns of congenital anomalies (Szemere, Csik, 1962). Scholarly interest expanded to encompass the relationship between genetics and blood group distribution (Nemeskéri, Thoma, 1961; Rex-Kiss, Horváth, 1970), alongside broader inquiries into the population genetics of blood types (Rex-Kiss, Szabó, 1970). Advancements in biotechnology during this period facilitated the expansion of genetic studies to encompass larger populations and, by the 1980s, this work increasingly included the investigation of ethnic groups across Hungary. The studies were largely motivated by the pursuit of medically significant findings that could inform public health policy and practice. A significant contribution to this discourse was made by medical geneticist Endre Czeizel, who in 1982 published an article addressing the relevance of population genetics to the fields of medicine, history, and national identity. Czeizel defined population genetics as “the study of a population whose individual members belong to the same species” (Czeizel, 1982: 2271), framing its social utility primarily through a medical lens. He argued that it was widely accepted within the genetic sciences that distinct population groups – often delineated by race or ethnicity – exhibit divergent disease spectra as a consequence of long-standing patterns of endogamy. Consequently, Czeizel advocated for the systematic investigation of disease prevalence within the Hungarian population to enable more effective disease management through medical genetics (*ibid.*: 2276).

The 1980s witnessed the emergence of comparative studies assessing the distribution of genetic mutations among various ethnic communities. A notable early example is the work of Flatz and his colleagues, who examined lactose intolerance rates across ethnic groups in Hungary. Their findings indicated minimal variation between groups with the exception of Roma communities, where lactose intolerance prevalence was recorded at 56%, significantly higher than the 37% observed in the general Hungarian population (Flatz et al., 1984: 147). Further research attention was directed towards

the mapping of cystic fibrosis (CF) mutations within Hungary (Németh et al., 1996). By the early 1990s, five mutations had been identified as the predominant causes of CF in Europe. The Hungarian data revealed that the ΔF508 mutation accounted for 64% of the cases, a distribution closely resembling that observed in Poland and Finland. The prevalence of other mutations (G542X, G551D, R553X, and N1303K) was comparatively lower in Hungary relative to neighbouring countries. Raskó and Kalmár (2003) posited that mapping the genetic distances between ethnic communities constitutes an objective scientific method for establishing correlations between genetic traits and disease susceptibility. In a similar vein, Judit Béres, a population geneticist specializing in the genetic structure of Hungary's Roma population, has argued that certain genetic diseases disproportionately affect Roma communities. The justification for targeted genetic screening within these populations is frequently predicated upon the high incidence of genetic disorders and the persistence of culturally sanctioned endogamous marriage practices (Béres, 2003). Judit Sándor (2013) explains that the situation of the Roma minorities in Central-Eastern Europe needs much improvement in many ways; they have endured harm for centuries, and thus they treat any majority intervention with reservation. It is also widely acknowledged that mapping their healthcare problems could benefit their communities, and thus genetic research in Roma groups should not only be based on individual information distribution and individual consent, but should be based on broad public consultation (Sándor, 2013: 241). Scholars have further argued that, given the enduring social and geographical marginalization of the Roma in Hungary, such genetic mapping initiatives are in the best interest of these communities, facilitating more effective medical intervention and public health planning.

Public health standards of Roma and non-Roma Hungarians after the transition

After 1989 it was widely recognized by researchers that there was a huge gap between the health standards of Roma and non-Roma Hungarians. For example, in their study, the sociologist György Gyukits and his colleagues noted that the Roma population suffered the biggest losses during the transition (Gyukits et al., 2000). Unemployment rates were very high among Roma – estimated to be around 45 percent; thus, their socioeconomic situation largely determined their health standards. In their study, Gyukits and colleagues explored the causes of the very low participation rates of Roma women in lung-screening programs. They claimed that in order to understand how effective prevention programs are, the state must know about patient behaviour during those programs. Their results suggested that prevention programs and campaigns that target Roma people should be designed so as to distribute information and help preserve their health. Furthermore, a problem was identified they could not answer: there was



a sizeable difference between Roma and non-Roma Hungarians even from similarly lower-educated groups. The initial hypothesis was that education could play a key role in utilizing various healthcare facilities, but research results suggested the contrary.

Other researchers, similarly focusing on environmental factors, pointed out that the health of Roma living in slums is much worse than that of Roma living in average circumstances (Kósa et al., 2008). In addition to their detrimental social situation, slum-dwellers endure high rates of discrimination when they want to use healthcare services. In their study, Zoltán Kósa and colleagues compared the 45–64 age group and found that Roma people view their own health status in a worse light than those who live in a similar socioeconomic stratum but not in slums. They argued that the health status of the Roma must be improved through multisectoral programs (such as health education) that are designed to target specific communities. Without structural changes, their health status will remain well below average standards.

Elevating the health of minorities as a criterion for joining the European Union

Hungary's intent to join the European Union initiated numerous epidemiological studies. This is because Hungary had to meet the Copenhagen Criteria that "require the respect and the protection of minorities through the stability of institutions that would ensure it" (Kósa et al., 2002: 2419). Consequently, a government program dealt with the issues of Roma minorities, and researchers such as Karolina Kósa and her colleagues contributed studies to the health focus of the program by analyzing the general Roma health standards. In order to facilitate measures that would improve Roma health conditions, it was necessary to survey their demographic situation, their morbidity and mortality rates, their genetic specificities, and their health behaviour. According to Kósa and colleagues (*ibid.*: 2424), only those genetic factors should be examined that significantly influence life quality (such as inheritable disorders and epidemiologically relevant genetic factors). The aim of the studies would be to identify those genetic factors that pose a high risk. With the knowledge at hand, it would then be possible to design screening programs that boost the effectiveness of prevention. They also acknowledged what the data suggest: that the detrimental health situation of the Roma is the result of their marginalized socio-economic positions – "their ethnicity is only epidemiologically important as a confounding factor" (*ibid.*: 2424). They also noted that any study interested in the mapping of health status must take into consideration the data protection law of 1992¹ that makes the use of racial, ethnic, or national identity in a medical context dependent on the consent of the individual or on legal approval. Kósa and colleagues argued that the new law made it difficult

¹ The LXIII. law of 1992 on data protection of personal information and the accessibility of public data.

to collect precise information on the health standards of Roma, but on the other hand praised it as a progressive measure that places ethnic/racial identification in the sphere of personal autonomy.

Genetic studies point towards the need to focus on mutations that are perhaps more frequent in Roma populations because of their cultural isolation (Kósa et al., 2002: 2422). Geneticists found that most of the Roma choose partners from within their Roma communities, and also found that endogamous marriages are much more common among Roma, which makes the prevalence of mutations and thus certain genetic disorders more frequent in these groups. Furthermore, healthcare studies pointed out that Roma people have an increased susceptibility to heart and cardiovascular diseases. For example, the Leiden mutation that makes people susceptible to thrombosis is much more frequent in Roma living in East Hungary (12.2 percent of them carry the mutation in its homo- or heterozygous form, against only 9.8 percent of non-Roma Hungarians). Other geneticists, like Kiss and colleagues, compared Hungarian Roma (Vlachian gypsies²) with non-Roma Hungarian populations. They focused their studies on allele polymorphisms that decisively influence tumour development and thus mortality rates of those who carry these genes. It was argued that studies are already published in which scholars have pointed out the higher rates of congenital glaucoma, galactokinase deficiency, and polycystic kidney disease in Roma. The researchers' position was that studies of allele polymorphisms are vital in order to design targeted preventive strategies (Kiss et al., 2004: 69). Furthermore, by comparing their results to literature results from Indian and Caucasian populations, they found that Hungarian Roma people differed from non-Roma Hungarians regarding the prevalence of GSTM1³ and p53⁴ genes; finding also that regarding the NAT2⁵ gene, the Hungarian Roma fall between the non-Roma Hungarian and Indian populations (Kiss et al., 2004: 72). Because of these findings, they argued that a part of the Hungarian Roma population, the Vlachian gypsies, are more susceptible to developing certain tumours than members of non-Roma and other Roma ethnicities. This is important because it implies that targeted knowledge distribution would be crucial in tackling the related diseases. Thus, targeted screening programs could be developed for use by people who identify as members of these groups to find out who carries the genes at risk and to manage their health more consciously.

² The term itself is used by geneticists, as this is the official ethnonym of a subgroup of Roma within Hungary.

³ Glutathione S-transferase mu 1 (National Library of Medicine, 2025); the mu class of enzymes joined with glutathione functions in the detoxification of electrophilic compounds (i.e.: carcinogens, therapeutic drugs, oxidative stress).

⁴ Tumour protein 53 gene (or p53 gene); it is essential for regulating DNA repair and cell division (MedlinePlus, 2020).

⁵ N-acetyltransferase 2 (National Library of Medicine, 2025); this gene encodes an enzyme that functions to both activate and deactivate arylamine and hydrazine drugs and carcinogens.



Kósa recalls that in the European Union, a complex public health program carried out between 2003 and 2008 was working on health equality; this was accompanied by a study that suggested looking for structural inequalities that hinder equality in health status among various populations. The European Committee issued a proposal in 2009 to start another complex program that would address these problems (Kósa, 2009: 334). The WHO began to research this topic already in 2005, and the results were published in 2008. Karolina Kósa summarized their most important findings on how to reduce inequality: (1) improve living conditions; (2) reduce the inequality in the distribution of power and economic resources; and (3) utilize targeted healthcare interventions. She argued that although reducing health inequality was the declared goal of the Hungarian public health programs, this would not be achieved. The goal was explicitly stated in the National Public Health Program adopted in 2003: the program aimed at helping the Roma, handicapped, and homeless gain access to healthcare. Kósa believed, though, that its strategic direction was deficient because it did not correspond to the suggestions of the European Committee. The problems that she emphasized relate to structural inequality; whereas the program was not addressing social and economic factors that determine the health of the marginalized groups. Thus, Karolina Kósa argued that access to health services by itself would not solve health inequality in the long term. One of the key arguments put forward to enhance the wellbeing of Roma people in Hungary is the inclusion of Roma perspectives in shaping and executing local policies (Fésüs et al., 2010: 317). Efficient contribution from Roma people – in which they could explain how they experience health problems and other relevant social issues – would help healthcare professionals, social scientists, and political decision-makers to design programs that include their needs, and thus prioritize economic and human resources in order to develop Roma living conditions, working possibilities, and ultimately their health standards.

One of the key starting points of the discussion was the European Union's Roma integration plan drafted in 2011; in this plan a key pillar of integration was understood to be healthcare. Among the various problems related to healthcare, the plan emphasized the need to improve access to health services, decrease infant mortality rates among Roma children, and improve the visibility of Roma issues in healthcare data (Balázs et al., 2011: 68). Balázs and his colleagues drew on the work of Marc Lalonde (who was the Canadian Minister of Health) in arguing that ethnic classification of healthcare data could advance the wellbeing of minorities. In his 1974 work 'A new perspective on the health of Canadians', Lalonde stated the importance of acknowledging that humans are biological and social beings, and thus ethnic specificities should not be left out from epidemiological programs, otherwise important information is lost to healthcare services. In this light, Balázs and colleagues argued for the integration of ethnic classification into medical research and service.

In their analysis, they emphasize that since 1989 there was still no healthcare database that would have collected health statistical data about Roma people in Hungary.

To place more weight on this issue, they cite the relevant public policy statute⁶ enacted in 2003: “we don’t know exactly the relationships between the Roma population and the healthcare system’s specific institutions (general practitioners, clinics); and we don’t fully know how biased the attitude of healthcare workers towards the Roma is, (and vice versa: what types of fears or biases Roma have towards healthcare institutions or their workers). Based on the data, it is possible to point out the effect that communication issues have in the doctor-patient relationship on judging the incidence of disease. It is an even more significant question that, in light of the data, general practitioners do not know the precise health condition of Roma people, including their mortality rates, hence it is not probable that they would pay greater attention to their Roma patients” (Balázs et al., 2011: 72). Based on this problem, a highly important question was raised in their paper: “What would happen if the attitude of general practitioners changed? What kind of Roma population data would they be able to use?” (ibid.). They posited that epidemiological studies are concerned with the mapping of real health problems of various populations within a society, and at the same time provide data on which primary and secondary preventive programs could be based. The authors argued that if the categorization of Roma identity is recognized as a potentially useful analytic variable for healthcare professionals aiming to meet epidemiological objectives that benefit Roma communities, then the refusal to employ ethnic classification in the collection of health data may represent a missed opportunity. From an anthropological perspective though, while rendering Roma health disparities statistically visible is indeed a necessary step toward addressing structural inequities, the use of ethnic categories in the context of so-called “ethnic diseases” raises significant methodological and epistemological concerns. In particular, medical-genetic interpretations that rely on historically constructed notions of isolation and inbreeding must be critically interrogated, as they risk reifying essentialist understandings of ethnicity and obscuring the socio-political determinants of health.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach to explore medical geneticists’ perspectives on racial and ethnic categorization in clinical settings. Drawing on constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Clarke, 2005), 34 medical geneticists were interviewed from Hungarian cities: Budapest, Debrecen, Szeged, Pécs, Miskolc, and Győr. Participants were chosen for their clinical experience with both Roma and non-Roma patients and, in some cases, for their involvement in mapping population-specific disorders. The experts who contributed to the research by giving interviews received their medical degrees between the 1960s and 1980s. The main intention was to find experts who are

⁶ Parliament declaration on the Epidemiological Program of the Decade of Health (46/2003, IV. 16.).



familiar with the historical background of their disciplines and are themselves widely recognized researchers and clinicians in their work field. With this focus, it was possible to make sure they will be able to reflect on the historical context, in which race and ethnicity as medically relevant identities have started to shape their practices.

Ethical considerations and consent

To ensure participants were fully informed, the study's purpose and objectives were explained, securing consent from each interviewee. No financial incentives or compensation were provided, preserving the voluntary nature of participation.

Participant recruitment and sampling

The study's participant pool was initiated from the website of Semmelweis Medical University (Budapest), where the contact data of researchers who took part in the lecture series that focused on medical genetics was available. Using purposive sampling, medical geneticists with a specific interest in population genetics and the use of race/ethnicity in medicine were identified. Snowball sampling was then employed by asking participants to suggest academically respectable colleagues in this area of study, thereby broadening the reach to include additional experts.

Interview process

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2011 and 2015 to allow adaptability in the questioning process, accommodating the evolving nature of qualitative research. Interviews lasting between 60 and 120 minutes were conducted in Hungarian and audio-recorded. Once transcription was complete, only those interview sections were translated⁷ by the author of this study that proved relevant after initial coding. To protect the privacy of participants, all identifying information was anonymized in published findings. In the interviews, the questions were articulated around the use of race and/or ethnicity in population genetics and in clinical genetic practice.

Data analysis

The analysis drew on Clarke's (2005) and Charmaz's (2003, 2006) methodologies relying on traditional grounded theory methods. This involved three phases of coding: (1) initial coding, where short active codes were developed that captured incidents described by participants; (2) focused coding, where the short codes were then refined into key themes that were compared across transcripts to reveal recurring patterns; and (3) finally theoretical coding, applied to integrate findings into a cohesive framework for the final analysis. Throughout these stages, memo-writing served as a bridge between coding and synthesis, enhancing analytical clarity (Charmaz, 2003: 261). The analytical

⁷ All translations from Hungarian to English are the work of the author of this article.

work was centred around three main problems stemming from the narratives: (1) the articulation of the boundary between Roma and non-Roma people; (2) the medically significant problem of isolates or isolated groups sharing genetic traits that have medical consequences; (3) and lastly, inbreeding and its medical consequences. This method facilitated a nuanced understanding of how various medical realities around racial and ethnic categorizations are produced by the participants during their work. The analysis maps those interpretations that frequently occurred during the data collection process.

Discussion of research results

Making distinctions between the Roma and non-Roma communities of Hungary

In the early works, geneticists were interested in finding out the genetic structures that make Hungarians Hungarian. For this reason, they wished to compare different ethnicities but mainly wanted to follow the lead of physical anthropologists and ethnographers who suggested that people in the Őrség region⁸ might be the ancestors of ancient Hungarians, since they had kept their separateness throughout the centuries. This lead eventually failed, and it was concluded that it is not possible to differentiate ethnic Hungarians from other white Europeans – relevant information in the rationalization of disease mapping.

In researching the genetic structure of the original Hungarian settlers, the geneticists found that the genetic structure is a mixture. There is no real difference between different ethnicities, once the Jewish and gypsy samples are excluded. They concluded that in Central-Eastern Europe, the present populations are genetically kin populations, which is good for the society because there is no specifically Hungarian genetic disease. It is well known that there are Jewish diseases, gypsy diseases, Celtic, and even French-Canadian diseases, and researchers know about Finnish diseases as well. Basically, from the perspective of genetics, the more mixed a population, the healthier it is. (PI 20121031)

One of the most easily observable directions in the interview is the distinctiveness of Hungarian Roma and Jewish samples from the majority. The explanation is connected to international literature, implicitly stating that this is an accepted narrative in the international medical genetic discourse. Certain ethnic communities within a society maintain their social isolation; and it is even more understandable when the explanation is that geographical barriers stop people from biologically mixing with

⁸ Őrség is a geographical area in South-West Hungary on the border of Slovenia.



other ethnic communities, such as is the case with Finland and the so-called “Finnish diseases”. The separation of majority Hungarians from Roma and Jewish Hungarians is primarily explained through historical narratives as we can see in the following excerpt:

In Hungary, one can distinguish between three ethnic groups of Roma: Vlachian, Romungro, and Beasi gypsies. It is clearly evident that they joined the Hungarians later, and that they lived in isolation. This is like the Jewish case: firstly, there is a religious law which prescribes that a Jewish woman can only bear a child to a Jewish man; and secondly in 1096 King Szent László sanctioned that Christians can only marry Christians, so he also restricted the choices of Jewish individuals; hence they chose partners from their small communities. As there were not so many individuals in these communities, certain kinds of inbred genetic characteristics evolved. When living in inbred communities, for example where cousin marriages are very frequent, which is typical for both Hungarian gypsies and Jews, a flawed gene from a common ancestor makes it much more probable that these genes resurface. For example, we know that there are Jewish-only diseases – there are seven such diseases – which is interesting because in Israel, all the newborn babies are screened for these diseases. Our research confirmed that there are similar gypsy diseases. Congenital glaucoma, buphthalmos, is such an example; it is much more prevalent in their communities. Of course there are advantages as well: there is no sclerosis-multiplex in gypsies. When we analyzed these gene signals it emerged – it was verifiable – that they came from elsewhere; they lived as isolates, in inbred communities. This was similarly verifiable regarding Jews. (PI 20121031)

This position, that there are Jewish-only, or Roma-only diseases, underscores the belief in biologically meaningful ethnic/racial differences and recreates the dividing line among racial/ethnic populations. Although it acknowledges that the cultural context played a decisive role in shaping disease frequencies, it glosses over the fact that these communities are not biologically closed reproductive groups; and on the individual level, where the medical diagnosis takes place, this might differ case by case.

The problem of isolated populations

Knowledge about different disease frequencies in populations is produced by the methods of population genetics. The information that is gained through its techniques is applied in two main fields of medicine: in clinical diagnosis and in genetic counselling. The central organizing principle of population genetics is the Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium, which allows researchers to predict the ratio of gene frequencies in different ideal and

real populations. The main benefit of this model is that researchers can predict that disease frequencies will be more or less the same in a given population on condition that (1) it is large and mating is random, (2) there is no observable mutation so allele frequencies remain the same. In other words, there is no selection against any genotype and there is no significant allele frequency that has been contributed by immigrants to the endogenous population (Nussbaum et al., 2007: 192–193). Population geneticists identified three factors that disturb the Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium (*ibid.*: 195–196): (1) stratification of a population, which means that subgroups of a large population remained genetically distinct from each other during the last centuries (this perspective is applicable to race/ethnicity); (2) assortative mating, meaning that individuals tend to choose partners with similar characteristics (from the perspective of medical genetics this contributes to the suspension of the Hardy-Weinberg law since mating partners possess similar traits); and lastly (3) inbreeding, similarly to the previous two factors, effectuating an increase in autosomal recessive diseases.

In the literature, the medical significance of isolates is explained by examples such as colour-blindness on the Pingelap Atoll. This problem is highly frequent there and the mutation that causes the phenotype can be traced back to a single individual. The history of this mutation is connected to an environmental disaster – a typhoon killed most of the inhabitants on the atoll around 1775 – and from those who survived, one person carried this genotype and passed it on to the next generations. Another similar example is the shared asthma disease of the inhabitants of Tristan da Cunha, an island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. It was found in 1961 that more than half of its 300 inhabitants carried the gene for the same asthmatic problem. Researchers comparatively analyzed the samples and found that the mutation can be traced back to the same person (see Raskó, 2015). The latter examples are medically significant in pointing out that genetic mutations accumulate in small populations which are closed to genetic inflow. These problems are relevant in any mainland region as well. One of the classic examples for genetic analysis is the Ellis van Creveld syndrome that was first identified in Amish populations in the United States in the 1960s by Victor McKusick (2000). But there are several other examples of other social isolates: the β -Thalassemia in several at-risk populations in the Mediterranean (Cao, Galanello, 2010) or Tay-Sachs in Ashkenazi Jewish communities in the US (Nussbaum et al., 2007). Such medical genetic knowledge is argued to be significant for Hungarian populations as well. To emphasize its relevance, one of the informants considered Finland and pointed out that because of generational immobility of Hungarians a couple of decades ago, perhaps similar problems could be detected.

A good example can be Finland for this question, because around the Arctic Circle obviously there are some villages with a couple thousand inhabitants who inter-married, hence there was no significant mixture. In these cases, genes were accumulated which characterized the populations.



When a genetic disease occurs, its incidence is much higher in such an isolated population than in a population where the choice is wider. However, there are isolates on the mainland as well: it is enough to think about small villages a few decades earlier, whose inhabitants could only reach the next villages to choose a partner. Thus, geography is one but ethnicity is another factor, because there are ethnicities who choose partners only from their own ethnic community. (PI 20130321)

In this explanation, besides the geographical determining factors, racial/ethnic identification and the internalization of traditional values play a significant role. Although it is widely accepted that members of ethnic communities tend to choose partners from the same ethnicity, it must be noted that these are not only determined by internal forces (such as community tradition, family values, peer pressure) but also external forces such as xenophobia, racism, classism, and linguistic discrimination that play key roles in shaping individual reproductive choices. Although other researchers who were interviewed acknowledge its medical usefulness, not all of them considered the question of closed populations easily explicable. They do think that it is indispensable to make use of this term and its tenets, but on the other hand they also shed light on its obscure nature. It is not possible to take hold of a closed population in a finite manner since they are constantly changing in emergent ways.

It is hard to define. In reality, I think, there are no closed populations because external relationships always occur in any community. The question is rather their frequency. (PI 20130214)

To clarify this point further, it was necessary to inquire about the methods and actual practices whereby geneticists choose homogenous populations, and how difficult it is to find such isolates, especially Roma isolates, in Hungary. To this inquiry the following answer was given by one interviewee:

We focused on Vlachian communities, choosing villages where the ratio of the population was more than fifty percent Vlachian gypsy. Which is, to a certain extent, a homogenous population. (PI 20131119)

The above demonstrates that this endeavour is not easy. It also relates back to PI 20130214's position, in which it is stated that there are actually no homogenous populations. It is rather how strictly researchers interpret homogeneity, and how they construct (or circumscribe) the boundaries of a population, take samples, and find a common shared problem whereby the members of the group are linked together, as is evident from another excerpt:

When individuals choose partners from within the same group, there is no inflow and outflow of genes. Hence, on a given genetic trait, everybody is in genetic kinship relation with everybody else. (PI 20100527)

In the explanation, it is glossed over that inbreeding is similar in effect to consanguineous marriages but not equal to this cultural custom, as its biological effects are larger in scale. Inbreeding is rather the result of geographical isolation from the majority population and hence the inflow and outflow of genes is minimal – the inhabitants of the Pingelap Atoll, mentioned above, is a classic example from the literature, where the population of the island lived in significant isolation for an extensive time period. In Roma communities, none of the above discussed factors – geographic isolation, social exclusion, and endogamous practices – are fully applicable regarding their reproductive processes.

Inbreeding and the problem of the founder effect

It is accepted within the field of human genetics that on a theoretical level, humans are all in consanguineous relationship with one another since it is possible to trace back our ancestors to common progenitors; but close consanguinity is an important factor in determining the occurrence of medical problems. Taking this standpoint into account, medical geneticists consider the problem of inbreeding to be relevant only in groups where closely related consanguineous marriages occur. Knowledge about inbred populations is important in calculating the F coefficient factor that helps in the prognosis of the occurrence of any genetic effect that has already accumulated in the studied population (Tóth, Hegyesi, 2007: 144–145). The F inbreeding coefficient factor is the half of a first-level familial relationship that means fifty percent genetic similarity, and in the case of inbreeding it means twenty-five percent genetic similarity. This shows why it is hard to talk about genetically homogenous populations, on the one hand, but it also shows that there are populations where genetic similarity among members on given traits can lead to the accumulation of genetic disorders.

It is very difficult to talk about completely homogenous groups, it is only possible to talk about approximately homogenous groups. It was revealed by molecular genetics methods that even if I should take a group to be homogenous according to their diagnosis, they won't be homogenous genetically. This means that the same disease can be generated by different mutations, different genes, or even different mutations of genes. There are inbred groups whose members marry each other. In these cases, certain rare genes accumulate. These founder effects influence the genetic characteristic of a population or a race in a given geographical area, because it is obviously true that the Roma population is, decisively, endogamous.



But it is not the fault of the Roma, similarly as it is not the fault of the Ashkenazi Jews that Tay-Sachs is more frequent in their communities.
(PI 20140307)

In population genetic studies, founder mutations are significant factors divided into two kinds. One kind occurs only in the same population or same group of people, and there is another kind that can be traced back to its origin in two different populations. An example of this might be a mutation which was found on the Iberian Peninsula, in a Roma individual in South Portugal; at the same time this type of mutation was found in Spain in a non-Roma individual, yet these two individuals had nothing in common and researchers could prove through the analysis of their respective BCKDHA⁹ genes that they did not share common roots – they developed the mutation in separate historical and geographical contexts (Quental et al., 2009). There are individuals described by these researchers who do not have anything in common. One identifies ethnically to be Roma and the other is non-Roma; they both carry the c.117delC- α mutation, but it has developed separately in space and time. These can be termed parallel founder mutations. The concept entails that the same mutation can develop as a response to environmental factors and then can be passed on to descendants, and it means that researchers can retrospectively trace back the same genetic disorder to separate groups of people, and to ethnically and geographically independent individuals. A similar example was given in one of the interviews:

In Szeged a similar mutation was described. Researchers found a mutation for a very rare multiplex dermatological disease – tumours appear in diverse locations on the patients' bodies – and within the same gene, the same type of mutation was described in England, in English families; thus it is impossible that one founder mutation spread from here to there or vice versa. This is a very rare event, but it can happen independently. On the other hand, there are founder mutations which are typical of populations. Let's take an example: cystic fibrosis, where the most common mutation is the lack of phenylalanine in an enzyme, in a protein. This mutation is prevalent in 85 percent of Danish patients, whilst in Hungarian and other South European patients this type is present in only 40 percent. In these populations, there are other types as well which cause the disease. (PI 20130328)

⁹ Branched chain keto acid dehydrogenase gene, or the BCKDHA enzyme complex is responsible for one step in the normal process of breaking down three protein building blocks, it is found on chromosome 19 (MedlinePlus, 2020).

In the above example, the rare dermatological disorder supports the idea of parallel founder mutations. On an individual level, these are already recorded multiple times, but on a population level, statistically, there are mutations which are epidemiologically meaningful. Cystic fibrosis is used as a genetic disorder that is ethnically/racially typical of certain populations, but even in this case, it is not excluded by the interviewee that populations whose social self-identification varies can carry the same mutation (see for example, Roberts, 2011: 99; where she discusses the CF case of 4-year-old African-American girl, when CF is predominantly viewed as a Caucasian/White disorder). Hence some population geneticists (see Raskó, 2022: 24) caution using race and ethnicity, because these terms are imprecisely defined cultural categories and thus their use in genetic research could yield imprecise results.

Conclusion

The use of genetics to address population-level health disparities has increasingly been framed as an ethical necessity, particularly as researchers turn their attention to ethnically identified populations with the aim of promoting health equity. This is significant for two reasons: (1) this orientation reflects a growing awareness that health inequalities are not solely biomedical phenomena but are fundamentally shaped by intersecting structures of economic marginalization and racialization; (2) it also shows that the medical genetic discourse operates with anthropological categories – such as ethnicity – that cannot be equated with biological phenomena. Nevertheless, within this context, genetics becomes a contested yet potentially productive site for negotiating justice in public health.

In the paper, this is demonstrated through the case of Hungary and its renewed focus on minority health. Hungary's 2004 accession to the European Union marked a significant political shift, bringing minority rights, especially those of the Roma population, into sharper institutional focus. National and EU-driven efforts sought to improve housing, employment, and access to healthcare for Roma communities. Medical geneticists participating in these initiatives undertook the task of mapping the distribution of genetic disorders and health vulnerabilities perceived to be concentrated among Roma populations. Drawing on both population genetics and empirical fieldwork, researchers pointed to phenomena such as geographic and social isolation and endogamy – conditions understood as shaped by both cultural practices and the structural violence of systemic exclusion – as factors influencing reproductive processes and health outcomes, such as the accumulation of genetic mutations, and thus the resulting health disorders.

The empirical work that this analysis relies on, semi-structured interviews with geneticists, revealed ambivalence about the use of ethnicity as a category of analysis. Interviewing is a valuable tool because it enables social scientists to capture the continuity of a scientific



idea through personal accounts. Predominantly, geneticists were in agreement with the use of ethnic identity for data collection purposes, but there were participants who stated their concern by claiming that these identity categories are ill-defined for genetic use. It must be emphasized that there was no reflection in the data on the historicity of these categories. The knowledge articulated and produced in a historically different time was carried on by geneticists and thus informs their practices in a discourse that has changed radically in terms of both biotechnology and culture. Although it is true that certain mutations may appear more frequently in socially isolated groups, through the analysis, it became clear that foregrounding ethnicity risks reinforcing essentialist understandings of biological difference. From an anthropological and bioethical standpoint, such practices demand critical scrutiny: the use of ethnic classifications can obscure the historical and political forces that shape health outcomes and may inadvertently re-inscribe racialized imaginaries under the guise of genetic objectivity.

Ethically informed public health genomics must therefore resist the reification of “ethnic diseases” and instead engage in nuanced, community-based approaches that centre lived experience and social context. Monitoring the prevalence of specific genetic conditions across populations can be a valuable tool – particularly when it facilitates informed consent, autonomy, and participation among historically marginalized groups. However, such efforts must be accompanied by strategies that challenge structural inequities and ensure that genetic knowledge is communicated in ways that are both accessible and culturally respectful. The integration of genetic research into public health must be socially reflexive, ethically grounded, and attuned to the complex entanglements of race, identity, and power.

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Research data statement

The author states that the article is based on ethnographic research materials that are not classified as research data. All additional information concerning the ethnographic research materials are available on reasonable request with the author.

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Kako medicinski genetiki interpretirajo genetske motnje v romskih skupnostih postsocialistične Madžarske

Članek kritično obravnava uporabo rasnih in etničnih kategorij v medicinski genetiki v postsocialistični Madžarski. Osredinja se na apliciranje biološke kategorije rase/etničnosti na romsko populacijo. Preučuje klasifikacijo in interpretacijo genetskih razlik v javnem zdravstvenem raziskovanju in klinični praksi v spremenljajočih se družbenih in kulturnih kontekstih. Raziskuje, kako se je medicinska genetika uporabljala za pojasnjevanje in obravnavo bioloških razlik ob vztrajni zdravstveni neenakosti med romskimi in neromskimi Madžari.

Članek se začne s kratkim zgodovinskim pregledom razvoja medicinske genetike na Madžarskem po drugi svetovni vojni in njenega postopnega uporabljanja v zdravstvenih ukrepih na populacijski ravni. Od osemdesetih let 20. stoletja so primerjalne genetsko-genomske študije, osredotočene na romske skupnosti, odkrivale višjo prevalenco nekaterih genetskih mutacij v teh skupnostih, in sicer v povezavi z boleznimi, kot so bolezni srca in ožilja ter prirojena glavkom in laktozna intoleranca. Te ugotovitve so bile pogosto pripisane trajnim vzorcem družbene in geografske izolacije, endogamnim porokam in družbeni izključenosti. Čeprav so te študije prinesle epidemiološko dragocene podatke, so znanstveniki opozarjali, da zdravstvenih neenakosti ne smemo pripisovati izključno biološkim dejavnikom, in poudarili pomembno vlogo socialne izključenosti, revščine in sistemskih diskriminacij.

Proces pristopa Madžarske k Evropski uniji je z zahtevami po izboljšanju manjšinskih pravic in zdravstvenih rezultatov dodatno spodbudil epidemiološke študije o romski populaciji. Raziskovalci so dokumentirali očitne zdravstvene pomanjkljivosti, vključno z višjo obolenjnostjo in umrljivostjo, slabšim dostopom do zdravstvenega varstva in neugodnimi življenjskimi pogoji v romskih naseljih. Trdili so, da bi učinkoviti programi javnega zdravja morali vključevati več sektorjev, ne le zdravstva, da bi morali obravnavati strukturne neenakosti, ki so



podlaga za slabe zdravstvene rezultate, ter vključevati kulturno občutljive in skupnostno-odzivne strategije.

Pričajoča študija temelji na analizi polstrukturiranih intervjujev s 34 madžarskimi medicinskimi genetiki, s katerimi je bil vzpostavljen neposredni stik prek njihovih institucionalnih naslovov. Intervjuvanci so bili izbrani na podlagi njihovih strokovnih dosežkov in nadalje z uporabo metode snežne kepe glede na priporočila kolegov. Vsi so strokovnjaki z večdesetletnimi kliničnimi in raziskovalnimi izkušnjami. Z analizo so bile opredeljene tri osrednje teme: (1) konstrukcija razmejevanja med romskimi in neromskimi skupinami; (2) pomen populacijskih izolatov v medicini; (3) razmerje med endogamijo, učinki ustavniteljev in genetskimi motnjami. Genetiki so Rome pogosto uvrščali v ločeno genetsko skupino in jih primerjali z drugimi izoliranimi populacijami, kot so Aškenazi in finske skupnosti za arktičnim krogom.

Analiza postavlja pod vprašaj pojem biološke homogenosti etnične/rasne populacije ter kaže na kompleksnost in dvoumnost opredelitve »izoliranih populacij« za genetske analize. Čeprav geografska in socialna endogamija lahko prispevata k razširjenosti nekaterih genetskih bolezni, pa slednje vedno oblikujejo prepletajoči se zgodovinski, kulturni in družbeno-ekonomski dejavniki. Poleg tega zanašanje na stroge etnične klasifikacije v genetskih raziskavah tvega prekomerno poenostavitev medicinske realnosti in ohranjanje stereotipov.

Impediment-, Absence-, and Silence-Based Methodology and the Study of Romani and Sinti Musicians in North Slovenia

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The author's research on Romani and Sinti musicians from north Slovenia has revealed several methodological obstacles. The author dealt mainly with deceased Romani and Sinti musicians, their absence from the archives, silence among their descendants, and anecdotal information. This paper therefore addresses methodological approaches to fragmented data, and the silence, absence, and distortion in the archival and ethnographic sources, exploring how to turn these impediments into a productive scholarly endeavour.

▪ **Keywords:** Romani and Sinti music and culture, minorities, anthropology of silence and absence, archival and ethnographic methods, historic ethnomusicology, Upper Savinja Valley

Pri raziskovanju romskih in sintskih glasbenikov in glasbenic iz severne Slovenije se avtor sooča z večjimi metodološkimi ovirami, kot so preminuli posamezniki, njihova odsotnost v arhivih, molk med njihovimi potomci in anekdotična narava podatkov. V članku obravnavajo metodološke pristope k pomanjkljivim in popačenim informacijam, k tišini, molku in odsotnosti v arhivskih in etnografskih virih ter k preoblikovanju teh ovir v produktivna znanstvena prizadevanja.

▪ **Ključne besede:** romska in sintska glasba in kultura, manjšine, antropologija tišine in odsotnosti, arhivske in etnografske metode, zgodovinska etnomuzikologija, Zgornja Savinjska dolina

Introduction

... it is important to understand that there are [...] fundamental aspects to the way the Roma fit into history. First, and perhaps most conspicuous, is what we call the *vacuum*. (Gelbart, 2012: 209; emphasis in original)

If we are not in someone else's memory, do we exist at all? (Gospodinov, 2020: 53)

In this paper,¹ I examine methodological challenges and solutions in the historical and ethnographic study of Romani and Sinti musicians in north Slovenia (particularly the Upper Savinja Valley and its surrounding areas), a region that is absent from Romani and Sinti historiography and that is usually not recognized as an area with any significant presence of Romani or Sinti population (Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2023;

¹ The article is part of the project Roma Musicians in Slovenia: Social Position, Cultural Practices, Interactions (ARIS J6-50204 PPS 28-122460.J6-50204).



Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, n.d.). Nevertheless, this epistemological absence belies a vibrant historical presence of Romani/Sinti people in the region, also demonstrated in the following example. Therefore, before I delve into the examination of specific methodological problems in my research, I first present two brief stories related to one Sinti music family from the Upper Savinja Valley that are based on the information I gathered through a combination of two different methodological approaches. My intent in this relation is not only to convey some general historical and cultural outline of the main topic of study (the historical presence of Romani and Sinti musicians in the Upper Savinja Valley) via one concrete example, but also to initiate some of the main methodological concerns of this paper.

In this regard, I ask the readers to consider which methods were used for the gathering of information used in each of the two stories. The options are:

- a. letters and diaries of Romani and Sinti individuals,
- b. archival bureaucratic records containing performance licences,
- c. journalistic articles from the relevant eras,
- d. narratives of the local non-Romani populations (interviews, memoirs),
- e. a wide population survey about musical practices conducted in the Slovenian countryside.

This exercise can encourage us to think about the nature of different methods used in our research, the type of information we associate with each method, and the expectations we have regarding the types of data we will be able to gather by using specific methods of research (specifically, how particular methods we choose to operate with shape our data, description, and analysis, as well as our research designs).

Story 1:

Jožef or Josip Roj (also Roy) was a travelling musician and carousel operator (in addition to a 5000 kg carousel, he also owned and operated a fairground shooting gallery and a travelling cinema). He travelled around in a wagon with his wife Marija (née Pestner) and four children (in the order from oldest to youngest: Marija, Julija, Josip, Ivan). Jožef Roj was born in 1870 in Ljubno, Upper Savinja Valley, and was regularly returning to the region throughout his life until his death in 1936. However, according to some accounts, due to his “incessant travelling”, he and his family were rarely seen in the Upper Savinja Valley, mainly during winters.

Jožef Roj liked to play music in guesthouses and coffeehouses, and also “every year” at the annual “grand fair” in Ljubljana. He travelled all over Slovenia with his family, and before 1914, across the whole Austro-Hungarian Empire, as Jožef Roj was in the music and carousel business since the 1890s.

Locally, in the Upper Savinja Valley, he was considered a trustworthy and “honest man”. However, Jožef Roj preferred playing in “bigger towns and cities” and said he didn’t like performing in the “countryside”, because the people there “don’t have the right sense for this kind of music”; he also complained he “cannot make any money there”.

Story 2:

Members of the Roj family lived in the part of Mozirje (Upper Savinja Valley) called the “Gypsy Quarter” [*Ciganski firkelc*]. They rode around in a wagon, and they would let their horses to pasture in the fields on the outskirts of the town, where the new municipality building now stands.

They played violins, guitar and double-bass [*berda*]; the women played the violins. The whole family would also sing in a typical Slovenian multi-part polyphonic folk style.

They would sing Slovenian multi-part “folk” songs or their own “Gypsy” songs, but they could also play any “world” music, they were “cosmopolitans” [*svetski*].

They were “welcome everywhere”, but they didn’t play in every house, only in those where the people “knew how to listen”, where there was some “mutual likeness” between them and the hosts [*en drugmu všeč*].

They were more “noble Gypsies” [*nobl Cigani*], they were “intelligent”, “better Gypsies”, they “didn’t steal”. However, they themselves claimed they were not “Gypsies” at all, just “Roj’s”.²

Their wagon was decorated in a very “posh” way [*gosposko*], and it looked better than many “posh” [*gosposke*] houses.

When Jožef Roj died, in 1936, people say it was an “extremely magnificent” [*strašno veličasten*] funeral. The local municipality ensemble played at the event, in addition to multiple Romani musicians who came from near and far (some say there were 70, even 100 Romani “violinists” performing at that funeral).

These are just some of the fragments of information about the Roj family. They were gathered exclusively from the following two methods: archival bureaucratic records containing performance licences and related documents (option b, as related to Story 1;

² This was probably a strategic response by members of the Roj family to the label ‘Gypsy’ (in original: *Cigan*). In Slovenian academic literature (including some written by Slovenian Sinti authors), the members of the Roj (or Roy, Rhoi) extended family in Slovenia are usually considered to be of Sinti ethnicity (DiRiccardi-Muzga, 2011: 61, 94, 109; Ocvirk, 2013: 30; Zalar, 2015: 61, 62). I therefore also regard them as Sinti in this article.



see Roj, 1923, 1941), and the narratives of the local non-Romani populations, namely two interviews and one published memoir (option d, as related to Story 2).³ Overall, I collected more relevant information about the Roj family (including about other members of the extended family) than it is presented in these two stories, and I also used other methods not mentioned above in my research (for example, journal articles of the era, other types of archival research, and material culture research – see Image 1). Moreover, the Rojs were just one of the many Romani and Sinti families that I study and who were in the time period between both world wars living, travelling, and performing in and around the Upper Savinja Valley, including the following: Eremita, Repič, Pestner, Huber, Seger, Gartner, Müller, Rosenfeld, and Rak (but only the first three mentioned families, in addition to the Rojs, are according to my accounts still remembered locally today, albeit vaguely, and only by a few elderly non-Romani individuals).

The data behind these two stories reveal many biographical and ethnographic details relevant for my study, including insightful information about cultural, economic, and social interaction patterns of Sinti (and Romani) families and individuals living in north Slovenia between both world wars. Methodologically, the examples demonstrate the usefulness in combining archival and ethnographic methods. However, while these combined methods proved to be instrumental in unearthing significant aspects of information, the final results still contain many gaps and absences in the data (e.g. no information about specific music repertory or style, or which specific coffeehouses and guesthouses or other types of music venues the Roj family performed in; and many other missing biographic and ethnographic bits of information). This problem also relates to the broader problem of the absence and silence in archival, scholarly, and ethnographic sources regarding the Romani and Sinti populations in north Slovenia (and Slovenia in general), and to many other methodological impediments that I analyse below.

My aim in this paper is therefore twofold. In the first part, I examine methodological challenges as well as the archival and scholarly lacunae related to the study of Romani and Sinti music families and individuals present in north Slovenia (Upper Savinja



Image 1: Jožef Roj's photo on his gravestone at the Mozirje cemetery, 17 January 2024. Photo by author.

³ The two anonymous interviews used for Story 2 were recorded on 16 January, 2024, and 7 February, 2024. For the memoir, see Gregorc, 2009: 170–173.

Valley and the surrounding areas) between both world wars; and in the second part, I proceed with a discussion of several scholarly approaches aimed toward redressing the problematic methodological situation described in the first part of the paper, and turning it into a productive scholarly endeavour. In this way, I repurpose methodological impediments, absences, and silences that I encountered in the field by transforming them into a productive impediment-, absence- and silence-based methodology.

Methodological grappling with silence, absence, scarcity, and distortion in the data

In this section, I identify several methodological problems that emerged during my research on Romani and Sinti music families and individuals in north Slovenia, including the following: the nature of the field (demographic challenges), silence and absence among the local Romani and Sinti descendants, issues with interviews with local non-Romani people, absence in the archives, scarcity of data, the state of the scholarship, and the distortion in secondary written sources (cf. Gelbart, 2012).

Regarding the nature of the field (and demographic challenges), I am studying a region that historically contained lower numbers of Romani and Sinti populations than some other parts of Slovenia (in the first decade after WWII, only 4 Romani people were registered in Mozirje, Upper Savinja Valley, and an additional 23 in neighbouring municipalities; in comparison, the total Romani and Sinti population in Slovenia in 1954 was 4369).⁴ Historically and today, there are more Romani people living in the east and south of Slovenia (in the Mura region, Lower Carniola, White Carniola, Central Sava region), and less in the north and west (but with a significant presence of Sinti people in the north-west of Slovenia, i.e. Upper Carniola) (Janko Spreizer, 2004; Štrukelj, 2004). Moreover, while there used to be more Romani and Sinti families living in the territory of the Upper Savinja Valley and the surrounding municipalities (in eastern Styria and Carinthia) in the past, there are currently hardly any of these families remaining in the area. Some of them perished during WWII (Zalar, 2015: 61, 62), and many of the descendants of these families moved out of the region, or out of the country altogether in the decades after WWII. Consequently, only a few individuals from one of these families still live in the region, as they are in the process of quiet assimilation into the local majority society (via intermarrying). Therefore, there are

⁴ More precisely, between the years 1948 to 1954, there were 4 Romani or Sinti people registered in Mozirje (Upper Savinja Valley), 10 in Celje (Lower Savinja Valley), 5-8 in Slovenj Gradec, and 5 in Šoštanj. The total of Romani and Sinti population in Slovenia in 1954 was 4369 (Studen, 2015: 182). In the 2002 census, 40 people from the Savinja region and 4 from Carinthia self-identified as Romani, out of 3246 in total for Slovenia (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, n.d.). The National Institute of Public Health (NIJZ) research in 2020 showed there are 6500 Romani people living in Slovenia. However, according to unofficial information, their numbers are higher (between 7000 and 12,000) (Fajfar, 2020).



almost no descendants of local Romani or Sinti people to talk to, and from those that I have found (three individuals), two refused to be interviewed while the one that I managed to talk to is estranged from his Romani side of the family to the point that he almost does not have any memories of his Romani predecessors.

Among the local non-Romani population, some people from the older generation still have some knowledge of the Romani and Sinti families who used to live in the region (especially about the Eremita, Repič, Roj, and Pestner families), but since these families were most active socially and culturally in the area between both world wars, and to a much lesser extent in the first two decades after WWII, many of the local elderly only vaguely remember them from their childhood, or can convey some second-hand information about them learned from the parents. Moreover, those individuals whom the locals tell me would most certainly know a lot about the Romani and Sinti people once living in the valley have mostly already died, and those who remain are few and far between, difficult to find, and often remember only a few vague details on this topic.

National and regional archives in Slovenia generally demonstrate a similar kind of informational paucity and omission regarding Romani and Sinti populations from north Slovenia (Štepec Dobernik, Tercelj Otorepec, 2006). In my research, I have contacted (and in many cases visited) thirteen regional archives, museums, and various other institutions with relevant archival collections, as well as some outside of the region, namely six in Ljubljana, and two in the Upper Carniola region, all together twenty-one.⁵ Most of them were very responsive and obliging, but the results themselves were scant. To be more precise, sixteen of these archives carried zero information about local Romani/Sinti people, and another four contained a relatively low amount of data (Institute of Ethnomusicology, Ljubljana; Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Ljubljana; Historical Archives Celje; Upper Carniola Museum, Begunje),⁶ and then there is one institution, the Archive of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana, whose archival records, quite unexpectedly, proved to be central for my research (I elaborate on this side of the research in the next section).

Furthermore, Slovenian scholarship on Romani and Sinti musicians in north Slovenia, and Slovenia generally, is equally limited. There are a few studies that mention information related to Slovenian Romani or Sinti music and musicians only briefly (Kumer, 1983: 74;

⁵ I have contacted the following regional (north Slovenian) archives and museums: Museum collection Mozirje, Mozirje church archive, Museum collection Gornji Grad, Rečica Municipality, Museum collection Ljubno, Historical Archives Celje, Museum of Recent History Celje, Celje Library (ethnologic collection), Velenje Museum, Velenje Library (ethnologic collection), Hotel Paka's archives (Velenje), Vila Mayer's archives (Šoštanj), Carinthian Regional Museum (Ravne na Koroškem); archives/institutions in Ljubljana: Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Institute of Ethnomusicology, Archive of the Republic of Slovenia, National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia, Ethnographic Museum of Slovenia, Slovene Music Artists' Association; and two archives/institutions from Upper Carniola: Sinti Association of Upper Carniola, Upper Carniola Museum, Begunje.

⁶ I also need to mention the Velenje Museum, which did not have any information on Romani and Sinti groups with historical presence in the region that I am studying in this article. However, they have made available to me some relevant information on one specific Romani group of musicians who moved from Serbia to Velenje via Nova Gorica in the 1950s/1960s, which I am studying in my separate project (forthcoming).

Omerzel-Terlep, 1984: 12; Štrukelj, 2004: 221–232; Gregorač, Juvančič 2006: 166, 167, 171, 172; Sardelić, 2011: 111, 116, 130), and some that write about the representation of Romani people in music and songs of the non-Romani populations (Kunej, Serec Hodžar, 2006; Klobčar, 2022: 224–229, 275), or about the appropriation of Romani music by non-Romani musicians (Gregorač, Juvančič, 2006; Kovačič, Hofman, 2023), plus one study about a Romani-produced DJ program (Kozorog, Škedelj, 2006), but there was no systematic research conducted yet on Romani and/or Sinti musicians in Slovenia.⁷

In relation to north Slovenia, specifically the Upper Savinja Valley, significant is the local lay historian, Aleksander Videčnik, who often mentions local Romani and Sinti people in his writings (1985: 100, 103; 1991: 35, 39, 62; 1998: 138–153; 2001: 16–24; 2003: 51, 55; 2007: 55, 156, 157, 220). His publications occasionally offer some valuable biographical and historical fragments and clues, but otherwise also excessively and uncritically focus on folk fabulations full of stereotypes about local Romani people (this mainly relates to local anecdotes about Pavel and Urška Eremita popular among the older generation of local non-Romani populations).

Impediment-, absence-, and silence-based methodology

All of the methodological obstacles, absences, silences, and distortions mentioned above need not bring scholarly discouragement, or the opposite, obsessive urge to achieve fullness, but can potentially be employed as fruitful methods and areas of research. Many scholars in this way talk about fragments and anomalies, archival ruins, ruptures and absences, or ethnographic silences among the people, and discursive misinformation and distortion, not necessarily as negative but also as potentially productive tools and sites of scholarly research (Ginzburg, 1993, 2013; Hirschauer, 2007; Stoler, 2008a, 2008b; Bille et al., 2010; Ladwig et al., 2012; Hrobat Virloget, 2017; Weller, 2017). Moreover, this kind of research does not only concern the silenced and marginalized populations, but also the majority society that is the main agent behind the historical, archival, and discursive production of silence, ruination, discontinuity, and misrepresentation (Pereira, 2008; Stoler, 2008a, 2008b; Skarpelis, 2020). Furthermore, this is not only about the absence, but also about the tracing of archival or ethnographic presence behind this absence, about the unearthing of the forgotten historical vitality of Romani and Sinti music practices, and minority and majority interactions, of discovering Romani/Sinti persistent traces in the present, as well as about the unmuted and reconstitutive future that these revealing ruins, traces and clues of testifying presence among absence can help shape (Stoler, 2008a, 2008b; Bille et al., 2010: 34).

⁷ I should also mention one biographical lexicon of Romani musicians from Prekmurje, east Slovenia, recently written by a Slovene-Romani scholar Jožek Horvat – Muc (2024).



This impediment-, absence-, and silence-based methodology therefore becomes imperative in my research, especially in relation to the following three issues that I examine in the second and last part of the article: (1) methodological approaches to the silence and absence among Romani and Sinti descendants, (2) the tracing of hidden historical presence in the bureaucratic records of performance licences in the Archive of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana, and (3) the autoethnographic scrutiny of the complicated music, social, and scholarly relations between Self and Other in the anthropology of/at home.

Methodological approaches to silence and absence among Romani and Sinti individuals

Historical silence and absence, or fragmented or distorted presence of Romani and Sinti people (and other related groups), often emerges in the archives as well as in scholarly research or music practice due to power imbalances in the society (e.g. censorship, political repression, lack of representation) and ideology (e.g. racism, nationalism) (Van de Port, 1998: 19, 148; Pettan, 2011: 108, 109; Gelbart, 2012: 208–210; Silverman, 2015; Studen, 2015: 9; Tervonen, 2016: 91; Hemetek, 2017: 92, 93; Bartash, 2019: 16, 20; Brooks, 2020; Trevisan, 2020; Kapralski, 2023; Janko Spreizer, 2024). However, as many scholars argue, Romani, Sinti and other related groups themselves often refrain to silence or absence (as invisible presence) either as a strategy of survival, form of protest/resistance, or due to fear or mistrust of majority populations, including scholars (Williams, 2003: 23, 55, 83; Halwachs, 2005: 153; Jezernik, 2006: 14; Hirschauer, 2007: 426; Tauber, 2018: 624, 692; Bartash, 2019: 16, 23; Brooks, 2020; Rapport, 2021: 42). Furthermore, Patrick Williams asserts that for the French Mānuš, who practice silence as a form of respect toward their dead and also as a form of relation toward the world of the Gadzos (non-Romanis), silence is their “reality” (Williams, 2003: 83). Elizabeth Tauber similarly argues that for the Austrian Sinti, silence is their way of thinking and remembering (death), as well as a form of their relationship with Gage (Tauber, 2018: 624, 629).

Silence among Romani, Sinti and other related groups also emerges from historical trauma stemming from the experience of Porajmos (Romani/Sinti Holocaust) (Halwachs, 2005: 157; Dragojlović, Samuels, 2021: 421; Kapralski, 2023); or Romani/Sinti silence can also appear out of shame and avoidance of disclosure of ethnic identity resulting from racism of the majority society toward Romani/Sinti people (Csepeli, Simon, 2004; Pantea, 2014). In all of these cases, silence and absence often operate as forms of agency and empowerment for the subjugated, marginalized, and repressed populations (Weller, 2017; Bartash, 2019: 16; Kidron, 2021). It is also important to acknowledge in this place that these strategies of “silence” can function differently for different Romani, Sinti, and other related social groups (see Williams, 2003: 1; Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2018).

However, when it comes to the interpretation of these Romani/Sinti actions of silence/absence, it is difficult to ascribe any of the above-mentioned meanings to them,

when Romani/Sinti people themselves are silent or absent and therefore cannot offer their own interpretations. Thus, as Robert Weller argues, there are always probable “multiple readings of silence” due to its “fundamental indeterminacy” (2017). In the case of the two Romani and Sinti individuals that have chosen to remain silent in response to my interview requests, all of the above readings are feasible as potential ways of interpretation. Some of my non-Romani interlocutors who are familiar, in some cases on a personal level, with Romani/Sinti individuals that I wanted to interview suggested their silence could be interpreted as “shame” of ethnic identity in one case, and as “mistrust” of non-Romani/non-Sinti researchers in the other. However, I personally think “resistance” or “preservation of personal autonomy” could equally well be applied as potential interpretations of their silence. In the end, it is impossible to fix any of the meanings of silence precisely. However, as Weller claims and I would agree, regardless of its indeterminacy, “silence is interpretable when it has a powerful cultural frame” (*ibid.*), in which case the scholarly frames of interpretation suggested above, which all acknowledge the cultural frames of Romani/Sinti historical experiences of violence, repression, and marginalization are probably at least partially applicable to any such cases of silence and absence that scholars might experience when approaching Romani/Sinti populations for interviews.

Furthermore, as researchers, we have no other choice in these kinds of situations but to adopt silence as a form of method, and thus as a “language of exchange that does expressive justice to the encounter with otherness and accedes to real unknown meanings” (Rapport, 2021: 48, 49). However, we also have a responsibility to study the social and historical conditions that produce silence and absence among various minority and marginalized populations, and when possible, to keep searching for other Romani/Sinti people who will be able to speak to us, or to find alternative methods that can lead us to their voices (I propose one of them below). Nevertheless, our results will always be doubly incomplete, not only as an unavoidable condition of every scholarship (Clifford, 1986), but also as reflecting the historical (racist) ruination of Romani/Sinti livelihoods.

Performance licences in the Archive of the Republic of Slovenia

Due to many complications in my research, as described in previous sections, I attempted to cast a wide net for the gathering of relevant data, not only by contacting all possible archives, institutions and scholars in the region, but also by employing a wide range of interdisciplinary methods, from ethnographic to archival, which many scholars recommend as a solution to addressing gaps and absences in the field (Blee, Billings, 1986: 448; King, 2016: 20; Tervonen, 2016: 91; Bartash, 2019: 24; Illuzzi, 2019: 75). Moreover, I was also open to surreptitious and accidental clues (Amit, 2000: 16; Poulos, 2018) that eventually guided me, among other directions, towards the archival bureaucratic records containing performance licences in the Archive of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana (fond signature: SI AS 68 13–17, 1919–1941).



On the surface level, these records at first seemed to carry little value for my study except for some dry and meagre facts about names, occupations, and dates. However, when I decided to scrutinize all of the 52 boxes containing performance licences for the Slovenia region (Drava Banate)⁸ between the years 1919 and 1941 (with 10cm per box amounting to around 5 meters of documentation), I gradually realized these files conceal much more than meets the eye at first sight. In this vast collection of documents, I found 113 performance licences belonging to 63 Romani/Sinti individuals from north Slovenia, with additional 78 members added to the licences as music or other collaborators with licence-holders (28 of them unidentified). There is therefore a total of 141 individuals mentioned on these licenses, from ten different Romani/Sinti families that lived in, travelled through, and performed in north Slovenia in the period between WWI and WWII (i.e. Eremita, Roj, Pestner, Rak, Huber, Seger, Gartner, Müller, Rosenfeld, Held), out of which 36%–41% were women. Biographical information about Jožef Roj mentioned in Story 1 above comes from this collection of documents (Roj, 1923, 1941; see also Image 2). Today, just small fragments of data related only to three to four of the families mentioned above are vaguely registered in, and slowly disappearing from, the local historical memory. This hidden but vibrant historical presence of Romani/Sinti musicians and their families in north Slovenia between WWI and WWII that can be traced through the archived performance licences therefore belies these people's current absence (or at best, their ephemeral and fading presence – see Amit, 2000: 14) from local majority society's memory and recognition.

As a clarification, the types of documents included in the licence files range from actual issued licences and final decision letters to institutional letters from the central administrative office, local municipalities, and local gendarmerie departments (these include moral and political assessments, statements regarding the suitability of particular individuals for the granting of licences, and also records of conviction), as well as supplicant-related documentation (application letters, occasional photographs, letters of complaint), attached older licences (with stamps of visited places, and with included old application letters), and some additional appendices (e.g. occasional gendarmerie reports, birth certificates, doctor's notes, and one certificate of performance in a coffeehouse) (see Image 2). Furthermore, the type of information included in these files contains the following: biographical information about dates and places, information about family members and social and family networks, occupation, music-related information (e.g. type of music groups, music instruments), places of activity (performance circuits), literacy, potential records of conviction, material conditions, economic relations, health situation, military service information, and various notes on behaviour, appearance, or language knowledge.

⁸ The province encompassing most of Slovenia (but without the coastal region and parts of the south) in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was between 1929 and 1941 called the Drava Banate (*Dravska banovina*).

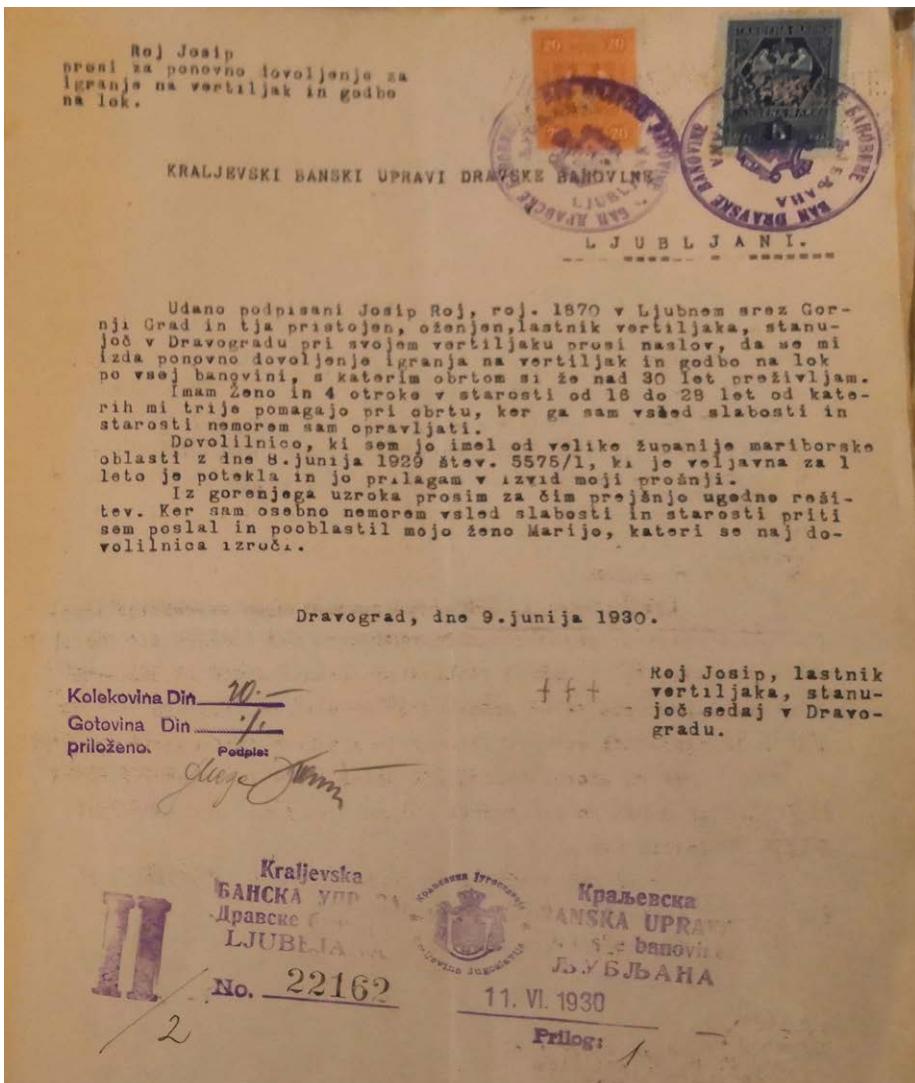


Image 2: Jožef Roj's old application letter from 1930, attached to his 1941 application for a performance licence (Roj, 1941).

Among all this relatively rich information found in the above-mentioned performance licence files, there are also two types of data that are especially valuable for my research. Firstly, in the supplicants' letters of application (or complaint) included in these files, it is possible to discern the voice of the local Romani and/or Sinti musicians. Even if these letters are mediated by scribes and governed by genre limitations pertaining to application letters, which influences the selection and reformulation of original Romani/Sinti statements and ideas that were included (Cody, 2009: 357; Holcman, 2020: 42), we can nevertheless encounter in these documents valuable Romani/Sinti



thoughts and commentaries, not only revealing information about their own material conditions, family relations (e.g. details about inheritance, care for elderly parents), occupational experience and music practice, but also demonstrating their affective strategies of persuasion (“I intend to earn my needed breadcrumb with music”), and their forms of tactful resistance, for example, in the way how Romani/Sinti musicians (and/or carousel owners) in these application (or complaint) letters ask to be given permission not only for the small towns in the provinces, but also for the big cities (otherwise often excluded from licences), which they claim would allow them to gain more financial profit from their performances. In this way, they politely and implicitly but persistently (repeatedly) resist geographic exclusion and economic discrimination. By reading these bureaucratic documents “against the archival grain” (Stoler, 2008a: 47), by performing a form of “peripheral” reading, a perusal of documents “in reverse”, and against their original intentions (Ištok, 2016; King, 2016: 21; Skarpelis, 2020: 396), it is therefore possible to trace the fragments and clues of Romani and Sinti agency and voice hidden in and mediated through the long forgotten archival bureaucratic records of performance licences stored in the Archive of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana.

Secondly, these music licences serve as evidence not only of the agency of the subaltern Romani/Sinti people, but also of the historical network of regional and national institutions of power governing their livelihoods. The attached letters from the local municipalities, local gendarmerie departments, occasionally also from the national Department of Social Affairs, as well as from the central administrative office in Ljubljana, demonstrate animated communication between different institutions of power regarding the moral, political, and socioeconomic suitability or non-suitability of particular Romani/Sinti supplicants for the granting of performance licences. These documents therefore reveal not only the formal and informal criteria for issuing the licences, and the racialized discourses full of prejudices and stereotypes underlining these debates, but also the intra- and inter-institutional tensions and contradictions regarding conflicting criteria, or conflicting institutional perspectives related to final decisions, for example, some institutions rejecting the issuing of licences while others actively supporting their approval for Romani/Sinti individuals (I am analysing these issues in my forthcoming publication). By scrutinizing different performative dimensions of these documents, it is therefore possible not only to read “against” but also “along the archival grain” (Stoler, 2008a: 49, 53; Ištok, 2016; King, 2016; Skarpelis, 2020), and to ethnographically study in this way also the complexities and contradictions inherent in the workings of the institutional network of power instrumental in shaping Romani/Sinti economic and music pursuits.

In sum, the Romani/Sinti performance licences stored in the Archive of the Republic of Slovenia appear to be valuable scholarly sources in several ways: (1) they attest to the vibrant historical presence of Romani/Sinti culture in north Slovenia between both world wars, (2) they provide a rich source of historical and ethnographic information for

scholarly analysis (including for triangulation between archival and ethnographic data), (3) they enable the study of the agency and voice of the local Romani/Sinti musicians, and (4) they offer a valuable historical perspective on the functioning of the regional and national network of the institutions of power affecting the livelihoods of Romani and Sinti groups in north Slovenia (and beyond).

Autoethnographic scrutiny of the relations between Self and Other in the anthropology of/at home

The study of the subaltern minorities is also the study of their relations with the majority society (Okely, 1987: 69; Van de Port, 1998; Janko Spreizer, 2002; Ginzburg, 2013; Parvulescu, 2016), either in the form of institutional or informal everyday relations, which can be studied through archives or ethnographically (or otherwise). However, it is possible and even necessary to move closer to this matter, in the case of non-Romani scholars such as myself by examining our own personal and scholarly engagements with Romani/Sinti people as well as our own family histories in this regard. In this way, autoethnography as a method helps us understand a wider social world by using the instrument of the self (Steedman, 1987: 8; Okely, 1992; Behar, 1997: 12, 14, 34; Adams, Manning, 2015: 351, 352; Verbuč, forthcoming). Furthermore, since the fieldwork site of the Upper Savinja Valley and north Slovenia where I trace Romani/Sinti presence and absence is also my place of origin, I am in this case also engaging with the anthropology of/at home (Jackson, 1987; Peirano, 1998; Amit, 2000).

Last year, I conducted a study of my family music history (Verbuč, forthcoming), and in the interviews with my parents, I realized they remember attending many Romani/Sinti music performances during socialism, some in Celje (in Restavracija Koper, by Oto Pestner Sr. and his ensemble) and some in Velenje (in Hotel Paka, by the ensemble of brothers Racz-Pal). Moreover, my father told me that during their bachelor years, his father Gregor (on zither) and his father's brother Franc (on guitar) occasionally played music with the Roj family from Mozirje (the brothers lived at the Verbuč farmhouse, which is located in Šmihel, a mountainous village 763m above sea level, otherwise around 8 kilometres from Mozirje which lies in the valley). This was probably in the late 1920s or early 1930s. I noted this down with interest, and a few months later I learned from one of my uncles there was more to the story. It turned out my grandfather supposedly had a romantic interest in one of the Roj daughters who played violin with the Roj family, and he left home to travel with them, but then suddenly returned after one week. My uncle claims when my grandfather's mother learned about this romantic connection, "it had to end immediately – she didn't let them [the two brothers] go play with them [the Roj family] anymore" (personal communication, 16 January, 2024). Another of my uncles later told me the same story and added that in those times, to associate and travel with Romani/Sinti people (local people called them "Cigani", translated as "Gypsies") was among the local non-Romani populations considered as "shameful", and that is why the



“Berbuč” brothers (local variation of the name Verbuč) had to stop playing and travelling with the Roj family (personal communication, 7 February, 2024).

There is still some confusion in my family regarding this matter however, with my uncles stating it was my grandfather who fell in love with the Roj daughter, and my father that it was actually grandfather’s brother Franc who developed this romantic interest. Nevertheless, when the researchers from the Institute of Ethnomusicology, Ljubljana, came to interview my grandmother Elizabeta Verbuč and to record her singing on 29 May, 1999, she also told them the following: “Those Gypsies, they often came by. Those Rojs. We really liked them. They would sing in the house, and always they had their instruments with them, so they also played” (GNI, 1999). It follows from this that the Roj and Verbuč families stayed in contact after my grandfather’s marriage with Elizabeta Verbuč (née Zidarn). The researchers from the Institute of Ethnomusicology did not ask any further questions about the Romani/Sinti musicians (they initially asked about “pedlars or beggars” [*petlarji* or *berači*] coming to their house, and if they would also sing or tell stories, but my grandmother herself added a part about the Roj family to the conversation), and as my grandmother is not alive anymore (she died in 2007), we only have this short quote above testifying also to the type of close social relations that developed between the Roj and Verbuč families in the period between both world wars (some probably continued also after WWII).

These stories told by my family members reveal something important. On the one hand, they demonstrate that close and positive social relations (not only romantic but also musical and friendly inter-family and inter-ethnic relations) were possible between Romani/Sinti and non-Romani families in north Slovenia in the early to mid-20th century (Story 2 from the introduction similarly corroborates this claim; I have collected more similar evidence that I am exploring further in my forthcoming article). However, at the same time, these family narratives also attest to the type of social relations fraught with stereotyping and social stigma (especially as it pertains to interethnic love relations) that must have affected the social interactions between the Roj and Verbuč families (and more so the Roj family itself). All of these perspectives point to the complexities and contradictions of the situation irreducible to binary interpretations regarding the interactions between Romani/Sinti and non-Romani/non-Sinti populations in a sense that not all social relations between both populations were always negative, but neither were they harmonious (cf. Tervonen, 2016; Tauber, 2019: 71). The above narratives of my family members also indicate we often only hear the non-Romani/non-Sinti side of the story, while the other, Romani/Sinti side remains silent (except for the comment about playing in the countryside made by Jožef Roj in his application for a performance licence stored in the Archive of the Republic of Slovenia, see Story 1 from the Introduction; this kind of triangulation of data shows a less exciting perspective by Jožef Roj on his encounters with the local “countryside” people than what these locals, including my grandmother, had to say about their interactions with the Roj family).

I should add that I could not find any descendants of the Roj family to interview for my research, which means they were not among those Romani/Sinti people mentioned in one of the previous sections who decided to remain silent in response to my interview requests. In this case their silence is the consequence of the Roj family's current absence in the region, which in itself probably results from a combination of factors: death, displacement, WWII (the only material albeit muffled and mute witnesses of their presence in the region are the performance licences discussed above, and Jožef Roj's gravestone in the Mozirje cemetery – see Image 1).

Engaging with autoethnography and doing anthropology of/at home has both its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, reliance on pre-established kinship and other types of social relations of familiarity and personal connection that I have built in the Upper Savinja Valley and the wider region of north Slovenia prior to this research were certainly helpful in finding those rare local interlocutors with some knowledge of local Romani/Sinti people who used to live in the area. Moreover, my close personal and kinship connections in the field were also beneficial in gaining more intimate information related to social interaction between specific Romani/Sinti and non-Romani populations (e.g. the Roj and Verbuč families) that can be simultaneously indicative of larger social issues as well as further illuminating publicly less visible (or invisible) complexities and contradictions intrinsic to the social interaction between these groups (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1987: 183, 184; Adams and Manning, 2015). On the other hand, closeness to the field can also affect greater personal and emotional involvement with the people under study, resulting in scholarly partiality, while socially pre-established personal and social positions that we develop at home prior to our research can potentially interfere with the newly acquired positions and goals of the researcher (Hastrup, 1987: 99; Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1987; Okely, 1987: 61, 70; Strathern, 1987: 31; Amit, 2000: 6, 7). There is probably some of each in my research as well.

Furthermore, when doing anthropology of/at home, one does not only study the Self or the local Other (either as a social difference or as a discursive construct; see Van de Port, 1998; Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2018), but also the interethnic relations between various heterogeneous groups of majority and minority populations constituting “home” (Peirano, 1998). However, there are limits to this kind of research, undergirded by unequal power relations between majority and minority positions reflected in social relations of research, in the imbalance between voice and silence, presence and absence, and therefore of who speaks for whom and how, and who remains silent or absent from research (Guha, 1983; Spivak, 1988; Matache, 2016, 2017; Dunajeva, 2018; Silverman, 2018).

It is therefore necessary to be self-reflective and acknowledge and challenge power imbalances constituting the field (Dunajeva, 2018; Silverman, 2018), and to deconstruct any forms of distortion and misrepresentation resulting from these kinds of interactions of knowledge production (Guha, 1983; Blee, Billings, 1986), as well as



to be transparent about the incompleteness of findings and the inconsistencies in the data (as in the example of the Roj/Verbuč story above, I point out many imbalances, silences, gaps, and contradictions in my research). All of these impediments of power imbalance, distortion, incompleteness, and inconsistency in the data should therefore also be turned around into productive impediment-based methodologies.

While it is imperative to aspire to collaborative research that would ideally include Romani/Sinti people themselves and in this way challenge historical power imbalances in Romani/Sinti studies (Bogdán et al., 2015; Dunajeva, 2018; Silverman, 2018), my research experiences show this goal is not always feasible. However, even in the case of the absence of Romani/Sinti people and their voices, we still carry a responsibility to study our own societies in all of their dimensions, including their majority and minority populations (and their interactions), past and present times, informal and institutional contexts, and problematic and encouraging aspects of our societies, and in this way to both shed light on the social injustices pertaining to various local populations (past and present) as well as to identify the affective interethnic social relations coexisting with them. With this approach, we are consequently able to confront reductive interpretations of the past and present lives by elucidating complexities and contradictions inherent to them.

Therefore, while my research affirms the marginal Other to be “radically inaccessible” to the hegemonic centre (Costache, 2018: 35), I suggest that we, the scholars from the majority population, focus not necessarily on the Other itself, but on the “contact zone” (Pratt, 1991; Piotrowska, 2022), and therefore study the interactions between the majority and minority populations, which are more accessible and visible to us (while still inherently incomplete). There are some important studies that already established the groundwork for this kind of approach (Pettan, 1996; Stewart, 1997; Janko Spreizer, 2002: chapter 5; Tervonen, 2016; Tauber, 2018, 2019; Savić, 2023), but more could be done in this regard. Moreover, I recommend we approach this field via autoethnography and anthropology of/at home (Okely, 1983: 38), since these methods bring us closer to the social relations in the contact zone (even if not all scholars’ families from majority populations have/had contact with Romani/Sinti people and groups, researchers can still engage with other aspects of their family history through which they can analyse “contact zones” with various other minority/marginalized “home” populations). Since interethnic encounters of the “contact zone” are inherently heterogeneous and often comprise different levels of conflict, negotiation, agency, and dialogue, they are therefore also challenging dominant narratives that tend to project homogenizing and one-dimensional representations of the Other (as a passive and silent figure of racialized imagination), as well of the minority-majority interchange (either as only negative, or as only positive and therefore romanticized) (*ibid.*: 37–40). We can in this way contribute to the reconstitutive remembering and to the formation of counter-histories emerging from the margins (Costache, 2018: 40; Brooks, 2020), which can challenge erasure

and forgetting of vital forms of historical or present-day social heterogeneity and interethnic communication, and thereby also destabilize hegemonic historical narratives (*ibid.*). Finally, we should also never stop searching for new clues about, voices of, and social and scholarly connections with local Romani/Sinti (or other minoritarian/marginalized) individuals and groups.

Conclusions

In ethnographic scholarship, we usually assume it as normal (even normative) to conduct interviews with people in the centre of our research and include their native points of view (emic perspectives); or when including historical research, to analyse ego-documents (letters, diaries) as another method of gaining access to people's ideas, thoughts, and emotions. We also strive toward establishing some sort of reciprocity and collaboration with the people we study (even if this is often impossible to achieve to the full extent, depending on specific historical and social power imbalances). Moreover, we tend to rely on our scholarly forerunners, aiming to inherit some of their knowledge and writing on the topics of our study and to mould their ideas and theories further in our research. However, it can happen that none of these "standard" methodological approaches are available to us, and we are therefore compelled to search for improbable alternatives, drawing on scant sources in pursuit of our earnest goals. Our determination, competence, and ingenuity might as well be put to the test on this path.

I therefore contend in this article that various methodological impediments, imbalances, absences, silences, and distortions that I encountered during my fieldwork can be in multiple ways successfully turned into a non-standard but fruitful scholarly endeavour that is in itself built upon and around the impediment-, absence-, and silence-based methodology. This includes employment of silence as a form of method, the archival scrutiny of forgotten social and musical Romani/Sinti presences (and voices) hidden in the "dry" and "dead" bureaucratic records revealing rich historical traces of vibrant social lives of the local Romani/Sinti groups in the face of their absence from the contemporary local social sites and discourses, and the autoethnographic scrutiny of complicated music, socio-cultural, and scholarly relations between Self and Other that is in itself partial, problematic, and incomplete.

All of these approaches should be coupled with critical self-reflection and a continued search for connection with Romani/Sinti people and communities. Methodologically and theoretically, a combination of various methods and disciplines, and an employment of methodological approaches such as autoethnography and anthropology at/of home, as well as conceptual procedures such as the study of contact zones and counter-histories, can prove to be indispensable in challenging the situations such as the one I experienced during my research of Romani/Sinti musicians in north Slovenia. We should



add to this list an interpretive and analytical approach of openness and transparency in writing about the aspects of fieldwork and scholarship that are otherwise incomplete, partial, and contradictory. Finally, I recommend that we also start using all of these non-standard, anomalous methods not as something exceptional and secondary but as a part of our central set of methodological approaches, and in this way to complement and enrich it, as well as to open with this kind of unconventional methodological orientation new avenues of research that can otherwise be hidden, forgotten or marginalized but that can offer significant and illuminating new ways of understanding our social and cultural worlds.

Research data statement

The author states that the article is based on ethnographic research materials that are not classified as research data. All additional information concerning the ethnographic research materials are available on reasonable request with the author. In addition, the author states that the article is also partly based on archival sources, which are cited in the list of references below.

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Ovire, odsotnost in tišina kot metodološki temelji raziskovanja romskih in sintskih glasbenikov in glasbenic v severni Sloveniji

V članku avtor obravnava metodološke izzive in rešitve pri preučevanju romskih in sintskih glasbenikov in glasbenic v severni Sloveniji, zlasti v Zgornji Savinjski dolini in njeni okolici, v obdobju pred in po drugi svetovni vojni. Omenjeno območje običajno ni obravnavano v romski in sintski znanstveni literaturi in ni prepoznano kot območje družbene prisotnosti romskega ali sintskega prebivalstva. Kljub temu ta epistemološka praznina zakriva živahno zgodovinsko, družbeno in glasbeno prisotnost Romov in Sintov na tem območju, zato je cilj članka dvojen.

Prvi del članka avtor nameni metodološkim izzivom, kot so preminuli romski in sintski posamezniki in posameznice, njihova odsotnost v arhivih in znanstveni literaturi, molk med njihovimi potomci ter anekdotična narava podatkov, povezanih s preučevanjem romskih in sintskih glasbenih družin in



posameznikov iz Zgornje Savinjske doline in njene okolice. V drugem delu pa odpira razpravo o znanstvenih pristopih, katerih namen je osvetliti problematičen metodološki položaj, opisan v prvem delu članka, in ga preoblikovati v produktivna znanstvena prizadevanja.

Avtor trdi, da je mogoče različne metodološke ovire in neravnovesja, tišine, molčanja, odsotnosti in popačenja, na katere je naletel med terenskim delom, uspešno preoblikovati v nestandardna, a plodna znanstvena prizadevanja, izhajajoča iz metodologij, ki temeljijo na ovirah, molku in odsotnosti. Ta pristop vključuje, prvič, obravnavo molka kot obliko metode, ki se ukvarja z interpretacijo in sprejemanjem molka med potomci romskih in sintskih glasbenikov in glasbenic. Drugič, arhivsko preučevanje pozabljene družbene in glasbene romske/sintske prisotnosti, ki se skriva v »suhoparnih« in »mrtvih« birokratskih dokumentih glasbenih dovolilnic iz Arhiva Republike Slovenije – dovolilnice razkrivajo bogate zgodovinske sledi živahnega družbenega življenja lokalnih romskih/sintskih skupin ob njihovi hkratni odsotnosti iz lokalnih sodobnih družbenih prostorov in diskurzov. Tretjič, avtoetnografsko preučevanje zapletenih glasbenih, družbeno-kulturnih in raziskovalnih odnosov med večinsko in manjšinsko populacijo, ki so sami po sebi pogostoma pristranski, problematični in nepopolni.

Avtor poudarja, da je treba te pristope združiti še s kritično samorefleksijo in nenehnim iskanjem povezave z romskimi in sintskimi skupnostmi. Z metodološkega in teoretskega vidika se lahko skupek disciplinarnih in metodoloških pristopov, kot sta avtoetnografija in antropologija domačih terenov, pa tudi uporaba konceptualnih modelov, kot je preučevanje »kontaktnih območij« (ang. *contact zones*) in »proti-zgodovin« (ang. *counter-histories*), izkažejo za nepogrešljive pri položajih, s kakršnim se je avtor soočil pri raziskovanju romskih in sintskih glasbenikov in glasbenic v severni Sloveniji. Tem metodam avtor dodaja interpretativni in analitični pristop odprtosti in preglednosti pri pisanju o vidikih raziskovanja in terenskega dela, ki so mnogokrat nepopolni in/ali protislovni. Nazadnje članek spodbuja k uporabi navedenih nestandardnih metod, in sicer ne kot metodološko izjemnih in sekundarnih, temveč kot dela osrednjega nabora metodoloških pristopov. Ta nabor lahko metode, ki temeljijo na ovirah, molku in odsotnosti, dopolnjujejo in bogatijo. Avtor še zatrjuje, da lahko tovrstna metodološka usmeritev, ki temelji na omenjenih nekonvencionalnih metodah, hkrati odpira nove raziskovalne smeri, ki drugače pogosto ostanejo skrite, pozabljene ali marginalizirane, a lahko vendarle odprejo pomembne nove pristope k razumevanju družbenih in kulturnih svetov.

Reassessing Latvian Infant Amusement Verses: Texts and Contexts

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This article examines the historical development and terminology of Latvian *infant amusement verses* within an international framework. The author traces the evolution of the genre through preserved materials and offers comparative insights into similar traditions in other European countries. The article then focuses on instances of violence and other controversial motifs that appear in such verses, offering a critical perspective on their reception in both historical and contemporary contexts.

▪ **Keywords:** infant amusement verses, nursery rhymes, violence in folklore, physical punishment, children, Latvia

Članek obravnava zgodovinski razvoj in terminologijo latvijskih *otroških razvedrilnih pesmi* z njihovo umestitvijo v mednarodni kontekst. Avtorica na podlagi ohranjenega gradiva sledi razvoju žanra in ponuja primerjalni vpogled v sorodne tradicije z drugih evropskih območijih, nato pa preuči primere nasilja in druge sporne motive tega žanra ter ponudi kritičen pogled na njihovo recepcijo v zgodovinskem in sodobnem kontekstu.

▪ **Ključne besede:** otroške razvedrilne pesmi, uspavanke, nasilje v folkloru, fizična kazen, otroci, Latvija

Introduction

Just about every Latvian child likely has heard or used verses beginning with the words *Vāru, vāru putriņu* ... “I boil, I boil porridge...”, *Cepu, cepu kukulīti* ... “I bake, I bake loaves...”, or *Tā jāj kungi, tā jāj kungi* ... “So ride gentlemen, so ride gentlemen...”. Infant amusement verses are short, rhythmical texts that are sung or recited by adults. They are accompanied by movements: playing with the child’s fingers, hands, and feet; tickling and stroking; and dandling or swaying the child on the adult’s knees or feet. In addition to parents, grandparents, or other adult relatives, sometimes the verses are performed by other children in the family for and together with their younger siblings.

Infant amusement verses have existed for centuries, and they are still passed on in oral tradition. Catalina Millán Scheiding, a scholar of children’s literature, points out that English nursery rhymes in general are still popular because of their link to oral tradition and their specific textual structure, which is different from written texts and makes them easy to remember. They are designed to be memorable and engaging, and they include rhythm, musicality, movement, formulaic elements, and repetition (Millán Scheiding, 2019: 37). Rhymes and actions are inextricably connected in infant amusement verses as a genre of folklore. Based on the movements employed, Latvian infant amusement



verses can be divided into four groups: 1) dandling rhymes; 2) texts accompanied by actions with the fingers and hands (finger games); 3) texts accompanied by actions with the child's feet; and 4) texts accompanied by stroking or tickling the child.

Considering the international context – both historical and geographical – this article examines Latvian infant amusement verses. Although such verses can be found in the folklore of nearly every nation, their terminology, classification, and research traditions differ significantly from country to country. The first part of the article is structured geographically and provides a comparative analysis of English, German, Lithuanian, and Russian folklore traditions. The second part focuses on instances of violence found in Latvian infant amusement verses, including content that is difficult for young children to comprehend or is considered inappropriate in today's context – as well as depictions of physical punishment. To analyze the infant amusement verses, the article uses previously collected and systematized texts, including materials from the Archives of Latvian Folklore, other previously published texts, and recently recorded texts inherited from oral tradition. For analysis of these texts, the article employs a historical-comparative and geographical-comparative approach, supported by fieldwork, qualitative interviews, analysis of published sources, and examination of unpublished folklore material. The article also explores the dynamics of use and shifting popularity of these verses over time, which is closely linked to changing social attitudes and values influenced by historical and social developments.

A brief overview of the history of infant amusement verses: Collection, classification, terminology, and publications

The term 'infant amusement verses'¹ (*ucināmās dziesmas*) is new in Latvian folklore studies. It was introduced by the author of this article when writing her dissertation *Šūpuļdziesmas un ucināmās dziesmas latviešu bērnu folklorā* (Lullabies and Infant Amusement Verses in Latvian Children's Folklore).² Infant amusement verses were

¹ There is no tradition in translating the term *ucināmās dziesmas* from Latvian to English; the closest corresponding term, 'infant amusement verses', is borrowed from the English nursery rhyme researchers Iona and Peter Opie (Opie, Opie, 1997: 16).

² This doctoral dissertation (Smilgaine, 2008) is the first comprehensive study in Latvian folklore studies dedicated to traditional folklore genres addressed to children: lullabies and infant amusement verses. The research investigates the origins, functions, distribution, and textual variety of these genres while also examining their role within the broader dynamics between adult and children's cultural spheres. A central contribution of the dissertation is the conceptualization and theoretical definition of infant amusement verses as an independent folklore genre, with particular emphasis on their syncretic character: the inseparable interplay of language, movement, and touch. The study draws on an extensive corpus of materials, including major publications of Latvian children's folklore and archival sources from the Archives of Latvian Folklore. To explore the contemporary use and significance of these genres, the author conducted fieldwork between 2003 and 2007, collecting oral testimonies through qualitative interviews with more than thirty respondents from various regions of Latvia exploring the use and function of these songs in everyday family practices.

classified as folk songs (Smilgaine, 2008: 17–18) and were not regarded as a unified group in Latvian children's folklore before, unlike in folklore studies in neighboring Lithuania.³ The genre does not have a common name in the Latvian vernacular tradition. Researchers of Latvian children's folklore usually classified infant amusement verses as folk songs (Greble, 1950; Vītolīņš, 1971), not taking into account their connection with movements, which links them with games. Unlike games played among children, these verses are mainly initiated and led by adults. The verses were not differentiated from other texts in the largest of the publications of Latvian children's songs, the sixth volume of *Latviešu tautasdziesmas* (Latvian Folk Songs, LTdz VI). The texts there are scattered among other folk songs and lack movement descriptions, making it difficult to identify the infant amusement verses among others.

In the English-speaking world, the term 'nursery rhyme' is widely known. It was consolidated in the second decade of the 19th century and is applicable to a broad range of texts intended for children. Nursery rhymes are short verses or songs that are recited or sung for children or otherwise performed by children themselves. The term is a general descriptor for a variety of verse forms that have come to be associated with children over time, especially with young children. The tradition of English children's verses or nursery rhymes is a long one, but new verses have steadily entered the stream. Many popular texts are centuries old and emerged as part of an ancient oral tradition, and others have appeared as part of the written text tradition, although the author cannot always be determined. However, the authors of some texts are known: one notable example is the song 'Mary Had a Little Lamb' (1830) by Sarah Josepha Hale. The song is regarded as one of the best-known four-line verses in the English language (Opie, Opie, 1997: 359). This is also why nursery rhymes are reasonably linked to the very beginning of children's literature in the English-speaking world. In contrast, in Latvian folklore studies children's folklore is strictly separated from the beginnings of literature. One of the oldest such English texts is believed to be 'Thirty Days Hath September'. A similar poem that enumerates days of the month has been identified in the 13th century in French. This is rather an exception because more often children's verses in English date from the 16th and 17th centuries, and they were composed in the greatest profusion in the 18th century (*Encyclopædia Britannica*). Only a small fraction of verses was created specifically for children: for example, lullabies, finger games, or rhyming alphabets. Most of the verses and songs – ballads, folk songs, martial songs, street vendor cries, riddles, proverbs, religious verses, and poems featuring historical

³ Žaidinimai (the Lithuanian term for infant amusement verses) is a folklore genre consisting of small syncretic verses. They are created and performed by adults and have a calming function. They differ from games in that children do not play with each other, but an adult plays with a child. The plots depicted in the games are dynamic, characterized by a playful style and the personification of animals through the use of many exclamatory words, repetitions of words, questions, and answers. Unlike lullabies, the lyrics of the playful songs are more varied and flexible, often imitating riding, baking cakes, walking, and so on with movements (*Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija*).



figures – were originally mainly intended as entertainment for adults. They came into being at a time when both grownups and children participated in the common oral tradition because children were regarded as small adults until the 17th century (Opie, Opie, 1997: 4–5).

The very first collection of children's verse in England was published under the title *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book* in 1744. It was the first book to be published expressly for children (Opie, Opie, 1997: 29), and it was also the first folklore publication for children. The most comprehensive publication with scholarly annotations and a study on the origins and the history of nursery rhymes can be regarded to be *The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book*, first published in 1955 and later revised and published again in 1997 (*ibid.*). The book was aimed at a wide readership encompassing scholars as well as parents and children. The authors, Iona and Peter Opie, researched children's folklore and collected some five hundred popular and less well-known verses. In the introduction to the book, the authors describe the classification of children's verses. One of the categories, 'infant amusements',⁴ includes texts that resemble Latvian infant amusement texts: verses designed for playing with children's facial features, fingers, and toes as well as dandling songs. This term in *The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book*, however, encompasses something wider and includes a variety of other verses that are accompanied by actions, as in the following example: "Handy-dandy riddley ro, / Which will you have, high or low?" While declaiming this, the reciter juggles a small item, which finally comes to rest in one fist, and the spectator is invited to guess which hand is holding the item (*ibid.*: 232). Although there are texts in English similar to Latvian infant amusement verses, they are nonetheless grouped differently. The guiding principle for selection here is the purpose of the text: to entertain the child.

In German-speaking cultures, infant amusement verses are also viewed together with other children's songs and verses known as *Kinderreime*. In terms of content, they are a parallel to English nursery rhymes. These children's verses incorporate a wide range of texts from a variety of sources, including both texts originally intended for children (e.g. lullabies, finger games, dandling songs, and riddles) and verses and songs for adults (e.g. drinking songs; student, soldier, and theatre songs; popular *schlager* songs; parodies; and advertising slogans appropriated by children over the time).

The first anthology of German children's verses was published as an appendix to the third volume of the major folk song compendium *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy's Magic Horn) between 1806 and 1808. This was accomplished by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, who completed the compendium a few years before the famous collection of fairy tales *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales, 1812–1815) by the Brothers Grimm. The entire 19th century continued to be an

⁴ They are also called "children's amusements" (Gregor, 1886), but Iona and Peter Opie introduced this category of texts as "infant amusements" (Opie, Opie, 1997: 16).

intensive time of gathering and researching folklore. The anthology *Deutsches Kinderlied und Kinderspiel* (German Children's Songs and Children's Games) by Franz Magnus Böhme in 1897 is the culmination of research in the realm of children's folklore. The book contains materials collected by local history researchers and folklore enthusiasts from various regions in Germany. This publication still continues to be of importance because it presents meticulously researched studies on the origins and dialect variations of children's verses (Gabrisch, 1970: 337–338).

Although infant amusement verses are part of the traditional culture of almost every nation, researchers have seldomly classified this as a separate genre of folklore. This is the case in the United Kingdom and Germany. In Lithuanian folklore studies, the model of children's folklore classification and terminology is similar to Latvia's. The extensive study of children's folklore *Lietuvių liaudies vaikų dainos* (Lithuanian Children's Folk Songs) was published in Lithuania in 1970 by Pranė Jokimaitienė (1922–1989), a researcher of children's folklore. She classified children's songs according to their theme, function, age bracket, authorship, and particular features of the genre. Jokimaitienė separated all children's songs into two groups: texts that were devised for children by adults and texts created by children themselves. Alongside lullabies, cumulative songs, and songs about animals, the first group includes Lithuanian infant amusement verses, or *žaidinimai*. Ten years after the publication of *Lietuvių liaudies vaikų dainos* in 1980, a scholarly edition of children's songs was published in Lithuania, comprising volume one of the collected *Lietuvių liaudies dainynas* (Lithuanian Folk Songs; Jokimaitienė, 1980). The compilation makes practical use of Jokimaitienė's classification system. There is a description of the division of infant amusement verses in the foreword, and it slightly differs from the Latvian version: 1) infant amusement verses accompanied by actions with fingers and hands; 2) rhymes accompanied by rocking and caressing (*mylavimai, sūpavimai*); 3) dandling songs (*kykojimai*); and 4) songs for pacifying and jokes (*maldymai, juokinimai*). The author highlights the pedagogical value of infant amusement verses and proposes that the key aim of this genre is to develop children's physical and mental abilities based on their needs. The texts are performed by adults either by singing, declaiming, or reciting expressively. Some kind of activity is always described, and it often expands into a short adventure story. Compared to lullabies, the activities accompanying infant amusement verses are more varied and they usually illustrate the text, although there is also amusement without corresponding movements (Jokimaitienė, 1980: 22–23).

Similar to Lithuanian folklore, in Russian folklore too there is an equivalent term, *poteshki* (Russian for 'infant amusement verses'). This term was not coined by researchers but is widely used by the general public. The term *poteshki* refers to texts spoken by adults when playing with children's fingers, hands, or any other body part. The aim is to distract, amuse, and also introduce the child to the surrounding world. These texts are inextricably associated with movements (Kapica, 1928: 54).



Evolution of the genre in Latvia

In Latvia, the active time of collecting children's folklore was the 1920s under the leadership of the founder of the Archives of Latvian Folklore (*Latviešu folkloras krātuve*), Anna Bērzkalne (1891-1956) (Vīksna, 1990: 66-68). However, research was not carried out until the middle of the 20th century, when the folklore scholar Vilma Greble (1906-1991) turned her interest toward children's folklore. She was the first to develop a comprehensive system of classification based on grouping folklore material according to children's age and their level of psychological and physical development. Lullabies are the verses mostly applicable to children in the first period of the development, that of infancy. The next period, which Greble labeled preschool age, includes both texts performed by adults for children (e.g. folk songs about cooking porridge and baking bread as well as dandling songs) and folklore performed by children themselves. When they reach age one, songs about their own care and maintenance become relevant to children, whereas at age four or five so-called instructive songs (*mācības dziesmas*) predominate. These are songs about animals and birds, as well as songs that replicate the language of animals and the variety of sounds they make. According to Greble, counting-out rhymes, singing games, naming the days of the week, and ways of telling time are also relevant to this age group. The third period of children's development is school age, characterized by riddles, exercises in mental aptitude, secret languages, secret writing, autograph album inscription verses, schoolchildren's songs, and parodies (Greble, 1950: 104-105). Thanks to Greble's research, *Latviešu bērnu folklora* (Latvian Children's Folklore; Greble, 1973) was published in 1973 and intended for a wide audience, including children. The book contains folk songs, including infant amusement verses. Texts from other genres of folklore (i.e., stories, anecdotes, myths, proverbs, counting-out rhymes, riddles, games, and singing games) were also published in the book. It was very popular with children, parents, and teachers alike.

Because there was a long-standing community of Baltic Germans, German folklore was also collected in Latvian territory. The Archives of Latvian Folklore hold 3,370 items, which were gathered by the Herder Institute of Riga.⁵ The institute was active from 1921 until 1939, and under its aegis German-speaking students collected German folklore in several places, mainly in Riga, Liepāja, and Cēsis. When the Herder Institute was closed in 1939, the collection was handed over to the Archives of Latvian Folklore. The materials are rich in various genres, including children's songs and counting-out rhymes bearing witness to mutual influences between Latvian and German. There are texts considered traditional for Latvians or Germans as well as borrowed phrases from neighboring cultures that were translated or taken over in the original language

⁵ This collection is catalogued under number [1825] in the Archives of Latvian Folklore, and it is accessible in the digital archive at www.garamantas.lv.

and were popular among children. There are also texts combining and merging both languages into an almost untranslatable “children’s language”, such as, for example: *Kin kinnī, / Minu minnī, / Nāšu pīpīt, / Au bānīts, / Bubu mānīt, / Tipu bānīt* (LFK 23, 13691). While reciting this verse, a human face is described; the reciter touches the relevant part of the face, giving its name in the “children’s language”. Usually, the verse begins with the lower part of the face (chin) and ends with the hair or forehead. There are not many similar examples in the Archives of Latvian Folklore, though there are significantly more in German folklore, which the texts presumably derived from, including the following example: *Kinnewippchen, / Rotlippchen, / Nuppelnäschen, / Augenbräunchen, / Zupp-Zupp-Härichen* (Kühn, 1905: 28).

Unlike English and German verses, in Latvian folklore studies there is an attempt to keep folklore texts apart from rhymes with known authorship. Moreover, texts intended for young children are kept strictly apart from those deemed unsuitable for their age for various reasons, though it is often challenging. Children’s folklore can be divided into two layers based on the actor: folklore for children and children’s folklore (e.g. counting-out rhymes). The two layers interact with each other, and the boundary is not always easy to define. According to the materials gathered in the Archives of Latvian Folklore, it is apparent that the same texts are used for the entertainment of young children and among peers at a later age.⁶ Lullabies and infant amusement verses are generally considered to be folklore for children performed by adults. Some texts that originated among adults have gradually migrated into children’s culture, and they are considered to belong to children’s folklore. Latvian folklore is not unique in this respect. The Czech researcher Jana Pospíšilová describes the same phenomenon, pointing out that some Czech children’s games such as the ‘Christmas Shepherd Game’ and the ‘Three Kings Game’ were once part of the ancient ceremonial culture of adults (Pospíšilová, 2008: 15).

The largest collection of infant amusement verses in Latvia is held by the Archives of Latvian Folklore (*Latviešu folkloras krātuve*, LFK). Part of the collection has been published in three scholarly publications: texts in volume one of the collected *Latvju dainas*⁷ (Latvian Dainas, LD I) in 1894, texts in volume six of the collected *Latviešu*

⁶ Example:

<i>Knībā, knābā sūrais vanags</i>	Pinch, peck, the fierce hawk
<i>Apēd saldo vistiņ'</i> ,	Eats the sweet chicken,
<i>Aizskrien mežā – špur!</i> (LFK Bdz 116, 7)	Flies into the woods – <i>špur!</i> (LFK Bdz 116, 7)

There are dozens of variations of this text. When playing, the children form a circle, take hold of their neighbor’s skin on the top of the hand with two fingers (like a hawk grabbing a chicken), and let go at the last word (LFK 28, 6). However, when playing with small children, their hands are clapped in rhythm, and at the last word both palms are shaken, and then the child laughs (LFK 1476, 98).

⁷ Krišjānis Barons (1835-1923) was a Latvian folklore scholar, writer, and journalist, widely regarded as the “father of the dainas” (*dainu tēvs*) for his monumental work in collecting and systematizing Latvian folk songs. His most significant contribution is the compilation *Latvju dainas*, a six-volume collection published between 1894 and 1915, encompassing over 217,000 folk song texts.



tautasdziesmas (Latvian Folk Songs, LTdz IV) in 1993, and texts with musical notation in the collection *Bērnu dziesmu cikls; Bēru dziesmas* (Children's Song Cycle; Funeral Songs) compiled by Jēkabs Vītolīņš in 1971 (Vītolīņš, 1971). Nonetheless, these publications contain only a fraction of the infant amusement verse materials held by the Archives of Latvian Folklore. One of the primary reasons for this is the specific character of the genre: that is, they manifest features typical for both folk songs and singing games.

In the publications so far, priority has been given to the form and the content of texts, whereas the aspect of accompanying movement has hardly ever been noted. The infant amusement verses included in the collections tend to resemble classic folk songs in their form,⁸ such as: *Vāru, vāru, putru, / Pieci milti katlā. / Ko došu kalpam, / Ko kalpa bērniem?* “I boil, I boil porridge, / Five flours in the pot. / What shall I give to the servant, / And to the servant’s children?” (LD 2965). Texts that are different in terms of their rhythm or expression are excluded from the publications. These include finger counting games or verses intended for tickling a child, such as: *Kaza nāk ar lieliem ragiem, / Grib to bērnu nobadīt – / Buku, buku, buks!* “Here comes the goat with big horns / It wants to butt the child / Buku, buku, buks!” (LFK 809, 806). The playful interaction between adult and child, however, is an integral constituent part of this genre; often the actions illustrate the text or otherwise the text evolves from the movements performed. Thus infant amusement verses often diverge from the traditional rhythm and number of lines in the folk songs, leaving more space for improvisation, mimicking sounds, and repetition. The materials in the archives also contain comments made by the informants or those recording the texts and melodies, including brief biographical notes, information about the actions to be executed, or the conditions and the purpose for verses to be performed. However, these comments have not been published.⁹

⁸ Classic folk songs or *dainas* are individually composed four-line verses or longer songs that are widespread throughout society and have been handed down from generation to generation. They have a traditional form and content that reflects the lifestyle and world view of the Latvian peasant farmer (Krogzeme-Mosgorda, 2020).

⁹ To document this valuable cultural heritage and make it accessible to the general public, the author of this article is currently working on a book about Latvian infant amusement verses. It will incorporate all the materials pertaining to the genre, both published and unpublished; it will also include infant amusement verses with musical notation. The arrangement and presentation of lyrics is based on the principles of the edition of *Latviešu tautasdziesmas* (Latvian Folk Songs), with the core material supplemented with explanations by contributors and those that recorded the materials. It is currently estimated that almost four thousand texts will be analyzed. More than half of them are texts for actions with a child’s hands and fingers (2,089), and the second most prolific are dandling songs (1,811). The remaining texts – infant amusement verses accompanied by playing with a child’s feet and legs (fifty-eight) and verses for stroking or tickling a child (thirty-three) – are far fewer. The manuscript contains Latvian folklore materials belonging to this genre collected from the end of the 19th century to the present.

The depiction of violence and questionable themes in Latvian infant amusement verses

Perception of the development and age-specific needs of children and the overall awareness and understanding of violence have gradually changed in Latvian society during the past thirty years – that is, after the restoration of independence in the 1990s. Violence has especially come into focus lately given the uncertainty and vulnerability of the international political context and the war in Ukraine. It is apparent that adults – young parents and grandparents – have become more attentive to traditional cultural heritage in its aspect of representing violence. Thus, folklore texts that parents feel might have a negative impact on young children (e.g. frightening them, encouraging physical violence, or breaching some social norms) are also being reviewed. The folklore materials collected and already published in various sources make possible a holistic view of infant amusement verses and their evaluation in a new context. However, so far the topic of violence has not been addressed by Latvian children's folklore researchers.

Violence has been highlighted in a number of studies by North American folklore scholars in the last decades of the past century, focusing on children's playground rhymes or schoolyard songs (Gainer, 1980; Newall, 1994; McCabe, 1998; Sherman, 1999). This is a tradition that exists separately from adult culture and independently of the official school culture and the relationship between adults and children (Newall, 1994). Songs and verses spread among children across geographical locations and across generations almost exclusively by word of mouth. The texts refer to current politics and popular culture, mutating and constantly changing to provide opportunities to play with language and taboo subjects (McCabe, 1998: 72). The texts break cultural taboos and include topics such as sex, racial hatred, banned substances, and various forms of discrimination.¹⁰ Due to the strict separation between children's and adults' worlds in the use of certain songs and verses, adults are often unaware and even shocked when they first encounter an oral tradition that children use within their community. Some of these songs violate important taboos concerning children's speech and violent language toward adults in particular (Newall, 1994: 109). Children themselves often perceive the violence mentioned in the verses not as cruelty but rather as humor (Gainer, 1980: 48), and the songs serve as "an informal safety valve for children's resentment" (Knapp, Knapp, 1976: 161).

This article focuses on folklore dedicated to young children whose practitioners are mainly adults. Infant amusement verses in oral culture function differently compared to the folklore used by children among themselves at a later age, and therefore the texts should be examined from a different perspective in both cases. Different inheritance

¹⁰ For example, on banned substances: "Marijuana, Marijuana, LSD, LSD. / Scientists make it, teachers take it. / Why can't we? Why can't we?" (McCabe, 1998: 71).



mechanisms are at work here. For example, when a baby joins the family, the parents use the verses they heard in their childhood or they learn them from other adults involved in the child's care.¹¹ Assessment and the subsequent choice of verses and songs for their child is mainly up to the adults. The choice depends on their understanding of what is appropriate and necessary for their children. Some verses are discarded over time. The mood of society is also somewhat monitored by the publishers because they try to avoid controversial folklore material in publications for child audiences.

Physical violence

Sitam, kaujam mazos ežus,

Metam podā, vārījam:

Tēvam galīņa, mātei kauliņi,

Bērniem zupa bļodiņā.

(LFK Bdz 3560, 6)

Let's hit and kill the little hedgehogs,

And throw them in the pot and boil:

Meat for the father, dice for the mother,

Soup in a bowl for the children.¹²

(LFK Bdz 3560, 6)

Variations of the verse in the example above were popular during the 1920s and 1930s throughout Latvia according to the materials held by the Archives of Latvian Folklore. The archives contain around 190 similar texts, mostly recorded by schoolchildren during lessons under the guidance of a teacher. This confirms that they were widely used at the time and were not judged disapprovingly. During the Soviet Latvia (1941–1991), this group of texts was interpreted as “a humorous song about ‘cooking’ small hedgehogs . . . and other animals for a feast” by the folklore researcher Vilma Greble (1950: 114); no deeper analysis followed the statement because the verses were not considered noteworthy.

The author's personal experience in 2005 when compiling a selection of infant amusement verses for the education of parents and practical use (Smilgaine, 2005) served as a testimony to the fact that these texts have become problematic. Initially it was planned to include the verse about the hedgehogs in the compilation, but it was omitted at the request of the publishing house. The publisher was concerned about a negative reaction from potential clients (parents of young children). This situation reflects a general shift in public sentiment because a formerly funny episode of beating and eating small animals in a children's verse as experienced in the first half of the 20th century can become problematic and no longer perceived as a joke.

¹¹ In 2006, during field research for the author's dissertation, while collecting lullabies and *ucināmā* songs in various places in Latvia, the informant also talked about where and from whom they had learned them. The mother of six-month-old Laima describes how she acquired the verse recited while manipulating the baby's feet: “*We had this [verse] when we were with Emil [the eldest son], we went for massages, and then he would recite the verse, and then I learned it. And now Lima and I are doing the exercises now, and then we recite the verse*” (LFK 2129, 265).

¹² All quoted texts have been translated by the author of this article.

Alongside texts considered inappropriate for young children, physical violence is also extensively depicted in infant amusement verses. This is demonstrated by motifs of spanking children as well as beating and killing animals. There are also a wide range of instruments used for corporal punishment that appear in the verses; for example, a log or a whip, but most frequently mentioned are twigs:

<i>Cep, cep kukul,</i>	I bake, I bake a loaf,
<i>Nesīs pāde,</i>	I'll bring it to my godmother,
<i>Izcep gārd,</i>	Comes out tasty,
<i>Apēd pats,</i>	Eat it myself,
<i>Aiznes pāde</i>	Take to my godmother
<i>Garoziņ vien.</i>	The crust alone.
<i>Pād man izkūl</i>	My godmother beats me
<i>Ar bērz žagar,</i>	With birch twigs,
<i>Pārtecēj mājās</i>	I come home
<i>Raudādams.</i> (LFK Bdz 1959, 4)	Weeping. (LFK Bdz 1959, 4)

The corporal punishment of a child with twigs is often mentioned, and this indicates that this was a widespread and accepted method of upbringing. Spanking and twigs appear as a means of discipline and punishment for various breaches – including, for example, gluttony, laziness, and theft. This was also used as a deterrent to ensure the child's obedience and good behavior; for example:

<i>Op, op, zirdziņ,</i>	Hop, hop, little horse,
<i>Lec par grāvīti</i>	Leap over the ditch
<i>Puisišam pēc žagariem!</i>	To fetch some twigs for the boy!
(LFK Bdz 2495, 3)	(LFK Bdz 2495, 3)

This example does not state the exact reason for the twigs to be fetched. It does seem to indicate that twigs are an integral part of everyday life with children. The range of tools used for punishment is not limited to twigs because the verses also mention being smacked with a ladle, a wooden spoon, or a club. Mostly this kind of beating is performed if the child refuses to eat the food that has been prepared, but it could also be used simply for preventive reasons. Acceptance of child spanking appears in the beliefs genre. It describes how exactly and with what means it is better to spank children so that they grow up obedient and decent. One belief states that a close and loving relationship between parents and children cannot be established without any spanking. For example: "A child who is spanked a lot by his mother will grow up to love his mother" (LTT 3089). Infant amusement verses about twigs and spanking are no longer recorded nowadays, which likely means that they are also no longer used.



Child spanking is not the only physical violence in infant amusement verses. Tools for beating animals are also mentioned. The texts provide numerous examples of colloquial terms for a whip – *džindžala*, *dandaks*, *daudara*, *dandara*, or *dandas* – traditionally used for controlling horses:

<i>Jājam, jājam Pēter' tirgū,</i>	Riding, riding to Peter's market,
<i>Džindžala palika mājās;</i>	Left a whip at home;
<i>Kamēr jājam džindžalai pakal,</i>	While we're riding to get the whip,
<i>Tikmēr tirgus nobeidzās.</i> (LFK Bdz 1347, 8)	The market ended. (LFK Bdz 1347, 8)

Extreme violence as killing is also mentioned in infant amusement verses. Most often the topic is animal slaughter, such as the killing and cooking of hedgehogs mentioned¹³ earlier in this article. Such texts are likely to highlight the consumption of animals normally not used for food, which deliberately creates an exaggerated and comic effect. The educational psychology researcher Tija Zīriņa discusses this understanding of the text. Describing the importance of finger play in infancy, she mentions the example of eating hedgehogs: "Latvian children's folklore is rich in various jokes. It helps to attract children's attention to finger play. See, for example, this folk song about eating hedgehogs" (Zīriņa, 2009: 60). Fun, joy, and humor are very important in infant amusement verses because one of the functions of the genre is to attract or distract a child's attention – for example when a child is impatient to eat – and it can be solved with fun and dynamic content. Nevertheless, the verse about hitting hedgehogs is not in use today. A formerly marginal version of the text with swatting flies and cooking them instead of hedgehogs has gained popularity today:

<i>Sitam, sitam plaukstiņas, kaunam mušiņas,</i>	Let's clap the hands and kill the flies
<i>Metam podā, vārījam;</i>	And throw them in the pot and boil:
<i>Tēvam gaļa, mātei gaļa,</i>	Meat for the father, dice for the mother,
<i>Bērniem zupa podiņā!</i> ¹⁴	Soup in a bowl for the children.

For the past ten years, the verse has been widely popular; it is taught in nurseries and preschools – and is also used for children's dances.¹⁵ Apparently, there is no social objection to the story about swatting and cooking flies; it is seen as a joke about cooking inedible insects. Thus, a formerly dominant version of the verse has been discarded in favor of a milder version of the same text, which is in line with the contemporary

¹³ See the example "Sitam, kaujam" above.

¹⁴ For an example of an internet portal dedicated to young parents on which some infant amusement verses are published, see www.maminuklubs.lv.

¹⁵ For an example of the integration of the text into a wide potpourri of songs used by a children's dance group, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9rdOny3ydY>.

understanding of content appropriate for children. Whether or not to use it is up to the adults; they are free to choose to teach the verse or not in families and preschool settings.

Some verses end with a beheading or cutting a person's throat, but it is not specified who has been killed:

*Vāru, vāru putriņu,
Trīs milti katliņā;
Tam došu, tam došu,
Tam pietrūka krējumiņa,
Špirkt, kakliņš nost!
Čir, čir, čir, asintiņi aliņā!*
(LFK 1177, 20297)

I boil, I boil porridge,
Three flours in a pot;
Some to that one, some to that one,
Not enough cream for that one,
Slash, off at the neck!
Drip, drip, drip blood into the cave!¹⁶
(LFK 1177, 20297)

The action descriptions for this type of text say that the index finger is stirred into the hollow of the child's hand as if porridge were boiled, and then the fingers are counted. Usually the little finger is placed on the palm or pulled, and at this movement it is said *Knaukšķ, kakliņš nost!* “Knock the neck off!” (LFK Bdz 1957, 4) or *Šim galva nost – čiks!* “This one's head off – čiks!” (LFK Bdz 2203, 5), as if imitating the slaughter of an animal. The ending of this text may seem unacceptable for contemporary society, especially if it is performed for a small child. It should be considered, however, that the breeding and butchering of domestic animals in households was common and widespread in Latvia as late as the 1990s. It was even more prevalent in the 1920s, when many of the infant amusement verses were recorded. When the throat-cutting episode is viewed in this context, it may no longer seem so extraordinary, although it is highly unlikely that the verse is still in active use.

Use of substances

The purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages and tobacco, theft, marital relations, and erotic innuendo are some of the activities considered inappropriate or even criminal nowadays because young children are not ready for that kind of content according to their parents or the general public. Substances such as alcohol and tobacco frequently occur in infant amusement verses. Although not expressly emphasized, the purchase and consumption such substances are not hidden either. Alcohol and tobacco in the verses are symbolic of the masculine world. Tobacco in particular is often mentioned in the verse types featuring travel or riding to a manor, a market, or town.

¹⁶ In infant amusement verses, a common model involves illustrating the content of the text through accompanying movements. However, in this particular case, the process is reversed — the final line of the verse emerges from the movement itself. As in many similar texts, this one concludes with the tickling of the child's armpit, which is symbolically represented as a cave — even though, in terms of content, this final line is not thematically connected to the rest of the text.



*Dop, dop Rīgā,
Pārdop mājā;
Pārvēd tēvam tabaciņ,
Vecam tēvam pīpgalviņ,
Mātei cukur gabaliņ!*
(LFK Bdz 3794, 5)

Clip clop to Riga,
Clop home again;
Bring tobacco to father,
A pipe bowl to grandpa,
For mother a lump of sugar!
(LFK Bdz 3794, 5)

The “I” in the verses is the child who goes to town with the aim of buying tobacco, which in some verse variants is brought home as a present for those that stayed or is consumed by the child himself or herself. Mostly it is stated that tobacco is for smoking, but in one particular text there are three different uses mentioned: for smoking, as snuff, and for chewing: *Tēvam pīpot, mātei šņaukāt, / Vecam tēvam aiz lūpas bāzt* “For father to smoke, for mother as snuff, / For grandpa to shove behind his lip” (LFK Bdz 1737, 3).

The most frequent alcoholic beverage encountered in infant amusement verses is beer, with occasional instances of wine and homemade spirit. Beer is mentioned as a drink for celebrations and festivities, including in verses such as *Brauksim brālos, / Saldu alu dzersim* “Let’s go visit brothers, / Sweet beer we will drink” (LFK Bdz 724, 24) and in text variants on cooking porridge, where beer takes the place of porridge:

<i>Te pelīte brūvēja</i>	Here a mouse brewed
<i>Saldu saldu alutiņu.</i>	Sweet, sweet beer.
<i>Tam deva, tam deva,</i>	Some to that one, some to that one,
<i>Tam deva, tam deva,</i>	Some to that one, some to that one,
<i>Tam nenieka neiedeva –</i>	Gives nothing to that one:
<i>Aiztek mājā raudādams – vidžu, vidžu vurr!</i> (LFK Bdz 106, 4)	Runs home crying – vidžu, vidžu, vurr! (LFK Bdz 106, 4)

Similar verses about cooking porridge are common elsewhere in Europe; for example, there is a finger game popular in Poland, in which the main character, a magpie, is described by the researcher Barbara Žebrowska-Mazur. In her analysis of the text *Tu sroczka kaszkę warzyła* … “Here the little magpie cooked porridge …”, which depicts cooking and sharing porridge, the author provides an ethnolinguistic analysis of variants of this text (Žebrowska-Mazur, 2024). She concludes that the finger game has a pan-Slavic character; it is known not only in Poland, but also in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine, and possibly in the wider Slavic region. Just as in Latvian folklore, the Polish versions of the text also include brewing beer alongside boiling porridge,¹⁷ and this is recited to young children nowadays.

¹⁷ An example in Polish:
*Tu sroczka piwko warzyła,
ogonek sobie sparzyła,*

Here the magpie was brewing beer,
She burned her tail,

Mentioning beer is not avoided in other Latvian children's songs and verses. A children's song about a ferret that brews beer enjoys popularity in Latvia.¹⁸ It is included in the repertoire of many children's song and dance groups, and it is also used as teaching material when learning Latvian.¹⁹ The song speaks about a small amount of raw materials yielding a lot of beer that it is also unusually strong. In similar mythical folk songs, it is mentioned that the magical beer is made by various birds and beasts as well as divine beings. It is likely that this is not ordinary beer, but that the children's verses instead preserve an ancient view of beer as a magical drink (Kursīte, 1999: 229–231). Parents and children use these texts nowadays with no attention to the fact that they speak about an alcoholic drink. Apparently, mentioning alcohol in verses for children does not cause as much sensitivity in Latvian society as spanking, given that the use of these verses has not been eradicated and is still accepted. The Latvian Academy of Culture conducted a survey on people's perception of cultural heritage in 2019. The survey reveals that brewing beer along with other craft practices is considered a characteristic example of intangible cultural heritage in Latvia. Beer is seen by respondents as one of the traditional beverages that they would like to be included in the list of intangible cultural heritage (Treimane, 2019: 116). This principle is also reflected in the use of folklore texts; that is, beer in folklore texts is not perceived by teachers and parents as inappropriate for children. Along with other national food and drinks, beer is experienced as part of Latvian traditional cultural values.

When speaking of going to the pub, the consumption of alcohol in Latvian infant amusement verses is mentioned indirectly in subtle way, as in the following example:

<i>Krip, krap kājiņas,</i>	Tip, tap little feet,
<i>Kājiņas krogā gāj’;</i>	Little feet off to the pub;
<i>Lintur, lentur mājā,</i>	Wibble, wobble home again,
<i>Mājā nāk.</i> (LFK Bdz 3649, 2)	Going back home. (LFK Bdz 3649, 2)

temu dala troszeczkę,
temu dala miseczkę,
temu dala garnuszek,
temu dala dzbanuszek,
a temu nic nie dala,
tylko ogonkiem pomachala
i fur poleciala
 (from Rogi in the district of Miejsce Piastowe; Źebrowska-Mazur, 2023: 285).

She gave this one a little,
 She gave this one a bowl,
 She gave this one a pot,
 She gave this one a jug,
 And she didn't give this one anything,
 She just flicked her tail
 And flew away

¹⁸ Example:
Aiz kalniņa dūmi kūp, –
Kas tos dūmus kūpināja?
Seskis dara alutinu,
Tas tos dūmus kūpināja. (LD 2323)

Behind the hill the smoke is rising, –
 Where is the smoke coming from?
 The ferret is brewing beer,
 He is the one making the smoke. (LD 2323)

¹⁹ One example is material for learning Latvian prepared by the American Latvian Association, which includes the song 'Aiz kalniņa dūmi kūp' with the aim of supporting children and non-Latvian speakers in an attractive and simple way: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDK0NZCQNPu>.



Going to the pub and back is onomatopoetically portrayed: getting there is quick and easy but coming home after drinking is clumsy. There are at least two levels of interpretation of the text. A little child most likely would not understand the implications and would enjoy playing together, and the hidden meaning of the verse would become a source of laughter and merriment for the adult.

Disapproval of alcohol consumption stems from modern social norms: the purchase and use of alcohol and tobacco is prohibited for children today, but this has not always been the case. An article published in the Latvian press in the 1920s refers to earlier times, when a glass of beer or even schnapps was given to children to help them sleep.²⁰ Already at that time, parents were educated about the harmful effects of alcoholic beverages on children's health and development. However, most of the folk songs mentioning alcohol or tobacco were recorded in the 1920s, according to the Archives of Latvian Folklore. This means that topics connected to tobacco and alcohol were not considered problematic for children, and that the verses were widely used and perceived as a joke.

Marital relations and criminal activities

Theft is another controversial activity depicted with humor in infant amusement verses. In the western part of Latvia, texts about stealing turnips are widespread:

*Jāju, jāju rāceņ's zagt,
Satiek rāceņ' saimeniek',
Žvīgs, žvāgs, maišels krūmos,
Es pats grāvē – špurks!*
(LFK 1965, 2629)

I ride, I ride turnips to steal,
Meet the turnip owner,
Swish, swoosh sack in the bushes,
I myself in a ditch – poof!
(LFK 1965, 2629)

Texts with this kind of motif can be found in many variations and describe going off to steal either turnips or carrots. Various versions reflect different plot twists: the thief obtains the turnips and arrives home safe and sound, or he is caught in the act by the owner and receives a beating. The verse can also conclude with falling into a ditch. It is characteristic of verses of this type, as well as of the infant amusement verses overall, that the story is narrated in the first person. The agent is "I" or "we": the child either on his own or together with an adult. He goes to the market, rides a horse, and drinks beer, and thus the story is presented as though he were a grown-up.

²⁰ In the first issue of 1924 of the newspaper *Nākotnes Spēks* (Future Force), which was devoted to the education of children, one of the authors writes that "one often hears that children sleep better if they have a glass of beer or even schnapps. Those that give alcohol to children should know that every drop of alcohol is a dangerous poison for the child's body" (*Nākotnes Spēks*, 1924: 50).

Marriage and marital relations are also part of the topics touched upon in infant amusement verses. There is a very extensive typological group about a wife falling out of a cart:

*Tilli, tilli, buku, buku,
Sievu vedu vezumā,
Pats tecēju kājiņām,
Stabulītes taisīdams.
Atskatos atpakaļ –
Mana sieva izkrituse!*
(LFK 26, 344)

*Tilli, tilli, buku, buku,
My wife in a carriage,
I run on my feet,
Making whistles.
Looking back –
My wife's fallen out!*
(LFK 26, 344)

The texts portray both respectful and loving as well as hostile relations between husbands and wives. However, negative comments about wives predominate, as in the following example: *Sieva, sterva, izkritusi* “The wife, the nasty one, has fallen out” (LFK 665, 634).

*Nu man bija laba laime,
Kad no vecās vaļā tiku;
Pēc kādām nedēļām
Jaunu sievu mājā vedu.*
(LFK Bdz 1376, 17)

*Well, I was very lucky,
When I got rid of the old one;
In some weeks
Took a new wife home.*
(LFK Bdz 1376, 17)

The subject matter and attitudes expressed in this group of texts suggest that the texts were initially intended as entertainment for adults rather than for children. Based on their content, Krišjānis Barons (1835-1923), a compiler of *Latvju dainas* (Latvian Dainas), placed this group of texts in a section called *Laulātu ļaužu, vīra un sievas, sadzīve* (Married People: Husband and Wife, Conjugal Life; LD III, 3). The section contains thirty-four texts.

The compilers of the scholarly edition of *Latviešu tautasdziesmas* (Latvian Folk Songs) chose a different approach. Volume six of the collection (LTdz IV) was published in 1993 featuring folk songs about birth and christening as well as songs about the care, upbringing, and instruction of children. Given the similar activities accompanying the verses, the texts with the motif of a wife falling out of a cart have been placed in the section featuring dandling songs, 247 in total. The comments of informants and recorders also confirm that these folk songs were intended for children and were used for dandling. The comments are available in the Archives of Latvian Folklore, such as the following example: *Šo dziesmiņu dziedot, bērnus uzsēdina uz ceļiem un jādina* “When singing this song, children are placed on the knees and dandled” (LFK Bdz 204, 16).



There has been no in-depth discussion of this set of texts among Latvian folklore scholars or educators; they have largely been ignored. According to Iona and Peter Opie, most of the rhymes we now call nursery rhymes were not originally created for children at all, but “are survivals of an adult code of joviality” and are surprisingly inappropriate for babies (Opie, Opie, 1997: 3). This is presumably also the case with the Latvian verses about the wife fallen out along the way because they deal with the relationship between husband and wife, and the content is primarily addressed to adults.

Conclusions

The practice of collecting, publishing, and studying infant amusement verses in Latvia differs from practices in western Europe. This has influenced the quantity and content of this genre of folklore. In English- and German-speaking cultures, nursery rhymes, including infant amusement verses, were already collected and published in the 18th and 19th centuries. Research on these texts commenced shortly after their publication, and therefore the content of rhymes has undergone a different development. The publication of children’s songs in Latvia did not start until the beginning of the 20th century, when volume one of the collection *Latvju dainas* (Latvian Dainas) was published. A more extensive collection of children’s songs took place in the 1920s and 1930s, under the aegis of the Archives of Latvian Folklore. This material was published only in 1993 with the release of volume six of the collected Latvian folk songs. Hence Latvian infant amusement verses remained inherited only in the oral folk tradition for much longer; they were not influenced by published texts. Fairly late publication in turn possibly ensured the diversity and quantity of infant amusement verses that have remained extant until the present day. There are also differences among some European cultures in terms of content: popular songs, ballads, verses with a literary origin, and so on have always been separated from folk songs in Latvian traditional culture and are not included in children’s folklore materials. In contrast, both German and English nursery rhymes include religious, political, and other content suitable for adult entertainment as well as verses that were composed as part of the written tradition. Despite the existence of scholarly editions of children’s songs and individual anthologies, the infant amusement verses collected at the Archives of Latvian Folklore were not published in their entirety until now because they were not regarded as a unified genre, and texts that do not fit the classical folk song form were excluded. This deficiency will be corrected by the author of this article in the forthcoming book *Latviešu bērnu folklore: Ucināmās dziesmas* (Latvian Children’s Folklore: Infant Amusement Verses), containing all available materials in this genre (i.e., more than four thousand texts).

The infant amusement verse materials collected permit an examination of various controversial issues such as, for example, the portrayal of violence in texts intended for

young children. As a constituent part of traditional culture, infant amusement verses exhibit varying notions from different eras about children and the content suitable for them. Some verses that are now considered infant amusement songs have entered children's folklore from the adult tradition and were not originally intended for children.

Perceptions regarding children and childhood have evolved over time. In the 1960s, the social historian Philippe Ariès was the first to draw attention to the idea that childhood or children's age was a social construct rather than a biological and natural quality. In medieval Europe, children tended to be regarded as small adults that were in the process of formation rather than discrete individuals forming part of differing age groups (Ariès, 1962: 17–32). This clarification is also backed by examples of Latvian infant amusement verses with content more suitable for adults that might often be not understood by children at all. At the same time, the use of traditional infant amusement songs and verses has expanded. In the 1920s, short texts were recited to children by their relatives at home – most often by mothers or grandmothers, but also by older siblings. Today infant amusement verses are actively used in preschools, and they are staged and performed by children's song and dance groups.

In infant amusement verses, violence is expressed both through depictions of physical actions and through themes or narratives that, from a contemporary perspective, are considered inappropriate for children. In terms of content, they appear as brief, anecdotal "narratives" that soften the violence and lessen its impact with the help of humour. Both parents and educators primarily focus on cases of physical violence in children's folklore texts, such as spanking. These verses are gradually being marginalized or deliberately pushed out of circulation. Nowadays, violence is a sensitive topic, especially in the context of publications intended for children. Infant amusement verses that include content incomprehensible to young children –such as the purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages and tobacco, theft, marital relations, erotic innuendo, and so on – are usually not recognized as problematic in terms of understanding violence. In some cases, verses with "inappropriate content" are overlooked, as in the case with beer; such verses are instead seen as oral heritage to be preserved and passed on. In studies carried out up until now, the significance of infant amusement verses has been highlighted in the foreground with the aspect of simple entertainment and socializing relegated to the back. The issue of unacceptable topics has also been ignored. The dual nature of the texts in terms of content has been confusing when compiling selections and doing research work as well – hence, occasionally texts have been classified for adults. The popularity of certain texts has varied over time as determined by social processes. All the same, throughout the ages infant amusement verses have been intended to be recited or sung under conditions of equal participation, in which children and adults enjoy a mutual experience together, and the choice of texts always remains with the adult.



Research data statement

The author declares that this article is based on ethnographic research materials from the Archives of Latvian Folklore and the author's fieldwork, including qualitative interviews. All archival sources and published references are cited in the bibliography. Further information regarding the research materials, if not publicly accessible or cited, is available upon request from the author.

Abbreviations

LD = Krišjānis Barons and Henrijs Visendorfs, eds. 1894–1915. *Latvju Dainas* 1–6. Jelgava, Saint Petersburg: H. J. Drawin-Drawneeka general-komisijā, Keisariskas Sinibū Akademijas speestawa.

LFK = Archives of Latvian Folklore (*Latviešu folkloras krātuve*).

LFK Bdz = Collection of children's verses and songs in the Archives of Latvian Folklore (*Latviešu folkloras krātuves Bērnu dziesmu kolekcija*).

LTdz = *Latviešu tautasdziesmas* 1–12. 1955–2023. Rīga: Zinātne.

LT = Pēteris Šmits, 1941. *Latviešu tautas ticējumi*. Vol. 9. Rīga: Latviešu Folkloras krātuves izdevums ar Kultūras Fonda pabalstu.

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Ponovna ocena latvijskih otroških razvedrilnih pesmi: teksti in konteksti

Članek obravnava zgodovino otroških razvedrilnih pesmi in z njimi povezano terminologijo v latvijskem tisku ter pesmi umešča v mednarodni kontekst. Raziskave latvijske otroške folklore, ki so bile večinoma izvedene sredi prejšnjega stoletja, so bile osredinjene na pedagoški pomen otroških razvedrilnih pesmi, čeprav se te pesmi niso vselej uporabljale za namen poučevanja in vzgoje otrok. Danes je določena vsebina takih pesmi lahko sporna in je zaradi prikazov nasilja opredeljena kot neprimerena za otroško občinstvo.

V članku obravnavane pesmi so kratka ritmična besedila, namenjena otrokom. Spremljajo jih gibi, kot so: igranje z otrokovimi prsti, rokami in nogami; žgečkanje in božanje; zibanje oz. zibanje na kolenih ali nogah odrasle osebe. Besedila in telesni gibi so med izvajanjem tega folklornega žanra neločljivo povezani. Glede na izvedene gibe je otroške razvedrilne pesmi mogoče razdeliti v štiri skupine: 1) zibajoče pesmi; 2) pesmi, ki jih spremlja igra prstov in rok; 3) pesmi, ki jih spremlja igra z otrokovimi nogami; 4) pesmi, ki jih spremlja božanje ali žgečkanje otroka.

Pojem ‘otroške razvedrilne pesmi’ (lat. *ucināmās dziesmas*) je v latvijski folkloristiki nov. Uvedla ga je avtorica članka, ker tovrstne pesmi dolgo niso veljale za poseben žanr otroške folklore, temveč so bile deloma uvrščene med ljudske pesmi, deloma pa med otroške igre. Otroške razvedrilne pesmi odpirajo razmislek o temah, povezanih s fizičnim nasiljem in drugimi vsebinami, ki so v sodobni družbi neprimerne za otroke. Med take vsebine sodijo prikazi nezaželenega ali celo kaznivega vedenja, kot so nakup in uživanje alkoholnih pijač in tobaka, kraja, zakonski spori in erotični podtoni. Fizično nasilje je prikazano neposredno z različnimi oblikami telesnega kaznovanja, npr. z udarci po zadnjici, in umori. Posebna pozornost je v članku namenjena ravno oblikam fizičnih kazni in nasilja, kot sta izražena v latvijskih otroških razvedrilnih pesmih, ki za sodobno otroško občinstvo niso več samoumevne in sprejemljive.

France Marolt's Research, Artistic and Educational Work as Reflected on Sound Recordings

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The article examines a less researched aspect of France Marolt's work: his sound recordings on direct cut 78 rpm gramophone discs. Using the Gailtal Wedding (*ziljska ohcet*) recordings as a case study, it analyses the context of the recordings, presents the metadata collected and discusses the recording technique used. It places the recordings in the history of Slovenian folk music research and in Marolt's broader work and shows the interweaving of his artistic, research and pedagogical activities.

• **Keywords:** France Marolt, sound documents, gramophone records, folk music research, Gailtal Wedding (*ziljska ohcet*)

Članek obravnava manj raziskani vidik dela Franceta Marolta – njegove zvočne posnetke na direktno rezanih gramofonskih ploščah z 78 vrtljaji na minuto. Avtor v članku analizira kontekst Maroltovih posnetkov *ziljske ohceti*, predstavlja zbrane metapodatke in obravnava uporabljeno tehniko snemanja. Posnetke umešča v zgodovinski okvir raziskovanja ljudske glasbe na Slovenskem in v širše Maroltovo delo ter prikazuje preplet njegovih umetniških, raziskovalnih in pedagoških dejavnosti.

• **Ključne besede:** France Marolt, zvočni dokumenti, gramofonske plošče, raziskovanje ljudske glasbe, *ziljska ohcet*

Introduction

Shortly after their invention, sound recording devices were quickly adopted by ethnomusicologists and folklorists who recognised their methodological advantages over manual transcription. Scholars emphasised their objectivity, precision, and ability for repeated playback, which allowed for more accurate analysis and documentation – especially of musical forms that were considered “untranscribable” with Western notation. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Carl Stumpf and Ludvik Kuba pointed out the essential role of the phonograph in capturing the soundscapes of non-European and oral music traditions, marking a turning point in the scientific study of music (Stumpf, 2000 [1908]: 67; Kuba, 1909: 273). A little later, Béla Bartók emphasised the extent to which the development of ethnomusicology depended on Edison's invention of the phonograph (Sárosi, 1981), while Jaap Kunst argued that ethnomusicology would not have emerged as an independent scientific discipline without this technology (Kunst, 1955: 19).

The establishment of early sound archives in the late 19th and early 20th centuries further advanced folk music research. These collections, created explicitly for scholarly purposes, aimed to document folk music through phonographic recordings to support various comparative studies. Often referred to as storehouses of tradition (Seeger, 1986: 262)



and compared in importance to libraries in other academic disciplines (Nettl, 1964: 17), sound archives were intended to preserve endangered or “authentic” musical forms for future generations. In Slovenia, this archival task was institutionalised with the founding of the Folklore Institute in 1934, where France Marolt and his successors attempted to compile the most comprehensive collection of Slovenian musical folklore – an endeavour in which sound recordings played a crucial role.

However, sound recordings cannot be considered reliable scholarly sources without accompanying metadata and a thorough understanding of the context of their creation. They are significantly shaped by various methodological and technical factors and reflect the perspectives and intentions of the researchers who produced them. This article focuses precisely on these issues and examines how France Marolt’s research, creative, and pedagogical intentions – often intertwined with his national ideas and aspirations – manifest themselves in his gramophone recordings.

France Marolt (1891-1951) was a versatile artist, researcher and teacher and a personality who was active in many areas of Slovenian culture and science in the first half of the 20th century. He was the founder, conductor and choirmaster of the Academic Choir, i.e. the University of Ljubljana’s student choir (1926), and the founder of the folk dance ensemble (1948), which was later renamed to the France Marolt Academic Folk Dance Ensemble in his honour and is one of the most renowned folk dance ensembles in Slovenia today. The founding of the Folklore Institute (today’s Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU) by the Music Society (Glasbena Matica) in 1934 and the preparation of the institute’s work plan and research guidelines make him the pioneer of institution-based folk music research in Slovenia. As some researchers emphasise, Marolt is undoubtedly still regarded today as “an icon of Slovenian music and folk culture” (Arko Klemenc, 2004: 49).

France Marolt was also “a unique and strong personality” and “a person who took a critical look at all aspects of life” (Vodušek, 1951: 2), which was reflected in his work. Zmaga Kumer, who was one of Marolt’s first students and later also his associate, had the following to say about him:

He was an extraordinary personality, full of artistic and creative impulses, a person with a rich imagination, rashly infatuated with everything Slovenian, more intuitive than rational, more emotionally fired than intellectually cool. (Kumer, 1991: 13)

Marolt’s artistic and research work has been the subject of many discussions, studies and reviews, and is relatively well known in professional circles in Slovenia.¹

¹ Most historical overviews of music in Slovenia mention Marolt’s work as a choirmaster and composer (e. g. Cvetko, 1960; Misson, 2018), several of them appraise his Academic Choir-related work (Špindler, 1968; Moličnik, 2006), and many also highlight his research work and the role he played in the establishment

Some of these studies include critical reflections on Marolt's research and work, i.e. the authors identified some constructions of the scientific sources used to prove the imagined theoretical framework (cf. Kumer, 1991), they pointed out the ways Marolt interfered with the dance tradition and influenced the development of folklorism and amateur folklore activities (Kunej R., 2004, 2017), as well as explored Marolt's folk song arrangements in the context of musical nationalism and his orientation toward the search for "everything Slovenian" in them (Arko Klemenc, 2004). In doing so, they also wondered how much of Marolt's research work amounted to hypothetical claims and even hasty unproven conclusions, and whether some of his explanations may have been the result of him being first an artist and second a scientist (Orel, 1951: 389).

The focus of this paper is on a less researched area of Marolt's work, i.e. the work related to the recorded sound materials that were created as part of his artistic, educational, and research activities. The recordings have been preserved in the sound archives of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU and constitute the first sound collection assembled by the institute. The recordings on unique gramophone records, made with special direct cut technology, provide resounding proof of Marolt's work. For a long time, researchers were unable to use these recordings as they could not be played due to the obsolete mechanical sound carriers and the lack of suitable playback equipment. A few years ago, this collection of gramophone records was digitised, however, the material was accompanied only with the very basic and often inadequate metadata, which did not allow it to be used as a good scientific source, and was thus not particularly interesting and useful to researchers.

The study is primarily based on the analysis of audio and other archival material,² as well as on the study of various sources and literature on Marolt's work in relation to sound recordings and on his research and artistic activities in a broader context. In this respect, it serves as a continuation, supplement and extension of the existing study on Marolt's efforts to document folk music through sound (Kunej D. 2020), which was one of the first more detailed studies on the subject.

Based on a case study of the Gailtal Wedding (*ziljska ohcet*) recordings, the paper explores the circumstances in which sound recordings on gramophone records were made, presents various collected metadata that shed light on and explain the recorded material, and describes the basic technical characteristics of the used recording technology. Several research questions were raised in relation to this sound collection. Could the recordings have been made as part of Marolt's field research or are these

of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU (cf. Kumer, 1991; Cigoj Krstulović, 2014; Barbo, 2019), as well as his life and work in general (e.g. Vodušek, 1951; Gobec, 1965; Mrak, 2015).

² Archival sources from the Institute of Ethnomusicology, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (GNI ZRC SAZU), are cited in the text as A-GNI; those from the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ISN ZRC SAZU), as A-ISN; and those from the Music Section of the National and University Library (NUK) as A-NUK.



studio recordings and his arrangements and reconstructions of folk music? Can the preserved sound recordings, the metadata and various other recording-related materials be used to determine when, where and how exactly these recordings were made as no such data is provided on the records? It also remains to be researched how familiar he was with the sometimes fruitful, sometimes problematic interrelation of scholarship and art, which was repeatedly observed in folk music researchers and collectors (cf. Morgenstern, 2020). Placing the recordings in a historical context of the Slovenian folk music research and the relationship with France Marolt's other work serves the purpose of finding out how Marolt viewed the Gailtal Wedding recordings, and whether they reflect the characteristic intertwining of his artistic, research, and educational work.

Artistic work interwoven with research

France Marolt's musical journey began in childhood under the guidance of his father, who introduced him to music theory and harmony. He learnt to play the violin, taught himself to play the piano and helped his father transcribe music for choirs. He showed initiative early on and founded and conducted a male-voice octet in 1909, while he was only a sixth-grade student, although his dedication to music affected his school performance. After graduating from grammar school, Marolt was drafted into the First World War and served on the Galician and Isonzo fronts, where he was seriously wounded. After the war, he briefly took up further studies, but soon abandoned them to devote himself entirely to music as a profession.

From 1919 to 1924, Marolt was choirmaster of the Primorska Quartet, which later became known as the Slovenian Quartet. The years 1924–1926 were particularly formative: as deputy choirmaster of the prestigious choir of the Music Society (Glasbena Matica) he gained invaluable experience and developed a clear vision for his future cultural contributions. He also taught piano and singing at the newly founded Ljubljana Conservatory and wrote a textbook for his students, the *Singing Exercise Book*, in 1925. Driven by a desire to explore new approaches to choral performance, particularly focussing on the interpretation of folk songs, Marolt founded the Academic Choir in 1926. The choir, made up of students from the University of Ljubljana, marked the beginning of his highly successful artistic career and his commitment to the integration of folk music into the choral tradition.

During this time, Marolt worked as a music critic for the *Ljubljanski Zvon* newspaper, where he met art historian and curator of the Ethnographic Museum, Stanko Vurnik.³

³ An art historian by education, Dr Stanko Vurnik (1898–1932) also worked as an ethnologist and musicologist. He grew up in a musical environment and authored numerous newspaper articles, which polemicized cultural events and happenings. He published a number of musical and fine art reviews and advocated for a new conception of art and for contemporary trends. He applied ideas from the field of art history in the field

Their shared interest in folk music strengthened Marolt's already deep connection to folk culture and prompted him to take a more active role in research and collecting. The Ethnographic Museum, founded in 1923, had begun to acquire and organise large folk song collections. Vurnik, who was responsible for these materials until his death in 1932, worked with Marolt in organising the collections. Influenced by this partnership, Marolt began to resume the pre-war folk song collection work that had been interrupted by the First World War.

The founding of the Academic Choir, Marolt's highly successful choral work⁴ and his passionate work with folk music laid the foundations for the establishment of the Folklore Institute in 1934, a specialised department of the Music Society that focused on researching the folk music heritage and was headed by France Marolt himself. An important milestone was the themed concert by the Academic Choir, Slovenian Folk Song Korotan, Bela Krajina, which took place on 7 May 1934. At this performance, the audience was introduced to newly arranged folk songs from Carinthia and Bela Krajina – many of which had previously been unfamiliar to both experts and the general public. Marolt wrote the detailed programme, which included a historical commentary, a stylistic analysis, and a scholarly essay on the significance of folk song in national art. The concert, which was met with great enthusiasm by both the audience and musicologists, introduced a new wave of folk song arrangements by Marolt, Oskar Dev, and Matija Tomc, which differed significantly from those of the older generation (for more see Arko Klemenc, 2004; Cigoj Krstulović, 2014).

A few months later already, in August 1934, members of the Music Society committee pointed out there was a need to systematically collect folk songs and organise the previously collected materials. They believed Marolt was just the person for the task: "Without doubt, the leading expert on folk songs in Slovenia is Mr France Marolt, the choirmaster of the Academic Choir" (A-NUK, 31.8.1934). The chief secretary of the Music Society then held several talks with Marolt to discuss its activities, which resulted in a charter describing the institute's organisation, aims and work, as well as the duties and rights of the head of the institute. Zmaga Kumer believed that "the author

of music. Although his lack of proper professional musical education sometimes led to dubious conclusions, he contributed to the foundations of Slovenian music science thanks to his zeal and principles. From 1924 onwards, he was employed at the Ethnographic Museum and started acquainting himself with ethnological themes with great enthusiasm. Apart from arranging collections, designing exhibitions and preparing comprehensive thematic publications, he also pursued his own scientific work. He published fundamental ethnological studies on Slovenian costumes, beehive panels, Slovenian homesteads on the south-eastern slopes of the Alps, and on the folk music. His approach to the material, based on comparisons with related European materials and on the study of forms and styles, indicates that he used the methodology of an art historian. (cf. Rogelj Škafar, 1998; Novak et al., 2013)

⁴ It did not take long for Marolt to create a very good choir, which was revealed at the choir's first performance in January 1927 and, even more so, at its first concert in Maribor in July of the same year, when it presented itself to the general public for the first time. The newspapers were full of praise and predicted a bright future for the choir. They also pointed out that Marolt systematically educated his singers through a special vocal school, and required complete discipline and dedication from them.



of the agreement was undoubtedly Marolt himself” and called Marolt “the institute’s conceptual founder” (Kumer, 2000: 12). Marolt was supposed to start working and take up the post of the institute’s head on 15 October 1934, which is considered the start of the institute’s work (cf. Cigoj Krstulović, 2014: 225).

When the institute was founded, Marolt was already planning to use sound recordings for collecting and researching folk music. In the charter (agreement) describing the institute’s organisation, aims and work, the sound documentation of folk material was planned as an important part of the institute’s field research. In order to achieve the institute’s main objective, which was “to compile the most comprehensive collection of Slovenian musical folklore, i.e. to collect all the existing song-related materials that were available in written form [...] and continuously add new ones”, the charter listed the institute’s work tasks in detail, in particular “documenting and phonographing folklore material” (A-NUK, 14.9.1934). Marolt intended to begin recording as soon as possible (cf. A-GNI, Zn. dps. 1/1(1), 1934), but was unable to realise this goal. Throughout his professional career, he sought to acquire a recording device for research and artistic work. Initially, he had hoped to use a simple Edison phonograph but later realised the superiority of more advanced technologies such as gramophone records, sound film, or magnetic tape. Unfortunately, the Institute was unable to acquire such equipment during his lifetime due to the high costs involved. It was only posthumously that the Institute received the necessary recording equipment to realise his vision (for more see Kunej D., 2017, 2020).

Gramophone records: “The key evidence of Slovenian sound folklore”

While artistic and research work formed a major part of Marolt’s efforts, he also dedicated significant time to public lectures and presentations, aiming to generate broader interest in folk music heritage.⁵ His goal was to engage collaborators – particularly teachers, clergy, and students – in “folkloristic work” (*folklorno delo*), and to revive the collecting of materials among the people, similar to earlier campaigns by the Commission for Collecting Slovenian Folk Songs and Their Tunes.⁶ His lectures often included photo

⁵ Marolt gave various public “ethnographic” lectures: in the winter semester of 1935/36, he lectured for conservatorium students, as well as in the Gailtal Valley/Ziljska Dolina (1935) and in the Bela Krajina region (1936), with the aim of arousing the interest of local people in folk heritage. He also made teachers aware of the importance of folk songs for “national education” and inspired them to collect songs (Domžale 1937, Ljubljana 1940). He prepared a series of radio lectures for Radio Ljubljana (1936–1937) and lectured to the general public on “modern views and newer principles of ethnographic science”, as well as on the music and characteristics of Slovenian folk dances (1937). Moreover, he planned a two-week ethnographic course in Ljubljana (1938) (cf. A-NUK, 22.5.1939).

⁶ The Odbor za Nabiranje Slovenskih Narodnih Pesmi z Napevi (OSNP) – translated as the Commission for Collecting Slovenian Folk Songs and Their Tunes – was a specialist body that operated as part of a broader ethnographic and cultural documentation initiative within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, under the collection campaign titled *Volkslieder in Österreich* (Folk Songs in Austria).

slides and musical demonstrations performed on the piano and by small vocal ensembles. Marolt repeatedly mentioned that his lectures aroused a great deal of interest.

These presentations also marked the beginning of his involvement in sound recording. The first sound recordings Marolt participated in were made during a series of 15 lectures titled Slovenian Folk Songs, broadcast from autumn 1936 to spring 1937 on the Ljubljana Radio Broadcasting Station. Marolt often played piano to illustrate musical examples; other performers who participated in the lectures were “the Sloga orchestra, a small mixed choir, the Music Society youth choir, and the Academic Choir octet” (A-GNI, Urd. dps. 55/2, 1937; A-NUK, 22.5.1939). Some of the songs from these lectures – particularly those performed by the Music Society youth choir and the Academic Choir octet – were recorded on gramophone records by Radio Ljubljana, likely starting in November 1936. These recordings garnered attention and proved valuable for other researchers. Already by 1936–1937, it was agreed that copies of these records would be made for the Folklore Institute (for more see Kunej D., 2020).

However, it took several more years for the institute to actually acquire the collection of gramophone records and no documentation has been preserved to explain in detail when and how individual records came into the institute’s possession. Also, the gramophone records are not dated, which is a general problem when it comes to older records (cf. Kunej D., 2014). It was not until after the Second World War that the archival documents and reports included information about the institute being in possession of a collection of gramophone records. In the spring of 1945 (first such report is dated 24 May 1945), i.e. immediately following the liberation, the collection consisted of 50 records, and at the end of 1945 it contained as many as 59 records. According to later reports, the number of records was even larger, however, despite some concrete plans for further recordings mentioned in archival reports and documents from that period, no detailed information exists of any such recordings, nor is it clear whether they actually took place. Thus, there are no preserved archival documents revealing when and how the recordings were made and when the institute included them in its gramophone record collection.

The preserved records in the collection confirm archival evidence suggesting that they were produced using direct cut recording technology, also known as instantaneous disc recording. This method, which was widely used from the 1930s to the late 1950s, was essential for both professional and semi-professional sound recordings. In direct cut recording, the sound signal is engraved directly onto the surface of a record using a cutting stylus. Unlike commercial records, which required galvanoplastic processing and pressing from a master, direct cut discs allowed for instant playback, bypassing these time-consuming steps. The discs were usually coated with lacquer or acetate and mounted on an aluminium or glass core. This construction made the surface soft enough to be cut into during recording, yet durable enough to withstand multiple plays without significant degradation.



These discs were particularly practical for radio broadcasts and archival documentation due to their ability to instantly produce a physical sound carrier.⁷ Their distinctive appearance – often accompanied by handwritten or typed labels – still serves as a primary means of identifying direct cut records today. Though they were produced in very limited numbers using relatively simple cutting machines, they were nonetheless invaluable tools for capturing ephemeral performances and spoken word in real time.

Initially restricted to professional settings like radio stations, disc recorders for amateur use began appearing around 1940, though their adoption was limited due to high cost. The Second World War soon halted their production. However, in the post-war years, the popularity of these machines grew significantly until the rise of magnetic tape recording in the 1950s, which offered improved fidelity, easier editing, and more efficient storage.

Following the liberation in May 1945, activities at the Institute experienced renewed vigour, as evidenced by numerous preserved archival documents. In 1947, France Marolt resumed closer collaboration with Radio Ljubljana, where he frequently encountered a variety of earlier gramophone recordings featuring arrangements of Slovenian folk songs, predominantly performed by choirs and vocal ensembles. During this period, he also prepared a new series of radio lectures dedicated to Slovenian folk music.

Today, the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU holds a collection of 69 double-sided 78 rpm gramophone records, of which 55 contain Slovenian material, while the remaining 14 feature foreign content, primarily arrangements of Russian and Ukrainian folk songs. A significant portion of the collection consists of instantaneous discs, recorded using direct cut recording technology.

Various archive documents also show that Radio Ljubljana was responsible for the production of most of these recordings. These are unique sound documents, usually preserved in a single copy, a fact emphasised in a letter from the Institute in 1953 (A-GNI, Strok. k. 31/4-53), which further enhances their documentary value. The recordings show a variety of folk song performances, often arranged by France Marolt and performed by his Academic Choir under his artistic direction. These recordings are of particular importance within the collection, as Marolt was not only the arranger of the songs, but also played a central role in shaping both the intended performance style and the overall sound of the recordings through his artistic direction. They serve as an audible manifestation of Marolt's own sonic vision – his ideal of how folk songs should sound. As Marolt himself emphasized, the institute's gramophone archive represents “the key evidence of Slovenian sound folklore”⁸ (A-GNI, Strok. k. 63/46-esc).

⁷ In the first half of the 20th century, the direct-to-disc recording technique was also used by some ethnologists, folk music researchers and folklorists to record and preserve traditional music, oral traditions and cultural forms of expression. Among the pioneers of direct cut field recordings were Alan Lomax and his father John A. Lomax, who recorded American folk traditions with portable disc cutters for the Library of Congress.

⁸ Using the term “sound folklore” (*zvočni folklor*), Marolt most likely referred to the part of folklore that is expressed by means of sound, such as folk music.

Sound recordings of the Gailtal Wedding: “Reconstructed folk culture rituals”

The case study of the Gailtal Wedding (*ziljska ohcet*) recordings aims to present the circumstances under which the sound recordings were made and, through various metadata and other recording-related sources, to examine how the recordings reflect the characteristic intertwining of Marolt's artistic, research, and educational work.

The Gailtal Wedding is an example of “reconstructed folk culture rituals”, the rituals which Marolt started studying during his first field work before the Folklore Institute was even founded. He used these collected field research materials (musical notations of folksongs, field notes) to prepare the aforementioned highly successful concert of the Academic Choir, Slovenian Folk Song: Korotan, Bela Krajina (*Slovenska Narodna Pesem: Korotan, Bela Krajina*), which was held in May 1934. Moreover, Marolt's earliest field studies, as part of which he researched various “rituals”, provided a basis for the Folklore Festivals, which he organised as part of his “restorations of Slovenian music-folkloristic attractions” (*restavracije slovenskih glasbeno-folkloarnih znamenitosti*), namely the Carinthian Day in Ljubljana in 1935, the Bela Krajina Day in Ljubljana in 1936, and the Folklore Festivals in Črnomelj and Maribor in 1939 (for more information, see Kunej R., 2004).

As part of his field research in Gailtal,⁹ Marolt documented 72 songs, which are included in the archives of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU as the “Gailtail records” (A-GNI, Korzps I, Korzps II), and he also collected various other ethnomusicological materials. In line with the Folklore Institute's plans, i.e. to take a critical approach to publishing the researched folkloric material, he published the results of his field research in a series titled *Slovenian Ethnological Studies* (*Slovenske Narodoslovne Študije*). In the first volume of this series, titled *Three Rituals from Gailtal* (*Tri Obredja iz Zilje*), he presented the rituals from Carinthia (Marolt, 1935). This volume was published in time to complement the aforementioned Carinthian Day, which took place in early October 1935. Both the publication and the event itself presented three rituals from Gailtal: the Štehvanje tournament (*štehvanje*), the Rej dance under a linden tree (*visoki rej pod lipo*), and the Gailtal Wedding (*ziljska ohcet*). According to Marolt, these were without doubt the oldest remnants of Slovenian rituals, which had been partially preserved and showed the “mystical character” of the common people (Marolt, 1935: 3). All three rituals have been sound-documented on 78 rpm gramophone records, and the recordings of the Gailtal Wedding will be analysed as an example below.

The entire Gailtal Wedding sound recording is presented on three double-sided 78 rpm records: one part on each side, i.e. a total of six parts (a tabular comparison is

⁹ The Gailtal (Slovenian: Zilja) is a valley in the south of Austria, located in the province of Carinthia. Although it is considered as culturally and linguistically part of the “Slovenian ethnic area”, it was not incorporated into the borders of Slovenia (then part of Yugoslavia) after the First World War and remained part of Austria. The region is known for its Slovenian-speaking minority.



provided in Figure 1). A detailed comparison of the recorded materials and the text of the Gailtal Wedding rituals in the book *Three Rituals from Gailtal* further reveals that the recording follows the published description and text quite faithfully.¹⁰ According to an analysis of the recorded content, the records feature several wedding rituals related to the groom's and wedding guests' arrival at the bride's house, i.e. they call for the bride to come out – there is some good-natured banter and the groom is offered “fake” brides, the bride says goodbye to her family and receives a blessing, which ends with the wedding guests leaving for the wedding ceremony. All of this is described in two chapters of the book *Three Rituals from Gailtal*, namely ‘Guests on the Way to the Bride's Home’ (‘Po Nevesto Gredo’) and ‘The Bride is Accompanied from Her Home’ (‘Nevesto Odpeljejo’).¹¹ The sound recordings often include verbatim parts spoken in dialect, which are also transcribed in the book. All the songs are listed in the book and presented with a monophonic melody and a text in dialect. Furthermore, an instrumental ensemble playing a tune is also featured on the recording twice. Its tune is described in the book as a “lively mazur-polka” and is written down in a monophonic musical notation as part of the description of the Štehvanje tournament ritual.

	COMPOSER	TITLE	PERFORMER ¹²	RECORD CODE
1	/	Gailtal Wedding – Part I Gailtal Wedding – Part IV	Marolt's mixed choir	Dea 767 768
2	/	Gailtal Wedding – Part II Gailtal Wedding – Part V	Marolt's mixed choir	Dea 769 770
3	/	Gailtal Wedding – Part III Gailtal Wedding – Part VI	Marolt's mixed choir	Dea 771 772
4	/	Gailtal Wedding – Part I Gailtal Wedding – Part IV	Marolt's mixed choir	Gevaphone 1029 1030
5	/	Gailtal Wedding – Part II Gailtal Wedding – Part V	Marolt's mixed choir	Gevaphone 1031 1032

¹⁰ Marolt presented the Gailtal Wedding in detail on 25 pages and divided his presentation into six chapters, i.e. six rituals that are temporally separated, yet chronologically connected into a whole. The six rituals are: Matchmaking and Courting (*snubljenje*), Wedding Guests on the Way to the Bride's Home (*po nevesto gredo*), The Bride is Accompanied from Her Home (*nevesto odpeljejo*), The Wedding Tollgate (*zapenjalca* or *šranga*), The Wedding Ceremony and The Wedding Party (*poroka in ohcet* (*nevesto vpeljejo*)). Marolt's presentation contains detailed descriptions of individual rituals with various local expressions, verbatim excerpts from speeches and established phrases, as well as some monophonic musical notation of typical songs sung during individual ritual stages, a few examples of dance tunes (The Wedding *Rej* Dance) and photos.

¹¹ Marolt reported that only two scenes were shown at the Carinthian Day event as part of the Gailtal Wedding ritual, i.e. Guests on the Way to the Bride's Home and The Bride is Accompanied from Her Home (A-NUK, 22.5.1939).

¹² Information on the composer, title, and performers is presented as it appears on the disc labels.

6	/	Gailtal Wedding – Part III Gailtal Wedding – Part VI	Marolt's mixed choir	Gevaphone 1033 1034
7	France Marolt	Gailtal Wedding – Part I Gailtal Wedding – Part IV	Marolt's male-voice choir and local speakers	Dea 31/15a 32/15c
8	France Marolt	Gailtal Wedding – Part II Gailtal Wedding – Part V	Marolt's male-voice and local speakers	Dea 33/15b 34/15d
9	France Marolt	Gailtal Wedding – Part III Gailtal Wedding – Part VI	Marolt's male-voice and local speakers	Dea 35/15c 36/15e

Figure 1: A tabular presentation of the Gailtal Wedding recordings in the archives of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU.

The collection of 78 rpm gramophone records at the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU contains as many as three preserved versions of the entire Gailtal Wedding recording; each version is on a different record label and has different record codes. The handwritten inscriptions on the labels are also slightly different and include the recording title, the performers, the composer, and the alphanumeric record codes (see Figure 2). All the labels also state that the record contains a recording of “a folk custom from Gailtal – the Gailtal Wedding” (on the Dea label, the recording has a slightly different title: *Gailtal Nuptials*), performed by “Marolt's mixed choir”, and only the Gevaphone label also mentions Marolt as the composer. The Dea label (No. 31/15a) lists “Marolt's male-voice choir and local speakers” as the performers. A comparison of the recordings on all the preserved record copies has revealed that all three versions feature the same Gailtal Wedding recording, i.e. different records are different copies of the same recording. The label that provides the most accurate information regarding the performers is the Dea label (No. 31/15a), which lists Marolt's male-voice choir and local speakers. In fact, all the songs featured on the recording are polyphonic songs performed by male singers and the spoken part includes both male and female voices speaking in a pronounced local dialect, which proves that this was a male-voice choir and most likely speakers who were originally from Carinthia.¹³

None of the record labels include information on when and where exactly the recording was made, which makes it difficult to work out the recording date and place from looking at the records. When listening to them, however, it seems at first that this may be a recording of what is happening in the field, as various sounds accompanying the rituals can be heard, e.g. boys' shouts of joy, knocking on doors, footsteps, gunshots, carts rumbling down the road, horses' trotting, the wedding guests' laughter etc. The fact that the recording process was complicated and that specific equipment was needed for recording on gramophone records at the time, as well as the inscriptions on the record

¹³ Marolt adopted a similar approach to wedding ritual presentations as part of the Carinthian Day in 1935 in Ljubljana, where the performers included the Ljubljana-based emigrants from Carinthia, singers from the Music Society's conservatorium and the Academic Choir, as well as the instrumental sextet Sloga.

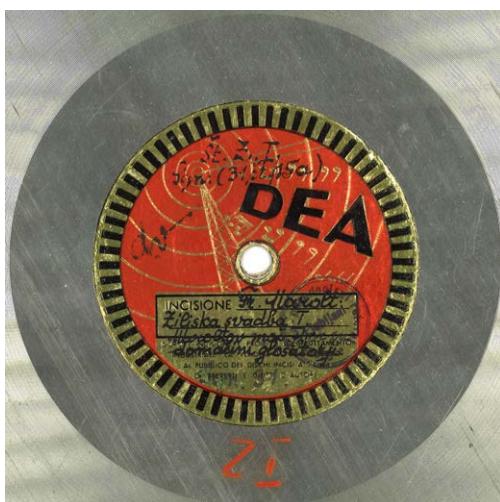


Figure 2: Three different copies of the Gailtal Wedding recording (Part I), which have been preserved in the collection of 78 rpm gramophone records in the archives of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU.

labels and Marolt's documented cooperation with Radio Ljubljana, as part of which he also recorded records, give reason to believe that the recordings were not made in the field, but in a Radio Ljubljana studio. This is further confirmed by a preserved typescript titled *The Gailtal Wedding* (A-ISN, 1945). It is immediately clear that the document is a written recording template, a script with a detailed text to be read in dialect, a chronological description of the scene, the listed singing and instrumental parts, as well as notes on their performance. A comparison of this typescript and the recordings on the gramophone records reveals that the recorded content follows the written script faithfully, both in terms of the chronological order of the recorded events and the presented musical acts, as well as all dialectal peculiarities of the oral presentation. Therefore, there is no doubt that the typescript is the base of the recorded content on the record in question. In addition, the handwritten notes next to typed text indicate what is recorded on each side of the record. The typescript also reveals the date of the recording, i.e. the following handwritten note is at the top of the document: "Recording 4 Apr 1945 at 13:00".

All the songs on the recordings from the gramophone records in question are polyphonic and the recorded instrumental tune is performed by instrumental ensembles. The archives of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU hold many preserved arrangements of folk songs by France Marolt, including several different copies of *Wedding Choirs (Ohcetni Zbori)* and *Wedding Folk Songs from Gailtal (Svadbene Narodne iz Zilje)*, which contain songs recorded on gramophone records. The handwritten musical notation thus includes a four-part male-voice arrangement titled *The Wedding Song (The Bride's Mother Bidding Farewell to the Bride)* (*Svadbena (Slovo matere od neveste)*), dated 26 Feb 1945. The archives also contain several printed examples of the arrangement of this song, which differ only in some minor details (e.g. the way individual dialectal words are written down, the expected tempo, individual dynamics etc.). The printed versions are not dated and it is therefore not clear when they were created. The only exception is the version published in the booklet *Wedding Folk Songs from Gailtal (Svadbene Narodne iz Zilje)*, as the booklet was published in 1947.¹⁴ In this particular booklet, this song is included in the Wedding content unit and is titled 'The Wedding Rej Dance' ('Svatski Rej'). This suggests that it was not until early 1945 when Marolt made the polyphonic arrangements of this song for the male-voice choir, and perhaps he made them precisely for the purposes of sound

¹⁴ The booklet presents seven songs, each belonging to its own wedding ritual content unit, which follow one another in chronological order. Each song (unit) has its own title: 'Collecting the Bride from Her Home' ('Po Nevesto Gredo'), 'The Groom and the Wedding Guests Calling for the Bride to Come Out' ('Nevesto Pozivajo'), 'The Bride Bidding Farewell to Her Mother' ('Slovo Od Matere'), 'The Wedding – the Wedding Rej Dance' ('Poroka – Svatski Rej'), 'Bidding Farewell to Home' ('Slovo Od Doma'), 'The Bride Being Taken Away' ('Nevesto Odvedejo') and 'The Bridesmaids Bidding Farewell to the Bride' ('Slovo Družic Od Neveste'). Combined with a short content explanation, the title clarifies in what way the song is connected to the wedding ritual. The content units are slightly different than in the book *Three Rituals from Gailtal* and, for the most part, represent the part of the wedding rituals that are presented on the records, which feature all the songs from the booklet except for the last one ('The Bridesmaids Bidding Farewell to the Bride').



recording. This is further suggested by the fact that the only song of the “ritual songs from Gailtal” performed at the 1934 concert, which was dedicated to the folk songs from Carinthia and Bela Krajina, was the ‘Visoki Rej Dance’ (‘Visoki Rej’). The song was performed for the first time and later at many other concerts. Arrangements of wedding ritual songs, however, were most likely not made until later, as they are not found on any concert programmes at the time.

Marolt repeatedly pointed out that his research findings, folk culture reconstructions and works of art were based on his field research, thus ensuring the “authenticity” of the material. Some researchers even believe that the fact that he often referenced his field notes and highlighted the faithfulness to folk practices is one of the key elements that contributed to his recognition and success in arranging and performing folk songs, as well as in creating new directions in Slovenian folk song arrangements, which are recognised and acknowledged by many contemporary Slovenian choral composers even today (cf. Arko Klemenc, 2004). Also, in his introduction to the book *Three Rituals from Gailtal*, Marolt pointed out that his research into the rites in question was for the most part based on his own observations, music notes and information collected over time in Gailtal (Marolt, 1935: 3). However, the preserved field notes from the archives of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU reveal that, when it came to publications and “authentically reconstructed” stage performances, Marolt did not follow the collected field material faithfully. For instance, in all musical notations of songs and instrumental tunes in Marolt’s field notes and in the book they are performed monophonic, whereas at concerts and on the recordings from the gramophone records the songs are polyphonic or performed by various musical instruments. According to Kumer, the tunes Marolt listened to in the field and wrote down by ear were mostly monophonic, later, however, he created polyphonic versions based on memory and his own interpretation (cf. Kumer, 1991). The instrumental ensemble featured on the records likewise does not correspond to the ensemble mentioned in the book *Three Rituals from Gailtal*, i.e. according to Marolt, “in the past” the “local villagers’ ensembles” consisted of a fiddle, a clarinet, a hammered dulcimer, and a double bass, whereas today there are mainly wind bands as evidenced by the data collected by Marolt during field research in Gailtal. The recording features an ensemble with the accordion playing the central part, joined by the violin, the clarinet, and the double bass.

Another problem with Marolt’s field notes from Gailtal and the accompanying data, which often lack information or are contradictory, is the fact that it is difficult to verify the authenticity of the written materials and the sources of the data obtained, as these data are often missing or likely inaccurate.¹⁵ Similar observations have been made by

¹⁵ For instance, some of Marolt’s fieldwork material from Gailtal contains no information about the place and date it was created, for the most part only the year or the place is stated. Few field notes state the exact date and place. A full date is connected mainly with September 1933, which was the first time it was actually attested that Marolt had done field research in Gailtal, as noted by Kumer (1991: 12). According to

other researchers who find that Marolt occasionally distorted and even falsified field data to make sure his arrangements and public presentations of folk culture would be considered credible and authentic (cf. Kumer, 1991; Arko Klemenc, 2004).

“Rashly infatuated with everything Slovenian”

Marolt's aim was to research, understand and get to the roots of folk music, as well as to “reconstruct” it and present it in its “real” and “authentic” form, the way he had envisioned and created it. His endeavours were influenced by various circumstances.

According to Orel, he delved into the ancient past and into the ancient Slovenian folk “movement and sound traditions [*gibno-zvočna izročila*]” with the aim of discovering the most original meaning and the most authentic forms of folk culture. His interpretation of folk rituals was based on Wilhelm Mannhardt's animistic theories about the cults of the fields and woods¹⁶ and on James Frazer's findings on magical acts,¹⁷ while also using Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's theories to explain the basics of simple folk way of thinking and views.¹⁸ Marolt did not regard “primitive” cultural forms

information on many of his notes, they were written as early as 1931, and some also in 1934. Similar lack of information and inaccuracies are found in relation to the informants. According to information in the field notes, most of the material was written by Marolt himself, he did, however, obtain some of it from the informants in handwritten form (A-GNI, Korzps I, Korzps II).

¹⁶ Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831-1880) was a pioneering German folklorist and mythologist whose research significantly advanced the study of pre-Christian European religions and folk traditions. He is best known for developing early animistic theories, arguing that many European seasonal customs and fertility rites originated from ancient beliefs in vegetation spirits inhabiting nature. Through works like *Wald- und Feldkulte* (Mannhardt, 1875-1877), Mannhardt traced how tree worship, harvest rituals, and personified plant deities reflected an earlier animistic worldview that gradually evolved into anthropomorphic religion. His comparative and historical approach laid the foundation for folklore and mythological studies and profoundly influenced later scholars such as James George Frazer, who expanded on Mannhardt's ideas in *The Golden Bough*.

¹⁷ Sir James George Frazer (1854-1941) was a foundational figure in anthropology and comparative religion, best known for his work *The Golden Bough* (first published in 1890; most expanded version the 3rd edition from 1906-1915), where he proposed a groundbreaking theory on the evolution of human belief systems – from magic, to religion, to science. His detailed analysis of sympathetic magic, particularly the laws of similarity and contact, offered a systematic framework for understanding how early societies sought to influence the natural world through ritual. Frazer's comparative method, drawing on myths, folklore, and rituals from diverse cultures, laid the groundwork for modern studies in mythology, anthropology, and psychology, influencing thinkers such as Freud, Jung, and Joseph Campbell. Despite later critiques of his generalizations, Frazer's work remains a seminal contribution to the understanding of cultural and religious development.

¹⁸ Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939) shaped the early anthropological and philosophical understanding of cultural cognition by proposing that traditional or indigenous societies function according to a particular way of thinking, which he termed “pre-logical” or “mystical” thinking (e.g. in publications such as *How Natives Think* (1926 [1910]); *Primitive Mentality* (1923 [1922]), *The “Soul” of the Primitive* (1928 [1927])). At the centre of his theory was the concept of “participation”, in which the individual sees himself as spiritually connected to nature, objects and living beings, leading to beliefs that contradict Western notions of logic and causality. Although his work was later criticised for its ethnocentric and binary orientation, Lévy-Bruhl's insights into collective representations and symbolic thinking laid an important foundation for the study of myths, religion and non-Western epistemologies. They influenced later thinkers such as Lévi-Strauss and contributed to the development of cultural relativism in anthropology.



as inferior, but rather as fundamentally different. However, his preoccupation with the oldest folk rituals reveals more than a dispassionate recognition of cultural differences. His scientific and ethnographic work reflects a vision of the nation that is essentially rooted in ancient ritual forms. This idea seems to have driven him in his reconstructions – not just for the sake of documentation, but to provide the nation with an artistically mediated and symbolically controlled expression of its identity through its most archaic cultural elements.

Marolt was also displeased with the attitude many educated musicians in Slovenia had to folk songs. As pointed out by Kumer (1991: 15), in Marolt's time folk songs were neglected and it was not until artistic arrangements in accordance with the taste of the time were made that these songs gained enough validity to be allowed to be performed on stage. Therefore, Marolt tried even harder to prove the merits and importance of folk songs, however, this required further research and substantiation. During the turbulent period, including WWI and WWII, characterised by political changes and Nazism, which coincided with Marolt's life, “the Slovenian national consciousness, which was one of the fundamental elements of Marolt's personality, grew into the glorification and veneration of all things Slovenian, into the search for Slovenian authenticity at all costs” (Kumer, 1991: 16). In his endeavour to preserve the Slovenian nation and its culture, Marolt rejected all foreign elements – particularly German influences – and sought to purify Slovenian culture, especially music and dance, of external characteristics. In doing so, he responded to German assimilation, cultural domination, and purification with his own, at times excessive, form of national purification.

Marolt's deep commitment to Slovenian folk music is clearly reflected in his approach to folk song arrangements. As Zmaga Kumer states, “Marolt intuitively managed to capture something in his arrangements that gives our polyphonic singing the charm that makes it feel Slovenian and moves us” (Kumer, 1991: 15). Arko Klemenc also emphasises that Marolt's innovative arranging style was based on ethnographic experience, noting that he “created a niche for arrangements as an art in their own right, and furthermore defined them as characteristically and authentically Slovenian” (Arko Klemenc, 2004: 48). Central to Marolt's methodology was the accurate representation of regional diversity, careful attention to the provenance and field documentation of each song, and deliberate resistance to the homogenising tendencies that had often characterised earlier arrangements.

Building on this basis, Marolt regarded his reconstructed and artistically adapted representations of folk culture as “authentic representations”, although the versions performed often deviated considerably from the actual folk aesthetic and performance practises. This discrepancy is particularly evident in the gramophone recordings, where the sound and vocal performance are more in keeping with the aesthetics of art music and choral performance than traditional folk singing. Although the repertoire and harmonic structures are based on Marolt's extensive fieldwork and ethnomusicological research,

the final performances reflect a stylised and formalised interpretation of the folk material. Similar notions of authenticity were shared by many of Marolt's contemporaries, who also regarded such recordings as genuine representations of Slovenian folk culture.¹⁹ However, the recordings they regarded as "authentic" were in fact often "restored" and arranged musical examples – performed by singers from Marolt's choir – that were presented as staged and orchestrated reconstructions of various customs, rituals and traditions, such as the Gailtal Wedding.

Conclusion

France Marolt's first recordings on gramophone records had actually been made as early as 1936 as part the educational lectures he prepared for Radio Ljubljana. The question, however, is whether any of these early recordings have survived and have been added to the collection of gramophone records of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU, which was mentioned for the first time in a report dated 24 May 1945. The analysis of the Gailtal Wedding recordings and the accompanying archival documents suggest that these were made in early April 1945 in a Radio Ljubljana studio. The performers were Marolt's male-voice choir and some speakers, who were most likely originally from Carinthia. The author of the recorded material was France Marolt, he was also mentioned on one of the labels as the composer. The archival documents also reveal that the recording was made on the basis of a detailed script and song arrangements prepared by France Marolt. In fact, the labels of other gramophone records, which are identical to those that include the Gailtal Wedding recordings, as well as the recorded content, indicate that most of the records from this collection may have been recorded after 1945.

The recorded sound samples of the Gailtal Wedding should primarily be understood as Marolt's interpretation of the Slovenian folk songs and as a representation of the "true character" that he always wanted to express, and not as a faithful reproduction of the songs that actually existed among the Gailtal people at the time of his field research. In his arrangements, Marolt adhered to the principle that regional diversity must be represented, while at the same time identifying elements of "Slovenian-ness" in the songs and rituals and freeing them from Germanic influences. In this context, he often focussed on musical and dance elements of archaic rituals, which he regarded as important values in his research. He tried to recreate these elements for both educational and artistic purposes. The recordings are not the kind of field-recorded sound documents

¹⁹ After Marolt's death, the researchers of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU classified the recordings of folk song arrangements (by Marolt, Švikaršič, Tomc, Kernjak etc.) as "authentic" folk song recordings on gramophone records on the grounds that "typical Slovenian characteristics" had been preserved in these arrangements, which made them almost equivalent to field recordings (cf. A-GNI, Strok. k. 13/1-52).



that are common in ethnomusicological sound archives and make up the majority of the material in the sound archives of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU.

The life and work of France Marolt is characterised by a unique interweaving of art, research, and national identity, which is also reflected in his sound recordings. As a passionate and visionary artist of the interwar and post-war period, Marolt combined his deep-rooted love of folk culture with the endeavour to document, preserve, and interpret Slovenian musical traditions through research methods. The example of the recordings of the Gailtal Wedding clearly shows the complexity of his approach: a mixture of field research, artistic reconstruction, and nationalistic fervour.

With the founding of the Academic Choir and the Folklore Institute, as well as his efforts in field research, folk song arrangements, and public education, he became one of the most important figures in the early institutionalisation of folk music research in Slovenia. His work represented “a revitalisation of everything that is valuable and positive in the Slovenian musical tradition” (Vodušek, 1951: 2). He wanted to show this through everything he did and he worked passionately on validating Slovenian folk music. He was always on the lookout for new archaic remnants of the Slovenian musical tradition, trying to get to where the influence of modern innovations and German culture had not yet been felt. However, on account of his musical talent, artistic soul, and one-of-a-kind personality, his actions were often more intuitive than rational, more emotionally fired than intellectually cool, which is clear also from the presented gramophone records. The preserved recordings on unique 78 rpm gramophone records with all metadata and related documents reveal France Marolt’s way of work and his approach to research, which is inextricably linked with artistic creation, and provide resounding proof of his belief on how Slovenian music is supposed to be, and how it is supposed to sound.

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Research data statement

The author states that the article is based on ethnographic research materials that are not classified as research data. All additional information concerning the ethnographic research materials are available on reasonable request with the author. The article is also partly based on archival sources, which are cited in the list of references below.

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Raziskovalno, umetniško in pedagoško delo Franceta Marolta v odsevu zvočnih posnetkov

France Marolt (1891–1951) je bil vsestranski umetnik, raziskovalec in pedagog, ki je pustil neizbrisen pečat na številnih področjih slovenskega znanstvenega in kulturnega življenja prve polovice 20. stoletja. Njegovo umetniško in raziskovalno delo je bilo deležno številnih razprav, analiz in ocen ter je v strokovni javnosti v Sloveniji razmeroma dobro poznano. V ospredju tega prispevka pa je manj raziskano področje Maroltovega dela: zvočni posnetki na direktno rezanih gramofonskih ploščah z 78 vrtljaji na minuto, ki so nastali v okviru njegovih umetniških, raziskovalnih in pedagoških dejavnosti. Ti posnetki so danes shranjeni v zvočnem arhivu Glasbenonarodopisnega inštituta ZRC SAZU in predstavljajo prvo zvočno zbirko, ki jo je inštitut zasnoval.

Prispevek osvetljuje Maroltovo raziskovanje, predstavljanje in ohranjanje slovenske ljudske glasbe ter uresničevanje njegovih umetniških predstav o tem, kakšna naj bi bila slovenska ljudska glasba in kako naj bi zvenela. Analiza ohranjenih zvočnih posnetkov, s posebnim poudarkom na posnetkih *ziljske ohceti* in spremljajoči arhivski dokumentaciji, je pokazala, da posnetki odražajo značilno prepletanje Maroltovega umetniškega, raziskovalnega in pedagoškega delovanja. Čeprav posnetki temeljijo na terenskih raziskavah, jim je Marolt skladno s svojimi raziskovalnimi ugotovitvami, stališči in prepričanji dodal osebni umetniški izraz, jih strokovno utemeljil in javnosti predstavil v rekonstruirani obliki. Tako rekonstruirane in umetniško preoblikovane predstavitev ljudske glasbene kulture je razumel kot »avtentične prikaze«. Menil je namreč, da so v njih ohranjene »značilne slovenske poteze«, čeprav so se izvedbe ljudskih pesmi pogosto precej oddaljile od dejanske ljudske estetike in izvajalske prakse. V nenehnem iskanju arhaičnih ostankov v slovenski glasbeni tradiciji si je prizadeval najti in predstaviti nekaj, v kar vpliv sodobnih sprememb, tujih vplivov in nemške kulture še ni prodrli. Njegovo delo je vodilo prepričanje, da ljudska kultura ni nič manj vredna od t. i. »visoke« kulture.

Digital Folklore and Digital Fieldwork: Researching Online Humour with Its Offline Context in Mind

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The digitalization of folklore has transformed the practices of folklorists' ethnographic fieldwork. Drawing on the experience of collecting digital family humour, the article discusses the peculiarities of digital folklore, its interconnections with oral folklore, and the ways to record and interpret it. As context is an important dimension for folklore interpretation, the analysis suggests ways to collect both the content of digital folklore and its offline contexts by combining various fieldwork methods.

• **Keywords:** digital folklore, fieldwork, family humour, context, Belarus

Digitalizacija folklore je preoblikovala etnografsko delo folkloristov na terenu. Članek na podlagi izkušenj zbiranja digitalnega družinskega humorja obravnava posebnosti digitalne folklore, njen preplet z ustno folklo ter načine njenega beleženja in interpretacije. Kontekst je pomemben za interpretacijo folklore, zato prispevek predlaga združevanje različnih metod terenskega dela, ki omogočajo hkratno zbiranje digitalne folklorne vsebine in njenih zunajspletnih konteksov.

• **Ključne besede:** digitalna folklor, terensko delo, družinski humor, kontekst, Belorusija

Introduction

The ever-increasing popularity of digital folklore (also referred to as 'electronic folklore' and 'internet folklore', see Domokos, 2014) means that folklorists and other researchers of culture inevitably must follow suit and embrace the content, forms, and context of folklore in the digital realm (De Seta, 2024). The collection of digital folklore opens new horizons, but also inspires important methodological reflections (see e.g. Ilyefalvi, 2018). Apart from granting the access to novel topics, genres and practices of contemporary folklore, digital fieldwork also presupposes a new dynamic of interaction between a researcher and their research participants which has to be taken into consideration while interpreting the collected data (Bluteau, 2021). And while digital ethnographic fieldwork has made large quantities of folklore materials much more accessible, some aspects of vernacular culture remain elusive if we rely exclusively on it.

The paper thus advocates for an approach that combines elements of digital and conventional fieldwork (cf. De Seta, 2024) and discusses this approach in the context of internet humour research. While digital fieldwork seems an appropriate tool for such data collection, a number of technical, social, and cultural limitations make it difficult to rely on digital fieldwork alone if the research question implies looking for the meanings of such folklore for its sharers. As one of the crucial aspects of vernacular



culture research is a close reading not only of a text, but also of its context (Goldstein, 2015), a scholar has to adopt a multilevel approach to the data collection. Therefore, the paper illustrates several possible ways how digital and conventional fieldwork can supplement each other in order to provide a broader perspective on internet humour. Finally, the applications of such new research methodologies are considered within the framework of the transformation of folkloristics as a discipline.

Outlining the boundaries of digital folklore and digital fieldwork

As much of the contemporary folklore goes digital, so must the folklorists. Despite some initial scepticism (see the discussion in Blank, 2009), many folklorists have embraced the digital realm in the recent decades and made it a fruitful field of study (see e.g. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1996; Mason, 1996, 2007; Howard, 1998, 2005, 2008; Blank, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014; Frank, 2011; Abello et al., 2012; Krawczyk-Wasilewska, 2016; Laineste, Voolaid 2016; Blank, McNeill, 2018; Peck, Blank, 2020; De Seta, 2020). Reflections and debates on digital forms of fieldwork are not specific to folklore studies alone, but have also been prominent in the neighbouring disciplines such as cultural studies and anthropology (see e.g. Kozinets, 2010; Horst, Miller, 2012; Markham, 2013; Bengtsson, 2014; Sanjek, Tratner, 2016; Airoldi, 2018), especially after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. Górlska, 2020; Howlett, 2022).

Scholarly works have shown that digital and oral folklore have much in common. While a detailed analysis of shared features of digital and oral folklore lies outside the scope of this article, it is nonetheless important to outline several aspects that are instrumental to the understanding of the very concept of contemporary folklore and folklore fieldwork.

Firstly, both formats of folklore contain patterns (Blank, 2012: 6) which, on the one hand, allow for maintaining traditions, and, on the other, account for variability. Another shared feature of digital and oral folklore is intertextuality. This concept has long been used in folklore studies to define genres and investigate the connection between folklore texts and the discourse to which they belong (see Briggs, Bauman, 1992; Shuman, Hasan-Rokem, 2012: 69–70), and it has become particularly crucial for the study of digital folklore (Laineste, Voolaid, 2016). Moreover, both digital and oral folklore contribute to community building and identity formation (Amato et al., 2010). Finally, the very practices of creation and sharing of digital and oral folklore are also strikingly similar as they largely rely on non-institutional, informal mechanisms of knowledge production and distribution (Sims, Stephens, 2011: 3, Howard, 2008).

The shared features of oral and digital folklore partly stem from the fact that these two formats are intrinsically interwoven (this process was labelled hybridization, see Blank, 2012: 4). And while acknowledging these interrelations and common features

is essential, it is also necessary to point out that digital folklore has a lot of idiosyncratic features that set it apart from the material that used to be analysed by folklorists throughout the 19th and most of the 20th century. These features include the amount of data that is instantly available, the speed of information sharing, new forms and genres of folklore (such as memes and gif animations), the increasingly important role of visuality, topics that are specific to the digital space (such as screen time and cybersecurity), interaction between digital folklore and mainstream media, the role and stance of the audience (such as producers who both create and consume content) and so on. In short, digital folklore has opened up a whole new world for the researchers to explore.

One of the questions that inevitably arises when a new type of material becomes available is the appropriateness of the earlier methods of data collection and analysis. This is particularly relevant for folklorists, who have always relied almost exclusively on face-to-face methods of data collection, or at the very least on the personal correspondence with their research participants or archival accounts of earlier researchers' fieldwork. The personal interaction with the research participants not only provides scholars with folklore texts but also gives an opportunity to understand the context in which these texts are created and spread (cf. Gilman, Fenn, 2019).

However, while traditional ways of conducting fieldwork can provide us with abundant data, some new genres and forms of folklore remain in the "grey zone" if we try to research them using oral interviews or face-to-face participant observation. These are the genres and forms that are specific to the online reality and cannot be easily performed in offline communication, such as, for example, internet memes, videos, forum discussion boards, animations and many more. Not only the quality, but also the quantity of this data differs dramatically from what a researcher could possibly access through face-to-face interaction (Ilyefalvi, 2018: 219). Therefore, folklorists have to resort to new methods of data collection that take into consideration the specificity of the digital realm.

The dynamics of interactions between researchers and research participants is also different in the digital spaces; as Timothy Tangherlini put it, "fieldwork can now be carried out *on* [emphasis in the original] and *among* (as opposed to *with*) groups and individuals who are not necessarily aware that they are participating in an ethnographic project" (Tangherlini, 2016: 6). In a realm where a scholar can remain not just anonymous but also invisible, the ethics of data collection becomes a particularly important consideration, especially if the participants belong to vulnerable groups (Thompson et al., 2021). The boundary between the public and private sphere on the internet is vague and in constant flux; it leaves folklore researchers with multiple questions on how to approach the data, when and how to obtain the informed consent of their research participants, and whether some of the technically public data is suitable for the analysis at all (Miller, 2012). A crucial ethical and methodological consideration is establishing the identity of research participants online. The (quasi-)anonymity of many online spaces



and the limitless possibilities for creating a fake identity often mean that folklorists can no longer investigate the links between a text and its context, a ritual and a performer etc. “[R]e-imagined people living their virtual lives” (Krawczyk-Wasilewska, 2016: 53) may project their “offline” lives onto the digital space in different degrees of proximity: from a careful and faithful documentation of their real life in their internet blogs to creating an entirely different avatar for their online activities. An additional complication is the frequent use of bots¹ – their activities can account for a significant proportion of social media posts (Bessi, Ferrara, 2016; Marlow et al., 2021) and they can become very influential (Aiello et al., 2012). These and other complications stimulate the reflections on folklore fieldwork in the digital space and encourage looking for new ways and methods to approach the data (Peck, 2020: 6).

Not only the boundary between public and private spheres, but also the boundary between face-to-face and digital fieldwork is often vague. While juxtaposing these two types of fieldwork might be a useful tool for methodological reflection (akin to the one presented in this article), in fact the contemporary ethnographic data collection can be seen as a continuum between oral face-to-face fieldwork and digital data scraping. Many forms of fieldwork combine digital and face-to-face elements, for example interviews with the help of voice over internet protocol technologies, or participant observation in the events that happen both online and offline (see Snodgrass, 2014 for a detailed account). The defining feature of face-to-face fieldwork discussed in this article thus lies not in the physical co-presence of the researchers and research participants, but rather in the participatory nature of the interaction between them, since for the brief period of time the researcher becomes not only an observer but also a participant in family humorous interactions. Digital fieldwork does not allow such immediate interactions and is, thus, less personally engaging and more asynchronous.

Challenges and opportunities of fieldwork on contemporary internet humour

Fieldwork on contemporary humorous folklore can serve as a good case in point that illustrates the benefits and challenges of digital fieldwork. It also offers several possible solutions to overcome its drawbacks. While defining humour as a research object, Boxman-Shabtai and Shifman have outlined three clusters of humorous genres:

- (1) “old humour” – humorous genres that were widely transmitted in the pre-internet age, mainly via oral communication (e.g. jokes); (2) internet-mediated humour – humorous genres whose interpersonal

¹ A bot is “a computer program that works automatically, especially one that searches for and finds information on the internet” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

circulation is enabled by internet technology (e.g. funny advertisements); and (3) internet-generated humour – new humorous genres that dwell on the affordances of internet technology and participatory culture (e.g. digitally manipulated images). (Boxman-Shabtai, Shifman, 2015: 526)

The first cluster of humorous genres is relatively easy to collect with the methods of traditional fieldwork (such as, for example, participant observation or oral interviews); however, jokes and other humorous narratives that belong to this cluster are also available in large quantities online. The latter two clusters, on the other hand, are often very specific to digital realms and thus are less accessible during face-to-face fieldwork. In the context of family communication, internet-mediated humour such as funny advertisements is less notable, but the internet-generated humour is often shared between family members. Internet-generated humour in the form of memes, viral videos, gif-animations and similar genres of humour is becoming increasingly popular not only in family interactions but also on a more general scale, while the popularity of oral jokes is gradually declining (see e.g. Graham, 2009: 139; Laineste, 2016; Fiadotava, 2020; Olah, Hempelmann, 2021: 331), especially among younger generations. Given this tendency and taking into account the fact that “[i]nternet memes have become a universal form of spreading worldviews” (Babič, 2020: 134), developing the methods for its study becomes of utmost importance.

Internet-generated humour is readily available in large quantities and in open access online, on social media, imageboards, internet forums and other digital environments. In some cases it is also aggregated in large-scale databases (see, for example, Know Your Meme) which categorise the examples of humour according to their topic, form etc.

However, this instant and easy availability does not necessarily mean a researcher can always adopt a versatile approach to their research material. A number of technical, social and cultural considerations have an impact on the nature of the dataset that can be obtained by a researcher by simply browsing online.

Looking at the technical aspect, it is important to take into consideration the mechanisms of search engines. On the one hand, by using internet search engines, it is possible to filter hundreds and thousands of examples of humour belonging to a particular topic or genre. On the other, Google, Yahoo and other popular search engines do not always index the data that have been posted on social media platforms. Given the prominence of social media in the spreading of contemporary folklore (see e.g. Peck, 2020), a significant share of folklore material is underrepresented if a researcher uses only web search engines to compile their dataset.

Lurking through popular social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. for data collection has its own complications. A researcher often has a personal account in the social media they use for their research, and thus they become a part of a certain community of users (friends, followers, members of thematic groups). Consequently,



a researcher's perspective and outreach are to a certain extent limited to this digital environment. In other words, social media contribute to the creation of echo chambers of like-minded individuals (Cinelli et al., 2021) which has an inevitable impact on the representativeness of a data sample that a researcher is able to collect on them. Social media algorithms that define the selection of content available to a user thus to a certain extent shape folk culture and promote both its continuity and its change (Flinterud, 2023). Moreover, many social media take a deliberate effort to censor and block certain content that could be potentially harmful for its users – not only serious, but also humorous one (Fiadotava et al., 2023). Some of this content may be of interest to folklorists: for example, conspiracy theories, rumours, fake news and so on. The absence or insignificant amount of this content on popular social media platforms might lead a researcher to biased conclusions about its general (un)popularity among internet folklore sharers.

Apart from web search engines and social media platforms, a researcher might also turn to the websites that aggregate folklore of a particular type. While some of them are indeed invaluable repositories of folklore material, these compilations might include examples from very heterogeneous sources, and often these sources remain hidden from a researcher. A good example is joke compilations that are published online “with no major discursive variations or demands for contextualisation” (Yus, 2021: 2). Without contextual clues, interpretation and analysis of the texts becomes problematic at best, as images, videos, or texts *per se* do not always reveal the ideas behind sharing them. Moreover, the data available in such compilations might be filtered to fit its creators and owners' tastes, technical characteristics of the websites where they are hosted, copyright restrictions and other factors. These circumstances do not mean that folklore compilations on the internet cannot provide any useful material for the analysis; but a folklorist has to be aware of these limitations and build their research strategy accordingly.

As the discussion above implies, many of the public and semi-public digital fieldwork sites share a common drawback: they provide access to texts, but not to their contexts. The context of a practice or performance is important for the understanding of any folklore text, but it becomes especially critical in the case of highly ambiguous and controversial material, such as, for example, humour revolving around pressing social issues (see e.g. Ödmark, 2021). If a person shares a joke or a funny meme ridiculing immigrants, vaccination, or climate change activism, there could be multiple possible explanations for it. A humorous item can be shared as an alternative way to demonstrate one's serious beliefs and ideas; in case of controversial issues, using the humorous rather than serious mode can be one of the ways to circumvent possible censorship and mitigate criticism (Lockyer, Pickering, 2008: 812). However, people can also share a joke or a meme even if they do not support the ideas it implies, but still find it amusing and entertaining.

Putting digital humour in context

The context surrounding digital folklore remains elusive unless we turn to the people who spread it. Researching the data in context thus requires a combination of conventional fieldwork approaches and digital ethnographic methods. It is essential to capture the personal background that resonates with specific humorous examples and understand the motivations behind sharing them with particular audiences.

These considerations informed and shaped my fieldwork on Belarusian family humour conducted during my doctoral studies between 2016 and 2019. My initial intention was to focus on humour in daily face-to-face interactions among family members. In order to investigate it, I did 60 oral semi-structured interviews with Belarusian couples aged 24 to 66. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, via VoIP-based applications (such as Skype or Viber) or via telephone. All the interviewees received the questionnaire and participant information statement at least several days before the interviews. Whenever possible, I preferred to interview both members of the couple together; in the cases when only one member of a couple was available to talk to me, I asked them to discuss the interview questions with their partner/spouse before the interview so that it would be easier for them to speak on behalf of both members of the family during the interview. I was asking my interviewees about their general attitude towards humour, the topics of their family jokes, the shared experiences that were transformed into humorous memories etc. (for a more detailed overview, see Fiadotava, 2021).

Although I initially did not focus specifically on internet humour and the digital ways of sharing it, it was mentioned rather frequently during the interviews, especially by the couples in their 20s and 30s, so I later included a question about the digital sharing of humour in my questionnaire. My interviewees described the practices of sharing humour digitally in the family communication, but the format of an oral interview made it difficult (if not impossible) for them to share with me the particular examples of the digital humour that circulates in their families. Even though many of internet-based humorous image macros (i.e. images with textual captions) structurally resemble verbal canned jokes (Dynel, 2016), there are many examples of digital humour that rely on the visual perception and cannot be efficiently retold during an oral conversation.

Therefore, I undertook the second round of fieldwork which consisted of an online survey dedicated almost exclusively to the digital sharing of humour. It included questions on the frequency of digital and oral sharing of humour, the ways of sharing humour digitally, the sources and formats of digital humour people preferred etc. The survey also invited the respondents to upload (the links to the) examples of humour that they have recently shared with their family members and add a comment of why they decided to share this particular example with them. 175 people replied to the survey and shared in total over 260 examples of humorous folklore circulating in their families



at that time (for the discussion of the results, see Fiadotava, 2020). The survey was anonymous, the only demographic data respondents were asked to indicate were their gender and age. The pool of the respondents overlapped only partly with the pool of my interviewees of the first round of fieldwork, but it was aggregated with the help of the same “snowball sampling” technique, which means that most of my interviewees and survey respondents were either my friends or the friends of my friends, and many of them had a similar socio-demographic background (middle class, urban dwellers, higher education etc.). While the difference between the pools of my interviewees and survey respondents does not allow for directly correlating the results of these two fieldwork rounds, it nonetheless inspired reflections on such a combination of face-to-face and digital fieldwork.

An important aspect of this combination is the possibility to analyse both the formal characteristics of the humorous examples and the layers of meanings that are embedded in them. The analysis revealed that while most of my respondents preferred sharing generic (i.e. not self-produced) internet humour (funny images, memes, viral videos etc.), they usually used private channels for sharing it and looked for personal connotations that would resonate with their idiosyncratic family experiences. The humorous genres with visual elements (especially images and image macros, often referred to as internet memes) tended to prevail in digital family communication. The prevalence of these genres in families’ online communication points to the importance of context in the study of humorous folklore. The spread and visibility of these items online is largely governed by digital algorithms, and they are too numerous for any human to account for. As families share only a small fraction of the existing humorous images and memes, it becomes crucial for a researcher to understand why they select these particular humorous items, in what way they are relevant to their family, and how they assess their humorousness.

The respondents’ comments to the items they shared showed that humorousness of some examples – which was clearly recognised and appreciated by my research participants – did not necessarily mean that these examples were shared “just for fun”; many of them were used to communicate serious ideas within a family. These ideas could have some didactic connotations (for example, sharing funny fake news to make family members aware of the potential harm of such information) or just aim at communicating love, care and tenderness in family interactions. Not surprisingly, a lot of digital humour in family communication revolved around children and pets. Some of it included the photos or videos of family’s own children or pets, but many others were humorous memes and virals that showed relatable behaviour patterns and situations (see Figures 1 and 2).

Some of the humorous items that are shared between family members play with the incongruities and funny aspects of everyday life: such mundane activities as eating, watching TV, or driving tend to be suitable settings for digital humour (see Figure 3).



Figure 1: The caption reads: “That’s my dog at every party”. The image was shared with me via the online survey by a 21-year-old female who commented that she had a dog and such situations occurred frequently. Here and thereafter, the translations from Russian and Belarusian are made by the author.

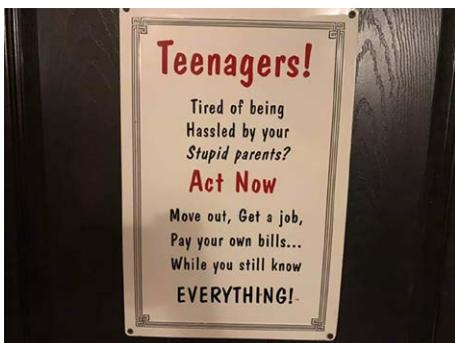


Figure 2: Unlike many other humorous items that featured young children, this image targeted teenagers. The image was shared with me via the online survey by a 38-year-old female respondent who commented that she found it funny because it refers to teenagers.



Figure 3: The image was shared via the online survey by a 26-year-old female. In the comment she mentioned that the image was sent to her by her sibling with the following caption: “When [the respondent’s name] buys a car”. At the time of receiving the image the respondent was attending driving lessons, and, according to her words, that was her family’s way of ironically “supporting” her (quotation marks in the original). This example is an interesting combination of a generic image and an idiosyncratic caption that reflects one of the ways internet humour can be customized to family communication.



Humour revolving around pets, children and everyday activities can be easily represented in the visual form, contributing to these topics' popularity in families' digital sharing. However, more abstract topics were also sometimes evoked. For example, some of the humour targeted interpersonal relationships (Figure 4).

Less common topics of digital family humour that was shared with me via the online survey include sports, politics, professional aspects, popular culture (see Figure 5) and other spheres of life that have less immediate connections with family life.



Figure 4: Speech bubbles read: "Mom, a guy has asked me out". – "Don't go" – "Why?" – "Don't ruin the person's life". This example was shared by a 29-year-old female via the online survey.



Figure 5: The caption reads: "That's Bran [Stark, a *Game of Thrones* character]. Bran knows everything but he doesn't tell spoilers. Bran is cool. Be like Bran!" This is a variation of a popular "Be like Bill" internet meme; it was shared by a 52-year-old male via the online survey. The respondent added a comment explaining that he and one of his daughters watch the *Game of Thrones* and they are tired of reading and hearing spoilers of the episodes they have not seen yet.

While the online survey participants mostly commented on the particular examples shared with me via the survey form, during the oral interviews my research participants also explained the general practices of sharing digital folklore in their families, focusing, among other, on the meanings of such sharing in their family communication. Many of them used digital sharing of humour to stay in touch while being physically away from each other. Several interviewees also mentioned that they send one another funny images, videos and jokes when they are together at home. Therefore, digital sharing of humour acquires the same meanings as oral face-to-face sharing; the format of sharing is just adapted to the formats of humour. If we look at these findings from the methodological perspective, it transpires that the multiple-choice questions of digital fieldwork became a useful tool to answer the questions of *what* and *how* is shared, while the traditional fieldwork helped to understand *why* it is shared.

On a technical level, combining oral interviews and online survey involved the adaptation of the questions to each form of fieldwork. During the interviews, I started by phrasing my questions in the broadest possible way to allow the interviewees to reflect on those features of their family humour that they themselves consider the most relevant, and then guiding them with follow-up questions if I wanted to clarify or elaborate on some aspects. Semi-structured interviews also created a suitable environment for better understanding the general family context and at least some of the nuances of family relations (for broader discussion of semi-structured interviews methodology in qualitative research see e.g. Adeoye-Olatunde, Olenik, 2021). While replying to the initial general questions such as “Do you often use humour in your family?” interviewees not only reflected on the frequency of their humorous utterances, but also made remarks on the role of humour in their family life (and life in general), pointed to some differences between themselves or between themselves and other families, and often tried to define the styles of their family humorous communication. The online survey, on the other hand, required very concise and unambiguous formulations of questions; in most cases the replies to the open-ended survey questions were also shorter and less detailed. Some survey respondents preferred not to elaborate on the meanings of the humorous items they shared, implying that any explanations of humour are redundant. The lack of broader contextual information about particular families also limited the possible directions of interpretation of the data collected via the online survey. This implies that digital fieldwork was instrumental to interpreting singular examples in particular settings, while oral fieldwork helped adopt a broader perspective on the data but often lacked finer details and specific examples.

Anonymity was also an important factor. Even though I assured my interviewees that their replies will be anonymised and their names will not be mentioned in any academic publications or presentations, the very setting of an oral interview with a researcher could and did prevent them from sharing some of the most intimate examples of their family humour. Some of the interviewees openly admitted that a number of humorous



stories and nicknames used in their family communication are too embarrassing or intimate to cite during an interview. The online survey, conversely, eliminates this restriction and provides the researcher with an opportunity to access a wider range of humorous expressions. For example, obscene and sexual references were more recurrent in the examples that were shared with me via survey than during the oral interviews; and even in the survey, some of the respondents apologized for sharing them. While comparing the data from oral interviews and online surveys (especially if interviewees and survey respondents are mostly the same people), it is important to take this factor into consideration to account for the discrepancy of the data.

Fieldwork transformations – a way to maintain the discipline of folkloristics?

The issue of combining the methods of face-to-face and digital folklore fieldwork is becoming more and more relevant for researchers as numerous new genres and topics of folklore emerge on the internet, and some of the folklore that used to be practiced orally is also gradually penetrating the digital realm. The latter process is prompted both by the ever-increasing role of modern technologies in our everyday life and particular events that make face-to-face folklore performances difficult or even impossible. The most recent and prominent example of such events was the COVID-19 pandemic, which boosted the online sharing of folklore in general, and humorous folklore in particular (see e.g. Sebba-Elran, 2021; Hiiemäe et al., 2021).

However, despite the abundance of different forms of (humorous) folklore on the internet and the ways of its sharing, the findings of this study clearly indicate that the context of humorous interactions considerably restricts their versatility. The responses of my interviewees and survey participants reveal the disproportionate popularity of one genre – internet memes created by third parties – among the genres of family humorous communication; likewise, private messaging was the most prominent mode of sharing humorous content. The fact that families often limit their humorous communication to certain genres and modes of sharing shows that humans still tend to scale the enormous variability of contemporary digital folklore down to the level at which they can grasp, understand and enjoy it.

The use of folklore in technologically-mediated communication not only affects its content and form, but also puts into focus the issues of performativity and the interrelations between the performers and their audiences. The concept of ‘folk’ which has been a topic for the discussion in folklore studies already since the 1970s when Alan Dundes published his thought-provoking essay ‘Who are the folk?’ (Dundes, 1978: 1–21), becomes even more ambiguous in the digital realm. The anonymity and impersonalization of many forms of vernacular expression online often leave open the questions of motives behind folklore sharing and the reaction of the (potential)

audience to it, even when sharing occurs in a relatively public digital environment. The ethics of researching these public environments adds an additional dimension to its complexity because a lot of contemporary folklore revolves around sensitive or taboo topics. Moreover, some folklore (such as rumours, conspiracy theories etc.) may be used to spread misinformation; thus its use even in scholarly context requires very careful handling and its publication should be accompanied by extensive academic commentary (see Fiadotava et al., 2025). The study of family digital humorous communication can shed light on these controversial issues on a relatively small scale. The contribution of this study to the digital folklore research therefore lies in pointing out the trends in digital communication that can be most fully revealed by combining digital and face-to-face fieldwork.

The large media datasets as well as the digital fieldwork methods have broadened the scope of folklore studies and allowed scholars to pose new research questions (Abello, et al., 2012). At the same time, these new research questions and the delicate balance between digital and conventional fieldwork call for new skills and approaches on behalf of researchers. The future implications of this call for new skills and approaches are possible changes in folklore studies curricula that might include more courses on digital fieldwork and the ways it could be combined with traditional fieldwork. Such courses might focus on technical and ethical challenges of digital folklore collection, as well as involve students and professors in the discussion on how traditional ethnographic approaches can be redefined to be better adapted to the study of contemporary folklore. The transformations this situation entails could become a challenge for folklore scholars, but they also imply that our discipline remains relevant in the contemporary world and can uncover some of its most interesting hidden layers.

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Research data statement

The author states that the article is based on research data that is stored by the author and is available upon reasonable request.



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Digitalna folklora in digitalno terensko delo: upoštevanje zunaj spletnega konteksta pri raziskovanju spletnega humorja

Pojav novih folklornih žanrov, ki so značilni za digitalno okolje, in preoblikovanje zgodnejših folklornih žanrov, ki so vse bolj dostopni na spletu, sta spremenila prakse etnografskega terenskega dela folkloristov. Članek obravnava posebnosti digitalne folklore, njene medsebojne povezave z ustno folkloro ter načine zapisovanja in interpretacije digitalnih folklornih žanrov s pomočjo folkloristovega metodološkega orodja. Avtorica članka izhaja iz osebnih izkušenj zbiranja digitalnega družinskega humorja in na podlagi izbranih primerov humorja, ki so jih delili avtoričini intervjuvanci in anketiranci, razpravlja o priljubljenih temah družinskega humorja in razlogih za priljubljenost teh tem. Ker je kontekst



pomemben za interpretacijo folklore, so v članku s kombiniranjem različnih metod terenskega dela predlagani načini zbiranja vsebine digitalne folklore in njenih kontekstov. Takšna kombinacija metod omogoča odkrivanje različnih vidikov folklornih podatkov. Vprašanja digitalnih anket z več možnimi odgovori lahko denimo postanejo uporabno orodje za odgovore na vprašanja, *kaj* in *kako* se deli v spletnem okolju, medtem ko tradicionalno terensko delo pomaga razumeti, *zakaj* se takšna vsebina deli. Avtorica zaključuje članek z ugotovitvijo, da so obsežne zbirke podatkov o digitalni folklori in metode digitalnega terenskega dela razširili področje folklorističnih raziskav in omogočili raziskovalcem postavljanje novih raziskovalnih vprašanj, vendar ta nova raziskovalna vprašanja in občutljivo ravnovesje med digitalnim in klasičnim terenskim delom od raziskovalca terjajo nove veščine in raziskovalne pristope.

Vabljenje na poroko ali slovenskogoriški rokopis iz prve polovice 19. stoletja

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Vabljenje na poroko je bilo v 19. stoletju pomemben del poročnih šeg v severovzhodnem delu Slovenije, prav tako pa je bila pomembna tudi vsebina posebnih vabovskih besedil. Avtorica obravnava rokopis vabila iz Lahoncev z domnevno letnico nastanka 1836, ki je pisan v bohoričici in prleškem narečju. Članek obravnava različne zgodovinske in družbeno-kulturne kontekste, pomembne za interpretacijo nastanka, rabe in spremenjanja besedila.

• **Ključne besede:** poročne šege, vabovska besedila, *pozvačin*, pisno in ustno izročilo, podeželje severovzhodne Slovenije

In the 19th century, wedding invitations were an important part of wedding customs in today's north-eastern Slovenia, as was the content of the special invitation texts. The author examines a handwritten invitation from Lahonci, presumably dating from 1836, written in the Bohorič alphabet and the Prlek dialect. The article discusses various historical and socio-cultural contexts that are important for interpreting the origin, uses, and changes in the text.

• **Keywords:** wedding ceremonies, wedding invitation texts, *pozvačin*, written and oral culture, north-eastern Slovenian countryside

Uvod

Pozvačin, prleško *pozafčin*,¹ je moški, ki je v 19. stoletju na nekaterih območjih današnje severovzhodne Slovenije na željo mladoporočencev in njunih staršev vabil na svatbo od hiše do hiše. S pisanim papirnatim okrasjem na klobuku, okrašeno palico, torbo in trobento je glasno naznajan svoj prihod in namen. Na poroko je vabil s posebnim, daljšim in šaljivim besedilom. Rokopisno besedilo takšnega vabila s Polenšaka v Slovenskih goricah je pred petinšestdesetimi leti predstavil Anton Smodič v *Slovenskem etnografu* (Smodič, 1960). Pred kratkim smo odkrili podoben rokopis – *Ženitovanjsko vabilo iz Lahoncev* – z domnevno letnico 1836.² Njegova posebnost je, da je daljši od Smodičevega, posebej v zadnjem delu besedila.³

¹ V 19. stoletju pojma 'prleško' niso poznali. Miran Puconja pojem povezuje s kulturnimi pojavi Murskega polja (Puconja, 2006: 99–114). Tone Ferenc je Prlekijo označil kot kulturno območje, ki obsega del Slovenskih goric ter Mursko in Ptujsko polje (Ferenc, 1995: 363). Tudi sama razumem Prlekijo kot kulturni in ozek geografski prostor vzhodnega dela Slovenskih goric in pokrajine med Muro in Dravo (Pšajd, 2022: 30). Boris Orel ta prostor imenuje vzhodna Spodnja Štajerska (Orel, 1942a: 30). Za Prlekijo so značilne materialno bogate ravninske kmetije.

² Besedilo nima naslova, zato opisni naslov uporabljam za ločevanje od drugih tovrstnih besedil.

³ Besedilo sem že predstavila v zborniku Splošne knjižnice Ljutomer (Pšajd, 2023–2024: 65–98), a si zasluži širšo razpravo.

Pričujoči prispevek bo s pomočjo besedila iz Lahoncev dopolnil znanje o lastnostih in pomenu pozvačina ter vlogi vabil, vabovcev in vabljjenja v poročnem obredju. Predstavila bom elemente, ki doslej niso bili deležni pozornosti raziskovalcev: ponazoritev oseb, ki jih najdemo v rokopisu; pomen črkopisa bohoričice in razlog odsotnosti dajnčice, sicer pomembne za ta prostor; pisno izobraženost vabovcev v začetku 19. stoletja; vpliv duhovnikov na nastanek in razširjenost tovrstnih besedil s poudarkom na vlogi Štefana Modrinjaka; pomen šaljivih ugank in drugih folklornih obrazcev v poročnem obredju; iskanje razloga za neohranjenost prleških v primerjavi s prekmurskimi nagovori vabljjenja na poroke; prikaz spremenjene, okrnjene vloge pozvačina in njegovih besedil v 20. stoletju; razloge za odsotnost rokopisov v materialni obliki in spominjanje prebivalcev in stroke. V etnološki literaturi vlogo poročnega vabovca severovzhodne Slovenije zastopa predvsem prekmurski dólinski⁴ pozvačin, v nadaljevanju članka pa bom ta pojav osvetlila v Prlekiji.

Vabljjenje na poroko je bil pomemben del poročnih šeg. Vabovce na severovzhodu današnje Slovenije so imenovali:⁵ *pozafčin*, *pozavčin*, *pozavščin* (okolica Ljutomera in Ormoža), *zafčin* (Ormož),⁶ *zovčin*, *povabič* (Ptujsko polje, Veržej),⁷ *pozovič* (Razkrižje),⁸ *pozvačin* (nižinski del Prekmurja), *zvačin*, *zvač* (gorički del Prekmurja) in *rovčin* (Slovenske gorice).⁹ Zaznamovala jih je oprava, rekviziti in vedenje. Vabovca sta običajno hodila v paru. Posebej pomemben je bil govor, ki sta ga imela na hišnem vhodu. Literarni zgodovinar Alfonz Gspan ga je opredelil kot zabavno in poučno besedilo posvetnega značaja (Pavlič, 2023: 1–2). Literarni zgodovinar Franci Just je v prekmurskem tiskanem pozvačinskem besedilu videl dedičino srednjeveške latinske poezije, ki so jo Madžari prevzeli konec 15. stoletja v obliki zgodovinskih, družbenosatiričnih in ljubezenskih pesnitev in jo razvijali tudi pozneje (Pavlič, 2023: 1–2). Slavnostne nagovorne obrazce različnih dolžin, rokopisne in tiskane, poznamo v slovenskogoriškem, prekmurskem in porabskem ter medžimurskem in bližnjem madžarskem prostoru, njihova besedila pa izkazujejo zgradbeno ustaljenost in medsebojno podobnost. Slovenskogoriška rokopisa s Polenšaka in iz Lahoncev, Karbov zapis (Karba, 1876, 1882) in Skuhalov zapis (Skuhala, 1910) dokazujejo, da so bila besedila na štajerski strani v primerjavi s prekmurskimi in medžimurskimi daljša.

V Pomurskem muzeju Murska Sobota (PMMS) je shranjen rokopis vabila iz Lahoncev (inv. št. E2003). Mojo pozornost je pritegnil s starostjo, saj je domnevno nastal leta 1836, bohoričico, ki je bila na prvi vtiš nenavadna izbira, saj je v Prekmurju

⁴ Dólinsko je del Prekmurja. Na Goričkem je na poroko vabil *družban* (Pšajd, 2014: 63–78).

⁵ Davorin Trstenjak omenja, da so bili leta 1845 imenovani *družbanji* oziroma *družba* (Kuret, 1992: 139), vendar ni jasno, ali ima v mislih le severovzhod ali širši slovenski prostor.

⁶ Marolt, Glasbenonarodopisni inštitut ZRC SAZU, Panzps. I, Ms. Ma. 94/34.

⁷ Novice 1858 (Orel, 1942b: 74).

⁸ Informacija Vlada Žabota.

⁹ Zapisal Koloman Mulec v *Kmetijskih in rokodelskih novicah* leta 1856.

prevladoval madžarski črkopis, in prleškim narečjem. Proti koncu besedila je ob nevestinem imenu zapisan kraj Lahonci v občini Ormož. Ker je bila rokopisna knjižica v osemdesetih letih 20. stoletja odkupljena v Lipovcih v Prekmurju, sem se vprašala, kako se je *prleški pozafčin* znašel onstran Mure.

Za potrebe prispevka je bila opravljena obsežna raziskava, v kateri sem sodelovala s številnimi strokovnjaki, navedenimi v Zahvali. V ustanovah in pri zasebnikih sem iskala podobna vabilia iz Slovenskih goric, vendar mi česa podobnega ni uspelo najti.¹⁰ Pregledala sem tudi zbirkovo rokopisov slovstva iz obdobja od leta 1815 do leta 1907.¹¹

V prispevku bom predstavila vabljenje na svatbo in značilnosti *pozafčinov*, prebivalce in prostor nastanka rokopisa, prepis *Ženitovanskega vabilia iz Lahoncev*, vsebino z domnevami o okoliščinah nastanka besedila, primerljiva tiskana besedila in spremembo šege vabljenja v stoletju od domnevnega nastanka rokopisa.

Vabljenje na svatbo in značilnosti *pozafčinov*

Domnevamo, da so kmečki vabovci posnemali plemiške vabovce. Plemstvo je prirejalo družbenemu položaju in premoženju primerne poroke. Vabovci so morali biti ustreznega statusa, da jih povabljeni ne bi zavrnili. Neposredno ustno vabljenje je predstavljalo precejšen strošek, zato so ga nekateri plemiči odklanjali. Vabljenje je bilo vsaj v drugi polovici 17. stoletja tudi v kmečkem okolju slavnostno. O tem piše Valvasor za Kranjsko, in sicer sta vabilia ženin z drugom ali nevesta z družico, ponekod so se jima pridružili godci, včasih so vabovci jahali ali se peljali z vozom (Makarovič, 1995: 133–145). Najstarejši ohranjeni zapis nagovornega obrazca sodi v leto 1757 (Makarovič, 1995: 133–145). Sestoji iz dveh delov: *Ohzeitnu vableinie* in *Na ohzait prosii*; prvo je vabilo z ženinove, drugo z nevestine strani (Makarovič, 1995: 133–145). Napisano ali natisnjeno besedilo je bilo v dolgem 19. stoletju osrednji pozvačinski atribut.

Večina porok je bila v predpustnem času. Po prvih oklicih mladoporočencev v cerkvi, približno štirinajst dni pred poroko, je bilo treba na gostijo povabiti sorodnike, prijatelje, znance in sosede. Od hiše do hiše sta hodila dva vabovca. Zaradi spremnosti govorjenja in sposobnostjo za dovtipe sta bila v Babincih (pri Ljutomeru) »najimenitnejši osebi pri gostovanji. Ko bi tega ne bilo, bi veselica splavala po vodi« (Karba, 1876: 1–2). Če je vabovca izbral ženin, sta najprej odšla v nevestino hišo, kjer so jima dali seznam povabljencev.

¹⁰ V raziskavo sem vključila zasebne zbiralce in naslednje ustanove: Pokrajinski muzej Ptuj-Ormož (PMPO), Pokrajinski muzej Maribor (PMM), Pokrajinski arhiv Maribor (PAM), Pokrajinski arhiv Ptuj (PAP), Univerzitetna knjižnica Maribor (UKM), Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica Ljubljana (NUK), Nadškofijski arhiv Maribor, Muzej Ljutomer, Pokrajinska in študijska knjižnica Murska Sobota (PiŠK MS), Slovenski etnografski muzej (SEM), Inštitut za slovensko narodopisje Znanstvenoraziskovalnega centra Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti (ISN ZRC SAZU), Glasbenonarodopisni inštitut Znanstvenoraziskovalnega centra Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti (GNI ZRC SAZU).

¹¹ Rokopisna zbirka UKM, rokopisi z oznakami: Ms 352/., Ms93, Ms 120, Ms 282, Ms 30/1, Ms30/II-I.

Njuna oprava je bila pisana, okrašena sta bila s pisanimi trakovi in cvetjem. Svoj prihod k hiši sta naznajala hrupno in veselo. Pogostili so ju s »sladkim vinom« in »mastno pečenko« (Karba, 1876, 1882). Tudi prekmurski pozvačin je moral biti veder, odrezav, domiseln in spreten z besedami ter počaščen, da so ga naprosili za to vlogo (Baš, 1967: 121–142). Takšen je bil tudi *zovčin* na Ptujskem polju (Orel, 1942a: 96–110). V okolici Lenarta v osrednjih Slovenskih goricah je pred letom 1815 na poroko vabil najeti vabovec, ki je dobro poznal tamkajšnje šege in navade. Oblečen je bil pražnje, s šopkom za klobukom in palico z rdečim trakom. S pozdravom in naslavljanjem, primernim stanu povabljencev, je imel daljši ali krajsi nagovor, v katerega je z zgodbami iz evangelija vpletel kraj in namen poroke, ženinu in nevesti pa je zaželet srečo v zakonu. Postrežen je bil s kozarcem vina (Kuret, 1993: 85). V začetku tridesetih let 20. stoletja sta bila na Cvenu (bližina Ljutomera) *pozaččina* moška iz ožjega sorodstva. Okrašena s pisanimi trakovi in glasnimi rekviziti sta brala napisano vabilo (Puconja, 2011: 117).

Obred vabljenja se dogaja pred vhodnimi vrati hiše. Vrata simbolizirajo prehod med dvema družbenima stanjem – neporočenostjo in zakonom (van Gennep, 1960: 116–145). Tudi Kristusova vrnitev je napovedana kot prihod popotnika, ki potrka na vrata (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1993: 678–679), zato lahko pozdrav vabovcev s *hvalen bodi Jezuš Kristuš* razumemo kot blagoslov, ki ga prinašata v Božjem imenu ter z dobrimi, odkritimi nameni.

Kulturno okolje rokopisa

Za kontekstualizacijo vabovskega rokopisa je treba razumeti prodiranje pisne kulture na vzhodnem Štajerskem. Do začetka 19. stoletja je bila slovenščina tam sredstvo vsakdanjega govornega sporazumevanja (Vodopivec, 1996: 65), ne pa tudi pisnega; za razliko od danes, ko je vsakdanje sporazumevanje v slovenskem jeziku v veliki meri tudi pisno. Šele v drugi polovici 18. stoletja so bila natisnjena prva cerkvena besedila za vzhodnoštajerske Slovence, v katerih pa je opazno prepletanje kajkavskih, osrednjeslovenskih in vzhodnoslovenskih jezikovnih prvin. V prvi polovici 19. stoletja so se pod vplivom romantične in slovenskega narodnega gibanja pojavile tudi pobude, da bi domači jezik vpeljali v posvetno književnost, šole, urade in strokovna besedila. Pisci slovenskih besedil so prihajali iz kmečkega in nižjega meščanskega okolja, nižja duhovščina pa je ustvarjala vzgojno-nabožno slovstvo (Ditmajer, 2020: 23–28). V rabi so bile različne pisave: od reformacije dalje bohoričica, v dvajsetih letih 19. stoletja pa sta nastali še metelčica, ki je bila v rabi pretežno na Kranjskem, in dajnčica, ki je bila v rabi predvsem na vzhodnem Štajerskem. V štiridesetih letih se je pojavila še gajica (Pšajd, 2023: 21–63). Pisci, duhovniki in ljubitelji slovenskega jezika (Vodopivec, 2007: 38–45) so se lotevali različnih besedil, zbirali jezikovno gradivo, sestavljeni slovnice in slovarje ter popisovali »starožitnosti« (Krnel Umek, 2023: 296).

Terezijanska šolska reforma je najboljše rezultate v slovenskih deželah pokazala prav na vzhodnem Štajerskem. V prvi polovici 19. stoletja je raslo število osnovnih šol in z njimi pismenost (Vodopivec, 2007: 38–50). Pri podatku o razširjenosti pismenosti je sicer potrebna zadržanost, saj vemo, da otroci zaradi različnih ovir, kot so npr. oddaljenost od šole, slaba in neprehodna pot ter pomoč pri kmečkih delih, niso redno obiskovali šole. Učiteljska služba je pogosto sovpadala s cerkovniško službo (Kuret, 1993: 71–73), v šolah pa je pouk obsegal verouk, branje, pisanje, pravopis in drugo. Slovenčina je leta 1811 postala učni predmet na graškem liceju, sicer je bila prisotna le v osnovnih šolah. Obstajale so tudi nedeljske šole, kjer je bil po nedeljski maši pouk eno uro za tiste, ki se niso mogli udeležiti rednega šolanja, in starejše. Šoloobvezni so bili otroci med šestim in dvanajsttim letom starosti (Pšajd, 2023: 21–63).

Na podeželju so z opismenjevanjem nastajali rokopisi, ki so bili večinoma prepisi, na primer *Sibiline knjige*, znane v Slovenskih goricah, Prekmurju in Porabju.¹² Izjemni in redek je tudi rokopis imenovan *Gormerkanska kniga*, gospodarski dnevnik ali zapisnik kmetije Hois iz Potrne med letoma 1842 in 1882 (Pšajd idr., 2023).

Z revolucionarnim letom 1848 so po Slovenskih goricah podpisovali peticije za Zedinjeno Slovenijo (Pšajd, 2023: 21–63). Po drugi strani je Stanko Vraz v istem obdobju promoviral ilirizem. Njegovi sodelavci so bili duhovniki, znanci iz časa šolanja v Gradcu, ki so službovali po različnih župnijah Slovenskih goric. Tako so Dajnko, Kreml in drugi prleški duhovniki in izobraženci, zagovorniki češko-ilirskega pravopisa, narodno zavest kmetov na vzhodnem Štajerskem oblikovali pomembnejše kot osrednjeslovenska narodna pobuda (Puconja, 2022: 9–17).

Pomembna družbena poteza tega območja so bile velike kmetije. Prleki so stereotipno označeni kot veseli, šaljivi, samozavestni, zgovorni, samozadostni, bahavi, ponosni kmečki aristokrati (Smolič, 1960: 175–186; Trstenjak, 1991: 47–52). V Slovenskih goricah so poročne gostije trajale tudi po več dni, razkošne v jedači, pijači in godbi, kar kaže na relativno premožnost prebivalcev.

Ženitovanjsko vabilo iz Lahoncev

Brezčrten papir, sešit v zvezek velikosti 32,5 cm × 19,6 cm, je obojestransko popisan na osemnajstih straneh s črno tinto, v manjšem delu s svinčnikom. Ponekod ni več mogoče prebrati posameznih besed ali stavkov, ki so zaradi starosti obledeli. Besedilo je razdeljeno na več delov, vključujoč satiro in zabavljanje na zakonsko življenje, s tremi vložki na koncu, ki vsebujejo krilatice, vprašanja in pregovore. Podrobnejša zgradba in vsebina ženitovanjskega vabila se nahajata v nadaljevanju:

¹² Rokopis iz leta 1878 hranijo v Ljutomeru v zasebni lasti. Uporabljal se je v osrednjih Slovenskih goricah, »spisal« pa ga je Andreas Vesenjak iz Juršincev (Pšajd, 2011: 58–72).



- V uvodu *pozafčina* z upanjem, da sta prišla v pravo hišo, povesta namen svojega prihoda.
- Vsak človek v svojem življenju trikrat najbolj potrebuje pomoč oziroma sočloveka – tako potrebujeta tudi mladoporočenca goste, svate za hišni blagoslov, da bosta pripravila ohcet kot v Kani Galilejski. Prebereta priliko o tej evangelijski poroki, ki pa v pričujočem besedilu ni zapisana (prim. Smodič, 1960: 175–186).
- Ker je hišni blagoslov svatbe začel Bog, bo svatbo tudi končal, enako kot stvaritev sveta. Prebereta pripoved o Božjem stvarjenju Eve iz Adamovega rebra, vendar drugi *pozafčin* to razlago zanika in humorno razloži, da je pes Bogu Adamovo rebro odnesel, zato nekatere ženske v zakonu opletajo z besedami kot pes z repom. Ker mora ženska poslušati moškega v zakonu, povesta svetopisemsko priliko o kači, ki zapelje Evo, in izgonu iz raja.
- Ponovita, kdo ju je poslal in naj se vabljenci ne izgovarjajo, da ne morejo priti, tako kot je zapisano v priliki o bogatašu, ki je pripravil za svoje prijatelje pojedino, pa so se izgovorili. Prebereta evangelij po Luku (v pričujočem besedilu ni zapisan; prim. Smodič, 1960: 175–186).
- Poudarita, da bo na gostiji dovolj jesti, z zabavljivim opisom mesarjev, ki so kupili bika, ga spravili domov in razkosali, njegovo meso pa obesili na vrv, ki se je strgala. Dodata, da bodo imeli še svinjsko meso, in opišeta, kako jim je prasič, ko so ga lovili, ušel, salo pa jim je odnesla sinica. Ulovili so jo, njeno meso pa skuhali za juho. Tudi za bolne so pripravili hrano, ulovili so ribe v Dravi. Dovolj bo medu in smetane.
- *Pozafčina* nadaljujeta, da bo tudi pijače dovolj, saj so poslali tri voznike v Runeč po vino. Ker so ga premalo pripeljali, sta ga po gospodarjevem navodilu šla iskat *pozafčina* s kobilami. Voz se je na poti domov prekucnil, kobile so ušle in končno sta sod pripeljala domov, nista pa ga mogla spraviti skozi vrata v klet.
- Poudarita, naj pridejo vsi, še pes, če ga imajo. Poleg pijače in jedače bo dovolj jedilnega pribora in postelj, postlanih s perjem za utrujene, s seboj pa morajo prinesi polne denarnice in poskočne noge. S stiskom rok potrdijo prihod.
- V zadnjem delu so satirični opisi dekleta oziroma zakonske žene, šaljiva vprašanja in življenjske resnice v obliki pregovorov, ki so navedeni po abecednem vrstnem redu.

Pred zabavljivimi vprašanji sta napisani imeni »*Joseph Majzen, Ursula Novag in Lahnperk*« (Jožef Majcen, Urša Novak iz Lahoncev) s pripisom »*samo dvakrat sta se lübila*«. Zaradi slabe ohranjenosti črnila druge in zadnje besede pripisa ni mogoče z natančnostjo prebrati, vendar lahko sklepamo, da gre za imeni mladoporočencev. Za ugotavljanje njune istovetnosti sem pregledala *Poročno knjigo 1806–1836*, vendar teh mladoporočencev tam ni.¹³ Na zadnji strani rokopisa sta zapisana še »*Marko Novagg*«

¹³ Kot nevesta je Urša Novak zapisana še trikrat, vendar nikoli z ustreznim ženinovim imenom: 26. februarja 1826 kot *Ursula Novak in Lachendorf*, 23. februarja 1835 kot *Ursula Novagg* in 17. februarja 1808 kot *Ursula Novak*.

(Marko Novak) in »*Ana phillippitzh*« (Ana Filipič), katere identitete nisem uspela ugotoviti. Marko Novak bi lahko bil zaradi izstopajoče velikosti črk zapisovalec/prespisovalec rokopisa. Če upoštevamo, da ima isti priimek kot nevesta, bi lahko bil tudi vabovec po njeni sorodstveni strani. Ali pa je vlogo enega izmed vabovcev prevzel neki *Jakob*, ki je prav tako podpisani z velikimi črkami, a zaradi obledelosti črnila njegovega priimka ni mogoče razbrati. Pod njim z zelo majhnimi črkami piše »*posvatzh*« (pozvač).¹⁴ Če je moral biti vabovec ožji sorodnik mladoporočencev, ni nujno, da je znal pisati in brati. Če pa so pri njegovi izbiri prevladovale druge lastnosti (npr. vesel, šaljiv značaj, besedne spremnosti, poznavanje življenjskih navad) in pismenost, bi lahko bil vabovec tudi avtor zapisa.

Ženitovanjsko vabilo iz Lahoncev sem najprej transkribirala. Bohoričica se od današnjega slovenskega pravopisa loči zlasti po zapisu sičnikov in šumnikov: črka z je v bohoričici zapisana kot s; črka s kot sh, ſ ali s; črka č kot zh; črka u kot ü; črka ž kot sh; črka š kot sh, ſh in ſhf; črka c kot z. Za potrebe tekočega branja sem zato besedilo prilagodila. Ker v njem ni zapisanih dveh evangelijs, ki naj bi se povedala ob vabljenju, sem ju dopisala iz besedila s Polenšaka iz začetka 19. stoletja (Smodič, 1960). Slednje je obravnavanemu vabilu najbolj podobno. Ta pristop se mi zdi smiseln zaradi popolnosti in razumljivosti vsebine ter morebitne poustvaritve v današnjem času. Pripis po besedilu s Polenšaka v spodnji transkripciji označuje oglati oklepaj in desni zamik. Ostalo je zapisano kot v izvirniku:

Hvaljen bodi Jezus Kristus

Začetek

Ne da bi naju prehitro sprejeli. Slišala sva, da neznane ljudi sprejemajo, zato vam midva rajši najino pismo pokaževa in prebereva, da bi naju sprejeli. K vam sva prišla, da bi se z vami pogovorila.

Pajdaš [tovariš, drugi pozvačin]:¹⁵ Želiva vam povedati, od kod sva prišla, kaj želiva in kaj se nama dogaja. Šla sva proti vaši hiši po zelenem travniku, do kolena v blatu. Hodila sva po tako globoki dolini, da nikamor nisva videla. Tam sva našla dekle, staro najmanj devetindevetdeset let, na borovem štoru in je pletla praprotne šibe. Prosila sva jo, naj nama pokaže pot iz grape. Ni nama mogla povedati z besedo, ne pokazati z roko; dvignila je peto in rekla: »Ta [?] bosta prav prišla.«

¹⁴ Ob veliki želji, da bi čim popolneje transkribirala besede in identificirala imena, se mi na trenutke dozdeva, da vidim in berem to, kar bi si že lela.

¹⁵ V izvirnem rokopisu je pred določenimi odstavki oznaka (črka, ki je ne znam prebrati), za katero menim, da predstavlja dele govora, ki sta si ga vabovca razdelila. Anton Smodič je pri transkriptu besedila s Polenšaka te dele označil z znakom [:].

¹⁶ V oglatih pokončnih oklepačih z vprašajem so manjkajoče besede, ki jih ni bilo mogoče prebrati. V oglatih oklepačih so tudi pojasnila frazemov, za katera sem menila, da so manj razumljivi.

Prvi pozvačin: Ko je dvignila peto, se je zabliskalo in zagrmelo in zagledala sva vaš hišni prag.

Midva se tolaživa in upava, da sva prav prišla. Morala bi priti tja, kjer so trije koti, v četrtem pa stoji peč.

Drugi pozvačin: Meni se zdi, da je tu tako.

Zdaj vam poveva, od kod sva, kaj bi rada. Naju so poslali na teren naš hišni oče, mati, mlada ženih [ženin] in sneha [nevesta], da bi vas povabila na gostovanje [svatbo]. Povabljeni ste vsi, od majhnega do velikega, vsi, ki živite v tem prelepem hramu.

Dobro veste, da človek v življenju trikrat najbolj potrebuje pomoč. Prvič, ko se rodi; nekoga mora imeti, da ga nese h krstu. Drugič, ko se ženi; imeti mora nekoga, kajti sam tega ne more narediti. Tretjič, ko umira; nekoga mora imeti, da ga spove in pokoplje, kajti sam v zemljo ne more.

Prvi pozvačin: Četudi bi si grob sam skopal in bi mu kost v zadnjico zabil, bi ga morebiti psi zvlekli v jamo, pa bi vseeno moral biti nekdo, da bi nanj vrgel zemljo.

No, naš mladi ženih in sneha, ki jima je tako lepo in imata voljo se ženiti, bosta potrebovala ljudi. Pripravila bosta hišni blagoslov ali gostovanje. Takšno, kot je bilo nekoč v Kani Galilejski. Povedal vam bom, kako je bilo.

[Na tem mestu se pove] (prvi Evangelij svetnika Janeza o ženitvi v Kani na Galilejskem i. t. d.)

[V tistem času je bila svatba v Kani Galilejski, na kateri je bila tudi Jezusova mati. Povabljen je bil Jezus s svojimi učenci. Ko je zmanjkalo vina, reče mati Jezusu: »Nimajo vina.« Jezus ji reče: »Kaj nama je mar, ni še prišel moj čas.« Njegova mati reče strežnikom: »Karkoli vam bo rekel, storite.« Tam je stalo šest kamnitih vrčev za obred judovskega očiščevanja; vsak je imel prostornine dveh ali treh veder. Jezus jim reče: »Napolnite vrče z vodo.« Napolnili so jih do vrha. Jezus jim reče: »Zajemite zdaj in jih nesite starešini.« Nesli so. Ko je starešina poskusil vodo, spremenjeno v vino, ni vedel, od kod je, strežniki, ki so zajemali vodo, so pa vedeli. Starešina pokliče ženinovega starešino in mu reče: »Vsak človek najprej na mizo postreže dobro vino. Ko so že vinjeni, pa slabše. Ti pa si do sedaj prihranil dobro vino.« To je bil prvi čudež, ki ga je storil Jezus v Kani Galilejski, se razodel in njegovi učenci so vanj verovali.]

Tako bosta tudi naša mlada ženih in sneha vesel hišni blagoslov ali gostovanje napravila, ki ga nista začela in končala onadva, ampak sam Bog. Na začetku sveta je ustvaril nebo in zemljo, drevje in travo, živino in

vse oblike zveri, raznovrstno sadje in nazadnje človeka. Najprej našega očeta Adama iz prsti; brez napak in brez greha. Peljal ga je v veseli raj, kjer so bile vse zveri, vso sadje. Videl je vse dobrote in rekel: »O, moj Bog, moj Stvarnik, ustvari še meni en par, po moji volji.« Bog mu je rekel: »Po tvoji volji imaš zveri in sadje.« Adam mu je rekel: »Kaj bom s temi stvarmi, če se ne morem pogovarjati. Volčico bi si izbral, pa je že oddana; lisico bi si izbral, pa je zvita; zajčico bi si izbral, pa je boječa; ježico¹⁷ bi si izbral, pa je bodeča. Kako bi jo ljubil?« Bog je rekel Adamu: »Lezi in zaspi.« Bog pride naslednjič k Adamu in razmišlja: »Če mu vzamem pri glavi, mu bo zrasla čez glavo [postala bo sitna, neznosna]. Če vzamem pri nogah, ga bo hotela imeti pod nogami [pod nadzorom].« Bog mu je vzel levo rebro, da bi ga v pravi meri ljubila; rebro je obložil z blatom, vdihnil vanj in rekel: »Vstani Eva, ti boš naša prva mati.«

Drugi pozvačin: Tako bi moral biti. Pa se je drugače zgodilo, kot je povedal moj tovariš. Ko je Bog Adamu vzel rebro, je prišel pes in odnesel rebro. Bog je tekel za njim, pa rebra ni dobil. Psu je odtrgal del repa in iz tistega dela ustvaril žensko. Zato pa še sedaj nekatere ženske, ko so v dvomih, mahajo z besedami tako kot pes z repom. Za vaše domače ženske ne veva, kakšne so, ene takšne jezikave sva danes že našla.

Adam se prebudi, ob sebi zagleda Eva in reče: »Čast in hvala naj ti bosta, moj Bog.« Pride Bog in reče: »Dal sem ti tvoj par, pajdašico, dam ti ves paradiž in sadove. Vladal boš raju, vendar ti prepovedujem, da z drevesa, ki raste na sredi raja, ne smeš nikoli okusiti. Vse drugo lahko, samo s tega drevesa Spoznanja ne.« Bog odide iz paradiža. Za njim pride hudič v podobi kače, spleza na drevo Spoznanja in reče: »Eva, pridi bliže.« Eva se je postavila pod krošnjo tega drevesa. Kača ji vrže z drevesa jabolko in reče: »Vzemi, Eva, jabolko, da boš vedela, kaj je dobro in kaj zlo.« Eva reče: »Ne smem, bi umrla.« Kača reče: »Ne drži, kar ti je Bog prepovedal.« Nesrečna vzame jabolko in ugrizne. Nese ga Adamu: »Adam moj, poskusi to slastno jabolko.« Adam ga vzame in reče: »Kje si ga vzela, da je tako okusno?« Eva mu odgovori: »Z drevja Spoznanja.« Adam izpljune jabolko, vendar v istem trenutku postaneta oba gola. Eva je brž začela šivati Adamu srajco iz figovih listov [?] ¹⁸. Bog se vrne v raj in kliče: »Adam, kje si, zakaj se skrivaš?« On reče: »Gol sem.« Bog reče: »Adam, ukažem ti, da takoj odides iz raja. Težko boš preživljal sebe, ženo in otroke. Eva, ti pa boš morala živeti pod oblastjo

¹⁷ Jež nima ustreznice v ženskem spolu, »ježica« je izvirna oblika zapisa za samico ježa.

¹⁸ ... figovih listov s paholko. Neznano besedo si razlagam v povezavi s figovim listom kot pahljačo (paholka). Idejo za pomen besede sem našla v slovensko-nemškem slovarju jezikoslovca Antona Murka, izdanem leta 1833.

svojega moža, v bolečinah rojevati otroke in nazadnje umreti vidva ter vajini potomci.«

Prvi pozvačin: Tako nam je storila ženska. Še sedaj so takšne, ki ne poslušajo; da bi Eva vprašala Adama, če sme vzeti jabolko, bi ji prepo-vedal. Najboljše je, da ženska povpraša moškega, kaj storiti.

Naš prvi oče Adam ni zdržal brez para eno uro, niti dve ne; naš mladi ženih pa čaka na svoj par več kot dvajset let. Adamu je Bog dal samo eno zapoved, pa je ni mogel zdržati. Nam pa jih je dal deset, če želimo v nebeško kraljestvo priti. Zato si je naš mladi ženih zbral svoj par in nam priskrbel vesel hišni blagoslov ali gostüvanje.

Drugi pozvačin: Ptica celo leto govoril: »Ptiček, ptiček.« Naša mlada sneha je tudi tako dolgo sladko govorila, da je pravico [ženina] dobila.

Naju so poslali naš hišni oče, mati, mladi ženih in sneha, da bi vas z dobro voljo na gostüvanje povabila. Zato vas prosiva, da se ne bi zgovarjali, da ne morete priti – kot so se nekoč oni zgovarjali. Kako, boste slišali.

(Tu Evangelij po svetem Mateju in Luki.)

Nek človek je pripravljal večerjo za več ljudi. Ob uri je poslal hlapca, naj jim sporoči, da je vse pripravljeno. Pa so se začeli izgavarjati. Prvi je rekel: »Veš, sem kupil ...«¹⁹

[V tistem času je Jezus farizejem pravil sledečo priliko. En človek je pripravil večerjo in povabil veliko ljudi. Ob začetku večerje je poslal vabit svojega hlapca naj pridejo, ker je vse pripravljeno. Drug za drugim so se začeli izgavarjati. Prvi je rekel: »Kupil sem pristavo, moram jo iti pogledat; prosim, sprejmi moje opravičilo.« Drugi mu je rekel: »Kupil sem pet parov juncev in jih moram preizkusiti; prosim te, opraviči me.« In tretji mu je rekel: »Oženil sem se in zaradi tega ne morem priti.« Ko se je hlapec vrnil, je povedal svojemu gospodu. Ta se je zelo razjezil in rekel svojemu hlapcu: »Pojdi na ulico, na ceste mesta in od tam pripelji uboge, šepavce, slepe, slabotne.« Hlapec je rekel: »Storim, kot si zapovedal.« Gospod reče hlapcu: »Pojdi na cesto, izza plotov in jih povabi, da bo polna moja hiša. Jaz pa vam povem, da nihče od tistih mož, ki so bili povabljeni, ne bo okusil moje večerje.«]

Tako vas midva prosiva, da nimate takšnih izgovorov, kot ste jih pravkar slišali.

¹⁹ Zapisano v gotici, vendar svetopisemska prilika, kaj Jezus pripoveduje farizejem, ni zapisana v celoti, samo začetek.

Prvi pozvačin: To, kako boste šli, pa veste, kdaj in h komu. Ampak vsi ste povabljeni. Znajdite se, od malega do velikega.

Morda si mislite, da vas na gostijo vabiva, pa ne poveva, če bomo imeli kaj jesti. Nič se ne bojte, mesa vseh vrst bomo imeli zadosti. Poslali smo v devetih dnevih devet mesarjev kupovat junce tja dol v beli grad. Norci so tam igrali in kartali, potem so šli kupovat junce.

Drugi pozvačin: To pa veste, da je mesarska šega po komisarski zapovedi. Zato so norci namesto junca kupili bika in niso vedeli, kako bi ga spravili domov. Bali so se, da se ne bi zgodila nesreča, kot se je naši dekli zgodilo, ko smo prašička lovili. To boste kasneje slišali, ker sva s pajdašem s tistim veliko dela imela.

Moj pajdaš se je pametno znašel; segnil je eni ženski nad koleno dve pedi en pedenj nižje popka in ji izpulil tri dlake. Spletli smo devet klapster dolgo vrv in smo ga srečno spravili domov in gnali v štalo.

Prvi pozvačin: Včasih mi kdo pravi, da sem norec, tam pa sem najpametnej razmišljal.

Naslednji dan zjutraj smo ga šli klat; teh devet mesarjev, jaz in moj pajdaš. Jaz sem ga udaril po bedru, moj pajdaš po rebru in je padel na kosmati del. Ubili smo ga, odrli in razsekali na dva dela. Iz ene polovice [bika] smo dobili devet kadi in devet [?].²⁰

Pa še veliko manjše posode, nekaj smo napravili ajnmohca [obara], pa še bocmohca.²¹ Višek bomo obesili na štalo, kar bo naša mlada sneha jedla, ko bo mlade imela.²² Drugo polovico smo obesili na sleme, pa se je vrv strgala.

Človek res ne ve, kje ga nesreča čaka.

Tako je padla skozi osem obokov in se je na srečo na devetem ustavila. Takšen obok je bil, kot ga imate vi tu. Imenuje se pajčevina, tako vam najlažje dopovem.

Morda si vi mislite, da ne bomo imeli mesa, vendar se ne bojte, da bomo jedli samo bikovo meso. Še drugo bo, dovolj drugega mesa.

²⁰ ... devet kadi in devet prepadi. Besede *prepadi* nisem našla v zapisih/tiskih iz tistega časa in nisem uspela ugotoviti njenega pomena. Najbrž ne gre za vnos novega pomena, ampak za ustvarjanje rime. *Prepada* v slovensko-nemškem slovarju Antona Murka iz leta 1833, pomeni 'prepad, podzemlje'. Poleg besede *prepada* je izpričana tudi imenovalniška oblika *prepad*, pri kateri gre ravno tako za samostalnik ženskega spola, a nima drugačnega pomena, torej enako pomeni neko obliko brezna, globeli ... Možno je, da gre v besedilu za metonimično obliko neke posode/globine v smislu devetih [različnih] globin.

²¹ Mislim, da gre v neznani besedi *bocmohc* za rimo z besedo *ajnmohc*.

²² V izvirniku se nahaja besedna oblika *jela* namesto *jedla*, ki s končno besedo *mela* tvori rimo. Če je bilo povedano dovolj teatralno in poudarjeno, kar velja za celotno besedilo, se je z rimo povečal učinek in zanimanje pri vabljencih. Dosledno zapisovanje odstavkov ima najbrž prav tako svoj razlog; s pravilnim poudarjanjem in premori je vabovec dosegel določen odziv vabljencev.

Poslali smo v osmih dnevih po osem mesarjev kupovat svinje v Kanižo,²³ kjer so kupili enega prašička. Bil je tako debel, da so se mastni sledovi spuščali za njim, ko so ga gnali.

Drugi pozvačin: To pa tako veste, da svinče ni bilo sloko.

Oni so ga srečno domov prignali in gnali v štalo. Jutri zjutraj ga gremo klat, teh osem mesarjev, jaz in moj pajdaš. Po vseh kotih sem pometel z metlo, moj pajdaš pa pograbljal. Prašiček pa je skočil ven izpod enega borovega lista.

Tako veste, da je skoraj povsod navada, ko se gre klat, da mora dekla svetiti. Naša dekla je tudi svetila, ko smo klali, in na srečo je stala pri vratih. Prašič je ušel iz stale, njej med noge, ji naredil veliko rano in ji pustil veliko ščetin.

Prvi pozvačin: Če ne verjamete, pojrite pogledat.

Videti je tako, kot bi imela ježa med nogami. Midva s pajdašem sva celo noč tisto zdravila in glodala. Pa nama je rekla: »Le večkrat me pridita zdraviti, zdi se mi, da mi tovrstno zdravilo pomaga.«

Drugi pozvačin: Ta prašič nam je ušel po prahi s kumino, po topolovem strnišču, jagnjedovem travniku, smrekovem vinogradu, kostanjevih gredah, mimo bezgovega vodnjaka. Naš stari oče se je razsrdil in za njim tekel. Prašič se je spotaknil v eni pravokotni pajkovi mreži, padel, stari oče pa na njega. Tako so ga ulovili, oprtali na ramo, odnesli razkačeni domov, vrgli na stolico in rekli: »Vi, mladi bedaki, ga niste mogli ujeti. Jaz, stari bedak, sem ga vsaj dobil.« Mi smo ga zaklali, razpravili in prišli do sala. Nismo našli posode zanj.

Prvi pozvačin: To tako veste, da včasih človek pove kakšno tako besedo, ki ji ne more najti posode [neprimerna beseda, ki nima učinka na poslušalca].

S pajdašem sva se dogovorila in hitro tekla pod leskov grm, našla pod njim eno kad in jo srečno prinesla domov. Salo smo notri stlačili, jo dali na okno, da bi sedlo. Priletel je ena velika ničvredna ptica, se pravi sinica, in odnesla salo.

Drugi pozvačin: Šlo je osem lovcev, jaz, moj pajdaš iskat sinico. Smo jo našli sedeti na mlečku [rastlina z lepljivim, mleku podobnim sokom]. Lovec je ustrelil, sinica je padla, mi pa nismo mogli zgruntati in se znajti, kako bi jo spravili domov.

Za peljati ni bilo, nesti pa ni bilo vredno.

Šel je mimo kočijaž s šestimi konji, njemu smo naložili sinico. Srečno jo je pripeljal domov, sinico zdaj že skubi devet dni devet bab.

²³ Kaniža, Velika Kaniža, Nagykanizsa je mesto na Madžarskem.

To pa tako veste, da bo veliko mesa in perja.

Sinico bomo razkosali, boljše kose za ajnmohc, nekaj pa na bocmohc.

Kar nam bo ostalo, bomo obesili v štalo, da bo naša mlada nevesta jedla, če bo mlade imela. Mi smo tudi dobili takšno črno ptico kot telico z laške Gorice.

Bila je podobna vrani, to pa tako veste, da pri nas takšne stvari ni.

Meso smo nametali v devet kadi in devet [?] ²⁴ in v drugo manjšo posodo. Meso zdaj pacamo in kvasimo, da ne bo žilava. To veste, da je vrana žilava.

Prvi pozvačin: Iz tega mesa bomo napravili vse vrste žup, kot ste že slišali. Nekaj mesa bomo obesili, da bo naša mlada nevesta jedla, ko bo mlade imela. To je najboljše za zvaro [mleko].

Mogoče si mislite: »Kot vidva govorita, da bo mesa zadosti. Kaj pa bi se zgodilo, če bi se mi tja napotili bolni?«

Drugi pozvačni: Nič se ne bojte. Mi imamo razno hrano tudi za bolne dni, kot za sodne [?] dni.

Morebiti ste slišali, da je Drava od Maribora do Ormoža pogorela. Od tam smo mi dobili pet vozov pečenic in pet vozov surovih rib. Eno ribo smo dobili pri Mariboru, tako veliko, da smo ji takoj morali odsekatи glavo, drugače je ne bi mogli domov spraviti. Ker jo je zbolelo, je zamahnila z repom in pri Ormožu most podrla.

Prvi pozvačin: To pa tako veste, da od tam dalje mostu ni.

Mogoče si bo kdo zažezel medu. Imamo ga dovolj, jaz in moj pajdaš, oba sva našla čebelo, ki ji je sledilo devet volkov. Midva pa sva jo zgrabilo, ji vzela med in napolnila tri žehtarje [lesene kadi, vedra (?)] in dva koša.

Drugi pozvačin: Manjše posode smetane [?] pa kisamo pri sosedu za hramom, kjer je obito z deskami.

Vse se najde, če bi bilo komu potrebno, samo malo naj na nos vleče.

Zeno besedo, jesti bo dovolj. Zdaj si pa vi mislite: »Jesti bo, od pijace pa nista še nič povedala.« Ne bojte se, piti bo zadosti, pred devetimi dnevi smo dva kupca poslali kupovat v gorice, kjer raste vino, vino kupovat. Toliko sta ga kupila, da sta komaj vsak v enem mehurju prinesla.

To bo dovolj na tešče, kaj bomo pa kasneje pili, tisto je pa še doma.

Jaz in moj pajdaš sva bila danes preden sva prišla k vam, pri našima ženihu in snehi in vino merila [?]; imamo ga dva polovnjaka [ok. 300-litrski sod]. Prvega ne manjka več kot za en ročaj motike, drugega pa precej več.

To pa tako veste, da ne bo malo vina.

²⁴ ... devet kadi in devet prepadi. Glej op. 20.

Poslali smo tudi tri vozниke v Runeč.²⁵ Eden je šel s tistim sodom, ki je držal dvojno vino, in ga ni prevrnil [?].

Drugi pozvačin: To pa tako veste, da je bil velik sod.

Drugi je šel s tistim, ki je držal za en dober košel [lesen pod sti-skalnice (?)].

Prvi pozvačin: To pa tako veste, kaj je velika posoda.

Tretji je šel s tistim, ki je držal za obod [?] rešeta.

Rešeto pa veste, da dosti drži.

Naš hišni oča so nama govorili: »Čuja, vidva, meni se zdi, da je to premalo vina.« Hitro sva šla in kupila od štrtjakovega²⁶ sina en sod vina.

Drugi pozvačin: Tisto vino je tako najboljše.

Jaz in moj pajdaš sva šla s šestimi konji po to vino in sva čudno težko vozila, da so se konji splašili. Bela kobila ni hotela, črna je bila kljub bičanju [?] trmasta, šutana [neumna] ni bila podkovana, modra ni bila zdrava, rdeča je bila preveč boječa, siva je bila še malo živa [živahna]. Pa tak sva ga čudno vozila [?]. Bela, tista, ki ni hotela, ko je zagledala, da jih gonjač dviguje iz konjskega dreka, se je ustrašila in dva prsta kvišku skočila. Bila je vajena [?] sedla in sva jo oba jahala, eden spredaj, drugi zadaj. Eden jo je držal za ušesa, drugi za rep. Pajdaš, ki je sedel pri repu in je kobila skočila kvišku, se je prevrnil in ji z glavo v rep ošvrknil. Še sedaj se ji pozna. Pa se je [?] zvrnila, kolesa so padla v mlako, kobile pa so pobegnile. Še zdaj jih ni našel, jih je lovil ali ne. Midva sva tisto gledala na vse načine, kako bi jih dobila ven. Pajdaš in jaz zgrabiva vsak pri enem koncu mlako in jo prisloniva na gaber. Tako sva ga [vino (?)] brez težav izvlekla, pa sva morala peljati peš po sveti, tja domov do kleti.

Pripeljeva domov, pa skozi vrata nisva mogla.

Prvi pozvačin: Veliko sva razmišljala, kako to notri spraviti.

Moj pajdaš se je pametno znašel, šel okrog kleti, našel luknjo, v katero sva postavila lestev, in sva [vino] srečno notri skotalila.

Drugi pozvačin: Čeravno nama govorijo, da sva norca, sva si to pametno izmislila.

Tako imamo troje vino, tri pipe v enem sodu; z gornje bomo točili moškim, je najboljše [?]. Iz srednje bomo točili dekletom, ker je sladko, kot so sladko domišljave same [?]. Iz spodnje je za kuharice, tam je slabše, da se ne bi zmešale in ne znale skuhati.

²⁵ Runeč je kraj v ormoški občini, od Lahoncev oddaljen 2,5 kilometra.

²⁶ Štrjak je vrsta soda, ki meri 150 litrov.

Vi bi nama še lahko rekli: »Jesti in piti bo, kot pravita, pa nimate nožev in vilic.« Tega se ne bojte; nam jih že devet dni devet kovačev na zeljevem kocenu v zapečku dela. Ampak na tiste se ne zanesite, ker bi lahko zamudili. Če pa ne, pa lahko ne bi bili dokončani [?]. Najboljše, da si svoje vzamete s seboj, svoj pribor najbolj znate uporabljati.

Morda si mislite: »Nimamo denarja. Kaj bomo na gostiji?« Tega se ne bojte. Nam je [?] tri dni na peč skozi okno z vryjo mešal, pa se vseeno na tiste ne zanesite. Svoj denar človek najbolj pozna [?]. Prinesite polne mošnje in urne pete.²⁷

Vi bi rekli: »Ja, urne pete. Moja navada pa je, ko se najem in napijem, da ležem. Tam pa ne bo postelj.«

Prvi pozvačin: Tega se ne bojte, pri nas bo postelj dovolj. Jaz in moj pajdaš, midva oba, sva ubila eno ptico kot stenico in sva jo skubila od Ljubljane do doma. No, doma [jo] že devet dni devet bab skubi.

Drugi pozvačin: To pa veste, da bomo imeli veliko perja.

Midva z mojim pajdašem sva tudi eno mlako oprala in s perjem nastlala, tam se lahko počiva, ker ne bo velike gneče notri.

No, postelj in vsega bomo imeli zadosti. Vsi ste povabljeni, koliko vas je. Če imate psa, ga vzemite s seboj, da bo odnašal kosti; mačke tudi, da bodo sklede umivale, saj naše dekle ne bodo imele časa.

To pač vas lepo prosiva, tistega [?], ki se je včeraj skotalil, doma pustite.

Prvi pozvačin: Mogoče bi mu kdo stopil na nogo, jo utrgal in bi morali iti še po zdravnika. Pa bi radi vsi bili do konca skupaj, najboljše, da ga pustite doma. Zdaj pa ne veva več; nisva šla na Dunaj, pa sva izgubila tista pisma, ki jih nisva imela. Sedaj pa, dajte roko, da bo za gvišno.

Amen.

Dan 24. marec 1836 [?].²⁸

Sledi nečitljiv in zato nepopoln (kasnejši?) pripis s svinčnikom: »Dere človik tak daleč pride, te si eno malo [?], mija tüdi ali [?] menje 24 vust.«

Kakršno dekle si vzamem, takšna bo ljubezen:

Novo – rada gospodari; tega ne trpim.

Staro – kot bi se hudič valjal pri starih kosteh.

Rodno – napravi mi veliko skrbi.

²⁷ Veliko besed zaradi slabe vidljivosti ni mogoče prebrati. Z vabilom s Polenšaka si ne morem pomagati, ker tam tega besedila ni.

²⁸ Nisem prepričana, ali je zapisan mesec marec, ki ni bil namenjen za poroke (v poročnih knjigah je najpo- gostejši februar, pa tudi meseci januar, junij, oktober in maj). S pomočjo stoletnega koledarja sem izračunala, da gre za sredo. Letnica bi lahko bila tudi 1806.

*Nerodno – moje pleme ostane prazno [v zakonu ne bo otrok].
Bogato – nenehno govorji o svojem denarju.
Siromašno – tista me ne bo nahranila.
Neverno [premalo ljubečo] – moram jo večkrat biti.
Me srčno ljubi – nenehno mi visi za vratom, da je ne morem poslušati.
Lepo – drugi moški mi jo zapeljujejo.
Grdo – jo lahko sovražim.
Veliko govorji – preveč žlobudranja ne morem poslušati.
Skopo [?] – pusti me od lakote crkavati, pozimi se moram greti pri mrzli
peči.*

8 *Kdaj je bik kričal, da ga je ves svet slišal? V Noetovi barki.*
7 *Katera črka je v abecedi na sredi? Med tistimi črkami a, b, in c je b
na sredini.*
3 *Kje so Jezusa prvič zvezali? Na popku, tako kot tebe.*
26 *Skozi kaj si danes najprej pogledal? Skozi zenice.*
6 *Kaj je večje od Boga? Tista luknja, skozi katero je šel v nebesa.*
1 *Koliko funтов ima mesec? Enega, ko ima ... [?].*
4 *Kateri kralj nima kraljestva? Tisti, ki je na [igralni] karti.*
2 *Na kaj se obešajo tatovi? Za grlo.*
20 *Kam je šel Adam, star dvanajst let? V trinajsto leto.*
9 *Kakšen je bil najprej plug? Nov.*
5 *Kaj ima šest nog, pa le po glavi hodi? Uš.*
10 *Kaj je to ena stvar, ki je vedno sita, pa nikdar ne jé? Sito.*
18 *Kje je bil Bog, ko ni bil ne na zemlji in ne v nebesih? Na sv. krizu
je visel.*
15 *Ko greš k svetemu Tomažu²⁹ v cerkev skozi glavna vrata, kaj je na
pravi roki [desni strani]? Pet prstov.*
19 *Kaj je čez sveto besedo? Tisti ... [?].³⁰*
11 *Kje je sredina sveta? Prav tu; kdor ne verjame, naj gre merit.*
21 *Česa je v vodi več, rib ali kamenja? Rib je več v vodi nad ... [?].*
30 *Kateri dan je v letu najbolj vroč? Fašenk; zjutraj začnejo huncvoti
cveteti, zvečer pa že na tla padajo.³¹*

²⁹ Sveti Tomaž je potrditev, da gre za Lahonce, od koder je bila najbrž nevesta Ursula.

³⁰ Lahko bi šlo za vprašanje: *Kaj je čez Božjo besedo? Trak (v mašnih knjigah).* Za pomoč se zahvaljujem Saši Babič.

³¹ So kot *huncvoti* v pomenu malopridnežev mišljeni pustni liki, ki hodijo čez cel dan, pobirajo darove od hiše do hiše in so zaradi prekomerne količine alkohola, ki ga pijejo pri hišah, zvečer do onemoglosti pijani? Ali pa je *huncvot* (vrsta rože, cinija) v pomenu papirnatega okrasja, ki ga pustni liki nosijo na sebi in je zvečer že popolnoma raztrgano in uničeno? Seveda vse ob moji predpostavki, da *fašenk* pomeni enega izmed pustnih likov; v vprašalnem delu *fašenk* namreč pomeni praznični dan.

25 *Kdo je kričal, da ga je ves svet slišal? Osel v barki.*

12 *Česa Bog ne more napraviti? Iz kurve dekliča [mladenke].*

13 *Kaj je to: oče spi, sin ... [?] Vino, trs pa ... [?].*

14 *Kaj imaš ti, pa drugi ... [?]?*³² *Ime.*

Abc resnice o življenju

*Adolf knjiga*³³ *pove, kakšni so ljudje.*

Bik služi denar, pa vendarle mora slamo jesti.

Cel teden ima šest dni.

Drva se ne jedo, temveč kruh.

Enkrat mora vsak umreti.

Fašenk je vsako leto v torek.

Grüška, ko je zrela, pade z drevesa.

Huncvot [ničvrednež] je tisti, ki druge huncvotari.

Igerc [ljudski godec, muzikant]³⁴ dobro voljo dela.

J ...[?] zverjad.

Kurva se ne sme poročiti z vencem.

Lahko je poditi tistega, ki sam beži.

Mož ima sivo brado, če je ne brije.

Noč je vselej, ko premine dan.

Ogenj speče, če ga primeš.

Prdec je smešen, pezdec [pizdun, bojazljivec, ničvrednež] pa grešen.

[?] se držijo štirikrat v enem tednu.

Rit je zadaj, to vsak vidi.

Seme kakršno seješ, takšen sad ti zrase.

Tam, kjer je veliko bab, je kilavo dete.

Uržoh [vzrok] mora biti, da se ve, zakaj se kregamo in jezimo.

V ... [?].

*W [?]?*³⁵ *gre po svetu tako kot ciganica.*

Z ... [?].

³² *Kaj je to, vsi ljudje ga govorijo, samo jaz ne?*

³³ Ne vem, za kakšno knjigo gre.

³⁴ 'Igerci nam čmigajo' ... ali pesem 'Gostuvanjski igerci' ali 'Igerc v' bas' ali 'Popotni igerci' (Dajnko, 1827: 44, 46, 108–109). Besedo *igerc* v pomenu muzikanta najdemo že v starejših Volkmerjevih pesmih.

³⁵ *Wagabung, klatež, potepuh?* Za pomoč se zahvaljujem Saši Babič.

Kaj vemo o Ženitovanjskem vabili iz Lahoncev in česa ne

Rokopis je z roko napisano besedilo, ki ga opredeljujejo naslednje značilnosti. Rokopis nastaja naključno, izjemoma v rednih presledkih. Njegovi zapisovalci znajo ne le brati, temveč tudi pisati; s svojim zapisom se ne trudijo zavestno za vstop v besedno umetnost, čeprav pogosto njihova dejavnost daje tak vtis. Zapisovalce rokopisa k slovstvenemu oblikovanju sili namen uporabe besedila, npr. življenjski in letni ritem s prazniki ali posebni dogodki. Rokopisni izdelki so unikatni, zato izgubljenih ni mogoče enakovredno obnoviti, namenjeni pa so točno določenemu sprejemalcu. V uporabi jezika je mogoče nihanje med govorjenim in sočasnim knjižnim jezikom. V zgradbi rokopisnega besedila so pogosti stereotipni začetki in sklepni deli. Po načinu nastajanja gre za prepisovanje, zapisovanje, prevajanje, prirejanje, sestavljanje in pisanje (Stanonik, 2011: 12–17). Pri vabljenu na poroke se mi zdi vredno poudariti še odnos med piscem in bralcem/govorcem, ker ni nujno, da gre za isto osebo.

Letnica Ženitovanjskega vabila iz Lahoncev je zagotovo pomenljiva, naj bo 1806 ali 1836. Pri tem se mi porajata vsaj dve vprašanji. Prvič: Je to leto poroke mladoporočencev ali letnica nastanka vabila? Glede na isto črnilo celotnega besedila bi lahko zapisovalec že vnaprej vedel, za koga prepisuje obrazec, zato je pripisal tako imeni mladoporočencev kot leto poroke. Vendar se bolj nagibam k temu, da gre za datum nastanka prepisa. Producija posvetnih besedil v prvi polovici 19. stoletja je bila tako redka in dragocena, da jo je bilo vredno ovekovečiti z datumom. Dalje: Če drži letnica zapisa 1836, zakaj je besedilo pisano v bohoričici? Leta 1824 se na vzhodnem Štajerskem tudi v posvetnih (ne samo v cerkvenih) besedilih uveljavlja dajnčica. Njen predlagatelj Peter Dajnko³⁶ (1787–1787) jo je učil v krajih po Slovenskih goricah, kjer je služboval. Med letoma 1816 in 1831 je bil duhovnik v radgonski mestni fari, od leta 1831 pa župnik in dekan pri Veliki Nedelji. Dajnčica se je uporabljala med letoma 1824 in 1838, do leta 1837 jo je podpirala tudi sekovska/graška škofija (Pšajd, 2023: 21–63). Zdi se, da se dajnčica v tem delu Slovenskih goric, kljub bližini Velike Nedelje, kjer je Dajnko služboval, med pišočim prebivalstvom ni uveljavila. Če sprejmemo za letnico nastanka 1836, vse kaže, da se avtor ni izobrazil v dajnčici, ampak v starejši bohoričici. Ali pa je bilo besedilo vendarle zapisano leta 1806, ko dajnčice še ni bilo?

Če drži, da so si morali vabovci sami priskrbeti ženitovanjski obrazec, enako kot ostale rekvizite (Baš, 1967: 121–142), so si ga pozvačini med sabo posojali. Obravnavani zvezek je tako z izposojanjem iz Prlekije prešel na prekmursko stran. V družini Rozike Erjavec iz Lipovcev, ki je rokopis prodala muzeju, je bil menda njen mož med letoma 1950 in 1980 dvakrat pozvačin, prav tako pa tudi ostali sorodniki.³⁷ Na kulturno

³⁶ Dajnko se je rodil v Črešnjevcih pri Gornji Radgoni, umrl pa je v Veliki Nedelji pri Ormožu.

³⁷ Darinka Gomboc, hči Rozike Erjavec, stara okoli 70 let. Živi v Beltincih in se česa drugega v zvezi z rokopisom ne spominja (telefonski pogovor, junij 2024).

povezanost štajerskega in prekmurskega brega Mure v začetku 19. stoletja in možnost posojanja tiskanih in rokopisnih vabovskih besedil kaže pesem Štefana Modrinjaka *Od pet pijanih bab*, ki je nastala pred letom 1807 v štajerskem delu Pomurja, natisnjena pa je bila v *Starištvu i zvačinstvu* leta 1807 v Šopronu (Novak, 1960: 169–174). Sorodstvene stike med obema stranema Mure prepoznamo tudi v ženitovanjski pesmi, ki se jo je pevka iz Borecev naučila v tridesetih letih 20. stoletja – pesem sporoča, da je šel prleški *pozafčin* vabit na poroko na prekmursko stran.³⁸

Kot rečeno, pri koncu *Ženitovanjskega vabila iz Lahoncev* je ob nevestinem imenu naveden kraj *Lehnperk*. Vas Lahonci je imela več poimenovanj: *Lechendorfferberg* v najstarejših virih pred letom 1500; *Lahuneze* po jožefinskem vojaškem zemljevidu med letoma 1784–1785; *Lachenberg, Lachonetz* v franciscejskem katastru 1824 – del kraja se *Lachonetz* imenuje še okoli leta 1910; *Lachonetz, Lahonec* v tretji vojaški avstro-ogrski izmeri, 1869–1887 (Blaznik, 1889).³⁹ Imeni *Lehnperk* in *Lachendorf* iz *Poročne knjige župnije Sv. Tomaž pri Ormožu* iz leta 1826 kažeta na mešanico zgoraj predstavljenih imen, zato lahko sklenemo, da gre za Lahonce. V tem raztresenem naselju, ki je spadalo k župniji Sv. Tomaž, so ljudje živelji skromno. Dostop v vas je bil do tridesetih let 20. stoletja mogoč pretežno peš, bil je namreč le deloma prevozen. Prebivalstvo je trgovalo s sadjem, perutnino in vinom. Vas je premogla mlin (B. n. a., 1937: 517).

Ker sta besedili s Polenšaka in iz Lahoncev zelo dolgi, slednje obsega 18 strani, se postavlja vprašanje, ali so ju vabovci znali na pamet ali so ju brali. Glede na nizko pismenost v prvi polovici 19. stoletja dvomim, da so besedili brali. Sta si vabovca obširno vsebino razdelila in povedala vsak polovico? To drži, saj je v *Ženitovanjskem vabili iz Lahoncev* na začetku posameznih odstavkov pripisano *Drugi*, kar nakazuje, da vsak pove svoj del. A kdo ju je učil, če nista znala brati? Tisti, ki je besedilo prepisal? Ali pa sta si besedilo zapomnila iz izvajanja starejših vabovcev? Za drugo polovico 19. stoletja je zapisano, da imata besedilo »črno na belem napisano in eden bere« (Karba, 1882). Če pa je bil eden izmed moških že večkrat *pozafčin*, besedilo »brbota na pamet« (prav tam). Za prekmurske pozvačine iz prve polovice 20. stoletja vemo, da so se tiskanega ali rokopisnega besedila naučili na pamet, vendar je bilo veliko krajše – obsegalo je 2–3 strani (Baš, 1967: 121–142). To velja tudi za Prlekijo, če izhajamo

³⁸ »Ženil se bo Jurkof Franček tja na Prekmursko, / vabiti pride Štraklof Joško s svojo palico. / K palici srebrni zvonček milo cinketa, / Bog naj živi domačijo Štajer, Prekmursko. / Danes vabim za sosede, drugič pa za sé, / kvišku prekmurske vasice, fse za mano gre. / Bistra Mura naj nas veže, brate in sestre, / brat naj bratu rad ustreže, da mu f svate gre!« (Dravec, 1981: 277). Mimogrede, njena vsebina asocira na narodnobuditeljske ideje združevanja prekmurskega in vzhodnoštajerskega prebivalstva v drugi polovici 19. stoletja, zato bi lahko bila pesem iz tega obdobja.

³⁹ Arcanum Maps, <https://maps.arcanum.com/en/synchron/cadastral/?bbox=1793157.346988053%2C585073.602924032%2C1795426.571265269%2C5859719.387689298&map-list=1&layers=3%2C4&right-layers=here-aerial> (10. 7. 2024). Matricula Online, <https://data.matricula-online.eu/sl/slovenia/maribor/sv-tomaz-pri-ormozu/> (25. 6. 2024). Seznam krajevnih imen na Spodnjem Štajerskem, <https://www.sistory.si/cdn/publikacije/36001-37000/36056/Stajerska-1910.html> (10. 7. 2024).

iz povesti *Juškovo gostovanje*, ki jo je leta 1907 ali 1908 zapisal Peter Skuhala.⁴⁰ V povesti podrobno opiše nošo in rekvizite vablenja, ne omeni pa papirja z besedilom. Poudari glasnost *pozavščinov, pajdašov*, ki sta vabila na pamet, brez papirja: »*poslušajte ali, kaj mija z gospodon pajdašon se napamet znoma!*«

Za vabovce zgodnjega 19. stoletja je bila zaradi nizke pismenosti pomembna zmožnost pomnjenja (prim. Goody, 1993),⁴¹ a naučenim besedilom so tudi kaj dodali ali zaradi pozabe izpustili, pri čemer so v ospredje prihajale uprizoritvene in improvizacijske zmožnosti posameznikov.⁴² Če za primerjavo vzamemo pesmi, so se jih ob raznih priložnostih učili s poslušanjem drugih:

Peti sem se naučila med delom, z materjo sva sedeli v vinogradu in peli.
Ko je pasel brat, sem šla k njemu in sva tam pela. Glasno se je pelo ob
prvi kopi v vinogradu, kosci na travniku so pela. Vam rečem, da ni bilo
lepšega, ko so moški na travnikih pela. Rada sem pela ljubezenske pesmi.
Čeprav utrujeni, smo pela, ko smo šli z dela domov, povsod si slišal pesem.⁴³

Obstajale so tudi t. i. *zovčinske pesmi*, kakršno je leta 1845 zapisal Davorin Trstenjak: »Mo meli gostovanje / v hiži na polici, / noter v herganjici / smo bujli enega vola / kak naj vekšiga mola.« Trstenjak *zovčine* imenuje »šaljivce, ki znajo povedati, kakšne dobre čakajo svate« (po Kuret, 1992: 139). Bili so torej spretni z besedami. Ker pa v *Ženitovanjskem vabilu iz Lahoncev* izrecno piše, da *pajdaša* besedilo *prebereta*, se nagibam k interpretaciji, da sta brala.

Zmožnost pomnjenja so v 19. stoletju gojili tudi bogoslovci, ki so znali tudi čez petsto pesmi (Smej, 1992: 194). Leta 1771 je evangeličanski duhovnik v predgovoru k *Nouvemu zakonu* zapisal:

Zato uživaj ta božji dar [prevod svetega pisma v prekmurščino] s pomočjo
Svetega duha, verni kristjan, uživaj ga za pravo zveličanje svoje duše.
Za svojo korist beri izdane knjižice. Če pa ne znaš brati, jih pazljivo,
pobožno in neprestano poslušaj, ko se berejo, in ohrani v srcu to, kar
razumeš v njih. (Kuzmič, 2008: 54)

Za vabilo s Polenšaka Smodič ni ugotovil, kdo ga je zapisal, je pa menil, da gre za prepis (Smodič, 1960: 175–186). Čeprav so bili izobraženi duhovniki jedro intelektualnega

⁴⁰ Rokopis hrani UKM v Rokopisni zbirki pod številko Ms 30/II-2. Skuhala je bil duhovnik nemškega viteškega reda in župnik pri Veliki Nedelji. Zapisoval je ljudske pesmi, različne šege in povesti iz Prlekije, natančneje iz Verzeja, Kapele, Cvena in z Murškega polja.

⁴¹ Mnoga besedila so najprej govorili ali pela, šele kasneje so jih zapisali (Novak, 1976: 30).

⁴² Za pomoč pri razvijanju misli se zahvaljujem Mariji Makarovič (telefonski pogovor, 1. 7. 2024).

⁴³ Kristina Čagran, rojena 1923, Ženik, 20. 5. 2003, AV 18–19. Hrani: PMMS.

dogajanja, zaradi zabavljaške vsebine verjetno niso bili prepisovalci. Ne izključujem možnosti, da se v tej vlogi ne bi mogel znajti kakšen neposvečeni študent bogoslovja. To možnost je ponudil Vilko Novak, ko je za prekmursko knjižico napisal, da je bil prireditelj ali prevajalec dovolj jezikovno in pesniško izobražen. To je bil lahko le bukovnik, učitelj ali organist, eden tistih, ki je sicer sestavljal rokopisne pesmarice cerkvenih in posvetnih pesmi (Novak, 1960: 170). Na drugem mestu pozornost usmeri v učitelje in cerkvene organiste, ki so potajoče rokopise prepisovali in jih včasih dopolnjevali (Novak, 1976: 39). Bukovnik je bil nešolan, književno udejstvajoč se človek, besednik na porokah in pogrebih, ki je negoval govorjeno in pisano besedo. Ti samouki so bili znani na Koroškem, vendar tudi na Štajerskem; v okolici Ptuja so pisale tudi ženske (Kotnik, 1952: 86). Za Mirana Puconjo⁴⁴ so bile pismene osebe tistega časa učitelji, premožni kmetje ali njihovi šolani sinovi. Prepisovalec bi lahko bil tudi obrtnik, trgovec ali študent. Naj omenim Božidarja Flegeriča⁴⁵ (1841–1907) – za potrebe domačega okolja je poleg domoljubnih pesmi zlagal različne prigodnice za rojstne dneve, godove, nove maše, žegnanja in razne obletnice (Baukart, 1966: 131–132).

Ženitovanjski nagovor ima številne elemente bogoslužja. Tudi humorna vprašanja na koncu besedila se navezujejo na *Sveto pismo*. Fabule in uganke bi lahko izražale ambicije izobraženega duhovnika, ki skozi razsvetljenske ideje vzgaja rajo. Zaznamo lahko vpliv tiskanih ugank,⁴⁶ čeprav so se podobne uganke, pregovori in drugi folklorni obrazci ustno prenašali v poročnih šegah severovzhodnega dela Slovenije. V prvi polovici 20. stoletja je moral pozvačin v bogojinski in turniški župniji, preden so mu dovolili vstop v hišo, odgovoriti na katekizemska vprašanja. Zaradi težavnosti ali slabega poznavanja »verske tematike« si je vstop v hišo izsilil na drug način, npr. s spustom živine iz hleva (Baš, 1967: 121–142). Podobno beremo v nadaljevanju, v opisu *pozafčina* Borka iz Vodrancov, ki je pomagal starešini z odgovori na vprašanja pri šrangi.

Vpliv kajkavščine v *Ženitovanjskem vabilu iz Lahoncev* je zelo majhen.⁴⁷ Ta bi lahko bil močnejši, saj so Lahonci blizu Središča, kjer pa je bil vpliv precejšen (Rigler, 1968: 661–681). Na mestu je zato vprašanje, ali je besedilo nastalo v Lahoncih. Od tam naj bi bila mladoporočenca, ne pa nujno avtor ženitovanjskega vabilia. Kajkavščina ni imela enakega vpliva povsod na vzhodnem Štajerskem (Rigler, 1968: 661–681). Prav tako leta 1836 kajkavščina ni imela več takšnega vpliva kot ob koncu 18. stoletja.⁴⁸ Naj pa omenimo vsaj dve uporabljeni kajkavski besedi: *hišni/hižni zakon* (Novak, 1976: 59) in *kakti* (Zorko, 2009: 222).

⁴⁴ Etnolog, slavist, filozof in kmet s Cvena ter dober poznavalec vzhodne Štajerske (osebni pogovor, 2. 7. 2024).

⁴⁵ Flegerič se je rodil v Vodrancih, umrl pa je na Kogu.

⁴⁶ Varijante uganke št. 15, ki govori o prstih na roki, je leta 1824 objavil Peter Dajnko v *Učbeniku slovenskega jezika* (Stanonik, 2024: 212).

⁴⁷ Za prihodnje analize bi moral besedilo pregledati jezikoslovec.

⁴⁸ Za sugestijo se zahvaljujem literarnemu zgodovinarju Franciju Justu.

Zakaj se *pozafčinski* govorji v pisni obliki niso ohranili v večjem številu, niti v obredju vabljenja na poroko niti v spominu prebivalstva vsaj tako dolgo kot v Prekmurju, kjer je *zvačinsko* besedilo še danes sestavni del vabljenja? Matija Murko je v *Naukih za Slovence* pozival k zbiranju starejših gradiv, zlasti s poudarkom na rokopisni dedičini: »Naj se posebno iščejo pisane knjižice, ki se še med ljudstvom hranijo, tudi stare listine, oporoke in pisma, seveda tudi stare knjige [...]« (Murko, 1896: 132–137). Se je slovenskogoriškim duhovnikom, ki so skrbeli tudi za zbiranje t. i. ljudskega blaga, tovrstna zabavljiva vsebina zdela preveč posvetna in premalo narodnostrna? Ženitovanjski obrazci med vrsticami namigujejo na spolnost, kar bi lahko bil vzrok, da so bili zbiralci previdni. Po drugi strani pa je bilo tovrstno besedilo vendarle namenjeno preprostemu izobraževanju in nauku o morali (Nečak Lük, 1996: 121). Mogoče pa *pozafčini* niso bili več dovzetni za dolge, gostobesedne oblike?

Posvetno slovstvo iz prve polovice 19. stoletja kot morebitni vir za Ženitovanjsko vabilo iz Lahoncev

Rokopisi so imeli pomembno vlogo tudi v času tiskanja slovenskih knjig. Tiski iz razlogov, kot so dostopnost, cena in nepismenost, niso dosegli celotnega podeželskega prebivalstva, zato so ljudski ustvarjalci in pisci v svežnje prepisovali kraje ali daljše pesmi, molitve in ostala besedila, za katera so že leli, da se ne pozabijo oziroma da se širijo v domačem okolju. Rokopisi tudi niso bili podvrženi državni cenzuri, kot so bili prenekateri tiski. Hkrati uradne ustanove rokopisov nikoli niso dale natisniti – npr. zaradi nesprejemljivosti slovenskega jezika ali/in vsebine (Dončec, 2024: 274, 277, 296).

Za primerjavo in iskanje podobnosti z lahonskim rokopisom sem pregledala naslednje knjižice tiskanega posvetnega slovstva, ki bi po letnici izdaje lahko vplivale na vsebino Ženitovanjskega vabila: Peter Dajnko, *Posvetnih pesmi med slovenskim narodom na Štajarskem*, 1827; Matija Ahacel, *Pesme po Koriškim ino Štajarskim znane*, 1833; posvetne pesmi Leopolda Volkmerja (Anton Murko, *Leopolda Volkmera Fabule ino pesmi*, 1836);⁴⁹ posvetne pesmi Štefana Modrinjaka.

Ženitovanjsko vabilo iz Lahoncev vključuje snov iz kmečkega okolja, omenja domačo pokrajino (Drava, Ormož, Maribor, Sv. Tomaž, Runeč) in spomni na komične podobe vsakdanjega kmečkega dela. Slogovno preprosto besedilo je tekoče, s poskusi rimanja, kot je npr.: »pa sva morala peljati peš po sveti, tja domov do kleti« (prim. Potrata, 1994: 103). Mešata se svetopisemska morala in vzgoja v razsvetljenskem duhu. Zaradi naštetega bi glede na mojo primerjavo z zgoraj navedenimi deli najbolj ustrezala primerjava s pisanjem narodnega buditelja in pesnika Štefana Modrinjaka (1774–1827).

⁴⁹ Dajnko in Ahacel sta priredila nekaj starejših Volkmerjevih pesmi (Potrata, 1994: 27), tudi z »zakonsko vsebino«, npr. 'Žena ali moža pokorščina', 'Zakon ali čudovita glihinga' (prav tam: 151, 202).

Morebitna vpletеност Štefana Modrinjaka

Čas in prostor rokopisa sovpadata z delovanjem in ustvarjanjem Modrinjaka. Rodil se je v Središču ob Dravi in kot župnik deloval v Miklavžu pri Ormožu ter med letoma 1814 in 1827 pri Sv. Tomažu, ko velja, da je imel najuspešnejše pesniško obdobje. Kraja Lahonci in Sv. Tomaž sta med sabo oddaljena eno uro hoje. Modrinjak je bil duhovnik kmečkega porekla, pisal je v pokrajinskem, lokalnem narečju (Vodopivec, 1996: 66). Kot župnik in domačin je poznal lokalne šege podeželja, prilike iz *Svetega pisma*, opravljal pa je tudi poročno cerkveno obredje. Po svojih nazorih je bil kmečki demokrat protifevdalne miselnosti, v verskem pogledu pa dokaj jožefinsko usmerjen racionalist (Kotnik, 1956: 203) in versko strpen humanist (Kotnik, Pogačnik, 1974: 10). Ker je bil osebnostno notranje razklan, nesrečen in zagrenjen (prav tam: 6), je skozi svoje pesmi izražal razkol med življenjem in duhovniškim stanom (prav tam: 7).⁵⁰

Primerjalno so zanimive Modrinjakove pesmi, imenovane »popevke«, ki so opevale bivanjske razmere domačega okolja in so zaradi svoje življenjske radosti in preprostosti zgodaj prišle med ljudske, ki so bile v rabi. Takšna je 'Popevka od pet pijanih bab',⁵¹ ki je bila že leta 1807 prvič natisnjena v prekmurski knjižici *Starišinstvo in zvacinstvo*. Zaradi omejitve na ustno in rokopisno širjenje vsebin, je Modrinjak v preprostem okolju pisal všečne, neizbirčno zbadljivo-šaljive rime iz prigod siromašnega vsakdana (Kotnik, Pogačnik, 1974: 10–13). Tako v njegovih pesmih najdemo naslednje besede: *prdne* v pesmi 'Mož toži prijateli svojo ženo', *ceckov* (prsi) v 'Popevka fašenska za dekline', *kurvarija* v 'Žena toži prijatelici svega moža' in *kurveši* v 'Prepir med starim možem in mlado ženo'. V lahonskem rokopisu so uporabljene enake besede: *kurva*, *prdec*, *rit* in *vrit* (v rit). V obeh korpusih so enake še naslednje besede: *cajt*, *istina*, *jager*, *kakti*, *reč*, *šteti*, *štigmati*, *vtič*, (z)vračiti, *žmetno* (Zorko, 2009: 222). Resda Modrinjak v svojih pesmih neposredno ne opisuje vabljenja na poroko, opisuje pa zakonski stan. V 'Popevki fašenski za dekline' nagovarja dekle, godno za možitev, naj se le poroči v (pred)pustnem času, dokler je mlada in lepa, in naj zaradi svoje prevzetnosti ne zavrne morebitnega snubca (*vuglednika*). V 'Tožni pesmi ene dekline' ženska tarna, ker je samska in neporočena. V 'Razgovoru med starim možom ino med Nežikoj' slednja prosi starejšega moža (*vuglednika*⁵²), naj ji pravočasno poišče moža. Po vsebini pesmi je bil Modrinjak blizu miselnosti podeželskega človeka, ki so ga naslavljali tudi vabovci. V pesmih »iz okolja« (Kotnik, Pogačnik, 1974) nekajkrat postane celo opolzek, očitno dovolj dobro poznavajoč vsakdanje zakonske in spolne navade Slovenskih goric v prvi polovici 19. stoletja.

⁵⁰ Povzeto po literarnem zgodovinarju Linu Legišu (1908–1980).

⁵¹ Še danes jo imajo v svojem repertoarju Ljudski pevci Zveze Slovencev Gornji Senik v Porabju. Slišite jo lahko na njihovi zgoščenki *Že spunjeno* (2006), ki je nastala pod strokovnim vodstvom Tomaža Raucha.

⁵² Čeprav gre za isto besedo, ima v Modrinjakovih pesmih dvojni pomen.

Z vsebino *Ženitovanjskega vabila iz Lahoncev* bi Štefan Modrinjak lahko izrazil svojo nepotešeno željo po (spolni) svobodi ali celo *hižnemu zakonu* (zakonski zvezi), saj ga je duhovni poklic zavezoval k celibatu. Vendar se moram ob umanjkanju konkretnih zgodovinskih virov distancirati od pripisovanja avtorstva Modrinjaku. Če bi bil Modrinjak avtor, bi bilo besedilo pisano z močnejšim vplivom kajkavščine. Zato se zdi, da je prepis vabila vendarle nastal leta 1836, torej po Modrinjakovi smrti (1827) in po koncu vpliva kajkavščine v posvetnih besedilih.

Primerjava rokopisnih in tiskanih vabil na svatbo

Rokopisi so vztrajali kljub prisotnosti tiskanih vabil, ki so bila pogosto osnova prepisov. Najstarejše tiskano vabilo na poroko v Prekmurju je iz leta 1807, ponatisnjeno pa je bilo v letih 1852, 1898, 1909 in 1929. Pokrajinska in študijska knjižnica Murska Sobota hrani tri rokopise: 1) brez letnice (zaradi uporabe gajice predvidevam, da gre za prepis po letu 1930);⁵³ 2) 1905, pisan v prekmurščini;⁵⁴ 3) 1902, pisan v prekmurščini.⁵⁵ Več rokopisov/prepisov je v lasti zasebnikov – vem za rokopis iz Filovcev,⁵⁶ rokopis z naslovom *Sztarsinsztvo*⁵⁷ pa hrani Slovenski etnografski muzej. Rokopisi in tiski iz Prekmurja so pogosteje namenjeni instituciji starešinstva (npr. v rokopisu iz Črenšovcev s konca 19. stoletja⁵⁸), medtem ko so slovenskogoriški pogosteje namenjeni instituciji vabovca. Besedilom iz Črenšovcev in Lahoncev so skupni številni elementi: prilika o svatbi v Kani Galilejski; sinica, ki jo skubijo za perje; dogodivščina s salom, ki se ujame v pajčevino; Bog blagoslavlja dotični zakon; ribe iz Mure; svatje naj pridejo s polnimi denarnicami in poskočnimi nogami. V Porabju so za vabljene uporabljali prepise iz tiska *Starinstvo in zvacinstvo*. Porabski rokopisi niso ohranjeni, besedila pa še danes uporabljajo *zvací* pri borovem gostovanju.⁵⁹

Rokopis iz Lahoncev poleg podobnosti z rokopisom iz Črenšovcev vsebuje številne podobnosti z medžimurskim tiskom iz leta 1921, ki ga je napisal Vinko Žganec, z naslovom *Pozovič, starešinstvo ili kapitanstvo*, saj vsebuje: pojasnilo od koga sta *pozoviča* poslana; ni izgovorov za prihod na svatbo; dogodivščine z mesom različnim vrst živali in salom, ki se je ujela v pajčevino; skubljenje sinice za perje; dogodivščine z vinom. V medžimurskem vabilu ni svetopisemskih prilik o bogatašu, ki je svoje prijatelje povabil na gostijo, in o nastanku Adama in Eve ter njunem izgonu iz raja;

⁵³ Evid. št. Ro 141.

⁵⁴ Evid. št. Ro 142.

⁵⁵ Evid. št. Ro 144.

⁵⁶ Za informacijo se zahvaljujem Branku Kermanu, direktorju PMMS.

⁵⁷ Inv. št. HA 34.

⁵⁸ PMMS, inv. št. EV252/2022.

⁵⁹ Informacijo je posredovala etnologinja Marija Kozar Mukič.

prav tako ni nauka o pomenu trikratne pomoči v človekovem življenju. V njem so nekateri drugi elementi.

Največja je podobnost med rokopisoma iz Polenšaka in Lahoncev, med katerima je večina elementov enakih. V govoru s Polenšaka ni naslednjih elementov iz Lahoncev: poudarka, naj pridejo vsi, ki živijo v hiši, še pes, če ga imajo; dela o tem, da bo poleg pijače in jedače dovolj postelj za vse, postlanih s perjem za utrujene, prinesti pa morajo s seboj polne denarnice in poskočne noge; potrditve prihoda s stiskom rok. Manjkajo tudi humorni opisi dekleta/zakonske žene, svetopisemska vprašanja in življenjske resnice, ker se rokopis prej konča.⁶⁰ Oba zapisa sta v bohoričici in med njima so manjše jezikovne razlike: *einmohc – ainmohtc*,⁶¹ Drava – Mura, Maribor, Ormož – Radgona, Razkrižje, se meni vidi – se meni zdi, nič ne povedala – nič ne pravla, Runeč – Brebrovnik itn.

Tudi zapis Josipa Karbe iz leta 1876 je precej podoben *Ženitovanjskemu vabilu iz Lahoncev*: pozvačina povesta namen svojega prihoda in upata, da sta prišla v pravo hišo; evangelijska zgodba o svatbi v Kani Galilejski; poudarita, da bo na gostiji dovolj jesti s šaljivim opisom, da jim je prašič, ko so ga lovili, ušel, salo so obesili in slanina se je ustavila v pajčevini; sinica je odnesla salo; kljub petku imata pripravljeno za svate hrano, ribe, ulovljene v Muri; za vse bo dovolj jedilnega pribora; s seboj naj svatje vzamejo denarnico in poskočne noge; vsak človek v svojem življenju trikrat najbolj potrebuje pomoč oziroma sočloveka. Karba natančno opisuje vrsto rib (krape za može, ščuke za žene, *menkavci* za neporočena dekleta); vabovca povesta točen dan poroke (nedelja) in kraj (cerkev in dom mladoporočencev Krapje in Babinci).

Za primerjavo lahonskega vabilia moramo upoštevati še pesem 'Vabilo na svatovščino' iz Ormoža, ki jo sestavlajo trije deli, tj. *pričetek, pozavanje in konec*, iz leta 1835, kar časovno sovpada z nastankom obravnavanega rokopisa. 'Vabilo na svatovščino' je pod vplivom kajkavščine in madžarskega črkopisa zapisal Albert O. Žižek. Kot 'Vabilo na svatovščino' je objavljena v *Slovenskih narodnih pesmih* (Štrekelj, 1980 [1895–1898]: 237–238). Zdi se, da gre za predelavo in krašanje starejšega vabilia z območja Lahoncev in Polenšaka. Enako besedilo, z interventno redakcijo Franceta Marolta, najdemo v Štrekljevi zapuščini na Glasbenonarodopisnem inštitutu (GNI) ZRC SAZU.⁶² Maroltu je pesem povedal neki uradnik Novak v Ljubljani. Tudi v poviši *Juškovo gostovanje* iz začetka 20. stoletja je viden ostanek lahonskega besedila. Okrnjeno besedilo vabljena iz leta 1935, *Prleška gostija* (Klemenčič, 1935), je zelo podobno vabilu iz *Juškovega gostovanja*.

⁶⁰ Ker Smolič (1960: 185) tega ne pojasni, domnevam, da se strani niso ohranile.

⁶¹ Prve so besede iz lahonskega besedila, druge iz besedila s Polenšaka.

⁶² »Naš hišni oča no mati, naš mladi ženih no snahava spustijo pozvati: najprle na par kupic dobrega vina, potli na en par kitic zelenega rožmarina, te pa na en par debelih kapuňov, na en par mastnih puranov, brez klúňov, na eno malo gošeje, pa na teleče pečeje, na en par lüštnih plesov, če je vaša dobra vola poskočiti, svoje peške kola po hiši potočiti, muzikašov pa mastno platiti, drgači van nečejo igrati, kurva jin mati.« (GNI ZRC SAZU, Ma. 94/34). Opomba: a-ji se v prleškem narečju izgovarjajo kot o-ji.

Spremenjena pozafčinova vloga v 20. stoletju

Vabljenje se postopoma začne spreminjati, kar je razvidno v krajšanju dolgih besedil, čeprav zares ne vemo, kdaj opustijo korpus *Ženitovanjskega besedila iz Lahoncev*. Tudi raziskovalci temu niso posvečali pozornosti, ker so se osredinjali na druge elemente vabovcev. V obdobju med obema svetovnima vojnoma prevladujejo opisi *pozafčinove* noše, vsebina besedil je drugotnega pomena. Leta 1937 in 1967 nošo upodobi domači slikar Ante Trstenjak,⁶³ opisi *pozafčinov* pa se pojavljajo v različnem časopisu. Nihče pa ni bil pozoren na vabovčev ugled, ki ga je v 19. stoletju imel na podlagi (po)ustvarjanja in teatralnega uprizarjanja dolgega besedila. Zdi se, da je imel v 20. stoletju, ko so nastajali opisi vabovcev, *pozafčin* že drugačno vlogo – izvajanje dolgega besedila med vabljenjem se je preneslo na aktivnosti na sami svatbi. Tako je ostalo do današnjega časa, ko prekmurski pozvačin ne sme biti kot *fajnšček*, to je preveč odrezav, vsiljiv, nevljuden, nedostojnega obnašanja ali preglasen.⁶⁴ Dobimo vtis, da je umirjeni sodobni prekmurski pozvačin postal nasprotje preteklemu glasnemu zabavljaču. Tudi v Slovenskih goricah in Prlekiji sta vlogo vabovca sčasoma prevzela ženin in nevesta, *pozafčin* pa je postal le še plesalec z ženitovanjsko pogačo, imenovano bosman (glej vlogo Viktorja Borka v nadaljevanju) in strežnik na gostiji.

Pri Mali Nedelji sta pred letom 1949 na poroko vabila dva *pozafčina*: Matija Horvat iz Bodislavcev, čigar predniki so bili iz Prekmurja, in Franček Kšela iz Kuršincev. Sogovornik se je spominjal, da sta imela vabilo napisano na papirju, nekaj pa sta povedala na pamet, ter da sta bila »razumna govorca«.⁶⁵ *Pozafčinova* vloga neposrednega vabljenja svatov od hiše do hiše je po drugi svetovni vojni še obstajala, vendar je bledela. Malonedeljčani so takrat začeli v Ljutomeru na vozovih uprizarjati »prleško gostovanje«,⁶⁶ tj. svatbo, ki je vključevala tudi *pozafčina*. V kratkih minutah je eden izmed akterjev na odru prebral: »*Toti [pozafčin] de fse sküp zvaba, vejko pa malo. Ker fsakšen človik trikrat najbolj pomoč nüca: najpret ko ga krstijo, drugič gda se ženi, more tüdi nekoga meti, najmeje dve priči. Ko pa kdaj vmerje pa ga tüdi neše more f triugo spraviti, ne. Tak so se negda ženili.*«⁶⁷ Gre za prirejen, skrajšan odlomek iz Karbovega članka (Karba, 1876).

V Maroltovi zapuščini,⁶⁸ ki najverjetneje odslikuje stanje v štiridesetih letih 20. stoletja, je *pozafčin* pomagal *tetici* na gostiji v Prlekiji, in sicer sta skupaj prinesla nevesti in ženinu v dar bosman in z njim plesala. Ob tem se je odvijal dialog med *starešino*

⁶³ Likovni deli hrani Umetnostna galerija Maribor.

⁶⁴ Franc Jerebic, pozvačin iz Beltincev (telefonski pogovor, junij 2024).

⁶⁵ Ludvik Rudolf, rojen leta 1944, Kuršinci/Mala Nedelja (telefonski pogovor, junij 2024).

⁶⁶ Besedno zvezo zapisujem med narekovajema, ker ne gre za še, ampak prireditev s prikazom preteklih poročnih šeg.

⁶⁷ *Prleško gostovanje*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1DCdzOT7Wo> (14. 9. 2024).

⁶⁸ GNI ZRC SAZU, Ma. 94/36.

(pričo) in *pozafčinoma*, ki sta ženitovanjsko pogačo predstavila ob delih priprave njive za pšenico, spravljanja pridelka, mletja zrnja in peke pogače. Naj opozorimo, da gre za prepis iz *Slovenskih večernic* iz leta 1882, kjer Josip Karba piše o bosmanu in *pozavčinu* (Karba, 1882: 63, 76–78). Sicer pa je leta 1858 (ali prej) *zovčin* v Veržeju »ravnatelj iger«, ki lovi tatove in jih pripelje pred sodnika⁶⁹ ter v procesiji nese bosman od nevestinega doma v hišo ženina, kjer je drugi dan gostija (Trstenjak, 1858). Leta 1910 je na Murskem polju *pozavčin* z bosmanom prvi v vrsti prišel pred nevesto in ženina, dekleta z bosmani pa so mu sledila (Skuhala, 1910). Še pred drugo svetovno vojno v Ključarovcih pri Ljutomeru v hišo prineseo bosman pozvačini (v množini) in kuharice, prvi med njimi pa se pogaja s starešino (Orel, 1942b: 31). Pozvačinova vloga pri bosmanu po drugi svetovni vojni izgine.

Viktor Borko iz Vodrancev,⁷⁰ ki so od Lahoncev oddaljeni 25 kilometrov, je prvič postal *pozafčin* leta 1967, zadnjič pa je to vlogo opravil leta 1986. Rojen je leta 1941 in ne spominja se, da bi mu kdo od starejših pripovedoval, da je *pozafčin* vabil na poroko. Vlogo vabljenja sta imela *ženih* in *sneha*. Prepoznavna oblačilna elementa sta bila bel *šürc* (predpasnik) in okrašen klobuk. Tako opravljen je bil *pozafčin* ves čas gostije, s predpasnikom je šel tudi v cerkev k poročnemu obredu. *Pozafčin* je bil na gostiji »*deklica za vse*«. En dan pred poroko je pomagal pripravljati svatbeni prostor. Na svatbi je imel svoje zadolžitve, nikoli ni imel govora, bil je v vlogi pomočnika. Nevestin *pozafčin* je bil glavni na njenem domu, ženinov *pozafčin* pa na njegovem. Ženinov *pozafčin* je pomagal starešini z odgovori in pri šrangi (*šrec*) na nevestinem domu. Vprašanja so bila ustaljena; eden izmed njih je, ko so šrangularji vprašali ženina in svate, čez koliko mostov so šli po poti, odgovoril, da čez pet.⁷¹ Nevestin *pozafčin* je imel nalogu pripeljati nevesto do praga, kjer jo je čakal ženin, še prej pa je *pozafčin* pripeljal starejšo žensko/ciganico z nezakonskim otrokom in neporočeno dekle. Ko so ženinovi svatje opravili vse naloge, je *pozafčin* vsakega posebej posedel na točno določeno mesto za hišno mizo. Ob večji gostiji je bilo več tudi *pozafčinov*, glavni pa je bil eden. Njegova glavna naloga je bila strežba pijače in jedače, tako da je vsak *pozafčin* nosil svojim svatom. Pozoren je moral biti, da na mizi nikoli ni zmanjkalo vina. Naslednji dan na *jutarnici* je šla svatba po vasi, *pozafčin* je moral z vaških dvorišč naskrivaj odnesti kakšen predmet, ki so ga potem muzikantje licitirali, lastnik predmeta pa ga je moral odkupiti nazaj. *Pozafčin* je tudi ves čas plesal s tistimi dekleti, ki na gostiji niso imele para, in z muzikanti skrbel za veselo vzdušje. Konec osemdesetih let 20. stoletja je *pozafčin*, oblečen v bel predpasnik, ženinu na glavni vhod pripeljal nevesto in prinesel vino na mizo, vmes pa poskrbel za dobro voljo. Kot vidimo, je skozi 20. stoletje vloga

⁶⁹ Vsebina spominja na borovo gostovanje.

⁷⁰ Pogovor 7. 8. 2024, Vodranci (posnetek hrani PMMS pod št. D420).

⁷¹ Mostovi so simbolno pomenili sedem zakramentov. Enemu so se na poti izognili (sv. mašniško posvečenje), do sedmega pa prišli ob poroki.

pozavčina kot zabavljača, povezovalca, vzgojitelja in graditelja skupnosti zbledela. Je danes sploh še prisotna (Mladenović, b. n. l.)?

Zaključek

Ohranjeni izvod *Ženitovanjskega vabila iz Lahoncev* je že zaradi svoje starosti in redkosti rokopisna rariteta, če vemo, da primerek s Polenšaka danes fizično ne obstaja več, oziroma ne vemo, kje se hrani.⁷² Preverbe v pristojnih ustanovah in pri posameznikih kažejo na to, da je obravnavani rokopis edini ohranjeni izvod za Prlekijo. O njegovi redkosti priča tudi pregled *Registra rokopisov slovenskega slovstva*,⁷³ kjer med obsežnim naborom ne najdemo vabljenja na poroko. Regijske ustanove in zasebni zbiralci hranijo različne rokopisne pesmarice in prepise prekmurskega *Starišinstva in zvačinstva* ter t. i. *Sibiline knjige*, osebne spomine in gospodarsko-kmečke knjige, tudi viničarske knjige,⁷⁴ ne pa veliko vabovskih besedil. Zato zaenkrat ne moremo govoriti o kontinuiteti ali stabilni prisotnosti (Pisk, 2018: 30) rokopisnih prleških govorov vabljenja na poroko. *Ženitovanjsko vabilo iz Lahoncev* je dragoceno in pomenljivo zaradi skromne pisne produkcije na podeželju v prvi polovici 19. stoletja. Ob tem ne pozabimo, da se je veliko (ali večina) rokopisov z ženitovanjsko vsebino, enkratnih avtorskih inačic vabovcev, izgubilo za vedno.

Ali lahko o ženitovanjskem besedilu govorimo kot o posebni obliki folklornega, vernakularnega pripovedništva (Kropej Telban, 2021: 11–14), kjer sta se dopolnjevala ustni (pomnjenje, dopolnjevanje, improviziranje) in brani pisni žanr?

Glede na nizko pismenost na Štajerskem v prvi polovici 19. stoletja upravičeno dvomimo, da sta pozvačina besedilo brala. Ker v *Ženitovanjskem vabilu iz Lahoncev* izrecno piše, da *pajdaša* besedilo *prebereta*, se nagibam k razlagi, da sta bila pismena in izobražena, zato lahko domnevamo, da je imela ta oseba pomembno statusno vlogo v vaški skupnosti. Poleg tega je moral biti vabovec spreten z besedami in nastopanjem pred drugimi. Glede bližine delovanja, časa nastanka, izobraženosti, poznavanja šeg in zasebnega življenja bi lahko imel določen vpliv na vsebino obravnavanega vabila tudi pesnik in duhovnik Štefan Modrinjak, vendar je zaradi kajkavskega jezikovnega vpliva na njegovo ustvarjalnost Modrinjakovo avtorstvo manj verjetno. Najverjetnejne gre za prepis starejšega besedila, kar se kaže v podobnosti z rokopisom s Polenšaka.

Posebnost rokopisa iz Lahoncev so šaljive uganke, reki in drugi folklorni obrazci na koncu besedila. Vprašanja so bila namenjena ženinovim svatom, ko so prihajali po

⁷² Po Smodičevi objavi (1960) se je rokopis nahajal pri pisatelju Antonu Ingoliču in kasneje v Pokrajinskem muzeju Ptuj. Po mojem poizvedovanju v muzeju, arhivu in študijski knjižnici ga te ptujske ustanove ne hranijo, niti ne poznajo.

⁷³ Glej: https://frss.manuscripta.zrc-sazu.si/frss_titlePage.

⁷⁴ V zvezek si je delovne dni zapisoval viničar/delavec/dninar, ne posestnik.

nevesto in poskušali priti mimo šrange. Podobne šaljive uganke, pregovori in folklorni obrazci so se samostojno ustno prenašali, širili in uporabljali v ženitovanjskih šegah severovzhodnega dela Slovenije še v drugi polovici 20. stoletja. V tem kontekstu je treba poleg svatovskih pesmi omeniti še drugo obliko ustnega slovstva, ki je bila pomemben del poročnega obredja, a velikokrat spregledana – dvogovore ob snubljenju, dialoge pred in izza šrange, slovo neveste od doma, govor staršev ob odhodu neveste in prihodu na novi dom, govore starešin (njihova vsebina je znana tudi iz tiskane knjižice *Staršinstvo in zvačinstvo* in smešnice ter igre muzikantov).

Vzroka za neohranjenost prleških besedil vabljene sta najmanj dva. Prvi je ta, da dolgo besedilo ni bilo del tiskane produkcije, zato ni imelo veliko možnosti, da se ohrani zgolj s pomnenjem. Drugi vzrok je ta, da pomnenje ob poslušanju zahteva veliko spretnosti, potrežljivosti, sposobnosti, zbranosti, vztrajnosti in še česa, zato so ga bili sposobni le redki; poleg tega so dolge oblike postopoma nadomestile poenostavljene, krajše oblike. Vabljene na poroko je zato danes po svoji teatralnosti le še bleda senca šegam iz 19. stoletja.

S krajšanjem besedil in počasnim izginjanjem dolgega vabljena se je spremenila tudi *pozafčinova* vloga v poročnem obredju. Če je v začetku 19. stoletja po vasi vabil s slovesnim nagovorom, okrašenim obličjem, posebnimi rekviziti in hrupom ter tako spominjal na obliko ljudskega gledališča⁷⁵ ali koledniške obhode, je svojo vlogo v drugi polovici 20. stoletja odigral kar na svatbi.

Ker pa *človeki nemreš dūše tišati naze*⁷⁶ (mrtvega človeka ne moreš obuditi), nikoli ne bomo izvedeli, kdo so bile v resnici osebe, ki so ustvarile, brale in hraniše *Ženitovanjsko vabilo iz Lahoncev*. Prav tako nikoli ne bomo izvedeli, zakaj rokopis ni bil natisnjen, čeprav je bil v času svojega nastanka v prleškem okolju pomemben element poročnega obredja in nosilec slovenske narečne besede (Novak, 1976: 54), pomembne identitetne poteze tistega časa.

Zahvala

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⁷⁵ Delovanje ljudskih odrov je bilo v teh krajih razširjeno ob koncu 19. stoletja (Puconja, 2012).

⁷⁶ Izjava Ivanke Šalamun leta 2024, živeče v osrednjih Slovenskih goricah.

SAZU; Miha Špiček in Blaž Verbič, SEM; Janja Kovač, Muzej Međimurja Čakovec; Nataša Mihinjač, Gradski muzej Varaždin; Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku Zagreb; Darinka Gomboc, Beltinci; Miran Puconja, Cven; Iztok Luskovič, Ormož; Helena Ložar-Podlogar, upokojena etnologinja, ISN ZRC SAZU; Franc Jerebic, Beltinci; Marija Makarovič, upokojena etnologinja, SEM; Ludvik Rudolf, Mala Nedelja; Monika Čuš, Ženik; Franci Čuš, Sv. Jurij ob Ščavnici; Franci Just, Murska Sobota; Boris Kučko, Nedelica/Beltinci; Tadej Murkovič, Bodislavci; Ivan Rihtarič, Radenci; Anton Vodan, Okoslavci; Srečko Pavličič, Pristava; Marija Kozar Mukič, Sombotel/Porabje; Vlado Žabot, Razkrižje; Metka Vrboňak, Selnica/Slaptinci. Posebej se zahvaljujem naklonjenosti Mihe Kozoroga, da je dolgo besedilo prebral in ocenil, da je vredno objave v znanstveni publikaciji *Traditiones*. Cenim njegov trud, natančno branje, sugestije, popravke in izboljšave. Iskreno sem hvaležna tudi recenzentom/recenzentkam in tehničnemu uredniku za vse znanstvene izboljšave.

Izjava o raziskovalnih podatkih

Članek temelji na arhivskih virih.

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Wedding Invitation or the Slovenske Gorice Manuscript from the First Half of the 19th Century

This paper presents a rare manuscript, *The Marriage Invitation from Lahonce* from the first half of the 19th century, which was used by the *pozvačin* or *pozačin* (a special actor in wedding ceremonies) to invite people to a wedding. In the 19th century in some areas of today's north-eastern Slovenia (south-eastern Styria), at the request of the bride and groom, a couple of *pozvačin* went from house to house to announce a wedding. In order to understand the significance and the use of the manuscript, the author analyses the content of the invitation text, the characteristics of the *pozvačin*, the political context and the demography of the area of the manuscript's creation (the village of Lahonce). The author proposes some assumptions about the circumstances of its creation by comparing this text with other manuscripts and printed texts with a similar content. The author also detects the changes in the role of the text and the *pozvačin* in the 20th century.

The text itself is divided into several parts. It includes morals, satire and fun on married life. It also has elements of catholic liturgy, while the humorous questions at the end of the text refer to the Bible. The fables and riddles, which are part of the text, could reflect the ambitions of an educated priest who strives to disseminate both religious and Enlightenment ideas.

The text is written in a Slovenian "Prlek" dialect. Until the beginning of the 19th century, Slovenian dialect was a means of everyday communication in this part of Styria. In the first half of the 19th century, under the influence of Romanticism and the Slovenian national movement, several initiatives to introduce the vernacular into secular literature, schools, offices, and professional texts were launched. The author ponders on how this movement influenced the process of handwriting secular texts, such as the present manuscript. The question is also whether the text was aimed for memorization or for reading; however, since it explicitly states that the *pozvačin* read the text, the author believes that *pozvačin* were literate, which could also mean that they had an important status in the village community. Later, though, such texts were shorter versions of this original manuscript, while also the role of the *pozvačin* in the wedding ceremony changed.

Texts of this kind spread in the 19th century in the south-east Styria (Štajerska) and Prekmurje, thus we find them on both sides of the Mura River. Notably, the manuscripts persisted despite the presence of printed wedding invitations. Since *The Marriage Invitation from Lahonce* was probably created in Lahonci in Styria, but was discovered on the other side of the Mura River, we can assume that such texts were borrowed between *pozvačin* and were in this way migrating

across the river. In the 20th century, however, the role of the *pozvacín* went through various transformations, as inviting from house to house declined and long invitations were replaced by simplified, shorter forms.

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