

PETAR KLEPAC/PETER KLEPEC/PITR KLJEPC: A BORDERLAND HERO AND THE MANIFESTATIONS OF HIS STRENGTH

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ANJA MORIC

Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology,
Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana

ANA PERINIĆ LEWIS

Institute for Anthropological Research, Zagreb

Storytelling and mythology are as old as humanity. According to some scholars the role of myths is “to unify the groups, tribes, nations or other entities where they are being told around certain common ideas, values and orientations” (Stugu 2003). Nations, in particular, need a unifying element, which they usually find in mythology, where the character of the hero often embodies desirable characteristics of the nation. Since mythology knew no boundaries until “the birth” of nation-states, some heroes are shared by more than one nation. One such hero is Petar Klepac (in Croatian)/Peter Klepec (in Slovenian)/Pitr Kljepc (in local dialects), a hero of the Kupa and Čabranka Valley in the Slovenian-Croatian border region, who still appears in the local narrative tradition. He is a mighty hero with a “dual citizenship” and hero legends about him are part of the heterogeneous intangible heritage of the valley. The subject of this article is the strength of this folklore hero, manifestations of his strength in the border region, as well as, more broadly, in the folklore and literary heritage throughout the territories of both countries, his diverse roles in the creation and mobilization of identities and in tourism promotion.

Keywords: Petar Klepac/Peter Klepec/Pitr Kljepc, hero, strength, border areas, oral legends

INTRODUCTION: ON HEROES AND STRENGTH

In the history of mankind, the image of a hero has always served as a dominating social ideology and as a way to reproduce the social order (Šaver 2006: 72). Therefore, the

ability to produce heroic stories is an important feature of humanity, whereas the history of the world is, in fact, a “biography of great men” (Carlyle 1913). The status of a hero is not only bestowed on true historical persons, such as generals, politicians, kings, etc., but also on narrative (fairy-tale and literary) figures. A hero possesses a special (physical) characteristic or ability which distinguishes him/her from ordinary people who sometimes, because of his/her supernatural power, perceive the hero as a demigod. As Boon states “the mythic hero links the world of ordinary men and the realm of the gods” (Boon 2005: 302), and as such needs to be believed in: “Though heroic acts abound, heroes are beyond human and thus remain elusive. The title ‘hero’ imbues on its recipient qualities (in quantities) that no man may possess; therefore, the identification of heroes in the world of lived experience requires a leap of faith” (Boon 2005: 305). A hero cannot exist without an adversary, because he is articulated through juxtaposed antitheses of good versus evil, positive versus negative (Šmitek 2005: 5). The charismatic character of a hero has to be “sought in situations where it is enticed by the expectations, hopes, views and yearnings”, therefore it is related to society (Muršič 2013: 140). The hero belongs to a particular group and community whose interests, values and identities s/he protects and for whom s/he carries out heroic acts. Heroism is almost always associated with the manifestation of power. The hero is usually physically or psychologically superior to the opponent, overcomes him/her in a physical confrontation, or in some other way: s/he is more thoughtful, more skilled, more determined, more inventive, etc. However, the hero only becomes a hero when s/he uses his power to carry out an ethical act (Huzjan 2016), for example, helping the needy, saving people from the enemy, etc. A hero can only become a hero when the society labels or understands his/her actions as heroic, and assigns them the essence of heroism. Heroes, therefore, can never be understood on their own, only as members of a community, as symbolic embodiments of that community, and therefore they serve as models for community identification (Povedák 2014: 13).

In the world’s mythology there are many examples of heroes who possess great physical strength: for example Samson (Biblical mythology), Hercules and Achilles (Greek mythology) etc. Legends about mighty heroes such as *Kraljević Marko* (Prince Marko), Martin Krpan and Veli Joža can also be found in the territories of Slovenia and Croatia. As will be shown below on the example of Petar Klepac, the symbols of the hero’s physical strength can manifest themselves in oral legends, toponyms and monuments. Identifications with a hero can be present within the local environment or can spread to the territory of the entire state. Intangible cultural heritage – oral legends in our case – can serve as the basis for tourism promotion, since Klepac’s power is used to attract visitors to a touristically, economically and socially underprivileged region.

The stories of the hero Petar Klepac speak of a frail boy who, in accordance with the adventures in heroic myths (cf. Campbell 2007), when he encountered supernatural forces, acquired the power to uproot trees or lift heavy objects and to drive enemies out of his home region. The hero Petar Klepac appears in the tradition of the inhabitants of the Kupa and Čabranka Valley, at the Croatian-Slovenian border area. The oral narrative

tradition continued despite the establishment of the state border between Croatia and Slovenia (in 1991), when the former administrative border became an international one. However, the new border has influenced its development, transmission and occurrence in contemporary written records and narrations. The administrative division of the area also brought about a division of scholarly research conducted by the Slovenian and Croatian research institutions. Because of these circumstances, the authors of this paper worked on a joint research project¹ from 2015 to 2017. The project explored how the images of this traditional hero and legends about him became part of contemporary regional and local identifications and representations of culture and heritage in the border region. The ways in which Petar Klepac manifests his power gives him the status of a hero in the local community, and a national hero in Slovenia as a whole (Moric 2015). On the basis of an analysis of the Slovene and Croatian oral legends about Petar Klepac and interviews that we conducted in the Kupa and Čabranka Valley, in this article we examine Petar Klepac and his strength:² first we present how he obtained and used his strength according to oral legends, then we turn to an analysis of the manifestations and the use of Klepac's strength in the valley (and the broader area). Also, we examine the diverse roles that Petar Klepac had in the creation and mobilization of borderland identities and heritage. Petar Klepac is not only a strong hero with whom local people identify and who helps them to survive unpleasant historical events and traumatic experiences, but is also used to actively promote (cultural heritage) tourism.

ON HOW KLEPAC ACQUIRED HIS STRENGTH

All the legends start with Petar Klepac facing his own lack of strength. He is a small, frail illegitimate child,³ abused and beaten up by his peers. He is underprivileged both socially and economically. To help his mother who could not provide for their livelihood, he had to work as a village shepherd. Because of his physical weakness, he was insulted, mocked

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² The first part of the article is descriptive and analytical with a focus on the analysis of oral legends, whereas in its second part we present findings from our field work, based on our interviews with the inhabitants of the Valley from the Slovenian and the Croatian side of the border. Nineteen interviews were conducted in total, but in this article we present only those relevant to the topic at hand. We focus solely on the manifestations of Klepac's strength whereas other research findings will be presented in our future works.

³ Anton Ožbolt (1974: 6) is the only one who refers to Klepac as a cottager's son.

and beaten by other shepherds if he disobeyed. A transition from a weakling to a hero happens when Petar goes to Sveta Gora (Holy Mount), where he gains his supernatural strength. “Depending on the source of Klepeč’s power or his encounter with the Supernatural, the legends may be divided into three groups: stories in which a Christian assistant (God, Mary, the angel) is present, those involving a non-Christian assistant (fairy, fairies, ox, kresnik), and those that combine both types of assistants” (Moric 2015: 208).

Before gaining his strength, Klepac was fearful and withdrawn: “He was small in stature” (Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 93)⁴ or “He was a sweet urchin, although small and not strong” (No 264 P 1997: 259)⁵ or in Bevk (1963: 283): “No bigger than a spindle, a lot smaller than the other boys his age. And so scrawny and frail that even a hazel rod which he used to take cattle to pasture seemed too big a burden for him...” After gaining strength his character changes, but his physical appearance remains the same – it is usually in contrast with his physical strength.

Supernatural beings that most often bestow the powers on Klepac – according to the legends on both the Croatian and Slovenian side – are the *krsnik* (Croatian)/*kresnik* (Slovene) and fairies. These supernatural beings are present in the oral narrative tradition in the valley and the neighbouring regions. A *krsnik* is a person with supernatural powers, most often male, who, during his life, fights against evil forces to protect humans. He performs the function of a protector (from *štrige* and *štriguni* – female and male witches, werewolves and other *krsniks* and their evil deeds), a physician and a healer. He has specific features: he is born in a caul or with a special sign on the body; he has a strange appearance or gaze, and possesses the power of zoo-metamorphosis (transformation into animals) or zoo-metempsychosis (transmigration of the spirit or soul into animals). In Croatia this tradition is known in Istria, in the Croatian Littoral and the Kvarner Gulf islands, and, it should be added, that “the phenomenon is only exceptionally found in Gorski Kotar as well” (Bošković-Stulli 1959: 225; Šešo 2002/2003: 23). The belief in the *krsnik* appears in Western Slovenia, in Styria and Carinthia (Šmitek 1998a: 94; Kropej 2012: 44).⁶

⁴ We will use abbreviations to refer to the sources (manuscripts and newspaper articles) containing legends about Petar Klepac. The list of abbreviations is given at the end of the paper in the “List of manuscripts and newspapers with abbreviations” section. Quotations from legends in Croatian were translated into English by Mirna Vilišić and Tomislav Belanović. Quotations from legends in Slovenian were translated into English by Miha Odar.

⁵ In Primc’s collection “Okamneli mož” (P 1997) all collected oral legends are numbered. In the quotations we use the number of the legend and the abbreviations “No” (number) and “Nos” (numbers).

⁶ Research on *krsnik* beliefs, legends about *krsniks* and the prevalence of these legends has been a common effort of both Croatian and Slovenian ethnologists and folklorists. Maja Bošković-Stulli (1975) was the first to determine the similarities and differences between the Croatian and Slovenian data on the *krsnik*. Šešo (2002/2003: 44) talks about the “Slovenian *krsnik*”, concluding that “although it is not an entirely identical being, the Slovenian *krsnik*, considering similar traditions from other areas, is closest to the Croatian version”. The mythological concept of the *kresnik/krsnik* was more widely researched by Slovenian ethnologists and folklorists. The research ranges from establishing a link to the Slavic myth and comparing the *kresnik* with *Svarožić* (Kelemina 1930), through Mikhailov’s (1996) recognition of elements from the underlying Slavic myth, comparing it with *Perun* and his battles with *Veles*, to the works by Zmago Šmitek (1998a, 1998b), who makes a distinction between the mythological aspect of the *krsnik*

Amongst the legends of Klepac, the oldest and the rarest, often preserved in fragments, are those about krsniks battling in the shape of oxen, and Petar Klepac appearing in the role of an assistant helping an ox/krsnik in its battle against the rivals. The motifs of a battle with a krsnik are preserved in three manuscripts: Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 93–97, R-P 1847: 84 and J 1953. The zoo-metamorphosis of a krsnik into an ox and the re-transformation back into a human appears in Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 95 (“This ox is named krsnik”, “In that moment, krsnik became a human again, being released from his metamorphosis forever”) and in J 1953 (“that ox, which in fact was a giant – the giant Krijesnik”). The rival ox is red in colour (Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 95) and from another region: “Deep in Hungary there will also be a rich man, who will transform into an ox”, “you will see two oxen, me and the Hungarian” (Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 95).⁷ Petar helps the krsnik by following his advice and hitting the ox with a branch or branches on a part of the body: “three annual twigs”, “Come closer and don’t be afraid to hit the ox with the twigs thrice on his horns” (Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 95), “little twig that grew last summer” (R-P 1847: 84), “take a hazel branch and beat that ox on its legs” (J 1953). The duel ends with a victory over the rival with a fatal outcome: “He struck the red ox on the horns; the krsnik stabbed and killed it” (Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 95), “killed the rival ox” (J 1953) or with the flight of the defeated: “The defeated ox ran away mooing terribly” (R-P 1847: 84). In his story, France Bevk adopts the motif of the duel between two oxen on Midsummer Night. Klepec helped the ox named Cik in a duel by hitting the rival black ox on the back with a hazel twig. The power of the defeated ox was transferred to Peter Klepec (Bevk 1963: 288–289). The relationship between the legend about the krsnik and the legend about Klepac, as well as their mythological foundation, were first pointed out by Zmago Šmitek (2004: 168) and later studied by other authors (Moric and Perinić Lewis 2016; Smole 2016).

Legends in which Klepac gains his powers from fairies or Fates⁸ after protecting them from the heat of the sun, or handing them their clothes when they were swimming in a lake, are much more common. Amongst the 15 legends about Petar Klepac in Primc’s collection (P 1997), eight of them involve the appearance of fairies. Furthermore, fairies give power to Klepac in all versions of the legend that we heard during our field research. In most of the versions of the legend, the fairies are directly named and described. Sometimes they are referred to only as a woman, women or girls: (e.g. Hirc 1898: 148; Nos 266–269, 277 P 1997: 261–272; BR 1953; Emil Klepac 2015) or simply by the personal pronoun “she”: “She asked what he wanted” (BR 1953). There are examples where encounters with women

and its ecstatic aspect in which it is a kind of shaman, a leader and protector of a local group. More recent works by Croatian researchers (Šešo 2002/2003; Bošković-Stulli 2005; Vinšćak 2005; Rudan 2016) are in accordance with the mentioned complexity and specificity of believing in the krsnik. A correspondence between the motifs of the legends about the krsnik is most evident in the border regions between Croatia and Slovenia. By exploring stories about Klepac who gains his strength from the krsnik, we can also find evidence of the existence of the legend in the northern part of Gorski Kotar.

⁷ “He told Petar to listen to the (bells) ringing to him in Hungary” (J 1953).

⁸ “The Fates are mythical beings who, according to folktales, predict a new-born’s fate” (Kropej 2012: 67).

and girls are mentioned vaguely at first, with their real fairy identity being revealed only later: “They were actually fairies” (No 269 P 1997: 264, similarly No 277 P 1997: 271–272), “probably so-called fairies” (Josip Klepac, 2015). The most common is the motif of a fairy or fairies that fall asleep in the sun with Petar Klepac protecting them by providing them with shade. Another motif concerns fairies that take a swim in the lake with Petar Klepac handing them their clothes so that they can get out of the water again. “Fairies – Fates – were swimming there” (No 271 P 1997: 266), “Some ladies were swimming there, which were in fact fairies”, “During the conversation, the swimmers – fairies got out of the water on the other hill and asked Petar to bring them their clothes there...” (No 277 P 1997: 271–272). As is the case with the legends in which Petar gains strength from the krsnik, in the legends about fairies, Sveta Gora (Holy Mount) also most often appears as a place where encounters with the supernatural occur (Nos 268, 270, 272 P 1997: 263–270), however, in these legends, some other toponyms appear as well, e.g. Draga (Nos 269, 271, 277 P 1997: 264–271) and Merlička near Mali Lug (Little Grove) (Josip Janeš 2017, Vera Ožbolt 2016). One of the aspects of the fairies’ actions is their encounters and relations with humans. The fairies are particularly linked to heroes, giving them their strength and helping them, as well as often getting involved in love affairs with young men. The most renowned example from the South Slavic epic tradition is *Kraljević Marko* (Prince Marko) and his fairy Ravijojla. Maja Bošković Stulli (1959: 199) reports that legends about a fairy who gives strength to a feeble shepherd, often Prince Marko, as a reward for providing her with shade or undoing her hair are common, as are fairies who give strength by breast-feeding. A similar motif can be found in the legends recorded in the region of Istria (Žiža 1914: 373,⁹ Bošković Stulli 1959: 131,¹⁰ 132;¹¹ Rudan 2016: 502¹²), in northern and north-eastern Croatia (Plohl Herdovigov 1868: 99,¹³ 100;¹⁴ Lovrenčević 1970: 78¹⁵) as well as in Slovenian records of the legends about Prince Marko (J 1869: 39–40; Hirc 1898: 35–48). The motif of gaining strength after helping a fairy or fairies in the legends about Petar Klepac is similar to that from the legends of Prince Marko. Similarities between the

⁹ The legend “Marko Kraljević” (“Prince Marko”) – “Fairies gave him the strength and from then on, all the shepherds were afraid of Marko.”

¹⁰ The legend “Vile daju snagu” (“The Fairies Give Strength”) – “The prince found the fairies asleep. There were twelve of them. And they gave him strength.”

¹¹ The legend “Vile daju snagu” (“The Fairies Give Strength”) – the shepherd Mate protected the sleeping fairy from the sun with a cut-off maple branch. The fairy’s mother gave him strength (“since you want nothing else, I’ll give you strength”).

¹² The legend “Vile i Kraljević Marko” (“The Fairies and Prince Marko”) – “That he kneaded the colter like it was a macaron of iron. Therefore that he had a strong hand” (Rudan 2016: 502).

¹³ Legend No 1 “Dečak i vila” (“The Boy and the Fairy”) – a swineherd boy, who was getting beat up by shepherds, protected a sleeping fairy from the sun and she gave him strength “he took the oak by the top, all the acorns fell off”.

¹⁴ Legend No 2 “Svinjar i vile” (“The Swineherd and the Fairies”) – the swineherds made the boy Marko bring them water, he encountered fairies, they scooped up some water and made him strong.

¹⁵ Marko protected a sleeping fairy-child from the sun, and the fairy suckled him in return, giving him supernatural strength: “he grabbed the oak and pulled it out with the roots. Cheerfully he thanked her and ran back home.”

legends of Klepac and Marko were already observed by Dragutin Hirc (H 1892a: 4) at the end of the 19th century, when Hirc referred to Klepac as the “second Prince Marko”.¹⁶

The most infrequent versions of legends are those in which Klepac gains his power from God (No 264 P 1997: 259) and the Mother of God (H 1892a: 3; Hirc 1898: 148, No 265 P 1997: 260). Those legends are the most recent to appear and have replaced those with supernatural beings, krsniks and fairies. In some legends we find a combination of Christian and non-Christian assistants (fairies and God’s Angel): “Peter Klepec fell asleep on the meadow and dreamt that, on this lonesome meadow, he saw girls who were fast asleep”, “Then the skies opened, God sent an angel that kissed Petar and gave him tremendous power” (No 266 P 1997: 261). According to Čater’s (1995) version of the story, Klepec pleaded to God for strength, upon which a fairy appeared fulfilling his wish. According to the legend written by Jože Ožura (2002: 7), Klepec prayed to Mary on Sveta gora and God, upon hearing his wish, fulfilled it through fairies. In Bevk’s story, Klepec asked God to give him strength, which he received by helping the ox Cik to defeat another ox (Bevk 1963).

MANIFESTATIONS OF KLEPAC’S HEROIC STRENGTH

Upon returning from the Holy Mount, Klepac’s newly acquired power manifests itself in various ways: 1) rarely, he takes revenge on his peers who used to beat him up and made fun of him; 2) then he cleanses the soil on his farmstead of rocks, builds a new house or brings a huge beam and builds it into his old house (in Mali Lug); 3) after that, he becomes a helper who assists the inhabitants of the valley in their daily tasks; and 4) their protector from the Turks i.e. Ottomans, Mongols, Tatars or even the cynocephalus; and finally, 5) the guardian of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (see Moric 2015). So, like the inhabitants of the valley, he uses his power to overcome natural disadvantages and to chase away enemies from his home region. In the following section, we present examples of the manifestation of Klepac’s power in the legends, and then the use of his heroic power in the Kupa and Čabranka Valley, as well as in the territories of Slovenia and Croatia.

1) KLEPAC DEMONSTRATING HIS STRENGTH AND TAKING REVENGE

In the legends, many faces of the strong Klepac appear. The first is the motif of Klepac – the strongman. It is a demonstration of power with no purpose, a way to check and prove newly-acquired strength through:

¹⁶ The legends about fairies are narratively fertile in the region of the Kupa-Čabranka Valley, which is evident from 17 collected legends published in the “Vile” (“Fairies”) chapter of Primc’s collection (P 1997: 113–130). We also recorded a lot of legends about fairies and beliefs in fairies, especially river fairies, in Croatian settlements near the Kupa River (Razloge, Kupari).

a) uprooting bushes and trees: “Peter, mighty strength was bestowed upon you, root up a bush, birch or fir tree!” (AŠ 1860), “he uprooted a bush, and then he began to root up even sapling trees” (H 1892a: 3; Hirc 1898: 148), “so he lifted the thickest fir tree and took it home” (BR 1953), “with his arms he clasped the thickest must pear tree together with its roots. He flourished it all around and flung it into the Kolpa River” (No 266 P 1997: 261), “And she said to him, pull out a bush. And he did. Then he went on uprooting spruce trees and from then onwards he was strong” (No 267 P 1997: 262; similarly in No 268 P 1997: 263). Most of the time he does not stop at a single tree but rather uproots more, so as to test the limits of his strength: “then he started uprooting even sapling trees and he became so strong that word about him reached far and wide” (Hirc 1898: 148); “and then he became stronger and stronger. He was pulling out things and was mighty strong” (No 271 P 1997: 266).¹⁷

The same motif of the manifestation of power by uprooting trees is also found in Slovenian and Croatian legends about giants – *ajdi* (No 166 Kelemina 1930, giants rooting up trees, later turned into stone according to Bošković-Stulli 1959: 197), *hajdi* (giants who lived in the mountains and uprooted oak trees according to Lang 1914: 120, 135) or giant Roman Girls in Styria (Kropej 2012: 134). The motif of giants fighting against the enemies using trees uprooted from the Motovun forest after attacking their town on Psoglavac hill is also found in the story by Vladimir Nazor (1908) about the most famous Istrian giant Veli Jože.

b) Bending several horseshoes at one time – the number varies from nine (Hirc 1898: 148, J 1953, BR 1953), twelve (R-P 1847: 84) and even up to nineteen horseshoes (Z 1828 according to RRZ 2010: 95).

c) Lifting and carrying heavy loads – e.g. carts “he upturned all drivers’ carriages” (R-P 1847, H 1892a: 3, J 1953), a bear: “Klepac caught the bear as if it were a lamb and carried it home” (Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 95), a large beam which he mounts into his home (Hirc 1898: 146, “Puffing with anger, he loaded the beam onto his shoulder and brought it home and drove the ox with an empty cart in front of it” Z 1828 according to RRZ 2010: 97, “when he once came from the Sveta Gora (Holy Mount) he brought with him a big, thick and heavy beam and he built it into the master’s house” No 272 P 1997: 267, No 277 P 1997: 270) and large rocks (H 1892b: 4, Hirc 1898: 148, J 1953; Bevk 1963: 294). The dimensions of the objects are often given in detail, for example: “This beam is finished and measures 4 feet long, 85 cm wide and 15–20 cm in height” (Hirc 1898: 146), “It was 1 meter long and twenty by twenty centimetres wide” (No 275 P 1997: 269), “The beam was six meters long, fifty-seven centimetres wide, and thirty centimetres in height” (No 276 P 1997: 270, similarly No 277 P 1997: 271), or the Klepac’s stone at Grobničko polje (Grobnik

¹⁷ The thematic group of motifs entitled “Tests” in the motif-index of folk-literature is presented with numerous subgroups. One of them is “H1562.1. †H1562.1. Test of strength: pulling up tree by roots” with references to “F621. †F621. Strong man: tree-puller. Can uproot and carry off trees” and “F621.2. †F621.2. Trees pulled up by giant” (Thompson 1997).

Field) near the town of Čavle, which is “1.5 m long and a few hundredweights heavy” (H 1892b: 4, Hirc 1898: 148). In such cases, his manifestation of strength is sometimes a response to a challenge, for example, he bends several horseshoes simultaneously after being challenged by the Emperor in Vienna (R-P 1847: 84) or by a merchant in Rijeka (Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 95). Frequently, a crowd astounded by his might gathers, for example, “he fascinated his fellow townspeople, the inhabitants of Mali Lug” (Hirc 1898: 148). Similarly, in front of the inhabitants of Grobničko polje (Grobnik Field) and “to the amazement of all that were present”, he lifted a cart, and his peers were astonished when he uprooted a beech tree together with its roots after which “they held him in high esteem and appreciated him” (Hirc 1898: 148). With these acts he proves his strength and asserts the status of a “strongman” within the community. First, he establishes order and justice within the environment in which he grew up, within a group of peers and neighbours. These parts of the tale speak of an abused individual who takes vengeance on his peers and his fellow townspeople. The punishments he inflicts are the same as later in his fights against the enemy army: “Now, Klepec went to his fellow shepherds who previously mocked him. They came at him but he severely beat every last one of them” (Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 95), “He scampered to the birch tree, uprooted it and used it to thresh his peers, and from then on everybody was scared of him” (No 275 P 1997: 269, similarly Nos 265 and 271 P 1997: 260, 266). Fights with his peers, unlike fighting with an enemy, present a method of corrective discipline and the establishment of a new position and identity within the community. Its outcome is intimidation or injury as a way of punishment and instruction: “All in tears, they ran home...” (R-P 1847: 84), “as soon as any one approached him, he would only flick him with his finger and they would tumble down” (Hirc 1898: 148), “from then on everyone was in awe of him” (No 277 P 1997: 272, similarly No 265 P 1997: 260).

2) KLEPAC, A FIGHTER AGAINST THE ENEMY

Klepac acquires his true heroic status by fighting against enemies, which is the second most common motif in oral legends. Like any hero, he also needs a contrast in the shape of an enemy. Overpowering a monster or an evil force is the only thing that can make a hero stand out from the world of averageness and promote his desirable physical proportions into the perfection of an exceptional divine origin (Levanat-Peričić 2008: 532). Most often the role of the enemy is assigned to the Turks i.e. Ottomans, who plundered parts of Gorski Kotar and the Kočevsko seigniory in the fifteenth and sixteenth century (Simonič 1971; Kruhek 1981: 51; Burič 1983: 14–16). As we will present later, a large number of toponyms, anthroponyms and legends in the valley are based on Ottoman raids.

Two faces of Klepac appear in the motifs of his fight against the enemy: the first is a modest boy or a young man of exceptional strength who defends his region from the enemy. During his fights against the Turks, he often uses uprooted trees (a cherry tree, a birch tree, a fir tree or a tree of an unspecified species) as weapons e.g.: “He uprooted a

cherry tree and used it to drive the Turks from Osilnica” (No 268, P 1997: 263; similarly in Nos 269, 270 and 273 P 1997: 264–267), or: “Peter stands on a strong bough, breaks it like a twig, it falls down burying and killing all seven Turks” (Hirc 1898: 148), in one case he even uses a beam from his own house, “he grabs the beam from the roof and goes after them” (Hirc 1898: 148).

Moreover, the motif of the duel with a giant representative of the enemy camp appears: “The Turks had a terrible giant that every Emperor’s subject feared and thought he was imperishable” (Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 95); “the Turkish giant weighing nine hundredweights” (R-P 1847: 84), “a sturdy stout fellow”, “an arrogant foreigner” (S 1846) “a Turkish ogre” (AŠ 1860), “he fought a duel with a giant” (H 1892b: 4), “a Gargantuan soldier” (Hirc 1898: 148), “In Rijeka, he fought with a giant” (J 1953), “a soldier giant” (No 273 P 1997: 267). These fierce life-and-death fights typically end with the enemy’s destruction: “Now, he grabbed him tightly, and threw him four fathoms deep into the ground crushing him completely so that he died on the spot”, “Thus, lastly all the army jumped into the Kolpa, where he killed them all” (Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 97), “Klepec seized him and threw him on the ground so that he was stone dead where he once stood” (Hirc 1898: 148; almost the same in No 273 P 1997: 267), “when he came to the fortress of Crikvenica, he grabbed every Turk that alighted and flung him into the sea, thus, he alone did away with all the Turks” (No 275 P 1997: 269).

In the legends where Klepac fights against the enemy outside his immediate home region, there is also the motif of Klepac as a soldier and even a commander in chief, which is somewhat inconsistent with the descriptions of a modest hero, farmer and shepherd from the borders. Klepac may have his own army: “he also formed a special troop which hunted down the Turks; he drove them from the district of Čabar, drove them from Osilnica” (Hirc 1848: 148), “When the Turks were at Osilnica, Petar readied himself to drive them out of there. Thus, he summoned a troop composed of 50 men, became their leader together with his son...” (Hirc 1898: 148). According to Moric (2015: 209; 214–215) as a fighter against the enemy, Klepac assumes the role of a Habsburg myth, i.e. he appears as the guardian and saviour of the Habsburg Empire protecting it against the Turkish threat, for which he is rewarded with privileges: “Because of this heroic act, he and his village were granted special privileges by the Emperor which he and his descendants have long enjoyed” (Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 97), “As payment, the ruler bestowed upon Klepac great hunting rights and exempted him from taxes” (R-P 1847: 84), or a noble title “For chasing the Turks off as far as Slavonia, the Emperor Leopold made him a nobleman for his heroic acts, but he was summoned to Vienna to surrender. And it is even today that his countrymen retell the story that he was a nobleman” (H 1892b: 4; Hirc 1898: 148). In one variant of being granted nobility for Klepac’s heroic acts, it is his fellow townspeople from both sides of the border that receive them: “People of Osilnica say that they and some of the neighbouring Croatian villages were given benefits due to Peter’s heroism, which they lost due to the negligence of their ancestors” (S 1846).

3) KLEPAC, A SYMBOL OF NATIONAL POWER

Since the mid-19th century, Slovene and Croatian nationalists have used legends about Klepac to stir up national feelings. They were inspired by romanticism, which emphasized the importance of language and folklore in the process of the creation of nations. A particularly significant role in this process was assigned to heroes or “great men” (Jezernik 2013: 30–31). Nationally conscious intellectuals became more avid in collecting oral traditions. Petar Klepac’s transformation from a local hero to a national hero began in Slovenia in the first half of the 19th century, with various press releases aimed at promoting national consciousness among the Slovenians (Moric 2015: 213), whereas it started in Croatia at the end of the 19th century. As was typical of Central European nations, the Slovenians perceived culture as the most important means of forming a national and political consciousness. The Slovene nation, which had no political autonomy for centuries and did not fight any major wars, could only build its national self-confidence based on “great men” (Jezernik 2013: 8), usually the literati and literary heroes. Simoniti (2003: 76) even notes that in Slovenia, where there were no major army leaders, a mythology of “quasi-heroes” was formed, and instead of (non-existent) actual historical figures, it was literary and folk characters such as King Matthias, Peter Klepec and Martin Krpan who were elevated to the status of heroes. In a tellingly entitled legend, *Peter Klepec, silni slovenski junak* (Peter Klepec, a Mighty Slovenian Hero), the unknown author christens Klepec a “heroic son of Slovenia” (S 1846). This is the first (known) example of the nationalization of the myth of Peter Klepec (Moric 2015: 215).

A similar note was written by a Croatian travel writer, who journeyed through the Gorski Kotar region at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, when national ideas flourished, and significantly influenced the perception of this area and the spread of the legends about Petar Klepac. In his travelogue *Gorski kotar* (1898: 146–150), Dragutin Hirc (1853 – 1921) calls Klepac “a Croatian giant” (Hirc 1898: 146), and refers to the village of Mali Lug as the home of the “Croatian hero” Petar Klepac. Hirc symbolically makes Klepac a Croat when describing his attire as well. Hirc’s Klepac wears a red hat i.e. a *crven-kapa*,¹⁸ which, apart from being a part of the Dinaric and Adriatic traditional attire, is often worn as a symbol of the Croatian national identity, as was the case, for example, during the period of the Croatian National Revival (the Illyrian Movement), when it was worn by the leader and the central figure of the movement, Ljudevit Gaj, and other “Illyrists” (Simončič 2011: 241).

Although appropriations of Klepac by these authors began at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, controversy on who the hero belongs to in terms of nationality, as we make clear in the last part of this paper, has not broken out until the end of the 1980s.

¹⁸ “He wore a *koretac* (a long coat), white trousers, so-called clogs on his feet, and he covered his head with a red hat” (Hirc 1898: 146).

Thanks to the literary works by Slovene writers (Ivan Cankar 1917; France Bevk 1963 [1956]; Ferdo Kozak 1971 [1949]), in the 20th century, Peter Klepec was transformed from a local narrative hero into a literary figure, which helped him acquire the status of a Slovenian national hero (Moric 2015).¹⁹ Bevk's story *Peter Klepec*, which was repeatedly reprinted, especially contributed to his popularity. Later, Petar Klepac also inspired other authors: children literature authors (Kunaver 1988; Čater 1995; P 2009), comic book writers (Gatnik 1970; Izgoršek et al 2017), makers of animated films (Steinbacher 1999; Nikolov 2016), playwrights (ballet: Škerl 1980; puppet show: Lužan 1994; theater performance: Sever 2017). The use of Petar Klepac's name is widespread across Slovenia, always in conjunction with strength and endurance. Here are some instances of objects, places and services named after him: a Slovenian Armed Forces helicopter, a floating suction dredger in the Port of Koper, the Osilnica adventure park, a fitness centre, a climbing wall course, and even a helpline for children and young people in need (Moric 2015: 218).

Although there are tendencies to symbolically make Klepac a Croat (particularly in Hirc's writings), in Croatia he remains known only in his "narrower home region", in the Kupa and Čabranka Valley and in the region of Gorski Kotar. Presumably, in the wider Croatian territory he was "replaced" by stronger folk (e.g. Veli Joža) and/or historical heroes (Counts Zrinski and Frankopans). In recent years, Klepac primarily appears as a literary figure in the works of local writers (Žagar 2001; Pochobradsky 2001; Malnar 2004) and in the schoolwork by primary school pupils attending the Petar Zrinski primary school in Čabar (Janeš 2002). Two literary works that thematize the character and the Petar Klepac narrative tradition outside the area of Klepac's native region are *Petar Klepac, Lutkarska igra u 5 slika (rukopis)* (Petar Klepac, a Puppet Play in 5 Acts (in manuscript)) written by the folklorist Nikola Bonifačić Rožin (BR 1964) and performed by the Rijeka Puppet Theatre in 1964 (Bonifačić and Zebec 2017: 449) and the children's book *Goranove priče* (Goran's Stories) by publicist and children's writer Mladen Kušec (2015).

THE TRANSFER OF KLEPAC'S STRENGTH ONTO HIS DESCENDANTS AND THE INHABITANTS OF THE VALLEY

Despite Klepac's particular popularity in children's literature in Slovenia, and despite the use of his name as a synonym for powerful machines and strength-related activities (see above), his power on the country level is much smaller than in the local Kupa and Čabranka Valley region, where identifications with Klepac are present to a greater extent. In particular, on the Croatian side of the valley, the tradition of the immediate descendants of Klepac and Klepac's house in the village of Mali Lug has been preserved, which still influences the identification of its inhabitants with this hero. According to some versions of the legend, after performing his heroic deeds, Petar Klepac, returned home to the house

¹⁹ Klepac was often used as a symbol of weakness in the wider Slovene area (more in Moric 2015).

he built himself, started a family and begot offspring, grew old and died: “When he was 85 years old, he went to Budim again, where he died” (H 1892b: 4, Hirc 1898: 149), “In Mali Lug, [...] there was a prominent Klepac’s house, in which lived to be an old man of great strength who had crushed and cut off hundreds of heads of the enemy and the Ottomans” (Jemeršič 1904: 128). But with his death, his power did not disappear. It was inherited by his descendants. Klepac’s sons appear in recorded legends, more rarely in the Slovene sources: “He then married and had a son” (Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 97), and more often in the Croatian sources. Dragutin Hirc (1892a: 3) talks about three sons: Petar, Andrija, and Jakov. Only the father’s namesake Petar inherited Klepac’s strength, but, unlike his father, he beat the shepherds and drove them away with a broken branch. He was strangled in revenge. His son Jakov moved to the neighbouring village of Gerovo, and Andrija inherited Klepac’s property including Klepac’s birth house in Mali Lug with a huge beam that the hero installed as another material proof of his strength. Hirc’s records are also influential because of the data on the genealogy of Petar Klepac, which is related to the fact that in the Kupa and Čabranka Valley he is perceived as a real historical person: “Petar Klepac was born in Mali Lug to father Juraj and mother Ana in 1650, while he built the aforementioned house in the year 1719.” (H 1892a: 3), “a large single-storey white house, above the windows of which the year 1712 was marked in red figures. In this house, where Andrija Klepec now lives, Petar Klepac was born and lived...” (Hirc 1898: 146). Genealogies are examples of the combination of the present and the age of origin in the sequence of an individual generation. They are “a means of bridging the gap between the present and the era of origin and a means of legitimizing the present order, the present law” (Assmann 2006: 63). From Hirc to the latest records citing Klepac’s genealogy and the description of his house in Mali Lug, the “right” to the hero and the heroic past and his affiliation to a certain community is confirmed. The fact that Hirc’s description of Klepac’s house and the genealogy of his descendants had a significant influence on the identification of the inhabitants of Mali Lug and certain surrounding places with Klepac, is also visible from the fact that we summarized his records during our field work in the years 2015, 2016 and 2017 that took place in the Croatian settlements of Mali Lug, Gerovo and Čabar, where our interviewee showed us their own volumes of the book edition of Hirc’s travelogue, his transcripts or photocopies.

Identification with the hero is especially present among the inhabitants of Mali Lug. In particular, siblings Vera, Dragica and Josip Klepac claim that they are Klepac’s descendants because they were born in his birth house. In his Slovenian-Croatian book *Petar Klepac and his country*, Jože Primc (1991: 11–16) recorded their narratives and descriptions of the hero’s house. All the records concerning Petar Klepac’s birth house collected in Croatian settlements detail the great beam that Petar Klepac brought after gaining strength and built into the house. Identical descriptions of the beam also appear in the testimonies by the Klepac family. They tell it from the perspective of Klepac’s successors and often use the adjectives “Petar Klepac is my ancestor...” (No 277 P 1997: 270). Their memories are associated with the descriptions of the house, the knowledge of which is confirmed by

describing the details of its exterior and interior. Such descriptions are used to further confirm the identity of Klepac's descendants born in his home.

A tradition similar to the description of Klepac's homestead in Mali Lug is also found on the Slovenian side. The birth house of the Žagars in Bezgovica was called *Junakovi* (Hero's house) because "more than 150 years ago, the house was the home to a very powerful man. He carried the top ridge beam on top of the roof himself. Since then, he was called the Hero and this is why the house is called *Junakovi* (the Hero's)" (Makarovič et al. 2002: 37). According to some legends, Klepac was born in other places – on the Slovenian side of the border, most often in/or near Osilnica or Ribjek. The town of Osilnica got its name after mighty (TN: cf. sl. silen = mighty), strong and heroic locals (P 1993: 15). Often, even when another place appears on the Slovenian side as the place of birth, Mali Lug is referred to as Klepac's later residence, where he moved with his mother or spouse (e.g. No 265 and 272 P 1997: 267, 271). However, all these places are only a few kilometres of air distance away, which explains the prevalence of the traditions all over the valley. At the end of the 1980s, when the Municipality of Osilnica started using Petar Klepac for promotional purposes, the inhabitants of the Slovene and Croatian sides of the valley expanded their appropriation of the hero. At that time, the place of Klepac's birth as well as his "citizenship" became more or less dependent on which side of the border the narrator lived.

The identifications of the inhabitants of the valley with Klepac were not only promoted in newspaper articles and (travel) literature. The stories have a basis in geographical and historical circumstances. The hilly border region of Kupa and Čabranka Valley was characterised by poor economic development, poor traffic connections, low population density (Pavić 1981: 18–19) and a strong depopulation trend (Lajić and Klempić Bogadi 2010). The region was not agriculturally productive, and work performed on its steep ridges (mowing, harvesting wood, cultivation of fields, pasture) required considerable physical effort from the inhabitants. Hardships and difficult historical circumstances (the Ottoman incursions, wartime devastation, and internment in Italian concentration camps) did not spare the inhabitants, so it is not surprising that the hero Petar Klepac was born here – a strong man, a symbol of survival in an inhospitable area and a fighter against the occupying forces.

Among the older inhabitants of the valley, the memory of the horrors of World War II is still strongly present. The settlements in the valley, including the house in Mali Lug, were burnt down by the Italian fascist army in 1942, which deported the inhabitants of the valley into concentration camps on the island of Rab and to Italy (Gonars, Treviso and Palmanova) (Malnar 2003). After Italy's capitulation, the Nazis took younger men to Dachau. Most of our interviewees were children at the time, who, after the war, often orphaned, returned from the camps to their ruined homesteads. They often talk about a "lost childhood" and about their childhood as "one great suffering" (Malnar 2011). Josip Klepac (born in 1932 in Mali Lug) whom we interviewed in 2015 and 2016 – one of five children born in Klepac's house, who lived through the Kapor camp on the Rab island, the Italian Gonars, and whose father was killed in the Dachau camp – told us: "I never felt that I was a child, a child, never." For Josip Klepac and his siblings, as well as for his fellow villagers who shared with

them the fate of Italian camps, the birth house (which Josip believes is the house of the hero Petar Klepac) represents memories of a happy childhood before the war, at the same time gives them the power to survive in the future. The war trauma interrupted previous collective and individual identities, after surviving through this, the figure of the hero and the stories of his strength often served as an identification point for the internees. Their legends about Klepac were intertwined with their stories about their life and childhood, as well as memories and testimonies from concentration camps. Their stories are of a weak and rejected child who is dreaming of power, with that power being an additional motive for connecting with the Klepac legends and genealogy. Klepac's descendants inherited his strength, as well as a special status within the local communities. The transfer of power to the offspring is evident in the above-mentioned examples from the stories, and today, most of the interviewees from Mali Lug (e.g. Josip Janeš, 81, born and living in Mali Lug, interview 2017) points out that the Klepacs had the nickname "Jaki" (the Strong). Josip Klepac (2015) also said to us: "My nickname is Jaki (the Strong), because I am of his kin..." Moreover, Klepac's descendants are to some degree the descendants of his birthplace, and his strength has remained a universal legacy that is confirmed by the saying "To be as strong as Peter Klepec" for every strong man, which was occasionally used in Slovenia (C 1877: 82, SG 1882: 185) and in Croatia (J 1953).

SYMBOLS OF KLEPAC'S STRENGTH IN THE LOCAL REGION

Klepac became synonymous for what goes beyond the boundaries of the human. The extent of his strength is evident in the landscape of his native region, as well as in the microtoponyms that relate to something large and oversized in the Kupa and Čabranka Valley and in the broader region. According to the oral tradition, large rocks break away from the Loška stena (the Loška rock) and fall into the Kupa River. The biggest piece was then named *Klepčeva skala* (Klepac's rock). Some microtoponyms associated with Klepac cross the boundaries of the valley, for example, Klepac's stone, located on Grobničko polje [Grobnik Field] near Čavle (Hirc 1898: 148). According to the oral tradition, Petar Klepac was loading wooden boards across Grobničko polje (Grobnik Field) to sell them in Rijeka. He got tired but could not find a stone in the field where he could rest, so he brought the rock there. Both localities are associated with something very large and heavy or with something that could only be lifted and broken off by a giant, a strong deity or a mythical hero.

Tales of how Klepac overcame the Turks, as well as the elements of the tradition related to Klepac's battles with the enemy, were recorded in the toponyms in the valley. In the tradition of Klepac and his battles with the Turks, the most common one is the settlement of Turke, on the western side of the Kupa River, which is now part of the Town of Delnice, as a place that was named after the fact that the Turks were defeated there: "He beat up all the army, drove it over the Sveta gora (Holy Mount) towards Osilnica, and then towards Bosljiva Loka and squeezed them into a corner where even today there is a village with

some water on the plane named Pri Turkih (now Turke)” (Z 1828 as cited in RRZ 2010: 97), “He drove them all the way across Kolpa to the place where today stands the village of Turke, which has this name in memory of the event” (No 268 P 1997: 263), “Peter Klepec pursued them to a village several kilometers away, where the Turks made camp at the time. From that time on, the village is called Turki” (No 274 P 1997: 268). Even though the name of the settlement is believed to originate from the surname Turk (Burić 1983: 62–63, 342; Malnar 2016: 208), literature often cites this popular etymology of the name of the place (Barac-Grum and Finka 1981: 430, P 1995: 19), while the inhabitants of the valley most often refer to the legend of Petar Klepac and the Turks: “and then according to the legend the Turks came to Osilnica [...]. Well, they turned the church into a horse stable and then he rebelled and uprooted a cherry tree and drove the Turks from Osilnica to Turke, the village Turke is called Turke precisely because of this” (Josip Klepac interviewed in 2015, similarly O 2002).

THE POWER TO INCITE THE FEELING OF LOCAL BELONGING AND PROMOTE TOURISM

Until the end of the 1980s there was not much talk of Petar Klepac. But after two wooden sculptures were erected near Osilnica, controversy over who has the right to the market hero, Slovenes or Croats, broke out (P 1989). Two identical statues made by sculptor Marijan Leš from Gerovo are located at the entrance and exit to the Municipality of Osilnica. Both “flat-design” Petar Klepacs hold an uprooted oak tree above their head, bearing the following inscription: “Welcome to the land of Peter Klepec”. The third statue by the same author, but made according to a different design, is located in Mali Lug near the ruins of Klepac’s homestead, and a fourth statue, sculpted by academic sculptor Stane Jarm is located at the Kovač Inn in Osilnica. Stanko Nikolić, a retired physician who was the president of the Municipality of Osilnica at the end of the 1980s was the mastermind and the activist behind the construction and installation of the monuments in Osilnica (Glavonjić 2016). When we interviewed him in July 2017, he told us that, to boost economic development and the development of tourism, he wanted to promote the emergence of the tourist destination of the Land of Peter Klepec. He came up with the idea of marking its boundaries with these statues. By placing the statues, he did not intend to stir up national feelings, but he saw Peter Klepec as a figure through which he would instill pride and connect the inhabitants of the Municipality of Osilnica. First, he ordered a large iron statue of Peter Klepec in the Liv Postojna plant in Osilnica, but he soon changed his mind and ordered two wooden sculptures from Marijan Leš that would fit the environment better than the iron statue (Stanko Nikolić’s interview in 2017). One statue was placed in Osilnica and the other in Mirtoviči. In 1997, when a bypass road was built along the riverbed of the Kupa River on the Slovenian side, the statue was relocated from Mirtoviči to St. Ana, on the border between the newly established Municipality of Osilnica and the Municipality of

Kočevje (when the statue was placed in Mirtoviči, the Municipality of Osilnica was still a local community of the Municipality of Kočevje) (DL 1997: 5). A wooden statue of Peter Klepec was also crafted by academic sculptor Stane Jarm a year or two after the first two sculptures were made. It hangs on the facade of the Kovač Inn in Osilnica, which seems to be disputable to Stanko Nikolić (interview in 2017), since, as he says, in this case, Klepec is used for the benefit of an individual and not the community.

Eighteen years later, on July 20, 2007, the village of Mali Lug also got its monument of Petar Klepac. It was erected by the town of Čabar with the support of the local forest office of Šumarija Gerovo and the Forest Administration Branch in Delnice (Frković 2007: 487). The informative plaque reads: “Petar Klepac, a legendary giant of the Čabar region”, citing some segments of different legends about Klepac, about his house, with comparisons with Veli Jože and Martin Krpan. Klepac appears with a bell tied around his waist, and the plaque next to the monument addresses the visitors: “Ring the bell and you will also find some strength and a lot of goodness.” The dimensions of the elm statue are monumental. Zlatko Pochobradsky (interview in 2016), one of the initiators of erecting the monument in Mali Lug, wanted this monument to serve as a memorial to the inhabitants who suffered and died in the Italian concentration camps during World War II. Although another monument to the internees already stands in Mali Lug, Petar Klepac’s statue was erected on the ruins of Klepac’s house, which was never restored after the war, unlike other houses. Thus, the children born in Klepac’s house actually never returned to their home, remaining only the owners of the ruins.

The wooden sculptures of the hero have become a symbol on both sides of the border and one of the major tourist attractions. The Osilnica and Čabar municipalities use the character and the tradition of Petar Klepac for their representation and tourist promotion. All national divisions related to the legends of Petar Klepac, the use of his character or his representation through monuments are examples of the “invention of tradition”. Monuments can also be seen as physical manifestations of fictional traditions that “tend to establish continuity with the corresponding heroic past”, which mainly arise as “answers to new situations”, such as the division of the valley between two different countries (Hobsbawm 2006: 139). Instead of using the character of the hero to promote the culturally and geographically connected area of the Kupa and Čabranka Valley, as, for instance, in the case of using the local character *Iisakki Mustaparta* as a trademark and a part of cross-border regional heritage on the Finnish-Swedish border (Prokkola and Lois 2016: 22–24), the state border between Slovenia and Croatia has caused local border communities to market the figure of Petar Klepac individually. Thus, the Municipality of Osilnica and the Municipality of Čabar see the potential for tourism development in the very tradition of Petar Klepac, but each of them tries to appropriate the hero. The Čabar Tourist Board and the Municipality of Osilnica present and promote themselves on their websites as “the Homeland of Petar Klepac”/“the Land of Peter Klepec”. Texts about the hero on both sides of the border display elements of national appropriation (a “legendary” Croatian giant), but appropriation is even stronger on the local Osilnica–Čabar level. Both sides mention leg-

ends about Petar Klepac. Rather than transmitting tradition, their practice aims at enforcing different variants of the hero's tradition. The selection of the variant coincides with its representation in Croatian and Slovenian literature from the time of the national movements. On the Internet sites of the Osilnica municipality two versions of the legend are presented (simply referred to as the 1st and the 2nd version). The first one deals with the poor, vulnerable and frail peasant boy who was mistreated by other shepherds due to weakness. God fulfills his desire and gives him the power to “suddenly uproot a bush, a birch, and eventually a thick fir tree” to defend the valley against the Turks and become “the symbolic hero of our locales”. In the second version, he is bestowed his might by a mountain fairy that he protected from the sun. The use of the possessive pronouns is noticeable: “the hero of our region”, “our valley”, “the legend of our hero”, “defended our valley from Turk invasion”, “the symbolic hero of our locales”, “against the invasion of the Turks into our valley”, “because of this, he became our hero”, “our valley is called the Valley of Peter Klepac”. The representation of Petar Klepac and his traditions, which was adopted by the Slovenian settlements in the valley, is based on the motif of a hero as a member of the community and the patron of the “Osilnica valley”. Apart from mentioning the Osilnica valley, other toponyms do not appear. In addition to the term “valley” which systematically appears in all the notes on the page, the term “land” is used in the title, signifying a duality of terminology. In addition to the text, a photograph of the monument in honor of Peter Klepac on the Slovenian side of the border also appears.

On the Čabar website,²⁰ Petar Klepac appears under “attractions”, where two stories “On Petar Klepac” and “The History of Petar Klepac” are presented. The first contains the motif of his place of birth (“Petar Klepac is a legendary giant with supernatural power, born in the village of Mali Lug at the foot of Sveta Gora (Holy Mount) to a poor family”) and his identity is bound to Gorski Kotar. This is evident in the pervasive use of adjectives: “a hero unto whom people projected the best traits of a man from the hills”, “the symbol of the strength of the people of Čabar”. Several variants of the legends are briefly featured, taken mostly from Hirc's travelogue. These include: the version where Klepac acquires his might from fairies and uprooting trees, the legend of the large beam that he built into his home in Mali Lug, the version where Klepac pursued the Turks with the beam to Istanbul and was bestowed privileges by the Emperor for his merit in fighting the Turks. Everything is actually directed at the motif of the birth house and the beam, as can be observed from the drawing accompanying the text, which depicts Petar Klepac bearing a large beam on his shoulders with the image of his house in the background (and the figure of the hero dominating the image and looming over it). The second picture is a picture of Petar Klepac's monument in Mali Lug.

Today, Petar Klepac's sculptures are a tourist attraction in the settlements where they were erected, and are part of the identity of the locale and their inhabitants. The sculptures do not only have aesthetic value, but they are also landmarks or markers of the area.

²⁰ Čabar Tourist Board, https://www.tz-cabar.hr/petar_klepac.html (accessed 4 October 2017).

On the Slovenian side, they mark the entrance and exit points from the municipality of Osilnica, the “Valley of Peter Klepec”, while on the Croatian side they mark his birthplace – “the birthplace of the Croatian giant”. All sculptures are very big, although Petar Klepac was small and frail. Their size symbolizes the hero’s strength, but it is also a way to measure their strength against each other. For residents on both sides of the border, they are a way to affirm, for example, working in the valley, their hardships and suffering, which they can overcome just like Petar Klepac. On the other hand, the sculptures arouse controversy over Klepac’s nationality, or, in other words, over who has the right to market Klepac. These sculptures are a source of local identity, which, gravitates towards national (Croatian and Slovenian) identity on either side of the border. Even the implementation of the Schengen border regime did not change this fact. The only question that remains is whether the annulment of the Schengen regime could make this happen, or whether the distinction between “Slovenian” and “Croatian”, which affects the otherwise cross-border cultural heritage, is already too deeply rooted in the valley.

CONCLUSION

The oral tradition, symbolism and the role of the hero Petar Klepac in the Kupa and Čabranka Valley, the border region between Croatia and Slovenia, have developed and transformed over time. By analyzing Slovenian and Croatian records of the oral legends about Petar Klepac as well as the variants of the most frequent motifs, permanent aspects of the heroic myth become apparent. The motif of a frail boy, a marked and isolated member of the community who, after coming in close encounter with supernatural powers, gains supreme strength, obtains the identity of a hero and becomes the personification of the ideal representative and defender of his community, classifies Klepac with other well-known heroes from the heroic tradition. The fundamental backbone of his heroic biography is the manifestation of strength, which is a recurrent theme in legends. The exceptionally strong Klepac publicly shows his strength in several ways. First, he demonstrates it within the local community and in situations of rural everyday life using it to establish his reputation by taking vengeance on his peers and by helping his neighbours. His second role is that of a protector against the enemies that attack the valley and the wider homeland. Because of this, he transforms from a local hero to a defender of the nation. In Slovenia, thanks to the thematization of this motif and the role of Klepac in literary works, he gains the status of a national hero, while in Croatia he remains a local hero. Yet his main role on both sides of the border is one of a frontier soldier whose “defensive potential” will be activated in contemporary identification strategies and representations in the border area. Legends about Klepac are interpreted and perceived differently, and the hero is employed as a cultural symbol for diverse forms of identification – from the local, regional to national and even individual level, as is the case with children who were prisoners in concentration camps. There are numerous interpretations and receptions of

the hero Petar Klepac, since he, like other heroes, could easily embody “the good or bad, honesty or crime, and can be a stumbling block or a solution” (Fikfak 2014: 8). Klepac’s strength, as part of the common heritage, regardless of the borders and different interests of local communities, is now most urgently needed by the inhabitants of the Kupa and Čabranka Valley, both in the metaphorical sense of survival in this regions, as well as a tourist symbol.

LIST OF MANUSCRIPTS AND NEWSPAPERS WITH ABBREVIATIONS

- A. Š. 1860. “Kratkočasnica: Peter Klepec. Narodna Pripovedka”. *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice* 18/31: 244–245. (AŠ 1860).
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LIST OF INTERVIEWEES²¹

Josip Klepac, born in 1933 in Mali Lug, interview: Čabar, 22 May 2015 (Ana Perinić Lewis and Morana Jarec), second interview: Čabar, 18 June 2016 (Ana Perinić Lewis and Anja Moric).

Josip Janeš, born 1936 in Mali Lug, interview: Mali Lug, 8 September 2017 (Ana Perinić Lewis and Maja Adžija).

Emil Klepac, born 1942 in Makov Hrib, interview: Prezid, 22 May 2015 (Ana Perinić Lewis and Morana Jarec).

Vera Ožbolt (birth name Mrle) from Mali Lug, interview: Mali Lug, 18 August 2016 Malom Lugu (Ana Perinić Lewis and Marko Smole).

Zlatko Pochobradsky, born 1946 in Gerovo, interview: Gerovo, 18 August 2016 (Ana Perinić Lewis, Jelena Marković, Ljiljana Marks and Anja Moric).

Marijan Leš, born in Vrbovsko, interview: Gerovo, 18 August 2016 (Ana Perinić Lewis, Jelena Marković, Ljiljana Marks and Anja Moric).

Stanko Nikolić, born in Serbia, interview: Hrib, Slovenia, 28 July 2017 (Anja Moric).

PETAR KLEPAC/PETER KLEPEC/PITR KLJEPC: JUNAK NA GRANICI I MANIFESTACIJE NJEGOVE SNAGE

Pričanje priča i mitologija stari su kao i čovječanstvo. Neki smatraju da je uloga mitova “ujediniti skupine, plemena, nacije ili druge entitete, gdje se uspostavljaju oko nekih zajedničkih ideja, vrijednosti i opredjeljenja” (Stugu 2003). Takav ujedinjujući element naročito je potreban nacijama, koje ga obično nalaze u mitovima gdje lik junaka često utjelovljuje poželjne nacionalne značajke. Budući da mitovi prije rođenja nacionalnih država nisu poznavali granice, neki su junaci zajednički za više nacija. Primjer takvog junaka jest i hrvatski Petar Klepac/slovenski Peter Klepec/dijalektalno Pitir Kljepc, junak iz Kupsko-čabarske doline na granici između Hrvatske i Slovenije, koji još uvijek živi u suvremenim lokalnim usmenim predajama. Riječ je o snažnom junaku s “dvije domovine”, a predaje o njemu dio su heterogene nematerijalne baštine u dolini. Ovaj se rad bavi snagom tog narodnog junaka, te manifestacijama njegove snage u pograničnom području i šire, u narodnoj predaji i zapisima na čitavom teritoriju dviju zemalja, u njegovim različitim ulogama pri stvaranju i mobilizaciji identiteta te u turističkoj promidžbi.

Ključne riječi: Petar Klepac/Peter Klepec/Pitir Kljepc, junak, snaga, pogranična područja, usmena predaja

²¹ Names, surnames and personal details of interviewees are fully disclosed in accordance with their request. Their informed consents were recorded at the beginning of each interview.