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## **BAN JOSIP JELAČIĆ IN CROATIAN ORAL LEGENDS: BETWEEN HISTORY AND MYTH**

The place of historical personages in oral tradition is analysed on the basis of oral legends. One starts out from the assumption that there exist in their presentation clichéd notions about the valour of heroes, the magnanimity or evil of rulers, and of their generosity and wisdom. Such narrative models are transmitted and adapted to the most diverse historical characters and historical eras, whether the actual biographies of such historical personages are consistent, or not, with the clichés.

The question arises as to the extent to which these texts are history, or fiction. In linguistic style, they are much closer to the living vernacular than historical texts are and it is just in that richness that similar but still quite diverse individual expressions reveal a greater density of both experiences and data. Although they are history in part, these legends primarily represent experience of a historical fact organised in a literary manner, with identifiable components of oral literature. Complex historical structures are described from the personal worldview of the narrator or the immediate local community. They reduce the macro-historical level to the local, or even the individual one. In this way, they approach contemporary historiography, which does not interpret historical events and persons solely by bare facts, but rather includes the context of events in its scholarly discourse, along with the testimonies of participants, various stories that do not have to be identical, while each one individually reveals or interprets a small portion of truth.

The selected examples show how historical works and the biographies of historical persons, for example, Ban [Governor] Josip Jelačić can become the foundation for the creation of national myths.

Keywords: history, oral legends

I don't know about other places, but where I live in Upper Posavina, there just north of Sisak, there was nothing more desirable for us village children – and there still isn't – than to go to Zagreb and see Ban

Jelačić.<sup>1</sup> When word spread through the village that so-and-so (...) was taking hay to Zagreb, I would immediately think: how lovely it would be if they took me with them (...). And then, after such a long and pleasant ride, there you were in Zagreb, in front of Ban Jelačić, seated on his horse with his sword pointing in the direction of the Hungarians.

The fact that he was pointing with his sword towards the Hungarians – that was something that interested me (Gorupić 1938:3).

This is a personal testimony and childhood reminiscence of Stjepan Gorupić of the first journey with his mother to Zagreb. The autobiographical statement is also part of the introductory chapter to a booklet on Ban Jelačić, which S. Gorupić published in 1938. These warm words bear witness to a living popular memory of Ban Jelačić at a time when he had already been dead for a long time. On that occasion, Stjepan Gorupić also mentions a recollection of his mother, who had seen the Ban during his lifetime:

I saw him, dear child, I saw him just when he was appointed Ban. I was your age then, but I remember it, because at that time the whole of Zagreb and the whole of Croatia was talking about Ban Jelačić (Gorupić 1938:4).

These two emotional recollections – that of the author and of his mother – refer to two time periods: during the life of Ban Jelačić, and after his death. However, what links them together is the emotional stance towards the Ban and the fact that the Ban was talked about. The boy's reminiscence is also something much more: in it, the personage of Ban Jelačić has already become a symbol of the city of Zagreb – to travel to Zagreb meant to see the memorial statue of the Ban on Zagreb's central square. It is noteworthy that in these statements – also in statements noted down later, and in literature – the statue is rarely mentioned directly, but rather its personification, the Ban himself, the horseman, Ban Jelačić. This memorial statue to Ban Jelačić was erected on the city's central square, Harmica, which was renamed in his honour as Ban Jelačić Square, and was to become the almost mythic centre of both Zagreb and Croatia as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Baron Josip Jelačić, a high-ranking officer in the Austrian army, is chosen as Croatian civil governor (Ban).

<sup>2</sup> Josip Jelačić Bužimski (1801-1859) was the Ban of Croatia from 1848-1859. After schooling at the Theresianum in Vienna, he undertook largely military duties. In the tempestuous year of 1848, he was appointed the Ban of Croatia, and, later, Vice Marshal and military Commander-in-Chief of Civil Croatia and Slavonia and of the Military Borderland, which, because of his reputation as an officer and of his populism, created universal delight. As the new Ban, Jelačić discontinued the real union of Croatia with Hungary in 1848, promised a Sabor [Parliament] based on "popular representation", convened the Banal Conference (Council), which issued the new Sabor's electoral law and later developed into the Croatian Government. By a Banal Letter (Decree) of April 25, Jelačić revoked appropriations based on the Urbarium Acts regulating the relations between landowners and the peasants tied to their lands, ecclesiastical tithing, and the corvée, or obligation to work on the landowner's estate. He was ceremoniously installed in office, but misfortune awaited him in that very year: he was stripped of his banal

The citizens of Zagreb, too, have featured the monument in their oral tradition: the ditty *Po grdom, po lepom, / Rendes pod repom!* [Rain or shine, / We'll meet under the tail!] is really understandable only to Zagrebians: here, *pars pro toto*, the Ban's monument is unambiguously identified only by the horse's tail, the tail under which the meetings are arranged (Fischer 1995:243). Even much later, during the later 1960s, when the monument had long been removed and when some of the people meeting on the Square had only heard of but never seen it, the saying "meeting under the tail" was still in use, meaning that the meeting-place would be on the Square, leaving out its full name. And although the square had been renamed as the Republic Square, for the old Zagrebians it was always 'Jelačić platz', while the new generation simply called it the 'Square'.

In this instance we are interested in the oral tradition about Ban Jelačić, particularly the prose. As far as I know, not many stories about him were noted down. By genre, they belong to historical legend. The themes and motifs are known in European, and expanded in Croatian oral literary prose tradition: the liberation from serfdom, the mythic sleeping popular ruler who would come to the aid of his nation in difficult times, and the riddle of the ruler's death. The texts were directly noted down as a relatively lively part of narrative repertoire in villages located in Zagreb's immediate environs: in Kamenjak and in the surroundings of Novi Dvori in 1970, and in Žeinci in 1994.

Josip Jelačić swore his banal oath on April 8, 1848 and was named Vice Marshal and military commander in Banal and Borderland Croatia. In Zagreb on St Mark's day, April 25, he issued an open letter

richly ornamented with the Ban's seal and signature, declaring that the peasants were liberated for all time from the obligation of corvée for the landowners and from all urbarial and Church tithing payments (Mijatović 1990:34).

This in itself did not solve all the existing problems, and, after his proclamation, many communities wrote to the Ban with requests, and wishes and proposals for new organisation.<sup>3</sup>

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rights, unsuccessfully tried to find a peaceful solution with the Hungarians, but finally declared war against them. Since Hungarian policies were also a threat to the interests of the Viennese Court, Jelačić's campaign at the same time meant defence of the Court's interests in the war waged by Austria against the Hungarian Revolution. As a loyal imperial servant, he considered the maintenance of Austria to be a guarantee of freedom for the peoples of the Monarchy, so he also took part in crushing the 1848 October Revolution in Vienna.

A supporter of the idea of political alliance between the Kingdom of Croatia, Dalmatia and Slavonia with Vojvodina and Slovenia and of Austro-Slavism, he was the mainstay of all the Slavs in the Monarchy. Notwithstanding, the Court in Vienna did not trust him. Within the framework of his possibilities, he promoted the interests of Croatia and, already during his lifetime, became one of its symbols.

<sup>3</sup> The greatest number of legends feature justice or, more precisely, injustice done to some member of the populace, as their themes were historically rooted in the time of serfdom

Part of the framework of the oral legends about Jelačić's freeing of the serfs definitely come in part from these briefly described historical events. In this respect, some questions arise: can a historical event – a decree on abolishment of the urbarial appropriations, the corvée and Church tithing – prompt the stories that have been preserved for so long in oral tradition and continue to be transmitted on; how much do these stories interweave with history; do they correspond with the narrator's present day and everyday life; what was it, in fact, that made a popular mythic hero of Ban Jelačić; and what is the relationship between local and regional history and national history and the entirety of particular historical periods?

Three texts speak directly about the abolition of serfdom: *Ban Jelačić Abolishes the Corvée*, *The Bell of Ban Jelačić*, and *Ban Jelačić's Horse*.

In the story, *Ban Jelačić Abolishes the Corvée*, peasants worn down with feudal dues came to Ban Jelačić in Zagreb's Upper Town to seek justice, since they thought the Ban was at fault for their woes. Ban Jelačić came out onto the balcony and asked the people what they wanted. He told them that he was not at fault and led them off

to Vienna in front of the Emperor and King, Franz Joseph. The Ban travelled on horseback, and the people followed him on foot. It took them four days to walk to Vienna. In Vienna, the Ban told the King everything. Then the King took out a white handkerchief and said:

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and/or its abolition. Emperor Joseph II had abolished serfdom in Croatia in 1785, which meant that, from that time, the former serf had freedom of movement, could marry without the consent of the squire, learn a trade, and dispose with his own moveable property, but it was also stipulated when and how much the serf had to labour on the landowner's land and how much rental in cash he had to pay for use of the landowner's land, forest, meadows and fish-ponds. The local squires often did not respect the stipulations of the Law, and demanded much more than the Law laid down, leading to frequent revolts and dissatisfaction.

Prompted by the influence of the peasant rebellions in 1848, partial liberations of the serfs followed later. The serfs in villages on feudal land were exempted from payment of feudal appropriations, while the position of the peasants on allodial land remained unchanged. The new relations were not codified, a large part of obligations were not rescinded and peasant dissatisfaction continued well after that time. This was partly due to their ignorance about their actual rights, but also because of the autocracy of the estate owners. Complaints on the part of the peasants were rejected or not replied to at all. The problem was that the peasants usually did not have any documents whatsoever or any written evidence regarding the land at their disposal (Gross 1985). Consequently, it is probable that Jelačić's letter on liberation from serfdom was remembered among the people as actual liberation (also being of more recent time), and that it was this very act on his part that became the source of the stories about him.

Various very distant historical periods and persons were remembered and traditionally transmitted onwards or, in other words, they were condensed, blended and partially amalgamated in popular notions and in texts that spoke of liberation from serfdom, and thematically similar historical legends about liberation from corvée also speak of the Austrian emperors, particularly about Joseph II (for more on this point: Marks 1994; 1998; 2003).

'From today onwards, there will be no more *klaka*' (Zečević 1973:23; Marks 1994:138-139).

This legend partly reflects historical events from Jelačić's time and relates to the period after the abolition of serfdom, but prior to the Ban's decree, since the narrator says that the *klaka* had already been abolished, but that the barons were still repressing the people. It gives a picturesque image of the hierarchical relationship of the peasants and the administration: Ban Jelačić represented power in Zagreb. The people had come to the Upper Town and stood below, in front of the Ban's house, while the Ban on the balcony, in an elevated position, declares to the crowd that he is not to blame but that he will go with them to Vienna. They travelled to Vienna for four days, the Ban on his horse, with the people behind him, on foot. The relationship changed when they arrived in front of the Emperor's court in Vienna: Ban Jelačić, admittedly still on horseback, was below with the people, while "the King came out, again on a balcony". From this elevation, symbolically, with a white handkerchief as a sign of his own surrender, Emperor Franz Joseph announced to the people that there would be no more *corvée*.

In conclusion, the narrator adds that there were journalists at the meeting with the Emperor, and that they printed their reports in the press. This commentary belongs to the time when its notation was made (in 1970) and the media age, when information and news exist only if they are published. Just as in the precise identification of the individual localities – Kamenjak, the village of origin of the dissident peasants and the narrator himself, followed by the local toponym, Groblje [cemetery], which really was once "a cemetery for those who had been hung during the time of the *corvée*", and the cross at Galženjak, a place which was given its name in popular etymology from the *galge*, or gallows, upon which the peasants were hanged, oral legend gives validity, authenticity, reality, and the significance of a historical document, so the newspaper report, although it belongs to a completely different time, undoubtedly confirms the Emperor's decree.

The metaphorical abolition of the *corvée* is also described in the legend entitled *The Bell of Ban Jelačić's*. The plot deals with the pact between the Austrian Emperor and Ban Jelačić: the sovereign will fulfill the Ban's wish if he, on his part, fulfils the Emperor's seemingly unfulfillable order. In order for the Emperor to abolish serfdom, Ban Jelačić had to cast a bell that would be so big that it could be heard all over Croatia. The bell in the legend is the well-known proclamation that the *corvée* was being abolished. That letter, too, like a great bell, echoed throughout all of Croatia – and the *corvée* was, indeed, abolished. In the minds of the people, Jelačić "had a heart of gold" since he wanted only good for the Croats (Marks 1994:140).

In the last sentence, the narrator departs from the actual time of the legend and comments on a much later turn of fate – not concerning the

Ban but his monument: the Ban wanted only good for the Croatians, but "then he was taken down by the communists from that Republic Square".

The abolition of serfdom is one of the themes in *Ban Jelačić's Horse*, but it provides only the framework of the story: the introductory and concluding sentences do speak of the rescinding of the corvée. However, the legend is more about Jelačić's pride and of his courage, wisdom and shrewdness. Jelačić had trained his horse so well that it could jump a two-metre wall. When Jelačić's life was threatened unless he signed his assent to Croatia being under the authority of Hungary, his horse jumped a wall and carried his owner straight back to Croatia, to his house in Novi Dvori (Marks 2003). This horse is also mentioned in historical papers: Jelačić had done battle together with the Ottoman Borderlanders near Podvizd and Glina. Some of them were his friends and Mahmud-Beg Bašić from Bihać presented him with a white horse called Arab as a gift. He rode Arab when going to his banal instalment and later in his campaign into Hungary (Mijatović 1990:23; Gorupić 1938:24).

Contemporary literary theory has paid considerable attention to just this relationship between the historical and the fictional and its possible diverse actualisations in the literary and historical discourse.

Since the impersonal statement in which 'events seem to speak for themselves' is linked with the scholarly practice of historiography, it is natural that [a story as] a personal statement that demands the effort of understanding is linked with literary practice (Biti 1997:63).

The greatest difference between historical and literary actualisation of discourse is most clearly delineated in the manner in which the literary discourse realises its chain of events. The historical chain of events is expressed in the parameters of historical time and place. The chain of events in a literary statement is "the result of the author's creative intention which, with various interventions, opposes the stereotypes of literary understanding. Consequently, it has mimetic but not actual significance, and therefore depends on the appropriate reception" (Biti 1997:63).

That does not mean that there are no points of contact between the two expressions: when historical narration aims at "story-telling", even when borrowed from oral and written testimony, the story-telling factor dominates rather than deduction from facts. Historical narrations "have much more in common with fictional story-telling than historians are usually prepared to admit. Institutionalised borders between history and literature can be challenged by pointing out the fact that the historical discourse is subject to the same type of analysis as any other discourse" (Walia 2002:18). Therefore, history, too, may be defined as ongoing tension "between the stories that have been told and those that could be told" (Hunt 1991:103; quoted according to Biti 2000:15).

Today, we increasingly read historical discourses as auto-referential structures that lead us into the complex process of the historian's "sometimes well thought out, sometimes spontaneously selective decisions.

(...) We can interpret in that light the most recent growth in interest and sensibility for the place of the subject in the historian's discourse. What is in question is an aspect which academic history has carefully suppressed, but whose exploitation – according to the arguments of numerous researchers – links Romantic and contemporary historiography" (Biti 2000:28-29). To that extent, historical legends – (those written down in direct communication, but also those that are found in Romantic historical works – largely in Kukuljević) are texts that mediate the past, but are packed on the affective, expressive and imaginal narrative level.

The meaning of historical oral legend written down in direct communication between a narrator and a researcher is realised through three factors: according to the narrated text; according to the researcher, and according to the time and situation in which the story was told (the source of diverse variants of the same stories told by the same narrators, but to various researchers). Greater or lesser numerosity, repetition, and the difference between the variants of the same motif noted down, make the motif typical and subject to broad identification, without removing the right to uniqueness of each individual statement.

Historical legends compress the many centuries of Croatian history, but events are not shown in their chronological sequence. These legends skip over and link what are frequently distant historical periods and diverse historical personages, while stressing what seems to them to be crucial, whatever period they belong to. Examples of this are the narrator's mention of the newspaper report as referred to above, but, even more so, the commentary about the communist authorities removing the monument. In their linguistic style they are much nearer to the living vernacular than the historical texts, and it is just that richness in similar, but still quite different, individual statements that reveals the density of experience and data. Although they are, in part, history, these legends are primarily literally organised experiences of historical acts with identifiable components of oral literature. The complex historical structures are described from the narrator's personal worldview or the worldview of the immediate local community.

They reduce the macro-historical level to the local, or even to the individual one. By that procedure, they are close to contemporary historiography, which interprets events and persons not only by data but includes in its scholarly discourse the context of the event, broadening themes from "grand persons" to "the little people", the testimony of participants, various stories that do not have to be identical, but with each one individually revealing or interpreting a small portion of truth.

However, contemporary history also seeks to research structures that cannot be reduced to the order of experienced events [thus, no longer *post hoc ergo propter hoc*] since their prolonged existence supersedes the temporal experiential space of the events' participants, so that they

should be regarded as causal elements that explain events (Gross 1996:365).

In the stories about Ban Jelačić, and particularly in the songs, one finds the narrative motif of the personage of an unreal, Utopian leader, the dormant leader sleeping in the interior of a nearby mountain that will, when the need arises, rise up and liberate his nation.<sup>4</sup> Matija Gubec is one of the personages (also one of the mythic characters in Croatian oral literary tradition) who emerges in the oral literary reconstruction and reconstruction of Croatian history, and it often happens that the legends that tell of the abolition of the corvée interweave the Matija Gubec and Ban Jelačić personages.<sup>5</sup>

Gubec represents a certain plebeian line of continuity, appealing to ancient rights as a sign of awareness of community that could not be achieved by way of the nobles and foreign rulers. During times of conditional State independence, he became a symbol of both popular resistance and the continuity of the domestic tradition that survived in later times. This was not a matter of chance since this really did mean the historical existence of strata that had neither a crown nor the attributes of power and authority, and had no written documentation, nor courts nor civil servants.

In the stories (and songs) about Ban Jelačić, the common man links his own world models, which imply the imperfectness of this world, and realistic solutions. The characteristics of a national leader and liberator are personified in the Ban's name; the solution of crucial events in the history of the Croatian people are attributed to him and he is invoked in times of crisis. All the misery, but also, the hopes and faith of the people in the liberation from foreign rulers, feudal lords and other power-wielders are transferred into his personage. The example of Ban Jelačić show that the "the 'individual' can be explained only by the 'general' which is primarily expressed in the individual" (Gross 1996:372).

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<sup>4</sup> The legends of the dormant ruler who sleeps along with his knights deep in the bowels of a mountain or in a cave, who will awaken when the time comes and re-establish justice, is usually linked with King Matijaš (Matija Korvin) and is largely written down in the lands of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. According to notations to date, the Slovenes more frequently tell stories about King Matijaš (and/or Matijaž) than the Croatians do. Slovenian legends were adopted in Croatia without any indication of their source and, sometimes, they were taken a step further so that the legends were interpreted as if they related to Matija Gubec, which is not beyond dispute. (For more on this point, see: M. Bošković-Stulli 1984:151-182).

Concerning the rumours and legends about authentic and false leaders in oral history and literature in Russia, where self-proclaimed czars also appeared on the basis of them, see: L. J. Lurfje, "Oral History und Volksgeschichte" in: *Bios. Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung und Oral History*, Hagen, I/1990, pp 9-21.

<sup>5</sup> Matija Gubec was the leader of the Peasants' Revolt in Croatia in 1573. After the uprising failed, he was arrested and later executed in Zagreb. His personage is often the theme in both written (Mirko Bogović, August Šenoa) and oral Croatian literature (Marks 1994; 1998).



The fearlessness, courage, unquestionable heroism, shrewdness, adroitness, incorruptibility, patriotism, love for his own people and readiness to defend them are the characteristics of a utopian and just leader, a leader sprung from the people, as the common man conceives him. All these virtues are attributed to Ban Jelačić. I mention elements that I consider important in the popular conception of Jelačić as a folk-ruler: when a deputation went to Vienna to pay homage to King Ferdinand in 1848, its members were dressed in folk costume: "in tight-fitting braided jackets, white or dark-blue trousers, with a fur cap or red cap and swords" (Mijatović 1990:30).

On the return to Zagreb, the Ban

thanked them in the Croatian language (...) for the heartfelt welcome. Never before had a Ban spoken in public in Croatian, but always in Latin. That was why Jelačić's brief speech delighted all those present so much that they lifted him up in their joy, to the thunderous cheers of the people, who had crammed into Mark's Square (Mijatović 1990:32).

Unlike his predecessor, "Jelačić was dressed in folk costume" for his investiture. "He wore a white tight-fitting jacket ornamented with white-red silver braiding. A red cape hung from his shoulders, bearing the Illyrian coat-of-arms embroidered in silver, with a silver turban plume and a tricolour tuft of feathers". His entry into Zagreb in those Revivalist times was a triumph: "the canon thundered, the bells rang out and on all sides there were resounding shouts of: Long life!" There was a host of people in the streets and they "threw flowers and wreaths to the people's darling" (Mijatović 1990:40).

For those who saw him, the image of the Ban on his journey from Karlovac through Jastrebarsko to Zagreb in 1848 seemed to be "enchanted. It was as though he was carried along by fairies, and accompanied by an angel of happiness! That possibly gave rise to the conviction among the people, that, with Jelačić at their side, no misfortune could befall them, because he was the chosen one of god" (Mijatović 1990:55).

At times of crisis, the people invoke Jelačić in the same way that the mythic sleeping king confined to the cave is called.<sup>6</sup> The call "Rise up, Ban, Croatia is calling you" was noted for the first time in 1867, and the syntagm "Rise up, Ban, rise up our pride and joy!" was first used by Ognjeslav Utješinović Ostrožinski in 1866 in the song *The Resurrection of Ban Jelačić* (Mijatović 1990:14). He wrote the song on the occasion of the erection of the monument, it was printed and handed out as a flyer, and it is indicative that, at the request of the Austrian authorities, Ostrožinski was

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<sup>6</sup> Songs written in Jelačić's honour in written and oral literature testify to his importance. A. Mijatović found more than 160 songs dedicated to Ban Jelačić. He gives 100 notations covering the period from 1844 until 1990 in his book *Ban Jelačić*. Separate analysis was made of the songs. The songs and bibliographic data on the songs mentioned in the following notes are from the cited book, *Ban Jelačić*.

sent into retirement a few months later (Mijatović 1990:14, 135). Diverse variants of those verses also appear in other written and oral songs. I shall quote only a few of them for illustration:

#### **Rise Up, Ban**

Rise up, Ban, Croatia calls you,  
Rise up, Ban, from your crypt.  
Rise up, Ban, Croatia awakens you,  
Rise up now, let your sword be judge...<sup>7</sup>

#### **The Weeping of the Croatian**

Listen here, Ban, Croatia calls you,  
Rise up from this crypt of yours!  
A sorrowful Croatian kneels on your grave,  
Rise up to ease his pain!  
Rise up, Joso, your people are calling,  
Redeem them from these misfortunes!<sup>8</sup>

#### **Rise Up, Ban, Croatia Calls You**

It was the year nine hundred and three,  
When a great misfortune befell Croatia:  
The Hungarian flag was raised by Hedervary,  
He wants to Hungarianise Croatia by force.  
Refrain: Rise up, Ban, Croatia calls you,  
Rise up, Ban, Jelačić!  
Rise up, Ban, Croatia calls you,  
Rise up, Ban,, save your people!  
Never a Croatian, never a hero,  
As was Jelačić the Ban!  
But now the black earth covers him,  
And green grass adorns his grave!  
Refrain.<sup>9</sup>

There is information that Matija Gubec and Ban Jelačić were also unified in songs. Records on the activities of the Peasant Harmony organisation between the two world wars mention, for example, that the songs *To Matija Gubec* and *There Are No Croatians, There Are No Peasants* were sung in Završje (Vincek 1938:139); *To Matija Gubec* was sung in Voloder (Galeković 1937:95); and "songs written in honour of Matija Gubec and Antun Radić were recited and sung" in Kobaš (Bačo 1940:76). The songs were sung for a time after World War II, while the Peasant Harmony

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<sup>7</sup> B. Županjac was the author of the song from 1906, *Rise Up, Ban*: it was published in *Hrvatski branik* in 1909, p 46.

<sup>8</sup> *The Weeping of the Croatian*, Small Croatian Songbook, Zagreb, 1897, Song No. 28.

<sup>9</sup> *Rise Up Ban, Croatia Calls You*, A Mijatović's own notation made in Zagorje in 1963. I have quoted this song in full, since it is a variant of the most popular oral songs about Ban Jelačić.

organisation was still active; subsequently, the 'Croatian' element was probably replaced by the 'fraternal', because it seemed appropriate to the times that Matija Gubec replace Jelačić in the songs of the people.

**Matija Gubec**

Never a peasant,  
Never a hero,  
Such as was  
Matija Gubec

His grave  
Has no trace,  
But his spirit feeds  
The peasant heart.

Time has passed  
Since you stood up  
Against the gentry  
And for your people.

Down with the gentry  
Long live the freedom  
Of the peasant folk  
The fraternal/Croatian nation.

Identification of the Ban with the homeland, particularly with the free homeland – was symbolically shown from the very outset in the stance towards his monument. The significance of Ban Jelačić in the mid-19th century, during the time of Absolutism and suppressed Croatian feeling is clearly demonstrated by the Croatian decision to place his statue on the main Zagreb square, on the main square of the Croatian capital. The size of the statue, its monumental and representative nature, the choice of one of the best sculptors of that time to make the statue, and its central position on the square, speak of the importance and significance of Ban Jelačić in the hierarchy of national heroes.<sup>10</sup> The monument was unveiled on December 16, 1866 in a special ceremony in the presence of an envoy of Emperor Franz Joseph, Ban Šokčević, Croatian members of parliament, numerous delegations and the Croatian populace. The attitude of the Austrian authorities towards the glorification of a domestic hero is shown by the information given above about the pensioning off of Ostrožinski.

After World War II, the new socialist authorities in Croatia were even more drastic: firstly, the monument was boarded in, and then, surreptitiously, in the dead of night between July 25 and 26, 1947 it was secretly removed, which was symbolically meant to denote new times and

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<sup>10</sup> The proposal to erect the monument was made by the City Assembly in 1854 and Forints 3 000 were allocated for the purpose; at the suggestion of the Zagreb mayor, the City Council was authorised to collect voluntary donations for the monument. The statue was made by the Viennese artist, Anton Dominik Fernkorn, and cast by a Czech, J. Röhlich. For more on political symbols in public life, see: M. Azaryahu 1999:255-267.

new heroes. This act led people who remembered the monument, and spoke about it to the new generations, to retain it even more in their minds, as a symbol of suppressed Croatian feeling and heroism. Its return to the central city square in 1990 was a sign of even newer times, and its recognisable European identity was restored to the city. The return of the monument was preceded by plebiscitary support and the act of restoring the monument to its place in the square can be equated with the procedures undertaken (by any) authority, whose fundamental intention is to promote its own political ideology or to canonise old/new symbols.

The fate of the song *Rise Up, Ban, Croatia Calls You*, the most popular oral song about Jelačić, is an almost identical one to that of the monument. Originally directed against the Hungarians and Baron Hedervary, it became a song by which the Croats called on their Ban in perilous times. Although it had no direct connotations with Croatian social reality after World War II, it was banned. The song (or story) was equated with the monument in the comprehension of the new authorities, since national symbols – apart from the fact that they represent a particular political entity – conjure up the representative heritage of the past and the historical tradition of a particular society.

The death of Jelačić, too, was to remain unsolved and controversial.

It shrouded all of Croatia in black, and the people lamented painfully: 'The weeping of fairies from the Croatian regions – Ban Jelačić is no more'. A legend was woven around the Ban's grave (*Obzor* 1938, No 11),

and there are elements of myths in the process of formation: the wailing of the people, the tears of the fairies, one of whose functions is as the mythic protectors of the entire nation, and the announcement of the legends woven around the Ban's grave.

Let us first see what history has to say: Jelačić was in weak health for a long time, and started to feel strong pain in his stomach in 1854.

Since those pains were accompanied by vomiting, it was suspected later that he had been intentionally poisoned. It was said that Jelačić was poisoned by the Court Marshal, Count Grünne, his sworn adversary; or perhaps by his cook (Mijatović 1990:123).

The indefinite "it was said" and "it was suspected" formulations are more at home in oral literature than in the historical discourse, and they leave enough room for the imagination.

Mentioning the writings of General Neustädter, Ferdo Šišić wrote in the Belgrade journal *Javnost* on February 22, 1936:

I have often heard from serious older gentlefolk, whose parents or close relatives were once in close contact with the Ban, and the same was always asserted by the Jelačić family, that the Ban was slowly and gradually poisoned by his cook, and that at the secret order of the Viennese Court. It is difficult to say now what the truth is, due to the

lack of fully authentic documents. It will definitely require much more work to be able reliably to resolve and evaluate Jelačić's illness and death.

Alfred Makanec wrote an article in *Obzor* entitled "What did Ban Jelačić die of. Legends and reality. Unpublished documents" in order fully to dismiss what were obviously still circulating rumours and stories about the Ban's death. He refers in the article to documents (letters) that had remained unpublished until then, and to the statements of witnesses.

Thus, the entire genesis and development of the illness unfortunately presents us with a typical picture of progressive paralysis, both at its inception and at its end. All other versions about some systematic poisoning of Ban Jelačić belong among fairytales and cannot hold up against the documents referred to above,

concluded Makanec. The statements of the members of the Jelačić family are also credible:

I often spoke about this theme with the late Countess Anka Jelačić and she never expressed any suspicion to me about the possibility of the Ban having been poisoned, nor did her father, Jure, the Ban's brother, ever mention anything about that, but rather referred quite rightly to it all as being fairytales.

The disputes about the Ban's death are interesting, but they are not important for the oral story. Detailed and pedantic listing of respected witness who deny that the Ban's death was a violent one do not stand in the way of the legends; in fact, they make them more intriguing, mysterious and cryptic.

The fact is that the story emerged after the Ban's death and has survived in the villages to the present day, but also in Zagreb. A sentence in one of the legends in *Zagreb Stories* reads:

It was said that Ban Jelačić was poisoned by the Viennese Emperor (Marks 1994:50).

The legend was related to Nikola Bonifačić Rožin at his house at 5, Demetrova Street, in Zagreb during the 1960s by Lato Mihalović, the last scion of a famous Croatian family. Mihalović was a lover of art and, in some ways, a Zagreb eccentric, who was still gathering together artists and intellectuals at salons he held during the 1950s. It was on one such occasion that the story from which I have extracted the above sentence was written down.

The story entitled *The Death of Ban Jelačić* was noted down in 1994 in Žeinci (a village near Luka in Croatian Zagorje) and it derives from family oral tradition – "That's the way my parents told it" – relating how the Ban was murdered at the order of the Emperor by a poisoned bouquet of flowers given to him by "a lovely lass!" during a ceremonial dinner in Vienna. The narrator's dilemma about what had been said was: – Whether

it's true or not, well... – belongs to the rule of the genre in oral legend, and is an almost mandatory closing formula, making what has been said remain a mystery (Marks 1994:141).

In one other aspect, the legends about Ban Jelačić differ from similar historical legends: the narrators usually declare and name ordinary people – unknown and anonymous in history – as the main heroes in stories about past events. The names of these personages belong to the narrator's home area and are preserved only in those oral statements. From the popular viewpoint, the names of the historically completely unknown persons also signify their right to a historical role, confirming without doubt the described event, but, it must be borne in mind, they belong, at the same time, to the genre-defining organisation of oral legends (Marks 2003). The places of such little men in the legends about Ban Jelačić are taken by the entire nations, since not even one such text mentions a local name.

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## BAN JOSIP JELAČIĆ U HRVATSKIM USMENIM PREDAJAMA: IZMEĐU POVIJESTI I MITA

### SAŽETAK

Na temelju zapisa usmenih predaja analizira se mjesto povijesnih osoba u usmenoj tradiciji. Polazi se od pretpostavke da u njihovu prikazivanju postoje klišeizirane predodžbe o hrabrosti junaka, o velikodušnosti ili zloći vladara, o njegovoj darežljivosti i mudrosti. Ti se pripovjedački uzorci prenose i prilagođuju najrazličitijim povijesnim osobama i povijesnim razdobljima bez obzira uklapa li se stvarna biografija tih povijesnih osoba u te klišeje ili ne.

Postavlja se i pitanje u kojoj su mjeri ti tekstovi povijest, a koliko su fikcija. Po svojem jezicnostilskom ostvaraju mnogo bliže živom, svakidašnjem govoru od povijesnoga teksta te se upravo u tom bogatstvu sličnih a ipak veoma raznolikih pojedinačnih iskaza raskriva veća gustoća i doživljaja i podataka. Premda su jednim dijelom povijest, te su predaje prije svega književno organizirani doživljaj povijesnoga čina s prepoznatljivim sastavnicama usmene književnosti. Složene povijesne strukture opisuju iz osobnoga kazivačeva vidokruga ili vidokruga uske lokalne zajednice. One makropovijesnu razinu svode na lokalnu, ili čak individualnu. Po tom se svome postupku donekle približuju suvremenoj historiografiji, koja povijesne događaje i osobe ne interpretira samo šturim podacima već u svoj znanstveni diskurs uključuje i kontekst događaja, svjedočanstva sudionika, različite priče koje ne moraju biti podudarne, ali svaka pojedinačna otkriva ili tumači djelić istine.

Izabranim se primjerima pokazuje kako povijesna djela i životopis povijesne osobe (primjerice bana Josipa Jelačića) mogu postati podlogom za stvaranje nacionalnoga mita.

Ključne riječi: povijest, usmena predaja