

ALEKSANDRA MURAJ  
Savska 8, 10000 Zagreb

## THE LONGEVITY AND VITALITY OF ZAGREB ANNUAL FAIRS

A phenomenon that denoted the people of Zagreb's holy-day calendar in continuity from the Middle Ages (the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries) right up to the 1920s is dealt with in this paper. In question are the three great annual fairs: *Mark's Fair*, organised in April; *Margaret's* in July, and the *Royal Fair* in August. Along with their primary trading and business purpose, these fairs were also an occasion for the leisure and entertainment of both the local population and the numerous participants and visitors from throughout the country and from abroad. As a meeting-place of people from diverse social levels, the fairs were characterised by robust liveliness and a picturesque scenario.

Keywords: fairs, annual customs, Zagreb, Croatia

### I

We are on the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it says in the year 1900, and the eye of the reader who picked up *Obzor*, a leading daily newspaper at that time, on Tuesday, August 21, was probably taken by an article entitled "Kraljevski sajam" [*the Royal Fair*]. And this is what he would have read:

The favourable weather that followed the universal clearing up of the skies just prior to this largest of fairs, held in Zagreb from times long past, attracted a host of people from near and far to the capital city of Croatia. Foreigners actually swarmed through the city streets yesterday. As early as on Saturday, people from Zagreb and visitors from outside the city started to visit the Fair Grounds. Yesterday evening they were the site of extraordinary vitality, endless fair-ground flurry and deafening noise that spread from the various panoramas, the merry-go-rounds, all sorts of hurdy-gurdies and other not quite harmonious music.

However, only when one turns left towards the tavern-keepers' tents and stalls that are lined up along the entire fairgrounds on the left side

of the way, only when one goes to the right where one finds the grilled meat stall-keepers, those selling bread and all sorts of buns, can one really feel what the Royal Fair means in Zagreb. Almost every tent has its own music, more or less harmonious, there is cheerful music in each one and, here and there, dancing to the most diverse accompaniments. Here gypsies playing furiously, there spinning in dance with their favoured maid-servant, as her mistress waits impatiently; tamburitza-players here, an accordion there, and noise and singing here, while there are toasts and political talk over there; but wherever you turn it is lively and cheerful.

Today's reader could well ask what the occasion was that attracted such crowds to Zagreb; why were some fairs given the "royal" appellation; from which times past did they date: from which social strata did their participants who, ostensibly, enjoyed themselves so much, derive?

It is generally known that a fair is one of the forms of direct trade in the open air, but we are not speaking here of the customary daily or weekly fair, but of annual events. That institution played a notable role in the life of European inhabitants from as early as the Middle Ages, and that as much from the aspect of both the trade and the entertainment that formed its integral part. The political and economic importance of the fairs is confirmed by the historical fact that the privilege of holding annual fairs could be conferred on a particular city solely by a crowned head. Such fairs had their place in the course of the liturgical year, since they were linked, without exception, to the celebration of a local parish patron saint. However, that calendar holiday – a day marked by Church celebration and forgiveness of sins – occupied only the central day of the fourteen-day fair period, which came to an end seven days after the holy day. If we can identify with the Mediaeval modes of transport and other overall circumstances, we will understand the justification for such prolonged duration. Such events gave merchants and craftsmen the hope that they would manage to sell all the merchandise with which they had set out to what were often considerably distant markets. In that process – as historians have informed us – they had to be prepared:

... to bear high transport costs and to pay numerous tolls, and to expose themselves to unpleasant and even perilous travel along poor roads and through thick forests where, along with wild animals, there were often also bands of brigands (R. Horvat 1994:53).

The various companies of entertainers, which shared the same itineraries in making the rounds of the annuals fairs, also had no protection from similar jeopardy.

## II

The special grant for holding an annual fair marking the day of their diocese's patron saint in Mediaeval Zagreb<sup>1</sup> was first procured by the Chapter; this was St Stephen [*Stjepan*], the Hungarian king, whose saint's day is celebrated according to the calendar on August 20<sup>th</sup>. The Charter of King Andrew [*Andrija*], issued back in 1227 (Tkalčić 1889:LXXIX), confirms the already entrenched holding of the fair, which means that the journalist was completely right in emphasising the longevity of the Zagreb tradition, then already more than six centuries old. Because of its patron, Stephen the King, the people called the fair *Kraljevo* [of the King, or Royal Fair]. In keeping with the customs of that time, which characterised the holding of annual fairs in other European cities, Zagreb's Royal Fair was announced by the peeling of the large bell on the Cathedral and the raising upon it of the flag – then red in colour over its entire surface – that continued to fly for the entire fourteen days (Hirc 1987:106). These were familiar indications to one and all; non-verbal messages of fair time and celebration, taking place on the square in front of the Cathedral.

However, the Chapter's neighbour – Gradec – had no intention of being left behind, so that it received the right from King Bela IV in 1256 to organise its own 14-day fair to be held around the day of its parish's patron saint.<sup>2</sup> From that time, the holy-day year was marked by the citizens of Gradec through their *Mark's Fair*, organised around April 25<sup>th</sup> on the square in front of the Church of St Mark.

And it did not stop there. Since the city expanded into its suburbs during the ensuing decades, King Ludevit [*Ljudevit*] granted permission on March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1372 for the holding of yet another fair beside the then parish Church of St Margaret [*Margareta*], in the area that is now Preradović Square (Tkalčić 1889:LXXX). The central date of St Margaret's festivities was July 13<sup>th</sup>.

Trading was not conducted in a disorganised manner, but was rather framed by norms of behaviour that had to be respected.

---

<sup>1</sup>Modern Zagreb grew out of two settlements: King Ladislav founded a diocese on the left bank of the Medveščak Stream in 1094, and the Chapter [*Kaptol*] settlement developed beside it, while on the hill beside the right-hand bank of the same stream, the Gradec settlement was granted the status of a Free Royal City by the charter of King Bela IV in 1242. Together with the suburbs that sprouted up around them throughout the centuries, Gradec/Zagreb and the Chapter united into an integral municipality in 1850.

<sup>2</sup>Tkalčić wrote: "... on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of March in the year 1256 Bela IV decreed that the annual Mark's Fair would be held in this municipality, and that it would commence a week before (St) Mark's Day and last for one week after the holy day, and that he would place under his protection both foreign and domestic merchants, moreover he would exempt them from the payment of the market-tolls during that time" (1889:LXXX).

A price list for merchandise was set in order to define the payment of market tariffs. Thanks to a preserved price list from the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, we know what was brought for sale at the annual Zagreb fairs. Prices are given for domestically made and imported cloth, linen, linen yarn, and male and female clothing made of cloth and leather, while the foodstuffs listed were grain, salt, wine, fresh and salted fish, crabs, cheese and honey, and wax. The domestic animals were largely horses and cattle, but also sheep and goats. There was also trading in tame animals and wild beasts, and in timber and furniture (Šercer 1991:22).

Foreign merchants were obliged to respect the regulations on the storing of merchandise. Particular areas in the vicinity of the fair were set aside for that purpose. It was strictly prohibited to store goods anywhere else.

The connection between the Zagreb fairs of that time with (Western) European trading rules is also confirmed by the institution of *treuga Dei*, that is, *the Truce of God*. This originally entailed a ban on the waging of war and the use of weapons in personal altercations and, subsequently, the rule of peace that was to be kept alongside the main holy days or particular days in the week. The institution was first introduced by the Roman Catholic Church in France (in 1033), whence it spread to Germany, England, Spain and Italy. The *treuga* was brought from Germany to Zagreb, where it was under the particular protection of the Crown and the city government from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. On the basis of preserved documents, Tkalčić informs us that the *treuga* was in force during the entire two-week duration of Margaret's Fair. All court prosecutions in the city ceased at that time, while two city representations, the *custodes treugarum*, oversaw the keeping of the peace. Its disruption was strictly sanctioned and punishment could be the imposition of fines, for example, for cursing, fighting and theft, or, in the case of more serious offences, the infliction of physical punishment such as beatings, the cutting off of hands, and even hanging or burning at the stake (Tkalčić 1900:VII-VIII).

The following is a concrete example. In the year 1499, a certain Matija set out for the *Margaret Fair* and had to pass through one of Zagreb's forests on his way there. He was attacked there by two robbers who stole not only his money, but also his clothing and jewellery, although they did spare his life. Acting on Matija's report of the incident, the city guards found the two brigands and the stolen property at the fair. When they were arrested and admitted their guilt, they were immediately sentenced to death and to having their bodies crushed by a wheel. However, it was taken into account that they did not take Matija's life and the sentence was modified to death by hanging, which was carried out on the same day, probably in the presence of the public at the fair (R. Horvat 1992:33).

Despite all the cruelty of the punishments, the rule of the *Truce of God* did not always succeed in restraining even more major and belligerent

undertakings. This is demonstrated by an incident from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a time marked by frequent conflicts between the inhabitants of Gradec and the Chapter. One such altercation took place during the holding of *Margaret's Fair* in 1433: the inhabitants of Gradec broke into the Chapter area, stole everything they could find, and then attacked the Cathedral with the intention of killing the canons who had taken refuge there. However, the attack was fought off by the armed troops of the Ban and the Bishop, and they were aided by "... many foreigners who were in Zagreb on the occasion of the large fair" (Tkalčić 1894:CXLVI).

For the people of Zagreb at that time, the large annual fairs provided more than an opportunity to buy a wider range of goods than that usually being offered to them, to supply themselves with more unusual foodstuffs or to acquire more favourably heads of livestock; they could also be entertained by the shows put on by itinerant buffoons and jugglers,<sup>3</sup> treat themselves in the tavern-keepers' tents and gladden their hearts to music and dance. It would seem that some of the revellers carried things too far. Namely, Bishop Kažotić – who fulfilled the duty from 1303 until 1318 – issued a public censure to individuals who took advantage of such occasions, as he said:

... to get drunk, fight, sing ribald songs and lead off in *kolo*-dances [circle dances] in which they dance in a roguish manner (Kampuš & Karaman 1975:42).

That was how things were in the Mediaeval era.

### III

And what was the situation in the New Age?

After the prolonged conflict between the Chapter and Gradec about who was entitled to collect the fair charges and market-tolls, both municipalities finally agreed in 1633 that the fairs would become theirs in common. Between 1636 and 1641, they ensured a more suitable site with more space for trade and entertainment, located in the vicinity of a drinking-water spring. This was the largish flat area around what was then the Manduševac Spring, which soon became the name of the entire square, renamed Harmica in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Zagreb's central city square, Ban Josip Jelačić Square, is located at that site today. The annual (and weekly) fairs were held there for the next two centuries, right up until 1826.

Their additional significance for the broader geographical region was confirmed by the Slovenian polymath, Janez Vajkard Valvasor in the 17<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Zagreb court records from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century mention *histriones* (actors) and *ioculatores* (players), and it is believed that they probably performed in the squares in front of churches during fairs and saint's day festivities (*Zagrebački leksikon 1* 2006:500).

century. Also describing Zagreb in his best-known work *Slava vojvodine Kranjske (Die Ehre des Herzogthums Krain)* from 1689, he mentioned its annual fairs that were visited by many merchants from Carniola and Styria. Valvasor emphasised that the largest among the fairs was *Kraljevo*, the Royal Fair (according to R. Horvat 1992:33).

However, the Zagreb merchants did not look with favour on their competitors from outside the city and from abroad. Uniting into the Merchant Guild of the Free Royal City of Zagreb, they drew up regulations on trading that were confirmed for them by King Leopold in Vienna on February 19, 1698. According to those regulations, foreign merchants were permitted to sell cloth, spices and similar goods only at the annual fairs, and that exclusively for a period of two days. If the foreign merchants did not adhere to that term, the local merchants were authorised by a permit issued by the City Magistrate to confiscate their goods and then to deliver them to the city government, and be compensated with a third of the goods' value (R. Horvat 1992:368-369).

An insight can be obtained into the appearance and content of the *Royal Fair* at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of a newspaper article from 1826, printed in *Luna – Agramer Zeitschrift*, a Zagreb newspaper published in German. If we can believe the author, the fair was visited in that year by people from the most distant parts of the country in the impressive number of 10 000 souls; this was undoubtedly an imposing figure, taking into account that Zagreb had only 16 000 inhabitants at that time! Three hundred stalls were erected on the Harmica Square, selling the most diverse merchandise, from dried fish, Hungarian cheese, bacon, soap, and tobacco through homespun cloth, ribbons and thread, cloth, boots and moccasins, to goods made by craftsmen such as harness and belt-makers, furriers, basket-weavers, coopers and stone-masons who made mill stones. One could buy hay, wood for fuel, horned livestock, horses and other domestic animals on the other side of the fair-grounds, opposite the stalls.

And what was on offer as entertainment? The author of the article mentions "Rossi's Menagerie", made up of several monkeys, a lion and a lioness, a Senegal tiger, a bear, a porcupine and exotic birds, and he continues:

Mayerhofer from Vienna also came to the fair and opened up the "Theatrum Mundi", that is, a geographic stage, to which the crowds just flock. They have a magician, advertised as Hercules from the far north, and there are also amusement parks for children and adults (according to Hirc 1987:107).

If these were places that were attractive to the common folk, there was also a dance organised in the theatre<sup>4</sup> building on the last day of the fair, which was attended by "many from higher society" (Hirc 1987:107).

However, the fair-grounds at Harmica were becoming an obstacle to Zagreb's further development, so the city fathers moved it to new locations three times during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was first moved somewhat south of Harmica to what was then a field and is now Nikola Šubić Zrinski Square, where the fair was held from 1826 until 1869. The Zagreb naturalist and journalist, Dragutin Hirc (1853-1921), described the appearance of that fair, as he remembered it from the time of his childhood. While the western side was occupied by the stalls, where the adults ate, drank, sang and danced, wrote Hirc, the south-eastern side was there the merry-go-round was placed, to the delight of the children. The merry-go-round was owned by a certain Vincenzo Frais and his wife Ana, and they had transported it from Wienerneustadt (1987:108). When work began on transforming the square into a park, the fair was moved in 1872 and functioned for the next eighteen years on the site of what is today one of Zagreb's most beautiful city squares, dominated by the luxuriant building of the Croatian National Theatre, built in 1895. However, on the eve of preparations for the *Gospodarska izložba* [Business Exhibition] – which was particularly important for the Croatian economy – that was held at that location in 1891, the fair was moved again, that time to the eastern border of the city. Between 1890 and 1920, the fairs were organised on the eastern side of what is now Drašković Street, covering the area of today's Franjo Rački Street, Fascist Victims Square and King Petar Krešimir IV Square. The above notation by the *Obzor* reporter from 1900 referred to that very space.

#### IV

How did the fairs unfold in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

Newspaper sources testify that all three fairs were still being held: *Mark's* in April, *Margaret's* in July and the *Royal Fair* in August. Their duration reflected their importance: *Mark's* lasts two days, *Margaret's* three, while "... the most famous Zagreb and general fair, the *Royal Fair*" lasts for eight days (*Novosti*, August 18, 1911).<sup>5</sup> The fairs were still announced and

---

<sup>4</sup> This theatre mentioned was the first theatre building in Zagreb, set up in the mansion of Count Antun Amadé de Várkony, in what is Demetrova Street 1 today (*Zagrebački leksikon I* 2006:502).

<sup>5</sup> It would seem, however, that *Mark's* Fair was losing its significance, judging from the description of a contemporary in 1909: "... there are two large annual fairs in Zagreb, known even to children throughout Croatia, one being *Margaret's* Fair and the other held at the time of St Stephen's [*Kraljevo*] (Širola 1909:582).

marked in the Mediaeval mode; the great bell of the Cathedral rang out to announce the fair's commencement, only the flag that flew for two weeks from the bell-tower was different; it was no longer red, but was replaced by the Croatian State tricolour.

Despite considerably altered economic circumstances, industrial development in the first place, the offer of livestock and agricultural products still prevailed.

Here you can find wonderful horned livestock of the best breeds, a large host of horses, there is riding, one can drive, and haggle, while a large number of members of the domestic public are very interested in that type of trade. There are many foreign merchants... (*Obzor*, August 21, 1900).

That was confirmed by a description published ten years later:

From all sides of our homeland, Croatia, and from neighbouring countries, thousands of head of livestock are driven [to the fair] so that our horse-traders, butchers and farmers do a brisk trade (*Širola*, 1909:582).

Among the foreign merchants, Italians, Styrians and Carniolans [Slovenians] are directly mentioned as buyers of horses. The trade in livestock was duly recorded and reported in the press after the fair had ended. For example: "... 3 667 head of horned livestock, 2 270 horses, 1 420 pigs and 100 calves" (*Obzor*, July 14, 1900), were brought to the 1900 *Margaret Fair* while, fourteen years later the numbers were: "... 2 926 head of beef, 195 calves, 3 077 horses and 842 pigs" (*Novosti*, July 15, 1914).

As well as trade in livestock, hay, straw and fuel wood were also sold there in 1914, and 150 carts loaded with these goods arrived at the fair.

The merchandise sections of the fairs of that time were also taken by craftsmen products, and domestic and foreign merchants took part in this trade. It was precisely stated that domestic cobblers, ginger-bread makers, umbrella-makers, and tailors exhibited their goods in the tents at *Mark's Fair* in 1912 (*Novosti*, April 25, 1912), while "... at *Margaret's Fair* they still bring: kitchen dishes – the Czechs; cloth – the Slovaks, and wooden goods – the Slovenians" (*Obzor*, July 12, 1905). It was noted that merchants selling furniture did good business in 1909 (*Obzor*, July 14, 1909), while the next year "there were more merchants at the fair selling cloth and dishes, so they had to display their merchandise on the ground" (*Obzor*, July 13, 1910). A surviving photograph taken at the *Royal Fair* in 1909 confirms that pottery products were laid out on the ground (*Prosvjeta* XVII:580), while one can detect the benches of clothing merchants on a photograph from the same fair in 1908 (*Prosvjeta* XVI:533).

While trade took place at the fair-grounds by day, the focus of the evening events transferred to the:



... part emitting the enticing aromas of roast meat of very many types. The traditional booths with real "home-like" service and a variety of music were full of thirsty, hungry people, so that the entertainment lasted on to almost midnight (*Novosti*, July 15, 1914).

And here's an entire town of booths and tents, occupied by Zagreb tavern-keepers, who pour "a fine wee drop" for the folk – confirms Širola (1909:582).

The tavern- and inn-keepers who wished to participate at the fairs had to ensure themselves a place by applying to the supervisors of the fair within an exactly defined term, several days before the fair opened. One could not apply unless one held a special permit, a document that authorised its bearer to serve wine and beer at fairs and local parish fêtes. The statistical reports published in the newspapers after the close of each fair gave exact information on the amount of wine served, and drunk, so that, for example, 212 hectolitres of wine was served (and consumed) at *Margaret's Fair* in 1906, while 120 hr and 69 litres was served and consumed at the 1914 fair (*Obzor*, July 17, 1906; *Novosti*, July 15, 1914).

The favourite foods were sucking pigs and lamp roasted on the spit, and it was revealed in *Obzor* July 17, 1908 that: "Two hundred and one lambs were roasted". The most highly-rated barbecue-stall operators were those from Šestine and Gračani, still real villages at that time in the direct vicinity of Zagreb, whose *šindelbraten* the people of Zagreb "jostled to buy" (*Novosti*, July 14, 1912). This is made from pieces of pork roasted as a kebab.<sup>6</sup>

Alongside this troop of barbecue-stall operators – writes Širola, describing the 1909 *Royal Fair* – there is a whole series of bakers and bread-sellers, who take care that those thousands of people who come to the fair, do not faint from hunger (1909:582).

The gastronomic offer was also expanded by caterers from Bosnia who served real "Turkish" black coffee, and also offered their refreshing domestic drink, *boza*.<sup>7</sup>

The people of Zagreb loved their fairs and visited them enthusiastically, both the pious among them, who filled the Cathedral to overflowing on St Stephen's Day, as well as the less religious ones who made their way to the fair-grounds in such numbers that "... the tavern- and inn-keepers could not supply enough chairs and benches for their guests" (*Novosti*, August 21, 1912). As we know from before, there was more than mere eating and drinking taking place. The better tavern-keepers also engaged musicians, either village *tamburitza* musicians or Romany bands, or even some accordion-players. So there was no lack of dancing, either.

---

<sup>6</sup> From the German word *Schindel* = a little board, cut into shape + *Braten* = roasted.

<sup>7</sup> *boza, buza* = an Oriental drink that has a sourish taste, made from corn semolina and sugar.

Songs and the playing of Magyar gypsies ring out, the tinkling sound of the *tamburitzas* beneath the tents, and here and there the dancing of the famous "drmeš" dance (Širola 1909:582).<sup>8</sup>

What else made up the contents of the Zagreb annual fairs in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? What was the source of their noise and caused the flurry? What contributed to it all being – as we can read in *Obzor* in 1900 – "lively and merry everywhere"?

Even then, the interest of the fair-ground in the menageries had not waned. Admittedly, it must be borne in mind that the city did not have a zoo at that time; it would be founded only in 1925. One of the then-inhabitants of Zagreb, the eminent journalist and *feuilleton* writers, Krešimir Kovačić (1889-1960), somewhat mockingly noted that at the menageries:

... they usually had a starving and raggedy wolf and a similar lion, while the greatest attraction was a sleepy bear and a seal who blew out matches when they were lit by anybody in front of his nose (Kovačić 1990:125).

It did not happen at that time either that there could be a fair without a merry-go-round or a swing for adults in the shape of a boat. In the well-known book *Tonkina jedina ljubav* [Tonka's Only Love], published in 1931 and written by August Cesarec (1893-1941), a major part of the story takes place precisely at the Zagreb fair-grounds, in whose vicinity the author himself lived, so that he had direct experience of the fair. That was the source of this description:

A red and white striped linen cover with cane struts was now spread above the swings, and the boats flew high as if on the tallest waves, with the beak-like ram ends almost rending the linen sky... The cover was removed from the merry-go-round and the wooden knightly horses rushed in a circle to the music of the nickelodeon, circling as if around the entire world of the royal box... (Cesarec 1966:28).

A roller-coaster powered by a steam engine joined the merry-go-round and the swings in 1909.

Shooting ranges were also popular and the male visitors fired at targets – both moving and stationary – in order to impress their graceful companions with their sharp eyes and precise right hands, while they could also throw cloth balls or balls filled with sawdust at various moving figures and, in the event of hitting the target, be given a prize.

And there were magicians there, too:

---

<sup>8</sup> The *drmeš* is a very widely distributed Croatian folk dance, performed to singing or music accompaniment, and characterised by a shaking movement of the body.

The *švarckinstlers*<sup>9</sup> made an egg out of a handkerchief, a rabbit out of an egg, and a silver five crown coin out of a rabbit, which suddenly disappeared into the pocket of an onlooker – reported Kovačić (1990:125).

Carrying on the tradition from the foregoing centuries, acrobats entertained the public in this era, too, and took their breath away.

But the *panoramas*, gadgets that made possible a 'sculptural' view of the photographs of particular events, were also popular. Since the pictures were viewed through a magnifying-glass, the objects were experienced as if in natural size, which made them particularly attractive. Admittedly, dissatisfied customers claimed that it often happened that the same event was shown for several years. However, in 1903, *Obzor's* reporter from the *Royal Fair* wrote that the main attractions among the *panoramas* that year was the one showing "Queen Draga and King Alexander", which was really a very recent event. It showed the murder of the Serbian royal couple, members of the Obrenović dynasty, carried out on May 29 in an officer plot.

Cesarec brought closer the horrifying scenes from the panoramas:

... how Russian Cossacks fall into wolf caves dug out by the Japanese, and how people in the jungle fight with tigers (1966:28).

Equally attractive were the panopticons, collections of wax figures. Kovačević's descriptions write of girls with moving eyes, a Turkish sultan with his hands in the position for prayer, the dying Russian Czar Alexander III with blood spurting from his swollen chest, and any other wax figure that was intended to depict the most current political personalities (1990:125), while Cesarec noted:

... dissected human figures made of wax, so that at least here, even without a doctor, everyone can learn what he/she looks like on the inside! (1966:28).

Everyone visited the photographers who offered the fantastic opportunity for that time of having a photograph taken that would be developed in three minutes.

On August 19, 1905, *Obzor's* readers could learn that the *Royal Fair* was offering one more type of "lovely and educative entertainment... sought by all the more intelligent strata of Zagreb society – the *bioscope*, or cinema". The youthful writings of the journalist Josip Horvat (1896-1968) confirm that the cinema really did make its first appearance in Zagreb at the fair-grounds during the *Royal Fair*.

That Bachmayer bioscope was a large tent, which had a locomobile in front that produced electricity, and a terrible smell. But at that time, the cinema had not yet managed to make a strong impression on the people

---

<sup>9</sup> From the German *Schwarzkünstler* = magician.

with its programme of short, flickering episodes, in which some people were constantly running around and breaking plates, which was funny at first, but then became boring with its monotony (J. Horvat 1983:20).

There is no doubt that the Zagreb annual fairs were a meeting-place between the citizens and the villagers, who gathered there either as vendors or as buyers, and sometimes only as onlookers at the fair's attractions or as participants in the "parties":

That is a real mixture of all strata of the population. Apart from merchants and craftsmen, one sees villagers both from the environs of Zagreb, and from the fertile Posavina region and rich Srijem, from the rugged Littoral and from proud Bosnia. The people have flocked here from all sides and all that mixture lives and buzzes like a huge swarm of bees. (...) It is especially lively in the evening, when a mass of city-dwellers flock to the fair-grounds. Then an authentic popular celebration develops, which lasts until late into the night – testifies Širola (1909:582),

while an anonymous writer of a newspaper item about the *Royal Fair* concluded:

Apart, perhaps, at local village fêtes, such diverse elements never meet at the same table, as happens at the Zagreb fair-grounds (*Prosvjeta* 1908:545).

A newspaper report about the *Royal Fair* in 1911 speaks of the large number of visitors from near and far and makes special mention of the villagers who, apart from attending the church services, also have a detailed look around the fair:

This [peasant] population is largely dressed in folk costume, and it is a delight to see them – says the reporter (*Novosti*, August 21, 1911).

Tomislav Cividini, working in tourism at that time, agreed with him. In his publication *Grad Zagreb kao središte prometa stranaca u Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji* [The City of Zagreb as the Focus of Travel by Foreigners in Croatia and Slavonia], published in 1912, supported the idea that foreigners should primarily be shown domestic, autochthonous values, and not "world achievements". According to Cividini, such assets could be best perceived precisely at the fairs, because it was there that one found:

... music, dance, folk costumes, and the barbecue grill cooks...  
(according to Vukonić et al. 1994:110).

The Zagreb craftsmen and merchants of that time were more than interested in taking part at the fairs and they tried then, too, as in foregoing centuries, to ensure their primacy in the face of the invasion of their foreign colleagues. This can be deduced from their protest submitted to the City Government on

the eve of *Margaret's Fair* in 1913. Their petition asked that they, as Zagreb craftsmen who – "regularly pay all our taxes and tariffs" – be permitted, as is customary with the tavern-keepers, to ensure their sales position ahead of time. They pointed out that "a large number of external and foreign merchants will definitely" be rushing to the fair, and that they "wanted to avoid a repetition of the quarrels and fights, that are known to take place". The person they regarded as being accountable for such a situation was the "director of the site", accusing him of giving priority to the foreign merchants, "... so that he simply comes and dislodges the domestic merchant" (*Novosti*, July 6, 1913). Unfortunately, we do not know what the outcome was of these fairground tensions and whether the domestic merchants managed to secure justice.

Zagreb's "better public" is mentioned among the fair visitors. Admittedly, it is not clear which social stratum was in question, but it is obvious that members of that world did not come to the fair to buy or sell. They will "probably 'encamp' at the fair this evening to enjoy the well-loved fairground ambrosia" – a comment on *Margaret's Fair* in 1903, (*Obzor*, July 11, 1903), while a report on the *Royal Fair* in *Novosti* on August 20, 1911 says: "Our elegant people also went to the Fairgrounds last night to spend a pleasant evening at the wooden stalls with a glass of wine and the well-known grilled sausages!" As well as noting the presence of people from the factories, workshops, kitchens and army barracks as visitors to the fair – A. Cesarec spoke of the so-called *cilindraši* [the top-hat crowd], as he mockingly called the members of the civil-servant and other non-proleterian strata.

But "the better people" also found themselves among visitors from the provinces. In coming to Zagreb, some of these were not interested solely in participating at the fairs, but wanted to fulfil their "more cultural" needs. This can be seen from newspaper items on their displeasure because of the impossibility of seeing the University Library mansion which – built in the Secession style – graced the city from 1913.

Our provincials complain to us that when they come to Zagreb at the time of the *Royal Fair*, they never find the University Library open. And they would gladly see this brilliantly designed cultural institution. They have read so much about the luxuriant building and the luxurious interior decoration, but when they would like to see and to revel in the cultural development of their nation, then the doors are closed to them. Efforts should be made to fulfil this justified popular wish (*Novosti*, August 26, 1918).

Along with all the other participants that it attracted, the fair was also a magnet for the "less established" world, the world of the vagrants, swindlers, and petty thieves. The honest citizenry had to be protected from them, and the following is an extract from the crime pages of *Novosti* in 1913:

Since *Margaret's Fair* is taking place, and all sorts of suspicious individuals make their way to Zagreb on such occasions, the police

undertook a raid last night... the most extensive "bag" was at the Fairgrounds, where 14 persons were arrested for vagrancy. Thirteen of them were men and there was also one woman (*Novosti*, July 14, 1913).

Certain "suspicious characters" infiltrated the fair public at the *Royal Fair* in 1903, palming off counterfeit money. Although the notes were of fairly poor workmanship, the police had to admit that they had not managed to trace the counterfeiters (*Obzor*, August 22, 1903).

Large fairs were also an opportunity for beggars, who gathered there from all over. They too, like the caterers, merchants and craftsmen, wanted to have their own defined "place of business" at the fair, but since they were unable to reach a gentlemen's agreement in that respect, they quarrelled and fought at the *Royal Fair* in 1905 and ended up in hospital (*Obzor*, August 23, 1905).

All these were components of the dynamic goings-on at the eastern edge of the city, whose attractive nature could not be resisted even by the pen of the author and *feuilletoniste* Antun Gustav Matoš (1873-1914). His conclusion on the *Royal Fair* of 1920 reads as follows:

Zagreb and the provinces have set themselves a meeting in these sunny days that are as red and juicy as a watermelon and life, so that the domestic population is boiling, blooming and flowing here like a river of wine and joy in the vulgar likeability of a folk celebration (*Obzor*, August 24, 1910).

And what the *Royal Fair* meant for children of elementary school age and how they experienced it can be seen from the oral testimony of a little girl who took part. Born in 1897, this little girl from Zagreb, Marija F.-P., speaking about the memories from her childhood, mentioned how she remembered those events from the time before World War I.<sup>10</sup> In her estimation, the fair was one of the city's prominent events, which attracted visitors from all corners of the country. It was particularly interesting to children, so that Marija and her brothers saved all year, especially for that occasion. Her father, a worker at one of Zagreb's sawmills, would take her to the fair on a Sunday, when he was free from work. They would first go the stands with various trinkets, where the vendor would stand, shouting: "Everything for seven, everything for seven *krajcars!*"<sup>11</sup> When the children were satisfied with buying, among other, glass figures in the form of angels or animals and similar baubles, their father would take them to one of the

---

<sup>10</sup> This narration was prompted and recorded on a tape-recorder by Maja Bošković-Stulli, and is stored in the Documentation of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb, IEF CD-319.

<sup>11</sup> *Krajcar* (Germ.), a small brass coin in the former Austro-Hungarian empire; one hundredth of a Forint.

taverner's tents. There they would eat barbecued meat and the children would drink the typical fairground beverage called *kraherl*, made of soda water and certain sweet additives. Marija remembered that "The meat was not as good as when Mama bakes it, but we thought it was wonderful, we were delighted".

Because of their father's interests, they would go to look at the part of the fair where the livestock was on display and then, to the joy of the children, they would carry on to the side-show section. They particularly enjoyed the shooting galleries, supplied with small cupboards containing various mechanisms. When anyone hit the centre of the cupboard – said Marija – the little door would open and reveal the scene of a saw man sawing wood; in another cupboard, a grandfather was rocking a baby in a cradle; and Tyroleans were dancing in a tavern in another. That was all very exciting to the children. To the contrary, the panopticum was repulsive to the little girl: "I did not like the wax figures, as if I was looking at corpses" – she said, and asked her father to move on. And she found the visit to the *panorama* more disturbing than enjoyable: "There was a woman there with two heads, and a sea virgin – half woman, half fish. A boy told me that the virgin had been caught in the sea, but I could not believe that sea virgins really existed. Somehow I could not grasp that it would be possible". She also mentioned the harlequins: "some sort of actors, half-dressed, who argued and chased each other", but the memory of them had already faded. After Marija and her brothers had looked at everything, returning home excited and happy, they would tell their mother all about their experiences and show the purchases upon which they had spent their savings. Evoking those experiences, Maria, now 68 years old, finished her statement with these words: "All the people of my age, who are still alive, remember the *Royal Fair* in Zagreb. It was a first-class sensation."

However, life in Zagreb changed in the late Summer of 1914, when its inhabitants, too, were drawn into the vortex of World War I. So the *Royal Fair* that year – according to newspaper articles – was only a pale image of its predecessors, with a considerably lower participation of vendors that was usual, and far fewer customers. The typical fair hub-hub was replaced by silence (*Novosti*, August 21, 1914). However, after this initial pause, the fairs were to show the persistence of their existence already in the following 1915, when there was a revitalisation of trade and interest among visitors. Admittedly, there were far fewer young men in the crowds, since they were absent, fulfilling their duties towards the homeland, but, on the other hand, there were numerous participants from the provinces, who took the opportunity to combine their visits to mobilised relatives in the military barracks, or to injured war veterans and convalescents in the hospitals, with their visits to the fairs. The people of Zagreb recognised them by their typical dress: "Here one could see the most highly varied folk costumes from various parts of our homeland" – it was said in *Novosti* on August 22, 1915. Apart from shopping, those visitors undoubtedly tried the various carousels and

swings, looked at the panorama images and the panopticum displays and tried their hand at the shooting galleries located around the fairgrounds. The photographers were also very busy in "... making a photograph or two as a souvenir for the departing soldiers and their relatives" (*Novosti*, August 22, 1915). The range of domestic goods on offer did not change to any extent, but the vendors of the so-called colonial goods, such as chocolate and vanilla, had disappeared completely.

The fairs continued to live their lives even in the coming war years, although they were somewhat subdued and even changed in some aspects. So it was that a reporter on the 1917 *Margaret's Fair* took particular notice of the fact that there were many more women at the section of the fair where livestock was being sold, demonstrating their predominance at that time in managing their own business activities, which they had had to take over instead of the absent men, who were preoccupied with their military obligations. Still, there were merry-go-rounds and swings at that fair, too – as testified to by *Novosti* July 14, 1917 – as well as similar devices to entertain the rural and urban visitors, while only the shortage of bread was a reminder that those were times of war.

The ominous aura of the last year of the war was seen in the absence of one of the emblems of the annual fairs. Although as in the long series of previous years and even centuries, the *Royal Fair* had been announced in that year of 1918 by the hoisting of the flag on the bell-tower of the Cathedral, the chiming of the great bell was absent for the first time. The reason was a banal one: the setting in motion of that huge, heavy bell had to be carried out by seven powerful men but – according to a newspaper report – there were simply no such men available! (*Novosti*, August 13, 1918).<sup>12</sup>

It was as though that symbolic act augured the fading away of the phenomenon initiated in the Middle Ages and consistently observed over the following centuries; it would not be able to survive any longer in its full former glory in the coming period. Admittedly, the fairs were still held in the

---

<sup>12</sup> The great bell was cast by Henrik Degen in 1843; he was a German from Lübeck who was the lessee at that time of the Chapter bell-casting foundry, established as long ago as in 1459. The size of that bell is spoken of in comparison with the previously cast Cathedral bell; while the first one weighed 4 959 lbs, the new bell was twice as heavy, weighing a full 11 525 lbs. It is 7 feet in diameter, 21 feet in circumference, and has a height of 6 feet. Degen had an especially sturdy cart built to transport the bell from the foundry to the Cathedral, and it was pulled by eight powerful oxen, decked out in ribbons and flowers. Namely, that was the first celebration at which many of Zagreb's people gathered, including some who did not believe that they would succeed in lifting the huge bell up into the bell-tower. The courageous Degen, convinced of the exactness of his calculations, was prepared to be 'buried alive' by the bell in the event that the scaffolding collapsed. The scaffolding held out, the largest bell in Croatia was raised to its place, Degen remained alive, and the doubtful ones were obliged to give full credit to the master craftsman (R. Horvat 1992:316)



following two years at the same location. However, as the result of the unstoppable growth of Zagreb and the accompanying urban modernisation, they were once again relocated to the new urban edge, increasingly losing their significance as social entertainment events. "That golden Zagreb mood, that can be understood and comprehended only by someone from here" (*Novosti*, July 15, 1914), which had been an essential component of the annual fairs, was to disappear in the face of the approaching circumstances of another way of life. In the years following the end of World War I and the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Zagreb was to transform into a centre of finance, modern trade and industry (Arčabić, 2007:46) as a member of the newly constituted State community, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

The former great annual fairs as the meeting-point of the most diverse people of the *monde* and the *demi-monde*, occasions strongly marked by their vitality and picturesque scenery would, however, be given their artistic transposition. We find it in the play *Kraljevo*, written by the leading Croatian writer, the Zagreb-born Miroslav Krleža (1893-1981) and published in 1918. The underlying concept of that work, with the dramatic events woven into it, constitutes almost all the elements of the entertainment part of the fairs. In that way, thanks to Krleža's incisive text, the atmosphere of the Zagreb annual fairs has outlived its actual existence.

#### REFERENCES CITED

- Arčabić, Goran. 2007. *Korak do novog stoljeća. Gospodarska izložba u Zagrebu 1891*. Zagreb: Muzej grada Zagreba.
- Cesarec, August. 1966. *Tonkina jedina ljubav*. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska - Zora, 1-87. [Pet stoljeća hrvatske književnosti, 97]
- Hirc, Dragutin. 1987. [1919.] "Stari Zagreb". *Zbornik III. programa Radio Zagreba*. Zagreb, 97-155.
- Horvat, Josip. 1983. "Zapisci iz nepovrata (Kronika okradene mladosti – 1900-1919)". *Rad Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti* 400/19:1-155.
- Horvat, Rudolf. 1992. [1942.] *Prošlost grada Zagreba*. Zagreb: August Cesarec & Atlantic paper.
- Horvat, Rudolf. 1994. [1926/1927.] *Povijest trgovine, obrta i industrije u Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb: AGM.
- Kampuš, Ivan & Igor Karaman. 1975. *Tisućljetni Zagreb*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Kovačić, Krešimir. 1990. *Priče iz starog Zagreba*. Izbor ilustracija i bilješke Nada Premerl. Zagreb: Grafički zavod Hrvatske.

- Krleža Miroslav. 1973. [1918.] *Kraljevo*. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska - Zora, 53-85. [Pet stoljeća hrvatske književnosti, 94]
- Matoš, Antun Gustav. 1910. "Kermesse". *Obzor*, 24. 8. 1910.
- Novosti*, dnevne novine. Zagreb.
- Obzor*, dnevne novine. Zagreb.
- Prosvjeta*, list za zabavu, znanost i umjetnost, dvotjednik. Zagreb.
- Šercer, Marija. 1991. *Stari zagrebački obrti / Alte Zagreber Handwerk / Old Zagreb Craft-Guilds*. Katalog izložbe. Zagreb: Povijesni muzej Hrvatske.
- Širola Stjepan. 1909. "Na vašaru o Kraljevu u Zagrebu". *Prosvjeta* 16/18:582-583.
- Tkalčić, Ivan Krst. 1889. *Povjestni spomenici slob. kralj. grada Zagreba. Svezak prvi (Izprave:1093-1399)*. Zagreb: K. Albrecht.
- Tkalčić, Ivan Krst. 1894. *Povjestni spomenici slob. kralj. grada Zagreba. Svezak drugi. (Izprave: 1400 -1449)*. Zagreb: K. Albrecht.
- Tkalčić, Ivan Krst. 1900. *Povjestni spomenici slob. kralj. grada Zagreba. Svezak šesti. (Knjiga sudbenih poziva i presuda) (God. 1375-1391)*. Zagreb: K. Albrecht Jos. Wittasek.
- Vukonić, Boris et al. 1994. *Tempus fugit. Povijest turizma Zagreba*. Zagreb: AGM.
- Zagrebački leksikon 1-2*. 2006. Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža & Masmedia.

## DUGOVJEČNOST I VITALNOST ZAGREBAČKIH SAJMOVA

### SAŽETAK

Godišnji su sajmovi od srednjega vijeka imali zapaženu ulogu u životu europskih građana, koliko zbog trgovanja, toliko i zbog zabavljanja koje im je bilo sastavnim dijelom. Njihova se gospodarska važnost ogleda u činjenici da su privilegiju održavanja sajma u nekom gradu mogli dodijeliti isključivo monarsi. Termin održavanja bio je vezan uz liturgijsku godinu, i to uz proslavu lokalnoga patrona župe. Trajali su 14 dana, a društvena im se važnost očitovala u poštivanju instituta *Božjeg mira (treuga Dei)*, tj. prekidanjem svih sukoba i sudskih progona za njihova trajanja.

Blagdansku godinu Zagrepčana ispunjavala su tri takva sajma, početak kojih seže u 13., odnosno 14. st. Bio je to *Markov sajam*, priređivan u travnju, *Margaretinje* u srpnju i *Kraljevo* (nazvano prema patronu prvostolne crkve, sv. Stjepanu kralju) u kolovožu. Uz trgovanje, mogućnosti za zabavu nisu se iscrpljivale samo u svirci, pjesmi i plesu pod gostioničarskim šatorima već i prisustvovanjem izvedbi putujućih glumaca, lakrdijaša i žonglera, razgledavanjem menažerija s egzotičnim zvjerima i sličnim atrakcijama.

Premda je početkom 20. st. trajanje sajmovanja bilo skraćeno na osam, odnosno tri dana, i nadalje je u životu grada bilo očekivano s uzbuđenjem i smatrano dobrom prilikom za razonodu. Dok se danju trgovalo, uvečer se središte zbivanja prenosilo na drvenjare i šatore s ponudom tipičnih sajamskih jela i pića uz sudjelovanje glazbenih sastava. Vrtuljci, ljuljačke, tobogani; streljane, panorame, panoptikumi; mađioničari, akrobati, patuljci i druga neobična bića

razveseljavali su publiku, čemu se 1905. prvi put u Zagrebu pridružio i kinematograf, *Bachmayerov bioskop*. Još i u to doba godišnji su sajmovi bili susretništem i seljaka i građana. Jednako su bili privlačni proleterskim slojevima, ali i "boljem svijetu", a i onom neetabliranom poput skitnica, varalica i sitnih lopova. Svi su oni sudjelovali u "vulgarnoj simpatičnosti pučkoga veselja" – kako je o godišnjem sajmu 1910. pisao A. G. Matoš. Pa kada su, nakon šestogodišnjega trajanja, potkraj drugoga desetljeća 20. st. izgubili značenje društveno-zabavnog događanja, doživjeli su svoju umjetničku transformaciju u istaknutom dramskom djelu Miroslava Krležje – *Kraljevu*, objavljenom 1918. g.

Ključne riječi: sajam, godišnji običaji, Zagreb, Hrvatska