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FOLK LEGENDS RELATING TO THE PEASANT REBELLION AND LIFE
OF FEUDAL SERFS IN THE SURROUNDINGS OF STUČICA

S u m m a r y

In the course of field investigation in the villages of Hrvatsko Zagorje, a region in northwest Croatia not far from its capital Zagreb, an important fact was repeatedly observed namely that the traditional view of the »field« was changing and that the scope of field investigation was extending to include both villages and towns. The change was most vividly reflected in the fact the investigator coming into a village in the morning would meet his potential informants leaving the village for Zagreb, where they had jobs. The process of blurring the sharp contrast between rural and urban life is taking place under our very eyes: as researchers we witness it as it is actually taking place and thus have no need to reconstruct it in the way in which we are forced to reconstruct processes that have already taken place and that we cannot observe directly. The requirement to revise the traditional concept of the »field« is therefore an external, objective requirement imposed by social development. During a coffee break in an office in Zagreb the researcher was able to record several descriptions of the nightmare, as well as several traditional folk poems from Slavonia and jokes identical with those that had earlier been recorded in villages in Hrvatsko Zagorje. Potential informants are in the city now, and folk traditions spread equally well among urban dwellers as among village populations. It is interesting to observe also how the immediate surroundings of the Croatian capital influence the daily life of the city. The characteristic features of a certain region become an integral and inseparable part of the personal life of every urbanite.

The next part of the paper deals with the place and significance of folk poets in every locality. Almost every village has its poet — a person who can sing about local events. In trying to record the oral traditions relating to the 1573 Peasant Rebellion and life of feudal serfs, the researcher is invariably referred to local popular poets as the most reliable source of knowledge.

One of those poets, Stjepan Rožman, has contributed interesting legends of peasant life in feudal times and also read his poem celebrating Matija Gubec, leader of the Peasant Rebellion. Among other things, he also revived

folk memories of the cruel monks and Emperor Joseph which are included in the material given here. Stjepan Rožman, a popular poet and excellent oral narrator, is a popular figure in his village and an inexhaustible source of information and advice for his neighbours. The paper describes a characteristic narrating situation and the relationship between the narrator and his listeners. A characteristic episode from this narrator's life illustrates how a story (dealing in this case with the mysterious Countess Carionca) comes to life and continues to circulate.

Our field investigations have shown that school children can also serve as an interesting source of information about oral tradition in a village. Many of the folk tales and fables which the adults never mentioned were freely narrated by the children, who could not possibly have acquired them from books. It can therefore be claimed confidently that the tradition of oral narration in Hrvatsko Zagorje is much richer than is generally believed and that their further investigation would be very useful.

The research of legends relating to the Peasant Rebellion and peasant life in feudal times shows how free associations enable the speakers to associate the names of protagonists of more recent historical developments with the events of the sixteenth century. Resistance to foreign or domestic (i.e., class) enemy is the central theme round which are built legends of certain periods or exceptional historical events, such as the 1573 uprising.

The next part of the paper analyzes narrations by two very good narrators. One of the them, Stjepan Vrančić, narrated a highly impressive legend about the abolition of villein services. The story is analyzed here in the chapter which follows the collection of text. The other narrator, Miško Lešković, narrated a legend about the immediate cause of the Peasant Rebellion. His narration was recorded by Zagreb Television in a programme on Hrvatsko Zagorje.

The collection of materials includes about forty texts dealing with the life of feudal serfs and with the Peasant Rebellion.

(Translated by *Vlado Ivir*)