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## ***Betle(he)ms* from Plemenščina Outside Klenovnik as an Expression of Folk Piety**

*The paper presents data from field research of making traditional wooden Christmas nativity scenes (betlehems or betlems) carried out in Plemenščina outside Klenovnik. Based on personal testimonies by several local elders, the nativity scenes and the process of making them are being described from the viewpoint of folk piety and identification with the community. The personal experience and significance the locals place on nativity scenes, through an ethnological interpretation, show how tangible and intangible aspects of traditional heritage are completely intertwined and cannot be interpreted separately. The paper also deals with the issue of carrying over the tradition to younger generations.*

**Key words:** folk piety, Christmas nativity scene, tangible and intangible heritage, Plemenščina

### **Methods, sources and context**

**T**he making of traditional nativity scenes in Plemenščina outside Klenovnik was the subject of a field research conducted as part of the preparations for entering the art of making traditional Christmas nativity scenes in northwest Croatia to the Registry of the cultural goods of the Republic of Croatia. It was carried out in association with Josip Barlek, senior curator of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, and Ljerka Albus, curator of the City Museum in Varaždin. Later, for the purposes of completing the data, it was also the subject of an independent research. The field research was most intensive before and

after Christmas of 2006 and 2007, and continued with interruptions throughout the year. The paper was written for the needs of the postgraduate study of ethnology and cultural anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb<sup>1</sup>. The analysis of personal testimonies that followed the descriptions of nativity scenes' making shows a connection with folk piety in a way that includes personal and social, religious and secular, tangible and intangible aspects.

The interviews sometimes turned into life stories that informants saw as an important part of presenting nativity scenes to interviewers. General issues concerning affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church were not discussed, but it was partly implied that the background of the very phenomenon of nativity scene's making, done in a wider context of folk customs in time before Christmas, was the celebration of one of the major Christian holidays – Christmas – celebrated by Catholics on December 25 in remembrance of the birth of Jesus Christ.

The making of nativity scenes in Croatia was mostly studied by museum experts with an emphasis on the tangible aspect, i.e., the process itself, while they were less interested in the personal approach to the making, meanings given to Christmas nativity scenes and influences. There are very few ethnological sources on nativity scenes, although this is a common practice in Christmas customs, which have attracted a lot of ethnographic, as well as ethnological, attention. For example, ethnologist D. Rihtman Auguštin in her book *Knjiga o Božiću* (The Book of Christmas) only briefly mentions nativity scenes, giving them a general, more of a historical framework, and mentioning the legend of St. Francis of Assisi, the alleged creator of the first nativity scene. There is also a lack of more detailed comparisons with the surrounding areas in Europe, which were the probable sources of influences, mentioned in a more general way by the ethnologist V. Belaj. In this paper, it will not be possible to confirm the influences that had contributed to accepting the practice of making nativity scenes in Plemenščina, due to lack of evidence. However, Lj. Albus did present data of their appearance, while exhibition catalogues by J. Barlek mention some of the bearers of this knowledge. A more detailed description of nativity scenes, which also includes the process of making them, was prepared by Lj. Albus, partly for the process of entering this material into the above mentioned Register.

Since the making of Christmas nativity scenes in Croatia has not been dealt with systematically from an ethnological and cultural anthropological point of view, in this paper I will interpret the practice of making nativity scenes from Plemenščina in relation to folk piety. I will also try to explain the personal relation to the making of and the place of *betlehems* in folk piety, as well as the importance of this practice for the identity and cohesion of the local community.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Professor Marijana Belaj in particular, whose comments contributed to the quality of the paper.

## Terminology and possible influences to the making of *betlehems*

Šimić's definition, most frequently used in theoretical works, describes folk piety as "a complex reality that consists of different religious expressions and pious behaviors, in different cultural environments, that originate from a historical situation and are as such the result of different spiritual and material needs essential for a certain period, region, nation or individual." (1994: 51) In the ethnological approach to studying folk piety, it is important to underline the "needs" mentioned by Šimić, in the sense that "it is impossible to grasp folk piety without observing it in the context of everyday life." (Rihtman Auguštin, 1991: 14). Folk piety should be studied through a prism of "everyday life" and from the viewpoint of "the individual and their relation towards God and the sacred," because without personal testimonies it would be difficult to track down the everyday life and actual problems faced by people on daily basis (Rihtman Auguštin, 1991: 11); and "it has to be learned what meaning the people give to a certain action at a certain moment." (Čapo, 1991: 18, 19). It will later become clear that the "relation towards the sacred, which is considered the essence of the definition of folk piety," (Čapo, 1991: 18) lies at the foundation of personal experience.

The making of nativity scenes in Plemenščina represents a form of folk piety also in the sense of Hoško's definition of folk piety as an "expression of Christian religious relationship with God in Jesus Christ, which is reflected in extra-liturgical and non-liturgical forms of Christian divine worship." (Hoško, 1983: 196) Hoško's definition defines folk piety through the relation with liturgy – the making of nativity scenes is not a liturgical form of divine worship and is in this sense a part of folk piety. It is not necessary to make a working definition from the definitions of folk piety presented so far, because they are almost completely adequate to defining the subject of study – the making of traditional Christmas nativity scenes as a part of folk piety.

"A *Christmas nativity scenes* in the narrow sense of the word is a group of figurines with which, once a year, in Christmas time, we evoke the Nativity scene by arranging them in space, usually in a plastic, panoramic form." (Belaj, 1995: 32) Today, nativity scenes are a quite common Christmas custom. The history of nativity scenes is connected to the first staging of Biblical themes, and only later people started to make them as items – the practice spreading to all social classes only in recent times (cf. Belaj, 1995; Rihtman Auguštin, 1995). M. Belaj states two times and two different classes in society in Croatia that accepted the making of nativity scenes and transferred it to new generations afterwards. The first class were citizens, who received the tradition "as an import from the west, from where nativity scenes could have been brought back by craftsmen, merchants, army officers who settled in Croatia especially during the 18th and 19th centuries, and as an imitation of nativity scenes seen in local churches." (1995: 39) The second social class includes people living in the country, who accepted nativity scenes "sometime during the 19th century, first in the northwest, often under the name *betlehem*, as in the neighboring Steiermark." (Belaj, 1995: 40) Nativity scenes in Plemenščina were also called *betlehem*, *betlem*, and M. Belaj draws a connection between this name and the "renaissance *betleen* from Delft." (Belaj, 1995: 41).

For now there is not enough data to definitely confirm the time and influences on the occurrence of nativity scenes in certain parts of Croatia. It can be assumed that the making of nativity scenes was brought to northwest Croatia from the neighboring countries, such as Austria, which had a major historical and cultural influence in this area. At the moment, this is substantiated by the testimonies in which informants explain the origin of their nativity scenes. Reportedly, a carpenter (*tišlar*) from Plemenščina Andrija Bunić, father of Stanko Bunić, traveled to work all the way to Vienna, where he saw a nativity scene being made, so he brought this idea back with him, adding to it his own vision of a nativity scene. The timeframe was not confirmed, but judging by the age of Stanko's father when he had taken the trip, it can be assumed this was in the 19th century, probably in the second half. Further research should establish how much truth there is to this story.

## The process of making *betlehems* and local features

The nativity scenes from Plemenščina, although probably created under the influence of the surrounding European regions, are especially adapted to the area in which several generations of locals were building and enhancing them, adding the details and meanings characteristic of each individual builder. The process of making nativity scenes of Plemenščina seems simple, because, according to the above Biblical, i.e. Christian tradition (cf. Belaj, 1995) which affected the creation of nativity scenes in general, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in a stable, or, to be more precise, in a “manger” (Lk, 2:7, 16). In the case of Plemenščina, the tale connected with the birthplace of Jesus Christ takes very specific local features, from the appearance of the town of Bethlehem, to the interpretation of the event, which supports the statement that “in the case of Central European nativity scenes it is important that they do not tend to create an oriental atmosphere, but instead present people and regions from their immediate surroundings” (Belaj, 1995: 36).

Lj. Albus brings a very simple description of these nativity scenes, saying that “this is an original folk work consisting of a series of larger or smaller models of the town of Bethlehem, with the scene of a small stable and the birth of Jesus. They are made of sawed and carved wood and consist of several parts, depending on their size, and connected together they make a single unit. They are made of a series of very interesting architectural buildings with exceptionally picturesque and diverse little houses, towers and churches, with façades plastered in paper of different colors. With a great deal of pride, care and patience, the master of the house places the Bethlehem on a shelf in the sacred corner and decorates it with fresh greenery.” (1997: 90 and 2001: 2)

There are several different parts of *betlehems* that are put together to form a unit (Image 1), with the left and the right hand sides being symmetrical: small tower, middle tower, *tornić* or *turnić*, the middle town (*grad*), above the town there can be balconies (*balkoni* - more recent), and before the town there are churches (*crkve*) or chapels

(*kapelice*), little schools (*školice*), mangers (*jaslice*) (as per the Resolution). In the center there is a wooden (lime-tree is used) model of a building, such as a town building, with floors and carved windows. They call this construction a *town*, i.e. the town of *Bethlehem*. Alongside it are models of *churches/chapels*, with a small cross on top as the key discerning characteristic. Stanko Bunić claims he had added a new element, which he calls *observation post that keeps the town safe from enemies*.<sup>2</sup> In front of this background wooden *little schools* were placed - as one informant explains, *where they once went to school*, probably talking about local schools (this would also support the interpretation of other elements of a nativity scene being locally defined). One of the informants does not call these models schools, but *small houses*, so it is also possible that they represent regular houses, which also contributes to the argument that nativity scenes were possibly adapted to local reality. Informants who interpret these forms say that *every town had its schools and churches*. In front of these small schools/houses there is a wooden stable (*štalica*), as builders say, *the place where little Jesus was born, because Mary ran with Joseph to Bethlehem to give birth, but noblemen kicked them out, refused to receive them; when they were getting back it was already late and she arrived to a stable with sheep, and this is where she gave birth to Jesus*.

Figurines of Mary, Joseph and little Jesus are placed in the stable (Image 2). Other characters and figurines of different animals, as well as the star from the Biblical story, are placed as the nativity scene's owner sees fit: *Little Jesus, holy Joseph and Mary, mother of the child, little angel, a donkey and an ox, and a herd of sheep that grazed around the stable*. Optional local details include birds that are placed on each post of the fence around the stable. According to the informants, the interpretation of birds is as follows: *everything came to witness Jesus' birth, these are probably singing birds, nightingales, because everyone was celebrating the birth of Jesus*.

Architectural elements of nativity scenes show a rich personal expression of the builder, as well as a need to adapt a Biblical story to local features. Builders are aware of the appearance of Bethlehem as a town in today's Israel and mention that it is characterized by mosques, or *kupole* as they call them, while explaining the appearance of their nativity scenes as *the most tasteful one from the past*. And this is in fact the moment of creating and adapting a Biblical story and its various versions to the local atmosphere, i.e. an atmosphere that the locals saw fit, as well as the explanation for transferring and preserving the tradition.

## Social aspects of the making and use of *betlehems*

The explanation that *this is the old way of making a betlehem* tells us about an experience of making nativity scenes as continuity and a link with the past, with the builders' ancestors. The opinion of the older people that younger generations lack the will

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<sup>2</sup> In order to adapt the speech to the researcher, informants also use some words from standard Croatian on their own accord.

to learn this craft and their feeling that they are the last bearers of this tradition is very important in this context. Such a feeling of a dying knowledge has been present in Europe for a while, ever since the 19th century, when national conscience emerged (cf. Leček, 1995).

Another aspect of the social meaning of making nativity scenes is a contest in the appearance and craftsmanship. *Since every craftsman did what he thought was most beautiful, it was a contest, a contest in making the figurines.* These were not figurines of characters and animals, but parts of nativity scenes. Stanko Bunić claims he added *balconies* with which he raised the basic content of nativity scenes one *floor* higher, making them, in his own words, *more modern*. The quality of a nativity scene is important as well – it reflects in durability, which is perhaps connected with the awareness of them being the last ones making *betlehems*.

Furthermore, a different life story is connected to every individual *betlehem* and its builder. The most frequent one is the story of making the *betlehem* as a gift to children born before Christmas. Stanko Bunić says he made one of his *betlehems* as a gift to a newborn baby from Plemenščina. Stanko also knows of a story of Branko Bunić's *betlehem*: *Branko's dad was working on this betlem, and Branko refurbished it and added new things.* Branko (Image 3) says the following: *my dad came to my mom's house as a son-in-law, and grandma did not have a chance to get this done, so he made it within two weeks. I was born on December 19, and my folk used to talk how they ate sweet bread while working on the betlehem (sweet bread used to be brought as a present when a baby was born).* Branko links his own personal history with his *betlehem*, which is also his family's history, something which he in fact identifies with. He further explains: *my dad had my betlehem built when I was born, as a birthday present for me, but it was not perfect, so I perfected it. After I got married, I became a fan of this tradition, these things, I watched it one Christmas and thought how I could make it even prettier. I thought about it and made notes in my notebook (because I put betlem away when Christmas passes). I waited for the fall to come, when nights are long, and I started to work. I completely refurbished the top part and carved the stars, which were not there before.* He also adds to his story the recent event which involves Josip Barlek, ethnologist from the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, who studied nativity scenes in Plemenščina and organized the *betlehems' tour* to the international Christmas nativity scenes exhibition "100 Presepi" in 2001 in Rome, Italy, where he won the first prize. Branko takes great pride in this and believes his *nativity scene* would not have gotten the award had he not upgraded, improved *papa's nativity scene*.

Apart from a personal story that every *betlehem maker* has, as was described above, the tradition also lives on because of the needs of the community. According to informants, 20-30 years ago every house had its own *betlehem*, because *everyone had to have a betlehem in the house, this was a tradition and an obligation*. However, at first glance the individual stories do not fully support this claim. For example, Branko Bunić speaks about this when he claims his grandmother did not have a *betlehem* in her house when he was born, because her husband had died. It seems that she did not have it because only men were making *betlehems*, but were also the exclusive buyers or mediators of their introduction at home. Was this the result of a somewhat patriarchal order in

the villages, or perhaps a lack of women's interest in such a "hobby"? The answer is probably in the latter, because not only were there no woman carpenters, but women were also busy with many other chores during long winter nights, such as spinning, weaving, making Christmas decorations etc. It seems it was enough to have one family member (brother) with a *betlehem*, which was probably considered a common property, or as a fulfillment of the vow for every family to have at least one *betlehem*.

Stjepan Bunić, Stanko's cousin, says that, just like Stanko, he also learned to make *betlehems* from his brother Martin, although Martin started to work on his *betlehem* motivated by Stanko's intensive work. This also reflects the bond between members of the community, because, as Branko claims, they were working on *betlehems* together when they were little, so this bond had been preserved. *We used to do this when it was snowing, there was no TV, radio or anything else to do. Oh, it was great back then, when it would start to snow, what else could we do, we would say: Let's go make a betlehem! So we sang, and when Christmas time came we sang Christmas songs, we played on St. John's Day, and toured the villages for New Year's.* This confirms that the making of *betlehems* as part of Christmas-related activities was an opportunity for villagers to get together, which is the case with many folk piety practices (cf. Čapo, 1991: 30).

According to informants, there were several men in Plemenščina who made *betlehems*. These were mostly *tišlari*, carpenters, and only if someone would request one. They were not making *betlehems* unless someone ordered one, because it is not good for the nerves. As they still say, *you have to love it, otherwise it won't work*, and as informants say, you have to start learning while you're still little. Branko started to work on his when he was six, in the beginning these were small *betlehems*, until he started to work on his father's piece. This was when he *fell in love with this job*. In return for the *betlehems*, the makers received some form of help, and, in the past several years, money as well. So, the ordering and consummation of this product by the community that used this (along with other customs) to show its belonging to the village, as well as to the Catholic religion, have kept the making of *betlehems* alive to this day. Although only a few villagers were making them, this process indirectly included the entire village. Therefore, it was the social aspect – the expression of belonging to the village of Plemenščina and differentiation from the neighboring villages - that was pronounced in this context, rather than the religious one. This is also argued by Lj. Albus from an objective viewpoint that "in this type of Christmas symbols, the village of Plemenščina is a distinctive feature" (1997: 90) in relation to a wider area that has nativity scenes, but in a different performative form. The making and use of a nativity scene, a *betlehem*, was therefore a special feature used to differentiate the people of Plemenščina (*Plementaši*) from the neighboring villages. This is also an "indicator, or an objective factor of distinctiveness and identification" of this community and a "marker, subjective factor," (Čapo Žmegač, 1997: 71) because the villagers themselves claim this differentiated them and made them special in relation to the neighboring communities.

## The making of *betlehems* as an expression of faith

The *betlehems* in Plemenščina are part of a set of Christmas customs characteristic of Northwestern Croatia. Most of them are based on tradition, but there are also some recent customs that partly suppress earlier practices. It was already mentioned that *betlehems* used to be put at a special place in the house, as part of Christmas decorations. So, “the main house building, the center of the family life in which all Christmas customs and rituals also take place was decorated.” To be more precise, *betlehems* were placed in “God’s corner” (Albus, 1997: 89 and 2002: 9), which was a special place for different items, as well as for the expressions of folk piety. The triangular form, or the base of these nativity scene/*betlehems*, is determined by the space, the corner of the room. This triangular shape is a distinctive feature of the nativity scene in Northwestern Croatia (cf. Barlek, 1995).

Looking at the spatial relation of the background, representing a town with churches/chapels, and the front part consisting of schools and a little stable, one can see an attempt to present the relation between Bethlehem as an important town in which Jesus was born on one hand, and, according to folk interpretations, Mary and Joseph who were unjustly rejected by the town’s *noblemen* and forced to lay baby Jesus in a manger on the other. Through the contrast between form and decorations, the stable is presented as a space unworthy of Jesus’s significance. At the same time, somewhat paradoxically, the excessive decoration of the town in the background was to evoke the importance of the moment. Hence, the display of the town gives a possibility to express festivity, it portrays all the skillfulness and ingenuity of the maker. The town in the nativity scene of Plemenščina does not represent an actual town, although it mimics elements from the nearby environment. Instead, it shows a nearly celestial town, which is reflected in the decoration. All this makes the *betlehems* of Plemenščina an exceptional expression of folk piety.

The atmosphere of a special time of the year is being created already in the making of *betlehems*, a long time before Christmas, as early as October, probably as a “spiritual preparation ... for celebrating this ... holyday.” (Albus, 1997: 87) Nearly sixty years ago Stanko Bunić started making *betlehems* in Plemenščina following his family’s tradition, as was already mentioned above. His motivation for building traditional wooden nativity scenes was a wish to recover his health. He was sick at the time, so he started to work on a *betlem* with an idea: *perhaps God will make the doctors help me*. A similar formula connected to a plea to God or a saint was mentioned by another informant, a Croatian woman living in Hungary, as a part of the vow by which she sought help from “dear God to let me get well.” (Čapo, 1991: 29) The informant himself claims this was his vow by which he tried to obtain healing.<sup>3</sup> This seems to be their shared

<sup>3</sup> In the context of a conversation about witches and spells, Stanko mentioned he had sought help from a person able to remove spells, but she told him she could not help him because of the power of the spell, that is, the power of the person who had put the spell on him. It is not known whether he did this before or after taking the vow, which could also have been the reason to address God (after all) for help. It is also not certain whether he told this only to relate a story about the world of witches and spells.



view of life. As Christian notes, this form of vow is a “prototype prayer of the Roman Catholics in the Mediterranean,” (1989: 119) and, according to this information, even wider. As Stanko claims, *this way I managed to get better, so I continued to work on other betlehems*. He therefore made a *betlehem* as a plea to God to help him recover from illness. This example supports the claim that “piety is the means for achieving specific earthly objectives.” (Čapo, 1991: 37). Stanko’s illness was the reason behind his vow, which is in line with the previously established argument that the reason for making a vow is “some great hardship – usually a human and/or animal illness.” (Čapo, 1991: 29). A vow differs from a simple appreciation, (cf. Čapo, 1991: 40, note 15) plea or prayer only by Stanko’s interpretation - that this was a *vow*.

J. Čapo lists three types of vows: ante interventum vow, post interventum vow, and a vow that incites a deity to act. Stanko’s vow falls under the type of ante interventum vows, because he made his *betlehem* with an idea that God would help him, as if he wanted to show he believed he would get better by making a *betlehem* that is related to the story of the birth of Jesus, Son of God. In general, the builder treats a *betlehem* with utmost respect, as a holy item, such as a consecrated picture. It is therefore not unusual that Stanko chose *betlehem* as a gift, because it fits the description of a votive gift as an “item ... of special value” (1991: 22). Fundamentally, Stanko’s vow seems to correspond to the type of vow aimed at humoring God to receive help, or “inspire a deity to action.” (Čapo, 1991: 23) “All three interpretations [share a common quality] that a worshiper has to return something to God for the granted mercy by determining in advance what kind of gift this will be.” (Čapo, 1991: 23). It is as if it did not matter how Stanko had taken his vow, it was almost spontaneous, *with the thought that God would help* him, and he chose to make a *betlehem* as his gift. In a special way, Stanko’s vow is a combination of all the three types of vows. It can therefore be said that his vow had passed through different stages, from an attempt to humor God with an idea of making a *betlehem*, the act of making the *betlehem* as a votive gift prior to recovery, and a further work on the *betlehem* as a kind of gratitude for getting better with God’s help. According to informants, the making of *betlehems* is mentally demanding and in this sense it represents an expression of faith. At the same time, a *betlehem* as an item is a material proof of the existence of faith. When it was part of a vow, as it was in Stanko’s case, it became a link between a believer and God.

## Conclusion

The making of nativity scenes, *betlehems*, in Plemenščina represents an expression of folk piety. It is manifested on the personal and social level and corresponds to a “cultural expression that is not in contrast with the announcement.” (Hoško, 1983: 194) The specific features of the making of nativity scenes in Plemenščina were influenced by the European environment, which can be seen by a transfer of the nativity scene making tradition. They were well accepted among the people due to possibilities of a stylistic, cultural (local), personal, and other forms of expression. More general chang-

es in folk piety, such as redirection from the social to the personal, (cf. Čapo, 1991: 34; Šimić, 1994: 47) are reflected in the fact that *betlehems* are no longer made as a joint effort (in the same room), and exclusive individualization can be seen in Stanko's vow. Vows are usually mentioned in the context of pilgrimage, (cf. Čapo, 1991: 28) so it can be conferred, based on our present knowledge of the matter, that Stanko's vow is a distinctive feature of the tradition of making nativity scenes in Croatia. Further studies could show whether there are other such cases in nativity scene making and in other folk piety practices as well, not primarily connected with vows.

Information relating to social aspects of making *betlehems* confirm that faith or "piety ... has a social dimension as well." (Rihtman Auguštin, 1990: 14). All of the informants who are still making *betlehems* claim that this is hard physical work, requiring substantial mental effort as well. They also add that you have to have *the will and love* to do this. The introduction of various and always different, sometimes new, elements to the art of making them, makes the *betlehems* of Plemenščina truly unique. Every maker of nativity scenes introduces his own meanings. This reflects a certain tension that motivates the makers, but also enables the creation of bonds in the community through a common element they participate in. There are stories about *betlehems*, about who made them, when and why, and who restored them - how new elements were added, who learned to *make the betlem* from whom. The making of nativity scenes was also a special characteristic that differentiated *Plementaši* from the surrounding villages, which at the same time acts as an indicator and marker of distinctiveness and identification of this community.

According to the informants, the younger generations show less interest in going to church and accepting Catholic values, which also influences the need to show one's faith through forms of representation, as was, and partly still is, the case with *betlehems*. For now, the younger generations show no interest, because the bearers of this art think their children spend their free time differently and do not experience the making of *betlehems* in the same way. As they say, the young *only decorate the Christmas tree now. We, the old ones, I, especially look forward to each holiday, it is all very beautiful for me, whichever it may be and in whatever company, for as long as God will have it.* Why don't the award winning *betlehem* in Rome and other *betlehems* that attract interest by experts fail to motivate the young ones to make them? How is it possible that in some families there are still older members who place a *betlehem* in a room and that this has no effect on the younger ones, while at the same time, in the next room, the children decorate a (new) Christmas tree and place a bought nativity scene under it, small in size, without any artistic, traditional or personal value? Yet, if we can assume that *betlehems* are an expression of people's needs within a certain period of time, the needs that are today suppressed by new wishes and strivings, it is not unusual that the tradition cannot carry on, at least not without some persuasion. Further studies should seek answers to the question of whether the transfer of the tradition of *betlehem* making, as well as other religious, Christian and traditional values from the elder to the most members of the younger generation has happened and why. If the folk piety is truly observed through a prism of morality, i.e. the value of a specific community, (cf. Riht-

man Auguštín, 1990: 14 and 1991:14; Čapo, 1991: 25), the question is to what degree have new and different values been established, and which factors affected it. Clearly, a certain lifestyle in a certain time influences the establishment of the prerequisites for the existence and maintenance, or transfer, of such a tradition. Although Catholicism is intertwined with many pre-Christian rituals, as well as “non-Christian” elements, (Belaj, 2007: 70), which is bestowed upon the people of Plemenščina and visible in their traditional customs – the people of Plemenščina expressed their belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, which had instilled in the believers certain attitudes towards God and the holy, through making and using *betlehems*.

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