

Carneval Customs in the Lobar Region

Summary

Lobar is a town in Hrvatsko Zagorje, fifty miles or so from Zagreb. It is the burrough seat for nine neighboring villages, some of which have almost merged with Lobar. At the turn of the century Lobar was the parish center, with jurisdiction over about fifteen villages. A monograph on the life and customs of the people of the Lobar region was written in this period by parish priest Josip Kotarski [Kotarski, 1915, 1917, 1918]. The author's research of carnival and other customs in the Lobar region was conducted from 1974 to 1984, and she started with Kotarski's article. She first tried to establish how well known the customs that Kotarski registered are to the current population of Lobar, distinguishing between customs that are still practiced and those that people still recall. She then tried to determine possible changes from Kotarski's day to the present and register the current state of carnival customs, following the changes that ensued in the course of her years of study.

There are three main groups of customs that Kotarski recorded. The first are facts about what one should or sholudn't do on Carnival Tuesday. These are data on customary procedures founded on certain beliefs, that are done with the intent of insuring prosperity in farming and personal lives, as well as facts on bans or actions forbidden on that day, in order to avoid undesirable consequences. Information on the food prepared for Carnival Tuesday can also be associated with this group, for the selection of these dishes is far from chance; it is part of an obligatory, or at least desirable inventory of Carnival Tuesday, and the dishes serve other purposes besides mere nutrition.

The second group of data in Kotarski's text consists of adages with which weather conditions and other forecasts are made, and third group of data is on masks, costumes and the routes made by costumed people.

Most of the information that Kotarski recorded on carnival customs is familiar to the residents of the Lobar Region, but not all of these have survived as living customs; they remain a part of living memory. The largest number of data in Kotarski's text are on masks and routes made by costumed people, and such customs also dominate today in the carnival. In this research project several carnival customs have been registered that, according to the memory of the older generation informers, must have existed during Kotarski's time, but he failed to mention them [for example small groups of masked men who go from house to house, draw a circle on the ground with a stick, dance and express good wishes for the turnip harvest].

About twenty years ago the central event of the carneval activity in Lobar and its surrounding area became the carneval wedding. The carneval wedding is described by Kotarski as well. The continuity of the carneval wedding in Lobar regional customs was never brought into question. The fact that it was occasionally not practiced, during, for example, the war and post-war years, was due to circumstances beyond their control, like in places other than Lobar. The changes that they experienced are more quantitative than qualitative: the number of participants and the forms of their organization have changed, but the basic subject matter always remains the same. The carneval wedding really reached its zenith in the Lobar region in the 1960s. Then the carneval events were organized by small groups of agile local people, who gathered together informally and spontaneously. In the 1970s the carnival embraced forms of organization which the broader society respected and provided support for. The inhabitants of Lobar and its surrounding villages founded the Lobar Culture and Art Society in 1973 with a particularly lively brass band section. The society has taken over organization of the carneval events, of which the carneval wedding was still the most important. Organizationally the carneval wedding was thus raised to the level of cultural activity, a cultural performance, with support [financially as well] from social organizations. Changes in organization resulted in changes in the carneval wedding as well, but they have occurred gradually; the basic content of the Lobar carneval wedding has still not changed in essence.

Participants in the carneval events are not just those who live in Lobar and surrounding villages, but also those who have moved away temporarily or permanently from the area, due to employment or schooling in near-by or more distant industrial centers, and abroad. One gets the impression that working emigrants abroad [quest workers], and some of the Lobar inhabitants living in other cities and in Zagreb, have never really become part of their new environment or felt at home there, so they compensate for this by coming back to take active part in the life of their native region. Individuals show considerable initiative, organization and other ambitions.

In Kotarski's time women did not take part in the carneval wedding. In the post-war years they have gradually begun to get more involved in carneval events: first by joining the procession in small groups or individually among the other masked participants, and then by joining the main actors of the carneval wedding, among the "wedding party" and as the entourage of the "bride" [who continues to be played by a man]. The total number of participants in the carneval wedding has increased with time, but among them are most of the obligatory figures

mentioned by Kotarski. Where once there were tambouritzas or improvised musical accompaniment, today is the impressive, continuous music accompaniment of the Lobar brass band.

The route taken by the modern carnival parade covers more territory than just the center of Lobar. It passes through several villages and covers distances of a number of kilometers, imitating the routes of real wedding processions: from the house of the "groom" it goes to the house of the "bride", and then the "wedding party" stops at a number of places, in front of the homes of prominent individuals, at inns and stores, where they are treated to drinks and food. They always stop at the parish residence and the former castle of the Keglević Counts where there is now an institution for the aged and ailing. For years now the carnival has an arrangement with the administration of the institution: the carnival wedding cheers up the patients and staff of the institution, and in return they are treated to food and beverages [sometimes the castle serves as the home of the "bride" where the "wedding party" picks her up]. In order to cover the distances it must, the carnival has been motorized; outside of Lobar its participants drive for the occasion in adapted trailers pulled by tractors, and when they reach each major place, they get down from their vehicles and form a procession according to an established order and go the rest of the way on foot. The procession of the carnival wedding ends with a "wedding ceremony" held in the middle of Lobar. The "marriage ceremony" used to be "performed" before the gathered crowds and other participants without particular preparation, to be later raised to a stage built for the purpose, equipped with a loud speaker system. Today the carnival wedding ends with entertainment in the social hall [at the Fire Station or Hunting Lodge].

The article presents a detailed analysis of the composition and route of the carnival wedding procession, the equipment of the carnival wedding party, the verbal content of the carnival wedding, performances of the Lobar carnival wedding outside Lobar [at a hotel, and performances on television and radio], and other carnival events are described in Lobar and the surrounding region.

In closing, the author discusses the role and meaning of the contemporary Lobar carnival customs. In the Lobar carnival wedding it is easy to recognize a search for identity in one's native region, as well as attempts at re-evaluating traditions. It is also easy to see that the people of Lobar, with the help of the inverted world of the carnival, want to announce their existence to the world. Their customs, which were hardly known beyond their villages, are now centralized in Lobar from where they go out into the world. Today's Lobar community consists of the

eight villages of the Lopor Burrough, and today's carnival customs reflect this community, confirming that it is not just an administrative, but a living entity, with all the advantages and drawbacks, benefits and conflicts that emerge from such a community. Individuals from outside, those who have left this community, return to it to assume prominent positions in the carnival events, and thereby, in the hierarchy of the community; they wish to reinstate their identity in this community, at home. In a new environment, in a large city and abroad they can not count on such prominent roles and their skills and talents [music, performing, organizational] will not be called upon or valued in that environment.

The Lopor carnival customs of the past were important in the sphere of cult and entertainment; cult and magic belonged to the sphere of power, although not human power, but a supernatural, abstract and certainly a slow, immediately harmless power. Today's carnival events are in good part entertainment; only fragments of the cult and magic elements remain, but the sphere of power is present in a new, concrete form. Socially entrenched and acknowledged forms of organization of cultural activities that the people of Lopor turned to primarily for the necessary funding, brought them, aside from financial support, a social evaluation of their activities, a social repute, and through this, power of sorts. Not a great deal, but power, nonetheless. It is therefore no wonder that an observer of many years notes changes in the cast, conflicts of interest, attempts of individuals and groups to maintain a decisive role in organizing the Lopor carnival events, as well as intolerance, disappointment, competitive interaction. One needn't, of course exaggerate in this, these are not pivotal issues, but they are not chance nor entirely distinct from the greater community and society as a whole; moreover they are a reflection of certain phenomena in the global society as such.

[Translated by Ellen Elias-Bursać]