UDK 398(=163.6):615.89
616.98:579.842
616-036.21

Monika Kropej Telban

PhD, Research Advisor, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts,
Novi trg 2, SI–1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia,
Email: Monika.Kropej@zrc-sazu.si
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6459-3683

Folktales about the Plague and Healing Practices against It in Narrative Folklore

ABSTRACT

The contribution discusses the narrative folklore about the plague, most notably how it spread, how people tried to protect themselves against the disease and how they treated it in Slovenian territory and, to some extent, within the wider European framework. The first part presents the analysis of folktales in which the Plague, personified as a demonic figure, roams from place to place, from one land to another. The second part focuses on steps taken to prevent the disease from spreading and means of protection against it, as well as healing, charms, incantations, and other vernacular practices during the epidemic.

KEY WORDS
plague, pandemics, folk narrative, Slovenia, folk medicine

IZVLEČEK

PRIPOVEDI O KUGI IN ZDRAVILNE PRAKSE PROTI TEJ BOLEZNI V LJUDSKEM IZROČILU

Prispevek obravnava pripovedno izročilo o kugi, predvsem tisti del, ki govori o njenem širjenju in načinih obrambe in zdravljenja pred to boleznijo v slovenskem prostoru in delno v širšem evropskem okviru. V prvem delu so analizirane pripovedi v katerih se Kuga kot poosebljeni demonski lik bolezni širi iz kraja v kraj in iz dežele v deželo, v drugem delu članka pa je obravnavan predvsem načini preprečevanja širjenja in zaščite pred to boleznijo ter zdravljenje, zarotitve, zagovarjanje ter druge vernakularne prakse ljudi v času epidemije.

KLJUČNE BESEDE
kuga, pandemije, slovstvena folklora, Slovenija, ljudska medicina

Folktales about the plague, the contagious disease, which had stricken humanity several times throughout history, have been preserved in oral tradition as depictions of conditions imposed by the plague epidemic as well as protection against the disease and its treatment or as folktales about the plague—the demonic creature that killed people and cattle. Especially in Europe, people described it as a supernatural being very akin to their conceptions of death, nightmare, hunger, and various other diseases. Its personifications featured in the demonologies of many cultures and represented one of the greatest horrors whenever and wherever it raged.

The set of distinctive motifs used in plague folktales is very comprehensive; in his catalogue "The Migratory Legends" (1958), the Norwegian folklorist Reidar Christiansen classified them under the chapter *Legends concerning the Great Plague*, referring to the following narrative types:

> 7080. The Plague, in the shape of an old hag, passing from district to district with a rake or, and, a broom.
> 7085. The hag is ferried across a river or lake by some one who in the end recognizes her, and asks to be spared. The hag consulting her book refuses, but grants him an easy death.
> 7090. The survivors, a boy and a girl, and their fate.
> 7095. The rediscovery many years after of deserted houses or a church.[1]

However, as materials preserved in the archives of research institutions and in printed sources suggest, folktales about the plague were thematically much more diverse.

The plague and hunger

Ivan Grafenauer was one of the few Slovenian folklorists who wrote about the plague accompanied by hunger in the form of the fabled insatiable creature Netek.[2] The plague was commonly associated with hunger, personified in Slovenian folklore as the Netek. However much he ate, he was never satisfied, and he always craved for more. Hence the name "ne tek," which literally translates to English "no appetite," although it is more correctly rendered as "never full."[3]

In the oldest preserved Slovenian folktale *O Neteku*, published in 1847 by Josip Drobnič, the association between the Netek and the plague is not made explicit. The author merely states that *in any house that wants to drive the Netek away without offering him food and drink, he will eat and drink all the human and animal supplies and make sure that the local fields, vineyards, and orchards will bear no fruit for three years. But whoever receives him with kindness, there he will show his gratitude*.[4]

Similarly, no such association between the Netek and the plague was made by the Slovenian novelist Janez Trdina, who wrote about the creature in 1881.[5] Grafenauer derived the connection between the Plague and the Glutton (equivalent to the Netek in Slovenian folklore) primarily by drawing on traditions about a voracious little man, the Glutton, that have been preserved in some Alpine areas, especially in the Central European territory, among the Romansh people in Switzerland, and in Vorarlberg in the Austrian Alps:

> *The Glutton / "Der Fresser"*
> *In the early seventeenth century, the plague swept through the Bregenz Forest in the drainage basin of the Bregenz River in the northern part of Vorarlberg. One morning, a foreigner walked into the former "Sun's" inn. He ordered lunch for twenty people and then set out toward Ellenborgen. He returned at noon, alone, and he ate all the food down to the last crumb by himself. The innkeeper found this atrocious, and she turned to the parish priest for advice. He told her to charge nothing for the lunch. When the foreigner asked how much he owed her, she said that everything had already been paid for. The foreigner thanked her and said that the plague would no longer spread. No one ever saw him again.*[6]

Oral traditions of other regions also talked about war and hunger that followed on the heels of the plague. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the latter was said to be followed by a year of hunger.[7] Bracing for the plague, believed to roam around in the shape of a woman, Rumanian farmers would leave plenty of food on the side of the road for all travelers to fend off the arrival of the disease.[8] Furthermore, many historical sources maintain that the plague usually brought general shortages and the economic turmoil in its wake.[9]

1 Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, pp. 214–215.
2 Grafenauer, Neték in "Ponočna potnica".
3 Ivan Grafenauer also stated the names of plants and animals with the common root: netečje = berries that do not make one full, mostly cranberries; netečnik = *bobnarica* or mire drum (Ardea stellaria), a type of bird that was given this common name for the male's distinctive call. (Grafenauer, Neték in "Ponočna potnica", pp. 164–165).
4 Drobnič, Slovenska pripovedka; Grafenauer, Neték in "Ponočna potnica", p. 171.
5 Trdina, Verske bajke, p. 537.
6 Beitl, *Im Sagenwald*, p. 65, no. 82; Grafenauer, Neték in "Ponočna potnica", pp. 159–160.
7 Softić, Zapisi usmenih predaja, p. 165.
8 Grafenauer, Neték in "Ponočna potnica", pp. 188, 190.
9 Mal, *Stara Ljubljana*, p. 81; Golec, Kužne epidemije, p. 59.

The plague personified as a woman, a man, a boy, a girl, or a plague pair

According to popular belief, the plague was the evil spirit that killed people and cattle. Especially in Europe, people described it as a supernatural or fabled creature very akin to their conceptions of death, nightmare, hunger, and various other diseases. People sometimes imagined that the plague was caused by witches, sorcerers, or by Satan.[10] Where the word "death" is of masculine gender, the plague was often presented as a man, and where it is assigned female gender, the plague, too, was analogously featured as a woman. In line with these conceptions, the plague—often dubbed the Black Death in folklore—took on a personification of its own.

The Rhaeto-Romance people in Switzerland conceived of the plague as an old woman. Arnold Bühli published a tale about the plague that in 1566 made its way to Ladir via Basel and Bern, personified as an old woman dressed in black:

> *She knocked on the window of a house at the top of the village and asked if she could spend the night there. No, she was told, there was no room in the house, but she could sleep in the barn if she wanted. Then they saw the old woman wrapped in black enter the barn. After that, no one saw her again. The next day, the plague broke out in the village.*[11]

In Croatia, stories circulated about the plague that lived in the woods near Pavlovac, a village in the county of Bjelovar.

> *One evening, a farmer crossed these woods with his wagon. The plague sat by the fire, roasting horse meat and human flesh. She offered the farmer human flesh, and he ate it. When he returned to Pavlovac, the plague broke out, killing all inhabitants.*[12]

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the plague was depicted as a woman holding a broom in one hand and a lantern in the other to find and 'sweep away' as many people as possible.[13] To save themselves from the plague, people ran to the mountains or other places.[14] In Slovenian folklore, an old saying has it that: "[i]f the plague appears, buy yourself a pair of sturdy shoes and run until the soles fall apart."[15]

Germanic peoples depicted the plague in the form of a man or a boy. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published, among others, the following folktale about the plague personified as a tall man:

> *The Tall Man in the Murder Lane in Hof*
> *In 1519, just before the plague killed so many people in Hof a large, tall black man was seen in Murder Lane. His wide-spread legs reached both sides of the street, and his head rose far above the housetops.*
> *My great-grandmother, Walburg Widmann, herself, saw how he walked along this street one evening with one foot at the tavern's entrance and the other foot across the street in front of the large house there. She was so frightened that she did not know which way to go. In God's name and making the sign of the cross, she advanced in the middle of the street and passed between his legs. Had she not dared to do this the ghost would have followed her. She had barely escaped when the ghost clapped his legs together so hard that all the houses in Murder Lane nearly collapsed. Soon afterward the plague befell the city, and it was first felt in Murder Lane.*[16]

Similarly widespread in Central and Northern Europe, and even in Iceland[17] were the notions of a plague pair, a man and a woman wandering from place to place together, bringing the plague. According to the German folktale from Schweinfurt on the river Main, male death cut grass and his wife, female Death (the Plague) raked behind him, and only what slipped through the tines remained alive.[18] In Bavaria and Germany, too, the notions are documented of male Death and female Death wreaking havoc across the land in the form of the Plague. One such folktale has been preserved in Austrian Carinthia:

> *Once male Death said to female Death: "I take the scythe, you take the rake; I'll cut, you'll rake after me." So, male Death and female Death climbed Mount Malta (Maltaberg). When they reached the last farmer, male Death started to cut grass from the top of Mount Malta to the bottom, and she raked the cut patches behind him and piled them into a heap. Meanwhile, the plague raged across the mountain, leaving no man alive; male Death cut them all down.*[19]

Folktales in Vorarlberg narrated about the plague coming to Feldkirchen and killing almost to the last villager. Thenceforth, when someone sneezed, people would say, "God help you!"

> *Die Pest in Feldkirchen / The plague in Feldkirchen*
> *Two monsters from Lichtenstein came to the river Ill, one carrying a broom and the other a shovel. By the river, one said to the other: "You go here and dig through here and I'll go there and sweep through*

10 Travner, *Kuga na Slovenskem*, pp. 72–73.
11 Bühli, *Sagen aus Graubünden*, 2, p. 210; from: Grafenauer, Neték in "Ponočna potnica", p. 186.
12 Krauß, *Südslavische Pestsagen*, p. 36.
13 Softić, Zapisi usmenih predaja, p. 166.
14 Ibid., p. 165.
15 Slekovec, Kuga na slovenskem štajerskem, p. 142.
16 Grimm, *Deutsche Sagen*, no. 167, p. 243: "Der lange Mann in der Mordgasse zu Hof."
17 Gunnell, Mists, Magicians, pp. 49–50.
18 Bronner, *Von deutscher Sitt*, p. 262; from: Grafenauer, Neték in "Ponočna potnica", p. 183.
19 Graber, Sagen aus Kärnten, no. 258; from: Grafenauer, Neték in "Ponočna potnica", p. 184.

there!" So, they divided the valleys between themselves, causing an untold death toll. If the monster so much as looked at someone, that person staggered and blackened, and whoever sneezed came down with fever and perished that same day. The disease announced its presence through sneezing, and people would say: "God help you!" or "God help us all!"[20]

Sneezing was considered one of the symptoms of the plague, and this expression became widely used throughout Europe. According to Jacqueline Simpson, in the plague-ravaged seventeenth-century England, too, people started to say, "Bless you!" or "God help you!" when they heard someone sneeze, and this custom has been preserved to the present day.[21]

Swedish folktales narrate about the plague that came from the south, looking like a beautiful little boy rasping with an iron grater, leaving one or two household members alive; after him came the plague damsel ("pestflicka"), who swept her broom in front of the gate, causing everyone in the village to die.[22]

In the Estonian folklore, the plague came in the form of a male figure, depicted as a boy or a black man:

/…/ Near Suure-Jaani the farmer of the Tooba farmstead was in the forest and saw the plague spirit dancing and singing under the trees: "Patt-patt-patt to Paelamaa [farmstead], kõps-kõps-kõps to Kõnnu [farmstead], topp-topp-topp to Tooba [farmstead]!" The farmer understood that it was the plague and said: "Let's see!" He went home, took a rowan cudgel, carved three five-pointed stars on it and started waiting. In the night someone came and asked to be let in. The farmer opened the door and saw a black man. The farmer started beating the man with his cudgel until the plague started begging that the farmer let him go. The farmer said: "When you promise that you won't go anywhere anymore to kill, I will stop." The plague promised and the man stopped beating.[23]

As seen above, stories about the plague also frequently named places that were visited by the Plague. According to the Estonian folklorist Reet Hiiemäe, within the framework of the legends about dangerous places—for instance of the places where the spread of plague is mentioned in the legends—a mental map can be established, which covers the emergence of the threat in the community as well as their escape from it.[24] In a similar vein, Timothy Tangherlini observes based on Scandinavian plague narratives that in folk belief, quite logically, people tried to narratively map the route of the plague spirit as the personification of the disease.[25]

People in Iceland and also in some other European countries narrated that the Plague appears as a fog, mist or cloud which lay across the lowlands, killing people and livestock, and that people saved their lives by going to the mountains.[26]

The plague will let itself be carried or ferried, because it cannot cross water by itself

Folktales about the plague traveling a predesignated route to selected destinations and letting itself be ferried across a river or a sea to an island are mentioned by both Timothy Tangherlini in Scandinavia (1988) and Reet Hiiemäe in Estonia (2016), and they are also documented in the French-Breton, Prussian, and Polish folklores. The Southern Slavs, too, narrated that the plague was unable to swim across a river or a sea and therefore found itself a means of transport. Many folktales were published by Matija Valjavec[27] and Friedrich Krauß,[28] for example:

The plague came to a piece of water. Just then, the river Sava spilled over, and she could not wade, so she asked a man riding in a boat to take her across, oblivious of a dog under his seat. He took her into his boat and started rowing. Once they reached the middle of the water, the dog woke up, saw the plague, and charged at her. The plague asked the man to set her free, but to no avail, as the dog was already tearing at her and grabbing her until she fell into the water. Thus, she barely reached the far bank of the river and threatened to avenge all her wounds until all dogs died. Well, thank God, that did not happen, and there are more dogs every day.[29]

Many folktales describing how the plague let itself be carried or transported from one place to another mention its fear of dogs[30] and cats, and that it was repelled by the rooster's crow. Juniper sprigs were also used to keep the plague away:

The plague asked a ferryman who transported people from the Littoral to a nearby island to take her there across the channel. She would do him no harm, but if he did not trust her, he could place thorns and juniper sprigs in the middle of the boat, between himself

20 Beitl, *Im Sagenwald*, p. 65 no. 82; from: Grafenauer, Neték in "Ponočna potnica", p. 184.
21 Simpson and Roud, *A Dictionary of English Folklore*, p. 280.
22 Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, p. 994; from: Grafenauer, Neték in "Ponočna potnica", p. 187.
23 Hiiemäe, *Esti kratkupärimus*, p. 124; Hiiemäe, Narrative Maps, p. 180.
24 Hiiemäe Narrative Maps, pp. 179–181.
25 Tangherlini, Ships, Fogs and Traveling Pairs.
26 Gunnell, Mists, Magicians, p. 49; Travner, *Kuga na Slovenskem*, p. 76.
27 Valjavec, *Narodna pripovjedke*, p. 243.
28 Krauß, *Südslavische Pestsagen*, p. 14, Krauß, *Volksglaube*, pp. 64, 67.
29 Valjavec, *Narodne pripovjedke*, p. 243; Krauß, *Volksglaube*, p. 64; from: Grafenauer, Neték in "Ponočna potnica", p. 190.
30 The plague also avoided dogs according to the Bosnian and Herzegovinian folklore; cf.: Softić, Zapisi usmenih predaja, p. 164.

and the Plague. The ferryman did so and was left unharmed, while the Plague sowed death all around.[31]

Such folktales also inspired the Slovenian poet Anton Aškerc and his ballad "Ponočna potnica" (*Midnight Passenger*).[32]

Prophylactic actions and remedies

The plague and agrarian rituals

The memory of ancient agrarian rituals in the Southern Slavic region has been preserved by the folktale about

the Plague and Death, who were believed to be sisters from Sarajevo. One killed people and the other took them to the otherworld. Once, they promised a man to do him no harm if he would carry them to another place on his back and protect them from being ravaged by dogs. On their way, the farmer asked them how people could be saved from the plague. They advised to yoke a dozen naked young men and a dozen naked young women to plows and make them plow the same furrow around the village seven times. When the man left them, many villagers died that day. Then, heeding his advice, they sent two dozen young men and women to plow a furrow around the village and saved themselves from the plague.[33]

Similar folktales and rituals of "plowing out the disease" were known in other parts of Central and Southern Europe, as confirmed by the memory of a custom that was preserved in Loška Dolina in Slovenia until the end of the nineteenth century. Women plowed out the plague by dragging the plows around the village, some having them tied to their waists and others holding them by the handle. In this way, they plowed the same furrow around the village three times.[34]

Aiša Softić discovered similar methods of protection against the disease in Bosnian and Herzegovinian manuscripts. The following folklore has been preserved around Bosanska Gradiška:

People in the village found twin sisters and two black oxen born of the same cow. A new plow had to be built overnight and then the sisters, completely naked, plowed a furrow around the entire village with the oxen. Thus, they fended off the plague.[35]

In such narrative traditions, Softić highlights the belief that it was important to draw the magic circle around a person, a group of people or, as in this case, around the entire village for protection against evil forces. However, this custom also attributed a special magic power to dragging a plow around the village as a magic act, where it was also important who performed the plowing and how.

Incantations and apotropaic acts

One of the rare reports on how people warded off the plague and cured it was provided by the English writer Daniel Defoe, who preserved a fictionalized account of life in London in 1665 in his book *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722). He described various herbal remedies, preventive charms, as well as omens and portents of the plague. Herbs that were believed to prevent the spread of the plague were garlic and rue (Ruta graveolens), as well as tobacco and vinegar. In his novel, he also wrote about charm papers, tied up on the person with many knots, and certain words or figures written on them, among them the word *Abracadabra* formed in a triangle.[36]

Similar approaches were documented elsewhere in Europe. In Slovenian territory, reports on incantations against the plague have been preserved from as early as the sixteenth century—specifically, one from 1583, in which Bishop Paolo Bisanti notified the patriarch of Aquileia that Slovenians in Gorizia region practiced incantations against the plague.[37]

An incantation or a spell of some sort against all contagious diseases from 1851, preserved in the Book of Incantations by Jakob Rant from Dolenčice in Poljanska Dolina reads as follows:

pokličem jest Jaka vimen Svetga Benedikta in vimen Tega Nar Svetišga Čez nebeške Moči nar Nar visokišiga Čez Svet zijan z zinaji Adonoji
Attanatos Deous
Bog tanar Močnejši U Presveti Trojici
zpik = tro = ik = volf
toje Aleluja Aleluja Aleluja
trikrat križ naredit in trikrat gor dihnit še 4 nebeška znamenja se morja dat (. S ♁ . . S S ♁ S S o. L. ♀) vžit Nato se moli 7 očenašov h Čajsti Presvetej Trojici in teh Patronov.
[I call Jacob in the name of Saint Benedict and in the name of the holiest of Saints in the Heavens and on Earth, looked on with *zinaji* (?) of *Adonis* (?)
Attanatos Deous
God the mightiest of the Holy Trinity
zpik = tro = ik = volf
This is Hallelujah Hallelujah Hallelujah
Draw three crosses and take three breaths in the air, and then make four heavenly signs *using* (?) (. S ♁ . . S S ♁ S S o. L. ♀). Then pray 7 Our Fa-

[31] Krauß, *Volksglaube*, p. 67; Grafenauer, Neték in "Ponočna potnica", pp. 190–191, note 24.
[32] Aškerc, Ponočna potnica, p. 385.
[33] Krauß, *Südslavische Pestsagen*, pp. 25–30.
[34] Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, pp. 130, 392.
[35] Softić, Zapisi usmenih predaja, p. 163.
[36] Simpson and Roud, *A Dictionary of English Folklore*, p. 280.
[37] Gruden, *Zgodovina slovenskega naroda*, p. 1061; from: Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 33.

St. Roch Church in Dravlje and a plague column on the Celovška Road.

Plague column from 1743 in Maribor's Main Square, by Jožef Straub. Saint Mary is surrounded by six saints–intercessors against the plague. The monument was erected as a token of gratitude for putting an end to the plague (1681), which killed one-third of the population in the seventeenth century.

thers in honor of the Holy Trinity and the Patron Saints.].[38]

People also used defensive magic symbols or letters and spells against the plague, very few of which have been preserved.[39] The oldest known Slovenian *zapretek* or charm against the plague is contained in the Carinthian *Duhovna brauna* (Spiritual Defense) from 1740:

Gospod Franzhiskus Salorius shkof v Salmonii je ana prizha de v leti 1547 se je sgodivo, da so utrenti per Conziliumu al rati ukupe bli sbrani shkofi in drugi kuoshterski tavishi, k so Rat dershali, da je she zhries 20 shkofou inu tok vishah na kugi umerlo, tedei je ta patriarh od Austicie, usam te prizhiozhe buhstabe ratou, kteri so od s. Zahariusa shkofa, v Jerusalem resvoshani, inu sa kuo gorei sehranjeni bli, inu poterdeni, to majo kako ano shishno pomuzh, kader je kuga de je imamo udrukano per sabe nositi. K so tu sturili ni obeden vezh na kugi umerou inu kader se bushtabi na ane duri sa shribajo, so usi pred kugo obuarani, kiri pod isto streho bonajo.

Buhstabi sa kugo so leti: + ZDIA + BIZ + SAB + ZHGP + BFRS.

[Sir Franciscus Salorius bore witness to bishops and other men of the cloth having gathered to hold a council in 1547. Because twenty bishops and several senior clerics had already died of the plague, the Patriarch of *Antioch* (?) recommended using all letters (*buhštabi*) that Bishop Zacharias from Jerusalem had approved to protect homes from the plague. They were to be printed and worn on the body. People heeded the advice, and no one died of the plague again; and when they wrote them on their front doors, no one ever died of the plague from that house again.

These are the letters against the plague: + ZDIA + BIZ + SAB + ZHGP + BFRS.].[40]

People would also wear little pouches around their necks, with incantations, charms, and magic symbols sown in to protect them from the plague.

Saints—protectors against the plague

To triumph over the plague, people also erected plague columns, churches and chapels dedicated to patron saints against the plague, especially St. Roch, St. Sebastian, St. Rosalie, and St. Barbara, as well as St. Oswald in Carinthia.[41]

As evident from the folklore that has been preserved in the village of Povir in the municipality of Sežana, St. Fabian was another powerful intercessor against the plague:

The plague in the shape of a black girl stood on top of a hill, calling: "Fabian, Sebastian, when you summon your strength, you keep me away from Povir!"

At the Church of St. James, people especially worshipped St. Sebastian and St. Fabian, who were also invoked against the plague.[42]

In 1644, when the plague raged in Zapuže and Dravlje near Ljubljana, the inhabitants of the Dravlje neighborhood swore to build a church and honor it with a ceremonial procession every year on the Feast of St. Roch (August 16th), which usually ended with a fête.[43]

In his sermon dedicated to St. Roch from the collection of sermons "Sacrum promptuarium" (1691), the Baroque preacher and author Janez Svetokriški wrote about the devastating plague in Slovenian territory and about processions that people attended on that day for St. Roch to protect them against this dreadful disease.[44]

Closures and quarantines

According to folklore, a cross alone, erected on the road or in front of a tunnel leading to another region, could prevent the plague from spreading. Thus narrates the Carinthian tradition:

The road from Mežica to Črna ran through a tunnel on which a cross was mounted some time before the plague struck. There being no other path connecting the town with Mežica, the cross prevented the plague from advancing to Črna.[45]

Violations of the ban on traveling to other places where the plague had not yet erupted could sometimes be very serious, and they could also result in death:

Hundreds of years ago, the plague raged in Mežica. For this horrid disease not to spread elsewhere, they posted military guards at Reht to prevent any villager from leaving. At the Kajžar Cross on the right bank of the river Meža, they dug a deep pit and threatened to bury alive whoever came to that pit and wanted to proceed toward the village.

Kajžar had a beautiful daughter. This beauty reached the pit first on her way to run errands in Mežica. The soldiers grabbed her and threw her in the pit. Deaf to her earnest implorations and heart-wrenching cries, the cruel soldiers buried her alive. Thenceforth,

38 The Book of Incantations by Jakob Rant, locally known as Kočar from Dolenčice no. 9 in Poljanska Dolina. The manuscript from 1851 was kept by Janez Dolenc; from: Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, pp. 23–24.

39 Some examples are in: Travner, *Kuga na Slovenskem*, pp. 79–80.

40 Dolenc, *Zagovori*, p. 45.

41 Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 33.

42 *Zgodnja Danica* 33, September 10th, 1880, p. 294; from Kropej, *Od ajda*, p. 300.

43 Mal, *Stara Ljubljana*, p. 82.

44 Svetokriški, *Sacrum promptuarium*, pp. 53–54.

45 Möderndorfer, *Koroške narodne pripovedke*, p. 62.

the plague was never seen again. According to the soldiers' and popular belief, it had transformed into Kajžar's beautiful daughter and that was the only way to do away with it forever.[46]

A tale, preserved in Treibach in Austrian Carinthia, narrates about the misfortunate fate of a victim—a girl that was thrown into a pit and buried alive to stop the plague from spreading. The memory of the pestilence that raged at that time is kept alive by a plaque, mounted near the tower in the cemetery adjacent to the Church of St. Kosmas and St. Damian, bearing the inscription: "Plague 1715."

When the plague ravaged the land in 1715, the villagers decided to dig a ditch in front of the church during Mass, where they would bury alive the first person that would come out from the church before the end of Mass. Such misfortune befell a little girl who rushed home early to tend to her ill mother. She was buried alive, and the plague never entered the village again.[47]

Town folk sought to fend off the plague by posting guards outside the town walls and preventing entrance to foreigners and beggars. The so-called plague guards prohibited passage to people and goods without health certificates or "fede." Newcomers from infected areas were sent into mandatory quarantine at the lazaretto station.[48] As a rule, any outbreak of no matter how locally limited epidemic prompted the closure of provincial borders and a severe restriction or suspension of traffic, which had an adverse impact on the provincial economy.[49]

Sources also report that in 1598, when the plague swept through Ljubljana, a wooden fence was raised around the village of Krakovo, completely cutting it off from the world, and the same steps were taken in other plague-ridden settlements. Infected houses were marked with a huge plague cross painted on the front door.[50]

Protection with herbal remedies and apotropaic acts

On the onset of an infectious disease, people also tried to protect themselves against it by smoking the house and barns with juniper (*Juniperus communis*) and charcoal, mixed with Alpine valerian (*Valeriana celtica*), myrrh (*Commiphore*), and incense.[51] The inhabitants of Styria also believed that they could ward off the plague by sharpening their scythes.[52]

To keep the plague away, the inhabitants of Trebija in Poljanska Dolina in Upper Carniola buried the plague victim's clothes in the ground for three days, after which they hung them for three days on the roof under moonlight, and then finally left them exposed to sunlight for another three days.[53]

According to the "Večna Pratika" almanac, diet helped keep the plague at bay by avoiding cooked herbs, such as spinach, sorrel, chicory, garlic, anis, parsley, and sage. It recommended to abstain from salted fish, mushrooms, all kinds of meat, bacon, old rotten cheese, melons, and onions, as well as from beverages, such as apple and pear cider, hard wine,[54] distilled wine,[55] and boiled water.[56] It was beneficial to drink celandine (*Chelidonium maius*) boiled in wine, juice from the leaves and roots of wall germander (*Teucrium chamaedrys*), or to mix wine with the dried powder of its leaves and roots. Wealthier families used lemon (*Citrus limonum*) and orange (*Citrus aurantium*) peels soaked in wine.

Protection against the plague was also provided by common rue (*Ruta graveolens*) and acorn as well as by ingesting the root of wild angelica (*Angelica silvestris*) or "the root of the Holy Ghost" after fasting. Another herbal remedy held in esteem was burnet-saxifrage, also called solidstem burnet or lesser burnet (*Pimpinella saxifraga*), a grassland plant resembling caraway with spicy roots tasting like pepper. Its roots and leaves were used to make tea. In Rosental (Slo.: Rož) in Austrian Carinthia, burnet-saxifrage also had a reputation as a remedy for cholera, which was considered as serious a threat as the plague. The following story has been preserved:

In Rosental, too, a terrible cholera once broke out, killing people like flies. Every house counted dead bodies, and some went completely extinct. Markele's cottage, too, had already buried its master, his wife, and their children, leaving only the old grandfather sitting sadly on the bench in front of the house. While he contemplated the fate of his children, a bird flew by, repeating:

"Burnet, burnet, burnet!"

The man did not know what to make of it. The bird flew away and soon returned and dropped from its beak an herb that looked like caraway. The old man picked up the herb and went to forage it. He brewed its roots into a tea and drank it. The Black Death did not catch him or anyone else who drank such tea or rinsed their mouths with its decoction. The herb was named burnet (Pimpinella saxifraga)! Thenceforth, cholera has no longer wreaked such havoc among those that are familiar with this remedy.[57]

46 Ibid., p. 61.
47 Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 33.
48 Mal, *Stara Ljubljana*, p. 84.
49 Golec, Kužne epidemije, p. 26.
50 Mal, *Stara Ljubljana*, p. 82.
51 Košir, Ljudska medicina, p. 30; from Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 23.
52 Pajek, *Črtice*, p. 84.
53 Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 31.
54 Wine containing a high concentration of acid, tannins, and usually also alcohol.
55 Cognac or brandy.
56 Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 31.
57 Möderndorfer, *Koroške narodne pripovedke*, p. 62–63.

People would also carry burnet in their pockets, apart from garlic and juniper, which were ascribed similar apotropaic effects. In Carinthia, it was customary to soak burnet in liquor and always have a bottle of this alcoholic concoction on hand. Styrians, however, would carry on them the seeds of pimpernel or chicken blindness (*Anagallis phoenicia*) to drive away evil spirits and wear the cross of St. Benedict around their necks.[58] During the plague, they protected their nostrils, eyes, ears, temples, and veins with wine vinegar, in which they soaked rue and elderberries.[59]

The healing benefits of sunlight and honey are presented in a folktale from Mežica, Carinthia:

> *The plague killed all the inhabitants of Mežica, except a man on the Pustotnik farm. He defended himself against the plague by eating nothing but honey and by soaking in the sun every day, lying face down at the foot of the hill.*[60]

Fire was deemed a natural disinfectant; in some plague-afflicted areas, every newcomer had to pass by the fire before they were permitted to meet the local inhabitants. In Lower Carniola, every participant in the Midsummer Day celebration would jump over the bonfire three times to protect themselves from the plague. In White Carniola, farmers would, still in more recent times, light bonfires in their courtyards during the plague and drive their cattle through the embers.[61]

In Styria, a time-honored tradition was preserved until the end of the nineteenth century to start the Easter morning by lighting bonfires or the so-called *vuzenice*, in firm belief that as far as their smoke reached, there the plague would never come, and buckwheat would never be nipped by frost.[62]

Water was attributed a similar defensive power against the plague. The inhabitants of Motnik in Upper Carniola believed that the plague would not come to them if they ran to the running water and washed themselves in it on Holy Saturday before "untying the church bells."[63]

Treatment

The plague was primarily treated with medicinal plants, vinegar, wine, honey, tobacco, and many other natural remedies. In the countryside, people most often turned for help to village healers, and witch doctors, whereas physicians, if at all accessible, primarily tended to patients in towns and mansions. During the plague, they would put on special protective outfits not to get infected by the disease themselves. They wore leather cloak and covered their faces with beaked masks and spectacles. The long beaks were filled with a mixture of aromatic herbs that were believed to protect against infection.[64]

Although already running rampant in Ljubljana in 1198 and 1230, the Black Death caused the greatest devastation between 1347 and 1350. It revisited Ljubljana in 1568 and 1569, and after it broke out again in 1586, a small lazaretto was set up near the walls of the Šentpeter cemetery on the bank of the river Ljubljanica. Lazaretto stations were subsequently expanded, and a plague hospital was also constructed.[65]

People fought the plague with herbal remedies; in *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola* (Die Ehre deß Hertzogthums Crain, 1689), Valvasor already wrote about butterbur (*Petasites officinalis*), a plant growing near waterbodies and in the valleys around Šmarješke Toplice that purportedly cured uncurable diseases and even the plague itself. In the same volume, he also mentioned the roots of angelica (*Angelica silvestris*) and stressed that he could not recommend them enough for their healing power against the plague, adding that the Carniolan soil provided herbs that beat the plague. Apart from the two stated above, these were also: *Doronicum*, *Pimpinella saxifraga*, *Scorzonera*, *Galera*, *Veronica*, *Juniperus communis*, *Succisa*, *Gentiana*, *Potentilla erecta*, *Veleriana*, *Chelidonium maius*, and *Imperatoria ostruthium*.[66]

In Carinthia, Vinko Möderndorfer wrote a tale about the already mentioned *Pimpinella saxifraga*, which was believed to cure the plague:

> *There was no known cure for the plague. Then birds, completely unfamiliar to the inhabitants of Mežica, flew in from somewhere, calling: "Use burnet, use burnet, use burnet!" And people, indeed, helped themselves with burnet (Pimpinella saxifraga) and recovered.*[67]

Another plant held in esteem was starch-root (*Arum maculatum*). The juice extracted from its leaves and roots was added sugar. People drank it every morning and evening, in the hope that it would take away the plague, fever, and other contagious diseases.[68]

During the plague and febrile diseases, it was further recommended to drink wine mixed with juice from the leaves and roots of starch-root and a concoction of wine boiled with burnet-saxifrage (*Pimpi-*

58 Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 32.
59 Ibid., p. 30.
60 Möderndorfer, *Koroške narodne pripovedke*, p. 62.
61 Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 31.
62 Pajek, *Črtice*, p. 84.
63 *Letopis Matice Slovenske*, 1887, pp. 88–167; from Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 32.
64 Golec, Kužne epidemije, p. 37.
65 Mal, *Stara Ljubljana*, p. 81.
66 Valvasor, *Die Ehre*, III, pp. 377–380; from: Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 34.
67 Möderndorfer, Koroške narodne pripovedke, p. 62; Kelemina, *Bajke in pripovedke*, p. 395, note 196/VII.
68 Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 23, 34.

nella saxifraga). Great benefits were also ascribed to powdered wall germander (*Teucrium chamaedrys*)[69] and a decoction of sorrel and *terjak* (black elderberry juice mixed with sugar).

Popular remedies against the plague in Murska Sobota were pine (*Pinus*) and anise (*Pimpinella anisum*).[70] It was advisable to drink "Ehrenpreis water" mixed with powdered heath speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*) every morning and evening,[71] and people also cooked wine soup with added garlic. A highly esteemed remedy was the king's egg or the golden egg, prepared with egg yolk, *terjak* tea, and saffron.[72] In some areas, an egg white or a prune was placed on the pustule, and the inhabitants of Murska Sobota treated infected wounds with dried toads.[73] Toads were considered a valuable plague cure by drawing out the poison. Some cooked them in milk or vinegar and ate them, or they were put as bandages on infected wounds. For this reason, people looked for them during the days of celebrating Marian masses.[74]

When the plague erupted in the autumn of 1680 near Leskovec in Haloze, a story circulated about a woman who recommended an infected man to cook a toad in vinegar. Heeding her advice, the farmer ate the toad and drank the soup in which he cooked it. He sweated profusely and fully recovered the next morning. The news spread like fire across the neighborhood, and toads became celebrated as the most effective cure for the plague. People throughout Haloze searched for toads and cooked them, as well as carried them around alive.[75]

Other plague cures were deer and chamois horns, sulfur, and vitriol used as powders, drinks, dressings, and bandages.[76] "Večna pratika" recommended wearing neck pouches with powdered spider (*Araneida*) or toad (*Bufo vulgaris*), as well as *žilštajn* (*snake stone*).[77] On their pilgrimages, Carinthians bought devotional images of Mother of God and put them in patients' food to ward off the plague.[78]

Believing that the demon of the person's disease can be defeated by the positive spirit, people also practiced a magical treatment: "hammering of the plague" into a tree. They bore a hole into a tree (linden, oak or willow tree) which was supposed to be a holy tree. Next day at sunrise they put into the hole a bit of the sick person's blood, nail or hair, than they crammed the hole, nailed up the tree with a nail, and hoped that the demon of the disease would be defeated by the spirit of the tree.[79]

The plague kills cattle

The plague also threatened cattle. Cattle plague was widely conceived of in animal form, especially in the shape of a pig, a goat, and a three-legged calf covered with spots of many colors.[80]

Whereas the memory of the murderous plague largely dissipated in the nineteenth century, it was still in the 1990s that the inhabitants of Slovenian Prekmurje described

> *the plague as Divine Punishment roaming the world, from village to village, from house to house, killing cattle in barns and chickens in henhouses. In ancient times, it also killed people, who then shut themselves in their houses and drove it away with prayers and superstitions*.[81]

According to another folktale that has been preserved in Prekmurje, people imagined the cattle-killing plague in the shape of a multicolored calf:

> *Küga*
> *Kuga [the plague] resembles a calf of many colors. It tends to appear in the courtyard or in the fence. Its apparition is always a bad omen. A cow or some other animal will die at the house where the plague has made itself seen. Sometimes, the plague will also trick people into thinking that it is heading somewhere at night. In the same way, it once lured Špilak, a* rojar *(beekeeper) from Bratonci, to the* ulnjak *(beehive). On returning home, he found that his most beautiful cow had died*.[82]

In the folktale above, cattle plague was also attributed features characteristic of supernatural beings that made people stray from their paths, such as witches or nightlights.

Another folktale from Prekmurje has it that the plague took on the form of a white calf wandering around at night and barking like a dog. When it roamed about settlements, it caused people and animals in the villages to die. Cattle plague is white and has a bovine head, and pig plague is white and has a pig head.[83] People warded off pig plague by attaching blessed sticks behind barn pillars. To protect pigs from infection, it was also customary to hang a toad in the barn. In Slovenian Istria, many barns still have horseheads and horseshoes mounted on the walls as defensive masks. In White Carniola (Slo.: Bela Krajina),

69 Ibid., p. 34.
70 *Slovenski gospodar* 18/12, March 20th, 1884, p. 94.
71 Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 23.
72 Ibid., p. 34.
73 *Slovenski gospodar* 18/12, March 20th, 1884, p. 94.
74 Gruden, *Zgodovina slovenskega naroda*, p. 1076; from Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 34.
75 *Slovenski gospodar*, 1885, 198; from Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 32.
76 Valvasor, *Die Ehre*, III, pp. 377; from: Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 34.
77 Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 32.
78 Košir, Ljudska medicina, p. 103.
79 Travner, *Kuga na Slovenskem*, pp. 78–79.
80 Krauß, *Südslavische Pestsagen*, p. 36.
81 Rešek, *Brezglavjeki*, p. 91, no. 35.
82 Kühar, *Narodno blago*, p. 58, no. 50; reprint: Kühar, *Ljudsko izročilo*, p. 148.
83 Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 29.

they also used to mount them on beehives and place brooms turned upside down on entrances to barns, as well as pierce tiny holes into doors with a knife.[84]

In Dražgoše, it was customary to place the cross of St. Benedict on the barn door and in the Podjuna Valley (Ger.: Jauntal) in Austrian Carinthia a *tatrman's*[85] head carved in wood.[86] Slovenians in the Raba (Hun.: Rába) Valley drilled holes in the horns of their cattle and put pieces of paper in them with various defensive spells or charms.[87]

Widely used in the eighteenth century was a book written by the veterinarian and healer Johannes Gottlieb Wolstein. In 1784, it was translated into Slovenian by Jožef Ignacij Fanton de Brunn from Ljubljana, a veterinarian of the province of Carniola and a physic in Idrija, who titled it *Bukuvze od shvinskih bolesni sa kmeteshke ludy* [The Book on Cattle Diseases for Rural People][88] His translation was later corrected by Anton Tomaž Linhart, who published it under the title *Bukve od kug inu bolesen Goveje shivine, tih Ovaz inu Svin* [The Book on Plagues and Diseases in Cattle, Sheep, and Pigs]; released in 1792 in Ljubljana, the volume also contains advice on how to treat cattle plague.

Cattle was also treated with herbal remedies. In the hills around Škofja Loka, it was still in recent times that people protected their animals against the plague by adding the roots of gentian (*Gentiana*) and especially juniper and garlic to fodder on Christmas Eve and Holy Saturday.[89]

Epilogue

The plague retreated from Slovenian territory after the Ottomans were finally driven out from the central Danubian region.[90] In subsequent periods, it gave way for other epidemics, most notably cholera, smallpox, typhoid fever, Spanish influenza, and currently the pandemic of Covid-19. Although the memory of the plague has all but faded in the light of scientific and particularly technological advances of the modern developed world, the Covid-19 pandemic has rekindled it and brought it back into the popular mental discourse, shining a new light on the long forgotten narrative folklore, literature, and visual art associated with these periods.

In such difficult situations as epidemic or even pandemic outbreaks, people adapt to the new circumstances and seek a way out of the crisis. Daily practices and narratives offer an insight into how people sought to protect themselves against the plague epidemic and how they cured the disease. Throughout history, folklore has approached epidemics earnestly and with great concern. Moreover, folktales about the plague epidemic, often presenting the plague in personified forms, narrate how it spread and where, how it traveled, and how it behaved.

Now, centuries later, it is interesting to observe many similar protective measures, for instance road barriers, border closures, and quarantine as well as penalties for their infringement, a list of active substances and nutritional ingredients helping to fight the disease. Notable differences are in the narrative culture, which now spreads through the internet,[91] and especially in major medical advancements.

84 Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 32.
85 In Carinthia, *tatrman* was—often in the form of a water sprite—depicted on water wells and buildings for apotropaic purposes.
86 Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 32.
87 Ibid, p. 32.
88 Štrekelj, *Zgodovina slovenskega slovstva*, p. 465.
89 Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina*, p. 29.
90 Mal, *Stara Ljubljana*, p. 84.

REFERENCES

NEWSPAPERS

Letopis Matice Slovenske, 1887.
Slovenski gospodar, 1884, 1885.
Zgodnja Danica, 1880.

LITERATURE

Aškerc, Anton: Ponočna potnica. *Ljubljanski zvon* 10/7, 1. 7. 1890, str. 385.
Beitl, Richard: *Im Sagenwald. Neue Sagen aus Vorarlberg*. Feldkirch: Montfort Verlag, 1953.
Bronner, F. J.: *Von deutscher Sitt und Art. Volkssitten und Volksbräuche in Bayern im Kreislauf des Jahres dargestellt*. München: Kellner, 1908.
Bühli, Arnold: *Sagen aus Graubünden* 1, 2. Aarau: Verlag Sauerländer, 1933, 1935.
Christiansen, Reidar Th.: *The Migratory Legends. A Proposed List of Types with a Systematic Catalogue of the Norwegian Variants*. (FF Communications 175). Helsinki: Academia scientiarum Fennica, 1958.
Dolenc, Milan: *Zagovori v slovenski ljudski medicini ter zarotitve in apokrifne molitve* (eds. Zvonka Zupanič Slavec and Marija Makarovič). Ljubljana: Inštitut za zgodovino medicine Medicinske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani, 1999.
Drobnič, Josip: Slovenska pripovedka o Neteku. *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice* 5/7, 1847, p. 24.
Golec, Boris: Kužne epidemije na Dolenjskem med izročilom in stvarnostjo. *Kronika* 49, 2001, nos. 1–2, pp. 23–64.
Graber, Georg: *Sagen aus Kärnten. Gesammelt und herausgegeben von Dr. Georg Graber*. Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Theodor Weischer, 1914.

91 More on that: Kropej Telban, Emotions of Fear (in print).

Grafenauer, Ivan: Neték in "Ponočna potnica" v ljudski pripovedki. *Razprave Razreda (II.) za filološke in literarne vede IV*. Ljubljana: SAZU, 1958, pp. 157–201.
Grimm, Jacob: *Deutsche Mythologie*. Göttingen: Dieterichsche Buchhandlung, 1835.
Grimm, Jacob und Grimm, Wilhelm: *Deutsche Sagen, herausgegeben von den Brüdern Grimm*, vol. 1. Berlin: In der Nicolaischen Buchhandlung, 1816.
Gruden, Josip: *Zgodovina slovenskega naroda*. V Celovcu: Družba sv. Mohorja, 1910–1916.
Gunnell, Terry: Mists, Magicians and Murderous Children: International Migratory Legends Concerning the "Black Death" in Iceland. *Northern Lights. Following Folklore in North-Western Europe* (ed. Séamas Ó Catháin). Dublin: University College Dublin Press 2001, pp. 47–59.
Hiiemäe, Reet: *Esti katkupärimus* [Estonian Plague Tradition]. Tartu: Estonian Literary Museum, 1997.
Hiiemäe, Reet: Narrative Maps of Danger as a Means of Subjective Protection. *Etnološka tribina* 39, 2016, no. 46, pp. 176–186.
Kelemina, Jakob: *Bajke in pripovedke slovenskega ljudstva*. Celje: Družba sv. Mohorja, 1930.
Košir, Pavel: Ljudska medicina na Koroškem. *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 17, 1922, pp. 20–32.
Krauß, Friedrich S.: *Südslavische Pestsagen*. (Separatabdruck aus dem XIII. Bande [Neue Folge III. Band] der "Mittheilungen der Anthropologischen Geselschaft in Wien") Vienna: Verlag des Verfassers, 1883.
Krauß, Friedrich S.: *Volksglaube und religiöser Brauch der Südslaven vorwiegend nach eigenen Ermittlungen*. Münster: Münster, 1890.
Kropej, Monika: *Od ajda do zlatoroga. Slovenska bajeslovna bitja*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, 2008.
Kropej Telban, Monika: Emotions of Fear in the Narratives about the Plague and the Contemporary Pandemic. *Studia mythologica Slavica* 25, 2022 (in print).
Kühar, Števan: Národno blágo vogrskij Slovancof. *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 8, 1911, pp. 47–76.
Kühar, Števan: *Ljudsko izročilo Prekmurja (Zbral in uredil Vilko Novak)*. Murska Sobota: Pomurska založba, 1988.
Mal, Josip: *Stara Ljubljana in njeni ljudje. Kulturnozgodovinski oris*. Ljubljana: Mestni muzej Ljubljana, 1957.
Möderndorfer, Vinko: *Koroške narodne pripovedke*. Celje: Družba sv. Mohorja 1940.
Möderndorfer, Vinko: *Ljudska medicina pri Slovencih*. (Classis II, Gradivo za narodopisje Slovencev) Ljubljana: SAZU, 1964.
Pajek, Josip: *Črtice iz duševnega žitka štaj. Slovencev*. Ljubljana: Blasnik, 1884.
Rešek, Dušan: *Brezglavjeki*. Ljubljana: Kmečki glas, 1995.
Simpson, Jacqueline and Roud, Steven: *A Dictionary of English Folklore*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
Slekovec, Matej: Kuga na slovenskem štajerskem. *Slovenski gospodar* 17/18, 3. 5. 1883, p. 142.
Softić, Aiša: Zapisi usmenih predaja o kugi u Bosni i Hercegovini s kraja 19. stoljeća. *Godišnjak. Centar za balkanološka ispitivanaja / Jahrbuch. Zentrum für Balkanforschungen* 49 (edited by Blagoje Govedarica). Sarajevo: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine, 2020, pp. 155–169.
Svetokriški, Janez: *Sacrum promptuarium* (ed. Mirko Rupel). Koper: Lipa, 1991.
Štrekelj, Karel: *Zgodovina slovenskega slovstva* I–II; III–IV (ed. Matija Ogrin). Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2012, 2014.
Tangherlini, Timothy R.: Ships, Fogs and Traveling Pairs. Plague Legend Migration in Scandinavia. *The Journal of American Folklore* 101 (400), 1988, pp. 176–206.
Travner, Vladimir: *Kuga na Slovenskem*. Ljubljana: Življenje in svet, 1934.
Trdina, Janez: Verske bajke na Dolenjskem: Netek. *Ljubljanski zvon* 1/9, 1. 9. 1881, str. 537.
Valjavec, Matija: *Narodne pripovijedke skupio u i oko Varaždina Matija Kračmanov Valjavec*. Varaždin: Josip von Platzer, 1858.
Valvasor, Johann Weichard: *Die Ehre des Herzogthums Krain*. 15 vols., Laibach, Nürenberg, 1689.

P O V Z E T E K

Pripovedi o kugi in zdravilne prakse proti tej bolezni v ljudskem izročilu

Pripovedi o kugi so se v ustnem izročilu ohranile bodisi kot opis razmer in obrambe pred epidemijo kuge ter zdravljenja te bolezni bodisi kot povedke o kugi – demonu, ki mori ljudi in živino. Motiviko ljudskih povedk o kugi je v svoj katalog »Migracijske pripovedke« (1958) uvrstil že norveški folklorist Reidar Christiansen pod številke 7080–7095. Vendar pa je tematika še precej bolj raznolika, kar lahko razberemo iz gradiva, ki se je ohranilo v arhivih raziskovalnih ustanov in tiskanih virih. Eden redkih folkloristov, ki je v slovenskem prostoru pisal o kugi in spremljajoči lakoti v podobi nenasitnega bajeslovnega bitja Netka, je bil Ivan Grafenauer (1958). Kugo so namreč ljudje pogosto povezovali z lakoto, ki jo je v slovenskem izročilu pooseblja Netek. Podobne pripovedi so se ohranile v alpskem svetu, predvsem v

srednjeevropskem prostoru, med Retoromani v Švici ter v Vorarlbergu v avstrijskih Alpah v liku požerušnega možička Snedeža. Tudi drugod je ustno izročilo poročalo o tem. V Bosni in Hercegovini so pripovedovali, da kugi sledi leto lakote (Softić 2020). Romunski kmetje so, ko so pričakovali prihod kuge, ki naj bi hodila naokrog v podobi ženske, ob cesti nastavili obilo hrane, s katero so gostili vse popotnike, da bi s tem preprečili prihod kuge.

Kugo so si v evropskem prostoru ljudje predstavljali poosebljeno v podobi žene, moža, dečka, dekleta ali kužnega para. Kjer je beseda »smrt« moškega spola, je bila tudi kuga pogosto predstavljena kot moški, kjer pa je beseda »smrt« ženskega spola, je bila analogno temu tudi kuga prikazana kot ženska. Pogoste so bile tudi predstave o kužnem paru – možu in ženi, ki sta hodila od kraja do kraja in morila ljudi. V nemški povedki iz Schweinfurta ob reki Majni je smrtnik kosil, žena smrt (kuga) pa je grabila. Podobne pripovedi so bile dokumentirane tudi na Bavarskem v Nemčiji in na Avstrijskem Koroškem.

Švedske povedke pripovedujejo, da je prišla kuga z juga v podobi majhnega lepega dečka, za njim pa je prišlo kužno dekle (pestflicka), ki je dokončno pometla z metlo pred vrati, tedaj pa so vsi v vasi pomrli.

V estonskem izročilu je bila kuga poosebljena v moški podobi, kot fant ali črni mož. Reet Hiiemäe je ugotovila, da je mogoče v teh povedkah, ki naštevajo kraje, kam vse je kuga namenjena, določiti mentalni zemljevid, ki je določal kraje, ki jim je grozila kuga, pa tudi možnost, kako ji ubežati oziroma preprečiti njen prihod.

V Evropi so bile razširjene predstave, da kuga ne more sama čez vodo in da se pogosto da prenesti ali prepeljati v drugi kraj. Timothy Tangherlini je ugotovil, da so v Skandinaviji ljudje pogosto pripovedovali o kugi, ki potuje po vnaprej določeni poti v kraje, kamor se je namenila in se da prepeljati čez reko ali morje na otok. Podobne povedke so bile dokumentirane tudi v francosko-bretonskem, pruskem in poljskem izročilu. Veliko tovrstnih pripovedi so poznali južni Slovani, številne sta objavila Matija Valjavec in Friedrich Krauß, navdihnile pa so tudi slovenskega pesnika Antona Aškerca (Ponočna potnica, 1890). V povedkah je pogosto omenjeno, da se je kuga bala psov in mačk, odganjalo pa jo je tudi petelinje kikirikanje.

Ohranil se je spomin na stari agrarni ritual, s katerim so v južnoslovanskem prostoru skušali »kugo zaorati«. Ljudje so namreč, da bi se obranili bolezni, kugo »zaorali« na različne načine, na primer tako, da so ženske okoli vasi vlekle plug in z njim trikrat zarisale brazdo okoli vasi. Izročilo iz okolice Bosanske Gradiške pripoveduje, da so v vasi našli dve sestri dvojčici in dva črna vola. Čez noč je bilo treba narediti nov plug, nato pa sta sestri povsem goli zaorali eno brazdo okoli cele vasi. Pri tej šegi je imelo poleg risa – kroga, ki naj bi branil pred zlimi silami – magično moč predvsem oranje okoli vasi kot čarno dejanje, poleg tega je bilo pomembno, kdo je oral in kako je bilo oranje izvedeno.

Proti kugi so se ljudje skušali zaščititi tudi z zagovori in obrambnimi čarnimi znaki ali črkami ter izreki zoper kugo, vendar se jih ni veliko ohranilo. Najstarejši znani slovenski »zapretek« proti kugi je zapisan v koroški *Duhovni brauni* (Duhovni brambi) iz leta 1740. Okoli vratu so nosili tudi vrečice, v katere so zašili napisane zagovore, »zapretke« in čarovne znake, ki naj bi jih branili pred kugo.

Da bi premagali kugo, so postavljali kužna znamenja, cerkve in kapelice, posvečene zavetnikom pred kugo, predvsem svetemu Roku, svetemu Boštjanu, sveti Rozaliji, sveti Barbari in na Koroškem svetemu Ožboltu.

Kršitve prepovedi prehajanja v drugi kraj so lahko bile zelo ostre in so zahtevale človeško žrtev. Pripoved, ki se je ohranila v Treibachu na Avstrijskem Koroškem, govori o nesrečni usodi deklice, ki so jo vrgli v jamo in živo pokopali, da bi preprečili širjenje kuge. V mestih kužne straže prišlekom in blagu niso dovoljevale prehoda brez zdravstvenih spričeval, imenovanih »fede«.

Pred kugo pa so se branili – in jo tudi zdravili – predvsem z rastlinami in apotropejskimi dejanji. Prostore v hiši in hlevih so pokadili z brinjem (Juniperus communis) in ogljem, ki so mu dodali spika (Valeriana celtica), mire (Commiphore) in kadila. Med rastlinami so posebno moč pripisovali predvsem česnu, bedrencu (Pimpinella saxifraga), angeliki (Angelica silvestris), repuhu (Petasites officinalis), šterkovcu (Arum maculatum) in jetičniku (Veronica officinalis). Kot zdravilo ali apotropejsko sredstvo pa so uporabljali tudi krastače (Bufo vulgaris), pajke (Araneida) in kačji kamen.

V težkih situacijah, kakršna je izbruh epidemije ali celo pandemije, se ljudje prilagajajo nastalim razmeram in iščejo pot iz krize. V vsakodnevnih praksah in pripovedih se kaže, kako so se ljudje skušali braniti pred kužno epidemijo in kako so jo zdravili.

Ljubljanski Zvon
Leposloven in znanstven list.

Štev. 7. V Ljubljani 1. malega srpana 1890. Leto X.

Ponôčna pótnica.

Balada po národnem motivu.

Po nebu ščlp plava,
Šumí, šumí Drava . . .
»Prepêlji, brodník, me takój!
Oh, méni mudí se;
Še predno zdaní se,
Mi daleč je priti nocój.«

Po nebu ščlp plava,
Šumí, šumí Drava . . .
Čez reko čoln črni letí;
A pótnica pôzna,
Orjaška in grôzna
Z brodníkom v njem tiho sedí.

»Obràz — kost in koža,
Tvoj stas — kost in koža . . .
Mrtvášk iz úst diše ti puh!
Pod čêlom prikrita
Dva óglja gorita . . .
Živ človek si, ali si duh?«

»»Káj znoj si otíraš?
Káj v mé se oziraš?
Naprèj, naprèj tiraj svoj čoln! . . .««
In žena vzravná se,
Glej, véča se, ráse:
Ves čoln že je skoro je poln.

Po nebu ščlp plava,
Šumí, šumí Drava . . .
Pri bregu! Čoln búti na kràj . . .
»Kdo tujka si grôzna?
O, pótnica pôzna!
Brodníno odštèj mi sedàj!«

»»Za máno smrt bleda,
Puščôba in beda,
Strah, stok in drgèt pred menoj!
Kdo tvoja sem drúga?
Imé mi je — Kúga!
Nocój grem na désni breg tvoj.

»»V dom vsak se odpravim,
Ljudí vse podavim . . .
A tebi naj milost storím!
Ne boš čul vpijóčih
In gledal ne mróčih —
Zdaj prvega têbe vmorím!««

A. Aškerc.

25