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Betle(he)mi iz Plemenščine kraj Klenovnika kao izraz pučke pobožnosti

U radu se donose podaci s terenskog istraživanja izrade tradicijskih drvenih božićnih jaslica (betlehema ili betlema) provedenog u Plemenščini kraj Klenovnika. Na temelju osobnih priča nekoliko starijih mještana opisuju se jaslice i proces njihove izrade s aspekta pučke pobožnosti i identifikacije sa zajednicom. Osobni doživljaj i značenja koji mještani pridaju jaslicama, uz etnološku interpretaciju, pokazuju kako su materijalni i nematerijalni aspekti tradicijske baštine sasvim prožeti i ne mogu se odvojeno interpretirati. U radu se dotiče i pitanje prenošenja tradicije na mlađe generacije.

Ključne riječi: božićne jaslice, betlehemi, pučka pobožnost, Plemenščina (Hrvatsko zagorje)

Metode, izvori i kontekst

Izrada tradicijskih jaslica u Plemenščini kraj Klenovnika bila je predmetom terenskog istraživanja u sklopu pripreme upisa umijeća izrade tradicijskih božićnih jaslica u sjeverozapadnoj Hrvatskoj u Registar kulturnih dobara Republike Hrvatske, a provedeno je u suradnji s Josipom Barlekom, višim kustosom iz Etnografskog muzeja u Zagrebu i Ljerkom Albus, kustosicom Muzeja Grada Varaždina, te kasnije, radi dopune podataka, samostalno. Istraživanje na terenu najintenzivnije se odvijalo uoči i nakon Božića 2006. i 2007. godine te uz prekide tijekom ostalog vremena u godini. Rad je uobičen za potrebe postdiplomskog studija etnologije i kulturne antropologije na Filozofskom fakultetu u Zagrebu.¹ Analiza osobnih priča koje su pratile opis izrade jaslica pokazuje vezu s puč-

¹ Posebno zahvaljujem profesorici Marijani Belaj koja je svojim komentarima doprinijela kvaliteti rada.

kom pobožnosti na način koji uključuje osobni i društveni, vjerski i svjetovni te materijalni i nematerijalni aspekt.

Vođeni su intervjui ponekad prerastali u domenu životne priče koju su kazivači željeli ispričati kao bitnu u predstavljanju jaslica ispitivaču. O općenitim pitanjima vezanim uz pripadnost Rimokatoličkoj crkvi nije se razgovaralo, te se djelomice podrazumijevalo da je u pozadini čitave pojave izrade jaslica, koja se odvija u širem sklopu pučkih običaja vezanih uz predbožićno vrijeme, slavljenje jednog od većih kršćanskih blagdana, Božića, koji katolici slave 25. prosinca svake godine spominjući se rođenja Isusa Krista.

Izradu jaslica u Hrvatskoj uglavnom su proučavali muzejski stručnjaci s naglaskom na materijalni aspekt odnosno sam proces izrade, a manje su se bavili osobnim pristupom izradi odnosno značenjima koja se pridaju božićnim jaslicama te utjecajima. O jaslicama je pisano u vrlo malo etnoloških izvora, iako se ta praksa odvija u sklopu božićnih običaja kojima je posvećeno dosta etnografskog, a i etnološkog prostora. Primjerice, etnologinja D. Rihtman Augustin u “Knjizi o Božiću” samo kratko spominje jaslice, dajući im općeniti, više povijesni okvir, i spominjući legendu vezanu uz Franju Asiškog, navodnog tvorca prvih jaslica. Također nedostaju detaljnije usporedbe sa susjednim područjima u Europi otkud su vjerojatno i dolazili utjecaji što općenitije spominje etnolog V. Belaj. Utjecaji koji su pridonijeli prihvaćanju prakse izrade jaslica u Plemenščini u ovom radu neće moći biti potvrđeni radi trenutnog nedostatka potrebnih podataka. No, postoje podaci o njihovom izgledu o čemu je pisala Lj. Albus, te se uz izgled jaslica spominju neki od nositelja tog znanja u katalozima izložbi J. Barleka. Detaljniji opis jaslica koji uključuje i proces izrade pripremila je Lj. Albus u jednom dijelu i za upis u navedeni Registar.

Budući da izrada božićnih jaslica u Hrvatskoj nije sustavno obrađivana sa stajališta etnologije i kulturne antropologije, u ovom ću radu interpretirati praksu izrade jaslica iz Plemenščine vezano uz pučku pobožnost. Objasniti će se i osobni odnos prema izradi i mjestu *betlehema* u pučkoj pobožnosti, te važnost prakse za identitet i povezanost lokalne zajednice.

Terminologija i mogući utjecaji na izradu *betlehema*

Šimićeva definicija, koja se najčešće upotrebljava u teorijskim radovima, pučku pobožnost određuje kao “složenu stvarnost koja se sastoji od različitih vjerskih izričaja i pobožnih ponašanja, u različitim kulturnim sredinama, koji proistječu iz povijesne situacije te su kao takvi posljedica različitih duhovnih i materijalnih potreba od životne važnosti za neko razdoblje, kraj, narod ili bilo kojeg pojedinačnog čovjeka” (1994: 51). U etnološkom pristupu proučavanju pučke pobožnosti bitno je naglasiti “potrebe” koje spominje Šimić u tom smislu da “pučku pobožnost nije moguće shvatiti ne promatramo li je u životnom kontekstu svakodnevice” (Rihtman Augustin, 1991: 14). Pučka pobožnost trebala bi se istraživati kroz prizmu “svakodnevice” i sa stajališta “pojedini-

ca i njegovog odnosa prema bogu i svetomu”, jer bez osobnih priča teško bi se moglo ući u trag svakodnevice i realnim problemima s kojima se ljudi u životu susreću i s kojima su se susretali (Rihtman Augustin, 1991: 11), a “valja saznati koje značenje puk daje nekoj radnji u određenome trenutku” (Čapo, 1991: 18, 19). Kasnije će se pokazati u razlaganju da je u osnovi osobnog doživljaja upravo “odnos spram svetoga, što se smatra osnovom definicije pučke pobožnosti” (Čapo, 1991: 18).

Izrada jaslica u Plemenščini pripada pučkoj pobožnosti i u smislu Hoškovog određenja pučke pobožnosti koja je “izražavanje kršćanskoga vjerničkog odnosa prema Bogu u Isusu Kristu koje se očituje izvanliturgijskim i neliturgijskim oblicima kršćanskoga bogoštovlja” (Hoško, 1983: 196). Hoškova definicija određuje pučku pobožnost u odnosu prema liturgiji, a izrada jaslica nije liturgijski oblik bogoštovlja i stoga u tom smislu jest dio pučke pobožnosti. Iz dosad iznijetih definicija pučke pobožnosti nije potrebno stvarati radnu verziju, jer odgovaraju gotovo u potpunosti za određenje predmeta istraživanja, dakle izrade tradicijskih božićnih jaslica kao dije-la pučke pobožnosti.

”Pod *božićnim jasicama* u užem smislu ovdje podrazumijevamo skupinu figurica pomoću kojih, jednom godišnje, u doba Božića, dočaravamo prizor Isusova rođenja razmještajući ih u prostoru, obično u plastični, panoramski oblik” (Belaj, 1995: 32). U današnje vrijeme jaslice su vrlo raširena pojava u sklopu božićnih običaja. Povijest jaslica veže se uz prve inscenacije prizora iz Biblije, a tek se kasnije počinju izrađivati kao predmet, praksa koja se tek u novije vrijeme širi u sve slojeve društva (usp. Belaj, 1995; Rihtman Augustin, 1995). V. Belaj navodi dva vremena i dva različita društvena sloja u Hrvatskoj koja prihvaćaju izradu jaslica i kasnije je prenose na nove generacije. Prvi sloj je bio građanski kojem tradicija stiže “kao import sa zapada, odakle su jaslice mogli donositi sa sobom obrtnici, trgovci, vojni časnici koji su se napose tijekom XVIII. i XIX. stoljeća naseljavali po Hrvatskoj i kao oponašanje jaslica viđenih u domaćim crkvama” (1995: 39). Drugi društveni sloj obuhvaća ljude koji su živjeli na selu, a koji jaslice prihvaćaju “negdje sredinom XIX. stoljeća, i to ponajprije na sjeverozapadu, često pod imenom *betlehem*, kao i u susjednoj Štajerskoj” (Belaj, 1995: 40). Jaslice u Plemenščini također se nazivaju *betlehem*, *betlem*, a taj naziv V. Belaj dovodi u vezu s “renesansnim *betleemom* iz Delfta” (Belaj, 1995: 41).

Zasad nema dovoljno podataka koji bi sasvim potvrdili vrijeme i utjecaje na pojavu jaslica u pojedinim dijelovima Hrvatske. Za pretpostaviti je da je izrada jaslica na sjeverozapad Hrvatske prenijeta iz susjednih zemalja, poput Austrije, koje su imale veći povijesno-kulturni utjecaj na ovom području. Tome u prilog zasad ide priča kazivača kojom oni tumače porijeklo svojih jaslica. Navodno je *tišlar* iz Plemenščine Andrija Bunić, otac Stanka Bunića, putovao poslom čak do Beča gdje je vidio kako se izrađuju jaslice, pa je tu ideju, u koju je unio vlastito viđenje jaslica, donio sa sobom. Vrijeme nije utvrđeno, no prema godinama koje je Stankov otac mogao imati kada je išao na put, može se pretpostaviti da zahvaća u 19. stoljeće, vjerojatno drugu polovicu. Koliko je ta priča istinita, trebalo bi utvrditi daljnjim istraživanjima.

Proces izrade *betlehema* i lokalne značajke

Jaslice iz Plemenščine, iako nastale vjerojatno pod utjecajem okolnih europskih područja, posebno su prilagođene podneblju u kojem ih već nekoliko generacija mještana gradi i usavršava, unoseći detalje i značenja svojstvena svakom pojedincu koji ih izrađuje. Proces izrade jaslica iz Plemenščine čini se jednostavan, jer prema spomenutoj biblijskoj odnosno kršćanskoj predaji (usp. Belaj, 1995) koja je utjecala na nastanak jaslica općenito, Isus je rođen u Betlehemu, u staji, točnije u “jaslama” (Lk, 2:7, 16). U slučaju Plemenščine, priča vezana uz mjesto rođenja Isusa Krista poprima vrlo određene lokalne značajke, od izgleda grada Betlehema do tumačenja događaja, što odgovara tvrdnji da je “za srednjeeuropske jaslice značajno da ne teže za orijentalnim ugođajem, nego prikazuju ljude i pokrajine iz neposrednog susjedstva” (Belaj, 1995: 36).

Vrlo jednostavan opis tih jaslica donosi Lj. Albus koja navodi da se “radi o izvornom pučkom radu niza većih ili manjih maketa grada Betlehema s prizorom štalice i Isusovim rođenjem. Izrađene od piljenog i rezbarenog drveta u nekoliko dijelova, ovisno o veličini, međusobno spojene čine cjelinu. Načinjene su od čitavoga niza vrlo zanimljivih arhitektonskih zdanja s vrlo slikovitim i raznolikim kućicama, tornjićima i crkvicama čije su fasade oblijepljene raznobojnim papirom. Kućedomaćin s posebnim ponosom, pažnjom i strpljenjem postavlja Betlehem na policu u svetom kutu i kiti ga svježim zelenilom” (1997: 90 i 2001: 2).

Postoji nekoliko zasebnih dijelova *betlehema* koji se slažu u cjelinu (Slika 1), s time da su lijeva i desna strana simetrične: mali tornjić, srednji tornjić, *tornić* ili *turnić*, srednji *grad*, iznad grada mogu biti *balkoni* (novije), a ispred grada *crkve* ili *kapelice*, *školice*, *jaslice* (prema Rješenju). U sredini se nalazi drvena (upotrebljava se drvo lipe) imitacija arhitektonskog zdanja poput gradske zgrade, a ima katove i izrezbarene prozore. Za tu konstrukciju kažu da je *grad* i to baš *grad Betlehem*. Uz njega se dodaju imitacije *crkvi/kapelica*, koje najviše od grada razlikuje mali križ na vrhu. Stanko Bunić tvrdi da je dodao novi element za koji kaže da je *osmatračnica gdje čuva grad da ne bi neprijatelj došao*.² Ispred te pozadine postavljaju se, kako ih nazivaju graditelji, drvene *školice*, prema tumačenju jednog kazivača *kud su školu hodili nekada*, vjerojatno misleći na lokalne škole što bi odgovaralo i tumačenju ostalih elemenata jaslica kao lokalno određenih. Jedan kazivač ne naziva te oblike školice, nego *kućice*, stoga je moguće da oni predstavljaju i kuće običnih ljudi, što također doprinosi mogućnosti da su jaslice prilagođene lokalnoj stvarnosti. Kazivači još tumače te oblike logikom da je *svaki grad imal svoje škole i crkve*. Ispred tih školica/kućica postavlja se drvena *štalica*, prema tumačenju graditelja, *gdje se Isusek rodil, jer je Marija s Josipom bežala u Betlehem da bi rodila ali su ih velikani sterali van, nesu šteli primiti da bi tam rodila, kad su se vraćali već je bilo kasno i stigla je do štalice gdje su bile ovčice i tam je rodila*.

² Kako bi prilagodili govor istraživaču, kazivači samoinicijativno koriste i neke riječi iz književnoga hrvatskog jezika.

U štalicu se u pravilu postavljaju likovi Marije i Josipa i malog Isusa (Slika 2). Ostali likovi i figurice raznih životinja te zvijezda iz biblijske priče postavljaju se već prema izboru vlasnika jaslica: *Isusek, sveti Josip i Marija, majka djeteta, anđelek, oslek v štalice i volek, i stado ovčice koje su se oko štalice pasle*. Mogući lokalni detalj su i ptičice koje se stavljaju na svaki stup ograde koja se smješta između tih stupića. Tumačenje ptica prema kazivačima je sljedeće: *sve se pojavilo na Isusovo rođenje, to su vjerojatno ptice pjevačice, slavuji, jer se sve veselilo dok se Isus narodil*.

Jaslice po arhitektonskim elementima pokazuju bogat osobni izričaj graditelja, kao i potrebu prilagodbe biblijske priče lokalnim značajkama. Graditelji su svjesni izgleda Betlehema kao grada u današnjem Izraelu, te spominju da ga karakteriziraju džamije, kako kažu *kupole*, dok izgled njihovih jaslica objašnjavaju kao *ono koje su izabrali iz starine da je najukusnije*. I to je ustvari taj trenutak stvaranja i prilagođivanja biblijske priče i raznih inačica prikaza te priče u lokalno ozračje odnosno ozračje koje se mještanima čini prikladno, kao i objašnjenje prenošenja i čuvanja tradicije.

Društveni aspekti izrade i upotrebe *betlehema*

Tumačenje da se *tak po starine* radi *betlehem* govori o doživljaju izrade jaslica kao kontinuiteta i poveznice s prošlošću, s precima graditelja. Vrlo je značajno u tom kontekstu mišljenje starijih da mlađe generacije nemaju trenutno volje za učenje tog znanja i osjećaj da se smatraju posljednjim nositeljima te tradicije. Takav osjećaj, posljednjeg i odumirućeg znanja, prisutan je već duže vrijeme na prostoru Europe, već od vremena stvaranja nacionalne svijesti u 19. stoljeću (usp. Leček, 1995).

Drugi aspekt društvenog značenja izrade jaslica predstavlja natjecanje u izgledu i izvedbi. *Kak je bil koji majstor koji je mislil da bu malo lepše to izvel, neku figuru - tu je bilo natjecanje, u tem figurama*. To nisu bile figurice likova i životinja, već su to bili dijelovi jaslica. Stanko Bunić tvrdi da je dodao *balkone* kojima je podigao osnovni sadržaj jaslica na *kat* više, pa je to po njemu *modernije*. Važna je i kvaliteta jaslica koja se ogleđa u trajanju, a što je možda i vezano uz svijest da su posljednji koji izrađuju te *betleheme*.

Također se uz gotovo svaki primjerak *betlehema* odnosno uz svakoga od njihovih graditelja vežu razne životne priče. Najčešća je ona koja spominje izradu *betlehema* kao poklon novorođenom djetetu, i to onome koje je rođeno uoči Božića. Tako Stanko Bunić priča kako je jedan *betlehem* izradio kao poklon novorođenčetu iz Plemenščine. Stanko poznaje i priču o *betlehemu* Branka Bunića: *od Branka tata je taj betlem radio, a Branko ga je obnovio i dopunio*. Branko (Slika 3) priča sljedeće: *moj tata je došel za zeta u kuću moje mame, a baka nije imala mogućnost dati to napraviti, onda je on to u društvu napravio u roku dva tjedna. Ja sam se rodil 19.12., moji su prepričavali kak su jeli pogače dok su betlehem delali (pogače su se nosile kad se dijete radalo)*. Uz svoj primjerak *betlehema* Branko veže svoju, osobnu povijest, koja je ujedno i povijest njegove obitelji, kroz što se ustvari identificira. Dalje objašnjava: *mojega betlehema je moj tata dal delat dok sam se rodil, meni kao za rodendan, ali nije bio tako usavršeni, tako kako sam ga ja sad usavršio*.

Nakon što sam se oženio, ja sam bio ljubitelj te tradicije, tih stvari, ja sam ga jedan Božić gledel i mislil kak bi ga napravil da bu to još lepše, ja sam si izmudroval i zabilježil u bilježnicu (jer pospremim betlem kad prođe Božić). Čekao sam jesen, kad su duge noći, pa sam počeo raditi. Gornji dio sam svega ponovo preobuko i zvezde sam narezal, kojih prije nije bilo. U svoju priču on ugrađuje i nedavni događaj na koji je utjecao Josip Barlek, etnolog iz Etnografskog muzeja u Zagrebu koji je proučavao jaslice u Plemenščini i predvodio odlazak betlehema na međunarodnu izložbu božićnih jaslica "100 Presepi" 2001. godine u Rim, Italija, gdje je osvojio prvu nagradu, čime se Branko jako ponosi i smatra da ne bi jaslice bile dobile nagradu da ih nije doradio, poboljšao tatine jaslice.

Osim osobne priče koju ima svaki izrađivač *betlehema*, kao što je opisano, na nastavljanje tradicije utječu i potrebe zajednice. Prema kazivanju, prije 20-30 godina svaka je kuća imala svoj primjerak *betlehema*, jer svi su morali imati *betlehema* u kući, to je bila tradicija i obaveza. No priče o pojedinačnim slučajevima ne podupiru na prvi pogled u cijelosti tu tvrdnju. Primjerice, o tome priča Branko Bunić kad tvrdi da njegova baka u kući nije imala *betlehem* kad se on rodio, jer joj je suprug bio umro. Čini se da ga nije imala zato što su isključivo muškarci ne samo izrađivali *betleheme* nego su i bili naručitelji odnosno posrednici njegova unošenja u kuću. Je li uzrok tome pomalo patrijarhalni poredak na selu ili možda nezainteresiranost žena za takvu, može se reći, "zanimaciju"? Vjerojatnije je potonje, jer žene ne samo da se nisu bavile tesarstvom, nego su imale mnogo drugog posla tijekom dugih zimskih noći, poput predenja, tkanja, izrade božićnih ukrasa i slično. Čini se da je bilo dovoljno da barem netko (brat) u obitelji ima *betlehem*, koji se vjerojatno doživljavao zajedničkom imovinom ili kao ispunjenje uvjeta da svaka obitelj ima barem jedan *betlehem*.

Izradu *betlehema* Stjepan Bunić je naučio od svog brata Martina, koji je toj vještini podučio i bratića Stanka.

U tome se ogleda i povezanost pripadnika zajednice jer, kako Branko tvrdi, oni su radili zajedno *betleheme* dok su bili mali, pa je ostao taj osjećaj povezanosti. *Kad je bilo snega to smo radili, ni bilo televizije, radija ni druge zanimacije, nekad, ma, to je bila divota, kad je počel sneg, ma kaj bi bili delali, rekli bi: Ajde, id' mo betlehema slagat!, pa smo pjevali, kad je došel Božić onda božićne pjesme, pa na Janušovo išli svirat, pa na Novu godinu po selima.* To potvrđuje da je izrada *betlehema* kao dio aktivnosti božićnog sklopa običaja bila prilika za okupljanje mještana što je slučaj s mnogim praksama pučke pobožnosti (usp. Čapo, 1991: 30).

Prema pričanju, *betleheme* je radilo nekoliko muškaraca u Plemenščini, a uglavnom su to bili *tišlari*, tesari, i to tek nakon što bi netko naručio svoj primjerak. Nisu radili *betleheme* ako ne bi bili naručeni, jer to živce uzimlje. Kako još tvrde, *to mora biti ljubimac tega posla inače to nejde*, a prema kazivanju treba odmalena početi s učenjem. Tako je Branko počeo raditi od svoje šeste godine, u početku male *betleheme* sve dok nije počeo obnavljati tatin primjerak. Tad se zaljubil u taj posel. Zauzvrat bi od ljudi koji su naručivali *betleheme* izrađivači dobivali pomoć u nekom obliku, a u posljednjih nekoliko godina i novac. Dakle, narudžba i konzumacija tog proizvoda od zajednice koja je time (uz ostale običaje) iskazivala pripadnost selu, ali i katoličkoj vjeri kao primjer

dobrog kršćanina, održavala je izradu *betlehema* do u novije vrijeme živom. Iako ih je samo nekolicina radila, ipak je ta pojava posredno uključivala i čitavo selo. Dakle, u tom kontekstu nije možda toliko izražen vjerski trenutak nego društveni aspekt prema kojemu su svi izražavali pripadnost selu Plemenščini što ih je razlikovalo od susjeda. To tvrdi i Lj. Albus s objektivnog gledišta da “u ovoj vrsti božićnog znamenja posebnost predstavlja selo Plemenščina” (1997: 90) u odnosu na šire područje koje ima jaslice, ali u drugačijem izvedbenom obliku. Izrada i upotreba jaslica tj. *betlehema* bila je, dakle, posebna osobina kojom su se *Plementaši* razlikovali od susjednih sela. To je ujedno i “indikator odnosno objektivni čimbenik različitosti i identifikacije” te zajednice i “marker, subjektivni čimbenik” (Čapo Žmegač, 1997: 71), jer sami mještani tvrde da su se po tome razlikovali i bili posebni u odnosu na susjedne zajednice.

Izrada betlehema kao izraz vjere

Betlehemi u Plemenščini dio su božićnog običajnog sklopa karakterističnog za sjeverozapadnu Hrvatsku, od kojih je većina temeljena na tradiciji dok su neke novijeg datuma i djelomice potiskuju stariju praksu. Već je spomenuto da su se *betlehemi* stavljali na posebno mjesto u kući kao dio ukrašavanja u božićno vrijeme. Dakle, “kitila [se] glavna hiža, središte obiteljskoga života u kojoj se odvijaju i svi božićni običaji i rituali”, točnije *betlehemi* su se stavljali u “Božji kut” (Albus, 1997: 89 i 2002: 9) koji je bio posebno mjesto vezano uz razne predmete kao i izraze pučke pobožnosti. Sam oblik, točnije postolje tih jaslica tj. *betlehema* određeno je upravo prilagođavanjem oblika prostoru, kutu sobe, stoga je ono trokutastog oblika. Taj trokutasti oblik posebnost je jaslica na području sjeverozapadne Hrvatske (usp. Barlek, 1995).

Kad se promatra prostorni odnos pozadine koja predstavlja grad s crkvama/kapelicama i prednjega dijela koji se sastoji od škola i štalice, vidljiv je pokušaj prikaza odnosa, s jedne strane, važnoga grada Betlehema u kojem se rodio Isus i, s druge strane, po tumačenju puka, Marije i Josipa koji su, nepravedno odbijeni od gradskih *velikana*, bili prisiljeni Isusa položiti u jaslje. Tim kontrastiranjem oblika i ukrasa štalicu se prikazuje kao prostor nedostojan Isusove važnosti, dok se, pomalo paradoksalno, obilnim ukrašavanjem grada u pozadini želi dočarati važnost tog trenutka. Stoga prikaz grada daje mogućnost izražavanja svečanosti, u njemu se ogleda sva umješnost i dosjetljivost graditelja. Grad u jaslicama iz Plemenščine ne predstavlja stvaran grad, iako oponaša elemente iz neposrednog okružja, već gotovo nebeski grad, što je vidljivo i po ukrasima. Sve to čini *betleheme* iz Plemenščine iznimnim izrazom pučke pobožnosti.

Ozračje posebnog vremena stvara se već za vrijeme izrade *betlehema*, mnogo prije Božića, već u listopadu, vjerojatno kao “duhovna priprema ... za proslavu tog ... blagdana” (Albus, 1997: 87). Stanko Bunić je gotovo prije šezdeset godina počeo izrađivati *betleheme* u Plemenščini slijedeći obiteljsku tradiciju kako je već spomenuto. Kao motiv za gradnju tradicijskih drvenih jaslica bila je želja za ozdravljenjem. Naime, tada

je bio bolestan pa je počeo raditi *betlem* s mišlju *možda bi mi Bog dal sreću/da/ bi mi doktori pomogli*. Sličnu formulu vezanu uz molbu Bogu odnosno svecu (svetom) izrekla je i kazivačica Hrvatica u Mađarskoj kao dio zavjeta kojim je tražila pomoć “ako mi dragi Bog da da ozdravim” (Čapo, 1991: 29). Kazivač i sam tvrdi da je to bio za njega zavjet kojim je pokušao postići ozdravljenje.³ Čini se da je to njihov zajednički svjetonazor. Kako navodi Christian, taj je oblik zavjeta “prototip molitve Rimokatolika na Mediteranu” (1989: 119), a prema ovim saznanjima i šire. Kako Stanko tvrdi, *tak sam uspel zlečiti se i dalje sam nastavil ostale betleme delati*. On je, dakle, izradio *betlehem* s nadom da će time utjecati na Boga koji će mu pomoći da ozdravi. Taj primjer potvrđuje tvrdnju da je “pobožnost sredstvo za postizanje konkretnih zemaljskih ciljeva” (Čapo, 1991: 37). Stankova bolest bila je uzrok njegovog zavjeta što odgovara dosad utvrđenom da je povod zavjeta “neka teška nevolja – najčešće bolest ljudi i/ili životinja” (Čapo, 1991: 29). Od obične zahvale (usp. Čapo, 1991: 40, bilješka 15), molbe ili molitve zavjet razlikuje samo Stankovo tumačenje da je to bio *zavjet*.

J. Čapo navodi tri vrste zavjeta: ante interventum zavjet, post interventum zavjet i zavjet kojim se potiče božanstvo na djelovanje. Ante interventum zavjetu odgovara Stankov zavjet jer je izradio *betlehem* s mišlju da će mu Bog pomoći, kao da je želio pokazati kako vjeruje da će ozdraviti izradom *betlehema* koji je vezan uz priču o rođenju Isusa, Božjeg Sina. Općenito je odnos graditelja prema *betlehemu* kao predmetu odnos pun poštovanja, kao prema svetom predmetu, primjerice posvećenoj slici. Stoga nije neobično što je Stanko odabrao *betlehem* kao uzdarje, jer on odgovara zavjetnom daru kao “predmet ... osobite vrijednosti” što karakterizira zavjetni dar (1991: 22). U temelju Stankov zavjet odgovara, čini se, ponajviše vrsti zavjeta kojim se želi udobrovoljiti Boga za pomoć, kojim se “potiče božanstvo na djelovanje” (Čapo, 1991: 23). “Sva tri shvaćanja [zavjeta imaju zajedničko] da je vjernik obvezan Bogu uzvratiti za dobivene milosti unaprijed određivši o kakvom će se uzdarju raditi” (Čapo, 1991: 23). Kao da i nije bitno na koji način se Stanko zavjetovao, gotovo da je to bilo spontano, *uz misao da će mu Bog pomoći*, a odabrao je izradu *betlehema* kao uzdarje. Na poseban način Stankov zavjet je kombinacija svih triju zavjeta pa se može zaključiti da je njegov zavjet prošao pojedine faze, od nastojanja da umilostivi Boga idejom o izradi *betlehema*, samom izradom *betlehema* kao votivnim darom prije ozdravljenja i daljnjom izradom *betlehema* kao svojevrsnom zahvalom za ozdravljenje uz Božju pomoć. Prema kazivačima, sama izrada *betlehema* zahtjevan je psihički posao, pa i u tom smislu, predstavlja izraz vjere, a *betlehem* kao predmet materijalni je dokaz postojanja vjere u vjernika, a u slučaju kad postaje dijelom Stankova zavjeta, spona između vjernika i Boga.

³ U kontekstu razgovora o vješticama i urocima Stanko je spomenuo da je tražio pomoć kod osobe koja zna skidati uroke, no ona mu je rekla da mu ne može pomoći radi jačine uroka odnosno moći osobe koja je na njega bacila urok. Nije poznato je li to učinio prije ili poslije zavjeta, što bi mogao također biti razlog obraćanja (ipak) Bogu za pomoć, a nije sigurno ni je li to ispričao da približi istraživaču svijet vještica i uroka.

Zaključak

Izrada jaslica tj. *betlehemema* u Plemenščini pripada pučkoj pobožnosti, a očituje se na osobnoj i društvenoj razini te odgovara “kulturnom izražaju koji nije u suprotnosti s objavom” (Hoško, 1983: 194). Na osobitosti izrade jaslica u Plemenščini utjecalo je europsko okruženje što je vidljivo u prenošenju tradicije izrade jaslica koje se dobro prihvaćaju u narodu radi mogućnosti stilskog, kulturološkog (lokalnog), osobnog i ostalih načina izražavanja. Općenitije promjene u pučkoj pobožnosti poput preusmjerenja s društvenog prema osobnom (usp. Čapo, 1991: 34; Šimić, 1994: 47) vidljive su u činjenici da se *betlehem*i više ne rade zajedno (u istoj prostoriji), a isključiva individualizacija vidljiva je u Stankovom zavjetu. Zavjeti se češće vežu uz hodočašća (usp. Čapo, 1991: 28), stoga Stankov zavjet predstavlja specifičnost posebno vezano uz tradiciju izrade jaslica na području Hrvatske koliko je zasad poznato. Daljnja istraživanja mogla bi pokazati postoji li još takvih slučajeva vezanih uz izradu jaslica, ali i ostale prakse pučke pobožnosti za koje se ne vezuje toliko zavjet.

Podaci vezani uz društvene aspekte izrade *betlehemema* potvrđuju da vjera odnosno “religioznost ... ima i svoje društvene dimenzije” (Rihtman Augustin, 1990: 14). Svi kazivači koji još izrađuju *betleheme* tvrde kako je to težak fizički posao u smislu živčanog napora, a još se nadodaje da za njegovu izradu treba imati *volju i ljubav*. Da su *betlehem*i iz Plemenščine uistinu jedinstveni, svjedoči unošenje raznih i uvijek drugačijih, ponekad novih, elemenata u umijeće njegove izrade. Svaki izrađivač jaslica unosi vlastita značenja pri izradi jaslica. Time se održava i određena napetost koja potiče izrađivače na rad, ali i omogućuje povezivanje zajednice kroz zajednički element u kojem sudjeluju. Vezano uz *betleheme*, pričaju se priče o tome tko ih je, kada i za koju potrebu izradio, a tko obnovio, kako su dodavani i koji novi elementi, tko je od koga naučio *raditi betlema*. Izrada jaslica bila je i posebna osobina kojom su se Plemenšaši razlikovali od susjednih sela, što je u isto vrijeme i indikator i marker različitosti i identifikacije te zajednice.

Prema kazivačima, osjeća se opadanje interesa kod mladih za odlazak u crkvu i prihvaćanje katoličkih vrijednosti, što utječe i na potrebu pokazivanja vlastite vjere prema van kroz predstavljačke oblike, kao što je bilo, i djelomično još kod starijih jest, slučaj s *betlehemima*. Zasad su mlađe generacije nezainteresirane, jer nositelji ovog umijeća smatraju da njihovi potomci na drugi način provode slobodno vrijeme i ne doživljavaju na isti način izradu tih *betlehemema*. Kako kažu, mladi za *Božić sad (samo) bore okitidu. Mi stari, ja, se posebno veselim svakom blagdanu, se mi je jake još lepe, koji god i u kojem god društvu, a kak bu dugo Bog dal*. Zašto nagrađivani *betlehem* u Rimu, i ostali *betlehem*i za koje su zainteresirani stručnjaci ne motiviraju mlađe na njihovu izradu? Kako je moguće da u nekim obiteljima stariji pripadnici obitelji još uvijek u jednoj prostoriji postavljaju *betlehem*, a da to nema odraza na mlađe, jer istodobno u drugoj prostoriji djeca ukrašavaju (novu) jelku i stavljaju pod nju kupljenu štalicu malih dimenzija, bez umjetničke, tradicijske i osobne vrijednosti? No, ako se može pretpostaviti da su *betlehem*i izraz potreba ljudi u nekom određenome razdoblju, potreba koje danas potiskuju nove želje i nastojanja, nije neobično da se tradicija ne može nastavi-

ti, barem ne bez nagovaranja. Daljnja istraživanja trebala bi tražiti odgovore na pitanje je li se dogodio i zašto se događa prekid prijenosa tradicije izrade *betlehem*, kao i mnogo drugih vjerskih, kršćanskih i tradicijskih vrijednosti od starijih na većinu pripadnika mlađe generacije. Ako se pučka pobožnost uistinu gleda i kroz prizmu moralnosti odnosno vrijednosti određene zajednice (usp. Rihtman Augustin, 1990: 14 i 1991:14; Čapo, 1991: 25), postavlja se pitanje u kojoj je mjeri došlo do uspotavljanja novih, drugačijih vrijednosti i uslijed kojih čimbenika. Očito je da određeni način života u određenom vremenu utječe na stvaranje preduvjeta za postojanje i održavanje odnosno daljnje prenošenje jedne takve tradicije. Iako se katoličanstvo ispreplelo s mnogim pretkršćanskim obredima, kao i “nekršćanskim” elementima (Belaj, 2007: 70) koje su baštinili i mještani Plemenščine, a što je vidljivo u njihovim tradicijskim običajima, pripadnost Rimokatoličkoj vjeri, koja je usadila u vjernike neke od stavova prema Bogu i svetome, mještani Plemenščine iskazivali su upravo kroz izradu i upotrebu *betlehema*.

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1.01



1.02



1.03

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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

The 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 Zagreb¹. 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.

¹ 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*.² 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

² 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.³ This seems to be their shared

³ 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 Auguštin, 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*.

Translated by Ivona Grgurinović