

IMAGE OF »THE TURK« IN SLOVENE FOLKLORE

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Abstract: Legends about the time of the Turkish raids form an important and substantial part of the Slovene oral traditions. A closer examination of their content reveals a mixture of mythologized historical events from the time of the Turkish raids that are preserved in the Slovene collective memory (thou influenced by different ideological agendas), elements that are in their core mythological and use the time of the Turkish raids more or less as a chronological frame, and elements that express the archaic fear of "the Other", which is the basic component of the image of "the Turk" in Slovene folklore. Materialization of these legends in the physical landscape also expresses this multi-layered image of "the Turk" – from the "places of memory" that can be historically confirmed to those that are just imagined and perceived as such – they all express a certain imagery that the community has about it's own past and it's understanding and rationalization of the (physical) world that surrounds them. The predominantly negative and almost demonized image of "the Turk" is an important part of the Slovene identity, collective memory and oral narratives

Keywords: Turkish raids; folklore; Slovenia; otherness; folklore and landscape; identity; collective memory

I. INTRODUCTION

For almost 300 years, from the beginning of the 15th until the end of the 17th century, Slovene lands, at the time part of the Habsburg Empire, were exposed to raids from the Ottoman Turks. The devastation they left behind, the constant fear and unease in the anticipation the next attack, the stereotyped and ideologically shaped image of "the Turk" remained deeply-rooted in the Slovene collective memory and oral traditions. Images of the Turkish raids are present in Slovene cultural heritage, art, in the media and in education. In this paper I will try to present the image of "the Turk" in Slovene folklore or, to be more exact, in *legends*¹ (therefore leaving aside other folklore genres in which the Turks appear, such as folk songs and idioms) and explain the origins of such imagery and its meaning. I use the term "Turks" or "Turk", but I am obviously referring to the people who were subjects of the Ottoman Empire and not of ethnic Turkish denomination in the modern sense of the word. However I use the term "Turks" because it appears as such in folklore.

II. "AND THEN THE TURKS CAME, BURNED THE VILLAGE,
KILLED THE PEOPLE OR CAPTURED THEM. THERE WAS ONE
LEFT."²: HOW ORAL TRADITIONS PRESENT "THE TURK" AND
THE TIME OF THE TURKISH RAIDS

In folklore, particularly in legends, Turkish raids are depicted in a dramatic and tragic way. The main characteristic of the Turks is their cruelty and savagery. They are presented as a destructive force, whose only aim is to cause maximum damage, to overtake, loot, burn, demolish churches, settlements, castles and to grab as much booty and prisoners as possible. Their different religion, Islam, is not perceived as equal to the "true", Christian fate and is presented almost as idolatry. That is why they are sometimes referred to as the Turkish dogs or Turkish devils which coincides with their general presentation as being demonized and almost inhuman. There are numerous places that are said to have a connection with the Turks – villages or churches they attacked, spots where they made camp, places where battles were fought with them, places where they buried their treasures and physical traces or things they left behind. The landscape is saturated with real and imaginary reminders of the times of the Turks and their presence also lives on in idioms and phrases like "to smoke like a Turk" or "to swear like a Turk", similar those that can also be found in other parts of Europe (see Kumrular, 2012: 44–45).

Many legends also explain the events that are supposed to have happened during a Turkish attacks. They depict the savagery and the slaughter committed by the Turks and speak of how they burned villages, kidnapped people, how they looted and they left behind total destruction.

"When Turks came to these parts, they robbed and killed and people were trying to find places to hide.

One man dug out a tree stump and made a big hole and hid in it. The Turks didn't find him. But they found those who were hiding in churches. They killed them or took them with them." (Kastelic, Primc, 2001: 100)

Some legends tell of people fighting back and sometimes also winning by means of deception or miraculous salvation. Yet usually the locals are shown being scared and running in the forests or hiding in caves, but mostly taking refuge behind the walls of churches and anti-Turkish refuges. Many churches that the Turks are supposed to have attacked are said to still bear visible signs of the attacks in a form of a horseshoe or a horseshoe imprint in the wall or the door of the church. Shelters, intended to protect people in case of a Turkish attack, are a very frequent motif. People hid in caves, churches, but preferably in specially built anti-Turkish refuges. These manmade forts were, besides fleeing, basically the only protection that the peasants had against the Turkish attack and as such they seem to have acquired quite an important symbolic role. Perhaps that is the reason they appear in so many legends. They were usually built around a church that by itself holds great symbolic value for the community. These forts are often depicted in legends as places where miraculous salvations usually performed by the Virgin Mary or the patron saint of the church occurred, or where a sudden mist covered the church so it became invisible to the attackers, who were sometimes also driven away by the ringing of the church bells or by the fact that suddenly their horses' feet started sinking in the ground.

"One day Turks came to Slevica. They managed to penetrate through the wall around the church. The elderly and the children ran into the church and the

Turks wanted to break in. In that moment Virgin Mary appeared over the church door and the horse of the Turkish commander couldn't move forward. That is how people were spared.

When I was younger it was possible to see a very clear impression of the horseshoe and the blow of the Turkish whip on the floor. You could also see the nail from the horseshoe of that horse." (Kastelic, Primc, 2001: 102)

These legends about anti-Turkish refuges are an example of oral tradition for which historical background can be confirmed. It would be oversimplifying to say that oral traditions about Turks can be used as a historical source, because folklore and history do not function by the same rules (see Hrobat, 2005, 2007, 2010; Palavestra, 1966; Pleterski, 2005, 2006) – even when describing the same subject, they do it in different ways. Yet oral traditions do (to a point) reflect and preserve collective memories about events taking place during the Turkish attacks – they tell stories of plunder, kidnapping, killings, ways of defending in case of attacks and of destruction that actually occurred. The Turks did try to cause maximum damage, because their primary goal in this area was to economically exhaust the lands and reduce the population so that in the next stage they could conquer the territory. However in folklore these acts are highly exaggerated and given almost an appearance of a fight between the good and evil. Most of these motifs are very typical and spread all over Slovenia³.

But often the time of the Turkish raids serves primarily as a chronological frame to give an appearance of truth and has little to do with the historical Turks.

Etiological legends that explain the origins of certain features of the landscape, like unusual rocks or hills, color of the soil, ruins, are probably the largest

part of folklore concerning the Turks. Anything that stands out can be explained as originating from the time of the Turkish raids or being of Turkish origin. Numerous place names and family last names or house names are presented as originating from that time. Yet only a few could have real connections with the "Turkish time" – for example, place names like Tabor or Straža, that sometimes indicate the location of the anti-Turkish fort where peasants took refuge or places where they took guard and lit the bonfires for signalization in case of an attack (more about that later). But in most of these legends the time of the Turkish raids serves merely as a chronological setting within which these landscape features or names are explained.

"In Studenec there is a puddle called the Bloody puddle. It is nothing to it, leaves fall in it and when they rot, the water becomes red. And then they named it the Bloody puddle.

But in the past it was said that Turks murdered people there and threw their bodies in the puddle that became filled with blood. I don't know what the truth is. I didn't see it, but I heard people talking about it. This puddle is on the top of the hill and has never dried out. It is still there, yes. It is probably not bloody, just red." (Krejan, 1999: 24)

So a part of oral traditions about the Turks does seem to echo certain real historical events (though mythologized and very typical), a part serves to give an explanation for the peculiar elements of the environment (features of the landscape, folk etymology about names and place-names whose real origins have been forgotten), while some legends seem so be even more submerged in the mythological sphere. Here too the time of the Turkish invasion offers mostly a historical frame within which a certain event occurs.

A very common motive is the hidden treasure. These treasures were sometimes said to be buried by the peasants themselves when Turks attacked, but usually they were buried or hidden by Turks with the intention of one day coming back to collect them. Many times legends also describe how people actually looked for these treasures, but these attempts are almost always unsuccessful or stopped by a supernatural power (unusual sounds, appearance of the devil etc.). These legends connect the Turks with the supernatural, with the "other world", which the treasures and the Turks themselves are a part of (see Hrobat, 2010: 54; 2012: 43; see also Champion, Cooney, 1999: 198).

"I have heard from older people that here, in Donačka gora, a golden calf is buried. It is supposed to have been buried by the Turks when they went through here. And people looked for it, but were unable to find it. It kept sinking in the ground. This was before I was born. And they say it is still buried." (Gričnik, 1998: 178)

Some other motifs as well seem to lack any sort of historical explanation and might have more mythological origins. There are a great many legends about lime-trees being planted by the Turks on the spot where they buried their commander or sultan that was killed, or to mark the place where they buried a treasure, or where they had a meal, or as a promise that they will one day return. Or stories about a maiden who, whilst fleeing from her persecutors, which are sometimes depicted as Turks, demons or a dragon, jumps off a cliff (see Šmitek 2004: 219–240; Šmitek 2009: 181–182).

"The Bloody Cliff used to be called the Rose Valley. When the Turks were here, they chased a girl. She fled to the cliffs and threw herself off. So they named the cliff the Bloody Cliff, because it was covered with the girl's blood." (Kastelic, Primc, 2001: 103)

III. "A FORT WAS BUILT UP THERE IN THE "TURKISH TIME". YOU CAN STILL SEE THE WALL"⁴: FOLKLORE, LANDSCAPE AND "THE TURKS"

But no matter if legends do echo certain historical reality or seem more mythological and historically implausible, they all have one thing in common: close attachment to the physical landscape. They are linked to specific places in the landscape, giving these legends an appearance of plausibility and reality and by materializing themselves in the physical world preserving the collective memory (see Halbwachs, 2001) of the time of the Turkish raids. Space is not just a physical entity; it also has a profound symbolic role and can be inscribed with the memories of the community and used as a means of perceiving the past through the landscape and its particular features (see Hrobat, 2010: 36; González Álvarez, 2011: 139). Some of these places which are, according to the legends, in some way linked with Turks, actually do have a connection with the time of the Turkish raids, for example the anti-Turkish forts as the most prominent remain from this period, while others are just perceived as such – as mentioned previously, these kind of legends are often used to explain how certain (natural or manmade) features of the landscape that in a way stand out, such as rocks, hills, caves, ruins, came to be. The latter is especially interesting: the archaeological remains of the previous habitations or forts (whether prehistoric, roman or medieval) are sometimes explained as remains of, for example, castles that were destroyed by the Turks, or predecessors of the current villages that were burned and destroyed in a Turkish attack, or also churches that were demolished by Turks. The archaeological and historical sources often deny any connec-

tion with this period. So in these cases the Turks and the time of the Turkish raids are used as means of interpretation and rationalization certain aspects of the physical environment that seem to be disconnected from experiences and knowledge of the community.



Figure 1. Remains of a prehistoric settlement on the hill Vahta presented in folklore as remains of an anti-Turkish refuge

The same applies to random archaeological finds – in legends there are often mentions of horseshoes and weapons that are attributed to the Turks or burials said to contain the remains of some Turkish military commander or the sultan – mentions of such finds can often be an indicator of archaeological remains of artifacts (Knific, Pleterski, 1993: 240–241; Slapšak, 1995: 19–20) that have no connection with the Turks. This is a mechanism of integration of the unknown into the established worldview and the quotidian of the community (González Álvarez, 2011; Hrobat, 2007, 2010; Pleterski, 2005, 2006).

But the aim is the same: to create a sense of continuity. The primary function of memory is not to preserve

the past, but to mould it and manipulate with it and in this way enrich the present (Lowenthal, 1995: 210). As such the narratives about Turks have become a part of the historical consciousness and identity of the people that bear them (see Santos-Granero, 1998: 144). The materiality of places and objects that appear in folklore gives an impression of reality and ascribing certain attributes, in this case attributes of being of Turkish origin or originating in the time of Turkish invasions to manmade or natural features in the environment, enables the transformation of these objects into material reminders of the community's past (see Santos-Granero, 1998: 140). Such localization of oral traditions also allows the identity of the community to be symbolically embedded into the landscape, to be reinforced and at the same time to serve in the ongoing process of exclusion of the members of other communities. In this way the localization of folklore tells who belongs here and who does not (Bird, 2002: 523–528; see also Staeck, 1999: 70).

IV. OTHERNESS OF "THE TURK"

In legends the different religion of the Turks is emphasized and this is usually presented as hatred that Turks show toward everything Christian. This is shown in numerous legends depicting their aims to attack and destroy a church and sacrilegious acts, such as feeding their horses hay from the altar or horses urinating in the church, or destroying paintings of saints. These acts are usually punished by the divine force and the Turks are driven away or scared away never to return again because they realize that people they have attacked have even God on their side – and

that only reinforces the belief that Christianity is the “correct” religion. Other miraculous salvations are also a popular motif in legends: a sudden mist covers the church so the Turks don’t see it or the ringing of the church bell or a bee or wasp attack forces the Turks to leave. Therefore the religious aspect in the confrontation with the Turks is quite important.

This is connected to one of the main characteristics that define the Turks in folklore: their otherness.

Perceiving the Other as hostile and dangerous is in its core archaic and reflects beliefs that those, who enter Our community from the outside come from the “world beyond” and can have supernatural traits (Belova 2007: 335–336). Fear and suspicion in regarding everything that is foreign and unknown as potentially dangerous, is common in folklore. In Slovene folklore foreigners are often depicted in a negative manner – as liars, enslavers, as heartless and hostile (Šmitek, 1986: 11). Considering the very real fear and terror caused by the Turkish raids it is no wonder that in folklore Turks came to represent the ultimate enemy and the embodiment of everything that is bad, malicious and destructive. In oral traditions Turks are presented as the “mythical Other” and can be viewed as a mythical archetype (Hrobat, 2010: 51–52). In some legends a new settlement is established after the Turkish attack – what these stories show is that the “Turkish time” presents an antithesis of “Our time”. After the Turks, who represent *chaos*, go away, the world is transformed into an organized, safe *cosmos* (Hrobat, 2010: 54; 2012: 43; Eliade, 1987: 29, 47; see also Risteski, 2001). I think the otherness of the Turk is the main reason for the quantity of legends and motifs about the time of the Turkish raids.

“A farmer from Ivanci once plowed his field in a place called Ijžišče. The soil wasn’t very good. He

plowed out bits of brick, parts of broken pots and occasionally some coins.

It was said that there was once a big village with a church and a monastery in Ijžišče. People here lived in prosperity, provided by the rich soil. In the church tower they were ringing with a golden bell. That came to an end when the Turks came. They slaughtered the women and children and took the men into slavery. They burned the village to the ground.

Just one man called Ivan was spared because he hid in the forest. He built himself a new house, got married and had many children.

This is how the village Ivanci got its name after this Ivan. The nuns threw the golden bell in a deep spring to save it from the Turkish robbers. It is still waiting there to be found.” (Rešek, 1995: 259)

So an important aspect of the Turks in folklore is their foreignness that in itself poses a threat to the community. In some legends the Turks are sometimes replaced by the Huns or the French soldiers from the time of Napoleon (or vice versa) who were present in the territory of Slovenia in a completely different historical context and eras. This is not unusual, because folklore can and often does combine elements and personalities from different historical eras and so in various versions of the same narrative different foreigners can appear (see González Álvarez, 2011: 138; Klímová, 1972: 222, 224; Parafita, 2006: 80, 97–98; Pleterski, 2006). What matters to folklore is distinguishing between Us and Them, whereas historical accuracy plays a secondary role.

“They used to say that Attila was buried on Kozjak. He was heavily wounded in that battle. [...] They said he was buried in an iron casket, then in a silver one and then in a golden one. And that he had a golden sword covered with pearls. So the boys dug there and

they dug up a big hole, but the support didn't hold and everything came crashing down. They barely managed to save themselves. And they were too scared to dig again. [...]” (Podbrežnik Vukmir, Kotnik, 2009: 156–157)

“My brother and more than thirty boys went up there [to Kozjak] trying to find the place where the Turkish sultan was buried. And they looked for the grave. But they didn't find it. They couldn't find anything. What was that? It was real. Either someone found it and didn't tell, or it is still waiting to be found. That is what I heard. The grave wasn't found, but the story was passed on from generation to generation.” (Podbrežnik Vukmir, Kotnik, 2009: 157)

In folklore Turks also lose their individuality and their image is constructed through a binary opposition between good and evil. Their otherness is constructed through the knowledge and worldview of the Self. The empirical reality is put aside – the reality of the Other is subordinate in the process of the validation of the Self of the community (Rapport, Overing 2003: 12; see also White, 1991: 116, 186, 193) with the world view and the values of the community serving as a point of reference for the valorization (see Parafita, 2006: 129). So by emphasizing the negative traits and the otherness of the Turks in folklore what is actually being presented is an image of the Self:

- savagery, destruction, chaos – civilization, order, cosmos
- false religion (Islam) – true religion (Christianity)
- “Turkish time” – “Our time”
- unknown, “otherworldly” – known, domestic.

The Others are a coherent group only from the point of view of the Self and their identity is based on stereotypes and simplifications. Thus the image that the

Turkish invaders would have had about themselves would hardly be similar to the image presented in oral traditions.

The Turks were therefore equated with “the Other”, “the foreigner” and were attributed different roles – on the one hand, in the process of constructing and maintaining the identity of a community by representing the very opposite of it and its values, and on the other hand their image is used to provide answers on questions concerning the community's past and the (physical) world that surrounds it.

V. WHAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE IMAGE OF “THE TURK”?

It is difficult to say to what extent this image of the savage, plundering and bloodthirsty Turk was influenced by propaganda. Creating and maintaining a certain image of the enemy as a means of procuring certain political, religious or ideological goals has not been uncommon in history (see Gießauf, 2005: 260–267; González Álvarez, 2011: 139; Jones, 1971: 377–379; Parafita, 2006: 88–93; Sabatos, 2008: 735–736). Such negative imagery about “the Turk” was spread by the ruling Habsburg dynasty in order to enhance their importance and assert their legitimacy. Maintaining the presence of the “Turkish peril” (even when the Ottoman Empire no longer posed a real military threat) served ideological and political purposes and helped in the process of centralization of the Habsburg Empire (Jezernik, 2010: 10).

This kind of portrayal of “the Turk” can also be contextualized within the concept of *frontier orientalism*. Frontier orientalism is described as “a relatively co-

herent set of metaphors and myths that reside in folk and public culture" (Gingrich, 1996: 119). It is manifested in folklore, Turkish museum collections, school textbooks, place names and other materialized reminders in the landscape that form a part of the local identity (Bartulović, 2012: 149–150; Baskar, 2012: 140; Gingrich, 1996: 119). Here the Muslim Other usually is not a distant Muslim, but a threatening nearby enemy; he presents a dangerous rival (or a humiliated opponent) and usually appears as soldier and always as a man (Gingrich, 1996: 120–121). Frontier orientalism is often accompanied by the myth of *antemurale christianitatis*, that glorifies the role of one's community in defending Christian Europe against the Muslim Other (Baskar, 2012: 140; see also Niewiara, 2012: 195–196). The Slovene variant of frontier orientalism doesn't emphasize the Christian military and cultural supremacy as some variants do and is predominantly concerned with lamentation about the suffering in the times of the Turkish invasions.

This sort of imagery is clearly present in Slovene oral traditions concerning the Turks and is consistent with a variant of frontier orientalism that places "the Turk" in the position of a mortal enemy and presents the fight against him as a demonstration of ethno-territorial patriotism (Baskar, 2012: 141), which with time led to an increasing awareness of a common identity. As such the myth of the Turkish raids also became a part of the Slovene collective memory (Bartulović, 2012: 147) and in nation-building discourses of the 19th century the lamentation of the time of the Turkish raids played a significant role in building Slovene national identity (Baskar, 2000: 4). Slovene writers were also inclined to write about the time of Turkish raids and they depict them in the most tragic way.

Those tragic motifs are in accordance with the general self-image of Slovenes as victims of "the eternal enemy, "the bloodthirsty Turk" that is firmly inscribed in the Slovene historiography and national literature (see Bartulović, 2012). With that in mind it is difficult to distinguish between the influence that the general folklore imagery of the Turk had on the works of Slovene writers and historians and vice versa: how did popular literary works that presented a very black and white picture of the Turk and the image presented by the historians and codified by the ideological state apparatuses influence the image of "the Turk" in the oral tradition (see also White, 1991, 208).

VI. CONCLUSION

Folklore is a reflection of a society's worldview, of its values, fears and its self-image (see Gunnell, 2008: 14–15; Krekovičová, 1997: 167). It is not immune to political, religious, social or historical changes that take place in the real world, yet it transforms them into a seemingly static, uniform and simplistic form. Slovene folklore is full of stories about the Turkish raids that at first glance do not seem to have any real depth. But a closer look reveals three different layers that in my opinion contribute to the collective representations of Turks in Slovene oral traditions:

- archaic fears of the Other, the foreigner who represents the element of chaos,
- a collective remembrance of the terror brought on by the Turkish invaders who for almost three centuries plundered the territory of Slovenia and
- the image that was for political and ideological purposes intentionally spread among the population

and was later codified in literature and spread by the ideological state apparatuses.

Turks are presented in a black and white image, historical accuracy is pushed aside and the mythologized vision of the struggle of Our, righteous society to survive the violent intrusion of the demonized Other is emphasized. It is a fight between cosmos and chaos, the existence of the world as we know it and complete destruction. In this aspect the Turks play the role of the evildoer in a game or a worldview that is much more archaic. So besides a very real danger of Turkish attacks people were exposed to propaganda that produced and encouraged a certain image of the Turk that was based on actual historical confrontations with them and on preexisting, archaic fear of the foreigner. Within the corpus of legends about the "Turkish time" "the historical Turk" (seemingly originating from the time of the Turkish raids) and "the mythical Turk" (belonging to an undefined mythical time) are not completely separated from each other – the collective remembrance of the Turks is an interwoven mixture of both.

The Turks came to represent the "perpetual enemy" and have as such also been remembered in folklore and materialized in the physical and "imaginary" landscape, yet have also provided a sense of historical continuity of the community and a reference source for explanation of certain aspects of its past and (physical) environment (even when it is clear that the historical reality is pushed aside). Thus if we look at it from this point of view we see, that oral traditions about Turks can also provide an insight into how the community perceives the world and its own position in it, and the localization of oral traditions in the landscape serves in the process of constructing and maintaining the community's identity and also shows how the community perceives and remembers its own past.

ENDNOTES

- [1] *Legends* are a folklore genre that is firmly connected to the physical landscape. They offer explanations for the unknown, express values, world-views, fears of a certain community and transform *space* into *place* (Gunnell, 2008: 14–15).
- [2] Ožbolt, 2004: 88.
- [3] I am not trying to say that imagery is completely universal. Studies have shown various ways of how different historical experiences shaped the image of "the Turk" in folklore and collective memory – the image is different in countries that had violent historical confrontations with the Ottoman Empire or were subjected to its rule or were more distant observers of the "Turkish peril". The imagery was also not static, it was constantly adapting to the current political or ideological situations or was "rediscovered" when a need for specific ideological, nationalistic, religious or other purposes emerged (see Jezernik, 2012: 15; Klímová, 1972: 199; Kuran-Burçoğlu, 2012: 75, 84; Niewiara, 2012: 192–202; Sabatos, 2008: 736, 738).
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