

ETHNOLOGISTS AND MISSIONARIES: CHAPTER FROM THE HISTORY OF NON-EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY IN SLOVENIA.

Various ethnologists valued the work of missionaries quite differently, but they have also agreed that both professions have a number of things in common. It seems that the opinions of ethnologists – both positive and negative – based on an emotional rather than on a professional basis. In ethnology we therefore miss profound systematic research works about the contribution of missionaries towards understanding and changing of Non – European cultures. It is possible to say that the separation of purely scientific interest for Non – European cultures from missionary work is a rather recent development. From the historical point of view we can say that in comparison to missionaries ethnologists have begun with their research rather late.

The most distinctive beginner of comparative culture research and a pioneer of scientific ethnology is a French missionary and Jesuit Joseph Francois Lafiteau with his work on various customs of Canadian Iroquois and antique peoples, published in 1732. Although there is no closer connection between Lafiteau and later culture researchers gravitating towards natural sciences in the 18th century and in the first decades of the 19th century, this indicates the importance of even early missionary work for the development of ethnology. This importance further increased with the work of Viennese cultural and historical school (W. Schmidt, W. Koppers and others), with comparative study of religions and language research and with individual regional research works (K. Strehlow, M. Leenhardt, R. H. Codrington and others). Therefore it may be interesting to examine the contributions of prominent Slovene missionaries to Non – European ethnology.

The first Slovene missionary in Asia and the first Slovene missionary outside Europe in general could be Franciscan Odorik Mattiuzzi from Pordenone (Odorico de Pordenone), that is if the presumption of the Slovene historian Gruden about Mattiuzzi's Slovene descent is right (Mattiuzzi = Matijevc, Matjuc). In 1314 Odorik requested to be sent to Asian missions and the Pope sent him to the East in 1318. Mattiuzzi travelled through present Turkey, Persia and Irak where he took a boat to India. Upon arriving in India in 1321 he crossed the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Sumatra, Java and Borneo and came to the court of the great khan in Peking where he already found eight other missionaries. After three years in China he returned to his homeland across Tibet, Sinkiang and Persia. Soon after his return, on January 14, 1331, he died in Videm (Udine).

After Marco Polo, Odorik was the first traveller who described the landscape, towns and people from his trip in detail. In some towns (in Lhasa, for instance), he was the first European. On request of the provincial he dictated an account of his journey to Franciscan Guglielmo da Solagna in Padova. This book was soon spread across Europe in many transcripts and printings (at least 73 transcripts and 14 printed editions).

Four centuries later, in 1738, another Slovene missionary came to China. His name was Avguštin Hallerstein and he was born in Mengeš. At the emperor's palace in Peking he studied mathematics, astronomy and geography.

Hallerstein's extensive letters with descriptions of his trips and work, life in China and at court were published and thus became available to scientific circles all across Europe. It seems that they were first printed in the collection entitled "Der Neue Welt – Bott" by J. Stoecklein. Eight Hallerstein's letters from 1735 to 1749 were printed here. Jesuit Franz Keller reprinted five German letters from 1735 to 1740 in the 30th book of letters and travel-records of Jesuit missionaries (printed in Vienna in 1755). Hallerstein also adapted and improved the Chinese calendar. With the aid of court income registers he calculated the number of Chinese inhabitants which amounted to 198,213,718 (published in „Memoires concernant l'histoire des chinois", Paris, part IX., P. 440). Hallerstein was so highly esteemed as a scientist that the director of the Petrograd Academy, count Ciril Razumovsky, asked him for some information about Chinese court, religion etc.

Ingnacij Knoblehar made an important contribution to the ethnology of Africa. He worked among the Nilot tribes in Sudan. He often travelled on Nile by ship. Almost half of his years in Africa were spent on trips. The way from Khartoum to Gondokoro is almost 1800 kilometers long and from Alexandria to the Lumutad island, which is the most southern point that Knoblehar reached, there is 4100 kilometers. For several years no European came further than the Lumutad island where Knoblehar came in 1855. An extensive report about Knoblehar's first voyage along Nile was published in a special booklet German and Slovene by Vinko F. Klun ("The Voyage Along White River", published in Ljubljana in 1850). The ship's diary about the same trip was published in the chronicle of Viennese central institution for meteorology and earth magnetism. On request of the same institution Knoblehar and Dovjak were the first to systematically collect data on meteorological conditions and water level of the white Nile. The state library in Vienna saves Knoblehar's material for a dictionary of the Dinka and Bari languages. Knoblehar improved the Bari dictionary in Gondokoro between April 11 and July 12, 1855, and translated the principal Christian instructions into the Bari language. When visiting Europe in 1850, Knoblehar donated his ethnological and ornithological collection from Sudan to the museums in Vienna and Ljubljana. In a letter dated November 29, 1852, (published in the second yearly report of the Mary's society in Vienna in 1853) he said that he had sent two cases with zoological and botanical collections for the Viennese zoological museum and for the museum in Ljubljana.

A premature death prevented Knoblehar to write his planned extensive work about Sudan. After his death, his diaries and various field notes went to the Roman "Propaganda", but they have not been examined yet. Some of his data and sketches were used by an American traveller named Bayard Taylor in the 27th chapter of his travel book about Africa. Many of Knoblehar's verbal and written information was also used by Ferdinand Lesseps, one of the builders of the Suez Canal, in his Nile memorandum to the French Academy and other articles. Knoblehar's "excellent scientific diary" was highly praised by the well-known German zoologist Alfred Edmund Brehm who met Knoblehar – together with the naturalist Johann W. Mueller – in Sudan in either 1848 or 1849.

Knoblehar's discoveries attracted so much interest in Europe that a report was given about them in the Berlin geographical society as early as 1851. Bayard Taylor met Knoblehar in Khartum in 1852 and described him as the best expert concerning Nile. On October 13, 1857, Knoblehar became an honorary member of the Geographical society in Vienna.

It has to be stressed that Knoblehar's associates also contributed an important part as far as the knowledge about the Nile region, its inhabitants and cultures are concerned. Thus a missionary named Andrej Mozgan who spent four years alone among the blacks of the kik tribe, tried hard to learn about their language and customs. He conveyed the data about the life-style of the Nilot tribes to the Italian researcher Carlo Piaggia and also helped to collect various artefacts for an ethnological collection which later came to the Berlin museum.

Janez Klančnik, a craftsman who was in charge of the economy in the Khartum mission and worked with Mozgan at the St. Cross mission, became an ivory merchant after Mozgan's death. During the winter of 1861–1862, he advanced west of the White Nile and came to a big river flowing west. This was probably Uele, a tributary of the Kongo river. Klančnik was the first European to reach the middle Kongo river basin. Later he accompanied H. Schubert there. In 1863 he joined an expedition of the Dutch researcher A. T. van Capellen and researched the river basin of Bahr el Ghazal at the southern rim of the Sahara desert. Yet he never published his discoveries.

Numerous Slovenes have been doing missionary work in North and South America since the 17th century. We will mention two of them: Marko Anton Kapus from Kamna gorica and Friderik Baraga from Mala vas near Dobrnič.

Kapus arrived to Mexico in 1687 and worked among the tribes Pima and Opata. He was also one of the first Europeans to come to California. He participated in the discovery of the fact that California is a part of the American continent and not an island. His description of the journey to California was later published in Mexico in 1857. There he also published a booklet containing 267 chronograms which are an attempt to combine ethnology and history through verses.

Friderik Baraga lived and worked among North American Indians around Lake Superior, Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. From the ethnological point of view his most important book is "Popis navad in zadržanja Indijanov polnočne Amerike" (A Description of Customs and Behaviour of Indians of Midnight America, printed in Ljubljana in 1837 in Slovene and German and in Paris in 1837 and 1845 in French).

Sine this book was written for a wide circle of readers, it was done so in a popular way, and yet so exhaustively and objectively that it retained the distinctions of similar scientific works. In the introduction Baraga mentioned that his homeland had asked him to write about various Indian customs after only a year of his life among Indians, but then he did not possess enough knowledge about Indians, partly because of his poor knowledge of English and partly because he was not able to critically evaluate his experiences. Only after living among Indians for five years, when he was almost completely accustomed to their life-style and walked in his snow-shoes hundreds of kilometres from one Indian camp to another, did he decide to grant the wish of his fellow-countrymen.

The book describes material, social and spiritual culture of North American Indians. The first part deals with the discovery of America and the European colonization. It is interesting that Baraga defended the theory about the Asian origin of American Indians which – in his time – had not been proved yet. He enumerated the names of twenty large Indian tribes and noted the number of Indians who lived in the west and in the whole of North America at that time. The second part of the book deals with the "characters, customs and habits of North American Indians". Here Baraga described various anthropological and characteristic features of Indians, their settlements, food, art and crafts, hunting, fishing, weddings and married life, birth, child-raising, religion, fighting, forms of government, illnesses, medicine and burial customs. Baraga's book is thus a real ethnological monography. At the same time this is the first Slovene book which is entirely dedicated to the description of a foreign people and also one of the first Slovene professional books in general. Slovenes received it in the time when ethnology started to form as an independent science.

Baraga took into account the data provided by other authors, but he also critically evaluated their works. Contrary to English writers, he condemned the English who became savages when fighting the Indians. But he also did not idealize Indians. Although he praised their courage, loyalty to their tribes, perseverance, strength and hospitality, he enumerated their bad qualities as well.

In the first half of the 19th century, Baraga's book presented a source of important information about Indians for the whole of Europe and of course even more for Slovene readers.

During the first five years among the Ottawa Indians, Baraga learned so much about their language that he was able to preach without any help of a translator. Since the Chippewa language was similar, he learned that one even faster. In both languages he wrote and published 32 religious books (some of them were reprinted), the Chippewa grammar and a double English – Chippewa and Chippewa – English dictionary. Baraga sent his ethnological collection to the museum in Ljubljana. Some artifacts went to Vienna as well. The collections of Baraga and Knoblehar are the oldest larger ethnological collections in Slovenia.

Another Slovene missionary named Franc Pirc from Godič above Kamnik followed Baraga's footsteps.

Pirc mastered the Chippewa and Ottawa languages. He even wrote poetry in them, as well as several Ottawa religious books. His most important work is the description of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians in German entitled "Die Indianer in Nord-Amerika, ihre Lebensweise, Sitten, Gebräuche". It was published in St. Louis in 1855. The book is divided into three parts: the first is entirely ethnological, dealing with Indian life in a way similar to Baraga, although it has more chapters and also covers some new subjects (language, birth rituals, Indian councils). Among the most interesting are the chapters about Indian medicine, religion and magic. The second part describes the history of christianization of Indians and the third Pirc's missionary voyages and work among Indians. An appendix has a short statistics of Minnesota and a description of German settlements there which Pirc knew very well.

Although Pirc started to write his book after spending almost twenty years among North American Indians, it is not as good as Baraga's book, despite the fact that the latter was written after only five years of field work. Baraga's descriptions are more condensed, precise, objective and sober. Pirc was of the opinion that Indians were the descendants of the builders of the Babylon tower, although he also mentioned the theories about their Asian and Jewish origin. Furthermore his book does not list any literature he may have used. He also described Indians in his songs which he sent home to his friends. Sometimes they were written in an Indian manner on a thin layer of birch bark.

Pirc tried to promote agriculture and commerce between Indians and European settlers. While working in Minnesota he frequently notified Slovenes back home about the regions which were especially suitable for profitable economy and invited them to the States.

Thus we only roughly indicated the importance of missionary reports for the history of Slovene ethnology. Further research, oriented especially towards Slovene missionary activity in the 17th and 18th century, will undoubtedly reveal new facts. It will also be possible to discover some parallels between the history of Slovene culture research and simultaneous research concerning Non-European cultures.

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