
VISITING AND TENDING THE GRAVES WITH A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CASE-STUDY IN BREŽICE

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IZVLEČEK

Obiskovanje grobov in skrb zanje na primeru študije iz Brežice

Avtorica opisuje obiskovanje grobov in skrb zanje v obdobju koledarskega leta in tudi v obdobju življenjskega ciklusa posameznika. Obiskovanje grobov in skrb zanje sicer povezuje s pogrebi in tradicionalno določenim obdobjem žalovanja, a ju skuša raziskovati onkraj tega konteksta. Predpostavlja, da je pokopališče kot socialen (javen) in obenem zaseben prostor vključeno v vsakdanji način življenja večine. Avtorica je želela ugotoviti, katera dejanja, pričakovanja pa vrednote in drugo so bili značilni za preteklost in so še danes povezani z obiskovanjem grobov in skrbjo zanje. Njena metoda je etnografska. Terensko delo je bilo osredotočeno na Brežice, majhno mesto na jugovzhodu Slovenije. Raziskava je zajela obdobje tridesetih let tega stoletja do sedanjosti.

Iz načina obiskovanja grobov in skrbi zanje je razvidno, da (živi in umrli) sorodniki delujejo kot hierarhičen sistem in da vedno obstajajo tudi razlike med grobovi. Ljudje hierarhično razporejajo najpomembnejše grobove sorodnikov in grobove družine kot gospodinjске enote. V tem kontekstu so avtorico zanimale odločitve izvršiteljev oporoke, povezave z lastništvom, vloga oporok, vplivi na spomine sorodnikov, njihova srečanja in prepričanja med njimi. Avtorica v članku poskuša pojasniti, kaj skrb za grobove obsega in kako jo posamezniki dojemajo. Zanimal jo je tudi videz grobov in nagrobnikov, finančna struktura ter delitev skrbi za grobove med spoloma, pa čiščenje in okraševanje grobov itd. Posebno pozornost je posvečala tudi (v preteklosti) dnevu mrtvih, oziroma vseh svetih, ki je v Sloveniji javni praznik, ter cerkvenemu prazniku vseh vernih duš.

Ključne besede: pokopališča, grobovi, obiskovanje, Brežice

Key words: cemeteries, graves, visiting graves, Brežice

This article¹ discusses visiting and tending the graves as a subject for ethnological study and, on the micro level, presents the findings of the field work carried out on the same subject.

I would like to start by determining why and from what points of view I believe that visiting and tending the graves is or should be a subject for ethnology.

¹ The report is based on the author's degree dissertation, written under the mentorship of Professor Dr. Janez Bogataj at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana, 1997/98.

Visiting and tending graves as an ethnological subject

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A survey of the existing literature makes it quite clear that the cemeteries, funerals and death in general are themes dealt with by architecture (urban planning), history (including art history), archaeology, sociology and other sciences. The basis for their research is - in some fields - the place itself (cemeteries or graves), while in other sciences the attention is given to the values connected with the place or to the attitudes thought to have been common in specific historical periods, societies or geographic areas. The Slovene ethnology asserts that as a carrier of the cultural phenomena (Kremenšek 1973: 115) is by definition the subject of an ethnologist's interest and, in accordance with this definition, also man's activities related to the graves and cemeteries are important issues for the ethnological research. In my opinion ethnology should beside funeral rites, death as a part of man's life cycle, people's attitude to cemeteries and other themes, also research the visiting and tending graves. The theme is a common, everyday and obvious basis for the study of cemeteries by many sciences, but none of them researches it as a specific subject. They all take it for granted and mostly deal with its external phenomena - tombstones, epitaphs and the like.

The subject of my study can be linked to some established fields of ethnological research. The basic subject the Slovene ethnology today deals with is folk culture and the way of living (considering all classes of society and all periods) (Kremenšek 1973: 111-125). In this context we can see visiting and tending the graves primarily as a part of people's way of living. According to the ethnological systematisation (Kuret... 1978: 1-94, Bogataj... 1978: 95-118) the subject was already partially researched in the fields of traditions and customs (as part of the calendar year and of the traditions and customs related to important events in a person's life) and in the field of religion. In the traditional societies we can chiefly consider death and funeral also as ceremonies, rites of passage (Prošić - Dvornić 1982: 41-53). However, my principal interest was not in visiting and tending the graves as the traditionally claimed final (and according to Arnold Van Gennep third aggregate) stage of a tripartite funeral ritual. I concentrated on periodical visits to cemeteries (Mystical... 1975: 32-41) after the (first) period of mourning. The ethnological research of these phenomena is also sustained by the premise that an ethnologist should deal with mass, public² phenomena on the level of everyday life, such as All Saints' Day. Moreover, cemeteries are considered to be public places, open to everybody and a matter of public consensus.

There are at least two possible views when researching the tending of the graves. On the one hand, we can examine professional tending of the graves and cemeteries (undertakers, municipal services, the jobs of grave-diggers etc.) and, on the other hand, there is the private care by relatives and friends of the deceased. I would like to point out that I was primarily interested in the latter aspect. What I see as people's care of the graves are intentional acts like paying the lease and other costs related to the graves, arranging and decorating them. I also believe that individual or collective visits to the cemeteries have multiple meanings: on the one hand and though they are viewed also

² For the definition of public, see: Habermas 1989: 293-299 & Bajec 1994: 358-359.

as an obligation, the attitude towards them is positive (they contribute to the establishing and preserving one's identity - be it on the level of one's family, native place or a country identity). On the other hand and more recently, visiting can also function as something possibly negative, if no appropriate measure is observed in giving expression to or effecting such visits. In the course of time the meaning of "appropriate" has changed. Analysing individual, different and always family-related actions I tried to find out, whether there is anything we might determine as common to a majority of people, as known to nearly everybody.

In the case study of the cemeteries of Brežice, a small town in the south-east of Slovenia close to the Croatian border, I attempted to present visiting and tending the graves within the periods of the calendar year and to a minor extent also within a person's life. I sought to answer some questions about how a cemetery as a public, social and at the same time private place is a part of the way of living of the majority. I dealt, beside cyclical visits and the ways of tending the graves also with the following issues: where are people's ancestors buried - in the graves of their parents or in the new graves; what is the connection between the graves of a family or new graves and the place of birth and residence of the deceased; where are children buried; what are the values and expectations that determine visiting the graves, what do these visits mean to people...

To gather answers to these questions, I primarily relied on interviewing people. The basis for an interview was beside a questionnaire (based upon literature, sources, media) also a survey of inscriptions from tombstones of my own relatives, buried in the cemetery in Brežice, and some observations and personal participation in the events. My informants were those who (even) today tend one or more graves and who are active in this sense, but who recently had no death in the family. This excludes all those who today do not pay lease for one or more grave plots, that is children, youths, elderly people, about whom I also believe that they have their own opinion about tending graves.

At first I wanted to deal chiefly with the present condition, but after carrying out some initial research I established that this would not be possible without revisiting the past. I then decided to deal with the period from a few years before the outbreak of the Second World War to the present. In accordance with this decision I chose informants among people who lived in Brežice in this period. Some further explanation is required: Brežice was a much smaller place in the period before 1941 than it is now. This means that there are only a few families and people left who actually lived in the town in the beginning of the period and who are still alive. This was one group of informants. Before the Second World War their families (parents) were mostly merchants, inn(hotel)-keepers, tradesmen. Accidentally, it was established that before the Second World War most of them were nationally conscious Slovenes with a Catholic background. Only one of the informants was (in the eyes of others rather than in his own) a member of the higher middle class and sympathised with the Germans. All the parents of the informants had moved to Brežice in the period between the two world wars. The second group were people now living in the town, but only since 1981, when the area selected for the case study was incorporated into the town. Earlier, this part consisted of villages and most people were farmers.

The cemeteries of Brežice

To begin the presentation of the findings of my field research let me provide some brief information on the cemeteries of Brežice³ throughout history. It could be said that the cemeteries in the town in general followed the tendencies described in literature and related to the history of attitudes towards death. In short: from the 12th century onwards (Lapuh 1990: 18 & Škaler, Savnik 1976: 25 & Pokopališča... 1916: 339), there has always been one main municipal cemetery which until the end of the 18th century was situated around the parish church. After a major flood caused by the nearby Sava river, the cemetery was transferred to the borders of the town, that is until 1901 (Pokopališča... 1916: 340 & Lapuh 1990: 22 & Tiller 1937: 4), when due to the ill-suited land and the lack of space, the graveyard had become too small. A new cemetery was established in the southern border of the town and is still in use today.

In the course of time there have been other cemeteries in Brežice and their history both confirms and reflects the common historical attitudes to death and cemeteries in general and as described in literature. The Franciscans built a monastery and a church in the town in the 17th century. They also had their own cemetery for which it has not been established yet until when it was used, but it is certain that it was no longer in use after the early 19th century (Tiller 1937: 10). Until 1775 also lay people were buried in the Franciscan church (Lapuh 1990: 26 & Pokopališča... 1916: 339), the site of the oldest graves in the parish of Brežice. In 1941 the church was demolished and the Franciscans were banned from the town. There still is a small Franciscan filial church in a nearby village that also had a cemetery (Lapuh 1990: 28) around it. This cemetery was used until the second half of 19th century. Sources confirm the existence of other churches (some of which are gone) in or near the town, but they do not refer to cemeteries around or near them⁴.

The new cemetery south of the city was the church property until 1955 (Škaler, Savnik 1976: 13), when the municipality of Brežice was founded. In the same year the municipality became the administrator of the land (until the 1980s the cemetery was managed by a special municipal service) while the church continued to be the owner of the greater part (and the municipality of the smaller one). The churchyard was laid out in accordance with generally accepted principles: it was surrounded by a wall or trees and divided into sections (for wealthy people, non-Catholics, Franciscans, dead-born babies and sinners etc.), and most of the tombstones are aligned east-west. Until the 1960s and 70s there were tombstones on the graves near the wall, others were mounds with wooden or iron crosses⁵. The big cross in the middle of the churchyard was erect-

³ The inhabitants of Brežice and those from its environs call the cemetery in Brežice “pokopališe” (colloquial), “britof” (German: *Friedhof*) and, in sources from before the Second World War I also encountered the expression “mirodvor”. The latter does not appear in any Slovene or Croatian dictionary, but I would like to point out its similarity with the name of one of Zagreb’s cemeteries (the capital of Croatia) “Mirogoj” (meaning perhaps a peaceful grove).

⁴ See: Tiller 1939: 12 & Tiller 1937: 11 & Lapuh 1990: 19 & Škaler, Savnik 1976: 26.

⁵ Today, when all plots in the cemetery should have equal value, informants consider a “nice spot for the grave” a plot that is seen from all sides, with an easy approach, clean (not near the waste) and which is not sloping - so that the soil stays in place...



The abandoned grave with a plastic note from the municipal service, which I attached behind Christ's left hand (Brežice, January 1998, photo: M. Habinc). ♦ Zapuščen grob s plastičnim obvestilom komunalne službe, pritrjenim na Kristusovo levo roko (Brežice, januar 1998, foto: M. Habinc).



Note from an abandoned grave, asking the owner (according to the text of the note - not the leaseholder), to fill out the data on the lease on the back of the note and hand it over to the municipal service (Brežice, January 1998, photo: M. Habinc). ♦ Obvestilo na zapuščenem grobu, ki sprašuje njegovega lastnika (kot je napisano na njem – ne njegovega najemnika), da izpolni podatke o njegovem najemu na zadnji strani istega obvestila in ga izroči komunalni službi (Brežice, januar 1998, foto: M. Habinc).

ed in 1901. The cemetery also had a mortuary chapel but until recently (mid-1980s) it was used only for people who died of certain diseases.

Today there are 1507 grave plots in the cemetery of Brežice⁶ and most of them are single or double graves. In the northern wing of the cemetery an area is dedicated to the partisans and civilians, victims of the Second World War. In the southern wing of the cemetery there is still a special section reserved for the graves of children. Today it presents a problem to the municipal service in the sense of managing the graveyard as a whole. There have never been proposals (as sources told me because there was neither need nor wish) for an urn garden or for a place for dispersing ashes. The first urn niches were erected in the cemetery in 1989-90 and today there are 60. From the evidence of people who pay the lease for grave plots in the cemetery of Brežice I tried to establish the structure of the cemetery: for 50% of the graves the citizens of Brežice pay the lease. Further - a comparison of the numbers of leaseholders from Dolenjska and Štajerska (the border between the two regions is the Sava river) which also belong to different dioceses, shows that the majority of the leaseholders are from Štajerska (from the villages or towns). This allows us to conclude that the cemetery in Brežice is used mainly by the families from the right bank of the Sava.

⁶ The number is approximate: according to the map of the cemetery of Brežice from 1996 there should be 1507 plots, but the figure differs from the number of leaseholders (October 1997: 1280 - a leaseholder can appear several times in the evidence if he or she is paying the lease for more than one grave). The municipal service in Brežice does not have any information about the number of abandoned graves (for which the lease has not been paid for a long period). I consider this situation to reflect also a part of the attitude towards the cemetery in Brežice and more generally towards death (as still personalised) in the new state.

Visiting and tending the graves with reference to the Brežice case study

In this presentation of the findings from the research of visiting and tending the graves in Brežice I highlight only those which I found to be the most common and applicable to a majority of people, while the article deals much less or not at all with details and descriptions of, for instance, events like All Saints' Day. When dealing with visiting and tending the graves in general, we need to distinguish between various groups of the graves. The first distinction must be made between the graves someone tends and those people only visit (bring flowers, lights candles). The two acts can be joined, but usually there are less graves that are tended than such that are merely visited.

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A further subdivision can be made into the two groups of the graves, similarly as we use term a family. A family (Flandrin 1986: 10-11) can either mean a nuclear family or an extended family including relatives. In this context we can distinguish between the graves of the nuclear families⁷ and those of extended families.

In the first case at least one parent of the children of a nuclear family rests in the grave. If we presume that the children of this fictional family are married, then every couple is related to the two **extended-family graves** - one belonging to the woman's/mother's line of relatives (her parent/s) and the other is the grave in which the father's/man's parent/s is (are) buried. All those related by blood or marital ties automatically become members of two different sets of relatives. But the attitude towards all relatives is never equal. Every family in its entity means and symbolises an arrangement of a special kind - a hierarchy (Rabuzzi 1987: 277). The same is true, in my opinion, of the tending of the graves: the spouses usually pay more attention to the one of the two graves belonging to an extended family. Which grave receives more attention mostly depends on the patrilocal or matrilocal residence (or on the proximity of their residence to the place where the spouse's parents live or are buried), on the kind a nuclear family or extended, and in general on emotional, material and other bonds within one line of relatives. When a person is single than his or her extended-family grave is automatically the grave of his or her parents.

Usually the tending of this extended-family grave is in the hands of a couple which through marriage also adopted the care for the household of the respective partner's parents. This has always been considered as something common, self-evident and not deemed to be worth mentioning or to be included in wills or donation. It has not been the rule that the oldest son or daughter should be the one to continue to live in the parental home. If the children decide not to live at (or near) the place where their parents are buried, they, at least in some cases, in Brežice pay someone to tend the family grave. Usually, the children share the costs and visit the grave at least once a year (generally on the occasion of All Saints' Day). Informants also mentioned the more or less present cases of exuma-

⁷ My informants (from the basic point of view of a married couple, used in the research, i.e. both partners are also viewed as somebody's children) did not distinguish between these two groups, they labelled both as "family" graves. But in the interviews it became obvious that the division is acceptable and in many cases exists.

tion and transportation to another place, closer to the residence of the children of the deceased. Such graves of an extended family are the centre of understanding, of meetings between relatives as well as the source or place of arguments - though not quite of arguments about the graves themselves; instead hidden animosity may become obvious (for example when relatives do not want to meet at a specific grave).

Visiting and tending the graves of an extended family also determines the scope of memory involving relatives. It is usual that the last two generations, including the grandparents, are commemorated. Dead brothers or sisters are also more or less commemorated (of any of the parents, but less their partners), especially if they were (in some cases) victims of the Second World War.

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Before the Second World War and until approximately the 60s parents generally buried their deceased children in a special children's section of the cemetery for one specific reason - because many of them had migrated to Brežice and/or did not have their own family grave (neither as nuclear or extended family) at the cemetery yet. In recent times things are different: "*Nowadays everybody makes sure where their grave will be before they die.*" (FN - Lepšina 1997: 24). When a couple establishes a family of their own they already reserve (though in most cases only in their mind) a place at the cemetery for themselves, for their nuclear family (Sore 1985: 203). In the past most of the relatives of my informants did not exhume and transfer the mortal remains of their deceased family members to the new graves. It was, however, a general custom for people to have their names and dates of birth and/or death inscribed on the tombstones of the nuclear or extended-family graves. In most cases it has always been considered (for example for dead children) to be unusual when this is not done, because the family ought to be at least symbolically together in one place. When a nuclear family leases its own grave, the relatives usually stop tending the children's graves in the special section. After some time most of them were abandoned and leased by other people.

People's recollections of who had a tombstone placed and a grave arranged are weaker among the inhabitants of the town's environs than among the townspeople. The latter exactly remember placing (even several) tombstones, what were they like... and recently people even take photographs of all the graves of their relatives so that they can preserve them for memory. Informants interpreted this as preserving information about one's relatives.

Nowadays a **family grave** is something everybody "wants" and the trend is connected with the feeling of private ownership (Vincent 1980: 157/50). By the term family grave I understand the grave of one nuclear family or one individual. This kind of grave can coincide with an extended-family grave or can be the abandoned grave of (usually, but not necessarily) relatives or acquaintances. Regarding the latter case: the tending of a grave is not necessarily officially agreed (the lease may still be paid by someone else). What is more important when someone considers to take a lease on such a grave is the attachment to the deceased and the material bonds with him or her, as well as a feeling of being obliged to make sure that the grave is always well tended. In this sense graves are often viewed as a real estate. There is also a third possibility for

acquiring a grave for a nuclear family - a completely new grave at the cemetery in a spot meant for graves and where no one is buried yet.

I have already mentioned that in recent years (twenty or more) people usually determine where their family grave shall be during their lifetime. To this I may add that there are some graves (approximately 10) in the cemetery in Brežice which have no inscriptions on the tombstones (some have names inscribed on them, but without the dates of death). Nevertheless, these graves are more or less well kept (with flowers, people tending them etc.). They are graves of nuclear families and informants say that this custom was not known before the Second World War and for some decades after it; as far as they recall the custom appeared some ten or fifteen years ago.

The two groups of graves mentioned do not mean that they are the only options to be buried - they are merely (and were especially in the past) the most common practice. But where someone is buried recently and increasingly depends on people's mobility and their life story or fate. The principal factor in deciding where to be buried - the informants were quite explicit in this matter - is the understanding and relationship with (dead and living) relatives, regardless where they live or where they are buried.

Besides graves of the two groups mentioned people may honour someone's wish or feel obliged (that is in the after-war period) to also tend other graves - of friends, relatives... Nevertheless, I found out that there still exists some hierarchy in tending and visiting the graves. The hierarchy can be compared to that existing between living relatives or people in general. Interviews made it clear that throughout the whole period under discussion people primarily visited and tended the graves of their nuclear and extended family (or, considering also singles). I have to mention also the graves of deceased partners). Second in the hierarchy are the graves of relatives, friends, acquaintances... but the occasional visits have always been concentrated on important dates like All Saints' Day, the anniversary of someone's death, Christmas or New Years' Eve, Easter and the name-day of the deceased (or his or her birthday).

Another hypothesis I put forward in my dissertation is - as mentioned above - that visiting cemeteries and tending the graves is a **part or a way of preserving one's identity** - on the level of the family, native place or country. This also explains why as far as Brežice is concerned I have no evidence to state that people do not tend the graves of their ancestors⁸ - as seems to be the case with some people in Western Europe and the USA. In my research I also included the old cemetery which was officially abandoned in 1901. People had the opportunity to transfer tombstones or exhume the mortal remains of the deceased but very few (one of the richest families) opted for the first possibility (moving tombstones) and no one for the latter. Nevertheless, until the end of the Second World War, there were still some tombstones on the graves in the old cemetery.

⁸ In the Christian areas of the Western countries people still occasionally visit the cemetery. In the cities, however, people visit the cemetery only once a year, on the occasion of All Saints' Day (Vincent 1980: 20). According to the data for Slovenia referring to 1997 (Slovenci... 1997: 1) one third of the respondents to a survey occasionally visit the cemetery once a month; a little under one third every week or even more frequently and 5,3 % only once a year. The latter data probably confirm the research carried out in Brežice. See further few examples, primarily related to the national and local identity.

Most of the people I spoke with remember the cemetery because of the tombstone of Radoslav Razlag, an intellectual and fighter for the rights of the Slovenians, who died in the late 19th century. In the period preceding the Second World War his grave continued to be decorated on the All Saints' Day by the school children who had to bring flowers from their home gardens⁹. On the same occasion people also visited other graves there, bringing flowers and lighting candles. The informants were, however, predominantly children of the immigrants of the town, who did not have their own nuclear or extended-family graves. According to the register of the church announcements from the 1930s prayers were also told in the old cemetery on the All Saints' Day.

154 In spite of the fact that the cemetery was officially abandoned, and a sports stadium was built next to it, that a part of it was rearranged into a fruit garden (Tiller 1939: 13) and that some informants remember it as a quiet spot for people in love as well as a good place for catching small birds, in the minds (and stories¹⁰) of people it still remained a more or less sacred place until recently. In this context we can also understand why some people (though not a majority) were against building the stadium next to the old cemetery.

People preserve their identity also through social contacts in a cemetery since it is a public place. Even communicating with the deceased can, in a way, be considered "socialising". However, if we agree that socialising is possible only between living social beings, then it includes people meeting and greeting one another in cemeteries on occasions when their primary reason for being there is to visit the graves of their family. In the past people used to greet everybody they met in the cemetery, but recently they only greet people they know from other places and have talked to on other occasions. More than just saying "hello" occurs between people who are well acquainted. On some occasions - for example when there is a larger group of visitors (usually relatives) in the cemetery, on certain holidays... disputes and/or loud laughter may occur between them or between the group and other visitors. The situation is specific when the groups consist also of children (youths) or distant relatives. Adults (those who regularly visit graves and take tending them) usually try to demonstrate not only what has to be done at a grave, but also explain who is buried where and what the deceased's relation to the nuclear or extended family was. It is further specific of women - who prevail among the people tending the graves¹¹ that they convey the family's history to the

⁹ See more in: Počkar 1998: 308, 347.

¹⁰ In 1997, for instance, I was told a story about a white woman who was walking to the town together with three sisters. Only one of the sisters was able to see the white woman, who after approximately two kilometers left them by turning to the place where the old cemetery was. Informants date the event approximately prior to the Second World War - but the story is still known to the family members (and recently told to children).

¹¹ For the whole observed period and for all strata the following division of labour reasonably applies: tending graves (or, in the higher middle classes, organising the tending) was women's business in pre-war times and in most cases still is. Observations from 1997 show that 57 % of the visitors were women (cleaning the graves, changing the flowers and lighting the candles). In most cases (39%) they went alone to the cemetery, the second largest group were the couples and the third were elderly single men (Habinc 1998: 81). Men tend graves themselves, if they are widowers or single, in other cases they organise the lease of the grave, help out when more demanding renovations (cleaning, renovating frames, plates, tombstones ...) are required.

young ones by regularly taking them to the cemetery. Communication varies from individual to individual, but cemeteries are generally held to be among other things public places (like churches, streets ...) - though primarily by the elderly people nowadays - where they meet and greet and which require a specific demeanour.

It is commonly known and accepted that when people went to the cemetery in the past they used to wear their so-called Sunday (or mass) outfit which was not necessarily black. Men had to take off their hats and as mentioned in a church announcement¹², they were supposed not to smoke or talk in a loud voice. Similarly, it is today still important for people to be dressed "properly, decently" - though it is on the other hand quite acceptable that when people go to arrange a grave they wear comfortable clothes of the kind they wear when gardening. If there happens to be a funeral at the time someone is visiting a grave he (she) will be quick about it or even abandon the idea. If, however, the funeral concerns someone known to the visitor (perhaps only by name or by his place of residence) some informants would join the mourners and attended the ritual for some time. This practice continues in recent times.

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The research also investigated and revealed some restrictions (taboos) connected with cemeteries and graves. What should be done or not, however, differs from reality. For instance, one should not step on or across a grave ("*don't squeeze the deceased, don't thrash him...*" FN - Habinc 1997: 7) - but for practical reasons this occurs very often and on different occasions. It is further unacceptable to "borrow" (pilfer) flowers, vases or candles from other graves, but all informants told me that they know of at least some instances when this occurred. Elderly people said that the punishment for such acts is that the deceased will appear visiting the perpetrator one night and ask for the flowers or a candle from his or her grave. Other taboos are sitting on the plates or tombstones, bringing one's bicycle or dog - but people continue to do this. Nobody approves of the practice but most of the pre-war inhabitants of the towers expressed their disagreement with it without having been asked. The only time people visit a cemetery at night - at least in the last quarter of a century - is the All Saints' Day. Some consider this to be the only time of the day when there is peace in the cemetery and when it does not matter how one looks.

There are also stories about cemeteries people tell their grandchildren, but this has become rare even among those who used to live in the environs of the town. People who lived in the town before the war remember such stories from their grandparents, servants, teachers etc. But most of them do not pass them on. The most common story¹³ is that about a man who went to the cemetery at night to test his courage. His friends gave him a stake so he could stick it in the ground of the cemetery to prove that he was really there, but he was so nervous that he pierced his own trousers when sticking it in the ground. Thinking that the hand of a dead person was holding his leg he became totally paralysed. The next morning his friends found him dead in the cemetery. There are also local stories¹⁴ about the heavenly chariots flying over the cemetery and about a

¹² See: Oznanila 1927-1934: 2. 11. 1930.

¹³ Mentioned (in more or less the same words) in: Smerdel 1980: 145, FN - Lepšina 1997: 25-26, FN - Poljanšek 1997: 35.

¹⁴ See: FN - Vidmar 1997: 69-70, FN - Lepšina 1997: 26.

pre-war grave-digger, of whom some people believed that he used to boil skulls from the cemetery at night to call the spirits of the deceased. One day he hung himself in one of the Brežice's churches.

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The interviews confirmed the thesis put forward in sources¹⁵ - **how a grave is tended depends on its actual form.** In the past when most graves were mounds the grass on them had to be cut regularly; graves with flower-beds needed to be weeded, and in nowadays some people quite honestly stated that they chose a grave with just a tombstone and a stone or concrete plate because it needs no special tending or gardening etc. The same is the true of the urn graves¹⁶, which first appeared in the cemetery of Brežice in 1989. But this has no impact on the (ir-)regularity of visits. Before the war and much in the same way as today, people used to visit cemeteries individually or with their partners or children, and only very rarely in bigger groups. Basically, visiting a grave has always been an individual, emotional act, which can, however, turn into a social event in the cemetery itself. Referring to the entire period, from the 1930s to the present, about half of the informants mentioned also special fixed days (Sunday afternoon, once a week, after morning mass etc.) when they used to go or still go to the cemetery. In the past, it was more common that the men from peasant families of the town's environs used to visit the cemetery more often. They used to do it after the mass or when going to town (on a bicycle) simply because they were more mobile. This was not common with the townspeople because the distance to the cemetery was shorter. But even their visits were - as nowadays viewed by the informants - quite rare and usually a part of the usual Sunday stroll. People started to visit the graves more often in the 60s and 70s when there was more money around and more spare time to do it.

Tending the graves before the war mostly involved their arrangement: hoeing or weeding, cutting grass, decorating graves with flowers and candles. How often people did this depended on the individual, his or her social class, how close the cemetery was and how much time they spend. When asked to recall how often they themselves or their parents tended the graves in the past, most informants stated that until around the 60s - they generally made comparisons with the present - that was not very often, approximately once a month, but in most cases even less, that is only on the most important (already mentioned) dates concerning the deceased. It was however, common as it is today that people started to clean the graves and prepare them for the All Saints' Day about a month in advance. Today some people wash the plates and tombstones with water, polish them with oil to make them shine, renew the colour of the letters in inscriptions ... If there is a flower-bed, they plant new flowers as they used to do before 1941, but the custom saw general revival only in the 1960s. On the same occasion they also strew new white gravel.

¹⁵ Regarding this issue I refer mostly to: Kocjančič 1980: 56.

¹⁶ One of the informants stated that he had heard about a cremation that took place before the Second World War. The story goes that a German chemist from Brežice wanted to be cremated and his ashes thrown into the Sava. In the past decade - according to representatives of the municipal service of Brežice, the urn funerals have become increasingly common. People prefer them because they are cheaper and "cleaner" (as I was told by informants - you don't see decaying body and that's why goodbye is easier). Urns can be kept in a grave intended for a coffin or in a special urn niche which occupies less space and can be tended as any other grave. In the latter case the decoration is concentrated on a smaller area, though a flower bed can be arranged, and an urn grave needs almost no cleaning or arranging.



Christmas and a New Year decoration (Brežice, January 1998, photo: M. Habine). ♦ Okraševanje v času božiča in novega leta (Brežice, januar 1998, foto: M. Habine).

For the rest of the year tending the graves means that women usually twice a year (in Spring and Autumn) plant flowers and that after winter some people renew the tombstones (if winter has damaged them). Minor damages are repaired by the men in the family, but if larger pieces have broken off of the tombstones or plates, professionals are paid to do it. Practically nobody protects the plates or tombstones during the winter with wooden covers or the like. What people do is protect the flowers from the cold with paper or plastic sheets.

Tending also includes decoration: before the Second World War graves were mostly decorated for the All Saints' Day and for the funerals. On the occasional visits people used to bring flowers, which they put in the vases or simply laid then on the grave. They also used to bring small white candles. Townspeople used to bring flowers from their gardens or they bought them at the florist's. After the world war wreaths became more frequent as a decoration, used not only for funerals (as was common before the war). Flower arrangements appeared as decorations in the 70s. Townspeople bought them at the florist's (some also in nearby Zagreb or in other towns) while women from the villages around Brežice mostly made them themselves from flowers they grew in their gardens. Before using flower work women also stuck flowers, pine or cypress twigs of pines or cypresses in the ground. They arranged them in different forms - hearts, circles, crosses etc. Women used this way of decorating the graves quite generally until the early 70s, but when there was any "emergency situation" as informants called it (for instance when flowers were stolen from a grave) they also used this method in later times. In recent years home-made or purchased flower arrangements made of dried, plastic or exotic flowers are popular.

On the eve of Christmas (or a New Year) people used to (and many still do) take a few pine branches to the graves, ornamented with Christmas tree decorations. Sometimes these bouquets look like small Christmas trees.

Before the Second World War many people, mostly the inhabitants of the town's environs, decorated the graves - some townspeople continue to do so - also for the Easter or Palm-Sunday. They brought a branch of an olive-tree or (more recently) specially decorated flower arrangements or bouquets with candles shaped into an Easter egg. People however stated that it was always risky to leave such rich decoration in the cemetery because it might be stolen. In Spring and in general throughout the year the flowers on the graves follow the seasons: Spring flowers (hellebore, meadow saffron, bell-flowers...) were planted or brought to the cemetery.

Before the Second World War only thin slender white candles were put on the graves without a box to put them in. They were still used sometimes until approximately five years ago¹⁷. Richer townspeople remember that before the Second World War candles were put in boxes and that there were "eternal lights", either home-made or bought, but they were very rare. Today many people use special electric lights.

People consider a grave to be neglected when the weed on it is half a meter high (FN - Lepšina 1997: 25) and to be well kept if there are fresh flowers on it and a

¹⁷ They were in use mostly at the Day of Remembrance of the Death (today's formal name for the former All Saint's Day) because at that occasion people "needed" a lot of candles and the white thin ones were the cheapest.



Spring flowers (tulips, hellebores, bell-flowers) on a grave (Brežice, April 1998, photo: M. Habinc). ♦ Pomladne rože (tulipani, teloh, zvončki) na grobu (Brežice, april 1998, foto: M. Habinc).

burning candle. Graves are supposed to be decorated with flowers and candles and nothing else because flowers symbolise love and candle's life¹⁸. Roses and carnations are thought to be the most appropriate flowers for a cemetery, but this is usually a matter of individual taste. If there are children buried in the grave, the proper colour is thought to be white both for flowers and candles. The cost of arranging and decorating the graves has never had any major effect on the family budget. Informants often said: "*A funeral is expensive, but tending the graves ... it isn't worth mentioning.*"¹⁹ Costs increase when a grave has to be repaired or renovated, but people usually save money for the purpose. People who accept to tend a grave, also decide about its appearance - the tombstone, the inscription etc. Even before the war it was obviously of major importance to the townspeople how a grave looked. On the one hand they may have had less time (for instance inn-keepers) to tend a grave - before and after the war they also paid women from the surrounding villages to cut the grass on the graves and the like - but on the other hand they renovated the appearance of the graves more often. It has always been important what natural stone to choose for the tombstone, what will be written on it, where it will be bought and from whom. And the grave also had to be in a good spot, meaning near or by the cemetery wall. Some informants valued the artistic outlook of the tombstones and intend to keep them the way they were intended to look like. Other people think that a grave

¹⁸ See for example: FN- Habinc 1997: 6.

¹⁹ *ibid.*



The crowd in the Brežice's cemetery on the All Saints' Day (Brežice, November 1, 1997, photo: M. Habinc). ♦
Gneča na pokopališču v Brežicah na dan mrtvih (Brežice, 1. november 1997, foto: M. Habinc).

needs renovation when the stone does not look new any more or when it is damaged, that is approximately every 40 years²⁰.

When talking about tending the graves in general, people often said that in the past twenty years there has been an explicit tendency towards exaggeration and material symbols (the All Saints' Day was dubbed the Fur Coat Day for instance).

They criticised not only the emphasis on the appearance - referring to it as pretentious - but also irregular visiting. Obviously visiting and tending the graves related to the perception of others and can be valued in two ways: connected with an obligation and duty in the sense of something positive (because of the identification with the family, the village, town etc.) and as something negative when there is no "proper limit" in the expression or material form of the tending. In the course of time this so-called appropriate limit changed in accordance with the general economic and ideological changes in the society (post-war "modesty" turned into "pretentiousness" in the 70s).

²⁰ It is also a period in which a generation, which is tendings for grave, changes.

Conclusion

The work carried out in the case study with the classical ethnological methods of observation, participation and intertwining offered some general data and some descriptions. But the links to a specific time sequence or to professional or stratified groups of the town's inhabitants are quite loose. It would be better to pick out a shorter period or to concentrate on just one or two social classes. Particulars have hardly any value for the present because of the increasingly diverse population living in the town or buried in its cemetery.

The picture described in this article is also a picture shaped by informant's belief. In order to establish more certain facts qualitatively and quantitatively, the findings would have to be verified with methods evaluating people's statements. To what extent is what they reveal actually a true, "objective" picture and to what extent is it embellished? In my opinion - this might be a direction for further research on the subject - that drawing up family trees of dead relatives may be a valuable method. Similarly as is done for the living relatives when dealing with the family as one of the basic ethnological subjects, we could draw genealogical trees of the dead relatives. Following a general genealogical tree we could go back into the past for a few generations and collect data where the relatives were buried, why in that place, what is written about them (if anything) on the tombstones etc. By doing this for a substantial sample of people from one period and one social class, I believe the thesis mentioned in my report could be either confirmed or refuted.

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BESEDA O AVTORICI

162 Mateja Habinc, dipl. etnologinja in novinarka, podiplomska študentka antropologije vsakdanjega življenja na Fakulteti za podiplomski humanistični študij v Ljubljani (ISH). Že v času študija je objavila več strokovnih prispevkov. Od leta 1998 je odgovorna urednica Glasnika Slovenskega etnološkega društva. Trenutno se ukvarja s problematiko spomina.

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