

Traces of the Virgin Mary

Tatiana
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Ed.



in Post- Communist Europe

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Photo: *Virgin Mary and religious statues
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03 Manifestations of Marian Devotion in the Czech Republic – the Past and Present

Markéta Holubová

Czech society is considered, along with the former East Germany, one of the most secularised in the world. The aim of this chapter¹ is to outline not only the historical preconditions of this opinion, but also to expand on the existing partial results of ethnological research focused on contemporary changes in the religiosity and the manifestations of Marian devotion in the Czech Republic after 1989.

Secularisation of Czech Society and the Origin of ‘Implicitly Religious Forms’²

The specific features of Czech society within the context of (Western) Europe consist not so much of the existence and extent of declarative atheism (Nešpor 2004; Hamplová 2000) that is present almost everywhere and is accompanied by a refusal of traditional churches and their social activities, but rather its historical consequences. Certainly, we should not search for the roots of negative posture towards religion in the heritage of Czech reformation. First, the Hussite movement was, despite all its national and social inclinations, first and foremost a religious reform movement (Šmahel 1993 (IV): 144–168). In addition, after the Battle of the White Mountain had begun, along with forced re-Catholicisation, positive Catholic church policy represented by Baroque religiosity also facilitated the mass spreading and dominance of Tridentine Catholicism in the course of the 17th century (Royt 1999; Nešpor 2006; Zemek 2006: 357–409). On the other hand, clandestine Protestantism, which had outlasted until the 18th century even after the issue of the Patent of Tolerance (1781) and led to the formation of the Czech Lutheran and Reform Churches, was only marginal.

1 This study arose with institutional support RVO: 68378076, The Czech Academy of Sciences, Institute of Ethnology.

2 ‘Implicit religion’ is a concept that seeks to overcome the categorical division between religious and non-religious behaviour. The term has been used by Edward Bailey since 1968 to refer particularly (but not exclusively) to ‘secular faith’. It points to that aspect of humanity which may find expression in organized religion (or in anti-religious movements) or in behaviour that is analogous to such religion, either in traditional societies or in industrial and post-industrial societies (see Bailey 2011).

From a contemporary point of view, there lies a great paradox: foreign observers of the Early Modern Era complained about the intense religiosity of the Czechs and its magical and superstitious character (Maur 2003: 89–90). However, the Hussite movement, or rather its nationalist re-interpretation of the 19th century, certainly instigated the present-day atheism. Dislike for official Catholicism, which formally remained as the majority religion, as well as the de-Christianisation of Czech society, can be traced back to the mid-19th century. This trend was connected with nationalism, as mentioned above, along with its primarily historical delimitation.

Czech nationalism arose as a product of the crisis of values at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. An intellectual project aiming for the creation of new social and symbolic ties that would substitute the bigoted Catholicism in this period was still professed by the majority of the population (Hroch 2003; Nešpor 2005). Even though there were many Catholic priests among its first protagonists – this was the result of the interconnection of the Enlightened and national-revivalist streams of thought – Czech nationalism did not have a religious focus. Rather, at least in some cases, it focused on explicitly anti-religious or anti-Catholic aspects, since Catholicism, which had a markedly majority confession, could be used as a ‘model’ of the Christian Church or even be identified with Catholicism. Furthermore, Czech nationalism was built predominantly on historical roots: it legitimised itself by accentuating the past grandeur and importance of the Czech state and its legal, social and religious institutions, as well as its political and military successes in an international context. However, these institutions and these results created a great part of the revivalists and through them, Czech society as a whole soon realised³ – owing, we must add, to the agitation of newly permitted Protestant churches – it was not Catholic, but predominantly Hussite/Protestant. Back in the first half of the 19th century there was a split between national and confessional identity, and this trend markedly increased with the rise of liberalism (Putna 1998: 35). In contrast to Germany, there was neither any

substantive wave of conversions to Protestantism nor a spreading of the Old Catholic movement. Instead, there was an increase of purely formal Catholicism, denominated as 'parish register Catholicism' by T. G. Masaryk (Masaryk 2000).⁴ It consisted of liberal opinions and either little or no participation at religious manifestations which were – often in a negative tone – presented as 'folklore anachronisms', typical for village populations (Hojda and Prahla 2003).

During the 19th century and up the beginning of the 20th, massive secularisation took place. Religious identity was substituted primarily by national identity, as well as by class identity and a 'scientific' worldview. This process found its historical-philosophical justification in the form of the Czech history concept, elaborated by F. Palacký and T. G. Masaryk. In this concept, the Baroque and post-Reformation period was briskly refuted in favour of the supposed connection of modern society and the Protestant-Humanist and Czech national tradition (Rak 1979; Schnur 1993: 51–55). Great dissemination of this concept was made possible through the historical novels of A. Jirásek. In the 19th century, Czechs thus became liberals, nationalists or socialists. At the same time, religion ceased to play its former role and was assigned only the role of occasionally sought-after, but unnecessary 'folklore' anachronism. Church religiosity was understood only as a 'medieval relic'. This development was, of course, corroborated by the European secularisation of the 20th century. The newly established Czecho-

3 Of great consequence was the language-literary orientation of the revivalists, ipso facto referring to the grandeur of the Czech culture in the period before the Battle of the White Mountain (and, in the spirit of Enlightenment, denigrating the Baroque culture), as well as the Romantic disinterest of the second generation of revivalists – led by Josef Jungmann – in institutionalised religiosity. There is no place here to analyse the present-day discussions of Czech (literary) historians on the importance of the Baroque for the formation of national culture that had begun in the first half of the 20th century. For implicitly religious inclinations of the Czech revival see, for example, David 2001; for other European nations see Aston 2002: 286–291.

4 Czech Germans called it 'böhmisch-katholischer Glaube' [Czech Catholic Thinking], see Kaiserová 2003: 72.

slovak Republic sought (not always with success) to apply the most 'progressive' model of secularisation and separation of Church and State, as realised in France (Rémond 2003: 29).

Czech Religiosity during the Communist Era

The rise of the Communist dictatorship after 1948 bolstered these trends and used them – mostly unmodified – for its own benefit. The non-religious and anti-religious components were accentuated, while the forms of 'implicit religiosity' stayed preserved and Church organisations were forced to face systematic repression (see, for example, *Církevní procesy padesátých let*, 2002; Cuchra 1999). This sped up the process of formal departure from churches. At the same time, Communist authorities were well aware that some activities could not be repressed. Therefore, they set about in taking them over. So-called national pilgrimages can serve as an example (Balík and Hanuš 2007: 271–274). In reality, these were not successors of religious initiatives of previous eras; they served to express loyalty to the Communist system, refute the policies of the Vatican and, finally, to establish a national Church. These Communist initiatives could be divided into two types. Firstly, traditional Catholic activities were taken advantage of (for example, holidays to old pilgrimage sites). Secondly, new traditions were created, for example, large-scale peace manifestations.

Predominantly in the 1950s, but also in the next decades, any religious manifestations were perceived negatively. The pressures from part of the regime fell not only on individual believers, but also on the places venerated by Christians for centuries, which constituted part of the treasury of our history. The lack of respect of the totalitarian powers for many sacral monuments had an impact on pilgrimage sites as well. Their background, mostly provided by monks and nuns, was paralysed by the famous 'Operation K' which, at the beginning of the 1950s, aimed at an irretrievable liquidation of monastic life in Czechoslovakia (*Církevní procesy padesátých let*, 2002). Pilgrimage festivities were forcibly

reduced, and in the course of time, became only gleams of their former splendour. The places of pilgrimage in the frontier regions, where access was prohibited or considerably complicated and which were, in addition, gravely affected by the expulsion of German inhabitants, who were the main bearers of folk religiosity in these areas, were isolated and decayed progressively. The negative attitude of Communists to places of pilgrimage and tradition culminated in the destruction of some of these sites. The best known case is of the 'ordered' vandalism and subsequent blasting away of the famous Church of Our Lady Auxiliary in the middle of the forest above the village of Zlaté Hory⁵ near Jeseník, in 1973 (Odehnal 2004: 236). However, this did not suffice to forestall the persistence of the pilgrimage tradition and the interest of the pilgrims, even though it is obvious that, in these decades, the various forms of pilgrimages did not develop, but only existed.

The period of 1970–1989, commonly known as the period of 'normalisation', brought about negative and positive changes in this area. On the one hand, the activities and hopes of the 'Prague Spring'⁶ failed also in the area of religion. On the other hand, especially at the beginning of the 1980s, religious activities were gradually liberated from the state and party interventions. The pilgrimage to Velehrad in 1985 was of enormous consequence from the point of view of Catholic religiosity, in which more than 200,000 believers participated (Balík and Hanuš 2007: 276–277). From this year on, a majority of Catholic Christians could no longer tolerate the Communist 'peace' and other phrases, and there were increasing numbers of those who through participation in pilgrimages openly demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the regime. At the same time, we should mention the phenomenon of unofficial pil-

5 See, for example, http://en.ms-dovolena.cz/zlate-hory/13_8840_church-of-our-lady-auxiliary/ (accessed on September 15, 2019).

6 The 'Prague Spring' was a short period of liberalisation in Czechoslovakia between January 5, 1968 and August 21, 1968. The Prague Spring came to a violent end after the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies invaded the country.

grimages that took place in the course of the 1970s and 1980s. These were organised by active individuals or informal Christian fellowships, usually under the cover of organised bus excursions to cultural monuments. In their course, important places of pilgrimage were visited – for example, Svatá Hora near Příbram,⁷ Stará Boleslav,⁸ Svatý Kopeček near Olomouc,⁹ Velehrad,¹⁰ etc.

In the latter half of the 20th century, Communist Czechoslovakia also faced the phenomenon of private revelations, however, only in a marginal way. One of the most prominent occurrences in this period was the Marian apparition to the Slovak gamekeeper Matúš Lašut in the village of Turzovka near Čadca in 1958¹¹ (Grufík 1991). The apparition consisted of appeals for penitence, prayers (e.g., the Rosary), improvement in behaviour, and also a secret that the recipient of the revelation obviously tried to keep for himself. The Slovak village of Turzovka remained a very popular, though unofficial, place of Marian pilgrimage throughout the entire period of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia. It was visited not only by the inhabitants of neighbouring villages, but also by pilgrims from all over Slovakia, Moravia and Bohemia. Soon after he made the apparition public, the visionary was transported to the psychiatric hospital in Bytčica (near Žilina) on September 12, 1958. He stayed there until July of the following year and was continually interrogated by state police until 1961.

7 For more details on pilgrimages to Svatá Hora [Holy Mountain] see <https://www.czechtourism.com/c/pribram-holy-mountain-pilgrimage-church/> (accessed on September 15, 2019).

8 For more details on pilgrimages to Stará Boleslav see http://private-tours.net/country_tour/number_36/ (accessed on September 15, 2019).

9 For more details on pilgrimages to Svatý Kopeček [Holy Little Hill] see <http://www.czechbaroque.com/stories/54-marian-pilgrimage-to-svaty-kopecek-holy-hill> (accessed on September 15, 2019).

10 For more details on Velehrad site and pilgrimages see for example <http://www.velehrad.eu/en/news/pilgrimages-for-priests-to-velehrad-have-a-tradition/> (accessed on September 15, 2019).

11 See also <http://www.free-rosary.net/?p=945> and <http://www.easterneuropilgrimage.com/en/clanok/53-slovakia-zivcakova> (both links accessed on September 15, 2019).

Marian Devotion after 1989

The years 1989 and 1990 brought about radical changes in the political and spiritual history of the Czech Republic. Religion lost its principal enemy – Communism. Innumerable forms of religiosity appeared, from versions of classical and modern Christianity to the spiritual schools of the Far East. After the fall of Communism, some Christians expected some sort of return to the idyllic reconciliation between the Church and society, to the situation where religion and its institutional representations would enjoy universal respect and support. This did not happen and therefore, feelings of bitterness affected the older priests especially. The consumerism of post-modern society stood in their way and great attention at that time was being paid to the year 2000.

In addition, three important phenomena marked the public opinion at the end of the 1990s. First, the ‘King of Terror’,¹² who was announced by Nostradamus¹³ to come in June 1999; second, the solar eclipse of August 11, 1999;¹⁴ and, finally, Y2K,¹⁵ a nightmare for IT experts. Neither the catastrophic scriptures nor the fears of attacks of religious fanatics came true. The beginning of the new millennium thus brought about only silent frustration from unfulfilled expectations, the weakening of prophetic moods and the calming down of the strenuous atmosphere provoked by some visions and revelations. This was enhanced by the fact that the famous third secret of Fatima¹⁶ was also made public.

We can see an overall decline of religion and Church attendance not only in traditional churches, but also in new religious

12 Astrologer Nostradamus, who lived in the 16th century, predicted in his prophecy the arrival of the King of Terror, which corresponds to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001.

13 Michel de Nostredame (1503–1566), Latin ‘Nostradamus’, was a French astrologer, physician and seer.

14 There was a total solar eclipse. Statistics show that two total solar eclipses are separated by approximately 400 years.

15 Abbreviation ‘Y2K’ describing the problem associated with the transition to the calendar with the year 20xx versus 19xx.

movements. There is a difference in the case of popular Catholic religiosity that has undergone changes, particularly in the last thirty years. The worshiping of the Virgin Mary has remained virtually unchanged. Just like in the past, emphasis is placed today on spirituality and emotional experience, thereby fulfilling the main conditions for survival in the modern era de facto. The Virgin Mary permits transmission and emotional identification (e.g. personal problems, difficulties, illness, etc.). She is a very strong and active ‘mediator’. In addition, the Marian cult is linked to numerous apparitions and miracles. There is a close connection between religious beliefs and physical healing, and miraculous healings often support the strength of religious beliefs. From the entire pantheon of cults of Catholic saints, this is most likely the reason why Marian devotion allows today’s faithful to build a strong emotional relationship with otherworldly beings.

16 In Fatima, Portugal, the Virgin Mary appeared to three children in 1917. The text of the Third Secret, according to the Vatican, was published on June 26, 2000: “I write in obedience to you, my God, who command me to do so through his Excellency the Bishop of Leiria and through your Most Holy Mother and mine. After the two parts which I have already explained, at the left of Our Lady and a little above, we saw an Angel with a flaming sword in his left hand; flashing, it gave out flames that looked as though they would set the world on fire; but they died out in contact with the splendour that Our Lady radiated towards him from her right hand: pointing to the earth with his right hand, the Angel cried out in a loud voice: ‘Penance, Penance, Penance!’ And we saw in an immense light that is God: ‘something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it’ a Bishop dressed in White ‘we had the impression that it was the Holy Father’. Other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark; before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the same way there died one after another the other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersorium in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the Martyrs and with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God.” (<https://catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2017/10/13/the-urgent-message-of-fatimas-third-secret/>, accessed on October 3, 2019).

Recipients of Apocalyptic Marian apparitions are usually denominated by the mass media as 'conservative Catholics', 'traditionalists' or 'fundamentalists'. These labels are also used for a wide spectrum of persons, from conservative theologians to participants in processions. This, of course, might be misleading. The accentuation of tradition, refusal of intellectualism, mistrust in the world and, sometimes, fundamentalism, are certainly some of the characteristics of the situation. However, in addition to the older generation, for which traditionalist attitudes are characteristic, there is an increasing number of young, educated people, attracted by the vivid spiritual renewal within the Catholic Church (Keppel 1996: 11). This might be the result of several factors – the authority of the late Marian Pope, charismatic revival, Marian spiritual movements, geographical conditions, the prevalent type of pastoral efforts focused on youth, etc. Marian spirituality is not a consequence as such, but rather its type, emphasis, orientation, relevance for personal as well as social life is the driving force of the so-called eschatological communities, as some of these groups can be denominated, consisting of Marian spirituality oriented towards the 'end of times', to *parusia*. And this consequential factor of dramatic change of folk religiosity connects the contemporary admirers of the Virgin with groups that had appeared continuously throughout the two thousand years of Christian history, not only at the turn of the first millennium.

Due to the delay caused by Communism, since the 1990s, Marian movements began to appear in the Czech Republic which had sometimes existed clandestinely in the previous period and sometimes came from abroad. These movements differ from each other in their preferences. Some are based on charity, some propagate spiritual development around the world, many come out of revelations and stress the need of life based on prayer.

On the one hand, in our country, there are ancient orders that consider Marian spirituality as an inseparable part of their religious experience of the world (Dominicans, Franciscans, Premon-

stratensians etc.), as well as new movements closely attached to the Marian devotion (*Focolare – Opera di Maria*, *Schönstatt Movement*, *Legio Mariae*, *Order of the Immaculate* and others). It is obvious that these movements do not support (at least not publicly) marginal revelations or revelations refuted by the Church. However, the members of these movements can themselves decide what they are willing to accept.

On the other hand, there are groups that derive directly or indirectly from concrete revelations. At present, there are two movements in the Czech Republic that influence the (folk) Marian spirituality to the utmost degree, thanks to the high number of priests among their members. These are *Marian Movement of Priests*¹⁷ and the *Apostolate of Fatima*¹⁸ (Blue Army). Membership of both movements consists mostly of the older generation. They are largely interconnected. The Fatima apparition (Felici 1994) is nowadays accepted by all Marian groups in the country.

Thanks to the efforts of the publishing houses focusing specifically on the Franciscan authors of Medjugorje¹⁹ (Barbaric, Zovko, Ljubicic etc.), many prayer groups in the Czech Republic live out the Medjugorje form of Marian spirituality and carry out the spiritual programme recommended by the Virgin, according to the exhortations of the visionaries.²⁰ As for the influences of Medjugorje in the Czech milieu, we should also mention the therapeutic

17 The Marian Movement of Priests was founded by the priest of Milano, S. Gobbi, in 1972. Since 1990, it has been called in the Czech Republic 'Kruh spolupracovníků Mariánského kněžského hnutí' [the Circle of Collaborators of the Marian Movement of Priests].

18 The Apostolate of Fatima, founded in the United States in 1947, has been active in the Czech Republic since 1990 under the name 'Fatimský apoštolát' [the Apostolate of Fatima].

19 Medjugorje is a town located in the Herzegovina region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, around 25 km southwest of Mostar and close to the border of Croatia. The town is part of the municipality of Čitluk. Since 1981, it has become a popular site of Catholic pilgrimage due to *Our Lady of Medjugorje* an alleged series of apparitions of the Virgin Mary to six local children that are still happening to this day. On May 12, 2019, the Vatican officially authorized pilgrimage to Medjugorje.

community for drug addicts, called *Cenacolo*, which operated at the turn of the century in Žibřidice in the Ještěd region (Remeš 2002). This community was allegedly linked directly to a similar group of Medjugorje which was founded, together with many other communities existing mainly in Italy, by the famous nun Elvira Petrozzi. However, after not fulfilling certain conditions, the founder dissociated herself from the Czech community.

From the analysis of the situation in the Czech Republic, it can be concluded that folk Catholic religiosity has experienced certain changes in the course of the 20th century, especially in the last three decades. Rural religiosity has remained stable and tied to the family environment of traditional regions. However, changing times have influenced a wide spectrum of groups, from charity organisations through Catholic labour unions up to closed neo-mystical communities.

It is quite difficult to try to delineate these phenomena geographically, even only within the borders of the Czech Republic. At first sight, it prevails within the country and specifically in southern Moravia. This observation can be confirmed by a concrete case that documents the carrying out of traditional forms of pilgrimage processions that can still be seen, for example, in the village Žarošice²¹ in southern Moravia (Frolec 1986). Žarošice differs from other places of pilgrimage by the splendour of the principal pilgrimage which that takes place on the day of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin, and the emphasis on compliance with the ceremony (Frolec 1991: 93–95).

The ancient pilgrimage ritual is preserved here thanks to the ‘older brethren’ – traditional leaders of processions. During their journey, the pilgrims observe a strictly delineated programme which includes specific songs referring to this place of pilgrimage

20 These are the so-called ‘Five Stones’ against Goliath: Holy Mass, fast of bread and water every Wednesday and Friday, family Rosary prayers, reading of the Holy Script, monthly confession.

21 For more on pilgrimages to Žarošice see <https://zarosice.estranky.cz/> (accessed on September 20, 2019).

(Frolcová 1991: 442–450). At the church of Žarošice, they greet the miraculous Madonna by song and prayer. During the Holy Mass, rituals reminiscent of the Baroque period take place; they are documented in literature, but are not commonly practiced in the contemporary Czech Republic (for example, Procházka 1910: 437). Before the pilgrims enter the church, a dialogue is staged between the Mother of God and the sinner, denominated by ‘asking for forgiveness’. This is followed by ‘bowing’, that is, maids lie down in front of the altar; in an act of ‘humility’, they give away their ‘crowns’ (i.e. chaplets made of flowers) to the altar.²² Other characteristic features of the pilgrimage to Žarošice include the night procession with richly illuminated Marian sculptures (Dvořáková 1998: 95–98).

This ritual takes place also in one of the most important and for centuries most often visited places of pilgrimage in Bohemia – Svatá Hora [Holy Mountain] near Příbram. Here, night processions with the Virgin of Svatá Hora have taken place on the anniversary of the coronation of the local statue²³ since 1732 (Royt 1999: 132–149), however, with some gaps in time.

The sustained popularity of the Marian cult in the ranks of the faithful, especially within the female population, was confirmed by research conducted at the end of the 20th and early 21st century with the popularity of travelling domestic devotionals, who were

22 ‘Humiliation’ consists of giving away of the chaplets that girls have in their hair and boys on their sleeve to the altar or the steps of the altar. During this ceremony, women approach the girls from behind and older men approach the boys in a similar way and take away the chaplets. In some cases, the maids themselves bring the chaplets on decorated pads. Maids offering their chaplets can be found in every procession; there is a much smaller number of boys, however. Only youngsters of good reputation are favoured by this honor by older brethren and their female attendants in the course of the year.

23 The institutionalisation of coronations of Marian sculptures and paintings began in the Baroque period. The initiator of these coronations was count Alessandro Sforza Pallacini, who bequeathed a great sum to the coronation of sculptures and paintings in 1640. His intention was approved by Pope Urban VIII. The Vatican chapter was entrusted with administration of the funds. In the case of Svatá Hora, this was the first festival of this type in the Czech lands and took place on June 25–29, 1732.

associated with carrying the statue of the Virgin Mary from house to house (Večerková and Frolcová 2008a: 377–383, 2008b: 418–431). Given their contents, they are exclusively part of the advent and correspond to older documents from the late 19th century (Plotěný 1895: 341–342). All these activities reflect the search for shelter by Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem on the eve of Christ's birth; inhabitants of the communities receive the expectant Mother of God in their homes, provide shelter and pray to her. This theme emerged from a minor verse in the Gospel (L 2, 7), it has a number of renderings in Baroque poetry, in nativity scenes, in spiritual folk songs and Christmas plays, in ceremonial walks and also in domestic devotions which are alive in parts of Moravia in the early 21st century. It represents a Central European phenomenon in the category of Catholic piety (Markmiller 1981: 262–263) and an empirical testing of the general hypothesis on the evolution of active religion within global processes.

The ethnological research conducted in 2006–2007 brought forward information about this form of living folk customs in three local variations: in Kozlovice (Moravian-Silesian Region), Malhotice (Moravian-Silesian Region) and in Ratíškovice (South Moravian Region). The current versions of the Advent custom are represented by two types of bearers and features. The Kozlovice and Malhotice variants have common characteristics (an initiative only within the female population, social circle of the faithful, religious function of the custom). The Ratíškovice version goes beyond denominational and generational groups (Catholics and non-believers, adults, youth and children) and has extra features in addition to the religious ones, such as a ceremonial walk to collect donations for the Church. Unlike the first type, it is open to novelties in the context of worship. The advent Marian devotions not only preserve legendary songs from the repertoire of the 19th century, but also encourage the creation of new compositions for these purposes.

In addition to these traditional forms of pilgrimage rituals, there are also new forms of religiosity brought about by the 21st century, especially in abundantly visited places of pilgrimage.

Due to the widespread use of the internet and e-mail communication, after centuries of pilgrimage tradition, there is for the first time no need to receive the written *votum* personally or even in representation.²⁴ It can be said that, in group journeying to contemporary Marian places of pilgrimage, we can find all age groups. The most numerous are people over 40 years of age and married women, as well as children and youth. Middle-aged persons are those who take the least part in pilgrimages (Witkowski 1966: 66).

However, this age structure of the pilgrims, which is common for most Czech places of pilgrimage, is being considerably altered by the pilgrimages of the Romani who have a markedly ethnic character. This was proven by the field research carried out at Svatý Kopeček [Holy Little Hill], a place of pilgrimage near Olomouc (Dvořáková 2002: 144). Young people prevail in these Romani pilgrimages; the most numerous group by far was that of youth between 18 and 20 years of age. The middle age was much less represented and – unlike non-Romani pilgrimages – old people are almost absent. Men and women were equally represented.

After 1989, visits to Czech and foreign places of pilgrimage began to appear in the catalogues of many travelling agencies. Bike pilgrimages are a very popular form among young people. On the other hand, pilgrimages by train, which were enormously popular at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, have almost entirely disappeared.

It should also be noted that similar groups found in the country can also be observed in the cities thanks to the intense activities of publishing houses and various popularisers – in Prague, Brno or Olomouc. It is much easier to obtain proper literature in the city; it is easier to spread new messages from apparitions through samizdat prints or leaflets; people are in closer contact and can meet each

24 This contemporary aspect of Marian devotion appeared for the first time precisely in Svatá Hora, when the site opened its own web page <https://svata-hora.cz/farnost/bohosluzby/> (accessed on September 20, 2019).

other. While the country remains more closely tied to the tradition, the May festivals and the land, eschatology and apocalyptic prophecies also add to these urban forms of Marian devotion. In addition, the city can serve as a 'better example' of the ruined world, vices, bad politics, liberalism, anonymousness, sins, social-pathological problems that the country increasingly knows from TV.

This difference is clearly apparent from two apparitions that are well-known in the Czech lands – that of Litmanová in Eastern Slovakia²⁵ (Zajicová-Nádaská 2004: 295–312) and the apparition to Don Gobbi.²⁶ While in Litmanová we find a traditional sacred mountain and a spring, that is, a place of pilgrimage, Don Gobbi elaborates the world-wide web of 'Upper Rooms',²⁷ whose inner messages are not localised and can therefore reach out, also thanks to intense missionary activity, as well as to a great part of the urban and rural population. Thus, an interesting combination of various types of spirituality emerges. On the one hand, the recipient of the message ascends the sacred mountains, draws water from sacred springs and struggles to live an ideal of Paradise in the middle of the world, while, on the other hand, he collects messages, reads the 'omen of time' and allows himself to be influenced by their radical interpretations for finding the 'definitive mountain' and 'definitive spring'. He wants to escape from the confused world and come with his brothers in faith in the right time to the right place, ready to accept definitive salvation (Secondin 2002: 31).

25 For more on pilgrimages to Litmanová see <http://horazvir.malcobcan.sk/> (both sites accessed on September 20, 2019).

26 Italian priest Stefano Gobbi reported first his *interior locution* (i.e. an internal voice) on May 8, 1972 when he was on a pilgrimage to Fátima while praying in the shrine of *Our Lady of Fatima* (Portugal). He does not claim to have any apparitions, just 'inner locutions' from Virgin Mary. The messages have a pronounced apocalyptic tone. Since 1973, he has published his 'locutions with the Virgin Mary' and these texts have been fundamental for the reflections of the *Marian Movement of Priests*. The Roman Catholic Church has never officially recognized the purported interior locutions of Stefano Gobbi as being of a heavenly nature, but a locution. He died in 2011.

27 See <https://www.upperroom.org/> (both links accessed on September 20, 2019).

Conclusions

Marian Devotion in the Czech Republic should be seen not only in the light of recent highly secularised climate of Czech society. For the current dislike of official Catholicism, which formally still remains the majority religion, as well as the de-Christianisation of Czech society, we have to return back to the mid-19th century, when Czech nationalism and new intellectual projects aiming at the creation of new social and symbolic ties replacing those offered within the bigoted Catholicism arose as a product of the general crisis of values. During the 19th century and up the beginning of the 20th century, massive secularisation took place in the Czech lands. In the 19th century, Czechs thus became liberals, nationalists or socialists. At the same time, religion ceased to play its former role and was assigned only the role of occasionally sought-after, but unnecessary 'folklore' anachronism, typical for village population. Religious identity was substituted primarily with national identity, as well as with class identity and a 'scientific' worldview.

The rise of the Communist dictatorship after 1948 bolstered these trends and used them – mostly unmodified – for its own benefit. The non-religious and anti-religious components were accentuated, while the forms of 'implicit religiosity' stayed preserved and Church organisations were forced to face systematic repression.

The period of 1970–1989, commonly known as the period of 'normalisation', brought about both negative and positive changes in this area. On the one hand, the activities and hopes of the 'Prague Spring' failed also in the area of religion. On the other hand, especially at the beginning of the 1980s, religious activities were gradually liberated from the state and party interventions.

The years 1989 and 1990 brought about radical changes in the political and spiritual history of the Czech Republic. Religion lost its principal enemy – Communism. Innumerable forms of religiosity

appeared, from versions of classical and modern Christianity to the spiritual schools of the Far East.

What is important to stress is that unlike its neighbouring post-Communist countries (Slovakia and Poland) (Podolinská et al. 2013: 187–265), in the Czech Republic, despite the fall of Communism and religious freedom, we face an overall decline of religion and Church attendance not only in traditional churches, but also in new religious movements.

In this regard, it is very interesting that *the worshiping of the Virgin Mary has remained virtually unchanged*. Just like in the past, emphasis is placed on spirituality and emotional experience today, thereby fulfilling *de facto* the main conditions for survival in the modern era. The Virgin Mary is a very strong and active ‘mediator’; her cult is linked to numerous apparitions, miracles, including miraculous healings that might also be a very important reason for why her cult, connected with pilgrimages to her shrines dispersed at various places in the country, is so stable and popular.

In addition to these traditional forms of cult and pilgrimage rituals, there are also new 21st century forms of religiosity, especially at abundantly visited places of pilgrimage. Due to the widespread use of the internet and e-mail communication, after centuries of pilgrimage tradition, there is for the first time no need to receive the written *votum* personally or even in representation. After 1989, visits to Czech and foreign places of pilgrimage began to be promoted in the catalogues of many travelling agencies. Bike pilgrimages are also a very popular form among young people.

On the other hand, it can also be mentioned that, despite the strong Marian tradition, the general public as well as the religious discourse on Marian devotion connected to private apparitions in the Czech Republic are at a certain point ‘marginal’. This may have two principal reasons. Firstly, the import of apparitions is caused by the absence of these apparitions at home. Secondly, the import of greater movements and groups represents the reaction to the delay of the Communist era and a smaller membership of believers.



Fig. 3.1

Fig. 3.1 Baroque processions on pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain near Příbram, drawing, 18th century (photo archives of the Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, v.v.i.; personal archives of M. Holubová).



Fig. 3.2

Fig. 3.2 The Holy Mountain near Příbram – aerial view of the Baroque pilgrimage complex, Bohemia (personal archives of M. Holubová, 2004).



Fig. 3.3

Fig. 3.3 Turzovka – mixing of spontaneous manifestations of popular faith with official ones: chapel with gifts on the site of the second revelation; on the right, a shelter for the new Stations of the Cross, Slovakia (reproductions of the photo archives of the Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, v. v. i., 1992; personal archives of M. Holubová).



Fig. 3.4



Fig. 3.5



Fig. 3.6

Fig. 3.4 Embroidered Picture of the Virgin Mary hanging on a tree, Turzovka (photo by M. Holubová, 2010).

Fig. 3.5 Celebrated mass for pilgrims in Žarošice (photo by M. Holubová, 2018).

Fig. 3.6 Place of apparition in Litmanová, Slovakia (photo by M. Holubová, 2008).

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01 ZACHAR PODOLINSKÁ, Tatiana

Traces of the Mary in Post-Communist Europe

The Virgin Mary as such cannot be examined scientifically. We can, however, examine her 'apparitions' in the world, as well as the innumerable variants of Marian devotion and cult. This volume focuses on her manifestations in the post-Communist region with some geographical spillovers. It is either because post-Communist transformation concerned not only the former socialist countries, but also had an impact on the entire European region and was part of the overall post-modern and post-Communist reconfiguration of the European area. Another factor is that Marian worship is not controlled by political borders of present-day nation states. It has a wider transnational potential and impact. Nevertheless, we focused our viewfinder primarily on the post-Communist region, as we believe that thanks to its geographical and symbolic location and economic position in Europe, as well as its historical roots and traditions and common Communist history and heritage, it not only shows different traits of modernity compared to 'Western Europe', but we also face specific features and forms of worshipping of the Virgin Mary. We therefore decided to present in this volume the traces of the Virgin Mary by means of more in-depth analyses from selected countries of the post-socialist region.

By means of this publication, we can observe how the Virgin Mary is manifested in the faces of seers and pilgrims and how audio-visual means are becoming a direct part of Marian apparitions in Germany in the modern era (H. Knoblauch and S. Petschke); how she speaks through the mouth of a blind Roma woman and pacifies the ethnic and religious tensions between various groups in Romania (L. Peti); how she attributes meaning to meaningless places on the map by reallocating her presence through the geographical and time distribution of Marian dedications in Slovakia (J. Majo); how, after the fall of Communism, she revitalises the old places of her cult with new power, bringing together traditional

and non-traditional forms of worship in the secular Czech Lands (M. Holubová); how her messages are spread on the websites of new non-traditional Marian movements and how their apocalyptic warnings are being updated and localised into the specific national environment in Czechia (V. Tutr); how she addresses the readers of Marian literature differently on the shelves of bookstores in Slovakia and Austria (R. Kečka); but also how the Virgin Mary absorbs ultra-modern millennial and spiritualistic concepts of Mother Earth and Mother of the Universe, becoming the speaker of the great unified Hungarian nation (J. Kis-Halas); how she is becoming the re-discovered herald of Serbian national identity (A. Pavičević); how she absorbs the local forms of faith and folk Christianity in modern era and is thus the manifestation of grass-root Christianity and local religious culture in Bulgaria (V. Baeva and A. Georgieva); and how the path from a private to an officially recognised apparition depends not only on the Virgin Mary and the seer, but also on the overall constellation of the audience and the ability to offer a *religious ready-made event* (T. Zachar Podolinská and L. Peti).

This publication observes the current diversity of the forms of Marian devotion in post-Communist countries through different national and geographically defined contours and, in particular, the ability of the Virgin Mary to satisfy the hunger for modern spirituality and authentic religiousness, give voice to unofficial and popular religions, revitalise and redefine old places of cult and add new ones, appease war conflicts, speak out on behalf of nations and marginalised ethnic groups, and guard national and conservative values. The post-modern and post-Communist Mary thus restores ruptured traditions with love, and enchants the violently atheised European region with new miracles and apparitions, regardless of whether top Church and state representatives like it or not.

02 KIS-HALAS, Judit

Sacred Sites Reinterpreted: New Age Phenomena at a Hungarian Marian Shrine

Marian shrines were always the sites of miraculous healings and spectacular apparitions. Nowadays, they have also become the crystallisation points of the New Age phenomena. Several studies have already pointed out this trend with regard to popular pilgrimage destinations. As far as the Hungarian Marian shrines are concerned, none of them have been systematically examined from this perspective. This chapter aims to provide a deeper insight of how a Marian shrine is being re-orchestrated as a specific 'power place' in the context of alternative spiritualities, such as New Age religiosity or ethno-paganism at one Marian shrine at Máriagyűd.

From the wide-ranging New Age phenomena and religious practices that the author observed during the past decades at Máriagyűd, she chose the prominent example of an esoteric group called *Magyar MAGok* [Hungarian Seeds], which deals with diverse religious and healing activities. Their programmes include shamanic drumming sessions, tours to 'sacred sites' in Hungary and the Carpathian Basin (mostly Romania), weekend meditations, esoteric workshops, readings on the history and culture of the ancient Hungarians, such as direct kinship between the Hungarians and the Huns, or the identification of the Ancient Hungarians with the Scythians, or the Hungarian origins of the Christian Father God. In accordance with the millennial narrative, they use the elements of the alternative history of the Hungarians as well as other motifs which recall UFO-religions and ET-spiritualities, and last but not least, the idea of healing and cleansing as the basic means leading to universal well-being. The description of their unique rituals and other religious practices is followed by an analysis of the discourse on the contested authority of the shrine.

The author of the chapter focuses on the role of the Virgin Mary within their discourse. She found it interesting that Mary

is connected with the so-called *Boldogasszony* (literally [Blessed Woman]), which is a special Hungarian denomination of the Virgin Mary and, at the same time, the alleged goddess of the ancient Hungarians. 'Boldogasszony' has been used as a synonym for the Blessed Virgin Mary since the Middle Ages (cf. Madas 2002). The quest for a lost epic and a missing mythology of the Hungarians, which was inspired by national romanticism, resulted in the term gaining an ethnic taste by the end of the 19th century. 'Boldogasszony' was the most emblematic female figure of the pantheon in the re-invented Ancient Hungarian religion – the Mother Goddess (Kálmány 1885). With regard to its contemporary use, 'Boldogasszony' is also interpreted as the Hungarian equivalent of the Goddess (Bowman 2009), and is also considered Mother Earth (Gaia) and the galactic patroness of all Hungarians *par excellence*. The author put the manifold interpretations of the Virgin Mary's figure in the centre of attention, highlighting the Catholic Church's standpoint on the emergence of New Age spirituality at Catholic devotional places.

03 HOLUBOVÁ, Markéta

Manifestations of Marian Devotion in the Czech Republic – the Past and Present

According to the author of the chapter, Marian devotion in the Czech Republic should be seen not only in the light of recent highly secularised climate of Czech society. For the current dislike for official Catholicism and de-Christianisation of Czech society, we have to go back in history. In the 19th century, Czechs became liberals, nationalists or socialists. At the same time, religion ceased to play its former role and was assigned only the role of an occasionally sought-after, yet unnecessary 'folklore' anachronism, typical for village population. Religious identity was substituted primarily by national identity, as well as by class identity and a 'scientific' worldview. The rise of the Communist dictatorship after 1948 bolstered these trends and used them – mostly unmod-

ified – for its own benefit. The non-religious and anti-religious components were accentuated, while the forms of 'implicit religiosity' stayed preserved and Church organisations were forced to face systematic repression. The years 1989 and 1990 brought about radical changes in the political and spiritual history of the Czech Republic. Religion lost its principal enemy – Communism. Innumerable forms of religiosity appeared, from versions of classical and modern Christianity to the spiritual schools of the Far East.

In this context, it is very interesting that the worshiping of the Virgin Mary has remained virtually unchanged. Just like in the past, emphasis is placed today on spirituality and emotional experience, thereby fulfilling the main conditions for survival in the modern era *de facto*. In addition to the traditional forms of cult and pilgrimage rituals, there are also new forms of religiosity brought about by the 21st century, especially in abundantly visited places of pilgrimage. Due to the widespread use of the internet and e-mail communication, after centuries of pilgrimage tradition, there is for the first time no need to receive the written *votum* personally or even in representation. After 1989, visits to Czech and foreign places of pilgrimage began to appear in the catalogues of many travelling agencies. Also, bike pilgrimages represent a very popular form among young people.

On the other hand, it can be also mentioned, that despite the strong Marian tradition, the general public and as well as the religious discourse on Marian devotion connected to private apparitions in the Czech Republic is at a certain point 'marginal'. This can have two principal reasons. Firstly, the import of apparitions is caused by the absence of such apparitions at home. Secondly, the import of greater movements and groups represents a reaction to the delay of the Communist era and a smaller membership of believers.

04 TUTR, Vojtěch

The Reception of Recent Marian Apparitions in the Czech Republic in the Field of Popular Religiosity – Two Examples

Marian apparitions have always emerged throughout the history of the Catholic Church. However, they have never been given a lot of attention and have never met with so much public acceptance as has been seen since the latter half of the 19th century. The development of *mass communication* and increasing population *mobility* have partly contributed to this phenomenon. These apparitions have a new function – providing *public messages*. The Virgin Mary is no longer speaking only to the visionary; she is pronouncing prophecies and messages to all believers, laying claims to the hierarchy.

This chapter offers a comparative analysis of two examples of ‘popular religiosity’ in the Czech Republic as a spontaneous religious activity produced and operated by their charismatic leaders and opinion-makers: *Vérité* centre founded by František Mráček and *Mariánské nakladatelství* [MANA, Marian publishers] founded by František Press in Brno. Both cases are based on modern Marian apparitions and are contextualised in the current global situation and in the Czech Republic. According to the author, this goes hand in hand with the trend of modernisation and the era of mass communication.

Marian devotion plays a central role in both studied cases and is crucial for understanding the portraying her as the *Loving Mother* and *Hope of the Mankind*, as well as the *Guardian of the World* coming as the (last) *Living Warning* before the expected global catastrophe. The apocalyptic, chiliastic and millennial tone presented by both interpreters of modern Marian apparitions is being explored as well. The main issue in both cases is the expectation of the *end of the current world* order. This element was certainly activated by the approaching end of the millennium. Even though this stimulation of thoughts on the end of the world is now out of play, the charismatic leaders flexibly postponed their prediction in this re-

gard and, according to them, we should expect some global threat in the future, the outbreak of WWII, nuclear or ecological catastrophes, globalisation or total control by means of information technologies.

Another nodal point is the reference to *globalisation* as an instrument of Satan's rule over the unified world. According to the author, both studied cases are examples of modern adaptation of Christianity to the post-modern religious landscape of post-socialist Czech Republic and represent a form of *popular religiosity* which is transformed and adapted to the context of modern society and ‘Western culture’.

05 KEČKA, Roman

Contemporary Models of Marian Discourse in Slovakia

According to the 2001 census, the majority of Slovakia's population statistically follows the Catholic confession of Roman or Byzantine rites. In both rites, the Marian devotion has a considerable place in religious reflection and spirituality. This study explores the religious discourse of the Marian devotion as it appears in available books and booklets on this topic. The main focus of the chapter is a comparison of the Marian discourse in Slovakia (representing a post-socialist country) and the Marian discourse in neighbouring Austria (representing a ‘Western’ country with no socialist history). For this purpose, a sample of Mariological reflections and spiritual texts was created based on their availability in all Catholic bookstores in the capital of Slovakia (Bratislava) and the capital of Austria (Vienna). The reason for this choice is that these bookstores offer books that mirror the living intellectual and religious brainstorming and reflect Christianity, in particular the pattern of the Marian discourse of the recent decades in both countries. The study comments on the absence of modern Marian literature in Slovak bookstores. The author also analyses the Marian vocabulary and topics in the both samples. The author distinguishes three existing models of the Marian discourse in

Slovakia, all of traditional origin, portraying Mary as an unselfish and patient mother, Mary loving conditionally and restraining God's anger; Mary leading the legions against Satan and crushing his head. All three models are based on the traditional images of Mary and, within the Christian communities, are not understood as contradictory, but complementary.

Compared to Western Christianity, the Marian discourse in Slovakia lacks two recurrent models: (1) the progressive 20th/21st century model, and (2) the traditionalist and fundamentalist model. The first model has created a Marian vocabulary and contents representing a self-confident, social and communicative model of Mary. This model presents an alternative to the old models combining mild or triumphant vocabulary with mild or triumphant contents. The second model which is absent among Slovak believers is the Marian discourse of the traditionalist and fundamentalist groups of each age tolerated by official Church structures. These traditionalist and fundamentalist groups return to the old Marian vocabulary and contents that is triumphant, militant and – in this modern version – has an offensive character. This form of discourse, created as a reaction to progressive Christian groups – did not emerge in Slovakia, since there were no progressive Christian movements.

Based on the research of the author, the Slovak Marian reflection and spirituality result from traditional beliefs, having no affinity to Western progressive and traditionalist models. In this regard, it can be stated that Slovakia's isolation from the European spiritual development, which has caused traditional devotion to be fixed in its forms, is, paradoxically, continuing also after the fall of Communism in the era of religious freedom. The comparative discursive analysis of Mariological literature in Slovakia and its Western neighbour – Austria has showed that the Slovak religious landscape is far more traditional (but not traditionalist) than the current trends in the 'Western' religious discourse.

06 MAJO, Juraj

Marian Dedications within the Current Cultural Space of Slovakia

Cultural geography (as the main field in geography with no connection to religion) is strongly influenced by constructivist approaches today. Geographer Doreen Massey wrote in 2010 (Massey 2010: 107) that space is always being made and always, therefore, in a sense, unfinished. The 'always' is rather that there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction, or not, potential links which may never be established. Loose ends and ongoing stories. With these ideas she perfectly outlined the relationship of space, time, and social world. In the field of religious identity and its expression it indicates not just variability of its representations but can also work as a hub to the local projections of identity interactions and how this space is formed within local actors and local circumstances.

All interactions within the various scales forms two paradigms of how place and space can be analysed – as politics and poetics of space. If the cult of the Virgin Mary prevails within the Catholic religious practice, then the poetics and politics of space can have vast forms of expression and impacts. This chapter attempts to outline the spatiality of this cult represented in dedications of sacred buildings, and open up questions on forming such distributions and regional specificities in Slovakia.

Research on the spatial aspects of dedications of sacred buildings provide interesting intersections of relations between sacred and profane as well as various levels of research resulting in a relationship between the 'politics' and 'poetics' of place. This chapter introduces such relationship within cultural geography. Although this approach is fully applicable in local or regional research, we have outlined the spatial aspects of the cult of the Virgin Mary as embodied in the dedication of sacred buildings, introducing the differences in the types of such dedication within regional and denominational aspects (such as Roman and Byzantine Catholics).

The link between time and space is observed in living as well as obliterated dedications, which helps us understand in a very broad sense the dynamics of construction and maintenance of sacred space and the projections of initiatives at various levels of political administration with an impact on the poetics of space and community.

Research on the spatial distribution of dedications in Slovakia is still a little explored field, even though the extensive data sources are relatively high in quality and quantity and enable the interpretation of different relations in various scales. In the context of important dedications, it is the Marian ones that have a significant position in church life and are the most common ones, reflecting the intensity of the worship of the Virgin Mary within the Slovak environment. The research also indicates that the importance and popularity of Marian dedications are accompanied by great diversity with growth over time. It also reflects on the background based on social changes, such as the extinction of the Kingdom of Hungary, the declaration of Our Lady of Sorrows as the patron of Slovakia, etc.

07 KNOBLAUCH, Hubert – PETSCHKE, Sabine

Vision and Video. Marian Apparition, Spirituality and Popular Religion

The chapter demonstrates that *spirituality* and *popular religiosity* are built into the Marian apparitions, thus turning them into a contemporary 'modern' phenomenon. The study refers to a series of apparitions which happened during 1999 in Marpingen, a German village close to the Western border with France. This village was the setting for a series of Marian apparitions back in the 19th century. These earlier apparitions have recently been subjected to a very thorough study by British historian David Blackbourn (1993). Whereas Blackbourn based his analysis on written documents mostly stored in archives, the authors had not only access to written documents, newspapers and books, but also the

exceptional chance to collect video-tape records from the event, and they could also rely on audio-taped statements by the seers. These data, supported by ethnographic field data, are subject to a fine-grained video-analysis provided in the chapter.

In Marpingen, it was Marion who began to have visions on May 17 and 20 near the chapel (built by the above-mentioned association) where the earlier apparitions had happened. Thereafter, the three women together had various apparitions near the chapel, mostly in the company of an increasing number of pilgrims. The sixth apparitions on June 13, 1999, was already witnessed by about 4,000 visitors, and on the ninth day of the apparitions, on July 18, 12,000 visitors turned up. The final apparitions were said to be attended by 30,000. As a hundred years before, the incident not only attracted masses, there was also some turmoil accompanying the apparitions: television stations turned up and reported critically on the event, the Church prohibited any proclamation by the seers, the seers were threatened and, finally, the village administration and the chapel association got into a conflict.

The authors pointed out that when talking about the apparition, we must be aware of the fact that this notion refers not only to a subjective experience by the seers. In order to become an apparition, it needs to be communicated. The communication of the apparition does not only draw on the verbalisation by which the apparition is being reported, i.e. reconstructed. In addition, the apparition is also being performed by the body of the seers who form part of the setting which includes the visitors in relation to the seers and the spatial constellations of other objects. Thus, the authors interpret apparition as a *communicative performance of religious action*.

However, the verbalisation of the cited vision is not, as in other cases, reconstructed *after* the vision. On the contrary, the seer (Marion) talks into a dictograph which is held by another visionary – Judith – while having the vision. In this way, the apparition is turned into a *live report*. It may be no accident that this kind of

live report is not directly addressed to the live audience. Rather, it is recorded so to be accessible to a larger media audience via audio tapes, transcripts of the visions and a number of books based on these reports. According to Auslander (1999: 39ff.), it is the '*technological and aesthetic contamination* of live performance'. The authors noted that the media are not only added to the event but are imparted in the event to such a degree that they transform it into something different. Thus, the use of the dictograph results in a format of the 'live report' on the inner visions. The microphone allows coordinating the actions of the seers with those of the crowd – a phenomenon that was virtually impossible at earlier apparitions.

According to the authors, the Marian movement is not only a static remnant of earlier periods but also a form of modern expression against rationality and secularism. The Marian apparition in question, according to the authors, is an example for the modernity of this form of religion by exhibiting the essential features of popular religion. It is not that religion has changed its contents: it is still the realm of the transcendent as the subject matter of religion. However, this subject matter is not an element of cognitive or moral belief; it is something to be experienced subjectively, the reasserting subject being the major instance and locus of religiosity. This way, the analysis of Marian apparitions is a case for the thesis of the modernity of religion and a case that demonstrates what is modern about religion.

08 PAVIĆEVIĆ, Aleksandra

Travelling through the Battle Fields. The Cult of the Bogorodica in Serbian Tradition and Contemporary Times

The chapter deals with the role of the Virgin Mary in the nation-state building process in Serbia. The beginning of the process of religious revival in Serbia coincided with the beginning of the social, economic and political crisis in the former Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, which took place at the beginning

of the 1990s. There was an urgent need to find *new collective identity*, since the earlier had been reduced to rubble. At the *individual level*, this process primarily implied increased participation in rites within the life cycle of an individual (baptism, wedding, and funeral), followed by popularisation of the practice of celebrating family's patron saint days and, only in the end and on the smallest scale, by an increase in the number of believers taking an active part in regular church services.

On the *collective level*, the traditional closeness of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Serb people and the state was the basic paradigm of such restructuring. The attempt to establish continuity with the tradition of the medieval Serb state, which implied active participation of the Church in both social and political matters, as well as the grafting of this relationship in the secular state and civil society in Serbia at the end of the second millennium, turned out to be a multi-tiered issue (Jevtić 1997).

At mass celebrations, as well as at revolutionary street protest rallies (which were plentiful in the capital during the last dozen years or so) and at celebrations of the town's patron saint days and various festivities, the image of the 'Bogorodica' [Gr. 'Theotokos', i.e. The Mother of God]; appears. Leading the processional walks of the towns, it emerges as a symbol which manages to mobilise the nation with its fullness and multi-layered meaning. The main thesis of the chapter is to explain the historical roots of her cult and her embeddedness in the national history and identity in Serbia.

The cult of the 'Bogorodica' has always had greater importance on the macro than on the micro level. This is corroborated by the fact that a relatively small number of families celebrated some of the 'Bogorodica' holidays as their Patron St Day, while a large number of monasteries and churches, as well as village Patron St Days were dedicated to one of them (Grujić 1985: 436). On the other hand, some authors believe that, with the acceptance of Christianity, it was the cult of the 'Bogorodica' which was the most developed

among the Serb population, because her main and most widely recognisable epithet *Baba*, connected to giving birth, was directly associated with the powerful female pagan divinities such as the Great Mother, Grandmother etc. (Petrović 2001: 55; Čajkanović 1994a: 339). In the folk perception, the 'Presveta Bogorodica' [The Most Holy Mother of God] is unambiguously connected to the phenomenon and process of birth-giving and, that is why, barren women most frequently addressed the 'Bogorodica' for assistance.

The observance of the image of the 'Bogorodica' was specifically connected with the so-called *miracle icons*, that is, her paintings linked to some miraculous event, either locally or generally. This was most frequently related to the icons which were famous for discharging myrrh, as well as icons which would 'cry' in certain situations, as well as those that changed the place of residence in a miraculous manner.

The use of icons in wars, either those of conquest or defensive, appears to be a widely spread practice in the Orthodox world. It was noted that Serb noblemen carried standards with images of various saints to wars, and that the cities were frequently placed under the protection of certain icons. The author shows how, travelling through towns and battlefields, throughout the decades and centuries, the 'Bogorodica' appeared through its holy image at the end of the second millennium as the protectress, advocate, Pointer of the Way and foster mother of those who were, possibly more than ever, in need of miracles and waymarks.

09 BAEVA, Vihra – GEORGIEVA, Albena

The Worship of Mary in the Region of Asenovgrad

(Central Southern Bulgaria): Sites, Rituals and Narratives

The chapter presents Marian worship in one of its specific local manifestations – the cult to the Virgin in the region of Asenovgrad, Central Southern Bulgaria. The fact that it is the most representative example of the vital and well-developed Marian cult with in present-day Bulgaria, as well as authors' long-term fieldwork

in the region (started 1996), influenced the choice of Asenovgrad as the focus of their attention. The methodological framework is based on the concept of local religion (Christian 1989: 3), reformulated by the authors into the concepts of *local religiosity* and *local religious culture*. The local Marian cult in Asenovgrad region is used as an example of how to understand this local and cultural embeddedness of religiosity, presented via (1) devotional sites and the images belonging to them (in this case, miracle-working icons of the Virgin); (2) local feasts and ritual practices; and (3) local and personal religious narratives. The authors regard places, rituals and narratives as basic elements which complement, influence and support each another, constituting a complex system of local religious culture. Following this pattern, the authors pinpointed for their analysis the three most important places of Marian worship in the region: the Dormition of Mary Monastery of Bachkovo, the Annunciation of Mary Church in Asenovgrad, and the Dormition of Mary Church in Gorni Voden. Besides the contextual information, the authors also focused on a more intimate, individual dimension of Marian worship, exploring the presence of the Virgin in personal narratives about miraculous recoveries, dreams, visions, etc. and delineating the connection between individual experience and cultural background. According to the authors, the local worship of Mary in Asenovgrad region is a brilliant example of the ways in which local religiosity exists and develops in the intersection of universal religion and local traditions, folklore and cultural specificities. On the local level, the general Christian figure of the Virgin acquires characteristic features, associated with her motherly aspect and her quality of a divine patroness and immediate helper in every need. Her intercession is achieved by means of sacred intermediaries that have the power to connect the common devotee with the celestial power: holy places, miracle-working icons, springs and caves. Apart from the well-known Marian feasts, idiosyncratic local holidays are observed, too, and the related ritual actions span from the canonical to the folkloric

and ‘magical’. Specific symbols, such as the apple, the water, and the fish, come to the fore as a material representation of Mary’s sacred power and assistance. Local and personal narratives add a private, sometimes even intimate aspect to the Marian devotion, binding the universal sacred figure of the Virgin with the history and geography of the local community, as well as with the individual life trajectories of the believers.

10 ZACHAR PODOLINSKÁ, Tatiana

‘From Periphery to the Centre’: Private Apparition of the Virgin Mary (An In-depth Qualitative Analysis of the Apparition’s Narrative with Field Journal Notes)

The overall research dataset used for the purposes of this chapter is part of ongoing research of the author on Roma folk beliefs (2006–2007), as well as on the activities of both traditional and non-traditional religious movements among the Roma in Slovakia (2003–2004, 2010–2011).

In the framework of the previous outputs from this research, the author attempted to create, with some generalisation, a typology of the elements of traditional rural *Romani Christianity* in Slovakia, elucidating the phenomena of the cultural and ethnic reinterpretation of mainstream Christianity into a Roma cultural context (Podolinská 2009). In particular, she pointed out the phenomenon of *inculturation* in which the ‘White’ Virgin Mary is culturally and ethnically ‘transcribed’ and ‘translated’ into the ‘Chocolate Mary’ that physically, mentally and spiritually fits better and corresponds to the hopes and needs of particular ‘peripheral’ ethnic community.

As Viktor Turner (1974) pointed out that what is interesting about apparitions is that they occur on the *periphery* not only from the geographical point of view (peripheries of cities, rural areas) but also at peripheral levels of society: the seers are mostly children or (illiterate) women from a socially deprived background. This chapter offers an in-depth qualitative analysis of a narrative

on private Marian apparitions of one Romani woman living in a segregated Roma settlement in Šariš region, Eastern Slovakia. The seer perfectly fits into the ‘periphery’ concept: she is an illiterate woman from a socially deprived settlement and is a member of the ethnically stigmatised community of *Cigáni* [Gypsies]. Her visions are private ones, and since they started to appear, she started her struggle for collective and public recognition. The story of her apparition thus contains the well-known part of the path of other ‘successful visionaries’ – ‘from periphery to centre’ (i.e. from marginal private/individual apparition to the central public/mass recognition). As far as visions are ‘cultural products’ (Christian 1998) produced in the process of communication (Knoblauch 2009; Knoblauch and Schnettler 2018), they are not only embedded in a particular cultural context but also in the language and aesthetic taste. For every apparition, the crucial point is to achieve collective consensus and to attract masses. This is the way from private/individual apparition to public/collective acknowledgement. This is the way from ‘periphery to the centre’. In the described case, however, the seer was able to achieve recognition only within her own family. The response of the local Roma community to her apparitions was mostly negative. Quite interesting about this case is that, according to her, she has support from the side of non-Roma local religious authorities. Based on the author’s qualitative analysis, the struggle for *collective consensus* and *ethnic code* are the most important themes of the analysed narrative on apparition.

According to the author, the peripheral and deprived life situation of the seer is embedded in her visions. In her narrative, the attempt to achieve ‘centrality’ in a marginal position is central and the recognition theme is more frequent than the description of the apparition itself. In order to offer the reader a holistic picture of research situation, the author uses not only the qualitative analysis and thematic coding, but also the perspective of multi-vocal ethnography (Tobin 1988; Clegg 2017). The interview is thus embedded in the synchronous context of field journal notes

of the author, as well as in the diachronic context of her recent memories. The qualitative analysis also includes a wider context of the thematic search of media reports on local apparitions among Roma households in Eastern Slovakia.

11 PETI, Lehel

The Marian Apparition of Seuca/Szőkefalva in the Context of Religious and Ethnical Interferences

Seuca became a known place for pilgrimage due to a blind Gypsy woman's public visions about the Virgin Mary in the first years of the new millennium. The author presents both the history of the ethnical and confessional co-existence in the village and the economic and social problems which affected the whole community. Then, the attitudes towards the apparition of the different denominations are highlighted by also presenting the way the seer attempts to question the different denominational opinions. The legitimating strategies of a Gypsy woman significantly influenced the aspects of the vision of the Virgin Mary from Seuca. In the history of Seuca, we find the practice of ethnic groups making well-defined boundaries between them, functioning as important parts of the communities. The artificial change of the ethnic structure during the Communist dictatorship changed the patterns of relations between the ethnic groups and made ethnic coexistence more problematic. The local parish that tried to expropriate the Marian apparitions has successfully integrated their messages into the ideology of ethnic reconciliation. The traditional ontological systems of religion in the communities still work and the frequent crossing of the ethnic and denominational boundaries have also promoted the strategies of the Church. In addition, the apparitions in Seuca earned the village a distinguished reputation in the region where enormous changes have taken place and where people have been forced to develop more complex strategies, or ways of life, without any pre-existing concrete models.

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