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## A RARE FIND: A 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY SONG ABOUT CHOLERA IN SLOVENIA AND ITS INTERPRETATION

**Abstract:** The accidental discovery of an 1847 manuscript in the Local History and Special Collections Department at Maribor University Library in Slovenia (shelfmark: Kreps, 1847; UKM Ms 563), which contains, among other things, a song about cholera, was the basis for its contextual interpretation and comparison with related recorded songs. This new discovery is important because the song refers to the first wave of cholera on Slovene territory in 1836, whereas other songs describing the disease were written later. The text of the song resembles a collection of frightening news about the disease circulating among the people. The questions of whether the information in the song is real or fictional, genuine or exaggerated are discussed in light of the memory of cholera outbreaks found in other songs of the same genre and historical data.

**Keywords:** cholera, Slovenia, 19<sup>th</sup> century, manuscript, folk literature, song, Modern Period

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### Introduction

The history of cholera and epidemic diseases from a cultural-historical point of view has been dealt with by two historians in Slovenia, Katarina Keber and Urška Bratož, both of whom also wrote their dissertations<sup>1</sup> on the subject and published them in monographs.<sup>2</sup> Writing about cholera would not have been a priority for me had I not accidentally discovered a manuscript from 1847 in February 2017 in the Maribor University Library. The manuscript contained three songs, one of which was dedicated to cholera.

The way this song articulates cholera piqued my ethnological interest. Despite the unambiguity about the nature of the disease (which is, after all, the title of the song), there were some stanzas that I could not understand. Even when compared with all the additional material on the origin of the song that the library

holds, the mystery did not diminish. Found in a settlement a few kilometres away from the city centre of Maribor and the library, the only information about the song says nothing about its origin or causes. Since the song about cholera was written in the *bohoričica* or Bohorič alphabet (an orthography used for the Slovene language between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries), I was not able to read it fluently (even though the handwriting was fairly legible).

So, first, I retyped the song to make it easier for me to read it aloud, which explained some but not all of the previously unintelligible parts. It was increasingly on my mind because I had read the song so many times, transcribed it, and tried to understand it, but then put it aside again. Then the verses and the sound of spoken words, which were somewhat exotic because of their archaicness, began to invade my dreams. Especially the ones about dying gave me no peace. It became clear to me that I had to decipher the song, because otherwise it would not leave me alone. Death touches us all, and I imagine that if the song upset me so much and stayed with me, it must have had a similar effect 150 years ago when the existential threat was disproportionately greater. I searched for contextual parallels to the song

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<sup>1</sup> Keber 2006; Železnik 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Keber 2007; Bratož 2017.



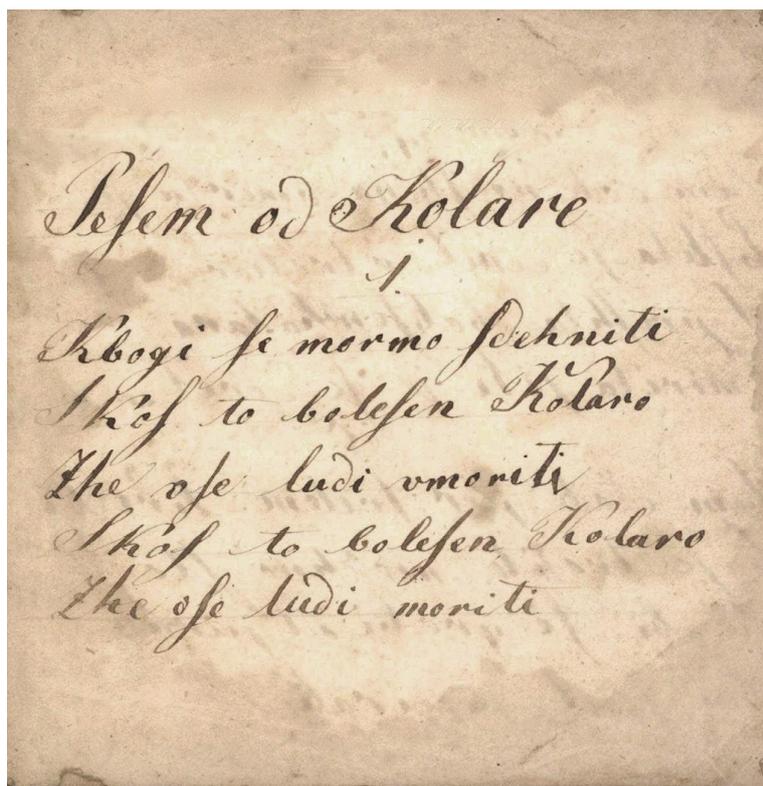


Fig. 1. Urban Kreps, *Pesem od kolare*, 1847 (Kamnica near Maribor), the first stanza. Source: Maribor University Library, Slovenia, Ms 563.

of cholera to calm my reaction to it, which I describe in this article. I see the message of the song as a kind of interweaving of cautionary warning arising from the impotence of protection against disease, insight into the horrors of high mortality, and pious readiness for suffering and impending death. This ‘dramatic’ and personal insight as part of an introduction to the material analysis process is given as an example of how a fragment of material can guide us to further contemplation and analyses in ethnology. It is also worth mentioning that I discovered this ‘Song on Cholera’ before the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when infectious disease tragedies were not being widely addressed. Because we have been preoccupied with pandemic stories for over two years at the time of writing this paper, however, the song’s message may seem lot less mysterious.

#### The occurrence of cholera in Slovenia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

Cholera, a bacterial intestinal disease, is an example of a contagious and rapidly spreading disease that can easily become an epidemic or even pandemic. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it spread across the world from its geographic origin in the Ganges Delta in India. Six subsequent pandemics killed millions of people across every continent. The current (seventh) pandemic began in 1961 in South Asia, reaching Africa in 1971 and the Americas in 1991. Cholera is now endemic in many

countries. It remains a global public health threat and is an indicator of inequity and lack of social development. Access to safe water and improved sanitation has eliminated the transmission of *Vibrio cholerae*, the bacterium that causes cholera, in high-income countries. However, the bacterium continues to infect millions of people in less developed countries where improved water and sanitation infrastructure is not widespread. Today, cholera is still prevalent in 47 countries and the map of cholera overlaps with the map of poverty, hunger, and war. It is estimated that 1.3 to 4.0 million people become infected with cholera each year and 21,000 to 143,000 of them succumb to the disease. In Africa alone, between 40 and 80 million people live in cholera areas.<sup>3</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, cholera was not the only mass killer; it joined a host of other diseases such as tuberculosis, smallpox, scarlet fever, measles, typhoid, dysentery, worms, helminthiasis, and gastroenteritis, many of which were fatal in most cases but are now curable. Cholera was the most violent, unpredictable, and ruthless, and consequently the most present in the spectrum of social discourses that testify to its violent emotional impact on the masses and to its many consequences at the socio-cultural level. Today, cholera is no longer a central public health issue in Europe, but, like

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization 2021; Ali et al. 2015, 2; *The Global Roadmap* 2017.

the bubonic plague, has been replaced by other serious diseases. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, this was not the case; cholera dominated large parts of Europe.<sup>4</sup> Cholera, which spread throughout Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the form of major pandemics, was the result of the development of trade and intense contacts between the Eastern and Western worlds. Originating in Bengal, it spread throughout the world via trade routes. Many Europeans at that time lived in areas with low standards of sanitation and hygiene, and thus had little chance of resisting this disease. Cholera was transmitted by contact and with contaminated water and resulted in rapid death by dehydration. Europe developed a system of protection by digging wells, separating sewage from drinking water, and other measures. After the pandemics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, cases of cholera in Europe were reduced to such a degree that it was no longer considered an epidemic disease in Europe.<sup>5</sup>

In the summer months of 1836, cholera began to spread from the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venice eastward via Trieste to Istria, to the Habsburg Slovene province of Carniola (*Kranjska*),<sup>6</sup> and the Slovene-inhabited province of Carinthia (*Koroška*). In the districts of Klagenfurt (*Celovec*) and Villach it spread more in the countryside than in Klagenfurt itself, where only a few people fell ill. In Carniola it spread from the district of Postojna to Ljubljana and Novo Mesto, where up to 7,297 people fell ill. It spread to the south from Istria to Dalmatia and to the east from Carniola to the Slovene-inhabited province Styria (*Štajerska*), where the district of Maribor was the worst affected, with about 500 people falling ill. The epidemic spread only to Maribor and Graz, and there were only a few cases of the disease in the district of Celje. From Styria, cholera spread to Lower Austria and Vienna, and from there to Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and Galicia.<sup>7</sup> The second wave of the cholera epidemic broke out in 1849, when 145,000 people died of cholera in the Habsburg Monarchy, with the disease being transmitted primarily through the movements of military troops due to the revolutionary year of 1848. In the second half of August 1849, there were a few cases in Slovene Styria, along the Drava River. By 1849 the authorities and the population had already had some experience with cholera, so fear of the unknown was replaced: this time, people knew exactly what to fear. Nevertheless, during the second epidemic, due to general ignorance of the mode of transmission of the disease and the inefficacy of the existing medicines, the effectiveness of the measures could

not be increased. In 1849, in addition to the German newspapers *Laibacher Zeitung* and *Illyrisches Blatt*, the Slovene *Novice* also reported on the cholera epidemic, which increased the level of information among the population, as it also covered the part of the Slovene public that did not speak German. Carniola was the most affected by the third cholera epidemic in 1855, when 19,370 people fell ill and 5,748 died. In Styria, the number of people sickened in 1855 was the lowest of all the provinces – 149 people fell ill and 63 died. In the entire Monarchy at that time 662,814 people fell ill and 270,915 died. Most deaths occurred in Hungary, Banat, and Vojvodina, where nearly half of all patients died. After that, there were two more cholera epidemics in 1866 and 1886, and the last epidemic is said to have killed 68 people in Carniola. In the 1890s, there were three more epidemics in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>8</sup>

According to data from the geographical proximity of the manuscript in question, cholera broke out 20 June 1836 in the district of Fala in the Drava valley in Styria, carried by a married couple who dealt in poultry and eggs. The husband died soon after, then the wife. The local authorities (the judge and the healer) quickly detected the disease, but it was already raging with a vengeance. In barely twelve weeks, more than 300 people had died, and about 860 fell ill. Cholera broke out first and most severely on the left bank of the Drava, crossed over the natural barrier of the water, and in three weeks had spread through the parish of Ruše. From there it spread to Lovrenc in Pohorje Mountains, where it was finally confined.<sup>9</sup>

#### Depictions of Cholera in Slovene folk literature, art songs, and imagination from Slovene Styria in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

In addition to historical and medical data, cholera is often mentioned in folk and artistic literature. The disease mentioned in literature often takes its example from earlier, much more severe plague epidemics.

European versions of the tale feature a personified Plague, who appears as a nocturnal wanderer in Anton Aškerc's (1856–1912) ballad of the same name. In the South Slavic variants, two characteristics of Plague are important. The first is that the personification can be bribed with food, especially milk, to spare donors. Another characteristic is that Plague needs a man to help it cross the water (either a river or a strait) by transporting Plague by boat. This characteristic is the basis for many tales about the night traveller Plague including Aškerc's ballad, for which he got the material in the

<sup>4</sup> Bratož 2017, 11–12.

<sup>5</sup> Zupanič Slavec 2017, 71.

<sup>6</sup> A historical region that included parts of present-day Slovenia.

<sup>7</sup> Krebs 1941; Keber 2007, 60.

<sup>8</sup> Keber 2007, 77, 78, 88, 91, 92, 151, 164, 165, 182.

<sup>9</sup> Vrbnjak 1985, 362.

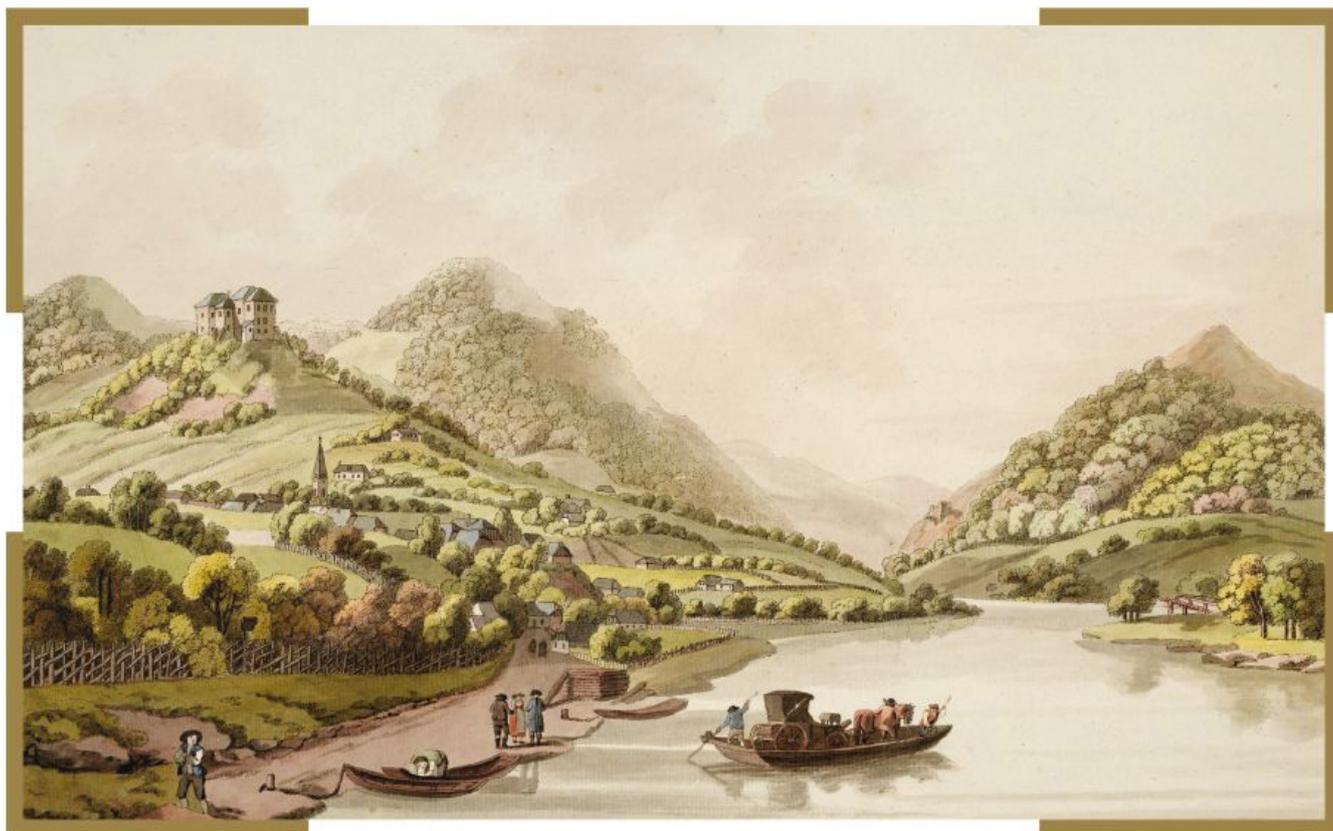


Fig. 2. Ferry place at the Drava river near Dravograd: Transport of a mail wagon with šajka, a boat with flat cut ends, c. 1800. Goods (mainly wood) were transported via šajka until 1863. Coloured etching. Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

eastern Slovene Hills (*Slovenske gorice*).<sup>10</sup> A relevant story, although not from the Slovene Hills but from the Drava region in Styria, was published in 1949 by the poet Janko Glazer (1893–1975) in a review of Aškerc's collected works. Glazer had heard the story from his mother, who told it as an experience of her great-uncle, who in his youth was a boatman in Selnica opposite Ruše west of Maribor. The boatman was called at night from the shore in Ruše, and he transported the invisible Cholera to the shore in Selnica; that day half of the village fell ill. Almost everyone in the great-uncle's house also died. The great-uncle cured himself with honey, or he would also have died.

Janko Glazer also published a historical report about the cholera epidemic in Ruše and its surroundings in 1836.<sup>11</sup> Glazer wrote the account based on a note in the parish chronicle of Ruše (1785–1876), which was written in German. The chronicler wrote more than 200 pages, but sadly the chronicle was destroyed during World War II and only Glazer's translated excerpts have survived.

*In August 1836, a terrible contagious cholera disease broke out in the parish of Ruše, which lasted until October 4, when the last person died of the disease. During this time 206 people fell ill in the parish and 38 died. The disease spread mainly in September; in the municipalities of Bistrica and Ruše. In Selnica, cholera had already appeared 14 days before, in Ruše it was hoped that it would not come across the Drava; but this hope was not fulfilled. Suddenly almost all the inhabitants of Bistrica fell ill and in 10 hours there were already 9 dead. Cholera came from Bistrica to Ruše and left out Bezzena, which was in between, which is incomprehensible. When the disease broke out, the spirit of the dead was felt: all the birds flew away and returned only when the cholera was over.*<sup>12</sup>

Glazer's story of seeing the invisible Cholera on the Drava, written after the experience of his relative, a boatman on the Drava, coincides with foreign visual depictions of this disease in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The cholera epidemic was often depicted in terms of dispersed poisoned air. It was also depicted as a covered skeleton crushing everything before it. The focus of the written story is on the invisibility of Cholera. This is

<sup>10</sup> The Slovene Hills, the largest hilly region of Slovenia; a smaller part is located also in the Austrian province of Styria.

<sup>11</sup> Grafenauer 1957, 154-155.

<sup>12</sup> Glazer 1949, 159-160.



Fig. 3. Cholera, as a large shrouded spectre with skeletal hands and feet, indiscriminately crushes soldiers on both sides of the battlefield. Robert Seymour, 1831, lithograph, colour. Source: U. S. National Library of Medicine. <https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101393375-img>

consistent with the medical theory of the time of miasmas or infections, toxic decomposing organic matter, and vapours from the earth that were thought to be the cause of infectious diseases prior to the discovery of microorganisms. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the infectious invisible force theory was abandoned when Robert Koch discovered the causes of anthrax, tuberculosis, and cholera. However, the miasmatic theory has survived indirectly in literary folklore.

#### ***The Song on Cholera from 1847***

Cholera is also mentioned in the 'Song on Cholera' preserved by the Local History and Special Collections Department of Maribor University Library in Slovenia.<sup>13</sup> I discovered the manuscript with the song by accident while reviewing folk medicine material at the University Library Maribor in February 2017. The 'Song on Cholera' is part of an unbound manuscript entitled

'Folk Songs' (containing 'Song on Young Love', 'Song on Cholera', and 'Song on Fraternity'), written by Urban Kreps in 1847. The six-page manuscript written in the Bohorič alphabet<sup>14</sup> (a Slovene language orthography used between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries) was found in Kamnica near Maribor. The manuscript was donated to the University Library by Bruno Hartman, the director of the library, in 1974. The second song in the manuscript, 'Song on Cholera', is one of 12 versions of folk songs about cholera found so far in Slovenia, and is the only one from Slovene Styria, although the content refers to Carniola at that time. Other versions, preserved at the Institute of Ethnomusicology of the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, were partly analysed by an ethnomusicologist Dr. Zmaga Kumer in 1959.

In that analysis, Kumer discussed how Karel Štrekelj (1859-1912), a Slovene linguist, Slavist,

<sup>13</sup> Kreps 1847; Maribor University Library, Manuscript 563 (UKM Ms 563).

<sup>14</sup> Slovene: *bohoričica*.

publicist, ethnologist, and folklorist, best known as a collector of Slovene folk songs, characterised the then-known ‘Songs on Cholera’ as artificial, which is why none of them are found in his edition of Slovene Folk Songs (*Slovenske narodne pesmi* published in four volumes in 1895, 1900, 1904, and 1908).<sup>15</sup> Karel Štrekelj excluded some songs referring to historical events and family songs based on his principles of defining the ‘national’, seeing them as products of travelling singers.<sup>16</sup> Zmaga Kumer hypothesised that for someone who, like Štrekelj, judged folk poetry by its artistic value, the song about cholera in Carniola was perhaps really just an insignificant versification. On the contrary, for her it was, from several aspects, an interesting phenomenon worthy of research by a folklorist. Ten archive records of this song are known – one version from Cerkno and Podmelec, one from Dolenjska, one with no location given, one from Sevnica, one from Pijava Gorica near Ig, one from Konfin near Moravče, one from Cegelnica near Novo Mesto, one from Šmarca near Kamnik, one from Trzin near Kamnik, and one from Žej near Moravče – written and recorded between 1906–1937.<sup>17</sup>

One song entitled ‘Cholera Disease’ (*Bolezen kolera*) was written by the poet Josip Jurčič (1844–1881) and published in the ninth book of his *Collected Works*.<sup>18</sup> The ‘Song on Cholera’ found in Kamnica near Maribor and dated to 1847<sup>19</sup> is evidently an eleventh version, hitherto unknown. The published list of 227 Slovene folk medicinal books and records with data on healing, prayers, charms, and advice on the treatment of people and animals does not include this version of the song. It is probable that the collector, veterinarian Milan Dolenc (1907–1993), was simply unaware of it.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, we learn nothing about the scribe Urban Kreps in the ‘Song on Cholera’ or from other transcripts of the songs in the manuscript (‘Song on Young Love’, and ‘Song on Fraternity’). His Bohorič alphabet is legible and beautifully written in black ink. He seems to have taken great care in writing, as there are traces of thin pencil guidelines on the paper. The line spacing is even and the stanza numbers, slightly underlined, are in the middle of the paper. The pages are numbered with a thicker pencil in the left or right corner. The scribe has taken pains to make the transcripts of the folk songs

look like they are in a book. There are 12 numbered pages. At the end of the transcripts is the inscription ‘*Finis*’, below which is the signature of Urban Kreps, and next to it an illegible word (probably initials); below that is the date 1847, underlined in pencil without a ruler. The writing practice of educated scribes of that time was that when they signed their name, they added (often illegibly) the letters *mp*, or *m. pr.* (Lat. ‘*Manu propria*’), an abbreviated phrase meaning ‘signed with his own hand’. The paper of the manuscript is torn at the edges. In the middle of the crease there is damage that indicates it had gotten wet, and in some places there are grease stains or spots of diluted ink. It is not known if the pages in the manuscript were ever bound between covers. Since there is no information about the use of the manuscript in Maribor University Library, we can assume that the manuscript was read by several people who lived through the time of cholera in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that it was forgotten as the disease subsided, so that it got tears and stains.

The version of the song from Kamnica near Maribor acknowledges the author of the song as a schoolmaster from Ljubljana, stating at the beginning of the sixth stanza: ‘*The teacher from Ljubljana wrote it*’.<sup>21</sup> This is actually possible because the song is written in more or less literary Slovene without strong dialectal features, and uses the facts of the cholera epidemic and details that mention specific places in Ljubljana.

Zmaga Kumer assumes that the songs about cholera did not reach the people or were disseminated through the press.<sup>22</sup> The stanza about a woman with nine children and the stanza about hundreds of dead are found in almost all versions, including the one from Kamnica (*A woman died there, / leaving nine children. / The cholera disease came / and killed nine more.*<sup>23</sup> *Eight hundred died down there in the town of Ljubljana. / My God, what will it be?*<sup>24</sup>). This stanza expresses a troubling existential question (included once in every variation of the song except one): What will happen to us – how will we survive? Only the version of the song from Cegelnica near Novo Mesto, recorded in 1911, lacks this line; it also stands out the most in terms of content. Zmaga Kumer is also sceptical of the song’s accuracy in reporting the number of deaths – she warns that the confusion and fear of the epidemics accelerated the dissemination of the most incredible news, which even the most objective writer

<sup>15</sup> Kumer 1959, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Klobčar 2020, 254.

<sup>17</sup> Kumer 1959, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Jurčič 1969, 219–220.

<sup>19</sup> Kreps 1847; UKM Ms 563.

<sup>20</sup> Dolenc 1988.

<sup>21</sup> Kreps 1847; UKM Ms 563.

<sup>22</sup> Kumer 1959, 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Tam dole na shena vmerla je / Počila je devet otrokov / I prišla bolefen Kolara / Omorila jih je se devet.*

<sup>24</sup> *Tam dole Vmesti lubleinskem / Sjih je o’merlo ofem sto / Moj bog Kaj bade to.*

(in this case, the schoolmaster from Ljubljana) could not verify.<sup>25</sup>

In the different versions of the song, the city in which all the inhabitants died of cholera is called by different names: 'Majland' (archaic for Milan in Italy), 'Keheronija' (an unspecified city), 'Elion' (an unspecified city), 'the city of Venice', 'the city of Trieste', or simply 'a city' or 'a peaceful city'. Despite the vagueness of some versions, the versions that do call the city by name place it somewhere in Italy, which corresponds to our knowledge that the cholera plague spread from Italy to the Slovene territories.

The versions of the songs' lyrics themselves tell different stories about the spread of the songs on cholera outside Ljubljana, their alleged place of origin. It is said the songs have been known in Italy, Carniola, Vienna,<sup>26</sup> Styria (in present-day Slovenia and Austria), and Germany.

One version of the song gives signs of the disease when it says that *a man turns black, blue, before he dies*.<sup>27</sup> Cholera is also called 'blue disease' or 'blue death' because the severe loss of fluids can turn the patient's skin colour bluish-gray. According to some versions of the song, the reapers passed out in the field and were brought to the hospital (*špetav*,<sup>28</sup> from German *Spital*, hospital) where they asked God for health.

Zmaga Kumer states that three versions of the song also include the idea of a strong earthquake at Sv. Krištof<sup>29</sup> in Ljubljana. These versions include information regarding the opening and closing of graves<sup>30</sup> (see also footnotes 31 and 33), which could be related to the devastating 6.1% earthquake that struck Ljubljana on Easter Sunday, 14 April 1895, while most of the inhabitants were asleep and a terrible noise accompanied the strong tremor as the ground shook, walls cracked, roofs and wooden floors creaked, tiles and chimneys flew from the roofs, and walls collapsed. The residents panicked in the darkness and hastily left their homes, wearing only night clothes, and gathered outside, where they prayed while enduring the aftershocks in fear. During this earthquake 21 people died (out of 31,000 residents) and 145 or 11% of the buildings had to be demolished.<sup>31</sup> Alternately, the stanzas might be describing the movement of the earth by frequent digging in the cemetery of Sv. Krištof because the number of cholera deaths was so high. The Ljubljana earthquake took place at a time

when the main waves of cholera in Slovenia had already passed, so it is more likely, in my opinion, that the songs were highlighting the high number of deaths from cholera.

This is also how the version from Kamnica near Maribor is to be understood<sup>32</sup> (*It was very shaky down there at the Holy Cross. As if the graves were opening and closing again*<sup>33</sup>). This fifth stanza probably refers to the Ljubljana cemetery of Sv. Krištof and the former cemetery that was on this site from 1779 until it was moved in the 1930s. The abandoned cemetery of St Krištof was later built upon, and the remains and gravestones of famous Slovenes were moved by the city authorities to the eastern edge of the old cemetery, which was given the name Navje Memorial Park.<sup>34</sup>

During the first cholera outbreak, 5-7 people were buried daily in the St Krištof cemetery because of the high number of deaths in June and August 1836. Many graves were dug up because the cemetery became too small and the gravediggers had to save space. It is said that children who died at this time were buried in graves with adults, and graves that were several years old were dug up.<sup>35</sup> There were also many cholera victims elsewhere in the country. According to Zmaga Kumer, who cites a source from 1911, the singer of one version of the 'Song on Cholera' said that all but two residents of a village near Ribnica in the Dolenjska region died of cholera. The only folk healer there died eight days after the disease broke out, according to a verifiable source.<sup>36</sup>

Life during a cholera outbreak seemed to stand still. Kumer reports that cholera halted work in the fields, wheat remained unharvested for a long time, and people despaired and commended themselves to God for help. People did not understand at the time why even those who did not come into contact with the sick died, though many doctors and servants did not catch it. In the same breath, newspapers gave instructions on how to fight it and warned against anointing it, calling the disease a whip of God for which there was no help. In winter the disease ebbed away.<sup>37</sup>

Zmaga Kumer makes the case that other versions of the song best fit 1855, the year of the worst cholera outbreak. The lines about the sudden death of reapers in the field of Ljubljana also testify to this.<sup>38</sup> On the contrary, the version from Kamnica near Maribor

<sup>25</sup> Kumer 1959, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Kreps 1847; UKM Ms 563.

<sup>27</sup> Kumer 1959, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Kumer 1959, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Kumer 1959, 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Koker be se grob odperali / pa spet zapirali* / As if the graves were opening and closing again, Kumer 1959, 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Močni potresi v preteklosti*.

<sup>32</sup> Kreps 1847; UKM Ms 563.

<sup>33</sup> *Tam dole per fvetem Krišhi / Se je trofilo mozhno flo / Ko bi fe grobi odpirali / Ino špet sapirali*.

<sup>34</sup> Lavrič 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Kumer 1959, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Kumer 1959, 3; referring to: Fr. Kobal (1911): *O koleri na Kranjskem*. ZMS XIII, 53-109.

<sup>37</sup> Kumer 1959, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Kumer 1959, 4.

moves the events of the song further back, to the time of the first cholera outbreak in 1836. This can also be deduced from the end of the seventh stanza (*My God, my God, what will that be / That has never happened before*<sup>39</sup>). The text is like a collection of news circulating among the people, whether real or fictitious, genuine or exaggerated, modern or from the memory of earlier outbreaks of the disease, especially from the first wave in 1836. It is likely that the song was written when the epidemic was already beginning to subside.<sup>40</sup>

### Conclusion

Certainly an infectious disease, the treatment of which was not possible, greatly affected the lives of people in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hygienic and general conditions were poor, doctors were far away, expensive and did not necessarily speak Slovene, and health insurance did not exist. People also passed on information about

the disease in songs they wrote and often sang because of the suffering they had endured. One of them is the ‘Song on Cholera’, a type of song of which ten variations were previously recorded and discussed by Zmaga Kumer. The Kamnica variation of ‘Song on Cholera’ that I found in the Maribor library has not been mentioned anywhere before. The song itself probably did not originate in Kamnica near Maribor, but was most likely written by a teacher from Ljubljana. If we decipher the content of the Kamnica version of the ‘Song on Cholera’ in a medical-historical context and in comparison to the different variations, we can conclude beyond a doubt that the song refers to the first wave of the cholera epidemic of 1836 and was (re)written in 1847. The need to reflect in the song the events related to cholera, which occurred almost a decade previous to its composition, testifies to how traumatic this period was in the memory of the survivors.

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