

## FROM THE SHEPHERDIC IMAGE IN SLOVAK FOLKLORE TO THAT OF NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION\*

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Folklore reflects several aspects of cultural history in a more penetrating way than other preserved historical sources. Attitudes and stereotypes are not mirrored directly but the reflection of reality is specific. Folklore does not take account of time relations and chronological succession, nor the present situation nor regional peculiarities.

Folklore plays an important role in the processes of "ethnicization of culture", its role often being "alternative". This is why multiple mythicizing takes place in the relation between folklore and ethnic group (nation). The article analyses the transformation of the shepherdic image in folklore to that of Slovak national identification in the period from the 16th to the 20th centuries at three levels: folklore, pseudofolklore and nation-identifying.

Folklore reflects several aspects of cultural history in a more penetrating and more vivid way than other preserved historical sources (iconographic, literary, musical, etc.) although it also has its limitations. Folklore material does not reflect attitudes and stereotypes directly, but instead reflects reality in a specific manner (e.g. it does not take account of time relations and chronological succession, nor the present state of affairs, nor any regional or local peculiarities of these stereotypes, etc.). Folklore also plays an important role in processes of "the ethnicization of culture" (Köstlin 1993), with its role often being as the "alternative". Logically, multiple mythicizing takes place in the relation between folklore and ethnic group (the nation) in time and space.

The folklore of village communities played a significant ethnoidentifying role (Simonides 1988) primarily in central European nations living in multinational states (in the middle of the 19th century amongst almost all western Slavs). Even after 1918, i.e. during the first Czechoslovak republic, this status was preserved and strengthened, among Slovaks in particular, as a result of historical and political circumstances. Its residues have been observable in a kind of petrification of the romantic picture of a Slovak who is inseparable from his folklore "entity" almost up to the present (Krekovičová 1992:66). This is associated with the formation and

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perseverance of ethnoidentifying stereotypes and myths, regardless of whether they have roots in self-reflection or in the assessment of an ethnic group/nation by the others, "foreign". One can trace in these the actual historical and cultural, as well as fictitious (mythic), semantic levels. One of such ethnoidentifying stereotypes is the symbol of the Slovak as a mountain shepherd who takes care of sheep and a surviving vision of the culture of the Slovak village as shepherd's culture. It is a picture of the Slovak - "bača" (chief shepherd) with all his attributes: "his fujara"- (a large shepherd's flute), his pipe, or a bagpipe, his flock of sheep and, with a group of shepherds (walachs), the free life of the mountain countryside, etc. In addition to other attributes of folk culture, folklore has served as an argument for such an evaluation of the "typical" representative of the Slovak nation. On the analytical basis of folklore material and its correlations with literary works of the particular period, we shall try to draft some aspects of the actual background and potential historical peripeteias of the symbol. We will point to the process and measure of Slovak identification with this picture, its acceptance or non-acceptance as self-portrait of Slovaks. Shepherd's songs and correlations of shepherd's songs in the region of central Europe, as well as pastoral carols and their connections with shepherd's songs, will serve as the basis for our study.

By contextualizing the period during which the pastoral theme took shape and how it functioned in songs, we can speak about a kind of ambivalently stereotyped picture of the shepherd in the folk and rural milieu similarly, we can see how the shepherd image works in so-called high culture and at the level of the national versus European relations as well. The picture of the shepherd is polarized: on the one hand, it follows the sacral-profan dichotomy and on the other hand, it allows along the literary-folklore or European-regional and/or Slovak axis. From the perspective of semantics, song material has helped identify three basic lines of the formation of the picture of the shepherd:

1. folklore,
2. pseudofolklore,
3. national identification.

The first two, controversial to some extent, move along the level of social status or particular occupation (shepherd's occupation as a social caste). The third line shifts the picture axiologically to the level of the national symbol with arguments based on both the folklore and pseudofolklore lines. The shepherdic image can, however, be decoded as polysemantic, multidimensional (Robotycki 1992:88), or axiologically ambivalent. In spite of this, we can also speak about certain semantic dominants in each of these levels from the evaluative perspective or of the presence absence of ideological aim. We shall use the two parallel levels of the picture of the shepherd:

1. subjective, self-reflection (the "I" view but also the view from "outside") (Jakubíková 1993:60-61).
2. directed towards objectifying the knowledge based on the existing scientific knowledge and material interpretation.

The shaping of the shepherdic image will be traced in its musical and textual components as being parallel but not identical. In view of semantics, decoding the shepherdic image is more unequivocal in textual element. The texts of the songs reflect the axiological aspect of the picture directly and its decoding is therefore easier. In identifying other pictures in folk songs (e.g. the picture of a Jew, a Gypsy, or members of other ethnic or social groups) it is usually the textual component that is unambiguously determining (Krekovičová 1992a). However, in the case of the shepherd element in Slovak folk and national culture it is the musical component that plays a significant role. The folklore perspective will be thus combined with the ethnomusicological perspective.

## 1. THE FOLKLORE LINE OF THE SHAPING OF THE SHEPHERDIC IMAGE

The shepherd's song does not exist in Slovakia as an unambiguous and homogeneous type of song. Slovak shepherd's songs represent a heterogeneous conglomerate of evolutionary, geographically, stylistically and functionally diverse vocal expressions interconnected with shepherding through themes and functions. Their basic division corresponds with the two historically successive and partially coexisting forms of shepherding in Slovakia:

- I. with the older form of cattle breeding in lowland areas;
- II. with mountain sheepherding associated with historical processes of Walachian colonization.

This matches, to some degree, the basic division of shepherd's songs. The shepherd element in a Slovak folk song can be explored from three basic aspects: a) the functional and thematic (songs with a dominant shepherd's motif in the text bound to shepherding as occupation and social status with an important aspect of a bearer); b) musical, so-called "shepherd's musical style" as one of the developmental levels of Slovak folk songs (Kresánek 1951, Elscheková – Elschek 1980); and c) genre.

a) From the functional and thematic viewpoint (more than 70,000 records were analysed), pastoral songs make up a quantitatively insignificant component within the Slovak repertoire, viz. 2.54%. About half of these (less than one thousand) are shepherd's songs. This number confirms the actual representation of shepherd's element in the life and economy of Slovak villages. Agriculture has been its basis from the antiquity in most of the territory (as in almost all European nations) (Neustupný 1969). The process of Walachian colonization was probably a historically significant break (14-18th century). This process cannot be, however, identified with shepherd's songs in Slovakia, because their connections with shepherd's or quinttonal musical style are more complicated than it has been interpreted so far (Elscheková 1978, Elscheková – Elschek 1980:8-10).

Because the picture of the shepherd is fixed in song texts, self-reflection and evaluation of "the others" are intertwined. This picture is multidimensional and in-

dicates ambivalence. Its centre of gravity consists, however, in the negative judgement. The following traits of the shepherd can be decoded in concrete texts (shepherd's songs):

- the poorest social stratum of village community;
- the shepherd chooses his occupation because he is lazy;
- the shepherd as sheep thief;
- the shepherd as robber;
- the chief shepherd as robber but also a victim of robbers' violence;
- the chief shepherd as magician, healer;
- the shepherd as a sensitive man with a strong feeling for nature and sheep;
- the shepherd as a protector of sheep as a source of living;
- the chief shepherd as the skilful expert who passes his craft to his followers
- the romantic figure of the old disabled chief shepherd;
- the tribute to shepherd's place in society - shepherd as a strong, proud, handsome man;
- the shepherd as a good musician, singer and dancer with a special feeling for musical instrument;

(outside shepherd's songs):

- the shepherd as a member of the lowest, poor social stratum;
- the shepherd as a socially handicapped individual or a child or an unmarried woman;
- the bucolic picture of a beautiful shepherdess;
- or sheepherding as an erotic symbol (Bartmiński 1974), shepherd – seducer

The shepherd was in folk culture mostly presented as a person standing on the margin of society. There was an evident qualitative difference between a hired village herdsman herding pigs, cows, oxen, etc. and a sheepherder (chief shepherd, shepherd) whose work was highly specialized and who often herded also his own sheep. All the fringes of the village community there was the shepherd seen socially as a representative of the poorest stratum of the village population and seen in terms of the specialization and their seasonal work that requires - that they spend half the year away from home (chief shepherds and shepherds). Proverbial expressions illustrate the marginal social status of the shepherd: "I am master, you are master, but who will herd goats?; Honour to anyone, honour to someone, just a horn to the shepherd" (*Ja pán, ty pán, a kto bude kozy pásť? Komu čest', tomu čest', pastierovi trúba.*). It was common that also children, girls before marriage, or the physically handicapped worked as shepherds. The assumed percentage of shepherds (approx. 0.05%, Elschek, 1991) in the structure of local village population also confirms their marginal representation. Shepherds usually created a social stratum singled out of village population on the principle "us-them". The more or less evident distance that was maintained between the two groups is seen in the song texts. We often see motifs of shepherds be-

ing taunted as they live in the rougher conditions of mountain sheep pastures. A girl's marriage to a shepherd could have been a social handicap for her.

The poverty of shepherds is emphasized by their non-peasant occupation perceived as a manifestation of laziness. Interestingly, Slovak folk songs as well as proverbs represent a Gypsy in an identical way: "A shepherd and a Gypsy, all the same" (*Válač a cigán, všetko jedno.*) (Záturecký 1974:214/X).

b) From the perspective of ethnomusicology, the so-called shepherd's or the quinttonal musical style that represents one developmental level of musical thought is not bound exclusively to the shepherd's song. In the Slovak folk song, it is more widely represented and is determined regionally by the genre or topic (Kresánek 1951, Leng 1961). However, shepherd's songs play a significant role in the shaping of this style of music and particularly in its development.

The fact that shepherd's songs consist of several successive and intertwined stylistic levels serves as evidence of the autochthonous development of the regionally differentiated stylistic shepherd stratum in the mountain regions of central and northern Slovakia. A wider comparative look mainly demonstrates the better development musically of (modal) variants of shepherd's and shepherd-and-robbert's songs. These represent a specifically Slovak quality that has no analogies in surrounding nations as for variety, plethora of forms and stylistic peculiarities. The melodiousness of shepherd's songs is closely associated here with shepherds' instrumental music, chiefly with wind instruments such as the bagpipe, pipes, shepherd's flute, signalling instruments (*gajdy, pišťaly, fujara, signálne nástroje*) (Elschek 1991). Other types of Slovak shepherd's songs belong to a wider European areals (shepherd's calls "halekačky", cowherd's songs, etc.). These areas partially meet and cross through Slovak territory gathering stylistically and functionally diverse components (Krekovičová 1992-1993). Shepherd's songs together with robber's songs create, however, a newer level of quinttonal, or so-called shepherd's style of music. Some characteristic signs of the shepherd's style are 5-part melodies, modal colouring, instrumental motives, beginning of the melody on the octave, cascade-like melodic lines of mixolydian songs, enlargement to octave, none, and so on). These are crystallized, however, in the newer phase of robber and shepherd songs, probably not occurring earlier than in the 17th or 18th centuries (Elscheková 1978).

c) Slovak shepherd's songs did not represent any special genre before Walachian colonization. As an expression of the certain specific unity of textual, functional and musical features this is identifiable only later in shepherd's songs. At the same time it occurs only in regionally limited places and does not create, as for the quantity, any important component of the repertoire (Krekovičová, 1992-1993).

In summary from the aspect of ethnomusicology the developed forms of shepherd's songs, these and shepherd-robber's songs bear characteristic features of Slovak folklore but primarily from the point of view of quality. Although they show typical Slovak signs within European area, they are not quantitatively significant or a representative component of the repertoire of the territory. They have their regional and relatively new time horizons of their crystallization. Although the picture of the shepherd that has been fixed in the texts of the songs shows the tendency towards ambivalence along the folklore line, from the perspective of self-reflection and perception of shepherds by the community, a negative evaluation dominates. The analysis of the folklore line has pointed out the mechanism of the formation of ethnoidentifying stereotypes which always imply simplifications to ethnic signs through the enhancement of a regional and socially marginal factor (Kalavský 1991:356). In our further considerations we shall therefore concentrate on the non-folklore sources of the mythification and the mystifying of the picture of the shepherd into national symbol.

## 2. THE PSEUDOFOLKLORE LINE

From the perspective of shaping the ethnoidentifying stereotype of the Slovak - the shepherd and the ties between shepherd's songs and pastoral carols is important, since they create a significant component in the Slovak fund of Christmas carols. Pastoral carols can serve to illustrate the second, so-called pseudofolklore dimension of the shepherd's element in Slovak folk songs. Pastoral carols are mostly of a "semi-folk" character as compared to shepherd's songs. From the point of view of music, they represent a newer developmental category more dependent on the models of European artificial church music with predominant harmonic thinking. Some of them, however, are musically interconnected with shepherd's songs of folk origin. The development and domestication of pastoral carols was strongly affected by intense anti-Reformation activities of the Catholic Church and, in concert with this, also the artificial spiritual song, the existence of pastorals (in Slovakia, mostly from the middle of the 18th to the middle of the 19th centuries) (Žilková 1992:85) and the popularity of the Bethlehem play. In the musical component of pastoral carols, we see parallels with the melodiousness of shepherd's songs, chiefly in numerous instrumentalisms (bagpipe motifs make up 10%, while another 10% are signal motifs of fanfare, shepherd's trumpet and pipe melodies). We also see not so many melodic loans. However, there are no shepherd's flute (*fujara*) melodies which are properly characteristic of Slovak shepherd's and robber's songs. This confirms the wider European origin of the greater part of our pastoral carols (Krekovičová 1992b).

Connections between pastoral carols and shepherd's songs in the textual component are still more interesting. The picture of the shepherd fixed in folklore material changes remarkably due to the influence of artificial or "semi-folk" pastorals and pastoral carols. Through pastoral carols and pastorals, similarly to painted or

woodcarved Bethlehems, the picture of the shepherd penetrating into the folklore repertoire is seen through the eyes of a man living in the town who has his roots in pastoral romanticism of baroque and in the literature as a whole. The shepherd is perceived and portrayed by an external romanticization and idealization of the life. The so-called "folk realism" of pastoral carols emphasizing the genuineness of the shepherd's life does not have its origin in folklore. Genetically, parallels with the late-Hellenistic picture of idyllic pastoral scenes, picturing the symbol of the life in Eden can also be traced (Mohr-Hein 1971:290-299). The Old-Christian symbolism of "Good Shepherd" occurs here, too (Forstner 1990:317).

The roots of the shepherdic image are found in the literary sources of "semi-folk" songs of the 17th century and are closely associated with the European Baroque period.<sup>1</sup> Individual, relatively convincing realistic details from the life of shepherds played the role of the attributes of sheepherding. Shepherds in carols were perceived through the prism of their role in the legend about the birth of Christ. Idyllic pictures from pastoral life convey much more, even ethnographically, detailed descriptions and realities than the shepherd's songs of folk origin themselves. The atmosphere of shepherd's songs is entirely different, expressive, with emphasis laid on lyrics. It describes the shepherd's emotional world. It does not stress the detailed depiction of the surroundings and realities from life in a sheep pasture. Through the Christian symbolism of Christ as a shepherd, the whole shepherd status is in fact "promoted" and sanctified. Shepherds, standing in their village ordinary life on the margin of community become the centre of attention in Christmas songs (Krekovičová 1992b).

What is important to underscore in the pseudofolklore line is:

1. the moment of "promotion", sanctification of the picture of the shepherd, implying a significant semantic shift to unequivocally positive perception and evaluation of the shepherd element.<sup>2</sup>
2. The reverse process of the folklorization of pastoral carols (Žilková 1992:85) and their strong resonance in folklore milieu has logically led to the strengthening of the importance of the shepherdic image as an organic part of national art and folklore.

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<sup>1</sup> I. Weber-Kellermann earmarks in the German carol repertoire one developmental stage dated from the 16th century, so-called "Hirtenstücke" in connection with the development of the church music (Weber-Kellermann 1982:64). In German literature these songs are also called "weihnachtliche Hirtenlieder" (e.g. Abel-Struth 1973), in Poland they are so-called "pastoralki" (Szwejkowska 1985). Interestingly, this group of carols represents practically one common semantic paradigm within central European territory. This holds for both the melodies and the texts of pastoral carols. To our present state of knowledge, this concerns mainly the area of Germany, Austria, Poland, Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia.

<sup>2</sup> A similar process occurs in the case of robber's symbolics, and not only in our country. Germany can serve as an example: the impact of Schiller's "Robbers" "distorted" reflection of robbery in folklore (Linder-Beroud 1982-1983).

### 3. NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION LINES

From the perspective of the present-day picture of the Slovak shepherd, this is the crucial line of its formation. The national identification lines' historical roots in the transformation of the shepherdic image to that of national symbol can be found in the interest in folk culture and in folklorism manifest in the intelligentsiab. Performances of the fast and expressive shepherd's dance, "odzemok" as "Walachian" or "Heyduck" dances without closer national ("Slovak" or "Magyar") attributes have been documented in historical materials from our territory from 1514 onwards (Kresánek 1959)<sup>3</sup>. The performance of the dance "odzemok" was also recorded later - during the 16th-19th centuries, on various occasions (various ceremonies, coronations, dances in noble courts, etc., Švehlák 1982). However, shepherd's culture had begun to be designated as "national" or "Slovak" as late as in the middle of the 19th century.

The national identification line of the formation of the symbol of a shepherd – Slovak accepts the ambivalent picture of the shepherd in both its folklore and pseudofolklore components. Both of these lines merge in the processes of the formation and declaration of national identification. They function as interchangeable. The dominant component of the picture is represented by an aspect of antiquity. This aspect was in the background of both native and "foreign" interests in folk culture and Slovak folklore. Mostly Magyar and Czech collectors showed interest in the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries although each had different intentions (Urbancová, 1987). The shepherdic picture as part of an archaic (or regarded as such) Slovak folk culture functions here not only as being polysemantic but also as being polyfunctional. Again, targetted ideological manipulation with symbols is evident. On the one hand, there is the picture of the shepherd as one of the means for building a self-portrait of Slovak national identity. This showed significantly self-defensive ambitions as early as the 18th century but mainly from the middle of the 19th century. It was determined by the feeling of being under threat (Urbancová 1987:68). In this sense, the inclinations toward a positive interpretation of antiquity as a quality claiming the right to one's national identity was demonstrated. On the other hand, the myth of antiquity and the shepherd symbol within it served as an instrument for differentiating Slovaks from other nations on the principle of contrast, even exoticism, mainly from their neighbours, who coexisted in a multi-national state (i.e. Magyars and Czechs).

From the middle of the 19th century onwards two parallel levels have been identifiable in the shaping of the Slovak-shepherd symbol. It is this level of self-portrait formation which resonated primarily among educated persons. It closely corresponded with the "plebeian genesis" of Slovak national culture emphasized and still being proclaimed in the present (Miko 1967, Hlôšková 1993).

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<sup>3</sup> It was the execution of George Dózsa, leader of the revolt, where, during execution, the suppressed rebels were forced to dance "hajdúsky" - a folk dance.

The second level was based on the evaluation and view of “the others”. The antiquity of Slovak folk culture proclaimed and sought out could have been and can still be interpreted from the “others” outsider perspective as a sign of primitiveness or a lower degree of civilized development. The attitude of the Magyars and Czechs to the Slovaks changes in close correlation with the “self-presentation” of the Slovaks as modern nation (within the context of European trends). As J. Kandert has noted (Kandert 1991), a semantic shift in perceiving the Slovak brother as a fellow-fighter by Czech educated persons to understanding him only in terms of kinship dates back to the 1850s. This understanding was strengthened by creating a picture of a Slovak younger brother. A category thus has arisen, which is given and forever unchangeable. “This vision incorporated the status of superiority and inferiority...The picture of the Slovak - younger brother is... always connected with the depiction of an archaic way of life in Slovakia. Descriptions documenting antiquity of Slovak folk culture appeared in the works of all explorers engaged in folklore or costumes or habits” (Kandert 1991:5). Such a picture of “younger brother” was then popularized in Czech tourist guides in the period before World War I containing instructions “how to talk to backward Slovaks and how to raise their national (that is, anti-Magyar) consciousness” (Kandert 1991:5). This prejudice has survived and exists in Czechia even today and, in my opinion, it has played a certain role as one of the (maybe unconscious) factors in the decision-making concerning the division of the Czecho-Slovak state in 1993.

The interest in Slovak folk on the Magyar side was afflicted by the struggle of Slovaks for national rights within historical Hungary. It is therefore understandable that in depicting the Slovak people and their properties, character, etc. there appeared tendencies, chiefly after the 1848 revolution and after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (1867) to point out mainly their negative sides (Urbancová 1987:252). Slovak material from the area of folk culture is, at the same time, used as evidence of the development of Magyar folk, independent of any Slavic or even Slovak influences but instead directly from the influences of ancient European culture (Urbancová 1991:10).

In ethnoidentifying line the genuine picture of the shepherd is enriched in myths as being part of the current understanding of this symbol as a symbol of nationality. There are three basic myths: 1. the myth of “Slovakness”, 2. the myth of antiquity, 3. the myth of the self-portrait and the plebeian origin of the Slovak. The shepherdic image as a component of Slovak national culture is freely followed and reinforced by robber myth, particularly the myth of the national hero Juraj Jánošík. All of these interconnected signs are within the mythic language (Robotycki 1992a:15) and are integral parts of our tradition and the tradition “about us” as Slovaks. The issue of the transformational process and construction of the shepherdic image as an important organic part of national culture deserves special attention. However, this will be the subject of another paper.

## CONCLUSION

The symbol of the Slovak shepherd thus has its actual and mythic roots. The mythification processes took place parallel to the sphere of folklore, pseudofolklore, and folklorism and in building national culture. This analysis has shown that the stereotype is primarily based on the evaluation by "the others", the outsiders. As a regional and closely socially determined element the elevation of the shepherd's element to a national symbol is built on the principle of exoticism and in contrast to the other, chiefly neighbouring nations. It is built on the principle of the "promotion" of the shepherd status. It is primarily based on sanctification of shepherds by means of the revitalization of the Christian "Good Shepherd" depiction and the role of shepherds in the legend of the Christ's nativity. The symbol has, to a large extent, the character of myth. Its position and gradual acceptance in the function of self-portrait was probably reinforced by the fact that both the folklore and pseudofolklore lines culminated approximately at the same time, i.e., between the 17th and 19th centuries. The transformation of the shepherdic image started in the middle of the 19th century, in the process of the "ethnicization of culture". From that period onwards, both lines have been further supported and reinforced through national art and literature, folklorism, tourism, and the robber's (Jánošík) tradition as integral parts of Slovak national culture, practically up to the present.

The symbol of the shepherd as part of the self-portrait of the Slovak demonstrates the preservation of several romanticized myths in the relationship between nation and folklore. It represents one of the forms of positive romantic nationalism in folklore common also in other nations (Abrahams 1993). Although the mentioned myth does not stem from folklore but from the baroque "shepherd's romanticism" (Biedermann 1989) and from pseudofolklore, the folklore and pseudofolklore lines coalesce in the processes of the shaping and the declaration of national identity in artistic representation and also in scientific interpretation which should be demythologized.<sup>4</sup> The expressive demonstration of the relation to folklore as the embodiment of "national aspect" (logically associated with the vision of educated people of plebeian Slovak culture) in Slovak conditions substituted, moreover, insufficient respect for and implementation of national identity in other, de facto the hidden but therefore more important levels (Bausinger 1970:221). The background to the transformational process of the shepherdic image to the level of self-portrait and its endurance as such can be decoded 1. as being the increased efforts "to differentiate" from the surrounding ethnic (national) milieu, 2. to demonstrate and confirm uniqueness and "otherness" in the multinational state of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as a kind of "self-absorption" and as the constant efforts to cor-

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<sup>4</sup> Similarly, it appears to be necessary to get rid of a romanticizing approach to the evaluation of shepherd's and robber's topic (e.g. Horák – Plicka 1965), or of overestimating the place of the robbery element in Slovak folk culture (Slovenský národopis 1988).

roborate the “ingenuity” of the Slovak element to the detriment of suppressing the Slovak’s “Europeaness”.

The analysis of the material has enabled us to reconstruct the advancing process of the transformation of the shepherd’s image to the symbol of the Slovak. What is interesting in relation to the acceptance of this symbol as self-portrait is the process of the basic, in principle axiologically controversial, semantic shift. This has proceeded from the evaluation of the Slovaks by “the others” (a picture of a “typical” Slovak as mountain shepherd with dominant negative assessment) through the obvious absence of own alternative self-portrait at the Slovak level (implemented usually only at a lower, social, local but mainly regional level or, on the contrary, at a higher (state) level: (Hungarian, Czechoslovak) (Leščák 1994, Droppová 1992) up to the partial identification with and acceptance of the picture. The potential negative side of the picture, still alive today in Slovak folklore, *a priori* eliminates its complete acceptance as self-portrait. In this connection the picture of the shepherd as self-portrait functions today more in official and “national” culture and less in spontaneous identification. However, it is still unambiguously comprehensible and used as a cultural code. As such, it preserves its historically justified ambivalence:

1. in the form of the romantic, glorifying dimension based on the existing artistic qualities of the Slovak shepherd’s art (particularly musical and pictorial) and based on a kind of “promotion” of the picture of the shepherd by means of the Slovak national art and literature;
2. as a picture of poverty, backwardness, with a pejorative flavour, an object of mockery or self-irony.

In the process of building the national identity of Slovakia, the image represents just one, but yet very important component. The process of shaping the symbol was long and went through several developmental stages. The ideological moment was an important factor of each stage (it can be observed almost from the 16th century). In spite of the various contents and the character of ideologies, we perceive it as one process. Its basic principle is the “aspect of promotion”, identical in all ideologies (the ideology of anti-Reformation, nationalism, and formation of modern Slovak or Czechoslovak nation as well as communism). Finally, it is the process of semantic shifts, jumps and mainly simplifications, even falsifications, which have to be demythologized, similarly as with the image of Jánošík, as well as many others.

Similarly as in the nations of northern Europe (mainly Danes and Finns), the relationship to nature and natural scenery belongs to the national picture and the self-portrait (Hojrup 1983, Nedrelič 1991). In Slovakia, it is village culture that has become the basis of such a picture. In the process of ethnic and national identification, it was sheepherding that was highlighted as the element of many-sided and internally differentiated folk culture in a village. All of this has been despite the fact that traditional Slovak folk culture has been in principle of “peasant’s” and not of shepherd’s character.

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