

Johannes Moser and Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch, eds. *Blatten. Ein Dorf an der Grenze*. Graz: Institut für Volkskunde, 1992. [= *Kuckuck. Notizen zur Alltagskultur und Volkskunde*, Sonderband 2/1992]. Paper, 108 pp.; ISBN 3-901270-01-9.

The small village of “Blatten/Blatno” (on this pseudonym, see my next paragraph) is situated in Steiermark/Styria, Austria, right on the border of Carinthia. The village is isolated and inaccessible, being ten kilometers from the nearest bus-stop (an unusual datum, given the efficiency of Austrian public transport). It had, in 1900, a population of 284, of whom 194 were listed as Slovene and 86 German. In 1919, the village was divided: one part became Austrian and the other now belonged to the SHS/Yugoslavia; about 120 villagers remained Austrians. The population of the Austrian portion grew until there were 156 villagers in 1956. By 1987-88, however, when it was visited by a research team from the University of Graz, Blatten’s population had shrunk to 23; by 1992, there were fewer than 20 people left, most of them elderly. This book is a report on the research conducted in the village: it is a compilation of fieldwork and research reports by eight investigators from Graz and one from Ljubljana, presented in six different chapters.

In their Introduction the editors state, *inter alia*, that they decided to change “all names and information which derive from the more narrow regional environment . . . to protect those concerned, since some of the results, for example the question of linguistic affiliation, still count among the taboos of this region” (5) [all translations my own, TP]. Another (and rather unusual) reason offered is that the researchers came away with different impressions from what the villagers wished them to have. Now: it is generally understood by fieldworkers that individuals may have to have their identities cloaked if there is any risk of unpleasant reactions to publication of real names; I have followed this procedure myself with respect to Carinthian Slovenes. However, the very precise description of the geographical position makes identification of the actual village straightforward, and the meticulous re-naming of every toponym, including hills and streams, is to my mind an unnecessary subterfuge. This decision — which explains, too, why there are no photographs and no maps — will however be respected in this review.

The fact that the team of researchers was organized by and came from the Institut für Volkskunde in Graz may give a false impression. The fieldwork was not concerned so much with traditional folklore objectives as with more subjective matters: it is indeed more of a psycho-sociological study than anything else.

Four of the chapters are oriented in this direction. The others are historical and geographical; I will mention these two first.

Most of the information in my opening paragraph comes from the final chapter, "Geographie und Geschichte Blattens" (102-107), by Gottfried Allmer. In this chapter, which by virtue of the basic information it conveys should have been placed first, a careful review of census figures and the history of property ownership shows that the village was settled from the south, and that the whole village was oriented in that direction, towards the Drava, throughout its pre-1919 history; the apportionment of two-thirds to Austria in 1919 was (it is argued) therefore in error.

The Ljubljana scholar Jurij Fikfak, in "Geschichten über die Grenze" (62-79), is more ambitious. He also uses censuses, but in addition cites such sources as marriage data, school records, church records, propaganda materials from the 1919 campaigns, and individual reminiscences ("In Austria [between the wars] there was more money; in Yugoslavia, there was more food"). His aim is to try to answer a whole series of difficult questions, thus: how exactly did the 1919 Austria/SHS boundary come to be drawn where it was? How was Germanization furthered? How was the use of Slovene maintained at all? How does assimilation occur? and so on. He was handicapped by not being included in the research team on the Austrian side of the border, see below (he worked in "Blatno," the Yugoslav-Slovene part of the original village); but in these few pages he manages to present some very interesting (if rather sketchy) ideas. He argues, for instance, that the residual feudal power structure, as well as members of the educational, administrative and ecclesiastical hierarchies, all were influential in the placement of the border; and that a complex interplay of economic and nationalistic interests was eventually decisive. As for Germanization, he concludes that education was the most important factor (the village primary school was closed in 1969).

Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch, in "Feldforschung in Blatten" (6-23), describes the problems encountered in the fieldwork. The aim of the project — to describe the effects on self-esteem and on 'ethnic identity' of social and economic deprivation and of geographic marginalization — explains why this particular village was chosen; its 20th-century history, with the new border splitting the inhabitants into two politically-distinct communities, made the task more interesting and at the same time very much harder. The dire economic straits and the political atmosphere both had their effects on the fieldworkers: the villagers were suspicious, even hostile, towards outsiders; the (then-)Yugoslav researcher was obliged to absent himself; even the Austrian investigators found themselves, especially at first, unwelcome. Katschnig-Falsch admits the consequent problems: were their observations accurate?

objective? — In spite of her description of the methods used to ensure objectivity, I doubt that the results are totally objective, and (since the exact length of time spent in contact with the villagers is not described) wonder if the data may be incomplete: my own and other ‘outsiders’ experiences in German/Slovene bilingual areas suggest that fieldworkers (especially those investigating ‘personal’ matters such as politics and ethnic identity, but not only those!) need extraordinarily lengths of time to become sufficiently acquainted with their ‘subjects.’ Apparently, no Slovene-speakers — other than the researcher from Ljubljana, who could not work in Blatten — were included in the research team: if there had been, the villagers’ anxiety and distrust would presumably have been even greater; however, fieldworkers who spoke some Slovene might have been able to gauge the villagers’ linguistic competence in that language, an assessment of which in these circumstances is essential, see below.

The two chapters headed “Bezeichnet werden wir schon als Jugoslawen” (24-45) by Johannes Moser and Ernst Töscher and “Strategien zur Behauptung dörflichen Bewußtseins” (46-61) by Georg Oswald and Josef Lipp cover much of the same material, indeed there is some repetition. Both bear on the obviously sharp diminution, during the last few generations, of “Sloveneness” in this village; both treat linguistic and non-linguistic evidence, and discuss various aspects of “identity.” Moser and Töscher present more examples of materials from the investigators’ interviews; Oswald and Lipp provide more precise data about economic circumstances.

Moser and Töscher concentrate on two major topics. Under the heading *Language and identity*, there is much useful discussion of the meaning and function of ‘identity labels,’ especially the term “Windisch”. Noticeable in this context is the fact that this section, valuable though it is as a study of what (as far as the use of Slovene is concerned) is termed low ‘linguistic vitality,’ appears to miss an essential ingredient: there is no description (let alone an analysis) of the linguistic *competence* of the villagers. It is unclear how many (if any) monolingual (German-only) speakers there are; as for the bilinguals, they appear (from the description) to include several ‘uneven bilinguals’ (individuals who are losing their Slovene competence), whose appreciation of their ‘identity’ would presumably be more in jeopardy than that of full bilinguals. Without data on competence, descriptions of the interaction of language and ‘identity’ are not valueless, but are far from rich. As far as *Social identity* is concerned, the lack of institutions (school, church, cultural organizations) and the effect of this bleakness on village life, the alcoholism, the general apathy of the population — all come across vividly in this chapter, both in descriptions and in

direct quotations from the villagers. From these authors' words, it is clear that Blatten is an extreme example of a marginalized village, and as such may not have been as "ideal" a case-study as they maintain: the fact that problems and conflicts are exaggerated at ethnic and political borders is acknowledged, but they do not mention that the resulting overabundance of data may well have been problematic in itself.

Oswald and Lipp provide some of the answers raised by the curious reader of the preceding section; for example, they state that "most" of the villagers had Slovene as their first language and learnt German in school. Their reluctance to admit to the investigators that they still spoke Slovene is in this context very telling. Here, also, the effects of the "Windisch" label are discussed. This chapter provides important details under two main headings, both dealing with the re-orientations that have become necessary during this century. *Social orientation* shows the different inns vying with one another for custom, the villagers' attitudes to cross-border marriage, and other social effects of the post-1919 international border. The economic effects of the border are covered in *Economic orientation*: the pre-World War One forestry business, directed southwards, had to find new markets and eventually succumbed when the sawmill was moved out of the village; cattle-smuggling seems to have become a major "industry;" and the accumulation of reasons for the mass migration out of Blatten are made very clear. Against this background, the authors discuss the clash of Yugoslav- and Austrian-oriented value-systems.

Monika Pieringer and Isabella Weingartner describe the life of typical Blatten [farm]women, using a single case study, in "Das leben der Christine Ziegler" (80-101). Family structure, sex roles, and women's daily routines (both chores and what little there was of free time) are considered in turn. The biography, which is furnished with many direct quotations, is very detailed, and the minutiae echo what can be heard from Carinthian Slovene informants now in their sixties or older; they echo, also, some of the stories by Prežihov Voranc. One sentence (80) encapsulates the whole: "As [Christine's] life evolved, so did that of most [village] women: poverty in childhood, a heavy burden of work from early childhood onwards, and finally moving away [from the village]."

This is the first sociologically-oriented description of a community in the German/Slovene bilingual area of Steiermark. With its emphasis on the psycho-sociological aspects of "identity," it ranks alongside several studies of other Slovenes "v

zamejstvu,"⁴ and must eventually be assessed in comparison to them and by a specialist in sociology. For the general reader, meanwhile, the book provides illuminating (if depressing) insights into what could be called "ethnic deprivation" in a community also suffering socio-economic deprivation. It suffers from some lack of editorial direction: there is repetition, and important information appears haphazardly; but all in all it is interesting and instructive.

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Karel Mihael Attems. *Slovenske pridige*, edited and published by Lojzka Bratuš, with an introduction by Breda Pogorelec. Trst/Trieste: Založništvo Tržaškega tiska, 1993 [Kulturna dediščina]. 224 pp. ISBN 88-7174-047-5.

The bilingualism that is still characteristic of the areas to the north and west of the present-day Republic of Slovenia extended in former times to many other parts of the Slovene lands. The first language of the majority of the population of Slovenia was Slovene, but the language of power and influence was German and many people whose first language was Slovene needed to know German too for certain purposes. The position was complex, for not only Slovene and German, but also Italian, Friulian, and Hungarian (not to mention Latin) were in use. In the seventeenth century, according to J. W. Valvasor, all the nobility spoke German, Slovene, and Italian,¹ but it is difficult to say which of these three languages a nobleman was likely to speak in a particular social context. There is, however, evidence that at least some members of the nobility at that time used Slovene even

⁴ To give just a few examples — concerning Carinthia: Wilhelm Filla, Ludwig Flaschberger, Franz Pachner & Alberta F. Reiterer, *Am Rande Österreichs. Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie der österreichischen Volksgruppen*. Vienna: Braumüller, 1982; Franc Merkač, *Lebenswelten slowenischer Jugendlicher. Volksgruppenidentitätsfindung - Emanzipation in Kärnten*. Klagenfurt/Celovec: Avtonomna delavnica, 1986; Bernard Perchinig, "Wir sind Kärntner und damit hat sich's..." *Deutschnationalismus und politische Kultur in Kärnten*. Klagenfurt/Celovec: Drava, 1989; concerning Friuli-Venezia Giulia: Anna Maria Boileau & Emidio Sussi, *Dominanza e minoranze. Immagini e rapporti interetnici al confine nordorientale*. Udine: Grillo, 1981; and concerning both: Robert G. Minnich, "Speaking Slovene — being Slovene. Verbal codes and collective self-images: some correlations between Kanalska dolina and Ziljska dolina," *Slovene Studies* 10/2 (1988) 125-47.

¹ J. W. Valvasor, *Die Ehre deß Herzogthums Crain* (Laybach: Wolfgang Moritz Endter, 1689), ii. 104.