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## **Letters from Lovran in the Correspondence of Vjekoslav Spinčić**

*This article catalogues the items of correspondence (letters, postal cards, and telegrams) sent from Lovran to Vjekoslav Spinčić which are kept in the archival collection HR-HDA-819 (Personal papers of Vjekoslav Spinčić). The author lists the letters and selects ten letters from one author (Nikola Battestin), summarizing them and describing them in the sociolinguistic context of Austria-Hungary in the late-nineteenth century.*

*Key words: Croatian language, Istria, letter corpus, Lovran, native-language literacy, Vjekoslav Spinčić*

### **1 Introduction**

This article discusses the content, as well as some of the linguistic features, of personal letters sent from Lovran to Vjekoslav Spinčić (1848-1933) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The author is constructing a digital corpus of selected personal letters from the correspondence that Spinčić, who was a priest, an educator, a politician, and a historian, donated to the national archives of Croatia in Zagreb. Spinčić's correspondence includes more than 16,000 items (letters, postal cards, telegrams, and visiting cards) sent from all over Austria-Hungary, but mostly from the province of Istria (which then included the Kvarner Islands), between the years 1867 and 1931. About 62 items from this collection were sent from the town of Lovran.

### **2 Vjekoslav Spinčić – Biographical background**

Vjekoslav Spinčić was born in 1848 in the village of Spinčići, near the town of Kastav, in the northeast corner of the Austrian

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province of Istria. His family were wealthy Croatian-speaking peasants, who could afford to send him to school. He attended primary school in Kastav, where the language of instruction was German (unlike most of the schools in Istria at that time, in which the children were taught in Italian). In 1860, he enrolled in the Croatian-language gymnasium in the nearby city of Rijeka, which was across the border, in the kingdom of Hungary. It was during those eight years in Rijeka that his political views were formed and he chose his first calling in life: to enter the clergy with the goal of becoming a teacher, specifically to educate rural Croatian speakers and raise their national awareness. After finishing gymnasium in 1868, he studied for the priesthood in Gorica and Trieste, was ordained in 1871, and continued his studies in Prague and Vienna, finally becoming a teacher of history and geography in 1875. The following year he started teaching at the teacher's college, or *preparandium*, in Kopar, at the time when that school adopted a three-language system in which future teachers in Italian, Slovenian, and Croatian schools would be taught in parallel groups. While teaching in Kopar (1877-1882), Spinčić also served as the district school inspector for the districts of Kopar and Volosko. From 1888 until 1892, he taught at the *preparandium* in Gorica. It is Spinčić's political activity, however, that he is most famous for. Together with Matko Mandić and Matko Laginja, Spinčić is known as one of the three most important Istrians of his generation, the so-called second wave of Croatian nationalist politicians. Through his activities as a representative in the Istrian Diet (first elected in 1882 and last in 1916) as well as in the Imperial Council (the central parliament in Vienna), he and his political allies continuously fought for the rights of Croats in an Istria dominated by Italians and Italianized Croats.<sup>1</sup> Most of this consisted of pushing for legislation that would ensure education in the poorest rural parts of the province, establish schools in Croatian and Slovenian for native speakers of those languages, and protect the rights of citizens to use their native languages in all communication with the authorities, such as in the courts and in all state institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the information from this section can be found in various sources, most of the dates mentioned here are from: Beuc, Ivan, *Rukopisna ostavština Vjekoslava Spinčića – Inventar*, Arhiv Hrvatske, Zagreb, 1993 (referred to elsewhere in this article as Beuc's *Inventar*). For more information on Spinčić's life and career, the reader is directed to the following source (among others): Strčić, Mirjana – Strčić Petar, "Sazrijevanje Vjekoslava Spinčića", in: *Hrvatski istarski trolist*, Izdavački centar Rijeka, Rijeka, 1996, pp. 97–118.

### **3 Spinčić's correspondence – Letters from Lovran**

Spinčić was a pedantic keeper of all kinds of records. During the course of his life, he saved what was probably the vast majority of all the correspondence he received, from friends and family as well as from professional and political colleagues. He knew that this trove of written data would be useful to people in the future who might be interested in the everyday aspects of life in the past, especially in a region where great changes were occurring. Therefore, he left all of his papers to the Croatian National Archives in Zagreb and to future generations. In its current form, the personal papers of Vjekoslav Spinčić are kept at the Croatian State Archives in 132 archival boxes, about half of which contain personal correspondence.<sup>2</sup>

Examining those letters from the Spinčić correspondence that were sent from the town of Lovran may seem like an arbitrary choice, but it should prove interesting for the readership of this publication, who are interested in the history of Lovran, especially when letters were written and sent by Lovran residents. These letters can be viewed as historical documents that show us what everyday life was like for ordinary people and how they navigated through their lives. This depends upon the type of letter in question. For example, we find much more about family life from letters that are sent between members of a family or between very close friends. Different things are revealed, however, from correspondence between people who are less closely connected.

Spinčić's correspondence contains all types of communication, even that between siblings, parents and children, and life-long friends. The letters, postal cards, and telegrams that he received from Lovran, however, fall in a different category. For the most part, these letters were written by people who may have known him, but who addressed him more formally. For example, while some of his oldest friends addressed him as Vjekoslav, or even Lojzo or Lojzek (Vjekoslav being the Slavicized version of his baptismal name, Aloisius), these communications would in most cases begin with an honorific, because he usually was of higher status than the letter writer, and especially because many of these letters were requesting that he help them in some way, often by using his influence as a teacher or as a public servant in the government.

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<sup>2</sup> Hrvatski državni arhiv, HR-HDA-819, *Osobni arhivski fond Vjekoslava Spinčića* [Personal papers of Vjekoslav Spinčić].

These letters can also tell us something about the language situation that existed in Lovran, and Istria in general, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. First of all, the languages in which they were written (Croatian, Italian, German, and Slovenian) tells us that people spoke a variety of languages in Istria in the Austro-Hungarian period. More interestingly, however, is the fact that it was appropriate for people to engage in written, and even public, communication in all of these languages. In addition, the letters that were written in Croatian can perhaps tell us something about how standard written Croatian was developing over time, as well as how literacy in Croatian was developing.

Finding any letter in a collection of this size would be impossible without two things: (1) an adequate system of organization and (2) a dedicated finding aid. In smaller archival collections, correspondence is usually grouped according to letter author. Because of its sheer size, however, the Spinčić correspondence could not possibly be organized in this way, especially since many writers are represented by only one or two letters. For this reason, the correspondence in the collection was organized chronologically according to the letter's date. The letters are arranged in 59 archival boxes (HDA-819 box nos. 63–121). The general organizing principle was for each box to hold the letters from one calendar year. Exceptions to this rule occur in the earliest and latest years of the time span, from which fewer letters were saved and several years' worth of letters are stored in one box, and nine calendar years which produced too many letters to fit into one box. The numbering system is based upon the calendar year rather than the archival box, with the first letter of each year being designated as number 1. This means that, when a calendar year is housed in two boxes, the first letter in the second box from the same year is not designated with a number 1, but the following number after the final letter from the previous box. Therefore, when identifying a letter from Spinčić's correspondence, three numbers must be given: Box number, Calendar year, and Item (Letter) number. Luckily, there is a useful finding aid for the Spinčić collection, Ivan Beuc's *Rukopisna ostavština Vjekoslava Spinčića – Inventar* (Referred to hereinafter as Beuc's *Inventar*), published in book form in 1993. This book contains a complete list of all the letter authors within the entire correspondence, the box, date, and letter numbers of their correspondence, as well as the place from which each letter was written. Since around 2012, the *Inventar* has also been available in scanned form as a PDF file, enabling faster searches of dates and

names. The *Inventar* is not without errors (e.g., some individuals are listed as separate people because of variation in the name signed on their letters, etc.), but without it, searching for letters from specific people or places would be almost impossible.

With Beuc's *Inventar*, the author was able to find 63 items of correspondence that Spinčić received from the town of Lovran. The table below includes the identification number of the item, the author's name as it is listed in Beuc's *Inventar*, the date written on the item, and a brief description of most of the items.

**Table 1.** Letters from Correspondence of Vjekoslav Spinčić Sent from Lovran<sup>3</sup>

| Letter number <sup>4</sup> | Author <sup>5</sup> | Date <sup>6</sup> | Description <sup>7</sup>  |
|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---|
| K063-1872-018              | Jernej Križaj       | 28.02.1872        | Letter requesting that V. Spinčić edit the sender's article before forwarding it to the newspaper <i>Naša Sloga</i> .   |
| K063-1874-099              | Ernest Jelušić      | 13.09.1874        | Postal card stating that the string musicians from Podgrad won't be hired – too expensive. He is against hiring anyone else. He can explain why only in person. |
| K063-1874-078              | Andrija Spinčić     | 01.07.1874        | Letter not deciphered in full (Beginning: "Lojzo! Dobar put — Pozdravite tamo! ...")  |
| K064-1875-042              | Andrija Spinčić     | 15.05.1875        | Postal card to Ernest Jelušić asking him to send him a catechism with new ways of singing during mass.  |
| K064-1875-057              | Matej Rebolj        | 20.06.1875        | Relatively long name-day greeting on the back of a postal card.   |
| K064-1876-079              | Nikola Batestini    | 19.10.1876        | First letter – written in Italian – asking Spincic to help enroll Batestini's son in teacher's college (in Italian!)  |
| K064-1877-070              | Andrija Spinčić     | 25.09.1877        |   |

<sup>3</sup> See the previous footnote.

<sup>4</sup> Correspondence items from HR-HDA-819 are identified by three numbers: K[box number]-[year]-[item number].

<sup>5</sup> Names in table are written as they appear in Beuc's *Inventar*.

<sup>6</sup> [day].[month].[year]. This coincides with the date as listed in Beuc's *Inventar* and in most cases refers to the date written by the letter's author.

<sup>7</sup> When the description is missing, this indicates either that the item was not found or that it was not readily decipherable by this author.

| Letter number | Author           | Date       | Description   |
|---------------|------------------|------------|---|
| K064-1878-020 | Miho             | 13.03.1878 | Letter warning Spinčić that Mate Praški's brother sent an article to <i>Naša Sloga</i> and asking him not to let it get printed, because its hateful tone is not appropriate for the newspaper. |
| K064-1878-021 | Ivan Mandić      | 13.03.1878 | Long letter in Italian.   |
| K064-1878-036 | Ivan Mandić      | 08.05.1878 | Not found   |
| K065-1879-036 | Nikola Batestini | 20.04.1879 | Letter asking Spinčić to watch over his son in school.  |
| K065-1879-056 | Nikola Batestini | 18.07.1879 |   |
| K065-1879-077 | Andre Sterk      | 12.07.1879 | Postal card stating that he has made sure that something will be sent to Trieste, which will probably arrive there the next morning.  |
| K065-1879-078 | Andre Sterk      | 12.07.1879 | Telegram: "Petris writes that he does not need decree. Sterk."  |
| K067-1882-085 | A. Krik          | 15.06.1882 | Postal card apologizing for not writing because of too much work. Promises to write soon (Croatian labels on form added by hand).   |
| K069-1884-079 | Vilim Grosmann   | 11.05.1884 | Letter explaining situation in Lovran's primary school.   |
| K069-1884-094 | Nikola Batestini | 23.05.1884 | Letter concerning son Kuzma's problems gaining employment as teacher.   |
| K069-1884-159 | Nikola Batestini | 07.07.1884 | ditto.  |
| K069-1884-239 | Nikola Batestini | 04.11.1884 | ditto.  |
| K070-1885-044 | Nikola Batestini | 10.03.1885 | ditto.  |
| K070-1885-066 | Nikola Batestini | 29.04.1885 | ditto.  |
| K070-1885-224 | Nikola Batestini | 15.11.1885 | ditto.  |
| K071-1886-241 | Nikola Batestini | 06.12.1886 | ditto.  |

| Letter number | Author                                  | Date       | Description   |
|---------------|---|------------|---|
| K072-1887-241 | Mikula Batestini                        | 04.12.1887 | Letter of thanks, Christmas greetings.  |
| K077-1891-270 | Ivan Jurčić                             | 02.11.1891 | Letter concerning proposal to widen the port of Lovran, accompanied by drawing and other documents.   |
| K080-1894-122 | Hrvatska čitaonica – inicijativni odbor | 21.06.1894 | Telegram: name-day greetings.   |
| K080-1894-183 | Julije Miran                            | 19.11.1894 | Letter referring to Grosmann and the question of how many Italian classes versus Croatian classes there will be in the local primary school.                                |
| K080-1894-211 | Julije Miran                            | 04.12.1894 | Letter regarding new Italian teacher sent to Lovran and Croats' protest against the same in court. Also includes letter 211/1 from Ivan Jurčić about the same case.         |
| K083-1897-149 | Hrvatska čitaonica "Danica"             | 21.06.1897 | Telegram: name-day greetings.   |
| K084-1898-262 | Andrija Fučić                           | 27.10.1898 |   |
| K085-1899-109 | Fran Jurinčić                           | 27.04.1899 |   |
| K085-1899-173 | Hrvatska čitaonica "Danica"             | 21.06.1899 |   |
| K085-1899-317 | Fran Jurinčić                           | 15.10.1899 | Gives data on number of students enrolled in Lovran's Croatian school in past three years. Also writes that Grosmann handed in his own list that was significantly smaller. |
| K086-1900-119 | F. Turčić                               | 22.05.1900 | Thank you note for Spinčić's influence in Turčić's being appointed captain for the Hungarian-Croatian Steamboat Company.  |

| Letter number | Author                       | Date       | Description   |
|---------------|------------------------------|------------|---|
| K086-1900-243 | Arkandeo Batestini           | 10.08.1900 | Letter about his experience applying for work in the Ministry of Agriculture. Mentions which offices have employees who speak Croatian.   |
| K086-1900-266 | Arkandeo Batestini           | 02.09.1900 | Notifies Spinčić that he got a negative reply from Zotti in Zadar. He will write to Laginja in Vienna about the problem and will write back when he gets an answer.   |
| K088-1902-057 | Josip Persich                | 21.02.1902 | Letter in Italian. Mentions Grosmann.   |
| K088-1902-227 | Josip Persich                | 01.06.1902 | Letter in Italian.  |
| K088-1902-203 | Hrvatska čitaonica u Lovranu | 21.06.1902 | Telegram: name-day greeting   |
| K089-1903-171 | Alfred Gayer                 | 24.09.1903 | Letter in German containing biographical information, requesting help gaining employment.   |
| K089-1903-190 | Leopold Tominić              | 24.10.03   | Letter in German. Mentions that he sent a letter the day before informing VS of (his?) visit to the Ministry, but that he is not sure that letter made it to him, so he is writing a second time. Very formal. Refers to Spinčić exclusively in the third person. |
| K090-1904-144 | Čitaonica "Danica"           | 21.06.04   | Telegram: Name-day greetings.   |
| K091-1905-172 | Franjo Lenaz                 | 31.08.1905 | Mentions that he sent a job application to <i>K.K. Post und Telegraphen Direktion</i> in Trieste two days before. Reiterates his request that V. Spinčić put in a good word for him.  |



| Letter number | Author                                 | Date       | Description   |
|---------------|--|------------|---|
| K095-1909-277 | Amadeo Peršić                          | 28.06.1909 | Letter in German explaining that author studied Law in Zagreb and wants to practice law in Istria because his parents were born there. But authorities in Vienna say he needs special permission to have his exams accepted in Austria, so he requests that V. Spinčić use his influence to help him get that permission. |
| K099-1911-287 | Lukež                                  | 12.07.1911 | Telegram: Tomorrow Thursday three men coming to see you between ten eleven o'clock. Dr Lukež.   |
| K100-1911-397 | Karlo Lukež                            | 05.09.11   | Letter and other correspondence and documentation related to the formation of a new (Croatian) bank by Herr Dr. Lukež, Blečić, and Bassan from Lovran.  |
| K100-1911-401 | Društvo za promicanje lovranske glazbe | 08.09.1911 | Letter (possibly a form letter) requesting donations for new Croatian Society for the Promotion of Music in Lovran.   |
| K100-1911-402 | Antonija Poje                          | 10.09.1911 | Letter in Slovenian from female postal worker who is unhappy with new position in Lovran.   |
| K100-1911-500 | Antonija Poje                          | 25.10.1911 | Letter in Slovenian. Continuation of the same case.   |
| K100-1911-538 | Karlo Lukež                            | 16.11.1911 | Thanks V. Spinčić for his help with application to found Lovranska Banka and requesting further aid with the same case.   |
| K100-1911-637 | Josip Blečić et al.                    | 22.12.1911 | Group letter from Croatian citizens of Lovran asking V. Spinčić to recommend their choice for head teacher of the Croatian school in Lovran: Mr. Zec.   |
| K101-1912-274 | Selma Madrunska?                       | 14.05.1912 | Letter in German. Signed: Selma gräfin Mad_ska (as yet undeciphered).   |
| K102-1912-389 | Ivan (i Ivanka) Sajević                | 21.06.1912 | Telegram: name-day greetings  |

| Letter number | Author                                 | Date        | Description  |
|---------------|--|-------------|--|
| K104-1913-157 | Karlo Lukež                            | 13.05.1913. | Letter with accompanying documentation. Lukež writes that he wants to take his name off a petition calling for Lovran Post Office to do business in Croatian.  |
| K104-1913-169 | J. Kumbatović                          | 19.05.1913  | Letter informing V. Spinčić about demonstration on 12.05.1913 at the town council, after which council okayed their demands -- that the Croatian language must be recognized by the local Post Office. |
| K104-1913-538 | Karlo Lukež                            | 16.11.1913  |  |
| K105-1913-486 | Društvo za promicanje lovranske glazbe | 01.12.1913  | Fundraising letter from Croatian Society for the Promotion of Music in Lovran. (typed mimeograph).   |
| K106-1914-107 | Karlo Lukež                            | 26.02.1914  | Letter to V. Spinčić updating him on the status of their case.   |
| K109-1916-005 | Pavao Saršon                           | 05.01.1916  | Writes to Spinčić explaining that his brother Ivan Čepić died and left a widow with two children. Asks V. Spinčić to help her gain employment in the post office.                                      |
| K110-1917-135 | Ivanka Sajević                         | 02.05.1917  | Asks Spinčić to help raise her living allowance from <i>Družba</i> (Association).  |
| K110-1917-179 | Franica Tončetić                       | 30.05.1917  | Asks help to raise husband's pension.  |
| K112-1918-145 | Ivanka Sajević                         | 27.03.1918  | Card: Easter greetings before moving to Serbia.  |

Originally, this paper was supposed to focus specifically on the local dialect features that can be found in the written language of these letters. The assumption was made that less educated correspondents would use a high percentage of dialectal forms, as is the case with letters from Spinčić's own family members.<sup>8</sup> For several reasons, however, this was not possible. First of all, some of the letters were written in other languages. Secondly, those in Croatian

<sup>8</sup> Hoyt, Alexander D., *A Historical-Sociolinguistic Analysis of the Written Correspondence of Vjekoslav Spinčić*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, 2012.

were mainly written in standard Croatian, or if not, the writers consciously attempted to write in a very formal register to Spinčić. In fact, the later letters (those written after 1910 or so) do not sound archaic in terms of the linguistic system, though they often sound stylistically old-fashioned.

#### **4 Nikola Battestin – Unschooled in native Croatian**

The writer who wrote the most to Spinčić from Lovran, Nikola Battestin, however, is an exception. Possibly due to age, possibly due to lack of education (at least in his native language), Battestin's letters do reflect the local dialect. For various reasons, however, his letters cannot tell us about his spoken dialect as much as confirm some things that we already know about Northern Čakavian dialects. Even this is difficult, however, for several reasons: (a) His spelling is heavily influenced by Italian orthography but is also influenced by standard Croatian orthography. In fact, his spelling seems at times to be torn between those two models. (b) His writing contains several instances of hypercorrection, which strongly indicates that, if not trying to write in the standard variety, he was consciously altering his speech-based writing in order to make it more formal. (c) His handwriting is at times difficult if not impossible to decipher conclusively, especially because the letters *a* and *o* and *u* are sometimes difficult to tell apart. This makes transcription particularly difficult because the undecipherable pairs often coincide with pairs of phonemes that vary in the spoken language. One example of this can be seen in the spelling of his name: Nikola/Nikula/Mikula. In Nikola's signature, the *o* sometimes looks almost like a *u*, because it's a little open at the top. Therefore, the transcriber has a dilemma: should he write *o* or *u*? This is especially problematic because in Čakavian, words that have the phoneme /o/ in standard Croatian are sometimes spoken with the phoneme /u/. Thus, we don't know what Nikola meant to write down. The first letter of his name is also sometimes unclear. Is it an *M* or an *N*? This is especially problematic, because the name *Nikola* is pronounced *Mikula* in the local dialect. The paragraphs below summarize the letters of Nikola Battestin with a few comments on his use of language. Mainly, however, they tell the saga of Nikola and his son Kuzma.

In the Spinčić inventory, Nikola Battestin's letters are cataloged under two different names: Nikola Battestini (9 letters) and Mikula Battestini (1 letter). In this text, however, he will be referred

to as Nikola Battestin because, in all of his letters, he signs his surname consistently as “Battestin,” and the modern standard form of the name is Nikola. These letters were written over an eleven-year period (19.10.1876 – 14.12.1887), and they are interesting on two levels. On the first level, they tell a story: they chronicle Battestin’s endeavors to ensure that his son, Kuzma, succeeds in finishing his schooling and obtains a position as a schoolteacher, thus illustrating the concerns of a father about his son’s future and the steps he takes to help him. On the second level, they show us something about the linguistic situation of the society in which Battestin lived: Istria during the Austro-Hungarian period, when Italian was the main language of official communication, while the majority of the population spoke Croatian as their native language. In the following paragraphs, each letter will be described in terms of the basic story line as well as its linguistic features.

### 5 Battestin’s letters as linguistic and historical documents

*Letter 1 – K064-1876-079 – dated 19.10.1876 – signed Nicolo Battestin.* The first letter in the Spinčić correspondence sent by Nikola Battestin was written in Italian.<sup>9</sup> In it Battestin explains that his son, Kuzma, finished the third year of the real gymnasium in Rijeka and wanted to transfer to the German gymnasium in Pazin, but that he was unable to do so because, instead of Greek, he had taken Hungarian. As Kuzma did not want to repeat the third year, his father kept him at home and hired the headmaster of the school in Lovran, “Signr Maestro Grossman” to give him private instruction so that he would not lose a year of school. He requests that Spinčić, who at the time was a teacher at the *preparandium*, or teacher’s college, in Koper, send him the necessary program and books needed for his son to enroll there, promising to pay for all the materials, along with postal fees, immediately. The letter is typical of personal letters written to Spinčić by people outside of his inner circle of friends and family in that it contains highly formal formulaic language at the beginning and end (i.e., “Molto Reverendo Sigr Professore”; “...resto il di Lei ubbitientissimo Servitore”), and contains several apologies for taking the liberty of wasting Spinčić’s valuable time. Although the vast majority of letters that were addressed to Spinčić were written in some form of Croatian, those written in other languages, especially

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<sup>9</sup> I would like to thank two of my colleagues, Vesna Deželjin and Anđel Starčević, for helping me decipher this letter written in Italian.

Lovran 19/X 76  
Molto Reverendo sign. Professore  
ad Amico ! 79

Avendo il mio figlio più giovane col  
nome Cosma Battestin assolto la terza  
Ginnasiale Esale in fiume, e volendolo  
fare passare nella quarta a Pisino  
col 1.<sup>o</sup> corrente in quell' ginnasio  
tedesco, e perchè avendo studiato  
a fiume nella terza invece del  
Greco, il Ungarese e per questo  
motivo non poteva entrare nella qua-  
rta Classe e nella terza non voleva  
ripetere. Siccome mio figlio Cosma  
sia intenzionato di prendere studio  
nella preparandia ~~ma~~ mentre <sup>ch.</sup> non  
ha compiuto ancora l'età di anni  
15. e mentre ~~che~~ questo ~~fanno~~ sia si-  
masto a casa e perchè il mio ragazzo  
non perderebbe tempo, gli ho trovato  
il sign. Maestro di Laurana onde gli

**Figure 1.** First page of letter K064-1876-079, written by Nikola Battestin in Italian. Hrvatski državni arhiv, HR-HDA-819, *Personal papers of Vjekoslav Spinčić*, box 64, year 1876, letter no. 79.



Italian, German, and Slovenian, are not uncommon in the collection, and those written in Italian and German were often from people who were apparently native speakers of Croatian. This is also true in Battestin's case, as will be seen in the descriptions of the subsequent letters.

In this letter, Battestin mentions that his son Kuzma is not yet fifteen years old. This gives us a clue as to the identities of both father and son. Thanks to the research of Žigulić and Biloš Žigulić, we have detailed information about the families who lived in the old center of Lovran during the nineteenth century, based upon parish records. Although the Battestins were one of the largest families to live in Lovran's old town during the nineteenth century,<sup>10</sup> it is most likely that Nikola was shoemaker, the youngest son of Mate Battestin (b. 1775) and Franciska née Sandalj (b. 1777). Nikola Martin Battestin [or Nicolaus Martinus Battestin, as he is listed in the parish records] (10.11.1814–2.3.1895) married Marija Antonija née Craglietto (11.8.1819.–2.4.1889.).<sup>11</sup> Their youngest son, Kuzma Battestin – Krompa [Cosmas Battestin – Crompo], b. 6.1.1863, was a teacher who married Suzana Rikarda Turčić [Susana Ricarda], b. 20.12.1861, also from the old town, with whom he subsequently lived in Rijeka and in Pula.<sup>12</sup> This assumption is made because, at that period in history, very few people went into the teaching profession, and on the date of the letter, Kuzma would have been almost fourteen years old.

*Letter 2 – K065-1879-036 – dated 20.04.1879 – signed Nikola Battestim.* This letter was written two school years later than the previous one. By this time, Kuzma was already a student at the preparandum in Kopar, probably 16 years old. It begins with the information that he has been told that his son failed two subjects in the first semester of that school year – Croatian and History (the latter of which Spinčić taught). Battestin assures Spinčić that he is not angry, and that a little punishment sometimes is the best form of love. He goes on to express his main request: that Spinčić keep an eye on Kuzma, making sure that he studies, so that he does not have to repeat the year, making Battestin spend his money unnecessarily.

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<sup>10</sup> Žigulić, Roberto – Biloš Žigulić, Sanja, “Stanovništvo južnog dijela lovranske gradske jezgre u XIX. stoljeću” [The inhabitants of the southern part of the Lovran historic town core in XIXth century], *Zbornik Lovranščine*, vol. 3, 2014, pp. 254.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

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Veličini Gospodine!

<sup>od Brozovickia</sup>  
Cuo sam u početku ovoga mjesca da moj sin  
Euzma je dobio u poklenu pol letju dva drugi  
reda, tojest od Hervanskoga i od Povesti, što va  
jih niite; Gospodine nista zato i to sam vam  
puno zahvalam kako pisatellu, neka popi da  
ni, govori pismo sveto, quem Dominum dile  
gebam etj eum castigat, jerbo dame nebite  
hotil dobro nebitega pedopsal, neka mu bude  
za nauk, da bude uil u, napridak, alli bim ja  
molil vaju veliku dobrotu da bite miloserno  
pregledat na gneza dabi niio, jerbo ja sam dale,  
ko da ne izgubi liepu godinu školsku i da ne  
bim ja siromaski otac maeju siromackine potro  
sil za bavaru.

Mamse u vaju gimnazijnu dobrotu da siite  
pregledat na moje siromastvo sto vece bude mogu  
no. Molim vau oprostitemi da samse postojio  
uzeti tolisko slobosine za vam pisati, alli

**Figure 2.** First page of letter K065-1879-036, written by Nikola Battestin in Croatian. Hrvatski državni arhiv, HR-HDA-819, *Personal papers of Vjekoslav Spinčić*, box 65, year 1879, letter no. 36.

Unlike the first letter, this one is written in some non-standard variety of Croatian, as are the remainder of his letters. This switch from one language to another is interesting and probably significant. If we have correctly identified this Nikola Battestin, then he was 61 years old when he wrote the first letter. People of his generation, if they went to school at all, would have only learned Italian or German there, and would certainly be more competent and probably more comfortable writing in their school language than in their mother

tongue. This is probably why Nikola wrote to Spinčić in Italian. It is another question, however, why he might have written the rest of his letters in Croatian. Spinčić may have answered Battestin's first letter with a letter in Croatian, after which Nikola would have done the same. Another reason could be that Nikola thought it would be politically more appropriate writing in Croatian.

In terms of overall tone, this one is similar to the first letter in that it contains formal formulas (e.g., "Vass pozdravjam iz pravoga serza, vass priatel i Sluga") as well as apologies for taking the liberty of writing to Spinčić ("Molim vass oprostite mi da sam se postupio uzeti toliko slobosćine za vam pissati"). Linguistically, however, this letter contains a mixture of dialectal and standard forms. One salient example of this would be the past participle forms used in the letter, some of which have the standard *-o* ending (čuo 'heard', *dobio* 'received', *učio* 'learned'), while others have the *-l* ending that is characteristic of northern Čakavian dialects such as the local dialect of Lovran (*hotil* 'wanted', *molil* 'asked, requested', *prigledal* 'kept an eye on'). Even more noticeable, perhaps, is Battestin's spelling, which used an interesting mixture of Italian orthography (e.g., *gnega* 'njega', *giubeznivu* 'ljubeznivu', *očietemi* 'hoćete mi') and standard Croatian spellings. The letter also has several instances of hypercorrection. In Croatian varieties spoken on the Adriatic coast, it is common to pronounce the final consonant of words that have word-final */-m/* in standard Croatian as */-n/*. Nikola was apparently aware of this, because, not only did he "correct" his word-final *n*'s in this letter, but he hyper-corrected them, writing *m* even when the word should have been spelled with an *n* (e.g., *zahualam* for *zahvalan* and even *Battestim* for *Battestin*).

An unusual fact about this letter is that the accompanying envelope is addressed to "Anton [i.e., not Vjekoslav] Spincich, Professor u Kopru". Since Anton was Vjekoslav's father's name, it is likely that this was due to a memory lapse, because Nikola, born in 1814, was closer in age to Anton Spinčić and certainly knew him as well.

*Letter 3 – K069-1884-094 – dated 23.05.1884 – signed Nikolo Battestin.* This letter was written when Kuzma was probably 21 years old. In the interim period, it seems, Kuzma has left school without finishing his course of studies and subsequently joined or was conscripted into the Austrian army. Now, Nikola explains, his son has been released from the army for two months so that he can pass his *matura* exams and thus finish his course at the preparandum. Nikola asks Spinčić to recommend Kuzma, take him in and forgive him as



the Prodigal Son and to clothe him in the same light as the Prodigal Son was clothed. He also asks Spinčić to present Kuzma's case to the headmaster of the school so that he would also accept Kuzma into the fold again and so that they all would help Kuzma to cast aside his chains of soldiery and become a man once and for all ("i da bite svi – zajedno mu pomogli da bi sse izbavio od onih Verugah Voiniskeh a da bi jedan put mogao biti človik").

*Letter 4 – K069-1884-159 – dated 07.07.1884 – signed Nikola Battestin.* This letter was written before Kuzma's exams. In it, Nikola asks if Spinčić will keep a merciful eye on his unlucky son and hopes he will recommend Kuzma to his good professors and the Provincial Inspector. He also asks whether, as a private candidate, Kuzma is required to pay a tax to take the exams. If so, he asks Spinčić to send him a postal card stating how much he needs to pay. It ends with a long apology: "Nadam se da očiete mi oprostiti na ovo sto vass odvisse postupjujem zabavjati vassu veličnosto, jerbo nie uridno".

*Letter 5 – K069-1884-239 – dated 04.11.1884 – signed Nikola Battestin.* This letter, written towards the end of the same year, begins with Nikola saying that he and Kuzma tried the month before to thank Spinčić for his good deed of recommending Kuzma to those "good professors". He informs him, however, that among them was one Judas, who gave Kuzma a failing grade in German. Kuzma is scheduled to take the German exam again in two months, while all of his other subjects are all right. He writes that the Headmaster told him in front of all the other professors that upon passing that exam, he can get a teaching position, and that, as soon as he sends his diploma to the Inspector, he will also recommend to the Inspector that Kuzma be given a teaching position immediately, so that he can be freed of his soldier's chains. The Inspector had planned to give Kuzma a teacher's position in the village of Šišun, but when he contacted Kuzma's regiment to see if they would discharge him, the regiment said no. In the remainder of the letter, Nikola cites conversations he has had with the Captain of the Voloska district, as well as specific statutes which stipulate that, if a teacher candidate has a decree stating that he has received a teaching position, then he must be discharged immediately from the army.

The letter ends with Nikola telling Spinčić to roast some Lovran chestnuts and have a taste of Teran wine from Kopar. He apologizes for not having sent more, explaining that the postal service limits how much he can send.

*Letter 6 – K070-1885-044 – dated 10.03.1885 – signed Nikola Battestin.* In this letter, Nikola informs Spinčić that, although Kuzma has finally officially received a position as teacher in the Pula district in the village of Šišan, and although upon presenting his diploma and teaching position documentation, he was told in Trieste by his commanding officer that he would be discharged from the army to start preparing for his new position, in Pazin he was called in by his commanding officer there, who handed him all of his documentation, saying that he could not be discharged after all. After receiving all Kuzma's papers, Nikola writes that he has proceeded to put together a petition to the Kaiser (*Kaisergesuch*). In addition, he humbly requests that Spinčić contact his friend, Mr. Vitezić, who is a representative in the parliament in Vienna, and ask him to find a contact in the appropriate ministry who can put in a good word for Kuzma and try to push his petition through. Of course, Nikola promises to be grateful to Spinčić until the end of his life.

*Letter 7 – K070-1885-066 – dated 29.04.1885 – signed Nikula Battestin.* In this letter, Nikola informs Spinčić that he has received no answer to the petition that he sent more than a month ago to Vienna. He asks Spinčić if Dr. Dinković is still in Vienna and requests advice as to what steps he should take next.

*Letter 8 – K070-1885-224 – dated 15.11.1885 – signed Nikula Battestin.* After the intervention of various people and entities on Kuzma's behalf, it seemed as if his discharge would finally come through. For some technical reason, however, this did not happen, and Nikola says that now all they can do is wait until October 1886. In the final part of the letter, Nikola writes that he is in fairly good health, but that his wife is not in very good health. This is the first letter in which Nikola mentions his wife. He mentions that they have sent him a few chestnuts as a token of their friendship.

*Letter 9 – K071-1886-241 – dated 06.12.1886 – signed Nikola Battestin.* Written more than a year after the previous letter, this letter has Nikola telling Spinčić that his son was finally discharged from the army, came home to Lovran for two weeks, and returned to Pula, taking his oath as a teacher in Šišan on 28 November 1886. The remainder of the letter is dedicated to expressions of thanks to God, to people who have helped them, and to Spinčić himself. He tells Spinčić to roast four chestnuts on Christmas and asks him not to be upset that he sent so few, but that they had a bad season this year.

*Letter 10 – K072-1887-241 – dated 04.12.1887 – signed Nikula Battestin.* This is the final letter from Nikola Battestin in the

correspondence of Vjekoslav Spinčić. In it, Nikola thanks Spinčić for all the good deeds he has performed for Nikola's children, tells him to roast a few chestnuts and drink a glass of good wine on Christmas. He again apologizes for sending so few chestnuts (and perhaps wine), saying that the post office will only take seven kilos.

## 6 Conclusion

As a group, the letters written by Nikola Battestin to Vjekoslav Spinčić illustrate the language use of an urban middle-class Croat from Istria born in the early nineteenth century. He is basically literate in Italian, because that was the main language of education and public communication when he was in his formative years. Later in life, however, he switches to his native language but is less competent in its standard variety than in Italian. He makes this switch either to identify as Croatian rather than Italian, or to adjust his language to the language his correspondent (Spinčić) uses. The other letters catalogued in this article certainly tell other stories, which can be used together with other sources such as newspaper articles to illuminate other aspects of the history of Lovran, such as the push to make Croatian a working language in the local post office and the competition between the Italian and the Croatian classes in the local primary school. These topics are worthy of further research.

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## SAŽETAK

### *Pisma iz Lovrana u korespondenciji Vjekoslava Spinčića*

Članak opisuje sadržaj i neke jezične karakteristike osobnih pisama iz osobnog fonda Vjekoslava Spinčića (Hrvatski državni arhiv HR-HDA-819) koja su Spinčiću poslana iz Lovrana u austro-ugarskom razdoblju. U istraživanju je prikupljen korpus sljedećih izvora iz Lovrana: 62 pisma, dopisnice, brzojavi i posjetnice. Prvotna namjera bila je istražiti karakteristike lovranskog mjesnog govora u pisanom jeziku krajem devetnaestog stoljeća, no budući da je većina korespondencije napisana ili drugim jezicima (poput talijanskog ili njemačkog) ili pak vrlo formalnim hrvatskim jezikom, istraživanje se posebno usredotočilo na 10 pisama Nikole Battestina iz Lovrana, koji je (prema istraživačevu mišljenju) naučio pisati na talijanskom, a u svom materinskom hrvatskom jeziku bio je slabije pismen. Članak tablično popisuje i opisuje sva 62 pisma iz Lovrana, a tematizira sadržaj Battestinovih pisama te njihove jezične značajke u kontekstu kraja 19. i početka 20. stoljeća u Lovranu, Istri i šire.

Ključne riječi: hrvatski jezik, Istra, korpus pisama, Lovran, pismenost na materinskom jeziku, Vjekoslav Spinčić