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## **TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE AND THE ROLE OF WITNESSES IN THE PARISH OF RAVNO IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY\***

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**ABSTRACT:** This article addresses the issue of marriage witnesses in the Catholic parish of Ravno in the Ottoman-controlled hinterland of Dubrovnik of the nineteenth century. In this rural community, witnesses at marriage were awarded an important role in establishing and sealing social networks. Based on the data of 233 marriages, i.e., 466 male witnesses, the article elucidates the reasons that guided the choice of marriage witnesses, along with their relationships with the bride and groom in terms of natural and spiritual kinship. Apart from the role traditionally assigned to the marriage witness by the Church, the article casts light on a less familiar customary role of *kum* at marriage.

*Keywords:* marriage witnesses, Parish of Ravno, Popovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, marriage customs

### *Introduction*

Prompted by numerous invalid marriages and their consequences, especially among ruling figures and the nobility, in 1563 the Council of Trent decreed the

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rules governing matrimony. The most important Tridentine decree, related to matrimony, was that marriage had to be performed in the presence of the parish priest or any other cleric authorised for this purpose, together with two witnesses. Also decreed was the reading of banns—the announcements of the intended marriage by the priest in the parish church during three successive weeks. This regulation was to ensure timely knowledge of the impediments to marriage, if any.<sup>1</sup>

The application of the Council decrees proved a slow process, notably in rural communities which strongly adhered to traditional marriage customs as was the case in the hinterland of Dubrovnik, the territory of the Catholic parish of Ravno.

Strict application of the Tridentine decrees was hampered by yet another reason—specific position of the Catholics in the Ottoman Empire. Although there was no formal restriction to the observance of all three monotheistic religions, Christians, Catholics in particular, were marginalised in relation to the privileged population of the Ottoman Empire—the Muslims. Namely, on account of their Islamic faith, the latter were exempt from many taxes and generally enjoyed greater legal security. Orthodox Church, however, was accepted as an ‘autochthonous’ institution, since the Orthodox patriarch maintained his jurisdiction in the territory of the Ottoman Empire. The position of the head of Catholic Church outside the Ottoman Empire, moreover, his frequently active role in creating anti-Ottoman military coalitions, contributed to a mistrustful attitude towards Catholics in general, Catholic priests in particular. Hierarchical connections of the Catholic clergymen with Rome gave way to suspicion and accusations of espionage on behalf of the Catholic states.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Electronic edition according to *Declarationes Illustr. Sac. Rom. Cardinalium Congregationis, ipsius sacrosancti et oecumenici Concilii Tridentini canonibus et decretis insertae*. Coloniae Agrippinae: apud Petrum Henningium, sub signo Cuniculi, 1619, Canones super reformatione circa matrimonium, Caput I (<http://www.internetsv.info/Archive/CTridentinum.pdf>, accessed on 9 November 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Adem Handžić, »Konfesionalni sastav stanovništva Bosne i Hercegovine u doba Osmanske vladavine«. *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju* 42-43 (1995): pp. 142-143; Noel Malcolm, *Povijest Bosne. Kratki pregled*. Zagreb-Sarajevo: Erazmus Gilda, Novi liber Zagreb, Dani – Sarajevo, 1995: p. 76; Milenko Krešić, *Odnosi katolika jugoistočne Hercegovine s muslimanima i pravoslavnima u vrijeme osmanske vladavine – Od osmanskoga zauzeća do Bečkoga kongresa (1482.-1815.)*. Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, unpublished PhD thesis, 2008: p. 118; Marinko Marić, *Stanovništvo Popova u Hercegovini: Ravno*. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2015: pp. 193, 196-197.

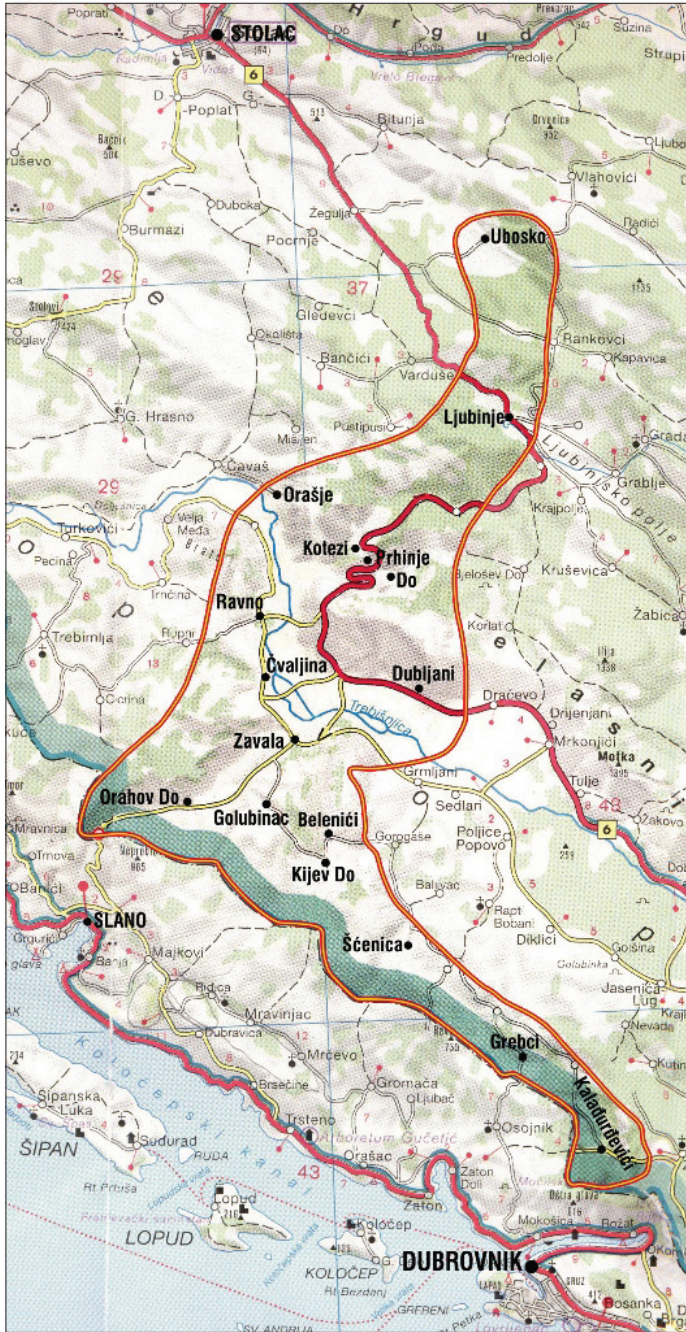


Figure 1. The Parish of Ravno: territorial boundaries before 1890

Pastoral work of the Catholic priests in the Parish of Ravno may be said to have been hindered by the Ottoman authorities, yet the application of the Tridentine marriage regulations met with unusually strong resistance by the otherwise humble, god-fearing Catholic population. Apparently, some traditional marriage customs could hardly fit into the post-Tridentine marriage rules. Hence the choice of marriage witnesses and their role in the Catholic parish of Ravno was to a large degree affected by the Council decrees on one side, and deeply rooted customs, on the other.

### *Traditional type of marriage by abduction*

The bride's and groom's mutual consent to marriage is the foundation of the sacrament of matrimony in Catholic Church. Nonconsensual marriage was considered invalid, and in this respect, any form of abduction of the prospective bride was deemed noncompliant with the Church regulations governing matrimony. Marriage by abduction was a common phenomenon in various cultures. This act necessarily included some kind of physical or psychological violence in which the woman played a passive role.<sup>3</sup> This profoundly archaic form of bride seeking void of betrothal in the cultures that practiced exogamous marriage has been traced throughout the Dinaric region until the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Confirmation of this practice may be traced in the criminal provisions of the statutes of the Dalmatian towns, such as Split and Korčula. Sixteenth-century law issued by Sultan Suleyman also prohibited this practice. Secular and Church authorities tried to root out bride kidnapping, since that custom undoubtedly led to an escalation of violence, murder even.<sup>5</sup> Austro-Hungarian authorities were particularly harsh in punishing bride thefts against the woman's will, so that acts like these, most common during the Ottoman Empire, virtually disappeared in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Marija Mogorović Crljenko, *Druga strana braka. Nasilje i ilegitalnost u (izvan)bračnim vezama na području Porečke biskupije u prvoj polovici 17. stoljeća*. Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2012: p. 68; Marija Mogorović Crljenko, *Nepoznati svijet istarskih žena. Položaj i uloga žene u istarskim komunalnim društvima: primjer Novigrada u 15. i 16. stoljeću*. Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2006: p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> Vesna Čulinović-Konstantinović, »Tradicija sklapanja braka otmicom u Bosni i Hercegovini«. *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja Bosne i Hercegovine u Sarajevu. Etnologija* 48-49 (1996-1999): p. 145.

<sup>5</sup> V. Čulinović-Konstantinović, »Tradicija sklapanja braka otmicom u Bosni i Hercegovini«. pp. 148-149.

<sup>6</sup> Radmila Kajmaković, »Ženidbeni običaji kod Srba i Hrvata u Bosni i Hercegovini«. *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Sarajevu. Etnologija*, N.S. 18 (1963): p. 78.

Marriage by abduction was also practiced in the Catholic parish of Ravno. In the seventeenth century, it became so common that this Church problem, based on a report of Bishop Dominik Andrijašević to the congregation *De Propaganda Fide*, came to be deliberated by the pope himself, who ordered that “the culprits for the cases such as those be expelled and excommunicated from the Church”.<sup>7</sup> The situation was not any better in the nineteenth century either. In conformity with the Council of Trent, Bishop Augustin Miletić (1813-1831), apostolic vicar of Bosnia, in 1818 dispatched *Naredbe i uprave* (Decrees and regulations) to all parish priests with an instruction to inform the faithful as often as possible about canon law punishment for taking part in kidnapping, which was excommunication.<sup>8</sup> Bans and deterrent effects of excommunication failed to root out this archaic custom, as by the end of the nineteenth century Vice Palunko, parish priest of Ravno, invested strenuous efforts to put an end to bride kidnapping. The parishers offered resistance, and the priest recurrently found himself at peril for attempting to retrieve the abducted girl to her parents.<sup>9</sup> It was believed that a futile abduction brought shame upon the groom’s family and relatives, and in no way whatsoever was the abductors’ ‘hunting party’ to return empty handed nor were they to let the ‘prey’ go.<sup>10</sup> This attitude was justified by a popular saying “what the wolf catches and grabs in his jaws, and a *hajduk* brings into the house, cannot be reclaimed”.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Krunoslav Draganović, »Tobožnja “Stjepanska biskupija - ecclesia Stephanensis” u Hercegovini«. *Croatia Sacra* 4 (1934): p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> See: Pavao Knezović, »Naredbe i uprave fra Augustina Miletića«. *Hum* 14 (2015): p. 9. Miletić’s *Naredbe i uprave* were also applied in the Parish of Ravno, although this area was not under his jurisdiction. A testimony on this has been given by Vinko Basile, Italian missionary, who visited the Trebinje-Mrkan Diocese in 1856. See: Mitar Papac, »Trebinjska biskupija sredinom XIX. stoljeća po izvješću apostolskog vizitatora o. Vinka Basila D. I«. *Vrela i prinosi* 8 (1938): p.100.

<sup>9</sup> The parishers would say: “Dumo, traži nam i krvi ispod grla, mi ćemo ti dragovoljno dati, ali nam nemoj dirati ovi adet ženidbe!” (Don, claim blood from our slashed throats, and we shall give it to you willingly, but pray, do not interfere with our marriage custom!). See: Vice Palunko, »Ženidba. (Običaji u Popovu u Hercegovini)«. *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje južnih Slavena* 13 (1908): pp. 234-235.

<sup>10</sup> It once happened that the abducted girl managed to escape, instead of whom her twelve-year-old sister was kidnapped and delivered to the prospective groom as substitute. See: V. Palunko, »Ženidba. (Običaji u Popovu u Hercegovini)«. pp. 243-244.

<sup>11</sup> Vuk Vrčević, *Narodne pripovijesti i presude iz života po boki Kotorskoj, Hercegovini i Crnojgори*. Dubrovnik: Nakladna knjižara Dragutina Pretnera, 1890: p. 96.



In priest Palunko's testimony from the 1870s, according to which his parish witnessed more abductions of brides than their leaving parental home in a wedding ceremony, the term *otmica* (abduction) should be broadly understood. Most commonly, these abductions were pre-arranged between the families of bride and groom or at least partly negotiated so as to avoid violence. The bride was usually taken to the household of the groom or his kin, where she remained until marriage.<sup>12</sup> Cases such as these offered plenty of ground for speculation about the bride's consent, even if there was no cohabitation or pre-marital consummation, because of which the mentioned customs were strongly frowned upon by the parish priests, who did everything in their power to eradicate them. In doing so, they had a variety of punishments at their disposal.<sup>13</sup>

Entering into marriage by consensual abduction still included some of the symbolic rituals characteristic of a proper wedding ceremony, though in a somewhat abbreviated form, and as such prevailed throughout the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina until the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> One of the main reasons behind this practice was the avoidance of high costs of an elaborate several-day wedding celebration. Only the food costs by far exceeded the budget of an average family in Ravno, who often had to turn to their kin for help.<sup>15</sup> Some grooms were known to fall into great debt due to the loans taken at usury rates.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In cases such as these, the priests would demand obligatory temporary separation until the day of marriage. However, since the bride's parental home acted against her return, in fear of her abandonment, the girl was temporarily put up at the groom's close kin. See: Ivica Puljić, »Život i okružje«, in: *Hutovo, Dobri Do, Glumina, Mramor, Prapatnica, Previš, Tuhinje, Vjetrenik, Zelenikovci*. Mostar: Crkva na kamenu, 1994: p. 396.

<sup>13</sup> Jozo Babić, *Svatovski običaji*, [http://taracin-do.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=60](http://taracin-do.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=60) (accessed on 11 April 2016).

<sup>14</sup> The least worthy form of traditional marriage was when the bride decided to enter the groom's household on her own initiative. The woman usually resorted to this step if the pre-marital relationship could not be crowned with marriage due either to parents' disapproval or groom's hesitation. Known as "samodošla" or "dobjeglica", the bride of this kind usually enjoyed a lower status in the family (Zorica Vitez, *Hrvatski svadbeni običaji*. Zagreb: Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga, 2003: pp. 21-22, 25).

<sup>15</sup> Ivica Puljić, *Hrvati katolici donje Hercegovine i Istočna kriza: Hercegovački ustanak 1875.-1878*. Dubrovnik-Neum: Državni arhiv Dubrovnik and Zaklada Ruđer Bošković – Donja Hercegovina, 2004: p. 68, note 69.

<sup>16</sup> P. Knezović, »Naredbe i uprave fra Augustina Miletića«: p. 13.

Consensual abduction (*umaknuće, umicanje*) was also practiced in the hinterland of Split as a form of entering into marriage when some of the required conditions could not be fulfilled: if one party was not wealthy enough or if, due to some unfavourable circumstances, there was not enough time to organise a proper wedding celebration, e.g. groom's departure for labour or war reasons.<sup>17</sup> From the trials conducted in the district of the Diocese of Poreč in the seventeenth century it is quite clear that the abductions were resorted to in order to avoid the wedding expenses, but also for preventive reasons so as to protect the prospective bride from being kidnapped by an undesirable suitor.<sup>18</sup> According to Pavlina Bogdan Bijelić, the reasons behind bride thefts in nineteenth-century Konavle lay in the criteria for the groom selection. Should a better-off and wealthier suitor appear, the previous one was discarded, and the woman was abducted consensually. The custom allowed the kidnapping of an already betrothed woman.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it was considered "an honour for the man who managed to abduct an already betrothed woman".<sup>20</sup> Cases of nonconsensual abduction were known to take place, yet this type was severely punished by the authorities. If the groom feared for the safety of his bride, he would take her to his household. Similar to Ravno, the priests strongly opposed to this custom and tried to negotiate the bride's return to her parental home.<sup>21</sup> Consensual abduction of a woman or even bride at the wedding was common in Herzegovina until the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The bride of this type was known as *suložnica* (cohabitant), and brides such as these were known "to cohabit for several years, whereupon the birth of the first, that is, the third child that relationship was solemnised". The negative attitude of the Church towards these customs met with popular defiance in poetic jocular form: "Vinčaj pope sudbina je taka, očeš, nećeš ja sam je umaka" ("Oh, marry us, priest, the fate is done, whether you will or won't, she's mine"). See: Dinka Alaupović-Gjeldum, »Običaji i vjerovanja pri sklapanju braka u dijelu splitske Zagore«. *Ethnologica dalmatica* 4/5 (1995/1996): pp. 78-79.

<sup>18</sup> M. Mogorović Crljenko, *Druga strana braka*: pp. 159-161; M. Mogorović Crljenko, *Nepoznati svijet istarskih žena*: p. 149.

<sup>19</sup> Pavlina Bogdan-Bijelić, »Grabež djevojaka: (Konavli u Dalmaciji)«. *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje Južnih Slavena* 26/2 (1928): p. 382.

<sup>20</sup> Jovan Vukmanović, *Konavli* [Posebna izdanja, bk. DXXVII]. Beograd: SANU, 1980: p. 218.

<sup>21</sup> Pavlina Bogdan-Bijelić, »Krađa djevojaka u Konavlima«. *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje Južnih Slavena* 11 (1906): p. 159.

<sup>22</sup> Vesna Čulinović-Konstantinović, »Tradicija sklapanja braka otmicom u Bosni i Hercegovini«: p. 166.

From the abductor's standpoint, to keep the other prospective grooms away from the kidnapped woman was to have sexual intercourse with her. Such a step also paved the way to the woman's consent to marriage. Consummation out-of-wedlock deprived the woman of her honour regardless of whether it involved rape or not. Honour could be restored only through marriage. Hence the women consented to marry their abusive abductors.<sup>23</sup>

Cutting the woman's hair lock or a piece of her clothes, kissing her or throwing a kerchief at her were the means aimed at the woman's public shaming, which necessarily led to her marriage to the abductor. Cases involving abduction of the women of Islamic faith have been recorded in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As consequence, the woman's retrieval soon took place, followed by her speedy marriage to a member of her own confession so as to avoid new abduction attempts.<sup>24</sup>

Seventeenth-century examples from the Diocese of Poreč in Istria show that the women were most commonly abducted outside of their home, while attending to everyday duties in the fields, carrying water or wood, or going to the mill. They were either alone or in a smaller company. Consensual abductions usually involved a few people. Nonconsensual abductions, however, included a larger party of armed men on horseback. The woman was grabbed by the arms, carried on shoulders, pulled by the plaits, or even beaten. The abduction was carefully orchestrated, most certainly preceded by surveillance of the woman's daily routine, and plan where to hide the 'prey' after kidnapping.<sup>25</sup> Bishop Miletić was well informed about the ways and methods of bride kidnapping in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the start of the nineteenth century, which prompted him to warn about the risky behaviour, such as the bride's unchaperoned travel to the places of pilgrimage, visits to feasts and fairs, even shepherding cattle to remote pastures, either alone or in company.<sup>26</sup>

Tridentine decrees on the bans of matrimony proved to have been a hindrance to the prospective spouses especially in the Dinaric region under Ottoman rule,

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<sup>23</sup> M. Mogorović Crljenko, *Druga strana braka*: pp. 162-163.

<sup>24</sup> V. Čulinović-Konstantinović, »Tradicija sklapanja braka otmicom u Bosni i Hercegovini«: p. 154.

<sup>25</sup> M. Mogorović Crljenko, *Druga strana braka*: pp. 170-171.

<sup>26</sup> P. Knezović, »Naredbe i uprave fra Augustina Miletića«: p. 17.



as in the case of the Parish of Ravno. Apart from other potential suitors, the announcement of marriage also attracted the attention of the Ottoman feudal lords, who occasionally kidnapped no other but these announced brides-to-be.<sup>27</sup> Also, by avoiding betrothal and later announcement, it was possible to by-pass the lord's privilege to permit the marriage of his serfs. As feudal lords, beys were in a position to deny permission had the betrothal come to their knowledge. It was their intent to keep all the active labour on their estates, and their serfs were to marry the women from the same village.<sup>28</sup>

One of the ways to protect the prospective bride from kidnapping and dishonour was to get married under Sharia law in the presence of a kadi. A number of examples from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries testify that Catholics in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina married under Sharia law which, as legal contracts irrespective of the parties' confession, may have been made through proxies and could be easily annulled.<sup>29</sup> However, according to the doctrine of the Catholic Church, by entering a marriage of this kind, the spouses were automatically excommunicated. If the spouses still agreed to enter the sacrament of matrimony in Catholic Church after the Sharia law marriage, the procedure required their absolution and other impediments, if any.<sup>30</sup> "For fear of the Turks", Catholic weddings were often performed without the decreed

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<sup>27</sup> In order to find a solution to this problem, priests used to organise collective marriages, their prime concern being to protect the brides from dishonouring. Thus, for example, Kraljeva Sutjeska once witnessed the marriage of 50 couples. A mass gathering of brides and grooms was intended to discourage the Ottoman Turks from attacking such a numerous congregation (J. Babić, *Svatovski običaji*).

<sup>28</sup> V. Čulinović-Konstantinović, »Tradicija sklapanja braka otmicom u Bosni i Hercegovini«: p. 155.

<sup>29</sup> Ante Škegro, »Katolici u mešćemi. Šerijatska vjenčanja katolikā: primjer župe Skopje u srednjoj Bosni«. *Bosna franciscana* 40 (2014): pp. 146-147.

<sup>30</sup> In a case from 1824 involving cohabitation of a young man and woman as result of abduction, whereupon it is not clear whether they also married under Sharia law, Bishop Augustin Miletić ordained strict repentance. The young unmarried couple had to separate first. The girl was to return to her parents, relatives or either find shelter at a respectable Christian household. The betrothed couple had to remain separated until they acquired the necessary Christian teaching, until the end of penitence and until the young man obtained a required document from his parish priest. The young man and woman had to stand as penitents with their arms open and with a stone tied round their neck, seeking forgiveness before congregation during four masses. Further ordained was Tuesday fasting through a period of twelve months and daily prayers on the knees. They were to confess at least three times a year over a period of three years. In his instructions to the parish priest, the Bishop also recommended a monetary contribution to the altar, but only if the couple were not poor.

banns, secretly, and the priests did their best to see the couples wed.<sup>31</sup> On occasion, some Catholics used the authority of their feudal lords of Islamic faith in order to coerce the priests into marrying a couple despite apparent impediments.<sup>32</sup> The Catholics of this sort also fell under “great curse”.<sup>33</sup>

The choice of marriage witnesses in Ravno in the first half of the nineteenth century should be viewed with regard to their dual role. On the one hand, marriage witnesses were to act in compliance with the regulations of the Catholic Church, while on the other, they were also expected to assume a traditional role based on deeply rooted customs, such as bride kidnapping and the rituals pertaining to the bride’s and groom’s consummation of marriage.<sup>34</sup>

### *Marriage witnesses*

During the nineteenth century, the rite of marriage was looked upon as an important life event throughout Herzegovina, and even more so in the family of the groom.<sup>35</sup> Marriage implied the arrival of a new member into the family,

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He stresses that the couple ought to be thoroughly catechised and they should most certainly seek forgiveness from the parents of the “shameless wench”. The instructions to the priest who was to marry the couple also included many cases of abductions by force or fraudulent persuasion, and for that reason it was very important to establish whether the girl wished to enter into marriage with the said groom upon her own free will. See: Ante Škegro, »Pisma u ostavštini biskupa fra Augustina Miletića apostolskog vikara u otomanskoj Bosni u fojničkom samostanu Duha Svetoga«. *Bosna franciscana* 39 (2013): p. 273.

<sup>31</sup> A. Škegro, »Katolici u meščemi. Šerijatska vjenčanja katolikā: primjer župe Skopje u srednjoj Bosni«: pp. 158-160; I. Puljić, »Život i okružje«: p. 396.

<sup>32</sup> If the groom was a witness at the confirmation of the bride’s son, it was considered an impediment to marriage by reason of “spiritual kinship”. Without petitioning for dispensation, the couple was previously married in the presence of a kadi. Bishop Miletić demanded that the couple be separated. Yet, dispensation from spiritual kinship arrived, and the widower, “villain blinded by heathen debauchery” and widow, “inflamed whore” were married in church in 1828 (A. Škegro, »Pisma u ostavštini biskupa fra Augustina Miletića apostolskog vikara u otomanskoj Bosni u fojničkom samostanu Duha Svetoga«: p. 294).

<sup>33</sup> P. Knezović, »Naredbe i uprave fra Augustina Miletića«: p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Milana Černelić draws attention to the blending of Slavic and Vlach elements in marriage customs in the broader area of northern Greece, north-eastern Serbia, whole Dinaric region as far as Podunavlje and Hrvatsko primorje. See: Milana Černelić, »Bunjevački elementi u svadbenim običajima Dalmatinske zagore«, in: *Dalmatinska zagora - nepoznata zemlja*, ed. Vesna Kusin. Zagreb: Galerija Klovićevi Dvori, 2007: p. 588.

<sup>35</sup> M. Marić, *Stanovništvo Popova u Hercegovini*: p. 133.

daughter-in-law, whose role was to bear offspring and thus secure the family's continuity. By the end of the nineteenth century, marriages were mainly arranged by parents. This custom did not comply with the Council's decree on the bride's and groom's mutual consent.<sup>36</sup> It often happened that the bride and groom first set eyes on each other at the church wedding ceremony.<sup>37</sup> The very nature of the choice of bride and groom and the tradition of the more or less consensual abductions, the so-called 'umaknuća', made the groomsmen aware that the bride could be kidnapped even while in the wedding procession. The practice of abduction most probably dictated the whole protocol of the wedding ceremony. Among the groomsmen of the Dinaric region were the most prominent male members of his family and kin.<sup>38</sup> The men were armed and rode horseback, and until the dawn of the twentieth century were always cloaked in red.<sup>39</sup>

Tridentine decrees regulating the marriage ceremony—the presence of a priest and two witnesses—were also applied in the Parish of Ravno. Prime importance was placed on the priest, to be followed by the witnesses. The latter also played a significant role in the wedding processional order as well as the traditional marriage rituals. Given the witness's dual role, traditional and sacramental, parish registers reveal not only the way in which witnesses of the church ceremony were selected, but also shed light on the choice of an important participant in the traditional marriage customs.

The analysis of marriage witnesses in the Parish of Ravno is based on the data derived from the parish registers of marriage (*Liber Matrimoniorum*) for the period 1804-1850, with a gap between 1834 and 1843 due to the lack of

<sup>36</sup> Bishop Miletić strongly opposed parents' interference with the choice of their children's prospective spouse. Particularly repulsive in his opinion was the custom of bride bidding as if she were a 'slave' (P. Knezović, »Naredbe i uprave fra Augustina Miletića«: p. 14).

<sup>37</sup> Vice Palunko describes a case when the groom Ilija Vuković from Ravno, having set his eyes on the bride for the first time at the altar, fled from the wedding. See: V. Palunko, »Ženidba. (Običaji u Popovu u Hercegovini)«: p. 258.

<sup>38</sup> V. Čulinović-Konstantinović, »Oblici sklapanja braka u tradiciji srednje Dalmacije«: pp. 104-105. In Livanjsko Polje all members of the wedding party (*stari svat, kum, barjaktar, enga, čavo*) were groom's relatives or his brothers-in-law. See: Radmila Kajmaković, »Ženidbeni običaji stanovništva Livanjskog polja«. *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Sarajevu. Etnologija*, N.S. 15-16 (1961): p. 205.

<sup>39</sup> R. Kajmaković, »Ženidbeni običaji kod Srba i Hrvata u Bosni i Hercegovini«: p. 80. In Dalmatian hinterland it was believed that the red cloak protected from curse and evil forces. The bride was thought to be particularly vulnerable, and during the wedding her *djever*, usually the groom's brother or cousin, shielded her with the cloak. See: Jelka Vince-Pallua, »Tragom vlaških elemenata kod Morlaka srednjedalmatinskoga zaleđa«. *Ethnologica dalmatica* 1 (1992): p. 141.

extant registers. This time frame includes 233 marriage entries. According to the Council's recommendations, the bride and groom were to have one male witness each, which in our case proved to be a rule without exception, and the analysis has thus included 466 witnesses. Although the Church regulations prescribed the use of the term *svjedok*, an alternative form *kum* was widely used in the Parish of Ravno.<sup>40</sup> All witnesses included in this analysis were male.

Table 1. Number and gender of marriage witnesses in the Parish of Ravno (1804-1850)

Period	Number of married couples	Witnesses			Average number of witnesses per couple
		Total	Male	Female	
1804-1850	233	466	466	-	2

Source for Tables 1-5 and Graphs 1-3: *Matica vjenčanih župe Ravno (1804-1850)*.

The analysis of marriage witnesses has brought to light customs governing the selection of witnesses and their kin relations with the bride and groom. Although without further genealogical research accurate results cannot be produced, the isonomic analysis still provides a relatively reliable picture of the kin ties between the witness and groom, that is, bride.<sup>41</sup> The results show that every third witness was related by kin to either groom or bride. This ratio owes largely to the witnesses on the groom's side, because more than one half of their witnesses (53.65%) were either closely or remotely related to them. This finding corresponds to the expected results, considering the best man's traditional role in the wedding procession, which in the Dinaric region mainly consists of groom's kin and affines.<sup>42</sup> The selection of witnesses on the bride's side was comparatively less governed by kin ties in merely 10.30% of the cases (Table 2).

<sup>40</sup> Černelić holds that marriage officer and his special role at weddings, common in the south-east of Europe, stems from the Roman cultural layer adopted by the Slavic settlers. Due to the migrations caused by Ottoman expansion, this custom spread beyond the original area. The marriage officer came to be named *kum* (*compar*, *kumpar*) under a strong influence of the Christian elements, particularly after the Council of Trent. Additionally, due to interrelating roles of witnesses to marriage and baptism, a parallel analysis of the two roles ought to be carried out (M. Černelić, »Tragovi bunjevačkih elemenata u svadbenim običajima Like i Primorja: svatovska čast kuma«: p. 43).

<sup>41</sup> Genealogical analysis concerns only the closest kin on the groom's side, and indicates that the groom's brother acted as his witness in 8.15% of the cases, and the groom's father in 4.29% of the cases.

<sup>42</sup> In the majority of cases, in the territory of central Dalmatia marriage witnesses were chosen among the family members, contrary to the popular saying: "Seek bride at hand, and witness from afar" (V. Čulinović-Konstantinović, »Oblici sklapanja braka u tradiciji srednje Dalmacije«: p. 111).

A considerable portion of kin-related witnesses with the bride and groom observed in a closed rural area of the Parish of Ravno greatly departs from the percentage established in an urban community such as that of Dubrovnik, where during a two-year period 1870-1871 only every fifteenth witness proved to be related by kin to one of the spouses (6.60% of the cases).<sup>43</sup>

Table 2. Isonomic connection between witness and groom/bride

Period	Number of witnesses per groom/bride	Witness's surname identical with that of			No surname sharing
		Groom	Bride	Both groom and bride	
1804-1850	233	125	24	14	70
%	100	53.65	10.30	6.01	30.04

Over one-third (36.27%) of the witnesses were drawn from ten lineages of the Parish of Ravno (Table 3, Graph 1). Most commonly, they came from the Čokljat lineage (9.23%), which at the same time was the largest lineage in this parish (6.38%).<sup>44</sup> However, one half of the mentioned ten lineages that gave the majority of marriage witnesses did not fall within the largest lineages of the parish. Moreover, the Skaramuca lineage, which held the second position in terms of assuming the witness role (4.72%), was fairly modest in size and participated with merely 1.74% in the overall parish population.<sup>45</sup> The most popular witness among them was Boško Skaramuca, who witnessed 14 marriages.

Analysis has established a significant number of 'exchange witnesses' between some families. This phenomenon has been observed in 17.85% marriages, in which the exchange ranged from one to several occasions. For example, Ivan and Stanislav, members of the family of Marko Čokljat from Doli, witnessed the weddings of both Mate and Ivan, sons of Petar Prce from Prhinje, while the latter witnessed the weddings of Marko's both daughters, Stana and Manda Čokljat.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ariana Violić-Koprivec and Nenad Vekarić, »Krsni i vjenčani kumovi katolika u Dubrovniku (1870-1871)«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 54/2 (2016): p. 359.

<sup>44</sup> M. Marić, *Stanovništvo Popova u Hercegovini*: p. 225.

<sup>45</sup> M. Marić, *Stanovništvo Popova u Hercegovini*: p. 225.

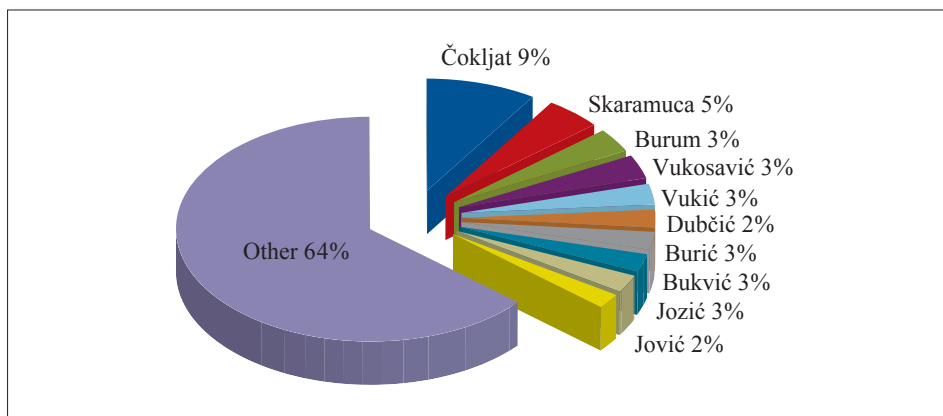
<sup>46</sup> *Matica vjenčanih župe Ravno (1804-1850)*, hereafter: *MVŽR (1804-1850)*: f. 316, 323, 330, 342.



Table 3. The lineages whose members most frequently acted as marriage witnesses in the Parish of Ravno (1804-1850)

Lineage	Number of witnesses	Percentage
Čokljat	43	9.23
Skaramuca	22	4.72
Burum	16	3.43
Vukosavić	16	3.43
Vukić	14	3.00
Dubčić	12	2.58
Burić	12	2.58
Bukvić	12	2.58
Jozić	12	2.58
Jović	10	2.15
Other	297	63.73

Graph 1. The lineages whose members most frequently acted as marriage witnesses in the Parish of Ravno (1804-1850)



Marriage registers of Ravno provide no data on the occupation of either the witnesses or the bride and groom. Considering the general economic circumstances of the day and the fact that we are dealing with a rural community, we may assume that there were no marked differences in terms of social status between its inhabitants. Agriculture, based on land cultivation and animal breeding, was the main source of livelihood. Therefore, property status was not essential

in the choice of witnesses, as compared to custom, traditional social networks and family alliances upheld from the days “of old”. Yet, on the basis of the results indicating a considerable number of habitual witnesses, there is reason to assume that some witnesses were particularly popular thanks to “the respectful position they enjoyed in the community”.<sup>47</sup> Boško Skaramuca was evidently a much-desired witness, because in the time period under study he assumed this role on as many as 29 occasions, 14 marriages and 15 baptisms.<sup>48</sup> Besides him, Miho, son of Andrija Vukić from Ravno, seemed just as popular, for he assumed the role of witness on 25 occasions, 12 marriages and 13 baptisms.<sup>49</sup> From the Table and Graph below, it is clear that every fifth witness acted in that role at least twice, while 189 persons acted only once. The total number of marriage witnesses included 275 persons (Table 4, Graph 2).<sup>50</sup>

Table 4. Habitual marriage witnesses in the Parish of Ravno (1804-1850)

Number of marriages	Number of marriage witnesses	Number of witnesshoods								
		Fourteen	Twelve	Seven	Six	Five	Four	Three	Two	One
233	275	1	1	4	4	5	10	12	49	189
%	100	0.36	0.36	1.45	1.45	1.82	3.64	4.36	17.82	68.73

Analysis has established the influence of cross-border social networks in the selection of witnesses, notably among individuals from the neighbouring villages of Dubrovačko Primorje. Alliances of this kind involved specific persons from the villages of Majkovi, Smokovljani, Mravinca, Osojnik, Dubravica and Slano, who recurrently appeared in the role of marriage witnesses, and with a reason. For example, habitual witnesses among the Milić lineage from Slano and the Milić from Belenići testify to their common origin and the migration of the Milić from their native settlement in Belenići to the new one in Slano.

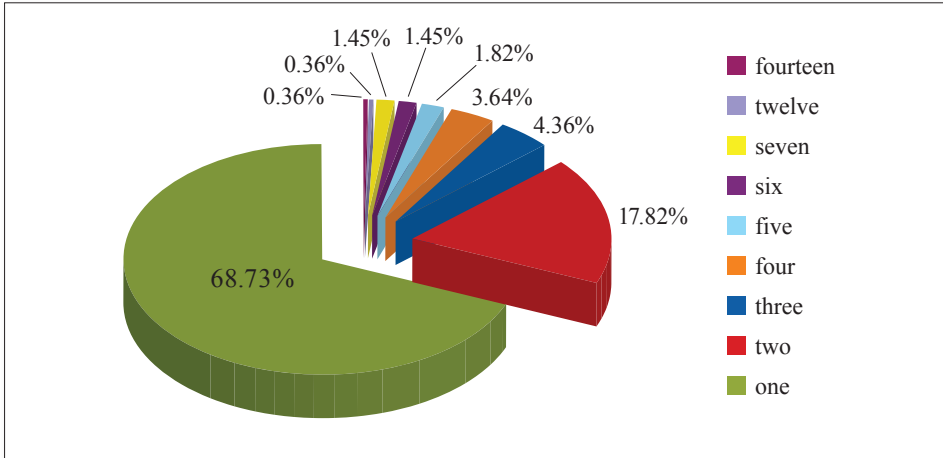
<sup>47</sup> A. Violić-Koprivec and N. Vekarić, »Krsni i vjenčani kumovi katolika u Dubrovniku (1870-1871)«: p. 364.

<sup>48</sup> By witnessing 14 marriages, he was by far the most sought-after witness in our analysis.

<sup>49</sup> With regard to the selection of witness candidates among those either working or living in the vicinity of the church (bell ringer, sacristan), our research has given no result. “Professionalisation” of marriage witnesses has been detected in the Istrian Parish of Svetvinčenat in the second half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century. See: Danijela Dobljanović and Marija Mogorović Crljenko, »Godparents and Marriage Witnesses in Istria from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century«: *Dubrovnik Annals* 21 (2017), in this volume.

<sup>50</sup> *MVŽR (1804-1850)*.

Graph 2. Habitual marriage witnesses in the Parish of Ravno (1804-1850) by number of witnesshoods



It was common for a marriage witness to act as godfather to the children born out of the marriage he had witnessed.<sup>51</sup> Thus, for instance, Boško, son of Vide Skaramuca, was the witness at the wedding of Boško Borojević, and subsequently godfather to Boško's first-born son, Mato.<sup>52</sup> This same Boško Skaramuca was the witness at the wedding of Šimun Koić, and later godfather to his son Mato, while the godparents to the remaining four children from that marriage were also chosen among the members of Boško's family.<sup>53</sup>

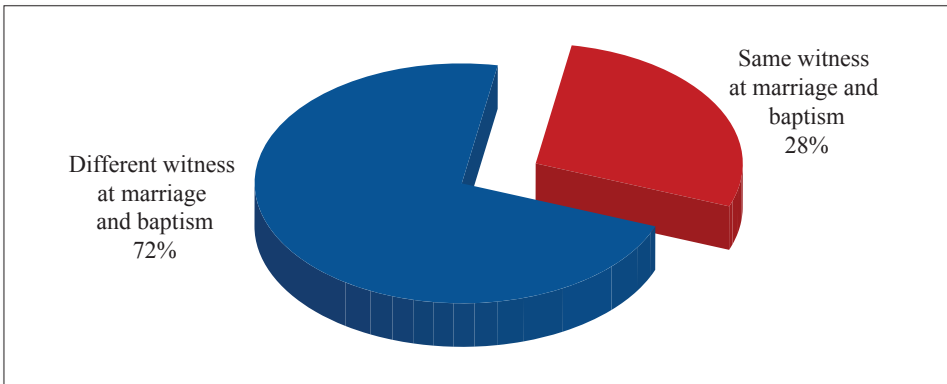
<sup>51</sup> The practice of choosing one's marriage witness to also witness the baptism of the first-born, or vice-versa, godfather or witness at confirmation of either bride or groom to act as marriage witness, has been traced in Gorski kotar and Lika. See: Milana Černelić, »Tragovi bunjevačkih elemenata u svadbenim običajima Like i Primorja: svatovska čast kuma«. *Etnološka tribina* 22 (1999): p. 41. A similar custom has also been observed in the area of Novska. See: Milana Černelić, »Svatovska čast kuma u okolici Novske u prostornom kontekstu«. *Studia ethnologica Croatica* 12-13 (2001-2002): p. 138. This custom was also known in Montenegro, in that the same person acted as godfather to all children. If the children died or only female children were born, the witness was chosen outside the customary pool. See: Žarko L. Đurović, Borislav Cimeša, Novak Adžić, Danilo Ivezić, *Crnogorski sveci, slave i običaji / Montenegrin saints, patron-saint days and customs*. Zagreb: Nacionalna zajednica Crnogoraca Hrvatske – Zagreb, 2005: pp. 102-103.

<sup>52</sup> *MVŽR (1804-1850)*, f. 349; *Matica krštenih župe Ravno (1804-1847)*, hereafter: *MKŽR (1804-1847)*, f. 196; The cementing of family bonds through reciprocal witnesshoods is evident on the relationships between these two families. Namely, Stana, Boško's mother, was the godmother to another two daughters from that marriage. *MKŽR (1804-1847)*, f. 218, 242.

<sup>53</sup> *MVŽR (1804-1850)*, f. 340; *MKŽR (1804-1847)*, f. 171.

A sample of 50 marriage witnesses from the period 1804-1812 was used for the analysis of the subsequent extension of these relationships through godparenthood. The results have shown that almost one-third of the marriage witnesses (14 witnesses or 28%) later acted as godfathers to the children born from the marriage they had witnessed (Graph 3). Out of this number, more than one half of the cases (8 godfathers or 57.14%) involved baptism of the first-born child. Considering that men usually acted as godfathers to male children, and women to female, with the latter practice we have detected that either the wife or mother of the marriage witness was chosen to act as godmother. Of 34% of the cases in our sample, where confirmed, the witness's wife was the godmother in 70.59% of the cases, and the witness's mother in 29.41%. With female children, too, the majority of godparenthoods involved the baptism of the first-born child, or 47.06%, while the rest of godparenthoods concerned the baptism of the second, third or fourth child.

Graph 3. The portion of witnesses who acted as godfathers to the children born out of the marriage they had previously witnessed in the Parish of Ravno (1804-1812)



Age structure of marriage witnesses in the Parish of Ravno has been analysed on the same sample of 50 witnesses. Average age of witness was 28.86. The oldest witness was 39, and the youngest 18. The bulk of witnesses performed this duty at the age of 29 (34.48%; Table 5). This result confirms that marriage witnesses were chosen among the groom's peers.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>54</sup> M. Marić, *Stanovništvo Popova u Hercegovini*: p. 141.

Table 5. Age structure of marriage witnesses in the Parish of Ravno (1804-1812)

Age of witness	18	20	22	25	26	29	30	32	35	36	39
Number of witnesses	2	1	1	7	7	10	8	6	5	2	1
%	11.11	5.00	4.55	28.00	26.92	34.48	26.67	18.75	14.29	5.56	2.56

### *The role of marriage witness in the Parish of Ravno*

The results mentioned above confirm the hitherto known facts about the significant role of marriage witnesses in establishing and strengthening social bonds. In his study of folk tradition of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ivan Buconjić writes about the marriage witness as follows: “*Kum* is the head of the wedding ceremony on that day, whose word should be obeyed by all the members of the wedding party. Whatever needs to be done, cannot be done without his permission”.<sup>55</sup> Although the weddings in the Parish of Ravno were performed according to the *Roman Ritual*, some customs contrary to the Church regulations were still upheld,<sup>56</sup> of which the priests strongly disapproved.<sup>57</sup>

From the perspective of the Catholic clergy, the best man’s ‘role’ in the bridal chamber was deemed infamous, as evidenced by a circular written by *provicar*<sup>58</sup> Vidoje Maslač, and addressed in 1847 to the priests of the Trebinje-Mrkan Diocese.<sup>59</sup> He orders the priests “from this day forth not to allow the *kum* to accompany the bride to the bridal bed, nor allow gun shooting when the two parties unite, but to see that the bride, upon her arrival to the house, be immediately consigned to her relative or any other woman acting instead of the best man, who will not interfere in any future matter whatsoever”.<sup>60</sup> Provicar writes that

<sup>55</sup> Nikola Buconjić, *Život i običaji hrvata katoličke vjere u Bosni i Hercegovini*. Sarajevo: D. A. Kajona, 1908: p. 93.

<sup>56</sup> M. Marić, *Stanovništvo Popova u Hercegovini*: p. 133.

<sup>57</sup> I. Puljić, *Hrvati katolici donje Hercegovine i Istočna kriza: Hercegovački ustanak 1875.-1878*: p. 70.

<sup>58</sup> *Provicar* acted as bishop’s deputy.

<sup>59</sup> M. Marić, *Stanovništvo Popova u Hercegovini*: p. 133.

<sup>60</sup> *Correspondence*, 1847, f. 12 (Archive of the Provicariate in Stolac).



“in publicly announcing these orders one should deal with due circumspection in order not to offend the ears of innocent souls”.<sup>61</sup>

Best man at wedding was the groom’s man of confidence. As a member of the traditional wedding procession, he protected the bride from potential kidnapers, together with other men from the groom’s kin group. His protective role went as far as the bride chamber where, according to traditional belief, evil forces could influence procreation.<sup>62</sup> The custom of delayed consummation of marriage survived until the twentieth century in Herzegovina, in the territory of Montenegro, Albania,<sup>63</sup> Serbia and Dalmatian Zagora.<sup>64</sup> The same custom has also been traced in seventeenth-century Istria.<sup>65</sup>

According to traditional marriage customs in Montenegro, best man was assigned a role of greatest significance. After dinner, *djeveri* (groomsmen) would accompany the bride to the bride chamber, followed by the arrival of the groom in the company of the best man. The latter remained with the bride and

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<sup>61</sup> “...che da qui innanzi non si permette, che il Kum accompagni la sposa al letto nuzziale, nè lo sbarro dei fucili altempo dell’unione delle parti, ma arrivata a casa la sposa sia subito consegnata ad una sua parente od altra donna, la quale faccia le veci del Kum, che in avvenire non dovrà ingerirsi in nessuna cosa. Nel pubblicare questa mia ordinazione si parli colla dovuta circospezione onde non si offendano gli orecchi delle anime innocenti”. *Correspondence*, 1847, f. 12.

<sup>62</sup> Seventeenth-century examples from Istria show that sexual impotence was ascribed to bewitchment and evil spells, and that the practice of blessing the bride bed and chamber in order to avert evil forces was particularly widespread in northern Europe (M. Mogorović Crljenko, *Druga strana braka*: p. 68).

<sup>63</sup> In the delayed consummation of marriage practiced in Montenegro and Albania, the bride slept with two *djeveri*, usually the groom’s brothers or members of his closer kin group, that is, with *kum* in Albania. *Djeveri* slept dressed. The relations between *djever* and bride were expected to be of the sibling nature, as between brother and sister. Stojanović holds that *djeveri* or *kumovi* in Albania were to help the bride in the transition from the parental household to that of the groom, here symbolised by *djeveri* and *kumovi*. See: P. Dj. Stojanović, »Ius primae noctis i njegov odjek u običajnom pravu Crne Gore i Sjeverne Albanije«: pp. 342, 345.

<sup>64</sup> R. Kajmaković, »Ženidbeni običaji kod Srba i Hrvata u Bosni i Hercegovini«: p. 89; Edmund Schneeweis, *Vjeronjanja i običaji Srba i Hrvata*, translated from German by Dubravka Hrastovec, professional redaction and preface by Ivan Lozica. Zagreb: Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga, 2005: p. 117; Dinka Alaupović-Gjeldum, »Običaji i vjeronjanja pri sklapanju braka u dijelu splitske Zagore«. *Ethnologica dalmatica* 4-5 (1995-1996): p. 75; Radmila Kajmaković, »Ženidbeni običaji«, u: *Etnološko-folkloristička ispitivanja u Neumu*. Sarajevo: Zemaljski muzej u Sarajevu, 1959: p. 123.

<sup>65</sup> On their first night, the couple shared the bed with an older woman from the bride’s kin group. Prospero Petronio, *Memorie sacre e profane dell’ Istria*, ed. Giusto Borri in collaboration with Luigi Parentino, Trieste: Tipografia Gaetano Coana, 1968: pp. 48-51, cited from: M. Mogorović Crljenko, *Druga strana braka*: p. 67.

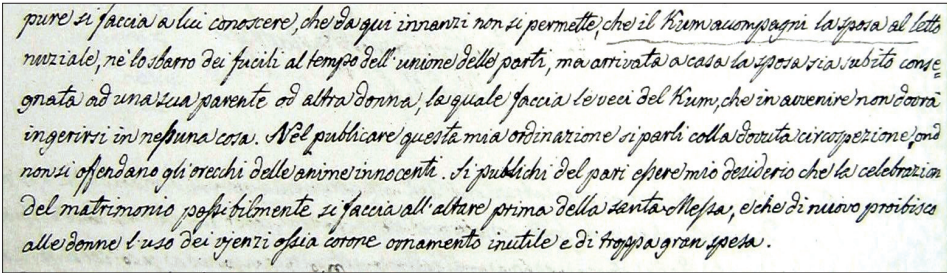


Fig 2. A circular of Provicar Vidoje Maslač from 1847

groom until they “undressed”, after which the best man fired a gun shot and returned to the hearth.<sup>66</sup> According to the research of Ljubo Mićević, though of somewhat earlier date and thus subject to scrutiny, Orthodox priests often acted as marriage witnesses at Orthodox weddings, this practice being sporadically traced among the Catholics, too.<sup>67</sup> A choice such as this was an expression of trust, and at the same time the witnesses could introduce the bride and groom to their matrimonial duties. According to oral tradition, sleeping with the bride was an additional role assumed by the best man.<sup>68</sup> This practice was discontinued by a local return immigrant to the Americas in 1919.<sup>69</sup> In Montenegro, the brother-in-law whose role was to sleep with the bride instead of husband, was replaced in the bride chamber by the groom’s sister or his sister-in-law.<sup>70</sup>

Similar customs were common in Neum and its hinterland. In her study of marriage customs in Zažablje, surroundings of Neum, Radmila Kajmaković

<sup>66</sup> Timeleone Vedovi, *Bilježke o Crnoj Gori*. Podgorica: CID, 2000: p. 74.

<sup>67</sup> Thus in 1890 Nikifor Vujinović was the marriage witness to Jovan Jakšić from Dubljani; in 1895 the former also witnessed the marriage of Đuro Pjanić from Grmljani; in 1893 Teofan Rudan, monk, witnessed the marriage of Nikola Vukanović from Zavala; in 1896 the same person witnessed the marriage of Tripo Srbe from Zavala, etc., while don Ivan Raguž, Catholic priest from Ravno, was the witness to marriage of Marko Čoić, a Catholic from Dubljani. Ljubo Mićević, *Život i običaji Popovaca*. Beograd: SANU, 1952: pp. 185, 196, 201.

<sup>68</sup> Oral accounts confirm that similar customs were upheld in south-eastern Herzegovina until the middle of the twentieth century, only that, instead of *kum*, it was the duty of *djever* to sleep with the bride as many as fifteen nights after the wedding. Oral testimonies provided by Cvijeta Marić (1932) and Pero Raguž (1934) from Donji Brštanik in the district of Stolac.

<sup>69</sup> The groom Đoko Pendo from Čvaljina, who returned from the Americas, denied Hristifor Mihajlović, Orthodox monk from Zavala, “the customary right to sleep with the bride by saying: I do not allow my father Ako to sleep with her, let alone the monk” (Lj. Mićević, *Život i običaji Popovaca*: p. 373).

<sup>70</sup> Mićun M. Pavićević, »Običaji (Katunska nahija u Crnoj Gori)«. *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje Južnih Slavena* 26/2 (1928): p. 173.

writes that after the wedding dinner “the groom retires first, followed by the bride accompanied by the groomsmen. *Kum* then unites the bride and groom, that is, commands them to undress naked and lie down in bed, after which he blesses them with ‘holy’ water. When the young couple go to bed, *kum* locks the door of their room and gives the key to a groomsman who unlocks it in the morning”<sup>71</sup>

Identical or similar customs were practiced among the inhabitants of Dalmatian Zagora. One of the duties assigned to the best man in this region was to accompany the groom to the bride chamber and remain with the young couple until they untied each other’s belt. He would then leave the room, and his gun shooting would signal that he has accompanied the bride and groom to the bride chamber.<sup>72</sup> In a part of Zagora bordering Split, *kum* also accompanied the bride to the bride bed, where the groom already awaited his bride. “Before the bride lay by the groom’s side in bed, the person who accompanied her would thoroughly search her clothes looking for a knot of any kind, anything tied up, for it was believed to have evil influence, and had to be untied without delay. If this was not done, it was believed that the bride and groom would not be able to consummate marriage. While the bride was getting ready for bed, the wedding party rejoiced loudly, shouting and singing till dawn”<sup>73</sup>

Apparently, marriage customs such as these caused considerable headache to the local priests and chaplains in Bosnia, because Bishop Miletić prohibited friars and clergymen to act as witnesses.<sup>74</sup> These customs were condemned by other clerics, too. Bernardin Carrara, Italian missionary in service in Gradac near Neum, while describing in 1854 the contemporary local marriage customs, petitioned the Ragusan bishop for their eradication.<sup>75</sup>

Traditional customs pertinent to betrothal and wedding of the hinterland of Split, Braćević–Zlopolje Parish, in the district of Muć in the eighteenth century, virtually scandalised the Catholic priests if the visitation reports are to be trusted. According to the testimony of priest Babaja, the visitor learnt of a

<sup>71</sup> R. Kajmaković, »Ženidbeni običaji«: p. 125.

<sup>72</sup> Ivan Lovrić, *Bilješke o Putu po Dalmaciji opata Alberta Fortisa i Život Stanislava Sočivice*. Zagreb: Izdavački zavod Jugoslavenske akademije, 1948: p. 128.

<sup>73</sup> D. Alaupović-Gjeldum, »Običaji i vjerovanja pri sklapanju braka u dijelu splitske Zagore«: pp. 74-75.

<sup>74</sup> A. Miletić, *Naredbe, i Uprave*: p. 57; P. Knezović, »Naredbe i uprave fra Augustina Miletića«: p. 22.

<sup>75</sup> I. Puljić, »Trebinjsko-mrkanska biskupija u XIX stoljeću«, in: *Katolička Crkva u Bosni i Hercegovini u XIX i XX stoljeću*. Sarajevo: Vrhbosanska visoka teološka škola, 1986: p. 105.

custom by which the bride, on her day of betrothal, went to bed with the person that brought her the ring, usually the groom's brother or father. After the wedding, the bride slept several nights with the brother-in-law. Had there been several brothers-in-law, she would sleep with the youngest. On the first feast day upon wedding, the brother-in-law or close kin would accompany the cloaked bride to church. There, the young bride was introduced to her new in-laws and exchanged kisses, after which the brother-in-law took her back home, again protected by a cloak. During introduction, "the cloak hides many illicit contacts, and is thus a foreplay that might precede an illicit act of some other kind, subsequently revealed with many in due time".<sup>76</sup>

In his accounts, Jozo Zovko, Catholic priest in Ravno, described some unseemly marriage customs that had survived in his parish until his priesthood (1932-42). He favourably looked upon the fact that young girls generally reached their marriage in chastity. He strongly condemned the bride's close physical contacts with *djever*, usually the groom's brother. Without any restraint, she kissed publicly men and women, yet not her husband, as that would be unbecoming.<sup>77</sup> The relationship between bride and *djever* during the wedding and afterwards in south-eastern Herzegovina has been examined by Stjepan Batinović, who argues that the bride spent her first marriage days and even months in the company of *djever*, which sometimes resulted in incest.<sup>78</sup>

### Conclusion

The rite of marriage was a significant life-cycle event in the territory of the Parish of Ravno in Popovo, whose ceremony was governed by various customs. The fact that this parish was under Ottoman control at the time largely affected the position of the local Catholics, notably Catholic priests, and the application of the Tridentine decrees regulating marriage. In addition, Catholic population was not willing to give up their archaic customs incompatible with the Council decrees. Similar marriage customs prevailed throughout the Dinaric region. Although some traditional forms of marriage were still practiced, Catholic

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<sup>76</sup> Lovre Katić, »Povijesni podaci iz vizitacije trogirске biskupije u XVIII. stoljeću«. *Starine* 48 (1958): pp. 297-298.

<sup>77</sup> *Uspomene i sjećanja na osobe - mjesta - događaje*. Lujan (Argentina), 1970/3, manuscript Jozo Zovko: pp. 768-769 (Archive of the Diocesan Ordinariate in Mostar).

<sup>78</sup> *Vjesnik župe Hrasno* 6 (1968): p. 9.

marriages were performed in church in the presence of the priest and two witnesses. Marriage witnesses, as a rule, both male, played an important double role. On the one hand, they were to act in compliance with the rules of the Catholic Church and witness the sacrament of marriage as regulated, and on the other, they were expected to play a traditional role according to deeply rooted customs, such as bride kidnapping and rituals related to delayed consummation of marriage.

Based on the analysis of 233 marriages and 466 witnesses to marriage in the Parish of Ravno during the first half of the nineteenth century, the research shows that every third witness was kin-related to one of the spouses. More than one half of the groom's witnesses was kin-related to the groom, and were his peers. In almost one-fifth of marriages (17.85% ) at least one exchange witnesshood between families has been established. Tradition and legacy of social ties proved to have been more important than property status when choosing witnesses. Cross-border social relations were also developed, witnesses being chosen from the families of the geographically adjacent Dubrovačko Primorje. The phenomenon of habitual witnesses draws attention to the popularity of certain persons in this role, usually selected among the individuals highly respected in the community. The fictive bond established between witnesses and spouses at marriage was further cemented through spiritual kinship, in that the same persons later witnessed the baptism of the couple's children.

In the traditional wedding procession, whose members in the Dinaric region were usually armed men, *kum* accompanied and watched over the bride. His protection extended to the bridal chamber, even into the bridal bed itself, as documented by a circular written by Vidoje Maslač, provicar of the Bishop of Dubrovnik and the administrator of the Trebinje-Mrkan Dioceses, Tomo Jederlinić.

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