

TOMASZ NOWAK (Warszawa)

## *Easter horseback processions in Upper Lusatia – from ‘waking’ nature to the religious and national idea*

**ABSTRACT:** Horseback processions are an historical phenomenon still alive today in many parts of Europe. In western Slavic lands (Poland, Czech Republic, Lusatia) they are all inseparably connected with the period of Easter, and one of the crucial elements of the processions is song. Behaviour observed in Slavic horseback processions can be directly related to the establishing of the world by delimiting boundaries and ordering and sacralising space. Taking place as they do in specific conditions undoubtedly exemplify a rite of passage. In this rite, the costume and pious symbols serve to take the participants away from the world of the profane and bring them to the realm of the sacred, while the ‘carrying on horseback’, besides its utilitarian use during chases, serves to maintain them in an ‘intermediate state, between earth and heaven’, for them to ‘transcend themselves’ and undertake a ‘mystical journey’. Processions cultivated among the Upper Lusatians and the available sources allow one to draw conclusions regarding not only the function of song and of the tradition itself, but also the way they have changed down the ages. Interesting to the musicologist is the change in the functions of the processional singing from a signal directed at nature, through a documented religious medium, to the symbolisation of social (national) meanings, making use of contemporary media. As such, these functions may serve indirectly the interpretation of such complex and poorly documented customs as Silesian processions, and especially the special social role of the processional *špiewak* (cantor).

**KEYWORDS:** horseback processions, Easter singing, functions of song

Horseback processions or cavalcades are an historical phenomenon still alive today in many parts of Europe: Andalusia, Geneva, Swabia, Tyrol, Silesia and Lusatia.<sup>1</sup> In Andalusia, among the cavalcades cultivated

---

<sup>1</sup> Adam Bujak, *Misteria* (Warsaw, 1989), 110–111; Dietrich Scholze and Hans Löffler, *Wir Osterreiter über den religiösen Brauch in der Oberlausitz / My křižerjo wo jutrownym naložku katolskich Serbow* (Bautzen/Budyšin, 1993), 9; Paweł Newerla, ‘O historii procesji konnych’ [On the history of horseback processions], *Głos Gminy. Gazeta Lokal-*

today are the grand procession of riders held on Epiphany in Málaga (*Cabalgata de los Reyes Magos*<sup>2</sup>) and processions accompanying equestrian tournaments held at the beginning of July in Estepona (*Feria y Fiesta Mayor*). The Geneva cavalcade of riders in historical costume (*Festival Escalade*) is of a secular character and takes place every December in memory of the defence of the city against an attack by the Prince of Savoy. In Swabia (Inchenhofen), Upper Bavaria (Bad Tölz, Chiemgau, Dietramszell, Grafing, Kreuth, Ruhpolding, Siegertsbrunn, Warngau) and the Tyrol (Brixen im Thale, Kundl), processions are held on Whit Sunday, St George's Day (23 April – *Georgi-Ritte*) or – most commonly – St Leonard's Day (6 November – *Leonhardi-Umfahrten*), the purpose of which is to visit outlying chapels dedicated to the saints and to ride around the chapels three times: for the harvest, for animals and for the dead. The Swabian town of Weingarten still maintains a thousand-year-old tradition of a horseback procession on Ascension Day with a relic of Christ's Blood (*Blutritt von Weingarten*). This procession crosses the fields in prayerful contemplation, with over 3000 riders taking part.

Compared with these examples, the horseback processions held in western Slavic lands (Poland, Czech Republic, Lusatia) are of a strictly local and peculiarly regional character; they are all inseparably connected with the period of Easter, and one of the crucial elements of the processions is song.

In Silesia, the custom of the Easter Ride (*Osterreiten* or *Osterritt*) is cultivated mainly in the areas around Racibórz (Bieńkowice, Pietrowice Wielkie, Racibórz, Zawada Książęca), Gliwice (Ostropa, Wójtowa Wieś), Strzelce Opolskie (Żędowice) and Kluczbork (Biskupice, Sternalice), although up until the Second World War its scope also extended to other villages near Racibórz (Baborów, Kietrz, Sudół) and Kluczbork (Olesno), as well as the area around the Silesian town of Hlučín, in the Czech Republic, near the city of Opole, in Lower Silesia (including the areas around Kłodzko, Grodków, Namysłów, Nysa, Prudnik, Wrocław, Ząbkowice Śląskie and Ziębice), and as far as Upper Lusatia and the Ústí nad Labem region (*Ústecký kraj*).<sup>3</sup> According to the local parish books, this custom has been cultivated since 'time immemorial', although records document a three-hundred-year-old tradition of Silesian processions. The processions of smartly-dressed riders and britzkas adorned with flowers and box-

---

*na Gminy Pietrowice Wielkie*, 64/2 (2004), 2; Gerhard Brendler, *380 Jahre Saatreiten in Ostritz – St. Marienthal 1628–2008* (Spitzkunnersdorf, 2008), 12–32. The examples cited here do not exhaust the subject.

<sup>2</sup> *Cabalgata* is the term for many processions on the Iberian Peninsula and in Latin America which in the past were frequently horseback processions. Today, the vast majority are on foot or in motor vehicles.

<sup>3</sup> Łukasz Gołębiowski, *Gry i zabawy różnych stanów* [The games and amusements of different social states] (Warsaw, 1831), 276; Newerla, 'O historii procesji konnych', 2; Brendler, *380 Jahre Saatreiten in Ostritz*, 28–29.

wood, in which clerics often participate, are held on Easter Monday. Individuals with a special function carry a cross and a figure of Christ Risen, and sometimes also a paschal candle. One of the most important people in the processions is the *śpiewak* [cantor], who intones the Easter songs and leads the prayers. The cavalcade passes through fields, meadows and woods to chapels and crosses standing beyond human settlements. Races are often held during the final phase of processions, ending in the family village.<sup>4</sup>

In this form, Silesian horseback processions constitute an interesting combination of elements of liturgical behaviour and folk customs familiar from other parts of western and eastern Slavic lands. They are, without doubt, a regional variant of services of intercession known as the *litaniae minores*, the roots of which reach back to pagan ceremonies of walking around the fields. Introduced c.450 by Saint Mamertus, Archbishop of Vienne, these were disseminated thanks to a resolution of the Orléans synod of 511.<sup>5</sup> Under the name *Dni Krzyżowe*, they are cultivated in Poland to the present day by parishes in small towns and villages. However, besides the *litaniae minores*, we also find in Silesian horseback processions elements of folk spring customs, not infrequently dating back to pagan times. The walking around the fields resembles the Easter custom, widely familiar in Poland, of 'walking to Emmaus',<sup>6</sup> the custom, cultivated in the East, of stirring up 'strife' and spring on the fields,<sup>7</sup> and also the custom of the Easter blessing of crops, cultivated in Wielkopolska<sup>8</sup>. Walking around settlements with a cross during Easter is also practised in northern Małopolska.<sup>9</sup> The singing of Easter songs<sup>10</sup> – and also

<sup>4</sup> Łukasz Gołębiowski employed the term 'rochwist' for chases of this type in Lower Silesia (*Gry i zabawy*, 276).

<sup>5</sup> Oskar Kolberg, in *Dziela Wszystkie* [Complete works], vol. 5: *Krakowskie, część I* [The Kraków region, part I] (Wrocław and Poznań, 1962), 291.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Kolberg, *ibid.* 288–289; *idem*, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 9: *Wielkie Księstwo Poznańskie, część I* [The Grand Duchy of Posen, part I] (Wrocław and Poznań, 1963), 134; *idem*, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 24: *Mazowsze, część I* [Mazovia, part I] (Wrocław and Poznań, 1963), 139.

<sup>7</sup> '[...] One cries out on the fields, that is, one provokes, by means of cries, 'strife', the hidden power that is the source and the cause, or the energy potentially latent in that which may bring about a greater or lesser harvest and generally all fertility on a farm', Cezaria Baudouin de Courtenay Ehrenkreutz, 'Kilka uwag i wiadomości o etnografii województwa wileńskiego' [Some remarks and information on the ethnography of the Vilnius province], in *Wilno i Ziemia Wileńska* [Vilnius and the Vilnius region] (Vilnius, 1930), 211. See also Kolberg, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 33: *Chełmskie, część I* [The Chełm region, part I] (Wrocław and Poznań, 1964), 138.

<sup>8</sup> Kolberg, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 9: *Wielkie Księstwo Poznańskie, część I* [The Grand Duchy of Posen, part I] (Wrocław and Poznań, 1963), 134.

<sup>9</sup> Kolberg, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 19: *Kieleckie, część II* [The Kielce region, part II] (Wrocław and Poznań, 1963), 188.

<sup>10</sup> Chiefly the song *Wesoły nam dzień dziś nastal*.

well-wishing songs – was a common custom of a magical character appearing in springtime ‘carolling’ all across the country (walking with the ‘cockerel’ or *kuras*,<sup>11</sup> *łatowanie*<sup>12</sup>), which for many earlier scholars was ‘a remnant of a ritual celebrated at the beginning of spring in honour of the goddess of fertility’.<sup>13</sup> The figure of the horse, as an animal symbolising – like the cock, the bear and the goat – fertility and vital forces (or else – as Oskar Kolberg opined – the sun), appeared in the form of an effigy or a costume in the spring rites of the Slavs.<sup>14</sup> A horse was also used (particularly in western Poland) in chases held after the Resurrection Mass, which were supposed to ensure abundant crops and a rapid completion of work on the fields.<sup>15</sup>

In this context, the behaviour observed in Silesian horseback processions can be directly related to the establishing of the world by delimiting boundaries and ordering and sacralising space (cosmisation and consecration).<sup>16</sup> Taking place as they do in specific conditions – a period close to the equinox, after the first full moon in spring, on the boundary between winter and spring, between the time when the fields lie dormant and the crops are grown – the Silesian horseback processions undoubtedly exemplify a rite of passage.<sup>17</sup> In this rite, the costume and pious symbols serve to take the participants away from the world of the profane and bring them to the realm of the sacred, while the ‘carrying on horseback’, besides its utilitarian use during chases, serves to maintain them in an ‘intermediate state, between earth and

<sup>11</sup> Kolberg, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 16: *Lubelskie, część I* [The Lublin region, part I] (Wrocław and Poznań, 1962), 117; idem, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 23: *Kaliszkie, część I* [The Kalisz region, part I] (Wrocław and Poznań, 1964), 85.

<sup>12</sup> Cezaria Baudouin de Courtenay Ehrenkreutz, ‘Zwyczaje wiosenne ludu polskiego’ [The spring customs of the Polish people], *Wiedza i życie*, 10/2(1927).

<sup>13</sup> Kolberg, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 43: *Śląsk* [Silesia] (Wrocław and Poznań, 1965), 20.

<sup>14</sup> Kolberg, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 19: *Kieleckie, część II*, 185; idem, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 35: *Przemyskie* [The Przemyśl region] (Wrocław and Poznań, 1964).

<sup>15</sup> Kolberg, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 9: *Wielkie Księstwo Poznańskie, część I*, 133, 135, 139; idem, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 10: *Wielkie Księstwo Poznańskie, część II* [The Grand Duchy of Posen, part II] (Wrocław and Poznań, 1963), 200; idem, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 11: *Wielkie Księstwo Poznańskie, część III* [The Grand Duchy of Posen, part III] (Wrocław and Poznań, 1963), 41; idem, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 19: *Kieleckie, część II*, 189; idem, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 16: *Mazowsze, część III* [Mazovia, part III] (Wrocław and Poznań, 1963), 77; idem, *Dziela Wszystkie*, vol. 33: *Chełmskie, część I* [The Chełm region, part I] (Wrocław and Poznań, 1964), 140. This reference appears to be directly reproduced in the conclusion of Silesian processions.

<sup>16</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Das Heilige und das Profane. Vom Wesen des Religiösen* (Hamburg, 1957), trans. Robert Reszke as *Sacrum i profanum. O istocie religijności* (Warsaw, 1999), 7–28.

<sup>17</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *Les rites de passage* (Paris, 1981), trans. Beata Biały as *Obrzędy przejścia* (Warsaw, 2006).

heaven',<sup>18</sup> for them to 'transcend themselves' and undertake a 'mystical journey'<sup>19</sup>. The question remains, however, as to the role of song in these processions. The poorly documented and quite recently discovered horseback processions from Silesia, preserved in relict form only, do not allow the scholar to elucidate this question. Much more helpful in this respect would appear to be the better documented processions cultivated among the Upper Lusatians (also termed the Upper Sorbs or Upper Wends), preserved in living practice, and the available sources allow one to draw conclusions regarding not only the function of song and of the tradition itself, but also the way they have changed down the ages (see Figure 1).



PHOTO: TOMASZ NOWAK

Figure 1. Procession of 'cross riders' in Wótrów (Ostro), 2009

The above-mentioned historical sources, defining the range of Easter processions in Silesia, appear to suggest their connection to Lusatian processions. Yet there are crucial differences between the two. Above all, the Lusatian processions take place on Easter Sunday immediately after the first Holy Mass, which means that they cannot be linked directly to the *litaniae mi-*

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 182–183.

<sup>19</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* (Paris, 1951), trans. Krzysztof Kocjan as *Szamanizm i archaiczne techniki ekstazy* (Warsaw, 1994), 461.

nores. What is more, they never feature an equestrian chase, which means that we cannot relate them directly to the customs familiar in Silesia and Wielkopolska. Given the lack of these elements, particular significance is taken on by the sonorous singing of the men, which is elaborated upon below.

It is difficult to pinpoint the origins of the Easter processions in Lusatia. The oldest mention indicates that in 1490 such processions took place between Wojerecy (Hoyerswerda) and Kulow (Wittichinaw), although this was already then described as an old custom.<sup>20</sup> Up until the period of the Thirty Years' War, this custom was either cultivated alongside the main pastoral current, as it were, or was not a manifestation of religiosity at all, and its relics can be observed still today in Wótrow (Ostro) and Wostrowiec-Marijiny Dol (Ostritz-Marienthal).<sup>21</sup> In Wótrow, before the procession proper, men ride around the fields on horseback singing Easter songs in a resonant voice, and in Wostrowiec-Marijiny Doł, the custom has been preserved of riding around one's own settlement only, partly straight across the fields. Today (in Wostrowiec-Marijiny Doł), as formerly (in Wótrow), this custom is termed the 'sowing ride' (Lus. *sywne jěchanje*, Ger. *Saatreiten*), which perhaps best conveys the original sense of these activities. The riding around the fields (probably by married men alone) with a cross borrowed from the parish church,<sup>22</sup> described in quite numerous sixteenth-century sources, under its current name is therefore most probably a later custom. One interesting observation from present-day processions is that even today the riders sing while riding across deserted places (and not only where a large group of spectators awaits them), and that with the most intense sound and the use of a high register. From this, one may presume that the singing in the fields dates back to the origins of this custom and constituted its very essence. In addition, the context of the performance, combined with the highlighting of those features of the sound that ensured its good propagation, allow us to state that this custom may have been the 'raising of the spring', through musical or 'paramusical' signals addressed to nature, described in some detail by Oskar Kolberg and Cezaria Baudouin de Courtenay Ehrenkreutz Jędrzejewiczowa.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Scholze and Löffler, *Wir Osterreiter* (see footnote 1), 7. Interestingly, in contrast to the official procession, in Wótrow great stall is set by riding around the fields in everyday attire.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 15; Michal Brežan, 'Zrowastanjenje docpěje jich tež wosrjedź žiwjenja' [The Resurrection will reach them too while alive], *Katolski Posoł* 15 (2009), 100–101.

<sup>22</sup> This seems to be confirmed by a record from Kulow, from 1632, see Alfons Frencl, *Křižerjo* (Budyšin, 1992), 27.

<sup>23</sup> See footnote 5–15.



PHOTO: TOMASZ NOWAK

Figure 2. The Cantor and Bearer of the Passion in Chróścice (*Crostwitz*), 2008

The period of the Reformation, which divided Lusatia into Catholic (a substantial part of Upper Lusatia) and Protestant (the remaining areas, including the whole of Lower Lusatia), brought serious changes to the way this custom was treated. Already in 1597, by an order of the Protestant magnate Hans Christoff von Ponickau of Rakecy (Ger. Königswartha), Protestants were forbidden to take part in the custom: 'It was formerly the custom to ride around the fields on Easter Sunday with a cross. This is to cease. From today, clerics and sextons are instructed to issue crosses from churches for such purposes to no one, on pain of a 5 thaler fine'.<sup>24</sup> This order and others like it proved effective – with time, all the villages in which Protestantism had been adopted completely abandoned the custom,<sup>25</sup> although up until the end of the eighteenth century many rural communities stubbornly asserted their right to cultivate it. One extreme example of this is the battle fought at Easter 1623 by the villagers of Radwor (Ger. Radibor) with the servants of Christof von Minkwitz, which ended with the church being stormed and the parish cross carried out. Ultimately, however, Easter horseback processions became an element distinguishing Catholic villages in Upper Lusatia.



PHOTO: TOMASZ NOWAK

Figure 3. 'Cross riders' between fields, 2009

The religious aspect of processions began to dominate particularly after the end of the Thirty Years' War, which in these religious borderlands heightened the differences between Catholics and Protestants. During the war, the

<sup>24</sup> Frencl, *Křížerjo*, 26.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.



custom was close to extinction, partly due to the great military losses among both people and horses. In many villages, the procession was discontinued, and in some it retained only a symbolic character. For example, in 1632 in Kulow (Ger. Wittichenau), the procession comprised only five riders.<sup>26</sup> However, in 1679, in Niebielčice (Ger. Nebelschütz), some twenty-three riders took part in the revived procession. The local chronicle indicated that such a great number of 'cross riders' could not be remembered, the high turn-out that year being regarded as a visible sign of the triumph of life over death.

Also during this time, the processions gained the support of the local monastic centres – Marijina Hwiezda (Ger. Marienstern) and Marijiny Doł (Ger. Marienthal) – on the estates of which almost all the Catholic parishes of Upper Lusatia were situated. Parish groups of cross riders took on the character of religious fraternities, cultivating their own customs (initiations, jubilees) and traditions, with their own costumes, symbols and hierarchy. Besides a cross, the horseback cavalcades were also furnished with flags and a figure of Christ Risen, after the fashion of Resurrection and Corpus Christi processions, and locally they also gained other additions, such as fanfares,<sup>27</sup> bells and even gorgets. An opportunity to enrich the ceremonies was also provided by Lusatians' numerous participation in the Saxon army<sup>28</sup> during the Battle of Vienna in 1683. It is thought that harnesses taken from the enemy led to a crescent moon and stars being introduced into the symbolism of the processions (alongside the already familiar Eucharistic Lamb), as the decorative element that dominates today,<sup>29</sup> although it is worth noting that an eight-arm star can also be found among the symbols of the Marijina Hwiezda monastery (Marienstern).

It is most likely that the Counter Reformation was also the period when the repertoire of the cross riders became established, later being subjected to only minor revisions. Such is indicated by a comparison of processional songbooks compiled in our times for the needs of the processions with the *Wosadnik*, or songbook, of Michał Wałda, from 1787. Still today, the core of the repertoire comprises Easter songs perfectly familiar to Wałda, already considered old in his day, with a Lusatian version of the Latin hymn *Surrexit Christus hodie* to the fore. The repertoire is completed by Marian songs and songs in praise of Christ the King. Today, songs written since the eighteenth century are used only marginally. Since the times of the Counter Reformation, one of the most important functions in the procession is that of the cantor, and the

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>27</sup> Scholze and Löffler, *Wir Osterreiter*, 15; Brežan, 'Zrowastanjenje docpěje jich tež wosrjedź žiwjenja'.

<sup>28</sup> Elements of Saxon army harnesses and battle dress were used up until the beginning of the twentieth century.

<sup>29</sup> Scholze and Löffler, *Wir Osterreiter*, 7.

principal duty of the cross riders has become the resounding proclamation of the Lord's Resurrection to all the faithful.<sup>30</sup>



PHOTO: TOMASZ NOWAK

Figure 4. Contemporary songbooks of the cross riders

<sup>30</sup> Yet to be elucidated is the appearance in Lusatian processions at this time of many elements familiar from horseback processions in Catholic Upper Bavaria (the gradual replacement of riding around the fields with rides between villages, the growing importance of prayers and hymns, the threefold circling of churches and chapels, and the appearance of the patron saints of the cross riders: SS George and Martin). No evidence of the copying of Bavarian models has yet come to light, but there is much that appears to point in that direction.

8. Wón rjekny: "Njebojće so mje! Wěm derje, koho pytaće. Wón njeje tu, wón žiwy je!
9. Wšu móc wón smjercí wotwjedže a překrasnjeny stanył je: tu ruby po nim widźíce."
10. A jandzelej so přidruži tu jandžel hišće jasniši. Strach zaja žónske wšitke tři.
11. Jim jandzelej pak rjeknyštaj: "Chryst stanył je a w rowje njej', wón knježi nade stwórbu wšej.
12. Haj, spomńće, kak wón prajŕ je, zo na dzeŕ třeći zawěsće wón zaso stanje, hladajće!
13. Nětk pak so ruče zebjerće, do Galileje chwatajće, wšo jeho pósłam powěsće!"
14. Kak rady žónske chwatachu a pósłam radosć powěchu, zo Knjez je stanył z hordosću!
15. Ći pósli měrnje sluchachu, wšak žónskim mało wěrjachu, hač Knjeza sami widźachu.
16. Ow překrasnjeny Zbózniko, naš pućo, swětło, wučerjo, my tebi dowěrjamy so.
17. Daj nam so tebi spodobać a po wšěch horjach kralować kaž twoji lubi, twoja mać!

**Chwalen Jězus Chryst!  
Na wěki! Amen.**

**Witajće wot nyšpora!  
Wjerš pomazy!**

22

## DOMPUĆ

### *Wotrow, dwójce wokolo cyrkwy*

1. Njeh w njebjesach, na zemi, přez cyły firmament, so česći z kěrlušemi Najswjetši sakrament: Njeh, Jězu, kłoni so Ći stajnje Ćlowjestwo, njeh k wutrobje so twojej wšo modli, štož tu je.
2. Je za nas stajnje bića a za nas bije šće. Štó je kaž wona mļa? Wša šćedrosć z njeje dže. Njeh, Jězu, kłoni so ...
3. Je wšitkim wotewrjena, njeh hrěch najwjetši je. Jej' smilnosć njeskrótsena nam želnosć zbudźuje. Njeh, Jězu, ...
4. Ja z tutej rany piju sej pokoj, Zbózniko, hdyž z bolosćemi wiju tu w dole sylzow so. Njeh, Jězu ...
5. Haj, tebi do wutroby so chować něhdy chcu, hdyž w mojej smjercí zloby mje helse napadnu. Njeh, Jězu ...
6. Ow, twoja krej njeh zmyje, mi, Jězu, wutrobu! Njeh twoja smjerc mi tyje, hdyž dušu wudychnu. Njeh, Jězu, ...

### *Př cyrkwi*

#### Magnificat

Wuchwaluje moja duša Knjeza, / a mój duch zraduje so w Bohu, mojim Zbózniku.

Přetož pohladał je na ponižnosć swojeje služownicy, / hlejće, wot nětka budźeja mje chwalić wšitke narody.

23

Figure 5. Fragment of a cross riders' songbook. See Křižerske, Njebjelčanskeje wosady, ed. Helmut Ledźbor (Njebjelčicy, 1997)

Further changes to the custom came around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Besides the additional modifications to the apparel of riders and horses, influenced by the Napoleonic Wars and bourgeois culture,<sup>31</sup> changes crucial to the function of the processions occurred on the wave of national rebirth, which represented a Lusatian echo of Europe-wide trends, including pan-Slavism. For many Catholic fathers of the Lusatian nation (including priests), the horseback procession became a symbol of Lusatian identity, eulogised in poetry and presented in exhibitions promoting the Lusatians' culture. The custom was reintroduced into villages which had abandoned it years before.<sup>32</sup> A new element in the processions were the newly adopted national colours.<sup>33</sup> With time, this national current began to gain increasing importance, at the expense of the religious aspect. Alarmed at the changes to the function of the processions, the clergy assembled at the synod held in the Marijina Hwiezda monastery in 1923 adopted a resolution whereby clerics would take part in the processions on carts.<sup>34</sup> However, this met with some resistance from the riders themselves, and the first two clerics did not take part in a procession until 1940 – and that on horseback.<sup>35</sup> Also resisted was the proposal put forward by Germanicised Lusatian communities to allow the use of the German language in processions. Still today, only one procession admits German on an equal footing with Upper Lusatian, and this allowance continues to cause conflict among its participants and draw caustic comments from participants in other processions. It is worth noting here that during the Second World War, in a bid to maintain the Slavic character of the processions at a time when men were generally lacking (taking part, as they were, in military activities), forced agricultural labourers from Poland and Bohemia were allowed to participate in the processions;<sup>36</sup> this was considered a lesser evil than the introduction of German<sup>37</sup>. These facts eloquently testify

---

<sup>31</sup> At this time, the traditionally worn male costumes modelled on (or adapted from) Saxon army uniform were ultimately abandoned, in favour of the costumes still worn today, 'in the American fashion', as they are usually termed. Frencl, *Křižerjo*, 19. Also adopted at this time were new models of saddle, harness and trappings.

<sup>32</sup> Siegmund Musiat, *Das Jahresbrauchtum im Gebiet der katholischen Sorben / Naložki katolskich Serbow w běhu lěta* (n.p., n.d.), 60–61.

<sup>33</sup> Scholze and Löffler, *Wir Osterreiter*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Frencl, *Křižerjo*, 20.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>37</sup> German-language processions did take place, however, on Germanicised estates belonging to the Marijiny Doł monastery (including Ebersbach (Lus. Habrachćicy), Grunau (Pol. Krzewina), Königshain (Pol. Wojciechowice), Ostitz and Seitendorf (Pol. Zatonie)) and in parishes in the Ústí nad Labem region (including Fugau (Cz. Fukov), Georgswalde (Cz. Jiřikov), Großschönau (Cz. Velký Šenov), Königshain (Cz. Království), Lobendau (Cz.

that the basic function of the processions, and of the processional singing, at that time was to manifest Lusatian cultural identity. And this function gained even greater significance during the times of the German Democratic Republic. The region's industrialisation brought an avalanche of German settlers, and the 60,000 Lusatians became a minority in their own land. Loud singing in the Lusatian language became an extra opportunity to raise the status of the language, marginalised in everyday life.

The final changes were brought about by events during the second half of the twentieth century. Another crisis in this custom was caused by collectivisation in Lusatia, as a result of which horses began to be in short supply. For this reason, in 1970 the procession in Budyšin (Ger. Bautzen) was discontinued<sup>38</sup> (not revived until 1993). Through the efforts of many national activists and substantial financial outlay, horses began to be brought in for that one day in the year from beyond Upper Lusatia, from as far afield as Leipzig and Berlin, although this augured ill for the continuation of the custom in the future. In this situation, a major stimulus was the election to the Apostolic See of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, which triggered a new wave of religious and national revival among the Lusatians.<sup>39</sup>

As a result of all these events, today the processions have a mixed national-religious character, where the two aspects are balanced; this is expressed both by the riders' code of ten binding rules and by the oft-repeated opinion: 'From his Christian convictions the cross rider (*křižer*) on public highways confesses the faith and acknowledges his nationality'.<sup>40</sup> Each year, 9–10 parish processions of various size (over 1700 riders in total) set off to cover a distance of 10–40 kilometres,<sup>41</sup> together covering the larger part of the land inhabited by the compact group of native-speaker Upper Lusatians. The processions have also become well known as a tourist attraction throughout Germany, enabling the Lusatian culture to be promoted thanks to their high media profile. For their part, the national Lusatian media are promoting the idea of the processions among both older and younger generations, seeking not only to preserve the custom, but also to develop it. In this context, the processional singing fulfils equally the functions of proclaiming the glory of Christ's Resurrection and shaping the public image of the Lusatian language as an old, dignified and still cultivated language. The custom is supported by a growing number of publications containing the traditional repertoire. Of

---

Lobendava) and Schluckenau (Cz. Šluknov)). At present, the custom is cultivated only in Ostritz.

<sup>38</sup> Scholze and Löffler, *Wir Osterreiter*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> Subsequently, the rise in living standards following the unification of Germany also enabled new riders to be kitted out.

<sup>40</sup> Frencl, *Křižerjo*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> Scholze and Löffler, *Wir Osterreiter*, 6.

particular importance here are the cross riders' songbooks, which essentially comprise a painstakingly elaborated musical scenario for each of the processions. Within the much more elaborate cross riders' ceremonial, a special role is fulfilled by their thanksgiving mass on the Tuesday after Easter. This is the only mass in the whole year to be broadcast by Lusatian radio (*Serbski Rozhlós*), gathering nearly all Lusatian families around their radios. In this instance, the singing of the cross riders is treated by the Lusatians as a source of national pride, a symbol of the nation's strength and vitality.

Passing over the possible links to other horseback cavalcades held across Europe, which are probably impossible to establish, the Easter horseback processions in Lusatia remain an interesting relic of the rite of the cosmisation and consecration of life space,<sup>42</sup> and also of the rite of passage,<sup>43</sup> suspended somewhere between the profane and the sacred<sup>44</sup>. Much more interesting would appear to be the changes in the function of the custom itself, which can be observed thanks to the well-preserved historical documentation. Interesting to the musicologist is the change in the functions of the processional singing from a presumed signal directed at nature, through a documented religious medium, to the symbolisation of social (national) meanings, making use of contemporary media. As such, these functions may serve indirectly the interpretation of such complex and poorly documented customs as Silesian processions, and especially the special social role of the processional *śpiewak* [cantor].

*Translated by John Comber*

---

<sup>42</sup> Eliade, *Sacrum i profanum*, 7–28.

<sup>43</sup> Van Gennep, *Obrzędy przejścia*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 182–183.