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Avtor

Martina Repinc

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Perice v Boljuncu

The article deals with the washerwomen from Boljunec near Trieste, the village where this service survived the longest. Some of them did the laundry for their clients until the late 1970s. The research is based on oral information and deals with the weekly working cycle (collecting, soaking, washing, rinsing, drying and returning the laundry). The article also presents the difficulties women met in carrying out their job (customers, the foreign town, language).

Summary

The washerwomen from Boljunec

The article describes the working cycle of the washerwomen from Boljunec near Trieste. The service survived in the village until the mid 1970s when the washerwomen stopped doing the laundry for their customers, mostly owing to their advanced age.

The working week started on Monday in the early morning hours when the local women left for Trieste to the families for which they did the laundry. They returned the laundry of the previous week and collected the dirty one. They carried the laundry in huge bundles called fagoti, and to transport them they were assisted by motorists. The women themselves always walked to the town regardless of the distance between Boljunec and Trieste. The drivers waited for them in the town at agreed places and the women took the newly collected laundry to these places. Most of their customers were of Italian nationality since the article deals only with the last generation of washerwomen who carried out this job from the mid 1920s onwards, that is when Trieste was an Italian town.

The relationships with the customers were fair, especially if they paid regularly.

Washerwomen avoided to have less reliable customers. They were paid upon returning the

clean laundry. The prices were agreed and the women decided among themselves when it was time for a raise.

The women set off towards their village before noon and in the afternoon they sorted and marked the laundry. They soaked the laundry in the evening hours and left it overnight in the tubs.

On Tuesdays the laundry was put in lye. The lye was boiled in large vats, on fires similar to those on which pig food was boiled. Special attention was devoted to the ashes used for the lye. If they were of poor quality, the laundry was not washed well enough. The laundry was then left in the lye until Wednesday.

On Wednesday the women took the laundry to the local stream to rinse it. Every woman had her own place at the water to avoid quarrels and the washerwomen had to obey these rules strictly. They rinsed until noon when they had to let the water flow out of the troughs for the millers to start their work. Until the Second World War they used to dry the laundry on the bushes growing close to the stream. They had to make sure that individual pieces were not torn or blown away by the wind. They dried the laundry successively and when necessary returned to the stream in the afternoon to take the rest home.

On Thursday and Fridays the laundry was again sorted by families and owners. The laundry was then packed into bundles and waited until Monday to be taken back to Trieste.

After the Second World War and the introduction of the Boljunec-Trieste bus service the washerwomen returned the laundry to the customer also before the weekend, if so requested.

Links

[1] <https://www.etno-muzej.si/>

[2] <https://www.etno-muzej.si/en/etnolog/revija-etnolog>

[3] <https://www.etno-muzej.si/en/etnolog/etnolog-11-2001>

[4] <https://www.etno-muzej.si/en/etnolog/etnolog-11-2001/perice-v-boljuncu>

[5] https://www.etno-muzej.si/files/etnolog/pdf/0354-0316_11_repinc_perice.pdf