

Nicknaming in Bigăr: A Contribution to the Anthroponymy of a Czech-Speaking Village in the Southern Romanian Banat

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Although extensive employment of nicknames in Balkan villages is far from unusual, little if any information is available on the subject in English anthroponymic literature. The aim of the present paper is to remedy this gap in part by describing an especially elaborate system of nicknaming used in Bigăr, a Czech-speaking village in the southern Romanian Banat.¹

BIGĂR—A GENERAL BACKGROUND

The available sources are not in full agreement concerning the circumstances under which the Czech-speaking villages in the southern Romanian Banat were established. According to archival records of the imperial war ministry in Vienna, the first two settlements came into existence in the early 1820s in response to the request of one Georg Magyarly to be allowed to bring in laborers from Bohemia for his extensive lumbering enterprise. Of these two villages, founded in the hills east of the present Moldova Nouă, only one remains today—Sf. Elena.

The second wave of migration of Bohemian families to the southern Banat began several years later with the encouragement of the administration of the Banat Military Frontier. Some of the migrants were settled in the hills northeast of Moldova, establishing the village of Weitzenried, known today as Gîrnic. Others were taken further northeast toward Lăpușnicel, near which

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they founded the village of Șumița. Still others were directed east along the Danube toward the present Berzasca and beyond it toward Orșova. This stream of migrants accounted for the villages of Ravensca, Bigăr, Eibenthal, and others. Despite some cases of real hardship, the settling of this second wave of Bohemian colonists apparently went well, and according to an early report, there were over a thousand Bohemian families in the southern Banat by March 1828.²

Although Bigăr apparently derived its name at the time of colonization from Poiana Bigerului, a large forest clearing extending west of the village site, for some time the community was officially known as Schnellersruhe. This name is said to have commemorated a visit and overnight stay in the vicinity by General Andreas von Schneller, whose distinguished military career included the command of the Banat Military Frontier.

Situated about 1,800 feet (550 meters) above sea level in rugged hilly terrain some 11 miles (18 kilometers) north of the Danube, Bigăr has remained relatively isolated from the other villages and towns of the region. The closest predominantly Romanian community—about 14 miles (22 kilometers) by dirt road—is Berzasca, to which Bigăr has been administratively subordinated since 1968. There is no public transportation to the village, and no telephone line connects it to the outside world. The villagers' supply of electrical power depends on the local naphtha-driven generator and is limited to several hours after sunset each night. On workdays, a truck equipped to carry passengers takes about two dozen men to their shift at Cozla, where they work as miners, and brings them back again eleven hours later. The same vehicle handles the village mail three times a week.

The peak of Bigăr's growth dates back to the late 1930s when the number of its inhabitants reached about 600. Since World War II, the village has been experiencing a steady decrease in population due to outmigration. The sharpest reduction occurred during the late 1940s, when a sizeable number of villagers, especially young males, chose to be repatriated to Czechoslovakia. As of July 1, 1980, the number of Bigăr's permanent residents stood at about 340, and there is every indication that the population will continue to dwindle as more families decide to leave in search of wider employment opportunities and better living conditions elsewhere, especially in such nearby communities as Berzasca and Bozovici or regional cities such as Reșița and Orșova. Bigăr is not alone in population shrinkage. This trend is equally characteristic of the other isolated Czech-speaking villages, Ravensca in particular.

²Karl Freiherr von Czoernig, *Ethnographie der oesterreichischen Monarchie* (Vienna, 1857), v. 3, p. 108.

During much of Bigăr's history the villagers made their living as peasant workers. In the early years, many of the men worked as lumberjacks in order to support families while enlarging their agricultural landholdings on the densely wooded hillsides of the surrounding countryside. During the final quarter of the last century, an increasing proportion of the men established a pattern of seasonal work in the several mines of the region. Since then mining has become the major traditional occupation of the village males.

During the past dozen or so years, the villagers' dependence on agriculture as a significant source of subsistence has sharply declined. The major factor has been the rapidly increasing population of wild boars. Protected by the state, these animals have been causing serious damage to crops on any field not immediately adjacent to the village itself. As a consequence, the land on which the villagers are able to grow crops has shrunk severely. Before the war, the most distant fields were at least 10 miles (16 kilometers) away from the village and nearly every farmstead had a pair of horses with which to cultivate the hilly ground; today, the outlying fields are well within a mile of the households and since 1977 there has not been a single horse in the entire community. A full 40 percent of households do not even bother to keep cows at present. Cereals are grown only to a small extent in the close vicinity of the village, and are used only as feed. Even so, most of the feed for domestic animals—with the exception of hay—is purchased from outside the village as are also flour and commercially baked bread. The only commodities in which the villagers are self-sufficient are potatoes, eggs, milk, and meat—poultry and pork. Lambs are occasionally purchased from Romanians in the area who raise them, while cows—two to three on the average in those households that keep them—are raised under contract for sale to the state.

Employment in mining has had an important effect on the village economy: as of July 1, 1980, no less than 80 individuals, including widows, were receiving miners' pensions, disability payments, or social assistance, and an additional six persons were paid half pensions to supplement their part-time jobs. Because as a rule miners' pensions are higher than average, the amount of cash available to the villagers each month exceeds the income of a farming village of comparable size by a significant margin.

Despite the profound socioeconomic changes that have marked the postwar years, the villagers continue to cling to the most important badge of their ethnic identity—the local variety of the Czech language—and have retained their strong preference for village endogamy. Marriages between second cousins are quite common and on occasion have been concluded even between first cousins. As a consequence, nearly everyone is easily able to trace ties of relationship to a sizeable number of other villagers. For example, one middle-aged couple selected at random were found to be related, by

either blood or marriage, to bearers of at least nine of the twenty-five different family names occurring in the community at present (38 percent). The effects of this tendency toward inmarriage are reflected in the manner in which the villagers are named and in the elaborate system of nicknaming developed over the generations.³

LEGAL NAMES

As of July 1, 1980, 343 persons resided in Bigăr—337 Romanian Czechs and 6 Romanians. Of the Czech-speaking villagers only three (less than one percent) were born outside the community: one was a woman in her sixties, born in Prague to a Romanian Czech; the other two were men who had become members of local households several years earlier by marrying into Bigăr from Ravensca and Gîrnic, two other Czech-speaking villages of the area.

The villagers clustered in 111 households of numbered dwellings ranging in occupancy from a single individual to a lineally extended family. Only one house was completely Romanian: it was being rented by an elderly couple who managed the state-owned cooperative store [*magazin mixt*] that supplies the villagers with a limited selection of necessities. Four other households included a Romanian male married to a local woman.

Every villager has a legal name that consists of a given name (first name, forename, Christian name) [*prenume*] and family name (surname) [*nume*], both conforming to Romanian orthography and identifying the individual in

³Proper names in recent or contemporary use by the inhabitants of the six Czech-speaking villages in the southern Romanian Banat have already been the subject of several short studies—Zdeněk Salzmann, "Naming persons in Bigăr, a Czech-speaking village in the southern Romanian Banat," *Working Papers in Sociolinguistics* (Austin: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1981), no. 89; Josef Skulína, "Vlastní jména osob i zvířat a trat'ové názvy u šumických Čechů v rumunském Banátě," *Zpravodaj Místopisné komise Československé akademie věd*, v. 15, 1974, no. 1, pp. 33–36 (Prague); and Slavomír Utěšený (3 articles): "Zeměpisná jména u Čechů v Rumunsku," *Zpravodaj Místopisné komise Československé akademie věd*, v. 4, 1963, no. 2, pp. 134–139 (Prague); "Pomístní jména v českých osadách na jihu rumunského Banátu," *Zpravodaj Místopisné komise Československé akademie věd*, v. 4, 1963, no. 3, pp. 196–201 (Prague); and "Vlastní jména osob a zvířat u Čechů na jihu rumunského Banátu," *Naše řeč*, v. 47, 1964, pp. 208–216 (Prague).

Skulína's contribution deals with the names of persons and animals in the community of Șumîța as well as a small sample of local toponyms. Utěšený's articles are more general in scope, providing a useful survey of proper names in the remaining five villages—Bigăr, Eibenthal, Gîrnic, Ravensca, and Sf. Elena.

The stimulus for this study has been Utěšený's remark in his 1964 article, "The strikingly peculiar system of [personal] nicknames in Bigăr, which has apparently been completely preserved and has remained fully functional to the present day, deserves to be recorded and described in detail. The same is true of the situation in Ravensca."

all official documents such as his or her birth certificate, school reports, identity card [*buletin de identitate*], marriage certificate, and the like. Besides the official Romanian forms of their names, the villagers may also use the corresponding Czech forms in such informal contexts as when writing to members of the other Czech-speaking communities, relatives and friends in Czechoslovakia, or in conversation with other native speakers of Czech whenever formal identification is called for. The custom, widespread in Romania, of placing the family name before the given name, both in speech and writing, is also followed with respect to the native Czech form of personal names. Furthermore, the family names of females are only rarely provided with the appropriate feminine suffixes, mostly *-ová* or *-á*, obligatory in the usage of both Common and Literary Czech. For example, such official forms as Mareş Veronica, Pelnars Ecaterina, Petravec Iosif, and Saucop Francisc are customarily rendered in their respective Czech forms as Mareš Veronika, Pelnař Kateřina, Petrášek Josef, and Soukup František.

Much like the Bigăr dialect of Czech, which has preserved a number of archaic features, the repertory of given names used in the village is quite conservative. Many were especially common in Bohemian villages during the past century.

Occurring more than once are the following male given names, listed here in their contemporary basic Czech forms and arranged according to frequency: Josef, Václav, František, Jan, Štěpán, Alois, Vincenc, Adam, Petr, and Matěj. The corresponding list for females includes Marie, Anna, Barbora, Kateřina, Veronika, Žofie, Štefánie, Jana, Magdaléna, and Terezie.

Inasmuch as the repertory of given names used in Bigăr is relatively limited, in order to help distinguish among individuals whose full names are officially identical—by no means always members of the same household—the villagers make use of a great variety of diminutive or hypocoristic (familiar, domestic) forms.

Although at the time of this study the fully Czech-speaking households comprised a considerably higher number of nuclear families—as when a young couple with or without children resided in a parental household—there were only 25 different family names in use in Bigăr (excluding the names of the four mixed Romanian-Czech families). The large majority of these names are Czech, but several have a German origin (Forst, Şnaider, Ştefbauer, and Şubert—in Romanian spelling). Some of these may have initially belonged to German-speaking colonists from either Bohemia or, in a rare case, other parts of Austria-Hungary, but most likely they were borne by Czech-speaking settlers: German family names were and continue to be as common in Bohemia (and Moravia) as surnames of Czech provenance were and are in Vienna.

The family names employed in Bigăr at present are listed below in alphabetical order according to their most common Romanian orthographic representation, each followed parenthetically by the corresponding unofficial Czech form and the number of households⁴ to which it is attached:

Başnic (Bašník, 1); Cafca (Kafka, 1); Carban (Karban, 2); Creş (Křeš, 1; from Gîrníc; residing in the Stehlic household, Nr. 133); Dlouhi (Dlouhý, 1); Filip (Filip, 1); Forst (Fořt, 2); Hamata (Hamata, 6); Hana (Hána, 8); Lis(s)i (Lysý, 13); Mareş (Mareš, 13); Mleziva (Mleziva, 17); Pelnars (Pelnař, 6); Petracec (Petrášek, 1); Rehac (Řehák, 3); Roch (Roch, 8); Saucop (Soukup, 2); Scornicica (Škornička, 3); Stehlic (Stehlík, 4); Svoboda (Svoboda, 4); Şnaider (Šnaidr, 2); Ştefbauer (Štefbauer, 1); Şubert (Šubrt, 3); Vocaci (Vokáč, 1; from Ravensca; residing in Vochoţ household, Nr. 112); and Vochoţ (Vochoc, 7). Of the 25 names above, two are not native to Bigăr—Creş and Vocaci.

NICKNAMES FOR THE MLEZIVAS

The high incidence in Bigăr of some of the family names—in particular those of Mleziva (17 households), Mareš (13), Lysý (13), Roch (8), and Hána (8)—coupled with the equally high occurrence of certain first names has given rise to an array of supplementary unofficial anthroponyms by which household heads as well as members of their families can be differentiated from each other whenever they are being spoken of by others. This aspect of naming is very highly elaborated. For example, each member of the nearly a score of households bearing the official family name of Mleziva is typically referred to by the familiar form of his or her given name followed by a nickname [*přezývka* in the Bigăr dialect of Czech].⁵ The rest of this section is devoted to the discussion of the salient features of nicknaming as it relates to the members of the various Mleziva households.

1. Mleziva Jan (in Romanian, Mleziva Ion) from No. 13, the familiar form of whose given name is *Johan*, is known as *Johan Ježek* ['Hedgehog'] because his hair resembles hedgehog bristles. This descriptive nickname was originally bestowed on Johan's father, who possessed the same physical trait.

⁴The count by households simplifies the presentation considerably. For example, in No. 34, owned by Scornicica Amalia, a widow, also resides her widowed daughter Roch Ecaterina with her son Francis; in No. 88, owned by Mleziva Adam, a widower, also resides his son Iosif with his wife and two sons; and so on. If one were to count nuclear family units, the incidence of some of the family names would rise appreciably.

⁵In the Czech spoken in the mother country, this archaic and dialectal word is now rarely used, the current terms being *přezdívká* or *přizvíska*.

The form in which the name *Ježek* occurs most frequently is *Ježkuc*,⁶ as in *Johan Ježkuc*, the suffix *-uc* denoting a family or family affiliation.⁷ Alternatively, Johan is also called *Čokan*, a nickname of obscure origin, or is referred to by the Romanian nickname *Lupu*, from *lup* 'wolf.' The name *Lupu* was given to Johan's father in the 1930s by a Romanian after the villager had shot a red wolf.

Johan's wife Barbora, called *Barka*, is referred to as *Barka Ježkuc*, *Barka Ježkovo*, or *Barka Čokanovo*, the forms *Ježkovo* and *Čokanovo* being possessive adjectives derived from her husband's nicknames.⁸

Until her recent marriage, the couple's daughter Cecilie, called *Cílka*, was referred to by nicknames analogous to those applied to her mother—*Cílka Ježkuc*, *Cílka Ježkovo*, or *Cílka Čokanovo*. Since the marriage the daughter's nickname derives from her husband's name: he is Gusta (from *August*) Lysý, and she is called *Cílka Gustovo Lysuc*.

The couple's son Václav, called *Venca*, is referred to as *Venca Ježkuc*, *Venca Ježkovo*, *Venca Čokanovo*, or merely as *Lupu* when there is no possibility of confusing him with his father.

Location at or existence in or near Johan's household is expressed by the prepositional constructions *u Čokana* or *u Ježkuch*, the latter consisting of the preposition *u* and the genitive plural form *Ježkuch*. In Bigăr, the form *Ježkuch* represents the leveling of two cases of the plural—the genitive and the locative—the final *-ch* being due to the influence of identical endings in the adjectival and pronominal declensions, and the preceding *-u-* reflecting the regular form of the masculine genitive plural, but with a loss of quantity.

Because the terms *Ježek*, *Čokan*, and *Lupu* have humorous and somewhat uncomplimentary connotations, they are used only in the absence of the two *Mlezivas* whom they designate. To do otherwise would be considered in poor taste, or even insulting if the speaker were to belong to a younger generation.

In short, then, the expected dialectal term *Mlezivuc* to designate a particular family affiliation, or the prepositional construction *u Mlezivuch* to denote

⁶The forms cited throughout this paper are not given in a phonetic or phonemic transcription but conform to the orthographic conventions of Literary Czech. Given the nature of the subject matter, the loss of relevant information as a consequence of this procedure is not significant.

⁷This suffix, which appears as the termination *-ovic* in Common Czech, has a number of dialectal variants, among them *-ojic*, *-ojc*, *-ouc*, *-oc*, and *-ujc*. The variant *-uc*, used in Bigăr, is characteristic of the speech of about half a dozen villages in the southwestern portion of the Domažlice region on the southwestern border of Bohemia.

⁸As compared to Literary Czech, in which it marks the neuter form of the nominative singular, the termination *-ovo* is used in the speech of Bigăr for a masculine possessor and all three genders of the possessed noun, and is indeclinable. The Bigăr form is characteristic of the Southwest Bohemian dialect of Czech.

location in or near a particular household, is hardly ever employed because in Bigăr either of them would apply to any one of a large number of families.

Most of the nicknames pertaining to the members of other households bearing the name *Mleziva* are discussed below.

2. Mleziva Antonín (in Romanian, Mleziva Anton) from No. 85 is referred to as *Tonda Učiteluc*, *Tonda Šúšuc*, *Tonda Učiteluc Šúša*, or simply *Šúša*. Tonda's nickname *Učiteluc* results from his grandfather's having been a teacher [*učitel*] in Bigăr; *Šúša* comes from an idiosyncratic trait of his speech, a lisp, which was especially pronounced in his childhood, when this nickname was used in reference to him almost exclusively. Since the death of his father, who was also known as *Tonda Učiteluc*, this designation has been applied to him more frequently than has *Šúša* or *Tonda Šúšuc*.

Tonda's wife Barbora is known as *Barka Učiteluc*, *Barka Tondovo Učiteluc*, *Barka Šúšuc*, or simply *Šúšovka*, *ta stará* ['the old one'] to distinguish her from their married daughter Anna, who is referred to as *Anka Ferdovo Šúšuc*, *Anka Učiteluc*, *Anka Šúšuc*, or *Šúšovka*, *ta mladá* ['the young one']. In *Anka Ferdovo Šúšuc*, the middle element comes from her husband's given name *Ferdinand*, the familiar form of which is *Ferda*. Were the couple to leave Anka's parental household and establish a neolocal residence, she would be referred to as *Anka Ferdovo Jeníkuc*, the form *Jeníkuc* being part of the nickname of her husband Mareš Ferdinand. His nickname, *Ferda Jeníkuc*, is derived from that given to his late father, *Jeník Husaruc*, whose name was Mareš Jan, to differentiate him from the numerous other males in the village who also bear the family name *Mareš* (*Mareş*). Anka's sister Kristýna is generally known as *Kristýnka Šúšuc* or *Kristýnka Učiteluc*.

The nickname *Šúša*, or the form *Šúšuc*, is not employed if members of this family are within earshot, but is acceptable when used by close friends.

Locative expressions vary depending on who among the members of the family has been singled out for reference: *u Šúšuch* (family as a whole), *u Šúši* (the male head of household), *u Barky Šúšuc* (his wife), and so on.

3. Mleziva Petr (in Romanian, Mleziva Petru) from No. 24 is known as *Petr Valášek* because his mother was a Romanian [*Valáška*, the feminine form derived from *Valach* 'a Walachian' or, in an obsolete sense, 'a Romanian'; *Valášek* is the diminutive masculine form]. Petr's wife Helena is referred to as *Helena Valáškovo* or *Helena Petrovo Valáškovo*. The nicknames of their sons Lojzin (from *Alois*), Vencík (from *Václav*), and Jenda (from *Jan*) are analogous. The locative construction is *u Valáška*.

4. The nicknames given Mleziva Adam from No. 88 are *Adam Učiteluc* (for the origin of *Učiteluc* see 2, above) or *Burtanos*, from the Romanian dialectal word *burtănos* 'big-bellied.' The latter nickname, *Burtanos*, applies only to Adam, who is rather portly. It is never said in his presence and is used

only by the older villagers, as in the locative construction *u Burtanosa*; younger villagers are expected to use the respectful phrase *u strejčka* ['uncle'] *Adama Učiteluc*.⁹

Adam, who in 1980 was 77 years old, is a widower. His wife Anna was known as *Nána Učiteluc*. Their son Josef, who with his family lives in his father's household, is referred to as *Józa Učiteluc*, with the optional addition *ten Šóny* (or *Šóný*), or simply *Šóny*. This nickname, given Józa in his childhood by his schoolmates, was the name of a mechanical engineer of Romanian nationality (Șoni [spelling?]) known to the villagers. Józa's wife Etela is known as *Etelka Učiteluc* or, more specifically, as *Etelka Učiteluc Šónýkovo*; the couple's two sons, Adam and Jan, go by the nicknames *Ády* and *Jenda Učiteluc*.

5. Another Mleziva Adam, who resides in No. 66, is known as *Adam Bednářuc*, and his wife Kateřina as *Kačena Bednářuc* or *Kačena Adamovo Bednářuc*.

6. Mleziva Josef (in Romanian, Mleziva Iosif) from No. 110 is known as *Jóži Učiteluc* to distinguish him from Józa Učiteluc (see 4, above), or simply as *Papr(d)lík*, or *Paprd* for short. The latter nickname, humorous in both its forms and pejorative in connotation by virtue of its sound structure,¹⁰ is never used in front of Jóži. Its origin cannot be established with certainty. According to one version, it used to be *Pópr(d)lík*, having been derived from the word *pópa* (from the Romanian *popă* 'priest'). Diminutive in form, the nickname reportedly was attached to Jóži at the time his father used to lead the villagers in prayers and hymns during the many church services that the Catholic priest who lived in Gîrnic was unable to attend. According to another version, *Papr(d)lík* is a corruption of *Pepík*, a very common hypocoristic substitute in the mother country for the given name *Josef*. After having spent some time in Czechoslovakia as a repatriate following World War II, Jóži came back known as *Pepík*, but before long this hypocoristic was changed to *Papr(d)lík*.

Jóži's wife is known as *Kristýna Papr(d)líkovo* or simply *Papr(d)lice*. Their daughter Johana used to be referred to as *Johana Papr(d)líkuc* or *Johana Papr(d)líkovo*, but since her marriage in 1980 she has come to be known as *Johana Jendovo Hlotskejch* because her husband, Vochoť Jan, goes by the name of *Jenda Hlotskejch* (by metathesis from *Lhotskejch*), the nickname attached to two Vochoť households, Nos. 2 and 112. An adjectival

⁹The terms *strejček* (colloquial form of the Literary Czech *strýček*) 'uncle' and *teta* 'aunt' are used, in appropriate case forms, both to refer to or address older people, whether related to the speaker or not.

¹⁰In Common Czech, the word *páprda* (or *paprd*) is a pejorative and refers to a disagreeable old man. The sequence *prd* is a root with a scatological meaning.

genitive plural in Common Czech, the original form *Lhotskejch* no doubt has reference to *Lhota*, the name of a great many small Bohemian and Moravian communities founded during the Middle Ages and temporarily endowed with certain privileges (*lhota* [sg.]).

As for locative constructions, members of the younger generation employ the phrase *u Józího Učiteluc*, whereas older people are most likely to say *u Paprdlíka*, as when playing cards with Józí in his house, or *u Paprdlíkuch*, as when invited by his family to a feather-stripping session.

7. Another Mleziva Josef resides in No. 2a. He is known as *Józí Bednářuc* because one of his lineal ancestors, possibly his great-grandfather, was the village cooper [*bednář*]. His wife Barbora's nickname is *Barka Józího Bednářuc*. The locative construction is *u Józího Bednářuc* to differentiate Józí's household from that of Mleziva Vincenc, his father, who also goes by the nickname *Bednářuc* (see 15, below).

8. Mleziva Václav (in Romanian, Mleziva Vențel) from No. 121 is known as *Véna Nácek*, *Véna Malejch Nácek*, with the optional addition of *ten starej* ['the old one'], or simply as *Nácek*. The nickname *Malejch*¹¹ goes back several generations to one of Véna's male ancestors who on account of his small stature was referred to as (given name +) *Malejch* (from *malej* [masc.; a common Czech form] 'small'). The origin of *Nácek* is not clear; in the mother country, it is the domestic form of *Ignác*. According to one informant, the nickname derives from the name of one of Véna's former close friends.

The nicknames of the members of Véna's family follow the regular pattern: his wife is known as *Maryška* (for *Marie*) *Náckovo*, *Maryška Malejch Náckovo*, or *Maryška Vénovo Malejch (Nácka)*; his son as *Vencík* (from the Romanian *Vasile*, interpreted in the Czech as *Václav*) *Malejch Nácek* or *Nácek*, *ten mladej* ['the young one']; the son's wife as *Barka Náckovo* or *Barka Vencíkovo Malejch*; the son's son as *Lajoš* (from the Magyar *Lajos* for the Czech *Ludvík*) *Vencíka Malejch*, less frequently as *Lajoš Vencíkovo Malejch* or *Lajoš Náckovo*, and rather rarely as *Lajoš Náckuc*; and the son's daughter as *Maryška Vencíkovo Malejch (Náckovo)*. For the locative, the villagers use *u Nácka*, referring to the household head, or *u Náckuch*, when what is meant is the household as a whole.

9. Another Mleziva Václav resides in No. 108; he is a cousin of the older Nácek (see 8, above). Because the familiar form of his given name also happens to be *Véna* and his nickname *Malejch*, he is differentiated from his

¹¹The form is a colloquial genitive plural in the compound declension of adjectives with a hard desinence.

namesake by the addition *za kostelem* [‘behind the church’ (where he lives)]. Besides his nickname *Véna Malejch za kostelem*, he is also redundantly nicknamed *Véna Barčino Malejch za kostelem*, in part after his wife Barka.

Of the members of his household, his wife is known as *Barka Vénovo Malejch za kostelem*; his son as *Štěpánek* (for *Štěpán*) *Malejch za kostelem*, also referred to as *Tulipán* (in Czech, *tulipán* means both ‘tulip’ and ‘dumb-bell, stupid person’); his son’s wife as *Sofina* (from *Žofie*) *Štěpánkovo Malejch*; and his son’s sons as *Jenda* and *Lojzin* (from *Jan* and *Alois*) *Štěpánkovo Malejch*.

10. Mleziva František (in Romanian, Mleziva Francisc) from No. 109 is referred to as *Fiala* because his mother came from a household known as *u Fialuch*, a name no longer officially attached to anyone in Bigăr. The familiar form of his given name is *Franta* which, combined with his nickname, yields *Franta Fialuc* (as in answer to the question, “Which Franta?”). His wife is known as *Pepina* (from *Josefa*) *Fialuc*, his daughter as *Johana Fialuc*, and his mother, who lives with them, as *Sofina Štěpánovo Malejch* (her late husband was Mleziva Štěpán) to distinguish her from *Sofina Štěpánkovo Malejch* (see 9, above). The locative construction is *u Fialy* or, in reference to the entire household, *u Fialuch*. (Franta’s son Alois, who lives in Moldova Veche, a regional town known among the Romanian Czechs as *Bošňák*, is referred to as *Lojzin Fiala*.)

11. Another Mleziva František resides in No. 122; he is the brother of the older Nácek (see 8, above) and of the late Štěpán Malejch from No. 109. His nickname is *Franta Malejch* or simply *Púd’a*. The origin of the latter nickname is not entirely clear: reportedly, as a child he referred to a dish made from maize flour mixed with boiling water and salt and baked in a greased pan in the oven as *malaj na pūdu* (from the Romanian *mălai* ‘maize flour or pancake made therefrom’). His wife Anna is known as *Nána Frantovo Malejch*, *Nána Púd’uc*, or *Nána Púd’ákuc*, and his daughter Helena as *Helena Púd’uc*. So long as his son Václav was living in the same household, he was referred to as *Venca Malejch Púd’a* or *ten mladej Púd’a* [‘the young Púd’a’], to differentiate him from *Púd’a*, *ten starej* [‘Púd’a, the old one’]. The locatives are *u (strejčka) Púdi* or *u Púd’ůch*.

12. There is a third Mleziva František, who resides in No. 111. He inherited his nickname *Ferd’ánek* from his late father, Ferdinand, also known during his lifetime as *Ferd’ánek*. His wife Magdaléna is referred to as *Majdy Ferd’ánkovo* or *Majdy Ferd’ánkuc* (or *Ferd’ánkuc*) and his son Josef, the village teacher, as *Jóži Ferd’ánkovo* or *Jóži Ferd’ánkuc* (or *Ferd’ánkuc*).

13. Mleziva Matěj (in Romanian, Mleziva Matei), who resides in No. 45, is nicknamed *Matějáš* or, after his wife Barbora, *Matěj Barčino*. His wife and their daughter Etela are known as *Barka Matějášovo* and *Etelka Matějášovo*.

The locative construction is *u Matějáše* or *u Barky Matějášovo*, when reference is to his wife.

14. Another Mleziva Matěj lives in No. 63. He inherited his nickname *Strnádek*, the diminutive form of *strnad* ‘bunting,’ from his father, who was small and skinny. His wife Marie is known as *Marica Strnád(k)uc* or *Marica Strnád(k)ovo*. The locative constructions are *u Strnádka* or *u Strnád(k)uch*.

15. Mleziva Vincenc (in Romanian, Mleziva Vichenti) from No. 118 is known as *Vincek Bednářuc*; he is the father of Mleziva Josef from No. 2a (see 7, above). His wife Anna’s nickname is *Andula Vinckovo Bednářuc* or simply *Andula Bednářuc*.

16. Mleziva Alois, who resides in No. 90, is known as *Pírča* or, with the optional addition of the familiar form of his given name, *Lojzin Pírča*. His wife Kateřina is referred to as *Káty Pírčovo*. The nickname *Pírča* was originally given to his grandfather, who had made the acquaintance of a Romanian peasant family by the name of *Pircea* in Bănia near Bozovici, some 25 kilometers (ca. 15 miles) north of Bigăr. The Pircea family acted as host (in Romanian, *gazdă*), whenever old Mleziva or members of his family visited Bănia, and he returned the hospitality whenever the Pirceas visited Bigăr.

17. Lojzin’s mother, Marie Mlezivová, who is the widow of the old Pírča’s son, lives in No. 89. She is known as *Maryška Pírčovo*, *Maryška Pírčovo Zedníkuc*, or *Maryška Martinovo Zedníkuc*. The nickname *Zedníkuc*, borne by her late husband, is derived from the traditional occupation of the males in his family (*zedník* ‘bricklayer, mason’).

18. No attempt has been made to include the nicknames of those Mlezivas who are either no longer living or who have moved away from Bigăr; such an inquiry would yield a large amount of additional data. For example, Mleziva Alois, who until his death around 1960 lived in No. 84, was known as *Červeňák* because of his red hair (in the Bigăr dialect, *červený vlasy*). His wife remarried and has since acquired a new nickname, derived from that of her present husband. Another Mleziva, Jaroslav by first name, who lives in nearby Berzasca, is referred to as *Bambula*, from the Czech *bambula*¹² ‘oaf, simpleton, blockhead.’ According to one informant, Jaroslav inherited his nickname from his father Johan, known for his immoderate consumption of alcoholic beverages. When Johan had had more to drink than he could reasonably tolerate, he would call other men by this name, until he finally earned the nickname for himself.

¹²According to Václav Machek’s *Etymologický slovník jazyka českého*, 2nd ed. (Prague, 1968), p. 44, *bambula* is a borrowing from the Magyar *bamba* ‘stupid.’ Other Czech sources consider the Italian as the source of the pejorative.

In summary, then, although there are a great many Mlezivas in Bigăr, a number of whom also share the same given names, each one is differentiated from all the others by an individual nickname.

ANALYTICAL COMMENTS

According to the information obtained from villagers, the need for a nickname arises whenever there are at least two individuals who have identical given and family names. While in Bigăr this condition alone would account for a fairly high incidence of nicknames, a person without one is in fact a rare exception. This is so because family names that at present are attached to a single household have not always been limited in their reference, becoming unique only after members of other households bearing the same name died, moved away, or, in the case of women, married. Under such circumstances a family nickname could be expected to lose its functional significance; instead, the sheer force of custom has caused it to be retained.

Although the nicknames in current use are known to those individuals to whom they refer, caution must be exercised whenever their bearers are within earshot. This is particularly true of uncomplimentarily humorous or pejorative designations, for example, *Šúša* or *Bambula* (see 2 and 18, above). Whether or not a person feels embarrassed or offended when his or her nickname is used while he or she is present depends on the age of the speaker and the nature of the audience.

A number of nicknames have been applied to the members of certain households for several generations, and some of them undoubtedly go back to the time of Bigăr's founding. One such is the nickname *Hlotskejch*, attached to two Vochoř households (see 6, above). Nicknaming, however, continues to be an active process; hence, names have also been attested that are of relatively recent origin. Among these are the nicknames for Mareš Štěpán (in Romanian, Mareș Ștefan) from No. 48, known as *Štěpán Mekánik* or *Štěpán Huzinantuc*. Both were assigned to Štěpán in 1958 when he took charge of the running and maintenance of the newly introduced direct-current generator. The nicknames derive from the Romanian words *mecanic* 'mechanic' (closely similar to its Czech equivalent *mechanik*), and *uzină*¹³ 'factory, (industrial) shop.'

Some of the nicknames in current use originated during the childhood or youth of the individuals to whom they are attached, having been given to

¹³The prothetic *h-* before the etymologically initial *u-* of *Huzinantuc* is especially characteristic of the Southwest Bohemian dialect of Czech spoken in the Chodsko region, which in all likelihood contributed a fair number of the original settlers.

them by their peers, friends, or parents. Among these are *Šůša* and *Púd' a* (see 2 and 11, above). Others were bestowed on villagers during their adulthood on account of a conspicuous physical trait or to mark a significant event in which they took part. The nicknames *Lupu* and *Burtanos* (see 1 and 4, above) are examples of this category.

The majority of nicknames, however, have been handed down from one generation to the next. Such is the case, for example, of *Učiteluc*, *Hlotskejch*, *Bednářuc*, *Malejch*, and a number of others. For the most part, inherited nicknames refer to the traditional occupation of a household's males whether or not it is still practiced today.

The predilection for nicknaming is evident from the fact that it is far from unusual for a villager to be referred to by two or three different nicknames: Mleziva Jan is known as *Johan Ježek*, *Čokan*, or *Lupu* (see 1, above); Mareš Štěpán as *Štěpán Mekánik* (*v [h]uzině*), *Štěpán Huzinantuc*, or occasionally as *Štěpán Jeníkuc*; and the like. The option to select from among several nicknames applies to women also. At the same time, though, women's nicknames are commonly based on those attached to their close male relatives (husbands or fathers). To give one example, the wife of the aforementioned Mareš Štěpán, Terezie, is known as *Rézi* (*Štěpánovo*) *Huzinantuc*, *Rézi Mekánikovo*, or *Rézi Štěpánovo Jeníkuc*.

Given the large number and variety of nicknames actively employed in Bigăr, it may be of interest to consider briefly how their coinage and selection are motivated. The following major categories are represented:

A. A few nicknames derive from the name of the place from which an individual or his lineal ancestor originated. For example, Hána Jan (in Romanian, Hana Ion) from No. 61 is known as *Jány Heleňák* or simply *Heleňák* because his father moved to Bigăr from Helena (officially, Sf. Elena), one of the six Czech-speaking villages of the southern Romanian Banat. Jány's wife is referred to as *Johana Heleňákovo*, and the locative construction is *u Jányho Heleňákuc* or *u Heleňáka*. By virtue of its original reference, the nickname *Hlotskejch* appears also to belong in this category (see 6, above).

B. Ethnic origin is reflected in the nickname *Petr Valášek*, given to Mleziva Petr, whose mother was a Romanian (see 3, above).

C. Maternal family name serves as a nickname in the case of Lysý Štěpán (in Romanian, Lis[s]i Ștefan) from No. 12, known as *Salaba* or *Štěpán Salabuc*. Štěpán's mother, who is no longer living, married into Bigăr from Helena; her maiden name was Salaba.

D. Paternal given names provide the basis for the nicknames of several villagers, among them Mleziva František, called *Ferd' ánek* (see 12, above), and Mareš Štěpán, who in addition to his other names is known as *Štěpán Jeníkuc* (from *Jeník*, a familiar form of *Jan*).

E. Nicknames deriving from Romanian family names are attached to Mleziva Josef, known as *Šóny* (see 4, above), Mleziva Alois, called *Pírča* (see 16, above), and Lysý Václav (in Romanian, Lis[s]i Vențel) from No. 103, referred to as *Marán* or *Venca Maránuc* after a Romanian by the name of *Maran*. The corresponding locative *u Maránka* is based on the diminutive form *Maráneek*.

More numerous than nicknames based on proper names are those derived from appellatives.

F. Very common are nicknames that refer to the traditional, but not necessarily present, occupation of the male members of a household. There are several other nicknames of this category in addition to those already listed—*Učiteluc*, *Bednářuc*, *Zedníkuc*. Hána Jan, this one from No. 35 (see also A, above) is known as *Józa Kovářík* (from *kovářík* or *kovařík*, a diminutive form of *kovář* ‘blacksmith’). His wife Kateřina is referred to as *Katuška Kovářikovo*, his son Jan as *Jenda Kovářuc*, and the son’s wife Anna as *Anka Jendovo Kovářuc*. Filip Václav (in Romanian, Filip Vențel) from No. 20 is nicknamed *Véna Kameníkuc* (from *kameník* ‘stonemason’). Mareš František (in Romanian, Mareș Francisc) from No. 10 is known as *Tišler* or *Franta Tišler* (from the German *Tischler* ‘joiner, cabinetmaker’), according to the profession of his father. Franta’s other nicknames are *Prášek* or *Nána*; his wife Veronika is referred to as *Veruna Tišlerovo* or *Veruna Práškovo*, and their daughter Helena as *Helena Tišleruc* or *Helena Práškuc*. An example of a nickname derived from an occupation recently introduced is *Mekánik* or *Huzinantuc*.

G. The most widely used nicknames are those that describe a person’s appearance, behavioral attributes, or idiosyncratic traits, or those that record some noteworthy circumstance of the bearer’s existence or origin, an exploit, or incident. Some of these nicknames are drawn from the Czech lexikon: *Ježek*, *Malejch*, *Strnádek*, and *Červeňák* (see 1, 8, 14, and 18, above), *Tulipán* (see 9, above), *Šůša* (see 2, above), *za kostelem* (see 9, above), and *Púd’ a* (see 11, above). Another nickname in this category is attached to the late Mareš Jan, known as *Jeník Husaruc*, because he served during World War I with the light cavalry (hussars, from the Magyar *huszár*). Jeník’s brother, Mareš Štěpán, who in 1980 was in his eighties and resided in No. 4a, is referred to as *Štěpán Husaruc Japan* because his father liked to tell a story about the Japanese. The additional nickname, *Japan*, was added to *Husaruc* in order to tell him apart from his late namesake in No. 114, known as *Štěpán Husaruc Krája*. Krája’s wife, the domestic form of whose given name is *Johana*, is referred to as *Krájovka*.¹⁴

¹⁴One particular female nickname, independent in origin of that attached to her husband, was explained by a villager as follows: “There was a time when there were a great many wild hogs in the woods not too

Nicknames of this category based on Romanian appellatives include *Lupu*, *Burtanos* (see 1 and 4, above), and *Marva*, attached to Mareš Matěj (in Romanian, Mareş Matei) from No. 4a. *Marva*, given to Matěj by his father, is derived from the Romanian dialectal word *marvă* ‘beast, cattle.’

H. The category of nicknames derived from the name of the original occupant of a household—referred to in Czech as *jména po stavení* or *jména po chalupě* [‘names according to dwelling’]—is partially exemplified by *Hlotskejch*, in reference to two Vochoť households (see 6 and A, above), and *Fiala* (see 10, above).

I. The origin of many nicknames used in Bigăr is obscure—for example, of *Čokan*, *Krája* (see 1 and G, above), and *Dobizuc*, applied to several of the Pelnař households. Some were given to the bearers spontaneously during their youth. By contrast, alternative explanations exist for other nicknames. One of the men named Hána Josef (in Romanian, Hana Josif) and known as *Papež* [‘Pope’] is said to have given the nickname to himself on account of the magic power he claims to possess. The explanation elicited from Hána himself in connection with this study, however, was different: he related that as a young boy he would stand below looking up whenever girls were picking cherries in the trees until one, aware of his ulterior motive, yelled out to him disapprovingly, ‘*Ty papeži!*’ [‘You pope!’].

CONCLUSION

The extensive use of nicknames is far from unusual in Romanian villages, but rarely has it attained the scope found in the predominantly endogamous Czech-speaking community of Bigăr, isolated in the hills of the southern Banat. Nicknames are usually attached to men and then serve as the basis for the derivation of female nicknames. It is not uncommon for a villager to be known by two or three nicknames whose origins are variously motivated. The elaborate system of nicknaming in Bigăr must be viewed as a highly adaptive mechanism serving to offset the excessive degree of ambiguity that has probably characterized the repertory of family names in the village since its founding more than a century and a half ago. Moreover, the origin and current use of nicknames in Bigăr no doubt closely approximates the evolu-

far from Bigăr and we were permitted to shoot them. I remember one particular winter when there was so much meat in Mraconea [a large tract of dense woods to the southeast of Bigăr] that one didn’t know what to do with it. Several of us went to get some of it—X, her husband Y, and others. On the way Y told us that when his wife broke wind, it didn’t make a loud noise, it merely sounded like [an onomatopoeic word], but that when this happened, we had better run, because it would smell bad right away. We children—I was about fourteen or fifteen—never forgot what he said, and since that time she hasn’t been spoken of by any name other than _____.”

tion of family names in the late Middle Ages and thus affords us a broad view of an important onomastic process.

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