

Poláková, Jana; Waschková Císařová, Lenka

The maintenance and transmission of memory through media : a murder in broadside ballads, news periodicals, and oral tradition

Bohemica litteraria. 2023, vol. 26, iss. 1, pp. 133-152

ISSN 1213-2144 (print); ISSN 2336-4394 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/BL2023-1-8>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.78430>

License: [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

Access Date: 27. 11. 2024

Version: 20230719

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

The Maintenance and Transmission of Memory through Media: A Murder in Broadside Ballads, News Periodicals, and Oral Tradition

Jana Poláková, Lenka Waschková Čísařová

ABSTRACT

This study uses a 1907 quadruple homicide to present the different ways that information was presented by broadside ballads, news periodicals, and the oral tradition. Broadside ballads, which were akin to tabloid journalism and commemorated important events as one-page hard-copies of song lyrics, were losing popularity at the time, and news periodicals, like newspapers and magazines, represented the most accessible source of information for the broader social strata. Both helped to transmit and, later, maintain the memory of the infamous crime. This text focuses on similarities and differences in the reporting, including the choice of topic, sourcing, transmission of information, work with audiences, and authorship. Drawing on primary sources and present-day recapitulations, it analyses the ways in which memory was maintained (and not maintained) through these media. In addition, the study analyses the passage of information through oral folk tradition and collective and community memory, and their mutual influences.

KEYWORDS

Broadside ballad; chapbook; oral ballad; news periodical; oral tradition; collective memory; community memory; moritat; quadruple murder; Křtiny (Blansko district).

This peer reviewed scientific article appears thanks to institutional support for the long-term conceptual development of research institutions provided by the Ministry of Culture (ref. MK000094862).

CZECH ABSTRACT**Udržování a přenos paměti prostřednictvím médií: Vražda v kramářských písničkách, tiscích a novinách**

Studie představuje na příkladu kriminálního činu z roku 1907 dva základní typy informačních médií a jejich schopnost udržování paměti. Kramářské tisky, jejichž popularita v této době již zaniká, a dobové noviny, které představovaly nejdostupnější zdroj informací pro široké společenské vrstvy. Text se zaměřuje na podobnosti a rozdílnosti při informování o vraždě, ať už z pohledu výběru tématu, jeho zpracování, zdrojování a předávání informací, práci s publikem, či autorství. Na základě dostupných pramenů od roku události po současnost analyzuje schopnosti a způsoby udržování a mizení paměti prostřednictvím těchto médií. A vedle dobového odrazu události ve vybraných médiích analyzuje také jeho předávání v ústní lidové tradici, v kolektivní a rodinné paměti, a jejich vzájemné vlivy.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Kramářská píseň; kramářský tisk; ústní tradování písně; noviny; orální tradice; kolektivní paměť; komunitní paměť; morytát; čtyřnásobná vražda; Křtiny (okres Blansko).

Hanging on a tree by a pond between Křtiny and Jedovnice in the Brno region of the Czech Republic, is a picture of the saints Cyril and Methodius. There is also text in Czech. It says: “Here on this spot were murdered on 5 July 1907 the married couple Josef and Amálie Němec from Ostrov and the married couple Hrazdíra from Krasová.” The site is still marked on maps as “Site of the slain” in remembrance of the infamous crime. The murder, which was committed by a local disreputable family, was well-covered by the news periodicals at the time, it became a theme for broadside ballads, and the event is preserved in oral tradition and by subsequent reporting.

This study uses the 1907 quadruple murder to present two basic types of information media: broadside ballads and news periodicals. Both were instrumental – combined with the oral tradition – in maintaining and transmitting memory.

This text focuses on similarities and differences in the reporting of the murder, including the choice of topic, sourcing, transmission of information, work with audiences, and authorship. Drawing on primary sources and present-day recapitulations, it analyses the capacities and ways in which memory has been maintained (and not maintained) through these media. In addition, the study analyses the passage of information through oral folk tradition as well as collective and community memory, and their mutual influences.

The History of Broadside Ballads and News Periodicals

The acquisition, processing, and transmission of news developed in relation to the willingness of the broad classes of society to pay for it (KLIMEŠ 1955: 13). From the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, leaflets and pamphlets constituted the basic sources of information about world events in politics, war, and society (DOLENSKÝ 1907: 34), and about criminal cases. Therefore, they are often considered to be the precursors of broadside ballads (SCHEYBAL 1990: 44) and the news periodicals that followed (BEDNAŘÍK – JIRÁK – KÖPPLOVÁ 2011: 17). By the 18th century, broadside ballads and news periodicals coexisted (STEJSKALOVÁ 2015), although, initially, their dissemination and impact were different. As a result, the oral form of broadside ballads became an important source of information, especially for the illiterate, for whom the oral form often represented the only means of expanding their own geographical awareness (MLYNAŘÍKOVÁ 2001: 175–176; MĚTRAK 2019: 157–160).

The term *broadside ballads* includes a wide range of printed material (DUFKA 2022: 9). They are (more or less) verse text in printed form, often accompanied by information about the tune or notation (IVÁNEK 2017: 224–226). Czech broadside ballad is a subcategory of the wider term chapbook, which includes both prose and verse printings (IVÁNEK 2022: 77).¹ Moreover, we differentiate oral from printed ballads, following Thomas Pettitt (2008: 90), who refers to both *oral ballads* and *broadside ballads*, distinguishing “the medium in which the songs are encountered: their generic status is compromised by the movement of actual songs between those media in both directions: ‘oral’ ballads could be printed on broadsides, and many broadside ballads, having been sold and sung, learned from singing, and sung again, entered oral tradition.”

The printed hard copies of broadside ballads (lyrics) and/or their oral form were most often traditionally available at a marketplace or fair. Here they were sung, often accompanied by pointing to pre-prepared pictures to help tell the story – the whole performance was thus audio-visual (cf. IVÁNEK 2022). However, the distribution range and type of performance venues was extremely varied (SCHEYBAL 1990: 19–30).

1) For more about the specifics of the Czech terminology, see IVÁNEK 2022.

Thematically, broadside ballads can be divided into two overlapping groups, characterised by either spiritual or secular content (KOSEK 2020: 11). The basic function of secular broadside ballads was to transmit news, provide entertainment, and exert ideological influence (BENEŠ 1970: 19). Their popularity depended on the topic. From the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, their purely informative character was supplemented, and gradually displaced, by entertaining or sensational textual and visual elements (GROCHOWSKI 2010: 152–166; WILTEBURG 2010: 173–186), which today are considered the main features of tabloid communication.

It was not until the second half of the 19th century that the general population gained regular access to news periodicals (MLYNAŘÍKOVÁ 2001: 61; SCHEYBAL 1962: 274), which is why secular broadside ballads were one of the few printed sources of news in many places (SCHEYBAL 1962: 266). At first, their authors mainly drew upon oral tradition as a source. Towards the end of the 19th century, they began to use newspaper articles as sources.

At the beginning of the 20th century, *news periodicals* (typically newspapers and magazines) already had a key role as a mass communication medium. By modernising production and focusing on publishing as a profit-making enterprise, they gradually became more professional (BEDNAŘÍK – JIRÁK – KÖPPLOVÁ 2011: 17, 98, 139). It was a period when, in addition to serious news and political newspapers with clear party affiliations, there were also popular magazines that focused on entertainment and tended towards tabloid themes (KONČELÍK – VEČEŘA – ORSÁG 2010: 21). Readers' expectations were “influenced by the gradual disintegration of authoritative cultural norms and moral and ethical practices. This was the impetus for the first cautious manifestations of the tabloidisation of the content of some newspapers and especially magazines.” (BEDNAŘÍK – JIRÁK – KÖPPLOVÁ 2011: 137). The visual component of the news and the reproductive possibilities of the press were also developing – texts in newspapers and (especially) magazines were often accompanied by illustrations and, increasingly, photographs, which contributed to “an interest in previously neglected settings and situations (in terms of the traditional idea of what was appropriate to be publicly depicted)” (BEDNAŘÍK – JIRÁK – KÖPPLOVÁ 2011: 137–138).

However, some types of printed texts were not immediately replaced by the growth in mass production of periodicals. Broadside ballads, for example, existed in parallel at the beginning of the 20th century, even though their informational importance was gradually declining. The development of the newspaper industry also had an impact on the form of the texts of broadside ballads. Whereas earlier,

broadside ballads had verse texts (SCHEYBAL 1962: 267) and prose chapbooks had narratives for so-called “descriptions” (IVÁNEK 2022: 89), by the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, chapbooks thematically related to broadside ballads were quite rare and usually used only by certain authors, who often copied entire passages from the newspapers (cf. below). Pettitt (2008: 89) calls this procedure, where ballad writers followed a narrative typical of journalism or court judgments, two different modes of narrative discourse: journalistic and judicial prose.

Both broadside ballads and news periodicals had some features in common. Both were seen as sources of information and entertainment. A key part of their production took place in printing houses. They targeted (among other groups) the lower classes. They were increasingly oriented towards tabloid topics, and the visual aspects of messages played an important role in both. For example, natural disasters, wars, and crimes were common themes (cf. PETTITT 2008). Secular broadside ballads that dealt with crime were called *moritat* (probably from the German *Mordtat* = murder) (FIALA 1994: 65; PŘÍRUČNÍ 1938: 947; REJMAN 1971: 239; FIALA 1990: 295; VOIT 2006: 496; SLOVNÍK 2011; BOČKOVÁ – POLÁKOVÁ 2021: 43–44).

Authorship evolved similarly for both broadside ballads and news periodicals. Authors become better known over time, not only in the texts themselves, but also in the public realm. In the context of broadside ballads, up until the second half of the 19th century we can find information about the author in the final verses of the song: “The composer of the song, named Franz Wollenfels, is a son of Příbram, a journeyman gingerbread maker.”² Sometimes the author was mentioned by a monogram: “...composed by the same ardent admirer J. A. S.”³ Or they could be identified with a general characteristic: “The song was composed by a girl...”⁴ The amount of unambiguous information concerning the authorship of broadside ballads increased during the second half of the 19th century, and from this period we know the authors by name, their songs, and sometimes their life stories (HAIS 1985; SCHEYBAL 1955). However, in some characteristics the two media differed, like in format, visual design, breadth of audience, geographical reach, and periodicity.

2) “Truchlivá píseň o dvou zastřelených, kteří sobě pro věrnou lásku jednou hodinou umřít umínili, roku 1818”, (“A mournful song about two people who were shot and who, for faithful love, within one hour want to die, in 1818”) [after 1818], MZM ST 1670/13.

3) “Horlivá píseň o velebném mučedníku Božím Janu Sarkandru, složená od téhož vroucného ctitele J. A. S.”, (“A fervent song about the glorious martyr of God, Jan Sarkander, composed by the same fervent worshipper, J. A. S.”) 1748, MZM ST 1075.

4) *Title not found (fragment)*, year not found, MZM ST 1670/4.

Maintenance and Transmission of Memory through Media

All the described media (ZELIZER 2008: 79) can be seen as tools for the transmission and preservation of collective memory (OLLICK – ROBBINS 1998: 108). To define *collective memory*, Jeffrey Ollick and Joyce Robbins summarise Maurice Halbwachs' understanding of memory as “a matter of how minds work together in society, how their operations are not simply mediated but are structured by social arrangements”. They also quote Halbwachs as follows: “It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognise, and localise their memories” (HALBWACHS 1992: 38 in OLLICK – ROBBINS 1998: 109). Nevertheless, Barbie Zelizer mentions journalistic ambivalence as a memory bearer – how the journalistic “first draft of history” is at the same time important for memory work and underestimated in this respect (ZELIZER 2008: 81).

Collective memory has its temporal (ZELIZER 2008; OLLICK – ROBBINS 1998), spatial (TALLENTIRE 2001), and emotional dimensions (WASCHKOVÁ ČÍSAŘOVÁ 2017). It can be time- and place-specific, and it often carries emotional recollections from the past. It has also been observed (OLLICK – ROBBINS 1998: 122) that “memory is not an unchanging vessel for carrying the past into the present; memory is a process, not a thing, and it works differently at different points in time”. More specifically, in the case of locally significant events, we can also consider *community memory* as a concept that enhances the spatial nature of memory. Jenéa Tallentire (2001: 199) defines it as “dynamic, negotiated between the individual and the community, between personal experience and wider historical events”. In the spatial sense, events can be commemorated through *material memory* – memorials and monuments (TALLENTIRE 2001: 202).

Considering our chosen media, we must distinguish between *oral tradition* (i.e. oral ballads passed on by singing in public and dependent primarily on memory for their survival) and the *written-printed tradition* – broadside ballads, chapbooks, and news periodicals (RUBIN 2009; PETTIT 2008).

While print media work with a selection of topics according to increasingly professionalised rules of newsworthiness (ZELIZER 2008) and preserve up-to-date information in tangible form, including visual material, for oral ballads it is more complicated. Broadside ballads represent news that is to be preserved as

an immutable three-dimensional object (BENEŠ 1957: 63). Due to the flexibility of oral presentation, there are variants that provide different levels of durability (SMETANA 1963: 14–15; BENEŠ 1957: 66). Their written, audio, and/or visual record establishes the current version, preventing its eventual change or complete loss, thus completing the list of possible sources through which the flow and transmission of information over time can be traced. The material format predisposes that printed broadside ballads are included among written printed sources. However, their subsequent dissemination, which was not without the creation of variants, is a feature of the oral tradition. The documentary value of broadside ballads is diverse and therefore a critical approach is necessary in their scientific use (KUTNAR 1963: 77–78; MĚŘIČKA 2023; ZÁLOHA 1975) as is the use of other types of sources (CASAS-DELGADO – GOMIS: 33–59).

A Murder Presented through Broadside Ballads and News Periodicals

This text focuses on similarities and differences in the reporting of a murder, including the choice of topic, sourcing, transmission of information, work with audiences, and authorship. Drawing on both available primary sources and present-day sources, it analyses the capacities and ways in which memory is maintained (and not maintained) through these media. Therefore, it is focused on acquiring a better scholarly understanding of the forms, significance, and mechanisms of collective memory and the oral tradition. The study should be seen in the context of the mutual relationships between narratives in broadside ballads and journalistic texts (cf. PETTITT 2008: 89).

The crime, as described in the archived file of the Brno court,⁵ took place at night or in the early morning hours of 5 July 1907 on the road between Křtiny and Jedovnice. The victims were the merchants Josef and Amálie Němec from Ostrov, who were probably the targets, and Josef and Josefa Hrazdára from Rogendorf (today known as Krasová). They were on their way from the market in a carriage, probably attacked as they slept, and killed with an axe. Within 24 hours, members of a socially problematic family from the nearby village of Ostrov – Jan Vajckorn Sr., his wife Marie, and son Jan – were arrested. The following items were found in their house a few days after their arrest:

5) See Fond C12 Krajský soud trestní Brno, box 213, MZA.

the possible murder tools; clothing with traces of human blood; the charred remains of a stolen savings book; a large sum of money hidden behind a picture frame; and other items of value. There was no direct evidence of the Vajckorns' guilt, but their statements seemed confused and, at times, contradictory. In the early 20th century, this was enough for a guilty verdict, although the original sentence of death by hanging was changed to life imprisonment on 19 March 1908.

The crime, its investigation, and the trial were immediately covered by the national Czech and German newspapers of the time. Initial reports were carried by the most widely read Moravian newspapers⁶ the very next day. A content analysis of all the articles from the time⁷ established the basic workflow for the information gathering and delivery of news by the daily press at that time: sources were mainly the local population, including acquaintances and relatives of the victims and the accused; official statements by the investigating authorities were basically non-existent. There was often inaccurate information, which usually later disappeared without further clarification. Readers of the news periodicals experienced the greatest information onslaught five days after the event. After 10 days, interest completely disappeared. In all the articles we can observe the rapid inclination for the local population to believe in the guilt of the Vajckorns. The effective accusation and moral condemnation are based on the “voice of the people”, which had a considerable influence on the course of the trial (PETTIT 2010: 76–77).

The treatment by the Saturday weekly magazine *Nové Ilustrované Listy* (K ČTYŘNÁSOBNÉ 1907) was significant. In addition to sensational descriptions of the crime and coverage of the lead-up to the trial, it also offered rich visual content. In its first issue dealing with the affair, it published its own photographs of the crime scene and of the orphaned children. After the trial, it provided drawings of the perpetrators and drawings from the court, as well as photographs of the crime scene (including the covered bodies of the deceased) and maps of the same, which apparently came from the court file (see Figures 1 and 2). Thus, the approach of the editors of the *Nové Ilustrované Listy* likely affected the case's strong, publicly shared visuality, which influenced the continued maintenance of its memory.

6) Newspapers: *Brněnské noviny* and its supplement *Moravské noviny*, *Lidové noviny*, *Rovnost*, *Brünner Zeitung*.

7) A total of 63 articles were analysed: 56 articles from 1907 from 11 German and Czech daily and weekly newspapers *Brněnské noviny*, *Lidové noviny*, *Moravské noviny*, *Nové Ilustrované Listy*, *Rovnost*, *Brünner Zeitung*, *Die neue Zeitung*, *Illustrierte Kronen Zeitung*, *Neue Freie Presse*, *Neue Schlesiische Zeitung*, *Reichpost*; and 7 more recent commemorative articles from 4 different titles – *Nový život Blansko*, *Lidová demokracie*, *MF Dnes*, *Blanenský deník*.



Figure 1. The location where the premeditated murder was most likely committed.
K čtyřnásobné vraždě u Křtin. *Nové Illustrované Listy: rodinná kronika současná slovem i obrazem: časopis pro zábavu i poučení.* Brunn [Brno]: V. Brockart, 1907, vol. 14, no. 28 – 13.7.1907, p. 465.
Olomouc Research Library, sign. II 56.465/ 14 (1907).

Arnošt Chládek from Heřmanův Městec created a broadside ballad to commemorate the murder, either at the end of 1907 or in 1908. He published the only two currently known prints: the broadside ballad “A song about the quadruple murder of two families of Hrazdíra and Němec, which happened on the road near Křtiny near Brno” (hereafter the “Song”; CHLÁDEK [1907?]a); and a chapbook – a prose description (hereafter the “Description”) with the same title, only exchanging the word “song” to “description” (CHLÁDEK [1907?]b) (see Figures 3 and 4). The treatment of crime stories in separate verse and prose forms was quite common for the author. After comparing the contents of the “Description” with the periodical press, it is clear that he copied whole passages from news periodicals (ČTYŘNÁSOBNÁ 1907; CHLÁDEK [1907?]b: 3).

At the time, the mass popularity of broadside ballads was already in decline, and the oral tradition may not have been intertwined with the printed form.

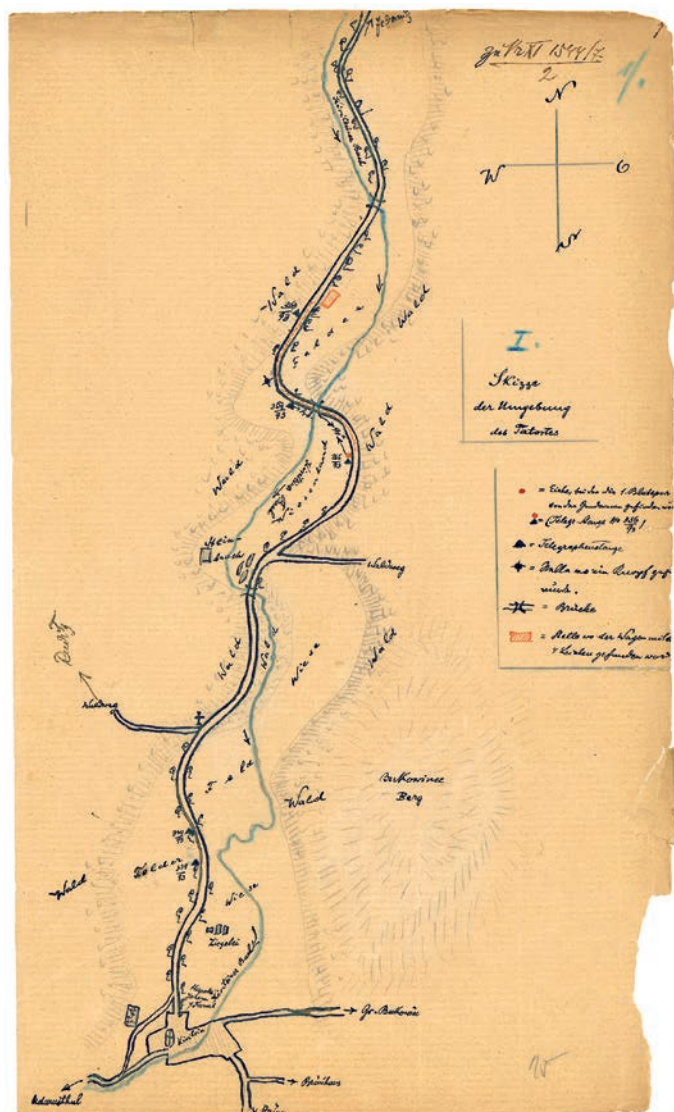


Figure 2. Crime scene sketch from the court file.

Fond C 12, Krajský soud trestní Brno, II. manipulace, box 213, sp. zn. Vr XI 1544/1907, obž. Č. 793, fol. 25, MZA.

Considering the broadside ballad, the “Song” marks the exact day of the murder but does not specify the year. The final verses suggest that the publication of the ballad was after the trial (which took place in November 1907), although we cannot be exact. The first stanza of the “Song” correctly places the action in the vicinity of the pilgrimage site of Křtiny, near the village of Jedovnice. The



Figure 3. The “Song” broadside ballad.

Chládek, Arnošt: “Píseň o čtyřnásobné vraždě dvou rodin Hrazdírové a Němcové, která se stala na silnici u Křtin blíže Brna” (“A song about the quadruple murder of two families, Hrazdíra and Němec, which happened on the road by Křtiny near Brno”). Litomyšl: Vladimír Augusta, [after 1907], sign. VK-0000.216, přív.66, MZK.

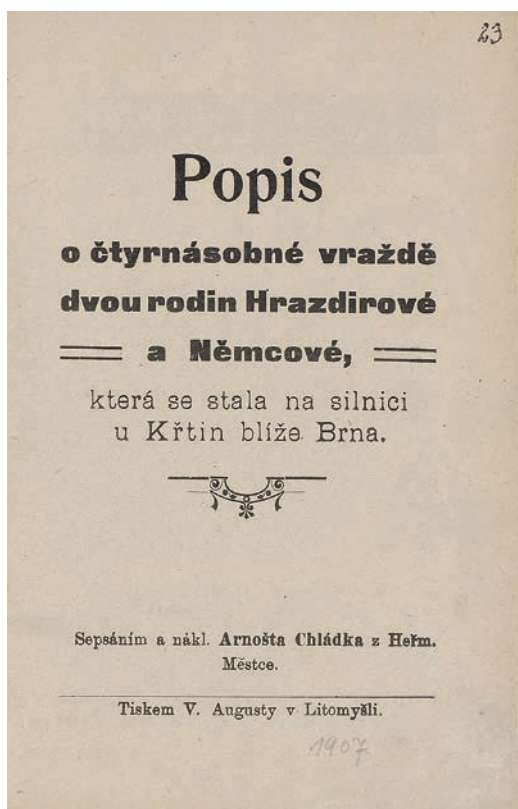


Figure 4. The “Description” chapbook.

Chládek, Arnošt: “Popis o čtyřnásobné vraždě dvou rodin Hrazdírové a Němcové, která se stala na silnici u Křtin blíže Brna.” (“A description about the quadruple murder of two families, Hrazdíra and Němec, which happened on the road by Křtiny near Brno.”). Litomyšl: Vladimír Augusta, [after 1907], sign. VK-0000.108, přív.22, MZK.

other main places are also accurately identified in the “Song”, although several toponyms are confused in the “Description”.

Oral ballads refer to the settings more generally, but they always link to the surrounding forest. These oral ballads may have been created in the folk milieu, which retained the generally known characteristics of broadside ballads (e.g. composition, rhythm, widely used refrains), but were only transmitted orally, which is the case with the oral ballads that reflected the 1907 murder at Křtiny. Interest in the crime led in the past to regional scholars and lay collectors recording them. Heuristic research of the literature, sources, and fieldwork have

brought to light recordings of several versions and variants of the oral rendition of the ballad (POLÁKOVÁ 2022: 80–82).

The analysed media (i.e. broadside ballad, chapbook, oral ballads, and news periodicals) approached the case to a large extent similarly, because they were each responding to one another, their audience, and the facts as they emerged – primarily as described in the court file. They portrayed the victims as respectable, hard-working persons, but inaccuracies arose in their names, while in the oral ballads we encounter only the epithets “merchants” and “Jews” (presumably because the latter were usually merchants). The perpetrators were described as having a criminal past, being of low social standing, and as being alcoholics (BATES 2020: 88–92). In all but one version of the oral ballad, the Vajckorns were identified as criminals. The dead were found in the early hours of the morning by František Pernica and his mother, who reported everything to the local gamekeeper. The fact that the gamekeeper did not arrive at the scene was mentioned only by the “Description” and the news periodicals. The “Song” attributed the discovery to an unnamed “neighbour” in the 13th stanza. The gamekeeper only made it into one oral ballad: 50 years after the crime he was identified in a popular narrative as an eyewitness⁸ (STRAŠLIVÁ 1907a; STRAŠLIVÁ 1907b). It can be speculated that the visual treatment of the theme in *Nové Illustrované Listy* may have led to the visual treatment of the broadside ballad, including pictures. As one witness described it, a version was sung at the fair, including the customary pointing to pictures.⁹

The crime was referred to in all the printed media – the broadside ballad, chapbook, and news periodicals – as a robbery-murder (BATES 2020: 93–95). The court later reclassified it as murder. At the crime scene, a relatively large sum of money for the time was found on the victims. In the “Description”, the amount of money not stolen is trivialised and it is incorrectly stated that the killers searched their victims. The court also worked with the possible motive of revenge, which was taken up by the broadside ballad, chapbook, news periodicals, and the oral narratives remembered by the locals. In the oral ballads, neither the motive for the murder nor the events afterwards are given consideration.

Printed sources also focused on the evidence of guilt, specifically a savings book, the charred remains of which were found in the Vajckorns’ home. According to the “Song”, the owner had handed it over to Josef Němec in public the day before the murder, so the murderers knew about the 700 crowns that had been

8) See *Potráce* (“Market traders”).

9) IBID.

withdrawn. However, this number is the only information that matches fact (POLÁK 1999: 37). In the “Description”, the author correctly gives the name of the financial institution from which Němec withdrew the money, although this was different in the “Song”, probably because it had an inappropriate number of syllables.

According to the court file, the lack of evidence for any form of self-defence suggested that all the victims were asleep at the time of the attack. This fact, demonstrating the brutality and premeditation of the crime, was emphasised in all the printed sources. In the “Song”, the author described broken heads, brains loosened from skulls, and severed ears, noses, and limbs. In reality, although the massacre was extreme, it did not reach this level of butchery. In the oral ballads, the horror is attested “only” by the presence of blood. The motif of women begging for mercy appears in the oral folk narrative. Compared to other sources, the broadside ballad devoted a lot of space – three and a half stanzas – to an emotional description of the burial of the victims. Other printed sources paid more attention to the eight orphans (K ČTYŘNÁSOBNÉ 1907).

Detailed information about the trial, which took place from 13 to 15 November 1907, can be found in the court file and in the contemporary news periodicals. The “Description” discussed the trial in detail, following the model set by the news periodicals. In the “Song”, the author devotes only half a stanza to it. Although the Vajckorns were presumed to be guilty from the beginning, hints of a lack of evidence made their way into the news periodicals. Expressions of regret for the wasted young life of Jan Vajckorn Jr. also moved from the news periodicals to the “Description”. The broadside ballad and the chapbook reported the original death sentence; the “Song”, moreover, described it as having been carried out. It is not known whether the author knew about the reduction of the death sentence to life imprisonment, but he did not use this information, deciding instead to rely on the hyperbole typical of broadside ballads to increase the moral impact. In the local oral narrative, the Vajckorns were given life imprisonment and their son a 20-year sentence. Mention of the commutation of the sentence was only found in a single newspaper article (MILOST 1908).

Conclusions

In our examination of a 1907 quadruple homicide, we have observed how the transfer of memory through media and the accuracy of recorded information

differs. The “Description” chapbook contains a significant number of contemporary facts that were copied from news periodicals (cf. PETTITT 2008). In the “Song” broadside ballad, a more significant frequency of inaccuracies can be observed, probably because the author wanted to attract the reader, heighten the drama, and sustain the verse. The least accurate, but with relatively strong durability, appear to be the oral ballads, created in a folk environment and passed down initially by oral tradition. From the outset, these oral ballads have represented a form of collective memory that has been passed on, with diminishing intensity, for more than 100 years. Residues of the murder story can be found in regional verbal folklore, but awareness of it is decreasing in intensity with each new generation (VANSINA 1965; HLAVAČKA 2014).

A visible trace of collective memory, combined with community memory, is still present in the regional newspapers, which, especially on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the event, again reported on the crime (BRÁNSKÝ 1983; MOKRÝ 2007; SOLAŘÍKOVÁ 2007). The unprofessional work of some journalists (carelessness with archives), however, further distorted the surviving information, for example, one author considered the main target of the attack to be the Hrazdíras, with the Němec as accidental victims (MOKRÝ 2007). Inaccurate information was provided by the great-grandson of the victims, and the journalists did not compare his information, based on the family’s oral tradition, with official contemporary sources. And they committed typos (e.g. apparently there was a computer-generated corruption of the name Jedovnice into Nerovnice, MOKRÝ 2007) (cf. ZELIZER 2008).

In addition to the memory work mentioned above, community and family memory (TALLENTIRE 2001) have kept the event alive, especially for people related to the tragedy. The accuracy, extent, and existence of information in oral form that relates to the crime is nonetheless now rapidly and irreversibly disappearing from community memory. The oldest generation retains several variants of the oral ballads, modelled on popular broadside ballads, knowledge of which is, in some cases, secondary. One variant, for example, was used in a private theatre performance by a tourist group in the 1970s, while another was recreated by primary school pupils in 2015 at social events in a nearby village.

The final stage of collective memory is its transfer into a site of memory (NORA 1989) or material memory (TALLENTIRE 2001), in our case a memorial at the place of the crime (see Figure 5).

In the future, the carriers of memory will mainly be written and material sources, professional or popular literature, and artificially created sound recordings.



Figure 5. A memorial plaque at the site of the crime near Křtiny in 2019.
Photo: Jana Poláková.

The constant creation of a shorthand to link re-cycled information, often combined with the need to present only a small fraction of the event in popular or tabloid tropes, distances future readers, listeners, and users from the possibility of knowing the story and maintaining any type of memory of the described event.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Fond C12 Krajský soud trestní Brno, box 213, MZA

1748 *Horlivá píseň o velebném mučedníku Božím Janu Sarkandru, složená od téhož vroucného ctitele J. A. S.* ("A fervent song about the glorious martyr of God, Jan Sarkander, composed by the same fervent worshipper, J. A. S.") Olomouc: n. p., 1748., inv. no. ST 1075, MZM

CHLÁDEK, Arnošt

[1907?]a *Píseň o čtyřnásobné vraždě dvou rodin Hrazdírové a Němcové, která se stala na silnici u Křtin blíže Brna*. (“A song about the quadruple murder of two families, Hrazdíra and Němec, which happened on the road by Křtiny near Brno”). Litomyšl: Vladimír Augusta, sign. VK-0000.216, přív.66, MZK

[1907?]b *Popis o čtyřnásobné vraždě dvou rodin Hrazdírové a Němcové, která se stala na silnici u Křtin blíže Brna*. (“A description about the quadruple murder of two families, Hrazdíra and Němec, which happened on the road by Křtiny near Brno”). Litomyšl: Vladimír Augusta, sign. VK-0000.108, přív.22, MZK

1954 *Potráce* (“Market traders”), Karel Grábl (b.1900), written down by Osvald Hofman, Benešov u Boskovic. C 286, inv. no. 4234, telling no. 78, EÚB

[no date] *Title not found (fragment)* Place of publishing, printer, year not found, inv. no. ST 1670/4, MZM

[after 1818] *Truchlivá píseň o dvou zastřelených, kteří sobě pro věrnou lásku jednou hodinou umřít umínili, roku 1818*. (“A mournful song about two people who were shot and who, for faithful love, within one hour want to die, in 1818”). N. p.: N. p., inv. no. ST 1670/13, MZM

SECONDARY SOURCES

BATES, Kate

2020 *Crime, Broadside and Social Change, 1800–1850* (London: Palgrave Macmillan)

BEDNAŘÍK, Petr – JIRÁK, Jan – KÖPPLOVÁ, Barbara

2011 *Dějiny českých médií*, (Praha: Grada)

BENEŠ, Bohuslav

1957 “Prameny a jejich zpracování v kramářských lidových písních”, *Český lid*, vol. 44, no. 2, pp. 63–66
1970 *Světská kramářská píseň. Příspěvek k poetice pololidové poezie* (Brno: Universita J. E. Purkyně, 1970)

BRÁNSKÝ, Jaroslav

1983 “Strašná hromadná vražda u Křtin”, *Nový život Blansko*, vol. 24, no. 51–52 (21. 12.), p. 6

CASAS-DELGADO, Immaculada – GOMIS, Juan

2019 “Female Transgression and Gallows Literature in the Spanish: literatura de cordel”, in ATKINSON, David – ROUD, Steve (eds.): *Cheap Print and the People: European Perspectives on Popular Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing), pp. 33–59

ČTYŘNÁSOBNÁ VRAŽDA U KŘTIN

1907 “Čtyřnásobná vražda u Křtin”, *Lidové noviny*, vol. 15, 13. 11., p. 3

DOLENSKÝ, Antonín

1907 “Píseň a letáky o defenestraci r. 1618”, *Český lid*, vol. 16, pp. 34–38

DUFKA, Jiří (ed.)

2022 *Kramářské písňové tisky. Kapitoly k materiálovým aspektům* (Brno: Moravská zemská knihovna)

FIALA, Jiří

1990 "Barokní balady a morytáty", *Česká literatura*, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 295–305

1994 "Kramářské kriminální zpravodajství", in: BENEŠ, Bohuslav: *Literatura a komerce* (Olomouc: Vydavatelství Univerzity Palackého v Olomouci), pp. 64–67

GROCHOWSKI, Piotr

2010 *Straszna zbrodnia rodzonej matki* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika)

HAIS, František

1985 *Vzpomínky pražského písničkáře* (Praha: Odeon)

HALBWACHS, Maurice

1992 *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University Chicago Press)

HLAVAČKA, Milan

2014 "Místa paměti", in ČECHUROVÁ, Jana – RANDÁK, Jan (eds.): *Základní problémy studia moderních a soudobých dějin* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy v Praze)

IVÁNEK, Jakub

2022 "The Czech Broadside Ballad in Its Historical, Social, and Literary Context", in FUMERTON, Patricia – KOSEK, Pavel – HANZELKOVÁ, Marie (eds.)

Czech Broadside Ballads as Text, Art, and Song in Popular Culture, ca. 1600–1900 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), pp. 75–92

IVÁNEK, Jakub

2017 "Poznámky k vymezení pojmu kramářská píseň (s ohledem na tisky náboženské povahy)", *Listy filologické*, vol. 140, no. 1–2, pp. 201–230

K ČTYŘNÁSOBNÉ VRAŽDĚ U KŘTIN

1907 "K čtyřnásobné vraždě u Křtin", *Nové Illustrované Listy*, 13. 7. 1907, p. 465

KLIMEŠ, Vladimír

1955 *Počátky českého a slovenského novinářství* (Praha: Orbis)

KONČELÍK, Jakub – VEČEŘA, Pavel – ORSÁG, Petr

2010 *Dějiny českých médií 20. století*, (Praha: Portál)

KOSEK, Pavel

2020 "Uvedení do historie české světské kramářské písně", in GLOMBOVÁ, Hana (ed.): *Do Brna široká cesta. Kramářské písně se světskou tematikou. Katalog k výstavě* (Brno: Moravské zemské muzeum), pp. 9–12

KUTNAR, František

1963 "Kramářská píseň jako historický pramen", in: *Václavkova Olomouc 1961* (Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství), pp. 77–86

MILOST VRAHŮM VAJCKORNOVÝM

1908 "Milost vrahům Vajckornovým", *Moravské noviny*, vol. 29, no. 67, 20. 3. 1908, p. 2.

MEŤTRAK, Maciej

2019 "Realistický a fantastický zeměpis v textech moravských kramářských tisků", in Heilandová, Lucie – Pavelková, Jindra (eds.): *Knížky naučení všelikého* (Brno: Moravská zemská knihovna), pp. 149–162

MLYNAŘÍKOVÁ, Barbora

2001 *Geografický horizont prostého člověka v Čechách v letech 1740–1830*, svazek 1, (Praha: Etnologický ústav Akademie věd České republiky)

OLICK, Jeffrey K. – ROBBINS, Joyce

1998 "Social memory studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, pp. 105–140

PETTITT, Thomas

2008 "From Journalism to Gypsy Folk Song: The Road to Orality of an English Ballad", *Oral Tradition*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 87–117

2010 "Journalism vs. Tradition in the English Ballads of the Murdered Sweetheart", in FUMERTON, Patricia – GUERRINI, Anita (eds.): *Ballads and Broad-sides in Britain, 1500–1800* (Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing), pp. 75–89

POLÁK, Vladimír

1999 *Byli Vajckorní vinni?* (Blansko: Muzeum Blansko a Týden u nás)

POLÁKOVÁ, Jana

2022 "Na silnici ho Křtin v lesi. Odraz skutečné události v tištěných, písemných a ústních pramenech", *Jižní Morava*, vol. 58, no. 61, pp. 75–85

PŘÍRUČNÍ SLOVNÍK

1938 *Příruční slovník jazyka českého* (Praha: Státní nakladatelství)

REJMAN, Ladislav

1971 *Slovník cizích slov* (Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství)

RUBIN, David. C.

2009 "Oral traditions as collective memories: Implications for a general theory of individual and collective memory", in: BOYER, P. – WERTSCH, J. V. (eds.): *Memory in mind and culture* (Cambridge University Press), pp. 273–287

SCHEYBAL, Josef st. (= SCHEYBAL, Josef V.)

1955 "Josef Tér, jarmareční písničkář", *Československá ethnografie*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 72–96

SCHEYBAL, Josef V.

1962 "Typy lidových zpravodajských tisků a devatenáctém století", *Československá ethnografie*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 265–280

1990 *Senzace pěti století v kramářské písni* (Hradec Králové: KRUH)

SMETANA, Robert

1963 "K problematice jevu české písně kramářské", in: *Václavkova Olomouc 1961* (Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství), pp. 13–58

SOLAŘÍKOVÁ, Ivana

2007 "Vrazi čekali na oběti v obilí", *Mladá fronta Dnes: Brno a jižní Morava*, vol. 18, no. 155 (4. 7.), p. B4

STRAŠLIVÁ A LOUPEŽNÁ VRAŽDA

1907a "Strašlivá loupežná vražda", *Brněnské noviny*, 6. 7. 1907, p. 3

1907b "Strašlivá loupežná vražda", *Moravské noviny: Příloha Brněnských novin*, 6. 7. 1907, p. 3

STEJSKALOVÁ, Eva

2015. *Novinové zpravodajství a noviny v Čechách od 17. století do roku 1740* (Praha: Karolinum)

TALLENTIRE, Jenéa

2001 "Strategies of Memory: History, Social Memory, and the Community", *Histoire sociale / Social history*, vol. 35, no. 67, pp. 197–212

VANSINA, Jan

1965 *Oral tradition: A Study of Historical Methodology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul)

VOIT, Petr

2006 *Encyklopedie knihy. Starší knihtisk a příbuzné obory mezi polovinou 15. a počátkem 19. století* (Praha: Libri)

WASCHKOVÁ CÍSAŘOVÁ, Lenka

2017 "The Voice of the Locality", in WASCHKOVÁ CÍSAŘOVÁ, Lenka (ed.): *Voice of the Locality: Local Media and Local Audience* (Brno: Masaryk University), pp. 19–38

WILTENBURG, Joy

2010 "Ballads and the Emotional Life of Crime", in FUMERTON, Patricia – GUERRINI, Anita (eds.): *Ballads and Broad­sides in Britain, 1500–1800* (Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing), pp. 173–186

ZÁLOHA, Jiří

1975 "Jarmareční píseň jako historický pramen", *Český lid*, vol. 62, no. 2, pp. 104–105

ZELIZER, Barbie

2008 "Why memory's work on journalism does not reflect journalism's work on memory", *Memory Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 79–87

WEBSITE CONTENT

BOČKOVÁ, Hana – POLÁKOVÁ, Jana

2021 "Crime and Punishment", in GLOMBOVÁ, Hana (ed.): *The Wide Road to Brno. Broadside Ballads with Secular Themes. Exhibition Catalogue* (Brno: Moravské zemské muzeum), pp. 48–50, in *phil.muni.cz* [online]. URL: https://www.phil.muni.cz/media/3331273/the-wide-road-to-brno_maly-soubor.pdf [Accessed January 20, 2023].

MĚŘIČKA, Matěj

2023 "Dvě muzea, jedna písnička", in *spalicek.net* [online]. URL: <http://www.spalicek.net/?q=node/2517#> [Accessed January 20, 2023].

MOKRÝ, Pavel

2007 "Od bestiální loupežné vraždy uplynulo sto let", in *denik.cz* [online]. July 2007 URL: https://www.denik.cz/z_domova/vrazda_krtiny20070705.html [Accessed January 20, 2023].

NORA, Pierre

1989 "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations*, no. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, pp. 7–24, in *jstor.org* [online]. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928520> [Accessed January 20, 2023].

SLOVNÍK SPISOVNÉHO JAZYKA ČESKÉHO

2011 "Slovník spisovného jazyka českého", in *ssjc.ujc.cas.cz* [online]. URL: <https://ssjc.ujc.cas.cz/search.php?hledaj=Hledat&heslo=moryt%C3%A1t&sti=EMPTY&where=hesla&hsubstr=no> [Accessed January 20, 2023].

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

PhDr. Jana Poláková, Ph.D., jpolakova@mzm.cz, Ethnographic Institute, Moravian Museum, Brno, Czech Republic / Etnografický ústav, Moravské zemské muzeum, Brno, Česká republika

Mgr. Lenka Waschková Císařová, Ph.D., cisarova@fss.muni.cz, Department of Media Studies and Journalism, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic / Katedra mediálních studií a žurnalistiky, Masarykova univerzita, Brno, Česká republika



This work can be used in accordance with the Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 International license terms and conditions (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>). This does not apply to works or elements (such as image or photographs) that are used in the work under a contractual license or exception or limitation to relevant rights.