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**Patriarchal zeal for purity and
maternal affection for infants.
Anti-vaccinationism in the religious community of
Lipovans in Bukovina around 1900 and the
cessation of the last smallpox epidemic in the
Habsburg Empire before WWI**

Summary

Widespread vaccination campaigns had already led to the near eradication of smallpox in the Habsburg Monarchy of the late 19th century, when a new surge of infections attracted the attention of both the authorities and medical experts. The specific source of the renewed spread of the virus in 1898 was soon suspected to be the religious minority of the Lipovans in Bukovina, a small community of Russian origin known for its very traditional, ascetic and isolated lifestyle. The Lipovans were notorious deniers of civil registration and professional medicine, especially vaccinations. The concept of “purity” played a major emotional role in the Lipovan belief system, and was linked to a specific abhorrence of mixing human and animal blood. Instead of medicine, the members of the community claimed to trust in God alone, so that cases of illness were even concealed and contacts with external medical experts were avoided. In 1898, this behaviour led to a regional epidemic that particularly affected the Lipovans’ unvaccinated infants. The regional authorities were slow and negligent in dealing with this health threat. Within the religious community, however, the devastating epidemic eventually led to a reorientation: according to the report of the district physician Dr. Josef Perl, several Lipovan women had their surviving children vaccinated “secretly”, and the immunity thus gained acted as a positive example for others.

Ausgedehnte Impfkampagnen hatten in der Habsburgermonarchie des späten 19. Jahrhunderts bereits nahezu zur Auslöschung der Pocken geführt, als ein neuer Anstieg von Infektionen die Aufmerksamkeit sowohl der Behörden als auch der medizinischen Experten auf sich zog. Als spezifische Quelle der erneuten Ausbreitung des Virus im Jahr 1898 wurde bald die religiöse Minderheit der Lipowaner in der Bukowina verdächtigt, eine kleine Gemeinschaft russischen Ursprungs, die für ihren sehr traditionellen, asketischen und isolierten Lebensstil bekannt war.

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Die Lipowaner waren notorische Verweigerer von Personenstandserhebungen und professioneller Medizin, speziell auch von Impfungen. Das Konzept der „Reinheit“ spielte im Lipowanischen Glaubenssystem eine große emotionale Rolle, und war dabei mit einem spezifischen Abscheu vor der Vermischung von menschlichem und tierischem Blut verbunden. Anstelle der Medizin behaupteten die Mitglieder der Gemeinschaft allein auf Gott zu vertrauen, sodass auch Krankheitsfälle verheimlicht und Kontakte mit externen medizinischen Experten vermieden wurden. 1898 führte dieses Verhalten zu einer regionalen Epidemie, von der insbesondere die ungeimpften Kleinkinder der Lipowaner betroffen waren. Die regionalen Behörden waren langsam und nachlässig im Umgang mit dieser Gesundheitsgefahr. Innerhalb der religiösen Gemeinschaft führte die verheerende Epidemie aber schließlich zu einer Umorientierung: Gemäß dem Bericht des Distriktsarztes Dr. Josef Perl ließen mehrere Lipowanerinnen ihre überlebenden Kinder „geheim“ impfen, und die so gewonnene Immunität wirkte als positives Beispiel für andere.

Keywords

Prevention, smallpox, anti-vaccinationism, history of emotions, Bukovina, Habsburg Monarchy

Preliminary remarks

This contribution deals with the last smallpox epidemics in the pre-war Austro-Hungarian Empire, which took place between 1896 and 1900 within the crown lands of Galicia and Bukovina, with a focus on the latter province. At the centre of both the epidemic incident itself, as well as the political and medical measures taken by central and regional authorities to contain the spread of the variola virus, was a particular religious community, the so-called Lipovans, a group of conservative Christian believers that arose from resistance to the state-led “modernisation” of Russian Orthodox church habits during the 17th century.

The author began to examine this issue several years ago in the context of a FWF-funded research project on epidemics and their prevention in 19th century south-eastern Europe.¹ Because of the “international” character of the topic, this contribution is presented in English, although most of the sources used here – and large parts of the relevant research literature, too – are written in German.² Further, important additional documents on the issue probably exist in Russian and Romanian in regional archives, which the author could not make use of due to both a lack of language skills and research time. Yet, scrutiny into the archives at the Austrian National Archive in Vienna (ÖSTA) delivered surprisingly rich material on this particular topic, located in the archive holdings of the Ministry of Interior (“Ministerium des Inneren”, MdI) within the General Administration Archive (“Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv”, AVA).

1 FWF-research project no. P 25929, led by Christian Promitzer, at the Department for Southern European History of the University of Graz, funding period 2014–2016.

2 All verbatim quotations within this article were translated into English by the author.

The issue was selected for a contribution to this volume on “epidemics and emotions” because of its ability to display the intense interdependence of processes of social identity management and individual demands on emotional regulation during epidemic threats.

Bukovina and the last smallpox epidemics in the Habsburg Monarchy before WWI

Smallpox was a peculiar disease. Its easy transmissibility and high lethality made it one of the most feared illnesses in pre-modern Europe. In contrast, so-called “variolation”, which proved to be quite an effective prevention measure against the deadly courses of the illness but was itself rather dangerous, was transferred from the Ottoman Empire to Europe as early as during early 18th century, and at the end of that saeculum, the famous Edward Jenner (1749–1823) developed the method of “vaccination” – the transfer of body particles from cattle infected with the less severe cow pox to the human body to prevent the severe pathogenic effects of later variola infections.³ This precaution proved to be enormously successful and spread over large regions of Europe very fast, heavily promoted by both state authorities and the majority of physicians and members of the cultural elite in general. Still, one element involved – the transfer of a “living” body substance from animal to human, by the “unnatural” way of “in-oculation” through a purposely inflicted (small) wound – created particular resistance among certain parts of the population in all countries. In many regions, some members of the clergy and other “professionals” in religious life played an important role in expressing concerns and organising resistance against such “vaccination” (the English term, in fact, already pointing at the “animal origin”), with regard to its supposed dangers for physical health on the one hand, but also the perceived sinful transgression of the God-given “natural order”, too, which would have the power to wreck man’s promise for a joyful eternal afterlife.⁴

Yet, during 19th century, vaccination became more and more established within most countries in Europe due to the ongoing political and social pressure, as well as positive advertisement, which could particularly point to the growing protective efficacy and decreasing of adverse effects following improvements in the techniques of serum production, vaccine handling

3 Donald HOPKINS, *The Greatest Killer. Smallpox in History* (Chicago 2002).

4 Cf. for Germany: Malte THIESSEN, *Immunisierte Gesellschaft. Impfen in Deutschland im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen 2017); Eberhard WOLFF, *Einschneidende Maßnahmen. Pockenschutzimpfung und traditionale Gesellschaft im Württemberg des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart 1998), esp. 399–412, for Austria: Marcel CHAHROUR, *Der Medizinische Orient. Wien und die Begegnung der europäischen Medizin mit dem Osmanischen Reich (1800–1860)* (Stuttgart 2022), esp. 62–111; Elke HAMMER-LUZA, ‘Lässt nicht impfen’. Widerstände gegen die Vakzination in der Steiermark in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts, in: *Virus. Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Medizin 20* (2021), 102–130; Elena TADDEI, Aspekte von indirektem Impfwang im Rahmen der Pockenschutzimpfung im Tirol des 19. Jahrhunderts, in: *Virus. Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Medizin 20* (2021), p. 131–146; Andreas GOLOB, Die präventive Blatternbekämpfung im Spiegel des Wiener Zeitungswesens. Sondierungen von 1722 bis 1812, in: *Virus. Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Medizin 20* (2021), 55–78; moreover, for the Russian Empire: Daria SAMBUK, *Wächter der Gesundheit. Staat und lokale Gesellschaften beim Aufbau des Medizinalwesens im Russischen Reich 1762–1831* (Wien 2015).

and injection procedures.⁵ Therefore, during the second half of the century, the number of strict anti-vaccination attitudes gradually faded away among most parts of European societies, even if scepticism and disinterest in vaccination remained astonishingly common phenomena.⁶

Nonetheless, vaccination efforts brought the quasi-endemic spread of variola to an end within many European countries by the end of the century. In Germany, for instance, during the mid-1890s the death toll due to smallpox declined – according to official statistics, which in this case can be trusted at least *grosso modo* – to fewer than 10 persons per year.⁷ The Austro-Hungarian Empire was somewhat behind in this development, but registered smallpox-caused deaths had fallen at least to about 1,200 annually within the whole monarchy by 1895. Moreover, 88% of cases were related to the crown land of Galicia in the relatively “backward” north-eastern periphery of the Empire. Even there, in the following year, smallpox dispersion was reduced considerably – but at the same time, the number of variola victims unexpectedly rose in the neighbouring Bukovina region, where more than 200 deaths were registered in 1896, a number several-times higher than the sums quoted in the previous years.⁸

This phenomenon drew the attention of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior (to which health issues of transregional importance, like epidemic prevention, appertained) – but only with considerable delay, from 1898 onwards, when the infection and death numbers due to smallpox had again risen to unexpected heights, with more than 2000 registered deaths from variola in that year in Galicia and nearly 500 in – considerably smaller – Bukovina.⁹ The relevant reports sent in by the regional government of Bukovina at that time soon hinted at a peculiar religious group of so-called Lipovans as the main source of the new epidemic, as the villages inhabited by them turned out to be hotspots of this new wave of infections – and this “sect” were already known as notorious and tenacious anti-vaxxers.

5 Cf., for the case of the Austro-Hungarian Empire: Heinz FLAMM / Christian VUTUC, *Geschichte der Pocken-Bekämpfung in Österreich*, in: *Wiener Klinische Wochenschrift* 122 (2010), 265–275; Michael MEMMER, *Die Geschichte der Schutzimpfungen in Österreich*, in: Gerhard Aigner u. a., eds., *Schutzimpfungen – Rechtliche, ethische und medizinische Aspekte* (Wien 2016), 7–36; Michael PAMMER, *Pocken I. Gesundheitspolitik unter Franz II./I.*, in: *Historicum* 12/1 (2003), 17–21; Michael PAMMER, *Pocken II. Die Impfung im 19. Jahrhundert*, in: *Historicum* 12/2 (2003), 15–19; Diether KRAMER, *Der Wandel der Mortalität. Untersuchungen zum Sterblichkeitsrückgang in der Steiermark* (Wiesbaden 2014), esp. 237–253; moreover, the author’s contributions cited below.

6 Cf. esp. Paul KÜBLER, *Geschichte der Pocken und der Impfung* (Berlin 1901).

7 *Ibid.*, 361.

8 Cf. esp.: Carlos WATZKA, *Weak State-controlled Disease Prevention in Peripheral Border Regions: Austrian Bukovina and Dalmatia in Late 19th Century*, in: Sevasti Trubeta / Christian Promitzer / Paul Weindling, eds., *Medicalising Borders. Selection, Containment and Quarantine Since 1800* (Manchester 2021), 100–125; Carlos WATZKA, *Pockensterblichkeit und Pockenimpfung in der Peripherie. Die Zurückdrängung der Blattern in der Bukowina während des 19. Jahrhunderts im Kontext der Gesundheitspolitik in der Habsburgermonarchie*, in: *Virus. Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Medizin* 20 (2021), 167–188.

9 Cf. Carlos WATZKA, *Pockensterblichkeit*, 173.

The Lipovans in Bukovina

Until now, there has been very little research literature in English dedicated particularly to the Lipovans (Filippowzy; Lipowaner) in Bukovina and their history.¹⁰ Yet, there is a considerable number of texts in the German language, particularly for those who lived in Bukovina when the region was a – multicultural and multilingual – part of Habsburg Monarchy between the late 18th and the early 20th century.¹¹ The contemporary ethnographic and historical displays on Lipovan life by Johann Goehlert (1863), Demeter (Dimiter) Dan (1890, 1899), Raimund Kaindl and Franz Wickenhauser (1896) and Johann Polek (1896), published in Vienna or in Czernowitz, are particularly worth mentioning.¹²

In all of these texts, the reader is first informed about the peculiar political and religious processes that led to the settlement of the Lipovans in Bukovina. Their ancestors were persons of Russian Orthodox faith who were opposed to certain church reforms initiated by the Muscovite patriarch Nikon during the 1650s and 1660s; in consequence, they were excommunicated and severely oppressed by Russian state authorities, including the execution of tens of thousands who refused to recognise the new ecclesiastical rituals as being right. This led to the escape, or emigration (and later sometimes forced deportation, too), of large numbers of such “Old Believers” (“Staroverci”; also called “Starobradtsi”, that is: “followers of old rituals” or, pejoratively, “Raskolniki”, “splitters”), from central areas of the Russian Empire to the regions on its periphery or even beyond, beyond the reach of government authorities. The Principate of Moldavia, then vassal to the Ottoman Empire but ruled by Christian rulers, was an important target area during the 18th century, as the Russian “Old Believers” were welcomed there as new tributaries, particularly for areas previously depopulated by wars and epidemics.¹³

10 But cf. Cristina CLOPOT, *Russian Old Believers' Heritage and Tradition in Romania – Bridging the Past and the Future*, Dissertation (University of Edinburgh 2017); Nichifor VOROBION, *The Russian Lipovans Between Three Empires*, in: Wilfried Heller et al., eds., *Die Dobrukscha* (München 2009), 151–156. The recent, comprehensive dissertation on the Lipovans in the Danube Delta by Camillo Breiling found only about 10 anglophone publications on Russian Old Believers at all, stating that the majority of academic texts on the issue are written in Russian: Camillo BREILING, *Die Lipowaner. Russische Altgläubige als religiöse und sprachliche kulturelle Minderheit im rumänischen und ukrainischen Donaudelta*, Dissertation (Universität Wien 2020), 38. As overviews in German cf. Wilhelm HOLLBERG, *Das russische Altgläubigentum* (Tartu 1994); Peter HAUPTMANN, *Rußlands Altgläubige* (Göttingen 2005).

11 The German language, as the dominant language of the Austrian part of the Monarchy as a whole, was largely in use among the state authorities in this particularly multicultural area, although the majority of the population were first and foremost Romanian or Ukrainian (Ruthenian) speakers. Cf. Kurt SCHARR, *Die Landschaft Bukowina. Das Werden einer Region an der Peripherie 1774–1918* (Wien–Köln–Weimar 2010), Victoria POPVICI, Wolfgang DAHMEN / Johannes KRAMER, eds., *Gelebte Multikulturalität. Czernowitz und die Bukovina* (Frankfurt am Main 2010); Emanuel TURCZYNSKI, *Geschichte der Bukovina in der Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden 1993).

12 Johann Vincenz GOEHLERT, *Die Lipowaner in der Bukowina* (Wien 1863); Demeter DAN, *Die Völkerschaften der Bukowina*, 1. Heft: *Die Lippowaner in der Bukowina* (Czernowitz 1890); Demeter DAN, *Die Lippowaner*, in: Erzherzog Rudolf von Habsburg et al., eds., *Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie in Wort und Bild*. Bd.: *Bukowina* (Wien 1899), 282–295; Raimund KAINDL / Franz WICKENHAUSER, *Das Entstehen und die Entwicklung der Lippowaner-Colonien in der Bukowina* (Wien 1896); Johann POLEK, *Die Lippowaner in der Bukowina*, 3 vol. (Czernowitz 1896–1899). For a scholarly critique of the existing elements in the depiction of Bukovina within the “Kronprinzenwerk” cf. Viktoriya HRYABAN, *Der ‘Bukowina-Band’ der Österreichisch-Ungarischen Monarchie in Wort und Bild*, in: *Kakanien revisited* 25/11 (2005), 1–11.

13 Cf. i.e. Demetrius ONIUL, *Landesgeschichte vor der Vereinigung, bis 1775*, in: Erzherzog Rudolf et al., eds., *Monarchie in Wort und Bild*, 57–116, esp. 111–116.

Thus, some “Staroverci” had entered the area of the later Bukovina even before it was established as a particular political entity in 1775, as a result of negotiations between the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empire’s governments after the Russian-Turkish war of 1768–1774. They were already called “Philippovans” or “Lipovans” then, for reasons not entirely known.¹⁴ This community was considerably reinforced by fellow Old Believers during the early 1780s. According to Kaindl and Wickenhauser, the Austrian authorities only then took notice of this particular group of inhabitants of the newly acquired territory.¹⁵ Emperor Joseph II, who visited Bukovina personally in 1783, granted tolerance, free exercise of their religious customs, and even exception from military service (without temporal limitation) to the Lipovans; moreover, he gave them on this occasion dispensation from the duty of paying tax for 20 years.¹⁶ Already then, the community was esteemed among Austrian political authorities – and the Emperor himself – as particularly “industrious”, and obviously it was the prospect of gaining productive new subjects for populating this peripheral and war-torn Eastern border region of the Empire¹⁷ that caused the granting of these considerable privileges to a religious community already renown not only as hard-working and very ascetic – and pacifist – in their lifestyle, but at the same time rather stubborn in their world-view and conservatively sticking to what they considered ancient commands for proper conduct regarding all spheres of life.¹⁸

From the 1850s onwards, four Lipovan villages existed in Bukovina, in which the vast majority of the community members lived: Klimautz (Klimoutz, Climăuți, today in Moldova) and neighbouring Fontina Alba (Weissenbrunn, Fântâna Albă, Belaja Kriniza, Bila Krynyzja, today in Ukraine) in the Sereth District (Siret, Seret), and Lippowany-Sokolince (L.-Socolinți; Lypowany, Lipoweni, Lipoveni, today in Ukraine) near Mitoka Dragomirna (Mitocu-Dragomirnei, today in Romania) in the Suczawa District (Suceava, Sutschawa, Szuscáva) and Lippowany-Kossowanka (Lypowany, Lipoweni, Lipoveni) near Lukawetz (Lukawzi; Lypowany) in the Wiznitz District (Vijnița, Wyznycia, Wyschnyzja, today in Ukraine).¹⁹ Together these villages counted nearly 3,000 Lipovan inhabitants in 1857, and their number increased only slightly afterwards to about 3,200 in the early 1890s. The size of the community even dropped quite rapidly to about 2800 at the end of the decade.²⁰

One important reason for an “aversion” to military service was said to be a new army law issued in 1868, which obviously prompted a lot of young male Lipovans to leave permanently, since the government had started to try to recruit them, too, ignoring the privileges granted to the community by Joseph II.²¹ At the end of 1890, nearly 1,000 Lipovans lived in Fontina Alba,

14 Cf. POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 1, 3, 18; vol. 2, 9; DAN, *Völkerschaften*, vol. 1, 12; GOEHLERT, *Lipowaner*, 4.

15 Cf. KAINDL / WICKENHAUSER, *Entstehen*, esp. 10–11.

16 Cf. POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 1, 4–12; DAN, *Völkerschaften*, 13–14.

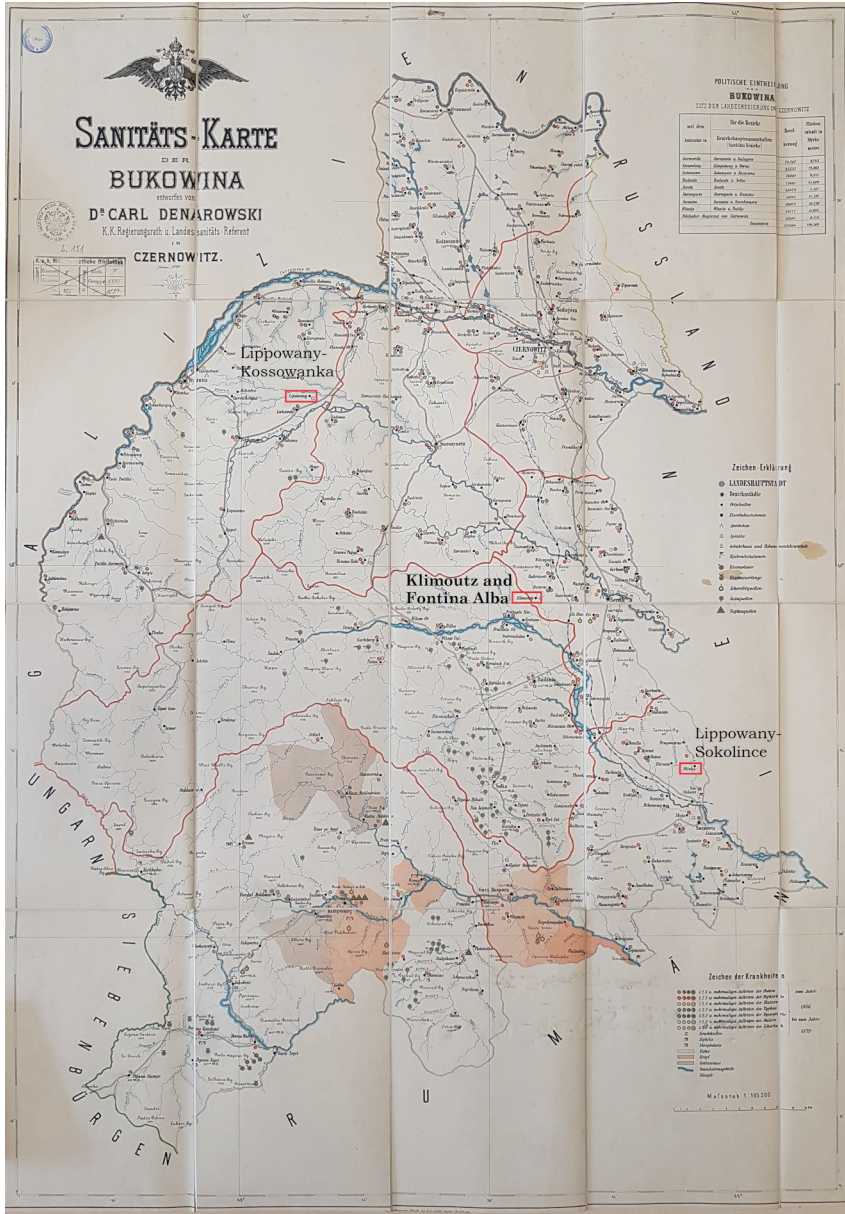
17 Cf. KAINDL / WICKENHAUSER, *Entstehen*, 13–14; POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 1, 11.

18 Cf. already the account of the military governor of Bukovina, Karl Freiherr von Enzenberg, who led negotiations with the Lipovans in the early 1780s: POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 1, 24.

19 GOEHLERT, *Lipowaner*, 12, names five. But from the “colony” of Mychdra / Mihodra a major part of inhabitants moved to neighbouring Lippowany-Kossowanka between the 1860s and the 1890s: Cf. KAINDL / WICKENHAUSER, *Entstehen*, esp. 45. For the geographical location of these villages see map 1.

20 Cf. POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 1, 21.

21 Already in 1873 it was conceded that Lipovans would be recruited for army assistance services only, a regulation that over time was accepted to a certain extent. Cf. POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 3, 43–45; DAN, *Völkerschaften*, vol. 1, 29–34; DAN, *Lipowaner*, 295.



Map. 1: The Lipovan communities of Klimautz & Fontina Alba, Lippowany-Kossowanka and Lippowany-Sokolince (marked by the author on a map of Bukovina from 1880), Source: Carl Denarowski, Sanitäts-Karte der Bukowina (Czernowitz 1880).

about 1,200 in Klimautz, nearly 500 in Lippowany-Sokolince, and about 300 in Lippowany-Kossowanka, along with some 250 in other places within Bukovina.²²

In terms of religious views and habits, the small population of Bukovina Lipovans was not at all homogenous; rather, there were several different currents of belief systems. A main difference was observed between those Lipovans (living mainly in Fontina Alba, Lippowany-Sokolince and Lippowany-Kossowanka) called “popovci” (“with priests”) and others (living primarily in Klimautz) called “bezpopovci” (“without priests”). The former, like the main churches of Christian Orthodoxy, regarded the distinct rank of priests as a God-given institution. The latter regarded the institution of priesthood as obsolete due to sins committed by the orthodox clergy in the past.²³ The “popovci” also maintained a cloister of lay monks in Fontina Alba, which they had founded in the late 18th century. In 1840, the Lipovan community there, due to the factual lack of a priest of their belief, intended to institute a spiritual head from outside, who would, among other duties, conduct pastoral care and education.²⁴

Secular authorities got involved, and some inquiries were made into the Lipovan belief system, though with little effort, because the community did not allow outsiders to attend to their religious ceremonies and the written information it handed over remained meagre, too. Until then the Lipovans had even successfully resisted keeping any written records on births, weddings and deaths (!) – a public obligation otherwise indiscriminately imposed on all subjects of the Austrian Empire as early as since the late 18th century.²⁵ This was probably not only due to their general distrust of secular political structures, but also because of their interest in impeding feared future taxation efforts (and eventually due to a lack of skills in reading and writing, too).²⁶

In 1846, the Bukovina Lipovan community finally succeeded in “recruiting” a spiritual head, which had been a difficult task, since the community was looking not just for a priest of their own peculiar faith, but rather for their “own” bishop. Thus the “popovci” would be able to establish a lineage of consecration on their own and a genuine Lipovan clergy. A “jobless” Greek-Orthodox ex-bishop from Bosnia indeed converted to the Lipovan confession and then took over a quite well-funded new bishop’s see in the tiny village of Fontina Alba.²⁷ Until the 1890s, the cloister there had grown to the extent of 50 inhabiting brethren and had risen in significance as a bishop’s see – a “Metropolitan of all old-believing Lipovans of the world” in their own terms, a “Swiatytel”, that is an auxiliary bishop, in the terms of Austrian secular authorities.²⁸

22 Cf. POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 1, 21; KAINDL / WICKENHAUSER, *Entstehen*, esp. 45, 55, 59–60.

23 Cf. POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 2, 7–11; DAN, *Völkerschaften*, vol. 1, 14; GOEHLERT, *Lipowaner*, 6.

24 Cf. POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 2, 17–19 and 44; DAN, *Völkerschaften*, vol. 1, p. 16; GOEHLERT, *Lipowaner*, 11.

25 Cf. POLEK, *Lippowaner*, esp. vol. 2, 20–21; Andreas WEIGL, *Quellen der Historischen Demographie*, in: Josef Pauser / Martin Scheutz / Thomas Winkelbauer, eds., *Quellenkunde der Habsburgermonarchie (16.–18. Jahrhundert)* (Wien–München 2004), 696–707, esp. 701.

26 Cf. GOEHLERT, *Lipowaner*, 8. The Lipovans on this occasion were regarded as being led by “blind religious fanaticism” by the relevant local authority. One still has to note that their successes in resisting being taxed, resulted in remarkable advantages in economic competition for the Lipovans. Austrian civil authorities were well aware of this, and sometimes supposed a direct nexus, too. For the matter of register books, the regional government enforced the implementation of relevant general laws around 1860 by installing a public officer from outside in Fontina Alba at the expense of the Lipovan community: Cf. KAINDL / WICKENHAUSER, *Entstehen*, esp. 76–81; POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 2, 22 and vol. 3, 33–43

27 Cf. POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 2, 28–31; DAN, *Völkerschaften*, vol. 1, esp. 16–21.

28 DAN, *Völkerschaften*, vol. 1, 27. This extraordinary status even led to substantial involvement of the Lipovan clergy in Fontina Alba into religious politics on a European scale. Cf. POLEK, *Lippowaner*, esp. vol. 2, 32–43; GOEHLERT, *Lipowaner*, 7.

One result of this success of the “popovci” was that tensions with the “bezpopovci” intensified. During the 1850s both factions even charged the other at the regional government of Bukovina as being new and heretic aberrations of the ancient, right belief of Lipovans. This incident, together with the fact that the Lipovans still opposed the observance of many secular laws, instigated the political authorities to conduct a formal inquiry into their religious and social customs. The first results confirmed, among other problems, the lasting fierce resistance of both branches of the community against epidemic protection measures. Moreover, the “popovci” of Fontina Alba also had founded – without notifying the secular authorities – a cloister for nuns next to the existing monastery in the village.²⁹

From the mid-19th century onwards, the “priest-less” Lipovans experienced internal divisions due to religious disputes, too, leading (quite paradoxically, from a rational standpoint) to the conversion of a large part of the “bezpopovci” to the Greek-Orthodox church as early as in the 1840s, but particularly from the 1870s. In the late 1890s, the number of “bezpopovci” thus had diminished to about 400.³⁰

The Lipovan lifestyle during the second half of the 19th century: archaism, community self-isolation and psychosocial avoidance patterns

Regarding the Lipovan lifestyle and attitudes in the late 19th century, the publications of Polek as well as Kaindl and Wickenhauser give very instructive information, although one has to be critical, of course, and take into account the particular positions and interests of the authors, who belonged among the intellectual, educated elites of the province’s capital and for certain had (like the author of this article) a quite critical stance towards the anti-intellectual, ritualistic and backward-oriented interpretation of the Christian faith the Lipovans obviously practised.³¹ Johann Goehlert, in turn, had been a public servant in the Ministry of the Interior in Vienna, and Demeter Dan was a priest of the Greek-Orthodox Church in Bukovina, both institutions which, for decades, were engaged in fierce confrontations with the Lipovans.³²

In the 1850s, Goehlert characterised the Lipovans as “commonly renowned as honest and industrious” on the one hand – but “with fear of all innovations” on the other. He stated explicitly that this did not only refer to spiritual doctrines, but to “any institution they did not inherit from their ancestors.”³³ This is a picture highly congruent with the public image the Lipovans tried to present of themselves; it becomes visible particularly by a petition text to the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of the Interior in 1858, in which the proponents unambiguously declared:

“We, the Old Believers, with unshakeable persistence adhere to our mores and fixed customs sanctified for centuries, and every innovation which can be felt as an obstacle offending our

29 Cf. POLEK, Lippowaner, vol. 2, 36–37 and 45–46. DAN, Völkerschaften, vol. 1, 30.

30 Cf. GOEHLERT, Lipowaner, 7; POLEK, Lippowaner, vol. 2, 48–51; DAN, Völkerschaften, vol. 1, 28; DAN, Lippowaner, 284; KAINDL / WICKENHAUSER, Entstehung, 78–79.

31 Dr. Johann Polek, born in Moravia, was head of the university library in Czernowitz and Dr. Raimund Kaindl was a university lecturer and the “k.k. Hauptlehrer” (“main teacher”) at the grammar school there. Cf. POLEK, Lippowaner, title page; KAINDL, Entstehen, title page. Also: HRYABAN, ‘Bukowina-Band’, 7–8.

32 GOEHLERT, Lipowaner, title page; DAN, Völkerschaften, vol. 1, title page.

33 GOEHLERT, Lipowaner, 8; cf. also: KAINDL / WICKENHAUSER, Entstehung, 74, POLEK, Lippowaner, vol. 3, 14.

conscience is, for us, unchangeably an impossibility. Our confession, like all confessions, has its conforming ecclesiastical side, but it is popular, since our religion is merged with the people, the latter being an ecclesiastic one indeed. What does not harmonise with our religion is in disharmony with our secular life, too.”³⁴

This habit (which can be labelled totalitarian in aspiration and theocratic in legitimation) actually meant, among other issues, a common repudiation of alcoholic drinks, tobacco, musical instruments (but not singing, which was allowed), as well as of new fashions in food, clothing, hairdressing (beards were obligatory for adult men) and so on. Moreover, strict ideas on feasting caused a denial of meat consumption for half of all days of the year. Even coffee and tea were for a long time despised as noxious alterations to traditional lifestyle, but factual behaviour, according to Polek, in this regard changed somewhat in late 19th century.³⁵

The mentioned patterns of avoidance very obviously had an ascetic component, as they particularly referred to substances and activities prohibited by religious commands, which are known as potential sources of (“worldly”) well-being or even of transgressive mental states usually experienced as joyful. In this, the Lipovan faith was not different fundamentally from other concepts of particularly “pious” Christian lifestyles³⁶ but was particularly strict regarding the range of prohibitions.³⁷

Regarding potential misjudgements within contemporary publications, it seems worth pointing towards a tendency to overestimate the homogeneity of “Lipovan culture” at a certain point in time, as well as to a certainly overestimated stability of cultural patterns over time.³⁸ This particular deficiency seems important but unspecific, because it was a common aspect of self-delusion among scholars in the 19th century (and later, too) to exaggerate the unity and

34 Cit in: DAN, *Völkerschaften*, vol. 1, 22–25. Cf. KAINDL / WICKENHAUSER, *Entstehen*, 73.

35 Cf. GOEHLERT, *Lipowaner*, 10–11; DAN, *Völkerschaften*, esp. 30; DAN, *Lipowaner*, 286 u. 290; POLEK, *Lipowaner*, vol. 3, esp. 6–7 and 13.

36 For early modern time Catholicism, cf. i.e. Carlos WATZKA, *Seelenheil und Seelenleid* (Stuttgart 2021).

37 To be clear about this, from the author’s point of view as a sociologist and historian of mentalities, there is no serious reason why we, as modern readers of these descriptions of Lipovan life in 19th century, should *not* take their central contents as appropriate displays of structures and actions factually prevailing among that particular community, even if some elements of the displays may sound quite strange to us, and even when taking into account the particular outsider position of the educated contemporary authors, who certainly looked with contempt on many issues of the Lipovan belief system. Although the Lipovans were a small minority group, they lived spatially embedded within Bukovina society and were in regular contact with outsiders – thus, their behaviour in public was at least visible for many observers in everyday life. Therefore, presenting some fictitious fairy tales as putative reality of the group’s conduct would not have worked well and would have damaged the credibility of the writers (in contrast to, i.e. ethnographic authors who narrate about the cultural life of “exotic” people living far away, who are not accessible for direct observation to the vast majority of readers). For sure, the outsider’s position of the authors yet led to some unconscious biases in their depictions, let alone open and deliberate devaluations, which can be easily found in some of the texts. Dan for instance, with obvious pleasure, hinted several times at discrepancies between the official religious doctrines of the Lipovans and the factual behaviour of at least a considerable portion of them, naming putatively frequent transgressions of the proscription of alcoholic drinks and dancing. Cf. DAN, *Völkerschaften*, vol. 1, 31. “Tendential” displays of the Lipovans’ habits already were criticised by: KAINDL / WICKENHAUSER, *Entstehen*, 71. There, even a contemporary statistical account is cited, which computed a significant difference in the frequency of crimes – in favour of the Lipovans compared with other confessions.

38 Cf. esp. POLEK, *Lipowaner*, vol. 3.

intelligibility of phenomena they dealt with professionally.³⁹ Moreover, some parts of contemporary descriptions of Lipovans could be interpreted misleadingly as sketching the “unique” cultural features, which, in fact, they were not. For instance, similar patterns of archaism as cultivated among the Lipovans can be found in quite a lot of religious groups, especially minority cults, during historical periods from antiquity to the present.⁴⁰

But it seems important here to note that such an attitude of refusal of “any alterations” acquired a very strong emotional component – in general and among the Lipovans, too: Goehlert referred to it as “timidity”. Dan called the behavioural pattern of self-isolation of the Bukovina Lipovans, who nearly all lived in very small, religiously near-homogenous villages, “anxious”. Kaindl and Wickenhauser stated a “reluctance” to “locating together with persons of different faith”, moreover citing a report on the “mistrust” against all potential change intruding from the outside world being a characteristic of the Lipovans’ common mindset. Goehlert mentions the “strong isolation” of the community but also the “commonality of attitudes” and the “unquestioned validity of tradition” among them. These can be seen as features continuously reproduced by a strong presence of fear.⁴¹ These aspects, from a sociological standpoint, primarily serve the functional need of a particularly high group cohesion⁴² of such small collectives for their survival over time. This attitude of avoidance of external contacts extended to all areas of life, except activities directly necessary for pragmatic reasons – foremost securing a means of subsistence via commercial exchange. The latter was exercised by some Lipovans with remarkable success, since many of them were skilled and industrious in agricultural – particular pomicultural – and handicraft production; moreover, in commercial exchanges they profited from their privileged tax status.⁴³ Necessary practical knowledge was transferred to the offspring within families and communities without the need for institutions like schools, which the Lipovans did not establish for a long time within their villages, as they were “opposed to the institution of regular elementary schools”, too.⁴⁴ The reluctance against anything “new”, according to Goehlert – until around 1860 – had even caused them to regard any books as dangerous for their spiritual life that had been edited after the mid-17th century, when the revisions of orthodox religious texts by Patriarch Nikon of Moscow had taken place and caused of the separation of the Lipovans from main current of the Orthodox Faith.⁴⁵ Polek characterised the Lipovans’ opinions on secular education as follows still in 1899:

“The Lipovan [sic] attaches little value to intellectual education. Currently, each Lipovan community has a school, but the teachers, mostly ignorant peasants, pursue no other goal than instructing the children in reading Church Slavonic books, writing Russian rudimentarily and learning some

39 Cf. HRYABAN, ‘Bukowina-Band’, esp. 6–7, who refers, deservedly, to the ground-breaking critical analysis of both scientific and popular world explanations with regard to their situational, practical political usability: Pierre BOURDIEU, *Le sens pratique* (Paris 1980).

40 Cf. Christoph AUFFARTH et al., *Archaismus*, in: Christoph Auffarth et al., eds., *Lexikon Religion* (Stuttgart 2005), 89; for a detailed, up-to-date discussion from a sociological perspective: Cyril ISNART, ed., *The Religious Heritage Complex* (London 2021); one contribution there particularly relates to the Lipovans: Cristina CLOPOT, *Iconography and Religious Heritage. The Russian Old Believers of Romania*, in: ISNART, ed., *Religious Heritage*, 37–50.

41 GOEHLERT, *Lipowaner*, 9; DAN, *Lipowaner*, 288; KAINDL / WICKENHAUSER, *Entstehen*, 73–75.

42 Cf. i. e. Donelson FORSYTH, *Group Dynamics* (Belmont 2014).

43 Cf. GOEHLERT, *Lipowaner*, 11; DAN, *Völkerschaften*, vol. 1, 30 and 33; DAN, *Lipowaner*, 288 and 294.

44 GOEHLERT, *Lipowaner*, 10.

45 Cf. GOEHLERT, *Lipowaner*, 10.

ecclesiastical chants. All other knowledge for the Lipovans seems to be more a danger to the faith than an enrichment of understanding.”⁴⁶

A far-reaching rejection of even secular medicine was regarded as a particular feature of this mindset, comprising a harsh refusal of vaccinations, too – the particular issue of interest here.

Fear of state authorities and medical experts and the aspiration for purity and self-reliance as motives for Lipovan anti-vaccinationism

In their petition to the imperial government in 1858, the Lipovan representatives asked to be exempted, “as in the past”, from several state laws, naming as “unacceptable demands”: “The introduction of registers, cow pox vaccination, magisterial consent in weddings, confirmations of medical inspections in deaths, oaths and other political and administrative regulations, which we were not forced to comply with [...] since our arrival in Bukovina”. On the issues of medical treatment and vaccination in particular, the petition then says:

“Against cow pox vaccination we have maximum repugnance, because our religious doctrines explicitly forbid any mixture of blood with animal materials. The love for order, cleanliness, frequent and strict fasting keep illnesses away from us and we do not have any example that one of our 2,000 religious fellows would have died from smallpox. Likewise, we do not accept physicians, because on one hand we hold illnesses to be temporal infestations sent from above, and on the other hand we ascribe the curing of sicknesses not to human art, but to the One, whose ineffable name has redeemed us from the most severe illness of original sin and whose unresearchable decisions guide our sorrow and all our joy.”⁴⁷

As visible here, a concept of purity – both spiritual and material – played an important role in shaping the religious beliefs of the Lipovans. Nineteenth century publications on their lifestyle expressly state that the Lipovans regarded all outsiders as “impure”, which led to complicated procedures to keep some physical distance to things that had been in direct contact with a non-believer’s body.⁴⁸

Of course, the issue of purity is closely connected to emotionally important habits of risk-management, thus relating directly to the topic of infections and epidemics prevention, too.⁴⁹ Quite obviously, in psychological terms, observing religious rites worked for groups like the Lipovans in these days as the functional equivalent of the more empirically based norms of

46 POLEK, Lippowaner, vol. 3, 9. Dan nonetheless recognised some changes in the concerning attitudes of at least parts of the Lipovans in late 19th century: cf. DAN, Völkerschaften, vol. 1, 31; DAN, Lipowaner, 290.

47 Cit. in. DAN, Völkerschaften, vol. 1, 22–23. The shared views of Lipovans on smallpox protection reported by a government official one year before was very similar. Cf. POLEK, Lippowaner, vol. 3, 25.

48 Cf. DAN, Völkerschaften, vol. 1, 31; DAN, Lipowaner, 288–290; KAINDL / WICKENHAUSER, Entstehen, 75–76.

49 Cf. Mary DOUGLAS, Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (London 1966). In case of late 19th century Lipovans, particular ritual purification practices relating to childbed and birth, are known, too. Cf. POLEK, Lippowaner, vol. 3, 18.

hygiene that had prevailed in the main current of European culture already for centuries by then and had intensified by and large in late 19th century due to the spectacular successes of modern microbiological research.⁵⁰ Yet, the Lipovans in late 19th century still tried to find calm by traditional manners only: in religious beliefs, and sometimes in practices regarded “magical” by their more “enlightened” contemporaries, too.⁵¹

But the official statement of the Lipovans dating from 1858 primarily exhibits an attitude of fatalism towards Earthly dangers, since it openly states that the purposeful neglect of potential medical help was held to be a religious virtue. Of course, this opinion was severely criticised by virtually all “outsiders”. An official report on the Lipovans by a local officer in 1844 stated:

“They try to suppress any epidemics among humans and animals by silencing them, for not allowing any physician to enter their house, because they live in the delusion that the physician would not be a professional summoned in order to mitigate corporeal sufferings, but a creature of extraordinary evil power that could not operate [positively] for a proper believer.”⁵²

In 1896, Polek reported some more details on the Lipovan “medical culture”, which obviously was coined by a drive towards self-reliance, too, in using “natural”, easily accessible remedies only:

“Each Lipovan used to take a bath before Sun- and Holidays, in summer and in winter. [...] Usually several bathe together [...]. Afterwards, they recreate themselves in a brook running besides. [...]. But if an illness befalls a Lipovan, he never calls a physician. He expects help from God only. To gain it, he prays or shares alms [...]. Else he applies, depending on the sickness, sweating baths, cold washings and tea from elderberry or linden blooms, peppermint or forest clover, or he drinks a glass of brandy [...] or uses totally superstitious means.”⁵³

Such supposedly “purifying” remedies of a “common” kind had the advantage of being applicable without the consultation of some medical professional from the outside world. External criticism did not only relate to the denial of secular professional knowledge among the Lipovans; even their theology was attacked on these grounds – since it could be proven to rely on a very selective, not to say an idiosyncratic interpretation of the “Word of God” laid down in the Bible: Wasn’t it already said in Jesus Sirach (Ecclesiasticus):

“Treat the doctor with the honour that is his due, in consideration of his services; for he, too, has been created by the Lord. Healing itself comes from the Most High, like a gift received from a king. [...] The Lord has brought forth medicinal herbs from the ground, and no one sensible will

50 Cf. i.e. Mark HARRISON, *Disease and the Modern World. 1500 to the Present Day* (Cambridge–Malden 2013); LOUIS MAGNER, *A History of Infectious Diseases and the Microbial World* (Westport 2009).

51 Cf. esp. POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 3, 25 and 32: The author mentions magical healing practices – for any kind of disease – operating with analogies, i.e. leaving money for (otherwise despised) alcoholic drinks or half of such a drink itself at a tavern, citing a spell, wishing that the sickness shall remain there, too.

52 Cited in: KAINDL / WICKENHAUSER, *Entstehen*, 81.

53 POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 3, 25.

despise them. [...] He has also given some people knowledge [...]. He uses these for healing and relieving pain; the druggist makes up a mixture from them.”⁵⁴

The particular contents of disputes on theological matters with representatives of the Lipovans are not known, but one can be quite sure that such biblical references played an important role – yet, for a long time without success, as is presented below. Authorities had hoped that strict refusal of vaccination would stop after the Lipovan communities experienced a great many deaths due to variola during the 1870s, when their communities were even forcibly isolated by the military, but for the time being “everything remained like before”.⁵⁵

Smallpox among the Bukovina Lipovans in 1898/1899 and the protracted administrative struggle for its control fought between Vienna, Czernowitz, Sereth and Klimoutz

As already pointed out, there was a distinct decrease in smallpox mortality within the Austrian Empire in general during the 1890s due to improvements in vaccination techniques and systematic extension of the relevant prevention campaigns to large parts of the entire population. Therefore, the new sharp rise in variola cases and deaths in 1897/1898, which were concentrated almost exclusively on the two Eastern regions of Galicia and Bukovina, attracted quite thorough attention even at the Imperial Government in Vienna, namely in the Ministry of the Interior, which was responsible for health issues at that time. As mortality rates were particularly high in Bukovina, where the epidemic also seemed to have started, a special inquiry was conducted into the sanitary situation in the region – and foremost on the Lipovans living there, already known as fierce opponents of vaccination. Thus, ample official records on this issue were produced not only in Bukovina itself, but also within the Ministry of the Interior in Vienna. Therefore, the pertinent files, accessible for research in the Austrian National Archive today, offer detailed insights into this last epidemic outbreak of smallpox within the Habsburg monarchy before WWI.

Moreover, the topic was dealt with publicly and at length in the journal *Das Österreichische Sanitätswesen* („ÖSW“) already in 1899.⁵⁶ The pertinent, anonymously published article “Die Infektionskrankheiten im Jahre 1898” cites from a report sent in by the Sereth/Siret District. In it, the “epidemic in the Lipovan communities Klimoutz and Fontina Alba” was noted as being of “particular interest” because of the high concentration of incidences there

54 Sir 38, 1–4. This text, dating from the early second century before Christ, although a „late writing“ within the Old Testament, had become a standard part of the biblical canon in European Christianity since the editing of the Septuaginta – the Greek translation of the Hebrew and Aramaic sources, and therefore was part of the early, commonly acknowledged versions of the Bible in Russian Orthodoxy, too. A first complete printed edition in Cyrillic letters, the so-called Ostrog Bible, was issued in 1581. Cf. Henry R. COOPER, *The Formation of the Church Slavonic Version of the Holy Bible* (Madison–London 2003), esp. 130–145.

The English version of Jesus Sirach is cited above according to the text at “Catholic Online”: https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=28&bible_chapter=38.

55 POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 3, 25. In 1813, the Lipovans even managed to get officially exempted from “forced vaccination” by a decree of the Bukovina government. Cf. *ibid.*

56 N.N., *Die Infektionskrankheiten im Jahre 1898*. In: *ÖSW* 11 (1899), 443–448, 456–461, 467–471.

compared to the rest of the district: Whereas in the other 21 communities only one in 200 persons was reported to have fallen ill in 1898, for Klimoutz and Fontina Alba, morbidity of more than a quarter of the whole population was registered! Of course, sanitary officials directly referred to lack of earlier vaccinations within the Lipovan community. Interestingly, the article also says that the positive habits of the community had motivated their acceptance as immigrants to the region in the late 18th century, but then pointed out that the opinion of state authorities on them would have changed “due to their resistance against all regulatory orders”. Regarding the repudiation of vaccination it summarised: “They resisted vaccination, stating the argument that their faith would prohibit a mixture of blood with animal matters or with the content of the pustules of heterodox persons.”⁵⁷

The fact that medical treatment in general was seen with suspicion and largely dismissed by contemporary Lipovans was also reported. Regarding the refusal of prevention measures against variola, the article moreover reproduces an argument not yet known from the literature on Lipovan history: “Smallpox is viewed as an illness that purifies the blood [!] and protects the body from other diseases.” Obviously a direct link between getting – and surviving – variola and being a “pure” human being thus was established in Lipovan ideology.⁵⁸ The article continues: “Based on such principles, the resistance of the population to all orders regarding sanitary policy become understandable and the quick spread of smallpox explainable.”⁵⁹

The article then pointed to some differences among the local population, too. The reader was informed that the community of Klimoutz, in contrast to that of Fontina Alba, did not exclusively consist of Lipovans but also had a few Ruthenian, German and Jewish inhabitants. Further, the difference between the “popovci” and the “bezpopovci” was mentioned, moreover the fact that a smaller part of the Bukovina Lipovans – labelled as “the progressive element” – had converted to the Greek-Orthodox Church during the last decades. Particular attention was paid to the occupational activities of the community because of their potential epidemiological consequences: Many Lipovans were then active in earthwork and fruit trade, both professions which caused them to travel a lot throughout large parts of the year, thus probably spreading the virus enormously.⁶⁰ Of course, this caused particular worries, even though the high risk of transmission through fruit handling was perhaps not explicitly picked up. But it was revealed to the public that the Lipovan community had totally concealed most of the early cases of the current epidemic for three months, from the probable start in July until October of 1898, and had not looked for medical help either: “Only in October, when police were ordered there to supervise the sanitary measures because of massed incidences of smallpox and their heavy, often deadly course, a more reliable registration of the diseased was achieved.”⁶¹

57 Ibid., 445.

58 Yet in early modern medical thought, smallpox had been quite commonly interpreted as a sickness of the blood. Cf. Karel CERNÝ, Protection from Smallpox before 1700. The “Buying of Pustules” in Early Modern Central Europe, in: *Virus. Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Medizin* 20 (2021), 41–53, esp. 47. Therefore, the pertaining concept among the Lipovans seems to reflect traditional medical attitudes, too, thus (implicitly) referring to the traditional doctrines of humoral pathology.

59 N.N., *Infektionskrankheiten*, 446.

60 For this issue, cf. DAN, *Lipowaner*, 294, too, who reports that the fruit trade activities of the community often implied border-crossing to Romania or Russia, too, another aspect of potential epidemic spread.

61 N.N., *Infektionskrankheiten*, 447.

It was also stated that the fatalities caused by the contagion among Lipovans were nearly all children: 335 out of 339 cases of infection with smallpox in Klimoutz and Fontina Alba, registered in a first stage, related to children. With the exception of two diseased non-Lipovan inhabitants, none of the infected had undergone immunisation for smallpox before. Ninety of the children died of the disease.

One can assume that the fact that children were primarily affected was one reason why the strategy of neglect and non-treatment “worked” for the Lipovans themselves for such a long time. Children, as ever, were particularly vulnerable and had little social power and agency. Moreover, in this case, they were situated within a community with – even in contemporary comparison – a highly patriarchal worldview.⁶² Most of the adults in both communities, in contrast, probably had undergone infection with smallpox during earlier stages of their lives. In fact, they were survivors of earlier epidemics and therefore had high grades of “natural” immunisation against a new variola infection, as the journal article explicitly points out.

The health officer in charge had examined all households in the winter of 1898 and found a portion of about two-thirds of the population bearing the typical, visible signs of earlier smallpox infection. Moreover, he observed many infections had been concealed until then. Therefore, more than a quarter of the whole local population in Klimoutz and Fontina Alba must have acquired smallpox in 1898.⁶³ The journal article on the issue concludes by stating the measures taken by sanitary authorities: Emergency vaccination, of course, but also – quite moderate – limitations of traffic to and from the communities. Finally, it sums up:

“The fact that smallpox could spread so extensively just among both Lipovan communities in 1898, whilst for the other communities of the district of Sereth, for which vaccination state is regarded favourable, [...] only occasional cases of infection with smallpox were observed [...] is renewed proof of the beneficial effect of vaccination against variola.”⁶⁴

This, of course, was the main lesson the journal editors, as well as Austrian sanitary officials, wished their readers to learn and disseminate from that “micro-history”.⁶⁵ Yet, the journal article provides little information about the Lipovans’ perceptions and judgements of the whole issue. Some more detailed insights into them, and in particular into the reactions of regional and local authorities, could be gained by examining the Viennese archival sources already mentioned.⁶⁶

The chronologically first notice regarding a specific smallpox problem in Bukovina dates from mid-August 1898, after several inconspicuous weekly reports on epidemic matters sent from Czernowitz, and set out only small numbers of incidences, explaining them, if at all, as imported from Romania.⁶⁷ But an official report, dated 19 August, then referred:

62 Cf. POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 3, 16.

63 N.N., *Infectionskrankheiten*, 447.

64 N.N., *Infectionskrankheiten*, 448.

65 Of course, no “objective” proof exists whether the Lipovans were right and kept their souls pure for the “other world” by refusing to get vaccinated, in contrast to the majority of Europeans of these days, who held more worldly views. We only know that an appallingly high share of children had only a very short existence in this life due to a death that would have been avoidable in most instances by the precaution of vaccination.

66 ÖSTA, AVA, Mdl, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031, 1032, 1033: *Epidemien Inland 1898 und 1899*.

67 ÖSTA, AVA, Mdl, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031, Nr. 25376/98.

“Within the Lipovan community Klimoutz [...] one incidence of smallpox occurred. Given that the Lipovans repudiate vaccination obstinately with fanatical stubbornness and, as a people engaged in commerce, could easily disseminate smallpox by steady traffic, the most extensive dispositions were conducted to avoid a further spread of the disease.”⁶⁸

Obviously, the spread of variola to the Lipovan areas had attracted some attention by the provincial authorities right from the point when they were informed about it, even if only a single incidence was officially reported in the beginning. Their report conceded that there was eminent epidemiological danger for the whole region but indicated that the “most extensive” measures – not yet defined in detail – had been already taken. The following weekly reports to Vienna related somewhat higher but still minimal numbers of infections.⁶⁹

But a further file, dating from 21 September, told that the highest ranking health official in Bukovina had moved to the Sereth District personally and tried to persuade “the spiritual head of the Lipovans” to “interfere with the community by instruction and elucidation”, to get them to “participate in protection by vaccination”. That medical officer obviously tried to treat the “religious sentiments” of the Lipovans with care, arguing that vaccination would not be a matter of religious rules or faith but a mere “secular matter” – yet without success.

The weekly reports from October then displayed growing numbers of variola infections for both the villages of Klimoutz and Fontina Alba, without giving much additional detail, but naming the inhabitants as “Impfrenitenten” (“vaccination refusers”) or “Impfgegner” (“vaccination opponents”).⁷⁰ Therefore, the community was assigned a clear, pejoratively intended “label”. The sanitary report of the last week of that month then provoked the first traceable reaction within the Ministry of the Interior, which – according to the draft of a reply – ruled that provisions against the further dissemination of the disease into neighbouring communities should be conducted “with all insistence”, that the further course of the epidemic had to be reported continuously and, moreover, a report with “scientific exactness”, which could be used for a publication, had to be prepared at the end of the epidemic.⁷¹ Interestingly, the response letter to the regional government did not mention anything about how to handle the smallpox cases within the Lipovan communities themselves, thus leaving these decisions to the regional and local administration levels.

Subsequent weekly reports in November again stated rising numbers of variola cases in Klimoutz and Fontina Alba (i.e. more than 100 in the second week alone) but repeated that the “most extensive” measures against spread of the epidemic already would have been implemented.⁷² Moreover, the regional government asserted that further information was being collected, and some details on the supposed proliferation of the disease from Klimoutz to Alba Julia were

68 ÖSTA, AVA, MdI, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031: Nr. 27905/98.

69 ÖSTA, AVA, MdI, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031: 28544/98 and 30902/98.

70 ÖSTA, AVA, MdI, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031: 34689/98 and 33891/98.

71 ÖSTA, AVA, MdI, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031: 36255/98. Obviously, there was already a plan of using the Lipovan anti-vaxxers-case for a public statement to the professional sanitary community. In November / December 1899, the short report indeed appeared in print as part of the article: N.N., Infektionskrankheiten.

72 ÖSTA, AVA, MdI, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031: 38300/98.

presented. Most interestingly, the report tells that the acting provincial sanitary officer, Dr. Basil Kluczenko (1844 – after 1913),⁷³ negotiated personally with the bishop of the “with priests” Lipovans, but in vain, with “stubbornness and religious fanaticism of the Lipovans”, named as the causes of this failure.⁷⁴ At least, among the non-Lipovan inhabitants of neighbouring villages, an “emergency vaccination” was conducted with success.

In mid-November, the Bukovina regional government finally felt compelled to inform all district authorities within the country – but also the vicegerency of Galicia and the Russian and the Romanian consulates in Czernowitz – about the serious state of the epidemic on site, and now instigated the “emergency vaccination” of persons not yet protected against variola within all parts of the country. The pertinent report sent to Vienna on 16 November⁷⁵ again asserted that all necessary provisions had already been taken and claimed a reduction of proliferation of the disease outside the Sereth District to nearly zero; it was signed personally by the head of the state government in Bukovina, Friedrich Bourguignon von Baumberg (1846–1907), vicegerent of Bukovina from 1897 to 1903.⁷⁶ This was a clear sign that the topic was, in fact, regarded as a serious problem. More detailed information was now given to the Ministry in Vienna through an annexed copy of a decree issued to the district authority in Sereth in August 1898. It literally ordered:

“1. Most strict isolation of the sick. To enforce this, a contaminated house must be put under guard, if necessary. 2. Diligent disinfection of the whole surroundings of the sick, accommodation, clothing, laundry, etc. 3. Strict enactment of the notification duty. Because not much can be expected from the population in this regard, the status must be ascertained precisely [by officials] by going from house to house; and every new case of smallpox is to be reported to the district authority immediately. 4. Emergency and re-vaccination to the broadest extent. 5. Most strict surveillance of the travel traffic outgoing from the polluted community [...] it must be prevented in any case that persons from houses infected by smallpox be allowed to travel to the outside, until their unsuspecting state of health and the disinfection of any suspicious matters are ascertained by a physician.”⁷⁷

These measures certainly sound quite severe at first glance, but since their primary addressee was a “community physician” (“Gemeindearzt”) who continued to reside in the town of Hadikfalva (Dornești), about 20 kilometres away from Klimoutz, and moreover who had to care for 13 communities and estates in the surrounding region,⁷⁸ it seems very questionable, how such thorough surveillance of an uncooperative local population could have worked. This impression is strongly reinforced by the fact that there were no police stations in the small villages of Klimoutz and Fontina Alba. Therefore, the mentioned “guards” had to go for a peculiar “patrol”

73 For biographical data on Basil Kluczenko, cf. ÖAW, ed., *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon*. Online: https://www.biographien.ac.at/oeb1/oeb1_K/Kluczenko_Basil_1844_.xml.

74 ÖSTA, AVA, Mdl, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031: 38300/98.

75 Ibid.

76 For biographical data, cf. Karl GUTKAS, *Geschichte des Landes Niederösterreich* (St. Pölten 1983), 566–567.

77 Record Nr. 16624, dated 13 August 1898, copy in: ÖSTA, AVA, Mdl, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031: 38300/98.

78 Kundmachung der Bukowinaer k.k. Landesregierung vom 27. April 1895, Z. 6788. Printed in: ÖSW 7 (1895), 289–294.

each time from outside (!).⁷⁹ These circumstances throw a sobering light on the miseries of factual sanitary control efforts in areas as remote and economically insignificant as rural Bukovina was in these days, at least from the standpoint of the Austrian central government.⁸⁰ The proclaimed aims of “biopolitical” control and factual possibilities to exert it were certainly quite different things – yet, this insight was quite inconvenient for state administration itself, and therefore probably silenced to a remarkable extent as long as possible. Like for centuries before, direct central state interference in such areas still was, by and large, limited to “extraordinary occasions” – like rebellions, wars, or visits by an emperor, and “ordinary folks” were mostly left to themselves, as long as taxes imposed were paid. As we have already seen, the Lipovans had an exemption even for that matter, as they were not obligated to pay direct state taxes and had even resisted official registration of persons and property quite successfully until the last decades of the 19th century. In the Bukovina case, the assertion of an effective public sanitary regime had, moreover, been seriously hindered by the poverty of the region, as the vicegerency itself conceded repeatedly – for instance in a decree from 1894 concerning the difficulties of putting into effect the measures against cholera scheduled by the Viennese central government.⁸¹

During the first stage of the smallpox outbreak in summer and autumn of 1898, both affected Lipovan communities apparently did not comply at all to the officially decreed sanitary precautions – not only with regard to potential vaccination, but also by continuing their travelling trade, upon which they relied heavily to make their living.

But none of this probably came to the attention of Viennese ministerial authority until mid-November of that year, when inconsistencies in earlier reports sent from Czernowitz obviously generated some mistrust against the truthfulness of these declarations. Now, the regional government was asked explicitly, “whether and in what manner the isolated accommodation and treatment of persons suffering from smallpox was provided, and if the peddling trade was prohibited in the communities struck by variola.”⁸²

Remarkably, the vicegerency of Bukovina did not answer this question directly at all but instead sent the usual, formal weekly report, notifying of decreasing numbers of infections, complemented simply with a cut-out from a local newspaper, which reproduced in length a decree issued by the district authority head for Sereth on 12 November, saying:

“On the occasion of a smallpox epidemic reigning to a considerable extent within the communities of Fontina Alba (Bilakiernica) and Klimoutz of this district, I find myself urged to make the following provisions for the duration of this epidemic, for the purpose of avoiding to the greatest extent possible the dissemination of the smallpox by travel traffic from those communities [...]:

1. Persons whose houses are struck by the smallpox disease may not, under any circumstances, leave the locality of their domicile for the duration of the danger of infection.
2. Persons from families with no existing smallpox diseases or where the mentioned infectious disease has already expired must notify of their scheduled departure – even if only for a short leave – to the pertinent

79 Record Nr. 16624, dated 13 August 1898, copy in: ÖSTA, AVA, MdI, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031: 38300/98.

80 For this topic, cf. esp. WATZKA, Disease Prevention.

81 Decree by Bukowinean Landesregierung, 18 November 1894, Nr. 20857. Published in: ÖSW 6 (1894), 683.

82 ÖSTA, AVA, MdI, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031: 38300/98.

community head and may commence it only after reliable disinfection of their travel items has been done and after the approval of a travel certificate issued by the community head and countersigned by the exposed imperial-royal police officer. 3. This certificate is valid for only one journey and must be renewed for every repetition of a departure. 4. The travel certificate must be issued in the name of the traveller, specifying his age and the destination of travel [...]. 5. The head of the community [...] must inform the community where the departing person is going, of his imminent time of arrival. 6. At the destination community the relevant travellers must register themselves at the community office displaying the certificate. 7. The perpetrators against these orders must be notified of the relevant crime court for punishment according to § 393 of the penalty code.”⁸³

Most remarkable, it seems likely that the measures proclaimed to the public with this decree were ordered for the first time at this point in time – in mid-November (!) – that is three months after the first notice of smallpox cases among the unvaccinated Lipovans, when the regional government claimed to have already taken up the “most extensive dispositions” against a potential epidemic spread.

At least at some point between August and November, some police officer obviously indeed was “exposed” continuously to Klimoutz to monitor the implementation of sanitary regulations there, as this measure is mentioned in the cited announcement. Regarding the impending punishment for perpetrators, it might be added that the cited law⁸⁴ was vague and left the scale entirely open to the judgement of the individual case – a further hint towards the rather “clement” attitude of contemporary local authorities in regard to sanitary matters.

In any case, whatever measures actually were taken against further proliferation of the disease, they did not succeed: the numbers of registered infections fell somewhat during December 1898 in Klimoutz and Fontina Alba, but now the Bukovina authorities had to report infections in several other communities scattered over four districts of the province, too.⁸⁵ As mainly the Sereth and the neighbouring Strozynetz districts were hit, the geographical pattern of the spread could only be seen as a result of failure of local prevention measures taken in the Lipovan communities. Yet the vicegerency’s report to Vienna remained tacit about the assumed paths of dispersion of the illness, mainly hinting for individual cases to an alleged “import” from Galicia. Quite probably, the regional authority thus tried to avoid occasions for unnecessary discussions on its own potential neglect in the past. But this tactic did not work; further detailed information was demanded, and thus the vicegerency in Czernowitz had to submit a further report. This text, provided on 12 December, explained among other issues that

“in the Lipovan communities of Klimoutz and Fontina Alba, which are hit by a heavy and extensive smallpox epidemic, special isolation localities for the persons infected with variola were not [!] erected, because according to experiences hitherto, one must assume with full certainty, that the relevant families would have completely refused to turn over these persons to the isolation houses.”⁸⁶

83 Local journal cut-out, stored in file: Ibid.

84 Strafgesetz vom 1. September 1852. Published in: Reichsgesetzblatt 1852, 36. Stück, Nr. 117.

85 ÖSTA, AVA, Mdl, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031: 40018/98; 40633/98; 41662-98

86 ÖSTA, AVA, Mdl, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031: 41974-98.

In sum, regional authorities seem to have been quite helpless, but maybe indifference played a role in the obvious neglect of legal regulations, too – which of course would not be openly declared by public officials. The report continued, asserting that “foreign persons” – what this actually meant remained unclear – “with full severity” were prohibited to enter the houses of the infected and that at the end of each infection a “diligent disinfection” was done. Concerning trafficking, it was claimed that “rural communities in this country” would be rarely visited by external traders, because of the “lack of needs” of the peasant population. Afterwards, the report admitted that the peddling trade had likewise not been prohibited in the area until recent (!). Instead, the vicegerency declared that it had *now* issued some decree to the district authorities, still leaving the issue of “in which cases and by which manner” temporal prohibitions of travelling commerce should be imposed, up to them.⁸⁷

Interestingly, the pertinent record at the Ministry of Interior in Vienna does not provide hints about negative reactions on the sloppy way of dealing with its regulations. The smallpox epidemic in Bukovina, although attracting some attention, was probably at that point in time considered a local and minor problem among Viennese bureaucrats, not worth engaging in an open confrontation with their somewhat negligent colleagues in Czernowitz. The ministerial reply sent there on 29 December 1898 merely encouraged them to “consider” the provision of emergency and ordinary vaccinations in the region during the following year.⁸⁸

In mid-January of 1899 the Bukovina vicegerent felt the need to report to Vienna that the region currently would suffer from “repeated carry-overs of smallpox from Galicia, Romania and Russia”, thus scapegoating all available neighbouring countries for the persistent trouble. Furthermore, annual vaccination statistics within the whole province in 1898 were delivered, adding the quite indisputable fact that greater damage was avoided by them. Regarding the Lipovans, the new account wrote:

“The large dangers of dispersion of smallpox by the vaccination-opponent Lipovans population in the communities of Fontina Alba and Klimoutz have been overcome, too, because variola now occurs only sporadically in these communities.”⁸⁹

Yet, the weekly report for the second week of January in 1899 already sends a somewhat different message, as smallpox had now spread further to other districts of the country – and to the Lipovan community of Lippowany-Kossowanka near Lukawetz in particular.⁹⁰

The subsequent weekly statements sent to Vienna each reported around 40 cases of variola infections for Lipoweni-Lukawetz, but only 10 to 20 for the whole rest of Bukovina, and none for Klimoutz and Fontina Alba. In February 1899 the contagion even reached Czernowitz, the

87 ÖSTA, AVA, Mdl, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031: 41974-98. The text of the attached decree moreover gives the impression that the vicegerency in Czernowitz did not know exactly which kind of decrees had already been issued on the topic by its subordinate authority in Sereth, and which not. Moreover, only the prohibition of the peddling trade “within the communities infected by smallpox” was prohibited explicitly – but nothing was said about inhabitants of such places commuting outwards for commerce.

88 ÖSTA, AVA, Mdl, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031: 41974-98.

89 ÖSTA, AVA, Mdl, Sanitätsakten: K. 1032: 3046/99.

90 This report was filed wrongly among the records of 1898: ÖSTA, AVA, Mdl, Sanitätsakten: K. 1031: 42892/98.

capital city of Bukovina.⁹¹ It did not end in the spring, causing a sanitary official in Vienna to comment on 1 April within a record file that “in the face of the notorious insolence of the [Bukovina] population, further diffusion in Czernowitz is very likely.”⁹²

Moreover, a critique on the lack of explanations given by regional authorities on the origin of the disease within several districts was now written into the ministry’s records. On 18 March the provincial government issued another decree on vaccination, now saying:

“The imperial-royal government of the country sets high value on finally including the Lipovans into the immunisation. Therefore, the Lipovan communities [...] are also to be integrated into vaccination sections and scheduled dates shall be announced in time. With respect to the particular importance [...] the performance of the vaccination has to be assigned to the imperial-royal authority’s physician.”⁹³

Subsequent weekly statistics on the epidemic in Bukovina then showed only moderate numbers of new cases of smallpox throughout the country and no longer mentioned the Lipovan communities in this regard. Yet, the significance of this silence remains somewhat unclear. But the focus of attention at that point had probably shifted considerably among the involved state authorities, since the disease had reached the provincial capital. Obviously even there, only part of the infected were taken, as ordered, to isolation localities.⁹⁴

In April 1899, as the health of urban dwellers was in visible danger, too, the vicegerency in Czernowitz was finally “urgently invited” by the Ministry of the Interior “to have an adequate handling of the eradication measures of the sanitary police” (!).⁹⁵ Interestingly, afterwards the smallpox epidemic indeed ended but only after causing at least 168 deaths across Bukovina in 1899.⁹⁶ Regarding the Lipovans, the full scale of the smallpox epidemic that occurred the year before was only disclosed to the Ministry in Vienna probably in February 1899 by a report authored by the physician from the Sereth district authority and submitted (probably intended as a final report on that painstaking issue) by the vicegerency in Czernowitz.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, the full, original report was not saved in the Viennese record (but rather, as a note said, was sent back to the regional government after use), but a summary of it was compiled and filed within the Ministry.

91 ÖSTA, AVA, MdI, Sanitätsakten: K. 1032: 5768/99.

92 ÖSTA, AVA, MdI, Sanitätsakten: K. 1032: 10200/99.

93 ÖSTA, AVA, MdI, Sanitätsakten: K. 1032: 10200/99.

94 The sanitary department in Vienna was informed about that problem directly by the magistrate of the city first, not by the provincial government, which moreover obviously had “overlooked” counting a considerable portion of these smallpox infections taking place right under its medical official’s eyes.

95 ÖSTA, AVA, MdI, Sanitätsakten: K. 1032: 13279/99.

96 Cf. WATZKA, *Pockensterblichkeit*, 173.

97 ÖSTA, AVA, MdI, Sanitätsakten: K. 1032: 6026/99.

Dr. Perl's surprising report on the real extent of the 1898 smallpox epidemic among the Bukovina Lipovans and the crucial role of infants' mothers in ending it

The report by Josef Perl transmitted outstanding information on the issue, as his short text overturned several main elements of the earlier narrations on the epidemic's reality as presented by the regional administration. In particular, its summary stated: During personal inquiry, Perl found many more victims of smallpox within the communities of Klimautz and Fontina Alba – 667 within five months – than had been previously reported to the authorities, confirming the suspicions there on the existence of systematic strategies of secreting them among the Lipovans.⁹⁸ Nearly all infected persons were children – an issue easily explained by Perl by the local “medical history”, highlighting that contemporary Lipovan communities consisted nearly exclusively of persons who themselves had survived earlier smallpox infections, mostly in their childhood. At least some 90 children within the two small villages had died from variola in the 1898 local outbreak there. The report also mentions the way in which the first breach into the tenacious anti-vaxxing attitudes there finally was blown: the mothers of infant children.⁹⁹ They were obviously more willing to accept the empirical evidence of the vaccination's life-protecting value. The actual difference in infant mortality risks due to smallpox was probably clearly perceptible for them by comparison of deaths among the children in their community with those in neighbouring, non-Lipovan villages.

98 In earlier decades, Austrian authorities from time to time even had tried to recruit police informers among the Lipovans – without lasting success – and certainly reinforcing their propensity to isolation against outsiders. Cf. KAINDL / WICKENHAUSER, *Entstehen*, esp. 74.

99 Because of its significance, the official summary of the report is cited here verbatim, omitting only some shorter, repetitive elements: “The voluminous report of 71 pages by the district medical officer Dr. Perl in Sereth contains a critical discussion of the smallpox epidemic which prevailed in [...] 1898 in the Lipovan communities of Klimautz and Fontina Alba. Apart from interesting historical and ethnographical communications on the Lipovans, one can gather from the report on matters of sanitary police: Within the mentioned two communities (with a number of 1031, respectively 1322, inhabitants) between August and December of 1898 all in all – which was revealed only afterwards – 667 persons were infected by variola and 90 of them died [!]. With the exception of three adults, only children suffered from smallpox, which can be explained by the fact that among the remaining inhabitants 1532 had already overcome smallpox during earlier epidemics in the years 1889, 1888, 1878, 1873 and 1864. Among the roughly 2400 residents, indeed, barely 200 persons were left, who evidently had neither earlier nor now acquired the disease; these were partly children of youngest age, partly non-Lipovans who had been inoculated. Because the Lipovans are opponents of vaccination – which allegedly infringes their statutes of faith – only 24 children could participate in the protection against smallpox by vaccination – those children who were brought to vaccination by their mothers secretly [!]. Out of 20 children, on which the lymph adhered, only one lightly fell ill of variola. This perception – because vaccination was attempted in those communities for the first time – allegedly had a mighty influence on the population, and thus the district physician hopes that absolute refusal of vaccination there has been broken. The measures displayed in the report on isolation of the sick and limitation of traffic should be viewed with some scepticism with regard to the extraordinary extent of the epidemic. To prevent dissemination to the outside every [...] departing person had to acquire [...] a certificate, saying that the travel items [...] were disinfected and that the person was “not suspected of infection”. The fact that Lipovans are primarily occupied with commerce explains that within two months 1500 such certificates were issued [!]. (Whether this was thus only a pure fake measure shall be left aside). From these two infected communities, transmissions took place within the district of Sereth to Strolaynetz, Baince and Sereth, moreover outside of the political district (as far as known to Dr. Perl) to Kimpolung, Tralautz, Storozynetz and Lippoweni-Lukawetz.” ÖSTA, AVA, Mdl, Sanitätsakten: K. 1032: 6026/99.

It is not said in the summary explicitly, but one may expect that the intense emotional bond between mothers and their infants¹⁰⁰ contributed heavily to their willingness to leave behind religiously substantiated traditions of denial and avoidance and overcome the anxieties which were certainly connected with such a tradition-breaking behaviour. Obviously, mothers ready to take this courageous step first expected heavy resistance from other community members: They had brought their children “secretly” to the vaccination point. After that period of reorientation by a few female members of the Lipovan community within a collective crisis, a broader cultural change obviously took place in quite a short time, and vaccination started to become an acceptable option for many members of the community within a few years.

This assumption is strengthened by the observation that registered deaths due to smallpox were clearly reduced to near zero in Bukovina in general, and in the Lipovan communities, too, within two years after the outbreak. Mortality statistics show 465 deaths caused by smallpox for the whole of Bukovina in 1898 and 168 (about a third of the former number) in 1899, but in 1900, registered lethal cases of smallpox in the region fell to 9, and from 1901 to the end of the first decade of the 20th century, only two deadfalls by variola were registered altogether.¹⁰¹ This probably occurred under the condition of intensified control activities by sanitary authorities among the Lipovans after the revelations of Dr. Perl, which must have caused considerable outrage at least among the medical and sanitary professional communities, who debated the issue publicly, as we saw, in the ÖSW-article in late 1899, after having still feared a further massive spread of smallpox to take place in summer, which fortunately did not occur.¹⁰²

In volume three of his tripartite presentation of Lipovan history and habits, appearing in print 1899, Polek referred to the beginning of the end of vaccination refusal among the Lipovans. But, remarkably, in this public statement, the attribution of progressive attitudes is rather different (in fact, in terms of gender, reverse) to that found in the non-public report of Perl, as Polek stated: “Only at the beginning of this year [1899] in Lippowany near Suczawa the more intelligent fathers of families allowed their children to be vaccinated voluntarily.”¹⁰³ One has to note that this statement relates to a different Lipovan community, and maybe, after the pioneering example of mothers in Klimautz and Fontina Alba – unmentioned in this or other contemporary published texts on the issue – it was indeed the fathers of the families, who, after changing their minds, initiated the protective vaccination process. Their wives (as doubtlessly primary carers of infants) in any case will have been involved closely in the matter, too. In any case, the termination of the epidemic on the local and regional level probably has to be attributed primarily to the vaccination activities, as the isolation obviously could not have been very effective, least – as it was stated clearly in the “critical” official report of Dr. Perl – among the Lipovans of Klimoutz and Fontina Alba, who somehow even had managed to obtain more than 1500 “sanitary certificates” for travel activities for a widely infected population of some 2000 people within a term of five months (!).¹⁰⁴ Probably, a considerable portion of the villagers

100 On psychological, evolutionary and psychodynamic theory of attachment cf. esp.: John BOWLBY, *Maternal Care and Mental Health* (Geneve 1952); John BOWLBY, *Attachment and Loss*, 3 vol. (London 1969–1980); Daniel STERN, *The First Relationship. Infant and Mother* (Cambridge 1977).

101 Cf. WATZKA, *Pockensterblichkeit*, esp. 173.

102 ÖSTA, AVA, Mdl, Sanitätsakten: K. 1033.

103 POLEK, *Lippowaner*, vol. 3, 26.

104 ÖSTA, AVA, Mdl, Sanitätsakten: K. 1032: 6026/99.

indeed appeared symptomatically inconspicuous themselves due to repeated earlier infections, when controlled by local officials, but with respect to the high numbers cited, suspicion of “whether this [...] was only a pure fake measure“, not exerted in reality, was a nearby consequence – even if the Ministry of the Interior itself obviously did not pursue the issue afterwards, but silenced it.¹⁰⁵ Probably, in its view, there were too many and much larger troubles in those peripheral Eastern provinces that deserved more attention and manpower than such minor “peculiarities of circumstances”.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion: The wish for life and progress in an endangered community

Although due to the limits of the information, the picture remains fragmentary, it can be summarised that inquiring about the history of the last smallpox epidemic within the pre-war Habsburg Monarchy led us to a traditionalist and isolationist religious community in Bukovina, which in the 1890s obviously was heavily in crisis: Growing pressure to comply with administrative demands by the secular state, but also inner doctrinal struggles and increasing offers to convert to one of the main Christian churches, led to a considerable decrease in community members, which was exacerbated considerably by the loss of some 100 lives, mainly infants, due to the renewed spread of variola in the second half of the decade, which met a still unvaccinated population. The emotional consequences must have been massive, since at least a portion of the Bukovina Lipovans then decided to turn away from their allegedly sacred and irrefutable principles of refusing professional medical help in general and variola vaccination in particular. As often in history, women seem to have been the first to favour the prospect for life – specifically the survival of their infants who were in imminent danger of being infected by smallpox virus – over the rigid self-demands of sticking to a social and individual “identity” visibly outdated by the course of events.

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¹⁰⁵ Moreover, from a retrospective epidemiological standpoint, a “healthy“ person who had acquired immunity by earlier infection could still have been a carrier of the variola virus at a certain time, transmitting the active virus, for instance by infected cloths, for weeks or even some months. Cf. Frederic O. MACCALLUM / James R. MACDONALD, Survival of Variola Virus in Raw Cotton, in: Bulletin of the World Health Organisation 16/2 (1957), 247–254.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. WATZKA, Pockensterblichkeit.