
Željko Oset: Pisma Georga Fabra Josipu Plemlju (2024); nekaj misli ob branju knjige
*Željko Oset: Letters from Georg Faber to Josip Plemelj (2024); Some Thoughts
on Reading the Book*¹

Tomaž Pisanski

Univerza na Primorskem in IMFM
University of Primorska and IMFM
tomaz.pisanski@upr.si

**Profesorju Antonu Suhadolcu
ob njegovi devetdesetletnici.**

Čeprav je Josip Plemelj (1873–1967) brez dvoma doma in v svetu najbolj poznan slovenski matematik, je naše resnično vedenje o njem precej pomanjkljivo. Praktično vse, kar se je doslej pisalo o Plemlju, je prišlo izpod peresa matematikov: njegovih študentov ali njihovih študentov. Pri tem je knjižica *Josip Plemelj: ob dvajsetletnici smrti* (1987), ki jo je napisal Plemljevega naslednik Ivan Vidav (1918–2015), začrtala zorni kot in postavila filter za nadaljnje obravnave Plemljevega življenja ter dela. Kljub temu da je Vidav poskušal biti kar se da objektivno, seveda ni mogel mimo globokega spoštovanja do svojega mentorja in velikega matematika. Vse drugo, kar smo vedeli o slednjem, se je prenašalo iz »roda v rod« preko ustnih anekdot in se je seveda na vsakem koraku malo popačilo. K sreči je Plemljevo zapuščino uredil matematik, prof. dr. Anton Suhadolc.

Plemelj je na Akademiji rad pripovedoval o kakšni pikantni podrobnosti iz študentskega življenja na Dunaju. Na eni od »krokarских razglednic«, ohranjenih v njegovi zapuščini, je za svoj naslov navedel kar gostilno. V tistih časih lokali niso bili samo okolje za družabno življenje, ampak so za vse revne študente, ki so se stiskali v skromnih najemniških sobah, predstavljali razkošno delovno okolje. Tako je tudi Plemelj celo doktorat pisal kar v kavarni.

Znano je, da »je bil nekoč v družbi s sošolci, ki so v mladostni razposajenosti vrgli klop v Tivolski ribnik«, kakor piše Vidav (1987, 6), in iz gimnazije izključeni Plemelj je moral zadnji letnik gimnazije opravljati kot zasebnik: prvi semester

**To Professor Anton Suhadolc
on his ninetieth birthday.**

Although Josip Plemelj (1873–1967) is undoubtedly the best-known Slovenian mathematician at home and abroad, our actual knowledge of him is somewhat limited. Practically everything that has been written about Plemelj to date has come from the pens of mathematicians: his students or their students. In this regard, the booklet *Josip Plemelj – Ob dvajsetletnici smrti* (Josip Plemelj – On the Twentieth Anniversary of His Death), written by Plemelj's successor Ivan Vidav (1918–2015), set the tone and established a filter for further discussions of Plemelj's life and work. Although Vidav tried to be as objective as possible, he could not help but express his deep respect for his mentor and the great mathematician. Everything else we knew about Plemelj was passed down from generation to generation through oral anecdotes and, of course, became slightly distorted at every step. Fortunately, Plemelj's legacy was edited by mathematician Prof. Dr. Anton Suhadolc.

Plemelj enjoyed sharing some of the more interesting details of student life in Vienna with the Academy. On one of the 'Krokar postcards' preserved in his legacy, Plemelj listed a pub as his address. In those days, pubs were not only a place for socialising, but also a luxurious working environment for all the poor students who were crammed into modest rented rooms. Plemelj even wrote his doctoral thesis in a café.

It is known that 'he was once in the company of classmates who, in their youthful exuberance,

¹ The English translation of the Slovenian original was created using the artificial intelligence tool DeepL.

v Novem mestu, drugega in maturo pa spet v Ljubljani. Dandanes bi tako vedenje označili kot vandalizem. Že pred tem je bil dve leti zapored kaznovan zaradi obiskovanja gostiln, kar je imelo zanj tudi neprijetne finančne posledice, saj je izgubil štipendijo. Res je, da se je takrat že vzdrževal z instrukcijami matematike, niso pa ta dejanja kazala hvaležnosti revni materi, ki je kot vdova težko zbrala denar za njegovo gimnazijsko šolanje.

Kolega Boštjan Kuzman me je opozoril, da *Slovenski narod* 5. avgusta 1893 na naslovni strani incident v Tivoliju opisuje drugače kot Vidav: »Znano je, da so pred nekaj tedni trije osmošolci zagazili v prepir s stražniki in prišli v konflikt z oblastjo. Mej temi dijaki osmega razreda nahajal se je najboljši dijak osmega razreda, nade poln in sicer tudi ponižen in miren dijak, ki je vzbujal najlepše upe za prihodnjost.« Potem avtor članka pijane dijake vzame v bran: »Pri mladini pa se po celem olikanem svetu sodi, da taki izgredi sodijo v prirojeni lahkomišljenosti in da tukaj ne gre govoriti o tistem hudobnem naklepu, kojega kazenski zakon zahteva pri svojih prestopkih.« Potem bralca spomni, da se podobna razgrajanja študentov na Dunaju obravnava blagohotneje. Jasno je, da je bila takrat toleranca do alkoholiziranih mladoletnikov mnogo večja, kot je dandanes. »[N]i čuda, če se vname mlado srce in če se v kozarcu vina vtope pametne in razsodne misli, ter se stori korak, ki bi se pri doraslem in zrelem možem moral strogo in ostro obsojati!« piše v članku. Tudi šolske oblasti pri nas so bile mnjenja, da za ta izgred »disciplinarna kazen zadošča«. *Slovenski narod* se pohvali, da ni poročal o izgredih mladoletnikov in jim tako škodoval. Nemški časopisi v Celju, Ljubljani in Gradcu pa so razpihovali incident in povzročili, da je zadeva prišla pred sodišče. »Mi se tolažimo, da bodo strogi, ali vendar pravični sodniki več srca imeli, nego ga imajo ti žurnalistični barbari [...]«. Pisec se še malo huduje (»Ali skrajna ostudnost, ki tiči v takim početju razbrzdane žurnalistike [...]«), potem pa opozori na dvojna merila: »Malo dnij po tistem dijaškem izgred, o katerem smo doslej govorili, pripetil se je drug jednak izgred. Udeležili so se ga trije nemški

threw a bench into the Tivoli pond,' as Vidav writes. Plemelj, who was expelled from high school, had to complete his final year of high school as a private student: the first semester in Novo Mesto, and the second and his final exams again in Ljubljana. Nowadays, such behaviour would be considered vandalism. Even before that, he had been punished for two years in a row for frequenting pubs, which also had unpleasant financial consequences for him, as he lost his scholarship. Indeed, he was already supporting himself by tutoring mathematics at the time. However, these actions did not show gratitude to his poor mother, who, as a widow, had struggled to raise money for his secondary school education.

My colleague Boštjan Kuzman pointed out to me that on 5 August 1893, *Slovenski Narod* described the incident in Tivoli differently from Vidav on its front page: 'It is known that a few weeks ago, three eighth-graders got into an argument with guards and came into conflict with the authorities. Among these eighth-grade students was the best eighth-grade student, a promising, humble and calm student who inspired high hopes for the future.' The author of the article then defends the drunk students: 'Among young people throughout the civilised world, it is considered that such misbehaviour is part of their innate light-heartedness and that there is no question here of the malicious intent required by criminal law for its offences.' He then reminds the reader that similar student riots in Vienna are treated more leniently. It is clear that tolerance towards underage drinkers was much greater at that time than it is today. '[I]t is no wonder that young hearts are inflamed and that sensible and judicious thoughts are drowned in a glass of wine, leading to actions that would be strictly and harshly condemned in an adult and mature man!' the article says. The school authorities in our country were also of the opinion that 'disciplinary punishment is sufficient' for this misdemeanour. *Slovenski Narod* boasts that it did not report on the misdemeanours of minors and thus harm them. German newspapers

Kočevci, ki so istotako v svoji lahkomišljenosti razbijali klopi po Tivolskem drevoredu ter ostanke vlačili in metali v vodometa sredi Tivolskih nasadov. Bili so ti dijaki tudi aretovani [...].« Potem pa pove, da o tem drugem incidentu niso pisali niti nemški niti slovenski časopisi. Čeprav pisec inkriminiranega dijaka ne imenuje, pa piščevi superlativi kažejo, da je šlo za Plemlja. Članek nas prepriča, da Plemelj nima nikakršne zveze z razbijanjem klopi v Tivoliju v drugem incidentu. Ni pa jasno, če ni morebiti tudi prvi incident povezan s klopami v Tivoliju. Članek se konča s podpisom avtorja: »dr. Iv. T....r«. To pomeni, da se je za Plemlja zavzel znani pisec povesti *Cvetje v Jeseni* dr. Ivan Tavčar (1893). Za dokončno razjasnitev okoliščin Plemljeve izključitve iz šole bi bilo treba pregledati še tedanje nemške časopise in morda še kakšne druge vire. To je bilo obdobje spopada slovanskih nacionalizmov z nemškim, vendar ni videti, da bi se Plemelj ob teh incidentih spopadal z Nemci.

Tudi Ivan Vidav v svojem tekstu o Plemlju zapiše (1987, 16):

Od dijaških let je imel rad veselo družino. S prijatelji je tedaj pogosto zahajal v gostilno in tudi dobre kapljice se ni branil. Vendar mu vino ni moglo do živega. Imel je tako naravo, da nikoli ni bil pijan. Čeprav ga je več spil kakor tovariši, ki so ga pošteno čutili, je sam ostal trezen. Ni pa postal suženj alkohola. Ko se je moral zaradi bolezni držati dijete, se je pijači zlahka odrekel.

Zanimivo je, da je o svojih »dosežkih« mladostne »radoživosti« Plemelj zelo rad pripovedoval svojim študentom in mlajšim kolegom. Vidav, ki je bil 40 let mlajši od njega, se je v intervjuju za *Obzornik za matematiko in fiziko*, ki ga je leta 2007 z njim opravil Damjan Kobal, spomnil še enega neobičajnega Plemljevega dijaškega incidenta, namreč kako je nekoč »ubil eno babo«, ki ga težko pojasnimo brez prisotnosti ali odsotnosti alkohola (str. 209):

Kot dijak je stanoval nekje na Petkovškovem nabrežju in je nekoč brez premisleka

in Celje, Ljubljana, and Graz, however, blew the incident out of proportion, leading to the matter being brought before the court. 'We console ourselves with the thought that strict but fair judges will have more heart than these journalistic barbarians from ...'. The writer continues to rant: 'The extreme obscenity inherent in such unrestrained journalism ...', and then points out the double standards. 'A few days after the student riot we had been discussing, another similar riot took place. It was attended by three German Kočevci, who, in their recklessness, smashed benches along the Tivoli tree-lined avenue and dragged the remains to the fountain in the middle of the Tivoli gardens and threw them in. These students were also arrested [...].', He then goes on to say that neither German nor Slovenian newspapers wrote about this second incident.

Although the writer does not name the student in question, his superlatives indicate that it was Plemelj. The article convinces us that Plemelj was not involved in the destruction of the benches in Tivoli during the second incident. However, it is unclear whether the first incident is also related to the benches in Tivoli. The article ends with the author's signature: 'Dr Iv. T....r'. This means that the well-known author of the novel *Cvetje v Jeseni* (Flowers in Autumn), Dr Ivan Tavčar, stood up for Plemelj. To fully clarify the circumstances of Plemelj's expulsion from school, it would be necessary to review the German newspapers of the time, as well as other relevant sources. This was a period of conflict between Slavic nationalism and German nationalism, but it does not appear that Plemelj was involved in any conflicts with Germans in connection with these incidents.

Ivan Vidav also writes in his text about Plemelj:

Since his school days, he had enjoyed cheerful company. He often went to the pub with his friends and did not shy away from a good drink. However, wine did not affect him. He was not the type to get drunk. Although he drank more than his companions,

vrgel prazno steklenico skozi okno. Zaslišal je krik, pogledal skozi okno in videl, da na cesti leži poleg razbite steklenice neka ženska. Zelo se je prestrašil, da jo je ubil. Pozneje se je izkazalo, da steklenica ženske ni zadela, temveč je padla tik ob njej na tla in se razbila. Ženska se je tega tako ustrašila, da je padla in zakričala. Take stvari se pač zgodijo mladim, ki so radoživi in ne pomislijo vselej, kakšne posledice ima lahko neko dejanje.

Oset (2024) se v knjigi, ki je osrednji predmet naše recenzije, pijače pri Plemlju dotakne zelo diskretno – v njegovi zapuščini da so ohranjene »krokarske razglednice«. Eno od njih mu je poslal Georg Faber iz Oktoberfesta v Münchnu septembra 1901. Na njej je zapisal, da bo spil vrček piva na čast Plemljeve izvolitve. Razumeti pa moramo, da so bili to drugačni časi. Še ko sem bil v drugi polovici 20. stoletja otrok, so me domači pošiljali v trgovino po rum in v trafiko po cigarete. Pa tudi k »Šumiju« sem začel zahajati že kot dijak. Dandanes pa povsod piše, da sta tobak in alkohol škodljiva za zdravje in sta veliko težje dostopna mladostnikom.

Na Akademiji je Plemelj zelo hvalil študenta in svojega kasnejšega naslednika Ivana Vidava, ki je doktoriral pri njem leta 1941, pri triindvajsetih letih. Ko se je Vidav naslednje leto vrnil iz Rima, kamor ga je bil med okupacijo poslal Plemelj, je slednjemu zaupal, da se je dolgočasil, ker tam ni slišal nič takega, kar ne bi že prej zvedel od njega v Ljubljani. Oset v knjigi pojasni, da je bil eden glavnih vzrokov za pasivno vlogo Vidava v Rimu njegovo neznanje italijanščine. Bil je sicer rojen na Opčinah, a se je cela družina kmalu po izgubi Primorske preselila na Štajersko.

Ko sem začel v srednji šoli (1964–1967) tekMOVATI iz matematike, mi je moj ded nekoč podaril vse tri Plemljeve knjige, ki so v letih 1953–1962 izhajale pri SAZU. Bil sem popolnoma presenečen, saj nisem vedel, da doma hrani tudi matematične knjige. Vedel sem tudi, da ga matematika ni zanimala. Razlaga je bila seveda preprosta. Iz SAZU so mu še dolga leta po tem, ko so ga zaradi zahtev politike odpustili, pošiljali vse

who were quite affected by it, he himself remained sober. He did not become a slave to alcohol. When he had to go on a diet due to illness, he easily gave up drinking.

Interestingly, Plemelj loved to tell his students and younger colleagues about his 'achievements' of youthful 'exuberance'. Vidav, who was 40 years younger than Plemelj, recalled another unusual incident from Plemelj's student days in an interview for OMF conducted by Damijan Kobal in 2007, how he once 'killed an old woman', which is difficult to explain without the presence or absence of alcohol.

As a student, he lived somewhere on Petkovškovo nabrežje and once threw an empty bottle out of the window without thinking. He heard a scream, looked out of the window and saw a woman lying on the street next to a broken bottle. He was very scared that he had killed her. Later, it turned out that the bottle had not hit the woman, but had fallen to the ground right next to her and broken. The woman was so frightened that she fell and screamed. Such things happen to young people who are lively and do not always think about the consequences of their actions.

Oset touches on the subject of drinking at Plemelj's very discreetly. His estate contains a collection of 'drinking postcards'. One of them was sent to him by Georg Faber from the Oktoberfest in Munich in September 1901. On it, he wrote that he would drink a mug of beer in honour of Plemelj's election. However, we must understand that those were different times. Even when I was a child in the second half of the 20th century, my parents sent me to the shop to buy rum and to the tobacconist's to buy cigarettes. I also started going to 'Sumi' as a student. Nowadays, however, it is widely known that tobacco and alcohol are harmful to health and are much more difficult for minors to access.

At the Academy, Plemelj spoke very highly of his student and later successor, Ivan Vidav, who obtained his doctorate under Plemelj's supervision in 1941 at the age of twenty-three.

publikacije, ki so jih na Akademiji izdajali, verjetno zaradi družinskega prijatelja, Primoža Ramovša, ki je takrat vodil knjižnico Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti (SAZU).

Knjiga *Željka Oseta Pisma Georga Fabra Josipu Plemlju* je plod temeljitega znanstvenega dela profesionalnega zgodovinarja. Nastala je na primerni časovni razdalji, ob 150-letnici rojstva Josipa Plemlja, in temelji na preverljivih dokumentih. Pri tem ima korespondenca med Fabrom in Plemljem posebno vlogo. Ohranjenih je namreč 91 pisem in razglednic, ki jih je nemški matematik Georg Faber (1877–1966) v letih 1901 do 1965 pisal Plemlju. Glede na to, da sta se v tem razdobju odvijali dve svetovni vojni, je vpogled v korespondenco med odličnima matematikoma pomemben ne le za razumevanje Plemlja, ampak tudi za razumevanje dogajanja v matematičnem svetu tistih razburljivih časov.

Seveda je nemogoče razumevanje te korespondence, ne da bi poznali okoliščine, v katerih sta živela in delovala korespondenta. Avtor knjige je izvrsten poznavalec dogajanja in protagonistov akademskega življenja v obdobju od začetkov Univerze v Ljubljani ter SAZU in o posledicah, ki sta jih na njih pustili prva in druga svetovna vojna. O tem je napisal več monografij. To poznavanje mu je seveda olajšalo delo pri iskanju in interpretaciji ustreznega arhivskega gradiva.

Knjiga bralcu odkriva nove, doslej neznane razsežnosti Plemlja. Seveda je njegova matematična dimenzija najpomembnejša in sorazmerno dobro poznana. Posebna zanimivost je dejstvo, da gre pri Fabru in Plemlju za osebnosti, ki sta si v marsičem sorodni, vendar ju loči nacionalnost – germanska : slovanska. Spoznata se, ko skupaj preživita leto 1900/1901 v Göttingenu, tedanjem Olimpu matematičnega sveta. Tri in pol leta mlajši Faber je še doktorski študent, medtem ko je Plemelj obiskal Göttingen dve oz. tri leta po doktoratu, potem ko je šolsko leto 1899/1900 preživel v Berlinu pri slovitih matematikih Fuchs in Frobeniusu. Ne smemo pozabiti, da je prav leta 1900 David Hilbert zastavil svoje znamenite probleme na mednarodnem matema-

When Vidav returned the following year from Rome, where Plemelj had sent him during the occupation, Vidav confided to him that he had been bored because he had heard nothing there that he had not already learned from him in Ljubljana. Oset explains in his book that one of the main reasons for Vidav's passive role in Rome was his lack of knowledge of Italian. Although he was born in Opčine, his entire family moved to Štajerska shortly after the loss of Primorska.

When I started competing in mathematics in secondary school (1964-1967), my grandfather once gave me all three of Plemelj's books, which SAZU published between 1953 and 1962. I was amazed, as I did not know that he also kept mathematics books at home. I also knew that he was not interested in mathematics. The explanation was, of course, simple. For many years after he was dismissed due to political demands, SAZU continued to send him all the publications they issued at the Academy, probably because of a family friend, Primož Ramovš, who was then head of the SAZU library.

The book *Letters from Georg Faber to Josip Plemelj* is the result of thorough scientific work by a professional historian. It was written at an appropriate time, 150 years after the birth of Josip Plemelj, and is based on verifiable documents. The correspondence between Faber and Plemelj plays a special role in this. There are 91 letters and postcards preserved that the German mathematician Georg Faber (1877–1966) wrote to Plemelj between 1901 and 1965. Given that two world wars took place during this period, insight into the correspondence between these two outstanding mathematicians is important not only for understanding Plemelj, but also for understanding events in the mathematical world during those turbulent times.

Of course, it is impossible to understand this correspondence without knowing the circumstances in which the correspondents lived and worked. The author of the book is an expert on the events and protagonists of academic life in the period from the founding of the University of Ljubljana and the Slovenian Academy

tičnem kongresu v Parizu. Po Göttingenu, kjer sta spoznala skoraj ves tedanji matematični svet, predvsem Hilberta in Kleina, imata popolnoma različni usodi.

Ves čas dopisovanja sta se Faber in Plemelj zelo spoštovala. Kljub majhni razliki v letih je imel drugi v primerjavi s prvim na začetku bliskovito kariero. Leta 1902, ko je Faber doktoriral na Tehniški univerzi v Münchnu in dobil službo kot gimnazijski profesor, je Plemelj že postal zasebni docent na dunajski univerzi. Takrat Faber v slednjem uvidi svojega vzornika. Plemelj je postal redni profesor na Univerzi v Černovicah leta 1908, Faber pa je naslov rednega profesorja dosegel leto kasneje.

Že takrat se je pokazalo, kako lahko okolje vpliva na delo matematika. Samozavestni Plemelj, tako rekoč čudežni deček, ki je v Göttingenu blestel, je naslednja leta v miru izkoristil za objavo svojih najboljših del. V Černovicah pa se je že začelo poznati, da počasi izgublja tesen stik z vodilnimi matematiki. Avstrija ni bila središče matematičnega sveta, kot je bila Nemčija. Černovice pa niso bile ravno središče Avstrije. Nasprotno pa je manj nadarjeni Faber, ki se je sprva selil po Nemčiji, ves čas ostajal v stiku z matematičnim svetom. V Münchnu se je ustalil šele med prvo svetovno vojno, leta 1916. Po nekaj letih je bil on tisti, ki je Plemlja seznanjal z dogajanjem v matematičnem svetu.

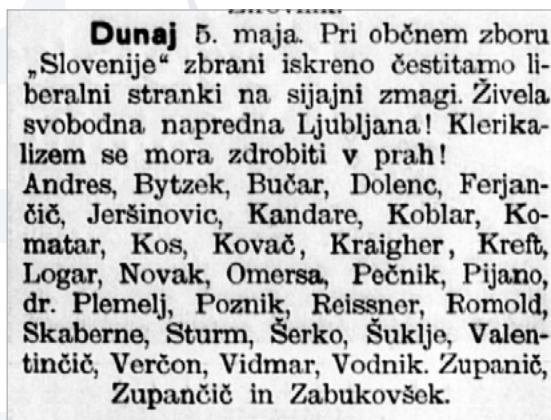
Plemelj je bil nedvomno matematični genij in v veliki meri samouk. Reševal je težke probleme, ampak take, ki so jih zastavljali drugi. Ni bil človek, ki bi odpiral nova področja, pravo nasprotje od njegovega sodobnika Hansa Hahna, ki je deloval na več različnih novih vejah matematike. Med njima je sicer veliko vzporednic. Oba sta doktorirala na Dunaju, pri Gustavu von Escherichu, bila sta kolega v Černovicah. Hahn je bil med prvo svetovno vojno težko ranjen, pa ga to ni odvrnilo od matematičnih raziskav. Plemelj fronte ni videl; je pa omenjal prvo svetovno vojno kot glavnega krivca, ki ga je iz raziskovalca spremenila v učitelja, češ da je bila vojna veliko večja od matematike. Izgovarjal se je, da je vpoklic močno vplival na njegovo matematično

of Sciences and Arts, as well as on the consequences that the First and Second World Wars had on them. He has written several monographs on this subject. This knowledge naturally facilitated his work in searching for and interpreting the relevant archival material.

The book reveals new, previously unknown dimensions of Plemelj to the reader. Of course, his mathematical dimension is the most important and relatively well-known. A particularly interesting fact is that Faber and Plemelj were personalities who shared many similarities but were distinguished by their nationalities: Germanic and Slavic, respectively. They met when they spent the year 1900/1901 together in Göttingen, then the Olympus of the mathematical world. Faber, three and a half years younger, was still a doctoral student when Plemelj visited Göttingen two or three years after completing his doctorate, having spent the 1899/1900 academic year in Berlin with the famous mathematicians Fuchs and Frobenius. We must not forget that it was in 1900 that David Hilbert posed his famous problems at the International Congress of Mathematicians in Paris. After Göttingen, where they met almost the entire mathematical world of the time, especially Hilbert and Klein, their fates diverged completely.

Throughout their correspondence, Faber and Plemelj had great respect for each other. Despite the slight age difference, Plemelj had a meteoric career compared to Faber. In 1902, when Faber received his doctorate from the Technical University of Munich and got a job as a secondary school teacher, Plemelj had already become a private lecturer at the University of Vienna. At that time, Faber saw Plemelj as his role model. Plemelj became a full professor at the University of Chernivtsi in 1908, while Faber achieved the title of full professor a year later.

Even then, it was clear how much the environment could influence the work of a mathematician. The self-confident Plemelj, a child prodigy who had excelled in Göttingen, spent the following years quietly publishing his best works. In Chernivtsi, however, it was already



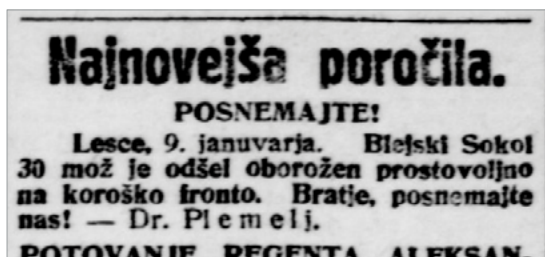
Slika/Figure 1

dejavnost, saj za delo ni imel dobrih pogojev. Kasneje je zapisal, da je bil glavni problem v njem samem. Gotovo so takrat problemi realnega sveta pri njem zasenčili matematične probleme, ki so ga navdihovali. Odrinjenost od središča matematičnega sveta in Plemeljeve izvenmatematične dejavnosti pa so povzročile negativno povratno zanko. Ampak ugašanje njegove strasti za raziskovalno matematiko se je začelo že prej, vsaj za časa balkanskih vojn.

Plemelj je imel trdne politične nazore, ki se niso skladali s politiko Avstro-Ogrske. Oba s Fabrom sta bila ateista liberalnih nazorov. Plemeljev sovražni odnos do klerikalne stranke se vidi iz čestitke, ki so jo z občnega zbora »Slovenije« na Dunaju slovenski študentje – med njimi je Plemelj edini doktor – poslali ob zmagi liberalcev in jo je objavil 5. maja 1899 *Slovenski narod* (slika 1).

Plemelj je bil slovanofil oz. panslavist. Med balkanskimi vojnami je zagovarjal srbsko stran. Zaradi vsega tega je postal politično nezanesljiv, po koncu prve svetovne vojne pa jugoslovenar in unitarist (slika 2).

Močno si je prizadeval za priključitev slovenske Koroške Jugoslaviji. V *Slovenskem narodu* je 10. januarja 1919 objavil kratek poziv v boj za severno mejo. Čeprav v njem zapiše »Bratje, posnemajte nas!«; tega ni mislil dobesedno, saj se sam bojev ni udeležil. 28. junija 1919 je bila podpisana Versajska mirovna pogodba, jeseni



Slika/Figure 2

becoming apparent that he was slowly losing close contact with leading mathematicians. Austria was not the centre of the mathematical world, as Germany was. Chernivtsi was not exactly the centre of Austria.

In contrast, the less talented Faber, who initially moved around Germany, remained in constant contact with the mathematical world. He only settled in Munich in 1916, during the First World War. After a few years, he was the one who kept Plemelj informed about developments in the mathematical world.

Plemelj was undoubtedly a mathematical genius and largely self-taught. He solved complex problems, but only those posed by others. He was not a man who opened up new fields, quite the opposite of his contemporary Hans Hahn, who worked in several different new branches of mathematics. There are many parallels between the two. Both obtained their doctorates in Vienna under Gustav von Escherich and were colleagues in Chernivtsi. Hahn was seriously wounded during the First World War, but this did not deter him from his research in mathematics. Plemelj, on the other hand, did not see the front. However, he mentioned the First World War as the primary reason for his transition from researcher to teacher, stating that the war was far greater than mathematics could ever be. He argued that his conscription had a strong impact on his mathematical activity because he did not have good working conditions. Later, he wrote that the main problem lay within himself. Certainly, at that time, the problems of the real world overshadowed the mathematical problems that inspired him. His isolation from the centre



Slika/Figure 3

istega leta pa je prevzel rektorski položaj na Univerzi v Ljubljani.

Med prvo svetovno vojno mu je na pomoč priskočil Rihard Zupančič in ga rešil fronte. Po vojni pa se mu podre svet, v katerem je živel in delal. Iz poražene in razkosane Avstro-Ogrske, katere pogin si je želel deset let, se preseli na Balkan. Vse, kar je dotlej počel, je bilo v nemščini. Potem pa mora skočiti v neznano: na popolnoma novo, skoraj nedonošeno univerzo, brez kadra, brez jezika, ki bi bil primeren za poučevanje. Iz pretežno nemško govorečega univerzitetnega sveta v petdesetmilijonski Avstro-Ogrski mora v majhno Slovenijo z amputiranimi Koroško in Primorsko predavat v jeziku za dober milijon prebivalcev. Prvi slovenski učbenik matematike za ljudske šole (slika 3), ki ni bil prevod, je izšel

of the mathematical world and his non-mathematical activities caused a negative feedback loop. However, the decline of his passion for research in mathematics had already begun earlier, at least during the Balkan Wars.

Plemelj had strong political views that were not in line with the policies of Austria-Hungary. Both he and Fabro were atheists with liberal views. Plemelj's hostile attitude towards the clerical party is evident from the congratulatory message sent by Slovenian students, among whom Plemelj was the only doctor, from the general assembly of 'Slovenia' in Vienna upon the victory of the liberals, which was published on 5 May 1899, in *Slovenski Narod* (Figure 1).

Plemelj was a Slavophile, or Pan-Slavist. During the Balkan Wars, he defended the Serbian side. Because of all this, he became politically unreliable, and after the end of the First World War, he became a Yugoslavist and a unitarian (Figure 2).

He strongly advocated the annexation of Slovenian Carinthia to Yugoslavia. On 10 January 1919, he published a brief appeal in *Slovenski Narod* to defend the northern border. Although he wrote, 'Brothers, follow our example!' he did not mean this literally, as he did not participate in the fighting himself. On 28 June 1919, the Treaty of Versailles was signed, and in the autumn of the same year, he took up the position of rector at the University of Ljubljana.

During the First World War, Rihard Zupančič came to his aid and saved him from the front. After the war, the world in which he had lived and worked collapsed. From the defeated and fragmented Austria-Hungary, whose demise he had wished for ten years, he moved to the Balkans. Everything he had done until then had been in German. Then he had to leap into the unknown: to an entirely new, almost premature university, without staff, without a language suitable for teaching. From a predominantly German-speaking university world in Austria-Hungary, with its population of 50 million, he had to move to tiny Slovenia, with its amputated Carinthia and Primorska regions, to

še eno leto pred Plemljevim rojstvom (Lapajne 1872) (slika 3).

Malo prej so začeli izhajati slovenski prevodi Močnikovih učbenikov računstva. Vsi slovenski matematiki, Vega, Močnik, Hočevar, vključno s Plemljem, so matematiko pisali (in razmišljali o njej) izključno v nemščini.

Kot drugi liberalci se je pridružil unitarističnim jugoslovenarjem, ki so utopično računali, da bo s časom prišlo do stapljanja slovenščine, hrvaščine in srbsčine v en sam, jugoslovanski jezik, ki naj bi se oblikoval s stapljanjem treh plemen v en sam jugoslovanski narod. Prepričan je bil, da se za dober milijon prebivalcev (Dravska banovina je leta 1939 štela približno 1.140.000 duš) ne splača ustvarjati univerze in samostojnega matematičnega jezika. V majhnem narodu Plemelj tudi ni pričakoval, da bo vzgajal raziskovalne matematike, ampak take, ki bodo matematiko posredovali drugim, torej gimnazijske profesorje matematike.

Plemelj pa nam je kmalu po drugi svetovni vojni zapustil trilogijo monografij, ki jih je pred tem uporabljal kot univerzitetne učbenike: *Algebra s teorijo števil*, *Diferencialne in integralne enačbe* ter *Teorija analitičnih funkcij*. To je v Sloveniji nedvomno izjemen skok za matematiko: od učbenikov poštevanke ljudskih šol do visokošolskih učbenikov na doktorski ravni. Ob tem velja pripomniti, da Plemelj knjig ni pisal sam, ampak je le popravil in uredil zapiske marljivega študenta Otona Sajovica s svojih predavanj. Druga pripomba pa je vprašanje ažurnosti. Glede na to, da je bil ob izidu knjig star že 80–90 let in je vsebino pripravljaj pri 50 letih, so bile knjige v praksi zaradi zastarelosti neuporabne. Razumel je, da mora pri terminologiji orati ledino. To je delal z večjim ali manjšim smislom za jezik. Pri vpeljavi izraza »podgrupa edinka« je preveč poslušal svojo intuicijo in se je požvižgal na to, kako so jo poimenovali drugi narodi: *normal subgroup* (angl.), *normale Untergruppe* (nem.), *sous-groupe normal* (fr.), *sottogruppo normale* (it.). Tako je slovenskim matematikom otežil branje tujih matematičnih tekstov pa tudi razumevanje slovenskih besedil

lecture in a language spoken by just over a million people. The first Slovenian mathematics textbook for elementary schools that was not a translation was published only a year before Plemelj's birth (Figure 3). Shortly before that, Slovenian translations of Močnik's arithmetic textbooks began to appear. All Slovenian mathematicians, including Vega, Močnik, Hočevar, and Plemelj, wrote (and thought about mathematics) exclusively in German.

Like other liberals, he joined the Unitarian Yugoslavists, who utopically believed that, over time, Slovenian, Croatian, and Serbian would merge into a single Yugoslav language, which would be formed by the merging of the three tribes into a single Yugoslav nation. He was convinced that it was not worth creating a university and an independent mathematical language for a population of just over a million (the Drava Banovina had a population of approximately 1,140,000 in 1939). In a small nation, Plemelj did not expect to train research mathematicians, but rather those who would teach mathematics to others, i.e. secondary school mathematics teachers.

Shortly after World War II, Plemelj left us a trilogy of monographs that he had previously used as university textbooks: *Algebra with Number Theory*, *Differential and Integral Equations*, and *Theory of Analytic Functions*. This is undoubtedly a remarkable leap for mathematics in Slovenia: from the level of elementary school textbooks to university textbooks at the doctoral level. It should be noted that Plemelj did not write the books himself, but rather corrected and edited the notes from his lectures, taken by his diligent student, Oton Sajovic. Another point to note is the question of timeliness. Considering that he was already 80–90 years old when the books were published and had prepared the content in his 50s, the books were practically useless due to their obsolescence. He understood that he had to break new ground in terminology. He did this with a greater or lesser sense of language. When introducing the term 'podgrupa edinka' (normal subgroup), he listened too much

matematikom drugih slovanskih jezikov. Zdaj med mladimi ponekod prevladuje izraz »normalna podgrupa«.

Aktivni matematiki živimo v dveh prepletenih in vendar med seboj neprodušno pregrajenih svetovih: v svetu matematike in v realnem svetu. Za kreativno delo v svetu matematike je nujno potrebna daljša koncentracija v realnem svetu. Nedvomno pa sta potrebni tudi samozavest in močna motivacija, ki pogosto vključuje ta tekmovalnost z adrenalinskim izzivom. Seveda pa se samozavest s starostjo zmanjšuje. Sveže, genialne ideje mladosti so v starejših letih manj verjetne. Koncentracija in moč, potrebni za dokončanje vrhunske razprave, ki vsebuje težke dokaze, ki ne smejo imeti prav nobene luknje, s starostjo pešata.

Dandanes je sodelovanje s kolegi in z mlajšimi (študenti) ter računalnikom (zunanji pomnilnik, eksperimentator) lahko v veliko pomoč – da o umetni inteligenci ne govorimo. Tega pa Plemelj žal ni imel. En razlog je njegova napotitev s periferije (Dunaj – Avstrija) do še bolj oddaljene periferije (najprej rob imperija – Černovice, potem Balkan – Ljubljana). Drugi razlog pa je znana mentaliteta prvorazrednih matematikov, ki jim v šali rečemo »pravilo 2n-1«. Prvorazredni matematiki okoli sebe zbirajo prvorazredne matematike, drugorazredni tretjerazredne in vsi nadaljnji še slabše od sebe. In Plemelj je bil vsaj deset let prvorazredni matematik. Ko pa je začutil, da ni več v vrhunski formi, je začel zgubljati samozavest in objave preusmeril večinoma v manj zahtevne, domače revije. Zgovoren je podatek, da je v svoji več kot pol stoletja dolgi univerzitetni karieri »pridelal« le dva doktoranda, kljub temu da kot mentor tako rekoč ni imel konkurence.

Prepričan je bil, da lahko samo prvorazredni znanstveniki osnujejo novo univerzo.

Na srečo pri matematiki ni bil čisto sam. Pomagal mu je organizacijsko spretnejši Ljubljančan, Rihard Zupančič, drugi rektor Univerze v Ljubljani, ki pa je bil žal po rodu Nemec in je nekoč npr. raje predaval v francoščini kot v slabi slovenščini.

to his intuition. He ignored how other nations referred to it: *normal subgroup*, *normale Untergruppe*, *sous-groupe normal*, *sottogruppo normale*. This made it more difficult for Slovenian mathematicians to read foreign mathematical texts, as well as for mathematicians from other Slavic languages to understand Slovenian texts. The term 'normal subgroup' is more commonly used among young people.

Active mathematicians live in two intertwined yet completely separate worlds: the world of mathematics and the real world. Creative work in the world of mathematics requires prolonged concentration in the real world. Undoubtedly, self-confidence and strong motivation are also necessary, often involving competitiveness and an adrenaline rush. Of course, self-confidence tends to diminish with age. The fresh, brilliant ideas of youth are less likely to occur in older age. The concentration and strength required to engage in a top-level discussion involving complex arguments that must be thoroughly watertight decline with age.

Nowadays, collaboration with colleagues, younger people (such as students), and computers (external memory, experimenter) can be a great help, not to mention artificial intelligence. Unfortunately, Plemelj did not have this. One reason is his transfer from the centre (Vienna, Austria) to an even more remote periphery (first to the edge of the empire – Chernivtsi, then to the Balkans – Ljubljana). Another reason is the well-known mentality of first-class mathematicians, which we jokingly call the '2n-1 rule'. First-class mathematicians gather first-class mathematicians around them, second-class mathematicians gather third-class mathematicians, and all the rest gather those who are even worse than themselves. And Plemelj was a first-class mathematician for at least ten years. However, when he felt that he was no longer at the top of his game, he began to lose confidence and shifted his publications mainly to less demanding domestic journals. It is telling that in his more than half-century-long university career, he 'produced' only two doctoral students,

Plemelj je raziskovalno vedno bolj sameval, čeprav je še dolgo živel na starih lovorikah, ne le doma, ampak tudi v svetu. Ko je imel leta 1928 možnost, da bi predsedal na Univerzo v Gradcu, ponudbe ni sprejel. Mnenje, da je to naredil iz žrtvovanja za Slovence, je po mojem zmotno. Takrat je bil že nekaj let »matematično mrtev«. Menim, da ga je bilo pri 55 letih preprosto strah, da bi se osramotil. Med matematiki je krožila anekdota o naivnem mladem Francetu Križaniču, ki je nekoč prišel k Plemlju in ga prosil, da naj mu da kakšen zanimiv problem. Plemelj pa naj bi mu pokazal knjige v knjižnici in mu dejal, da naj si ga kar sam izbere. Takrat ostareli Plemelj že nekaj desetletij ni več spremljal novosti v matematiki in mu problema ni mogel dati. Po pripovedovanju prof. Suhadolca je Križanič še enkrat poskusil, da bi dobil temo za doktorat. Plemelj pa mu je predlagal, naj obdela življenjepise Vege, Močnika, Hočevarja ... Križanič je bil prepričan, da ga Plemelj kot matematika daje v nič, saj je bila to tema iz zgodovine in ne iz matematike. Pa ni bilo tako. Plemelj mu takrat ni mogel nič več dati.

Po prvi svetovni vojni je Plemelj v kraljevini Jugoslaviji, Faber pa v vse bolj nacistični Nemčiji. Med drugo svetovno vojno (1941–1945) sta nekaj časa spet v isti državi, če štejemo, da je imel Plemelj hišo na zasedenem Bledu, le da je Faber v okupatorski, Plemelj pa v okupirani državi.

Po drugi svetovni vojni pa je Plemelj v komunistični Jugoslaviji, Faber pa v demokratični Zahodni Nemčiji. Tudi karierni poti sta do neke mere podobni. Najprej ima Plemelj izrazito prednost (nagrade za vrhunsko delo), potem pa se na Univerzi v Ljubljani oddalji od svojih aktivnih kolegov. Plemelj postane rektor leta 1919, Faber pa šele leta 1945/46. Faber ostaja v jedru svetovne matematike, Plemelj pa je osamelec med provincialci.

Zanimivo je, da se v pismih prijatelja pogovarjata o vrhunskih matematikih. Bolj kot to, koga Faber imenuje, je zanimivo, kdo vse manjka. Faber namreč ne omenja nobenega slovenskega matematika: Vege, Močnika, Hočevarja, Zupančiča. Ne omenja niti Plemeljevih doktorskih

even though he had virtually no competition as a mentor.

He was convinced that only first-class scientists could establish a new university.

Fortunately, he was not entirely alone in mathematics. He was assisted by Rihard Zupančič, a Ljubljana native with organisational skills, the second rector of the University of Ljubljana, who was unfortunately of German descent and once preferred to lecture in French rather than in his poor Slovenian.

Plemelj became increasingly isolated in his research, although he continued to live on his old laurels for a long time, not only at home but also abroad. When he had the opportunity to transfer to the University of Graz in 1928, he declined the offer. The opinion that he did so out of sacrifice for the Slovenian people is, in my opinion, mistaken. At that time, he had already been 'mathematically dead' for several years. I believe that at the age of fifty-five, he was simply afraid of embarrassing himself. There was an anecdote circulating among mathematicians about the naive young France Križanič, who once came to Plemelj and asked him to give him an interesting problem. Plemelj showed him the books in the library and told him to choose one himself. By then, the ageing Plemelj had not been following developments in mathematics for several decades and was unable to give him a problem. According to Prof. Suhadolc, Križanič tried once more to find a topic for his doctoral thesis. Plemelj suggested that he work on the biographies of Vega, Močnik, Hočevar, etc. Križanič was convinced that Plemelj was dismissing him as a mathematician, as this was a topic from history and not mathematics. But that was not the case. Plemelj could not give him anything else at that time.

After the First World War, Plemelj was in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, while Faber was in increasingly Nazi Germany. During the Second World War (1941–1945), they were again in the same country for a while, considering that Plemelj had a house in occupied Bled, while Faber was in the occupying country and Plemelj in the occupied country.

študentov, Vakslja in Vidava. Ali je to izbira Fabra ali pa jih Plemelj v svojih pismih ne omenja, ni znano.

Žal ne zvemo, o čem vse in na kakšen način je pisal Plemelj. Vse, kar zvemo, je odmev preko Fabra. Je pa slednji duhovit in pogosto kar zabaven pisec. Včasih pa so novice, ki si jih izmenjuje, žalostne. Name sta največji vtis naredili sporočili, da je Fabrov zet, še leta 1942 ob poroki prepričan oficir nemške vojske, kasneje postal protestantski pastor. Žalostno pa je pismo iz leta 1948, ko se Faber sprijazni z dejstvom, da je bil njegov vpoklicani sin, ki je bil leta 1943 pogrešan v Afriki, mrtev. Zanimivo je tudi poročanje Fabra, kaj se je dogajalo med prvo svetovno vojno, med nacizmom v 30. letih in po vojni z njunimi skupnimi matematičnimi kolegi, predvsem s tistimi judovskega porekla. Usode so bile zelo različne. Faber je nasprotoval nacističnim posegom v akademski svet, vključno z uveljavljanjem rasnih zakonov.

Faber in Plemelj sta pripadnika nesrečne generacije, ki je doživela obe svetovni vojni. Oba pa sta doživela tudi vsak svoj totalitarizem. Dopisovanje v takih časih seveda ne more biti popolnoma odprto. Podvrženo je bodisi odkriti cenzuri ali pa samocenzuri zaradi strahu pred tem, da bi z zapisanim škodoval sebi ali sogovorniku zaradi vohljanja tajnih služb.

Osetova knjiga v uvodnem delu prinaša tudi Plemljevo beležnico, v kateri so imena več kot 100 velikih matematikov. Tako je razviden Plemeljev matematični svet okoli leta 1912. V njem ni nobenega Balkanca. To seveda pomeni, da se je zavedal, v kakšno matematično puščavo se odpravlja po koncu prve svetovne vojne. Iz seznama oseb na koncu Osetove knjige pa je razvidno, da Plemelj Fabru ni pisal o nobenem matematiku iz teh krajev, tudi o Vidavu ne. Ne kaže, da bi si Plemelj želel vzgajati slovenske raziskovalne matematike. O tem pove sam, ko pravi, da je Vidava »odkril«, ne pa »vzgojil«. Ob doktoratu Vidava je bil star že 68 let.

Veliko matematike se je naučil sam že v srednji šoli. Težki problemi elementarne matematike so ga zanimali vse življenje. Z nikomer,

After World War II, Plemelj was in communist Yugoslavia, while Faber was in democratic West Germany. Their career paths were also similar to a certain extent. At first, Plemelj had a distinct advantage (awards for outstanding work), but then he distanced himself from his active colleagues at the University of Ljubljana. Plemelj became rector in 1919, while Faber did not become rector until 1945/46. Faber remained at the heart of world mathematics, while Plemelj was a loner among provincials.

It is interesting that in their letters, the friends discuss outstanding mathematicians. More interesting than who Faber mentions is who is missing. Faber does not mention any Slovenian mathematicians, such as Vega, Močnik, Hočvar, or Zupančič. He does not even mention Plemelj's doctoral students: Vakselj and Vidav. Whether this is Faber's choice or whether Plemelj does not mention them in his letters is unknown.

Unfortunately, we do not know what Plemelj wrote about or how he wrote. All we know is what Faber tells us. Faber is a witty and often entertaining writer. Sometimes, however, the news they exchange is sad. I was most impressed by the news that Faber's son-in-law, who was a convinced officer in the German army at the time of his marriage in 1942, later became a Protestant pastor. His letter from 1948 is sad, as Faber comes to terms with the fact that his conscripted son, who went missing in Africa in 1943, is dead. Faber's account of what happened during the First World War, during Nazism in the 1930s and after the war, to their mutual mathematical colleagues, especially those of Jewish origin, is also interesting. Their fates were very different. Faber opposed Nazi interference in academia, including the enforcement of racial laws.

Faber and Plemelj belonged to an unfortunate generation that experienced both world wars. Both also experienced their own form of totalitarianism. Correspondence in such times cannot, of course, be completely open. It is subject to either overt censorship or self-censorship for fear that what is written could harm oneself

25. Villa Stella [Dr. Jof. Plemelj], 5 Zimmer, Küche, 2 Veranden, Garten.¹
 25.a Villina Maria [P. Rikli], 4 Zimmer, Küche, Veranda.
 26. Villa Rikli [Paul Rikli], 12 Zimmer, 2 Küchen, Veranda, Garten und Dependance.¹

Slika/Figure 4

niti doma niti po svetu, ni sodeloval pri ustvarjanju matematike. Takrat timsko delo še ni bilo v navadi. Človek dobi vtis, da se je že kmalu po obdobju Berlina in Göttingena Plemljevo delo prelomilo. Pri svojih objavah je naletel na zavlačevanje ali pa njegovega dela niso želeli pravilno ovrednotiti. Oset sklepa, da je bil Fredholm odločilen za to, da je neko Plemljevo pomembno delo izšlo kasneje, kot bi moralo.

Žal pa Plemelj ni čutil potrebe, da bi se učil novejših poglavij matematike, kakršna je npr. topologija, še manj pa, da bi jih sam pomagal razvijati (slika 4).

Faber, tako kot Plemelj, ni bil praktičen človek. Oba sta si idealistično predstavljala svojo pomembnost univerzitetnega profesorja in sta si zgradila preveliki hiši. Plemelj v nekaterih avstro-ogrskih turističnih vodnikih v letih 1910–1914 – tik ob slovitem Paulu Rikliju – reklamira pet sob, kuhinjo, dve verandi in vrt svoje vile (Villa Stella) na Bledu (slika 4) (Bayer 1910; Zavodnik 2015). Seveda vse praktične probleme gradnje, vzdrževanja itd. prepušča drugim. To pa zagotovo ni način za varčevanje.

Ko smo matematiki podvrženi velikemu stresu, v splošnem delujemo na dva možna načina. Realne probleme najraje ignoriramo in se znova in znova potapljamo v čudoviti svet matematike, kjer so problemi bolj izzivi kot kaj drugega. Če nam to ne uspe, pa se nam lahko zgodi ravno nasprotno: odreenimo in matematiko ter njene probleme postavimo v drugi plan. Tako je reagiral Plemelj ob prvi svetovni vojni.

Osetovo knjigo lahko razumemo večplastno. Naj naštejemo le nekatere plasti. Po eni strani v njej vidimo razvoj nekega matematičnega prijateljstva skozi zelo dolgo obdobje, ki pa večino časa poteka le na daljavo. Po drugi strani spoznamo razmere, v katerih sta živela in delala geografsko in politično ter nacionalno ločena

or one's correspondent due to the prying eyes of the secret services.

Oset's book also includes Plemelj's notebook in the introductory section, which contains the names of more than 100 great mathematicians. This gives an insight into Plemelj's mathematical world around 1912. There are no Balkan mathematicians in it. This, of course, means that he was aware of the mathematical desert he was heading into after the end of the First World War. The list of people at the end of Oset's book shows that Plemelj did not write to Fabru about any mathematicians from these parts, not even Vidav. There is no indication that Plemelj wanted to nurture Slovenian research mathematicians. He himself states this when he claims to have 'discovered' Vidav, but did not 'nurture' him. When Vidav received his doctorate, Plemelj was already 68 years old.

He had already learned a great deal of mathematics on his own in secondary school. Complex problems in elementary mathematics interested him throughout his life. He did not collaborate with anyone, either at home or abroad, in the creation of mathematics. Teamwork was not yet common practice at that time. One gets the impression that Plemelj's work came to a halt soon after his time in Berlin and Göttingen. His publications were met with delays, or his work was not adequately evaluated. Oset concludes that Fredholm was instrumental in delaying the publication of some of Plemelj's important work.

Unfortunately, Plemelj did not feel the need to learn newer chapters of mathematics, such as topology, let alone help develop them himself.

Like Plemelj, Faber was not a practical man. Both idealistically imagined their importance as university professors and built houses that were too large. In some Austro-Hungarian tourist guides from 1910 to 1914, Plemelj – right next to the famous Paul Rikli – advertises the five rooms, kitchen, two verandas and garden of his villa (Villa Stella) in Bled. Of course, he left all the practical problems of construction, maintenance,

matematika. Spoznamo Plemljevo mednarodno matematično mrežo. Knjigo lahko vidimo tudi kot pomemben kamen v mozaiku pionirskih časov Univerze v Ljubljani ter Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti. Zanimivo je spoznanje, kako narazen so si bili začetniki Univerze v Ljubljani glede na samostojnost Slovenije in kako močno se je angažiral Plemelj na strani podpornikov »integralnega jugoslovanstva«, kako si je želel Univerzo v Ljubljani kot »jugoslovansko« in ne kot »separatistično slovensko«. Kaj dosti v tej smeri ni naredil, najbrž niti srbsko ni govoril. Je pa večkrat nasprotoval kolegom, ki so dajali prednost Sloveniji pred Jugoslavijo, še v 30. letih jih je tožaril ministrom v Beogradu. Iz političnih razlogov je npr. nasprotoval, da bi Izidor Cankar postal rektor Univerze v Ljubljani. Poleg tega je iz osebnih razlogov pretirano vplival na usode nekaterih matematikov.

Ko so ga nekoč vprašali, ali se talent za matematiko pogosto deduje na sina, je odvrnil: »To je redko; se pa talent pogosto deduje na zeta!« Kandidaturo za univerzitetnega profesorja Antona Vakslija, ki je pri njem doktoriral leta 1923, je podprl šele četrto stoletja kasneje in mu tako močno otežil raziskovalno kariero. Po pripovedovanju nekaterih mojih profesorjev naj bi razlog za to na nek način zadeval Plemljevo hči. Še huje pa je bilo z Rihardom Zupančičem. Plemljev odnos do Zupančiča se je med obema vojnama postopoma ohlajal, po drugi svetovni vojni pa je bil že sovražen. Koliko je šlo pri tem za osebne zamere, koliko pa za politično nestrnljanje, ni jasno. Ko so po vojni zaradi političnih pritiskov revolucionarne oblasti iz SAZU izključili štiri svoje člane, je Plemelj kar pozabil, da ga je prav Zupančič v prvi svetovni vojni zaščitil pred odhodom na fronto. Žal je po letu 1996 ostal izključen le Zupančič. Vidav, ki je s Plemljem tesno sodeloval, je od svojega mentorja prevzel odnos do Riharda Zupančiča. Ob razpravi za rehabilitacijo Riharda Zupančiča na SAZU, ki jo je leta 2001 predlagalo Društvo matematikov, fizikov in astronomov Slovenije (DMFA), je temu odločno nasprotoval Ivan Vidav, ki je navajal Plemljeve argumente. Nekateri odločno

and so on to others. This is certainly not the way to save money.

When we mathematicians are under much stress, we generally react in one of two ways. We prefer to ignore real problems and immerse ourselves again and again in the wonderful world of mathematics, where problems are more like challenges than anything else. If we fail to do so, the opposite can happen: we become numb and put mathematics and its problems on the back burner. This was Plemelj's reaction during World War I.

Oset's book can be understood on multiple levels. Let us list just a few of them. On the one hand, we see in it the development of a mathematical friendship over a very long period of time, which, however, mostly takes place at a distance. On the other hand, we learn about the circumstances in which they lived and worked as geographically, politically and nationally separated mathematicians. We learn about Plemelj's international mathematical network. The book can also be seen as an important piece in the mosaic of the pioneering days of the University of Ljubljana and the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. It is interesting to note how divided the founders of the University of Ljubljana were regarding Slovenian independence and how strongly Plemelj was committed to the supporters of 'integral Yugoslavism', how he wanted the University of Ljubljana to be 'Yugoslav' and not 'separatist Slovenian'. He did not do much in this direction, probably not even speaking Serbian. However, he often opposed colleagues who gave preference to Slovenia over Yugoslavia, even complaining to ministers in Belgrade about them in the 1930s. For political reasons, for example, he opposed Izidor Cankar becoming rector of the University of Ljubljana. Plemelj, however, had an excessive influence on the fates of some mathematicians for personal reasons. When Plemelj was once asked whether a talent for mathematics was often passed on to sons, he replied, 'That is rare; but talent is often passed on to sons-in-law!' He only supported the candidacy of Anton Vakselj, who had obtained his

nasprotovanje Vidava pripisujejo grenki osebni izkušnji.

Čeprav je bil Vidav med vojno civilist, je imel hude izkušnje. Po vrnitvi iz Rima je bil v Ljubljani aretiran in je mesec dni preživel v koncentracijskem taborišču Gonars, kjer se je spoprijateljil s štiri leta mlajšim študentom matematike, prof. Nikom Prijateljem. Takrat so Nemci njegovega očeta pregnali v ustaško Hrvaško in se je za njim izgubila vsaka sled. Ubili so oba brata: en brat je padel kot talec novembra 1941, drugi pa je umrl v zloglasnem taborišču Auschwitz leta 1942, medtem ko je mama preživela vojno v drugem koncentracijskem taborišču. Ko se je 29. januarja 1944 na Plečnikovo stavbo NUK-a zaradi odpovedi motorja zrušilo italijansko pošto letalo v nemški službi, je bil Vidav na prisilnem delu v pritličju stavbe. V enem od redkih osebnih pogovorih je nekoč nepričakovano spregovoril o tem dogodku. Zaupal mi je, da je bil prepričan, da so takrat NUK bombardirali, vendar je stavbo zapustil nepoškodovan. To je kasneje potrdil tudi v svojem intervjuju za *Obzornik za matematiko in fiziko*.

V tej luči se lahko držo Vidava ob poskusu rehabilitacije Riharda Zupančiča razume kot sporočilo, da z nacizmom ne more biti sprave. S tem se je, pod vplivom nekaterih mlajših kolegov (Bernik 2012), zgolj s svojo avtoriteto zoperstavil z močnimi argumenti podprti želji slovenskih matematikov, zbranih v DMFA, da se tudi nič krivemu Zupančiču vsaj na simbolni ravni popravi krivica, ki mu je bila storjena ob koncu vojne. Anton Suhadolec (2011) je četrto poglavje svoje knjige o Zupančiču posvetil poskusu njegove rehabilitacije. Tako pa ostajata z madežem na zgodovini slovenske matematike povezani imeni Vidava in Plemelja. Pogled na nekatere strani iz obsežne knjige spominov *Kronika mojega življenja* tedanjega predsednika SAZU akademika Franceta Bernika (2012) razkrije, kako so mu nekateri člani SAZU »minirali«
skrbno pripravljeni predlog za Zupančičevo rehabilitacijo. Ob tem ne gre spregledati dejstva, da Osetova knjiga, ki je izšla pri SAZU, tam še do danes ni doživela javne predstavitve.

doctorate under him in 1923, a quarter of a century later, thus greatly hindering his research career. According to some of my professors, the reason for this had something to do with Plemelj's daughter. The situation was even worse with Rihard Zupančič.

Plemelj's attitude towards Zupančič gradually cooled between the two wars, and after the Second World War, it had become hostile. It is unclear how much of this was due to personal grudges and how much to political disagreements. When, after the war, four members were expelled from the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts due to political pressure from the revolutionary authorities, Plemelj forgot that it was Zupančič who had protected him from going to the front during the First World War. Unfortunately, after 1996, only Zupančič remained excluded. Vidav, who worked closely with Plemelj, adopted his mentor's attitude towards Rihard Zupančič. During the debate on the rehabilitation of Rihard Zupančič at SAZU, proposed in 2001 by the Slovenian Society of Mathematicians, Physicists, and Astronomers, Ivan Vidav strongly opposed it, citing Plemelj's arguments. Some attribute Vidav's opposition to a bitter personal experience.

Although Vidav was a civilian during the war, he had some terrible experiences. After returning from Rome, he was arrested in Ljubljana. He spent a month in the Gonars concentration camp, where he befriended a mathematics student four years his junior, Niko Prijatelj. At that time, the Germans deported his father to Ustaše Croatia, and all traces of him were lost. Both of his brothers were killed: one brother was taken hostage in November 1941, and the other died in the notorious Auschwitz camp in 1942, while his mother survived the war in another concentration camp. When an Italian postal plane in German service crashed into Plečnik's NUK building on 29 January 1944 due to engine failure, Vidav was working on the ground floor of the building at the time. In one of our rare personal conversations, he unexpectedly spoke about this event. He confided in me

Osetova knjiga je tehtna razprava, ki je izšla v zbirki Korespondence pomembnih Slovencev in osvetljuje zgodovino slovenske matematike na prelomu stoletja ter prve polovice 20. stoletja. Dodatno teži ji dajeta matematična recenzenta doc. dr. Boštjan Kuzman in akademik prof. dr. Matej Brešar.

Zahvale

Dele in zgodnje različice tega rokopisa so brali in z nasveti pomagali: Anton Suhadolc, Marko in Nada Razpet, Peter Legiša, Boštjan Kuzman, Milan Hladnik in Željko Oset. Za njihove pripombe se jim najlepše zahvaljujem. Seveda pa jemljem vse morebitne napake in netočnosti nase.

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that he was convinced that the NUK had been bombed at the time, but he left the building unharmed. He later confirmed this in his interview for OMF.

In this light, we can understand Vidav's thoughtful stance on the attempt to rehabilitate Rihard Zupančič as a clear message that there can be no reconciliation with Nazism. With this, he used his authority to oppose the strongly argued desire of Slovenian mathematicians gathered in the DMFA that Zupančič should also be vindicated, at least on a symbolic level, for the injustice done to him at the end of the war. Thus, the names Vidav and Plemelj remain connected with a stain on the history of Slovenian mathematics. A look at some pages from the extensive book of memoirs *Kronika mojega življenja* (Chronicle of My Life) by the then president of SAZU, Academician France Bernik, reveals how some members of SAZU 'undermined' his proposal for Zupančič's rehabilitation. It should not be overlooked that Oset's book, published by SAZU, has yet to be publicly presented there.

Oset's book is a weighty discussion, published in the collection Correspondence of Important Slovenians, which sheds light on the history of Slovenian mathematics at the turn of the century and in the first half of the 20th century. It is given additional weight by mathematical reviewers Doc. Dr. Boštjan Kuzman and Academician Prof. Dr. Matej Brešar.

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