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Historical Folkloristics in Hungary

The Past and The Future*

The relationship of folkloristics and history had its own story in Hungary. This symbiosis is almost as old as the field itself, as it has been a part of a less scientific and more enthusiasm- and ideology-driven inquiry of the age know for the discovery of folk culture. From the second half of the 19th century, it gradually became a part of the scientific paradigm that was responsible for the establishment of the institutional background of folkloristics and since the latter half of the 20th century, it has been in many ways a key branch of the study of folklore in Hungary. A mere historical outline of the 200 years of research would result in a collection of huge tomes, full of bibliographic data.² If one would attempt to tackle a much larger topic, the history of the science of folkloristics in Hungary, the result would have to be a monograph that would far exceed the length of this essay.³ Of course, such a research could not be conducted without mentioning international connections. One of the reasons why writing such a summary would be beneficial to our discipline is that it could uncover numerous important elements that make up the current paradigm of ethnography. When we decided to attempt the writing of a concise summary of the topic that is reflected in the title, we had no such grand ambitions. This overview merely serves to highlight a number of convergences in the history of science and to draw up possible pathways into the future. We hope that, with our humble recommendations, we can help Hungarian ethnography in finding its way into the 21st century.

When it comes to a historical inquiry into the study of folk culture in Hungary, we can rely on a number of fairly recent history of science publications.⁴ A representative overview has been published recently, which presents historical cross-sections of folk culture using a periodisation based on public history.⁵ It is too early to say how social sciences received the penultimate “half-volume” of the planned eight-volume publication, so this paper will not cover how the field received this work, and the criticisms that were raised.⁶ All in all, we can safely say that this paper is the most complete overview of the thousand-year history of Hungarian folk culture and folklore. Attila Paládi-Kovács, recognising both the intricate and fragmented nature of the body of knowledge and its many gaps, emphasised the ground-breaking nature of this publication in editorial foreword.⁷ He had good reason to so, as this handbook, like all overviews, is also a tool to discover and exhibit the gaps in our knowledge. Without such grand undertakings, defective research is indeed very hard to identify, even in relatively “small” disciplines such as folkloristics.

As, among other publications, the foreword of the said publication states, the comprehensive overview of the history of Hungarian folk culture had been envisioned in a number of forms in the past fifty years. The synopsis of the aforementioned handbook was written by Tamás Hoffmann and Vilmos Voigt in 1968, entitled *A magyar etnikum és a magyar népi kultúra fejlődése* [Development of Hungarian Ethnicity and Hungarian Folk Culture]. This outline was based on a rough overview that they published in the series *A kultúra világa* [The World of Culture] in 1965 as a book intended for public consumption (*A Föld országai. A világ népei*. [The Countries of the World. The Peoples of the World.] Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, Budapest). This work is especially inter-

esting because it included the most complete overview of Hungarian folklore up to that day (and for many subsequent years), written by the young (25 years old) Vilmos Voigt.⁸ The paper aligns the specifics of the origins, life, development and passing of folklore within the framework of Marxist social history. While this summary was no doubt highly useful for the author, as he continued to improve and expand his views and his data in the following half century. Regrettably, he is yet to publish his comprehensive monograph on the history of folklore that has been announced on numerous occasions in the past, more so because the genre-based chapters of the textbook he edits (*A magyar folklór* [Hungarian Folklore]) and his summaries aimed mostly at foreign audiences are not sufficient at filling in the blanks.⁹

For many years now, Hungarian folklorists have been actively working on clarifying the theoretical questions that arise during the research of the history of ethnography. By now, it is almost a bibliographic tradition to cite the 1961 publication of Lajos Vargyas, whose title includes a clear declaration relating to this subject (*Miért és hogyan történelmi tudomány a néprajz?* [Why and How is Ethnography a Historical Science]).¹⁰ In this work, one of the leading figures of Hungarian historical folkloristics presented an in-depth classification of the historical views held by his predecessors and contemporaries. His overview extended beyond the area of folkloristics. On the contrary; it seems that folkloristic initiatives were somewhat overshadowed by the high-quality studies targeting material culture that experienced an upsurge in the 1950s. Due to the lack of material, the author could only refer to, amongst the complex methods, dance history studies and his own works on ballads as positive examples. Vargyas was well aware of the growing pains that characterised historically minded ethnography in Hungary before the change of attitudes that happened in the 1940s: its haphazard nature, its constrained historical perspective that was all too heavily influenced by the present and its unhistorical view that the peasantry possessed the conserved knowledge of “ancient” traditions. He also recognised that the results of what he called “sui generis historical-ethnographic” methodology¹¹ represented cutting edge of historical ethnography not only in Hungary, but also in a broader, European context. According to Vargyas, research conducted using the widest possible range of historical sources alongside references to current studies was part of an effective complex methodology that united the methods of both historical and ethnographic inquiry. Besides his own studies on ballads, he cited several works on material history by Alice Gáborján, Mária Kresz and Klára Csilléry, on dance history by Péter Morvay, on settlement ethnography by Tamás Hofer and on agricultural ethnography by Lajos Takács. Besides these “complex” methods, Vargyas also introduced two “purely ethnographical” approaches, which can also be used for historical purposes. The first one is the ethnographic description, which, if done correctly, is bound to include at least the basic outline of modern historical progress and the second approach is the comparative study, which, according to Vargyas, enables researchers to use not only the broad perspective of relativistic chronology in their research, but also more absolute dating methods. When it comes to the latter, he mentions his own research on ballads, but other works, like those of Vilmos Diószegi on folk beliefs, István Vincze and Bertalan Andrásfalvy on viticulture and winemaking, Lajos Szolnok on hemp objects and László Földes on shepherding.

Vargyas published his paper in the periodical of his then employer, the Museum of Ethnography. Its main goal was to represent the museum as a research institution and the work that was being done there. In his denouncement of pre-Second World War ethnographic research, he said “their main fault was that they did not recognise the deterministic role productivity and society played in progress and those eras marked by the emergence of new systems of productivity and social organisation, which was the greatest discovery of Marxist historiography.”¹² On the other hand, the evaluation of Marxist historiography included a promise that was practically mandatory in that day and age: “Our present role is to create unambiguous technical terms and to review and categorise the opportunities for historiographic research within the field of ethnography, to create a methodology for such research and to affirm everything that has been more or less already correctly present in our scholars and their work through the results of Marxist theory.”¹³ Today, it is impossible to tell to what extent did this rigid adherence to the ideologies of the time come from personal beliefs and how much of it was inserted to protect the science. When it comes to historical research, the field did not need much protection at the time, especially since the new “historical paradigm shift” of Hungarian ethnography was announced in the late 1940s – early 1950s

following a Soviet model.¹⁴ Based on later comments, many prominent Hungarian ethnographers, among them the ground-breaking István Tálasi, realised that pursuing philology-centered studies into material and agricultural history would mean not only the survival of the field of ethnography, but a chance to prosper under a certain degree of ideological protection.¹⁵ The result of this was that Jenő Barabás, in a 1961 work that is sometimes characterised as if it was written in opposition to Vargyas's publication even if it contains no references to the latter, warns against a historical bias and the strengthening of the more recent fields of ethnography.¹⁶

Even if we disregard the Marxist leanings of Vargyas's work, which was a product of its times, the publication will still seem outdated for a number of reasons. The previously mentioned categorisation seems to be the least useful of all his suggestions. The field of ethnography and its subject, folk culture, has experienced tumultuous changes during the past fifty years. The year of publication for the aforementioned essay, 1961, has symbolic importance in this regard, as it marks the completion of the last great historical trauma that befell Hungarian peasantry: collectivisation.¹⁷ The eradication of traditional folk culture put the "recent" ethnographic studies into a completely new light. In the past fifty years, "folk culture" has become a purely historical notion, or according to some, an abstract historical concept. Even in its own time, Vargyas's biases were obvious from the perspective of the history of the science: he only considered the affiliates of the Museum of Ethnography (and did not even mention the works of Edit Fél that had an important historical component) and had a complete disregard for any historically minded researchers who happened to work for other institutions. They included György Martin, Schram Ferenc, Tekla Dömötör and Sándor Bálint, who already began their enquiries in the 1950s. It is possible that their works could not be conveniently placed within one of the four groups. Vargyas could not be aware that the heyday of so-called historical ethnography in Hungary would only happen later, thanks to young researchers who begun their careers in the 1960s. In the Hungarian frame of reference, this research direction means long-term, ethnographically minded historical inquiry that is based on archival research that concentrated on materials from a set time period (usually the two centuries before 1848 that were previously called "late feudalism")¹⁸ Within the categorisation invented by Vargyas, these would have been sorted under the "sui generis historical-ethnographic" category even though he placed the great practitioner of the method, Lajos Takács into a different category, albeit only after careful consideration. We shall return to this group later on.

Its importance for the history of science is the reason why Vargyas's essay is dealt with in such detail. Within the canon of Hungarian historically-minded ethnography (including the aforementioned historical ethnography), there is a lack of methodological or theoretical publications. The most enduring (and most quoted) segments of the essay are those, which attempt to explore this strange methodology that is alien to historians. According to Vargyas, the elements of the "ethnographic perspective" used to examine historical source materials are as follows: the knowledge of ethnographic materials and relevant education, alongside research into the history of folk culture. Naturally, this list can and should be expanded in the light of new research and especially the fundamental changes of perspective that occurred in the field of history since the publication of Vargyas's essay.¹⁹

The other main theoretically minded folklorist of the second half of the 20th century, whose interests lie not only historical folkloristics, but also the current state of affairs of this field, is Vilmos Voigt. He has been a leading scholar and teacher at the Folklore Department at the university of Budapest for decades and in the early 2000s, he published his less available essays in almost 1200 pages in three thick volumes.²⁰ The said works were selected from an eminent oeuvre of publications. The overarching theme of the publication can be sensed from the subtitles of the volumes: these are all "treatises on historical folkloristics". The first two volumes show the most coherence in this regard, as they even display a chronological order of publications. The second volume ends at more or less the end of the 20th century. The "contemporary" research that was conducted on the May Days of the 1970s–80s has since become "historical folkloristics", for obvious reasons.²¹ Essays written on "contemporary folklore" during the last decades of the 20th century are also considered to be "historical" by now. Although, merely the themes of most of these essays would place them into an earlier historical period. If the whole of the three volumes is considered, they present a clear picture of what the author deemed folkloristic enquiry. The consistently applied

“historical-philologic” method of Voigt is also uncovered: “The first thing to do is to collect the genuine, historical data. These should be viewed within their historical context and the developments and changes of our culture should be noted. Terms of evaluation and quality should be used with great care,” he writes in the postscript of the first volume.²² In such historical enquiries, he greatly values scepticism on one hand and conformation to the data on the other. He prefers the method of over-viewing connections and tendencies on a larger scale, when the solution is generally included within the review of previous problems and questions. On the other hand, he often conducted concrete surveys of materials in the forms of case studies. One of the highlights of his inquiries in this field is his paremiological analysis of a Bruegel painting, which was, surprisingly, wrote for the 70th birthday of Lajos Vargyas as an “experimental analysis in the field of Hungarian historical folkloristics.” In this essay, he emphasized comparative links and opportunities for non-genetic historical interpretations.²³

The essays in which Voigt reviews and evaluates the achievements of historical folkloristics, which weren't meant to be thorough summaries, just concise surveys, are over three decades old.²⁴ They mostly discussed the archaic elements of folklore and its inner historicity, criticising the often deceptive perceptions of the subject. He demonstrates how such flights of fancy prevented the development of fact-based historical enquiries. To him, the question of utmost importance is: “If the ethnographic research of smaller topics results in the discovery of certain courses of social history, could the examination of these courses lead to finding one overarching narrative that could be called the history of Hungarian folk culture? And if such a course was to be found, its relationship with the narrative based on the achievements of cultural history and “grand” social history”²⁵ When it comes to textual folklore, instead of the study of individual genres, the identification of these processes is best done through the comparative analysis of the hierarchy of genres. One of the chief aims of Voigt is to interpret the historical facts of folklore within the cultural history of Hungary and Europe. “On the one hand, the history of folk culture should be included in the body of Hungarian cultural history, undoubtedly by historians and by using their scientific criteria. Folklorists will learn a great deal from this. On the other hand, the folklorists should create a general outline of the cultural history of the whole of Hungarian folklore, based on their own system of criteria. The results of the two will not be the same. While some of the differences might be eliminated through academic dialogue, the two views will not match perfectly and the views of historical folkloristics and folkloristic history will not be the same. Folklore is a unique and, to a certain extent, independent facet of societal consciousness, complete with its own distinct characteristics. If we consider the history of culture to be an integrated, complex science, it is not necessary for the idiosyncrasies of its sub-fields to be merged into its body and be made to disappear. On the contrary, the differences between these sub-fields and their scholarly examination is the key to understanding the culture of a people, a state, a society as a whole.”²⁶ Once again, we have arrived to the problem of distinguishing between the ethnographic/folkloristic and historical/cultural historical points of view. For that matter, what Voigt is discussing in this passage seems to have been realised for the 18th century in the form of the two thick volumes that contain the magisterial works of Domokos Kosáry,²⁷ that examined the trends in folklore within the context of the cultural history of the century, while the interdisciplinary collection of essays entitled *A megváltozott hagyomány. Folklor, irodalom, művelődés a XVIII. században* [Tradition in transition: Folklore, Literature and Culture in the XVIII. Century] broadened this view through a combination of folkloristics and history of literature both in a spatial sense (by surveying Central Europe) and with regards to the dynamics of culture (the interactions between the culture of the elites and the people).²⁸

Following the above summary of theoretical precedents, it is now time to draw up our own ideas about the past and future currents of historical folkloristics. In our view, three historical dimensions can be identified within folklore and folkloristics:

1. The first one is the oldest of the three views, which regards folklore phenomena as living embodiments of history, in other words, as if as the far-reaching horizon of history would be an integral part of the data derived from folklore. This thought is deeply rooted in the ethnographic paradigm as it has been present in both academic and lay thought for over two centuries. No-one in their right mind would doubt that folklore has “archaic” or “ancient” elements, but the claim

that these elements can survive unchanged after hundreds, if not thousands of years of transmission is much less accepted by the “sceptical” academic community. In other words, hypotheses that lack of tangible sources and evidence are interpreted as misconceptions and are critiqued as such. A comprehensive rundown of the best examples from the 19th century reign of this view and its survival into the 20–21st centuries, which would cover the time between the first folklorists of Romanticism and contemporary romantic folklorists, is beyond the scope of this paper. But this has already been achieved, especially with regards to the critique of the scientific flights of fancy about protohistory.²⁹ The so-called “Eastern Heritage” controversy, the problematics of the “ancient religion” of the Magyars and the question of their lost heroic epics, the prehistory of Hungarian poetry and many other such topics were thoroughly dealt with by rational (“sceptical”) critics, who dismantled the beautiful, rousing daydreams by pointing out European parallels and a rigorous adherence to genuine source materials.³⁰ Unfortunately these new results often failed to make waves even within the realm of academic folkloristics, not to mention many related fields who were, even very recently, still waiting to be supplied with “proto-poetic” and “proto-historic” data and the general public, which is still very much stuck with 19th century notions of folklore, inspired by romantic nationalism. In the words of one of the “sceptics”: “Scholars studying historic folklore bear an immense responsibility. Even their smallest mistakes will be forever carved into stone and their rational results will be seemingly ignored for years and years.”³¹

Projecting folklore data collected in the 19–20th centuries onto the when the Hungarians first entered the Carpathian Basin, or even onto earlier times is not the only questionable idea. Pinpointing the folklore of later historic events and figures is also problematic. For many years, a concentrated effort was made to find genuine folklore data relating to the great events of “class warfare” in Hungarian history, all without much success. The evidence-based studies into the Kuruc era and the folklore of the revolutions showed the difficulties of such undertakings.³² It is impossible to separate these matters from the problematics of the “historical memory of the Hungarian people”, which is an especially delicate subject.³³ During the past decade, dozens of books were published about the representations of great (usually medieval) historical figures in “Hungarian folklore”. The critical scrutiny of these works is yet to be done.³⁴ All of this is related to the review of the results produced by the historical research of legends, which experienced a sudden upsurge in the 21st century, but this topic has more to do with the second group.

2. Folkloristics achieved its most lasting results, which were also the ones most useful for social sciences through the exploration of historical data contained in individual folklore genres and areas. In order to avoid misunderstandings, it has to be stated that this includes, the historical research of areas besides textual folklore, for instance folk beliefs, customs, religions, music, dances, games, art, etc. This system of folkloric genres was established over a long period of time based on and with reference to folklore data collected in the 19–20th centuries (this should be emphasised over and over again). This state of affairs caused (and still causes) significant issues not only with the categorisation of the post-folklore of recent decades, but it also severely limited the scope of historical folkloristics. The fact that modern-era data forms the basis of inquiries practically pre-determines the retrospective character of the inquiries and (often positivist) construction of genre history data series mostly resulted in segmented development narratives with sparse connections to other areas of folklore and the history of Hungarian culture. For most of the latter half of the 20th century, the points of connection between chronological data series were being embedded into obsolete Marxist political, social and economical histories of development.

Obviously, even briefly reviewing the stages of this extraordinarily rich and diverse scientific historical tradition is beyond the scope of this paper. The field of ethnography has already reached the stage where all areas of folklore and folkloristics were subjected to substantial historical inquiry. There are certain areas of research that are especially well-documented, such as folk music, dances, beliefs and folk religions, but we also have a good knowledge of secular folk traditions. In truth, all fields are commendable for the amounts of data they gathered. The researchers mentioned by name only serve as examples, and they are not referred to as a result of any selective process. Due to the imbalance of the history of the science, textual folkloristics will receive a greater emphasis.

The contributions of Lajos Vargyas to historical folkloristics were already mentioned. The most famous examples of these were his studies of ballads. His methods included not only a collection

(genuine) historical data on a national level, but he broadened his scope to encompass the whole of Europe. This comparative perspective forms the basis of the timelessness of Vargyas's works.³⁵ His genetic extrapolations and his hypothesis about the medieval connection between French/Valloon and Hungarian ballads have already received a number of scathing criticisms. He ventured onto even more treacherous grounds when, aligning himself with the (un)historical folkloristic attitudes discussed in the first group, he claimed to identify traces of early Magyar heroic epics in 19–20th century ballads.³⁶ The extent to which Vargyas believed in the possibilities of using ethnographic analogues as historical data relating to ancient times is well illustrated by his passionate and conceited arguments he made against the less cited, but still not disproven radical claims of Vilmos Voigt³⁷ in the ethnographic handbook of the Academy.³⁸ Despite of this, it is a well-known truism that the ethnographic-historical discourse between Vargyas and Volt is, to this day, the most illuminating and exciting chapter of the otherwise generally uneventful field of Hungarian historical folkloristics.

One of the most successful branches of Hungarian historical folkloristics is the study of 17–19th century common poetry. This field gained its foothold in the 1980s, thanks to the eminent academic contributions of Imola Küllős. Her main area of research is comparative studies of histories of genres, subjects and motifs, using songbook manuscripts as her main sources.³⁹ Her research revolutionised our understanding of modern era trends in folk poetry and the interactions between elite and folk culture. Her results are not only crucial for our own field, but they are also relevant for related sciences, especially for the history of 18th century literature.⁴⁰

Being at the meeting point of historical folkloristics and history of literature, the study of the genres that make up 19th century Hungarian textual folklore has also experienced a resurgence of activity during the past decade. The leading line of research is the study of folk tales, thanks to a number of young researchers. Their peers have also done great works on other genres, for example riddles and *vőfély* (the traditional master of ceremonies at weddings) poems.⁴¹ Others are working on the relationship of literature and oral tradition, based on 19th century pulp magazines and calendars.⁴² The aim of such researchers is to fill in the gaps left by decades of academic neglect by showing how the corpus of 19th century textual folklore came to be. It is very probable that the historical study of folklore texts will become one of the most important fields of ethnography in Hungary.⁴³

The role literary history plays in the story of genre-oriented historical folkloristics has to be discussed in more detail. The relationship between textual folkloristics and literary history is rather self-evident and its first known signs appeared in the 19th century. On the other hand, the fact that in the second half of the 20th century, students at the universities of Budapest and Debrecen could, and in some cases had to do double degrees. Those majoring in ethnography most often chose history or Hungarian besides their “stronger” research major. Many examples (and somewhat fewer counterexamples) point to this setup being deterministic choosing the fields material culture and folkloristics.⁴⁴ This trend was especially visible in the ELTE of the 1950s and 1960s, when the two heads of department, István Tálasi and Gyula Ortutay practically split the students between their respective departments: the history majors generally went to Tálasi and those majoring in Hungarian language and literature went to Ortutay. This was certainly not the reason why most Hungarian folklorists (including the historical folklorists) of the second half of the 20th century were literary historians and linguists, as opposed to historians. This “bias” for literary history is not only visible in studies on textual folkloristics: it can be seen in the way Gábor Tüskés or Erdélyi Zsuzsanna approaches the historical research of folk religion, or Tekla Dömötör's approach to the historical study of folk customs. It has to be said that these are merely examples of a trend and there are many exceptions within the academia. One of the results of this particular leaning is that the knowledge of folklorists encompassed an understanding of the genres and historical trends of elite literature, and this was used as a frame of reference for the historical study of folklore. The other consequence was that the methodology of literary historians was adopted, which was at the time very distinct from that of historians who worked in the archives. Actually, the literary historians' distaste for archival research also “infected” many historical folklorists, who kept their distance from such institutions. This negative attitude is still alive today, but lately it seems to have started to wane. Somewhat paradoxically, the young textual folklorists in Hungary are drawn into

the archives not by the effect of the field of history, but through the social historical attitude that gained a foothold in the field of literary history.

3. After the above paragraph, it makes perfect sense that the third branch of Hungarian historical folkloristics is archival historical folkloristics, which uses the methodology of historians. This field encompasses research that interprets the historical data of folklore within its own social, cultural historical and, preferably, local context. Such inquiries might open up a new, third dimension of the history of folklore. These studies, which are strictly constrained both in time and space, are based on a large-scale archival research of sources and aim to understand folk cultural phenomena through examination of everyday life.

The source of this approach within the field of ethnography can be traced back to the most eminent traditions of historical ethnography. As it has been mentioned before, a new generation of young researchers dominated the field from the 1960s, who did not merely use the archives for “quick dips”, but instead spent considerable amounts of time and effort scrutinising carefully chosen source materials from the latter part of the early modern period. It is a uniquely Hungarian trend that the vast majority of such research was about agriculture, material culture and everyday life and only rarely covered topics such as habits, beliefs and religion. Of course, few researchers could resist highlighting particularly interesting pieces of folklore data, but this was not done systematically and such examples only serve decorative purposes in publications, lacking any real context. Most researchers specialised on the history of agriculture and lifestyles and only a select few applied the aforementioned methods to other areas of folklore⁴⁵ despite eminent examples from other parts of Europe, such as the German “Munich School”, which put much focus on social and folklore aspects when attempting to define “folk life” (Volksleben).⁴⁶ This is another example of the fact that Hungarian historical ethnography did not emerge and blossom due to foreign influences, but evolved (“automatically”) through the internal processes of the field.

Though he would not have believed that he would be mentioned in such context, Ferenc Schram is the person who should be credited with being the most important member of the first generation of archival historical folkloristics, who operated in parallel to the first generation of historical ethnographers. Even though his life was cut short, Schram, who was often mentioned in disparaging and belittling terms by theoretically minded folklorists (never in writing, of course), left a significant body of work behind, whose thorough assessment is yet to be completed. His awareness-raising, and often forward-looking publications⁴⁷ were mostly ignored and his remarkably well-researched, but horrendously presented treatises were published in obscure outlets⁴⁸. His main field of inquiry connects him with the historical study of folk customs, where he gave evidence of his approach that served as an alternative to the otherwise highly remarkable work of Tekla Dömötör.⁴⁹ His most famous and most extensive publication is a multi-volume collection of Hungarian witch trials, which is a testament to the great results one diligent and persistent scholar can achieve without research grants and technology.⁵⁰

Schram did not know that by collecting and publishing all the witch trials available within the borders of Hungary, he would lay down the foundations of an interdisciplinary research project that is unique in Hungarian historical folkloristics. The witch trial work group that was formed in the 1980s within the Ethnographic Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was in truth created by the confluence of folkloristics that studied, among other topics, the historical aspects of folk beliefs (Éva Pócs) and new areas of historical research (Gábor Klaniczay). The common goal was the exploration, publication and interdisciplinary study of one of the largest, most homogenous and most interesting body of source materials: the documentation of witch trials. From this cooperative enterprise, that is still very much alive, the names of Ildikó Kristóf and Péter G. Tóth should also be mentioned. The products of this work group have been published in numerous conference publications and collections.⁵¹ It is of utmost importance for historical folkloristics that the trial documentation in itself sets up a time frame for the research. Éva Pócs’s monography⁵² describes the early modern systems of mediators using a very critical approach to the source materials and Ildikó Kristóf, operating within strict spatial boundaries, created one of the most prominent works of Hungarian archive-based historical folkloristics and historical anthropology with her treatise about the societal background of the Debrecen witch hunts.⁵³ It is of no surprise that the aforementioned publication by the historian-ethnographer Ildikó Kristóf was

praised for its achievements in two distinct fields of study. In fact, one of the cornerstones of our scientific programme lies within this “dual identity”. But to understand what this entails, the background of folkloristic interests of the field of history should be briefly considered.

The history of the relationship between Hungarian historiography and the ethnographic approach alone deserves scholarly attention, which should discuss the matter in comparison with European parallels. Generally speaking, the role of Sándor Domanovszky and his interwar period school of economic and social history and that of the pioneering professor from Debrecen, István Szabó.⁵⁴ This current in historiography, based on the obvious connections with the history of agriculture and settlements, created the connection with historical ethnography, that manifested in continuous reflections and co-operative scholarly activities. István Imreh of Kolozsvár (Cluj), who was immortalised through his outstanding knowledge the self-governance of Székely communities, also stared out from economic and social history.⁵⁵ In his case, just like in the case of Kálmán Benda, Erik Fügedi and Domokos Kosáry, the influence of the French journal *Annales*, founded in 1929, is already visible.⁵⁶ On the other hand, “folk culture” only came into the centre the attention of historians around the world in the past half century. In this, the work of “third generation” of French historians, connected by the aforementioned journal, the appearance of the history of mentalities in the sixties and that of historical anthropology in the seventies, spearheaded by mostly British historians, the emergence of microhistory in Italy and 1980s German research into the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*) all played a major role.⁵⁷ Peter Burke, who unified these new pathways under the name of new cultural history⁵⁸, wrote a still unsurpassed monograph⁵⁹ on the history of European folk culture in the early modern period and these days, one could fill a whole library just with publications covering the different sub-topics from the medieval and early modern periods. The acceptance of these new approaches and methodologies in Hungary has not been without its hurdles in the past decades. Thanks to the invaluable educational and organisational works of the early propagators, like Gábor Klaniczay and Gyula Benda, many of the fundamental publications are available in Hungarian and the works that were created in this new paradigm have at least become a part of the university curriculum.⁶⁰ One of the core aspects of this dimension is that certain Hungarian varieties of new cultural history formed a strong bond with historical ethnography. While one of the more recent publications on historical anthropology⁶¹ seems to have forgotten about it, ethnographers are the ones to credit with initiating and organising the first conference of the field (1983) and publishing its results.⁶² The European scale treatise of Gábor Klaniczay on the history of the science that was published as a result of this conference was the first and for a long time, the best overview of the achievements of new cultural history.⁶³ Alongside a well identifiable group of social and economic historians, the main attendees came from the fields of historical folkloristics (Vilmos Voigt, Éva Pócs, Gábor Tüskés, György Martin) and historical ethnography (Tamás Hofer, Lajos Takács, Miklós Szilágyi). This fact was not the only one that eluded the later researchers who studied the history of how this new approach was accepted. They seem to have ignored both the old and new contributions of historical folkloristics and historical ethnography.⁶⁴ In our view, the general ignorance of Hungarian cultural historians (with honourable exceptions) shown towards folkloristic and ethnographic achievements should be blamed on the fact that the problematics of “folk culture” hardly appears in the Hungarian academic discourse of history.⁶⁵

The hardly understandable distance ambitious and theoretically well-versed historians keep from the “bottom-up” research of everyday life in early modern-era villages and small towns is a great advantage for the newest generations of ethnographers folklorists, who come armed with an ethnographic approach to historical sources and all the tools of a modern historians. The historical study of religious life presents especially promising opportunities,⁶⁶ especially the historical dimension of “local religion”, which would study the folk religious practices that exist alongside the “official” religion and the belief systems that fall outside of religious tentets not alongside the traditional divisions of folklore, but in a unified and localised focus.⁶⁷ The renewed historical study of customs and habits also has a great potential.⁶⁸ This field, as far as we understand, does not limit itself to the historical aspects of lay “folk customs”, which used to be the case in the past, but it has expanded its scope with the help of a broader concept of “customs”, which includes love life, aggression, religious customs, etc, that has already been used by researchers of present-day phenomena and it’s attention is directed towards analysing historical data relating to such subjects.

The renewed historical study of customs and habits does not venture onto the treacherous territory of questions of origin, but instead it limits itself to a well-defined historical period. The 18th century seems to be the best possible period to study, due to the availability of sources. The goal of this approach is not to project manufactured ethnographic facts (and thus create new artificial constructs). Instead, it attempts an “inside” analysis of carefully selected and critically scrutinised sources.⁶⁹ The historical study of customs and habits could become, when it comes to the pre-19th century time period, one of the most important fields of historical folkloristics if the analysis of sources aimed at uncovering everyday life⁷⁰ (mostly trial documentations and witness testimonies) could also reveal information about folk poetry, dances, music, games, etc. Not the paradoxical idea that yet undiscovered texts of folk poetry could appear from the time before folk poetry was “discovered” or that dances before the film and music before the phonograph would be found, but that the researchers could unveil new data about songs, dances and music as gestures of everyday life.⁷¹ If their interpretation stops being artificially isolated and considers these acts in their socio-cultural context, as it should be its function, we will have already surpassed the boundaries of our field.

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This overview of the history of Hungarian historical folkloristics and its possible future was not aimed at being an all-encompassing review. Its aim was much more practical: to provide enthusiastic university students with points of reference within a complex system. It was important that this overview was published in a brand-new, youthful journal, which has been at the forefront of cultivating the best of historical folkloristics, alongside the ethnographic study of the present and textual folkloristics. We had similar aims in mind when, during the most recent reshuffling of higher ethnographic education, we made the historical approach one of the cornerstones of the masters programme in Budapest.⁷² Of course, the products of any initiative need some time to come to fruition, and they need years, if not decades to become truly visible. The author of this essay was greatly honoured when the editors of this journal presented him with the opportunity to tend the renewal of this field, which has a great past and a very promising future. *Ad majorem Dei (et folcloristicae historicae) gloriam!*

Translated by Dávid Tosics

NOTES

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² Previous publications on the history of folkloristic research in Hungary are only able to partially bridge this gap: Voigt, V. (ed.) 1998. *passim*; Paládi-Kovács, A. (ed.) 2011. 127–212.

³ The summary of the whole history of Hungarian ethnography would probably prove to be a good starting point: Kósa, L. 2001.

⁴ Most of these were written by Attila Paládi-Kovács: Paládi-Kovács, A. 1993, 2009. This was the topic of his inaugural lecture at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences: Paládi-Kovács, A. 2010. His recent overview of the history of the science discusses the achievements of historical ethnography from a broader perspective: Paládi-Kovács, A. 2011.

⁵ Paládi-Kovács, A. (ed.) 2009.

⁶ It would be unethical from a “stand-in” author of one small chapter of this publication to give a summary review of the publication, but for all intents and purposes, it should be noted that this 700-page work is thematically disproportionate (favouring material ethnography over folkloristics). A good example of this is that the same amount of space is allocated to medieval wheeled vehicles (pages 181–185.) and to the chapter about the beliefs and religious notions of the same period (pages 262–266.). Numerous chapters of the handbook suggest that this lack of proportion is not due to the amount of available data, but rather to that editor’s own interests.

⁷ Paládi-Kovács, A. (ed.) 2011. 8–9.

⁸ Voigt, V. 1965. 719–740.

⁹ Voigt, V. (ed.) 1998. *passim*; Voigt, V. 2009.

¹⁰ Vargyas, L. 1961.

¹¹ Before, the only research worth mentioning about this topic was conducted by Márta Belényesi, who studied the material culture of the late middle ages. The re-publication of the works of this researcher with an extraordinary career only started in recent times: Belényesi, M. 2011.

¹² Vargyas, L. 1961. 7.

¹³ Vargyas, L. 1961. 8.

- ¹⁴ Paládi-Kovács, A. 2009. 11–12.
- ¹⁵ Kósa, L. 2001. 200–216.
- ¹⁶ Barabás, J. 1961. It should be noted that a few years later, he was the one to write the 18th century “ethnography” of Békés County, using only published sources, without any archival research. (Barabás, J. 1964.) Many arguments of his “groundbreaking” essay could be overturned, but that is beyond the scope of this paper.
- ¹⁷ From the works that are the result of a recently revived socio-historical interest in the topic, the publications of József Ö. Kovács should be mentioned, especially his monograph entitled *A paraszti társadalom felszámolása a kommunista diktatúrában. A vidéki Magyarország politikai társadalomtörténete 1945–1965* [The Elimination of the Peasant Society in the Communist Dictatorship. Political Social History of Hungary 1945–1965] Korall, Budapest, 2012.
- ¹⁸ Sadly, Hungarian historical ethnography only rarely defined itself and its methodology. Reflections on the ethnographic use of historical sources can be found in the introduction of an early book by Miklós Szilágyi: Szilágyi M. 1966. In the following decades, mostly books describing the types of sources and their ethnographic use were published: Filep, A. – Égető, M. (eds.) 1989; Paládi-Kovács, A. (ed.) 1993; Fülemile, Á. – Kiss, R. (eds.) 2008, representing the achievements of the first generation of historical ethnography (for example: Bertalan Andrásfalvy, Ferenc Bakó, János Bárh, Tibor Bellon, Melinda Égető, Antal Filep, Mária Flórián, Tamás Hofer, Antal Juhász, Gyula Kocsis, Miklós Szilágyi, Lajos Takács) and the generations that followed (for example Ilona Tomisa, Péter Granasztói, Réka Kiss)
- ¹⁹ The prospects of connecting archival work and an “ethnographic” point of view appeared most recently in German ethnography: Wietschorke, J. 2010.
- ²⁰ Voigt, V. 2000, 2001, 2004.
- ²¹ cf. Voigt, V. 2001. 259–293.
- ²² Voigt, V. 2000. 361.
- ²³ Voigt, V. 2000. 187–202.
- ²⁴ From these, he probably considers the two essays which he included in the newer book: Voigt, V. 2001. 29–42.
- ²⁵ Voigt, V. 2001. 33.
- ²⁶ Voigt, V. 2001. 42.
- ²⁷ Kosáry, D. 1980.
- ²⁸ Hopp, L. – Küllős, I. – Voigt, V. (eds.) 1988. A book published a few years later expands the problematics of 18th century folklore with important new areas: Paládi-Kovács, A. (ed.) 1995.
- ²⁹ For example: Pócs, É. – Voigt, V. (eds.) 1996.
- ³⁰ For example: Voigt, V. 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004.
- ³¹ Voigt, V. 2004. 304.
- ³² Voigt, V. 2000. 307–340; Voigt, V. 2001. 147–165.
- ³³ Mostly this more narrow question is dealt with in the following book with a title that would suggest a broader approach: Szemerényi, Á. (ed.) 2007.
- ³⁴ After the only critical voice (Voigt, V. 2004. 298–304.) see the little bit defiant reply by the author: Magyar, Z. 2007.
- ³⁵ For a summary, cf. Vargyas, L. 1976.
- ³⁶ For critics, cf. Voigt, V. 2000. 101–141.
- ³⁷ For the debate, cf. Voigt, V. 2000. 169–185.
- ³⁸ Vargyas, L. 1988. 518–522.
- ³⁹ Küllős, I. 2004, 2012.
- ⁴⁰ See also the 18th century collections of common poetry by the *Régi Magyar Költők Tára*, edited by Imola Küllős and István Csörsz Rumen: RMKT XVIII. 2000, 2006.
- ⁴¹ Gulyás, J. (ed.) 2008.
- ⁴² cf. Mikos, É. 2010.
- ⁴³ cf. the first, introductory issue of the journal *Etnoszkóp* 2011. (1)
- ⁴⁴ cf. the index of theses of the Ethnographic Institute of ELTE: Csonka-Takács, E. (ed.) 2004.
- ⁴⁵ Some spatially and temporally contained collections that deal with folklore-related topics: Szilágyi, M. 1995; Imreh, I. – Pataki, J. 1992; Zsupos, Z. 1994; Bárh, J. 2005.
- ⁴⁶ Kramer, K-S. 1989; Moser, H. 1985; Göttisch, S. 2007; Bárh, D. 2008. 290–291.
- ⁴⁷ For example: Schram, F. 1957, 1967.
- ⁴⁸ Schram, F. 1968, 1969.
- ⁴⁹ Schram’s complex works on the history of church and liturgy and his ethnographically minded studies of customs and habits (for foreign parallels, cf. Hartinger, W. 1992) were only continued after long decades: Bárh, D. 2005.
- ⁵⁰ Schram, F. 1970–82.
- ⁵¹ We only cite one of these: Pócs, É. (ed.) 2001.
- ⁵² Pócs, É. 1997.
- ⁵³ Kristóf, I. 1998.
- ⁵⁴ Kósa, L. 2001. 189.
- ⁵⁵ Imreh, I. 1973, 1983.
- ⁵⁶ Summary in Hungarian: Benda, Gy. – Szekeres, A. (ed.) 2007.
- ⁵⁷ The international literature by and about these fields is both immense. For general use, we recommend a Hungarian textbook: Bódy, Zs. – Ö. Kovács, J. (eds.) 2003.
- ⁵⁸ cf. Burke, P. (ed.) 2001; Burke, P. 2005.
- ⁵⁹ Hungarian translation: Burke, P. 1991.

⁶⁰ In the experience of the author of this paper, the acceptance was hardly noticeable in the reading lists of the Department of History in the 1990s, but such publications were already featured in the reading lists of ethnography courses.

⁶¹ Apor, P. 2003.

⁶² Hofer, T. (ed.) 1984.

⁶³ Klaniczay, G. 1984.

⁶⁴ Multiple chapters are informative from this point of view in this handbook, especially the overview of the acceptance of historical anthropology in Hungary (Apor, P. 2003. 456–458), which is evidence of stunning levels of ignorance. It does not recognise the works of Ildikó Kristóf, but it is from the citations seemingly uninformed about terms such as “folk religion”.

⁶⁵ The works of Gábor Klaniczay (1990) and Gyula Benda (2006) are an exception and promising tendencies are showing in the books of Gabriella Erdélyi: Erdélyi, G. 2005, 2011.

⁶⁶ From the previously authoritative literature: Tüskés, G. – Knapp, É. 1997.

⁶⁷ On the contemporary, anthropological dimensions of the study of local religion: Stewart, Ch. 1991. 10–12.; Hesz, Á. 2012. 79–86.

⁶⁸ The topic is dealt with in another essay: Bárh, D. 2012. Previously, the importance of church sources for the field was highlighted: Bárh, D. 2008. Only a few monographs are cited that contain the newest results of the historical study of customs and habits in Hungary: Kiss, R. 2011; Deáky, Z. 2011.

⁶⁹ The (authoritative) treatise of Ildikó Kristóf is cited: Kristóf, I. 2003. On the similarities and differences between the methodology of historical ethnography and cultural anthropology: Fenske, M. 2007.

⁷⁰ On the vast philosophical, sociological, anthropological, etc. literature about the problematics of everyday life cf. the opinion of a Hungarian historian: Gyáni, G. 1999.

⁷¹ From among many possible examples, only Hofer's excellent source analysis is cited: Hofer, T. 2004.

⁷² In the present curriculum, Historical Folkloristics is a mandatory course (lecture and seminar), for which Source Analysis (at least its part dealing with archival sources) is a prerequisite course. Those specialising in folkloristics have another course (Historical Folkloristics 2. Lecture and seminar) during their second term.

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