

THE LIVING ROSARY SOCIETY
AS FRAME AND FORM OF THE MARIAN DEVOTION
THE FEMINIZATION OF THE MARIAN DEVOTION
A CASE STUDY

Abstract: The renewed form of the rosary prayer, the Living Rosary Society, established in Lyon (France) in 1826 spread rapidly on the continent. The paper examines the life and work of the society in an agrarian town on the Great Hungarian Plain. The rosary confraternity was principally an association of the peasantry. From the late 19th century the rosary increasingly became a form of women's devotion and confraternity, the lower middle class and elderly women. But even in the mid-20th century its leaders were still men. While religious life became feminised the secular world retained its patriarchal character in which only men could be leaders. The First World War brought rapid change.

Keywords: rosary society, The Living Rosary Society, female devotion, patriarchal society, offices in the society

The Rosary and Its Confraternities: The Living Rosary Society

The rosary, as an object and a prayer, is regarded as uniquely characteristic of Catholics. According to the legend, the Virgin Mary herself gave the rosary to Saint Dominic in the 13th century.¹ Although the rosary is generally regarded as one of the individual forms of devotion,² forms of its use in a communal frame are known from the last third of the 15th century. There are records of rosary confraternities in Hungary too from the end of the 15th century.³ The basic structure of the rosary remained essentially the same: 150 Hail Marys, 15 Pater Nosters and three times five, that is 15 mysteries taken from sacred history. In different periods and places, other prayers could also be associated with these, giving rise to the various forms of rosary devotion. This 800-year-old prayer underwent numerous changes in the course of history, but was always capable of renewal.

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2 RADÓ 1961, 488-492; KLINKHAMMER 1981, 473-507; LÉVAY 1934, 229-255; VEREBÉLYI 1983.

3 BÁLINT 1977, II, 367; BARNA 1996, 287-288.

One such renewal can be dated to 1826 when Jean-Maria Jaricot, a French woman from Lyons, initiated the formation of 15-member prayer groups corresponding to the number of mysteries. In this way, each sacred mystery was said simultaneously in the group and so this kind of rosary was made *living* according to Madame Jaricot. With episcopal and papal support, this form of confraternity spread rapidly from the 1830s in Austria, Germany and Hungary. One of the first Hungarian parent confraternities (archiconfraternitas) is known to have operated in Győr (North-west Hungary) from 1843. From then on the confraternity spread rapidly in Hungary and between 1885 and 1945 also published its own periodical. Many prayer-books on the languages of the Hungarian Kingdom (Hungarian, German, Slovak, Croatian) were published for the members.⁴

The Living Rosary Society became and still is the most popular prayer confraternity among Roman Catholics in Hungary and elsewhere.⁵ In this paper it will be examined in wider Hungarian context based on the case study of the Living Rosary Confraternity in a small agrarian town, Kunszentmárton (county Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok) on the Great Hungarian Plain.

The Living Rosary Confraternity in Kunszentmárton

The people of Kunszentmárton first encountered the “living spiritual rosary” prayer and confraternity form in 1851 in Máriaradna (up to 1920 part of Hungary, now Radna, Arad County, Romania), a place of pilgrimage at the Whitsun feast.⁶ The singers leading the pilgrimage decided to form a similar confraternity in their own town.⁷

They obtained the approval of the rector.⁸ The permission given by the rector meant recognition of the legitimacy of the confraternity activity since the rector represented the clergy and the power of the church authorities. The permission given by the rector was based on his own authority and that of the Church, and further reinforced that authority. Besides giving his support, he also demanded the right of supervision.

The rector entrusted one of the singers to draw up a list of the confraternity members and asked for the list.⁹ A list of members was drawn up in 1852. This was supplemented and corrected in 1854 and again in 1857. A new list of

4 BARNÁ 1991, BARNÁ 1996., BARNÁ 2011. 130-131.

5 BARNÁ 2011. 149, 384-385.

6 For details on the pilgrimages made to Máriaradna by the people of Kunszentmárton, see: BARNÁ 1991.

7 Minute-books of the Confraternity of the Living Spiritual Rosary in Kunszentmárton (Min), p. 4. The minute-books were published by Barna in 1998. The figures refer to the page numbers in the minute-book.

8 Min 4, 7. József Trangos was rector in Kunszentmárton from 1844-1858. DÓSA – SZABÓ 1936, 146-148.

9 Min 8-10. József Ökrös (March 19, 1816 – January 21, 1893) was a master weaver. He founded a choral society (1845), rosary confraternity (1851), burial society (1856), organised church and guild celebrations, and composed many hymns. See also: JÓZSA 1998, BARNÁ 2001.

members was drawn up in 1897 when the Confraternity was its peak: at that time it had 1800 members in 120 groups of 15 persons each.

Minutes were kept on the functioning of the confraternity between 1851-1940. These also contain the lists of members.¹⁰ My short paper is based on these lists, an analysis of the confraternity's minute-books, as well as on observations and interviews.

The leaders of the confraternity

Offices and roles

Under canon law the rectors are the leaders of the confraternities. The rector supported the organisation of the confraternity¹¹ and encouraged church members to recite the rosary, but did not personally participate in the life of the confraternity or interfere in its internal affairs. He and his successors could be said to hover above the confraternity, acting as arbitrators in case of disputes.¹² The only departure from this practice occurred when a locally-born priest was rector:¹³ in the first years of his activity he regularly participated in the meetings of the leadership of the Rosary Confraternity. He exercised his right as head of the confraternity, named himself *president*, and the earlier lay president *vice-president*, titles that were used in this form in the minute-book from 1891. Adapting to the local religious traditions and his own local socialisation can be mentioned as factors in his participation.¹⁴ From 1891, thirty years after the establishment of the Rosary Confraternity, the Kunszentmárton rectors wished to control the society's financial affairs.¹⁵ However, the lay presidents (vice-presidents) remained the de facto leaders of the Rosary Confraternity throughout its existence.

At the time of establishment in 1851 the rector called on the singer and leader József Ökrös "and at the same time authorised him to direct the affairs of the Confraternity and to teach them whatever was necessary, while taking care not to act or initiate anything new without informing him".¹⁶ This latter sentence can be

¹⁰ BARNÁ 1998.

¹¹ He even protected the Rosary Confraternity from the political police at the time of its establishment. He did not allow meetings to be held in private houses even though this was possible under the rules adopted, insisting instead that they be held in the church to prevent them from becoming suspect in the eyes of the political police following the defeat of the War of Independence (there was a ban on assemblies).

¹² BARNÁ 1999, 34-35.

¹³ Min. 144. József Dósa, rector of Kunszentmárton from 1888-1913. See: DÓSA – SZABÓ 1936, 149-150.

¹⁴ He took an active part in the life of the rosary confraternity at a time when secularisation was already well under way in Hungarian society and when Catholic public life was also strongly articulated. The demand for functioning of the confraternities had greatly changed on the part of the official church, and the Rosary Confraternity was not the only lay religious society in Kunszentmárton.

¹⁵ Min 122.

¹⁶ Min. 8.

regarded as authorisation for József Ökrös to act as religious leader of the Confraternity. It was a form of church permit¹⁷ (*licentia*), and József Ökrös made use of it. He also preached sermons, something that had become rare by then, and wrote down his sermons.¹⁸

The confraternity's office-bearers came from the middle strata of society (tradesmen, farmers). The leadership was hierarchically structured. It was headed by the *confraternity president* (called *lay president* or *vice-president*). In most cases they also held the post of *singer* / *chief singer*. This circumstance points to one of the most important tasks of the confraternity leaders: to lead the singing on pilgrimages and in the church before official liturgies. In addition, they organised, directed and handled the church patronage. They corresponded and negotiated with tradesmen and artists and they also provided for the transport of the objects ordered (paintings, crosses, statues, banners and other items). One of the lay leaders, József Ökrös wrote and published special booklets of hymns and prayers for the confraternity. Through these he introduced new customs.¹⁹ One of the manuscript song-books of the 19th century singers was found in the legacy of a 20th century descendant, indicating that in undertaking this role they also preserved and passed on a cultural heritage. The confraternity's main office-bearers were the *president*, the *singer* and the *treasurer* and in most cases they filled these posts until their deaths. This meant that their experience, their social contacts and also their age played a part in their social prestige.

The confraternity employed a *servant* who – in the manner of the guilds²⁰ – delivered invitations to the meetings. All of the confraternity office-bearers received payment for their activity. There was also an *elected body* of five to fifteen members to direct the confraternity. Up to the 1920s its members were all men. What we see here is a typical, conservative, patriarchal association.

For a long while there was only one woman among the inner circle of leaders: the *deaconess* who supervised and directed the Daughters of Mary. All of their names are known from the minutes. To raise the pomp of the liturgical service, in 1852, almost from the date of its foundation, the rosary confraternity created the group of *confraternity girls* (*Daughters of Mary*) composed of girls around the age of 12.²¹ They carried the confraternity banners and the portable statue of Mary at

17 The Catholic Church in Hungary often gave permits of this type in the 17th–18th centuries, a period when the number of priests had greatly declined as a result of the Reformation and the Turkish occupation. These literate men conducted christenings, marriages and burials, organised religious life (e.g. pilgrimages) and taught. In the course of the Catholic restoration in the 18th century their activity was restricted. Their right to teach (preach) was withdrawn. See: JUHÁSZ 1921, SÁVAI – PINTÉR 1993, SÁVAI 1997, SÁVAI – GRYNÆUS 1994.

18 In these sermons he encouraged all social strata and age groups to say the rosary prayers. See: BARNA 1998, 132-133.

19 Min 37, 118. BARNA 1998. 33-34. The prayer written for the novena of the feast of the Immaculate Conception and published in 1887 is especially beautiful.

20 In Hungary the guilds were not disbanded until 1872 when free exercise of trade was introduced.

21 This is indicated by the minutes of the extraordinary assembly held on August 10, 1873, recording the closing and transfer of the finances and assets due to the death of the treasurer, József S. Tóth. Among those confirming the procedure is “signed x by Deaconess Anna Doba”. Min 27.

the masses and in processions, they accompanied those setting out on pilgrimage to Máriaradna, as far as the Blaise Cross at the edge of the town, and waited there for them when they returned, with the cross and banner, adding pomp and splendour to the thanksgiving held in the church on their return.²² They were listed by name at the time of establishment but unfortunately we do not know the later lists. It was the task of the deaconesses to instruct and supervise the girls in their participation in the liturgy. The various *deaconesses* were probably in charge of the Daughters of Mary for many years. When her term of service expired, the same deaconess was generally appointed again. When a deaconess died, her successor was chosen from among the women in the confraternity. In one case the minutes mention that the deaconess was 85 years old. Judging from their names and their probable family ties, the deaconesses must have been from the lower middle classes. Not all of them were literate.²³

Most of the leaders of the 15-member groups, known locally as *tens*, were women. The group leaders, who are hardly mentioned at all in the minutes, probably held their positions for decades. They organised the everyday life of the rosary confraternity, they made sure that the prayers and devotions were observed, distributed the mysteries and supervised their performance. They maintained prayer-houses in their homes. It was through them that the members were in contact with other groups and with the leaders of the confraternity.

The minutes report in detail mainly on the work of this narrow circle of leaders, dealing with the organisation of patronage by the confraternity: the collection of funds, purchases, travel and correspondence.

The membership of the confraternity, the led

Social composition of the confraternity membership

The rosary confraternity drew its members mainly from the broad middle strata (tradesmen, farmers), as well as the upper and lower strata. The founders and first leaders of the confraternity were prosperous and respected tradesmen and farmers. However, the confraternity minutes do not mention the secular occupation of any of the confraternity office-bearers.²⁴ This indicates that their authority arose not from their secular occupations or their financial status, but from their religious life. This, of course, also determined their social prestige. In a few cases it can be shown from the list of members that some of the town's leaders were also

²² Min 115.

²³ Min 92. However, we know from another source that during this period many devout women already subscribed to religious papers and periodicals. But it is perhaps not by chance that the surviving manuscript song and prayer books from the second half of the 19th century have all come down to us in the handwriting and from the possession of men.

²⁴ The founder, József Ökrös, was a master weaver and head of the guild at the time of its dissolution (1872).

members of a rosary group. The list for 1897, for example, includes the chief judge and his family. However, it is almost impossible on the basis of the membership lists to make any distinction regarding the financial status of the members.²⁵ On many occasions József Ökrös, founder and leader of the confraternity, stressed that the support of the town's leaders and the rector was important for them, obviously regarding it as a factor of legitimisation.²⁶ The social prestige and recognition of the rosary confraternity were no doubt enhanced by the fact that its church leader was always the rector. At the same time the secular public administration demanded the right to control the financial operation of the confraternity, not principally as a member but as patron.

The most influential and wealthiest landowners and their wives were among the members and patrons of the confraternity.²⁷ They maintained their determining role as patrons for decades. Summing up the data of the minute-books it can be said that members of the most prominent families in the local farming society initially figured in the rosary confraternity as members but later tended rather to be patrons. This role was played mainly by their wives and the women. However, the professionals (lawyers, judges, teachers, doctors, officials), were not members. The absence of the so-called intelligentsia from the church and religious life was a recurring complaint made on the occasion of visits by the subdeacon at the end of the 19th century.²⁸

The leaders of the rosary confraternity regarded the membership as a relatively homogeneous group. It made no distinction among the members by age or occupation, only by sex and place of residence. However, it was only in the early years that the distinction between men's groups and women's groups seems to have been a major consideration. Later it lost its significance.

Kinship and local connections within the confraternity

One of the reasons why this form of confraternity was so popular could have been that it broke the large community of religious society down into small communities that the individual could grasp and, at the same time, through them also incorporated the individual into the larger community. The rosary confraternity also involved two traditional principles of the horizontal organization of society into its own organization: kinship ties and neighbourhood. Throughout its existence the 15-member groups seem to have been organized on the basis of neighbourhood and kinship. Each group was composed of members of two or three families: parents, children and members of the older generation living in the same household with

²⁵ This would require the use of other contemporary sources, e.g. tax assessments.

²⁶ In one of his speeches, in connection with the establishment he made special mention of the patronage of the chief judge of the time and his deputy. Min 68.

²⁷ Min 53.

²⁸ Eger Archdiocese Archive, Minutes of visits by subdeacons 586.

them.²⁹ By the mid-20th century this frame was loosened somewhat. These groups were able to join up to form an even wider frame. The ordinary members were able to belong to this wider community through the person of the group leader who ensured and maintained the network of informal contacts among the groups. Family participation in the rosary confraternity must have strengthened family ties and emotional bonds. This confraternity offered the individual another way of integrating into the wider community of the parish and town. Organisation on the basis of sex and generation at first added variety and later quite clearly replaced it. The family confraternity frames disappeared, the men dropped out and women made up the majority of the confraternity members.

Men and women in the Rosary Confraternity

The confraternity, which was very dynamic at the time of its establishment, conducted a census of its members on several occasions (1852, that was supplemented in 1857, 1897, 1918, 1922) and from 1897 sent the list to the archconfraternity in Győr. An unusual and interesting feature is that right up to the censuses taken in the 20th century women figured almost exclusively under their maiden names. This circumstance makes it very difficult to identify the marital status and family ties of confraternity members.

The censuses carried out and recorded within the Rosary Confraternity of Kunszentmárton from 1852 clearly show the gradual feminisation. In 1852 separate men's and women's groups were still being formed, later there was mingling within groups and then a strong process of feminisation in the confraternity, although right up to the 1940s the leaders remained men. According to the census of 1852 there were 11 men's groups (= 165 persons) and 40 women's groups (= 600 persons). This means that already at the start there were four times more women

²⁹ The 47th group of the 1897 census can be cited as an example. The membership was recorded as follows: 1. Ilona Balla, leader, 2. Ilona Pásztor, 3. Mária Barna, 4. Ilona Barna, 5. Rozália Kis, 6. Ilona Kis, 7. Ilona Kovács, 8. Katalin Barna, 9. Teréz Kis, 10. Márta Katona, 11. Katalin Nagy, 12. Rozália Vincze, 13. Julianna Kakuk, 14. Rozália Tóth, 15. Katalin Sári. The members of this group who belonged to the same family and lived in the same household were: 1. Ilona BALLA, 2. Mária BARNÁ, Ilona BARNÁ (Mrs. Lukács Ecsédi, widow), Katalin BARNÁ, their mother (Mrs. Péter Barna, widow) Julianna KAKUK, 3. Katalin SÁRI. The SÁRI, BARNÁ and BALLA families were neighbours in their street – even in the mid-20th century.

The significance of family and kinship ties can be seen even more strikingly in the 93rd group of Alsóréz, a former 'puszta' (outlying settlement cluster) of Kunszentmárton which was given independent public administration status in 1897 as Mesterszállás. Its members were: 1. István Kuna, leader, 2. Apolló Dékány, 3. Antal Kuna, 4. Julianna Kiss, 5. István B. Nagy, 6. Ilona Devánszki, 7. János Imrei, 8. Anna Farkas, 9. József Kuna, 10. Mária Kuna, 11. Viktória Kovács, 12. Antal L. Kuna, 13. Viktória Kovács, 14. György Romhányi, 15. Veronika Kuna. The Kuna family dominates in this group. There are two members with the same name: Kovács Viktória. The list does not reveal the relationship of the members to each other. This can only be interpreted by someone familiar with these relationships. It was found that the group contained a number of siblings and several married couples but the women's married names are not given: 1. István Kuna – Apolló Dékány, 2. Antal Kuna – Julianna Kiss, 3. István D. Nagy – Ilona Devánszki, 4. János Imrei – Anna Farkas, 5. József Kuna – Viktória Kovács and their daughter, Mária Kuna, 6. Antal Kuna and Viktória Kovács, 7. György Romhányi – Veronika Kuna.

than men among the members.³⁰ When the confraternity census was updated in 1856 they found 16 men's groups (=180 persons), 6 women's groups (=90 persons) and 4 mixed groups (=60 persons).³¹ However, there was scarcely any change in the ratio of men to women. Of the 111 "tens" (=15-member groups) recorded in 1897, only 7 consisted solely of men, 47 were formed solely of women and 57 had a mixed membership of men and women with women in the majority.³² The 1917 census found only 52 groups of 15 members and when this census was updated in 1922 there were 56 groups. This means that by then the total membership had dropped to 840 persons. No further censuses were carried out. Today the confraternity has 30 members who are no longer divided into groups of 15. Women generally figure in the censuses and lists of donors under their maiden names. The increase in their numbers was not accompanied by a corresponding increase in their role in the leadership.

Women were the biggest patrons donating the most money to the confraternity for its various purposes. Already when the first donations were collected in 1852, 6 of the 11 largest donations were made by women, 4 by men and one was listed under joint donations.³³ In 1855 they collected money for a banner for the pilgrimage to Máriaradna. There were 86 donors, of whom 33 were men and 44 women, most of them listed under their married names.³⁴ In 1861 the confraternity began to collect donations for paintings of the Stations of the Cross to be placed in the Kunszentmárton parish church. There are 316 names on the list of donors: 106 men and 210 women.³⁵ In contrast, in 1868 305 persons made donations for the Stations (painted columns) planned for the Lower Cemetery: 248 men and only 57 women, some of them figuring under their married name. It is of note that the donors were mainly women from the prosperous farming families. This indicates that within the division of roles inside the families, religion was the field of the women, while the men were active in farming, in the family's external relations and in secular public affairs.³⁶

The wives of the most influential and wealthiest estate-owners, András Szabó and Gergely P. Kovács (from 1896 chief judge) are among the members of the confraternity and its donors. Around the turn of the century the Szabó and P. Kovács families were the church's principal patrons, making numerous gifts. In the jubilee year of 1900, Erzsébet Cziráki Almási was wife of the owner of the neighbouring Almási estate (now Kungyalu).³⁷ In the case of active membership this was probably true in the initial period. While they continue to act as donors, the

30 Min. 13-25.

31 Min. 64-65.

32 Min. 164-183.

33 Min. 26.

34 Min. 52-53.

35 Min. 76-82.

36 December 9, 1904. At the recommendation of vice-president Imre Szarvák it was recorded in the minute-book that the confraternity had 14 Stations of the Cross paintings done for the church at Radna. (Min 185) It was also recorded here that a sanctuary lamp was made for the local church. (Min 185) The names of the donors are listed in separate minutes. The Stations paintings cost 100 crowns each.

37 Min. 160.

town's leading families scarcely figure at all in the later lists of members. The absence of this stratum from the church and religious life was a recurring complaint made during visits by the subdeacon at the end of the 19th century.³⁸

The first decades of the 20th century were the period when women began to play an increasing role in the rosary confraternity, not only as members but also at the leadership level. The influence of wider social processes had begun to have an impact. However, it was the First World War that brought a decisive change. All this is reflected in a very instructive way in the entries in the minute-books.

On December 8, 1867, for example, women are first mentioned by name in a record of an assembly of the confraternity. Before that time, only the deaconess is mentioned by name. The women who are mentioned are not group leaders but ordinary members.³⁹ Later, for many decades, the list of members present at the confraternity assemblies merely notes that "many women" were also present. The list of participants at the confraternity assembly held on December 8, 1874 gives the names of 18 men and for the first time gives the exact number of women present: "a number of confraternity members and 37 women".⁴⁰ At the extraordinary assembly on April 23, 1922, beside the 14 male office-bearers present "there were also over 100 women". In 1923 over 200 women attended the assembly.⁴¹ They are the background, the decisive mass. Their numbers show that they felt responsibility for the affairs of the confraternity and also that the assembly was a social event for them. At the renewal of offices, the vice-president, treasurer and keeper of the minutes were always men.⁴² *The first time women were elected to the confraternity leadership was on January 8, 1923.*⁴³ After that, especially in the 1930s, men and women were elected to the leadership in roughly equal proportions.

Apart from the donations made by the more prosperous, the role of women in the confraternity was to decorate the church with flowers, care for the confraternity painting, statue and banners, and direct the Daughters of Mary. This represents a system of internal tasks, while the male members of the confraternity cultivated relations with the municipal and parish authorities, maintaining and operating a system of external relations. This was in line with the contemporary notions of women's roles and religion.

Age groups

It is not possible to distinguish the members by age as the censuses of confraternity members give no data on age. The censuses and the minutes of the confraternity assemblies make no reference to the age composition of the membership. It can be assumed that the members of the leaders and the deaconesses

38 Eger Archdiocese Archive, Minutes of visits by subdeacons 586.

39 Min. 85.

40 Min. 95.

41 Min. 209.

42 Min. 212.

43 Min 212.

supervising the Daughters of Mary were at least middle-aged or perhaps even older men and women.

The group of Daughters of Mary was obviously composed of children. Their numbers are not known either after the list of names given in the first year. We do not know how many girls carried banners and portable statues in the processions, or waited for the pilgrims returning from Máriaradna. However, it can be seen that such participation in the Rosary Confraternity in childhood must have influenced the later form of individual religious practice, giving young people a model, and in more wealthy families also setting an example for the practice of patronage.

It is no longer possible to determine the number of children or even their proportion, although the participation of a family could be reconstructed within one or two rosary groups. However, these data are not sufficient to make generalisations. Perhaps all that can be said is that a number of teenagers, especially girls, were members of the Rosary Confraternity, no doubt under the influence of their parents. Later they probably ensured the continuous recruitment of new members. This continuity and generational link was broken after the communists took over power, during the years in which the church and religion were repressed, and largely contributed to the fact that there are now only around 30 rosary members active in Kunszentmárton, all women, with only one or two teenage girls. The rapid decline began from the 1970s with the gradual death of members of the age groups born in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The local religious confraternity “market”

In the decades between the two world wars religious life in Kunszentmárton underwent great change. The occupation by Romania of the eastern part of the Great Hungarian Plain and its subsequent annexation to Romania made pilgrimages to Radna impossible. This previously important organising role of the rosary confraternity slowly faded. Local society became more articulated, creating an important basis for the organisation of groups. However, parallel with this, the primary role of the church as organiser of society and integrating force gradually declined.

In addition to the growing process of secularisation in the final decades of the 19th century, the greater supply on the “market” of religious confraternities also played a role in the feminisation and the declining numbers. New confraternities appeared in Kunszentmárton too, and divided the religious lay society. They offered men and women, young people and children, as well as the wealthy and the poor different models of socialisation and spirituality. In 1936, at the end of the period studied, the following confraternities operated in the town: Sacred Heart Confraternity⁴⁴ with 689 members, the second biggest was the Living Rosary Confraternity with 652 members, the Heart Brigade for children with 420 members, and the Sacred Heart Childhood Association with 125. Lagging far

44 Cf. BUSCH 1997.

behind these were the Franciscan Third Order (46 members), the Altar Society (87 members), the Missionary Association (52 members), the Congregation of Mary (56 members).⁴⁵ The very popular Catholic Young Men's Society (KALOT⁴⁶) and the Catholic rural girls' society (KALÁSZ⁴⁷), were organised after 1935 on the basis of occupation and age. And in this supply of religious societies the rosary confraternity was regarded as traditional. In the 20th century, especially from the middle of the century it increasingly lost ground and became a prayer society of middle-aged and elderly women. At the same time, its original function as a prayer society strengthened. Young people were attracted to other organisations; religious representation declined and after 1948 was banned under the communist dictatorship. Other forms of aid and of pomp at funerals emerged. In 1940 the Carmelite Order moved to Kunszentmárton. Another rival confraternity form, the *Carmelite Third Order* and the *Scapular Confraternity* also became popular.⁴⁸ The members of the Carmelite third order were mainly women. The scapular confraternity grouped broad strata of local and rural society.

A few conclusions

At the time the confraternity of Kunszentmárton was established, politically Hungary had only recently experienced the defeat of the revolution and war of independence in 1848-49 and was in a period of political absolutism, economically it was the beginning of rapid industrialisation (regulation of rivers, railway construction, manufacturing industry) and socially the period was marked by accelerating embourgeoisement. These changes naturally had a much stronger impact in the big towns and industrial centres than on the Hungarian Great Plain, the area of my investigation. Here, the large-scale industrialisation brought favourable years and decades for agrarian society but from the end of the 19th century the region was marked by economic stagnation and then in the 20th century by a steady decline that can still be felt. It was under these circumstances that the rosary confraternity was established. It became the longest-lived religious society in the modern history of Kunszentmárton, mobilising and organising the biggest masses. It still exists and functions.

The rosary confraternity was principally an association of the peasantry, not only in the settlement studied here but in Hungary in general. The rosary (also) became an object of dress, especially for middle-aged and elderly peasant women on festive occasions. In many places it is still worn.⁴⁹

45 BARNÁ 1998, 18.

46 KALOT: National Body of Catholic Rural Young Men's Associations (1935-1946). See: Magyar Katolikus Lexikon [Hungarian Catholic Lexicon] VI. 2001, 89-93.

47 KALÁSZ = Federation of Catholic Girls' Circles (1935-1946). See: Magyar Katolikus Lexikon [Hungarian Catholic Lexicon] VI. 2001, 364.

48 JÓZSA 1991, KÓSA 1991.

49 BARNÁ 2011. 382-384.

According to the evidence of the minute-books and contemporary religious literature and the confraternity's periodical, the rosary was principally a form of *women's devotion*. The women's enthusiasm is reflected in the lists of donors. If a *sponsor* had to be found for a cause, the confraternity could always count on the *female society*. However, the leaders were men.

What is the reason for this difference between men and women in reception of the rosary, clearly perceivable in Kunszentmárton after the first decades? It is probably not sufficient to refer to the commonplace in research on religion that religion has always been closer to women. The process of steadily growing feminisation of religion can be observed in Hungary from the mid-19th century and in Central Europe in general from the early 19th century. It affected all Christian denominations. It can be concluded from this that from the 19th century Christianity played a bigger role in the lives of women than of men.⁵⁰

The high degree of feminisation can only be interpreted in the context of the process of secularisation. The processes of economic, social and cultural modernisation, which can be seen as part of the broader processes of industrialisation and embourgeoisement, separated the living and working places and living spaces. It was the role of men to support the family and this went together with certain public roles that made men more receptive of secularisation. Women occupied the private space, within the family. It was their task to manage the household and raise the children. Within this context they also provided for the family's sacral world.

The rosary devotions and membership of the confraternity represented an important means of Christian education for the parents. But this can be said in a wider sense too. The confraternity's monthly periodical *Rózsafüzér Királynéja* [Queen of the Rosary]⁵¹, and other devotional writings related to the rosary tended to stress conservative religiosity, sharply opposing it to the liberal, Masonic and (in the 20th century) Bolshevik (communist) ideologies, blaming them for the social and moral problems of the time. They stresses, as a model, what could now perhaps be characterised as a feminine religiosity. In other words, they can be said to have legitimised the gender characteristics of religiosity.

From the late 19th century the rosary increasingly became a form of women's devotion and confraternity. But even in the mid-20th century its leaders were still men. While religious life became feminised the secular world retained its patriarchal character in which only men could be leaders. For a considerable time to come public forums were open largely only to men. This role is even strengthened by the women's roles.⁵² The rosary confraternity preserved its nature as a women's mass movement right up to the 1940s.⁵³

This was probably because 1. its operation involved substantial church patronage, so its continued existence was in the interest of the church, while it provided

50 McLEOD 1988.

51 The periodical, issued from 1885-1945 had strong ties to the Dominican Order. A number of people in Kunszentmárton and district subscribed to it.

52 MARSHMENT 1994, 131.

53 BARNA 2011. 384-385.

lay church members with a frame for their charity, 2. because it set tasks that were clear, readily understandable and easily performed, 3. it required members to co-ordinate their forms of individual and collective religious practice in a way that was acceptable. As individual religious practice the rosary group meant saying 10 “Hail Marys”. The place and time structure for the prayers was flexible, meaning that the prayers could be said anywhere and at any time, even during work; in fact it was even recommended that they be said during work. This gave special emphasis to intimacy in prayers, an important requirement for individual religious practice, while at the same time also ensuring a certain collective character. The confraternity members say their individual prayers simultaneously with other members. All this gave legitimacy to a distinctively feminine form of religious practice.⁵⁴

At the same time however, efforts were made to involve men and children in the rosary confraternity and devotions. The confraternity’s periodical regularly published stories of conversion influenced by the rosary and also regularly wrote about men – mainly belonging to the intelligentsia – who used the rosary for prayer. All these stories were read in Kunszentmárton too. In the early 20th century rosary groups were formed in Hungary and throughout Europe for children and soldiers.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, these examples were unable to reverse the general trend.

The First World War brought rapid change. Some of the men who had been to the front became alienated from religion and the church, while religiosity strengthened among women. The only change in this came from the late 1920s and even more from the mid-1930s when the Jesuits successfully organised the KALOT and KALÁSZ organisations.⁵⁶ Besides the strengthening and legitimisation of both gender and religious identity, these also represented strong social and nationalist ideals. However, this had the effect of drawing people – men, women, youth and children alike – away from the earlier confraternity forms felt to be traditional.

The motivations for establishment of confraternities were varied. In certain historical periods they could represent a forum of public life for the individual, making them important organisational frames for individual awareness (embourgeoisement). They could provide a frame for the manifestation and assertion of different aims and interests.

As Hungarian society underwent change in the late 19th century new demands arose in religious life, requiring a new frame, new forms of content and new social roles in the practice of religion. On the one hand, big mass movements⁵⁷ emerged, and on the other pastoral work became more differentiated. The new type of rosary confraternity form that arose in the mid-19th century was able to meet these new demands: it was able to link the horizontally organised confraternity to the

54 BARNÁ 2011, 378-381.

55 KIRSCH 1950, 344-348.

56 See notes 45 and 46.

57 E.g.: Catholic mass rallies.

vertically organised church. In Kunszentmárton it played a big role in integrating the entire society.⁵⁸

Membership of the confraternity represented a distinctive path and form of religious socialisation. Its frames were family membership: parents and children were members together, although later this was the case mainly for mothers and their daughters. Membership of the Daughters of Mary played a similar role. It is very likely that many young girls aged 10–14 years developed the habit of saying the rosary prayers, together with the demand, possibility and means of playing a certain community religious role.

This acceptable blend of functions and community roles, the individual and collective practice of religion led to a situation where, in the last decade of the 19th century, one fifth to one sixth of the town's inhabitants were members of the rosary confraternity, with the predominance of women. Practically all families in the middle and lower strata were represented in the confraternity. For the leaders of the confraternity this association frame represented a possible means and path for gaining social prominence. At the same time it also legitimised the existing (social, secular and ecclesiastical) order.

The change in the proportions of the leaders and the led, that is, the male office-bearers and the predominantly female members, reflects the economic and social processes of the late 19th century and first half of the 20th century. The activity of the men was confined mainly to the confraternity's external relations, while the women were active inside the confraternity. But as the social and political attitudes towards women changed in the early 20th century and the forums of openness became increasingly accessible for women too, women gained increasing possibilities and began to play a greater role in operating the confraternity's external relations. This was also assisted by the rapid spread of technical civilisation: transport and commerce became part of everyday life. At the same time they also retained their earlier, internal scope of activity. As a result women gradually took over all levels of confraternity activity and the network of contacts.

It can be seen that the rosary confraternity is principally a prayer and religious society of the peasantry, the lower middle class and elderly women. The intelligentsia and men participate only rarely and in small numbers. Nowadays very few young people and children are drawn into the organisation. While the men are representatives of "official religiosity" (priests, cantors, sextons, vestrymen, etc.), women are the organisers of unofficial religiosity. "Their institution is organised and operates from below, giving them a better overview than the representatives of official religion have of the most important demands coming from below, from the village community. They know when the family, as the primary group, has need of material and spiritual support and a helping hand. While official religion helps those in need only spiritually, through the means of church liturgy, the Rosary Confraternity, besides its interpretation of the liturgy originating from below, also tries to give every other kind of help: voluntary work groups, material assistance in the form of donations of money and loans of tableware, and

58 Min 97.

at the same time friendly, human encouragement and support through the close contacts. This institutionalised, helping organisation has a network covering almost the entire village; there are very few houses without a member. For this reason it can be said that it keeps the whole village under its supervision. Both the assistance and the contacts are linked to the cycles of nature (spring, summer, autumn, and the months), and to the turning points in human life.⁵⁹ In the case of the Kunszentmárton confraternity in the 19th century the system of external connections was operated by the men, while the women were responsible for the internal contacts.

For a century ageing and feminisation have been a recurring complaint by leaders and members of the rosary confraternity. And although a certain decline can undoubtedly be observed, the confraternity form itself has not disappeared, indeed, it can be said that it still constitutes the most popular religious association with the greatest number of members. There are perhaps two explanations for this: 1. the tasks women undertake in society have changed very little or not at all over the past decades and the changes that have taken place have had the effect of strengthening women's role in some areas, 2. as people approach the end of life their feeling of existential and spiritual uncertainty grows stronger and there is a need for the sense of security offered by a religious society to resolve this feeling, a need for the service of prayer undertaken and offered for another, giving the individual the security of hope.

The Marian legitimacy of the rosary is increased by the circumstance that the predictions of Fatima (1917) – for long mentioned only in whispers – have come true: socialism and communism in Europe, including Hungary, has collapsed, Russia has set out on the path of change and “conversion”. The prayer of the Living Rosary has been able to undergo renewal at the beginning of the 21st century. This renewal was initiated by the supreme authority of the church, the Pope himself, who introduced the rosary of light beside the joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries.⁶⁰ His recommendation has been quickly adopted in many places by popular religiosity in Hungary and the size and structure of the prayer groups has been adapted to the new number of mysteries (4x5). Elsewhere however, knowledge of the luminous mystery has not brought structural change in the operation of the confraternity; this is the case for the majority of confraternities although they know about the rosary of light.

59 SZÓCSNÉ 2004. 166.

60 BARNÁ 2011. 316-318.

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