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**HUNGARIAN ETHNOGRAPHIC BOOKS IN ROMANIA**

**FOLKLORE RESEARCH ON THE BOUNDARY  
OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPHERES  
RESEARCH, PUBLICATION, RECEPCION**

**PHD THESIS ABSTRACT**

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## CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1. Scientific context and theoretical framework of the research, sources and methods</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.1. Keywords, theoretical framework</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.2. Sources of research</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.3. Methodological framework for the research</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2. The first period of Hungarian ethnographic book publishing in Romania (1919–1947)</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2.1. Institutional framework</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2.2. Periodicals</b>	<b>20</b>
2.2.1. <i>Erdélyi Irodalmi Szemle</i>	21
2.2.2. <i>Erdélyi Múzeum</i>	22
<b>2.3. Scientific booklets, excerpts</b>	<b>24</b>
2.3.1. <i>Erdélyi Tudományos Füzetek</i>	24
2.3.2. <i>Erdélyi Néprajzi Tanulmányok</i>	26
<b>2.4. Book publishing</b>	<b>27</b>
2.4.1. <i>A Magyar Nép Könyvtára</i> book series	30
2.4.2. <i>Hasznos Könyvtár</i> book series	31
2.4.3. Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh	32
2.4.4. Public education book series of the historic churches	32
2.4.5. Hungarian folklore volumes published in Romania (1919–1947)	35
<b>3. The second period of Hungarian ethnographic book publishing in Romania (1948–1989)</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>3.1. Institutional framework</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>3.2. Periodicals</b>	<b>41</b>
3.2.1. <i>Utunk</i>	41
3.2.2. <i>Művelődési Útmutató, Művelődés</i>	42
3.2.3. <i>Falvak Népe, Falvak Dolgozó Népe</i>	42
3.2.4. <i>Igaz Szó</i>	43
3.2.5. <i>Korunk</i>	43
3.2.6. <i>Nyelv- és Irodalomtudományi Közlemények – NyIrK</i>	43
3.2.7. <i>A Hét</i>	44

3.2.8. <i>Dolgozó Nő</i>	44
3.2.9. <i>Pionír</i>	44
3.2.10. <i>Jóbarát</i>	45
3.2.11. <i>Napsugár</i>	45
3.3. Collecting campaigns, competitions	45
3.4. Formal and informal social science circles	49
3.4.1. Social science circle of <i>Korunk</i> cultural-literary-scientific magazine	49
3.4.2. Working Group on Communicative Anthropology (KAM) in Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda	50
3.5. Book publishing, book publishers	51
4. Case studies	58
4.1. Folktale, written „false” fairy tales, literary fairy tales – book-related debates in the late 1940s and early 1950s	58
4.1.1. Research questions	58
4.1.2. Sources and methods	59
4.1.3. The participants of the controversy	60
4.1.4. The first book-related debate	62
Folktale, collecting of folktales, published collections between the two debates	
4.1.5. Folktale, collecting of folktales, published collections between the two debates	66
4.1.6. The second book-related debate	69
4.1.7. Conclusions	75
4.2. <i>White Flower</i> . The history of the reception of Tamás Balla’s folktale collection from Cireșoaia/Magyardécse	77
4.2.1. Research questions	77
4.2.2 Sources, theoretical framework, method	78
4.2.3 Method – discourse analysis	79
4.2.4. <i>White Flower</i> – the folktale collection and its context	79
a. Folktale-collecting competition	79
b. Ethnographic research for Hungarian students in Romania	81
c. <i>White Flower</i> – folktale collection from Cireșoaia/Magyardécse	81

d. The importance of the folktale collection in the second period of Hungarian ethnographic book publishing	82
4.2.5. Collection of fairy tales and fairy tale collector encounter	80
a. The context of the folktale collection – discourse of the folktale collector	83
b. Success series – main prize of the competition, the possibility of publishing the book	85
c. Unexpected events – reorganization of the book publishing, reprint of the first edition	85
4.2.6. Storyteller and collection of fairy tales encounter	86
4.2.7. Reviews, critics, professionals reception – professionals and collection of fairy tales encounter	87
4.2.8. Local community and objectified tradition encounter – success and conflicts	88
4.2.9. Fate of the fairy tale collector and its collection	90
a. Tamás Balla’s successes and failures	90
b. Second and third edition of the collection of fairy tales from Cireșoia/Magyardécse	91
4.2.10. Conclusions	92
4.3. Folclorism and remembrance – two book-related debates at the end of 1980’s	94
4.3.1. The controversy about folclorism – <i>Folk Traditions     in a New Environment. Essays on Folklorism</i>	94
a. The participants of the controversy	95
b. Presentation of the argumentative press articles	97
4.3.2. The controversy about remembrance – <i>Confessions About the Servant-life</i>	104
a. The participants of the controversy	106
b. Presentation of the argumentative press articles	107
c. The actuality of the questions raised during the debates	113
4.3.3. Conclusions	115
5. Hungarian ethnographic book publishing in Romania after 1989	117
5.1. Ethnographic books of Mentor Publishing – 1996–2011	118
5.2. Conclusions	138

<b>6. Case studies – folklore research, the relation between publication and reception</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>6.1. Representation of local culture and reception</b>	
of a Hungarian folklore collection in Viștea/Magyarvista	142
<b>6.1.1. Sources, theoretical framework, method</b>	142
<b>6.1.2. Discourse analysis</b>	144
<b>6.2. Folklore research and conflicts – the relation between</b>	
research, publication and reception	148
<b>6.2.1. Theoretic framework and method</b>	148
<b>6.2.2. White lucky frogs – scientific representation</b>	
and local reception of a belief story	149
<b>6.2.3. Humorous folk story – scientific representation and local reception</b>	153
<b>6.2.3.1. Content and discourse analysis</b>	154
a. Data collection – research planning	154
b. Definition of the analysis units	155
c. Choosing samples – process of coding, content categories	155
d. Data registration – presentation of data	
opinions recorded by categories	156
e. Data reduction	160
f. Conclusion	160
g. Analysis – interpretation	161
<b>6.2.4. Rules of the critical edition of folklore works</b>	161
<b>6.2.5. Codes of ethics</b>	163
<b>6.2.6. Similar cases</b>	164
<b>6.2.7. Laws and regulations in Romania</b>	166
<b>Conclusions</b>	168
<b>Bibliography</b>	174
<b>Annexes</b>	200
<b>1. List of Hungarian folklore volumes, books and special prints,</b>	
scientific booklets in Romania (1919–1947)	200
<b>2. List of Hungarian folklore volumes published in Romania (1948–1989)</b>	208
<b>3. List of translation volumes – Hungarian folk poetry translated</b>	
into Romanian and other nationalities folklore translated	
into Hungarian (1948–1989)	228
<b>4. List of ethnographic/anthropological books published by Mentor Publisher</b>	243

**KEYWORDS:** publishing folklore, folk poetry publications, professional reception, local reception, local and regional representation, public sphere, private sphere, communication technologies, scientific folklorism, representational folklorism

## **ABSTRACT**

In my paper, I'll examine how the professionals (ethnographers, folklorists, anthropologists) and the reading public related to Romanian folk poetry publications over the last hundred years, given the historical and political context. The paper focuses on the published books, concentrating on the mechanisms and results that filter through from the book releases.

During the research I have studied the political, economic and institutional background of the eras of the Hungarian folklore publishing in Romania – first era (1919–1947), second period (1948–1989) and third, from 1990 to the present. In the case studies – using articles and book reviews, critical treaties published in journals and folklore of conversations, interviews and letters, reading books reception were followed – on the one hand the tension between scientific representation and the local reception, examining the contradictions in connection with an encounter with a folklore publication, on the other hand, the objectified encounter with tradition, the cultural heritage of oral rather than written taking into account, in printed form to transfer the possibility of positive aspects.

In the first chapter I present in the context of scientific research, the concept of use and the theoretical framework indicating the sources of research and methodological framework for the research.

In the second chapter I review the institutional framework in relation to the first period of Hungarian ethnographic book publishing in Romania (1919–1947), which made scientific research possible, methods and strategies of finality, the publication of results in journals and books have been determined, present the journals and the era of book publishing. In addition to the chapters compiled in Hungarian folk poetry publications in Romania – list for this period, which can be read thesis Appendix – books and special prints, scientific booklets.

The third chapter, the institutional framework, key journals and book publishing, I present the second period of the Hungarian ethnographic book publishing in Romania (1948–1989) and the era of collecting folklore movements, competitions, tenders and their results. This chapter complements the list of the era's Hungarian folk poetry publications

in Romania, and a list published in translation volumes – Hungarian folk poetry translated into Romanian and other nationalities folklore translated into Hungarian.

The fourth chapter includes three case studies: the first presents and analyses the tale discussions of the late 1940's and early 1950'; the second one the professional and local reception history of a folktale collection published in 1970, and the third a book-related debate around two key themes – folklorism and remembrance – which took place in 1987-1988, and can be followed in the argumentative press article, reviews and critiques.

At the beginning of the fifth chapter I briefly summarizes the changes affecting the Hungarian ethnographic book publishing in Romania after 1989, then I present ethnographic, anthropological publications appeared in Mentor Book Publishing (1996–2011) in detail. The chapter lists as an Appendix the publisher's ethnographic/anthropological books.

The sixth section contains two case studies: the first the reception history of a Hungarian folklore collection published in 2008, a self-taught folk specialist autobiography and poems from Viştea/Magyarvista, while the second seeks answers in connection with the folklore research and publication – why can conflicts develop between local reception and the academic, professional receptions.

## **CONCLUSIONS, THESES**

1. When looking through the history of the Hungarian folklore book publishing in Romania I relied on Keszeg Vilmos' era definition: 1. Publishing between 1919–1947 and 2. publishing between 1948–1989. To my mind the period between 1940–1947 could be viewed as separate period due to the folklore education in universities and given the possibilities offered by the Transylvanian Academic Institution.

The continuity of the Transylvanian academic life was ensured by the Transylvanian Museum Association. In the 1930s and 1940s their magazine *Erdélyi Múzeum* (Transylvanian Museum) and their series *Erdélyi Tudományos Füzetek* (Transylvanian Academic Notes) have offered ground for the folklorists too next to other academic branches and given place to academic discourses.

Next to their academic value the folklore publications in their first period had a literary value, moreover they were viewed as means to maintain local and regional identity a form of discourse that is meant to shape identity supported by historic religions as well.

In the second period of the Hungarian book publications in Romania, 1948–1989 the

public discourse was defined by the historical-political frames of the socialist state. There was no folklorist training but the Humanities Faculty offered folklorist courses. The most important institution for the Hungarian folklore studies in Romania was the Folkloric Institution in Cluj Napoca/Kolozsvár. The defining magazines, weekly and monthly publications of the period gave room for discourses about folklore, next to organizing folklore collecting contests and invited entries for competition.

The most important forum for folklore publications during the 1970–1980's was the Kriterion publishing house, which was established to publish publications of the Hungarian minorities in Romania. The end of the 1970's beginning of 1980's brought about a change in discourse in both formal and informal sociologic circles and generation shift while the 1989 revolution they expressed the need for reorganization on institutional level as well as the need of the change of the era.

**2.** In the first era of the Hungarian folklore publications in Romania the intellectual circles looked at the folklore publications – collections of folk songs, folk tale collections, myths, ballads, folk games etc – as means of maintaining national identity, forming local and regional identity. This expectation met the expectations of the large public and as a matter of fact it is true for the second period as well as for our days.

The period of 1948–1989 was characterized by a biased attitude concerning folklore: on the one hand there was a strong fear of weakening even disappearance of certain genres such as folktale, folk ballads, on the other hand sustaining that the phenomenon is only that of change and development.

In the beginning the aim of the folklore research was seen mainly as the study of the changed life of the classless societies of villages and cities, in order to assess the consequences of the industrialization and cultural revolution and the results of the planned social education. In the mirror of the time and value confronting discourse of the folklorist the illiterate people of “village of the past” did not have any idea of the more pretentious therefore higher ranked forms of entertainment so the present was much fuller of values as compared to the past. Nevertheless the old village had a valuable word of oral tradition, which had to be put to serve the cultural revolution. Besides the social changed value of the folklore was to serve the cause of the peace and friendship between nationalities. For that it was necessary to research the national, local and individual traits of folklore and find a common ground for comparison.

The researchers, representatives of scientific research expected theoretical and methodic



modernism, the constant renewal.

After the change in 1989 with the renewal of the Hungarian folklore studies in Romania and the reorganization of institutions the publications themselves have differentiated according to different end products and target audiences.

**3.** Folk tales, folk songs and folk ballads were the most popular genres in both the first and the second period of Hungarian folk publications in Romania. The true stories and life stories became popular only from the 1970's.

Looking through the volumes we can observe the extension of the research paradigms and methods as well as the extension of the topics. There was an even larger place for analysis instead of the plain description. Instead of a fragmented, timeless folk culture the main topic became the changing social context, the changed view of life and the actual problems. In addition to publishing the sources, description, functionality, typology, structuralism and semiotics the anthropological theoretic frame appeared (anthropology of writing, anthropology of speaking), a shift towards social and cultural anthropology, the research of the individual as a method, the monographic method, research of mentality and contextual research.

We can observe two different paradigms. One is the research based on new fields based on traditional views (collecting folk tales, folk ballads, funny folk stories, life stories and myths – and publishing them). These volumes represent the timelessness and survival of the traditional culture and enrich the data that refers to the period before the 20th century. The representatives of the other paradigm conduct well defined research, problematize, choose a field, an era and in these frames look into the changes of the social contextual field. In the latter there is a strong historical and social folkloric, social and cultural anthropologic approach.

**4.** In Transylvania some reader and publisher communities still expect a folklore publication to be helpful in shaping and maintaining local and regional identity.

The folkloric publication is not a neutral medium; it has got a sensitive social reception. Concerning the autobiographies, life stories, true life stories we can assert that in every person, folklorist/anthropologist and his/her conversational partner there is a picture of themselves, moreover the researched community as such has got a picture of themselves more or less accepted by every member of the community. Most people know what is accepted as normal or what is deviant in the given community, what can be spelt out loud and what has to be communicated only informally. Those who appear in the book as

characters, data suppliers individuals and their relatives who the books is about expect the representation to be congruent with their self-image, or even be an improved version of it. In my view the social conflicts can be explained by the simultaneity and jamming of the communication techniques and mediums but this simultaneity has got its advantages as well as disadvantages. In a given case this simultaneity can be helpful in maintaining identity not only a source of conflict.

**5.** During the discovery and preservation work, data entry and processing and scientific presentation ethical issues and legislation cannot be overlooked. The ethical codes contain only suggestions and the folklorist/anthropologists decide by him/herself what to do with the existent data. One cannot forget though that the folklore data taken from its original context and introduced into a foreign one becomes not only will become scientific and representative folklorism but also may be involved in civil or even penal law. Not being familiar with the relevant laws and regulations or not understanding the language it was written in is not a plausible excuse. Whether knowing or not the legislation the consequences have to be faced. Therefore it is advisable to ask for written permission of publishing the collected voice and picture data. Moreover in addition to getting the written permission both the author and the publisher should specify in the publication that those expressed are not their views/opinions, but publishing the views/opinions of data furnishers collected according to rules of academic methods published in folkloric/anthropologic context.

Rules for the issue of folklore collections, Rules of the critical edition of folklore works (Voigt – Balogh 1974) today is as valid as the actual legislations and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) coming to its rights on 25th May 2018, which is about honest and understandable data protection.

**6.** The publishers, booksellers in the idea of bind to the region (e.g. works presenting the folkloric culture of the Szekely Land or Szeklerland) consider the criteria of understandability, salability and marketing sometimes more important than the criteria of professionalism or actuality.

Concerning payment for the collectors and data furnishers' of the folkloric publications very often neither the researchers nor the discussion partner expect any payment.

Hungarian communities in Transylvania want to turn some motifs from oral tradition into cultural heritage because on the one hand they are afraid that there will be a break in the continuity of the tradition, the representatives of the younger generation are unwilling to

take it, in our globalized world that can be done only with the authority of socially well positioned individuals who in Transylvania are generally still keepers and knowers of these traditions. On the other hand the today still organic tradition can be turned into heritage, often by being forced to in order to obtain material resources (applications, agroturism).

Well trained folklorists, anthropologists should undertake the tasks of popularizing science, taking into consideration the high standard dissemination through different media considering its advantages and disadvantages, mediation between individuals and groups using the tradition, preserving, researching and commercialization of release.

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