UNIVERSITATIS COMENIANA BRATISLAVENSIS
FACULTAS PHILOSOPHICA
Tomus 40 ETHNOLOGIA SLOVACA ET SLAVICA 2019

SACRED IMAGES ON THE WALL TRADITIONS AND GENERATIONS

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Abstract: In the case study below, the author aims to show how ethnography allows to encounter tradition in its living form; meeting and greeting cultural customs on a personal and professional level. Our analysis revolves around a vignette of 80-year-old Aunt Anna, who lives in a village in southern Transylvania, Romania. This village, boasting a majority Romanian and minority Hungarian population, is where her story begins and ends; namely, within the domestic sphere. By chance or by providence, Aunt Anna showed us a room in her home with sacred icons that had been left under her care by her grandfather, who had acquired those images seven decades earlier. As the family was Lutheran, the scene of holy images was rather unusual. The pictures refer to several generations and intermingling life histories, as they look back on a friendship between a Hungarian Lutheran man and a Romanian Orthodox man, both of whom fought in the First World War. They act as a sign of the community forged and maintained over the years, influencing the customs and traditions of the private home sphere. In connecting the personal stories with the historical changes of a broader socio-cultural milieu, it becomes possible to make sense of how traditions begin, evolve and take on new shapes and forms.

Keywords: generation, icon, Lutheran, Orthodox, minority, tradition

Introduction

Orthodox churches are usually adorned by holy icons. Correspondingly, Roman Catholic churches are traditionally teeming with sacred images. Since the Reformation, Protestant churches have neglected this iconographic tradition. Jewish and Islamic representations of the divine have also remained non-pictorial and non-figural. The public sacred space is thus defined by sacred

images that are specific to the tradition at hand. In a similar way, the home sphere is characterized by these explicitly defined and delineated spiritual domains. Orthodox homes have icons, while Catholic homes have relics or devotional objects.

It is then reasonable to assume that finding objects, relics, images or icons of a differing denomination in a specific religious public or private area might indeed present one with a host of questions. Finding such symbols shakes the religious and socio-cultural equilibrium that encompasses and holds a denomination under one shared canopy.

A few years ago, when I was conducting field work in Romania, I happened upon a situation that is similar to the paradigm or problem described above. I was travelling through the formerly Saxon region of Transylvania, where several Hungarian-speaking clusters can be found to this day. While I was there, I came across a Lutheran house which for some reason had a wall decorated by holy images of Mary and Jesus. These sacred icons did not seem to fit into a carefully characterized system which I hoped to describe, including its borders.

It became apparent to me that the placement of these images in a Lutheran home was not a coincidence, a mistake, or an accident. Indeed, this placement was careful and categorized. Those images seemed to speak stories. They were part of a system of their own, one that was marked by the facets of tradition, family memory, and the web of relatives and friends related to them. The following case study aims to explain why these images were placed in a Lutheran home, out of their usually prescribed public and private context.

The main source which I utilized in shaping this essay was a personal encounter I had with my main interlocutor, Anna. The analysis below is based on an interview I conducted with Anna, concentrating on her family memories and stories. Following our personal meeting, we spoke by phone twice. In terms of other primary source materials, I was also able to reach the Lutheran pastor in the village of Oltszakadát in order to retrieve more information about the village. Naturally, one interview cannot possibly serve as the basis of an entire research study; however, my interview with Anna served as a fruitful start to this endeavour. I chose the genre of the essay, as I saw it better fit to this kind of the case-study. Like a thin beam of light, one isolated case can often illuminate the past, bringing aspects of personal and collective identity formation, tradition and family memory to the fore. Thirty years of fieldwork, and countless interviews later, allocating links between individual situations and thematic cultural precedents becomes a task rooted in both practice and theory.

In a previous publication, I utilized the economic diary of a farm keeper as a graphic source, which was complemented by many personal interviews with the owner of the diary. The interviews helped to shed light on the accounts

in the diary, which was written several decades before. In analysing the narrations and memories that arose in the interviews, I was able to handle the written form of the text. The visual and auditory realms of this diary came alive through the personal interviews. Both the written diary and the oral interviews presented memories about decisions regarding the farm and the household and how they were influenced by political and historical changes throughout the years (Mohay, 1994).

In reflecting on these highly specific personal encounters, it might be useful to reflect on the work of a philosopher Mihály Polányi who published a book on post-critical philosophy in the late 1950s (Polanyi, 1958). His book centralized around ideas about personal knowledge. Polányi's primary questions revolved around distinguishing between the objective and subjective, intuitive realms. He suggests bridging them by personal knowledge.

Encounter, questioning, analysis, anthropological explanation, and ethnographic writing follow this basic schematic outline. Meeting the sacred images in Oltszakadát occurred in a situation where the questions were emerging, and accordingly, my very first conversation with Anna was already a step towards an analysis of the position and location of these enigmatic sacred images in a Lutheran home. The first interview was incredibly revealing, however it left room for questions that could only be answered through the acquisition of localized first-hand primary sources and materials. Our further conversations sought to allocate and dive into such sources.

It is not my aim here to provide a full research hypothesis or make claims of any kinds. However, my intention is to make sense of the communication used by families and their benefactors, to shed light on how family memory operates, how family identity works, and finally, what power or prestige tradition has over the mentioned factors in the Hungarian speaking clusters of Transylvania, namely in the village of Oltszakadát. The following case study will seek to unravel these thematic trails.

Encounter

Oltszakadát (Săcădate) is a small village in Romania, in Szeben County, not far from the town of Nagyszeben (Sibiu). Such "diaspora villages" unite disparate identities and socio-cultural polarities. Romanians outnumber Hungarians living in the village of Oltszakadát and surrounding regions. There is no linguistically identical environment or milieu in this geographical area. However, Hungarian minorities live in similar situations further away. For hundreds of years, this region was predominantly inhabited by German Saxons of the Lutheran faith – up until the second half of the 20th century, when most of them left and resettled in Germany. The size of the village has not changed

much over the past decades, as there are hardly any new houses in the core of the settlement. The only significant change was a shift in ethnic population in favour of Romanian and Roma inhabitants. We passed by this village on our way to another destination but made a short stopover because the name of the village was familiar to us from Hungarian and Romanian historical sources. When we found that the early medieval Lutheran church was closed to visitors, we unexpectedly dropped in at "Aunt Anna's" house to obtain some information regarding the village. She lived close to the church.[1]

Image 1

Anna Bálint in her room in Oltszakadát (Sacadat, Romania)
(Vargyas, Gábor, 2003)

When the old woman standing at the gate noticed that we were curious about the village (even though we were strangers), she amicably greeted us and invited us inside her typical two-storey Saxon village house. We exchanged introductions, and soon the family photos were presented, paired with her stories. The long-dead grandparents and parents were mentioned as well as the daughter and son (now living far away), depicted in traditional costumes, at confirmation in church long ago. We chatted about the Saxons in the neighbourhood, from whom "much could be learned", particularly about viticulture. In the meantime, we were invited to look around the place: bench, table, water stand, bed in the corner and on the other side of the room, and the oven. All these things were part of an old-fashioned one-room layout. There was also an elongated plot at the back of the house, at the end of which was a barn, built

[1] In this text and context, the words „Aunt Anna" do not mean that she would be a relative of the author, just a common expression.

crosswise to the plot. After looking around on the ground floor, we were ushered upstairs. There were three empty rooms, preserving the memory of a once larger and more extended family. We saw something unusual on the walls: large framed sacred icons as well as prints of oil paintings of the Virgin and Jesus. It is not customary to keep such typically Catholic or Orthodox objects, as well as images of saints, or the Virgin Mary in Lutheran homes. They struck us as unusual and we began to ask about them.

There was no need to ask about how come that these works of art and devotion were positioned in this room into such an unusual place: on the walls of a Lutheran family home. Aunt Anna began to tell her story on her own and gradually her tale unfolded, revealing the traditions and life histories of the past generations.

Image 2
The house of Bálint family in Oltszakadát
(Vargyas, Gábor, 2003)

Sacred images in personal and family memory

In 1914, Aunt Anna's maternal grandfather, Péter Tamás, was conscripted into the service at the outbreak of the First World War. He was nearly forty when he was called into the service. Tamás worked on his own small farm. His wife was six years younger, and their only daughter Ilona was fourteen at the

time. Péter Tamás was sent to the front and soon fell into captivity. He made good friends with a fellow Romanian soldier who lived in the village of Felek (Avrig) on the other side of the Olt river. Aunt Anna's grandfather and her Uncle Ion Bădila, who was around his age, were like two good brothers: they never parted, and they always helped each other. They survived the war, and both returned home after four years. They maintained their friendship, visited each other, and their children also knew each other.

Uncle Bădila's son Gheorghe ("György" in Hungarian), was sixteen at the end of the war, when he got involved in a serious, violent fight. Anna said that the young men in Felek had a strange disposition for fighting. On Sundays he used to knock out men or even kill them. One day a boy Gheorghe was grabbed and tossed around until he fell on an iron railing which severely injured his spine. He was left paralyzed and was never able to walk again. He lived for another forty years, completely bedridden. His parents went from county to county with hopes of finding a remedy to cure him, in vain and to no avail. Nuns came to look after Gheorghe. They travelled to him from a nearby Orthodox convent in the mountains. The nuns brought sacred icons with them, which they gave away or sold in the villages they visited. Disabled Gheorghe soon became a believer, eagerly reading the Bible and other holy books at home. He prayed for those who visited him; some visitors were ill or had their own problems. According to Aunt Anna, "it would never happen that he would not read something comforting, trying to cure the visitor, or praying". Allegedly, Gheorghe was an ardent believer. He helped many people. When his parents died, his sister took care of him.

Aunt Anna spent a considerable amount of time with her grandfather when she was a child in the 1930s. She enjoyed listening to his stories. She was probably in third grade, around ten years old, when she first escorted her grandfather to Felek to visit Uncle Bădila and his disabled son. They often repeated the visit: on Sunday after church, the man fastened the horses up to the cart and off they went to Felek. On one occasion, the former comrade-at-arms and friend as well as his paralytic son gave her grandfather several large sacred images (a few of which the nuns had brought) so that they could hang them up in their home, "even though they were Hungarians" (and Lutheran). Much later, Anna also hung the images up. "I have fulfilled this request", Aunt Anna said decades later, and she indeed acted as she had promised in her childhood. "Those who will be here should put them up. These will stay on the wall. The Virgin Mary and our Lord Jesus Christ," was the special request given by Gheorghe and Aunt Anna's grandfather. Thus, it was the succession of Orthodox icons passed on from one generation to the next. The friendship between the Romanian and Hungarian soldiers served as the linkage between these ostensibly differing realms. It was also partly a reason why we found such sacred images on the wall of the Lutheran family's house in the village of Oltszakadát.

It must have perplexed some people, for no other family in Oltszakadát had icons at houses. On a Boxing Day (December 26), Aunt Anna invited the reverend for a chat. When he saw the icons upstairs, he asked why they were there. She immediately told him the story. He did not say anything for or against this decision. Of course, if it was a wish of the pious son of an old friend, it should be so, it would have been morally wrong not to comply.

"Uncle Ion was a good man, the old generation were good people, they believed in God" – Aunt Anna exclaimed during our conversation. "He was full of affection, he came to visit us from Felek when his comrade died, and he already walked with difficulty. When he arrived, he said: 'I've just come to see what you're doing'. They talked, and we were happy to see each other, then he pulled himself together and left for home".

This story leaves no doubt that these images, as it were – present us with a particularly fine case of the transmission of traditions. Our meeting with Anna was just as unexpected and surprising as the thoughts and interpretations which our conversation generated about tradition, the people of Szakadát, and that of family histories. After three digressions, I would like to return to this story of Anna's family to present my conclusions on the link between sacred images, traditions and generations.

Image 3

Picture of Virgin Mary on the wall.
(Vargyas, Gábor, 2003)

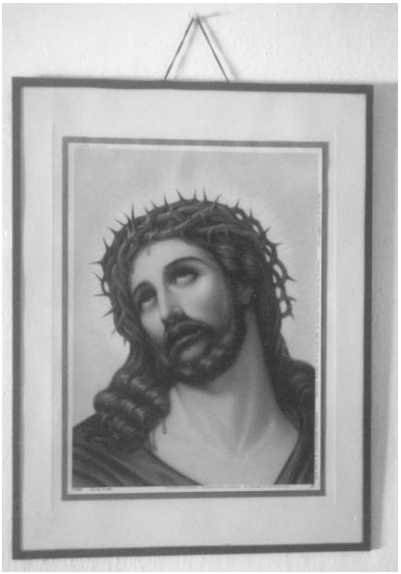

Image 4
Picture of Jesus Christ on the wall.
(Vargyas, Gábor, 2003)

Memory and tradition

With regard to the correlation between "tradition" and "culture", there are two salient theoretical positions in Europe and particularly in Hungary. The theories diverge and form a dialogue. István Györffy, who was a professor of ethnography at the Budapest University, published a political pamphlet in 1939 on the complex relationship between folk tradition and national culture. His analysis revolved around how to transfer the values of folk tradition into broad circles of public culture (Györffy, 1939). He, and several others to come for decades after, have viewed tradition (including folk tradition) as a value; one of the main sources of culture which must be duly protected (Vargyas, 1943; Andrásfalvy, 1983; Faragó, 2000; Halász, 2000). Others assumed that folk culture was the product of a constrained social situation, which would fade away in time, with the emancipation of the peasantry. These scholars regarded tradition as an impediment of the past that yearns to be superseded. Its mere presence was questionable, for it was becoming more and more obvious that many contrived traditions arose because of the passionate yet often eluded efforts of intellectuals (Hobsbawm, 1983; Hoffmann, 1972; Hofer & Niedermüller, 1987; Hofer, 1991; Popper, 1968). The articulation of the mentioned arguments can be subtly shaded or polarized, as the outlook may

be narrower or broader. The conclusions might be restricted to scholarship or perhaps, have a chance at influencing cultural policies. On this note, it might be worth looking at the disciplinary diversity of the interpretation of tradition in order to investigate these themes further (Fehér, 2001; Gunda, 1994; Nyíri, 1992; Popper, 1968; Ricoeur, 1994; Shils, 1981, 1996; Stahl, 1992; Voigt, 1988).

Those who take a critical stance against tradition apparently conceive it as an abstract notion and fail to see or comprehend its actual essence or obvious functioning. Similarly, the essence of living traditions and their function in society remain in obscurity for those who are emotionally committed to it. In their case, the enlarged *value* of traditions dims their clear vision. Oftentimes, the reality of tradition is identified with a declining past – within a "petrified" state, seen for a short period of time – of which posterity has either a disparaging, or contrarily, an idealized picture. Those who criticize it condemn it as contrived, fictive, and satisfying the needs of an imaginary community. Those who defend it stick to it vehemently, claiming that only tradition has the authority to authenticate their values; that is why they save, conserve, cherish and resuscitate tendrils of traditions amidst visions of decay, trying to form communities out of generations.

I think we could make more progress if we could speak about tradition based on our own lived experiences, which (armed with an adequate theoretical apparatus) we acquire through personal contacts – face to face, as it were – with tradition. Our encounters with tradition, whether they be accidental or deliberate, become authentic through the personal human contacts we form and through the sharing of stories. I am more and more convinced that where such encounters take place, they occur within the bounds and bonds of *personal* relations, much more than in *abstractions*; given that there is openness, perceptivity, and attentiveness on both sides.

It was this kind of experience, that Ernő Kunt (1991) wrote about some decades ago, when he analysed the case of three widows who commemorated the violent deaths of their husbands on All Souls' Day by their family customs, hidden from the eye of the village community. Kunt delved into how the family memory and public memory had come into conflict. Vilmos Tánczos discusses (1995) how prayerful women and men of the Moldavia and Gyimes region receive and remain in direct contact with the powers above. The philosopher Ágnes Heller shares her experience of comprehending the sustaining power of tradition when she commemorated the death of a relative as one of her own personal religious experiences (Heller, 1998). We will misconceive tradition if we approach it as a phantom or as an idol. It is thus certain, that both strong theoretical and emotional commitments may greatly affect both biased and unbiased approaches. When it evolves in the magnetic sphere of personal attention, genuine stories may be discovered about traditions, about generations, or, for that matter, about sacred images on a Lutheran wall.

The European model and mode in which memory contains the past, and the way the past becomes and amalgamates into what we define as history, was developed three hundred years ago. In terms of the formation of European thought on the issue of tradition and tradition-making, it is imperative to turn to the work of the contemporary John Lukacs, an American-Hungarian historian, who immigrated to the New World in the 1940s. One main precedent Lukacs focuses on in his work is that European thought has tended towards historicism since the end of the 17th century (Lukacs, 2004, p. 46). It was only in the last two hundred years that the way history was framed and thought about in earlier periods was re-contextualized and given new merit. There was a remarkable shift in the way we think about history, as historians became to search for the essence of things by examining and searching for the history of things. Previously, this was not the case, as a stronger emphasis was placed on the concept of grace, most especially in Roman Catholic circles.

It is not unreasonable then to suggest that these new ways of thinking about history did not have the same effect on those societies and regions where ethnography, folklore, anthropology and folk culture were primary facets of knowing, and of knowing personally. This is precisely why folk culture has been linked with archaism, pre-industrialism, and indeed, with medievalism.

The work of Kristóf Nyíri is also of importance when reflecting on tradition from the philosophical standpoint. He writes: „If non-literate cultures, who have predominantly relied on oral culture serve as the current seat of curiosity, then it can be said that this curiosity stems from facets of secondary verbalism, wherein auditory languages with no visual record gain novel appeal" (Nyíri, 1994, p. 285). Moreover, this pronounced interest in learning about literacy and linguistics have allowed for a whole spectrum of ways of thinking about communicating in autobiographical, biographical accounts and through the webs fashioned by relatives and their correspondences. The way the past events are considered and re-considered has thus been uprooted and re-planted. These precedents have now taken new root in soil that both reflects and refracts the past and the present.

Settlement

The region, wherein this village is located, is traditional in terms of both agricultural and cultural indicators. Traditional spheres are marked by spaces that have not been weighted down by civil authorities or the realities they often present societies with. These are spaces and places that have not been much affected by the issues related to stocks, capitals and inner agglomerations. Traditional environments are also marked by feudal systems that were part of prior generations. Since the great transformation (Polanyi, 1957), such regions have

not been swept over by enough funds or assets to make the switch over. In such cases, the settlement or village dwellers are forced to rely on traditional modes of self-preservation (Csanády, 1998, p. 14).

The Hungarian community of Oltszakadát has a population of fewer than two hundred inhabitants. It is acknowledged by the ethnographic literature as a diaspora settlement that is particularly vigorous and insisting on the native language and traditions more stubbornly than neighbouring villages. The studies and books on Hungarian and Romanian populations of this village appeared from the beginning of the 20th century onwards. These accounts were reviewed and described in an ethnographic monograph by Géza Vámszer (1940).

In 1906, the son of a Lutheran minister of Kissink (now Cincşor, formerly Kleinschenk, Romania), Mihály Schuszter, wrote a dissertation for his teacher's diploma on the dialect of the Szakadát population (Horger, 1910). In 1912, a retired minister from Oltszakadát, János András, published a booklet on the past and origin of the village (András, 1912), "upon commission from the inhabitants of Szakadát". The work was intended to be an argumentative response to the paper of Ioan Podea (1911). Podea, whose grandfather originated from Szakadát, wrote the paper as a third-year student of Orthodox theology in 1907 and published it as a young priest in Lupény (Lupeni). Later, he also became a renowned historian. Several books were issued on the Romanians of Szakadát later on (Georgescu, 1920, Prie, 1934). The different viewpoints of the Romanian and Hungarian authors concerning the origins and past of the settlement need no explication here. None were professional historians, but rather clergymen who put a high value on the opinions of their respective communities.

Géza Vámszer's monograph (1940) describes the history of Hungarian Szakadát, as well as that of historical relics, general demographic, economic, cultural relations and ethnographic characteristics of this settlement. He investigated the factors that promoted the conservation of the identity of this small ethnic group and paid tribute to their determined survival. In Vámszer's description, the local coexistence of Hungarians and Romanians was peaceful and mutually respectful for a very long period. The village belonged to the Saxon municipality of Nagyszeben (Sibiu) and had a long-standing Romanian majority. The interethnic relations were regulated. A statute of 1582 prescribed, for example, that 16 Hungarian and 16 Romanian members were to be elected for the council and it was the duty of both parties to take care of the vicarage, the church and the school (Binder, 1972, p. 57-59, 322-323). The peaceful relationship only turned hostile in extreme cases, first perhaps in 1848 during the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence. Romanian young men shot at Hungarians singing religious hymns in the church tower in 1848. However, these men all died young, which the Hungarians interpreted as God's punishment. In the years to follow, the Romanians gradually squeezed the

Hungarian villagers out of leadership positions in the village. They were, however, able to keep their school and church.

A disastrous event occurred in Oltszakadát during the First World War, when Romania unexpectedly attacked Hungary and tried to occupy Transylvania. In early September 1916, after the occupation by the Romanian army, the greater part of the Hungarian population – 110 women and children, and the 21 men remaining at home (who were not away at war) – were gathered and driven off to Felek, in spite of the request of local Romanians not to harm them. Family members were only allowed to return a few weeks later, but nearly two dozen men were taken as prisoners far into Romania. Months later, six of them returned, while the rest perished, including the pastor who had buried the members of his flock one by one (Vámszer, 1940, p. 40-42). In May of 1918, the villagers erected a black marble obelisk in the churchyard to preserve the memory of the 15 dead prisoners. They have managed to protect it from destruction to this day. The Hungarian community of Oltszakadát could not forgive or forget the loss of many heads of households, as those fifteen people were practically one fifth of the entire Hungarian male population of the village (Pozsony, 2000, p. 186). Péter Tamás of Oltszakadát and Ion Bădila of Felek were fighting in war and would only hear of the developments at home later. Despite these trials and tribulations, they did not turn against one other and remained friends after the war.

Image 5.

Wooden cross near the village.
From Prie, Octavian, 1934, p. 85.

Accounts also describe that Romanian majority in Szakadát cherished their traditions as keenly as the Hungarians did, namely in terms of maintaining their communal customs, folk attire, and traditional family relations. These traditions were all well and alive in the interwar years, as we concluded from several archive photos that survived these times.

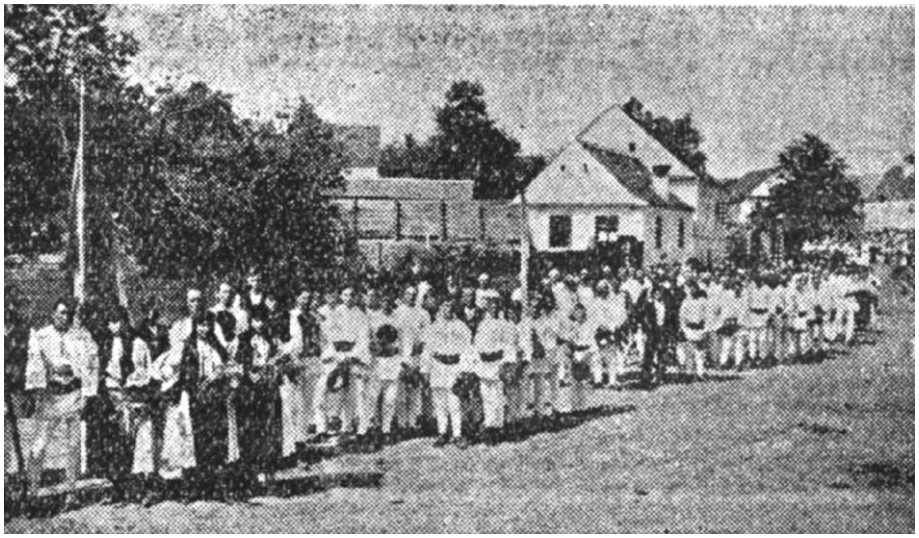

Image 6

Procession in the village, around 1920.
From Prie, Octavian, 1934, p. 43.

As late as ten years ago, after the turn of the millennium, the Hungarians of this village still observed such traditional customs (also described earlier) as the hitting of the rooster at Easter, choosing the leader of the young men at New Year, holding a procession around the altar, etc. "Civil institutions", such as the women's and young men's societies, found their purpose again – though with some changes – in the local community after decades of collectivization and the collapse of socialism. These societies can help the individuals' search for their place in the community (Sándor, 1990; Pozsony, 1998). Today, the Hungarian community in Oltszakadát consists of around two hundred people, a constant minority within the general village population of 1100 – 1200 that has hardly changed over the past one and a half centuries. Ferenc Pozsony, who initiated research into family structure after collecting folklore and folk custom fieldwork in the village, concluded that the main component of the survival of an isolated community is rooted in internal cognitive factors (Pozsony, 2000). His findings largely coincide with the observations of linguist

Edit Kádár who complemented this family structured research with ethnolinguistic analyses (Kádár, 2006). One accompanying feature in the coherence of a community is self-isolation, which is also manifested in family structures. Marriage data conducted in the last ninety years reveals that locally and denominationally endogamous marriages (60 %) are in majority; the first mixed Romanian-Hungarian marriage was registered only in 1964. The rate of exogamous marriages grew unexpectedly in the fifties, and later still, there was a decade when no marriages between native villagers were established. There was hardly any emigration from the villages, for most young people commuted to jobs in neighbouring settlements after the collectivization in the 1960s. In the 1990s, when the borders opened, many people settled abroad (mainly those with higher education).

The spatial layout of this settlement also reflects religious separation: the Romanian community of Orthodox believers and the Hungarians of the Lutheran faith deem it natural to pursue their religious and denominational life in separate spaces, but also to respect each other's feasts, customs, and religious traditions. The younger generation has often opted to start family life at a distant location, some in the more ethnically homogeneous Hungarian areas of Székelyföld (Pozsony, 2000). Until the Second World War the inhabitants of Szakadát were mostly farmers. Other occupations, even crafts, were found mainly among the newcomers. The change, similarly to many other places, started in the 1950s and accelerated after the collectivization in 1962. By then, the upper grades of the Hungarian primary school were closed, and a generation later, in the eighties, the upper grades were closed down as well. However, the latter was restarted in the early 1990s. At the end of the nineties, two generations after Géza Vámszer's research project, nearly every family retained their copy of Vámszer's book in their home. They continually referred to it, and it is highly likely that the book had a significant role – along with countless other factors – in helping to preserve the personal and collective identity of the villagers (Kádár, 2006).

Within the Hungarian Szakadát network of social relations, other Hungarian diaspora settlements – Bürkös (Bârghiș), Hortobágyfalva (Cornățel), Porumbák (Porumbacu de Sus), Vízakna (Ocna Sibiului) – as well as larger villages and towns such as Nagydisznód (Cisnădie), Nagyszeben (Sibiu) have played a distinguished role. The natural centre of the villages is Felek (Avrig), the town that is closest to them along the Nagyszeben – Fogaras (Făgăraș) highway. It has been an administrative centre since 1924. People from Szakadát travelled to arrange matters in Felek by horse and cart across the bridge over the Olt, or by boat on the river, and then on foot. Prior to World War I, about 3000 Romanians and 400 Saxons, many of whom were smallholders, household servants, or laborers, populated Felek. There was greater denominational diversity here than in the smaller villages. Apart from the majority Orthodox and Lutheran believers, there were also Roman Catholics, Calvin-

ists, Greek Catholics and Jews in smaller numbers (according to the Census conducted in 1910). The population first grew gradually, only accelerating after the Second World War and in the seventies-eighties. Now it is above nine thousand (Varga, 2002). The Lutheran church in Felek is Romanesque, which in the 18th century transformed from a three-aisle, groin-vaulted basilica with a semi-circular apse into a single-nave church with a straight apse. The tower and some details have survived in their original form (Halaváts, 1914). Here, the relations between Romanians and Saxons were regulated by a statute containing similar laws as the Szakadát regulations of the same year, in 1582. Felek is also a well-known folk-art centre and was the birthplace of some notable individuals, including Gheorghe Lazăr and Vasile Stoica (Binder 1982, p. 59-62).

Generations

Aunt Anna's father, János Jakab Veres, was born in Csernátfalu (now part of Săcele) in 1895. His native village is over 120 km away from Oltszakadát. This distance was bridged by denominational and ethnic similarities. At that time, this settlement near Brassó was also a village with a population of Lutheran Hungarians. The young János had ten siblings. His mother died young, and his father brought him up. He learnt the trade of brick laying and was about to quit regular military service when in 1914 he was taken to the battlefields of the Italian Front. When he returned from the war in 1919, at the age of 24, he married Ilona Tamás in Oltszakadát. The historical background is also known: the pastor of Szakadát at that time, László Bíró, was also from Csernátfalu. He served in Szakadát between 1918 and 1927. He organized theatre performances two or three times a year and reorganized the Hungarian Lutheran School. When he went home to his village, he spread the word that there was a smart little girl in the Tamás family in Szakadát. In 1919, no marriage with an outsider had been registered in Szakadát for seven years (and there would be no more for another three years) (Vámszer, 1940, p. 66; Pozsony, 2000, p. 190). It was not an easy start. Five children were born in ten years, but only two daughters survived: Ilona, born in 1923, and Anna, born in 1928. Three of the children were either stillborn or died from diphtheria. The master mason kept the house as it was built decades earlier by his wife's grandfather in good shape: he reinforced the structure, replaced the open beam ceiling with a plastered one, and modernized other areas of the house. The original iron bars in the cellar and on the ground floor still can be seen to this day.

Then troubled times hit once again. The Vienna Award annexed the northern part of Transylvania. Originally part of Hungary before 1920, it was then awarded to Romania by the Treaty of Trianon and ceded back to Hungary

again in 1940. A new borderline was drawn. Many Romanians moved from North Transylvania to South Transylvania, and conversely, many Hungarians moved from South Transylvania to the other side of the frontier. János Veres did not move as he made a secure living with a good craft and consequently did not want to leave the elderly behind and "burn his bridges". As he was not young, he was not drafted, but from time to time, he was impressed into a forced labour battalion to repair roads and railways damaged in the war years. He was away from home often, working for a German engineer. The management of the estate and the cultivation of land was left to his old father-in-law, his wife, the growing daughters and the servant. The Romanian comrade of his father-in-law was not included in his network of relations. After his mother-in-law died in 1947 and father-in-law in 1948, he lived through the political changes from the late forties, and in the early sixties, his lands were collectivized. He lived on mason's work as an employee of the collective farm, working in a radius of 80 – 100 km from Szeben to Fogaras. Janos was over eighty when he buried his wife, and seven years later, in 1983, he died at the age of 88. He outlived his elder daughter, Aunt Anna's sister Ilona, who died by mushroom poisoning at the age of 59.

Aunt Anna's maternal grandfather, Péter Tamás, who bequeathed the icons to her, was born in 1875 and was a grown-up man when the Great War broke out. He was taken to the Eastern Front and returned from Russian captivity together with his Romanian friend, Ion Badila. His surname, Tamás, was one of the oldest and most common names in the village. He acted as a parish clerk and knew those decades earlier, an old wooden coffin dating back several centuries, had been found in the church apse (Vámszer, 1940, p. 52-53). He had enough land to ensure the subsistence of his family. They kept animals, fattened pigs, and with about 20 acres of land, they belonged to the class of larger landholders, so they could employ a Romanian servant boy, something that few could afford (Vámszer, 1940, p. 68, 72). After 1919, he lived with his daughter's family and was glad to teach his grandchildren. He showed them all he knew in and around the village, telling them stories to accompany his teachings.

István Tamás, another villager who had no relation to Peter, fell into Russian captivity in World War I and did not return until 1940 (Vámszer, 1940, p. 56-66) It is almost certain that the story of waiting for the return of the prisoner of war in vain was known and spoken about in the entire village. They also knew about the families whose male members had fallen victim to the disastrously deteriorated Hungarian-Romanian relationship in 1916. One of them was the aging father-in-law of Péter Tamás, Péter Hosszú András, who could hardly have thought that they, the ones at home, would not live to see the return of the younger men conscripted for the war. I refer to the beginning of the story to indicate that in the interwar years it was no longer natural that laden with such grave collective memories, a Hungarian villager, could foster a friendly

relationship with a Romanian fellow soldier from a neighbouring village. For Péter Tamás, however, it was possible to maintain a friendship with a comrade of a different mother tongue and religious denomination. Forced to be at front and in captivity, it certainly did not keep them apart from one another that they addressed the same God (by different names) whose help to return home they had both hoped for.

The old grandparents lived for only a few years after the war: first, the grandmother Ilona András died at 66, in 1947, followed by her husband a year later, at the age of 73. They did not live to see the wedding of their granddaughter Anna. Amidst Romanian political changes and the communist ascendancy to power, it became clearer and clearer that the old world was over, and that new forces were on the rise. The grandparents could not know what would remain of the old world, the old house, how long the date at the top of the church would be seen, or even whether the icons that the Romanian comrade Uncle Bădila had given them would remain on their wall.

Family tradition tells us that Péter Tamás' mother was Catholic and only adopted the Lutheran faith when she married in the early 1870s, as she was expected to do so in order to maintain peace in the family. Peace was maintainned. However, who knows how much she had preserved of her youthful memories, religious affiliation, or even of the sacred images hidden in her prayer books. It was her son who was to receive the icons from a devout Orthodox brother-in-arms decades later, to be kept by Peter and his granddaughter, "though she was a Hungarian". The husband of the great-grandmother (who became Lutheran) was also a mason, and an outstanding one, at that. When in 1892, the roof of the church was being repaired, he made a bet that he could walk along the ridge of the roof from the tower to the roof end and back despite his limping, and he did. Allegedly, "he had strength, was dexterous, and accustomed to the height." The date traced on the roof from tiles was seen by Anna Bálint in her childhood – but it faded, so that only memory preserves it now.

The grandchild of the fellow soldier, Anna Veres, married István Bálint, another Szakadát native, in 1948, at the age of 20. It was in her generation, and within her family that long-standing traditional ways of living were broken after centuries of practice. They left the village, the church and their religion. Both their children chose Saxons for their spouses, and the two couples resettled in Germany. For ten years after their wedding, the Bálints lived in the village, if they could pursue – amidst constraints and privations – the way of life of peasants and artisans. Ten years later, when the lands were gathered in the collective farm, the husband enrolled for the "militia school" and became a militiaman who was constantly transferred from place to place. (It was a political position: in communist Romania, unconditional adherents of the ruling regime could be militiamen.) Between 1958 and 1982, for 24 years – a genera-

tion's lifetime – they did not live in Szakadát. If they wanted to see their parents, they had to take the train home. They only moved back when they "were forced to withdraw from the militia", as their son was to marry a Saxon girl. So István Bálint had to leave the corps because it was obvious that they would all leave for Germany. After the premature discharge, he only got a job as a night watchman. A year after their return home, the widowed father died. He had kept the icons that he had received from the former comrade in the upstairs room where his father-in-law had put them many years prior even though he could have easily disposed of these icons, and no one would have known or cared about it.

For decades, the family lived in a Romanian environment, under the keen eye of the authorities, torn from their original community, adapting to new situations from time to time, under permanent control. It was certain that they could not continue their traditions or the style of life they had become accustomed to as children and as young people. The children attended high school and university. Their education must have been another break with the old way of life, which was coupled with far from negligible financial burdens and obligations. A village militiaman and his family could obviously not attend church (and practically they still do not go, most often on the pretext of various illnesses). Today Aunt Anna says she misses it and mentions instances when she went to church in secret, sometimes to a church of a different denomination. When alone at home on Sundays, she secretly took out her copy of the New Testament. She read it over many times, and almost learnt it by heart. "I was satisfied," she says, acquiring peace of mind while reading the sacred scriptures. When they were in Bajom (Boian), his colleague in Szakadát sometimes visited the local Romanian priest, "they had done theology together" and they gladly attended the local bath. According to Anna, "he came there to preach, too, and I went with him to church, no one found fault with it." Aunt Anna invited them to lunch, for the local priest's wife had died young and he lived alone. On other occasions, when she visited her daughter, who worked in Sepsiszentgyörgy, Anna visited the Orthodox Church to pray, remarking: (after all), "that is also the house of God; you can recite the Lord's Prayer there, too." When the priest asked her what she was doing there, she said she liked the church. At the same time, she bought flowers and placed them, "before the statue of our Lord Jesus Christ outside the church." These episodes were an attempt to bridge the growing distance between the native village and the life of the family at a time when it hardly seemed possible to bring these two back together. In that situation, instead of the congregation, an "individual's" religiosity could give her some support and maintain a thin thread to tie her to the values of her parents and grandparents. These connections meant more and more to her after their final return to the village and after their children left. This "change" still "sends messages" in today's world.

Anna heard about the death of Gheorghe, the son of the former comrade, by chance, from a Romanian woman on the train when she went home for a visit, at a time when Anna's grandfather had been dead for some ten years and Uncle Bădila was no longer alive. The son's death was kind of a miracle in the vicinity. The pious man who tried to help everyone, died after being bedridden for forty years. At his funeral (at the very end of the fifties), a large crowd gathered. Everyone tried to approach the coffin placed in the courtyard. Strange miracles happened around the corpse, which did not become rigid in death: those who touched it in belief were cured, whatever their illnesses, even blindness. "That's true! These Romanian women do not lie, they believed in God and didn't tell lies" – Aunt Anna says even today. She regrets that she did not attend the funeral, even though she read the announcement in the paper. As is customary among Romanians, "the coffin is in the courtyard without the lid, the relatives kiss the deceased on the cheek or forehead, and then kiss the cross laid on his chest, and then the cross is passed from hand to hand so that all the mourners could kiss it." (Vámszer, 1940, p. 128-130). That was how the Romanians of Felek could get into direct, miracle-working contact with the dead man. He was buried in the yard of the Romanian church. The miracles did not continue at the grave – no one knows why – but Aunt Anna did not go to see the burial either. She thinks she knows about a miracle from that time, but it did not become part of her life; remaining a strange, interesting story, the reality of which was no longer hers.

Image 7

Anna Veres and István Bálint as a young married couple in 1948
(Vargyas, Gábor, 2003)

Back home after twenty-four years – a generation's time – the Bálints were soon left alone in the old house: where the memories, relics of the past, the icons left by the grandfather welcomed them almost unchanged, just as they were put up generations before.

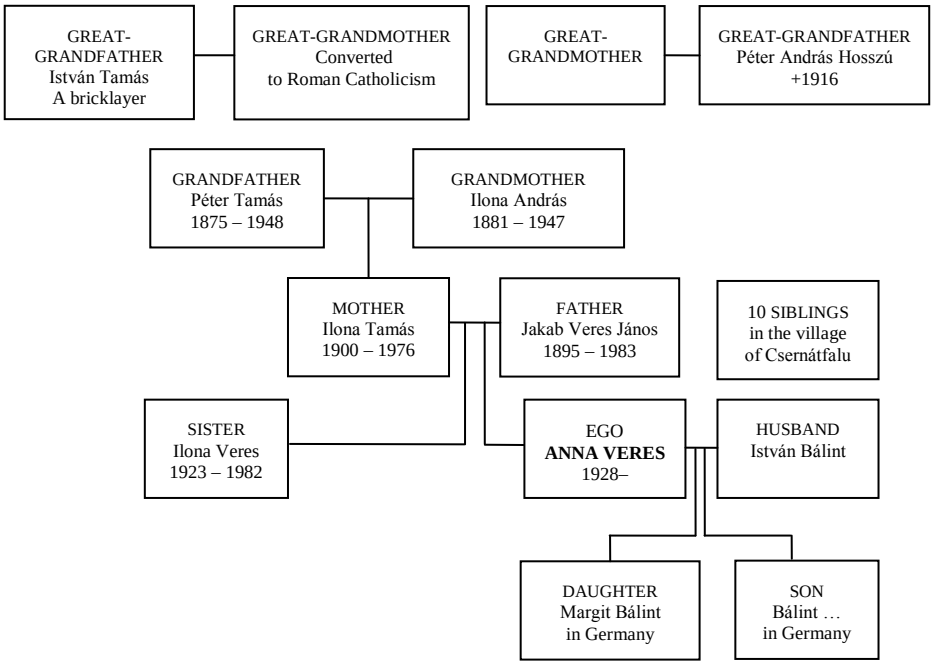

Figure 1
The Bálint (Veres) Family Tree

Pictures and symbols

This unusual sight for Lutherans, icons on the wall, is the expression of religious reverence and of the elevation of the values of the past. The objects personify, so to speak, those who live on only in remembrance: the grandfather who introduced Anna to the village traditions, his friend from the army and the pious holy man, the paralyzed son; all are present through them, symbolizing the sacredness realized in the veneration of the ancestors. Looking at the images (and speaking about them) confirms that in spite of all that has happened, through epochs and world-shaking changes, this *contact* with one's predecessors and grandparents is and remains as a *continuous* connection point, over

generations. This contact becomes a sacred doing and a sacred being. These symbolic pictures are perhaps denominationally unusual, yet ever still point to a means of compensation. The woman, who was not able to attend the congregation during the militia service of her husband, and similarly, could not practice the religiosity she internalized in her childhood, is left with a few pictures to look at (with her deteriorating eyesight). Her viewing becomes a seeing, but not only in the physical sense of the term. Such resuscitation of contacts is also the instrument of integration. Returning home must have been difficult. Finding their place in the former community, even though they had a physical place to settle in must have posed a cultural challenge. Old relations were to be rekindled or filled with new meanings and interpretations of what tradition was, is and will be.

In the meantime, novel roles were learnt, and an exchange of roles took place. The woman, who would come to the village to see her aging parents, now lives in the village, at home, in the house built by her great-grandfather, waiting for visits or phone calls from her children from abroad. In such a situation, with the experience of the succession of generations, it is naturally easier to identify with the former grandparents and adapt their knowledge of how to comprehend and explain the past to others, through the sharing of common knowledge and values.

Aunt Anna's stories are about traditions and values embedded in and manifested through human relations. In this sphere of tradition, the linkage of generations is realized, apart from the objects, by living stories-the repeatedly retrieved, retold, and revised narratives that are also presentable to strangers. The stories reinforce relations with long-dead forebears, strengthen the sense of continuity, and provide a link to a time when fundamental human relations evolved within the village milieu. Amidst the changing reality of history, the relationships between infant and grandparent, two mutually helpful grown-up men in danger, a parent and a child reduced to constant care, a godly man of prayers and people soliciting him for heavenly intervention, takes on multiple forms. With the passing of time, their basic values have become sharply outlined, and as it becomes increasingly difficult to preserve them in their original form under the pressure of changes, conjuring up the relations in stories has become an attempt at conserving these values. The little child, who experiences basic human relations in simple and suggestive forms, will keep something of the image of sane human relations decades later – even if during their life these memories did not provide a firm protection. These traditions are removed further from one-time patterns, due to external pressure or internal decisions. The transmission of these traditions that have occurred continuously in earlier generations undoubtedly ricocheted and were consequently impaired in Anna and her parents, and grandparents' generation by both war and cultural changes.

Thus, tradition becomes visible when we get out of it, when with the passing of the natural, automatic and unquestionable involvement in it; it becomes a task, a question. Yes, the revaluation of the past, the strengthening of a certain level of respect for traditions, the search for order and a point of departure are human needs that become more urgent in broken situations. Tradition, in which people are embedded, is made invisible by its continuity and the lack of its interruption (Fehér, 2001). Those who, "live in" tradition do not need to guard it, as there is no one to guard it against; it is natural that he/she has no other choice. Someone who guards it, reflects upon it, must be sure – overtly or covertly – that past times cannot be re-lived, that forms cannot be passed on as we received them in their direct form. What can, however, be preserved is a certain sensibility that ties us to the basic human relations once experienced as intact. In this case, the values we received as tradition, which we cast away precisely because they were traditional, only to find them again, can be preserved under new circumstances, and amidst innovative expectations.

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