

## Foreword

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In this issue, our research team has been given the opportunity to report on some of the results of our five-year religious anthropological research supported by the European Research Council.<sup>1</sup> Almost two-thirds of our 15-member research team is represented in the volume, but that does not mean that the total volume of our research, in all its aspects, can be presented: space limitations only allow for some excerpts from the main branches of the research.

The subject of our project, *Vernacular Religion on the Boundary of Eastern and Western Christianity: Continuity, Change and Interaction*, is the anthropological, historical and folkloristic research of a number of key phenomena of folk religion in a religious frontier zone of Central Eastern Europe. The core of our investigations has been the constantly changing constellations of cultural and religious relationships that have existed since the European beginnings of Latin and Byzantine Christianity, and their past and present manifestations in local religions and folkloristic representations thereof. Our research strategies were guided by the examination of a number of key issues, such as inter-denominational interactions, co-operation, contrasts and conflicts; religion as an identity-forming factor; the relationship between formal religion and lay religiosity; the religious world view and religious norms, as well as the role of the priesthood in past and present communities; the modernization and globalization of the traditional religious world view; and the emergence of the esoteric, spiritual New Age religiosity. These issues have been studied through some of the major topics of folk religion (cult of saints, cult of the dead, supernatural communication, seers and shrines, healing, demonology and witchcraft), in broad temporal frames, from the late antiquity to the present. Particular emphasis was placed on the synergic/mutually reinforcing relationship of anthropological research that is based on historical and archival sources and one that is based on fieldwork. Exploiting the opportunities of exploring cultural boundaries, influences and exchanges, our research

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was carried out in the outermost frontiers of the Hungarian-inhabited areas, in multi-ethnic, multi-denominational villages, and in shrines visited by several nations and denominations. The studies in this volume represent some of the aspects of these investigations.

The role of religion as an identity-forming factor is presented in *Eszter Gyórfy's* article based on her own archival and field research, in which she explores the changes in the linguistic/national and religious identities of the Ruthenian, Romanian and Hungarian inhabitants of the village of Kosteleg/Coşnea in the county of Băcau in Romania.

Of the central themes of anthropological contemporary studies, *Judit Balatonyi* researched wedding-related festive representations of Hungarians and Romanians in Gyimes. In her article, she presents an alternative betrothal rite in the Roman Catholic Hungarian community of Gyimes/Ghimeş in Harghita county, which, in her opinion, offered opportunities to exit marginal life situations while bypassing ecclesiastical norms. *Laura Jiga Iliescu* examined several aspects of the religious life of Romanian shepherds in the Southern Carpathians. Her article is a case study of a shepherd-cum-healer, the subject of which is the examination of the use, effectiveness and social environment of a healing incantation.

Our research of the cult of saints and shrines is represented in this volume by *Bea Vidacs's* study: she analyzes the similarities between two currently operating Hungarian and Lebanese seers and the communities that formed around them. The conclusion she comes to is that the followers of both seers perceive the performance related to Christ's suffering as a "historical drama" of their own nation.

The most active participant in our research on new religious movements and alternative Christian denominations was *Lehel Peti*, who conducted an extended fieldwork research in Romanian and Roma Pentecostal congregations in Moldavia. His article analyzes the community practices related to migration and their religious conversion aspects, and points out the role of the Pentecostal religion in the modernization changes that began in the Roma community.

Our research group's historical-anthropological and historical-ethnographic research proceeded in close association with contemporary research. The normative role of religion and the magical and religious "services" of the priesthood in solving everyday crisis situations were explored in both the present and the past, through archival sources. *Dániel Bárh's* study presents the case of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century Csík county (today Harghita county, Romania) spirit possession cured by the Catholic priest through exorcism, which also sheds light on a number of ecclesiastical and folk demonological notions of the time. While studying the 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century religiosity of Greek Catholic Romanians in Transylvania, *Valer Simion Cosma* discovered important source material that also relates to Transylvania's Hungarian populations. In this article, he analyzes *Pashchalia*, a document used in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries for bibliomancy, both by lay people and the Greek Catholic priesthood.

In her studies of sacred communication, *Éva Pócs* combines the analyses of historical sources and contemporary fieldwork research. In her present article, she outlines the research issues surrounding the figure of the wizard called *táltos* and the presumed shamanism in the pagan religion of the Hungarians before their conversion to Christianity.

One of the major sets of themes of our research based on historical sources is the examination of religious holidays and cults in the Late Antiquity and Middle Ages. In

her study, *Judit Anna Tóth* uses the results of her own large-scale source exploration work to arrive at a new result regarding the issue of the trance-inducing methods of Pythia, the Oracle of Delphi.

The research group's textual folklore research is represented in this volume by *Emese Ilyefalvi*'s study, who is working on the creation of a large digital incantation archive. In her article, she examines the theoretical, methodological and technical issues of computational folkloristics, using the extensive international literature of digital textual folklore databases.

