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Reviews

Ethno-Lore. XXXIII. Balogh, Balázs (editor in chief), Mészáros, Csaba – Vargyas, Gábor (guest editors). 2016, Budapest: MTA BTK NTI. 364. ISSN 1787-9396

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This thematic number of the Yearbook of the Institute of Ethnology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences deals with the issues of ethnographic and anthropological fieldwork. The primary objective of the conference proceedings comprising the studies of 15 researchers of the institute is to provide a glimpse into the types of field research carried out at the institute, and to show "what one of the most important research organizations of Hungarian ethnography thinks of the opportunities and of the future of fieldwork today" (Mészáros – Vargyas 2016:11).

All disciplines need to periodically review and reflect on the scientific methods they use. This is all the more true for cultural and social studies that examine ever-changing phenomena: because of social, political, and economic transformations in the world, the issues to be examined always change, and so does the place and role of humanities in society, as well as its research opportunities. These changes are challenging for these disciplines not only from the academic but also from the legitimizing and identifying perspective (which is a particularly exciting issue for an institute where researchers conduct their research according to the theoretical and methodological foundations of two related sciences, cultural or social anthropology, and ethnology, in a broad temporal and spatial framework). Thus, the individual disciplines need to consider whether they can keep up with ongoing societal changes, whether they can still ask scientifically and socially relevant questions, and whether they can provide a better insight on scientific stage where the boundary between the different disciplines is ever narrower in terms of research topics and research methods. For example, in the case of cultural anthropology – which no longer necessarily involves being stationed in exotic fields but rather studying macro-level connections – the question of what differentiates it from sociology or cultural science has been raised quite some time ago, while ethnology has been driven to reexamine its scientific objectives and ultimately its self-definition by the disappearance of traditional peasant culture. By focusing on the diverse problems posed by fieldwork, this volume attempts to launch (or relaunch) this discourse – which has been long-running in international scholarship – in Hungarian ethnology.

Although, owing to the profile of the institute, the studies discuss a wide range of fieldwork methods and issues, there seems to emerge a set of issues that, though varying in scope, equally affect more anthropological or more ethnographic field research (these issues only partially correspond to the issues identified by the four major chapters of the volume – fieldwork and epistemology, dilemmas of contemporary fieldwork, research history and fieldwork, the researcher's self and fieldwork).

The first such issue is the transformation of the concept of anthropological field site. Owing to global political, economic, and social processes and changed lines of scientific questioning, the site-bound, long-term stationed fieldwork within specific communities – once a hallmark of social and cultural anthropology – is no longer dominant. The traditional field site lives on more as a metaphor, for example, in multi-sited field research that seeks to capture translocal processes and follows the flow of people, goods and ideas *(Turai)*, where the field site is in fact the mental space that connects each scene *(Nagy)*. In a metaphorical sense, the on-line world can also be regarded as a field site, which, according to the volume's studies, can be, on the one hand, a space for maintaining contacts with and gathering information from members of the studied community (see, for example, *Turai, Nagy*), and on the other hand, a diverse online content created by those studied, which serves to provide information on the contexts needed to understand each research topic, such as various political, scientific, and artistic discourses *(Tamás)* or classic folkloristic issues *(Vargha)*. Additionally, research conducted in historical archives and other historical databases *(Bálizs)*, where the use of anthropological field studies or methodological practices – such as the ongoing reflection on the position of the researcher – can result in new reading strategies and new readings (*Bednárik*) can also be interpreted as a metaphor of traditional fieldwork.

The other common thematic focus of the studies is the impact of the current political and social situation on research. The political and economic interests of government, as well as the peculiarities of science grants systems, have always determined what should or could be researched (see, for example, *Borsos, Mikos, Sz. Kristóf*). At the same time, however, changing power relations, such as the emancipation of previously oppressed social groups, or the heritagization of culture, may also limit research opportunities – in this case, in the person of the researcher him/herself: the question arises whether non-indigenous anthropologists have the right to research a particular culture and whether they are able to provide an authentic representation of it (see *Tamás*).

This central and highly sensitive question in cultural and social anthropological discourses since the postmodern revolution brings us to the third issue that emerges from the studies, namely, the ethical dimensions of fieldwork. The studies in this volume deal with two major questions of a rather complex problem: how can one still collect data ethically with new collection techniques and in accordance with today's expectations (*Turai*), and how can the information gathered in the field be handled in a way that does not harm the interests of any of the affected groups *(Vargyas)*.

The fourth of the emerging issues is the epistemological problem regarding the foundations of fieldwork. The essence of this can be summarized in two closely related questions: is the researcher able to understand the way of thinking of another person or group of people as an outsider? In other words, is an anthropologist able to think in emic categories while also interpreting these categories according to etic concepts? The importance of these questions is illustrated by the fact that a number of studies in the volume focus on them – and offer different solutions for them. One possible way is for the researchers to consider themselves as part of the field site, since they may only truly understand the phenomena studied by utilizing fieldwork's perhaps most important "data collection tool": observing their own physical and emotional reactions. Another option is the so-called collaborative method, in which anthropologists collaborate with members

of the community they study, supplementing their insights and knowledge with their own experiences and observations *(Sántha)*. The third alternative may be perspectivism, which does not discriminate between emic and etic, and according to which the different perspectives of the researcher and the researched together determine how the anthropologist interprets certain phenomena. In their interactions, the researchers and their interlocutors create a constantly changing common framework of interpretation, which the researchers then use to interpret their experiences in the field. However, in order to interpret these experiences correctly, that is, to be able to understand the reality or realities considered valid by the researched, the researcher must recognize the changes in the framework of interpretation and reflect on his/her own role in the creation of the current framework of interpretation *(Mészáros)*.

As is the case with conference proceedings, the studies here are of varying quality. Overall, however, the volume fills a gap in Hungarian ethnology and deals with issues that certainly deserve further consideration.

Ethno-Lore. XXXIV. Balogh, Balázs (editor in chief), Mészáros, Csaba – Vargyas, Gábor (guest editors). 2017, Budapest: MTA BTK NTI. 358. ISSN 1787-9396

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In his preface to the 36th issue of the journal Ethno-Lore, summarizing materials of the second conference on fieldwork, organized by the Institute at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (p. 9.), Balázs Balogh writes: "Ethnological/anthropological fieldwork is the method that most clearly distinguishes our scientific field of study from other disciplines." In line with this idea guest editors Csaba Mészáros and Gábor Vargyas assembled fellow researchers from various institutes in February 2017 to discuss how fieldwork can be conducted in the context of radical societal changes in the 21st century.

The volume offers a wide-ranging overview on the most fundamental methodological issues of ethnography, with 13 published articles representing approaches taken in every fields of ethnographical scholarship: historical ethnography, folkloristics, anthropology, social ethnography and material anthropology. Fieldwork sites range from Hungary to Mexico, from Siberia to the United States of America and from Transylvania to Transcarpathia, bringing together a variety of field experiences. Not incidentally to this geographical scope, the entire process of fieldwork is also reconsidered in the articles: the field as a concept, a place, a locus and non-locality, factors influencing research (time, human relations and cultural distinctions), the scope of interpretation regarding acquired data, the dilemma of missing data and the self-reflective creation of knowledge are all addressed.

Ethnographical scholarship acquires a significant portion of its knowledge through fieldwork, and the volume offers a fresh debate enlightening from several perspectives the key issues of data collection i.e. what becomes data and how information is to be

structured with the aim of interpretation and comparison. Attila Paládi-Kovács and Péter Granasztói examine historical precedents of using research surveys for data collection in ethnography. Questionnaires became a regular method of data collection after the 18th century and underwent major changes throughout the following centuries. Initially, researchers had local clerks fill out the surveys in keeping with data collection practices implemented in public administration. By the 20th century, however, the method had become increasingly organized and coordinated, which greatly raised the professional quality of accumulated source materials. In describing the developmental arc of survey research, Granasztói states that by the 1970s the data collection movement had reached boundless proportions, followed by changes in the social matrix during the 1990s that limited opportunities for this kind of collection. Paládi-Kovács exposes readers to a similar dynamic when he describes in a close study how the Atlas of Hungarian Culture was developed, being a major achievement in Hungarian ethnogaphy. Data collection took place over the course of several decades. From 1939–1940, questionnaires were completed by untrained volunteers, whereas after 1955 work continued under stricter professional control, with the participation of trained ethnographers. In spite of this, it should be mentioned that the result is lacking in uniformity due to the sheer number of researchers involved and because the process of archiving halted around 1970.

Erika Vass also reflects on the process of data collection and its inherent dilemmas. Her study presents the open-air museum method in relation to the development of the "Transylvanian village" site in the open-air Museum of Szentendre. From the perspective of theoretical knowledge, she attempts to address the following difficult issues: "On what basis do we select potential art objects?" – How does a plain, dusty item become an art object full of value? (p. 285.) – "Who can be considered a 'good source' of data?" (p. 294.) – "To what extent can data acquired in interviews be considered credible?" (p. 295.) All of these are essential issues and decisions that must be handled by researchers in the field, with the responsibility that they will determine the effectiveness and quality of the given research.

While Nóra Kovács derives her theme from elsewhere, her writing also deals with very similar methodological problems, using research on Chinese-Hungarian couples as an example to analyze the process of constructing data collection as well as its permanent reconstruction. In a self-reflective way, she discusses the obstacles and limitations arising in the course of fieldwork (linguistic, socio-cultural and gender-related factors) in addition to addressing dilemmas caused by the lack of data and subsequent epistemological uncertainty.

The next set of major methodological issues dealt with in this set of studies involve interpersonal relationships between researchers and informants, which have a tremendous impact on the quality of fieldwork as well. Vilmos Keszeg reflects on the circumstances of data collection, given that they constitute both professional and human relations. He construes dialogue as an act and therefore handles boundaries and cooperation between two people along the same lines. The exploratory phase of his research on beliefs focuses on how the latter interactions are used and configured as well as on their functions and their changes.

Zoltán Nagy then delves into this train of thought even further. It has become fashionable to use the metaphor *friendship* and rapport concerning the non-hierarchical connection

between the researcher and the researched, instead of qualifying the source of data, but the type of relationship this euphemistic term wishes to convey is hardly clear. Nagy's study attempts to explore the essence of the cooperation that develops in the course of fieldwork, which can also cause difficulties, obstacles, contradictions and unpredictable turns depending on the mental constitution of participants and their mutually arising intentions. György Szeljak discusses the process of integrating the researcher, from the point of attraction to the point of rejection and on to actual acclimatization. Research conditions are strongly influenced by the nature of local power relations, the structure of contact networks and the establishment of the researcher's position.

Gábor Biczó's theoretical study aims for a critical analysis of the fieldwork paradigm, incorporating the complex range of issues related to the construction of field research as discussed in the previously mentioned studies. He also comments on the confusions arising from these, which limit familiarization with the "place" and the "other". He then interprets the scientific/historical place and heritage of *multi-sited* ethnography, an area that many other authors in this volume also focus on.

Studies that attempt to incorporate the effect of the internet into their scope of investigation shall comprise a separate unit given that information technology is one of the major elements within the changed socio-cultural context. Social sciences face a serious challenge in how to research offline and online reality from an epistemological, technological, ethical and structural point of view as well as from the perspective of data interpretation. As of yet, there is very little experience regarding the methodological approaches that can be used to grasp and understand a constantly and rapidly transforming society. Antal Lovas Kiss maintains that research conducted in a physical space without regard to virtual space may prove to be erroneous and that instead of conflating, globalization actually highlights unique features and local culture. Armed with these ideas, Kiss carried out multilevel research at one field site, drawing attention to the changing position of the researcher and to the unforeseen extent to which science has been democratised.

László Mód and András Simon take a similar approach to their subject of research, viti- and viniculture. Globalization, the internet, consumer culture, the transformation of traditional spaces and the increasingly reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the research subject are all factors that prompt constant self-reflection and a flexible reconsideration of research methods.

Balázs Balogh tested his repertoire of ethnographic fieldwork methods among Hungarian-Americans. Resorting to several different strategies, from spontaneous encounters to data collection by "appointment", he was able to break open the time and mental capsule that determines the particular identity constructions of Hungarians living across the ocean. He then moves on to discuss the types of surplus data conveyed by fieldwork based on physical presence, in addition to the info dump generated by the internet.

Lastly, I would like to draw attention to the study by Sándor Borbély, who is the only author in the volume to deal with the significance of time in fieldwork. The researcher encounters divergent chronologies and local historical discourses that branch off in several directions, depending on the specific experiences of the partial communities he examines in the course of data collection. He regards conscious reflection on this phenomenon to be vital in terms of maintaining a high standard in the process of

scientific inquiry. His approach offers a useful compass and a promising perspective on further mutual deliberation.

In conclusion, I will rely on the words of Mihály Sárkány regarding the significance of this volume. "It is worth becoming familiar with these studies in order to expand the methodological repertoire of the researcher because fieldwork requires resourcefulness and creativity, regardless of whether it involves simple data collection or working from several sites, and it cannot be carried out effectively by simply applying a well-worn template." (p. 338.)

LAJOS, Veronika – POVEDÁK, István – RÉGI, Tamás (eds.): *The Anthropology of Encounters/ A találkozások antropológiája*. 2017, Budapest: Magyar Kulturális Antropológiai Társaság. 252. ISBN 978-615-80336-5-7

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When studying social or cultural phenomena, it is possible to focus on observable uniformities as well as dissimilarities. Put simply, what we are discussing is that on one hand (as indicated by anthropological research) every individual qualifies as a human, regardless of gender, race or social conditions. On the other hand, humans can also be construed as individuals with their own life strategies, unique cultural backgrounds and specific social circumstances. In other words, it is the given research approach which determines the size and scope of a group that can be regarded as an independent entity based on common traits and separated from others according to some kind of uniformity or distinction.

Having had a long-standing, prolific impact on social research, Durkheimian social theory states that society is not a composite formed of individuals, but rather an alloy that lends new properties to its components, which can therefore not be separated from one another. Consequently, discussing Nuer and Kachin peoples, or a given village community as a whole, became a relevant research focus in anthropological scholarship. Nevertheless, it is also possible to discuss these topics in a different framework, as shown in Tim Ingold recently published article *"On Human Correspondence"*. Ingold advocates that society and human communities are not fused like an alloy, but are rather joined up like a patterned carpet woven together from multiple strands, which provides a more appropriate image to describe the relationship between society and individuals.

Therefore, when speaking about boundaries and contacts, we always claim that there are certain characteristics and distinctions whereby groups are formed and by which they can be described. As a corollary boundaries and encounters between different groups form an *interface* where intercourse between two societies, cultures etc. can be observed and understood. After marking out relevant frames of a group, and pointing out intergroup boundaries anthropological research may proceed focusing on the following questions:

1. uniformity within the group,
2. the nature of differences between groups, or
3. encounters between groups and the particularities thereof.

Research has typically interpreted differences between groups, border phenomena and their spatiality in two ways. On one hand, physical space was completely disregarded, which meant that observable differences within social groups or between ethnic identities were either difficult or impossible to interpret from a geographical perspective. One of the most renowned examples of the formation of non-spatial boundaries within groups is the theory of schismogenesis, which crystallised in the course of research conducted by anthropologist Gregory Bateson among the Sepi and Iatmul people of Papua New Guinea. Ethnographic research, however, far more frequently attempts to provide a spatial context for cultural differences. This not only means a relative orientation in comparison to another group, but also serves to anchor specific cultural or social phenomena within a network of geographical coordinates. Of course, this does not mean that the phenomena placed within a spatial context actually possess a spatial dimension, just as it is mere abstraction to assume how these phenomena are linked to certain individual points within a geographical space.

Nevertheless, a need to provide a spatial context for cultural distinctions and contrasts was fundamental to European thought (i.e. orientalism). The impact of Earth sciences on ethnography was further reinforced by 19th century debates among geographers who wished to interpret the definiteness of human cultures as rooted in geographical location. Influenced by the committed empiricist Adolf Bastian, Franz Boas and other advocates of the school of cultural relativism associated with his name were devoted to a cadastral description of individual cultures, arguing that each culture can primarily be evaluated and understood within the context of its own system. Despite the fact that Boas was aware of the significance of contact between groups adjacent to one another, he never actually payed close attention to them or to related border areas. For this reason, many regard his legacy as having developed an archipelago of more or less isolated cultures.

While the ascertainment of geographic diversity did not initially coincide with the examination of border zones and areas of contact, researchers increasingly wanted to observe and study various cultures with respect to mutual impacts and nexus. The study of mutual impacts was primarily limited to *lateral comparison,* an endeavour best illustrated by the archive *Human Relation Area Files*, which observes and compares world cultures, focusing on individual groups without blurred boundaries, indicated by discrete points and labels. This approach stresses distinctions and uniformity within individual groups, and it has often been criticised by researchers emphasising the diversity of contacts between groups. Observation of the boundaries between cultures and communities as well as efforts to understand border phenomena and the unique nature of peripheral encounters require an approach that is hardly compatible with theories raised by Murdock and Boas.

In my view, ethnographic/anthropological research in Hungary until now has placed a stronger emphasis on the examination of uniformity and distinctions rather than the study of encounters and contacts. It is for this reason that I consider *The Anthropology of Encounters* to be a significant publication, especially in light of the two introductory

articles written by Tamás Régi and Gábor Wilhelm, which finally provide an appropriate theoretical and scientific/historical framework for addressing the issue. The present review simply does leave room for an analysis of all 15 studies. I encourage everyone to delve into these encounters and connections between media, generations, ethnicities, disciplines and rational/irrational worlds in order to take stock of how it makes sense to discuss boundaries between groups, examining the scope and density of the interwoven carpet surmised by Tim Ingold and whether it is worth discussing one or several weaves. Reading the volume under review confirmed for me the that the most important characteristic of borders and distinctions is the fact that we draw them ourselves and that only we are capable of transcending and bridging them, taking advantage of the opportunity for encounters that they provide – stepping out of our comfort zone and into the contact zone.

Horváth Puli, Ferenc: *Farben und Formenkultur der Ungarischen Zigeuner.* [Colors and Forms in Hungarian Gipsy Culture]. 2016, Authors edition: n. p. 271. ISBN 978-3-2000-4723-5

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This volume is an edited and expanded version of the author's dissertation handed in at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. Painter Ferenc Puli-Horváth was born in 1935 in the city of Győr, where he began his schooling. During the war, he lived with his parents in Mosonszentjános and attended secondary school in Győr, taking his final exams at the Vocational School of Textile Industry in 1954, after which he moved abroad in 1956. He studied textile design at the College of Applied Arts in Vienna (1956–60), where he obtained his master's degree and then continued his studies on a Rockefeller Scholarship at the Brooklyn Museum Art School in New York. He dealt with textile design until 1965 and later worked as a stylist at the Lyman Löwenstein Company in South Carolina. In 1973, Puli-Horváth returned to Vienna, where he also obtained a drawing instructor's diploma in 1976. He taught at the secondary school in Mattersburg until 1994. The artist has been taking part in exhibitions since 1958. His first personal exhibition was organised in 1965 at the Rockefeller Center in New York, and he also participated in mutual exhibits with the Hungarian-American Art Association (1961–62). Puli-Horváth first returned home to Hungary in 1966, when he began drawing the characteristic features of Győr, Mosonmagyaróvár and Sopron. An exhibition of these drawings was held in 1986 in Mosonmagyaróvár, and his icons have been displayed in Fertőd, Sárvár, Kőszeg, Répcelak and Nagymárton (Mattersburg). He has also exhibited his water-colors in Szombathely (1997). In 1998, he was awarded a PhD – *summa cum laude* – from the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. His dissertation work, *A magyar cigányok szín- és formakultúrája* [Colors and Forms in Hungarian Gipsy Culture], was shown at a personal exhibition in 2001 in Sopronkertes (Baumgarten). During the same

year and at the same location, he participated in a mutual exhibit entitled *Pannon barátság* [Pannonian Friendship] in cooperation with Erzsébet Dorozsmai and Bernadett Horváth-Török, then once again in 2004 at the Schinner Gallery in Nagymárton (Mattersburg). (Salamon, Nándor: *Kisalföldi Művészeti Lexikon* [Kisalföld Art Lexicon], 285–286. Vasszilvágy: Magyar Nyugat Könyvkiadó. 2012). In addition, a representative collection of his icons was exhibited in 2016 at the Galerie Haus der Begegnung in Eisenstadt.

In reality, the present volume is the result of nearly three decades of research work, inspired by the author's early fascination with Gipsy culture and followed later by a comparative analysis of historical data and legends. The body of knowledge incorporated in the book as well as the original dissertation comprises a comparison of traditions, customs and contemporary artistic endeavors embedded in processes of development in social circumstances and political rights. As a drawing instructor, textile designer and printer, and as an artist working independently, the author has understandably focused primarily on the forms and colors prevalent in the everyday life of Gipsy people and in the works of Gipsy (naive) artists. In light of the above, Puli-Horváth came to the realization that the culture of Gipsy communities living in Hungary offers hardly known information and viewpoints that have not yet been examined to an appropriate extent.

The planning phase entailed a thorough and prudent analysis of professional literature followed by the involvement of consultants and years of research, utilizing surveys, personal interviews, individual and common art projects as well as various action initiatives. This resulted in the body of material which the author has endeavored to analyze – practically unrivalled in current professional literature.

Surveys covered 2,500 individuals, including 2000 Roma and 500 non-Roma participants. The youngest among these was 11 years old while the oldest was 90. The questionnaires were all submitted anonymously, although participants were also given the option to provide their names. Where the latter was necessary, those interviewed identified themselves using their initials. Participants were selected on the basis of their age, gender, education and place of residence. A comparison of the completed surveys was based on answers provided by the following groups: 1/ male and female students aged 12-19; Roma and mixed classes, Roma and non-Roma classes; 2/ Roma people living in various regions of the country; 3/ educated and illiterate Roma, Roma and non-Roma intelligentsia; 4/ Roma and non-Roma people deprived of their freedom.

Fieldwork was conducted mainly in regions and settlements with a significant Roma population e.g. Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties as well as Baranya county in the Transdanubian region, together with Vas county, neighboring Győr-Moson-Sopron county, and of course Budapest. A unique aspect of the research approach was to discover the impact of a broad variety of colors and forms on Roma people, who largely exist in poverty on the periphery of society, but with practically unlimited freedom, in contrast to those living outside of society within the confines of prison. Puli-Horváth focuses separately on how individuals reacted to blank forms as opposed to their colored versions. The book offers a well-organized and articulate table of contents, with individual chapters titled in such a way as to provide easy orientation for the reader. At this point in my review, I should mention that I became acquainted with the author through one of his Viennese instructors – Gloria Withalm *(Österreichische Gesellschaft für Semiotik / Institut für Sozio-Semiotische Studien)* – and have continued

to follow his versatile work until the present day. Having become familiar with his research in connection with colors and forms in Roma culture, I consider it important for the Hungarian scientific community to know about it as soon as possible. As a result, it was based on my recommendation that Puli-Horváth's study entitled *Colors and Forms in Hungarian Gipsy Culture*, which contains 142 diagrams along with 10 black and white as well as colored samples, was published by the Hungarian Ethnographic Society in its periodical dealing with Roma studies. (See: Bódi, Zsuzsanna (ed.) *Cigány Néprajzi Tanulmányok 7*. [Roma Ethnographic Studies 7], 33–120. Budapest: Magyar Néprajzi Társaság. 1998). It should be noted that, unfortunately, this fact is not mentioned in the book currently under review, although the study is available online: http://www.sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/magyarorszagi_nemzetisegek/romak/cigany_neprajzi_tanulmanyok_1998/pages/004a_A_magyarorszagi.htm.

Given that the Puli-Horváth's work is overwhelmingly based on an analysis of extensive fieldwork and interview materials, also worthy of special attention from the perspective of ethnographic science, we may discern one small flaw, namely that the author's analysis did not include the theory and practice of general color dynamics and the results cited in professional literature (Compare: Nemcsics, Antal: *Színdinamika – Színes környezet tervezése* [Color Dynamics – Designing Colored Environments]. Budapest: Akadémia. 2004).

The dissertation contained in the present book, published privately, with the entire text in German (including notes, footnotes, bibliography and a brief English language synopsis), will presumably be difficult to obtain. This is why we consider it important to notify readers of *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* about its publication. In summary, the book comprises a presentation of research on Hungarian Roma culture based on a unique approach to observation and analysis, making it singular among publications in national as well as international professional literature.

Voigt, Vilmos: *Negyvenöt év a szerelem kertjében. Összegyűjtött tanulmányok* [Forty-Five Years in the Garden of Love. Collected Studies]. 2013, Érd: Mundus Novus Könyvek. 264. ISBN 978-963-9713 33-8

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Vilmos Voigt is a highly influential figure in Hungarian folkloristics and an internationally renowned researcher. Besides his writings on folklore, he is also well-versed researcher in the fields of aesthetics, semiotics, religious studies and the philology of literature and art. However, he feels most in his element when he can create connections between these disciplines and take a comparative approach to his subject. It was in the spirit of this interdisciplinary and comparative approach that he produced his cycle of studies on the motif of the garden of love.

The title of the volume provides a brief introduction into his empirical method of assembling data as a jigsaw puzzle over a period of 45 years on a single subject within folkloristics (lovers talking in the garden at dawn) and his analysis of a motif that appears within that subject (*'poison instead of honey',* symbolizing unfaithfulness). Voigt first gave an overview of the theme first in 1969 when the public could read three major studies published in the leading journal of Hungarian ethnology *Ethnographia* (1969, 1970, 1980). These three articles constitute the main text of the volume under review. The lengthy, three-part study was followed by an overview of the genre history and cultural history of love songs, published in 1979. These four studies were built around a single goal: using the method of folklore textology to demonstrate the period in which Hungarian strophic lyrical folk poetry arose. Here, Voigt goes against earlier opinions widely held in Hungarian folkloristics, namely that the lyric folk song was already present in our culture in the period before settlement in Hungary (896). He puts the date of its appearance much later, to 1603, when the first stand-alone text on a lyrical encounter in the garden of love appears in a manuscript collection from the Moldavian Csangos (a Hungarian-speaking ethnic group living in the Romanian province of Moldavia). This is the earliest manuscript Hungarian poem for which we also have folklore parallels dating from the 19th century. The author therefore considers that by analyzing these two layers (written and oral poetry) of lyrical motifs it is feasible to show the laws of lyric development, the process of passing down the tradition. For this he takes into consideration the historical development of literature, its social background (e.g. the appearance of minnesänger and troubadours), as well as its cultural history, and occasionally even data on the history of metre. He shows that the motifs of a highly decorative garden serving as a place for love, the *locus amoenus* and *'poison instead of honey'* have long been known in various genres and works of literature. International comparative research has confirmed this with many parallels. Among these parallels, the author cites an entire series of examples from China, Japan, Mesopotamia, Ancient Greece, the Old Testament, India, Arabia, Persia and the Koran. In addition, he cites a wealth of comparable data from medieval European literature (French, English, German, Italian, Scandinavian). The volume includes 79 illustrations complementing the literary texts. These include works of art portraying the Garden of Paradise, the months (the garden of love is linked mainly to the month of May), and splendid gardens. There are also images portraying folk life and depictions of what are regarded as folk objects (honey cake molds, woodprints, glass paintings etc.), giving an indication of how widespread this motif is. The author emphasizes that these data also demonstrate how little there is to support and how unrealistic the prehistoric, ethnic preconception that so often crops up in Hungarian folkloristics in connection with love poetry is. He brings the same thorough approach to an examination of the *locus amoenus* theme that appears in world folklore. Finally, he places the Hungarian literary data within this broader context. His textual analysis leads him to the conclusion that the love poetry appearing in Hungarian sources probably draws on international sources and is inseparable from Renaissance literature.

The next piece in the volume is innovative in its methodology. The author places visual images beside textual sources and attempts to show the meaning of the different works of art, outlining the cultural and historical background of the motif to reveal the unity of images and texts. One of the most exciting parts of this cycle of studies is when

the folklorist interprets the motifs already described via two paintings by Jan Massys (1510–1575), an artist of the Antwerp school. Both paintings portray Flora, the Roman goddess of flowers and spring. Vilmos Voigt analyses a dozen similarities and differences between the two versions of Flora. He then shows that the two Floras seated in the garden of love represent the two faces of Venus *(amor divinus, amor humanus)*. They represent *humanitas,* a refined, artistically and philosophically reinterpreted portrayal of the universe.

The two last pieces in the volume were also written in the spirit of the author's iconographic, comparative approach to the Massys analysis (first published: 2003, 2010). In these Vilmos Voigt presents more visual images of love and the flowers in the garden of love. The first is an exciting analysis of the Angelo Bronzino (1503−1572) painting *Venus, Cupid and Jealousy* (Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts), and its portrayal of jealousy. The final study presents the flowers in the garden of love, examining both visual and textual portrayals. Voigt's complex methodology is apparent here as well, wherein he places the data of the visual and written sources in the history of Hungarian and European gardens with the confidence of a garden historian.

The studies are followed by a 25-page postscript, in which Voigt meditates on the response in Hungary to his theoretical findings on the theme. In addition, the author points to the need for further research drawing on literature and data from comparative social and cultural history. The volume ends with an English summary and indexes facilitating use of the volume.

Through the complex examination of a single motif (drawing on textual philology, iconography, social and cultural history), Vilmos Voigt aims to provide an example of how he sees comparative folkloristics embedded in a social/historical approach. It will be no easy task to follow his methodology. Thanks to his knowledge of many languages and his extensive reading, Vilmos Voigt is equally comfortable dealing with folklore, literature, the fine arts and corresponding literature, from China to the Balkans, from ancient times to the present. Indeed, if the topic requires, he enjoys venturing into other areas of cultural history, for example into garden history in the present case. As we read his iconographic analyses, in our mind's eye we can imagine him in the art galleries of Europe, carefully studying minute details and storing them in his memory for later use with texts. He brings the same close and all-encompassing attention to his analysis and comparison of texts. We can only regret that the same attention to detail has not been given to the editing of the text in this volume. Footnotes and references are not included for all of the republished studies; the reader is referred to the original place of publication. This can be inconvenient, in the same way as multiple repetition in parts of the content.

Despite these shortcomings, I can warmly recommend this cycle of studies for readers interested in curiosities of both folklore and cultural history. Vilmos Voigt has compiled a unique collection of data on the garden of love motif and has made exemplary use of it in support of his theoretical ideas.

VOIGT, Vilmos: *Az európai folklór - a középkor végéig* [European Folklore – Until the End of the Middle Ages]. 2015, Budapest: Loisir. 322. ISBN 978-9-638-96555-4

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The reviewed book (European Folklore) recalls the atmosphere and syllabi of university classes held by the author for decades at the chair of Folkore Studies in Budapest. This used to be an integrative subject, preceded by other courses where the students had been introduced to Vilmos Voigt's concept of the hierarchy of genres and had listened to lectures in Hungarian and Comparative Folklore Studies with a syllabus based on different genres (such as lyric poetry, ballad, tale, and short epic prose). Besides a considerable list of readings to process, each class enlisted indispensable accessories: foreign language recordings (e.g. milking songs, bell tolls) and a ubiquitous and selection of foreign language books, which filled two or three shopping bags. Some among these may have been the only copies available in all of Budapest.

In the preface of the book, Vilmos Voigt states that the current work is the result of fifty years scholarly work. Between 1958 and 1963, as a university student, the author used to attend the class "Nations of the World", which had been held by ethnologists, primarily by László Vajda. However, after he moved to West Germany in 1956, the four-semester subject was taught by folklorists. By then, Voigt had completed several comparative courses and some classes in German, Scandinavian, Fenno-Ugric, Baltic, Slavic, Celtic and Ancient studies. Meanwhile, he became acquainted with the folklore of Mediterranean and Balkan nations, in classes where epic poetry were translated from their original language by students in small groups. Later, as a department head, he invited Hungarian ethnologists focusing on non-European studies (such as Tibor Bodrogi, Lajos Boglár, Mihály Sárkány and László Borsányi) to provide a concise introduction into World anthropology for undergraduate students.

European Folklore is the synthesis of Vilmos Voigt's decades long educational experience, as well as a framework for his cherished readings. Already at the beginning, it was clear to him that summarising the folklore of Europe meant something entirely different from presenting America or Asia in Ethnology classes, and that the content should receive a completely different framework. His classes offered two different approaches: the syllabus had to progress either in a regional-geographical or in a historical order. I can still remember that it did not matter which order we actually chose because during exams he would always ask questions using the other logical structure. Initially, he applied the regional principle, followed later by the historical approach. In his book, he followed his usual solution i.e. presenting the content regarded as worthwhile in the frame of history – more precisely the "great social history", as he prefers to call it.

Regarding the textual predecessors of this book, the author himself calls attention to the fact that the topic had already been discussed in the reference book series in Hungarian *"The World of Culture. The Countries of the Earth. The Nations of the World"*. The series was published in 1965, and one can find Voigt's summary on pages 664–695.

I recommend these 30 pages as an introduction since – in contrast to the newly published work – this summary describes how the reception of folklore developed in different eras, and what characteristics apply to all of Europe in his view. The book published fifty years ago provides a wide range of theories, and it is obviously more didactic than the newly published one. The former is led by the geographical approach, which has been replaced by an evolutionist, social-science based perspective in later decades.

The structure of the present volume *(European Folklore)* is the following: it begins with the unwritten forms of memory, a mythological and poetic introduction, which is followed by a geographical-historical approach from ranging from primitive man to Antiquity, then a description of the forms of different societies and the well known issues of ancient folklore. Unfortunately, with the Middle Ages – the age of feudalism – the book already comes to an end, although its continuation exists in manuscript.

Exceptionally, the author does not provide us with a thorough bibliography. However, speaking in the hope of a sequence, this cherished practice might still be applied by Voigt in the future as well. The index at the end of the book is nonetheless useful. The introduction tells us what is not included in the book. The author has consciously left out the ethnogenesis of European nations, European history, and the book is neither a social ethnography nor a lexicon. In my view, despite the logically presented structure, it can be interpreted in multiple ways. It can serve as a collection of critical notes written with the personal, sarcastic humour and jokes so typical of Voigt, supplementing the readings for the course "Europe's Folklore", which is undoubtedly useful for university students.

On the other hand, this book conveys the results of the great classics of international folkloristics. Unfortunately, newer ones are only to be found in the notes hidden in the back of the book. The personal ars poetica of the author: a pursuit of comparison is also present throughout the book. It can be interpreted as the image European culture creates about itself from era to era, the history of civilizations emerging and disappearing, the mythological and logical "reading" of their internal development in different ages. Although the author admittedly only takes on the introduction of folklore up to the Middle Ages, we can hardly understand the topic without having knowledge about the history of ideas. Thus, we can also read about the ways of thinking and ideologies through which later ages approach earlier historical periods. For example, the idea of looking for the common traits of humanity emerged in the 17th century, and that makes it possible for Vico's "Scienza nuova" to appear in the book. Through this, Voigt encourages criticism and illustrates the volatile – or, rephrased with an idealistic approach, the increasingly precise – nature of certain interpretations. (In my view, it is not only André Leroi-Gourhan who stands as a good example for this.)

The author mentions different scientific delusions as well, and aims to present them in a critical way. His engagement is not with ethnogenesis but with mythological stories, symbols, and topoi transformed into symbols; the impact of the first known cultures to shape, interpret and describe European culture. This is the origin and the first expression of characterologies. Theories reconstructing mythologies are included in the book based on this logic. (e.g. the part written about Dumézil belongs here.)

In addition, the history of thinking appears as a theme as well, which is closely related to the question of the interpretation of time. Here we could cite the following question: After the fall of Rome, when did people first think that they were living in a new era?

The empire of Charlemagne, who was anointed with tremendous symbolic splendour in 800, belongs to a new era. And how do later commanders, such as Napoleon, draw upon this change? The development of historical thinking also has a place in the book - with Voigtian emphases. This topic becomes especially important in the chapter entitled "The forms of societies". Here, the basic frame of mind of Marxism appears, in addition to Marrism and the Leningrad school in relation to Olga Freidenberg. The social frame is present throughout the book. Although the author raises the question of what circles different stories could possibly have been popular in, due to the lack of sources, no detailed answer is given.

The book can also be read with the aim of discovering the theme of searching for one's identity in literature, the moment when history becomes a symbol, or the appearance of ethnographic and folkloristic themes in the literature of any era. This topic appears with a different highlight in each historical period. The summary of the poetic history of the Spanish and Old French context is more detailed than the other, which might be explained by the fact that early Spanish and Old French themes emerged in multicultural European areas as the forerunners of later folklore.

It must be mentioned that Voigt interprets Europe as a geographical area as well. In relation to this, the reader might ask what landscape means as a cultural experience. The book also brings up the topic of cultural interactions and the appearance of ethnographic curiosities, together with the boundaries of culture and the construction of a mythical past during the eras presented, and furthermore, how these later developed into folklore – although Voigt does not demonstrate the process in detail, but rather provides glimpses into the origin of the topoi.

Because of the diverse proportion of sources and specific shifts in the emphasis of certain eras, different folklore themes are represented in the chapters unevenly, which raises the question of the origin of regional differences. For instance, in relation to Ancient times, the dominant elements are animal tales and the description of knowledge and festivities learnt from Egypt. Folklore as a historical issue appears most specifically in relation to this era. Beside this, another important and highlighted topic of the book is the theory of the development of epics.

European Folklore most definitely encourages further thinking. The author indicates several times that what he does not write about (being a contemporary topic), he nevertheless knows about and regards as worthy of discussion. All through the book, historical introductions are accompanied by the most recent topics of folkloristics. For example, when describing the method of archaeological dating, Voigt mentions that Stonehenge is "still alive today", now becoming an observatory, now a spaceport, and now a UFO nest. Even Wicca witches were initiated there under the leadership of Cézár, the Hungarian warlock. This pursuit of the author is also well traceable in his mention and confutation of contemporary mythologies and theories of origin (e.g. the Etruscan-Hungarian theory). Besides, Voigt regards it important to investigate the folklore of immigrants (e.g. Arabs in France, Indians and Pakistanis in the UK, or Turkish in Germany) as "it is the responsibility of folklorists to pay attention to that".

As it were, the book is a set of university notes written in essay style. Instead of strict notes connected to the main text, as in the case of other academic works by the author, this particular work reflects the experience gleaned from years and years of reading

and interpreting. My only criticism is that the text could have undergone one more proofreading. For instance, geographical names are used with an apparent inconsistency, and it is somewhat confusing that the parts of the main text written in bold became subchapters in the table of contents. The main text could have been organised with the same structure. Hopefully, with the help of a publisher, the book will become more easily accessible than it is at the moment, perhaps in a version including the later historical eras as well.

Sárközi, Ildikó Gyöngyvér: *A mártírium homályából. Sibe ősök és hősök a kínai nemzetépítés oltárán* [From the Mists of Martyrdom. Sibe Ancestors and Heroes on the Altar of Chinese Nation-Building] /Kultúrák keresztútján 24./ 2018, Budapest – Pécs: Institute of Ethnology, Research Centre for the Humanities, HAS – Department of Ethnography and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pécs – L'Harmattan Publisher. 320. ISBN 978-963-414-395-6

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The book authored by Ildikó Gyöngyvér Sárközi focuses on the Sibe, an officially recognised ethnic group in the People's Republic of China. Today, the Sibe live in two locations, in two corners of China far apart; one group lives in the north-east, the other in the north-west as the outcome of an imperial order issued in 1764 which relocated some of the Sibe to the western border. The two torn-apart Sibe groups were exposed to entirely different challenges and had to adapt to different conditions, and consequently the life, moreover, the culture of the two groups significantly diverged with time. The extent of these differences can be best understood through the changes their language underwent: the Sibe in the north-east adopted the Chinese language while the Sibe in the west preserved their original Manchu language. The two ethnic groups share the Sibe name but cultural similarities are rare to find, yet it took them only a few decades to transform into a homogeneous group. Moreover, the Sibe population grew significantly in number through the decades compared to the first censuses. The book traces the evolution and growth of this "imagined community", as theorized by Benedict Anderson.

The story is easy to sum up. Ethnic policy constituted an integral part in the ideology of the Communist Party of China from the onset, i.e. how to build a multinational state of a diverse, ethnically divided China. Initially, this policy drew on nationalism and then the ideology of patriotism was placed into focus after a radical disruption during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. At the outset, Sibe ethnic nationalism pivoted on ancestral knowledge and ancestor worship while the fact that the Sibe had been torn apart was barely reflected upon. After the Cultural Revolution, however, the main vehicle of their aspirations was chosen to be something that might have as well imperilled their recognition as a homogeneous ethnic group – the Great Western Resettlement and ensuing consequences. The analysis traces how this historical event gained an increasing role in

history writing and turned into a central motif to prevail over and determine Sibe ethnic nationalism. The ideology grounded in Chinese patriotism required proof of sacrifice or "active patriotism" from national minorities. The Sibe identified their tearing-apart as the greatest sacrifice they had brought: the split of the Sibe nationality and their clans, and having to live at a great distance from each other was the utmost evidence of their loyalty and patriotism. Thus the situation was turned around: the immense differences in language and culture, which would have posed an obstacle to act as a homogeneous ethnicity, were drawn on to demonstrate as evidence of martyrdom. The effectiveness of the Great Western Resettlement as a pivotal idea rests on three pillars, which the author analyses and presents in three separate chapters. The three pillars are as follows: the memory preserved of ancestors, which can unite the family trees of torn-apart groups; the Sibe Ancestral Temple, which transforms into a "site of memory" (as described by Pierre Nora) dedicated to the Great Western Resettlement thanks to the efforts of the local elite; and its political commemorative ritual, the Commemoration of the Western Resettlement. It is utterly meaningful to follow the process how a homogeneous, colorful, and powerful master story and myth are being moulded from dispersed and ambiguously-interpreted sources of the past. Such was the power of the myth that an increasing number of Sibe, officially categorised as belonging to another, most commonly to the Han nationality, felt encouraged to request a rectification to their ethnic categorization.

The book is about the development of this process. What the book is not about is perhaps what could be called as Sibe culture. Even after reading the book, readers have faint impressions of how the Sibe live either in the east or the west. When readers shut their eyes and reflect on what has been read, it is difficult to visualise the everyday life of the Sibe. However, this is not a deficiency but the outcome of a consciously made decision. The author solely focuses concentration on how the Sibe's ethnic identity evolves and does not delve into what cultural carriers there are to this process. As the author states, the key reason for this is the following: "the cultural values preserved among the relocated groups were not put at the service of Sibe ethnic nationalist aspirations in a *direct way*, but [...] in an indirect way" (p. 227).

Thus the book describes a success story as the Sibe were able to formulate their ethnic identity and succeeded in unfolding Sibe ethnic nationalism as well as in asserting their own interests in a rather authoritarian People's Republic of China. Moreover, all this was done in a manner that the Chinese state not only assented but apparently continues to provide significant financial assets as well. This highlights the deftness and resilience of the group the author calls the Sibe knowledge elite since it is known very well that not all the 55 nationalities officially recognised in addition to the Han were able to integrate their aspirations so successfully into the ambitions of the Chinese state. This is the best exemplified by the home of the Sibe group in the west, which is an administrative region with a dominant Uyghur population, an ethnic group that is accused of separatism, religious fanaticism, and even terrorism, and considered to be one of the greatest enemies of and a threat to the People's China.

The book is first of all about the interplay between the state and the local elite; how the local elite or ethnic entrepreneurs strive to attain their own objectives and formulate their own claims within the ideological framework conditions set by the ubiquitous authoritarian state. This double game is described by the author as the Janus-faced

character of Sibe ethnic nationalism: it is put to the service of both creating Chinese national unity and shaping Sibe national identity, and ultimately creating a homogeneous Sibe national minority. If all this is translated into the possible levels of analysis of ethnicity, as formulated by Barth, then this book, in fact, concentrates on the macro and median levels of analysis despite the inclusion of numerous personal examples and stories taken from real life. The question that would actually lead to a micro level analysis is almost only put forth at the end of the book: how people not involved in the big games respond; how much of the message formulated by the political elite active at various levels reaches people; and to what extent the message permeates people's thinking. To revert to the book's main theme, the martyrdom of the Great Western Resettlement, it seems to have little effect on the Sibe, whose identity continues to be shaped most of all by ancestral worship.

The different analytical levels require different sources and different methods of collecting materials. Owing to this, the book draws on accessible written source materials at least to the same extent as on materials gathered in fieldwork. Texts of official history writing, scientific history writing, and local history writing are read side by side and compared by the author with great virtuosity. In fact, this was the only way to reveal all the aspects in the construction/reconstruction of Sibe history and include all the actors in the process. It is this dual source base that makes this piece of work a prominently important text not only for anthropologists but for historians as well.

A great number of thoughts emerge in the readers while reading the book. Thoughts, points to be discussed, which need to be jotted down on the margin of the page (if other readers also share this bad habit of mine). And the readers are pleased to read the Conclusion, perhaps the best-written chapter in the book, and see that the author too not only came up with the same questions but the entire book was built upon these thoughts by conscious choice, both in terms of content and composition.

What do I mean here? For instance, being an anthropologist myself and my field being Siberia, I could not read the events described in the book without seeing the same methods and tendencies as the ones employed by the Russian political and ideological elites as well as by the ethnic entrepreneurs of the ethnic groups in Russia. It is also patriotism that forges ethnic groups in Russia together, which is intended to sustain a seemingly ethnic identity called Rossiyane i.e. identification with Russia. In Russia too, the cult of heroes, mainly war heroes, and most of all heroes who died of martyrdom in the Great Patriotic War, constitutes a pivotal component (see Mácsa, Boglárka 2009 Cult of Soldiers-Internationalists in the Post-Soviet Bashkortostan. In Vargyas Gábor (ed.) *Passageways. From Hungarian Ethnography to European Ethnology and Sociocultural Anthropology.* Budapest: L'Harmattan, PTE.). Here too, these are the frameworks for the local elites within which they need to seek possibilities to shape and sustain a homogeneous identity for their own ethnic group. Apparently, however, the more authoritarian a regime is, the more direct are the methods resorted to. While Russia aims to create an identity fitted together like a matryoshka doll where Rossiyane identity is to embrace ethnic and local identities, it is the direct, inseparable, and immanent part of ethnic identity that is to bond ethnic groups to the unified Chinese nation.

However, it would be hypocritical if readers did not associate the above-described processes with current processes in today's Europe or even Hungary, and with the

methods that are aimed at taking control over the past in order to have control over the understanding of the present and the vision of the future as well. Today, perhaps nothing seems as important strategically as extending control over history. Actually, this is one of the most powerful messages of this book: we continuously revolve around concepts such as past and history, remembering and forgetting, history and myth; and at the same time we assume that the debate is about what we talk about and not about why we say what we say. This draws the attention not only to the discourse historians conduct about the essence of history as a science, which is also significantly accentuated in the book, but also to the essence how ethnicity and nationalism work, which can first of all be understood in an instrumentalist approach, definitely at least on macro and median levels. Ethnicity and nationalism on these analytical levels constitute an arena for opinion-shaping elites; and they also offer purpose and means for the games elites engage in. This also draws the attention to ethnicity and nationalism being a model of dual meaning in the same way as religion in Geertz's famous analysis: religion models the world and religion is a model for the world. Implied to ethnicity, this means that the present of an ethnicity simultaneously facilitates the understanding of both the past and the future: it is about what we are, where we come from, and where we are heading for at the same time. Or as the author formulates it with reference to Assman: "This is how history turned into myth can shape the self-imagining of groups and offers a guiding thread for action" (p. 228).

While reading the book, European readers will repeatedly take note of something that is discussed in detail in the concluding part of the volume, and the author also offers illustrative examples and explanations for the phenomenon. This is the difference in the relationship with history, museums, and historical monuments. Since the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment, European thinking has been determined by a particular relationship with the past and objects from the past, and this relationship has been crucially framed by the question of authenticity or striving for authenticity to be more precise. Both tangible and intangible cultural heritage is continuously and baldly being built before our eyes in China without any efforts exerted to play with authenticity, which may seem frivolously unsophisticated. The author compares the play or the confrontation with the illusion of being ancient to the feelings she had upon entering the Enchanted Castle in an amusement park, which is perhaps more difficult to process than to comprehend. Because it may be easier to understand as the author says that: "it was not the reality of the present itself that was important (...). It was much more important to understand how this reality was filled with meaning" (p. 215).

I must confess that reading the book, I was filled with admiration for Ildikó Gyöngyvér Sárközi about her fieldwork. I do not necessarily mean that she conducted an extremely long fieldwork because the time spent in the field is not a virtue in itself and neither is it a grant for bringing added value to the analysis. What filled me with admiration first of all was the way I envisaged the author doing her fieldwork and coping with the circumstances. Anybody who has done fieldwork and adapted to specific conditions tends to look at the fields of others to be a great deal more difficult and cannot even imagine working there. While reading the book, I constantly asked myself whether I would have been able to untangle all the threads wound up in the book. It is to be appreciated that the author did fieldwork in locations that very few can visit; foreigners

are frequently refused entry to these places owing to the political situation. She did long-term fieldwork in a region where not only local people but hotels as well are not allowed to receive foreigners. She managed to cut through the red tape and obtain all the permissions necessary for her to do work. You need special abilities to be able to do so. You must be in full possession of the language, local languages too, so that you can conduct conversations with apparatchiks and decision-makers, the outcome of which depends on nuances and subtle distinctions in formulations. You must be assertive and determined enough to get everything done, and if you are thrown out through the door, you must climb back in through the window; you need the toughness of a bulldog and the kindness of a cat to get everything signed with time. And you need to be sensitive, clever, and empathic enough to be able to judge how far you can go, when to keep silent, when to adapt and when to ask questions again. You must have incredibly profound knowledge of the rules, codes of conduct, and games of a culture in order to cope so well. Page after page the book reveals that the people Ildikó Gyöngyvér Sárközi came into contact with during her fieldwork not only tolerated her, but accepted, got to like, and respected her.

Moreover, every chapter of the book tells that the fieldwork was not only sensitively and thoughtfully conducted but also extremely carefully planned by the author. Readers can see not only a fieldworker adapting to unexpected conditions but also an investigator doing systematic work.

In order to be able to see all this, readers need the author, who offers an insight into her everyday work. I myself especially appreciated that almost each chapter is introduced with a personal story, a recollection of an ordinary yet emblematic event, and such accounts recur in the course of the analysis as well. The personal tone the book is written in is the most important stylistic tool she uses. There is no all-knowing, hiding author but instead the readers are involved in the process how the author follows an idea and arrives at an understanding. Readers can asses to what extent personal relations are at play and how much uncertainty there is to it. I thought of it and also called it as a simple stylistic technique and in fact I did not realise it until the concluding chapter of the book that it was the outcome of a consciously-made and well-weighed choice.

In addition to a personal tone, the style of the writing is also characterised by honesty and modesty. By honesty, I mean that the author never draws conclusions unless they are fully supported. Here and there the author herself states where her knowledge ends and her understanding becomes uncertain. By modesty, I mean the way the author has drawn on literature: she never refers to theoretical texts in order to embellish her statements; references are solely made and her analysis is only placed in discourses if they can in fact contribute to understanding the story she unfolds.

A personal tone, honesty, and modesty mark the authenticity of her work.

There is perhaps one thing worth pondering over even though some reference is made in the book. It would be worth reflecting on how the author came to take part in the story she has presented in the book, because a foreigner who explores such questions must have made some impact in a location that cannot be accessed by foreigners. Readers can only guess how Sibe ethnic nationalist aspirations were shaped, legitimated, and popularised, or on the contrary, weakened or even imperilled by her mere presence. It seems obvious that the author was accepted by the Sibe knowledge elite and by others outside this circle. Readers can also see that the author herself takes an active role and,

for instance, contributes to the compilation of family trees. What readers cannot see at all is the impact story of her mere presence.

It also makes readers greatly wonder what impact story this book will have in China when its contents become known.

Reflecting on all that I have said so far, perhaps I do not exaggerate when I state that the book in the readers' hands is one of the most important and fascinating anthropological writing accomplished by a Hungarian author in recent years. It cannot be a coincidence that the book was also published in English in the 'Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia' (Sárközi, Ildikó Gyöngyvér 2018 *From the Mists of Martyrdom: Sibe Ancestors and Heroes on the Altar of Chinese Nation-Building.* Halle: Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, LitVerlag).