

## FOREWORD

This is not the first time that the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Szeged, and – since July 2013 – the MTA-SZTE Research Group for the Study of Religious Culture have dealt with the connections between politics and festivals. Back in 1999 the Department organized the 3<sup>rd</sup> conference of the SIEF's Working Group on Ethnology of Religion under the title *Politics and Folk Religion*.<sup>1</sup> The narrower topic of feasts, festivals and religion has always been a focus of interest in our researches. This is also reflected in the publications of the Department. One of our series of publications is devoted to textual and visual sources on religious life, another series publishes analyses, monographs and conference papers. In the 1990s and the early 2000s the Department published a large number of books on the subject of rites, rituals, customs, ceremonies, feasts, national/state/political festivals.

Calendar feasts, or in a wider interpretation, the ritual year are traditional topics of the research activity of the Department. The roots of this interest go back to the early 1930s when Sándor Bálint (1904-1980), the later professor of the Department, became assistant and then Privatdocent at the Ethnographical Institute which was established some years earlier, in 1929. In the second half of the 1930s he published the first writings and books on calendar feasts. The topic remained his main field of interest in the following decades, too.

Sándor Bálint's seminal comprehensive work, *Karácsony, húsvét, pünkösd* [Christmas, Easter, Pentecost] and the two volumes of *Ünnepi kalendárium* [Feast Calendar] appeared in the 1970s. These books are considered to be his chefs-d'oeuvre. They are dazzling displays of his knowledge of ethnology, folkloristics, cultural history, ecclesiastical history, literary history, heortology, theology, liturgical history, music history and linguistics. He places everything in a historical and Central European context and takes into consideration the Romanian, Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Slovakian, Czech, German and Austrian material. *Karácsony, húsvét, pünkösd* surveys the traditions related to the major church feasts and the liturgical and paraliturgical phenomena that infiltrated into everyday life. The two volumes of *Ünnepi kalendárium* review the feasts of Mary and the saints in the order of the church year, month by month. These offer a rich source material of an almost forgotten world.

As a result, multi-directional research on religion and festivals continues to be an important part of the department's teaching and research activity. Over the past 20 years, through its publishing and conference activity, our department has become an important workshop of ethnology of religion, including also feasts and festivals.

National feasts have also been examined. We especially studied our new national feast, 23<sup>rd</sup> October, the commemoration day of the 1956 revolution which

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1 The contributions of the conference were published in a volume edited by Gábor BARNA: *Politics and Folk Religion*. Szegedi Vallási Néprajzi Könyvtár 6. Szeged, 2001.

before the change of political system in 1990 was an alternative but prohibited feast.

At first glance politics and culture are two different spheres of human culture. However, if we make a deeper analysis several intersections emerge. Feasts in particular can express political, cultural, religious or ideological contents with individual and communal variants, thus they often use symbolic forms. Both the system and the content of feasts change from time to time, manipulated by political ideologies. Feasts as extraordinary time offer a possibility for the connection of high and low tradition, the accommodation of elements of folklore and/or popular culture and their association with local or high politics. Therefore politics and political regimes always want to control the world of feasts, have a special feast-policy and may have different attitudes toward feasts. The concept of (folk) culture played a diverse role in the historical development of national/patriotic, religious/church, and regionalist movements as well as in processes of community-, nation- and region-building directed by the society/state.

In recent decades the intersection between politics and (folk) culture greatly intensified, creating a strong emphasis on the political aspects of the appropriation of the elements of folklore, stressing its contemporary uses by cultural activists and policy makers, and by national, regional and ethnic movements. All these aspects and transformations can be best analysed on the basis of rituals, the changes in the structure, function, and symbolic meaning of folk/political and newly invented rituals. That is why we held the conference on the biggest Hungarian national day, March 15<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of the 1848 bourgeois revolution and war of independence.

*Gábor BARNA*