

Gábor BARNA – Bertalan PUSZTAI

## A Changing Feast between the Saint and the Profane

The essays of the present volume (with one exception) are the result of the work of the 3rd International Ethnology Student Seminar held between 31st July and 6th August 1997 in Szeged. The objectives of our international seminars is to learn from each other both in the fields of theory and methodology through working in co-operation when analysing a certain topic, also to create a process of joint professional thinking and to establish personal contact between the students and teachers of European universities in the spirit of sharing the same European culture and forming a common European sense of identity.

In addition to the students and the organiser teachers of Szeged, the following students and teachers participated at the 1997 3rd Seminar organised by the Ethnology Department of József Attila University of Arts and Sciences: the School of Scottish Studies (Edinburgh, Scotland), the Department of Ethnology (Łódz, Poland), the Department of Comparative Religion and Folkloristics (Åbo Akademi, Turku, Finland), the Department of Ethnology (Zagreb, Croatia), Volkskundliches Seminar (Göttingen, Germany) and the Department of Ethnology (Brno, Czech Republic). The guest institutes are in regular contact with our department.

Our department's idea of an ethnology seminar originates from the 1960s and 70s' Slovakian practice. In those years, the Department of Ethnology at the Komenský University of Bratislava invited students and teachers of Ethnology departments mainly from Central European and Central Eastern European countries (e.g. Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, Slovenia, etc.) and occasionally from more distant European states and they organised a summer fieldwork in various regions of Slovakia under the name of Seminarium Ethnologicum. We considered the institutional framework adequate and beneficial therefore in the 1994/95 academic year the Szeged Department of Ethnology launched an international student seminar entitled Seminarium Ethnologicum Szegediense. In the first two years we carried out research work in Csongrád then in the third year in Szeged-Alsóváros. By this time our seminar practice had matured, according to which after the primary theoretical and methodological preparation and discus-

sion we now perform the comprehensive ethnological study of a subject with the participation of students and teachers from Szeged and abroad alike.

The professional aim of the 3rd Seminar was to document the 5th August 1997 Szeged-Alsóváros pilgrimage feast as thoroughly as possible. The choice of subject besides many factors was influenced by the Szeged University Department of Ethnology's intention to follow Sándor Bálint's (1904-1980) legacy, to continue the late professor's religious and ethnological work while satisfying our times' professional demands. Bálint Sándor could not see the publishing of his book entitled "Szeged-Alsóváros. Templom és társadalom." [Szeged-Alsóváros. Church and society. Budapest, 1981], which introduced primarily the historical aspects and historical-cultural references of the local feast. This present volume is dedicated to his memory.

Thus the main aim of the study was to comprehensively document an Alsóváros pilgrimage feast held in a given time. The study emphatically concentrates on the present and the actual realisation of the festival. Due to the limited number of our research group, we faced a major methodological challenge in recording the events taking place in a given physical space and happening simultaneous in the linearity of time. Therefore, relying on Sándor Bálint's aforementioned book and our own experience of previous research work, we formed small research teams in order to be able to observe the events taking place at several venues. Probably the formation of these teams characterises our research approach already i.e.: concentrating principally on the present and not only on the peasant class. One of the work teams recorded information about the church and the surrounding square, the pilgrims and the events taking place there. Another team dealt with the adjoining square, the cloister and its inhabitants as well as the Franciscan friars who were engaged in the operative organisation of the Feast. This meant that the friars were also subject to research in the society of the festival, not only the festival congregation or the sellers and showmen of the fair who were examined by a different research team. The fourth important team, which commenced its work already in the weeks leading up to the feast, studied the wider Szeged-Alsóváros social environment and observed the preparations in the homes and the church. It is also worth mentioning that a video camera was used at all venues to observe even the researchers themselves, recording the details of the research work. We hope that this research grouping also serves the purpose of displaying that according to the organisers and participants it is the science of ethnology that through the method of direct data collection performs qualitative research activities when studying various social groups' cultures and culture in general.

During the research activity, furthermore, it acknowledges that its results are borne from the co-operation of the subjects of the research and the researchers.

We also consider it necessary to briefly introduce the structure of the research activity and the seminar. In the first two days of the time spent together, the participants gave lectures about the local festivals, the local religious festivals in a

theoretical and methodological point of view. They received briefing about the subject of research, which was the actual local festival, the history of Alsóváros pilgrimage feast and its time and space structure. After such preparation we carried out the research itself in the aforementioned grouping scheme. Following the feast, the work teams summarised their research findings which were publicised to all the participants in the form of plenary lectures delivered on the last day.

Our study volume's writings are mainly based on these stage-summary reports. They do not intend to provide a synthesis in themselves, they simply draw conclusions from the research studies and observations of the teams. A mosaic picture assembles from the rather various studies. These snapshots may show a variety also because the authors received their training on the empirical study of a culture in various schools of Europe, they are from various cultural and religious background therefore they have different attitudes towards the studied local feast. We are convinced, however, that this variety and the presence of a number of viewpoints is also the ultimate asset and benefit of our co-operation.

In the Szeged-Alsóváros 5th August pilgrimage feast pilgrimage and church dedication amalgamates. Our Lady of the Snow is the church's dedication and celebrating this has always been a festival among the locals. On the other hand, there is a miraculous image to be seen on the main altar of the church and owing to this *Auxiliatrix Szegediensis* the place is also a shrine where the people of Szeged Region have made pilgrimage to.

The notion of pilgrimage is not a static one, it means constantly being on the move both in space and time (*status viatoris*), from one place to another destination and back. During this a believer doubles the centre of his religious life and positions the other centre outside his structure of life. Being a pilgrim means being estranged from the social environment for a certain period of time and in this state establishing a relation with other communities and God. In this period of time the pilgrim seeks the grace of God, his own restoration of health, the settling of his soul and remission of his sins, in other words *indulgence*.

A church dedication, on the contrary, is the dedication festival of a church or maybe the memorial day of its consecration. It closely relates to the particular community, the *community* of the church / parish, in fact, *it is the memorial festival of its living and deceased members*. A church pilgrimage therefore gathers the members of the particular community. Throughout the centuries many churches have gained indulgence for the occasion of the church dedication festival.

In the case of Szeged-Alsóváros also, the two concepts are intertwined, which is to be taken into consideration in the research. The structure of a religious festival may be described through contrast pairs. The most essential framework for realisation is provided by the conjoined and complementary phenomena-sequence of the *saint* and the *profane* components. These dichotomies can be observed in the space hierarchy and space application or the time structure of the festival but also in the society of the feast.

The venue of the festival is the city of Szeged, a neutral space. The closer venue, the Mátyás Square, however, may be divided into saint and profane space levels. The church and the cloister belong to the saint space whilst the fair organised in the park around the church is part of the profane space. The tents of piety object sellers form a bridge between these two types of space. In the space application of the festival we can discover the relative permanence and occasional changing of the two components, more precisely, the expansion and the shrinkage of the saint space may be observed during the grand festive procession.

The streets surrounding Mátyás Square, which have always belonged to the profane component, were used as parking places for the pilgrims' carts, cars and coaches. The street names illustrate the *irradiation of the saint*: Barát [Friar] Street, Szent Ferenc [Saint Francis] Street, Szent Antal [Saint Anthony] Street, Szentháromság [Holy Trinity] Street, Boldogasszony [Blessed Virgin Mary] Avenue, Apáca [Nun] Street, etc. The presence of the Franciscan order and the Poor School Sisters' educating order in Szeged-Alsóváros secularised the physical space. The dichotomy of the church and the square may also be well described. The *church* is the scene of prayer, devotion, tranquillity, contemplation and peace of the soul, the home of order and regularity. The *square* is the scene of selling and buying, showmen, babble, music, fun and entertainment, the home of constant movement and apparent huddle. The church represents a different world, the world of the transcendent whilst the square expresses the world of the everyday life, the immanent. There are family houses and homes around the church and the square, which can unify everyday life and the feast's saint and profane elements. Once these homes were (and partly still are) the meeting places for family members returning home for the festival occasion, relatives, acquaintances or stranger pilgrims and these homes were the scenes of festive meals (agape) consumed in the company of relatives. In the 18th and 19th century for the settlers who migrated from Szeged but returned home for the pilgrimage feast homes (together with the cemeteries) meant the sacred dwellings of ancestors, thus links and roots to a greater emissive community.

The church itself and the connecting cloister corridors are also well structured. We may record its points of greater and minor emphasis: the sanctuary with the main altar and the icon, the icon of the Black Virgin under the choir, the vestry and the parsonage which may become emphatic at different and several times during the festive sequence of events.

The time structure of the festival bear characteristic features. It is due to the anti-church policy of the previous atheist regime that those religious festivals that fall on a weekday are only allowed to be celebrated on the following or the previous Sunday. Thus the 5th August Our Lady of the Snow pilgrimage feast was held on 3rd August in 1997.

The time structure of the festival in fact means the structure of events, the scheme of spontaneous and organised programmes. These events can simultaneously take place in all profane (homes and the square) and saint (the church and

the cloister) levels although their dominance within the time structure may be different. Instead of going into details, hereby we only note that the profane events are present with more emphasis in the preparatory and leading down stages (e.g. cleaning, decorating, packing away; cleaning, cooking, transport; the sellers and showmen's unpacking and packing away) while during the climax of the festival, the holy mass and the procession the sacral events dominate. In other words the sequence of events leads the participants from the immanent towards the transcendent world and then back.

In this event structure there used to be characteristic events, e.g. the pilgrims who arrived at the church the day prior to the festival spent the night in the church and worshipped. The services commenced on the vigil of the festival and the festival reached its the climax in the morning of the festival with the bishop's high mass and the procession. Participating in the pilgrimage festival for the participant means that he can join both the sacral and the profane events. The pulsing nature of changes between the sacral and profane events provide the pilgrimage festival's time structure. While the sacral events and the pilgrimage festival's fair were limited to two days of the festival only, a certain number of the showmen appeared on the square a few days before and also stayed a few days after the festival.

The social composition of the pilgrimage feast is not homogenous. It comprises the great two groups of believers and non-believers. Although these groups are not homogenous either. Within the group of believers we can separate two groups, that of clericals and lays.

Among the clericals we can find the monks, the nuns and the diocesan priests. The role of the latter has not been insignificant in the past decade since they have introduced the tradition of diocesan ministrant meeting on the Saturday of the festival where the diocesan priests bring their ministrants in great numbers. In the past decade both the ministrants' mass and the next day's festival high mass were conducted by the diocesan bishop.

The group of lay believers cannot be considered homogenous either. It well may be, however, that as it preserved in the agrarian environment that from a pastoral point of view they are generally regarded as a homogenous unstructured crowd. Although if we take a close look besides the above mentioned ministrants we can see the inhabitants of Szeged and elsewhere, the locals and the returning pilgrims coming from distant places. And since the pilgrimage feast has for decades coincided with the time of the Szeged Open Air Festivals, tourists are also to be found who may be believers or non-believers, there may also be participants and curious spectators.

In the sense of content we can see that the Szeged-Alsóváros pilgrimage feast is an important chance for meeting, acquaintances, relatives, strangers, the monks, secular priests, laymen, believers and non-believers have the chance to meet in a common belief and festival. In the decades of the past communist era a special fac-

tor accompanied the general characteristic features. Namely the fact that our religious festivals were (usually) saturated with national feelings and content because only at these occasions was it possible to confess healthy national feelings. This special feature has prevailed almost to date.

The above explained space and time structure as well as the social structure of the festival has gone through a lot of changes in the past century. After World War One its role of uniting Szeged Region and the migration from Szeged weakened and ceased. Its scope of attraction, however, expanded to a different direction of the Southern Hungarian region. Simultaneously, the social composition has transformed: the formerly dominant peasant participation has given its place to a more complex constitution, in which the dominance of the intellectual professionals has been growing since the 1920s when a university and pedagogical college started operating in Szeged. In this changing process an important stage was the Franciscan order's moving back to the Alsóváros friary in 1989.

After the ban of monastic orders' operation in 1950-51 the church was led by diocesan priests. They left the organisation of the pilgrimage feast mainly to the lay followers who endeavoured to run it according to traditional norms. The church i.e. the clergy adjusted itself to these norms of vernacular needs for decades. With the moving back of the Franciscans, however, the function of the friary changed which effected the whole operation of the Alsóváros Church. The friary was the scene of the Franciscans' theological studies, with full house in the academic year and a long summer vacation. The theologically highly educated Franciscans could not deal with the 'traditional vernacular' world of the pilgrimage feast, its apparently disintegrated structure and the several-thousand-member crowd. They started to organise it. By the mid-90s the then Franciscan parson and the cantor published a book containing services, which regulated and organised nearly every minute of the events of the pilgrimage feast. This 'script-book', in which they included the next ministrant meeting element as well, is realised year by year. And since this time the significance, dynamism and attractive character of the pilgrimage feast has been decreasing and declining.

Why so? Our observations attempted to seek and find the answers to the question.

One and probably a comprehensive explanation is that in 1990s a theologically well educated, ecclesiastical religiousness here conflicted with a vernacular / popular piety that insisted on its traditional patterns. This explanation may be disassembled into further components, behind which lie the great social changes of the past decades, which left neither the church, religion and religiousness nor the world of the local society untouched. In other words, a spontaneous social change co-effected with a conscious need for change.

The dominant one of the changes aforementioned seems to be the social change in the composition of the organisers. While at the beginning of the century a festival organising group that also kept and sustained the elements of Franciscan parsonage of the time allowed for the festival's mass character to be ensued which con-

tained several characteristic features of the popular devotion. In the 1990s the Franciscans wanted to set this seemingly 'chaotic' world in order and to hold the string of events which they felt too loose. They wished to realise the church song reform, which meant that instead of the local - and extremely mixed both in a theological and aesthetic point of view - vernacular song-composition, the songs of the Gregorian based Éneklő Egyház [Singing Church. Budapest, 1984.] were to be introduced. The characteristic local features have disappeared from even the sermons, the pilgrimage feast, the story of the 4th century Roman Augustan snow-miracle of Our Lady of the Snow, which for today's audience (that believes in its rationality) unbelievably mysterious and the historical events and miracles of the shrine. On the other side, the offices of hours that had been missing for decades naturally appeared as pilgrimage feast 'programmes', and an excuse for the realisation of the strong ecumenical idea, a sound Catholic unity the Greek Catholic nocturnal liturgy was also positioned in the programme. The intervals between the hourly scheduled liturgical events were filled - and so are they today - with church musical devotion.

In essence, beside the organised church events there is no time, no space and no opportunity allocated for the spontaneous forms of devotion, for the expression of individual ('vernacular') forms of religiousness. Thus the once respected religious roles such as the leader of the pilgrimages or leadsinger were devalued and the familiar religious practices and knowledge of songs and prayers were ousted. And as a final consequence, the individuals and groups that insisted upon these did not come to Szeged any more.

There is an array of 20th century events in the region that account for the transition.

The new borders drawn by the Trianon Treaty after World War One - especially those that cut off the swarmings to Szeged from Southern Hungary, the Bachka and the Banat mother towns - unabled the population of Szeged to have their great annual meetings.

The local societies of Szeged and Szeged Alsóváros themselves also transformed during the course of the century. By today the agrarian character of Szeged-Alsóváros has weakened and this part of the city has taken up more of a suburban role. Even if this change seems to be slower than in other parts of the city, its direction is clearly recognisable. There is a great amount of moving in from other parts of the city and from outside. This implies that an Alsóváros social layer is also being formed beside the Franciscan parish that pays little or no cultural significance to the traditional world of the pilgrimage feast. The local religious historical identity has greatly weakened since now nobody writes or talks (with keeping distance) about the miraculous events that once the Franciscan resident of the friary, *Ordinánsz Konstantin* collected into a volume entitled *A Libanus havasai alatt illatozó rózsza* [The Rose Flourishing Under the Alpines of Libanus.] They do not feel the religious reality that has inspired the poet Gyula Juhász to write the poem *Fekete Mária* [The Black Mary], which is engraved in the marble plaque in the

church. The number and the influence of the intellectual professionals within the circle of followers at the parish has grown, which is due to the expansion of the 20th century higher education in Szeged. This can be demonstrated in the organisation of church musical devotion that serve as time fillers between the pilgrimage festival's liturgical programmes, these prayers are performed by the students and teachers of the college of music.

With the moving back of the Franciscans the place which before had only operated as a parish regained its function as a communal home and a study house for an order with growing number. The Franciscans, probably due to their several decade absence, cannot feel the festival to be one of their own, they cannot affiliate with its peculiar, strongly peasant like and popular atmosphere which is so distant from their attitude. They continue organising it since there is a certain traditional demand for it and since they are aware of its historical roots. They behave as a serving organ, although so far they have not been able to incorporate the occasion into their framework of parsonage. However, it has already been done in some of their shrines in the past decades: the pilgrimage place of Hajós for example has become the venue of pilgrimage for the youth, the pilgrimage place of Csatka for the gypsies, the pilgrimage place of Máriapócs exhibits a strengthening Greek Catholic character, while the pilgrimage place of Csíksomlyó [Șumuleu] – in the heart of today's Romania – has become a Hungarian national shrine with some ecumenical character.

Several circumstances signal the process of transition in Szeged.

Virtually, all forms of organised pilgrimage has ceased to exist. In 1997 there were only five places from where pilgrims arrived in coaches. In many places they did not manage to gather the number of people to fill a coach therefore they travelled in smaller groups or individually by train. The majority of the pilgrims arrived only for Sunday to see the holy mass and the procession celebrated by the bishop. The graphs of attendance prove that participation soars at the time of the masses but then rapidly drops. All these prove that it is mainly the locals that visit the events. This means that the pilgrimage feast has become the festival of Szeged-Alsóváros or maybe the greater area of Szeged. The inhabitants of Szeged are the ones who do not or only partly spend the intervals between the liturgical events in the church or the babble of the fair since they can sometimes go home. Then in the empty church we can hardly see stranger pilgrims who do not have anywhere else to go. The pilgrimage feast that used to unite the area of Szeged Region, its population with their Szeged roots and the Southern Plain region by now has lost most of the characteristic features of a mass pilgrimage and has become the pilgrimage place and opportunity of a rather urbanised community, of a city or part of a city.

The religious communities and groups of the pilgrimage festival's society show distinct separation. Their aims, ambitions and interests were different. On the one hand there was the official, theologically (more) highly educated, artistic but rational world whilst on the other hand there was the people's world heated with



stronger emotions wishing for a more intimate and communal type of devotion and demanding education, historical knowledge and explanations. These two types of religiousness failed to meet, they existed simultaneous and only came into contact for the time of liturgical events. The sequence of events proved to be well organised, probably to the greatest satisfaction of the organisers, but it appeared to be over organised in the eyes of the traditional followers of religion. We can discover a defensive-refusive attitude here, which does not want the vernacular (private, small community, local, intimate and emotional) forms to outweigh the 'official', liturgical forms of religious practices.

For other social groups this event has been desacralised. They are the ones for whom and their children the pilgrimage festival only means the babble of the fair and opportunity for playful entertainment. There were a good number of them, too. They only had the 'courage' to get the church door, or if they entered, it was obvious that they felt alien in the environment, to the religious behaviour and were surprised at the sacral square, the events and the rituals of religious people. For them the pilgrimage festival had a different meaning than for the religious participants. However, they still formed integral part of the society of the festival.

Future events will decide whether the different worlds, communication systems, forms of religious practices converge or diverge even further apart. The examined pilgrimage festival nevertheless exhibited a decline of traditional celebrational forms. We do not know whether the disappearance of an older world suggests the birth and the beginning of a new type of celebrational framework. It is certain, however, that the August 1997 pilgrimage feast displays a completely different picture to that we have become familiar with in Sándor Bálint's shrine monography and essay published here.

*English translation Zsuzsanna Végh*