

BOOK REVIEWS

Kontra, Miklós – Borbély, Anna (eds.): Tanulmányok a budapesti beszédről a Budapesti Szociolingvisztikai Interjú alapján [Papers on Budapest Speech based on "The Budapest Sociolinguistic Interview"]. Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó, 2021, 356 p.

This collection of papers, co-edited by Miklós Kontra and Anna Borbély, is concerned with *The Budapest Sociolinguistic Interview* (henceforth abbreviated as BSI; Hungarian: *Budapesti Szociolingvisztikai Interjú*, abbrev. BUSZI). It focusses, therefore, on the major sociolinguistic research project carried out between 1985 and 2010 by co-workers of the Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, aiming at an exhaustive description of Budapest's Hungarian linguistic usage, based on a broad database.

The volume contains recent (or quite recent) essays as well as earlier publications, introduced by two recent papers by Miklós Kontra. The first of his papers, entitled *The History of The Budapest Sociolinguistic Interview (A Budapesti Szociolingvisztikai Interjú története)*, the author provides a full-scale overview of the story of BSI, starting 1985, when József Herman, the then Director of the Research Centre for Linguistics at the Academy, commissioned Kontra with starting and supervising the Hungarian sociolinguistic and dialectological research to be pursued by the Institute. Kontra, who reacted quickly, conducted preliminary research, with other fellow linguists who participated, during the autumn of the same year. Their work resulted in the completion of the first version of their research method/corpus (BSI-1, Hungarian BUSZI-1). Two years later, in 1987, based on the experience they had gained from BSI-1, they tape-recorded sociolinguistic interviews with 50 interviewees (the corpus known as BSI-2, Hungarian BUSZI-2); during the years 1988 and 1989, the corpus became even more expansive with two hundred new infor-

mants interviewed (called BSI-3-4, Hungarian BUSZI-3-4). Kontra provides a detailed description of the team's research methodology: during the phase of preliminary work, as he informs us, the starting point was a traditional Labovian interview (Labov 1984), and each interview contained guided conversations and tests. He goes on to explain that they had used a quota sampling technique during BSI-2 (i.e. teachers, students, shop assistants, industrial employees, and skilled labour pupils, with 10 informants per each group), but BSI-3 and BSI-4 were carried out in a different way: the 200 informants were now chosen in order to give a representative sample of the Budapest populace, considering age, sex, and erudition. Lastly, the author emphasizes the fact that, having recorded and coded the interviews, they had successfully created an excellent computer-based corpus of spoken language, based on BSI-2 and without a match in Hungary, by the end of the year 2009. At the same time, Kontra says, the directorship of the Research Centre expressed their wish for the interviews to be made available online. Kontra himself admits to have opposed such a move, mainly because it would have been against research ethics. He details his view in his second paper in the volume, entitled *Issues of Research Ethics*, saying he had contacted the Privacy Commissioner concerning the subject, who in turn informed him that the publication of the recordings, or the transcripts thereof, was illegal unless the informants had previously agreed to it; or, the recordings and the transcripts thereof might also be made public if sufficiently modified (distorted, as far as audio-visual recordings were concerned, or made anonymous, in relation to the transcripts). Based on that legal requirement, the linguists involved in the research programme did receive a written permission from ten of the informants; yet, the Institute distorted each of the fifty recordings, insisting on publicizing them in that form. In the end, the recordings failed to be publicized.

The two papers discussed above are followed by a thematic section of the volume, *Introductory Essays (Bevezető tanulmányok)*, itself introduced by Miklós Kontra's study *Research on Living Budapest Speech (Budapesti élőnyelvi kutatások)*, where the author emphasizes, among other things, that research on living speech is quite different from earlier linguistic research both in its methodology and its subject. Connected to this, and indeed reflecting upon the Budapest sociolinguistic surveys, he discusses several issues, such as what characterizes any study that is to be sociologically interpretable; what the issues of data storage and data processing are; furthermore, he provides a detailed definition of what terms such as first language, observer's paradox, elicitation, stigma(tization) and hypercorrection.

The second paper, by Andrea Ágnes Reményi, is entitled *On the Coding System of The Budapest Sociolinguistic Interview*. The author first describes which linguistic variables were in the focus of attention of the researchers while designing the structure of the sociolinguistic interviews; thereafter, she goes on to produce a detailed presentation of how the computerized processing of the test results and the guided conversations had been carried out; finally, she shows what kind of phenomena one can examine, using various types of software to decode BSI-2 coded texts.

The third paper, by Tamás Váradi, *The Budapest Sociolinguistic Interview*, starts by the author's overview of the preliminary work underlying BSI, devoting special attention to the problems, and some solutions, of how intonation – including pauses – could be marked and recorded. He then goes on to list an inventory of phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical issues (as well as the modules, or components, of the guided conversations) which have emerged during the interviews. Váradi also discusses the technical problems of digitalizing analogue magnetic tape recordings as well as converting recorded interviews to a html or multimedia format.

In his essay, entitled *Average Sentence Length in BSI-2?*, the fourth in the above-mentioned section, Miklós Kontra replies to a claim made in Váradi, Oravecz, and Peredy (2012), according to which “The syntactic segmentation, or the division of the BSI corpus (text) into sentences, was determined by the native intuitions of the people noting down the texts, as well as along the principles laid down in T. Németh (1991). Kontra points out, furthermore, that the linguists in charge of writing down the interviews and double-checking the transcripts did not follow any explicit regulation as far as the marking of syntactic boundaries was concerned, due to practical considerations.

The fifth, and last, essay is a recent joint paper by Anna Borbély and Csilla Bartha, *BSI-2: Interviewing, Recording, and Coding*, in which the authors point out that the BSI-2 corpus can be used for multiple purposes. Notably, not only is it a useful tool to analyze linguistic phenomena or variables, for which purpose it has been designed for by the linguists who had the goal of their research in mind. Instead, it has been a fruitful source of linguistic data for adherents of the social-constructivist theoretical model of sociolinguistics; as such, it makes possible to analyze the discourse-organizing and style-creating activities of field workers, too.

The second main thematic part of the volume, *Analyses*, contains seven sections, viz. *Phonetics/Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Lexis, Style, Discourse and Varia*.

The first paper (entitled *Hangtan* in the Hungarian original, but corresponding to the English expression “Phonetics and Phonology” – Translator's note), by Helga Hattyár, Miklós Kontra and Fruzsina Sára Vargha, addresses the question whether there exists a mid-high (half-close) front unrounded short vowel, viz. IPA [e], in the dialect of Budapest (*Van-e Budapesten zárt ë?*). The authors approach

1 *Van-e Budapesten zárt ë?* = “Is there a half-close [e] in Budapest?” Note that <ë> (called

the problem considering the perceptual and productional data collected during the relevant test questions and guided conversations of BSI-2, while also analyzing the effects of independent variables. Another paper within the same section, entitled *The variability of /l/ across five professions: Research in the spoken language corpus of Budapest Sociolinguistic Interview*, by Anna Borbély and András Vargha, examines the variability of /l/ depending on profession (occupation), based on the guided conversations in BSI-2. The authors base their analysis on the percentage of formal L-Dropping, which results – among other things – in a falsification of a common stereotype, according to which L-Dropping is less frequent in the conversations with white-collar professionals than in the speech of blue-collar ones.

The section called *Morphology* starts with a paper by Kinga Mátyus, Julianna Bokor, and Szabolcs Takács, bearing the title “*I cannot possibly go to the theatre in those jeans*”. A study of the variability of the [Inessive – Translator’s note] suffix (*bVn*) in the test tasks in BSI. The authors examine the effects of social background as well as the type of task on the usage of the standard form of the suffix (*bVn*) vs. its non-standard form (*bV*). Their statistical analyses lead them to conclude that the standard variant is used by BSI-2 informants with a degree in higher education to a significantly higher proportion than by less educated people; furthermore, BSI-2 informants have produced a significantly lower number of the standard form in the tasks focussing on slow and fast reading than in other task types. The other essay in the *Morphology* section, by Anna Borbély, *A statistical and socio-cognitive analysis of two morphological variables in the spoken language corpus of Budapest Sociolinguistic Interview*,

analyzing the occurrences of the dialectal variables –*nék* and *jöttök* in these standard forms as opposed to the non-standard variants –*nák* and *jöszök* in the spoken language, based on BSI-2. The essay shows that the use and acceptance of the relevant variables depends greatly – both across social groups and contextual styles – on how widespread they are geographically speaking as well as to what extent they are stigmatized by prescriptivists.

The following section of the volume, *Syntax*, opens with a study by Ilona Kassai, one of the field workers in the research project, entitled *The interrogative clitic –e in Budapest usage: A pattern without value judgment*. On the basis of BSI-2 data, she concludes that the non-standard use of the interrogative clitic is mostly characteristic of urban working-class speakers, while it is least characteristic of teachers and college/university students. The only English-language paper of the volume, *Loss of Agreement between Hungarian Relative Pronouns and their Antecedents*, by Dániel Szeredi, is found in this section, too. Szeredi studies the use of the relative pronouns *amely*, *amelyik*, *aki*, *ami* in the BSI-2 corpus, contrasting the results of the research with the dogmas of prescriptive literature. His analysis shows that the use of *amely* is increasingly restricted, but it still occurs occasionally – as an archaism – in the speech of upper-(middle)-class speakers.

The section entitled *The Lexicon* contains but one essay, written by Miklós Kontra, viz. *Word-making (The role of motivation in naming an unknown object)*, discussing the process of how the word *kapocskiszedő* ‘staple remover’ was created. First, Kontra lists the expressions used by BSI-2 informants to name the object in question; then he points out that the terminological variation was finally eliminated by the need of manufacturers and distributors, who required a single standardized technical term.

The section called *Style* includes an essay by Csilla Bartha and Ágnes Hámori, entitled *Style in sociolinguistics and style in interaction. Linguistic variability and social meanings in the social constructivist stylistic studies of*

“close e” has been a traditional symbol for Cardinal Vowel №2 in Hungarian dialectal studies, opposed to “open e” (= Cardinal Vowel №3). (Translator’s note.)

sociolinguistics. The authors provide an interactional stylistic analysis of fourteen BSI-2 interviews, based primarily on the social constructivist sociolinguistic method. They conclude that style (as well as how and why it changes) is not determined solely by predetermined social factors or specific topics of discourse by themselves; instead, what plays a crucial role is the active strategy on the part of speakers, which keeps forming their self-presentation and discourse identity as well as their relation to their speech partner.

The next section, entitled *Discourse*, contains but one paper, also written by Csilla Bartha and Ágnes Hámori, called *The dynamics of speech modes in interaction. The potentials of speech adaptation theory in studying social language use*, in which the authors – based on social-constructivist sociolinguistics as well as speech adaptation theory – study the changes in the speech mode of a field worker, who co-worked in several interviews (partly in line with the BSI-2 guided conversation modules), with reference to the connection between the informant and the informant's language use.

The last section of the second part, entitled *Varia*, contains two papers by Miklós Kontra. The first of them, bearing the title *Notes on linguistic indeterminacy in BSI-2*, examines the differences between the BSI-2 informants' views on what is "linguistically correct" as opposed to their judgments concerning their own speech; this boils down to the Labovian notion of "manifest linguistic indeterminacy index" (cf. Labov 2006: 319). The second paper, entitled *Samples gained from the two-dimensional data tests in BSI-2*, in which Kontra examines to what extent the four independent variables (age, gender, job, as well as whether the informant is a native/immigrant inhabitant of Budapest) influences the BSI-2 informants concerning their responses to the oral sentence completion test data.

The brief overview above will go to show that the collection *Papers on Budapest Speech based on "The Budapest Sociolinguistic Interview"* does indeed fill a gap in

Hungarian linguistic studies: not only does it collect and systemize various pieces of information based on the first survey on living Hungarian, but the information publicized in it makes it perceivable for the reader to see the essential differences between the views and research methods of sociolinguists versus linguists working in "ivory towers".

Literature:

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- Labov, William 2006. *The Social Stratification of English in New York City. Second edition*. New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Németh, T. Enikő 1991. *A megnyilatkozás-típus elméleti kérdései és a szóbeli diskurzusok megnyilatkozás-példányokra tagolása [Theoretical issues of utterance types and the segmentation of oral discourse into utterances]*. Academic Dissertation, Szeged.
- Váradi, Tamás - Csaba Oravecz - Márta Peredy 2012. *A Budapesti Szociolingvisztikai Interjú lexikai és szintaktikai jellemzői. [The lexicon and the syntax of the Budapest Sociolinguistic Interview]*. In: Váradi, Tamás - Prószéky, Gábor (eds.) *Általános Nyelvészeti Tanulmányok XXIV. Nyelvtechnológiai kutatások*. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 199–222.

Veronika Dančo Jakab

Kollai, István: Szlovákia királyt választ [Slovakia Elects a Monarch]. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2021, 260 p.

A central point of Kollai's book is found in its concluding part, notably, "The foregoing chap-

ters have discussed a number of events of the past millennium; yet, one might draw some general conclusions resulting from those events, one of these conclusions being that *present (current)* conflicts of interests do influence one's view of *past events*. The current trends in the issue of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia results in a strategic conflict of interests between Hungary and Slovakia, which could also alter the views on the past."

Well, that's probably true, as shown, indeed, by this book. An important and well-known theory of nationalism (see Karl W. Deutsch) considers it to be a tool of political elites, used by them to mobilize the masses; in order to have the capacity to mobilize, it is clearly necessary for them to construct an appropriate national ideology (cf. Elie Kedourie).

For the most part, Kollai discusses an aspect that plays a key role in achieving this aim, specifically, textbooks. Analyzing the history textbooks in Slovakia, he considers the historical events and figures that have been viewed in differing and contrasting ways in the two cultures.

The author provides an overview of most of the debated topics, using a similar methodology in each case: he examines the points of view on the given topic, paying special attention to the doubted and controversial ones. He then describes the one we find in Slovakian history textbooks from a range of historical periods, considering the similarities as well as the differences between them.

His first topic is the geographical space occupied by Great Moravia, one of the most sensitive issues. This is followed by a presentation of the Slovak interpretation of the period of the Hungarian Conquest (of the Carpathian Basin), going on to discuss the issues concerning the foundation of the Kingdom of Hungary and the co-existence of Hungarians and Slovaks in the Kingdom. Checking the details, we find some further questions of great interest. For instance, "Were the Moravians Old Slovaks?", or "Blonde Scythians and Slavs following Avar

fashions: stories of origins on unstable ground." Also, "The Duchy of Nitra: A Slavic duchy within the Kingdom of Hungary?" – and so on and so forth. He discusses the issues concerning the patriarchal cross, the early medieval ethnic situation in the Northern Carpathian region, the debate around Máté Csák (Slovak *Matúš Čák Trenčiansky*), the interpretation of the Holy Crown as a Slovak symbol, the role of Slovak legions in the 1848 revolution, the Beneš Decrees, among other things.

The chapter on the problems of the Slovakization of personal names includes a telling sentence of methodological importance: "We might as well quote Vladimír Mináč, editor-in-chief of the *Slovak Biographical Lexicon*, who says, 'This is our own sovereign territory that we populate with people such as *Balaša*' (Hungarian Balassa)."

Let us make it clear that the chief weakness of the book lies in its having been published in Hungarian only, although its Slovak translation would be more than welcome. The overall picture suggested by it to us, i.e. the readers, is more than interesting. These problems cannot be solved or clarified by debating historians who specialize in these particular fields, since such debates are hardly heard, if at all, outside conference venues. Yet, the primary target audience would (and should) be the two nations' public, with the specialists of the other party playing a secondary role: specifically, national identity is mass identity.

The author's choice of his topic is excellent: by studying textbooks, he provides an analysis of an especially relevant kind of machinery in the formation of such a mass identity. During the development process of the idea of nationalism, there have emerged several models of how national pride may pervade the folk spirit, and how estate identity and loyalty can be altered by it. One of its instruments is the all-pervasive historical glory that derives from joint past actions as examples of community identity. These must be interpreted as elements of the nation's history, not caring about the fact that modern

national identity did not exist at the time these events had taken place. Should there be gaps in the story, they must be filled, which can chiefly be achieved by assimilating the past: people or events that can – at least partially – be associated with the ethnic past of the present nation should be fully integrated into it.

Kollai gives a list of such attempts and the surrounding debates in his book, providing a detailed description of the parties' claims and views. The reader is thus given a detailed picture of most issues concerning the nation-based "creation of history" in Slovak-Hungarian relations - more specifically, about the grandiosity of the fight for an exclusive interpretation of the past.

István Kollai is able to critically consider all of such matters because his system of values reaches far beyond them. As he writes, "Therefore, the attractiveness of the *common internal inheritance* of the Visegrád area greatly depends on how it is personified, which now, in 2020, appears weaker than the powerful images of *common external enemies*. Put differently, the collective identity of the member states of the Visegrád Group in recent years has not been inspired by their common heritage, but, instead, a common concept of external enemies, including "Brusselian" politicians and the migration problem. This may have a demoralizing effect on these societies, without any promise of stable future co-operation. It would be better to see any kind of common thinking within the Visegrád Group that is founded upon common heritage rather than a shared view of enemies, although it would certainly be a much greater and risky political challenge to accomplish."

Furthermore, as the author says (in Footnote No. 502), "There have been ideas of co-operation between Central European nations due to external threat, none of which lasted, such as the attempt at co-operation of the nations oppressed by Russian and Austrian absolutism [...], the opening attempt of Czechoslovakia fearing its end by Germany [...], or the collaboration of opposition forces in

Central Europe against the Soviet Union; none of them proved to be fruitful or lasting."

Kollai thinks, therefore, that the common heritage of Slovak-Hungarian co-existence should be popularized instead. He formulates the concluding remark of his book as follows: "... it certainly is a more difficult way to improve the relations between neighbours than creating images of a common enemy, but it might have more lasting and much better results."

We must emphasize, repeatedly, that the main weakness of this otherwise excellent book is that it has not been published in Slovak, which needs to be done – and in a way that makes the book accessible to a wide range of readers (rather than published in the usual, limited, number of copies for the narrow circle of specialists). Let me repeat, national identity is mass identity. Using the Internet, in the 21st century, would make this possible at a low cost.

All we need is strong will.

László Öllös

Simon Attila: Az átmenet bizonytalansága. Az 1918/1919-es impériumváltás Pozsonytól Kassáig [The Uncertainty of Transition: The "Change of Sovereignties" in 1918 and 1919, from Pozsony (Bratislava) to Kassa (Košice)]. Somorja–Budapest, Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet–Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2021, 248 p.

Attila Simon has been, for quite a while, one of the best known and most productive members of the Hungarian community of historians in Slovakia.² The research topics of Simon, Head

2 The author uses the term *Felvidék*, which has multiple meanings, nowadays chiefly, but not exclusively, used to refer to the ethnic Hungarian area in modern Slovakia. The term *Felvidék* will be used from now on in this sense. (Translator's note.)

of Forum Minority Research Centre, concentrate on the overall history of the community, including the most important turning points during the 20th century as well as transitional periods such as the history of the “regime change” [the change from Communist dictatorship to democracy - Editor’s note] or ethnic Hungarians in Czechoslovakia³, the First Vienna Award and its consequences⁴, the seven years of the “Hungarian era”⁵, or, as now, a multi-faced presentation of the “change of sovereignties” in 1918 to 1919.

Anyone familiar with the Internet will often find that historically sensitive anniversaries frequently give rise to intense emotions, leading to tsunamis of posts which, in turn, result in increasing anger rather than contributing to clarification and mutual understanding. Yet, we might expect for the current (later) generations to be “conveniently protected” against outbursts of temper by the (fake) wisdom of posterity. On all accounts, Simon is – fortunately enough – “outdated”, not only by trying to avoid such traps of a one-sided attitude, but also by indulging in deconstructing

the expected clichés of interpretation. A fitting example of the former is that he refuses to present either Károlyi or Horthy on the basis of widespread ideological approaches. As he says, “[o]ur history is full of talented and untalented politicians; or, should I say, competent and incompetent leaders of the country. I consider both Károlyi and Horthy as incompetent, but I do believe that both of them were trying to act with having the interests of the country and the nation in mind. Well, they often did fail.” (p. 15.) Simon, moreover, thinks that “the interpretation of the past is doomed to be unsuccessful if one fails to consider the views and opinions of the people who lived back then” (p. 10.). This view of contemporaries will often, and by necessity, contradict our presuppositions, as illustrated by the story of an elderly citizen of Rimaszombat (Rimavská Sobota), talking to a representative member of the Red Army, after it had recaptured the city, said, “if you advertize to all that it’s going to get better”, they had better recapture the area from which he usually obtained his cottage cheese in summer. It might appear as a surprise, in the shadow of national tragedy, how often individual people are driven by understandable human considerations.

In his latest book, Simon assumes a “lower perspective” of this kind, in order to show the feelings and the perceptions of “a Hungarian of the Felvidék during the spring or summer of 1919”, when the “Trianon trauma” was starting to be perceivable, but all seemed changeable and temporary. The book discusses this “uncertainty of transition”, “from the perspective of the predominantly ethnic Hungarian population of the area between Pozsony (Bratislava) and Királyhelmec (Kráľovský Chlmec), called Southern Slovakia today” (p. 11.). Writing his book, Simon consulted an impressive range of archival sources in Prague, Kassa (Košice), Pozsony (Bratislava), Budapest, Besztercebánya (Banská Bystrica), Léva (Levice), Rozsnyó (Rožňava) and Komárom (Komárno); and, although the COVID pandemic caused him to cancel his planned repeated visit to Prague and the

3 Popély, Árpád, and Attila Simon (eds.) 2009. *Regime Change and Ethnic Hungarians in Czechoslovakia (1989-1992)*. Vols. I-II. Pozsony/Bratislava, Forum Minority Research Institute.

4 Simon, Attila (compiler and editor) 2010: *1938: Re-annexation or occupation? Aspects of the interpretation of the First Vienna Award*. Balassagyarmat, Nógrád County Archives and János Selye University; by the same author, cf. *The history of a short year: Hungarians in Slovakia in 1938*. 2010. Somorja/Šamorín, Forum Minority Research Institute; *Fighting for the city: Pozsony [Bratislava] and its Hungarian populace in 1938 and 1939*. 2011. Pozsony, Kalligram Kiadó; see also Simon, Attila (ed.) 2018. *We were but standing around, crying. The days of the First Vienna Award as seen by contemporaries*. Somorja/Šamorín, Forum Minority Research Institute.

5 Simon, Attila 2014. *The Hungarian years in the Felvidék, 1938–1945. The First Vienna Award and its consequences*. Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó.

Bodrog-Tisza Interfluve, he says had at least the time to analyze the archival material he had collected earlier. Besides analyzing the most important items in the literature and various databases, he succeeded in browsing around forty issues of daily newspapers.

The population got completely exhausted by the end of the last year of the war, i.e. 1918; they suffered from a range of problems, including the lack of everyday commodities, rationing, the lack of firewood, an alarmingly increasing inflation rate, and – on top of it all – the influenza pandemic known as Spanish flu, often mentioned in the past few years. These topics, supplemented by the presentation of local events during the Aster Revolution and the riots demonstrating the deterioration of public safety, form the core of the second chapter of the book, entitled *The last autumn in Hungary*. Simon adopts a “local” approach: the issues of “greater politics”, which are in the focus of attention in this chapter, are presented from a local viewpoint, something we can rarely read about, including riots and lootings (in which the local national guard, intended to protect law and order, was often involved), or the interruptions in coal supply, – problems which diminished the energy and the powers of the recently formed local national councils.

The following chapter, called *The Czechs are here*, gives an account of the stages of occupation, and the actions, by the Czech army entering the Felvidék. What is of especial interest is the variety of ways that the locals reacted to the Czech occupiers: sometimes they greeted them enthusiastically (as in Turócszentmárton/Martin), but sometimes with distance-keeping coldness (as in Ruttka/ Vrútky or Zsolna/ Žilina). As Simon states, this rejection did not quite derive from an unwillingness regarding change of sovereignty, but, instead, was based on the “*experiences of meeting the invading troops*” (p. 47.). The unruly behaviour of the Czechoslovak troops in Zsolna/Žilina, for example, totally failed to impress the population, to say the least: as expressed by a physician (who was otherwise pro-Czechoslovak), “*They were but scum, completely undisciplined, giving such*

an unfavourable impression throughout the whole area that the entire population feels anti-Czech”. In other places, though, the situation was quite to the contrary: an example is provided by Dunaszerdahely/Dunajská Streda, where the unbridled lootings by the local mob on the 4th and 5th of January resulted in the citizens asking Czechoslovak troops for help, in order to restore security.

These local examples, in contrast with our expectations and prejudices, are definitely the most thought-provoking new bits of information in this volume. The author enumerates several nice examples to illustrate the ambiguous nature of the problem, notably, whether the transition from one “empire” to the other was peaceful. In many places, people were prepared (and devoted) to defend their homeland, including the use of armed force, which was enhanced and supported by the Hungarian government, generally stating that it was committed to defending the country’s territorial integrity, although these statements now appear to have been quite vague promises rather than specific plans of resistance. In some other places, the local citizens decided not to resist the “arrival” of invading troops using armed force. In Simons’s opinion, Károlyi’s government must have been responsible for the lack of armed home defence, including the small number of recruits, but the fact that Hungarian diplomacy “was in a vacuum”, i.e. Hungary had no internationally recognized legitimate government. Even so, he blames the “*conditions of contemporary Hungarian society*”, cf. p. 49. A good example is provided by the 1918 “sad Christmas at Pozsony”. At first, the press informed the public about the Pozsony Military Council’s decision on December 22nd to defend the city with armed force; next day, though, the claim was refuted. Furthermore, the backing out of the city’s citizens from actual fighting was indicated by the fact that the Pozsony (Pressburg) German Popular Council sent a letter to Hungary’s government on December 19th, emphasizing the pointlessness of resistance, as well as the material-economic damage to the city and the unnecessary bloodshed. Simon

thus assumes a definitive stance against the fashionable view regarding a single person as responsible for the failure in proper military organization, substantiating his claims with appropriate examples which go to show that it was not Mihály Károlyi, prime minister and subsequently president of the republic, or Béla Linder, minister of defence, who could be exclusively blamed for the lack of organized military resistance.

The process of occupation was not taking place in the same manner and at the same time in different places, and the author summarizes the specific geographical, spatial and spiritual aspects thereof. While the takeover of cities and towns by the Czechoslovaks was well visible and perceivable, the contact with the occupiers was but sporadic in rural areas; indeed, as Simon puts it, “for several weeks, it was but the occasional Czechoslovak patrol that reminded the population of the change of sovereignty” (p. 77.). After the long war, followed by a turmoil, the first weeks of occupation were considered by most people as a period of order and certainty – yet, the Czech presence seemed transitional and temporary.

It was February 1919 when the fragile peace came to an end: notably, that was when it was becoming clear that this territory might permanently be annexed by Czechoslovakia, followed by outbursts of violence everywhere. In Losonc/Lučenec, demonstrators wearing (Hungarian) cockades clashed with (occupying) troops, while – on February the 12th – seven citizens of Pozsony/Bratislava were shot dead by a fusillade of Czechoslovak troops. (The latter event has been a controversial subject: the tragic incident has been regarded by recent Slovak historiography as a reaction of Czechoslovak soldiers to a provocation by Hungarian civilians attacking them.) The waves of strikes kept going on, nonetheless, in Losonc/Lučenec on the following day, and subsequently, in early March, in Komárom/ Komárno and Kassa/Košice. According to Simon, the protests were primarily motivated by a strong demand to handle the ever-worsening social problems, rather than – as almost exclusively emphasized in the

Slovak interpretation – trying to cause an outbreak of an armed uprising (although he does recognize the political goals of such protests). The resistance against the establishment of Czechoslovak rule was strengthened by drafting men into Czechoslovak military service (and immediately at that), well before the Parisian Peace Conference effectively defined the national boundary between Hungary and Czechoslovakia), resulting in intense protests as well as the fleeing to Hungary of the people involved. The recruitment, not based on realistic considerations, can also be blamed for the tragic events at Zselíz/Želiezovce on the evening of March the 20th, when youths protesting against recruitment were shot at by a strengthened patrolling division, resulting in five deaths. Besides these regrettable events, Simon provides an account of everyday manifestations of violence, including internment, primarily affecting ethnic Hungarian areas, the battles fought against the Hungarian Soviet Republic (the war between Czechoslovakia and Hungary)⁶, including the breakthrough of Komárom/Komárno on May 1st, the details of which have not clarified to date; this meant a Czechoslovak attempt at occupying the part of Komárom/Komárno on the left bank of the Danube, whereby the Czechoslovak troops suffered a loss of about 20 men, but retaliated by killing an estimated three to four hundred people during the bloodshed committed against Hungarians trapped on Elizabeth Isle and the city’s fortress.

The author devotes a chapter of its own to the “anatomy” of the shift from one state to another, entitled *The office and its language*. In it, he discusses how the Czechoslovak state attempted to integrate the occupied territories into its own organization, including the adminis-

6 In more general terms, it was a war between the Hungarian Soviet Republic on the one hand, and Romania, Czechoslovakia, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; later to form an alliance called “Little Entente”, supported by France, a member of the “Triple Entente” alliance. (Translator’s note.)

trative takeover via symbolic gestures (such as the replacement of Hungarian national banners by Czechoslovak ones), up to governing by decrees and the construction of a new administration, a major challenge indeed for the new power or state. In Chapter 7 of the book, titled *The tools of occupying a symbolic space*, Simon provides an overview of symbolic measures to his audience that were evaluated higher during the period. For instance, a small crowd gathered on May 24th in Kassa/ Košice, having seen a red-white-green flag, which – after the dissolution of the crowds – turned out to be the Italian national flag. The events and trends during the transformation, i.e. the “de-Hungarianization” and the simultaneous “Slovakization” of public spaces, the massive opposition from Hungarian clerics to Slovak-language public signs, the ban on celebrating the national holiday of March 15th, and the humiliation of Hungarian public statues and monuments by damaging or completely destroying them, clearly go to show how important symbolic gestures of celebration and remembrance indeed were upon the “turn of the tides”, and how massive and extensive the efforts of the new state were to enforce its own set of symbols, including the replacement of public signs and the forced introduction of their own public holidays, completely alien for the Hungarian (or German, for that matter) populace.

The book’s timeline is defined by the local events of the autumn of 1918, in a country exhausted by war and on the verge of falling apart, on the one hand; the end point is the early winter of 1919. Simon’s latest volume elaborates on a long year of radical changes, during which the ethnic Hungarian population of the *Felvidék* region found itself in a minority situation, as opposed to its former majority position, gradually giving up its emotional resistance to the new Czechoslovak state, assuming a stance of “*pragmatic acceptance*” (p. 214.). In Simon’s opinion, a major contributing factor in this respect must have been a longing for stability after a long period of uncertainty.

“*Boys, trust me, it is your story, too*”: this dedication of the author’s, at the end of the

preface, is aimed at his friends living in Bátka, his own native village – they had been trying to convince him to write a book about them, too. Well, the book is now available, and we do hope that it will be read by many of them as well as by others.

Gergely Bődök

Holec, Roman. 2020. *Trianon - triumf a katastrofa [Trianon: Triumph and Tragedy]*. Bratislava, Marenčin PT, 256 p.

Roman Holec has been one of the influential Slovak historians during recent decades. His earlier research concentrated on issues of economic history, as well as assimilation, of the age of the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary, but he was not uninterested in topics of post-1918 history. Furthermore, he has been one of the few historians who have realized that professionals must not allow “public history” to take over, - instead, they must meet the readers’ expectations by producing texts suitable to a broad audience without a compromise in professional requirements. It is in this spirit of opening towards the readership that Roman Holec has recently published some books on Andrej Hlinka or Pozsony/Bratislava Habsburgs, with a favourable reaction from both professionals and the wider audience.

Nevertheless, the Treaty of Trianon has not been a subject of special importance for Holec, but this is hardly surprising: after all, Slovak historiography in general has not been playing much attention to the Trianon issue, something that strikes the outsider as a surprise, unless we consider the range of publications emphasizing Slovak historical myths, such as a thousand years of oppression, sparkling the anti-Hungarian attitude of Slovak society, a favourite topic of which is justifying the Trianon Treaty, but which are in want of even the minimal professional standards.

The fact that Trianon has been a “non-issue” for Slovak historians derives, to some extent, from Slovakia’s winning position. Notably, from the conviction that the Treaty of Trianon, signed June 4th, 1920, was not merely

justified, but so much unquestionable, too, that it cannot even be subject to professional debate. Based on this axiomatic stance, the huge Hungarian literature on Trianon has not been met with genuine professional counter-arguments from Slovak side; instead, the only reaction has been to state that Trianon was a just (and justified) peace treaty, and anyone who questions this fact is a revisionist. Thanks to all of these factors, the Slovak historical literature on Trianon (I mean “officially sanctioned” historiography), after the fall of communism, has been essentially (maybe exclusively) based on Marián Hronský’s (1998) *Boj o Slovensko a Trianon 1918-1920* (‘A fight for Slovakia and the Treaty of Trianon, 1918-1920’ – *Translator’s note*), which provides a range of data concerning the military and diplomatic aspects of the subject, but it is quite biased too. The main problem about Hronský’s book, however, is its afterlife, having been treated ever since as a canonical work of Slovak historiography; indeed, Hronský’s mistakes and biases have remained unrevealed even by colleagues, Holec included, who seem to be aware of how biased the book is.

The first (2020) edition of *Trianon: Triumph and Tragedy* contains 350 pages, which may look discouraging to the average reader; yet, the length is counter-balanced by its readability as well as the author’s use of end-notes rather than footnotes. Those who have been following Holec’s scholarly activity will find the content familiar, with the individual chapters often reflecting upon his earlier topics, such as the fate of aristocracy, the issue of the Danubian shipping lane, the image of Trianon in Hungarian historiography, or people like Andrej Hlinka and Ľudovít Bazovský. This makes the structural composition of the book somewhat mosaic-like, characterized by a kind of duality, too. Specifically, some chapters are deeper and more analytic, providing new insights to professionals, while other chapters give a summary of individual topics aimed at the general public, without adding new results of research to the professional discourse.

Holec’s book is mostly important due to the author’s refreshingly new and co-operative/constructive approach to the Trianon issue,

which is in many a way “unorthodox”. For instance, he explicitly claims – against the accepted Slovak interpretation – that Trianon was not an inevitable consequence of the so-called “oppression of Slovaks by Hungarians for a millennium” or the punishment of that oppression. Indeed, he keeps emphasizing that the extent to which Hungary was punished by the Trianon Treaty was unjust. At the same time, he also expresses his considering the historical Kingdom of Hungary’s treatment of its ethnic minorities, Slovaks included, as equally unjust. Therefore, it seems justified that Hungary was given the bill to pay by the post-war peace conference for all it had committed before 1914 or, for that matter, during World War I. Put differently, it is Hungarian nationalism that is to blame for Trianon.

The first two chapters are essentially intended to justifying this claim, providing, as it were, an inventory of the acts of Hungarian nationalism and imperial aspirations. These two chapters present the work and thought of authors such as Béla Grünwald, Jenő Rákosi, or – indeed – Alajos Paikert, but (of course) the assimilation of Slovaks in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy is given especial attention, too. Concerning the latter case, the author partially accepts, but – on the whole – rejects the arguments put forward by Hungarian historians who have emphasized “voluntary” as opposed to “enforced” *Hungarianization*.

The next chapter, *Defeat and the Birth of a New Europe*, is devoted to the period when the First World War ended and the Czechoslovak Republic was born. Besides a tangible presentation of current affairs, a significant part of the chapter is devoted to the issue of how the boundary between Hungary and Czechoslovakia was drawn. Holec gives an overview of how the demarcation lines were being formed in a way that is rather unusual in the Slovak historiographic literature, stating that the demarcation line known as the Bartha–Hodža line was drawn along ethnic boundaries, but the state borders finalized in June, 1919, were not; instead, they were drawn south of the Bartha–Hodža line, based on political considerations rather than ethnographic ones. Although this statement by Holec can

hardly be considered as a merit by itself, it certainly shows the courageousness of the author, considering the fact that such views have long been regarded by Slovak historiography and public opinion as a downright questioning of Trianon itself.

As far as the events of the autumn of 1918 in Upper Hungary are concerned, there are but a small number of moments where we perceive the presentation of them somewhat biased. For example, we find it difficult to interpret what Holec means by the "terrorization" of the population of Slovakia by Hungarian troops. Sure enough, there must have occurred some instances of violent demonstrations of force, but the claim appears to be exaggerated still, raising questions such as why Hungary's military might have terrorized the people of their own country, whom it actually terrorized – and what *terror* means. Yet, we get no answer. The author would have done a better job by providing specific examples – as quite a few times in his book – of what he was suggesting.

Holec gives a presentation of the Czechoslovak military occupation of the *Felvidék*⁷ and the relations between Czechoslovak authorities and the local populace during the first few weeks of occupation based on a variety of perspectives, shedding light on individual stories which, however, have universal validity, - and he does so with plasticity and empathy. He also discusses issues relating to (dis)continuity during the change of sovereignty. Moreover, although the traditional approach is that the creation of Czechoslovakia marked a sharp boundary between past and present, with the new state starting from scratch, Holec seems to see, quite appropriately, that such a view is untenable. The new Czechoslovak state was, in many ways, a continuation of the foregoing period, which was not only perceivable to those who worked in the state administration, but in many walks of everyday life, too; that is hardly surprising, given that the entire population of

Czechoslovakia had been socialized within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

Holec devotes Chapter 4 to the events of 1919, specifically, the first half of that year, a period exceptionally rich in (often tragic) turns, which are often reflected upon quite diametrically by Hungarian versus Slovak historians. Yet, Holec gives an excellent solution to this difficult problem by not aiming at defending positions or giving judgments; instead, he aims – yet again – at a multi-lateral presentation of events, be it about the Pozsony/Bratislava fusillade resulting in several deaths, or the closing down of the Hungarian *University of Elizabeth*. He clearly understands that the strike wave across Slovakia in 1919 cannot be attributed solely to national or social motives, since these aspects supplemented and occasionally reinforced each other. He attempts at staying unbiased concerning the fusillade of February 12th, which he succeeds in, while he takes the responsibility of evaluating those events, too. While he does see (and accept) the responsibility of all participants of the demonstration, including local citizens as well as the legionaries coming to keep law and order but also knocking out the city's Italian military commander, he still considers the tragic event, resulting in eight deaths, as a failure of the state administration.

Furthermore, Holec perceives, quite appropriately, that this kind of misuse of power against citizens was by no means a unique event, and that the responsibility of the contemporary Slovak political élite is beyond doubt. True, he criticizes Šrobár and his associates quite indirectly, quoting the Czechoslovak President T. G. Masaryk, who expressed his criticism regarding the growing feeling of anti-semitism and the acts of violence against Hungarians in Slovakia. Our perception of lack might not be unfounded: Šrobár's activity, his dictatorial manners and his measures against Hungarians were criticized by his own contemporaries, cf. the hundreds (if not thousands) of ethnic Hungarians deported to Ilava/Ilava, and later on to Terezín.

Similarly, the author seems to fail to seize an opportunity to provide a detailed account of an armed conflict in Komárom/ Komárno on May 1st. Holec describes these events rather

7 Roughly, Upper Hungary, or the (predominantly) ethnic Hungarian parts thereof. (Translator's note.)

briefly, devoting but 3 to 4 lines to it, mentioning a letter by Lujza Esterházy, although the number of victims, amounting to between 300 and 400, might have deserved more attention. In a similar vein, the claim that the Italian officers' disapproval was caused by the Czechoslovak authorities executing some civilians after driving back Hungarian attacks is somewhat misleading. Reading the report by Piccione, Italian commander-in-chief, there emerges a rather different picture. Piccione, while (of course) disapproving the execution of civilians, was mostly worried about how cruelly the Czechoslovak troops treated the unarmed Hungarian soldiers. As he said, "the satisfaction resulting from defeating the enemy often got bitter by the acts committed by certain soldiers during and after the battle, against the founding principles of civilization. Among the less respectable members of the army, the highly regarded feelings of patriotism and individual braveness appear to be mixed with low instincts of hatred, revenge, and destruction".

The complexity of the issue of the change of sovereignty, including several weeks of the population's attempts at adapting or confirming to, or rejecting, the new state, is shown via personal fates and stories. And that's a "bull's eye" indeed: via the stories of individuals, it becomes possible to give a shaded and detailed overview of sensitive issues such as "change of sovereignty". It is only regrettable that Holec fails to utilize the same device, viz. the presentation of individual lives, regarding the processes of assimilation and nation change in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, although there are lots of fitting examples.

One of the most powerful chapters of the book is the one on Ľudovít Bazovský (Hungarian: *Bazovszky Lajos*), a Slovak politician of Losonc/Lučenec. The first ethnic Slovak count of the County of Nógrád/Novohrad, he was an extremely interesting and controversial person. The profile of him shown here, however, suggests a broader interpretation, exemplifying the characteristic behaviour of the contemporary Slovak political élite, including its occasional inner discrepancies and unreadiness.

The following chapter is devoted to the finalization of the Trianon borders, presenting

the work carried out during the Paris peace conference, the diplomatic background of the Czechoslovak delegation, as well as the differing opinions among the members of that delegation, including the differences of emphasis between President Masaryk and Beneš, Minister of the Interior, regarding the issue of state borders. In this respect, Holec shares the majority view in the literature, claiming that Masaryk (unlike Beneš) was not unwilling to make some concessions to Hungary; this might have been so, but one must also understand that the view contrasting a "benevolent Masaryk" with a "malevolent Beneš" is not quite evidence-based. What is closer to historical reality is the image of a pragmatic Beneš, paying attention to the general atmosphere at the Paris peace conference, with Masaryk being emotionally influenced by the predominant public feelings in Czechia. This is proved by the border conflict between Czechoslovakia and Poland, concerning Teschen (Czech *Těšín*, Polish *Cieszyn* – Translator's note), during which Masaryk would opt for a military solution, that is, attacking Poland, while Beneš favoured diplomatic negotiations. The same claim is substantiated by the fact that Masaryk, who would have been prepared to give up the Csallóköz region (an island between two branches of the Danube south of Pozsony/Bratislava – Translator's note) in March, 1919, changed his mind upon the outbreak of war between Czechoslovakia and (the Soviet Republic of) Hungary, demanding the border to be fixed south of the Rivers Danube and Ipoly, and suggested a punitive occupation of Budapest itself.

While this chapter gives a relatively unbiased overview of the topic, some of the details are not uncontroversial, such as the issue of what is known as "the second demarcation line", regarding which Holec seems unable to rise above the (Czecho-)Slovak historiographic myths. Specifically, following the tradition established by Milan Krajčovič, Marián Hronský and Jindřich Dejmek, he claims that, upon launching an attack on Hungary on April 27th, 1919, attempting to reach the so-called "second demarcation line" (i.e. Verőce – Mátra – Mályi – Gesztely – Táillya – Sárospatak), Czechoslovakia acted with the approval of the peace con-

ference, writing, furthermore, that the “second demarcation line” had been laid down in the Vix (or, Vyx) Note (received on March 20th). But this view is mistaken, for several reasons. On the one hand, the Vix Note is not concerned with the demarcation line between Czechoslovakia and Hungary at all, a fact that Holec might have found out with ease. On the other hand, Slovak historiography has been unable to come up with a single authentic source to prove that the “second demarcation line” had indeed been approved by the peace conference. Moreover, it was Beneš himself who admitted, albeit indirectly, in a letter to Masaryk, that they had had no approval to push forward; as he wrote, “when we occupied Miskolc, we appeared to be violators of the peace agreement. I’m not entirely sure, but I guess we indeed were”. Well, it is hardly likely for Beneš to have written anything of the sort if he had been aware of the approval of the new demarcation line.

Holec pays considerable attention to the issue of the Danube as the new state border and – related to it – the status of *Csallóköz*, coming to the conclusion that the initial rejection of the *Csallóköz* populace of joining the Czechoslovak Republic (chiefly due to the creation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic) diminished, and they became more and more supportive of the idea that the region, inhabited almost exclusively by ethnic Hungarians, be part of Czechoslovakia. He seems to regard – as the most important piece of evidence – a memorandum by Samuel Zoch, Count of Pozsony and Vavro Šrobár, Minister Plenipotentiary, concerning the issue of the County of Pozsony, saying, quite literally, “the inhabitants of the island [i.e. *Csallóköz* – Translator’s note] keep on asking the signatory of the present text, as a representative of Pozsony County in the Government, to do all he can do within the Government to make the island part of the Czechoslovak state”. As for me, I have no doubt that there might have been Hungarians whose economic interests or political sympathies made them require precisely that. At the same time, we would be naïve to think, based solely on a Czechoslovak memorandum, that the majority of ethnic Hungarians in *Csallóköz* were in favour of such a decision, especially because that

claim is falsified by other sources, including the attitudes of Hungarians living in Pozsony/Bratislava, Dunaszerdahely/Dunajská Streda, or Komárom/Komárno (see, for example, the above-mentioned general strike, the fusillade of February 12th, or the events at Komárom/Komárno on May 1st), but also by the plans of establishing a “Hungarian Republic of *Csallóköz*”.

The author touches upon several further issues in the remaining chapters. These include the importance of the Danube as a navigable river and its role in determining the state border; the activity of the international commission to establish the new borders; the fate of aristocracy after Trianon (an excellent chapter indeed); the position of cities, such as Losonc/Lučenec, finding themselves on the periphery due to the new borders; or, even the speech made by Albert Apponyi before the peace conference’s audience. As in the whole book, he performs this in a sober and well-founded manner, relying on specific historical sources, just as he is concerned with Trianon’s aftermaths, including how the treaty affected Hungary’s subsequent history. In connection with this topic, and not for the first time in his book, he refers to István Bibó; specifically, Holec disagrees with Bibó, whom he otherwise appreciates, and who said that Hungary’s history between the two world wars could have taken a different course, had the peace treaty been more just and favourable for Hungary. Holec, however, considers this stance to be an example self-deception, claiming that Hungary’s political tradition had predestined the country to take an anti-democratic course, which, in Holec’s opinion, was characterized by a strong rightward trend, an authoritarian regime, the stigmatization of non-Hungarians, as well as the “first anti-Semitic legal acts in Europe”. While agreeing with the image of Hungary as described by Holec on the whole (with the reservation that the infamous *Numerus Clausus Act of 1920* was not followed by other anti-Semitic acts up to 1938, the use of the plural being, thus, misleading), I do not personally believe that some nations (such as Germans or Hungarians) have been *a priori* antidemocratic, versus others (such as Czechs), which have inherently been in possession of

some democratic cultural attitude. Bibó's argumentation, moreover, appears plausible because the Versailles peace treaties, having divided European nations into mutually exclusive groups of "good" winners vs. "evil" losers, i.e. positively vs. negatively "discriminated" ones, had a significant impact on the history of these nations in the inter-war period.

What I consider to be a less successfully developed aspect in the book is the author's quite negative evaluation of Hungarian historiography and the current treatment of the Trianon subject in Hungary. While it is obvious that there has indeed been a trend in Hungarian historiography, neglecting the basic scientific principles of the field, that has blamed Jews, freemasonry or the conspiracy by "background" powers, as scapegoats for Trianon – rather than making an attempt at self-reflection, a symbolic figure being Ernő Raffay. Yet, Raffay (or Gyula Popély) are not mainstream historians in Hungary: instead, they are on the periphery, even though they are read by many, and they are also promoted by the media and the government. Nonetheless, it is not them, but Ignác Romsics, Balázs Ablonczy, Miklós Zeidler (et alii), who represent the genuine academic tradition of historiography. In fact, just as one should not equate Slovak historiography with Martin Homza, department chair at Comenius University (Pozsony/Bratislava), and Holec's supervisor, and with his views and the situation at his department.

In sum, *Trianon: Triumph and Tragedy* deserves to be considered positively, since Roman Holec creates his own image of Trianon on the basis of strictly professional criteria and a rich database. One may, of course, argue with him, and – indeed – one must: after all, that's a historian's job. One thing, however, is beyond doubt: the author approaches the topic with great empathy towards how we, Hungarians, perceive Trianon, stepping out of the traditional Slovak narrative space, providing the reader with a fresh perspective on the topic. We might as well say that Holec's image of Trianon is one which, perhaps for the first time, brings it closer to all of us than ever before to find a consensus between Slovak and Hungarian scholars. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary for

Hungarian historians to read Holec's book and interpret it in an appropriate way. I can but encourage them to do so, for it is worth the while.

Attila Simon

Liszka, József: Monumentumok. Szakrális (és „szakrális”) kisemlékek a Kárpát-medencében [Monuments. Sacred (and “sacred”) small relics in the Carpathian Basin]. Komárom–Somorja, Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet–Etnológiai Központ, 2021, 702 p.

Five years after József Liszka published the impressive collection entitled *Boundary Regions (Határvidékek)*, in a certain sense interpretable as a self-festschrift, containing his most important folkloristic essays, he has now published another volume, as impressive as the previous one, and also comparable in size, layout, and typography. Upon our first impression, but also having taken a closer look, we can see a paradigmatic work that can be considered as another summary of a professional career. Being placed next to each other on the shelf, these two volumes look much like the three voluminous festschrifts (similar in layout) to celebrate the 60th birthday of Ferenc Pozsony, Vilmos Keszeg, and Vilmos Tánzos, the Transylvanian trio of ethnographers; and, three being a mystic number, too, it is very likely and indeed expected that a similar volume by Liszkay will be published in the year 2026.

The Transylvanian contemporaries have achieved their paradigm-creating results during the past three or four decades by working together as a team of ethnographic researchers and organizers, with a broad social and institutional background, giving space to a multitude of ambitious young researchers, too. As opposed to this, József Liszka has long remained a sort of a single-person institution of Hungarian ethnographic studies in Slovakia. This, of course, is an exaggeration, since we could equally refer to the work of researchers such as Károly Csáky, István B. Kovács, Ilona L. Juhász or Norbert Varga; yet, the Ethnological Centre at Komárno/Komárom, founded and run by Liszka to date, is a basis and a measure that

has been able to define the directions of research, organize field work, as well as to summarize and publish the results in a representative way. Were it not for that, one could but mention some lonely authors; yet, as demonstrated by the example of a contemporary genius, viz. László Szegedi from Rimavská Sobota/Rimaszombat, even comprehensive research of the highest quality will probably remain unechoed and lying in the shadow without an institutional background.

Right from the outset, one of the Ethnological Centre's main profiles and directions for research has been the field of religious ethnology. As the founding director has also been charged with playing the role of "the nation's (general) labourer", this field is but one of the visible parts of his perplexingly rich work. It was Liszka who wrote a definitive manual on the ethnography of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia; it was him, too, who wrote a gap-filling textbook on folklore and folkloristic studies when a course of ethnography had begun at János Selye University (although unduly neglected by folklore researchers in Hungary); he has been editing, for 23 years, the yearbook of the institute, a yearbook of exceptionally high quality even with Central European standards; indeed, the list might be continued, but let us mention two volumes to serve as forerunners of the subject of this review: the (1995) *The cult of holy images. Essays on popular religious practice*, and the (2000) *Erected in Christian devoutness. Essays on the sacred small monuments of the Kisalföld region*.⁸

The new book, of 702 pages, *Monuments. Sacred (and "sacred") small relics in the Carpathian Basin*, as indicated by the author in the preface, collects the relevant papers published during three decades in a "condensed" form in a single monograph volume. This is, after all, acceptable: most of the greater publications and academic dissertations are generally produced in the same fashion. Apart from matters of content, the obvious crucial question is how successful the author's attempt at organically "condensing" the papers has been. In other words, to what extent do the original texts, spanning several decades, written from a variety of theoretical perspectives and based on ever-changing background information, as well as the newly added parts and conclusions which serve as a sort of "mortar" to bond the blocks together, form an organic and unified text? In this respect, József Liszka has undeniably excelled: it is only after noticing some of his brief remarks and browsing the bibliography that the reader realizes how many of the topics had been elaborated on earlier (e.g. the stone crucifixes erected along highways, the cult of St. Wendelin in the Kisalföld region, the cult of St. John of Nepomuk in Hungary, the iconography of the Holy Trinity and Mary Help of Christians, the issues concerning the "sacred depot", etc.). The book's style, as usual, is admittedly subjective, even informal and belletristic, but nowhere does it any harm to the scientific content; it suits Liszka anyway, having become quite like a "copyrighted" feature of his (somewhat like in a number of provocative analyses by Vilmos Voigt, one of Liszka's masters and a former teacher of his at Budapest).

In the preface, József Liszka clarifies that he aims at an overview of the entire Hungarian-speaking area regarding sacred small monuments, but he also emphasizes that his work is mainly based on, and illustrated by examples of, ethnic Hungarian popular culture in Slovakia; this culture and the linguistic area, as he says, is a small universe by itself, being in contact with Western European patterns and also influenced by them in the West, but by Eastern (Greek) Christianity in the East (e.g. the upper region of the Bodrog-Tisza [Slovak *Tisa*] Interfluve as well as Ung [Slovak *Uh*]). Although

8 *Kisalföld* can be rendered as "Little Plain", a geographical area divided between Hungary, Slovakia, and Austria, in contrast with the "Great Plain" on both sides of the River Tisza, occupying most of Eastern Hungary. Also, henceforth, Hungarian topographical names will be cited in Hungarian as well as Slovak/German/Romanian/Serbian, etc., as appropriate. Since the paper is primarily concerned with ethnic Hungarians, topographical terms, once so cited, will be referred to by their Hungarian name only. (Translator's notes.)

this claim is generally tenable, the Eastern influence is not adequately demonstrated, and indeed, it may not be significant in relation to ethnic Hungarians in (Eastern) Slovakia (the pilgrimages to Máriapócs⁹ might be an exception). This may be the reason (apart from the apparently scarcer fieldwork carried out in Eastern Slovakia) why the overwhelming majority of data come from Western Slovakia. Or, rather, from other regions, too: the illustrative texts and images reach out far beyond the (South-Western) regions known as Csallóköz (Slovak *Žitný ostrov*), Mátyusföld (Slovak *Matúšova zem*), the Vág-Garam (Slovak *Váh-Hron*) Interfluve, and along the rivers Garam (Slovak *Hron*) and Ipoly (Slovak *Ipeľ*). Indeed, considering earlier studies and interethnic relations, it includes a number of data and parallels from Austria, Germany (Bavaria), Slovakia, Czechia and Slovenia. As for other parts of the Hungarian linguistic space, the Transdanubian part of Kisalföld, the region called Palócföld¹⁰, as well as Vajdaság (Serbian *Vojvodina*)¹¹ are represented by a wide range of illustrative samples, relying on the religious-ethnographic research of colleagues working in those regions, as well as the manuals by Sándor Bálint, a great classic figure in the field of Hungarian religious-ethnographic research, which are also concerned with Liszka's topic. Still, the farther we go towards the East, including Slovakia's Hungarian-speaking parts and also beyond the River Tisza, the scarcer and sporadic the examples given, and referred to, by the author tend to become. I will later discuss a specific formulation of this (feeling) of a gap; let us now see the unquestionable merits of the book.

When writing *Monuments*, József Liszka was making an attempt at producing a volume

that might also serve as a manual, i.e. highlighting the broadest possible range of aspects of the topic. That is why several distinct chapters contain information on “sacred small monuments”, a technical term attributable to him, but which has now become part and parcel of “received” wisdom in the field; also, on the sources of his topic, on the locations and methodology of the archiving process (including his own “Archive of Sacred Small Monuments”), on typology (still unclarified in several respects), and – last but not least – on the systemic presentation of the small monuments discussed, both according to form and content. It is appropriate at this point to repeatedly refer to the exceptionally copious illustrative material presented in the volume, also including many curiosities, which is attributable to the author's broad knowledge of the technical literature (the bibliography of the volume is almost 150 pages long) as well as the professional archive at Komárom/Komárno, itself based on extensive field work. To be sure, the publication of the volume without these features might have been almost pointless: this particular area of religious ethnography (and art history) includes visual representation to a crucial extent, much like no discussion of folk poetry is possible without presenting the given text. The volume does, occasionally, feature textual folklore sources related to sacred small monuments as illustrations, but featuring somewhat more of them might have been useful, since a variety of “founding” traditions and stories of miracles often form an integral part of the tradition around such “monuments”.

A crucial part of the book is the chapter on the typology and the terminology of sacred small monuments, partly an overview of the history of the research, but more than that: its primary goal is to clarify things. Specifically, as long as the relevant literature is full of a range of different interpretations and readings, even professionals may go on misunderstanding each other. An example is provided by chapels erected in borderlands, which Liszka does not consider as sacred small monuments – not to mention the fact that this expression, and the concept denoted by it, varies regionally and even locally. Liszka provides the most complete

9 Máriapócs is a major Greco-Catholic shrine, located in the North-East of Hungary. (Editor's note.)

10 Palócföld, a region in Northern Hungary and Southern (Central) Slovakia. (Editor's note.)

11 Vajdaság is a region within the Republic of Serbia, south of Hungary, with a significant percentage of ethnic Hungarians. (Editor's note.)

and coherent classification of sacred small monuments we have seen to date, classifying them into nine major groups based on form and content. 1. Proto-monuments, i.e. natural formations considered sacred. 2. Sacred signs or constructs as elements added to existing natural formations. 3. Pictorial/figurative poles (columns/statues). 4. Calvarias (individual scenes or complete ones). 5. Crucifixes along country highways. 6. Wooden bell towers and belfries. 7. Open chapels. 8. Grave markers, headstones, death sites. 9. Miscellaneous forms, difficult to classify in any of the above groups. Although some will have a feeling of lack concerning this specific typology, or they may equally attribute too broad a sense to some categories (e.g. “chapels” vs. “grave markers”), I myself do welcome Liszka’s classificatory tables, considering them innovative and example-setting – with but a few critical remarks, especially regarding “figurative-pictorial poles”. Regrettably, the text following the tables is rather in want of more copious illustrative samples; for instance, the otherwise quite spectacular and regionally frequent belfries, as in Gömör/Gemer, are given only half a page of discussion and but two graphic illustrations.

For the most part, nevertheless, the book is concerned with presenting the material relevant to the discussion, rather than issues of terminology. Over three hundred pages are devoted to the presentation (in thematic order) all the themes and scenes, as well as biblical and historical figures, represented by small monuments and having a public function or a multi-layered sacred or pseudo-sacred meaning. Some of the sections in this grand chapter seem to almost anticipate a minor monograph (e.g. columns/statues devoted to the Holy Trinity, representations of the Holy Family, St. John of Nepomuk, St. Wendelin, or the Ice Saints); elsewhere, the analysis is not quite detailed: the author seems to have found it satisfactory to clarify the most basic facts, considering the scarcity of sites in Slovakia. A well-prepared religious-ethnographic researcher with an up-to-date knowledge of the field will notice new phenomena, too; an example is provided (connected to the “Holy Family” theme) by the iconographic representation of the “Hungarian

Holy Family”, i.e. King St. Stephen, Queen Consort Gisela, and Prince St. Emeric, in a group of statues at Nagycétény/Veľký Cetín in Nyitra County (today in *Nitriansky kraj/Nyitrai kerület*, or Nitra Region, Slovakia). This is rather similar, we might note, to a number of medieval frescoes representing the biblical three magi (or three wise men/kings) in the form of Hungary’s royal saints, the latter representing three ages and three royal ideals on the mural paintings. Connected to representations of Jesus and the Holy Family, the author mentions Christ the Saviour, an adaptation of the Rio de Janeiro motif; indeed, the topic could possibly be given a full chapter of its own (in the book, it is part of the chapter on *The most sacred heart of Jesus*). The similarity between public statues depicting Jesus as the Good Shepherd on the one hand and the sacred small monuments featuring St. Wendelin on the other would be worth some discussion, as their formal similarity seems to be undeniable.

A significant number of public statues, besides the Holy Family or the Holy Trinity, represent some biblical or medieval saints. Reading Liszka’s book, one cannot fail to notice the long list, and the great variety, of these subjects. Their presentation is, quite appropriately, consistent and unitary: a brief description of their biography and legendarium is followed by an overview of their iconography and the history of their cult, and, lastly, a more or less lengthy discussion of their representational types, as well as in which geographical areas in the Carpathian Basin they are found. Besides the saints mentioned above, Saint Florian, the Plague Saints, and the Fourteen Holy Helpers are presented in a similar way, as well as “other” saints depicted in public spaces. The same is true for the “national saints” straddling the boundary between sacredness and profanity, discussed by the author as chiefly contemporary phenomena, but also recording Baroque and 19th-century forerunners. Indeed, such monuments do have an undeniable, and often almost explicit, nation-forming and identity-reinforcing role (cf. the Saints Cyril and Methodius); in fact, the primary motivation behind erecting these statues has been of this nature, apart

from occasional instances of local historical relevance.

The grandiosity of the chapter raises several additional questions for the reviewer. For example, why are the discussions of Saint Wendelin's representations limited to the Western half of (the Hungarian-speaking parts) of Slovakia, with none of them mentioned east of Nógrád/Novohrad – one instance is recorded from the Bodrog-Tisza Interfluve, maybe as an exception that strengthens the rule? Yet, Wendelin has been the patron saint of shepherds and animal-keepers, and – socially as well as culturally – sheepherding has mainly characterized the upper regions, as far as Slovakia's ethnic Hungarians are concerned, cf. the Palóc/Gömör/Torna traditions as well as the folk poetry and art of these regions; the Upper Bodrogtisza area, while belonging to the Alföld (Great Plain) cultural region, may also be considered as part of this group. Liszka's solution, as far as I am concerned, is not quite satisfactory: there *is* some Catholic population in the above-mentioned regions, albeit often mixed with other denominations. The author includes Saint Michael as one of the Plague Saints, who – being an Archangel – is defined as a mediator; perhaps more importantly, his biblical (sacred) role is not to protect people against disease, but to fight demonic forces (cf. the legend of Saint George, with whom he is rather comparable), let alone his sacred role in the cult of the dead, also accompanying the deceased persons' soul in the otherworld.

Saint Christopher, one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, has been devoted a thought-provoking chapter, too. Christopher (despite the small number of extant monuments) has been subject to a deep and widespread cult, including Hungarian-speaking lands, extending, indeed, beyond the Carpathian Range, as far East as Moldvabánya (Romanian *Baia*).¹²

Regarding Liszka's book (and his overall typology), I have not found a single unambiguous statement about which category he thinks the exterior frescoes on church walls are supposed to belong; notably, if a statue in an exterior recess or an exterior Lourdes grotto adjoined to the outer walls of the church do qualify as such, then exterior frescoes of the above-mentioned type have a fair chance of belonging to the same category. These aspects are especially prominent regarding the monuments devoted to Saint Christopher, since their sheer size is directly proportional to their cultic relevance. For another example, cf. the 14th century exterior fresco on the southern wall of the church at *Pelsőc* (Slovak *Plešivec*), something that Liszka fails to mention in his discussion of national saints.

Admittedly, Liszka's inclusion of Saint Martin as one of the national saints is more than welcome: he had been represented wearing traditional Hungarian costume, since as early as the Baroque Age, and hardly without a reason. Martin's cult in the Pannonian region has persisted since early medieval times, and it is abundantly attested in the form of small sacred monuments in Western Transdanubia; still, quite regrettably, Liszka's book fails to discuss (or illustrate) these monuments in detail, although the broad-ranging and fruitful research during the past two decades, including a brief monograph by the author of this review (titled *Pannonia's Patron Saint. Saint Martin in Hungary's cultural history*), may include an amount of relevant data. The public iconography of the holy kings and royal princesses (i.e. Elizabeth, Margaret, Kinga and Hedvig [Polish *Jadwiga*]) might also be expanded to a greater degree than what is referred to in this book – indeed, as for sacred and “sacred” issues, might even deserve a volume of its own. For instance, I happen to be familiar with dozens of (chiefly contemporary) public monuments associated with the cult of St. Ladislaus, one of my narrower fields of research; moreover, they are iconographically complex enough and historically multi-layered, too; an example is provided by the recently uncovered exterior fresco scene at Székelyszentlélek (Romanian *Bisericanii*). In the same way, I also miss, though not as

12 In *Suceava* (Hungarian *Szucsáva*) County in the Romanian part of *Moldova* (Hungarian *Moldva*), not to be confused with the *Republic of Moldova*, sometimes referred to as *Moldavia*, a former “socialist republic” within the USSR, now an independent country. (Translator's note.)

emphatically, a discussion of St. Helena, whose cult, originating in the Middle Ages and surviving in the form of sacred small monuments, also requires further research.

The volume concludes with three autonomous and amply documented essays on “sacred depots”, the painting of sacred small monuments, and the fate of statues representing a sacred theme. One of the strongly emphasized examples mentioned in the last of these essays is the statue of St. John of Nepomuk (or, several statues of him) at village *Torna* (Slovak *Turňa nad Bodvou*). The story of the statue(s) may remind one of a piece of textual folklore, collected at the nearby village of *Jablonca* (Slovak *Silická Jablonica*) in the 1990s, presumably inspired by the reinterment of Imre Nagy¹³, “ Saint Stephen was buried like that, with his face down. The statue of St. Stephen, that is. Hungarians buried him that way during the Communist era”. (cf. Magyar, Zoltán. *Popular legends from Torna County*, p.127.).

The reason I have quoted this small bit is that it might serve as an addition to a future monograph, a monograph that is half complete, but not entirely so. Liszka’s grand work, with its extensive preliminary methodological studies, as well as its richness of detail, provides a stable foundation upon which a much larger work on sacredness can be erected, including additional structures and decorations. Furthermore, while the author does emphasize in his preface as well as in his concluding remarks that his book is not a comprehensive monograph, it is certainly he, himself, whom we can expect to produce on the topic; specifically, a manual-like monograph to give an overall picture of the sacred small monuments to be found in the Carpathian Basin and the Hungarian-speaking lands, based on an extensive database. This is especially true because this book of Liszka’s contains but sporadic examples of the monuments of the eastern part of the Hungarian lin-

guistic space, although the region of *Székelyföld* (Romanian *Ținutul Secuiesc* or *Secuimea*, German *Szeklerland*, English *Székely Land* or *Szeklerland*), including *Gyimes* (Romanian *Ghimeș*), also *Moldva* (Romanian *Moldova*) exhibit an exceptionally rich and unique ethnographic heritage; the same holds for other regions, somewhat neglected in the book, including *Barkóság*¹⁴, *Cserehát*, *Hegyalja*, *Jászság*, *Nyírség*, *Szatmár* (Romanian *Satu Mare*), the South of *Partium*¹⁵, *Bánság* (also known as *Bánát*)¹⁶, the area around *Szeged*, as well as the south-western parts of Transdanubia, including the Mura-Drava Interfluve area; admittedly, the available material varies somewhat region by region. There is, thus, a task to be completed – and the very person we might expect to do the job is the author of the book himself, presenting a sort of “cathedral” of sacred small monuments, finally providing a truly comprehensive overview of this cultural heritage, surviving up to the present, in its entire typological, historical, and geographical diversity.

Zoltán Magyar

13 Imre Nagy was Prime Minister of Hungary during the 1956 revolution. He was charged with high treason and sentenced to death, executed on June 16th, 1958. (Editor’s note.)

14 The region around *Brekov* (Hungarian *Barkó*), in East Slovakia, not far from the Ukrainian border.

15 Roughly, the “frontier” area between the Principality of Transylvania on the one hand and Royal Hungary as well as areas of central Hungary under Ottoman rule. (Translator’s note.)

16 Cf. Romanian/Serbian/German *Banat*. (Translator’s note.)

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle – Forum Social Sciences Review

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As a general rule while quoting, use this orthography: ...as Kant says "....."

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