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International memorial conference on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Vilmos Diószegi

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1. On the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Vilmos Diószegi (1923–1972), ethnologist-anthropologist and an internationally renowned researcher of shamanism, a memorial conference was organized at the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest on 5 June 2023. The event was jointly organized by the Institute of Ethnography of the Research Centre for the Humanities, the Museum of Ethnography, the International Turkic Academy, and the Hungarian Representative Office of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS).
2. At the international conference, presentations were made by contributors from the Museum of Ethnography, the Research Centre for the Humanities, the University of Bern, the Nazarbayev University in Astana, the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSÖY), the Chinggis Museum in Ulaanbaatar, the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, the University of Leiden, and the University of Helsinki.
3. An international conference was organized in memory of the influential Hungarian researcher of shamanism and ethnologist. During the all-day conference, invited researchers evaluated, praised and criticized the research programmes of Vilmos Diószegi. The presentations were primarily focused on Diószegi's fieldwork in southern Siberia and northern Mongolia, the results of which were analysed, interpreted, considering as to how the research could be continued.
4. In addition to researchers, collectors, diplomats representing the Hungarian and the Turkic states, Hungarian artists were present, as well as interested persons for whom the books of Vilmos Diószegi had been of decisive importance.
5. The presentations were divided into four sections. In Section 1, the heads of the institutes organising the conference welcomed the distinguished audience. The presentations in Section 2 discussed the personality, life, and work of Vilmos Diószegi, as well as his fieldwork in southern Siberia and Mongolia. The researchers of shamanism from South Siberia and North Mongolia were gathered in Section 3. In Section 4, the fate and life of museum collections and plans related to them were in the focus.
6. Vilmos Diószegi (1923–1972), Hungarian ethnologist-anthropologist, was an internationally renowned researcher of shamanism. His exceptional and steadfast personality made it possible for him to go on research trips in southern Siberia and the northern parts of Mongolia four times in the 1950s and 1960s, in an unparalleled manner, thus ensuring, after World War II, the continuity of fieldwork-based Hungarian and international research of Siberia. In 1957, he travelled to the

Soviet Union for two months, to return home only after a year and a half, when his passport expired. By methodically studying the elements of shamanism in Siberia, he wanted to clarify the question of the origin of the ancient Hungarian religion. During his research carried out in the field, archives, and museum collections, he considered the ethical ideas of his time to be the standard for him. From his diaries and letters to his wife, we gain an insight not only into the practices of shamanism after World War II, but also into the research habits and everyday life of the community of researchers in Leningrad, Moscow, as well as locally in Siberia. He played a major role in making representatives of the local intelligentsia realise the values of their own culture, including shamanism, in an era when the communist state apparatus persecuted and prohibited the activities of traditional representatives of local culture, including shamans and storytellers of epics. In this way, he actively assisted the local indigenous Siberian intelligentsia to develop through education and promoted the strengthening of the role played by shamanism in ethnic and national identity. His scientific-popularizing volumes and publications, reporting on his research journeys, are considered as some of the defining foundational works not only by the (Hungarian and international) representatives of the generation of researchers of shamanism who followed him, but also by the readership interested in the related peoples of Hungarians living in Southern Siberia and Northern Mongolia. On the centenary of the birth of Vilmos Diószegi, participants at the international conference recalled the personality of the great Hungarian researcher of shamanism, worthily commemorating his research, research results, collections, as well as his objects, photographs and audio materials kept in the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest.

7. In the first part of the commemorative meeting, the local and foreign leaders of the organizing institutions welcomed the distinguished audience, gave short presentations on the institutions represented by them and their links to the work of Vilmos Diószegi, outlining the resulting future opportunities.
8. First, Lajos Kemecsi, Director of the Museum of Ethnography (Budapest), welcomed the guests as the host of the event. In his presentation he described the newly built institution housing the conference, its infrastructure (present exhibitions and future plans) and, within it, the place for Vilmos Diószegi's shamanism research in Siberia and Mongolia.
9. Then Balázs Balogh, Director General of the Research centre for the Humanities (Hungarian Research Network), Director of the Institute of Ethnology (HUN-REN, the former Hungarian Academy of Sciences), welcomed the audience on behalf of the heads of the institutes organising the conference. In his presentation, he gave an account of the work carried out by Vilmos Diószegi at the Institute of Ethnology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences between 1963 and 1972.
10. Then Shahin Mustafayev, President of the International Turkic Academy (Astana, Kazakhstan) of Azerbaijani origin remembered Vilmos Diószegi, researcher of shamanism, in his presentation. He gave an account of his role of undying merit in the introduction and acceptance of shamanism as a scientific subject in the Soviet context, with particular regard to Turkic peoples.

11. The next presentation was given by Kemal Ünnek, General Adviser of TürkSoy (Ankara, Turkey), who presented his institute, the Hungarian connections, and the historical context of the cooperation.
12. János Hóvári (†), turkologist, ambassador, head of the Hungarian Representative Office of the Organization of Turkic States, remembered Vilmos Diószegi as a turkologist in his presentation. He pointed out that Vilmos Diószegi conducted his most of his research among Turkic peoples. His research formed a link between the Turkic-language peoples of southern Siberia and are of crucial importance in nurturing the roots of these peoples and expressing and strengthening their ethnic identity.
13. István Sántha, social anthropologist, researcher of the Institute of Ethnology (RCH HUN-REN), gave an account of Vilmos Diószegi's research in Southern Siberia and Northern Mongolia. He drew attention to the pioneering nature of this research in the post-World War II Soviet and socialist context. Immediately after the post-World War II persecution of charismatic Siberian storytellers of epics, which lasted until Stalin's death in 1953, Diószegi pointed out the historical importance of the other charismatic specialists, the shamans, among Siberian peoples, and the crucial role of cultivating shamanic roots in maintaining and strengthening ethnic identity. On the other hand, István Sántha drew attention to the fact that, although Vilmos Diószegi's shamanistic research is usually interpreted primarily in the context of the Altaic studies that intensified and developed after World War II, it is nevertheless thought-provoking that this research on the origins of the Hungarian ancestral religion in the region of the Sayan-Altai mountains may provide an answer, and thus can be considered an organic continuation of the pre-World War II Turanian research tradition aimed at the search for related peoples and the ancestral homeland.
14. Dávid Somfai Kara, researcher at the Institute of Ethnology (RCH HUN-REN) and professor at the Department of Turkology of the Nazarbayev University (Astana, Kazakhstan), followed up on some of Vilmos Diószegi's field research in South Siberia. His fieldwork took him to the Sayan-Altai region (Soviet Union) and northern Mongolia, the same places where Vilmos Diószegi had also conducted research. Thus, in addition to helping to interpret the shamanistic research of Vilmos Diószegi, research by Dávid Somfai can also be considered as the continuation thereof. Furthermore, Dávid Somfai also mentions Diószegi's interest in Turkology, since he collected texts among the Turkic peoples of South Siberia in their original languages, even if his knowledge of the local language was not always satisfactory and, therefore, he had to rely on mediation by his Russian-speaking helpers and the support and language skills of Turkologists and Mongologists knowing these languages well in Hungary. This in no way diminishes the merits of Vilmos Diószegi's pioneering and systematic research.
15. Professor Judith Hangartner, a social anthropologist researcher at the University of Bern and a specialist in Darhat shamanism, reflected on Diószegi's social anthropological fieldwork. She was familiar with Diószegi's writings published in English on Darhat and Mongolian shamanism. Her critical approach led to the following questions. She could not quite understand why Diószegi was only concerned with shamanism and why he did not research Lamaism (the Mongolian

version of Buddhism of Tibetan origin), especially the repression of Lamaism in the 1930s (modelled on the Stalinist repression in the Soviet Union), when tens of thousands of lamas were liquidated in Mongolia, as among Darhats. She viewed Diószegi, as someone who wanted to approach shamanism through the method of ethnogenesis, and as a typical socialist researcher interested in primitive communism and the question of ancestral religion. On the other hand, she also found it important that Diószegi had managed to visit a large number of shamans over a very short period of time, which he had only been able to achieve with the help of local support and the use of the materials of the Mongolian researchers S. Badamhatan and O. Pürev, who had been researching in the field and only later published those materials. And finally, she also thought of the question that, despite having met living and, in the past, practicing shamans, Diószegi speaks of shamanism in the past tense (treating it as a narrative, as folklore, without ritual practice). Had Diószegi seen a practicing shaman alive in 1960, had he attended shamanic ceremonies? It is hard to imagine that, having met so many shamans, he would not have had the opportunity to do so; but why then did he not write about his related experiences and impressions?

16.

Victoria Peemot, a postdoctoral researcher of Tuvan origin at the University of Helsinki, described how she is tracking down objects of Tuvan origin in European museums. In European museums, the relationship of these objects to their original environment and to other objects from the same source, has weakened and can only be reconstructed with great difficulty. Meanwhile, the circumstances of the acquisition of the objects also got surfaced. Both presented cases were related to the final days of the construction of the infrastructure of the Tsarist Russian empire. European museums' links with Russia (Soviet Union) have weakened after the October Revolution, making it impossible to obtain additional information on objects, and these questions have become of interest only for a particular group over time. Now, with the Russian-Ukrainian war, we are witnessing similar trends again, with objects and their locations becoming more distant from each other again.

17.

Ivan Peshkov, a social anthropologist-economist-historian of Polish-Russian Irkutsk origin at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland, discussed the religious syncretism of the Evenki (Tungus) people living on the periphery of the Russian (Slavic) empire. His research focuses on the places where Evenki (Tungus) live in the contact zones of the Russian and Chinese empires. He examines how the Russian and Chinese empires, or both socialist regimes, have sought to integrate 'evenkism' and to find a place for it in the process of constructing their own national identities. This is where Evenki shamanism plays a key role, developing its own fusion and syncretism, with the Orthodox Slavic faith appearing on the peripheral regions, on the one side, and with Burkhanism, on the other side. For socialist regimes, the historical perspective and layers of Evenki shamanism will be essential. These above-mentioned different perspectives and configurations co-occur and provide many opportunities for the articulation, expression, and living of *evenkism* in the peripheral regions.

18.

Liesbet Nyssen, social anthropologist researcher from the Area Studies Institute of Leiden University, focuses her research on the activities of indigenous Khakas activists and Khakas epic storytelling techniques in southern Siberia. In her presentation, Liesbet discussed the relationship between epic storytellers and shamans,

and the question of vocation. The so-called “shamanic gift”, which was one of the main questions of interest in Vilmos Diószegi’s research, is sent by primordial spirits to a shaman to be initiated, in a dream or trance state. Accepting this involves torture and suffering, and is a fundamental part of the process of becoming a shaman. It is acquired from the host spirit of the mountain by withdrawal into nature. According to Liesbet, epic storytellers (musicians, especially musicians playing an instrument, the Khakas folk zither or harp) undergo a similar process of initiation by spirits as shamans.

19.

Timur Davletov, contributor from TürkSoy, the representative of Turkic peoples of Siberia, who himself is of Khakas origin, made a presentation on Khakas shamanism. His approach can be considered a continuation of Soviet research traditions, insofar as he intends to shed light on the historical layers of shamanic traditions using the ethnogenetic method. In his opinion, clarifying the question of Khakas shamanism is of crucial importance, not only for the Khakas themselves, but also for other related peoples, including primarily the Kyrgyz people.

20.

Chuluun Sampildondov, director of the newly established Chinggis Museum in Ulaanbaatar, spoke about Khotogoit shamanism. The significance of this is that Vilmos Diószegi met several Khotogoit shamans during his research trip to Mongolia in 1960, and he managed to record several shamanic songs during his stay. The Mongolian researcher spoke about the cult of the 18th century Khotogoit warlord, Chinguinjav, who was eventually captured and executed by the Chinese, but who is the subject of countless legends and, to this day, the Khotogoits offer sacrifices to him, as the master-spirit of the land.

21.

Gombosuren Uranbayar presented the shaman artefacts in the Chinggis Khaan National Museum. The interesting thing about the presentation was that the newly-formed Museum also collected objects that were held by local history museums in rural areas yet during Diószegi’s trip to Mongolia in 1960. These objects are now displayed in a worthy environment so as to become part of the Mongolian national identity.

22.

Gábor Wilhelm, curator of the Asia Collection, contributor from the Museum of Ethnography (Budapest) explained in his presentation that there are two different research trends in the study of Hungarian ancestral religion. According to the representatives of one of them, the Hungarians adopted pre-Christian religious traditions from the surrounding European peoples. Conversely, Vilmos Diószegi believed that the organic unity of ancestral religion, language, and cultural kinship could be found in the East. It was through Diószegi that concepts such as *táltos* (shaman) and *regős* (bard) became established in the Hungarian common knowledge. Secondly, Gábor Wilhelm discussed how Diószegi’s research in the East is related to Hungarian research traditions (Sándor Kőrösi Csoma, Antal Reguly, Ármin Vámbéry) and international ones (Göttingen, Castrén). Diószegi’s ethnogenetic approach fortunately coincides with the fashion in the Soviet Union for the Morgan’s evolutionary approach. The significance of the “Finno-Ugric-Turkish war” at the end of the nineteenth century was mainly to draw attention to Hungarian Orientalism and its achievements, rather than to be a “real” intellectual war of blood. With his research in South Siberia and Mongolia, Vilmos Diószegi can be considered as the person continuing, and a representative of, the tradition of Turanism in Hungary after World War II.

23.

Tímea Bata, curator of the Photograph Collection, contributor from the Museum of Ethnography outlined the newly planned permanent exhibition and the role played in the exhibition by Vilmos Diószegi's research trips in the East. How Diószegi's research is integrated into the series of exhibitions presenting research by his predecessors aimed at getting to know the related peoples. The presentation of research on Finno-Ugric kinship (Antal Reguly and János Jankó) and that of Turkic kinship (Bartók, Vilmos Diószegi and Gyula Mészáros) shows the intention to find a balance.

24.

In the second part of the presentation, Krisztina Pálóczy, curator of the Folk Music Collection, contributor from the Museum of Ethnography, spoke about how the planned Diószegi exhibition will present the great Hungarian ethnologist's research among the Mongolian shamans, and what shamanic objects have been selected out of what considerations, and how these objects will be exhibited. What accompanying background materials will be used to make the exhibition more interesting and complex, taking advantage of possibilities offered by modern technology. The staff of the Museum of Ethnography will also present related archive photographs and Vilmos Diószegi's relevant apparatus of notes. On the other hand, she reported that the sound recordings collected by Diószegi are now available on the Museum's on-line platform: <https://www.neprajz.hu/hirek/2023/dioszegi-vilmos-hangfelvetelei-a-neprajzi-muzeumban.html>

25.

Originally we had planned to invite the Czech photographer-traveller Stanislaw Krupar to Budapest. Attention has been drawn to Stanislaw's research by Viktória Peemot, as Stanislaw has been systematically following and recording the rituals and lives of Tuva (Todja) shamans for over fifteen years. Although he is not a scientific researcher, he has created an archive that could be of interest to other researchers, also as a material documenting a period. The interesting thing is that, using his camera, he captures the life and movements of nomadic Tuva people not only in the middle of Asia, but also in Ukraine, to find out about the traces and scratches soldiers of Tuva origin fighting in Russian units leave behind on the Ukrainian landscape and people living there, how they become part of the foreign landscape. This naturally opens up the possibility of comparison. Unfortunately, Stanislaw had to cancel his participation in the Diószegi conference at the last minute, as he did not have time to come to Budapest now, returning from Ukraine and preparing for visiting Tuva people in Mongolia.

26.

Cheinesh Baytushkina was the guest of honour at the official dinner of the conference, and her concert was a real treat for participants, the organisers, Turkic diplomats accredited to our country and Turkic students studying in Hungary. Even the costume of the epic storyteller from Altai was extremely attractive, as the basis for her dress and headgear were Scythian finds from the Sayan Mountains. Cheinesh is one of the specialists, including shamans and epic storytellers, who have been chosen in their sleep by spirits, initiating them into the essence and spirituality of their craft. Cheinesh's concert gave us an introduction to how the activities of shamans (kham) and epic storytellers (kaichi) come together. First, she evoked the traditional (musical) world of the Telengits (an Altaic minority group), the soundscape, using her main instrument, the mouth harp. Even from the two pieces of music demonstrating her playing of the mouth harp, it was clear that the Altai-Telengits are a mountain people, but that their musical motifs are

based on their relationship with horses. Next came the plucked string instrument of the Altai people, the topshuur. Traditionally, women do not play this instrument, so Cheinesh's art is an exception. The topshuur is the instrument of kaichi people, who accompany their epics with their own particular styles of throat singing. Cheinesh has mastered and uses four of these singing techniques, but there are/have been epic storytellers who perform/have performed epics in six to eight or even twelve throat singing styles. Cheinesh addressed her instrument with her song to succeed in her journey of epic storytelling. In the next song, she demonstrated the aforementioned throat singing styles mastered by her, in the form of a modern pop song (popsa), for which she played the basic music from a phonogram (playback). In this song, Cheinesh was joined by her fellow Hungarian experimental musicians, Balázs Pándi (percussion instruments) and Béla Ágoston (wind instruments, vocals, 'ütőgardon' – folk musical instrument, a cello is played percussively). In the rest of the evening, the audience heard experimental pieces, witnessing how music motifs from the Gyimes and Csángó regions (now in Transylvania/Romania) were taken out of their usual Balkan contexts, and at the same time a bridge was built between the musical worlds of the (Trans)Carpathian and the Altai regions.

27.

Last but not least, the conference was accompanied by two mini-photo exhibitions; one in the Museum of Ethnography and the other in the Ybl Villa, where a reception was held for participants and organisers. Both exhibitions gave an insight into the fieldwork of Vilmos Diószegi in South Siberia and North Mongolia. On the occasion of the conference, the Museum of Ethnography published, on its on-line platform, the sound recordings made by Vilmos Diószegi in South Siberia and North Mongolia. The significance of these is that not only can we hear shamanic songs in their original atmosphere, recorded in the field, but, for the first time, the native language sounds and dialogues spoken during collection have been recorded, not least preserving Vilmos Diószegi's own voice for his family members and posterity.

28.

The next morning, the Museum hosting the conference invited the presenters to visit the storage room, where the specialists were able to get acquainted with the shamanic objects collected by Diószegi, in many cases making valuable comments on the objects. An exciting discussion between the curators and the specialist visitors ensued, laying the foundations for future collaboration.