

THESIS OF A DISSERTATION

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THE FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF A WEDDING AND CARNIVAL CUSTOM WITH RESPECT TO THE INTERWEAVING OF THE OCCASSIONS



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I. Aim, specification of the topic

The starting point of the dissertation is a carnival masquerade custom, which is held even nowadays in the village of Moha in Fejér County. The custom is called *Tikverőzés* [verbatim: chicken hitting], and its plot is organized around fund-raising and fertility magic. Parallel customs can be found in several points of the Carpathian Basin; however, most of these, from terminological and structural aspects, are connected to the custom-system of weddings. The unravelling of the connections of the *Lakodalmi tyúkerő* [verbatim: chicken hitting at wedding parties] and the *Farsangi tyúkerő* [verbatim: chicken hitting at carnival] and the studying of functional and historical questions of these have failed to raise the interest of custom researchers so far – apart from the allusions to *Kakasiítés* [verbatim: rooster hitting], made by Ujváry Zoltán. A thematic custom-monograph defining the types of the custom-activities, showing the geographical spreading of the custom-set, as well as the main directions and motifs of its historical development and changing has not been made yet.

The studying of a folk custom justifies the presentation of the wider custom set which it belongs to, but, in the case of *Mohai tikverőzés*, [verbatim: chicken hitting in Moha] this aim has become the fundamental goal of research, in order to remedy the lack mentioned above. The question raising was fundamentally aimed at the terminological and functional study of the customs belonging to the custom-set, as well as the geographical relations of these. This brought certain wedding customs, like *Hajnalozás*, *a Kárlátó*, or *Hérész* into focus.

The dissertation looks at *Mohai tikverőzés*, as the starting point of the topic separately, it being one of the last mementoes of the carnival versions of *Tyúkerő* customs, and a custom that can be examined today. The contemporary research and analysis of *Mohai tikverőzés* has been made legitimate by the continuity of the custom. The research has aimed at finding out whether *Mohai tikverőzés* has uniquely survived to present day, and to see what factors influenced its survival. The continuity and the fact that this custom has been well documented in the last fifty years have naturally raised the questions concerning the changing and evolving of the custom. In connection with the survival of the custom another research aspect evolved: the questions of keeping the tradition and of tourism, as well as the contemporary function of the custom, *i.e.* its social imbedding and function in the lives of the followers of it.

II The applied methods

The research of the subject could be carried out with the help of a complex methodological apparatus. During the processing of the tradition set of *Tyúkverő* I aimed at a wide overview of the written data (folklore works from the 18th-19th centuries, the data of protocols, dictionaries of areas and languages), then I tried to show the geographical distribution of the collected data with cartographical methods. The basic condition for the thematic data processing is to have a great amount of data from the whole area of the Carpathian Basin, which makes it possible to compare and categorize. As far as *Tyúkverő* is concerned I found it important to examine the background belief system of the tradition, as the appearance of notions concerning chickens in the Hungarian belief system could provide an evident basis for the evolving of this tradition set.

The basis of the examination of *Mohai tikverőzés* was the classic method of ethnography: fieldwork. The annual inspection and documentation of the tradition was completed by interviewing followers of the tradition. During the collection, I strived to talk to people of different ages, both men and women, who play different roles in the realization of the custom, and represent different points of view of the tradition. Documentation of the tradition and analysing already existing documentations were the chore of the work. Studying Pesovár Ferenc's legacy defined the direction of thoughts about the tradition to a great extent, and the legacy – especially the photos – revealed his special relationship to *Mohai tikverőzés* and his important role in preserving it. The conversations I had with his friends who accompanied him to *Mohai tikverőzés* also gave new dimensions to the data gained from the legacy. I also used articles and films about *Mohai tikverőzés* as sources as well as ethnographical works containing the description of the tradition.

Ethnographical and anthropological works that have appeared in the field of tradition research serves as a theoretical background to the analysis of the collected data. I tried to systematize and interpret the revealed phenomena with their help. Apart from works on dramatic folk customs by Dömötör Tekla and Ujváry Zoltán I primarily relied on Verebélyi Kincső and Niedermüller Péter's ideas. Verebélyi Kincső's modern festival theory serves as methodological scaffolding to the minute examination of the elements and content of the tradition.

III. Results

The research of Ujváry Zoltán has revealed that *Lakodalmi tyúkverő* was widely known among the Hungarian, and although it belongs to the same custom complex as *Kakasütés*, taken from neighbouring peoples, it is an independent, Hungarian tradition. The thorough study of the custom set has proved that *Tyúkverő*, as a complex tradition activity with respect to its function, content and form, existed in a significant part of the Hungarian speaking areas. In the historical approach to the custom-set terminological and functional analyses have proved to be effective, which, put into a geographical context, have shown the following results.

1. The custom of *Kakas-ütés* which, similarly to the original goal of *Tyúkverő*, aimed at slaughtering the animal, had taken its place in Hungary because of the influence of minorities. It lived on in areas with mixed population, taking on the name of the gradually fading custom of *Chicken hitting*,

The rooster games coming from foreign people formed certain versions of the custom, thus making the slaughtering of a rooster, as a stunt, part of the chicken hitting walks going from house to house after weddings in some areas.

Originally, *Lakodalmi tyúkverő* had a function of slaughtering an animal. However, unlike *Kakas-ütés*, it didn't aim at killing one animal in public, but, while going round the village, at killing numerous chickens and other poultry to use as food later on.

2. Using data from historical linguistics it can be seen that having fun, catering for guests and feasting are in the centre of the custom from a functional point of view, and this might have been the basis and condition for the *Tyúkverő* to appear in the custom set of the carnivals. By the turn of the 19th-20th century, the slaughtering of the animal had faded, and the donation collecting custom had merged with other amusement activities of the custom system of weddings done at dawn. Some of these existed in the Carpathian basin with a different name but the same function, others, however, apart from a different name, denoted a custom-activity different from chicken hitting. So, as far as the occasion, the name and the characteristic activity are concerned, a very complex phenomenon has to be faced.

- *Csiszló* and *Kóborlás* are the dialect equivalents of *Lakodalmi tyúkverő* in the central, south-eastern and south-western parts of the *Dunántúl* [Trans-Danubian Region]. The gist of the custom activity is that the best man has the guests who have already left taken back to the wedding house.

- *Hajnalozás* [approximate meaning: dawn-making] was originally music played very early in the morning to greet the newly wed couple. It had developed into a greeting of a wider circle over the years, including the family of the couple and the other guests..
- *Remélés* or *Reménylő* [approximate meaning: hoping or hoper] is connected to the appearance of *Lakodalmi tyúkverő* during carnival, mainly in the North-East of Hungary. As far as its content and activity are concerned it denotes a donation collecting custom both in the custom set of carnival and weddings.
- *Kárlátó* and *Hérész* were customs with a long past among Hungarian people. However, they were practised with a content different from *Tyúkverő* in most parts of the Carpathian Basin. Both customs originally meant the visit paid by the guests of the bride at the house of the groom. The merging of these two customs with *Tyúkverő* might have been promoted by the fact that they took place during the last phase of the wedding, and a key moment in both *Tyúkverő* and in *Kárlátó* and *Hérész* was to walk around the village or part of it in a group.

The merging of the wedding customs which had been once distinct from each other was certainly caused by the shortening and simplification of wedding ceremonies, and this is why *Lakodalmi tyúkverő* became a donation and booty collecting, village-walking custom which was still widely practiced, but had different names.

3. With respect of activity types it is noteworthy that the single common element of the custom set is the visiting of the inhabitants (or some of them) of the village which basically has two functions according to the occasion of the practice of the custom. Both taking the guests back and hitting the chickens appear in the custom set of weddings, but, in the custom set of carnivals, taking the guests back is not present. Hitting the chicken has disappeared from the practise in a lot of cases, and the function of the custom is only masquerading or fancy dressing and collecting donations. These latter activity types occur in several versions of the custom set (but not in all of them).
4. The geographical examination of historical linguistic data and custom descriptions of *Tyúkverő* from the 19th and 20th century shows the custom set of *Tyúkverő* as a Hungarian tradition appears in most parts of the Carpathian Basin. The area where the custom of *Tyúkverő* was spread from west to east started at the Austrian-Hungarian Language frontier and moved as far as the line of the river Tisza, bordered on the South by the river Dráva and on the north by the Slovakian-Hungarian language

frontier. Taking the guests back and hitting the chicken is also separated geographically, so the visit to the wedding guests had different aims in different parts of the Carpathian Basin. Taking the guests back is mainly characteristic in the Southern, South-Western parts of the *Dunántúl*, in *Északi Középhegység* [Northern Mountain Range] and in Bukovina, while hitting the chicken occurs primarily in the areas of *Alföld* [Plain] and *Kiasalföld* [Small Plain].

5. Taking European parallel customs into consideration *Lakodalmi tyúkverő* is not unique in the Carpathian Basin, it stands among the similar customs of surrounding western, eastern and southern Slavic people. Similar customs are known primarily from Slovakia, Ukraine, and Serbia.
6. The only memento of the custom set which has lived on without having been restored is *Mohai tikverőzés*. It belongs to the customs which are called *Tyúkverő* and which used to be aimed at grabbing chickens.

Mohai tikverőzés has lived on primarily thanks to the folkloric interest in it, but several other factors also played a role. Amusement and playing had defining roles in the survival, as these were functions that appealed to young people decades later as well, and appeared as a real need after the disappearance of fertility magic.

As Pesovár Ferenc discovered the still living custom for folklore and the public in the 1960's, he started the evolving of the need for representation in the local people. This need is expressed in the conscious keeping of the tradition today.

In the middle of the 20th century the special festive nature of Shrove Tuesday still dictated a behaviour which was valid for and expected from all the inhabitants of Moha. In the last half century the number of local participants has decreased, but at the same time a wider participation has developed which gained publicity for *Tikverőzés*. The presence of the public sphere provided a basis for the increase in the need for traditions at the end of the millennium, and it was interwoven with the emphasis on local identity in Moha. Inhabitants of Moha consciously try to keep the tradition alive, and their main purpose is to strengthen the local community - and by that the individual identity – and to proclaim the uniqueness and special nature of the village towards other people.

The festive nature of *Mohai tikverőzés* is expressed mostly in the following factors.

1. *Festive space and time*

An extraordinary use of space and time characterises the custom. Its special time is Shrove Tuesday, the last day of the Carnival, which, while the custom takes place, makes the everyday space, i.e. the streets and houses of the village special by the activities and rituals characteristic of the festival. The most intensive period of the festive time is the morning of Shrove Tuesday, when the local young people show the tradition of their village to their own community on one hand, and to interested people coming from outside on the other. While the morning is characterised by social representation and a high degree of publicity, the afternoon and evening is devoted to strengthen the community, relationships in the family and with friends. A szokást a hétköznaptól eltérő tér- és időhasználat jellemzi.

As far as the individual lifecycle is concerned *Tikverőzés* means a change of age group, and it expresses the new situation arising from it to both the individual and the community.

The special nature of space is formed to be central and peripheral space by the activities and happenings of the event and by the changing processes of the custom during history.

2. *The participants*

Both the viewers and the performers of *Mohai tikverőzés* constitute heterogeneous groups. Most of the figures constituting the group of performers can be easily categorized under mask type groups of dramatic folk customs. However, the masqueraders wearing rags and called clowns represent an individual, so far less examined group of mask types. The parallels of this mask type primarily suggest German, Slovenian and Transylvanian Saxon relations.

Among the participants, the groups of inner and outer “customers” can be strictly separated. The expression “customer” shows the 20th century tendency that requires a customer attitude towards experiences, too. The heterogeneity of the audience is meant by the local (inside) and outside visitors (customers) of the custom.

3. *Organization*

The criteria for becoming a performer, the arrangements for the custom and the official regulations of the last decades are defining moments of the festival.

4. *Props*

The props of *Mohai tikverőzés* can be interpreted as object codes expressing the festival. The masks and the costumes, the soot, the chicken and the egg are

symbolic objects of the custom. However, because of their multifunctional nature, their efficiency, their emotional and mood effect and their sociological function are also significant.

5. *The system and rhythm of the activity sequence*

Mohai tikverőzés, as a belief based activity system is abundant in ritual activities. The ritual activities (sooting, making the girl masqueraders pee, the march, eating, making noise) originate from the agrarian cult, *i.e.* they are aimed at the success of agricultural work.

Apart from dramatic elements the most important code expressing festivity is movement, *i.e.* the march through the whole village. Moreover, other kinetic forms (jumps, running, standing, sitting, lying) also characterise the custom, which are also the manifestations of the festival.

The use of sounds is primarily the festive noise making, as in *Mohai tikverőzés* there are no set words that would show the content of the festival.

Eating, as a code to express festivity is realized primarily in the quality and the increased quantity of meals, and its important element is catering, which expresses the presence of a festival in itself.

The documentation of *Mohai tikverőzés* as a living custom is an important task also in the future. In the last half a century the short descriptions of ethnographers, the reports of the press, and the photos and films taken of the custom provided the documentational background that made the examination of the content and form of the custom possible. The representational processes towards *Tikverőzés* caused the representation of this custom in museums, creating an opportunity to show *Mohai tikverőzés* as a timeless value

Mohai tikverőzés, which still takes place today, lives on as a folklorism-phenomenon in the 21st century. The usual features of folklorism-phenomena can be seen in its evolution, but it also has some peculiarities. In its new context it has retained its place, time and partly its original audience. Although touristic and professional interest in it has defined its survival and is going to define its directions of survival in the future, the custom cannot be alienated from the followers. Perhaps this is the reason why it has not become a controlled, choreographed programme that is under the influence of touristic interests yet. On the contrary, up until the latest time, it has remained a carnival finishing festival for a small community: the inhabitants of Moha.

IV. Publications

“70 éve született Pesovár Ferenc”. [Pesovár Ferenc was born 70 years ago] Ethnica, 2000. Volume 2. No. 3. pp. 77–78.

“A hagyomány ápolása és változása a mohai tikverőzésben.” [Changing of the tradition and looking after it] Ethnica, 2000. Volume 2. No. 3. pp. 118–120.

“A lakodalom terminológiai kérdéseire.” [To the terminological questions of wedding parties] Ethnica, 2004. Volume 6. No. 3. pp. 81–84.

“Új kérdések és új válaszok a szokáskutatásban.” Verebélyi Kincső: Szokásvilág. [New questions and answers in custom research. The world of Customs by Verebélyi Kincső] Tabula, 2005. 8. (2) pp. 345–351.

“A farsangi és lakodalmi tyúkverő földrajzi elterjedése a Kárpát-medencében.” [The geographical distribution of chicken hitting at weddings in the Carpathian Basin] Ethnographia, 2006. Volume 117. No. 2. pp. 105-136.

“Szempontok a mohai tikverőzés tér- és időstruktúráinak vizsgálatához.” [Aspects to examine the space and time structures of chicken hitting in Moha] Néprajzi Látóhatár, 2006. Volume 15. No. 1-2. pp.169–195.

“Egy szokás fotódokumentációi.” [The photo documentations of a custom] Ethnica, 2006. Volume 8. No. 3. pp. 83–85.

Popularizing writings

“A mohai tikverőzés – húsz éve Pesovár Ferenc nélkül.” [Chicken hitting in Moha. 20 years without Pesovár Ferenc] Fejér Megyei Hírlap (01/03/2003) p. 9.

“A mohai tikverőzés a harmadik évezredben.” [Chicken hitting in Moha in the third millenium] Fejér Megyei Hírlap, (24/02/2001). 5. 7.