

Thesis of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

Functioning of religious and denominational communities in local and regional fields

Peculiarities of the Ruthenian Greek Catholic communities of the decanal district of Sajópálfala

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Debrecen, 2022

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I. The aim of the dissertation, the delimitation of the topic

Ethnographic research of Greek Catholics in Hungary has shown outstanding results in recent decades. However, certain areas inhabited by Greek Catholics have been the focus of research to a lesser degree. My ethnographic-anthropological community research has led to a comprehensive study of such an area. The Greek Catholic inhabitants of the settlements belonging to the decanal district of Sajópálfala show a peculiar organization of the connection of ethnic and religious identity that rightly arouses the interest of ethnographers. For me, it is primarily important to understand and present that, in the case of local communities, we capture the historical process of change in ethnic and religious identity by focusing on the concepts of religion and identity. The effort to maintain ethnic and religious identity is still strongly felt in these local communities. The aim of the research is primarily to explore the Ruthenian Greek Catholic traditions, but also to present the local and regional ethnographic features of the area, thus shedding light on the functioning of local communities and their drivers. Due to the specific composition of the studied population, it is possible to explore tradition-creating events for the maintenance of local identity. I also analyze the form of identity created mainly from religious components in terms of ethnographic usability.

Focusing on the research of the Greek Catholic communities living in the decanal district, we also examine some local identity-forming factors through which the secrets of the depth of faith and the ways of identity expression among the Greek Catholics living here can be formulated. The dissertation examines the functioning of religious and denominational communities in local and regional stages. I studied the forms of identity and the Greek Catholic customs, as well as the typical way of life of the people living here in a well-defined area in the decanal district of Sajópálfala. The issue of identity and religion, as well as the functioning of communities, is not easily accessible to the researcher, therefore it is expedient to make it the subject of research in well-defined local spaces that can be examined with a unified system of criteria and methods.

The diversity and richness of the form of the local identity patterns hides a wide variety of variations, however, a certain homogenization specific to the study group is also revealed. This homogenization can also be seen as a unique feature of the

Greek Catholic customs of the area, but the diverse cultural environment has developed special forms of coexistence in the area. In settlements with mixed religious denominations, there is a slight segregation between the individual denominations, which may be more pronounced in certain periods. The detailed study of these dualities is an important task of the dissertation. We can witness a loss of ethnic identity, while at the same time finding an unbroken religious identity that is still an integral part of local Greek Catholic culture.

The topic of the research is the complex study of the traditions and identity of the Greek Catholic Ruthenian communities in the decanal district of Sajópálfala. The study focuses on the central areas, mainly the center, Sajópálfala, whereas relatively homogeneous Greek Catholic Ruthenian customs can be found in this area and to this day, although in a minority, people with Ruthenian origins live in an array.

In the dissertation I aimed to answer the following questions: What is the role of the Greek Catholic Church in building identity and creating new communities? What strategies does the church use in order to survive the Greek Catholic community? Why are the eastern elements rebuilt in these partly Greek Catholic settlements? Why did unique customs remain in the settlements? What traditions have survived? What kind of relationship system connects the settlements? How do local communities work? How does identity consciousness work among community members? In what decisions does marriage and kinship affect the individual? What is the role of the Greek Catholic Church in the construction of identity and what is the role of the abolition of institutions in the degradation of this identity? How does the community respond to all this?

The following settlements belong to the decanal district of Sajópálfala, within which the research was carried out: Arnót, Berzék, Eger (organizing pastoral care), Gyöngyös (organizing pastoral care) Emőd (organizing pastoral care), Felsőzsolca, Hejőkeresztúr, Mályi, Sajópálfala, Sajópetri, Sajóvamos, Szirmabesenyő, the study only touches filial church and organizing clergy. The central area with the center of Sajópálfala is relatively homogeneous and can be studied well, the emphasis on this area and the main focus on the center is the main part of the dissertation. On the one hand, the assimilated indigenous Greek Catholic Ruthenians can be found in the decanal district of Sajópálfala although in most settlements it is now a minority, on the other hand, the settlements operate along the organizing principles of the Greek

Catholic religion, such as the religious community of Hejőkeresztúr, Sajópálfala or Sajópetri. These settlements were able to maintain the dominance of Greek Catholics through the large Roma population that had become Greek Catholic. Greek Catholicism, which moved from Cserehát, is also present in the decanal district, which has become a separate part of the settlements in a community of other denominations (Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Calvinist). The Greek Catholicism that came here were forged and formed from several settlements, albeit in a minority, but had a dominant role in the denominational division and in the life of the settlements. The formation of new communities can also be observed in the decanal district. Tiszaújváros, Arnót and Mályi have only recently become a parish, and the organizing clergy are well on their way in that direction. Everywhere, but especially in the old communities with a long history, a decrease in the number of Greek Catholics can be observed due to a high degree of emigration and depopulation.

The research is mainly focused on the core area of the decanal district, to which the following settlements belong: Sajópálfala, Sajóvamos, Arnót, Felsőzsolca, Sajópetri, Szirmabesenyő, Hejőkeresztúr. The customs in this area seem homogeneous and the way of life of the people of Greek Catholic Ruthenian origin is also unique and closely connected with the center, Sajópálfala.

The ethnographic-anthropological analysis begins with a presentation of the history of the Ruthenians and the Greek Catholic communities, with the aim of acquainting them with the context of history. Then, I turn to a systematic analysis of the relationship between ethnic identity and religion, and to the description of the local customs and lifestyle strategies.

I examine the elements of the identity of the local population involved in the study as well as the characteristics of the settlements in a more detailed study, touching on both the aspects of the past and the present. One of the marked features of today's processes is the revival of the oriental elements, followed by a decrease in their intensity and their constant change. These oriental influences are present differently in each community and do not have the same impact on those living in local communities. The detailed analysis of these is also a particularly important task of the dissertation, as it can reflect the continuous change of religious life.

Since we consider the Greek Catholicism living in the decanal district of Sajópálfala as a community, it was important in the research to study the community identity as a characteristic of the decanal district in detail. The results of the research suggest that the speed of change and modernization is visibly having an impact on the daily life of the community, the change in its world of customs and identity. In the case of the Greek Catholics living in the decanal district of Sajópálfala, due to the early linguistic-cultural assimilation, ethnic identity is present only in a specific way through the preservation and awareness of the consciousness of origin, they are bound to the Ruthenian culture itself, exclusively by the Greek Catholic religious identity associated with it. In a sense, this phenomenon shows differences from other Hungarian Greek Catholic communities. The religious customs of the Greek Catholic communities, which have unique characteristics and are closed, appear to be homogeneous in the decanal district, thanks to the centuries-old strong influence of Sajópálfala in the center area. An important question is to clarify the impact of this inter-village relationship on religious life and how this can be interpreted in a unified framework of study. In my view, the uniform worldview of the Greek Catholic population can provide this research a framework for exploring and interpreting the problem. It is important to examine the unique customs of the area, as well as the question of why the worldview of the Greek Catholic population in these settlements is so homogeneous and uniform.

II. Applied sources and methods

The interrelationships of local communities, the decisive influence of the social environment on the events of the last three hundred years, and the demonstration of the emphatic role of ethnic diversity are all essential for understanding the processes. Therefore, my research focused on the exploration of historical processes (diachronic) and present relations (synchronous) at the same time.

To analyze the present situation, we need to know all aspects of the local history of the Greek Catholic community that allow us to form a picture relevant to the research. Due to the complexity of the subject of the research, it is difficult to

approach the examined entity. In order for the research to be effective, I associated the ethnographic approach with the methodological procedures of the co-sciences. Primarily, I used the methodological help of historical science and cultural anthropology, through which I can get a comprehensive picture of today's conditions. An interdisciplinary approach is essential for mapping the relationship between religion and identity. The study was conducted with participatory observation as well as semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. I did not use a guideline interview due to the following methodological considerations. In the case of this interview technique, there is a danger that due to the preliminary external structure we cannot get heuristic results, the text passages produced in this way are only suitable for illustrating and not proving our preliminary assumptions. I selected my interviewees from those who live within the central area of the decanal district of Sajópálfala. During the interviews, 24 people were interviewed.

When selecting the interviewees, although I could not strive for full representativeness, I made sure that all ages were represented among the chosen people, and I also took into account the denominational distribution. Members of the two dominant denominations, the Greek and Roman Catholic Churches, are also represented among the respondents, I also included Calvinist and those with Lutheran roots in the study. There are also those surveyed who do not practice their religion. I considered it important to place interview excerpts in my work, which I also analyze in detail.

In the course of my research, I always kept in mind the fact that the subjects of the researched culture are in an understanding way of life with themselves. The most authentic representative of a culture is the person living in the culture who, during the interview, composes a text about the culture within the framework of his or her own interpretation. The researcher interprets this text with a kind of duplication, in which the researcher's interpretation is already included, thus creating a kind of "mixture" text that tries to give an authentic picture of the processes.

The age distribution of the interviewees consciously shows an uneven distribution. The proportion of the elderly is overrepresented in the sample. There are several 85-year-olds among the respondents, they have helped the most in understanding nowadays' processes, because they have lived in pre-socialist times and, due to their age, have a good view of the processes both in the past and in the present.

They are members of this elderly generation who even speak a language called “tót” by the locals. Their life experience and knowledge provide the researcher with inevitable information. Some of the interviewees have knowledge of several settlements in the decanal district through their marital and kinship relationships. One of the interviewees is from Sajóvámos, who went to Arnót to get married, but his mother is from Sajópálfala. Therefore, he also knows three local communities from within. His involvement was necessary in order to be able to examine the relations of the settlements with other settlements as well. In the course of my research, I also studied the registers available in the parishes, which were essential for the research. Registry research has been of great help in the exploration of surnames and family histories, but most emphatically, the system of marital relationships has facilitated the reconstruction of the process of historical change in endogamous and exogamous marital strategies. Sources and events in memory do not always overlap, so in-depth examination is almost always essential, and it takes a great deal of help to consider the issues of social memory and categorization for the sake of clear vision.

One of the basic conditions for the successful feasibility of the research was the systematic inventory of the available literature. Since it is a question of examining a complex range of problems, it was necessary to find out about several disciplines when searching for the background of the literature. Primarily, the results of ethnography are those that are crucial for the exploration and analysis of the examined issue. For the history of Greek Catholics, the historical presentation of its local conditions is also a key dimension of the application of the literature. A separate unit is the visual examination of the scientific results presenting the local conditions, however, this does not show a significant scientific approach due to the lack of research in the field.

During the compilation of the literature background, the research results came to the forefront of my interest on several levels. Getting to know the main findings of religious ethnographic research was unavoidable because of the processability and interpretability of the topic. This is how the various components of folk religiosity, folk customs, land use, pilgrimage, etc. were placed. processing works. These are not exclusively approaches to the Greek Catholic denomination.

International research is very extensive both for Ruthenians in Eastern Europe and for Greek Catholics living in the area. Especially after the collapse of the communist system, research became an increasingly wide range of issues. In my dissertation I will focus only on the defining works of the international literature, primarily highlighting those that can be considered relevant to my own research. When counting the research results, it is very difficult to find the marked trends from which the diversity, methodological and theoretical diversity of the research directions emerges. After the communist system in Eastern Europe either eliminated or marginalized the activities of the Greek Catholic churches, scientific research in the post-1990 period is understandably dominated by this issue. For this reason, a significant number of independent books and comprehensive studies are published, which focus on the situation of the Greek Catholic Church in different regions, the history of its persecution, and then the process of revival following the change of regime. In addition to historical approaches, reference should also be made to works that focus on the relationship between national identity and the Greek Catholic religion, so these studies examine the Greek, Ruthenian, Polish, Slovak, and Romanian Greek Catholic communities in the context of national discourse.

Ethnographic research on Greek Catholics in Hungary has shown significant results in recent decades. In presenting this, I briefly refer to the main thematic units that are decisive in ethnographic studies, but highlighting the local aspects of the research also seems important. One striking research trend is a comprehensive ethnographic study of local communities. There are studies that seek to uncover the Greek Catholic traditions of a wider area. There has also been considerable research on several thematic units of Greek Catholic life. Festive customs, sacraments, Lent and Easter traditions, Greek Catholic identity, identity change, revival of Eastern Christian traditions, examination of religious-ethical tensions. Typical research directions are the research of the ethnic landscape, the ethnic space, the research of the sacred landscape.

III. Thesis-like listing of results

The Ruthenian population of the decanal district of Sajópálfala is unanimously aware that their ancestors are not of Hungarian origin, but their origins are obscured, so they do not feel completely Ruthenian, they are uncertain, and the ancestral language is also referred to as 'tót'. It is difficult for them to classify the language version of the former Sajópálfalaian, which they no longer speak, they think that their language is neither Ruthenian nor Slovakian. In judging the question, one must also take into account the fact that from the end of the 19th century, Slavic-speaking ethnic groups from the north in the Hungarian-speaking area were usually given the collective name Tót. This is why belonging to a Roman Catholic; Lutheran or Greek Catholic denomination can be a decisive factor in determining ethnicity. We can state that the Greek Catholics living in the decanal district are of Ruthenian descent, but this is no longer relevant in social reminiscence. Many, however, retained their identities, but almost exclusively through religion. Keeping the Greek Catholic traditions still palely gives faint of the Ruthenian identity, although this is often washed away by the tót. Interviews conducted during the research reveal that the ethnic identification of the people living here is uncertain. Sometimes they call their ancestors, and themselves, Ruthenians, sometimes tót. They hardly identify with the Ruthenian self-consciousness, and everyone unequivocally declares themselves Hungarian, but their Greek Catholic religious identity is solid.

The social knowledge that exists about the Ruthenians is mostly learned back, their customs are ancient, although they have changed a lot lately. In the villages, traditions of Ruthenian origin can be found among Greek Catholics. Faith is a strong link between communities and sub-communities. Some people share a common identity. It can also be seen that Greek Catholicism became a minority in the former Greek Catholic settlements with a long history (Hejőkeresztúr, Sajópálfala), but through their integration, many of the Roman Catholic believers took over the customary world of the Greek Catholics. Although this tendency seems to stop in Sajópálfala. Although there are fewer Greek Catholics, the Romans make up for the deficit to a lesser extent.

The religious conflicts of previous decades seem to be ending everywhere. But it always depends on the situation, it depends on the personality and orientation of the given priest. On the other hand, it can be seen that the processes of shifting to the east are received by the population with mixed emotions. This seems to be a source of more conflict in the near future.

People in a state of temporary confusion don't know what to do, how to do and their usual rhythm has been upset. Therefore, the attendance of the Greek Catholic liturgy in Sajópálfala shows a decreasing trend. In the center of the decanal district, the issue of identification with Ruthenians and the shift to the east together cause insecurity among the inhabitants of the settlement. Therefore, by 2020, Greek Catholicism had noticeably lost ground in Sajópálfala and everywhere in the decanal district. It is difficult to convince people of Ruthenian descent to identify with Ruthenian self-awareness. In Sajópálfala, 41 people currently claim to be Ruthenians in addition to Hungarian. Therefore, the name of Greek Catholics of Ruthenian descent living in the decanal district seemed the most appropriate in the study. How is Ruthenian self-awareness realized? It also depends in part on education. The duality of social memory and learning is felt in the words of the interviewees. The elements of identity forged from these give the individual its current identity, which is rooted in continuity and, together with today's influences, carries with it all the changes of the present and past decades, expanding with the learned elements in a different new quality. This could also be called an identity crisis, but religion creates order in the chaos and controls the everyday life of the community, it has become a dominant factor in religious identity in the identity of locals.

Ruthenian identity is not only ethnically available in the practice of religious traditions among the population. These church traditions, on the other hand, are changing and old practices are changing. The community is so strong in these settlements, because kinship relationships are functional, the Greek Catholic communities and sub-communities of the villages close together in crisis situations. Greek Catholics of Ruthenian descent could remain closed communities because kinship and religion have a retaining power and make communities and sub-communities closed and unique. Religious endogamy kept the settlements as a

homogeneous community, where the Greek Catholic religious identity became so strong that they could integrate people of other religions and immigrants.

The retaining power of local identity, religion and kinship together curbs the phenomenon of emigration. Currently, this retaining force is exclusively the Greek Catholic religion. Sajópálfala is a place of pilgrimage with a monastery, a church, a spiritual house and a house of pilgrimage. Sajópálfala has always functioned as a Greek Catholic center in the area. It functions as a kind of sacred landscape, so the relationship between religiosity and the Greco-Catholic people can also be recognized in the sacred landscape.

It has already been recognized, but unfortunately they cannot implement it yet, and its significance could be enormous, if the community also benefited from the Ruthenian origin and favorable conditions. The farewell of Csíksomlyó or the example of Medugorje could be a model for them. The leaders of the settlement and the Ruthenian municipality are not strong enough to take advantage of these opportunities. Maintaining and making known religious identity is the merit of the Greek Catholic Church alone. Although with the introduction of the Ruthenian farewell, the Ruthenian municipality is trying to gain ground with the help of the church, but the local population has not identified with this endeavor. Although they are aware of their foreign origins, Greek Catholic religious identity does not include Ruthenian self-awareness. Yet these events could ensure the well-being of the community, e.g. selling local products to pilgrims and introducing Ruthenian folk art and folklore traditions. It would be important to put the country house in full order. The municipality bought a colorful mirror house in the central part of the village ten years ago, but it has not fulfilled its function since then.

Religious identity exists in the settlements as part of the local culture, but no new kind of Ruthenian Greek Catholic identity is emerging because people do not identify with it. In the religious field, teaching-back is in progress, but the population considers the Eastern elements to be too strict, preferring the previously established practices closer to the looser global capitalist world to the new. Thus, only the world of customs realized in the past of the settlements is the guiding principle in the development of people's identity. What is "new" is rejected.

Ruthenian identity also means something for the few of them, just by learning back. Everyone declares themselves to be Hungarian in every settlement, and the

Ruthenian or Roma identity appears next to it. This cohesion, which is characteristic only of Greek Catholic communities, maintains a mechanical solidarity in both the individual and global capitalist worlds, which, together with the identity realized through religion, can rightly be called a unique, settlement-specific micro-identity, a unique phenomenon. This makes the Greek Catholics of Ruthenian origin living in the settlements different from their surroundings. Anyone who professes to be a Greek Catholic of Ruthenian descent in the decanal district of Sajópálfala and keeps customs and traditions shares this identity with the community. The Greek Catholic population of Sajópálfala and the settlements of the decanal district form an ethnic community. In the identity of local Greek Catholics, the religious component is decisive, which is related to the consciousness of different origins. After the language of the settled Ruthenians is now completely lost, the local people's sense of national belonging identifies themselves as Hungarians in the majority of the population. In the decanal district of Sajópálfala, the Ruthenian Greek Catholic identity that spans the settlements is still decisive and forges the people living in the area into a community. Acculturation has had a significant impact on the communities living here. Settled in the settlements of the decanal district of Sajópálfala, the Ruthenian population came into contact with the Hungarians living here through cultural contacts, from whom they gradually adopted different values, customs, behavioral norms, language elements, handicraft and agricultural techniques, institutions and mentalities and incorporated them into their own culture. This did not mean full merger at the time, but eventually led to assimilation.

It can be observed that in the settlements inhabited by former Ruthenians, where Greek Catholicism is now a minority, the organizing principles of life still appear in everyday life in connection with the Greek Catholic religion. The presence of strongly radiant sacred spaces affects all denominations in these settlements. It can also be seen that the strategy of the Greek Catholic churches increasingly includes the teaching-back of Eastern elements to communities. I believe that a new kind of Ruthenian Greek Catholic identity is emerging, which is nourished by the customs of the past and appears to be intertwined with the taught elements. This trend seems to be halting, mostly by the end of the decade.

Among the core settlements of the decanal district, denominational endogamy had a strong effect, and extended to more remote areas of the decanal district. Denominational endogamy conserved traditions and maintained a system of marital and kinship relations among Greek Catholics.

IV. List of Publications related to the dissertation

Simárszki Ádám

2016 Újjáéledő görögkatolikus ruszin identitás egy lokális közösségben: Miért maradt meg zárt közösségként Sajópálfala? *Szellem és Tudomány* 7. évf. 1-2. szám, 85–137.

2020 Endogámia és exogámia kettősége, mint a legfőbb görögkatolikus identitást megtartó erő a sajópálfalai esperesi kerület központi területén. *Néprajzi Látóhatár*, 29. évfolyam 1–2. szám 1–17.

2021 *Ruszinok Sajópálfalán*. Miskolc: Sajópálfala Ruszin Nemzetiségi Önkormányzata 100 oldal

2021 Újjáéledő ruszin görögkatolikus identitás egy lokális közösségben, In: Kotics József–Lajos Veronika–Kántor Barbara (Szerk.) *Változás és változtatás: Kihívások és válaszok interdiszciplináris megközelítésben*. Miskolc: Kulturális és Vizuális Antropológiai Tanszék Könyvei 1–14. (megjelenésre elfogadva)

2022 A görög katolikus vallás, mint a ruszin etnikus identitás kifejezője. Egy lokális közösség példája. *Néprajzi Látóhatár*. (megjelenésre elfogadva)

V. Conference Presentations on the topic of the dissertation

2020 "*A vallásosság keleti elemeinek újjáélesztése egy görögkatolikus közösségben*" címmel tudományos előadás tartása a Változás és változtatás: kihívások és válaszok interdiszciplináris megközelítésben. III. Ilyés Zoltán emlékkonferencián. Miskolci Egyetem 2020. november 20.

2021 „*A görög katolikus vallás, mint a ruszin etnikus identitás kifejezője. Egy lokális közösség példája*” címmel tudományos előadás tartása a „Hagyomány és örökségésítés. Ruszin nemzeti tradíciók” című nemzetközi konferencián. Debrecen 2021. november 20.



Registry number: DEENK/406/2022.PL
Subject: PhD Publication List

Candidate: Ádám Simárszki
Doctoral School: Doctoral School of History and Ethnology
MTMT ID: 10075801

List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian books (1)

1. **Simárszki, Á.**: Ruszinok Sajópálfalán. Sajópálfala Ruszin Nemzetiségi Önkormányzata, Miskolc, 100 p., 2021. ISBN: 9786150107295

Hungarian book chapters (1)

2. **Simárszki, Á.**: A görög katolikus vallás, mint a ruszin etnikus identitás kifejezője: Egy lokális közösség példáján.
In: Ruszin nemzeti tradíciók a Kárpát-medencében, -, [közlésre elfogadva], 1-10, 2022.

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (2)

3. **Simárszki, Á.**: Endogámia és exogámia kettősége, mint a legfőbb görögkatolikus identitást megtartó erő a sajópálfalai esperesi kerület központi területén.
Népr. Látóhatár. 29 (1-2), 135-153, 2020. ISSN: 1215-8097.
4. **Simárszki, Á.**: Újjáéledő görögkatolikus ruszin identitás egy lokális közösségben.
Szellem és Tudomány. 7 (1-2), 85-137, 2016. ISSN: 2062-204X.

Hungarian conference proceedings (1)

5. **Simárszki, Á.**: A vallásosság keleti elemeinek újjáélesztése egy görögkatolikus közösségben.
In: Változás és változtatás: Kihívások és válaszok interdiszciplináris megközelítésben, -, [közlésre elfogadva], 1-11, 2022, (A Kulturális és Vizuális Antropológiai Tanszék Könyvei ; 14)

The Candidate's publication data submitted to the iDEa Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of the Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) database.



30 August, 2022