

**Theses of doctoral dissertation (PhD)**

**Hungarian Vocal Folk Music Repertoire,  
Its Stratification and Place in the Hajdúság Region in the Context  
of 20th Century Society**

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# **1. Goals of the Dissertation and Framing the Subject**

By studying various publications summarizing the folk music tradition of the Hajdúság region we may receive a lucid and clear-cut picture. According to these works there are two characteristically different groups of folk songs: old-style shepherd songs and new-style folk songs. We may just as well accept this division however this taxonomy leads to many questions.

How is it possible that an entire small region is characterized by melodies sung by shepherds who belong to one single class making up only 10-14% of the local population? Have so-called shepherd songs appeared as part of the musical culture of shepherds or have they been used by other social classes as well? How can we define the genre of the shepherd song? Is it only their text that differentiate them from other sub-genres or is it their musical character that is also unique? Cannot we find other examples of our old-style folk songs sung by members of other social classes in the Hajdúság region?

The social composition of the Hajdúság region, similarly to the entire area where Hungarian language is spoken, is complex, and obviously we cannot simplify its musical culture either. Regarding the entire area of Hungarian language territory there are more shepherds living in the Hajdúság region, their number and ratio is higher in the population however they do not at all count as the majority. The isolated living style of the shepherds also questions the presumption that their songs exercised such an overwhelming influence on the majority and everything else just fell into oblivion. It is much more likely that the interest of researchers and collectors was directed towards this – for the outsider – exotic, archaic, special musical tradition, meaning that when recording the first shepherd songs, collectors did not really seek out other types of songs systematically, instead their attention was turned towards variants in the shepherd tradition.

There is a presumption in the center of the current research: the folk melody repertoire of the Hajdúság region is much more varied than it is presented in the reference literature introducing this area. This presumption gives way to further thoughts: most likely old-style folk songs were not represented only by one single genre, i.e. the shepherd songs. Supposedly, a significant part of the melodies that carry features of the archaic musical tradition (for example studying thoroughly the Betlehem games performed around Christmas time, or the wedding rituals and customs) can be revealed by studying the customs. We may read the statement in monographic works introducing Hungarian folk music that the musical folklore of the Hajdúság region is characterized by shepherd songs. According to my presupposition shepherd songs

were not only spread among the shepherds but among other social classes as well (such as peasants and merchants).

Among certain social classes in the Hajdúság region those socio-cultural factors might have been still at work during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that nourished the survival and variations of a traditional musical culture. Contemporary research taking place when collecting and mapping the entire repertoire of one individual is suitable for adding new hues to the outcomes of 20<sup>th</sup> century research. It is also likely that the melody repertoire of the Hajdúság region, the image formed on the basis of reference works and spread in the public mind have been also influenced by external factors such as the Romanticism of the Flatlands, movements organized around folk music, television and other media. In my dissertation my aim is to reveal the values of the Hajdúság region and to sketch the true musical image of the region.

Considering geographical, economic and social ethnographic aspects I have marked my research area within the previous borders of the Hajdú county. The historical framework of the research spans from the first folklore collections in the Hajdúság region from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hajdúsámson, 1906, collector: Béla Bartók), to the formation of the first Peacock Circles (singing groups organized within the context of public education from the mid 1970's onwards) since during these times we can suppose the least external influence – compared to later decades to come – on the melody repertoire. In my dissertation I will analyze the Hungarian repertoire of the Hajdúság region, therefore neither the musical tradition of the minority groups living in the Hajdúság region, nor the instrumental music of the region will be primary subjects in my research.

## **2. Outlining the Applied Methodologies**

During my research I approached the topic from various aspects and applying various methodologies has been developed to result in a triangular application. The methodologies of my research are mostly and basically are of a qualitative character.

*Document analysis* is one of the most basic method in research and it accompanied the whole process of my work. In the beginning of my research, besides the reference works on folklore and folk music that could be linked to my research topic, I specifically studied volumes relating to the Hajdúság region. Following this work phase I organized and analyzed documents found at institutional or private archives (sound recordings, reports, other written documents, films) as well as the online folk music data of the Hajdúság. Simultaneously I worked with and

analyzed freshly collected data and the related set of information. Working with this material meant the organization and ordering of the material but also transcribing, transforming them onto sheets.

The other basic method my research was *observation*. My assumption connected to my subject has been formed already during the participant observations. In connection to my various professional roles (folk singer, folk music performer, folk music teacher) I was fortunate enough to observe the appearance of folk songs from the Hajdúság region at revival or traditionkeeping events. During the research period my assumptions have turned into hypotheses through newer and newer observations. I conducted fieldwork by being in several roles of the participant observer (full participant, observer participant, participant observer, full observer).

During the research process I have *conducted several interviews*, both structured ones and mixed types. The majority of the interviewees were chosen from the group of tradition keeping singers and the aim was to reveal their folk music repertoire. Besides the recording of the melodies I studied information related to folk songs, and in several cases I have conducted a full interview on the life of the singer. In some situations during the collection, fieldwork took place with the involvement of a focus group: when we interviewed two (or more) tradition keeping singers one time apart from the individual variations we could observe the laws of joint group singing. In a few interviews I asked questions about the life and folk music collection work of János Papp.

When analyzing folklore phenomena the individual has a major role today as well as the peculiar performance features and the conscious individual creative processes. The foundations of the *performer centered approach* are to be rooted in folk narrative research, this methodology is mainly connected to two researchers, Gyula Ortutay and Linda Dégh. The method has well-known followers among folk music researchers however, we cannot put our fingers to any specific examples known from the Hajdúság region. I made up this shortfall in my fieldwork, i.e. I sought out elderly tradition keeping singer and musician masters living in the territory of the Hajdúság region, collected their melody repertoire and wrote up the recorded melodies I collected during my folk music fieldwork (this included organization, analysis and notation).

The *comparative method* in Hungarian folk music research was first applied by Béla Bartók when he studied the folk music of Hungarian and neighboring nations, and Zoltán Kodály in his comparative analysis on the folk music of those people who are considered to be the relatives of Hungarians. This methodology highlights the differences and similarities in the music of various people and we can apply it for approaching the specific features of small

regions as well. We can only highlight the unique features of the melody repertoire of the Hajdúság when comparing it with the repertoire of other small regions. As one phase in the *document analysis* I created comprehensive charts on both the publications and archival data – these charts show the melody types already recorded in this small region, just as well as their proportion. These charts and their thorough analysis provide a solid base to the comparison of published data about the folk music of neighboring regions.

Summarizing all of the above I can say that my research considered archival sources and they were also completed by the fieldwork I carried out as I consider research and collection of recent material equally important. During the local fieldwork I also had the opportunity to clarify those questions that had emerged during the analysis of the primary research period (1906-1973).

### **3. List of outcomes in the thesis**

1. It is clear from the review of the available research history that compared to other small regions we meet quite a small number of songs from the Hajdúság region in comprehensive works used on the most regular basis by applied folk music science – performers of the folk movement and teachers of folk music. Local publications and volumes considering only the folk music of this region greatly support the formation of a realistic picture.

The main perspective when giving a concise analysis the folk songs is grouping songs by their main structural features. Based on these features three larger units can be delineated: the first unit is composed of melodies having a free structure, as well as folk songs showing structural similarities; the second group is characterized by strophic structures, divided into two large subgroups, the old and new style songs. Within these large groups we can list and introduce the main types of groups and folk songs. As part of the dissertation I included a chart compiling the most important musical features of the vocal melodies of the Hajdúság region published previously (*Appendix III. List of Published Folk Songs in the Hajdúság Region*)

2. In order to dive deep into my research topic I started a multi-directional research. One direction was the summary and organization of folk music collections compiled of the Hajdúság in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The number of melodies preserved in museums and folk music archives not yet published are significant. Part of the melodies recorded during the 20-21<sup>st</sup> century can be accessed in online data bases however, no analysis or arrangement work has been taken place so far. During my research I have organized this pile of documents then I created a regional

folk music data base (*Appendix IV. Folk Music Data Base for the Hajdúság Region*). This data base makes up an important basis of my further research, besides it may become a source for other scientific works as well.

3. When analyzing the data one researcher stands out among all others who have been committed to scrutinize the folk tradition of the Hajdúság region, János Papp. An additional outcome of my research was the focus on the regional work carried out systematically by this folk music collector. Collections by János Papp are unique in both their quantity and in their regional character and they are suitable for introducing the folk song melody types of the Hajdúság region.

4. The research conducted by János Papp in the Hajdúság region were done between 1961 and 1976. The János Papp legacy contains 771 recordings and notes from altogether 33 different settlements, outskirts or individual farms. The list of his collections can be found in *Appendix V. (List of folk songs from the Hajdúság region collected by János Papp)* which also includes the musical analysis of these melodies.

5. When analyzing the Hajdúság melodies found in the János Papp legacy one can see that the repertoire of this small region is rather varied, it spans various genres. In the regional folklore we find shepherd and “betyár” songs, prisoner songs, ballads; in the group of melodies connected to the turning points of human life and phases we find folk plays, “pócirka” (folk custom using masks) melodies sung in the weaving rooms, coupling games, soldier songs, wedding songs, lamenting and mourning songs. Connected to celebrations mainly the songs around Christmas celebrations, the Pentecost songs; among the melodies sung in relation to work we find harvest songs, summary songs as well as melodies sung by merchants and mongers. Among the musical features it must be underlined that we may meet archaic and rhythmic features in the Hajdúság that characterize the dialect of the Transdanubian folk music; it is important to note that hat several different types of rhythmical solutions of the same melody also show up.

6. During the analysis of folk songs it turned out that melodies typically known as shepherd songs can also be accompanied by lyrics ignoring the topics of shepherd life. When analyzing the melody sets of the archives and recent collections it became clear that the definition of shepherd songs is closely connected to its lyrics in the mind of the folk. Parlando shepherd songs are connected to characteristic melody types, and they typically appear with shepherd or “betyár” lyrics in the folk tradition, however this coupling of the melody and the lyrics is not exclusive. There is no necessary mention in the texts of tempo giusto pig shepherd melodies to shepherd life.

7. During my recent folk music collection work I looked for elderly singers in the Hajdúság region whose melody repertoires have been formed by traditional folk culture. Most of their melodies were learnt outside any institutional framework. I launched a research work that may become the basis for further individual folk analysis – a missing research in the region. Among the data providers we find representatives of all types of social groups, therefore I had the possibility to study the recent folk music repertoire of the shepherd society (János Németi, the elder, born in 1938, János Németi, the younger, born in 1964, Imre ‘Csinos’ Molnár, born in 1951), the peasant society (Mária Rác Barna Imréné, born in 1928), Sándor Rác, born in 1929) and the craftsmen and merchant groups (János Erdei, born in 1937).

In the Hajdúság region old style melodies also appear among the non-shepherd groups whose local variants nicely present that an autochthon musical education was alive here – with the help of their features the style and character of Hungarian folk music repertoire of the peasantry. Those documents I found during my research justify the hypothesis and when listing their data I could see that non-shepherd performers also have a peculiar and characteristic musical education of their own that can be separated from the forms of widely spread new style folk songs. As it was presumed during the research process I could prove that in the Hajdúság region not only shepherds but the peasantry of the region also had their own characteristic musical culture; besides several indications are present to justify that the melody repertoires of different social groups differ significantly from each other. Therefore, those statements according to which the Hajdúság region is characterized by shepherd songs have not been confirmed by my research. The outcome of my research shows that shepherd songs tend to characterize the repertoire of the Hajdúság shepherds but even there they are not exclusive. When outlining the true picture of the traditional culture of the Hajdúság region we may not ignore the culture of the peasantry and craftsmen when considering the musical features. Craftsmen and merchants did not necessarily make up such closed or specific communities than that of the peasantry and shepherds and accordingly it seems that their folk music repertoires do not carry distinctive features either.

8. An additional outcome of the work in collecting folk music melodies is that I could also record instrumental melodies apart from recording vocal performances. As a resumption and perspectival aim of my research when continuing the repertoire analysis is the possible recording of the concise folk music melody repertoire of tradition keeping singers and musicians. During the folk music collection fieldwork conducted among the tradition keeping musicians it is possible to record data unprecedented in the region.

9. In some folk songs documented in this small region we can find traces of the tendency to use the pentatonic character. This pentatonizing tendency is the manifestation of organic inclusion, these melodies serve as nice examples of how melodies are reshaped in the light of a more archaic musical taste. Considering all of the above I can say that despite the more urban environment a strong traditional musical culture was alive in the Hajdúság region. The same statement is supported by the living tradition of folk customs, the custom of Betlehem games, chanting or “staring” (procession of the three kings around either Christmas time, new year or epiphany).

10. During the analysis of the research data it was justified that songs from the Hajdúság region are connected to the traditional musical culture of the surrounding regions in several respects. Closer ties can be revealed to neighboring small regions (Nyírség, Szatmár, Nagykunság, Bihar) but both among old and new style melody types we can find connections to the western and eastern territories, further regions to specific items of the Hajdúság song repertoire. The folk music from the Hajdúság is organically fitted into the Hungarian folk music environment, however its specific features are also manifest. Within the large units of Hungarian folk music specific micro-regional or small regional specificities can be grasped in as much as local variants can be found (even in tiny moves). These small differences add up in a well-established unity, an outcome that after all shows the musical character of the individual small regions. It can be also said of the Hajdúság region that the musical character of the small region is not characterized by local melody types or genres but by documented characteristic musical or performative features, variants and the sum of the small differences in the versions that have been collected at the neighboring small regions.

11. Following the detailed folk music analysis I studied those phenomena that might have been influencing views on the Hajdúság region and the cultural processes taking place in this small region. The ratio of ethnic groups registered in the Hajdúság are very little but most likely the culture of different ethnicities did exercise some influence on each other. This cultural interference motivates a short summary in this regard. Among the ethnicities living in the Hajdúság region we can find interferences in their folk music due to the cohabitation of Gypsies as well as the German groups from Balmazújváros.

12. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards cultural influences that had an impact on the ever-present national identity directed national and international interest to the Hortobágy puszta region and it also reinforced the importance of the shepherd culture among local inhabitants. Most likely the so-called Romaniticism of the Puszta had been influencing the identity of the people living in the Great Plain in Hungary and it boosted the interest in shepherd culture.



Elements related to the life of shepherds penetrated into the lives of other social groups as well and it might have influenced their folk music repertoire. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century having an effect on traditional culture another strong influence arrived from the *Gyöngyösbokréta* movement due to which several customs and songs were preserved – although in a fixed form – that would have been fallen into oblivion without the activity of the movement.

We should not ignore the role of the media either. The shows in radio channels aired country-wide made it possible that composed urban tunes resembling folk songs could be easily integrated into the musical repertoire of the cities and villages. Besides the shows wanting to educate the public, transmitting authentic tradition through the channels of the Hungarian television I would point out the folk music and folkdance contests: the *Fly Peacock* and the *International Golden Peacock Song Contest*, later renamed and becoming a show called *Főlszállott a páva* (The Peacock Flying Upwards). Today the greatest influence is exercised by the dance house movement. The *dance house movement* is a Hungarian folk art movement with a complex approach that started to be spread in the 1970's from Budapest in areas where Hungarian language is spoken. Along with the dissolution of traditional cultural frames transmitting cultural values have been moved onto new lands. Those taking part in the *dance house movement*, amateur and professional musicians, singers and dancers who could only learn the different elements and laws of the traditional culture in the beginning, later the institutional frameworks of teaching folk music and folk dance were set up in all levels, in the elementary, middle and higher education.

13. A new function is assigned to the activity of singing within the framework of public and cultural education. Teachers and leaders have greater responsibility as they become the primary transmitters of cultural values. When adapting the model set up by Dan Lundberg about the roles taken by participants in custom activities (doers, knowers, makers) to the context of cultural education I can say that I have tasks undertaken in all three roles when I reformulate and restore the folk song melody repertoire of the Hajdúság region – as a doer (I am a singer and a musician), as a knower (I am researcher) and as a maker (I am teacher). I am doing my tasks and build my roles steadily. Altogether my goal in the roles undertaken in passing on the heritage of the Hajdúság culture is to transmit true and real values and not schematized or fictive traditions. And these are not individual but community goals: the restoration of their own cultural values for the people of the Hajdúság region.



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### List of publications related to the dissertation

#### Hungarian books (3)

1. Szerk. **Tóth, L.**: A magyar népzene oktatása Kodály után ötven évvel: A XXVII. Kecskeméti Népzenei Találkozón megrendezett konferencia előadásai. Hagyományok Háza, Budapest, 72 p., 2021. ISBN: 9786155927195
2. **Tóth, L.**: Szédeli borsó...: Népi játékok és szokások Polgárról. Hagyományok Háza, Budapest, 111 p. +, 2017. (Helyi hagyományok, ISSN 1785-7848 ; 8.) ISBN: 9789637363948

#### Hungarian CD (1)

3. Szerk. Agócs, G., Sáriné Szebenyi, J., **Tóth, L.**: Pendely: Debrecenbe' nyílik a virág... Fonó Budai Zeneház, Budapest, 2020.

#### Hungarian book chapters (4)

4. **Tóth, L.**: A népiének-oktatás módszerei a Debreceni Zenedében.  
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5. **Tóth, L.**: Az éneklés mint magatartásforma.  
In: Bárdos Szimpóziumok : 16 zenei írás. Szerk.: Sárosi-Szabó Márta, Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, Debrecen, 179-190, 2021. ISBN: 9789634902980
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9. **Tóth, L.:** Népdalgyűjtés göröngyös utakon: Papp János élete és munkássága.

*Honismeret.* 49 (3), 80-87, 2021. ISSN: 0324-7627.

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31577/EtnoRozpra.2022.29.1.05>

**List of other publications**

Hungarian book chapters (2)

12. **Tóth, L.:** Előszó.

In: A magyar népzene oktatása Kodály után ötven évvel: A XXVII. Kecskeméti Népzenei Találkozón megrendezett konferencia előadásai. Szerk.: Tóth Lilla, Hagyományok Háza, Budapest, 7-8, 2021. ISBN: 9786155927195

13. **Tóth, L.:** Bartha Elek - Keményfi Róbert - Marinka Melinda (szerk.): Regionális kutatások a Kárpát-medencében című kötet recenziója.

In: Néprajzi Tanszék 70 Debrecen. Szerk.: Bihari Nagy Éva, Marinka Melinda, Debreceni Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar Néprajzi Tanszék, Debrecen, 57-59, 2019, (Néprajz egyetemi hallgatóknak, ISSN 0239-1961 ; 37) ISBN: 9789634901211

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (2)

14. **Tóth, L.:** Az éneklés mint magatartásforma. Másodközlés utánközlés,

*Folkszemle* 1-16, 2021.

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*Folkmagazin.* 25 (6), 32-37, 2018. ISSN: 1218-912X.





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Other journal articles (1)

16. **Tóth, L.:** A magyar népzene oktatása Kodály után ötven évvel. A XXVII. Kecskeméti Népzenei Találkozón megrendezett konferencia előadásai. Új kiadvány a Hagyományok Háza gondozásában.  
*Folkmagazin.* 29 (1), 9, 2022. ISSN: 1218-912X.

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