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PREFACE

It is an honour for me to be editing a collection of essays on the ethnographic material of the population of the Central and Eastern European region. This population is highly varied in terms of languages but is bound together by a number of common traits in terms of its culture. This special issue of *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*, which represents a wide spectrum of research efforts and researchers in this field, is also extremely timely. All of us doing ethnographic and folklore research in this region have had the feeling of stepping into an alien world each time we enter the neighbouring areas in an effort to find parallels for our material, to map out their connections in time and space or simply to gain access to the latest research findings of a particular problem. It is hard to gain information about the status of various branches of folklore or anthropological research in the neighbouring countries.

The main aim of the present publication is to take one step in bridging this gap. After all, we all know that in a small country, in the folklore or religious life of a population, which speaks a relatively small language, there are innumerable elements in common with the neighbouring communities. The topics cannot be researched in isolation as purely Hungarian or Romanian or Bulgarian problems. Because of language barriers we are less acquainted with research projects and findings in our immediate vicinity or with the basic folklore material even currently being collected than with the Western European parallels which are in fact linguistically more divergent.

As regards the questions of religion and folk belief that are the focus of the present volume, we are aware that there are a great many common Central European motifs, borrowed rituals and beliefs. All of these render the research of local variants truly exciting. In the case of historical research it is particularly important to be aware of the time and space dimensions of the various effects but even a present-oriented investigation based on anthropological field work is unlikely to achieve significant results unless it places its

work in the context of wider dimensions of time and space. We are conscious that a great deal has been done over the past years to pull down the barriers that separate our research efforts from each other. Conferences are being held, joint publications and translations are being produced in the field of religious research. Nonetheless it is no accident that, aiming to bear in mind both the European and the local interests at the same time, Ion Taloş wrote at the end of his summary of the St. Peter problem in Romania, "...it would be necessary to do a study on the role of St. Peter in all European mythologies". We can safely say that this is true of all the subject areas mentioned in this volume.

The present collection can only be a small step in such a globalisation of research. Due to limitations of space it cannot extend to every country in the Central and Eastern European region. We are also aware that religions and beliefs are far too complex and extended an area for this volume to be able to form a coherent whole. With the transformation of the peasantry and of what is generally termed folk culture the traditional folk belief that has been researched so far in Central and Eastern European folklore has also disappeared or been transformed and become a part of popular culture. Its past has also been re-interpreted. The boundaries valid in "classic" folk belief research have been rearranged, the artificial, heuristic category of beliefs separate from official religiosity (non-Christian, "pagan") has become at least questionable. There is a noticeable tendency also in this part of the world to enforce a complex anthropological category when speaking about religion, which also encompasses folk belief. The dichotomy of *religion* vs. *belief* is being replaced by conceptual pairs such as *official* and *popular*; *central* and *local*, and by an emphasis on the connections between the two and on the ways in which they operate in one and the same system.

In the present volume the traditional and the modern understanding of popular religion are equally present depending on the varied methodological orientation of the authors. However, the fact that we brought together the various subject areas of religion and beliefs in one collection of papers at least symbolically indicates our conviction that neither popular religion nor popular belief can be studied in isolation. Our aim was to represent this complexity and unity through even a relatively small number of papers, although we acknowledge that the dichotomy in the title points inevitably toward the traditional opposition.

Of course, the contents of this volume were primarily determined by the contributors – a number of excellent experts on the varied branches of popular belief and religion. Let me take this occasion to express my warmest thanks to all of them for offering their contribution.

Authors were not bound by methodological restrictions – from this point of view the present volume is truly versatile, showing a number of different approaches to folk belief and religion, various terminologies, research traditions and methods. We requested our authors to strive for a rich presentation of such research material as is unknown to others. The majority of articles on beliefs offer us a glimpse into some segment of the traditional belief system which has survived in many parts of Central and Eastern Europe, shedding light, by presenting such material, on a magical practice which is still in operation or at least was so in the past and was captured by the collection in the modern period. Mirjam Mencej presents the wolf holidays of the Balkans and the rich legacy of related '*lord of the animals*' beliefs, Evgenija Troeva presents Bulgarian beliefs about night demons, Urszula

Lehr and Ljiljana Marks write about Polish and Croatian weather magicians, while Éva Pócs gives a summary on Hungarian fairy magicians complete with a detailed presentation of material.

In most of the papers we find a most fortunate mix of universal European/Christian subject matters and the simultaneous presentation of folklore phenomena specific to a particular language or denomination. Several papers represent inter-cultural connections which overarch linguistic or denominational boundaries or the borderlines between various phenomena and the area they cover inside Europe.

Mencej describes the presence of the *lord of animals* belief over the Balkans and in Southern Europe in general; Pócs analyses the way in which fairy beliefs radiated from the Balkans toward Hungary, Similarly, Ion Taloş's paper enlists the characteristically Romanian motives of St. Peter legends as well as their general European traits which are shared with Hungarians or the Slavic peoples. Lehr and Marks again discuss two aspects of the common weather magician figure of Central and Eastern Europe in the duality of the common European and the local folklore and religion, while Marks' article also sheds light on Hungarian–Croatian relations.

The two papers on weather magicians also extend their analysis to the connection between folklore and written culture, on the mediating role of 19th-century popular literature and the way in which church benedictions have influenced the oral tradition. Emanuela Timotin's essay also discusses the duality of the oral and the written tradition. Her complex textual analysis is a testimony to the clerical written tradition of the area affected by the radiation of Byzantine culture and describes one of the sources of past and modern folklore.

In his study Peter Tóth G. focuses on the changing social attitudes towards the methods of curing demonic possession in 17–18th century Europe. Following the thorough examination of various historical, medical, theological literature and legal sources the author reveals how the ecclesiastical character of the exorcising-purging activity had been slowly shifted to the sphere of medicine.

Using an anthropological approach in their analysis of religion, Galia Valtchinova and Lehel Peti present religious phenomena as social constructs evolving within the current of local historical events. Peti reviews the influence of the economic and social crises of the end of the last century on the Csángó society of the Moldavia region and, in light of this, examines the quasi-mediaeval reality of the seers of Moldavia and the visions of the other world experienced in this area. Valtchinova reviews the role of new religious organisations, seers and visions as they appeared in the religious development of Bulgaria after it lost WWI within the political climate determined by the ideology of “national disaster”.

I trust that despite its inevitable heterogeneity the present volume is an important step toward a better mutual understanding of research efforts and a closer international co-operation. I hope that with their varied approaches the papers also shed a new light on our work and give us an impetus to review our fixed research traditions. All of this will probably lay the foundations for further “encounters”.

Éva Pócs