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Geographical Distribution of the Traditional Dance Culture in Mezőség

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ABSTRACT

The exact definition of the Mezőség/Câmpia Transilvaniei/Transylvanian Plain, hereafter Plain, as a region with an independent folk culture having a coherent internal structure is still a subject of debate among ethnographers. Some of them regard certain small regions (Borsa/Borşa Valley, Kis and Nagy Szamos/Someşul Mic şi Someşul Mare etc.) as belonging to the Mezőség/Plain, while others do not. I distinguish a central group of the villages in the Mezőség/Plain region (Belső-Mezőség or Central Plain: e.g. Visa/Vişea, Magyarpalatka/Pălatca, Katona/Cătina, Pusztakamarás/Cămăraşu) from the rest of the territory, similarly to György Martin, István Pávai and László Barabás, relying on material culture and folklore research, as well as my own investigations. When advancing outward from this core area, the concentric circle of so-called peripheral areas follow (the West, North, East and South Plain/Mezőség), reaching the boundaries on the edges of the region: Nagy Szamos/Someşul Mare Valley, Lápos/Lăpuş Valley, Sajó/Şicu Valley, Maros/Mureş Valley, Marosszéki¹ Mezőség/Mureş Seat Plain, Erdőalja/Sub Pădure area, Borsa/Borşa Valley, and Kis Szamos/Someşul Mic Valley. A further, smaller group of villages can be distinguished in the area of Belső-Mezőség/Central Plain by their dance and music culture; for the regular weekend dance events of these villages, organised by local youths in the 1960s, Roma musicians of Magyarpalatka/Pălatca would play the music. I assign the name **Palatka dance district** to this area in my paper.

Keywords: Mezőség (Transylvanian Plain, Câmpia Transilvaniei), dance dialects, linguistics, folklore research, traditions and modernisation, migration of cultural elements

Introduction

Over recent decades, ethnology and cultural anthropology, including ethnochoreology and dance anthropology, has been increasingly

1 Szék/Scaun/Seat: former unit of administrative-territorial organisation.

turning towards contemporary research, nevertheless historical topics have recently come to the forefront of our interest (Kavecsánszki; Varga, “Two Traditional Central Transylvanian Dances”). By critically combining the approaches, theories and methods of historical anthropology and micro-history with the earlier inquiries of historical ethnography and folklore studies, new perspectives are opening up for our discipline (Bárth), which, in my opinion, point towards inter- and even transdisciplinary cooperation. In my study, I raise some questions in connection with the regional-historical investigation of Hungarian folk dance research, which may help us to critically review the theories underlying the earlier approaches, and thus provide us with an opportunity to supplement and further reflect on György Martin’s investigations, which have remained unfinished.

The question of the regional fragmentation of folk culture and the spread of cultural elements has been of interest to local and international researchers since the end of the 19th century (Kósa, 11–30). Among the major anthropological theories, such questions have been addressed within the framework of diffusionism; for many decades European historical folklore studies were dominated by the Finnish historical geo-historical method, which was close to diffusionism and to some extent to evolutionism (Szőnyi, 107–111).² The work of Bartók and Kodály, who were the founders of European folk music research, and the Hungarian dance folklore research that followed in their footsteps, were also based on this approach, supplemented by methods borrowed from linguistic structural analysis (Fügedi; Könczei, “Has Dance Research”).³ Martin attached great importance to the study of dance culture according to its distribution, emphasising that the geographical division of folk culture is related to the social and historical development of a region (“Hungarian dance dialects”, 217). He considers that the study of the different genre-based or formal groupings is important from both a cultural and an aesthetic (artistic) point of view (“Magyar tánc típusok”, 6–7).

Some problems in the research of dance dialects

Perhaps one of the most important – and most troubling – questions in the field of dance-dialect studies is what we are actually studying. What do we consider to be folk dance culture or traditional dance culture? Do these concepts overlap? It is not the aim of my study to solve this theoretical question, but it is necessary to point out that Martin’s definition of

2 Csilla Könczei has written thorough analyses of the evolutionist foundations of the research model developed by György Martin for the historical research of Hungarian folk dances (“Dance”, 143–144; “A ‘60-as–‘80-as évek”, 832–833).

3 In addition to those mentioned here, several important studies have been published in recent years, which bring us closer to understanding the history of Hungarian dance folklore (Hofer; Könczei, “Dance”; Könczei, “A ‘60-as–‘80-as évek”; Szőnyi; Varga “The Scientific Legacy”; Varga “Reassessing conclusions”).

dance dialects as those dances that “lived without institutional dissemination and learning, as an integral part of the slowly changing peasant life and customs” (“Magyar tánc típusok”, 6) seems to be somewhat outdated and imprecise. Today, it seems that by relying on this definition, we obtain an inflexible and in a certain extent an “unhistorical” system, in which we cannot place very many elements of dancing practice (dances, related customs, etc.), nor can we see the dynamics of the cultural processes behind the changes in the phenomena under study.

Martin speaks of dance styles and dance customs from different periods and fashions in European dance history that have been embedded in local cultures – folklorized, if you prefer – despite their intermingling at different rates and to different degrees. This is how the traditional dance culture of certain areas or settlements has developed („Magyar tánc típusok”, 6–7). The various dance genres and elements of customs were intermingled in European peasant culture in some areas in the middle of the 20th century (and in some places not even until the 21st century). Nevertheless, certain “dominant genres” (“Magyar tánc típusok”, 11) emerged from these, which can be examined to outline the cultural-historical processes that shaped the peasant dance culture of the area or settlement under study (“Magyar tánc típusok”, 11). On the basis of this logic, Martin divided Europe into three large-scale geographic regions and, within this framework, the Carpathian Basin into three major and twenty minor dance dialects (“Magyar tánc típusok”, 10–12; “Hungarian dance dialects”, 220).⁴

Martin argues that the pattern of uneven social and cultural development has meant that different dance styles reached certain areas at different rates and with different strength. In exploring the possible reasons behind this, Martin finds that certain ethnic groups preserved their cultural traits in a more isolated state during feudal fragmentation, that some others did not do so, a difference which can be observed even in the present days (“Hungarian dance dialects”, 217); this may explain the relative heterogeneity of dance culture in certain areas. The homogeneity of dance culture in other areas, on the other hand, may be due to the unifying effects of modern capitalist development, the development of national culture, the spread of literacy, and the development of infrastructure, which gradually dissolved “the boundaries of feudal territories” in Europe (“Magyar tánc típusok”, 14). In Eastern Europe, however, differences, which were rooted in feudalism, do not disappear completely, but are only pushed into the background, due to the delayed development of the bourgeoisie.⁵ In my opinion, Martin examines this

4 For the major European dance dialects and the Hungarian territorial division, see also: Martin, “Performing styles”; Martin, “The relationship”.

5 It is interesting that the principle of László Kósa’s summary of the regional-historical division is contrary to this idea. According to Kósa’s hypothesis, feudal conditions maintained cultural homogeneity and the emergence of regional differences in peasant culture was due to the differential impact of the development of civil society that started after the serf emancipation (Kósa, 44–48).

complexity at a kind of macro level in his summarizing works (Varga, “Scientific legacy”, 88). At the same time, he also refers to changes at the meso- and micro-level, such as the integrating effect of population migrations during the Turkish occupation (“Magyar tánc típusok”, 14), or the specific historical and social situation of certain regions and villages (e.g. Szék/Sic in Mezőség Plain) (“Hungarian dance dialects”, 277). Martin speaks of the combined, often simultaneous, influence of separating and unifying factors in the historical development of Hungarian dance dialects. In addition to the unequal development of civil society already mentioned above, the spread of foreign and internally developed dance styles and interaction with other peoples are emphasized (“Hungarian dance dialects”, 217–218). Regarding the latter, Martin notes that “the adoption of these influences was possible during the period of contact” (“Magyar tánc típusok”, 19).

Writing about the limits of dance dialects, Martin repeatedly refers to the influence of the problems and methods used in linguistic dialect research on his approach. In this connection, he clearly argues, in my view, for a kind of etic approach to culture, saying that the criterion of linguistic dialect researchers as to whether speakers understand each other has proved useless when applied to dance.⁶ As an analogy of the differences between languages and language dialects, he draws attention to fundamental differences in national dance dialects. He notes that the Hungarian dance heritage is vertically structured, as the traditional dance culture of a village bears the imprint of many layers of dance history. In contrast, the Romanian dance heritage is sharply separated horizontally – “the so-called dance zones of the Danube, the Carpathian countryside and Transylvania represent three separate worlds in the Romanian dance heritage”, he writes in *Hungarian Dance Types and Dialects* (“Magyar tánc típusok”, 20). The question is whether we can speak of dance as a kind of national characteristic or product – either in an early or a late sense – on the basis of the linguistic analogy.⁷ The fact is that there are many more similarities in the dance culture of a Hungarian village in the Mezőség/Plain and a Romanian village in the Mezőség/Plain than in the dance culture of, say, a Hungarian village in the Mezőség/Plain and a Hungarian village in Transdanubia (I could cite a Romanian village in Banat also as an example). This shows that, in the case of traditional dance culture, geographical distance, regional fragmentation and other circumstances that cause differentiation are much more decisive than in the case of language – if we can even speak of former national roots in the case of dance in the Middle Ages or earlier periods. For this reason, the linguistic analogy may (also) be

6 Indeed, studies have shown that there can be profound differences between certain dialects, but not always between languages (Kiss, 31–36).

7 In a study, Tamás Hofer points out that “there was an early wave of cultural integration and national identity building in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries” and that this process also affected Hungary. György Martin drew attention to this with his historical study of the *bejútanc* (Hofer, 65–66).

misleading here, as Csilla Könczei points out in one of her studies: „nonverbal media cannot be categorized according to the boundaries of spoken language. Nonverbal communication communities are not at all similar to language communities. They are much smaller or larger” (Könczei, “On the verbal representation”, 168).⁸

When drawing the boundaries of dialects, György Martin speaks of “essential phenomena” that are considered crucial, which the researcher must select⁹ and on the basis of the overall picture obtained from the analysis of these, the “approximate boundaries of the dance dialects” can be defined. In this case, we are talking about a research construct that marginalises the possibilities of an emic approach to culture.

Martin also considers it important to examine the temporal spread of dance phenomena: Given that the aim of defining dance dialects is to reconstruct the situation before the complete disintegration of peasant dance culture around the turn of the 20th century, temporal-historical control is essential to draw the right boundaries” (“Magyar tánc típusok”, 22). Here too we are talking about a criterion, the application of which makes our historical approach inflexible. Not only does the question of the interaction between modernity and traditionalism thus remain outside the focus of research, but the question of the lower boundary of the period under study also becomes questionable. If we accept Martin’s axiom, stated in several places, that the dominant dance forms of the Middle Ages were circle and chain dances and weapon dances, then we should expect a rather homogeneous picture of the dance dialects of this period – which is in complete contrast to Martin’s other statement, quoted above, that the feudal period could be characterised by a heterogeneous dance culture.

In the course of my research on the Mezőség/Plain from 1994 to the present, I have conducted fieldwork primarily in two settlements, Szék/Sic and Visa/Vișea, but in addition to these in this paper I use

8 “The dance cultures of larger European regions are similar – regardless the language and ethnicity – despite that since the spread of national consciousness certain people carefully record and emphasize their differentiating marks. For an observer having a bird eye perspective Balkan, respectively East European and West European dances are amalgated. The outsider has little capacity to make a difference between Russian and Ukrainian, between Slovakian and Hungarian or Transylvanian Romanian, between Romanian from Walachia and Serbian, between Macedonian and Bulgarian. Separating German from Czech or Polish is as difficult as separating Swedish from Finnish” (Pesovár, 10).

9 Martin considers the most important of these to be the study of the dances themselves (“Hungarian dance dialects”, 218). Another important aspect is: the existence or absence of certain dance types; the formal-structural characteristics of the dances, their motifs; the dance name and the related terminology; the use of space in connection with the dance; the use of tools in connection with the dance; the place and function of certain dances in peasant dance life; the nature of dance calendars, dance arrangements, customs, dance styles; dance order; musical accompaniment, melody, tempo; instruments and the formation of the orchestra (“Hungarian dance dialects”, 218–220).

data from my long-standing fieldwork, carried out in nearly fifty villages.¹⁰ (Varga, “Folk dance research” 123–124) My questions have been based on the etic factors identified by György Martin, as the existence or absence of certain dance types, the motif and structure of dances, the development of dance order, the co-use of certain dances, the use of tools, the terminology related to dance, the role of dances in peasant dance life, the nature of the dances, the way in which the dances were performed, the role of the dance in peasant life, the characteristics of the musical accompaniment, the nature of the dance and the customs of dance arrangement, and the dance style. I also collected emic data from my respondents questioning on the villages to which their dances resembled their own, the villages to which they went to dance, the villages to which they married, and the striking features of the dance culture of neighbouring villages. I do not consider my research to be closed and I also touch upon several problems of principle that I cannot yet undertake to solve.

The Mezőség/Transylvanian Plain as an ethnographic landscape

There is no consensus among ethnographers as to the exact delimitation and internal division of the Mezőség/Plain as an area with its own ethnographic culture (Keszeg, 7–8). The most recent summary of the regions of Hungarian folk culture has treated the Erdélyi Erdőhát/Someş Plateau, the Lăpos/Lăpuş Valley, the Nagy Szamos/ Someşul Mare Valley, the Sajó/Şieu Valley, the Felső-Maros/Upper Mureş Valley, the Mezőség/Plain, the Erdőalja/Sub Pădure, the Aranyosszék/Aranyos Seat and the Torockó/Rimetea area as separate regions (Magyar, 189–235). It is therefore difficult to determine the exact size of the region: some people include a hundred villages, others two hundred to two hundred and fifty, perhaps three hundred. All the researchers emphasise the cultural distinctiveness of the former market town of Szék/Sic (Martin, 8; “A széki hagyományok”, 74). A precise delimitation is made difficult by the lack of an unifying conceptual framework, the scant attention paid to the study of cultural changes (the impression of timelessness), and the differences in the research carried out in the individual landscapes (Pávai, 22–23). In summary, however, the above-mentioned divisions mark a central area, to which the peripheral or border regions are connected.

Kós Károly refers repeatedly to the regional differences in the culture of Mezőség/Plain in his analysis of costume, folk architecture and folklore phenomena. In doing so, he distinguishes between the

10 This paper is a more elaborate version of the relevant chapter of my doctoral dissertation written in 2011 (Varga, “Változások” 52–59). More details about my fieldwork in the Plain area can be found in: Varga, “Néptánc kutatás” 123–124. Other relevant information about my research related to my present paper: Varga, “Formai változások”; Varga, “A nemesi kultúra”; Varga, “Zenészfogadás”.

North-Western, the Southern and the „true” villages of the Mezőség/Plain (‐A Mezőség”, vol. 2: 77, 196–239, 257–259, 269, 271, 273). László Barabás holds a similar view, based on the experience of previous ethnographic and folklore research, as well as based on his own research into folk customs. According to these, he distinguishes a central group of villages within the Mezőség/Plain region (Belső Mezőség/Inner Plain: Visa/Vișea, Magyarpalatka/Pălatca, Katona/Cătina etc.), and from there, in the next concentric circle the following peripheral areas are located (Western, Northern, Eastern and Southern Plains), then at the very edge of the region the following border areas are located: Nagy-Szamos/Someșul Mare Valley, Lápos/Lăpuș Valley, Sajó/Șieu Valley, the Beszterce/Bistrița region, the Szászrégen/Reghin region, the Felső-Maros/Upper Mureș Valley, the Maros/Mureș Valley, Marosszéki Mezőség/Mureș Seat Plain, the Ludas/Luduș region, the Torda/Turda region, the Erdőalja/Sub Pădure, the Borsa/Borșa Valley and the Little Szamos/Someșul Mic Valley (Barabás, 57–58).¹¹

At the heart of the region lies the historically and infrastructurally most isolated Belső-Mezőség/Inner Plain, while the border areas are located in close proximity to cities and related larger regions with sharp cultural differences. The cultural distinctiveness of the former petty noble villages along the Kis Szamos/Someșul Mic and the Erdőhát/Someș Plateau, and the cultural distinctiveness of the market towns along the main roads further colour the overall cultural picture of the area. It is questionable how far these concentric circles can be specified and to what extent the different cultural phenomena show a similar distribution. Quite large cultural differences can be observed between small areas, and sometimes also within them (see for example Szék/Sic) (Barabás, 59–60). Comparative research to date (on agriculture, architecture, costume, folk dance, folk music, folk customs) shows a strong cultural influence from the surrounding ethnographic regions in the border areas, which gradually weakens as one moves towards the Belső Mezőség/Inner Plain. According to Barabás, this is also supported by the internal (emic) image of culture that the inhabitants have of the region in terms of their perception of the landscape and their sense of belonging (Barabás, 59). Looking at dance culture, I am of the same opinion, but I think that a thorough study of regional identity would be needed to better define the external and internal borders of an area.¹² It would be important to examine, for example, how the local understanding and acceptance of the term „Mezőség” has changed over the last decades. As late as 1964, Zoltán Kallós

11 Similarly, the Romanian ethnographic regional classification includes the area between the Kis és Nagy Szamos/Someșul Mic and Mare and the Maros/Mureș in the Mezőség/Plain (Barabás, 59).

12 I consider Balázs Balogh’s and Ágnes Fülemile’s research in Kalotaszeg/Land of Călața to be exemplary in this respect (Balogh and Fülemile, 9–15.) Besides, it is worth mentioning Csongor Könczei’s research in the Lozsárd/Lujerdiu Valley (‐A regionális identitástudat”).

wrote that the inhabitants of Bonchida/Bonțida, Válaszút/Răscruți and Szék/Sic did not accept the term “Mezőség” which they could identify with (“Táncagyományok”, 235), and Károly Kós also refers to the fact that the inhabitants of Ördöngösfüzes/Fizeșu Gherlii consider the „backward” Mezőség/Plain to begin from the line Kékesvásárhely/Târgușor – Vasasszentiván/Sântioana bordering them on the East (“A Mezőség”, vol. 2: 212, 225).

My own research confirms that until the mid-1990s, most villagers in the area considered the term “from the Mezőség/Plain” undesirable. However, afterwards, presumably due to the growing interest of folk-tourists and the positive image projected by the media, this opinion slowly began to change.¹³

Delimitation and internal division of the folk music and dance dialect of the Mezőség/Plain

Only since the 1950s – following the studies of László Lajtha, Zoltán Kallós, János Jagamas and their colleagues – has Mezőség/Plain been included as an independent dialect in the territorial division of Hungarian folk music (Pávai, 27). Lajtha drew attention to the possible internal division of Mezőség/Plain as early as the 1950s,¹⁴ but the delimitation and internal division of the area according to folk dance music aspects was carried out extremely late, only in 2005. In this context, István Pávai, in addition to the Mezőség/Plain, mentions the Kalotaszeg/Land of Călata – Mezőség/Plain transition area (Erdőalja/Sub Pădure and the petty noble villages of the Erdélyi-Erdőhát/Someș Plateau), Aranyosszék/Aranyos Seat, the Maros/Mureș and Sajó/Șieu regions, the Marosszéki Mezőség/Mureș Seat Plain and the Felső-Szamos/Upper Someș region (including the tributaries of the Nagy és Kis Szamos/Someșul Mare and Mic), and within the region he distinguishes between North, Inner, South and East Mezőség/Plain (Pávai, 38–39). Pávai warns on the dialectal differences in dance and dance music, saying that in addition to the uniformity of dance and dance music styles, the same structure of dance order, the presence or absence of the same dance types, the identification of the areas of operation of village bands may also be a factor in determining the dance music sub-regions (Pávai, 37). I find the results of his study instructive to compare with György Martin’s findings on the dance dialect in the Mezőség/Plain.

13 According to Keszeg, the first dance folkloristic summaries of the 1970s and 1980s, the táncház/dance house movement that flourished at that time, emphasized the archaic, untouched nature of local culture, thus creating a “positive myth of the Mezőség/Plain region” (Keszeg, 14).

14 The material collected so far suggests the existence of a Northern and a Southern Mezőség/Plain dialect (Lajtha, 4).

Martin classifies the Mezőség/Plain as belonging to the Eastern or Transylvanian dance dialect (“Hungarian dance dialects”, 110–113),¹⁵ distinguishes Mezőség/Plain from three other Central Transylvanian provinces, Kalotaszeg/Land of Călata, the Maros-Küküllő/Mureș-Târnave region and Marosszék/Mureș Seat (“Hungarian dance dialects”, 108–118), and detects five small provinces by delineating the smaller internal units of the region:

1. Some features of the dance culture of the Borsa/Borșa and the valley of the Kis Szamos/Someșul Mic are related to those of the villages of Kalotaszeg/Călata and Szilágyság/Sălaj.
2. He considers the valleys of Nagy-Szamos/Someșul Mare and Sajó/Șieu and the Lápos/Lăpuș valley as a more urbanised region. Few collections of dances from this region were available at the time Martin wrote his summary.
3. The best known area of the mixed population villages in the central part of the Mezőség/Plain (Magyarpalatka/Pălatca and its surroundings and the Tóvidék/Lacurile Geaca) is a region with a rich men's solo dance and couple dance culture, where there is a great overlap between the Hungarian and Romanian dance traditions. The old-fashioned, asymmetrically pulsating couple dance is considered to be typical here. He mentions that, in addition to the musicians from Magyarpalatka/Pălatca, who played in a large area, there were several peasant musicians in the area.
4. He defines the South-Western Plain as a transitional area bordering the Kalotaszeg/Land of Călata and the Maros-Küküllő/Mureș-Târnave region, whose dance culture was poorly known at the time of his writings. Some features of its dance culture suggest that it is related to the dialect of the Maros-Küküllő/Mureș-Târnave region.
5. The Eastern Plain “dance and music culture is characterized by more modern, Szekler influences. The old asymmetrical slow couple dance is absent in the countryside, but the *korcsos* and *Szekler verbunk*, typical of the Marosszék/Mureș Seat area, appear” (“Hungarian dance dialects”, 111). According to Martin, the Hungarians of the county adopted dance types from the Szeklers in more recent times

15 Romanian dance scholars classify Transylvania as a Western dance dialect, within which several smaller dance dialects are distinguished. According to Andrei Bucșan, the core of the Western dance dialect is the Western part of Transylvania, to which Northern and Central Transylvania, including the Mezőség/Plain are organically linked. He considers the area around the lower Maros/Mureș a separate sub-dialect (Bucșan, 327). For the different interpretations of Hungarian and Romanian, see the following sentences of László Kürti: “Romanian scholars utilize a one-sided ethnographic map and Hungarian folklorists yet another. Hungarian ethnographers and folklorists speak of regions that are never uttered by Romanian scholars with such an awe and reverence [...] Clearly what is at the heart of this problem is that both Hungarian and Romanian intellectuals live and work in a dual positivistic tradition separated into majority and minority spheres” (Kürti, 93 cited by Quigley, 120).

(probably at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries), which is why this dance dialect has developed over the last half century through the “fusion” of the Hungarian dance repertoire of the Mezőség/Plain region and the dances of the Maros/Mureș region (“Magyar tánc típusok”, 18).¹⁶ This is important because it is here that Martin takes the most account of the changes over time in the dance culture of the Mezőség/Plain region.

In his last summary, published in 1985, Martin thus spoke of the central part of Mezőség/Plain, when he tried to define the cultural unit, as consisting of the villages of e.g. Visa/Vișea, Magyarpalatka/Pălatca, Feketelak/Lacu, Mezőkeszű/Chesău (111). As a parallel, the findings of Zoltán Kallós and Károly Kós should also be considered. In what Kallós calls, albeit not always consistently, the Northern Plain, he distinguishes three smaller units: the valley of the Kis Szamos/Someșul Mic and the area to the West of it, the territory of Erdőhát/Someș Plateau; and the central group of villages (Visa/Vișea, Vajdakamarás/Vaida Cărnăuș, Mezőkeszű/Chesău and Magyarpalatka/Pălatca), which is distinct due to its ancient culture, and to which a few settlements (Kötelen/Gădălin, Mezőszava/Sava, Légen/Legii, Gyeke/Geaca and Katona/Cătina) are added on the basis of the cultural characteristics of the local Hungarian minority. In his division, the third area includes the villages around Cege/Țaga, Feketelak/Lacu and Vasasszentgothárd/Sucutard, the Lacurile Geaca (“Adalékok”; “Észak-mezőségi”). Kós Károly, when discussing the differences in singing culture, dance organisation, spinning house customs and games, speaks of villages in the North-Western Plain (Girólt/Ghirolt, Kecséd/Aluniș, etc.) and the villages of belső-Mezőség/Inner Plain. Within the latter, he identifies a narrower circle: Magyarpalatka/Pălatca and its marriage districts (Visa/Vișea, Vajdakamarás/Vaida-Cărnăuș, Mezőkeszű/Chesău), where he has found similarities in terms of spinning games and song repertoire. In this respect, he treats villages further East, such as Katona/Cătina and Mezőköbölkút/Fântânița as being different (“A Mezőség”, vol. 2: pp. 257–258, 269, 271, 273).

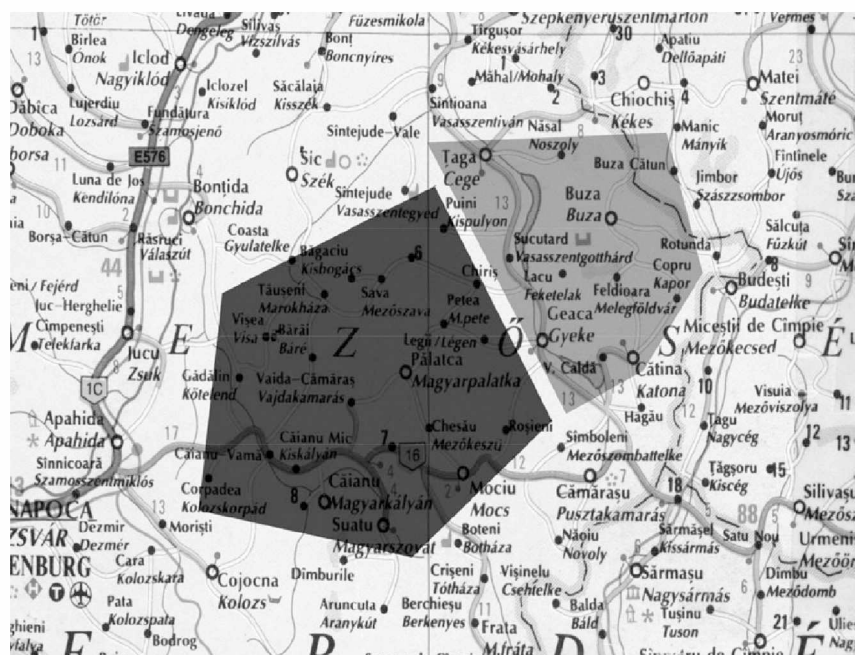
By an etic examination of the features of dance culture that Martin also identified as important, and by including some emic aspects in the research, I believe that György Martin’s regional division can be further refined in relation to the Mezőség/Plain. In the light of István Pávai’s recent studies on dance music, I think that, when examining dances danced by Hungarians, it is worth discussing Mezőség/Plain separately from the surrounding small areas (the area along the Kis Szamos/Someșul Mic, the area along the Nagy Szamos/Someșul Mare, the Sajó/Șieu, the Erdőalja/Sub Pădure, the Marosszéki

16 László Kósa, however, writes in his summary that in the Mezőség/Plain region of Marosszék/Mureș Seat the consciousness of belonging to the Szekler minority persisted long after the end of the orderly division of the estate-based society (Kósa, 155–159, 319–344).

Mezőség/Mureș Seat Plain), obviously bearing in mind that the dance and music culture of these areas is linked to the North, East and South Mezőség/Plain in many ways (Pávai and Abonyi).¹⁷ My own research is also in line with István Pávai's data (Pávai and Abonyi), and, based on this, I treat the Belső-Mezőség/Inner Plain, the villages of the former Tóvidék/Lacurile Geaca (e.g. Cege/Țaga, Buza, Feketelak/Lacu, Melegföldvár/Feldioara, Vasaszentgotthárd/Sucutard, Gyeke/Geaca) and the villages West of this line up to Gyulatelke/Coasta – Visa/Vișea – Köteland/Gădălin as a separate village group. The villages bordering the area to the North (Ördögösfüzes/Fizeșu Gherlii, Füzesmikola/Nicula, etc.), as well as the former market town of Szék/Sic, are excluded from this unit. In the South, the villages (Magyarszovát/Suatu, Mócs/Mociu) still belonging to this area, form the border along the Kolozsvár/Cluj-Szászrégen/Reghin route. My research shows that the above classification can be further considered and deepened, since in the area of the Belső-Mezőség/Inner Plain, from the point of view of dance and music culture, another small group of villages can be outlined, in which until the 1960s, the Roma musicians from Magyarpalatka/Pălatca played music for the weekend dance festivals regularly organised by the local youth. Hereafter I will refer to this area as the **Palatka dance district**, which comprises twenty-three villages (and several small groups of farms belonging to them).¹⁸

17 Csongor Könczei's studies on Aranyosszék/Aranyos Seat and on the Transylvanian Erdőhát also show that research on the Erdélyi Mezőség/Plain still needs to be continued, as well as the discussion of theoretical issues related to dance dialects ("A regionális identitástudat", "Az aranyosszéki tánc kultúráról").

18 These villages are: Bărâ/Bărai, Belditanyák/Chiriș, Gyulatelke/Coasta, Kisbogács/Băgacu, Kályáni-Vám/Căianu-Vamă, Kolozskorpád/Corpadea, Köteland/Gădălin, Kiskályán/Căianu Mic, Kispulyon/Puini, Lărgatanya/Văleni, Légen/Legii, Magyarkályán/Căianu, *Magyarpalatka/Pălatca*, Magyarpete/Petea, **Magyarszovát/Suatu**, **Mócs/Mociu**, Marokháza/Tăușeni, Mezőgyéres/Ghirișu, **Mezőkeszű/Chesău**, Mezőszava/Sava, Omboztelke/Mureșenii de Câmpie, **Vajdakamarás/Vaida-Cămăraș**, **Visa/Vișea**. In the more remote villages (Apahida, Botháza/Boteni, Gyeke/Geaca, etc.) the Palatka Roma musicians played much less frequently, on the occasion of a calendar festival or a wedding. (The villages in **bold** have a Hungarian majority population. In the villages in *italics*, the proportion of Hungarians and Romanians is roughly 50-50%. In these villages, the nationalities danced separately when they could. In the villages marked with underlining, the proportion of Hungarians is negligible – 10-12 families at most. In the others there are no Hungarians.)



Inner Plain dance dialect. The Palatka/Pălatca dance district is in dark grey, the Tóvidék/Lacurile Geaca district is in light grey colour.
Map of Transylvania, 1993, Dimap Editions, Budapest

Comparing the dance repertoire and the choreological characteristics of the dances of the local settlements with those of the other Tóvidék/Lacurile Geaca, vague differences emerge. The asymmetrical slow couple dance (*lassú cigánytánc/slow gypsy dance*) with asymmetrical pulsation, which was typical of the Palatka district and danced by Hungarians, had already disappeared in the late 1800s in the areas around Buza, Melegföldvár/Feldioara and Feketelak/Lacu. The mixed *magyar/Hungarian* or four person dance (men and women dancing together) also fell out of fashion sometime around the First World War, while in the Palatka dance district it was still danced by Hungarians in the 1960s.

The asymmetrical, rotating couple dance (*vașitură*) of the Romanians of the Tóvidék/Lacurile Geaca has choreological features different from the so-called *joc românesc* danced in the Palatka district. In the Romanian dance of the Tóvidék/Lacurile Geaca, men and women dance almost exclusively holding each other's left hands, in many cases moving almost opposite each other, whereas in the Palatka dance district, couples mostly hold hands with their right hands. In addition, in the symmetrical couple dances in the Tóvidék/Lacurile Geaca there is an under-arm rotation, where the woman turns twice around her own axis in a simple duple meter (2/4) while in the Palatka district the same movement is almost always executed in a simple quadruple meter (4/4). These latter differences may seem very small, but in many cases they

can confuse dancing and, in the case of the Romanian slow couple, even make dancing together impossible.¹⁹

The separation of the two small regions is justified not only by the different musical accompaniment and dance terminology²⁰ but also by the locals' image of their own dance culture (the dance group they define). At the time of collectivization, many people from the villages around Magyarpalatka/Pălatca moved to the larger, and therefore more labour-intensive, village of Katona/Cătina in the Tóvidék/Lacurile Geaca. A recurring motif in their memories is that they were reluctant to attend the festivities because they could not dance with the locals.

According to my informants, the Hungarians of Visa/Vișea still have close kinship relations with the Hungarians of Köteland/Gădălin, Mezőkeszű/Chesău, Magyarpalatka/Pălatca, Kispulyon/Puini, Vajdakamarás/Cămăraș, Mezőszava/Sava and Magyarszovát/Suatu,²¹ which they claim to belong to the same ethnographic unit. The much broader marriage relations of the Visa/Vișea Romanians concerned all the villages around Magyarpalatka/Pălatca except Kisbogács/Băgaci, Magyarpete/Petea and Légen/Legii, and apart from these they rarely married with the inhabitants of the Romanian villages along the Kis Szamos/Someșul Mic, but not at all with the inhabitants of the Tóvidék/Lacurile Geaca. Until the 1960s, Hungarian and Romanian men from Visa/Vișea attended weekend dances in the villages belonging to the marriage circle outlined here.

Conclusions

The above division is mainly based on the analysis of the Hungarian dance material. In terms of the formal and structural characteristics of Romanian couple dances, as well as the motif repertoire, the Mezőség/Plain and the surrounding small provinces present a rather homogeneous picture, and only in the case of the men's dances, which make up a much smaller part of the dance stock than the couple dances, do we see regional differences similar to those of the Hungarians.²² All this warns us that it is worth reviewing and refining the aspects on the basis of which we conduct our dialectological investigations. In my opinion,

19 I experienced this at several festivals where we tried to get dancers from the Tóvidék/Lacurile Geaca and the Magyarpalatka/Pălatca area to dance with each other.

20 István Pávai's most recent map also marks the Tóvidék/Lacurile Geaca and the Belső-Mezőséget/Inner Plain separately (Pávai and Abonyi)

21 They married less frequently with people from Bonchida/Bonțida, Válaszút/Răscruți, Mócs/Mociu, Mezőgyéres/Ghirișu and Kályán/Căianu, and occasionally with people from Légen/Legii and Szék/Sic. In addition, some Hungarian families of Köteland/Gădălin and Zsuk/Jucu are of Visa/Vișea origin.

22 The Romanian dance material is all the more worth examining, as since the 18th century the Romanians have been the most important ethnic group in the Mezőség/Plain.

in the case of the dances, the study of the symmetrical pulsating pair dances known as the *Gypsy dance*, the *csárdás/ceardaș*, the *szökös/bătuta* and the *sűrű/des* is of particular importance, since, unlike the men's dance, the majority of the people of the Mezőség/Plain know and still dance them. This idea is supported by the fact that in the vast majority of cases, the locals distinguish between these dances when defining dance districts.

All this also shows that when examining dance dialects, we should be careful with our national or ethnic focus, and that in the future it would be worthwhile to examine the dance culture of the Mezőség/Plain from a Romanian, Saxon and Roma perspective in addition to the Hungarian one.²³ It is worth quoting Károly Kós: "The Mezőség/Plain is the common homeland of the Romanian and Hungarian people, and even of the settled Saxon and the Gypsy ethnic group living in some villages on its Northeastern periphery. As such, it is obvious that the „Mezőség/Plain” specificity can hardly be understood without taking this into account” („A Mezőség”, vol. 1: 18). Among Romanian researchers, Anca Giurchescu drew attention to the interethnic realtions of the dance culture of the villages in Central Transylvania (Giurchescu and Bloland, 275).²⁴ Such research, which seeks to explore the inter-ethnic and transnational aspects of dance culture, would require a change in approach and methodology, and would also necessitate the creation of new theoretical frameworks.²⁵

23 According to our present knowledge, which is superficial from this point of view, considering the formal appearance of the dances, the accompanying music and the related use of space, it seems that in the case of the Roma dances in the areas of Central Transylvania we would get a much more homogeneous picture than both Hungarian and Romanian. It is conceivable that a study focusing on Roma culture from a Roma ethnic perspective would interpret Central Transylvania as a single large dance dialect.

24 I agree with Colin Quigley's next statement: "Dance tradition, I would argue, as practiced among different ethnic communities in central Transylvania is [...] mixed and difficult, if not impossible to disentangle. Ethnic distinctions that can be made and that are used to mark ethnic difference are usually only relevant in local contexts. This is particularly so in the Mezőség/Câmpia Transilvaniei central region" (Quigley, 121).

25 György Martin already referred to this in a 1984 study: "Today the peoples of East Central Europe remain unaware of the fact that their specific national dance cultures have common roots and how similarly their national dances have evolved. The public opinion considers these dances to be individual and unique, originating in the distant and hazy past of the nation. In reality, the differences in the peasant dance culture of various peoples were created by the different pace and phases of historical development in smaller or larger regions. The differences deriving from belated development were emphasized by national elites; they filled them with ideological meaning and made them serve their own political objectives during the period of national awakening. The ultimate goal of political and cultural efforts during this period was the achievement of national independence and the demonstration of the distinct cultural standing of independent national communities. Stressing distinctness one-sidedly was justified as long as national independence had not yet been achieved. But the objectives of national

“Research to date on the regional segmentation of folk culture reflects a concept of culture that understands culture as a set of products that can be described and measured,” writes Csongor Könczei in 2002. He rightly points out that, in contrast, little attention has been paid to cultural processes (“A regionális identitástudat”, 7). I believe that the solution to this problem, and the clarification of the notion of „transitional territory”, also questioned by Csongor Könczei, lies in carrying out micro-level studies sensitive to changes over time. Not only would this solve the problem of uneven collections, but it would also fine-tune the now rather rigid framework within which Martin and his colleagues studied dance culture and the spread of related cultural elements. Such studies might show that certain phenomena of dance culture could have been brought to quite distant places, even by jumping through cultural units previously thought to be closed (the school, the church, the dance masters, or perhaps the influence of contemporary literacy, for example). The question of migration also needs to be examined in more detail, as Márta Belényesi did with the Szeklers of Bukovina (“Kultúra és tánc”). Finally, the relationship between traditional and contemporary culture needs to be reconsidered. Some of my studies show, for example, that there have been changes in peasant culture in the different phases of acculturation, caused by modernisation in the 20th century (festivals, cinema, etc.), changes which have left their mark on the traditional dance culture of some villages (“The Necessity”, 195).

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independence have by and large been accomplished. Today we should look back upon the enthusiastic youth of the development of national cultures as adults. Instead of cultivating historical myths further, research must bring to light real historical interrelationships in the interest of unprejudiced national self-consciousness” (Martin, “Peasant”, 211).

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