

Traces of the Virgin Mary

Tatiana
Zachar
Podolinská
Ed.



in Post- Communist Europe

Editor:

© Mgr. Tatiana Zachar Podolinská, PhD
Institute of Ethnology and Social
Anthropology, Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Bratislava

Reviewers:

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Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia

Authors:

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Holubová, Roman Kečka, Judit Kis-Halas,
Hubert Knoblauch, Juraj Majo, Aleksandra
Pavičević, Sabine Petschke, Lehel Peti,
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Traces of the Virgin Mary in Post-Communist Europe

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02 Sacred Sites Reinterpreted: New Age Phenomena at a Hungarian Marian Shrine

Judit Kis-Halas

Marian shrines were always the sites of miraculous healings and spectacular apparitions, and they attracted a large number of pilgrims. This is still the case, but nowadays they might also become the crystallisation points of the New Age phenomena (Gilhus 2013: 35–49). Several studies have already pointed out this trend with regard to popular pilgrimage destinations such as Glastonbury, for example (Ivakhiv 2001; Bowman 2000, 2005). As far as the Hungarian Marian shrines are concerned, none of them have been systematically examined from this perspective.¹ This paper² aims to provide a deeper insight of how a Marian shrine is being re-orchestrated as a specific ‘power place’ in the context of alternative spiritualities, such as New Age religiosity or ethno-paganism (Ivakhiv 2001: ix–x, 3–9).

The Shrine and Its Short History

Today, Máriagyúd³ is one of the most important Marian shrines and a popular destination of religious tourism in South Hungary (Fig. 2.1). It was established by the local landlords on the southern slope of the Villány mountains in the 18th century. The first records of miracle accounts date to the early 1720s. From 1723 on until 1799, more than 300 cases of miraculous healing and further manifestations of divine intervention were registered in the three miracle collections compiled by Franciscan authors from the Gyúd and Siklós friaries (Kis-Halas 2019a, c, f).⁴ Pilgrims arrived from 109 locations situated

- 1 With regards to shrines visited mostly by Hungarian pilgrims but situated outside the country, only Csíksomlyó (Șumuleu Ciuc, Romania) have been investigated from this perspective, see Tănczos 2010; Povedák 2014.
- 2 The research leading to these results was financed by the European Research Council allocated from the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Community (2007–2013), based on the ERC Grant Agreement no. 324214 *Vernacular Religion on the Boundary of Eastern and Western Christianity: Continuity, Changes and Interactions*.
- 3 Gyúd (since 1935 Máriagyúd) is a village situated in the southern area of the Transdanubian Region, 2 km from Siklós, the nearest town and cca 10 km from the Croatian border. I only use the shorter name when I refer to events before 1935 (J. K.-H.).
- 4 The historical Gyúd village belonged to the Siklós castle. The shrine church was built by Countess Eleonore Batthyány-Strattmann, the lady of the Siklós castle, between 1744–1746.

partly in Hungary, and partly in present-day Croatia and Serbia. In terms of the size of the circle of attraction and the recorded number of pilgrims, Gyúd was rather typical of 18th century medium-sized Marian shrines, and so it remained during the 19th and the 20th centuries (Kis-Halas 2018, 2019a, d).⁵ Nowadays, the Hungarian Catholic Church's conscious efforts aiming to integrate Máriagyúd into recently established pilgrimage routes, such as the Marian Route and the Hungarian Pilgrimage Route, signal not only the desire to regain the former international reputation but also the presence of the contemporary experiential-spiritual interpretation of pilgrimage (Eade and Sallnow 2013; Margry 2008; Kis-Halas 2018).

Apart from its growing prestige among Catholic believers, Máriagyúd is today of particular importance for several esoteric groups and individual seekers. During my fieldwork in the past decade, I have observed that the shrine area is occasionally or even secretly turned into a site of various ceremonies, such as the opening of ‘dimension gates’⁶ by group meditation, or praying for love and peace around one of the open air crosses at the winter solstice, or lighting bunches of candles at various places in order to conjure up angels, or communicating with extra-terrestrials in the church building, or channelling cosmic energies. Though the number of spiritual seekers seems insignificant among the flocks of Catholic pilgrims arriving on Marian feasts, their presence is well-recognisable in the shrine area. Ceremonial objects and paraphernalia such as colourful tealights, chalk drawings, silk ribbons, etc. are often found on the spots after the gatherings as visible claims of a share from the sacred site.

- 5 The origins and the history of the Máriagyúd shrine are discussed in detail in my thesis, which describes the various medical spheres of the region in the 18th century, see Kis-Halas 2019a.
- 6 The notion is borrowed from sci-fi literature, where it means particular virtual spots or holes through which one can step out from and enter into another dimension in space or in the universe. In contemporary esoteric use, dimension gates are situated at power spots and a particular meditative state of mind is required to open and cross them, see Kis-Halas 2009 and 2019b.

Furthermore, the local esoteric healers and seers occasionally communicate Marian messages to their clients, thus reviving the old historical miracle type of moving sculptures (Christian 1992). My interlocutors told me about children who saw the *Immaculata* sculpture turning her head, nodding or talking to them.⁷ Zita, a Máriagyúd healer and angel seer, reported me a dream of hers when the Gyűd Virgin came to her bed and covered her with her blue mantle. She also felt the Virgin's 'blue energy' while Mary was caressing, holding and cherishing her and soothed her anxious mind (Kis-Halas 2008).

As my intention is to give a more intimate knowledge on the wide-ranging New Age phenomena and religious practices at the Máriagyúd shrine, I chose a sole but prominent example, the rituals of an esoteric group. The following analysis is based on my own fieldnotes recorded in 2013–14, which I completed with retrospective interviews from 2017–18 and further internet research.⁸ I systematically checked relevant internet sources on various locations and sites considered 'sacred' or 'power laden' in the vicinity of Máriagyúd. There I came across some photo documentation and Youtube videos on rituals in the Máriagyúd shrine area and some further ceremonies which took place inside the Medieval church in the neighbouring Túrony village. These findings revealed important facts on a Hungarian esoteric network called *Magyar MAGok* [Hungarian Seeds] that largely contributed to the results of my investigation.

The Esoteric Network ('Magyar MAGok')

In short, 'Magyar MAGok' is a loose network of individuals and temporary esoteric groups (cf. Luhrmann 1989: 29–41) from all over

7 Field note of July 12, 2005, Siklós-Máriagyúd (Hungary).

8 I have been conducting anthropological field research among rural communities in this multi-ethnic and multi-confessional region of South West Hungary and in the neighboring regions of Northern Croatia since the late 1990s. The principle aim of my inquiry so far has been to describe the medical pluralism I observed both in the past and in the present-day therapeutic landscapes.

Hungary under the lead of two women, Ilona and Magdolna (Magdala). Magdolna is the founder of the *Fénysugár Jézus Krisztus Háza Szeretetszolgálat Alapítvány* [Ray of Light – The House of Jesus Christ Charity Foundation], which seems to be the actual legal organisation in the background of the nationwide informal network. The foundation is situated in Kecskemét, a country town 90 km south-east of Budapest. Although its name suggests charity work, it deals with diverse religious and healing activities. The programmes include shamanic drumming sessions, tours to 'sacred sites' in Hungary and the Carpathian Basin (mostly Romania), weekend meditations, esoteric workshops, readings on the history and culture of the ancient Hungarians (Fig. 2.2). Unlike many similar, partly virtual formations, the network does not have its own website (Kis-Halas 2016). Yet, Hungarian Seeds has some online publicity, as Magdolna contacts the members and sympathisers through her Facebook page, and Ilona writes two blogs titled *Istengyermek* [God-child] and *Istenember* [Godman]. The entries of the latter two report on past gatherings and provide information on future events. If anyone wishes to tune in meditation and channelling sessions from home, which requires only virtual attendance, she or he can also find detailed instructions on how to join into the virtual ceremonies. In this respect, the activity of 'Magyar MAGok' fits the paradigm of *religion on-line* and *on-line religiosity*, which means that in several new religious movements the internet serves as an important social arena to communicate on religion as well as a site of religious practice (Cowan and Hadden 2004). Nevertheless, the actual rituals held at various locations throughout the country attract 100–150 people per event.

The Founders

Magdolna is a prophetess and a healer. As a disciple of Lajos Szántai and Gábor Pap, leading figures of the alternative scene of Hungarian historiography, archaeology and folkloristics (cf. Sándor 2011: 59–68; Szilárdi 2013; Lázár 2006; Kis-Halas 2019b), she considers

herself the bearer of the ancient Hungarian tradition. Accordingly, she preaches the Scythian-Hunnish origins of the Hungarians, she reveres Attila the Hun⁹ among the first kings of the Hungarian nation, she says that *táltos*¹⁰ was not only the shaman of the ancient Hungarians but a *magus-priest*,¹¹ and, most of all, that the Hungarians are God's chosen people who can save the whole world from the galactic conspiracy of the evil forces, just to mention some of the ideas she must have borrowed from the alternative discourse. She calls her mission 'the awakening of the Hungarian people', that is to make them aware of the role they must take and, at the same time, to prepare them for the war they should fight for the country, the Earth and the whole universe.¹² These ideas are well reflected in a recent message that she received from the Father God and the Virgin Mary and then published at Ilona's blog:

- 9 Attila, the ruler of the Huns (434–453). The idea of the close kinship of Huns and Hungarians, and Attila being predecessor of the land-taking Hungarian duke, Árpád appeared in 13th century chronicles, and it became an accepted historical explanation of the origins of Hungarians until modern times. When linguists discovered that the Hungarian language belonged to the Finno-Ugrian language family, the Scythian-Hun theory was shaken, but it did not disappear in the 19th and 20th century. Extreme nationalists still insist on it and try to disprove the Finno-Ugrian kinship, see Klaniczay 2011.
- 10 *Táltos* denotes wise man/woman, healer, and seer in Hungarian folk belief. As G. Róheim, G. Klaniczay and É. Pócs have already pointed at, similar sorcerer characters appear in the beliefs of other European peoples, see Róheim 1925; Klaniczay 1983, 1984, 2001; and Pócs 1989, 2017. For a long time, Hungarian research in linguistics, ethnography and prehistory has interpreted the figure and activities of the 'táltos' in the context of Eurasian shamanism, see Diószegi 1958, 1967, 1971. Consequently, the 'táltos' has been generally considered to this day as the *par excellence* Hungarian shaman and a proof for the Central Asian origin of the Hungarians. É. Pócs has recently provided a well-founded refutation of this standpoint, yet, in the Hungarian ethno-pagan discourse, which considers national identity a crucial point, this generally held opinion is still dominant, see Szilárdi 2013: 234–6; Kis-Halas 2014; Bajkó 2007.
- 11 This is a general phrase in the nationalist and ethno-pagan discourse in Hungary, Povedák and Hubbes 2015: 9–25. It was probably borrowed from the 19th century reconstructions of the mythology of the ancient Hungarians by A. Ipolyi (1854: 447–448.)
- 12 These ideas seem to dominate most of her public speeches and readings, see for example <http://huntut.info/szelei-magdolna-beszede/> (accessed on July 19, 2019).

"Blessed holy seeds and holy souls all over the world! I am conveying the message of the Omnipotent Living Old One God and the Great Blessed Woman.

'I am asking all spirits and souls who have received and perceived the call to come home to their homes in the ancient holy homeland of the Carpathian Basin. The time has come to unite our forces, our spirits, our hearts, and our souls. As the God of the Hungarians I have prepared and ordered the liberation of the Hungarian nation and the reversing of the Earth's fate by the agency of the Hungarian Seeds [Magyar MAGok]. You have stepped into an era that turns your fate. We should start our common duties. The time to act has come. Those who have to stay abroad, should serve there. You will receive all information in time. May all those coming home walk on the holy road. I am waiting for you, don't be late! Be at home by the ides of March¹³ this year. More information is on the way, thus be attentive and be careful! Have my blessings with and within you. This is the holy will of the Blessed Lady of the Hungarians and your Father.'"¹⁴

In line with her strong conviction of her mission's importance, Magdolna takes the religious and social roles attributed to the ancient Hungarian 'táltos'. She acts as a community leader, a magical and religious expert, a healer and the treasurer of the community's collective mythic and poetic knowledge. On the one hand, she is convinced of the divine origin of her knowledge, because she believes that she is God's chosen one. Furthermore, she activates the energies of the 'Hungarian Holy Crown'¹⁵ during the healing sessions, which indicates that her healing activity is an inherent part of her mission. Her therapeutic repertoire embraces the laying on

- 13 Here 'Ides of March' refers to the day of the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. March 15 is a national holiday in Hungary.
- 14 Available at <http://istenember.hu/index.php/ct-menu-item-5/130-haza-h-vo-szent-uzenet-az-os-iranyito-elv-megerkezett-indulunk-szelei-magdolna> (accessed on July 22, 2019).

hands, meditation with the use of Tibetan singing bowls, and shamanic drumming (cf. Kürti 2015) (Fig. 2.3).

Ilona, the seer, lives in Pécs, which is the largest city in south-west Hungary, some 30 km far from Máriagyűd. Her interest in esoteric and spiritual issues can be traced back to the early 2000s, when under the name of Miritia she published two books at a small publishing house in Pécs. The one out in 2004 is titled *Közös út* [Common Road]. It is a guide to spiritual self-improvement, where personal experiences serve as examples of the milestones on the road to spiritual empowerment. In the second volume from 2006, called *Pannónia liliomai* [The Lilies of Pannonia], she dwells on trendy themes of New Age spirituality, such as Tutankhamun's secret,¹⁶ the Da Vinci Code,¹⁷ or the 2012 dimensional shift.¹⁸ The fact that the first entry in her blog 'Istengyermek' is about the returning of the seeds (souls) from *Atais*¹⁹ to particular localities in Hungary suggests that she was already familiar with the ideas and the activity of 'Magyar MAGok' and might have even joined the network. Nevertheless, during the following years, she organised or assisted in several rituals not only in the vicinity of Pécs, but all over in the country (Fig. 2.4). The fact that she regularly published channelled messages on her blogs points to the role she plays in the network's virtual communication and publicity.

15 The Hungarian Holy Crown – believed, erroneously, to have been the crown Saint Stephen had received from Pope Sylvester II – is one of the principal symbols of Hungarian statehood. It had a special significance during the four centuries of Habsburg dominion, see Péter 2003. After 1990 strange, politically motivated esoteric cults developed around this core national symbol, cf. Kürti 2015: 245–254.

16 In 2015 a British archaeologist claimed to observe mysterious spirit-beings in Tutankhamun's burial chamber. Since that there has been a belief that there should be a room filled with golden treasures, hidden in the tomb. However, this was refuted by recent archaeological research in 2018.

17 See Dan Brown's bestseller (2003). The Hungarian translation was published in 2004.

18 In his book *The Biggest Secret* (1999) American conspiracist author David Icke predicted the real millennium to 12/12/2012, a date assigned by the Mayan Calendar's transformation cycle, see Barkun 2003: 173. Icke's ideas reached Hungary by the early 2010s, see also Kis-Halas 2019c.

Mission, Ideas and Rituals

The members in the network seem to be mostly women and they consider themselves the adherents of *Boldogasszony* (literally [Blessed Woman]), which is a special Hungarian denomination of the Virgin Mary and, at the same time, the alleged goddess of the ancient Hungarians. 'Boldogasszony' has been used as a synonym for the Blessed Virgin Mary since the Middle Ages (cf. Madas 2002). The quest for a lost epic and a missing mythology of the Hungarians, which was inspired by national romanticism, resulted in the term gaining an ethnic taste by the end of the 19th century. 'Boldogasszony' was the most emblematic female figure of the pantheon in the re-invented Ancient Hungarian religion – the Mother Goddess (Kálmány 1885). With regard to its contemporary use, 'Boldogasszony' is also interpreted as the Hungarian equivalent of the Goddess (Bowman 2009), and she is also considered Mother Earth (Gaia).

As for the 'Magyar MAGok', she is revered in both of these latter guises with an additional feature that 'Boldogasszony' is not only the Mother Goddess, but the galactic patroness of all Hungarians *par excellence* as well. Therefore, it is not accidental that the ritual activity of the network is often centred around Marian shrines, either historical-traditional ones, like in the case of Máriagyűd, or at recently established alternative sacred sites where not only the Virgin Mary but 'Boldogasszony' is worshipped. A good example of the latter is the so-called 'Healing Star' at Pilisszántó in the North Hungarian Pilis Mountains. The Healing Star is a large star-pattern which was created of stones and gravels on the ground on the top of a large plateau above Pilisszántó village. It was established eleven years ago in an abandoned limestone quarry. The location is believed to have been appointed by heavenly/extra-terrestrial forces: 'Sky Father opened a healing channel here', as the introduction puts it on an

19 According to a wide-spread popular alternative myth of origin in Hungary, the so-called *Arvisura*, 'Atais' is a mythic island in the Pacific Ocean where the souls of the ancient Hungarians landed from space, see Sándor 2011: 54–58.

alternative healer's website.²⁰ Next to the star stands a small stone chapel, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, in which her statue is placed.²¹ Although the chapel was erected two years prior to the Healing Star, and has been operating ever since as a devotional place acknowledged (and consecrated by) the Roman Catholic Church, 'spiritual' pilgrims also frequent it. Their presence is marked by particular devotional objects, such as red-white silken ribbons, cemetery lights, or tablets with 'ancient Hungarian' runic inscriptions laid upon the altar or hung from the Virgin's stone statue.

As Ilona's blog-entries revealed, the 'Magyar MAGok' paid regular visits there over the past six years. Their 2016 tour to the Healing Star was documented by the participants, and it also provides an insight into the group's ritual activities.

The declared mission of the 'Magyar MAGok' is to bring about the 'ascension' of Hungary (which is meant to expand to the whole Carpathian Basin) to a new epoch by channelling benevolent energies to the whole Hungarian nation and, at the same time, to restore the energy-balance between the universe and the Earth. They think to achieve these through a ritual called *Fénymegkötő Szer*²² [Light-binding Feast], which is a literary reference to the actual bond established between the human world and the cosmic entities. It also refers to the means of contacting, as it is set up through light. The Máriagyűd ritual was offered for both Mother Earth and the whole universe.

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- 20 The site has become a popular tourist destination by now and visitors launched a Facebook-page of the Healing Star, see <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Pilissz%C3%A1nt%C3%B3-Gy%C3%B3gy%C3%ADt%C3%B3-Csillag/366999083745041> (accessed on September 18, 2019). Alternative healers from all over Hungary recommend their patients to visit it, see <https://afenygyermekei.hu/gyogyito-csillag/> (accessed on September 18, 2019).
- 21 See <https://www.pilisszantozarandokhely.hu/boldogasszonykapolna.html> (last accessed on September 18, 2019). The statue depicts Mary as the woman clothed with the sun, which is a clear reference not only to the Apocalypse, but to the Church itself. However, it goes beyond the scope of this paper to unfold further symbolic meanings this identification implies. The story of the chapel also deserves a separate study.

In general, the participants of the ritual place three or four cemetery lights on the ground on the top of a hill or any higher place at an especially 'power-laden' location and encircle them with a white and a red silk ribbon. These colours hint to the Árpád House, the first Hungarian royal dynasty.²³ Additionally, a Hungarian rune referring to the initials of the planned target of the universal light is drawn or applied in the middle of this circle. In Máriagyűd, it was the letter 'K' because, according to Hungarian spelling, the word 'Carpathian' [Kárpát] begins with it and the aim of the ritual was channelling cleansing and benevolent energies to the Carpathian Basin (Fig. 2.5).

When the lights are lit the participants form a circle holding each other's hands and the meditation starts. For each occasion a new text is recited. The words are received from the extra-terrestrial helpers by the leaders through channelling. The goal of the group meditation is to open a so-called dimension gate through which the light brings the heavenly energy down to the Earth. As their name suggests, dimension gates are passageways between the dimensions of the Universe (Kis-Halas 2009). They are often believed to overarch more than one 'powerful site', such as the one linking the Máriagyűd shrine and the medieval parish church of the Túrony village. At certain occasions, more gates are unlocked at the same time in order to access a larger quantity of cosmic energy. In November 2013, for example, three rituals took place simultaneously

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- 22 The Hungarian word 'szer' means the settlement of a clan. In contemporary Hungarian ethno-pagan and nationalist-extremist discourse, it denotes a festive occasion and/or tribal gathering. In this latter sense, 'szer' is a reference to a Hungarian medieval chronicle (*Gesta Hungarorum*), in which a location called 'Szer' is mentioned and where 'Duke' Árpád and the clan leaders held the first 'national assembly' of the Hungarians, see Anonymus: 86–87.
- 23 According to medieval Hungarian chroniclers, 'Duke' Árpád lead the Hungarian tribes during the conquest of the Carpathian Basin in 895–6, cf. Engel 2001: 18–20. He became the ancestor of the Árpadian dynasty, which ruled the Hungarian Kingdom between 1000 and 1301. The first king, Stephen (1000–1038), was canonised in 1083, see Klaniczay 2002: 123–147.

at three Hungarian Marian shrines: Máriagyűd, Márianosztra and Máriapócs, the geographical location of which forms a triangle.

Receiving and channelling cosmic energies in the form of light is only one of the purposes of the rituals. The other goal is to connect with those benevolent superhuman and divine entities of whom the energies originate. The cosmic helpers conjured up this way are either members of the Christian pantheon such as God, the angels and the Virgin Mary, or the Biblical-extra-terrestrial 'ancestor spirits' of the Hungarians believed to exist in faraway galaxies, such as the Pleiades or the Sirius (cf. Szilárdi 2013).

During the Máriagyűd ceremony, the Archangel Michael appeared first in the form of colourful rays in front of the chapel dedicated to him (Fig. 2.6). Later, as it was growing darker, the extra-terrestrial energy became visible in the shape of light balls flying all around the participants. Finally, Ilona, who was the leader of the ceremony, had a vision. She saw that Árpád, the head of the Hungarian tribes and the founder of the first Hungarian royal dynasty, arrived on horseback leading an army of ancestor spirits. He was also holding an enormous swallowtail flag with red and silver stripes, the heraldic and vexillological symbol of the Árpád dynasty. 'Wherever the flag swept over, the whole world shone up,' noted Ilona in the blog-entry where she published the course of the ceremony. Árpád's escorts were Nimrod²⁴ on his right and Jesus on his left side. Árpád and his companions were only seen by Ilona, in her vision at the site, thus the only evidence is her report. Nevertheless, she presented two photographs taken at Máriagyűd, which were obviously meant as visible evidence of the supernatural experience (Wojcik 1996, 2009).

Not only the sites but also the date of the rituals is carefully chosen. On the one hand, it is adjusted to the ethno-pagan cycle of seasonal festivals and the Marian feasts of the year; on the

24 The Biblical hunter king, who is believed by the 19th century 'alternative historians' to have been one of the Hungarians' forefathers, see Ipolyi 1854: 133.

other, it is chosen according to the instructions received from the extra-terrestrial entities channelled by the two leaders. However, as I studied Ilona's blog entries on her heavenly contacts and the dates of the rituals, the will of the universal forces seemed to be more decisive in this respect. In the Máriagyűd cases, the first known ritual took place on November 24, and a second one was organised a month later, soon after the winter solstice. The day before the first occasion, Ilona reported that she had received a message that the cosmic energies were ready to be conveyed to the Earth.

A Spectrum of Intertwined Narratives

A more thorough description of the 'Magyar MAGok' network obviously requires further in-depth research, which I have just started. To sum up my findings, I shall highlight only those issues which are relevant to my initial topic, namely the reinvention of this particular Marian shrine in the context of the New Age movement.

First, I should point to some of the global discourses of New Age religiosity that appeared in our case. Among them *millennialism*²⁵ and especially *ascensionism*²⁶ is one of the most outstanding, as the purpose of the 'Fénymegkötő szer' ceremonies is to elevate the Earth to a higher level of existence. The fact that the rituals are organised at specific places which are believed to be spiritually powerful fits into the millennial trend but also connects them to another New Age discourse, namely to that of Gaia's cult and the Earth mysteries movement. It is about the spiritual geography of Mother Earth, which not only considers the planet a living entity but has also redesigned its geographical image. It says that instead

25 *Millennialism* is the 'academic term to refer a belief in imminent transition to a collective salvation, in which the faithful will experience well-being and the unpleasant limitations of the human condition will be eliminated', see Wessinger 2011: 720. On New Age millennialism see also Lucas 2011.

26 *Ascensionism* "reflects a [...] dualistic [...] cosmology, identifying 'forces of Light' aligned against those forces which would constrain humanity's spiritual potential. This evolutionary potential of humanity is often modelled on the motif of 'ascension' to higher levels or dimensions of existence," see Ivakhiv 2001: 8.

of latitudes and longitudes, the Earth is calibrated by mystical power-corridors called Ley-lines, or St Michael or St George lines, etc. This hypothesis is relevant in the choice of ceremonial localities in our case, because often Hungarian Marian shrines, such as Andocs, Bodajk, Máriapócs, Máriakönyve-Vodica, Márianosztra, and Máriagyúd are appointed. A further feature of 'Magyar MAGok' links the network not only to New Age phenomena but to UFO-religions,²⁷ too. It is *channelling* as a means of superhuman communication.²⁸ While both leaders claim to have permanent extra-terrestrial connections, the participants may also establish temporary contacts with the cosmic forces through mantras repeated silently or sometimes loudly during the ceremonies because these chants are recited in order to evoke the cosmic forces and draw down the energies.

Secondly, in accordance with the millennial narrative, there are also other motifs well distinguishable which recall UFO-religions and ET-spiritualities, namely the alliance between humans and benevolent extra-terrestrial entities (cf. Grünschloß 2004; Flaherty 2011; Östling 2016), the universal conspiracy of evil humans with harmful superhuman beings and cosmic forces (cf. Dyrendal 2016), and lastly the idea of healing and cleansing as the basic means leading to universal well-being (Hanegraaff 1996: 42–48).

Thirdly, I could draw the attention to the strong impact of various Hungarian ethno-pagan narratives which lend an obviously nationalistic overtone to the 'Magyar MAGok's' eclectic character (cf. Szilágyi and Szilárdi 2007; Szilárdi 2013). It is best seen in the repeated references to the mythological reconstructions of the ancient Hungarian religion, such as the aforementioned figure of 'Boldogasszony', Attila the Hun or Árpád, enumerated among the ancestral spirit-helpers, and the very name of the ritual, to

²⁷ For UFO-religions, see Smith 2003.

²⁸ *Channelling* is not the invention of ET- and UFO-religions, neither restricted to them. It is rooted in the mediumship of 19th century spiritism, and it has become a widespread practice in various New Age spiritualities, see for instance Sutcliffe (2004: 470).

which I have already hinted. Furthermore, elements of the alternative history of the Hungarians are taken at face value and are thus frequently referred to, such as the direct kinship between the Hungarians and the Huns, or the identification of the Ancient Hungarians with the Scythians, or the Hungarian origins of the Christian Father God, just to mention some of the most frequently repeated ideas (cf. Sándor 2011; Klaniczay 2011). Last but not least, one should bear in mind that Magdolna, the healer and prophetess, considers herself a religious and community functionary, a female shaman *par excellence*. She connects regularly not only with extra-terrestrial entities but also with the *turul*, the prey-bird totem of the Hungarian tribes according to the romantic reconstructions of ancient Hungarian mythology (cf. Ipolyi 1854).

Finally, I should underline the fact that the process of reinterpretation is a permanent one with regard to Máriagyúd. The latest stage of it is the Hungarian Catholic Church's response to the challenges of New Age presence at the Máriagyúd shrine. One remarkable achievement in this respect is that, in 2015–16, the entire shrine area was rearranged and redesigned within the frames of an EU-funded renovation project of the Pécs diocese. The roads and paths connecting the various devotional sites within the shrine area were reconfigured and renamed as the Rosary Route, which is an explicit reference to the Loreto Litany (Kis-Halas 2019f). However, its map displayed on wooden boards reveals a stellar design similar to that of the Via Sancti Martini (Fig. 2.7). In addition to it, when mapped, these two new pilgrimage routes form the shape of a cross (Fig. 2.8), an interesting fact that the promotion film on the Marian Route does not miss to emphasise. One cannot deny that these astronomical depictions of geographical realities could remind people who see them of the mysterious paths connecting the 'powerful sites' well-known from the Earth mysteries.

There was another event which points to this Catholic 'spiritualising' trend, namely the Assumption pilgrimage in 2016. Pope Francis announced an extraordinary jubilee of mercy for the year 2016

and issued the bull *Misericordiae Vultus*.²⁹ The pope also ordered the bishops to open 'the holy gates of mercy' at each and every shrine in their Episcopal see. Accordingly, pilgrims arriving at the Marian feasts to the Máriagyűd basilica minor could cross the holy gates, which provided them a more direct access to the Gyűd Virgin's altar. During the Assumption pilgrimage, I noticed an extraordinary ritual which took place while the procession was passing through the gate. At both sides, a member of the Máriagyűd Catholic Community stood holding a bowl with colourful glass-stones. Pilgrims took some or even a handful of stones and carried them inside the church. After praying in front of the miracle-working statue of the Gyűd Virgin, they placed the glass-stones on the altar or put them into the small baskets held by other two community members standing at both ends of the high altar (Fig. 2.9). When I inquired about the unusual ritual, I was told that this innovation was the community's own initiative. I was explained that the glass-stones symbolised the sins that one carried as a 'heavy load' in order to be presented to Mary, and of which the Virgin released them after their penance. The stones were therefore left upon or next to the altar. According to my interlocutors, the goal of adding this nuance was to make the entire ceremony more tangible for the ordinary believers, even in a literary sense. However, this paraliturgical act, according to my interpretation, was not only a re-invention of a former devotional practice, namely the offering of votive objects (Kis-Halas 2019e), but it might be understood as a potential, yet probably not entirely consciously planned, answer to a general demand for more comprehensible forms of devotion. On the other hand, the aforementioned more direct references to obviously New Age phenomena can be interpreted as cautious attempts to recapture the spiritual seekers to the Catholic faith (Kis-Halas 2019f).

29 Although the 'Jubilee year' has passed, the website of the Máriagyűd shrine still stresses the importance of the 'holy gates', see <http://mariagyud.hu/index.php/35-bolt-weblap/37-gyumolcsenciklopedia/38-a/6-alma> (accessed on July 25, 2019).

Conclusions

During my longitudinal field work on religious practices at the Máriagyűd shrine, I regularly came across various devotional forms that seemed to me of having esoteric-spiritual characteristics. Respective internet research revealed that an esoteric network called 'Magyar MAGok' [Hungarian seeds] has left its footprint at this historical-traditional Marian shrine. Beside their diverse religious and healing activities, 'Magyar MAGok' regularly visit 'sacred sites' in Hungary and the Carpathian Basin, including Marian shrines in particular, where they perform a ritual called 'Fénymegkötő Szer' [Light-binding Feast]. The complexity of the rite needs more in-depth investigation, therefore, this time, I highlighted the various narratives that composed the ideological-spiritual background of the ritual. I distinguished motifs which relate the beliefs and activities of 'Magyar MAGok' to global New Age phenomena, especially UFO-religions and ET-spiritualities, such as the alliance between humans and extra-terrestrials, the channelling mediumship, or the idea of healing the universe by cleansing it from evil and harmonising the universal energies. On the other hand, I also pointed to the conscious use of particular elements of the 'alternative history' of the Hungarians, such as the galactic 'Turul' energy, the extra-terrestrial Hungarian ancestral spirits, and 'Boldogasszony' – The Blessed Virgin Mary – as the central figure of worship.

My investigation also revealed that the figure of the Virgin Mary is the clue to understand the discourse on the contested authority of the shrine. First of all, I should point to the fact that even though 'Boldogasszony' is revered both by Catholic believers and the followers of alternative spiritual traits, including the leaders and sympathisers of 'Magyar MAGok', the Hungarian Catholic Church strongly objects to the assimilation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to a pagan goddess, or to Mother Earth or to some kind of a galactic Patroness of the Hungarian nation.

Consequently, it was not surprising that when I asked the Máriagyűd Catholic priest whether he noticed any 'neo-pagan'

pilgrims or tourists among the visitors, he and the sacristan replied with a laughter: 'If we see any, we will chase them away!'³⁰ They meant it a funny comment, yet it reflected the official standpoint of the Hungarian Catholic Church with regards to such expressions of belief. The Catholic Church's opinion was communicated in a 2009 circular issued on September 19 by the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference, ordered to be preached in each and every Catholic church on September 20.³¹ The circular drew the priests' and the believers' attention at the 'importance of keeping the Catholic faith against the rapidly spreading ideas of neo-paganism'. It mentioned occultism, spiritualism and 'the various forms of idolatry' among the 'the threats to our faith'. As far as the Máriagyűd presence of the 'Magyar MAGok' is concerned, the priest and the Catholic believers seemed to ignore their activity in the shrine area: the cemetery lights and the ribbons next to the church building remained there for weeks without anyone trying to remove them. However, it is worth noting that, unlike in the above-mentioned occasions at Pilisszántó, the 'Magyar MAGok' did not enter the church and could not use the high altar for their own ritual purposes. As they did not cross the borderline between the profane and the consecrated space, their activity was generously disregarded by the local representatives of church authority. Further inquiry is needed to explore the 'Magyar MAGok's' reactions to the Catholic Church's attitudes, but it goes beyond the scope of the present article.

³⁰ Field-notes from May 2014.

³¹ See <https://regi.katolikus.hu/cikk.php?h=1386> (accessed on August 10, 2019).



Fig. 2.1

Fig. 2.1 Máriagyűd Basilica Minor (photo by J. Kis-Halas, December 15, 2017).



Fig. 2.2

Fig. 2.2 Shamanic drumming session in the woods of the Pilis mountains (Hungary). Magdolna is beating the drum, while Ilona is clapping her hands (photo on her Facebook page, archive of J. Kis-Halas).



Fig. 2.3

Fig. 2.3 Magdolna is preparing for a healing session. She is placing a copy of the Hungarian Holy Crown, made of straw, in the middle of her healing yurt at the Tribal Gathering of the Hungarians at Bösztörpuszta, August 22, 2008 (photo on her Facebook page, archive of J. Kis-Halas).



Fig. 2.4

Fig. 2.4 Ilona fastening the Pauline lily onto a cross next to the recently built open-air sacred site dedicated to the Blessed Woman at Pilisszántó, Hungary (photo uploaded to Ilona's blog: https://istengyermek.blog.hu/2014/05/21/liliom_zarandoklat, accessed on June 18, 2019).



Fig. 2.5

Fig. 2.5 The cemetery lights encircled with red and white ribbons in the shape of the 'K' rune next to the Máriagyűd shrine church (photo by J. Kis-Halas, December 27, 2014).



Fig. 2.6

Fig. 2.6 The apparition of lights by the St Michael Chapel by the Máriagyűd shrine. A participant's photo uploaded to Ilona's blog. Source: https://istengyermek.blog.hu/2013/11/25/szer_2013_11_24_en_a_foldanyaert_es_a_vilagert, accessed on June 18, 2019).



Fig. 2.9



Fig. 2.8

Fig. 2.7 Shrine map with the Rosary Route (photo by J. Kis-Halas, June 18, 2017).

Fig. 2.8 Map of the Marian Route from the image film (source: <https://youtu.be/XVvCfQzLr78>, accessed on June 18, 2019).

Fig. 2.9 Pilgrims before crossing the holy gate at the Assumption pilgrimage in 2016 (photo by J. Kis-Halas, July 14, 2016).



Fig. 2.7

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01 ZACHAR PODOLINSKÁ, Tatiana

Traces of the Mary in Post-Communist Europe

The Virgin Mary as such cannot be examined scientifically. We can, however, examine her 'apparitions' in the world, as well as the innumerable variants of Marian devotion and cult. This volume focuses on her manifestations in the post-Communist region with some geographical spillovers. It is either because post-Communist transformation concerned not only the former socialist countries, but also had an impact on the entire European region and was part of the overall post-modern and post-Communist reconfiguration of the European area. Another factor is that Marian worship is not controlled by political borders of present-day nation states. It has a wider transnational potential and impact. Nevertheless, we focused our viewfinder primarily on the post-Communist region, as we believe that thanks to its geographical and symbolic location and economic position in Europe, as well as its historical roots and traditions and common Communist history and heritage, it not only shows different traits of modernity compared to 'Western Europe', but we also face specific features and forms of worshipping of the Virgin Mary. We therefore decided to present in this volume the traces of the Virgin Mary by means of more in-depth analyses from selected countries of the post-socialist region.

By means of this publication, we can observe how the Virgin Mary is manifested in the faces of seers and pilgrims and how audio-visual means are becoming a direct part of Marian apparitions in Germany in the modern era (H. Knoblauch and S. Petschke); how she speaks through the mouth of a blind Roma woman and pacifies the ethnic and religious tensions between various groups in Romania (L. Peti); how she attributes meaning to meaningless places on the map by reallocating her presence through the geographical and time distribution of Marian dedications in Slovakia (J. Majo); how, after the fall of Communism, she revitalises the old places of her cult with new power, bringing together traditional

and non-traditional forms of worship in the secular Czech Lands (M. Holubová); how her messages are spread on the websites of new non-traditional Marian movements and how their apocalyptic warnings are being updated and localised into the specific national environment in Czechia (V. Tutr); how she addresses the readers of Marian literature differently on the shelves of bookstores in Slovakia and Austria (R. Kečka); but also how the Virgin Mary absorbs ultra-modern millennial and spiritualistic concepts of Mother Earth and Mother of the Universe, becoming the speaker of the great unified Hungarian nation (J. Kis-Halas); how she is becoming the re-discovered herald of Serbian national identity (A. Pavičević); how she absorbs the local forms of faith and folk Christianity in modern era and is thus the manifestation of grass-root Christianity and local religious culture in Bulgaria (V. Baeva and A. Georgieva); and how the path from a private to an officially recognised apparition depends not only on the Virgin Mary and the seer, but also on the overall constellation of the audience and the ability to offer a *religious ready-made event* (T. Zachar Podolinská and L. Peti).

This publication observes the current diversity of the forms of Marian devotion in post-Communist countries through different national and geographically defined contours and, in particular, the ability of the Virgin Mary to satisfy the hunger for modern spirituality and authentic religiousness, give voice to unofficial and popular religions, revitalise and redefine old places of cult and add new ones, appease war conflicts, speak out on behalf of nations and marginalised ethnic groups, and guard national and conservative values. The post-modern and post-Communist Mary thus restores ruptured traditions with love, and enchants the violently atheised European region with new miracles and apparitions, regardless of whether top Church and state representatives like it or not.

02 KIS-HALAS, Judit

Sacred Sites Reinterpreted: New Age Phenomena at a Hungarian Marian Shrine

Marian shrines were always the sites of miraculous healings and spectacular apparitions. Nowadays, they have also become the crystallisation points of the New Age phenomena. Several studies have already pointed out this trend with regard to popular pilgrimage destinations. As far as the Hungarian Marian shrines are concerned, none of them have been systematically examined from this perspective. This chapter aims to provide a deeper insight of how a Marian shrine is being re-orchestrated as a specific 'power place' in the context of alternative spiritualities, such as New Age religiosity or ethno-paganism at one Marian shrine at Máriagyűd.

From the wide-ranging New Age phenomena and religious practices that the author observed during the past decades at Máriagyűd, she chose the prominent example of an esoteric group called *Magyar MAGok* [Hungarian Seeds], which deals with diverse religious and healing activities. Their programmes include shamanic drumming sessions, tours to 'sacred sites' in Hungary and the Carpathian Basin (mostly Romania), weekend meditations, esoteric workshops, readings on the history and culture of the ancient Hungarians, such as direct kinship between the Hungarians and the Huns, or the identification of the Ancient Hungarians with the Scythians, or the Hungarian origins of the Christian Father God. In accordance with the millennial narrative, they use the elements of the alternative history of the Hungarians as well as other motifs which recall UFO-religions and ET-spiritualities, and last but not least, the idea of healing and cleansing as the basic means leading to universal well-being. The description of their unique rituals and other religious practices is followed by an analysis of the discourse on the contested authority of the shrine.

The author of the chapter focuses on the role of the Virgin Mary within their discourse. She found it interesting that Mary

is connected with the so-called *Boldogasszony* (literally [Blessed Woman]), which is a special Hungarian denomination of the Virgin Mary and, at the same time, the alleged goddess of the ancient Hungarians. 'Boldogasszony' has been used as a synonym for the Blessed Virgin Mary since the Middle Ages (cf. Madas 2002). The quest for a lost epic and a missing mythology of the Hungarians, which was inspired by national romanticism, resulted in the term gaining an ethnic taste by the end of the 19th century. 'Boldogasszony' was the most emblematic female figure of the pantheon in the re-invented Ancient Hungarian religion – the Mother Goddess (Kálmány 1885). With regard to its contemporary use, 'Boldogasszony' is also interpreted as the Hungarian equivalent of the Goddess (Bowman 2009), and is also considered Mother Earth (Gaia) and the galactic patroness of all Hungarians *par excellence*. The author put the manifold interpretations of the Virgin Mary's figure in the centre of attention, highlighting the Catholic Church's standpoint on the emergence of New Age spirituality at Catholic devotional places.

03 HOLUBOVÁ, Markéta

Manifestations of Marian Devotion in the Czech Republic – the Past and Present

According to the author of the chapter, Marian devotion in the Czech Republic should be seen not only in the light of recent highly secularised climate of Czech society. For the current dislike for official Catholicism and de-Christianisation of Czech society, we have to go back in history. In the 19th century, Czechs became liberals, nationalists or socialists. At the same time, religion ceased to play its former role and was assigned only the role of an occasionally sought-after, yet unnecessary 'folklore' anachronism, typical for village population. Religious identity was substituted primarily by national identity, as well as by class identity and a 'scientific' worldview. The rise of the Communist dictatorship after 1948 bolstered these trends and used them – mostly unmod-

ified – for its own benefit. The non-religious and anti-religious components were accentuated, while the forms of 'implicit religiosity' stayed preserved and Church organisations were forced to face systematic repression. The years 1989 and 1990 brought about radical changes in the political and spiritual history of the Czech Republic. Religion lost its principal enemy – Communism. Innumerable forms of religiosity appeared, from versions of classical and modern Christianity to the spiritual schools of the Far East.

In this context, it is very interesting that the worshiping of the Virgin Mary has remained virtually unchanged. Just like in the past, emphasis is placed today on spirituality and emotional experience, thereby fulfilling the main conditions for survival in the modern era *de facto*. In addition to the traditional forms of cult and pilgrimage rituals, there are also new forms of religiosity brought about by the 21st century, especially in abundantly visited places of pilgrimage. Due to the widespread use of the internet and e-mail communication, after centuries of pilgrimage tradition, there is for the first time no need to receive the written *votum* personally or even in representation. After 1989, visits to Czech and foreign places of pilgrimage began to appear in the catalogues of many travelling agencies. Also, bike pilgrimages represent a very popular form among young people.

On the other hand, it can be also mentioned, that despite the strong Marian tradition, the general public and as well as the religious discourse on Marian devotion connected to private apparitions in the Czech Republic is at a certain point 'marginal'. This can have two principal reasons. Firstly, the import of apparitions is caused by the absence of such apparitions at home. Secondly, the import of greater movements and groups represents a reaction to the delay of the Communist era and a smaller membership of believers.

04 TUTR, Vojtěch

The Reception of Recent Marian Apparitions in the Czech Republic in the Field of Popular Religiosity – Two Examples

Marian apparitions have always emerged throughout the history of the Catholic Church. However, they have never been given a lot of attention and have never met with so much public acceptance as has been seen since the latter half of the 19th century. The development of *mass communication* and increasing population *mobility* have partly contributed to this phenomenon. These apparitions have a new function – providing *public messages*. The Virgin Mary is no longer speaking only to the visionary; she is pronouncing prophecies and messages to all believers, laying claims to the hierarchy.

This chapter offers a comparative analysis of two examples of ‘popular religiosity’ in the Czech Republic as a spontaneous religious activity produced and operated by their charismatic leaders and opinion-makers: *Vérité* centre founded by František Mráček and *Mariánské nakladatelství* [MANA, Marian publishers] founded by František Press in Brno. Both cases are based on modern Marian apparitions and are contextualised in the current global situation and in the Czech Republic. According to the author, this goes hand in hand with the trend of modernisation and the era of mass communication.

Marian devotion plays a central role in both studied cases and is crucial for understanding the portraying her as the *Loving Mother* and *Hope of the Mankind*, as well as the *Guardian of the World* coming as the (last) *Living Warning* before the expected global catastrophe. The apocalyptic, chiliastic and millennial tone presented by both interpreters of modern Marian apparitions is being explored as well. The main issue in both cases is the expectation of the *end of the current world* order. This element was certainly activated by the approaching end of the millennium. Even though this stimulation of thoughts on the end of the world is now out of play, the charismatic leaders flexibly postponed their prediction in this re-

gard and, according to them, we should expect some global threat in the future, the outbreak of WWII, nuclear or ecological catastrophes, globalisation or total control by means of information technologies.

Another nodal point is the reference to *globalisation* as an instrument of Satan's rule over the unified world. According to the author, both studied cases are examples of modern adaptation of Christianity to the post-modern religious landscape of post-socialist Czech Republic and represent a form of *popular religiosity* which is transformed and adapted to the context of modern society and ‘Western culture’.

05 KEČKA, Roman

Contemporary Models of Marian Discourse in Slovakia

According to the 2001 census, the majority of Slovakia's population statistically follows the Catholic confession of Roman or Byzantine rites. In both rites, the Marian devotion has a considerable place in religious reflection and spirituality. This study explores the religious discourse of the Marian devotion as it appears in available books and booklets on this topic. The main focus of the chapter is a comparison of the Marian discourse in Slovakia (representing a post-socialist country) and the Marian discourse in neighbouring Austria (representing a ‘Western’ country with no socialist history). For this purpose, a sample of Mariological reflections and spiritual texts was created based on their availability in all Catholic bookstores in the capital of Slovakia (Bratislava) and the capital of Austria (Vienna). The reason for this choice is that these bookstores offer books that mirror the living intellectual and religious brainstorming and reflect Christianity, in particular the pattern of the Marian discourse of the recent decades in both countries. The study comments on the absence of modern Marian literature in Slovak bookstores. The author also analyses the Marian vocabulary and topics in the both samples. The author distinguishes three existing models of the Marian discourse in

Slovakia, all of traditional origin, portraying Mary as an unselfish and patient mother, Mary loving conditionally and restraining God's anger; Mary leading the legions against Satan and crushing his head. All three models are based on the traditional images of Mary and, within the Christian communities, are not understood as contradictory, but complementary.

Compared to Western Christianity, the Marian discourse in Slovakia lacks two recurrent models: (1) the progressive 20th/21st century model, and (2) the traditionalist and fundamentalist model. The first model has created a Marian vocabulary and contents representing a self-confident, social and communicative model of Mary. This model presents an alternative to the old models combining mild or triumphant vocabulary with mild or triumphant contents. The second model which is absent among Slovak believers is the Marian discourse of the traditionalist and fundamentalist groups of each age tolerated by official Church structures. These traditionalist and fundamentalist groups return to the old Marian vocabulary and contents that is triumphant, militant and – in this modern version – has an offensive character. This form of discourse, created as a reaction to progressive Christian groups – did not emerge in Slovakia, since there were no progressive Christian movements.

Based on the research of the author, the Slovak Marian reflection and spirituality result from traditional beliefs, having no affinity to Western progressive and traditionalist models. In this regard, it can be stated that Slovakia's isolation from the European spiritual development, which has caused traditional devotion to be fixed in its forms, is, paradoxically, continuing also after the fall of Communism in the era of religious freedom. The comparative discursive analysis of Mariological literature in Slovakia and its Western neighbour – Austria has showed that the Slovak religious landscape is far more traditional (but not traditionalist) than the current trends in the 'Western' religious discourse.

06 MAJO, Juraj

Marian Dedications within the Current Cultural Space of Slovakia

Cultural geography (as the main field in geography with no connection to religion) is strongly influenced by constructivist approaches today. Geographer Doreen Massey wrote in 2010 (Massey 2010: 107) that space is always being made and always, therefore, in a sense, unfinished. The 'always' is rather that there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction, or not, potential links which may never be established. Loose ends and ongoing stories. With these ideas she perfectly outlined the relationship of space, time, and social world. In the field of religious identity and its expression it indicates not just variability of its representations but can also work as a hub to the local projections of identity interactions and how this space is formed within local actors and local circumstances.

All interactions within the various scales forms two paradigms of how place and space can be analysed – as politics and poetics of space. If the cult of the Virgin Mary prevails within the Catholic religious practice, then the poetics and politics of space can have vast forms of expression and impacts. This chapter attempts to outline the spatiality of this cult represented in dedications of sacred buildings, and open up questions on forming such distributions and regional specificities in Slovakia.

Research on the spatial aspects of dedications of sacred buildings provide interesting intersections of relations between sacred and profane as well as various levels of research resulting in a relationship between the 'politics' and 'poetics' of place. This chapter introduces such relationship within cultural geography. Although this approach is fully applicable in local or regional research, we have outlined the spatial aspects of the cult of the Virgin Mary as embodied in the dedication of sacred buildings, introducing the differences in the types of such dedication within regional and denominational aspects (such as Roman and Byzantine Catholics).

The link between time and space is observed in living as well as obliterated dedications, which helps us understand in a very broad sense the dynamics of construction and maintenance of sacred space and the projections of initiatives at various levels of political administration with an impact on the poetics of space and community.

Research on the spatial distribution of dedications in Slovakia is still a little explored field, even though the extensive data sources are relatively high in quality and quantity and enable the interpretation of different relations in various scales. In the context of important dedications, it is the Marian ones that have a significant position in church life and are the most common ones, reflecting the intensity of the worship of the Virgin Mary within the Slovak environment. The research also indicates that the importance and popularity of Marian dedications are accompanied by great diversity with growth over time. It also reflects on the background based on social changes, such as the extinction of the Kingdom of Hungary, the declaration of Our Lady of Sorrows as the patron of Slovakia, etc.

07 KNOBLAUCH, Hubert – PETSCHKE, Sabine

Vision and Video. Marian Apparition, Spirituality and Popular Religion

The chapter demonstrates that *spirituality* and *popular religiosity* are built into the Marian apparitions, thus turning them into a contemporary 'modern' phenomenon. The study refers to a series of apparitions which happened during 1999 in Marpingen, a German village close to the Western border with France. This village was the setting for a series of Marian apparitions back in the 19th century. These earlier apparitions have recently been subjected to a very thorough study by British historian David Blackbourn (1993). Whereas Blackbourn based his analysis on written documents mostly stored in archives, the authors had not only access to written documents, newspapers and books, but also the

exceptional chance to collect video-tape records from the event, and they could also rely on audio-taped statements by the seers. These data, supported by ethnographic field data, are subject to a fine-grained video-analysis provided in the chapter.

In Marpingen, it was Marion who began to have visions on May 17 and 20 near the chapel (built by the above-mentioned association) where the earlier apparitions had happened. Thereafter, the three women together had various apparitions near the chapel, mostly in the company of an increasing number of pilgrims. The sixth apparitions on June 13, 1999, was already witnessed by about 4,000 visitors, and on the ninth day of the apparitions, on July 18, 12,000 visitors turned up. The final apparitions were said to be attended by 30,000. As a hundred years before, the incident not only attracted masses, there was also some turmoil accompanying the apparitions: television stations turned up and reported critically on the event, the Church prohibited any proclamation by the seers, the seers were threatened and, finally, the village administration and the chapel association got into a conflict.

The authors pointed out that when talking about the apparition, we must be aware of the fact that this notion refers not only to a subjective experience by the seers. In order to become an apparition, it needs to be communicated. The communication of the apparition does not only draw on the verbalisation by which the apparition is being reported, i.e. reconstructed. In addition, the apparition is also being performed by the body of the seers who form part of the setting which includes the visitors in relation to the seers and the spatial constellations of other objects. Thus, the authors interpret apparition as a *communicative performance of religious action*.

However, the verbalisation of the cited vision is not, as in other cases, reconstructed *after* the vision. On the contrary, the seer (Marion) talks into a dictograph which is held by another visionary – Judith – while having the vision. In this way, the apparition is turned into a *live report*. It may be no accident that this kind of

live report is not directly addressed to the live audience. Rather, it is recorded so to be accessible to a larger media audience via audio tapes, transcripts of the visions and a number of books based on these reports. According to Auslander (1999: 39ff.), it is the '*technological and aesthetic contamination* of live performance'. The authors noted that the media are not only added to the event but are imparted in the event to such a degree that they transform it into something different. Thus, the use of the dictograph results in a format of the 'live report' on the inner visions. The microphone allows coordinating the actions of the seers with those of the crowd – a phenomenon that was virtually impossible at earlier apparitions.

According to the authors, the Marian movement is not only a static remnant of earlier periods but also a form of modern expression against rationality and secularism. The Marian apparition in question, according to the authors, is an example for the modernity of this form of religion by exhibiting the essential features of popular religion. It is not that religion has changed its contents: it is still the realm of the transcendent as the subject matter of religion. However, this subject matter is not an element of cognitive or moral belief; it is something to be experienced subjectively, the reasserting subject being the major instance and locus of religiosity. This way, the analysis of Marian apparitions is a case for the thesis of the modernity of religion and a case that demonstrates what is modern about religion.

08 PAVIĆEVIĆ, Aleksandra

Travelling through the Battle Fields. The Cult of the Bogorodica in Serbian Tradition and Contemporary Times

The chapter deals with the role of the Virgin Mary in the nation-state building process in Serbia. The beginning of the process of religious revival in Serbia coincided with the beginning of the social, economic and political crisis in the former Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, which took place at the beginning

of the 1990s. There was an urgent need to find *new collective identity*, since the earlier had been reduced to rubble. At the *individual level*, this process primarily implied increased participation in rites within the life cycle of an individual (baptism, wedding, and funeral), followed by popularisation of the practice of celebrating family's patron saint days and, only in the end and on the smallest scale, by an increase in the number of believers taking an active part in regular church services.

On the *collective level*, the traditional closeness of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Serb people and the state was the basic paradigm of such restructuring. The attempt to establish continuity with the tradition of the medieval Serb state, which implied active participation of the Church in both social and political matters, as well as the grafting of this relationship in the secular state and civil society in Serbia at the end of the second millennium, turned out to be a multi-tiered issue (Jevtić 1997).

At mass celebrations, as well as at revolutionary street protest rallies (which were plentiful in the capital during the last dozen years or so) and at celebrations of the town's patron saint days and various festivities, the image of the 'Bogorodica' [Gr. 'Theotokos', i.e. The Mother of God]; appears. Leading the processional walks of the towns, it emerges as a symbol which manages to mobilise the nation with its fullness and multi-layered meaning. The main thesis of the chapter is to explain the historical roots of her cult and her embeddedness in the national history and identity in Serbia.

The cult of the 'Bogorodica' has always had greater importance on the macro than on the micro level. This is corroborated by the fact that a relatively small number of families celebrated some of the 'Bogorodica' holidays as their Patron St Day, while a large number of monasteries and churches, as well as village Patron St Days were dedicated to one of them (Grujić 1985: 436). On the other hand, some authors believe that, with the acceptance of Christianity, it was the cult of the 'Bogorodica' which was the most developed

among the Serb population, because her main and most widely recognisable epithet *Baba*, connected to giving birth, was directly associated with the powerful female pagan divinities such as the Great Mother, Grandmother etc. (Petrović 2001: 55; Čajkanović 1994a: 339). In the folk perception, the 'Presveta Bogorodica' [The Most Holy Mother of God] is unambiguously connected to the phenomenon and process of birth-giving and, that is why, barren women most frequently addressed the 'Bogorodica' for assistance.

The observance of the image of the 'Bogorodica' was specifically connected with the so-called *miracle icons*, that is, her paintings linked to some miraculous event, either locally or generally. This was most frequently related to the icons which were famous for discharging myrrh, as well as icons which would 'cry' in certain situations, as well as those that changed the place of residence in a miraculous manner.

The use of icons in wars, either those of conquest or defensive, appears to be a widely spread practice in the Orthodox world. It was noted that Serb noblemen carried standards with images of various saints to wars, and that the cities were frequently placed under the protection of certain icons. The author shows how, travelling through towns and battlefields, throughout the decades and centuries, the 'Bogorodica' appeared through its holy image at the end of the second millennium as the protectress, advocate, Pointer of the Way and foster mother of those who were, possibly more than ever, in need of miracles and waymarks.

09 BAEVA, Vihra – GEORGIEVA, Albena

The Worship of Mary in the Region of Asenovgrad

(Central Southern Bulgaria): Sites, Rituals and Narratives

The chapter presents Marian worship in one of its specific local manifestations – the cult to the Virgin in the region of Asenovgrad, Central Southern Bulgaria. The fact that it is the most representative example of the vital and well-developed Marian cult with in present-day Bulgaria, as well as authors' long-term fieldwork

in the region (started 1996), influenced the choice of Asenovgrad as the focus of their attention. The methodological framework is based on the concept of local religion (Christian 1989: 3), reformulated by the authors into the concepts of *local religiosity* and *local religious culture*. The local Marian cult in Asenovgrad region is used as an example of how to understand this local and cultural embeddedness of religiosity, presented via (1) devotional sites and the images belonging to them (in this case, miracle-working icons of the Virgin); (2) local feasts and ritual practices; and (3) local and personal religious narratives. The authors regard places, rituals and narratives as basic elements which complement, influence and support each another, constituting a complex system of local religious culture. Following this pattern, the authors pinpointed for their analysis the three most important places of Marian worship in the region: the Dormition of Mary Monastery of Bachkovo, the Annunciation of Mary Church in Asenovgrad, and the Dormition of Mary Church in Gorni Voden. Besides the contextual information, the authors also focused on a more intimate, individual dimension of Marian worship, exploring the presence of the Virgin in personal narratives about miraculous recoveries, dreams, visions, etc. and delineating the connection between individual experience and cultural background. According to the authors, the local worship of Mary in Asenovgrad region is a brilliant example of the ways in which local religiosity exists and develops in the intersection of universal religion and local traditions, folklore and cultural specificities. On the local level, the general Christian figure of the Virgin acquires characteristic features, associated with her motherly aspect and her quality of a divine patroness and immediate helper in every need. Her intercession is achieved by means of sacred intermediaries that have the power to connect the common devotee with the celestial power: holy places, miracle-working icons, springs and caves. Apart from the well-known Marian feasts, idiosyncratic local holidays are observed, too, and the related ritual actions span from the canonical to the folkloric

and ‘magical’. Specific symbols, such as the apple, the water, and the fish, come to the fore as a material representation of Mary’s sacred power and assistance. Local and personal narratives add a private, sometimes even intimate aspect to the Marian devotion, binding the universal sacred figure of the Virgin with the history and geography of the local community, as well as with the individual life trajectories of the believers.

10 ZACHAR PODOLINSKÁ, Tatiana

‘From Periphery to the Centre’: Private Apparition of the Virgin Mary (An In-depth Qualitative Analysis of the Apparition’s Narrative with Field Journal Notes)

The overall research dataset used for the purposes of this chapter is part of ongoing research of the author on Roma folk beliefs (2006–2007), as well as on the activities of both traditional and non-traditional religious movements among the Roma in Slovakia (2003–2004, 2010–2011).

In the framework of the previous outputs from this research, the author attempted to create, with some generalisation, a typology of the elements of traditional rural *Romani Christianity* in Slovakia, elucidating the phenomena of the cultural and ethnic reinterpretation of mainstream Christianity into a Roma cultural context (Podolinská 2009). In particular, she pointed out the phenomenon of *inculturation* in which the ‘White’ Virgin Mary is culturally and ethnically ‘transcribed’ and ‘translated’ into the ‘Chocolate Mary’ that physically, mentally and spiritually fits better and corresponds to the hopes and needs of particular ‘peripheral’ ethnic community.

As Viktor Turner (1974) pointed out that what is interesting about apparitions is that they occur on the *periphery* not only from the geographical point of view (peripheries of cities, rural areas) but also at peripheral levels of society: the seers are mostly children or (illiterate) women from a socially deprived background. This chapter offers an in-depth qualitative analysis of a narrative

on private Marian apparitions of one Romani woman living in a segregated Roma settlement in Šariš region, Eastern Slovakia. The seer perfectly fits into the ‘periphery’ concept: she is an illiterate woman from a socially deprived settlement and is a member of the ethnically stigmatised community of *Cigáni* [Gypsies]. Her visions are private ones, and since they started to appear, she started her struggle for collective and public recognition. The story of her apparition thus contains the well-known part of the path of other ‘successful visionaries’ – ‘from periphery to centre’ (i.e. from marginal private/individual apparition to the central public/mass recognition). As far as visions are ‘cultural products’ (Christian 1998) produced in the process of communication (Knoblauch 2009; Knoblauch and Schnettler 2018), they are not only embedded in a particular cultural context but also in the language and aesthetic taste. For every apparition, the crucial point is to achieve collective consensus and to attract masses. This is the way from private/individual apparition to public/collective acknowledgement. This is the way from ‘periphery to the centre’. In the described case, however, the seer was able to achieve recognition only within her own family. The response of the local Roma community to her apparitions was mostly negative. Quite interesting about this case is that, according to her, she has support from the side of non-Roma local religious authorities. Based on the author’s qualitative analysis, the struggle for *collective consensus* and *ethnic code* are the most important themes of the analysed narrative on apparition.

According to the author, the peripheral and deprived life situation of the seer is embedded in her visions. In her narrative, the attempt to achieve ‘centrality’ in a marginal position is central and the recognition theme is more frequent than the description of the apparition itself. In order to offer the reader a holistic picture of research situation, the author uses not only the qualitative analysis and thematic coding, but also the perspective of multi-vocal ethnography (Tobin 1988; Clegg 2017). The interview is thus embedded in the synchronous context of field journal notes

of the author, as well as in the diachronic context of her recent memories. The qualitative analysis also includes a wider context of the thematic search of media reports on local apparitions among Roma households in Eastern Slovakia.

11 PETI, Lehel

The Marian Apparition of Seuca/Szőkefalva in the Context of Religious and Ethnical Interferences

Seuca became a known place for pilgrimage due to a blind Gypsy woman's public visions about the Virgin Mary in the first years of the new millennium. The author presents both the history of the ethnical and confessional co-existence in the village and the economic and social problems which affected the whole community. Then, the attitudes towards the apparition of the different denominations are highlighted by also presenting the way the seer attempts to question the different denominational opinions. The legitimating strategies of a Gypsy woman significantly influenced the aspects of the vision of the Virgin Mary from Seuca. In the history of Seuca, we find the practice of ethnic groups making well-defined boundaries between them, functioning as important parts of the communities. The artificial change of the ethnic structure during the Communist dictatorship changed the patterns of relations between the ethnic groups and made ethnic coexistence more problematic. The local parish that tried to expropriate the Marian apparitions has successfully integrated their messages into the ideology of ethnic reconciliation. The traditional ontological systems of religion in the communities still work and the frequent crossing of the ethnic and denominational boundaries have also promoted the strategies of the Church. In addition, the apparitions in Seuca earned the village a distinguished reputation in the region where enormous changes have taken place and where people have been forced to develop more complex strategies, or ways of life, without any pre-existing concrete models.

BAEVA, Vihra, Assoc. Prof. and PhD. in folklore studies, is a member of the department of Anthropology of Verbal Traditions at IEFEM – BAN. She is the author of the monographs *Miracle Stories: Local Tradition and Personal Experience* and *The Thread of Life: Between the Fertility Belt and the Holy Girdle of the Theotokos*; co-editor of the *Dictionary of the Terms of Verbal Folklore. Bulgaria* (2013); and editor-in-chief of *The Dragons in Bulgarian Folklore. Collection of texts* (2016). Dr Baeva has published over 50 articles in Bulgarian, English, German, Czech and Serbian in academic journals and edited volumes, and lectured at the universities of Sofia, Plovdiv, Krakow, Lodz, Palermo, Prague and Bratislava. She is a scholarship holder of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences – NIAS (2011) and the National Scholarship Programme of the Slovak Republic – SAIA (2016). Her fields of interest include ethnology and the anthropology of religion, local cults, oral narratives, symbolic anthropology, and Bulgarian folklore.

Contact address: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Acad. G. Bonchev Str., bl. 6, 1113 Sofia, Bulgaria
e-mail: vihrabaeva@abv.bg

GEORGIEVA, Albena, Prof. DSc., focuses on Bulgarian folklore, verbal folklore, non-tale narratives – genre characteristics, myths and legends, narratives and narration, images of otherness in folk culture, religious narratives, and local religious culture. Main publications: *Etiologichnite legendi v bulgarskija folklor* [Etiological Legends in Bulgarian Folklore]. Sofia, University Press St. Kliment of Ohrid, 1990, 123 pp; *Razkazi i razkazvane v bulgarskija folklor* [Stories and Storytelling in Bulgarian Folklore], Sofia, Figura, 2000, 160 pp. (a collection of studies and articles); *Obrazi na drugostta v bulgarskija folklor* [Images of Otherness in Bulgarian Folklore], Sofia, PH Gutenberg, 2003, 191 pp. (a collection of studies and articles); *Balgarska mitologiya i folklor* [Bulgarian Mythology and Folklore. A Collection of Folk Texts]. Compilation, foreword and comments. Sofia, Prosveta Publishers, 2006, 304 pp; *Folklorni izmerenia na hristiyanството. Ustni razkazi i lokalna religioznost v rayona na Bachkovskia manastir "Uspenie na Presveta Bogoroditsa" i na Hadjidimovskia manastir "Sv. Velikomachenik Georgi Pobedonozets"* [Folklore Dimensions of Christianity. Oral Narratives and Local Religiosity in the Region of Bachkovo Monastery 'Dormition of the Virgin Mary' and in Hadjidimovo Monastery 'St George']. Sofia, Prosveta, 2012.

Contact address: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Acad. G. Bonchev Str., bl. 6, 1113 Sofia, Bulgaria
e-mail: albenaang@abv.bg

HOLUBOVÁ, Markéta (Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, p. r. i.), research assistant at the Department of Critical Heritage Studies. From 2001 to 2017, she lectured externally at the Department of History of Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem. She focuses on the research of folk religiosity from early modern times to the 21st century as well as on the pilgrimage tradition in the Czech lands and its transformation after 1989. She also studies folk piety, printed media, ethnocartography and prosopographic research. Main publications: *Etnografický atlas Čech, Moravy a Slezska. VI. Okruhy kultů poutních madon jezuitského řádu* [Ethnographical Atlas of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. VI. Cult Radius of Virgin Mary Jesuit Pilgrimage Sites], Praha, 2009, Etnologický ústav AV ČR, v. v. i., 108 pp.; *Salve Regina. Mariánská úcta ve středních Čechách* [Salve Regina. Veneration of the Virgin Mary in Central Bohemia], Eds. Markéta Holubová and Marcela Suchomelová, Praha, 2014, Etno-

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Contact address: Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, v. v. i, Na Florenci 3, Prague 1, CZ-110 00
e-mail: holubova@eu.cas.cz

KEČKA, Roman, PhD, studied philosophy and theology at the Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. He obtained his doctorate in theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy. He is currently Assistant Professor at the Department of Comparative Religion at the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. His main research areas include Christianity in the 20th century, modern Catholicism in the societal and cultural context, as well as secularity and non-religion.

Contact address: Department of Comparative Religion, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, Gondova 2, 814 99 Bratislava, Slovak Republic
e-mail: roman.kecka@uniba.sk, romankecka@gmail.com

KIS-HALAS, Judit, PhD, freelance researcher. She earned her PhD degree in the Hungarian and Comparative Folkloristics Doctoral Programme at the Doctoral School of Literary Sciences, Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest, in 2019. Between 2013 and 2018, she was researcher in the ERC grant of Prof. E. Pócs (Agreement No. 324214) titled *Vernacular Religion on the Boundary of Eastern and Western Christianity: Continuity, Changes and Interactions* at the Institute of Ethnology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS). Her publications include: *Soldiers of Christ on Earth and in Heavenly Jerusalem: Psychotronics: A Contemporary Esoteric Healing System*. In: É. Pócs (Ed.), *The Magical and Sacred Medical World*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019, (pp. 448–493); *Divinatio Diabolica and Superstitious Medicine: Healers, Seers and Diviners in the Changing Discourse of Witchcraft in Early Modern Nagybánya*. In: G. Klaniczay – É. Pócs (Eds.), *Witchcraft and Demonology in Hungary and Transylvania*. (Palgrave Historical Studies

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Contact address: 7800 Siklós-Máriagyűd, Járó Péter u. 24. Hungary
e-mail: kishalas.judit@gmail.com

KNOBLAUCH, Hubert (1959) is Professor of General Sociology at the Technical University in Berlin. His major fields of interest include the sociology of knowledge, communication, and religion. His publications include *Religionssoziologie* [Sociology of Religion], Berlin/New York 1999; *Qualitative Religionsforschung* [Qualitative Religious Research], Paderborn 2003; and *Populäre Religion* [Popular Religion], Frankfurt/New York 2009 and the *Communicative Construction of Reality*, Routledge 2019.

Contact Address: Leiter Fachgebiet Allgemeine Soziologie, Technische Universität Berlin, Fakultät VI: Planen Bauen Umwelt, Institut für Soziologie, Sekretariat FH 9-1, Fraunhoferstraße 33-36, 10587 Berlin, Germany
e-mail: hubert.knoblauch@tu-berlin.de

MAJO, Juraj, Assistant Professor, Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Economic and Social Geography, Demography, and Territorial Development. His research and teaching interests include the geography of religion and non-religion, historical demography, computer cartography, cultural and social geography. He co-authored several atlases of ethnic and religious landscapes in Slovakia (East Central Europe) such as *Národnostný Atlas Slovenska* [Ethnic Atlas of Slovakia] in 2015, *Náboženský atlas Slovenska* [Religious Atlas of Slovakia] in 2015, or *Historický atlas Evanjelickej cirkvi a.v. na Slovensku* [Historical Atlas of the Lutheran Church in Slovakia] in 2011.

Contact address: Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Economic and Social Geography, Demography and Territorial Development, Ilkovičova 6, 842 15 Bratislava, Slovak Republic
e-mail: majo@fns.uniba.sk

PAVIČEVIĆ, Aleksandra, PhD, graduated from the Faculty of Arts, Department for Ethnology and Anthropology in Belgrade in 1995. She obtained her MA degree in 1998 (MA thesis – *Popular and Church Marriage in Serbian Rural Society*). She received her PhD degree

in 2005 (PhD thesis – *Marriage and Family Life in Northern Shumadia in the Second Half of the 20th Century*). She works as researcher at the Ethnographic Institute of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade. She is a member of INASEA (International Association for Southeast European Anthropology). Since 2008, she has been President of the Serbian Ethnological and Anthropological Society. Main publications: *Narodni i crkveni brak u srpskom seoskom društvu* [Popular and Church Marriage in Serbian Rural Society], Special Edition of the Ethnographic Institute SASA 46, Belgrade, 2001; *Na udaru ideologija, Brak, porodica i polni moral u Srbiji u drugoj polovini 20. veka* [Ideologies at Work, Marriage, Family and Sexual Morality in Serbia in the Second Half of the 20th Century], Special Edition of the Ethnographic Institute SASA 57, Belgrade, 2006. *Vreme (bez)smrti. Predstave o smrti u Srbiji od 19–21. veka*. [Time with or without Death. Notions about Death in Serbia in 19th–21st Century]. Posebna izdanja Etnografskog instituta 74, Belgrade, 2011. (Summary available in English: <http://www.etno-institut.co.rs/eng/monografije/73.php>); *From Mystery to Spectacle. Essays on Death in Serbia in the 19th–21st Century*. Institute of Ethnography, Special Editions 83, Belgrade, 2015 (<http://www.etno-institut.co.rs/eng/monografije/83.php>); *Plamena tela. Spaljivanje mrtvih*

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Contact address: Ethnographic Institute SASA, Knez Mihailova 36, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia
e-mail: aleksandra.pavicevic@ei.sanu.ac.rs

PETSCHKE, Sabine is the author of the MA thesis focused on visual analysis of Marian apparitions in Marpigen (*Marienerscheinungen als soziale Veranstaltung. Eine religionssoziologische Untersuchung der Marpinger Marienerscheinungen*, 2007). Her main focus is visual analysis and new developments in the interpretative analysis of video and photography. She is researcher at the Institut für Soziologie, Fakultät VI Planen Bauen Umwelt at the Technische Universität in Berlin in Germany.

Contact address: Institut für Soziologie, Fakultät VI Planen Bauen Umwelt, Technische Universität in Berlin, Franklinstr. 28/29, 10587, Berlin, Germany
e-mail: sabine.petschke@tu-berlin.de

PETI, Lehel, PhD, graduated from Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Letters, specialisation in Hungarian ethnography and literature. In 2006–2008, he was assistant at the University of Szeged (Hungary), Department of Ethnography and Cultural Anthropology. He currently works as researcher at the Romanian Institute for Minority Issues (ISPMN). Qualifications: MA (2005) and PhD (2010) in ethnology and cultural anthropology at the Department of Hungarian Ethnography and Anthropology, Cluj, Romania. In 2013–2018, he was a member of the project entitled *EAST-WEST Vernacular Religion on the Boundary of Eastern and Western Christianity: Continuity, Changes and Interactions*, financed by ERC Advanced Grant (project ID 324214) and coordinated by É. Pócs. He focuses on religion and minority research. Main publication: *A moldvai csángók népi vallásosságának imagisztikus rítusai* [The Imagistic Rituals of Popular Religion in Moldavian Csángó Villages] (2012).

Contact address: Romanian Institute for Minority Problems (ISPMN), Cluj-Napoca, 400697, str. Gavril Muzicescu, nr. 5., Romania
e-mail: petilehel@yahoo.com

TUTR, Vojtěch, PhD, graduated at Hussite Theological Faculty, Charles University. He is focused on Marian apparitions and Marian movements in the context of contemporary culture. He publishes mainly in the Czech journal *Dingir*.

Contact Address: Thákurova 14, Praha 6, Czech Republic
e-mail: vojtech.tutr@seznam.cz

ZACHAR PODOLINSKÁ, Tatiana, PhD, is the Director of the *Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology* (Slovak Academy of Sciences, since 2012). Her career includes the posts of visiting professor at the University of Oslo (Norway), Masaryk University (Czech Republic), UNAM (Mexico), Missouri State University (USA) and University of St Andrews (UK). She participated in several national research projects (Centrum of Excellence of SAS Bratislava), European research projects related to the Romani Studies (5FP EU, 6FP EU) and international research projects on social anthropology (Mexico, Guatemala). As a researcher, T. Zachar Podolinská is focused on the anthropology of religion (Romani studies, contemporary religiosity and spirituality). In 2010, she was the main

coordinator of the national project Social Inclusion of Romanies in Slovakia via Religious Path. In the past years, the publications *God between the Barriers* (with T. Hrustič, 2011) and *Religion as a Path to Change* (with T. Hrustič, 2012) resulting from this project were published. In 2015, she was the co-editor of a monograph entitled *Black and White Worlds – Roma in Majority Society in Slovakia*. Since 2015, T. Zachar Podolinská has been Vice-President of the Board of the Network of Academic Institutions in Romani Studies (NAIRS). Since 2015, too, she has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Gypsy Lore Society, in the position of its secretary. In 2018, she was one of the authors of the collective monograph *Globe in Motion: Patterns of International Migration – Similarities and Differences*, awarded by the SAS Prize. She is the author of more than 105 articles and scientific studies in peer-reviewed national and international journals.

Contact address: Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Klemesova 19, 813 64, Bratislava 1, Slovak Republic
e-mail: tatiana.podolinska@savba.sk

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Authors:

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