

Traces of the Virgin Mary

Tatiana
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Ed.



in Post- Communist Europe

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Figure on the front cover:

Photo: *Virgin Mary and religious statues
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Academy of Sciences, Bratislava 2019

ISBN 978-80-224-1782-2

This volume is an output of the research
project VEGA 2/0060/19 *Ethnographic
Research of Non-Religion and Secularism in
Modern Slovak Society Life-Trajectories and
Stories*.

The publishing of this book was supported
with a financial contribution from the Slovak
Academy of Sciences upon recommendation
by the SAS Editorial Board.

Traces of the Virgin Mary in Post-Communist Europe

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

Lehel Peti

William A. Christian, one of the eminent scholars and pioneers of visionary research, emphasises in several of his works that visions can be approached by scholars primarily as a product of society or of the social life (Christian 1987, 1992, 1996, 1998). The phenomenon which the scholars are currently facing is the result of a complex historical process that includes several components: the seers, the authorities, those who interpret the visions, and those who admit them (Christian 1998: 107).¹

Visions are *cultural products* not only because, as a religious experience, they connect in various ways into a cultural context, but because they are, in fact, the result of a *collective consensus*.² Christian emphasises that ‘paradoxically, what appears to be most spontaneous in Catholic culture, the visions of lay seers, including those of children and unlettered, come to us in highly formulaic and controlled reports. These are serious, touchy, sacred matters, and what we have to work with is a complex social product that first and foremost reflects what certain groups of people *wanted* to be seen and heard’ (Christian 1998: 118, emphasis L.P.).

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- 1 This paper was written as part of the OTKA-research (Hungarian Scientific Research Fund) organised by the University of Pécs, Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology. The guider of the research was Éva Pócs. In completing this Chapter, I was enormously helped by the leaders (Gábor Klaniczay and William A. Christian) and participants of the workshop *The Vision Thing: Studying Divine Intervention*, June 24–July 8, 2007, organised by the Centre for Advanced Study in Behavioural Sciences (CASBS, Stanford, California). I am very grateful for the ideas and experiences that I acquired there and for the available specialised literature. The material used for this paper was previously published in a working paper (Peti 2009a, bilingual, English and Romanian). In specific phases of the research, at different stages of the elaboration of the analysis, several versions of the analysis were made in Hungarian language (Peti 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2012a). About the various aspects of the formation of the apparition sites see the analyses resulted from the same OTKA-project: Pócs 2008; Györfy 2009, 2012.2 As mentioned in Herzog et al. (2019: 5), a qualitative analysis ‘requires a relatively large degree of individual judgement’, that is way they stressed ‘the importance of being transparent and clearly explaining the methodological and analytical decisions made’.
- 2 Paolo Apolito makes important remarks on the methodological problems of visionary research (Apolito 1998).
- 3 For more see Christian 1998: 112–116.

By revealing how communities select their seers by gender, age and personality,³ we glimpse a multi-layered, anonymous process by which societies and their institutions construct their reality and formulate their hopes. According to Christian, it is not the fact that people have visions which are interesting, because people have always had visions in different historical periods; it is rather that, in certain cases, they attribute special importance to them.

Most scholars explain the *cultural sensitivity* to apparitions and, in general, to transcendence with the emergence of a political and economic crisis.⁴ According to William A. Christian, any research which analyses visions must give accentuated importance to the dynamics of historical interaction.⁵

Ellen Badone shows, through the example of a 20th century, apparition-based place of pilgrimage in the northwest of France, that the writing down of vision-narratives has been constituted as the ‘sacred history’ of the place of pilgrimage (Badone 2007). At the same time, the codification process of the various versions of a vision narrative and their particular focus is also a selective process in which the confidence assigned to different actors is not consistently shared (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 11). William Christian showed through his material that, in the construction of the official history of apparition-based pilgrimage sites, the testimony of different people is given different credibility or importance (Christian 1987: 112–114). The testimonies of married women were very often considered of less importance compared to the testimonies of men and children (Christian 1996: 244) as well as of unmarried, ‘pure’ young girls (Ibid.: 246).

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- 4 More analyses focus the socio-historical context of apparitions. See, for example, Blackburn 1994: 19–27; Niccoli 1990.
- 5 It is important to mention that these analyses pointedly refer to the formation of apparition-based places of pilgrimage.

Victor Turner emphasises in several of his works 'that the holiest pilgrimage shrines in several major religions tend to be located on the periphery of cities, towns, or other well-demarcated territorial units' (Turner 1974). According to him, in these cases, the periphery represents the *liminal* and the communities against the socio-cultural structure (Turner and Turner 1978: 241). According to Turners 'the regular connection between Mary, the laity, the poor, and the colonised, in the rapid development of pilgrimages from visions and apparitions of the corporal type, and from related miracles, points to the hidden, non-hierarchical domain of the Church, with it stress on the power of the weak, on communities and liminal phenomena, on the rare and unprecedented, as against the regular, ordained, and normative' (Ibid.: 213).⁶

Hence, visions are forms of communication with the transcendental, which very often comes into being against the official worship controlled by the Church. In this paper, I consider 'visions' rather as *social constructions* and less as *subjective religious experiences*, and I examine the components that influence their use in a given socio-cultural space.

The Lead up of the Subject

Seuca is a village in Romania, situated on the border of Latin and Orthodox Christianity, in a region where the infrastructural and economic possibilities are very poor. In the first years of the new millennium, Seuca became an internationally recognised place of pilgrimage because of a blind Gypsy⁷ women's public visions of the Virgin Mary.

⁶ According to Victor and Edith Turner, poor people played an important role in the development of places of pilgrimage in the Middle Age: 'Some medieval pilgrimages (for example, that to Aylesford in Kent, which originated in a vision of the Virgin Mary experienced by a Carmelite prior, St Simon Stock) owed their beginning to the dream or vision of a religious, but, even in the Middle Ages, the laity, particularly the poor, played a fundamental role in determining where, when, and how pilgrimages would develop' (Turner and Turner 1978: 213).

Along with the important East-European places of pilgrimage of the Hungarian language area, such as Csíksomlyó and Mária-radna, Seuca has a particular cultural and socio-historical context. Seuca is currently undergoing a process of modernisation within a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic region where important economical transformations and modification are taking place in the social and ethnical structures.

In this context, the apparitions of the Virgin Mary have become specific to Seuca, showing more and more individual, novel features. The importance of these distinctive attributes of the Virgin Mary have been rooted in the recent past and present of the community living a region of a developing East European country that faces numerous problems.

In my analysis, I aim to present the history of the ethnical and confessional situation in the village as well as the economic and social problems that have affected the community. I shall also illustrate the attitudes towards the apparition of the different denominations. I consider it important to present how the seer tries to adapt his or her messages to the different denominational opinions. The strategies of legitimisation of a Gypsy woman significantly influenced the process in which the *Virgin Mary of Seuca* was adapted to the idiosyncratic context.

The *Virgin Mary of Seuca* has undergone such *collective revaluation* of meanings that, nowadays, she possesses an *individual name*, rendering and symbolism. Moreover, as I shall show, her messages include *updated social meanings*. In this paper, I shall also discuss the problematic nature of visions and miracles specifically related to this social process of *symbolic cultivation*.

⁷ The members of the local Roma community refer to themselves as Gypsies [cigányok], same as the Hungarians call them. To a more detailing question, for example, 'who are they?', it is very probable to get an explanation from Hungarians that they are 'domestic Gypsies', which also involves the idea that this is a settled community, on the way to cultural assimilation, even if in many contexts the success of this cultural oncoming is questioned.

The Scene of the Apparition

Seuca (Szőkefalva) is situated in the region along the Kis-Küküllő River. The village shows all characteristics of a multi-cultural context: several ethnic groups and at least ten religious groups live here close to each other. According to the census of 2002, Seuca was not an independent village, because it was administratively attached to Gálfalva (Gănești). The ethnical and confessional data were therefore aggregated. According to this census, the two villages had 2420 Hungarian, 820 Romanian, 280 Gypsy and three Saxon inhabitants in 2002.

The denominational structure of the villages is more diverse. On the basis of the same census, there were 831 Orthodox, 264(!) Roman Catholic, 3 Uniate, 2,074 Reformed, 4 Evangelical, 114 Unitarian, 7 Baptist, 4 Adventist, 33 Evangelical Christian and 35 persons claiming other 'not specified religions'.

This multi-cultural facet is accentuated by the ethnic origin of the local seer and the cultural strategies that she and her family follow. During the public visions, she usually spoke Romanian in spite of the fact that she considered herself a 'Hungarian-speaking Gypsy'.

In the *legitimising strategies* of the Church, the intercultural context is often accentuated in order to give an *international status* to the place of pilgrimage. The legitimisation strategies of the Gypsy woman also take place in this cultural 'playground' which, nevertheless, is not free of *symbolic tensions* between *confession* and *ethnicity*. In the past, this 'symbolic communication' was a very important component in the functioning of the communities. However, in the early years of the second millennium, this traditionally important component seems to have become dysfunctional.

The Apparition

In Seuca, where the modernisation process has led to serious problems because of the changing lifestyle, a blind Gypsy woman had visions. Rózsika Marián has been diabetic since she was thirteen.

Because of her illness, she lost her eyesight in 1991. She has had religious visions since the autumn of 1998. Until 2001, only a few persons were present during her visions, principally the members of her family, the neighbours, and a high-school pupil from a nearby village (Lőrinczi 2003).

Her *private* visions could become *public* because the Virgin Mary let the prophet know the precise date of future apparitions. As a result, at a public vision on July 17, 2001, approximately 5,000 pilgrims were present. From this date, the place of the visions became controlled by the Roman Catholic Church. The number of the pilgrims subsequently increased each time. Therefore, an altar was built in the garden of the church, where in the days of the apparitions there were 15,000 pilgrims awaiting the appearance of the Virgin Mary with adoration, vigil, and prayers (Molnár s. d.).

The father of Rózsika Marián was Romanian. However, the family lives in a Gypsy-populated street of the village. In the village, everybody considers Rózsika a Gypsy. Nevertheless, she follows the *cultural strategy* of identifying herself with Hungarians. The fact that her father was a Romanian, changes nothing in her ethnical identification: 'Her father is a Romanian; otherwise, they are Gypsies [Cigány]. Her family name is Marian [...]. They speak Hungarian at home, in the family. They are Hungarians, Hungarian Gypsies [Cigány]' (woman, 39 years old, Seuca, Evangelical Christian, Hungarian, October 24, 2006; material collected by L.P.).

During the apparitions (except for the last public vision), Rózsika used to speak Romanian. However, she used to communicate the messages of the Virgin Mary in both languages (Romanian and Hungarian). In her visions, she usually sees a 70–75 cm light-statue appearing in front of the altar. The Virgin Mary wears a crown composed of twelve stars. Above the statue encircled with heavenly light, she sees a bright star. In that moment, the statue of the Virgin Mary disappears, and she can only see the heavenly light. According to her, the messages of the Virgin Mary are coming from this 'heavenly light' in Romanian: 'And then came the evening of

December 8, 11 o'clock, as the Virgin Mary had told me. But then she appeared in light, a kind of oval light composed of many stars with the statue inside, which was the statue of the Virgin Mary, folding her hands. The statue is about 70–75 cm high. She always used to appear in this way. Dressed in pure white, holding a rosary in her hands folded for praying, wearing a crown composed of twelve stars. And then above her head, a really big star, covering her in light. And so I began to talk with the Virgin Mary' (Rózsika Marián, woman, (1962), Catholic, Gypsy/Cigány, Seuca, October 24, 2006; in other places R.M.; material collected by L. P.)

The History of Inter-Ethnic and Denominational Coexistence

Regional Context

The inter-ethnic coexistence in this region situated along the Târnava-Mică is traditional. Homogenous Hungarian, Romanian, Saxon communities have been coexisting in the villages established along the middle course of the river in the recent past. However, multi-ethnic settlements were not rare in the region either, with four (with Gypsies) ethnical groups living next to each other. The past relations between the ethnic groups can be described as simultaneously co-existing life-worlds with extensive economic relations. However, they also lived in closed communities; for example, they followed ethnic endogamy.

Until the collectivisation in 1968, the inhabitants of this region were primarily engaged in agriculture. The Communist dictatorship artificially developed an industrial centre in Târnăveni, a small town situated near the region. The process of industrialisation resulted in changes in the ethnic structure of the community and a strong internal migration process. Those villages which were situated closer to the centre, like Seuca, became attractive locations for settlement due to their favourable geographical location and infrastructural condition.

In the euphoric atmosphere after the changes in the Romanian system in 1989, the state farms were dissolved, and the pos-

session-structure was re-established to its earlier form. Villagers tried to keep their jobs in the towns and to invest the income in agriculture. Following the changes in 1989, the factories and industrial units being in the property of the state began to close down. Subsequently, the population of this region became mostly unemployed or obliged to take their pension up to the year 1995. Without a fixed income, they had no possibility of paying for the basic agricultural services.⁸

Ethnic Competition

According to the local Hungarians from Seuca, the Romanian community settled in the village which had been previously, during the Communist dictatorship, inhabited by the Hungarian majority. There had only been five to six Romanian families living in the village. Most of them worked as milkmaids or on the farms, taking care of animals. The Romanian families congregated in a homogeneous group in a remote street of the village. The increasing number of the Romanian population resulted in a symbolical competition between the two ethnic groups, Romanian and Hungarian, in which the symbolic occupation of public spaces (for example, setting out objects marked with national symbols) became an important act. Some Romanian families bought houses in the symbolic centre of the village and moved there. Besides their religious meanings, the *sacred statues* and *crosses* placed near the main street and in the gardens of the Romanian families also have connotations of *nationality* and *identity*, being explicitly expressed by the *national colours* painted on the crosses.

Under the earlier rules of multi-ethnic coexistence, the members of the Romanian community learnt Hungarian. However, this practice is changing. Earlier members of the indigenous Romanian community used the Hungarian language in everyday situations

⁸ There are more complex macro-economical processes in the background of the crisis, see Peti 2004.

to communicate with the major ethnic group; and they only used their mother tongue in the private sphere. At present, the norm regulating *multi-ethnic coexistence* is replaced with *ethnic rivalry*.

The settled Romanian inhabitants – mostly the nomenclatures elite which had moved to the village during the Communist dictatorship – did not consider it important to learn the language of the major ethnic group. As a result of their elite position, *separation* has become their strategy of coexistence.

Up to the 1940s, the Gypsy community was formed without exception by so called *házi Cigány*, which means ‘domestic’ or ‘our Gypsies’. This indicates that the Hungarian community felt culturally closer to this community, in spite of the newcomer Gypsies. The native members of the Gypsy community followed the ‘cultural strategy of adaptation’, marked very well by the fact that, according to local memory, they spoke Hungarian and attended Hungarian denominational schools.

The ethnic rivalry between the Romanians and Hungarians intensified the strategy of integration of the Gypsy community. At present, the Gypsies follow the strategy of *adaptation* to the Romanian community. Nevertheless, the Gypsies as a community are very seriously *stigmatised* by both major ethnic groups. Although, historically, they chose the strategy of adaptation to Hungarians and later to Romanians, the routine stigmatisation of Gypsies is still a cultural attitude of both groups. It is significant that the inhabitants of the village believe that the Gypsies from Seuca organise robberies for their relatives who live in the neighbouring villages. In reality, according to my experiences on field, most Gypsy men take up jobs in tinworks, while the women obtain their income by peddling or trading.

Denominational Rivalry

In the recent past of the community, we find complicated relationships linked to religious coexistence. In the village, the Reformed outnumber the other denominations: Catholics, Unitarians and

Greek Catholics. In 1932, the Greek Catholics built a church near the other three churches. In 1949, the Greek Catholics were forced by national politics to convert to Orthodoxy.⁹ After the fall of Communism, the Orthodox Catholic religion was permitted. Individuals who had changed their religion to Orthodox Catholicism during the Communist era wanted to return to their old religion, but this was not possible anymore.

The rivalry between the denominations is most emphatic between the Reformed majority and the Catholic minority; this is mostly due to the mixed denominational marriages. The Reformed resent that those who want to get married in the Catholic Church must christen their children in the Catholic religion (the unofficial practice of the Catholic Church is called *reverzalis*). The Reformed priest, as an answer to this, threatened the people that he would *ring the bell* for the girl who married into the Catholic Church. ‘To ring the bell’ means that the Reformed Church’s bells would ring during the mass held in the Catholic Church. No one in the community remembers such an event. In the case of mixed marriage, the young couple must get married in both churches.

The Non-Catholic Community’s Opinions on the Apparition

The apparitions in Seuca became popular and legitimate also due to a peculiar argumentation of the Catholic Church according to which the place was to be considered a multi-cultural realm. At the national and regional levels, the public phenomena linked to the apparitions were thus acted out in front of multi-ethnic and multi-confessional crowds.

Only the Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic and a few Orthodox priests took part in the apparitions. Each of them performed the

9 The Romanian priest, who probably descended from a Hungarian family (his name was Meszaros and, according to the villagers, he could speak Hungarian quite well), was sentenced to twelve years’ imprisonment because he did not change his religion. Of the Greek Catholics, only one person did not convert to Orthodoxy. Instead, he visited the Catholic Church.

ceremony according to their own ritual: confession, blessing and sacraments. During these occasions, they had the confessions made – even in German. The village's ethnic and religious segmentation can be observed in people's attitudes towards the apparition. These attitudes contain the stereotypes of the different ethnic and religious groups.

It is a common religious behaviour in Transylvanian villages that the borders between religions can be crossed. People who are in a religious minority often go to the church of the religious majority, and there are always some who visit other churches in addition to their own. It is also known that people go to see the Orthodox priest as a popular specialist. In the light of this tendency, it is not surprising that foreigners, Romanians, Hungarians, Gypsies, Saxons and Csángós¹⁰ take part in the publicised apparitions. The apparition occurred in a mixed denominational environment: besides the Roman Catholic majority, the Greek Catholic, Reformed, Unitarian and the members of several new religious communities were also represented. Considering the apparition's religious and ethnic context and the local and regional environment, we can say the same thing about these kinds of tendencies in the whole country. The motivations of the people involved were not the same, of course.

Both the Reformed and the Unitarians were *sceptical* about the apparitions and said they went there only out of *curiosity*. According to many people, the Catholic Church became rich because the village received international attention. Some of the Reformed said that a few Catholics shared this opinion.

¹⁰ The Csángós are a Roman Catholic minority living among Orthodox Romanians in Eastern Romania. There are well known stereotypes about them as a community who have strong attachment to their Roman Catholic religion, and they are usually referred to as a community that has preserved a 'traditional religious culture' with many elements which are not part of the formal, official religiosity. The Csángó pilgrims have visited the apparitions site of Seuca several times during the apparitions of the Virgin Mary (about their motives and religious practices at the site see Peti 2012b.)

According to my fieldwork, these religious communities do not identify themselves with the entire apparition, but only with *certain elements*. One Reformed inhabitant's opinion is a good example of this. She was one of those villagers who did not believe in the apparition, but she was not convinced that the apparition had nothing to do with the protection of the village from natural disasters. The Evangelical woman's opinion can be included in this context, too, as she declared that she did not believe in the apparition either, however, she saw one of the apparitions where a cloud appeared before the sun and this could be interpreted religiously: 'I only saw, I don't know, that a cloud was before the sun, I did not see anything else' (woman, 39 years old, Evangelical Christian, Hungarian, Seuca, October, 2006, collected by L.P.).

The non-Catholics living in the village identify themselves with the apparition; this can be deduced from the fact that, following one of the apparitions, someone took a statue of the blessed Virgin to the Reformed church. This greatly disturbed the Reformed people entering the church, but no one dared to remove the statue, because they were afraid it would be a sin. It was eventually removed by the ringer, who considered it as his duty. The people protected the statue's sacrament by taking it to the Catholic parish so that it could not be vandalised: 'I took part at some of the apparitions, I was looking where anybody else was looking too, but I did not see anything. The year before, after the apparition, I went to the church to ring the bell, and I saw a 30 cm tall statue on the window. No one wanted to take it away. Everybody thought it was a sin to touch it. I took it down before we went in the church for the mass. We took it to the Catholic parish' (man, Reformed, Hungarian, Seuca, 2005).¹¹

¹¹ Source: daily newspaper *Népújság* [Vox populi] August 24, 2004. See <http://www.hhrf.org/nepujasag/04aug/4nu0824t.htm>2005 (accessed on August 4, 2005).

The Catholic Community's Opinion on the Apparition

The non-Catholic community's opinion was that the Catholics accepted the apparitions because during those occasions they could pray with the pilgrims and take part in the religious rituals. A general opinion is that the Catholics identified themselves with the apparition only because of its benefits of tourism. These opinions contradict the findings of my fieldwork. Most Catholics I talked to identified themselves with the apparitions in a religious and emotional manner. Even people living in mixed marriages with the spouse being of another opinion share these views.

Besides individual devotionism, there is also an emphatic multi-cultural side of the apparitions. It is interesting that the most intensive elements of this religious experience were received by most people as transcending language borders: 'When Rózsika said in the church that the Virgin Mary appeared, they closed their eyes, smiled and cried. I was amazed like someone who doesn't belong there. After a while, I realised that I had to get involved in it. It is something sublime, something special. It doesn't disturb me that the other one is praying in Romanian, you in Hungarian, everybody to the Virgin Mary. I believe that she really appears' (woman, cca 45 years old, Roman Catholic, Hungarian, Seuca, 2006, collected by L.P.).

On one occasion, the apparition took place during one of the most important Hungarian national celebrations, on March 15. The Hungarians usually feel that the Romanians do not like them to celebrate their ethnic identity's most spectacular feast. As a result, on this occasion, the local community's members waited with much anxiety for the apparition that was expected on this date, because of its inter-ethnic surfeit. They thought the ethnic tensions between the two ethnic groups would surface in violence. This did not happen, and they concluded that, thanks to the apparition, it was a miracle:

'The Romanians don't like that we celebrate individually. I really was afraid that if so many Romanians would gather in one place to pray, some kind of complication would appear. Everything was

so beautiful. Next to me, there were three Romanians, I was praying in Hungarian, they were praying in Romanian. Neither of us was bothered by the language in which the others were praying to the Virgin Mary' (woman, cca 45–50 years old, Roman Catholic, Hungarian, Seuca, 2006, collected by L.P.).

Church Strategies for the Apparition's Acknowledgement and Expropriation

Rózsika Marián was living in Târnăveni with her grandmother when the apparitions began. In this period, her 'emotional guide' was a Greek Catholic priest. The Greek Catholic Church wanted to *expropriate* her visions from the beginning. According to the seer, the Greek Catholic priest went to Lourdes, where he popularised the apparitions. This was the reason why the first pilgrims appeared at the apparitions in Seuca. The Greek Catholic Church tried to confer public frame to these occasions by holding masses at the women's house. The apparition's expropriation by the Greek Catholic Church could have led to the Church's reformation, which reflects a need in the local community after Communism.

The Catholic Church was also in competition to *propagate* the visions. In 1999, Rózsika joined the grey friars, and was deeply influenced by a Franciscan monk. The Catholic priest visited her every day, held masses, talked to her and 'taught her to pray'. Beneath the surface, according to my research,¹² there was a *competition* between the Greek Catholic and the Roman Catholic Church for the public propagation of the apparition.¹³ So far, the competition for the legitimation of the apparition has seen the Roman Catholic Church emerge as the winner. However, the competition for the shrine is yet to begin.

¹² The seer has mentioned several times her spiritual relationship with the Greek Catholic priest and also emphasized his particular role in the popularization process of the shrine.

¹³ About the rivalry between Greek Catholic and Orthodox Churches see Pócs 2008: 487.

When the apparitions became public, the Catholic Church's representatives accepted the seer's aspirations of *imitation Christi*. The seer would wear a crown of thorns for six months as penance, because the Virgin Mary asked her to do so in her vision. Rózsika considered it important to mention during our conversation that it was sanctified by the Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic and the Orthodox priests as well.¹⁴

The higher institution of the Roman Catholic Church did not promote legally the apparition, but they did not forbid it either. A Marian specialist from Budapest and the local Catholic priest made considerable efforts to make the shrine acknowledged, legitimise the apparitions and develop the rituals. The local Catholic priest was able to maintain the community's unity by preaching that it was not a sin to doubt the apparitions: 'I doubted it at the beginning. When the priest said in the church that we should hear from him that: Neither those who believe in it, nor those who do not commit a sin' (woman, cca 45 years old, Roman Catholic, Hungarian, Seuca, 2006, collected by L.P.).

We can find the important elements of Marian shrines in Seuca: a holy well and healing water. The well is in Rózsika's yard. The Blessed Virgin sanctified the well during one of her visions. All these miracles were with the seer's involvement and included a miraculous painting (Pócs 2008). The seer alluded to certain 'secrets' which cannot be made public because the Virgin Mary forbid it. All these miracle genres can also be found in other modern apparition-based shrines (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 165–189).

The periodical called *Christ's Light* dedicated its August issue in 2005 to the Seuca-apparitions and contained the opinions of the local, high-positioned representatives of the Catholic Church (including the statement of some theological teachers and of the arch-

14 The seer's role as a *specialist* is not the purpose of this paper. I mention only that, in her role as a *local specialist*, she uses local folklore elements (for example, the elements of the *scholars'* role). Besides the role of the seer, she identifies herself with the role of the *healer* and *exorcist*.

bishop). These statements contain the history of the apparition and the most important interpretations in a canonical form. The two interpretational models offered are: (1) the prophecies from the apparitions came true (for example, the village is magically protected against natural disasters, referring to the fulfilment of the prophecy of March 10, 2005),¹⁵ (2) the ethnical peace emerging during the apparitions. This was a reference to the regions' distant, but important centre, Târgu-Mureş, where bloody events took place in the spring of 1990.¹⁶ The pogrom against Hungarians is still mentioned as the 'black March', since it had numerous casualties from the city and the nearby villages: '...the events of 1990 took place not far from here, maybe partly with the same participants. And now they pray together in peace. Is this not a miracle? It was like this during all 24 apparitions. This must come from God, by the merit of his most dear daughter, the Virgin Mary' (*Christ's Light*, August 2005).

The Virgin Mary from Seuca

Centring around the official recognition of the shrine by the Catholic Church, rivalry between the Greek Catholic Church and Roman Catholic Church can be ascertained, involving a symbolical competition which is not displayed in public. The most important strategy of the process of acknowledgment is the emphasis on the *discursive* level that the shrine is developing in the spirit of *reconciliation* between the ethnic groups and denominations. This is the most important ideology of the legitimating process of the shrine against the two other important places of pilgrimage, Csíksomlyó and Máriaradna, which, in the context of the Hungarian minority (both are situated in Romania), have become the biggest collective rituals to expose Hungarian identity.

15 The seer predicted 'difficult times' for humanity. The Church's representatives thought it was important to mention that 'after a few weeks, because of the snow melting and the rains, the rivers flood and half of the country was under water, the damage is not yet estimated' (*Christ's Light*, August 2005).

16 During that time, the city's ethnical composition was half Romanian, half Hungarian.

It is significant that the communal context of the public visions in Seuca, on the one hand, expresses the disorders of ethnical and confessional coexistence and, on the other hand, it contributes to their rectification. The Roman Catholic Church tried to supervise the process of the rectification, trying to adapt the messages of the Marian apparition to the multicultural features of the region, by accentuating the ideology of the ethnical and confessional reconciliation.¹⁷

This ideology has been embraced by the blind seer. In our conversation she emphasised that, during her visions, the Romanians prayed with their beads in Hungarian, and the Hungarians in Romanian in total harmony. She explained that she interpreted the messages of Virgin Mary because of her demand:

[P.L.]: 'How do you explain that the Virgin Mary spoke only in Romanian, and she spoke in Hungarian only during the last apparition?

[R.M.]: Unity, solidarity. When thousands of pilgrims are together, Romanians and Hungarians, and how magnificent is that everybody prays in his or her own mother tongue. This could be happening only with the support of the powers above. And there was no conflict. And so nicely have the Romanians learnt the rosary in Hungarian and the Hungarians in Romanian, and they prayed together. And on top of this, there was a miracle, because the Blessed Virgin Mary made a miracle on the sky. So beautifully showed the Romanian to the Hungarian to look up the sky! Can you imagine, how much an *Oltyán* and a *Szekler* can understand each other. But they showed with gestures to each other, and they embraced with love. Well, it is hard to explain. It was made by the powers above' (October 24, 2006, collection of L.P.).

17 For the ideological use of messages of Marian apparitions see the observations of Victor Turner and Edith Turner (Turner and Turner 1978: 299). In the institutionalisation of the apparition-based pilgrimages, Mart Bax attributes a very important role to the elites (Bax 1990:72).

In her draft, the reference to the 'Szeklers' (Hungarians of eastern Transylvania) and to the 'Oltyáns' (Romanians of southern Romania), which as groups have very strong national connotations, she refers to the miraculous reconciliation between the two nations.

In addition to the ideology of intercultural reconciliation, which is supported by the Church, one of the most important functions of the apparition at the local level is in connection with the collective demand originated from below, especially with the demand of the locality. The Marian apparition of Seuca has contributed to the strengthening of the local identity, which is a collective demand of every ethnic group and denomination from the village, independently gained from the attitudes to its religious messages.

The social benefits of the Marian apparition were not only recognised by the Roman Catholic Church, whose economical and symbolical influence has strengthened in an accentuated way. The economical profit of the apparition was also a model for the local council, which has in the recent years organised several profane festivals (for example, the beer and wine festival), helping to sustain local identity. Through the apparitions, Seuca has become a mediatised and well-known Transylvanian village.

During the last apparition on June 17, 2005, the seer mediated the following message:

[R.M.]: 'My name in this place is the Queen of Light'. From this moment, the ecclesiastical media, undertaking efforts to gain recognition for the shrine, has frequently referred to the Virgin Mary of Seuca as the *Queen of Light*. Based on the seers' reports, an artist has also painted a devotional picture of the Queen of Light, the Virgin Mary shining in light, wearing a blue dress and a crown. Furthermore, the apparitions became very important facets of the local Catholic community, as made evident from their claim that 'we have our own Medjugorje!' (collection of L.P.).

The Legitimizing Strategies of the Seer

Besides the legitimating strategies of the Church, we can observe the efforts made by the seer to make her recognised in the local community as a trustworthy specialist. As part of this, she has emphasised several times the most well-known and magical claim supported by the whole community – that in contrast with the neighbouring settlements, Seuca has not suffered because of natural disasters:

[R.M.]: 'Jesus said, there is no prophet in his own country. And so it is with me. They don't believe up to the present day. They only say that, since the apparition took place, Seuca has been very much protected from natural diseases.

[L.P.]: This is the locals' opinion?

[R.M.]: Yes, those, who don't believe, observed at least this' (October 24, 2006, collection of L.P.).

The seer keeps in her mind the narratives about the miracles, and occasionally tells them to those who visit her. One such story is about a shepherd, who once saw that there was a hailstorm in the neighbouring village, but in miraculous way the 'black, iced clouds' did not affect the fields of Seuca.

[L.P.]: 'Were there many disasters affecting the village earlier?

[R.M.]: I don't know exactly the year, but the apparitions had already started, and around Seuca all the villages were affected by the hailstorm. But it did not strike our village. Unfortunately, the shepherd who was on the fields has just died, and he saw the black, huge clouds. He saw the terrible storm which approached Seuca. And at the boundaries of the village, as if the powers above had drawn a line and the storm did not come closer. When he came home, he told everybody what he had seen' (October 24, 2006, collection of L.P.).

In the context of her strategies for legitimisation, we can interpret her story of the Reformed mayor of the village, who, according to her, smelled the fragrance of roses, proving the presence of the Saint:

[R.M.]: "And the car passed here in Seuca, and the driver smelled the perfume of roses as they descended to the village. And he looked around: 'Oh, my God, there are no roses here, where is this fragrant of roses coming from? And why are so many people here?' I think he was talking with the mayor, and he said: 'What happened that it smells so strong of roses? The festival of roses took place here?' 'No – answered the mayor – this is because of the Virgin Mary!' The mayor was a Reformed" (October 24, 2006, collection of L.P.).

In her opinion, there were no real apparitions after Medjugorje. Except for hers, all other apparitions were false. She related that pilgrims who visited her for blessings, miraculous cures or advice, in many cases reported to her their own visions. She used to verify the authenticity of these visions by asking them details about the voice, details of the Virgin Mary, which they could not recall. According to her, the voice of the Virgin Mary is like the sound of bells, but this cannot be heard by those who have false visions:

[R.M.]: 'There has never been and there will never be any real apparition. False ones can appear, but not real ones. Since the apparitions from Medjugorje ended, all the others have been false. Unfortunately, there are many false apparitions in Romania. To have a communication with the celestials, many people say, it is so easy, so good for you that Virgin Mary visits you. But it is not easy at all. These grey weekdays are the worst; the real apparitions manifest themselves on these days' (October 24, 2006, collection of L.P.).

It often happens that those who do not believe in the apparitions make fun of the seer or try to swindle the pilgrims. She claims that her Orthodox neighbours guide the pilgrims who are looking for the miraculous fountain onto the fields. Other neighbours invited the pilgrims in their court to their fountain, telling them maliciously that its water is exactly as good as the seer's sacred fountain's water.

The seer also legitimises her visions by telling stories about magical punishments of those who did not believe them. For example, she claims that somebody fell from a tree because he had a joke at the expense of the powers above. In this case, the just divine punishment is the transcendental acknowledgement of the seer's genuineness.

Conclusions

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; it made the 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. Besides the local experiences, the success of ethnic integration was also supported by references to emotionally charged events like the pogrom against Hungarians in 1990 in Târgu-Mureş, which was well-mediatised in western mass-media. The traditional ontological systems of religion in the communities still function and the frequent crossing of the ethnic and denominational boundaries also promoted strategies of the Church. In addition, the apparitions in Seuca earned the village a distinguished reputation in a region where enormous changes have taken place and people were obliged to develop more complex strategies, or ways of life, without any pre-existing concrete models.



Fig. 11.1



Fig. 11.2



Fig. 11.4



Fig. 11.3



Fig. 11.5

Fig. 11.1 The sacred statues, crosses placed near the main street, in the gardens of the houses inhabited by Romanian families, besides their religious meanings

→ also have national, identity connotations, being expressed explicitly by the national colours painted on the crosses (photo by L. Peti, 2006).

Fig. 11.2 Rózsika Marián, the seer of Seuca (photo by L. Peti, 2006).

Fig. 11.3 Objects for sale with national Romanian and Hungarian national connotations exposed during the pilgrimages (photo by L. Peti, 2008).

Fig. 11.4 Pilgrims doing the Stations of the Cross in Seuca (photo by L. Peti, 2008).

Fig. 11.5 Romanian group of pilgrims (photo by L. Peti, 2008).



Fig. 11.6



Fig. 11.7

Fig. 11.6 Pilgrims touching with several objects the statue of the Virgin Mary for its magical power in the garden of the church (photo by L. Peti, 2008).

Fig. 11.7 'Sun-dancing'. The pilgrims see different transcendental occurrences around the Sun (photo by L. Peti, 2008).



Fig. 11.8

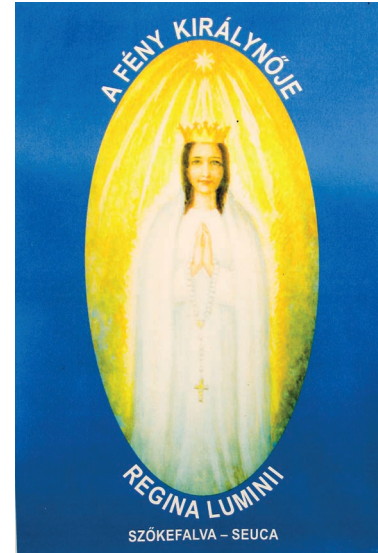


Fig. 11.9

Fig. 11.8 'Sun-dancing'. The pilgrims see different transcendental occurrences around the Sun (photo by L. Peti, 2010).

Fig. 11.9 The picture of the Virgin Mary painted after the instructions of the seer (photo by L. Peti, 2008).



Fig. 11.10

Fig. 11.10 Pilgrims touching with several objects the statue of the Virgin Mary for its magical power in the church (photo by L. Peti, 2010).

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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.

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The First Edition.

Published by VEDA, Publishing House of the SAS, Centre of Operations of the SAS as publication no. 4464 and by the Institute of Ethnology and Social anthropology SAS as Ethnology Studies publication no. 38.

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Language proofs © Mgr. Judita Takáčová,
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Graphic Design and Layout © Matúš Hnát

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Bratislava 2019

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Academy of Sciences, Bratislava 2019

The title was supported also by the scientific
society Slovak Society for the Study of
Religions within the mutual cooperation
with the Institute of Ethnology and Social
Anthropology.

ISBN 978-80-224-1782-2

