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DICTATION AS A FEATURE OF THE REFORMED FUNERALS IN TRANSCARPATHTIA

Анотація / Abstract

У статті в рамках етнографічних досліджень досліджується новий аспект народної грамотності, що є важливою частиною культури. Основна тема – народна грамота та пісенний речитатив. Одним з головних осередків «начитування» було недільне богослужіння, а також похорони та нічні пильнування. У дослідженні представлено деякі рукописи з Угочі (історичної області Закарпаття), що їх використовували на похоронах. Для цих випадків вживалися звичайні рукописи з похоронними піснями під назвою «Книга, виготовлена та написана для поховальних ритуалів», або «Збірник похоронних пісень». Нині в області збережено понад десять таких рукописів. Найдавніші з них датуються 1880-ми роками. Їх написали кантори. Рукописи існують у чотирьох примірниках, вони містять лише похоронні пісні. Кантори вибирали пісню з цього рукопису відповідно до соціального становища померлого. Усі рукописи мають схожу структуру, кожен поділено на десять розділів. Пісні в розділах згруповано за віковими групами. У них указано причину смерті, іноді ранг або матеріальний статус померлого. Практика «начитування» завершилася лише кілька років тому. Речитативи мешканці сіл оцінюють по-різному. Більшість із них прагнули дотримуватися цього звичаю, адже він репрезентував релігійні звичаї угорців-реформатів. У дослідженні представлено як погляди старшого, так і молодого покоління. Міцний зв'язок із традицією зумовив доволі тривале існування речитативного звичаю в досліджуваних поселеннях. Поки громада «ототожнювала» себе з речитативним виконанням, вона практикувала цей спосіб співу. Цей звичай був вагомою частиною життя і релігії угорців-реформатів Закарпаття і віддзеркалював також моральні стосунки в громаді. Ритуал глибоко укорінений в угорській культурі, наш обов'язок захищати та зберігати його.

Ключові слова: рукописи, поминальні пісні, пісня-речитатив, народна грамота, похорон.

The present paper examines a novel aspect of folk literacy within the ethnographical research, which is an important part of the culture. The central theme is the folk literacy and the song dictation. One of the main scenes of the dictation was the Sunday worship, and the other were the funerals and the vigilances. The study presents some manuscripts from Ugocsa, which were used at funerals. For the funeral occasions, direct manuscripts were made full of funeral songs, with the title *Book made and written for the funeral occasions* or *Collection of funeral songs*. We can find nowadays more than ten manuscripts in the region. The earliest are dates from the 1880s. These were written by cantors. The manuscripts are in quadruplicate, and contain only funeral songs. Cantors chose the song from this booklet according to the social position of the deceased. At funerals the cantors dictated only from these. All of the manuscripts have a similar structure. They divided them into ten sections. The songs in the sections built around different age groups. They refer to the cause of death, sometimes the rank of the dead or to the material status. Dictation has ended just a few years ago. The inhabitants of the villages think differently about the dictation. Most of them wanted to observe the custom, because it was part of our reformed hungarianness, and part of the reformed religion. The study parallels the views of the older and young generation. The strong adherence to traditions preserved the dictation for so long in the researched settlements. Until the community identify oneself with dictation, it also practiced this mode of singing. The custom of dictation was part of our Reformed Hungarianness, and it was part of living the Reformed religion. It also morally reflected the community's relationship to each other. The custom is the part of our Hungarian roots, and it is our duty to protect and defend it.

Keywords: manuscripts, funeral songs, song-dictation, folk literacy, funeral.

My research is about an ancient custom, about the song-dictation in a Transcarpathian county, Ugocsa. I would like to emphasize the importance of this old custom.

Dictation is an old tradition, which was typical of the Reformed in Transcarpathia. It has ended just a few years ago. The inhabitants of the villages think differently about the dictation. Opinions are splits. Most of them wanted to observe the custom, because it was part of our reformed Hungarians, and part of the reformed religion.

To the World War II in the reformed villages students dictated the psalms in the church. Ethnographer Ambrus Molnar wrote about the custom in his study, which was published in 2001 [8]. His work is about the custom of *dictation* in Nagydobrony, but it was typical of several Hungarian-inhabited settlements in Transcarpathia. Ilona P. Lator also mentioned this custom in her work. The texts were dictated from *manuscripts*.

The reason of this custom maybe was the lack of printed books and the illiteracy [7].

One of the main scene of the dictation was the Sunday worship. The person, who was dictating, said the song per line and the community sang after him. In Shalank [3, p. 122–127] the *pre-recited* form was used [5, p. 429–433]. This means that the dictator said the rows, singing slightly. This form was

practiced in Nagyecsed as well [9, p. 157–176]. The characteristic of the villages is that the reformed inhabitants also sang after dictation from the printed psalm books.

In Ugocsa county the person who dictated was named *cantor*, elsewhere his name was *precentor* or *song-leader* [3, p. 122–127]. He was the one who set the tune and started the song, members of the community could sing after him.

After the Sunday worship the second and main scene of the dictation were the funerals and the vigilances. The funerals and the vigilances had a private cantor or precentor [2].

For the funeral occasions, direct manuscripts were made full of funeral songs. The titles of these were *Book made and written for the funeral occasions* or *Collection of funeral songs*. The manuscripts contain mixed songs/psalms to be dictated in the funerals and during the vigilances [11, p. 58–59]. It is a collection, in which the source of the songs is unknown. These are reformed folk songs. According to the literature these songs came from the middle ages, however they spread at the time of the Reformation, in the XVI. Century [6].

In Ugocsa the funerals and the vigilances are held in the courtyard today. Earlier mostly men participated in the vigilances. Here is the

cantor and the assistant cantor dictated from the manuscript mentioned above.

The cantor chose the song from this booklet according to the social position of the deceased. Different songs were sung at the *church caretaker's* funeral and other at the *bellman's* funeral. In such way they made a distinction between the pastor and a simple man. The cantor chose different song for the funeral of a young girl or a grandmother. The members of the community respected each other by selecting the appropriate songs/psalms.

The *Book made and written for the funeral occasions* can be found in several copies in the researched area. I have found four manuscripts in Shalank, and others in other villages in Ugocsa. The manuscript contains songs related to only the funeral service. None of these can be found in today's psalmody or in psalms. Some songs may have familiar melodies, but most of them are labelled with subtitle «*own melody*». This means that the melody of these funeral songs is not found in the psalmody.

The first manuscript was written in 1883–1884. It was owned by Ferencz Gáll. On the first page we can find the most important entries written in carefully drawn letters. Here we can find the function of the book, the name of the owner and the date of the entry. On the next page we can read the songs of Stage I.

The second manuscript was written in 1906. It was owned by József Orbán. On the first page of the manuscript we can read the name of the owner, and the date of the copying as well. On the next page we can read the songs of Stage I.

Both of the manuscripts are worn and damaged by long use. They were often used, because at funerals the cantors dictated only from these.

The third manuscript was written is 1971–1973, and was owned by Zoltán Zán. At the first page of the book we can find the author's notes: «*Explanation*», which serves as a guide for cantors and precentors who use the booklet.

The content of the quote is as follows:

«*In this book are written familiar and less familiar songs/psalms for each funeral service. To this belongs a table of contents at the end of the manuscripts. So the cantor must choose the psalms like that those present may know it*» (The quotation is provided only by translation).

The fourth manuscript was written by Zoltán Zán in 1981 too.

The fifth manuscript was written in 1899 by Lajos Bán. On the first page of the manuscript we can read the name of the owner, and the date of the copying as well. On the next page we can read the songs of Stage I.

The construction of the manuscripts. All of the manuscripts have a similar structure. They are divided into ten sections. The songs in the sections are built around different age groups. They refer to the cause of death, sometimes the rank of the dead or to the material status. The content at the end of the book also shows the sections. The ten sections are the following:

Section 1: Funeral songs for babies;
Section 2: Funeral songs for children;
Section 3: Funeral songs for youths;
Section 5: Funeral songs for middle aged;
Section 5: Funeral songs for the elderly;
Section 6: Simple songs at vigilance;
Section 7: Songs at vigilance;
Section 8 and 9: Songs for various cases;
Section 10: Songs on the way to the cemetery and other songs for vigilance.

Songs are similar and matched in the five manuscripts. This is the proof that one has been copied from the other. In some texts the difference is barely noticeable. We find spelling errors in many places, but the stylistic value of the songs will not be less because of that.

The central thought of the songs is passing away which is expressed often with natural image. Human life is paralleled with the development of the plants and the cyclical change of the nature. The nature appears in several songs, mostly in the songs of the first, the second and the third Sections. Some examples:

«*Sprightly spring of my life had faded away...*» (Section 1, song 2);

«*In Autumn is falling the splendor of the Summer...*» (Section 5, song 96).

Most common symbol is the flower, which is the symbol of the origin of the universe [4, p. 235]. Roses are often used among the flowers. The rose is the symbol of the rebirth, the kindness and the respect [4, p. 183]. The rose also symbolizes young life. It often occurs in songs singing for youth. Buds are also common, because it is the symbol of the child, and it can be the symbol of the hope [4, p. 37]. Consolation in the texts is frequent.

The role of the dictation. Dictation is an old tradition. It ended just a few years ago. The inhabitants of the villages think differently about the dictation. Opinions are split. Most of them wanted to observe the custom, because it was the part of our reformed hungarianness, and part of the reformed religion.

Especially the elderly stuck to tradition. Young people are already dismissive. Many of them consider the expulsion of dictation from the church and from the rites.

On the other hand, the elderly ones want to preserve the traditions or just keep the dictation in its original form by clinging to the custom.

«*That's what we're used to. It was so beautiful, because everyone knew it, and now we don't even know the songs. It was the good way the cantor did it*».

«*The old songs were more beautiful. We just make dances out of new songs*».

«*The new singing mode is not nice. They are not for funeral*».

Narratives referred to the current songbooks, which are used equally by Reformed congregations at funerals.

Opposite opinions:

«*The songbook is much better. So, it's better because we can learn the songs. After dictation, it cannot be*»;

«*It's more beautiful because everything goes in line and you can understand the song*».

Young people liked soon the catchy melodies of the new and official songbooks, the rhythmic singing style. The change, the initiation of new songs, was difficult. This resulted «strange» situations in worships. While the organ sound and the young people with good vocals sang according to the new melodies, the singing of the elderly differed. They stayed with the old slow singing style. So, the singing was in canon.

The strong adherence to traditions preserved the dictation for so long in the researched settlements. Until the community identifies oneself with dictation, it also practiced this mode of singing.

The dictation first ceased on church occasions, but it was still used at the funerals. Later it was expelled from the funerals [10, p. 117–121]. Members of the assembly switched to the use of songbooks. The custom of dictation was part of our Reformed Hungarianness, and it was part of the living Reformed religion.

Today we talk a lot about the necessity of preserve our folk-rooted spiritual culture. Similarly, it cannot be uninteresting from the church point of view.

The old dictated songs were written in manuscript booklets and these old manuscripts hide not only lyrics, but also ancient Hungarian folk melodies. The song material of these manuscripts is highly diverse, but they are less well known [1, c. 5–10]. These booklets have kept the songs and melodies of the community for centuries. These are reformed folk songs [12, p. 882–908]. According to the literature these songs came from the middle ages, however they spread at the time of the Reformation, in the XVIth century.

One hundred years ago, the same melodies were heard at the vigils and funerals as they were a few years ago. Nothing had changed. The dictation also morally reflected the community's relationship to each other. It meant respect and honour.

Dictation stopped and ceased around the 2000's in most Hungarian settlements in

Ugocsa. In many places, Reformed people still remember the cantors who dictated. They also remember the manuscripts in which the songs were written. However, these manuscripts are becoming increasingly difficult to collect. The customs of dirge singing are no more a living tradition.

In my research, I introduced a custom that is part of the tradition of our region, Transcarpathia, and part of the Hungarian nation, who lives here. I would like to draw the attention to the dictation, the manuscripts, and the funeral songs in it. Because these

manuscripts contain not only simple texts but also ancient Hungarian folk tunes. The community has preserved the tunes for centuries. We cannot bring the habit back but we must not let it forgotten. First, manuscripts should be collected as soon as possible. Secondly, this ancient singing tradition should be introduced not only to young people but also to professionals. We can no longer bring the habit back, but we can do it to protect it from being forgotten. These most precious works of the Hungarian people's soul must be saved! This is our duty.

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