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The reasons and functions of conversion to Pentecostalism in a Roma community in Moldavia, Romania

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Abstract | The ethnographic material underlying this study was collected by the author during fieldwork conducted between 2013 and 2017. The fieldwork took place in a large Roma community of *Ursari* (bear trainers/animal tamers) residing in a Moldavian village in Romania, most of whom converted from Orthodox Christianity to Pentecostalism in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This analysis explores the conditions under which the Roma community embraced Pentecostalism, the reasons behind this conversion, and the roles that Pentecostalism plays in the lives of the Roma. Following a brief historical overview of the recent past of the Roma, the author outlines the community's main sociocultural characteristics and presents their current situation, then details the conversion stories of five individuals. The Roma community's livelihood is primarily based on migration, which can be categorised into two types: one involving "begging migration" primarily directed toward Northern European countries, and the other involving long-term settlement in Western European countries. As a result of migration, Pentecostal communities composed of Roma have also emerged in England and France, primarily along the kinship networks and relational ties of the studied *Ursari* Roma community. The author analyzes the religious conversion within this Roma community in relation to scholarly literature that theoretically examines the conversions of Eastern European Roma. The author argues that significant modernisation changes are occurring within the community through the value system of Pentecostalism. Furthermore, it is posited that through the ideal of being "born-again", a central concept in Pentecostalism, there is an effort to transcend the stigmatised Roma identity.

Keywords | Pentecostalism, religious conversion, Roma Pentecostalism, Romania

Introduction

I set about to the scientific research that forms the basis of this study in 2013 in the Roma Pentecostal communities of three nearby Moldovan settlements: one with an Orthodox Christian majority, one with a Roman Catholic (Csángó) majority and one with a mixed Romanian and Roma population.¹ The main research question of my fieldwork is why the ideology of Pentecostalism can become so successful among groups with radically different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, although they are spatially close to each other, connected to each other, and essentially organised into a loose network?² What are the religious concepts based on which new communities are created or previous ones reorganised, offering new lifestyle models and patterns of identification? As part of this broader research objective, I make an attempt in my analysis to interpret the reasons for the Roma community's turning to Pentecostalism, and to examine how Pentecostalism has changed Roma life.

In the first part of my study, I briefly introduce the Roma community examined in my analysis and outline the circumstances under which Pentecostalism appeared in their lives. Following an attempt at social contextualisation of the Roma's conversion to Pentecostalism, I present the stories of the conversion of five individuals on a case-by-case basis, based on oral interviews with them, and then summarise their common characteristics. I then move on to an interpretation of the reasons and functions of conversion to Pentecostalism. In this context, I will try to provide a brief overview of the theories explaining the reasons for the conversion of Eastern European Roma to Pentecostalism, and finally I will examine how these theories relate to the cases described herein and to my other ethnographic experiences.

The Roma of Ursăreni³

In terms of sociocultural characteristics (as well as economic ones), Pentecostal Roma communities constitute the most homogeneous group. The native language of the Roma is *Romani*, but in various life situations they also use *Romanian* in addition to *Romani*. The ritual language of Pentecostal gatherings is Romanian, with testimonies orated and most of the songs sung in Romanian. Before their conversion, the Pentecostal Roma were officially Orthodox Christians, but this merely meant a very loose, in fact formal, integration into the religious congregation of the local Orthodox Romanians.⁴

Like the vast majority of Roma living in segregated areas, Pentecostal Roma are quite poor, have low education, and are largely illiterate.

Regular migration abroad for begging (in which Roma people participate both directly and indirectly through their family members) plays a major role in ensuring the livelihood of Roma families.

Just to give you an idea of the extent of begging, it was rare for me to talk to someone in the Roma settlement who didn't have at least one member of their family abroad begging for money during the time we talked. The main season for begging is summer, but many Roma people go abroad to make some money by begging during off-peak seasons, as well.

In addition to periodic migration for begging (characterised by a few trips per year and occasional stays of one to two months), another form of migration also exists. The migration destinations of these Roma families from Ursăreni⁵ are Western European states (primarily England, France and Germany). Families affected by this form of migration have been living in the aforementioned countries for years, striving for permanent settlement. As a result of this type of migration, two Pentecostal Roma communities, mainly from Ursăreni, were established in England and France⁶.

The Roma usually supplement their income from begging with money earned on Romanian-owned farms in the village, some take on seasonal agricultural work even in more distant regions, while others keep a few domestic animals, including horses, goats, donkeys, poultry, and perhaps pigs.

Case presentations

Below, I present five cases to describe the circumstances of the conversion of individuals who tell their stories of conversion, attempting to show how they interpret the significance of converting to Pentecostalism in their own lives. Four of them are men, the fifth is

a woman; one of the men and the woman are spouses. Three of them have a special status in the Roma Pentecostal community. One of them is *Iosif*, and according to the leaders of the group and the wider Pentecostal network, it was his merit to establish Pentecostalism in the segregated area where I conducted my research. He has long held a formal position in the leadership of the local church and is close to the leadership of one of its branches⁷, and informally has legitimacy within the group similar to the prestige and authority of the current formal leaders. *Petru*, as one of the two deacons of the local community, is one of the most significant figures in the body leading the Pentecostal group. *Florin* is also a member of the group's leadership, although he has less authority and legitimacy than the previous two individuals. He serves as the *censor* (internal financial auditor) in the local church and is also known in the community for his activities as a *proroc* ("seer/forecaster"). He has a much higher degree of mobility than ordinary members of the church.

Iosif

A key role in the conversion of the Roma to Pentecostalism was played by the proselytising activity of a local Roma man, who himself converted while working on a farm near a town in southern Romania during the year of the regime change. Iosif is a 44-year-old Roma man. My first encounter with Iosif took place in the summer of 2013, in rather memorable circumstances, when I visited Ursăreni for the first time. I arrived in the village by thumb, accompanied by Anton, the leader of the Csángó Pentecostal community. The segregated settlement inhabited by the Roma is several kilometres away from the village, which also extends to the side along the main road of European importance. We set off on foot for the rest of the way. Anton knew the surroundings of the village very well, so we followed various paths, choosing the shortest route to the segregation zone, and stopping occasionally so he could explain a thought or two that had come to mind during our conversation. Suddenly, a car with a Swedish license plate stopped in front of us, with three people sitting in it: a young man (the driver) and two older, imposing men. One of them was Iosif, and the other was a deacon from the Roma Pentecostal group. Iosif greeted Anton as an old friend and said that they had heard from one of the leaders of the Pentecostal network that visitors were coming, and as a sign of respect, they had come to take us to the Roma settlement by car. After making an appearance at several leaders of the Pentecostal group, our growing delegation also visited Iosif's house. Even during the short time spent in the segregated area inhabited by the Roma, the extreme poverty they live in was striking to me, and Iosif and his family were no exception, either.

I interviewed Iosif, who was 44 years old in 2013, several times, mainly about his conversion.⁸ He has only four years of primary schooling, but he didn't complete them all, as his family moved frequently, migrating to different places where his parents had job opportunities. Iosif converted during the change of regime. At that time, he worked in Constanța, where he spent a longer period of time with his wife because of the agricultural job opportunities available there. As his wife also told us, Iosif, at a religious gathering of proselytising Pentecostals, suddenly felt the Holy Spirit filling his soul while listening to the preaching of the word of God. He felt the presence of God, and the weight of God's words in his soul:

Immersed in the word of God, I felt the Holy Spirit penetrate a corner of my heart, and I was abruptly deeply moved by the word of God, sensing the presence of God in my soul. I was a really bad, bad man, smoking more than four packs of cigarettes a day, but I never drank [alcohol]. Those brothers came to us, they came constantly, twice a week, where we

*were, in Negru Vodă, and they said that whoever wanted to have a relationship with God could do so, which was an invitation, and I said, yes, I want to convert.*⁹

On another occasion, Iosif told as a true story that he responded to the accusations of “the priests” that Pentecostals were like “poisonous, toxic mushrooms” and that they were “fools” by asking them why they didn’t come to “lift” him when he was “drinking 5-6 litres of țuică” a day, smoking cigarettes, swearing, and cursing. While according to his previously quoted account, he never drank, in recounting his conversion on another occasion, he emphasised his sinfulness before his conversion by mentioning that in addition to smoking, he was also a drunkard.

In Iosif’s narrative, in which he describes his sinful life before his conversion, we can discover the well-known characteristics of conversion stories. According to the literature, the basic narrative structure of conversion stories is the construction of the story on a kind of moral contrast, in which the dividing point between the former sinful lifestyle and the correct life pleasing to God is represented by the act of conversion (see Fosztó 2007: 32). I also observed the changes occurring in different conversion story variations in the narrative of Anton, the Csángó community leader. When we visited another Roma family on one occasion, Anton, who was also with us, said – to illustrate/demonstrate his sinful lifestyle before his conversion – that he had been a truck driver for a long time, and that no one should explain to him what “hiring prostitutes” meant. However, during a private one-on-one conversation, he told me that his affairs with women were always based on arranged relationships. The exaggerations found in various versions of conversion stories should be considered a rhetorical device aimed at making such stories acceptable to the audience; this was pointed out by László Fosztó based on his fieldwork among Pentecostal Roma in Transylvania (see Fosztó 2007: 27, 45). What is interesting about Iosif’s narrative (but not an unknown phenomenon in the literature analysing Romani Pentecostalism) is that he listed the stereotypes with which members of the majority society tend to stigmatise the Roma as characteristics of a Roma person before conversion. Iosif reported that the establishment of the Roma Pentecostal congregation in each of the villages studied was accompanied by opposition, inciting negative attitudes from representatives of the majority churches. According to Iosif, after his conversion, he had to endure many trials for his faith. He earned the disapproval of the local priest and the police by holding Pentecostal gatherings in the village’s segregated Roma area.

*The priests gathered and told the people not to accept the word of God from us. They said we were poisonous mushrooms, people who turn off the lights – excuse me, I don’t know how to express myself – turn off the lights and have sex [at gatherings, in church]. And when people faced the truth, when we worked for them, they could see with their own eyes that we didn’t drink, we didn’t smoke, we didn’t steal... They tested us, dear sir.*¹⁰

According to Iosif, the police also treated the formation of the group with considerable distrust. He told me that he was once summoned to the local police station, where he was beaten mercilessly. In the early 1990s, the Roma began building a church. The relationship between Orthodox Romanians and the Roma was heavily strained by the church-building zeal of the Pentecostal Roma. According to Iosif, the Pentecostal Roma used to be a laughing stock for the Orthodox majority. For example, they were often mocked by saying that the Gypsies had once stolen a church for themselves, but the church was made of cheese, and once, when they were hungry, they ate it. This funny story highlights the main element of negative stereotyping about Roma: the image of the starving poor Roma who would rather steal than work, and the fact that the initiatives of the Roma as a community cannot be taken seriously.

Previously, people [the Romanians in the village] said that you Gypsies had a church. As I say, they took it as a joke. "You stole a cheese church and, being hungry, you ate it!" And we proved before God and people that we could indeed build a church.¹¹

Dénes Kiss reports on a similar case to the one mentioned above. Reflecting on the role of Pentecostalism in social transformation in a Hungarian-speaking Pentecostal Roma community in Transylvania, he sees the fact that the Pentecostal Roma built a church as an opportunity to correct the asymmetric relationship with the majority community: "Organisation into a congregation [...] creates the Roma equivalent of a typical institutional form of non-Roma, churches, which in a sense represents a step towards equality" (Kiss 2014). In the case I examined, for the Roma, having their own church is also a source of pride; in their relationship with the Orthodox Romanians, they consider it an attribute of assimilation and "civilisation". The enthusiasm of the Roma Pentecostal community for building a church can thus be interpreted as a symbolic struggle for identity.

According to Iosif, the construction of the church was also helped by a divine miracle. He recounted on several occasions that after the construction of the church, the Orthodox community accused the Pentecostal Roma of being the root cause of the drought afflicting the population of the settlement. Iosif said that due to the anti-Roma public sentiment stirred up by the priests, people said things like the Roma Pentecostal church should be destroyed. They were threatened with bulldozing the Pentecostal church under construction if they did not participate in a joint prayer for rain and ask their God to end the drought. The "rainmaking ritual" initiated by the Orthodox believers took place at a cross erected on a hillside above the village, where – according to Iosif – the Pentecostals' prayer caused it to first drizzle, then rain heavily. The miracle caused the Orthodox to "change their minds", and thus the Pentecostal church was saved.

Iosif very often identifies his own story of conversion with that of the Roma as a community, often speaking on their behalf. Taking on a civilised human character following his conversion is a key element of Iosif's identity, as well as his thinking about converted Roma in general.

Elena

She is Iosif's wife. Along with Iosif, she converted to the Pentecostal faith during the internal nationwide labour migration boom typical of the period of regime change. Elena was born in 1970 and married at the age of 19. They had no children during the first four years of their marriage, so she sought medical treatment. Since then, she has had ten children. She has never been to school, and is illiterate. Her family, which has a total of nineteen members – including the families of her two adult children – lives in a three-room adobe hut.

In 1989, Elena was working with her husband in the Romanian port city of Constanța. There they came into contact with Pentecostal proselytisers. She said that the Pentecostals held meetings at their place. On one such occasion, a song she heard from them touched her deeply, which led to her conversion and baptism a year later. After returning to Ursăreni, the first gatherings (several times a week, usually in the evenings) took place in their home, and then in the homes of other converts.

Elena has been suffering from a brain tumour for years, which often causes her to faint. She has had two surgeries (in the capital), the total cost of which was covered by a donation from a Swedish (presumably Pentecostal) churchman. Elena got in touch with the Swedish donor through a neighbour who was begging in Sweden. The Swedish benefactor has since visited Ursăreni.

In the experience of her religious faith, dreams and their interpretations, *prorocire* (i.e. soothsaying/divination), and miraculous healings have a special significance, as is generally emphasised by the literature analysing the function of Pentecostalism in everyday religiosity (see, for example, Pop 2007: 6).

When I get so caught up in prayer, there are more of us brothers and sisters¹², and sometimes at home, but when there are children, I can tell you, they get scared. In the temple the Holy Spirit comes upon me, but I have no divination, no revelation [regarding the future], I have no [such gift].

It's just that I talk to the Holy Spirit too. Sometimes God has a vision for me, like through dreams, and I tell the sisters what I saw, a sister, a brother, and I realise what it means.¹³

Elena also sees the importance of the change that has occurred since her conversion not so much in her own life as in the community as a whole. According to Elena, the villagers are happy about the positive social changes among the Roma, which are a result of their conversion to Pentecostalism:

Do you know what the Gypsies did? They stole, they committed fornication, they fought, and they did all sorts of bad things, but now God did a great miracle, he lifted us out of our sin, he opened our eyes. We were in the dark, sitting in a swamp, we didn't even know if it was Sunday or Friday. Nothing. We Gypsies didn't know anything. But look, God opened our eyes, through the brothers, through God himself.¹⁴

Viorel

In the following, I present the conversion story of a Roma man of 65 or so. Viorel is illiterate and has no profession. During the socialist era, like the majority of the Roma population in rural Romania, he worked as an agricultural labourer on the local collective farm. Viorel and his wife have no steady income. He earns a living by begging regularly in a nearby city, most often as a street musician. His wife is seriously ill. They have seven adult children, all of whom live abroad. I reached him with the help of Anton and a "brother" with great authority in the Pentecostal community. Viorel attached great importance to our visit and quickly sent his wife to the store to do some shopping so that he could properly host me in his modest home. After his wife returned and served the baloney sausage, olives, and soft drink, I asked him to tell me the story of his conversion. The key element of the narrative about Viorel's conversion is that after getting to know God, with his help he was freed from the severe alcoholism that was threatening his life, and his life in general took a turn for the better. Viorel began his conversion story with these words:

I, brother [addressing me], was a drunkard, known throughout Ursăreni. I was addicted to drink. I didn't even drink water, only spirits. I drank cognac straight, and I even drank vinegar, if I had nothing else. I poured vinegar into water, added sugar, and drank it.¹⁵

Viorel said that his chronic alcoholism had made him seriously ill physically. One day, he was lying drunk at home and suddenly he heard beautiful religious songs being sung next door to the accompaniment of an accordion. There was a Pentecostal religious gathering in his neighbourhood. Viorel was deeply moved by what he heard there, which prompted him to go to the Pentecostal church on Sunday, where he was converted. His alcohol withdrawal was a real struggle; it took a long time for his severe withdrawal symptoms to go away, but he drew strength from his faith, persevered, and has not drunk alcohol since about 2001. After his conversion, he wanted his wife, who also had alcohol problems, to join the Pentecostal community and attend church with him, but she refused to follow him for two years. At his persistent urging, which also included some trickery, his wife

eventually complied with his husband's request and began attending the religious services of the local Pentecostal Church. According to Viorel, what was said there touched his wife deeply, and miraculously, she too recognised the greatness of God. Viorel considers it a divine miracle that both he and his wife were "redeemed by God to belong to his garment and to his feet".

At that time, Viorel and his wife suffered a serious blow. Their house was taken by loan sharks after they had not been able to repay the loan they had received for a long time. The total amount of the debt plus the usurious interest was very high. According to him, he had to turn to loan sharks because of his severe alcoholism and his wife's hospitalisation. After they became homeless, they went to Finland with the help of one of their daughters, where they stayed for a month and a half to two months to earn some money by begging. During his trials, he often turned to God in prayer.

After returning home with the approximately 3,500 to 4,000 euros they earned by begging in Finland, they managed to buy a small, adobe house in the Roma segregated area, which they renovated with their own hands. The harmonious, brightly coloured house, which exudes a cheerful atmosphere, has a neat porch, and an adobe oven built by Viorel himself. He said that he still has a debt of 500 euros. Like him, his children live mainly by begging in various Western cities.

Petru

Around 45 years old, Petru serving as a deacon in the Roma community in Ursăreni, described his former self as an atheist before his conversion about 15-20 years ago. At that time, like many other Roma living in the settlement, he worked as agricultural labourer in a town in southern Romania or in a gravel quarry. He was about 35 years old when he had to endure a great spiritual ordeal. His 14-year-old child was diagnosed with a brain tumour. According to Petru, one time before leaving for work, he took the Bible with him and began reading the New Testament in his lodgings on a Sunday, his day of rest. After reading a few lines, the words of the Bible completely captivated him. Lost in his reading, Petru realised that he was the unluckiest person in the world, because he had committed so many evil acts in his life. He decided then that when he returned home, he would convert, and after that he was filled with a strange happiness. According to Petru, by "accepting God", a strange change took place in him, thanks to which he was no longer able to steal, use crude or obscene language, drink alcohol, or cheat on his wife. According to him, after he "surrendered himself to God", his child soon died, but God continued to work in him, and as a result of the change he went through, God "baptised him in the Holy Spirit"¹⁶, and after a while he also submitted to water baptism. He said that in this process, he was also helped by "brothers" (Pentecostal believers) who prayed for him. He said that since then he has taken God's word and love seriously, which for him means finding the meaning of life, which he put as follows:

*And since then, I have taken seriously what the word of God and the love of God mean. And I could not break away from it, because that is where I found it ... the meaning of my life, and I have not regretted it.*¹⁷

Florin

Florin, 43, has had a life path that is not very different from the typical path of the Roma in Ursăreni. His parents were poor people who worked mainly as seasonal agricultural workers and, like many Roma in Romania during the socialist era, periodically followed job opportunities on farms and plantations in more distant regions. His father was also a skilled mason. Florin had non-religious parents. He was placed in state care from the age of 13 to 18, in a way that allowed him to maintain contact with his family. During Romania's socialist era, it was a common practice for families in need of outside labour to raise children in state care under a kind of guardianship. This type of "child raising" practically corresponded to what we would call "servitude" today. This is how Florin ended up "back" in Ursăreni, where he lived with an Orthodox Romanian family for years. According to Florin, an additional advantage of being raised by a Romanian family was that he could attend school continuously. As Iosif's case shows, Roma children who followed their parents on seasonal intra-country labour migrations had little or no schooling, which is a major factor in the high level of illiteracy in the settlement.

Florin and his family live in extremely poor conditions. The tiny mud shanty consists of only one room, about 20 to 25 square meters, which the two parents share with their five teenage children. The house has no gas, electricity and water supply, and has no Internet access. The only room in the house serves as both a kitchen and a bathroom. Florin has been lame since birth, so he receives a minimal monthly allowance from the state. This allowance, as well as the state support received for children, together amounts to approximately RON 700 (approximately EUR 150) per month, and the family has to live on this modest permanent income. Florin usually takes all the money at the beginning of each month and pays it to the village shopkeeper, where he and his family usually do their shopping, thus settling the debt they accumulated during the previous month for the daily necessities of food and living at the local store.

Florin serves as a *censor*, a kind of internal financial controller, on the five-member Church Council of the Pentecostal Church in Ursăreni. He checks and keeps track of the donations collected by the *treasurer* and the tithes given to the church. It also plays a very important role in distributing the aid funds that the local Pentecostal Church provides to its members in need in times of emergency. The church aid system is of a social nature, consisting of food provided to starving families and contributions to the financing of basic medical treatment in the event of an accident. Florin has been elected to the position of censor by the congregation several times. This status requires responsible moral conduct on the part of the censor and unconditional trust on the part of the congregation, and this strong trust is likely related to the positive social connotations attributed to Florin's socialisation with the Romanian family. Florin is proud that, unlike the majority of Roma living in the colony, he and his children do not earn their living by begging.

Florin, by his own admission and by the accounts of others, practices divination. He also provides this service locally in the settlement, but his main occasions are group visits to mainly Roma Pentecostal congregations within the region.

In the first half of our conversation, Florin primarily recounted the main moments of his life story, briefly introducing the Roma community. While he emphasised his own reliability, honesty, and love of work, attributing these qualities largely to his "upbringing" with a Romanian family, in recounting the story of his conversion, he outlined a character who stood in direct contrast to the former. In other words, Florin's presentation of himself before his conversion was in complete contrast to what he had said when outlining his

life path outside of a religious context. After I asked him to tell his conversion story, Florin began as follows:

When I was younger [before his conversion], I was a [bad] person to the core, I deceived the villagers whenever I could. To tell the truth, before [his conversion], how should I put it, I lied so much. I was a heavy smoker, spending one or two lei out of every ten lei on cigarettes. Despite my supervisor's orders, I didn't work, so I don't even know what to say, what kind of person I was...¹⁸

To emphasise the great change he had undergone through his conversion, he portrayed his former self as a cheat, a liar, a spender of money on cigarettes, and a work avoider. One time, while he and some friends were wandering the streets of the Roma shanty settlement, smoking cigarettes, he noticed strange music coming from one of the shacks. A Pentecostal church service was taking place inside. The event piqued Florin's interest, and he entered the poor building, but – as he said – he soon forgot what they were singing about there. His conversion came later, about 26 years ago¹⁹, when he was away from his native village for an extended period of time due to a job opportunity on a suburban farm in eastern Romania. During his work, he came into daily contact with two Pentecostal families who held joint congregation meetings, which Florin also attended. Sing-alongs and “rejoicing in the Lord” had a great impact on him. According to Florin, under the influence of the shared experience, he “received Christ into his heart”, which he demonstrated to the outside world at that moment by throwing away the pack of cigarettes in his pocket.

He then undertook a 20-day fast. He meant his voluntary food deprivation as a sacrificial gesture. While fasting, the joy of his encounter with God gradually overwhelmed him. As he said, “he was getting filled with happiness”. From that moment on, Florin felt like a different person. He began to regularly attend Pentecostal church services held on the farm. The orderly lifestyle of the members of the small community, “the blessing manifesting in their lives”, as he put it, strengthened his determination to redesign his life. Florin attached great emotional significance to the fact that he received Christ into his heart in a stable, which served as his lodging.

Florin's conversion story is structurally identical to the conversion stories I heard from other Roma in Ursăreni. By accepting Christ into his life, he feels that he has been “born again” and is no longer the person he was before. He considers the radical change in his life path to be the result of his own conscious decision (“and I made a new decision in my life”), and feels in control of his life.

Summary of cases

Analysing the motivations for joining sects, Bryan Wilson writes about “a wide variation of personal circumstances” (Wilson 1992: 181)²⁰. Analysing interviews with converts, he emphasises the emergence/strengthening of the role of conscience in these individuals (see Wilson 1992: 182, 184). Among the significant benefits of conversion for these individuals, he mentions, among others, the development of a sense of purpose and self-confidence, the satisfaction of intellectual needs, and the ability to exercise “moral control” in their lives (see Wilson 1992: 186, 187, 190). Several of Wilson's functions of conversion and joining a religious community can be identified in the conversion stories presented, especially in Petru's. For Petru, conversion and joining the Pentecostal denomination meant giving his life a new existential meaning during his most difficult personal trial. Conversion was a means of interpreting his individual situation, which had both the intel-

lectual and emotional qualities mentioned by B. Wilson. The most striking sign of change in Petru's life is gaining the ability to exercise "moral control" – which B. Wilson considers a substantial benefit of joining a sect, and which is also a particularly important component of the concept of conversion of the studied Roma Pentecostal community, as has been emphasised several times by social researchers studying Romanian Pentecostal Roma (see, for example, Pop 2007; Fosztó 2007; 2009; Gog 2008).

Highlighting the positive personal and community effects of Pentecostalism is a common element in the narratives of the interviewed individuals. According to these narratives, as a result of the conversion to Pentecostalism, conditions in the colony have become more orderly, social security has been strengthened, while alcoholism has somewhat declined, which also contributes greatly to the improvement of the image of the Roma among the Romanian population. According to this discourse, the fact that the Pentecostal Roma were able to build their church through a joint effort, despite the prejudice of the locals, is a clear sign of another stage on the path towards a civilised lifestyle (Iosif also considered it important to emphasise that they are planning to build a toilet next to the church). In this context, the conversion of Roma to Pentecostalism has resulted in an increased awareness of their way of life (cf. Wilson 1992), and those affected "find a new human dignity" in it (Hollenweger 2004: 133). Walter J. Hollenweger attributes this latter feature to Pentecostalism in general in the case of poor social groups converting to Pentecostalism (see Hollenweger 2004: 133). Another common and general element of conversion stories is that the conversion itself occurs suddenly, all at once, which is also often emphasised in the literature on conversions (see, for example, Coleman 2003: 17). Another such feature is the heightened emotional involvement at the moment of conversion.

The validity of the theories explaining the conversion of Eastern European Roma to Pentecostalism in the case of the Pentecostal Roma of Ursăreni

Dénes Kiss, reviewing the theories that attempt to explain the causes of religious conversions in general (and the reasons for conversion to Pentecostalism in particular) based on the similarity of their lines of argument, identifies five fundamentally common argument systems – as he calls them, "theses" – and applies them to his own research material. These theses are namely *individual conversions*, *cultural affinity*, *Protestant ethics*, *high birth rates*, and *the discourse of Protestant ethics* (Kiss 2009).²¹ I organise my review of the literature along the "analytical (thesis) grid" he compiled in such a way that I first present the theoretical foundation of each thesis and the essence of Dénes Kiss's line of thought based on them, then I try to demonstrate what validity is attributed to the various models in the recent literature dealing with (mainly) Eastern European Pentecostal Roma communities, which relate to the reasons for the emergence of Pentecostalism among the Roma (and which also form the basis of Dénes Kiss's summary). Finally, I analyse my own ethnographic material, maintaining Kiss's summarised thesis grid and building on the further contextualisation of the aspects included in it in the literature.

A) The nature of conversion stories – The thesis of individual conversions

Dénes Kiss believed that the theoretical construct according to which a new religious community is formed from the sum of individual conversions, and what he calls the “individual conversions thesis”, was not relevant in the Hungarian-speaking Pentecostal Roma community of Magyarhermány (Herculian) where he conducted his research, as the lack of conversion stories suggested that the transition to Pentecostalism was not preceded by religious conversion (see Kiss 2009: 136). One of Kiss’s hypothetical explanations for the lack of conversion stories is related to the structure of the community of Magyarhermány: “In the case I examined, conversions were not individual events, but entire families joined the Pentecostal denomination.” (Kiss 2009: 137). Unlike the conversion of the residents of Magyarhermány, in the case of the Roma living in the segregated colony of Ursăreni, I have also heard stories indicating the subjective, individual nature of conversion (for example, the story of Petru’s conversion). However, these stories were not elaborated, and the stages and details of the individual conversion process were not given as much emphasis as in the case of the longer, more complex conversion stories collected in the other two groups belonging to the network (Romanians with an Orthodox background and Csángós with a Roman Catholic one). Most of the stories feature a kind of stereotypical narrativity, which suggests that, similarly to the case of the community examined by Kiss in Magyarhermány, the formation of the Pentecostal community cannot be explained primarily by individual religious conversions. For the Roma I interviewed, living in segregated colonies, conversion stories as a genre were only of limited use as a source material for interpreting the subjective process of conversion. This raises the possibility that the religious-subjective function of conversion is not as important in the case of the Roma in their conversion to Pentecostalism as it was in the case of the conversion stories collected in the other two groups (the Csángó and the “central congregation” with an Orthodox background).

B) Pentecostalism and magical worldview – The thesis of cultural affinity

Dénes Kiss found the hypothesis that groups with a specific cultural structure may be more open to conversion to Pentecostalism relevant to explaining the conversion of the Roma in Magyarhermány, especially with regard to the oral nature of Pentecostal culture (considering the illiteracy characteristic of the local Roma) (see Kiss 2009: 137–138). The explanation for the success of the Pentecostal movement among the Roma in the analytical framework called the *thesis of cultural affinity* by Kiss is also present in academic discourses addressing the religious integration of the Eastern European Roma in the post-socialist era.²² However, there are quite a few works in the literature that have proven the relevance of this question by mapping the religious system of a Roma community, and not merely hypothetically.²³ According to Tatiana Podolinská, analyses conducted under the influence of the *theory of relative deprivation*²⁴, which present the conversion of Roma to Pentecostalism as a strategy of liberation from stigmatisation, oversimpli-

fy the problem (especially in the Slovak literature), insofar as they see “the main reason for the conversion of Roma to Pentecostalism in the new religious identity, usually seen as a substitute for ethnic and social stigma” (Podolinská 2014: 91). Podolinská believes that in order to understand the mass religious conversion of Slovakia’s Roma communities to Pentecostalism, it is essential to have a thorough knowledge of the specificities of (pre-conversion) Roma religiosity, of which she also provides an overview (see Podolinská 2014: 94–99), emphasising that some of the characteristic features are quite similar to the specificities of the folk religiosity of Roman Catholic Slovaks (see Podolinská 2014: 94). Podolinská is convinced that in order to understand the mass religious conversion of Slovakia’s Roma communities to Pentecostalism, it is essential to have a thorough knowledge of the specificities of (pre-conversion) Roma religiosity, of the most important characteristics of which she also provides an overview (see Podolinská 2014: 94–99), emphasising that some of the characteristic features are quite similar to the specificities of the folk religiosity of Roman Catholic Slovaks (see Podolinská 2014: 94). The author concludes that the Slovak Roma easily accept Pentecostalism due to their traditional religious structure, as the main features of their prior belief system are also reflected in Pentecostal religiosity (see Podolinská 2014: 101).

In relation to Pentecostal Roma communities living in the former Soviet Union, Elena Marushiakova and Veselin Popov state that Pentecostalism is in a symbiotic relationship with the previous religious practices and traditions of the Roma: “Their new religion does not come into serious conflict with traditional values, holidays, customs and rituals, but rather enters into a complex symbiosis with certain elements of previous traditions” (Marushiakova–Popov 2014: 53). The authors observed that the Pentecostal Church has unsuccessfully banned, for example, fortune-telling/divination practices common among Roma women (see Marushiakova–Popov 2014: 53). Tatiana Podolinská indicates similar processes when she writes that the Pentecostal pastors’ hands-on therapy practice “can be interpreted to some extent as a replacement for the practice of earlier Romani healing specialists” (Podolinská 2014: 102).

Although most of the Roma were formally Orthodox believers, they were not actually organically integrated into the Orthodox Church, as several Roma who had converted to Pentecostalism pointed out: their families only went to church occasionally, at most on major holidays. It seems that the religious practices of the Roma Pentecostal communities – whose number swelled to several hundreds by the early 2000s – have incorporated numerous non-canonical religious ideas and practices from before their conversion. At least, this is what the interviews I conducted regarding the conversion and religious practice of Pentecostal Roma indicate, and the same is supported by the related narratives of people who are well acquainted with the religious practice of Pentecostal Roma and who play leading roles in the “network”.

The data currently available to me clearly show that, in the case of the Roma, demonic possession (the practical functioning of which is not yet clearly visible) plays a major role in the Pentecostal discourse and at some points comes into contact with the notions of evil spell present in the folk religiosity of the Roma.²⁵ The collective imagination of the local Roma is strongly influenced by demonic possession and prophecy. Iosif, whose conversion story I have already described above, told me many stories of possessed people who were freed in one of the Pentecostal churches. Although many questions have been raised regarding the veracity of his accounts of exorcisms and prophecies he claims to have performed, these texts reveal several aspects of exorcism and prophecy, which undoubtedly form part of the religious imagery of the local Roma.

During our conversation, he claimed that “Satan gives birth to spirits that do not leave a person without prayer”, and then told me a specific story that, contrary to the official Pentecostal understanding of exorcism, explained the phenomenon of possession not with the ideology of sin, but with that of an evil spell. I have heard from many people in the Roma community that demonic possession can also be the aftermath of some kind of spell. According to him, his sister-in-law practiced witchcraft before her conversion to Pentecostalism. She was said to be able to commune with demons at midnight, during the full moon. The demons demanded one of her sons in exchange for fulfilling her sister-in-law’s wishes. His sister-in-law offered her father instead of her child, which the demons eventually accepted. Iosif said that a month after the offering, his sister-in-law’s father actually died. He told me the story to illustrate what it is like when someone is put under a demon spell and the demons “handcuff their life”.

The Pentecostal Church recognises soothsayers and prophets (*prorocs*). These roles are filled by individuals who have gone through several stages of the process of gaining legitimacy within the organisation and represent significant symbolic and social capital, such as Martin, the founder of the network. While in the central Pentecostal community of the Orthodox village, prophecy is strictly connected to Martin’s activities, and in the Csángó group it is outright forbidden or limited to special occasions, it seems that in the case of the Roma, various divination practices play a greater role. There are several individuals in the Roma community who are said, or who describe themselves as, to have the ability to see the future. For now, it is difficult for me to assess the extent to which these individuals operate as true specialists, or the extent and scope of the services they provide. However, the practice of turning to a prophet seems to be quite widespread in the Roma community. The experiences told in the first person, as well as the elaboration and detail of the stories also show that turning to a prophet fulfils several functions, from combating various illnesses and fears to satisfying spiritual needs: the prophet can confront the person turning to him with their sins they have committed, who confess their sins and pray for absolution.

The man quoted earlier claims that the Holy Spirit shows him the future like a movie. Regardless of whether he actually practices prophecy or merely has experience with it as a user, his account well illustrates one possible scenario for turning to a prophet. Prophecy, like the other gifts of the Holy Spirit, is a “*lucrare*,” that is, the result of God’s work. The implicit meaning of “*lucrare*” is best understood as a *miracle* performed by God. If someone encounters an unexpected turn of events or a particularly fortunate and positive outcome, they usually attribute it to God’s “work”. All events and manifestations fall within the conceptual scope of “*lucrare*” in which traces of God’s presence and intervention are believed to be discovered.

Elena, a 45-year-old woman, mentioned in an interview with her that there are sisters who “have one or two works from the Holy Spirit”, meaning they are approached for prophesying, but they rarely fulfil such requests. These *proroc* women also recognise and tell if the person who turns to them for prophecy has sinned, but at the same time they warn them to be careful because something bad awaits them or something threatens them, so that they do not carry out certain things. For example, if they are planning to travel, they should cancel it because it is not certain that it is according to God’s will.

There are some sisters who have the Holy Spirit [have the gift of the Holy Spirit]. There are some sisters who have a work like this, but they don’t really give it a chance [they rarely practice it].

What kind of work?

The work should be understood as prophesying, and it tells you if you have sinned, or for example what awaits you, so that you should be careful not to do [...], see if something comes your way, or if you are planning to go on a journey, don't go when it is not according to God's will. We went there last night too, and I said, Lord, I am sick, I am not..., I don't know what to do, I want the Lord to speak. If the Lord puts suffering on me, through surgery, the Lord should speak to us too. I was with Brother Florin, who had just referred me to a brother in P.²⁶

The woman mentioned earlier said that the old woman who was also present at the time of the conversation (the interview took place outside the house) was sick with cancer. Her husband and the entire church congregation fasted and prayed a lot for her. On one occasion, through the prophecy of one of the sisters in the church, the Holy Spirit declared that the woman's illness was gone.

Stories of miraculous healings were a frequent theme in the life-story narratives of the Roma. Dionisie and his wife Mirela have nine adult children. Like most Roma in Ursăreni, the family survives by begging and receiving social benefits. The couple is currently raising a 12-year-old grandson who came into their care through an unfortunate circumstance. As they told me, a serious conflict erupted in their son's new family over the birth of their granddaughter, a blonde, blue-eyed girl. The family assumed that the child's biological father was not Roma but Romanian, which led to the six-month-old infant being thrown into a snow-filled ditch on the outskirts of the village on a winter day. The child was found at night by his grandparents. One of the child's eyes was severely damaged, and the family feared that she would lose her sight completely. The woman told me that in her fear she "fell to her knees and cried out to God". In her prayer, she confessed that she knew that divine teaching required loving orphans, and she asked God to have mercy on them, since they had very few means to help her.²⁷ By the next morning, the little girl's eye had miraculously healed. The child has been raised by her grandparents ever since.

The spontaneous character and high emotional charge of Pentecostal gatherings, as well as the essentially verbal nature of the rites, may have been equally attractive to the Roma of Ursăreni and may have played a role in their conversion to Pentecostalism, as Dénes Kiss demonstrated in the case of the Roma of Magyarhermány (see Kiss 2009: 137).

C) Begging and Pentecostalism, economic aspects

– The thesis of protestant ethics

One conclusion of the literature examining religious conversions in the context of modernisation changes is that religious conversions can lead to the development of new value patterns and system of norms, which may have consequences for the economically motivated behaviour and culture of poverty in certain communities (see Steigenga-Cleary 2007: 16–17). The validity of this theory has been confirmed by social researchers in several cases regarding Roma who converted to Pentecostalism, demonstrating that conversion to Pentecostalism can positively influence the economic situation of the converts (see Kiss 2009: 138; Thurfjell 2013: 131). Tatiana Podolinská draws attention to the fact that the official Pentecostal discourse in Slovakia also acknowledges and even emphasises the connection between conversion and the converted ones' improved economic well-being (see Podolinská 2014: 105). In addition to what she calls "*trans-social discourse*", in her view, the "*trans-ethnic discourse*" of Pentecostalism, i.e., the discourse

that views Roma in an ethnically and socially neutral context, also plays a major role in the conversion of Roma to Pentecostalism (see Podolinská 2014: 105–106). The line of argument supporting the connection between religious conversions and modernisation and economic prosperity, which can also be demonstrated in the previously cited works, is called by Dénes Kiss the “*thesis of Protestant ethics*”, which had a valid explanatory power in the study of the conversion of Pentecostal Roma in Magyarhermány, as the author demonstrated a connection between the more orderly economic situation and stability of families who converted to Pentecostalism and the encouraging moral norms of Pentecostalism (see Kiss 2009: 138–139).

Individuals and groups joining religious minorities are often accused by the majority ethnic or religious groups living with them of converting primarily because they hope to receive aid from the small church in question (see Kiss 2014). Based on his research conducted in a Pentecostal Roma community in Székelyhíd (Romanian: Săcueni), Dénes Kiss convincingly demonstrated that the “folk hypothesis” of explaining religious conversions, as he calls them, does not correspond to reality (see Kiss 2014). Although the topic of aid channelled to the Pentecostal community came up many times during my fieldwork in Ursăreni and my conversations with locals, I have not yet been able to gain a clear picture of the operation of the aid system, the extent of financial support, and the various group interests and relationships behind it. I often encountered exaggerations, obfuscation, and silence, probably due to the sensitivity of the topic. So far, I have learned about three different types of aid sources. The Pentecostal Roma of Ursăreni usually receive various forms of aid, including clothing and food, from the community that forms the centre of the network, mainly through the connections and mediation of the elderly charismatic leader who founded it, Martin. Another source of aid is the national Pentecostal organisation. Regarding the aid received from this organisation, the Roma claimed that they received significant aid before the official ownership of the church was transferred to the national Pentecostal organisation.²⁸ After the “handover” of the church, the frequency and extent of aid gradually decreased. According to them, while previously the aid was channelled directly to their community, since the transfer of ownership of the church building, the aid has been provided to the local Pentecostal Roma under the control of the national organisation, presumably within the framework of a kind of redistribution mechanism. Aid from relationships with foreign churches serves as a third source of support. The helpful role of churches during the times of Roma begging abroad, as well as the support received through foreign church relations, were also common topics of our conversations, but I was unable to find out exactly which churches and how much support they were talking about. A nursing home is being built in the village with the support of a Norwegian church. Some say that the local Pentecostal Church also received Norwegian support. I have heard several reports about the aid intensities, but I think they are exaggerated. Perhaps the situation that Dénes Kiss observed is closest to reality: although the Pentecostal Church occasionally has aid campaigns among Roma believers, and the operation of the Church as an institution may also bring some economic benefits to some members of the community, the level of support and income received in this way is so low, even in the case of Roma communities living in extreme poverty, that their mass conversion cannot be directly linked to such aid campaigns (see Kiss 2014). In addition to aid as a motivational factor for conversion, the transformation in mentality following conversion to Pentecostalism may be of much greater importance, as the Pentecostal literature also points out in the case of groups, living in severe poverty aggravated by social problems, who have converted to Pentecostalism.

The Roma who have converted to Pentecostalism consider themselves poorer than non-Pentecostal Roma. Their conversion stories, on the other hand, suggest that in some cases conversion positively influenced the living conditions of the converts, and there were even situations where joining a Pentecostal group provided tangible benefits for the converts, similar to what other researchers have observed in Pentecostal Roma communities across Eastern Europe (see, for example, Kiss 2014).

As I have already mentioned, in the Roma settlement, where I have been conducting my research for years, the livelihood of many people (including Roma who have converted to Pentecostalism) is basically ensured by income from begging in Western countries, mainly in Sweden and, to a lesser extent, in Norway. Despite the prevalence of begging, begging and mendicancy are stigmatised in Pentecostal discourse beyond the local level. It is no coincidence that delegates from various levels of the national organisation, in their sermons at the Roma church, praise the “ethos of decent work” and stigmatise begging as a sin. Several Pentecostal Roma believe that many Orthodox Roma do not convert because they are afraid that they will have to stop begging abroad.

D) Conversion and ethnic stigma (the thesis of the protestant ethics discourse)

Researchers studying Roma communities that have converted to Pentecostalism argue that, under the influence of Pentecostalism, ethnic Roma communities undergo significant transformations (Gay y Blasco 2008; Ries 2007: 132), which at the same time also transforms their patterns of relationship with the non-Roma community (Ries 2014).

Paloma Gay y Blasco, speaking about a Roma colony in the suburbs of Madrid, claims that the Pentecostal movement constitutes an “identity project”²⁹ on a par with the identity-creating aspirations of Roma activism based on the NGO organisational structure and its institutional logic and dependencies (see Gay y Blasco 2008: 37–38). According to the author, both movements aim to create a kind of Roma community/diaspora, but fundamental differences can be observed in terms of implementation: “...while Roma activism is based on non-Gypsy models of personhood – according to which Gypsies are entitled to human rights similar to everyone else and are to be considered units of humanity equally valuable and equal to others – the Pentecostal movement fully maintains the gitano belief in the concept of two types of people” (Gay y Blasco 2008: 38). The author vividly demonstrates that during this process, important structural transformations take place in Pentecostal Roma communities, which, in addition to the creation of new institutions, affect the methods of maintaining contact with the outside world and conflict management, as well as the redistribution of power (see Gay y Blasco 2008: 43–44), and also change “the foundations of gitano socio-political relations” (Gay y Blasco 2008: 43). The fact that the Pentecostal movement is often declared a civilisational achievement by the Roma of Ursăreni may be related to the fact that with the establishment of the Pentecostal Church, not only did the socially expected patterns of behaviour of converts change, but a new institution was also established in connection with the local Pentecostal Church to control and sanction actions and attitudes that deviate from the expected Pentecostal behavioural model. This new institutionalisation of social control is similar to what Gay y Blasco claims about the changes in the social structure of the Spanish Gitanos as a result of the

Pentecostal movement. The Roma community has a meticulously developed system for making its norm-violating members change their ways, disciplining, and ultimately excluding them from the Pentecostal community.

Johannes Ries identifies two types of argumentation regarding the relationship of Pentecostal Roma to the majority communities, namely the argument based on the *“Roma/Gypsy Church”* and the argument based on the *transethnic denomination*. The first line of argumentation is actually the argument of researchers who consider “Roma/Gypsy Pentecostalism to be a redefinition of Roma/Gypsy ethnicity” (Ries 2014: 127), according to which the conversion of Roma to Pentecostalism “reinforces the separation between Roma/Gypsy and Gadge³⁰ (non-Roma/Gypsy)” (Ries 2014: 127, citing T. A. Acton).

Drawing on his research in Sweden and Finland, David Thurfjell argues that conversion to Pentecostalism offers the Roma the opportunity to find meaning in the suffering that comes with marginalised Roma status through belonging to a global community (see Thurfjell 2013: 164). “Pentecostalism therefore serves as a scene for the creation of a globalised transnational Roma identity” (Thurfjell 2013: 163). The author’s observation, based on the classification by Ries, supporting the *Roma/Gypsy Church* line of argument, therefore creates a connection between stigmatised Roma ethnicity and the conversion to Pentecostalism.

Researchers studying Romanian Roma who have converted to Pentecostalism have also indicated processes in which conversion becomes a strategy for escaping stigmatisation. Following the findings of Liviu Chelcea and Puiu Lăţea, László Foszto considers the attempts at religious identity change generated by conversion to be a potential opportunity for liberation from ethnic stigma: “... the desire to be freed from ethnic stigma, or to exchange it for a more neutral religious identity, points in the right direction for attempts at transformation...” (Chelcea–Lăţea 2000: 99 cited in Foszto 2009: 185). The validity of this approach seems to be confirmed by fieldwork analyses conducted in other Romanian Roma communities. For example, Johannes Ries observed in a Pentecostal Roma community in Romania that converted Roma, when telling their conversion stories, used stigmatising adjectives used by the majority community about Roma to convey their pre-conversion sinfulness: “In fact, Roma converts confess and confirm all the Gadjó stereotypes” (Ries 2007: 134). However, the author points out that the application of this strategy can result in the development of a positive Roma self-image: “The darker the picture that Roma paint of their past sinful lives, the more positive the new self-representation as redeemed children of God will be” (Ries 2007: 134). In another work, Johannes Ries argues that for a Romanian-speaking Transylvanian Pentecostal Roma community he researched, conversion functions as an ethnicity strategy: “By converting to Pentecostalism, Roma/Gypsies appropriate a denomination that they can use as a strategy for managing their ethnicity” (Ries 2014: 137). Based on a sociological study of Pentecostal Roma communities in Romania, Sorin Gog assumes that one of the most important reasons for the rise of Pentecostalism in Romanian Roma communities is their marginal social position and discrimination (see Gog 2008: 56).

In Dénes Kiss’s opinion, two additional aspects played a role in the mass conversion of the Roma of Magyarhermány to Pentecostalism: one is the importance of the *discourse of Protestant ethics* among the Roma, which emphasises the “orderliness” of the converted, their stable adherence to norms recognised by the majority community during their interactions; the other – a related aspect – is the “decentralised character of the Pentecostal Church”, which allows the discourse of Protestant ethics to remain valid despite the fact that it clearly does not work in many situations (for example, in case of violating the prohibition of alcoholism or the norm of marital fidelity, etc.) (see Kiss 2009: 140–141).

In his analysis, Dénes Kiss concluded, among other things, that although the conversion to Pentecostalism had a positive impact on the economic situation of the Transylvanian Roma community he researched (see Kiss 2009: 138), the Roma who converted to Pentecostalism attributed excessive importance to it compared to what it actually meant (see Kiss 2009: 140). According to the author, the members of the Roma Pentecostal community he researched attached special importance to “thematizing Pentecostal ethics”³¹ because “they thereby created an opportunity to tell people that they are not just any Gypsies, that their community is special, because their religion does not allow drinking, stealing, cheating, etc.” (Kiss 2009: 140)³² The arguments of the authors referred to above, as well as the observations presented by Dénes Kiss as the *thesis of the discourse of Protestant ethics* and the line of thought based on them (see Kiss 2009: 140–141), form a common ground in that the conversion of the Roma to Pentecostalism is seen as an attempt to assert a more positive image of the Roma towards non-Roma communities.

Most of the Roma I spoke to considered conversion to Pentecostalism a kind of civilising achievement. In these narratives, ignorance of God was equated with uncivilisation, illiteracy, alcoholism, antisocial and blasphemous behaviour, and they said that before their conversion they behaved “as if possessed by demons”.

*Such is the Roma ethnicity, the people of God, we were drunkards, found on the bank of the ditch, like some cigarette butts, wallowing in mud [?] when possessed by demons, we were those who didn't know who God was. If we looked at such an icon [Orthodox icon], we just laughed ... did not know writing, and there are many who do not know it even today. We thank God for bringing us to the light; it is not the inscription/name that saves a person, but conversion, the faith that comes from the heart.*³³

In the way the Roma constructed the image of the sinful Roma before their conversion, traces of a kind of ritual behaviour can be detected (see Fosztó 2007: 29). According to these stories, with their conversion they have left behind their bad selves that dominated their lives, the one that got drunk, stole, swore, smoked, and rolled around in roadside ditches.

In the narratives of Pentecostals living in Roma segregated colonies, one can mostly observe the tendency to identify the sinful Roma life before conversion with the ethnic stigmas attributed by the majority society to Roma, similar to what Johannes Ries observed in a Pentecostal Roma community in Romania (see Ries 2007: 134). A similar strategy is used when Pentecostal Roma transfer ethnic stigmas to unconverted, Orthodox Roma.

In the case of the Roma community I studied, the delineation of conversion as a “civilisation strategy” is similar in many ways to what Dénes Kiss described in the case of the Pentecostal Roma of Magyarhermány regarding the “thematization of Pentecostal ethics”. The way the Roma of Ursăreni present their own conversion as a “civilisation strategy” works very similarly to the “Pentecostal ethics-ethos” described by the author, emphasising the civilising/modernising readiness of the Roma and its results. However, the way in which they do this, i.e. using ethnic stigmas to characterise their old pre-conversion selves, suggests that belonging to the community of converts functions as a strategy of liberation from ethnic stigmatisation, as Johannes Ries points out in the case of the Roma community he studies (see Ries 2007: 134). Conversion stories collected from Roma about the paths to conversion can be defined as narratives of civilising community strategies of conversion, rather than narrative types that condense personal memories, emotions, and transcendent experiences.

Summary

In my analysis, I tried to thoroughly explore the reasons for the conversion of the Pentecostal Roma community of Ursăreni to Pentecostalism, as well as the importance they attach to the Pentecostal religion in their own lives and in relation to their community. As a theoretical basis, I used Dénes Kiss's summary of the reasons for the mass conversion of Pentecostal Roma in Magyarhermány (Herculian) (Kiss 2009), comparing the validity of the different models included in it with the results of further analyses based on research conducted in Pentecostal Roma communities across Eastern Europe, and then I compared all this with my experiences in Ursăreni.

In the case of the Roma, the Pentecostal religion aims to change the lifestyle of the newly converted members, which may result in a more conscious economic behaviour. Giving up alcohol may result in a reallocation of financial resources available to families living on the bare minimum. In this way, the members of the Pentecostal Roma families had the chance to escape the usury system, which is closely linked to the culture of poverty and reproduces poverty, the negative effects of which have been indicated by several researchers in the case of the Roma communities of Transylvania (for example: Kiss–Peti 2015; Kiss 2014). The Pentecostal religion stigmatises the lifestyle of habitual begging, which forms the basis of the Roma's livelihood, contrasting it with the "ethos of decent work." This discourse is mainly promoted by Pentecostal leaders from "outside". In my study, I also outlined two important segments of the religious worldview of the Pentecostal Roma from Ursăreni, the concepts of possession and prophecy. The practice of exorcism, which plays an important role in Pentecostalism, and prophecy, which fulfils complex functions (healing, averting troubles, problem-solving, confession of sins, etc.), easily fit into the imagery of popular religiosity related to spell and divination, which is practically outside the control of the official church (as I mentioned, the Orthodox Church only formally integrated the Roma before their conversion to Pentecostalism).

The Roma narratives sometimes suggested that when they tried to imagine how Orthodox Romanians would view them as Pentecostals, they felt that they were being "tested" to see if they could conform to the "civilising" value system promoted by Pentecostalism. For the Pentecostal Roma, Pentecostalism serves a function similar to, or perhaps even more important than, personal attempts to change one's own way of life; Pentecostalism is an expectation of changes at the community level. With their conversion, the Roma of Ursăreni undertake a "test situation" whose ultimate goal is to prove that they can truly meet a modernisation challenge at both the individual and community levels.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Dénes Kiss, Tünde Komáromi, Ágnes Hesz, Bea Vidacs, Stefánia Toma, László Fosztó and József Gagyi, as well as the "East–West" Research Group for their useful comments and suggestions on various versions of the study. Data of the previous Hungarian publication of this study: "*A pünkösddizmusra való áttérés okai és funkciói egy moldvai roma közösségben*". *Ethnographia* 128. 2017. 3. 485–509. Also published: "*Krisztus ajándéka van bennünk*". *Pünkösddizmus moldvai román, roma és csángó közösségekben*. [The Gift of Christ is Inside Us. Pentecostalism in Romanian, Roma and Csángó Communities.] Budapest – Kolozsvár: Balassi Kiadó – Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2020. 49–73.
- 2 For the time profile of the research project, the history and structure of the network, the system of relationships between the individual communities, and their integration into the national and regional institutions of the Pentecostal movement, see Peti 2016, 2020a.
- 3 Ursăreni is a pseudonym, I am grateful to Iulia Hossu for it. All names mentioned in the study

- are pseudonyms. Naturally, I have also changed the names in the quotes from the informants.
- 4 Tatiana Podolinská makes similar observations about the "loose" attachment of Slovak Roma to the Roman Catholic Church (see Podolinská 2014: 92). Sorin Gog reports a similar situation in the case of the Roma in Romania (regarding the relationship with the Orthodox Church), the fundamental reason for which he attributes to the lack of religious socialisation of the Roma (see Gog 2008: 59).
 - 5 According to the local Roma party councilor, the number of these families is around 700, but I consider this estimate to be an exaggeration.
 - 6 I will address the migration practices of the Roma from Ursăreni and the relationship between migration and Pentecostalism in a separate analysis. See: Peti 2020b.
 - 7 The Roma Pentecostal community is led by a body representing two different interest groups.
 - 8 I treat the recorded narratives and the related topics covered in them in a uniform manner, indicating the date of recording of each text passage (L. P.).
 - 9 October 2013.
 - 10 October 2013.
 - 11 October 2013.
 - 12 In the three Pentecostal communities where I conduct my research, members of the congregations call each other brother and sister.
 - 13 14 April 2015.
 - 14 14 April 2015.
 - 15 October 2013.
 - 16 This means receiving the gift of speaking in tongues, which is of particular relevance in the central congregation operating in the Roma and Orthodox villages.
 - 17 October 2013.
 - 18 7 April 2014.
 - 19 Florin said that his conversion took place 20 to 22 years before, but the interview revealed that it happened right after the change of regime.
 - 20 The translations of verbatim quotes from studies not in Hungarian or not published in Hungarian are mine – L. P.
 - 21 I will only present four of the five theses, as I do not consider the "high birth rate" thesis relevant in the case I am examining.
 - 22 And of course, it is present in Pentecostal studies in general. Eric W. Kramer explains the success of the Pentecostal Church's proselytising work in Brazil with "its sensitivity to local cultural discourses, the use of direct language, high-energy theatricality, and emotional release in rituals" (Kramer 2005: 117).
 - 23 An exception is Tatiana Podolinská's work, which is based on the results of sociological measurements in addition to observations made in several small rural settlements (see Podolinská 2014).
 - 24 The theory explaining conversion as compensation for some disadvantage/deficiency, the different types of which were developed by Charles Glock (Glock-Stark 1965: 246, cited in: Török 2011: 48); described in more detail in: Török 2011: 48–49.
 - 25 Anton also referred to this when he said that the Roma specifically look for the old magical practices from before their conversion, even in the new religion.
 - 26 14 April 2015.
 - 27 P. is a nearby settlement. Middle-aged woman, 7 April 2014.
 - 28 Unlike those congregations (for example, in the Csángó village and the "central congregation" with an Orthodox background) where the church or meeting house is the property of the congregation, the Roma community has become more subordinated to the territorial organisation.
 - 29 A term created by the author, Paloma Gay y Blasco.
 - 30 The highlight is also from him – L. P.
 - 31 Terms created by the author, Dénes Kiss.
 - 32 Rough translation from Romanian by me – L. P.
 - 33 A 44-year-old Roma man, October 2013.

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A pünkösdzizmusra való áttérés okai és funkciói egy moldvai roma közösségben

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Rezümé | A tanulmány alapjául szolgáló etnográfiai anyagot a szerző 2013 és 2017 között végzett terepmunka során gyűjtötte. A terepmunka helyszíne egy nagy létszámú romániai moldvai faluban élő urszári (medvetáncoltató/állatidomár) roma közösség, amelynek nagy része az 1990-es évek második felében, valamint 2000-es években ortodox vallásról pünkösdzizmusra tért át. Az elemzés azt vizsgálja, hogy milyen feltételek mellett tért át a roma közösség a pünkösdzizmusra, melyek voltak az áttérés okai, illetve milyen funkciókat tölt be a pünkösdistista vallás a romák életében. A romák közelmúltjának rövid történeti áttekintését, a közösség főbb szociokulturális jellemzőinek ismertetését, valamint jelenlegi helyzetét felvázolását követően a szerző öt személy megtéréstörténetét ismerteti. A romák megélhetése a migráción alapszik, amelynek két típusa figyelhető meg: az egyik elsősorban észak-európai országokba irányuló „kolduló migrációt” jelent, míg a migráció másik típusa nyugat-európai országokba való hosszú

távú megtelepedést feltételez. A migráció nyomán főként a vizsgált urszári roma közösség rokonsági hálója és kapcsolattrendszere mentén Angliában és Franciaországban is létrejöttek romákból álló pünkösdista közösségek. A szerző a roma közösségben lezajlott vallási konverziót a kelet-európai roma megtéréseket különböző elméleti síkon elemző szakirodalomhoz viszonyítva elemzi. A szerző emellett érvel, hogy a pünkösdizmus értékrendszere mentén jelentős modernizációs változások zajlanak a közösségben. Emellett azt állítja, hogy a pünkösdizmus egyik központi gondolatát képező újjászületés (born-again) eszmény segítségével a stigmatizált roma identitás meghaladására törekszenek.

Kulcsszavak | pünkösdizmus, vallási megtérés, roma pünkösdizmus, Románia

Defining the Városmajor neighbourhood of the Hungarian Bahá'í community

Navigating the global, negotiating the local

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Abstract | The article examines what it means to be caught up in glocalisation, that is, how the newly established Városmajor neighbourhood of the Hungarian Bahá'í community has to, at the same time, navigate its global context ("the global common vision") and cater to its local realities. The findings aim to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the global and local through revealing how these dynamics manifest in the everyday life of the community, in the form of consultations, negotiations, and sometimes even challenges.

Keywords | Bahá'í community, Budapest, glocalisation

"Where do you live?" seems like a simple and obvious question to ask when meeting someone for the first time; yet, as I was conducting my fieldwork with the Hungarian Bahá'í community, I realised that it is rather curious why this is the exact thing so many community members ask me after being introduced to each other. Even though the question is simple, it is fairly specific, and as I later came to understand, the answer reveals much more about the newcomer than we would probably anticipate.

The community of the Bahá'í Faith is a global community that consists of countless local communities all over the world. Bahá'ís believe in the unity of all religions and humans, which they not only keep as individual beliefs, but as teachings that have to be acquired by all people to eventually reach the ultimate goal: world peace and harmony. Therefore, the aim of forming local communities is to spread the teachings and involve more and more people in the Bahá'í Faith and its mission. The fieldwork which serves as the base for this article, was conducted with the Városmajor neighbourhood – one local community in Budapest within the global Bahá'í community.

When I first got connected to a Bahá'í family, I did not know how deeply I would engage in the life of this neighbourhood, nor that I would find Hungary's most active Bahá'í community, whose focused action started only a little before my arrival. In fact, engaging in the life of an emerging neighbourhood resulted in being the most intriguing feature of my research, as it has allowed me to follow how this community defines itself. As a local neighbourhood that is connected to the global Bahá'í community and its mission to spread the teaching of the Faith, the neighbourhood not only has to position itself in its immediate surroundings – the existing infrastructures and communities of the area – but it also has to navigate its relation to the global Bahá'í community. This article illustrates how this local Bahá'í community navigates its global context, which – as the local and the global are inseparable – ultimately sheds light on how the community mediates and reconciles its local and global circumstances. In this circle of inquiry, the most central

concept will be the “common vision”, which connects and binds together all Bahá’í individuals, localities and global institutions. To assess these topics, the study will employ a globalisation perspective to look at questions such as: In what ways is the “common vision” a global notion? How can it be connected to the global aspect of the community? What was the role of the “common vision” in the creation of the neighbourhood? How does this vision operate in the Városmajor neighbourhood? What are some of the tensions that come from having to cater to a global community while also having to address the specifics of the locality? Through these questions the study approaches the understanding of the neighbourhood not from a traditional, localising ethnographic perspective, but from one that seeks to capture the dynamic production of the locality as an “experience in a globalised, deterritorialised world” – which is highly relevant in case of a Bahá’í locality – that also includes the consideration of the imagination, which is a fundamental feature of such world (Appadurai 1996: 52). Indeed, this approach is exactly what anthropology can contribute to the understanding of such localities, and in this case, that of the Városmajor neighbourhood.

And by the end of the article, through gaining some kind of understanding of certain aspects of the Bahá’í reality, the reader will also learn what will be revealed about them if they ever answer a Bahá’í’s question of “Where do you live?”.

Why a globalisation perspective?

The Bahá’í Faith and Community

The Bahá’í Faith was founded in Iran in the mid-19th century. The Bahá’ís believe in the progressive manifestation of God, meaning that all religions belong to the same one God, each of them carrying messages which are the most relevant for humanity at that given time. During my fieldwork, one of the community members would explain this concept to me in the following way: “If a four-year-old kid goes near a hot stove, you yell at them. But as the kid grows older, you may even let them cook on the stove over time.” The kid, who personifies humanity in this example, must be guided by principles depending on their “maturity” and capabilities. That said, the Bahá’ís also believe that Bahá’u’lláh – the founder of the Bahá’í Faith – is the most recent messenger of God, making the Bahá’í teachings the current and most up-to-date guidance of God. Carrying the remedy of our times, Bahá’í teachings are centered around the challenges of globalisation. Bahá’ís believe that the key cure for humanity’s current problems is to realise the oneness of humanity and create communities where people accept and love each other without prejudice and inequality. When this is realised – through spreading the teachings to all humans – humanity will reach the “New World Order”, the state of ultimate peace and harmony.

It is also a fundamental feature of the Bahá’í Faith that it emphasises the inseparability of belief and action: Bahá’ís are expected to not only devote themselves to these teachings on a theoretical or spiritual level, but to also act accordingly. Thus, the global Bahá’í community has a very detailed and wide-spreading action plan, which is based on the idea that to achieve the “New World Order” action must begin on the local level. In practice, this means that Bahá’ís all over the world are creating small local communities (such as the Városmajor neighbourhood) in which they are organising an all-encompassing community life based on Bahá’í principles, involving local residents. The goal of the global Bahá’í community is to create more and more of such local communities, eventually reaching a world where everyone is familiar with Bahá’í teachings and living according to them, reaching the “New World Order”.

To bind together this worldwide local action, the Bahá'í community operates a very complex global institutional organisation (see Figure 1), connecting small local Bahá'í neighbourhoods to regional, national, and international level institutions. The head institution of this international organisation is the Universal House of Justice¹ (UHJ), which has supreme religious and administrative authority. This means that the Universal House of Justice looks over and legislates on any questions regarding the Bahá'í writings, and has the authority to decide on newly-emerging issues that are not addressed in the original writings. In addition, the UHJ provides guidance for the activities of local Bahá'í communities by creating multi-year plans and publishing yearly "messages" that are addressed to the worldwide Bahá'í community. To understand this better, here is an excerpt from the UHJ's 2010 message, in which they describe and prescribe the neighbourhood activities: "Energies are, at the same time, focused on smaller pockets of the population, each of which should become a centre of intense activity. In an urban cluster, such a centre of activity might best be defined by the boundaries of a neighbourhood. The activities that drive this process, and in which newly found friends are invited to engage—meetings that strengthen the devotional character of the community; classes that nurture the tender hearts and minds of children; groups that channel the surging energies of junior youth; circles of study, open to all, that enable people of varied backgrounds to advance on equal footing and explore the application of the teachings to their individual and collective lives—may well need to be maintained with assistance from outside the local population for a time. It is to be expected, however, that the multiplication of these core activities would soon be sustained by human resources indigenous to the neighbourhood or village itself—by men and women eager to improve material and spiritual conditions in their surroundings." (The Universal House of Justice 2010). Firstly, this quote demonstrates how the UHJ guides and binds together the action of the countless Bahá'í communities by providing the basic outline and main modes of action. Secondly, this message provides an insight into the previously described local action. In addition to creating an all-encompassing community life through various activities (such as devotional (prayer) meetings, potluck dinners, weekly basketball trainings), one of the main focuses of the neighbourhood activities is the spiritual education of children, which is realised in the form of afternoon extracurricular classes for the local children in the neighbourhoods. These classes include praying, singing, crafting, going outside, playing, and talking about human virtues – introducing children to Bahá'í stories and perspectives. Similar study groups are also created for young people and adults, to provide a better understanding of Bahá'í writings. These classes and study groups are based on exercise books created by the Ruhi Institute, which contain quotes from Bahá'í writings, and provide exercises and questions to lead the interpretation and acquisition of the scriptures. The Ruhi Institute is a Bahá'í-inspired educational institution that was founded in Colombia in the 1970s. By the early 2000s the UHJ acknowledged the success of the Ruhi books, and started encouraging local communities through messages and plans to integrate them into their educational process. Until today, most National Spiritual Assemblies have adopted Ruhi materials, forming a common base for Bahá'í communities worldwide.

Thirdly, the quoted message of the UHJ sheds light on another crucial feature of the Bahá'í neighbourhood: that neighbourhoods should be created with "assistance from outside the local population" – that is, with the help of Bahá'ís – but eventually they have to become self-sustaining through the activities of local residents. To help the formation and expansion of local Bahá'í communities, the UHJ has in recent years encouraged pioneering activities, during which Bahá'ís from more experienced local communities move to smaller and less experienced areas (such as Hungary) to share their experiences (The Universal House of Justice 2021).

As visible from this overview – through constantly reflecting on the issues of globalisation, operating a globally interconnected community, and encouraging the international mobilisation of Bahá'ís – the Bahá'í Faith and its community are clearly inseparable from the notion of globalisation.

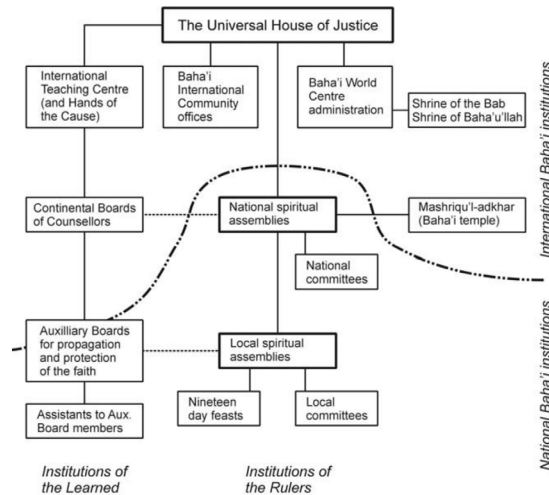


Figure 1. – The institutional organisation of the Bahá'í Community (Warburg 2006)

The Városmajor neighbourhood

When it comes to the Bahá'í community in Hungary, although there have been Bahá'ís in Hungary for more than a hundred years, it still counts as a smaller, "less advanced" community compared to many other national Bahá'í communities. For the lack of official data, it is hard to estimate the number of Bahá'ís in Hungary, but according to the participants in the research, about a thousand registered Bahá'ís live there, although only 50-100 of them are actually active in the community – activity here refers to attending community events, and participating in community-building actions. Within this Bahá'í community, the most active group is located in the XII. District of Budapest: the Városmajor neighbourhood – the protagonist of this article. The neighbourhood was founded in 2022 with the encouragement of Bahá'í institutions to begin more focused activities in Hungary. When choosing which area to focus on within Hungary, there were various aspects that made this Városmajor area the winning candidate: its well-connectedness to the rest of the city, its proximity to many schools and kindergartens, being a family friendly area, and having some Bahá'í families living and working close by already. Not least, one community member bought a place that could serve as a community space in the neighbourhood, which was a crucial step, as activities such as children's classes and devotional meetings need a hosting venue.

After deciding on where to focus the efforts, Bahá'ís were encouraged by the institutions to move to the neighbourhood to start off their activities, and to induce community life involving the local residents – following the method previously demonstrated in the quoted message of the UHJ. First, Hungarian Bahá'ís moved to the area – including

Bahá'í families with children – which was later followed by the arrival of pioneers from Austria and England to support community-building actions with the experiences they had gained in “more-advanced” communities. The Bahá'ís (“pioneers”) who moved to this area “serve” – as it is referred to in Bahá'í communities – full-time, earning their salary from the Bahá'í community in exchange for their service. This is not a nine-to-five office job, but a life where your colleagues are your neighbours, which sometimes results in having meetings at 10 pm in the neighbouring community centre or in each other's homes, wearing pajamas and trying not to wake the already sleeping children in the house.

During the time of my fieldwork, there were around ten Bahá'ís who served full-time in the community; they are referred to as the “core team” in this article. Coming from different countries and local communities, these core team members each have different kinds and levels of experience when it comes to Bahá'í community building. Some arrived with young children, leaving the help of their close family abroad, while others moved to the neighbourhood with friends, or without knowing anyone, but the Bahá'í Faith that connects their mission. It also adds to the diversity of experiences that the age of the pioneers ranges between 26 and 72 – although most of them are between 30 and 35 years of age. As for the gender distribution within the core team, the proportion of men and women is equal.

Although the community-building activity aims for involving many other people, not only the core team, the protagonists of this study are still the core team members, as they are the most active in the neighbourhood. Throughout the study I will refer to core team members anonymously for privacy reasons. Due to the small size of the community, even minimal demographic details, such as age or nationality, may pose a risk of identifying the participants; therefore, detailed descriptions are omitted to ensure confidentiality.

Accordingly, only a short overview of the Városmajor neighbourhood already provides some insight into how it is connected to globalisation: it was founded due to a global mission, and is created with international efforts – such as pioneers moving to the area from abroad with the encouragement of international institutions. These features once again create a reason for using globalisation as the framework for understanding the Városmajor neighbourhood and its community.

Bahá'í studies

Although the Bahá'í Faith has been followed through an academic lens from even before its foundation (since its emergence from Babism in 1844), and it has communities in every part of the world, the study of the Faith is in many respects incomplete. One, a big portion of research has been conducted by Bahá'ís, which – although not a shortcoming in itself – calls for the examination of the topic from a non-Bahá'í perspective (for debates on this issue, see MacEoin 1990; Momen 2007). Two, despite waves of Bahá'í studies both in the 19th and 20th centuries, there are almost no studies produced in the 2000s that consider the life of local communities. Three, the scope of the existing literature is predominantly historical (e.g. Browne 1893; Dieulafoy 1887; Gobineau 1866; Huart 1889; Rosen 1886), theological, or, when of social scientific nature, they are sociological (e.g. Berger 1954; Ebaugh—Vaughn 1984; Warburg 2006). This not only puts a strain on the way topics are interpreted but has also limited the variety of topics that have been researched in connection to the Bahá'í Faith and its community. When it comes to examining the Bahá'í community from the perspective of its entanglement with globalisation, although its relevancy seems obvious, the body of research on this topic remains very limited.

Traces of such understanding can be found in some theological studies that analyze the Faith as a new religious movement (e.g. Ebaugh—Vaughn 1984; Van den Hoonaard

1997) (which categorisation has not been uncontested; for this debate see further Warburg 2006), which implies a perspective similar to that of globalisation. Even though such studies can be implicitly connected to the globalisation perspective, when it comes to literature that deliberately uses this approach, the list is quite short. The most significant research in this regard, which can also serve as a handbook for the academic (sociological) understanding of the Faith, is Margit Warburg's book, *Citizens of the World* (Warburg 2006). The book uses the theoretical frameworks of globalisation to examine the Bahá'í Faith and its community, creating a "dual global field model" (which is an alteration of Robertson's "global field model"). By using Robertson's globalisation perspective, the book highlights the interconnectedness of the global and local levels, as well as their equal importance. This feature supports the basic assumption of this study – namely that the Bahá'í Faith can and should be interpreted from the globalisation perspective. Though Warburg's work served as an insightful starting point for this study, the approach of this study is rather distinct. Warburg's model and sociological analysis do not capture the complex and dynamic operation and interplay of the different levels, thus neglecting the nuances and underlying processes of such interaction. This critique not only applies to Warburg's study but could be generally claimed when it comes to existing Bahá'í studies. One reason behind this is that essentially all studies are either sociological, historical, or theological. That said, this article strives to address all these gaps by providing an anthropological study of the fluid production of a local Bahá'í community (the Városmajor neighbourhood) from a globalisation perspective.

What is a globalisation perspective?

After establishing the relevance of applying a globalisation perspective, we should lay the ground for the analysis by introducing its main concepts. One time, after I sent one part of my writings to some of the neighbourhood community members to make sure I hadn't misinterpreted anything, I received this feedback: "I don't know if that is the right word, for me globalisation contains quite a lot of negative [...] For me, what comes to mind with the term globalisation is more cross-border economic investments, influences spreading more worldwide, and nations being interdependent." This feedback problematises my use of the word globalisation when describing how the Faith itself reflects the issues connected to it. Though in this case the concern arose because the participant lacked the spiritual dimension in this understanding of globalisation, the feedback resembles how globalisation is often interpreted: as a phenomenon that refers to macro-level processes which stand in opposition to locality (such as Barber 1996). This is the exact "mythology about globalisation" (Ferguson 1992, as cited in Robertson 1995) that Roland Robertson's – along with others' (such as Eriksen 2010; Friedman 1990) – conceptualisation of globalisation (or rather, glocalisation) counterposes.

One of the central elements of Robertson's globalisation paradigm is the emphasis on the role and position of locality within the processes of globalisation. What is distinct in this approach is that many theoreticians have neglected the role of the local when thinking about globalisation, conceptualising it as contradictory to the homogenising force of globalisation (such as Barber 1996; Ritzer 1993). As opposed to this perspective, Robertson writes that "The global is not in and of itself counterposed to the local. Rather, what is often referred to as the local is essentially included within the global." (Robertson 1995: 35). Robertson claims that the global and the local levels are intertwined and inseparable, which is already inferable from his understanding of globalisation as the "linking of

localities” and the “invention of locality” (Robertson 1995: 35). This interconnectedness means that each level is capable of shaping the other, and often what seems to be local is “constructed on a trans- or super-local basis” (Robertson 1995: 26). In other words, the global context in many ways determines and invents the local – through providing the framework (tools, terms, etc.) of the local action as well as the circumstances that have to be navigated and reacted to at the local level. At the same time, the processes of globalisation inventing and including localisation also shape globalisation itself. With this, Robertson resolves the antagonism between the local and the global, as well as between the homogenising versus heterogenising forces of globalisation, creating and claiming a symbiosis between them. This is the reason for Robertson to introduce a new² term, globalisation, which – in opposition to the notion of globalisation – considers the local equally as important as the global in the processes of globalisation. What is further important in Robertson’s theory – which will be highly relevant in this study – is that even though the two levels do not contradict each other, he does not deny the potential tensions coming from globalisation, i.e. from the encounter of the local and the global (Robertson 2000).

Similarly to Robertson, Arjun Appadurai approaches globalisation as a transformative, complex and dynamic process, where many different levels and cultural elements interact with each other. Appadurai sees globalisation as a chaotic cultural process that manifests in everyday practices, in fact, what is unique in this conceptualisation of globalisation is exactly that it emphasises the cultural aspect of globalisation. He appoints mass media and migration as the main, distinguishing, and interconnected characteristics of the globalised world of today. Appadurai’s theory of globalisation revolves around how these two aspects affect the imagination – how people imagine the world. He argues that because of mass media (e.g. seeing and hearing about other places) and migration (which can also transmit new images), imagination has become an ordinary practice – unlike before, when it was restricted to specific contexts, such as art, myth, and rituals (Appadurai 1996). This imagination can be both individual and collective. Collective imagination, by producing “community sentiments” (Appadurai 1990) and collective identities through the “collective experiences of mass media” (Appadurai 1996: 8), can make people feel like they belong together, which closely builds on Benedict Anderson’s (1983) concept of “imagined communities”. This collective imagination is also central for agency, providing a basis for action even in its translocal sense (Appadurai 1996). Even though Appadurai’s theory does not revolve solely around the debate of how the global and local interact with each other within globalisation, his focus on cultural processes emphasises the localising effects of globalisation, as cultural elements are negotiated – accepted, incorporated or refused – at the local level (Dimitrova 2002). In fact, one of the most important elements of Appadurai’s work is how he conceptualises locality. In his book *Modernity at Large* (1996), he devotes an entire chapter to the Production of Locality. According to Appadurai, even though locality has always been fragile, the processes of globalisation have posed even more struggles for its production. These struggles lie exactly in what he marks as the main features of globalisation: migration and virtual mass media – migration preventing the stabilisation of local communities; virtual communities questioning the existence of locality and neighbourhoods by deterritorialising them. With this, he also claims that the factors that affect the production of locality have become primarily trans-local (Appadurai 1996).

Thus, Appadurai’s theory provides a particularly relevant framework for understanding the emergence of the Bahá’í Városmajor neighbourhood, as it highlights the effects globalisation has on the production of locality.

Drawing on Appadurai's (1996) approach, the general goal of this article is to write ethnography that understands the techniques of the community in producing the neighbourhood, rather than trying to provide a fixed image of its history.

Methodology

The material discussed in this article was collected with two main methods: participant observation and narrative interviews. It was very important for me to interpret these methods as integral parts of the research, not just as tools for gathering information, which meant choosing methods that are not only suitable for acquiring data but also contribute to the general dynamics of the research.

Participant observation

I conducted my fieldwork in the Városmajor neighbourhood from December 2023 to March 2025. My participation in the life of the neighbourhood was fairly active, I helped tutor children's classes, participated in countless meetings, attended weekly devotional meetings and study groups to learn about the Faith, helped to organise community events, attended Bahá'í celebrations, spent a week in a Bahá'í summer school, participated in a summer camp for a few days, and got added to many of the WhatsApp groups, including one called the "Core team". As the goal of the Bahá'í community in the Városmajor neighbourhood is to build an all-encompassing community life, as well as because the participants live in the neighbourhood, participating in the life of the community not only meant joining official activities, but also visiting each other's homes, having long conversations, cooking together, having sleepovers, and so on. It is an important feature of my fieldwork that I accidentally live within a 15-minute walking distance from the neighbourhood, making it much easier for me to commute. Throughout the almost one and a half year-long fieldwork, the intensity of my participation fluctuated, but during the most intensive months I visited the neighbourhood at least 2-3 times a week.

From a Bahá'í perspective, participating in neighbourhood activities meant contributing to the community-building mission, which made the dynamics of the research much more balanced, as it was not only me gaining from this participation, but I also contributed to the efforts of the community. In fact, I was never the one pushing my participation; it was more often the community that wanted to make use of my "service" and involve me in more and more tasks and activities. This was possible particularly because in recent years the Bahá'í community has changed its approach to Bahá'í–non-Bahá'í relationship. Previously, the goal of all local communities was specifically to increase the number of proclaimed Bahá'ís, whereas now the official goal is to have a growing number of people involved in the Bahá'í mission, regardless of whether they are Bahá'ís or not. Hence, from the point of view of the neighbourhood community, my participation as a non-Bahá'í has never been a question or an issue.

Biographical narrative interview

The second pillar of this research is the biographical narrative interview, which I have found to be an invaluable tool not only for gaining a deeper insight into a topic, but also for creating positive experiences for everyone involved in the research, not just for the researcher.

The biographical narrative interview as a methodology was developed by Fritz Schütze in the 1970s. Unlike most interview types, narrative interviews do not involve direct questions such as “why?”, “how?” and “when?”. Instead, after establishing the main topic of inquiry, the conversation starts by asking the interview partner to tell their life story. After this first segment, the interviewer only asks for elaboration on elements of the life story that have already been mentioned, exactly in the order in which they were mentioned. It is also important that the interviewer should not interrupt the interviewee at any point during the interview. Not guiding the conversation from the outside can often uncover connections that could not be discovered through direct questions, as such questions often interrupt the interviewee in elaboration and free associations (Rosenthal, 2002), limiting the conversation and thereby the understanding of the research topic. Another special feature of narrative interviews is that by letting the interviewee lead their own narrative, the narrative itself (what and how things are mentioned) becomes an interesting source for analysis. That is, the connection and order of the stories, as well as the frequency of mentioning certain topics, become analyzable.

This research consists of five narrative interviews, which were all conducted with core team members of the Városmajor neighbourhood. The average length of the interviews was 3 hours – 1,5 hours being the shortest and 4 hours the longest interview. I selected the interviewees from the core team in a way to capture the diversity of their careers and perspectives. This meant selecting people from all different age groups (so, just as the whole core team, the interviewees’ ages also range between 26 and 72), and from each country of origin (Hungary, England, Austria). Moreover, for narrative interviews, it is important to have a calm and interruption-free environment; therefore, one interview was conducted in a café, and the other four either at the participant’s or my home. Because of the length of the conversations, all of the interviews – except for the shortest one – were conducted on two sessions.

The dynamics of the common vision

The study further provides an analysis of the materials collected through participant observation and narrative interviews with the Városmajor neighbourhood of the Bahá’í community in Hungary. Being a locality within the system of the global Bahá’í community, the emerging neighbourhood community has to define and position itself in two different contexts: the global and the local. That said, the analysis will consider how the neighbourhood establishes itself in relation to its global context – what are some of the concepts that mediate the relationship between the global and the local Bahá’í community and what are some of the realities and challenges that derive from having to meet global expectations while also functioning as a locality. Though the scope of the analysis varies between the global and the local, it is impossible to consider only one at a time. In fact, this interconnectedness is what the analysis aims to demonstrate, forming the core argument and conclusion of the article.

“You’re just a small part of a huge process. You know, everybody wants to make a difference. But it’s understanding that you’re a part of a huge process and you’re a very small part of it, which keeps, keeps you motivated because no individual, [...] is going to make a huge difference. [...] So I think, yeah, I think having an understanding that your little contribution is going to be built upon [...] it’s really a fantastic thing to be involved in, isn’t it?” (P4) Being “part of a huge process”, having a higher motivation and always trying to have a positive approach after all – even if it is for trying to cheer yourself up after a quick,

but sometimes necessary session of complaining – is an attitude I witnessed very often in the community of the Városmajor neighbourhood. The source of motivation as well as the reason for being optimistic often seems to be some kind of vision that makes it worth working for regardless of the current circumstances or the lack of obvious progress. In fact, all narrative interviews at some point mentioned this vision, which is a good indicator of its importance, as there were no questions that guided the conversation.

The everyday life of the core team members involves a lot of meetings, during which future activities are planned, and past events are talked through and reflected on. As an example, when I took on tutoring one of the children's classes, my responsibility extended far beyond the single hour each week. It included having a meeting for studying and preparing for the class, then leading the class itself, and then staying afterward to reflect on what worked and what could be improved – not to mention that we also decided to start learning to play the ukulele so we could accompany the songs we sang for the children. That said, the core team members, who are involved in many more activities, come together multiple times a day to discuss and reflect. These conversations, which form a substantial part of the core team members' lives, always have a thread that connects the efforts and the community members, a central base that serves as a point of reference in the conversation. Even if having only the most basic knowledge about the Bahá'í Faith, it is not difficult to understand or imagine that this vision is the ideal of the "New World Order", the ultimate peace and harmony for all humanity. This is the goal towards which all Bahá'ís must work, and this is the vision that ties all local Bahá'í communities together all over the world. One of the claims of this research is that this vision connects and navigates the different levels of Bahá'í communities. Thus, the following sections will illustrate how the emerging Városmajor neighbourhood positions itself within the global Bahá'í community by navigating and negotiating the common vision.

What is the common vision?

Before analysing why the common vision is important and how it operates in the community, it is important to look at what this vision means according to the participants. One participant said in their interview: "I consider it important to have a common vision because then we know where we're heading, then everyone puts in their part, and there is a common understanding. But if there is no common vision, then there is no common understanding, no unity, and no collective action." (P5)

Another participant said: "You know, when it's not just like, okay, we're doing the same thing, but we have the same vision, the same thoughts, there is unity in the vision, unity in thought, and unity in action." (P3)

Firstly, it is important to note that the similarity between the two quotes, as well as the general importance of the concept of common vision, can be closely linked to the messages of the Universal House of Justice, as well as Bahá'í study materials, such as the *Ruhi* book 2³, which are Bahá'í institutions that convey these ideas to the worldwide community of the Bahá'ís. Nevertheless, in both quotes common vision refers to a "common understanding", an agreement among the community members, which is a prerequisite for collective action and for everyone to know how to "put in their part" – how to contribute to the action. However, it is not yet clear what exactly this common vision contains. How do community members get to this mutual understanding? What is the basis of this agreement? Interestingly, the content of the common vision is not revealed through explicit explanations, but rather the implicit references – when talking about the absence of

a vision – shed light on its meaning. One of the community members, when talking about her experience in a Bahá'í community abroad, compared the other Bahá'í community to her experience in Hungary in terms of understanding: “there [in another Bahá'í community] they are much further ahead, I think, in terms of understanding or the process, or I even don't know. So here at home when certain things are still questioned, and they ask ‘Should we really be doing this?’ or I don't know, and so, the community there was much more mature [...] It was also strange for me to be at home sometimes, because here they come up with something like, ‘Well, what if we did it completely differently?’ [...] it was a bit chaotic, and the understanding of... ‘Oh, should we really celebrate this holiday?’ [...] I felt less like it was being taken seriously.” (P2)

Even though she did not explicitly mention the common vision, from the previous quotes we could see that common vision refers to the common understanding of the community members, so the lack of common understanding experienced at home can be understood as a reference to the lack of a shared vision. Then, according to this extract, in a less “mature” community, the indication of not having a common understanding – common vision – may be that some members are hesitant about the decisions of the community. At the same time, it seems like this skepticism not only refers to questioning each other's ideas within the community, but also to not “taking seriously” enough matters of the Faith – bringing holidays as an example. Therefore, according to this community member, part of the common vision is being in agreement with the community's decisions, as well as accepting the laws and traditions of the Faith. This perceived idea of accepting the Bahá'í writings and institutions as key elements of the common vision can be further supported by another quote: “And, well, this is how we can build vision, as we talked about earlier, by reading the writings and achieving mutual understanding. So, it's not just about putting our own ego into it.” (P5)

Here, we have reached the point where the meaning of the common vision seems to be multifaceted. While, based on the quotes, there is consensus about the primary importance of the common vision (being a prerequisite for common action), when it comes to the definition of the common vision – what exactly is the vision? – the participants seem to be referring both to the common acceptance of the Faith and its matters by the community members, as well as to the mutual accordance of the local community members in how to organise the community life. In other words, the concept of the common vision encompasses both a global understanding of the Faith and a locally negotiated mutual understanding of community members. The upcoming sections will try to untangle these interconnected aspects of the common vision (the global and the local), solely with the purpose of uncovering its operation.

The global aspects of the common vision

As seen earlier, the common vision means both the acceptance and understanding of the writings and guidance of the Bahá'í Faith and community, as well as mutual agreement among the community members. As mentioned in the previous quote, common vision at all levels (and in general) must be reached through studying the Bahá'í writings. This element represents the global feature of the common vision, as the Bahá'í writings globally connect the followers of the Bahá'ís Faith; this is the universal basis for any type of common vision in any and every Bahá'í community. The emphasis on the conscious extensivity of the Bahá'í mission is also represented in one of the previous quotes, where the participant explained that “You're just a small part of a huge process,” almost explicitly referring to the global scale of the common vision – once again reinforcing its global as-

pect. McMullen (2000) analyzed this aspect of the common vision – the “New World Order” – based on the concept of the “images of world order”, which is defined by Robertson as an “explicitly globe-oriented perspective as one which espouses as a central aspect of its message or policy a concern with the patterning of the entire world” (Robertson 1994: 79), which again emphasises its global characteristic.

Another element of the common vision connected to the global level of the community, can be demonstrated by looking at how the vision is acquired, maintained, and reproduced. Because of the internationality of the Bahá’í community, it is a very common practice for community members to visit Bahá’í communities in other countries to learn about their activities and community-building techniques. For example, one of the community members traveled to the Netherlands just a few months after becoming a Bahá’í, and only 1,5 years after first engaging with the Faith. Speaking about her experiences abroad, she said: „I think it was also a bit of a hasty step, so to speak, because a few months after I became a Bahá’í, I went to the Netherlands and served full-time, which at the time seemed like a very big step and a huge challenge [...]. However, it was a sort of crash course.” (P1) But overall, she considers it a good experience, where she learned a lot about herself and the Bahá’í community-building process: “It is, after all, a more advanced cluster [...]. For me, all these things were so foreign at the time. I didn’t even understand what community building or neighbourhood meant. So, for me, it was my service in the Netherlands that laid the foundations for all of this, and that’s when I really understood what it means to start serving in a neighbourhood for the first time and actually build these relationships there.” (P1) Then she elaborates on what are some of the specific things she learned during her stay abroad and how she is applying this knowledge now: “It was so impactful for me that many times I would go out on the street, go to the store, or something, and then I would run into, I don’t know, six or seven people—some of them were Bahá’í, some were just involved in the activities, some came by occasionally to help with cooking, and I don’t know. There were also community-building activities like that, [...] so there were programs for the children twice a week, there was a Children’s Class, Junior Youth Club, Study Circle, and we always had dinner together. [...] Now we’re trying to do the same things here, and looking back now we can see that, for example, that worked there, and that’s why we started, after the children’s class on Thursdays, having the parents stay and have a shared dinner with the families. And this idea came from my service in the Netherlands. So, it’s really great that the year I spent there helped so-so-so much.” (P1)

These quotes illustrate well the experiences of a new community member acquiring the common vision of the community by serving in a “more advanced” Bahá’í community in the Netherlands. In the interview, she reveals that it was the community’s decision – as is usually the case – to send her to the Netherlands with the exact purpose of learning about the Bahá’í community-building process. In this sense, this “crash course” can also be interpreted as an invitation into the Bahá’í community, suggesting that acquiring a common vision is a crucial element of Bahá’í life. This interpretation aligns with the previous quotes where the community members marked the common vision as a prerequisite for common action – an essential aspect of Bahá’í life. Having such a connection between local Bahá’í communities and using these connections for producing and reproducing a common vision again demonstrates a global feature of it. Furthermore, the second quote provides insight into some elements of the “common vision” – such as having dinner together and bumping into people in the store who are somehow connected to the community. The extract also shows how the acquired vision gets implemented in the actions of the local community.

The Bahá'í community, spreading its vision principally through migration, reflects Appadurai's (1996) thesis about the imagination becoming quotidian in a globalised world through transnational migration and mass media. As Appadurai writes: "These diasporas bring the power of imagination with them, as a memory and a desire too." (Appadurai 1996: 6), which aligns exactly with how community members go abroad and learn about the vision, acquiring motivation and desire to achieve something similar, thus they bring this vision back to their local communities as a memory to work from – as the previous quote also illustrates. Then, in this sense, the common vision can be analogous with the work of imagination, which is almost explicitly mirrored in the expression itself (vision). Then, if the common vision is a collective imagination of the Bahá'í community – whether global or local – it could also indicate the "community sentiment" (Appadurai 1990) of the group. In other words, a common vision is not only an ideal that sets a goal for all individual Bahá'ís to work toward, but also a sort of collective identity, an ("imagined") community. And according to Appadurai (1996), communities that are tied together through collective imagination are "capable of moving from shared imagination to collective action" (Appadurai 1996: 8), which is again exactly illustrated in previous interview extracts, as the community members regard the common vision as the basis of collective action.

This imagination can be acquired not only through first-hand experiences but also through storytelling. At one point during my fieldwork, I was thinking about doing an Erasmus in Gran Canaria with the Bahá'í community. When I mentioned this idea to some participants, one of them said with excitement and amazement in his voice: "There are hundreds of thousands of people [Bahá'ís]". Another participant joined the conversation to help illustrate to me the impressiveness of the Gran Canarian community: "They had a youth camp of 500 people!". Neither of these community members had ever been to Gran Canaria, yet both of them knew about it, and were seemingly inspired by it. This conversation made one of the community members remember his time in Zambia, so he started sharing some stories, again, about the imposing Zambian community. He included statements such as: "hundreds of thousands of Bahá'ís" (using the same expression and measure as before), "half the city is Bahá'í", and "when we arrived, the whole village came to welcome us". He said that as they were walking in the city, people came up to them and asked, "Have you done book 12⁴²". With this, he implied that even the mere passerby was so advanced in the study of the Faith. Another emphasised element of these stories was that everyone knew each other – their guide was constantly saying hi to everyone.

This conversation shows that a vision, an inspirational image, is shared not only through migration and direct experience, but also through sharing myths with each other. The myth-like nature of the story is particularly evident from the expression "hundreds of thousands", as this is a vague measure that was used referring to both communities, suggesting that it is not necessarily an exact number, but rather an expression meant to capture the impressiveness of the community. In this particular case, I was the one to whom this myth was passed on to motivate me to do an Erasmus in Gran Canaria with the Bahá'í community. Moreover, these comments and excited claims also show which are the most important and impressive features of a community according to Bahá'í community members.

Thus, so far, we have established that the global aspects of the common vision of the Bahá'í community as expressed by the participants reflect Appadurai's concept of collective imagination in many ways, suggesting that the global common vision is not only the basis for the action of the Bahá'ís but it also seems to be the foundation of the community sentiment, the feeling of belonging together. Although not explicitly, this idea appears to be supported by the existing literature on the Bahá'í Faith, as identity has been a central

focus of several Bahá'í studies since the early 2000s. In his book *The Bahá'í* (McMullen 2000), Michael McMullen dedicates a chapter to *Boundaries and Identity* in the Bahá'í community, based on his fieldwork in Atlanta. McMullen distinguishes two different types of boundaries: the boundary between Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís, and the internal boundaries that reinforce the boundary of the group from within. According to McMullen, one of the main boundaries between Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís – besides the most obvious one, which is that Bahá'ís have to follow certain rules that non-Bahá'ís do not – lies in their “ability to foster and inculcate new-world-order thinking” (McMullen 2000: 112). This means that the Bahá'ís see the world through the dichotomy of the “old” and the “new” world, where the “old world” is the possessor of racism, sexism and other destructors of peace, while the “new-world-thinking” is based on Bahá'í principles and is the one and only framework for a peaceful future. McMullen (2000) suggests that this division creates a definite boundary between Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís – by distinguishing two separate worldviews, and by entailing a distinct mode of action. Nevertheless, he notes that even though this boundary exists, it is rather vague and situational. McMullen claims that there are also internal boundaries within the Bahá'í community which serve to prevent the fractioning of the community. The authority of the Administrative Order is of central importance in the Bahá'í Faith, and if anyone diverges or questions this authority, they may be expelled from the community. This internal boundary serves to prevent schisms of faith, and at the same time maintains and reinforces the external boundaries of the community (McMullen 2000). Hence, the “new-world-order-thinking” and the importance of the Administrative Order in a sense also ties Bahá'ís together as they form the basis of their identity, which then seems to be coherent with the claim that a common vision is not only a vision but also a community sentiment – although in this study, common vision is understood in a broader way.

Similarly to McMullen, Moonjan Momen also examines the boundaries of the Bahá'í community. Momen states that “the Baha'i community has a strong collective identity, and consequently strong boundaries” (Momen 2007: 191). To support this claim, he lists three mechanisms that underlie these strong boundaries. The first one – in agreement with McMullen (2000) – is the rules that apply to the Bahá'ís, which creates a clear boundary between Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís and also reinforce group identity. The second underlying mechanism is the Covenant, the loyalty towards the authority of the Universal House of Justice, the successor of Bahá'u'lláh. Thirdly, Momen lists the organisational aspect of the community, which prevents individuals from gaining unauthorised power and prevents the community from fragmenting (Momen 2007). As visible, this study supports the claim of the present research in much the same way as McMullen's work.

This section has demonstrated the global aspects of the common vision – what it means on a global level, how it can be acquired, reinforced, and shared – and concluded that the common vision is not only a mutual agreement among community members, nor simply an inspirational image, but it is the imagination of the global Bahá'í community that forms the basis for its community sentiment and thus its collective action.

While these global aspects of the common vision may seem almost utopian in a way – a perfect ideal that connects and motivates Bahá'í believers all over the world – the Város-major neighbourhood is one local community where merely acquiring a global common vision is not enough; it is also expected to take local action. Hence, in the following, we should look at how this global-level common vision operates in the everyday life of the emerging neighbourhood.

The common vision on the local level

In the final interview excerpt, while talking about her acquisition of the common vision during her time abroad, the participant expressed that the vision helped her understand “what it means to start serving in a neighbourhood”, which is clearly connected to the local level of the community: by learning about the activities of another, more experienced Bahá’í community, she gained a vision that she could then use in Hungary as well. This is a perfect example of how the global aspect of a community interacts with its local aspect – local action gains motivation through its globality. Another community member talked similarly about her experiences abroad, saying: “the experiences that I or we have gained, partly in Haifa, and partly in the English community [...] I did have this vision or thought that, well, this is a direction [...] to see how things are progressing [...] but if that hadn’t been there, I think it would have been really difficult” (P2). In this quote, it can again be seen that the vision acquired in foreign Bahá’í communities served as a motivation for working in Hungary, in a less “advanced” community. She explicitly states that without this vision it would have been much harder to work on community building, again reinforcing the significance of the shared vision, which – as she expressed in another segment of the interview – “could keep her spirit up” even in difficult times. In this aspect, we can say that local action and its motivation directly stem from the global common vision. This not only illustrates the interconnectedness of the two levels, but similarly to Robertson’s glocalisation theory, this connection lies in the global, connecting and inventing the local (Robertson 1995). The work of the common imagination vividly demonstrates how a local community can be constructed from the outside, “on a trans- or super-local basis” (Robertson 1995: 26). However, can the local common vision only be derived from the global common vision? Or does the individual interpretation of the vision pose any tensions in the neighbourhood?

The complexity of navigating the global Bahá’í vision at the local level – especially when forming a new local Bahá’í community – can already be seen (or at least guessed) from the official Bahá’í approach to local community building. According to the guidelines of Bahá’í institutions, it is important that, regardless of the global common vision which provides the ultimate goal and many resources for everyone, every local community should come up with their own approach and techniques, seeking the needs of the specific area and tailoring the initiatives accordingly. As one participant expressed: “It’s very common for us to visit clusters that are further advanced along this program of growth to learn from them, and then see, okay what my reality is [...] and what principles we can apply at home without thinking in terms of recipes” (P3). Similarly to the previous excerpts, this quote also refers to learning from other Bahá’í communities. However, the community member very clearly explains that learning does not mean “thinking in recipes”, that is, the vision that is the acquired vision does not provide exact guidance for community building in another locality – what tools to use, how to approach people, what activities to launch, and what issues to focus on. For example, throughout my fieldwork, I heard many stories about foreign Bahá’í communities – similar to the previously mentioned mythical story of Zambia – illustrating the transformation of problematic or disaster-stricken regions through the community-building process. However, when it comes to the Város-major neighbourhood, community members would point out that this area is located in an affluent and green part of Budapest, which makes the necessities of the residents very different, sometimes even hard to grasp. Thus, while this approach to community-building aims to enable local communities to be able to adapt to the particularities of the given

area, it naturally also raises many questions and potential challenges, as the local community must define its own vision. A community member put it frankly, painting a clear understanding of the challenge at hand: “And when we started these community-building processes here in the Városmajor Neighbourhood, we had just one big vision: the improvement of the world to make it a better place. But that’s very broad approach. On the street as well, I think if you ask 80 people, all 80 will say that yes, improving the world is important. But okay. So, this big vision is there. It’s there, but to bring it down to a more practical level, I feel like that’s happening now” (P5).

This excerpt provides a perfect picture of how the global common vision – “the improvement of the world” – has not proven sufficient to initiate action at the local level, reassuring the idea that the Városmajor neighbourhood must come up with their own ideas and techniques for approaching community building.

Then, although we saw how the local is partially created from or included within the global vision, it is also visible that it is only a part of it. The vision is not acquired solely from the global level; it must also be negotiated on the local level. This again supports and illustrates Robertson’s perspective on globalisation, where the global and the local, the homogenising and the heterogenising forces, are not contradictory, but are present at the same time (Robertson 1995). The global common vision of expanding the Bahá’í community calls into life the local Bahá’í communities; however, local communities are not merely small, localised versions of the same global vision, but are altered, interpreted forms of it, as they have to be positioned and articulated in their own settings. Then, it is exactly the unity of the global Bahá’í common vision that creates the plurality of local visions – just as globalisation is not only a homogenising force that creates a universal condition, but also one that produces divergent, sometimes even contradictory phenomena in distinct localities.

This negotiation process is not only a theoretical matter visible only in anthropological analysis. It also manifests in the everyday lives and feelings of the community members. As one of the participants recalled the times when common agreement was not yet present in the local community: “There was a lot of disunity about how things should be done, many felt that efforts were going in different directions, and many felt that they were overwhelmed, you know?” “And they simply didn’t know what to do next.” (P3). This quote not only reveals the experience of diverging visions, but also manages to vividly illustrate how these challenges manifest in the everyday lives of community members. Considering that the core team members live in the area of the neighbourhood and serve full-time, it is conceivable that the difficulties of achieving a local common vision while managing everyone’s individual understanding of the global vision, was not only a theoretical issue to solve. Rather, during the emergence of the neighbourhood this was the reality and the day-to-day life of the community members – negotiations among each other, discovering the area to figure out what was needed here, trying out and experimenting with different approaches, while (not least) starting this mission completely from scratch. Therefore, it is understandable that this process left its mark on their individual and personal lives, which they did not shy away from expressing in our everyday conversations or interviews; in fact, when talking about the initial period of the formation of the Városmajor neighbourhood, every interviewee mentioned some kind of personal or collective challenge they had to face. One of them said: “I couldn’t really imagine how this could actually come to life, or what it would look like. I didn’t even know where to find my place, like what I could contribute to this, or how I could help, how I could push these things forward. It has now become quite clear that, for me, it’s more about working with children, building relationships with families, and my focus is more towards that”. (P1) Here it can be seen

again that the struggle arising from the lack of a shared vision at the local level or even individual level led to a feeling that they could not find their place. Although she had previously expressed that, due to her foreign service experience, she had a vision for what this community should become or what tools could be used, still, when arriving to a new place where only little action had been initiated and a new team was being formed, she did not know where her place was, in fact it was even hard for her to imagine how “this could actually come to life”. This again demonstrates the importance of having a local common vision besides the global one, which includes each contributor’s task, giving each person a purpose and a role.

One of the interviewees gave an example of how they discussed this local common vision and what tensions or disagreements came up during this process: “And that’s when it came up, that we should [...] do children’s classes or children’s groups. I didn’t have much experience with activities related to children, [...] but I did have experience in kindergarten, my studies, and my background in pedagogy and psychology. And this is where it comes in that working with people isn’t necessarily something that’s like, ‘Oh, how nice’ [laughs], because [...] how each person interprets the Faith itself. Because whenever I said anything related to pedagogy or psychology, like, ‘We could do this or that,’ the response was, ‘Well, this is Bahá’í children’s classes.’ And I didn’t understand... so is it only what is in the Bahá’í Faith, and should it be done only that way?” (P5) This interview excerpt is a very interesting example of how people who share the same global common vision can disagree on the local vision and action plan. The excerpt also illustrates a mechanism – assigning roles to each person – through which imagination can be converted into collective action – but only if there is local imagination (a common vision). It is also clear that while the global vision is something provided to the individual through the writings and the institutions, the local vision must be negotiated by the community members, which also seems to make it much more of a personal matter.

This provides insight into the local operation of the common vision – in all its coexisting senses – hopefully demonstrating the complexities and everyday realities of the interaction between the global and local.

Discussion and conclusion: navigating between the different levels

The article revolved around discovering how the recently emerging Bahá’í Városmajor neighbourhood defines itself in the context of the global Bahá’í community. In doing so, the principal claim of the study is that the local and the global aspects are completely intertwined in this definition process, making it an illustrative case study for understanding glocalisation. Specifically, the research looked at how the Városmajor neighbourhood defines itself in a global context: within the worldwide Bahá’í community. The analysis showed that the main concept that mediates this complex and multi-layered process is the “common vision” – the mutual understanding of community members, which is principally rooted in the Bahá’í teachings and the institutional guidelines. This vision must be acquired and constantly reproduced by all community members through reading the writings, traveling to more “advanced” Bahá’í communities, and sharing the stories of mythical communities. The main importance of this vision is that it is the thread that ties all Bahá’ís and local communities together, making it the basis of the global Bahá’í identity, the “community sentiment” (Appadurai 1990), and thus of collective Bahá’í action (Appadurai 1996). These features of the “common vision” make it legibly compara-

ble to Appadurai's conceptualisation of imagination, which is even reflected in its name ("vision"). In this sense, similarly to Appadurai's theory (1996), it can be said that it is the globalised aspect of the Bahá'í Faith – being international, encouraging migration and traveling, knowing stories and having experience about foreign communities, etc. – that allows for the constant production and reproduction of the collective imagination (the "common vision"), which then serves as the ground for collective action. This finding demonstrates that the practice of the Bahá'í Faith and community is closely connected to the processes of globalisation, thus underscoring the relevance – and even the cruciality – of examining it from such perspective.

After discussing various global aspects of the Bahá'í community, the research went on to consider how this "common vision", which is so deeply embedded in the globality, operates at a local level. Although it was discovered that the global "common vision" could serve as a motivation for the neighbourhood community in hard times, it was also found that the relationship between the local and the global is much more complicated, and not always perfectly utopian. Although the Városmajor neighbourhood is expected to navigate the global vision of the community – that is, to always consider and act according to what is stated in the writings and guidelines – this does not provide enough detail for the measures of local action, hence the neighbourhood community is expected to come up with a local "common vision" that considers the particularities of the locality. The participants in the research were open about the everyday challenges that arose from negotiating this mutual understanding, revealing that while the global "common vision" provides a general ground for action, it is often interpreted differently by individuals. This finding shows that local action cannot be directly derived from the global "common vision". That said, although the global force was the one to create the local – as it is part of the global mission of the community to create local neighbourhoods –, it cannot be claimed that this globalisation is equated to a process of homogenisation, as each locality has to negotiate its own vision and way of action, creating its own unique interpretation of the global. In this aspect, examining how the Városmajor neighbourhood defines itself in the context of the Bahá'í community, it perfectly illustrates Robertson's concept of glocalisation, in which the global and the local are entirely interconnected, yet equal, shaping each other (Robertson 1995).

These findings demonstrate that the Városmajor neighbourhood, being a locality within a global community, must navigate both local and global contexts simultaneously during its production and reproduction, which proves that examining it merely as a local community would not provide a sufficiently comprehensive understanding. Although, at this point, this claim may seem almost too repetitive or even self-evident, the repetition itself underscores the very point it seeks to make – that the matter at hand is so integral and pervasive that it emerges in every aspect of the analysis. At the same time, while the study constantly returned to emphasise the role of the global, it was not by any means the goal to illustrate the Városmajor neighbourhood as a miniature version of the global Bahá'í community, identical to any other Bahá'í locality. Hopefully, the research has managed to demonstrate that the interconnectedness of the global and the local does not equate to the domination of the global. As could be seen, all aspects that are derived from the global are then reinterpreted, negotiated and reshaped during their local adaptation, resulting in the creation of a unique locality endowed with agency. That said, the study also thrived for illustrating these issues – that at the end of the day often appear as merely theoretical matters – through everyday examples and interactions, revealing that mundane conflicts, tensions, or the feelings of being lost often stem not only from your immediate surroundings, but also from the complex interactions of multi-level processes one is tangled up in.

Thus, the contribution of this research to Bahá'í studies is multifaceted: it offers a new (anthropological) perspective for understanding a local Bahá'í community; it illustrates the community's inseparability from globalisation not only by analysing local and global processes parallelly, but also by pointing out their interactions and negotiations from a local perspective; and, more importantly, this is the first non-historical study of a Hungarian Bahá'í community; and the very first study of the Városmajor neighbourhood. At the same time, the study can also be considered a contribution to the understanding of globalisation. Although this is a much larger field, with countless existing theories and case studies, the scope of globalisation itself is also much broader – encompassing the entire globe – which makes it impossible to overstudy. Specifically, as globalisation is by no means synonymous with homogenisation (Eriksen 2010; Friedman 1990; Robertson 1995), human experiences will continue to vary endlessly. Thus, maybe what can be claimed as universal is that “People’s lives are neither wholly global nor wholly local – but glocal” (Eriksen 2010: 318), underscoring the inexhaustibility of trying to make sense of this process.

This research aimed for a comprehensive understanding of a specific issue, which – although it ensures its primary relevance – also carries limitations, as various aspects of the topic remain yet to be closely examined. For example, the study focused on the perspective of the local Bahá'í community, so in future studies it would be interesting to explore the viewpoints of the residents of the area – both those who have contact with the community, and those who do not – to better understand how they interpret the actions of the neighbourhood and how they relate to the “common vision” of the Bahá'í community. As the purpose of this research was not to provide a static snapshot of the Városmajor neighbourhood of the Hungarian Bahá'í community, but to reflect on its emergence in a way that can provide a dynamic basis for further interpretation and examination – whether of similar communities or this one in particular – hopefully all these remaining questions will offer sufficient reason and inspiration for further exploration of the topic.

And finally, based on all these findings and insights, what do Bahá'ís mean when they ask “Where do you live?” Why is it a frequent question? Why is it interesting, and what does it have to do with this study? First, as we have seen, the Bahá'í community is very international, thus the desire to locate someone geographically makes sense in a larger (national, international) Bahá'í gathering, as people come from a wide range of countries and cities. However, I was also asked this question repeatedly in the Városmajor neighbourhood, a small local Bahá'í community, where the relevance of such inquiries is far less apparent. After coming to understand some segments of the Bahá'í reality, this mundane, yet in such context almost surprising question makes sense. As we have seen, in the Bahá'í community, one’s locality is not only essential for understanding where someone comes from, but also for positioning them within the Bahá'í action. Every person is seen as a potential contributor to the Bahá'í cause, whose contribution is best realised if they are connected or can be connected to a local Bahá'í community. Thus, finding out where one lives reveals whether they are or could be connected to such a local community. Additionally, one’s locality also contains information about their experiences and knowledge related to the Bahá'í mission, as localities vary in their levels of “advancements”. Hence, through the question “Where do you live?” community members get answers to many more crucial questions: Where are you from? Which local community are you or could you be part of? Where can you contribute to the activities of the community? Are you from a “developed” community? How do you participate in the Bahá'í action? How much experience do you have in the Bahá'í action? In a way, the question approaches the person directly from the perspective of their usefulness in the community’s mission and seeks

to place them in both the local (where exactly you live) and the global (what this locality means within the worldwide community) context. The meaning of the simple question that I have been asked so many times right after a first meeting encompasses, is in itself two intertwined aspects of Bahá'í reality: the importance of locality and the mission that serves as the foundation and reference point for everything. The story of this seemingly ordinary question also illustrates how boring interactions contain fascinating meanings, and how anthropology can lead us to understand such nuances, which are nuances only in their subtleness, not in their importance.

Notes

- 1 The Universal House of Justice is located in Haifa, Israel, and has nine members – nine being an important number in the Bahá'í Faith – who are elected for five years.
- 2 The term *glocalisation* can be considered new in the context of the social science theories of globalisation. However, the term already existed in the business world before Robertson implemented it, referring to micromarketing.
- 3 The Ruhi book 2 discusses the importance of united thought and action, such as: "Through consultation, we achieve unity of thought, and with our thoughts and views united, we create effective plans for the progress of our communities." (Ruhi Institute 2020: 51)
- 4 Refers to Ruhi book 12.

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A városmajori Bahá'í közösség kialakulása Globális keretek és lokális gyakorlatok között

NADERI ANNA

doktori hallgató, ELTE Interdiszciplináris társadalomkutatások doktori program

Rezümé | Jelen esettanulmány azt vizsgálja, hogy mit jelenthet a globalizáció jelensége a hétköznapiakban: miként igazodik a magyarországi Bahá'í közösség újonnan létrejött városmajori „szomszédsága” egyszerre a globális keretekhez, „a közös globális jövőképhez” és reagál környezete egyedi adottságaira. Az eredmények rávilágítanak a globális és a lokális szintek elválaszthatatlanságára, s bemutatják, hogy ez az összefonódás hogyan mutatkozik meg a közösség mindennapjaiban, az egyeztetések, egyezkedések és az olykor felmerülő kihívások során.

Kulcsszavak | Bahá'í közösség, Budapest, globelizáció

Ethnographic map

European ethnographic, ethnological and cultural anthropological museums in the social media world

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Abstract | In recent decades, ethnographic and ethnological museums across Europe have been searching for new identities: changing their names, moving into new buildings, and reshaping their exhibition strategies, while increasingly emphasising dialogue, diversity, and ethical responsibility in their missions. But how do these shifts appear on social media – the space where most audiences now first encounter them? What do followers perceive about the institutions' work and mission? This study analyses the social media activity of 49 European museums in May 2025, asking what kind of narratives these institutions construct about themselves. It highlights the differences between Western, Southern, Central, and Eastern European practices, and examines how museums seek to communicate the meaning, relevance, and contemporary role of ethnography in the digital sphere.

Keywords | ethnography, ethnology, social media, communication, museum

In order to support the communication work at the Museum of Ethnography, I launched an online questionnaire-based survey in 2024 titled '*What is Ethnography?*' specifically among respondents who are not professionally involved in this field or the world of museums. In compiling the questionnaire, I aimed to create an educational set of questions that would allow us to map out what knowledge, ideas, and conceptual frameworks we can rely on across different age groups when conveying information. Conducted between 24 July and 2 October, the survey involved more than a thousand respondents, of whom 658 indicated that they had not dealt with the topic professionally until then. Questions were open-ended, encouraging the formulation of independent thoughts. The answers indicated that the concept of ethnography carries a variety of meanings and appears with different emphases for respondents of different ages living in different settlements. While our older-generation respondents associated the term ethnography with exploring traditional folk culture and studying various aspects of peasant life, the younger ones not only expressed their ideas much more creatively and vividly, but their answers also reflected some uncertainty. Respondents in their thirties tended to associate the concept more with preserving traditions and researching the cultures and histories of 'different ethnic groups', which they found less engaging. Among those born before 2010, more emphasis was placed on a historical perspective and the preservation of traditions, whose contemporary manifestations – such as folk dance, folk customs, folk art, or even reflections in contemporary art – were highlighted, alongside the diversity of different cultures. Respondents who specifically linked the concept of ethnography to a museum context also came from this age group.

Survey responses highlighted that the majority of research participants did not associate a precise definition with the concept of ethnography; for them, it simultaneously meant tradition and modernity, nostalgia and a scientific approach, local and global culture, as well as community identity. Although with different emphases, the common approach that has ultimately emerged is that the essence lies in understanding culture and the human lifeworld. However, far fewer respondents were able to give a definite answer to the question of what ethnographers and ethnologists actually do: only 30% of those born between 1996 and 2010, compared to 47% of those born between 1982 and 1995 and 60% of those born between 1961 and 1981. This drastic decline can be partly explained by the younger age cohorts having less knowledge and experience due to their age, while recent youth research also points to a worrying trend: fewer and fewer young people aged 15–29 visit traditional cultural institutions. According to a large-scale survey in 2020, 89% of young people had never seen an opera performance, 86% had not attended a classical concert, 65% had not visited a museum, and 62% had not been to the theatre.¹ These data not only show an increasingly declining trend compared to previous years, but also suggest that young people feel less and less that the experiences offered by these cultural spaces are relevant, and they do not believe in their future usefulness either (Domonkos et al. 2020: 37–38).

The survey conducted among the Hungarian general public is both a reflection and a consequence of the uncertainty and constant change that characterizes this entire discipline. In the 21st century, numerous European institutions have changed their names, questioned their previous operations and paradigms, and moved into new buildings (Foster 2025; Kemecci 2022; Pagani 2018). Alongside heritage preservation, research, presentation, interpretation, and education, words such as cultural diversity, dialogue, inclusivity, audience- and community-orientation, active engagement with the contemporary world, ethical responsibility, and self-reflection have become increasingly prominent in the mission statements of these institutions. In Hungary, Budapest the Museum of Ethnography reopened in a new, modern building after being closed for several years. Simultaneously, researchers and institutions in the discipline organised a nationwide conference series and published a volume on the challenges facing the field. These debates concerned, among other things, the radical transformation of European societies, the disappearance of the peasant class, the vanishing rural and small-town ways of life, as well as acculturation, globalisation, and dynamic economic, social, and ethnic changes. At the same time, they also highlighted that the gap between researchers and society's perception of ethnography's discipline is widening: fewer and fewer people are choosing a career as an ethnographer (Cseh et al. 2020). Reflecting on this process of change, a new university textbook has recently been published in Hungary, which aims to convey to students the opportunities arising from the radical transformation of the conceptual framework of ethnography and ethnology (Keményfi 2025).

Communicating changes in the identity, strategy, theoretical and methodological research, as well as in their approach to collections and mission, of European museums with a profile focused on ethnography, ethnology, cultural anthropology, and world cultures poses challenges just as much as maintaining their classical mission aimed at researching and presenting traditional folk culture (Berényi 2023). The relocation, renovation, or renaming of a museum can temporarily attract attention, but maintaining an active relationship with communities and audiences requires continuous effort (Foster 2025). In recent decades, the internet—including social media platforms in particular—has become one of the most important arenas for achieving these goals.

Museums on social media platforms

Today, most public collections and scientific institutions have their own profile on one of the popular platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, X, Bluesky, LinkedIn, etc.) and regularly share content about their activities.

Although research suggests that the activity of these platforms declined somewhat following the coronavirus pandemic (Berényi 2025: 286–287), by the mid-2020s they had become one of the most important communication channels for cultural and scientific institutions. Especially museums with large artistic and universal collections use these platforms progressively. In March 2025, the MoMA NYC, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Tate in London collectively had over 10 million followers on Instagram, Facebook, X, and TikTok. The Louvre had nearly 9.7 million, the Van Gogh Museum 6.9 million, and the British Museum 6.2 million online followers (Dawson 2025).

Most ethnographic and ethnological museums, as well as museums of world culture are also active across social media platforms, though not to the same extent. However, their work and activities are mostly overlooked in studies and measurements of museum communication, since the audience they reach remains almost invisible compared to the enormous follower bases of major art institutions. As a result, these museums are often uncertain about their actual effectiveness and have little guidance when it comes to mapping out best practices or opportunities. Yet it is precisely these platforms that provide them with a unique opportunity not only to convey their contents but also, through its nature and style, to express in a multifaceted way their mission, professional work, and how they think in the 21st century about ethnography, folklore, ethnology, or cultural anthropology. Through social media, they can raise new interpretations of their collections, interact with their communities and the general public, and generate dialogue about current social and cultural issues.

About the survey

With this motivation, I launched a comprehensive study on how European museums that deal with or are related to the field of ethnography and ethnology use social media, and what messages they convey to their followers about their mission, thinking, practices, past, and current activities. The database of the International Relations Office of the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest served as the starting point for my research.² Based on preliminary exploratory observations, I ultimately decided not to work with the full list, meaning I will disregard open-air ethnographic museums, as well as institutions that, alongside a significant ethnographic collection, also have natural science, art, or multidisciplinary collections (for example, the British Museum or the Horniman Museum and Gardens), since their content focus and opportunities differ significantly from those available to ethnographic institutions in the classical sense. Finally, I reviewed the social media activities of 49 European institutions, primarily on their official, clearly verified platforms or platforms accessible from their websites. For each institution, I analysed the content data published in May 2025 based on a questionnaire created for this purpose.³ In addition to numerical data, this questionnaire also examined the content characteristics of posts, their visual aspects, the forms of their presentation, the institutions' science communication and PR strategies, as well as representation-critical and participatory practices, and reflections on responses to contemporary global challenges. For linguistic style analysis, I used the translation tool of the given platform, which I checked with the DeepL program. I used MS Excel for data processing.

Of the institutions under review, 38 had verified official Facebook profiles; in addition, 36 had Instagram, 29 had YouTube, 11 had LinkedIn, 9 had X (formerly Twitter), 7 had TikTok, and 8 had other channels. In terms of the number of followers, the Parisian Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac stands out far above the rest, with 186,000 Facebook and 120,000 Instagram followers, as well as with 22,600 YouTube subscribers. The Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (Mucem) in Marseille reaches a similarly large audience: 171,000 on Facebook, 116,000 on Instagram, and 376,000 on YouTube. The Nordiska Museet in Stockholm, which defines itself as a cultural history museum and showcases the life and culture of the people of the northern regions, also has a significant audience, including 110,000 Facebook, 96,500 Instagram, and 5,000 YouTube followers.

On Facebook, the fourth most successful museum was the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest, with 71,000 followers, plus it had 10,400 on Instagram and 2,250 on YouTube. The Danish Moesgaard Museum, which also has an archaeological collection, has a following of 58,000 on the platform, while the Wereldmuseum Leiden (formerly Museum Volkenkunde), the Wereldmuseum Amsterdam (formerly Tropenmuseum), the Państwowe Muzeum Etnograficzne in Warsaw, and Berlin's Humboldt Forum each have over 40,000 Facebook fans.

On Instagram, the Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) in Antwerp, the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Madrid, and the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford have over 30,000 followers. TikTok is also successfully used by the Mucem (3,200 followers), as well as the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest, the Państwowe Muzeum Etnograficzne, and the Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève (MEG) – all of these institutions have audiences exceeding a thousand, with the Hungarian and Polish examples sometimes reaching tens of thousands. Although more and more institutions have recently stopped using X (formerly Twitter), the Pitt Rivers Museum still stands out with its 40,000 followers.

LinkedIn is becoming increasingly popular, especially for professional networking. This platform is particularly successfully used by institutions with an archaeological collection: both the Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) in Cambridge have networks of over 11,000 connections.

Facebook, Instagram, ethnography...

In my research, I primarily focused on the use of the two most popular platforms, Facebook and Instagram, while also reviewing content published on other channels. On these two platforms, most museums post multiple times a week, and often daily, in various formats, publishing images, text posts, videos, stories, and reels. Nevertheless, even for institutions with the largest followings, it is rare to receive more than a hundred likes or comments. During the period under review, the only exception was the Musée du quai Branly in Paris, whose posts showcasing garments created by contemporary fashion designers for the exhibition *'Golden Thread. The art of dressing from North Africa to the Far East'* received several thousand likes. However, most museums have to be satisfied with at most a few dozen likes for their efforts, regardless of the quality of the content.

Having said that, almost all institutions apply a top-down, institution led 'broadcasting strategy' (Agostino: 2020). It can be said to be a general phenomenon that they rarely strive for interaction or active dialogue, and only in exceptional cases do they build active communities on these platforms. In their community and participatory projects, they treat these forums more as news channels rather than as opportunities for community building offered by social media. Only a few museums take advantage of the possibilities that are

actually available, for example, in Facebook public groups. This is particularly interesting because most institutions seemingly place great emphasis on their relationship with communities in their mission statements. This inadvertently echoes a critical observation from a recently published book that assesses the future prospects of museums, in which the author highlights solutions where an ethnological museum merely wants to ‘check off’ collaboration with various disadvantaged groups.

This approach does allow segregated groups to position themselves, but it often regards their target audience as a faceless and uniform group, with whom their knowledge about collaborators and source communities can only be shared didactically (Foster 2025: 180). This is also true in the sense that the museums which used multiple social media platforms at the time of our survey posted almost the same content on each, not taking advantage of the opportunity to tailor their messages to the needs and interests of the different user groups active on each platform, and to the specific style trends of the platform.

However, based on the content published by ethnographic museums on their social media platforms across Europe, a highly heterogeneous yet somewhat patterned image of ethnography communicated to followers emerges. Probably the most consistent message of this image is that it is a field that can primarily be experienced through offline museum exhibitions and events. After all, most posts from any museum primarily serve to promote these extremely varied museum programmes that appeal to a wide range of different target audiences. Parallely, in the content offerings of almost all museums, the presentation of collection items and documents through photographs, videos, and texts intended to educate occupies a prominent place, and recurring elements often include curatorial interpretations, museum history anniversaries, and current events. For this very reason, it is somewhat surprising that, despite its noticeable popularity, only a few institutions take advantage of opportunities such as publishing archival photo and film materials. In addition to the one or two visual materials of this kind from the collection each month, we can usually browse through explicitly contemporary, trendy visual content on various platforms. Similarly, very few institutions strive to report on their latest research and acquisitions. On the timelines of many museums’ Facebook and Instagram pages, it is barely noticeable that ethnography or cultural anthropology is still a living research practice today, rather, what is observed is a kind of interpretation or critical revision of past results. Thus, we can witness an interesting, contradictory duality: we can connect with the stories of the past through contemporary visual materials and object photographs, while museums, conversely, with archival materials that reflect the present, could just as well make not only their collections and databases, but also their knowledge, appear useful.

Regional differences

Just as the ethnographic museums of individual European countries were established in different ways and with different professional intentions, and the disciplines behind them, their institutional networks, and the societies that maintain and operate them have each followed different paths of development, one cannot speak of a unified social media practice characteristic of European ethnographic museums in general. However, the topics appearing on the institutions’ platforms and the posts by their followers clearly reflect the characteristics, methodological and theoretical differences, and nuances typical of each European region.

The social media of ethnographic museums in Western and Northern Europe (the United Kingdom, France, Scandinavian countries, Germany, Austria and Switzerland)⁴ typically relies on content that showcases different cultures from around the world, presented with scientific rigour and aesthetic appeal. It is common to prominently display collection materials from ‘other cultures’, showcasing traditions and objects in a visually striking way, while also highlighting the importance of research and scientific context behind the posts. They actively reflect on their colonial heritage, regularly addressing how the objects came to Europe and what historical contexts and power relations lie behind them.

In most institutions, migration, identity, and cultural diversity are not merely mentioned in passing, but also appear as central themes of exhibitions and museum programmes. Some institutions occasionally take a stance on public issues. In their communication, they usually present ethnography as current and relevant, avoiding excessive exoticism; they rather address the audience in an accessible, informative tone. Humour and playful, entertaining content elements appear less frequently – the focus is more on exhibition recommendations, showcasing collection items, and promoting events, all presented in a visually appealing manner. Communication is often multilingual: alongside the primary language, English descriptions are usually provided for an international audience. The style of interaction is more informative and inspiring rather than conversational: the tone is friendly but fundamentally institutional, and only occasionally prompts followers to take action (for example, in the form of program invitations).

The social media of Southern European museums (Italy, Spain) is characterised by cultural diversity and the dialogue between tradition and modernity. They often explicitly refer to their own mission – for example, decolonising cultural heritage or showcasing social diversity – and in their posts, they strive to combine traditional and critical content. The Museu Etnològic i de Cultures del Món in Barcelona plays a prominent role, consciously avoiding ‘closed narratives’, encouraging critical thinking among its audience, and regularly addressing issues of identity, gender, and minority rights, as well as showcasing urban diversity and the relationship between tradition and modernity. The ethnographic image they convey simultaneously emphasises the diversity of the world’s cultures and the message that the museum is a space ‘where we can reflect on who we are today’. The visual communication is enriched and made aesthetically pleasing by the deliberate alternation of object photographs, exhibition interiors, and interactive audiovisual content. The tone is direct and inclusive; according to its slogan, this museum is ‘a place where we can look at ourselves and each other, and see the world through different eyes’ – accordingly, their communication is inspiring and invites dialogue.

In the Central European region (Hungary, Slovenia, Poland, the Baltics, Croatia, and Western Romania), a dual trend can be observed: some institutions continue to follow the traditional, classic ethnographic narrative, while others are at the forefront of contemporary reflexive communication. In both types, there are exhibition and programme recommendations, displays of collections, and representations of elements of folk culture on social media, but with different emphases. Platform usage is diverse: Facebook is mainly used for presenting news and events, Instagram focuses on visual content, while websites concentrate on multilingual information, with several institutions also using TikTok successfully. Social media content elements also reflect the dual efforts of institutions: on the one hand, making collections and peasant traditions visible, and on the other, responding reflexively to the past and present roles of ethnography. As part of this, many posts also feature curatorial or research reports, covering fieldwork or professional events. The need for a multi-voiced mode of communication

is particularly noticeable in the communication of the museums in Budapest and Ljubljana, which address their audiences with different tones and targeted messages. The museums in the region also creatively take advantage of the possibilities offered by Facebook groups. The Muzeul Etnografic al Transilvaniei in Cluj-Napoca runs a 33,000-member heritage preservation group and a 10,000-member professional museum group⁵. The Museum of Ethnography in Budapest, on the other hand, experiments with the genre in a progressive way, whether by creating a contemporary intellectual network linked to the concept of the *tiger*, launching a collection campaign, encouraging followers to showcase their contemporary festive customs, or by providing a forum in connection with a special zither exhibition for those who still play the instrument today.⁶

The social media of ethnographic museums in Eastern Europe and the Balkans (Russia, eastern Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria) generally presents a more conservative, tradition-oriented image than their Western counterparts. The focus is primarily on preserving national and regional traditions, showcasing the tangible and intangible heritage of folk culture, and highlighting the institution's anniversaries and current events. Their posts often feature folk costumes, folk art objects, and scenes of traditional life, while these museums present themselves as the preservers of national culture. Their platform use is more restrained, meaning that they are present on Facebook and Instagram, but use interactive or trendy formats less intensively; TikTok is mostly absent or inactive. The content is dominated by exhibition previews, event invitations, collection showcases, and educational programs, while humour and playful tones are quite rare. The ethnographic image they suggest is more classical: it focuses on preserving the treasures of folk culture while reflecting less on contemporary scientific discourses.

At the same time, there are also noteworthy initiatives: some institutions are already trying to connect with current social issues or new forms of communication, but these appear more as exceptions, in a project-dependent manner. A particularly interesting example is the question posed by the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Saint Petersburg) on specialised Russian social media platforms in May 2025: 'Why is ethnography important today?' emphasising the discipline's mediating role between past and present, and highlighting the contemporary relevance of ethnography.

Contemporary ethnography, interdisciplinarity, representation criticism

Almost every museum studied noticeably strives to make contemporary ethnography somewhat visible, but the extent and form of this effort vary greatly. There is no museum that does not regularly reflect in this public space on its collections, collection objects, the knowledge associated with them, and how it changes. Western European and progressive Central European institutions often post content that reports on current research projects, new scientific findings, or showcases collaborations. For example, Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum posted about the award-winning Living Cultures Project implemented in collaboration with the Maasai community, as well as about a new book by a renowned curator (Professor Dan Hicks), which is now part of the anthropological discourse. The Quai Branly in Paris also reported on an international research project (CRoyAN), in which they examined their collections with the involvement of the communities concerned – this post highlighted the community curatorial approach and scientific collaboration. The Museum of Ethnography in Budapest regularly shares videos and images about its cooperation with source communities or fieldwork. In Southern Europe, interdisciplinarity

and a contemporary perspective are particularly noticeable for Spanish and Italian institutions. For example, a museum in Madrid regularly highlights the perspective of modern anthropology, explaining through video series and collaborations why it is still important today to study cultural diversity in depth. In contrast, in the more traditional museums of Eastern Europe, contemporary scientific discourse is less present in their posts. Although these institutions also organise conferences and publish publications, their social media platforms tend to focus more on promoting existing knowledge rather than communicating new developments. What is, however, common in the professional practice of European museums is that posts appear throughout the entire continent discussing specific current issues at the intersection of ethnography, environmental science, and climate research, which proves that ethnography is interpreted here in an interdisciplinary way, in the context of natural and social phenomena.

Where the significance of an interdisciplinary approach increases, ethnography often combines with artistic and historical aspects. True, the period under study focused only on the activities of museums in May 2025, but by scrolling through the long series of posts, it is clearly noticeable that collaboration with contemporary art is increasingly appearing in the practices of such institutions. Overall, it can be said that many of the museums examined consciously position ethnography as a modern, diverse discipline, striving to build bridges to related fields (e.g. art, natural science, history, or ecology) through their social media content. Other museums tend to maintain a more implicit presence by keeping their traditional profile and are less reflective of where ethnography stands today or what research is being conducted. For these institutions, the lack of contemporary scientific dialogue can also be considered part of their profile, as the focus is more on preserving tradition.

The willingness to reflect on contemporary social issues, such as migration, sustainability, minority identity, globalisation, or social inequalities, depends heavily on the specific museum, though general regional patterns can also be observed. In Western, Southern, and Central Europe, major museums occasionally pay attention to these topics, although typically not in a directly political way, but rather in connection with their collections and exhibitions. Though, it is not typical for these museums to include socially critical messages in every post – they rather only occasionally and thematically incorporate these issues into their communication. It is also important to note that where reflection does appear, it is generally connected in some way to the museum's collection or profile; for example, Western museums with colonial collections mention colonialism and restitution, while Eastern ones focusing on national culture highlight community identity and tradition (e.g. UNESCO lists) either critically or with pride.

A similar regional map emerges regarding how museums reflect on the potential biases of their own collections and presentation methods, their dark legacies stemming from colonialism or other causes, ethically or methodologically questionable precedents, and whether they involve members of the cultures being presented in shaping the narrative. In Central and Western Europe, as well as in the Mediterranean countries, museums generally speak openly about the critical history of their collections, often involving representatives of the cultures on display and sometimes striving to present multi-perspective narratives. In contrast, museums in the Central and Eastern European region – partly due to a different historical context – feel less need to apply a postcolonial narrative. Not only because these countries were not colonial powers (in fact, they were often viewed more as colonies), but also because they focus more on representing their own cultural heritage, with the firm belief that this is legitimate in itself and does not require a special critical approach.

It is noticeable that museums' own brand identity and sense of mission strongly shape the direction of their social media communication. Where a mission statement on the website often emphasises a critical perspective, the posts tend to be bolder and more socially critical. Where the mission is more about preserving tradition, the posts tend to focus on showcasing that tradition. It is also important to highlight that some museums explicitly communicate their own definition or understanding of ethnography: for example, the museum in Ljubljana does not hesitate to state that for them, ethnography is a bridge between the past and the present, a science about people. This, on one hand, educates the public about the nature of ethnography, and on the other hand, strengthens the museum's profile both professionally and in terms of its image. In contrast, Nordiska consciously avoids using the term 'ethnography' in its public communication, instead describing its activities with other expressions (e.g. 'cultural history', 'heritage', or 'everyday life'). This is also a kind of identity strategy, positioning itself as an institution of broader interest rather than just a collection aimed at professionals. Both approaches – stating or avoiding the 'definition' – are their own conscious decisions, and social media content is shaped accordingly.

From the perspective of the future of the institutions of ethnography, cultural anthropology, and ethnology, a key question is the extent to which they can convey their values and mission to society. This is important also because in the online space and the world of social media, many content creators specifically focus on interpreting ethnographic content. Their results speak for themselves. The @transylvania.heritage page, launched in 2021 and often based on materials published by public collections and ethnographers, regularly reaches nearly 66,000 followers with content representing the ethnic diversity of former Transylvania, Banat, and Partium, generating significant user engagement, mainly with archival photos, not always citing their sources.⁷ However, if we look beyond Europe, those typically North American 'indigenous' influencers, who identify as Native American, can have over 2 million followers, complementing the content of their fashion, art, commercial, and political profiles with ethnographic material. They often rely more on stereotypes than on deeper interpretive possibilities, whether in visual, textual, or video form.⁸ Channels that convey the value of folk music, folk poetry, or traditional costumes are just as popular as those that showcase the reconstruction of traditional work processes and the restoration of old tools and objects. For example, the Irishman Eoin Reardon, who authentically showcases the tricks of traditional carpentry and restores farming tools, can boast 3.4 million TikTok followers.⁹ In Hungary, there are also numerous profiles on social media whose content creators focus on interpreting Hungarian ethnographic heritage. Auróra Németh Hajnal, an applied artist and the operator of the Auróra FolkGlamour brand, not only promotes the colourful collections she designs, but sometimes reaches hundreds of thousands of people on her TikTok and Instagram channels with the hashtag #HungarianFridaKahlo, humorously and originally showing how the knowledge accumulated over more than a century by ethnographers can be conveyed in the spirit of our time.¹⁰ Users are often unaware of where these contents come from; they are simply captivated by what they see on their digital devices. Even though the stories and information reach tens of thousands of users, they cannot identify them with folklore studies or ethnographic or ethnological museums. In the 21st century, a fundamental challenge is for ethnographic and ethnological institutions to maintain the right to convey authentic knowledge and to control interpretative and analytical frameworks, while increasing their popularity and visibility on social media, filling the concept of ethnography and ethnographic museums with widely accessible, diverse content, and embracing their own values.

Notes

- 1 European Union data show a similar pattern: 43% of the 16–29 age cohort did not visit a museum, gallery, or heritage site at all in 2022, while 34% attended a theatre or other live performance at least once. However, when interpreting these data, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic must also be taken into account. (August 2024). Culture statistics – cultural participation. In Statistics Explained. European Commission. Accessible at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Culture_statistics_-_cultural_participation#Cultural_statistics_.E2.80.93_general_findings
- 2 Special thanks to International Relations Coordinator Eszter Bazsó Borka for her valuable information.
- 3 The selection of a date in May was influenced by the ICOM International Museum Day, which affects almost all institutions.
- 4 The regional grouping is not a geographical classification but is based on the institutions being analysed. For example, museums in Russia and the Balkans are included in the Eastern Europe block, while Scandinavian ones can be classified under Western/Northern Europe due to their similar communication patterns. The above list does not provide a complete overview of Europe, but the selected museums offer characteristic examples of practices typical for each region.
- 5 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/muzee>, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/565588270229934>
- 6 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/963214647358445>, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/622778816854394>, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/3413958892261220>, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/574718925416895>
- 7 Content creator Radu Frențiu settled in Austria after travelling the world. He created the profile to reconnect with his roots and to demonstrate the traditions of the region beyond Dracula as an ambassador of Transylvania's cultural heritage. Interview: <https://www.new-east-archive.org/articles/show/13358/this-instagram-lets-you-time-travel-through-transylvanias-culture-craft-and-cooking> (last downloaded: 21. 09. 2015.)
- 8 Top 100 Indigenous Influencers in 2025. https://influencers.feedspot.com/indigenous_instagram_influencers/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Last downloaded: 21. 09. 2015.)
- 9 <https://www.tiktok.com/@pintofplan>
- 10 [tiktok.com/@aurora_folkglamour](https://www.tiktok.com/@aurora_folkglamour), [instagram.com/aurora_folkglamour](https://www.instagram.com/aurora_folkglamour), [facebook.com/aurora.folkglamour](https://www.facebook.com/aurora.folkglamour),

List of museums under review

Eesti Rahva Muuseum (*Estonian National Museum*), Tartu, Estonia
 Etnografski muzej Rupe (*Ethnographic Museum Rupe*), Dubrovnik, Croatia
 Etnografski muzej Split (*Ethnographic Museum Split*), Split, Croatia
 Etnografski muzej Zagreb (*Ethnographic Museum Zagreb*), Zagreb, Croatia
 Ethnographic Museum – Branch of the National Museum, Kraków, Poland
 Ethnographic Museum of the National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic
 GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig (*GRASSI Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig*), Leipzig, Germany
 Humboldt Forum, Berlin, Germany
 Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria
 Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika (AfricaMuseum) (*Royal Museum for Central Africa*), Tervuren, Belgium
 L'ETNO, Museu Valencià d'Etnologia (*Valencian Museum of Ethnology*), Valencia, Spain
 Moesgaard Museum, Aarhus, Denmark
 Museo de América (*Museum of the Americas*), Madrid, Spain
 Museo Nacional de Antropología (*National Museum of Anthropology*), Madrid, Spain

Museu Etnològic i de Cultures del Món (*Ethnological and World Cultures Museum*), Barcelona, Spain

Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK) (*Museum at the Rothenbaum – Cultures and Arts of the World*), Hamburg, Germany

Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) (*Museum at the River*), Antwerp, Belgium

Museum Europäischer Kulturen (MEK) (*Museum of European Cultures*), Berlin, Germany

Museum Fünf Kontinente (*Museum Five Continents*), Munich, Germany

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) (*Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology*), Cambridge, United Kingdom

Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (Mucem) (*Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations*), Marseille, France

Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac (*Quai Branly Museum – Jacques Chirac*), Paris, France

Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, Prague, Czech Republic

Néprajzi Múzeum (*Museum of Ethnography*), Budapest, Hungary

Państwowe Muzeum Etnograficzne (*State Ethnographic Museum*), Warsaw, Poland

Pitt Rivers Museum (*Pitt Rivers Museum*), Oxford, United Kingdom

Regional Ethnographic Museum, Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Slovenské národné múzeum – Archeologické múzeum s etnografickými zbierkami (*Slovak National Museum – Archaeological Museum, with ethnographic collections*), Nitra, Slovakia

Slovenské národné múzeum – Etnografické múzeum (*Slovak National Museum – Ethnographic Museum*), Martin, Slovakia

Slovenské národné múzeum – Historické múzeum (etnografická zbierka) (*Slovak National Museum – Historical Museum, Ethnographic Collection*), Bratislava, Slovakia

Slovenské národné múzeum – Múzeum karpatských Nemcov (*Slovak National Museum – Museum of Carpathian Germans*), Bratislava, Slovakia

Slovenské národné múzeum – Múzeum kultúry Chorvátov na Slovensku (*Slovak National Museum – Museum of Croatian Culture in Slovakia*), Bratislava, Slovakia

Slovenské národné múzeum – Múzeum kultúry Maďarov na Slovensku (*Slovak National Museum – Museum of Hungarian Culture in Slovakia*), Bratislava, Slovakia

Slovenské národné múzeum – Múzeum kultúry Nemcov na Slovensku (*Slovak National Museum – Museum of German Culture in Slovakia*), Bratislava, Slovakia

Slovenské národné múzeum – Múzeum kultúry Polákov na Slovensku (*Slovak National Museum – Museum of Polish Culture in Slovakia*), Nitra, Slovakia

Slovenské národné múzeum – Múzeum kultúry Rómov na Slovensku (*Slovak National Museum – Museum of Roma Culture in Slovakia*), Martin, Slovakia

Slovenské národné múzeum – Múzeum kultúry Čechov na Slovensku (*Slovak National Museum – Museum of Czech Culture in Slovakia*), Martin, Slovakia

Slovenské národné múzeum – Múzeum rusínskej kultúry (*Slovak National Museum – Museum of Ruthenian Culture*), Prešov, Slovakia

Slovenské národné múzeum – Múzeum ukrajinskej kultúry (*Slovak National Museum – Museum of Ukrainian Culture*), Svidník, Slovakia

Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden (*State Museum of Ethnology Dresden*), Dresden, Germany

Völkerkundemuseum Herrnhut (*Ethnographic Museum Herrnhut*), Herrnhut, Germany

Volkskundemuseum Wien (*Museum of Folk Life Vienna*), Vienna, Austria

Wereldmuseum Amsterdam (voorheen Tropenmuseum) (*World Museum Amsterdam, formerly Tropenmuseum*), Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Wereldmuseum Leiden (voorheen Museum Volkenkunde) (*World Museum Leiden, formerly Museum of Ethnology*), Leiden, The Netherlands

Wereldmuseum Rotterdam (*World Museum Rotterdam*), Rotterdam, The Netherlands Weltmuseum Wien (*World Museum Vienna*), Vienna, Austria

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Néprajztérkép

Az európai néprajzi, etnológiai és kulturális antropológiai múzeumok a közösségi média világában

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Rezümé | Az elmúlt évtizedekben a néprajzi és etnológiai múzeumok egész Európában új identitást keresnek: nevet változtattak, új épületbe költöztek, kiállítási stratégiáikat alakították át, miközben küldetésükben egyre hangsúlyosabbá vált a párbeszéd, a sokszínűség és az etikai felelősségvállalás. De vajon hogyan jelennek meg mindezek a közösségi médiában – ott, ahol ma a legtöbb látogatóval először találkozunk? Mit érzékelnek a követők az intézmények munkájából, missziójából? A tanulmány 49 európai intézmény 2025 májusi közösségimédia-tevékenységét elemzi, és arra keresi a választ, milyen narratívát építenek a múzeumok magukról. Kiderül, milyen eltérések figyelhetők meg Nyugat-, Dél-, Közép- és Kelet-Európa gyakorlata között, és hogy miként próbálják a múzeumok a digitális térben közvetíteni a néprajz fogalmát, relevanciáját és mai szerepét.

Kulcsszavak | néprajz, etnológia, közösségi média, kommunikáció, múzeum

Craftsmen and archaeology

Tunisian photographs in the missionary photo corpus of the Museum of Ethnography

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Abstract | In 1896, for the request of the parish priest of Kispest, thousands of objects and more than 900 photographs were sent to Hungary by missionaries working in various parts of the world. The aim was to organise a large-scale exhibition, the proceeds of which contributed to the costs of building the local church. This is how the earliest Tunisian photographs of the Museum of Ethnography became part of its collection. Apart from a few exceptions, they focus was on two major themes and locations: artisan workshops overlooking the streets of Tunis, and the results of the archaeological excavations in Carthage. Except from a brief title in the early inventory books, no further information was available about the photographs. In this study, I examine the background and history of all 29 photographs, their authorship details, their photo-historical context, as well as their life within the collection of the museum.

Keywords | photo, mission, Tunisia, Carthage, craftsmen, archaeology, museum

The earliest Tunisian photographs held by the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, arrived in Hungary in 1896 as part of a large-scale, global missionary collection project. In the first decades of the twentieth century additional photographs from Tunisia entered the museum, yet their number remained very small. In terms of period, subject matter, and authorship, only one series can be compared to the Tunisian images discussed in this study: a set of ten Tunis postcards from the inheritance of Sándor Makoldy, a secondary-school teacher known primarily as a historian of shorthand writing, who also conducted ethnographic research (Szűcs 2025). These postcards were published by Maison Garrigues, whose work will be discussed later. This mainly studio-based material – consisting of half-length and full-length female portraits, costume representations, staged street scenes, and a panoramic view of a characteristic Arab market – complements the nineteenth-century missionary selection.

The present study focuses on the museum's earliest Tunisian photographs: twenty-nine images that entered the collection as part of the missionary photo corpus. To understand this material, the first part of the paper briefly outlines the origins and main characteristics of the missionary photo corpus. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the photographs received from Tunisia, placing them within both a broader international history of photography and a narrower institutional collection context.

The origins and characteristics of the missionary photo corpus

In 1896, the Catholic world mobilised in support of a Hungarian church. Missionaries belonging to different religious orders and national backgrounds sent objects, books, and photographs to Hungary in response to an appeal issued by Antal Ribényi, parish priest of Kíspeszt. The aim was to organise a large-scale missionary exhibition, the proceeds of which were intended to finance the construction of a new parish church. The income of the exhibition was further increased when, after its closure, the Hungarian state purchased its entire collection of objects and images for the Ethnographic Department of the Hungarian National Museum – the predecessor of today's Museum of Ethnography. As a result of the multiphase acquisition, 910 images entered the museum through missionary mediation. Owing to later institutional reorganisations and deaccessioning processes, the Photography Collection currently registers 661 items from this material.

In October 1895 (Jankó 1896a: 7), Ribényi sent out Latin letters of invitation to addresses previously agreed upon with the Roman Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith¹. In these letters he not only outlined the purpose of the exhibition but also provided detailed instructions organised into four points, concerning the types of objects and photographs to be collected by missionaries working across different continents. First, he requested objects related to religious practice, education, and missionary activity within the missions: icons found on walls or in books, crosses, rosaries, liturgical garments worn by missionaries during ceremonies and in everyday life, Bibles and prayer books used in missionary work, school textbooks used in mission schools, and secular books written in the language of the local community. The second point of Ribényi's requests – most relevant for the photographic material examined in this study – focused almost exclusively on visual material, especially photographs. He requested exterior and interior photographs of churches, cathedrals, schools, and other mission institutions, as well as of local houses, villages, and towns. Beyond the built environment, he asked for photographs of events, highlighting school performances, Christian weddings and funerals, portraits of missionaries – especially those who had died as martyrs – and copies of newspapers published by the missions. After this he turned to the specific characteristics of individual countries and peoples: traditional costumes, household and work tools, weapons, and handicraft products made from natural materials, either as physical objects or in photographic form. The third and fourth points listed the ethnographically significant objects: household utensils; tools of various crafts (with examples of tailoring, shoemaking, and carpentry); local tobacco consumption practices and the instruments associated with them; and characteristic musical instruments from different regions. His interest extended to both utilitarian and decorative objects made of wood, stone, metal, glass, or marble, as well as products sold by traders in larger towns – such as bells, carved sticks, baskets, barrels, and other items of cottage industry. In a final sentence, the letter requested that missionaries label objects and photographs in Latin and, where possible, indicate their mode of use.

Although we are lacking detailed documentation of the drafting process of this letter, it appears likely that it was the result of collaboration between Ribényi and János Jankó, then director of the Ethnographic Department and curator of the Missionary Exhibition. The first two points reflect the parish priest's ecclesiastical interests, while the third and fourth clearly express the concerns of an ethnographic museum professional. It is therefore probable that Jankó participated in formulating the letter and sought to ensure that

ethnographic and anthropological considerations were strongly represented in the collecting process. A close analysis of the entire missionary photo corpus reveals how precisely the collectors of the photographic consignments followed Ribényi's instructions, and how clearly the thematic categories outlined in the letter are reflected in the material. The collectors of the Tunisian series – although not fulfilling every aspect of the criteria – attempted to respond to both religious and ethnographic–anthropological interests while emphasising the unique nature of their local activity as well. Alongside missionary work they engaged in archaeological research too. From this aspect the Tunisian material is exceptional within the missionary photo corpus.

In terms of their thematic content, the photographs in the missionary corpus can be classified into several groups, which differ significantly in quantity. The group of portraits, representations of individuals, and anthropological photographs is particularly rich; among them are numerous studio photographs originating from the popular or lesser-known photographic studios of the period. Within the works of professional photographers, another highly popular genre of the time becomes apparent: staged studio scenes. In these images, the same individuals often appear in entirely different roles, or the same backgrounds and setting are used to present different life situations and activities. There are series of photographs similar in character, even though they are not staged but captured in real-life scenarios, depicting the settings of everyday communal life, such as the bustle of fairs and markets, street scenes, and – most prominently in the North African and Middle Eastern images, including a significant portion of the Tunisian photographs – the workshops of craftsmen opening directly onto the street. Although present in only small numbers within the missionary photographic material, object photographs can also be found. Within this category, photographs of museum artefacts, object assemblages, and showcases are particularly notable. Despite their insignificant quantity within the corpus, the images of museum artifacts deserve special emphasis in this study, as after Algiers the second largest coherent group within this genre arrived from Tunisia.

Viewed from another classificatory perspective, it is possible to distinguish actual ethnographic photographs, which provide insight into the life, culture, and ritual practices of a given people, though not through staged genre scenes. Organised according to yet another set of criteria, the largest group within the material becomes apparent: missionary photographs in the narrow sense. These images offer insight into the life of the missions, the various works of the missionaries, and the results of their activities.

Owing to the geographical, thematic, and provenance-related diversity of the material, the question of authorship likewise presents a highly varied picture. The list of photographers ranges widely, from anonymous creators to well-known photographic studios of the period, and from amateurs to professional photographers. The material also includes better- and lesser-known examples from the broader history of photography, which circulated in the respective countries and across Europe at the end of the nineteenth century in the form of photographs, engravings, or postcards. Although the missionaries had a list of criteria to follow when they selected the images, as it has been described earlier, however, these sets of photographic positives are their personal or small-communal choice within the specified limits. As such, they provide insight into what the fathers and sisters working at different missionary stations considered important to show about the countries in which they served, and to communicate about the peoples among whom they carried out missionary and other humanitarian activities, in that specific historical context.

It is important to consider that at the time when the images of the missionary photo collection of the Museum of Ethnography were taken – between the 1860s and the 1890s – the history of missionary work and colonisation was closely intertwined. From

the 1820s and 1830s onwards, worldwide missionary activity gained renewed momentum (Nemeshegyi 2001: 10), to which the colonial expansion of the European great powers also contributed. The institutional systems of the missions formed part of this complex network of cultural relations, creating 'intercultural spaces' in which missionaries operated as mediators. The verbal and visual knowledge they conveyed to their home countries, through press organs, slide projection lectures, and missionary publications, shaped Europeans' perceptions of Others. In Hungary, Ribényi Antal's Ethnographic Mission exhibition and the surviving photographic material from it likewise contributed to this process. Regarding photography from a colonial perspective, it can be stated that the photographer determined the purpose and message of the image, thereby directing the viewer's mode of seeing and thinking. Richard Eves, analysing the photographs of Methodist ministers serving in the Pacific Islands, also points out that although the colonisers are in most cases not visible in the image itself, and while standing behind the camera often remain unidentifiable, unknown, and faceless to the viewer – unlike their photographic subjects – the photograph nevertheless primarily speaks about them. The framing, choice of subject, and compositional arrangements reflect their perspective, their interpretation, and their 'visual vocabulary'. The viewer sees only as much of colonial reality, and from such a perspective, as they choose to show and allow to be seen. Thus, "colonial photographs in fact tell us less about the colonised and their culture, than about those who produced that particular portrayal" (Eves 2006: 727). In case of the missionary photo corpus of the Museum of Ethnography this theory becomes even more complex. It is not only the photographer who determines "colonial reality" and the vision of the Other but also the missionaries through their choice and Antal Ribényi through his detailed criteria. In this way the final photo material is a result of this multi-layered visual and ethical filtering that was further refined by additional selections during its life in the museum based on other criteria.

Orientalist photography is likewise a product of the colonial period – a characteristic also observable in the Tunisian photographs examined in this study. Primarily as a successor to orientalist painting, it is fundamentally a matter of viewpoint: the vantage point from which the photograph itself is taken. This viewpoint invariably reflects a Western, Christian perspective (Jacobson 2007: 20). It defines the subject of the photograph as a counterpoint to its own identity. Orientalist photography – similarly to orientalist painting – cannot be regarded as a unified trend of style. Rather, these photographs are linked by an interest in the East, by the locations depicted (the Middle and Far East, as well as the northern regions of Africa), by the representation of sensuality, and by the display of natural and cultural richness (Jacobson 2007: 19–20). This curious, outsider European gaze can be observed in the Tunisian images of the photographic corpus too, both when observing the workspaces of urban craftsmen and the treasures of the ancient world.

Tunis – three men, one photograph

The photo assortment addressed in this study could serve as part of a visual anthropological and archaeological reader on North Africa: an originally 41-item selection arriving from Tunisia and focusing on two locations, Tunis (16+3 photographs) and Carthage (13+9 photographs), which was reduced to 29 items during museum deaccessioning procedures. From the inventory records of the Museum of Ethnography, the titles and inventory numbers of the discarded images have been identified; however, no further information is available regarding the reasons for or criteria behind the deaccessioning.

Inventory number	Old inventory number	Title	Photo location
F 2344	30432	The St Louis Chapel, Tunis	Tunis
F 2345	30433	The cathedral, Carthage	Carthage
F 2381	30469	Old inscriptions	Carthage
F 2836	30954	Seminar of White Fathers	Carthage
F 2902	31011	Victoria (Nike) statue from the 3 rd Century	Carthage, Tunis
F 2903	31012	The great seminar, Carthage	Carthage, Tunis
F 2904	31013	Interior of the cathedral	Carthage, Tunis
F 2905	31014	City view	Carthage, Tunis
F 2906	31015	Ruins of the catholic dome, Carthage	Carthage, Tunis
F 2910	31019	View of P. Delattre, archaeologist's museum	Carthage, Tunis
	27136	Gunsmiths	Tunis
	27141	Woodturner	Tunis

Table: List of discarded images

Based on entries in the inventory books, two major waves of deaccessioning can be outlined within the missionary photographic corpus, first in the 1930s and later in the 1960s, in addition to several individual instances of selection. No formal deaccessioning reports were produced; instead, only a stamp certifying the fact of removal from the register was added next to the relevant entries in the inventory books. In numerous cases, the semi-blank stamp was not completed with a date and signature, rendering the time of deaccessioning uncertain for some of the images. In the absence of documentation, it remains unknown whether their physical condition had deteriorated over time, or whether their subject matter did not align with the museum's collection profile. A comparison of the themes of the kept and removed positives suggests that the latter explanation is more probable, although the selection process appears non-consistent in either group. The inventory-book titles of the discarded images indicate that photographs depicting the buildings of missionary and colonial infrastructure – churches, church interiors, missionary schools, hospitals, printing houses, and public buildings – as well as the individuals operating them, were primarily regarded as falling outside the museum's collecting scope, even though a small number of enlargements on similar themes were kept. The majority of the deaccessioned Tunisian photographs also fall into this category. However, in the case of two images portraying turners and gunsmiths (inv. no. 27136, 27141) in Tunis that may have formed part of the series presenting crafts to be discussed later, their removal does not correspond to the logic of profile-based selection. In these cases, the possibility of physical damage may also be considered, although in the case of positive paper enlargements this would likely have been negligible.

The material lacks the photographs outlined by Ribényi that document missionary work and the life and activities of missionary communities. Nevertheless, as will be demonstrated in a later chapter of the study, the photographs of the Carthage excavation and exhibition provide insight into a different dimension of the monks' activities: archaeological work undertaken alongside their evangelising mission, and the results thereof.

Although the Tunisian photographic material contains only one indoor studio photograph (Figure 12), the outdoor images were likewise produced by professional photographers who travelled extensively across the Arab countries of North Africa. Their work addressed all the thematic categories that travellers of the period were eager to purchase as souvenirs during their journeys: orientalist portraits, scenes of everyday life, urban and

panoramic views, and genre photographs. Among the Tunisian photographic positives that entered the museum's collection, alongside several street scenes and costume studies, there emerges a coherent series depicting crafts, workshops, and shops, together with their owners, customers, premises, and merchandise. These images condense characteristic scenes of local everyday life. The chosen viewpoint is almost identical throughout the series. The photographer looks into the interior spaces from outside, stepping very close to the subject. The external world disappears from view; the street is no longer visible, and only the photographed interior remains, together with the figures within it. The photographs were not provided with captions or signatures by their maker. For this reason, the identity of the photographer remained unknown until the present research, and even during the investigation further uncertainties and new questions emerged.

One of the best known and most frequently cited images in the series entered the collection of the Museum of Ethnography under the title Arab Notary of Tunis (Figure 1). Its gelatin dry plate negative is preserved by one of Europe's largest photographic archives and picture agencies, the French L'agence Photographique, founded in 1938. In this archive the image is no longer anonymous. At the bottom of the glass plate a serial number, a French caption, and even two photographers' names are also visible. On the image itself, in small white printed letters, the following text appears: "Tunisie 1270 Arabe dans son Étude ND Phot" (Arab notary in his office) (Roger-Viollet 82024-7).



1. Arab notary. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1885–1896.

Taken by Albert Clappier. Black and white positive, 19,5x25,5 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 1136

The abbreviation ND Phot was used by the Paris-based Neurdein brothers, Étienne and Louis-Antonin Neurdein, on their photographs and on the postcards they published. The two brothers, who inherited their profession from their father, operated a photographic studio in Paris from 1863 onwards (Degroise, Neurdein). They received commissions and financial support from the French government to produce photographs in North Africa, primarily in Algeria. These images were disseminated in travel guides, souvenir albums, and postcards, thereby promoting colonial tourism and encouraging private investment in the colonies (DeRoo 2004: 159). In addition to running a photographic studio, they also operated as a publishing company. By the end of the nineteenth century they had become the largest producers of tourist photographs and postcards, mainly from France,

Belgium, Algeria, and Tunisia (Jacobson 2007: 259). They produced and distributed large quantities of landscape views, city and street scenes, and genre photographs from Algeria and Tunisia, both in the colonies and in Europe, in order to compete with local photographic studios and publishers (Jacobson 2007: 55).

However, due to the volume of travel and work required, the Neurdein brothers, similarly to other Paris-based studios, employed photographers who travelled throughout the colonies and produced images on behalf of the French company. In 1898 the French government entrusted the Neurdein enterprise with the management of the photographic archive of the Service des Monuments Historiques (Hannavy 2013: 992), which likewise contained the work of numerous photographers. The combination of publishing activity, picture agency operations, and archival management resulted in a situation in which the signature of the Neurdein brothers appears on works produced by different photographers, either alongside the name of the original photographer or leaving it entirely ambiguous. For this reason, it is often impossible to determine the true creator of a particular image today. In certain cases, the same photograph appears under different authors' names in various archives or publications. This explains how it is possible that on the glass negative depicting the Arab notary, preserved in the L'agence Photographique Roger-Viollet, another French caption and signature can be read in the black strip beneath the previously quoted inscription, also in white printed letters. The title is identical to the one cited above, but the signature reads "ALBERT Ph – Tunis". On the opposite side, written by hand, another serial number and place designation appears: "1870 Tunis".² The signature "Albert Ph", and occasionally "Albert Phot.", is interpreted by some sources as referring to Albert Clapier³ or Clappier, whose full name was Albert Joseph Marie Clappier (Mégnin 2024). Other sources identify the photographer as Charles Albert (e.g. Degroise, Albert). However, according to Michel Mégnin, who is preparing an encyclopaedia of Tunisian photographers, no documentary evidence supports the latter attribution (Mégnin 2024). However, researchers agree that Albert began his photographic career in Paris and opened a studio in Tunis in the mid-1880s. After the turn of the century, he relocated to Algiers. Mégnin considers him one of the most influential figures in the photographic life of Tunis in the 1890s. He served as the official photographer of the bey of Tunis and received medals for his photographs at several world fairs (Mégnin 2024). Although many of his photographs were distributed on postcards published by the Neurdein brothers, in the early twentieth century he also issued postcards himself, including works by other photographers, under the designation EPA, meaning Collection Etoile-Photo Albert, later Editions Photo Africaines (Degroise, Albert).

Beside the photograph of the Arab notary, the Paris-based L'agence Photographique Roger-Viollet preserves the negatives of ten further Tunisian genre scenes that entered the missionary photo corpus of the Museum of Ethnography, mostly as anonymous works. On most of these negatives both the mark of the Neurdein brothers and that of Albert can be found. This suggests that the photographs were most likely taken by Albert and later incorporated into the photographic agency operated by the Neurdein brothers. Most of these images were also published as postcards. On the postcards, the photographer's name is generally absent, and only the designation "Collections ND Phot" appears as the source reference (Figures 2 to 5). In the second half of the 1910s or beginning of 1920s the Neurdein collection merged, under the direction of Emile Crété, with the second most significant French photo agency, Lévy et fils. under its new unified name, Lévy et Neurdein Réunis, which was acquired by the L'agence Photographique Roger-Viollet in the 1970s (Jacobson 2007: 259). This is how the original glass negatives of the photographs discussed in this study were preserved.



2. Arab chef. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1885–1896.

Taken by Albert Clappier. Black and white positive, 19,5x25 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 1133



3. Blacksmith. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1885–1896.

Taken by Albert Clappier. Black and white positive, 19x25 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 184012



4. Furniture makers. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1885–1896.

Taken by Albert Clappier. Black and white positive, 19x26 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 1397



5. Leather goods stores. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1885–1896.

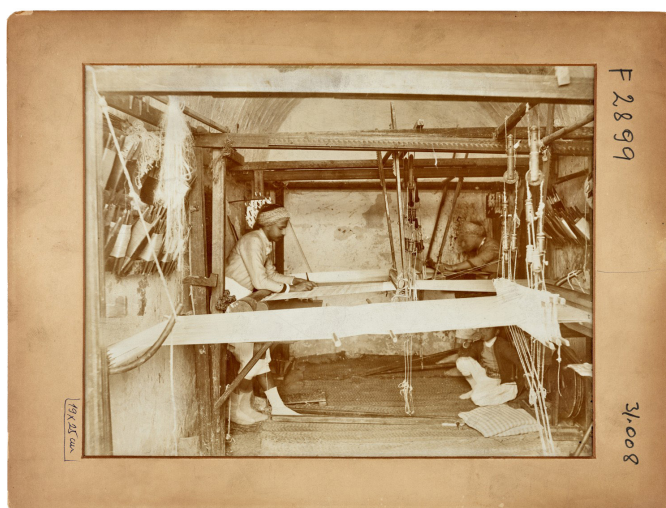
Taken by Albert Clappier. Black and white positive, 20x26 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2900

Albert's authorship is further supported, in the case of three images (Figures 6 to 8) by a comprehensive publication on Tunisia that appeared in Paris in 1896, the very same year in which the ethnographic Missionary Exhibition initiated by Antal Ribényi was organised (Olivier 1896). In the chapter presenting the handicrafts of the indigenous population of Tunisia, the author published three photographs and explicitly indicated the name of the photographer. These same images could also be viewed by visitors in Hungary that year, displayed in the colonnaded hall of the National Museum (Fleury 1896: 1119, 1121, 1124).



6. Arab painters. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1885–1896.

Taken by Albert Clappier. Black and white positive, 19,5x25,5 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 1138



7. Tunisian weavers. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1885–1896.

Taken by Albert Clappier. Black and white positive, 19x25 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2899



8. Manufacturers of baskets and mats. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1885–1896.

Taken by Albert Clappier. Black and white positive, 20x26 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 184013

In terms of style, subject matter, and visual formulation, the photograph entitled Barber's Shop in the inventory of the Museum of Ethnography fits closely into Albert's series depicting street-facing workshop interiors. However, the negative of it – in which the French inscription indicates that the image in fact offers a view into a wig maker's shop – attests exclusively to the authorship of the Neurdein brothers. Up to the present stage of research no source is known that would conclusively link the image to Albert or to any other photographer (Figure 9).



9. Wigmaker's shop. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1863–1896.

Taken by Neurdein Frères. Black and white positive, 20x26 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 1135

Four photographs within the Tunis section of the material bear Albert's signature. Two of these belong to the series depicting street vendors. However, their original or duplicate negatives likewise came into the possession of the Neurdein brothers and eventually entered the holdings of L'agence Photographique Roger-Viollet. In this archive, every photograph that once formed part of the Neurdein agency is today catalogued under their name, even in cases where the image clearly bears the name of another photographer (Figures 10 and 11).



10. Shop at the saddlers' market. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1885–1896.

Taken by Albert Clappier. Black and white positive, 20x25 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2790



11. Grocery store. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1885–1896.

Taken by Albert Clappier. Black and white positive, 19,5x25,5 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2901

The photograph providing a view into a saddler's shop (Figure 10), as well as a studio portrait of a woman (Figure 12), clearly illustrates the close interconnections among the Maghreb countries that fell within the French sphere of influence, as well as the transregional mobility and professional networks of European photographers and publishers active there. The images originally produced by Albert entered the commercial sphere of the Neurdein Frères through the mechanisms described above. Later both representations became available as part of an extended postcard series published in Morocco, without indication of the author's name. On the reverse side "Imp. Phot. Neurdein et Cie. – Paris", while on the picture side "P. Cousin et Cie, Rabat" was imprinted. Cousin was a French photographer too who operated a studio in Rabat and was also active as a postcard publisher (Degroise, Cousin). The precise professional relationship between the Neurdein brothers and Cousin requires further investigation. It is, however, plausible that Cousin functioned as the Moroccan representative or intermediary of the Neurdein enterprise. It is misleading that in the aforementioned postcard series the photographs originating from various countries of the Maghreb were published not only without indicating their actual location, thereby automatically presenting them as Moroccan, but in some cases even with altered titles adjusted to the geographical context. A characteristic feature

of the period was the production of studio genre scenes and staged compositions in which often the same paid models represented different occupations, social groups, or even nationalities. Photographic and postcard series presenting the “ethnic types” of particular regions were also highly popular, fulfilling European demand for exotic imagery. These photographs did not give any information about the individuals portrayed, they particularly intended to display anthropological and of attire characteristics. Because the depicted places and populations were geographically distant from the target audience, it could occur that the same photograph served to illustrate different ethnic groups.

A similar procedure, namely the broadening of the subject and the shift from precise designation to more general classification, can be observed in the case of the signed, numbered, and captioned studio photograph by Albert (Figure 12). The original title of the image depicting a woman carrying her child on her back was “Bédouine des environs de Tunis” (Bedouin woman from around Tunis). On the Rabat postcard edition, however, the more general designation “Mauresque” (Moorish) appears. This term presumably intended to function as a generalisation referring to the North African Arab population as a whole, yet it is by no means identical with the nomadic Bedouin communities.



12. A Bedouin woman from around Tunis. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1885–1896. Taken by Albert Clappier. Black and white positive, 11,5x16,5 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2785



13. Arab horsemen. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1885–1896. Taken by Albert Clappier. Black and white positive, 20x25 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 184014

The North African network of the Neurdein Frères once again becomes visible in the case of a full-length portrait of an Arab man, which likewise entered the Museum of Ethnography without the author's signature (Figure 14). On the gelatin dry plate negative of the same portrait preserved in the L'agence Photographique Roger-Viollet the inscription "Chef Arabe, ND Phot. Tunis" appears, which suggests the authorship of the Neurdein brothers. On the postcard version of the photograph, above the designation "Collection ND Phot.", the inscription "D'Amico libraire 15, Avenue de France, Tunis" is also visible. This indicates that the card was published by Emilio (Degroise, Amico, D'), or according to other sources Emmanuel (Bourial n.d.) D'Amico, an Italian-born entrepreneur who established a bookshop and publishing house in Tunis in 1878.

Although several sources mention only his activities as bookseller and publisher, Marie-Hélène Degroise, who researches and publishes biographies of European photographers active overseas between 1840 and 1944, provides more information about his profession. She notes, with reference to a Tunisian commercial directory from 1901, that D'Amico himself also practised photography, sold cameras and photographic equipment, and acted as an assistant to the Neurdein brothers in Tunisia (Degroise, Amico, D'). This may explain how the image of the Arab leader, which formed part of the ND Collection, was also distributed in Tunis issued by D'Amico. These cases illustrate the dynamic circulation of photographs within the network linking agencies operating from Europe and locally based photographers and publishers.

Following the criteria set out in the appeal of the Hungarian parish priest, Antal Ribényi, visual documentation of characteristic local living spaces and the built environment was also included in the selection compiled by the missionaries in Tunisia, although only in the form of a single image (Figure 15). This photograph differs markedly from the previously discussed human-centred representations. It depicts an almost entirely empty street scene, showing the Sidi ben Ziad Mosque, also known as Becquia and today called Youssef Dey or Al B'chamqiya, together with the surrounding souk and the buildings of the traditional Arab market. This photograph entered the Museum of Ethnography as an anonymous work. However, on a signed version the name Garrigues appears, who's activity and photographic career will be discussed in detail in the following chapter of the study. The characteristic nature and popularity of the location is demonstrated by the fact that several well-known photographers of the period produced images at this site with almost identical framing and from approximately the same viewpoint as Garrigues. One such image appears on a postcard preserved in the Collection of Prints at the Museum of Ethnography. This postcard was produced after the late nineteenth-century renovation of the mosque. The author is unknown, while the publisher is indicated as Lévy et Neurdein,



14. Arab chief. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1863–1896.
Taken by Neurdein Frères. Black and white positive, 10,5x15 cm.
Museum of Ethnography, F 1142

signalling that the card was issued after the merger of the two largest French publishing companies. The monogram LL following the title suggests that the photograph originally belonged to the publishing house Léon et Lévy, founded in 1864 (Méglin n.d.a).

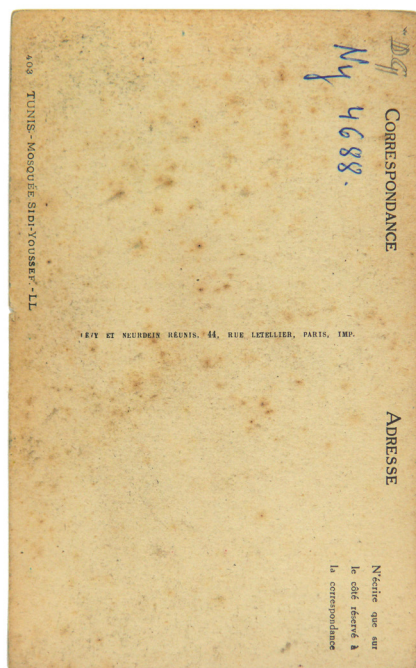


15. The Sidi ben Ziad (or Becquia) Mosque with the buildings of the traditional market. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1863–1896.

Taken by Neurdein Frères. Black and white positive, 19,5x25,5 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2397



16. Sidi Youssef Mosque. Tunis, Tunisia, ca. 1900.
Edited by Lévy et Neurdein Réunion. Museum of Ethnography,
Ny 4688



17. Reverse side of the postcard
Museum of Ethnography, Ny 4688

At the ruins of Carthage

For most orientalist photographers working in North Africa, documenting local tourist attractions and newly excavated archaeological sites formed a significant part of their professional activity. The ruins of Carthage belonged to this category. As a result of later deaccessioning, the museum's missionary photographic collection currently preserves five photographs of the site. In addition, eight object photographs entered the collection from the Musée Lavigerie de Saint-Louis, founded by Alfred Louis Delattre, where artefacts discovered during the excavations at Carthage were displayed.

The outdoor photographs of Carthage were produced partly for documentary purposes and partly to satisfy the growing demand for souvenirs. Three of the images bear the photographer's signature, while two remain anonymous. One of the signed photographs carries, alongside a serial number and a French title, the printed inscription "Phot. Garrigues – Tunis" (Figure 25). The other two display the handwritten signature "Soler Phot. Tunis" (Figures 18–19). The careers of the two studios show several similarities, yet they were each other's principal rivals in the region. Both were among the earliest registered photographic studios in Tunis. After relocating several times, they operated for decades in the same street, the Avenue de la France (Jacobson 2007: 235; Degroise, Garrigues, Soler). The Maison Garrigues was first located at number 9 (Jacobson 2007: 235) and

later at number 5 (Degroise, Garrigues), while the Soler studio opened at number 10 (Degroise, Soler). Each served in turn as the official photographer to the bey of Tunis: Garrigues held the position first, followed later by Soler (Méglin n.d.).

In case of Soler, there is no uncertainty concerning authorship. The signature "Soler Phot." on the positive prints refers to a single individual, Francisco Soler, born in Oran in 1861 (Méglin n.d.). He began operating a photographic studio in Oran together with his brother-in-law, Juan Pavia. After establishing his independence, he transferred his business to Tunis in 1890. In the early years of the twentieth century, his nephews, Desiré and Adrien Pavia joined him. Following Soler's retirement in 1908, they continued to run the studio under the name Soler – Pavia Frères (Méglin 2024).

The 1905 Hachette Almanach described Soler as a „defining figure of Tunisian colonisation“, whose photographs and postcards made the country widely known internationally (Almanach Hachette 1905: XLII). With his Tunisian photographs, he was awarded a silver medal in Paris in 1892 and a gold medal in Monaco the following year (Méglin 2024). Besides fulfilling state commissions, one of his most recognisable themes was the aboriginal types presented in studio portrait series, circulated widely as postcards too. Like his contemporaries, he also offered an extensive range of Tunisian views (Degroise, Soler). Among them is the photograph depicting the old harbour of Carthage, taken from a nearby elevated vantage point, most probably from the Byrsa Hill (Figure 18).



18. Old harbour of Carthage. Tunisia, 1890–1896.

Taken by Francisco Soler. Black and white positive, 19,5x24,5 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2909

The location used for this photograph was easily accessible and popular among photographers. Numerous engravings and photographs from the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century depict the harbour from almost identical viewpoints and with similar framing. By comparing these visual documents, the changes in the natural environment are visible, which may assist in dating the image. In Soler's case, however, a firmer chronological point of reference also exists. He relocated his studio from Algeria to Tunis in 1890 (Méglin 2024), and the missionary photographs reached Hungary in 1896, so the date of the image can be narrowed down to the first half of the 1890s.

Another photograph by Soler preserved in the Museum of Ethnography bears both a serial number and a French title on the positive print, indicating that it depicts a Punic tomb at Carthage. Based on H  l  ne B  nichou-Safar's 1982 publication, the photograph can be identified as showing Tomb No. 10, a built stone tomb on Byrsa Hill, in its condition at the time of excavation (B  nichou-Safar 1982: 146).

19. Punic tomb in Carthage. Tunisia, 1890–1896.

Taken by Francisco Soler. Black and white positive, 19,5x24,5 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 1416



146

LES TOMBES PUNIQUES DE CARTHAGE

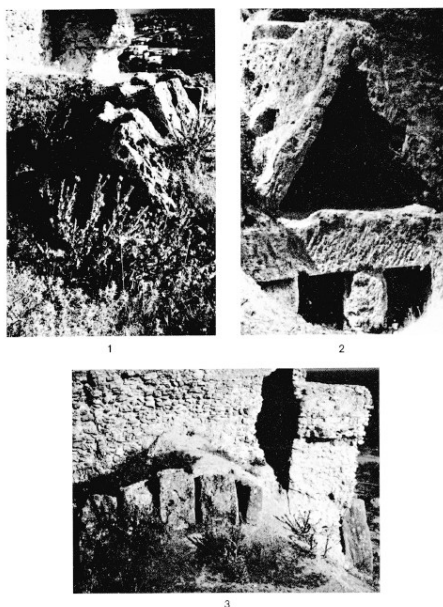
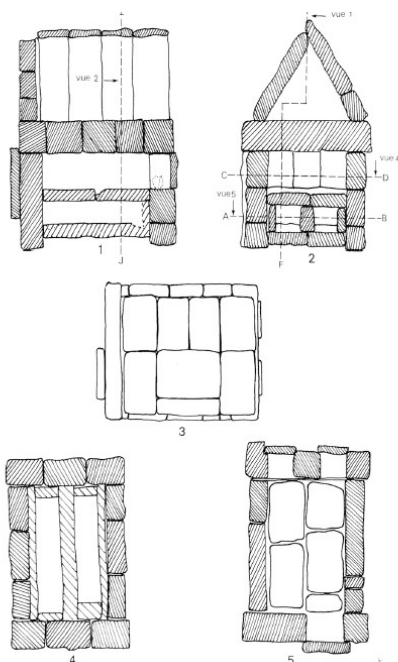


Fig. 83 – Tombeau n   10 de Byrsa (fouille n   14) : type X, 3, h. 1, stat actuel du tombeau vu de l'arri  re; 2, face post  rieure du tombeau lors de sa d  couverte; 3, tombeau vu de c  t  .

20. Stone tomb No. 10 from Excavation No. 14 at Byrsa, Carthage: the tomb's current condition as seen from the rear; the rear side of the tomb at the time of discovery; the tomb as seen from the side. (B  nichou-Safar 1982: 146).



21. Cross-sections of Stone Tomb No. 10 at the Byrsa Excavation Site No. 14. (B  nichou-Safar 1982: 147).

Although Bénichou-Safar does not mention the photographer's name, it is evident that she used Soler's photograph in her book. As the source of the image, she cites the archive of the White Fathers in Rome (Bénichou-Safar 1982: 427). This confirms the claim discussed later, namely that the positive print depicting the Punic tomb, together with the other Carthage photographs, reached Hungary from Tunisia through the mediation of the White Fathers. Soler's photograph also appeared as a postcard, most likely in the first decade of the twentieth century. However, instead of the photographer's name, the monogram "D. P." appears on it alongside the serial number, location and title. This indicates that the postcard was issued by his nephew Desiré Pavia, using a negative created by his uncle.

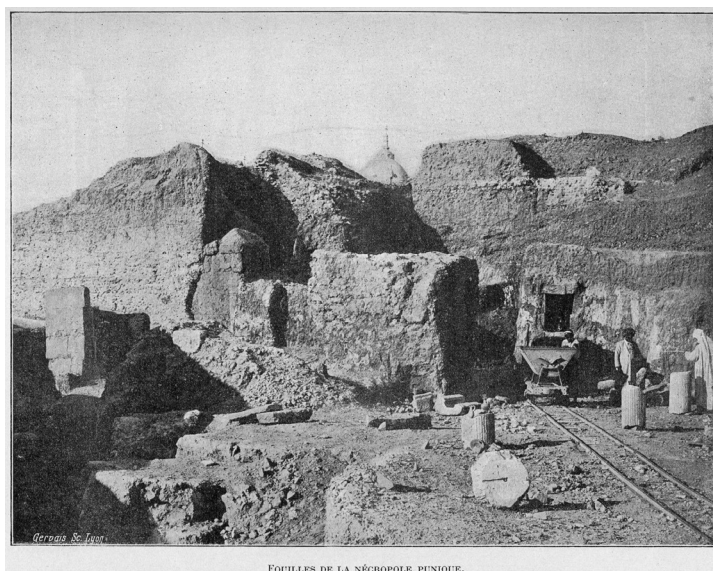
By government commission, Francisco Soler documented not only archaeological excavations but also mining activity in the vicinity of the capital (Mégnin n.d.). For this reason, his name was considered as a possible author of a photograph in the missionary corpus that was catalogued in the museum inventory under the title The Carthage Quarry. The image, however, was reproduced by Alfred Louis Delattre, the French archaeologist and missionary who directed the excavations at Carthage, in his 1896 publication *Carthage: nécropole punique de la Colline de Saint-Louis*. From the caption it becomes clear that the photograph does not depict an ordinary quarry in operation at all, but a moment during the excavation of Punic tombs (Figure 23) (Delattre 1896: 17). The reproduction appears in the section of the book in which the author discusses the excavations of 1890 in detail. It is therefore likely that the photograph also dates from that year. The positive print preserved in the Museum of Ethnography bears neither inscription nor signature. However, in the lower left corner of the version published by Delattre, the inscription "Gervais Sc. Lyon" is visible. Some researchers, based on similarity of names, have attributed photographs bearing this signature to Jules Gervais-Courtellemont, also known as Jules Claudin Gervais (e.g. Quejido 2002: 2016), a French photographer active in Algeria during this period, who is known to have produced several images in Tunisia, including views of Carthage. However, there is no evidence that he was connected to Delattre or that he photographed the excavations on site. Nor can he be associated with the city of Lyon. The same signature appears on several illustrations in Delattre's volume, not only on photographs but also on maps (Delattre 1896: 6) and drawings (Delattre 1896: 47). The abbreviation "Sc." in the signature is revealing. It is the abbreviation of the Latin word *sculpsit*, meaning "engraved it", which indicates that the image was adapted for printed reproduction. It is therefore clear that the Lyon-based Gervais merely prepared a version of the original photograph suitable for printing.

Delattre's book was published as a special issue of the Lyon-based journal *Les Missions Catholiques*. In the same year, the journal also printed extracts from the archaeologist-missionary's book, including the section containing the photograph under discussion. The image published in the journal does not bear a signature (Figure 24). However, the caption states that it was made after a photograph by Delattre. There is, nevertheless, no evidence as to whether Delattre himself took photographs during the excavations. Consequently, the question of authorship requires further research.

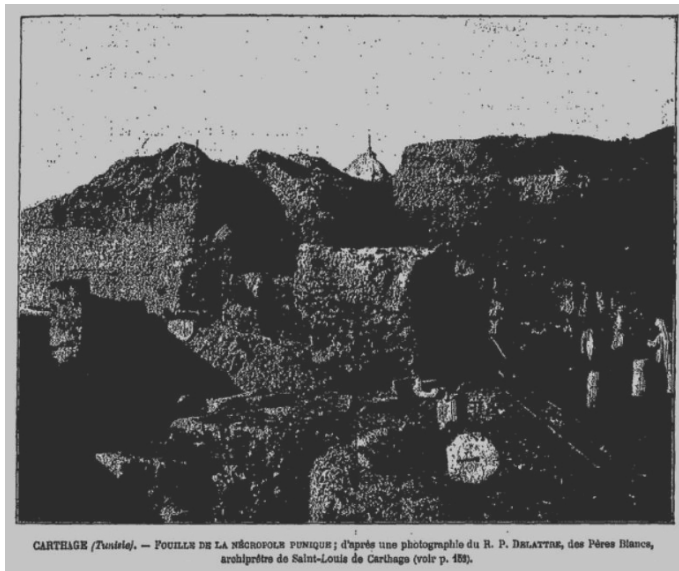


22. Excavation of a Pun cemetery. Carthage, Tunisia, 1890.

Photographer unknown. Black and white positive, 20x27 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2908



23. Reproduction of the above photograph in Delattre's book 'Carthage: nécropole punique de la Colline de Saint-Louis' (Delattre 1896. 17).



24. Reproduction of the above photograph in *Les Missions Catholique* (*Les Missions Catholique* 1896: 151).

The third signed Carthage photograph in the missionary photographic collection of the Museum of Ethnography comes from the previously mentioned Garrigues studio. However, the question of authorship here is not as straightforward as in the case of Francisco Soler. Although the Maison Garrigues was one of the most popular resident photographers in Tunis during his time, and the most surviving 19th-century Tunisian landscape photographs bear his signature, according to Ken Jacobson, a researcher of orientalist photography (Jacobson 2007: 235), still, there are uncertainties regarding his biographical details, including even his first name, as well as the identities of the persons associated with the studio. The Garrigues-signature appears in several different forms on his positives, his postcards and on the rectos and versos of his visit cards⁴, but the most that can be learnt from all is only 'J. Garrigues'. Some photo historians, gallery owners, and antiquarians interpret the signature as Joseph Garrigues (e.g. Heliouli 2015: 140–143), while others – including internationally recognised museums⁵ – refer to him as J. André Garrigues. Neither interpretation is supported by concrete evidence, and in the absence of reliable sources, these remain speculative or are best understood as virtual words-of-mouth rapidly circulating online. As for biographical facts, many assumptions exist in printed and online sources, yet most authors agree that although Garrigues ran one of the most productive studios in the region, verifiable data on his operations are scarce.⁶

The most up-to-date and comprehensive information is provided by Michel Mégnin in his continuously updated 2024 database, written as part of the preparations for the encyclopaedia of Tunisian photographers (Mégnin 2024). According to him, the founder of Maison Garrigues was the French photographer Henri Jules Jean Garrigues, born in 1835,

who opened a studio in Paris in 1860. From 1864, he was also active in Tunis but only established a permanent studio in the city around 1868–1869, which he operated alongside his Paris atelier. After his early death in Tunis in 1870, his wife Josephine Naudin, herself a photographer, continued the business in North Africa under her late husband's name. In 1873, the widow married Paul Antoine Delsol, who managed the studio between 1881 and 1884, still using its original name. Garrigues' daughter, Celine Henriette Maria, married Auguste Joseph Marichal (sometimes written as Marechal), who became the fourth principal of the studio and ran it the longest, until 1910 (Mégnin 2024), still continuing to use its original name.

The title "photographe de SA le bey de Tunis" (photographer to his highness the bey of Tunis) appears on the earliest Tunisian versions (Mégnin 2024), even before Garrigues had a studio in the African capital. It indicates that initially, the founder Henri Jules Jean Garrigues himself held this position, later succeeded by his heirs, who together, according to the research of Moncef Helioui, served two beys through the existence of the studio.⁷ However, the greatest professional recognitions in contemporary photography as seen in later versos, were earned later: in 1888 in Tunis and Toulouse, and in 1889 at the Paris World Fair, so these awards are associated already with Marichal's management of the studio.

Jean-Yves Tréhin, in his French lexicon of orientalist photographers, notes that Garrigues' photographs are very reminiscent in style and visual composition of those taken by Jean Geiser in Algiers at the same period (Tréhin 2012: 448). Moncef Helioui takes this idea further. In his comparative research highlights that the two photographers' activities are similar not only in style but also in subject choice and in the characteristics of the clientele visiting their studios. He proposed that gaps in Garrigues' biographical data may result from the fact that the two photographers, sharing even the same monogram, 'J.G.', in fact, are the same person. (Helioui 2015: 143). However, Michel Mégnin's latest research supersedes this hypothesis.

One photograph in the Museum of Ethnography's missionary collection bears the Garrigues studio signature. According to its French inscription, this photograph depicts the old cisterns of Carthage prior to their restoration. Although some archives identify the site as the La Malga cisterns – Carthage's largest and best-known cistern system – it actually depicts the Borj Jedid (or Bordj Djedid, Bordj el Djedia, Bordj el Djedid, Borj ej Jedid, Burj al Jadid) that supplied water to the Baths of Antonius. In order to use the cisterns in their original function and supply water to the area of Tunis, the beg commissioned French engineers to excavate and restore the cisterns. G. Gouvet worked on them from 1862 to 1864 and J. Vernaz between 1884 and 1887, who published a thorough documentation on the cistern system in the *Revue Archéologique* in 1887 (Vernaz 1887: 11–27). Given the period while the Garrigues photo studio was active in Tunis and the partially excavated state of the cisterns, it is likely that the photograph was taken during the 20 years between the two excavations, between 1864 and 1884. R. Cagnat and H. Saladin published Garrigues' photo as an engraving made by Maynard in their article "Voyage en Tunisie" in the August 19. 1893 issue of *Le Tour de Monde*, using the same title as Garrigues but without mentioning his name. Another engraving – held in the collection of the London-based Wellcome Collection – also presents the image without mentioning its author, but its caption lists the geographical features in the background. In this case the engraver (Hillborn?) enriched the right-hand foreground of Garrigues's photograph with staffage figures – a packed donkey next to a seated and a standing figure – in order to convey a sense of scale and spatiality and to enliven the composition. The Garrigues

photo studio later issued this photograph both as black-and-white and coloured post-cards, indicating its author (Bibliothèque Nationale de Tunisie E-CP-1329). Such early photos depicting the cisterns of Borj Jedid are rare. Apart from Garrigues, M. Catalanotti – another Tunis-based orientalist photographer, who was also among the first ones to open a photographic studio in the North African city – photographed the same site during this phase of the cisterns' excavation. His photograph, which has circulated with various authorship data,⁸ was taken from a slightly different angle but with nearly identical composition.



25. The cisterns of Carthage before their restoration. Tunisia, 1864–1884.

Taken by Garrigues. Black and white positive, 20x26 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2907

The fifth surviving outdoor photograph of Carthage in the museum's missionary collection depicts the amphitheatre (Figure 26). This paper positive also provides evidence regarding the sender and the nature of the package that arrived from Tunisia in response to Ribényi's letter. The photograph was numbered and annotated on the reverse side by the missionary who assembled the Tunisian selection. When it entered the museum, in accordance with contemporary practice, it was mounted on cardboard along with the other images, turning the backside text into unseeable. Nevertheless, using ink that penetrated the paper, portions of the information became visible on the emulsion side too. So, despite the mounting, it is possible to learn – when reading in reverse – that this positive received the number 1 in the series of sent images. Most of the text is also partially readable: "Emplacement de l'amphithéâtre de Carthage, (?) une croix en occupe le centre. La chapelle a été érigée dans une caverne, où on mettait les bêtes fauves" (The location of the Carthage amphitheatre, with a cross at the centre. The chapel was erected in a pit where wild animals were kept previously).



26. The Amphitheater of Carthage. Tunisia, 1887–1894.

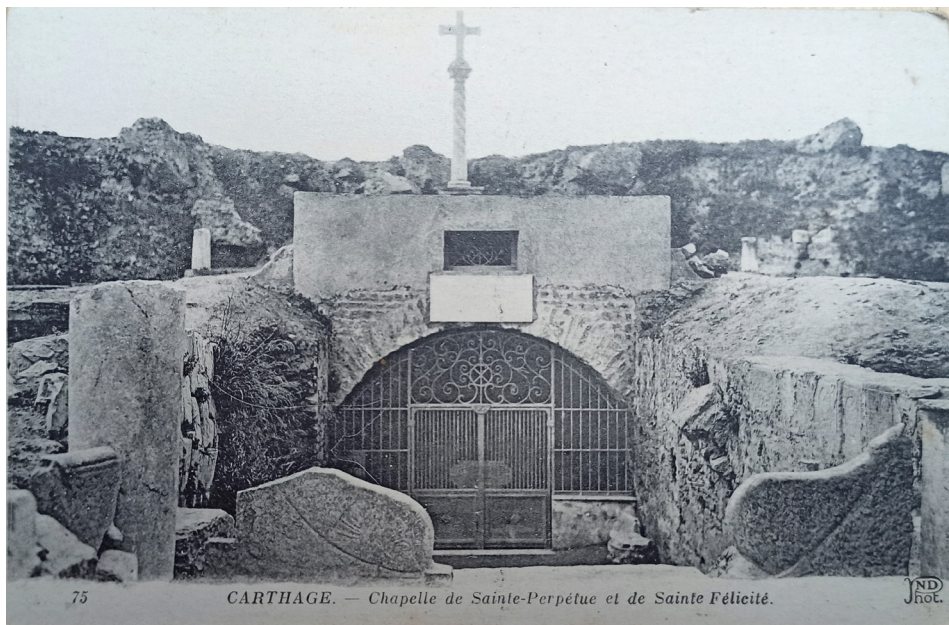
Photographer unknown. Black and white positive, 20x25 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 1419



27. Inverted inscription from the back of the photograph

F 1419 (figure 26.) Museum of Ethnography, F 1419

The photograph clearly shows the cross erected in 1887 (Delattre 1906: 18), mentioned by the annotator. The underground chapel, however, likely did not yet exist when the photograph was taken. There is no precise date for the creation of this photograph, but comparison with later images of the amphitheatre indicates that it was taken before the beginnings of Alfred Louis Delattre's excavations. The chapel was brand new when the missionaries sent their shipments to Hungary. The first mass was celebrated there by the Archbishop of Carthage, Barthélemy Clément Combes in 1895, on the feast of Saint Perpetua and Felicitas martyrs, who were executed – according to Delattre supposition in this same amphitheatre – in 203. The Murray guidebook, also published in 1895, provides detailed descriptions about this occasion, and also explains that in 1881 Delattre had uncovered the underground chamber used to house wild animals, which later became the prison of the martyrs before their execution, and that in 1894 a chapel was established there to honour the martyrs (Playfair 1895: 306–307) (Figure 28). Later researches suggested that the two women might have been executed in another amphitheatre. Based on all the data provided above, the time the photograph has been taken can be narrowed down between 1887 and 1894. The photographer likely stood just above the future chapel's edge when the photograph was taken.



28. 'Chapelle de Sainte-Perpétue et de Sainte-Félicité'.

Taken and edited by Neurdein Frères (own property)

There is one more Carthage photograph that reveals traces of its backside inscription, the one previously discussed depicting the old harbour of Carthage (Figure 18). The inscription is faint and unreadable, but it confirms that the photographs were part of the same shipment and originate from the same missionary centre. In the inventory and on the cardboard mounts, only a few words were recorded for each photograph, so information from the paper positives' backside – or in other cases from a separate paper or covering letter – was not preserved before mounting. It remains uncertain whether curators of the time deemed these details unimportant or whether the rapid preparation for the 1896 Ethnographic Mission exhibition required staff to mount the photographs before the curator could catalogue them, permanently concealing valuable information. Future research might develop technologies to recover the content of such paper-embedded information.

The information was inscribed in French on the back of the mounted photographs. This supports the hypothesis that the photographs originated from French monks, specifically the White Fathers (Missionnaires⁹, Pères Blancs, M. Afr.), established in 1868 for the mission of Africa. A significant portion of the missionary photographs of the Museum of Ethnography consists of shipments from the White Fathers from various regions of Africa, primarily the eastern part of the continent (modern-day Tanzania), and from North Africa, specifically Tunisia and Algeria. The previously mentioned archaeologist, who conducted excavations at Carthage, Alfred Louis Delattre was also a member of this religious order. In 1875, he founded and served as first director of the museum named after Charles Lavigerie, the founder of the White Fathers, the Musée Lavigerie de Saint-Louis de Carthage (Héron de Villefosse 1900: VII) to preserve and display the artefacts uncovered at the site. According to early 20th-century inventories of the Museum of Ethnography, one of the photographs sent from Carthage depicted Delattre's archaeological museum: *P. Delattre, view of the archaeologist's museum. Carthage, Tunisia*. It shows that the White Fathers sent an image in order to introduce their local museum, but it was later deaccessioned from the collection. However, eight photographs survived illustrating some of the display cases and individual objects of Delattre's museum, including Christian tombstones, early Christian lanterns, Carthaginian pottery, as well as necklaces and other jewellery found in tombs.



29. Oil lamps and pots. Tunisia, 1874–1896.

Photographer unknown. Black and white positive, 21x27 cm.

Museum of Ethnography, F 2911



30. Artefacts found in a tomb in Carthage. Tunisia, 1874–1896.
Photographer unknown. Black and white positive, 19,5x25,5 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2918



31. Votive stelae. Carthage, Tunisia, 1874–1896.
Photographer unknown. Black and white positive, 21x27 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2916

During his lifetime, Delattre published several works on his archaeological excavations and his museum. In 1880, he published *Lampes Chrétiennes de Carthage*, analysing Christian lanterns found in Carthage and the symbols on them (Delattre 1880). Two photographs in the Museum of Ethnography correspond to the illustrations of this catalogue (Figures 32–33).



32. Oil lamps decorated with Christian symbols. Carthage, Tunisia, 1874–1896.

Photographer unknown. Black and white positive, 21x27 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2912



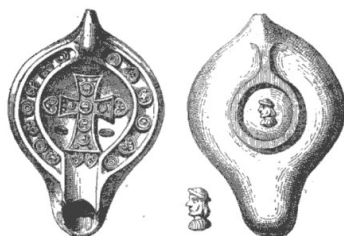
33. Oil lamps decorated with Christian symbols. Carthage, Tunisia, 1874–1896.

Photographer unknown. Black and white positive, 20x28 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2915

54 LAMPES CHRÉTIENNES

Quand saint Augustin décrit la croix de la Passion, c'est la forme latine qu'il lui donne.

Le culte des fidèles de Carthage pour la croix est bien exprimé sur deux lampes nouvellement retrouvées, où elle



se dresse sous une espèce de niche ou de portique, composée de deux colonnes avec chapiteau qui portent un cintre orné. Tout autour sont des oiseaux comme symboles.

Mais la plus belle croix que nous possédions sur nos lampes est, sans contredit, celle qui renferme plusieurs médaillons, dans lesquels est figuré l'Agneau. C'est ce genre de croix qui a précédé immédiatement l'apparition du crucifix, tel que nous le voyons aujourd'hui.

XXIII

DANIEL DANS LA FOSSE AUX LIONS

Ce sujet, que l'on rencontre fréquemment dans les antiques fresques des catacombes, est moulé sur une lampe,



trouvée en juin 1879, au pied de la colline de Byrsa. Daniel est debout, les bras étendus dans l'attitude de la prière. Deux lions sont à ses pieds. Près du prophète, on voit deux personnages. L'un représente Habacuc qui offre un pain rond, et l'autre ressemble à un ange, qui, comme pour bénir, tend la main vers Daniel.

XXIV

NOTRE-SEIGNEUR JÉSUS-CHRIST

Mais la lampe la mieux conservée et la plus intéressante que nous ayons recueillie est celle dont nous allons parler.



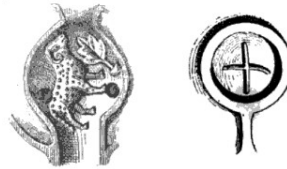
Le sujet qu'elle représente n'est plus un symbole, ce n'est plus le nom du Christ caché sous les emblèmes des différents monogrammes, ni même la croix pure et simple, soit latine, soit grecque, mais Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ lui-même debout, la tête nimbée, vêtu de la tunique,

VII.

L'AGNEAU ET LA FEUILLE DE VIGNE

Une lampe d'argile trouvée à Oudena (l'ancienne Uthina) porte cet emblème au milieu de son disque. Elle est aujourd'hui dans notre collection.

Nous avons déjà étudié le poisson comme figure eucharistique. « Ce second symbole, dit l'abbé de Solesmes, a la



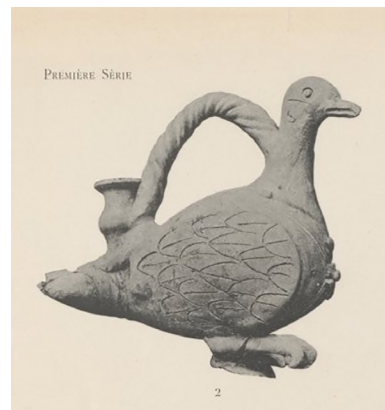
même signification. » Il est aisé de reconnaître en effet que la feuille de vigne placée à côté de l'agneau a ici un sens tout-à-fait dogmatique. C'est l'explication de ces paroles de Notre-Seigneur : « Ma chair est véritablement une nourriture et mon sang est véritablement un breuvage. » L'Agneau divin s'immole chaque jour sur les autels et sa chair devient l'aliment des fidèles ; le vin, signifié par la feuille

34–37. A few examples from Delattre's book, where the lanterns' motif pictured in the drawing can be found on one of the photographs.

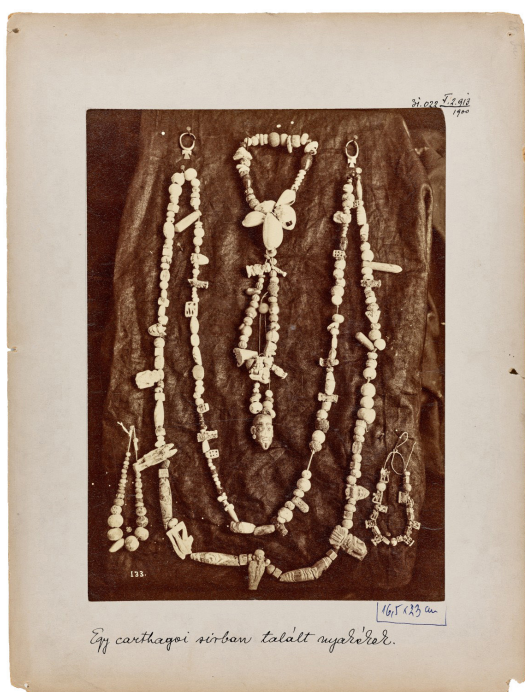
The 1900 catalogue of the Carthage museum (Berger 1900) provides detailed descriptions of individual objects and object groups that are illustrated through photographic reproductions in the appendix. This use of photography clearly demonstrates how objects, originally photographed in their display cases with drapery, supports, and backgrounds, as seen in the photographs now in the Museum of Ethnography, are removed from their context. The focus is solely on the object, which becomes 'floating' and, simultaneously, a generalized museum artefact. The following three photographic pairs illustrate how museum catalogue pages remove objects from their surroundings (Figures 38–43).



38. A pigeon-shaped vessel found in a Punic necropolis on Byrsa Hill. Carthage, Tunisia, 1874–1896. Photographer unknown. Black and white positive, 20x26 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2917

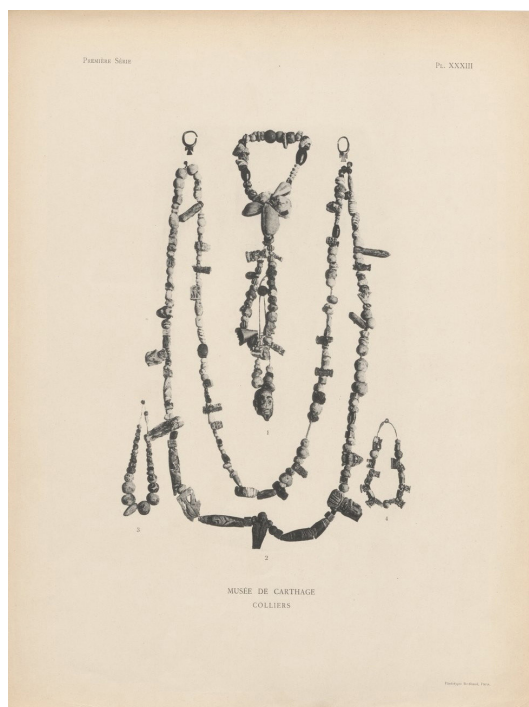


39. Musée Lavigerie De Saint-Louis De Carthage, Collection Des Pères-Blancs. 1900. PL XX.2



40. Necklaces made of glass and ceramic beads, amulets, and shells found in a Punic tomb. Carthage, Tunisia, 1874–1896.

Photographer unknown. Black and white positive, 16x23 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2913



41. Musée Lavigerie De Saint-Louis De Carthage, Collection Des Pères-Blancs. 1900. PL XXXIII



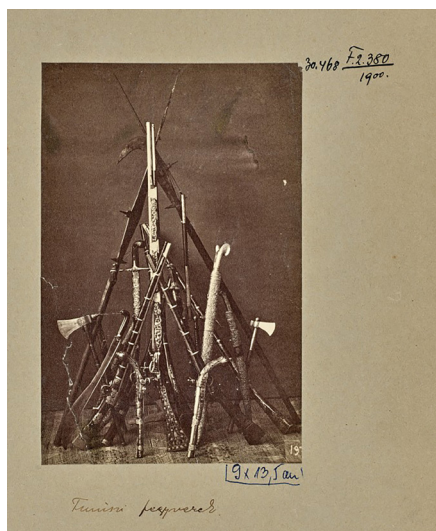
42. Votive stelae dedicated to the main deities of the Puns, Tanit-Pené-Baal and Baal-Hamon. Carthage, Tunisia, 1874–1896.

Photographer unknown. Black and white positive, 22x27 cm. Museum of Ethnography, F 2914



43. Musée Lavigerie De Saint-Louis De Carthage, Collection Des Pères-Blancs. 1900. PL II.5–8

One of the photographs sent from Tunis could, in terms of composition, setting, and mood, belong to the Carthage museum series (Figure 44). Its central focus, however, is on contemporary craftsmen, weaponsmiths and goldsmiths at work. Beyond Delattre's archaeological museum in Carthage, the White Fathers also operated a missionary museum in Algiers, which, unlike the Tunisian one, had ethnographic rather than archaeological significance. It presented the cultures, attire, everyday and ceremonial practices of indigenous peoples living in different parts of Africa. Twenty-nine photographs from members of the order active in Algiers were accessioned into the Photography Collection of the Museum of Ethnography Budapest. Of these, only one has been deaccessioned in recent decades; it depicted the Algerian headquarters of the White Fathers, the *Maison Carrée d'Afrique* in Algiers. Among the surviving photographs, three provide a glimpse into the daily life of the mission. Twenty-five positive prints – similarly to the object photographs of the Musée Lavigerie in Carthage – present exhibition material, individual artefacts, and groups of objects from the museum of the Algerine mission. This visual ethnographic collection includes weapons of African indigenous peoples (spears, knives, and arrowheads), musical instruments – including several drums of varying shapes and sizes – along with jewellery, scoops, wooden spoons, pipes, and a shield. The photographs were most likely taken within the museum interior. A white drapery used as a background – probably part of the display setting – creates a sense of weightlessness and lightness, lending an airy quality both to the exhibited objects and to the photographs themselves, even in the presence of strong contrasts. No data is currently available on a comparable museum in Tunis which collection might be depicted in the photograph in question. However, the photographic parallel with objects sent from the museum of the White Fathers in Algiers suggests that the numbered positive of weapons arranged in a pyramid may have been created as part of an ethnographic display established by the missionaries in Tunisia.



44. Weapons. Tunis, Tunisia, before 1896.

Photographer unknown. Black and white positive, 9x13,5 cm.
Museum of Ethnography, F 2380

Although the Carthage material in the missionary photographic corpus is small in number, its examination and interpretation provide substantial new photo-historical information and the synthesis of earlier and recent data, while also opening possibilities for further research.

Summary

The photographic material sent by the White Fathers, heavily reduced due to deaccessioning, does not offer a comprehensive view of the country or its inhabitants where the missionaries operated. Instead, with a few exceptions, it provides two significant ‘deep dives’ into late-19th-century daily life in Tunisia and the region’s ancient treasures. The corpus exemplifies how photographs, once better or less documented, became stripped of context through musealisation.

During the research process, I started to recontextualise individual photographs, placing them within the photographic period in which they were created. This allows the visual symbols and newly emerging layers of meaning in the images to be interpreted.

The study also revealed that contemporary photographic research is being significantly transformed by the expanding possibilities of the digital realm. The number of digitally accessible materials from various archives, libraries, photo collections, and other visual archives is rapidly increasing, and advances in search and image recognition technologies offer photo-historians new opportunities. This makes the study of 19th- and 20th-century photography a dynamically evolving field, necessitating the regular review of even recent research findings. Consequently, further study of the Tunisian photographs in the missionary photographic corpus of the Museum of Ethnography, including multi-faceted interpretations and exploration of additional layers of meaning, remains essential.

Notes

- 1 In 1622, Pope Gregory XV established the Vatican-based Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith), between 1988 and 2022 named as Congregatio pro Gentium Evangelizatione (Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples) (Erdő 2004: 738). Since 2022, the global coordination of missionary activity has been overseen by the Dicastery for Evangelization. <https://www.vatican.va/content/romancuria/en/dicasteri/dicastero-evangelizzazione.index.html>
- 2 In this case, the number 1870 might at first appear to indicate a date. However, when compared with the inscriptions found on the other glass negatives in the same series, it becomes clear that it does not refer to a year but rather to the serial number of the photograph.
- 3 E.g. Musée d’art et d’histoire du Judaïsme https://www.mahj.org/en/collections-online/search?collection_fulltext=Clapier, Musée des Confluences https://portail.museedesconfluences.fr/en/collections/search?recherche_li-bre=Clapier (last downloaded 12. 02. 2026.)
- 4 J. Garrigues, Phot. Tunis / J. Garrigues Tunis / Ph Garrigues Tunis / Phot. Garrigues. Tunis / on recto: Photographie Garrigues, Tunis / on verso: J. Garrigues. Photographie. Tunis / on postcards: Photo Garrigues, Tunis
- 5 e.g. Victoria & Albert Museum, Photo Collection https://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/?page=1&page_size=15&q=Garrigues (Last download 29. 01. 2026.) or The Israel Museum, Jerusalem <https://museum.imj.org.il/imagine/collections/AZSearch.asp?let=G&artist=Garrigues,%20J.%20Andre,%20Tunisia> (last downloaded: 29. 01. 2026.)
- 6 The Aix-en-Provence-based Galerie Vincent Bercker provides specific birth and death dates – 1851–1901 – for Garrigues; however, these are given without any source citation <https://www.proantic.com/display.php?id=472942#> (last downloaded: 08. 05. 2023). Until the publication of Mégnin’s most recent publication in 2024, neither printed nor online scholarly literature recorded either a birth or a death date for Garrigues. In his synthetic study, Ken Jacobson merely defines the period of activity of the Maison Garrigues as extending from the 1870s until 1911 (Jacobson 2007: 235) The Tunisian art blogger ARTmedina-tounes describes Garrigues as having been born in Tunis <https://art-tounes.blogspot.com/2017/04/patrimoine-de-tunisie-de-quelques-legs.html> (last downloaded: 09. 05. 2023.) This information, however, does not appear in other sources, and was later refuted by Mégnin.
- 7 III. Muhammad (Sadok) bey and III. Ali bey (Helioui 2015: 140–143).

- 8 Two versions of the same image – one bearing the signature “Catalanotti Tunis”, the other inscribed “Collection AM Tunis” – were included in a photographic album belonging to the Swiss–Swedish von Hallwyl family. The album contains 146 photographs depicting scenes from Algeria and Tunisia, which the family purchased and arranged into an album during their North African journey in 1889. Hallwylska Museet, DIG 21472, DIG 8259.
- 9 <https://www.peresblancs.org/en/about-us/origins-of-our-society/> (last downloaded: 10. 05. 2023.)

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Műhelyek és ásatások Tunéziai fényképek a Néprajzi Múzeum missziós fotókorpuszában

GEBAUER HANGA

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Rezümé | 1896-ban a kispesti plébános felkérésére több ezer tárgy és közel ezer fényképnagyítás érkezett Magyarországra a világ különböző pontjain működő misszionáriusoktól egy nagyszabású kiállításához, amelynek bevétele a helyi templom építésének költségeihez járult hozzá. Így kerültek be a Néprajzi Múzeum legkorábbi tunéziai felvételei is, amelyek néhány fényképtől eltekintve két nagy témára és helyszínre összpontosítanak, Tuniszban elsősorban kézművesek utcára nyíló üzleteibe, Karthágóban az ásatások eredményeibe engednek bepillantást. A korai leltárkönyvek néhány szavas meghatározásán kívül nem állt rendelkezésre több adat a nagyrészt hivatásos fényképészek által készített felvételekről. A tanulmányban megvizsgálom mind a 29 fotó készítésének hátterét, szerzőségi adatait, nemzetközi fotótörténeti és szűkebb, gyűjteményi kontextusát.

Kulcsszavak | fotó, misszió, Tunézia, Karthágó, kézműves, ásatás, múzeum

Through the eye of the bead

Fieldwork and collecting in Ghana

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Abstract | The photo essay presents selected aspects of a two-month field research and object collection on Ghanaian bead culture, carried out in the spring of 2023 with the assistance of Kati Torda, a Ghana-based bead expert of Hungarian origin. For the Museum of Ethnography, I documented – through photographs and videos – seven bead-making techniques using various materials: glass powder, crushed glass, bauxite, snail shell, brass/bronze, plastic, and horn, I also collected objects ranging from raw materials to finished products, including tools. The research further explored the cultural significance of beads: their role in rites of passage (birth, naming ceremonies, initiation of adolescent girls, marriage, and death/funerals), their use in expressing social status and special functions, and personal attitudes towards wearing them.

Keywords | Africa, Ghana, bead, fieldwork

In the spring of 2023, I had the opportunity to conduct two months of fieldwork in Ghana, which was preceded by a decade of planning and several attempts to secure research funding. The purpose of the fieldwork was to compile a bead collection for the Museum of Ethnography with the aim of presenting a comprehensive overview of Ghanaian bead culture. This was made possible by Kati Torda, who has been living in the country for 45 years through marriage and with whom I have had a personal relationship spanning two decades in connection with the Africa collection. Thanks to her work as a jewellery designer, maker, and dealer, she has not only gained a deep and comprehensive understanding of bead culture, but has also become an active participant and promoter of it through exhibitions, lectures, publications, and workshops. I was not the first person she introduced to this milieu, as Kati is a key figure for anyone interested in the subject. Her jewellery store in Accra is one of the hubs of her extensive network of contacts in Ghana, West Africa, and beyond.

During my field research in the capital, Accra, and several rural locations – Koforidua, Kumasi, Tamale – I documented the techniques used to make beads of various materials and types, covering the different stages of production from raw materials to the final product, including tools and supplies. My research and collecting work have covered certain particularly important European and Ghanaian glass bead types (Murano chevron, locally made *bodom*, *akoso*, etc.) their ancient and modern types as well as their development, use and significance. In addition to old, typical types of beads, those made from recycled modern materials (plastic objects) were also the subject of research and col-

lection. I documented a total of seven bead-making techniques: beads made from glass powder and glass granules, bauxite, giant African snails, horn, recycled plastic, and brass beads produced using the lost-wax casting method. In the northern part of the country, traditional jewellery is made by blacksmiths, and I was able to gain insight into their craft. I also obtained other types of imported beads used in Ghana from local sources, the bead market, and directly from traveling merchants.

Another aspect of my research and collection was to examine and document the symbolic and practical role of beads in the life cycle, in various rites of passage, and in the expression of social status. I sought to process the themes of birth, naming-ceremony, the initiation of adolescent girls into womanhood, marriage, and death and burial through participant observation and interviews. I planned my fieldwork for the spring because this is the period of initiation for girls among the Krobo, the country's most famous bead makers and users. I participated in the initiation of girls in their two sub-groups, the Manya and Yilo Krobo, which allowed me to make comparisons. They complemented each other as I was able to observe community events taking place at the site of the rituals in one group, while in the other, I could observe celebrations within the extended family. Where possible, I also tried to collect data on individual relationships with beads, stories, and intergenerational transmission.

In addition to careful planning, a number of coincidences during my fieldwork helped me in collecting items together with data on the use of beads and indeed other elements of culture, visually documenting these throughout. The collection of more than 900 pieces arrived in Budapest in a shipment weighing 200 kg.

Gyöngyszemen keresztül Terepkutatás és tárggyűjtés Ghánában

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Rezümé | A fotóesszé a ghánai gyöngykultúráról végzett kéthónapos terepkutatás és tárggyűjtés egyes részleteit villantja fel, amelyet az ott élő Torda Kati gyöngyszakértő segítségével végeztem 2023 tavaszán. Különböző anyagok (üvegpör, üvegszemcse, bauxit, csigahéj, sárgaréz/bronz, műanyag, szaru) felhasználásával készülő hét gyöngykészítési technikát dokumentáltam fotón és videón a Néprajzi Múzeum számára, valamint gyűjtöttem tárgyakat az alapanyagoktól a szerszámokon át a végtermékekig. A gyöngyöknek a kultúrában betöltött szerepe, az átmeneti rítusokban (születés, a csecsemő névadása, a serdülő lányok nővé avatása, az esküvő és a halál, temetés) és társadalmi státusok, illetve speciális funkciók kifejezését célzó használata, valamint a gyöngyviselethez való egyéni viszonyulások szintén a kutatás tárgyát képezték.

Kulcsszavak | Afrika, Ghána, gyöngy, terepmunka

Photos by Edina Földessy



Kati Torda at the entrance of her bead shop with her bead arrangement, *Beads of a Lifetime*. Accra, 5 April 2023

2–8. The process of recycled glass powder beadmaking in the workshop of Johanes Narh. Koforidua-Aboabo, 11 April 2023



2–3. Open-air beadmaking workshop of Johanes Narh, outside and inside



4. Inserting cassava leaf stalks into the holes of the mould to form the bead holes after firing



5. Pouring painted powdered glass into the mould with tin funnels, also creating motifs with different colours



6. Turning each bead after the first firing and placing it in the kiln for a second, shorter firing to achieve a domed surface on each side



7. Painting beads with very fine powdered glass mixed with ceramic pigment and water



8. Polishing beads with fine sand and water on a grinding stone

9–14. Translucent and opaque glass beadmaking in the workshop of Okrah Tetteh. Koforidua, 15 April 2023



9. Set of raw materials and tools for making translucent beads from fragments of broken glass, retaining the original colours of bottles or industrial glass products



10. Breaking bottle glass with a stone or hammer



11. By placing crushed glass of different colours in the mold, multicoloured translucent beads can be created



12. Imported factory-made glass seed beads are also used to mix colours



13. Just after firing, each bead is pierced with a homemade pricker and shaped by turning it in the hole of the mold. This operation requires great skill and practice.



14. Women can have different roles in the beadmaking process, such as filling molds with powdered or crushed glass, creating motifs by pouring glass powder of different colours into the mold or by painting, and stringing beads for sale.



15. At the Thursday bead market in Koforidua, locally made glass beads are usually sold by women, while beads from around the world are traded by merchants. Koforidua, 13 April 2023



16. Abompeh is the only settlement in Ghana where bauxite beads are made, thanks to a nearby bauxite mine. Simple tools are used, and holes are drilled with a bow drill. Because of their red colour, bauxite beads are mainly worn at funerals and during mourning. Abompeh, 14 April 2023

17–18. Koforidua Zongo, 12 April 2023



17. In Ghana, beads are no longer made from the shells of the giant Ghana snail. Kati Torda knew the last woman who practiced this technique and asked her daughter, Lebene, to revive it for documentation. The multi-phase process – crushing the shells and shaping them into discs with a bush knife, roasting in a pot, boiling in soapy water, making a pricker, drilling with a bow drill, stringing, and polishing on a stone – took an entire day, with some technical steps needing reinvention. The finished shell discs were delivered the next day, as Lebene was dissatisfied with their polish. She had forged the bow drill bit herself in a simple portable oven.



18. Although Lebene had difficulty operating the bow drill with a string, she managed to use it thanks to the sticking friction of the shell powder.



19. Twenty years ago, Mrs. Amina discovered – through a kitchen accident she saw as divine guidance – how to make beads from melted plastic. In a space of less than two square meters, using simple kitchen utensils, she produces thousands of beads in various colours and shapes. Kumasi, 20 May 2023



20. The Kumasi region is famous for its brass and bronze production. Using the lost-wax casting process, artisans create beads in various shapes and with different motifs from beeswax wire. Sokoban Krofrom, Kumasi, 1 May 2023



21. At the start of the Dipo initiation ceremony, symbolizing a girl's coming of age, Krobo girls replace their everyday waist beads with ritual ones. Yellow stands for wealth, maturity, prosperity, and long life. Somanya, 21 April 2023



22. During the initiation, girls are adorned with large amounts of beads, especially on their breasts and waists. These are passed down through many generations and symbolize a family's wealth and status. Beads can also be purchased for the occasion or hired from women who rent out collections for this purpose. Somanya, 23 April 2023



23. Initiated girls from an extended family are grouped together to be photographed by a professional photographer. In the past, scarifications were made on the body to prove that the stages of initiation had been completed. Today, photographs serve the same purpose. Nuaso, 15 May 2023



24. Beads are an obligatory part of the gifts from the husband's family to the bride, publicly presented during the ceremony. At one wedding, where the absent groom was represented by his brother, the bride received a bowl of glass beads. The two families sat facing each other, and after the bride-asking rites, she moved to sit with her new family. Odumase, 28 May 2023



25. For funerals, people wear black and red to express anger at a sudden death, and black and white if the deceased was over 70 and had lived a full life. Beads are worn in accordance with this colour code. On the road between Nkwanta and Wli in Volta, 25 May 2023



26. Traditional healers and priests have their own special beads, some inspired by their guiding spirits. We met Togbe Hogbe by chance in a village, and he was willing to share his life story with us. Taviefe Avenya, 10 April 2023

Jens-Ivar Nergård: The Sámi narrative tradition. Cosmopolitans on the Arctic tundra. New York: Routledge, 2023. 114 p.

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Jens-Ivar Nergård is Professor Emeritus at the Arctic University of Norway (UiT). His work is characterised by a kind of interweaving of various cultural disciplines. In his multidisciplinary approach, anthropology, psychology, pedagogy, and philosophy are given special emphasis. His scientific interest lies primarily in globalisation and decolonisation processes, and how they influence the lives of contemporary indigenous, postcolonial communities. Beyond his thematic focus, Nergård's approach also shows a strong correlation with authors (such as James Clifford) who have made a great contribution to the period in anthropology marked by self-criticism and "decolonisation" from the 1980s onwards. The volume is based on the author's lecture series which he gave at the C. G. Jung Institute, Zurich in the early 1990s. The fieldwork has not stopped since then, and continues to this day. However, the psychological perspective pervades both his later writings and the present volume. This is not only a project of astonishing diachronic depth, but also of great significance in terms of its geographical scope. The collection work, carried out during a long-term field presence, has covered several areas inhabited by the Sámi people, encompassing not only large northern parts of Norway and Sweden but also Finland and North-West Russia. Thematically, the volume covers history, religion, and all significant areas of Sámi culture.

In his monograph on the Sámi narrative tradition, the author provides an overview of the hands-on experiences of fieldwork carried out intermittently over a period of 40 years. As the title suggests, the author's focus is always on the text, the web of traditional and everyday stories, and communication. He interprets both the text and the message holistically, including not only verbal acts, but also sounds, movements, phenomena, and the static and changing signals of the immediate and wider environment surrounding the Sámi people. Communication is not limited to human communities either; the constituents of the living environment and the nature beyond it, such as plants, animals, rocks and rivers, as well as the spirit world, appear as participants in communication. As Jens-Ivar Nergård puts it, the Sámi narrative tradition is a universe of knowledge and communication, with retold, rethought and reinterpreted stories that address emotional, spiritual and

practical issues (...).

Although at first glance the volume appears to be based on a chaptered linear thematic structure, the reader is actually holding quite a complex hybrid genre work in their hands. The author simultaneously follows the logical patterns, as well as the reasoning and referencing rules of scientific dissemination, and employs a more subjective, often explicitly novelistic style. The reader is sometimes confronted with unexpected timeline shifts, objective observation suddenly shifts focus and the tones of internal experience change, while general summaries, scientific arguments and bibliographic references are interwoven with individual case descriptions and profound utterances from people living in the deeply researched milieu. However, these are organically connected, without any dissonance, and the usual sharper caesuras are not perceptible in the articulation of what the author and the Sámi characters say. The narratives merge together imperceptibly, along the writer's internal logic. This is a kind of holistic writing style that not only presents and explains, but also attempts to apply the logic and category system inherent in the indigenous cultures' vision of the world, where pieces of reality are separated differently than in modern "developed" societies. He connects worlds, making them understandable to each other, and not only contrasts different worldviews, but also translates one into the "language" of the other, for example by finding distant analogies. This practice naturally includes the habitus of a researcher who is at home in both Sámi and Norwegian/Scandinavian culture, has good observational skills, and contemplates with empathy and insight.

The author's text – although it begins with a presentation of the history of the Sámi, and is also a retelling of knowledge elements taken from Sámi literature – continuously reflects on the present, connecting past events with contemporary ones and fresh experiences, while the narrative timelines continuously reflect on each other. The book is full of causal narratives, emotional bridging motifs and sudden flashbacks, as if frames from a movie were rolling before our eyes.

Overall, the work is a thorough ethnographic description with anthropological depth. It covers all important areas of life, as the individual chapter titles reveal.¹ Anthropological depth stems not only from the long multi-sited stationary fieldwork (which, to be more precise, is extremely long in the history of the discipline) spanning nearly half a century, but also from deep understanding, or at least the need for it, which is logically based and yet subjective, as we can also experience in the case of Renato Rosaldo. Nergård is also characterised by a postmodern writing style, in which he is not running after rainbows when striving for completeness with his thematic diversity, holistic approach, and broad temporal frameworks. For him, reflexivity goes far beyond an open and honest approach to reporting, and it noticeably expresses personal involvement. This can also be interpreted as a kind of activism – not only because of the colonial past – and can also be closely related to the global trends that permeate our present era. The appreciation of the indigenous mentality, which does not intend to own and exploit natural resources, but rather to exist in harmony and peace with nature, is also brought into focus, and is also articulated as a counterculture against the harmful attitude of modern societies that perpetuate overconsumption.

The greatest merit of Nergård's book lies in the sensitive and unique case descriptions that enrich the body of knowledge we have had from the literature published so far on Sámi society and culture. He can highlight new focal points for every key topic, put familiar stories in a different light, and competently connect the past with the present. Many new small details appear in the description of previously known topics, for example, in relation to the boarding schools so typical of the period of strong assimilation (from the

turn of the 19th and 20th centuries to the middle of the 20th century). These pieces of information generally reveal that the use of the native language was prohibited, the Sámi were not allowed to wear their own national costumes, and various elements of Sámi culture in general were banned, and that children were separated from their families for long periods of time, who migrated with the reindeer herds and stayed in different lodging areas at different times of the year. An important new input for the writer of these lines was the mention of cradles, which were used in Sámi settlements when children were given time off from school during periods when their parents were away with the herd. To be precise, these were cradle-like beds. Since school-age children typically no longer sleep in cradles, these beds are a good illustration of the trauma that the Sámi children experienced, which caused them serious psychological and psychosomatic symptoms, such as difficulty sleeping. Rocking in the cradle was intended to cure these psychological problems. The cradle therefore becomes a metaphor for the spiritual wounds resulting from the soulless assimilation of minors. The work offers numerous similar examples, which shed new light on known facts through the study of Sámi narratives collected from the 1970s to the present day. In general, the relevant literature has not yet completed the processing of the serious psychological effects on the Sámi, although Johan Turi, in his work published in 1910², already mentions the serious physiological and psychological effects of environmental change and existence in closed spaces on both Sámi children and adults.

The narratives that appear in the title are given a rich reading in the chapters of the volume. The focus is on storytelling, but the Sámi narratives, which essentially summarise knowledge and experience, do not only represent verbal communication: the author also includes singing called *yoik* (a traditional Sámi song form which hardly uses meaningful text), and handicraft, i.e. *duodji*. All of these not only play a role in passing down knowledge and traditions across generations, but also undergo continuous transformation, adapting to changes in Sámi society and lifestyle. The Sámi are able to find in their ancient stories everything that can be used as a sure compass in our modern world. These elements of knowledge include both those that are widespread at a broad community level and those that are only inherited within internal, family circles. Nergård considers this approach to be the most important basis of the Sámi survival strategy. Traditional Sámi stories gain meaning through practice, and Nergård's research narrative is structured along a similar logic. He not only uses, but also applies the knowledge accumulated in the literature, authentically updating and projecting it onto contemporary Sámi society.

Notes

- 1 Preface. 1 Nature, Animals and People. 2 The Narrative Tradition. 3 The Messenger. 4 Leaving a Child Behind. 5 The Voice of Common Properties. 6 The Narratives about the Noaidi. 7 The Spiritual Aftermath. 8 The Spirituality transferred to Læstadianism. 9 Narratives on Local Justice. 10 The Gaze of Future in the Past
- 2 Johan Turi: *Muitalus sámiiid birra*. [The Life of the Sámi.] In Hungarian: A lappok élete. Budapest: Gondolat, 1983.

Larson, Frances: Undreamed shores. The hidden heroines of British anthropology. London: Granta, 2021. 352 p.

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When asked to name women in cultural anthropology, most university students might recall figures such as Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, or perhaps Zora Neale Hurston. This is hardly surprising, given that academic curricula across the sciences still tend to overlook women's contributions. Cultural anthropology, a relatively young discipline emerging in the late 19th century, incorporated women from its earliest years. Yet, as in most scientific fields, women's work often remained invisible, overshadowed by the discipline's masculine norms. In humanities and social sciences, the picture has been slightly different. Considered hierarchically less prestigious than the natural sciences, these fields historically offered women somewhat easier access. Nevertheless, the price to be paid for a science career was no less. As Frances Larson's *Undreamed Shores* reveals, early women anthropologists in Britain faced obstacles: lack of recognition, systemic sexism, harassment, mental and physical illness, and even suicide.

This compelling group biography offers insights into the life and work of five pioneering female anthropologists at Oxford University: Katherine Routledge, Maria Czaplicka, Winifred Blackman, Beatrice Blackwood, and Barbara Freire-Marreco. Among the first women to study anthropology at Oxford, they conducted groundbreaking fieldwork in remote regions ranging from Siberia and Easter Island to New Guinea, Egypt, and the American Southwest. In doing so, they challenged prevailing gender norms and pushed the boundaries of their discipline.

Larson, herself an anthropologist educated at Durham and Oxford, first encountered Winifred Blackman's work while researching the Wellcome Collection – an archive and museum devoted to the 19th century medical collections of Henry Wellcome. Her research on the history of the Pitt Rivers Museum and Blackman's contributions to anthropology and Egyptology in the early 20th century encouraged Larson to investigate further, uncovering the stories of her female peers. All five women had, at some point in their careers, studied or worked at the Pitt Rivers Museum – a shared institutional thread of early British anthropologists. In this way, the book recalls Charles King's *Gods of the Upper Air* (2019), which traces the birth of American anthropology through Franz Boas and his circle of women anthropologists at Columbia University. Yet while King examines the gendered struggles of well-known figures such as Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, Larson shifts the lens to British anthropology at the turn of the century, offering fresh insight into a parallel story of intellectual courage and marginalisation.

The book consists of 19 chronologically arranged chapters beginning with Katherine and William Scoresby Routledge's first expedition in 1906 and concluding with the final years of Beatrice Blackwood in the 1970s. Rather than presenting separate biographies, Larson traced the broader evolution of female fieldworkers, situating their experiences within anthropology's shift from museum-based scholarship to field-oriented research. Central to her narrative is the recognition that women's contributions have been largely omitted from the discipline's mainstream history. However hard it was to set one's foot in academia as a woman, anthropology offered a loophole. At the time, the discipline lacked the prestige of the natural sciences, and women often found opportunities in areas considered marginal within the field, positions that nonetheless allowed for a form of professional self-assertion.

The story unfolds with the coming of age of Katherine Routledge (née Pease, 1866–1935), a middle-class British girl who has never fitted in the well-mannered salons of Darlington. Upon arriving to Somerville College, Oxford, she encountered anthropology, a relatively new academic field at the turn of the century. After her marriage to William Scoresby Routledge, the couple embarked on an expedition to British East Africa to study the Kikuyu people, resulting in their co-authored *With a Prehistoric People: The Akikuyu of British East Africa* (1910). Their second, far more ambitious expedition took them to Easter Island, a voyage that alone required more than a year's travel by sea. Katherine's research was published in *The Mystery of Easter Island* (1919), and her collected artifacts were later donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum. Another pioneer female anthropologist was Winifred Blackman (1872–1950), who studied at the Pitt Rivers Museum in the 1910s and earned her diploma at Oxford. She went on to specialise in Egyptology, traveling to Upper Egypt to study contemporary culture. In the 1920s and 1930s, she collected over 4,000 artifacts for Henry Wellcome's medical and anthropological collection. Her groundbreaking book, *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt* (1927), documented the customs, rituals, industries, and agriculture of rural communities, with particular attention to the lives of women and children, local magic and superstitions, and the interplay between Muslim sheikhs and Coptic saints. As with Katherine Routledge, Blackman's life ended in tragedy: she spent her final years institutionalised in a mental hospital.

Also affiliated with the Pitt Rivers Museum, Barbara Freire-Marreco (1879–1967) undertook fieldwork in the United States, studying the Navajo, Tewa, and Pueblo peoples. After marrying the anthropologist Robert Aitken, she experienced a personal breakdown that led her to abandon her academic career. The couple subsequently relocated to Spain, where they reportedly enjoyed a happy marriage. However, evidence suggests that Barbara played a significant, albeit often unacknowledged, role in supporting her husband's scholarly work after abandoning her own. Among this group, Maria Czaplicka (1884–1921) stands out as a unique figure. A Polish immigrant, she developed a deep fascination with Siberian shamanism, translating key Russian texts that paved the way for her Yenisei expedition. Despite fragile health and difficult conditions, Czaplicka worked tirelessly to document the shamanic traditions of Siberia. Much of her collected material now held in the Pitt Rivers Museum. Tragically, after being denied a crucial fellowship, she took her own life in 1921. The final heroine of Larson's narrative is Beatrice Blackwood (1889–1975), who conducted extensive fieldwork in New Guinea and the Northern Solomon Islands. Her book *Both Sides of Buka Passage* (1935) examines the social, sexual, and economic dimensions of life in the northwestern Solomon Islands. Blackwood's career was closely tied to the Pitt Rivers Museum, where she worked from the 1930s until her death, contributing a rich collection of artifacts from her field studies.

Authors of scientific publications often face the challenge of defining their audience, and Frances Larson's intention to reach a broader readership is evident in her choice of a non-academic publisher. While this approach makes this volume accessible and engaging, it does present certain limitations. Notably, the book's format omits formal citations, which may leave readers in the dark seeking to verify sources of the research. This absence places greater trust in the author's account, that can be somewhat unfortunate in a work spanning both popular and scholarly realms. To address this, Larson thoughtfully provides an appendix¹ and a detailed timeline of events² online, offering valuable supplementary material to support her narrative.

The female pioneers of anthropology occupied a uniquely privileged yet precarious position, just as all female forerunners in every discipline. Despite their hard-won opportunities to study and conduct fieldwork in distant lands, these women had to struggle not only with a male-dominated academic world but also with their own internal struggles of self-doubt and perceived failures. Larson does not shy away from exposing the darker facets of their stories, addressing the colonial contexts in which they operated, as well as personal hardships such as the mental health challenges faced by Routledge and Blackman, and the tragic suicide of Czaplicka. The author also avoids romanticising its subjects and willing to note the less flattering aspects of their personalities and work. In doing so, the book offers a nuanced illumination of the obstacles women faced in academia during this era, enriching our understanding of their resilience and vulnerability alike.

A defining thread uniting these women was a deep ethical commitment and a persistent practice of cultural relativism. In distant shores, far from the social restrictions of early 20th century Britain, they found a freedom and vitality that their own society often denied them. As Larson touchingly observes, they "escaped their own society in the name of scholarship." For these women, fieldwork represented not only academic quest but also liberation from rigid social expectations and prescribed gender roles. Against the odds – unsupportive families, disapproving peers, and gatekeeping professors – they carved out moments of autonomy and the freedom of their own that many could only dream of. *Undreamed Shores* is a delightfully interwoven tale of female courage, resilience, friendship, and independence, an inspiring read both on the shores and within the halls of academia.

Notes

1 <https://franceslarson.com/sites/franceslarson.com/files/downloads/Undreamed%20Shores%20-%20notes%20and%20references.pdf>

2 <https://franceslarson.com/sites/franceslarson.com/files/downloads/Undreamed%20Shores%20timeline.pdf>

Ethnography and experience

Workshop conference in Cluj Napoca and Stana 01. 09. 2024.

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Between August 28 and September 1, 2024, the workshop "Ethnography and experience" was held in Cluj-Napoca and Stana. This event was organised Imola Püsök (Georg-August University of Göttingen) and Áron Bakos (Babeş-Bolyai University), who were helped by anthropology students of the Babeş-Bolyai University, András Beke and Noémi Demeter. The workshop brought together PhD students, university lecturers, and researchers from various corners of the world, providing them with the opportunity to elaborate on and share their studies within their respective fields. Based on the workshop's theme, each participant framed their research within the paradigm of phenomenology, thereby contributing to the scientific discourse with a perspective deeply rooted in subjective experience and human interactions.

The opening session took place on August 28 in Cluj-Napoca, with architect Árpád Furu setting the tone through an architectural presentation. He introduced the participants to the culture and architecture of the Călata region, which became the backdrop for the scientific discussions that continued the following day.

On August 29, the series of conferences resumed with contributions from Ewa Klekot (SWPS University, Warsaw) and Ion Copoeru (Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca). Before reaching the main venue, the Szentimrei house in Stana, participants had the opportunity to observe the craftsmanship involved in creating board games and to visit the village's Reformed Church, a symbol of local heritage.

The subsequent sessions took place at the Szentimrei house, where PhD students presented their research, enriching the diversity and complexity of academic discussions. On August 30, the program featured presentations by Diana Vallejo Robalino (Eötvös Lóránd University), Cheshta Arora (Western Norway Research Institute, Sogndal), Debarun Sarkar (Res. Assoc. at Vidyashilp Research Centre, Vidyashilp University), Sára Eszter Heidl (University of Erfurt), Joanna Połec (University of Warsaw), Colleen Alena O'Brien (Palacký University Olomouc), Roger Nascimento (University of Oxford), Bianca Bellafiore (University of Aberdeen), Theodora Năstasie (National Museum of the Romanian Peasant), Lydia Donohue (University of Manchester), Bridget Kelly-Vincz (University of

Michigan), and Jacek Wajszczak (University of Warsaw), who addressed themes ranging from ethnographic methodology and humour to religion, education, sensory experience, and museum studies.

On August 31, the workshop's activities moved to the Cultural Hall in Stana. Here, Áron Bakos, Helena Patzer (University of Warsaw), Vilmos Katona (independent researcher, architect), and Marcela Venebra Muñoz (Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México) delivered presentations on a variety of topics, each bringing unique and well-argued perspectives to the fields of phenomenology and ethnography.

September 1 marked the conclusion of the event in Stana. On this occasion, Sorin Gog (Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca) delivered a closing address, bringing the workshop to an end. The final activity took place on September 2 in Cluj-Napoca, where participants, guided by an expert, explored the city's architecture, gaining insights into its history and cultural significance.

The experience of this event was deeply communal, fostering the creation of professional and interpersonal relationships grounded in collaboration and trust.

Unwritten time

SIEF 2025 Unwriting. A reflection

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"Oh, I wish I didn't have to write!" – since 2022, when I joined the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, this has been one of the most frequently heard phrases from our undergrads. In a university where we all live under the spell of design work, writing is none of our interest, or at least less interesting to us than design. Nevertheless, it was here at the university that I truly understood the unfathomable value of handwriting, and writing in general, a ritualised action, the purpose of which is to leave marks in the dust, on paper, blackboard, or even on screen. To begin with, I'm putting my thoughts in a broader, yet personal, perspective, because this is essential to understanding my relationship with the SIEF 2025 Congress. This mega-meeting took place in Aberdeen, Scotland in 2025 (the event welcomed 1,128 delegates, featured 118 panels, and saw the presentation of 880 papers) explored the theme of "UNwriting". In the logo, which visually interprets the theme, "UN" is highlighted in handwritten capital letters, "writing" is displayed in small handwritten ones, and a thin, tendril-like line starts from the stem of the "g" at the end of the word in the direction of a pen shaft, which is held by a clearly visible hand with the tip pointing upwards. The tip of the pen falls at the point where the index finger and thumb meet, and the line is drawn by the shaft of the pen and not the tip. This is how the call translates this into words: "Unwriting – a powerful tool with which to retract or rewrite what has been inscribed or recorded, allowing us to reshape that which power has imposed and presenting an opportunity for those who have often only been written about." Another face of the same duality I highlighted above. Writing can rightly be protested against, as it can be a tool for colonisation, oppression, rationalisation and the gentle or harsh violence of system creation. On the other hand, we can also be enthusiastic about writing, because through it we can restore and undo everything that we have ruined by writing. There is a lot of talk today about how our sociological imagination has narrowed, how globalisation has overriden local knowledge too much, and therefore we need to reclaim long-forgotten, authentic imaginary worlds in order to broaden the narrow spectrum of our current worldview. The same is true for writing, meaning that bad, questionable, and arrogant practices of writing cannot provide sufficient reasons to reject writing. However, there are other kinds of writing, including slow, patient, and reception-focused writing practices. We need to find and showcase these.

I am not an anthropologist; however, I prefer to use the term “cultural researcher” to describe my academic orientation. I am mostly interested in ideas related to contemporary clothing culture. I must say that I do not have a single, well-defined natural habitat within the domain of science, being aware of all the advantages and disadvantages of this situation. I have degrees in literature, philosophy, history, and sociology of art, and my most basic disciplinary experience is that I feel like a humanities scholar among social scientists, a social scientist among humanities scholars, and simply a theorist among designers. The fact that I am currently working at a design university also reflects my disciplinary journey. My university work here helped me understand that for me, writing is the material that embodies my relationship with the world. Paradoxically, this is the very first conference where I won't bring a pre-written text with me, just a poster. And now I forget that writing is mandatory. The problem I am addressing in the poster is similar in logic to the topic raised. Our knowledge of fashion has become vestigial, focusing too much on the Western European dress codes and habits, so I propose that we use folklore to expand our understanding of fashion. My intention is to present some examples of contemporary fashion to demonstrate folklore-inspired dress paradigms. I am incorporating these non-Western European clothing concepts into contemporary fashion, that is, expanding the range of clothing options available to us.

Expanding our possibilities today is actually buying time. We must buy time while and before these narrowed structures rewrite the earthly conditions of human life. For me, the conference is primarily about how seeking out opportunities for a different kind of writing can become a time strategy. The plenaries consistently emphasised the need to stop, get off the treadmill, and slow down the standardising, irrational writing expectations of globalised science. We need to look around and take a closer look. We were delighted to listen to the sublime, inspiring plenary presentations. They were not actually about science, but rather presented parables about what science should be like instead of what it is. Because what is it like? Today, for the first time, we are consciously questioning the automation of science. Artificial intelligence can write better Q1 publications than we can, which is because it is trained on the entire database of Q1 publications. If this is really the case, then what else is left for us to do? After all this, is it even worth spending energy on writing publications? Or should we rather recite with exaggerated gestures, dance, knit, have long conversations, or even do stand-up comedy? Or should we write as if we were weaving, composing music, playing soccer, running, fishing, raising children (as Shawn Wilson's plenary presentation suggested)? At the early afternoon plenary lecture on the last day of the Congress, given by Si Poole, an Associate Professor of Cultural Education at the University of Chester, anyone could come forward with an action that brought the act of unwriting to the stage. This light-hearted and humorous multi-character show captivated me, but I quickly zoomed back in on the busywork I had left behind at university. Yes, it would be all too easy to get lost in slowing down, but in Eastern and Central Europe we are still in the process of forced acceleration, we still hear this everywhere. Now we have managed to fall behind precisely with acceleration. The slowdown in science has the character of a crisis reaction. The message we are getting is that societies have experienced countless crises and have developed a multitude of strategies to overcome them, we just need to find the right one. The Congress was also facing its own crisis, not a small one, as it had to re-elect its Scientific Council, and I had the opportunity to indulge in one of my favourite pastimes, namely observing how scientific lobbying works in another branch of science.

What I took away from the conference were human automation practices combined with machine automation, i.e. raising awareness of the similarities between writing, weaving, and encoding. I learned the most from lectures on the concept of "*embodied knowledge*". Bert De Munck and Marc Jacobs from the University of Antwerp, and Tim Ingold from the University of Aberdeen, were the participants in the roundtable discussion on embodied practices of heritage, where the artificial boundary between craftsmanship and technology is eliminated. It was very refreshing and insightful for me that the way we talked about cyber technologies and craftsmanship was also an example of human experimentation with automation. Our cultural technologies show continuity.

It is impractical and unscientific to think about the development of the world in misleading caesuras. During the panel discussion, the colleague sitting next to me was spinning wool on a hand spindle. It turned out that her specialty was Estonian wool processing. We were a twelve-hour boat ride from the Shetland Islands, the homeland of wool. And now I see my scientific assumption confirmed – critical fashion research also weaves its own stories of unwriting. That's why it's good to mingle with anthropologists. This is how unwriting allows me to write.

