

**BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY OF LETTERS  
CATHEDRA OF HUNGARIAN ETHNOGRAPHY AND ANTHROPOLOGY**

**SUMMARY OF THE DOCTOR'S DEGREE THESIS**

**Functions and roles in a community's written popular culture**

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## INTRODUCTION

### SOURCES AND METHODS

The timeframe of the research

Methods

*Observation situations and types of observations*

Sources

Data recording and processing

Methods of interpretation

### CONTEXTS (SOCIAL, ECONOMICAL, CULTURAL)

Geographical location

Administrational and scenery appartenance. Cultural context 25

The settlement in literature. Literary, historical and ethnographical representations

Classification(s)

Social development

*Economical movements*

*Tuition and literacy*

*Cultural institutions and cultural life*

*Public institutuions and institutionalisation*

*Infrastructure and modernization*

### WRITING USAGE AND WRITING FUNCTIONS IN PUBLIC GROUND53

Information centers of Sáromberke

The usage of writing of profane spaces

*Public institutions, economical units, nameplates*

*Communicated content and mediums*

*Mediums of cultural and entertainment shows*

*Political parties and usage of public places*

*Verbality and literacy: communication strategies of the authority*

Writing usage of sacred grounds

*The reformed church and surroundings*

*Written texts in the reformed church and surroundings*

*The functions of written texts related to the reformed church*

Summary

### SYSTEM(S) OF WRITTEN TEXTS, PEASANT ARCHIVES

Nekifutások ?

*Systematization of written texts and pertinent research*

*Archives, record and letter offices*

*Typoligy*

*Adaptations*

Archive of the Mózes family

*Big family and generations*

*The structure of the archive and texttypes*

*The place and role of the archive in the family habitat*

Archive of the Szabó Kádár family

*Big family and generations*

*The structure of the archive and texttypes*

*The place and role of the archive in the family habitat*

Archive of the Berekméri family

*Big family and generations*  
*The structure of the archive and texttypes*  
*The place and role of the archive in the family habitat*  
Habits: the types of usage and preservation  
The roles of writing, files and archive  
What do peasant archives „tell” us.  
Summary

## THE CONTEXTS OF WRITING

Writing, communication, history: second world war soldier letters

*The history of letterwriting*  
*Letterwriting in research*  
*Second world war letters of Sáromberke*  
*Letter communities – correspondent society*  
*Writing compulsion: letterwriting habits of soldiers*  
*The structure of letters*  
*Letters and recollection: the narrative representation of the world war in personal writings*  
Summary

Memorial poems

*The tradition of memorial poem writing*  
*Memorial booklets and memorial poem writing in the society of Sáromberke*  
*The structure of memorial booklets*  
*The roles of memorial booklets*  
Summary

Poets, poems, verse situations: intruder writers

*Intruder writers and contexts*  
*The local tradition of poem writing*  
*Casework: and intruder writer and the story of his book*  
Summary

Recollection and the creation of the personal past: popular autobiographies

*Publication and research of autobiographies*  
*Lifestories in the Sáromberke society*  
*The lifestory of Berekméri István Andrásé*  
*Biographical strategies*  
*Recollection and framing: recalling the past*  
*The structure of the story*  
*The effect of the official lingo on biographical texts*  
*The roles of lifestories – the usage of lifestories*  
Summary

Local specialists in historiography: history about us

## ROLES AND USAGE OF WRITING

## CONCLUSIONS

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## APPENDAGE

Writings of Berekméri István Andrásé  
*I. Notes in books*

*II. Blanks*

*III. Notebooks*

*IV. Catalogue of Berekméri István Andrásé's books*

**Writings of Berekméri Domokos**

*I. Notes in books*

*II. Blanks*

*III. Notes in notebooks, pages*

**Berekméri Mária**

*I. Notes in books*

*II. Blanks*

*III. Notes in notebooks, pages*

**Writings of Berekméri D. István**

**Poems of Berekméri György**

**Writings of Berekméri Edmond**

**Indexes**

**Maps**

**Picture attachments**

KEY WORDS: literacy, popular literacy, peasant archives, common files, functions of writing, habits in writing, contexts, habits, mentalities

#### THE SYNTHESIS OF DISSERTATION

The subject of the analysis is the written popular culture (literacy) of a settlement on the banks of Maros (Sáromberke). It analyses how writing as a practice, technique and cultural phenomenon organizes, shapes the collective and individual world of a local community. How do different families connect to each-other, to different institutions and changing relations via writing? Beside the differentiation of certain text types, pertinent roles and their temporal modeling I am interested in writing as an act and as a textobject and their pertinent roles as well as the habits related to writing.

THE FIRST CHAPTER includes the subject of the dissertation and the structure of the paper as well as those general observations regarding popular literacy that provide the basis of the work. The questions that run in the background of the research are: what are those communication acts that a community would transact in writing as opposed to orality and how does this affect the local writing usage? How common is the production and usage of local files and writings? What is its relation to the changing social and economical space? What functions does writing have in the everyday life of the local community? What kind of writing habits does it realize and what kind of rituals relate to it? What kind of writer roles materialize in the habitat of the settlement? How do they change in time? By what kind of selectivity principle does the individual expropriate the role of „writing-specialist” in a community? Or, to the contrary: how is this role forced upon an individual by the community? How does this status restructure the individual’s life, relations? What objects and symbolical representations refer to these roles? Are these roles inheritable, and how? How do inherited texts get built into the individual’s life, writing? What kind of secondary functions do written texts gain by the preservation, tradition, inheritance and the continuous usage and reinterpretation? Lastly: how does writing become common?

THE SECOND CHAPTER presents the timeframe, the sources and the exploration methods, the processes of exploration and recording. It discusses the preparation and procession of the research, the used collecting techniques, the sources and the applied theories regarding the processing of information and interpretations.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Writing and life with writing is no act secluded from social, economical and cultural life. Even one writing a journal in his room's privacy is a socially embedded act defined by his surrounding micro and macro context and also reflective to it. Thus the next chapter of analysis aims to present this larger context. Its goal is to point out that the changing of economical structure, institutionalization, literacy and modernization on a local level strongly affects the production of writings and the intensity of writing usage. Besides, some individuals in the community were provided roles of a writer, others were forced to resort to the services of the former.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER analyses the collective and public uses of writing. On the premises of different settlements many writings can be found. Analyzing these however meets some difficulties. Writings of public places change, get replaced or deteriorate quickly. For this reason instead of a general analysis of public signs I restricted my interpretation to a few phenomena. First of all I paid attention to written contents of sacred and profane authorities and related functions. Writings in public spaces reveal the dual nature of writing. On one hand they reveal the communication strategies of the authority and on the other hand they signify that writing tends to grow out of control and becomes uncontrollable. Private ideologies invade the spaces controlled by mundane and spiritual authorities, commemorate themselves, publishes alternative knowledge and ideologies, contradicts and antagonizes. Attacks and undermines official decisions and ideologies on their own ground. Or individuals make their own representations and slink it in publicity.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER is the central part of the analysis; it consists of the assessment and analysis of three peasant archives. During the research I have reviewed and taken stock of these three archives. I absolutely found it necessary and well reasoned to restrict the analysis this way. My decision is justifiable by the fact that the structure found during the analysis of those three archives, the habits and roles related to the safe-keeping and publishing of writings would not have widened by introducing other archives. The analysis of the three archives includes the presentation of certain habitats, the annual distribution of writings, their repartition by genre, language and date of creation, functions and habits of safe-keeping. The analysis of the three Sáromberke peasant archive shows that the writings have a system in which the official, institution issued writings are linked to the common writings of the private sphere. The types of writings are in the same context and fulfilling complementary roles. The analysis of the archive structure shows different consumer habits. The aggregation of private and official

writings, the different proportionality of them, and the differences in the intensity of usage is the outcome of this. The usage of official writings does not just mean safe-keeping or discarding but also conformity or non-conformism: mostly the involuntary imbibement of official clichés and phrases and the use of those in private, common writings. Private administrations make imitative consumption of official lingos and contexts necessary. Archives preserve the time of authorities instead of that of the family or the person. My goal with the analysis of the archives was to record and show the prolonged processes.

Certain subsections of CHAPTER SIX discuss writings that came to be related to a specific event and related habits and writing usage contexts. They are caseworks that present writing functions that developed in different contexts and related habits.

1. The analysis of the second world war letters proves that a letter is not merely an instrument of relationkeeping that bridges spatial distances but also has an economical (partially normative) and a psycho-sociological function. It serves as a reproducer of privacy. In the same time due to inheritance it is also a document of history becoming thus the narrative representation of that. Its safe-keeping and reading is motivated and shaped by the relation to the past of the family and the community. The front life is a specific life and letter writing is the product of this culture. The second world war is an era-parting line which compelled the individual to use the written culture by uprooting it from its natural medium making it impossible to use spoken culture.

2. Memorial poems actually show the workings of the connective structure holding groups and societies together, how a group realizes and communicates their own thoughts. For this reason I have identified the memorial poem as the product of a group culture (counterculture). For its users it is a connective structure that has tying and committing effect on two levels: in a social and a time dimension. Ties people together by defining a common practical and active ground which by its own binding force gains trust and orientates, makes separate individuals become „us”, and it is based on common rules and values. The memorial booklet spreads the communicative situation via writing. It feeds the tradition and communication.

3. An intruder writer can be defined as a casual writer whose poems play a larger role in public life. These poems are commissioned which defines their size, content and style. These poems are meant to be published without exposing their writer. The texts are often copied and actualized without their writer's knowledge. Thus there is a special relationship between these texts, their writers and the community: the community knows and keeps count of these casual poets and their activity but their writings are not identifiable in the context of the discourse.

Via popular poets poem writing and the pseudo-anonymous types of poems perpetuate within the community.

4. The authors of popular autobiographies use different strategies in recording them, thus their publicity and factualization also differs. The texts are known by the family in a direct way, by reading them, by acquaintances in an indirect way, of dialogues. The larger community however has little knowledge about the texts. The autobiographies of Sáromberke include the memories of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the era after collectivization is referred to by only a few sentences even if the text finishes much later. The greater part of the texts is devoted to the events of the two world wars. They also linger over personal insults which are among the motivations of writing autobiographies.

5. While writing about the local traditions the local specialist of regional history validates more than one writer attitude: he is at the same time autonomous author, copier, translator and informant. The different locutions present in his work are the result of the lack of a narrative scheme that is suitable to approach the historical past. In the text creating activity of the writer we can separate the following models: the sermon, the chronicle, the memoir, the novel and the informative, educative literature. His writings are not mere documentaries about the events on the settlement but also the way of thinking of the person in Sáromberke about their community, themselves, and their obligation towards the community.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER reviews the functions of the writing usage and the written texts of the settlements habitat. It presents the magical, ritual, commemorative, economical, literary, aesthetical and decorative functions of writing. Depending on the used context it identifies primary and secondary functions.

CHAPTER EIGHT encompasses the conclusions. My analysis' most important conclusions set in thesis are as follows:

1. *Functions.* Based on the researched and analyzed material there are three functions of writings in the habitat of the settlement. These are depositive, informative and performative (effecting speechact) functions. Within these some texts may have ritual and/or spiritual, commemorative, economical and legal functions.

2. *Contexts.* The writing, text has a private context but always gains meaning in a given context. A part of contexts refers to that proximate surroundings in which the text is created and affects (is put in usage), other part comes into play during the bequeathing when the text is torn out of the original environment and changes context.



3. *Habits*. Individual archives are blueprints of different mentalities. They show the different habits regarding the production and storage, the usage and safe-keeping. From the point of view of the production and usage the archive can be repetitive and progressive, cold and hot, exclusive and inclusive. On the field of text safe-keeping there are three basic attitudes: the keeper (collector), the selective and the discarding. The first is minimalistic in the selection aspect regarding the storage and organization. By selective attitude I mean the conscious and uniform selection of texts. The discarding attitude means that the individual discards texts or most of the texts out of personal conviction. There are more attitudes linked to writing as an act, accordingly, there are three writer roles. These are: the poet, the clerk and the historian. The poet writes to indulge the demand of the community or in the hope of personal fame. The clerk serves the community by managing administrative issues. The historian collects and creates his private or the community's history. The first and the last writer attitude often mixes, interlocks creating a kind of a hybrid. Different writer habits create differently structured family archives.

4. *Writing and orality*. In the Sáromberke society the written and oral culture is simultaneously present both in the private and public ground at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There are many communicational situations in the local society when writing and orality is both usable, the two technologies interfering with each-other. Depends on the context which of them holds magical/performative, ritual or normative function. The optional relation of the two technologies in certain situations means alternation, in others combined presence.

5. *Production and distribution*. The production quota of texts shows an era dependent tendency. The growth of production can be due to the development or change of the institutional system, or changes in the economical, social, political life. Text production is not uniform considering an individual life either. At major turning points in life text production grows. Texts in private habitat can be of two types depending on the medium of creation: official and private writings.

6. *Public and private administration*. The number of texts entering an individual's habitat is defined by processes by which the administration of the life in the family and settlement is operated.

7. *Writing and its spaces*. Texts used and created by individuals, written texts that define the individual are localized in space in different places. The individual can have only a part of the texts about, for him in his surrounding. On the other hand, certain texts about the individual are held in institutions. Then again, well defined places are identifiable within the family and public space as well where texts and writings are created.

8. *Bequeathing*. In the community the bequeathing of texts goes on the male line from generation to generation. The vast majority of texts is inherited and kept by the family member who stays in the family house. In extreme situations one generation can be skipped in the inheritance. The giving-receiving during the inheritance also makes a certain selectivity work.

9. *Selection*. The preservation and the structural development of archives is partially accidental, partially the result of conscious selection. Based on the analyzed material we can state that the conscious selection effects two types of behaviors: a) the preservation of official texts b) the preservation of personal texts that regard the personal/family history.

10. *Short and long processes*. Archives preserve the long processes of writing usage. The generations overspanning analysis of preservation and writing practice shows the temporal formation of writing (as an object and as an act). During the analysis we can follow how the act of the private space entering the public creates status, profession for its user. The short processes enlighten writing as an event, an act (the present context and function).

11. *The language of writing*. From the point of view of language the analyzed era can be divided in two periods. The first period is from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century till the end of the first world war which is characterized by the exclusive use of Hungarian language. The second period is from 1918 till our days.

12. *The power of writing*. The analyzed processes equally indicate the power and uncontrollability of writing. With the spreading of literacy writing stops being institution-controlled, grabs functions, forms habits, occupies situations, produces specialists, in brief: produces an own culture. Notwithstanding individual intentions, and in many cases despite of them, written text steps out of its primary context and lives a life of its own.

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