

THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF THE WEEKLY MAGAZINE *NEMZETI TÁRSALKODÓ* (1830 – 1844) IN TRANSYLVANIA

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Abstract

The study examines the 12 years of the *Nemzeti Társalkodó* [National Companion] (1830 – 1844), the auxiliary of the *Erdélyi Híradó* [‘Transylvanian News’], the first Transylvanian political weekly, examining the travelogues, country-presentations published in it. On the one hand, it shows how the newspaper as a medium contributed to the fashion of travel, how it conveyed widely usable knowledge about travel, and how it helped readers acquire the available knowledge about travel. On the other hand, it also examines the image of folklore conveyed by *Nemzeti Társalkodó*, tracking what folklore knowledge appeared in the weekly, what it was able to convey to its readers, which genres of knowledge can be demonstrated, and how all this is related to the growing number of travelogues. The study identifies the people who made the travelogues as progressive reformist, mostly protestant oppositionists who played an important role in the Transylvanian society of the reform era, being in contact with each other.

Keywords: travelogue, folklore knowledge, protestant college, Transylvania, media, 19th century

Abstrakt

Článok skúma 12 ročníkov časopisu *Nemzeti Társalkodó* [Národný spoločník] (1830 – 1844), prílohy *Erdélyi Híradó* [‘Transylvánske správy’], čo bol prvý transylvánsky politický týždenník, pričom sa zameriava na cestopisy a prezentácie krajín v ňom publikované. Na jednej strane poukazuje na to, že noviny ako médium prispeli k spopularizovaniu cestovania, sprostredkovali užitočné poznatky o cestovaní a pomohli čitateľom získať dostupné informácie o cestovaní. Na druhej strane skúma aj obraz vidieka a folklórnych zvyklostí, ktoré sprostredkoval tento časopis, sleduje, aké folklórne poznatky sa v týždenníku objavili, aké žánre článkov sa uverejňovali a ako to všetko súvisí s rastúcim počtom vydávaných cestopisov. Článok identifikuje autorov cestopisných príspevkov ako progresívnych reformistov, väčšinou protestantov, ktorí hrali dôležitú úlohu v transylvánskej spoločnosti v reformných časoch.

Kľúčové slová: cestopisy, etnografia, evanjelické kolégium, Sedmohradsko, media, 19. storočie

In this paper,¹ I attempt to present the impact that the periodical *Nemzeti Társalkodó* [National Companion], an auxiliary to the first political periodical in Transylvania, *Erdélyi Híradó* [Transylvanian Harold], launched in 1830, had on travelling becoming a mass phenomenon and the way it raised a widespread interest in ethnography and folklore collection.

Introduction

There are very few data available regarding the earliest phase of folklore collection in Transylvania (particularly the 1830's and 40's). Earlier research in the history of the discipline could boast little more than its familiarity with János Kriza's² advertisement for subscribers of the *Vadrózsák* [Wild Roses] produced around 1842 – 43, as if that alone represented all the interest in ethnographic collection in pre-1863 Transylvania. This may lead, in my view, to the mistaken conclusion that there existed no significant interest in ethnography or ethnographic collecting in Transylvania or that not much thought was given to the subject in the 1830's and 40's, or even that the activities of János Kriza and Pál Gyulai³ were nothing more than the emulation of paragons in mainland Hungary or abroad and the application of these to Transylvania.

By contrast, my hypothesis, confirmed by the in-depth research carried out over the past years,⁴ has been that this was far from being the case. In fact in Transylvania we may detect significant ethnographic pursuits which, although not entirely separate from those in Hungary, nevertheless had their own trajectory of development, describable in its own right, even if this may require a more systematic exploration of sources than has been done previously. I am convinced that by the time Pál Gyulai embarked on his activity as a teacher at the Calvinist College and involved his students in the collecting efforts, and by the time János Kriza re-launched efforts to collect folk poetry in the late 1850's and early 1860's, there were a great many people in Transylvania who had acquired some degree of knowledge about folk poetry collection. A certain level of understanding of ethnography and folklore was present in the knowledge register of some intellectual circles, and collection fitted well with the objectives of the Reform Age in Transylvania.

It is János Kriza's 1863 publication (*Vadrózsák* [Wild Roses]) that is traditionally considered by Hungarian folklore studies as the starting point of folk poetry collection in

¹ This paper was supported by the *János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences*.

² János Kriza (1811, Nagyajta / Aita Mare – 1875, Kolozsvár/ Cluj) Unitarian pastor at Kolozsvár, from 1861 Transylvanian Unitarian bishop.

³ Pál Gyulai (1826, Kolozsvár/ Cluj – 1909, Budapest) between 1858 – 1862 teacher at the Calvinist College of Kolozsvár, later literary historian in Pest and editor of the series Collection of Hungarian Folk Poetry started in 1872.

⁴ SZAKÁL, Anna. The emergence and composition of the reading society of the Unitarian College of Kolozsvár and its impact on launching organised folklore collection in Transylvania. In: *Kniha 2019: zborník o dejinách a problémoch knižnej kultúry*. Martin: Slovenská národná knižnica, 2019, p. 281–301; SZAKÁL, Anna. *Őnfejtő unitárius lelkész – innovatív néprajzi gyűjtő. Ürmösi Sándor (1815 – 1872) írásos hagyatéka*. Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2020.

Transylvania.⁵ This was the first regional collection of folk poetry in Hungary covering the entire generic spectrum. By this time, János Kriza stands before us as a collector with a mature folklore concept – while we know very little about the pre-1863 period. However, if we do accept that Kriza cannot have been a starting point all to himself, we also need to accept that 1842/43 (when Kriza advertised for subscribers) cannot have been one, either. For Kriza to be looking for subscribers to a complete book of collected folk poetry, efforts at collection, recording and publication had to have begun much earlier. It is my conviction that traces of this must be sought for in the progressive spirit of the Protestant colleges of the age including their reading clubs established in the early 1830's, as well as in the learned journals of the age.

It was with this end in view that I read through all of the years of one of the most significant learned journals published in Transylvania in Hungarian, called *Nemzeti Társalkodó*, and tried to register traces of thought about ethnographic or folk poetry collection.

About the journal

Before *Erdélyi Híradó* and its sub-journal, *Nemzeti Társalkodó*, examined in the present paper, there were only two more periodicals published in Hungarian in Transylvania: *Erdélyi Magyar Hír-vivő* [Transylvanian Hungarian Courier], published for a period of just under one year by one Martin Hochmeister, from April 1790 until the beginning of the following year, first in Nagyszeben [Sibiu, Romania] and later in Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca, Romania]. The other, *Erdélyi Múzeum* [Transylvanian Museum], was seen as the only Hungarian speaking literary and cultural journal of the Hungarian speaking area of the age, published at Kolozsvár between 1814 and 1818, edited by Gábor Döbrentei and financed by a broad base of intellectuals.

Next, a person practically unknown at Kolozsvár, Ferenc Kisszántói Pethe applied for permission in August 1826 to launch a political periodical under the name *Hazai-Híradó* [Home Harold], to appear twice a week. He was granted permission and thus the first Transylvanian Hungarian political paper was launched on January 1st 1827, along with its first subsidiary paper, the *Nemzeti Gazda* [National Farmer]. In 1828 the title of the paper changed to *Erdélyi Híradó* [Transylvanian Harold]. After announcing, but failing to publish a whole line of Appendices, Pethe finally announced that in 1830 “a brief academic summary is to appear twice a week under the name *Társalkodó* [The Companion]”. Eventually in autumn 1831, under the duress of a range of different circumstances, Pethe ceded editorship to Sámuel Méhes, former teacher at the Protestant College of Kolozsvár, and died early the following year. Méhes considered the publication of these Appendices equally important and from 1834 onwards *Nemzeti Társalkodó* was accompanied by another subsidiary journal, *Vasárnapi Újság* [Sunday Paper] which is thought of as the first proper paper to be dedicated solely to the dissemination of knowledge in Transylvania. This was edited by Sámuel Brassai, thought of as the last true polymath in Transylvania, until its dissolution in 1848. The paper was intended specifically for village readers and its establishment owed a great deal to Farkas Sándor

⁵ This hefty collection contained folk poetry from Seklerland villages typically of Unitarian creed, consisting of 36 ballads, 20 folk tales, 116 riddles, over 500 folk songs and a whole line of dance rhymes, sayings, proverbs and proper nouns. Kriza's interest in linguistics is shown clearly by the fact that he appended a dialect glossary and a study on dialects to his collection.

Bölöni who had returned home from a tour of North America with reformist plans of launching a paper for the people.⁶

It was also in the period here under examination, i.e. between 1841 and 1848, that *Múlt és Jelen* [Past and Present] and its two subsidiary papers *Hon és Külföld* [Home and Abroad] and *Historiai Kedveskedő* [Historical Endearments] were published. Edited by Ferenc Szilágyi, another teacher from the Protestant College, this was a conservative paper which consistently represented the interests of the government and made every effort to denigrate its opponents through personal insult, not refraining from taking them to court from time to time.

Editors of Nemzeti Társalkodó

Ferenc Pethe (1763, Büdszentmihály – 1832, Kolozsvár) was a man who worked tirelessly for social progress in his qualities as a printer, a publisher of papers on the economy, as a translator or a lecturer at the Georgikon in Veszprém. His uncommon life history reveals a man incapable of compromise, who was always ahead of his age in his plans and ideas. As we have seen, as a last station in his life, he came to Kolozsvár and established Transylvania's first Hungarian language political weekly.⁷ This was later taken over from him by a Protestant college teacher with a progressive attitude, strong connections with the Protestants and with intellectuals of his milieu and a good network of contacts, Sámuel Méhes.⁸ I believe it would be fair to say that it was the coincidence of two strengths, knowledge and attitude, that made it possible for a local medium to emerge which could serve as a new forum for self-expression and debate, catalysed the public discussion of issues where were specifically Transylvanian and which thus also contributed to the emergence of a new type of public domain.

Subscribers and readers of Nemzeti Társalkodó

The exact number of subscribers, changes in its readership and the impact that the *Nemzeti Társalkodó* had on society in general do not constitute the subject of this paper – mostly due to the absence of sources. What I wish to present here are the data published by the relevant literature and the editors of the papers in question. Ferenc Pethe only ever published the subscribers' list of *Nemzeti Társalkodó* – at the time when the auxiliary paper was launched in 1830.⁹ This includes a total of 97 names. If we examine this list in terms of locality we find that the greater number of subscribers came from Marosvásárhely [Târgu-Mureș, Romania] (23), Nagyenyed [Aiud, Romania] (12), Kolozsvár (8), Székelyudvarhely [Odorheiu Secuiesc, Romania] and Abrudbánya [Abrud, Romania] (5-5), as well as Radnót [Iernut, Romania], Szászrégen [Reghin, Romania] and Kézdivásárhely [Târgu-Secuiesc, Romania] (2-2). It is also noticeable that the paper raised hardly any interest outside of Transylvania – the only subscribers

⁶ VITA, Zsigmond. *A Hazai Híradó megindulása és mellékletei*. Debrecen: KLTE, 1967, p. 198-202.

⁷ SÜLE, Sándor. *Kisszántói Pethe Ferenc (1763 – 1832)*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1964.

⁸ TÖRÖK, István. Méhes Sámuel, doctor philosophiae. 1809 – 1845. In: Török, István: *A kolozsvári Ev. Ref. Collegium Története*. Kolozsvár: Stief Jenő, 1905, 2, p. 129-167.

⁹ PETHE, Ferenc. A' Nemz. Társalkodó' fizető-Olvasóinak Név-Laistroma. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1830, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 32, No. 5, p. 40, No. 6, p. 48, No. 7, p. 56, No. 13, p. 104, No. 16, p. 128, No. 19, p. 152.

there were the Casino of Pest, the Senate in Debrecen and one individual in Miskolc. A strong Calvinist proclivity is noticeable not only in the cities but also among colleges, professors, seniors and students, themselves accounting for a high ratio of the subscribers.

However, the fact that the readership was not limited to these 97 individuals is indicated by a statement Pethe made in No. 12 of 1830, whereby, “the publisher of *Társalkodó* is sending out over 180 copies free of charge and even pays the postage”.¹⁰ We also find out that the individuals who receive the paper free of charge are expected to make no other recompense than to make the journal known to as many people as possible.

The second published history of subscribers in the journal’s history comes from 1838.¹¹ This was a combined list for three periodicals, which allows us to draw only very limited conclusions regarding the individual journals. The list contains the names of 528 individuals or institutions. A mere 41 of these come from outside of Transylvania, 25 of which are public institutions (mostly casinos or newspaper editorial offices), and only 16 were private individuals. As regards place names outside of Transylvania, most highly represented were Vienna (13 subscribers), followed by Pest (10), Buda (3), Eger (3), Pozsony [Bratislava, nowadays Slovakia] (2) and one subscriber each from Nagykánizsa, Nagyszombat, Székesfehérvár, Nagybecskerek [Zrenjanin, nowadays Serbia], Zemplén, Kaposvár and Padua. Within Transylvania, the highest number of subscribers came from Kolozsvár (94), followed by Marosvásárhely [Târgu-Mureş, nowadays Romania] (30), Nagyenyed [Aiud, nowadays Romania] (21) and Nagyszeben [Sibiu, nowadays Romania] (14). What we can discern from these data is again that the journal had hardly any readership outside of Transylvania, and anyone who read it outside of Transylvania was either (with some exaggeration) of Transylvanian origin or bought the paper out of professional interest. Inside Transylvania, while Kolozsvár was very much the centre, two smaller cities (Marosvásárhely and Nagyenyed) stand out in significance. Whether Kolozsvár was highly represented only with regard to the *Erdélyi Híradó* or proportions also shifted over the eight years as regards the readership of *Nemzeti Társalkodó* cannot be ascertained. It is a telling fact that as far as colleges are regarded, only a few Protestant institutions appear on the list (the Calvinist colleges of Nagyenyed, Marosvásárhely and Székelyudvarhely, as well as the Unitarian college of Torda), thus their presence is noticeably lower than in 1830. Subscribers also include a further 23 casinos, 10 reading societies, 3 cafés/restaurants and 10 editorial offices.

The majority of subscribers were clerics (pastors, vicars, deans or bishops): 20 Calvinists, 19 Roman Catholics, 4 Unitarians and 2 Greek Catholics. The others included 19 professors, 6 doctors, 3 teachers, 27 magistrates, 20 royal, chief or other judges, 9 chief or vice notaries, 7 treasurers, 6 attorneys, 14 councillors and 78 counts or barons. Perhaps the most significant group of subscribers came from the nobility who – alongside others who subscribed with the aim to support the magazine – contributed greatly to the journals reaching a wider readership than the subscribers’ lists testify. It would require a separate research effort, and one for which we have too little and dubious source material at this moment, to ascertain how and in what ways certain data, bits

¹⁰ PETHE, Ferenc. A’ *Társalkodó*’ Kiadójához. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1830, Vol. 1, No. 12, p. 95.

¹¹ MÉHES, Sámuel. Előfizetési figyelmeztetés. Az Erdélyi Híradó, *Nemzeti Társalkodó* és Vasárnapi Ujság tisztelt olvasói. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1838, Vol. 9/1, No. 1, no page no. [I-VIII].

of information or knowledge were spreading in the period (who were the mediators or the copyists) – including the *Nemzeti Társalkodó* and some of its news items. The subscribers' list of 1838 points out shortcomings which render it almost certain that the journal was read through being copied and/or borrowed.

Travels and travel journals in the *Nemzeti Társalkodó*

According to my hypothesis, the fact that travelling, as well as writing and publishing travel journals and descriptions of countries and places became increasingly common was related to broadening interest in and talk about folk poetry and the start of collecting folk art and folk poetry. In order to verify this, I looked through the travel descriptions published in *Nemzeti Társalkodó* (1830 – 1841, 1844), from the time when it was published as an independent sub-journal. For my research I used the copies found in the Lucian Blaga University Library of Cluj-Napoca. The publishers aimed to bring out the journal on a weekly basis (at first it amounted to 16, then to 8 pages in a smaller format), which meant an approximate 52 issues per year.

Based on the issues I perused I identified a total of 157 travel related writings. The majority of them (143 texts) contained travelogues of Transylvanian or outside of Transylvania, or offered descriptions of various countries/places/sights. In a smaller portion, travelling was portrayed in a different function. Most of these travel or place descriptions were written with the purpose of collecting data in order to promote a later magnum opus on history, statistics or geography. If we examine one of the two major groups mentioned above, journeys outside of Transylvania, we find that they are fairly evenly distributed: 1832: 4, 1833: 3, 1834: 7, 1835: 5, 1836: 3, 1837: 5, 1838: 6, 1839: 3, 1840: 7, 1841: 3, 1844: 11. While travels outside of Transylvania were represented in the journal by a total of 57 accounts attributed to 28 authors writing with no name or under pseudonyms and 5 writing under their own name, journeys inside Transylvania were made by 15 people who used their names and 10 authors who could not be identified – altogether amounting to 86 publishing occasions.

The frequency of publishing on Transylvanian travels (after a potrusion in 1831) began to increase after 1836 and peaked in 1939 and 1840. Distribution according to years runs as follows: 1830: 2, 1831: 9, 1832: 2, 1833: 0, 1834: 0, 1835: 1, 1836: 10, 1837: 11, 1838: 5, 1839: 22, 1840: 23, 1841: 1, 1844: 0.

All texts share the characteristic that they do more than guide the reader to unknown lands and foreign cities or describe their economic, architectural or cultural characteristics: they also provide examples of the best way to look at a foreign country or city, what one should note down about them or share with the readers. It must have been the result of conscious editorial decision that the various journeys appeared in an admittedly fragmentary form. Generic references such as “travel fragment” or “fragment from a letter”, “fragment from a diary” are quite common. It is my conviction that these show, simultaneously, that whatever the reader can access there and then, in the journal, is not the total presentation of something, but it does ensure that the subject matter becomes more interesting, as if the reader got a chance to peep into something. Often this form also served to demonstrate topicality, and served to raise readers' expectations to find out about events shortly after they happened. It does appear as if publishing travel accounts in the form of ego-documents (diaries, letters) seemed like

a way to make it easier and more interesting and palatable to publish descriptions of countries and cities.

The role of the *Nemzeti Társalkodó* in teaching people to travel

If we view the achievement of the *Nemzeti Társalkodó* from the sole aspect of all it did to make sure that travelling should become generally accepted as a part of the general mindset and should take root as a way of acting for the greater good, we can distinguish three phases. In the early, preparatory period (in the first few years of the journal's existence) this consisted in drafting a programme, elaborated in such detail as to be entirely suitable for preparing and organising a trip to Transylvania and provide thorough grounding.

Launched in 1830, by late January 1831 the paper had reached the stage where it could not merely showcase a progressive institution whose Western European prototype was functioning well (the travel society), but describe it in detail and point out why it would benefit Transylvania hugely, were they to adopt the institution. He tailors the proposal to Transylvania, elaborates it to the last detail and ties its goals in with other contemporary, progressive objectives, indeed, finally, he uses his own paper to propagate the elaboration of the idea and its sharing with the wider public. It is hard not to surmise a conscious editorial choice in the background – the way of thinking of a man (just like Ferenc Pethe as his figure has emerged before us) who firmly believes that a wise and well-designed editorial gesture is a fit tool to attain a good social impact.

The next phase could be termed the period of preparation (1831 – 36) in which the journal mostly published descriptions of various countries and cities outside of Transylvania. From late January 1831 onwards, descriptions of Transylvania also began to appear sporadically. It is also in 1831 that we start to witness, what was to become general later on, the publication of various types of writing bearing titles that imitate one or the other of the ego-document genres (epistles, fragments of letters or travel journals, diaries or fragments of diaries). From 1837 onwards, the publication of travel accounts becomes widespread, almost an everyday occurrence turning into a mass phenomenon. This was probably the time when periodicals that were generally less progressive also came to include travel accounts (e.g. *Múlt és Jelen*), since by this time it had become fashionable to travel, to write, publish or read travel journals. As Mihály Szentiváni put it in his travel journal of 1837, “to travel and even more to write about travelling is one of the literary fashions of our age. I myself, loyal to this fad, did my fair share of walking from one end of Transylvania to the other, and to satisfy the other strand of the fashion I hereby disclose my humble account to my reading public.”¹² Although by the second half of the 1830's travelling had become increasingly popular, this did not mean a degree of familiarity or massive involvement that would have waived the need for the journal to mediate ever newer information or to deepen people's understanding regarding travelling. During this third phase of the paper the function of travelling as a public good became ever more pronounced – while parallelly with this a whole line of different objectives and motivations also became outlined. Writing about the goals of travelling, in October 1836 János Fogarasi emphasised that “travellers travel for the

¹² SZENTIVÁNI, Mihály. Közlemények Erdélyről. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1839, Vol. 10/2, No. 18, p. 141.

sake of the non-travellers”¹³ – meaning that the subsequent summary of all that the traveller had seen (something that is nigh-on expected) and its publication serve to mediate knowledge to others. In May 1837 József Téglási Ercsei was of the opinion that travelling and recording the findings in writing are “a sacrifice [...] on the altar of our sweet homeland.”¹⁴ He added the following explanation to a travel journal by János Zeyk Sr, published in October 1837: “My travels being not of a planned and scholarly, but rather of a private nature, and also reckoning up all the hurry, inclement weather and roads, I would be glad if someone were to appreciate what I have written driven by patriotic zeal.”¹⁵ In a piece of writing from 1838 entitled *Egy szó a hazábani utazásról* [A word about travelling in my country], Ferenc Nagy claims that “travelling is necessary, indeed a duty for persons of all ages” if the goal of the traveller is to acquaint himself with some sort of human achievement in this country or abroad, so they can “go on to build the often tattered structures of this land”. Nagy resonates with Rousseau’s idea who believed that “he who travels without a stated purpose just so as to travel is at best a loiterer, a veritable vagabond.” [...] No one is worthy of the name of ‘traveller’ unless they appoint a purpose of public merit for their journey.”¹⁶

Certain texts, produced around this time, also start teaching and offer a model for the way in which travellers can relate to nature – how to admire it, how its beauty can impact us. In his text of 1838 Ferenc Nagy described the “wonderous beauty” of Torockó [Rimetea, Romania] and offered an example of the peculiar way in which he first came in contact with nature. “It must have been some eight years ago that a friend and I were out hiking and collecting herbs among the limestone hills along the stream Aranyos [Arieş, Romania] when he stopped all of a sudden, untied his scarf and blindfolded me. Familiar with his capricious nature, I followed him without any foreboding over a distance of some quarter of an hour, where he untied the scarf and said, ‘open your eyes and see!’. What a surprise – in front of me spread the rift of Torockó in all its terrible beauty; its limestone rocks painted pure gold by the light of the morning sun. I stood there muted by aw, marvelling first at the glorious apparition, then at God’s splendid blue sky, next at my friend’s curious eyes. He was smiling. I shall never forget that moment.”¹⁷

An important step in raising travelling to the rank of a common, everyday activity, and also an example for Transylvanian travellers was to show readers that travelling was not necessarily a male privilege – something that was first showcased in a travel account by Ferenc Nagy. He describes that on one occasion he was member of a company of eight travellers where two of the members were ladies.¹⁸ The subject matter of the female traveller recurred in the journal in an even more pronounced fashion roughly a year later.

¹³ FOGARASI, János. Útazás a Nagy Küküllő mellett. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1836, Vol. 7/2, No. 17, p. 257.

¹⁴ TÉGLÁSI ERCSEI, János. Útazások nemes Torda vármegye alsó kerületének nevezetesebb járásaiában. Első czikkely. Torda városa s környéke ismertetése. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1837, Vol. 8/1, No. 19, p. 292.

¹⁵ ZEYK, János. Útazási töredék. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1837, Vol. 8/2, No. 16, p. 250.

¹⁶ NAGY, Ferenc. Egy szó a hazábani utazásról. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1838, Vol. 9/1, No. 8, p. 57.

¹⁷ NAGY, Ferenc. Levéltöredékek Torockóról. *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1838, Vol. 9/2, No. 26, p. 204.

¹⁸ NAGY, Ferenc. Reminiscenciák 1837-ről. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1839, Vol. 10/2, No. 26, p. 209.

Starting in September 1840, the periodical published three instalments of a travel account called *Fragments from the book of memories of a Hungarian lady traveller*. This female traveller who put her experiences into words may be considered a pioneer of fledgling tourism – a cultured and educated woman, she had very clear notions about the kind of sights she wanted to look at abroad. She hired a tour guide and, conjoined with other young people, went to visit a whole range of worthwhile natural and cultural venues.¹⁹ Ferenc Mentovich returned home in 1844, after his university studies in Berlin. In his travel description he summed up for his readers the kind of “fond obligations” that he thinks a traveller has when voyaging abroad. “I believe that all those visiting foreign parts with the purpose of broadening their knowledge and experiences, the fond occupations, indeed, so to say, obligations entailed by such a venture, such as the visiting of societies and institutions or observations of the people’s character and level of culture etc., etc. each has one in particular in which he likes to proceed, if not with the result of the most outstanding success, but, at any rate, with the utmost joy. For one this is to attend theatres, for the other it is the admiration of private art collections, a third might find utmost pleasure in a children’s nursery school amongst the innocent infants, while, if asked one by one, each will admit that acquainting themselves with educational institutions, learning methods, subjects related to industry and commerce or any other institution that furthers the public good would yield far more benefit to themselves and could more profitably be disseminated to improve conditions in our own country.”²⁰ He himself considers that making the acquaintance of “men of outstanding spirit” is one such activity, therefore on his way home he visits Gauss and later describes the encounter and the exchange of ideas that took place.

To sum up, we can safely declare that while in the first phase of the existence of *Nemzeti Társalkodó* it was mostly the editors who showed the required direction and promoted the popularity of travelling in Transylvania by showing exemplary models and patterns of behaviour and providing a programme, the second phase was marked by the beginning and the third by the unfolding of the range of actions and behaviours associated with travelling, which became ever more differentiated, with the journal defining a clearly outlined goal and a guiding ideal. Serving the public good noticeably became increasingly emphatic. The most positive and laudable goal in service of society was for a traveller to set out fuelled by patriotic zeal in order to gather knowledge by travelling and disseminate it in their own country in service of progress in their own society.

The authors of travelogues

Reading through the journal I identified a total of 57 travel descriptions from outside of Transylvania and 86 from Transylvania. The former are associated with 33 individuals (five of them were named), the latter with 25 authors (16 of whom appeared with their name). Since many of the authors used pseudonyms, only a portion of them (a total of 17 individuals) could be identified, localised and placed in a broader narrative from all those who wrote travel or country accounts for the *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. This, however, does not mean that we are losing sight of important contributors. Partly it is highly

¹⁹ P. Töredékek egy magyar utazó-nő emlékkönyvéből. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1841, Vol. 12/1, No. 13, p. 97-102, No. 14, p. 105-109, No. 15, p. 113-119.

²⁰ MENTOVICH, Ferenc. Naplótöredékek I-IV. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1844, Vol. 13, No. 35, p. 273.

likely that the majority of articles under a pseudonym or with no name whatever were written by the editors or people in their closest circles. This assumption is made all the more likely by the fact that the missing authors are mostly those of travel accounts outside of Transylvania and of those dating to the earliest period. On the other hand, we may safely declare that the authors of the more significant and detailed travel accounts and authors of serious works on folk poetry were successfully identified without exception.

As regards their religious denomination, 8 of them were certainly and 3 were very probably Calvinist, 4 were Unitarian, 1 was Roman Catholic and on one person we have no data. All but two of them were born in Transylvania. Five of the Calvinists had studied at the college of Nagyenyed, three in Marosvásárhely, one at Kolozsvár, two had studied in Hungary and for one we lack data. Each of the Unitarian authors had studied at the Unitarian College of Kolozsvár. The only Catholic had studied at the Piarists in Kolozsvár. Three of these authors had studied at universities abroad (at Göttingen, Marburg, Stuttgart, Vienna and Berlin). One of the authors had gone to Pest to complete his studies. All of the authors pursued some kind of intellectual career with one exception – a vine-grower. Four of them became members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences at some point in their career. The age at the time of writing ranged as follows: 2 were over 50; 6 were between 35–50; 3 were between 29–34; 4 were between 20–28; and 1 was under 20 years of age, while for one person we lack data.

Finally I would like to describe two individuals whose travel related writings included ethnographic observation and collection raised to the rank of written record and, on occasion, even of interpretation. Their accounts also allow us to discern the widely diverging roles that travellers fulfilled in the Transylvanian society of the age and the ways in which this was connected with their interest in ethnography.

Téglási Ercsei József (1792, Somosd [?] – 1868, Torda)

József Téglási Ercsei was born in 1792 and spent most of his life at Torda where he worked as a forestry engineer. His father was a schoolteacher, his younger brother had studied in Marburg and later became a famous lecturer at the college of Marosvásárhely. He only published one work in his lifetime, the botanical monograph *Nemes Tordamegye florája* [*The Flora of Noble Torda County*], which came out at Kolozsvár in 1844. He also published altogether 11 contributions in the *Nemzeti Társalkodó* that could be classified as place or travel descriptions, in the year 1830, 1836 and 1837. In these he not only wrote at length about the history of the place in question, about old inscriptions, castles, churches, Roman relics, the inhabitants, their agriculture, industry and opportunities he saw for bringing the place to thrive – he also described the plants that he saw (Latin names included), as well as the manner in which local caves were found and explored and the investigations carried out there. It was on this latter account that he was later referred to as “the most excellent, indeed perhaps the first great naturalist of Torda Aranyos County”,²¹ and cave experts still look on him today as the first to discover certain caves and to carry out significant measurements there.

²¹ TULOGDY, János. Egy régi erdélyi természetjáró. (Téglási Ercsei József, 1792 – 1868). In: *Turisták Lapja*. 1941, Vol. 53, No. 4, p. 64.

This description is also important in that it proves once more that prominent individuals of the age were not simply interested in scientific matters, but were also willing to engage in perilous undertakings in service of the noble objective. József Téglási Ercsei invited county magistrate Baron Lajos Jósika to accompany him on his very first cave exploration tour. Later he described how the magistrate waded through ice-cold water, shedding his upper body clothing, while he himself (who could not swim) constructed plank bridges to follow his noble companion. On this occasion they failed to explore the entirety of the cave system, so they repeated the same tour with the same challenges – this time with success.²² On this second journey, Téglási Ercsei and the county chief were also accompanied by royal chamberlain József Csáky and his son György, professor Gusztáv Schuler from Jéna and “several noble lords”.²³ On his trip of 1834, the account of which was published in 1836, Téglási Ercsei was accompanied by Baron Simon Kemény, the honourable János Herczeg, twelve armed men and two guides.²⁴ From the travelogues he published in the *Nemzeti Társalkodó* we discern an individual who was in possession of a certain amount of understanding of ethnography even to start with, but his approach to the existing tradition displays a certain ambivalence: he is familiar with it, but he also rejects it as an obstacle to progress. He condemns it and thus does not consider it worthy of recording. As time goes on, this attitude seems to shift. This becomes most explicit in his approach to story-telling and legends (and its changes).

Writing in 1830 about a journey he had made in 1817, he notes that although he had the occasion to listen to stories about fairies (presumably a historical legend), he saw nothing valuable in this at the time. “My companion noted about a rosemary shaped plant that had been planted by the very fairy who had built the castle way back. He also related such a lot of stories about fairies that a Walter Scott could write book after book of novels from it. My God! When will enlightenment come to all the youth of our lovely country?”²⁵ In the second half of his 1837 travel account he talks of a story-telling occasion similar to that described in 1830, but this time the negative connotations of the earlier writing are entirely missing. While in the 1830 description story-telling appears as an only just tolerable babble, here it is clearly a thing of some prestige: the famous story-teller relates his story in response to the unanimous request of the company after having been paid, and does this in such a way that we are left with no doubt that he is seen as a valuable member of the company. At Gereben mountain “we lay down around the fire and our company chose story-telling as the way to spend the evening. Our caravan included a tough little man with a satire’s face from the tall ore mountains, a famous story-teller, who remained as silent as a fish even to our most honest entreaties, until we unsealed his lips with a silver key. Then he told us the story of the dragon

²² TÉGLÁSI ERCSEI, József. Utazások nemes Torda vármegye alsó kerületének nevezetesebb járásában. Második czikkely. Lupsai járás. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1837, Vol. 8/2, No. 6, p. 85-87.

²³ TÉGLÁSI ERCSEI, ref. 21, p. 86.

²⁴ TÉGLÁSI ERCSEI, József. Utazások nemes Torda vármegye Vécsi járásában. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1836, Vol. 7/1, No. 7, p. 106.

²⁵ TÉGLÁSI ERCSEI, József. Római út-nyomozás, a Bekecs körül. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1836, Vol. 1, No. 52, p. 411.

with the seven heads, and did this with such dignity as Virgil Maro's Silenus relating the history of creation."²⁶

In his writing of 1836 he also recorded the plot of a local legend without determining its genre.²⁷ In his travel account of 1837 he noted down the sujet of two historical legends, identifying them as "popular legend."²⁸ During the time when he published these articles he was probably living in the city of Torda [Turda, Romania] as a generally respected citizen. This is indicated by the fact that in 1833 when the Casino of Torda was opened, he was one of the six notorieties invited to feature at the festivities. In his speech he explored the ways in which national culture could be promoted and strengthened. He identified five areas – travelling was third in sequence. He emphasised that although foreign travel was important and useful (particularly if the traveller later went on to share his experiences with their compatriots), but travelling inside the home country was a primary duty for everyone who wanted to act in service of the public good and the thriving of national culture. It may fairly be declared that all of the travel accounts published under his name were created in the spirit of the principles he laid out. His later publications, similarly to those published in the *Nemzeti Társalkodó*, moved in the interim areas between natural science, tourism and general knowledge about his own country. In the second half of his life József Ercsei's publications included *Hazai mérges növények ismertetése* [A description of poisonous plants in our country] published in *Mentor* in 1842. As regards travelling and ethnographic description, his writing titled *Kalataszeg vázolata* [A Sketch of Kalotaszeg] and published in *Hon és Külföld* [Home and Abroad] in 1842 stands out in significance. In order to prepare this piece he made a short journey and while describing the natural features of the Kalotaszeg region he also made mention of an event that he presents as a local legal custom.

His very early interest in ethnography and the extent to which he considered this an organic part of any work connected to public culture is shown clearly by one of his manuscripts. This piece contains Téglási's glossary of forestry terms submitted to the *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* [Scholarly Collection] in 1827. There are two points where the explanations of the words related to forestry contain descriptions of folk customs. The work of collecting and writing up, as the introduction to the glossary reveals, was something he had done on commission, in service of general culture – as was the case with all his other works.

Ferenc Űrögdi Nagy (1804, Sajószentandrás – 1876, Kolozsvár)

'A teacher, widely known for his versatile scholarly aptitude and patriotic activity' (Bereczki M. 1882. 1.), Űrögdi Nagy had studied at the Calvinist college of Marosvásárhely, then went to study at foreign universities in 1829 – 30, then, upon his return, became

²⁶ TÉGLÁSI ERCSEI, József. Útazások nemes Torda vármegye alsó kerületének nevezetesebb járásában. Második cikkely. Lupsai járás. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1837, Vol. 8/2, No. 5, p. 71.

²⁷ TÉGLÁSI ERCSEI, József. Útazások nemes Torda vármegye Vécsi járásában. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1836, Vol. 7/1, No. 8, p. 114.

²⁸ TÉGLÁSI ERCSEI, József. Útazások nemes Torda vármegye alsó kerületének nevezetesebb járásában. Első cikkely. Torda városa s környéke ismertetése. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1837, Vol. 8/1, No. 22, p. 339-340.

a pastor at Torda. From 1836 until his retirement in 1872 he was a teacher at the Calvinist college of Kolozsvár.

Right from the 1840's onwards his interest turned toward viticulture and fruit growing, he was a founding member of the Transylvanian Farming Society established in 1844, and operated as its secretary between 1854 and 1860. He acted as editor of the society's calendar from 1854 to 1856 and organised the society's contests and exhibitions of fruit, grape, wine, produce and livestock. He was also a founder and organiser of the fruit and vine-growing school that the society ran at Kolozsmonostor, and did all of this so successfully that he in fact contributed greatly to the society gaining financial stability. He assisted in the emergence of several farming societies in the countryside and was president of the Farming Society of Torda-Aranyos County. He also gained national renown as a vine-grower and fruit producer and was in correspondence with a host of experts. In his orchard at Torda, famous at the time, "he had collected nearly 500 Hungarian and foreign breeds of fruit and bred the best of them in his nursery orchard."²⁹ Alongside all of this he also edited popular reading matter for the general public, which is a good example to show the broad spectrum of activities that could be interlinked under the aegis of acting for the public good in this period. Volume two of the popular book *Mentor* was dedicated by its editor to Miksa Teleky, "keen friend of the cause of temperance."³⁰ Ferenc Nagy himself is also writing in this book about the dangers posed by palinka and the necessity to prevent these by forming temperance societies.

Ferenc Ürögdi Nagy published his travel accounts, amounting to four accounts of three venues, in the *Nemzeti Társalkodó* in 1838 at the outset of his teaching career at Kolozsvár, before engaging in the above described activities. On two occasions he wrote about Torockó and once each about Dextrád and Teke. The article he published about iron ore mining at Torockó contains but an allusion that the author is aware that there are ethnographic and linguistic curiosities at the location that would also deserve to be recorded.

In his other description of Torockó, published as a fictitious letter, he enlists a number of arguments to support the idea that the locals are of German origin (besides historical data he founded his reasoning on data regarding language use, clothing and identity in furniture). He offered a particularly detailed account of the female costumes and the wedding customs observed at Torockó .

Before his description of the wedding custom at Torockó, published in December 1838, in October and November of the same year Ferenc Nagy came out with the detailed description of two other customs under the title *Hazai képek* [Scenes from country life]. First he presented "a fond and harmless custom ... which may have been fashionable for centuries"³¹ – the horse-race of Dextrád. It seems likely that one reason why he made himself familiar with the folk custom was that he saw in it a tradition which would

²⁹ TAKÁTS, Rózsa. Nagy Ferenc tordai gyümölcstüftvényének jegyzéke, 1862. In: Estók János, ed.: *A Magyar Mezőgazdasági Múzeum Közleményei*. 2013 – 2015. Budapest: Magyar Mezőgazdasági Múzeum, 2015, p. 109.

³⁰ NAGY, Ferenc. *Mentor. Erdélyi népkönyv*. Kolozsvár: Királyi Lyceum, 1843, no page no.

³¹ NAGY, Ferenc. *Hazai képek*. A dextrádi lófuttatás. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1838, Vol. 9/2, No. 17, p. 129.

lend itself to being transformed into something noble. He first inventories all of the information he could gather about the Saxon custom of the horse-race, held on the second day of Pentecost, then goes on to describe it in detail.

In the following issue of the journal, Ferenc Nagy offers a detailed description of a characteristic custom – a ring game that existed at Teke, near Dextrád, and was performed on the second day of Pentecost. Ferenc Nagy viewed it as “a custom that bears the true stamp of the life of the nation” and, as he writes, in the past he had been an eye-witness to it. However, since “many small things pertaining to it had dropped out from the storehouse of my memories, I acquired data from individuals of public credit, and this helped overcome the infidelities of memory.”³² The structure of this custom description is similar to that used at Dextrád: after the origin and history of the custom are described, he offers a detailed presentation of the action elements, shedding special light on the costumes worn at the festivities.

When publishing under his own name on ethnographic subjects, Ferenc Nagy confined himself almost exclusively to the description of customs. To a smaller extent he also considered local costumes a presentable subject matter. By contrast, when he wrote under a pseudonym, other folklore genres also appeared on the scene. In the altogether 11 pieces he published under the name Árokalyi in 1839, he mostly shared legends or reported their existence. His ethnographic publications are characterised by a particular, enlightened and somewhat distant approach which considers it important to record folk tradition, but clearly refuses to identify with it, indeed, considers such sentiments harmful and a hinderance to social progress.

The use of the terminology suggests that he considers *rege* (historical tale), *monda* (legend) and *népmonda* (folk legend), but considers *rege* to be a broader term which may also be applied to different contexts. Altogether he published three legend texts and two *sujets*.

On one occasion he also describes the conditions under which he first came in contact with the legend in question – and presents it as a very commonplace, mundane event. He believes that walking along the hilltop above Brassó any “skillful cicerone” will tell it to any wanderer. His use of these terms also seems to reveal that travellers and the later authors of travel accounts most commonly came in contact with local legends via the tour guides who assisted them through the region and who were closely familiar with the stock of local narratives. Thus we may assume that this may well have been one such typical occasion for relating legends. This is also an important locus because it records the attitude which the traveller took toward these local legends. Árokalyi seems to have looked on these legends as a living tradition that is worth hearing and recording, but which has nothing to do with historical reality (“historical truth”), and thus the people who believe in them live in an unenlightened state of blissful ignorance. A surprising element in his publications under pseudonym that these include only one custom account, and for this he chose not one of the elements of the accepted calendar festivities, but the folk custom of the *tussle* practiced at Kovászna. This is probably related to the fact that he looked on this custom as a traditional element which might lend itself to transformation into a more noble tradition. As it stood at the time, he

³² NAGY, Ferenc. 1838d Hazai képek. A tekei gyűrűjáték. In: *Nemzeti Társalkodó*. 1838, Vol. 9/2, No. 18, p. 138.

apostrophised the custom as “a degrading human habit” and is hopeful that soon it will vanish completely.

I believe that these two examples show clearly that the intellectuals who first wrote and published travel accounts for the *Nemzeti Társalkodó* played very different, but equally significant roles in Transylvanian society. These roles were interconnected in the age through the behaviour repertoire of individuals labouring for social progress. This is how the written recording and publication of travel experiences could find its place alongside causes such as fruit growing, viniculture, cave exploration, temperance societies and the fight against excessive alcohol consumption. Recording a certain range of ethnographic observations was one of the many objectives of such travels. The attitude which we may discern in the background of these observations ranges between rejection and the intention to salvage. Individuals who published travel accounts with ethnographic data in the *Nemzeti Társalkodó* did not go on to become collectors, but their presence and their articles played an important role in ethnographic collection emerging and growing into a mass phenomenon in Transylvania.

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