

Theses of the DLA Doctoral Dissertation

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The Practice of a Folk Instrument, the Kobož, in
the Musical Life of a Hungarian Village in
Moldavia

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I. Background of the research

Hungarian folk music research has a long tradition. In 19th-century Hungary, prominent intellectuals played a key role in shaping a structured musical culture and establishing institutional musicology. Their efforts paved the way for the work of Béla Vikár, Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, who helped to launch folk music research that met the criteria of modern scholarship. There are historical and technical reasons why the processing of vocal material long predates instrumental research. Even within this field, there are topics that have either remained outside the mainstream of research or have been marginalised over the last decades. These include research on the *koboz*.

Due to the lack of Hungarian data and the challenge of distinguishing factors influencing Hungarian communities in Moldova from cultural practices of the majority society and interethnic influences has long prevented the identification of musical facts and the social context related to the *koboz*. Essentially, musicians attempted to articulate their experiences, often relying on an incomplete scientific framework. There was a need to investigate traditional *koboz* playing and to clarify its Hungarian elements. My thesis aims to contribute to this work by a comparative analysis of the repertoires of two Moldavian

Hungarian koboz players and by exploring their social background.

The focus of my research is the study of the traditional koboz repertoire of two Hungarian koboz players from Lujzikalagor, György Gyöngyös and György Butak, who were related. I chose this topic because no comprehensive musical notation of the full repertoire of these two solo koboz players has been created yet, which would offer a scientific overview of their entire repertoire and utilize the methods of comparative analysis.

II. Sources

The most significant sources of musical analysis are the seventeen solo pieces by György Gyöngyös, a koboz player from Lujzikalagor, recorded in 1965. These pieces have been preserved thanks to the collection of Zoltán Kallós. In 1975, György Stuber recorded eight melodies from the solo performance of György Butak, a koboz player from Lujzikalagor. In 1978, Attila Zakariás documented György Butak's playing accompanying Antal Gábor's violin playing, and two solo pieces can be heard on this recording.

The mapping of musical occasions and the network of local musicians is essential for a proper interpretation of the data

on music folklore. Drawing on literature sources as well as on my own fieldwork, I have sketched a brief history of the Hungarian Catholic community in Lujzikalagor, in addition the musical life that was still active at the time of the researched koboz players.

Due to the inaccuracy of the family data of Gyöngyös and Butak, I extended the research to the field of kinship relations. It soon became clear that the missing data could only be filled by active fieldwork, which consisted of two parts: collecting information from Bákó County's archives and summarising information from the community's knowledge.

III. Methodology

In total, I transcribed twenty-seven recordings of solo pieces in detail. As I was planning my research I had to face the lack of methods of analysing instrumental data. Each transcript of the songbook consist of an A/3-sized sheet score, that can support the comparative analyses as it contains every variant, by verse and dance music, listed below eachother.

In my analysis, I will examine the structure, rhythmic variations, harmonic structure and melodic elements of the solo pieces. In addition, I also observe the relationship between melody playing and singing. After thoroughly transcribing all

the recordings, I analyzed the data obtained using statistical methods, drawing on my own instrumental experience for interpretation. Based on the results obtained, I looked for general correlations.

In interpreting music folklore data, it is crucial – beyond the descriptive musical aspects – to examine the musicians' backgrounds, their social networks, and family circumstances. Based on existing publications, I compiled the available data, identified gaps and inconsistencies, and gathered unpublished sources. It became evident that additional findings could only be achieved through field research.

Fieldwork was required to survey cemetery grave inscriptions and record community memories, supplemented by archival research. The main fieldwork tools used were both general and personalised questionnaires of our own design. In addition to interviews with local residents, we also received significant assistance from people born in Lujzikalagor or those working in the village.

IV. Results

Since these records have not yet been subjected to a thorough analysis, supported by scientifically detailed annotations, the primary goal of my research was to address these gaps. New

perspectives have resulted in numerous insights, clarifications, and even refutations of previous findings. It was anticipated that the analyses would provide an insight into the traditional koboz playing of Lujzagalagor and its characteristic stylistic elements, complemented by the stylistic formative power of local knowledge transfer.

The multi-level comparative analyses uncovered the relationship between the sung melody and the instrumental melody. Additionally, with the help of graphic representations of the signed variants, the micro-level mapping of the thinking and technical elements in instrumental playing was achieved. This also allowed for the continuation of work started in previous publications: the glossary of terms used to catalog the technical elements of traditional koboz playing was expanded with new terms.

A comparison of the published biographical data of the musicians studied revealed several inaccuracies and gaps in the information. An important result of this research is that almost all of these discrepancies have been clarified – many of them are being published for the first time – allowing for the creation of a family tree that illustrates all the relationships.

In addition to literary sources in Hungarian and Romanian (not yet published in Hungarian), I prepared a summary of the brief history of the Hungarian Catholic

community in Lujzikalagor and the musical life that remained active during the time of the researched koboz players, based on my own fieldwork. It is noteworthy that local residents continue to provide valuable music-related information, leading to the discovery of previously unknown details about other active koboz players in Lujzikalagor, as well as many aspects of the musical life from that period.

V. Documentation of activities related to the subject of the thesis

Publications, workshops, recordings, folk music collections:

László Szlama: *Păun Vasile, a kobzos*. (Budapest: Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music 2020.)

Sándor Balogh: *Megvirágzott a diófa - Moldvai csángó énekes kamarazene furulyával, citerával és kobozkísérettel*. Koboz chapters, contribution to CD annex. (Budapest: Dialekton Folk Music Publisher, 2019.)

László Szlama: *Kobozreneszánsz/Ahogy régen...* (Budapest: Dialekton Folk Music Publisher, 2017. BS-CD 25.)

Fieldwork in Moldavia 2023. (Bákó, Lujzikalagor, Somoska, 2023.10.29–11. 04.)

Fieldwork in Transylvania and Moldavia 2021. (Biharfalu, Csíkszereda, Sepsiszentgyörgy, Brassó, Diószeg, Lészped,

Somoska, Lujzikalagor, Tamás, Redojé, Diószén,
2021.09.27–10.05.

Presentations:

László Szlama: *Păun Vasile, a kobzos. Könyvbemutató.*
(Institution and Tradition Conference, Budapest, Ward Mária
School, 2021.)

László Szlama: *Păun Vasile, a kobzos. Könyvbemutató.* (5.
koboz players' day, Sfântu Gheorghe, Unitarian Parish, 2021.)

László Szlama: *Ahogy régen... Egy mai lemez régi
töredékekből.* (4. koboz players' day, Budapest, Liszt
Academy, 2020.)

László Szlama: *Păun Vasile, a kobzos. Kérdések egy készülő
kiadvány kapcsán.* (3. koboz players' day, Budapest, Liszt
Academy, 2020.)

László Szlama: *Ahogy régen... – Szólólemezem
forráselemzése.* (Budapest, Lumen Café, 2018.)

László Szlama: *Bartók és a népzene.* (Tokyo University of the
Arts, 2016. in the posting of Liszt Academy)

László Szlama: *Dallamjáték a hagyományos
kobozrepertoárban.* (1. koboz players' day, Budapest, Fonó,
2016.)

László Szlama: *A koboztabulatúra. Kísérlet kobzos
dallamanyagok és átiratok lejegyzésére.* (XXXII. OTDK,
Budapest, Liszt Academy, 2014.)