

## ETHNOGRAPHIC AND FOLK MUSIC TRADITIONS OF JOBÁGYTELKE (SÂMBRIAŞ), I. PART

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**SUMMARY.** The paper hereby entitled *Ethnographic and Folk Music Traditions of Jobágytelke (Sâmbriaş)* presents a village in Mureş county. I started my research on this village already during my high-school years, more precisely in the school year of 2012-2013. This was the period when I collected the pieces of information regarding the traditions and folk costumes of the village and the 23 tunes that Mr. András Sinkó (my teacher of ethnography at the time) helped me do the notation for. In the first year of my university studies I extended the paper. This was the period when I collected the children's songs, the nursery rhymes and the children's plays that used to be played by the old generation in the nursery and in elementary school. This year I attempted to set the existing information on scientific basis and to collect more information. This is when I dwelt on the origin and historical data of the village, on the community institutions meant to preserve traditions, on folk dance and the members of the folk dance ensemble. I succeeded in noting another 21 new tunes, 3 of which I wrote down from recordings made by the late Antal Balla. In the paper I used 28 other tunes as well, besides those collected by me. For these 28 other tunes I own acknowledgements for István Almási, PhD who kindly granted that I have access to his collection kept at the Folklore Archive of Cluj-Napoca. The paper hereby could not have been written without the kind help of Ilona Szenik, PhD. It is her merit that my research can rely on scientific grounds and that the tunes are organized and have musical analysis attached to them. And last, but not least I owe acknowledgements to my thesis coordinator, Mrs. Köpeczi-Kirkósa Júlia, PhD, to PhD. Zoltán Gergely, researcher at the Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy, department of Cluj-Napoca and also to my informants from the village and to all the inhabitants of the village who readily informed me and introduced me to village life.

**Keywords:** folklore, folk music, research of folk music, musical analysis, folk costumes, folk dance, folk tradition.

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**1. Image**

**A picture of the village**

## **1. Geographical and historical data on Sâmbriaș**

### **1.1 Geographical location - population**

"At the beginning of the Hodoș stream, near the creek that in that place is called Darvas, below the Tarbük forest lies Sâmbriaș, the last village belonging to the Seat of Mureș on this side. Tradition holds that its first inhabitants were serfs from a castle in the Gurghiu Mountains settled in this place and that explains the Hungarian name of the place, Jobbágytelke, which literally means 'the parcel of the serfs': *Sâmbriaș* is mentioned with its Hungarian name in the register of 1567 and in a document dating from 1614 the same Hungarian name is spelt *J o b b á g i t e l k i f f a l w a*'. Sâmbriaș seceded in 1781 from the village of Hodoș and created a parish of its own. The most popular craft of the village, famous also in the neighbouring villages is straw hat twinning, straw hats being sold as far as Bistrița and Cluj-Napoca; at Târgu Mureș one can see hundreds of beautiful girls from this Szekler village bearing piles of straw hats and heading to the weekly markets.

On the hills above the village there are remnants of an old building called the Castle of the Germans, but in fact that was nothing more than the barracks of the German military stationed near the village. "<sup>2</sup>

Gáspár Bereczki, sr. related on the history of the village the following: "This was a nobleman's possession. There was a place at the end of the village called *The lord's land*, he lived there and the village was populated by its serfs. That parcel is called *The lord's land* up to this day."

<sup>2</sup> Orbán, Balázs, *A Székelyföld leírása (Tour Guide to Szeklerland)*, Helikon könyvkiadó, Pest, 1868, p. 80.

“VALLEY OF THE NIRAJ: the former → region limited by the Niraj river and the stream that joined the Niraj, inhabited by Szeklers of the Seat of Mureș. The central market and for a period even the capital town of the Seat of Mureș is Miercurea Nirajului. The region east to Miercurea Nirajului is also called *the Underbekecs* after the Bekecs Mountain above it.

The humorous name of the Catholic villages in the upper part of the valley of the Niraj is *The Holy Land*. Near the mouth of the Niraj river there are several villages that are famous for cultivating vegetables intensively since the turn of the century and therefore the area is humorously called also *Carrotland*.<sup>3</sup>

Jobbágytelke, in Hungarian, Sâmbriaș, in Romanian is a village in the eastern part of the Seat of Mureș, in the upper part of the Valley of the Niraj, a valley formed by the river Niraj with its rise in the Mezőhavas area of the Gurghiu Mountain, a river that created a 82 km long, densely populated valley.

It is one of the 27 settlements of the upper valley of the Niraj river (the Underbekecs area). Sâmbriaș lies among the hills on the right side of the nearby Niraj river, in the valley of the Darvas river having its rise in this location, under the Tarbükk forest. The village lies 24 kms far from the seat of the county, Târgu Mureș, to the north-east. The village belongs to the township of Hodoș along with villages Ihod and Isla. Sâmbriaș has the biggest population of the four villages, about 700 people, the majority being of Hungarian nationality.

The village is open only southward, from the other three directions it is limited by hills. They say that “Sâmbriaș is so wedged in among the hills that should there be so great a lid it could be covered.” The neighbouring villages in the north are: Chiheru de Jos and Chiheru de Sus (the majority of their population is Romanian); in the east: Mătrici, Călugăreni and Dămieni; in the south: Hodoș; in the west: Teleacul (the majority of their population is Romanian). Despite the fact that it is bordered from the north and west by villages where Romanian language and culture is dominant, Sâmbriaș continued to be a Szekler village for centuries. Until the mid-20 century boys in the village were not allowed to choose a wife from another village, therefore most of the population is Catholic.

After the change of regime in 1989 when borders were opened many villagers went to work in the West or moved to a neighbouring town.

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<sup>3</sup> Kósa, László – Filep, Antal, *A magyar nép táji-történeti tagolódása (The Historical-Idiomatic Segmentation of the Hungarian Folk Culture)*, Akadémiai kiadó, Budapest, 1975, p. 152-153.

## **1.2 Historical data**

### *1.2.1 The church*

At first Sâmbriaş was part of the parish of Hodoş (one of the oldest parishes in the region, its parish church having been mentioned already in 1332 in the papal list of tithing). The parish of Hodoş had the first wooden chapel built in the cemetery in 1619. This burnt down later.

A church of stone was built in Sâmbriaş only in 1778 and in 1781 it seceded from the parish of Hodoş into an independent parish church. The first priest to serve in the new parish was András Bartos who occupied his function on the 6th of May, 1781. The church was demolished in 1981-82 and it was rebuilt with some extensions from the donations of the parish members. The only building preserved was the old bell tower. The church was finished to its final form in the year 2000 when it was renovated again with several Dutch donations.

The parish church of Sâmbriaş dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is part of the archdeaconry of Mureş in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Alba Iulia. The day of the saint of the church is the birthday of the Virgin Mary commemorated on the 8th of September. There is also a pilgrimage pardon on the day of Saint Lawrence. Many years ago on the 10th of August, on the day of Saint Lawrence there was a big storm that destroyed much of the village. The villagers decided to observe that day as a feast and no work is allowed to be done on that day.

### *1.2.2 The school*

The school was built in 1876. The parcel on which it was built was bought by the township. The house on the parcel was sold and with that money building materials were bought, there were also some donations from the church and also the villagers went to great lengths to help the school to be built. The school building was maintained out of the money earned from selling wood cut from the township forest at auctions.

The first teacher was József Petres (he was a teacher and a cantor in the village in the period 1883-1933). The present form of the school was created in 1976 when it was extended and renovated. Since then this is a building with two stories, several classrooms, offices, a library, a laboratory, a storage room and a greenhouse.

Today this school offers education for the secondary school students of all the villages of the township. Primary education is still done in each of the villages separately. The number of students is decreasing compared to data from the past century. Today the entire number of students equals the number of students in a single class back in the 20th century.

### 1.3 Trades

“Lately the village population has dramatically decreased, many people moved away to the nearby towns or went to work abroad in order to increase their standard of living. But most of these people return regularly for the major holidays: for Easter and especially for the day of the saint of the village. They did not sell their former houses. As a result only the older generation continues to keep a farm and a living.” – Mária Tóth affirmed.

The bad soil, the high number of parcels lying on hills and a little cunning - and the result was that in Sâmbriaș the Communists did not force collectivization. The members of the evaluation committee concluded that the bad soil and the hills on which most parcels lie make it impossible to do mechanized agriculture in this area. This was not the reality, since there are already very few villagers who use only animal labour to cultivate their land. Which leads to the conclusion that the bad soil might have been nothing but an invention. “The members of the evaluation committee were convinced of the ‘facts’ in their report by the weaker spirit (the cereal brandy) and by the stronger spirit (the plum brandy) of the villagers and the calf that was not allowed to be slaughtered simply for the needs of the family, but one had to have a good reason for slaughter.” - related Gáspár Bereczki.

The inhabitants of Sâmbriaș were and are famous for their brandies and besides that they make a living from agriculture, animal breeding and straw hat twinning.

#### 1.3.1 Agriculture

Since boys in the village were not allowed to choose a wife from another village until the mid-20th century, parcels mostly remained within the family. This is why one can see so many stripes of land and parcels in one piece belonging to one family: the Bakós, the Ballas, the Orbáns, the Bereczkis and so on.

From spring till autumn there are always many people on the fields. Until the 1930s and 1940s the agriculture of the village was based on the so called *Threefold usage*. Which meant that agricultural land was classified to be used for three purposes. Hilly parcels were used to cultivate vine and the other parcels were divided into two: half for cereals and half for meadows. The vine was in the same place always, but on the other parcels cereals were cultivated on the meadows of the year before and viceversa. Changing the type of crops to be cultivated on a land improved the quality of the soil. This is called crop rotation.

People used to work in groups and helped each other. A work performed for another villager had to be returned by the beneficiary on the occasion when the worker needed it. Every farmer did their harvest and vintage gathering the family and the young people. Everybody worked together and landowners helped each other mutually in this manner and thus everybody had the hands they needed to do a labour considered to be a greater enterprise. Villagers always went to help in greater numbers in the places where labour force was best needed.

Mária Tóth relates of this kind of working: "80% of the houses were built with this labour system: the neighbour, the relative, the friend came to help and your house was built, then his house, and their house and so on, and all the houses were built collectively and everybody was happy, money was not relevant and nobody helped the other for money. Everything worked based on reciprocity."

### *1.3.2 Straw hat twinning*

The hilly, poor soil was wonderful for the einkorn (the bald headed wheat), which was a certain source of income for the people of the village and brought along another, special trade in the village, that of *hat binding (or straw hat twinning)*. Straw hat twinning was introduced to the villagers in 1831 by the parish priest who saw the toilsome, difficult life of the villagers and showed them how to twin hats, a trade that continues to be practiced to this day.

Until 1958 everybody twinned and sew straw hats independently. Women twinned hats in the winter, since there was no agricultural work in that period. They organized themselves into *guilds* (twinning circles) so that work would be more pleasant and routine less boring. Both women and girls were invited to these circles. The circles were organized according to every street of the village. There were approximately 10-12 guilds. Today only one or two of these circles are left. People returned to twinning independently whenever they have time.

Straw marked out for hats is left in the field for one or two weeks to dry, then it is taken home. First the head of the einkorn is cleaned, where the seeds are. Seeds are taken out and cut off at the knar so that the surface of the straw would be completely smooth. Then these pieces of straw are organized into 7 classes according to thickness. This is necessary for the straw needs to be approximately of the same size, since only thus will the twinning be nice and even. All the seven classes have specific local names. The pieces of straw are then washed and twinned.

The image below presents the braid. It ends once there are no pieces of straw left and it must be at least 40 meters long. This 40 meter long braid is coiled up to a stick called 'matura' and it is bought by the manufacturers. This 40 meter long braid is long enough for 2-3 or at best 4 straw hats, which means that a braid of einkorn of at least 10 meters is needed for one straw hat. And only the sawing needs two whole days. The rim of the *women's hat* is wider so that the face of the girls would be better protected from the sun, but it is not as tall as the men's hat. After it is sewn the hat is put into a press that presses decorative patterns on the rim.



Image 2

The rim of the *men's hat* is narrower, but it is taller, usually about 9 cm, but that depends on the dimensions of the head. Men's hats are not decorated. *"When we finished the hat we continue with two more threads twinned like the girls' hair and fix it around the rim of the hat. That is what a young lad's hat looks like."* - explains Irén Kiss.

Hats are not the only objects made of straw, but there are also tapestries, doormats, bags and Christmas tree decorations. What is more, on 13th January 2013 when I visited Boldizsár Miklós he told me surprised that several days ago there were some manufacturers in the village who bought only the thickest type of straw and planned to make beach umbrellas out of it for vacation houses since these can provide reliable shadow in the summer and protect people better also from heat.

This tradition is not in danger of going extinct. There are also young people who are interested in learning and practicing it. Many of them learned the trade and are ready to pass it on to the next generation. Every summer they organize "The Folk Music and Folk Dance Camp of Sâmbriaș" where participants are taught not only folk music and dance, but also traditional trades, among others straw hat twinning can be learnt as well.

**Image 3**



**Image 4**



## **2. Community institutions meant to preserve the tradition**

### **2.1 The village museum**

Creating a village museum was the idea of the villagers. On 4th October 2005 the general assembly of the parish decided to offer a house with a yard owned by the church for this purpose if someone accepted to finance its renovation. After a short negotiation the Vitéz Ének Foundation of Budapest accepted to provide part of the necessary funds by fundraising and to organize the renovation works. Preparations for renovation started in May 2006 and by mid-June most of the work of the tradesman was done.

Thus it was possible for the village museum to be inaugurated with two rooms of exhibits on the day of the saint of the village, the 18th of June, 2006.

The village museum is on the main road coming from Hodoş at no. 370. The house which hosts the museum was built at the beginning of the 1900s as a teacher's lodging. It is a typical L-shaped bourgeois house with big windows, especially fit to be a museum. The house has 5 rooms three of which look on the street. In the yard there is a stall and a barn with an entrance to the orchard.

The organizers exhibited the first pieces in two of the rooms looking on the street. The villagers donated 250 objects to be exhibits in these two rooms and to every exhibit there was attached a label with pieces of information. The exhibits were pieces of furniture, room fixtures, practical and decorative objects, costumes and photographs.



**Image 5**

**A corner dedicated to Hungarian composer  
Béla Bartók in the village museum**

The villagers remember only one folk song collector who visited their village and that was composer Béla Bartók in 1914. One of the rooms in the village museum commemorates the collections he made in Sâmbriaș.<sup>4</sup> He managed to note down 40 tunes, the original phonograph recordings of this collection being kept at the Folklore Museum of Budapest. On the wall of the village museum there are copies of several scores noted down in handwriting, a photograph of Béla Bartók, part of a collector's list bearing the notation of the tune, the introductory line of the song and the name and age of the singer.

Béla Bartók stayed at Kálmán Petres's house during his visit in the village. I was fortunate enough to meet Veronika Orbán, Kálmán Petres's descendant who told me that Bartók spent little time at Sâmbriaș. He spent his whole day going about the village and recording folk songs. His favourite dish was chicken *paprikas* made with sour cream, but when he arrived at his abode tired from a day's work he did not mind simpler dishes either.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://falumuzeum.eu/a-muzeum>

## **2.2 Museum of the typical village house**

It was Antal Balla's last wish that his home would be turned into a museum of the typical village house. The house which bears the name of an important organizer of the local cultural life and the president of the local folk dance ensemble is administrated today by the Cultural Association of Sâmbriaș.

Antal Balla had no direct heirs, his entire life was dedicated to his calling: his dear home village and the folk dance ensemble of Sâmbriaș. The main supporter and organizer of the Village Museum and the Museum of the typical village house of Sâmbriaș is Antal Stoller, the Knight of the Hungarian Culture. The house hosts besides the original fixtures also an audiovisual collection of archive and digital photographs, recordings, documents and tokens of Antal Balla and the folk dance ensemble of Sâmbriaș.

The house with a veranda in the center of the village kept its original building style, specific to the Upper Niraj region, while its fixtures reflect the living conditions of the Transylvanian rural population at the end of the 20th century. In this village they do not use the so called 'Szekler gate', the carved, ornamental wooden gate specific to the Szekler population. However Antal Balla made his house a more specific one by having built such a gate in front of it and on the gate it writes: "This gate is not meant to shut you out / But to show you the way into the house".

### **2.2.1 Antal Balla (15th June 1926 – 30th March 2008)**

Antal Balla was born at 15th June 1926 at Sâmbriaș to a peasant couple with six other children. Due to his thirst for knowledge and his talent he became a leading personality in the village: He was the council secretary for 31 years and a public servant for 10 years. He organized and managed the Folk dance ensemble of Sâmbriaș from 1945. Antal Balla was one of the finest personalities of the Transylvanian folk culture. His life and fame was entirely dedicated to the improvement of his home village. Sâmbriaș has been famous among the neighbouring settlements for centuries for the predisposition for singing and dancing of its people. And Antal Balla was no exception to this rule. He was always joyful and funny and made everybody's day a little nicer.

The folk dance ensemble was very fortunate to have "Uncle Anti", the favourite of the entire village who followed his own dreams and by doing so he also strengthened those community forming drives that made the preservation of the ancient culture of the village possible. He could not have children of his own, but despite this fact he was a joyful person who taught how to dance and improve themselves in any other way both the

children and the adults in the village. His kindness took him also abroad where he met his best friend, Antal Stoller. He turned 80 when the village museum was inaugurated. Thus the village and the guests coming from many places celebrated his 80th birthday along with the inauguration and the saint's day of the village. This was a surprise celebration organized in his honour by his friend, Antal Stoller. The Vitézi Ének Foundation made an interview about this memorable day in 2007.<sup>5</sup>

In this interview he related that he started his culture preserving activity on 1st November 1945. He managed to travel to Budapest several times with the folk dance ensemble where he met and befriended Antal Stoller. Antal Stoller was the one who came with the idea of a village museum and it took him a long time to convince Antal Balla to make the necessary arrangement. And in a while Balla finally set out indeed to find a house that would be fit for the realization of such plans. Then a house with a yard was offered by the parish and with the help of the villagers they managed to decorate it with furniture, costumes, and household and agricultural tools typical for Sâmbriaș. He said he had no idea of what was being planned, that the inauguration of the village museum was in fact planned for that day in his honour.

The village has many things to appreciate Antal Balla for. Among other things he was the cunning one who saved Sâmbriaș from collectivization. And it was also his merit that the road leading to Sâmbriaș was bituminized at the beginning of the 1970s.

Antal Balla's life was defined by the cultivation and preservation of culture and tradition. I realized this best when I visited the Museum of the typical village house. He wrote several memoirs in which he described in detail, as in a journal everything that they did with the dance ensemble. He wrote a detailed report of every activity, rehearsal, performance, competition of the folk dance ensemble and of its achievements. Besides he documented also what folk plays and roles he had taught to the ensemble, who played which role, when, who played in the performance and how successful it was. In many of the descriptions he included also the choreography of the performance, the name of the dancers, the assignment into couples and the place of each couple on the stage, the forms of the dance. He planned and noted everything, then he made corrections and summarized it. Besides this he collected every newspaper article in which the name of the village came up. He cut these out and glued them to paperboard and put them into a big file, which also contributed to the preservation of the past of the village

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<sup>5</sup> The video recording can be found on the website of the village museum. Photography: György Bancsik, editor: Róbert H. Árkosi

culture. But he went even further in his documentary work. He collected also every photograph taken of important events and arranged them into photo albums and he wrote next to every photograph when, where and on what occasion it was taken and who are represented in the photograph. He wrote down everything related to the Folk dance ensemble of Sâmbriaș in a stunning detail and care.

In his letters I read that he considered it very important to procure the tunes collected by Béla Bartók in 1914 at Sâmbriaș. Finally he succeeded. The recordings are kept on audio cassettes in the Museum of the typical village house of Sâmbriaș. The villagers who were members of the folk dance ensemble at the time related that he had taught new folk songs to them from those cassettes and there were performances in which they had sung only folk songs collected by Béla Bartók.

**Image 6**



**Antal Balla**

*"The fire keeps burning only if it is fed."* (Antal Balla)

Besides this he had also collections of his own on several audio cassettes. He was very thoughtful about preserving folk songs, so he had asked several people to sing as many folk songs as they know while he records their singing. At the end of almost all such interviews he thanked the informer for having sustained the ensemble so far with his presence and asked him or her to continue to be a member and to send also his children to learn dancing.

Antal Balla talked of the ensemble also on his deathbed as he did his entire life and asked all present to continue his life's work. In 2008 his Parkinson's disease had the best of him and he passed away on 30th March at the age of 82.

### **2.3 The Folk Dance Ensemble of Sâmbriaș**

The founder and main manager of the folk dance ensemble was the late Antal Balla who managed the ensemble from 1945 to 2008 when his illness prevented him from continuing. He improved the cultural life of the village teaching folk plays to the young people. They used the income from the performances of the ensemble to go and see plays at the Hungarian National Theatre of Cluj-Napoca.

In 1948 the "National Competition for Amateurs" was started. This was the first event on which Sâmbriaș was represented officially by the ensemble led by Antal Balla. And the first prize to be won was not far away either. The ensemble was awarded first prize at the county level folk competition of Târgu Mureș in 1949 and they were also the winners of the national level competition.

#### *2.3.1 The most important awards of the ensemble are:*

- 1st prize at the national folk competition in 1949
- 2nd prize at the national folk competition in 1951
- 1953: 6th World Youth Festival, 1st prize
- 1969: 9th National Cultural Competition, county level, 1st prize
- 1971: 3rd International Festival of the Countries of the Danube River organized at Baja, Hungary, 1st prize
- 1974: special award of Mureș county, silver medal
- 1977, 1979, 1981: Song of Praise to Romania (Cântarea României), county level, 1st prize
- 1979, 1983: Song of Praise to Romania, national level, 2nd prize
- 1981: Song of Praise to Romania, national level, 3rd prize
- 1985, 1987, 1989: Song of Praise to Romania, national level, 1st prize
- 1997: Antal Balla is awarded the *Életfa Award* for his work as the president of the Folk Dance Ensemble of Sâmbriaș. As the ensemble became famous they were invited to many national and international tours. The once famous folk dance ensemble forms a community even today out of the youth in the village.

The Folk Dance Ensemble of Sâmbriaș used to have a choir as well. Its conductor was Ferenc Nagy. The older generation of the villagers is still proud to have been a member either of the choir or the dance ensemble. Discussion with former members revealed the fact that the choir learned to sing the folk songs collected by Béla Bartók at Sâmbriaș. The recordings of these collections are kept in the Museum of the typical village house.

Antal Balla considered it absolutely necessary that the ensemble would relearn the old tunes almost forgotten by everyone. This is obvious from the documents and letters kept in the Museum of the typical village house in which he asks his acquaintances from abroad to help him have access to the "Bartók legacy" so that the villagers could relearn it.

### 2.3.2 *The present situation of the ensemble*

Since Antal Balla had no direct heir, the ensemble has been presided since the 15th of July, 2009 by his distant relative, Kálmán Orbán, jr. The ensemble has two groups formed of two generations: *the little ones and the big ones*. Little ones are children from kindergarten age to seniors of the secondary school. Some of the seniors of the secondary school were taken in among the big ones due to their height, even if they are not in high-school yet. The oldest members of the group of the big ones are juniors or seniors at the university.

The band is made up of two persons: Antal Tóth on violin and Dezső Bereczki on accordion. Due to the small band both the little ones and the big ones have to sing all the songs in the programme during the performance. Their repertoire is made up of newly created series of dances specific to the village, besides the choreographies made up by Antal Balla. Many of the present members of the ensemble were and are members also in the Zoltán Kodály Children's Choir of Maros County.

"We, the younger generation *follow in the footsteps*<sup>6</sup> of our parents and grandparents and predecessors in order to continue to preserve the tradition they had also preserved. And this will continue to be so until *The colourful rainbow bends over the sky*<sup>7</sup> of the village of Sâmbriaș. Our parents were dancers in the ensemble as well. They were the ones who taught us to like folk music and dance. This is our inheritance, this is what we will pass on." (Kálmán Orbán, jr. the president of the folk dance ensemble).

<sup>6</sup> The Hungarian expression used here as an equivalent to the English idiom 'to follow in one's footsteps' is an expression specific to the village meaning 'we attempt to follow in their footsteps'.

<sup>7</sup> The Hungarian correspondent of the English title 'The colourful rainbow bends over the sky', i.e. 'Szép szivárvány koszorúzza az eget' is the first line of a folk song from Sâmbriaș. It is considered the village anthem due to its popularity in the days of fame of the ensemble in the last century.

### 2.3.3 Irén Kiss

Irén Kiss was born in Sâmbriaș and she spent her childhood in the village. In the past few years she sang many times during the Folk Music and Dance Camp of Sâmbriaș. She also taught many people folk songs. I personally am very thankful that she introduced me to so many wonderful folk songs of Sâmbriaș.

*“I was born here, in Sâmbriaș on 29th March 1947. My mother and father were cattle farmers. We were five siblings. One of us died as a child and four of us lived to be grown up. My parents are dead. I am the oldest. I also have two children, one of them a girl; my siblings are all away from home. One of them lives in Gheorgheni and the other three in one of the neighbouring villages. We had a large family and a different childhood from the present generation. We had to accept things as they were. In those times there were not so many products, such modern trends. In those times we were walking barefoot and wearing only a shirt. We had no fancy dresses and shoes for the twinning circles and the dances in the village. We had to go barefoot also to the stubble, nobody cared that it was uncomfortable to us. We had to hoe other people’s cornfield for a little share of the crop. For we had no land of our own. And neither had many of the other villagers. In my father’s youth for a period the land had a threefold usage. One part corn, one part wheat and one part meadow for the animals. At holiday time, at Easter or at Christmas we went carol singing, we visited each other and talked, played cards and at Easter time they came to smigus-dyngus us, with tubs of water, not perfume... In our times there were not so many toys and gadgets, computers and everything. No way! We played with the wet fur that came off when grandpa cleaned the cow. He made a ball out of it, a very hard ball which you did not wish anybody would throw at you. That was our ball instead of ping-pong balls and footballs.*

*I went to school for four entire years. And when I was in the fourth grade I was still so dumb that I would count fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen, ten teen. I did not know that was called ‘twenty’. It was at that time that we studied Romanian and learned about Horea, Cloșca and Crișan. I could not pronounce their names and my father gave me a spanking that brought down the sieve from the table. In those times children were not speared so much. If we did not know the multiplication table or any other lesson the teacher would strike our fingertips with a rod.*

*Such were our times. You know, Heni, I did not have a schoolbag. My mother turned an old hat into a kind of bag and she put a handle on it out of wick and that was my schoolbag. We used the cheapest ink, but I could barely afford even that. And I spilled it all until I took it home. I had a*

*kind of official clothing in which I went to school. I spilled ink over it so badly that I could not go to school the next day. We were poor so it had to be that way. I am not ashamed to admit it even in the Parliament that this was how I was raised: my father was a cattle farmer, I was a cattle farmer, my husband was a herder and thus our great fortune. This is how I grew up, Heni, as the daughter of a poor man. Now we are more sensitive as old people and sickly people in general... But Heni dear, trust me, when we were children we could not say I would not eat this, I do not want to eat that. We ate roasted hazels full of soot, we baked potatoes, we toasted bread, we ate pumpkins with almost no pulp, just as piglets would and we were fine... I would not eat it today. They cooked stewed nubbins and plums. Then they baked it when they baked bread and three or four times we baked it, then it was let to rest and put into polenta and served to us..."*

"So, Heni, this was my great adventure, the great fortune I had, this is how I grew up as good as I could..." - Irén Kiss, 2013.

## **2.4. Dances from Sâmbriaș**

In the Szeklerland there are several types of dances. The dances of the inhabitants of Szeklerland are not so obsolete as that of the Transylvanian Hungarian diaspora, for they accommodated more rapidly to the new style adopted in the central part of Hungary and also the folklorized bourgeois social dances (*the two-step, the Polkalike dances*) also became dominant in their dances. The highest number of bourgeois elements was adopted in the region of Háromszék, the most archaic dances are in the valley of the Niraj river, the eastern part of the Seat of Udvarhely and the upper region of the Seat of Csík, while the richest in decorative elements is the dance of the Seat of Maros.<sup>8</sup>

Old dances were *danced in a suite* following a strict order. This means that dances had a predetermined regular order organized into a cycle and they were danced in that predetermined order with smaller interruptions or pauses between them. The dances of the suite had different names according to region: *One pair, one song, one piece, turn, rupture*.

### **2.4.1. The series of dances specific to Sâmbriaș**

In 1978 Antal Balla recorded an interview with Antal Simó, one of the villagers who related the dance suite of that time: *Slow step, turn step, quick whirl, hopper, and official, quick step*. This series of dances was preserved, but there are occasions when it is expanded with a girls' dance or a lads' dance. Such an occasion is the dance of the vine wardens at vintage.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://mek.niif.hu/02100/02115/html/4-1608.html>



The first dance in the series is the *slow step*, with an average tempo (♩ = cca. 100-120). During this dance everybody looks for a partner and the dance is made up mostly of steps specific to the *csárdás*, whirling in pair, stepping toward each other and away and a few dancing figures, which every pair dances following their own pattern. Exceptions from this rule are only choreographies presented in performances. During the slow step the musicians play popular folk songs and the dancers sing the songs.

The *turn step* has a quicker tempo. Figures are more varied and this dance is livelier. Men present several figures where they slap their bootlegs. The step of the girls during these figures varies from region to region. In some regions they simply step from left to right and back, in other regions they have a more complex footwork. In Sâmbriaș girls whirl at the back of their partner and continue whirling until the figures of the partner last. Dancers sing also during the *turn step*, but at this stage there are also instrumental parts during which the dancers whoop.

The *quick whirl* or otherwise: *quick turns*, *quick whirler* or *hybrid* has a tempo that is relatively slower, but still quite lively (♩ = cca. 80-100). This dance is also danced in pairs. Musically this dance is dominated increasingly by varied and ornamented tunes and dancers whoop during the entire dance.

The *hooper* or *skipper* is a quick round dance (♩ = cca. 148-152). The dancing pairs form a circle, they grab each other by the shoulder and have a synchronous footwork, then at a certain point they start to go round. This dance has two types of footwork, familiar to both the girls and the boys. The simpler figures are danced to the first melodic line and the more complex ones to the second. During the first part of the third melodic line they simply go round stepping more accentuated with their inner leg and in the second part of the melodic line they ornament the figure by stepping on the left leg and crossing it with their right leg once in front of, once behind the left leg. The most popular skipping tune is the folk song entitled *Erdő mellett nem jó lakni* (No One Should Live Near The Forest).

The *official* is another dance in pairs with a temperate tempo. Its tune is made up mostly of popular folk songs.

The *quick step* is also a dance in pairs, the dance with the quickest tempo in the series, although it is not much quicker than the quick whirl. This music hardly contains any familiar tunes. And even when they are it is uncertain whether any of the dancers would have the lungs to sing besides such a quick tempo, but whooping is constant.

The interview does not mention the *verbunkos* (*recruiter dance*), the *girls' dance* and the folklorized versions of the bourgeois social dances (*the fourth, the sixth, the eighth and the stork*), but my later collections prove that these were also part of the series of dances, even though these were danced

only in the dance house, at vintage at the vine warden's dance and in some of the performances. During my research I participated at several dance houses. I described the dances based on what I saw there and using my expertise as a dancer.

Sâmbriaș does not have a folk band so they always have paid musicians and they provide for the "firy music" in this manner up to this day. There is a nearby village, Petrilaca de Mureș, one of the most important musical centers of the upper region of the Mureș River. This village had several Gipsy bands since the mid-20th century and these could provide dancing music, high quality music not only to their own village, but to the neighbouring villages of the upper region of the Mureș river, the upper region of the Niraj river and Aluniș at the same time. Most of the musicians belonged to famous Gipsy musician dynasties like the Csiszárs, the Fülöps, the Lunkas, the Ötvöses, the Ráczes and the Tóths. They all belonged to the so called Hungarized Gipsies who spoke Hungarian as their mother tongue, were reformed and had given up their nomad lifestyle several centuries ago.

The most famous Gipsy band leader still living and the favourite fiddler of Sâmbriaș and of the neighbouring region is Aladár Csiszár. He confesses that since there are fewer and fewer traditional weddings and balls he is asked to play quite rarely nowadays. After the change of régime in 1989 he had been the informer musician of the dance houses and camps organized in Hungary and the violin teacher at the Folk Music and Dance Camp of Sâmbriaș from 1999 to this day. His children and grandchildren did not learn to play instruments so there is nobody left to continue the family tradition.

## **2.5 The folk costumes of Sâmbriaș**

**Image 7**



**Some of the folk costumes exhibited at the village museum of Sâmbriaș**

The folk costumes of Sâmbriaș did not change much over time. The economic, social and cultural development and parallel the change of clothing type gathered ground in this village as well. Today only a few old men wear the folk costumes as their common clothing. Young people wear costumes only on holidays and for the performances. Besides development there are several other reasons why the villagers do not wear their costumes on the common days. First of all they are quite uncomfortable, they are too warm, especially in the summer and they seem too festive for common use and also their creation is very expensive. Earlier the villagers produced themselves the materials needed for their clothing, like wool, baize, hemp and straw. They processed and ornamented it themselves. Only the shoes were bought from stores or from the market and they wore them only on occasions, since shoes were expensive and difficult to procure. So the villagers used to go barefoot most of the time.

Usually every generation had its specific clothing, but there were also pieces that were generally worn both by younger and older. For example everybody wore white shirts, in the summer and went mostly barefoot, while at winter they wore smooth legged boots. These boots were made of black leather treated with fish-tallow, which could not be cleaned shiny, so girls usually decorated it with a brown-blackish or red string.

- *The folk costumes of the children:* Boys were considered of age at eighteen and girls at sixteen. Boys would wear cream coloured stretchy trousers made of baize decorated with a black cordon and the so called 'szokma', which was a kind of long coat. And an uncut shirt with a single opening for the neck with three buttons, one at the neck and two at each arm. Girls had a similar type of shirt and the lower part was wider than the upper part, tied at waist with a hemp string. Their woven skirts were sewn to their vest called a 'lajbiskontos'. These could be of different colours: red, blue, green. Their apron was sewn from a hybrid material (half hemp-half cotton).

- *Lads and girls (up to the age of 30):* Lads went to work wearing rubber moccasins or sometimes leather boots. This was the usual footwear of all the other male generations, too. All men were wearing cream coloured stretchy trousers made of baize on which there was a single pocket decorated with a green cordon. Their vest was red decorated with black apricot kernels and green and blue cordons. Several hundred apricot kernels were needed for a single vest. In the summer they wore straw hats, while at winter hats made of baize. Girls wore long shirts similar to those of the children with a densely wrinkled tier of 1 or 2 cms. The shirt had no armhole and no slimming with long, wrinkled sleeves. Vests of baize were decorated with red velvet, while vests of velvet were decorated with materials of other

colours than that of the main fabric. The vest could be of several colours: red, blue, black. On the ornamental velvet ribbon and next to it they sew white and black beads in a zigzagged (oxenpiss) line. The vest had armholes, but no slimming. Girls wore woven skirts of different colours (dark blue, black, brown). The length of all the skirts was to the ankle. The aprons were made of simple, hybrid linen with no decoration. They wore two or three strings of red bead tied together with a bead knitter. On common days girls twinned their hair and put it into a bun and they wove into it three fingers wide ribbon decorated with pictures of roses which was long enough to reach the end of the skirt. The girls to be married did not twin their hair into a bun, but wore it freely.

- *Married and middle aged men (between 30 and 60)*: Men went barefoot in the summer and wore smooth legged boots, hiking boots or moccasins in the winter. They wore white shirts and stretchy baize trousers. As they grew older the green cordon decorating the stretchy trousers was changed to black one. At old age they wore *trousers made of frieze*. In the winter, when they went for a longer journey they changed their jackets to a long coat called 'szokma'. As a vest they wore their groom vest decorated with apricot kernels. In the summer they wore a *tall straw hat with a headpiece* decorated with a 10 cm wide velvet string.

- *Married and middle aged women (between 30 and 60)*. They wore exactly the same outfit as the girls. The only difference in attire between girls and married women was that the latter wore their hair in an untwined bun and they wore a kerchief on their heads.

- *The elderly (60 years and older)*:

*MEN*: They had the same footwear. Over their white shirt they wore a short waisted sleeved jacket called the 'frisko'. It was worn for protection. The 'frisko' was made of hybrid linen and it had an inner pocket for the *tobacco bag made of leather in which they put their pipe, pipe cleaner, flint and tinder*. They wore stretchy trousers like their middle aged peers. The pocket of the trousers was decorated with black cotton yarn, but the pattern was unchanged. They also wore trousers of frieze. In the summer they also wore straw hats with a headpiece, while in the winter they had hats bought from Sighișoara.

*WOMEN*: Elderly women wore black, dark red or dark blue. They wore a *parselylike* shirt. This kind of shirt differed from the shirts of younger women only by the collar, which was narrower (about half a cm) and it had an easy wrinkle made by tearing a thread from the fabric. All the other pieces of their clothing were the same as their younger peer's, they had no red string on their boots and they wore a dark coloured kerchief.

Besides that there were holiday garments which had various accessories, like coloured ribbons. Villagers gave up wearing their costumes after the turn of the century, especially after the Second World War. Folk costumes became less and less worn and they were replaced with more fashionable, cheaper, easier to wash pieces of clothing. Today costumes are worn only on holidays. Only some of the elderly wear them on common days and even they wear only some pieces, for example men would wear the stretchy trousers, the straw hat, the jacket, the vest, women the skirt and the kerchief.

*“Lads used to wear trousers and shirts made of tow. They used to have two sets of clothes: one for the common days and one for holidays. They wore the stretchy trousers also during the harvest. These trousers were made of baize. Baize was made of wool, which was cut and then taken to Chibed to be combed and then people from the neighbouring villages would spin it, for they knew how to spin, but they could not make straw hats, so they would spin stretchy trousers instead.” – Mária Tóth.*

**Image 8**



**The most specific costumes worn today**

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