

CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS IN BOZIEȘ (MAGYARBORZÁS) AND VIȚA (VICE)

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SUMMARY. Every time I have been asked which my favourite holiday was, I replied without a moment's hesitation that it was Christmas. It would be difficult to explain why, though... This is the time of the year when families come together and celebrate together. Celebration means more than a Christmas holiday, snow, sledging, delicious food, so much more. Christmas is the time when old customs come to life again and come back into our lives. When I went on my folk song collecting tour, it was such a pleasant experience that people welcomed me into their homes, set the table for me, or as they would say "gave me a treat", informers were pleased to sing, pleased to help. And they did not just sing, they also informed me. They described how it used to be in the old days, what customs used to be there, how people would celebrate...

Keywords: Christmas, Mezőség, Câmpia Transilvaniei, carols, celebrating, Bethlehem, Kurucz, Rákóczy II.

As they spoke I had the feeling that the time stopped and I was in another dimension where everything used to be so beautiful, so peaceful, people would not be always on the run, a place where Christmas was about Christ being born, about love and care for each other, about community life and singing, not supermarkets, holiday tours and fancy presents - a real celebration.

As a final conclusion I would state that customs and singing are closely related, we could almost say one does not exist without the other. If we know the songs and we know the customs, it is easier to picture what Christmas on the Mezőség² (Câmpia Transilvaniei) is like.

In my previous article I presented the tunes of the traditional Christmas carols of Mezőség, now I would like to introduce you to the customs in which these songs are integrated. Regrettably, in my experience of our days, this priceless treasure is less and less valued and it will soon die out. Young people in my generation are almost completely ignorant of the traditional folk songs and customs.

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² In the paper hereby I will use the name of this region in Hungarian, since this region forms a cultural unit within the Hungarian culture and therefore its Romanian name (Câmpia Transilvaniei) would be merely a geographical name, while in Hungarian the name Mezőség means not only a well defined area in the land, but also a subculture, a life style, a piece of folklore.

Therefore, I regarded it as my duty to do my share in saving the customs and songs of my home village on the verge of extinction for the next generations. In the following pages, I will reveal how people used to celebrate the sacred time of Christmas and how we celebrate it today.

My home village Bozieş (Magyarborzás) and the village next to it, Vita (Vice) lie in the eastern part of the Mezőség, or rather of Northern Mezőség. Other villages like Valea Unguraşului (Csabaújfalú), Ceaba (Bálványoscsaba), Sâmbieni (Erdőszombattelke), Fizeşu Gherlii (Ördögösfüzes), Sânmartin (Szépkényerűszentmárton), Bonţ (Boncníres), Sic (Szék), Buza (Buza), Țigău (Cegőtelke), Geaca (Gyeke), Sângeorgiu Nou (Szászsztgyörgy), Şarmaşu (Nagysármás), Fântâniţa (Mezőköbölkút) are also part of this ethnographical unit.

Besides the customs, also some demographic data will be presented on the region. The Encyclopaedia of Hungarian Ethnography presents the region of Mezőség as follows: "A hilly region without any forests bordered by the Someşul Mic, Someşul Mare, Şieu, Mureş and Arieş rivers in the central part of Transylvania."

I will present the area also on a map.

Ex. 1



Historical Data on the Villages. Bozies (Magyarborzás)

Bozies (Magyarborzás) is one of the ancient settlements of Szolnok-Doboka county. Sources mention it in 1332 as Buzias, in 1614 as Magyar Bozzás and in 1678 as Magyarborzás. The name of the village derives from its numerous elder trees.

Until the sixteenth century, the inhabitants of the village were Catholics. There are records of a priest called Domokos paying 16 denary and a few years later a priest called János paying sixty denary to the Catholic Church.³

In the times of the Reformation, the village turned Protestant. In 1614, a Reformed parish was established in the village, it exists ever since. Among the pastors of the village, there was János Szöllősi, also a teacher, who was given a noble rank by Prince Gábor Bethlen. The church in the village is united into one parish with the church of Khétely in 1622. In the 1750s, the Catholic Church is being reorganized, but the village kept the Protestant faith. Until 1772 it formed a parish by itself, later it belonged to Vita (Vice). A few years later, it forms a parish by itself again.

Judging by its style the church is probably of Romanesque style. At the end of the fifteenth century the Romanesque nave of the church was completed with a Gothic, pointed sanctuary. Its window grills were of an uncommon refinery. Unfortunately, from the arch only the pendentives and the fine cut consoles were preserved. The church building was renewed in 1867 when they also built a tower and a belfry. Elderly people remind of the fact that in 1907 there was once such a strong windstorm that it knocked down the tower of the church. In addition, wagons pulled by oxen were knocked down by that storm. Ever since that time, the church does not have a tower.

In the times of the kuruc rebellion⁴, during the reign of Rákóczi II there were two cauldrons for boiling saltpetre for preparing gunpowder in Bozias (Magyarborzás). The elderly people of the village know up to this day where the two cauldrons used to stand. The reason for their presence was that the terrain from the village protected it from a military point of view. Some sources mention that Rákóczi had relatives in Vita (Vice) and therefore a close relationship formed between the two villages.⁵

The names of the various places in the village also remind us of its inhabitants. There are names originating from 1622 like Hágó-hegy (Mountain Pass), Hosszú (Long), Négy (Four), Polgárság föld (Bourgeoisie Area), Rétkút (Meadow Well), Éhmező (Hunger Meadow), Kerten kívül (Over the Gardens), Puszta szőlő (Desert Vine); from 1644 Dekkő, Hosszú-hegy (Long Mountain),

³ Kádár.

⁴ The **kuruc** was a term used to denote the armed anti-Habsburg Hungarian rebels in Royal Hungary between 1671 and 1711.

⁵ Kövesdi, p. 468.

Kender-hely (Hemp Place), Végláb (End Foot), Böd felé (towards Böd), Felső tábla (Upper Field), Tornáckút (Porch Well), Hortus (Hortus), Rézkút (Copper Well), Határhíd (Border Bridge), Spathi felé (Towards Spathi), Szőke-szer (Blonde Place), Bikás (Bull Place), Pál Antal hídjá (Bridge of Antal Pál), Kovács rét (Field of Kovács), etc.⁶

Vita (Vice)

The reliable sources regarding Vita (Vice) are available only from the nineteenth century onwards. The history of the village before that time is told only by tales and legends. The first obscure source comes from the fourteenth century and it tells the fact that there was a Roman Catholic parish that used to pay tax to the Pope. The *Domus Historia* is the only reliable written source. According to the 614 page of the 85th booklet written in 1894 it is said that the village was known as Vitex. Later this became Vicze and later Vice.

Another reference to Vita (Vice) we find in the work entitled „Szolnok–Doboka Vármegye Népoktatás Ügyének Története” (History of People’s Education in Szolnok–Doboka County). The source tells us that “a priest called János paid in 1333 20 denary as tax to the Pope and later that rose to 25”.⁷

In the times of the Reformation, the Catholic parish was abolished and all the inhabitants became reformed. The only sign of the past Catholic life of the village is the Reformed church in “Felszeg” Street, which used to be a Catholic church.

At the beginning of the 1800s, the population of Vita (Vice) was 900 people. However, within a century the population decreased by 50%. In 1873 the Reformed church in the village went through a schism. The church bought a great estate, but could not pay for it. The villagers asked the Roman Catholic bishop of Nuseni (Apanagyfalu), Miklós Fogarasy for help. He offered financial help with one condition: the village would turn to the Catholic faith. Most of the villagers complied; only one third of the population remained Reformed. There were even some disagreements between the two sides in the course of time. The poorer part of the village remained Reformed.

The number of Catholics was increasing so in 1878 the Catholic bishop, Mihály Fogarasi of Gheorgheni (Gyergyószentmiklós) ordered a Catholic church to be built. According to the report of Gusztáv Zsigmond, the local Catholic priest, the church was completed in the following year with the help received from the bishop. The church has a memorable high altar portraying Saint Stephen, but also the pulpit, the 22 pews, the liturgical robes, the two flags and the banner, the harmonium and the two bells are worth mentioning, as well.

⁶ Kádár: Vice.

⁷ Kádár: Vice.

In 1898, the first steps were taken to build a parish. Both the bishop and the state contributed to this with important donations of land and money. In 1901, the Catholic congregation had 756 members in the village and in the affiliated villages. During this time, the church is furnished with more pieces and farm-buildings are added to the parish. Many people turn to the Catholic faith. On 30th September 1901, the state-financed school of the village is inaugurated. Before that, for over thirty years education was provided by a village school financed by the Catholic Church, also initiated by Bishop Mihály Fogarasi. The interim teacher of the newly functioning school was the cantor of the Catholic Church who was trained also to be a teacher who used to teach in the former Catholic-financed school.

WWI had its events in Vita (Vice) as well. On 5th February 1917 troops arrived to Vita (Vice) and climbing to the belfry at the order of their commander threw down the smaller bell which broke into 23 pieces. The organ was also damaged: on 29th May 1918 organ restorer Sándor Nagy removed at the ministry's orders the external pipes of the organ in the presence of the priest and sent them to Beclean (Bethlen). Due to the Romanian occupation the Hungarian-language state school is dissolved the Romanian state authorities releasing teachers from their jobs.

Despite of the hard times the village went through its population is constantly increasing since the revolution (the 1990s).

Christmas

The ethnography literature presents Christmas as follows: "It is the most important holiday in Christianity, Jesus' day of birth. The first data on celebrating Jesus' day of birth on December 25th originate from the fourth century. According to the writings of bishop John of Nicaea Jesus' day of birth was celebrated for the first time in Rome under Pope Julius I (AD 337–352) and the custom spread from this time on.

On December 25th, 343, a sermon was already held for the Syrians. In Constantinople, Gregory of Nazianus remembers Christ's day of birth and celebrates it in 379-380. According to *Chrysostom* in 386 Christ's day of birth was celebrated on December 25th and even though the holiday had been taken over from the West only for ten years the effect of the sermon and the enthusiasm of the believers was so great that all the churches in the town were full. In the fifth century, the Roman Empire accepts Christmas as an official holiday, emperors Honorius and Arcadius ordered even the circuses to be closed that day.

Jesus' day of birth being celebrated on December 25th, the debate on the exact date of Jesus' birth came to an end. The reasons for choosing this particular day was that the calendar of Antioch calls December 25th the birthday of the Sun (the Sungod). Emperor Aurelianus (270–275) ordered

celebrations to be held on December 25th in honour of the invincible Sun (*sol invictus*) in every region of the empire. The symbolic explanation of the meaning of the new holiday had it that Christmas was Jesus' day of birth and he was the eternal Sun, the source of divine light. In the liturgy of the church there formed around Christmas a time of preparation (advent), just as in the case of Easter."⁸

In time, several myths and legends formed around Christmas, as follows "girls and women ought not to go to visit other people on Christmas day since they would bring bad luck to that house. Therefore, in the places where boys' carol singing was not a custom, young boys of the family were sent to visit their relatives under various pretexts. Szeklers believed that cows would bear bulls if their first visitor on Christmas day were a boy and heifers if the visitor was a girl. In the villages of the northern areas, there was also a particular ritual for watering the animals on this day.

The farmer took the wafer that remained from Christmas Eve dinner, spread parsley leaves on it and a red apple and put the composition in the trough and the cattle were watered so that they would be healthy. In some of the villages also a silver coin (a coin of five crowns) was added so that animals would turn out as nice as red apple and as valuable as silver.

Before dinner, the members of the family took a bath. In many areas, red apples and silver coins were put into the water as well so that they would be lucky and healthy in the year to come. In the Lent of Christmas, the attitude of each family member was observed since it was believed he/she would have the same behaviour throughout the next year. On Christmas day, members of the family ought to be at home and all the family possessions as well, so borrowed things and tools were returned during the Lent. In the evening shepherds smacked their whips throughout the country, shook cowbells, blew their horns in the streets and in some regions farmers would give them presents."⁹

Christmas in Bozies (Magyarborzás)

Christmas is probably among the favourite holidays of my home village. As a child, I was anxiously waiting for Santa to bring the Christmas tree and the presents and also to go carol singing (kántálás). I think my fondest memories are connected to Christmas, since this time of the year was the most special time for me.

Before Christmas, there is the time of advent. In this period of the year all the villagers, young and old go to church where they have the Lord's Supper during the worship of the first Sunday of the advent period. This is

⁸ Encyclopedia of Hungarian Ethnography (EHE): Christmas.

⁹ EHE: Christmas.

probably one of the most important events before Christmas. Another important event is the preparation week of repentance. During this week, all those able go to church to prepare for the holiday worship to follow on Christmas day and for having the Lord's Supper.

However, people do not prepare only their souls for the holidays, but also their houses. Everybody performs his or her chores. Men do the cleaning around the house, women inside. Everywhere in the village, it smells of freshly baked bread and milk loaf.

In our village, Christmas is also the time for meeting and catching up. Families and young people living abroad come home to celebrate with their families. It is almost the only holiday when everybody is at home.

One of the most important customs in the village is carol singing. The ethnography literature presents the following on carolling: "Group singing performed on the eve (or the period) of an important holiday, repeated at each house expressing season's greetings and best wishes. Many times customs related to offering best wishes are called carol singing as well. Carols can be both songs with a fixed structure formed into stanzas, formulas with variable structure, resembling children's songs and various types of recitatives. Singing parts sometimes accompanied at some kind of instrument are often completed by "chants" or declamation of texts in prose."¹⁰

Two weeks before Christmas, young people (about 18-25 years old) organize this long-awaited event. Usually it is a larger group of friends who organize the event and go carol singing. Although in the neighbouring villages the custom is that only boys can go carol singing, in our village both boys and girls participate and they go to the house of every member of the group. The number of people coming together in a carol singing group can vary, but it is usually around 15-20 people. There have been years when several carol singing groups were formed. At times like that, singing can be heard all over the village.

Before starting to sing carols, they ask, "*Will you have us carol singing?*" Then the host replies: "*But of course!*" Usually carol singing groups sing in front of the house or in the hall, depending on the size of the house.

On Christmas Eve they usually sing the carol called "*Elindult Mária*" ("*Maria Set Out*"), but they go carol singing only until midnight since the next day it is the Christmas worship and the Lord's Supper to be attended. I could not find out why they sing that particular carol on Christmas Eve. It is a kind of an unwritten law to do so. Regrettably, there are carol singing groups who do not know this carol; they sing the well-known carol, Silent Night instead.

¹⁰ EHE: Carol singing.

After singing the carols, they also chant humorous greetings learned from the older generation.

Like the ones following:

*„Ne fenyegezz engem, kétágú korbáccsal,
Nem kell nekem korbács, csak egy darab kolbász.
Ha nincs a szobában, van a kamarában,
Gyerünk hát, ide vele a tarisznyába.”*
[“Please, do not threaten me with a two-ended whip,
I do not want the whip, but a piece of sausage.
If there’s none in the room, there’s some in the pantry,
So come on, send it in my satchel!”]

*„Adjon Isten sokakat, sok karácsony napokat,
A kocsinak kerekét, a pohárnak fenekét,
Hogy abból ihassunk eleget.”*
[“Let God give us many days, many of the Christmas days,
Let him give the wag’n a wheel, bottom to the glasses here,
So that we can drain them still.”]

(Tóth Attila, age: 67)

*„Áldjuk, magasztaljuk, seregeknek Urát,
Hogy elérhettük szent karácsony napját.
Áldja meg az Isten a ház gazdáját,
A ház asszonyát, s az egész családját!”*
[“Let us give mighty thanks to the Lord of hosts,
That he granted to us this day of the Christmas.
May the Lord God richly bless our kind host,
Our kind hostess and all the family!”]

(Papp Sálomi, age: 90)

After hearing out the greetings, the host invites the visitors into his house and gives them a treat: delicious cakes, pretzels, good wine and brandy.

Should the carol signers be hungry the host will set the delicious cooked sausage of Magyarborzás before them. At midnight then it is time to go home.

On the first day of Christmas, in the morning, the singing can be heard again in the village. This time it is the children. *„Mennyből az angyal, lejött hozzátok”* [“Here lo the angel coming from heaven”] one can hear in every other house. Children go carol singing in smaller groups of five or six. People give those sweets and money for their singing and greetings. Children go carol singing only on the first day of Christmas.

Zsuzsanna Gergely, a woman of 80 tells the following about the carol singing of the children:

“Well, in the old times it wasn’t like that at all. People were not so stressed. Back then, people would give children nuts or apples or scones. And children were glad to have them.”

During the evening worship of the first day of Christmas children have a short holiday program coordinated by the teacher and the pastor. One or two days before Christmas, the youth of the village decorate the Christmas tree in the church where poems and carols will be sung later by the children. Sometimes they present also a play on Christmas day. After that, the long-awaited moment comes, the presents, which the children are convinced, were put under the tree by Santa are distributed.

On the first day of Christmas, young people continue their carol singing. This time they sing a different carol called *„Hála legyen az Istennek”* (*“May God Be Praised”*). This goes on also on the second and third day of Christmas until they have been to the homes of all the members of the group.

In Bozies (Magyarborzás) carol singing is not a custom only for the children and the youth, also the couples go carol singing. They usually celebrate together on the second and third day of Christmas. Four or five families join together and they get around to everybody. They also sing the carol called *„Hála legyen az Istennek”* (*“May God Be Praised”*).

My grandmother recounts: *“...Well, my child, in the old times it was nice. There was a really large group going carol singing, not as it is now. In those times, there were no cars and buses, so we went on foot in the high snow through the woods. We went up to Bréte and there were times when we crossed the mountain at Vita (Vice) and Sânmartin (Szentmárton) up to Fizeși (Füzes) to visit relatives. But today young people find it hard to go carol singing even next door...”*

(Tóth Mari, age: 63)

Another Christmas custom of Bozies (Magyarborzás) is the Christmas ball that regrettably is also dying out. Today young people are tempted rather by disco music than the balls. They usually do not know how to dance in pairs. My grandfather relates *“What we did was that: four or five boys agreed and paid Gypsies to sing, we gave them brandy and bread or a chicken and they played. There was no camin¹¹ either, we went to somebody’s house, somebody who had a bigger house, we took out cupboards and tables from the room and any other piece of furniture within and there we used to dance and pass time.”*

(Tóth Attila, age: 67)

¹¹ cultural center.

I should also mention another Christmas custom, the “Capra”¹². The ethnographical literature defines it as follows: “A kind of dance danced with an animal figure appearing in the Christmas customs of csangos of Moldavia. The Capra is a carved animal head made of wood and decorated with horns held on a stick by the dancer who makes it dance while he himself is hidden under a cover. The figure is a loan from the Romanian *turka* (turca).”¹³

The Capra is danced mainly by the Romanian and Rroma people. They rarely sing during the goat dance, rhythm is provided mainly by playing a drum and clapping the wooden mouth of the goat. Ethnographical literature presents this dance and the accompanying noise to have the effect of driving evil spirits away and bringing good luck for the year to come. The dancers are rewarded with money, cake and wine.

2. Christmas in Vita (Vice)

Christmas is celebrated almost in the same manner in Vita (Vice) as well. Children, young people and couples go carol singing, but they rather call it “colind singing”¹⁴. In Vita (Vice), they preserved the Bethlehem play that is nearly extinct today. Ethnographical literature defines Bethlehem play as follows:

“A *dramatic play* having several characters, the most popular Christmas *mystery play* in the peasant culture, a pastoral. No Hungarian pastorals from the Middle Ages have been preserved, the first pastoral texts are from the seventeenth century, these were school plays. Pastorals of the nineteenth and the twentieth century consisted mainly in dialogues, singing and dancing of the pastors of Bethlehem wearing turned out sheepskin coats. The Bethlehem players brought with them a manufactured manger or church also called a Bethlehem.

Two forms of the Bethlehem play are known to us: Bethlehem play performed by actors as a theatrical play and Bethlehem play performed as a *puppet show*. It has several types varying from region to region. The main scenes in such a play are usually the following: it can begin with *seeking a shelter*: Joseph and Mary look for a shelter, but neither the king, nor the wealthy man, nor the blacksmith offers them a place to stay, the latter directing them to the stables. The play may present also the punishment for an unkind heart. In the next scene, shepherds are sent to Jesus. They go to the newborn baby and give him presents.

One of the scenes in the play is the *Herod play*, which is sometimes presented on its own, usually during Epiphany. The main character of the Bethlehem play is the old, deaf shepherd whose misunderstandings are a

¹² the goat dance.

¹³ EHE: goat dance.

¹⁴ ‘colind’ is the Romanian word for carol.

great source of humour. Shepherds misunderstand also the angel who speaks in Latin; they are unlearned, but kind hearted people who give freely from the little they have. They also dance, sing and play the flute. The last scene, in verse, asks for donations.

András Benedek distinguishes several groups of texts within the script of the Hungarian Bethlehem play. The most archaic pieces are the Bethlehem plays of Transylvania played sometimes by men and with shepherds sometimes wearing *masks*¹⁵.

“The first Bethlehem play containing also music was published in 1896 and it describes the Bethlehem play of Baraolt (Barót).”¹⁶ In the Catalogue of the Hungarian Folk Song, the Bethlehem plays are presented according to the plot:

- A) Bethlehem play
- B) Pastor’s journey
- C) Special types

There is a Transylvanian type within the first two groups. This type has two subtypes: a) Bethlehem service b) Bethlehem play presenting the seeking of a shelter. The Bethlehem play customary in Vita (Vice) belongs to the latter. „The characters of the play are: Holy Mary, Joseph, King, angels and shepherds”¹⁷.

3. Bethlehem Play in Vita (Vice)

Messenger: Dicsértessék a Jézus Krisztus. Befogadnak egy szép bethlehemest? Újságot hirdetek, mindennek öröme, öröndetes szép hírt hallottam az éjjel. Amit hallottam elmondom örömmel, csak versemre legyenek figyelemmel. Dávid király nemzetségéből két király adatik és méltán tiszteltetik. Kinn állnak egy szép Bethlehemmél. Behívjam őket, mert nagyon fáznak? Jó gazda, mit mondana rája? [Praise is to our Lord Jesus Christ. Will you have us with a beautiful Bethlehem play? Let me announce you a piece of news to be the joy of your hearts, a happy and pleasant piece of news I heard in the middle of the night. I will be glad to share it with you should you be willing to hear my verse. From king David’s family two kings come, both honourable in their ways. They are outside right now waiting to present the Bethlehem play to you. Should I invite them in, for they are quite cold?! What answer do you give to that, kind host?]

¹⁵ EHE: Bethlehem play.

¹⁶ Catalogue of the Hungarian Folk Song (CHFS) II, 397, Baraolt (Barót), the county of Covasna (Kovászna).

¹⁷ CHFS II, 397.

Host: Igen, be! [Yes, do invite them in!]

Carol: Mennyből az angyal... ["Here lo the angel coming from heaven"]

Caspar: Én vagyok az első, Gáspár, aki az arabi tartományok között egy nagy, fényes világot láttam az éjjel. Annak tiszteletére és felkeresésére jöttem. [I, Caspar, am the first king. Last night I saw a great, shiny light in the Arab kingdom. I came to honour this sign and seek for it.]

Knocking on the Door...

King: Nézz ki szolgám sietséggel, ki mer kopogni az ajtón késő éjjel, bátor szívvel? [Servant, go and find out who is bold enough to knock on the door so late in the night.]

Servant: Ki vagy? Mi vagy? Honnan jöttél? Miféle dolog, hogy magadnak éjjelre szállást nem kerestél? [Who are you? What are you? Where do you come from? Why did you not seek for a shelter for the night?]

Joseph: A názáreti tartományok közül jöttem, egy éjjelre szállást keresni! [I am coming from the region of Nazareth and I am looking for a shelter for the night.]

Servant: Itt már szállást nem kapsz, a falu közepén a jég hátán is megfagysz! [There is no chance you can get a shelter here, even if you freeze to death in the village square!]

Joseph: Ó, te kemény, kősziklához hasonlatos nemzetség! Még a kősziklában is van kegyesség. Hát te benned király, miért nincsen kegyesség? [Oh, what cruel people, their hearts are made of stone! Even rocks would have more mercy! Oh, king, have you no kindness in your heart?]

King: Parancsolom szolgám, engedd be egy pár szóra! [Servant, let the man enter so that we can exchange a few words!]

Servant: Gyere be barátom egy pár percre pihenni! [Come in, my friend and rest for a while!]

Carol: Ó boldog Bethlehem... [Oh, happy Bethlehem ...]

Angel: Keljetek fel pásztorok, megszületett Uratok! Hallod- e te pajtás, mit mondott az angyal? Keljünk fel, Bethlehembe menjünk el! " [Rise, shepherds, your Lord is born! Brother, have you heard what the angel said?! Let us rise and go to Bethlehem!"]

Shepherd: Hallom, hallom, csak ne erőst rázd a bundám, mert így is elég rongyos. Már az éjjel az álmomban a Sinai hegyen jártam, 100 juhot őriztem, de úgy, hogy egy se maradt meg belőlük. Ha ez a ringy- rongy botocskám nem lett volna, a bocskoraim is széttépték volna a farkasok. Vigyázzatok ti is pásztorok, mostan felkeljetek, készüljetek bátran, semmitől se féljetek. Örvendetes új hírt mondok én tinéktek, megszületett Jézus, kicsiny Bethlehemben! [I can hear you well, do not shake my sheepskin coat, it is tattered as it is! Tonight I had a dream that I was walking on Mount Sinai tending for 100 sheep, but in the

end, all were gone. Should I not have had this little staff with me, wolves would have torn even my sandals off me! Now, brothers, you take care too, prepare for the journey and fear nothing! For I share a happy piece of news with you, Jesus is born in the little town of Bethlehem!]

Carol: Pásztorok, pásztorok... [Oh, shepherds...]

Elderly shepherd: Én vagyok a pásztoroknak a legöregebbik pásztora, aki a lábát a nyája után cimmegve- cammogva hordozta. Hoztam egy báránkát, fogadd el szívvel, még más egyebet is hozhattam volna! [I am the oldest shepherd among the shepherds trudging along my flock. I brought you a lamb, receive it with a kind heart, I could have brought other things as well!]

Young pastor: Én vagyok a pásztoroknak a legfiatalabbik pásztora, aki a lábát a nyája után szerényen hordozza. Hoztam egy sajtocskát, fogadd el jó szívvel, még más egyebet is hozhattam volna! [I am the youngest shepherd among the shepherds, walking humbly along my flock. I brought you a piece of cheese, receive it with a kind heart, I could have brought other things as well!]

Shepherd: Mielőtt e háztól el nem mennénk, sietve az erszényemet az asztalra tenném. Hadd kerüljen belé egy- két fényes pengő, áldjon meg titeket az égi teremtő! [Before leaving this house let me put my pouch on the table! There are a few shiny coins in there! May the creator of heavens bless you rich!]

Carol: Pásztorok keljünk fel... [Oh, shepherds, let us rise ...]

Young shepherd: Nosza pajtás fogd az ajtót, kezedbe a kilincs tartót, hogy e háztól elmehessünk, másokhoz is bemehessünk! [Brother, grab the door, put your hand on the handle and let us go so that we may visit other homes as well!]

Carol: Vedd fel juhász a bundád... [Shepherd, take your sheepskin coat...]

Bethlehem players: Adjon Isten sokakat, sok karácsony napokat.

Tölthessük el békével, lelkünk üdvösségére! [Let God give us many days, many of the Christmas days. Let us spend them in peace, seeking the salvation of our souls!]

The Bethlehem players then received money and cakes. Then they left the house and went to the next house.

Actors:

Andor Henrietta, age: 11 (**angel**)
Bálint Noémi, age: 11 (**angel**)
Balla Renáta, age: 12 (**angel**)
Barta Mária, age: 14 (**servant**)
Kulcsár Norbert, age: 12 (**messenger**)
Pál Áron, age 11 (**Joseph**)

Pál Zsolt, age: 12 (**Caspar**)
Salak Gergely, age: 12 (**young shepherd**)
Salak Tibor, age: 11 (**King**)
Szöllősi Márton, age: 11 (**shepherd**)
Takács György, age: 12 (**elderly shepherd**)

Ex. 2

Bethlehem play: The shepherds and the messenger



I interviewed Mrs. Julianna Kádár (age: 74) in order to find out how the elderly people used to celebrate Christmas.

Gergely Zoltán: What kind of customs do you used to have?

Kádár Julianna: Boys used to hire somebody to play and went carol singing to the girls... Then the girls, the girl-friends would gather together, for we usually worked in groups, then in the same groups we would agree to go on the first day of Christmas carol singing to the girls, to each other's homes and so we did. On the second day, in the evening there was a ball, we could hardly wait for that to begin.

On the first day of Christmas or at Easter time, on the first day in the afternoon we learnt roles from a play ... then there was dancing, and we danced on the stage, Hungarian dances, even Russian dances, also Romanian ones, every kind of dance ... there was the régime, you know ... Women used to be impatient to see us dancing and singing, to see what we learnt to present on the stage. Pupils nowadays do not learn very much anymore.

G. Z.: What carols did you used to sing on Christmas Eve?

K. J.: The same carols they usually sing nowadays, but we went to sing at each house. Then there was the ball, two nights in a row, on the second and the third day ... in fact on the second day it started at noon already. We could hardly sit through the morning worship; we were all thinking to go to the ball (smiling). That was the custom of the time....

This is the way our grandparents and great grandparents used to spend Christmas. This is the way we spend it today. There will probably be many December 24th to follow, there will be supermarkets and presents as well, Christmas will also be celebrated. However, where is the beauty of Christmas if it is all about presents and making great trips?

Kind reader, I confess, for me Christmas would be quite different if it would not be spend with my beloved ones in going to church on Christmas Eve, receiving carol singers or carol singing at other people's homes...

I leave you now hoping that many great Christmases spent in love and rich in customs will follow for both of us.

Vita (Vice), 24th December 2007.

(Translated from Hungarian by: Borbély-Bartalis Zsuzsa)

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