

SMALL AMBITUS – NEW STYLE CHRISTMAS CAROLS FROM THE TRANSYLVANIAN PLAIN

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SUMMARY. Folk music literature includes into the group called small ambitus new style all those melodies, which present a domination of tonal characteristics. Besides the two most well known and most popular examples of the Christmas carols repertoire from the Transylvanian Plain, there are also two other melodies, which were integrated into the local Christmas repertoire only in one single settlement.

Keywords: Christmas Carols, Small Ambitus – New Style, Transylvanian Plain, local repertoires.

In the fourth chapter of volume I of the MNTK (A Magyar népdaltípusok katalógusa [Catalogue of Hungarian Folk Song Types]) we can find those melodies, which have a structure dominated by tonal relations, opposed to the modal character of the old melodies. Also, the third and second sequences are quite frequent here on the level of certain melody lines as well as of the repetition of motifs.

Example 1.

The origin of the group of stories on the holy family looking for a place to sleep was first debated by Tekla Dömötör, then by Ildikó Kríza. Rooted also in apocryphal literature, the works of popular poets and cantors – including the motif of the miraculous healing of the blind girl – were spread especially by 19th century pulp literature and the blind beggars.² Some motifs of this text type can be found massively also in the Romanian carol poetry³.

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² Dömötör Tekla 1983. 110–119. Kríza Ildikó 1982. 77–79.; a text variant from Chibed: Ráduly János 1997. 131–132.

³ Pozsony Ferenc 2000. 76–78.

The Transylvanian pieces having the function of a Christmas carol are thematically identical. Joseph and Mary are looking for a place to sleep, thus they knock on the door of a rich blacksmith, who refuses them, saying that he already has many guests. In the end the blind daughter of the blacksmith leads them to a stable, where Jesus is born at midnight. Because of his heartlessness Mary curses the blacksmith, but also blesses/heals the blind girl. This story line is followed by the text of examples 1a, b, c.

A variant from Chiochiş adds to the story a sequence from the type *Holy Mary, the goodness and cruelty of trees and animals*, and only then takes place the birth of Christ:

<i>LefeküdtMária, A lovakjászlába. A lovak mind nyerítettek, NemnyugodtMária.</i>	[Mary went to sleep] [Into the manger of horses.] [The horses were all neighing,] [So, Mary could not rest.]
<i>FelkeltSzűzMária, A lovakjászlához. ElmentSzűzMáriasírva, Az ökrökjászlába.</i>	[Mary woke up] [At the manger of horses.] [She went crying] [To the manger of oxen.]
<i>LefeküdtMária, Az ökrökjászlába. Az ökrök mind lefeküdtek, Ésszépenkérőztek.⁴</i>	[Mary went to sleep] [Into the manger of oxen.] [The oxen layed down,] [Chewing the cud nicely.]

The performance of the informant from Cămăraşu misses the sequence of curse/blessing, therefore the accent is on the presentation of the great news, the birth of Jesus:

<i>Ébredj, gazda, ébredj! E jeleséjszakán. Nézd meg mi van, kapudelőtt, Egyaranyalmafa.</i>	[Wake up, master, wake up!] [On this glorious night.] [Look what's in front of your gate,] [A golden apple tree.]
<i>Madarakrepdesik, Angyalokhirdetik. MegszületettIstenFia, A világMegváltója.⁵</i>	[Birds are singing,] [Angels are claiming.] [The Son of God is born,] [Saviour of this world.]

⁴ Personal Archive: nr. 14e., Group, Chiochiş, Bistriţa–Năsăud County, recorded by Gergely Zoltán, 2012.

⁵ Personal Archive: nr. 14j., Cămăraşu, Cluj County, Szabó (Tamási) Anna 84, recorded by Gergely Zoltán 2012.

The melody of the song *Karácsony estéjén / Elindult Mária* [On Christmas Night / Mary has Started her Journey] belongs to the new style type of melodies with small ambitus. At Christmas it is one of the most frequently performed carols on the Transylvanian Plain, so in my collection I have 16 items. The tonal character of the melody is signalled by the sequence between the beginning of the first and the second line, plus the turns of common chord break up.⁶

The most important differences between the melody variants are illustrated by examples 1a, 1b and 1c. The general melody structure has four lines: AA³BC, the cadence order is 1 (1) 2 1. The structural difference is given by the repetition of the last line (1b, 1c), the difference of cadence order is 2 degree at the second line (1c), and the starting motif of the third line differs at variants 1a and 1b. At example 1c there is a difference in the number of syllables of the second line (6 syllables), while in the third verse there is a formal transformation, resulting in fact from the modified starting motif of line A and line C. This form is not a unique variant, as it can be found in other examples as well.

E.g. 1

1a. *Elindult Mária* [Mary has Started her Journey]

Giusto ♩ = 85

I. El-in - dult Má - ri - a, Ka - rá-csony es - té - jén.

El-ment a gaz - dag ko-vács - hoz, Szál-lást ke - ri - te - ni.

Feldioara, Cluj County, Sütő Irma 62,
recorded by Gergely Zoltán, 2012.

1b. *Elindult Mária*

Giusto ♩ = 70

I. El - in - dult Má - ri - a, Ka - rá - csony éj - sza - ka,

El-in-dult, hogy szál-lást kér - jen, Egy gaz-dag ko - vács-hoz, Egy gaz-dag ko - vács-hoz.

Fizeșu Gherlii, Cluj County, Lapohos Margit 69, Lapohos Zsigmond 72,
recorded by Gergely Zoltán, 2012.

⁶ MNTK I. 643–644. type IV (B)/139.; MNT II. 619–622. nr. 459–461., note 1129.

1c. *Egy karácsony este* [One Christmas Night]

Giusto ♩ = 54

1. Egy ka - rá - csony es - te, El - mé - ne Má - ri - a,

1) 2) 3)

El - mé - ne Má - ri - a, A gaz - dag ko - vács - hoz, Szál - lást kér - ni tő - le.

**Buza, Cluj County, Eke (Simon) Mária 78, Czégér (Marha) Ilus 67,
recorded by Gergely Zoltán, 2012.**

Example 2.

The ABCD structured, major hexachord scale carol *Bethlehemkisfalucskába* [In the Small Village of Bethlehem]⁷ – with an exception from Szabolcs County – has been recorded in almost every Transylvanian settlement (the Transylvanian Plain, Călata Region, Odorhei Region, Ciuc Region, Moldavia), as in the more archaic villages it has been part of the Christmas repertoire up to our days.

Example number 2 is related to a medieval Christmas song called *Innatale Domini*⁸, well known all over Europe, respectively to a 16th century song, which was edited for the first time in 1744, and since then it can be found in every edition of Reformed hymnals from Cluj, with the first line called *Mondjatok dicséretet* [Praise].⁹

The melody variants used in folk practice have no written sources, their survival is due to the preserving power of oral tradition. In the analysed examples we can find a few essential modifications. In example 2a the first line moving around the fifth note starts with a common chord break up, while examples 2b–2e start with the third note. Furthermore, the cadence of the first lines is not identical. As in some variants the structurally accentuated note falls on the seventh syllable, and not on the eighth, the cadence is on

⁷ MNT II. 653–654. nr. 519., 1135.; MNTK I. 598. IV(B)/ type 75.; Hungarian Academy of Sciences Folk Music Typological System number: 18.497.0/1.

⁸ RMDT II. 320. nr. 209., 598.; SZ–D–R I. 240. nr. F/9; SZ–D–R II. 109–110. nr. F/9.; MNTK I. 379. type III(B)/39.; Dobszay László 2006. 119–120. nr. 349.

⁹ RMDT I. 282. nr. 93., 643.; SZ–D–R I. 52. nr. I/93 sz., SZ–D–R II. 24. nr. I/93.; Péter Éva 2008. 72. nr. 15., 115–117. nr. 53.

the 4th degree, but in most of the variants the melody rises or descends on the eighth syllable: within our examples on the eighth syllable the cadence jumps onto the 5th degree (2b, 2c), or on the 4th degree (2a, 2e), while in most cases on the first one (2d, 2g).

The text *Betlehem kis falucskában* [In the Small Village of Bethlehem] was included in the Catholic religion textbooks at the beginning of the 20th century, and the melody was learnt by ear. According to István Volly, the author of the text was probably Adolf Mohl, a priest, poet and historian from Győr, who was in fact the author of several Christmas plays.¹⁰ The melody is known in several regions of Transylvania with the same text, which presents the most important events from the life of Christ: the story of his birth, the arrival of the three wise men, Jesus as a teacher, the story of passion, the resurrection, the ascending to heaven and the fulfilment of the Holy Spirit¹¹. The related Romanian melody variants are known all over Transylvania, and the variant with the Romanian text (2c) was performed by a Hungarian informant, although the text is not related to Christmas.¹²

E.g. 2

2a. *Betlehemkisfalujába*

Giusto ♩ = 117

1. Bet-le-hem kis — fa-lu - já - ba, Ka-rá-esony-kor éj - fél-táj - ba.

Fi - ú Is - ten em-ber lett, Mind kis gyer - mek szü - le - tett.

Feldioara, Cluj County, SalakMagdus 58, recorded by Gergely Zoltán, 2012.

¹⁰ Volly István 1982. 87–88. nr. 70–71., 279.; Móser Zoltán 1997. 102.

¹¹ See also Kríza Ildikó 1982. 120–123. Ildikó Kríza includes the carol *Betlehem kis falucskában* into the group of so-called *Jesus-songs*.

¹² Bartók Béla 1935. nr. 121 a–m., among which nr. 121e is from the Transylvanian Plain; Szenik Ilona – Bocşa, Ioan 2011. group V. G, subtype nr. 181–184; Medan, Virgil 1979. 170–171. nr. 49. According to the oral statement by Ilona Szenik the Romanians attach to the variants of this melody type other lyrical or medieval ballad texts: *A falbaépített feleség* [The wife built in the wall], *A megölt havasi pásztor (Miorița)* [The murdered shepherd], *A halva talált menyasszony* [The bride found dead]. The informant from Buza performing example 12c learnt the Romanian song from her Romanian neighbour.

2b. *Betlehemkisfalujába*

Poco rubato ♩ = cca 94

1. Bet-le - hem kis fá - lu - já - ba, Ka - rá - csony - kor éj - fél - táj - ba,
 Fi - ú Is - ten em - ber lett, Mind kis gyer - mek szü - le - tett.

The musical score is written on two staves in treble clef. The first staff contains the first line of music with lyrics. The second staff contains the second line of music with lyrics. The tempo is marked 'Poco rubato' with a quarter note equal to approximately 94 beats per minute. There are various musical notations including slurs, accents, and a triplet in the second staff.

Buza, Cluj County, Eke (Simon) Mária 78, recorded by Gergely Zoltán, 2012.

2c. *Pui, puișorii miei*

Poco rubato ♩ = cca. 142

1) Pu-i, pu - i - șo - rii mi - ei, Când e - rați _____ voi mi - ti - tei, _____
 lo - me - ream pe a - ră - tu - ră, Șă strân - geam _____ să - mă - nă - tu - ră. _____

The musical score is written on two staves in treble clef. The first staff contains the first line of music with lyrics. The second staff contains the second line of music with lyrics. The tempo is marked 'Poco rubato' with a quarter note equal to approximately 142 beats per minute. There are various musical notations including slurs, accents, and a triplet in the second staff.

Buza, Cluj County, Eke (Simon) Mária 78, recorded by Gergely Zoltán, 2012

2d. *Betlehem kis falucskába*

Poco rubato ♩ = 150

1. Bet-le-hem kis fá - luc - s - ká - ba, Ka - rá - csony - kor éj - fél - táj - ban.
 Fi - ú Is - ten em - ber lett, Mind kis gyer - mek szü - le - tett.

The musical score is written on two staves in treble clef. The first staff contains the first line of music with lyrics. The second staff contains the second line of music with lyrics. The tempo is marked 'Poco rubato' with a quarter note equal to 150 beats per minute. There are various musical notations including slurs, accents, and a triplet in the second staff.

**Nușeni, Bistrița-Năsăud County, Kiss (Gergely) Rozália 63,
 recorded by Gergely Zoltán, 2012.**

2e. *Betlehem kis falucskába*

Quasi giusto ♩ = 126



1. Bet-le - hem kis fá-lucs-ká-ba, Ka - rá-csony-kor éj - fél-táj - ba,
Fi - u Is - ten em-ber lett, Mind kis gyer - mek szü - le - tett.

Feldioara, Cluj County, Sütő Irma 62, recorded by Gergely Zoltán, 2012.

Example 3.

The Christmas carol *Hej, vígjuhászok, csordások*¹³ [Hey, Merry Shepherds and Herdsmen] – belonging to the small ambitus new style melodies – is very popular; it has been recorded all over the Hungarian language area. In many settlements of Hungary this song was one of the most beloved pieces of the midnight mass, but it was also performed before the mass from Christmas to January 6.¹⁴

In spite of the fact that the officially published hymnals had not been popularizing this song in Transylvania, it was present in the 20th century handwritten and published¹⁵ cantors' hymnals, especially in the Catholic regions. From the Transylvanian Plain we have only one recording, collected from the village of Unguraş¹⁶. Most probably it was a cantor teacher¹⁷ who taught the song to the locals, that is how it was included in the local Christmas repertoire.

¹³ MNTK I. 637–638. type IV(B)/128.; MNT II. 676–677. 558–559. ex., 1139–1141.; Barna Gábor 2009. 263–264. song nr. 121.; <http://mek.oszk.hu/11400/11419/11419.pdf> (2012. 09. 19); Molnár József 1903. 452–453. song nr. 20.

¹⁴ Volly István 1982. 100–101. (song nr. 91–93.), 288–299.

¹⁵ Hungarian Academy of Sciences Folk Music Typological System number: 18.518.0/1. In the folder related to this number, on a file of a variant from Szolnok County we can read the following: „Ez a zének (szöveg és dallam) található: Énekeskönyv a k. Katolikus hívek használatára. Öreg Mezey János és Mezey István szerzeményeiből sajtó alá rendezte és egyházhatósági jóváhagyással kiadja Mezey István, kúnshentmártoni kántor. Budapest, Pesti könyvnyomda R. Társ. Metszésenyomása 1913. Ez ének található a 126. oldalon. 10 verse van.” [This song (text and melody) can be found in: Hymnal for the use of Catholic believers. From the works of János Mezey Sr. And István Mezey it was prepared for editing and it is published with the approval of the church by István Mezey, cantor of Kúnshentmárton. Budapest, Pesti Press, 1913.]

¹⁶ The author's collection, 2011.

¹⁷ The cantors' book of Mezey from 1913 was published mainly for cantors, therefore we suppose that it has been spread not only on the Hungarian plain. Many of its songs have become quite popular, thus these were popularized almost all over the Hungarian language area through different Catholic hymnals or religious pulp literature. See: Barna Gábor 2009. 443–475.

Besides its role within the Christmas mass, the song was recorded mainly as part of the Christmas carols. If we took into consideration the texts of the collected variants, we can see that most of them are related to the winter holidays. Furthermore, other popular religious texts were attached to the same melody¹⁸.

E.g. 3

3. Hej, vígjuhászok, csordások

Poco rubato ♩ = cca. 69

1. Hej, víg ju - há - szok, csor - dá - sok,
 Csőr - ge - dez - nek a for - rá - sok.
 De győ - nyő - rü ez az éj - jel.
 Te - kint - se - tek it - ten széj - jel.

**Unguraş, Cluj County, KerekesAndrás (Bandi) 72,
 recorded by Gergely Zoltán, 2011.**

Example 4.

The repetitive AABA structured, major hexachord scale melody, built of common chords, which touches the subvocal too in its first and fourth line, shows similarities to the type IV(F)/360 of MNTK I.¹⁹ The night song from the Palóc region differs from the one from Unguraş only by the number of syllables and by structure, as in the A lines the number of syllables grows to 13 through rhythm break up; line B repeats itself, resulting an AABBA structure. The end of the lines, the melody and the sequence structure from line B remain the same in both songs.

¹⁸Hungarian Academy of Sciences Folk Music Typological System number:: 18.518.0/1.

¹⁹ MNTK I. 822. type IV(F)/360.

The text reveals the harsh conditions of the birth of Jesus Christ in a kind of sentimental style. Regarding the Transylvanian Plain we do not know of other variants than the one from Unguraş, and the informant has probably learnt it from a book.²⁰ According to István Volly this song had several functions: greeting, Christmas carol, but sometimes it was sung also in church.²¹

E.g. 4

4. *Jézus ágján nincsen paplan* [There is no Quilt on Jesus' Bed]

Giusto ♩ - 90

1. Jézus ágján nin-csen pap-lan, sír az ár - tat - lan,

Nincs pa-lo-ta ha nem nyugzik, bar-mok jász - lá - ba,

Nin-csen pár - ná - ja, szal - ma az á - gya.

Ke-mény szal-ma gyön-ge tes-tét, ó, mint rin - gat - ja.

Unguraş, Cluj County, RétiRozália 60, recorded by Gergely Zoltán, 2011.

Conclusion

There are four melodies included in the category called *small ambitus – new style*. Two of them are still the most popular and well known Christmas carols from the Transylvanian Plain. Regarding the carol called *Elindult Mária karácsony estéjén* [Mary has Started her Journey on Christmas Night] (example 1) I was able to identify 35 apparitions from the Transylvanian

²⁰ From Călata Region we know of only one variant:

http://db.zti.hu/kallos/kallos.asp?VBSdbClickClass_1=VBSdbGoToGridRow&VBSdbIndex_1=1 (2013. 09. 19.)

²¹ For other text and melody variants see Volly István 1982. nr. 178–179., 195–197., 335.; the text variant from Chibed: Ráduly János 1997. 133.

Plain. The melody of the song *Betlehem kis falucskában* [In the Small Village of Bethlehem] (example 2), which is a type known all over Europe, and can be found in the repertoire of both Hungarians and Romanians (15c *Pui, pușorii miei*), is represented by 36 apparitions in the same region.

However, the songs *Hej, vígjuhászok, csordások*²² [Hey, Merry Shepherds and Herdsmen] (example 3) and *Jézus ágyán nincsen paplan* [There is no Quilt on Jesus' Bed] (example 4) were known only on a more limited area, at Unguraș.²³

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²² MNTK I. 637–638. type IV(B)/128.; MNT II. 676–677. 558–559. ex., 1139–1141.; Barna Gábor 2009. 263–264. song nr. 121.; <http://mek.oszk.hu/11400/11419/11419.pdf> (2012. 09. 19); Molnár József 1903. 452–453. song nr. 20.

²³ This chapter was published in Hungarian within the volume *Mezőségi kántáló énekek* in 2016-ban. Gergely Zoltán, *Mezőségi kántáló énekek*, [Christmas Carols from the Transylvanian Plain] Hagyományok Háza, Budapest, 2016. ISBN 978-963-7363-89-4.

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