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The Significance of György Martin's Historical and Comparative Studies in Hungarian and International Ethnochoreology

“... instead of further cultivating historical myths, research has to bring to light the real historical interrelationships in the interest of unprejudiced national self-consciousness.”

*György Martin*¹

Introduction

The initial aims of European folk dance research which were formulated in the era of national romanticism were to save vanishing dances and to emphasize their stylized national character, as well as to support their stage presentation. In addition to collecting dances, the aim was to analyze, compare, classify their forms, and to examine their changes. When American dance anthropology emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, it primarily concentrated on the person who danced and the sociocultural environment of those dances, whereas European ethnochoreology considered dance as a movement system and prioritized the analysis of its formal characteristics.² Although there is not such a clear distinction between these two approaches nowadays, the geographical location and historical context of dance research workshops greatly determined the attitude and topic choices of twentieth-century research, as well as the practice of gathering data, its analysis, and interpretation. György Martin, who is one of the most significant figures of the twentieth-century East Central European ethnochoreology—or “dance folkloristics,” in the Hungarian scientific term—lived and worked in this particular environment.

Martin's work in ethnochoreology is based on two defining pillars: systematic research and the preservation and publication of knowledge. As a pioneer in Hungarian dance folkloristics, Martin revealed the dance culture of several territories in the Alpine-Carpathian Region. He visualized the investigation in a highly complex way,

¹ Martin 1985b: 126 (Martin 2020/5: 211).

² Giurchescu-Torp 1991: 1–2; Kaeppler 1991: 11–12.

based on function, content, music, and forms of dance.³ The majority of his work was determined by a structuralist perspective, as he considered form analysis of different dances to be the starting point for comparative research. His research within an institutional framework was characterized by extensive fieldwork, however, he believed establishing an archive and the management of this collection to be crucial. He made efforts to distribute the knowledge he collected and processed, not only in an academic milieu but also in a wider social environment, since as a prominent figure in the Hungarian dance house movement he strived to make traditional dances and knowledge relating to them more available to the public.⁴

Martin began to study Hungarian dance culture within a wide geo-historical framework, and by doing so, he provided a proper basis for the contextual interpretation of his original dance folkloristic approach. In this chapter, those of his historical and comparative works are included that examine the dance traditions of the nationalities in the Alpine-Carpathian Region from the European cultural-historical point of view. This short introduction aims to outline certain essays of the chapter, to unveil the researcher's intention behind these scripts, to demonstrate the theoretical views that influenced György Martin's research methodology and work, and to explain his key terms. I hope this will provide a critical reading of this aspect of the academic accomplishments of this renowned Hungarian dance researcher, shed new light on the content of his essays, and also place him within the horizon of international dance studies.

Exposition of Papers and Key Terms

The order of papers discussed here is determined by the date they were published.⁵ In his 1964 paper, "East-European Relations of Hungarian Dance Types," Martin states that different dance variations make up dance types showing different stages of development based on their functional, content, rhythmical, and formal similarities and that these variations can be classified into two historical style strata.⁶ Dances in the old style are already mentioned in sources before the eighteenth century; they have common roots with the dances of Eastern Europe, Slovakia, Romania, and Poland, and in the case of the so-called weapon dances, we can discover an intensive

³ Martin 1979: 523; Martin 1990b: 190 (Martin 2020/7: 342).

⁴ Voigt 1993: 26.

⁵ The date of publication does not always coincide with the time of the writing of the essay.

⁶ Martin 1965a: 469 (Martin 2020/1: 119). See more on the concept of dance type in Martin 1982b: 187. See more on historical strata of Hungarian traditional dances in Pesovár 2019.

relationship with the Balkan countries.⁷ Dances within the newer style of Hungarian dances appeared after the eighteenth century and presented an even closer relationship with the Central European dance culture in the case of couple dances with “close contact.”⁸ Martin expounds on the characteristics of dance types in four major groups. Apart from the old-style weapon dance and the *ugrós-legényes* dance types, he investigates the formal and functional features, musical accompaniment, and international relations of the new-style *verbunk* and *csárdás*.⁹

The paper entitled “Performing Styles in the Dances of the Carpathian Basin” was published in 1967, and the conclusions drawn in it influenced Martin's later papers concerning dance studies.¹⁰ He establishes that the dance culture of the Alpine-Carpathian Region is of a homogeneous nature, which allows for comparative style analysis.¹¹ From the dance culture's perspective, the peripheral regions of the Hungarian language area form a transitional region; being mixed with Croatian, Romanian, and Serbian dance traditions, these present a complex and supplemented dance assortment.¹² Martin further identifies the attributes of the Balkan and Carpathian dance dialects and points out the differences between the dances of those two regions. The Balkan dance dialect¹³ presents an abundance of dances; it is geographically and ethnically more differentiated and diversified. The Carpathian dance dialect can be regarded as rich from a different perspective; its dance repertoire is more coherent and possesses a fewer number of dances, however, the individual dance manifestations and the presence of irregular solo and couple dances make it more diverse.¹⁴

Martin defines individual improvisation as the most important performing style among the dances of the Alpine-Carpathian Region.¹⁵ He believes that this sort of artistic spontaneity is not apparent in the Balkan chain dances, and he presumes historical reasons account for this difference. Since the Balkan region was under Turkish occupation for a long period, modern couple dance fashions did not reach them; thus, the transmission of impersonal and collective medieval dance forms was maintained. Similarly, couple dances of a more rigid character are part of the Central

⁷ Martin 1965a: 470 (Martin 2020/1: 121).

⁸ Martin 1965a: 487–488 (Martin 2020/1: 134–135).

⁹ Martin 1965a (Martin 2020/1).

¹⁰ Martin 1968 (Martin 2020/2).

¹¹ Martin 1968: 59 (Martin 2020/2: 168).

¹² Martin 1968: 60 (Martin 2020/2: 168–169).

¹³ In this essay, Martin makes a distinction between European dance dialects of larger geographical dimension based on general characteristics. Later, within the Hungarian language area, he defines regions of dialects on the basis of the spread of certain dance types, their motivic development, accompanying music, and connected customs (Martin 1982a: 175–176; 1990a: 390–392; Martin 2020/6: 217–218).

¹⁴ Martin 1968: 61 (Martin 2020/2: 171).

¹⁵ Martin 1968: 61 (Martin 2020/2: 171).

European (Austrian, Czech, German, Moravian) style. In a geographical and historical sense, they border the Carpathian dance dialect that is characterized by improvisational dance creation. This latter kind of dance improvisation can be studied in several ways: based on individual performing style, stylistic difference between social classes or generations, regional and ethnic dance styles, or dance historical strata.¹⁶

Similarly to the previously mentioned papers, the “The Relationship between Hungarian and Romanian Dance Folklore in European Context” (1978) highlights the transition between historical eras and the so-called phase shift that results in different historical and social development as the causes of change in genre and form in the dance culture.¹⁷ Martin separates the following three major European dance dialects; a) the Western European dance dialect characterized by regulated couple dances; b) the East Central European dance dialect characterized by irregular couple dances; c) the Southeastern European dance dialect characterized by regulated chain dances.¹⁸ He attempts to place the Hungarian and Romanian dance culture within this wide cultural-historical framework and to expound the relationship between dances of these two ethnic groups considering their similarities and differences.

Martin’s 1984 paper, “Ethnic and Social Strata in the Naming of Dances: Different Types of Historical Nomenclature in Hungary and Europe,” illustrates in-depth archival research and exploration of historical sources.¹⁹ Martin specifies the analysis of dance names as an important factor in defining dance dialects since the name of the dance is linguistic data that suggests the place it takes in the human mind; therefore, names can serve as a source of information when studying the relationship between man and dance, or between dance and society.²⁰ The author divides the dance names into two groups: a) they may indicate the dance’s content, form, or musical features or b) they denote the relation between dance and society and certain people.²¹ The author calls attention to the fact that while European people, nations, social layers, and individuals lived in a hierarchy, there was also a constant interaction among them. For this reason, nations and their peasant, gentry, middle class, popular, and elite layers of society cannot be unequivocally and rigidly separated from each other. Since these groups belonged to the same unified cultural circulation, their dance naming traditions were also similar.²²

The 1984 paper entitled “Peasant Dance Traditions and National Dance Types in East-Central Europe in the 16th–19th Centuries” is the printed version of Martin’s

¹⁶ Martin 1968: 63–64 (Martin 2020/2: 175).

¹⁷ Martin 1978: 9 (Martin 2020/3: 178).

¹⁸ Martin 1978: 10 (Martin 2020/3: 179).

¹⁹ Martin 1985a (Martin 2020/4).

²⁰ Martin 1985a: 179 (Martin 2020/4: 185).

²¹ Martin 1985a: 179–180 (Martin 2020/4: 185–186).

²² Martin 1985a: 180 (Martin 2020/4: 186).

last conference lecture in which the process of the evolution of national dance types is discussed.²³ The national culture that emerged in the age of national romanticism put a great emphasis on the representational role of dance.²⁴ Among the Hungarians, three types of dance became truly “national” and in this way, a symbolic means of expressing national identity. These were the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century *hajdútánc*, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *verbunkos*, and the *csárdás* that appeared in the last third of the nineteenth century.²⁵ Recent events, distant historical myths, and current political and social aspirations all played a part in “creating” these national dances.²⁶ Martin mentions two functions of national dances: firstly, they became an important element of the autonomous art of dance and music; secondly, they played a role in influencing the social dance culture. The institutionalized promotion of peasant dances that had undergone stylized, standardized, formal, and behavioral changes made it possible for the national dance types to become popular; the work of dance schools and masters resulted in making them part of the nation's folklore.²⁷

In his “Hungarian Dance Dialects,” Martin attempted to write one of his most synthesizing studies. The text translated here was published after his death in 1990, but the first version of the study had already appeared in print in 1970.²⁸ In order to define a dance dialect, he stresses regional division as the most important factor, so he believes that dances should be analyzed in terms of geographical regions and the historical and social developments linked to these. Uneven development, spreading of dance fashions, and interaction with other peoples are mentioned as dividing and unifying factors among dance dialects. He emphasizes that the boundaries of dance dialects are not clearly distinguishable; a researcher can primarily rely on the existence or lack of certain dance types or a comparative analysis to define dialect regions.²⁹ He envisages the analysis of the dance types in a complex way taking several aspects into consideration: a) name of the dance and terminology relating to the dance; b) place and role of a dance in peasantry; c) musical accompaniment, with different tempos; d) structure of dances; e) motifs; f) spatial movement and floorplan of dances, types of holds; and g) the use of implements. These are the most important aspects of analysis. Furthermore, when defining a dance dialect, the dance events of the community, the ways of organizing the events, dance manners, the or-

²³ Martin 1985b (Martin 2020/5).

²⁴ Martin 1985b: 118 (Martin 2020/5: 202).

²⁵ Martin 1985b: 119–120 (Martin 2020/5: 203).

²⁶ Martin 1985b: 124–125 (Martin 2020/5: 207–209).

²⁷ Martin 1985b: 125–126 (Martin 2020/5: 209–210).

²⁸ There are many differences between the two studies, mainly concerning the sub-dialects, which are more detailed in the new volume. See Martin [1970–1972]; 1990a (Martin 2020/6).

²⁹ Martin 1990a: 390–391 (Martin 2020/6: 217–218).

der of dances, and the use of musical instruments must be taken into consideration as well.³⁰ Based on this complex analysis, Martin differentiates three main dance dialects and within them several smaller sub-dialects in the Hungarian language area. The existence of these dialect regions is traced back to the 'phase shift' in historical development frequently mentioned by him, and in the background, historical, social, geographical, ethnic, and population differences are detected as defining factors. In his opinion, the dialectological study of dance culture will allow us to reveal changes in cultural history.³¹

György Martin's Research Method

Following the preceding short summary of his papers, the historical comparison of Hungarian dance culture based on dance types and dance dialects, which was one of Martin's main research disciplines, becomes possible. Taking further chapters of the present volume into account, which include the theoretical framework of structural analysis of dance, the link between dance and music, and case studies of these subjects, Martin's research topics fit well in the domain of contemporary European dance folklore.³² On the one hand, he gained his data for this comparison from historical, archival sources, and Hungarian and international references; on the other hand, he focused on ethnographic fieldwork, through recurring short-term local collection aimed at precise recording of data.

In the 1950s, Martin joined Ernő Pesovár and Ágoston Lányi, amongst others, at the Néprajzi Osztály of the Népművészeti Intézet, later known as Népművelési Intézet, who began their systematic and monographic group research in 1953.³³ Their research method was characterized by complex fieldwork based on group work with previously prepared field surveys. Ideally, the research team comprised a dance and music folklorist, a cameraman, and a tape-recorder operator. During local data collection, interviews, descriptions, photographs, and motion pictures were recorded.³⁴ The majority of dances were recorded under circumstances created by researchers, mainly due to technical limitations of the time. During filmmaking, in conformity with the folkloristic approach of the time, they focused on the older generations of villagers or a particular dancer with outstanding knowledge. They tried to collect within traditional communities or marginalized groups where the last people who

³⁰ Martin 1990a: 391–393 (Martin 2020/6: 218–220).

³¹ Martin 1990a: 432 (Martin 2020/6: 272).

³² Giurchescu–Torp 1991: 3.

³³ Martin 1965b: 251–252.

³⁴ Pesovár 1955: 312; Martin 1965b: 252; Andrásfalvy 1993: 44.

knew of dance types from the old dance historical stratum could be found.³⁵ The preservation-based selection and the pre-arranged nature of filming had an effect on the content of the recorded data and the formal and stylistic execution of dances; all these determine the interpretation of sources. The effect of these research methods, however, was not problematized in critical reflection, so that later on Martin's data collection technique served as an unquestioned methodological guide for the upcoming generations of researchers.³⁶

During the data processing following fieldwork, dances were notated to support structural analysis, a motifs catalog was compiled, and Martin and his colleagues worked on establishing a dance archive consisting of several units.³⁷ Ernő Pesovár felt that folk dance research must be at the service of the dance house movement and the art of dance.³⁸ The archives they established continue to meet these expectations in the present because the contents of the collections are still actively used for research, educational, and art purposes.³⁹

Theoretical Background of the Papers

Precise interpretation of the papers in the following part of this volume is hindered by the fact that Martin only occasionally used a proper system of reference to identify his sources. Where he did do this, his references are to the sources of dance historical data rather than theoretical approach. This means that the theoretical tendencies intertwined with the contemporary Hungarian ethnographic way of thinking only vaguely appear behind the papers in the following part of this volume, and there is no reference to any deliberate use of them in Martin's papers.

³⁵ Pesovár 1955: 312–313; Martin 1979: 526–527; Andrásfalvy 1993: 46.

³⁶ Dance researcher at the Institute for Musicology, Gyula Pálffy's opinion of the dance filmmaking methods: „Practice shows that valuable dance films can only be made on artificial dance events. Recording the functions of dances is only good for illustrating the ambiance, and a photo is enough to show that” (Pálffy 1990: 4).

³⁷ The Dance Archives of the Dance Department in the Népművelési Intézet (transferred to the Folk Music Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1965) consisted of the following: film collection, dance music collection, dance photo collection, manuscripts, dance notation collection, motifs collection and dance cadastral survey. The dance historical repository of the Dance Department and the folk game collection of the Ethnography Department were also connected to the Archives (Martin 1965b: 254).

³⁸ Pesovár 1955: 312–313.

³⁹ Currently, the *Knowledge Base of Traditional Dances* website operated by Archives and Department for Folk Music and Folk Dance Research at the RCH Institute for Musicology is responsible for publishing dance archive materials online. See Fügedi ed. 2016.

Nevertheless, in the background of Martin's several works, cultural evolutionism appears as the first dominant theoretical approach within ethnography and cultural anthropology.⁴⁰ According to the exponents of evolutionism, human culture goes through a certain development, starting from the simple to the more complex. The first and more significant exponents of this approach, who promoted the notion of unilinear cultural evolution, set their own culture as a point of reference, so they view the stage of development of the studied community in an ethnocentric way.⁴¹ Their work was strongly influenced by research results and methods in the natural sciences as they attempted to classify and categorize their data, and after comparison, to place them on a single straight line of development.⁴² Appearing from the middle of the twentieth century beside unilinear evolutionism, multilinear evolutionists argued against a single line of cultural development but rather saw more possible pathways and divergent dynamics of progress. As the starting point of progress, they presumed that developments in more than one are could lead to various cultures (thus not a *universal* culture) under different circumstances of development.⁴³

In Martin's papers, the influence of cultural evolutionism appears mainly when he describes and analyses certain dances and dance types. He traces the existence of different European dance dialects back to historical and social shifts in development and depicts them with dance types showing different stages of evolution.⁴⁴ Formal and musical complexity of dances (motifs, elaboration of structural level, adaptation to musical accompaniment) primarily serve as a basis for comparison; in his notions about dance types, he attempts to outline unilinear progress.⁴⁵ For instance, he argues that within the old-style *ugrós-legényes* type,⁴⁶ on the basis of their motifs and their complexity and assimilation to music, Hungarian solo male dances advance from simple to more complex and elaborated dance creating practices.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, he fails to go into detail concerning the reasons for the formal simplification occurring in the new style of Hungarian dances and where these dances might be

⁴⁰ Sanderson 1998: 172–173; Eriksen–Nielsen 2001: 17; Claessen 2002: 325.

⁴¹ Sanderson 1998: 174; Claessen 2002: 328; A. Gergely 2010b: 144–145.

⁴² Claessen 2002: 326; Kisdi 2012: 59–61.

⁴³ Sanderson 1998: 174; Eriksen–Nielsen 2001: 81; Claessen 2002: 328; A. Gergely 2010a: 108; Kisdi 2012: 60.

⁴⁴ Martin 1978: 10 (Martin 2020/3: xxx); 1990a: 390 (Martin 2020/6: 217).

⁴⁵ Martin 1965a: 469, 483–484 (Martin 2020/1: 119, 131).

⁴⁶ From the dance types, he defined the Central Transylvanian *legényes* and within it the Kalotaszeg *legényes* as „with the richest motifs and the most evolved male dance type” (Martin 1990a: 433; Martin 2020/6: 273–274). In another study of his: “[the *legényes*] is between our old style shepherd dances and the new style *verbunk*; thus we can regard it as the most advanced of the old style and as its final blooming, as well as the starting point of our *verbunk* dances” (Martin [1970–1972]: 224).

⁴⁷ Martin 1965a: 486–487 (Martin 2020/1: 133–134).

situated on the line of development. He is more subtle when he characterizes dance dialects; he presumes a multilinear development in the background of the evolution of various dialect regions. He separates central and peripheral cultural regions within European dialects, including the Carpathian dance dialect, and among these regions, he tries to reconstruct the diffusion of various dance fashions.⁴⁸

Analysis of the spread of cultural elements leads us to the next theoretical concept, diffusionism,⁴⁹ some propositions of which are manifest in Martin's historical and comparative papers. The key representatives of this idea, such as the so-called Vienna school of ethnology or the British school of cultural diffusionism, strived to interpret the history of cultures, attempted to capture the connection between various peoples and cultural areas, and tried to discover the ways through which cultural elements and phenomena spread.⁵⁰ The diffusionists traced similar traits among different cultures to one or more centers and worked on reconstructing historical processes based on the geographical dispersion of these elements.⁵¹ Their approach was characterized by confidence in identifying cultural elements and finding parallels, however, they were unable to find a "final" explanation for the diffusion of cultural traits or the methods of acquisition.⁵²

Martin assumed that European dance fashions move horizontally (geographically) from west to east, while they spread vertically (socially) from the upper classes to the lower classes of people.⁵³ This concept can be related to the theory of "sunken cultural assets" (*gesunkenes Kulturgut*), which suggests that the culture of the lower layer of society thrives on assets coming down from the culture of upper classes.⁵⁴ In his papers, Martin further elaborates this approach by distinguishing among three main dance regions in Europe (Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Southeast Europe) which, in turn, were divided into central and peripheral areas;⁵⁵ however, he does not regard the cultural interaction between social classes as a one-sided handoff but rather as a back-and-forth process.⁵⁶ The Hungarian language area is a transitional region in the European context, where the features of western and southeastern dance-cultural regions can be observed thanks to its peculiar historical and social

⁴⁸ Martin 1985b: 118 (Martin 2020/5: 201).

⁴⁹ Glick 1998: 118–119; Eriksen–Nielsen 2001: 21; 25.

⁵⁰ Barfield 1998: 103; Eriksen–Nielsen 2001: 27–28; Dostal–Gingrich 2002: 401; Kuklick 2002: 243–245; Boglár–A. Gergely 2010: 225; Kisdi 2012: 74; Martin 1985a: 180 (Martin 2020/4: 186).

⁵¹ Bodrogi 1977: 582.

⁵² Barfield 1998: 103; Kuklick 2002: 245; Boglár–A. Gergely 2010: 225.

⁵³ Martin 1985a: 180 (Martin 2020/4: 186).

⁵⁴ See more Dow 2014.

⁵⁵ Martin 1965a: 470 (Martin 2020/1: 120–121); Martin 1978: 9–10 (Martin 2020/3: 178–179); Martin 1985b: 118 (Martin 2020/5: 201–202); Martin 1990a: 390–391 (Martin 2020/6: 217–218).

⁵⁶ Martin 1985a: 180 (Martin 2020/4: 186); Hofer 1994: 43.

background; mainly due to their individualistic style of performance, these dances have their own flavor and become even richer through interethnic relations.⁵⁷ From a narrower perspective, he states that in terms of the two Hungarian dance, the newer dance fashions pushed the old style dances to the margins of Hungarian dance dialect areas, to secluded regions or to the lower layers of society.⁵⁸ Dance naming practices, as shown by Martin, can be the source material for analysis of the horizontal and vertical spread of dances and cultural elements relating to them. He assumes that dance naming traditions of certain communities may refer to the “path of life” of the dance, to its origin and path of diffusion, to its interethnic relations, or to the social class owning and using the dance.⁵⁹ Martin always called attention to the role of higher social layers—dance masters and dance schools—or to the culture-shaping force of the current political power in the background of the transforming dance culture.⁶⁰

Martin’s approach was also influenced by the theory of variant and affinity,⁶¹ elaborated by Gyula Ortutay in Hungarian folkloristics. The variant, or variation, refers to the manifestation of folkloristic works of art. The same artwork can exist in numerous versions depending on the aim, content, occasion, or audience of the performance. Folklorists presume many reasons behind variation, such as adaptation, modernization, expansion, contamination, oblivion, innovation, or artistic deterioration.⁶² Affinity refers to the relationship that can exist between different cultural phenomena based on their content or formal similarities, thus enabling new versions to evolve or become attached to them. The notion may also refer to the process itself through which, by connecting related elements, newer variants come into being.⁶³ Martin attempts to reconstruct the transformation (progress) and variation of certain dance types based on these ideas tracing their relationships through similarities of structure and morphology (motifs).

Another early folkloristic method, the geo-historical method, or the so-called Finnish method, had a huge influence on Martin’s analysis and interpretation.⁶⁴ This theoretical approach, which tried primarily to uncover the origins of folk poetry by following the historical continuities and geographically spread consistencies among variants, appeared first in the Scandinavian countries, but later on, it served as a base

⁵⁷ Martin 1968: 60 (Martin 2020/2: 169); Martin 1978: 10 (Martin 2020/3: 179); Martin 1990a: 390 (Martin 2020/6: 217).

⁵⁸ Martin 1965a: 470 (Martin 2020/1: 120).

⁵⁹ Martin 1985a: 179–180 (Martin 2020/4: 185–186); Hofer 1994: 43–44.

⁶⁰ Martin 1985b: 123–126 (Martin 2020/5: 207–209).

⁶¹ Ortutay 1972; Voigt 1993: 30.

⁶² Ortutay 1972: 133; 136–137; Voigt 1982: 473–474.

⁶³ Ortutay 1972: 150; 163–164; Voigt 1977: 33.

⁶⁴ Voigt 1993: 30; Kearney 1998: 193; Finnegan 2002: 609.

for Soviet and Hungarian ethnographic data collection, data conservation, and classification, as well as folk song study internationally. After a morphological analysis of certain folklore works, various formal-content units (for example, motifs) were set apart and classified typologically, enabling the creation of type and motif catalogs and facilitating the organization of folklore archives.⁶⁵ Following typology and classification and taking into consideration the social-historical and cultural context, the geo-historical method was used to determine dialect regions. Depending on the focus of research, the determination of a dance dialect was based on the existence of a single element (motif), the constitution of a motif or a genre system, or an examination of the function of a certain cultural element.⁶⁶

This theoretical framework provided a solid foundation for Martin's concept of dance dialect since his analysis took into consideration regional division, local historical and social progress, interethnic relations, the spread of dance fashions, but above all, the characteristics (mostly structural and formal features) of dance types in their definition.⁶⁷ As is obvious from his efforts to create an archive, Martin attempted to compile a dance motif catalog in the course of data processing, and he thought it was essential to assemble additional motif catalogs based on different regions and dance types as well in order to make large-scale comparative study possible.⁶⁸

The research tendencies discussed here correspond to the ones that influenced Hungarian ethnography in the 1950s. Martin was not only a professional dancer; besides his Hungarian language degree, he also majored in ethnography and museology. Hungarian ethnographers in this era could make use of only a limited selection of western literature in their papers.⁶⁹ The strongly historical character of Hungarian folkloristics was determined primarily by the then outdated—but politically expected—evolutionist perspective, the Vienna school of ethnology, and the Finnish method. In spite of this, Martin, who was also inspired by the Hungarian individual-centered researching school,⁷⁰ surpassed the Hungarian perspective that was romantic, idealizing, ethnocentric, and static on many levels because of his commitment to scientific objectivism and holistic perspective.

⁶⁵ Voigt 1975a: 174–175; Voigt 1975b: 219–220; Frog 2013: 19–20; Landgraf 2016: 514.

⁶⁶ Frog 2013: 27–28.

⁶⁷ Martin 1990a: 390–392 (Martin 2020/6: 217–218).

⁶⁸ Martin 1965a: 495 (Martin 2020/1: 141); 1965b: 253; 256.

⁶⁹ For example, the theory of the British functionalists, Bronisław Malinowski or Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, was rejected in Hungarian ethnography since it was seen by the Soviet ethnography as a slave of the colonial empires and conveys racist ideas (Ortutay 1949: 13; 17–19).

⁷⁰ About the individual-centered research school and its effect in Hungarian dance research and the biographical method, see Ortutay 1972; Felföldi 2005; Felföldi 2008; Tari 2015.

A Critical Reading of György Martin's Historical and Comparative Papers

If we aim at a critical evaluation of the papers mentioned above, we must consider our present scientific position, the perspective from which we look back to the papers of Martin from forty–sixty years ago. From our contemporary point of view, the flaws and merits in his research methodology, theory, and interpretation can be regarded as outdated or ahead of their time. As mentioned before, Martin's research method was characterized by systematic fieldwork, although during his trips, he did not stay for an extended period in one village. He was sufficiently self-reflective and critical enough of the effects of his main data collecting method, that is, the defining nature of filmmaking in artificial circumstances on dance materials; we lack information on whether he made any participating observations in the organically set up dance events of the investigated communities. Recent dance folkloristics and dance anthropology regard these imperfections and the aesthetic and historical selection of dances during data collection as outdated methods. Of course, we cannot disregard the contemporary political and social-historical context, nor the technical conditions that limited the researchers' photo-, sound-, or filmmaking options. Besides, we must take into consideration Martin's original research objective, the notation of dances and their formal analysis, for which the most accurate source of data can indeed be guaranteed by recording dances at events organized by the researcher.

Understanding of his theoretical approach and data sources is greatly hindered by the lack of a consistent system of introducing his sources in his papers. Because of that, revealing historical processes as one of his focal points may appear here and there to have been based on speculation in his papers;⁷¹ we also come across superficial generalizations in the presentation of certain cultural phenomena. Nowadays, the theories lying unarticulated in the background of these papers are not considered up-to-date in the fields of ethnography and dance studies. By now, the cultural relativism informing symbolic and interpretive anthropology's treatment of every culture as unique has suppressed the idea of linear progress in a universal cultural history as well as that of diffusion from cultural centers.⁷² The positivist approach, Martin's belief in the possibility of an objective identification of cultural laws, has now been replaced by recognition and acknowledgment of the inherently subjective acquisition and, indeed, production of knowledge in the study of human expression.

⁷¹ György Martin emphasized that by doing comparative dance research, the transition from the dance culture in the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and certain events in the history of culture can be revealed. Martin 1978: 10; 13 (Martin 2020/3: 179–184); Martin 1990a: 432 (Martin 2020/6: 272–273).

⁷² For example, a stereotypical conclusion would be his general characteristic description of the Balkan and Carpathian dance dialects without any reference to or emphasis on the lack of spontaneity in terms of the Balkan chain dances. Martin 1968: 61 (Martin 2020/2: 170–171).

Despite all this, Martin's research perspective was ahead of his time because he deliberately aspired to apply a holistic approach during the elaboration and interpretation of the collected data. Although his main research area was form analysis, he considered the investigation of the complexity of dance culture, the function and content of dances, and the sociocultural environment of dance culture a priority. As opposed to many of his contemporaries, he did not possess a romantic or ethnocentric approach; he examined the dance culture of many nationalities in the Hungarian language area, he drew attention to the "cultural exchange" between various ethnicities and social layers,⁷³ and his comparative papers were influenced by scientific objectivism rather than a definition of cultures on a national basis.

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The papers of the following part of the present volume are milestones in the history of Hungarian and European folk dance research. Ahead of his time, Martin pointed out cultural correlations between dance traditions of different ethnic groups which enriched knowledge not only in dance study but in other art and social science disciplines on a high level. One of the main goals of his historical and comparative studies was to place and thus define Hungarian dances within the European history of culture. His papers fulfilled their task; moreover, they surpassed it as they laid the foundation for Hungarian ethnochoreology and served as a firm background for Martin's groundbreaking studies concerning structural analysis and typology of dances and many of his case studies. Before his death, Martin ended his last conference lecture with the statement chosen as the motto of this essay.⁷⁴ Besides dispelling myths, his academic achievements in the service of uncovering historical truth and revealing the character of true national self-awareness are exemplary for all of us.

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⁷³ Fischer 1998: 264–265; Kisdi 2012: 141.

⁷⁴ Hofer 1994: 45.

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