



This session is part of an international workshop managed by the Center for Microhistorical Research at the Institute of History at the University of Iceland called: Working out the curriculum of a joint MA programme "Microhistory", financed by the Tempus Public Foundation of Hungary. This project unites colleagues from Hungary, Norway, Iceland and other countries to work together towards the elaboration of a joint international History MA programme called "Microhistory." For details see <http://www.microhistory.eu/workingout.html>.

### **Workshop on Microhistory in Reykjavík – Schedule for students and scholars from Hungary, Norway, Iceland, Russia, USA and Poland**

**27 June 2016** – Arrival – A day for Reykjavík excursions – Recommended: National Museum of Iceland ([thjodminjasafn.is](http://thjodminjasafn.is)), Reykjavík Art Museum ([artmuseum.is](http://artmuseum.is)), National Gallery ([listasafn.is/](http://listasafn.is/)), Culture House – Safnahúsið on Hverfisgata ([culturehouse.is](http://culturehouse.is)), etc.

**28 June 2016** – Microhistory: Methods and Meaning – A open session on microhistory from 9 am to 13:00 pm at the University of Iceland – on the ground floor of the National Museum of Iceland (the green room); approximately 20 minutes presentation for each paper + 10 minutes for discussions:

#### **Participants:**

Chair: Prof. Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon (University of Iceland)

#### **Introduction: Opening remarks**

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Prof. Thomas V. Cohen (York University, Canada)

#### **Soaking with our Subjects: the Intimacy of Microhistory**

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Like many a microhistory, this talk launches with a metaphor: Icelanders soaking. A recent New York Times article, with lovely photos of rising steam, bobbing heads, and chilly scenery, meditated on the role of collective bathing in keeping Iceland happily at peace with itself. Microhistorians of all nations too are great soakers: they lounge at length with their subjects, be they persons, things or places, and this long stewing, like chefs' slow cooking, brings out subtlety. But does it bring true intimacy, or does a certain strangeness linger? And, indeed, should it? How do we microhistorians balance our connection to the object of our study with our continuing, perhaps salutary estrangement? And how, as writers, should we impart to our readers that curious balance between knowing and not-knowing? How might our art and science teach a double lesson?

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Associate Prof. Mónika Mátay (Loránd Eötvös University, Budapest, Hungary)

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**The ordinary biography: a useful category of microhistorical analyses**

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During the past 25 years biography has become an important and interdisciplinary academic field. The goal of my lecture is to demonstrate in what ways microhistory can use and profit from producing and analyzing individual life stories. As historical evidence I will use the life narratives of members of a Hungarian Calvinist urban community, Debrecen.

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Prof. Thomas Robisheaux (Duke University, USA)

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**Microhistory and Story**

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Among the tools of the microhistorian's craft none has been more controversial, or as poorly understood, as narrative as a carefully crafted tool of analysis. Ever since the work of Carlo Ginzburg and Natalie Davis the revived interest in story telling and experimentations with narrative has figured as one of the distinctive features of many microhistories, especially among North American scholars. To microhistory's critics this embrace of narrative brings history dangerously close to fiction and literature. The subjectivity of story telling, the inability of narrative to penetrate the underlying patterns in a society or culture, the idea that story imposes a pre-determined aesthetic pattern on the past, among other objections, all call into question the ability of narrative microhistories to solve difficult historical problems. This paper examines the uses of narrative among microhistorians—not for reasons of aesthetic or form—but as carefully crafted analytical devices. After a brief discussion of the uses of narrative in early microhistory, the paper responds to the "scientific" objections to narrative and then explores some of the playful experiments with narrative analysis characteristic of "new wave" microhistories since 2000. The paper closes with a plea not just for a serious engagement with narrative but for new and even more creative uses of story in writing microhistory.

– Coffee break

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Dr. Þóra Pétursdóttir, Post Doc (University of Tromsø, Arctic University of Norway)

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**Archaeology and the Language of Things**

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Coming from the field of archaeology, *Micro-history* has not been influential to my research. Nevertheless, an archaeological approach may have much affinity with microhistory. While not putting primary emphasis on establishing that kinship, this paper aims to discuss the challenges of telling the past through things. How, for example, does an *archaeology* of the past differ from a (micro)*history* of the past? Further, what is the language of things, and how does it survive translation into narrative or other forms of mediation? And, if fragmentation, ephemerality and chronological hybridity are among the characteristics of material assemblages, how might taking these features seriously (instead of aiming to translate them away) alter the way we tell the past?

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Prof. Arnfinn Kjelland (Volda University, Norway)

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### **Local history as Microhistory?**

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The aim of the project is to create an English-language master, and a module on local history has been proposed. In this paper I will reflect upon to what extent we can expect different types of local history to be labelled microhistory, following István Szijártó's definition (Szijártó 2013: 4f).

I will discuss how "local history" has been defined and categorized in some English-speaking countries, and look briefly at to what extent different categories of local history from these countries can be said to fit into Szijártó's definition. I will also compare this to the local history traditions of Norway.

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Prof. Elizabeth S. Cohen (York University, Canada)

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### **Microhistory and the Everyday: Finding Real Women**

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In classic microhistories by Carlo Ginzburg and Natalie Zemon Davis based on trial records, stories of the transgressive or dramatically anomalous often occupy the centre. At the same time microhistorical analysis of trials can yield rich "thick description" of the everyday: earning a living, protecting reputation, having a baby, and a host of other routine needs and activities. The best microhistory, and perhaps especially where the focus is on the less remarkable but still fundamental habits of past lives, depends on knowing a lot beforehand, but also on being willing to be surprised about what we thought we knew. For example, immersion in trial records produces a sense of what was normal that often contrasts with conventional scholarly knowledge. The case of women is a good example. Women pursuing everyday lives were not men's equals; nor were they silent, inactive, or docile. Nor were they in these behaviours necessarily transgressive or liable to sharp reproof. For all the exceptionality of the sources, microhistories can show us with rare texture how most women navigated everyday obligations, risks, and opportunities.

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Dr. Davíð Ólafsson, adjunct lecturer (University of Iceland)

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### **Minor Knowledge and Microhistory. Exploring literacy practices through small networks of "barefoot historians" in Nineteenth Century Iceland**

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This paper is based upon a book written jointly by Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and me, forthcoming in summer or fall 2016. It will outline particular features of the history of education and communication during the long nineteenth century in Iceland, put in a global perspective. By this we aim to study procedures, experience, and content of everyday literacy practices beyond the realm and perspectives of national or local history. We seek to view and study early modern and modern manuscript culture as vernacular, everyday practice, giving agency to its ordinary participants and attention to hitherto overlooked source material. We will examine how manuscript exchange – the scribal community – as a sociocultural network questions the traditional view of the development of literacy, education and communication.

Against formal institutions of literacies we postulate an informal structure of educational and communicational practices, largely founded on handwritten material. The web of scribal practices was, we argue, not controlled by either of the two opposites, individuals or institutions, but by the third force, namely the dynamic rhizome itself. Within the large network we may, however,

recognize smaller groups that may or may not be propelled by vigorous individuals, strategic alliances, and even institutional structures, but were driving forces to be dealt with in the larger network. We have dubbed this kind of group of lay scholars and popular poets, that can be found in one form or another around Iceland throughout the long nineteenth century, “barefoot historians”.

- After the morning session, lunch at the home of Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon at Viðimelur 27, 107 Reykjavík (close to the University) for all the participants
- Visit to the Manuscript Department at the National and University Library. The head of department, Bragi Þorgrímur Ólafsson, will show us some interesting manuscripts.
- Free time the rest of the day. – All participants are invited to accept a discount ticket to the Blue Lagoon in the afternoon. A bus leaves from the BSÍ bus terminal at 6 pm and runs into the evening (look for informations).

**29 June 2016** – Student Papers – closed session at Miðbúð in Kjós, outside Reykjavík (40 minutes’ drive) –second home of Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon – 9 am to 12:30 pm. Participants should gather in front of the Main Building of the University of Iceland at 8:00 am. The bus leaves at 8:15.

#### **Students present their papers:**

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Oddgeir Fossil – BA student (Volda University College, Norway):

#### **Migration from a small rural community in Norway 1865–1910**

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In this paper I will follow the individuals from my home community in Norway in the time between 1865 and 1910. The community, “Vist-grenda” is a part of Inderøy commune in the middle of Norway, in the county of Nord-Trøndelag about 120 km north of Trondheim. This community consists of 10 farms with a variation of 9 to 16 cotters’ places in the years 1865 to 1910. The population of the community varies between 117 and 160. Today most of the cotters’ places are gone and the population on the farms has decreased. None of the farms today has agriculture as the main source of income. By following individuals who migrated, I will try to find more about the migration in a micro perspective.

My main focus will be migration, and emigration to America in particular. From one the farms, Vistaunet, a whole family emigrated; these will be the main part of the individuals presented in the paper. Where did they go, and what can available sources today tell us about their movements and career (education, work etc.) in their new country? By following the emigrants from a small community it will not be possible to make generalized statements about the entire region, but this will illuminate new perspectives that is not easy to find in more generalized studies of a commune, region or the country.

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Guðný Hallgrímsdóttir – PhD candidate (University of Iceland):

#### **A Tale of a Fool or a Common Woman’s Autobiography. A microhistorical study of an 18th-century peasant woman.**

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My case study focuses on the autobiography of Guðrún Ketilsdóttir (1759–1842), written in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and first published in 1921. Throughout her life, Guðrún worked on farms in Iceland. Her

autobiography is extremely entertaining. She uses short sentences and says things directly without mincing words. It is possible that the exaggerated narrative style led to her autobiography later being classified in an archival catalogue as a humorous story or an example of female foolishness. However, it is probably the oldest extant autobiography by a working-class Icelandic woman, and well worth studying.

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Svetlana Yatsyk – PhD candidate (National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow)

### **Who horrified Pope Alexander III? A Case Study of Letter «Audivimus».**

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In 1171 or 1172 Pope Alexander III sent a letter, which begins «Audivimus», to the king of Sweden, referred to as «K.». In this letter he accused Swedes for venerating a person who was killed while drunk, regardless of the fact that this person performed miracles. The Pope stated that it is forbidden to venerate as saints these who have not been approved by the Roman Church. Despite the fact that it was a personal letter, «Audivimus» is partly inscribed in the Decretals of Gregory IX and became a rule of law.

This letter is *locus classicus* in historiography of canonization. It is frequently cited and has provoked much argument concerning whether it should be considered as the first step to the papal reservation of the right of canonization. But the identity of K. and of the unnamed saint drunkard is usually disregarded: some historians believe this king to be Kol Sverkerson and others affirm that the matter concerns Knut Eriksson.

I aim at contributing to this discussion and will present my list of persons mentioned in «Audivimus».

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Bragi Þorgrímur Ólafsson – PhD candidate (University of Iceland)

### **‘Great men’ and microhistory**

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One of the most popular characteristics of microhistory is its emphasis on historical analysis from the common people’s point of view: farmers, millers, maids and midwives. That characteristic is often regarded as a symbolic historiographic departure from the “great men” theory of history that dominated the discipline since the latter part of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. But before “great men” are thrown into the dustbins of history, microhistory could offer some new perspectives on using them as a analytical tool. I will discuss these perspectives in relation with my research on Icelandic national hero Jón Sigurðsson (1811–1879).

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Piotr Kowalewski – PhD candidate (University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland)

### **In the Search for Historical Identity. The Story of One Religious Painting from a Silesian Village.**

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In my text I intend to examine whether singular material sources may be useful for microhistorical research. As an example, I will use a religious painting from the Silesian village of Bierun Stary from the late XVIII century. My task would be to show the importance of singular material sources for our knowledge about the past. However, I would also argue that the knowledge we may get from such sources depends on the framework we are using as historians. I would like to show three different

contexts for this one painting: artistic, religious and political – ask how (or if) we should choose between them.

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Áron Tóttös – PhD candidate (Loránd Eötvös University, Budapest, Hungary):

**Prostitutes' family life and divorce in Budapest, 1867–1918: The normal exception.**

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In my exposé I basically wish to present to you, through the exemplification of two prostitutes' lives, this social group's marriage and divorce within the time period of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. The scene of location is the capital of Hungary, Budapest. The history of prostitution – in other words, in a wider sense, the history of womanhood composed of a lower social stratum, that of deviations and marginalized individuals making up a particular mix of stories. We look at the incidence of prostitution that is defined by the society and its culture, which is, vertically, to be found in each layer and group of a society, but horizontally shows in an awe-inspiring insight into the lower society layer. Women belonging to this group are more or less characterized by similar socio-cultural description: promiscuity, marginalization, anomalous deviation from the common type, exclusion from society, etc. Hence then there should be a particular microworld meant for prostitutes. A microworld where rules are not only decided by the main core, in spite of the existence of other value-preferential self-assertion. Therefore prostitutes' lives and marriages belong to the group of "normal exceptions".

The Hungarian reception of prostitution history includes some analyses with a micro-historical approach. One can list as exceptions some works of Mónika Mátay and Zsuzsa Bokor. The divorce documents could be better analysed by a historian's microscope, because personal history is better followed up on a micro-level. Our undenied intention is, so far as possible, to present a little more than only a single person's acting life, but that of a city prostitute's microcosmos.

The investigation had shown that prostitution finally leads to breaking up of marriages. Yet it does not mean, there were no relationships based on love, intimacy, reciprocal reliability and high esteem. This gives to prostitutes' marriages a unique subculturally separable identity. Another very important result of our investigation is that through sexuality and intimacy, even if just at a glance, one can also look into the microworld of prostitution.

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Dániel Molnár – PhD candidate (Loránd Eötvös University, Budapest, Hungary – Early Modern Hungarian History Program):

**István Losonczy and Bernardo de Aldana: Colliding military concepts in 16th-century Hungary.**

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In the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century Hungary, Hungarian and foreign – mostly German, Spanish and Italian – soldiers served together in armies and in fortifications, fighting against the Ottomans. Their cooperation, however, was far from desired, and the years of 1551 and 1552 marked the worst period.

The conflict of István Losonczy and Bernardo de Aldana from the spring of 1552 is well known in Hungary. The story is the following: Losonczy, the commander of the fortress of Temesvár (today *Timisoara*), was a noble, brave warrior, ready to die for his country, while Aldana was a cowardly traitor, who – as a foreign mercenary – only fought for money.

Aldana was blamed by historians for sabotaging Losonczy's preparations for the upcoming siege, and also wrote letters to King Ferdinand asking him to move Losonczy from the post, because he wanted to become the commander himself. When it did not work, he simply let Losonczy and his garrison die, as he had not organized a relief force.

However, their conflict was not personal, but more like a conflict of different ways of thinking. Their conflict was also not unique in the Hungary of the time. In my presentation, I will show through their example the problems of the cooperation of foreign and Hungarian military leaders and common soldiers. Through this example, with some remarks on other similar events, I will present the generally misinterpreted relations of these people.

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- After the morning session, lunch at Miðbúð
- Hiking trip up to the waterfall of Glymur, close by in Kjós, Hvalfjörður (see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glymur>).
- Dinner at Glymur restaurant in Hvalfjörður
- Back in Reykjavík around 11 pm

**30 June 2016** – Departure from Keflavík Airport